Journal of a Dissenter

On History, Philosophy, and Psychology, 1996-2025

Chris Wright

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Prefatory note: A journal from the age of 15 to one's 40s is bound to be, in places, pretty embarrassing, and unintentionally very funny. I used to think my journal would be of interest to future readers—wanted it to be "the most intellectually rich document in history"—and years ago even wrote a table of contents for it. My grandiose hope was that I might help preserve certain aspects of our culture's heritage from the global conflagration that I was sure is coming, by bringing them together into one document that could be read, perhaps, eventually, by those who survived the catastrophes. I also thought it might be worthwhile to record one individual's lifelong attempt to grapple with perennial questions. –But life cures one of youthful self-importance. Maybe someone will at least find interesting passages.

It might seem like shameless exhibitionism to make a document like this public, but I've deleted a lot of personal stuff and changed names. (I've kept some personal passages, however, because they depict common experiences and youthful psychological tendencies.) There's little reason for anyone to care about the author. What might be of interest, rather, are the general truths—about society, history, humanity—that, hopefully, the journal expresses.

The perspectives on subjects of intellectual substance are surprisingly consistent over nearly two million words. On social questions, the point of view is almost always Marxian. On the nature of the human mind, the perspective is rationalist, or innatist, nativist, semi-Kantian, Chomskian. On "the human condition," there is a fair amount of existentialist alienation, albeit tempered by themes from the Enlightenment and Marxism. On gender roles and relations between the sexes, a polemic against doctrinaire social constructionism and radical feminism runs through the whole document. On "value theory," the point of view is pretty consistently in the skeptical and empiricist spirit of David Hume, J. L. Mackie, and the "sentimentalist" thinkers of the Enlightenment. On consciousness and the self, the journal continually returns to methods and themes from phenomenology and even Buddhism. On academic and mainstream intellectual culture, the viewpoint is highly critical, not very different from the attitudes of Marx and Chomsky.

Since I still agree with all these (and other) positions, I'd say that one useful thing about the document is that, in a world of stunning irrationality and unintelligence, it lays out a rational and comprehensive worldview. But underlying it all is a simple intellectual and moral attitude: an anti-institutional humanism, a rejection of the specialized, bureaucratized, 'professionalized' way of doing things. Truth and humanity are not to be found in values exemplified by intellectual, cultural, political, and economic elites.

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September 22, 1996[1]

For the past year and a half I have been confused and, in general, unhappy. The unhappiness has at times been intense and at times hardly noticeable, but it has always had at least a slight damper on my temporary feelings of artificial contentment. But enough of these vague references; I'm unhappy because, in short, I'm wasting my life. How am I wasting it? In several ways. First of all, I'm not being virtuous. I was born with a foul temper; when it flares up, there's no stopping it. Only time can gradually ease my anger—but unfortunately, there's no telling what my psychotic neurons will make me do before they're stopped by the Great Healer. As a result, all of the attempts I've made in the past year to become virtuous have failed. My temper isn't the only reason, but it's a big one. Another is that my personality just won't allow it. I had to constantly remind myself to be generous, to be forgiving, or to be unselfish, and in the end I got sick of it. It just wasn't working. A third reason my life is being "wasted" is that I am one of the quietest kids I know. I rarely talk to my fellow students, and consequently I have hardly any friends. As if that weren't bad enough, I now have a slight stutter, so when I do talk I sometimes end up making a fool of myself. How can I live a prosperous and happy life if I rarely talk to anybody? These three reasons—and a few other minor ones—have led me to the conclusion that I absolutely must change if I want to have a happy life. But for the last year and a half I have tried every way I could think of to become virtuous, and I've failed. A few months ago, however, I think I may have found the answer.

It was on a trip I made to my uncle's house. John, who is a Buddhist, has more than a hundred books on this religion. When he saw me skimming through one of them he offered to give it to me. For the next few weeks I was all but attached to it: I realized that Buddhism, one of the few religions without a "supernatural" god, was going to save me. It was like a miracle: I'd come upon this book when I needed it most, and practically everything in it was related to solving my depression. At first, many of its ideas seemed highly implausible, but gradually I came to see they weren't so ludicrous. Immediately I resolved to meditate every day, so as to increase my "mindfulness"....but then the evil known commonly as 'school' started. This brought a temporary halt to my hopes and plans. Due to the excessive amount of homework I had, I didn't have enough time for prolonged periods of meditation. And I still don't have enough time. Today I finally decided to look at the book again, hoping I'd remember the proper way to meditate. My hopes were again dashed, though, when I opened to a page that addressed impermanence and selflessness. As I read about how there is no self, only empty thoughts and sensations, I realized I would never be able to truly believe this. And maybe I wouldn't even want to: it would mean that everything is trivial, and nothing matters. In fact, that's more or less one of the teachings of Buddhism. How could I be motivated to do anything if I believed that nothing mattered? I couldn't. So now I am again at a roadblock which seems, at least for now, impassable. One thing I do know, though: the road to happiness is in some way connected to Buddhism, because millions of people have in fact reached true happiness through this religion. Furthermore, I'm sure that the authors are right: the loss of the self can in some way lead to happiness. The problem is finding a way to reconcile this belief with all the values I've been taught. This task is indeed daunting, but I have no doubt that I'll eventually master it....somehow.

September 23

Whenever I stop to reflect on life, I'm overwhelmed. I was born even though the chances of that were infinitesimal. […] The odds that I would be this kind of person are quite small, so I don't intend to waste this lucky combination. The problem, though, is that so far I have wasted it—because of my temper and my reclusive personality.

Buddhism is the solution. I'm almost certain that, by renouncing the self and believing that all our thoughts are just 'processes'—just temporary conditions—happiness will come. Equanimity will result

[1] [Periodically throughout the journal there are bracketed statements. In nearly all cases, these are later interpolations. The bracketed ellipses signify deletions.]

from the belief that these thoughts are not 'ours', and this equanimity will be the beginning of a lifetime of imperviousness-to-suffering. There's one difficulty, however (as I said in the last entry): if 'my' thoughts are not actually mine—if they're just fleeting processes that don't 'mean' anything—how can I motivate myself to do anything? Sooner or later, though, even if I never think about Buddhism again, I'll have to confront this problem, because 'deep down' I already know that thoughts are simply neurons firing, and my 'self' is just these neurons doing their job and producing so-called thoughts. Since I've never deeply thought about this, the idea seems foreign and extremely depressing. Even so, I'd be much happier if I could just meditate for months and finally understand the nature of selflessness.

October 13

So far I've only written about depression; this entry is about a different problem I'm having. A much less serious one, but a problem nonetheless.

I'm nearly infatuated with sex. Whenever I see a beautiful girl, that's all I think about. […] I know this is the case with many boys, but I doubt it's this serious with them. Sex, sex, sex! This thought occupies much of my time at school. When I look at girls I'm actually surprised I don't lose control of my salivary glands. That's how bad it is. I guess what it comes down to is that I am a skinny, awkward, sexually frustrated kid who happens to be intelligent and fairly reflective. The first three things, however (even the skinniness, indirectly), would change if I were to meditate on Buddhism every day, and eventually become enlightened. My self-confidence would increase, I wouldn't be shy around people (because I'd know they aren't really people with a 'self', they're just a collection of thought-processes that produce the illusion of the self), I wouldn't be obsessed with having passionate sex every day of my life (because Buddhism would help me lose most of the 'desires' I feel today), and I would exercise regularly to keep my body in shape. (Buddhism isn't wholly concerned with the mind; it also teaches you to stay healthy.) […]

[Deleted entry.]

February 10, 1997

The New Years resolutions have been successful so far. The pet one very much so (all my pets are still alive).

I mailed the letter to the Insight Meditation Center in January; I didn't get a reply until last week. The woman who wrote to me took the time to write a long one, which was nice, but unfortunately it didn't answer my questions well. It basically just repeated what all the books I've read have said. Fortunately, another book I got at the library (*In the Lap of the Buddha*) includes a list of meditation centers in the country, so I can mail another letter to a different place.

[…]

March 18

I'm going to keep a record of all the questions and doubts I have about Buddhism; this way, when I finally decide to start meditating seriously I'll know what issues I have to sort out beforehand.

1. If our bodies are merely collections of cells and body parts, and there is no real me, no real self, how can people who gain a deep understanding of this be motivated to do anything in life? What's the point? If there

is no soul (which I admit there surely isn't), then aren't humans just animals, except with bigger brains?

2. Buddhism says that people should gain complete equanimity and never be consumed by emotions, but doesn't that mean we should never be consumed by love? And isn't love one of the greatest pleasures in life? Isn't love a totally natural part of life?

3. How do people conquer pain? Supposedly you have to accept the pain and concentrate on it—and have no aversion to it whatsoever—but does this really work? How would concentrating on the pain get rid of the pain?

[…]

March 28

From now on I'm going to write down the basic beliefs of Buddhism, and its suggestions for the solutions of different problems, so that when I finish the book I'm reading (*In the Lap of the Buddha*) I won't forget everything I've read. Also, in a few days I'm going to start researching the mind, to find out how cells activated by tiny surges of electricity can create thoughts and ideas, and even the illusion of a self. Who knows?—maybe I'll even discover that my whole belief system is wrong, and that humans actually do have a 'self'—that they aren't just trillions of cells working together to prolong an empty life with empty thoughts, just as everything else is empty.

FEAR— Obviously we shouldn't try to overcome certain forms of fear, like the fear of what might happen if we step in front of a moving train. The fears that protect us from physical and psychological harm are usually justified. But in general, when you feel fear you should ask yourselves these questions: What do I feel right now? Where do I experience it in the body? Where do I experience it in the mind? Is there resistance or contraction of any kind? The most important thing is to accept the fear and analyze it. (Indeed, this is essentially what Buddhism advises with regard to most problems.) Eventually it will begin to lose its power over you.

PAIN— To conquer pain you should first realize that there's a difference between the actual pain and the worry it causes. For example, if you're sick and you're constantly groaning and wondering how long you'll be sick, etc., you're just increasing the suffering. Instead of concentrating on the pain, concentrate on the transience of your sensations. Even if your pain is due to a fatal disease and you know you're going to die, it shouldn't matter—because death doesn't matter. Death is part of life. (I'll talk about death later, though.) So, in general, just surrender to the pain: accept it and analyze it, and you'll see that it isn't "solid". It comes and goes. If you're completely "in the moment"—not concerned about what'll happen if the pain doesn't subside—then you'll lessen the pain considerably.

DIVINE ABODES— These are lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. Here are instructions for meditation:

Lovingkindness

-give attention to the breathing
-when the mind feels calm, repeat the following phrases: May I be happy. May I be peaceful. May I be filled with love and kindness. May love fill and heal my body and being.
-be aware of any feeling or "stirring" there might be
-if there's no lovingkindness, it's okay. Eventually there will be.
-say those same phrases about a person you love

-then say them about someone you don't know very well, and then someone you don't like
-include all creatures in your meditation; wish for the happiness of everybody and everything

Compassion

-think of the areas of difficulty in your life
-repeat these phrases: May I be free from suffering. May my pain be resolved. I care deeply about myself.
-think of someone who is suffering and consider their pain. Then recite those phrases.
-extend compassion to all beings
-wish that their minds be free of anger, terror, or any other suffering

Sympathetic joy

-think of a friend who is experiencing happiness
-direct these phrases toward him: May your happiness and good fortune continue. May prosperity and success never leave you.
-direct them to someone you envy
-wish every creature complete happiness and contentment

Equanimity

-think of someone you don't know well
-reflect on sentences like these: All beings are the owners of their karma. Good actions lead to good results; bad actions lead to bad results. Everyone must face his own situation. Although I wish only the best for you, I know that your happiness depends on your actions, not my wishes.
-think of specific people and say these sentences

FAITH AND DOUBT— We have to have faith in each moment. Forget about the past and the future; be aware of the present and let go of the yearning for stability. Life is insecure; instead of denying this insecurity, surrender to it. When there is doubt, step back and examine it. It's nothing. It's just one of the many empty experiences we have in life.

FEAR OF DEATH— Emotional states dissolve and pass away. They're not solid. No one controls them: they just come into existence and then pass out of it. Humans are the same way. We aren't solid; everything that happens in us is continuously dissolving and occurring again and dissolving—which means that we are dissolving also. So death is simply part of the lifelong process of beginnings and endings.

GENEROSITY— Everyone should be generous because we're all interconnected. We're part of nature and we're part of each other. But in the process of giving we should examine our intentions, our motivations for giving. If we're doing it because we want popularity, it isn't true generosity. Only if we truly want the recipient to be happy are we being generous. Taking care of nature also falls under the category of generosity, because everyone is interconnected and interdependent on nature. Ultimately, the most profound generosity is the loss of the self.

KARMA— Everything has a consequence that is either good or bad. For example, if you kill someone you might be arrested later in life; if you're generous you'll be happy. Etc. The theory of karma has so many holes in it I'll ignore it.

THE FIVE PRECEPTS—
1. *Refrain from harming*. Never hurt anyone or anything without first asking yourself why you are doing it. This way you'll know if the pain is in fact necessary and just.

2. *Refrain from stealing*. Many of us have stolen things, but at the time there was probably fear, confusion, paranoia and guilt. These emotions usually cause pain and sometimes self-hatred.
3. *Refrain from false speech*. Don't curse. (How does it feel to hear these words rather than soothing, sweet words?) Don't gossip. Don't engage in idle or frivolous talk. It has no meaning and can cause distraction and carelessness in the mind. Having a sense of humor, though, is important. Don't lie. It's wise to examine our intentions before speaking. In general, be kind when you talk, and if you suspect that your words will create unnecessary unhappiness (or if you're trying to be manipulative), don't say anything at all.
4. *Refrain from sexual misconduct*. Practice lovingkindness for whomever you're having sex with.
5. *Refrain from the use of intoxicants*. Pretty self-explanatory. 'Intoxicants' refers not only to drugs and alcohol but also to television and the like.

June 9

This is going to be the most important summer of my life. The summer in which I sort out every problem I'm having and get my life back in order. By the time school starts next year I'll be a new man. You're probably thinking it'll never happen; after all, this is exactly what I said last summer. This time, however, I'm more experienced, and I already have an idea how I'll make myself be more outgoing. I don't feel like describing it now; instead I'll write a list of everything I plan to accomplish this summer, so I don't forget. This way I can look back and decide whether I had a productive summer.

1. I'm going to take a six-week biology course at Roger Williams University to prepare for Bio. Med. next year.
2. I'm going to attend a one-week biology camp at RWU, dealing with DNA.
3. I recently got a job at a grocery store called Clements' Market.
4. I'll probably read a lot of material to prepare for the SATs at the end of next year.
5. Almost everything else I'm going to do this summer is related to changing my personality, or answering questions that have been plaguing me for a long time. I'll describe these in the next few entries.

[…]

June 13

The next thing I have to sort through is the resolution relating to music. When I made the resolution back in January I didn't explain why I wanted to start thinking about music, because I didn't know, and I didn't want to waste time figuring it out. But I should. I want to have a good, solid reason for becoming more involved in music—a reason that will keep me motivated for many years. Unfortunately I have no idea what it is.

....I've thought and thought about the problems I have relating to music, and I think I've partially solved some of them.

1. I want to know why I'm so interested in music. That is, I want to be sure I'm not wasting my time spending hours every day playing music. If it doesn't make my life more meaningful, what's the point of being obsessed with it?

2. Even if I decide that playing and listening to music are profitable activities, I still have to decide whether learning about music history and theory is.

3. One of my problems is that I always want to play impressive pieces in recitals. I suppose it's because I want recognition, but the reason doesn't matter. What I'm concerned about is whether I'd be motivated enough to play these pieces just for myself rather than in public. That is, I don't know whether I'd want to play them if the only person who would ever hear them is me. I want to convince myself that I

don't actually have to play them in public to make all the trouble of learning them worthwhile.

4. This summer I intend to make a list of all the different styles of music in decreasing order of quality. In other words, classical music would be at the top, and rap would be at the bottom. The only difficulty is that I don't know how to judge the quality of the music: is it based on beauty, or sophistication, or the expression of emotions, or what? Even more important than this, however, is the question whether tastes in music—or all of art, for that matter—can be disputed. How do I know that my taste for classical music is better than someone else's taste for pop?

5. I'm going to learn to appreciate music as much as I can.

I spent hours thinking about those five questions, but I finally gave up. [Deleted stuff.] (Incidentally, the piano pieces I'm playing are Beethoven's Pathetique sonata, Mozart's Fantasie in D-minor, Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C-sharp minor, and Chopin's Polonaise in A, Barcarolle, and the Fantasie-Impromptu.)

June 14

This summer I also plan to solve the problem of the self—specifically, whether such a thing exists. I'm going to read a biology textbook and a few other books about the subject; the combination of this and my six-week biology course at RWU ought to give me enough information so that I can form my own opinion.

If I can convince myself that there isn't a self, this might be one way to make myself talk more in school. After all, if humans are nothing more than bones and muscles and ligaments covered by skin, it would obviously be a lot easier not to care what people think of you. It would be like talking to a machine—except that the 'machine' can think. I know it doesn't make a whole lot of sense, but I'll figure it out this summer. If I decide that the theory is true, though, many complications will result. For instance, how will I be able to fall in love if I think that humans are nothing but machines? I'd be falling in love with a machine! Also, if I discovered that people don't have identities, as animals don't, how would I refer to people? I couldn't say 'Joe' or 'Christine'; I'd have to say, "Hello, all you cells. How are you doing today?" Maybe I could avoid this problem by telling myself that names are simply a convenient way of referring to trillions of cells; in other words, I'd be referring to the cells collectively. [Deleted discussion of a resolution.]

June 19

[This was a long entry describing my new job and various resolutions relating to it. Also my curiosity about what career I'd have (I was leaning towards biology). And I resolved to answer the questions 'Why is arrogance bad?' and 'How can I ensure that I'll never be arrogant?' Hilarious, like all of these entries.]

June 20

Forget about the egoism/altruism problem. I've been thinking about it for an hour, and I've decided that for the present I'll just assume I'd be happier if I were always generous and altruistic. It would be too complicated to read about the arguments for and against egoism, largely because an important argument against it is the idea that we're all interconnected—which is precisely one of the questions I have with regard to Buddhism. *Are* we "interconnected"?

So, I have to figure out whether I want to be an extremely generous person. That's my first task. Or rather, I have to rationally justify my inclination to answer that question affirmatively, and then I have to practice being generous—because it's good to have a mind rooted in generosity when you start doing

serious meditation, since it gives you more of an open mind (more "mindfulness"). In other words: first I'll think about generosity and the interconnection of all beings; then I'll think about lovingkindness, compassion and morality, and then I'll start the meditating. (Incidentally, the way I'll convince myself to be generous is by listing all the reasons I can think of to make people happy, and then going into the belief that we're all connected somehow.) If I delve deeply into all these issues I'll never get to the meditation part by the end of the summer, so I think I'll only go into a little depth. [Etc.]

June 21

[…]

First of all, I should ask myself why I'm studying Buddhism in the first place. The main reason is that I want to eliminate as much suffering in my life as possible. One way to do so is to discover the truths of existence, such as the fact that we're all interconnected. Discovering them eventually leads to decreasing the suffering in the lives of others. (For example, the theory of 'interconnectedness' is what motivates Buddhists to be generous.) As a result, it appears that the way to become happy indirectly leads to helping others become happy. This might sound a little selfish—in that making others happy is only an effect of wanting to make myself happy—but I'm also studying Buddhism because I want to be a better person. To summarize, eventually I'll become happy by making others happy. If this still sounds a bit selfish, then so be it. I can't make it sound any less selfish than that. […]

June 28

For a few days after that entry I was totally obsessed with the self. I spent long hours every day wrestling with the notion of the self's existence. I asked myself what people mean when they say "it is *my* mind", or "*I* am the one who is ordering ice cream"; I asked Dad his opinion on various questions, and started reading a book of his called *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity*. But a couple days ago I asked myself whether I really needed to discover the truth about the self in order to be happy, and in order to change my personality. I decided not. The question isn't important enough to waste my whole summer on. Instead I'll focus on more practical things.

August 28

The last month has been trying. But that's an understatement. I was often in complete despair. Why? Because I didn't know if there was any point to life. I didn't even know if I existed, though at the time I worded the question differently (the rewording of which was actually the mistake that led to so many miserable, wasted hours). The question seems strange, but think about it: the self can't be physical, because everything physical can be reduced to atoms and molecules that obviously, in themselves, can't think. Even the brain can't be 'me', the self, because the brain, of course, is composed of billions of cells [as the self is not]. Even if the theory that thoughts are created by chemicals and electricity and neurons isn't true (which is possible, since the idea is inexplicable), I still don't see how billions of cells could unify to create—to *be*—me. Maybe they can, but anyway, I quickly discarded it as an option. So I turned to the idea that the self is nonphysical. However, if the self is that which thinks—a theory that seems obvious, though I'm not so sure anymore—how can something nonphysical think? I suppose it's possible that something nonphysical could be an *effect* (as thoughts are supposedly effects of neural processes)—but I'm not even sure of this. So it's all very contradictory. I began to think there wasn't a self at all. But since I was desperate to prove to myself that there was, I trudged on. [I've deleted a long description of what this trudging consisted of.] Using the knowledge I'd gained from the previous weeks (which was basically that it would take me years to figure all this out—if it were possible at all, which I'm no longer sure of), I decided I had

to find an answer that would have nothing to do with the complex, impossible ideas I'd been struggling with. It would have to be based on only the most obvious facts, the most simple questions. The simplest question, then, was 'Do I exist?' And the obvious answer was YES. How could I not exist? It's preposterously obvious. Its obviousness, though, wasn't enough to extinguish all doubts, so I asked myself again whether the possibility that 'I' am just thoughts and sense-perceptions upset me. I decided it didn't. *So what* if I'm simply the result of brain-processes? I still exist. I'm still conscious. *So what* if humans aren't "meaningful" creatures, in the strictest sense? We can still be happy, we can still enjoy life, we're still more aware of life than animals are. Why are we more aware? Because we can think, whereas animals can't. Sure, it's possible that *we* aren't the ones thinking—that we are mere thoughts, and therefore don't think—but at least I know that thoughts are produced somewhere along the line. (For now, I'll just assume that I am thinking, in hopes of making everything simpler. I still have doubts, but who cares? It's the most obvious solution I can think of.) Besides, right now I don't even care what we are, or what we're created by, as long as we exist. –As you can see, I still am lost when it comes to understanding the nature of the self, and I probably always will be, but at least I likely won't be tormented by the question ever again. [Ha!]

[Deleted entries.]

April 8

Sorry I haven't written in so long. [Don't be sorry. It was very considerate of you.] I've been thinking about Buddhism a lot lately, so I haven't had time. I've been slacking off, however, with regard to schoolwork, so you can imagine how surprised I was when I found out today that I'm the valedictorian of my class. It'd be nice to maintain this status, so I've decided never again to slack off. What's more, I'm going to actively seek out knowledge (about genetics, for instance) and I'm going to read much more than is required of me. I'll also read more novels, since I ought to enjoy this great stage of life as much as I can. Going to practice the piano as often as possible, though not the xylophone, since I'm not very fond of it. […]

June 16

[Deleted stuff about my efforts to stop organizing my life around resolutions.] This past year was the most successful one in terms of being outgoing, mainly because of the pills I'm taking. I developed my social skills: for instance, teenagers have short attention spans, so it's wise not to dwell on one topic for too long if you don't want to seem stupid. Unfortunately I'm still not very assertive, since I find it hard to order people around and especially to swear at them. I don't like cursing in the presence of others (though I frequently curse when I'm alone), and I think this is one of the barriers to teenagers' taking me seriously. (I have no idea why.)

Here's a list of what I'll do this summer:

1. Be kind to my family.
2. Read novels, philosophy, history, biology, etc.
3. Play a vast amount of music. Chopin's pieces: Barcarolle, Nocturne in E-flat, Etude in A-flat, Etude in E, Berceuse, and maybe Valse Brilliante. Beethoven's: the Pastoral sonata, the Pathetique and part of the Hammerklavier.
4. Talk a lot more and make more friends.
5. Think about various topics that have to do with improving my life.
6. Start exercising again.

August 17

My life has lasted an eternity, it seems. I feel like I'm a 60-year-old man, weary from hardships—from the tragicomic character of these past few years. I have seen happiness come and go like the feather floating in the wind in *Forrest Gump* so often that I hardly care anymore. This summer has been hard. For a time I was in despair; at other times I was certain I was finally recovering from adolescence. I don't even know what I want out of life anymore, aside from the clichéd idea of "happiness". I'm lost. No one will ever know how lost I am, and what a strange kind of "lost" it is. […] I still have hope, though. I'll always have hope, no matter how much shit I'm forced to crawl through. But I've filed down the sharp edges of my definition of happiness, making it more dull, less glamorous, easier to accomplish. You may call it a form of defeat, but I call it experience. Acceptance.

August 18

I have reached the end. For three years I've been struggling to improve my life, with limited success; I've had enough. I can go on no further; this struggle is killing me. No one will ever know the depths my unhappiness has reached because of this struggle, which ironically was supposed to improve my life. The only option I have now is to forget nearly everything I've learned these past few years, and start anew. In this new beginning, however, I will not think about the fear of death, or the loss of the self, or the loss of arrogance, or the loss of fear, or the virtues of Buddhism, or anything that requires deep thought. I am sick of it; words can't describe how sick of it I am. […]

Today I reread my journal. The last fifteen or so pages illustrated the depths to which my obsessive-compulsive thinking reached—and it is this that has caused me to become sick of the "struggle" more than anything else. So I'm not going to think about anything that requires deep concentration for the next several months. […]

July 18, 1999

Hello, faithful reader. It's your old buddy Chris again. As you can see, I didn't write a single entry the entire school year. Never felt like it, I guess. But I'm happy to say I've gotten out of that rut. It's over. I've come out alive. I've experienced thousands of moments of depression, but I've lived through it. The human spirit can persevere if a naïve hope remains. Ha! Can it really be over? Can my obsession with self-change finally be over? […]

I feel a peculiar equanimity—an equanimity which still is greatly attached to the world, but which has accepted most of my 'qualities.' As depressing as it sounds, I can truthfully say I don't care anymore. But that isn't to say I've lost my charming naïveté, or my irrepressible but cynical idealism. If anything, my idealism is stronger (though my naïveté has certainly diminished). The only aspect of my personality I still want to change is my introvertedness. But I know damn well I'll never lose the lack of self-confidence in social situations; the most I can hope for is that I'll learn to deal with it and forge on. Besides, I recognize that having *real* friends wouldn't solve all my problems—its novelty would vanish after several months. I would still continue to be bored often....

Speaking of which: the biggest problem at this point in my life is boredom. Too much emptiness. Not enough passion, enthusiasm, inspiration. I still love music, I enjoy reading—novels as well as philosophy—I play the piano, and in the past few months I've tried to write novels. But something is missing. There isn't really a purpose to my life. I'm wandering. Sometimes I read, sometimes I sit on Walley Street Beach for hours, sometimes I play the piano.... It's all random. There isn't a driving force like there used to be. For years I always had my "change" to think about during spare moments of boredom, but now....what's left? I rarely contemplate philosophy, for several reasons: I might become obsessed, and I don't care about vast areas of philosophy—such as ethics, metaphysics, and logic. Even Buddhism has lost

its hold on me. (I am by no means upset by that.) The only kind of philosophy I really care about is social philosophy.

Every day I spend hours on the cursed Internet (we just got it a week ago) talking to people in chat rooms. Oh, those meaningless, depressing chat rooms! Why do I feel the need to visit them? Rarely do I have interesting conversations. Already I'm sick of the Internet, yet I continue to spend time on it. Is it out of boredom, maybe? Of course.

July 19

I know my ambitions are unrealistic, but that hasn't extinguished the flame that has burned within me for I-don't-know-how-long. I am going to make a difference in the world; I am going to follow in the footsteps of Marx and lead humanity to salvation. [!] I am going to pick up where he left off.....wherever that is.

I know what you're thinking, so there's no point in my telling you. Maybe you're right. I don't know. I'll obviously have to adjust my plans in the face of disillusioning Reality, but I know I want to do something to alleviate the suffering of millions of people. Nothing else I can think of would give enough meaning to my life to satisfy me, so it comes down to this one noble ambition. One thing worries me, though: I might someday stop caring, since I don't have an excess of love for people 'in person'—and maybe not even in the abstract. […] I just don't think it's in my nature ever to be truly content with what I have. I'm always searching for something else. Truth, change, redemption, "happiness"—there's always something just out of my reach. I've experienced this feeling too often to believe it's just an apparition. It's been the driving force behind four years of struggle against myself—against the very essence of who I am. That's how omnipresent it is.

July 20

It's strange that I've gone from being obsessed with happiness to not even thinking about it much. I still care, of course, and I still wish I were outgoing because it would make me happier, but happiness no longer seems to be my ultimate goal. My goal is to make an impact on the world. I think I'd sacrifice my own happiness if I knew it would help realize my ambition. But this doesn't mean I'm an unselfish person. I really don't have profound compassion for real people—only for the "concept" of people. [Not true.]

I think that one of the reasons I care more about helping humanity than about being happy is that I realize how illusory happiness is. It comes for a while and then leaves me in a haze of depression. As long as I can remember, I've wanted to "appreciate" happiness, but now I finally understand how impossible it is for me to "appreciate" anything. I can never live in the moment. My curse is that I'm constantly looking to the future, trying to accomplish something that will have an effect in the future.

It's hard to analyze my thoughts and feelings. Usually I don't know if I'm right in my conclusions, because...it's hard to tell what role the subconscious has in my thoughts. I try to take it into account when I examine them, but as you can understand it's always a shot in the dark. –I am composed of so many contradictions that rarely do I understand myself. For example, I'm arrogant behind the veneer of humility. (It's strange that I can be one thing on the surface and the opposite "deep down." My self-consciousness has split me into at least two (maybe three) very different people.)

July 21

I have to make a lasting contribution. One of the reasons I've given up on Buddhism is that it only affects *me*: if I became a Buddhist it would only affect *me*. I wouldn't be contributing anything to the world.

I suppose my obsession with having a legacy arises from my desire to know that after I die I won't be forgotten; that my accomplishments will live on for years, decades, centuries; that when I'm eighty years old I won't regret my life. And the only way I won't regret it is if I help give 'happiness' to a great number of people. 'Self-happiness' means more to others than it does to me; therefore I'll try to help them achieve it.

[…]

Every day I find myself stupefied by the depths that humanity can reach. I'm not talking about crime or violence; like most of us I've become virtually immune to any feeling of surprise at mankind's atrocities. I'm talking about something less extreme: maddening stupidity and ignorance. It surrounds us. The human race is saturated with it. The sad thing is that many people shake their heads at this thought when often they are the very ones who perpetrate the crime! So many stupid people think they are safe from the ravages of ignorance when in reality they are themselves its perfect manifestation! Thoreau thought that since most people daily go about their monotonous, pointless lives they must be 'courageous heroes' or some such. But the truth is that most of them are dim-witted buffoons, and this is what enables them to endure terrible monotony. The stupider one is, the less one cares.

Were it not for the equally fantastic achievements mankind exhibits, I would lose all hope for the future. Were it not for the likes of Karl Marx, Socrates and the Buddha, I believe I would despise humanity. It is these great men who are the redeemers; it is the reformers and the "wise" or "compassionate" who are the redeemers of humankind. Without reformers we would live in filth and misery; without wise men we would not recognize the possibility of Truth; without the compassionate we would not have an ideal to strive towards. And in between these categories are the titanic geniuses like Beethoven who add depth to mankind and make us proud to belong to it. The vast majority of us are simple-minded idiots. […]

July 22

Earlier in the summer I tried to write a novel—several, actually, since I got bored with whatever I was working on—and although I abandoned my enterprise fairly quickly, I'd like to include a fragment of a story I began. It's just a lot of boring description, but I think the quality of the writing isn't awful:

> The lonely house stood atop a lush hill on the Georgian coastline, overlooking a canvas stretched far beyond the horizon. The tall blades of grass danced in the dawn as the giant feathers above continued their pilgrimage inland, blown by great gusts of wind past the lonely house, toward civilization. A cliff continued where the hill lost its nerve; a jagged edge delineated the separation between the sympathetic curves of the hill and the merciless drop of the precipice, the bottom of which was licked by friendly waves. On the horizon could be seen rays of light peeking over the imperceptible slope of the Earth: a soft reddish-purple hue colored the sky, radiating in all directions from a single, not-yet visible source; a haze of golden air hovered around the edges of these radii and was reflected in the shimmering water below. The underbellies of passing clouds were illuminated by this vanguard of the sun: what was normally a shapely blob of off-white gases had become a crimson painting.
>
> Standing conspicuously in the center of this unified whole was the lonely house. It was a small wooden building, 30 feet by 40 feet, rundown by decades of apathy. The sloped roof—shingled ages hence—had long ago lost its strength; it was now merely an eyesore visible to the passing clouds. Each bare spot remembered a particular storm, a gust of wind, a downpour of rain. The gutter along the edge was swamped with dirt, pebbles, twigs, shingles, feathers, chips of paint, excrement from careless seagulls. Two black shutters hung on each side of the house, bordering the windows opaque from filth collected over months and years; paint peeled in ugly chunks off the unsightly shutters, collecting on the ground below, only to be blown away by the wind. Surrounding the shutters was ten-year-old grayish-white paint, marred by dried rivulets of

rainwater defined by thin lines of dirt on the edges. These minuscule streams cut into the old paint, crept under the protruding lips of the dull wood, soaked into the pores, and contributed to the rotting of the lonely little house atop the hill that looked out onto the magnificence of the Atlantic Ocean.

The entrance to the house was on the east side. The paneled, red-and-white door had, along with the rest of the house, lost most of its color; all that remained were faded shades of grayish white and hints of a reddish hue in spots. If a visitor happened to open the door he would notice that the movement was accompanied by a high-pitched creak from the rusty hinges. A short hallway would lead him into a roomy living room, where a threadbare but comfortable couch lay across the northern wall; an antique rocking chair, intricately carved and surprisingly glossy, sat in a dusty corner facing the ocean; a dim lamp sat atop a small wooden desk on the right side of the couch; a cushioned chair lay hidden in the shadows of another corner facing the rocking chair; a stained, tattered rug full of colorful flowers intertwined—sun-bleached in the center and torn in two corners—covered the wooden planks that simultaneously served as a floor and a ceiling; the entire western half of the room was occupied by a century-old grand piano, the ivory keys of which had become filthy and chipped over the years. This instrument was the prized possession of the house: the jewel in the lives of all its past inhabitants.

[Deleted the rest.]

That's where I finished my story. Fascinating plot, isn't it?

I shouldn't have ended where I did, but I got bored. That's my biggest problem when it comes to accomplishing ambitious things: I don't. Surfing on a wave of inspiration that might last several days, I am discarded on the sand when the wave abruptly vanishes. And for quite a long time I am deathly bored with life.

[…]

August 7

I'm writing a list of the problems with which society is afflicted, so as to organize my ideas on how to change it.

Maybe you're thinking that this ambition of mine is supported by a crumbling foundation, a foundation of 'abstraction,' not real 'concrete.' Of course you may be right. But before you pass judgment, let me tell you that I *am* affected by stories of the woes of people. I just finished *A Tale of Two Cities*: at the end I cried a little (a very little) at the suffering and the courageous dignity of the seamstress and Sydney Carton as they walked to the guillotine. Granted, I *wanted* to cry, and that may be what allowed me to. Maybe I wouldn't have been able to show emotion if I hadn't *tried* to. Still, I was indeed affected by the sufferings of those people who were unjustly killed on the guillotine.

[…]

By the way, here's that list I mentioned:

The things wrong with society:

Bad health care in America.
Too much bureaucracy in American government.
Excessive amount of prejudice in the world.
Poor people throughout the world, though fewer in socialist countries than in capitalist ones.
Education isn't great in the U.S.—and much of the world.
Racism, etc.
Excessive amount of crime everywhere.
Lack of freedom in various countries.

Huge gaps between rich and poor.
Politicians are influenced by money and the lust for power. (Human nature??)
Lack of appreciation of good music and art.
Extremely high population in the world...and growing fast.
Technology rules: we can't control it very well.
Precarious world economy.
People everywhere are obsessed with material goods.
Too many separate nations.
Millions of people have meaningless, boring jobs.
Many Americans don't vote in elections. (Too much apathy when it comes to politics.)
Environment is in trouble.
Sometimes not able to appreciate nature in capitalist countries, due to private property.
Insensitivity of the media towards real human problems.
Preeminence of business, and the worshiping of money as an end in itself.
Ignorant, intolerant religions.
Tendency of children to be mean towards one another. (Human nature?? Probably.)
In general, not enough compassion in the world.
Man is alienated from himself, from society, from nature, from work.

August 8

[…] I've just been reading about Karl Marx. What a great man! What a hero!—like a second, much less pacifistic Jesus. But seriously: he sacrificed himself, his 'happiness', for the cause of the workers whose miseries were amplified in himself. When I read about him I think that if I owe it to no one else, I owe it to Marx to spend my life working for the perfection of humanity. I don't think I'd be able to endure all the sufferings that he did, but anything short of these catastrophes would not deter me from my path.

Read this passage written by Karl Marx when he was seventeen years old, and tell me it isn't inspiring:

> When we have chosen the vocation in which we can contribute most to humanity, burdens cannot bend us because they are only sacrifices for all. Then we experience no meager, limited, egotistic joy, but our happiness belongs to millions, our deeds live on quietly but eternally effective, and glowing tears of noble men will fall on our ashes.

I chose those lines as the conclusion of my valedictory. Good choice, don't you think?

August 9

I'm a little concerned as to *how* it is I'm going to change society. I mean, assuming I am eventually able to form definite goals, how will I achieve them? Make a lot of speeches? Form a small political party? Become a Congressman? Become the President? These options are clearly absurd, but what else is there? How can one start a revolution in the 20th or 21st century? I would like to change society so much that it could be characterized as a "revolution"—because anything short of this would be half-ass. I don't want to do something as conservative as eliminating poverty, for instance; I want to eliminate the chance of poverty *forever*, and at the same time eliminate the poverty of Americans' spiritual lives. I would like to come as close to Marx's ideal as possible. Though I know it would take longer than a single lifetime to accomplish this, I'd like to at least start the process.

[…]

August 17

Going to college in eight days. I've decided not to read anything about Marx for the next few months; I'm going to make friends, join clubs, go to concerts, etc. It's time I tried to live in the moment—and college is certainly the best time of life to do this. I'm not going to let myself be a loner in college and then regret it my whole life. I have to learn to *enjoy* myself; I have to end my obsession with *accomplishing* something permanent every day. My reading of Marxism is a manifestation of this obsession, so I'm going to keep away from it.

August 22

[…]

My main task now (other than college etc.) is to read Marxism. I've even started taking notes on everything I read, thus facilitating the information's absorption-into-the-brain, and at the same time giving myself access to brief summaries of the most important parts of the system.

September 5

I'm in college. I've had two classes so far. I've already read Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* for one;—that's how different college is from high school. I've made quite a few friends, too. It's awesome. I'm not homesick at all, either. I'm loving life! I've gone to several parties—went to a so-called sex party last night, but it was incredibly stupid and disappointing—and after experiencing this form of social life I can honestly say it leaves a lot to be desired. Parties are insanely juvenile, the music is insanely loud, and in order to have a good time I'd have to be insanely drunk. I'm amazed that my fellow humans enjoy going to parties! It boggles the mind. But at least most of the students here are reasonably intelligent, so it isn't as one-sided as it was in high school. I've had interesting conversations with some friends, the topics of which generally involved philosophy, Marxism, or biology. My roommate is polite, clean, considerate...basically ideal.

I've met a cute girl named Rebecca Reynolds (from California); she lives down the hall from me. She loves philosophy, sociology, psychology, and creative writing; she runs every day and is on the cross-country team; her "heaven on earth" is snowboarding. She's beautiful, sweet, funny, intelligent, kind, and friendly. And she seems to be growing mildly attached to me.

September 7

Once again my manic-depressive symptoms have fought their way to the surface, albeit in a mild form. Often I feel the tattered remnants of my former omnipresent depression manifest themselves in 'diluted' ways, so I've grown used to it. But sometimes it happens so frequently that only the belief that I'll one day contribute to the making of a better society pulls me through the desert and deposits me in the oasis: the oasis of happiness—of inspiration—of anything other than maddening apathy. Were it not for my ambition, depression would strangle me, as it did only a few years ago. How well I remember those days of desperation! […] I learned that friendship can't fulfill me, and pure introspection can't fulfill me, and music can't fulfill me, and ambition can't fulfill me; nothing can. I'll always be striving for something just beyond my reach. I may achieve it for brief periods of time (e.g., when I get married or have a child), but it will evaporate eventually and I'll be forced to continue my quest. Maybe this prediction sounds depressing to you, but it shouldn't. I'm used to the feeling of incomplete happiness, and I've accepted the queer little 'dance' I must perform while slipping in and out of emptiness.

September 13

The freedom of college is unbelievable. The workload is fairly large—mostly reading—but I don't mind it. Most students complain hourly about the stress, but the thought of stress, or even a longing for less reading, hasn't even entered my head. I'm lovin' life, dude. I frequently still experience my "mellow", "depressed" moods, but these experiences seem almost like luxuries. I haven't been truly depressed for a long time; and the moods I just described are more introspections on life than bona fide states of depression.

November 3

I can't describe my state of mind. All I can say is that something is missing from my life—some fundamental 'rallying-point' that can give a purpose to my existence. I think that, most likely, the majority of people are also missing this same quality, but they don't know it. I have made several good friends, and I still don't feel "full." I haven't experienced deep depression for a long time, yet I still feel "empty." I have a better life now than I've *ever* had, but there is *something missing*. Of course I'll never find this "something"; the most I can hope for is that the periodic feeling of emptiness will magically evaporate through time. (What a pathetic "hope"!)

[A few deleted entries about my pining for love.]

December 7

Hello again. I've being reading a lot of psychoanalysis; I can testify that one of its theories is correct: the need for adolescents to identify with a 'hero'. This hero actually becomes part of the ego—the "idealized self" is, I believe, the right terminology. We try to live up to the standards that this hero imposes on us. Karl Marx has become my "idealized self", the part of 'me' I admire most, the image I try to live up to. I experience a sort of 'camaraderie' with him when I read about socialism. Whenever I'm discouraged, I think of Karl Marx's sacrifices and instantly regain confidence. It's a great feeling, this conviction (however stupid) that Marx and I are, in some sense, *one*. Will it last? Not permanently. But for a long time, I think my reverence will be essentially similar to a religious fanatic's love of God.

I'm going to make an ongoing list of most of the major books I've read. (This way I can refer to them later.)

NON-FICTION
Man and Society (vols. 1 and 2) by John Plamenatz
The Age of Extremes by Eric Hobsbawm
The Meeting of East and West by F.S.C Northrop
most of *Socialism, Capitalism, and Democracy* by Joseph Schumpeter
The Future of Socialism by C.A.R. Crosland
most of *Europe and the People Without History* by Eric Wolf
The Colonizer's Model of the World by J.M. Blaut
most of *To the Finland Station* by Edmund Wilson
Historical Capitalism by Immanuel Wallerstein
The Culture of Narcissism by Christopher Lasch
most of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
excerpts from *Ideas and Opinions* by Albert Einstein

excerpts from *Wealth of Nations*
Marx's Concept of Man by Eric Fromm
Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx by Shlomo Avineri
Marxism by George Lichtheim
Existentialism versus Marxism edited by George Novack
Marxist Economic Theory (vols. 1 and 2) by Ernest Mandel
Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory by Ernest Mandel
Contemporary Capitalism and Marxist Economics by Gouverneur (only half so far)
excerpts from *Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century* by Gajo Petrovic
most of *Marxism and the Moral Point of View* by Kai Nielsen
Karl Marx by Saul K. Padover
The Communist Manifesto, Wage-Labor and Capital, Class Struggles in France, The Civil War in France, and excerpts from *The German Ideology*
half of *A History of the Modern World* by R.R. Palmer
most of *Childhood and Society* by Erik Erikson
half of *Psychoanalytic Theories of the Human Condition* by Paul Marcus and Alan Rosenberg
Life Against Death by Norman O. Brown
Civilization and Its Discontents
The Golem by Harry Collins and Trevor Pinch (a stupid book)
Metaphysics by Richard Taylor (when I was 13 or 14)
Democratic Theory by C. B. MacPherson (the first half)
most of *Walden*
The Republic
Thus Spake Zarathustra
Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist by Walter Kaufmann
Leviathan (parts 1 and 2)
On Liberty by J. S. Mill
half of *Color Conscious* by Appiah and Gutman
Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals by Kant
Seeking the Heart of Wisdom by Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield
Lovingkindness.... (I forget the rest of the title and the author)
Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age by Heiner Roetz
Rethinking Feminist Ethics: Care, Trust, and Empathy by Daryl Koehn
In the Lap of the Buddha
The Tao Encounters the West by Chenyang Li
excerpts from *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon
half of *Principles of Microeconomics* by Stiglitz
Political Science: A Comparative Introduction by Hague, Harrop and Breslin
Nations & Governments by Thomas Magstadt

FICTION (most of which I've forgotten)
half of *Doctor Faustus* by Thomas Mann
half of *Lord Jim*
A Prayer for Owen Meany
The Andromeda Strain, Sphere, and *Jurassic Park* by Michael Crichton
The Brothers Karamazov
Crime and Punishment (when I was 13 or 14; I don't know how much I got out of it)
War and Peace (same age)
The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison
Dawn by Elie Wiesel
A Tale of Two Cities

Sophie's Choice by William Styron
Anthem by Ayn Rand
Shogun by James Clavell (twice)
The Complete Works of Sherlock Holmes (three times in 4th and 5th grade)
Jane Eyre
Battlefield Earth by L. Ron Hubbard
The Moon is Down, The Pearl, and *The Red Pony* by Steinbeck
The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett
To Kill a Mockingbird
The Stand, It, and *Pet Semetery* by Stephen King (forgive me; I was young)
Patriot Games, Without Remorse, The Sum of all Fears, Debt of Honor, and *Executive Orders* by Tom Clancy
Siddhartha
All Quiet on the Western Front
Ethan Frome by Edith Wharton
The Catcher in the Rye
Lost Horizon by James Hilton
King Lear, Twelfth Night, Hamlet (twice)
The Stranger
innumerable little books like *A Wrinkle in Time, The Hobbit*, *Where the Red Fern Grows, A River Between, Fahrenheit 451,* as well as many short stories (*Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, *An Experiment in Misery*, etc.)
Grendel
The Awakening by Kate Chopin
Yellow Raft in Blue Water
Snow Falling on Cedars
The Razor's Edge by Somerset Maugham
Looking Backward by Edward Bellamy
The Rise of Silas Lapham by William Dean Howells
The Marrow of Tradition by Charles W. Chesnutt
A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court by Mark Twain
Call It Sleep by Henry Roth
The Street by Ann Petry
Cane by Jean Toomer
In Our Time and *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway
Laughing Boy by Oliver LaFarge
McTeague by Frank Norris
The House of Mirth by Edith Wharton

I'll also keep a list of the major piano pieces I've played:

Barcarolle by Chopin
Fantasie-Impromptu by Chopin
Nocturne in E-flat by Chopin
Nocturne in C-sharp minor (op. 27, no. 1) by Chopin
Raindrop Prelude by Chopin
Funeral March by Chopin
*Aeolian Harp Etud*e by Chopin
Military Polonaise by Chopin
Fourth movement of F-minor sonata for clarinet and piano by Brahms
Opus 39, waltz no. 15 by Brahms

Claire de Lune by Debussy
First movement of the Appassionata Sonata by Beethoven
First and second movements (and most of the third) *of the Pathetique Sonata* by Beethoven
Für Elise
Rondo alla Turca by Mozart (and several others)
First movement of the Moonlight Sonata
Love Dream No. 3 by Liszt
Siciliano from Sonata no. 2 for Harpsichord and Flute by Bach
Rootbeer Rag by Billy Joel
The Entertainer and *Maple Leaf Rag* by Scott Joplin

December 15

It's frustrating to be superior to the majority of lunkheads in this world. I suppose I'm superior in many ways, but right now I'm thinking of only two: intellectually and revolutionarily (if that's a word). Capitalism means death to humanity, and I'm part of the tiny minority that understands this. My determination to destroy the system consumes me. *Every day* I think about it, I wait patiently for the time when I'll be able to begin my struggle. You have no idea how frustrating this *wait* is; you don't know how frustrating it is for me to live in the decadent, decrepit, dilapidated, decaying society of America! I'm ashamed of my country! […]

December 17

Why do I have such trouble analyzing my feelings? I'm sure you've noticed the problem. For example, I know I want friends; there's no doubt about that. But on the other hand, what's so great about them (judging by the ones I have)? They often bring me nothing but grief. In the past six years I've gotten into the habit of examining every social situation for signs that I'm being ignored. Since *everyone* ignores me sometimes, I frequently (maybe unjustifiably) get pissed off.

I guess it's in my nature to be suspicious and jealous, even when there's little reason to be. On slight provocations—as when Lauren or Kaitlyn or whoever ignores me—I get sad, wonder if my personality is defective, if I seem annoying to my friends, if it's actually *their* fault because they're inconsiderate, etc. Then I try to picture myself in their eyes. Then I long for a girlfriend who really cares about me, whom I can say *anything* to. Then I turn on some Chopin. Then I sit down to write. Then I try to sound mildly entertaining to you, the reader. Then I think about socialism and wonder if friendship is really as important as I make it out to be. Then I simply stop thinking and listen to the music. And during this whole time there is a certain self-consciousness that threatens to turn it all into a joke, into a parody of self-pity and depression.

December 19

[…]

I'm attaching a couple of paragraphs from one of the papers I've written for a course, since they provide a possible explanation for my obsession with Karl Marx:

> Object relations theory emphasizes the individual's relations with others as the most important force determining personality and the growth of the self. Melanie Klein probably exaggerated the importance of objects and the transformations they undergo after the self has "internalized" them (e.g., her peculiar theory of the "good" breast and the "bad" breast seems too fanciful to

> be true), but it is certainly correct that people develop their values through their relations with others. Heinz Kohut postulated that the "idealized parental imago" (the idealized image of the parent) becomes transformed by the child's relations with other adults into a permanent set of values, ideals, and "higher causes" (Marcus and Rosenberg, 216). This theory can, I believe, be adjusted to state the following: the child idolizes his parents during the first stages of life, and as he becomes older the realm of his "idealized selfobjects" broadens. By the time he has reached adolescence he no longer "idolizes" his parents as unconditionally as he once did; instead he latches onto the image of a hero. This "hero" represents most of the adolescent's ideals, and—unconsciously or consciously—the adolescent's behavior is affected by this hero-worship. The hero essentially becomes part of the adolescent's self—the part of the self he loves most. Thus he gains self-esteem through this process of "internalization" (Marcus and Rosenberg, 223); his identity is reaffirmed and strengthened.
>
> Most adolescents can attest to the truth of this theory, but I'll provide a specific example. At about the age of sixteen I started reading books on Karl Marx, intrigued by his dedication to socialist revolution and the overthrow of capitalism. I did not only study his theories, however; I also read about his life. I wanted to know if he was worthy of the great respect I accorded him. Gradually I convinced myself that he was, and since then he (or rather his ideas) have become such a part of my life that it is clear that I have "incorporated" the image of this man into my self. He represents—he *is*—the part of my self that I love most.

Well? Do you think it makes sense? I think so. Karl Marx has become part of me; if somebody insults him, they sort of insult me as well.

At the same time, I'd like to think that an important reason for my determination to contribute to the overcoming of human "alienation" is that I genuinely care about it. I have probably been more alienated from my fellow humans (and thereby from myself, or at least the social part of myself) than most people I know. Since I know firsthand how devastating alienation can be, I have made it a goal to reduce "alienation" in the world. In other words, despite my frequent lack of sympathy for humanity, I don't simply desire immortality; I want to help mankind. But enough of this hogwash.

December 21

What an idiot I am! I was just at the mall with Kaitlyn, and I bought two CD's: Billy Joel's *Kohuept* and the *Great Piano Concertos* of Mozart. Why the hell did I buy the Billy Joel album? What a freaking waste of money. But it's awesome to listen to a rock 'n' roll album and then to hear Alfred Brendel play Mozart! Listening to *la musique classique* after suffering through our modern trash makes me feel pristine and purified. I do enjoy most Billy Joel, but his music is simplistic and stupid compared to Mozart's. *All* modern music makes me ashamed to belong to my culture. Why has the quality of art diminished so much in the past 150 years?

By the way, I wrote an article on the history of modern music for a college magazine. Rereading it, I can see that it's crap.

January 22

Back from my month-long break. A month long! After a week I was ready to return! But maybe it was a blessing in disguise: since I had nothing to do, I wrote an over-long screenplay about the life of Karl Marx. Spent three days writing an outline of it, and then ten days (twelve hours each day) writing the actual script. And, despite my usual excessive modesty, I must say that for a kid who doesn't know a damn thing about writing screenplays—I skimmed a couple of 'how-to' books before I sat down to write it—it isn't bad. It's a lot better than the majority of screenplays that are made into movies (e.g., *Mickey Blue Eyes*.

What a piece of trash!). When it was finished I was *ecstatic*; I had finally proven to myself that I was capable of completing the projects I frequently attempt (such as novels). While writing it I was a machine. I got sick to death of the supposed mediocrity of the dialogue—on many occasions I lost all heart—but I *forced* myself to take no breaks. The simple act of completing the script in ten days was a triumph of the human spirit, a triumph of willpower.

One of the reasons I wrote it was to counteract the willful ignorance that pervades our society regarding communism and Karl Marx. I painted Marx in a fairly sympathetic light—but it was all true, of course—and I portrayed communism as mankind's only possible salvation. Which is, again, the truth. I'm so sick of the asinine American philosophy of unbridled individualism, selfishness, a barren "freedom" at all costs, and contempt for any culture that's different. The philosophy of choice for Americans is ignorance and apathy—and it's one of my goals to change this. Hopefully the movie will start the process. Some other purposes of the script are as follows: to portray poverty and its effects on people; to glorify the human spirit; to examine the human condition (by portraying most of the emotions that humans experience, tracing an entire life, and probing into the causes of Marx's more 'peculiar' actions—such as his adultery with Helene Demuth); to make people disgusted with the philosophy of capitalism; to retell the forgotten atrocities of the Paris Commune and the 1848 revolution in France; to explain the need for a utopia; to provide a sketch of the harsh lives of industrial workers; to 'introduce' the audience to classical music (of which the whole soundtrack will consist); to analyze Marx himself, to expose all his faults and strengths; and to write a love story (between Marx and his wife). Now all I have to do is....get a Wesleyan film professor to read it, convince an agent to represent me, and get the movie made.

I have declared war on society. One of us will win.

January 23

What can I write about? You, the reader, are still the only *truly loyal* friend I have—the only one I know I can rely on. Everyone else can be an object of suspicion, anger, jealousy, etc. Sometimes I wonder if Sartre was right when he said that hell is others. His reasoning was more philosophical and abstract, but I believe that my experiences have basically confirmed his idea. Nevertheless, the contradictions of human nature are such that we need other people no matter how much despair they bring us.

January 24

[…]

I'm listening to the second movement of Chopin's 2nd Piano Concerto; the beauty of it is overwhelming. Life is divine at moments like this, when I'm alone with my thoughts and my music. I wish I could make you feel the way I do right now! Words just aren't enough; only music is capable of coaxing tears out of one's over-dry eyes, of washing away reality and substituting a breathtaking illusion in its place. Music is the greatest art form; even poetry pales in comparison.

January 25

Today I got an e-mail from the top Marxist sociologist in the world: Erik Wright. I had written him a letter about summer research opportunities; to my surprise, he actually said he'd be happy to meet with me once a week to discuss Marxism! He suggested I organize informal study groups with some of his students in Madison.

January 26

I'm temporarily forsaking Marxism: this semester I'm going to have a lot of work. Three of my classes are reading-intensive—the American Lit. has 14 required books—and one of them (Econ.) is sure to be difficult.

Literature is much easier to read than nonfiction. Spending half an hour reading about the history of capital is equivalent to spending five hours reading a decent novel. Given that I love literature, it's odd I don't read it more often. I suppose the most important reason is that reading it doesn't seem to accomplish anything. I enjoy it, but at the same time....I guess I feel uneasy because the moment will be gone soon, and the book will be a mere memory. Pleasure doesn't last; accomplishments do. –Once again we encounter what I think is the primary reason for my 'ambitions': my need for some kind of insurance against death, for "symbolic immortality". Pleasure doesn't interest me, because (unless it's physical pleasure) I can't always *recognize* it as pleasure. Intellectual pleasure is something of an oxymoron for me; emotional pleasure is, of course, easier to recognize.

I sent my grandparents a letter today; I'm trying to send them as many as possible before they die, mostly because I know how much pleasure it gives my grandfather. He's a good guy. When I was unwrapping presents after my graduation I hugged him....and he cried quietly. Rubbed his rough face against mine and hugged me. Afterwards, when he was recording me playing the Appassionata sonata, he again cried a little. He realizes he might die soon, and he's glad that he lived to see one of his grandsons become a 'success'. It's a grand feeling to know I've helped make him happy in his old age.

January 27

Edward Bellamy's novel *Looking Backward*—which I have to read for American Lit.—is quite interesting. Virtually the entire book consists of an imaginative description of a possible utopia.

The ironic thing about a 'utopia' is that I'm not sure it's really desirable. Humans *need* something to fight for; a utopia might become decadent and dissolve into corruption. Furthermore, there wouldn't be the kind of excitement that exists in today's world; people would resort to crime just for a sense of adventure.

These considerations, of course, are academic. A utopia will never exist.

Finished Bellamy's book. What an inspiring novel! It ain't great literature, but I recommend it to anyone capable of critical reflection on his society. The fact that I was listening to Chopin's "Fantasy on Polish Airs" metamorphosed my mundane intellectual delight into a hope that penetrated to the core of my being. How I love the ecstasies of exhilaration erupting in me as I dream of the future! They're tempered only by my frustration with the present.

(later) Went on a pleasant outing with Rebecca; when we came back I asked to read her essay for a course she had applied to. It described her job in a factory during the past summer: it was poignant and well-written. She's a unique girl: she willingly spent her summer working in a factory from 6:00 till 5:00 p.m., after which she went to an evening job as a secretary. Not many teenagers would do the factory thing out of sheer compassion for the plight of the workers. And this summer she's working with migrant farmers. It's hard to believe that her friends are the frivolous people she described in her e-mails; how could she tolerate people like that? She has faults, but she's a *goddess* compared to a boor like me! And I'm not saying that to be endearing; I mean it. I would never work in a factory out of compassion.

But think of what those people go through every day! One of her co-workers has a young wife and a child, but he's forced to get to work at 5:00 in the morning, leave at 5:00 pm, and then go to another job until 1:00 a.m. When he gets home he looks at his baby son for a little while and then goes to bed.

I'm listening to the second movement of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto; the tears are flowing freely. Music, especially when combined with thoughts of the misfortunes of people like "Jay", has that effect on me.

[Several entries deleted.]

February 8

Economics is quite complicated. I'm worried that my brain isn't wired in the right way to absorb everything I read—or, indeed, to *understand* it. But with enough patience I think I can conquer this infernal "science". After I've been struggling over a specific concept for some time, frustration begetting more frustration, it's a great feeling when I finally understand it. At such times, for a moment I'm impressed by the logic of economics....but my admiration turns to revulsion when I remember that this very "logic," abstract and impersonal, is what makes economics so hateful.

February 9

A plethora of questions is fermenting inside my head: Why am I so obsessed with revolution? Why is it so important to me that I would dedicate my life—that I would *sacrifice* my life—to the overthrow of capitalism? If I am so concerned about humanity, why am I such a cynical bastard who does nothing but criticize humanity? How did my obsession arise in the first place? To what lengths would I go in order to realize my "dreams"? Does the revolution matter more to me than life itself (my own and others')? Is it not foolish to neglect, as I am doing, all the significant questions in life? (e.g., "What is justice?" "How can I be a moral person?" "Isn't being a moral person more important than anything else?" "What is happiness?" "Is happiness an ultimate goal or is it a useless abstraction, a hindrance to the realization of a 'meaningful' life?") Should I try to be a well-rounded person, or should I focus all my energies on the revolution? Is the glory of martyrdom the mirage that lures me to this imaginary oasis, wherein I sacrifice myself and my happiness for an abstract cause? Does the 'revolution' mean nothing more to me than an insurance against death? Do I care more about my 'legacy' than about my happiness? Why am I seemingly incapable of appreciating everyday pleasures? Is it because of their fleeting nature?—because of *death*? If the fear of death does govern my life so completely, am I not making a terrible mistake by submitting to it and not confronting it?

What priority should I give to the other aspects of my life? Should I make a mighty attempt to increase my circle of friends, or should I just submit to the inevitable? Is there something so irretrievably wrong with my personality that I repel my friends and destroy my chances at romance? Am I not making a fatal mistake in trying to model myself after Karl Marx? Should I rather try to be a compassionate, 'understanding' person? […] Do I not cherish the absurd, simplistic notion of self-sacrifice?

These questions and others occupy all my spare time (of which I have none). Every day I read, read, read without confronting these questions....and it's driving me crazy. I can't retain my mental health for long and continue to neglect questions that relate to something so fundamental as my *identity*.

Lord! Is this another identity crisis? Is this simply a more severe continuation of the one that lasted four years? I'm nearing adulthood. This is the time of life when we harden into recognizable, unchangeable entities. Thus, I'm worried that this crisis is more significant than the one I experienced several years ago; its outcome will determine who I am for the rest of my life.

Should I do nothing about it and accept whatever inevitable conclusion it leads to? I've learned from experience that I can rarely influence the paths of my development. But there's such a feeling of urgency and confusion that I can't sit back in artificial apathy; I have to *do* something!

There's nothing I can do, though. For now I'm going to immerse myself in my work and ignore the gnawing feeling of dulled panic that upsets my mental balance and makes me wish I lived in the sublime apathy of a Donald Trump or a Jesse Helms.

Maybe you doubt the authenticity of this "identity crisis" because it seems abrupt, and derivative

of my other ones. But it's not the abruptness that surprises me; it's the fact that it's only just occurring *now*. Why did it take so long? I suppose the reason is that the perceived dissolving of my friendships is a good catalyst for this kind of crisis.

(several hours later) I guess I'll stop isolating myself from everyone. I'll just act 'naturally'—the way I used to. And I can't let myself think about my "identity crisis", for two reasons: I'll get obsessed, and these dilemmas usually work themselves out in the end.

February 12

Saturday night. I'm reading *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. I love this novel.

[…]

February 18

Listening to Brahms' Intermezzo in A, a surprisingly luscious and melancholy piece that nourishes my bleak mood.

I just attended a concert by Odetta, the seventy-year-old folk/blues singer. She was excellent; I didn't even mind much that I was alone. The only problem with blues is that a lot of it sounds the same, and the way she sang, well....after I had heard one piece I had heard them all. But it was good anyway.

February 20

For the next few days I'm going to take a break from my coursework. I'm sick of it. Instead I'm going to read *Marxism and the Moral Point of View.* I started it a few hours ago; it's fairly interesting, but more importantly, it provides me with the therapeutic feeling that I'm doing something meaningful (as opposed to incessantly reading for my classes).

February 21

The book I was reading last night repeats itself over and over again; I'm through with it. In its stead I'm reading *Existentialism versus Marxism*.

(later) I love that book! Existentialism is more interesting than I thought. I always thought it was a ridiculous, overly intellectual philosophy that ultimately makes no sense (much like Hegelianism, which I'll never understand), but I think there are actually merits to it. (Of course, it irritates me that existentialist thinkers have to write in incomprehensible language: e.g. "Man is a being who makes himself a lack of being in order that there might be being". Huh?) Marxism is undoubtedly a superior philosophy....but the natural philosophy of dialectical materialism is bullshit.

Now that my interest in philosophy has been temporarily renewed I can watch with horror as the telltale signs of obsession begin to manifest themselves. After reading a paragraph I sit back and ponder what I've read, and it takes me several minutes to realize I'm getting nowhere with this "pondering"—so I return to the book. Thirty seconds later I take a break and think about what I've just read. After several minutes I force myself to return to the book. It never ends. The frustrating thing is that I never get anywhere; I just meditate myself into frustration.

In the past several weeks I've regained my ambition to construct a vast theory on which to base the future society. (Have I already told you this?) Marx recognized the need for socialism to have a "scientific"

basis, and now that there are so many conflicting 'philosophies' in the air it's more necessary than ever. My goal is to understand the laws of history, of capitalism, of economics, and to base communism on philosophical-psychological-economic-sociological-historical theories. For instance, I want to delineate a coherent theory of morality.

The problem is that I have little faith in my ability to accomplish this.

February 22

I've decided to alternate between doing coursework one day and reading on my own the next. I think it's the only way I'll be able to have the motivation to do work for courses: every day that I spend reading for my classes I'll desperately try to get as much work as possible out of the way. I'm sick to death of my research job; one can easily get tired of comparing Confucianism and feminism. Confucianism is quite interesting, but I'd rather spend my time on Marxism.

(later) Ah, *je t'aime, le désespoir!* What would I do without you? Be happy? Ha! I don't need happiness! You are my only friend; you are the only one who understands me. You understand me better than I understand myself, *mon cheri*.

February 23

For the past five hours I've been reading *Existentialism versus Marxism*. This book is inspiring me to become a philosopher before I stomp out capitalism. The essay written by Sartre called "Marxism and Existentialism" has especially influenced me: despite my ignorance, it appears to be a brilliant critique of "contemporary" Marxism. But more importantly, I'm intrigued by Sartre's ambition to make Marxism a nearly universal philosophy with an "existential" base. He criticizes its dialectical materialism [which includes its philosophy of nature] and its theory of knowledge, but he thinks that an integration of Existentialism and Marxism would 'complete' the massive system. Of course, this all took place decades ago—and no integration ever occurred—but the point is that I'm now determined to devote years of research to the construction of a grand philosophy of human society that rejuvenates Marxism. I won't take anything for granted: I'll treat every aspect of Marxism as a hypothesis that has not yet been proven. Where the theory is lacking necessary elements I'll reform it.

Clearly if I intend to 'construct' (or verify) theories of morality, metaphysics, epistemology, history, economics, psychology, etc., I'll have to do an inordinate amount of research. I'll have to acquaint myself with all the major philosophies of history; for the next several years this will be my highest priority. I'll have to read boring analyses of class society, of primitive societies, of all the influential Asian civilizations and their philosophies.... Psychoanalysis will be an important part of my 'theory', too.

[…]

I realize perfectly well that all this is unrealistic and I'll never be able to carry it out, but you who are acquainted with my disgustingly irrational idealism know full well that no amount of reason will deter me from my ambition. Only if I lose my inspiration do I ever give up. And after a year my inspiration to help establish socialism has only grown in intensity, so maybe my new inspiration to base this socialism on a "universal" philosophy will last for a long time. […]

Philosophy is so fascinating. It's bizarre that I was able to keep myself away from it for....at least a year. Marxism, of course, is a philosophy, but I've never thought of it as a *philosophy* in the sense that Hegelianism is, for instance. I saw it as nothing more than a theory of human society, not as a metaphysical-psychological-ethical-epistemological philosophy that attempts to solve almost all the problems of human existence. I suspect that it isn't, as a matter of fact, very adequate in these purely philosophical realms, but I won't know for sure until I do more reading.

February 24

After spending a few minutes reading economics, even Hegel is refreshing.

Change of topic: The feminist "philosopher" Mary Daly spoke at Wesleyan a few weeks ago. I didn't go to the lecture, but I saw posters plastered around the campus advertising her latest book. Its title is *Quintessence...Realizing the Archaic Future: A Radical Elemental Feminist Manifesto*. Can you believe it's possible for someone to take herself so seriously she'd choose that title for a book? Judging by this and other stories I've ever heard about the old hag, I'd say she's a pretentious buffoon who postures as an intellectual. (On the other hand, it often seems as if one of the necessary criteria for being an intellectual is precisely this pretentiousness. That's why I don't want to be labeled an "intellectual.")

Here's a moral dilemma: Suppose I eventually become President (this is only hypothetical; I know it won't happen). What if by some trick of fate it comes to pass that the only way for me to institute socialism/communism in this country is to kill every member of Congress? What would I do? Would I fulfill my revolutionary dreams and resort to murder, or would I refuse to kill anyone and relinquish my dreams? I suspect that if I were actually placed in the position I would refuse to kill them....but it's an interesting question. And it's bugging me.

February 25

It's fascinating how much more *human* are artists and poets and musicians and composers and authors than economists. In economics humanity is reduced to a multitude of graphs. I would rather remain depressed than somehow convince myself to *like* economics. Economics is the negation of humanity; it is death.

(later) If it weren't for music, my frequent bouts of depression would lack substance. They would lose their poetry, their elegance, their opulence. I listen to music at least six hours a day, often as I do nothing but sit in a chair and contemplate the luxury of existence and the splendor of sorrow. My mind is empty; thoughts neither come nor go; the music admits no room for them. While others piddle on their Playstations, I commune with my soul.

(later) I spent several hours tonight playing Chopin's Nocturne in C# minor (op. 27), a masterful, distressingly moving piece. I haven't played the piano seriously for several weeks, but now I plan to go to the Center for the Arts as often as possible. I love playing the piano; unlike reading, I *know* I enjoy it. It can be a surreal experience, an escape from reality. Tonight I trekked across campus in the miserable, sadness-scented rain because I couldn't handle the ache of loneliness. The piano is a forum for my grievances. It listens to me, it understands me, as I pour out my emotions; it comforts me, reassures me; this piano, which has seen so much of life, which has encountered every emotion, has witnessed the confessions of countless sinners, caresses me with its wisdom. It is fazed by nothing. It is the one underlying continuity of life. It *becomes* me, it molds itself into the shape of *me*. The Piano asks nothing of me as I, in my self-absorption, take advantage of its patience.... Its sound is indescribable. One can say that violins sound 'stringy', that trumpets sound bright and metallic, that oboes sound nasal, that saxophones sound 'jazzy', that flutes sound airy and high-pitched and fluttery....but how do pianos sound? They're ineffable. The sound of clarinets is difficult to describe also, but not nearly so much as that of the piano. *The Piano:* the greatest of all "luxuries" (precisely because it's a necessity).

If I were a poet, my first composition would be an ode to despair; my second would be an ode to pianos.

February 26

Eventually I'll get out of this rut I'm in. I always do. It's lasted a fairly long time (about a month), but on the other hand....the longer it lasts, the closer I am to the day when it'll be over. [?] As I've said

before, I'm somewhat of a romantic in that I don't even know if I *want* to be absolutely cured of my "manic-depression"—partly because that might involve losing my wonderful periods of inspiration, and partly because depression seems to get me closer to myself—but then again, I, uhhh, like it a lot when I'm not depressed. (Incidentally, the clinical version of pointless suicidal depression is obviously harmful and is never what I'm referring to.) I actually have the energy to *do* things when I'm not depressed.

A few minutes ago I visited my friends....and what do you think they were doing? Piddling on their Playstation. I returned to my room. Too many people in this sad world are shallow. […]

"Oh, the arrogance!" I can hear the condemnations of the self-righteous preachers who worship their own mediocrity. "The hypocrite! The snob!" I laugh as I listen to the assaults from God's lackeys. "The naïve idealist! The ridiculous dreamer! The self-absorbed child! The deluded pseudo-intellectual!" Ha! I spit in your face, civilization! I am a nihilist; your taunts cannot affect me. I have built a barrier of bitterness around me. Do you think I still have a desire to change? Do you think I still want to be a perfect person who isn't able to accept his faults? I cherish my faults! Without my faults I would not have my strengths. "You like being a hypocrite? You like being an arrogant, self-absorbed intellectual? You like being unhappy?" Hypocrisy, arrogance, self-absorption, unhappiness....these words have lost all meaning for me. I am all of them and none of them at the same time. […]

February 27

Finished *Existentialism versus Marxism.* After a long hiatus from philosophical problems my interest has again been piqued—and this time it will not evaporate in a shroud of murky, inconvenient "obsession". To give up philosophy solely because it carries me to the brink of despair is weak and foolish. Imagine if Beethoven had given up music because he thought it made him depressed! Granted, I'm not Beethoven, but the point is that no self-respecting person with an iota of willpower would relinquish a subject simply because it made him unhappy. (On the other hand, I suspect that it would require a great deal of "willpower" for me to *ignore* philosophy.)

There are so many unsolved problems of human existence! My goal is to do one of two things: either solve them, or convince myself it's impossible to solve them.

(later) […] I've told you all this before, but I have to say it again. Loneliness is tearing a gaping hole in me. I would rather be unhappy over more profound things like philosophy, but I simply cannot escape the world of people.

And yet even friendship doesn't fulfill me. Love alone would fulfill me; a *girl* would fulfill me. Oh, the hopelessness of the situation is driving me insane!

At heart I'm a romantic, a poet who hasn't the slightest skill with words.

February 29

I finished the book *McTeague*; it didn't help my depression much. Curse loneliness. Curse my need to live in a peculiar mixture of pain and happiness.

One would think that with a simple exertion of willpower I could escape from this prison I've created for myself, but it's not that easy. I don't seem to have the energy to do it. If I could just make more friends I'd be cured (temporarily). But I think it's the nature of depression to feed off itself: the more depressed one gets, the more one feels hopeless, unable to break away from the compounded maze of depression, hemmed in on all sides by an impersonal force. Inertia becomes the guiding thread of life. My mind ceases to operate as I languish in my chair, listening to the collections of empty sounds that caress my darker side—that encourage it as it wallows in a pool of self-pity—that reassure it there's no escape from depression, that pain gives life meaning.

I've long forgotten what the justification is for this particular episode. Loneliness? Pshaw! I have friends; if I wanted to, I could resurrect my friendships and make new ones. So then what is it? Inertia. I

can't break out of this annoyingly hopeless state of mind, so I revel in it while it lasts.

March 3

Schumann's piece "Scenes from Childhood" (op. 15/12) is wonderful to listen to when one is sad. It's almost as if he wrote it for me. Ahh....that first major chord after 30 seconds of hopelessness is Divinity. So beautiful, so wise, so comforting.... A flower in the kingdom of Death. A ray of hope clings to it as it vainly tries to fight the darkness. Alas! it loses the battle; we're plunged into despair once more. We can't protect ourselves from it; our only hope is to accept the inevitable, to acquiesce in melancholy. And....oh, the devastating ending.... We've lost the will even to *contemplate* our misery. There's nothing left to live for; death overcomes us before we've paid our last respects to life.

Maybe *that's* the meaning of the middle section. It isn't a vain struggle against the inevitable; it's Happiness out of Hopelessness. Awareness of our hopelessness brings a perverse, soothing embrace, that is happiness too meaningful to be contemplated. But in the end all that's left is our despair, no matter how much meaning it may give us. Despair is the only reality. Everything else is transient, mind-games, metaphysical bullshit. Despair is Life, Consciousness, Eternity, Being....Death. Nothingness. Nirvana. All else is an illusion.

However, Chopin's Nocturne in C-sharp minor, op. 27 No. 1, is the quintessence of anguish. No other piece of music captures the brilliance of suffering so perfectly. It contains all states of mind: sadness, loneliness, hopelessness, flashes of inspiration, happiness, determination, hope, rage, acquiescence, forgiveness, equanimity, nirvana.... This nocturne is life itself. In five minutes it sums up humanity's experience—all the contradictions of the human condition. Only a god could have composed such art.

March 5

Humanity is music. There is no truth; science is nothing more than a vulgar attempt to determine the vulgar causes of vulgar "observations"; philosophy is a vain attempt to discover meaning in a meaningless world; poetry is a heroic but futile effort to express the ineffable. Language is useless; it serves merely to disguise reality. It encourages us to analyze the world, and at the same time prevents us from understanding the world. Music alone communicates the inexpressible. Music is synonymous with meaning. Words belittle humanity; they sterilize the spirit, maim the mind. Put simply, they're very limiting. Yet at the same time they enable us to express our thoughts coherently. –Oh, I'm so sick of thought! Thought is oppression. At this moment I want nothing but to hold hands with Rebecca, or to kiss her, or to run my hands through her hair.

March 8

I went to a bagpipe performance with Rebecca. It was a long show, made even longer by the fact that a bagpipe was playing the whole time. I have nothing against bagpipes, but two hours of that incessant drone can get on pretty much anyone's nerves.

On the way there I lightly brought up the subject of the "thing" I'd had for her in the beginning of the year (and said it was over now). She seemed surprised, pretended she hadn't known about it, and asked why I hadn't told her. Etc. etc. In any event, I've given up. 'Romance' ain't gonna happen. Perhaps it's for the best. It *is* for the best. I'm not very disappointed, in fact. Rebecca's a good friend, but she wouldn't be a good girlfriend.

March 9

Today was a good day in the 'friends' department. First I played basketball with Kaitlyn, Lauren, and Jason. Then I went to the town with Rebecca; then had dinner with a bunch of friends. Later I "studied economics" with Kaitlyn and Jessie. It didn't involve much studying, mostly just fun conversation. I was fairly amusing; they spent most of the time laughing wildly. It's a good feeling to reflect on a day like this—a wholesome, pleasant feeling.

March 10

Vladimir Ashkenazy is amazing. When he plays Chopin, the upper registers of the piano…exude *droplets* of sound. There's no other way to describe it. It's as if the sound has turned into a smattering of gentle rain. (So I suppose this contradicts what I said about the ineffable quality of the piano's sound—but it's an exception.) I love listening to the water-lilies of music that emanate from Ashkenazy's fingers.

March 26

Finally I've returned [from spring vacation]! For days I've been dying to write about my experience with Nietzsche. First I read *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist,* by Kaufmann, and then *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. I'm not certain I caught all the symbolism in the latter, but I did read it slowly enough to appreciate the general philosophy—as well as its beauty. It is surely the most artistically perfect philosophical work ever written.

Nietzsche's philosophy is so profound it may take me years to fully understand it. As I read those two books I was overcome with adrenaline, inspiration, passion—you name it, I felt it. Nietzsche has opened up new worlds for me! He has convinced me to spend my life studying philosophy (without giving up my former plans). Nietzsche! His philosophy is deeper than anything I've ever read! I'm currently reading a book on feminist ethics; it's shamelessly superficial compared to Nietzsche's thought. Nietzsche was also passionate about music and literature; he was (I believe) a manic-depressive; and he seems to have been something of a misanthrope who had an intense desire to overcome himself and humanity.

[…]

Nietzsche! I think this man is going to take a place beside Marx as my second hero. Such a fascinating, depressed, lonely, music-loving genius: how can one *not* worship him? He stood for everything I 'believe in' or have experienced: he was deeply anti-racist; he was passionate about philosophy—he *lived* his thoughts; he frowned on the human species; one of his heroes was Beethoven; he was a lonely man who was either so happy that he cried tears of joy or so sad he wanted to take his life; he was profoundly anti-religious. My ideal is to become a combination of Marx and Nietzsche.

My friends are watching the Academy Awards. I watched a little of this spectacle, but I had to leave the room. There's nothing else to do, but anything is better than witnessing the decadence that our culture has been reduced to. (The annual obsession with what these celebrities are *wearing*! God Almighty! It's enough to make you want to put an axe through the TV when you see the sycophants interviewing those stick-thin girls weighted down with bloodthirsty, spirit-sapping jewelry.)

I was accepted into the College of Social Studies.

March 27 - "It is night: only now do all songs of lovers awaken. And my soul too is the song of a lover."

I finally finished *The House of Mirth*. Quite a tragic novel. My former buoyancy of mood has vanished like the baseless fabric of a vision. Melancholy is exquisite beyond words. Sitting here, listening to Mozart, writing, is my variation on the theme of nirvana. At last I can see with lucidity that sadness adds a certain texture, a wistfulness, to life that can be attained through no other channels. It is necessary to my

well-being; it justifies me. The Buddhists prefer not to become "attached" to it, but I relish this escape from reality, from the monotony of day-to-day living.

Life would be unbearable without suffering.

March 28 - "Lately I looked into your eye, O Life! And I seemed to sink into the unfathomable."

Have you ever heard Rimsky-Korsakov's "Variations" from *Capriccio Espagnol*, op. 34? The opening of it is....extremely noble. Mere verbiage, this verbal sludge that's printed on the page in front of you, could not do justice to the stirring simplicity and life-affirming loftiness of the first few bars. The french horn's solo, with the strings in the background, is incredible. Nothing else matters as soon as those notes strike your eardrums; they encompass all experience.

March 29

I'm going to take ballroom dancing lessons in April.

Tonight: going to a restaurant with Rebecca and then a book reading.

One of the reasons I don't like being in the company of more than four of my peers at once is that everyone feels a need to say something just for the sake of saying something. They don't want to be left out of the conversation, so they'll do anything for attention. Sometimes it's simply responding to a statement; other times it's blurting out random noises or songs or bad jokes. The more people enter a group, the lower the quality of the conversation becomes. Ultimately it's reduced to an exchange of monosyllables, or their intellectual equivalent.

March 30

[…]

I finished *Laughing Boy*. Another depressing novel. Why did the professor choose so many tragic stories for us to read? They affect me terribly.

If one spends too much time with other people, one loses....music. One forgets the ineffable. Life becomes commonplace. No longer is life music; it is noise.

Classical music reminds me that there is more experience than can be expressed in words, that life would be meaningless without the inexpressible, that I'll never know myself—and that it's better this way. Music reminds me that despite what all the scientists say, there *is* magic in the world, in the self. I could not endure life without this magic.

If one spends too much time with others, one loses oneself.

April 2

The third movement of Beethoven's Sonata No. 28 is exquisite. And the third movement of his Hammerklavier Sonata is one of the most moving artworks I've ever experienced.

Beethoven is a forbidding figure. He exemplifies the Lonely Man, the artistic genius who conquers life. Every emotion I've endured he experienced to the power of ten. I can't even comprehend what it must have been like to be Beethoven.

I'm desperately bored right now. Curse boredom.

April 7 - "Life is a fountain of delight; but where the rabble also drinks, all wells are poisoned."

Mediocrity loves company. One simply has to spend a few days in the presence of other people to recognize that. The more contact I have with society, the more I believe that society corrupts us. We lose ourselves, get sidetracked, become mindless ants.

[Several deleted entries.]

April 11

I finally met with the film professor who read my screenplay. He was helpful. Basically his criticisms were that there's too much philosophy, too much talking, and it's too long. But he was impressed that a freshman had written it. He said I could turn it into a hundred-million-dollar epic. Apparently I have a good feel for "cinematic devices and dramatic scenes". His advice was to read screenplays and rent the movies for them, compare the lengths of their scenes to those of my scenes, eliminate any repetition in my script, etc.

April 18

I'm not going to my economics class at all for the rest of the summer; it's boring and I don't understand it. I'm not even going to read the textbook. In its stead I'm going to read volume two of Ernest Mandel's *Marxist Economic Theory*. This summer I'll probably research microeconomics so I'll be ready for the macroeconomics course in the fall.

I'm fascinated by the differences between Marxist economic theory and contemporary bourgeois economic theory. Many of their respective claims are completely contradictory; so who's right? How is it possible for economists to disagree so completely? Economics isn't like philosophy: you'd think it wouldn't be possible for people to interpret *statistics* so differently. Either the labor theory of value is wrong or it's right; either the theory of surplus value is wrong or it's right. After all this time there still isn't a consensus!

[…]

April 21

[…] Capitalism is sick, it's true. But no matter how many revolutions we have, humanity will never be redeemed. Its face is permanently disfigured.

(later) […] This journal has become, to a certain extent, my escape from rationality. (I get enough rationality from the books I read.) No longer is it imperative that I fully understand myself; no longer do I have a frantic desire to be *correct* in everything I write—in all the little self-analyses I write. Am I "right" when I say that pop culture prevents the unfolding of your potential? Am I "right" when I say that humanity is in certain respects "akin to music"? These questions miss the point, I think. The important question is *'Is it possible to be "right" at all?'* What is truth? If logic fails to guide us to "truth", if reason and its companion, language, lead us astray, then how can it be said that "truth" is possible? How can it be said that truth is expressible in words? We invented words; thus we invented "truth". Thus there is no Truth.

Of course, we can draw conclusions from empirical observations. We can confidently assert that the Earth is (approximately) spherical. But, as I mentioned earlier, science is vulgar. Empirical observations are vulgar. They are not what I'm interested in; I'm interested in *people*—in their psychology, their patterns of behavior—and in philosophy that directly or indirectly relates to people. (This is why I have never had as much interest in metaphysics as in ethics.) These are the subjects in which it seems difficult or impossible

to arrive at "truth".

[…]

I suppose this entry has gotten me embroiled in quite a few contradictions.

April 22 - "Overcome, you Higher Men, the petty virtues, the petty prudences, the sand-grain discretion, the ant-swarm inanity, miserable ease, the 'happiness of the greatest number'!"

I finally finished *Marxist Economic Theory*. This book is monumental, a triumph. Ernest Mandel (who recently died) had a *complete* grasp on the subject; he was acquainted with seemingly every relevant book on Marxism. After reading him I get the impression that he is ahead of all other contemporary economists. I admit I don't understand every facet of the labor theory of value, but he seems to have such a grasp on the subject that the people who criticize Marxist economics are almost certainly too shallow to understand it.

(later) I just finished Mandel's *Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory*—a 75-page book that's quite easy to read.

Speaking of Marxism....a few weeks ago I skimmed a couple of passages in a book written by some nondescript film critic. Apparently he was frustrated with his pointless life, so he decided to take a few courses at a college that was running a special program on "great books". Two of these books were the *Communist Manifesto* and excerpts from *The German Ideology*. After beginning his chapter on Marx with a short preface, this film critic proceeded to heap criticisms on the *Communist Manifesto*—"the prose is killingly bad" (?), etc.—and basically make fun of the author. After several paragraphs of this he informed the reader that Marx's *early* works, however, are still relevant. Contemporary culture is, according to this film critic, plagued by alienation and shallowness. Most jobs are very boring, professional athletes have become obsessed with money, etc. The film critic ended his exposition with his opinion that since Marx is no longer relevant for our *society*, he is all the more relevant for our *souls*.

I hope that if this diary is ever published, the film critic who wrote that book will read what I'm about to write. [There was some good vitriol here, but I've deleted it.]

April 23

I've decided to focus my intellectual energies, for the time being, on understanding the labor theory of value. I was going to continue researching Marx's entire theory of capitalism, but since I can't get my mind off the perplexities of the labor theory of value—and since this is, after all, one of the foundations of Marxist economics—I've abandoned my original plan.

I'd love to read Nietzsche instead of economics, but (1) because the latter is relevant to my summer research job and (2) because I am generally *incapable* of abandoning a subject before I've attained "closure" on it, I think I'll wait until the end of the school year to return to my survey of Nietzsche (and philosophy in general).

How I love the crazy hedonism of the intellect!

[…]

April 27

I finished reading *The Street*. One of the most depressing novels I've ever read. Brutally, it plucked the fruits of poverty and shoved them down my throat until I choked and tears were squeezed from my eyes.

Racism and poverty. Racism and poverty. Both perfected under capitalism.

If you are a champion of capitalism you're committing a crime against humanity. If you are one of the asses who still thinks capitalism and the alleviation of poverty are compatible....look at history! Look at the past two hundred years, you fucking ass. Half of the world still lives in poverty. Maybe 20% of the world's population is able to take full advantage of the wealth created by decadence. Everyone else is forced to live a virtual death-in-life.

According to some anthropologists, human prehistory was characterized by a remarkable harmony within individual communities. If this is true....what can explain it? Are Marxists right in maintaining that it was the origin of the social surplus product that inaugurated history proper—i.e., inaugurated the pain that mankind has not been able to escape for millennia? If so, then it's conceivable that man could be 'redeemed' by developing the productive forces to an extreme and thereby abolishing scarcity. So there is still a shred of hope.

April 28

If you're familiar with the works of Nietzsche and Marx you're aware that these two philosophers are largely incompatible. Nietzsche had nothing but disdain for socialism. So it seems contradictory for me to idolize both of them. Oh well. No amount of Nietzsche will make me renounce communism, and no amount of Marx will prevent me from taking Nietzsche more seriously than any other philosopher.

I *love* Franz Schubert! One can always rely on him for a pleasant/beautiful melody. Most of the composers of the classical period are similar in this regard. Listen to the melody in the middle section of Schubert's D. 946 No. 3; words can't describe it. I won't even try.

April 29

Modern "intellectuals" get on my nerves. Everything about them. Their pretentiousness, their irrelevance, their tendency to spend years studying minute areas of thought, their unfounded snobbishness, the way they stick together and promote each other. They've built their own irrelevant little world. It seems like they revolve around their own stereotype.

I have nothing against intellectuals *per se*. It's only because the name has developed such bad connotations that I would prefer not to be called an intellectual.

I've shortened my screenplay by fourteen pages! (Keep in mind that these pages are three times as long as those of the professional, correctly formatted screenplays.) And yet there's still too much dialogue. But how I love my screenplay! Not necessarily because it's good, but because it's *mine*. It's my baby. It's my first major piece of work.

May 3

Trying to get a full grasp on the labor theory of value is...more difficult than you'd think. Still, in the past few days I've made some headway. I'm reading excerpts from about fifteen books that criticize or clarify the concept. Meek's *Studies in the Labor Theory of Value* and Gouverneur's *Contemporary Capitalism and Marxist Economics* have been especially helpful.

May 4

I can be asinine sometimes. For Economics we're supposed to write a brief essay on whether globalization is bad, using some articles the teacher gave us to read and the lousy bourgeois theories she

taught us this semester. So what did I do? I spent a few minutes skimming through this thirty-page packet of articles and then proceeded to write an essay the thesis of which was essentially that globalization is good because it develops the world's productive forces and thereby paves the way for socialism and the abolition of scarcity. I didn't have the patience to read the articles, so I didn't use them in my essay.

Here it is. (Incidentally, the whole thing is a regurgitation of parts of Mandel's *Marxist Economic Theory*.)

> "Is it good or bad to allow free trade between international communities?" The question is absurd—or, at the very least, irrelevant. The gradual sharpening of free trade is *inevitable* under capitalism. One can attempt to halt it in the short run; but in the long run, the entire world will one day be part of a universal free trade zone. Is this globalization beneficial for capitalists? Does it make the world a richer place? Does it facilitate social, economic, and technological progress? To answer these questions I'll provide a brief history of imperialism, thus clarifying what the pros and cons of globalization historically have been.
>
> In the 19th century, after the first Industrial Revolution had run its course, as trusts and cartels began to replace free competition, a surplus of capital appeared in Western Europe. Opportunities for investment were no longer as readily available as they had once been. To counteract this distressing development, capitalists invested heavily in less-industrialized countries like Australia and South Africa. The export of capital goods encouraged the export of consumer goods; capitalists, partly because of the low wages required to pay colonial workers and partly because these new markets were able to absorb the influx of capital, began to realize super-profits. The capitalists did not, however, *industrialize* these colonies (which would have given rise to competition between the imperialist powers and their colonies); they took advantage of them as a source of raw materials and as markets for their goods. In this way the world's productive forces increased, became more efficient, etc.—while at the same time the poorer nations suffered severe underdevelopment. After World War II had decimated most of the imperialist powers, their former colonies gained their independence and embarked on the road toward industrialization. Thus the first phase of "globalization"—i.e., imperialism proper—facilitated the development of the productive forces solely of the advanced Western nations. The second phase of globalization, which began after World War II, is currently contributing to the industrialization of both the advanced *and* the "backward" nations. Of course, exploitation continues—permanent exploitation is, in fact, one of the necessary conditions of capitalism (What is the *source* of capitalist profits, of *new value*, if not the surplus value extracted from workers?)—but all that matters is that the underdeveloped countries continue their industrialization.
>
> This process will, of course, reduce profits for some corporations, necessitate greater unemployment in imperialist powers like the United States, periodically provoke an unfavorable balance of trade, but these are merely temporary side-effects from developing the *world's* productive forces (a goal that few deny is achieved most effectively through free trade).
>
> Now we arrive at the crucial question: why is the "development of the world's productive forces" more important than the innumerable harmful side-effects which result from it?
>
> First, it would be wise to keep in mind that capitalism is merely a particular stage of history; sooner or later it will die out. Now, despite what bourgeois economists assert in their apologias for capitalism, scarcity is not necessarily permanent. I concede that it *is* permanent under the anarchy of capitalist production, but as soon as democratic (not bureaucratic) economic planning is adopted, inefficiencies will become obsolete. Society's resources will be allocated *rationally*; development in "third world" countries will be planned; the wastes of excessive advertising, overlapping between industries, non-utilization of all the labor-power of a society, will vanish; inefficient enterprises will be shut down, their resources diverted to other sectors; defense spending and the overwhelming wastes associated with it will be cut drastically. (The fact that the Soviet Union, which was an almost entirely agrarian society at the turn of the century, was

> able to industrialize so rapidly is a striking corroboration of the effectiveness of planning. Of course, in this case the planning was inefficient, brutal, and unnecessarily bureaucratic, and ultimately caused the collapse of the USSR. Planning would not, however, necessarily have these harmful side-effects in an advanced country like the U.S.) In short, scarcity will gradually wither away, thereby giving rise to the withering-away of money and even of commodities (since commodities, by their definition, must be bought and sold).
>
> Incidentally, another reason why globalization is beneficial in the long-run is that it increases the likelihood of a recession/depression which occurs on the other side of the world spreading to America—thus possibly expediting the inevitable collapse of capitalism.
>
> In conclusion, scarcity is the cause of quite a few of the evils of capitalism: this is why the development of the world's "productive forces"—facilitated through globalization—is to be encouraged. [....]

May 15

This summer is going to be better than any I've experienced. My goals are to get a firm grasp on the labor theory of value, to increase my understanding of Marxist economics in general, and to educate myself on the entire philosophy of Marxism. In addition, I'm going to read about 'Nietzscheanism' and conduct 'surveys' of aspects of philosophy that I find interesting (Existentialism, phenomenology, etc.). I can't wait!

(later) For the last eight hours I've been reading a book called *Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man*, by John Plamenatz. It's so refreshing to return to my roots (i.e., philosophy) after spending weeks focusing on economics!

May 16

Several hours ago I skimmed parts of Mary Daly's masterpiece *Quintessence: Realizing the Archaic Future...A Radical Elemental Feminist Manifesto*. You have to read this book!—if only to understand the buffoonery to which mankind is capable of descending. I won't elaborate on everything that is absurd about it (I'd be writing all night), but there are a few qualities I must point out. First, *every other sentence* contains a minimum of three capitalized words—such as (I do not exaggerate) Wild Women, Wise Women, Wily Women, Tactful Women, Daring Desperate Women, Dreadful Dreadless Women, Shrewd Women, Canny Women, Essential Women, Militant Women, Elemental Feminist Genius (seriously)—or clever wordplays like Dis-cover (get it?—she's 'uncovering' Truth). Christ! Every time she mentions the word 'discover' she has to capitalize it and place a hyphen in the middle! Her obsession with capitalizing words *severely* detracts from the quality of her work: it's so distracting! And another slight defect is that she seems to lust after Militant Women: her book is dripping with pathetically self-conscious militancy. […] And she has a tendency to divide the world into two irreconcilable groups: Women and Men. Good and Evil. Mary Daly is, quite frankly, even more simple-minded than Ayn Rand. Lord! If I weren't woefully aware of humanity's silliness I would *swear* that her book was an attempt to parody herself or other militant feminists.

(3:00 a.m.) I spent the day reading that book by John Plamenatz. He's an impressive writer, a deep 'prober' into the complex doctrines of Marxism (though he fails to take account of the origin of the social surplus product as a cause of the division of labor and alienation). It occurs to me that Marx's conception of man as a self-creative being whose fundamental need is to affirm himself has a little in common with Nietzsche's will to power. They both give vaguely similar reasons for the human 'need' for religion. (Marx's concept of alienation is certainly different from anything Nietzsche had in mind, but it is similar insofar as it can be interpreted as signifying a lack of power over oneself and one's relationships with others.) I'm too tired to think, though.

May 18

Five minutes ago I bade farewell to Rebecca. Tomorrow she's returning to California. I bought her an Irish music CD (she *loves* Irish music) as a farewell present—a token of my friendship-love.

This is a sad time of year. Not necessarily because I'm going to miss my friends—I'm not—but because my first year of college has come to an end. It has flown by; nothing remains but memories. What a cruel trick of fate to make my freshman year in *high school* last forever—when I loathed every minute of it—and my freshman year in college last a *week*, when (overall) I enjoyed it more than any other time of my life!

I learned much about myself this year. My destiny has, for better or for worse, essentially been sealed; my identity is nearing the stage of development in which it crystallizes into a hard, recognizable substance. […]

June 8

I'm in Madison. The university is situated in quite a charming neighborhood next to a lake. The town seems so appealing that I've decided not to spend the entire summer cooped up in my room and instead to meet people, make friends, and enjoy the city. My research will be most important, of course, but it won't make a recluse out of me. I'm taking Zoloft again, too.

I spent the past week or so reading about Hegelianism (also a book called *Nietzsche and Psychoanalysis*, by Daniel Chapelle); I must admit that I had underestimated this superhumanly brilliant philosophy. There are certainly faults that may potentially cause it to crash to the ground (I haven't read enough to form an opinion on this), but it is so complex, inspiring, difficult, and ambitious that one can't help but bleed admiration for Hegel. It almost seems as though Hegel constructed the detailed outlines of this philosophy and Marx simply perfected it and greatly modified it—made it more consistent by assigning communism as "Spirit's" goal rather than 19th-century Prussia. I may be wrong, but that was my first impression.

June 10

[…] I suppose I should continue reading the book called *Karl Marx's Theory of History: a Defense* (by G. A. Cohen), but I'm not in the mood.

I'm going to provide another 'ongoing' list of works I've read since April.

excerpts from *Studies in the Labor Theory of Value* by Meek
Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today (half of volume one)
Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man by John Plamenatz
excerpts from approximately ten other books on the labor theory of value
Nietzsche and Psychoanalysis by Daniel Chapelle
"Phenomenology" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
Edmund Husserl: Philosopher of Infinite Tasks by Maurice Natanson
An Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics by Ivan Soll
The Philosophy of Hegel: An Introduction and Re-examination by J. N. Findlay
Pragmatism by William James
Karl Marx's Theory of History: a Defense by G. A. Cohen
much of *History, Labour and Freedom* by Cohen
Essays on Marx's Theory of Value by I. I. Rubin

Existentialism by Patricia Sanborn
Beyond Good and Evil by Nietzsche
half of *Reconstructing Marxism* by Wright, Levine and Sober
Marx and the Third World by Melotti
On the Genealogy of Morals by Nietzsche
part of *Ethics* by Spinoza
part of *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* by Jonathan Bennett
History and Totality: Radical Historicism from Hegel to Foucault by John Grumley
Ego and Archetype by Edward F. Edinger
part of *What Does the Ruling Class Do When it Rules?* by Göran Therborn
Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions by Sartre
The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology by Therborn
Elbow Room: the Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting by Daniel Dennett
Ecce Homo by Nietzsche
most of *Being Oneself: its Meaning and Worth* by mon père
half of *Human, All Too Human* by Nietzsche
The Transcendence of the Ego by Sartre
The Tragic Finale by Wilfrid Desan
half of *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre* by Desan
The Coming of the French Revolution by Lefebvre
most of *The Unbound Prometheus* by David Landes
half of *Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West, vol. II*
The Second Treatise of Government and *A Letter Concerning Toleration* by Locke
part of *The Making of the English Working Class* by E.P. Thompson
most of *Changing Lives: Women in European History Since 1700* by Bonnie Smith
Discourse on the Origin of Inequality by Rousseau
Essay on the Origin of Languages by Rousseau
On the Social Contract by Rousseau
part of *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* by Bentham
most of *Macroeconomics* by Samuelson and Nordhaus
Revolutions of 1848 by Priscilla Robertson
part of *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* by David Cannadine
Faust by Goethe
The Great War, 1914 - 1918 by Marc Ferro
The Russian Revolution by Sheila Fitzpatrick
part of *The Russian Revolutionary Intelligentsia* by Philip Pomper
Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism by Lenin
Patterns in Prehistory by Robert Wenke
Philosophy of Right by Hegel
On the Jewish Question, Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right': Introduction, The German Ideology: Part 1, and parts of *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* by Marx
Socialism: Utopian and Scientific by Engels
Hitler and Nazi Germany: A History by Jackson Spielvogel
Survival in Auschwitz by Primo Levi
part of *Hitler's Willing Executioners* by Daniel Goldhagen
part of *Karl Marx's Theory of Ideas* by John Torrance
half of *Wittgenstein: Philosophy, Postmodernism, Pedagogy* by Peters and Marshall
The Philosophy of Schopenhauer by Bryan Magee
part of *The Division of Labor in Society* by Durkheim
half of *The Development of the Modern State* by Poggi
Wittgenstein: an Introduction by Joachim Schulte

The Metaphysics of the Tractatus by Carruthers
half of *Individualism and the Japanese* by Yamazaki Masakazu
parts of *Democracy in America* by Tocqueville
Spinoza's Philosophy: An Outline by Errol E. Harris
A Brief History of Time by Stephen Hawking
half of *The Dancing Wu-Li Masters* (several years ago)
A Source Book in Indian Philosophy ed. by Radhakrishnan and Moore
part of *Communism, Fascism and Democracy* ed. by Carl Cohen
On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason by Schopenhauer
The World as Will and Representation (vol. 1)
excerpts from various books on political theory
The Apology and *the Symposium* by Plato
most of *A Kierkegaard Anthology* ed. by Robert Brentall
Principles of Human Knowledge by Berkeley
The Lives of the Great Composers by Arnold Schonberg
various poems by John Keats
part of *Theory of Color: Didactic Section* by Goethe
On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life by Nietzsche
Proslogion by St. Anselm
The Russian Revolution and *Leninism or Marxism?* by Rosa Luxemburg
Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics by Kant
most of *The Dream that Failed* by Walter Laqueur
part of *Democracy in Capitalist Times* by John Dryzek
Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion by Hume
Love and Its Place in Nature by Jonathan Lear
part of *Critique of Practical Reason* by Kant
part of *Foundation Course in German* by Homberger and Ebelke
Vorsprung: An Introduction to the German Language by Lovik, Guy and Chavez
Das Kapital (vol. 1)
economic writings by Ricardo, Say, Smith, Ohlin, Jevons, Pareto, Mill, Veblin, Hayek, Menger, Schumpeter, Keynes, Malthus, and numerous others
half of *The Philosophy of Niels Bohr* by Henry Folse
The Odyssey
Don Quixote, Part 1
several of *Plutarch's Lives*
On Friendship by Cicero
The Will to Believe by William James
Equus by Peter Schaffer (several years ago)
Philosophical Fragments by Kierkegaard
A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality by John Perry
The Cenci by Percy Shelley
part of *Reasons and Persons* by Derek Parfit
much of *The Gay Science* by Nietzsche
Notes from the Underground by Dostoevsky
From the Gracchi to Nero by H. H. Scullard

June 12

Cohen's book is exceptional. Read it. Or at least read about Marxism in general. Trying to fully understand Marxism is a life-experience.

And now that I'm finally beginning to gain a thorough understanding of historical materialism, it is apparent that this doctrine is magnificent, an intellectual masterpiece. One of the great triumphs in the history of thought. I'm not yet convinced of its truth, but my first impression of it has overwhelmed me. Even the 'unconscious' motivation behind history that it discerns—development of the productive forces—is intelligible and plausible (more than I can say about Hegel's "self-consciousness of spirit"). *[This 'technologistic' interpretation of historical materialism is Cohen's, and it has flaws. But actually, now that I'm older, I have something like Chomsky's dismissive attitude towards attempts to ponderously theorize society. On the whole, critical intelligence is enough to get the job done.]*

June 13

One aspect of historical materialism that I'm having trouble fully grasping is precisely that which I called "intelligible and plausible" in my last entry: development of the productive forces as the propellant behind history. I think it makes sense if one looks at history as a whole, but since it has rarely been the conscious motivation behind the development of societies—excluding recent "communist" countries—how can it be said to be the basis of (or to explain) humanity's actions? It seems vaguely reminiscent of Hegel's "cunning of reason"—which I've always been skeptical of—in that we humans are merely the unwitting agents of an historical tendency we're unaware of.

On a different topic: I'm surprised that I haven't mentioned Offenbach's *Barcarole* (from "The Tales of Hoffman") in this journal. I'm sure you've heard the melody; it's a deliciously romantic tune. And the way the piece ends....it's as if you were listening to a dream, captured in a vision, which melts away with the reinstatement of reality. A wistful breeze blows by, rustling the leaves at your feet, and you're transported from the realm of music to the realm of nostalgia. Life itself is transformed into fantasy. Perfection.

June 16

I'm reading Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, an illuminating, lucid exposition of basic Marxian economics. Rubin seems to be more of an expert than even Ernest Mandel was. (One of the profound injustices of Stalin's regime was that Rubin met his fate at the hands of that "man of steel".)

As I'm sure you know, another reason I so admire Marx is that he was not afraid to denounce his contemporaries. Unlike the prim and proper British (e.g., John Stuart Mill) or the reactionary German apologists (e.g., Hegel in his *Philosophy of Right*), Marx fought the Medusa of mediocrity mercilessly wherever it reared its grotesque head. He simply shoved a mirror in front of its face and it was cast into oblivion through a realization of its own repulsiveness. It is quite fun to read some of his comments on people (e.g., on Rudolf Schramm, "a rowdy, loud-mouthed and extremely confused little mannikin whose life-motto came from *Rameau's Nephew*: 'I would rather be an impudent windbag than nothing at all'", or on Gustav Struve: "At the very first glimpse of his leathery appearance, his protuberant eyes with their sly, stupid expression, the matt gleam on his bald pate and his half-Slav, half-Kalmuck features one cannot doubt that one is in the presence of an unusual man..."). His *Civil War in France* is the most passionate, eloquent condemnation of bourgeois civilization I've read.

June 18

In a chapter of Cohen's book *History, Labour and Freedom* he tries to refute the labor theory of value. The argument he provides is quite simple—so simple, in fact, that I was skeptical of it from the beginning. It isn't easy to believe that Marx was capable of making the mistakes Cohen accuses him of. And sure enough, it turns out that I was probably right: Rubin, in a distinction between abstract labor and

"material-technical" labor (the first creates value, the second doesn't, which is the principal source of confusion in Cohen's essay), refuted Cohen sixty years before Cohen thought he had refuted the labor theory of value. This theory hinges on so many subtleties and intricacies that even a capable intellectual loses his way!

Isn't it peculiar that people can be *absolutely positive* they're right, beyond any shadow of a doubt, and yet be wrong? That's happened to me many times; I find it disconcerting. Oh well. Something to think about.

June 19

Finally I finished Rubin's book. It took me a full five days. Even Findlay's book *The Philosophy of Hegel* was a shorter read. What a relief to escape the complexities of the labor theory of value! I can't explain to you how frustrating it is to force myself to trudge through the difficult passages in books on economics when I lack the knowledge that would enable me to absorb what I'm reading. The neural pathways in my brain simply weren't designed to admit free access to the subject of economics.

Change of topic: tonight I watched *Notting Hill* for the third time. I like romantic comedies. I always feel buoyant after watching them, no doubt because they enable me to escape into a fantasy world where all is sweetness, laughter and love.

June 21

I'm reading about Existentialism. According to Patricia Sanborn, some of the Existentialists (e.g., Marcel) thought that "self-realization"—becoming one with one's being—is possible only if one relinquishes the need for possession and becomes "creative" instead. In this way it is *possible* for the anguish of nonbeing to be overcome—for contemporary man's underlying frustration and lack of fulfillment to be surmounted. This belief clearly has some affinity with Nietzsche's (although Nietzsche had more in mind). But I'd suggest that creativity, the realization of one's potential, is not a sufficient condition to "become oneself"—or rather, to become one with one's being. (The first idea can be misleading, in that "becoming oneself" can mean precisely this realization of one's potential. I prefer the latter: "becoming one with one's being".) I am sufficiently aware of myself to know that if I accomplished every one of my goals I would still not have realized myself in the sense in which I'm interpreting some of the Existentialists. I would continue to experience frustration and anguish. Sartre doesn't even think this "realization" is possible, but I think that if one becomes a true Buddhist—enlightened in the most meaningful sense of the term—it is possible to conquer the anguish of nonbeing. Nietzsche characterized the Buddhist religion as one of "weariness", I believe, and he may have been right; but whether or not Buddhism signifies a weariness of life, it is plausible that Nietzsche's ideal, the *Übermensch*, can by its very definition not conquer nonbeing. It is continually striving. After enlightenment, Buddhists do not continually strive in the same emotional/driven manner in which the *Übermensch* does: they have overcome the "nonbeing" thought by Sartre to be an inseparable aspect of human existence, as the *Übermensch* has not. Buddhists may be wrong or deluded, for all I know, but I'm fairly certain that enlightenment gets one closer to oneself than simple, if profound, artistic or intellectual creation (unless this "creation" deals with precisely this spiritual aspect of philosophy). I would decidedly rather spend my life striving for a possibly unattainable goal than experience enlightenment and subsequently live in sublime, impenetrable happiness (perhaps because *I*'m deluded), but if one's ambition is to conquer the frustration of "nonbeing", then one should follow Buddhism (and its relatives) rather than Nietzsche. It even seems as though the Buddhists have somehow overcome the dualism between the self and the world, though I can't conceive how that's possible.

[…]

I've grown weary of reading summaries of the thoughts of great philosophers. 'Tis time to read the

masters themselves.

(later) Another disgusting fact to corroborate my belief in the virgin idiocy of my fellow countrymen is that they see the collapse of the Soviet Union as a final refutation of Marx, the ultimate vindication of capitalism. They're too American to realize that the USSR's collapse is exactly what Marx would have predicted; in fact, he *did* predict it, though not in so many words. He knew that socialism would not succeed unless the revolution took place in a capitalist country—that Russia would revert to capitalism unless it triggered a socialist revolution in the Western nations. He knew that a "communist" revolution in Russia would lead to a dictatorship, the trampling of basic human "rights", etc. Additionally, in the *mid-nineteenth century* he predicted globalization! He and Engels both predicted and explained the necessary reasons for World War I in the 1870s (loosely paraphrasing, 'ten million men will die, Europe will be devastated....because of capitalism's logic, imperialism, and international alliances that were made after the Franco-Prussian War....'). Marx recognized the potential strength of trade unions in the *1840*s. He recognized that a depression as severe as the one that began in 1929 was, sooner or later, inevitable. In the 1850s he foresaw a great uprising in France—what came to be known as the Paris Commune. He predicted a revolution in China.

And "people" triumphantly assert that all of his predictions were proven wrong.

June 22

Why do you not wish to overcome the frustration of "ontological lack"?

Because I realize that the effort is futile.

But have not some Buddhists overcome it?

I don't know. Maybe they're deluding themselves.

"Maybe," you say. You can't be sure until you experience the richness of that religion in full.

I'll never experience it. I tried.

You were young and stupid then.

So I was. But I'm older now, and I recognize that my nature precludes the possibility of enlightenment.

Then you're not only young and stupid, but weak.

How so?

You've sacrificed painful self-examination for a "miserable ease". You're living in bad faith. You've forsaken yourself.

I've grown weary of introspection; it leads only to apathy and the knowledge of wasted time. I don't have the time to examine myself; more important things occupy me.

Like what?

Like concrete achievements. Like Marxism. Like the demise of capitalism.

Ha! There you go again with your self-deception! Does the destruction of capitalism really mean as much to you as you pretend, or is it not rather a brilliantly effective way to divert your attention from the subtle, ever-present frustration of life?

I suspect it's both.

Then why not confront the awareness of "meaninglessness" you insist is always at the back of your mind?

Because whenever I do, I accomplish nothing but the augmentation of my frustration.

So you've given up. You sincerely no longer desire absolute self-knowledge.

I recognize that such self-knowledge is impossible.

At the age of nineteen you recognize what takes others decades to recognize? Are you not rather deceiving yourself again?

I don't know. All I know is that those questions *have no answers*. The self is the greatest mystery, and probably the only way to experience "enlightenment" without deluding oneself is to come to grips with this fact.

Stop trying to sound experienced and wise. The bottom line is that you're afraid of confronting the emptiness that lies on the horizon of your consciousness. Be honest with yourself.

Okay. You're right; I don't deny it. But why confront this emptiness if nothing will come of it?

How do you know nothing will come of it? Sartre confronted this emptiness; look how much came of *his* confrontation.

But was he a happier man because of it?

Was he a happier man?! What's that supposed to mean? I thought you were aware of the superficiality of happiness!

I am. But I can't get past the feeling that such unending introspection would be a waste of time. Unhealthy unhappiness would result. I would not be able to overcome death.

Aha! Now we're getting somewhere. So death is behind this whole charade?

—I think so. Since I realize the futility of attempting to find fulfillment in life, I plan to give humanity a reason to remember me after I've entered the void.

I don't follow your logic. After you're dead you won't care an iota what humanity thinks of you. And if even the belief *during* your life that they'll admire you after you've died doesn't give you "fulfillment", what's the point of all this striving? What's the point of fighting for the revolution?

The point is that *intellectually* I know how important it is to increase the world's happiness. I don't feel it with my whole being, but since whenever I do feel anything with my whole being the experience lasts only a few moments, this "intellectual" awareness is enough to make me content.

Make you content? Isn't that—

I know, I know. Contentment is worthless. I don't want contentment; I want.... Hell, how am I supposed to know what I want?

You're not, unless you have the patience and courage to examine yourself.

Well, I guess I don't.

Then you're a coward who is living in bad faith.

But what *good* could possibly come of such "examination"?

How will you know until you try it yourself?

But—

Look. What is the goal of life? Self-fulfillment. "Self-affirmation", as Marx might say. Self-fulfillment in the broadest sense of the term is clearly the meaning of life, as is intuitively and conceptually understandable. I don't know what this "self-fulfillment" entails—that is for you to discover—but I recognize that all human striving ultimately boils down to it. […] Mere "research" might help, but the last step must be taken by you. If you don't want to be introspective for the sake of improving yourself—something I find hard to believe—then do it for the sake of improving humanity. And in the process you'll come to know the deepest truths of existence: you'll "fulfill" yourself. You'll reach an alternative enlightenment. Because let's face it: you do desire enlightenment, as much as you deny that. You enjoy "despair" only because it seems to carry you to the edge of enlightenment.

[…]

(later) It occurs to me that I've personally experienced much of what Sartre describes in his philosophy; I simply haven't analyzed my experiences sufficiently to clarify them and their causes. If you read about his philosophy and then refer to some of the entries in this journal you'll see what I mean. I can pinpoint exact instances in my life when I literally *felt* everything he analyzes.

June 23

Tonight I experienced the movie *A River Runs Through It*. It was exquisite. I could have cried at the end, when the old man was fishing alone in the river, haunted by the past, by time, by pure *being*. Trying to feel the perfection his brother had known in his moments of himself: those precious moments in which he had conquered the ravages of time and existence. In which he had been *whole*. In which he had overcome *lack*.

If it were only possible to know oneself so deeply in every moment. In *every moment*. That would be enlightenment.

But, in the end, is enlightenment so desirable after all? Is it not rather an escape from the clutches of one manifestation of misery into the embrace of another? Is it not rather a flight from shallow emptiness into the great "river" of deep emptiness? Is it not an exquisite but *false* realization of man's eternal will to godliness?

The most distressing aspect of the movie was its devastating portrayal of the truth that, when all is said and done, man is *alone*. We live our lives, find "soulmates", have children, pass through old age and die—all the while unaware that we are *alone* to our very core. Every single one of us is living in his own little cell, into which not a soul is allowed entrance. And the queer thing is that this little cell is large enough to contain all existence—all striving, all sadness, all brilliance, even the infinite boundaries of being. [?] Is it not a perplexity?

And is it not a greater perplexity that people so rarely stop to reflect on so obvious a truth?

June 25

Ah, the joys of youth! The enthusiasm of innocence! How I love this time of life! Endless dreaming is my favorite preoccupation: it is the sole reason that my life has a fair amount of meaning.

I do not yet, of course, have the ability to think; but eventually this will change.

[…]

Let's try a thought experiment, the outcome of which will hopefully be an incremental increase in our understanding of the human condition. Let's reflect on what would happen if we peeled away our many layers of "being"—our emotions, our thoughts, our memories, our activity, our need to talk and think, our need to observe, our need to *do*. What would be left? What *could* be left? Pure existence, pure being. What would this "being" consist of? 'Indifference'. Pure awareness. A lack of preoccupation with *anything*. A complete absence of recognition. Thus, "pure being" can be characterized as....*nothing*. To repeat: *being*, reduced to its essential 'elements', is *nothingness*. What does this mean? It means that the reason for man's inability to find absolute fulfillment—the kind of fulfillment that is so profound it would make unnecessary any continued striving (perhaps "nirvana" is the word I'm searching for)—is simply that there is *nothing* to be fulfilled. No matter how wonderful, how perfect, we may feel at times....*we are not*. *We cannot be*. There will always be an inexpressible feeling of "lack" because we can never completely conquer our essence. We can try to escape it (witness humanity's attempts to do so: Christianity, Buddhism, most other major religions, philosophy, art, absolute dedication to causes—e.g., Marxism—and most recently, capitalism's perfected superficiality, its work ethic, and the fast-paced lives it breeds—a *necessary* consolation for the masses, now that they pay little more than lip-service to religion), but we'll never succeed. Not even the enlightened ones have succeeded. They may feel completely at peace, like gods, but either this feeling is brought on by a Great Weariness or it's a product of so many years of meditation that these Buddhists have *falsely* convinced themselves they have risen to the most perfect level of existence. Of course, they've overcome everyday concerns, they've reached the pinnacle of "equanimity", but what they don't understand is that it is *impossible* for them to reach the purest level of being. It is *impossible* to overcome oneself so completely; humans are constituted in such a way that they *need* all their more common bodily/intellectual/spiritual 'functions'. Otherwise they would, quite literally, die. The Buddhists are certainly right that the only way to overcome suffering (or "nonbeing") is to sink to this level of being, but it is simply not possible! Is Nietzsche's "will to power" a proper way of interpreting humanity's most basic, most unattainable need? I don't know. I'm inclined to answer in the affirmative, but since the hour has grown late I'll leave it to the reader to reflect upon.

All that nonsense was, of course, nothing more than a brief meditation on a topic about which I know very little. I was merely thinking "aloud", as it were. And forgive me if some of it sounded suspiciously like Sartre: I haven't read any of his longer works or much about his philosophy, so it's possible that I accidentally tripped over a few of the ideas he came upon half a century ago.

June 26

I've been reading for most of the day; I'm tired of it. Instead, I'll try some of my own independent thinking on issues related to Marxism.

First, Marx's explanation of revolution solely in terms of the fettering of the productive forces by the production relations is in need of a few psychological insights. I'm not as yet challenging the claim that full-scale revolutions take place only when the productive forces are unable to develop further; I'm saying only that *individuals* must be sufficiently motivated to risk their lives for a cause, and that this motivation doesn't consist of their desire to advance the productive forces.

So what incentive could possibly be strong enough? Let's first acknowledge that it's something they would not have to be conscious of: indeed, historically most revolutionaries have in fact not been aware of it. (Maybe this partially explains why it's been so powerful.) Especially in the case of communists, they have felt an *overwhelming* desire to dedicate their lives to a cause. "Desire" is not the word, however. Something has *compelled* them to become revolutionaries, to give up their individual identities, to sacrifice their lives, to *lose* themselves in a collective whole. Empirical research on the early Chinese communists testifies to that.

The psychoanalyst Robert Lifton has suggested that the need for "symbolic immortality" is an unconscious causal force on our actions (see some of my essays for the "Psychohistory" class). It has five manifestations: the desire to create lasting accomplishments; the desire to procreate; the need for religion; a certain kind of "communion" with nature; and what I'll call a "transcendence" of the particularity of existence. (I would add that the masses overcome death in the additional manner of incessantly keeping their minds occupied with trivialities.) What interests me especially is the fifth manifestation. Dedicated communist revolutionaries experience this transcendence in their absorption into the community. Their lives gain a profound meaning; petty concerns no longer plague them, death no longer preoccupies them. The most determined ones devote every aspect of their existence to the revolution. In addition, they intend to establish lasting achievements, thereby overcoming death twice (utilizing the first and fifth above manifestations). This analysis therefore suggests that awareness of death is the *prima causa* of revolutionary devotion. But let us probe deeper into the muck of the psyche.

We must consult the Buddhists in our search for enlightenment. What compels them to seek nirvana? Is it really nothing more than a deep-seated, unconscious fear of death that does so? I hardly think so. If humans were not mortal creatures, would they nevertheless feel the lack of meaning that would lead to the existence of religions? I think they would. After one hundred, one thousand, one million years of life, every person would seek a form of salvation in religion—would try to conquer the meaninglessness of reality, the gnawing feeling that something is missing. Maybe their need for "salvation" would be less urgent than it currently is, but it would be there all the same. Thus we seem to have arrived at the temporary conclusion that death is not the fundamental reason for Buddhism's existence; instead, an infinite, pervasive dissatisfaction, rooted in the nature of life itself (whether immortal or mortal), is what causes people to conjure up perfect states of being like nirvana and heaven. And communism.

What is the connection between religion and communism? They both involve the transcendence of the particularity of existence. Nirvana is in fact closest to this ideal, but in the modern age—with its technology, consumerism, science, and capitalism—religion has basically been discredited: communism, the more realistic, attainable version of heaven, has taken its place. But I've detected some flaws in my argument, so let's pursue a different course.

Why do I feel "meaningless" when I watch TV? Clearly it's not because TV is preventing me from reaching nirvana or overcoming the "particularity" of life, for by this logic I would feel meaningless right now. Which I don't. I think, rather, that I cannot tolerate the feeling of wasted time. Why not? Would this intolerance exist if I were immortal? Clearly not: I wouldn't care a whit about wasting time in this case. Therefore my fear of wasting time has its origin in my consciousness of death, not in my need to experience nirvana.

Now we're getting somewhere. All five manifestations of "symbolic immortality" are in response to the fear of death. But the third and fifth ones also exist on another level: namely, on the level of the kind of frustration which is inherent in the nature of being (but which we're not always aware of). Both of these manifestations, in addition to consoling mortals *qua* mortals, also provide people with a way to "transcend the particularity of existence" (meaning the necessary characteristics of individuals, such as memory, pain, emotions, and separation from others)—i.e., to reach the level of pure being. (The sixth "manifestation" is also helpful insofar as it keeps people's minds off of their need for pure being.)

Let's sum up. There are two sources of irredeemable frustration for humans: death and an inability to attain "pure being". (I'll call the last six words of that sentence "nirvana-lack" for brevity.) The first exists only in mortals, the second in immortals as well. Thus the second is more fundamental. The fear of death, although a source of frustration in its own right, is frequently confused with "nirvana-lack", but since the overcoming of the latter would make unnecessary an overcoming of the former—while the converse is not true—"nirvana-lack" is the fundamental and necessary source of meaninglessness in life. (I.e., it ensures that there will always be a subtle lack of meaning.)

Okay. What does this have to do with revolutionaries? Quite simply, the two psychological drives just delineated are what influence individuals to become revolutionaries in the first place. "Whoever, at any time, has undertaken to build a new heaven has found the strength for it in his own hell." Whether they're conscious of it or not, there is a void in their lives. They're driven to fill it in various ways—perhaps they first look to philosophy and religion—but ultimately they decide that philosophy isn't compelling enough and religion just isn't realistic enough. (They're too saturated with modern ideology to convince themselves to believe in religion.) They need something that will "take their minds off of" meaninglessness—something that has a practical value, that can give a direction to their lives—and the most effective way to do this is to adopt a fantastic goal to strive towards. Communism is this goal. It is an achievement that, if realized, will ensure their immortality, and the struggle for it is a way to divert their attention from "nirvana-lack" (which, in the last analysis, is the basic cause behind all of life's frustrations). What of the fact that communism is by definition a (partial) overcoming of the separation between man and man? Is this merely a coincidence, or is it necessary that the revolutionaries' goal be this surmounting of the particularity and definiteness of life? Buddhists consciously strive for this state of being, but revolutionaries certainly don't have nirvana *in mind* as they fight their battles against capitalism. So the question is: are they really striving to *overcome* nirvana-lack? I suggest that, unconsciously, they are. Under capitalism individuality reaches its highest pinnacle; communist revolutionaries consciously want to reunite man with his fellow man. (Behold the dialectic.) What they don't realize is that this desire is in truth a "sublimation" of their more fundamental desire to reach pure being, which by its definition overcomes all separation between individuals (because there are no individuals). […]

First, it would be useful to point out that most religions around the time of Buddhism and after arose partly to address the problem of nirvana-lack, but Buddhism seems to have been the least deluded in its diagnosis and suggested cures. Also, we should acknowledge that for almost every religion, its least corrupted form was achieved soon after it was founded. The religion's original ideals all generally deteriorated over time—or rather, the actual realization of these ideals occurred less frequently. (Christianity is the religion I have in mind, but insofar as religions become more widely accepted by the masses, they always deteriorate.) The religions were hardened into dogma, thereby losing touch with reality. And as the religions gradually conquered their respective countries, the ruling classes often took advantage of the lower classes' adherence to them: these religions became a means of prolonging the established order. Less were they a means of salvation; more were they an obligation imposed on everyone. Catholicism was used by apologists for feudalism; Protestantism was used by apologists for capitalism; Confucianism (albeit not a religion *per se*) was adopted by the Chinese state to justify its often repressive methods of maintaining order. (Since I have very little knowledge of Asian history I'm focusing on European history.) But because physical suffering and poverty were so widespread around the time of feudalism, a vague sense of "nirvana-lack" was not the greatest preoccupation of most people. […]

June 28

The greatest characteristic of Nietzsche's writing is that it *compels* one to think. That's why it's taking me forever to finish *Beyond Good and Evil*: every two minutes I pause to reflect on what I've read.

For a long time I've been puzzled by what I now see is a relatively simple problem: why do people listen to modern music as often as they do? Especially the kids in my generation. They listen to rap and pop music almost as much as I listen to Chopin! I can't see how they can possibly *love* it as much as I love classical music, so what the hell drives them to spend most of their days with that incessant *boom boom* in the background? But I've finally found the answer (and an obvious one it is). There are three parts to it: least interesting, and most obvious, is that they grew up with it; they spent their tender years letting it penetrate them, and so they grew used to it. Related to this is the masses' need to fit in, to be part of a crowd, to be accepted, to conform; they're not self-confident and motivated enough to go their own way. (The reader realizes, of course, that few of them are *aware* of these reasons.) Third, it's the nature of late capitalism—its consumerism, superficiality, pop culture, etc.—to dissuade people from pondering life. There are simply too many distractions and temptations of the flesh. This is fine and dandy when people are with their friends or out in the open, but what about when they're alone? How can they avoid the pain of independent thinking when they're *alone*? Very easily: they can rely on their music. And I must admit, I can imagine how easy it would be to follow their example: all I would have to do is listen to their music as often as they do! The pressures of thinking would vanish. […]

And so to all those "preachers of equality" who confidently assert that every type of music is as good as every other, I say: it is perfectly understandable for you to think so, because you've never experienced what it's like to be *me*. To be *different*.

(later) I don't know if you've ever noticed the phenomenon, but when one is reading a book one tends to unconsciously adopt the point of view of the writer. (That is, of course, unless one consciously tries to disagree with the writer.) Writing, as ridiculous as this sounds, is manipulation in disguise. The reader has no choice but to agree with the writer; the thoughts are, literally, being 'placed' into one's head. Right now, for example, whether or not you're aware of it, you're being compelled to absorb my opinions; your own opinions don't matter, only mine. And if, perchance, you're inclined to disagree with me, you have to pause and reflect on it. The process of reading is the process of being brainwashed; only after this process ends does one regain one's "independence" and "freedom to think" (insofar as such a thing exists).

As I experience *Beyond Good and Evil*, I wonder if Nietzsche's greatest mistake was to substitute an abstract ideal for reality. He praises the true philosophers, the "creators", the ones without pity, the "free spirits", and sees the rest of humanity as a means to attain this end. He sees scholars as a *means*. He sees slavery as a necessity and a good because it leads to the strengthening of the spirit. He despises socialism because he interprets it as the ultimate realization of "equality". (This in itself demonstrates his ignorance of the subject.) In fact, he doesn't think the masses have a reason to live, apart from their use as a foundation for great men to erect palaces upon.

Granted: the masses are nature's most unforgivable mistake. But they are *alive*! They each have *being*, a spirit, a mind, ambitions. I realize they're insignificant when contrasted with Beethoven, but that doesn't mean it's permissible for them to live in filth and misery. If *they're* not going to gain by suffering—well then, should we not abolish such pointless suffering? *Let* the masses live in shallow happiness; let the *philosophers* experience suffering: maybe the masses will grow ashamed and learn to emulate the philosophers. And even if they won't, at least they'll be living in their ideal state of happiness.

Sometimes it seems as if Nietzsche let his misanthropy (and misogyny) get the best of him. I have to be careful to learn from his mistakes.

June 29

In the collection Mom has made of my 'achievements' from every school year, there's a book I wrote in the fifth grade. It was an assignment: we had to write and illustrate stories and then bind them into

a book. Back then I was obsessed with insects. They were a preoccupation from toddler-hood into adolescence. I was especially fascinated by praying mantises (as I still am), and so the plot of my story revolved around a young praying mantis who was ostracized by his peers. He had no friends. He was a sad little mantid. All his attempts to find friends failed. But lo and behold!—the story had a happy ending! I've forgotten the exact mechanism by which it arrived at its inevitable dénouement, but the sad little bug finally overcame his shyness and made friends.

The most striking quality of the story I wrote, its most poignant, innocent, wonderful characteristic, is the unpretentiousness, the naïveté, with which I fashioned reality into a fantasy and subsequently gave it a happy ending. I can imagine myself writing the story: gayly drawing the pictures, sympathizing with the main character, feeling anger at the antagonists, experiencing the relief and satisfaction at the mantid's final acceptance into society. Was I aware of the obvious parallel between the book and my life? I must have been. But that doesn't matter. What is so heartwarming about the episode is my faith in the future, my certainty that everything would turn out right.

Change of topic: In aphorism 259 Nietzsche declares that life *is* the will to power. Exploitation is part of the *fundamental nature* of living things.

Let's examine this. It is certainly in the nature of the human spirit to *incorporate* foreignness, to overcome it, to make it its own. Witness our need to humanize the world, to mold it in our image, to explain nature and to conquer it. Witness the harsh effect upon our ears when we listen to a new piece of music: it sounds unnatural, nonsensical, almost like a jumble of noise; only after we have come to recognize its 'necessary' structure do we learn to appreciate it. Witness our aversion to unnatural people, to unexpected situations, to embarrassment, to circumstances that get out of hand, that we can't control or enjoy or interpret with a preordained formula. Even 'daredevils' have a fundamental need for security; even *they* desire power. In fact, that's why they engage in their feats of 'derring-do' in the first place: they experience a rush of power and excitement. (Is the latter merely a sublimation of the former?)

[…]

Oh, this is absurd! It's premature for me to engage in this pointless reflection; I'm not yet experienced enough.

I'd like to make one observation, however. If the will to power *is* life, if we are essentially depriving a person of his potential if we deny him the realization of his power, then how can slavery or exploitation be condoned? They deprive people of the realization of their will to power! Would Nietzsche retort that these institutions are necessary for the *society* to realize its will to power?—for the greatest members of the society to become truly outstanding and noble? If so, he is probably wrong. But even more importantly, I simply don't see how it's justified to let millions live in misery only so that a *handful* can rise to the top! Life itself—even without any will to power (however "impossible" that may be)—is, I believe, more valuable for its own sake (whatever that means) than Nietzsche thought.

But don't take my word for it, reader! And don't mistake your own unoriginality for altruism! Nietzsche may have been wrong, but he was *original*.

June 30

This morning Eric and I met with Erik Wright again, but this time there were three more students with us. One from Harvard, one from Wesleyan, and a girl from Oberlin. And guess what. The boy from Harvard is a pretentious prick who takes himself more seriously than is healthy. Surprise, surprise. […]

Why do I dislike pretentious intellectuals? Is it partly because I envy them their ability to communicate well? No doubt that contributes to it, but there are more substantive reasons. At least the masses have the "good taste" not to try to appear more than they are!

And another thing: many intellectuals adopt the language and opinions of others and write them off as their own. Young adults are especially susceptible to this disease. A twenty-year old will read Nietzsche and the next day spew Nietzsche's ideas as his own. At least I have the good taste to forewarn my conversation partner that what I'm about to say is an inept regurgitation of someone else's ideas.

July 4

I've never been able to understand why we're supposed to respect our elders. Is it because they've experienced the hardships of life? But this is in no way *meritorious*; such respect is analogous to respecting someone for living, which is absurd. Do they deserve respect because they're wise? But this is precisely the opposite of what they are.

In truth, the elderly are, usually, the quintessential dullards. What was once a mind has become a *hindrance*; what was once potential has deteriorated into *what might have been*; what was once interest has given way to apathy. They spend their days sleeping, bickering and filling out crossword puzzles, waiting patiently for death to release them. I hope I die before old age happens to me.

(later) Finished *The Genealogy of Morals*. The book is one of the high points of philosophical psychology. Reading it is a life experience; *please* take the time to read it.

July 5

If I have seemed mentally healthy lately it's only because I haven't let myself ponder deeply the philosophical dilemmas that assail me. One perplexity in particular, the relationship between the mind and the chemical processes in the brain, has caused some ongoing headaches. Not recently: several years ago. When I was thirteen I wrote a ludicrously short "essay" on the subject.[1]

Despite my virginity in matters of the intellect, I'm reading Spinoza's *Ethics*.

July 6

It seems to me that in the opening pages of his book Spinoza has already made several blunders, one of which involves his second argument for the existence of God (whom he defines as "substance consisting of infinite attributes"). He says that "if there is no cause which hinders a thing from existing then it exists necessarily." Earlier he had stated that substances cause themselves because they have nothing in common with one another—and so cannot act upon each other—and, putting this argument to good use, he subsequently combines it with the aforementioned one by declaring that if God doesn't exist, the reason for His nonexistence must lie in His own nature (because one substance cannot have any effect on a completely different substance), which involves a contradiction. We are saying that God doesn't exist because something in His nature prevents Him from existing, which is tantamount to saying that He doesn't exist because He exists. Therefore He *must* exist. But this argument, as convincing as it may seem at first, can be used to prove the existence of *any* substance. One could say that an infinite number of substances exist because their nonexistence would necessitate that their own nature prevents them from existing (again, because they cannot be an effect of any other substance; see his earlier propositions, especially prop. 6)—so they must exist. But Spinoza believes that only one substance (namely, God) exists. Therefore his own argument can be used against him.

I may, of course, be wrong. But the point is that I don't find any of his arguments for the existence of an infinite substance very convincing. (As an example of the claims I made in the last paragraph, I'll quote his first demonstration for the existence of God, altering only the number of attributes: "If it be denied that a substance with 12 attributes exists, conceive, if it be possible, that it does not exist. Then it follows [Ax. 7] that its essence does not involve existence. But this [Prop. 7] is absurd. Therefore a substance with 12 attributes necessarily exists." Of all the absurd philosophical arguments I've encountered, this one takes

[1] The question I attempted to answer was, "Is the mind physical or non-physical?" I decided that it's physical, since it wouldn't be able to communicate with the body if it were non-physical.

the cake.)

Immediately preceding Proposition XVIII Spinoza writes that "A thing which is the cause both of the essence and of the existence of any effect must differ from that effect both with regard to its essence and with regard to its existence." Am I misunderstanding him, or does that statement contradict what he said earlier about a cause necessarily having something in common with its effect?

Proposition II (commentary): This is true only if *all* the attributes of separate substances are different, which is not necessarily the case. Substances can have some of the same attributes without the conception of one (substance) involving the conception of another.

Proposition V (commentary): Why should two substances not have even *one* of the same attributes? I can understand why they wouldn't have the same *nature*, but this is because their nature is the sum of *all* their attributes. (I think I just rephrased my previous objection.)

Proposition VI: If my objections to props. 2 and 5 are valid, prop. 6 is false.

Proposition VII: Is this equivalent to saying that the substances that do exist *necessarily* exist, and that they are *necessarily* the only substances that exist? (I haven't forgotten that Spinoza uses the term "substance" differently than most people.) But *why* are they the only substances that exist? As I pointed out above, according to one of Spinoza's arguments an infinite number of substances should exist: they cause themselves, so it is only because of themselves that they wouldn't exist. Which makes no sense. In any event, if prop. 6 is false, prop. 7 is false too.

Proposition VIII: If substances have only one attribute, then I agree that they are infinite. But why should all substances have one attribute? Substances with many attributes can be limited by other substances which perhaps have only one of the same attributes as the former. And if my criticism of prop. 7 is correct, note 1 is also invalid. (The 'refutations' of all these propositions entail, as you may well imagine, the refutations of many subsequent propositions. But I won't make explicit these subsequent "refutations".)

Proposition XIX: "Eternity pertains to the nature of substance." Okay (ignoring my previous objections), but it isn't *all* that pertains to the nature of substance. Attributes may be eternal (in the conventional sense of the term), but they don't each necessarily express eternity. This deals a blow to Proposition XX as well, since the attributes would express existence only if they *expressed* eternity, not simply if they themselves *were* eternal (the implication being that the simple fact that God exists and the more complex fact of his essence aren't one and the same thing). If Spinoza only means that you can't have God's existence without His essence (and vice versa), then my objection is worthless—but such a claim would, in any case, be little more than a truism (if we're operating under the assumptions of previous propositions).

Proposition XXVI: This seems to open the can of worms dealing with free will and determinism. If God determines how we act, is there no such thing as free will? And what does it mean to say that God determines how we act? If Spinoza's God isn't precisely the same God of most of his contemporaries (which I don't believe He is), *how* does He determine our actions?

Proposition XXIX: Again, what does it mean to say that "all things are determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and act in a certain manner"? Does it mean that our actions are, in the last analysis, not determined by us? That *everything* that happens is necessary? If so, what is the significance of thought? It is manifestly true that humans constantly debate between alternatives, so does Spinoza mean only that thought is part of the nature of God? This seems more likely—rendering my objections, once again, futile.

Proposition XXXIII—Note 2: "...God has not existed before His decrees, and never can exist without them." This statement anticipates Hegel, does it not?

Proposition XXXIII—Note 2: I'm confused as to the nature of God's intellect (and will, etc.). If God is everything, *what is* His intellect? (Sometimes—although rarely—it seems as if Spinoza doesn't even believe that God *has* an intellect.) Supposedly He doesn't have free will (because such a thing doesn't exist), but His possession of an intellect would seem to require that He plans the nature of the world, etc. In short, if He has an intellect and no free will, what good is His intellect? In fact, what good is *our* intellect if we have no free will? Is it *possible* to have an intellect if one has no free will? (I suppose it probably is.)

(Incidentally, I'm not recording *all* my criticisms.)

July 7

Part 2 of The Ethics: I'm a little confused as to what Spinoza means when he says, e.g., "the modes of an attribute have God for a cause". Isn't God *everything*? So shouldn't He Himself be the modes of an attribute? On the other hand, God causes Himself, so perhaps the previous sentence is precisely what Spinoza means. But then again, Spinoza occasionally declares that God is infinite and many modes of His attributes are finite, which certainly suggests that God is not the same thing as these "modes". Supposedly substance is prior by nature to its modes, but isn't it 'contained in' its modes? ....Actually, I've decided that there is no contradiction between an infinite God and His finite modes.

But how does a substance "cause" its modes? One would think that it needs an external stimulus to transform its infinite attributes into finite modes: *how* (and *why*) would God transform Himself?

In truth, these objections exist merely by virtue of my suspension of disbelief. For I have no idea how to conceptualize any of Spinoza's statements about God. *What does it mean* to say that He thinks? that He acts? that He causes? Are His thoughts just a collection of all of our thoughts? Is there another realm in which He *truly* exists? Sometimes I see connections between Hegel's Spirit and Spinoza's God, but I can't be sure if these "connections" are fanciful or if there is some truth to them.

In the note to prop. VII Spinoza refers to "the attribute of extension" and "the attribute of thought". Is each of these two incredibly broad categories an attribute? If so, what else can possibly be an attribute? Don't thought and "extension" cover everything? But I have been assured by Spinoza that God has infinite attributes. I wish he would give more examples of what he means by "attribute".

In short, either Spinoza's arguments are catastrophically inadequate or I am catastrophically stupid. (The latter seems a bit more likely.) Maybe he clarifies himself in the pages to come.

Proposition VII: This is not necessarily true. As Nietzsche can attest to, ideas often appear out of nowhere. This is precisely how he came across his idea of the eternal recurrence: out of nowhere it just *hit* him. It was not caused by another idea or by reflection on a physical object. This fact indicates that ideas are of a fundamentally different nature than "the modes of extension" (the nature of which presumably involves cause and effect, although some philosophers—including Nietzsche—might disagree), and this seems to refute Spinoza's belief that thoughts and bodies are different attributes of one substance.

Proposition XI—Corollary: This partially answers some of my questions.

Proposition XII: The knowledge of everything that happens in the body may necessarily exist in God, but that doesn't mean that it exists in the mind. Spinoza himself admits (in the corollary of prop. 11) that minds often perceive things inadequately; merely by extending this admission can we arrive at the fact (if I may be so bold) that minds *necessarily* perceive many things inadequately. For if they don't, then do they not have the same amount of knowledge as God? (Something is screwy here; this objection is far too obvious for Spinoza not to have understood it and tacitly answered it.) He also refers the reader to the note to prop. 7, but the claims in this note have not been proven to my satisfaction (see above, prop. 7). And besides, let's be realistic: it's simply not possible for minds to be aware of *everything* that happens in the body.

(Upon reading about Hegel and now Spinoza I've come to the conclusion that system-builders tend to get carried away by their own logic. They try to fit too much into their systems, and in so doing brutalize many concepts and blind themselves to inadequacies in their arguments.)

Proposition XIII: "If the body were not the object of the human mind...,the ideas of the modifications of the body would not be in our mind. But (Ax. 4, pt. 2) we have ideas of the modifications of a body, therefore, the object of the idea constituting the human mind is a body..." This logic is not a little faulty.

Lemma III: Does Spinoza recognize the difficulties he gets involved in whenever he asserts that every action is the effect of an infinite chain of causes? For doesn't this statement lead to the absurd conclusion that no actions are possible (since an infinite amount of time was necessary for them to occur)? On the other hand, this conclusion is arrived at even if one draws out the implications of astronomy: whether

or not the Big Bang occurred, there must have always been matter in the universe (because matter can't suddenly appear out of nothingness)—which implies that the past was an eternity long, which seems to imply that time should never have arrived at the present moment. Everyone is aware of this monumental paradox, the inconceivability of which demonstrates the inadequacy of the human mind. I suppose Spinoza was cognizant of the difficulties inherent in his aforementioned conviction, but since he was also aware that both of the alternatives are equally illogical he elected for the one that is consistent with his philosophy. And I don't see any crime in this.

Returning to Lemma III....isn't it true that in order to move my leg, an initial chemical reaction sets off a process that culminates in the movement of my leg? Many conditions are necessary for this movement to occur—conditions which, let's assume for the moment, are the results of an infinite number of causes—but the actual movement originates with a single definite event that is not necessarily "caused" by other events. As I sit in my chair, reading, keeping my legs still, the motor-related neurons in the muscles of my leg are just patiently waiting for a command to be given them. They're not preparing for the movement of my leg, which movement they can foresee ahead of time; they're minding their own business, attending to other tasks. But suddenly an 'initial' chemical reaction occurs that orders them to get off their butts and do some work. What caused this chemical reaction? Certainly not an eternity of other events. I'm not an expert in biology, so I don't know the precise mechanism, but I do know that this 'initial' reaction is on a different 'order', as it were, than are all of the 'conditions' necessary for it to take place. It occurs *spontaneously*, whether or not a prerequisite of its occurrence is an eternal past. *[In this paragraph I put my finger on a mystery that scientists will quite possibly never solve: how can you 'neurologically' explain actions? What 'causes' an action, or a thought, or a decision? What causes the 'initial' neural impulse that leads to the action? How can it emerge from an indefinitely-extending-into-the-past chain of neural processes? It's very mysterious.]*

As I write my criticisms of Spinoza, I have the withering feeling that I'm misunderstanding him. And that I'm too dense to absorb what he's saying. Fortunately I have a father who is a professor of philosophy; if I'm desperately confused I can call him. (But it's a bummer he hasn't read Spinoza in decades.)

July 8

I feel sorry for myself: until yesterday I had never heard Tchaikovsky's *Marche slave* and *Capriccio italien*. The sublime brutality of much of the *Marche slave* would transform the most trivial irritation one was feeling into righteous rage at the world; the *Capriccio italien* is....well, just listen to it. It's fun. (I "submit" that Tchaikovsky loves grand endings.)

Proposition XVI—Corollary 2: This directly implies Kant's "thing-in-itself", as does, indeed, much of what Spinoza says in the Appendix to the first part.

Proposition XVII—Corollary, Demonstration: Does this not imply that the mind is a passive 'instrument' of the body? Regarding the note, consistent with his separation of imagination and understanding, Spinoza essentially defines "error" as the lack of a true idea. It makes sense to speak of error only when discussing the understanding, not the imagination.

Proposition XVIII—Note: I agree that memory is often the concatenation of ideas directly related to "bodies"—and the sequence in which these bodies at one time affected the mind—but memory is also of ideas that are absolutely unrelated to anything physical. I can quite easily remember thoughts I had which were independent of the external world—which did not "involve the nature of things outside the human body". This fact is so obvious that it makes me wonder, again, whether I'm interpreting Spinoza incorrectly. (Incidentally, the proposition itself is simply wrong.)

I've decided that before I read the rest of this book I'm going to skim through a brief summary of Spinozism. I'm sick of fumbling through the dark, tripping over myself, constantly wondering if I'm hallucinating.

Several days ago a girl named Katie wrote a note on my 'white board' which said, "Thanks for

always playing beautiful music. It makes me smile when I walk by.... P.S. Who's your favorite composer? Do you like Rachmaninoff?" I wasn't sure where this girl Katie lived, but I ventured a guess and wrote on her white board. Today she came to my room; we talked for awhile. She's going to be a junior at "Eleanor Wesleyan" in Illinois. I found her quite friendly; tomorrow I'll invite her to Wednesday night's concert in front of the Capitol building.

(later) I saw *Pleasantville* for the second time. The movie isn't perfect, but it makes a good case for communism.

Nietzsche thought that religion is a refuge for the weak, an outlet into which they can pour their resentment against the strong. To corroborate his conviction, let me quote part of a speech by one of the men who expelled Spinoza from the Congregation of Israel:

> ....Let him be cursed by the mouths of the Seven Angels who preside over the seven days of the week, and by the mouths of the angels who follow them and fight under their banners. Let him be cursed by the Four Angels who preside over the four seasons of the year, and by the mouths of all the angels who follow them and fight under their banners. Let him be cursed by the mouths of the seven principalities. Let him be cursed by the mouth of the prince of the Law, whose name is Crown and Seal. In a word, let him be cursed by the mouth of the strong, powerful, and dreadful God.
>
> Let God never forgive him his sins. Let the wrath and indignation of the Lord surround him and smote forever on his head. Let all the curses contained in the book of the Law fall upon him. Let God blot him out of his book. Let God separate him to his own destruction from all the tribes of Israel, and give him for his lot all the curses contained in the Book of the Law....
>
> And we warn you, that none may speak with him by word of mouth nor by writing, nor show any favor to him, nor be under one roof with him, nor come within four cubits of him, nor read any paper composed by him.

The religious are very admirable, are they not?

July 9

[Deleted stuff about my admiration of Marx.]

The commentary I'm reading on Spinoza (by Bennett) is much more than a "summary". As *mon père* was good enough to warn me, this Bennett fellow is almost as difficult to read as Spinoza himself. But since I've already read eighty pages it's too late for me to quit.

(later) I quit. Or at least I'm taking a break. I don't like wasting time, and if I try to finish that book I'll waste a week of a preciously short summer. I'm also taking a break from Spinoza in general. Reading *History and Totality*.

One of the criticisms I've encountered of communism as the outcome of history is that it implies an eschatology, which is a completely inappropriate way of interpreting history. History has no goals; it is not teleological. The concrete emancipation of humanity is as absurd as the idea of the Second Coming.

First of all, we should clarify what "emancipation of humanity" means. It has nothing in common with a vision of the cessation of history; it is unrelated to morality [?]; it does not even imply the overcoming of struggle. It merely entails that the historical process *as we know it* will succumb to a historical process more under the control of humanity. "As we know it? How do we know it?"

If mankind had lived its entire history in a land of plenty, where every physical want was satisfied, where there was no use for private property, where our seemingly innate desire for social power was nonexistent, its process of development would have been vastly different. In fact, it would have had no process of development. There would have been no need for philosophy, which arose as a response to

"loss";[1] there would have been no need for science of any kind, for there would have been no discrepancy between appearance and reality [?]; there would have been no social movements, for they could have served no purpose. Thus it is apparent that the lack of development of the productive forces, whether or not it was the driving force of history, was certainly the condition that made history necessary and inevitable.

Sorry, but I'm too tired to continue. I bid thee a good night.

July 10

Ass that I am, I didn't take notes while I was reading the *Genealogy of Morals* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. Maybe I'll reread them in a few weeks.

Another instance of my asininity is the fact that I read *The Future of Socialism*, authored by the worthless piece of practicality C. A. R. Crosland. The man was stupid enough to declare that in the 1950s Britain had transcended capitalism! You see, several British industries were nationalized back then, and the government was taking a more active role in social programs, which *obviously* means that capitalism no longer existed. "But how would Crosland have interpreted the de-nationalization of industries in the 1970s and 1980s? What was the significance of 'Thatcherism'?" Well, isn't it evident? After a brief period of what Crosland called "statism" Britain was plunged back into capitalism! Those volatile Britishers fluctuate between capitalism and statism every two decades.

Enough of that Croslandish silliness.

The 19th century was a period of such majesty and brilliance that I almost wish I'd lived in it. The decadence, misery and dashed hopes would have been nearly intolerable, but as far as I'm concerned it was the century that most realized human greatness. That's why I immerse myself in its philosophy and art. One of my most ardent desires is to accumulate the erudition worthy of its great men, to supersede the academic particularity and pointlessness of contemporary intellectuals and return to the unbounded Victorian self-confidence of people like Marx, to commence a process that will result in an analogous age of glory but without the accompanying filth and decadence. I sincerely believe that humanity's most splendid hour has yet to come.

Modern society cannot last. Something is going to burst—whether it's in fifty or a hundred years—that will lead either to barbarism or to communism. It almost seems as though mankind is merely going through the motions, repressing a terrible anxiety that grows annually, waiting apprehensively for....*something,* which no one can foresee. Globalization, the worldwide democratic movement, the paradoxes of late capitalism, the increasing technicality and pessimism of what were once enclaves of greatness—philosophy, art, literature, politics—the cynicism that is now so fashionable everywhere, the universal lack of a vital *Weltanschauung,* the obsession with individualism (which would not exist were the individual not suffocated under the weight of inhuman institutions and massive bureaucracies): these tendencies must reach a pinnacle, must overcome themselves eventually. Nothing lasts, least of all phases of history. I tell you we are on the eve of the most revolutionary epoch ever to confront humanity with its promise.

(later) My mind is too restless for its own good. I haven't read even half of Grumley's book and already I'm impatient to move on to something else—even though it's a good book. I don't find it particularly difficult to read; I just have an itch to move beyond it. This is the case with *everything* I read: I have to exercise some self-discipline merely to finish the books. When I begin a new one I am excited and inspired; by the time I've read a hundred pages I'm desperate to move on to another one. On the other hand, whenever I indulge my impatience I feel weak and disappointed with myself. Thus I'm engaged in a constant battle between my mind's restlessness and its conscience. I suspect that Marx experienced the same difficulty (which is why he rarely finished his projects).

[1] And, admittedly, fascination with life.

July 11

I must admit that I'm impressed by capitalism's power of endurance in the face of all odds. It has survived many a crisis that rightly should have destroyed it. But on the other hand, hindsight demonstrates to us the logic of its apparently significant lifespan: the heyday of feudalism lasted approximately....500 years?—whereas the heyday of capitalism has lasted only....200 years? Or less? It was to be expected that capitalism would prevail as long as it has.

The history of bourgeois society provides a striking confirmation of Marx's theory that social forms—and ultimately the mode of production—determine the general consciousness of society. People first revolted against capitalism because its logic hadn't yet been *absorbed* by them: it has always been in the countries where capitalism is still young that the masses are most intent on overthrowing it. The Russian revolution wouldn't have occurred if that country had already lived through several generations of capitalism; the European revolts of 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1871 broke out in countries where capitalism was not yet completely secure—and not in the most advanced capitalist countries, England and America. (There are, of course, also other reasons for this circumstance.) The Great Depression led to welfare-state capitalism (and fascism) rather than socialism in most Western nations because the consciousness of the masses had been sufficiently conditioned even then for many people to assume that capitalism was the natural organization of society. Movements like Existentialism were the last desperate attempts to overcome the dehumanization of bourgeois civilization, but they too succumbed to the growing rationalization of culture. Ultimately capitalism has determined the consciousness of the world to such an extent that most people now automatically accept it as inevitable and eternal. No longer are there revolutions: now there is only an increasing sense of individual and historical isolation, an increasing preoccupation with the movements of the world economy, an increasing lack of interest in questioning the foundations of society, an increasing and unnoticed poverty of meaning in life, an increasing acceptance of the dominance of vast impersonal institutions that no one comprehends, an increasing acquiescence to the stodgy ideal of "comfort"—to that most insipid ambition, the "American dream".... In fact, to be perfectly consistent with his own doctrines Marx would have had to foresee these developments.

The world as it currently is makes sense; it is rational in its irrationality. Its characteristics are all consistent with the general trends of history. Capitalism will last for several more generations: the above tendencies and the ones I mentioned in my last entry will continue to develop, will sharpen, will control the minds of the masses. Gradually they will become intolerable. The devastating logic of globalization will bear down on the destitute nations of the world as the loathsome qualities of capitalism's "culture" will make unendurable the conditions in the most advanced nations. At the end of this process of development, humanity, which hitherto was walking backwards toward the edge of a disastrously high precipice, will suddenly feel itself stepping onto air as the ground underneath gives way. It will flail its arms wildly; it will churn the atmosphere in desperation as it grasps for anything concrete; it will create such a commotion that all the *worms* sleeping in the dirt for so long will awaken and crawl to safety. And just as it plunges to its doom, screaming to the heavens that it doesn't want to die....*it will realize it can fly.*

(later) I have a deep urge to spend all my time reflecting on history and philosophy—and to write all of these thoughts in my journal—but I can't let myself engage in such an immature and useless exercise. I am so wanting in knowledge that such reflection would accomplish nothing. Nevertheless, it is frustrating: seemingly original ideas often occur to me, but I lack the ability to synthesize what few theories I've been exposed to and thus to draw out the implications of these ideas.

When I was twelve years old I had an IQ test (combined with a psychological test; Mom was concerned about my lack of friends). I forget what my IQ was, but I remember what percentile I was in for the two categories verbal/math and visual/spatial. Maybe you'll find this information interesting, because it's an objective confirmation of my own subjective self-evaluations. For the verbal/math category I was in the 99^{th} percentile; for the visual/spatial category I was in the 45^{th} percentile! What a difference! I guess that explains why I can never make sense of maps and get lost so easily (and why it is extremely difficult for me to picture in my mind people's faces: for example, I can't visualize Rebecca's).

(later) Georg Lukács seems quite an interesting and dynamic thinker. He went through many

philosophical stages—some optimistic and utopian, some very pessimistic—and several of his ideas are actually similar to some of my reflections in this journal. Specifically, his division of life into the two realms of "authentic" existence and "everyday" existence is comparable to my largely intuitive idea that we most realize ourselves when we're alone, that it can be much more difficult to have a "meaningful" life in the company of others than in the company of oneself. I say we're all fundamentally alone; he says authentic human communication is impossible. Language? Bah! Language is too universal and abstract to be personal. (This was an implication of my claim that language defeats humanity, "sterilizes the spirit". I was too dim-witted to articulate it.) Music alone promises redemption. Lukács thought that art in general holds out this promise, but it's my opinion that music alone can be the ultimate realization of true subjectivity. Of course, even music isn't perfect: the listener can never experience the precise emotions that the artist felt as he composed his work. But the listener can, in choosing his own interpretation of the music, lose himself in its universality and thereby reach a form of "pure being". Also, in certain individuals the conscious striving for nirvana clearly fulfills this same purpose, although the two manifestations are very distinct. (Lukács, of course, transcended this tragic view of life, as I have not yet done.)

Incidentally, it was stupid of me to characterize pure being as the final realization of "indifference". But more importantly, I can't decide if our fundamental desire is for nirvana or simply for the highest 'fulfillment' (?) of intersubjectivity—a fulfillment so complete that intersubjectivity itself becomes basically *one* subjectivity. I'm leaning toward the latter now. Of course, the frustrations of life would continue even if the latter were realized—and not if the former were—but perhaps these frustrations are of little moment. Perhaps the positive joy of individuals completely understanding and 'loving' one another is more precious even than nirvana, that realm in which individuality itself is negated.

How does romantic love fit into this scheme? And friendship? Are these relationships so desirable primarily because they partially overcome individual separation? And what is psychoanalysis' relation to all this? Whenever I think I am making headway, psychoanalysis rears its ugly head, reminding me that in the end I must supplement philosophy with rigorous psychology in order to synthesize a *Weltanschauung*.

July 12

As an addendum to yesterday's discussion of humans' lack of mutual understanding, I'd like to point out (again) that what to me is the sheer obviousness of Marx's claims about alienation in capitalist society reinforces the sense of isolation I feel from people. How can *everybody* not recognize the truth of Marxist condemnations of capitalism? The evidence is daily before our eyes, everywhere we go. How can businessmen, who are perpetually exposed to the odious operations of the economy, not feel the need to rebel against it? Is it *possible* to be so brainwashed? Don't they have the gnawing feeling that something is missing from their lives?

Not even music, unfortunately, provides redemption from the vicious circle of seclusion. Music is *too* universal.[1] It's too vague to be an accurate representation of specific subjective states. And it's too powerful: it doesn't merely communicate emotions; it *dictates* them. It controls them. Sadness becomes giddiness upon exposure to Mozart; joy becomes heartache upon hearing Chopin's introspective masterpieces.

Returning to the adverse effects of capitalism upon independent thought, it occurs to me that even those who profess distaste for the system have often unwittingly succumbed to it. All the academic swindlers have retreated into their separate fields of study and thereby lost touch with Marx's (and the 19th century's) original, all-encompassing vision(s). Weberian sociologists, Marxist sociologists, feminist sociologists, neoclassical economists, Marxist economists, Freudian psychoanalysts, Jungian psychoanalysts, feminist psychoanalysts, existentialist psychoanalysts, analytical philosophers, analytical Marxists, logicians, Kantians, neo-Kantians, neo-Hegelians, neo-Marxists, neo-Freudians, neo-Existentialists, neo-Darwinians, neo-this, neo-that.... All these spheres have isolated themselves just as it

[1] In a different way than language.

has become most necessary for them to integrate themselves. *Why* have they done so? Is it because of the atomistic view of man that capitalism fosters? Is it only because society has become vastly complex?

What has happened to the proletariat? Were all those Marxists who saw this class as the potential realization of the totality of history simply wrong? [Yes, because that's meaningless verbiage.] Is socialism destined to be achieved by a gradual process rather than by a revolution? Above all, how much longer can capitalism last? Our culture is going nowhere. It is in such a state of disarray that I'm tempted to predict a "revolution" in the next forty years.

(later) Whether it is at all evident to the reader, my mind is in turmoil. I read all day long, take frequent breaks to absorb thoughts that occur to me, incessantly write in my journal to let off steam and eternalize ideas that strike me as potentially fruitful. I am engaged in a continuous, *devastating* struggle between my craving to write all day and my craving to read all day. I can't make sense of any of the dilemmas that persecute me from 10:30 a.m. till 2:00 a.m.; if I start to reflect on an idea I lose my train of thought; if I read ten pages of a book I become frantic to articulate the implications of what I've read; every waking hour I am mortified of wasting time. But most distressingly—questions abound! How can I make sense of the notion of historical progress? Is it possible to justify present suffering if it leads to a better future? What is the relation between the proletariat and philosophy? the proletariat and history? the proletariat and previous social classes? Can history be interpreted within the Marxian framework? If so, what is the relation between particular empirical conditions and the abstract whole? Is "historical totality" a fiction? And then there are all the philosophical-psychological obsessions that my reading of Nietzsche has provoked. The only circumstance that provides relief is when I'm in the company of others, incapable of pondering the questions of existence, unconsciously converted into a wholesomely superficial idiot. My mind has become my hell. And there's no escaping one's—hell.

(later) Tonight I went to a concert with Katie and three other people I didn't know well. Sure enough, I was fairly quiet the whole time. Why? Because I just didn't have an urge to say much. The combination of a lack of energy, a lack of confidence, and a lack of interest defeated whatever qualms I felt about keeping silent. It was frustrating: Katie, while she is perhaps a little too 'superficial' for my taste, is attractive and rather fun to be around.

The more I consider the problem, the more I believe that every individual's entrapment in his own subjective world is a major cause of life's miseries. We don't understand one another—or ourselves. This is the basis of hatred, anger, annoyance, contempt, over-generalizations: all the painful and divisive psychological forces in life. Experiences such as love, meaningful friendships, empathy, pity, and compassion would only be intensified if we radically understood one another. Why is this so? Is it little more than a coincidence or a vain hope that "good" experiences and "bad" experiences are separable along such a clearly demarcated line? Nothing of the sort. It is a consequence of two of the deepest realities of life: the undeniable truth of universal isolation, and the fact that objective values don't exist in the depths of being. The latter claim is substantiated by the discoveries of psychoanalysis, and it is recognized by everyone who is even vaguely aware of his own instincts and their eternal, tragic struggle against morality. The individual more or less internalizes society's values: in some cases his instincts are very powerful, in other cases he is able to repress them. Thus the common morality must be assimilated to a different nature in every person.

[…]

Anyway, to describe the other side of this process: it is relatively easy to forgive ourselves or not to pay much attention to our faults (or to reconcile ourselves to them). If we ever do fly into a self-induced rage or find ourselves contemptible, it is never the same as when others provoke these emotions in us. When others do so we often condemn them immediately, 'objectively' find them despicable or not worth our thoughts. It is impossible to have this same reaction to *our* faults: our relation to ourselves is far too subjective and necessary. We *are* ourselves; self-contempt is necessarily of a very different nature than 'other-contempt'. Furthermore, we believe we understand ourselves. We recognize that one incident was a temporary lapse in judgment, that another will never happen again, that a third was precipitated by forces outside our control. And while these are often considered rationalizations, they are usually closer to the truth than the simple piling of blame upon others is. *People can't deeply control themselves*. Their pre-

established natures have the final say in determining who they are, what they do. Eternal recurrence (in a sense different from Nietzsche's) is the greatest psychological force precisely because it is ultimately a synonym for *necessity*, which is the one overriding characteristic of life. Behind our apparent freedom is a vast realm of necessity: commonplace choices (like what to eat for dinner, whom to invite to a party, what topic to write an essay on) are probably free, but destinies and momentous decisions—*and personal characteristics*—are overwhelmingly not purely objective choices. And since freedom either exists as objectivity (rationality) or not at all (although it does exist in degrees), destinies etc. are not fundamentally free.

As regards ourselves, we are always partially aware of this. That is why it is so easy to forgive ourselves and so impossible to "hate" ourselves. (Recall the two manifestations of hate.) But in the case of other people, this scenario is inconceivable. How could it not be? We don't "experience" other people, so every aspect of our relationships with them is qualitatively different from every aspect of our relationship with ourselves. The divisive (painful) states of mind always arise through our seclusion from one another; the generally pleasurable—and *unifying*—states of mind are characterized by a greater understanding or forgiveness of each other. But the latter states of mind are often 'fragile' because of the weak emotional/subjective experience/understanding of the other and the weak intellectual appreciation of the fact of necessity (i.e., of the other's nature). Both of these are much more powerful when the object is oneself.

If we truly understood ourselves—not just in the way that is forced upon us, but as a result of rigorous self-examination and psychoanalysis—the remnants of '*rational*' self-contempt would vanish at the same time that we became more aware of the other's nature as well. (All of these considerations have to be reconciled with the cursed chemical basis of the mind, which is the foundation of all 'irrational' states of being.) Nevertheless, the inevitable tragic conclusion is that radical understanding of others is not possible because we can never know precisely what their state of mind is [or *experience* it] at any given moment. Life is fragmentation.

Another concern: do people who consciously strive to overcome their "faults"—and ultimately succeed—deserve more respect than the average person (that is, if the implication that it's possible to partly overcome "necessity" and [psychological] "eternal recurrence" is true)? If so, does this not leave open the possibility of a 'hierarchy of values' the logical implication of which is the continuation of contempt and other destructive states of mind?

July 13

An obvious flaw in my above reasoning is that emotions are not subject to rational calculation (perhaps this is desirable)—which only confirms my conclusion that unless we can *feel* each other's states of mind we are destined to misunderstand and destroy one another. This is a beautiful illustration of the tragedy of the human condition.

But the one fact that continues to disturb me is that there are most assuredly people who *have* conquered harmful states of mind. Furthermore, I have the distinct feeling that it is permissible to criticize people and even to feel contempt for them based on their decisions and actions. […] I refuse to sink into the quagmire of extreme relativism, in which it is impossible even to *move* without incessant pauses and struggles.

(later) I called Rebecca a minute ago, but she wasn't home. Upon hearing the sound of her girlish voice on the answering machine, my once-powerful attraction to her flamed up for a moment. Is it not fantastic that even the sound of a voice has the power to ignite my hormones? Not just any voice, though: hers. It is so adorable and innocent that I wish it were a physical object I could caress. I can only imagine it being a unique combination of velvet, silk, honey, and an infant's cheek.

The subconscious is a wonderful storyteller. It's capable of inventing fascinating sagas on the spur of the moment, while the miserable *conscious* mind is so aware of itself and so unoriginal that it has to plan everything beforehand. I don't know where the plot lines from my dreams come from! The successive

events just *happen*, like in movies. Now if only my subconscious would put its talent to good use. Specifically, I'd like to dream about meeting Karl Marx, asking him a slew of questions, and receiving illuminating answers. He would set all my doubts to rest. And we'd become good friends in the process. My subconscious could do all this, but it refuses.

What secrets does this mischievous subconscious hold from me? Why does it insist on concealing the keys to my identity? Does it think I'm too fragile to withstand a battering of its truths?

July 14

Perhaps (or rather, probably) one of the unconscious reasons for the supposed desirability of nirvana is that it is a return to the God-like mental state of infancy, but without any of the original negative aspects. If this is true, it is probable that real enlightenment is impossible: the infant's psychological state consists of a complete identification with the environment, and no one denies that such a state, once gone, is gone forever. (Behold the similarity with the Judeo-Christian doctrine of paradise, the fall, and the quest for redemption.) Once we have become self-conscious, we're doomed.

On the other hand, since infants are essentially unconscious, they're unaware of the "paradise" in which they live. And what is the point of living in a paradise if one isn't aware of it? Furthermore, if "paradise" is defined as it is by the mystics and the religious—namely, as nirvana—then it is *necessary* that one be unaware of it. Consciousness is simply impossible in this realm, because thinking is the process that precipitated (or coincided with) man's fall in the first place. What a mistake is man! He's heedless when he's in paradise, and he's fully conscious when he's not!

Perhaps you'll retort that the reason for calling paradise such is precisely that its inhabitants *are* unconscious. But I can't accept that. If I'm going to live in paradise, I'd like not to be oblivious. "But wait!" you cry out. "If infants are oblivious, and if you don't think paradise can exist unless one is *conscious* of it, then you've tacitly concluded it doesn't exist at all! There is no hope for men; not once in their lifetimes do they experience anything akin to nirvana." Precisely so! By my account, paradise would be nothing less than an eternal spiritual orgasm, which is inconceivable. In fact, paradise is *logically impossible*. Mankind never "fell" and will never be "redeemed"; infancy is just as barren of perfection as is adulthood.

But if our entire psyche is built upon chemical processes—if it is basically an *effect*—then shouldn't the primary object of analysis be the brain rather than the mind? In fact, isn't it conceivable that someone will someday invent a drug that psychologically enables us to return to infancy? The constraints are physical, not mental. Matter has primacy over mind. But I cannot *stand* this crude materialism! It is illogical, and it leaves many questions unanswered. (Believe me: the greatest philosophical dilemma is the relationship between consciousness and the body.)

I am very skeptical of books by psychoanalysts who attempt to see meaning in every mental process, every dream, every action. For example, in a book I'm reading, the author, referring to dreams about flying, says that "When one is off the ground the danger is that he may fall. Abrupt impact with reality, symbolized by the earth, may be dangerously jarring." Is this not a little hard to swallow? Maybe flying is the subject of so many dreams only because the queasy feeling it provokes in the pit of the stomach has some kind of resonance with the chemical processes in the brain. This example merely highlights my more general inability to comprehend how *nerves* can create *meaning*. Do they undergo reactions because of the "meaning" which seems to be the consequence of these reactions (an absurd notion), or is the meaning just a side-effect (another absurd notion), or is the meaning unrelated to the chemical processes (another absurd notion)? It certainly seems that in dreams the meaning may be a side-effect with hardly any significance whatsoever. But....forget about dreams! *Everything* pertaining to the mind is inexplicable!

Returning to a topic that I've already beaten to death: our lack of understanding of each other has an exceedingly adverse effect on our understanding of ourselves. To take an example, because of my ignorance as to what occurs in the minds of others, I can't decide if I'm a good thinker or a terrible thinker. My thoughts don't seem to flow; it requires a great effort to think deeply about anything, but is this true for everyone? Is it truer for most people?

July 15

Now and then I experience something too sublime for prose.

[Deleted a pathetic poem here.]

Okay, enough of that. It deteriorated into a parody after the first word.

What I had hoped to communicate eventually was that music sometimes seems to bring me close to the "spiritual orgasm" I referred to earlier. If I focus all of my energy on listening to a piece of music, *occasionally* I feel as though I'm on the verge of losing myself. But never do I succeed. The music never completely consumes me. Every day I try to penetrate to this deepest level of aesthetic appreciation, but it's impossible! (Usually I follow the strategy of consciously "catching my throat", which helps a little.) Do you remember the scene in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* when Indiana is grasping for the Holy Grail and his fingertips are actually touching it? What he must have felt at that moment is what I feel when I *almost* have reached the spiritual peak for which I'm striving. The frustration is inexpressible. But I know it's possible to climb to this peak, because it's surely what drove the great composers to spend their lives writing music. Unfortunately, unless one has an artistic nature one is automatically shut out from this "paradise".

But is this really the paradise I'd like to believe it is? Most composers were tortured, depressed, suicidal. Are these the symptoms of one who has experienced paradise? Maybe the question is absurd: these people were not always composing, and it was when they weren't that they felt most depressed. (If you'd like to challenge this assertion, imagine the possessed state Beethoven was in when he composed the most breathtaking passages of the Ninth Symphony. Is it likely that despair was on his mind then? Is it not more likely that his mind was transported to a realm in which emotions don't even exist?—in which the term "emotion" is far too inadequate to characterize the richness of the experience?) The composers relentlessly strove for a more perfect state precisely *because* they periodically experienced beauty in its ideal form. When one's nature is not of this earth, the shock of reality is too great to endure. Mundane mental health is sacrificed for an occasional mingling with the gods.

Whether rare moments of aesthetic splendor can justifiably be considered the ultimate "paradise", I have at last come to the conclusion that if this paradise exists at all it exists as loss-of-self. Commonplace thought, which presupposes a self and consciousness, is not compatible with my spiritual ideal. Only the kind of thinking that Nietzsche periodically engaged in—namely, the kind in which a person's identity is forgotten and he is transformed into a vessel—doesn't necessarily preclude the possibility of paradise. The lack-of-thought requirement is one of the reasons for my skepticism about art forms other than music: it seems that a master painter or sculptor (or, in most cases, a writer) could easily *think* as he created a masterpiece. Buddhist enlightenment allows thought as well. Even if Buddhists can teach themselves to accept unpleasant emotional states—these states still exist! Boredom, one of the worst, continues to exist. In fact, I would go so far as to say that it only occurs more *often* after enlightenment has been attained. But a composer in a state of rapture could not experience thought or even any emotions per se; it's the nature of music to shut out thought. (Just as it's the nature of deep thought to shut out music.)

In yesterday's entry I said that paradise is logically impossible. Am I now contradicting myself by suggesting that the great composers and musicians experienced paradise? Well, aside from the fact that I change my opinions every day—so it wouldn't matter even if I *were* contradicting myself—I was operating under the principles I put forward in that journal entry (regarding consciousness, infancy, etc.) when I made the rash declaration. So it is the principles I have altered: I now consider consciousness to be compatible with my ideal. Not typical consciousness, mind you; Beethoven-consciousness.

While we're on this topic I suggest you listen to the fourth Bagatelle of Beethoven's op. 126—not because it's incredibly moving, but because it's a relatively unknown piece that doesn't deserve that cruel fate.

An unintended logical byproduct of this entry is a justification of my hatred of New Age and pop music: music, to deserve the name, should be able to engulf a person in flames of ecstasy. It should have

the power to stimulate loss-of-self. Have you ever heard of any New Age fluff that had this power? Have you ever (while sober) listened to rock music that made you think you had transcended the fragmentation of existence?

July 16

To summarize yesterday's conclusions, paradise exists only in rare moments that are necessarily transient. Humans are too attached to this world to remain distant from it for long. Music, philosophy Nietzsche-style, and very unique instances of religious splendor are the only experiences that allow for my definition of nirvana. In the last entry I said I was skeptical about the inclusion of religious experiences under the heading of nirvana, but I'll concede that during *moments* of "enlightenment" nirvana is attained. It never lasts as long as Buddhists say it does: the instant that one returns to Earth—that one becomes self-conscious again—paradise vanishes.

But what about sex? What about physical orgasm? Is that not paradise as well? If it is, it's a completely different kind of paradise—which seems to imply that it isn't paradise at all, because how plausible is it that two types of paradise exist? Fortunately, this problem can be solved fairly easily. Go have sex right now, and in the middle of orgasm reflect on your 'ontological' location.

....Well, see what I mean? The experience can't be described as "nirvana" in any sense of the word. In truth, the mere fact that you were able to reflect on your situation *at all* during orgasm shows that you were completely self-conscious and thereby hadn't transcended any aspect of existence. Orgasm is physically pleasurable, but humans are above all creatures of subjectivity. We are creatures of the mind. Physical pleasure is little more than a distraction or a temporary release.

By the way, I've personally recognized that music can intensify experiences, so my inclusion of it under the heading "Potential Catalyst of Nirvana" is partly based on my own emotional ordeals. I have not, however, experienced the other two potential "catalysts"; in honoring them I am primarily relying on the testimony of Nietzsche, the testimony of the religious, and my own imagination.

(later) In eighth grade the ten students in my class each had to give a brief speech in front of the school on any topic they chose. I vividly remember the day in English class when it was time to announce what we planned to give our speeches on. The teacher successively asked each student what topic he had chosen; the exchange was something like the following:

"Jason? What's your speech going to be about?"
"Basketball."
"Nick? How 'bout you?"
"Scuba diving."
"Dan?"
"Basketball."
"Megan?"
"The history of airplanes."
"Jay?"
"Basketball."
"Gardiner?"
"Roger Clemens."
"Chris?"
"Uhh....well, I'm not....I was thinking about—well, I guess the meaning of life."

It was an embarrassing moment. But I gave the five-minute speech anyway. The strategy I followed was to examine specific opinions and refute each one until I arrived at *my* opinion—which was, of course, the only true one. I believe the last sentence of my presentation was, "In conclusion, the true meaning of life is helping others." Surprise, surprise. Apparently I didn't think much of the speech, for I promptly threw it away. Mom was none too pleased about that, and now that I look back on it I don't blame her. It would have been amusing to reread it five years later.

But enough of that. One of the reasons I find psychoanalysis impressive is that it is capable of attaching meaning to chemical processes in the brain—indeed, it has made progress in reconciling the mind with the brain. Psychoanalysts do, of course, tend to go overboard with their never-ending quest for meaning (as I stated above) but this doesn't necessarily invalidate psychoanalysis itself. Nevertheless, one of the obvious difficulties with this broad field is that it seems exceedingly tricky to judge one theory as better than another. What empirical evidence there is for one theory can be interpreted in a different way to confirm the hypotheses of a different theory. How do scholars overcome this predicament?

Although my 'research' with Erik Wright isn't as fascinating as I'd like, it has taught me to make explicit what has always been a rather intuitive suspicion of mine: the mere fact that we can interpret a process as having a definite purpose doesn't mean we can ignore the basic mechanism through which this process is enacted. And perhaps when we have done so we'll realize that the apparent purpose was either incorrect or was simply a byproduct of the process. For example, psychoanalysts are usually guilty of assigning a purpose to events in the subconscious without asking themselves what the precise *mechanism* is by which these events take place. They simply state, "The reason for this dream is to reduce this kind of tension." Well, *how* and *why*? Is the goal foreseen by the subconscious? Is the dream nothing more than an automatic reaction—a "letting off of steam", a mechanical release of pressure? "It doesn't matter. What matters is that the tension is resolved subsequent to the occurrence of the dream." Okay, but maybe it's not the dream itself that resolves the tension; maybe it's the chemical processes in the brain. And if this is so, wouldn't it be more worthwhile to focus research solely on the development of medicine rather than on the improvement of necessarily imperfect psychotherapy? For Christ's sake, aren't psychologists aware of the insuperable difficulties that the brain itself poses to psychological analyses? Until these dilemmas are confronted head-on, psychoanalysis is destined to remain a pseudo-science.

[…]

It's a pity I used not to record all my thoughts in this journal, for in the past year I've realized how easy it is to sound original nowadays. Authors of books like *History and Totality* pour lavish praise on scholars who articulate outlandishly obvious implications of statements that, e.g., Karl Marx made in his manuscripts. Erik Wright became famous because of his "contradictory class locations" idea—which surely should have been obvious to anyone who had engaged in a modicum of class analysis. For all I know, many of the ideas that have crossed my mind over the years have been "original" enough to get me recognition.

Speaking of ideas, it seems to me that if everybody recorded his thoughts and then published them (anonymously or not) the world would be a better place. People would understand each other more. That's one of the reasons why, maybe after I die—because I'm going to write it my entire life—I intend to publish this journal (although the most important reason, of course, is that I'm self-absorbed and vain).

I think it was a bit fatuous of me to write (on June 25th) that communism, religion, etc. are all attempts to evade meaninglessness in life. The explanation is surely a great deal more complex. (In fact, that entire passage was hogwash. "Pure being" isn't the highest good; spiritual ecstasy—paradise—is. Indeed, I think that Buddhists confuse the former with the latter: what they strive for is spiritual ecstasy, not pure being.)

In the book *Ego and Archetype* the author states that "[a] possible way of dealing with the loss of a religious projection is [as follows]. If when the individual is thrown back on himself through the loss of a projected religious value, he is able to confront the ultimate questions of life that are posed for him, he may be able to use this opportunity for a decisive development in consciousness. If he is able to work consciously and responsibly with the activation of the unconscious he may discover the lost value, the god-image, within the psyche.... The connection between ego and Self is now consciously realized. In this case the loss of a religious projection has served a salutary purpose: it has been the stimulus which leads to the development of an individuated personality." It's as if the man is describing me. What's more, all of it is true. *That* is why you religious ones should relinquish your fallacious faith in a god that controls you and instead begin to worship yourselves.

This very interesting book is forcing me to think more deeply about the psychological hypotheses I've put forward in the past few days. I've only read a hundred pages and already I'm confused. How does the relationship between the ego and the "Self"—understood as the psyche *in toto*—affect my interpretation

of nirvana? This fellow Edinger writes that the ego sometimes inflates itself (meaning that it 'believes' it has more power over the psyche than it really does; it is identified with the Self) and is sometimes alienated from the Self (which is the exact opposite of inflation). These are the two basic processes that cause almost all major psychological imbalances, but they are both necessary for the development of the individual. Ideally, the individual will eventually experience individuation, which is essentially a conscious recovering of the "original unconscious wholeness and oneness with life". The split between unconsciousness and consciousness is overcome; a dialogue emerges between the two. The ego, of course, remains separate from the Self, but this is desirable. One "comes to realize that there is an autonomous inner directiveness, separate from the ego and often antagonistic to it." "One is not master in his own house." Notice the similarity with Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence[1] and *amor fati*. The path of one's life is necessary, not governed by chance. "Chance as a category of experience is a symptom of the alienated life." The goal of psychological development is "to redeem by conscious realization the hidden self, hidden in unconscious identification with the ego"—which involves recognizing the Self's disturbing but liberating power over us. (As I pointed out several entries ago, one of the implications of this power would seem to be moral relativism, which I find distasteful.)

I haven't yet read the part of the book that deals with individuation in depth, but I can already see that despite its possible truth as the end-product of psychological development, it is not precisely the same state as my ideal. I can't stress this enough: it is inherent in the nature of mundane consciousness for there to be *lack*. As long as we are self-conscious there will be something missing. And before we reach self-consciousness there is nothing we *can* miss. There is *nothing*. Only after we have attained self-consciousness and *subsequently lose it during fleeting moments of "perfection"* can we properly be said to have passed through the gates of the Garden of Eden. The tragedy is that only a tiny minority is born with a nature that allows for this transcendence. *I* certainly will never experience it.

Can this 'transcendence' be understood as the ego's temporary identification with the Self (which effectively implies the disappearance of the ego)? I don't know.

July 17

I apologize for my inability to explain my thoughts adequately. I'm too 'abrupt' a writer: I briefly record the skeletal structure of ideas and then move on to something else. (To be precise: I reflect on a thought until for a fraction of a second I have 'experienced' the thought intuitively, and only then can I with a good conscience think about something else.) In order for you to understand what I mean by terms like 'paradise' it is quite literally necessary for you to experience something like the states of mind I experience—which is unfortunate, and maybe impossible. Pure reason must always be supplemented with subjective experience to be more than....nothing. This is why it's so hard for most of us to understand Nietzsche, and why it's so easy to label him a megalomaniac.

If mental events are based on physical events in the brain, maybe nirvana can also be experienced by taking drugs that may or may not yet exist. Maybe this is why heroine, cocaine, etc. are so desirable. I've smoked marijuana twice, and although I never got "high" (but I *did* "inhale") I know that this wouldn't have corresponded to my spiritual ideal. The same is true for the one time I got drunk (after drinking approximately eight gin-and-tonics) and spent the weekend blowing chunks. But I've never taken the notoriously hard drugs; perhaps these enable one to experience a sort of Beethoven-consciousness (although I doubt it). I'm curious.

However, until I'm better equipped to confront the difficulties of the mind-body problem I'm going to focus on understanding just the mind. In fact, I'm going to pretend humans are pure mind. (It's wise to reduce problems to their component parts.)

My relationship with music is perplexing. Why do I enjoy listening to it? Indeed, why do people in

[1] [My 'psychological' interpretation of 'eternal recurrence' was influenced by a book I'd read that ignored Nietzsche's intentions and gave the doctrine a different meaning than it was supposed to have.]

general enjoy listening to it? Every society has its own style of music. Why is it such a universal need? I'd suggest that music is so ever-present because it's an excellent absorber of libido. By "libido" I don't mean sexual energy; I mean unconscious energy in general. By "excellent absorber" I don't mean that it's more powerful than other 'absorbers' of libido (in most cases sexual energy is more potent); I only mean that it's a very reliable absorber—as well as a powerful manifestation. (I call music a "manifestation" of libido insofar as it is composed. For the rest of us it merely '*absorbs*' our libido. See below.) Music is reliable because in most cases it is an eminently stable outlet for emotions, whereas the emotions themselves (which are always manifestations, not only "absorbers", of libido) are by their nature unstable. Music is soothing, constant, caressing, flexible. (By "outlet for", "absorber of", and "manifestation of" I mean essentially the same thing, the main difference being that "manifestation of" implies a 'crystallized' form of libido—something we create or engage in voluntarily. If a professor loves his job, his professorship is a manifestation of, outlet for, and absorber of his libido. If he hates his job, it is merely an outlet for and absorber of his libido. These designations aren't *purely* arbitrary.)

[Blah blah, I've deleted more meaningless blather.]

Music has a unique position in the hierarchy of these manifestations: it is the only one of the three most intense that can readily be experienced by anyone. Religious enlightenment is the ultimate subjective experience: it is so personal that no amount of description can give a person an idea of its power. Nietzsche-philosophy, unlike enlightenment, involves the creation of something, which implies that anyone who can read can "know" this experience. But few can *feel* the experience, which is all that matters in our current discussion. Music, however, is a creation that is directly related to the emotions. It can intensify *any* emotion that someone feels; it can carry experience to another plane, so it is very popular. This other "plane" is weak in comparison with the plane reached by the rare people who have a nature that is especially touched by music, but it is comparatively pleasurable even for those who don't have an idea of music's true potential.

What is the relation between thought and libido? My guess is that thought is a particularly weak manifestation of libido [i.e., psychic energy], because in its most 'objective' forms it is much less intense than emotions.

On an unrelated topic, sometimes it's fun to listen to modern music if only because the lyrics are so pitiful. For example, there is a song entitled "I Touch Myself", the lyrics of which include the following: "I think of you; I want you to touch me. I feel you; I want you to touch me. I touch myself. I touch myself. I touch myself. I touch myself." A more recent and popular song includes the lyrics "I get knocked down, but I get up again. You're never going to keep me down. I get knocked down, but I get up again. You're never going to keep me down. [Repeat *ad infinitum.*]" And these are the more respectable examples.

July 18

So that you don't *completely* lose respect for me, I want to remind you that almost all my psychological meditations of the past few days have been basically original. What triggered yesterday's speculation on "libido" was the following sentence in *Ego and Archetype*: "Narcissus represents the alienated ego that cannot love, that cannot give interest and libido to life..." As I thought about the word 'libido' it suddenly hit me that music can be thought of as 'absorbing' our libidinal energy. The rest followed from there.

Because I currently don't have many friends, the strategy I follow to relax my mind is to alternate between books on different subjects. Thus, if I'm tired of reading a book on psychoanalysis I'll switch to a book on the Marxist theory of the state; if I get tired of this I'll read a book on Nietzscheanism; if this gives me a headache I'll reflect on psychological dilemmas; if I lose interest in this I'll read a few adventures of Sherlock Holmes. If I'm desperate I'll watch a movie.

[…]

An obvious question I haven't asked is: *why* is music so closely related to the emotions? What do emotions and sound have in common? The same isn't as true for sight and emotions, so there is clearly something in the nature of sound that makes it especially resonant in our unconscious. I suspect that this

phenomenon can be satisfactorily unraveled only by resorting to physical explanations.

I feel disgraceful due to my ignorance of Asian, African and South American history. This year I'm going to acquaint myself with the relevant literature.

(later) There are quite a few important questions that have yet to be answered within the framework of my nonsensical psychological opinions. First, loss-of-self has to be adequately defined. Second, what does it mean to say that it is desirable? Doesn't loss-of-self imply loss of knowledge about oneself? Should loss-of-self be 'acceptable' only after a certain amount of self-knowledge has been attained?

Since loss-of-self is incredibly rare and only lasts for fleeting moments, the latter questions are irrelevant. It is fully compatible with an extraordinary amount of self-knowledge and self-consciousness at all other times of life. "But what if it could last for an entire lifetime? Would it be desirable then?" Who cares? Such a scenario is impossible. It would necessitate a drastic alteration in the human condition.

July 19

(I may have already addressed the following topic.) Nietzsche raises an interesting question when he asks, "Why do humans pursue truth rather than falsehood? What is so valuable about truth?" His answer is admirable: humans unconsciously seek to create the world in their image, to humanize it. They seek power over it.

Nietzsche's definition of the superman, too, is noteworthy. It reconciles my idea of paradise with the seemingly innate urge of people to create. Unless I'm mistaken, an approximate definition of the *Übermensch* is 'the exceptionally passionate man who is able to channel his passions into a creative outlet'. As we've seen, it is only through a superhuman burst of passion that the self can be overcome—that a person can most realize himself. Unless this passion is channeled into a single outlet it will be too diffuse to accomplish the desired end. Thus we arrive at the *Übermensch*—

Except for one qualification: why must the passion be creative? Buddhist enlightenment-passion is not creative in Nietzsche's sense, but its product is loss-of-self. Nietzsche would not, of course, see any difficulty in this; his ideal has nothing to do with loss-of-self. But *my* ideal does. How can I reconcile my two partialities for a life devoted to artistic or philosophical creation and a life devoted to loss-of-self if the two don't necessarily coincide? I can't convince myself to adopt the latter wholeheartedly at the expense of the former. And yet I suspect that even an occasional experience of the latter would enable me to enjoy life as much as is possible within the parameters of normal consciousness. In fact....yes, I am an ass. There isn't the slightest inconsistency between the two lifestyles. It's perfectly plausible for one to engage in intellectual creation as often as possible and at the same time to strive for loss-of-self: creative passion *is* a way of momentarily integrating the ego with the Self (i.e., of losing oneself). The passion *need* not be creative, but it *can* be.

(By the way, Edinger opposes the integration of the Self with the ego because this supposedly is the unhealthy state of "inflation" which always leads to "alienation". But in my opinion there are two types of inflation: the unhealthy, commonplace one in which the Self continues to exist independently of the ego despite the ego's pretensions to the contrary, and the healthy one in which the ego truly *does* become the Self—or, what is the same thing, in which the ego disappears. This exists in the state of infancy, but its paradisiacal manifestation occurs only after consciousness has been attained and is subsequently 'lost' temporarily. In fact, the two are qualitatively different 'manifestations' of loss-of-self, but they occur within the same overall framework—viz., that of an identification of the ego with the Self. The primary differences are that the adult manifestation (1) is a liberation of the acquired wealth of the unconscious (that is, basically a liberation of the libido) and (2) is so 'exhilarating' that it can't be comprehended by ordinary mortals.)

[…]

Returning to the problem of self-consciousness, this very ambiguous concept has a few characteristics that must be delineated before paradise can be understood. First, underlying all self-consciousness is a taken-for-granted feeling of lack that escalates as self-consciousness sharpens—so much so that life can turn into a comedy, a charade. But even more importantly, true self-consciousness comes

with the realization that we are trapped in our own little worlds, that we're alone. Most of the time we're not completely aware of this very subtle absence of perfection, but that doesn't make it any less real. Second, there are 'levels' of self-consciousness. When I'm completely absorbed in a conversation I'm not really aware of myself at all, but the feeling of "lack" necessarily persists. When I'm alone and listening to music I'm almost always a little more aware of myself (although in a basically unreflective manner). When I'm in love I'm even more self-conscious, often reflecting on myself and how I appear in the eyes of my beloved. I'm *extremely* self-conscious when I'm 'introspecting' or when I'm bored. If emotions or interests or desires didn't exist, each of these successive stages would coincide with an increasing sense of almost imperceptible dissatisfaction. (These stages actually wouldn't exist, so just imagine to yourself levels of intensified self-consciousness.) But because emotions do exist and are always more powerful than simple, objective "awareness", the love stage is much more pleasurable than, e.g., the conversation stage (even though it may imply more self-consciousness). Unpleasant emotions like anger are certainly not very desirable, but they instill a different and less severe displeasure than does pure self-consciousness. This is evidenced by the fact that I—and probably you—would rather be angry than very bored, which state of mind coincides with a lack of all emotions, desires, etc. Or rather, severe boredom is equivalent to 'emptiness', which I suppose is an emotion. But it is a unique emotion in that it signifies a virtually complete lack of energy. As far as emotions go, it is the weakest manifestation of libido, and thus implies the most acute instance of self-awareness. But more importantly, it is the only *emotional* manifestation of self-consciousness: since self-consciousness is, in its deepest form, consciousness of lack and loneliness (because "lack" and loneliness are subjective characteristics of all human existence except for nirvana and infancy), and the emotion of emptiness is the outstanding realization of lack (moreover, of the same qualitative kind of lack involved in self-consciousness; I know because I've experienced it), this emotion is the most penetrating realization of the essentials of self-awareness. By "essentials" I mean loneliness, emptiness, apathy, absence of self-understanding, etc. Shame, guilt, and the rest of the unpleasant feelings directed toward the self are sometimes more unpleasant than boredom not because self-awareness is necessarily any sharper, but because self-awareness is supplemented with aversion-toward-self.

When people are temporarily free from emotions their self-consciousness is more 'objective' than otherwise, so it is not *painful*. The moment it becomes painful is the moment it becomes most acute: the devastating emotion of "emptiness"—or "nausea"?—enters upon the scene. So, carried to its logical conclusion, the deepest kind of self-consciousness becomes painful.

If this is true, is self-consciousness ever desirable? Yes, because it is only through pain that we reach pleasure. (As hackneyed as that sounds, I think it's true.) Furthermore, our pleasure is inevitably more profound if it emerges from such despair. We feel liberated. In addition, it is only through self-knowledge that we can discover our deepest spiritual needs and can begin to heal our 'wounds'.

Because humans (after infancy) are always conscious (when they're not asleep),[1] and consciousness always presupposes a kind of self-consciousness, even in paradise we are self-conscious. But it is the weakest kind of self-awareness that exists. Loneliness and pain vanish. This self-consciousness is even weaker than the aforementioned "conversation"-consciousness, in which practically our whole being can be oriented to the exchange. But nirvana is overwhelming not only because of the lack of self-awareness, but because it involves a transmutation of the person from a *subject* into a *vessel*. Nirvana is a flood from the unconscious. The ego ceases to exist as such. Enlightenment, a Nietzschean deluge of philosophy/literature, and music (when it's a torrent that seems to *burst* from the clouds in one's brain) all crush the barriers between ego and subconscious: they are the latter's liberation.

July 20

I should clarify the phrase "liberation of the unconscious": it is not an instantaneous liberation of the *content* of the unconscious (which, aside from being impossible, would drive a person insane); it is only

[1] I.e., when they're not unconscious—which is, of course, a ridiculous truism, but that doesn't affect my argument.

a liberation of the libido.

If my notion of nirvana is more than a fantasy, Handel experienced it when he composed the Hallelujah Chorus. His servant walked into the room and saw his master crying. In response to queries, Handel exclaimed, "I have seen God!" I can't think of a better way to describe such an experience.

In Sartre's book *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* he attempts (and, I think, fails) to refute the psychoanalytic theory of the subconscious. He claims that such a thing could not exist because it would be "logically inconsistent": consciousness cannot be caused by something it's completely unaware of. But as illogical as the idea of the subconscious may seem to Sartre, there is so much evidence for an unconscious that it *must* exist: repressed desires, memories, fantasies, instinctual forces, psychotic episodes, etc. Sartre's entire philosophy is absurd.

An obvious question I haven't answered is why there are only three manifestations of nirvana. Could not *any* manifestation of the libido potentially "liberate" the latter? One would think so, but I've never heard of, e.g., romantic love being that powerful. Nor anything else. Is there something in the nature of anger and other unpleasant emotions that precludes paradise from being manifested in their form? Yes: they are unpleasant and divisive. They presuppose a consciousness of individuality, whereas (1) the unifying emotions are the only ones that have a distinctly pleasurable feeling,[1] and (2) nirvana signifies the almost-complete absence of a "consciousness" of individuality. It is as close to the mental state of infancy as we can get: it is the least-noticeable non-reflective awareness of self that is possible. While divisive emotions often are compatible with a merely non-reflective awareness of self, they always imply an awareness of others, of the world (which is indeed what necessitates their non-reflective *self*-awareness). In short (this clarifies yesterday's discussion as well), we are always explicitly conscious either of the world or of ourselves, and the awareness of one implies (different levels of) a non-reflective awareness of the other. Nirvana is, therefore, so overwhelming not because of the low degree of awareness but because of the flood of energy from the subconscious—from the "depths of being".

[…]

Aha! I've discovered the reason for the low number of possible manifestations of nirvana! Even the unifying emotions—love, joy, compassion, empathy, etc.—presuppose a great degree of self-awareness. In fact, for them to "unify" at all there must necessarily be *a priori* consciousness of individuality. But we have seen that nirvana exists only when self-/other-awareness is at its ebb (because self-consciousness is a consciousness of lack, and there is no lack in nirvana), so emotions and normal states of mind forbid paradise. Love can never become so powerful that a person forgets he is a person, and if it could it would cease to be love and would become something higher, divine.

(later) I don't think I should record any more psychological reflections in this journal. I feel like a charlatan, a hack, a pitiful excuse for a pseudo-phenomenological psychologist. Sometimes my ideas sound a bit original—inasmuch as *I* have never heard of anything quite like them—but originality isn't an end in itself. (That's why I dislike people who praise forms of contemporary music because they're original. "John Cage is original, therefore he is admirable and brilliant." That "therefore" is a non sequitur. John Cage wouldn't have been worthy of licking Beethoven's spit.)

If you knew what goes on behind the closed doors of the government you'd be cured of your lack of misanthropy. The lying, the bribing, the cowardice, the lack of principles, the naked self-interest, the complacency, the lust for power, the lack of compassion for the downtrodden, the inability to give a correct diagnosis/prognosis of society's ills, the obsession over worthless details, the degeneracy of the bureaucracy, the sycophancy, the profound hypocrisy, the money-grubbing, the pandering to the masses, the predominance of *bureaucratic minds*, the total allegiance to big business, the arrogance, the disgusting politicking, the fixation on one's "image".... This is all made necessary by the nature of monopoly capitalism and consumerism, but as *individuals* could these politicians not shed their inhumanity? […]

[1] I recognize the possible objections to this statement, but since they're unimportant and based on ignorance I'm not going to answer them.

July 21

The problem with humans is that they almost always need an outlet into which they can pour their aggression. The phenomenon of professional wrestling seems to serve this purpose. My outlet is this journal, which is why so much of it consists of indictments against individuals or people in general. Do societies have a need to vent their pent-up aggression at least once or twice a century? I don't know if the idea makes much sense, but is there a way to prove it wrong?

Occasionally I think that my idea of paradise is wrong. If all it takes is a flash of self-consciousness to destroy it, isn't it too fragile to exist at all? But in rationally calculating the possibility of self-awareness in that realm I suspect we are doing nirvana a disservice. Such a flood of inspiration/energy cannot be comprehended—even by those who experience it. Nevertheless, I think we ought to concede that its Nietzschean manifestation is the most delicate because it involves thought, albeit thought born from the womb of the unconscious.

[…]

In fact, pride in general is ridiculous—as are all other supposedly "objective" assessments of oneself or others. How can we properly estimate the value of anyone if we don't know whether freedom is possible? That's the curse of (Chapelle's interpretation of) eternal recurrence. Perhaps both free will and determinism are incorrect. I think that the only plausible position is a combination of the two: we can make free choices within several determined realms. But who is making the choices? If our conscious decisions are often or always influenced by the subconscious, what influences the subconscious? The subconscious certainly isn't free—because by its definition it is unaware of itself and can't make decisions—so what is it determined by? Itself? If it's determined by itself it's the freest entity that exists. So is it determined by electrochemical processes? Perhaps, but what are these determined by? External stimuli and other electrochemical processes? Okay, so there is an infinite regress.

Let's try another tack. (That one was going nowhere.) Let's assume that not all of our decisions are determined by the subconscious (because this would effectively abolish freedom); some are purely objective, rational. But if this is so, it must be true only for the decisions that are of little consequence.

What I want to know is whether it's intellectually honest to have any values [and to 'blame' people for not abiding by them]. Can we condemn Mobutu for being a murderous, corrupt, power-hungry dictator who cared only about himself? Can we condemn him for building an airplane runway in his backyard and owning seventy Rolls-Royces while his people starved and his country fell into chaos? This was who he was; it was his nature. He didn't decide when he was fifteen years old that for the rest of his life he would be a vicious predator. Maybe he had no control over the atrocious acts he committed: he was incapable of thinking morally, his instincts were all-powerful.

This is bullshit. It's damned absurd and useless to engage in this kind of reflection when I have so little knowledge of human nature and freedom. But I can't help myself.

[…]

July 22

To be honest, I haven't yet appreciated the disastrous truth of individual isolation, partly because it's astonishingly easy to ignore the fact and partly because I don't take myself seriously enough to care. In addition, its terrible implications are somewhat mitigated by the knowledge that everyone shares this fate with me. We're all in the same boat.

I had planned to read some books on the philosophy of mind, but (1) not a single satisfactory book has been written on this subject, and (2) reading sucks. I hate reading.

Propositions regarding freedom:

A certain degree of freedom is necessary for moral responsibility to be a meaningful concept. Freedom is defined as objectivity (or rationality)—the ability to reason, to commit oneself to 'impartial' decisions, actions, etc. I am free inasmuch as I cause (or control) myself—or rather, control my actions,

thoughts, etc. (What this means is very debatable—perhaps unknowable; maybe the statement is meaningless—but a 'variation' on it is necessary for the existence of freedom.) Pure freedom, understood as "radical objectivity" in every area of life, is an empty concept and does not exist. The free being is necessarily aware of itself—reflectively or unreflectively, "non-thetically" or thetically—and is unfree insofar as it is not aware of itself or what 'causes' its actions. (Awareness of the causes of one's actions is not a sufficient condition for freedom; one must, in the last analysis, *be* the cause.) The ego is the only aspect of the "Self" that is aware of itself; thus it is the only aspect that is potentially free. The ego is often unaware of the parameters (and the causes thereof) in which it is forced to make decisions, and it is unfree to this extent. It is also unfree to the extent that it is aware of its causes but doesn't have control over them.

(I apologize for the muddled sentences and lack of argumentation; the preceding was all based on intuition, not logical thought. It's hard to translate obscure "intuition" into logically crisp statements.)

The implications of the foregoing are obvious (animals aren't free, etc.), but I'd like to articulate one in particular: Beethoven, Nietzsche and others of their kind, when awash in the flood from their unconscious, left the kingdom of heaven as soon as they were free to reflect on a note or a word (because if they're free they're aware, and if they're aware they've become human again, so to speak). This is why I think enlightenment is more powerful than the other two manifestations; it does not specifically involve creation, so there is no reflecting to be done. In addition—and this is key—the *explicit goal* of enlightenment is to overcome individuality, and it is individuality that must be overcome in any case for 'paradise' to be reached. The Buddhists consciously orient their ego to allow for this possibility, thereby (gradually) disabling its defenses and allowing for a fuller surge of energy from the unconscious. I would go so far as to say that enlightenment is the most perfect paradise even though the other two manifestations do certainly cross the threshold beyond self-consciousness.

I haven't read *Being and Nothingness,* but I know Sartre argued that it is part of human nature to be *completely free*. This is true inasmuch as we always feel subjectively free, but *objectively* we are not. Our complete subjective freedom is precisely why it's so difficult to accept that we are objectively determined. This is so obvious that I wonder if I'm misunderstanding Sartre.

(later) What does the phrase "surge of energy from the unconscious" mean? What is to be understood by "energy"? These questions are, unfortunately, the least of my problems: I'm beginning to doubt every psychological hypothesis I've put forward in the past few days. I spent the last several hours reading parts of *Brain and Psyche: the Biology of the Unconscious*, and it occurred to me that any attempt to discover the nature of the mind starting from its non-physical aspects is doomed to failure. Everything related to the mind is anchored in the brain, and unless we take into account this primacy of matter we're fools.

To hell with psychology! It's driving me insane! I need a break from it and everything remotely connected with it. I'm going to finish reading the book by William James and then return to my study of phenomenology.

July 23

There's something about the "1812 Overture" that bothers me. I think it's the cannons: they're obnoxious. In the middle of the most exciting part one has to cover one's ears so as not to be startled by the cannon-booms. Furthermore, the entire piece carries the signature of machinery, of the modern age. This is true for all pieces that attempt to incorporate modern sounds (whistles, sandpaper-scraping, etc.) into the texture of the music. Johann Strauss is sometimes guilty of this unpardonable sin.

Unless I'm mistaken, Kant dodged the issue of free will by declaring that even if we aren't free we have to act under the assumption that we are, so it's a moot point. In order to be agents we must have free will, so if free will is believed to be incorrect we'll be incapable of and will have no right to meaningful action. The problem with this argument is that we already know that under many circumstances we are almost completely determined; merely by extension, this can be altered to state that "under all circumstances we are almost completely determined". Of course, "almost" is an ambiguous term that I

won't attempt to clarify now—because I can't.

Besides, whether it would imply the cessation of our ability to act, the almost-total absence of free will would certainly have momentous consequences for moral responsibility. It makes no sense to discard the problem as a waste of time.

Here's a conundrum I've hinted at previously: if thought takes place in the brain, what causes the neural processes associated with a particular thought to be set in motion? The thought starts somewhere—so how does it start? What causes the very first electrochemical event associated with it? Indeed, what causes the first such event associated with *any* given conscious activity?

I have the withering feeling that we humans are victims of the greatest hoax of all time. Winson thinks that underneath our consciousness and 'above' our unconscious is something called the "preconscious", which consists of a continuous process of neural interactions dealing with potential fragments of thoughts. I would add the following: whenever a relevant connection is made—and a thought is created—it instantly rises to our consciousness and becomes a link in an ongoing chain of ideas. When we make choices the relevant neurons establish connections with each other through electricity and chemical reactions; sometimes certain relevant neurons are left out of the process for whatever reason, thereby preventing us from being aware of possible alternatives or additional considerations. An alternative is chosen through this mechanism (somehow) and electrical charges are sent to the relevant bodily organs if their movement is required. (This theory seems to answer the questions in the last paragraph, namely by hypothesizing that initial chemical reactions aren't necessary.) "We" don't have any control over "ourselves" at all because "we" don't even exist. The connections between neurons determine what "our" thoughts are, and the neurons don't control themselves; they merely follow their duty to send impulses to each other. "We" are just a bundle of sensory information, ideas brought to "consciousness" solely by existing—which comes about when sufficient neural connections are made to constitute an "idea"—and memories stored up. True, we can't comprehend how 'meaning' has its origin in chemical processes, but then again we can't comprehend how time could have existed for an eternity and yet have arrived at this moment.

This is the quandary I confronted four summers ago. I decided then that even if such a mechanism is true, it is irrelevant because *something*—whether ideas, bundles of sensory information, etc.—exists no matter what. "We" exist even if we can be reduced to neurons—even if we are just an effect. But the implications of it are overwhelming. We would have no control over our thoughts; pills could give us meaningful happiness; higher culture and all things spiritual would be superfluous, indirect ways of achieving a goal more effectively realized simply by inserting chemicals into one's body. How I detest materialism! But how can it be avoided?

One day scientists will invent a pill for attaining nirvana. And when that day comes....humanity will die.

[…]

July 25

The dilemma of reconciling psychology and biology is a pseudo-problem: they can be reconciled without any effort at all. One simply must remember that the functioning of neurons as a collectivity creates a self. Even if the psyche is completely determined by neural processes, it is an indisputable fact that these processes as a whole form the 'subjective' psyche. If ideas are effected by neurons; if personalities originate with these neural processes; if one's unconscious, one's identity, one's emotions are determined by the brain—psychology and biology have obviously been reconciled already! How was I stupid enough to overlook this? (*Did* I overlook it?) It is fruitful to analyze psyches (as opposed to physical processes) precisely because the psyche is the end-product of the processes: it is, so to speak, their reason for being. Whether it would be more practical to research the processes rather than the psyche itself is, of course,

another matter; and in fact I am sure that it is in the nature of mental illnesses—indeed, it is in the nature of the entire Self—to be more influenced by drugs than by pure 'therapy'. But since selves do exist, and since they are the 'deliberate' result of the brain, it is always necessary to research the psyche itself in order to understand people and their actions. In short: we do exist in the most meaningful sense of the term (you have no idea how relieved that makes me), but we might be impotent in the face of our neurons.

On the other hand, the insoluble 'flip-side' of the reconciliation dilemma remains: how can chemicals be in any way related to concepts and meaning?

Unfortunately, the problem of "reconciliation" wasn't my prime obsession; the degrading quality of materialism was, and I still haven't come close to overcoming this. Above all, I wish to restore dignity to humanity. (By "dignity" I don't mean the elimination of vulgar instincts; I mean the discrediting of the theory that we are nothing but effects of physical processes—that we are incapable of controlling our actions.) Science, despite its respectable quest for truth and its beneficial practical effects, will not be content till it has completely degraded humanity to the level of electrical impulses.

(later) *Hoowah!* I feel like God now that I've decided I undoubtedly exist! I don't even care if I'm merely an effect—because *I exist*! Loneliness has vanished!

This is the conclusion I arrived at four years ago, isn't it? Well, 'eternal recurrence' decides our fate.

July 26

I hope you don't think I'm being hypocritical by condemning the spinelessness of modern critics of society—that I, the shy little boy, would be incapable of practicing what I preach if I had the opportunity. When I was editor of the high school newspaper I may have written articles of poor quality, but they certainly didn't lack a degree of boldness. One article was spent ridiculing lovers of rap and other contemporary music (of whom there were *many* in my school); in another article I ridiculed the school committee and the teachers who supported 'heterogeneous grouping' in classes; in two more I ridiculed all the teachers—including my guidance counselor, whom I liked personally—who criticized one issue of our paper for being too "controversial"; in another article I ridiculed the school's requirement of physical education; in another (excessively corny and long one) I actually made fun of all the punks who settled their disagreements by fighting and advised them instead to 'talk about their differences' (!). The year-and-a-half in which I was the editor (and an excellent art teacher the faculty advisor) was the *Husky Herald*'s golden age: almost every issue provoked controversy among the student body and the teachers. Entire class periods were spent discussing the articles; even the illiterate students were seen looking at the paper; people came up to me and either voiced their appreciation or vented their anger; one time students 'threatened' me, although the threats weren't very serious. The staff criticized me for being a dictator, but as soon as I'd graduated, the *Husky Herald* sank into disrepair and eventual oblivion. My main goal during my tenure was to effect as much controversy as possible: this hope was always on my mind, and it was the one factor that made our newspaper fairly interesting and substantive.

[…]

(later) My relationship with philosophy is a perfect example of the transmutation of sexual energy into spiritual energy. It's so acute that this "transmutation" is practically a conscious decision on my part. If I spend a few minutes walking on State Street at night, passing good-looking young couples every thirty seconds, staring at gorgeous girls, I eventually am forced to rush back to my room to study Marxism. The heartache is sublimated into intense intellectual activity.

It seems as though in almost every intellectual endeavor of mine—including self-analysis—I find examples of dialectical movements. Especially in history. History is one long chain of dialectics.

July 27

Last night I read some passages on Nietzsche in a book called *Existentialist Revolt*, and all of a sudden I realized that *The Birth of Tragedy* [which I hadn't read] rests on the distinction between the 'plastic arts'—sculpture, painting and the like—and music. Nietzsche even characterized music as the negation of individuality, etc. In fact, my term "Beethoven-consciousness" has nearly the same meaning as Nietzsche's "Dionysian rapture". How was I dim-witted enough not to see these similarities between Nietzsche's ideas and my own? 'Tis a mystery.

Incidentally, it's obvious that by "eternal recurrence" Nietzsche had something different in mind than my interpretation of it. But since his idea is wrong, my idea (or Daniel Chapelle's) is all that's left.

[…]

I've almost definitely decided that humans have no free will. We are such complex organisms that "free will" seems ridiculous and, indeed, almost meaningless. But the complete negation of free will forbids the possibility of moral responsibility. How can the paradoxes implied by a lack of moral responsibility be surmounted? I don't think they can. The only solution is to somehow rescue the notion of moral responsibility from complete disintegration.

I can't understand why seemingly intelligent people insist on identifying communism with absolute equality. Communism is the *opposite* of absolute equality in all the meaningful senses of the term: diversity will be the guiding law of communism. It is rather capitalism that suffers from extreme, odious [commodified, depersonalized] "equality".

[…]

July 28

I think (I *know*) it's wrong to say that language is necessary for thought. All of us daily engage in thought-processes that have no affinity with language. They are simply 'intuitive'. I don't even think language is necessary for us to gain this capacity in the first place. Once our brains have developed beyond a certain point in early childhood we're automatically capable of this "intuitive" form of thinking. Even the most primitive humans were.

I suspect that the paradoxical notion of 'controlling oneself' is meaningless—just a product of language's trickeries. There is no "I" in the usual sense; *I* am a melange of thoughts, memories, etc. that combine to create an identity, a shared sense of self. I do exist, but I am not a single thing that can control itself. *[(20 minutes later) See below. I've changed my opinions since I wrote this paragraph.]*

An even greater trick of language is the tacit assumption that I am an object of myself. "I control myself"—generally this sentence-form involves two distinguishable entities. But when the self is the object of analysis—ah, *that's* when the rules of language and logic lose their cogency.

....Anyway, I've decided that what we are is pure Being. That isn't just what is underneath our more important qualities; that is our *essence*. We are not our bodies, our characteristics, our thoughts, our actions, our "identity"; we are not even all of these combined. No; we are the ineffable. We are not pure indifference or pure nothingness; we are pure [conscious] existence. Our qualities are supplements. Supposing it were physically possible, we would continue to exist in our essentials even if all the "trappings of existence" were discarded. That's why on June 25th I made the false assertion that a 'return' to this state would be paradise. 'Twould not! It would, to be sure, be the ultimate realization of our *essentials*—of that which *everyone necessarily has in common* (pure awareness, etc.)—but not of ourselves as we really empirically exist. In order for the latter to be fully realized we need to experience *active, positive ecstasy*—the highest affirmation of the fusion of all our emotions—because real, concrete existence implies emotions. Since we have experienced the power of emotions, a return to the state of Being would not be the highest paradise. Indeed, we would still be self-conscious, although in a drastically different way than we are now. And even if it were possible for self-consciousness to be cancelled, this "paradise" would not include the *positive* joy experienced by those rare individuals who know what it means to be God (or rather, Dionysus).

So why is it impossible for us to control ourselves? "The very notion of control is foreign to our nature." Exactly. And why is that? "Because all we are is existence [you mean consciousness?]. Control

has nothing to do with our essence." And what does? "Well, nothing. Except for existence, being, awareness."

(Digression: I think Sartre defined human subjectivity as Being-for-itself. Did he have in mind the same thing I do? Something close to it, at least.)

We experience thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations, but they are not us. They contribute to our sense of identity and define our empirical, subjective existence, but they have nothing to do with our essence. We all share exactly the same essence even though we're isolated from each other and 'have' different qualities. It is because of these different qualities that it would be such an eye-opening, joyful thing to *experience* one another as we experience ourselves.

So we don't have any control over ourselves because we can't be controlled; we just *are*. After we originally become conscious we never change, but the characteristics of our consciousness certainly do change. What we experience obviously changes all the time, but we as pure awareness are constant [unchanging] until death. Therefore *we* (the essential "self", although a completely different self than the 'normal', 'observable' kind; see below) logically cannot be the cause of any changes in 'our nature' (our personality, thoughts, etc.)—that is, because (the essential, not empirical) *we* are constant and our characteristics are not. When I think or engage in any other activity, I am experiencing something which in itself is foreign to who I am. Not even the sum of my characteristics is who I am; it is merely how I in my human, corporeal, existential form manifest 'myself'. I am ineffable and thus have no characteristics and cannot even be understood conceptually. I do not think or feel emotions directly. I *experience* thought: thought *happens* to me, emotions *happen* to me. We all are, in a sense, purely passive recipients of anything we experience or are aware of, because awareness (which we are) is necessarily passive. Grammatical confusions notwithstanding, I am merely *aware* of thoughts, etc.

Now that I have tried to explain what our essential selves—what *we*—consist of, I must point out that the common use of the term implies something very different. It represents 'our' characters in their totality—our memories, thoughts, personalities, repressed desires, etc. In fact, what constitutes the stuff of life, of ourselves, is awareness (which cannot be reduced to anything else), but because of our bodies (especially our brains) our entire psyche necessarily exists and has its own identity. We interpret our psyche as what we in fact are because (1) awareness constantly permeates aspects of the psyche that have been, for whatever reason, chemically 'predetermined' as accessible to this consciousness, and (2) our spiritual isolation from others necessitates that the characteristics we experience are interpreted as *our* characteristics. Awareness lacks substance, but the qualities it is aware of *give* it substance—*constitute* its substance. These qualities are seen as *us* because over time we have gotten used to experiencing them directly and because we would otherwise consist of basically nothing. Awareness is a vacuum. We are awareness, so what 'fills' us....is seen as us.

"But it sure seems like we're capable of controlling our thoughts!" Appearances can be deceptive. That we're aware of our thoughts doesn't mean we control them. "Who controls them?" No one. They just happen when the relevant neurons connect with one another and thereby create a link in the thought-process. (It requires a minimum amount of imagination to think of possible explanations for the origins of thoughts that arise "out of the blue" and other unusual phenomena.) I say "think" not because *you* are controlling the thinking, but because stimuli from the senses enter the brain and initiate conscious thought-processes—so the word "think" activates your neurons in certain ways that lead from one thought to the next. You, who are pure awareness, are aware of these thoughts and so think that they are your products. You become identified with them because the *"real"* you is....empty, passive.[1]

July 29

For the life of me, I can't understand why girls are attracted to guys. I've sometimes envisioned myself as a girl in order to imagine what they find appealing in the opposite sex, but I've gotten nowhere.

[1] "Passive" only in a sense that can be understood intuitively, not conceptually.

Guys are hairy, flabby, smelly, uncouth, arrogant, insensitive, and dumb overall. Girls, on the other hand, are (often) smooth, fresh, clean, pleasant-smelling, thin, sexy, sensitive, achingly lovely. Guys are not sexy; they're presumptuous and cocky, especially when they think they're sexy. I haven't often asked girls why they like guys: such a question would make me feel moronic. But I'd love to know the answer!

Regarding yesterday's entry, a possible counter-argument is that if we "become" what we are aware of, then rightly we should "become" *anything* we are aware of: music, telephones, etc. But I can twist this argument around into one that supports my claims. Infants, whose characters have not developed, *are* everything they're aware of. They are their mother's breasts, they are the environment; they do not distinguish between themselves and the world. It is only when the physical needs that they are directly aware of have been frustrated again and again that they begin to develop a distinct identity which eventually becomes who they are. So it's not *wrong* to say that we are what constitutes our identities, because this is in fact what we are most immediately conscious of. The empirical 'I' is not the *fundamental* 'self', but for the fundamental self to exist *as it is*—as 'consciousness' or 'awareness', and nothing else—is indeed logically and physically impossible. (Just because we can 'intuit' what the self consists of doesn't mean that the self in its pure form is possible.) So 'my' identity fills the vacuum of the self and becomes it; therefore it is permissible to talk about 'my' characteristics.

In short, my theory solves the problem of the self by reducing it to one thing—consciousness, awareness, or 'being'—and at the same time describing how the self is also a hodgepodge of personal characteristics. **[See the entry of May 2024.]**

July 30

There isn't one thing that controls us and our thoughts. Different parts of ourselves control other parts: our emotions often influence our thoughts, our conscience sometimes influences our actions, etc. It's misleading, to say the least, to think that "we" control all of this, because (in common parlance) we *are* all of this. And as I've said, the reason it seems peculiar (when reflecting philosophically) to say that we are all of our characteristics is that the 'true' self is merely awareness.

Another possible confusion arises when people say that "he is more aware of himself than others are of themselves". Clearly what is meant here is that the conscious part of the person—what from now on I'll call the 'reduced self' as opposed to the 'inflated self'—is very aware of his own qualities; the reduced self (consciousness) is very 'aware' of the qualities that constitute the inflated self. It's not as if the former is equivalent to the latter—which is the tacit assumption that creates all the confusion about the self in the first place. (A basic rule of thumb for delineating the boundaries of the reduced self is to ask "If this (whatever it is—thoughts, etc.) existed by itself, would I necessarily exist too?" The only thing of which it can rightly be said that I would exist if *it* existed is consciousness. Not particular thoughts, emotions, or sensations; just pure consciousness.)

"But the conscious part of the person can't be what you mean by the 'true self' because everyone has a different consciousness than everyone else." Yes, but the simple fact of their consciousness is identical. What qualities are grafted onto it are part of the inflated self; their awareness itself is the reduced self, and this we all have in common.

"How can we tell which self people are referring to when they say 'he is angry', 'he is aware of this', 'he did that'?" They're always referring to the inflated self. They may be emphasizing the "reduced self" aspect of the inflated self,[1] but they certainly nonetheless have in mind the person as a whole. In any event, who cares? The question is irrelevant.

Now we should address the problem of free will. If the respective parts of the inflated self influence each other, but neither the reduced self nor the inflated self as a whole has any control, is it possible that we have free will? ....*Je ne sais pas*. But even if the two selves are just effects of processes in the brain it's

[1] The latter includes the former, but only as the necessary, taken-for-granted foundation upon which a person's identity—the inflated self proper—is constructed.

conceivable that the inflated self has free will.

Of course, we have to ask ourselves what "free will" means. A person's will is not separate from the rest of him; his will cannot be set aside in the same manner as emotions or thoughts can. In fact, one's will—assuming for the moment that it exists—is necessarily a component of every conscious activity that one desires: it is my will that I write these words, that I feel this rage, that I conquer this pain, that I experience these doubts. To be sure, sometimes the will is actually an effect of, e.g., an emotion that is so powerful it drags the will along with it. So in this sense the will is not in control. But when *is* the will in control?

First we should clarify further what the will is. Is it desire? Certainly when we feel desires it is our will that they be satisfied, but then the will is not these desires themselves. "So the will is just a more fundamental desire. We desire that our desires be satisfied—and since we don't desire to desire that our desires be satisfied, the will is not caught in an infinite regress. It is simply *the* fundamental desire: that our wishes be fulfilled." But not everything we do is a "wish". "You know what I mean! Our will is part of everything we *want* to do. It's not our will, for example, to be depressed, but that's because we don't *want* to be depressed." Okay, as long as you're not saying that our will has *control* over our wishes, I think I agree with you. Our will is the part of our wishes—whether or not they are interpreted as explicit "wishes"—that craves their fulfillment. Thus the will is not in control if we experience something we don't consider 'good' or 'pleasurable'. (These terms are so relative that they can actually signify 'suffering'—although if it's suffering we enjoy, it's not *true* suffering. Which is precisely why it is seen as desirable.) But I don't even think it makes sense to say that the will is *ever* "in control", because it is always just the implication of desires—viz., that their presence implies a need for satisfaction—that come and go without any input from something called the will.

"What about objective reason? Isn't that free when it's not excessively influenced by emotions or....anything else?" What does "excessively influenced" mean? That it's incapable of coming to a decision through purely rational means? "Yes." Then reason is never free, because it's never purely rational. There is always some kind of a subjective, 'partial' component to it that we sometimes aren't even aware of.

So basically, the will is never free, reason is never free, and *we* are never free? It seems that way, but I'm not yet sure. (Another question: what's the relation between the will and reason?)

I have a confession to make: as long as I can remember I have been an atheist. Never once did I seriously wonder if *maybe there is a God*. Even when I was nine years old. I can recall going to Sunday school each week, disliking every minute of it, drawing worthless pictures that were pinned on the bulletin board, listening to stories from the Bible that I found absurd or didn't even take seriously enough to judge as "absurd". (I simply don't remember thinking about them at all.) God was always an artifact of people's imaginations, less real than Santa Claus; and when I was old enough to reflect on my need for meaning in life I didn't once consider the Big White Guy in the Sky as the solution to my problems.

Lately I've been exceedingly impressed by the effect that weather has on one's disposition. If the day is sunny, healthy, fresh, breezy, I'm *invariably* in a stellar mood. If I live in a dreary clime (such as has been my fate at Wesleyan), I am at most glad that I'm not stuck outside; I lack energy and my sole ambition is to sleep the entire day. Nietzsche goes so far as to say that "men with *esprit*" must live in warm, dry climates if they're going to exploit their genius. This is probably an exaggeration, but there is usually a grain of truth in Nietzsche's convictions.

July 31

"Scholars spend all of their energies on saying Yes and No, on criticism of what others have thought—they themselves no longer think.

"The instinct of self-defense has become worn-out in them; otherwise they would resist books. The scholar—a decadent." Verily, these are more than half-truths.

Several months ago I made the comment that there are two of me, but I had trouble clarifying what I meant by this. As it turns out, that statement was just an intuitive (and backward) comprehension of my

theory of the two selves: the 'real' me is consciousness; the me that I love is a combination of my identity and my consciousness (i.e., my inflated self).

For those of us who will never have the good fortune to experience nirvana, how can life be redeemed? We unknowingly experience such ever-present lack—loneliness, fear of death, fear of introspection, boredom, meaninglessness in general—that one wonders if communism is perhaps a bit superfluous: until we've dealt with the fundamental ontological questions, what's the use of striving for a grand future? I don't have the faintest idea how to redeem life. This has been the one burning issue in every age, and we *still* haven't ferreted out of our psyches an acceptable solution. Maybe there is no solution—but there certainly are approximations. What does it mean to fulfill oneself? Are these two words the "undecipherable hieroglyphic" that links reality and redemption?

Clearly they are. He who experiences 'nirvana' realizes himself by obliterating the ego (thus temporarily ending the repression of the "Self"), by overcoming that most insidious of afflictions, self-consciousness, by harvesting the rich nourishment buried in the unconscious, by becoming God—by giving birth to the world! But is self-consciousness really an illness? Certainly not if illnesses are seen as unnecessary. Perhaps it is an illness "in the sense in which pregnancy is an illness": it is sometimes unpleasant, sometimes beautiful, sometimes excruciating, but is ultimately only a means to an end (in this case, *Self*-realization). "Self-knowledge is not good in itself?! Thou art a traitor to thy cause! Wert thou not once attracted to the idea of genuine self-knowledge?" Verily, I was! And I am yet! You misunderstand me if you think I wouldn't sacrifice my "happiness" for the sake of self-knowledge. But mere self-*consciousness*: that is another matter. We are always self-conscious; we are rarely self-knowledgeable.

"But isn't self-knowledge just an acute form of self-consciousness?" No, and insofar as I've hitherto tacitly assumed it was I've been mistaken. "Puff Daddy" is self-conscious inasmuch as he can be called a man; Nietzsche was self-*aware* inasmuch as he could be called a *higher* man. It is a prerequisite for realizing ourselves (when we're self-conscious and not in the kingdom of Dionysian rapture) that we be self-aware. Thus Beethoven (who was surely not very self-knowledgeable) did not fulfill his humanity when he was self-conscious—only when he was Dionysus humanized; Nietzsche, on the other hand (in his later years), perhaps fulfilled his humanity even when he was self-conscious.

"Damn you! Stop confusing me and say what you mean!" In short: there are two ways for people to fulfill themselves. The privileged ones can experience "Dionysian rapture" for fleeting moments, but its very ephemerality breeds dissatisfaction. They necessarily become self-conscious once again and therefore feel all the more impotent and dead. But all is not lost! If people have learned to disentangle the Gordian knot of the psyche to the extent that consciousness is no longer a threat but rather a *liberation*, a joy, an extravagant offering of thanks to oneself and one's forbears for the simple fact of one's being—to this extent will they fulfill themselves even amidst the muck of mundane existence. Nietzsche would say that if they could, with utmost knowledge of its implications, accept eternal recurrence, then they would thereby transcend the boundaries of the merely human. It isn't necessary to believe that eternal recurrence is true (which it isn't) in order for this to be an effective formula, because above all it is meant to induce a specific state of mind—namely, *amor fati*. But what I find objectionable is that *amor fati* is at best a *reluctant* Yes to life […]. "Loving" fate: how is such a thing possible? Nietzsche went so far as to say that we must *love* the bloodbath that is history—although he quite obviously found this thought nauseating. "Fate"—this word encompasses everything. We must *love* the Holocaust; we must *love* Stalinism. Such thoughts are beyond revolting, they are beyond unholy: they are *dishonest*. This has always been the reason for my qualms regarding Buddhism; we are dishonest to ourselves if we think that we love one phenomenon to the same extent as another, if we quell hatred and contempt for the sake of a shallow love. I cannot see how Nietzsche avoids the same trap (or the similar one of mere intellectual, detached appreciation of "necessity"), and so I cannot accept his way out of life's pains. There must be another way, or *homo sapiens* is destined to eternal unrest.

[…]

August 1

Nietzsche believes we must say Yes to suffering. We must *love* suffering. But there's a problem with this: if we love it....it's not suffering. The moment we begin to relish despair, it ceases to be "despair" properly so-called. It becomes useful, or good, or meaningful—but no longer is it the same kind of suffering it was. Even if the emotion itself remains basically the same, our *state of mind* has changed; we have come to accept it. We have *conquered* the harmful state of mind; we have run away from pain. I realize, of course, that we may continue to experience *emotional* pain, but the very fact that we no longer shy away from it indicates that there has been a subtle alteration in our mental state—that we have shied away from a lack of meaning, that we have been unable to accept *all* of life. If we see pain as meaningful or necessary, then it's quite all right! It's meaningful! We can learn from it, it's significant, perhaps it facilitates insights into our condition. Or it undergoes a very subtle transition to a kind of masochistic pleasure. Either way, it is no longer the pain it once was. Our need to love it is precisely a symptom of our *inability* to love it.

Amor fati is impossible because it is not part of human nature to feel "amor" for "fati", when "fati" involves genuine suffering. Thus we must accept that mental pain—not emotional pain, which can be 'translated' into masochistic pleasure or can simply be accepted and is therefore no longer painful—is not compatible with the good life. Maybe it is necessary as a kind of prerequisite, but it is never *part* of the good life. (I'll continue these reflections later.)

On another topic, *Human, All Too Human* has rekindled my interest in the nature of truth. Specifically, must truth be logical, or can it be intuitive and ineffable?

Before I answer that, I'd like to point out that questioning the existence of objective truth seems misguided. […] Even people who assert that there is no such thing as absolute [i.e., objective] truth are tacitly assuming that there is! "It is a truth....that there are no truths!" What an absurd notion! "Nike made over a billion dollars last year." That sentence is either absolutely false or it's absolutely true. In either case there is an absolute truth. […]

August 2

Hallelujah! Today I received the formatted version of my script in the mail; it cost $218. The first thing I did upon receiving it was make a copy and send it to the one agency that has indicated an interest. The script isn't as long as I had expected it would be—it's only 169 pages—but I suspect even this is a tad on the lengthy side.

I used not to enjoy the process of philosophizing. I wanted to find answers, and that was the only reason I thought about philosophy at all. But *finally* I am beginning to appreciate the journey rather than the destination: I delight in contemplating the quandaries of human existence, even if they do sometimes drive me to despair and I do still have as a goal the acquisition of "truth".

Whenever I've said "socialism" in this journal, I've meant communism.

Ideology is an interesting subject. I haven't read much about it yet, but I'm inclined to agree with Therborn that the term doesn't necessarily signify false consciousness, as Marx would have it. It's not as if all ideologies are *wrong* just because they're ideologies. But it *is* false consciousness in the sense that ideologies have nothing in common with the scientific method, which is generally the most accepted way of arriving at truth. Ideologies do not arise because groups of brilliant men get together, sort through various theories, objectively decide that, e.g., democracy is the best method of governing people, and then publish their findings; ideologies arise and collapse with the rise and fall of social structures. They don't exist because they're "true"; they exist because each specific one is conducive to the functioning of a specific part of society—or is a response to changes in the social structure, an alteration in the general consciousness of society on the basis of an alteration in the social, objective 'being' which is in turn determined by the development of the....mode of production? Perhaps the mode of production "overdetermines" ideologies, but does not directly influence *all* of them—only the ones that are directly related to the functioning of the economy (like the mendacious bourgeois obsession with individualism, freedom, private enterprise, the inviolable sanctity of private property, blah blah).

My friend, I am in one of those luscious evanescent moods—encouraged not a little by Schubert's Impromptus Nos. 1 and 2, D. 935. I don't feel like thinking about ideology; I feel like....kissing a girl. I feel like telling her I love her. I feel like pouring my soul into a blender, watching as she does the same, and scrambling the two together so that there is no longer *mine* or *hers*. I feel like a poet. How wonderful 'twould be to be a poet! But when all is said and done, I just want to fall in love.

What I enjoy thinking about more than anything else is the opposition between things spiritual and things material. I can't understand the origin of the "spirit" from crude molecules and cells. Individual neurons are nothing—but when billions of them get together, the *self* is produced! They're all frantically working every instant to perpetuate *me*! It's not at all unusual for me to spend a couple of minutes just laughing with joy at the thought of life. It truly is quite flattering that trillions of astronomically complex cells devote their entire existence to me. I feel special, and very grateful. I only wish there were something I could do in return. If cells were thinking beings I would give them advice about their relationships, or about tactics and strategies when fighting bacteria; we would all share our wisdom with one another; we would be one big, happy family. Whenever they fought amongst themselves I would willingly act as the mediator to help them sort through their differences.

Why are critics of society currently so keen to yield to the propaganda about capitalism's strength and permanence and the failure of socialism? Are they so myopic as to *believe* this propaganda? Are they really not perceptive enough to recognize that our society is preparing for a massive upheaval, that our culture is suffering from a deep spiritual malaise which can only be cured by that miraculous tonic called "communism"?

August 3

I've decided that it's wisest to read one or two books on a subject like ideology or truth as a sort of introduction, and then to venture into uncharted waters without the further help of pseudo-navigators. In other words, thinkers shouldn't first get very acquainted with the thoughts of others, because it tends to diminish the possibility of their own originality: they get hung up on these other ideas and aren't able to add much to the discipline that is of interest. I, for example, have read Therborn's book, and now intend to do some independent thinking on ideology without more help from academics.

I wouldn't consider the academic disciplines "ideologies"; they're too precise, oriented toward the 'discovery' of truth. While they are very much influenced by the society in which they come to maturity, they're 'qualitatively' different than the popular beliefs (rituals, and so on) that grab the attention of the masses. But if fields like professional psychology, sociology, the natural sciences, and economics are not ideologies, how should this term be defined? Furthermore, Marx undoubtedly considered bourgeois economics an ideology, and insofar as it serves as an apology for capitalism I'm inclined to agree with him. What this implies is that I'm wrong about academic fields not being ideologies. Erik Olin Wright has suggested that we distinguish between practices that form subjectivities and those that form knowledge; the former are ideological, the latter are scientific. But bourgeois economics certainly attempts to form knowledge—while creating 'subjectivities' at the same time. Should the subjectivities be distinguished from the economics *per se*, even though the latter clearly operates within the framework of capitalism and indeed serves to justify it? Both of the alternatives seem rather inadequate: each of them leads to complications and contradictions.

Tomorrow I'm meeting Erik; I'll ask him to clarify these problems, and then I'll get back to you.

It was foolish of me to declare that all truths are absolute [or objective]. What was I thinking? If humans create truth, what is the standard by which it can be measured? In fact....that's a pretty little problem in itself. Is there no such thing as absolute truth? Is it not even an absolute truth that the earth currently has an elliptical shape? Such a statement is absurd, for I can think of many things that are 'absolutely true' at this moment. (For instance, it is a fact that I am thinking right now; it is a fact that George Bush is giving his acceptance speech tonight; it is a fact that I am ashamed of my miserable script.) Humans, in a sense, create truth, but only in such a way that it agrees with reality. But what does that mean? How can we be

sure if, e.g., quantum mechanics agrees with reality? We can't. When we're trying to explain nature, how can we be sure of anything? But I think we can be sure (or certainly *surer*) of simpler facts like the ones listed above. So what's the difference between the two? It's not that the first deal with humans and the second with nature; many theories about societies are difficult or impossible to prove. Besides, what does it mean to "prove" something? Countless scientific hypotheses have been "proven" only to be falsified later. Even the most accepted theories are necessarily held in a degree of doubt. I don't even know where to begin in discovering the nature of truth!

The last two or three decades have been the Dark Ages of capitalist culture. And you know what follows the Dark Ages: a Renaissance. (Once again, the mischievous Dialectic makes its presence felt.)

August 4

Is untruth sometimes favorable to life? Certainly, insofar as knowledge of truth would make us aware of the indefensibility of many of our 'actions'. Our evaluations of others and ourselves, for example, are usually untrue or based on ignorance (as Nietzsche points out). If we had complete knowledge of human nature we might even discover that evaluations per se are untrue. But Nietzsche goes too far when he says that because of this, truth is hostile to life. The search for truth is, in fact, the only way of arriving at knowledge of what will enable us to conquer deep distress and the like; and while it may show us that our present motives (to take Nietzsche's example, honor) are superficial and ultimately 'false', it will in so doing guide us to more meaningful happiness. If it turns out that truth is very depressing—that Sartre's theories regarding bad faith, relations with others, etc. are true—we will simply organize our lives so that these truths become acceptable and maybe helpful; we'll find ways to accommodate them. (Sometimes the only solution will be to ignore them at all times except when they will have a beneficial effect.) It is my opinion that every psychological truth, however unpleasant at first, eventually enriches our lives merely by forcing us to take account of it.

I'm going to keep a running commentary on *Human, All Too Human.*

[…]

Anyway, keeping in mind that we are not as sure of anything else as we are that we exist, we can tacitly assume that each of our successive discoveries is a deeper penetration of the "truth". Quantum mechanics is truer than the belief that we can observe nature without affecting it. The latter was at one time thought to be true, and because there is no absolute [objective] standard for truth, it in fact *was* 'true'. But with hindsight we are able to recognize that it....wasn't true? This sounds suspiciously like pragmatism, the American philosophy bereft of....truth. If we can declare that some beliefs are truer than others, how can there not be an absolute standard for truth? There *is* an absolute standard: whatever agrees with reality is true. But since reality is 'humanized' we can't be sure if what we see as true is *really* true. There are too many variables. There is no "truth"—or rather, there is no way to be sure of truth; there is only *truer.* Every judgment made by people is necessarily no more than an approximation of the truth, even if they happen to hit upon this "truth" itself. But that statement presupposes that there are absolute truths—a faulty assumption, since if there are no truths apart from those 'created' by humans how can there be absolute truths waiting to be discovered? Perhaps there actually are absolute truths in nature, and it is up to humans to translate them into language. Maybe this is the link between nature, truth, and humanity. In a world without humans there would be no truth per se—because truth as such requires language; it needs to be communicated, it needs concepts—but there is the *potential* for truth. All that's required are concepts which represent actual structures in nature for the truth to be 'realized'. But even if this is true, how will we know when we've hit upon the truth? We'll still be condemned to *approximations* of the truth, because (as I said before) there are too many variables in a humanized world.

This is giving me a headache and I'm getting nowhere. Let's move on to the nineteenth aphorism.

Aphorism 19: "Our feelings of space and time are false, for if they are tested rigorously, they lead to logical contradictions." This implies that nature can, without exception, be expressed logically, which is not the case. This is indeed the reason it's difficult to accept that truth is nothing more than things translated

into concepts [or propositions]: space and time are not susceptible to rational explanation, and if concepts are blatantly inadequate here, maybe they're (less blatantly) inadequate everywhere (in nature).

It is not only impossible to know if our ideas are true; the question itself is meaningless. In nature there is no truth. Our feelings about space and time are not absolutely true or false; they are simply 'humanistic' interpretations of that part of nature which is revealed to us. They can only be true or false within the boundaries of sense-perception and concepts. "Is it true that the earth is elliptically shaped?" It is true in a humanized world [i.e., the world of our experience], but to say it is in the 'natural' [not-experienced-by-the-human-mind] world is meaningless. "Yes, because there are no concepts in that world. But if humans entered the scene they would just translate physical facts into concepts and would thereby arrive at truth. Even *absolute* truth, in most cases (the notable exceptions being a few unanswerable questions regarding space and time), could be arrived at." Stop bothering me.

Aphorism 29: Nietzsche is assuming that truth must be logical, but is such an assumption after all so self-evident? I don't think so. Not until we have defined truth can we decide whether it is necessarily logical. And if it is—if "error" has given rise to art and religion, which I am skeptical of—then perhaps truth *is* harmful to life. But truth can always be ignored.

Aphorism 31: The illogical certainly is necessary for life, but again—is the illogical necessarily untrue?

August 5

Morality is a sham. We are deemed moral or immoral on the basis of our actions—when what matter most are our *motives*. (This is Nietzsche's opinion too.) It's so easy to refute morality on its own terms!—and when we attack it on two fronts, well then, it has no hope. It's completely impractical because we can never be sure of a person's motives for committing a moral act or refraining from an immoral act; it doesn't take account of human nature, in that (1) often (or always?) people are not free to control themselves, and (2) there is no such thing as good and evil in the psyche—these superficial judgments are imposed on it; hypocrisy is considered bad, but we are all hypocrites; […].

Aphorisms 57 - 60, 63, 65, 68, and so on: What Nietzsche says is absolutely true.

I'm sick of wondering about truth; it's time to solve the problem once and for all. Birds have hollow wings for two main reasons: genes and other cell-related mechanisms (evolution, etc.), and the fact that hollow wings make flight possible. The latter is the reason that random variations in genes eventually resulted in an entire category of animals possessing hollow wings. The birds that weren't able to adapt to the new hollow wings condition became extinct. The foregoing are the *true* reasons for hollow wings; if humans were not alive to express these reasons, they would exist nonetheless. They wouldn't be made explicit, but making something explicit presupposes that it's implicit *before* it has been made explicit. Of course, maybe in the future we'll make some discoveries that refute the theory of evolution (highly improbable), thereby rendering our current interpretations of nature (articulations of its causes and mechanisms) incorrect, but this is beside the point. The mere fact that we can never be 100% sure of anything in nature doesn't mean that there are no real reasons (i.e., independent of humans' interpretations) for anything. Because we are separate from nature we cannot be *positive* that our interpretations of it are correct—just as because we are separate from each other we cannot be positive of each other's states of mind. In fact, the only thing we *can* be positive of in nature is that we exist—precisely because we experience this part of nature; it is the only thing that is as much us as it is nature. Everything else relies on sensory-input, subjective reason, intelligence, etc.—all of which are more nature than they are us; we are not as directly aware of them as we are that we exist (or rather, they exist only through input that we are not directly aware of, which is effectively the same). Furthermore, my conclusion (viz., that our interpretations of nature's "reasons" are potentially absolute truths—although we'll never have any way of being sure if a particular one is in fact one of the absolute truths) is supported when we recognize that *it is an absolute [or objective] truth that we exist*. "We exist" is an absolute truth—but "we exist" involves concepts! The obvious implication is that concepts can express absolute truths (i.e., nature in its authentic

ways of being, undistorted through the use of human reason); in other words, human reason doesn't necessarily distort realities. I say "realities" rather than "reality" because in certain cases it does distort them; for example, it 'distorts' the origin of the universe. No matter which way we interpret the universe's origin, reason throws the possibility out. This is not because reason is *always* inadequate when describing nature, but because infinity is one of the few concepts not subject to rational comprehension. Therefore there are certain absolute truths about nature that are simply incapable of being understood; but how idiotic to conclude from this that *all* "truths" about nature are incapable of being expressed!—or even that there just *are no* truths about nature!

[…]

If we 'bracket' the possibility that nature doesn't exist, that our senses completely deceive us—which is so unrealistic that it can hardly be considered a possibility at all—we will significantly narrow the range of possible untruth. If, furthermore, we abandon much of what is left of the irrational spirit of skepticism, it will be easier to accept that a great many objective truths about nature are already known by us. It isn't as though all of humanity's scientific endeavors since the dawn of history have been for naught; it isn't as if nature is such a mystery that discoveries simply are out of the question. We are, for example, so sure the earth is shaped elliptically that it would be foolish to assert otherwise solely on the basis of "skepticism". On the basis of science, fine; but not on the basis of a vague philosophy most people can't even understand. When past ages believed that the sun orbited the earth, this was for them an objective truth. Just because they were sure of it and we are now sure of the opposite doesn't mean that all truth is relative—that there is no such thing as *objective* truth. Indeed, as I have pointed out elsewhere,[1] it is virtually impossible to operate unless under the assumption that there *are* objective truths, and that we in fact are aware of a good many of them (even if they can't be decisively proven beyond a shadow of a doubt). Humans do indeed create truths, inasmuch as truths cannot be made explicit without the help of rational beings, but it is a mistake to assume that this implies that anything which is useful to humans is a truth, or that there are no boundaries within which truths must exist.

If a statement agrees with reality, it is a truth. There is not a realm of pre-established truths, but there is a realm—namely, nature or reality—that exists independently of humans, is objective (despite its continual state of flux), and therefore determines which propositions—which are nothing more nor less than expressions of nature in thought—are true and which aren't.

To give due credit to pragmatism, it must be acknowledged that most of what people find useful in the long run is considered by them to be true. Most people consider Darwinism to be useful and Creationism to be a useless heap of intellectual refuse that makes a mockery of—Creationists. But criminey! This isn't a criterion for *real* truth; it shouldn't even be considered a criterion for determining what people *think* is true! I can think of quite a few lies that are useful in the long run and yet are known by many to be lies. The "cash-value" of truth?! What the...? Isn't it wonderful when philosophers incorporate terms from capitalism into their philosophical theories?

Anyway, to respond to another objection, "in a world without humans there are no numbers. There are no isolated entities, there are no separate causes and effects, and so on." Yes, but just by saying so you're tacitly conceding that there are absolute [i.e., objective] truths. And besides, since you're clearly a skeptic, how can you be *sure* there are no distinguishable causes and effects? In fact, there almost certainly *are* causes and effects, but they are just so complex, numerous, and subtle that it is rather arbitrary to separate them into great big happenings like a sound being caused by my hand striking a table. There probably *are* atoms in nature independently of humans. In fact, there almost certainly are, because the method that scientists use to test their hypotheses is finding out whether they work! The atom bomb worked, so those physicists must have gotten *something* right.

Now that we've settled the pseudo-problem of the existence of objective truth, it is necessary to ask how 'reasons' can be used to explain the workings of the mind. Emotions exist because of chemical processes in the brain, but don't they also exist because they serve a distinct purpose for the self as a whole?

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[1] Cf. my massive treatise entitled *A Massive Treatise on Every Philosophical Problem Ever Conceived Since the Dawn of Thought*, soon to be published by....Bantam Books.

(In other words, don't they have a functional explanation?) How can this purpose be discovered? It is certainly permissible to use functional explanations in nature, for this is precisely what Darwinism does. And furthermore, it is almost certain that functional explanation as such is a valid way of articulating absolute truths (which, as *absolute* truths, 'exist' even in a de-humanized world). [No, only causal explanations are genuinely explanatory.]

I'm going to interrupt myself now. A few days ago I sent Dad a copy of some of my reflections on the self. A little while ago I called him to discuss what I had written: he said he was skeptical that (1) there can be two selves, and that (2) the most fundamental self is pure consciousness—because we are always conscious *of* something. But I am fully aware of that. My point was that what we are conscious of is never *us*, unless we are conscious of consciousness itself. Of course, we are always self-conscious in a way, but generally unreflectively. (And usually we are only conscious of our actions, emotions, thoughts, characteristics; not of consciousness itself.) Unfortunately, it occurs to me that if we are conscious of consciousness, then this consciousness in turn has to be conscious of something else. I suspect that the way out of this dilemma involves Sartre's notion of unreflective consciousness, but I won't be sure until tomorrow morning when I can go to the library and read the beginning of the translator's introduction to *Being and Nothingness*.

August 6

As I read the translator's introduction, it occurs to me that my earlier theory about the self was....hogwash. It wasn't precise enough. It didn't take account of all the different types of consciousness. Phenomenological descriptions of the self are insanely difficult to undertake and even to understand; consequently, I'm taking a break from them. They're a waste of time for one so inexperienced as I.

I think Sartre is wrong that humans can't become both Being in-itself and for-itself. Can't [my interpretation of] nirvana be interpreted in this way, albeit with a few qualifications that don't amount to much? Indeed, this has been one of the reasons (although with different terminology) that I have all along said that nirvana is so perfect.

(later) I've discovered the difficulty involved in my former 'theory' of the self: there was an obvious tension between the statements that consciousness is the 'true' self and that consciousness needs to be of something that then becomes the self that consciousness is conscious of. But all I meant was that consciousness is what unites all our various qualities, actions, states, etc., and that even if all our characteristics were the opposite of what they really are, *we* would still exist. We would just have different characteristics. Consciousness, according to my earlier belief, *is* the self; memory and the like merely intensify our feeling of self-identity, of continuity. The reason we consider "the *I*" and "the *me*" (to quote Sartre) as objects, as things that can be reflected on, is that the psycho-physical *me* (and the *I*, which I think Sartre is correct in describing as an infinite contraction of the *me*) is obviously not the same thing as consciousness. The *me* is the self that exists in consciousness as the *I,* and neither *is* consciousness—so consciousness can separate them from itself.

But the point is that if we reflect on this process, it will take the form of "I am separating consciousness from myself. I am reflecting on consciousness." "Consciousness" is in this instance passive, it is an object; it is unreflective consciousness. The *I* is "reflecting" on it; the *I* has become reflective consciousness. The *I is* reflective consciousness. *I am reflective consciousness*. If I want to reflect on this reflective consciousness, I will be transformed into reflective consciousness of the third degree. (But I don't have to become this third reflective consciousness in order to be aware of myself; reflective consciousness is, by its nature, aware of itself even while reflecting on the reflected consciousness. (In other words, there is no infinite regress.))[1] If it seems like there is an *I* behind all of these consciousnesses, this is because (1) we are confusing the *I* with the constant, corporeal *me* that has real qualities and isn't as evanescent as specific consciousnesses, and (2) it is reflective consciousness itself which posits this *I* behind unreflective

[1] This is borrowed from Sartre.

consciousness—precisely because reflective consciousness *is* this *I*. It involuntarily, by its mere existence, posits the *I* behind the reflected consciousness. And now that I think about it, the *me* is quite clearly not precisely the same thing as the *I* (as I said it was above); it is sometimes an object of the *I* (i.e., of reflective consciousness). But since it is less subjective and ephemeral, it continues to exist even when I am not thinking about it. This salvages the useful theory of the unconscious, because the latter is part of the *me*. It is an objective existent that has nothing to do with the *I*. (It does, of course, *affect* the *I*.)

So where does this leave us? I am reflective consciousness. When there is no reflective consciousness, I don't, strictly speaking, exist—but the *me* does. The *me* is the objective manifestation of the self (the always-existing unity of states and qualities); the *I* is the subjective manifestation. (When existing, it too is a (subjective) unity of states, qualities, and actions.) The *me* has all the characteristics; it is similar to what I called the "inflated" self. ....I've decided that although we needn't have in mind the psycho-physical *me* when referring to the *I* (and therefore the two terms don't necessarily signify the same thing; not even different aspects of the same thing), often we do tend to conflate the two. Thus, when we're reflecting on ourselves and when we refer to others we conflate the *I* and *me.* We say, "I get angry very often. Anger is one of my most predominant qualities." Anger obviously can't be a quality of the *I,* but it is the *I* that is declaring that it gets angry very often. The way out of this dilemma is to recognize that the *I* is in fact usually an "infinitely contracted" version of the *me*, and thus assumes the qualities of the latter. (The only times it isn't is when it is reflecting on the separation between the psycho-physical *me* and itself, and when unreflective consciousness is our 'mode of being' (in which case the *I* doesn't even exist, so it *can't* be the same thing as the *me*).) So long as we're reflecting on consciousness, or we're simply aware of our consciousness even though we're reflecting on something else, the *I*—the true self, the one that gives life to the notion of self-consciousness, the active, reflective self that knows it is aware of things—exists. The objective self (which is subjectivized when it becomes the content of the *I)* always exists, although we're not always aware of it. Pure unreflective consciousness belongs more to the objective self (the *me*) than to the *I*, but with the onset of reflective consciousness it too is incorporated into the subjective self that we become aware of.

[…]

August 7

Now that I've finished reading *The Transcendence of the Ego*, it's become apparent that Sartre basically stole my idea of the ego as reflective consciousness[1] (actually, there are many rather noticeable differences between his ideas and mine): "The ego is an object apprehended, but also an object *constituted,* by reflective consciousness." (It was foolish of me to say that I *am* reflective consciousness, because the ego is, while present only when reflective consciousness has posited it, most assuredly more than reflective consciousness in and of itself. The *I* itself (considered separately from the ego) may be little more than reflective consciousness, but the ego *in toto* evidently includes one's objective being, one's various qualities, in addition to reflective consciousness. It 'unifies' qualities, states, and actions, and reflective consciousness in itself does not do this.)

Regarding my use of the term "I" (or "transcendental I"), perhaps it would have made more sense just to say "ego". But on the other hand, I wanted to distinguish between reflective consciousness per se (independent of any qualities etc. that might belong to 'me') and the objective self. Like Sartre, I would interpret the ego as being a synthesis of the *I* and the *me*—as being the purely subjective, "transcendental" self with the 'content' of (or symbolic of) the objective self (the content, that is, that consciousness is aware of, which doesn't include the unconscious). Incidentally, Sartre refers to the "*I*-concept", an example of which is when someone asks me what I am doing and I answer, while completely absorbed in my task, "I'm typing on the computer." The ego doesn't exist; the *I* doesn't exist; all that exists is the *me*, which 'I' am not aware of. Thus it is the *me* that is being referred to in the statement above.

[1] I recorded all those reflections above before I had reached the part of his book that says the same thing.

(Another note on the term "transcendental I": by "transcendental" I mean a 'mode of being' without any concrete qualities, completely unempirical—in the usual sense of the term 'empirical'.)

I'm not sure what all these considerations have to do with discovering a plausible way to overcome the sorrows of life, but there's always a chance they'll lead to some important insights.

The reflections on truth I recorded several days ago were, as you may have guessed, only concerned with certain truths about nature, not with those regarding psychology and more subjective disciplines. I'm worried that much 'truth' in, for example, phenomenological psychology is necessarily erected on the crumbling foundation of subjective interpretation.

Returning to my meditations on the self, I can't decide if the *I,* when existing completely alone (without the ego)—admittedly a very rare occurrence—*is* reflective consciousness or is something more. Maybe the *I never* exists unless simultaneously with the ego, in which case it might be only another name for the latter. But doesn't it seem as though in our reflections on, for example, a thought we had one minute ago, we can be self-conscious without really being *fully* aware of ourselves? If so, then this self-consciousness is only reflective consciousness aware of itself.

In any event, what matters more than these nitpicky details is that the ego doesn't exist unless reflective consciousness posits it. The objective self—the unity of qualities and states, the *me*—exists even when we're not aware of it. Neither the ego nor the objective self can rightly be considered a subject; they are both (to borrow another idea from Sartre) passive 'creations' of consciousness—reflective and unreflective, respectively. But this doesn't mean that consciousness is absolutely free.

God damn phenomenology. At 2:00 a.m. it's not a fun activity. And it seems to me that most of my thoughts are useless, inasmuch as Sartre says nearly the same thing in a (slightly) more lucid way.

August 8

Ecce Homo is a superlative piece of writing. Incidentally, much of what Nietzsche says about Germans applies to Americans as well; for example, referring to Americans, I could say, "...one never fathoms their depths; they don't have any, that is all. They aren't even shallow." The Germans in the nineteenth century were, while disgraceful in many ways, certainly deeper than modern Americans. "What is called 'deep' in Germany is precisely this instinctive uncleanliness in relation to oneself..." Well, at least Germans thought *something* was deep. The concept of 'deep' is so foreign to Americans that it's used as the butt of jokes. There is no "deep" or "shallow" in the culture of American capitalism; there is just....*nothing*. There is just *routine*, and *commercialism*.

Returning to Sartre, it seems to me that his assertion of the fundamentally impersonal character of consciousness is not very original. Men have, at the very least, *intuitively* recognized the fact for millennia. What else is the Buddhist nirvana but a realization of this impersonality? I myself recognized it (in a distorted way) on June 25th.

That's what's so ironic about modernity: despite the fact that, after humanity's long history, there is really nothing new under the sun, the most trivial declarations are nowadays worshipped as original! Hell, Luckács was even praised by John Grumley for recognizing that authentic human communication is impossible! 'Tis absurd!—this mundane world in which such an unremarkable declaration is admired as tragic and profound: 'tis absurd!

[…]

So are we wrong at the moment that we confidently assert beliefs we discover to be false later on? Yes. Objective truths might not be articulated, but they exist as a kind of 'potential' all the same. (And there are many that *have* been articulated by us but which we can't be completely sure of because we must always concede the possibility that our information is inadequate. (I.e., we can never know when it is *not* inadequate.))

You'll probably think the following is indefensible (because of America's obsession with political correctness and the like), but you're wrong: generally it is possible to, roughly speaking, gauge a person's intelligence by looking at his features. In fact, my friend Dick Goldberg has convinced me it's often possible

to sketch someone's *personality* just by looking at his face and appearance. "No! No! That's tantamount to stereotyping! You're pre-judging—" Shut up. If you can show me a single truly intelligent person with the features of, say, a Steve Forbes (who has the visage of a mutilated infant), I'll be surprised. And if you can show me a simpleton on the level of Steve Forbes who has the features of a Karl Marx, I'll be shocked. If you keep in mind this general rule-of-thumb you'll save yourself from many inconveniences and futile endeavors.

I don't know if the debate between those who say that all acts are essentially egoistic and those who don't is still going on, but I'm going to contribute to it anyway. In my opinion, the altruistic actions that we undertake without reflection, as a sort of instinctive reaction, are always of two kinds: either they are merely conditioned impulses or they are genuine, in-the-moment responses to the pain of the other. They are unreflective consciousnesses, not even true 'acts'—and actions cannot be truly egoistic unless we, who don't even really exist in the state of unreflective consciousness, are aware of them and consciously decide to 'proceed with' them because we know they will put an end to whatever pain we are feeling as a result of the other's pain. Of course, the objective self exists in the state of unreflective consciousness, but the objective self is not the ego. It is never more than an object (although it does 'involuntarily' influence our actions). And it's not as though the unconscious registers our pain and calculates for us the actions necessary to alleviate it. The unconscious doesn't work that way. It can't reflect; if anything, it controls only our spontaneous consciousnesses. And that is precisely what exists in this situation—a spontaneous consciousness. I see a homeless girl; compassion and pity overwhelm me, maybe even without any real awareness on my part; I invite her up to my apartment and give her some food; tender joy at her happiness and gratitude take the place of pity; she leaves, and I feel satisfied. Where in this illustration is there egoism? I manifestly did not give her the food because I wished to rid myself of pity or because I wanted to feel good about myself; I gave it to her because 'I' experienced a spontaneous consciousness of compassion/pity, the logical result of which was the offering of food.

Of course, unless I am aware of myself at one time during the process (which I surely am), giving her the food is not an altruistic *act* either. It is merely the result of an 'altruistic' spontaneous consciousness.

The case is different with reflective consciousness.[1] When reflection is at its peak—when I look at the girl, debate between the alternatives of walking away and offering her food, glance at my watch to see if I have time, ask myself why I care about helping her in the first place, and if it occurs to me even for an instant that a possible reason is the likely resultant inflation of pride—there is a good chance that the act is at least partially egoistic. Even if I convince myself that the reason I want to offer her food is entirely that she looks so miserable, I am possibly deceiving myself: it is possible that the act is in fact entirely egoistic. I don't know if the unconscious is behind every self-deception—i.e., if it somehow withholds from us the information that our act is egoistic and at the same time gets us to believe that the act is altruistic—but I do know that self-deception occurs frequently. (This example, of course, leads directly into the issue of free will.)

If I feel that it's my *duty* to help her—and that's the only reason I do so—is the act egoistic? When reflecting on the act after it is finished, it is easy to think that my real reason for doing it was to avoid the guilt that would result if I hadn't done it, but I'm inclined to believe rather that it is generally a kind of conditioned response to help someone if we think it our duty. I see a crying girl, I don't feel overwhelmed by sympathy, but I ask her what's the matter anyway. I see it as my duty; it is a 'conditioned' response. It's quite possible that I wouldn't have felt guilty even if I had ignored her, but I nevertheless chose to help her. Clearly there is no "egoistic" or "altruistic" here. I was taught that there is such a thing as duty, I was taught to act on a sense of duty, so I did. That's all there is to it.

Enough of this. Have I told you yet that this has been the best summer of my life? It's rather significant that even though I haven't had a single friend up here I have *thoroughly loved* my stay in Madison—because of the minor headway I've made in certain areas of philosophy (and because I've finally proven to myself that I *can* be a somewhat original thinker). Never have I experienced a happier time of life. In fact, my very rare moods of acute loneliness or vast confusion are the icing on the cake! I am truly

[1] Many a reader will consider these and similar passages verbose rubbish. But many a reader is wrong.

grateful for those painful episodes; they add the perfect amount of depth to an otherwise sickeningly saccharine existence. It's not good for one to be *too* content, and that is currently a very real risk for me.

As I gaze into the future I see nothing but excitement, thrills, triumphs, and a few necessary frustrations or sorrows. Praise the Lawd! I can't wait for my sophomore year to begin. This year, as I've mentioned once, I'm going to survey human history from its dawn to its dusk.

This passage from *Human, All Too Human* is precious: "A god who conceives children with a mortal woman; a wise man who calls upon us to work no more, to judge no more, but to heed the signs of the imminent apocalypse; a justice that accepts the innocent man as a proxy sacrifice; someone who has his disciples drink his blood; prayers for miraculous interventions; sins against a god, atoned for by a god; fear of the afterlife, to which death is the gate; the figure of the cross as a symbol, in a time that no longer knows the purpose and shame of the cross—how horridly all this wafts over us, as from the grave of the ancient past! Are we to believe that such things are still believed?"

A thousand years from now people will look upon this age as the most confused in history.

While we're on this topic I'd like to propose an analogue of contemporary culture: a 'broken record'. A record of Black Sabbath, the needle caught on one groove, skipping continuously. "Fuck the worl—fuck the worl—fuck the worl—fuck the worl—" Thus: every year a new pop star/rapper becomes the darling of the public, only to disappear from its (unreflective!) consciousness ten months later. Thus: every holiday a new toy becomes an object of infatuation, a fetish, for all children and their parents. Thus: every election year politicians attack each other, destroy each other, to experience another two years of power, while the rest of us become more and more sick of the charade, lose more and more interest in its puppets, and become more and more apathetic about its outcome. Thus: every six months there occurs an earth-shaking merger between This Big Corporation and That Big Corporation. Thus: unbeknownst to us, technology and all things impersonal patiently consolidate their totalitarian rule and plan the destruction of humanity.

But this broken record does allow for one element that adds a bit of interest and variety to the sad lyrics drumming on our ears: it becomes scratchier with every revolution of the turntable. Thus: each year the cycles of capitalism become a little more forced, more self-conscious, more predictable, less exciting. Its culture is drowned out under the hissing of white noise. Nothingness, that poisonous worm in the heart of Being, eats away the soul of mankind. And we know what follows the duality of Being/Nothing in the dialectic: *Becoming*.

August 9

Perhaps it was foolish of me yesterday to say that there is a chance the altruistic 'act' was in that case not really an act—that it was just the result of a spontaneous consciousness. In such a long-drawn-out example (seeing the girl, inviting her to the apartment, giving her food, etc.) it's absurd to say that the entire process is a spontaneous consciousness. But rage is often a spontaneous consciousness, and certain actions we commit as a result of this rage—such as smashing the desk—can not really be considered "acts" in the fullest sense, can they? (If you're going to insist they can, at least concede that they're of a very different nature than those that are a 'result of' reflective consciousness.) If it's true that the ego doesn't fully exist in the state of unreflective unconsciousness, how can the ego be responsible for its actions? How can it be free?

This is all very peculiar. The fact of the matter is that there is not really a clear demarcation between reflective and unreflective consciousness; there are different levels of each. There isn't a 'leap' from one to the other: the change is so subtle it's almost imperceptible in many cases. Furthermore, what practical difference does reflective consciousness usually make? If it's defined as that state in which consciousness is aware of the ego, then it's perfectly conceivable that unreflective consciousness (unawareness of self) is compatible with the utmost reflection on possible alternatives or even on deep thought. Maybe it's even more compatible with this than reflective consciousness! Nietzsche surely wasn't reflectively [self-]conscious when he wrote many passages in *Zarathustra*—and probably this was in fact the reason for his

ability to think so deeply. When I'm in a state of passion I might be reflectively conscious and yet be unable to control my actions; when I'm unreflectively conscious I am very possibly absorbed in debating between alternative courses of action (and thus am more free than I was in reflective consciousness!). "Then it's the objective self that was free." The objective self can't be free. "Then it's consciousness that was free." Consciousness isn't the ego.

The truth is that all of these categories of being are forced and false. [*Yes!*] I'm inclined to think it's useless even to reflect on this crap.

Another thing: what does Sartre mean when he says that nothing can act on consciousness? If this were true then consciousness would probably be entirely free—but it's utterly false! *Everything* acts on consciousness: the unconscious (the existence of which he would admittedly deny), the environment, the passions—which determine what consciousness 'we' experience—neurochemicals, etc. Consciousness as an abstract entity is indeed 'free' or 'independent', in a way, because it is by its nature 'isolated' or 'insulated' from everything else—but what a truism! Besides, this doesn't mean that its 'manifestations' aren't often absolutely determined by the environment. Isn't spontaneous consciousness determined by forces over which it has no control? "But it is intentional, and thus it is free." It has an implied intention, yes. But this intention is only a kind of instinctive (impulsive) reaction to stimuli. For something to be free, it has to have control. Or will this be denied too? If so, we're talking about two completely different kinds of freedom. By "freedom" I mean the ability to control one's actions—in whatever way that is understood. Sartre says consciousness is always free. Fine! I'll grant him that, because I know he understands by "freedom" something so abstract it's utterly useless and inapplicable to concrete reality. I am talking about freedom of the *ego*, not freedom of consciousness—whatever the latter is supposed to mean.

Another thing: Sartre thinks the ego is an *object* of reflective consciousness. (I neglected to appreciate this in my recent entries.) But *I* think that while the ego fully exists only in the state of reflective consciousness, it is not merely an object of this reflective consciousness. It is itself a *part* of this consciousness. I am an object of myself. Fine. I am reflecting on myself. Thus in one sense Sartre is right that I am an object. But I am also a 'subject'. I am this reflective consciousness reflecting on the qualities of my "objective self" (my identity, etc.). To be more exact: I am this reflective consciousness *and* this objective self subjectivized (together they constitute the ego)—and therefore I can 'separate' reflective consciousness from myself because I am more than it. Therefore I agree that the *me* part of the ego—when it has become subjectivized, become aware of itself (or rather, become part of the *I* which is now aware of it)—is an object of the *I.* But the *I* is not an object! The *I* is reflective consciousness. And the ego *in toto* cannot be considered solely an object either, because included in it is the *I.*

Sartre seems to recognize something along these lines when he says that *we* are free. But what little I've read of *Being and Nothingness* has concentrated almost exclusively on the free character of consciousness as such—but consciousness is not the ego! His earlier views in *The Transcendence of the Ego* necessitate that not even the *I* exists in all consciousness; thus the *I* itself—forget about the whole ego!—is unfree. If it doesn't *choose* to disappear and reappear (or, what is the same thing, if reflective consciousness doesn't choose to disappear and reappear), then it's not entirely free. There's no way around it. The *I* (1) sometimes doesn't exist, and (2) has no control over *when* it exists. To be consistent with his own views he'd therefore have to concede that we are not completely free. Who cares about consciousness as such? Consciousness is not us; it's a somewhat 'abstract' thing which can have only an abstract, almost theoretical, freedom—so I consider it irrelevant to the core of the debate over free will.

Returning to my earlier observations, I've decided that it in fact isn't at all possible that the *I* doesn't exist when there is a chance we are free. We must be reflectively conscious to be free. But, to you alert readers, I'm not contradicting myself! Above I was foolishly assuming that reflective consciousness necessitates *complete* awareness of the ego, but it doesn't. It only necessitates awareness of itself, which it is by its very nature. Thus if I am reflecting on alternatives, the *I*—not the ego—necessarily exists, and that is a necessary condition of freedom (because the *I* is, as I said before, the heart of the ego, its most active aspect). To repeat: whenever the *I* doesn't exist (you won't be aware of this occurrence because 'you' won't really exist), there is no freedom. If we're reading a book and we suddenly *decide* to sit up (and don't do so 'unconsciously'), the *I* 'imperceptibly' comes into being—as does reflective consciousness. "Reflective

consciousness? We're not reflecting on the ego or former states of mind, so it can't be called reflective consciousness." Who cares? What's in a name? Call it a qualitatively different form of self-consciousness, if you wish.

In fact, that's a good idea. Let's slightly alter the definition of reflective consciousness so as to mean awareness of the *ego*. Awareness of the *I* we can call self-consciousness (consciousness conscious of itself), and "non-thetic" self-consciousness will refer to the level of self-consciousness in which we really have no idea of our existence.

Aha! I finally understand why I defined the 'true', 'reduced' self as pure consciousness rather than emphasizing the self-conscious aspect: I am so often aware of the *I [i.e., very self-conscious]* that I stupidly assumed this kind of awareness to be necessary as part of the 'human condition'. So I did in fact have in mind the *I* when I talked about the reduced self. Furthermore, by the inflated self independent of the reduced self I understood the objective *me*, and by the fusion of the two I understood what Sartre calls the ego (although I foolishly continued to call it the inflated self, and the former the inflated self *proper*). 'The reduced self is essentially subsumed under the inflated self': in other words, the *I* (r.s.) absorbs or subjectifies the *me* (i.s.), resulting in the birth of the ego. "We are awareness": 'we' are the *I*. If you refer to the entries in which I discuss my earlier theory of the self you'll realize that almost everything I say is, with slight modifications and a substitution of Sartre's terms, the skeleton of Sartre's own theory. Ha! Think of that! I *knew* I was onto something when I wrote those incomprehensible passages. But I don't blame Dad for rejecting my theory: I communicated it terribly.

Anyway, I'm inclined to think that when we are aware of reality—when we fully exist [in our full self-consciousness]—we can be held accountable for our actions. We may not be completely free, but we're nonetheless aware of our actions. The belief that since we can't know what it's like to be the Other we can't justifiably impose standards on him is wrong. Based on a great deal of testimony and evidence over the ages, we can in fact approximate what it's like to be the Other: namely, it is like being us. Unless a person has some kind of severe mental disorder, he can be held morally responsible. But there have to be degrees of moral responsibility. If I fully appreciate the pain someone will feel by an act of mine but I go ahead with the act anyway, then (other things being equal) I am more 'guilty' than he who is simply incapable of imagining what the other's pain will be and thus commits the harmful act.

You should reflect on those opinions (as I'm going to do), because I have no idea if they're at all defensible. (Incidentally, they seem similar to Dennett's.)

On an unrelated topic, I find it disappointing that it would be a waste of time and space to record hundreds of Nietzsche's aphorisms in this journal: many of them are brilliant and witty. For example:

"People who think their daily lives too empty and monotonous easily become religious: this is understandable and forgivable; however, they have no right to demand religiosity from those whose daily life does not pass in emptiness and monotony."

"There is not enough love and kindness in the world to permit us to give any of it away to imaginary beings."

"The poet presents his thoughts in splendor, on the wagon of rhythm--usually because they cannot go on foot."

"If spouses did not live together, good marriages would be more frequent."

"He who is modest with people shows his arrogance all the more with things (the city, state, society, epoch, or mankind). That is his revenge."

"We like to be out in nature so much because it has no opinion about us."

"We belong to a time in which culture is in danger of being destroyed by the means of culture." More true now than ever.

"Error has turned animals into men; might truth be capable of turning man into an animal again?"

"He who strays from tradition becomes a sacrifice to the extraordinary; he who remains in tradition is its slave. Destruction follows in any case."

"That something is irrational is no argument against its existence, but rather a condition for it."

"Fathers have much to do to make amends for the fact that they have sons."

"Christianity came into existence in order to lighten the heart; but now it has to burden the heart

first, in order to be able to lighten it afterward. Consequently it will perish."

"'Forgive us our virtues'--thus one should pray to men."

"Whoever thinks more deeply knows that he is always wrong, whatever his acts and judgments."

"The demand to be loved is the greatest kind of arrogance."

"Sometimes we remain true to a cause because its opponents will not stop being insipid."

"One must suffer of the fate of music as of an open wound." If that was true in the nineteenth century—how much truer must it be at the start of the twenty-first!

Returning to pseudo-phenomenology: all those years of obsession with personal change prepared me for engaging in the phenomenological psychology of the past month. That time of life was more painful than you'll ever know (unless your psyche suffers from a wretched need to 'intuit' *everything*), but it was useful. I created for myself a *character* in high school.

It's so gratifying nearly to understand the nature of the self at long last! What has plagued other men for a lifetime I will put behind me before I reach legal adulthood![1]

The pleasures of the mind are infinitely more perfect than the pleasures of the body. That is *my* maxim.

August 10

Today I received an e-mail that contained the course-reading for next year. Unfortunately the sheer amount of it (close to a thousand pages per week, so I've been told) precludes the possibility of my reading anything else. Furthermore, the CSS students are required to write one or two papers each week—and the professor of my history tutorial sets up so many guidelines for the essays that creative freedom is thrown out the window. For instance, we can't use the following words in our essays: really, actually, fact, truth, reality, obviously, feel, believe, say, mean, important, interesting, significant. The thesis of each paper has to be "genuinely controversial". We can't repeat words or use contractions. The title must be short and memorable. The second paragraph must address "test case 1". The third paragraph must revolve around the counterargument to test case 1. The fourth paragraph must include test case 2 (followed by a response to the counterargument), and the sixth paragraph must include test case 3 (with the counterargument). As one might imagine, the introduction and conclusion also have strict guidelines. We have to write the essays in the style of a turn-of-the-century scholar. Each essay must be between 5 and 6 pages. We cannot write in the first person. Passive verbs are forbidden. Each essay must have 25 footnotes, and we have to circle ten words we've never used before. We have to identify three logical fallacies of an author and engage in at least three textual analyses, which must include such items as "symbolism, internal logic of passage, language, tone, style, bias, and link to thesis". We also are required to include a map at the end of our essay and find some way to relate it to the subject we've written about.

The danger of attending prestigious colleges or graduate schools is that one is bred to become a mindless academic who spends his life following the rules; i.e., one becomes bureaucratically minded (the worst thing that can happen to an intelligent person). The intellect is raped. (Oh no! I used a passive verb!)

Even if we concede that not all actions are egoistic, it is not a foregone conclusion that Nietzsche's contempt for the selfless ideal is unjustified. He didn't mean that we shouldn't be perfectly kind and considerate in our actions with people; he didn't mean that we should only help the homeless girl if it inflates our ego! He was more concerned with selflessness as a way of life, as an *ideal.* Kindness and generosity don't coincide with the kind of selflessness Nietzsche had in mind.

"Become who you are!" In other words, don't get lost in neighbor-love and thereby take the easy way out of suffering and realizing the potential you're not even aware of. […]

The implication of all this is that we often are not conscious of "lack". Of course, many of us are never *explicitly* conscious of lack even when, in a given moment, we're fully self-conscious, but since "lack" is part of the nature of self-consciousness it is always present when we are [fully] aware of ourselves;

[1] Yeah, right.

we just aren't perceptive enough to articulate it. We would instantly recognize the tremendous feeling of perfection if somehow it were possible to experience the negation of lack while self-conscious. (Such a 'possibility' can't even be imagined, unfortunately.) The difficulty is that even if it's true we aren't always conscious of lack, it seems that there must 'objectively' *be* lack all the time (except possibly when we experience Dionysian rapture). Doesn't it? Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe humans, while not in any kind of paradise during those states of self-unawareness, are nonetheless more 'content' (even when furious) than when they're self-conscious. But that's certainly crap, because I can be in despair and *not* be [wholly] conscious of myself at the same time, or I can be in love and *be* conscious of myself at the same time.

Aha! I've just had a stunning breakthrough! This is all gibberish! That revelation seems to be the virtually predetermined outcome when I draw thoughts to their logical conclusions. And guess what I do whenever I crash into the reef of logical absurdity. In order to guard against the probability of mindless obsession and philosophical despair I cease to engage in any kind of deep reflection and instead listen to music. The muse of music! What worth would my existence have without you? There would be no escape, no possibility of redemption, no *personality* and *substance* and *color* in life! All would be bland and meaningless, in vain. […]

In any event, I've almost had enough of using phenomenology to arrive at truth. I miss good old-fashioned Marxism, a philosophy *tangible* and *understandable.* Reading a thousand pages a week on history and social theory will be a relief after the intellectual exertions of this summer.

August 14

At this moment Bill Clinton is preparing to recite his speech at the Democratic Convention. Here are the phrases he'll use: "we have put people first", "Al Gore has helped lead this country into the 21st century", "there are fewer poor people now than eight years ago", "Al Gore is the only man who can prepare America for the 21st century", "I have talked to thousands of single mothers over the last eight years, and they have thanked me....[etc. etc.], but there is still work to be done; we cannot tolerate this and that, we cannot endure that and this, we must work for this, that, and that....", "we have cut welfare rolls in half".... How gratifying it would be if a terrorist nuked the whole convention! No more of those Democratic scallywags to smear the political left with the stains of hypocrisy.

And what is this about cutting welfare rolls in half? Is it the purpose of welfare to cast the needy onto the streets because—it looks bad for the politicians? "The welfare rolls have been cut in half!" "Three cheers for Bill Clinton! He's forced those lazy welfare bums to get jobs!" But here is where that great desert of willful ignorance reaches its most barren spot; here is where blindness becomes an occupation; here is where humanity, in all its triumphant barbarity, loses hope for redemption: while these *politicians* are tooting their horns about the brilliant success of welfare reform, the impoverished are daily being thrown off welfare in the *thousands*—whether they have jobs or not! "Time's up. You've had your chance. The Bureaucracy can't sustain all these masses of poor." The Bureaucracy. The Bureaucracy is the god we all unwittingly pay allegiance to; it is our religion, our life-blood, our *mind*.

For the past few days I've been concerned about how to justify my writing this diary. This problem has obsessed me. *Why* am I writing it? Is it because I want to be remembered after I die? Because I think I'm a unique person? Because I want a record for myself when I've grown old and feeble? Because I'm vain and think this journal will honor me in the eyes of my contemporaries? Would I like to be worshipped as Lenin was by the Soviet Union?

No, I wouldn't. Such a useless prostration of the people, a kind of secular religion that degrades them to the status of mindless subjects, is out of the question in true communism. If you think that by writing this journal I'm underhandedly attempting to create such a god out of myself, you're quite mistaken.

Nevertheless, it would be nice to be admired or even venerated. *Why*, though? What good could that possibly do? It certainly wouldn't make *me* happier. I suspect it's just a manifestation of the irrational human need for immortality. [No; for recognition.] As I've said before, that is the primary purpose of this diary—although that more general purpose and the former unfortunately conflict, insofar as the

immortalizing of my personal flaws does me no favors. Therefore it appears that any kind of immortality matters more to me than being revered.

On the other hand, I surely wouldn't like to be remembered as a jerk. I want to prepare for my death; I want to ensure that people won't forget me or judge me too harshly. Call this cowardly and disgraceful; the fact is that we all desire it, although some of us are too self-blind to be aware of this.

[…]

Several days ago, when I didn't have my computer to write on, I jotted down some notes regarding consciousness. Here they are:

> When the I doesn't [fully] exist we can't control consciousness or our actions, but this doesn't mean they don't have a kind of direction or purpose to them. The moment consciousness attempts to control itself is the moment the I (the self) comes into existence. At that moment we can control our thoughts, consciously direct our attention to something else, etc. Consciousness, which we are (in a particular form), cannot control actions, but the brain can—and since the brain is intimately connected with consciousness, our actions can be 'compatible' with the purposes of the conscious mind.
>
> Consciousness can't be controlled by anything else, and to that extent it is free. But it is certainly influenced by the environment and kept within a more or less enormous realm by genes, etc. If someone will say that since consciousness is essentially an effect of neural processes it can't be free, I have two responses. First, if by freedom we understand control over oneself, then I agree that consciousness isn't free when it can't control itself (see the second point). But if freedom implies only a lack of absolute external constraint, then consciousness is always partially free. (These are in fact two kinds of freedom that should always be distinguished.) "But it's constrained by the neurons!" Maybe the neurons produce it, sure; but how do you know the neurons are completely constrained (i.e., 'determined' or controlled) by anything else? Besides, there are always other alternatives, different routes, that can be taken by consciousness; we debate before arriving at decisions. Of course, if somehow we could travel back in time and debate over the decision again—while keeping all the conditions exactly the same—we would go through the identical thought-processes and arrive at the identical decision. But what does this prove? Certainly not "necessity". It's not as though we are just going through the motions in deciding, or that our decision is predetermined. In any event, merely by 'watching' yourself reflect on anything you can see that consciousness is free (in both senses—but such is the case only when you're watching yourself. See below. There's possibly only freedom in the second, lesser sense if you're not watching yourself.) In short, even in the moments when we're not aware of ourselves there isn't an absolute constraint on the routes that consciousness follows (i.e., there isn't a single necessary route), but this doesn't mean that consciousness[1] has control over itself in the state of self-unawareness.
>
> This brings us to the second point. When we are fully aware of consciousness we have control over it—
>
> This is all wrong. We hardly ever control our thoughts, because there are levels of self-consciousness and it is only in the highest levels that it can be possible to 'control' them. (And even *that's* probably wrong!)
>
> Enough of this. After reflecting on my thoughts I've come to the conclusion that Sartre is very likely right about his theory of non-thetic self-consciousness (viz., that it exists). I can't give reasons for my new belief because it relies on pure intuition; in order to test its validity one must observe one's states of mind.

August 16

[1] Or the neural processes; both terms mean the same thing in this context—if neurons do in fact produce consciousness.

Another singular problem is the nature of time. A few weeks ago I wrote that the origin of time and the universe is an unsolvable question, not susceptible to conceptual understanding. Still, it is very absorbing. […]

On the other hand, I can't come to any conclusions until I read more of Sartre. (I've only read the two abovementioned works and excerpts from *Being and Nothingness*.) Therefore I must compel my impatient and juvenile mind to tolerate reading another book: *The Tragic Finale*, by Wilfrid Desan. It's a summary of *Being and Nothingness*.

Before I bid farewell for the rest of the day, I'd like to emphasize again that in my opinion Sartre is either engaging in a flagrant contradiction or is abandoning his (or perhaps primarily *my*, if I'm misinterpreting him) very useful distinctions between the me, the I, and consciousness as such, which were present in *The Transcendence of the Ego* and are absent in *Being and Nothingness*. Absolute freedom, bad faith, the impossibility of sincerity—all of Sartre's notions rely on the conflation of the ego with consciousness (or rather, the complete ignoring of the ego). It is impersonal consciousness *independent of the self* that is free, that cannot be sincere, that is in bad faith—precisely because this consciousness itself has no personal characteristics. But the ego certainly does! The ego is not impersonal consciousness—and neither is the active, conscious part of the ego, the I—and so none of the three foregoing terms can apply to it. They are meaningless. I can be sincere simply by knowing myself to a sufficient extent that I recognize my fundamental characteristics and act on that knowledge. I can, of course, *try* to be outgoing or obsessed with movies or a completely virtuous person—and for a time I may succeed—but eventually I'll fall back into my old habits *because I have very little control over who I am*. I of all people should know this truth! I tried for four years to change my identity, and the only time I was even mildly successful was when I took a pill! This in itself demonstrates consciousness' lack of control over a vast range of very significant elements of oneself. The reason for our tendency to ignore what Sartre considers our absolute freedom isn't a vague consciousness that the alternative is anguish; it's simply that the I [self-consciousness] identifies itself with the me, and the me [the psyche, etc.] is not totally free. If it will be said that the I could choose not to identify itself with the me, I will say only that such a conscious decision would be futile. The moment the I decided it had complete freedom and would lead a different life from then on, it would be thrown back onto the massiveness of the me.

I don't mean to suggest that personal change is impossible; I mean only that its great difficulty implies the defeat or irrelevance of Sartre's notion of absolute freedom. Furthermore, although it is true that I am not, e.g., a heterosexual inasmuch as I am self-consciousness, it is not true that the me is not a heterosexual—or that we are mistaken when we think the ego is a heterosexual. This may signify the tragedy of human existence—viz., that consciousness is what it is not and is not what it is—but it doesn't signify anything like bad faith. Moreover, as I mentioned once before, it doesn't mean that "massive identity of oneself with one-self" is *always* impossible; such an identity is the nature of Dionysian rapture. Consciousness then is basically identified with the unconscious, with the objective self (although I admit that this psycho-physical *me* cannot be considered an object in the same sense that external things are objects), and this is so because the unconscious 'takes over' consciousness while at the same time allowing the latter to remain in existence. There are no longer values, goals, objects, or ego; there is only a magnificent union of oneself with oneself, of oneself with the world. "Ripeness is all." The moment is all. Are we still non-thetically self-conscious in this moment? I can't say for sure. I am inclined to say no—because if we are, consciousness necessarily continues to 'look upon' the self as an object—but since I'm still a bit skeptical about the theory of non-thetic consciousness I won't confidently assert my opinion for at least a few more days.

August 17

I was an archfiend to suggest that I might vote for George W. Bush in the coming elections. The truth is that I haven't yet decided what strategy is best to prepare for socialism/communism—the

revolutionary or the evolutionary. If the revolutionary were best I *might* want the Republicans to ruin our country as much as possible; if the evolutionary were best I would favor the Democrats with my heart and soul. But since I have no idea, it would be folly *par excellence* to vote for George Bush. Quite aside from the question of the ends justifying the means—which can even be *considered* only when revolutionaries are sure of the practical value of each alternative and its probable outcome—I would be perpetually stung by my conscience if I knowingly contributed to the disintegration of millions of people's lives. Besides, the Democrats could never have so much power that there's a chance they could forestall the deterioration of our society. Such a thought is absurd and un-Marxist. Moreover, free trade and the abolition of tariffs, etc.—which I am, as you know, in favor of—will not necessarily be pursued with greater fervor by the Republicans than by the Democrats. Clinton, for example, has unwittingly helped us revolutionaries by passing NAFTA and fighting for the induction of China into the WTO.

August 18

The concept of a psycho-physical "me" is rather ambiguous. The body is clearly part of it, but shouldn't we distinguish between the body and the psyche? What *is* the psycho-physical me? Is it the body, unreflective consciousness, and the unconscious? What is the unconscious? What is the ego? Must the latter include an awareness of the body? Consciousness certainly 'inhabits' the body, at the very least; sensation is consciousness, right? The ego is not a substance; it is only a kind of awareness. Is the me a "substance"? Is it an 'object' of consciousness? Is the me a sort of idea that exists even if we're not aware of it? **[These questions—and a lot of the preceding entries—give some indication of how futile it ultimately is to try to work out a phenomenological 'system' of consciousness and the self. In the end, all this Sartrean stuff devolves into masturbatory nonsense.]**

August 19

At long last I've finished reading *The Tragic Self*. Although Sartre's philosophy is in some respects innovative, it is also a failure almost on a par with Hegelianism. The whole thing crashes to the ground once it is recognized that there is no such thing as absolute freedom, that consciousness has a physical/chemical basis in the brain, and that if the For-itself is as empty as Sartre believes then it is necessarily passive rather than active. Nevertheless, it certainly seems as though consciousness is in fact empty and yet, in a sense, undertakes such gargantuan feats as constructing the universe [by being aware of it]. I suppose if consciousness is merely an effect—if neurons do all the work and consciousness is only the result—then the problem isn't inexplicable; but it continues to be rather illogical.

So I'm going to study social theory. I still think there's a good deal I could contribute to phenomenological psychology and the like, but there's also a lot I could contribute to Marxism and other theories of history. So I've started reading *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre*.

August 21

Underneath my placid exterior, my half-humorous, self-deprecating, self-aggrandizing writings, my unassuming, nearly wispy social presence, my self-doubts and my self-confidence, my trivialities and my profundities—underneath all these contradictory traits is an ocean of passion. How often am I drowned in it! How often do I exclaim—lost in the depths of my rage and despondency—"Is there not a bed below this sea?" Alas! there is not. I am condemned to eternal unrest. I am a prisoner of my own ephemerality, my own nothingness! Behold, reader, the most devastating truth of all: *nothingness*. Beneath one's unruffled appearance are one's strengths; beneath one's strengths are one's weaknesses; beneath one's weaknesses

are one's passions; and beneath one's passions is *nothing*. Where is "one"? Have we forgotten it? Have we overlooked it? On the contrary: we have passed through it. There is no substance to be designated "I". And yet, *I am*. Who would deny it? Who would deny my fanatical need to love? Still, it is not *I* who yearns for love; it is....consciousness. It is love itself that yearns for love.

How mawkish that sounds (when misinterpreted)! You see, reader, I too can be sweetly sentimental if I so desire. With practice, I too could gush extravagant rivers of prose worthy of young Werther. *Quelle folie!* He who is a good writer is pronounced passionate, despite daily proof that humanity is, above all, a fickle thing. Passion is a flood one moment, a trickle the next. And it is little appreciated that "passion" is not much more than a singular blend of confusion, impatience and distress unless it is *articulated* or supplemented with art. One moment I am a sad person who is vaguely aware of a pain in his chest; the next moment—that is, upon poeticizing my passion—I am transformed into the embodiment of anguish. My ardor is crystallized, immortalized and reified, while I am left behind in its wake. Subsequently I can be judged passionate, and although this judgment probably contains a kernel of truth it is misleading: my so-called passion is never equivalent to its 'objectification' on the written page. Beethoven's passion cannot be equated with his music, for the latter is merely an *expression*, an effect. It results from his genius, not primarily from something called "passion"—which is nothing more than an impetus. Judge for yourself the truth of what I am saying: the next time you feel an unquenchable thirst engulf you, listen to Debussy's "Clair de lune". You'll notice that your thirst grows to epic proportions at the same time that it changes into eloquence and climbs to the pinnacle of beauty. The next time you feel angry, listen to the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. You'll realize that passion is nothing if not completed by art. Why is this so? Because art reifies, "crystallizes" passion. Artists seem so ardent only because it is they who create these objectifications. If you'll insist that many surely are abnormally passionate, my response is that they *feed* their passion with their creations, that they become fixated on what are admittedly the most important questions of life, and in so doing milk their obsessions for all they're worth. What others are too shallow to dwell on for more than two minutes at a time, many artists *constrain* themselves to dwell on because they enjoy pain. It may drive them to suicide, but they enjoy it nonetheless. They *need* it, because it is coextensive with meaning. It's not as though artists are anything like martyrs who despise their passion but cannot escape it—who live in misery, who sacrifice themselves for their art.

If the label "passionate" refers not to subjective experience but to behavior, then I concede that great artists are passionate. Their behavior indicates obsessions, but I still think that what they *feel* is not really qualitatively different from anything ordinary people feel (although it may be intensified).

Incidentally, despite the apparent incompatibility between the first paragraph of this entry and the second, if the reader interprets the former correctly it can be seen as consistent with the latter. Furthermore, for what it's worth, I'm not sure that my opinions on the artistic nature are at all accurate. I'm not even sure if they are in fact my 'real' opinions!

Briefly returning to the topic of 'reified passion': if I wanted to write this diary in the style of a sentimental but brilliant artist who on some level wished to glorify himself, I don't think the task would be an impossible one. With a tasteful amount of poetry I could make this diary elegant and maybe even a little musical. But such extravagance is appropriate only in published works, and even then can get rather heavy-handed at times. Besides, no matter how impassioned I sometimes feel, a shadow of self-consciousness, a slight suspicion that I'm putting on a show for myself, dilutes my would-be fervency and makes me incapable of *absolutely* glorifying my 'distresses' in this diary for fear that doing so would be an imposture.

(later) Blah, blah, blah. I don't think my reflections on the 'artistic nature' were very perceptive. Many of them directly contradicted my long ruminations on "Dionysian rapture"—not to mention the truth that since I can't experience what Beethoven *et al* experienced, I can't justifiably come to any conclusions about the nature of the passion they endured. Perhaps their 'anguish' was in fact many times more overwhelming than the emotions ordinary people experience. I'm skeptical with respect to the vast majority of artists (even "great" ones), but skepticism isn't certainty.

At any rate, what matter these considerations? What matters philosophy or even psychology when one remembers that events like the Holocaust occurred? All things profound shrivel to the status of irrelevance when confronted with the Holocaust. The Ninth Symphony is the squeak of a mouse. (To be

fair, I should say that from *one* angle it is only a squeak, but from another it is more monumental and all-encompassing than the Holocaust times one hundred.)

[…]

August 26

Professional philosophers can go to the devil. Only those who are *not* professionals are *maybe* worthy of being called philosophers. All the rest are irrelevant, not irreverent enough—and not ambitious enough. Irreverence is the motto of all true philosophers, particularly the colorful, good-natured ones (for example, me).

August 27

Tomorrow I'll return to Wesleyan. On the whole I'm excited—but I'll miss *choosing* the books I want to read. But that isn't so bad: I've spent the past few days ignoring all thoughts about phenomenology, existentialism, even Marxism, to the point that I'm now nearly drained of intellectual curiosity. I.e., I'm ready for college!

September 1

I've written my first paper and read quite a few books. To quote a girl who was a sophomore in CSS last year, "CSS is as bad as everything you've heard and worse." I'm usually not one to complain (?!), but I have to agree with her: the workload is extraordinary.

There isn't much else to tell you. For some reason I feel much more mature and 'accepting' of my situation than I was last year; it even seems likely that despite my wretched social life I'll (almost) never again be as committed to improving it as I have been in the past. I don't give a rat's ass anymore. I haven't even tried to contact Rebecca yet. Apathy isn't a very appealing emotion, but it seems more realistic than all the others.

September 4

A few hours ago I attended a CSS party. This is how I would describe it: juvenile, artificial, shameful. That's my formula for all "parties". They shorten humanity by a head; they reduce it to a state of imbecility. I drank some vodka, hoping to overcome my social inhibitions with the help of a little drunkenness, but the taste was too rancid for me to take more than a few quick gulps.

Maybe I'm being judgmental, 'dogmatic', raising my own personal idiosyncrasies to a universal standard that I expect everyone to adhere to, but I can't help thinking that people who engage in these weird rituals are acting falsely. I get the impression that they take themselves too seriously. Not to feel a twinge of self-consciousness, of 'shame', in those situations seems beyond belief. You who have experienced parties know what I mean: rap music blasting in the background, forty kids squeezed into a space that could comfortably fit ten, all of them drinking, most of them drunk, half of them moving their bodies about in absurd ways, all of them screaming at each other just to be heard, conversations revolving around the beneficial effects of various hard drugs.... The only conclusion I can arrive at is that mankind is too depressing to think about.

September 5

I've met a lovely freshman (named Juliana) who lives in my hall. She's similar to Rebecca in many ways: quiet, intelligent, interested in the social sciences, hails from California, is very easygoing, etc. But her exceptional quality is her artistic talent: it is, to say the least, on a par with Picasso's.

September 6

College is nauseating. I am infinitely more motivated to learn and read when I'm *not* in school than when I am; I accomplish more when I don't have to maneuver under the burden of useless responsibilities like writing essays of which I don't believe a single word. Honoré de Balzac hit the nail squarely on the head when he opined, "School is brutalizing." It is impossible for me to read books with the object of *learning* when I don't even have time to read all of them. I'm forced to skim through potentially engrossing books on the French Revolution solely because a professor is dictating to me what I must read, when I must read, and what I must do with what I read. 'Who cares about learning? I have to write a paper!' And most of the books we're assigned are so monumentally dull that they leave me feeling bleak and dead—and, of course, I don't retain any of their fascinating statistics or economic theories. I'm skimming too quickly even to remember what I've read in the last paragraph.

Aside from the fact that college prevents me from learning, it is also nauseating inasmuch as it causes me to experience 'emptiness' approximately eight times a day. Often I'm not sure *why* it does, but it is vaguely an effect of my living in the midst of my peers. (If you're still having trouble understanding what I mean by "emptiness"—what Sartre calls "nausea"—perhaps this will clarify it a bit: if a person frequently experienced nausea who didn't fear death as much as I do or have as many ambitions as I have, he would sooner or later commit suicide. It is the state of mind most conducive to thinking about ending one's life, because it signifies a complete lack of interest in life. It is *hatred of life*.)

College certainly isn't *all* bad, but overall I believe I would (1) be more mentally healthy and (2) learn more about what interests me, if I dropped out. Because I generally have an excess of self-discipline when it comes to reading, I could teach myself economics, history, philosophy, science, and so on.

How often I have dreamed about dropping out of college (and high school)! What a pity our society attaches a stigma to the dropout.

September 9

Maybe I was a bit hasty when I said I could learn more were I not in college. It isn't true. In fact, I can 'reverse' this statement if I spend 90% of my time this year with my nose buried in the books I've been assigned. The biggest problem with this strategy is that I'll be forced to neglect my social life, but....as I do not *have* a social life, this dilemma matters little.

September 17

Not a great deal has happened. I must have the blandest life of any student at Wesleyan: generally nine hours of each day I spend reading. No matter. It's my own damn fault I don't have more friends.

Last night I went to a performance by two world-famous Indian musicians—one a violinist, one a tabla-player. It was without a doubt the most spectacular concert I've ever attended: both performers were superhumanly talented.

Lately I haven't recorded my dreams, but this doesn't reflect any lack of wealth in the material. Three nights ago, for example, I dreamt that Adolf Hitler and I were together in a room on the second floor

of my house. He was in the shape of a large tarantula which, I believe, continually attempted to bite me; I tried to kill him by stomping on him. Occasionally I succeeded (whereupon I created a sticky smudge of black tarantula-goo), but he reappeared almost instantly in another spot. All this time we were arguing with one another—about what, I know not.

September 20

Last night I read Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Language*, and I am somewhat ashamed to admit that I didn't get much out of it. I found a lot of it irrelevant or boring. But in class today the professor explained it in such a way that I felt *inspired*. Rousseau's opinions on music were uncannily similar to those I recorded several months ago in this journal—about music's being the only authentic human communication, the one mode of expression that partially overcomes the dichotomy between self and other. I remain skeptical that that's true, but its implications are spectacular. If I had enough time, I'd spend weeks thinking about it.

That's what I loathe most about college: it prevents me from meditating on philosophy. The reason I didn't arrive earlier at any of the theories I conjured up this summer is that there wasn't enough *time* last year to think about philosophy! College brutalizes me into being a sterile academician.

Incidentally, when I say I'm an elitist I'm referring to the sense in which Matthew Arnold, Rousseau, and maybe Nietzsche were elitists. I have nothing but contempt for any other sort of 'elitism'.

September 24

It occurs to me that, aside from my love of music, I'm not a very cultured person. Hence I've undertaken a perusal of *Faust*. This task will take quite a while, since I intend to study thoroughly the philosophical and literary themes in Goethe's great work, but....the longer it takes to read, the more opportunities I'll have for a respite from the drudgery of college.

I've read scores of novels in my life; rarely have I read poems or dramas. So I'm going to try to keep reading Classical and Romantic poetry. *Culture* is my salvation. Music may be its loftiest expression, but literature is not as formless; it provides a necessary counterbalance to the loose structure of Dionysian art.

September 25

I *guarantee* you that under communism such symptoms of decadence as rap, heavy metal, punk rock, and economics would wither away.[1]

I've only read a few pages of *Faust*, but I can see that it's a great drama. I encounter at least three 'new' words on every page, and since I am recording them and their definitions in a notebook—*and* am jotting down relevant philosophical observations—*and* am reading every scene aloud, with the dramatic expression of an unexperienced wannabe actor alone in his room—*and* am reading commentaries on the play—you can well understand why it'll take me awhile to finish the poem.

But even more awe-inspiring than all the great cultural monuments of history is....history itself. The sheer magnitude of events like World Wars I and II—which the old world *needed* in order for the remnants of feudalism to be swept aside, to prepare mankind for the unfettered reign of capitalism and "democracy"—such monuments to the triumph of an extra-personal historical logic are as overwhelming as death.

[1] And I'm not just arbitrarily including this in my definition of communism.

October 3

Sometime this year I plan to perform Chopin's Scherzo no. 2 (in B-flat minor) in one of Wesleyan's concerts. That masterpiece will bring the house down.

(later) George Bush was resoundingly defeated in the presidential debate tonight. All in all, he made a fool of himself.

The more I read about history, the more convinced I am that 'individual' initiative is more important in determining the course of history than Marxists have traditionally assumed. For example, socialism might have triumphed on an international scale but for the decisions of four or five European leaders in 1918. Humanity might have experienced an apocalypse in the 1940s had Hitler diverted sufficient funds to his programs researching the possibilities of nuclear warfare. So much depends on the idiosyncrasies of individual wills!

October 6

Any country that could produce Jeremy Bentham is composed of arch-philistines. Any country that could produce Joe McCarthy is composed of collective mindlessness.

October 10

[…]

Life *cannot* be an "end in itself". It is a means to possible ends. It is too common, too purposeless, too unremarkable. *Animals* certainly aren't ends in themselves, since they aren't even self-conscious. Maybe *humans* are, simply because they have the potential to 'realize themselves'. (Can self-consciousness really be considered a criterion for this 'end in itself' label? If so, only because it implies that one can realize oneself.) But I'm not sure most people have much to realize.

Something is very wrong with these reflections. Maybe I'm starting from erroneous assumptions. Maybe my 'project' of 'justifying life' is too artificial to yield other than nonsensical conclusions.

October 15

I'm reading Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. It's quite a difficult text; I've read only 80 pages in two days (partly because I'm also reading the Remarks, the Additions, and the Translator's Notes).

One reaches a point when undergraduate education becomes an embarrassment. What are we students supposed to 'get out of' Hegel if we spend only two days on him and then move on to Marx? I'll have to read numerous books on Hegelianism *outside* of my courses if I want to gain more than a passing understanding of brief segments of one text. This weekend I read *Patterns in Prehistory* to learn about the origins of society.

October 17

I seem to have matured a little since last year, for I've been careful not to include in recent entries complaints about my social life. No more griping. However, you'd probably appreciate at least a minimum of information, so: although I eat many of my meals alone, I am not completely without friends.

Unfortunately I have as yet made no progress in the romance department.[1]

Am I as frustrated as I was last year? No. For one thing, I'm absorbed in my schoolwork; for another, I've learned to repress whatever frustration I do experience.

October 18

Finished the *Philosophy of Right*.

A major source of my skepticism regarding the philosophical enterprise is that philosophers are so often *wrong*. They feel *absolutely convinced* that they have hit upon the truth, but other people invariably demonstrate that they haven't. How can this eternal uncertainty be overcome?

[…]

October 19

We humans are playing into nature's hands by obsessing over sex. Sex, that supremely animal act, is nature asserting its dominance over us. I'm tempted to treat it as a purely optional, entirely unimportant part of life—something I should engage in rarely or never—if only to give nature the shaft.[2] (I'm even tempted to prevent myself from falling in love, in order to assert my complete autonomy.)

It's difficult for me to come to terms with the baser aspects of life, the animal functions like sex, urination and defecation. Indeed, every reminder of our materialistic origins (such as the biological sciences in general)[3] I find repulsive, disillusioning, and contradictory. The dualism between the 'spiritual' and animal aspects of life is so complete that I'm convinced it's one of the major sources of unhappiness (unconscious or otherwise).

Don't you find it maddening that throughout history nature has successfully tricked us into believing that we're autonomous—even as love and sex have so obviously dominated us? Procreation, procreation, procreation, the continuation of life! That's nature's one concern! Can anything be more humbling than to know that such a mundane, pointless force unconsciously controls us through love and sex?

October 21

Listen to the middle section of Chopin's Funeral March and you'll know how I feel right now. I sincerely, fervently, intensely, ardently, passionately wish I had a girlfriend to whom I could communicate my melancholy. Love and melancholy: what an exquisite combination! The perfect recipe for an overflowing of tears. As it is, I can do nothing but stare at a cheap poster of Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream*.

October 22

Today I read four sections of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. Certain passages, particularly in the sections 'Alienated Labor' and 'Private Property and Communism', seem to contain potential starting points for resolving the many philosophical problems that are plaguing me. Of course, they're no more than starting points, for the creation of a *Weltanshauung* is a complex task, but—anyhow,

[1] This seems to be a recurring theme.

[2] Pun intended.

[3] Which I also, however, find fascinating.

I've come to admire Marx even more after reading these manuscripts. He was only 26 when he wrote them.

October 25

I've decided to drink more often from now on. The sensation is indescribably liberating and fun. In fact, *everything* about it is indescribable—or paradoxical: I am utterly aware of myself and my actions, yet I don't *care* about them; I can see people with perfect clarity, yet my vision (my depth-perception?) is somehow deficient; I can think clearly, yet my thoughts are somehow 'superficial', just a show.

October 28

I spent the last few hours reading a twenty-page-long section of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* entitled "Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole". It was difficult, but once one is acquainted with the Hegelian terminology, *nothing* is impossible. Strange as this may sound, Marx was even more brilliant than I'd thought. By the age of twenty-five he had grasped the essence of Hegel's philosophy, followed it through its tortuous intricacies, and refuted its basic premises in the space of twenty pages. Moreover, he unwittingly provided an excellent introduction to and summary of Hegelianism. *Furthermore*, I've become amenable to Marx's idea that labor is the objectification of man's essence.

Also, those twenty pages are directly related to the phenomenology of the self and the definition of man—two problems with which, as you know, I was obsessed during the summer. Marx disagrees with Hegel's identification of man with self-consciousness, and insofar as man *in toto* is certainly a great deal more complex than mere self-consciousness I agree with him; but I still think that the most *essential* part of man is self-consciousness. Man's self is self-consciousness.

Unfortunately, although I understood what I was reading as I read it, I've relapsed into my characteristic muddledness. Even so, I'm clear-headed enough to see that there remain problems with Marx's account of humanity and especially his belief that individuals can fully realize themselves only in communism.

October 29

It's gratifying to me that many intellectuals continue to write books obsessing over interpretations of specific *sentences* that Marx wrote: Marxology, though it may in some respects be a superfluous academic discipline, is a reassuring indication that not *everyone* is an ignoramus. I see it as a kind of respectful acknowledgement on the part of academicians that Marx was *profound*—profound enough to merit an entire field devoted to interpreting him.

[…]

The following piece of writing is a paper I wrote for my philosophy course, related to Marx as well as phenomenology.

> In his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, Karl Marx posits a theory of alienation that is to be one of the guiding threads in his later studies. Contrary to Hegel, who conceives of alienation as a kind of abstract estrangement from self-consciousness, Marx insists on the objective character of man and his 'essential powers'—his senses, his labor, etc. Once the latter have ceased to be alienated from their social essence, man himself will no longer be alienated: he will be perfectly happy. Marx's insistence on man's objectivity is valuable, for Hegel excessively stresses man's subjectivity—but Marx advances too far in this direction by denying the critical importance of self-consciousness as man's essence. This essay will (1) examine the principal aspects of Marx's theory,

(2) oppose a different theory of alienation to his severely 'objective' one, and (3) analyze the consequences of this new hypothesis on Marx's theory of history.

The profundity of Karl Marx's conception of communism has not often been appreciated. Philistines often ridicule his prediction of a world full of entirely developed human beings—without understanding what it is they are ridiculing. They ignore the historical context, in this case by forgetting that Marx developed his theories in the wake of Hegelianism. Hegel conceived of man as self-consciousness, as an abstract awareness which undergoes various objectifications—'alienations' in Hegel's terminology—in the process of achieving unity with itself. Thus, man first looks upon nature as external from him and a threat; eventually he recognizes that his own consciousness produces this nature, that nature is self-consciousness objectified, that 'he' (self-consciousness) is 'his' own object; he comes to be at home in his "other-being as such". Marx criticizes this primacy of abstraction, of the Idea: self-consciousness does not posit the world, and it cannot be one with the world. Hegel's project of unifying the subject and object is unrealizable, for (1) it is his own premise that self-consciousness is alienated when there is objectivity, and thus (2) self-consciousness can never be at home in its "other-being as such". For example, Marx argues that because Hegel recognizes that religion is alienated self-consciousness, it is necessarily only when religion is "annihilated and superseded" that true self-consciousness can be achieved. Yet Hegel insists on retaining religion as a kind of 'symbol' or representation of self-consciousness. In actuality, he is forced to do this—to dishonestly acknowledge the objectivity of religion—just as he forced to dishonestly acknowledge the objectivity of everything in nature (i.e., its independence from self-consciousness). Marx sums this up in the following paragraph from "Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole" (1844):

> In Hegel, therefore, the negation of the negation [e.g., the retaining of religion solely because of the 'rational kernel' inherent in it] is not the confirmation of the true essence [of man], effected precisely through negation of the pseudo-essence. With him the negation of the negation is the confirmation of the pseudo-essence, or of the self-estranged essence in its denial; or it is the denial of this pseudo-essence as an objective being dwelling outside man and independent of him, and its transformation into the subject.[1]

Hence Marx recognized the necessity, if we are to 'realize' ourselves, of insisting that man's essence is not simply self-consciousness; man is an objective being who does not alienate himself merely by objectifying himself or his self-consciousness. Only when man's 'essential powers' are hindered or stunted—and thus come to dominate him in their effects, as does labor under capitalism—is he estranged from his essence as a species-being. Now it is apparent why Marx demanded the complete development of all our essential powers under communism: people are objective beings, so to fulfill themselves they must realize their objective essential powers (the senses, emotions, etc.). Hegel strove for a similar goal, but because he conceived of people as self-consciousness he remained in the realm of the abstract.

It is at this point that Marx begins to sound rather utopian. It may be true that humans need the 'other' in order to attain self-consciousness (which is what distinguishes them from animals), and hence that they are in one sense "species-beings". Indeed, it may be true that people must live in a community to develop their objective essential powers. However, there is no escaping the fact that, despite the great importance of "objective powers" and our species-being, humans are fundamentally self-consciousness. Even if there existed a man who had 'perfected' his senses, his passions, his intellect, he might very well remain unhappy and feel alienated from himself. Admittedly, alienation is for Marx an objective condition that we might not even be aware of, but awareness of it—i.e., its transformation into a subjective state of mind, a 'feeling'—surely intensifies the alienation, makes it personal. Hence, unless one's consciousness is affected, all

[1] Robert C. Tucker ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), p. 119.

personal development is, in a sense, for naught (in eliminating alienation).

The complete absence of any kind of alienation is synonymous with perfect happiness. However, such a state of mind—although not impossible (see below)—is extraordinarily difficult to attain, for self-consciousness entails what existentialists might call 'ontological lack'. As long as we are self-conscious, we are Faustian creatures who are 'aware' (although sometimes not explicitly) of a hole in the core of our being, an ineffable nothingness at the center of the self. This is an 'objective' condition that is coextensive with self-consciousness; it is a more meaningful alienation from oneself than anything Marx had in mind, precisely because it implies that there is no such thing as 'oneself'—as a kind of substance that has the potential to be realized. 'I' do not exist, for I am self-consciousness (my objective qualities such as the senses are not logically essential to my being, although they empirically are insofar as they cause me to come into existence) and self-consciousness is a hole. In short, Hegel recognized that we are essentially self-consciousness, but he failed to recognize what this implies; Marx recognized that we have objective qualities that can be realized independently of self-consciousness, but he failed to recognize that self-consciousness is, so to speak, our essence.

However, it is possible to overcome self-consciousness, to 'effectively' become one with the world. Indeed, this is our state of being as infants. For the majority of people, once they have 'fallen' from this 'paradise' of infancy they remain fallen; but the truly exceptional humans have learned to be 'redeemed'. The moment of enlightenment which Buddhists experience is actually this overcoming of self-consciousness; this is precisely why it is impossible for them to communicate it to the rest of us. They achieve perfect happiness in that one moment, whether it lasts for five minutes or an hour.

But what does "enlightenment" really consist of? How is it possible to conquer self-consciousness? The answer to this question is apparent after reading Nietzsche's lengthy analysis in *Ecce Homo* of what he experienced while writing *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

> If one had the slightest residue of superstition left in one's system, one could hardly reject altogether the idea that one is merely incarnation, merely mouthpiece, merely a medium of overpowering forces....A rapture whose tremendous tension occasionally discharges itself in a flood of tears....a depth of happiness in which even what is most painful and gloomy does not seem something opposite but rather conditioned, provoked, a necessary color in such a superabundance of light... Everything happens involuntarily in the highest degree but as in a gale of a feeling of freedom, of absoluteness, of power, of divinity...[1]

Nietzsche had no control over his thoughts during this experience; he had lost self-consciousness. [Um, okay… That's stupid.] Hence his thoughts could only have come from his unconscious—from that which we have no control over. The thoughts and passions he experienced in those moments of divinity were simply a deluge from his unconscious, a flood so powerful that it drowned self-consciousness. Buddhist enlightenment is, similarly, a liberation of the 'repressed' contents of the unconscious: the psyche *in toto* is unified, alienation is overcome. If this is how we are to define the only true surmounting of alienation, the great classical composers (particularly Beethoven and Mozart) experienced it as well: their music was a 'flood' from their unconscious.

The foregoing 'theory' of alienation is very different from Marx's, but it is more consistent with the psychological and empirical facts. Capitalism alienates us from our objective powers, our abilities, our labor, etc., but there is a still deeper undercurrent of alienation that cannot be overcome even in communism: the psychological alienation from the unconscious and the psyche as a whole implied in self-consciousness. Likewise, exceptional people can overcome this deeper alienation regardless of the society they live in, but they cannot overcome Marx's form of alienation except in communism.

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[1] Walter Kaufmann ed., *Friedrich Nietzsche* (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 300.

This revision of Marx is unrelated to his theory of history, which is concerned primarily with production and its effects on society. Humans must eat before they do anything else; originally it is when they engage in the act of production that they become aware of the other, and hence become social; this leads to the formation of consciousness and ideology. Once the society has become productive enough to create a surplus (through agriculture), classes come into being, and this starts the historical process. Because the satisfaction of needs begets new needs, the forces of production always remain the prime mover of history, the factor which ensures that mankind will progress and which indeed "overdetermines" the general course of mankind's progression. This is all relatively self-evident, and it testifies to the prejudice and stupidity of the bourgeoisie that they continue to ignore it or criticize it so as to continue their unrelenting charade of chasing profit. What is not so self-evident is that it is only when the productive forces are fettered by the production relations that revolutions break out, or that the dictatorship of the proletariat will be the inevitable form of the next revolution. These two theories of Marxism—both of which can be phrased using the dangerous word inevitable—are symptomatic of a general trend in the later Marx to deny the importance of individuals, to reduce everything to historical laws. Individuals are a combination of objectivity and subjectivity (which is an implied conclusion of the previous discussion on alienation), and it is the latter which ensures that they can influence the outcome of history and its "laws".

To conclude, the early Marx recognizes, contrary to Hegel, that man is not mere self-consciousness; he has essential, objective powers which can be realized independently of self-consciousness. Marx does not, however, assign enough significance to the role of self-consciousness in man, and consequently his theory of alienation is superficial. Self-consciousness itself must be conquered in order to eliminate the most fundamental alienation—alienation from self—and communism as a form of society is too objective and impersonal to facilitate this triumph over self-consciousness. These criticisms only indirectly affect Marx's theory of history, and only inasmuch as they emphasize the importance of subjectivity and individual initiative in determining the specific directions that history takes. Moreover, they do not lessen the desirability of communism as the culmination of history, for the vanquishing of objective alienation is far better than the vanquishing of no alienation.

October 31

Most intelligent people are currently asking, "Why do so many Americans support George Bush?" The answer is simple. Americans see themselves reflected in Georgie; they can relate to him. They see Gore as arrogant, and arrogance is politically incorrect because it is incompatible with a belief in equality—and so Americans interpret Gore's condescension as a personal affront. They feel sympathy for Bush, so they're going to elect him president.

It's a bad sign when the herd identifies with its leaders. [Ugh, stop with the Nietzscheanism.]

(later) I've read only a third of Torrance's book, but I'm taking a break from it. I've been focusing too much on Marxism lately; I should read about other philosophies. Like postmodernism.

I've decided that the focus of my senior thesis isn't going to be my theory of history; it's going to be the philosophical and psychological framework for my later studies. Specifically, I want to develop a theory of truth (or adapt one from already existing theories), epistemology, psychology in general (although primarily psychoanalysis, and its relation to biology etc.), metaphysics (if possible), language, and other secondary issues.

(later) I'm reading about Wittgenstein's philosophy. What a pity I didn't read more philosophy when I was in high school, instead of wasting my time trying to "change" myself! Four years down the drain! Gone forever. And my childhood—what happened to that idyllic phase of life? 25% of my life is already over. *Never again* will I be the exuberant, innocent boy who overflowed with personality and joy. […]

Time is depressing.

November 1

The book on Wittgenstein is boring, so I'm reading *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*. I *should* skip this introduction to his philosophy and instead plunge right into *The World as Will and Representation*, but Wesleyan doesn't seem to have any decent copies of the latter.

November 3

I'm twenty years old. Whoop-dee-doo.

November 5

On Friday night (November 3rd) I went to a CSS party. Had eight or nine shots of rum in less than an hour; then I walked to another party. I talked to as many people as I could during the hour or two in which I could still stand up, and at 3:00 I vomited into the bushes several times. I then proceeded to sit on some steps away from everyone and bawl for perhaps an hour—but not out of self-pity. Out of self-hatred. […] Somehow I managed to return to the dorm, undress, throw up in the bathroom, and fall asleep instantaneously (at 5:00). I woke up later in the morning, noticed there was a bit of vomit on the floor next to my bed, inferred that I had thrown up in my sleep, and proceeded to throw up violently into a toilet. For the entire day I alternated between light sleep and the most overwhelming bouts of vomiting I have ever experienced. Whenever I drank a cup of water I vomited it out ten minutes later. […] I even apologized profusely to my body!—for causing it to undergo so much pain and at the same time to 'correct' my unbelievable stupidity. I didn't sleep much during the night, but at 10:00 a.m. I could finally eat without getting sick.

Never have I been as violently sick as I was this weekend. I was literally shaking *almost uncontrollably* at times. I was transported to a realm in which nausea is the only law of existence, in which there is no time, no space, and one's thoughts are only thoughts of nausea. It didn't help that I was unable to vomit 'naturally', so I had to stick my finger into the back of my throat—not a pleasant feeling—to provoke the convulsions that generally resulted in mere dry heaves. On the whole I think I vomited (fruitfully) at least thirty or forty times. The scary thing is that apparently I threw up *while partly unconscious*: I must have leaned over, ejected a few bits of food, and fallen asleep again. I could have choked!

How could I have been stupid enough to drink so much in such a short period of time? Nobody else was doing this binge drinking. Did I think the shots were too small to have much of an effect? Was I thinking *at all?*

Still, I'm glad it happened (and not only because of the lesson it taught me). I was so sick I couldn't distinguish between my nausea and a perverse form of mysticism. At times I felt as if I'd penetrated to the deepest truths of life. I recognized that humans are fundamentally *animals*, and that self-consciousness—the distinguishing mark of humanity—is just superimposed onto an animal existence. Self-consciousness and even *life* are so delicate that they're *inessential*. This realization (together with my nausea) was so depressing that I was thankful there were no lethal weapons in my room to tempt me. I wouldn't have used them, but the thought occurred to me quite a few times.

I think I've gained a certain humility from the experience. As I wallowed in self-hatred/self-pity I felt sure that I had been repressing this mild self-contempt my entire life, and that I had needed this sublime bout of drunkenness to release my unconscious from its repression and thereby make me a more mentally healthy person. For at this moment I do feel more mentally balanced—more at peace with myself—than I have in a long time.

But self-hatred is far too strong a term. More accurately, I think I recognize that I am and will remain unable to cope with certain aspects of modern life, with many of its responsibilities and mechanical necessities. I definitely can't cope with them alone, without a wife or a close friend or my parents. I'm too irresponsible, absentminded and dreamy not to go insane from battling mundane reality alone. I'm too childlike. […]

Ahh, but I am *indescribably* glad to be alive and healthy! This will wear off soon, but the legacy of Friday night will remain: I have been brought a little closer to myself through the greatest physical hardship of my life.

(later) I'd like never to get drunk again. I hate the animal aspects of existence. Yesterday this hatred, which had previously been unsure of itself, was shocked into a prolonged existence precisely because I reverted to a nearly animal state of being. Drugs and alcohol, which appeal to our subhuman qualities, always provoke the temporary death of who I am ideally, so I intend to shun them for the rest of my life. And if I could I would repress my knowledge of the excremental function and the material basis of life[1]—just as Jonathan Swift wanted to do. ("Oh, Celia, Celia, Celia *shits*!") How can I fall in love with someone who shits?

November 8

I just found out that Bush is going to be the next president. I'm mystified that half of the country was dumb enough to vote for him, but when all is said and done, these little shifts of power from one party to another will hardly affect the future revolutionary movement at all. Capitalism is irrevocably heading toward its own destruction. What matters a decade here or a decade there?

(later) Praise the Lawd! I bought a screenwriting program, edited my screenplay, and now I've printed it! I cut it down from 169 pages to 121. Tomorrow I'll mail it to the only agent who's interested. And tonight I'll scour the internet for agents I haven't contacted.

I feel so free right now! I feel divine! My life is ideal! Just think: *for the rest of the night* I can do whatever I want! *For the rest of my life* I can do whatever I want! What has caused this surge of adrenaline? The knowledge that....*I am alive*. My life is under my own control. I am one of the most privileged people on Earth, certainly one of the most fortunate. I am ambitious in the best sense of the word: my goal is nothing less than perfection. I am living in the most exciting era of human history. I recognize to a wonderful extent that I am *a part of history*, that history is one long continuous process, that by my mere existence I am directly related to Aristotle. Philosophy and music are my passions: I am a disciple of the mind. Every day I experience more of life, and my fascination increases.

(later) One of the main reasons for my envy of boys who've had sex with girls is that the latter have blatantly exposed their animal aspects to the former. Nothing can be more intimate than allowing another to experience one's animal nature, for in a perverse way it is the *soul.* Nothing is more truly human—and hence *separate* from everyone else, *private*—than the animal aspects of being. Eventually I'll have to conquer my distaste for them; the only way this can happen is by working them into an all-encompassing philosophy.

November 9

Here's a conundrum: why is it I who exist rather than someone else? What connection is there between *this self-consciousness*[2] and the neurons that are related to it? Why do they produce this self-consciousness and not another? And how can there be different self-consciousnesses? My question isn't concerned with the relationship between cells and self-consciousness in general; only with this particular

[1] No, that would be cowardly.

[2] Or perhaps I should say existence, for in a way there would be no existence at all if I didn't exist. But this is a truism.

combination of cells and *me*. The question is unresolvable, I suspect, for in order to answer it we must first understand the connection between neurons and self-consciousness *in general*.

The book on Schopenhauer is excellent.

Isn't it strange that at my age I'm more of a genuine philosopher than most professional ones? "What is a genuine philosopher?" you ask. Here's what Schopenhauer thought:

> [Schopenhauer] came to feel that the most important difference between academic philosophers and real ones was that the former encountered and acquired their philosophical problems conceptually, by study, and the latter existentially, by involuntary reflection on their existence and experience. For the former, philosophy is entirely a verbal activity, a matter of reading and writing, of talking and listening: for the latter, the most important parts of it are rooted in non-verbal being and living, and have something profoundly in common with creative art. For the former, philosophy is an illuminating interest and an enjoyable, serious pursuit: for the latter, it is inseparable from life itself, and may be a matter of life and death. The former might make good teachers, but only the latter are likely to make original contributions to the subject.... Philosophy as an academic subject comes to be the means whereby [professors] are provided with a living for themselves and their families, a post in a respected social institution, a professional reputation, prestige, a pension, even administrative authority and power over subordinates.... 'For a being who thinks, it is a precarious position to stand on one those numberless spheres freely floating in boundless space, without knowing whence or whither, and to be only one of innumerable similar beings that throng, press, and toil, restlessly and rapidly arising and passing away in beginningless and endless time.' To see this as a vast riddle pressing on the human mind for solution is something that happens occasionally, in glimpses, to most people. But a few are bewitched and engrossed by it. Among these are some of the great artists, great philosophers, great religious thinkers—and these comprise, in Schopenhauer's assessment, 'the noblest portion of mankind in every age and in every country.'

Without hesitation I can say that I'll always be bewitched by the great questions. I would sacrifice 'happiness', wealth, love, honors, health, family, a home, only to pursue and gain insights into the fundamental problems of existence. Life never ceases to amaze me, particularly as I grow older.

It's because of this unquenchable thirst for "wisdom" that I have grave doubts about whether I'll attend graduate school. College is bad enough, but graduate school...?

God damn college! It's nothing but busywork!

November 11

I finished that book. Schopenhauer's philosophy sounds monumental, brilliant, as well as astonishingly similar to Buddhist thought—and to certain of the thoughts I reached this summer, particularly with regard to music and the like. I'm nearly convinced that Schopenhauer, in many respects, reached the truths of existence. [Ugh. Luckily, like Nietzsche, I eventually saw the truth about Schopenhauer.]

My next task is to read Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and Max Black's 400-page commentary on it. Then I'll read a book by some guy named Kwant on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. After that I'll familiarize myself with the overarching themes of postmodernism, and then I'll probably read a book on Nietzsche's philosophy of nature. I imagine that from there I'll return to Schopenhauer, but this time to the man himself: his masterpiece *The World as Will and Representation*. After reading this I'll inquire more seriously into transcendental idealism, which at the moment seems to me an eminently sensible philosophy, but which I want to be *sure* is true before engaging in other philosophical undertakings.

The more I acquaint myself with philosophy, the more muddled yet exhilarated I become. Sometimes it's an intolerable feeling: for brief moments I perceive what must be the true nature of reality

according to transcendental idealism, and before the insight vanishes it nearly crushes me.

November 13

I've read forty pages of Black's commentary, but most of what he talks about I'm not sufficiently acquainted with to....understand. So I'm not going to read the *Tractatus* yet; instead, I'm skimming through a book called *Wittgenstein: An Introduction*, and then I'm going to read one called *The Metaphysics of the Tractatus*.

November 15

The opening of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto is more overwhelming than anything I have ever heard. Life would be pointless without it.

Sometimes I wonder if the desire to live in the moment is based on a confusion, viz. that we can't *not* live in the moment. It sounds trivial and stupid, but it has paradoxical implications. For when we're eighty years old we'll be living in the moment in the same way we are at the age of twenty—when it seems to us that our life hasn't really *happened*. If it weren't for my memory, high school wouldn't have happened. I might as well have just been born and then transported to this moment, for this moment is all that has ever really existed. We might as well just skip over all of life and arrive at the moment before our death, for this is essentially what happens anyway. Past and future, somehow, don't exist—never have and never will. We travel through life and arrive at the moment before our death, but in a weird way it is all a dream, for the instant after anything has occurred....it hasn't occurred. It has become a dream, a figment of our imagination recorded in something called "memory". For time, insofar as it exists at all, is not 'linear'; it does not 'travel'; all that exists or has existed is the present.

If you understand what I'm trying to say you'll realize, with Wittgenstein, that mysticism is the only solution to philosophical dilemmas. But not even mysticism is a *true* solution. Consequently, we philosophers are cursed; we are a painful reminder of the tragedy of the human condition.

Nothing is more humbling than the following two truths: Mankind is *irrelevant*, and *consequently*, the universe is irrelevant.

(later) There is something inherently sad and poignant about masturbation.

November 17

This journal is a one-dimensional portrait of me. I am not *alive* in it; it's only my thoughts that are recorded, and generally these come across as far gloomier than I actually feel. Indeed, I often wonder if my 'truer' self is the good-natured one present in nearly everything I do outside my journal or the disagreeable one portrayed in the latter. There seems to be a vast difference between the two. I suppose it's in the nature of writing to crystallize one's states of being, make them seem hard and permanent, even if they're purely momentary phenomena that are transcended as soon as they've been recorded. For such is invariably what happens right after I've written 'unpleasant' thoughts (such as advocating the demise of the masses): I cease to take them seriously and instead treat them only as intriguing relics of a foreign state of mind. Actually, I rarely take them seriously even as I write them; they just sound so depressing (and, occasionally, evil) that I laugh at them.

Nonetheless, I never intentionally mislead you; I just exaggerate. It's foolish and reflects poorly on me, but it's fun!

So I suppose that my good-natured self is the truer me. But this doesn't mean I don't experience occasional episodes of depression, or that I don't often feel some manifestation of disgust for people. Similarly, a major reason for my love of certain music is that it encourages my excessive good nature to

forsake me for a while, to leave me in peace with my "inner being".

(later) To clarify why my sentiments in this journal appear harsh even though they generally feel light-hearted: it is because *language is crude*. Language lies. It can *never* convey the subtlety of inner states of mind, as I've often reiterated. Thus, merely that my thoughts sometimes *read* as if they were written by a serial killer doesn't mean I have much in common with people of that caliber.

November 18

Today I'm going home for Thanksgiving break.

November 26

I'm back. While I was at home I (1) began studying German; (2) started reading two books about Indian philosophy (see above book list); (3) read Kwant's book on Merleau-Ponty for fifteen minutes and then stopped permanently, due to Kwant's childish writing; and (4) interested myself in physics—specifically, quantum mechanics and general relativity, which have profound philosophical implications.

On that note, I've realized that two-and-a-half years is not nearly enough time for me to work out the foundations of my future philosophy. Hence, once again, I have no idea what to write my thesis on.

I'm starting to notice more often that *every day* life essentially reintroduces itself to me. It's not as though I've returned to a state of childlike bliss, but I'm eternally fascinated with reality and the "truths" behind it all. This is a main reason that I still have a healthy outlook on life despite my inability to find a girlfriend (and friends in general).

German, by the way, is a fun language. And very expressive.

November 27

I'd intended to read an anthology of Kierkegaard's works, but since my interest in cosmological and metaphysical themes has been reawakened I'm going to keep reading Indian philosophy and *The World as Will and Representation.*

November 28

The strategy I'm following with regard to my academic work is to spend a day or two each week writing and reading for my classes;[1] the rest of the time I read philosophy.

(later) I've decided to read Schopenhauer's *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* before I tackle *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*.

November 30

America's economic sanctions on Iraq and Cuba are, to put it mildly, evil. How can Clinton and Albright endure the knowledge that because of them, millions of people are suffering? They have the power to end the sanctions, so their inaction is actually the worst form of action. [Um, it wasn't "inaction."] They're wretched hypocrites (as are most Democrats).

As I listen to Franz Schubert's impromptus, it occurs to me that one of the greatest tragedies in the

[1] Of course, I'm reading fewer than half the books I'm supposed to.

history of music was the ludicrously early death of that man (at 31).

December 3

Those philosophers, among them Nietzsche and Wittgenstein (?), who proclaimed the end of metaphysics were I think unjustified in doing so. It seems impossible to end speculation about the nature of the world, just as it seems impossible for there *not to be* a 'true' nature of the world.

December 6

When I read *Faust* I feel *clean*. I feel elevated far above myself, cleansed of everything ordinary. This state of mind is similar to that when I listen to some of Mozart's pieces[1]—but not to many of Beethoven's more famous ones. That may sound odd, but Beethoven (and much other Romantic music, excepting some of Chopin's) affects me in a 'deeper', less light-hearted, less 'pristine', less *classical*, more emotional and/or introspective way. Maybe the distinction I'm making between composers is unfounded, but the distinction between the two states of mind certainly isn't.

Anyway, my point is that *Faust* is magnificent. Nevertheless, I've always hated analyzing every sentence of a poem for its possible symbolism. And I often get the feeling that trying to enjoy "the moment" by reading poetry is futile, for the moment never lasts. Moreover, when this misgiving gets in the way of whatever enjoyment I might nevertheless be experiencing, it causes me to enjoy the activity even *less*. I'm too damned obsessed with accomplishing things. (Indeed, am I reading Goethe's drama only because I want to be cultured? Is it only to increase my self-esteem?)

December 10

The "Classical Walpurgis Night" in *Faust* is rather difficult to understand. If it weren't for the commentaries I've read I'd have no idea what any of it means. One day, after I've acquainted myself with the majority of world literature, I'll reread the play.

December 15

Fascists were brain-dead. Read the following quotations:

> There do not exist things important and things unimportant. There is only duty.
>
> Mussolini is always right.
>
> The supreme gifts of synthesis, intuition, revelation, are denied to us; they belong rightly to the hero and to none other. And if there is no hero in a country, darkness is upon the land.
>
> To be a Fascist is, of all things, the most difficult in the world.
>
> Fascism may finally furnish man with the long-sought solution of the riddle of life.
>
> Discipline is the sunshine of armies. It prepares and illuminates the victories.

[1] Parts of *The Magic Flute*, for example.

One thing must be dear to you above all: the life of the Duce.

The Fascist State is a will to power and to government—

—and Fascism is a will to stupidity.[1]

December 19

Today I bought a CD called "The Best of Boccherini". I've never heard of the man, but he's a genius! [Um, no.] He composed during the Rococo period; hence his music is even more lighthearted than Mozart's. It's splendid.

In an hour I'm going home for a month. Kaitlyn is leaving Wesleyan today forever; she's spending the rest of her college years at Barnard. She doesn't like the social situation here.

January 22

I'm back. Christmas vacation was, on the whole, more enjoyable this year than last. […]

During the vacation I read some philosophy. I would have read more had I not burned myself out by the last week. The following are some notes I took.

> The truly great don't need to rely on 'objective', material suffering to realize themselves; they have their subjective suffering. Hence communism, the abolition of material suffering, facilitates the emergence of greatness by getting rid of useless distractions. (I.e., Nietzsche was wrong.)
>
> *Basis* of the dialectic?!? Fundamental law of the psyche? of nature?
>
> Is there a specific reason, rooted in the nature of humanity, for the overwhelming presence of *dualities* rather than 'trialities' (etc.) in philosophy? Original division in our nature?
>
> Constant reading: incredibly *easy.* An escape from the pain of thinking.
>
> To gaze upon mankind as a whole, in its relation to the universe—to see it through the cold, time-conquering light of reason—is to understand the folly of mankind most profoundly.
>
> If we 'create' the world [as according to philosophical idealism], how can there be parts of phenomena we're not aware of? For example, in Schopenhauer's philosophy how can internal organs exist if we're not directly aware of them? His answer: they don't. (?)
>
> Sartre's "bad faith" derivative of Kierkegaard (*Either/Or).*
>
> Why are depressed intellectuals sometimes the most good-natured people? Goethe, Nietzsche, Mozart, Berlioz, Kierkegaard, me.... Because these people are always childlike, and fickleness characterizes children?
>
> "Too good to be true": a depressing saying because it's so matter-of-fact.
>
> Berkeley p. 71: precursor of Schopenhauer.
>
> My destiny is to pull together the threads of all previous thinkers....
>
> Santa = miniature God. Exact parallel.
>
> Music is not an emotion. It is not the content of emotions. It merely has a more direct relation to emotions than words do.
>
> Music is the only art that's *alive*. This is why it has such emotional power. It isn't the "content" of our states of mind (as S. thinks). Drama is alive and it, too, affects us emotionally.
>
> Why would the will-in-itself strive for higher objectifications?
>
> Imagine the poets (et al) writing their poems: you realize their meaning better.

[1] Nazism and Fascism are, strictly speaking, not the same.

> I've finally 'discovered' poetry! This art form induces a very *subtle* state of mind, which is why I haven't found it particularly edifying until now.
>
> Mankind has reached maturity—and *therefore* it has now regressed, dishonestly, to immaturity. A fake immaturity.
>
> Entropy vs. dialectic (viz., striving to become something higher). They seem incompatible. Maybe they can be reconciled by applying entropy solely to individual beings, and the dialectic (in biology) to general categories.
>
> Schopenhauer thinks that people can *permanently* remain in a state of non-individuality—complete "freedom of the will" (which he defines differently than I do). See his ethics and his postulated abolition of the will-to-live. Absurd.
>
> Contradiction: I want to understand as much as I possibly can, yet I want a great deal to remain an eternal mystery to me.
>
> Writing for a potential public is always unhealthy. It breeds dishonesty and pathetic 'self-consciousness'. But in my self-deprecation I am never just putting on a show for the reader.

I also read some of Goethe's *Theory of Color* this past month, but I lost interest. And I read part of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and Fichte's *Science of Knowledge*, but since the first is very dry and the second is obscure, I gave up. For now. One day I'll read them.

Now I'm reading Kant's *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, which a philosophy professor is going to discuss with me (as part of my work-study job!).

I've come to the conclusion that Mozart was the greatest, most natural composer in history. Had he lived longer I'm sure he would have outshone Beethoven. He died at thirty-six, Beethoven at fifty-seven, and yet the two are essentially on a par in many people's minds. Imagine what Mozart would have given us in twenty more years! Furthermore, I'm convinced that he was the only person who could have composed music in *any style* after studying it: impressionism, romanticism, ragtime, expressionism, atonality. Some of his pieces are astonishingly modern. The Fugue in C minor for Two Pianos, KV 426, is more dissonant than most *contemporary* listeners could tolerate! Some of the passages in the Larghetto and Allegro in E flat for Two Pianos, KV deest, are very Chopinesque.

January 25

[…] On the other hand, lately I've been reading passages in philosophical works that would suggest I'm not just a sham. Referring to Schopenhauer and Wagner, Brian Magee says the following:

> Both of these supreme liberators were also dominators, men of ferocious and tireless will; both were polymaths, with a need to know everything and be right about everything; both were erotic to an uncommon degree, and yet each was his own man who, with respect to his creative work, never made a significant compromise once he had found his feet; each was the centre of his world, yet had a deep-rooted feeling of isolation; and although each had that engulfing zest which others found so exciting, each was deeply pessimistic in his view of ultimate reality; and in spite of that, each was unshakeably convinced of his own unique greatness in his chosen field.

Except for perhaps the last statement (and the first eight words), this is virtually a description of me. In another passage Magee praises Wagner for writing the following when he was "only" twenty-one: "The essence of dramatic art does not consist in the specific subject or point of view, but in this: that the inner kernel of all human life and action, the Idea, be brought to show." What's so great about that? It's vague and derivative. I wrote many more profound psychological and philosophical observations when I was 19.

I don't want to seem self-congratulatory. My main point is that there may be a unique side to my nature, but if so, there is also a profoundly ordinary side to every great man. Wagner tried to cultivate, on the whole, his peculiar greatness—and at the same time dishonestly drew attention to it whenever he could.

I'll do the former but not the latter, for I'm honest with myself.

January 27

God bless Paxil. Already I'm noticing a change in my attitude toward social interaction. I feel buoyant and natural.

Today I read *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, which is quite an inspiring little pamphlet. It raises a question I'd begun to neglect, namely, what is the value of truth? Must it be pursued at all costs, even when harmful to life? Grasping truth is a realization of the will to power, and because Nietzsche interprets the will to power as life itself, is the duality between being and knowing too artificial to be of importance? Is knowing just as adequate an expression of life as is being (or willing)? I certainly don't think so. Passionate intellectual/artistic creation, however, reconciles the two. Indeed, isn't this the reason that Nietzsche chose the *Übermensch* as his ideal?—that it reconciles truth and life, knowledge and being? Nevertheless, it would seem that there's a bit more *life* in it than *truth*, *willing* than *knowledge*. Maybe Nietzsche finds it beneficial solely because it is an expression of *one* truth—but the *highest* truth, viz. that the will to power is life and the *Übermensch* is the highest manifestation of the will to power. […] *[This Nietzschean stuff just devolves into meaninglessness, as you can see.]*

January 28

The *Proslogion* is a joke. It's funny to read St. Anselm's desperate attempts to reconcile the contradictions of reality with his belief in God. It's also rather pitiful. He expends an incredible amount of energy contorting words in every possible way simply to rationalize God's actions and His contradictory manifestations. This book is a compelling example of Nietzschean psychology.

The ontological proof, incidentally, if it "proves" anything at all, doesn't prove the existence of a *personal God*—only of an absolute reality (a "One"). I think Anselm confuses the two. He addresses this absolute reality as if it has a personality. Why call it God if it is actually the One that is everything and in everything? The name only propagates misunderstanding.

Mom called me a minute ago. She's excited about my probable study-abroad in Salzburg this fall—in addition to my two-month stay (June-July) in Freiburg—and I must admit that her exuberance is infectious. I'm thrilled. From the beginning of August to the middle of September I'm going to roam Europe, soak myself in its effulgence, live off the land and spend my nights in youth hostels—and visit Greece, Italy, France, Austria, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, Norway....

January 29

Notes on *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*:

Metaphysical cognition necessarily consists of synthetic a priori judgments, according to its own definition. Schopenhauer completely contradicts this; I'm inclined to think he's right. Analytic judgments essentially make explicit what is in the definition of a concept; synthetic judgments add something to a concept ("All bodies are extended" versus "Some bodies are heavy"). All analytic judgments are a priori, even if their material is empirical. Their common principle is the principle of contradiction, for this is implicit in all definitions. Mathematical propositions are synthetic a priori, for they are *necessary* and they proceed not from concepts but through the *construction* of concepts. They "go beyond the concept to that which is contained in the intuition corresponding to it." I'm not sure I agree with this, but it's important in Kant's system: it enables him to ask, instead of *Is synthetic a priori cognition possible?*, the question *How is it possible?* The answer to this question will illuminate how metaphysical cognition is possible.

January 30

Kant. "How is it possible that when I am given one concept I can go beyond it and connect another one to it that is not contained in it, and can indeed do so as though the latter *necessarily* belonged to the former?" In other words, how are synthetic a priori cognitions possible? In the sphere of pure mathematics, cognitions are based on intuition. But how can there be an intuition of an object before the object is present to the understanding (i.e., a priori)? The only way is if the intuition "contains nothing else except the form of sensibility, which in me as subject precedes the actual impressions through which I am affected by objects." Mathematics is based on the intuition of space and time. All of what Kant says here is said and proven more comprehensibly by Schopenhauer. Kant himself proves it by appealing to the apodictic certainty of mathematical propositions, which implies that they cannot be based on empirical intuitions, and by arguing that if space and time inhered in objects themselves rather than in us, we would not be able to intuit them (space and time) a priori.

Okay! Let us proceed to the second part of the main transcendental question! How is pure natural science possible? By "pure natural science" Kant means the a priori certainty of the necessity of causation, the permanence of substance, etc. Judgments of experience are "empirical judgments insofar as they have objective validity"; judgments of perception are "empirical judgments that are only subjectively valid." An example of the latter: "If the sun shines on the stone, it becomes warm." An example of the former: "The sun warms the stone." Every judgment starts out as a judgment of perception. Objective validity is a consequence of the operation of the concepts of the understanding: when judgments are subsumed under one or more of these a priori concepts they become objectively valid.

Section 22 is a useful summary of these (and more) ideas.

A pure natural science is possible because when all of the aforementioned concepts and judgments and principles (cause, substance, existence, necessity, axioms of intuition, anticipations of perception, etc.) are arranged logically they form exactly the kind of system that is necessary for science.

February 1

Last night I slipped violently on a patch of ice. My feet gave way, my hands shot out in front of me, and I almost fell flat on my face. As it was, I suffered some painful scrapes. But the first thought that entered my head, even as I was still falling, was, "I hope nobody sees me." I would have felt embarrassed and ashamed. Is that not remarkable? What does it say about me?

[…]

I've grown weary of philosophy. I've grown weary of reading. I've grown weary of being weary. I want to experience *life*. I need to escape from my wretched intellect. And I need sex more than anyone has needed sex in history.

I'm sure I've mentioned this in the past, but I am the most absentminded person one could ever aspire not to be. I'm the kind of person who accidentally almost brushes his teeth with a pen, who nearly tries to drink a yogurt. Sometimes I place a book on a tidy desk, forget where I've put it twenty seconds later, and search the desk without finding it. Half an hour later I'll notice that it was in the center of the desk all along. If Schopenhauer is right that the genius is utterly absorbed in himself and looks upon the world with a purely objective interest, well then…

February 2

People who think they see in the Russian, Chinese, Cuban, Vietnamese, and other revolutions of the Third World a refutation of Marxism are wrong. These revolutions were never Marxist, except perhaps for certain aspects of the Russian. They were, in the end, ways for poor countries to compete with capitalist

nations (i.e., enter the modern world) without adopting capitalism. Marxist language was adopted because it was convenient and it articulated their hatred of the West. Communism was never the goal of these revolutions; strong nation-states were the goal. The only historical fact that forces Marxists to revise orthodox Marxism is that a true communist revolution never happened in the West—although it came within an inch of happening in Germany. Marx didn't foresee social democracy and the welfare state. This doesn't reflect poorly on him or Marxism, for all philosophical and social theories must be revised as history progresses.

The leaders of the German Social-Democratic party after World War I were despicable cowards and pseudo-revolutionaries who could have made Germany socialist had they wanted to—and then Italy might have followed, which could have sparked a French revolution. Had this happened the future of Russian "communism" would have been very different and less brutal; all of Europe's socialist nations would have cooperated with each other and with Russia, and socialism might still exist today. No Vietnam or Korean War would have occurred. World War II wouldn't have happened, for Hitler wouldn't have had a chance to rise to power, and the Cold War wouldn't have happened either (because a socialist Europe wouldn't have been able to remain an enemy of a capitalist United States for very long). Indeed, the United States itself probably would have adopted elements of socialism during the 1920s and 1930s, in which case no Great Depression would have devastated the world.

The twentieth century could have been the greatest success story of history if the German revolutionaries had fulfilled their mission after World War I! A few pitiful individuals influenced history to this extent! Who can blame Marx for not foreseeing the likes of Eduard Bernstein? *[These two paragraphs are pure fantasy.]*

(later) Have you ever wondered what it would be like to rape a girl? Would you feel a surge of power? Would you be able to go through with it? Would you melt with compassion and feel such self-hatred that you would end your own life?

If you're the father of a teenage daughter, have you ever been curious to see her naked? Do you feel attracted to her, even *slightly*? Do you lust after her young friends?

Surely you've wondered what it would be like to kill someone. What feelings would pulse through your veins? Exhilaration? Horror? Would a single shot from a gun ruin your life?

These and similar thoughts sometimes plague me. How fragile is sanity? What monstrous world lurks beneath appearances? What is the truth: sanity or insanity? Which is reality? Should I attempt to experience insanity if it will permanently alter my perception of the world?

I'd like to go insane for a day. Indeed, I can almost imagine myself in some alternate universe killing people solely for the intellectual curiosity of it.[1] Maybe through a sheer force of will I could shut off the visceral disgust I would feel during the act. I would kill them, and then I would carve up their bodies in a kind of sadomasochistic orgy. It would be a rebellion against my inability to attain absolute meaning in life, against my inability to reach that pure realm of the spirit for which ecstasy is an inadequate term. Moreover, it would force my specious sanity to flee itself. There is undoubtedly a masochistic side to me, and brutal murder is its logical fulfillment. Perhaps I would even kill a friend in this quest to reach a perfect equanimity—in this self-overcoming rebellion against life. Underneath all our experiences is the continuous death of the moment and of these experiences themselves, and murder is simply a way to confront and amplify this necessary ontological lack. It is, paradoxically, an affirmation of life, in that it affirms and accepts the mastery-over-oneself of the aforementioned most overwhelming law of human existence. In other words, it is a miserable succumbing-to-life, but at the same time it is a triumph over life, for one affirms and *chooses* masochistic/sadistic ontological lack and despair rather than the alternative of contemptible and ignorant "contentment", which is nothing but a weak, comical flight from this ontological despair. Hence serial killing can be a triumph of the will. Of course, I eventually would kill myself as well: I wouldn't be able to tolerate the contradiction between my conscience and my acts.

Enough of these unpleasant reflections. I feel as though I'm losing my innocence and my love of life by engaging in them.

---

[1] This has nothing to do with Raskolnikov, and he didn't inspire these questions. I've been aware of them for years.

February 3

Kant's individual sentences are sometimes excruciating, but on the whole I don't find it difficult to grasp his main ideas. Nevertheless, I don't have the time or the energy to summarize the details of the twelve judgments, the twelve categories, and the four universal principles of natural science, except to say that each category corresponds to its respective judgment, and that each of the four triads of these judgments/categories corresponds to one of the four universal principles. […]

February 6

I, with Schopenhauer, believe it is completely appropriate that people are as obsessed with sex as they are. Indeed, I'm surprised they're not even *more* obsessed. Sex is at once the defeat of our most human qualities and their triumph. It is an infinite degradation of humanity and an infinite *affirmation* of it. In one basely biological and sublimely spiritual act it unites the sundry complexities of human nature. There is nothing like it; the profundity of philosophy pales in comparison.

February 7

Anselm's God reminds me of Kant's thing-in-itself, which reminds me of Schopenhauer's Will, which reminds me of the One in Indian philosophy, which reminds me of Spinoza's God, which reminds me of Hegel's Spirit, which reminds me of Fichte's Self....

February 8

Ich bin loving life at this moment, partly because je suis listening to the overture of Rossini's "The Italian in Algier". I wrote my government paper in two-and-a-half hours, I'm making friends left and right, next year I'm going to Europe, tonight I'm watching *Silence of the Lambs*, and my life is practically perfect. I can't even remember the last time I was really depressed.

(later) The problem with me is that I'm too complex to understand. Sometimes I think I experience emotions more strongly than other people, and sometimes I think I experience them much *less* strongly. But the truth is, I believe, neither of these. I am much more 'spontaneously' intellectual than emotional, but when I concentrate on my emotions and amplify them through my intellect, they can become overpowering. Thus I might say that, for example, if I fell in love with a girl I could tolerate not seeing her for a week or two, but if I deeply contemplated her beauty and perfection I would probably be consumed by a desire to touch her. Except in the case of anger, I think my emotions have to be filtered through my intellect in order to acquire the sense of urgency that characterizes them in other people.

I've realized something: I treasure music partly because it enables me to experience emotions more fully than I do otherwise. It is, in a way, an escape from the barren world of the intellect. Maybe it elevates me to the emotional level of the average person and then pushes me beyond.[1]

February 11

[1] But generally it doesn't cause me to experience genuine emotions when I otherwise wouldn't. Rather, it prolongs them, intensifies them, or simply caresses an emotionless state of mind I might be experiencing. On the other hand, it's hard to delineate the boundaries between a true emotion and an emotion-like state of mind.

Friedrich von Hayek, that pathetic cocktease of an intellectual, was so proud of himself for predicting the fall of the Soviet Union ever since the 1930s.[1] "I told them so! I told them so! But they didn't listen to me!" What an ass.

This is how I know communism is right: the masses think it's wrong.

Why do I often not pursue Truth? Because it's the only way I can pursue life.

Why do I think I'm superior? Because I know I'm inferior.

At this moment the back of my computer does not exist.

What am I? The absence of myself.

As I write these words, thousands of people are dying.

Music is the greatest art because it exists only in our imagination.

What is self-consciousness? Consciousness of nothing & unconsciousness of something.

Why is there hatred? Because there is no One.

Why is Indian philosophy wrong? Because there is hatred.

Ayn Rand's greatest gift to the world was in putting down her pen for the last time.

How do I know egoism is wrong? Because most people are egoistic.

Why are there Republicans? Because there is egoism.

Why are there Democrats? Because there is ignorance.

The music of each era characterizes that era's attitude toward life. (The same applies to individuals.)

How do I know that both materialism and idealism are wrong? Because the controversy persists.

Why am I so absent-minded? Because I am too aware of myself.

Why is there love? Because there is ignorance.

What is science? The death of the soul. [Double meaning.]

Aphorisms, even when mediocre, are fun to write. They're easy, they're a convenient way to sound original, they're a stimulant to further thought, they're an effective way to highlight contradictions in concepts, they can be poetic.... Why have I not written any until now? I suppose I thought I didn't have such a lambent wit. (Cue laughter.)

[1] He missed the mark by only fifty years.

February 12

Why do I want to write novels and became a master painter and write poetry and fall in love a hundred times and travel around the world and learn everything my mind can absorb and attempt to rival Goethe's greatness? Why do I so desire to experience life if I am aware of how fleeting experiences are? I'm genuinely puzzled. If, for the sake of argument, no one would ever know about my adventures, I would nonetheless want to experience them—which leads me to believe I would crave them only for the sake of enjoying life. But would I obsess over philosophy or write novels if posterity wouldn't be able to derive the benefits from my doing so (or if I wouldn't get any recognition)? This question is more difficult. Why try to accomplish things if these accomplishments won't last beyond my lifetime? Would Goethe have done so?[1] I don't know, but I'm almost certain I would. If intellectual creation is one of the most perfect ways of living a rewarding life, then I believe I would create only to fulfill myself. I would not spend my life contemplating the One or trying to reach perfect equanimity; this would dilute my zest for living. I would live as Goethe lived, periodically philosophizing and periodically *willing*, alternating between the extremes, observing and creating.

Since my achievements fortunately will be transmitted to future generations, I can say with certainty that not only *would* I live as I have described, but: I *will* thus live.

Individualism has become a cultural obsession because the individual no longer exists.

The masses are able to deny greatness because they instinctively recognize it.

Conservatives hate Fascism because it makes them look bad.

What is the one thing for which society's desire increases as it is sated? The entirety of capitalist commodities.

Contemporary individualism is wrong because it defeats itself.

Mankind will destroy itself one day. How do I know? The twentieth century tells me so.

And then what will happen? The cycle will begin anew....

In a sense, no number of Holocausts can be as tragic as this final thought: One individual is rolling on his rocking chair, listening to Chopin's *Berceuse*, sighing. All around is silence. The individual looks at his watch. "It's time," he whispers. He places a pill onto his tongue, washes it down with a gulp of water, and stares straight ahead. A painting of a bygone era hangs on his wall: a superhighway is cluttered with automobiles, and in the distance are the faces of four American presidents carved into a cliff, smiling down upon the world in benevolent wisdom. The *Berceuse* ends. The individual dies. And music dies with him.

February 13

> *Faith in oneself.*— Few people have faith in themselves. Of these few, some are endowed with it as with a useful blindness or a partial eclipse of their spirit (what would they behold if they could see to the bottom of themselves!), while the rest have to acquire it. Everything good, fine, or great they do is first of all an argument against the skeptic inside them. They have to convince or persuade *him*, and that almost requires genius. These are the great self-dissatisfied people.

[1] I propose that the famous expression be changed from "What would Jesus do?" to "What would Goethe do?"

Am I one of the deluded ones or the self-dissatisfied ones? Certainly I am engaged in an eternal battle against my own awareness of my intellectual inadequacies, but I also have a kernel of faith in myself. This faith is less natural than my "skepticism". It is based on objectifications of my thoughts, whereas my *lack* of faith in myself is an immediate consequence of my own self-consciousness. Yet there is, on the other hand, a fundamental hope or faith that never dies, which too is a consequence of my self-consciousness. It is the deluded aspect of me. The more accessible and immediate skepticism is the self-dissatisfied part of me, and not even genius will conquer it. I will always be dissatisfied with myself; this is what will necessitate the Faustianity[1] of my existence.

I can't get enough of Nietzsche:

> The secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is—to live dangerously! Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas! Live at war with your peers and yourselves! Be robbers and conquerors as long as you cannot be rulers and possessors, you seekers of knowledge! Soon the age will be past when you could be content to live hidden in forests like shy deer. At long last the search for knowledge will reach out for its due; it will want to rule and possess, and you with it!

(later) I saw the Vagina Monologues. The actresses had such talent and courage that I couldn't help but *bleed* admiration for them. There was such *poetry* in their voices that I felt nothing written by Nietzsche could compare with them. And the simple profundity of the interviews staged by the girls, their exquisite candor, the plaintive moans of the rape victim, the heart-rending self-confidence of the old woman: it was all an artistic whole.

After listening to such art I would almost like to become an aesthete, an eroticist, rather than a philosopher. Life lies in the vagina; death in philosophy. The vernal meadows of youth in the vagina; the broken twigs of wisdom in philosophy.

And now....sadness lies in Chris....

But sadness accomplishes nothing; we must press onward. The concepts of the understanding have no other use than to make experience possible, so we cannot use them to explain objects in themselves. The antinomies of pure reason arise from applying these concepts to the noumena. Thus, determinism applies to appearances, but freedom, which is the absence of causality, applies to things in themselves. Hence we are free even though our psyche is empirically determined by necessity. This doctrine is rather obscure; I'll ask my professor to clarify it.

Incidentally, if the word "God" weren't used in ontological proofs for His existence, I and most other atheists would agree with the claims of these proofs. I'm skeptical that they actually *prove* anything, but I agree that there is something-greater-than-which-nothing-can-be-thought, namely the true nature of the world. Maybe it's will, maybe it's pure energy—but it must be there all the same.

February 14

A bunch of random crappy "poems":

the firefly
winks at me
and is gone

the breath
of the sacred night—
swiftly am i cleansed

[1] Faustianity would be a truer religion than Christianity.

the musical note
carelessly brushes my cheek
and I unfold

across the hall
a brutish boy and sickly girl
commingle their souls

i ask myself Why
—and the Empty answers

why does she
not look my way
and we embrace

what empty confidence
i can hear
in the squawk of the crow

what keen despair
is there
in the sick silence

i laugh out loudly
at the miserable joke
as others do the same

the clitoris
is a bundle of nerves
that houses the soul

screeching laughter
far off in the distance;
girls travel in flocks

snowflakes moisten my hair
—nature's substitute for chopin

a furious car screams
as an eagle soars above;
somewhere someone is impatient

sweat on the keyboard—
a person has lived here;
frigid rain outside

twinkling street lamp
glistening
in a bottomless pit

hello
hello
....goodbye forever

two hills rise and fall
as the verdant earth breathes
—my inspiration

Haiku are startlingly fun to write. As poems they can be very effective, but only if the reader is in a wistful mood. Otherwise they seem silly and pretentious. One should listen to the *Berceuse* as one reads haiku.

Lately I haven't wanted to read literature; I've wanted only to create it. But what good is such creation? Humanity has plenty of literature already. It doesn't need more mediocre poems!

February 16

Extroverted people are popular because they're a distraction.

Capitalism has lasted longer than expected because people *need to be stunted* more than Marx understood.

God used to be the projection of our will to power. Now the System is. Conclusion: the masses have never had faith in themselves.

Why capitalism? Autonomy is scary.

Why capitalism? Chimpanzees are our nearest relatives.

I am the last humanist.

(later) I talked with Rebecca on the phone for half an hour; it was fun. (She has the voice of a young Aphrodite!) Generally I hate phones, but they do make me feel 'freer' than usual. Tomorrow we're watching a movie at the theater in town. Hopefully this friendship will last my whole lifetime.

I love girls. Nearly everything about them. Romantically, of course, I am rather obsessed with them, but even on less sexual levels I find them fun and sweet and sensitive and lovely to be around.

February 18

Most people have a hidden interest in philosophy. Sometimes I talk to them about metaphysics, and as soon as I explain the insoluble problems involved in both realism and idealism, these "ordinary" people become very engaged and propose solutions that I then argue against. For brief moments their eyes light up and they shake their heads in befuddlement. […]

Philosophy! How easy it is to engage in this activity! The only requirement for such an inclination is that one never leaves childhood. One merely continues to ask the big questions without getting sidetracked by boring practical pursuits. I often think it's more of an accomplishment to move *beyond* philosophy than to obsess over it—for this obsession is so *easy*—but I suppose that for most people the opposite is the true challenge. And yet I can't understand how *that* could be a challenge!

February 20

Das Kapital's most entertaining passages are its most vicious. Referring to the ancient Greek thinkers, Marx writes the following:

> Oh those heathens! They understood nothing of political economy and Christianity, as the learned Bastiat discovered, and before him the still wiser MacCulloch. They did not, for example, comprehend that machinery is the surest means of lengthening the working day. They may perhaps have excused the slavery of one person as a means to the full human development of another. But they lacked the specifically Christian qualities which would have enabled them to preach the slavery of the masses in order that a few crude and half-educated parvenus might become 'eminent spinners', 'extensive sausage-makers' and 'influential shoe-black dealers'.

Intellectual giants like Marx will always be necessary, if only to illuminate the shallowness of everyone else.

The following is a short essay I wrote for my Philosophy of Religion course.

> In the *Proslogion* St. Anselm postulates as the decisive criterion of truth a moment of illumination in the mind of the seeker. He borrows this analogy from Plato, who, in the *Republic*, uses as an example of this illumination our intuitive certainty that the angles of a triangle must equal 180 degrees. Nothing could be more certain. We cannot really *argue* for this truth, except insofar as it is necessary to define our terms correctly; we just *know* that a triangle has 180 degrees. This is the sense in which Anselm believes that everyone must know the existence of God once he understands what it entails. This paper will argue that the metaphor of illumination is useful, but that it is not appropriate for determining whether God exists.
>
> The question is, does this so-called illumination really provide a measure of truth? The majority of accepted truths—such as natural selection as the mechanism of evolution, or the Big Bang as the origin of the universe—do not have the distinctive quality of *necessity*, which is what arithmetic, for example, has. Indeed, not even our own existence is as necessary as the equation 2 + 2 = 4, for it is certainly conceivable that we might not have existed, whereas it is inconceivable that at one time 2 + 2 did not equal 4. This equation is an eternal truth, in that it *could not be any other way*. My own existence is not a truth of this caliber.
>
> So what is the difference between the two kinds of truths? Kant would say that the necessary kind is *a priori*, and the unnecessary kind *a posteriori*. The first is, on the one hand, either part of a thing's definition or implied in the definition, or, on the other hand, is necessary as a result of our direct intuitions of space and time. Mathematics is a consequence of the latter reason. The second type of truth is based merely on experience. Thus, it is true that trees exist, but since I can only arrive at this statement after having seen the trees myself, they are not as necessary as arithmetic. I can conceive of a world in which they do not exist, just as I can conceive of a world in which I do not exist. Hence it is only *a priori* truths that are illuminating in the sense that Anselm means.
>
> Anselm's argument for God is, fortunately for him, *a priori*, and so his ontological proof has passed the first test. But the existence of a thing, which is what he is proving, has been shown to be an *a posteriori* claim—so how can God's existence be *necessary?*
>
> God is and is in everything, but he cannot be reduced to anything. He is the reason for the world's existence. In this sense He can be compared to Schopenhauer's will, Kant's thing-in-itself, the One in Indian philosophy, and perhaps Fichte's Self. However, it is probable that neither Schopenhauer nor Kant would say that their distinctive concepts are necessary in the sense in which geometrical equations are. They are, indeed, necessary as *a posteriori* foundations for existence, but it is easily conceivable that there is no necessity for existence to exist. Such a thought is essentially no different than the thought of one's own non-existence, for if one did not exist, there

would literally *be no existence* for one. As Kant stated, it is impossible for existence to be involved in a thing's definition, and in all cases except mathematics, it is only the *definition* of a thing which is *a priori* necessary. Hence God may be necessary if the world is to exist, for Anselm includes Him in the definition of the world, but since there is no reason that the world necessarily exists, there is no reason why God necessarily exists. In other words, Anselm is wrong: understanding God's existence is not equivalent to experiencing an illumination similar to the kind involved in geometrical reasoning.

Given that the world exists, however, it is quite appropriate for Anselm to assert the existence of a God, provided that he does not invest this God with attributes (which he does). This God is none other than the ground of reality, and it is indeed certain that reality must have a ground. This is an instance of a fundamental principle of logic, namely the principle of sufficient reason, which declares that there must be some kind of a reason (or a cause) for everything. Hence Anselm's God, divested of his goodness, justice, mercy, and all other attributes that rightfully apply only to humans and an anthropomorphic God, is equivalent to the thing-in-itself, the One, or the will-in-itself. They are all different names for the cause and the essence of the universe, and since this essence is outside of our experience, concepts cannot apply to it.

In conclusion, the metaphor of illumination is indeed very useful as a criterion for *a priori* truths, but it is inappropriate when applied to anything *a posteriori*. All existence, even that of God, is included in the latter category. Hence God, like the universe, is completely unnecessary, but insofar as the universe exists He exists as well.

I would *love* to read Aeschylus for the next few weeks, but I don't have time. I have to do work for two philosophy courses, a music class, an intense economics class, my work-study job, a "comprehensive exam" study group,[1] and I have to learn German.

I'd like to become fluent in French, German, Italian, and Latin.

February 22

Tonight during dinner I sat next to a lovely girl who was eating alone. As it turned out, she's the type of person who adores punk rock. Need I say more? Our conversation didn't have much momentum.

The more one adheres to the masses, the less one adheres to oneself.

Why? asked the young boy. Because! answered God. The young boy grinned, and God was heard no more.

Artists who have no genius hope they will at least be called "original". They crave attention, and thus, like the charlatan John Cage, refute their own ostensible artistry.

There are two rules to which scientists should pay heed: (1) gather all the evidence and (2) know that this is impossible.

An appropriate motto for science: "I defer to philosophy."

An appropriate motto for philosophy: "Ye fools, enter here."

An appropriate motto for fools: "We exist not." [Double meaning.]

[1] At the end of the year we CSS sophomores have a series of exams whose scores are our grades for the entire academic year.

Kant postulated a transcendental ego because our own nothingness is too scary to be true.

Is there objective truth? Damned if I know—what that question means.

It is very easy to judge someone. It is very difficult to do so and not be a hypocrite.

(later) For some reason it is usually only through considerations involving friendship or love that I can induce a sort of passion in myself. During high school this was definitely true, as can be seen from my diary. Although I doubtless exaggerated my melancholy at times, I genuinely was quite an unhappy person much of the time—primarily because of loneliness. Similarly, last year I was often lonely, and it was this that incited me to write all those repetitive and boring pages of lamentation. This year I have not felt nearly such a surfeit of loneliness as in the past, and so my journal has grown rather cerebral, in spite of the passages signifying a revolt against this blandness. I am, of course, as alone as ever, but this no longer carries with it so much regret.[1]

Nevertheless, a few minutes ago, as I was thinking about Rebecca and my friendship-love for her, I regressed to that saturnine state of yearning I once knew so well. I was surprised. Had I felt this emotion as often last year as my journal suggests? No wonder I wrote like such a bore! This emotion would obsess anyone who was at all sensitive, particularly if music raised it to the level that it sometimes achieved in me. How had I forgotten this state of mind?

Friendships are not worth much if friends do not periodically remind one another how much they need each other. I was very aware of this last year, but I seem to have slid into a miserable ease as I became more philosophical. Soon I'll have to reassure Rebecca of her own importance in my life; otherwise I'll begin to feel corrupt.

February 24

The more concerts and performances I see, the more impressed I am by people's talents. It is truly astounding. Dancers and singers in particular have my admiration. However, I believe that nearly all of us could reach an impressive level in an art if we cultivated our latent talents—which I think most of us have—at an early age. Many of us have the potential to be semi-universal human beings, and it testifies to the inhumanity of our society that so few ever attain this level. Pop culture is a virus. I want a new classicism, a modern ancient Greece and a postmodern Enlightenment. I want a "community of equals who are different" (a famous definition of democracy). I want a reincarnation of all the highlights of human history in a single century. I want a new golden age such as the world has never seen, and so protracted that it will end only with the end of our species.

Here's a question that has bothered me for a long time: to what extent are humans determined by the environment in which they mature, and to what extent do they have permanent characteristics that cannot be altered by altering the form of a society or changing the conditions in which they grow up? Nurture vs. nature. In many respects the Greeks were similar to people today, and yet it must be partially true that the form of a society determines human nature. [No; human *behavior*.] But to what *extent* is it true? If we operate on psychoanalytic principles, I suspect that the basic human "drives" remain eternally the same, but their more appropriate sublimations vary between historical epochs. Thus the love instinct manifested itself differently among the Greeks that it did among 12th-century Europeans. If the United States in the twentieth century has approached or surpassed the openness with which Athenians generally discussed love and sex, it is primarily because ancient Athens was a kind of mass society (with a direct democracy), and the United States is a *pure* mass society. (There are many obvious considerations that establish this correlation between mass society and sexual liberation.) […]

[1] On the other hand, last year I often enjoyed being alone.

Anyway, similarities between an early and a late society do not invalidate historical materialism.

February 25

I've discovered the reason for music's ability to tap our emotions: sound is an extremely personal mode of communication. We become used to inferring people's emotions by listening to such things as quiverings in their voice or confidence in their manner of speaking, and so an art whose sole object is to manipulate and enhance these subtle 'vocal' modulations through various media achieves a closer relation to the emotions than do other arts. Music exploits our acquired sensitivity to sound as a particularly effective method of expressing ourselves; this sensitivity comes from years of listening to and conversing with people. Neither sight nor smell nor taste nor touch are born from the womb of the emotions, as sound is.

February 26

Life requires too much blind faith in the future.

I'm very confused and not exceptionally happy at this time of my life. Few of my beliefs have a firm foundation, especially not the philosophical ones. I have a compulsion to be *sure* that I'm right in whatever I believe, but currently I don't know if I'm right about anything.

An epiphany completely unrelated to this just hit me: the reason I was obsessed for five years with making hundreds of impractical resolutions to change myself is that this was the only way to make myself feel inspired. It was how I kept an interest in life, for every time I made a resolution I felt gloriously happy and inspired. I always relapsed into reality, but this only led to new explosions of inspiration.

But now existence is tiring me. Rarely do I feel the kind of stimulation I once did. Nothing the world can offer will slake my boundless ambition. Eternal life itself would be infinitely inadequate.

What is greatness? How should one define this term? Psychologically, how large is the difference between Goethe and the masses? It is almost surely very small, and probably most people could make it smaller if they would only cultivate themselves. [Well, it would help if they were as incredibly privileged as Goethe was.]

February 27

The drive toward various types of unity is an excellent candidate for the title "Most Universal Force in Existence." It seems to be everywhere. In fact, I think that "entropy"—the hypothesis of which I've always found a little unscientific—can itself be interpreted as a perverse way of returning to an original state of unity. If so, the dialectic and entropy can probably be reconciled by hypothesizing that the two are merely different ways of reaching the same essential goal. The goal of the dialectic is always a higher synthesis, and the goal of entropy is unification on a 'lower' or 'earlier' (more primitive) level. This leaves hundreds of questions unanswered, but it's a stimulus toward further thought.

My ambition is to write a complete history of existence, from the dawn of the universe to the present day. But it will not only be a history; it will provide an *explanation* of everything that can be explained. This multi-volume work will occupy much of my life, for I'll have to become an expert in most areas of thought, but I don't think it's an impossible task. It is, of course, more ambitious than anything anyone has ever attempted, but I see its implausibility rather as an argument *for* it than *against*.

(later) I've always been puzzled as to why Goethe and Nietzsche so insist that giving form to one's passions—indeed, to every aspect of one's life—is a supremely important part of living, but I suppose the answer is simple: for Goethe, it is a microcosmic realization of nature's achieving Order out of Chaos; and for both Nietzsche and Goethe it signifies that a person has power over his passions. But I still don't know why they see this as more important than overcoming time by letting the passions exert their full force in a

single divine moment.[1] There would not be "form" in such a moment, but who cares? A concern with form seems comparatively trivial.

February 28

I'm getting my second wind. Finally I'm going to buckle down and study German. I'm going to read the textbook every day.

I'm also going to read books on quantum mechanics.

Change of topic: Whenever I think about human history I grow very weary for mankind. I actually identify with my species at such moments; I sympathize with it. My historical sense is far more pronounced than is normal, and it's partly this that fuels my ambition; or, more exactly, I have a passion to tie up the loose ends of intellectual and 'real' history so as to bring 'order' into the 'chaos' that is humanity. Had mankind a single Hegelian Spirit, it would have committed suicide long ago out of sheer weariness. It is this weariness that I want to counteract by *ordering* our existence, by facilitating a universal *understanding* of it and thus by giving mankind *control* over itself. The theoretical aspect of this is my proposed history of existence; the practical aspect is the establishment of communism. The latter is much the more urgent of the two, but the former is the more specifically personal—and hence is more important to *me,* though certainly not more *important* to me.

March 2

Tonight I ate dinner with Rebecca at a classy restaurant. Once again we talked about our lack of enthusiasm for life.[2] Rebecca is truly a wonderful person. As a friend, I love her deeply. Few things in life give me more pleasure than listening to her talk about herself, though I imagine she's oblivious to her effect on me. She is the human equivalent of sunshine—in both positive and negative ways. Think of every quality that sunshine possesses, and then transfer those qualities to Rebecca,[3] and you'll paint for yourself a fairly accurate portrait of her.

March 5

The value of any human activity consists only in the extent to which it cultivates us and is an objectification of our higher powers. What this means, I haven't decided.

…It means that we should strive for whatever embodies our specifically human qualities. Borrowing from Jonathan Lear, humans are distinguished from the rest of nature by their self-consciousness, which implies that only they can individuate themselves. This individuation consists in autonomy, and this autonomy consists in accepting and understanding oneself and one's unconscious drives.

Now, borrowing from the Greeks, every part of nature has a function or a quality that distinguishes it from the rest of nature. If an individual being successfully fulfills its allotted 'function' or 'distinguishing quality (-ies)', it is an excellent instance of its kind. The human species is the only kind of being that is self-conscious and has the capacity for abstract thought and, hence, individuation.[4] Thus the person who individuates himself more completely than others is a more perfect specimen of humankind than anyone

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[1] This moment could, of course, last as long as an hour, for time would not really exist.

[2] Our conversations are never as gloomy as I make them sound.

[3] And apply the qualities of the earth as it relates to sunshine to me.

[4] Moreover, these are the most distinctive marks of mankind. This can be argued against (see the next paragraph), but it's true.

else.

I've thought of another quality that can be seen as distinctively human. Every living creature creates something, whether it be offspring or piles of dirt. But people are the only beings who can create in a qualitatively different manner, i.e., which is not merely instinctual. Whereas nature operates through necessity, humans operate through freedom. Hence those people who most adequately objectify or use their intellects (their higher powers) are more perfect than the rest of us.

The first and second distinctively human qualities can be reconciled by recognizing that the second is derivative of the first. The more individuated a person is, the greater will his intellectual creations be. If that solution seems contrived, I'm willing to rely on this one: creation is not as necessarily human as is individuation because the former hypothesis rests on a possibly invalid application of a universal natural 'law' to humanity, while the latter rests on a genuine contrast between humans and every other known species. In any case, the point is that however one looks at the issue, intellectual creation is derivative of or not as important as individuation.

March 6

Often it's difficult for me to concentrate. I can't think deeply unless there are no distractions *anywhere*.

Speaking of thinking, I'd like to paraphrase Nietzsche by suggesting that my writing is rather 'dense'. Whereas when one is reading most other philosophers—such as Kant, Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard—it is necessary to condense their sentences to get directly at the thoughts behind them, one must *unpack* my sentences in order to absorb them. No doubt you have more than once concluded that my thoughts have at times been empty, but this conclusion is, ironically, based on the fact that my thoughts have been so *full* of content. They have more often than not been the results of immediate intuitions so inaccessible to conceptual thought that I have simply written an ambiguous sentence and moved on. My phenomenological discussions about the self are difficult to read not because they are empty, but because in order to understand them one must experience the intuitions I experienced.

I'm reading a book called *The Philosophy of Niels Bohr*.

March 7

I am so fascinated by people that my infatuation borders on extreme love.[1]

The opening movement of Mozart's symphony *Jupiter* is Dionysian in its rapture. It is a naïve, heroic glorification of life more overwhelming in its innocence than anything Beethoven composed. I love Mozart as my second self. I adore his music, his life, his personality, his gleefulness, his innocence, his flaws. His memory is the ideal toward which we can strive but will never reach, a single point of light in the squalid darkness of history.

The second movement reminds me of Raphael's painting "The Ecstasy of St. Cecilia": it is a translation of the language of God. Nietzsche loses his appeal as I bask in the superabundant light of this music.

(later) If it weren't for her love of jocks and alcohol, Jenny Williams would be a perfect girl. Whenever I make her laugh I feel as if I've done my part to make the world a better place.

March 8

[1] It also borders occasionally on animosity.

The qualm I have with Nietzsche is that he bases his estimates of people on intuition. At one time in his life he reveres Socrates, at another time his criticisms of him are vitriolic. Nietzsche reaches into the unconscious and comes out with myriad theories of the motivations behind people's actions, trying to determine if people are acting out of *ressentiment* or if they are in fact genuinely passionate, but in the end all he has to show are suggestive intuitions—vitriolic insults based on suggestive intuitions. Who's to say if they're right? How is it possible to determine if there's substance behind Nietzsche's claims? This is an inadequacy of psychology in general, and it is why psychoanalysis in particular will never rise above the level of a pseudo-science.

March 9

I bought Rebecca a CD called "James Galway and the Chieftains in Ireland".

What I love about Irish music is that it's magnificently unpretentious.

Sometimes I wonder what the point is of experiencing all that life can offer. People have had the same experiences millions of times throughout history. Why should I feel that my life is worth anything? If we were really aware of the exquisite *repetition* that is the guiding law of history and of life, we would lose our interest in living. If we were aware of every truth about the unconscious mind we would be permanently disillusioned with ourselves, and would realize that nature has all along been playing a hoax on us. It is death to embrace this truth, and it is cowardice to flee it. Hence, what is the value of truth? Would I prefer to live a happy but cowardly life or a miserable but *truthful* life?

On the other hand, I suspect that I would be able to accept life even after uncovering its secrets. I wouldn't feel miserable; I'd feel sublime.

(later) I went to a party. I must admit it's understandable why people enjoy dancing to rap music in a crowded, hot room: it's invigorating. I do not, of course, feel comfortable dancing, but I don't begrudge others their zest for it.

In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche recommends which climates are most beneficial for one's spiritual health. Many philosophers would ridicule his preoccupation with nutrition and climate, but I take his advice seriously. I know that weather partly determines my moods and hence my productivity.

I think that the main reason for my love of Nietzsche is that he articulates who I am. He enables me to be myself; he reinforces my self-esteem. This may seem a vain pleasure, but it's truly a felicitous inspiration in that it helps me give a direction to my moods.

March 24

Well, gentle reader, I have returned from spring vacation. While I was away I read *The Odyssey*,[1] several parts of *Plutarch's Lives*,[2] Cicero's essay *On Friendship*, half of *Don Quixote*, parts of *Shogun*, and some of *The Philosophy of Niels Bohr*. […]

I'm still reading *Don Quixote*, one of the most delightful novels ever written. However, I find it even more intriguing as a corroboration of my idea that self-consciousness is (almost) necessarily degrading to the extent of being a comedy. Don Quixote represents the modern age, the age that has grown so aware of itself that anything it does is subject to ridicule. If people try to be 'sincere'....they either can't, because they're too aware of themselves, or, if they can, they're behind the times and are laughed at by everyone else. Don Quixote tries to be sincere, but since repetition is one of the laws of history he can only repeat what others have done in a clumsily self-conscious way, and so we laugh at him. Nowadays, everyone who is intelligent is aware of himself to the extent that he is a parody of himself, just as this capitalist era is a parody of itself.

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[1] It was an excellent translation by some guy whose initials are A. L.

[2] Themistocles, Pericles, Demosthenes, Caesar and Antony.

How can we ever move beyond this embarrassing self-consciousness? The only way is to become self-conscious of this self-consciousness, i.e. to 'negate' it by transcending it. Mankind will have to become aware that the former arrogant kind of self-awareness is itself an imposture, a charade, and that indeed *life* is a charade: only then will we understand ourselves enough to surpass ourselves and accept life as it is and must be. Truth is the one thing that is not presumptuous, and so our presumptions will wither away once we have realized truth. Moreover, since truth is compatible only with radical self-consciousness, communism[1] is most compatible with truth. This is why communism must be based on a universal and *true* theoretical framework.

Incidentally, I wonder if 'self-consciousness', or consciousness of one's separation from the characters, is a defining characteristic of comedies, and if non-individuality[2] is the defining characteristic of tragedy.

Quantum mechanics is a perfect corroboration of Schopenhauerian transcendental idealism. Atomic physics is, first of all, not directly accessible conceptually, for the concepts we apply to it are mutually inconsistent when used as *the* characteristics of an independently existing reality. Secondly, concepts such as "energy" and "electron" are all but empty,[3] which further suggests that the subject of quantum mechanics is the thing-in-itself. Thirdly, consistent with Schopenhauer's method, we can only arrive at the characteristics of this thing-in-itself by theorizing rather than observing. Fourthly, none of our most important notions, particularly space, time, and causality, apply to the subatomic realm in any way we can intuitively understand. Fifthly, Bohr contends that we, the observers, essentially construct the subatomic reality by observing it, which is precisely what Schopenhauer believes.

General relativity is another gateway to the thing-in-itself.

After reading *Shogun* it has occurred to me that my ideal recreation would be to write a series of perfectly accurate historical novels, for (1) I wouldn't have to worry about inventing plots, since I would use real historical characters; and (2) it would be a good way to sneakily educate the public. They would read art, learn about history, and enjoy themselves at the same time! Besides, I've always wanted to write novels. This way I could avoid the basic hassles of novel-writing and yet have a good deal of creative freedom (which would, however, be limited by the necessity of being historically accurate).

How much do you think names contribute to identities? If I didn't have a name I would probably have a less secure identity.

(later) My life has lately been too 'easy'. There is hardly any suffering in it, and so I have not been productive. I associate deep philosophy with despair, but I have not felt any despair for a long time; thus, I have apparently not deeply philosophized lately. I think the last time was during the summer.

I generally have a conscience only when guilt is mixed with shame—wherefore I usually have a conscience only in the presence of others, for it is the Other who creates shame.

March 25

It seems to me that truth can exist only as a system. Objective reality is the measure of truth, which even Kierkegaard tacitly admits (otherwise his position is nonsensical), and objective reality—in any sensible way one understands that term—must be consistent with itself and with nothing else. It must exist as an entirety, as a whole 'system' over and above fleeting states of mind that bear little or no relation to each other. Again, Kierkegaard himself admits this, for he states that truth is "subjectivity"—which encompasses all mutually 'contradictory' subjectivities. Reality, whether it be understood as subjectivity, as nature, or as God, is always sufficiently abstract to be a self-consistent and self-enclosed whole. In the realm of thought, only an all-encompassing system can claim to be as self-enclosed as objective reality. Isolated positions such as Kierkegaard's presuppose thousands of 'externalities'; but only by including

[1] Which signifies mankind's ultimate awareness of and control over itself.

[2] I.e., identifying utterly with the characters.

[3] In this respect they're similar to Schopenhauer's "will" (which does, however, have some content).

these externalities within the system itself[1] can we hope to arrive at the complete truth (for reality has no externalities, and reality is the measure of truth). We can never attain through philosophy the kind of pure totality that is the world, but we can at least 'symbolically' understand it and its general outlines.

Notice I wrote above "*the* complete truth". As much as William James would disagree with me, it is certain that there is *one* 'truest' system waiting to be created. No doubt several philosophical systems can all be true as far as they go, but at least potentially there must be a philosophy that encompasses so much of reality that it is impossible to find one more all-embracing (i.e., more true). Although self-consciousness is, in one respect, logically subject to the possibility of an infinite regress[2]—and the sharpest self-consciousness is a prerequisite for understanding the highest truths—this does not imply that there are infinite *systems*, each more universal than its predecessors. Each level of this type of self-consciousness is a purely subjective, practically imaginary state with no real significance, so it has nothing in common with an objectively true system that can by its nature incorporate into itself the fact of this infinite regress.

Of course, science will never cease making new discoveries, but this doesn't mean that another system has to be erected after each discovery. If the system is sufficiently abstract, like Schopenhauer's, these discoveries can simply be incorporated into it to make it more thorough.

Moreover, for the reasons given by Schopenhauer, a philosophical system must be logical and consistent, even if the thing-in-itself is illogical or unconceptualizable. A philosophy must be based on conclusions, and conclusions must be based on logic, for logic is based on the principle of sufficient reason (and a few others), which is in turn grounded in the way that reality manifests itself to us (through causes and effects, etc.).

March 26

I'm worried I might become a dilettante.

(later) Ethics has never really interested me. As far as I'm concerned, nothing is intrinsically good, so there is no "right" way to act. There are *good* ways to act, but these always presuppose subjective moral values. Who's to say *I'm* "right" in my moral beliefs? How is it possible to be morally "right"? Only if there is a commonly agreed-upon set of values ought we to judge other people's actions.

So what's important is to find the *best* set of values, not the *correct* set. But I don't know how to do this.

March 28

I'm tired. So *boundlessly* tired.... And I'm only twenty years old.

The Adagietto-Adagio from Georges Bizet's "L'Arlésienne" Suite 1 is a valuable insight into the nature of God.

March 29

Most twentieth-century philosophy is inferior to earlier philosophy because it *narrows* one's outlook instead of *broadening* it. Schopenhauer encourages me to lasso the moon and pull myself into the stratosphere; Robert Brandom encourages me to huddle in a corner and regret my own existence.

(later) I'm reading Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.

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[1] As Schopenhauer did, for example, with his explanation of the acceptability of presupposing the principle of sufficient reason.

[2] I'm referring to statements like the following: I am aware that I am writing; I am aware that I am aware that I am writing; I am aware that I am aware that I am aware that I am writing; etc.

March 30

Here I am again. Lonely, overworked and bored, as usual. Drowning in a sea of music, as usual. Vainly yearning for ecstasy, as usual.

All this has become too commonplace to merit consideration.

§2. The fact that Augustine's description of how certain words stand for objects or have 'meanings' is incorrect as an account of the entirety of language doesn't mean that not all words have a meaning 'behind' them. The difference between the two kinds of words—those which stand for concrete objects and those which are more esoteric—is merely that the meanings of the second kind are intuitions[1] (immediate intentions (or intensions?)) rather than actual physical objects. In the sentence "the cat is black", the three letters that together are "the" have an ineffable intention 'behind them' in consciousness that makes sense out of them. This intention can be expressed by saying, "'The' signifies that there is a particular, definite object which is being referred to", and this statement more or less articulates the intuition behind the word "the" because in such esoteric cases[2] our intuitions are originally[3] formed by 'internalizing' the wordy definition (or rather the use of the word, determined by observing its function in the context of other words) as an immediate intuition or intention.

§6. Presumably Wittgenstein is arguing that words don't have definite meanings when they are taken out of context or when the way in which we use them is ignored. To establish this he constructs an analogy between words and brake-levers: the latter are "nothing or anything" when separated from the rest of their mechanism, and so are words. I pray to God I'm misinterpreting him, for this argument is pitiful. It is of course true that we don't quite know how brake-levers interact with the entire mechanism when they are isolated from it, but it is precisely the *intention* that we apply to them which enables us to call them brake-levers when they are separated from the system. Similarly, we may not be entirely sure how individual words 'interact' or 'fit in' with others when they are taken in isolation, but they manifestly do continue to have meanings nonetheless. In any case, I'm a little suspicious of comparing language to locomotives.

§10. I don't see the point of the last two sentences of this section.

§14. "...Would anything be gained by this assimilation of expressions?" Yes: we have learned the purpose of tools. Likewise, we learn the peculiar advantage of words when we recognize that each has a meaning in consciousness.

§18. Even if we concede that W.'s example *is* a complete language—which implies that in a complete language words don't have to have an "immediate intention" that *attaches to them* in consciousness—my argument remains untouched. A language is not *fully developed*[4] until it has reached the point at which its words have an immediate significance to a person. It may be *complete*, i.e., it may sufficiently serve its purpose (viz., to facilitate communication), in a very minor sphere of influence when its sounds don't have the immediate significance that our sounds do for us, but of course it has not reached a full level of development. It is only the latter that I am concerned with at the moment.

§19. When I call out "Slab!" I am not actually thinking "Bring me a slab!"; rather, I am merely *intending*, without the use of words, that you bring it to me. I am 'wanting' and 'expecting' it. When I say the entire sentence "Bring me a slab" I am indeed intuiting slightly different intentions than I did when I said simply "Slab!", but all in all they amount to the same thing. I say "Slab!" and I *anticipate* that I will be brought a slab;[5] I say "Bring me a slab" and I am aware of all the components in the situation that the

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[1] These intuitions can in turn be expressed as definitions, although the latter are of course not the intuitions themselves.

[2] I.e., when the intention is so tied up with the word itself, and would not exist in its precise form unless the word itself existed.

[3] During the process of learning words.

[4] Yes, I am making a distinction between a complete language and a fully developed one.

[5] Anticipation itself is the primary intention here.

former condensed sentence implied. In other words, "Bring me a slab" unfolds the various intentions that were (in a different form) latent in "Slab!".

§20. "Doesn't the fact that sentences have the same sense consist in their having the same *use*?" Not really; rather, their having the same use *indicates* that they have *basically* the same sense. The sense is in consciousness, not in use (although the two are, admittedly, intertwined).[1]

§21. It seems to me that the difficulties addressed in this and similar sections can be solved by recognizing that what the subject *intends* determines (or *is*) the meaning of a word. Thus, the sentences "the son is bright" and "the sun is bright" sound exactly the same but are based on entirely distinct intentions [or intensions] in the mind of the subject—and hence it is the subject's consciousness that determines their use and their sense. What is so difficult about this thesis? It seems almost so obvious as to be a truism.

April 1

Chapter 1 of *Das Kapital* contains many phenomenological descriptions as brilliant as those of Sartre.

April 3

§23. "The *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life." Duh. So? This doesn't contradict my thesis.

§27. Of course we are not *aware* of meanings 'behind' words when we use them in sentences. But when we speak there is obviously nonetheless an intuition in consciousness. How else could we know the meanings of words? How could we understand commands or questions if consciousness did not *intuit the intentions* that invest statements with meaning? In the vast majority of cases this intention can't be readily separated from the words themselves, but it should nonetheless be clear that words *themselves* are nothing but arbitrary sounds or symbols until an "intuition" makes them meaningful. Besides, very often we manifestly *are privately* aware of intentions without thinking or saying a single word. We intuit condensed versions of potentially very long sentences—versions that bypass all words—in the space of half a second. Evidently, then, we also intuit something that cannot really be conceptualized when we're *speaking*. Although words may not always refer to images or objects or even concrete meanings, they do always 'refer to' intentions in consciousness. [That's a misleading and silly way of saying it.]

§33, etc. I'm not sure what Wittgenstein is driving at.

I read Plutarch's Life of Alexander the Great yesterday. It wasn't as well-written as his Life of Caesar.

April 8

Why does everyone except [some] academics dislike atonal music? Because it's based on a faulty aesthetic. Why else would tonal music have endured for so many centuries, *never* yielding its dominant territory—even during the twentieth century—other than because it is consistent in some fundamental way with (1) how our brain organizes perceptions of sound, and/or with (2) the principles of physics? Indeed, I think this "fundamental way" is obvious: it is in our nature to humanize all aspects of experience, to organize them and control them, which implies that a certain amount of predictability in music is essential. Random noises are not music because they are not organized along any clear basis. (The need for predictability in music has actually reached its culmination in the most popular twentieth-century trends,

[1] One way to tell them apart is that the use can be observed by another party, whereas consciousness cannot. It is consciousness that invests the use with meaning.

like rock ‘n’ roll.) Atonality is capable of appealing even to a tiny minority of academics only because these people have subtly rearranged their innate artistic sense by surrounding themselves with atonality and thus making it ‘predictable’, or at least less nonsensical than it is to the rest of us.

[Deleted entries.]

April 14

Nietzsche:

> Some day, in a stronger age than this decaying, self-doubting present, he must yet come to us, the *redeeming* man of great love and contempt, the creative spirit whose compelling strength will not let him rest in any aloofness or any beyond, whose isolation is misunderstood by the people as if it were a flight *from* reality—while it is only his absorption, immersion, penetration *into* reality, so that, when he one day emerges again into the light, he may bring home the *redemption* of this reality: its redemption from the curse that the hitherto reigning ideal has laid upon it. This man of the future, who will redeem us not only from the hitherto reigning ideal but also from that which was bound to grow out of it, the great nausea, the will to nothingness, nihilism; this bell-stroke of noon and of the great decision that liberates the will again and restores its goal to the earth and his hope to man; this Antichrist and antinihilist; this victor over God and nothingness—*he must come one day.*—

As you’ve probably inferred from my quoting this passage in such an intensely personal document as my journal, I am the most deluded person in history.

April 16

§40. The meaning of a word is not what ‘corresponds’ to it but what the ‘intention’ is behind it.

§43. I agree with Wittgenstein’s definition of ‘meaning’, for a word’s use in the language is essentially synonymous with what the person’s consciousness is of that word. *[Well, no, we’re often not explicitly conscious of all the shades of meaning of a word.]* (I still don’t understand why W. thinks it’s so important to minimize the role of consciousness in language.)

Incidentally, the proposition “The king of France is bald” is neither true nor false if there is no king of France. A sentence’s [I meant *proposition’s*] truth-value is always determined by the predicate’s truth-value, by the truth of what is being asserted, not by the referential or non-referential character of the subject. If we say it is false we are obliged to say, “Because the king of France is not bald”, not “Because there is no king of France”. If the latter were an acceptable way of explaining the sentence’s falsity, we would actually be asserting the falsity of the phrase “the king of France”, which cannot rightly be declared false or true because it is not a proposition. If someone disagrees with me, then I retort that he is actually judging the proposition “The king of France *exists*”—and is thus judging the predicate, not the subject.

However, the proposition is not nonsensical, either. It has a meaning; it has sense, for consciousness can understand what it is supposed to be asserting. I’m tempted to say that meaningless propositions can’t exist, for if they don’t make sense they aren’t really propositions. “The king is a dirt” does, I admit, have a predicate and a subject, but the predicate itself is actually meaningless. “Is a dirt” is an incorrect way to say, “is a piece of dirt”.

So how can a meaningful proposition be neither true nor false? Very easily. Meaning is logically intertwined with *intention*, or consciousness; truth and falsity are logically intertwined with an objective *reference*, or *reality*. In my consciousness or “intention” I understand what a king of France is. Objectively,

however, there is no such entity, so the statement is untrue because there is no referent, the existence of which is a *presupposition*—not the criterion—of truth. The "criterion" of truth—the *meat* of the sentence, the part that is being judged—is the predicate. Hence the proposition is not false either, for the predicate is not false. It is simply lacking an objectively real referent.

[I was pleased to learn years later that P. F. Strawson agreed with me in his famous paper "On Referring" (1950). In fact, my objection to Russell's theory of descriptions was basically the same as Strawson's, as stated in this excerpt from a Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article: "[Strawson's] fundamental objection to Russell's theory is that it is simply obvious to him as a sensitive and self-reflective user of language that the use of the word 'the' does not conform to the theory. Whatever puzzles there may be about language and reference, their solution cannot require us to deny such obvious facts." It's always refreshing to come across philosophers who understand the importance of intuition!]

April 17

[See the May 2024 entry. In all these early thoughts of mine on the self, I was groping towards ideas similar to what I say there.] Consciousness is intrinsically peculiar. Suppose I die and my brain is immediately transplanted to another body. All my memories and character traits will live on in this new body, so the person will presumably have the same 'identity' as me. But will the *consciousness* that *was* me continue to exist, or will 'I' be a completely different person with the memories of the *original* me? If the self-consciousness that is I dies with my body, I will die as well, even though my 'identity' (my personality, memories and other psychological traits) will continue to exist in another body.

I suppose this isn't such a great problem after all. The possibility that *I* might not exist even though my memories might is illogical, but thought-experiments often are. This just proves the inadequacy of our conceptual equipment. It also shows that memory is not a sufficient condition of identity.[1]

But how would it even be possible for the new person to know if his consciousness were the same as mine?[2] He would have to rely on his memory, which would indicate that he does indeed have the same consciousness. But the problem is, consciousness exists only in the moment. There's no way to be *sure* if it is one long continuation.

Then again, the only reason I think I am the same person as I was twenty minutes ago is that I have memories.

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[1] See below. Incidentally, this discussion owes a little to a book I recently read.

[2] [*From 2008.*— Such 'knowledge' is meaningless! It's meaningless to say that one consciousness is the same as another, and that someone 'knows' two consciousnesses are the same. But, on the other hand, that means it's meaningless to say that this consciousness that is writing this sentence right now—or, in other words, I, me, Chris, this self right now—is the same consciousness (or self) as 'it' was an hour ago, or a year ago, or ten years ago. If it's meaningless to say that one consciousness, or self, is the 'same' as another, then it's meaningless to talk about self-continuity, i.e. continuity between, for instance, Chris Wright yesterday and Chris Wright today. For the temporal distance implies that we're talking about two different consciousnesses (between which there is supposedly continuity)—two different consciousnesses that are, however, somehow the 'same,' because they are both "Chris Wright." All these paradoxes lead directly into the paradoxes and agonies of my senior thesis.]

[Written later than the paragraph above… I should correct what I wrote in that footnote. It isn't always meaningless to say that two consciousnesses or two selves are the same; that is precisely what you're saying when, for example, you look at a picture of yourself when you were 10 and say it's hard to believe you're the kid in that picture. You're saying that in some sense that self is the same as this one. But what makes them the same? That's the question. But really there are two questions: what do you mean, and how can one 'test' your claim that these two selves are the same? I agonized over this in my thesis, trying to find a non-question-begging answer to both questions. As I recall, I finally decided that there is no such answer—and therefore that, after all, it isn't wholly meaningful to assert an identity between two 'selves,' or between two temporal 'stages' of the same person, or whatever. This conclusion is very disturbing if you think about it, since it half-dissolves the notion of self-continuity, but it's also consistent with Buddhism and other profound philosophies, as well as with my own insistence that there is no such thing as the 'self' as we ordinarily understand it.]

What's confusing me is that if a person somehow had the *exact* memory I had in a situation, so that he would be seeing the situation from my eyes, he would nonetheless remain a different person than I and have a different consciousness that I cannot access. Maybe this is taking the thought-experiment too far. The only way for him to have the same memory as I (and for it to have really happened) is to *be* me in that moment, which implies that for a moment he does cease to have his own distinct consciousness.

So is memory a sufficient condition of identity? If we answer yes, we get entangled in the problem of real and unreal memories. I may remember being Julius Caesar, but "really" I was not him. Some people would try to avoid this difficulty by adding the caveat that memory must be "caused in the right way" for it to be a sufficient criterion of personal identity. But this opinion is boring and too similar to professional philosophy for me to accept it.

(later) Tonight I wrote Rebecca a long email in a fit of despondency. I include it in my journal only because it is intended as an affirmation of our friendship as well as a happy acceptance of my inability to "separate" myself from her. [I've deleted it.] …Are you embarrassed by the sentimentality exuding from every sentence? I am too, but what's done is done. I'm tired of hiding behind conventions.

April 18

I plead insanity for having written that email. Last night I had a mild version of every conceivable illness—fever, stomachache, headache, earache, chills, runny nose, back pains—so my judgment was warped. Also, I was listening to "Kathy's Song" and "Ave Maria" as I wrote it, thereby murdering my critical faculties.

(later) It's intriguing that people never articulate the obvious truth that the self is located directly behind the eyes. It almost seems as though consciousness is intimately *associated* with the eyes—much more so than with any other sense, even touch.

I am, unfortunately, not the Nietzschean ideal of the free spirit. I'm too sentimental, too obsessed with truth, too fond of my emotions, not refined enough, too prone to comparing myself with great men. I have too great a need to esteem myself.

Whence arises this need? –Faith in myself is the only way for me to have faith in life. I can't rely on anyone else, certainly not Rebecca. Also, I'm so aware of myself, so constantly reminded of my own silliness and *mendacity*, that without a certain inherent arrogance supplemented with frequent self-flattery—which, ironically, contributes much to my self-deception—life would be intolerable.

April 20

The Fifth Act of *The Cenci* is a masterpiece if ever there was one. I cried, for a moment, at the very end. To live in a world in which such suffering is commonplace—! To be as a pawn in the hands of fate! To be impotent, when pain is the regnant passion, when misery every moment enjoys a recrudescence—! Life can be affirmed only in ignorance.

[…]

(later) The fact that there are no absolute [objective] values, that life has no meaning or purpose, doesn't necessarily commit us to nihilism. I don't see why Nietzsche was for a long time so bothered by the death of God. We simply must create our *own* values, as he realized. We base these values on certain fundamental facts about nature or humanity, on certain "truths". It is this foundation that justifies us in criticizing people who do not adhere to our new value-system.

Of course, the problem remains that there is no way for us to know when we have discovered these "truths". *This* problem, rather than the fact of no absolute values, is what seems insurmountable.

Kierkegaard thinks that even in the case of "forced" beliefs (necessary or obvious truths) there is a final element of human agency. No matter how many irrefutable demonstrations are made for the truth of a proposition, in the end everyone makes a "leap" in choosing to accept it or reject it. Hence humans are

completely free, such that no one can be obligated to believe a truth or accept a morality that is based on a truth. But I disagree with him. I think he (1) overestimates the role of agency and (2) too eagerly dismisses the human 'obligation' to guide one's life according to absolute truths (supposing they exist).

But why should there be this obligation? If there are no values, there can't be an *a priori* obligation to adhere to any kind of truth. If our freedom is what we're most directly conscious of (after our existence)—if consciousness is necessarily 'free' in some way—then maybe Kierkegaard is right that freedom is the basic fact of our existence. If so, how can certain lifestyles be considered "better", truer, more admirable than others? And even if they can, what does it matter? If there is no fundamental *true* reason why they should be followed, moral relativism is the consequence. All values must then be as good as all others. For we can't in good conscience criticize a moral system unless we assume that (1) morality should and can be founded on truth, and (2) our own value system is truer or better than the other. But these criteria don't hold if nothing is seen as truer than freedom.

On the other hand, if an ethic is based on the fact of freedom and nothing else (if such is possible), perhaps it can be seen as the "truest" ethic. But this is no reason for people to adopt it, since there is no reason to abide by truth. So the most one can do is say, "Hey guys! Come over here! I've discovered the only true hierarchy of values! Don't you want to know what it is?" And they'll say with justification—"Shove it up your arse, Jean-Paul! We've got our own values! Who needs yours? Ours are easier." And then poor Jean-Paul can only look downcast as he ponders his own anguish. "Ha! Look at Jeanny-boy! He wishes he had more freedom to come over here and pummel us! He's feeling forlorn!" "One day, you—you idiots, I'll show you! I have faith!" "Look at that, Pierre! One eye is staring at you while the other glares at *me*!" "Yeah, 'cause my eye has more freedom than yours!"

It's past my bedtime: that's my excuse.

April 22

I like R. J. Hollingdale's interpretation of Nietzsche's thought. In his 1969 edition of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, published by Penguin Books, the fourth section of his introduction concisely articulates a profound philosophy that reminds me of Kierkegaard's. Answers to my questions of yesterday are hinted at. But I remain skeptical.

April 23

It is impossible to 'transcend' metaphysics. There is—there *must be*—an essence of reality. The difficulty is in reconciling metaphysical truth with the fact that "all-too-human" psychological forces determine what is the Truth to us.

"Why must there be an essence of reality?" you ask. I admit I can't give a satisfactory reason. Indeed, now that I reflect upon it I begin to have doubts.

April 25

I spent all of yesterday writing the beginnings of two novels. The first was meant to be a parody of the history of the human race; I finished the prologue. After a few hours I lost my inspiration, so I began a story that was to be in the form of a journal. It was to chronicle a young man's overcoming of nihilistic despair; included in it would have been numerous reflections on philosophy, on society, and on relationships. But I lost my inspiration, again. I realized that my literary talents haven't matured enough to permit me to write books. Instead, I'll continue to read great literature as a means of cultivating my latent talents.

(later) Nietzsche believes that all truth is relative....except for the will to power! And except for the truth that all truth is relative! This is the inconsistency that all relativistic philosophies fall into. I wonder how they resolve it.

I know that all philosophical claims are made from a particular perspective, but this doesn't refute the belief that a 'true' or 'truest' perspective exists. We simply must take into account every philosophical/scientific position that exists, must attempt to nullify our own biases—which is surely possible, for I do it often when evaluating philosophies—and then decide 'objectively' what is most true.

[…]

April 29

Dad turned 60, so I went home this weekend for his party.

I'm reading *Notes from the Underground*. Three words describe it: profound, profound, profound. Already it is one of my favorite books. I can relate to it like few others, particularly in regard to my annoying self-consciousness. It corroborates what I've always insisted on: the more one is aware of oneself, the more one is a parody of oneself. There are two major differences (thus far) between the main character and me: (1) I am so aware of the presumptuousness of every state of mind—including self-awareness—that I usually find life more a comedy than a tragicomedy; (2) since I don't know whether 'sincerity' is more real than 'parody', at times I am able to give the benefit of the doubt to sincerity. Thus, I sometimes allow myself to wallow in sadness even though I have a suspicion it's a form of self-deception. Put more felicitously, I suspect that extreme self-awareness is so presumptuous and arrogant that it too is a deception—so I can transcend it and choose whether to feel sad or to feel self-superior. Of course, even if I feel self-superior I still look down upon my perceived superiority—i.e., I feel self-superior to the second degree. I could potentially feel superior to the third and fourth degrees, but usually before the process reaches this point all my senses of superiority have bled into each other and thence into feelings of hilarity and doubt, until eventually I am conscious of nothing else but the Great Doubt. This is barely a temporal process, for it takes place within three seconds. At its culmination I just laugh and "transcend" the cause of my original sadness; I move on with my life, postponing philosophy until another day.

But that's very simplified and not entirely correct.

May 9

The firebombing of Dresden [and many other cities!] during World War II is more unforgivable than Roosevelt's persecution of Japanese. It was one of the most atrocious crimes against humanity committed this century. Roosevelt, Churchill, and the other decision-makers deserve to burn in hellfire forever.

(later) Chris is bitter. Again. […]

So as an escape from reality I'm writing the following paper for a philosophy course.

> Friedrich Nietzsche puts forward an original theory of the reason for mankind's universal attraction to religion. He thinks that, since the will to power is so fundamental to life as to be its *essence*, humans have a need to either (1) dominate themselves, (2) dominate other people, or (3) be dominated by various external forces. Religion is largely a manifestation of the first and third needs. Ascetics, a minority, consciously control themselves, whereas the vast majority of people rely on a God to force them to control themselves. These people are too weak to dominate themselves *knowingly*, without fear and with pride; in order to repress their own passions (which they are frightened by), they require the stimulus of an omnipotent authority who has the power to punish them for eternity. Hence their self-domination is based on self-hatred, self-delusion, and fear. This theory, however, as appealing as it may be to atheists, is not entirely correct. This paper

will argue that a true account of religion must be based on a recognition of the intrinsic characteristics of consciousness; it can then, perhaps, be supplemented with considerations like the foregoing.

The reason we have to examine the role of consciousness in beliefs about God is that consciousness (or rather, 'self-consciousness') is the essence of humanity; it is the 'self', about which philosophers have argued for centuries. It is, indeed, what primarily distinguishes people from animals. Hence a digression into the phenomenology of consciousness is necessary in order to understand the true basis of religion.

First we must recognize that time is inherently a subjective phenomenon. It does not exist objectively, independently of humans, as something we encounter upon coming into the world. Many considerations establish this: for example, Einstein's general theory of relativity. Time, Einstein showed, is not linear; it is curved. This suggests that in a world without humans (or sentient beings) there is actually no such thing as time [as we perceive it], just as there is probably no space in the way we perceive it. Our perceptions impose a form on the environment. When theoretical necessities (like relativity and quantum mechanics) come into conflict with the way we interpret the world, it becomes apparent that the 'thing in itself' must be radically different from our preconceived ideas. In any case, there is another fact that demonstrates the unreality of time: during sleep, time ceases to exist. It is possible, of course, to retort that it merely ceases to exist *for us*—that we are simply unaware of it, that objectively it does exist—but this objection is non-falsifiable and hence meaningless. The only world we know is the one we are conscious of; it is wrong to extrapolate from this world that our perceptions of it are just as true in a world we are *unconscious* of. No doubt there is time and space and perceptions *for other people* when we are unconscious, but this does not imply that 'objectively' there is time. Objectively there is *something*, probably, but it is impossible to know what this 'something' is. Moreover, it is absurd, in light of Einstein's discoveries, to think that this 'something' is the linear time we are aware of.

The immediate present moment is the only aspect of time that has ever existed. The past, for example, has never existed except in our imaginations, and the future never 'exists' either. Hence the present (the moment) is eternal, even though it must also be defined as infinitesimal if we have in mind the common linear view of time. This implies that, inasmuch as time exists, it is always and only the moment.

If the moment does not exist independently of consciousness, it must be posited by this consciousness. But does consciousness exist 'behind' the moment, as it were? If the present moment is continually arising into and passing out of existence, such that the aggregate is essentially one *perpetual* moment, clearly consciousness must itself arise and pass away with the moment. After all, it is not outside of time. This inseparability of time and consciousness yields a further insight: the two are not only inseparable, but identical. Taken in abstraction they are never seen as the same thing, but this is because memory—which is itself only an abstraction—necessitates that we *fabricate* the concept of linear time. We abstract from the moment when we define time, even though the moment is the only part of time that really exists. Indeed, even when people define the *moment* they confuse themselves by presupposing the linearity of time, which (as we have argued) is an artificial but necessary device invented by consciousness to make sense of existence. True definitions must be phenomenological when esoteric items like time are being defined, and in order to be phenomenological they must take account only of what is present in the *moment*—which typical definitions in dictionaries don't.

There remains a hitch in our argument: how can there be such a thing as memory if time is not in some way linear? […]

There is a dialectical contradiction between the perpetual and the fleeting character of the moment. Unfortunately, this contradiction is never resolved. Its product is what existentialists have called "ontological lack". This is what necessitates the ever-present but often unnoticed[1] sense of

[1] Because it's subtle and we've gotten used to it.

> frustration in life. There are, of course, *many* sources of frustration in life, but underneath them all is this ontological lack, this contradiction between the permanence and the transience (or nothingness) of consciousness.[1]
>
> Nearly all religions have as their ideal a timeless state of being. In Buddhism, for example, it is nirvana; in Christianity it is God and Heaven. This harmony between the ideal of timelessness and the source of "ontological lack" as time is hardly a coincidence: it suggests that the need for religion arises from the contradiction between eternity and the moment. The religious look to their ideals as ways to escape from this contradiction.
>
> Nietzsche's explanation of religion as the result of the will to power is therefore wrong or inadequate. It ignores the importance of the intrinsic features of consciousness in providing an impetus toward religion. Perhaps Nietzsche would retort that he could simply rephrase his theory to state that people want to attain *power over consciousness* (and time) itself, so they postulate God. However, this too seems inadequate, in that it is, again, non-falsifiable. A theory which relies on the sentence "But they just want to attain power over it" as a response to any objection is a theory that says nothing. Nevertheless, since there are differences between all religions, the hypothesis of the will to power can be used to account for dissimilarities. Thus, it is quite possible that the introduction to this paper (which is a summary of Nietzsche's views) refines and enriches our own theory of religion by forcing us to recognize that there are *many* reasons for the importance of religion in people's lives.

It petered out in the end.

May 12

Comps have started, yippee. I wrote two papers yesterday; tomorrow I'll have to write two more. And so on for the next week.

I wasted this year. I'm the biggest ass on the face of our wonderful planet. I made so few friends I might as well have lived in a vacuum. Today I asked a girl in CSS if I'm seen as aloof; she said yes. I'm aloof! The very thought is noxious, absolutely contrary to who I really am. Anyhow, this summer and next year will be a fresh start.

May 14

Last night was the first all-nighter of my life. At 5:30 a small group of us walked to Foss Hill and watched the sunrise and read poetry. I read Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn".

What's the relation between consciousness and self-consciousness? How similar are they? Are the higher animals conscious in much the same way we are when we're not explicitly self-conscious?

I haven't nearly finished reading *Das Kapital* yet. I'll finish the first volume in the summer.

May 19

Notes from the Underground, which I've finished, is a depressing story. But it's high art. –But it's so depressing! And it's so true! We're cowards or simpletons if we don't confront its truth. That's why it seems as though life can be 'affirmed' only in ignorance.

Maybe human nature could, in a sense, change under communism. Maybe it wouldn't be *necessary*

[1] To the journal-reader: all these statements are grossly oversimplified. But you can see that I've supplemented last summer's analyses with reasons for the 'lack' necessary in self-consciousness.

to confront these qualities of people, for they would cease to exist. On the other hand, it is by such a confrontation that we can (perhaps) achieve greatness.

Why do we want to achieve greatness? Because of vanity. Why do we want to probe so deeply into our own psyches? Because of....the compulsion toward greatness? And thus because of vanity?

Does vanity, or simply the need for self-respect, govern my life? If so, what's the harm in that? It does, however, disappoint me. Why? Because it diminishes my self-respect! Why should it do this? Why should vanity or self-love be seen as a contemptible motive? Because its satisfaction is not determined by a person's intrinsic worth? What is one's intrinsic worth? […] So we arrive at where we started: vanity or self-flattery governs our lives.

It's frustrating to ponder the psyche.

May 22

I'm happy. This year ended on a wonderful note. In spite of comps, these last few weeks have probably been the most enjoyable all year.

I had my oral examination today. The prof told me my history paper was marvelous, one of the "better ones I've read over the years". Good. I spent a long time writing it.

Tomorrow I'm going home. On June 4th I'm going to Germany. I won't have my computer with me for the summer or the first semester of next year, so I'll have to keep a '*written*' journal.

June 3

Guten Tag. On the morrow I depart for Germany. *Ich bin gespännt auf meine Reise*. To prepare for my sight-seeing activities I read a book entitled *The Renaissance: Six Essays*. Each essay describes a particular aspect of it: economics, politics, art, religion, etc. I'll read similar books in Germany.

I also read *Macbeth* and I've started Mill's *System of Logic*. I have yet to finish *Philosophical Investigations*.

[…]

I'm so intellectual I don't know who I am.

June 4

I'm somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean. At last! Freedom! The next few months will be the adventure of a lifetime.

When I read Berkeley several months ago I made the following notes:

"Ideas are images in the mind. Abstract ideas can't exist. We can abstract from determinate qualities, but the idea that remains must still be of a particular object. Words signify any particular thing in a certain 'category' (e.g. book), but they are not ideas. - Names do not always stand for ideas. - Unperceived qualities can't exist. - Will, soul, spirit are not ideas. We can't understand or picture them in the way we do everything else. (Schopenhauer) - Ideas have no causal power; only Spirit (will) does."

Oscar Wilde once said, "I bring my journal with me when I travel. One should always have something outrageous to read on the train." It's good advice. Hence I intend to make this diary even more outrageous than it's been. No doubt its provocativeness will be mitigated by its self-consciousness, but one can't help that. In any case, all I ever do in this journal is try on 'masks'. None of them is the 'real' me, for I don't know who the real me is. Maybe there *isn't* a real me. –Actually, that seems unlikely. My objective self—indeed, my ego *in toto—must* have certain definite characteristics. It *does*. The difficulty is that one never *feels* these characteristics; i.e., they aren't 'compelling' in the way that emotions are. We know when

we're angry (usually), but it's harder to know if we're angry people overall. This is because thoughts (as opposed to emotions) are not *urgent*, and they are much the most common state of being. We can think or write *anything*, whether it be grotesque or sublime, and yet these thoughts may be completely foreign to the overall nature of our objective self. The reason for *this* rests on my distinction between the objective self and the I. The latter, you recall, has no qualities except negative ones (and freedom). It is the absence of anything substantive: thus it can, in a sense, be whatever it wants. That is, it can have whatever *thoughts* it wants, for thoughts too are not substantial in the way feelings are. (Feelings belong more to the objective self.)

Since I (seem to) have fewer emotions than most people, I'm less in touch with the 'concrete' part of myself. Thus I'm more unsure of my identity than others are.

I'm too tired to pursue these thoughts.

June 6

I arrived in Freiburg yesterday. The 'dorm' in which I and all the other students are living is excellent: my room is spacious and has its own bathroom. Even a refrigerator!

First class today. They stuck me in Grundstufe 1, but I'm going to change that: it's far too elementary to be of any use.

Believe it or not, there's a picture of Clara Schumann on the hundred-mark bill. On the back is a picture of a piano.

June 7

I met a twenty-year-old Indian girl, whose first language is English. We became friends instantly: our personalities are incredibly compatible. We went on a two-hour-long tour of Freiburg together; by the evening we had become *close* friends (I think)! We've already agreed to take a trip to Berlin. This girl, whose name I forget, is exceedingly intelligent and has a near-perfect personality. She's even cute/adorable! Her only flaw is her body's lack of curves. There's a distinct possibility I'll fall in love with her one day. (She laughed at everything I said! How can I *not* fall in love with her?!)

June 12

I'm depressed. I'll tell you why later.

I'm ecstatic! I'll tell you why now: I asked Sangeetha (the Indian) to dinner tomorrow night, and she accepted.

I should also tell you that yesterday and today we spent the entire afternoon together. We toured Freiburg and climbed a hill whose summit serves as a place from which to view the vista of the countryside. The two of us sat together for hours, isolated from humanity, relishing our existence. We spent most of the evening discussing romance. I had an urge to kiss her more than once.

Today it became apparent she's interested in me romantically. She dropped many hints—"Are you a sloppy kisser?" "Are you a good hugger?" "What's the weirdest place you'd like to have sex?"—but I was too much of a coward to make any moves. As we walked home I felt abject, like a failure.

A few minutes ago she came to my room—and *finally* I got the nerve to ask her to dinner. When she accepted she *must* have known I had romantic designs. […]

The more I see of this girl, the more I like her. Her personality is so exquisite that it over-compensates for whatever slight flaws I see in her looks. (Actually, she's beautiful.)

I feel reborn! Haven't felt this happy for a long time. At last a desirable girl really likes me! I don't

know *why* she does—there are many better-looking, 'bigger', wittier guys out there—but I'm not about to dissuade her.

June 13

I think I'm cursed. Sangeetha is already seeing someone. I'd known this before, but she had complained about him so much that I'd assumed he was out of the picture. Actually, another, possibly more important, factor in her decision was that our relationship would last only two months. She's told me multiple times she's not the kind of person who has flings. She never has and never will. Indeed, she told me she hasn't even had sex with her boyfriend after more than a year! She's waiting for a "really special" person.

Anyway—to start from the beginning—I finally asked her today to clarify our relationship. Told her I'd intended tonight's dinner to be a "date". Her answer was that she too was confused, but that because of the abovementioned reasons it couldn't be more than a friendship. I made some observations to the contrary, but they didn't change her mind. She did, however, in complete sincerity say she'd date me "in a shot" under better circumstances. Also said I'd probably find another girl in this course....and I told her not to try to comfort me, to which her response was that she was trying to comfort herself.

For half an hour we thus talked or sat in silence on the riverbank. I spent most of the time fighting back tears. I wanted to embrace her and bawl, but I do have pride.

Dinner was at a lovely restaurant outside in a platz, under a sympathetic old tree. She told me she was afraid she was making the mistake of her life.

Several hours ago (it's 1:00 a.m.) she came to my room. We talked about philosophy—mysticism, Marxism, science—as well as 'light' topics. 'Twas thoroughly enjoyable.

Thus I'm quite happy to remain her friend. I'm thrilled, actually. Supposedly she doesn't have as much in common with anyone as she does with me, and she's never made a friend so quickly. Neither have I.

I don't even feel *incredibly* bad about this romantic failure, for it was due to circumstances beyond my control. I acted as any intelligent adult would have, and so did she.

Sangeeetha is the only person I've known whom I like *exactly* the way she is.

June 14

I told her that last statement today, after she'd regaled me with complaints about her boyfriend. –I wish I had the patience to record our conversations: they're lively and intimate.

They've stimulated me into fascination with Indian mysticism. Never again will I ignore it. It may be a truer way of interpreting the world than through rationality and logic. There's no reason everything must be susceptible to rational explanation; there's every reason that parts of reality are *mystical*. [?? You're a confused idiot.] Yet I haven't the faintest idea what the relation between the two should be.

Apparently there's a temple in India (in Pune) where people can have their futures and pasts read to them off of (copies of) leaves that an ancient sage wrote on. According to Sangeetha, the writings on these leaves are always correct; they've been tested thousands of times. She has accompanied several of her friends when they visited the place and listened to the readings given them. So she knows what she's talking about.

As Sangeetha exposes me to 'non-rational' philosophies, I expose her to rational ones: Marxism, Schopenhauer, my own thoughts, etc. Sometimes we argue for hours about the respective virtues and vices of rationalism and irrationalism. Kant versus mysticism. West meets East. Once again, I'm expanding my horizons.

Our friendship is probably the best I'll ever have. There's not a thing I'd change about it. If I were

younger and more naïve I'd write for pages and pages about it. But I'm tired of writing and tired of thinking. Just want to be around Sangeetha.

June 15

I'm lying in bed next to Sangeetha. We're really exhausted and sweaty and hot. –But it's not what you think. We spent most of the day traveling to Berlin and then walked several miles to the hotel. (All the hostels were full.) We've decided to travel in France and Italy together after the course ends.

I'm reading *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

June 18

These past few days have been fun. Sangeetha and I have 'passionately' kissed many times. We slept in the same bed in a hotel for two nights, during which she fell asleep in my arms. Berlin wasn't wonderful, but since we were together we enjoyed it. She's breaking up with her boyfriend.

I could describe to you so many deliciously romantic things we did—and are doing—but I don't have the time or energy. We didn't make love, though, nor do we plan to (she wants to have sex with no one but her husband).

The first night in the hotel I expected her to have no desire to do anything with me, so I quickly started to fall asleep. But suddenly she broached the topic of sex. My fatigue miraculously vanished. We talked awhile, but eventually she fell asleep. Of course, I was now wide awake. So I was pleased when she woke up a half-hour later. We whispered to each other, lying in a rich silence, until at last I got the nerve to say that if I were more impulsive I would have kissed her by now. At that point she asked if she could hug me; I answered in the affirmative, so for the rest of the night we lay in each other's arms. After an hour or more she gently kissed me—and was momentarily mortified at the thought that she'd cheated on her boyfriend—and then our kisses became passionate. At 3:30 she fell asleep on my chest; I lay awake until after 6:00.

The second night was similar to the first. Since we'd previously decided (that day) to be friends rather than lovers (which decision I'd spent a long time arguing against), we didn't kiss much the second night. But she lost her self-control the next day and today. Especially today. We were practically lovers tonight.

Berlin, incidentally, wasn't worth the trip. (Actually it was, but not on account of the city's merits.) We went to the Pergamon Museum, which was interesting, and the Nikolaikirche (I think), which was stupendously beautiful, but the rest of Berlin wasn't much to brag about. Potsdam was very pretty, but since it rained we were forced to tour the city in a bus. –No matter. I was happier hugging and kissing Sangeetha than I would have been walking around anyway.

June 19

Irving Howe calls Hardy's Tess "one of the greatest triumphs of civilization: a natural girl". Sentimental fatuity!

Sangeetha still wants us to be just friends. She doesn't want to have a broken heart when we separate in August. Thinks she'll be miserable and won't 'get over me' for years. But I really love kissing her—and she likes kissing me even more, I think. So I kiss her even against her gentle protests.

Do I feel remorse for this selfishness? No, though I probably should. Will I feel bad if I'm the cause of her unhappiness? Probably not unless I think about it deeply. I guess most of the time I just don't have

spontaneous upwelling empathy for people. […]

These 'feelings' are only on an intellectual level. I.e., they exist in my imagination. They don't give me the kind of satisfaction I'd always hoped they would.

I don't think I'll ever fall in love with Sangeetha, much as I'd like to. Maybe it's not part of my personality to fall in love. Or, more likely, I can't love anyone but a *gorgeous* girl.

So if I can't love her why am I pursuing her? Possibly because I'd like to be the most important person in a girl's life, purely for the intellectual pleasure of it. I think I could tolerate being only her friend, which is what she wants (contrary to her emotions). So why don't I? It would be the chivalrous, selfless thing to do. I'd feel good about myself. –But I wouldn't feel good *enough*. –But I'll try to do it anyway. To an extent, that is.

June 22

Sangeetha is *achingly beautiful* when she wears a bit of make-up.

Before I'd experienced love, I thought it would be an unearthly feeling. Now that I'm half in love, I've become disillusioned with it. When I finally achieve *true* love....will these two extremes be reconciled?

You'd be charmed if you saw how Sangeetha and I act together. We're as affectionate as Helen and Paris.

June 24

Last night we attended a Mozart-Mendelssohn-Schubert-Webern concert. String quartets. I thought I'd hate Webern, but there were many *breath-taking* passages in the piece (Langsamer Satz für Streichquartett 1905). Sangeetha enjoyed Mozart the most, as did I.

(We were actually supposed to go to a different concert, one that included Chopin and Rachmaninoff, but somebody accidentally gave us directions to the other instead!)

I read a few pages of Sangeetha's diary today, with her consent: it's obvious she 'cherishes' me. Apparently it will hit her "like a ton of bricks" when we say goodbye in August. I too will be very sad, but not as much.

This weekend I read *The Middle East in the Twentieth Century*, by Martin Sicker. It's a political history of the region.

June 26

Sangeetha is still very confused about our relationship. It's understandable: yesterday, for example, we kissed for a long time but didn't go beyond that. We probably never will. She feels guilty about not yet having broken up with her boyfriend, though I doubt he's worth her guilt: she told him she'd gone to Berlin with me and his response was, "Who the fuck is Chris?" Nice guy.

[…]

Thomas Hardy's sentimentalism irritates me. I too am often sentimental, but such moods I usually transcend quickly. I would never write a *novel* the foundation of which was sentimentality!

June 27

Haven't finished *Tess* yet, but I'm reading Rondo Cameron's *Concise Economic History of the World*. Not an excellent book, but it's a good preview to my future detailed studies of economic history.

June 28

Our relationship, of course, hasn't changed at all. Except that daily we grow more attached. Occasionally I feel a surge of deep love. In those moments I experience a tremendous urge for physical and spiritual union.

June 29

I'm reading the Koran. From the 80 pages I've read, it's evident that the book is nearly worthless. It's repetitive, contradictory, boring, intellectually sterile, spiteful, dogmatic, confused, petty, unoriginal, confrontational, malicious, nonsensical, and dishonest. I.e., it's too religious.

There's an obvious tension in the Koran between free will and the omnipotence of God. (Of course, the whole thing is one vast absurdity punctuated by thousands of little confusions.) In my opinion, in view of its myriad philosophical dead-ends, this book should have no more than a historical interest.

Incidentally, why should God care so much about convincing people to believe in him? It's as if the Heart of Being has an inferiority complex.

June 30

I admit that it reaches admirable heights in some chapters (such as "The Merciful"), but on the whole it's too vindictive and empty to appeal to me.

However, it provides insight into Mohammed's psyche—and that of any fanatical Muslim. Hatred and malice, as well as a perverse naïveté, radiate from its pages. This was indeed appropriate in the 7th century, but the Koran has no place in the modern world.

Sangeetha is in Amsterdam this weekend, so I'm alone.

July 1

I should remark that the Koran contains the literary merits of, among others, vigorous prose-poetry and striking images. It's certainly a powerful voice from the past.

I miss Sangeetha. She's my only real friend in Germany.

July 4

Yesterday she told me something startling: in December she'd had a dream in which she saw a boy who she felt would have romantic importance in her life—and the boy was indistinguishable from me! She'd woken up with the uncanny feeling that she would spend her life with him. The vividness of the dream has allowed her to remember his appearance: he had red hair, facial features similar to mine, a similar voice, and was an American. This was in fact the reason she'd introduced herself to me last month.

No doubt you think Sangeetha made this story up. But you're wrong. I read it in her journal. Besides, her eyes projected sincerity (and the eyes rarely lie). She'd really seen this person, and this person really, it seems, was me.

The difficulty is in understanding how such a phenomenon is possible. After all our conversations I've come to believe that the scientific, rationalistic tradition of the West is cracked in its foundation.

Mysticism has something to contribute to philosophy; I can no longer afford to neglect it.

July 5

I'm reading *A History of the Indian People*, by D.P. Singhal.

Sangeetha is angry with me: she thinks I'm interested only in sex. But the truth is, I couldn't care less whether I'm affectionate with her or not. I've simply gotten into the habit of kissing her all the time: it's not really a manifestation of love or even lust. Love is a sham, an illusion, a trick the mind plays on itself. I have no 'need' whatsoever to be affectionate with her. […]

—Life lacks a heart. I'm only a reflection of its empty core.

July 6

I've screwed up royally. I'm an ass. Sangeetha's probably furious now.

Ironically, everything was going wonderfully until a few minutes ago. I bought her flowers today to atone for my mistakes last night. When I gave them to her she was flattered, but it took a good deal of discussion to convince her that her anger was based on misunderstandings: I genuinely do enjoy being with her, and not mainly because we 'make out'. I love talking to her, and I sometimes feel a spiritual/romantic love. For quite a while we discussed this and similar themes; at length she forgave the mild pushiness I'd displayed last night.

Later it foolishly occurred to me to read her a few sentences from yesterday's entry. (She had told me that last night she resolved, in a fit of anger—just as I had—not to be affectionate anymore, so I thought it would be funny to read to her the last three sentences of the entry.) After I'd read them she was amused—but she wanted me to read her the rest of the entry. This wasn't a good idea. So I refused. But the more I refused, the more she thought I was hiding something fundamental to the way I think about her. So I finally had to give in (though I didn't read the bit about the "manifestation of love")—and she took it harder than I'd expected. I explained how fickle my moods are, and that I hadn't meant what I'd written, but she didn't believe me. Said I shouldn't try to justify myself. And then she left.

So now I have to reconcile with her again. What a bummer! What's even worse is that her anger is, once again, based on a misunderstanding. You who have read my journal know it's a record of one 'mask' after another, but *she* doesn't know this.

Okay, I've fixed everything. I'm a smooth talker. (Ha! What a joke.) –But that doesn't mean that not everything I said was true! We had an intensely intimate conversation in which we 'bared our souls', and by the end I had reassured her of my proto-love. It was hard work, but now we're closer than ever.

July 7

Why has the lust for power been such an overwhelming force in history? What are the precise psychological reasons? What does it say about mankind?

July 8

I spent the night at Sangeetha's. Cuddled and kissed for hours. In the morning, as we woke up looking into each other's eyes, she said she loves me. Doesn't know how she'll be happy in India without me. She's quite sad.

This profession of love hasn't really sunk in. No girl has ever loved me. For years I've wanted someone to fall in love with me—but now that it's happened I don't feel glorious. One of the reasons is simply that I haven't yet reflected on the implications of Sangeetha's love, and another is that I don't entirely 'love' her, but this lack of emotional response is disillusioning nonetheless. It's further testimony that I don't usually experience emotions unless I *concentrate*.

[…]

I finished the book on India. Now I'm reading *The Formation of Muscovy: 1304-1613,* by Robert Crummey.

July 9

One day I'd like to write an orchestral transcription of Beethoven's Hammerklavier sonata. Nietzsche gave me the idea. The piece is begging for an orchestra. It could be a veritable symphony.

July 10

Sangeetha is frustrating. Because she thinks she'll be sad in September she refuses to acquiesce to a little pleasure now. She won't even 'make out', much less have sex. She won't give in to the moment! Her philosophy is that it's better not to experience life if doing so involves emotional pain. I'm tired of her weird insecurities. I'd like to find another girl here to 'have fun' with, but that would be insensitive and would probably confuse me emotionally.

July 11

I'm writing the transcription of the Hammerklavier. Bought a score of Beethoven's Ninth to learn how to write for an orchestra.

July 13

It would be easy for me to turn my life into a tragedy. If I simply embraced my own nothingness—carried it from the realm of metaphysics into reality—I would be forced from my "miserable ease" into painful introspection.

Sangeetha begged for two hours to read my journal. I adamantly refused. It would wreck everything. It might destroy our relationship. –But in the end I had to yield. I think some of the entries disillusioned her, but on the whole she took it rather well. *So far*, that is. Tomorrow she'll probably hate me.

I'm depressed. Sangeetha probably is too.

....I went to her room. She told me she's not obsessed with me, she doesn't give a shit about me, and I should leave. So I left.

And now I'm crying. She thinks I don't care about her, which is false. As a friend I genuinely desire her happiness. This desire isn't a powerful *feeling*, as it is in other people, but it exists. It's equivalent to my desire for my family's happiness.

It wasn't particularly kind of Sangeetha to say she doesn't give a shit about me. But since it was said in anger and I probably deserved it, I don't really think less of her for it. –Even so, it causes me to wonder if I care more about her than she does about me.

This life is cruel. No one can deny it. It's pointless, tragic and cruel. Maybe suicide is the answer

after all. If I were more selfish and weak I might leave this world. I'm tired of being alone. I'm tired of having to be arrogant to compensate for insecurities.

I care about people! I'm not a sociopath. At this moment I care more about Sangeetha than anyone else, even though she's devastated me.

I went up to her room again (several hours after the first time); she hurled at me one accusation after another. Finally she said, "The one person I really liked doesn't care a damn about me. That makes me feel good", and I left the room instantly. The moment I was outside her door I burst into tears—not because she'd hurt my feelings but because she misunderstands me and there's nothing I can do about it. She'll just think I'm lying.

I desperately need her as a friend. I don't think even Rebecca knows me as well as she does. But it's imperative that I correct her misconceptions.

She thinks I got "kicks" out of being important in her life. Yet at this moment, in the 'depths of sorrow', I think I love her. Is such a reaction likely from one who "got kicks out of being important" to her?

Why do I think I love her? Because I care more about her than anyone else, because I feel '*complete*' when I'm around her, because her moods are always reflected in mine, because I *need* her to think well of me, because I *need* her in my life.

Sometimes, I admit, I can be a hollow person. But I've never felt this way about anyone. For once I don't feel hollow.

[…]

She returned to her former wonderful self as soon as she saw that she'd hurt me. She told me that everything she'd said was only meant to hurt my feelings, that she loves me now more than before. I let her read what I'd written today: she doesn't think that my professed love will last, but it was good for her to read it anyway.

July 15

I'm reading *A History of the Modern Middle East* by William Cleveland. It's a more useful book than the other. Also *Ancient Greece*, by Donlan, Pomeroy, Burstein and Roberts.

July 20

The more I'm around Sangeetha, the more I think I love her. I can't imagine a happiness at once deeper and more secure than when I'm lying in her arms. At such moments—or perhaps when I'm kissing her nipples—I feel united with the universe.

My family came to Freiburg yesterday. (Unfortunately they missed—by thirty minutes—my performance of Liszt's Liebestraum No. 3 in the Goethe Institut's concert.) Sangeetha had dinner with us; Mom thought she was adorable. (Who wouldn't?) After several hours I was able to escape from them; immediately I ran to Sangeetha's room, where I spent the night. She gave me a lesson in salsa dancing, wearing her tight black pants, bouncing her bottom back and forth, giggling. God, I love her.

Today my family and I are going to Salzburg for the weekend.

I wish I could find a copy of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. I'm tired of reading introductory books by obscure authors.

July 23

The weekend went as well as could be expected. The car ride to Salzburg was hellacious (7 hours), but Saturday wasn't bad. We saw Mozart's house and walked around the marketplace; later we took a tour through a salt mine. In the night we had an informal concert in Susan's living room, Jay and I playing Chopin's A-flat étude together on Susan's two pianos.

On Sunday I took a train to Mannheim at 3:00, but I got onto the wrong connection to Freiburg. So I had to get off at the next station—having been given advice by friendly passengers—and wait for a train to Karlsruhe. This time I took the right one, but due to its delay I just barely made it to the connecting train to Freiburg. Asked a man if it was indeed going to Freiburg; he said yes. But he was wrong. So, having had my itinerary planned out *again* by a friendly passenger, I debarked at Heidelberg and waited till 3:30 a.m. for *another* train to Freiburg. By then I'd become rather impatient. But I arrived safely at 5:30.

Much of the weekend I spent thinking about Sangeetha. The only reason my delays were frustrating is that I was frantic to see her.

Today (Monday) I spent a lot of time with her and thus felt complete again. She took a nap as I sat at her desk reading, the soft lamplight angled away from the bed so as not to disturb her. When she awoke I was in the same position, reading; she smiled groggily and remarked how pleasant it was to wake up and see me watching over her. "It makes me feel protected. Warm and protected." I'm still in her room and might sleep here. I'm so happy with her!

July 25

Finally finished *Ancient Greece*.

I still can't understand why Sangeetha loves me. –Actually, I'm almost convinced she doesn't. Despite her protestations of love, she seems to take me for granted. I, on the other hand, *never* take her for granted. I never ignore her, I never treat her with an iota of disrespect, I constantly indicate that she means the world to me....

As an example of the discrepancy between her words and her acts I'll describe what happened tonight. At 8:00 Sangeetha, I, and a Brit named Rufus went to a bar (with others) for a few hours. Most of the time she ignored me. I was happy sitting next to her, gently rubbing her back once in a while; but she told me to stop because it embarrassed her. So I sat there feeling rejected and dejected. We all left at 10:30. We had planned to go dancing, but since we couldn't find a "discothek" we ended up walking around town for an hour. Again, she ignored me and showered attention on Rufus (who, by the way, tried to kiss her several nights ago and convince her to go out with him). Gradually she forgot my existence. Whenever I tried to talk to her she answered in near monosyllables and returned to Rufus. The experience was painful. Ultimately I got fed up and returned home.

What's even worse is that Sangeetha already knows I'm not fully comfortable about her relationship with Rufus, for he's handsome, smart, funny, interested in her, 'sexy' (according to her), etc. We've had light-hearted conversations about this, so she's well aware she's not the only one with insecurities. –Yet after all our conversations she's capable of being so insensitive! Does she lack a shred of common sense? […]

I may be making a big deal out of nothing. But if I were aware only of Sangeetha's actions and not her words, I'd think she sees me as some kind of a love-toy to play with for a time and then discard. After all, how can anyone in love act the way she sometimes does? From my perspective it's impossible. So either she's lying to herself and to me or the kind of love she's able to feel is less intense (or 'devoted') than the kind I am.

All in all, I'm tired of dishonest relationships. I wish I could find a soulmate. For a time I thought Sangeetha could be this person, but I guess I was wrong.

—This is my definition of *homo sapiens*: the animal that can't help but be dishonest to itself and its fellows.—

July 26

Sangeetha's insensitive behavior last night wasn't just my imagination. We talked about it today. Apparently her friends in India had told her she should end her romance with me before we travel around Europe together. Why? I have no idea. She told me she's being inconsiderate to her boyfriend by having a "physical" relationship with me, so she wants to stop. […]

Sangeeetha predicts we'll drift apart over the two years before she comes to America. Because of this vague prediction she feels justified in crushing my feelings and forcing me to suppress my love. She says our relationship is pointless and going nowhere. Because of this she thinks it makes sense to end it—prematurely—on a sour note. I had no idea she was capable of being so unreasonable and inconsiderate.

Moreover, if she still loves me (which she says she does) how does she expect to 'turn it off' as we're constantly around one another for two weeks?

Today I told her the only reason I'd gone to the bar last night was to be around her. So what did she say? "I've never done anything only to be around you." Boy, that made me feel great. When I pointed out the effect her behavior last night had had on me, she first accused me of acting like a jealous boyfriend and then admitted that she "hadn't been thinking". I find it mind-boggling that anyone can be so insensitive. This whole experience has left such a bitter taste in my mouth that I'm not even *really* looking forward to the next two weeks. She handled it in the worst possible way. She didn't tell me about her decision until I'd squeezed it out of her; she didn't reflect on how her actions would affect me; she got defensive even as I was *crying*; her attempts to console me have been half-hearted; and her hasty 'decision' itself is asinine. She seems to care more about her oblivious former boyfriend than about the boy she loves and who loves her. I'm quite disillusioned. Sangeetha seems to have a weak, unempathetic character.

On the other hand, I'm too good-natured to hold a grudge against her. She probably feels repentant. Undoubtedly she doesn't appreciate me, but I appreciate her good qualities and can try to ignore her bad ones.

We've talked about everything and have sorted it out. First she read my journal; then she explained what had been going through her head in her episodes of insensitivity. Apparently she'd become afraid of how dependent she was on me. I was the center of her life. Instead of discussing her concerns—which she's not used to because her boyfriend never did—she simply 'shut herself off' and tried not to love me. This resulted in her callous behavior.

Anyway, our physical relationship is probably over. But at least we're back on good terms. I entirely forgive her; it's 'water under the bridge'. She is who she is, and it's admirable that she's trying to change herself by discussing her concerns rather than ignoring them.

July 28

I'm sitting in front of the Louvre right now. It's intriguing that mere humans were able to build this palace. It's disappointing, though, that such a monument is conspicuously out of place in the modern world. It doesn't belong. It's evocative of the Sun King's era and the unbounded confidence in historical progress and national greatness that characterized it. The Louvre reminds me both of humanity's potential and of its inevitable decadence. –If only we could experience a classicism without its attendant misery of the masses!

I'm in the Islamic section of the museum. The ivory sculptures and carvings from the Middle Ages are remarkable in their vivid depiction of Near Eastern life. A 7- by 3-inch fragment of a relief shows a warrior fighting an animal; in another fragment, a lion devours its prey as a minstrel sings; in yet another, men dance and drink wine, celebrating their existence and momentarily forgetting God's wrath. –What a majestic, naïve age it must have been.

The ancient Mesopotamian art is equally striking. Indeed, more so, for it has immortalized the birth pangs of civilization. It signifies man's triumph over nature, just as the remarkable statue "Hercule combattant Acheloüs, métamorphosé en serpent"—which was carved in the early 1800s—celebrates human beauty, power and form as contrasted with the savagery of untamed nature. At the same time, the statue "Roland furieux", built in the mid-1800s, symbolizes man's constraint in the macrocosm, his entrapment, his irredeemable frustration. These two sides of man are in tension with each other and thus compel him to reach ever more exalted manifestations of his power.

–However, such dichotomies sound suspiciously Goethean, i.e. lofty and unscientific.

Paintings and sculptures have never been able to affect me (intellectually or emotionally) as strongly as music, literature, philosophy, science, history, psychology/sociology and religion [Buddhism] have. I ought to have read more books on art before I came to the Louvre. As it is, art interests me primarily as a muddled reflection of society.

Because Sangeetha isn't here I feel too listless to do anything. I'm apathetic and alone. I guess I'll read *Das Kapital* (of which I still haven't finished half). But I don't have the energy to do that either! I'm obsessed with Sangeetha! Nothing seems to matter without her here. Normally I'd write about philosophy in my spare time, but since I'm in love[1] philosophy seems dry and contentless. I can't enjoy myself without Sangeetha; I'm only a half-self. *I* give my life *form*, *she* gives it *content*. I miss sleeping at her side, holding her and being held in her arms, brushing her lips against mine. I miss laughing with her.

There are many 'deeper' thoughts I should pursue—such as my partial dependence on the memory of Goethe in determining how to mold myself and which experiences to seek out—but the less productive activity of kissing Sangeetha is what occupies my mind. I could reflect on mysticism, ethics or the labor theory of value, but instead I mull over my loneliness. Strangely, however—although I'm frantic to see my beloved—my solitude is more comforting than the kind I'm used to.

July 29

I don't know what to do today. I'm devoid of energy: can't stop thinking about the joy Sangeetha brings into my life and the unfortunate fact that I can't trust her anymore.

Anyway, I should eat breakfast.

A mother nursing her child is a touching sight. It's a communion between two bodies of the same substance, a special kind of sex. While the sexual act has often been associated with pain and death, the act of nursing is purely life-giving. It is an innocent, intimate affirmation of existence.

What if Sangeetha doesn't come tomorrow? What if she never comes? We have no way of getting in touch with each other. Theoretically I might never hear from her again.

July 30

I'm starting to panic. When I confirmed Sangeetha's reservation, the person at the desk couldn't find it. What if Sangeetha can't find her way here? What if she accidentally told me the address of the wrong hostel? What if she decides it would be emotionally easier for her not to accompany me on this trip? What if I never see her again?! I don't have a way to get in touch with her.

....It's almost 11:00 a.m. I'm sick with fear that she won't come. Seeing her walk through the doorway would be too grand an experience to happen to *me.*

....It's 12:00. If I weren't listening to Mozart I'd be pacing the room in anxiety. Instead, I'm staring

[1] I must be, or nearly so.

out the doorway, nervously praying each second that she'll suddenly appear as if by magic in my line of vision.

....It's 1:00. I feel worried enough to cry; hence, I'm crying. I'm imagining myself traveling through Europe without Sangeetha. In spite of her flaws, I love her without reserve. Life is as a shell without her. I can understand why some lovers commit suicide after losing their beloved.

August 2

Sangi and I are in Barcelona. We left Paris yesterday, having visited Versailles, Notre Dame, l'Arc de Triomphe, the Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay, the Eiffel Tower, the Tuileries, the Catacombes and other sites. We also took a trip down the Seine at night.

As you probably remember, my last entry ended on a mildly despondent note. Fortunately for my sanity, Sangeetha arrived soon after I'd finished writing. She'd gotten lost.

August 5

I ought to write more often, but I don't have time. The two of us are in Rome today and tomorrow: we've seen the Colosseum, the Forum, the Pantheon and the Vittorio Emmanuele monument. The architecture of the latter was startlingly palatial for the late nineteenth century. It could have been built in classical Rome.

August 8

In the past few days we've been to Pisa and Florence; now we're in Venice. Pisa is a charming town with some striking architecture—notably, of course, the leaning tower. This building is old enough to have increased its angle of incline by less than one cm each year and yet today to be four or five meters off the perpendicular. Reflecting on it, I was struck that history provides so few examples of similar occurrences. In antiquity, how could architects have known whether the soil they built on was capable of sustaining their projects? Maybe they got lucky most of the time.[1]

We stayed in Pisa for one night. On the morning of the next day we took a train to Florence. After finding a hostel we wandered through a flea market—in which I ate one bite of a cow's-stomach-sandwich and threw the rest away—and got lost in several narrow alleys, until finally we found the Duomo. This cathedral was staggering in its luminescence. I didn't go inside, but the exterior consisted of such a dazzling array of dancing tints of light that I felt as if the interior could only be a disappointment. I've forgotten the exact appearance of the main structure of the monument; instead, there remains indelibly inscribed in my mind an impression of brilliant greens, yellows, reds and whites harmoniously commingled in a perfect totality of sculpted reliefs and Corinthian columns. Few other medieval buildings can compare with it as a simple glorification of life and humanity (sublimated into worship of God).

Our next destination was Michelangelo's *David*. Everything else in the Galleria dell' Accademia is a mere prelude to that masterpiece. I was completely unprepared for its size (twice a man's height), but the real marvel was its fidelity to life. The veins on David's hands were realistic enough to have been modeled from Michelangelo's own; the muscles of the knees contained the same twisted sinews that my own do when I stand; the face radiated that boyish confidence and equanimity which is evident in certain sculptures of Alexander the Great; the bodily proportions were seemingly *perfect*. Were there, indeed, any flaws in the statue? I could discern none.

I was moved as I pondered the immortality of art. Four centuries ago Michelangelo carved his

[1] [Yes, that was clearly the reason. Luck.]

masterpiece; to this day it survives. It has remained a beacon of hope and stability through wars, inquisitions and plagues. David's expression of 'boyish triumph' hasn't been altered an iota—even as millions of Jews have been slaughtered, two thirty-year wars have devastated the continent, Italy has declined as a power, the British empire has risen and fallen, feudalism has succumbed to capitalism, one hundred thousand Japanese have evaporated in a flash of light.... Humankind doesn't cease to strive, and all the while there remains the *David.*

Of course, there also remains St. Peter's Basilica. This cathedral, the largest in the world, needs no introduction and can suffer no description. Seeing it was the climax of my trip to Italy. I hadn't imagined that such a structure existed in the world, for even Notre Dame pales in comparison. (Think of all the creative energy that has been devoted to worshiping God!) The Basilica is one of the wonders of the world; in its beauty it rivals the most exquisite creations of nature. I who haven't been educated in art and architecture am unable to provide detailed commentary, but I know enough to recognize beauty when I see it.

As I write these words I'm standing on a balcony overlooking a canal and a long line of gondolas. Every fifth gondola carries an accordion-player and a singer; as they pass, I'm regaled with their tunes. This is quintessential Venice. Time has come to a halt in this place;—or, at the very least, this place recognizes none of the trappings of time. It is the spirit of Romance made real.[1] Venice lacks the majesty of Rome, perhaps, but it's more consistently seductive. Its narrow alleyways in which one soon gets lost have a rather more tranquil air than the congested backways and byways of the typical city. Indeed, the absence of cars is one of Venice's greatest strengths. Were it not for the tourists I'd want to spend my life here.

Tonight I'm sleeping on a bench. After a day of searching for accommodations in the sweltering heat, Sangeetha and I finally met tourists who knew of a single vacancy in a nunnery. That's where Sangeetha is sleeping. There was no room for me. But it doesn't matter: I'm satisfied with life's bare necessities.

Venezia, city on the sea,
Embodiment of the muse 'f Tranquillity
- In our society an anomaly -
You cannot but eternally fascinate me!

August 9

Last night wasn't especially fun. I slept about two hours.

This morning Sangeetha and I took a boat to the San Marco piazza, after which we split up because she was mad at me. The day started off well: we had breakfast, walked through streets together and had a great time. The previous night had ended on an even better note: as we cuddled on the bank of a canal, Sangeetha expressed her profound regret at leaving me in two days—in tones bordering on tearful. But today, as we entered the boat taking us across the canal, I neglected to buy a $3 ticket for the ride. Sangeetha bought one after the boat had already begun its trip, so I jokingly called her a "goody-goody". She retorted that not buying one was tantamount to stealing, so I good-humoredly said that at least I wasn't stealing from anyone in particular (rather a wealthy business that could afford not to gain three dollars). Our 'argument' gradually escalated. Eventually she professed—still smiling—to like me less because I hadn't paid for a ticket, so I countered that my action wasn't nearly as bad as something her boyfriend had once done, viz. bribe university officials to give him a good grade on a major exam he had failed. But she disagreed with me! I pressed her, but she continued to disagree! Even worse, she *insisted* she liked me less now. Still smiling, she actually insinuated that she didn't like me at all. I didn't know what to make of her sudden

[1] That may be an exaggeration.

change of mood, so I alternately accused her of trying to be funny and being mean. The upshot of the conversation was that I became convinced of her sincerity and then half-jokingly accused her of self-complacency. That, unfortunately, was not a diplomatic thing to do. She stopped talking to me, a sure sign her mood had changed for the worse. Well-acquainted with her peculiar alterations of temperament, I knew the best policy was to be silent myself. Hence I followed her around the Piazza and through winding streets, sometimes not saying a word and sometimes acting as if nothing had happened. At length I grew tired of this game, so I asked her if she wanted to meet me sometime later in the day. She said yes: at 4:00. It was 10:30 at the time!

For a while I was angry and confused, but now that that's subsided I can examine her actions objectively. Clearly she perceives me as self-complacent and arrogant. This perception has been at the heart of all her severe mood-swings around me. Assuming for the moment that it's true, why does it so exasperate her? I can vouch that an inability to make a person care about his faults is quite frustrating (though I don't know exactly why), but she's mistaken if she thinks I don't care about my own. –Be that as it may, she sees me as self-complacent and hence frustrating—and also, my arrogance maddens her, since she is a girl well-acquainted with insecurity.

My point of view, however, has strengths as well. For one thing, a good friend ought to constructively criticize my flaws rather than insult me. Sangeetha shouldn't interpret it as a personal affront whenever I unwittingly act complacently. I respect my friends—of whom there are two or three—*and* their feelings, regardless of their character flaws. I may criticize them and encourage them to develop themselves in ways they might not have previously considered, but I'm always circumspect with the words I choose in so doing. […]

Sometimes it seems as though Sangeetha interprets our relationship as a kind of subtle competition. She possibly thinks I see myself as better than she, or that I have high standards for her that she doesn't have even the inclination to fulfill. (Maybe this is why she found our romance "constraining".) Aside from being untrue—I wouldn't be a friend of someone whom I really thought was inferior—this perception of 'comparative arrogance' is potentially fatal to meaningful relationships. […]

Anyway, this trip has rid me of my "love" for Sangeetha. I don't think less of her than before, but she's right that we're too different to be around each other all the time. Our personalities and our convictions—even some of our moral values—are quite dissimilar.

Regarding my pride, I can at most diminish it by degrees. It will, for better or worse, always be a component of my character.

Maybe I should write about Paris. –It was marvelous. Sangeetha and I both enjoyed it immeasurably, although the heat was scorching. (Heat makes her cranky, so she wasn't always an ideal travel companion.) Versailles and the Louvre are so immense that we saw only fractions of them, but the Catacombes were *incredible*! Bones everywhere! Skulls arranged in the shapes of hearts! Never-ending tunnels of death! I thought it was disturbingly appropriate that the French Resistance had had its headquarters there.

August 12

Sangeetha and I bade farewell yesterday morning. We were sad. Despite our differences, we were half in love for the two months we spent together. We returned to this romance during our last two days together, making our parting all the more doleful.

On the evening of the ninth I discussed with Sangeetha her anger at me. She was reluctant to explain it, so I read her my speculations. This triggered a mutual exchange of thoughts, including reflections on friendship, which I considered valuable in that it 'cleared the air'. For example, she professed not to want to change my arrogance, since she didn't think she had the 'right'; I tried to convince her that friends are *supposed* to improve each other, indeed intentionally. Anyhow, our talk lasted quite a while, at the end of

which we had become, predictably, ‘closer’ than before. We shed the appearance of mere friendship and grew lovey-dovey once again.

The next day, our last in Venice, we walked through pleasant cobblestone streets in the vicinity of the train station for five hours, holding hands and kissing. At 8:00 we took a train to Vienna. The ride lasted the entire night, during which, for the last time, we kissed and groped each other fervidly. Sangeetha got much more sleep than I did: she finds my lap comfortable. I remained awake, staring tenderly at her face and cradling her breast in my hand. For a long time I’ll look back on that night with fondness.

Sangeetha wanted to spend a day with me in Budapest, but since her visa didn’t extend to Hungary we had to say goodbye in the train station. She’s going back to India in two days. I won’t see her for at least two years.

Lately I’ve read *The Soul of Man* and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* by Oscar Wilde; poems by John Donne; “The Gold Bug”, “The Black Cat”, “The Fall of the House of Usher”, “William Wilson”, “Ligeia” and other short stories by Edgar Allan Poe; and *Parapsychology and the Nature of Life* by John L. Randall. The latter book wasn’t impressive—the last chapter, consisting of philosophical speculations, was comical—but at least it’s nearly convinced me to believe in ESP. This belief will have a momentous effect on the development of my thought: it necessitates major revisions in the prevailing scientific worldview.

Here I am atop Mount Something-or-Other, glorying in the prospect of Pest below. On the horizon is a never-ending sea of misty green. Lovers surround me, steeping themselves in each other’s presence, nourishing themselves on it, dancing to the ‘music of the spheres’.

’Tis a pity I lost my camera last week. –But I value the moment more than faded mockeries of it.

I can well understand why Goethe remained idealistic his whole life. When there are views like *this* in the world, it’s hard *not* to be sanguine. At this instant I’m not even bothered that I technically don’t exist. (I’m postponing philosophy for a later date.)

August 13

Love is an eclipse of the intellect. Hence, it must be pursued at all costs.

To say that Marx confused capitalism’s birth pangs with its death throes is misleading. It thrusts back upon history a halo of necessity. Nothing is inevitable. Had strong leaders emerged, socialism could have triumphed in the late 19th century. [Nope. Definitely not true.]

(Even if in a metaphysical sense *everything* is necessary, in the sense Marxists have assumed, *nothing*—or very little—is.)

I’m atop Castle Hill on this most glorious day of the year: the infinite ocean above me is marred not by a wrinkle. St. Stephen’s Basilica lies directly in my line of sight, competing with a corner of the sky, reaching toward the heavens. –Mankind asserts its will to power yet again.

August 14

I’m in the Statue Park. This little park consists of monuments from the communist era. Some are impressive, but on the whole they’re typical products of barren socialist realism.

Today I’m traveling with my two roommates (American and Japanese). One is friendly, the other is as quiet as all Japanese.

....We went to a Turkish bath after leaving the park. (It took a helluva long time to find it.) That was quite an experience. In some of the pools we were forced to savor the fragrant aroma of sulphur, but what I found more ‘distinctive’ was the sight our eyes feasted on: round old men, happily naked as hippopotamuses, waddling from bath to bath. Nevertheless, on the whole it was a GRAND experience. In

terms of sheer physical pleasure it towered above everything but sex. For two hours I walked from cold baths to hot baths to cold baths to hot baths, so that by the end my skin had advanced seventy years in age. However, the hottest and steamiest of the saunas was not so pleasurable. The moment I walked into it, my American friend, who was already sitting there, said, "Hello Chris. ....Do you believe in hell?" I hadn't until that instant. It was, first, impossible to breathe in there, and second, boiling hot. Even so, I endured it for four minutes. After that I utilized the remaining molecules of oxygen in my body to stagger out of the room and into the frigidarium.

Anyhow, the baths were veritably *decadent*. I felt like a Roman.

I'm reading Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*. What befell him as the culmination of his relationship with "Lord" Alfred Douglas incites me to fury. If there is a grain of truth in Wilde's characterization of the man, Douglas was despicable. How often have artists suffered Wilde's fate at the hands of people like Douglas and the public?! How wearisome I find the herd's self-assurance after so many calamities have been caused by its prejudices! –The reason that moral and cultural relativism are wrong is that if the herd had had its druthers in the domain of culture, mankind would have died out long ago! There would have been no *ideals* for it to realize,[1] so it would not have passed beyond the first stages of history.

(One day I'll have to thoroughly research the role of cultural ideals in propelling history forward.[2] This notion is decidedly un-Marxist.)

August 15

Poe is right: to understand people's states of mind is much easier if one momentarily adopts their facial expressions. This indicates, of course, that the face is an objectification of the mind and that the mind is significantly influenced by the contours of the face. (The "science of physiognomy" was less silly than phrenology.)

De Profundis contains many truths whose profundity I can't yet appreciate. I'm too young.

The people of Budapest seem unfriendly. And few speak English.

I miss Sangeetha. I miss loving her. I'm tired of comparing myself to great men. I'd like simply to bathe in sweetness and light.

Some preach the richness of our "inner life", some [e.g., behaviorists] deny its very existence. What a confused thing is man!

For a long time I've had one overriding concern: if there is 'emptiness' at the heart of the self, how can one know oneself? Must one's actions be relied upon, as expressive of the *real* rather than the *surreal* self?[3] But is this indeed always true of them? What does it *mean* if it is? Is the two-self distinction valid? (I doubt it. At best, the lines between the two are blurred beyond recognition. This is evident from today's earlier reflections.)

The way I can tell that my recent intellectual and personal developments are the true me and not merely imitations of others is that they are natural outcomes of my adolescence. In the earliest entries of this diary I was hardly influenced by any idols whatever. My adolescence was pure, unadulterated *me*: even my style of writing was naïve and candid. (Unlike other 'great' men, I had a poor education. I had to willfully rise above it to acquire culture and writing skills.) In college I began to be influenced by historical figures, but their own resonance with my nature suggests that they merely sharpened my self-awareness and thus sped up the process of growth. In short, I'm not deluding myself by trying to be an artist or philosopher.

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[1] The herd always follows, never creates, ideals.

[2] Or enabling it continue.

[3] I always use very precise terms. [Sarcasm.]

(In any case, after my fling with Nietzsche, these individuals have had but a negligible influence on me.[1] I now emulate them as a class.)

August 16

Oscar Wilde, whose face sparkled like clay, was an unimpressive thinker. There is much of value in *De Profundis*, but Wilde couldn't have been a philosopher if he had tried. Neither could Goethe. Kant, Herder, the Greeks and others determined Goethe's philosophy (if indeed he had one). His conception of the "demonic" has some intuitive validity—though it, too, is derivative—but it's woefully imprecise.

Returning to Wilde, I must admit that his extravagant style of writing is embarrassing. It's beautiful, but if I had written in that style I would have felt artificial, dishonest and cheap. The Romantic movement exaggerated *everything*.

I arrived in Prague today. I was happy to leave Budapest, where the people are uncivilized. [Not true!] I'm staying in a hostel next to the train station.

Food for thought: philosophers must be almost as imaginative as poets, but rarely are both arts combined in a single person.

I don't understand children's universal desire to scare birds. Is it their immature will to power?

People who constantly honk their car horns are foolish and annoying. What has it ever accomplished? Hungarians, or those living in Budapest (Buda-pests?), love to beep their horns; Czechs are more sensible.

How can definitions of art be other than arbitrary? There is no 'true' definition or ideal of art, although I wish there were.

—Is everything relative?!?! God, let that not be true!

August 17

I'm somewhere in the vicinity of Prague Castle. The area is picturesque, to say the least.

Nothing in life is more 'flower-like' than young love. Nothing is fresher. I'm not referring to its sexual or passionate aspects, but to its spiritual aspect. It is Innocence. It is the first bloom of life's instinct for renewal. It is a return to childhood and all things associated with children. What can be more glorious than that?

—That babble was the Romantic approach to love. There is also the scientific approach, which is less pretty but more valuable. One day the scientific in my nature will win out over the romantic.

August 18

Sangeetha and I write to each other every day. She feels empty and miserable because I'm not with her; she's worried she'll feel this way for two years! (That's absurd.) She broke up with her boyfriend yesterday. Today was her first day of something like "graduate school".

I'm trying to write a short story about a composer who works himself into such a frenzy while composing that his body vanishes. There will be various philosophical themes.

I'm in Staromestské námesti, eating supper next to the St. Nicholas Church. This square is truly a tourist's heaven. It contains a little museum of medieval torture instruments, which I of course visited, whose exhibits are fascinatingly barbaric. (The Middle Ages were not a nice time to be a criminal.)

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[1] Example: my "misanthropy" lasted none too long.

Today I also tried, and failed, to find the Mozart Museum. I saw the Museum of Decorative Arts, but for sheer human interest it didn't hold a candle to the torture museum.

....Went to a performance of Mozart's Requiem in St. Nicholas's Church. Some of the instruments, particularly the trombone, had excellent tone quality, but overall the production wasn't impressive, for two reasons: we might as well have been in an echo chamber, and the sopranos and altos were women. Never trust women to sing classical music. [Decades later, I still remember that the vibrato in that performance was terrible.]

I also saw the exterior of the opera house in which Mozart conducted Don Giovanni's premiere. It occurred to me, I know not why, that it's a tragedy I didn't meet Mozart. We could have benefited each other enormously, as always happens when sensitive minds meet. He could have given me insights into the nature of genius, which I would have communicated to history, and I could have been a moderating influence in his life.

Two American girls struck up a conversation with me before the Requiem began. We sat together during the performance; after it had finished we perambulated. They were charming girls—though not as charming as Sangeetha.[1]

August 19

Today I went to some museums in the Jewish Quarter. Rather boring. Didn't do much else except write to Sangeetha and buy three books (*De Anima*, *Eugene Onégin*, and Frank Walbank's *Decline of the Roman Empire in the West*). Tomorrow I'm going to Krakow.

My impressions of Prague were, on the whole, of unqualified admiration. Its architecture is as consistently 'lavish' as that of Venice; its people are friendly and helpful; its culture and history are rich. That it was not destroyed in World War II is an extremely fortunate accident.

August 21

I'm in Krakow. The Old Town is nearly as enchanting as Venice; the architecture reminds one of Krakow's distinguished past. I feel like I've been transported to the 18th century.

Yesterday on the train I read Walbank's book. It was very good, though brief. The author has obvious Marxist sympathies—he thinks the economic structure was the main reason for Rome's decline—so I'm sympathetic to most of what he writes. I even agree that Rome's decline was, on the whole, inevitable. Without an industrial evolution such a byzantine empire couldn't be self-perpetuating. Nothing anyone could have done would have changed that.

I also read most of a 100-page introduction to Aristotle's work.

On the train last night I met an Irish girl who was going to Krakow. She was friendly, though a little dull. Through her I met an elderly couple—a Canadian and a Pole—who helped us find a hostel. The four of us had a short conversation about Marxism and its relation to Communism: I defended Marx and the others criticized him. They couldn't understand that perversions of his doctrine are irrelevant to the doctrine itself. Like all close-minded imbeciles they conflated a huge range of vastly dissimilar phenomena because they share a few superficial resemblances. The herd is not capable of abstract thought.

Anyway, the Irish girl and I walked to our hostel as she did nothing but complain that she wouldn't see her friend in Krakow, since she didn't know where he was staying. But suddenly he was standing right in front of us, purely by coincidence! And guess who he was! –A kid I'd known at the Goethe Institut! I was stunned. It was a remarkable occurrence.

The three of us walked a hell of a long way to a hostel. In the morning the two friends left Krakow, so I was thankfully alone again. (Their conversations were none too edifying.) In the safety of solitude I

[1] She has zest, innocence, and a strong presence.

walked to Wawel Hill, which is crowned by a castle and a cathedral. I spent two hours there, missing Sangeetha more than I ever had since she'd left on the eleventh. I had the distinct feeling that half of me was in India. So I e-mailed her again, sounding a little sentimental, and then e-mailed Jenny. We've been discussing philosophy and relationships. Soon she's coming to Copenhagen; we plan to meet for a day or two. I have no idea where I'll go after that. Maybe Spain again. Certainly the Netherlands.

August 22

I had planned to leave Krakow today—I should have, since it's cloudy and drizzling—but I was too lazy to get my act together. Tomorrow I'll go to Warsaw.

Walked to Kazimierz, the Jewish district of Krakow. It was quiet and dead. Reminded me of a ghetto, ironically. I left it as quickly as I could. Now I'm wandering around and writing e-mails. Sent Sangeetha a postcard.

August 23

I'm on the train to Warsaw. I loved Krakow, but it has one flaw: a mist of pollution hovers above it.

I bought two CDs to send to Sangeetha: Mozart's last four piano concertos, and Grieg's and Schumann's piano concertos. I wrote notes on the cover flaps to help her appreciate the music. […]

In Barcelona Sangeetha and I saw the Picasso museum. I was impressed with the man's early, sophisticated art, but in his later phases he degenerated into childishness. Supposedly he tried to discover the "essence" of art in his seemingly immature paintings, but I have no idea what such a discovery entails. How can a person find art's essence? What does that mean? Why didn't Picasso communicate his earth-shaking discovery through *words* rather than *paint?* In any case, art has no "essence", just as the concept of the "game" probably has no essence.[1] Besides, if it does—couldn't Picasso have searched for the essence in a more sophisticated manner?! […]

Why did physicalism and related philosophies emerge in the 20th century and not before? Why has Cartesianism fallen out of favor? I can think of convincing reasons for these developments, all of which are related to the feudal, industrialist and late capitalist economic structures (and science, etc.). But I'll let the reader do some independent thinking for a change.

Oscar Wilde's tract "The Soul of Man" is interesting but woefully inadequate both philosophically and prescriptively. What's the use of praising socialism if he doesn't even define the term? "But you're missing the point. He's merely using a utopian idea to highlight the inadequacies of capitalism." Oh well, la-dee-dah. Even his artistic reflections are defective. The whole piece is too Romantic and unphilosophical. "But you're ignoring the historical context. He lived during the heyday of late Romanticism, so his errors are excusable." Sure. What does that mean? How are they "excusable"? He prided himself on being an individualist, yet he couldn't break out of the unscientific cant his age wallowed in! He embraced it, just as he embraced other prejudices current in his day. Individualist, my arse! "What's your point?" I don't have a point, duh! I'm bored, so I'm ranting and raving and holding dialogues with myself to pass the time! "Shut up." With pleasure.

August 24

[1] Wittgenstein.

It's hard to believe I'm in Poland, sitting on a wall of bricks in the Old Town, listening to street performers play Vivaldi. A year ago I would have laughed if someone had predicted this future. I'm in Warsaw, my friend! I'm in a city the mere existence of which is a triumph of the human spirit. *History* happened here: WWI, the Great Depression, WWII, the Occupation, the reconstruction. I am a participant in history! How glorious it is to be alive!

....I'm going to start exercising again, or at least doing sit-ups and push-ups. The main reason, of course, is that I want my future girlfriend to love *every aspect* of me. (I didn't feel great when Sangeetha described to me her boyfriend's fabulous body.) However, I'm also just wary of cultivating my mind and not my body. I want to be cultivated in as many ways as possible.

Today I saw the Chopin museum, which basically consisted of one room. I spent most of the day writing the beginning of my short story.

August 25

I'm bored. I don't feel like doing anything. I'm sick of museums. I'm sick of trying to feel "appropriate emotions" as I explore Warsaw.

....I saw the Royal Castle. (Entirely rebuilt after the war.)

It's disgusting that every human being defecates. Every one! That's unthinkable! How many tons of shit are produced by us each day? How many gallons of urine? How many gallons of semen dribble down women's legs every night?

August 26

I called Sangeetha. The conversation was so expensive we were able to talk for only two minutes. But hearing her voice was worth all the money. Incidentally, I don't think she misses me as much as she did a week ago. She's enjoying her independence, her freedom to do as she likes and not have to worry about the feelings of a 'boyfriend'. Have I mentioned she's writing a novel? It's a fairytale.

Today I'm taking a twenty-hour trip to Stockholm. That ought to be fun.

I said once that German is a beautiful language. What was I thinking? In poetry it can have a strange beauty, but not when spoken on the streets! In the latter case I can almost hear the doctrines of Nazism being espoused. This leads me to believe that there's an intimate connection between Nazism and the German language. (After all, no philosophy so hate-filled could be expressed (compellingly) in French!) How influential is the way a particular language sounds on the beliefs held by its speakers?

Etymology, by the way, fascinates me.

I'm bored. Tired of writing my story. Don't want to read. Tired of traveling alone. Tired of sitting on this train. Tired of not having a girlfriend.

Well, things haven't worked out quite the way I'd planned. (Do they ever?) I'd hoped to arrive in Stockholm at 12:30 on the 27th; now I won't get there until 6:00. You see, the train reached this Berlin station a few minutes late, so now I have to wait around here until 4:00 a.m. and then switch trains three times before I reach Stockholm. There's a fun journey ahead, my friend.

I wish I could rid myself of my temporary creative impulse. I'm unable to read when I have the insatiable appetite to write.

....I loved Sangeetha.[1] Had we stayed together I might have *desperately* loved her. When I think of her I feel a throbbing, an ache to kiss her, to feel her legs wrapped around me. Her behavior the last week

[1] It's 3:00 a.m. Forgive the blatant repetitiveness.

at the Goethe Institut still pains me when I think about it, but I forgive her because she's so innocent. I *loved* her! –God, how I could have loved her if she had been a little different! Sangeetha, darling! Do I still feel the bloom of love for you? I want to see you again, even though I know you'd disappoint me.

August 28

I reached Stockholm last night, after a thirty-hour trip. My hostel room is in a boat. The location is romantic in the extreme, but I have no one to share the experience with, so it doesn't matter. Last night I felt crushingly alone. Today I'm wandering around Gamla Stan, the beautiful old section of Stockholm, but since the weather is cold and dreary and my mood isn't much different, I'm not having the time of my life. I don't want to see museums. I can't wait to visit Jenny! Traveling alone is fine for a time, but after two weeks it loses its charm.

Mr. Sun has come out. Like a dutiful tourist I saw the Royal Apartments and the Treasury. Now I'm letting the weather improve my mood.

August 29

I'm atop Skånsen hill on this most glorious of days. What an amazing place! The zoo and outdoor museum are both splendid, although it's primarily the natural beauty and tranquility that grab me. I saw some playful, adorable monkeys, and it occurred to me that my childhood fascination with insects hasn't left me; rather, it's been broadened to include the whole of the animal kingdom. I could watch those monkeys for days, studying their behavior and enjoying their presence, doing nothing else but eat and sleep. They're so marvelously "innocent"! There are also many insights into the "human condition" to be had from examining the behavior of other primates. (Are we, too, fundamentally playful animals?)

I'm setting aside my story till I can write on the computer (in October). I have only to compose the climax, but that'll be the hardest part. In the meantime I'm trying to think of another story with more of a plot. Spent most of yesterday doing that but didn't get anywhere.

The lone ant surveyed the wreckage of its colony
And thought, "Civilization's been destroyed. –I'm free!"
****
The golden calf was terrifying
In its stoical majesty.
Believing it to be divine,
Each man sank to his knee.

"Get up, you fools!" cried the creature.
"Why do you kneel before a calf?
"Make a cross, find a beggar,
"Pin him there, and worship that!"
****
My heart afire, I softly kissed
Her subtly rougèd lips:
'Twas pleasant, but oh! I longed to kiss
The lips between her hips!

I like writing bad poetry.

August 30

I'm in a town called Uppsala. At the moment I'm trying to find a hostel. Ain't having much success. By the looks of it I'll have to sleep on the streets.

September 1

Yesterday I met three friendly Brits. We wandered around Gamla Uppsala together, went to a museum of pre-Viking times, saw parts of Uppsala's old university, admired the immense—though rather new-looking—Gothic cathedral (which I suspect is larger than Notre Dame), and then went our separate ways. The three Brits, two guys and a girl, were intelligent medieval history buffs in college. We got along well.

We tasted mead, a drink that's made from honey, water and spices. It was thought to have magical powers by the Vikings because it intoxicates. Needless to say, my tastebuds rejected it.

On the whole, Uppsala was a charming, attractive town. I can't think of much else to say about it.

Spent the night at a hostel in Göteborg. The weather today is dark and dreary.

I'm walking down the Kungsportsavenyn, a boulevard lined with classical architecture (and some contemporary concrete things). It's hard to comprehend the patience and skill that must have entered into the construction of this "monumental architecture". We take this kind of art for granted because we lack the imagination (and inclination) necessary to let ourselves reflect on it, admire it *truly*, contemplate its implications, and imagine it being constructed.

It's a pity that postmodernity is unwilling to tear down its concrete blocks and erect classical or Gothic architecture in their places. This would have a healthy effect on the herd, for pre-20th century architecture "broadens one's outlook". Modern buildings have only a *function*; older buildings have also a *beauty*. Their "Forms" are more complex and life-affirming. They "encourage even the masses rather than belittling even the philosophers". My critic will, of course, say that we can't return to an earlier period of history; architecture, like everything else, marches on. I understand that. It's nearly impossible under late capitalism to achieve beauty on a large scale. But this is because of the 'mindset' and ideologies that capitalism fosters. We must simply transcend postmodern decadence. With this happy happening will our ideologies change again. Great art will become the fashion, not because we'll return to a more naïve era, but because the causes of capitalist artistic atrophy will be abolished. Mass society will be abolished, and a joyful rather than cynical self-consciousness will be the norm. –You want *reasons* for all this; see my earlier entries. Contemplate the march of history and its underlying forces and you'll see I'm right. Observe the workings of the dialectic! There is much to be learned from the dialectic!

Unfortunately, none of my predictions will come true if the economic basis of communism is impossible.

[…] Secrets about human nature can be gleaned from our rituals and ceremonies.

I'm taking a bus to Oslo tonight, for the train has already left.

--Okay, I'm in Oslo. I couldn't find a hostel with an available bed, so I'm sleeping in a train station.

I couldn't sleep in the station because it closed at 12:30. So I wandered around until 1:15, when I met two friendly Portuguese girls. For two hours we toured Oslo, observing the night life (it's Saturday), and now we're sitting in Burger King until the train station opens. Scandinavians are noisy at night. We saw a great many of them staggering through the streets, yelling at the top of their lungs.

September 3

Yesterday I left the girls at 7:30 a.m. Took a tram to a hostel in a muddy meadow, slept on a couch until noon, and returned to the city. After e-mailing Sangeetha and my parents I walked to the Royal Palace, the National Theatre, the parliament building and the Akershus fortress. Unfortunately it was raining. Finally I went back to the hostel and slept.

Today is cloudy. Right now I'm in the wonderful Vigeland park, which contains a central walkway lined by statues. Later I'll go to the Munch museum.

Yesterday I finished reading *Eugene Onegin*. A delightful masterpiece. Reminded me, in some respects, of *Don Quixote*. Its themes were, for example, nihilism, mankind's loss of innocence, the emptiness of modern life, and the inexorability of time. They were all treated with an amusing, self-deprecating self-consciousness. The translation by Babette Deutsch is excellent.

[…]

Vigeland's statues are impressive and thought-provoking, but they're a regression from Michelangelo's *David* and *Pietà*. This, however, is to be expected.

September 4

[…]

Yesterday I walked through parts of the National Gallery, which is an enormous museum featuring Norwegian and European paintings and sculptures. Today I'm not sure what to do.

Saw the Munch museum; it was excellent. Some of the paintings are truly disturbing and thought-provoking, such as "Inheritance I", whose focal point is a blood-bespattered infant. I'd like to contemplate the 'nature' of cultural decline and muse on when and why it has occurred at particular points in history—and do the same for eras of cultural renewal,[1] such as the Renaissance—but I don't have time.

Incidentally, it's impossible for humans not to believe that the self is a 'substance'. This belief is ingrained in the way we perceive the world. Some people[2] may *intellectually*, i.e. superficially, believe in their own 'nothingness', but on a deeper level they don't.

....The one unfortunate fact about my travels around Europe is that they've prevented me from thinking deeply about anything.

Judging by my asexual dreams, I think Freud was wrong about the omnipresence of the sexual instinct in the psyche. I'm not sure, though, since it's hard to tell where and why its influence would end. The pleasure-principle, with its hedonistic overtones, is of course wrong. […]

September 5

I still can't believe that as beautiful a girl as Sangeetha fell in love with me. She actually wanted to have sex with lil' ol' me! That's incredible. My self-confidence has certainly climbed as a result of her love.

Those two months were wonderful, just because I met her. At last I have experienced a bit of love! No longer need I believe that I'm a bookish nerd who hasn't encountered life. Now I can reasonably begin to hope that, like Goethe's, my life will be my greatest achievement. Nor need I think that I'm cerebral in a bland way. My thoughts are simply a part of my life, in the way that my relationships are.

[Deleted some stupid reflections on Aristotle.]

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[1] I'm skeptical of these terms.

[2] Like me.

September 6

The trip to Bergen yesterday was spectacular. Mountain ranges, lush vegetation, shimmering tarns, barren crags.... I arrived at night and slept in a hostel. This morning I missed the "Norway in a Nutshell" train, but there's another one at 10:30. At 11:00 p.m. I have to take a train back to Oslo in order to arrive in Copenhagen by Saturday.

Mankind hasn't constructed any towering monuments on the scale of Norwegian fjords. This is sad. It's time we cooperated with nature in molding massive tributes to Beauty. We ought to erect a statue comparable to the *David*, but on a more immense scale, at the pinnacle of a medium-sized fjord.[1] (It must, of course, be hand-made. We can't let machinery eclipse our own natural abilities.) In the middle of the Sahara we should build a great city consisting of marble statues, fountains and temples in which people contemplate the immensity of the universe.

....I wonder if Bryan Magee is right that the basis of the dialectic is simply that it is man's automatic reaction to new situations or new problems. It's our "problem-solving" capacity. For example, in my earlier youth I wasn't arrogant, but as I grew up and was exposed to the stupidity of people (and my own attendant rejection by my peers) I oscillated to arrogance, and now that I have begun to accept and expect a certain amount of both simple-mindedness in others and my own social isolation, I'm more comfortable with my situation in life and don't need to be aggressively arrogant in my diary. I suspect, though, that this scheme is drastically simplistic even as an explanation of the dialectic in individuals; it certainly doesn't take account of mass movements (or not *entirely*) or the dialectic in the physical sciences—if such exists.

Returning to an earlier topic, it would be a crime against good taste to build such large sculptures in the wilderness.

....I'm in the little village of Flåm, situated in a gigantic fjord. What a place to live!

I've never fully understood Newton's theory of color. From what I've seen of Goethe's, it's inadequate, but I think it does raise interesting objections to Newton's.

How can all the colors be 'latent' in white light? I've never understood it. What does it mean? Is it really likely that all green plants contain the same substance that reflects only one tiny fraction of the color spectrum? How can Newton's theory explain the colors that appear when one presses one's eyes? It can't, yet any comprehensive theory of color must. […]

Regarding man's relationships with nature, it is certainly true that nature is a kind of 'other'. (Neither Goethe nor, perhaps, the young Marx sufficiently recognized this in their philosophies.) But humans also feel united with it in essential ways—mystically and intellectually (sometimes), and even practically. Anyway, I'm not in the mood to think philosophically.

I've been in the ship heading to Bergen for several hours. The weather hasn't been great, but most of the views have. I don't feel the kind of pleasure or excitement my mom seems to when presented with sights like these; rather, I try to *think* about them. For example, I find it funny that we always 'see' lakes incorrectly (just as we shadows incorrectly): it appears to us that the surrounding land is floating on the water, that the shoreline is truly the edge of the land. In reality, of course, the body of water is more like a puddle, in that it's placed on top of land we can't see.

September 7

When I read entries from the first four years of this journal I feel polluted.

September 8

[1] Or rather, on a mountain that is one side of a fjord.

I'm in Copenhagen. Last night I spent a long time searching for a hostel (in the rain), since I'd forgotten to make a reservation. Today I met Jenny in the train station. She's as attractive as ever. First we ate lunch in a wonderful Turkish restaurant; later we walked down the main pedestrian street. The weather was fickle today—rain and then sun—but I had fun. Copenhagen has some truly stunning buildings. Jenny was nice to talk to, but I enjoy Sangeetha's company more. Sangeetha is more responsive and easygoing, and laughs more often.

September 9

Today I stayed inside and read, the weather being miserable. I finally finished Thomas Hardy's novel! It was a frustrating, though beautiful, work. At times it was slow-moving and at times fast-paced; sentimentalism exuded from every page (though this contributed to its beauty); Tess's fate was far from inevitable, based largely on contingencies and whims, so the book wasn't as effective a social commentary or a tragedy as it could have been; the characters themselves were annoying twits, puffed up with absurd pride (on the whole); occasionally I grew weary of the endless word-painting. At any rate: no more Thomas Hardy for me!

In Bergen just before I left for Oslo I met two friendly, cute 20-year-old Japanese girls. We talked for a long time; it turned out they were taking the same train as I that night. I didn't see them during the train ride, nor when we arrived at Oslo, so I thought they were gone from my life forever. But half an hour later, as I was beginning my six-hour wait for the train to Copenhagen, one of them appeared out of nowhere. Her friend had gone to the Munch museum, but *she* hadn't because she was sick. So we talked for quite a while—in German, no less—until she felt better and wanted to see some sights while she waited for her train. Fortunately the weather was incredible, so I took her to the Royal Palace and its surrounding park. Until noon we sauntered around the grounds, enjoying the sexual tension, standing in silence or enthusiastically talking. We exchanged email addresses.

September 11

This morning I bade Jenny farewell. Went to the National Museum, bought a copy of Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, had lunch, and walked to the station to buy a ticket for a train to Amsterdam. It leaves at 7:00, so I have time to read my new book.

September 12

I was always surprised that terrorists hadn't undertaken massive attacks against America. I need be surprised no longer.

My beloved country is, in a sense, getting what it deserves. What goes around comes around: the law of karma. We've done far worse to millions of people everywhere in the world. I feel no shock whatever at this attack, though I am, of course, dismayed that it ended so many lives. […] But since Bush is effectively condoning the suffering of Iraqis and Palestinians (and many others), the fault lies also with him and his ilk. On the most basic level the fault lies with late capitalism [and imperialism!], which as we have seen contains the seeds of its own destruction, but powerful individuals can have a more positive effect than Marx thought.

Bush can deal with the situation intelligently—by acting as a mediator in Middle East conflicts, or by devoting resources to the political and economic development of Muslim nations—or he can use it as an excuse to push through his missiles proposal. He'll do the latter, of course. Stupidity is as predictable as genius isn't.

I arrived in Amsterdam this morning. After finding a hostel I went to the sex museum, which I didn't like. The one in Copenhagen was more tasteful.

My hostel is located in the Red Light District. This area is intriguing, to say the least. Pornographic pictures abound in window displays; sex shops litter the streets; prostitutes sell their bodies to men who have no compunctions about entering brothels in broad daylight. I myself could have sex with any of those girls, but unfortunately I have self-respect.

My gut reaction is to be repelled by the Red Light District, but maybe its sexual openness is socially healthy. Aside from reducing the incidence of prostitution-related crime, it may be psychologically wholesome to legalize whoredom. Society is probably less repressed as a result.

On a somewhat related topic, yesterday a friend of Sangeetha's died from a drug overdose. He was found lying in a street. Many of her friends take drugs; hopefully this incident will teach them some caution.

Copenhagen, by the way, was indeed "wonderful". (Its nickname is Wonderful Copenhagen.) The main pedestrian avenue is fun and has character. The museums are worthwhile too. But the weather is horrendous.

I like Amsterdam more.[1] The architecture is extremely creative, there is much more 'character' on the whole, the atmosphere is more relaxed (though this isn't an unqualified good), the canals are fairly unique, and its history is, I think, richer. The Netherlands has always been one of the most liberal and progressive nations in Europe, due largely to its early trade and resultant cosmopolitan outlook. (It was commercialized *long* before France emerged from feudalism, and even England was for a time backward in comparison.)

I've read a good chunk of the abridged edition (published by Penguin Classics) of Lyell's book. I'm much more interested in astronomy, physics, biology and psychology than geology. Even so, geology is less dull than I thought it would be.

September 13

For the past few hours I've been skimming philosophy books in a store. Predictably, I've become frantic to escape economics and geology and return to the fundamental questions. I feel terrible that there are so many books I haven't read. I know nothing about postmodernism, for example, and very little about existentialism. Even worse, I've forgotten the details of Schopenhauer's philosophy. I must confront Popper's critiques of Marxism. I must decisively refute empiricism. I have yet to acquaint myself with analytical philosophy. There's so much I have to do before I can escape my constant muddled state of mind! I think I'll take a break from *Capital* and the *Principles of Geology.*

Briefly, let me state a few intuitive and immature opinions on doctrines I'll one day confront in full. First, I concede that non-falsifiable theories are not fully scientific (though certainly not meaningless!), and Marxism may be one of these theories. Or rather, *some* of its doctrines undoubtedly *are* non-falsifiable. The labor theory of value is not falsifiable in the same sense that the physical sciences are. But what is the point of deciding whether the label "scientific" is applicable to doctrines? "Scientific" is not synonymous with "potentially true", so we can ignore it when judging the validity of theories.

[…]

The claim that social being determines consciousness is inexact and impossible to prove, but it's suggestive. Hence it's not meaningless. But it may have to be abandoned as a philosophical theory in favor of a more nuanced one that is (1) easier to understand and (2) more easily argued against. […]

I'm unimpressed with what I've read of Karl Popper. His criticisms of Marxism lack a hint of intellectual integrity, i.e. of an attempt to understand the subtleties of Marx's thought and imagine what

[1] Copenhagen can't compare to most cities I've seen.

Marx's replies would be. If one caricatures doctrines, it is easy to refute them.

Additionally, this academician's other philosophical positions are boring and unoriginal. Some are simply obvious.

I know full well that Americans won't learn anything from the terrorist incident. They won't even become significantly less naïve. I don't mind, though, since revolution is what interests me most.

I'm wandering through the city again, though it is, sadly, after 7:00. I love Amsterdam. It's exponentially more appealing than Copenhagen.

Returning to Marxism, I'd like partially to justify Marx's reliance on historical "laws" in *Capital*. How can history have laws, you ask. In the strictest sense I admit it doesn't. But, confining ourselves to capitalism, we need only to make a few basic assumptions in order to realize that Marx's scientific method is *somewhat* permissible. For example, capitalists make profit, which is the goal of capitalist production, by competing against one another (generally speaking). Firms exist in a fragmented economy, and they try to benefit only themselves. Etc. etc. When manifold other conditions, historical and logical, of capitalist production are taken account of, and bourgeois ideology is thrown into the equation, and Marx's tenets regarding production and consciousness are invoked, it's apparent that there are good reasons to speak of capitalism's "laws of development". The success of many of Marx's predictions in itself demonstrates the validity of much of his theoretical framework. The failure of other prophecies shows us that we cannot speak of laws but only of tendencies and probabilities, which however are grounded in the same reasons for which Marx thought he could speak of laws. So you see that Marx's scientific method isn't cracked in its foundation; it's only more fallible than he thought.

September 14

When I think of decadence, I think of postmodernism. This so-called philosophy, a product of the Great Weariness,[1] is so nihilistic as to be positively degrading. It's also mendacious in the highest degree, partly because it blames the tradition of Western philosophy for the 20th century's atrocities! It abandons philosophy for political correctness. It "critiques" everything—except itself. Perhaps if postmodernists had an intellectual conscience they would recognize that their beliefs are so much a product of the late-capitalist will-to-nothingness that one day these, too, will be supplanted—one day, when civilization has regained its confidence, their ideology will be cast aside like a plague.

Postmodernists think there is no Truth. But is there truth with a small 't'? Of course; it's impossible for humans not to believe in truth, just as it's impossible for a certain class of propositions to have no truth-value. The philosophical system that contains none but true propositions is the Truth. We may never arrive at it, but the nature of language necessitates that it potentially exist.

Unfortunately, philosophy is concerned primarily with thoughts, and not all thoughts can be expressed linguistically. I'm not sure how to overcome this difficulty. (Schopenhauer recognizes that it's this divergence between thoughts and language that makes it easy for philosophers to go astray in their doctrines.) This "difficulty" is all the more frustrating for me in that I so rarely arrive at opinions through logic: I somehow 'intuit' what I think is true.

By the way, I admit that I may be underestimating postmodernism.

I'm reading A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*. I've read only five pages, but I can tell I won't agree with much of what this "founding text" of logical positivism has to say.

....I read the first chapter. It was absurd. The confidence exuding from Ayer's writing is embarrassing, not least because most of what he writes is wrong. His basic idea, that metaphysical "pseudo-propositions" have no meaning, is based on an arbitrary interpretation of the word "meaningless". He

[1] [I guess I meant the weariness engendered by history, by the failure of utopian hopes, the supposed collapse of the search for truth and of Enlightenment ideals, a great cultural skepticism and nausea, etc.]

dogmatically says that nonsensical statements are those that can't be verified by appealing to experience, and then triumphantly declares that because metaphysical propositions can't be verified, they're meaningless! But he hasn't defended his own arbitrary definition of the latter term, except by rejecting an even more absurd definition. Essentially he's fabricating definitions and casting aside a huge realm of philosophy based on these fabrications. Furthermore, it's manifestly true that almost all metaphysical claims have some kind of content, and thus are not meaningless in the conventional sense.

Ayer thinks that no metaphysical propositions have a "literal" meaning. He repeatedly says "literal". But I have no idea what this word is supposed to contribute to the sentence.

Wittgenstein, incidentally, was wrong to say that "in order to draw a limit to thinking, we should have to think both sides of this limit". This statement is a result of reflecting on the 'form' of Kant's project—viz., critiquing reason by means of reason—and being misled by its apparent circularity. It's a mistake to ignore content and concentrate on form, for content is intuition (see Schopenhauer), and it's intuition that invests thoughts with meaning. I'm still not sure why the distinction between the content and the form of thoughts is able to be the ground of misunderstandings. That is, why is form misleading and content *not* misleading? Is it only because form is an abstraction? Probably.

I think I agree that "any attempt to base a deductive system on propositions which describe what is immediately given is bound to be a failure." Or, at least, it won't be nearly as certainly true as what is immediately given. Then again, no system will be.

I don't know why induction is looked on so suspiciously by philosophers. It's less certain than, for example, syllogistic reasoning, but that doesn't mean it's inherently flawed. Nevertheless, I'm not sure *why* it's not inherently flawed—or rather, why it works.

All this philosophizing seems pointless when it's possible that thousands of people will imminently die at the hands of our military. The old slogan "socialism or barbarism" is relevant once again. Indeed, I'm nearly frantic that the consequences of Bush's decisions will be catastrophic.

September 15

The phenomenalist theory of perception seems to make sense. On the other hand, I can understand Schopenhauer's belief that there must be an underlying 'substratum'—which belief has little to do with "grammar", much as Ayer would disagree. Even so, it's the result of induction, is it not?—and induction is never infallible. But there must be *something* underlying phenomena. Berkeley was right that perceptions, which constitute experiences, are essentially mental, in that they exist only within consciousness. But consciousness itself can never really be an object in the way that all other things (except time) can, for it is always consciousness that looks on other things as objects. Consciousness is necessarily the subject, even when it reflects on itself; it has no attributes that can be abstracted from it and contemplated *separately* in their *real being* (as do all other objects except time, and perhaps space by virtue of its mere abstractness) as opposed to only 'conceptually'. Hence it is a kind of substratum of the type that Schopenhauer had in mind (because, again, it can never be a 'real' object, separate from the subject). This suggests that the reason we're so tempted, almost compelled, to believe in a substratum (or substrata) is that we essentially *are* a substance of this kind. […]

I'm on a ferry to England.

It seems as if the meaning of words and sentences must somehow be a combination of their referents and the concomitant intuitions (or 'intentions')[1] in the mind, because this is the only way to avoid inadequacies that result from the adoption of one account and the exclusion of the other. (For example, (1) synonymous sentences which, however, have different structures or different words don't 'cause' precisely the same intuitions; (2) I still don't understand the concept 'intuition'; (3) the referential theory has problems too.) But how is this so-called combination possible? Clearly the notion of meaning is woefully

[1] [In Fregean terminology, 'senses'.]

imprecise and will remain so, so maybe the fault lies in the vagueness of our language. That is, our language creates problems that it prevents us from solving by its very nature (whatever that means). Does this mean it's not a "genuine" problem, as Ayer might contend if he adopted my assumptions? I don't know.

[In talking about meaning, it's necessary to distinguish between semantics and pragmatics. Which I wasn't doing. There are different kinds of meaning: the rules of how given words are used, the person's intentions in a particular context, a state of affairs the person intends or is referring to, etc.]

For the past five minutes I've been thinking the following: the round square....the round square....the round square....the round square....the round square.... At last I've come to two conclusions: (1) I'm losing my sanity and (2)—actually, this second conclusion requires another paragraph:

We think the phrase "the present king of France" is empty because its referent doesn't exist. Similarly, though on a more extreme level, "the round square" presumably has no content. But clearly these phrases aren't as empty as, for example, "blah blah blah". Hence there are degrees of meaning. The words that compose the two phrases each trigger a recognition in consciousness, so the phrases aren't completely empty. But they have different degrees of meaning: the concepts of the second are logically incompatible, so it's not an organic whole but rather a mere collocation of two distinct words; the concepts of the first are logically consistent, so the phrase *is* an 'organic' (?) whole in that (1) the mere sum of its parts is not equivalent to the actual phrase and (2) we can imagine a situation in which there is a king of France, i.e. there is a *sense* to the phrase.[1] But since it has no referent yet is clearly 'reaching out' toward one, it is meaningless in this sense. Thus, my idea from three paragraphs ago isn't as ridiculous as it appears.

A few minutes ago I saw a cloud in the shape of a gigantic "mushroom cloud". Given the time we live in, a more superstitious person would have been affrighted.

Oscar Wilde, whom I genuinely admire, was, I think, right that we should mold life into art. This would signify a "joyful self-consciousness" of the kind that both Nietzsche and I see as the "highest good" (put romantically).

I had to buy another guidebook because, of course, I lost my second one.

Humans aren't primarily playful creatures. We have a whole variety of 'fundamental' attributes, which is why our lives can be so rich.

When I can't remember dreams I have the distinct feeling that the dream-images are too *close* for me to see. It feels like if I could somehow 'back up' I would remember them. This illustrates the reason for our difficulty in understanding the self: we are, quite literally, too close to it.

September 16

Today I meandered through the streets of London until I reached, first, St. Paul's, then Trafalgar Square, and then Whitehall. I had no idea London is so magnificent. Quite aside from Westminster Abbey, Big Ben, the Parliament buildings and St. Paul's, the architecture is consistently imaginative and striking.

I met a delightful, cute Slovakian girl near the Abbey. Together we walked to Buckingham Palace and through parks that led to Kensington, and then back to the Abbey and across the bridge. Talked about a variety of subjects, including her culture, philosophy, her family, and terrorism; when we reached the other side of the Thames we separated. I subsequently took the metro to my hostel, pleased at the amount I had accomplished today.

September 17

Americans, than whom no one is more myopic, are digging their own grave by supporting military strikes. This war is going to unleash the Furies of Islam and revolution. If Muslim terrorists have sufficient resources, they'll assassinate Ariel Sharon and attack D.C. again.

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[1] Uhh, that last part is very misleading—or, to be exact, the "i.e." is. Maybe the "i.e." is wrong.

I'm impressed by the seeming inexorability of the coming disaster. All the circumstances fit together perfectly. For example, George Bush is bound to make decisions fatal to America; Sharon is the worst possible man to lead Israel at a time that calls for conciliation; Afghanistan may attack Pakistan, and the latter has nuclear weapons! I can't conceive why the Taliban would be so stupid, but it has threatened the action. (Probably an idle threat.)

Clearly the (apparent) existence of ESP and the success of some religious prophets throughout history suggest that behind phenomena is an undifferentiated thing-in-itself. This is an example of inductive reasoning (I think), but since it is the most obvious (semi-)explanation, we ought to adopt it as the probable truth. Time is the moving image of the eternal. The future has already happened, or is perhaps happening at this very moment, in another dimension. I haven't the faintest idea what that means, but it contains *some* content.

In chapter 3 Ayer is wrong to suggest that the question "What is the nature of a material thing?" is primarily linguistic. It is actually 'conceptual', having to do not with symbols (words) but with things themselves. […]

The reason that philosophers can never seem to arrive at truth, or to reach a consensus on it, is that they don't experience each other's intuitions. They superficially critique opposing *doctrines*, or certain *verbal expressions* of these doctrines, while ignoring opposing *states of mind* [or 'intuitions', 'understandings'] (which are the real content of doctrines).[1] The philosopher who wants to arrive at truth must first understand all philosophies as well as he understands his own, and then transcend each and every one by subsuming it in the whole. This is what Hegel tried to do, but he went astray in not really understanding certain positions (esp. ones asserting the primacy of the individual and the 'irrationality' of the universe) as well as he understood his own. I suspect it's impossible to be so generous to *all* philosophies, but if this is the case we'll simply never arrive at the Truth.

September 18

Now that the herd mentality has manifested itself once again, my "patriotism" has decreased. Most Americans have no compunctions about killing Afghans—as if that attitude is any different from the attitude that spawns terrorism! It's callous and hypocritical, just as terrorists usually are.

Empiricism is manifestly false: the law of cause and effect has factual content (is synthetic) and yet is *necessarily true*—'independently' of experience.

Interruption: How does the U.S. government know that bin Laden was in charge of the attack? It doesn't. It's desperately searching for a scapegoat, and bin Laden is the convenient one. There is no concrete evidence linking him to the crime. Now that the Taliban have demanded this evidence, the government will (1) ignore the request, (2) hurl accusations at the "protectors" of bin Laden, and (3) attack Afghanistan, thereby sowing the seeds of *its own* destruction and that of thousands of Afghans.

I went to the British Museum yesterday and listened to a superb operatic tenor sing "Nessun Dorma" in Covent Garden, but most of the day I wandered around. I'm in York now—sitting in the cathedral—where I'll stay until tomorrow, when I take a train to Lisbon.

York is one of the most captivating places I've visited. Its medieval ruins are amazing; its streets are delightfully narrow and fun to walk through; its history is long and distinguished. If the weather were better I might want to live here.

Returning to philosophy: the laws of Euclidean geometry are expressions of the ways in which space is manifested to us. They are truths about experience known independently of experience. No amount

[1] [Think of Heraclitus: "Listen not to my words but to the Logos," i.e. the meaning behind my words. Which is in my understanding, so to speak, not in my words. They are only poor expressions of it.]

of word-twisting can get past that.

I don't see how the falsity of empiricism can be doubted. It's self-evident that the mind imposes *a priori* forms on experience: moreover, all the major discoveries of physics in the twentieth century have confirmed this. The one argument sufficient to 'disprove' empiricism is that there are *compelling, 'necessary'* truths that apply to experience, and if empiricism were true there wouldn't be.

Furthermore, how can Ayer seriously assert that geometrical truths are tautologies (based on definitions alone)? Definitions are not *certain* in the way that Euclidean geometry is--they don't *strike* you in a moment of illumination as *having to be true*--and this is so because definitions are merely inventions, or conventions, whereas geometry is a product of our intuitions of space. This is indeed why it's so helpful to use diagrams when proving geometrical propositions, and why the truths seem to leap out at us (once we understand them) in a way that definitions don't.

....What the—? Ayer declares that "our knowledge that no observation can ever confute the proposition '7+5=12' depends simply on the fact that the symbolic expression '7+5' is synonymous with '12', just as our knowledge that every oculist is an eye-doctor depends on the fact that the symbol 'eye-doctor' is synonymous with 'oculist'." Wrong, wrong, wrong. A *static symbol* like '12.00' would be synonymous with '12' in somewhat the way that 'eye-doctor' is synonymous with 'oculist', but it's entirely different with the symbolic *operation* '7+5'. '7+5=12' is the equation of a *process* with its necessary *end-result*; it's not an arbitrary linguistic convention. But I need not continue arguing against empiricist claims: in my mind, they've been refuted.

September 19

I'm in London again. In a few minutes I'll take a train to Paris, whence I'll proceed to Lisbon.

I'm not sure what to think of Ayer's theory of truth. In regard to empirical propositions I agree with much of it, but since I'm a transcendental idealist I must disagree with his ideas on a priori truth. I suppose my main (and perhaps *only*) bone of contention is that synthetic a priori propositions do exist. But I also think that there's such a thing as intuitive truth—which can be mystical—although I don't know how to define it.

In chapter 7 Ayer is wrong that the only thing "involved in self-consciousness is the ability of a self to remember some of its earlier states." This is one 'type' of self-consciousness, but the fundamental type exists purely in the moment, with no reference to the past. Moreover, although I agree that the self is composed of experiences,[1] it is nonetheless obvious that 'presupposed by' experiences is an *awareness* of them, and the self is produced when this awareness is turned on itself (that is, when we have experiences of this awareness—which are so subtle they're ignored). Additionally, since it's intuitively evident that this awareness is in some way *active*, and in order for something to be active it must be a kind of substance, awareness is substantial somehow.

....I reached Paris at 10:00 p.m., asked two unfriendly ticket-people about departures, raced to Austerlitz on a whim, was told (again) that no trains were going to Lisbon or Madrid or Seville until tomorrow, was advised that I should take a train to the border and thence to Lisbon, ate quiche and ice cream, decided that the advice was wise—and now here I am on a train going to God knows where.

September 20

I took the wrong train. Luckily it went to Tarbes, which is reasonably close to my original destination (Irun). I have to wait until 6:00 p.m. to take a train to Irun, whence I'll travel to Lisbon. So I have the whole day to explore Tarbes.

I tentatively agree with Ayer's rejection of ethical and aesthetic 'truths', unfortunately (for my

[1] Albeit ones of a specific kind.

sanity). They are merely feelings, inclinations, whereas metaphysics is based on logic and observation—both intuitive and sensory.

In chapter 8 Ayer makes a metaphysical claim. Briefly, he writes that "there are good inductive grounds for believing" that objects exist unperceived. This, however, is equivalent to saying that, even though it's logically impossible for us to have a sense-experience of an unperceived object, such things probably do exist in some way (or rather, 'behind our backs' exists the potentiality for future sense-experiences to occur)—which is a metaphysical claim in that it is a factual statement that cannot be tested by experience. Hence Ayer himself has 'proven' that logic sometimes forces us to make metaphysical claims.

The "argument from illusion", which Ayer criticizes, does indeed suggest that there is no independently existing material object with a definite, 'correct' appearance—which is the argument's purpose. Moreover,[1] I don't know what Ayer means in saying that objects are logical constructions, for it's plain that we have no need of logic or language in order to see objects. Maybe his idea is similar to Schopenhauer's, but I doubt it. Additionally, why can sense-contents be neither physical nor mental? In my opinion they're subclasses of mental phenomena. (Everything [in our experience] is mental in the final analysis.)

Ayer's response to the objection from four paragraphs ago would be that by saying a material thing exists unperceived, he means only that under certain conditions there would occur the relevant sense-contents. But I retort that he's nevertheless making a claim that applies to the moment in which it is made, and in the moment it can't be verified. But he asks why it must be verified in that particular moment. So I respond that he's actually saying a material thing *in this moment* exists, which implies that in this moment it has to be verified, which is impossible because it's unperceived. So he falls back on the assertion that the meaning of his proposition is merely that under conditions not currently fulfilled there would occur sense-data whose logical construction would be the material thing. So I return to my first response. And he returns to the one just mentioned. –Now, I ask you, how can this debate be resolved? Both sides have valid arguments, it seems to me. *Can* it be resolved? Or is it not a "genuine problem"? I don't even know what a genuine problem is.

I agree with Kant, which I used not to, that '7+5=12' is synthetic rather than analytic. ....Well, actually, I'm not sure: if we analyze the 'concept' 7+5 we'll be forced to come up with 12, right? And this means it's analytic. So are all mathematical truths and equations analytic, since the product of an equation seems to be contained within the equation's left side? But maybe the distinction between analytic and synthetic doesn't apply to math—no, that's wrong; I've figured out where the problem lies. I assumed '7+5' to be a single concept—which I recognized was false two days ago—because it appears to be the subject of the proposition, whereas it's obviously a combination of two (or three) concepts. But in *language*, when two concepts 'added together' result in a third logically necessary concept, is the proposition considered analytic or synthetic? Clearly analytic, for I don't think this situation would arise unless the first two concepts were the definition of the third one. In mathematics it's different because numbers and axioms (and, indeed, most other 'terms') aren't arbitrary definitions: they're necessary in a way that linguistic definitions aren't. –But what is all this about definitions? Obviously the focus of analysis should be propositions. The laws of logic seem as compelling as mathematical laws: what's the reason for this? Clearly they're a priori, even though language is invented by us. Or perhaps it's merely *discovered* by us, similar to the way math is discovered rather than invented. (This in itself shows that math is not based on 'arbitrary' definitions but rather direct intuitions. –Incidentally, I now do think that arithmetic is synthetic. [That is, it involves cognitive "syntheses." But it's not *empirical*, so it's not synthetic in that sense. These categories of analytic and synthetic are kind of simplistic anyway.]) But it can't be 'discovered' in the same sense, for there are many languages with different structures and only one universal system of mathematics. Maybe—probably—after we've invented or learned a language it becomes ingrained in us to the extent that its logical structure seems necessary. But actually the only rules that seem as necessary as mathematics are ones like the law of non-contradiction, the syllogism, the principle of sufficient reason (even this is

[1] This paragraph is actually a random collection of comments.

stretching it) and other basic ones that *must* be integral to *all* languages! –Oh, wait a minute! Kant already addressed all this, didn't he? Damn. I'll shut up now and go to sleep. (I'm on the train to Lisbon.)

September 21

I reached Lisbon at 11:00 this morning. After dragging my luggage around for half an hour I found a pension with a bed available. I then explored winding, poverty-stricken alleys until I came upon the Avenida da Libertade, which is the main boulevard in Lisbon. With hardly a care in the world I strolled down the avenue under the palm trees, admiring the statues and hotels and diverse architectural styles. For several hours I walked up and down the steep hills on both sides of the Baixa area, seeing—among other masterpieces of architecture—the Praça do Comércio and a cathedral, and at last came to the conclusion that Lisbon overflows with character. It has, perhaps, more character than any city I've visited. Most of it is poor, but the poverty has a picturesque, exotic flair. It gives one the impression that the city has existed for ages, and thus augments one's fascination. The narrow streets and precipitous hills add much to the mystique, as does the castle overlooking the city (which I haven't yet visited). Nonetheless, I wouldn't live here in a million years.

Today I felt rather alone again. Wanted to be with Sangeetha. I've long since grown used to traveling alone, but I can't wait to settle down in Austria and make new friends. I could keep traveling for weeks without excessively griping, but I'm tired of living out of a backpack and relying on my own resources. I really just want to fall back into a routine—and find a girlfriend. Yes, yes, there's that word again: girlfriend! I need one! After a two-month-long hiatus my sex drive has returned with a vengeance! I absolutely must fall in love and have sex soon or I'll explode. (Fortunately I have Mozart to distract me.)

Speaking of whom, I must say that there's something indescribably moving about the restrained, unpretentious, measured melodies and dynamics of the second movement of his sonata for piano duet, KV 497. The dissonances are gentle, the transitions smooth, the tense moments somehow soothing, and the whole piece has an exquisitely classical air which is the more remarkable for the obvious passion behind every phrase. It's as if Mozart is molding his melancholy into a resigned, happy acceptance of itself—and yet this imposed form adds poignancy to each note. It's more effective than the formlessness of Romantic art.

I wish I could convince Sangeetha to renounce her pop music. I know from experience that classical music can facilitate an appreciation of life and undermine one's vulgarities, but I don't think she believes me. That's not surprising.

September 22

Most of the details of my relationship with Sangeetha I haven't told you about. […] –Those were happy days.

Unfortunately I didn't always appreciate our relationship. When I was with her I usually concentrated on either talking, kissing, or admiring her face, so I didn't feel the kind of 'happiness' I wanted to. When I was away from her, on the other hand, I lacked the imagination to feel consumed by my love—or even to feel this love at all, if indeed it was love—so I just read books! Nevertheless, there were many moments in which I was nearly overpowered by happiness and by Sangeetha's superhuman girlish cuteness. Sometimes I was *forced*, by a will not my own, to murmur in embarrassed tones, "I love you!"

Some parts of Lisbon remind me of the sun-drenched Greek isles. Like Paros, it has hundreds of lovely whitewashed homes and is speckled with palm trees—and the weather is magnificent. Lisbon is the perfect city in which to end my two months of traveling. […]

September 23

Today I went to an area of Lisbon called Belém. The star attraction there is the Mosteiro dos Jerónimos, a vast monastery built in 1496. The exterior is decorated with microscopically intricate carvings, and the interior is nearly as impressive (or perhaps more so, on account of its sheer immensity). There was a cultural festival along the Avenida da Libertade, featuring talented break-dancers, African dancers and musicians; I spent most of the day observing the festivities and the people. I wish I could dance as well as I can think.

Let's examine the consequences of Ayer's theory of meaning. It entails that the statement "The self is self-consciousness" can be neither true nor false, for it can't possibly be verified, it's not immediately evident, and it's not analytic. Upon analyzing the proposition, though, we find that this conclusion is either incorrect or an oversimplification. For the proposition can be stated more exactly as follows: Insofar as I am abstracted from my body and my observable characteristics, I am merely consciousness aware of itself. No doubt this statement still seems meaningless to you, but that's because you haven't experienced the intuition that corresponds to it. That claim itself, I realize, is dogmatic and probably hard to understand, but I can do little else except (1) suggest that you observe your own states of mind until you recognize that behind every meaningful statement is an intuition that 'gives' you the statement's meaning, and (2) tell you that I myself have experienced the intuition behind the proposition in question, though I concede that it certainly is more obscure than that behind common-sense statements. –I'm too tired to think.

September 24

Certain propositions are almost self-evidently true *intuitively*. For example, Ayer thinks it's obviously true that John Stuart Mill was mistaken in believing that arithmetic is just a generalization from a large number of instances. Ayer does provide a couple of reasons for his belief, but it's clear that ultimately he thinks we can *see* Mill's proposition to be wrong. Similarly, I can, without reasoning, 'see' that the proposition asserting the self to be a combination of personal attributes is wrong; and though I may subsequently provide evidence or argumentation for this belief, I originally knew it was correct without considering the evidence. (I suppose what I'm intuiting in this case is that 'I' am immediately active—every moment, as it were—and that if I were only a collection of attributes I couldn't be active in this way.) The point is that we can know truths intuitively even if they aren't analytic or synthetic a priori. We don't know them with the same degree of certainty as the latter, but we 'know' them nonetheless.

An inevitable reply to that argument is that intuition is properly psychological, not philosophical. I consider this objection unworthy of my attention. A more serious criticism is that what I intuit in cases not analytic or synthetic a priori are the most obvious *reasons* for the proposition, not the *truth* of the proposition. This objection may be valid. For in the case of the obscure proposition from yesterday's entry, I think I am merely intuiting that the most obvious and sensible possibility is that the self is self-consciousness—i.e., that all other possible definitions of the self are either meaningless or wrong. Thus, in my instantaneous intuition I actually arrive at my definition of the self by default, and at the same time by deciding that it makes sense and contains no serious flaws. In thinking it makes sense I'm intuiting that when consciousness is *entirely* oriented towards an external object (if such is ever the case), I, insofar as I am necessarily an active awareness of myself, can't possibly exist, for there is no 'room' for me in consciousness. In realizing that I'm necessarily an active awareness of myself—which realization seems circular when it occurs in the middle of a chain of reasoning meant precisely to establish it—I'm imagining consciousness focused absolutely on an object and intuiting that in this case I wouldn't exist, for there would be no room for me in consciousness, and inferring from this fact of 'no room' that I must be a creation of consciousness (for—to put it logically—if I don't exist in this moment, and the only difference between this moment and moments in which I do exist is that, in the former case, consciousness is absolutely preoccupied with something outside itself, then clearly I exist only when and because consciousness is *not* entirely preoccupied with something outside itself, which means that in these moments consciousness is

partly focused on *itself*, which means that I exist only when consciousness is aware of itself, which means (or very strongly suggests, particularly when combined with intuitive thought-experiments) that I am consciousness aware of itself). The step in this argument that runs "....I, insofar as I am necessarily an awareness of myself, can't possibly exist...." is based entirely on thought-experiments and an intuitive recognition that I must be aware of myself when I exist.[1] (The aforementioned circularity isn't fatal to the argument because "awareness of myself" isn't, at the start of the argument, equivalent to "consciousness aware of itself".)

The ostensible proof of my definition of the self in the foregoing paragraph was merely an incidental byproduct of my purpose, which was to analyze an intuition that seems certain to me. This analysis has suggested that, except when we intuit thought-experiments and a priori propositions, we're actually intuiting the *reasons* for a proposition rather than the self-evident *truth* of this proposition. That is, Ayer is probably right that intuition can never be a criterion of truth, which means that "intuitive truth" is only a sub-class of 'linguistic' or 'propositional' truth. Hence philosophers should always try to articulate the logic and empirical reasons behind their intuitive recognition of obscure truths. So, to conclude, intuition is not a method separate from logic to arrive at truth; it is merely an instantaneous 'absorption' or 'seeing' of logic and various reasons for judging a given proposition to be correct or false. (We can arbitrarily define a class of truth as being somehow 'existential' or 'mystical' or 'non-logical', but then this is excluded from language by its very definition.) Of course, it's still the intuitions behind (or: which are part of) propositions that give the latter their meaning, but, again, these intuitions can always be translated into language. Even thought-experiments can (to a more or less adequate degree).

I'm temporarily forsaking philosophy. In a few minutes I'm taking a train to San Sebastián in Spain. Lisbon was the perfect climax to my travels: it's one of the great cities of the world. I *would* live here in a million years! I like it as much as or more than Rome, more than London—and almost as much as Paris! Parts of it are dirty, but even its poor neighborhoods are captivating. I'd love to spend more time in it.

Today a startling coincidence occurred. I was eating breakfast on my way to the train station when one of the Portuguese girls I had met in Oslo showed up! (This type of incident has happened many times on my trip.) We talked for a while, astounded, and exchanged e-mail addresses.

September 25

I'm not so sure thought-experiments can always be described. How do I describe the intuition that was so crucial to yesterday's demonstration of 'my' theory of the self? I tried to explain it by declaring that there was no "room" for me in consciousness when the latter is absolutely focused on an object, and that this is because I'm an awareness of myself. But I can't argue for the last part of that sentence;—or rather, I can, but the arguments, in being discursive, aren't the real reason I believe it. The reason is just my private intuition. And it *is* somewhat circular in the context of the argument, for since consciousness is the only thing that can possibly be aware of anything, the statement implies that I am consciousness aware of itself. So when we try to translate intuitions into logic we may very well find ourselves committing a logical fallacy. But the same is true if we try to 'reason through' arithmetic propositions: we inevitably presuppose the laws of mathematics. I.e., we're trying to establish them by presupposing them. Hence it seems that, at least in the case of the intuition we're discussing, it's a synthetic a priori truth: for, (1) like mathematics, a logical justification of it results in circular reasoning; (2) the intuition certainly isn't analytic, but it isn't based on contingent empirical facts either, since (a) it is actually a presupposition of the possibility of certain experiences[2] and (b) it's a *necessary* truth. That is, if we understand what it is we're defining, we can't conceive of a different definition of the self. (Don't be misled by the word "definition" into thinking that the intuition is somehow analytic: what we're doing is *establishing* the definition, not *using* it. Besides, the intuition certainly adds something to the abstract concept of a self.) –I'm getting tired of this, so I'll

[1] See four paragraphs later.

[2] No, that's wrong. Ignore it.

sum up:—oh wait, I forgot to add something: if my idea of the self seems less necessary than 2+2=4, it's because (as I mentioned several days ago) we're so 'close' to the self that it's difficult to back away and contemplate it, which is how we understand mathematics. This proposition is verifiable only through intuition.

The train ride was fourteen hours long—and I was in a compartment with two noisy drunks the entire time—but *man* was it worth it! San Sebastián is, like Venice, heaven on earth. The weather is unearthly, the beaches smell of an irrepressible love of life, the streets are clean and yet full of character,[1] the architecture is a model of good taste and melds perfectly with the mountainous environs. Atop one hill is a giant statue of Christ. The harbor is the color of turquoise, reminiscent of the Mediterranean. The people are friendly, conscious of their privileged status vis-à-vis the rest of mankind. This city is wealthy in all senses of the word.

I feel a tremendous love for humanity! I feel connected with everyone, conscious of only an *artificial* isolation. Couples in love don't excite my envy;[2] they arouse exhilaration! Love is the greatest truth of all: it *must* be, if only because of its omnipresence and potency. It exposes philosophy as a sterile, vain pursuit. (Sitting on the beach, surrounded by gorgeous half-naked women, effectively kills the appeal of philosophy.)

Before I forget, I should write down two thoughts. First, Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning isn't too impressive, since on one interpretation it's manifestly false and on another *obviously* true. (I may be misinterpreting it.) Second, I'm skeptical that "joyful" self-consciousness can ever not contain an element of self-deception; i.e., it's impossible not to feel as though in some sense we're only acting. Even if this feeling can be partly 'transcended' it will always exist for self-aware people.

I'm not sure that the intuition discussed earlier really is an a priori truth: it *seems* as if I can conceive that I am a noumenon behind appearances, which means that the 'intuition' isn't as necessary as an a priori truth. But in any case, I now think that there are some intuitions—though probably very few—that genuinely are ways of arriving at truths which can't be reached through logic (because logic in this case results in circular reasoning, and this isn't a problem with the intuitions themselves because they are *immediate* and unrelated to logic). Actually, maybe the "I am awareness of myself" intuition is in the same class as immediate *empirical* intuitions like "bed-in-front-of-me", and *this* is the reason why logic can't be applied to it. If so it is a direct intuition of 'truth', but in a different way than synthetic a priori intuitions are. (I wonder if the idea of the synthetic a priori is an artificial 'form' that brutalizes the richness and variety of our many possible intuitions.)

I'm glad that in the past year I've learned to suppress and overcome my frequent frustration with people. That was an unpleasant aspect of my personality. *Now* when I feel frustrated I let the sensation arise and pass away. This is not only good for my mental health; it also undermines my arrogance.

September 26

I have to wait until 9:00 tonight to take a train to Paris; from there I'll go to Salzburg.

I'm loath to return to philosophy, but there are a few thoughts that need expressing. Metaphysical propositions may not be susceptible of the kind of verification that scientific propositions are, but they can be indirectly verified.[3] If, for example, a metaphysical system contains outlandish ideas with no basis in logic or experience, or it brutalizes experience in trying to explain it by means of the system's concepts (as do Hegel's and Spinoza's philosophies, and perhaps Schopenhauer's), we can cast it aside as false. But if

[1] The character is purely a simple happiness and love of beauty.

[2] Or—not much, anyway.

[3] [Actually, science *is* metaphysics. It's an investigation of the world-in-itself. Physics in particular tries to elucidate the nature of ultimate reality.]

metaphysical propositions (or systems) are composed of fairly well-defined concepts that correspond to intuitions, and if they can be made compatible with accepted scientific truths, and if one or two other obvious conditions hold, then we can accept them as probable truths. –The same applies to pure intuitions that can't be directly verified (like "I am self-consciousness") except through a *possibly* dubious introspection. (That is, we articulate the propositions they entail and then judge the probability of these, etc.)

Today I spent more time on the beach, vainly attempting to acquire a tan. I also wandered around—observing people, which I love to do—and listened to Mozart for the first time in five days. The music had an almost physical effect on me: I returned to yesterday's happiness instantaneously. I was the brother of my fellow men once again! I recognized with enviable clarity the base animal aspects of humans, yet I loved those poor creatures all the more for that! I saw delectable girls wearing tight Spandex walk by, and instead of feeling lustful and frustrated I felt tender and protective. This is the effect Mozart has on me. (Show me the greatest 'masterpiece' of Indian classical music and I'll show you a minor composition of Mozart's.[1])

There are important similarities between Aristotle's idea of the active intellect and my notion of self-consciousness. For example, he writes that it is "in substance *activity*" and that it is "separate, unaffected and unmixed" and never a mere *potential*. I think he had the same intuitive idea in mind as I do, for I too have divided the mind into passive and active aspects ((unreflective) consciousness and self-consciousness).

Random thoughts: I have to find out why Greek art, for example, is so different from Egyptian art, and why the East never developed the twelve-tone musical scale, and why the Aztecs loved terraced pyramids, and why Persian art (and architecture) is so distinctive, and why no sprawling kingdoms were constructed in Central Africa, and why *Homo erectus* died out, and the solutions to a thousand other mysteries of history.

September 27

Schopenhauer took sight and touch as the paradigms of representation, since they're the most concrete senses. This being so, it's understandable why he thought that music is an immediate manifestation of Will: it can't be seen or touched, but it 'feels' like it should be. It seems like something substantial, but it can't be 'grasped'; it's elusive (always just beyond our reach) in the way that the self and time are, though to a lesser extent. Moreover, aside from drama (which however exists 'out there' in space) and literature (which is, however, abstract in Schopenhauer's sense), it's the only art that is intimately connected with time; and since time is our inner sense, music is intimately connected with *us*. More so than any other art. (Additionally, sound is—originally in the form of the human voice—closely connected with emotions, which are the most concrete, yet, again, elusive, aspects of the mind.) Thus, because of all these considerations and others regarding the relation of consciousness to the external world (which I have already touched on in previous entries), music *seems* to be a part of inner reality.

....I'm on the train to Salzburg. Had to wait six hours in the Paris station because I missed the connecting train at 8:00 a.m., but this gave me an opportunity to read more of Aristotle and Marx. –On an unrelated topic, San Sebastián is a slightly more 'sterile' city than I indicated: it's a resort town, albeit a stunning one.

The ancient Greeks are my model in all areas of life. If I want to be a universal human being—and this is my strongest desire—I must force myself to submit to the rigor of physical exercise, and become a—

[1] (In fact, Indian music doesn't really have "masterpieces", it seems. The music isn't individualistic enough for a piece to be masterful in comparison with others; it's all of the same kind and on the same approximate level of quality. It barely has melodies and it doesn't have inner direction in the strict sense in which Mozart et al do. Creatively, it's inferior to the best Western music.)

dancer.

The older I get, the harder it is to believe that I actually wrote the bitter journal entries of my freshman year in college. I rarely felt as angry as they made me appear. And I'm surprised my self-consciousness didn't prevent me from writing what I knew to be a one-sided portrayal of myself. But there are obvious explanations of this puzzle, two of which are that I was determined not to let self-consciousness emasculate the bold expressions of a turbulent nature, and that night carries with it an impulse to curb self-censorship.

The scenery in Europe is ravishing. Shapely and well-proportioned. Pulchritudinous, in fact. Hundreds of acres of cornfields lie at the base of a mountain range, which sits directly beneath a pale blue universe, which overlooks miles of verdant meadows.... Villages are tastefully interspersed here and there. The countryside is evocative of such tranquility that it's hard to believe four major wars and hundreds of minor ones have, since the 1600s, decimated everything in sight. Yet peace inevitably returns. There is something *universally comforting* in the fact that "the eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again".

Watching myself grow up is scary. Ever since I was a boy I've thought I'll remain a child my entire life: it's impossible to imagine myself as an adult. I'm too silly! And irresponsible! How could *I* ever be a *father*?! So far I haven't had to confront the aging process, but now I can discern traces of maturity in my facial features. I can imagine myself with long hair and a mustache—and the image is frighteningly similar to my dad's face.

September 29

I stayed in a hotel my first night in Salzburg, after searching (at midnight) for hostels that were all closed. The next day I took a cab to my dorm. Commands a good view of the Alps. I found out from the Americans I met that the entire program consists of thirty American students. 'Wunderbar!' What's even worse—none of the girls are very pretty.

October 1

It's imperative that I distinguish between types of intuition. The least noticeable but most ever-present kind takes place when we 'intuit' immediate sense-experiences; then there is the intuition involved in immediately understanding words and propositions; lastly, there is the second major class of intuitions (the first two are subclasses of the category of 'imperceptible' intuitions), which consists of thought-experiments and the imagination. Thus, if I want to assess the validity of Nietzsche's theory of slave morality, I might imagine myself as a poor Christian in Roman times and introspectively 'examine' the probable motives for my beliefs. (In this case, I think that "slave morality"—which must be clearly defined, of course—is a valid reason for the existence of the *majority* of Christians in Roman times. I can translate this intuition into arguments....but I don't feel like doing that.)

I'm reading the New Testament. The translation isn't as good as the King James version,[1] but it's satisfactory. I've read only ten chapters in Matthew, but I can already see that most of what Oscar Wilde wrote about Jesus in *De Profundis*[2] was true. (I'm glad I read that work before the Bible.) That is, Jesus was the supreme individualist, who wanted us to live not for others but for ourselves. He knew that love is the pinnacle of life. He told us to forgive our enemies not for their sake but for our own.

I feel peaceful as I read the Book of Matthew. It has none of the pettiness and vehemence of the Koran: it is full of hope and wonder. Certain passages are magical. If one adopts Wilde's interpretation, Jesus does seem to cast a spell upon him who encounters his personality directly or indirectly. The man

[1] It's the New King James version, published by Gideons International.

[2] Parts of this letter are more sublime than anything I've ever read.

was a work of art. –Nonetheless, I don't think that modeling one's life or personality after Jesus's is the best thing to do. There are other, perhaps 'better', ways to live a beautiful life. (Actually, I don't think there's a single 'best' ideal, except maybe in incredibly vague outlines.) Moreover, Jesus was only human: his flaws partially offset—but made possible[1]—his greatness.

October 2

My judgment of last night was premature: Jesus wasn't as impressive as the Buddha. I'm not sure there's a coherent underlying principle in his teachings—and if there is, it can't be reduced to Wilde's interpretation.

Today was a good day. I made several new 'friends', one of whom is a pretty Austrian girl. I've agreed to see *Aïda* and a Mozart concert with an American girl, who, by the way, is an excellent pianist majoring in music. (When I discover a talent in someone I instantly lose my self-absorption: I become *fascinated* with the person.)

Returning to the Bible: I won't read any more until I can find the King James version.

Science and philosophy can try their hardest to explain the world, but there will always remain an element that can't be sifted through a conceptual scheme. Listen to music and you'll understand what I mean.

October 3

I'm inclined to accept transcendental idealism, since I can't think of any way to avoid it, but it contains obvious problems. Maybe I'm searching for the 'Truth' from the wrong direction somehow: every metaphysical philosophy I know of is inadequate. Even so, I can't just abandon metaphysics, for science, logic and epistemology lead directly into it. [Such confusion! Science *is* metaphysics, dude! I was misled by the confusion of previous philosophers who distinguished between science and metaphysics. Natural science is just the modern, naturalistic form of metaphysics and ontology.]

I'm reading *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* by Bertrand Russell.

There are difficulties involved in my idea of meaning as both a reference and an intention, one of which is that intentions are inseparable from the very words whose meaning I'm trying to understand. […]

October 4

In some ways, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* embodies the romanticism that Nietzsche despised: it's relatively formless, it's full of passionate excess, it's modeled after the Bible rather than Greek literature, etc. In this sense Nietzsche was a bit of a hypocrite.

I ought to remind you that I'm not always entirely honest in this journal. I can't be, or else I'd have to interrupt every paragraph with disclaimers and self-analyses. Stylistic considerations must be adhered to, though their result is that I appear more superficial than I am.

October 6

Yesterday afternoon I toured Salzburg with the kids in my program. It was a 'geographical' rather than historical or artistic tour. Unfortunately the guide spoke only in German, so I understood 0.1% of what

[1] Because everything in our psyche determines who we are. It is holistic.

was said. [Later met up with an American named Rachel.] Together we walked to the castle overlooking the city, which was where the concert was to take place; after a half-hour of minor travails we reached our destination. The setting was, needless to say, exquisite: an intimate, ancient room towering directly over Salzburg. At 8:00 the performance began: first was a symphony by Haydn, second a bassoon concerto by Mozart (delightful!), third a brilliant set of variations for cello and orchestra by Paganini, and fourth was "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik". During the intermission, Rachel and I gazed out of an open window upon a Salzburg lit by moonlight and street lamps. In short, for two hours I communed with the Almighty.

Now that I've recounted what happened last night, I ought to tell you about today. At 8:00 a.m. we all met at a designated bus stop. (Landgraf, the director, and his wife were with us.) We then took a bus to St. Gilgen, after which we walked across a small mountain to a ship that took us to a town called St. Wolfgang. Later a train carried us to the summit of Schafsberg, where we ate an immense lunch. At 1:30 we took the train down the mountain, and then (in small groups) we wandered around St. Wolfgang for two hours.

Enough of the skeletal outline of our journey: I have to describe to you how glorious the day was. Walking through St. Wolfgang was the highlight. The town is minuscule, but it's situated on a lake nestled within the Alps. The weather was warm and sunny (though the day began quite cold); this helped me absorb the elemental forces that surrounded us. For an hour I sat on a pier. I experienced what one might call a pleasure-overload. The feeling wasn't 'overwhelming'; it was, rather, peaceful and spirit-cleansing to the point of realizing Truth in some way. I felt pure. Didn't feel small in the shadow of the Alps, but serene and privileged and *part* of them.

I'd like to live in St. Wolfgang more than in Venice or Salzburg. This village is truly one of the ideal places I've seen in my life. The view from the heights of Schafsberg was awe-inspiring, but I felt more natural gazing up at the peaks from St. Wolfgang's shore.

Now I have to tell you about Thursday. In the morning I took a German placement test. Didn't do as well as I should have, so I'll be in Mittelstufe 1 this semester. Didn't do much for the rest of the day, but at night there was a party on my floor (in the kitchen, next to my room). At first I was a hermit, preferring to indulge my melancholy, but at length I decided to get drunk and meet girls. Within minutes a girl named Sofia, who lives in my hall, was talking to me; we spent most of the night together. She's a twenty-year-old Austrian who studies languages and loves to paint; she's pretty, and sweeter than most people I've known. Her smile is magnificent, luminous. As the night wore on and I grew tipsier, I felt the urge to kiss her many times. Later we and several other girls went to a party across town, but since there were hundreds of people—and the smoke-ridden atmosphere hurt our eyes—we left at midnight. Sofia and I walked home alone, discussing our families, our lives, our interests, and politics. She invited me to her room to view her posters of Monet's paintings; for a while we talked about our favorite types of art. (She was actually surprised she was having this conversation with a boy. "You're not like other boys I know.") At last I judged it was time to go. This weekend she visited her family, so I haven't seen her since that lovely night.

October 7

Yesterday, during a conversation with a girl named Christine, I remarked that most twentieth century artists are too self-conscious. It occurred to me that this claim has philosophical potential, but later I realized it's only old wine in new wine-skins: artists are self-conscious *cynically* (hence their love-affairs with types of minimalism), which means they aren't yet aware of the poverty of cynicism. However, questions remain. What are the *precise reasons* for the shallowness of cynicism? (I realize that cynicism is the antithesis in a dialectic, but this essentially begs the question.) Does self-consciousness in itself somehow dilute the greatness of art, or is it only in its current manifestation that it does so? Indeed, is it true that in its current manifestation it does so? How would one analyze and solve this question?

So far I've disagreed with, or thought superfluous, many of Russell's ideas. He constantly delves into logic when it seems unnecessary. I haven't written down my criticisms because I want to finish the

book as quickly as possible, and also because I've agreed with most of his substantive claims. But in a footnote at the beginning of chapter 4 there occurs a somewhat technical logical discussion that I'd like to demonstrate as superfluous, for the sole reason that I dislike 'logical' language to the point of wanting to expose *as much of it as possible* as inessential. (This involves providing non-'logical' solutions to problems that logicians have supposed can be solved only with the use of formal logic.) First I'll copy the footnote.

> The arguments [for the necessity of a hierarchy of languages] are derived from the paradoxes; their applicability to the words "true" and "false" is derived from the paradox of the liar.
>
> ....A man says, "I am lying", i.e., "there is a proposition p such that I assert p and p is false". We may, if we like, make the matter more precise by supposing that, at 5:30, he says, "between 5:29 and 5:31 I make a false statement", but that throughout the rest of the two minutes concerned he says nothing. Let us call this statement "q". If q is true, he makes a false statement during the crucial two minutes; but q is his only statement in this period: therefore q must be false. But if q is false, then every statement that he makes during the two minutes must be true, and therefore q must be true, since he makes it during the two minutes. Thus if q is true it is false, and if it is false it is true.
>
> Let "A(p)" mean "I assert p between 5:29 and 5:31". Then q is "there is a proposition p such that A(p) and p is false". The contradiction emerges from the supposition that q is the proposition p in question. But if there is a hierarchy of meanings of the word "false" corresponding to a hierarchy of propositions, we shall have to substitute for q something more definite, i.e. "there is a proposition p of order n, such that A(p) and p has falsehood of order n". Here n may be any integer: but whatever integer it is, q will be of order n+1, and will not be capable of truth or falsehood of order n. Since I make no assertion of order n, q is false, and, since q is not a possible value of p, the argument that q is also true collapses. The man who says "I am telling a lie of order n" *is* telling a lie, but of order n+1.

The third paragraph is unnecessary, not to mention that its solution of the difficulty seems contrived. We can resolve the paradox simply by saying that q—the original q—lacks a referent. That is, there is no proposition it refers to. In this case the lack of a referent means that q is false, for it is asserting precisely that this referent exists. Further reflection on my solution yields the insight that propositions can never both refer only to themselves and have a truth-value, for if they refer only to themselves there is no criterion by which to judge their truth. Thus, the statement "this proposition is absurd" is neither true nor false, for "is absurd" refers to the subject, and the subject is "this proposition", which contains no claim whose absurdity we can judge, but rather refers to the statement that hasn't been completed when the first two words have been spoken. *This* statement, however, would be true: "'This proposition is absurd' is absurd", because the subject is a proposition in and of itself, albeit a meaningless one, which however is exactly why it's absurd. –Hence the general rule we've arrived at as a result of our solution of the paradox is itself the ground of our solution, for it makes a claim about a class of propositions that includes q, and we're merely applying the claim to a specific instance. Therefore my solution suggests its own justification, whereas Russell's has an air of the 'ad hoc' about it. Moreover, my solution does not rely on an invented "hierarchy of languages".

October 9

[…]

Today I read a column in the *New York Times* by Thomas Friedman entitled "It's Freedom, Stupid".[1] It consisted of worthless, unoriginal apologetics for American foreign policy. Truly, I can't imagine having an intellect as shallow as Friedman's. However, the most enraging characteristic of him and his ilk is that *it's impossible to get through to them*. They're absolutely smug in their commonplace

[1] The quality of the article was directly proportional to that of the title.

ideological moralizing. This is indeed why I was so vicious in my journal entries from two years ago: I was acutely aware that it's impossible to pry open the closed mind[1] of the herd. I was frustrated that I could do nothing but *tolerate* people like Thomas Friedman. –In any case, *ich soll nicht an sie denken*.

I'm not going to read Russell's book anymore. It's boring. It ain't rewarding enough to be worth the effort of deciphering. In its stead I'm going to read Franz Brentano's *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*.

October 11

My courses are as follows: Mittelstufe 2, 20th-century German Literature, History of Renaissance and Baroque Art, Conversation and Living Grammar, and Contemporary Themes in Austria. They're all auf Deutsch, of course.

I've read most of Brentano's book. (I'm skimming through it.) It's not a bad work, but much of it seems confused. This judgment may be only a reflection of my own muddledness, but I get the impression that Brentano introduces conceptual distinctions where there ought to be none, and periodically *fails* to make necessary distinctions. His notion of "presentation" seems vague, but his classes of mental phenomena seem too 'precise'.[2] Indeed, I'm skeptical of attempts to classify mental activity, since consciousness is fundamentally a unity (and conceptual distinctions necessarily brutalize this unity). At any rate, I'm tired of phenomenological psychology: I think it somehow lacks a foundation. The very notion of consciousness seems misguided in some way, though I can't state precisely how or why. Psychology, of course, isn't alone in lacking a foundation. I'm still searching for *philosophy's* starting point![3] Nevertheless, psychology is more in dire need of help.

Tonight I attended a guitar concert in the elegant Mozarteum. The pieces played, except for one by Leo Brouwer, were superb. I especially loved Fernando Sor's Variations, Op. 28, and Grand Solo (Op. 14). I've heard other pieces by that Spaniard: every one is a triumph. Sor understands the guitar like few other composers.

Back to philosophy for a few minutes. I've often been bothered that phenomenological and properly 'psychological'—not to mention physiological—explanations of mental life can contradict each other. When the supreme importance of the Other in our psychic life can be explained by either the intrinsic characteristics of self-consciousness or by the sex instinct, which explanation ought to be preferred? Perhaps neither. They're each appropriate on 'different levels', and neither is more basic than the other. That is, since we are fundamentally objective beings, and yet the self is self-consciousness, the two classes of explanations (which refer respectively to these two aspects of us) complement one another. They're never really contradictory. Moreover, physiological explanations of mental phenomena must always complement psychoanalytical (that is, psychological—not phenomenological) ones, because the latter are based on the former. They are the 'reasons for' or 'expressions of' physiological phenomena. Thus, supposing that Freud's theory of infantile polymorphous perversity is true, it's only an expression in psychological language of the chemical and physical dispositions of infants. (Insofar as our objective being is matter, clearly physical/chemical theories are the basis of psychological ones.)

I'm still not sure what the *relation* is between psychoanalytical and phenomenological theories. If they're completely unrelated we'll have to adopt a kind of modified complementarity theory of psychic life.

October 12

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[1] I use the singular advisedly.

[2] However, I haven't yet read the relevant chapters.

[3] The entire philosophical enterprise is circular, of course. In more than one way.

They obviously are related, however. One of the methods used by psychoanalytical theorists is to examine what's immediately present in consciousness. They then reason inductively [or abductively], which isn't permissible for strict phenomenologists; the latter must draw conclusions only from the direct analysis of consciousness. Thus, psychoanalysts try to find the reason behind our states of mind—the laws beneath them, as it were—while phenomenologists try to find the immediate laws and characteristics *of* consciousness. The existence of the two fields reflects the fundamental division in our nature. On the other hand, ultimately it must be possible to transcend this theoretical dualism (or at least to provide connecting links between the two disciplines), because the human being is an immediate unity.

If we define the unconscious simply as thoughts of which we're unaware, then clearly it doesn't exist; for thoughts, in order to be such, must be conscious. (That's part of their definition.) However, this doesn't mean that consciousness isn't determined by neural processes, or that there isn't a pre-conscious realm of potential thoughts[1] in constant movement. Moreover, the conceptual need for an unconscious cause of thoughts is evident from phenomenology, for thoughts appear *out of nowhere*—and yet they must come from somewhere. (Strictly, this simple and obvious hypothesis of an 'unconscious' isn't part of phenomenology, because it's based on [ab]duction.)

Last summer I was too harsh in my judgment of my valedictory. The speech did have faults, but it wasn't a "hodgepodge of unrelated ideas". Two themes ran through it: we ought to know ourselves, which involves affirming our humanity over technology, and once we do we'll recognize that the most truly human life is spent in the service of mankind. I don't necessarily still agree with the latter idea, but it contains at least a kernel of truth.

Today fifteen of us Bowling Green students climbed the Gaisberg. *Es war sehr lustig*. The weather was perfect, as usual, and the hiking itself was invigorating. Mountain-climbing is one of my favorite physical activities. The view of Salzburg and its environs was majestic enough to trigger profound philosophical ideas; the air was pristine and pregnant with a 'vital force'.

I need order in my life, but it has to be a self-imposed order. It has to be an *inner* order. My objective situation might be entirely disorderly—as it was in August and September—but this would bother me only a little if there were a direction to my life. On the other hand, order imposed by institutions, like college, interferes with my own internal self-control, so it has the paradoxical effect of introducing a bit of anarchy into my life.

I love not having the faintest idea how my life will unfold. This uncertainty ensures that the next sixty years will be a journey of self-discovery unhampered by career goals and the pursuit of money.

I think Brentano is wrong that the sentence "A exists" is only an affirmation of A rather than a combination of the attribute 'existence' with A. In asserting that A exists we're stating that an objective referent corresponds to our idea. (Saying that an *idea* exists [as an idea] is, perhaps, a tautology.)

On second thought, many existential propositions are tautologies. "That tree exists" and "The house in which I live exists" are tautologies because the subject already refers to something 'out there'.[2] However, "God exists" and "A green tree exists" are not tautologies, for the subject is only a concept 'pure and simple'; that is, the subject doesn't say something about the concept which entails its existence.

[…]

October 14

It may be impossible, even theoretically, to provide a physical basis for all non-phenomenological psychological statements. This is one problem with my earlier reflections, but there's another: even if phenomenology can be definitely restricted in its scope, I don't think psychoanalysis can. It overlaps with

[1] Dreams are, perhaps, expressions of the constantly existing potential thoughts.
[2] Because of the words "that" and "in which I live".

phenomenology. This would be merely a verbal issue if it weren't that psychoanalysis can contradict phenomenology. I won't get any further with these ideas, though, until I examine specific psychological theories.

Actually, two true hypotheses can never contradict each other. They're either appropriate on different levels (which is vague, I know), or there are simply multiple reasons for a phenomenon.

[…]

October 15

I finished reading Brentano's book. Now I'll finish the *Philosophical Investigations* (of which I haven't read even 200 sections).

October 17

Yesterday I talked to a cute Austrian on the bus. She studies in the same building as I do, so I'll probably see her again. Today I met a 19-year-old Czech girl in my Mittelstufe 2 class: her name is Michaela and she's directly descended from Helen of Troy. I can imagine men going to war for her, solely on account of her beauty. We talked for a while, getting along 'famously'. I'll see her again tomorrow.

My academic studies are as boring as ever. I'm reading Arthur Schnitzler's short story "Die Toten Schweigen" for Literature; most of its words I'm unfamiliar with. The students (mostly Americans) in my courses are dumb to the nth degree.

There have recently been anthrax attacks in Britain and the U.S. What a surprise. This is exactly what I predicted would happen. As the bombings in Afghanistan escalate, so will the terrorist attacks. Eventually the Taliban will be ousted, and this won't have the slightest effect on stopping terrorism. As I've insisted all along, the "war against terrorism" cannot be won[1] unless the U.S. provides massive economic aid to poor nations. No other method will be anything but counterproductive in the long term. Since our politicians, however, aren't Marxists, they won't follow the wisest policy.

October 18

I saw Michaela again. I may have exaggerated her beauty, but not by much. I want to write a poem about her, but I have no poetic talent.

It didn't even occur to me today to ask for Michaela's phone number! I planned to invite her to a concert next week—though she's required at all hours as an "au pair" for an Austrian family—but I ought to get her phone number first. I can't do that until Monday, though!

I spent the last hour writing eight lines of a long narrative poem—but I quit the enterprise soon after my inspiration had. (The inspiration was fueled by the thought of Michaela.) Now I'm bored.

October 21

Yesterday I wrote three pages of a mediocre short story. Today I'm trying to finish the one I began this summer.

....I was just given a piano for my room! Dad's cousin, who's a concert pianist in Salzburg, is lending me her Clavinova so we can play Mozart's Larghetto and Allegro in E-flat together. This is a dream come true, my friend.

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[1] Certainly not in the long run.

I finished the story of the vanishing composer. I'm pleased with it, surprisingly enough. (Its extravagant language, though, is excessive at times.)

....Actually, I think it's amateurish. It's too short. Its inconsistencies in 'phenomenological' language are indeed intentional—they're meant to illustrate the inconsistencies of the common notion of the self—and its form is more complex than appears at first (just as its philosophical themes, among them an implicit critique of dialectics, are fairly profound), but this doesn't mean it's a good piece of literature.

October 23

My story, despite its flaws, is a good debut to a life of literary endeavors. It unites art and philosophy. Schopenhauer's philosophy is implicit in it, as are my ideas on the self, as is my enlightened 'contempt' for matter (bodies), as are theories of artistic creation (such as its relation to self-consciousness and to the sex drive).... It even contains original ideas I've never articulated....and, of course, also ideas I'm not yet aware of.

Last night I saw *Aïda* with Rachel. (It was the first opera I've ever been to.) Verdi's music was phenomenal, but the orchestra occasionally overpowered the singers. The women's voices had a little too much vibrato. The direction was awful: the set was modernized, the costumes were unimpressive, and several grand scenes were *pitiful* rather than overwhelming. At the end of one, the audience booed. (And also when the director bowed at the end.) –Even so, I thoroughly enjoyed the evening. Verdi's music saved it.

My strong sex drive and the fact that I'm a perfect gentleman conflict. (Coercion and violence are obviously implicit in the sexual instinct and act.)

October 24

The last sentence of §202 in P.I. doesn't follow from the previous one. Besides, if thinking itself follows rules, as it obviously does, then clearly it's possible to obey a rule privately. –Or is W. going to deny that we think?

I can't figure out what Wittgenstein is arguing for. If he's arguing that intuitions don't exist, he's wrong. (The most that can be said is that they're usually 'imperceptible'.) If he thinks they're somehow unimportant, I don't know what he means.

§242 is interesting, but I don't entirely understand it. I don't understand the significance of 239 either. 248 is peculiar. I'm not sure that the last sentence of 247 is correct. 251 and 252 are very intriguing but I'm too tired to think about them. I'll say only that I don't understand why the first sentence of 252 could be called nonsense.

[Deleted entries about meeting a couple friends from college.]

October 31

[…] Lately I've been interested in the philosophy of science. I can't figure out the relation between the noumenon, phenomena and theoretical concepts like chemicals and molecules. How can the latter have such explanatory power if there doesn't really exist anything that corresponds to them? Schopenhauer believes that theories are accounts of how the Will manifests itself, but I'm skeptical that this idea has as much content as he thinks. I ought to read about Bertrand Russell's philosophy of science, but learning German occupies too much of my time.

Sometimes I feel on the verge of intellectual breakthroughs, but I never get anywhere because I

can't devote more than a few minutes to philosophy each day. I have to practice the piano, read about art history, attend classes, and think of ideas for short stories.

November 1

I've felt constricted lately. I'm frantic to accomplish something magnificent. My interests are so varied, and it's so hard for me to stay focused, that I don't get anything done. School contributes much to this anarchy.

It's frustrating for me to pretend that adults are my superiors—to caress their vanity, to acquiesce in the charade of "respecting one's elders". Adults are boring, not wise.

Today I wrote a parable about a willow tree. It's meant to be a short children's book, although children wouldn't appreciate the symbolism behind each sentence.

The key to explaining the startling analogies between history and the growth of an intelligent individual lies in a society's collective consciousness, "which appropriates and learns from past experiences like individuals do." (From my letter to Jessica.) This analogy in turn is explained by the fact that collective consciousness is nothing but the 'sum' or 'collective tendency' of individual consciousness. The former is more sluggish than the latter for a variety of reasons: (1) collective experiences can be ignored or forgotten more easily than an individual's experiences can (because c.c. isn't a single continuous consciousness); (2) c.c. is composed largely 'of the masses', and individuals in this category learn from (and reflect on) their experiences more rarely than intelligent people do; (3) a society's experiences are far less important—and *compelling*—to people than their own are; etc.

I realize that the concept of collective consciousness is incredibly vague, but it's necessary. Not only does it correspond to a reality, but only by using it can one arrive at the most sensible explanation of the first abovementioned analogy. Thus, collective consciousness is one of the links between the individual and history.

The dialectic is so much more noticeable in history than in individual psychology because collective consciousness isn't subtle: whereas individuals cover much psychic territory in traversing from the thesis to the antithesis, c.c. seems to leap from one to the other because (1) it's the *product* of many individual 'facts',[1] (2) it doesn't *exist* in the way that consciousness does (it's simply an extrapolation), and (3) [partially because of (2)] it's not as easy to interpret as real consciousness. (So we notice only its broad outlines, and only when *these* are obvious.)

C.c. is a difficult concept, but a revolutionist can't afford to neglect it.

Lately I've felt somehow isolated, cut off, from my earlier self. I want to be inspired again. I'm tired of everything. I'm tired of dreary "wisdom" and discontinuity with passion. And I hate feeling like a foreigner to myself.

Incidentally, I'm convinced that nearly every philosopher in history has approached the problem of self-continuity from the wrong angle (i.e., with incorrect assumptions). I'll elaborate on this some other day.

November 2

I'm not especially brilliant. I just happen to be *right* most of the time.

I wonder how philosophers have resolved Zeno's paradoxes. I think I know how Kant did, but how have empiricists done so?

The following is my rough thematic outline of the novel I'll never write.

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[1] And hence lags behind the facts themselves. (Or at least our awareness of it is delayed.)

> Gradual emergence of naïve self-consciousness. (Absence of self-reflection except in exceptional moments.) Proto-sexual incidents in childhood hint at the terrifying nature of the subconscious and the vastness of the universe. Conformism in middle school. Reflection on others but little on himself. Extreme popularity in middle school and high school. Contempt for everyone intellectually and socially beneath him. (Hegel's master-slave relationship. Striving for recognition by an equal or superior.) A competitor arrives—a true equal—but he's finally 'disgraced' by the main character. (Drives for power and for recognition conflict. Consequent Faustianity of life.) Triumph is short-lived; contempt returns. Beginnings of cynical self-reflection/self-consciousness. Depression. Cruelty to classmates. Rebellion of the 'masses' against the 'leader'. College begins: 'fresh start'. Boredom for a time, but he discovers philosophy. Begins to 'realize' himself. Falls desperately in love with a girl; neglects everything else. One day she wants to read his entire journal; he lets her. She's appalled by it and breaks up with him. (Relationships would be impossible if we really knew each other (but not if we also knew ourselves).) Suicidal despair. Return to philosophy, but despair increases. Disillusionment with everything: life is meaningless. Not even sex is pleasurable anymore. Finally he abandons society....but not before stealing a lot of necessities like food and CDs (practical nihilism; consequent self-loathing). (Murder...?) Lives in a tent in the mountains, letting nature heal him. He has recently discovered classical music. For three years he struggles to overcome nihilism. He succeeds, though at the cost of abandoning intellectual integrity. Rejoins society (lives with his parents). Contempt for others begins to return, but he falls in love. This time it's less passionate: they feel comfortable together. They get engaged....and he's smashed by a train. (Marriage=death of the individual.)

In the months—and years?—to come I'll considerably alter this vague outline such that the story is a cohesive whole rather than a formless mass.

It seems to me that Wittgenstein could have done a better job of explaining his arguments.

November 3

I'm tired of thinking! I can't stand it anymore! I spend most of every day trying to ignore philosophy and psychology! But I fail, inevitably. Hence the wisest course of action is to *embrace* my destiny, with love.

Collective consciousness has an intricate dialectical relationship with both the *individual's* consciousness and the objective conditions of society. It stands between the former subjective factor and the latter objective one.[1] For example, in the beginning of history there were nomadic tribes. Survival was their primary concern. The conditions of production forced them to hunt and gather—it can be said that the latter *were* the conditions of production—and this necessitated that they always be working with their hands. Intellectual pursuits didn't occupy individuals, and starvation always threatened them. Hence these people weren't aware of any fundamental separation between man and nature. Because this was true of everyone (or certainly the majority), it was part of the tribe's collective consciousness to feel like a part of nature. With Sumerian and Harappan civilization the situation became more complex: agriculture had been invented, so cities could be formed (from the surplus product of the agriculture); there were further gradations within the city between people *somewhat* engaged in production (merchants) and those not at all (priests, kings). In broad outline, all these divisions, combined with the development of thought, pressed upon civilization the awareness that mankind was distinct from nature. This time, however, it wasn't a simple case of an aggregate of individual consciousnesses determining collective consciousness; instead, the earlier c.c. had become partially internalized by individuals, who thus took as their 'starting point' an already *collective* consciousness[2] [?]—which was, of course, more 'naïve' than the emerging one.

[1] That's misleading, though.

[2] Remember that ideas in c.c. are only a part, but a very influential part, of an individual's consciousness.

(Obviously collective consciousnesses are always in flux, but to simplify matters we can and do point to certain 'extremes' or noteworthy developments as being culminations or beginnings or historical landmarks. In fact, that's all that the dialectic is: a simplification, albeit a useful one.) So you see that, once civilization has emerged, changes in production are basically the driving forces behind decisive advances in c.c. (certainly the level of productive forces confines possible c.c.-es within more or less definite areas), but that the specific details of a c.c. are determined by the one it develops out of (and many other obvious factors).

Collective consciousness is the sum of the most general, 'agreed-upon' ideas in a society, even if these ideas aren't entirely articulated. (This is merely a rephrasing of my earlier definition.) It must be distinguished from the *conditions* of society, be they political institutions or relations of production. Of course, once these conditions are made part of an ideology, their ideological expression is included within the c.c.

Incidentally, the consciousness of a division between man and nature is the antithesis in one of the most general dialectics in history, which won't be concluded until mankind realizes its unity with nature on a more enlightened level than before (i.e., until communism is established).

Today I'm officially 21 years old. Strangely enough, I *do* feel a little different than I did last year: I feel less ingenuous and impressionable, more confident. I'm also a little more bored (though this will soon pass). There is a variety of reasons for my subtle change, chief among them being my relationship with Sangeetha and my travels around Europe. –Yet in spite of my maturation, there will always be a core of childishness within me. It is this, I think, that will keep me interested in life.

Whenever I think about time I get into a muddle.

November 4

Today I went to Susan's house. For a while I played with her adorable grandchildren and ate the cake she'd baked for me. Then we practiced the Mozart duet.

I can't understand the meaning or significance of many sections in W.'s book. For example: 271, 296, 297, 298, 300 (who cares about *pictures*?), 302. Why is the proposition in 295 not experiential? It's different from other such propositions, but its truth can be ascertained only on the basis of experience. (It's not a priori. I admit, though, that I don't completely understand the distinction between learning a priori ideas in experience and learning a posteriori ideas from experience.[1]) 304 is important, but we *can* say things about intuitions. (Pain is a kind of intuition.) That is, intuitions are more a something than a nothing, because they are perceptible. 305 is important as well (and 303), but I don't think it's entirely correct. I agree that in the majority of cases the picture of the inner process of remembering is irrelevant to an understanding of the use of a word. But it does help us describe the concept of remembering and acquire a more exact understanding of it. (In future entries I might provide examples of such descriptions, but it's easy enough to see what they'd involve.) 307 and 308 are also significant, as are 315, 316, 311 and 312 (though I only vaguely understand the last two). In regard to 316, what W. criticizes can at least *add* to our comprehension of the word "think".

W. is right to point to inadequacies in both the concept and the reality of intuitions. Because of these inadequacies, intentionality isn't a sufficient explanation of meaning. However, it is necessary, for reasons I have stated before and probably will state again.

November 5

Occasionally in this journal I've referred to my "inferiority complex." I ought to clarify that. Even on the most basic psychic level—probably even in my subconscious—I distinctly feel pretty impressive

[1] How can we tell when an idea isn't based on experiences? Simply by its apodictic certainty?

and ‘good’. However, I know myself well enough to recognize that I’ll never compare to my ‘ideal man’. (This man will *never* be realized. He is only an ideal.) Hence, in this respect, I am inferior.

In knowing oneself, one knows humanity—i.e., everyone. (And one doesn’t know oneself until one knows humanity.) Philosophers and psychologists ought never to forget this.

Last night I had many odd dreams, or one long one, having to do with cats and sex. But what I remember most clearly is that I listened to a piano piece by Bach so crushing in its emotional power that I literally convulsed with sobs. After the pianist had finished I raced to a library to get a copy for myself, but I had forgotten the name of the piece! I was devastated.

November 6

In spite of my recognition that genius exists only in the moment of creation and is thus more delicate and less ‘monumental’ than most people imagine, I’m inclined to agree with Michelangelo that only those works deserve to exist that are products of genius. This certainly seems true with regard to philosophy and music (and perhaps nothing else, though I know not why): all creations except the most profound are expendable. I don’t know precisely what that means—it’s almost surely wrong, in fact—but I believe it on an ‘intuitive’ level. ....Genius is akin to perfection, and perfection describes the thing in itself. The genius has access to the ineffable; what is created by him has *value*. His thoughts haven’t been completely filtered through self-consciousness—the great equalizer—but rather contain within them a kernel of Truth. (This is the case especially with regard to the musical, philosophical and mystical genius.)

Unfortunately, these reflections aren’t very exact. They’re probably wrong or meaningless. [They’re too Schopenhauerian.]

November 7

Tonight Sofia and I went to a concert. The program included Mozart, Schubert and Beethoven (the Kreutzer sonata), so we enjoyed it. We also enjoyed each other’s company. After we had returned home I invited her to my room—to “take a picture” of her in her nice dress—and then for a while we discussed art and such topics. There were several awkward pauses. Finally I leaned over, stroked her hair and kissed her, quite suddenly; she reciprocated. We kissed “passionately”. After we’d unlocked our lips, we shed our false social shells and asked each other what we had been thinking (about our relationship) during the past few days. She had apparently liked me for a long time but had thought I didn’t like her, etc. A minute later we resumed our kissing; this time it evolved into more than that. Eventually she went to her room—to face the endless questions posed by her American roommate.

[…]

November 8

I think I no longer really fear death. I don’t look forward to it, of course, but if it’s synonymous with oblivion, why fear it? I am somewhat annoyed that it’ll prevent me from witnessing the future of humanity, but this isn’t a fear of death itself. –Even so, I’m anxious not to die before I’ve fulfilled my potential. I don’t fear the end of life, but I fear not realizing my ambitions. (Are my ambitions more important to me than life itself?)

One of the reasons for my high self-esteem—a stupid reason, to be sure—is that I know Nietzsche would approve of me.

Tonight Sofia and I engaged in some sexual activities. Specifically, oral sex and ‘fondling’. I didn’t like it very much. As my face was buried in her crotch I felt a bit disgusted. I was tasting, smelling, touching, seeing and hearing the animal aspects of existence. My finger was actually *inside* this girl! As time went

on I got bored.

November 9

I'm in Wien.

Sofia is a sweetheart. I might love her one day. Even so, last night I had the peculiar feeling that I was cheating on Sangeetha.

November 10

Tonight I saw "Salomé", the opera by Richard Strauss. I had quickly read Oscar Wilde's play beforehand, so I understood the plot of the opera (which followed the play to the letter). The music was brilliant, but it couldn't compare to *Aïda*. It was too intellectual—i.e., not aesthetically pleasing—and its few gorgeous passages were fleeting. Verdi can sustain beauty; Strauss can't. Or he doesn't want to, which is just as bad. The story itself was intriguing, touching on such issues as humans' tendency to 'kill' that which they love (because they want to possess it?) and their fascination with psychic forces they repress. (Wilde's play was a strange combination of comedy and tragedy, but I liked it.)

Earlier in the day we took a monotonous tour of Vienna. Later I walked through the city with two acquaintances. The weather was frigid, but that didn't chill my impression of the magnificent Altstadt. The architecture—Gothic, Baroque, Classical, Neoclassical, Modern—is possibly more attractive than most parts of old Rome. I *love* Wien!

November 12

I'm in a sparkling mood. I was just listening to Handel's Concerto a duo cori No. 2, but more importantly, Sofia and I like each other better every day. She is indeed a wonderful and attractive girl. Tonight we kissed and cuddled for over an hour; tomorrow we're attending a concert together; next week she's coming to the Thanksgiving party with me.

Moreover, I simply love my life! I'm HAPPY not thinking deeply about philosophy. Of course, I feel 'superficial' enough to be Goethe, but this absence of obsession is merely a temporary respite that will encourage a redoubled effort in the future.

I don't understand why our prehistoric ancestors became self-conscious about their genitals. The only reason *I* am, I think, is that I was brought up to be so. There isn't a good *reason* for this self-consciousness. (The only *reason*—as opposed to cause—I can think of for the original embarrassment is that excrement is smelly.) Maybe our ancestors covered themselves for protection, and after thousands of years this developed into the desire for privacy we feel today.

It's startling how many psychological insights are discernible in the structures of words. (German verbs in particular are suggestive.) Did the societies that invented these languages just happen to be abnormally perceptive? How did our languages come into being? How did people originally invent syntax? How did sounds become so sophisticated?[1] How was mathematics discovered? Was calculus somehow 'latent' before it was articulated?

November 13

Sangeetha is my best friend, but it would require no more than a nudge for her to become an

[1] Obviously the answer is: time, time, and more time.

"enemy". The need for tact in friendships—refutes friendships.

There is something vaguely pathetic in my craving to be "great". Actually, I know how dishonest is the concept of greatness....but I strive for it anyway. Clearly the solution to this dilemma lies in the nature of self-consciousness: viz., that it is its own other. Ultimately, I want to be impressive in front of myself; only secondarily in front of other people. This is because, *to me*, the primary other is myself (since I'm so self-aware) rather than the "Other" (other people). Most people want to impress other human beings more than themselves because they're *less* self-aware (i.e., they objectify themselves less than I do), and so they see their fellow humans as the most basic other. Be that as it may, inasmuch as we are all self-conscious (and therefore are literally an other from whom we want respect) we like to think well of ourselves.

Of course, I haven't explained why pride (or vanity, in many cases) is preferable to self-contempt. What is the deepest reason for this? Is there a phenomenological reason or only a psychological one? Or are the two related?

How on earth are computers and televisions and cars and phones and lamps and refrigerators and particle accelerators and factories built? For years I've been fascinated by technology. One day I'll learn the principles behind machines (after I've studied higher mathematics).

My inability to write well prevents me from undertaking ambitious literary projects. I'm exceedingly frustrated.

Yesterday a plane crashed in New York. It seems that America has fallen out of favor in God's eyes.

November 14

Last night Sofia and I arrived at the concert late, so we didn't hear part of Dvorák's "Golden Spinrod". Nevertheless, from what I did hear it sounded amateurish—as did Prokofiev's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 1. This piece did indeed have some sparkling moments, but I didn't appreciate its apparent lack of continuity. Tchaikovsky's 4th symphony was brilliant; it redeemed the concert. I especially enjoyed the playful third movement—and the fourth....and, for that matter, the first and second.

After the concert I gave Sofia a piano lesson in my room and then we made out for an hour. I also 'pleasured' her. I generally feel moronic in sexual situations—because, after all, we're taking physical pleasure so *seriously!*—but I try not to let it show. (Thus, as I rub her and she gasps and gyrates her hips to a rhythm, I'm wondering when the hell she'll reach her orgasm so I can stop this absurd rubbing!)

I'm reading a translation, by Charles E. Passage, of Goethe's play *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

§329: I agree, but it's nonetheless obvious that we must *recognize* the words; and it is these recognitions that, when doing philosophy, we can deepen into more or less distinct intuitions. In the first case the intuitions exist only in name, as a logical presupposition; in the second case they're more noticeable, though they admittedly can't be *felt* in the way that pain can.

337: In the last sentence he admits what he rejected! (Even if he didn't really reject it, the sentence is nonetheless a triviality.)

342: My first impression after reading this was, "Shut up, Wittgenstein. You're creating problems where none exist." Incidentally, the existence of the very method I use in trying to understand him presupposes that he's wrong or deluded.

347: Obviously we have to assume that everyone understands words as we do.

348: It's possible to imagine what the first sentence means—*I* at least can imagine it fairly easily—and this imagination is our understanding. It's a less exact understanding than more commonplace kinds, but this is only because the subject is more esoteric. The mere fact that we can't test our understanding doesn't invalidate the concept of "understanding" in this situation.

I don't 'understand' 350, 351 and 354. 352 seems important. 353 could have been written by A. J. Ayer.

Self-expression is the highest truth. (It's everywhere!) Our task is to achieve the highest form of this truth.

November 15

I've finished Goethe's play. It was undoubtedly a work of genius, and undoubtedly superior to Euripides's of the same title. It addressed the loftiest themes in literature, in particular: love, compassion, truth, and the relation between them. (Compassion is a product of love; love is the 'highest' truth, partly because utter truthfulness is its result.) Moreover, the author was invisible behind his characters: he didn't assert himself in every sentence, but let the characters speak for themselves. As Nietzsche once opined, only the greatest poets are capable of such self-suppression.

What a spiritually pure work of art! What a masterpiece!

November 16

I'm desperate to write a work of art. But I don't have the ability. My curse is that I have talent in most subjects but genius in probably none. [I.e., it is my talent that compels me to strive for an unattainable genius.] Why must I live in an ethereal world of dreams and pointless ambitions? Why must I compete with great men? Why am I doomed to the fate of Tennyson's Ulysses?

Another asinine goal of mine that I haven't often mentioned is that I'd like to be one of the most prolific writers in history. This necessitates that I write more often than I've been doing.

—So: Today I have to watch a German movie with my literature professor. It's based on Stefan Zweig's *Schachnovelle*, which we were supposed to read. I loathe that class. This weekend I have to write a thoroughly meaningless comparison, auf Deutsch, of the two main characters in the novel. I did something similar two weeks ago and received a C-. Why? Because such vain exercises hold no interest for me. They're drudgery. School itself, without exception, is drudgery.

Last night Sofia came to my room; we talked awhile about absolutely nothing, and then I gave her another piano lesson. […]

I used to talk to two or three Americans in my group, sometimes with enthusiasm, but not anymore. Now I'm polite to them to the extent of *occasionally* having conversations. They're simply bland people. Would that I could find a single fascinating person in Salzburg! Why do accomplished pianists, for example, never fall in love with me?

Oh, "love", blah blah. Love is as Faustian as everything else. Not even this most supreme of emotions is a haven from boredom.

Yesterday I tried to write a poem. I got as far as turning the computer on. I also tried to write a piece of music, and was somewhat more successful—but I have no desire to create anything that isn't ingenious. There's too much mediocrity in the world; why contribute to it? Nothing deserves to exist except genius. Everything else is boring.[1]

How frustrating that I can't be independent of the dialectic! Nearly everything I do conforms to dialectics.

Death must be somewhere in the vicinity of me: I'm not in the mood for life.

I watched the Schachnovelle movie. It was good, but....it was in German. Fortunately I saw it with a hilarious American student, so the time wasn't wasted.

Several hours tonight with Sofia. Aside from engaging in our usual 'erotic' activities, we *finally* talked about our relationship. The only conclusion we arrived at was that two months is probably too short a time for us to get seriously involved.

[1] You see I'm tired of critical thought.

November 17

I'm often tired. I woke up three hours ago (at 11:00) but I already want to sleep again.

What's most incomprehensible about time is that it's a combination of objective and subjective factors.

Ever since my childhood I've had facial tics. They're very annoying.

....I spent the past two hours writing sixteen lines of a narrative poem intended to be in the style of *Eugene Onegin*. However, I have, inevitably, given up. I simply am not a poet! I'm a hack!

....Ha! Ha! With dedication, one conquers all! Tonight I wrote 31 lines of a poem; tomorrow I may finish it. It's amateurish, of course, but it's also semi-beautiful and relatively profound. When I sat down to write, feeling an exquisite longing that craved expression, I had no idea what would result. I knew only that I wanted to write—and that I hadn't the patience to consider a topic. At first the lines were mere description, but gradually (and unwittingly) there emerged philosophical themes. With each new line I recognized them more clearly. By the 31st line, philosophy had, unfortunately, begun to predominate, so I quit for the night. Even so, I was and am rather pleased with myself.

By the way, I have little desire to write in the formless, non-rhythmic style of twentieth-century poetry. (It would be easier, though.) My poem is in something like blank verse.

November 18

[…]

Speaking of music, I'd like now to tell you a story I'm fond of. One day, when I was two years old, my parents and I went shopping in a mall. Being sensible people, they constantly held my hand so I wouldn't wander off. However, being a mischievous little boy, I had an urge to do precisely what they dreaded most. In a moment of carelessness my dad let go of my hand; so, taking *carpe diem!* as my motto, I waddled as quickly as my stubby legs would permit to the other side of the mall. Soon my parents noticed my absence. Frantically they searched all the nearby shops. In terror lest they lose their son, they informed a security guard of the situation. He, in turn, sent the word out to his comrades. By now my mom was crying hysterically, but she could do little else except wait for news from the security guard. At last he heard from his buddy that a short red-haired boy had been spotted in a different section of the mall; my parents raced there to reacquire me. When they arrived at the store a guard smiled and pointed to a child sitting in front of a stereo system, oblivious of everything but the music.

Returning briefly to an earlier idea: we ourselves are a kind of self-objectification. This implies that, perversely, we are self-expression. Because, moreover, every action and thought is self-expression, the latter is a supreme truth not only of nature but of ourselves. The most sensible thing to do, then, is to cultivate, and achieve the noblest form of, self-expression. (Is this self-objectification also, somehow, self-creation?)

....Today I rehearsed the Mozart duet with Susan. After I'd returned home, I gave Sofia a quick piano lesson....and then made out with her for an hour. This time I felt quite happy kissing and hugging her: I felt *spiritually* close to her rather than just physically. Physical closeness is nice, but it's nothing without spiritual passion.

November 19

The reason time passes quickly when we're having fun and slowly when we're bored is that self-consciousness is less intense and more intense respectively. After all, time is created by self-consciousness.

Humans are always self-conscious to a degree (though, I suppose, there *may* be exceptions; it's hard to tell, because in those moments 'we' don't exist), so they are always explicitly or 'implicitly'—non-thetically—aware of time. They're just more aware of it when they're more 'in existence'. –That relates to the subjective aspect of time. The objective is far more difficult to understand.[1]

(Cats are almost certainly not self-conscious, and they're surely unaware of time.)

Today was uneventful. I skipped a class. Boredom assails me violently. I spent two hours with Sofia tonight.

I'm worried that I may one day lose my revolutionary idealism.

November 20

I think I was wrong that listening to classical music sheds one's vulgarities. It does so only if one isn't very vulgar to begin with.

Nothing matters. Life's a sham.
  Love's a Sadist's joke.
I'm passionless. –Even so,
  I'm eager for a poke.

Last night I began a work somewhat in the style of *Notes from the Underground*. I intended it to peel away the layers of false values that cake the consciousness of the masses. But it was a pitiful piece of writing, so I've abandoned it.

I feel like a foreigner, an alien, to my fellow human beings. I feel as though I've been placed on this earth for a reason—as if I'm the tool of some higher power—as if I'm supposed to clarify unresolved issues and tie up humanity's loose ends before I depart.[2] I'm meant to help give mankind something to do for the next couple of centuries—to postpone or eradicate the Great Weariness. […]

It's fascinating to reflect that Western civilization is, in a sense, based on the ideas of an obscure little cult founded in the time of Augustus. The doctrines of these religious fanatics glorified the masses, so they were circulated and accepted to the extent that they became the dominant ideology of an entire hemisphere. Marxism, too, can be interpreted as a philosophy for the herd; hence it once had enormous practical power and probably will again. (Particularly because religion is so far behind the times that it will never again have the inspirational power it once had.[3])

[…]

Before I go to bed—I've actually already been there, but a thought occurred to me that I must write down—I'd like to explain why I recently classed the musical genius with the philosophical and the mystical. At first this comparison seems strange, for how is music related to *truth*? But there are two reasons for it: (1) the highest musical genius composes from his 'inner being' (he doesn't need the piano, or uses it only as an inessential aid to the creative process); (2) his musical phrases develop out of each other and are thus organically connected (creating a totality that seems to be *necessary*, though it really isn't). Mystical 'truths' share these traits. A philosopher's thoughts do as well: they're directly intuited—not arrived at *merely* through reasoning[4]—and they exist in a kind of totality that ultimately ensures their compatibility. (Just to warn you, I didn't experience a direct intuition when pondering that last statement, so it could be wrong or

[1] Partly because it seems to contradict the subjective, in that it exists when the latter doesn't—e.g. in animals.

[2] This is similar to how I felt in 7th grade, when I imagined I was an alien sent here to report on his findings to the planet's inhabitants, after which I'd return home.

[3] Don't point to Muslim and Christian fanatics as counter-proofs!

[4] Which is superficial and prone to error.

meaningless.) Ideally, the philosopher and mystic meet in one person.

It's *possible* that the greatest literary geniuses can be included in this category. Goethe probably can, as well as Shakespeare, Byron and James Joyce.

November 21

Today I finally received Sangeetha's letter. It was more personal and engaging than Jessica's; I liked it, on the whole. She also sent me pictures of our trip through Europe (though only one with her in it!). I had almost forgotten what a sweet-looking, twinkle-eyed, dimple-cheeked, adorable, petite, glowing girl she is. I was so happy around her! We were so wonderful together!

I've learned from her e-mails and her letter that our two months together had a deep impact on her (more than she's willing to admit). She's changed since she met me. She's now more critical of others, more self-confident, more mature, perhaps more independent. Her friends apparently aren't as interesting as she thought they were. Obviously her change is somewhat a result merely of her stay in Europe, but I flatter myself to think that her relationship with me was a factor.

I'm in the mood to write my darling a letter.

November 22

The reason I'm in such a philosophical muddle is that my reflections aren't precise. When discussing genius I use words like "totality" and "intuition", which are so inexact as to confuse me *more* rather than clarify the issue.

Moreover, I need a foundation on which to build my thoughts. I need a *methodology.*

....Tonight I went to the Thanksgiving dinner with Sofia. The food was decent (the dessert was delicious). Some of us students performed music; I played Liszt's Liebestraum No. 3. Sofia liked it exceedingly. (Who wouldn't?)

After dinner the two of us walked home in the rain. Sofia was quiet the entire time. I wasn't sure why until we'd reached our rooms, when she took me to hers and handed me a letter she'd written yesterday. It was addressed, of course, to me. I returned to my own abode and read it. It was a touching document that bared her feelings: she wrote that she was at that moment in tears, that she had never met anyone like me, etc.—and also that I had never given the impression of really liking her (that I rarely said her name, for example). I felt remorseful as I read, though many of her gentle accusations applied to herself as well. Instantly I began a letter in response to clear the air and end her confusion, and to raise her self-esteem. I haven't finished yet; by the time I do, it will be of a high enough quality to reassure her and help her feel better. (It won't compare to hers for sheer 'human interest'. –I.e., hers is more genuine, moving and innocent.)

Sofia is the first girl I've known to feel the need to express her emotions. In this respect she's more interesting than the others, and more like me. What a pity I can't sense a romantic spark between us! We could be perfect for each other—if only that spark existed! If only she were as quick-witted and charismatic as Sangeetha!

Speaking of whom, my letter to Sangeetha has grown quite long and rather weird. Last night I was in a sentimental mood, so I wrote a great deal about our friendship and what I hoped it would become. What I wrote was utterly inane, but I didn't have the energy to rewrite it all, so I let it stay.

November 27

I'm tired of 20th-century pseudo-philosophy. So I'm reading vol. 1 of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*. Of the 30 pages I've read so far I agree with almost nothing—in fact, most of the ideas are patently

false—but since the book is an incredibly lucid classic I'll trudge on.

It irritates me that I haven't been reading more philosophy lately. I've been trying to write literature! WHY, in God's name?[1] Philosophy is far more important and absorbing than literature. Damn my vain creative impulse!

....I played in a concert tonight with Susan. We were the last performers. On the program, next to my name was the word "Guest". That was pretty satisfying; I've never been a "guest" before.

America, my beloved homeland: land of the slaves, home of the meek.[2] The human species is going to experience a holocaust within the next few decades because of my country. (—My country, late capitalism: what's the difference?)

I'm not impressed with Bertrand Russell. His social 'theories'—probably his moral, psychological and economic ones too—are superficial, derivative and boring. His criticisms of Marx in *German Social Democracy* are founded on startling misunderstandings of *Capital*. Was he a genius? Let's agree with Ray Monk that he was "marvelously intelligent" and leave it at that.

November 28

It seems to me that denying life is a deeper truth than affirming it. Life is time; hence, life is meaninglessness. (It's time that swallows potential meaning.[3]) When combined with our knowledge of the vastness of the universe, the denial gains force. However, in our merely human world, *affirmation* is a deeper truth. It's impossible for us to appreciate the enormousness of time and the universe, so we must accept this truth and use it to our advantage: it provides an excellent, honest excuse for doing what *feels* right (living life to the fullest). (Why does that feel right?)

Thus, affirming life is the third stage of a dialectic that includes (1) "affirming life" naïvely and happily, unaware of the apparent inconsistency between this attitude and 'deep truth', and (2) noticing only the 'grandest' truth of Meaninglessness—and thereby denying life (thus: cynicism, pessimism)—while ignoring the unavoidable and redeeming conditions of human existence (viz. our inability to appreciate meaninglessness). Hence the synthesis is, in a way, more superficial than the antithesis, but in a more important way it's profounder.

Surely there is significance in the fact that the attitude of 18th century Western Europe largely corresponded to the thesis, the attitude of 19th and 20th century capitalism corresponds to the antithesis, and the attitude of socialism/communism will correspond to the synthesis. This suggests that history, which is partly a record of man's increasing awareness of the world and himself, is also (and consequently) a record of his gradual approximation to the deepest truths. The reasons for the first half of that sentence are obvious.

Tonight Sofia came to my room again to discuss our relationship. She's still infatuated with me: she can't do her homework, she can't sleep at night, her diary is a record of our relationship. […]

Why do girls often have strong feelings for guys who don't 'like' them? Is it because of some primitive instinct related to confidence/strength in the man who is to give them children? (There are at least two considerations that connect this to the foregoing.) Maybe it's related to the Hegelian theory of recognition: they want 'recognition' from a man they implicitly perceive as superior to themselves and others. (This begs a question, but it's easily answered.) Maybe it's for both reasons, in which case: dualism of biological instincts and phenomenology.

November 29

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[1] I want to be a Renaissance man. That's why. Vanity.

[2] 'America, la-a-and that I lo-o-oathe....'

[3] Put differently, it's self-consciousness that makes 'meaning' impossible and absurd.

Hume is surely right that the literary genius is he to whom the best words and phrases occur in a split second. It may be the best *artist* (the most disciplined) who can impose a simple, coherent form on his writings, but I don't think this requires an extra amount of genius. The musical genius is he to whom the best *notes* come relatively naturally, so he has more in common with the literary than the philosophical or mystical genius, to whom non-verbal *intuitions* come naturally. Maybe the theoretical scientific genius ought to be included in the same broad category as all the foregoing, for he works purely with his mind. His original thoughts simply *occur* to him, seemingly from out of nowhere.

The previous paragraph describes the subjective genius. The objective has less exclusively intellectual ability: he is the brilliant painter, sculptor, etc., and in some cases also the brilliant inventor. (Inventors can belong to either category, depending on whether they're more experimental or theoretical.) Great orators, I think, belong in the objective category.

Those are only suggestions, probably foolish ones.

November 30

Hume introduces the following classifications: impressions and ideas; complex and simple for both; sensation and reflection for impressions; memory and imagination for ideas; resemblance, contiguity in time or place, and cause and effect, for how we associate ideas; relations, modes, and substances for complex ideas; resemblance, identity, space and time, quantity, quality, contrariety, and cause and effect for *relations*; abstract and particular ideas, of which the former don't strictly exist. Passions are reflections of sensations (mediated by ideas of the sensations), so they belong to *impressions*. The difference betwixt ideas and impressions is the latter's vivacity. All ideas ultimately arise from impressions. (Simple ideas correspond exactly to simple impressions, but the same is not true of the 'complex' category.) Memory is more vivid than imagination. We have no idea of substance, since it cannot be derived from any impression. It's actually only a collection of simple ideas that have a name assigned to them. The same is true of modes. Regarding abstract ideas, Hume is wrong that "we form the idea of individuals whenever we use any general term".

Hume's argument for the proposition that no finite extension is infinitely divisible is wrong. It rests on a vicious circularity: "the 'compound' idea of extension arises from the repetition of the idea of a part of extension." Huh? The question that needs to be answered is, "How can it occur to us that the smallest part of extension we can conceive is itself a compound of *smaller* parts?" Joining this to Hume's argument demonstrates that the latter is circular and fails to address the main question.

His explanation of time is subject to a similar criticism. Both time and space, but especially time, are such 'holistic unities' that we think they *must* be infinitely divisible. If we're honest with ourselves we'll admit that the idea of an indivisible moment has an air of the absurd about it—just as, admittedly, the idea of an infinitely divisible moment is incomprehensible. The difference betwixt the former and the latter is that we know infinity 'exists' in one direction (vastness), but we know we can't comprehend even this—so what's the harm in supposing it to 'exist' in another direction that we can't comprehend? Besides, if we understand what we're asserting, we ought to *feel* dishonest in pondering the former. I certainly do.

....Does Hume understand the concept of mathematical points? They're *infinitesimal*, so their 'existence' is, if anything, a demonstration *against* his doctrine. (He's wrong to think they can be given solidity.)

One of Hume's greatest errors is to suppose that ideas are exact. The ideas I have are not "individual"; they're abstract and closer to nothing than something. They're individual only when I dream at night. (Surely this has a significance I don't appreciate.)

In section 4 of Part II, as Hume is proving the inadequacy of geometry, he writes that we can't rely on reason because it's contradictory. His solution to the mathematical absurdities is to rely on the senses—on the *appearance* of geometrical figures. (Thus, we can judge their equality only by deciding if they look, or are measured to be, equal.) [Such are the absurdities to which empiricism leads.]

Saturday, December 1

Last night Sofia and I painted together. She brought her paints and brushes into my room, I turned on some Handel, and we made art. Well, not really. Her portrait of me wasn't a masterpiece, and my painting of many little headless stick-figures running around a city—the buildings of which were colorful, in opposition to the gray men[1]—was meant to be a parody of modern art (and modern life). Hence, it wasn't a masterpiece either. (Modern art, of course, is its own parody.) I entitled the piece "*Menschen ohne Köpfe*".

Later we saw a wretched movie. Today we went grocery-shopping and cooked Wiener Schnitzel, which wasn't bad. I had fun being with her, though occasionally I didn't know what to talk about.

I'm giving her a piano lesson now. She's playing music I wrote for her.

Speaking of which, using physics as an explanation of the 'harmony' that the musical scale strikes within us isn't entirely adequate. –Well, it may be, but only if we articulate certain assumptions/logical consequences: namely, that the mind operates on a physical/mathematical basis and is thus only an effect of neural processes!

Returning to Hume, in the beginning of his book he concludes that all ideas are derived from impressions because some are! He gives examples of such ideas and then declares, essentially, that *therefore* all ideas come from impressions.

December 2

I agree with the commoners that self-righteousness and arrogance are usually a product of delusion. I disagree, however, that (1) they are *always* a product of delusion and (2) the commoners themselves are the only exception to this delusion. (For, let us be honest: the rabble (*and* its individual units) are arrogant and self-righteous.)

Actually, everyone inevitably thinks that his most basic beliefs are right, and hence that all people should follow him in these beliefs (or attitudes). –This implies that everyone, on some level (of which he may not be aware), has an interest in truth.

....Let me start from a different angle. It's a fundamental belief of mine that he who searches for truth must adopt a critical stance toward everything (himself, his beliefs, existence, etc.). This is because he must decide between alternatives, and in order to do this responsibly he has to examine them and their presuppositions. This necessitates that I be 'critical' of this belief itself—which is peculiar, since in doing so I'm more or less proving that I believe it. However, I may doubt the words "toward everything" and yet believe that it's necessary not to accept all *propositions* blindly. Doubting this leads to absurd consequences; therefore, it's true. So we should accept *no* propositions blindly (a generalization of the principle); i.e., the truth-seeker should 'critically examine' even such propositions as "There is something". –At any rate, the point is that because I'm firmly convinced of this principle, I automatically universalize it (so it applies to all truth-seekers). Another example: in doubting my first principle, I'm tacitly assuming that everyone ought to doubt it. In looking for the psychological causes of religion, or in doubting Hume's account of time, or in believing that the mind is a product of the brain, I'm assuming that these attitudes are truer than their opposites, and hence that everyone interested in truth should do the same. I might not explicitly *believe* this, but it's inherent in my action.

It's not inherent in all actions, of course; only in those that carry with them a momentary sense of conviction/seriousness.[2]

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[1] In the sky a storm is brewing.

[2] Thus I've changed my opinion since the sentence "—At any rate....". There are actually two relevant types of 'universalization'. [I forget what I meant by that, but I know it made sense when I wrote it. Maybe I was differentiating between a type that has to do with 'firm long-standing conviction' and a type that has to do with 'momentary focused and serious consciousness'.]

....I'm bored with this. I had planned to explain that we're all self-righteous to an extent, that we all 'pursue' truth (we think we're right), that my critical stance is the most sensible one for achieving this object, that therefore I've understood and transcended the self-uncritical attitude of the rabble, and that therefore I have an extra right to be 'self-righteous' (and to feel superior in this regard to anyone who isn't critical of his beliefs). I had also hoped to clarify all the foregoing ambiguities. –Some other day, maybe.

December 3

Morality isn't based on reason. It's based on feeling and tradition. The most that reason can do is support it with arguments. Why is murder wrong? Because it *feels* wrong. Why is charity good? Because it *feels* good, or *seems* good. Why does it feel good? "Because....you're helping a person." Why is that good? "Because....you'd like to be treated in the same way" or "it ties communities together" or "it's consistent with the undifferentiated nature of the thing-in-itself." Oh, come on! Isn't it obvious we just grope for arguments to support our feelings (or impulses, or 'intuitions')?[1] I can think of excellent reasons to treat people badly. Reasoning carries virtually no weight with any of us.

How do values originate in the first place? –That's a fascinating question that I'll investigate fully one day. In the case of some values created five thousand years ago, social necessity (reason) did have a role to play[2]—and feeling came gradually to accord with it as the conscience developed. From then on tradition and feeling were more important than reason. (Example: Christianity.)

My own values (creation, self-cultivation, non-conformism) are grounded in feelings intensified by reasons. The task of him who would create the most perfect value-system is to unite his feelings with pure intellectual integrity (i.e., infallible reasons based on truths).

The problem is that values will always be arbitrary. Even if they're based on "infallible" reasoning. They'll always be apologetic/after the fact. That is, it's impossible for there to be an a priori reason to follow any value; hence, 'miscreants' can't rightly be condemned or said to be inferior. This means that we can't impose a 'compulsory' intellectual *order* on life—there's no reason to strive for greatness, because ultimately it isn't ['objectively'] on a 'higher order' than thuggishness—and so life must sink into anarchy. (To repeat: this is because there's no a priori, non-"arbitrary" goal to strive for.)

Maybe this lack of a goal doesn't matter in the end. Maybe we just have to accept our intuitions and affirm life in the grandest ways possible, and simply look with pity on people who deviate from this path. –But that raises difficulties all over again! (The difficulties always seem to arise immediately upon confronting the Other.)

Sofia no longer likes me as more than a friend, according to her. She unloaded her feelings onto me and then moved beyond them. Good! It's much better this way.

Tuesday, December 4

[…]

Even people who, like Sangeetha, profess to be tolerant of all opinions and not to think that any is "better" than any other obviously believe their attitude is better than so-called elitism. Their response to this criticism would be that elitism takes more than a single 'foundational' belief as being better than its opposite, whereas relativists minimize their own self-righteousness so that it covers only one basic principle. But this is beside the point. The question we have to ask ourselves is, "How can we have the right to think that *any* value is true or the best?" If relativism is to guide our way of thinking, *all* values must be subjective (not 'true'), and hence intellectual life can have no secure foundation. (Most of our thoughts presuppose values.) Relativism, at least as a moral position (i.e., "It's 'bad' to impose one's values on

[1] [Needless to say, a lot of my arguments in these pages are rather Humean, though I didn't know that.]
[2] Cruelty did too. (Hammurabi's code.)

everyone"), defeats itself, for according to its own ideas there are no absolute or true values (so we can't in good conscience believe in any). Therefore nihilism is the result; i.e., nihilism is the only true ethical 'system'.

All we can do is resort to intellectual dishonesty (ironically a result of intellectual integrity (our critique)): we must follow our feelings and our own subjective reasons.

(Interruption: if you're skeptical of the inevitability of nihilism, remember that even if there are 1000 reasons to believe in one value and 0 reasons to believe in its opposite, doing the latter is perfectly permissible. For we ultimately make a "leap of faith". There's no a priori obligation to follow a value that somehow derives from truth or reason; in other words, there is no true or best value.)

The most intellectually honest thing that can happen is for a philosopher who has decided that he's discovered truth to come forward and impose his will on the world. His values, he thinks, are the most sensible and admirable ones, even though this implies no obligation to follow them. So he has to mold the world in the image of his ideal man while ignoring the objection that there's no reason for people to do as he says. He's a nihilist; but he's been more successful than anyone else in reconciling feeling[1] and reason, so he's convinced of his own rightness. Once he has established communism, morality will no longer be the issue it is today. It will wither away, in a sense, and a celebration of life will take its place.

—That's clearly romanticized. But its central points, which I'll elaborate tomorrow, remain relevant even upon a confrontation with Marxism.

December 5

My recent discussions have contained elements of confusion. For example, I was wrong to suggest that certain values automatically derive from truth. Rather, it is in thus "deriving" them that we make a leap of faith. If it's true that behind appearances is an undifferentiated noumenon, there remains nothing necessary in the conclusion that we ought to be compassionate to each other. The two statements are on different levels.

....Shit. I don't know if that's right. It certainly seems as if our togetherness behind appearances suggests compassion and love as values.

Aaaaaahhh!! Help me! I'm living in anarchy! There's no foundation for me to stand on! I'm sinking, suffocating.... What can I grasp? Is there a single solid brick in the entire philosophical firmament? How do I begin to rescue myself? How can I? We each create our own truth. The dialectic is dishonest because we'll inevitably arrange it such that the synthesis coincides with our own hopes. What kinds of truth are there? ....I pace my room like one possessed, thinking, thinking, approaching problems from various angles, frantically trying to order my mind—but getting nowhere. Insanity is the only light at the end of the tunnel. –And then I feel admirable for obsessing over truth, but what's so admirable about it? Clearly the reason, if there is one,[2] is unimportant; the feeling, which creates the value, is the justification of both itself and its sycophant morality. So I keep feeling admirable even *because I wonder why* I feel admirable, and if I reach a conclusion I'll feel even more admirable, and any conclusion I reach will inevitably confirm that I'm admirable, so it's all a sham from the beginning. Finally I give up and listen to the Arietta from 111 or the last movement from 109.

....Ethical relativism implies cultural relativism, and cultural relativism implies ethical relativism (because cultures have their own values). And consistent relativism is nihilism (no absolute, best, compulsory values). Nihilism seems logically impeccable.

Example: a reply to Schopenhauer could be that the principle of individuation makes true compassion/love impossible, so instead of deluding ourselves we ought to 'intensify' every experience—*savor* every experience, be it love or contempt—simply because such affirmation is the fulfillment of individuation, i.e. of the conditions of life that the noumenon's mode of manifestation forces us into.

[1] His feeling, the feeling of a genius.

[2] It has to be invented, of course.

Schopenhauer, of course, will continue to insist on his viewpoint. In the end we'll choose our highest value—i.e., which 'truth' to 'emphasize' (individuation or inaccessible unity)—entirely on the basis of our predisposition/feeling, for there's no other way to decide between the two. This is always the case. There are always arguments for both sides of a moral value, and neither is better than the other, for they either (1) state good and bad consequences or (2) infer the values directly from 'opposing' truths, in both of which cases we must rely on subjective preference to resolve the contradiction.

The immediate problem, then, is evident: how can I be honest and yet be convinced that my values are right?

December 6

The real reasons (or original causes of) why I think genius/art/philosophy/music is better than stupidity/philistinism/vulgarity are as follows: (1) the former fascinate me, stimulate my mind, stave off boredom; (2) it increases my self-respect to differentiate myself from others; (3) I'm a naturally curious, obsessive and whimsical person; (4) I've internalized certain great men, such that I have them looking over my shoulder; (5) creation in and of itself makes me feel good, partly because it heightens my self-respect—but also because it's the only way to rid myself of tormenting thoughts.

Those and perhaps a few others (ignoring for the moment biological and psychoanalytical causes) are the true reasons for my highest values. I subsequently add, after the fact, reasons such as the one I sketched on December 2nd. These serve to justify, even intensify, my feelings/convictions by providing them with rational excuses.

....For an hour I've been thinking; I haven't gotten anywhere. The hypothesis of the will to power seems potentially fruitful, but it's inexact. (Incidentally, it wouldn't be hard to combine Schopenhauer's Will and Nietzsche's will to power into a single theory.)

This morning, while I was in bed, Sofia slid a note under my door wishing me a happy weekend. (She goes home every Thursday.) What a wonderful girl! How truly considerate she is!

I took midterms yesterday; got a C on one and A's on the others. In Literature we're about to read Max Frisch's play "Andorra".

Suppose for a moment that it's possible to discover a truest philosophical system. Imagine this system suggesting, beyond a reasonable doubt (there is always *some* doubt because of the leap of faith), the moral position that denying life is most consistent with truth. (For you sticklers, I realize that the moral position as such must be formulated as, "One should deny [or reject] life".) Do you think many people would take this value seriously? Of course not. They'd continue striving and hoping and carrying on as before.[1] Therefore we don't care as much as we think about reconciling "objective truth" with morality. The only reason we pretend we do is that there exists a rational side to human nature that likes to think it controls us. (This rational side is intimately related to self-consciousness, which is why it wants to be in control.)

....I had intended to draw from the last paragraph the conclusion that trying to reconcile truth with morality is doubly futile: not only (1) is such a reconciliation impossible (since morality introduces a subjective, arbitrary element into any chain of reasoning), but it's (2) unnecessary, in that we'd never adhere to a repugnant truth in the first place. But I've noticed an even more obvious conclusion (which I had, moreover, always been aware of): most people will do whatever they can (unconsciously or otherwise) to affirm themselves, to heighten their self-respect or self-contentment. The few people who might not do so are either extremely chemically imbalanced—which begs questions—or simply do so in unusual ways. Therefore the most sensible thing to do is to affirm oneself as completely as possible; and it may be that

[1] The system would never actually suggest such a value, for it would take that last sentence into account. But that's beside the point.

my ideals succeed in doing this more adequately than alternative ideals.

That obviously begs questions, but I'll ignore those for the moment. More relevant is the fact that the foregoing fundamentally true statement about human nature....forget it, my point was unimportant.

The word "self-contentment" triggered something in my head: even people who appreciate the value of depression and sorrow ultimately want *self*-contentment as much as others do. Contentment and ease, as distinguished from self-affirmation,[1] they don't want, but their reasoning is left unsaid: the product of struggle and despair is triumph, i.e. self-affirmation. (And admittedly a rich existence—and the ability to appreciate happiness—which both amount to the same as the foregoing.) Why else would 'ease' be looked upon so universally as contemptible, if not because people have learned from experience that it leads to a sense of meaninglessness, whereas its opposite engenders powerful self-respect and joy? If self-contempt is ever said to be 'good' in some way, it's primarily because it often evolves into its opposite. Thus, the highest self-affirmation rather than the 'highest realization of the will to power' is the true goal of individuals (partly because it's more exact than the other).

I'm bored with this shit.

Incidentally, what's the relation between self-affirmation and self-expression? Perhaps it has two sides: sophisticated self-expression affirms a person *objectively*, and generally does so *subjectively* as well. Actually, every moment carries with it (and *is*) a form of self-expression. S.a. is and is a result of s.e., but not every s.e. is s.a. (obviously).

So many questions are assailing me that I'm not going to comment on any of them.

College is a game I play in my spare time.

December 7

Nihilism, like solipsism, can't be refuted. But both are almost psychologically impossible. I think it's sufficient to rely on the intuition of the vast majority of people—including the greatest men in history—that we ought to abide by a fundamental 'human' morality. I'll outline it later. For now I'll say only that the values that can be reasonably derived from this morality are, on the whole, 'better' than their opposites. (I.e., it makes more sense, and is—again, relying on our foundational intuitions—more admirable/self-affirming/species-affirming, to follow *these* values.)

December 8

Today I wrote a little description of a dead Afghan woman and her child, as a way to escape from my intellect for an hour. I also tried to memorize random words in a German dictionary.

The preceding entries are essentially shit.

....Hume is obviously wrong that the difference betwixt memory and imagination consists in the strength of ideas produced by memory. The real difference is that our memory-images are involuntary. Imagination has a creative, unreal 'feel' to it.

Hume is also wrong that the idea of existence isn't different from the idea of a given object. I add something to my concept of a unicorn when I imagine it as existing: namely, I think there exists an external reference to my image. (This isn't necessarily belief.)

Another inaccurate statement: "belief is [defined as] a lively idea related to a present impression". Actually, (1) it has a less voluntary feel than imagination does, and (2) it feels less 'frivolous', i.e. more serious and to the point. But since I can't describe it well, I'll shut up.

I suppose I agree that "reason can never satisfy us that the existence of any one object does ever imply that of another". I'm not positive, however. And I'm skeptical of most of Hume's classifications of

[1] (Yes, I'm actually differentiating between mere 'contentment' and 'self-contentment'.)

mental life.

Why is the concept "meaning" confusing?[1] Because it lacks a clear intuition. The term "rape", at least when one philosophizes, is coexistent with a half-image/mental-haze of 'violent, forced sex'. "Meaning", on the other hand, in isolation, is little more than a meaningless collection of sounds that acquire a use/half-meaning only when they're used in context. ("Rape" is understood very well in isolation.) Philosophers make the mistake of trying to impose a new meaning on the word. (Examples: "What is the meaning of life?" has a recognizable sense only when translated into "....purpose....", for *purpose* has a more concrete intuition (and hence definition) than *meaning*, and can therefore be used in a variety of contexts without confusion. "What is linguistic meaning?" is even more empty, since it's so vague that any translation brutalizes it. There literally isn't even a hint of a noticeable intuition behind it. It *seems* to have meaning because we're used to using the word "meaning" in contexts like "The meaning of this word is....".) Therefore, strictly speaking, we ought not to search for the meaning of such terms as "linguistic meaning", because they indeed have *no* meaning. But, being humans, we'll keep searching anyway. The most reasonable suggestion I can make is to break down similar terms into specific categories and then clarify these. This is difficult, for it involves working in circles. (We'll constantly have to presuppose the word "meaning".)

December 9

The reason I write less extravagantly in diary-books than on the computer is that writing by hand brings me closer to my sentences. I'm more conscious of what I'm writing, so I feel more pretentious and silly if I write in a flowery style. (Example of the effects of self-consciousness.)

History confounds me. It is at once on a huge scale and yet *tiny*. In a mere four thousand years we've gone from Sumer to globalization. Four thousand years is *nothing!* Even on the scale of human history it's *nothing*. Where will we be four thousand years from now? I think we'll be extinct. All our achievements will be dust.... The Ninth Symphony won't even be a memory.

What's the point of it all? Who gives a rat's ass, when all is said and done? Why do I care about anything? What's so wonderful about love? "Man invented love, so he is great." Yeah, right. Man himself judges that he is great, when the universe on a whim can flick him out of existence. One day he *himself* will end his existence;—how "great" does that suggest he is? Under conditions like these I can understand suicide.

Hume defines knowledge as "the assurance arising from the comparison of ideas", proof as "arguments which are derived from the relation of cause and effect, and which are entirely free from doubt and uncertainty", and probability as "that evidence which is still attended with uncertainty". 'Chance' he defines as the negation of a cause. Two important principles on which he bases his analyses are "that there is nothing in any object, considered in itself, which can afford us a reason for drawing a conclusion beyond it; and that even after the frequent or constant conjunction of objects we have no reason to draw any inference concerning any object beyond those of which we have had experience". I suppose these principles are right, but since I don't always understand his reasoning I'm not *sure*.

Hume's atomistic psychology is wholly wrong.

December 10

[…]

Today I spent a few hours in the philosophy library. Glanced through Gilbert Ryle, a bit of Sartre, some Popper, and a couple others. My, it's startling what a lot of pretentious shit is called philosophy!

[1] Examples: reference, intuition, verification....

Verily. After Nietzsche, everything fell apart. There were a few original insights in the 20th century, but not enough.

Tuesday, December 11

I used to think that dialectical materialism (as opposed to historical materialism) was empty nonsense. I agreed with Sartre's verdict, primarily because I had read him before Engels. (I still haven't read much Engels.) But I'm becoming amenable to it, for nature undoubtedly is dynamic, developmental and, from certain perspectives, even teleological.[1] This is, of course, nature as seen through the prism of consciousness, but what else are we to understand by "nature" if not what we observe? The constructions from sense-data, which we have nothing to do with (Who consciously arranges his sensations in the shape of an animal?), are as dynamic as human history and psychology, though not in the same way. (No thesis - antithesis - synthesis.) There's no point in protesting that nature is given its dynamism by being filtered through senses, for nature is the only genuine object there is for us. There's no other less humanized object with which we can compare it to discover how "humanized" it really is—so, since it's certainly less human than we ourselves are, it's simply an object for us. We have to work with what we're given, and what we're given is a teleological object called nature. And that's the end of it.

If Sartre understood the foregoing argument he would have no choice but to accept it and then assert that in *consciously interpreting* nature we humanize it. We conduct experiments, we impose concepts on it. Science is one long record of humanization. This is true, but it doesn't significantly weaken the argument that nature is "dialectical" 'independently' of humans. (Remember the preceding argument: that the nature we observe is as independent of humans as can be expected from any object we're aware of—i.e. any object. It's not as independent as the noumenon, but the noumenon isn't an object. It's the nature we're aware of that we're trying to explain, not one that is unknown by—hence, *completely* independent of—us.) For (1) it can't plausibly be maintained that all the scientific theories implying potentiality, fulfillment, "immanent" principles of development/teleology, and struggle are mere products of the laws of consciousness and don't reflect realities in the nature which confronts us; (2) these theories have had enormous practical success, suggesting that their basic features are correct. Moreover, the dynamism of consciousness surely says something about the dynamism of nature, since consciousness arises out of physical processes in the brain. However, it seems to modify these aspects, such that the dialectic in history is different from the watered-down "dialectic" in nature.

The problem is that we still must explain the ontology of nature. Maybe this is impossible.

December 12

Tonight I got to know two girls. The first started a conversation in the communal kitchen as I was eating dinner. She was quite friendly. Seemed genuinely interested in me, for some odd reason. Later five of us had a snowball fight in front of our Studentenwohnheim, which was exceptionally fun. (Snow is one of those luxuries that make life worth living.) At 10:30, as I was sitting alone in the kitchen, a lovely blonde walked in to eat dinner. I struck up a conversation. Her name is Mariella, she plays a wind instrument and studies at the Mozarteum. As you can imagine, as soon as I'd heard that, my ears perked up. Tomorrow she's performing with an orchestra in Deutschland, so we discussed her traveling experiences. The more we talked, the less I cared, but that didn't matter: I'd started the conversation in the first place only so I could look at her amazing features (cheeks, lips, dimples, nose, vivacious eyes). She had an adorable tendency to burst into laughter over slightly amusing comments. My, what a smile that girl has!

Why didn't I try to meet more girls earlier?! I have only one month left! Damn, damn, damn!

[1] DNA, evolution. [That's wrong, of course. Nature isn't teleological.]

December 13

I'm in my Deutsch als Fremdsprache class now. Why did I come today? It's hard to conceive of a more boring activity.

In some ways Marx was a far more mature and admirable person than Goethe. He wasn't subject to the childish romantic delusion that genius has its own special rights. (Is that a delusion? I don't know.) The rational part of his mind was on a higher level than Goethe's.

Women, women everywhere, and not a drop to drink.

One of the reasons I tend to denigrate Goethe is that I sometimes see him as a rival. You already know that. It annoys me to think he may have realized my ideal better than I'll be able to. I don't want to be second-best. (One day this absurd desire will die out, crushed by the burden of reason.) But I sincerely believe everything I write about him, e.g. that he's so admired because his admirers misunderstand themselves and him.

Tonight there's a huge party. I'd go if I thought I could find a sex-partner, but the last time I went I failed and didn't have much fun. (That was the night I met Sofia.) Blast it, I'm fed up with being a virgin!

December 14

For the past two months I've been more bored than ever in my life. Today I did nothing except read some of *Andorra*.

....Tonight I watched a movie called *Ten Things I Hate about You*. A charming romantic comedy about high school relationships. One of the actresses had a luminous face and played a delightful girl, so—being an eminently rational person—I quickly developed a crush on her. Seriously. I felt that I could fall madly in love with this actress if I met her. I could tell by her physiognomy that she was intelligent and we'd be compatible. It was painful to watch her, knowing we'd never be together. –Then again, most of the girls I see in Salzburg are so cute it's painful for me to look at *them* too.

But I'm still in love with Mozart, thank God!

December 15

Tonight I saw an altered version of the *Nutcracker* ballet. The life of E.T.A. Hoffman was integrated into the traditional plot and some pieces were omitted. (The Waltz of the Flowers wasn't played!) Nevertheless, I enjoyed myself. Loved it, in fact. Ballet is spiritually the purest art form. It appeals to both the eyes and the ears; no other art does this to the same extent. The movements of the dancers couldn't be more graceful (at least ideally), which is in fact why goofy characters (clowns) are sometimes seen in ballets: clumsiness, imperfection, is so foreign to the art that it's both amusing and highlights the grace of the other dancers. Extravagant costumes heighten the purity of the experience. Thus the purpose of ballet, more than any other art form, is to transform the spectator into his spirit.

December 16

Today I went to Susan's house to play the piano. On Christmas we want to videotape a performance of the Mozart duet and the first movement of Bach's "Art of Fugue" (in duet form). Susan is letting me borrow a book entitled *The Secret Power of Music*, by David Tame, which is partly a history of music and partly an examination of its effects on humans. The author's beliefs are basically in accord with Schopenhauer's.

Tonight I went to a Christmas party at the house of the program director, Dr. Landgraf. For the first time he and I had a real conversation, a long one about philosophy. Specifically Nietzsche and Freud. Landgraf loves Nietzsche; he suggested I read "Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" and then discuss it with him. We also talked about Schopenhauer; Landgraf didn't seem to understand my doubts. He's an extremely intelligent and interesting man. […]

December 17

The following profound piece of writing is from a Chinese text by Lü Bu Ve:

> The origins of music lie far back in time. It arises out of proportion and is rooted in the Great One. The Great One gives rise to the two poles: the two poles give rise to the powers of darkness and light. The powers of darkness and light undergo change; the one ascends into the heights, the other sinks into the depths; heaving and surging they combine to form bodies. If they are divided they unite themselves again; if they are united they divide themselves again. That is the eternal way of heaven. Heaven and earth are engaged in a cycle. Every ending is followed by a new beginning; every extreme is followed by a return. Everything is coordinated with everything else. Sun, moon and stars move in part quickly, in part slowly. Sun and moon do not agree in the time which they need to complete their path. The four seasons succeed each other. They bring heat and cold, shortness and length, softness and hardness. That from which all beings arise and in which they have their origin is the Great One; that whereby they form and perfect themselves is the duality of darkness and light. As soon as the seed-germs start to stir, they coagulate into a form. The bodily shape belongs to the world of space, and everything spatial has a sound. The sound arises out of harmony. Harmony arises out of relatedness. Harmony and relatedness are the roots from which music, established by the ancient kings, arose.
>
> When the world is at peace, when all things are at rest, when all obey their superiors through all life's changes, then music can be brought to perfection. Perfected music has its effects. When desires and emotions do not follow false paths, then music can be perfected. Perfected music has its cause. It arises out of balance. Balance arises from justice. Justice arises from the true purpose of the world. Therefore one can speak of music only with one who has recognized the true purpose of the world.

There is truth in both the mystical and the logical/scientific approach to life. Both yield the same product: dialectics. There is not one way of interpreting reality, for different interpretations are appropriate on different levels and each ultimately suggests (or presupposes) the others. […]

December 18

What the....? In the *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche writes the following: "There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective 'knowing'; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity', be." When I read that book I must have skipped over III:12; I have no recollection of reading those thoughts. They're exactly what I've been saying all along![1]

I can't find a copy of "On Truth and Lies", so I'm skimming through two books on Nietzsche as a stimulus toward independent thoughts. (For some reason it's easier for me to think after reading. Probably because it provides me with a specific starting-point and a definite view to criticize, encouraging *exact*

[1] It's a pity I live so late in history, because all of my original thoughts will mistakenly be seen as copies of earlier ones.

thoughts.)

....Nietzsche's reflections on causality in *The Will to Power* seem to be a regression from Kant's position. The belief in causality isn't an extrapolation from psychological prejudices (viz., that the will causes events, etc.); it's simply a 'given' condition of human life. How could it be the former? That's intuitively absurd. Moreover, causality isn't an error; e.g., it's *true* that felling a tree causes a sound. The most that can be said (against our common-sense idea of causality) is that there is a whole concurrence of causes and effects involved in every event. Of course, many of these aren't experientially accessible to us, but since they're theoretically necessary and empirically 'verifiable' they exist for us all the same (until they've been 'proven' not to exist). Things that we can't see or feel, such as molecules, are only concepts we invent to make sense of what does exist in our world. They may really exist in the bodies that we see, but we can't know if they do until we see them for ourselves. Biological cells exist, for we've seen them in microscopes. Do they exist when we're not looking at them? This question is useless (and ultimately unimportant), for we can't conceive of them as really existent except by imagining their appearance.

We know things to exist only through sensation. Objects indubitably exist *for us*, and practically—from the viewpoint of activity, of our natural and automatic 'life-process'—they exist in themselves.[1] The theoretical question of their independent existence is unimportant, unanswerable, and not worth pursuing.

It's inconceivable that there's not a thing in itself. Denying the noumenon is perverse. From the naïve practical viewpoint it's simply the objects we see; from the theoretical viewpoint it's an unconceptualizable realm to which even causality might not apply. (This isn't the "continuum" of causes and effects—a hypothesis that is located midway between the practical and extreme theoretical outlook,[2] but isn't less true for that.) Physics connects the two outlooks: in searching for the laws behind our reality it inadvertently penetrates to the most inaccessible thing in itself. (Quantum mechanics.) But it can't say much of substance about the latter—particularly not through natural language—and everything it does say is subject to doubt on account of the impossibility of sensory verification and the radical divergence from our usual concepts (and hence the inappropriateness of concepts at this level). –By the way: if mathematics is capable of expressing characteristics of the subatomic world, it would seem that nature has implanted within us a mode of formally understanding its most basic level (the noumenon, so to speak). If so, this should in principle provide us with a way of *formally* understanding mystical truths like ESP.

Obviously it's only an interpretation that all truths are interpretations, but the latter statement can be true because it's the expression of an 'objective' standpoint—of a standpoint that examines all other possible interpretations and decides, on the basis of the psychological facts (experiences) as well as logic, that this particular one accords best with reality or makes the most sense.

December 19

David Tame is an ass. He thinks Beethoven composed from altruistic motives! He agrees with many of my opinions on music, but he's naïve and his book is unimpressive. He's too prone to mysticism. He has trouble thinking critically and clearly. He doesn't write well.

Currently there's a great hullabaloo in America about some poor idiot who abandoned his country and sided with the Taliban. That means, of course, that he deserves to die. Personally, though, I respect traitors as such—traitors from any country. I may despise them for their motives and think of particular individuals as contemptible, but I have nothing against the 'Form' itself.

Tonight I talked to a gorgeous Austrian in my dorm named Stephanie. As we were talking in the kitchen a guy suddenly barged in and told a group of us that the washing-machine room had flooded. The

[1] We're oriented towards them, towards something 'out there'.

[2] I.e., it posits a reality midway between representation and 'deepest' [or most microscopic level of the] noumenon; and this reality undoubtedly exists (in the only sense that matters) independently of us. It is the goal of the scientist and organizes his truths.

others debated what to do and finally decided to clean up the mess themselves. Four of them proceeded to carry out their plan, Stephanie among them; since I wanted to be near her I took part as well. Until 1:00 a.m. we swept the floor with mops and rags, having realized fairly late that in dumping the water into the sink we were effectively dumping it onto the floor again. (The leak was in the sink's pipes.) At last we finished doing the Hausmeister's job for him, thoroughly proud of our self-sacrifice for the common weal. I, however, was secretly disappointed that my ecstatic conversion into a Good Samaritan hadn't perceptibly altered my relationship with Stephanie. At least I had fun being with her.

I also enjoyed a concert I attended with Sofia tonight. Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto, which I had never before heard in its entirety, was performed in the first half; it was magnificent—as much in its control over passion as in its periodic emotional outbursts. There was a pristine feel of restraint hovering over the whole piece. (That may have been because the pianist's approach was excessively technical.) Tchaikovsky's 5th Symphony was played next and last. I loved it, though the 4th had made a greater impression on me.

I wanted to record some philosophical ideas, but it's after 2:00. Wait till tomorrow.

(Today was my last day of classes!)

December 20

I can imagine that decades from now I'll be a man tired and worn down by life and the failure of his dreams. I'll be disillusioned with everything. Maybe I won't care if humanity lives or dies. This is only a *possibility*, however, so for the moment I can remain buoyant.

Today Sofia and I are shopping in the Christkindl Markt and ice-skating afterwards. It's snowing again.

The reason it's not useless to search for a relatively objective basis of values (moral and nonmoral) is that it's not a foregone conclusion that our 'discovery' will merely confirm our prior dispositions. Maybe I'll decide that personal freedom is a higher good than self-cultivation, thus sacrificing my *feeling*.[1] Of course, even if we decide that we've found the truest measure of values there remains no necessity for anyone to believe that values should have a rational foundation, but on this level the philosopher must trust his own intuition. He can't rationally convince the masses to do the same, but he can help change or destroy the society in which they flourish, thus 'convincing' them through the only mode of argumentation they recognize. (Actually, the project to rationally ground values *is* largely futile, for whatever values are consistent with the structures of society will be adopted. But the philosopher is ruled by a compulsion toward intellectual integrity, so he has to engage in this project merely to attain peace of mind.)

Sofia and I walked through the market. She was a flower as always. I bought an odd fuzzy hat and gloves, only to come home and discover that one of my parents' Christmas presents was an excellent pair of gloves. We walked to the ice-skating rink, but it closed the minute we arrived. At 7:00 we're going back.

Another of my presents was a CD of Billy Joel's classical music. I'm impressed by it. It successfully avoids the New Age feel, despite a few borderline passages. (New Age is cheap sentimentality.) It doesn't succumb to the temptation to indulge in pointless virtuosity that overawes the listener while concealing its own emptiness. I especially like the Waltz #1 and the Aria, which are quite Chopinesque. Billy Joel may lack the spark of genius[2]—for his pieces don't really go anywhere—but he's undoubtedly a "diamond in the rough". And I can tell from his songs that he has an "instinct for life".

I also received a copy of the King James translation of the Bible.

....Sofia and I went ice-skating. It was pretty fun, though I'm none too skilled. After we came home I read her a short fairy tale in German—understanding none of what I said—as she tried to fall asleep. She wasn't successful. Eventually we bade farewell (she's going home tomorrow) and she returned to her room

[1] [Um, but self-cultivation presupposes freedom, Chris.]

[2] Strictly speaking, there is no 'spark of genius'.

as I returned to the Bible.

December 21

The main reason for my feeling that life is boring if (1) there is no one *great* to emulate and (2) we all understand each other is that this kills the Other. Or rather, it kills the 'master'—who is the most compelling and fascinating form of the Other. It interferes with the drive toward recognition, for there is no one left to 'recognize' us. (Who wants to be recognized by his equals or inferiors? That's just boring. It carries with it little satisfaction/self-affirmation.) However, in this case the [admirer's] desire for recognition isn't fundamental, for an unqualified admiration of someone is intrinsically fulfilling even though it entails a 'degradation' of the admirer. –My former unqualified admiration of Marx is an example. It had nothing to do with recognition. But then why did I find it so fulfilling? Simply because it provided me with a source of fascination? No. Because it encouraged me to strive for an ideal? Perhaps somewhat. Because it underhandedly affirmed *me*? Yes, this was important, and it was tied to my positing of an ideal. But was it *most* important? If so, what is the reason for the supreme importance of self-affirmation?

Interruption:—The reason that girls often choose punks who seem self-confident and dominating as boyfriends is that they want recognition by their peers and a master. Punks have the air of the 'master' about them,[1] so the girls they show an interest in are automatically recognized by a 'superior'. At the same time, the guys themselves are affirmed by having a girlfriend, for she is the Other—and usually isn't perceived as an inferior (nor as an equal, for she isn't male; she's just the incommensurable Other). Of course, they desire each other also for purely emotional/sexual reasons. (What's the relation between this and the foregoing? Surely they blend into one another.) Thus girls tend to see boys as somehow superior, as a more intense and dominating form of the Other, more commonly than boys do girls. The reason for this surely has to do with typical reproductive behavior (not only during the sex act) as well as, obviously, biology. But relying on biology as an explanation for anything is a cop-out; it should at most be the foundation and guiding light of all psychological investigations.

Incidentally, it's because I see girls as a more basic Other than boys that I prefer friendships with girls. They provide me with 'recognition' and thereby self-affirmation.

Returning to the former discussion, I suspect that only people who are highly aware of themselves and life have a desire to be fascinated by incomprehensible greatness. The thought that even the highest beings are "human, all too human" disturbs them alone, probably because they alone are truly able to understand it. It means that greatness is exactly similar to themselves, and hence that it's a dishonest concept. It means that there are no 'superiors', that there's no one worthy enough to 'recognize' them, that the only people they should strive to impress—and even then only dishonestly—are themselves. It means that the Ninth Symphony could, in a sense, have been written by *them*! What an atrocious thought! (While listening to music one can't help thinking that one is communing with the other world.) However, ultimately not even they can appreciate this, for if they could they would most likely lose their interest in life. –So you see how important is the Other for some of us.

Nevertheless, in the sense I'm referring to, the Other doesn't exist. I have to accept this and move on.

....I'm bored with these thoughts. I've finished reading Genesis. In spite of some peculiar passages it was extremely impressive. It has a 'vast' feel to it, a product partly of its tendency to understate, partly of my knowledge that it was written in the childhood of mankind, partly of the naïveté and candor (and simple poesy!) with which its tale is related, partly of the absolute lack of commentary by the authors, etc. How many men wrote it? How much is historical fact and fiction? Is there any truth to the story of Joseph? (There must be.) Is the account of the growth of the House of Israel nothing more than an allegory of the 'birth' of the Jewish race? (Maybe it outlines the history of a real family which is only one among many.) In any case, the Old Testament is a priceless historical document that sheds light on the mind of man at the

[1] For reasons grounded in the advertising business and also in their 'aura', the way they deport themselves.

dawn of civilization. Moreover, it illuminates how soft and effeminate society has become through the millennia. (Such a development isn't necessarily to our disadvantage. It may be a decisive *advance.*)

December 22

What prevents us moderns from performing mystical miracles is self-consciousness. The more control we have over ourselves, the further we are from our mystical origins. [For example, anthropologists have recorded instances of tribal people with diseases of some sort being cured by semi-religious ceremonies and communal rituals. These sorts of cures, as well as ESP (which seems to have been shown to exist), are what I meant by "mystical miracles".]

I can understand why Schopenhauer considered the Torah incomparably inferior to the Upanishads. Not a single verse is intrinsically valuable or ennobling, except poetically. However, its story is inspiring, and it runneth over with historical interest. It takes us back to a time when man and animal were equal, when animals were held accountable for their actions. Thus: "If an ox gore a man or a woman, that they die: then the ox shall surely be stoned." Moreover, its harsh laws suggest that morality had to be *carved into the flesh* of humans at the time of its inception, such that over the centuries it became instinctual. ("He that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.") Undoubtedly the Torah was written by priests in the service of 'lawgivers' who needed an apologetic foundation for their codes of law; and what better foundation than God himself?

This is intriguing: "Whosoever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death." Was lying with beasts common? Obviously common enough to warrant a brutal law against it—suggesting, again, that merciless violence was required to separate, in the mind of man, humans from animals (a separation that had already been accomplished in the mode of production and the mere existence of society).

In 23:12 of Exodus the priests let slip the real material reason for the Sabbath: "Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed."

Obviously the reason for feasts like the Passover is to tie the community together. (Whether this reason was in the heads of the lawgivers is beside the point.)

The reason for not serving other gods: "It will surely be a snare unto thee." In other words....

It's amusing that in Chapter 32 Moses is forced to treat God like a child. He says, essentially, "Stop your tantrum. Try to be a little reasonable! Grow up!"—but very respectfully, of course. For once, the Lord listens to reason and refrains from annihilating the ants he's created. What a cool guy! Seriously. He has a colorful personality and is ruled by his passions. He knows everything but doesn't let that interfere with his having fun. He probably has thousands of concubines. I can imagine him interrupting sex with the exclamation, "Those foolish humans have got themselves into a mess again. Let me stamp a few nations out of existence to simplify matters a bit." He surely loves to fart and get drunk. He'd make a good friend.

I'm bored. I'm the only student left in my building; everyone's gone home.

The problem with Nietzsche is that he wasn't a social thinker (in two ways....). He was obsessed with himself and had trouble understanding views opposed to his own. He claimed to want disciples who could think for themselves, but anyone who disagreed with him he attacked. (I often do the same, unfortunately.[1])

....Newton's theory of color can be correct because phenomena exist in some form even when we're not aware of them. Processes inherent in phenomena occur outside our perception of them. This may seem inconceivable to people who understand its significance, but the alternative is more absurd. Surely the wall exists in some way after I turn my back on it.

In any case, the point is that the success of scientific theories shows that reality isn't simply a representation. It has *levels*. There is the appearance itself, which, as an appearance, doesn't exist independently of our perceptions; there are the cells and microscopic components of the representation

[1] However, I forbear from attacking genuine philosophers. And I don't go to the extremes that Nietzsche did.

(what matters is that they exist when we see them and they help explain the representation); there are the molecules we can't see but which surely exist in some form because they explain our representations so well; there is the subatomic level where space and causality cease to operate and reality becomes the thing in itself [i.e., the 'deepest' level of the thing-in-itself].[1] The reality we live in *may* exist only when we do, implying that space and time are creations of consciousness, but then it would be paradoxical that phenomena conforming to space and time exist outside of our perceptions (which they must). It seems more likely that space and time are objective facts about the portion of reality we live in (not 'are aware of', for they would apply also to phenomena of which we're unaware). But this too raises difficulties! [Dude, surely space and time exist both objectively and subjectively, but their subjective form is naturally very different from their objective, *real* form.]

December 23

Whoever wrote the Torah had at best a muddled understanding of the distinction between actions and intentions.

December 25

My suggestion about the lawgivers was undoubtedly wrong. Also, now that I'm reading Numbers, it's evident that the Jewish God lacks the sense of humor I attributed to him earlier. He takes himself so seriously! What an idiot!

Today I played with the children again. But not as much as they wanted me to; I preferred to play the piano. Geza (their father) videotaped Susan and me playing Mozart and Bach: the product was a far cry from perfection, but my mom will be delighted.

....I can't fall asleep. Philosophy is bothering me. I've realized that Sartre's principle of the absolute translucence of consciousness is either truistic or wrong. It's truistic because anything of which we're not aware can't be part of consciousness! Consciousness can't be opaque—and can't have opaque elements—because by definition we're conscious of everything in it. The principle is wrong, on the other hand, if it implies that there aren't mental processes independent of consciousness that influence it. (To deny the discoveries of science is wrongheaded.) However, another implication of the principle is correct: namely, that the self can't be metaphysical, i.e. behind appearances. For the self is what I am; it's another word for 'I'. And how can I not be present to myself? That would mean that I am not I, which is absurd. Moreover, 'not being present to myself' is another expression for 'not present to consciousness' (since what else could I be not-present to?), which implies that consciousness isn't present to consciousness[2] (because 'I' and 'myself' are synonyms), which implies that....I am consciousness? This would contradict my belief that I am self-consciousness, but the contradiction is explainable by the superficiality of language and logic. (Incidentally, there's something truistic about saying that I am self-consciousness.)

I've also thought about the conscience, the Other and the changeability of human nature, but I'll develop those thoughts later.

December 26

Leviticus was boring, by the way. Numbers was only a little more interesting.

Deuteronomy 1:17 articulates one of the basic principles of the modern legal system and liberal

[1] To repeat, this idea of the thing in itself is somewhat different from Kant's. It implies that, somehow, there are several things in themselves (several 'levels' of the thing in itself, i.e. nature in itself).

[2] That's not an absurd or meaningless statement.

democracy in general: "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's...." The difference is that the Israelities still had to worship a mighty being in order to justify this legal principle, whereas we worship the laws themselves. (Legal fetishism.)[1]

It's intriguing that Moses, in Chapter 9, insists that the Israelites are receiving their promised land not because of their righteousness (which he thinks they lack), but rather because of the wickedness of the current inhabitants. So basically they're receiving their land out of default (and because God made a promise to Abraham).

The frequent insistence that offerings be of free will indicates that the distinction between actions and intentions was indeed beginning to be made at the time of the Torah. Other indications are in Chapter 19.

Note to self: Judaism condemns transvestites. If I ever want to embrace Judaism I must discard my flamboyant transvestite tendencies.

Men whose penises ("privy members") have been cut off aren't allowed into the congregation. (John Bobbit, that means you!)

....I've finished the Torah. At last. It can't compare to the Upanishads for philosophical fertility, but for historical interest it's their peer.

It's mind-boggling that even after World War II there remained anti-Semitism throughout Europe, America and Russia. A fifteen-year-long celebration of savagery culminating in the murder of millions wasn't enough to rid the masses of their prejudices. Of a single prejudice![2] Nowadays these same masses pride themselves on not being anti-Semitic, as if they deserve any credit for not succumbing to the disgusting prejudice. They have hardly any freedom in their beliefs: every opinion, in their hands, acquires the character of a prejudice. It's accepted mindlessly, absorbed passively,[3] during the tender years of youth. The most enlightened idea is degraded to the status of ignorance when the rabble seizes upon it—and soon it's perverted into evil. Under different conditions the majority of people living today would have actively acquiesced to Nazism.

Oh, do I hear the voice of Equality screaming at me in the distance? "Why are you so special?" it asks. "You're no different. Circumstances make men: you would have accepted Nazism like the rest of us." From the other direction, however, I can hear the voice of Goethe. "There's a fundamental core in each individual that can't be altered by external conditions. Inevitably it fights its way to the fore, past all the accidents of life, and appears as the individual's essence." For most, this essence consists of servility; for some it consists of freedom. The few in the latter category know they belong in it; the many in the former *think* they belong in it—but they're deluded insects. The freest people are necessarily self-conscious to an extraordinary degree. They have *autonomy*; they belong not to the crowd. (Most of us have free will to an extent, but only a fraction have *freedom* in the meaningful sense.)[4]

I'm rereading the Book of Matthew. Now that I've read the Torah I can appreciate how radical and daring Jesus was. What he undertook was nothing less than a revision of morality from the ground up. My earlier criticism of his teachings—that they weren't entirely consistent—more or less missed the point. He didn't care about consistency; his morality was based on feeling. What matters logic? An adherence to logic above all else is a life-denying fetishism.

Jesus's apostles are duller than clay. It's amusing when he taunts them: for example, 15:15-18 (where Jesus continues to speak in parables even after Peter admits he doesn't understand them) and 16:6-12 (which Matthew relates with a heavy-handedness that makes it even more amusing). ....Ha! 17:17 is delightful as well. And 18:21 is absurd. –If Jesus had answered, instead of "seventy times seven", "seven

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[1] A product of commodity fetishism, in particular the fetishism of money. God a result of nature-fetishism.

[2] What was required was a sustained process of capitalist/liberal-democratic brainwashing.

[3] "Osmosis"?

[4] "That's all un-Marxist!" you exclaim. So what? (Never think you're one step ahead of me. You're not.)

times seven", Peter would have said, "49? What if my brother doesn't sin 49 times? Or what if he sins 50? What should I do with him then? Do you want me to keep count of all the times my brother sins?...."

In 19:27 Peter again exercises his lambent wit and proves his exceptional understanding of Christ's teachings.

(One last example of a charming passage is 21:23-27.)

The second half of chapter 26 is blessed with an atmosphere pregnant of melancholy and wonder. It calls to the mind visions of misted, flickering candle-flames nestled in a garden at midnight, glowing in dew drops rolling off rose petals. Translated into music, it is the achingly brief melody—sublimer than any of Chopin's—hidden in the middle of Schubert's Fantasia, D. 940. This chapter is one of the pearls of literature.

....I've read Matthew—for the first time. At last I truly understand the appeal of Christianity. It's certainly the worthiest of the three Judaic religions,[1] and its founder was one of the worthiest beings in history. He came as close to perfecting himself as the human condition permits. He was one of the great mystical geniuses (a few of the miraculous feats attributed to him may have taken place), and of course few people can compare to him for skill with words. Like the Buddha he was somehow a living truth. Unfortunately, his teachings became institutionalized, which was clearly a betrayal of their spirit. I'm inclined to agree with Oscar Wilde that not a single Christian exists in the modern world.[2]

December 27

For years I've had the feeling that until I experience sex I won't truly belong to the human community. I'll remain an outsider, uninitiated to the secrets and rites of the tribe. I've given oral sex to a girl, but since I didn't love her it bored me.

Tomorrow I have to wake up at 5:00 to catch a train. After three or four connections I'll arrive in Amsterdam in the evening. Hopefully Jessica will be waiting for me there. At any rate, she and I will probably spend New Year's Eve in the City of Debauchery, and then we'll go to The Hague for a couple of days. I'm quite looking forward to seeing her.

....Quick thought after I get into bed: truth oughtn't to be valued over life. Truth in itself has no value, and although life 'in itself' is probably valueless as well (whatever that means), living it to the fullest isn't necessarily. However, there are different kinds of truth, and some of them go hand in hand with living meaningfully. In fact, the necessity of the latter is itself a result of investigations and truths (but ultimately intuitions). Some myths are *necessary*: for example, the self-as-substance myth is psychologically impossible to abandon. Similarly, meaninglessness can't be appreciated, so we embrace the myth of meaning (while remaining intellectually aware of its true status) and thereby fulfill our destiny to *live dangerously*. Nevertheless, it's very rare that we ought to willingly abandon a truth because it's hostile to life: after all, 'living dangerously' involves precisely this confronting of challenges and rising above them.

(Truth and life are caught in a circle, but life always comes out on top. –Food for thought.)

December 28

The more self-aware (free) one is, the harder it is to be convinced of one's judgments of people (i.e. to abide by them, to treat them as dead data, as indubitably certain).

I'm on the second train. It's 2:00 a.m. I read the Book of John in the past few hours. Didn't like it. The Jesus of Matthew is more impressive, more likable and more humanistic than the Jesus of John. He approximates more closely Oscar Wilde's description in *De Profundis*. John's Jesus is a deluded, self-

[1] Ignoring its history, that is.

[2] Maybe there are a few, such as the Dalai Lama.

absorbed, uninteresting, fanatical, dangerous character. Predictably, *he's* the one Christians worship.

I recognize that there are no sharp distinctions between humans. Whenever I discuss the masses—the "sheep"—I'm generalizing.

The solution to the dilemma of self-continuity is ever on the tip of my tongue, but I haven't yet been able to articulate it. Whenever I explicitly think about it I get entangled in paradoxes—but I can *feel* that I'm a hair's breadth away from the answer.

....I'm on the third train. I found it purely by chance.

Okay, I'm on the fourth train. Final leg of my journey!

[…]

December 29

I love this city! I love it almost as much as I loved Lisbon! Its greatest strength is its surfeit of *character* (and its beauty). An irresistible zest slams into one as soon as one leaves the train station. Excitement and joy and a festival of life are what this city means to me. Even the bums add to its charm. – Amsterdam is quintessential Europe: enormously more relaxed and easy to live in than America.

I met Jessica this afternoon. The first thing we did was see a sex show. It was weird, to say the least. For a few minutes a beautiful stripper did things like stick a lit candle into her vagina and twirl her legs about; then a couple spent five minutes having sex in various positions; then another stripper teased us; and then we left. I wasn't aroused very much, and if I had been I would have found the show merely frustrating. As I sat in the darkness I felt that Jessica and I had regressed to a pre-human evolutionary stage, and that the other spectators were the chimpanzees. On the other hand, part of me doubted there was any harm in the ritual: maybe in some perverse way it tied the women and men together. At one point the stripper walked into the audience and talked to the men as if they were friends—each man being respectful—and directly after, she stuck a dildo into herself! What's wrong with people accepting their instincts (provided they keep them within reasonable (non-violent) bounds)? Maybe strip clubs are healthy! –But I doubt it. They're degrading.

Afterwards we went to a museum of modern art. Jessica's a real art aficionado. There was a wonderful hallway of quotations from famous artists discussing art: Oscar Wilde's was something along the lines of "That an artist is a poisoner is no argument against his prose." After the museum we walked back to the train station—which took forever, since we got lost in a blizzard—and went to Den Haag, where we're both staying for a few days (in a hostel). We had dinner together and then played pool, which was a blast. A six-year-old British boy gave us advice on our shots and took the liberty of making fun of us the whole time. We were terrible, so he was justified.

Jessica made the mistake of inviting a girl from London on this trip. Fortunately she wasn't with us today, but I met her a little while ago....and she's ANNOYING. Jessica hates being around her; she invited the girl in a fit of loneliness. What most upsets me is that Julie, who talks non-stop about nothing, will intrude into the fascinating conversations Jessica and I have. She'll make them impossible.

Imagine the logistics involved in the exodus of 600,000 people from Egypt into Palestine! Moses, who was presumably a real historical character, was superhuman.

I'm almost finished with Joshua, the story of which is mind-boggling. I can't think of any history more inspiring and gigantic and unbelievable than that of the Israelites—in fact, of the Jewish people through the millennia.

December 30

Today the three of us took a train to Amsterdam. […]

With regard to painting, I think pure realism is my favorite style. [In retrospect: No.] Perfect representations of nature and humans resonate most within me; Van Gogh strikes no chord. The Dutch still-lifes I saw in the Rijks museum shocked me to the core: they could have been photographs, yet were infinitely more beautiful than such. Their colors leapt from the canvas. Van Gogh pursued vivid coloring, but his paintings don't approximate the sheer luminosity of the Dutch masters'. It seems relatively easy to paint like a passionate madman; it's more impressive to paint like an aristocrat. I'm intrigued by *skill* more than juvenile "originality". I like perfection. What does the cul-de-sac of mindless torment matter to me? It's necessary only as a contrast to the Ideal.

On the other hand, I recognize that painters like Van Gogh add depth to the art form.

January 1, 2002

Jessica is a goddess. She's the daughter of Ammon Re, radiating vivacity and sunshine. I enjoy nothing more than to talk to her about her life and interests, or to watch her as she talks to strangers like they're bosom friends. She's a wonderful, complex girl—more appealing and fascinating than Sangeetha.

I suppose what prevents me from having a crush on her is that she's too independent and not girly enough.

Last night we wanted to go to Amsterdam to smoke pot, but no trains were running. So we walked around The Hague again.

Today at noon the three of us ventured into the frigidarium to see the North Sea. We walked all the way to the beach. Which, though pretty, wasn't too special. It was just another beach.

Regarding the debate between realism and idealism, we have three major options: (1) we can believe that the world of the senses is nothing but a representation existing only in our minds; (2) we can think it has reality independently of us but that it's impossible even to *approach* certainty in our scientific theories explaining it (because theories are only constructions, etc.); (3) we can think that most hypotheses accepted as true *do* accurately explain the world. I consider the first option absurd, the second incompatible with at least two facts, and the third correct when supplemented with the spirit of the second and the first (resulting from one philosophical consideration). The second is incompatible with our ability to influence the world by relying solely on scientific theories (example: the atomic bomb) and with the subsequent 'confirmation' of hypotheses by means of microscopes and other advanced technologies. I think the third option is true if we keep in mind that we can't know how anything 'appears' outside of our perceptions (i.e. that phenomena in themselves are in this respect probably unconceptualizable). Hence the first option probably has a kernel of truth. At any rate, except on the level of quantum mechanics, hypotheses generally imply at least the idealistic realism I've outlined here.

Recently I discussed with Jessica the ostensible logic of my philosophical investigations: she was of the opinion that I always pursue thoughts to exhaustion, but I told her that, on the contrary, I usually 'cut myself off' when I reach a tentative conclusion. The instant there's a pause in the flow of my thoughts, I seize the moment and stop thinking. Otherwise I'll have to write endlessly, which would be distressing and boring.

I loved "Joshua". Was impressed by the battle prowess of the Israelites, who demolished all the kingdoms that stood in their way.

Incidentally, heaven and hell haven't yet been mentioned in the Old Testament. When did these notions enter the Judaic tradition?

The importance of the Other in our psychic life is not an immutable fact. It's a historical creation. I'm pretty sure the conscience in both its historical and individual origins is inextricably intertwined with an awareness of the Other, and the conscience is obviously a historical creation (implying....).

The words 'recreate' (recreation) and 're-create' must have been related in their inception, but how? Their senses are completely dissimilar. –This is an example of the hidden wisdom in languages.

Tributary (one who pays tribute) and tributary (offspring of a river) are clearly related. One probably grew out of the other:—actually, it's obvious that the latter came from the former. (For two major

reasons.)

[1]Trying to be "great" is deluded and futile, since greatness doesn't exist, but if it's how a person motivates himself to live brilliantly then it's a desirable myth. Not needing it as an impetus toward self-cultivation is preferable, for willful self-delusion is cowardly, but for asses like Wagner who need it, pursuing such an ideal is better than not.

January 2

Today we went to the excellent Mauritshuis museum and a modern art museum. Jessica was in a moody mood and apparently wanted to be alone, but she got stuck walking with two foreigners in addition to her two friends. I like Salvador Dali more than most modern artists: with the exception of his cubist phase he was a very exact, imaginative, 'realistic' and appealing painter. I also like much of Picasso, and not only his early work. In regard to Dutch painting, I've learned to appreciate Rembrandt—I love his large painting of an anatomy as well as his small landscape scene—and I find Vermeer to be perfect. Why is Rembrandt so famous? Why is his "Nightwatch" so admired (aside from the obvious)?

[…]

I like "Ruth". It's an intimate and touching story of one family—of an old woman and her daughter-in-law whose loved ones die, but who persevere and triumph in the end. The faith of Naomi is simple and sincere. This sad old woman illustrates one of the best qualities of the Old Testament: it is too naïve to be melodramatic.

Whence arose humans' ability to let their promises govern them? The Bible is replete with examples of people taking their promises as seriously as they take their belief in God, even when their oaths directly contradict their interests. What could have caused this self-denial? Nietzsche has some ideas, but I don't think his suggestions are the whole story.

January 4

The three of us saw Anne Frank's house this morning. It was very moving, of course. Miss Frank was the type of person who justifies my faith in humanity—who rends the veil (vale) of tears and 'redeems the light'. Her diary is one of the most moving documents in history. She was a much better writer than I am, a more genuine person with a more simple and sophisticated faith in life, eager and perfect, a delight unto all who knew her. Would that I had known her! I might have loved her, found a kindred spirit in her and suffered through life with her at my side.

I'm on a train heading for Duisburg, whence I'll spend all night traveling to Salzburg. Jessica and I bade a fond farewell at the train station, since I elected not to go to London for a day. I miss my home in Salzburg.

....Here's some news that might amuse you: I got onto the wrong train. It went to Eindhoven, where I took a train to Venlo. At 8:00 I'm going to Cologne, and I'll weave my way home from there.

I can't believe that Rudolph Giuliani was selected as *Time's* person of the year. What a joke! Isn't the criterion for this oh-so-august title that one have a major impact on the world? If so, I have a hunch that Osama bin Laden deserves the award *slightly* more than Giuliani. Patriotism, that disease to which the intellectually feeble are most susceptible, is the reason for *Time* magazine's willful inanity. *Giuliani?!* His most immortal service was to prove that sheep need a shepherd—and that Forrest Walker Gump is one of the sheep.

I'm skeptical that it's necessary for me to mold a morality. Of what use is such an enterprise? Morality isn't separate from society: it's a byproduct of objective conditions. And of personal dispositions.

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[1] Return to an earlier discussion.

There's nothing rational about it, nothing 'valid'. Contradictions and artificialities and glosses are inevitable. Whatever is contrary to the basic principles of Marxism is wrong or futile; Nietzsche's ideal philosopher is deluded. Everything in thought and life will be anarchical until capitalism is cast aside. Are the freest geniuses somehow more valuable than the herd? I'll leave it to you to decide if the concept of "value" has a shred of content; in the meantime I'll fight to bring history to its climax. I refuse to be irrelevant, to follow the beaten path of all philosophers *ausser* Marx. I'll not pirouette in a garden of whimsies: I'll wrench the weeds by their roots.

However, it's psychologically and socially impossible for humans not to follow a morality. Marx was right that, on some level, morality is a sham, but he himself couldn't escape from making moral judgments and pursuing an ideal. Thus we end up where we started: which values are best? We live in a human world, so we have to work within human limitations. A morality is necessary.

If a better society comes into being, a value system will work itself out—with our help—but this doesn't mean we can't predict what it'll be or try to mold it before its inception (and thereby influence what direction it takes). In any case, we need a morality during the long transition period as well as ideals to look forward to.

In the Old Testament there's confusion between slave morality and a modified master morality. The writers admire and idealize powerful, rich, brutal men, but they talk of the oppressed rising up against their rulers. Their heroes are always poor men from obscure families who become strong and wealthy. The New Testament, on the other hand, is pure slave morality: its protagonists don't even *want* worldly power. This morality may be an advance even though its causes lie in degradation and self-pity and *ressentiment*.

I've read Samuel I. I like the character of David, whose personality-type is diametrically opposed to that of the slave moralist. The Old Testament celebrates self-confidence; the New Testament waxes poetic over meekness.

January 5

(Forgive me if I've already touched on the following subject.) Non-human primates aren't wholly un-self-conscious. Their self-awareness isn't as extreme as ours, but it does exist in a crude form. Read about the gorilla named Koko—which communicates with humans via sign-language—and you'll see I'm right. There's no definite qualitative change between mere consciousness and self-consciousness: there are many varieties of the latter.

I love Rachmaninoff's piano arrangement of Bach's Partita No. 3 for Unaccompanied Violin. It unites intimacy, dissonance and classicism.

When I listen to the overture to *Fidelio* I remember that awareness of Meaninglessness is an artificial and alienated way of experiencing life. Time makes possible art; self-consciousness is its own redemption. Life is Truth, and joy is the jewel of life [and therefore—]. Time is Luminosity.

January 6

Obviously the Greek idea that everything in nature has a potential, and whatever realizes all its potential is a perfect instance of its kind, readily justifies my values and ideals. But adopting it as the measure of all values is an arbitrary *cutting-off,* a dishonest easy-way-out of probing beneath appearance. Moreover, it's so inexact and begs so many questions ('Which potentialities should we actualize?') that it's all but a philosophical dead-end. On the other hand, it's intuitively true and is ultimately the last word of morality. We can't progress beyond it—partly because it's so vague!

However, all of philosophy is, on the most basic level, stillborn. The intellect is an inessential second-order representation of reality, confused and severed from the objective conditions of life:—a dusty shelf cluttered with illusions and magical salves. Nothing invented by thought is real—nothing except that which doesn't pretend to be 'real'. (Imagination, creation divorced from 'truth'.) The moment the intellect

separates itself from reality—i.e. the moment it comes into existence—is the moment we lose ourselves in flights of fancy. We try to understand the world, but this very act makes its own fulfillment impossible: there's a radical difference between an interpreted world and an experienced world. Interpretation is accidental and wholly unlike its object.[1] (There are no laws of logic outside of thought, no values,[2] no conceptual distinctions.) Self-consciousness too is accidental, but (1) it's the framework in which the world appears to us, and thus exists on the level of sheer *experience*, and (2) it exists even when thought doesn't (especially thought oriented toward reality, thought that abstracts from experience and is not 'in-itself' or 'for its own sake' (like other kinds of thought).) Philosophy is alienation from life—sometimes explicitly, as when it questions the value of living—but this doesn't mean it's not a valuable type of experience! It may consist of illusory inventions, but it's nevertheless an experience—and one that can teach us to "harvest from existence the greatest fruitfulness". Moreover, the fact that philosophy is somehow illusory and circular doesn't mean it's *wrong* (which would itself probably involve an absurd circularity). Philosophical propositions can be true, but they're always imaginary fabrications with no real significance apart from the whimsical world of the intellect. Because morality doesn't reflect reality it gets lost in contradictions; and the same is true of philosophy in general, which is more autonomous from the world than most sciences are (and hence more unreal).[3]

—Oh, I'm sick to death of this shit.

The poem I wrote several weeks ago is intellectual refuse. I ought to throw it away. You can judge it for yourself:

Tucked away within my loneliest loneliness,
Trapped among the folds of a mystical yearning,
Is a jewel of glimmering opalescence.
It sparkles in the warm light of desire.
A sibilance hovers about the halo
Of its soft luster; a flower-like languor tints
The dreams of him who feels its affecting presence.
Its silky scarlet whispers tease and torment,
Remembering to the drowsy spirit—weary
From dusty days spent in dissipation—
Visions of satyrs and nymphs who skitter through wooded
Cloisters in gay self-forgetfulness.
'Neath drooping canopies dripping silvery
Dew, fairies dart 'twixt waking tulips
And speckled spider webs. The rosy-hued,
Plush, velvet dawn, painted in haunting
Shades of tempered chiaroscuro, lumines
Sleeping nymphs and is imbibed by darkling
Souls. Mine own is nearly drunk on this
Lush dream too fetching to be real, too real
To be not a passing whim. I feel
Nought but myself and this intoxicating
Wine so eager to drown the drinker and
To sedate his boorish senses. Mine are
Immune; but I can see, in front of me,
A cloudy vision of the ideal, the goddess

[1] This statement is bound to be misinterpreted as a rejection of the correspondence theory of truth.

[2] Hence philosophy in particular is unreal.

[3] So I'm using the term in two senses, one of which applies to all self-denying attempts to discover objective truth. But I think the senses bleed together. [By the way, much of that paragraph was rather Kierkegaardian.]

Of love, the peerless, potent Aphrodite.
Coquettishly she turns her cheek to me
As I approach in shy confusion, hoping
Naïvely for a kiss in lieu of the act
Of passion. Instead, I'm granted a flimsy handshake
—Nothing more. She turns her back on me
And, with a gesture of contempt, proudly
Treads the sky toward her abode on sacred
Mount Olympus. Rejected thus, I languish
In my impotent despair: too weak
For rage and bored with sublime quietude,
I notice not my subtle shift in mood
Till it's too late. The limpid waters of holy
Longing in which I have been wading are now
Frozen solid, impenetrable, dead
To warmth and feeling. The pinions on which I was
To float to a mystical Union with love and life
Dissolve in an acid shroud of bitter
Self-awareness veiling self-deceit.
The charmed naïveté of the blooming tulip
Is swallowed by cynicism; the tulip dies.
The "darkling souls" adopt a sinister
Significance: they brutally remind
Me that fate is a desolate crag.
—Yet Time, so often our sadistic foe,
Here plays the role of savior: in weakness
I sit and wait, reflect and muse, bore
Myself to agony—and then am frantic,
Pace my cell, batter the walls, rend
My hair, long for joy and inspiration
—And then, again, I am quiescent, as I
Wait eternally. Hours pass....
At last, happiness bestowed from heaven!
My endless waiting has not been for nought!
My eyes check my watch hopefully
As I feel enticing mists of sleep
Swirl within my mind: 12:00.
Time for bed!

A great deal of historical exegesis would be necessary to discover the precise reasons for the universal existence of classes throughout history, but we can partially explain it by invoking aspects of human nature (even at the dawn of civilization), effects of an economic surplus, and so on.

The economy (and thus class) has a logical and historical priority over gender, race and nationality. It has more of an influence on these than they have on it. People who disagree ought to read *The German Ideology*.

It was stupid of me to equate—one year and two months ago—non-alienation with happiness. What was I thinking?

I'm tired of not playing the piano as often as I should. At Susan's house I learned the second impromptu from D. 935; now I want to learn a Chopin polonaise. (I've already played the one in A.) Next semester I hope to master the Scherzo and the Barcarolle, as well as the nocturne in C# minor. Then I'll

take a break from Chopin and play Bach.

....The type of truth with which pseudo-philosophers like Richard Rorty are exclusively concerned—truth that can be expressed in language—has to be defined as a correspondence between the world and propositions. The 'world' includes whatever is the subject of the proposition. I realize that often we judge statements as true because they're rationally acceptable (and "coherent"), but in so doing we're tacitly assuming that since they're 'rationally acceptable' they're true about the world! In the case of abstruse scientific hypotheses—and, indeed, many simple social theories—our only mode of proceeding is to decide if they make sense; but this doesn't mean we don't think they're true of some corresponding reality!

Actually, this whole way of talking is muddled. The point is that whenever we judge a proposition we suppose it to be true or false independently of us. (We think its truth-value won't change if we merely *want* it to, for it is 'set' objectively.) That is, we can't help but think that all truths correspond to a reality outside us. Sometimes this reality is the world of appearance, sometimes it's the essence behind appearance,[1] sometimes it's a description of subjective phenomena, etc.

January 7

Communism 'needs' to be based on a theoretical framework as little as capitalism does. It can and possibly will develop spontaneously—though not as spontaneously as capitalism did. However, a theoretical justification is desirable and inevitable in the way it was for capitalism. (People must organize their thoughts and believe their reality is good; and theories—or 'ideologies' when seized upon by the masses—provide this organization.) But the framework doesn't have to be all-encompassing; it merely needs to be *general* and related to humanity. It must articulate an ideal, explain it by reference to history and psychology, and describe how communism facilitates the ideal's realization. Truths not somehow related to this ideal need not be included in the theoretical framework. (Thus metaphysics isn't remotely related to communism.)[2]

Extension exists in the world of consciousness, but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist in a world outside of consciousness!

I want to understand the mathematics of quantum theory and relativity, for I'm sure these fields are the most philosophically fertile in the natural sciences. They're deliciously counterintuitive.

Supposing that humankind doesn't destroy itself or suffer some tremendous natural calamity, it will continue to evolve for thousands and millions of years. Societal earthquakes lasting centuries and millennia will shatter human nature to bits, wash away all remnants of "eternal truths", erode the mud of the psyche only to mix mud of a finer texture. Our biology and psychology will revolutionize themselves. Ten thousand years ago logic didn't exist [?]; ten thousand years from now it will be a memory,[3] transcended [?]. All social orders are smothered under the sands of time. Unrelenting progress, hesitating not an instant, is Truth. We must accept it and contribute to it.

January 8

I'll never attain anything approaching certainty in my answers to the majority of philosophical questions. My theories will, one and all, be hypotheses.[4] They'll be educated guesses. I'm too aware of the

[1] I'm aware that my discussions are vague, but they're only outlines meant to stimulate thought.

[2] [It's too bad I rarely described the positions I was arguing against. It must be hard for the reader to relate my ideas to anything. To make sense of them. But the next sentence was obviously directed against some philosopher, maybe Kant or Schopenhauer.]

[3] Actually, it won't even be that.

[4] That statement itself is a hypothesis—as is that one—as is that one....

absurdity of existence to hope for anything definite from it. The highest man takes life with a grain of salt: he knows that living is a play within a play. He recognizes that being a complete person involves suspending disbelief, even as it requires that he disbelieve all. (Living according to truth is a circular process.)

There's something thrilling in the fact that nature created man and then left him to his own devices. Aside from our instincts, we're alone. Consciousness has to carve its own world out of dead matter. We can do essentially whatever the hell we want! What can be more exciting than that?! The casting-aside of God is indeed synonymous with liberation.

It's hard to believe that in eleven days I'll leave Europe. Part of me is sad and part looks forward to being at Wesleyan. ....Oh, the march of time just kills me. One moment ago I was in a bus traveling to Freiburg—I was talking to Sangeetha for the first time—I was lying in a hotel as she slept on my chest—I was crying in her arms after we had fought—I was touring Europe in alternating bouts of loneliness and joy. I was in Lisbon and Oslo and Rome and Barcelona. I was in "love".... I'm tired of writing. I need silence.

—But I can't find it! My thoughts are too loud.

[Deleted entries.]

January 14

Karl Popper, my idol, declares triumphantly that 'ought' cannot be logically derived from 'is'. What a monumental discovery. He goes on to suggest that people who base their values on facts are wrong and deluded. But there's a flaw in his reasoning: if nothing about morality is 'true', it's useless to argue against moral positions (with the exception of the one that states that values *must* be derived from facts,[1] because this one declares that values and facts are necessarily connected—which is false). Arguments, in order to be worthy of the name, proceed from facts or from common beliefs—which are precisely what is missing in this case. So Marxists and Nietzscheans are not violating truths or facts when they choose to base their 'morality' on what is. They can base it on whatever they want: it's their choice! The only thing they can't do is claim that their position is the 'right' one. Even if it can be justified by relying purely on reason unrelated to subjective preference—which it surely can't—it's not thereby better than other value-systems. However, the designation 'better' is vacuous and useless: what matters to moralists is that their derivative values abide by their basic ones, and that their morality itself becomes praxis.

January 15

Today Sofia and I saw an art exhibit in the Residenzgalerie: it was *ganz hervorragend.* I wish I could paint like a Baroque artist. The building itself was extremely beautiful, though it had a little too much gold leaf along its ceilings and walls. We saw the room where Mozart performed when he was six.

Tonight I wrote some interesting, though obvious, reflections on history in my letter to Sangeetha. I also reread my short story "Transfiguration", which I no longer like (at all). I have potential as a writer, but I lack discipline.

> The gray infinitude of the whitewashed wall cut through the composer like a razor. It entered his mind through his eyes and ears and thence grew, tumor-like, to possess his soul. It began as nothing and ended as nothing, but he was powerless to resist its onslaught. Swiftly was he engulfed in its timelessness; inevitably did he lose his capacity to think; terrifyingly did he forsake his self-awareness; impossibly was he abandoned to Existence. He withered. Nothing remained of him but

[1] Well, that isn't really a moral position.

a name. He was the crushing apathy of the white wall, the despair of the self-proclaimed nihilist, the heartache of the unrequited lover. His will to live was overwhelmed by a deep void, a vast meaninglessness that shriveled everything but itself. In a splitting moment the composer was one with the underbelly of Being, and it nearly killed him.

A mosquito buzzing in his ear shocked him back to life. The moment was gone, along with its mystery. Sounds he knew well regaled him: the screaming of the landlady, the clatter of the cabriolet, the crying of the neighbor's child. Reality hit him with the force of death. He indeed wondered if his awe-inspiring experience had been but a figment of his imagination. Perhaps he had dozed for a moment. Perhaps the sweltering midday heat had burst a blood vessel in his brain. Disinclined to philosophical reflection, he didn't know how to react to the violent contrast between his world and the one he had just left. So he merely gazed again at the paper on his desk. This paper would have been blank but for the black lines drawn across its width. Its severe wrinkles and small tears attested to a brutal history at the hands of the composer, but it rested on the desk in simple equanimity, passively awaiting the man's next outburst. Blithely it remained motionless. To the composer it seemed as if the paper were convinced of its own superiority. It had witnessed all his frustrations, all his creative lapses, even his tantrums when in the throes of despair. Not one of his failings had escaped its notice. It had even been a party to his humiliating experience of a few moments ago! It sat there taunting him, and his frustration increased. A bead of sweat dripped off his forehead and splattered onto the paper. His hand involuntarily rid his skin of its moistness and resumed its position on the desk, clenched in a fist. The composer continued to stare at the paper. His mind was occupied with its own emptiness, wondering where its thoughts had gone. Had the heat sapped them of their vitality? —An itch on the man's leg erupted from non-existence; he slapped it and it was gone.— Or were there merely too many distractions for him to concentrate? Either way, he cursed the force that held his creative inspiration in abeyance. The wailing child's entreaties grew shriller. Fleas congregated around the man's face. His foot chattered against the floor in impatience. His fist was white as it warred with his pen. His mind remained mere form divested of content: not a note sounded in it, not the whine of the oboe nor the caress of the flute. The gray infinitude of the wall was forgotten in his consciousness of artistic impotence. Frustration and boredom fought for predominance; frustration won the day. What had moments ago been intense impatience was now an ecstasy of rage at the whole of existence. The man crumpled up the paper in fury—hurled it into the trash—pounded against the wall to frighten the child into silence—rained upon the desk a flurry of blows—leaped up and paced the room—clenched his teeth to relieve his chest of pressure. Sweat streamed from his scalp and armpits. Fetid air from without wafted in. And the muse did not grace him.

At that moment he glanced outside in desperation....and beheld a remarkable sight. Standing alone on the street below was a vision of such fine workmanship that it could have been crafted only by God. It was in the shape of a woman. She was of ordinary height, but her sleek auburn hair cascading down her back gave her the appearance of a sculpted colossus. The contours of her face heightened the impression. Her nose bore the subtle aristocratic curve of Franz Liszt's; her cheekbones were taken from Michelangelo's "David". Her full, pursed lips, their corners upturned in an ironical half-smile, revealed her as an incarnation of the omniscient virgin Athena. From her eyes emanated both wisdom and innocence. There was nothing explicable about this woman. The composer gazed at her dumbly, soaking in her earthy yet spiritual presence. She smiled up at him knowingly; he beamed, proudly displaying his rotting teeth. The woman laughed gaily, and he felt as if the two of them alone existed in the world.

Suddenly, rudely, a hunchbacked elderly hag caught his eye. He cringed in disgust, allowed himself a shudder, and quickly returned his gaze to the first woman. But she was no longer there. Apparently she had rounded the corner in haste as his glance had faltered. Why, though? And how could she have been so fast? Devastated, sure that he would never see her again, the composer sank into his chair. His chest transformed into a yawning cavity that swallowed him whole, consuming his desire to live. In the space of an instant he felt himself enveloped by a great weariness, a terrible

apathy and hatred of life. But out of this inexplicable sadness rose the faint murmurings of a melody.

At first only a slight mental disturbance, it quickly developed into a piece partaking of necessity. Seizing upon the man's momentary dearth of psychic defenses, it emerged from deep within his body in a virtually complete state, forcing him to listen to it. He had no choice. For this music lacked the hardness of reality to the extent that it could be called unearthly. […]

A single cello opened the piece. The whispered melody was born from the womb of heartache. It was in a minor key, but it was possessed of a yearning that is seldom heard except in D-flat or G-flat major. Periodically the melody grew agitated, fervent, climbed to the heights of passion....only to sink again into resignation. At last it succeeded in leaping to the major key, just at the moment when the entire string section began to echo the original theme. Soon the french horns and clarinets accompanied the strings, playing variations on the violins' embellishments, and then the oboes and flutes introduced the second theme before the first had run its course—and the piece acquired a contrapuntal air. Theme wove through theme; giddiness was entangled in sorrow; melodies were inverted and transposed; fugues appeared and vanished momentarily. A festive atmosphere pervaded it all. Trumpets and bassoons joined the fray—the first adding brilliance, the second humor. Trombones doubled the clarinets, flutes doubled the cellos, oboes doubled the basses. All remnants of heaviness were cast aside, overwhelmed by an irresistible compulsion toward comedy. Pianissimo was echoed by fortissimo. Instruments competed against each other, mocked each other. The halo of self-consciousness parodied itself, as it parodied everything in existence.

Throughout this fiesta, the composer was as a medium of overpowering forces. He listened with inhuman concentration to the ravings of his creations. Everything he heard made sense, even in its senselessness: there was a logic to it, though not the frigid logic of the philosophers. The festival of mimicry at length succumbed to its own logic, growing weary of itself. It was transcended by its antithesis, a glowing simplicity. Nature was affirmed. Birds twittered; wind conversed with waves; droplets of sound smattered against the wall of consciousness. Everything unrelated to music was denied entry into the composer's mind as he became the flute's flutterings and the horn's poetry.

Suddenly the original melody was heard from afar. The clarinet had remembered it. Coming from this instrument, the theme bathed in sweet melancholy: the notes were dipped in honey before being realized. Gentle ecstasy was the composer. Violin, then viola and cello, then oboe and flute and horn and bassoon, and trumpet—ever so smooth, inseparable from the horn—and finally the lofty bass....each instrument grazed the lips of Beauty. Each was integral to the cumulative effect. Each phrase grew organically out of the preceding, as the theme itself had emerged from the subtle celebration of nature. Tentatively, but with a sureness of purpose unsurpassed by Bach, the music flowed in and out of the major and minor modes, creating a dream-like atmosphere. Transience was all. Spirit was embodied in sound, even as thoughts lost their meaning and mind was overcome. The composer was possessed by the eternal. Powerless, he was engulfed in flames of timelessness and caressed by Existence. He withered. At once he was the universe, the spirit, and God. His will to live was snuffed out by music and its ineffable truth. In this crushing, eternal moment, as the orchestra climbed higher and higher to its climax, as the soundless affirmation of life reached its breathless peak, as violins and horns and cellos and flutes trumpeted their triumphant message to one who was able to listen—in this moment, the composer was one with the ocean of Being....and it killed him.

—His body could not withstand the pressure, and it evaporated whither it had come. Flesh and bone vanished. Chemicals and cells and electricity ended their stay on Earth. Nothing remained of the composer but his papers, his pen—and his music.

Need I assist the reader in exploring the themes? (Insofar as they're worth exploring.) Probably. Example: when the composer is *trying* to write, when he's focusing on his writer's block—when he's self-conscious—the notes don't come. Only when he's distracted (by the woman and the emotions she causes)

can his instincts assert themselves—and, you know, artistic genius is instinct. The relation between self-consciousness and art is hinted at in other ways too. And obviously one of the points of the ending is that, when the music was flooding from the man's subconscious, he had effectively ceased to exist (because his self-consciousness had). What about dialectics? I illustrate its kernel of truth but also its inadequacy when treated as an *a priori,* three-pronged formula.

January 17

Last night Sofia and I went to a concert. Rachmaninoff's "Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini" was played by a sensational pianist. I loved it. Dvorák's eighth symphony was also played, but I didn't like it much: it was boring, too long, and had few noteworthy passages. It didn't compare to Tchaikovsky's fourth and fifth. A Brahms piece was performed in the beginning of the concert, but it was excessively ponderous and plodding.

I found Sofia uninteresting last night. She certainly didn't have anything to say about the music. In general, for months, I've thought her conversations have been boring and shallow, but it was especially true last night.

This morning we said goodbye. She cried as we sat in silence in my room; I didn't know what to say. I told her I'd miss her very much. We exchanged e-mail addresses and she gave me a present—so tomorrow I'll have to buy a gift to leave with her roommate. (I was going to earlier but forgot.)

[…]

January 20

"The world is my representation" isn't strictly true—or at least, we can't know if it is. Rather, the world *as it appears to me* is my representation—which is a truism. Similarly, "the existence of the world hangs on a single thread; and this thread is the actual consciousness in which it exists" is either wrong or impossible to know on the one hand, or a truism on the other. Schopenhauer thinks that the world can't exist if there is no being to represent it, but surely the point is that even after I or you die the world continues to exist—for other people, to be sure, but outside of us all the same. *That* is just as inconceivable as the idea that there is existence outside of any subject, but we know it to be true.

"There can never be an existence that is objective absolutely and in itself; such an existence, indeed, is positively inconceivable. For the objective, as such, always and essentially has its existence in the consciousness of a subject." First of all, the Will is admitted by Schopenhauer to be objective "absolutely and in itself"—this is the premise of his whole system!—so he can't declare that it's inconceivable for the world to exist objectively in some form independent of appearance. In fact, the truth is that it's indeed impossible to imagine what the world is independently of us, but that the bare idea of such an *existence* isn't inconceivable. Moreover, two senses of the word "objective" must be distinguished: there is 'object for a subject' and there is 'outside of a subject'. The former is inconceivable without at the same time imagining a subject; the latter is perfectly conceivable even if there exists *no* subject *anywhere*.

It makes no sense to say that "it is just as true that the knower is a product of matter as that matter is a mere representation of the knower." This is equivalent to saying that each is a product of the other.

However, it does seem that Kant's antinomies suggest the untenability of any kind of realism.

Tuesday, January 22

[Boring deleted stuff. Back at Wesleyan.]

I've started reading Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. The Preface is marvelous and entertaining.

[…]

I've read a couple pages past §1 ("Holy Scripture"). So far I find Kierkegaard's central idea interesting and original but vague and unsatisfactory. His belief that there's a yawning chasm between objective interest and infinite, impassioned involvement is wrong. For example, the following passage is an oversimplified account:

> Anyone who as a believer posits inspiration must consistently regard every critical deliberation—whether for or against—as something dubious, a kind of temptation. And anyone who, without having faith, ventures out into critical deliberations cannot possibly want to have inspiration result from them. To whom, then, is it all really of interest?

But maybe someone can become inspired to alter his life after reading an interpretation of the scriptures. Maybe he suddenly becomes "infinitely interested" in Christianity—whatever that's supposed to mean—as a result of a lucid and brilliant interpretation by, say, Thomas Aquinas. In any case, it's only Kierkegaard's bizarre terminology that makes it seem as though there's a leap between the highest level of subjectivity and the one directly below it: it means nothing to say that an interest is "infinite". That just conceals the issue in a cloak of Hegelian sophistry. Besides, it's practically impossible and nonsensical to 'rank' subjectivities.

January 23

"The ludicrous aspect of the zealot was that his infinite passion thrust itself upon a wrong object (an approximation object [viz., the objective, historical truth of Christianity]), but the good aspect of him was that he did have passion." I thought that according to Kierkegaard the highest fulfillment of his kind of truth is infinite passion. Isn't that the reason for his eulogy on faith?—that it's the only infinitely passionate subjectivity? If so, how can the zealot be infinitely interested in objective truth? Or, if the zealot is infinitely impassioned, how can Kierkegaard justify his statement that it's the wrong kind of infinite passion? Doing so adds an extraneous element into the mix. *No* infinite passion can be wrong, for it is precisely the one thing that Kierkegaard desires. Hence, the object of one's infinite passion shouldn't enter into discussion; all that matters is that passion exist. (There can be no wrong object: there is either *no* object—because no infinite passion—or *an* object.)

I've spent much of the past two days copying my Europe-journal onto the computer. It'll be a long process. I know it's a waste of time, but I'm obsessed with making everything substantial in my life *orderly*.

Kierkegaard is right that uncertainty is inevitable in the sphere of objective truth. Even if we're 'certain', we're uncertain on some level. (That proposition itself is uncertain.)

As her farewell gift Sofia gave me a tape on which she described all the ways she'd miss me, read a poem that made her think of me, recorded us talking together (without my knowledge), and so on. What an unbelievable girl! It was the sweetest gift imaginable, but it was a little excessive. I felt embarrassed as I listened to the tape. There was nothing subtle about it: over and over again she pounded it into me that she would miss everything about me. Relentlessly! Entirely devoid of embarrassment! Her candor was astonishing. It's predictable that the first girl I find who's genuinely truthful isn't remotely my intellectual equal—isn't an other from whom I crave 'recognition'.

Why on earth does Kierkegaard repeat himself so often?

Anyone who wants to master anything of difficulty must be something of an autodidact.

Tonight I saw the new version of *Apocalypse Now*. I had never seen the movie before. Now that I have, I know to what heights film can reach. The idea behind Marlon Brando's brief speech at the end was identical to the idea behind the end of my February 2nd entry. The significance of the movie's end was that we have to accept the horror of which we are capable and yet repress it. It can't be eradicated, but it can be

suppressed. Committing atrocities does, perhaps, require a kind of strength [as the film suggests] (and is thus, in a perverse sense, 'impressive'), but being human isn't being 'strong'. Being human is overcoming the animal inside oneself.

January 24

Today I had my first two classes: "Molecules, Microbes and Man" and "Murder and Adultery: The French and Russian Novel". […]

I wonder if Kierkegaard's essential idea is similar to the one I tried to express in the second paragraph of the entry on January 6th. (For example, the third sentence implicitly contains Kierkegaard's distinction between direct and indirect communication.) My sentences were confused and erratic because I was formulating for the first time a thought that was full of apparent contradictions—the mere act of formulating which was a circular enterprise, since an important component of the thought was that all thinking is subjective self-expression (i.e. an "indirect" process of becoming), yet this was stated—directly—to be an objective truth. (That is, it was a thought that, if true, was false.) However, I'm pretty sure the paradox is sophistical.

January 25

> Suppose someone wanted to communicate that the truth is not the truth but that the way is the truth, that is, that the truth is only in the becoming, in the process of appropriation, that consequently there is no result. Suppose he were a humanitarian who necessarily had to publicize this to all people. Suppose he took the splendid shortcut of communicating this in direct form in *Adresseavisen*, by which means he gained masses of supporters, whereas the artistic way, despite his utmost efforts, would leave undecided whether or not he had helped anyone—what then? Well, then his assertion would indeed turn out to be a result.

That thought, I think, is related to the one I addressed yesterday. Here's another:

> The form of a communication is something different from the expression of a communication. When a thought has gained its proper expression in the word, which is attained through the first reflection, there comes the second reflection, which bears upon the intrinsic relation of the communication to the communicator and renders the existing communicator's own relation to the idea.

Another:

> Ordinary communication, objective thinking, has no secrets; only doubly reflected subjective thinking has secrets; that is, all its essential content is essentially a secret, because it cannot be communicated directly. This is the significance of the secrecy. That this knowledge cannot be stated directly, because the essential in this knowledge is the appropriation itself, means that it remains a secret for everyone who is not through himself doubly reflected in the same way....

Another:

> Every subject is an existing subject, and therefore this must be essentially expressed in all of his knowing and must be expressed by keeping his knowing from an illusory termination in sensate certainty, in historical knowledge, in illusory results. ....Nothing historical can become infinitely certain to me except this: that I exist, which is not something historical. The speculative result is an

> illusion insofar as the existing subject, thinking, wants to abstract from his existing and wants to be *sub specie aeterni.*

Another:

> In connection with negative thoughts of the kind mentioned, an illusive form [of communication] is the only adequate one, because direct communication implies the dependability of continuity, whereas the illusiveness of existence, when I grasp it, isolates me.

That last thought isn't entirely true. Aside from the fact that it's impossible not to communicate directly most of the time (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is basically an example of direct communication, if I'm understanding the term correctly), such communication is permissible in this context because *words* and *meaning* aren't quite synonymous. This is evident when one spends time reflecting on a paragraph, trying to understand it—and suddenly its meaning 'clicks into place' in one's head. Therefore, though the words may be definite and 'dead', the intuition behind them needn't be. Direct communication can be a stimulus toward the same kind of intuition that Kierkegaard assumes to be a product of indirect communication. Perhaps this is the solution of the sophistical paradox I mentioned yesterday.[1]

January 26

> Existence itself, existing, is a striving and is just as pathos-filled as it is comic: pathos-filled because the striving is infinite, that is, directed toward the infinite, is a process of infinitizing, which is the highest pathos; comic because the striving is a self-contradiction. From a pathos-filled perspective, one second has infinite value; from a comic perspective, ten thousand years are but a prank, like a yesterday, and yet the time the existing individual is in does consist of such parts.

Pathos is from the perspective of subjective time; the comic is from the perspective of objective time. The second is infinite because there are no divisions in subjective time, subjective time is perpetual (yet perpetually fleeting); ten thousand years are but a prank because they're an arbitrary objective segregation that is not only unrelated to subjective time but vanishes subjectively as soon as it has begun. –Actually, the main reason they're a "prank" is that objective time consists of parts and is perpetual in a different way than subjective time is, rendering these parts meaningless and effectively infinitesimal (particularly when experienced by the subject—when the subject looks back on them after they have occurred and is nevertheless in the same moment, so to speak, that he was in *before* they had occurred (as if they had never happened)).

I read Chateaubriand's *Atala* and *René* for my class. They were gorgeously written but exhausting to read. In fact, they were annoying. Such a shameless profusion of sentiment, such intemperate milking-of-sorrow-for-all-it's-worth, such enraptured pessimism—yes, life is suffering, now get over it! I grew deadened to feeling, immune to all but impatience. Romanticism is self-defeating, self-caricaturing. (As Kierkegaard might say, it ignores the comic.)

Judged by absolute standards, Chateaubriand is a mediocre artist. However, we shouldn't ignore the historical context in which he wrote. European civilization was bored and jaded around 1800, disillusioned with itself, thus giving birth to Romanticism. This movement was essentially a deflection from life, an outlet for alienation, a comfort and a caress. It was a plush velvet couch, purchased with the tokens of luxury and indolence.[2]

Kierkegaard's ramblings about the "eternal" and the "eternal decision" as related to the historical

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[1] Actually, no it's not. The solution is that thoughts aren't always only "self-expression". Stated differently, there are various kinds of self-expression.

[2] I mean that in two ways.

are hard to understand. Section 3 of chapter 2 is all Greek to me. It's quite diverting, though—or rather, it's profundity in the guise of humor. ("Although results and accomplishments were otherwise plentiful in those days, no one was equal to putting an end to Lessing and having him world-historically butchered, salted, and packed in a paragraph. He was and remained an enigma."[1])

January 27

I don't think Kierkegaard's arguments against a system of existence apply to *all* such systems. They apply only to systems that, like Hegel's, try to force existence into *a priori* categories that are supposed to be the only true account of existential development and leave nothing unexplained. A system, perhaps like Marx's, can be sufficiently vague to allow maneuverability within its perimeters—i.e., to allow for the infinitude of existence. Kierkegaard wrongly assumes that a system must explain *everything*. It's obvious that all systems can only be approximations. In fact, even if a system does the impossible—explains every little accident of existence—it can never be more than an approximation because it doesn't have the immediacy of existence.[2] (Don't accuse me of plagiarism. That proposition is so self-evident I was aware of it before I'd read Kierkegaard.) Being is on a different order than thought, so thought can only be an approximation of being.[3] But its approximation can be true. Even if it's impossible for us to reach such a perfectly specific and true approximation, we can achieve a *vague* one that's true as far as it goes. So a system of existence is possible.

On a different topic, the impression I get from Kierkegaard is that making false or meaningless statements is permissible if it leads to subjective truth (whatever that is). Christianity's objective truth is irrelevant, he says. However, the knotty point is that Christianity makes statements that it claims to be objectively true. So are we supposed to delude ourselves for the sake of passion?

"Passion is subjectivity, and objectively it does not exist at all." This doesn't mean we can't reconcile objective truth with passion. Kierkegaard goes astray in stressing the importance of the subjective decision, the leap. Forced beliefs do exist: for many of us it's psychologically impossible, or very difficult, to choose to ignore overwhelming evidence against a thesis. This is why truth and passion must be 'reconciled'.

"Aaaaahhhhh".... The first movement of Chopin's second piano sonata is my home. The third movement is my heaven.

January 28

> Continual association with the world-historical makes a person incompetent to act. True ethical enthusiasm consists in willing to the utmost of one's capability, but also, uplifted in divine jest, in never thinking whether or not one thereby achieves something. As soon as the will begins to cast a covetous eye on the outcome, the individual begins to become immoral—the energy of the will becomes torpid, or it develops abnormally into an unhealthy, unethical, mercenary hankering that, even if it achieves something great, does not achieve it ethically—the individual demands something other than the ethical itself. A truly great ethical individuality would consummate his life as follows: he would develop himself to the utmost of his capability; in the process he perhaps would produce a great effect in the external world, but this would not occupy him at all, because he would know that the external is not in his power and therefore means nothing either *pro* or

[1] Technically that quotation is part of section 4.

[2] 'Immediacy' not quite in Kierkegaard's sense.

[3] Thought itself is being, but its objective, finished products are Ideal and hence not being. They're abstractions, as the activity of thought is not.

> *contra.* He would remain in ignorance about it, lest he be delayed by the external and fall into its temptation.... The ethicist fears drawing a conclusion or making a transition from the ethical to something other than the ethical. He would, then, remain in ignorance about it through a resolution of the will, and even in death he would *will* not to know that his life had had any significance other than that of having ethically prepared the development of his soul. Then if the power governing all things would want to dispose circumstances so that he became a world-historical figure—well, that is something he would first inquire about jestingly in eternity, for not until then is there time for the light-minded questions of carelessness (Princeton edition, 1992, pp. 135-136).

That's inspiring but oversimplified. However, I have to read more before I can pass definitive judgment on it.

Kierkegaard himself articulates one reason for my skepticism regarding his position on the ethical:

> The longer life goes on and the longer the existing person through his action is woven into existence, the more difficult it is to separate the ethical from the external, and the easier it seems to corroborate the metaphysical tenet that the outer is the inner, the inner the outer, the one wholly commensurate with the other. This is precisely the temptation, and the ethical becomes more difficult day by day....

Additionally, it seems to me that the arguments in which he invokes God are marred thereby. All his serious propositions are objective—aspire to some kind of objective truth, even the proposition that subjectivity is truth—so he's assuming that God really exists. His arguments are meant to be objective, *nicht wahr?* Direct communications. They have to be. He's trying to debunk existential systems, which necessitates that he keep at least one foot in their territory. Otherwise he and they don't even have a language in common, in which case he can't legitimately argue against them. At any rate, he manifestly does believe most of his claims to be true (like the impossibility of an existential system), so he should at least notify the reader when he alternates to his 'truth is irrelevant', 'all my sentences are untrue hypotheses aimed at increasing passion' mode. The fact that he doesn't suggests that he invokes God as an already-established truth. Which he isn't entitled to.

I fear that my senior thesis will have to be a primarily empirical investigation into the origins of civilization. I haven't yet refined any of my theories—hell, I haven't even arrived at them—so the most sensible option is to aid my future endeavors by getting the drudgery of research out of the way.

January 30

Much of Section II, Chapter I is essentially a vacuum of meaning. It's tedious to read. In any case, I've decided to start preparing for my thesis by temporarily abandoning Kierkegaard and reading instead *The Sumerians*, by Samuel Noah Kramer. My agenda is (1) to read detailed studies of the most ancient societies, (2) to learn about the progress of evolution from ape to man, (3) to educate myself on the existing theories of how mankind emerged from the primeval swamp, and (4) to confirm or revise the Marxist hypothesis. (4) is the purpose of my project.

January 31

I'm taking a break from Kramer: it makes more sense to begin at the beginning. Hence I'm reading an interesting book entitled *The Emergence of Humankind* (fourth edition), by John Pfeiffer. Topics like evolution and primate behavior stimulate me to a preposterous extent. I envy Jane Goodall's lifelong

intimacy with chimps.

Late last night, in the throes of inspiration, I ran to the library and borrowed, among other books, Erik Wright's *Reconstructing Marxism*. I had been assailed by paralyzing doubts about my senior thesis and had decided it should be theoretical rather than empirical. But after skimming through parts of Wright's stupefying book I changed my mind. It's an almost maliciously tedious work; it's where enthusiasm goes to die. It raises questions and answers none of them. At best, it polishes off its 'solutions' with 'What I have just written is probably wrong.' Ambitious!

The contemporary cornucopia of theoretic cul-de-sacs cannot be sifted through with the sieve of the Academic's mental equipment. It's misguided to try to explain phenomena from one limited perspective, and then, upon apparent success—to trumpet triumphantly "Victory!" Inevitably some evildoer will explain the same phenomena using a diametrically opposed theory, and then he too will claim success. The process will continue indefinitely—scholar responding to scholar in those myriad scholarly journals—until at last the participants realize they've wasted a decade of their lives. The method to be used is simpler, though it assumes infinite patience, a renunciation of partisanship, acquaintance with all the relevant ideas, and genius. It is, in fact, surprisingly obvious. I'd outline it now if I knew what it was.

—Actually, I do have an idea. First, theorists can't plunge straight into complex societies like capitalism or feudalism: they'll invariably get confused or overwhelmed. They have to start at the beginning, with the simplest humans and the simplest tribes. They have to start with straightforward principles. For example, human biology can be taken as a given, a brute fact that hasn't changed in tens of thousands of years and thus can't be used to explain differences between primitive and modern cultures. It outlines the parameters within which civilizations vary as a result of less 'unchangeable' conditions than biology. In any event, the philosopher both accumulates and begins with these principles as he continues his empirical/theoretical analysis of history. By the time he reaches complex cultures like Sumer he has undertaken more intricate deductions (and inductions), and he then proceeds to examine these cultures with his new explanatory principles—and continues to discover others. Eventually, painstakingly, he progresses all the way through history and ends up with a multi-tiered theory as 'certain' as can reasonably be expected.

February 1

[....] Another of my principles will have to be that, even though psychology is based on biology, psychological theories are just as necessary—and have just as much explanatory power—as biological ones. The two correspond to two 'sovereign' levels of explanation, partly because the effects of social life are autonomous from biology. (Even if experiences are somehow recorded in cells, or in networks between cells, and it's *this* that directly (chemically, etc.) determines 'us', our social life—including its foundations—and our psychology need to be examined together (and independently of the 'intermediary', biology) because they exist on one plane and biology on another. That is, *de facto* they directly interact even if *de jure* they don't. Biology completes the picture and is necessary for technical accuracy, but in many respects it's superfluous in a general account of the interaction between society and the individual.)

The major problem with social theories is that it's impossible to know when they sufficiently explain the facts. How can they be tested? Anomalies can always be explained away.

Several days ago I read *Adolphe*, by Benjamin Constant. It was a perceptive psychological analysis of a tragic love affair, a book easier to read than Chateaubriand's. It was actually more an investigation than a real story, which is one reason I wouldn't consider it great art. Now I'm reading Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*.

Are there innate ideas? Most assuredly: I can testify personally that children have an intrinsic fascination with the pubic area even before they know its function. They experiment (even engage in penetration) without having the slightest idea what it is they're doing. Therefore the question that ought to be asked is *which* ideas are innate.

Whenever you're taking people too seriously, for whatever reason and in whatever circumstances,

tell yourself that they're naked beneath their clothes. This thought will chase away all traces of soberness.

The Adagio in Beethoven's eleventh piano sonata is sufficient. "The world is not enough", but the Adagio is.

February 2

For my microbiology course I'm reading a textbook (*Microbiology: A Human Perspective*), a mind-numbingly complex one. Maybe I'm exceptionally stupid, but I find its pages to be chock full of gibberish. How is it possible for people to understand, and remember, the details of anabolism and catabolism, of aerobic respiration and anaerobic fermentation? The stuff is fascinating, to be sure, but bewildering. I have unbounded admiration for scientists.

February 3

When I listen to the Molto Allegro e con brio in Sonata No. 4 (Beethoven, of course) I feel exhilarated beyond endurance. I feel as though connected directly to an adrenaline-pump. This is almost the way I feel when listening to Billy Joel's "Travelin' Prayer".

Another of my principles will be that the potential of each individual hasn't changed much in 20,000 years. If two newborn infants were exchanged between the prehistoric and modern epochs, they would grow up acting the same as the people around them. That is, our psychic structure (our 'potential') has changed imperceptibly if at all. This principle is desirable because it justifies my use of the method of intuition (imagination) in coming up with hypotheses.

I'm done with Pfeiffer's book. It was intriguing and entertaining, but I think I'll stop reading such books for a while and instead arrive at my own ideas. Most authors have little to offer me. My main concerns are to figure out a methodology and list axioms. […]

[…] By the way, the amount of propaganda for America and "freedom" before and during the Superbowl was nauseating. Aside from its utter lack of taste and embarrassing self-congratulation, it reminded me that I'm an exile in my own country. I simply am not an American.

What am I? An intellectual sick unto death and an individual in love with life.

It bothers me that biology can theoretically explain all things human. It's terribly disturbing. I will not be reduced to chemical reactions. My moods are more than hormones. –Oh, but they're not! Life is unfathomable!

These are the halcyon years of my youth. This is the happy time that will be snuffed out for eternity. Soon I'll be a despairing creature bored of the world. Already I'm weary of thought.

[…]

February 4

The reason why extreme self-consciousness often implies the comic is that self-consciousness, in this form, is a type of emptiness and abstraction. It is itself not emotional or 'full' in any way, so—since it necessarily adopts the smug, superior and detached attitude of the observer—it looks upon that which is *immediate* as foreign and inferior,[1] and hence amusing. Why the inferior should be funny, I have no idea;

[1] Inferior (or deluded) because....self-consciousness knows it's adopting a more considered viewpoint. Self-consciousness is, in a sense, inherently sure of itself; it is self-affirmation (though it needn't be affirmation of oneself,

but this question regards the nature of laughter in general, which I suspect we'll never understand.

Unfortunately the issue is more complex than that, but I don't feel like untangling my thoughts. (Even the footnote is begging for further distinctions. There are distinctions *within self-consciousness* that must be made.)

February 5

What I really want to understand are the dynamics of *modern* society, not of ancient societies. But I think my historical method is best, so I'll stick to it.

[…]

Brief interruption: the reason for the increase in technological complexity throughout history isn't really that the satisfaction of needs begets new needs, nor is it that technology has an autonomous tendency to develop. In the beginning of history it is that the biological needs of the body (survival, not power[1]—or power (over bacteria, etc.) only insofar as it ensures survival) are manifested in consciousness as a drive to attain 'control' over nature. As history progresses, the specific social reasons for technological advancement become more varied, and the bare need to survive becomes less important, but there remains the fundamental fact of the will to power—which is biology filtered through consciousness—in its original form of power over the environment. The difference between the primeval will to power and the later one is that the latter has been made 'cultural'. It has become relatively autonomous from its original biological functions and more a phenomenon of consciousness. It has many manifestations: for example, an inventor may want to make an aspect of life easier, or he may want to create a source of financial profit, or he may want prestige, etc. Technological progress is predictable because (1) the will to power never dies (it's only sublimated differently in various periods of history) and (2) on a societal level there is usually, from some direction, an impetus toward more power over nature because of the conveniences it affords. (That is, increasing power over nature remains a fundamental drive throughout history even though it becomes less necessary-for-survival than it was originally.) Of course, in capitalism there are many more *institutional* factors forcing technological progress, but the reasons for their influence over us are ultimately grounded in human nature (which means, on the most general (and sometimes meaningless) level, the will to power).

[…]

February 6

The last paragraph consisted of nothing more than hasty hypotheses, but I think I was onto something in the previous two paragraphs. I was trying to unite biology, Marxism, phenomenology and Nietzsche. (Phenomenology was primarily the invisible method.)

I'm reading a book by Charles Cogan entitled *Charles de Gaulle: A Brief Biography with Documents*. From the first two chapters it seems that de Gaulle was a world-historically deluded, pompous charlatan. He believed, absurdly, that he was the "true" French government during the war. Not only did he overestimate himself, but he adopted the medieval mentality in being obsessed with France's "honor" (which anyway no longer existed after 1870, 1871, 1918 and 1940). And what is all this about France's "destiny"? Its "destiny" is to wither away ignominiously along with every other nation-state. –France, poor

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for it can make the ego an object for itself and thus see the 'ego'—oneself in toto—as contemptible even while it 'affirms' (unthinkingly) itself). By its mere existence it is a type of self-affirmation (and can't be anything else because it is just awareness); and this affirmation becomes explicit when the viewpoint of self-consciousness is adopted vis-à-vis something unreflective. –That babble does make sense if you reflect on it. Incidentally, it may also contain the seeds of an explanation of the omnipresence of the drive for 'ego'-affirmation.

[1] [Contrary to Nietzsche in his metaphysical moments. –I write that because otherwise you won't know why I wrote "not power...." in the text.]

France. Its people never tire of demonstrating their mediocrity.

February 7

Ohhh God.... Clairvoyance is disturbing. I can foresee humanity's destiny, and it's unequivocally tragic.

I can't conceive of higher phases of reflection. It seems impossible for there to be further momentous developments in this arena, *my* arena. History has played itself out: the curtain is rising on the last act, the fifth. Aeschylus has met his match.

The meaning of history has been revealed to us: it has been—its own negation, meaninglessness. We have arrived, my friend! We have reached the end! You and I have tarried in this death-trap long enough to witness the dénouement. The innumerable travails and triumphs of history have been for....this. Nothing still exists but wonder, and wonder has lost its nerve. Insatiable in its impotence, it has sapped the spirit's verve. Now in its death-throes it can do nothing but wheeze, "How...did...you...do...it?"

Self-consciousness is one of the reasons I'm aroused by female nudity. That is, in addition to the hormonal reactions—which are manifested as a kind of eagerness and excitement—there is my implicit awareness of the contradiction between the self and the vagina. This awareness augments my fascination with the object of my desire, thereby intensifying the desire itself. (Two levels of explanation.)

Friday, February 8

Is self-affirmation nothing but pride? No, it's subtler. Pride is slightly cruder, harder to achieve, rarely certain. More often than not it's based on achievements, whereas self-affirmation is nearly always present in some form. Often it's hardly noticeable.

I finished reading Lermontov's superb novel. (Superb for a 24-year-old.) I feel sympathy with the main character, Pechorin. We're not identical, thankfully, but I understand and pity him as well as anyone can. It would take but a nudge for me to become a Pechorin.

What'll I do tonight? Today I woke up at 12:30 and did nothing but read and go to the CSS social hour. Now it's 6:30, my day has just begun, and I'm bored. I'd planned to write down several revelations triggered by Lermontov's book, but I don't feel like it. I'm so bored I might as well have sex with someone I've never met.

All the paradoxical actions of women in regard to romance can be explained by the hypothesis in the second paragraph of my December 21st entry. Women fall in love with men from whom they want recognition (in the Hegelian sense). They implicitly judge the men [*certain* men] as in some sense superior to themselves [stronger, etc.], so they most effectively affirm themselves by being affirmed by the men.[1] Thus, they may like men who love or are loved by someone else because these men can less easily be possessed, they represent something less achievable and 'above' the women, something that must be 'conquered' and must succumb to love in order for the women to feel at peace with themselves and the world.[2] At the same time, in taking a man away from someone else they are tacitly raised above the level of the first woman. Then as the relationship continues, the woman is doted on and loved by the one whom formerly she judged as a sort of prince beloved by a competitor, and this further increases her self-

[1] [This paragraph is just an introspective phenomenological analysis, though a pretty awful one. I was trying to imagine what's implicitly in the woman's consciousness. It has nothing to do with the value-judgments about men and women that feminists rightly object to.]

[2] Of course, the initial hormonal reaction may be what first attracts them to the men and stimulates them to the chase, but my ideas have a prominent place on another level. They interact with and intensify the biological reasons for love. See below.

contentment (happiness). […]

That example was a pathological case, but its laws apply by and large to all or most women. Incidentally, I've just corroborated Goethe's/Hegel's/Nietzsche's idea that people with the highest power are tranquil and undisturbed rather than tormented and Byronic.

A woman wants a type of power over a man by being recognized by him, but if she's spirited and Faustian she'll quickly become bored and want new confirmations of her power. (Especially if she really possesses him like a toy will she get bored and feel gradually less 'affirmed'.) Similarly, a man wants to be affirmed/recognized by being loved or idolized by a woman. I'm not sure what the difference between the two cases is, but it must exist because women are seen as relatively passive and men as active. Anyhow, the greater bliss of actually *being in love* rather than merely *being loved* is due (1) to the hormones released during the former and (2) to the more powerful, immediate kind of self-affirmation involved in passionate and unifying emotions than in the mere abstract awareness of recognition by another. But the whole previous analysis is valid because people are *really* in love only when it's reciprocal—that is, when the other is possessed and oneself is affirmed.

Obviously I'm trying to unify Hegel's, Marx's, Nietzsche's and Sartre's approaches to the human condition while adding something of my own.

February 9

Today I finally practiced the piano. Didn't do much else. By the way, I've lost the CD that runs the screenwriting program through which I edit *The Moor*, so I can't access it. The agents are just waiting for me to send them the script and sign the contract. Damn. What'll I do now?

Aphorism 354 of *The Gay Science*, which I hadn't read until a few minutes ago, is important and suggestive. It relates to my thoughts on consciousness and language.

Occasionally I miss Sangeetha. Now is one of those times. Late at night I often feel tender and melancholy and muse on love. In former days I would have sent Sangeetha an e-mail describing my feelings, but her responses usually disappointed me. So what should I do now? Go to bed?

I've never understood the hullabaloo over Wittgenstein. The guy was a muddled thinker.

February 10

Yesterday I wrote the first page of a new story. I got the inspiration from reading *A Hero of Our Time*. In fact, the format of my novella will be similar to that of Lermontov's: it will consist of a series of entries from the hero's journal. The difference is that they'll be in reverse order, starting in April and progressing back to September. This makes my task more difficult but more fun—difficult because I have to take account of two directions of time (since the tale has to make sense and be suspenseful both chronologically and 'backwards'), and fun because....it'll be difficult! I'll arrange it in the form of a classical tragedy—with five acts that can be more or less differentiated from each other—but the twist will be that it's two tragedies in one. That is, the 'act' right after the prologue (in which he kills himself by jumping off a mountain) will be both the fifth and the first, depending on whether the story is read forward in time or backward. The next will be the fourth and second, the next the third, the next the second and fourth, and the final the first and fifth. Moreover, the tale read forward (starting from the end) will be the tragedy of one individual, and read backwards it will be a symbolic tragedy of mankind.

I'll clarify. 5/1: The hero saves a girl's life and resolves to kill himself—not in a fit of passion but in a carefully considered chain of disinterested reasoning./We meet the main character, the human essence (the self). This character has the peculiar quality of affirming the Other and denying itself. 4/2: His girlfriend breaks up with him. He despairs./We meet the second character (not quite the "antagonist" that it is in the classical drama, but nearly). The human essence loses itself completely in the Other. 3/3: The hero flirts with other girls, is unfaithful to his girlfriend, and tension develops in their relationship./There are 'others'

all around us, and the self's automatic reaction is to assert itself (its independence) against them. It *has* to; that's how it survives. 2/4: We meet the antagonist (the girlfriend) at the same time that the hero is intensely engaged in philosophy./The self withdraws from the world—though not entirely severing all its connections—in response to its 'identity-crisis' in the midst of so many others. It's been so corrupted by foreign influences that it doesn't know who it is, so it tries to find itself in solitude and philosophy. 1/5: In a single entry we get acquainted with the main character, as well as with the thought that will eventually cause his suicide./The self is confronted with the final word of philosophy (aphorism 341 in *The Gay Science*). Its reaction is bewilderment and joy, but the tragedy is that it can never pass the test of Nietzsche's "ultimate eternal confirmation and seal". It thinks it can, but it's wrong, for the human essence is self-denying, incapable of such eternal, overwhelming appreciation and rapture. So it's doomed to a death-in-life. –However, I may be wrong, so I leave open the possibility of salvation by finishing my story with the aphorism. The main reason we're drawn back to the theme of death is that the hero kills himself in the beginning. (The prologue is obviously the *very* end,[1] when humanity kills itself after realizing it can't affirm life, but because it's physically located at the beginning we're left at the end not with a bad taste in our mouths but with *inspiration*.)

I haven't yet planned the further complexities of the tale, such as the subtle interweaving of the two dramas, but these will come involuntarily as I write. Indeed, the idea of the double tragedy was itself an afterthought, something that popped into my head a couple of hours ago. Last night, after I had written the prologue, all I knew was that I wanted to write a story detailing the vicissitudes of self-consciousness in the form of a chronologically reversed diary.

Walter Kaufmann quotes a delightful dialogue in graffiti: "'God is dead.' Nietzsche." "'Nietzsche is dead.' God." "'Some are born posthumously.' Nietzsche."

February 11

Poor Enron executives. What a heartbreaking happening. Unfortunate Mr. Skilling and pitiable Mr. Lay. I feel such sympathy for them.

Businessmen, businessmen, everywhere you look—businessmen! It's really too bad I can't take them seriously, for this means I can't take *humanity* seriously. But on the other hand, that adds an element of gaiety, of superfluity, to life. It's fun to see to the bottom of their prosaic ideals—their dingy dreams, their dusty souls.

I got a B+ on my first paper in History, surprisingly. Didn't deserve it. Grade inflation is a wonderful thing*, n'est-ce pas?*

I have to give de Gaulle credit. He was an impressive man in some respects, who accomplished a great deal. His strengths were based on his weaknesses (his delusions and simple-mindedness), but they were strengths nonetheless. His historical sense was almost as admirable as mine.

February 13

Sangeetha is hosting two radio shows. She's even producing them and writing the scripts. What an incredible girl. I'm so proud of her!

Karl Marx was partly right that historical figures appear twice: the first as tragedy, the second as comedy. (The Kennedys and Bushes are an example.) The reasons are grounded in the nature of societal self-consciousness—which in turn is based on the nature of individual self-consciousness.

Related to that: merely alluding to historical events is far from demonstrating a historical sense. In 1989 Margaret Thatcher warned against German unification because of "what history has taught us", but invoking her encyclopedic knowledge of history actually demonstrated that she *lacks* a historical sense. It's

[1] Of both stories.

obvious that in this day and age Germany could never do anything remotely similar to what it did in the past. It has progressed beyond its crimes: the conditions that caused them are gone forever; Germany's collective consciousness has transcended them. One can retort that it's always *possible* for another Hitler to come to power, but this is true only in the sense that it's *possible* I'll combust into flames in three seconds.

[Deleted entries.]

February 19

I'm skipping my literature class: I feel as mellow and slothful as a hippo. Instead I'll do my favorite activity: kill my brain cells by overdosing on Kant.

> We may regard *natural beauty* as the *exhibition* of the concept of formal (merely subjective) purposiveness, and may regard *natural purposes* as the exhibition of the concept of a real (objective) purposiveness, the first of which we judge by taste (aesthetically, by means of the feeling of pleasure), and the second by understanding and reason (logically, according to concepts).
>
> The understanding, inasmuch as it can give laws to nature a priori, proves that we cognize nature only as appearance, and hence at the same time points to a supersensible substrate of nature; but it leaves this substrate wholly *undetermined*. Judgment, through its a priori principle of judging nature in terms of possible particular laws of nature, provides nature's supersensible substrate (within as well as outside us) with *determinability by the intellectual power*. But reason, through its a priori practical law, gives this same substrate *determination*. Thus judgment makes possible the transition from the domain of nature to that of the concept of freedom (p. 37).

Mull on that. By the way, asses who criticize Kant's premises as generalizing the Western mentality haven't the slightest understanding of his philosophy.

[…]

I suspect that according self-affirmation the foremost place in the phenomenological psyche has a hint of the sophistical about it. It's misleading to reduce states of mind to "affirmation". On the other hand, there's a grain of truth to it.

February 20

The pupils of our eyes are seen by us as substances, as our souls, as the lights in our faces. But this involuntary viewpoint is wrong. If you look intensely at your eyes in a mirror you'll realize that your pupils are *holes*, not *substances*. The biological sciences have confirmed this, but it's far more compelling and infinitely scary when you see it for yourself in a mirror. Pupils, the symbol of the personality, are nothing but empty black holes. How incapable we are of appreciating that truth! How strange but sensible it is that we interpret so many things—incorrectly—as more substantive than they are: lakes, shadows, pupils, *ourselves.* You know why we can't see the self in its true character? Because that would involve *transcending* the self. Nature has ingrained in every animal an inability to peer over its horizons, for every animal must take itself seriously in order to survive. Such a revelation, such self-understanding, would be dangerous to life—not to mention useless. The most that thinkers can strive for is a detached, intellectual awareness of the devastating proposition; intuitively we'll never fully grasp it.

> The agreeable, the beautiful, and the good designate three different relations that presentations have to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, the feeling by reference to which we distinguish

> between objects or between ways of presenting them. The terms of approbation which are appropriate to each of these three are also different. We call *agreeable* what GRATIFIES us, *beautiful* what we just LIKE, *good* what we ESTEEM or *endorse*, i.e., that to which we attribute an objective value. Agreeableness holds for nonrational animals too; beauty only for human beings, i.e., beings who are animal and yet rational, though it is not enough that they be rational (e.g., spirits) but they must be animal as well; the good, however, holds for every rational being as such.... Of all these three kinds of liking, only the liking involved in taste for the beautiful is disinterested and *free,* since we are not compelled to give our approval by any interest, whether of sense or of reason. So we might say that the term liking, in the three cases mentioned, refers to *inclination,* or to *favor*, or to *respect*. For FAVOR is the only free liking. Neither an object of inclination, nor one that a law of reason enjoins on us as an object of desire, leaves us the freedom to make an object of pleasure for ourselves out of something or other. All interest either presupposes a need or gives rise to one; and, because interest is the basis that determines approval, it makes the judgment about the object unfree (p. 52).
>
> Many things may be charming and agreeable to [someone]; no one cares about that. But if he proclaims something to be beautiful, then he requires the same liking from others; he then judges not just for himself but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. That is why he says: The *thing* is beautiful, and does not count on other people to agree with his judgment of liking on the ground that he has repeatedly found them agreeing with him; rather, he *demands* that they agree (pp. 55, 56).
>
> If a judgment has *subjective*—i.e., aesthetic—*universal validity,* which does not rest on a concept, we cannot infer that it also has logical universal validity, because such judgments do not deal with the object itself at all. That is precisely why the aesthetic universality we attribute to a judgment must be of a special kind; for although it does not connect the predicate of beauty with the concept of the *object*, considered in its entire logical sphere, yet it extends that predicate over the entire sphere of *judging persons* (pp. 58, 59).

February 21

I finished *Père Goriot*. It's certainly a great work of art, but it's too melodramatic. The descriptions of Goriot's death were excessive; I found myself feeling not pity for the character but impatience with Balzac. It's a bad sign when a reader is forced to distance himself from the story.

Last night Bruce and I got into a brief but heated argument regarding political correctness. He thinks it's praiseworthy even in its most preposterous manifestations—e.g., printing world maps upside-down because of our subliminal association between 'north' ('above') and 'better', 'south' ('beneath') and 'inferior'—and I think it's often a waste of energy that signifies not open-mindedness but hypersensitivity, pettiness, impotent *ressentiment* against the abstract Oppressor, and is an excuse for self-complacency. ("We're open-minded because we're politically correct! We're better, etc.") […]

Melancholy again. Tired of the great game. There's nothing irrational about suicide; people who take that path have my sympathy.

> §9: *Investigation of the question whether in a judgment of taste the feeling of pleasure precedes the judging of the object or the judging precedes the pleasure*. If the pleasure in the given object came first, and our judgment of taste were to attribute only the pleasure's universal communicability to the presentation of the object, then this procedure would be self-contradictory. For that kind of pleasure would be none other than mere agreeableness in the sensation, so that by its very nature it could have only private validity, because it would depend directly on the

> presentation by which the object *is given*. ....[The] merely subjective (aesthetic) judging of the object, or of the presentation by which it is given, precedes the pleasure and is the basis of this pleasure, [a pleasure] in the harmony of the cognitive powers.
>
> A *pure judgment of taste* is one that is not influenced by charm or emotion (though these may be connected with a liking for the beautiful), and whose determining basis is therefore merely the purposiveness of the form (p. 69). [Purposiveness without a definite purpose. Incidentally, perfection has nothing to do with beauty, for it has nothing to do with subjective purposiveness and everything to do with *objective* intrinsic purposiveness. On the other hand, see pp. 76 and 77, where Kant makes a distinction between free and accessory beauty.]

[More deleted entries.]

February 24

I feel better now. Finished the wretched paper I'd had to write[1] and can return to *Crime and Punishment*. (How did I read that book at the age of fourteen?!) Dostoyevsky is the most brilliant and insightful of the great Russian novelists. No one is more psychologically perceptive than he. I have to prove my ideas in the crucible of his intuitions. He challenges me; his analyses, like that of Marmeladov, challenge mine:

> "....I need to be crucified, not pitied! Crucified! Crucify, O Judge, crucify, and when you have crucified, then take pity! If you do that, I will come and ask for crucifixion, for it is not merriment I crave, but tears and sorrow! Think you, publican, your bottle has been a sweetness unto me? It has been a sorrow. I have sought sorrow in its dregs, sorrow and tears, and I found and savored them...."
>
> ...."Where's the money?" she yelled. "O Lord, he's drunk it all up! But there were twelve rubles left in the box!" Suddenly she seized him in a frenzy by the hair and dragged him into the room. Marmeladov made it easier for her by meekly sliding after her on his knees.
>
> "And I tell you I enjoy it! I tell you I feel no pain, but I actually enjoy it, my dear sir!" This he shouted out as he was being shaken by the hair, and once his forehead even struck the floor.

How can that man be explained? Certainly self-affirmation and the will to power can't explain such actions. 'He wants to avoid responsibility', you say? 'He wants debasement because it makes life easier'? 'Self-contempt is easy'? No, no, that won't do either. There's some fathomless masochistic undercurrent pulsing through his underworldly soul. –Dostoyevsky is unmatched in plumbing the depths of perversity.

February 26

I think Dostoyevsky is right: madness begins as a kind of intolerable feeling that you're blockaded from the citadel of rationality. Even the windows are shut: you can't peer in to get a glimpse of where you are relative to the cosmos (the external). After all, that's all that rationality is: a clear awareness of the relative positions of things. A depth of vision, a lucidity. Rational beings judge relative importance every instant of their lives—the importance of a state of mind as against another, the significance of a word vis-à-vis another, etc. They can look at the *whole* in one glance, see what's trivial and what's decisive, see *externality* (beyond the edges of things). They can look in from outside, as it were. This is precisely what

[1] When I write papers the one thought continually on my mind is "How can I lengthen it? How can I lengthen it?"

the insane can't do; they have an *idée fixe* (as it were), or they can't judge consequences and see *outside* themselves (if you will), or their vision is somehow obscured (but only as it were). Essentially they're enclosed within themselves, they're not objective. (It's significant that objectivity is often equated with rationality.) After his crime Raskolnikov keeps forgetting to take things into account, to look at the whole picture: he obsesses over his fleeting torments and forgets that the stolen goods are bulging out of a hole in the wall. What makes his experience so terrifying is that he *feels* he can no longer view the world objectively; he feels imprisoned (within his mental torments, within himself) and yet cannot see the walls of his cell—so he doesn't know to what extent he has lost his sanity (because, again, in order to be able to do so he'd have to cognize the totality, which is exactly what he *can't* do on account of his madness). So he feels insane because he knows he can't judge the relative importance of things, and he feels more insane because he can't judge the extent of his insanity (which is a result of his inability to see *anything* relatively, including the insanity)—so his madness is a vicious circle from which he knows he can't voluntarily escape (for *nothing* is certain, there's no Archimedes' point). Ironically, everything in his mind has become 'relative', free-floating, groundless—even as (and *because*) he can't clearly see relativeness. That's what insanity is: a retreat into oneself, an absolute and consuming relativity, a lack of certainty, perhaps an insight into reality (arising from the sudden intensity of experience).

Aha! I've inadvertently clarified an array of issues, a veritable spectrum! Now I know why strong emotions and emotional states of mind (like patriotism) are irrational, and that they're one step toward madness. I have a vague idea of how to define rationality. I know why geniuses, who so often are self-obsessed and uninterested in mundane reality, think of themselves as living on the fringes of madness. I know why I have such fear of relativism and such infatuation with certainty. I understand why some geniuses have no interest in the world and others are fascinated with it. (Their attitudes are opposite expressions of their same essential inwardness. The second type of genius is enthralled with something external to him *because* it's external.) I know why geniuses who *do* interest themselves in the world contribute so much to the study of it. (They either relate it to themselves or they observe it with the same intensity/passion with which they've come to observe themselves (or simply to live life). Not to mention the obvious fact of their higher intelligence.) I know how self-consciousness, which is awareness/knowledge of the unity of oneself, is related to rationality. (In most cases it's so intimately connected to rationality as to be the latter's precondition (because of its connection to a clear awareness of the whole and the parts of the whole), but in extreme manifestations it actually reaches beyond its partner (canceling it out) and undergoes a dialectical shift to insanity. It becomes pathological, shutting out the world (the all-encompassing totality, the true measure of rationality) as it concentrates on the micro-totality of the self. Raskolnikov's proto-insanity is an example.) I can even say that insanity is a half-return to an animal state. (You might not understand that proposition until I argue for it, which I'll do some other day.)

One of the reasons I tend to be quiet around people is that they more easily see *me* as annoying than they do *others*. I've had this feeling since middle school. When I act extrovertedly I'm ignored or I'm the target of odd looks, whereas when others do so they become more popular. I'm not sure why this is the case. Maybe it's because I'm seen as trying to fit into the crowd—so I come across as just a pathetic conformist who's not even witty. Maybe it's that my social presence has never been strong (a result partly of my skinniness and partly of my general introvertedness), which means that it's easy not to pay attention to me when I *am* outgoing. I.e., I'm not a true "other", a person whose "recognition" one desires. At any rate, I've learned the lesson well enough to conform to the role in which my peers prefer me. (Adults, on the other hand, seem to prefer me in the extroverted role, which is largely why I'm more comfortable around them.)

February 27

Today I crawled out of bed at 3:00. I'm a lazy bum.

The *Critique of Judgment* is rife with brilliant phenomenological analyses of aesthetic judgments.

Not one detail of our state of mind in admiring mountains or oceans escapes Kant's attention. However, I don't think his ideas are quite right. For one thing, his division of the mind into understanding, imagination and reason has an artificial and archaic flavor to it.

The summer after my first year of college was the most important summer of my life.

Whence derives our fascination with the grotesque and violent—with "sudden accidents" like Marmeladov's death? Why do they tend to inspire subtle pleasure? Does the explanation have something to do with our repressed animal origins?

I tell you, I try to appreciate life's magic as much as possible, but it's terribly hard! Life is nothing but a succession of miracles, but they slip by unnoticed. We build our homes on top of them and exile them from our minds. We forget about them because they're not practical. We need our own cozy cubby-holes in which to live, in which to be sheltered from the imponderable. I intend never to have a home for precisely that reason. I wish I could tap into my strength and funnel it, bypass all the manufactured red tape between me and my potential. I can feel my strength pining away from inactivity, atrophying irreversibly. I must harness it quickly! I need a rebirth! I need a paroxysm of inspiration! I need love!

....Raskolnikov is quite a character. I feel sympathy for him, though I suppose I wouldn't like him in person. Strangely enough, in spite of our differences, I can relate to him. I can see myself acting similarly.

February 28

I'm a bit irritated by my comical characteristics. From the bare fact that I was born at the end of the twentieth century, everything about me is comical. All my attempts at pathos are comical. My high self-esteem, my longing for love, my episodes of depression, my high ambitions, my inquisitiveness, my Faustianity, my friendships, my self-probing, my literary attempts—they're all comical! […] I'm being held captive by my own intelligence!

What I love about *Crime and Punishment* is that it reverses our ordinary value judgments. It raises a murderer and a whore on a pedestal and lowers a respectable businessman into the dirt. More provocatively, it's *right* in doing so—at least in the case of this particular murderer and this particular prostitute. Raskolnikov and Sonia have an instinct for life in spite of what their actions might suggest. Peter Petrovich, on the other hand, is out for base material gain and incapable of spiritual impulses. All he cares about are appearances—and, in fact, that's all that Napoleon cared about too. (See below.) The possibility of his salvation is eliminated from the beginning for the simple reason that he doesn't feel the need to be saved. He doesn't suffer, he doesn't doubt himself; he's shallow. Raskolnikov and Sonia endure wrenching psychic conflicts, self-contempt, despair—and they survive it all because of their faith and passion. (That is, their souls—and everyone else's—are what interest them most. They don't give a damn about appearances.) Sonia has a simple faith in God, and Raskolnikov has a subtle faith in himself and fate. They're both strong human beings who will appreciate salvation solely because they were baptized in fire. Dostoyevsky's point, perhaps, is that the only people worthy of salvation are those who desperately want it. Those who don't need it are ordinary. On pages 249-253 (of the Signet Classic edition) Raskolnikov lauds extraordinary men, claiming they have the "inner right" to allow their consciences to transgress obstacles in the execution of their ideas; but Dostoyevsky alters this judgment to state that those who transgress the accepted limits of what's right or healthy and then *suffer* for it and *then return* to their original state of abiding by their conscience's dictates—but on a higher level, not merely mechanical, a self-aware level in which they recognize the reasons for and the necessity of compassion and pity (='conscience')—these people[1] are the *most* extraordinary, more so than Napoleon and *much* more so than Peter Petrovich. But the label "extraordinary" is actually irrelevant; what's relevant is salvation. In fact, "extraordinary" is a product of delusion and hypocrisy: it's a prejudice seized upon by arrogant, brutal men to justify their

[1] Among whom is Sonia, because she's been degraded by her profession.

actions and hide their moral cowardice.

I haven't even finished reading Part 4, but I think my ideas have some validity. I don't know how to sort them out, though.

Incidentally, Dostoyevsky has a distinct fondness for melodrama.

March 1

[…]

What's that you say? "What's the function of Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment*?" Excellent question, and "quite, quite" relevant! I haven't finished the novel, but I think Svidrigailov represents the danger of Raskolnikov's ideas. He has no conscience and no shame, so he has the "right" to commit atrocities. Rodia would certainly disagree with that, for he introduces the notion of genius and the 'execution of ingenious ideas', but this is only a smudging of the issue. What's the measure of genius? Why, cruelty! The capacity to inflict suffering and not let it bother you! (Ambition? What about ambition? Bah! That's tacked onto the formula as an afterthought.) *L'Empereur* is an example. *Vive l'Empereur*! –Yes, of course, my friend, but only if he sacrifices *you*! Napoléon and Svidrigailov are birds of a feather. Birds of prey. The difference is that one got lucky—though not so much—and the other didn't. In any case, the point is that Svidrigailov represents the dark side, the ordinary genius (if you will).

But on page 473 his role changes. In the midst of his passion, quivering with lust, just when you think he's going to rape Dunia, he suddenly yields to his intellect! He crucifies himself and lets Dunia go (who had just been trying to kill him)! For a sensualist like himself this is indeed the ultimate sacrifice—and all on account of some flitting compassionate thought! 'Go quickly. Quickly, quickly, before I lose my strength!' You see, for a "genius" like him it requires strength to *care*, while it's *easy* to *sin*. Napoleon deserves no credit for his callousness, since that came naturally; he would have been admirable had he used his intellect to overcome his heartlessness, as Svidrigailov did. (Therefore another purpose of the scene is to show that the intellect need not always be the instrument of evil, as it was in Raskolnikov's case. And it disproves Svidrigailov's dictum that reason must be the instrument of passion.)

....Well, I may have been wrong about Svidrigailov. I suppose he is capable of actually *feeling* compassion rather than merely *thinking* it. His purpose in the story is not only to provide a few shocking hints of what Raskolnikov's nihilism can lead to, but also to suggest that a nihilist can overcome his "depravity" by conquering his own base egotistical impulses. He may remain a nihilist, but at least his actions and feelings (sometimes) indicate otherwise.

At this time of my life, for some inexplicable reason, I find it difficult to judge people. I just can't do it! Every judgment I make I don't believe. –A consequence of my perverted ideas, no doubt. Blasted philosophical perversion; it can drive a man insane.

Mindy and I went to a birthday party tonight for an international student. 'Twas mildly entertaining. I'm glad to be back here listening to Franz Liszt's transcription of Bach's Prelude and Fugue in A minor, BWV 643. (One day I'll hold that tempest in the palm of my hand.)

—Ah, how would Kant classify that smoldering piece of music? Is it beautiful or sublime? Its form may be beautiful, but what about its content? Is it agreeable? Most definitely, but it's more than that. It's positively disturbing. Can it be sublime? "The sublime is described thus: it is an object (of nature) *the presentation of which determines the mind to think of nature's inability to attain to an exhibition of ideas*" (p. 127). In other words, "No". Therefore it seems that Kant's theory of aesthetic judgments is inadequate. Beauty is a disinterested liking of form, agreeableness has a shallow ring to it, and sublimity is entirely inappropriate. If you're a Kantian, however, you'll say it's agreeable and I'm just being difficult. Maybe so. But I can't help thinking that "agreeable" is superficial, doesn't say enough, doesn't 'plumb the depths' of impassioned artistic interest. Besides, what does Kant have to say about tragedy? Is it, too, "agreeable"? Has he read Aristotle's treatise? Has he read Nietzsche??? ....Well, now that I've read up to page 140 I recognize that Kant would indeed label the Prelude and Fugue "sublime" (or rather, the state of mind it induces). For it causes an "affect of the vigorous kind (i.e., makes us conscious that we have forces to

overcome any resistance, i.e., makes us conscious of our *animus strenuus*)" (p. 133). On the other hand, his example is anger, which isn't very similar to the state of mind induced by the piece.

March 2

Today Sangeetha sent me a lovely e-mail entitled "I miss youuuuuuu". Here are some excerpts: "Today while sitting at the office, I suddenly missed you really badly. I can't think of anything that brought it on so suddenly. I was just feeling lonely in a room full of people. I hate it when that happens, don't you? You know what I realised, however often we fought and crap like that, I was never lonely when you were around. Does that make any sense to you? I don't know—ahh whatever. ....I now realise that you are the nicest elitist I know. There is this one guy at work who is such a horrible elitist. The only way he makes himself feel better is by putting other people down.... I hate cars and I am never going to learn how to drive. I wish you were to teach me. Hell I just wish you were here. I miss you. Now I am really sounding corny, but it's true!!" Yes, I felt good after reading that.

Kierkegaard, in your extravagant elegies on subjectivity—your nightingale songs which take such pleasure in "divinely squandering" words—you forget one thing: maybe knowledge of world history can enrich the task of becoming subjective. Objectivity and subjectivity aren't sequestered from each other by a grand canyon of the infinite; each enhances and elevates the other in their mutual interaction. –Anyway, I'm finally about to read Chapter II of Section II of Part II, which promises to be more fertile than Chapter I.

I seem to recall that one of the aspects of *Crime and Punishment* that I found most exciting when I read it at 13 was Raskolnikov's theory of the genius. Imagine that! The plot itself didn't stick with me, but the abstruse theory did—for seven years.

March 3

I wrote another worthless history paper, on the causes of the Soviet Union's demise. Tonight I went with Bruce and his friend to a club in New Haven called Toad's Place; we saw the blues guitarist Buddy Guy perform there. If you're an ignoramus like me you've never heard of him, but apparently Eric Clapton considers him the best guitarist in the world. The concert started off pretty well, but as time wore on Guy turned up the volume to deafening levels and ceased playing good music. He had a lot of charisma and a strong stage presence, but the performance was still mediocre. It couldn't compare to the two Billy Joel concerts I've seen (and the time I heard him give a talk in Providence, when I was in eighth grade), partly because of the style of music itself: the blues chord progression is so simple it bores me. 1-4-1-5-4-1. Over and over again. On the other hand, as I was listening to the concert I recalled how fun and easy it was for me to improvise over the blues. I grew nostalgic. I want to play the vibes again. Vibraphonists don't deserve the respect accorded other musicians—because the instrument is so damned *easy*—but they look cool when they play.

March 4

It doesn't follow from the fact that we're existing individuals continually in the process of becoming that there are no objective, 'abstract' truths that describe the ways in which we exist. Heck, the middle part of that sentence proves there *are* such truths. Propositions are self-expressions, but they aren't *only* self-expressions. (I may be misunderstanding Kierkegaard.)

Comment on pages 194-196 of the Princeton edition: the point is that the objective *attitude* precludes lunacy and the subjective doesn't. Objective truths may be the *idée fixe* of a lunatic, but the lunatic's *attitude*, his *standpoint*, is always more subjective than objective.

"Viewed abstractly, everything *is* and nothing becomes." Wrong or misleading.

> *When the question about truth is asked objectively, truth is reflected upon objectively as an object to which the knower relates himself. What is reflected upon is not the relation but that what he relates himself to is the truth, the true. If only that to which he relates himself is the truth, the true, then the subject is in the truth. When the question about truth is asked subjectively, the individual's relation is reflected upon subjectively. If only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth, even if he in this way were to relate himself to untruth.*
>
> Let us take the knowledge of God as an example. Objectively, what is reflected upon is that this is the true God; subjectively, that the individual relates himself to a something *in such a way* that his relation is in truth a God-relation. Now, on which side is the truth? Alas, must we not at this point resort to mediation and say: It is on neither side; it is in the mediation? Superbly stated, if only someone could say how an existing person goes about being in mediation, because to be in mediation is to be finished; to exist is to become. An existing person cannot be in two places at the same time, cannot be subject-object. When he is closest to being in two places at the same time, he is in passion; but passion is only momentary, and passion is the highest pitch of subjectivity (p. 199).

—Food for thought. Incidentally, what he writes at the end reminds me of what I wrote in August before my sophomore year began.

"If someone objectively inquires into immortality, and someone else stakes the passion of the infinite on the uncertainty—where, then, is there more truth, and who has more certainty? The one has once and for all entered upon an approximation that never ends, because the certainty of immortality is rooted in subjectivity; the other is immortal and therefore struggles by contending with the uncertainty" (p. 201). Huh?? What do we mean here by "immortality"? The conventional meaning is eternal life. How can someone be immortal simply by having passionate inwardness? For that is what Kierky says: "the other is immortal". He states quite clearly and objectively that the guy is immortal as he struggles with the uncertainty of whether he's immortal. There's something fishy about this whole business. First, Kierky seems to be using "immortality" in a way that doesn't have the slightest thing in common with our ordinary understanding of it, and second, he's explicitly stating something to be an objective essential truth even as he declares that we can never know if it is! In fact, he says it's *because* we can never be certain of it that it's certainly true! What the hell is going on?! He thinks he's being profound, but he's really just losing himself in muddles and word-twisting. He's a Hegel clone, a willful obscurantist. Put more precisely, he appears to be hopping in and out of the objective standpoint he so deplores.[1]

March 5

Something I've noticed about girls is that they're quite clever. Far more than most guys. The beautiful ones, at least, usually know how to escape gracefully from an uncomfortable situation; they're adept at sending subtle signals to guys; they often go to great lengths to avoid confrontations. With a word or a look they can shatter you, show you who's in control.

I finished *Crime and Punishment*. In class today it occurred to me that the real reason why Raskolnikov stakes everything on the extraordinary man is that he considers no one else to be a *person* in the truest sense. Everyone else is a cog in the machine, a being that is determined more by its environment and its *nature* than by its will. Only geniuses are autonomous, real individuals. (I don't agree, of course.)

I'm skeptical about the last paragraph of the January 8th entry. I'm not sure that humans will continue to evolve biologically, because in the past century we've overcome the law of natural selection—

[1] Why does he do this? Because it's unavoidable! Because there's no leap between the subjective and the objective! They mesh and meld together.

as Piero and Alberto Angela state in *The Extraordinary Story of Human Origins*. I haven't read that book yet, but its last page caught my eye. I found it inspiring and vaguely Hegelian:

> One of the things that can be observed throughout the story of human development is the gradual increase in intelligence: from bacteria, to fish, to primates, this process has been relentless. The end result, the human brain, is the most complex and sophisticated object known today.
>
> The human brain, composed of atoms emitted during the explosion of the supernovas, is basically a piece of universe that can look back on its history, ponder itself, and start to direct its own future.
>
> This nucleus of intelligence has continued to develop by creating networks and supernetworks with other brains, that is, through culture. And now it is starting to spread to matter, for example, by putting together molecules of silicon and other minerals to build intelligent machines. Some of these intelligent machines (although still very primitive) are already leaving the solar system to travel through interplanetary space.
>
> Furthermore, this brain is learning to "assemble" other molecules—those that make up the genetic code—in order to modify and (perhaps) construct new forms of intelligence: biological, bio-electronic, or other forms as yet unknown.
>
> In other words, a very slow process that took 15 or 20 billion years has produced intelligent organisms that are now able to transfer new kinds of intelligence to matter rapidly, in a continuing and unending spiral. This fantastic ability to spread to other matter may accelerate in the next hundred, thousand, million, or billion years.
>
> Where will it lead?
>
> A science fiction writer might imagine an "all intelligent" universe, a thinking superentity, like a huge superbrain. But let's stop there. These fantasies could lead us off course. Certainly that prospect would bring some sense into the long and slow evolution of intelligence. But it would also have to be reconciled with the Second Principle of Thermodynamics, which calls for the progressive degradation (sigh!) of the energy potential of the universe and, therefore, calls for the death of all systems that consume energy, including intelligence. But then again, our present knowledge may be updated in this field, too.

I think it will be. The Second Law of Thermodynamics has always struck me as a somewhat unscientific, unsatisfactory hypothesis.

The implications of human evolution stupefy me. *At last*, through us, nature will cease to evolve blindly; it will control its own evolution! That is, we *will* continue to evolve biologically, but in a *planned* way. We are nature molding nature. We're the chosen instrument for nature's self-realization a million years from now, when we learn to govern the universe. One day we'll understand every secret of the universe, and eventually we'll apply this knowledge practically. By then we'll have learned how to construct humans of genius, who will themselves contribute invaluably to the process of attaining control over nature, and the pace of all kinds of evolution will quicken exponentially. In millennia we'll colonize planets, learn how to travel almost at the speed of light, maybe learn how to teletransport. In the end we'll become God.

But I'm skeptical about the value of such developments. I realize that, short of mankind's collective suicide, there's no way to prevent them from happening, but they remind me of a dystopia. What will be the fate of culture and *mystery*? What Dostoysevsky wrote in *Notes from the Underground* about humanity's inevitable will to freedom, even at the price of self-delusion, is true, but freedom might be the *only* vestige of magic. How depressing!

March 6

The relatively long footnote I wrote yesterday [which I deleted] was probably wrong. It's eminently

possible that evolution has been thoroughly arbitrary in spite of appearances to the contrary. (It's dangerously easy to look back on history and see it as following a preordained path. Some of the greatest thinkers have fallen into this trap.) Eventually we'll become extinct; we'll never be masters of the universe. Besides, the "argument from design" for God's existence has been put forward hundreds of times,[1] and it's by no means *remotely* conclusive. Even if we couldn't conceive of other explanations, which we can, this wouldn't prove that there *were* no other explanations.

[…]

Returning to the subject of the previous paragraph, I must admit that I still have trouble believing that random variations in genes produced such developments as the following: "Human infants, who need to be able both to breathe and to swallow during long bouts of suckling, are born with the primitive mammalian vocal tract anatomy. The larynx only later descends to the low position in the throat, beginning at about two years of age [and it is this that makes possible speech]" (Ian Tattersall, *Becoming Human*, p. 167). Could random variation have created such perfect functional adaptability? Even if it could, how did it spread through the entire human species? Surely it's not that the descendants of a few lucky individuals with genetic mutations—which just so happened to be dominant alleles that continually reappeared—were the only ones who survived the long process of evolution?! Surely it's not that hominids without descended larynxes lost the evolutionary battle—because they didn't have descended larynxes?! In fact, I can't think of a more preposterous hypothesis than that *random variation*, together with natural selection, is the prime mover of evolution.[2]

March 7

Yesterday I may have been unjustifiably harsh on Darwinism. The truth is that I can't think of a theory that better explains the facts. Lamarckism is surely false, and Orthogenesis (which postulates an inherent tendency in organisms to evolve in a specific direction, independent of environmental adaptability) doesn't seem persuasive. It's too teleological.

Jorge Luis Borges has some screwy ideas on time. (See "A New Refutation of Time", most of which is confused.) They're wrong, but they've re-stimulated my interest in that useless topic. Subjective and objective time aren't clearly delineated. Subjective time is consciousness (not merely *self*-consciousness[3]); it applies to every animal, for it is intuition of experience; it's relative to each individual, so that no two individuals are ever in the same subjective moment (=no two beings have the same consciousness); it's seamless, indivisible, and in this respect 'infinite'—except when interrupted by unconsciousness (sleep), which however doesn't make a difference subjectively, only 'objectively'.[4] Humans are the only animals clearly aware of objective time, though perhaps apes can dimly perceive it. It comes with self-consciousness. Maybe it doesn't exist outside self-consciousness—in which case it wouldn't be *truly* "objective"—but I'm inclined to think it does. (Although, admittedly, I can't conceive of the *form* in which it would do so.) Anyhow, what's important is that subjective and objective time get

[1] Hume's *Dialogues on Natural Religion* is one example.

[2] The problem with scientists is that they rarely question their basic assumptions. If they did, they'd realize how many flaws there are in the mechanistic, Malthusian Darwinian hypothesis. (Is "competition for resources" supposed to explain unremitting creative increases in complexity and intelligence?? My dad's friend Rich Pollak believes, with some justification, that such advances require a kind of "surplus energy" that has no place in Darwinism. Maybe it's surplus that explains evolution, not want.)

[3] I'll get to self-consciousness in a moment.

[4] My point is that for itself subjective time is seamless, but for an objective, self-conscious being that can abstract from pure consciousness and consider the matter from the viewpoint of self-conscious memory (i.e., of objective knowledge), subjective time is, a posteriori, seen to have breaks in it. These breaks exist only on a level abstracted from (or more considered and 'rational' than the immediacy of) experience, because they exist only when experience doesn't. (So we become aware of them after experience, when reflecting on it.) In short, experientially, subjective time is indivisible.

muddled together in self-consciousness. From one perspective, no one shares this moment with me; from another perspective, *everyone* shares this moment with me. The second perspective isn't possible without presupposing self-consciousness, but the first *is* possible (because it doesn't presuppose a real awareness of others). Objective time is what we're counting when we count to 10; theoretically it ought to be infinitely divisible, but in actuality it can't be. What makes it seem as though it *should* be infinitely divisible is that we apply our knowledge of the divisibility of objective, countable time to the infinitude of the subjective moment, thereby conflating the two. We think, "I know it's possible to count discrete units of time; but from my inner perception it's obvious that time is so continuous that there are always units between the discrete units I count. Therefore, time must be infinitely divisible." This reasoning, as I said, is based on a conflation of the objective and the subjective. The objective is just as divisible as we choose to make it; the subjective can't be divided at all. Self-consciousness is necessary for the former because it (that is, objective time) is based on relating ourselves to something else—which can even be *ourselves*, since we are our own other. But what *is* objective time? Is it a relation? One thing's for sure: it's an abstraction. It doesn't concretely *exist*, as its subjective counterpart does.[1]

What role does memory have to play in this scheme? Memory isn't necessary for subjective time, which exists only in the moment and doesn't presuppose self-awareness. Even a fish, which has scarcely any memory at all, lives in subjective time. But it *is* necessary for objective time; and to explain why, I have to inform you of a modification I've just made in my idea of self-consciousness: memory, be it of the previous instant or of the past ten years,[2] is necessary for self-consciousness. I used to think not because self-consciousness exists purely in the *moment*, in every moment; but now it seems intuitively obvious that memory is fundamental. An inane thought-experiment can establish this. Suppose a man is in a coma from infancy to the age of thirty; suddenly he wakes up. Will he be even remotely self-aware the first moment of consciousness? Certainly not. In any event, the point is that because memory is necessary for self-consciousness, it's necessary for objective time. (We don't even need that logical link to establish the connection, for how could it be otherwise?) The logical and chronological orders of the four factors are: subjective time, memory, self-consciousness, objective time. The latter two are essentially simultaneous. (By the way, don't think that memory is anything more than a *necessary* condition of self-consciousness.)

Incidentally, humans can (probably) never experience subjective time the way animals do. For them it's intensely immediate, as solid and impenetrable as a brick; for us it has an aura of transience and nothingness—a consequence of the overwhelming presence of *self*-consciousness at the expense of 'pure' [more primitive] *consciousness*. However, it mustn't be thought that consciousness is subjective time and self-consciousness is objective time; rather, self-consciousness includes both the subjective and the objective. It *is* the subjective, but it's *dominated* by the objective. Stated less cryptically, in humans the subjective element of time includes awareness of the objective; i.e., the subjective is aware of itself (and this automatically 'posits' the objective). So the subjective is the only really existing aspect of time, but an important part of it is awareness of the objective. And the objective is, somehow, an abstraction or a relation, an emptiness, a *void*. Hence the subjective feels ephemeral.

See how it all ties together in a circle? That's a sure sign of a perceptive theory.

March 10

Spring vacation. I'm reading the Preface to Hegel's *Phenomenology* and the *Divine Comedy*. I started the latter last night as a respite from philosophical drudgery. The archaic translation by Henry Cary is magnificent; the poem itself is easy to read.

Last night I dreamed of Sangeetha. Now I miss her more than ever. Never in my life have I come

[1] Recall my belief that self-consciousness doesn't "concretely exist" in the way that consciousness does. It is but a modality of consciousness.

[2] Whether of one or of the other depends on what kind of self-consciousness we're talking about. Immediate self-consciousness, consciousness of the past self, consciousness of the body, etc.

close to missing anyone as much as I do her. […]

March 11

In a few months I'll have to apply to graduate schools. I'll have to take the GRE. I'll have to go through the whole shit all over again. How can college have sped past so quickly and cruelly? It seems like it never happened, like it was a dream. It doesn't exist and never has. Even had I achieved feats of immortality and genius, I would feel this same sense of fleetingness. –If I'm not careful, I'll be polished in the manufactured tumbler that smooths one's rough edges. I must retain my individuality at all costs! I must not cravenly submit to time! I'd rather be abject than ordinary.

The great paradox from which I cannot extricate myself, the paradox that gives rise to all the confusions besetting the idea of meaning,[1] is that words are the meaning of intuitions and intuitions give words their meaning. On the other hand, maybe it's paradoxical because it's sloppily expressed.

I've decided to change the subject of my thesis. My earlier idea required too much erudition. Instead I'm going to discuss time, the self and—probably—truth. These are my main obsessions, and I have more experience with them. Nevertheless, there's a great deal I have yet to read; therefore I began *Being and Nothingness* tonight. The first section of its introduction was woefully inadequate: Sartre naïvely subscribes to phenomenalism without considering counterarguments. He's wrong to reject the concept of potency. He hasn't indicated an awareness of the glaring incompatibility between phenomenalism and science.

March 12

It seems to me that philosophers can either believe there are things in themselves [i.e., mind-external things] or be phenomenalists. There's no compromise. Logical word-twisting is a vain pseudo-outlet for pseudo-philosophers; it adds nothing of substance to the debate.

The song "Light as the Breeze", sung by Billy Joel on his Greatest Hits album, is remarkable. It's intensely poetic and melancholy. It seems to grow out of an exhaustion with life—a terrible all-knowing sadness—but it exalts love as the final resting-place of the soul. When all else fails, we have the pure serenity of Woman to revitalize us. It is Woman that is our last buttress and our caress, our justification and our object of faith. Woman is what's left of God.

March 14

I've read most of a book by Magda King called *Heidegger's Philosophy*. At first I was impressed with Heidegger's thought, but now much of it seems like empty gibberish. I won't even take the time to critique it. I admit that some of his ideas seem profound, but on the whole he doesn't have a great deal to offer me. Neither does Sartre. In fact, there's a risk in reading books by those two thinkers: I might get distracted from my own original insights. I might approach problems with a subtle bias toward their perspectives, thereby undermining my own intuitive abilities. If I am who I think I am, I should be able to arrive at truths from my own independent introspection, severed from all existentialist umbilical cords.

What are the basic reasons for the human interest in dramatic situations? Why do people love to watch sleazy talk shows and dating games? The explanations I can think of are superficial.

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[1] And perhaps, indirectly, most of the confusions in logic.

March 15

"'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'—that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

I agree. There's an ineffable symmetry and perfection in truth. There's nothing inessential or ornamental; everything is integral to the whole, all 'parts' being organically intertwined. There can be no flaws in truth, although of course the object of which it is true may be flawed. Truth just *is*; and when it's existential truth, with which Hegel, Kant, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre were occupied, it has all the necessary qualities of beauty.

The converse is the case as well: beauty is truth. Conventional beauty like nature, music, poetry, love and the womanly figure gives life its meaning. It is our own humble human truth. It is the one thing that makes life bearable and joyful; it is that which inspires man to realize himself and understand himself. Were it not for beauty I'd have little or no reason to live.

Another (?) expression of Keats' poetic equation is that truth is "agreeable" and ennobling, while beauty is life's meaning (pinnacle) and inspiration. It isn't a coincidence that beauty and existential truth imply each other: they both exalt the human being and elevate his vision. I won't even argue for that: it's obviously true.

[…]

March 17

I may have already mentioned my admiration of *The Truman Show*. The movie is incomparable. I could write a multi-volume essay on its philosophical, psychological, social and moral themes. It could be the starting-point of a semester-long course investigating the history of, and relations between, its diverse critiques of the modern world. 'Which critiques are most fundamental? What are the causes and symptoms of the maladies it diagnoses? What are its proposed remedies? Summarize its symbolism. What are the adverse and beneficial qualities of extreme self-consciousness (social and personal)?' Etc., etc. The movie asks whether sincerity is still possible in this spectating, cynical, bored, Other-obsessed age, and it answers with a resounding Yes! When Christof says in the beginning that the public is bored with actors, he's referring not to professionals but to the spirit of the time. He's referring to our pathological desire for an audience and, contrariwise, our thirst for unaffected passion in life, for *meaning*, for an outlet from our stale, jaded selves. We need *spontaneity*, the forsaken Godhead of genuine living. This is what Truman represents; he is the side of us, rapidly fading, that *lives* in the full sense. Christof is the dominant melodramatic and manipulative 'evil genius' in all of us[1]—the poison which, ironically, attempts to concoct its own antidote. In its morbid mania to overcome itself, all ethics is ignored as a superfluity: the demon has its own standard of morality—its compulsion toward self-transcendence. But sadly, even this compulsion is rooted not only in the demon's self-dissatisfaction but in its desire for Other-recognition.

I could go on and on, but I don't have the discipline or time to order my thoughts. I'll add only a few comments relating to the movie's end. Acute self-consciousness (Christof), which is our demon and evil genius, our satanic God,[2] thinks it can fathom the depths of the psyche and thereby make predictions, but it's wrong. Humans are fickle, inscrutable beings; and this is their saving grace. It is what makes sincerity possible—or at least what ensures the eternal *possibility* of sincerity. It can be the only source of our redemption. Thus, in a quintessential dialectical magic trick, the precipitant of our fall is indirectly the means of our redemption. For it is self-consciousness which insists that we can never know ourselves! (Let's pray that mankind *never* understands itself.)

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[1] Or at least those of us who keep pace with the march of history.

[2] In the end, Christof is a satire on God—a gauntlet thrown down at God's feet. Not even God understands humanity, the species capable of spontaneity. And when Truman says, "In case I don't see you, good afternoon, good evening and good night", he (mankind) leaves God behind. He denies the need for God (this vain Being who has created him for His own entertainment) and sets out on his own.

Of course, there are many more obvious themes in the movie; but in proportion to their obviousness they're less interesting. (Example: at the end, Truman touches the sky. Man can touch the sky. The sky's the limit. Etc.)

March 19

I read *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which wasn't bad. I wouldn't say it's truly great literature, but it's touching. I felt sorry for the hero, though occasionally I doubted that there wasn't exceptional exaggeration in his descriptions. Extravagant writing is undesirable mainly because it's less-than-honest, unsophisticated and it distances the reader from the text. Nevertheless, when the feelings are genuine I can forgive their "sentimental" self-expression.

It's easy to overlook the radicalness of Hegel's break with the past. Earlier philosophy had been interested only in a fixed absolute truth divorced from the conditions of consciousness and social development. It had said, "I am right; all others are wrong!" *Hegel's* truth, on the other hand, *was* development; every false philosophy partook of truth by virtue of existing. Hegel didn't even stop to consider the truth of philosophies on their own merits; his focus was infinitely broader than theirs, so he was incapable of operating on their level. His system was in fact a translation of history into philosophy. His approach was even more similar to Marx's than is usually realized: he not only recognized the fact of dialectical development, but he took it as axiomatic that philosophies are nothing but expressions of temporary stages of consciousness, mere parts of a whole which (parts) cannot, by Hegel's definition, be true in isolation from history and the rest of reality. That is, for Hegel as well as Marx it's axiomatic that all previous philosophies are wrong both on their own terms (since they pretend to describe reality) and because they approach the issue in a spirit contrary to the way it should be approached. (It has to be axiomatic because in choosing a 'different' reality to describe, Hegel and Marx practically eliminate their ability to argue 'on the same level' as their predecessors.) The difference between them and Kierkegaard is that K. carried some implications of their position to their logical conclusion, viz. that everything objective is false. For in critiquing other philosophies as 'mere' expressions of a moment in existential/historical development (as results of limited knowledge, etc.), they were tacitly exposing their own philosophies to the same criticism. Maybe Hegel would retort that his system is 'grounded in' Absolute Knowledge, but this is a specious defense.[1] Kierkegaard applied Hegel and Marx's revolutionary approach, which concentrated on existence rather than abstract, objective, static truth, more consistently than they did, thus showing its untenability. (Hume apparently did something similar for Locke.) The only solution can be a compromise between the extreme represented by Spinoza and the extreme represented by Kierkegaard. But what does it involve??

Consciousness bereft of self-consciousness[2] is similar to dream-consciousness, though more concrete.

March 20

Truth expressed in language is forced to be static by the nature of the medium. That's the source of Hegel's inconsistency. If it's static it's objective and 'finished', which is both against the spirit of Hegelianism—because Hegel is a confused Kierkegaardian—and opens it up to its criticisms of other systems. ....But maybe I'm engaging in those sophistries I mentioned many weeks ago. In fact, I undoubtedly am, in that Hegel does *substantively* recognize development while his opponents don't. (The implication is that it's not his fault that the form of communication is inconsistent with the content of his

[1] Marx might accept the criticism and reply that objective truth isn't his goal; conforming to historical laws is. But this is an awkward position: with one hand he offers objective truth and with the other he snatches it away.

[2] [In other words, animal consciousness.]

ideas. Content should occupy us, not form.) But I'm *not* insofar as Hegel's belief in the omnipresence of spirit implies that propositions are an existing thing, a part of existence (of "spiritual substance"),[1] and an existent can't be objectively 'true'. So Hegel's system rules out objective truth and leaves room only for subjective truth. (Of course, this subjective truth supposedly isn't of an individual but of spirit. And it has nothing to do with passion but rather with the 'correspondence of spirit with itself'—which I consider to be a misleading or meaningless idea.) Anyhow, we necessarily look upon propositions objectively, in fact as ideas that can *in themselves* be false or true, so Hegel is wrong. (I think spirit is meaningful only as it applies to humans, not as a reified being that exists over and above us, so I consider Hegel's inevitable defense against the preceding sentence meaningless.)

Ah, shit. I don't know what the hell I'm saying. I've been thinking for four hours and haven't got anywhere. I'm not sure of anything now.

March 21

I'm having unprecedented difficulty understanding and criticizing the foundations of Hegel's system. Part of the problem is that I've read only half of the Preface. An intolerable cacophony of thoughts is assaulting me.

I might as well outline the mundane events of my life at home. For a week I've been completing summer music-camp applications; I'm going to be a counselor. Two days ago I got a duplicate driver's license and went to an eye-doctor, who said in no uncertain terms that I need glasses. That's fine with me: Sangeetha thinks I'll look sexy in them. Besides, it would be nice to see clearly.

Saturday, March 23

I'm reading a little book called *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, by Wolff, Marcuse and Moore, Jr. It addresses modern American political theory; i.e., for me it serves as a vacation from thought. The real purpose of my reading it is to get ideas for my 30-page government paper due in seven weeks.

March 28

Here's what is bothering me. I don't understand how reality can be *anything* "in itself". (I mean "in itself" not necessarily in the Kantian sense but in the way we all presuppose when deciding upon the truth-value of a claim—which is precisely why my doubt is contradictory and absurd.) How can there be a way that reality *really* is? Is time *in fact* both subjective and objective?—truth *in itself* developmental and never finished?—the economy *really* determinant of culture? No! Nothing is anything outside of our interpretations! Not only have we no 'direct access to reality'; not only must we subjectively interpret it: in fact, truth *cannot apply* to it. By the nature of the case it cannot. Truth is a human invention, a caprice spun in our ethereal self-conscious world. It has no relation whatever to anything outside of our self-consciousness and the objects in our self-consciousness. How could it? By analyzing and describing reality we appropriate it and thereby change it.

But that can't be right. How could it? For example, the world outside of our consciousness (i.e., of our interpretations)—the objective world, the world to which statements such as "the self is self-consciousness" apply[2]—is either somehow 'differentiated' or it's not. Right?

I don't know. Let me begin from a different angle. Plato's allegory of the cave is a striking

[1] That position is actually nonsensical.

[2] Even if the proposition applies to self-consciousness, we believe it to be true outside of our own self-consciousness. Its form is objective, so it posits objective truth.

expression of what I'm trying to say. Every philosophical and scientific truth—indeed, *every proposition*—is indirect and an approximation, a shadow cast by the self and the historical moment in which it exists. It's an expression of a particular point in 'existential' development. Even everything I'm saying right now applies to my critique—which is unnerving, because it means I'm doing what I accused Marx of doing: offering truth and snatching it away at the same time. But in my intuitive understanding that philosophy is circular, I see that as corroborating rather than opposing my argument. But am I saying only that truth is never absolute?—that there's always an element of uncertainty? [Those statements aren't equivalent!]

I don't know. Who gives a shit?

March 29

I just sent a philosophy professor an email to convince him to be my thesis advisor. I'll include an excerpt here because it addresses the overall conception of my theory.

> Basically I want to define the self and outline its characteristics. This will necessitate that I address the problem of self-continuity, which means I'll have to discuss time. Very briefly, I want to argue that the self—the active self, the "I", not the "personality", which is only a sum of qualities that *apply* to the self—is self-consciousness. I.e., consciousness of consciousness. It's not a substance and it "acts" only insofar as it is *aware*. It's responsible for "a person's" actions and thoughts only to the extent that it's aware of them and 'expects' them[1] and accepts them as its own. To explain why it does this I introduce the notion of the objective self, which is a hodgepodge of things less subjective than self-consciousness: the body, the personality, the subconscious, bodily desires, emotions, thoughts, the past self, the future self, etc. All these things are seen by self-consciousness as its own, for in early childhood it is compelled to 'attach' itself to them (because it learns from experience that it's integrally connected to them). However, in asserting that the objective self includes the past and future selves I'm presupposing self-continuity. (Incidentally, the subjective and objective selves are *fused together* in the "past and future" selves, for self-consciousness doesn't distinguish between them when projecting itself into the past and future.) At this point I introduce my division of time into a subjective and objective aspect. The subjective is the private moment inaccessible to anyone but the individual himself. It is the 'framework' in which a being experiences life (the 'mode' of experience); therefore, for humans it is essentially self-consciousness (because that's what makes our distinctively human experience possible). However, by stating it that way I'm being misleading, for there are degrees of self-consciousness corresponding to the many situations in which a person can find himself. But since I believe there is always a slight residue of self-consciousness in even the most "other-oriented" situation, it's convenient and not wholly wrong to say that the human 'mode' of being is self-consciousness. Anyway, the subjective aspect of time is entirely relative to each person and not at all divisible. It is, to put it obscurely, constant and continuous. The objective, on the other hand, is what we count and divide; it is that which 'passes'. They're both inner senses, but the first corresponds to the purely experiential, immediate part of our consciousness, and the second to the objective orientation of self-consciousness (that is, to its self-abstracting, self-aware function). […]

March 30

[…] I've read part 1 of Robert Paul Wolff's *In Defense of Anarchism*. I agree with Wolff that

[1] [By "expects them" I meant that whenever a person does something—for instance, a bodily movement—in the instant in which he is about to do it he 'expects' that it will happen. He anticipates it, and only insofar as he anticipates it is it 'his' act. This is all that intentionality, as applied to physical actions, really is. It isn't causation; it's anticipation.]

political philosophy is a fraud and that anarchism is the most sensible position, but not for the reasons he gives. I'm inclined to disagree with the claim that we have a moral obligation to be autonomous whenever possible;—or, more precisely, I don't like the Kantian, moralistic phrasing of the statement. If it's removed from the domain of morality—i.e., stated nonmorally—then I'm more likely to agree with it.

April 1

The circularity of epistemology, which, as you know, has been bothering me, really isn't worth losing sleep over. (Believe me: I've lost plenty of sleep over it.) Essentially it means only that certainty is never possible. But who cares? A preoccupation with certainty is pathological, *sickly* and confused. How were we to measure certainty in the first place? How *could* we have? We can't rely on a feeling of absolute conviction, because it is the *object* of 'certainty' that determines truth, not a state of mind that accompanies the judgment. (By "certainty" I mean the objective kind, the kind that refers to an object, not Kierkegaard's "subjective truth"—which in any case has nothing to do with "certainty" properly so-called.) And we can't rely on our experience of the object (which means we can't rely on the object itself), because experience is, after all, subject to doubts, ambiguities, improvements, and so on. As I've said all along, the best a person can do is to take account of as many positions (=propositions+intuitions) as he can think of, and thereby to contribute to the Faustian evolution of truth.

By the way, I still think that the possibility of a truest system is logically necessitated by the nature of language and its abstraction from reality, but this system is in the same awkward situation as is infinity. They're both necessary, but they can never be completed.

April 2

The Melancholic

Forlorn, the black pitch swallows me,
Engulfs me, miserly.
Alone, I am its company;
I share its misery.

It grips me, hugs me, smothers me,
As, terrified, I flee;
It lulls me, fondles, kisses me:
I yield willingly.

This cool breeze of deathly night
Blows sightless shadows nigh:
They muffle me, stifle the light;
My glowing embers die.

The pitch as black as dark midnight
Seeps into my grey mind;
United, these two lonesome wights
Together, as one, shine:

I am nighttide, blackness am I;
I give the moon her sheen:
Were 't not for me, her gleam divine

Would seem common and mean.

I am the gloom, the needed grief,
I am the darker side;
I am the one we like to hide,
Happiness's relief.

Eternally from death's demesne
I rule the universe.
I am its star, its self, its curse—
Its pleasurable pain.

***

Forlorn, the black pitch swallows me
Cannibalistically.
Alone, I am its company;
It and I are—*Me.*

April 3

These are hard times. I'm still unsure of my identity. I'm insecure. I feel burdened all the time. It's upsetting that I can tolerate life only by basking in the thought of my potential greatness. All my social disappointments, my frequent boredom, my philosophical doubts and obsessions, my dislike of the modern world, my knowledge of Meaninglessness, my contradictory and disturbing awareness of basic human equality—all this is offset by my naïve faith in the future and my hope that I'll exalt myself. This hope is sacrilegious to every rational neuron in my brain, but it overpowers reason because I'm not a rational being. Even if I wanted to I couldn't renounce it. […]

April 5

This is one of those rare special occasions when I bring out the big guns—when I commune with God: when I listen to the Ninth Symphony. I'm in a grandiloquent mood. Things are falling into place. I'm fitting together the jigsaw puzzle of my world. I spent the last hour at the gym, pumping iron. Felt *tight, manly, Davidian*. Hitherto I've been too lazy to lift weights (except in my room), but from now on I'm doing it every other day. My self-confidence will increase, my attitude toward life will improve, my boredom will wither on the vine, my posture will straighten.... No longer will I be only a thinker; I'll be a proto-athlete as well. Maybe I'll attract females. [Ha. Good luck with that.] I'll get involved in organizations and clubs. I'll *seize the day*—all because of my higher self-confidence! If only the semester weren't almost over!!

Ryan and Andy are interested in my joining them for housing next year, so I won't be alone in a house with people I don't know. - Tonight I'm going to a party. - I've thought of a good topic for my government paper. - I was a central part of two fun debates in class today. (I successfully defended Marx and attacked gender-based theories of history.) - I haven't obsessed over philosophy for *days*.

I'm in a dreamy mood. The Arietta is lulling me, rocking me to sleep. The passage in which time stops, in which bass and treble converse in whispers, is breathing into my ears.

Aphorism 276 of *The Gay Science*: Why does Nietzsche want so much to be only a Yes-sayer? Mediocrity and ugliness that are unnecessary should be attacked and destroyed. If that doesn't work, *then*

they should be ignored—but not before. Isn't it impossible to love fate for its own sake? What would such love mean? It would be a love of the ugly only inasmuch as one *abstracted* from the ugly, which then wouldn't be loving the ugly! It would be a love of the world in abstraction from the world (*especially* in abstraction from the mediocre in the world). Any way you look at it, *amor fati* is either not feasible or not desirable.

April 6

When I went home in March I found the screenwriting CD, so I edited the script. I then applied to more agencies, and one has sent me a contract offer. This agency isn't trying to scam me like the last one; it's more professional. I've sent the contract to Mom and Dad for approval.

Went to the weight room again.

April 7

I just finished *Madame Bovary*, a shockingly tragic novel. Maybe *blatantly* and *obnoxiously* are more accurate. At the end of the novel the world ends and the forces of darkness triumph. Even the innocent little daughter is forced to work in a factory! What a disillusioned and bitter man Flaubert must have been! He wrote gorgeously, though.

Damn it all, I'm dehydrating into a dustcloud! I understand Madame Bovary all too well.

(What's most peculiar about me is that my distinctive identity is my lack of a distinctive identity. I can understand—and *be*—everyone.)

April 8

I'm having difficulty coming to grips with the ideas of the noble person and the noble action. The more 'self-aware' an action is, the less noble it can be. A spontaneous, dumb offering of charity is noble; a self-conscious offering can be a whole variety of things, least likely of which is noble. It has been corrupted, it's no longer purely from the goodness of the heart. Charles' kind actions are noble; Emma's are ambiguous at best, even when they're the *same actions!* Therefore Emma isn't "noble" because she was cursed with intelligence, while Charles is because he was blessed with stupidity. –That may be an oversimplification. I suppose that an intelligent, self-aware person can have pure motives. But the point is the same: one's motives, over which one has very little control (because they're based on one's character), should be *simple* in order for an action to be noble. Therefore it's difficult for us sophisticated people to be noble! How unfair is that!

Went to the weight room again. For the first time in my life I have a muscular body. I feel like I'm finally entering a community of equals—a *human* community, in which I am *self-confident*. It's grand.

Kierkegaard is right that we sometimes judge a true proposition to be false when a particular person says it (202). That is, we feel sure the person understands it incorrectly, so what *he* means is wrong even though the proposition *can* be true. This implies that the meaning isn't contained only in the words; it's contained also in the intuition, or the intention. (Again, I'm trying to compromise between objectivity and subjectivity.)

April 17

Here's the rough outline of my government paper:

I. Introduction. Statement of the question: "Is political philosophy an example of 'false consciousness' in the Wrightist-Marxist sense?"
II. Definitions.
A. *Political philosophy*: the normative attempt either to justify/criticize a political system or to outline an ideal one.
B. *Ideology*: a chosen set of normative, legal, economic, social and political principles integral to the organization and consciousness of a collective (and large) social entity. The principles need not be explicit (though in the modern world they usually are)—and not every member of the entity need be aware of them—because they can be inferred from the institutions and consciousness of the 'body' in question. They need not be consistent or coherent either. Not every relevant social entity has an ideology. (Serfs in the 12th century did not, though the society as a whole did.)
C. *Collective consciousness*: the general ideas and attitudes of most of the members of a social entity (and not necessarily of the entity *in abstracto*—though such may be the case because usually the abstract 'body's' dispositions result from those of the individuals who compose it). It includes the ideology but is not limited to it. For example, cynicism is part of America's collective consciousness but not of its ideology.
D. *False consciousness*: unawareness of one's true relation—and the relation of one's beliefs—to one's psychological, social and biological 'determinants'. This definition presupposes, what I consider obvious, that social conditions, psychology and biology are the major immediate causal forces with regard to who we are and what are our beliefs. (It applies not only to individuals but to collective social groups.)
E. *Freedom*: self-control.
III. Preliminary critique of moral and nonmoral values 'on their own terms', i.e., from within the perspective of false consciousness. (The transition to morality is implied in the definition of political philosophy.)
A. Classification of values into three divisions, the first two of which are conventionally assumed to be "morality".
1. Values that it is obligatory to follow under all conditions because they are intrinsically right. They are categorical imperatives.
2. Values that ought to be adhered to under most circumstances because they are considered "good". Instead of being intrinsically right, they have *nonmoral* justifications *external* to them.
3. Nonmoral values, such as pleasure and happiness. These are supposed to be distinguished by not containing the imperative "ought", but in fact there is no clear division between (2) and (3).
B. Demonstration of the impossibility of (1).
1. To be inherently right they must be *necessary* and *self-evident*. However, such transparency is impossible—or irrelevant—in this case because of the fact of freedom. (This fact is not only immediately evident from our inner perception of consciousness, but is actually a presupposition of morality. For morality implies responsibility, and responsibility implies freedom.) Freedom is the basic datum of experience, the foundation of all states of mind, the fundamental quality of self-consciousness. No conceptual distinctions or 'inherently right values' can get 'underneath' it or 'behind' it: we are always free to ignore a deduction or an imperative simply because we choose to ignore it! Therefore categorical imperatives cannot exist.
2. What would a value to be followed for its own sake *look* like? The most obvious model is arithmetic, which is known to be right based solely on itself. However, there is no 'ought' in arithmetic; there is only an 'is'. This has three implications:
a. An element of freedom absent in mathematics is introduced in morality.
b. Values cannot be as necessary or 'obvious' as arithmetic, for the 'ought' implies

that they are not a part of reality, as arithmetic is.

c. In short, because a categorical value implies the absence of 'ought', and yet this 'ought' is the one necessary component of values, the thought of a categorical value is a contradiction.

C. Reduction of (2) and (3) to relativism, and hence to nihilism.

1. The values under the heading of (2) are conditional, in that they are supposed to apply to *most* circumstances. They are allowed to be qualified, amended, suspended, etc. Because there is no necessary point at which this 'qualification' ends, it can logically continue forever—even until the value is effectively 'amended' out of existence.

2. A nonmoral basis can be found for any value. If someone thinks that adversity is good because it strengthens people, then he can consider it a moral imperative to make everyone's life difficult.

a. However—as is in fact implied by the preceding—this moral imperative cannot strictly be called an *imperative*. For we have freedom in a double sense: it is 'morally acceptable' that we choose whatever nonmoral value we like, and therefore, indirectly, any *moral* value;[1] and we have freedom in the abovementioned sense, viz. that freedom is ontologically, logically and empirically prior to any kind of obligation.

b. In other words, an implication of the (2) under C is that moral imperatives cannot exist (and thus, incidentally, that the person in our example is wrong).

3. The foregoing leads directly into nihilism, i.e., into the position that no values are "best" or "good" because all are based on subjective inclination.

IV. Critique of values as false consciousness.

A. Believing in any kind of value means that the believer pays more attention to the *reasons* for it than the *causes* of it [i.e., of his holding it], whereas the reasons are actually derivative and the causes fundamental.

1. When we 'live by' a value we necessarily think it's better than alternatives. We need not *consciously decide* it is, but when asked to defend it we take as axiomatic that it's the best and then defend this judgment with reasons. We always invoke *reasons* rather than *causes,* over which we have little or no control, because we like to think that we are sovereign over ourselves, and the process of reasoning is what we have most control over. Indeed, it is practically *synonymous* with control, for it is nearly synonymous with freedom.

2. However, the psychological, social and biological causes of our choosing particular values are what induce us to have them in the first place. (The scientific spirit has rightly arrived at this conclusion.) Subsequently we add reasons to justify our preexisting inclinations, for we like to rationalize the world, but the inclinations and their causes are clearly more essential.

3. Therefore, by holding values we are in false consciousness. (To repeat: we think we control what we believe, but we're largely wrong.)

B. The *exact* psychological and social causes[2] need not concern us here, but we can suggest what they might be. Primarily they include the conscience, the need for self-affirmation (which is similar to self-contentment, and is a cause of derivative explanatory factors like conformism), and social tradition (or collective consciousness). These are three examples of why we hold the values we do.

V. The relation of political philosophy to the foregoing ideas.

A. Normative political theories are all erected on such values as right, duty, equality, liberty and utility. Nevertheless, they can be distinguished into two classes, each corresponding to one type of morality.

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[1] If morality declaims against the latter statement, this is only because it misunderstands itself. It doesn't recognize that moral values are based on nonmoral values, and therefore that what applies to the latter applies to the former.

[2] For the present we can ignore biology.

1. The kind that claims to be categorical. Kantian political theory is the classic example. It declares, as an *a priori* postulate of reason, that we are *obligated* to organize society on the basis of rights and duties. This theory succumbs to the above criticisms.

2. The kind that is conditional, i.e. that provides consequentialist arguments for its premises (such as describing desirable nonmoral effects (of living by the values propounded by the theorist)) if it expects us to subscribe to it. Bentham's utilitarianism is an example. As was explained above, the freedom intrinsic to humans undermines these political theories to the extent that the values they try to actualize seem virtually arbitrary.

B. The second criticism is that political philosophy, insofar as it is normative, is false consciousness. The more normative it is, the less factual or explanatory it is; i.e., the less aware is it that it is a byproduct of social conditions and not an autonomous or ahistorical creation of 'free' reason. This is because there is a radical break between unfreedom and freedom in the gap between facts and morality.

C. There are two important causes of, or restrictions on, the genesis of a particular political philosophy in its author's mind.

1. The collective consciousness and ideology of his society or social 'class'. In other words, the ideas that are already current in his day. He borrows from them or reacts against them; he cannot exist in a 'disinterested', ahistorical, purely objective and rational position.

2. The facts of his psychology and the circumstances of his intellectual-psychological maturation.

3. Insofar as the philosopher does not take into account these and similar causes, he is in false consciousness.

D. Nevertheless, it is when a political theory becomes an ideology of the masses that it represents a false consciousness most inevitable and acute. It becomes oversimplified, is accepted blindly, etc.

VI. Objections. How is 'not-false consciousness' possible? Aren't philosophy and science themselves—and even *freedom*—false consciousness?

A. The scientific spirit (which is not limited to science) uses reason to search for causes and explanations. It necessarily does this from the standpoint of freedom, of self-control. It even looks for the neural processes governing consciousness and reason—but, again, from a *free* standpoint. In other words, it contradicts itself: it (reason) takes as axiomatic that it is caused by biological and psychological processes over which it has no control, but it investigates its own causes *freely!* Therefore its activity contradicts the stated purpose of the activity.

B. This is true of all endeavors to explain the factors that influence the self. The activity of reason posits reason's self-control, which means that an objective, independent, 'free' point of view is adopted.

C. However, one of the basic tenets of science, which we must accept, is that nothing is autonomous. Everything has a cause. Therefore freedom is nonexistent, and we—who in our unceasing activity of self-consciousness live as though it *does* exist—are always in false consciousness.

D. If this is so, not only morality (and political philosophy) are delusions, but our very consciousness itself is. And because this means that every conscious activity we engage in is false consciousness, we have to conclude either that science is in the same situation as morality (and is therefore equally culpable) or that there are *degrees* of false consciousness [the implication being that science is somehow less falsely conscious than morality].

VII. Replies to objections.

A. Science has indeed demonstrated that there are so many unknown determinants of our behavior and our thoughts that we really do not "control" ourselves. On the other hand, because of the intentional (and therefore free) structure of consciousness, it is intuitively obvious that we *do* have control in some way.

B. The simplest solution to this dilemma is that we are free within an area whose boundaries are determined by external factors. This area coincides more or less with the activity of reason (or

intentional thought). Scientific axioms notwithstanding, it is intuitively obvious that *somehow* we have control over our intentions and are therefore partially free. Hence we are in false consciousness only if we believe that we are *completely* free.

C. Moreover, though partial freedom may be contrary to the principles of science and philosophy, as human beings we are forced to believe in it. We may be wrong, in which case (B) is incorrect and we always live in false consciousness—but this kind of false consciousness is different from morality and political philosophy, for the following reasons:

1. Freedom is in the nature of consciousness (particularly of reason), whereas morality and its derivatives are '*post facto*' human creations.

2. Morality can be clarified and partly transcended. In its current form it is an *unnecessary* false consciousness.

VIII. Conclusions.

A. Necessity of morality.

1. Most people have, for thousands of years, had a need to live by a personal morality. It is a way to impose some order on their lives. In the foreseeable future this urge will not disappear; i.e., morality will continue to be psychologically desirable.

2. Socially too it is necessary. A society cannot avoid chaos without an accepted morality (and thus a political philosophy).

B. However, if we can understand what causes it and realize that it is not 'eternal' or 'true', we can without self-delusion reason our way toward a more sensible and less contradictory system of values. We can achieve a compromise between blind moral certitude and outright nihilism. This applies also to political philosophy. In short, we can both live by (better) values and recognize that they are not inviolable, and thereby mitigate our moralistic false consciousness.

C. We can base an improved political theory on these values—these values that take account not only of *reasons* (as do our contemporary values) but of their own *causes*.

April 22

After 150 years of radical social transformation, the relations between men and women remain fundamentally the same. Romantically, nothing but the inessential trappings of our attitudes have changed, and domestically the major differences are only that men often take an active role in household duties and women sometimes pursue careers. Excepting certain disproportionately vocal radical feminists, no deep psychological revolution has occurred,[1] as is evident from comparing many nineteenth-century novels with current attitudes. Instead, *external duties* and 'social rites' have evolved. In any case, the main point is that romantic attitudes haven't changed over centuries, and romance is the definitive relationship between the sexes (and therefore....).

April 24

To alleviate my ennui I'm reading a book called *Inside Relativity*, by Mook and Vargish. It's so lucidly written as to border on the childish, but it's informative. I'd also wanted to refresh my memory of calculus, but I couldn't find a good textbook in the Science Library.

April 27

The second movement [do you mean the fourth movement?] of Schubert's Trout Quintet is one of

[1] Even in their case it's not a revolution but an example of the fact that there are exceptions in every age.

those pieces that make me feel unreservedly glad to be alive. I feel as though I'm bathing in waters of purity, of eternal youth! The music is so leisurely and unceremonious, so in love with its own easy charm, like a picnic on a spring day, that the Enlightenment springs to mind when I listen to it.

....General relativity is awe-inspiring. It's a phantasmagoria of divine revelations in the guise of mathematics. What a way of interpreting the world! Newtonian physics is comparatively sterile. Discard our common conception of gravity! What a bold move! Planets actually travel along a *warped straight line!* Now *that's* a stroke of genius. And it's simpler than Newton's idea. Can *no force* really be acting on those objects? Is invoking non-Euclidean spacetime and inertia a truer way of explaining planetary motion? Presumably it is. Moreover, it advances us 'light years' in the search for a unified field theory (which I'm sure potentially exists (i.e., can and probably will be discovered)). –I rather resent having been taught an incorrect theory all these years.

April 29

The revered academician teaching my Government course wrote the following suggestion on his copy of my outline: "Make sure you find scholarly support for your arguments, so that even if the reader disagrees, she can see that the arguments have strong adherents." Of course; I stupidly forgot that scholars can't think for themselves and that the quality of an argument depends on how many famous people agree with it. Unfortunately, I can't think of any famous people who agree with my arguments. Even if I could, I doubt I'd reference them in the paper. It would be entirely extraneous and slavish to do so.

I'm reading a complicated and badly organized textbook called *New College Algebra*, by Marcus and Mink. It's an introduction to modern algebra. Eventually I hope to work my way up to tensor calculus, the language of general relativity.

By the way, the theme of *Monster's Ball* can be stated as "the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like an incubus on the brain of the living".

May 1

I've written five pages of the government paper. For the first time in months I feel relatively inspired. This paper will, hopefully, clarify the nature of morality once and for all, at least in my own mind. The actual process of writing it is exciting not only for that reason but for another more wonderful one: without my planning it, the exposition fits together perfectly. Sometimes I find myself at a dead end in the argument, so I write in an exceptionally ad hoc manner "We shall have to return to this issue after we have further analyzed the nature of moral judgments." This translates as "I haven't the faintest clue how I'm going to resolve this issue, but hopefully it'll come to me after I've analyzed the nature of moral judgments." Lo and behold, after a couple paragraphs down the line I realize that the course of the argument has clarified the problem for me—and that it *could not* have been clarified until those paragraphs had been written. The solution has emerged of its own accord, and the exposition has unwittingly taken the form of a "dialectically articulated artistic whole". It's miraculous!—as if some impersonal intellectual force is working through me.

(Some of my opinions have similarities to Kant's, but I'm trying to use different arguments from his. I don't want to appeal to "form", as he does. So I'm not rereading *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*.)

I'm sick of going to the gym.

May 2

For Literature I have to write a paper this weekend and then do a take-home exam next week. This

is bad enough, but what makes it worse is that I severely *do not care* anymore. There's not a particle of motivation in me. I'm fed up with all the manure that my life partakes in. I can suffer it no longer! It's shit—all shit! Boredom has become my universe, the "steady state" from which I sometimes sneak away only to be catapulted back again. Everywhere I turn—boredom! Utter continuous unrelenting monotony. I'm so sick and tired that I might as well die. How am I going to finish this semester? My will is dead. I don't care about anything. "Wonder", that rare sublime intellectual emotion, yields only confusion and a sense of intellectual impotence. It's with me *at all times*, so often that it exhausts me and I've lost my fascination with it. Nothing ever comes of it. It just makes me feel ashamed, ashamed that I lack the brilliance to appreciate and understand nature. I wish there were a God. Maybe there is, but—there might as well not be.

I read Byron's "Beppo". Odd little poem, that. Entertaining, but seemingly rather barren of meaning.

May 3

I don't deserve the pleasure I derive from listening to the Emperor Concerto.

She Lay in Loveliness

She lay in loveliness, star-gazing
In the ghostly air of night,
Breath still, chest calm, thoughts chasing
Foggy tendrils,—eyes soft and bright.
Her hair lay thickly on the grass
All wet with dew and black with mud,
And sleek and shiny as a mass
Of torn entrails or clotted blood.[1]

May 9

Wonder bleeds into metaphysics.

May 11

I've finally finished the government paper. Upon rereading it I've noticed just how flawed it is—how furious-paced is the argument, how imperfect is the exposition, how many side-issues are left out—but I'm too exhausted to work on it more. It is in fact so condensed that its profound claims can slip by unnoticed or seem empty. (That's what comes of writing philosophy in a vacuum, in a dialogue with oneself and no one else.) Nearly every paragraph could be expanded, though not by me, into pages of implications and further arguments. I'll leave that task to the people who read this journal.

Freedom, determinism and values

Since antiquity, philosophers have debated the merits of all conceivable political systems. The Athenians saw it as axiomatic that dictatorships were evil and democracy good, while the Spartans,

[1] [In other words, she was murdered.]

in organizing their city-state on a rigid social structure approximating totalitarianism, believed democracy was contemptible and weak. Aristotle extolled the virtues of an aristocracy; Cicero longed for a free republic; Hobbes wrote a treatise in defense of monarchy; Rousseau passionately advocated an intimate direct democracy; John Stuart Mill upheld the rights of the private individual. Scores of thinkers have borrowed arguments from the domains of ethics, religion, metaphysics, history and science to support their political philosophies, but in the end the great debate has proved perpetual. Reason will never resolve it. Societies will continue to evolve and political philosophies will evolve with them, never reaching a consensus, Faustian in their compulsion to 'better' themselves. How can this eternal self-dissatisfaction be explained? Is there not one truly 'just' society waiting to be born? If there is, how can we decide what it is? If there isn't, what is the value of political philosophy? Is it only a moralistic delusion and an indirect byproduct of objective social conditions? Is Karl Marx right in believing it to have no intrinsic value and to be instead a type of "false consciousness" that mobilizes the masses and has no other worthwhile function? This question is momentous and imperative to answer, particularly for philosophers who want to understand the nature of values. Answering it may be the gateway to a better understanding of the human condition. Our paper intends to do precisely that—to answer the question "Is political philosophy an example of 'false consciousness' in the Marxist (and Wrightist[1]) sense?"

Before we embark on our examination of the topic, it is necessary to define some relevant and problematic terms:

Political philosophy: the normative attempt either to justify/criticize a political system or to outline an ideal one. This is narrower than the common definition in that it is limited to normative claims, whereas typically the term is applied also to non-normative critiques of political ideologies and 'philosophical' analyses of how political systems function. I dub these analyses "philosophical" to distinguish them from political *science*, which is typically more limited in scope, less critically oriented, more concerned with classifying and characterizing political phenomena than seeking fundamental *causes* of them. Thus, Marxist political philosophy has nothing in common with normative positions but instead examines why and how political structures are a certain way; and it does this by 'functionally' explaining their purposes within a given society and investigating the overarching causal mechanisms of their existence. It would be inappropriate to call such an enterprise political *science* because the latter is generally more ahistorical and concerned more exclusively with the political realm in isolation from the totality of society. At any rate, we have defined the sense in which "political philosophy" will be used throughout this paper.

Ideology: a chosen set of normative, legal, economic, social and political principles integral to the organization and consciousness of a large social entity. The principles need not be explicit (though in the modern world they usually are)—and not every member of the entity need be aware of them—because they can be inferred from the institutions and consciousness of the 'body' in question. They need not be consistent or coherent either. Not every relevant social entity has an ideology. (Serfs in the Middle Ages, arguably, did not, though the feudal society as a whole did.) Lastly, ideologies tend to be illusions or false consciousnesses (which terms are not quite synonymous) in that they are rarely arrived at through the rigor of science.

Collective consciousness: the general ideas and attitudes of most of the members of a given social entity (and not necessarily of the entity *in abstracto*—though such may be the case because usually the abstract "body's" dispositions are an extrapolation from those of the majority of individuals who compose it). It includes the ideology but is not limited to it. For example, cynicism and communal arrogance are parts of America's collective consciousness but not of its ideology.

False consciousness: unawareness of one's true relation—and the relation of one's beliefs—to one's psychological, social and biological 'determinants'. First of all, this definition is grounded in the scientific attitude that has dominated the West since the 19th century—the attitude that emphasizes *causes* over the rational *reasons* that people invoke to justify their traits, their actions

[1] As will be seen below, I have modified the traditional Marxist conception of "false consciousness".

and their beliefs. Scientists, psychologists and philosophers (at least those who keep pace with the times, such as Friedrich Nietzsche) tend to ignore freedom and rationality when explaining why we are a certain way. This will be elaborated later. Secondly, the definition presupposes that social conditions, psychology and biology are the major immediate causal forces in regard to who we are. Thirdly, it is a modification and generalization of the traditional Marxist definition, which is adumbrated by Friedrich Engels in this quotation: "Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him.... Hence he imagines false or seeming motive forces.... He works with mere thought material, which he accepts without examination as the product of thought, and does not investigate further for a more remote source independent of thought."[1] Incidentally, Engels' notion of ideology is confused; it is not ours.

Freedom: self-control. This definition includes also the negative conception of freedom, viz., absence from external constraint. Depending on the context, it can mean self-control vis-a-vis (1) other people, (2) one's emotions, (3) one's animal appetites, etc. Clearly in order for the definition to be purged of all ambiguities we must define the self, but this task is beyond the scope of the essay. However, because we cannot proceed without having *some* idea of what the self is, we shall be obliged to claim dogmatically that it is consciousness of consciousness, i.e. self-consciousness. It is not a 'substance', not an aggregate of thoughts, not the personality, but simply one's immediate awareness of oneself.[2] It is purely intentional.

Preliminary critique of moral and nonmoral values 'on their own terms', i.e. from within the perspective of false consciousness

Political philosophy as we have defined it applies to theories that presuppose, or base themselves on, values. These values can be either moral or nonmoral. Therefore, in order to critique political philosophy we must first critique moral and nonmoral values. To do so thoroughly, however, it is not enough to explain why they may or may not be false consciousness; it is necessary also to examine them *on their own terms*. (We shall argue later that this is in fact to critique them from within false consciousness, because values themselves *are*—or, to be precise, exist *in*—false consciousness.)

The very broad category of "values", as we said, can be divided into the classes moral and nonmoral. Conventional wisdom divides the first into its collective and personal manifestations, although we shall see later that this division is largely scholastic. Nevertheless, because (1) it is convenient and (2) we cannot show it to be inessential until later, we shall temporarily make use of it. Under the heading "collective" we include, on the one hand, the values of a society—as vaguely embodied in its collective consciousness—and, on the other, the values of a relatively independent portion of society with its own distinctive identity (such as orthodox Jews or the Amish). When people expect others to adhere to the same values they do, it is usually because the morality is collective. "Personal" refers to the values of a single individual. Generally an individual's values are essentially the same as those of the social group he identifies with (whether it be his country, his class, his religion, his ethnicity, etc.)—and therefore he 'unthinkingly' expects others to abide by the values he does—but occasionally people *choose* their own morality. In such cases they (probably) do not unconsciously expect others to follow the values they do (though they may consciously think people *should*). At the moment our task is to outline the essence of collective moralities, for these have an epistemological priority over personal value-systems. (The latter are always either copies of or reactions against the former.) Eventually we shall see that, on the whole, what applies to one applies to the other.

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[1] Robert Tucker ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), p. 766.

[2] Inasmuch as we have included the word "oneself" within the definition of the self, the latter may be thought circular. But logic cannot be trusted in an analysis of consciousness—for reasons it would be inappropriate to delve into now.

Preliminarily, we can suggest that collective moral values are distinguished from nonmoral ones by translating into commands that are *duties*. The definition of the term "duty" is highly elusive. One finds oneself stumbling over meaningless, circular statements like "A duty is something we have an obligation to do" or "A duty is a moral imperative" or "Duties are commands—strongly supported by good arguments—relating to how we ought to treat others". None of these statements addresses the main question, which is "What does it *mean* for something to be a moral imperative?" It is not enough to suggest that whatever our conscience dictates is a moral imperative, for this does not inquire into the meaning of the word "imperative". In fact, if the term "duty" (or "moral imperative") is to have any meaning at all, we must define it as a command that we follow for its own sake, because it is intrinsically right. It is a categorical imperative. If we follow it for the sake of something external to it, then the decisive factor is the external thing (for it is this that determines why it is a duty), which means that we are again ignoring the question of what it means for something to be an imperative. I.e., we are saying that only those commands are duties which are based on good reasons, which statement—aside from introducing extraneous problems—leaves unexplained the intrinsic meaning of "duty". Therefore to salvage the notion of a "duty" we say that it is not adhered to for external reasons but solely for itself. This is an explanation both of why we abide by a duty and of *what it means* to abide by a duty.

We have defined the word, but we have not argued for our claim that it is the definitive characteristic of morality in all epochs and cultures. To do so we shall first observe that almost all people who frown upon lying, for example, do so because they see it as a duty not to lie; that is, they adopt (perhaps unbeknownst to themselves) the viewpoint that lying is intrinsically wrong. To provide arguments for this statement is not easy, for it is grounded solely in an intuitive examination of the psychological state that obtains when one condemns liars. The best we can do is to suggest that when someone flares up in righteous indignation after discovering a lie, his reaction is explainable only by supposing that he considers lying to be intrinsically wrong. He does not investigate the circumstances of the lie nor remind himself dispassionately why he thinks lying is so bad; he simply exclaims, "She *lied* to me!" Similarly: "He *murdered* her!" or "They had an *affair*!" or "He disobeyed a *direct order*!" These ejaculations are 'immediate consciousnesses' of astonishment and disgust that appeal to no reasons. They judge their object to be wrong for the single 'reason' *that it is wrong*. However, it must not be thought that if a forceful exclamation is absent, so is the belief that truthfulness is a duty. Rather, we should interpret these exclamations as intense manifestations of our ordinary consciousness. Ordinarily, during our daily affairs when we're not examining the reasons for our moral convictions, we take our (collective) values so seriously that we treat them like duties. We abide by them blindly.

Conversely, values which few people in our culture would claim to be duties—such as acting compassionately as often as possible—are not typically included in the domain of morality. From the perspective of our culture, it is absurd to say that acting coldly is immoral or that acting kindly is moral. Because they are not considered duties, they are not considered relevant to morality.

Before continuing we must highlight a distinction between immediate, unreflective consciousness and people's self-conscious understanding of morals. On the level of the former, most of us—that is, those of us who have a morality—cannot but look upon moral values as duties. It is a psychological fact that we shall explain in the critique of morals as false consciousness. On the other hand, it is very possible to *believe* that such values are not duties. Often people suspend their values in certain situations without feeling shame or guilt—a phenomenon that seems to indicate that the moral commands are not perceived as duties. Nevertheless, they are, though on a more unconscious and involuntary level. The self-conscious temporary repudiation of them—and even the disinterested judgment that they are not duties—is a superficial reaction against the underlying consciousness of their being categorical imperatives. (In fact they are *not* categorical imperatives, but we shall address this later when we discuss the distinction between our obscure consciousness of duty and the exact philosophical definition of it.)

Of course, feminist philosophers sometimes defend an "ethics of care" and denounce an "ethics

of duty", but they do not inquire into the conventional meaning of the word "morality". If they did, they would recognize that an ethics of care and an ethics of duty need not be mutually exclusive. Certainly a system of values can exist and has existed (in Confucianism, for example) that relies more on the notions of care and filial love than on the notion of abstract Kantian duty, but our point is that these values are effectively cognized as duties.[1] The only time that duty- and care-ethics are mutually exclusive is when we invoke the distinction mentioned above—when we understand "duty" not in the sense of a vague immediate consciousness but in the sense of a *formal declaration* integral to—or rejected by—an ethical system.[2]

The other side of our argument is that definitions of morality that do not judge the concept of duty as fundamental are bound to fail. For example, it is inadequate to say that the term *ought* distinguishes moral from nonmoral judgments, for the statement "You ought not to kill people because it might land you in jail" is not considered morally relevant. Nor can we say that only commands appealing to the intrinsic dignity or rights or even the instinctive 'fellow-feeling' of a living being are moral, since not all cultures have based their values on these ideas. Confucianism based its doctrines of compassion and paternalism on the natural order of the universe, which is quite contrary to modern Western notions. In short, if we looked at every definition of morality aside from the one given in this paper, we would see that it is not universally applicable. (It is possible that philosophers in the tradition of Wittgenstein would proceed from a different direction and assert that there is *no* essence of morality, but the burden of proof is on them.)

We should note that social norms and mores are not what we mean by a collective morality. We are referring to what is '*felt*' by people to be right and wrong or good and bad—what is sometimes called a "moral sense" (though not necessarily an *instinctual* one). Laws and conventions usually abide by the common morality, but they are logically distinguishable from it. Hence they are not included in our discussion.

The category "personal morality", implicit in all the foregoing ideas, differs from collective morality by being a translation of it into the consciousness of the individual.[3] This translation can result in three general scenarios. In the first kind (by far the most common), personal moralities are based unthinkingly on the common system of values, which means that their adherents basically see them as duties. Of course, as mentioned above, they may choose to ignore them in many situations, but this indicates merely that they don't *care* whether they're duties (or that on a considered and self-conscious level they believe they're not duties). A second class of people includes those who do not *have* a personal morality. They do not respect nor follow any values in a dutiful, 'morally sensitive', 'conscientious' way.[4] The third class includes those rare exceptions among humanity who invent their own morality. They pick and choose their values based on *reasons*, which as we saw earlier is incompatible with the notion of duty. Nevertheless, sometimes they do learn to follow their values as if they were duties—particularly (and inevitably) when the values cease to be abstract intellectual ideas and become 'ingrained' in consciousness—which is a contradiction we shall address when we discuss the problematic phenomenon of *degrees* of 'duty-consciousness'. At any rate, the main point is that the classification of value-systems into collective and personal should not be taken as more substantive than convenient, because the two share the same essence and most of the same characteristics, and they imply each other. ("Collective"

[1] Therefore it is misleading to say that in Confucianism the notion of care was more important than that of duty. In fact, it is wrong, because Confucius explicitly stated that care is a duty! This technicality obviously corroborates our main argument, which is that duty is the definitive characteristic of morality in all cultures. Incidentally, the term "abstract Kantian duty" is redundant, for in order to have meaning duty must be Kantian (i.e., for its own sake).

[2] See below.

[3] Orthodox Marxists might say "reflection", but I prefer "translation" because it allows for differences between the original copy and the derivative one.

[4] The reader may criticize the use of "dutiful" in this sentence because it seems to presuppose an identification of duty with morality, but I literally can't think of a better way to describe my feeling when I act morally. This in itself suggests the equation of duty with morality. In any case, from now on I shall take it for granted that duty defines morality.

logically implies "personal"—in that it supervenes on many personal moralities—and "personal" epistemologically presupposes "collective".)

Now we shall finish the drudgery of classification so as to proceed to the critique. A second conventional division of moral values is into the following two categories: (1) those which it is obligatory to follow under all conditions because they are intrinsically right (or self-evident). In the form of commands they are duties. (2) Most values are not *consciously* thought of as 'inherently' right but rather base their moral status on arguments (generally consequentialist ones). (However, as we have already stated, they are '*half-consciously*' treated as being inherently right.) If compelling arguments are adduced against them they may lose their moral force; that is, they are not fixed moral truths. Moreover, it is theoretically permissible for them to be suspended sometimes. For instance, though under most conditions we consider it wrong to lie, we consider it eminently justified if it will save a person's life. Hence lying is not intrinsically wrong.

In fact, none of the values we half-consciously treat as being intrinsically wrong are objectively so. This is easily established by looking at the example of murder. Even though we generally assume that murder is intrinsically wrong, it obviously is not. For it is meaningless to say that it's wrong because it's wrong, or that refraining from murder is right for its own sake. Neither is it 'good' for its own sake. Therefore it is not a duty. Generalizing this example, we arrive at the conclusion that all values of the form "___ is right" or "___ is wrong" or "It is right to ___"—i.e., all values expressed in the form of linguistic sentences—are not duties, simply because it is meaningless that a repetition of the proposition should be the justification of the proposition! Adding "because (original proposition)" or "because that's just the way it is!" after a proposition is *never* a reason for *any* proposition. However, this being so, we seem to have invalidated the concept of the categorical imperative. Therefore we should ask ourselves if there is a model in any sphere of human endeavor that can show us what a duty might look like. Fortunately, there is a very simple example: arithmetic. Such mathematical sentences as 2+2=4 are 'intrinsically right', based on no reasons whatsoever. When asked why they are right, we have no option but to say, "Just because—that's the way it is!" Granted, this is not a *reason* for them, which implies that they are not their own reasons (one way of expressing our definition of duty), but they nonetheless *essentially* correspond to the criterion for duty because we intuitively know them to be right, without appealing to reasons.

Obviously it will be objected that we're using the word "right" in two senses, but this is precisely the point. The only model we can find for what a duty might look like is one that has (from another perspective) nothing in common with duties! There is no "ought" in arithmetic; there is only an "is". There is not the element of freedom that exists in morality; in other words, arithmetic is a part of reality that *forces* itself on us, whereas morality, in logically implying freedom, cannot belong to reality in this sense. Therefore, because from our example we have decided that a categorical imperative cannot contain an "ought", and yet this "ought" is integral to the notion of a moral value, the very thought of a categorical imperative is contradictory. This means that the idea of morality, in the strictest sense, is contradictory.

Now we shall critique duty (morality) from the *subjective* standpoint. Our first argument is that there is a continuum between the consciousness of duty and the consciousness of nonmoral values. Suppose a person chose to live by the moral value of self-cultivation. He would consider it an imperative that he cultivate himself in a variety of ways. However, if he also lived according to the judgment that murder is wrong, it is very likely that he would consider this a more compelling, 'absolute' duty than the first. Now suppose, on the other hand, that he saw self-cultivation as a *non*moral value: he considered it a 'worthy' thing or 'advisable' or 'good' to cultivate himself. But if he suddenly decided to make this nonmoral good a moral good, where would we draw the line between the two kinds of values? Would the second be *more* 'worthy' or *extremely* 'good'? Would it be an *imperative*, i.e. *right*, as the first was not? This, however, is not as clear-cut as it sounds, because we saw that it's possible for him to judge restraint from murder as a more unconditional imperative, which means that the word "imperative" is subject to degrees—which in turn suggests that there is not a clear division between (moral) *imperatives* and (nonmoral) *goods*. Nevertheless,

it only *suggests* that; it remains logically possible that there can be a sharp division between imperatives and nonmoral 'goods' even if imperatives are not all of the same intensity. Hence, to support the argument we shall note that one's consciousness when philosophizing is different from one's ordinary state of mind. The ordinary mentalities of cultivation-as-moral and cultivation-as-nonmoral are identical, for they treat both as inherently right. That is, they are utterly 'immediate', taking account not of reasons but solely of the commands themselves. It is only when we dissect these two consciousnesses that we notice that the first command feels more 'for its own sake', more like a categorical imperative, and the second feels less urgent or 'obligatory'. Therefore in our ordinary consciousness there is indeed (in this case, though not always) no distinction between duty and nonmoral preferences. Furthermore, someone with a particular nonmoral ideal—and with a rather authoritarian strain in his personality—may *demand* that everyone else follow his value simply because he thinks it makes the most sense, without appealing to morality whatsoever. The implication of all this is that, in spite of the effort we made to delineate precisely what can be called "morality", normally in consciousness there is no leap between it and nonmoral subjective preferences. Or, at any rate, there certainly *need* not be a leap, which is itself devastating to the concept of morality.

In our second argument we make use of the second set of classifications. It will be recalled that the first category, duties, was the only category that adhered to the definition of morality; i.e., the second class—values based explicitly on reasons—was excluded from the domain of morals. We shall now provide two additional arguments for this while at the same time critiquing them in their true role as 'nonmorality'. These values sometimes derive from nonmoral ones and sometimes from moral ones, and sometimes from perceived truths. The injunction to love one's neighbor can, in a sense, be derived from the metaphysical tenet that the thing-in-itself is an undifferentiated whole, or from the basic moral value that interpersonal harmony is intrinsically good, or from the nonmoral value that harmony is pleasant.[1] We have already shown that nothing is intrinsically good, but to avoid mixing our arguments we'll ignore that. The point is that a logical derivation of values from *anything* is invalid. This is a logical consequence of freedom—a notion that we shall address fully later on. For the time being, in defense of the assertion that freedom exists, it is enough to remark that (1) freedom and responsibility are presupposed by the "ought" logically present in all values, and (2) our freedom is immediately present to us in self-consciousness. It is in fact (a component in) the basic datum of self-consciousness, for *intentionality* is the basic datum and intentionality is essentially freedom. Or—if that is denied—intentions certainly *presuppose* freedom. Therefore, because "ought" implies freedom and is the defining characteristic of values in the form of commands, freedom is the basis of values. Logical necessity and determinism are inessential to the understanding of values; we need only recognize freedom. Thus a logical derivation of morals relies on an operation foreign to the essence of morality, which means it cannot be the way to arrive at a value. This shows that moral values based on reasons (external considerations) have no foundation. Hence they are not part of morality; or, expressed differently, morality deteriorates into 'arbitrary' (non-coercive, non-'good'[2]) subjective preferences.

To state the preceding in another way: believing in a value is an outcome of a subjective leap. No matter how many reasons are invoked in support of the value, ultimately the believer makes his decision based only on his inclination. An equivalent statement is that an argument can be found for any value. An example can establish this. Schopenhauer thinks that compassion is moral because

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[1] The ambiguity between good and right should be clarified. Saying that something is inherently good and saying that it is inherently right are essentially the same thing, with the one difference that "right" has a slightly more 'forceful' sense to it than "good". This difference, however, in the context of morality amounts to nothing. Moral rightness and moral goodness are identical. The only reason they might seem not to be so is that "good" is also used in the context of nonmoral values—while "right" isn't—which confuses its meaning for us.

[2] Judging something as morally 'good' implies either intrinsic goodness or external reasons, both of which concepts we have rejected.

behind appearances is a unified thing-in-itself, a One, and by treating people compassionately we are acting in conformity with the knowledge that we are all part of the One. On the other hand, a central notion of Schopenhauer's is what he calls the "principle of individuation", which is meant to explain how individual beings can exist even though essentially they are all the same thing. The principle of individuation is space and time; it is these that allow for the fragmentation of phenomena in our world. Therefore, a response to Schopenhauer's morality could be that the principle of individuation makes *true* compassion/love impossible, so instead of deluding ourselves we ought to 'intensify' every experience—*savor* every experience, whether it be love or contempt—simply because such affirmation is the fulfillment of individuation, i.e., of the conditions of life that the thing-in-itself's mode of manifestation forces us into. Schopenhauer, of course, would continue to insist on his viewpoint. In the end we would have to choose our value—i.e., which 'truth' to 'emphasize' (individuation or inaccessible unity)—entirely on the basis of our subjective inclination, for there is no other way to decide between the two. This is always the case. There are always arguments for both sides of a moral value, and neither is better than the other, for they either (1) state good and bad consequences or (2) infer the values directly from 'opposing' truths or values, in both of which cases we must rely on subjective preference to resolve the contradiction.

To sum up, we have suggested that moral values must be duties, but duties do not exist. For the reader who disagrees with the first claim, we have argued that values cannot be based on reasons and are instead arrived at through a subjective leap from objectively oriented arguments to the adoption of the value. Hence there is no such thing as morality [in the strict sense]: all values are subjective, ultimately arbitrary choices, and cannot be "good" or "the best" vis-à-vis other values. Nihilism is the philosophical truth.

Incidentally, if the Wittgensteinians are right that morality has no essence, this claim would surely *support* our conclusion rather than argue against it. The only difference is that the process of reasoning would have nothing in common with our own.

Critique of values as false consciousness

The preceding section investigated values without questioning their assumption of human freedom. This assumption must now be challenged; but first we'll clarify it. Believing in any kind of value means that one pays more attention to the *reasons* for it than the *causes* of one's belief in it. It cannot be otherwise: in the act of belief we unconsciously 'take ourselves seriously'; we *intend*, and it is in the nature of an intention to feel free. Furthermore, in holding a value we think it's better than alternatives. We need not *consciously decide* it is, but when asked to defend it we take it as axiomatic that it's good or the best and then defend this judgment with reasons. We do not defend it by saying, "My brain is wired in such and such a way, and the precise neural mechanisms are so and so, and I grew up in this kind of an environment....and therefore this is a good value."

However, science, psychology and philosophy have in the past few centuries done everything in their power to demonstrate that living beings have little or no freedom. Everything in nature is determined by external [or internal] causes; nothing is self-determined. The veracity or falsity of this mechanistic hypothesis will be examined later; for the present we shall merely examine its consequences with respect to freedom and values. When applied to humanity it means that social, psychological and biological factors are the explanations of the personalities, thoughts and attitudes of individuals, and therefore that the rational *reasons* we use to explain ourselves to ourselves are themselves the product of factors entirely outside our control. Thus we are nothing but effects. We, who are self-consciousness, do not cause events; we and our intentions are just inserted between the relevant events and their causes. The reason why we are an exception to the universal law of causality—i.e., why we do not cause anything even though other phenomena do—is that the only way we can cause events is through our *intentions*. Saying that we do is not only synonymous with the false postulate of self-control, but it is contrary to the *mechanistic* nature of causality. Even social tradition *mechanistically* (impersonally, automatically) influences how I act. Besides, it is

intuitively obvious that intentions cannot cause anything: it is not my intention that causes my finger to wriggle, since the intention can exist in my mind well before the finger actually wriggles. Hence intentions are not causes.

An observation slightly off the topic, but important nonetheless, is that there are different kinds of causes. Social tradition ought to be distinguished from biological mechanisms. But how are they different? Surely the difference is that the first is a product of human action and the second is a natural, 'unchanging' determinant of our actions which we are unable to influence in the way we can social tradition. What this amounts to is that tradition is a *constraint* and biology a direct *cause*. (Psychology must either be somewhere in between or be a 'mental' expression of biology. The latter makes more sense.) This suggests that there are degrees of freedom, which is problematic for the hypothesis that all freedom is equally deceptive. However, it is not appropriate to address the objection at this point; we shall do so in the last section of the paper.

To return to the question at hand. In having values we exist in false consciousness because values are grounded in freedom and freedom is nonexistent—i.e., because we necessarily do not adopt the standpoint of determinism. But values and freedom stand and fall together: if values exist in false consciousness, so does—or *is*—freedom. This is a repugnant conclusion, because it means that humans are always in false consciousness; but from the scientific viewpoint it is true. On the other hand, because we have not established that the scientific viewpoint itself is true, it is conceivable that its implications are false. We shall, again, return to this issue shortly.

In the last section we left open the question as to why the 'immediate consciousness' of moral values is that they are duties. The reason for the postponement was that the question could not be answered without presupposing the concept of false consciousness. The answer itself, however, is quite simple and obvious: during childhood, when the personality is still forming, people learn their behavior from their environment (primarily their parents), and because the environment includes—and is composed largely 'on the basis of'—values, the latter are internalized by the children. Over the course of years some of the values become more ingrained in consciousness than others, for the children learn by trial and error that some things are *very* frowned upon and others less so. The first give rise to an inner 'check' on actions (sometimes called the conscience, but the overtones of this word are slightly too narrow to cover the whole phenomenon) which is more or less adhered to, depending on the individual's psychology. In other words, the result is the formation of moral values.

—That simple hypothesis serves as an example of what is meant by a critique of values as being false consciousness.

Critique of political philosophy

Political philosophy can be subdivided into two categories corresponding to our second division of morality. The first includes theories that claim to be categorical. Kantian political theory is the classic example. It is based on the ideas of right and duty, which Kant considers moral in the extreme sense of inherently right (*a priori*). Such philosophies succumb to the same criticisms we directed against the concept of duty. The second class includes those that have as their foundation the (nonmoral) values in the corresponding class.[1] Bentham's utilitarianism, which uses extrinsic reasons[2] (primarily its utilitarian conception of human nature) to justify it, is a good example. As was explained above, the freedom intrinsic to humans [or to humans' self-experience] undermines these political theories to the extent that they lose their status as "good" or "the best". They are essentially arbitrary.

Nevertheless, we ought to keep in mind that logic does have a place in a discussion of values despite the "subjective leap" which leads to the adoption of a value. For example, people who agree

[1] Recall our conclusion that these supposed moral values actually cannot be distinguished from nonmoral ones.
[2] Of course, all reasons are extrinsic to what they argue for.

on a general value but disagree on a derivative one can debate either the 'moral' implications of the first or the logical basis of the second in order to reach a consensus. This doesn't conflict with our earlier argument because it is highly unlikely that either interlocutor will suddenly choose to ignore the claims of logic[1]—though he may say that opposite logical derivations of the second value can be found (as they surely can), in which case the argument is moot.

The second criticism is that normative political philosophy is false consciousness. The more normative it is, the less aware is it that it's a byproduct of social, psychological and biological conditions rather than an autonomous and ahistorical creation of 'free' reason. This is because, even when abstracted from consciousness, values have freedom as their condition, while *truths* do not. (They *cannot, since the hypothesis of freedom is false*.) On the other hand, a political philosopher can be aware that he and his values are determined by objective factors and thereby mitigate his false consciousness.[2] It is otherwise when a political philosophy becomes an ideology. In this case it enters the masses' collective consciousness as a simplistic ideal and nothing else. It is dogmatically assumed to be correct, when in fact values can *never* be 'correct'.[3] Hence it is in this sense that political philosophy is a most acute false consciousness.

Objections, replies, conclusions and implications for action

Throughout this paper there has been a vacillation between the positions of freedom and determinism. This confusion must be cleared up. From the perspective of science, freedom—and therefore our very consciousness—is a delusion, but our inner perception indicates that we *are* free. Before we decide which is right, we should remark that science investigates causes and effects through the activity of reason, which means that its activity posits self-control—because it is intentional—which in turn means that the activity of science contradicts the axioms of science. For example, science searches for the biological mechanisms that control thought; i.e., thought *freely* seeks out its own causes, and therefore its activity contradicts the purpose of the activity. Moreover, this is true of *all* endeavors to explain the factors that influence and determine the self. It is simply in the nature of intentionality—or "reason", in this case—to posit absolute self-control. In short, if the axioms and purposes of these endeavors have validity, not only is 'value-consciousness' false consciousness but so are the activities of engaging in science, philosophy, psychology, etc. (These disciplines themselves (as opposed to the *activities* of them) are not because they are abstractions that do not partake of—nor presuppose, as does morality—freedom.)

When faced with the immediate datum of freedom, the question arises as to why we should trust science. There are at least three reasons. First, another 'immediate' datum is that causality is applicable to all experience. We *know* that when there is an event, there is an effect and a cause. This is both testified by experience and intuitively self-evident. Second, science has in the past few centuries had immense success. It has been 'proven' again and again that thoughts are based on neural processes, personalities are influenced by the environment, and so on. This in itself demonstrates that our immediate perception of freedom is wrong or only partly correct. Since the logical conclusion of science is that we are *wholly* determined—and, moreover, this agrees with our intuition of causality and our irresistible feeling that the world must be composed of continuous series of causes and effects—we conclude that our consciousness of freedom is entirely deluded. This seems absurd because we *feel* ourselves choosing and intending, but—and here is the third

[1] These claims do exist in the realm of morals; it's just that they can be ignored or disputed. There is always an element of uncertainty in them because of the "subjective leap".

[2] We shall later elaborate on several of the points made in this paragraph, including that one.

[3] It should be kept in mind that our preliminary critique of values was unrelated to their being false consciousness. Therefore it has nothing to do with why I say—in this context—that values can never be correct. (Maybe it was inappropriate to include the preliminary critique in this essay, but I felt compelled to clarify my own ideas on the subject.)

reason—we already know that our immediate experiences are not always trustworthy. Sensory experiences are sometimes deceiving, and consciousness is an elusive phenomenon. (This is why after thousands of years there remains a debate on something so fundamental as the definition of the self.) Logic, on the other hand, when supported by meaningful intuitions, and *especially* when supported by observed facts, is more reliable. Thus we can conclude that freedom does not objectively exist.[1]

We qualify that statement with "objectively" because it is necessary to explain how our inner perception can be as wrong as it is, and the explanation involves a distinction between "subjectively" and "objectively". Nature has made all animals subjective, which in this context means that they interpret everything in such a way as to judge (consciously or 'unconsciously') their own subjective/biological needs as most fundamental. Nature considers the continuation of life far more important than the imparting of objective truths to us poor creatures. Objectivity is at best superfluous to this goal and at worst harmful to it. It's superfluous in that ants do an excellent job of surviving in spite of their limited appreciation of objective truths; it's harmful in that humans have a tendency to react *against* life the more objective they are. (Religions, which are 'objective' in that they offer insights into the nature of the world, tend to devalue life on earth. This is true of Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, even paganism, though for different reasons. Philosophy, another quintessentially objective pursuit, has a tendency to do the same thing.[2]) They see it as flawed and meaningless, and this can have only adverse effects on the continuation of life—nature's own "categorical imperative". It is not surprising, then, that freedom is ingrained in our consciousness, for without such an *a priori* knowledge of self-control what motive could we have to continue living? Would we want to live if we felt continually thrust between a cacophony of causes over which we had no control? I, for one, would certainly choose to end such a miserable existence.[3]

The point, poorly expressed, is that animals are organized in such a way that, as we stated earlier, they take themselves utterly seriously. They are not meant to peer over their horizons; such objective knowledge would have no purpose. In the one animal that is half-way capable of it, rationality has led to disaster time and again. Therefore there is a practical reason that freedom subjectively exists even though it objectively does not. –Mother Nature is engaging in her usual tricks. Though she no doubt had reasons in mind when bestowing a degree of rationality on us, she was wise in being niggardly in her gifts.

The implication is that we always exist in false consciousness. But is it the same as the kind involved in dogmatically believing particular values to be (nonmorally) good or (morally) right? No. We have to distinguish between active *beliefs* and the unavoidable nature of *self-consciousness*. Dogmatically believing in particular values is an unnecessary false consciousness—unnecessary because people need not always believe that their values are right or the best, false because values are not only subjectively (as intentions) but *objectively* based on freedom [since morality logically implies it]—whereas freedom itself is a comparatively 'unconscious', constant, essential (subjective) condition of human life, of rational, self-conscious existence. Science and philosophy, in turn, do not *in the abstract* presuppose freedom, though their *activity* necessarily pretends to be free. Thus, (1) disciplines partaking of the scientific spirit are *correct*, unlike morality, and (2) with regard to freedom itself, it cannot be transcended, while morality can—to an extent.

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[1] As was remarked earlier, the facts that (1) we are conscious of degrees of freedom and (2) it seems necessary that there be these 'degrees' appears problematic to my hypothesis, but I don't think it's fatal. It boils down to my not having indicated the relations between the many factors that influence us. Unfortunately, I haven't yet discovered a way to resolve the difficulty, so it will have to remain as a lapse in the paper.

[2] The major exception is when philosophy has progressed to such a stage that it can critique itself in this way. Nietzsche is the best example.

[3] This discussion obviously is rather nonsensical because it keeps presupposing freedom. But a complete lack of freedom is unconceptualizable, so we have to proceed within this limitation.

Admittedly, for thousands of years most people have felt compelled to live by a personal morality. It has been a way to impose order on their lives. (Ordering one's life makes it easier to live. The 'will to power', the drive toward 'self-affirmation', is the explanation of this, but we shall not discuss it now.) This compulsion will not disappear in the foreseeable future. Moreover, in the form of social norms, ideologies, laws and *collective* morality it is necessary because it prevents society from sinking into chaos. Nevertheless, it need not exist in the form of morality properly so-called, viz. compulsory, autocratic values grounded in blind certitude. It can be light-hearted, self-skeptical, self-mocking, more a *dance* than a *funeral*. Values can allow for their own inevitable evolution, can respect our critique of them, can even acknowledge that freedom objectively does not exist. It will always be awkward that mankind is a bridge between crude animals and exquisitely rational beings, that we have been endowed with powers sufficient to appreciate that there is a mysterious world beyond our ken but insufficient to *understand* this world—that therefore we are fated to embark on philosophical excursions into the Great Unknown only to recoil back, as on a spring, into our merely subjective human realm of being—but as a resourceful species we can learn to live with and even to celebrate this state of affairs. We can, for example, judge when to take lightly the claims of reason and when to abide by them religiously. In the case of values we do the former, for we can do no else. But by being *intellectually* aware of truth we mitigate the false consciousness endemic in holding values.

Aside from such vague suggestions, what are the practical implications of our investigation? We have discovered that it is 'philosophically' neither good nor bad to kill a person. This conclusion is unacceptable within the bounds of our imperfect human world; pure philosophy is not necessarily a guide to action. (Life is richer than philosophy.) What we ought in fact to do is to respect the fundamental intuition of 99% of humans and affirm our species in the noblest ways possible. There seems to be biologically ingrained in most of us not only an aversion to actively harming our brethren but a concern for the well-being of the species. Many people do act against these involuntary feelings, but they can rarely eradicate them. We unconsciously hope for a continuation and glorification of mankind. From the perspective of nature's mundane goals, this makes sense. Thus 'it makes the most sense' for us to abide by our life-affirming intuitions, to cultivate ourselves in lofty ways, to give life a positive meaning.

No doubt the critical reader will object to that, find logical flaws in it, provide compelling arguments against it. But we have already stated that we're temporarily forsaking lifeless philosophy—and that no matter what values we have, they will be vulnerable to criticism. Reason will always find ways to critique the subjective animalistic limitations within which we operate—values being one of them—but sooner or later we have to make a leap of faith. Otherwise we'll live forever in a state of suspension, a fantastical levitation above reality that precludes *action*. Admittedly, it's stupid not to preface certain actions with considerable reflection, but it's naïve not to suppose that at a certain point we break off thought and proceed in spite of objections. Therefore in spite of objections we can use the last sentence of the previous paragraph as a foundation for the truly human morality of the future—simply because no matter how many arguments are adduced against it, the irresistible feeling that such values are *best* will never be crushed.[1]

Unfortunately the details of a value system are more problematic. Is political liberty with

[1] That seems to suggest that there are in fact 'objective' gradations of how 'compelling' reasons are vis-à-vis one another, but this is just because the reason I've invoked corresponds with our inclinations. So it seems (objectively) compelling. The point is that people who don't have similar inclinations need not accept it, i.e. that it's not 'valid' outside of an individual subjectivity. Nevertheless, in frowning upon disagreement with our basic moral value (expressed in the sentence above that starts "Thus 'it makes the most sense'....")—'moral' in a looser sense than its strict definition, though still meaning a kind of imperative (see the discussion of people's subjective perception of a continuum between moral and nonmoral values)—we automatically think that the reasoning and the value are both 'objectively correct'. This is a false consciousness whose inevitability I have already implicitly noted. But I've suggested that we can at least be intellectually aware of its untenability. We can walk a tightrope between objectively-oriented belief in our values and knowledge of their objectively indefensible status. (Hence the "dance" metaphor.)

cultural stagnation a higher good than an enlightened despotism with cultural flourishing? The question has no sense because it tries to be objective, which as we have seen is not permissible. We can only examine the respective arguments, ponder our own inclinations, and make a leap of faith. And then live on the edge of a precipice for the rest of our lives.

Prescriptions for *collective* 'morality'—in its modified, loose, seemingly contradictory meaning of 'nonmoral imperatives'—cannot be the same as those for personal morality. A social entity, aside from not technically *existing*, is less subtle than an individual; its consciousness vacillates from extreme to extreme and rarely exists (as one) in the interim. Moreover, it is composed of the rabble, who are incapable of rarefied thought. Hence its morality is necessarily dogmatic. Reasoning has no effect on it; the only way for it to fundamentally change its character is for a social revolution to transpire. This would alter the objective conditions of society, which are what ultimately determine the mindset of the masses, and would thereby revolutionize the subjective conditions as well. The resultant morality would correspond to the resultant objective conditions, so we shall not attempt to outline it. Nevertheless, we can suggest that if the resulting society were communist—in its Marxist, anarchistic sense—morality would shed its current mendacious definition as *duties* and would instead consist of the nonmoral 'suggested imperatives' (or 'imperative suggestions') that characterize our own more sophisticated conception of it.

Good luck sorting out that semi-"Bacchanalian riot". It would take a Jürgen Habermas to appreciate its ideas. (Not even I appreciate them.)

"Wherefore hast thou ignored the concept of rights in your paper?" Rights are the other side of duties. There are no duties, so there are no rights. In an extended critique of morality I'd have to address them in detail.

Notice I didn't mention God even once, though he's commonly associated with morality. It would have been undignified. In fact, now that I've mentioned him I feel silly.

By the way, I had a hell of a time writing the "preliminary" critique of values. It was not easy, nor was it fun.

May 12

I might as well paste into this journal the parable and the little description I wrote several months ago.

The willow tree wept.

"What ails you, my friend?" cried the wind to his brother.

"I'm old and tired," sighed the tree.

"Time has caught up with you. That's no reason for sorrow."

"But I have one last wish which cannot be fulfilled."

"What is your wish?"

"Brother wind...." said the willow, "I long to see the world! I long to break free from the shackles of the soil and to see all that life has to offer!"

"Yours is an admirable wish, and I shall help you. But I warn you, there is much of little value in the kingdom of animals."

"Freedom, be it of the basest kind, must be nobler than my slavery."

"So you'd think. I shall grant your wish."

"With these words, the wind gathered his strength and burst forth in a gust. The old willow, helpless and weak, was uprooted and carried through the sky.

"This is marvelous!" gasped the tree in delight. "I finally understand the glory of freedom!"

Cradled by the wind, the willow sailed above mountains and oceans. He soared over lakes and forests and greeted the lofty eagle. Animals grazing in the fields below gazed in wonder at the

flying tree; he waved to them and laughed. But then the willow and his friend the wind came in sight of monstrous collections of cement. Structures of glass and concrete rose high into the air, almost touching the clouds; round their bases congregated thousands of bustling little animals.

"What is this place?" asked the willow tree in horror. "What are those animals doing? Are they praying to those big cement blocks?"

"No, my friend," answered the wind. "They live in them."

"Are they being punished?"

"No, they choose to live so."

"Why do they live in this desert when an oasis surrounds them?"

"Because, my brother, they have forgotten the power of the wind."

"How can one forget such a thing?"

"Freedom breeds forgetfulness."

"I don't believe it! I can't!"

"And they have invented something called 'money'—"

"Enough! Tell me no more! Take me away from this place! Return me to my home!"

"As you wish."

"I should rather spend each day weeping than live in such folly!"

So the wind deposited the weary tree into his old prison in the soil. And the willow spent the remainder of his days in sorrow, weeping for the poor souls who lived in freedom.

The Afghan woman lay on the shattered sidewalk in a shimmering lake of her own blood. Another explosion was heard from a distance. Her hair, knotted and greasy, was meticulously arranged in a tumbled mass to conceal her mutilated face. Screams emanated from the broken landscape. Her left leg was fully extended in its frozen sprint from oblivion. Nearby a building rumbled and fell. Four fingers of her right hand clawed at the red-soaked dirt, shuddered, and were still. Rapid fire speckled the road. The upper half of her left arm had fused to her torso, preferring warmth to cold amputation. Far off, a house was riddled with shells. Her breasts had shrunk to two wrinkles; the bone of her chin jutted into the air. A fourth explosion shook the mountains. The cartilage of her nose had melded to her pale hollow cheeks. Two machine guns rattled their message to the hills. Her sunken eyes prayed for the last time in their black loneliness. More planes appeared on the horizon. Her child lay across her chest, sleeping peacefully, dreaming, the crown of his head severed gracefully from his body.

Across the world, on the other side of the chasm between life and death, stood Mr. Donald Rumsfeld and his superior, George Bush, before a crowd of their admirers: two paragons of righteousness in a world gone mad.

I'm starting to feel superficial again. Who the hell am I? *What* am I? Above I suggested that my contempt for modernity is a burden, but that's far from true. It may indeed weigh me down, but that's not unpleasant. I savor it! I'm too shallow, too weak, to want to overcome it.

I'd like to experience a spiritual upheaval every few years, as a way to keep me in touch with life. The time is due. When will be my next, or my first, mystical revelation? Maybe this journal is a crutch, a brace I must break free from in order to venture outside my cozy little nest. In fact, I'm sure it is, but I still lack the courage to walk without it.

[…] Regarding the Middle East....the fat-witted Ariel Sharon won't accomplish a damned thing until he and his countrymen move out of the occupied territories. If he thinks he's going to stop terrorism by inciting Palestinian youths to hatred he's an even bigger fool than he looks. His strategy can work only if he takes it to its logical conclusion and murders the entire population. However, being a compassionate, forgiving old man, he won't do that, so the upshot of all the shit will be that Israel agrees to a gradual

withdrawal from the territories it illegally holds. How stupid do you have to be not to see that the way to pull the rug out from under terrorism is to *help* the population! Help them economically and end the repression. [Idiot, Israel doesn't care about ending terrorism. Violent Palestinian resistance is *useful* for Israel.]

May 13

I don't recall recording my impressions of George Sand's story "L'Orco". The translation may have been to blame, but I thought it was atrocious. So nauseatingly Romantic as to be disgusting. I was actually enraged. I felt corrupted as I read it. Here's a sample: "....And what a death! The greatest sorrow of this age of sorrows! And her life!—what a life! So full of beauty and contrast, so mysterious, so brilliant, so sad, so splendid, so enthusiastic, so austere, so voluptuous, so complete in all points of resemblance with all human beings! No! No life and no death have ever resembled hers. She alone, in this prosaic age, has been enabled to suppress all the common realities of life, and to leave nothing but its poetry...." Can writing be *more* cheap?

I don't understand how anything can travel at the speed of light. How is it possible for light to travel the circumference of Earth seven-and-a-half times in one second? Surely it would have to be 'dragged' rather than 'pushed' in order to go so fast. But what would it be dragged by? Space itself, somehow?—like it's filling a vacuum? Or maybe the key to understanding light lies in the fact that it gets sucked into black holes. Those structures are denser than anything else in the universe—maybe they're *infinitely* dense—so, according to general relativity, they must be the greatest 'warps' in space and time. Light's straight path curves around the sun and heads directly *into* black holes. This suggests that the reason why light radiates in all directions from its source is that it's heading into something infinitely dense, something that must be everywhere and nowhere, something beyond the edges of space perhaps? Does the universe exist in an enormous black hole, and the little ones that pepper it are tears in the 'fabric' and portals to the Great One, the deepest thing-in-itself, the Mother of all black holes? This would make some sense. It wouldn't explain the actual *speed* of light, but it would mean that the universe exists in a gargantuan spacetime warp that draws light into it just as black holes do. But we have to avoid the 'attraction' metaphor, because Onestone has proven that the *attractive* force of gravity, properly speaking, doesn't exist. So I'm still not sure what makes light go so fast.

Anyway, I'm sure that understanding light is the key to understanding the nature of the world.

Husserl's book *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* is an impressive jumble of gibberish. It can have no meaning except for the author, who, fortunately, is dead. Therefore it's meaningless. The pretentious schmuck obviously *wanted* to be imposingly obscure, for he doesn't define his invented terms and he cockily waltzes on while stubbornly refusing to acknowledge that he's writing nonsense. "If the presentification of the succession lived and experienced yesterday implies a presentification of the temporal field originarily lived and experienced yesterday, and if this field manifests itself as a continuum of primordially associated phantasies, then what we now have to do with are phantasies of phantasies." I'm not going to waste my time.

May 15

Finally writing the play about Ivan the Terrible. Its main purpose is to explore the nature of "evil". Today I was offered a job at a summer music camp called Blue Lake.

Guess what! I just realized I can print music off the internet! How incredible is that! I should have been doing it all semester! God damn, I LOVE the internet! Private property is obsolete now that the world has an internet! […]

No one appreciates as well as I that man is composed of schisms. The Great Schism is between animal and 'spirit', subjective and objective (approximately consciousness and self-consciousness). It's the origin of the confusions about freedom, the 'objective' validity of value-judgments, and ultimately everything else of moment. Every value-judgment pretends to be objectively true, but it can be true only 'subjectively'. As I said in my essay, for thinkers this poses a dilemma: we can't help but judge things, yet we know that no judgment is *true*. Therefore the thinker must be a dancer. (As Nietzsche said.) The problem of freedom will never be 'resolved' in the extreme way people have hoped: it's ingrained in the human condition, in the contradiction between consciousness and knowledge. Reason extends too far; it can't reconcile itself with the subjective facts. I doubt that I'll ever even *intellectually* solve the problem, though I'll keep trying. –On the other hand, I relish the paradox. Certainty would make life banal.

May 16

As I suggested once before, the way you can tell who you are is by deciding which actions and thoughts and attitudes feel natural and which feel forced. Reading books can make you feel "double" if you adopt the book's attitude, but if you can't sustain it then probably that's not who you really are. So I guess sustainability is what matters most.

May 17

It's significant that guys never think of girls as creatures that defecate. It never occurs to us!

It you don't have an intuitive understanding of the way I use Hegel's "Other", you may think that by using it to explain such things as why certain girls don't take me seriously I'm introducing an arbitrary and shallow concept that doesn't get us further to the solution. *Aber das ist ganz falsch*. On the phenomenological level I don't see how an explanation can be much more fundamental than that one. Nor do I arbitrarily, 'externally' apply it to situations; I base it always on *feeling*, which is not as meaningless as external reason.

On the 15th I should have made it clearer that the 'antinomy' isn't between a subjective awareness of freedom and an objective fact of unfreedom. Rather, the very application of the word 'freedom' to our subjective experience brutalizes the latter, because 'freedom' is just an artificiality that, moreover, doesn't have an obvious definition. It both adds to and subtracts from the essence of our inner perception. Subjectivity can't be encompassed in the word 'freedom'—in *any* words, actually, for they carry too much conceptual baggage with them. (They *are* conceptual baggage, as subjectivity is not.) There's a leap between the two (though this doesn't mean that there's a leap between an objective and a subjective *orientation*, as Kierkey thinks). Nevertheless, 'free' is far more accurate than 'unfree' as a description of how our inner being feels.

—Only a hypothesis, probably a mistaken one. For the overtones of concepts are integral even to our subjective, immediate interpretations of ourselves. They're unconsciously tangled up with 'pure' self-consciousness. So our knowledge of the concept of freedom somewhat determines how we actually *feel*. Therefore, in our "real life-process", subjectivity and objectivity, which are logically distinguishable, play off against each other and become essentially a Substance with two modes.

May 18

This quotation is so intense it brings tears to my eyes: "*Carcasse, tu trembles? Tu tremblerais bien davantage, si tu savais, ou je te mene.*" Said by a French general to his body as he was preparing for battle.

May 20

I've been home for two days. The arrangement [of the Toccata and Fugue in D minor] I downloaded off the Internet was infantile—nothing of excellence is free in this world—so today I bought the transcription by Ferruccio Busoni. It's abominably difficult. I can't learn it in one summer, so instead I'll play the Prelude and Fugue in A minor.

I'm reading *The Development of the Modern State*, the CSS book I never finished in my sophomore year.

Nietzsche says we aren't entitled to the thing-in-itself because we don't know enough. This has some validity, but we might as well say that we aren't entitled to quarks and black holes because we don't know enough. My point is that, for humans, the thing-in-itself is a necessary concept—and not only because science presupposes it, but because it is an involuntary assumption of human consciousness. Insofar as the world is an object for us, we automatically see it as a perpetual thing 'out there'. It's subjectively necessary, even if it's objectively wrong. –But that, too, assumes a thing-in-itself, an objective, true world! The noumenon is an *unavoidable* concept.

I was just reading a journal I kept at the age of nine. My writing skills have certainly improved a little. What a philosophical quagmire is self-continuity!

It reflects poorly on girls that few of them have been romantically interested in me. They prefer popularity over substance, and they're bad judges of character. But they're angels, so I don't care.

For many months, and until I write my thesis, I've been following a simple strategy as regards philosophy. It's been implicit at all times. I'm letting an array of thoughts percolate in my head, periodically ignoring them and then aiming glancing blows at them, feeling them from various angles, tip-toeing toward a coherent *Weltanschauung*. Hitherto I've been *forced* to do this, for it was only a couple years ago that I awoke from my dogmatic slumber. But now the embryos are hatching: I'm starting to see the outlines of my philosophy. If I harnessed my latent willpower and sat in solitude for weeks and systematically thought about everything, the product would be a long essay painting in broad strokes the framework of a new 'system'. However, I'm waiting until next year, when I'll have enjoyed a restful, energy-collecting summer spent at a music camp far away from serious thought and when more ideas will have finished their incubation in my brain—and I'll be *ready*. My thesis will be my tribute to the passion of youth and the fortitude of philosophy in its decrepit old age *and*, above all, to the union between the two, whose consequence is: adding spring to the step of philosophy and a *goal* to the 'sprint' of youth. The most sublime partnership is that between the quest for knowledge and a giddy joy in life.

May 21

Johann Sebastian Bach: with the exception of Mozart, the supreme composer in history. With the exception of Beethoven, the most *solid* and *weighty*. You can *chew* on his music; it's like eating a well-done piece of steak—but juicier and tastier. In fact, ignore the qualifying clause about Beethoven.

I love that the music of Bach, Mozart and Beethoven is called *absolute* music. Or: absolute *music.* Talk about wisdom in language!

Freedom vs. determinism.... Surely the "levels" of freedom I mentioned in my paper aren't incompatible with my hypothesis. Our periodic subtle awareness of unfreedom is merely a leaking-into-consciousness of the objective causal world. I.e., factors that influence us become subjectively present, so we feel unfree. It's never the case that everything determining us is all at once filtered through consciousness; therefore we can be aware only of *partial* unfreedom. But something still feels wrong. My thoughts haven't 'clicked'. Maybe I've misunderstood the paradoxes.

May 22

Remember those obsessive-compulsive journal entries from my high school years? They grew out of the fact that it was hard for me to operate unless I was utterly clear on my "resolutions". My mind would feel 'cloudy' if I wasn't exactly certain of the path I'd take to improve myself. The way I felt then is similar to the way I feel now, when the paradox of freedom is plaguing me. The main difference is that I'm more successful at ignoring the obsession now than I was five years ago.

May 23

Consciousness doesn't control anything. It could do so only by intending, and intentions aren't what cause bodily movements (which are what cause events outside us). Consciousness can only 'immediately consent to' actions. (Does consciousness control itself? = Do thoughts have control over themselves? I'll get to that later.) Biologically it makes sense that intentions almost always coincide with actions, for they are both products of neural activities that are coordinated together. Now, when a person's actions don't coincide with his intentions we say he is unfree. I don't know if that ever occurs, but if it does we're justified in saying, for example, that a criminal 'subject' to it isn't responsible for his actions. What about criminals with severe psychological disorders? They usually aren't considered free because their intentions are products of factors over which they have no control. But according to biology, so are the intentions of everyone. Do those criminals have *less* control over their intentions (and, by implication, their concomitant actions)? In a sense, yes. Their illnesses make them less capable of 'pure' rationality than normal people are, and reason is freer than less intentional things like passions and schizophrenia (and therefore—).

It's a *fact* that productive forces, especially in this day and age, demolish all obstacles impeding their development. Cloning and genetic engineering will conquer all artificial devices invented to regulate them. I explained why in an earlier entry. A second *fact* is that private property rights will grow progressively more incompatible with the distribution (general usage) and further development of the productive forces. Capitalism hasn't yet exhausted its potential, but, as I've already noted, in certain spheres it's coming close. It'll be in grave danger fifty years from now. I'm sure of it!

Some people think that Marxism's influence has been a testament against its central ideas. They couldn't be more wrong. In fact—as I noted long ago—the eclipse of Marxism and the communist countries was an eloquent *confirmation* of the theory (and refutation of the objection's premise). Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Castro and others based the revolution on *will*, and in the long run they failed ignominiously. They inserted themselves into the historical process and thus, as it were, threw a wrench between the hitherto smoothly functioning gears of historical logic. Objective conditions weren't right; the opportunity for revolution had to emerge involuntarily, from the inner workings of the economy, in order not to be specious. That's a vague hypothesis, but in a refined form it would be correct. (How will I arrive at the refined form? What will it be?)

May 24

That thoughts and actions are directly determined by cellular processes we don't control is irrelevant to the problem of freedom. Though we are effects, we can still be free. In the beginning of yesterday's entry I forgot to make the point that, even though science has left to us nothing but the ability to 'affirm' actions (and not to control them), we *are* nonetheless free. This is because...—well, damn it, we're *obviously* free! = We obviously have a measure of control—which admittedly is objectively false, but in our intentional world it's true. Moreover, subjectively we and our actions are an immediate intentional unity, and therefore we 'effectively' control them. It's because they're intentional that they feel just as free as our intentions (thoughts) themselves. We're less free under the influence of passions and mental illnesses

because we feel less in control; i.e., the 'mental structure' is less intentional.[1] (We feel most in control when we're most self-conscious.) By "less intentional" I mean that we feel....less in control! Since that's circular I have to introduce a third synonym, viz. *rational* (or lucid; see the relevant entry). Rationality, or objectivity—in a particular sense unlike the one I've been using—is the highest realization of freedom, because we can *choose* more easily, we feel like we have a better grasp of a situation. But that has nothing to do with intentions per se: there are no grades in intentionality. Human consciousness consists of intentions—and that's the end of the matter. I got confused because the notion of control seems implied in the notion of intention, while it actually isn't. (I thought that "intention" suggested "control over intention", in which case intentionality *would* be subject to degrees because the alternate presence and absence of lucid objectivity means that we don't always have the same control over our intentions). However, all this means that there are two relevant senses of "freedom": that relating to intentions and that relating to control. The first is constant, never more nor less, because humans have intentions in every waking moment; the second fluctuates because objectivity isn't constant. (The first is concerned merely with the abstract fact of our intentionality. It's far less meaningful than the second, but it's not empty.) Self-consciousness, in people for whom it doesn't evolve to a pathological *idée fixe*, is associated with objectivity (control) to an even greater extent than pure reasoning is, so it's freer. Insane criminals are less objective than the rest of us, so they're less responsible for their actions. People sometimes say that it's because of their illness that these criminals are unfree—i.e., they leap from objective involuntary causation (which is, after all, applicable to everyone) to the unwarranted statement of "therefore, unfreedom"—but they fail to provide the link to *subjective* unfreedom, which is the only kind that matters to humans. They fail to say, "The illness causes criminals to lose their 'rational lucidity' or self-control, and *this* is the direct cause and symptom of their unfreedom." Without that connecting link between the objective and subjective realms we confuse the two types of unfreedom. The objective kind is made neither more nor less by the presence of a mental illness, while the meaningful subjective kind is made to exist in a big way.

Okay, *BABY!* This time I *know* that my analysis is meaningful. To make it seem so to you I'll have to expand on it, but I'll save that for another day, when it's not 2:30 in the morning. I think I'm *finally* on the way to a solution of the paradox of freedom. The main thing to keep in mind is that analytical distinctions are absolutely imperative—are, indeed, the solution itself. Yet they always have to be reconciled with the immediate unity of experience.

By the way, yesterday and today I wrote the rough outline of my play. It was frustrating, but I'm pleased with the outcome.

May 25

[…]

I hope that by the time you read this journal the Ozzy Osbourne show will have disappeared from society's collective memory. On the off-chance that that's the case, I'll inform you that Ozzy and his family have let cameras invade their home; the result has been a wildly popular MTV "reality" show. It mislikes me to mention it; I do so only to point out that reality TV is the newest fad. More and more movie stars want to have their private lives blatantly exposed on television. The *Truman Show* mentality has become the definitive characteristic of our culture—with reality TV as only one of its manifestations. What will be its long-term evolution?

We shouldn't confuse *dispositions* with real unfreedom. I may have a disposition to be shy, but I remain free to do as I choose. ....No, no, ignore that. I have to do a lot more thinking before I make statements like that.

—Let's try another approach. Because humans aren't perfectly objective beings—aren't omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent—they can never be perfectly free. If we were omniscient we

[1] I'll explain what I mean by that after I've figured it out. –For even schizophrenics and the insane have intentions!

could, for example, survey an infinity of linguistic possibilities before choosing one and then speaking; or we would never be subject to the unfreedom of absent-mindedness, for instance. If we were omnipotent we could choose to turn emotions on and off; we could act however we wanted at any time; we could even control others. Notice that omniscience applies only to thought and omnipotence properly applies to everything outside of thought. Hence there is another analytical distinction in freedom (which I've perhaps implied a few times): control over 'intentions' (thoughts abstracted from any emotional content) and control over actions, passions, dispositions and so on.

Before I continue I'll tell you one of the things that's bothering me. Namely, from one perspective it seems that shy people should be able to talk if they just decide they're going to, but from another perspective....they can't. In fact, they *can* do it (obviously)—but something's blocking them, so in a way it's 'difficult'. What does this difficulty consist in?.... You probably don't understand why this is causing me trouble; on paper it seems simple, but it *feels* paradoxical.

May 26

Several days ago I read the second book of Samuel. Now I'm reading as much as I can of John Richard Green's four-volume work *A Short History of the English People*. It's engaging and well-written, though the author uses vain poeticisms.

It may be wrong that the brain is the sole cause of thoughts. However, at this point in history there is (1) no evidence against the purely biological hypothesis and (2) no obvious theoretical lapse in it. It does seem paradoxical and uncomfortable to people, but that's far from being an argument against it. Even our inability to understand how neural processes can produce consciousness isn't a valid objection. The theory is simple, logical, and explains the facts. […]

May 27

The use of the word "reduction" to mean "conquest" is strikingly poetic. "Wallace reduced Stirling castle"; "Edward reduced Llewelyn's army". He *reduced* it! Isn't that wonderful? It's like "absolute music". So simple and matter-of-fact, yet so pregnant of meaning.

In what way are independent people like Nietzsche freer than the typical American, the herd animal?

....There's a chance I remarked on the following long ago, in a land far, far away. Karl Popper was an ass to rant and rave so often, in such banal moralistic vehemence, about the totalitarianism of Plato's *Republic*. What was he thinking?—the intellectual thug! It's like attacking the Bhagavad-gita for sanctioning war, except that it's even *more* irrelevant and demented. What can be more obvious than that the *Republic* is totalitarian? The stupidest peasant could see that—and only the stupidest peasant would thus flare up in righteous indignation at every chance he got, ignoring the philosophical originality and fecundity of Plato's masterpiece (as well as the historical context!). Pooper even had the mindless audacity to say that reading the work turns students into "little fascists". ("Open Society", eh?) "[Popper's] attacks on dogma, authoritarianism, and historical inevitability, his stress on tolerance, transparency, and debate, his embracing of trial-and-error, his distrust of certainty and espousal of humanity—these today are beyond challenge." [From *Wittgenstein's Poker*.] Yes, as are the profound ideas of diluted liberalism and the hallowed canon of common sense. Only a genius could have been so completely derivative and obnoxiously boring. But let's not forget the greatest discovery in the history of the philosophy of science, the grand doctrine that can be summed up in that one sacred word to which all scholars and everyone with half-a-brain pay obeisance: falsification! Falsification! It's the new gospel, brethren! Hallelujah! […]

May 29

[…]

Most philosophers and scientists have been stunted human beings. They have let the search for knowledge control them. At this time of my life I feel dismal when I continually focus my energies on knowledge—and I feel dismal when I don't! The second feeling is connected closely with my acute awareness of the Other—as is, I suppose, the first. I can't separate my 'intrinsic' desires (if they exist) from what I do for the sake of "recognition" (or just from Other-awareness).

May 30

By "Other-awareness" I didn't mean real people—or only indirectly. I meant my own self-consciousness, or a kind of vague, universal, abstract Other. It's hard to distinguish the two.

June 2

Today I finished writing the second scene of my play. I also read more of Green's book, of which I've almost finished the second volume. On the other hand, I've already forgotten most of it. Why does that always happen?! My memory is a sieve. –Be that as it may, reading about history is more thrilling than reading an epic novel.

June 3

I want a creature other than man to recognize mankind's accomplishments—preferably an immortal being. That way, our achievements will themselves be immortal. Incidentally, the human desire for any kind of immortality isn't a psychoanalytical but a phenomenological....phenomenon. It's a species of the genus "desire for Other-recognition".

Today I wrote a couple more scenes of my play. I'm trying to write as much as I can during a few lucky hours of inspiration. Of course, when I reread it in the fall I'll think it's shit.

June 4

Mother Nature knows her work well: the people who are bothered only occasionally by life's meaninglessness are the ones who don't have the capacities necessary to overcome it, while those who are obsessed by it have been blessed with talent. What an exquisitely refined system of rank has been devised by our creator! It's so fair and humane! (All of Mother Nature's edicts are wise beyond human comprehension.)

Yesterday and today I read the delicious play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The last time I read it I was nine years old and living in Cambridge. Shakespeare's self-mocking sense of humor is all the more delightful in that it's aware of its own value and the value of its "frivolous", dreamy creations. "You have but slumb'red here while these visions did appear", says Puck at the end, reminding us of the significance of sleep in the play. In other words: watching the play has the same regenerative effect on the spectators as sleep has on the characters. If sleep is necessary and healthy, so is Shakespeare's comedy. It's an idyllic, refreshing recess from real life.[1]

In the past few months I've noticed that I get shivers down my legs and tears in my eyes over the most trivial cultural experiences. Puck's last speech—and my realization that Puck is intended as

[1] Alternatively, it *is* real life, and everything else is the illusion. I prefer this to the other.

Shakespeare himself—had that lovely effect on me.

June 6

I call Goethe's arrogance (or pride) unenlightened because it isn't indistinguishable from a self-critical, self-deprecating approach to life. (Analytically pride can always be thus distinguished, but subjectively, in one's immediate consciousness, it needn't be (though it usually is because most people aren't very self-knowledgeable, i.e., self-"critical"—so their pride, if they have it, is more naïve)).[1]

Long ago I remarked on Karl Marx's prediction of the Russian revolution. For you willful ignoramuses who still have doubts, here is proof of his remarkable prescience (from a letter he wrote): "What the Prussian jackasses do not see is that the present war is leading inevitably to a war between Germany and Russia. And such a war No. 2 will act as the midwife of the inevitable social revolution in Russia." America too will experience an inevitable social revolution—though it will almost certainly be comparatively gradual—but I can't say for sure what will act as the midwife.

....My play is brazenly mediocre. It's far too short and I haven't planned it out well. As I was writing it new themes kept popping into my head. Moreover, in general it's amateurish. So I'm indefinitely postponing writing it. In the meantime, I read tonight Henrik Ibsen's play *The Master Builder*. I would use two words to describe it: surreal and thought-provoking. I could think of several possible interpretations, but I'm not in the mood to think analytically. Music has temporarily blotted out my analytical streak.

I can think of no more perfect heaven than for a girl to sit on my lap as I gaze into her eyes, our souls embracing, and we listen to the last movement of Op. 109. That final variation, when you feel yourself engulfed in an ocean—and the theme itself, and the first variation, and the whole movement!—is Passion. Nothing more nor less than Passion. Beethoven, Beethoven, *I love you!*

How odd it is that what I consider to be my very *core*, the key to my identity, the glue that holds me together, the comfort that nips identity-crises in the bud, enjoys scant expression in this journal. Maybe because it's so ever-present, nearly coextensive with my consciousness, that I take it for granted and hardly even notice its existence much of the time.

June 7

I have little doubt that readers will criticize my reflections as not exact enough, nor boring enough. "Precision is the measure of knowledge", they'll say. "You can't know anything unless you're precise, for a lack of preciseness is obscurity, and obscurity only clouds the issue." *I* say, on the other hand, that a ready-made reliance on the criterion of "preciseness" is a sign of the philosophic philistine. Precision is good, but it shouldn't be pursued at all costs—because it tends to castrate the potent intuitions of the true philosopher.

I read part of Windelband's *History of Ancient Philosophy*, but it doesn't interest me much.

....I've always found it singularly amusing that, when having a conversation, one has to choose which of the other person's eyes to look at. I find myself bouncing from eye to eye, sometimes pausing in the middle, losing track of what's being said because the situation is so hilarious. We're talking so seriously, nodding gravely, grunting in agreement, while at the same time we're deciding which eye to focus on! 'Which facial feature should I favor? The lips, the left eye, the hairline.... Hurry up, I must decide!'

....What I've never been able to understand is why self-mastery should be such a great thing. I admit it has a nice ring to it, but if someone doesn't care about 'controlling' the directions in which he cultivates himself, why is it nevertheless a 'better' thing for him to do? Besides, the term itself is practically

[1] My pride too is unenlightened sometimes. In other words, rather than being proud of my relentless self-criticism—which pride would, ironically, be coexistent [you mean coextensive?] with the critical attitude itself—I might be proud of my achievements, my mind, my abilities, etc. The distinction is very subtle, especially because pride can be a result of both the former and the latter at the same time. In my case I think it generally is.

meaningless, except in the vaguest senses. It literally has no definite philosophical meaning, i.e., no *sensical* meaning. How are we supposed to know when we've achieved self-mastery? What's the difference between him who expresses his nature by being a "universal" man and him who does so by perpetually writing music? For all we know, both are expressing characters[1] that they hadn't the slightest influence in forming. Maybe Goethe had in this sense as little "self-control" as Mozart. Furthermore, we obviously can't proceed a single step in clarifying the word until we clarify the self and freedom. I'm not surprised that Goethe didn't attempt such an elucidation, but I am surprised that *Nietzsche* didn't. What could be more fundamental?

Supposing that I can give a meaning to the word, one can meaningfully argue against another person that self-mastery is "better" only if both agree on something more fundamental (which the value can be based on) and if they ignore the objections relating to the subjective leap (and the corresponding 'right' we have to hold whatever values we like even if they're logically inconsistent). In other words, I'm killing the pretension to objective validity that tends to be inherent in value-judgments when not qualified in the ways I've qualified them. Both Nietzsche and Goethe assumed their ideal to be objectively good (in a particular sense of "objective", having nothing to do with "independent of humans" or "eternally absolute"—a sense which is, in fact, not entirely meaningful; hence my inability to describe it adequately).

June 8

Girls are *achingly* fresh beings. Everything about them—their weaknesses, vanities, frivolities—I adore. That they're the passive, unwitting medium for the greatest miracle of life almost makes me weep with love. (If their role were somehow more conscious or intentional I'd love them less. It's because of their *weakness*—their *involuntary* participation in the mysteries of the Unknown—that I cherish them so.) Weakness, albeit of a specific, perhaps indefinable kind, will always typically attract men to women, and strength will always attract women to men. It's the unavoidable dialectic of the mutual affirmation of the sexes. –Eat that, feminists!

[…]

In Marx's attempt to leave philosophy he must have understood by that vague word only metaphysics and ethics, for otherwise his position isn't even plausible. I don't agree with his rejection of metaphysics (as you already know) because humans aren't merely a reflection of conditions, and therefore reason has a degree of autonomy. (Ultimately we can't consistently deny that. I suppose *intellectually*—i.e., ignoring reason's *activity*—we can, but this is futile as a justification for rejecting metaphysics because it means we'd have to 'reject' every other doctrine arrived at through reason. They'd all be mere reflections of [psychological, social, etc.] conditions!)[2] On the other hand, if Marx thinks that metaphysics is *irrelevant* in the way that God is, I disagree. (Depending on how we define the term, I agree that it's *less* relevant than science etc.)

June 9

The Prelude and Fugue is fun to play, highly satisfying. It fits the hands perfectly, like Chopin. The tempestuous ending—oh, what an ending!—calls for such murderous fury that I worry I'll break the piano's strings.

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[1] Or: are expressions of characters....

[2] In a similar situation in my paper I failed to appreciate that science and philosophy would thus, by their own ideas, be groundless. I saved the day by saying that we should 'bracket' the conclusion of self-contradiction, i.e., go halfway by simply accepting the idea in question and recognizing that it's the (incomprehensible) paradox of freedom that makes the contradiction inevitable. But for one who wants to be strictly consistent, as Marx did, the self-contradiction is indeed fatal. (I didn't write any of that, but it was implicit.)

June 11

I suggested that reason can have validity in spite of the many irrational [no, you mean *non*-rational] factors that influence it because it can be considered in itself. It can be abstracted from them. In fact, that's what the act of reasoning involves: immediate subjective ignorance of, or 'abstraction from', its own causes and constraints. It applies objective measures to itself and thereby reaches conclusions that it considers true. The critique of reason under consideration yields nothing, because it undermines itself. That's why I wrote in the footnote that we can apply the critique only to things outside the domain of reason, like religion and values. It's not self-contradictory to criticize them in this way because they don't partake of the rigorously logical, rational, truth-seeking spirit of the criticism, as do science and philosophy (the two general categories of strict reason).[1]

Ohhh, I'm in philosophical despair. I don't even know what I'm arguing for anymore. I'll have to begin again when my mind is clear.

....We unpractical self-centered people have, perhaps, a greater potential for acute sadness than ordinary people. I'm listening to Scott Joplin's bittersweet song "Solace", which should suggest to you my state of mind. I'm not rejoicing in my existence. It's always the little things that upset my delicate equilibrium—things like an email Sangeetha writes, or an evening spent at a picnic, or philosophical confusion, or boredom. Or a day in which I accomplish nothing. All in all, I feel trapped within my rational irrationality. I'm a seething mass of contradictions: in every direction I turn I run into conflicting desires, conflicting attitudes, conflicting thoughts. An example is the war between, on the one hand, my intellectual integrity and, on the other, my weariness of questioning everything and my tendency to judge and ridicule people. When I obsess over philosophy I'm frustrated and unsatisfied, but when I don't I have a guilty conscience. I always have a craving to express myself through writing, partly because this is the best way to be judged an impressive person by—whomever. So my guilty conscience is in part a result of subtle vanity. Maybe it's *entirely* such a result; I can't tell. I'm moved in so many ways that I don't know which are imaginary and which genuine. I don't know what my real motives are; my mind is so far from being translucent that it's indistinguishable from mud. Sometimes I think that if I really wanted to I could renounce philosophy altogether for months and instead pursue love or hedonistic pleasures. But philosophy is still a 'needed' crutch, almost as much as this journal is. –Nevertheless, the intellectual side of me is daily growing more impatient with itself.

June 12

'Science' is a better method of pursuing truth than religion and mysticism because it focuses all its energies on impartially investigating the object, whereas religion is more a projection of the individual's state of mind—his desires, fears, awe, etc. Science does as much as it can to suppress the subject, which is preferable when we're making statements that claim to be true of the object![2] (Mysticism can be more sophisticated than religions like Christianity because it's usually metaphorical: it doesn't pretend to be literally true, as do science and Christianity.) It's this which distinguishes that critique of reason from religious thought and so on, and is therefore the reason why the critique isn't circular when applied to religion etc.—i.e., because they're more subjective—while it *is* when applied to science and philosophy. Of course, there's no real dividing-line between the two spheres, so ultimately this critique of certain spheres as "false consciousness" applies to *all* activities of thought. I'm merely saying that in the case of

[1] [That paragraph is directed against, among other things, postmodernist critiques of reason and science. Science is criticized as only an expression of social conditions, a product of power relations, etc. A stupid criticism.]

[2] I'm including philosophy in 'science'. Philosophy is impartial and objective even when investigating the 'subject' (which then becomes the object).

scientific reason it can result only in the injunction to examine positions from all possible standpoints (because every standpoint is subjective, caused and constrained), while in the case of all less objective thinking it (this thinking) *is* essentially nothing but psychological dispositions etc., which can therefore be more effectively criticized as false consciousness (or simply as....).[1] Of course, to be thorough it's always necessary to examine the claims of this thinking on their own terms—so I'm not sure why I expended so much energy writing all that at such a furious pace. I had to get those thoughts off my chest, I guess. (So 'vanity' isn't the only reason for my concern with philosophy, or even the most important one. Duh.)

Maybe the essential 'criterion' isn't scientific objectivity but the degree of orientation-to-an-object. Science and philosophy are most objectively oriented, religion less so, lyric poetry even less so (or equally). In other words, this objective orientation adds something that's absent from purely subjective pursuits, which means it can't be exhaustively analyzed by invoking conditions that cause and influence it, as lyric poetry and anything else that's 'in-itself' or 'for its own sake' can.

These considerations, however, are so hard to grasp and problematic that they may be only fragments of my imagination, resulting somehow from language and nothing else. Well, the fact that they don't correspond to some 'real' world doesn't mean they're 'unreal' problems. They're invented by us, but they needn't therefore be illusory. They're illusory only if they can be solved by clarifying ambiguities in language.

June 13

At the end of *Les Préludes*, when the piece is coming to its magnificent conclusion, the horns blare a single note as the rest of the brass section continues its climb to the final triumphant chords. The effect is hair-raising and tear-jerking. Nothing could sound more heroic and inspiring. It's both a call to battle and a signal of victory. The reason I'll never lose myself in hopelessness is that this piece of music exists.

June 16

The camp has a rustic flair, and the people are quite friendly. At a campfire last night I met my fellow counselors: a few cute girls, but most are somewhat homely.

Breakfast is at 7:00 everyday. That pleases me not.

....So far I've made the acquaintance of several angels. Two of them I've already recruited to play Dvorák's Piano Quintet in A with me; another is from Scotland and plays the harp; a fourth is a beautiful sophomore named Catherine who plays the french horn.

June 17

Woke up at 6:15, took a [freezing] shower (shivering uncontrollably) and spent the rest of the day in meetings and workshops. Also played soccer with Maureen and Ryan. Now I'm going to a restaurant with everyone, where we'll sing karaoke. (I actually enjoy karaoke, believe it or not.)

June 19

I'm about to go to a restaurant/bowling alley. Today I spent in meetings and workshops, most of them commonsensical. I received my schedule: I'll be the pianist in a jazz band, which is ironic, because…I've never played jazz piano. I'll also help supervise a camper band and play in another ensemble.

[1] I was conflating the two critiques, because they're very similar. They're almost identical.

I'm still trying to start that chamber group. The early mornings are as unpleasant as ever—it feels like my life consists of one long day with moments of darkness interspersed, whereas formerly my life was an eternal night with moments of daylight added for effect—but at least the showers are no longer a problem: I take them at night, when the water's scalding.

....I talked to an enchanting girl tonight. She is the personification of the Good. Gorgeous, tall, sweet, friendly, funny. Laughs all the time. She's interested in philosophy, psychology and writing. Plays the violin. Has a lovely smile! She followed me around tonight; I could feel the chemistry between us. Her name is Kristin. I'd better not be imagining everything again!

June 21

I've never been so busy in my life. Today I have a few hours of spare time because a canoe trip was cancelled.

Kristin, the potential model, doesn't seem romantically interested in me. She's friendly, but she's always around four other girls, so I can't talk with her in solitude. It's making me lonely, even though I'm so busy I don't have *time* to be lonely. All other girls here pale in comparison with Kristin.

June 23

That was an exaggeration. Kristin isn't "ideal", though I still really like her. Last night we and some friends saw a movie and went to a restaurant. The evening started off well, but as it wore on, the other boy with us (Brian) monopolized the conversation and K. stopped paying attention to me. Luckily, Brian isn't much of a competitor: though every word out of his mouth is hilarious, he's neurotic and annoying. Still, by 11:00 I felt pretty dejected. I'd planned to make a 'move', but an opportunity didn't present itself.

Today wasn't much better for a while. I had no energy to do anything, nor did I care. But in the afternoon I happened to meet Kristin alone (the first time ever); after innocuous conversation I broached the topic of our relationship. We both professed to "like" each other etc., but she said she just wants to "go with the flow". Be friends now and see what happens. –I felt better afterwards even though I hadn't reached anything akin to 'closure'.

Have to play in a talent show now.

June 24

It went well. I'm always intimidated by talent, though I have it myself. Sometimes I actually wonder why girls would be attracted to *me* when other guys have such skills. I know it's absurd.

Afterwards Kristin and I sat on the beach together, an orange moon above us. It was romantic; if I hadn't talked about our relationship the other day I might have tried something. But Brian and Amy showed up.

....Opening day is tomorrow. I won't be directly in charge of campers because I'm a Unit Counselor, which is essentially a glorified name for: not Cabin Counselor.

This past week has lasted a short lifetime. My former self is a memory. I literally feel as though I was born last week: that's how radical the break has been between my two lifestyles. I haven't thought about philosophy once, except superficially. Sociality has been my one concern. My self-continuity feels external—but oddly (and inevitably) internal at the same time. Who can understand it?

I don't have high hopes for my friendship with Kristin. I can't see myself wanting to be involved with her except romantically. In fact, it's hard to see myself wanting to be involved with *any* girls unless there's at least a *tinge* of romance. Friendships with guys I tend to value even less. Therefore it seems that pure friendships scarcely exist for me.... I'd better shut up before I coax myself into depression.

June 29

I like most of the boys in our unit. They have a lot of personality. One of them, a 13-year-old, plays the sitar, meditates whenever he has the chance, and reads about Eastern religions during dinner. Another is convinced he has telekinetic powers. A third is a funny, adorable, precocious boy who unfortunately stutters. They all apparently are fond of me. I'll miss them when they leave.

June 30

The Pleasant Dream
A Romance, by Chris Wright
(Outline)

Act 1: Chris, Kristin and three other girls have their night off, from 7 to 12. They go to Ruby Tuesday's. Chris is terrifically bored as he listens to the three uninvited guests gossip and complain about various counselors. He and Kristin say little.

Act 2: At last they leave. They drive to the shore of Lake Michigan and wade in the water. Kristin and Chris go off together, preferring to have a private conversation. After struggling for a while with his shyness, Chris gets the nerve to tell Kristin he'd like to kiss her. The tension has been building to a heart-pounding peak in this moment; the two kiss passionately. But Kristin is self-conscious (her friends are nearby), so they sit on the wet sand and have a confused, halting conversation. Then they kiss again, etc.—until their friends say they want to go back to camp.

Act 3: They arrive at 11:00. Kristin tells her friends she wants to take a walk alone, so they part. Then she and Chris walk to the camp's beach, sit on a bench, and take advantage of the solitude. […] They hold each other in a cacophonous silence. [Oh, come on!] […]

—Yes, that all happened last night. I needn't tell you how overjoyed I was. [No, you needn't.] When I awoke this morning I couldn't believe it hadn't all been a dream. It had all happened to *me*! [Very impressive, Sherlock.] How was that possible?! [Good question.] […]

[…]

July 4

Well, apparently, at this time of life Kristin "want[s] to have friends rather than a boyfriend". Sound familiar? She didn't give a better reason, and I didn't press her. I smiled and said, "I understand. It's okay." I just didn't *care* enough to talk about it. Besides, by now I'm used to rejection.

....Fortunately I'm absurdly fickle. My sadness lasted a few hours—and will no doubt reassert itself soon—but at the moment, sitting alone in my cabin, I don't care about disappointments. I like my campers, and some of them *love* me. I never lose my temper with them, I'm stern only when I have to be, I treat them like adults, I'm patient, I never ignore them,[1] and on the whole we have fun together. I'm like a favorite uncle to the ones who interest me. We even discuss our love-lives and give each other advice. It's stupid to mull on misfortune—though tempting.

[1] I know all too well what it's like to be ignored.

July 6

A few days ago I conducted a band for twenty minutes. The real conductor was worried he was about to have a heart attack, so he left the rehearsal to me as he went off to the hospital or somewhere. The kids were justifiably amused by unique style of conducting: waving my arms about and making frantic gestures when I wanted them to stop playing. They made fun of me, but we had a good time.

I just read aphorism 301, "The fancy of the contemplatives", from *The Gay Science*. Now I feel like myself again. I will not be bogged down by social disappointments; I'll accept them or ignore them and continue my lifelong trek toward that most ambitious of all goals:—death! (Yes, I'm *choosing* death. I could reject it if I wanted to.[1])

....Tonight we saw a concert. (There's one every night.) Kristin sat in the front row of the orchestra, so I was able to gaze at her from afar. The other players didn't exist for me; she and her golden hair leapt out from the stage. She was the foreground, the others the background. I watched her long, slender fingers maneuver the bow in its fluid strokes and reflected that if her personality were a little more open and easygoing I could love her. I was happy as I watched and listened tonight, but it was a bittersweet happiness full of yearning. –Incidentally, Nietzsche is right that I generally don't distinguish between happiness and unhappiness. They blend together. When I'm happy I'm often sad on some deeper level, and when I'm unhappy I tend to feel subtly and inexplicably happy. Maybe it's hope that sustains me so, or maybe it's the 'tenderness' that seems to be a part of me. Either way—I don't care and I'm going to bed.

July 7

Loneliness, sadness. The campers are leaving today, and I won't miss them. They're too similar to my peers: mean, loud, malicious and dull. I'm sure the high-schoolers will be even worse. Why must people be so petty?

July 8

"I've lived too long on my knees": praying and meditating and loving and begging and crying and dying. With my hands clasped and raised to the heavens. I'm not in touch with myself and I never will be.

July 9

Met a girl named Christy, a friend of Kristin's. Our conversation revolved around sex, our past lovers, etc. Christy obviously likes me a lot, but—since fate doesn't, I wasn't attracted to her. She ain't pretty enough. Damn! I finally find a girl who wants a guy like me, but *I* don't want *her*! Could my life be any more ironic? It's like an elaborate practical joke, or a Seinfeld episode. The only sensible reaction I can have is to laugh and shrug my shoulders.

Reading *Guy Mannering*.

July 13

Not much has happened lately. One word describes my life here: 'puttering'. Everything is repetitive and easy, though not necessarily boring. I was far more bored during the months preceding this job. Today something out of the ordinary occurred: Christy told me that I treat her better than any guy she's

[1] Existentialists would approve of that sentence's pointless obscurity.

known[1] and that she likes me a lot. She even thinks I'm a great conversationalist. I don't have feelings for her, but I couldn't bring myself to say that. Instead I said that, while I enjoy talking to her, we hardly know each other—and that therefore I can't say anything definite about our prospects. We talked awhile; I was relieved when she had to go to a rehearsal.

Kristin and I haven't had real conversations lately. I don't think she cares. She's a less exciting person than I thought a week ago—so *I* don't care either. I'll let her be as bland and detached as she likes. Good riddance, Kristin! No hard feelings; we're just different people.

[…]

July 18

Talked to Chris again—a friendly, chatty conversation interrupted by card-games. On the night of the 16th I went to a restaurant with ten counselors. It was fun only because I was in a good mood. I had to listen to a pretty girl talk about herself and her jumbled religious beliefs. She thinks she has psychic powers and considers Ouija boards dangerous temptations of fate. She's an active Christian, though; she spent much time complaining about her Christian friends' condemnations of her devil-worshiping practices. […]

After dinner I lay on the beach with the others. It was beautiful. The lapping waters lulled me almost to sleep even as the infinite sky moved me to tears. I felt overwhelmed. The view and its implications were shattering. Just as my sanity was about to explode in a cloud of stardust we drove home. I rode with a boy who'd taken the liberty of stealing a "Park Closed" sign and stashing it in the trunk.

Yesterday Chris was at her uncle's funeral, so during the rec. period I talked with Robin. An attractive blonde with strangely dark eyebrows who laughs so often she seems ditzy. But she isn't. She's more intelligent and perceptive—and fun—than both Christy and Megan (the devil-worshiping Christian), and maybe even Kristin. She gave me a nice massage as we sat by the pool; all in all, I got very good vibes from her. She actually *asked personal questions!* (the first time I've encountered such a weird phenomenon in months).

July 20

Yesterday I had a great conversation with Robin. We sat on a beach by the lake and talked about everything under the sun. The last half-hour was devoted to Marxism; she was open-minded and a wonderful listener.

Next session I'll probably play the third movement of Dvořák's Piano Quintet in A with her string quartet. (She plays the violin.)

Trying to read a jazz voicings book by Frank Mantooth, since I'm tired of ignorance, but it's confusing. Maybe I'll stick to jazz theory and avoid the praxis. (I would, however, like to unite the two.)

July 22

Went canoeing today. Last night I spent on a beach under a storm. Fluorescent red and orange lightning lit up the sky. My awe was at once emotional and intellectual.

Nothing's going to happen with Chris. Nor, in all likelihood, with anyone else. Kristin has a new romantic interest named Liam. I wish them neither the best of luck nor the worst—though I suppose that if I had to choose, I'd choose the worst. I'm not bitter, but I have no great love for either. In fact, I'm not

[1] Men are brutes.

bitter towards a single person on this planet, in spite of everything.

July 24

[…]

The expression "I'm coming" for "I'm having an orgasm" is beautiful and poetic and aristocratic. It's simple, un-melodramatic and profoundly meaningful—precisely because it seems meaningless. 'Where am I going? Where am I coming from? –No; I'm just *coming*, pure and simple. I'm entering the infinite.' When did that expression originate? *How* did it originate?

July 25

Reading the *Te-Tao Ching* [a new version of the *Tao-Te Ching*], not because of its impressive philosophical fecundity but because I want to understand all Eastern philosophies. Taoism interests me as a cultural phenomenon rather than a potentially 'true' doctrine. However, I expect that one day I'll attend to it on its own merits (an act symptomatic of my inevitable spiritual crisis).

July 27

Mike is still successfully fulfilling his role as the most likable guy at Blue Lake. I'm truly lucky to live in a cabin with him: half the time I'm doubled over with laughter, and the other half I'm asleep. He can have serious, intellectual conversations as well, but his main talent is as a comedian. –Actually, his main talent is as a marimba player. Last night he played "Marimba Spiritual" in the staff recital, and it blew me away. He was the star of the night—which is saying a lot, since another piece performed was the Sibelius violin concerto. What an all-around great guy!

July 30

Something out of the ordinary has at last happened. Eli quit yesterday and I've taken over his cabin. No more luxurious living in Moe with Mike; I have responsibilities now. This session is almost over, happily, but there's one more after it. I'll have middle-schoolers, which will hopefully be more fun than difficult.

Finished the *Te-Tao Ching*. Now I want to learn about the society in which it was written.

....There are nine ballet dancers in my cabin; three of them are little shits, and the others are cocky and loud. I can tolerate the others, but Brent and Thad drive me insane. Every word out of their mouths is profane; they like nothing better than to cause trouble. Thank God they're all leaving in three days!

[…]

August 5

Not reading *Guy Mannering* anymore. Instead, Suetonius's *The Twelve Caesars*.

I miss Sangeetha.

Even when I don't think about philosophy I can't escape confusion and restlessness.

August 13

Reading *The Sound and the Fury*. The first part is brilliant portrayal of a "retard's" (nonexistent) inner consciousness. It's also very poignant. And hard to follow. I'll have to reread it later.

August 16

I've finished it. What an extraordinary work of art! It calls for detailed analyses on many levels, but I won't attempt that until I read relevant literary criticism and then reread the book itself. I was impressed not only with its intensity but with its perfectly self-contained circular totality. What happens in the end happens in the beginning, and vice versa. Its artistic craftsmanship is unbelievable. In short, it's a haunting work that demands weeks of study. And I treasure Faulkner's pithy style of writing. It's exhausting to read, though; I'm going to return to the charming, gorgeous *Guy Mannering*.

Two days left! Then campers and counselors will be gone! I'll miss some of them—and my campers were obedient and respectful—but I'll get over the loss. Quickly.

August 19

I've moved into my temporary new abode. I'll stay here for a week to help lifeguard at the pools, since there's a band camp until the 25th. My cabin is, compared to the former, decadent in its spaciousness and furnishings. It's like a little apartment, in fact. I'm alone, which is a pleasure I haven't known for three months.

Speaking of pleasure: yesterday was its quintessence. 'Twas a glorious day, like unto Paris's liberation from the Germans. The campers' departure was wonderful enough, but the *counselors'* farewell nearly induced orgasm. I couldn't believe the day of deliverance had finally arrived. Brian, Moises, Ben, David, Eric and Jason are gone from my life forever!

....I like Scott's book, but because I value knowledge over bare amusement—and nothing stimulates me more than perusing history—I'm going to read Balsdon's *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome.* I don't know anything about how Romans spent their days, and I have only a minimal knowledge of their culture.

August 23

One gets the impression from reading books written before the 20th century that people didn't have sex back then. At least not the aristocracy. They were far too refined, delicate and subtle to insert penises into vaginas. Indeed, they were so "scandalized" when conversations came within a mile of the forbidden territory that—how could they *not* have been ashamed of the dark crevices in their minds and bodies?! I simply cannot imagine Colonel Mannering engaged in the sexual act. (How does one 'hump' in a dignified manner?) What a ridiculous charade and conspiracy of silence those people were consumed by! No wonder Freud considered civilization unhealthy.

August 27

Today I spent hours thinking about my senior thesis, trying to get back into the groove. Thought about topics like truth, language, time and the self, but ended up no wiser than when I'd begun. The experience was distressing. I felt intellectually frigid. I wanted to piss all over philosophy and move on with life. To have an inclination and no talent—especially if an inclination arising from both desire and

necessity—is a torture.

I'm at Bob and Betty's house. (Jay and I drove here yesterday.) My grandparents are remarkable and amusing people. I appreciate their help in distracting me from existential ambivalence.

August 28

Picture to yourself an ocean. There's not a fleck of land on the horizon. Waves ripple methodically, to and fro. The water's depth cannot be fathomed. There's no hint of life anywhere—except directly in the center, where there is a bobbing figure, a soul twisting in the wind. It rolls and sways with the breeze and the waves, flitting as a seagull's shadow. It thirsts, yearns to be still, but stability is nowhere on the horizon.

Thoughts conceived in weariness: Immense differences in outward activity correspond to *slight* variations in consciousness. - If you adopt the point of view of a higher being while watching human behavior, you'll see how animal-like our behavior really is. - I seem to have lost all powers of thought and self-clarification.

August 29

I feel normal today. Perfectly ordinary. Life is very easy if you don't try to make it difficult.

Bob and I had some conversations about Russian history and literature. He loves to talk with his 'scholarly' grandson—and, for his age, he's an impressive and intelligent talker. More so than I am. Being the product of an excellent old-fashioned education, he uses words like "gentrified" as frequently as young people say "cool". Yesterday he admitted, jokingly, that he particularly enjoys our conversations because he doesn't want his grandson to forget him after he's gone. There's no need to worry about that: all my memories of him are pleasant and permanent.

August 31

Once upon a time I was self-confident. Sure of myself and my abilities, and my destiny. No longer. The two-month intermission outlasted its purpose—to be a respite—and became instead a bottomless pit. My delusions of grandeur will now spend an eternity careening through temporal space. The basic reason for my self-doubt is that I'm aware of how *difficult* it is for me to think. Sustained concentration is virtually impossible—particularly if I'm not writing on a computer at the same time—and, when it occurs, it achieves very little. (Maybe I have mild ADD.) I can never attain the comprehensive, all-knowing perspective—the sufficiently distanced viewpoint to see all connections between phenomena—that I require. My mind simply isn't as fertile as Nietzsche's, Marx's, Goethe's, and so on. Hopefully it will at least reacquire its former meager capacities.

Now when I read my journal, I feel revulsion. I see myself as having a narrow, petty nature that craves its own exaltation. I lose sight of who I am and wonder whether I actually have an identity. So much self-mocking self-congratulation! (Sitting in front of a computer hours every day, writing an autobiography, causes one to lose a grasp on reality.) I live through my pen—which is not, indeed, a deflection from life but an abjuration of its quotidian aspects; and this can result in an addiction to perversity. The prospect of the journal's falling into Mom's hands horrifies me: she'd misunderstand it and leap to conclusions about me. Why have I written so many cruel sentiments? Why haven't I expressed my *sympathetic* side more often?

September 1

Returned to Wesleyan yesterday. As you know, I'm living in a house with Ryan, Andy and Eric. They're good guys: intellectual, funny, responsible, and popular. I'm looking forward to this year.

[…]

My thesis will be an intensely personal work, a therapeutic dissection of my identity—of the *possibility* of my identity. I'm tired of writing disjointed reflections on the subject; I want to settle accounts and move on.

Isn't it surprising that, states of consciousness being as subtle as they are, we nevertheless usually consider them easily distinguishable? Only when we analyze them do they lose their individuality.

September 2

I've been working on my thesis. It's a frustrating process. Sometimes I have a brief flash of insight, but if I take a break—talk to somebody or watch TV—and then return to the task a while later, it's insufferable. The inspirational insight seems threadbare, my sentences desolate. At such times I wonder why in the hell I lose my composure over philosophy. What a charmless activity it becomes!

[…]

[Deleted entries.]

September 6

[…]

I'm happy to tell you that a certain whim of mine is no longer a whim; it's a newly acquired disposition. Namely, I'm sick of writing maliciously and contemptuously. I'm bored of it. It's easy to ridicule people, but—"we're not entitled to it because we don't know enough". Besides, I feel less 'constrained' now that I'm writing as I *act*; I feel expansive, accepting, peaceful and humane. Less petty and prejudiced, more *myself*. Like I'm too noble-minded and disinterested to concern myself with mean-spirited trifles. Eventually this attitude will lose its charm and I'll return to the former—and then again to the latter, and so on—but I'll enjoy it while it lasts.

September 9

I sympathize with Rousseau: I tend not to be witty on the spur of the moment and am a bit intimidated by those who are. If I can *think* for a few seconds the odds are higher that I'll be entertaining, but in high-energy social situations (such as the party we had tonight) I don't have the luxury of time.

[…]

Good ol' sexual frustration. Ain't it grand? I'm trapped between a rock [my brain] and a hard thing.

September 11

I wanted to preface my thesis with an examination of linguistic meaning, but I've decided to nix that project. For one thing, I can't conceive how I'd justify such a digression within the larger context of my work. Secondly, I'm having difficulty addressing all the issues. The further I delve into them, the more questions arise. Thirdly, I don't think the problem is as substantive as it seems. Fourthly, I'm more or less convinced that the most relevant and immediate sense of "meaning" is "intuition of use". That is, through

processes we'll never fully understand, the uses of words are 'conditioned' into us, and the resultant 'intuitions' (or 'states of consciousness') are not only *concomitant with* but *part of* the words. I don't really care anymore, though, whether that idea is, in some form, correct. I can't imagine that the answer bears much on the rest of philosophy. […]

September 15

With this journal I have painted another me, a self blossomed in the meadow of a barren imagination, a flower vibrant with color from which I feed modestly. […] I 'throw my voice' and am cast along with it, into a whirlwind of divine imperfections. My daring, Gray [cf. Dorian Gray] self-portrait has blemishes, but it is not bland. So I try to lose myself in it and flee what's real....but inverted Platonism is the physics of the mind and honesty the gravity of the soul. Life cannot be without pretense; *my* life cannot be without art:—but my honesty reveals my art as pretense.

It's all pretense. When I read Nietzsche and then read—myself, I compare myself with myself and shrink from the realization that I am a mere imitator. He has too great a sway over me. I have to stop reading his books and arrive at my own ideas. I know that many of his thoughts and ideals are right and admirable, but unless I adopt them through my own independent experience I'll be derivative. I care less about knowledge than self-cultivation and originality.

....Despite my professions of life-weariness—which, it must be said, correspond to parallel moods and are not empty words—I am in the bottom of my soul grateful for it all. All the "marvelous uncertainty and rich ambiguity of existence", all the lavish suffering and frivolous aspirations, all the temperamental giddiness and gaiety riddled with doubt—it all radiates an overabundant glow. It is a flame, and I a moth. Perhaps my contrary moods are oxygen for this flame, or wings for this moth.

September 16

This is my judgment of Schopenhauer's philosophy: practically every idea is wrong, unfounded or confused. (His achievement was impressive, but that doesn't make it any less ludicrous.) This is my judgment of the man himself: comical. His resentment of Hegel and his willful misunderstanding of him are hilarious. The scurrility he indulges in betokens a worm-ridden soul. The tacit reasoning is obvious: I don't understand him; therefore, he's wrong and a charlatan. At bottom, Schopenhauer couldn't tolerate competition, for he wanted to be exalted above every other philosopher of his era. Vain man. Why couldn't he at least stylize his vanity and bitterness?

[…]

To say it again, I consider astronomy and cosmology spellbinding. The universe entrances me like nothing else—not history or philosophy or psychology or even the human brain. More than anything else it induces in me *awe* and *infinite wonder*.

September 21

Humankind. I don't know whether to lament for it out of pity or out of hatred. How could things have gone so horribly wrong? How could affairs have been allowed to come to such a pass? I'm so sad right now. I feel such love for my species but such *disappointment*. We're on a one-way road to Doomsday.

People are fond of saying that technology has power over us. But *why* does it? Because we *let* it. The fault lies with us. We hold our fate in our own hands, but we're too myopic to know what to do with it. Why are we so unutterably stupid?

September 25

Slices of the Spheres: Liszt's Love Dream No. 1, Tchaikovsky's Romance No. 5, Grieg's Lyrical Piece No. 21.

The overture to Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is so magnificent—overpowering—rapturous—life-giving—that I hope I'm listening to it as I die. How could I have spent twenty years of my life in ignorance of it? How could God have permitted it to have gone unwritten for countless millennia?

....It's humbling to know that squirrels have a greater power of concentration than I do. Imagine how much concentration is required to leap from limb to limb without hesitating!

September 29

I've never attempted anything as difficult as my thesis. Today I worked sedulously for seven hours (pondering the nature of truth), and the product was a single paragraph that I'll probably discard. Four days ago I thought I'd investigated the issue sufficiently—not exhaustively—and was prepared to move on to ideas more relevant to my thesis, but I couldn't stop myself from ruminating on the inadequacies in my treatment. Finally I yielded to the inevitable and decided to rewrite most of it....but so far I've succeeded only in giving myself headaches.

October 3

Poor Bertie Russell. Had to make a fool of himself in reading Nietzsche literally. How obtuse must a man be not to see that Nietzsche wasn't trying to be "consistent," that he didn't take himself seriously, that his self-glorification was always tinged with self-mockery? You can learn a lot about a man through his interpretation of a thinker, for in some measure he projects his own qualities onto the other.

There's a fine line between intelligent conversation and sheer pretentiousness. Andy leaps over it.

Generally I'm of the opinion that most rules find an exception in me. Life would be so easy and pleasant were I not nature's guinea pig!

[…]

Oh well. If I didn't have music it would be unbearable. That's my edifying conclusion. But I'm trying my hardest not to bear resentment toward anyone or anything, nor to feel thereby superior to people. Surprisingly, I'm succeeding. I'm usually able to stop myself when I start thinking the way I used to in moments of gloom and inspiration. Probably because I'm so disinterestedly certain of my own worth that to exaggerate it is superfluous. (And, of course, I have confidence in the future.)

Wednesday, October 9

My mind is usually empty. That's why I talk less than others. *That* is the main reason.

…Oh, my friend, *ich bin so fröhlich!* I just met the sweetest, cutest girl imaginable. Denise. A recent graduate who lives one minute from my house. […] Have you, dear reader, heard Schumann's Concert Piece for Piano and Orchestra in G major, Op. 92? It contains a musical phrase repeated once, ten seconds long, introduced by horns, that is quite possibly one of the most emotionally satisfying musical ideas I've ever heard. It is otherworldly. It has no counterpart in reality—*excepting* my mood at this moment. Thanks to Denise.

…I finished the Introduction yesterday and submitted it to a professor today. He isn't my advisor—I don't have one yet—but he'll suffice.

October 10

Crestfallen. I ate dinner tonight with Mindy, and she mentioned that Denise has a boyfriend. Of course! For some idiotic reason I got it into my head last night that since I've been unhappy for so long, this girl could not possibly have a boyfriend. It would be such a slap in the face, such a tasteless joke on the part of Existence, that it seemed virtually impossible. Ha!

I'm too jaded to languish in sadness. I don't want to flatter life's ego. Life isn't worth a second thought. I have to apply to graduate schools and take the GRE and drown myself in the mundane.

October 11

I don't get much pleasure out of corresponding with people. It's boring and I have little to say.

…I could write a paragraphs-long jeremiad lamenting my present situation, but I'll spare you. Except to say that…I am superhumanly lonely. My loneliness has assumed transcendental proportions. At night my mind feels poisoned and rotten and maggot-ridden.

The structure of my being is oriented toward living in a symbiotic relationship with a girl. That is my destiny, the one fact that coheres my personality into a whole. Nothing matters as much. I might as well die if I'm to live without love. Negation seeps into my veins if I live without love.

Byron's *Don Juan* has again lightened my load. Its lively humor is invigorating. Even its many bittersweet stanzas have a trace of jollity; for example, number 213 in Canto 1:

> But now at thirty years my hair is gray—
> (I wonder what it will be like at forty?
> I thought of a peruke the other day)
> My heart is not much greener; and, in short, I
> Have squander'd my whole summer while 'twas May,
> And feel no more the spirit to retort; I
> Have spent my life, both interest and principal,
> And deem not, what I deem'd, my soul invincible.

What fresh verse! What limpid language! It trips along lightly, interrupting itself yet continuing unmarred, charming and touching. The next stanza is less droll, but its beauty lends it an affecting serenity.

> No more—no more—Oh! Never more on me
> The freshness of the heart can fall like dew,
> Which out of all the lovely things we see
> Extracts emotions beautiful and new,
> Hived in our bosoms like the bag o' the bee:
> Think'st thou the honey with those objects grew?
> Alas! 'twas not in them, but in thy power
> To double even the sweetness of a flower.

…Changeability is the token of the higher human being. He is more spiritual and exists on a rarefied plane of whimsies.

October 14

I cherish the English language. It is dazzlingly expressive and (supposedly) has about 600,000 words, as contrasted with German's 185,000 and French's 100,000. The words that nobody knows are the best. Our language has a word denoting the act of throwing somebody or something out of a window! *Defenestration*.

The past few days have seen me continue my hermitic existence, though I've tried to organize trips to the movie theater among favored CSSers. Fortunately I haven't felt as lugubrious as I did on the 11th. No more ululating for me!—at least temporarily. As you know, I'm truly the opposite of a lachrymose person. Tomorrow I'm having dinner with Denise. Abdullah confirmed that she has a boyfriend, so I won't be able to indulge my randy, concupiscent desires. Damn my mansuetude! If I had opportunities—and if my speech weren't so laconic—I'd be a veritable lecher. (On the other hand, I'd rather be laconic than a blatherskite.) My sexual fantasies tend to be blatantly lubricious and horribly salacious. (Not really.)

My thesis is turning out to be quite a gallimaufry of subtle ideas to which I can hardly do justice. – But I'm tired of writing euphuistically. Excessive use of sesquipedalian words leads to turgid prose.

October 15

People who know me think I have Multiple Personality Disorder. They're right.

Dinner with Denise. Fun, though not glorious.

…It's impossible to argue with religiose Christians, Jews and Muslims. Arguments are founded on logic, refutation and so on; the religious ignore logic and resort to dogmatisms about God. "This is what God wants"; "That may seem unfair to us, but God existed long before we invented our notions of justice"; "If you believe in Christ you'll go to heaven"—"But what if I believe in Him only because I want to go to heaven?"—"It has to be a *genuine* belief"—"How do I know if it's genuine?"—"Bah! Technicality!"—"So if a murderer repents and genuinely believes in Christ he'll go to heaven, whereas a Buddhist who devotes his life to charity will go to hell?"—"Yes"—"Does that seem fair to you?"—"God existed before we invented fairness." The Judaic tradition is so fatuous it can barely be called human. I never argue with Ryan about Christianity because it's a charade. Not an argument. He's a fairly intelligent kid, but when the subject of religion is broached he becomes an anile, doddering old illiterate serf snatched from the Middle Ages.

October 18

I've hit another roadblock in my thesis. I'm suddenly in the midst of a host of inextricable confusions. When doubts assail me from ten directions I always have difficulty addressing even one of them. It's too bad I can't make an outline for a thesis like this. All I can do is follow my thoughts where they lead me—and the result tends to be a labyrinth of loose ends. Actually, I can describe my method for you fairly well (a method *imposed* on me): I start writing thoughts with little or no idea where they'll end up. Often they have their own momentum, but nevertheless I'm lost in the dark for a long time. After a while I start to perceive the overarching plan and direction of my ideas, and I can focus my meditations more closely. They acquire a coherence, a *purpose* they didn't have before. But soon after I am thus enlightened I realize that a few of my earlier statements either contradict my new plan or skip over many issues that, according to the logic of my vague mental outline, should have been addressed a long time ago. So I'm forced to return to the beginning and tweak or slash or rewrite. This process is always maddening—at least, it has been in my thesis and was in my government paper—partly because it demands that I whittle my thoughts to analytical precision.[1] And *that* is hard. A single word can make a world of difference. Because I try to temper philosophical exactitude with literary elegance (a virtual impossibility when analyzing the self in depth), it's not unusual for me to spend twenty minutes rearranging a sentence or

[1] Of course, this is a constant necessity. But its difficulty is enhanced when I have to backtrack.

groping for *le mot just*. But the *really* hard part is overcoming my proto-ADD and forcing all my ideas into consistency—and at the same time *believing* them! Eventually I fix everything and can forge ahead with renewed confidence. Right now I'm in the middle of the whole process, when everything falls apart.

October 26

I'm reading Philip Roth's masterful novel *The Human Stain* for a CSS class. Three days ago, after I had read the first half, I wrote the following short analysis on our web-board.

> I'd like to defend Coleman's murder of his mother. I haven't decided what Roth is trying to express in this episode, but one possible interpretation is inspired by Nietzsche. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (and other writings) Nietzsche declares that the Übermensch, the man who is most free and most creative, must be "hard with himself". He has no pity; he will inflict suffering on himself and others in order to cultivate his latent genius. All is sacrificed for freedom. Do you think it's easy for Coleman to renounce his family? Does it not rather require a self-brutality as ruthless as the brutality he displays toward his mother? Coleman's ambition is to sever all umbilical cords to his environment, to mold himself and achieve autonomy. Tragically, this is impossible. His destiny is determined not only by him but by the forces that impel him to act in his eccentric, perverse ways. Perhaps Roth's point is that self-creation and freedom are unrealizable: if it isn't the social forces determining us, it's the sex instinct. But we are not necessarily doomed to slavery. Coleman, in carrying the Nietzschean ideal to an extreme, demonstrates his misunderstanding of the human condition and the limitations inherent in it. He should have recognized that there is a type of freedom not incompatible with a lack of autonomy: there is a 'beauty' in filial devotion and a beauty in sex, and if we artistically integrate these most pleasant manifestations of 'bondage' into our lives we can achieve a kind of psychological liberation, a triumphant affirmation of ourselves and our 'unautonomous' lives. Perhaps, like Nietzsche, we should adopt as our model not the self-governing Lord Jesus Christus but the "extraordinarily ordinary" Goethe, who found his own freedom in loving the conditions imposed on him by existence. *Amor fati* was his freedom. Coleman tries to escape from the human stain, but in doing so he succumbs to it all the more disgracefully. His wisdom is of the life-denying kind; real wisdom isn't ashamed of itself.

Roth is a writer in the grand tradition. There aren't many left nowadays. His book is so complex that I don't completely agree with the oversimplified account of it above. (However, I noticed today that on page 243 are two sentences relating to Zeus and Christ that support the last few lines of my critique.)

I wonder when I'll attain a degree of emotional maturity.

October 29

I can't wait to write the preface to my thesis. It will be sheer mischievous joy translated into written characters. It'll be my first really public attempt to challenge the status quo. And it will set the tone of the rest of the work.

Sangeeetha emailed me today. Receiving a message from her always perceptibly improves my mood. I've never fully 'gotten over' her. My memories of that summer are almost unequivocally fond, in spite of the unpleasant incidents.

…Rebecca's eyes are deep and sultry. I saw *Smiles of a Summer Night* with her tonight; afterwards I had a craving to kiss her, seduced by those eyes and that smile. Our walk home wasn't nearly long enough. We bade good night and now I feel strangely unsatisfied.

November 3

Happy Birthday, me. The big 2-2.

I think I've finally liberated myself from the chains of writer's block to which I referred earlier. I wrote and rewrote until I'd made enough analytical distinctions within the concept of identity so that I no longer felt burthened with paradoxes. I still don't feel satisfied, but I'm less mentally ill than a week ago.

November 7

After reading my introduction Dad was right to wish me luck in my "life as a salmon". The swimming upstream started two days ago, when I had a meeting with that prick Eric Schliesser to discuss my thesis. It lasted an hour, during which he attacked my work and basically insulted me. Not a single compliment or piece of encouragement was interspersed in the barrage of criticism, and when I tried to defend my arguments he either interrupted me or didn't listen. An acrid tone of subtle *ad hominem* underlay the whole episode, as though Schliesser was offended that I had tried to be ambitious. At one point, after I mentioned that I had read part of an essay by Tarski two days earlier, he smirked and said he had noticed similarities between my views and Tarski's. The implication was that I had plagiarized. I reiterated that I had read the essay *after* I had written the introduction, but he ignored me and moved on to another topic. In other words, he was willing to draw attention to parallels between my views and a famous philosopher's only if he thought it would belittle what I had written rather than compliment it. I was so infuriated afterwards that I wrote him an angry, though restrained, email, and he responded defensively. Asshole. (As luck would have it, he's the professor of one of my classes.) He was never my advisor, but now that I've broken with him I *really* don't have anyone. The chair of CSS has offered to step in if I can't find anyone else.

November 20

Death elevates illustrious men to greatness. If Hegel were alive I would see him as just another man. I might admire him tremendously, but I wouldn't revere him as the virtual philosopher-god he has become for me. I wouldn't worship him, nor would I worship Marx. But because they're dead—they're spirits. Until recently I thought Jürgen Habermas was dead, so I respected him greatly. Now that I know he's alive (teaching at one of the schools to which I'm applying), he's just another contemporary philosopher. In fact, my having seen a photograph of him has ruined everything. Not only does he live, but he has a face! I'm so disillusioned!

(Actually, the more I read of that obscurantist, the less I respect him. Several nights ago, moreover, Andy told me that Habermas once submitted an article to a journal, the argument of which was decisively refuted the following week by a graduate student who wrote a response to Habermas. So of course Jürgey immediately wrote a letter to the editors of the journal, threatening that if they ever printed another such essay in response to one of his he would never again do business with them. "Communicative rationality", eh? What a hypocrite. A pompous charlatan, like all other contemporary philosophasters.)

C'est incroyable how deep is the human need for attention. Everywhere I look I see it.

[Deleted entries.]

November 29

Jay and I went to Mom's friend's house for Thanksgiving. I'm glad I'm back. Last night Josh and the two of us drove to Montreal to gamble at the casino; it was a comical experience. I played "video blackjack" nearly the whole time, desperately bored and amazed that people enjoy this sort of thing. Throngs of human geldings, money-scavenging hyenas, hovered about me smoking and cursing and yelling at the slot machines. Just sitting there, staring blankly, blind to all but their lust for cash, living their utopia of unbridled greed. Lights beating down on them, pollution streaming from their mouths, cigarette-residue caked to their lips, obsequious attendants waiting on them, coffee-dregs at the base of each cup, jingling coins in plastic containers, machines rigged to lose once every fifth turn. Ostentatious luxury—oriental rugs, oak banisters, marble stairwells, cascading fountains—gilded decadence—it all coaxed us into ignorance of the passage of time. The three of us left after a few hours and drove to the heart of the city, the Rue St. Catherine, brimming with excitement and character.

I suppose we have God to thank for the slow section in the middle of the first movement of Schumann's piano concerto—and, of course, for the beginning of the Konzertstück in G major.

I'm reading Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*. It ain't a bad book. In fact, it's well-argued, well-organized and, well…well-done. (Repetitive, though.) But he neglects to appreciate that the thrust of his argument isn't contrary to Marxism. Marx's point is that when competition ceases to be efficient it will give way to planning—*not* that planning is *always* more effective than competition. As for the supposed loss of freedom: we don't know what forms planning might assume in a hundred years.

…I cannot believe that I'm a Salieri and continue living at the same time.

November 30

Goethe was lucky. He was born at the perfect time and in the perfect place, and lived among the perfect people. Herder and others molded Goethe into what he became. Instead of having to assert himself against his environment he simply absorbed it, for it happened to be one that could recognize and would lavish hero-worship on genius, or anything high-cultural. What a time to live!

It's thrilling to reflect that when Mozart wrote the first movement of his 25th symphony he was composing the score for a future movie about him (*Amadeus*). He was scratching notes on a piece of paper, lost in his music, unaware that he was writing a eulogy for himself. Isn't that a striking image?

December 3

I'm in an oddly, happily melancholy mood. Listening to the second movement of the Coronation piano concerto. I spent most of the day completing graduate school applications; now I want to slink into a repose, a sweet homecoming. Steal a moment for myself. Bow before an image of Platonic beauty, an imaginary idyll. Margaret is a blossom on the stem of life—a pointlessly lovely gift, superfluous but desperately necessary. Such a girl, such a body, such a face, such a *nose!* That nose is so jutting it's a model-mountain! But she's all the more charming for it. Margaret. She looks like a Margaret. Quiet, kind, sophisticated, deceptively wise. Vernal eternally. A Gretchen, with wisdom hidden in her innocence, of which she herself is unaware. The wisdom that exists in not 'existing'.

December 4

Eight years until I turn thirty! Christ Jesus, where has it all gone??! *Thirty*, that magic number after which middle age is right around the corner, and then death. This cannot be. I'll never become an adult, I swear it. I'll hold onto youth with a ferocity born of fear. I will *not* grow up. I will *not* have a career. The prospect terrifies me. –It's damn near miraculous that I'll be thirty in eight years.

I shade myself under the bower that is *Clair de lune.*
The sun-dappled canopy, leafy and recessed,
sheltering me from coarse daylight,
on and through which snowflakes trace their involute paths to my recumbent soul.
The drowsy sleep that enfolds the beholder.
The blanket of soft white enwreathing this nook of hermitic bliss;
The sky-streaks cascading to the crisp frozen earth;
The dancing child dallying in the chill;
The window through which I observe and absorb;
The muffled, awesome tranquility enveloping all.
The silence textured by lunar song-play.
The skylarking youths, the flowing music, the sweet deep melancholy,
The sadness, the tears, the beauty, the longing,
The joy in sorrow.
The grace.
Ecstasy in grace,
for which I strive and to which I am devoted.
Doubt made shallow by my "love of loves",
self-doubt smothered under snow and Liszt
—but living all the same!
But shaded.
But shriveled.
But shallow.
But "blessed death" washes over me and cleanses and restores me
to a rude insanity.
And I return to the tasks of living, forgetful of the task of dying.[1]

Tonight I had my thesis workshop. What a sham. [One professor], an academic *par excellence*, attacked it just as Schliesser had. Except *this* guy's criticisms were even more preposterous—criticizing the moral implications of my ideas on the self, and my use of phenomenology, etc. What a waste of time.

December 6

When I listen to Bach I hear logic and mathematics translated into sound. That's why he's a genius: an impersonal force of which he is unconscious speaks through him. […]

December 14

Mozart was meant to be played in New Zealand, where natural beauty is second nature. He is, as it were, an extension of the countryside; it is incomplete in his absence. The mountains are comparatively flat, the foliage less colorful. This isn't to say that I need the spirit of Mozart beside me if I am to appreciate nature; it is to say, however, that his living soul imparts enthusiasm to mine. I live on a higher level when accompanied by him, and so have a greater appreciation of perfection.

Jay and I reached Dunedin yesterday, after a thirty-hour trip. My parents drove us around the city, the architecture of which is modeled after Europe's. The downtown area is quaint and full of character, with steeply sloped, narrow streets lined with small shops and cafes. It's situated around a harbor in a valley,

[1] [The words in quotation-marks are the names of pieces by Liszt.]

rolling hills hemming it in on all sides. I say 'rolling' because their slopes are gentle and their aggregate is a horizontal waterfall of meadows, one atop the other, tumbling into the ocean. Thousands of sheep speckle the blanket of lush green, nestled in its folds against the harsh wind. From a height one is overwhelmed by the proud beauty of the scenery and humbled by the knowledge that it required many millions of years to reach its present state. This land used to be a mass of churning lava, bubbling in fury and smoking from its collisions with the sea. Gradually it settled down, hardened with age, matured and grew weary of its youthful passion, and today it remains as a tribute to the power and wisdom of nature. The construction of a town within the cradle of these hills is its own special kind of wisdom.

Today we hiked along the peninsula, our destinations the soldier monument, Lover's Leap and a precipitous chasm nearby. The wind whipped our faces into a pink rawness, but that made the experience more invigorating. Unfortunately my allergies asserted their will to power, so I enjoyed the afternoon less than I might have. Tonight we're seeing a play, a farce ("Noises Off"), which I'm sure to like.

Though I've only been here one day, I truly love Dunedin and New Zealand. Dunedin for its location and its charm, New Zealand for the reckless sublimity of its environment. Too bad I don't live here.

December 17

Nothing exciting has happened recently. The weather has been awful. I've been thinking about my play on Ivan the Terrible, planning it out, researching his life, inventing historically inaccurate subplots. I've shown myself to be a phlegmatic thinker when it comes to conjuring stories out of thin air. I wish I were a Shakespeare.

December 18

Today we began the Milford Track, which is a four-day hike through a mountain region on the south island. The weather has been ideal so far—which is a fluke that probably won't last through the night. We reached the first hut at 2:30, having walked for two hours on flat land. The next three days will be more strenuous, since we'll be hiking up- and downhill six hours each day. But the views will be worth the effort (and the back pains). 'Majesty' is what comes to mind when I look at the snow-peaked glacial remnants.

Tonight I played cards with two Aussies and two Texans. The game was '500'. The Aussies just graduated from high school; one of them is a lovely girl who's a good conversationalist. But the two are a couple, so that's that. I also met two Wesleyan graduates.

December 19

To paraphrase Bill Watterson (the *Calvin and Hobbes* guy), this day was not only seized but throttled. At 9:30 we were underway. The first few hours offered the usual spectacular vistas, but I found them [i.e., the hours] otherwise uninspiring. Because the ground wasn't hilly it wasn't interesting. I was hungry, my shoulders ached, etc. But lunch rejuvenated me. We walked through an enormous valley, the sun hammering at us and sweat soaking us, until we saw a little pond fed by a 200-foot waterfall. We jumped in. Due to the gelid water I spent the first minute gasping for air, but as I became numb I could tolerate it better. I swam to the base of the waterfall and gazed upward—a beautiful sight. Thus far it was the best part of the day. After an hour we resumed our march, refreshed and ready for more challenges. Jay walked so far ahead that we didn't see him again until the evening, but I—I took the road less traveled by, and that made all the difference. More precisely, I got lost. Wandered ahead of my parents and accidentally took a detour from the main path, which consisted in climbing a long, steep stairway of loose rocks in a swiftly moving river. With my heavy backpack it was by no means an easy task, but it was the highpoint

of my day. The challenge forced me to concentrate all my mental energy on not slipping into the stream, which caused me to stop wondering whether I was experiencing appropriate emotions. It was immediate and intense. I loved it. But when I was halfway up, my parents reached the base and, seeing me hiking on relatively dangerous terrain, yelled at me to descend. For a moment I ignored them: I was screeching coyote calls at the sky, enjoying my 'animal spirits'. But when I realized they had a good point, I decided to continue the climb to the top and then hike down a smoother path to the main trail. It turned out to be not as smooth as I had thought—my boots were drenched by the end—but by the grace of God I survived. Felt glorious afterwards. The last hour featured the steepest climb in all four days, and it seemed to go *on and on*. I kept thinking the hut was right around the corner, the next bend in the trail, but another stretch of rocks always emerged. Fortunately most of it was shaded by the walls and ceilings of boscage around and under which the trail weaved. Eventually I passed into a trance, a peculiar zombie-consciousness in which I was aware only of the need to *trudge on*, and the contact of my boots with the ground was the lodestone of my thoughts. In moments of lucidity I picked moss off trees and inhaled the earthy smell. Finally I reached the hut, the promised land, unpacked my bags, exchanged boots for sandals, and lounged until my parents arrived. In a few hours we were all eating dinner with the other hikers and conversing with Erin and Matt. Fun to talk to—Erin because she's an adorable girl with a lisp and a pleasant personality, Matt because he's enthusiastic and witty. They live in Sydney, where we're heading in two weeks; Erin seemed amenable to the idea of accompanying us for a day or two, which—would not bother me in the least.

The forests we walk through are enchanted. Spidery, luminescent tendrils of moss dangle from tree-limbs; ferns blanket the ground; brooks bubble over pebbles and boulders; ribbons of sunlight pierce the tangled canopy above. This is the kind of setting that Shakespeare intended for "A Midsummer Night's Dream". It's a temperate rainforest.

December 21

Yesterday was not easy. I slept restlessly during the night and woke up at 7:00, my entire body aching. The day began with a two-hour climb to McKinnon Pass, though I reached it in 90 minutes or so at my forced-march pace. Precipitous ascent. Incredibly tiring, but the more exhausted I was the more alive I felt. The magnificent scenery heightened the impression: as when listening to Mozart or Chopin, I was cleansed of every impurity, everything inessential and animalistic. The view from the promontory was even more unbelievable: a feast of boundless natural delights. For example, cirrus cloud-impostors that were level with us continually appeared from behind a cliff and floated away on a curved path that followed the contours of the land—for they were only a few feet above the peak. They were a perpetually regenerated marshy mist whose source seemed deep within the earth. That sight was itself striking, but it was made even more so by the presence, several hundred meters away, of clouds that were *frozen* in space. In over an hour they didn't move at all, even as the others were propelled very quickly from creation to dissipation fifty feet above us. We also saw a Kea bird, which is an intelligent and mischievous parrot that knows how to unzip bags and snatch food before anyone is the wiser.

Our next stop was a small hut nearby, from which one could see the long, lush valley we had traversed the day before. (For the third day in a row, miraculously, the sky was blue and the sun shining.) From there we descended a thousand meters in three hours. *That* was hard, since the descent was not what you'd call smooth. Every step was a jolt. Nor could I slow down, with gravity pulling hard at my backpack. Jogged the whole way, the heat strangling me and wringing out rivulets of sweat. I also had the one obligatory fall, the result of which was a mere scratch. Somehow my ankles remained intact the whole day. My thighs, calves, feet, knees, back and shoulders were the parts that suffered. But I loved it.

We ate lunch in a shaded alcove in the woods, next to a stream and a huge boulder. It was an ideal location, well hidden from the scorching heat and colored with several layers of a glowing phosphorescent green. I felt as though I had traveled back in time to Middle Earth. Afterwards Terry and I continued walking together. As the day wore on, our trek grew more tiring and I found myself stumbling and my vision blurring. The experience ceased to be as perversely pleasurable as it had been. At last we reached an open

field, swarming with sandflies, whence there was a detour to Sutherland Falls. We grabbed our swimsuits and walked the half-hour to the roaring waterfall, I not realizing I had forgotten to grab my sandals. When I did realize it, it was too late. Because I wasn't eager to get my boots as sopping as they had been the day before, we didn't venture behind the falls, as we'd planned. Instead we crossed the river and walked into the thick of the mist…which resulted, of course, in the soaking of my boots. Soon after, we returned to the building housing our bags, attempted to dry our shoes in the sun, failed, donned our packs, and continued the forced march to the hut. This last segment was pure misery—an hour of something approximating hell. Because it was already ("already"?!) after 6:30 I didn't want to stop to rest, so the whole walk was essentially a postponed fall, a pitching-forward. Finally we reached the hut, only to be consumed alive by sandflies. Three hours later I was in bed; fifteen minutes after that I was asleep.

Today was less than pleasant as well. I'll describe it for you tomorrow, when I'm not groggy to the point of mental torpor.

December 22

At 8:00 yesterday we set out on the trail with another family we had met the previous day. There were two daughters, Jemma and Georgia, aged 12 and 8. We all liked the parents, who were personable and had great senses of humor, and the daughters were of course 'darling'. Georgia is a Goldilocks with a mirthful personality, Jemma a soubrettish young lady with a pointed wit. But in the beginning of the day I wasn't thinking about any of that; I was reflecting on the prospect of walking for six hours over such ground as I had endured the last three days. Fortunately the land was flat, so the morning was tolerable. But only because we took three long breaks and walked at a worm's pace. I spent much of the morning in silence, neither talking to anyone nor thinking about anything. Didn't even talk to Jemma, for I'd gotten the impression earlier that she was shy. But at one point when I was walking directly behind her I must have said something about books—maybe I muttered that in 24 hours I would be sitting on a sofa, reading—because I remember she whirled around to discuss all the authors she'd read. In the span of two seconds she was transformed from a reticent child of 12 to an outgoing adolescent of 16. She lost all inhibitions and treated me like a friend. Apparently she's an avid reader: last week alone she read eight books; her average is two. Though I'd heard of none of her favorite authors—they were all contemporary writers of romance and mystery and such—I was impressed. I recommended Art Doyle, Nietzsche, Hubbard (she likes science fiction) and a few others. […]

At 1:30 we ate lunch. That may not have been the smart thing to do, because when we got moving again my feet were subjected to an exquisite pain that lasted until we reached the boat. I thought they were bathed in blood. Felt like a victim of bastinado. […] My mental and physical torment together made the experience wonderfully surreal. Finally arrived at Sandfly Point, aptly named. Then the boat transported us to a bus that took us to our car, whence we drove to our luxury hotel where I took a shower. And that was the end of our four-day abandonment of the comforts of civilization.

Considering that I was in the worst shape possible for a healthy young man when I began the track, I'd say I did a darn good job of surviving.

December 23

Yesterday, Queenstown. The first thing that Jay, Terry and I did was luge down a mountain twice. That was as fun as could be expected. Because the weather was gorgeous—again—we were able to savor the sight of the Remarkables, which is a jagged range of serried razor blades silhouetted against the sky.[1] In the evening we checked in at a hotel and learned that Erin and Matt were staying there too. Quite a

[1] I write that last phrase not because I want to add an artificial poeticism to the sentence but because the mountains, when they're viewed from a distance, look like a two-dimensional cutout superimposed on the sky.

coincidence. After our delicious dinner we went to a Maori concert downtown. The Maoris are the indigenous people in New Zealand; their importance for tourism is immense. An industry has developed around them, of which their music is a significant sector. The concert was smashingly entertaining. Six half-naked men provided the background music, most of which involved ear-splittingly loud grunts and foot-banging. They tried to look as fearsome and ugly as possible—for instance by sticking out their tongues and grimacing—and succeeded marvelously. The women provided the melody and most of the harmony. Some of the songs were surprisingly lovely. During the intermission the men in the audience were called to the stage to be taught the basic moves and noises of Maori music—which are, of course, squatting and grunting. Jay and I participated; we were among the most boisterous of the fools onstage. Great fun to contort my face into the ugliest expressions I could manage, especially when the audience responded with laughter and applause. After the concert we ate ice-cream and toured the blithesome streets of this tourist haven.

Today we wanted to raft down the Shotover river, but since the water level had risen during the nocturnal torrent we had to cancel our plans. Maybe we'll do it tomorrow. Instead my brothers and I spent an hour on a jet-boat. It was an excellent ride: fast, wet, rocky—every time we hit a wave we might as well have hit cement—and damned exhilarating. Fantastic views, as always. Now Jay and I are about to 'go out on the town' with Erin and Matt.

December 24

It's sometimes hard for me to 'appreciate' natural beauty.[1] In an effort to remedy this situation I've devised several alternate methods to experience the environment. The common thread through most of them is to increase the number of senses that partake in the absorption of relevant stimuli. For example, I'll bury my nose in dirt as I gaze at a valley, or I'll listen to the second movement of Chopin's E minor concerto as I look at snowcapped mountains. Another method is to close my eyes, imagine that I'm about to see hideous concrete skyscrapers, and then open them to witness the 'surprising' sight of New Zealand's phantasmagoric natural effulgence.

Last night my family and I ate ice cream next to the lake as we waited for Erin and Matt to meet us. Eventually they arrived, Erin dolled up in makeup and tight-fitting, sexy clothes. Terry didn't accompany us, though he certainly wanted to on account of his 'crush' on the fine specimen of young womanhood whose presence graced us. By the time we were underway it was quite late and I was quite tired, but since one never knows what will happen at nightclubs—whom one will meet and whether one will get laid—a part of me was eager. Our first stop was a pub packed to the brim with screaming Kiwis, so we quickly left. "The World" looked more promising—it had a dance floor and was sufficiently empty to allow for movement—so we stayed there. Erin is an amazing dancer, and Matt a lucky bastard. Jay and I made sure to down a few beers before subjecting ourselves to tomfoolery.

At 7:30 today we woke up to raft the Shotover river. The weather, yet again, was incomparable. We struggled into our wet-suits and rode in a bus along Skipper's Road, which is a winding avenue across sheer cliffs, constructed by gold miners long ago. I can't fathom how they were able to build it. (Greed conquers all obstacles.) Our raft was occupied by seven people: us and two Israeli men. The experience wasn't wholly satisfying, since much of it consisted in paddling over long stretches of glassy, boring water. Moreover, all the rafts frequently had to land on beaches to deal with an inordinate number of accidents. One woman scratched her hand badly, several people lost their oars, one raft capsized—that was pretty cool—and so on. But there were some thrilling moments. When the guide yelled at us to "Get down and hold on!" we squatted in the center of the raft, held our breath, bowed our heads and yielded to fate. That moment of uncertainty was exciting, and one couldn't help shouting gleefully as the waves crashed over us.

[1] The reasons are that I have mediocre eyesight and I forget to wear glasses. But I'll be less absent-minded now that I remember how much more attractive the world is when I can *see* it.

In the afternoon we left Queenstown. Staying now in a cute little backpacker's place in Wanaka that reminds me of Paros: sun-soaked, whitewashed, laid-back, friendly, decorated with flowers. Attractive girls, too.

Prejudice against individuals and groups is akin to the tendency of some animals to segregate themselves. It is a fundamentally animalistic activity. –I suppose that my emerging worldview gets some of its inspiration from Nietzsche.[1] "Animal, all too animal" is its motto. ("Tierisch, allzu tierisch.") It is a systematic rebellion against every human pretension to godliness; its purpose is to put us in our place in the vast scheme of things, yet in such a way as to avoid the temptations of nihilism and the unrestrained revolt against human dignity. It accepts Nietzsche's central theme, even expands on it, while recognizing that it folds back on itself and thus makes inevitable a perpetual hovering between two positions, one of which we must courageously choose in order to have integrity. Nihilism or a delicate balance between the animal and the ideally human. They are both difficult; I have chosen the latter because it permits me to live a noble, 'driven', sublimely insecure human life.

December 26

Christmas did not feel like Christmas. No snow, no awful cold, no slushy streets, no garnished tree, no mountain of gifts. But it's okay; at least the sun wasn't shining. We went to "Puzzling World" in the afternoon. Entertaining, even fascinating—holograms are cool—but the cynosure was a shockingly sexy French girl traveling with her family. She was practically a force of nature. A glamorous, mascara-masked moviestar. That night we ate a tremendous potluck dinner with everyone at the hostel. I talked to a rotund Swiss girl with an appealing face for over an hour; she was delightful and friendly, but after our conversation lost momentum we floundered for a while and then I went to bed.

Today we took a ferry to Stewart Island. It was a remarkable ride: a virtual gale tossed the boat up and down, making me nearly seasick.

[Deleted entries.]

December 29

Dunedin again. Yesterday, *weil das Wetter schön war*, we trekked around Ulva Island, hoping to see a variety of birds. We didn't. Steward Island was disappointing too: it doesn't offer the breath-depriving vistas that the mainland does. One doesn't have the opportunity to admire flecks of fuchsia tastefully arrayed along a stretch of mottled verdure. Why visit a part of New Zealand that suffers from a dearth of splendor?

December 31

Went to the Octagon downtown to celebrate the new year. A band was playing to a throng of Dunedinites. Hundreds of delectable girls in sexy outfits milled about the square—tasty morsels to a ravenous wolf like me, with lips dripping saliva and fangs eager to be sunk in flesh. But the devouring was left to my eyes rather than my mouth. One girl in particular caught my attention, an angel who works in the hair salon I visited at the beginning of my trip. She is gorgeous. I was '*gobsmacked*' when I looked upon

[1] That isn't to say that Nietzsche was the impetus for it. His writings merely stamped a seal of approval on my own inclinations.

her supernal countenance. Strands of russet hair dangled below her left eye, hiding it behind a stringy veil of deliberately casual beauty. A Crawfordesque mole marked her cheek beside her lip, a couple inches south of her aristocratic nose. Her eyes were brown, deep, spirited. Her firm buttocks were traced by her skin-hugging skirt; as she walked they jiggled with the confident buoyancy of the self-assured object of lust. It pained me to watch her walk out of my life forever.

January 1, 2003

Two days ago Jay and I toured the peninsula on a bus that took us to an albatross nesting site on a hillside bordering the Pacific. It is one of only two such sites in the world. For an hour we learned about these amazing birds and ogled them in their natural-artificial habitat, taking pictures, intruding on their privacy behind glass panes and, on the whole, behaving like paparazzi. But I think we had just cause. Albatrosses are unlike any other bird: they live for forty years (one we saw is still breeding at 62); they're behemoths relative to their cousins, with a wingspan of three meters and a height of 1.5; during flight they have a majesty unmatched by other birds, *gliding* before the distended jowls of the wind; they have a nuanced language, a complex culture and a sharp intelligence. Their behavior has affinities to our own: they're usually monogamous—I suppose in this respect they're different from us—they have quarrels arising from a lack of reciprocity in the relationship between mother and father; teenagers attend 'parties' for three or four years, in which they jabber and show off,[1] with the purpose of finding a suitable lifelong mate—and sometimes these youths are so roisterous that the grumpy adults holler at them to shut up. Albatrosses are essentially seafarers, spending most of their lives circumnavigating Antarctica at speeds of 500 kilometers a day. No one knows how they find their way around it, for they don't go within sight of land even once. Yet they always return to the same nesting area in the same week of the year! How is it possible?

Later we observed yellow-eyed pigeons, but that was anticlimactic. They're comparatively stupid, though mildly attractive, and they don't have the human interest of the albatross. Yesterday we meandered through the Botanic Gardens—an excursion marred by the presence of Terry. I would have enjoyed myself had I been alone and able to write. Maybe to poeticize on my surroundings, thus intensifying the experience. Schade.

I'm intrigued by the relativity of all things in nature. We see mountains as intrinsically large, but to a giant they'd be molehills. Trees would be fungi covering the ground, as what we call fungi are trees to an ant. Earth is unimaginably large to us, but to the galaxy it doesn't even exist. How odd! –I'm sure there's some deep insight to be gleaned from this, but I'm not the one to glean it.

The problem of morality has been distracting me lately. Some of what I wrote on June 5 doesn't hold water. ("We can't hop from one world to another.") If there's really no such thing as morality in its strict sense [maybe I meant that realism about values is false], how does it show a lack of integrity to act on this sometimes? Even if we usually abide by particular values and only *occasionally* transgress them, we're being honest by consoling ourselves in such cases with the thought that nihilism is ultimately true. At the same time we can recognize that in order to live a good life it's necessary to act on the basis of certain values most of the time—so we're not being cowards by oscillating between the two extremes, because there are good reasons for both and therefore the oscillation is a symptom of honesty. On the other hand, it's easy. So…what? Where do I go from here? Where has this reasoning led me? Which option will I arbitrarily choose? It's easy, but it's honest. Bad yet good. I won't fall back on the assertion that a desire for ease rather than honesty is my real motive, and hence that the vacillation is to be rejected, because I don't know what my real motive is. "Real motive" is probably an untenable concept. So—I'm lost.

[1] We witnessed one of these gatherings from behind the window. I might as well have been watching humans transformed by Circe into birds.

January 3

Yesterday we left Dunedin. It was sad to say goodbye to New Zealand, but I intend to revisit this land in the future. Its wilderness is one of Earth's treasures, its towns are among the 'coziest' I've visited, and its people are as friendly as any Eastern European I met. I'm annoyed that I didn't see the north island.

We traveled the whole day, flying first to Sydney and then to Cairns. Though we reached our hotel at 11 p.m., the weather was muggy, hot and oppressive. 'Twas an ill omen. Today was the same quality with more quantity: unpleasant at 8:30, stifling at 2:30. But whatever. In the morning we rode in a shuttle to Kuranda, which was once an aboriginal village and is now an aboriginal tourist attraction. Our first order of business was to walk along a "Jungle Walk" beside a river. It was 'of interest', but not 'of excitement' or 'of gratuitous beauty', like New Zealand. It was jungly, though. Terry and I hunted for exotic insects, making several discoveries that are sure to have a far-reaching impact on entomology. For example, we learned that ants need not be black, red or brown, but can be green instead. We also observed a glittering fluorescent beetle in its unspoiled home on a railroad track. At one point I picked up a diminutive toad hopping across the path which we all dutifully admired for a moment, unaware that it was poisonous and we were flirting with temporary blindness. At last we returned to the village and the joys of aboriginal tourism, manifested in this instance as a marketplace where one could buy thousands of goods hand-carved and hand-painted by authentic real live dark-skinned natives. We bought a didgeridoo. Our next stop was Bird World. The flighted and flightless creatures on display were dazzlingly colorful. We were especially taken with a gigantic bird called the Cassowary, which seemed to have been teleported from the Jurassic era. It is supposedly the largest land animal in Australia—which sounds far-fetched. It is also one of the most awkward-looking: on the crown of its head is a jutting brown leathery helmet whose purpose I cannot fathom; the folds of flesh at the base of the back of its neck look like blood-red wrinkles in the brain; its head is arbitrarily attached to a disproportionately bulky body covered in hair rather than feathers, seeming to belong to another species altogether. The other birds made more sense.

We sailed along a sky-rail back to Cairns, which allowed us to view the jungle from above. The trip ended at the Tjapukai cultural center, which is a museum of—the aborigines! It was a damn letdown. We saw six pathetic dancers, an embarrassing attempt to create fire aboriginal-style in front of an audience, a boring film explaining the outlandish autochthonic theories of creation, and a disturbing movie outlining the history of British barbarism as it affected the natives. I felt such rage as I watched it that I wished a Spartacus had led a wholesale massacre of the colonizers. "British justice and fair play"? What a revoltingly disingenuous phrase.

January 5

Yesterday was a life-experience. It's not every day that one swims in the waters of the Great Barrier Reef. Early in the morning we and sixty other explorers boarded a ship that carried us to a designated portion of the reef. The sun tyrannized over the sky: its beams held dominion over all creation, electrifying the air, scorching the skin and slicing through waves to become spectral shards igniting corals. A prismatic world teeming with life was revealed to me when I dipped my face in its lucency. Underwater luminaries swam and swayed with the current: fish of flaming blue, green, red, yellow, orange, violet and the iridescent derivative colors with names worthy of them; finger-like anemone, tentacles undulating so as to be nearly liquid themselves; coruscating coral of chiaroscuric neon tones seemingly unnatural. Muffled swishing and munching, mesmerizing and potentially soporific, perpetually resonated through an undersea Eden. My pores drank the 'warm waters of Lethe' and my mind grew drunk, as my body ceased its thrashing to partake in the blissful, tranquil isolation of the reef. I was in a magical and unreal world.

I snorkeled in two distinct sections of the reef, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. Initially it was an uncomfortable sensation—the forced breathing, the large mouthpiece, the leaky goggles, the sore salty throat, the cumbersome flippers, the constant need to empty the headgear of water and cough

out gobs of mucus—but with time I grew accustomed to it. I learned to flap my feet efficiently and could eventually swim for extended periods without raising my head. […]

In the morning I scuba-dived for half an hour. It was an eerie though wonderful experience. For the first few minutes I was a bit afraid—and came close to panicking at one point. All the elements of scuba-diving seemed to hem me in and oppress me: the deep breathing that was necessary to have enough air; the sluggish movement of my limbs; the irresistible urge to free my mouth of that damned device and really *breathe*, and the awareness that I'd probably drown as a result; the rasping sound of my breaths reverberating in my head; the difficulty in maneuvering. I was in a ghostly realm where everything occurred in slow motion. But I got the hang of it quickly. I felt some slimy soft corals with my hand and caused the hundreds of beady little eyes to shoot inward. Unfortunately it was hard for me to 'appreciate' such beauty, concentrating as I was on *survival* and the remarkable nature of the diving itself. Nor were the colors as resplendent as they are in photographs (though they approached that intensity when I snorkeled, since the water was shallower, brighter and clearer). –Be that as it may, during the course of the day, from 8 to 5, I was taught to cherish the reef as one of the world's great wonders. Its treasures are miraculous; you have to see them to believe them. If it's allowed to wither out of existence, as it will if global warming continues at its present rate,[1] civilization will be deprived of one of those rare natural formations that help make life worth living. I want to save animals not for their own sake but for ours.

Ogling the sleek tanned bodies of half-naked women was an added pleasure. I felt quite hircine at times—had an overwhelming impulse to carry some of the girls into a bathroom. But I ended the day alone with my frustration, as usual. How long will this last?! Zeus must have it in for me, or Aphrodite. Whenever I see a pretty girl I see a mysterious fleshy cleft beckoning me.

January 7

The last three days haven't been eventful. We drove to Port Douglas on the 4th to live in a hostel for four nights; on the 5th we went to a Sunday morning market and roamed around the countryside for the rest of the day. Yesterday we traveled to Cape Tribulation, a peregrination I didn't think was worth its tribulations. We were confined in a car most of the time but took frequent breaks to look at the rainforest. They became wearisome quickly. I wasn't impressed with the tangled mess of green I saw wherever I looked and which wasn't even as pretty as the Milford Track's 'rainforest'. Nor was I in the mood to be patient and contemplative: I felt, and still feel, spiritually claustrophobic around my family. A trip in a twelve-person boat along the Daintree river was the one really pleasant incident of the day. It was a quiet, electrically powered boat, and our guide was entertaining.

Today we went to Mossman Gorge and frolicked in the swimming hole. Spent the afternoon at "Hartley's Crocodile Adventures", which features not only crocs but birds, snakes and marsupials. The koalas were perhaps my favorite animals, being huggable sleepy teddy bears. But the crocodile feeding was a tad more exciting than watching those balls of fur take naps.

January 8

We're in a small town called Yungaburra. We spent most of the day driving here; our journey took us through a part of the Outback, which is the desolate expanse constituting most of Australia. The land was spattered with immense termite mounds that rose four feet off the ground and were rock-hard. Incredible. I was dumbfounded that such tiny creatures had built these crudely beautiful works of modern art. The achievement of Stonehenge not only *pales* but *blanches* in comparison. The power of 'mere instinct' lay crystallized before our eyes. The complexity of the termite and ant hierarchy is, of course,

[1] Higher water temperatures have already killed much of the reef—and the fish feed on the corals, so they're dying too.

another example of nature's fine-tuning itself to create an uncannily human organization. How can one account for these phenomena? Surely no existing theory of evolution is wholly adequate.

We also admired a volcanic crater and a towering fig tree—the "curtain fig tree", named for its appearance. In the evening we looked for platypuses in a river near our hostel, but not a single one surfaced. It probably wouldn't have been an orgasmic experience anyway.

January 11

Like all cities, Sydney radiates a magnetic charge—both positive and negative. Unlike all cities, its architecture and its scenic background and its harbors and its plazas are magnificent—and so its 'charge' is primarily positive. It has a European, Old World flair with an exuberance approaching Paris'. While it lacks inimitably charming cafes, marble palaces and the Champs-Elysées, it has a spirit of ebullience that draws sustenance from buildings like the Town Hall, boulevards like George Street, harbors like the Darling, and street-performers like the comedic juggler we saw yesterday. It would take more than four days to tap the riches of this city. Unfortunately four days are all we have.

We arrived on the afternoon of the 9th. After unloading our bags at the Sydney Central YHA we ate dinner at a restaurant in Chinatown. A singer regaled us with Neil Diamond songs the whole time; after hearing one, we had heard them all. (Dana Carvey: "This is every Neil Diamond song you've ever heard…") We then walked to Darling Harbor, where a Latin band was playing to a crowd of thousands. It was part of the Bacardi festival, which is part of the Sydney festival, which lasts the whole of January.

On the 10th we didn't get started until 1:30, for reasons I've forgotten. The only one I remember is that Terry had to go to a doctor for his sore throat. When we finally got our act together we went to the Sky Tower, the view from which extends to the Blue Mountains when they aren't shrouded in fog, as they were yesterday. Later we walked through the Queen Victoria building—old-fashioned, "the most beautiful shopping center in the world"—the Strand Arcade and Martin Place. In the evening we saw the juggler on the Circular Quay, which is on Sydney Harbor. The Opera House, a masterpiece of modern architecture with some of the best acoustics in the world, is on the harbor as well. Everybody has seen photographs of this unique building; it's world-renowned. The mere sight of it is memorable—but Jay and I saw an opera in it! And the opera was none other than *Don Giovanni*! It was a minor coincidence that this particular one was being performed, for I had remarked offhandedly the previous day that I should like to see *Don Giovanni* here. We had no idea it was playing: we went into the lobby to check the schedule for upcoming events and noticed that Donny Johnny was set for that night at 7:30. It was 7:15 at the time. At 7:25 we learned that no more tickets were available, but at 7:28 we learned that that wasn't true: two partial-view seats were left. Mom and Dad bought the tickets and then returned to the city with Terry, while Jay and I enjoyed three hours of Mozart. The singers were superb, especially the lead—Teddy Tahu Rhodes—whose voice was as mellifluous and sonorous as Josef Spacek's, and Ali MacGregor (or Lisa Russell?), who played Zerlina. The set and costumes were in the style of the eighteenth century, which was a relief and a respite from the misguided trend to 'modernize' operas. It was a spectacular production, from start to finish. One theatrical flourish will be etched in my memory for years: when the Commendatore appeared behind the tall window at the beginning of the climactic scene and chillingly intoned the name of his murderer, the window collapsed into the stage at the moment that the two columns crashed down on either side of the Don. He cowered in the shadow of the spirit, hugging the road to perdition lined with the palatial ruins of his own rakish existence. The symbolism was both dramatically compelling and meaningful in its own right. Then the scene began in earnest, as demons from hell gallivanted around the set, Leporello leapt from corner to corner in sheer terror, Giovanni vied with the embodiment of doom through his heroically impious refusal to repent, the music grew increasingly impassioned and chaotic—though only on the surface; Mozart is never chaotic—and finally the trap-door gaped to swallow the evildoer in flames. It was a moving climax, but it would have impressed me even more had our seats been closer to the action and afforded a view of more than two-thirds of the stage. My chief bone of contention, however, was not with my seating but with myself: I couldn't leave self-awareness by the wayside. I had to bear the burthen yet again, and my

enjoyment was not uncorrupted. –But 'be still', my über-meditations and hypochondriacal delusions. Be still, my stuttering pen. You are as fertile as the Sahara desert.

January 13

Tonight I had a rare intellectual conversation with my family during dinner. I asked them whether they thought that humanity's loss of innocence was a reasonable price to pay for scientific progress; the ensuing debate led me to question certain beliefs that have in the last three years become ossified assumptions. Obviously 'innocence' is a word that desperately needs a definition before it can be used in a philosophical discussion, but because I've sensed that it signifies *something* I haven't felt an urgent need to define it in my half-poetic digressions. But tonight's conversation may have changed my mind. Perhaps the notion of innocence, which relies much on that of collective consciousness, really is too imprecise to be of use. Perhaps humans haven't experienced a 'fall' as dramatic as I thought. There are still frontiers beckoning us; the spirit of exploration still thrives, though it has been sublimated into technical/technological strivings. The loftiest minds, which "outrun their tardy ages", are still enthralled by the unknown—in spite of the dull apathy and quotidian preoccupations of the masses, which however predominate in all eras. The absence of worthy ideas in postmodernity may be an example of the tendency of unique people to be born posthumously.

Those are comforting ideas, but they aren't the whole story. This age is unlike any other. Its malaise can be *felt* but is hard to diagnose. I have trouble pinpointing it, but it exists. I've just neglected to appreciate that *every* age is in its own way unhealthy. I'll have to compare many cultural illnesses to shed light on our own.

January 14

On the 11th we went to The Rocks, which is a colonial district in Sydney. It has a large marketplace; we dawdled there for several hours and then walked along the Sydney Harbor Bridge. At 5:30 we took a ferry to Manly, a city near Sydney. Its beach offered a superb view of the Pacific and its tumultuous waves. –I forgot to mention that our first activity of the day was to see the lovely Chinese Gardens. They're secluded from the hustle and bustle of city life; they feature rivers and streams, rock gardens and traditional Chinese architecture. I saw a dignified lizard perched on a large stone—an Eastern Sea Dragon, I believe. Terry and I attired ourselves in the regalia of a Chinese emperor, which meant that we had to pose for a hundred pictures. My colorless Western outfit was distasteful afterwards.

In the evening we sailed back to Sydney to meet Erin and her friends at a jazz festival in the Domain. The park was huge and jam-packed, but Erin somehow found us as we stumbled across the narrow grassy strips between picnic blankets, lost and despairing at our chances of seeing her again. The music wasn't wonderful, the singer fairly atrocious, but I had an engaging conversation with two of Erin's pretty friends. Surprisingly easygoing girls. After an hour one of them left, along with my parents and Terry, but the rest of us lingered until almost midnight to hear the band, which played music a good deal more exciting than the preceding. […]

Finally we all trekked across town to a nightclub called Gas. I was by then tired and quiet, bored of these people, but I conformed like a good American. Luckily I wasn't allowed in to the 'classy' expensive club wearing my shorts.

On the 12th we toured the Opera House. The guide was informative and likable, partly because he shared my respect and sympathy for visionaries. Jørn Utzon in particular. Utzon was the original architect of the building; he was, and is, an inspired dreamer. He's currently overseeing renovations in the opera theater, but it has taken him forty-five years to be even partially reconciled with the Australians. He hasn't returned to Sydney since his resignation of his commission in the '60s, for the controversy surrounding his project created a lot of bad blood. Sydneysiders hated the way the building looked, thought it was a waste

of money, didn't understand the need for a grand arts center, etc. One of their complaints was mildly reasonable: the original projection of the cost was $7 million, while it eventually skyrocketed to $102 million. This was outrageous to philistines. Utzon finally quit because his vision was unacceptable to the yahoos in Sydney—who have now, predictably, realized that his original plans were superior to the end-result, and have asked him to supervise changes that have much in common with what he wanted initially. For example, he wanted the opera theater to be blue and silver and the concert hall to be red and gold; instead the first was painted black and the second neither red nor gold. Now the first will probably be painted gold and acoustics will be improved in the second. –It's yet another instance of a genius's work being first grudgingly accepted and then becoming a source of pride for the very people who fought against it in the beginning!

After the tour we walked through the Botanic Gardens. I wasn't in the mood to try to enjoy scenery, so I sat and sulked. A Jewish wedding occurring nearby raised my spirits, but I could watch for only five minutes. We had a schedule to keep; we couldn't pause to share a sweet moment with lovers. We had to race down McQuarry Street, admiring the hoary government buildings that exuded nobility-of-purpose, and walk through Hyde Park. We saw the fountain commemorating Australia's alliance with France in World War I, the ANZAC memorial and the canopy of trees shading the long promenade from one end of the park to another. In the evening we watched two IMAX movies: a documentary about the international space station and a history of Ernest Shackleton's attempt to traverse Antarctica in 1914. They were both inspirational, but the latter was astounding. Shackleton's journey was not only epic; it was the stuff of legend, of myth, of ancient Greek hero-worship. Hercules would have loved Shackleton as a brother. While watching the film I might have felt like a contemptible sybaritic coward had I not been convinced that in the straits in which he and his men found themselves I would have behaved similarly. Most people with an iota of hardihood would have. It's human nature: we grow accustomed to situations and learn to accept them; when our lives hang in the balance we can even behave like intrepid explorers battling the elements and daring nature to inflict her worst. It's a pity we aren't tested more often, for extreme conditions offer the best opportunities to show our mettle and live heroically.

January 15

This morning we flew in a seaplane from one of Fiji's two main islands, Viti Levu, to a tiny paradise named Nanuya Lailai. Its neighbor is Turtle Island, which is where *The Blue Lagoon* was filmed. The water here is liquid glass, cooled to body temperature after melting. We're staying on the side of the island that faces the ocean rather than the lagoon, but the atmosphere is the same: laid back and sheltered from the world. Outside events have no significance here; the natives live according to their own rhythm and routine, which is tranquil to say the least. Virtually no hint of Westernization taints their lifestyle, excepting the tourists who provide them with their livelihood. The burres, or (thatched) huts, in which we and they live have few modern conveniences. The small community neighboring ours (called Sunrise) has electricity and a radio, but Seaspray lives more primitively. After 7:30 we have to carry lanterns into the shower, into our huts and to dinner. The food isn't wonderful; tonight's supper included some kind of meat that wasn't. But most of it is edible. The friendliness of the Fijians compensates for the inadequacy of their meals. The two young ladies who are the nieces of the couple that runs the place, Maria and Katarina, are shy but extremely kind. They perform their duties diligently and spend the rest of the day giggling and whispering. Apparently they think Terry is cute: whenever he talks they laugh and chatter delightedly in their own language. Their aunt and uncle are personable hosts.

This environment in which one lounges and swims in the sun all day long is so foreign and provincial that I don't understand it. How can people live here? Don't they get restless? Don't they crave something new? (Maria does, from what I gather.) There is no Other to impress! My obsessions and ambitions would dissolve away if this island were my home, and my mind would probably lose its inquisitiveness. Or, more accurately, if I had been born here my mind would never have had the chance to mature. But I'd be incredibly bored nonetheless. –Yet to *visit* this island is an eye-opening experience. It

makes me feel as though my usual thoughts are petty and miss the point of life. I suspect that Levin's fascination with the peasantry, typified in the mowing scene, springs from the same source. Such a life is simple, rustic and *real*.

January 16

At 5:00 yesterday we walked along the coast to the Blue Lagoon, guided by Daniel, who is the head honcho's husband. The sand on the beaches is so fine as to feel like clay squishing through your toes. At one point Daniel shimmied up a palm tree, knocked some coconuts down and expertly carved two for us to eat. I didn't relish the taste of either the soft or the hard meat, or the milk, although the soft meat was a *tad* more sapid. We reached the lagoon at 6:30, admired the cloudy sunset, and climbed a lot of hills back to our base. The journey was as beautiful and uplifting as we had expected, with one exception: Daniel showed us a site on which a resort will be built in a few years, marring the lagoon's unspoiled appearance.

After dinner all the tourists watched a show performed by the natives, which featured them dancing and singing Fijian-style. The songs were surprisingly euphonic, with proper melodies and harmonies and a festive 'joi-de-vivre'. After the concert they taught us two traditional Fijian dances—one involving couples, one not—and then we played 'follow the leader' in a thirty-person chain. I doubt that anyone present didn't enjoy the evening. A halo shone around the near-full moon.

I didn't sleep well. Not only was the heat muggy, but at 5:30 a crowing rooster woke me up. I chased it away, but the sunlight streaming into our room didn't permit further sleep. Hours later I half-ate a mediocre breakfast of oatmeal and tasteless donuts, then sat in the shade until noon to finish yesterday's entry. We were eager to visit the Sawa-i-Lau caves, an hour away by boat, but we had to wait until the waves grew less choppy. At last we embarked, slathered with sunscreen in the intense heat (shielded by clouds). The ride was scenic. Upon arrival at the beach we snorkeled, seeing razor-thin fish as spectacularly colored as those near Cairns, and then entered the dank caves. Their reputation is well-deserved. We jumped into the cool water (10 meters deep) and admired the colorful walls around us, which apparently a volcano had carved. After swimming through a narrow channel we found ourselves in another chamber, pitch-black. Fortunately Daniel had a flashlight; he shined it on the high smooth ceiling, causing Mom to gasp with pleasure. After returning to the main area we watched the fifty-year-old Daniel climb its walls as though wearing suction-cups on his fingers and toes—and then from a height of fifty feet leap into the water. Jay and I attempted the climb, but it was impossible. The exercise was so strenuous that my limbs quivered uncontrollably. At 3:30 we puttered back to Seaspray, stopping twice at tiny villages whose material wealth was comparable to that of a shantytown. But their inhabitants seemed carefree. Before dinner I bought some remarkable shell-jewelry for Rebecca; after dinner, we all discussed Fijian politics together by the fire.

January 17

It was sensible of Byron to write his letters and journals in that halty jargon using incomplete sentences and dashes between every phrase. Not only is it more economical and easy to write, but it's oddly poetic, compelling and fun to read. Less pretentious, too, and a better reflection of how thoughts work. I might adopt his style at the end of this year, if and when I live in India. It's a damned hassle to waste time composing fluid sentences when I'm traveling.

I slept restlessly again last night because of the heat and the rooster. Today I'm not doing anything to speak of. Just walking, swimming and sitting.

—What a life these people lead! You have to see it to believe it—or rather, *disbelieve* it, for you can believe anything abstractly. Stranded on this isle—idyllic for a vacation but devilish for a home—they're lazy and hardworking at the same time. Their drudgery lasts a good portion of the day, but it's an unambitious, mechanical drudgery. (That's not necessarily redundant, by the way. Drudgery need not be unambitious or mechanical.) The rest of the day they idle in the shade or the water, playing the guitar and

singing love-songs. I don't blame them: the heat is unforgiving. I wonder if they envy the ambassadors from the West who visit them continually.

January 18

In a few minutes we'll leave the island to fly to L.A. 'My heart is aching': there are two incarnations of poetry here whom I'll never see again. I'll miss Fiji itself as well. When I sit in the shade it is heaven on earth. If I were here with a girlfriend my happiness would be indescribable. Nanuya Lailai is possibly the most romantic place I've ever been to.

We're back in the Nadi Bay Hotel. At 11:00 p.m. we'll board our flight. In the meantime I'll relate to you what we did on the 14th: we drove along the Coral Coast. Drove and drove and drove. The dirt road to Natadola beach extended into infinity but its preposterous underdeveloped convolutedness was amusing rather than annoying. We ate dinner at a restaurant whose dusky atmosphere was fertile soil for the seeds of love. But I was with my family, so my pleasure was asexual.

I'm fed up with the lie I live. It's time to tread the primrose path of dalliance, recking not my rede. I should sip from the hedonism residing permanently in the dregs of my soul, conjure it to the level of appearance, tempt it with the succulent promise of raw pink flesh—transmute myself into a peripatetic libertine who fritters away his hours in profligacy refueled by a diet of literary and philosophical nourishment. (A daily soupçon of such sham saintliness ought to be sufficient to humor my deceived spiritual desires.) […]

What struck me about the villagers was what strikes me about some Asians: they're easygoing, trusting, and they don't adopt airs as often as Westerners. They're almost naïve. I suppose that the more worldly one is, the 'harder' one (usually) is. A social carapace grows, an exoskeleton that isn't needed in village life. Many obvious reasons explain this phenomenon. It's lucky that Fiji in the 1870s elected to join the British empire instead of the American. Had the latter country gained ascendancy over Fiji, the land would by now be partitioned into thousands of private properties, the islands forbidden to common folk and owned by Richard Evanson clones. (Evanson owns Turtle Island, on which no one is allowed except fourteen couples who pay $1000 a night.) England was fairer and juster.

The beauty of this world is devastating. Millions of sterile scientific facts cooperate to form a unity that includes such details as the blazing full moon sitting in the armpit of the palm tree in front of me. The moon revolves around the earth, a gray dusty object obeying dry Newtonian physics flavored with a pinch of Einstein, floating in the desolate vacuum of space two hundred thousand miles away, and it looks like *that!* What sheer spontaneous perfection! If I squint my eyes, everything but a circle of light is blotted out.

—If you pry open your eyelids while rolling your eyes back into your head and looking at the sun, you can see the veins in your retina from the inside.

January 20

The traditional equation of the Good Life with moderation in all things is imprecise and wrong. Moderation = 'morality', propriety, the 'good' life. Intoxication = the Lived Life. Both are prerequisites of the Good Life, which consists in moderating intoxication such that it is distributed through all facets of being. Breadth is as necessary as depth, because life's potential is as broad as it is deep. Great passion with many outlets, tempered by worthy values: that is my formula for the Good Life, much as I may not always abide by it. This awareness constitutes one side of my torment; the other lies in my uncertainty as to which values are best.

January 21

Bach's Prelude in C minor, BWV 999, as transcribed for guitar, has a wavering, wraith-like, waif-like, lonely, dreamy quality, as though it doesn't quite exist or is an outcast from the world. It's a musical vignette, a story of sweet sadness, a slice of the higher life, with a quiet wisdom lulling from behind the plucked tones. The repetitive pattern so exquisitely Bachian, ebbing and flowing in the minor key for eighty seconds, prepares the partaker for the unexpected major third—and the following three chords—as a pregnant woman is prepared for the birth of her child after nine months of waiting. That single note is the rustling of the silken undergarments on a teary-eyed virgin deep within the soul of her lover. It is the soundlessness of Venice at dawn. It is the surcease of strife and the end of history.

January 22

Had two classes—Greek Drama and History of Traditional China—first professed by an effeminate probably gay likable young man, second by a stodgy old Israeli dude on leave—but subject interesting, so I'm keeping it—must know more about China, 'broaden my horizons' or some other cliché.—Met cute girl, junior named Sarah back from Italy, James Grossman's friend—but she's dropping the class. Lunch with Bruce—not easy to talk to him, reserved—him, that is, but me too because. Dilettantic, or just pseudo-intellectual, conversation with housemates—more of a spectator sport on my part—didn't know what to say about world affairs, their choice—unacquainted and uninterested—so sat and watched and thought of quietus. Reluctant mental masturbation at the moment—thesis, namely—no orgasms yet—don't know what to write, scarcely care.—Thought of prick philosophaster Schliesser and that unpleasant meeting—should have called him a dick after his reference to my "*attempts* at metaphysics" and left the room—"I'm being deliberately patronizing" said he—what the fuck?—fuck you. Thesis—how am I the same self?—self-identity = can of worms, slipping through my fingers ADD-style—*hasse es*—think of Vonnegut's (Vonnegut's?) short story about a futuristic 1984 in which people aren't permitted to think—when thoughts creep in, a noise blasts in their ears (they wear permanent headphones) to distract them and they forget the thought—well, *c'est moi*.—I am my own Big Brother. Return to Paxil?—panacea for social ills—what ills?—introvertedness—'tis tempting but I'm a romantic, must evolve through willpower, not dastardly mechanistic reintegration of bodily chemicals. This writing-style exalts charlatanry as highest good—no wonder Byron preferred it—'I am the Great Charlatan, no. 2'—no, no. 3—Goethe number 1—*ich verstehe ihn wie mich selber*—iconoclast, I.—Couldn't record daily events in erstwhile style, would have been cumbersome and tantamount to taking them seriously—in short, infantile—but now they can be seen as what they are, as jokes.

Sor's L'encouragement, Op. 34, Cantabile—the whole piece, actually, but especially the coda of the first movement—makes me happy, a happiness deep—and shallow—but sweet in its essence.—So much music to laud, so little time.

January 23

Stayed in house all day—it was bitterly cold, frosty, required thick coat—and that was *inside*—outside can't be described, air is frozen—"global warming" my arse. [Joke.] Making headway with thesis, chapter on time, wrote two paragraphs—referred to journal entry on Borgesian time—was illuminating, surprisingly. Read Andy's humongous book on history of architecture, took copious notes on Greece, words like trabeated, megaron, cella, peripteral, prostyle, entablature, entasis, echinus, architrave, metope, triglyph, abacus, cornice, crepidoma, stylobate, volute, torus, spira, plinth—yes, I know their definitions too.

January 24

Detest the way I write philosophy—parched, dead sentences condensed into black holes swallowing all light—not pretty or gripping—reminds me of Greek columns lacking entasis—even Hegel more interesting—depresses me considerably but don't know how to rectify it. Went to three parties until 2:00, met Lily, Hispanic model, and others—wanted to invite her to my house—drank much vodka, got tipsy—talked with Andy and Ryan in house until 4:00—a *human being* when drunk—ambition to become an alcoholic.

January 25

Read Byron's dramatic poem *Cain* three weeks ago; ingenious, of course, but a smidgen monotonous—too philosophical—question after question—why this? why that? what meanest thou? enlighten me, Lucifer!—one long overblown expression of doubt—through ravishing poesy that portrays Cain's anguish well—but life ain't all *that* bad—which is Byron's point, perhaps?—Goethe's article on *Cain* is hollow as ever, barely scratches the surface, speaks in windy platitudes—as a literary critic Goethe isn't worth much.—He's nothing but a poet, not even a dramatist—his plays can't really be *acted* like Shakespeare's—have no *meat*, no dramatic character-development—pleasant-sounding pseudo-thoughts with rounded edges.—Constant embarrassing gesticulation (though subtle) toward himself—'Look at me, look at me, what I've done!'—'I am whole, be like me!'—'I teach you the Superman'—obtuse—no wit, no magnifying lens on himself—sails through life on the crest of popular approval (with occasional half-exceptions).

January 27

CSS party tonight (Monday), a few beers—drunk—still drunk at 2:30, had fun—came perilously close to kissing a sweet junior, Beth; earlier ate dinner with Rebecca at Russell House and played piano, recounted trip, made fun of Schliesser together—and then saw him suddenly, quite a fright—he complimented my musical talent (had heard me from upstairs)—seemed shy and lonely, I felt sorry for him but wasn't friendly. Must cram into one semester the lost fun of seven.

January 28

Skimmed a moment ago the maudlin email I sent Rebecca in sophomore year, painful to read—embarrassing—'one wonders how one is capable of writing such schlock'—former self = worm burrowing in the muck of bathos. Reading about architecture everyday—weird effects on mentality: I *see* buildings differently now, hidden details pop out and I can *name* them, to have power over them. Listening to the quiet resignation of M.'s P.C. 24, 2nd m.—bewitching—I'm tired of struggle, of need for destiny, of need for appearances and for genius—and cult of experience, and no love, and people I know—and myself—but would rather be me than anyone else in history—and that's the tragedy, for what does it say about others?—and me especially?—I am an illusion that's outlived its day, died a hundred years ago, nothing left but the charred contemplative mockery writing these words, lost in its sham loneliness, confused, wasting time.

January 29

At a loss again regarding my thesis, not surprisingly; tormented by thought-experiment involving implications of MPD for self-continuity—thought I'd solved it, but was wrong. Last night reread Schopenhauer, "On Genius", vol. 2: uplifting, though silly—recalled former joy at reading it (two years

ago): everything described fits me perfectly, so it seemed to confirm my sui generisity and thus intoxicated me—in bygone days—though I could never escape doubt that *I* was a 'genius' (partly because that label turns me into an object, which objecthood I can't conceive—can't even accept that I'm *talented*—but, on the other hand, my fascination with such 'objecthood' was also a reason for the occasional *opposite* of my doubt)—anyway, now it just amuses me, though pleasantly and ego-caressingly, for part of me still believes in myself.—But the happiness it induces is a fart compared to music's effect on me.

A Lover's Lament

The poetry of yore is dead and gone,
Its beauty peregrine in modern life,
Its rhythm—romantic, steady, classical—
Too orderly to coexist with us.
'Artistry is foolish, behind the times,
Can offer us wise moderns nothing more,
For we have seen too much of history
And learned that chaos is the deepest truth,
That "meter" is a hoax, a sham, a fraud
Distracting us from scientific knowledge—
The Irrational is the Deus, and we are pawns.'
Thus speaks the spokesman of a proud despair
Unconscious of its essence in its proud conceit.
Between the lines one reads, 'I hate you, life,
You great betrayer, derailer of my dreams;
You reek of shattered hopes and long-lost loves,
Visions of the future wreathed in velvet
But now relics of a sanguinary
Celebration of barbaric bloodlust.
Nothing remains for me but death ignoble,
Anguish imperishable, faith's antipode,
And science lusterless. –Because of you,
Life, Knowledge, History, Mankind and "*Beauty!*"'
Such is the curse of the postmodern Zeitgeist,
Ignorant behind a veil of wisdom,
Weak behind a mask of stoic courage,
Vulgar when attempting to be noble.
—The spirit's dead, mimesis is abortive;
Poetry has made its bow: we're doomed.

January 30

Read *Prometheus Bound* five days ago, a mediocre translation (David Grene)—prefer Shakespeare to Aeschylus, predictably; don't fully understood the purpose of the Chorus—represents propriety?—captures the mood of a scene?—and the thoughts of the audience?—seals emotions in an airtight package of music and words—purged of ambiguity, thus inviting catharsis?—Dionysian versus Apollonian is intuitively obvious, Greek culture all but screams it: Aristotle's "catharsis" is Dionysus (intoxication), the god of tragedy—*content* of the tragedies—the Chorus, the plaintive recitations, the droning music—but then the self-evident need to impose form on everything—what theory could be more uncontroversial? Reading *The Persians* now, prefer it to the other, partly because it portrays the sorrows of real people during recent events—every line gushes compassion and a deep humanity—Aeschylus's genius is nonpartisan, he

is a human, in the way Shakespeare was: understands suffering, understands human weakness, understands the folly of hatred, understands the necessity of understanding.—Here's something to ponder: I'm reading a play written 2500 years ago in the Mediterranean, in a city whose citizens were so humane as to mourn the losses of their enemies in a war seven years past—and this play is so sublime as to move me in the year 2003, to leap over the vicissitudes of circumstances and remind me what it means to be human, that there is still and always will be hope—that out of disaster is born greatness, that struggle is salvation.

…Here's a version of what's bothering me about the thesis: reincarnation means that in the future, after I've died, I exist once again, which is equivalent to 'this self-consciousness exists again', which seems bereft of meaning, for what can make the two self-consciousnesses the same if not memory and the moment's extension?—which is lacking here.—Self-continuity can have no other meaning; one cannot say, for example—as I have in the thesis—'it consists in the same personal, private existence—same perspective, as it were—displaced in time', because of course that's just a garbled version of 'same self-consciousness', which begs the question. (Maybe that's wrong.)—But it *feels* like it should be possible, conceivable, for there to be life again after death—'for me', though not for this identical self—i.e., if existence is perceived *I* must perceive it, or someone from my 'perspective' (which is the same thing), because if someone else does it won't exist *for me* = it won't exist.—You see that language doesn't permit of my confusion's articulation; but the crux is simply…too labyrinthine for me to describe, so I won't.—But part of it is that even if one 'imagines away' memory and the continuous moment (so that there is at one point an abrupt break), my consciousness of ten minutes ago *must have been* intimately related to this one, an exact copy—*me*, in fact—yet the meaning of self-continuity can only be the two ingredients I've discarded, because other definitions are petitio principii-ies—and therefore the forgotten consciousness is as 'intimately related' to me as *someone else's*—i.e. not at all—which seems ludicrous because ten minutes ago I existed ('there was existence')! So where have I gone astray?

January 31

Birthday party at Kanchana's; drank too much, ended up vomiting multiple times in her toilet—maybe 20 fruitful heaves all told—then went outside, hid behind a corner for an hour and a half (until 2:30) wearing no jacket on one of the coldest nights I can remember—sat on the ground shivering, huddled, felt infinitely alone, encouraged myself to cry, wished Nietzsche were there beside me—Mr. Compassion, in spite of his writings—so I whimpered and waited for the waves of nausea to ebb, then sat in silence seemingly forever. When vision was less blurred I returned to grab my coat—guests were gone—and walked home, teeth chattering like a typewriter—long walk—peeled off clothes and fell into bed; woke in the morning, threw up and was sick the whole day—tried to lie perfectly still because movement triggered sickness—felt abject—couldn't do anything, not even read or think, so lay there zombie-like—at 9:00 I ate soup tentatively, was able to keep it down, and now it's 2:30 a.m. and I feel mostly better.—One question for myself: Why? Before the party I called Mom, talked for a while; she told me how much she misses me and enjoyed our time together, thinks I'm really "funny", keeps "replaying images" in her mind—it left me feeling happy, only to walk headlong into a night of misery. I shudder to think what my future judgment of myself will be. Just remember, Chris, that the sad truth of isolation from oneself and everyone else demands we adopt at least a semblance of understanding.

February 2

Best part of college is the freedom; never again will I be so free, unfettered by responsibilities—can do whatever I want all day long—but don't take advantage of it, as few students do—"college is wasted on the young"—though not entirely. Have finally, I believe, moved past those thesis-perplexities, namely by embracing my original idea. Talked with Andy last night until 4:00 about our Wesleyan experience, and girls, and *Hamlet*—asked him what was the justification of Hamlet's faked insanity—his intentions— To

buy time? No. To know the truth? Madness didn't help. To portray the turmoil of self-consciousness and doubts? No, that was *Shakespeare's* intention. So then *why?* Andy's (inadequate) answer: artistic license.

Looked at the Tufts Philosophy department website—applying there—part of mission statement is "to provide students with the skills necessary for Ph.D. research, as well as to foster the independence of mind required for genuinely creative philosophical work"—depressed me to read that: life felt picayune suddenly, perniciously unambitious, scholarly—training people to think!—and denying philosophy even as they preach it!—well-oiled parts of the machine—functioning smoothly—cooperating with contemporary ways of doing things.—What philosopher has ever cooperated? Philosophy is rebellion, war with the status quo; it is a *way of life*, not 'tidy thinking' or scholarship or a specialty.—Spartacus was a philosopher; Dennett is not.

February 3

Seven Against Thebes is tiresome, too heavy at times, like *The Persians*, though it probably fulfilled its cathartic purpose well—and besides, I'm "imposing my cultural standards" on it!—the monstrous crime condemned by all relativists—who don't know how superficial is their judgment. Greek class a waste of time: professor does nothing but summarize plots and genealogy—so I might as well read the plays on my own—would have chosen better translations anyway—must learn ancient Greek! Chinese class not much better, but history awe-inspiring. Met with Don Moon, who wants me to rewrite the thesis eventually to make it accessible, user-friendly.—Fat chance: all that work so two mindless readers can understand me better?!—I don't think so!—Is Hegel reader-friendly?—does it matter?—is he less profound on that account? *Could* (the mature) Hegel have written lucidly, with sentences *unpacked? Sicher nicht—und ich auch nicht*.

Reading *Agamemnon*, translated by Robert Fagles—this play best of all, Aeschylus' art honed to perfection after a lifetime of experience. Line 222 is significant; here's the context:

> And once he slipped his neck in the strap of Fate,
> his spirit veering black, impure, unholy,
> once he turned he stopped at nothing,
> seized with the frenzy
> blinding driving to outrage –
> wretched frenzy, cause of all our grief!
> Yes, he had the heart
> to sacrifice his daughter,
> to bless the war that avenged a woman's loss,
> a bridal rite that sped the men-of-war.

"Wretched frenzy, cause of all our grief." Dionysus is frenzy—*and* Dionysus is god of tragedy, of catharsis—catharsis is a kind of frenzy—frenzy is thus the *cause of* and *remedy for* grief.—Greeks knew this, knew the contradiction, knew the absurdity of life—hated it and loved it—their wisdom knew no bounds.

February 4

A major advantage of living at this time, so late in history, is that the past is a kaleidoscope of cultural achievements across the world, or rather a cornucopian buffet whose fruits I can sample—a kiwi here, a mango there—a few papayas—and then choose which are my favorite delicacies—which are healthiest, which savory and sweet—and invent my own diet tailored to my needs. History can be appropriated by each person as he chooses, selectively employed in the service of his self-creation. The

individual can be more complete than ever in the past. –The goal of humanity *can* lie in its end, if we make it such. (Its highest specimens are merely *another type* of goal.)

Gym with Ryan—satisfying—no nausea for once. When reading *Agamemnon*, having trouble concentrating—don't know why;—Fagles' style too flowery, too turgid, too metaphorical.

February 6

Miraculous that conversation is possible, that meaningful sentences can be extemporized, 'blurted out': double supremacy of the subconscious. Woke up at 11, as usual, worked on thesis—wrote a page—didn't do much else, ate dinner alone at Campus Center, watched part of a special on Michael Jackson—rather freakish-looking man with freakish lifestyle, but maliciously misunderstood, a tragic figure. Finished *Agamemnon*, last 700 lines compelling with a powerful momentum—Cassandra a superbly crafted character, piteous, an innocent caught between the spokes of fate—in the wrong place at the wrong time—whose undoing is through no fault of her own, and courageous till the end, nobler than all others in her godlike but poignantly human acceptance of her doom.

February 7

Sangeetha emailed me after a five-week silence; I was overjoyed, was beginning to think she didn't care if we ever communicated again. Reread some comp papers from sophomore year, was startled to discover how well I had learned the art of bullshitting: intelligently written, in some cases brilliantly, especially considering I didn't believe a word of what I wrote—successfully pretended to have great erudition—and *did*, compared to now—my ideas were not sufficiently argued, of course, but they were at least interesting and complex, and are good starting-points for finding the Truth.—Truth? What of it? Who cares? I just want a girl. Opening of the *Eroica* is *hilarious*: two brutal chords, violent, murderous, and then off we go into the main theme. Ha! It's one of my favorite symphonies, every movement a masterpiece.

I was lonely today; housemates played video games from dawn till dusk, laughing it up, but I didn't want to and so felt like the outsider I am, almost friendless. But a reversal of mood has transpired—adrenaline rushes—it's 10:30 and I'm going to the gym.

February 8

Nothing eventful today: got a haircut, wrote on freedom, read about Schelling and Fichte—(Schelling a pitiful thinker, such hero-worship of the Absolute!—all nonsense; Fichte insightful but confused)—then watched a movie with Andy and his friend.

Sunday, February 9

Brunch with Rebecca at O'Rourke's; watched *Gladiator* with Andy on our new sound system; wasted many hours; wrote thesis. While enjoying *Les Préludes*, which involved thrashing my head around like a maniac, I smashed my nose against my knee. Listened to the whole of *Les Misérables* with Andy as I tried to read Aeschylus—cathartic musical, Eponine my favorite character—idealistic, innocent, an unrequited lover, alone, downtrodden, wise beyond her years ("suffer into truth"), strong, the Victim who manages to stay human in the most slummy conditions—"A little fall of rain" makes me weep oceans, "Bring him home" is another, and "I dreamed a dream", "Who am I", "Come to me", "Drink with me", and many others. *The Libation Bearers* is not as good as *Agamemnon*. –Greek tragedies' constant emphasis on

suffering is wearisome—reminds me of Wagner's Music of the Past, though it's more pristine than the latter.

February 11

Music videos are incomprehensible to me. What kind of person wouldn't view them as comic relief?

Rejected from Cambridge, predictably; I wonder if I'll be accepted anywhere else. *The Eumenides* is my favorite Aeschylus play.

February 12

This has been my happiest year at Wesleyan—which says more about the previous years than it does about this one. It's nice to have the comfort of a house.

What is the psychological function of names? In my own case I can testify that having a name counteracts my solipsism, reminds me that I live *in the world* and am a being like all others, possessing a face that people can see as I see theirs. It reassures me that I am part of a community. It sharpens self-consciousness and sustains the myth that I am *one substantive self*. Why else would we find it so essential to learn a person's name upon meeting him? "Hi. What's your name?" Who cares?! A name doesn't tell us *anything* about the person! But we've identified ourselves so utterly with our own names that we know it is an integral part of *his* self too. It coheres him. "I forgot to ask what her name was! Damn! I don't even know who she is!"—even if I know her personality quite well. Her name is her self, so to speak.

…Avid devotees of science fail to comprehend the *sine qua non* of human existence: wonder. Science can try all it will to solve the riddle of Being, but after a certain point its labors become Sisyphean. Understanding cannot pass beyond a predetermined boundary. Mankind will never really know how, for instance, the brain produces thought, no matter how much information scientists accumulate. Our own complexity is simply beyond our ken. The universe is frightful, but *under our noses* is the infinitude of the noumenon.

Had a test in Greek Drama today; researched Italian architecture; thought about freedom, got nowhere.

February 13

Parents stopped by tonight on the way to Bob and Betty's, gave me a comfy chair and some wall decorations. Room looks *lived in* now, has *character* finally. Had dinner at Thai Gardens with them. Went to Senior Cocktails, met a cute girl—Julie—now I miss her, hope to see her again soon.—My present bittersweet joy betrays just how lonely I am. I've seen Julie many times but never thought I'd meet her. Such a pretty girl (by Wesleyan standards)…not for the likes of me!

February 14

Ate at an Indian restaurant tonight with Ryan, Andy, Jason and Mike—unpleasant experience: service was two hours late, meanwhile I listened to a conversation on politicians and the like, secure in my status as the fifth wheel. Andy intolerably supercilious as usual—truly a conceited brat who has a desperate love of 'looking down' on people, ignoring them or acting like they're not worth his consideration. But all four, and others, habitually ignore my comments because of who has spoken them rather than because of

their content. –The signature of the snob. But as long as I remember that most people are not Wesleyan students I'll stay sane.

Today I mailed the Tufts application and read *Oedipus Rex*. Sophocles is easier to read than Aeschylus, but Aeschylus' writing is more ravishing. It is also sometimes over the top. I remember an entertaining dialogue between Xerxes and the Chorus in *The Persians*—toward the end, when everyone is lamenting the downfall of Persia—that goes like this:

> Oh alas, woe.
>
> Woe, O gods
> Who brought these unexpected woes!
> How baleful gleams the eye of doom.—
>
> Struck by woes perpetual.
>
> Struck by recent—
>
> A recent woe.
>
> Woe, alas,
> They met the men-of-war without success:
> How luckless was the Persians' war.
> […]
> Greeks stand firm in combat.—
>
> Alas, too firm! I scan an unexpected woe.
>
> You mean the host, routed and broken?
>
> My garments I rent at my woe.
>
> Alas, O woe.
>
> And even more than woe.
>
> Double and triple the woe.
> […]
> Weep, weep, weep for the woe, and homeward depart.
>
> Alas, O woe, misery.
>
> Shout antiphonal to me.
>
> To woebegone woeful gift of woes.
>
> Raising a cry, join together our songs.
>
> Alas, O woe, woe, woe upon woe.

You get the point. I lost my composure at the line "Double and triple the woe." It may just be an awful translation, though.

Sunday, February 16

Called Julie this afternoon, talked for a few minutes somewhat awkwardly—she sounded shy; on Friday we're having dinner at the Tuscany Grill. […]

…A few minutes ago I ate dinner with Mariam in the C.C. At first we colloquied on such mundanities as theses and graduate schools; then we reminisced about Cocktails. I told her I'd met a cute girl and was having dinner with her on Friday. In the midst of this Julie-chat I heard a delighted voice behind me exclaim "Hi Chris!"; my about-face revealed the visage of…yes, Julie, live and in the flesh! I was so *happy*, not only to see her but to see how pleased she was at seeing me. The remainder of the dinner was fun: I can be my exuberant self around Mariam, for she reciprocates. I love that girl! She reminds me that there are plenty of people in the world who aren't schmucks.

Finished *Oedipus at Colonus*; have nothing to say about it—too tired at the moment—and it didn't make a strong impression on me anyway.—I wonder what it would be like actually to believe in paganism; can't comprehend it. Must have been an awe-full world in Greece.

February 17

Blizzard conditions; no classes today; no work either, except for a few sentences in thesis—mostly just thoughts. Zeus damn this thesis!

Two poems:

Sadness
Prolific in tears
Euphonic in sensation
Stonily silent in expression
Dissonant in perception
Rich in self-comfort
Sadness

Cello
My consolation
So proudly self-sufficient
Loving passion apollonian
A lonesome Dionysus
My musical self
Cello

2-5-7-9-7-5-2: peace-conflict-resolution.

February 19

Watched *Requiem for a Dream*: shattering movie—I feel like dirt, so filthy that I'm incapacitated, catatonic, haven't energy to do anything—and can't go to bed feeling like this. What's worse is that I have the sense that I've experienced an insight into the nature of life—which I can't dissolve in an acidic solution of antiseptic artistic creation, because I'm creatively impotent—an impostor—the most delusional sane person in history—unsure of everything, insecure, an actor so talented as to fool myself more than anyone

else—acting even in my acute self-dissatisfaction—even while being sincere—*even then*, when I seem bared to myself and naked for all self-consciousness to behold—*even now—even now!*

…Cleansed myself by reading about Carolingian architecture.

February 20

Wrote a page of the preface—was incredibly fun—but now when I reread it I'm disgusted—it's so hubristic. Judge for yourself:

> This is a dark age for a thinker. If he lives up to his name he can find no sympathy from the public. They frown on his endeavors, not understanding them nor caring to. He is a benighted, unpractical, puerile clowd-dweller, at once a laughing-stock and a menace to society. Dreamy and frivolous, whose ideas might have—and have had—a pernicious impact on the world. Perhaps he's even *malicious*, intentionally perverse and disruptive of the status quo. Just look at his godless attacks on religion! He wants to do away with morality! The communist! *Anarchy* would result if the Thinker's teachings became practice. –Such fear and contempt are understandable, for none of these accusations is unjust. The thinker is guilty as charged! He has assigned himself the task of being an antidote to political correctness and American liberal-democratic nihilism. Is it any wonder, then, that he is universally ignored? Of course, that is merely a convenient *justification* for such; the real *cause* of his current irrelevance is that he no longer exists. There is no place for him in the contemporary scene. What cultural sector craves inspiration from the philosopher? In past centuries, movements among the elite demanded and were enriched by contributions from men who had elected the *vita contemplativa*; the bifurcation, or trifurcation, of culture permitted thinkers to cavort in the aristocratic arena and snub their noses at the populace. Postmodernity knows a like '-furcation' to the nth degree, such that there are a thousand nooks and crannies in our civilization, but *none* of them affords delight or comfort. How could it? Even a philosopher thirsts for applause; even *he* wants to influence society—yet what applause can he receive from a splintered, chaotic world in thrall to the spirit of the Quotidian? The late-capitalist Zeitgeist is not a home for him; it does not reflect his consciousness or aspirations; it is a miasma that suffocates him.
>
> Academia appears to be a haven for him: it provides security, ease, a close-knit family—nearly incestuous, in fact—mutual respect and a permanent audience. Intellectuals, surely, have sympathy for each other. But he is ultimately foreign to most of them: he cannot abide the dull *gravitas* and obtuse self-satisfaction of the philosophaster. He can identify with the latter as little as Faust could with his assistant Wagner. Where is the mischievous joy in the unfathomable, the profound and sparkling *joi-de-vivre* of the self-consciously savage noble human being, in books by sophists like Daniel Dennett and Derek Parfit? Their blandness stems from a habit of thinking discursively rather than intuitively. This preference for negotiating and compromising between *words*, for bandying names about, at the expense of *experiencing* truth in the mode of the philosopher—this equivocal diplomacy of the mind, with its policy of appeasement in the proud tradition of Eduard von Hartmann (who tried to reconcile Hegel and Schopenhauer in his *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, unaware that he was brutalizing the *spirits* of both systems by doing so)—this strange verbiage-fetish is a cause and symptom of philosophy's postmodern decrepitude, an anarchy in the 'superstructure' parallel to the fragmentation in the 'base'. Philosophy is sick, if indeed it isn't dead. It has a severe case of osteoporosis:[1] it hobbles along, limping painfully. Its past vitality has been sapped; it is now only going through the motions in all those scholarly journals that cater to professionals. One is gravely concerned about its future. What will be left of this ancient *way of life* in a hundred years? What is left of it now? Philosophy is

[1] Yes, "truth is a woman".

rebellion, ruthless destruction of everything that exists and erection of a new world order. Its spokesman is Beethoven. But Beethoven has been smothered under the cloak of pop culture.

Nor is all that the whole story. Our world is so labyrinthine that to become proficient in any discipline requires extraordinary technical knowledge. Hence scholars and scientists have retreated into narrow spheres that permit of being mastered but do *not* permit of achieving the all-encompassing vision that was the goal of the philosopher in times past. This ambition could perhaps be pronounced an obsolete relic of an age of innocence, inappropriate to our wiser, more cynical era, and thereby be happily discarded on the dust-heap of history, the entrance to which bears the inscription "Good riddance!"—such visions, after all, have been known to hold an evil sway over the masses—were it not that the ideal of a *Weltanschauung* motivates an essential type of self-cultivation. Self-creation is the be-all and end-all of human existence, and philosophy is but a means to that end. However, it occupies a privileged location in the pantheon of Higher Pursuits, for it functions as a glue that unites and coheres them and can bind them into a single worldview. Or it can critique them with the uncompromising intellectual integrity of *honest* nihilism. Either way it has a breadth that does not exist in the academic world today, implying that intellectuals are in some respects more stunted than they were in the golden ages of thought (antiquity, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the nineteenth century). The onslaught of technology is turning us into automatons and *appendages* of human beings; the real thing, the ideal, is now not even *that*. Is there no way to be both a complete individual and an original thinker? Is philosophy doomed to succumb to science and *business*, of all things? What an ignominious demise, to perish at the hands of the philistine after such a glorious history!

As I pondered these unfortunate truths I began to question the value of writing such an essay as this. Its wildest ambition could be but to share the fate of all scholarly works, namely to float around in the world for a while until the few in Academia grew bored of it and it was consigned to the vacuum of recognition in which it had, anyway, *effectively* spent its five seconds of fame. And that 'lucky' fate would itself be a miracle! […]

February 21

If I think about it deeply, intuitively, imaginatively, I'm kind of amazed that Julie wants to have dinner with me tonight. She has *thought* about me—*me*—thought "I want to have dinner with Chris"—*Chris*—a date—she talked to Ally about me—*Chris*, a person, here in the world, 'one of us', an other, a boy with romantic potential, who must have *something* going for him in order to interest Julie—an actual human being like all others, corporeal and spiritual, an *object*!

…Well, I've always known it, but now it's been confirmed, indubitably and indelibly: I'm a fool. A fool without peer. An idiot beyond comprehension. Dinner went well, Julie was wonderful—friendly, funny, easygoing—I was apparently entertaining and it couldn't have gone better. But when we arrived at her doorstep I told her that "I guess I'll head back now" to avoid the awkward moment when I would look at her and she would look at me and I would think "May I kiss you?" and she would think "No you may not" and I would shuffle my feet and she would shuffle hers and so on. So I said "I guess I'll head back now." And she said "Okay." And I asked if I should call her again and she said yes. And it occurred to me that she had for a split-second looked surprised at my first declaration, so I thought "What the fuck have I done?" but what was done was done, so I walked away and she went inside. And then I stopped walking in stupefaction at my own stupidity and to think of an excuse to knock on her door again but I couldn't think of one in time, so I stood there dumbly contemplating what had happened. I felt oppressed with disappointment. Had she planned to invite me in before I opened my big mouth? Of course! She hadn't said anything to the contrary: she said she was looking for her key and I said it was time to leave and she said "—Okay." And the long lonely walk home was painful, I felt ready to explode and could do nothing to vent my rage but speed-mutter again and again, pressure-cookerly, "How is it possible for someone to be so stupid? Who would believe it? Who can conceive it? [Etc.]"

[Deleted entries.]

February 24

Dinner at Campus Center with Julie—fun, but we're not right for each other. Made no plans. I'd hoped for 'friends with benefits', but that looks unlikely. Skipped Greek class, but Chinese was rewarding. Learned about the unfortunate language, which has a mere 40,000 words, no tenses (wen-yen doesn't, but bai-hua may; I forget), no singular or plural (likewise), only monosyllabic words (which implies many homophones; there are even homo*tones*, making comprehension difficult—as if it weren't already hard enough between the mutually incomprehensible dialects!), and so on. Thank God I speak English! My language is incomparable.

February 26

It *pisses me off* that I can't write my preface in the old style, the energized, galvanized, passionate style of the rebel. The new version is *tame*, contemptible. Fucking sallow. 'This is what I'm attempting, and this is how I'll attempt it. I apologize, by the way.' I was not made to conform. But it's 'inappropriate' to be overly provocative in a college thesis. Screw conventions! My last hope for inspiration has been whisked away; this thesis is shit and I don't care.

Lately I've been saddened by my age. You already know that, but the mood is choking me again. There's no sorrow like that which can but remember the past and regret…no oppression like that from the knowledge of *what might have been*. It is *finished*; to yearn is as fruitless as to wish for immortality. "If only…"—ah, *if only! If only* I had made more friends or known more lovers! *If only* I had lived Byronically and not eremitically! *Freely*, not hermetically! Philosophy and youth are oil and water. It is unhealthy to desire wisdom before one's time. Summer is for *living, winter* for thinking. Introversion is a disease.

February 27

I've managed to retain *some* of the spirit of my earlier preface in the new. It is sufficiently arrogant and unapologetic, though not so defiant and disdainful of the modern world.

Philoctetes is a good play—sympathetic, piteous main character with an impotent and tragic hatred of his betrayers, and noble Neoptolemus, idealistic young man who rejects un-Greek guile for honesty and friendship with the 'enemy'—Odysseus not seen in a favorable light (very different from the conciliator in *Ajax*): crafty, callous, inhumane.—It's intriguing that only after Neoptolemus has chosen to abandon the Greeks and save Philoctetes that the *deus ex machina* makes its appearance—when Heracles orders the two to sail to Troy—seems that N. had to prove his worth, prove he was the antipode of Odysseus, before the conflicts could be resolved.—Strange phenomenon of unconscious guilt haunts the Greeks—e.g., Oedipus, Ajax ('unconscious' slaughtering of animals), Philoctetes—perhaps related to their obsession with the dichotomy between fate and free will.—The most human among them recognize that guilt is not really such unless *intended*.

I had a discussion with Ryan tonight about morality. I argued that it degenerates into relativism and hence nihilism; he argued the contrary. I wish a third party had seen us! It was a fun and exciting conversation, and I was unnaturally brilliant. Battered him with all the ammunition from my paper on political philosophy and with arguments from Kant. He was less than perceptive, but my enjoyment outran my frustration.

February 28

Approximately seven minutes and ten seconds into the third movement of the ninth symphony—if the tempo is about 110—a clarinet plays three notes on the fourth beat of three consecutive measures, 'hidden' behind the horn, flute and pizzicato strings. It's nothing but decorative harmony, but it's an embellishment of unparalleled genius. As necessary as any decoration can be. The conductor should try to focus all attention on these notes, even go so far as to treat them as a secondary melody—like the ravishing bassoon, and the oboe that accompanies the (vocal) bass, in the fourth movement.

I can't begin to comprehend the happiness that Beethoven must have felt when he stood on stage watching the premier of his masterpiece. It is the godlike, resigned joy of one who has suffered only to be purified.

…Denise and I saw *The Life of David Gale*. Powerful movie. Death penalty: bad.

March 1

Zerlina's aria "Vedrai, carino" is one of my favorites in *Don Giovanni*. For most of the song she sings coquettishly about her magical salve for Masetto's pains, a medicine that will surely cure him, hinting at its power and effectiveness, and you're *convinced* she's referring to sex. Thus you listen to the enchanting music with an amused grin, charmed by its translation of a lover's flirtatiousness into the most sublime beauty. Yet there remains a *slight* doubt in your mind as to whether you've guessed the remedy correctly, and you wait for the libretto to confirm it somehow. But suddenly there's a pause in the music, followed by a pulsating cello that heralds an event of excruciating serenity. A flute is fused with it, pianissimo and legatissimo, whetting your anticipation. Gently Zerlina places Masetto's hand on her chest and says to him "Feel it [i.e., the medicine] beating"—and you realize that you were mistaken; she was referring not to sex but to her love, her heart. In an instant the aria has been transformed from a fetching exercise in innuendo to a pure expression of undying love.

…Mariam and I attended a concert at Crowell that featured a Schubert and two Beethoven sonatas. I was acquainted with the latter but not the former: B-flat, D. 960. I adored the first two movements and loved the last two. (I wished the first and second would never end. In the former, the periodic trill in the bass was as captivating as the opening melody itself. The second movement cast a spell over me.[1]) The laughter exuding from it was contagious: I had to smile every time the key changed—which was often—or when there was a sudden contrast between quiet lyricism and bombastic chord-hammering. It's imperative that I buy more Schubert CDs. There's so much great music I've never heard! I find it comforting that I could spend a lifetime expanding my collection, constantly hearing new works. A moment ago I bought four CDs online: Schubert sonatas, Bach piano concertos and two guitar albums.

March 2

Lately I've been exercising in my room every day in lieu of lifting weights.

The Women of Trachis surely measures up to Aristotelian standards, with its tragic ending, flawed hero and heroine, unified plot, etc.

March 3

[1] If it had been written by someone like Yanni I'd have thought it sentimental, New Agey and artificial.

Reading *The Tempest*.

March 5

It's hard to believe I've never asked my grandparents what it was like to live in the twenties, thirties and forties. They experienced that momentous time of history; they're living resources—and I haven't taken advantage of them! I wrote them a letter today in which I noted my lapse.

Had my last two classes today before spring vacation. Easy Sophocles-test in Greek Drama.

When people ask me what it was like to live in the 1990s, my answer will be "I *didn't* live in the 1990s."

March 6

Weight room. Ryan's departure. Shakespeare. Progress on free will—giddy for ten minutes after meditating in my armchair for an hour—fluttered about the room, giggling—thought I had outlined a solution in my mind—maybe I have—but I hope I don't forget it overnight (it's 4 a.m. now).

I wonder if my journal will survive the eventual holocaust and make it to the new world. I wonder if *I* will survive it. I wonder if global warming will precipitate our fall.

Congenital myopia: the birthmark of mankind.

March 9

I admit it's a superhuman feat to justify the war in Iraq. And I know it's perverse that a homunculus like George Bush is deciding the future of the Middle East and, by extension, the world. But good *might* result from Iraqi reconstruction. As I said earlier, that's why I don't completely oppose the invasion. I'm a consequentialist.

March 13

The cheerful arpeggiated and dignified solid-chordal passages in the second movement of D. 960 are good make-out music. I'm picturing myself kissing a girl while listening to them. It's a nice image. But it's hilarious. I suppose the music is too heroical, or too evocative of long-lost lovers finding each other after a lifelong search. I'd explode in laughter in the middle of a kiss.

The dedicatory page of my thesis will read, "This book is dedicated to my parents, who raised me in such a way that I could 'become who I am'." The last four words hint at Nietzsche's influence on my philosophy.

March 15

Today was the first spring day. It felt like the first one I had ever really *experienced*.

Saw *Fight Club* for the second time tonight. Spectacular movie. Genius. On the same level as (or better than) *The Truman Show*. Diagnoses Generation X expertly. The scores of critics who criticized it were mindless twits, anachronisms out of touch with the Timespirit, conservatives in denial. Some of them had the astounding insipidity to project their own obtuseness onto the artists by thinking that the movie was meant to be taken seriously. It is, but on a more profound and ironic level than critics have the capacity to appreciate. I'm amazed that some called it "fascist", when it *obviously ridicules* that mentality. It rejects its

own proposed solution—which was, of course, never really proposed—leaving the viewer with little but an awareness of my generation's illness and the categorical imperative to begin anew from a *tabula rasa*.

Gym yesterday. *Coriolanus* today.

March 23

My sojourn in the house of my agèd betters is over. In my absence I read Moliere's *Tartuffe* (translated by Curtis Hidden Page), part of Benvenuto Cellini's autobiography—a braggadocio, that man—and Euripides' *The Trojan Women*. The latter is little but an elegy on the fall of Troy, sung from the perspective of…the Trojan women.

I like this maxim: "The best iron is not to be used for nails, and the best men are not to be used for soldiers." But I think Einstein went overboard in saying something to the effect that 'he who joins an army has already lost my respect'.

Reading *Principles of Literary Criticism*, by I. A. Richards, because I haven't a firm grasp on what makes literature good. If I've ever written anything literarily valuable it has been through instinct, not knowledge.

On the 19th I received a box of chocolate candies made only in California, from Rebecca. That made my day.

March 24

Got up at 11:30; showered; brushed teeth; smeared zit-cream on face; took thirty milligrams of Paxil; ate at WesWings with Ryan; returned to house; walked to Olin. Richards' book is too philosophical, so I checked out Pritchards' *Training in Literary Appreciation*. That one's better. I searched for a spare bench in front of the Campus Center, but the surging mob intimidated me and I sat down on the grass near Olin instead. The weather was too pleasant to permit of schoolwork, so I skipped my classes. Jake Roberts, a 'cool' CSSer in my Greek course, deigned to converse with me. I used to dislike him—considered him a typical arrogant popular druggie-jock—but our conversations this semester have enlightened me. He's friendly, at least, and less aloof than his friend Andy. After he'd left I resumed Project Tan till Rebecca arrived. […] (I told her the good news, viz. that I was rejected from Stanford.) Continued Operation Albino-Freedom, while pretending to read Pritchard, but within ten minutes Anna walked by. "Hi," I said. She paused and we talked for several minutes. […] After she left I went home to read. Later lifted weights. Now I'm gonna read again.

—Typical day.

Last night gave Don Moon the rough draft of the final draft of my thesis. Also continued reading *Coriolanus* and a history of China.

March 25

I've read most of Pritchard's book, and I'm sick of it. Makes some good points, but by the tenth chapter it gets tiresome. Ultimately knowledge can take you only so far; instinct has to take over, or you get bogged down in all the axioms and dogmas and arbitrary preferences and subjective judgments of literary critics.

Eminem is extremely talented. I don't like his music, but I won't begrudge him the recognition he deserves. It extends only so far, though: he's also mean-spirited, arrogant and spiteful.

March 26

I read *Hecuba*, which bears obvious similarities to *The Trojan Women*. Hecuba sure had it tough. From rags to riches to murder to transformation into a dog. I don't blame her for blinding Polymestor and killing his sons. What would *you* do if placed in her position? Forty-seven of your fifty children have been killed, and in quick succession your second-to-last daughter is sacrificed to the spirit of Achilles and you discover the body of your last son washed up on the shore, murdered by his treacherous host out of greed. You've already become a slave yourself, so you have nothing left to lose and nothing worthwhile to live for. Your one thought will be for *revenge*, will it not? I hope I never experience such suffering.

…Finished *Coriolanus*. It's an incomparable play: brazenly, shamelessly, nakedly ingenious. Shakespeare partook of the divine. My eyes and mouth gaped, my heart paused in respect, my fists beat against my temples as I read the conclusion of scene V.3, wherein Coriolanus abandons his plans for revenge due to the entreaties of Volumnia. His humanity is salvaged, his hatred smothered under love—and his *true* nobility shines forth. His martial glories are not why he is great; he is great because is human (1), as Napoleon was not—because he can *overcome* his 'strength', his militant disposition and ambitions. He is an authentic person in every way. (His earlier refusal to kowtow to the masses (2) ties into that central theme.) Twice he is killed for this authenticity: first exiled (2) and then murdered (1). He always acts as his 'heart' bids him, and this is both an aspect of his greatness and one of his flaws, the other of which is his hubris. The point is that it is socially and militarily unacceptable to be authentic, in the first case because society demands artifice and in the second because war demands callousness. Coriolanus flouts convention in two senses, demonstrating that he is unfit to live in this world and must be destroyed.

The play deserves more recognition than it has, but because it exalts a man who despises commoners it will never receive its due.

March 28

No one will ever appreciate the richness of my thought. It synthesizes elements of Indian philosophy, Marxism, Kantianism, Hegelianism, dualism, monism, phenomenology, existentialism, Nietzscheanism, 'Bergsonism', psychoanalysis and other philosophies I'm forgetting. The system isn't yet fully worked out, but it's progressing.

If I existed in the happy medium between an intoxicating fame and an utter lack of recognition I wouldn't need to subsist on self-congratulation in this journal.

Today I wrote most of the conclusion to my thesis. I also started reading a mammoth book entitled *The Rise of Modern China*, by Immanuel C. Y. Hsü. I learned yesterday that I wasn't accepted to Northwestern. Not that I really care. Too many Blue Lakers live in that area.

March 29

It occurred to me today that I can use the internet to research anything. So I read essays on the French impressionists.

The reason I strive is to fight self-doubt.

Philosophers who completely reject the correspondence theory of truth have implicitly rejected their own rejection.

Weight-lifting on an empty stomach is not recommended.

March 31

It's amazing how happy I am not writing papers. I don't have to write a single one this semester! No more busy-work for the rest of my college life!

…Skipped my classes, read about China and lifted weights. It's startling to what extent a bulky body increases one's self-confidence. I'll always be skinny, but I need not be *skin and bones*.

[…]

April 11

Today I read *Hippolytus, Iphigenia in Tauris*, and *Rhesus*. Also went to the gym, tossed a frisbee with John, bathed in the sun, and rejoiced when Jason told me he had arranged a blind date for me. Ate dinner with him and Ryan. It was entertaining: Jason and I argued passionately over the merits and demerits of Marxism/communism. Two weeks ago a similar argument occurred, wherein Jason was profoundly obnoxious, constantly resorting to name-calling. He so disgusted and enraged me that I indulged in personal attacks as well. Ryan supported me—for, even though he's a Christian opposed to most Marxist doctrines, he can recognize defensible arguments when he hears them. The discussion tonight was tamer, though Jason criticisms of communism were backed up more by emotion than reason. "Marxists are idiots! Human nature is greedy! Will there be garbagemen in communism? Who will do the menial work?! What kind of idiot would be a Marxist?!" Whenever I feel 'passionate' my brain and tongue work at lightning-speed, so I bombarded him with counter-arguments—many of which he accepted and then ignored. Finally I told him that even though communism seems implausible (because it presupposes an abundance of goods), I *have* to believe in the possibility because otherwise I can see no future for mankind except catastrophe—and I need hope to live. When he attacked hope I just laughed and gave up. […]

April 15

CSS banquet last night. At the pre-party I got sufficiently drunk to enjoy myself for most of the evening, but the speaker was a bore. He even admitted it. I sat next to Lauren, who was as amusingly patronizing with me as always. I almost mentioned it to her, but my gaucherie doesn't extend that far.

Finished Hsü's thousand-page tome on China. Now I'm reading an interesting book by Michael Werth Gelber entitled *The Just and the Lively: The Literary Criticism of John Dryden*. […]

April 16

The tragedy of Karl Marx is that he was a hundred years ahead of his time. This led him to confuse capitalism's "birth pangs" with its "death throes"—yes, in spite of what I wrote two years ago—which led him to think that the social order would necessarily end in a dictatorship of the proletariat. The basic theses of historical materialism can be revised and separated from that one. The fate of Marx's ideas was the greatest perversion in the history of thought, so much so that it's more akin to a comedy than a tragedy. Marxism, being a universalistic philosophy, is appropriate to an era *after* nationalism, but because its founder was a genius it was conceived *before* nationalism, which made inevitable its misuse at the hands of people like Mao, Stalin and Castro. […]

It astounds me that in twenty years I'll look back on myself *now*. This time of life will be over and I'll *look back* on it. It exists now, but it won't exist then. It'll be an abstraction. *I'll* be an abstraction. That's scary! It doesn't make sense! I partly untangled the conundrum in the third chapter of my thesis, but to really understand it is impossible.

April 17

Tired of the book on Dryden. It's too detailed and academic. Instead I read Aristotle's *Poetics* today.

April 18

Academicians are so predictable! I knew all along that I wouldn't get Honors on my thesis. Today I read the reviews from my three readers. They were impressed with my ambition and intellectual liveliness but thought my arguments deficient and my style too personal. One of them wrote a particularly mean-spirited critique; it was either Scheisser or Arash Abizadeh. Were it not that a number of great philosophers have been reviled by their contemporaries I might care what judgments these professional sophists render on my work. Their minds have been molded by their teachers: had they read Nietzsche's books in the 1880s they would have denounced them as polemical, unphilosophical, confused, disjointed, empty gibberish. Even more so had they read Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* as an undergraduate thesis submitted to them when the author was 22. Think of the scathing criticisms they would have leveled at it! These nihilistic people make me sick. They tell you to "think outside the box" and then attack you when you do. They hate anyone who isn't as intellectually tame as they are. The *pettifoggers* don't even know how *irrelevant* are their life-pursuits, how *useless* they are as thinkers, and how *diseased* is a society of whose maladies they are a symptom.

Some criticisms were possibly valid: I may have misinterpreted Husserl (though from what I read of McInerney my interpretation seemed the only correct one);[1] my writing is dense; I didn't always address possible objections. However, in certain places I didn't think that would have been worthwhile.[2] My goal was never to impress professors or be awarded Honors. (That's why I *laughed* rather than *fumed* when I read their comments.) My goal was to know truth—to convince *myself*—and I answered objections only to the extent that it was necessary to clear my mind. I *know* that the 'self-as-narrative' theory is a threadbare fabrication of intellectual worker-bees, so I merely dubbed it an "inept metaphor" and moved on to more important topics.[3] Posterity will be my judge. While I lack Schopenhauer's ironclad faith in the 'inevitable revelation' of truth, I know that people tend to be more objective and charitable when reading the works of dead renegade thinkers than when reading such books while the author is still alive—and still young!—because in the former case they don't have to 'compete' with him. Few people give due consideration to a contemporary who opposes propriety (= everything they stand for), but if the rebel is dead[4]—and they are generous—he can be judged more objectively. Anyway, the value of my intuitions ensures that intelligent thinkers will continually arrive at them, or similar ones, in which process my thoughts are bound to be rediscovered sometime.

[…]

Reading *Rameau's Nephew* (Diderot) and *The Decameron* (Boccaccio).

Francisco Tárrega's "Recuerdos de la Alhambra" makes me think of a Venetian gondolier. It consoles me whenever I feel like a tumbleweed in the middle of a desert.

Went to the gym this evening.

I think that one of the reasons I'm so vehement in my vitriol against 'thinkers' who criticize me is that I'm not absolutely positive of my self-worth, even relative to other people. My skepticism extends *everywhere*, as you know. How could intelligent middle-aged professors be wrong and a 22-year-old be

[1] Indeed, I did nothing but regurgitate McInerney's analysis.

[2] More often than not I addressed counter-arguments in my head (not on paper) and subsequently revised my paper accordingly.

[3] [It *is* a metaphor, of course. I was right about that. And it fails to get to the root of the matter, the *active* nature of the self.]

[4] Or has already established a reputation.

right? I am, however, *fairly* certain of my merits,[1] so I'm usually able to laugh off such criticisms as products of deluded minds or insufficient acquaintance with my thoughts.

…Rameau reminds me of Svidrigailov and Johannes the Seducer: he's a sensualist, a cynic, a skeptic, an actor. (He's sincere, but at the same time he's acting.) Diderot successfully lampooned the modern mentality, while acknowledging its insights, even before the French Revolution had happened.

April 19

Sunbathed and read. Finished Diderot's ingenious dialogue (which 'ages well')—essentially a critique of the artificiality of the Enlightenment, though not a *rejection* of its values. Foreshadows romanticism in some respects. […]

April 21

Boccaccio's stories are somewhat less than exciting to read. I ain't gonna peruse all 100 of them. I'm also reading Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly* (Norton edition) and Aristophanes' *The Frogs,* translated by B. B. Rogers. It's much more beautiful and interesting than the translations chosen by my insipid Generation-X professor. I hate the modern, colloquial, dumbed-down style of David Grene, William Arrowsmith and their ilk.

…'Tis marvelous that the Greek sense of humor was not much different from our own. Some of the exchanges between Xanthias and Dionysus are laugh-out-loud funny. If I saw the play performed I'd fall out of my seat numerous times.

April 22

As I reread the evaluations of my thesis, written (I believe) by Moon, Rouse and Abizadeh, I'm amazed at how superficial they are. Moon's is at least open-minded. That he misunderstands most of my ideas is comforting, for it means that his only valid criticism is the one I was always aware of: my writing is so personal that the thesis is essentially a dialogue with myself. Rouse opines that the single best page of the essay is my exposition of McInerney—which opinion was to be expected, since Joe himself spends his life studying other people's ideas. He says I get Husserl's view wrong on precisely the point at which I criticize him. "Husserl does not hold that the present is an instantaneous 'now', indeed the denial of that claim is the centerpiece of Husserl's conception of time." Since I don't hold that Husserl holds that the present is an instantaneous 'now', the objection is the result of a misreading (of myself *and* McInerney). Another careless complaint is the following: "When one appeals to privileged first-person authority on conceptual and evidential matters, there seems to be no basis for distinguishing understanding or justification from the semblance of understanding and justification." Ingenious. Unfortunately he has misread me again. In the introduction and conclusion I suggested additional criteria by which my thoughts could be judged. I also contended that, because intuition is the best method by which to 'understand' the problems I address, every thinker ultimately *must* rely on his own "privileged first-person authority" in dissecting such issues. There's no way around it. You can mouth Wittgenstein's methodological qualms all you want, but in the end you'll have to march onward in spite of them because personal experiences are the data most relevant to these problems.[2] The reason it isn't futile to communicate private intuitions is that it's

[1] I'm also incapable of comprehending that my ideas may be baseless. Whenever I've examined them from alternate perspectives the result has (usually) been my renewed belief in their worth.

[2] Besides, whatever I'm guilty of, Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl and the existentialists are as well. Yet *somehow,* miraculously, their works are full of insights. –But here Witty (or his Roustaboutish mouthpiece) might retort, "How

possible for open-minded readers to experience the same intuitions as the author's if he writes clearly and they're patient. They can then critique his ideas intelligently, and he can revise them accordingly, and so on. Rouse's evaluation ended with these misguidedly condescending remarks: "I know from prior encounters with Chris…that he is moved to think about challenging issues, with a passion to understand. I was therefore very troubled and saddened at the extent to which his considerable intelligence and hard work went so badly awry in his attempt to work out this project. Had he focused his efforts on a smaller part of the project, taken more seriously the need to articulate his claims in relation to prior discussions, and made more effort to respond to those readers for whom his conceptual leaps were not intuitively clear, this thesis undoubtedly could have resulted in a much more satisfying achievement."[1] I have a burning desire to write an email to that man. […]

My advice to you when criticizing my ideas is to take it as a provisional assumption that you're wrong. The odds are that I've already considered your objections and satisfied myself that they were specious or unimportant. *At least* try to imagine how I'd *respond* to them. That's how I read Marx: when I notice what seems to be a flaw in his argument I assume I've misunderstood him. I reread the problematic passage many times, imagine counter-arguments to my criticism, and only if I see *no way out* for him do I conclude he's wrong.

…The first movement of Beethoven's seventh symphony is a suitable piece to listen to as you read Erasmus's winsome encomium of folly. It enables you to savor the experience more fully.

April 24

Gym. Finished Erasmus's eloquent but repetitive 'mock-encomium'. (What a loquacious goddess is Folly!) The style calls to mind Kierkegaard's. The content revolves around two theses: that folly is *inevitable* and that it is *good*. The latter is qualified by Folly's malicious ridicule of many of her own disciples: the pompous, scholastic, hypocritical ones. Clearly Erasmus loved the humanistic, vibrant varieties of folly (such as sex) but loathed the lifeless or hypocritical types (such as over-subtle and -effete theology).

I'm applying to work at a summer camp.

Reading the extant fragments of Heraclitus and Parmenides. I'm also reading a rhymed translation (Gilbert Murray) of *The Bacchae*. I don't know if it's an accurate reflection of Euripides' style, but the verse is almost as puissant as Dryden's. I suppose it's unwise to read versions other than those selected by the instructor,[2] since the final exam will include passages from the *mock*-translations, but I refuse to sacrifice the quality of the poetic experience for a *grade*.

Here are two versions of the same passage (starting on line 177), the first rendered by Murray and the second by Arrowsmith:

> True friend! I knew that voice of thine, that flows
> Like mellow wisdom from a fountain wise.
> And, lo, I come prepared, in all the guise
> And harness of this God. Are we not told
> His is the soul of that dead life of old

---

do we know they've reached *understanding* and not mere *semblances* of understanding?" This is the kind of folly that deserves no praise.

[1] [Written by 29-year-old Chris: There's something contemptible about those remarks, in light of the fact that Rouse made no effort whatsoever to guide me as I wrote the thesis. He and everyone else passed on the project until Don Moon had to take it up by default. Nobody referred me to specific books, nobody tried to convince me that I had to spend much more time discussing other authors, no philosophy professors gave me any *specific* input. These people are not teachers; they're commentators on old philosophers.]

[2] I won't dignify him with the title 'professor'.

That sprang from mine own daughter? Surely then
Must thou and I with all the strength of men
Exalt him.
Where then shall I stand, where tread
The dance and toss this bowed and hoary head?
O friend, in thee is wisdom; guide my grey
And eld-worn steps, eld-worn Teiresias.—Nay;
I am not weak. Surely this arm could smite
The wild earth with its thyrsus, day and night,
And faint not! Sweetly and forgetfully
The dim years fall from off me!

My old friend,
I knew it must be you when I heard your summons.
For there's a wisdom in his voice that makes
the man of wisdom known. But here I am,
dressed in the costume of the god, prepared to go.
Insofar as we are able, Teiresias, we must
do honor to this god, for he was born
my daughter's son, who has been revealed to men,
the god, Dionysus.
Where shall we go, where
shall we tread the dance, tossing our white heads
in the dances of god? Expound to me, Teiresias.
For in such matters you are wise.
Surely
I could dance night and day, untiringly
beating the earth with my thyrsus! And how sweet it is
to forget my old age.

The first rendering is masterful: rhythmic, fluid—consistently iambic pentameter—sumptuously metaphorical, brimming with striking images (though less so than other passages), tastefully rhymed. Each line ends on a weighty word, a conclusion of a 'phrase' or a group of adjectives that are sturdy enough to stand on their own for a split-second (the time it takes the reader's eyes to travel from the end of one line to the beginning of the next). The second version has little in common with the first. It is admittedly somewhat rhythmical—many of A.'s passages are not—but only if the reader slurs together consecutive unaccented syllables (or accented, as the case may be). The number of accents in each line is erratic, varying from five to seven. Nor can A. decide whether he likes iambic or trochaic. There are only two metaphors, no memorable images, no indications of an instinctual poetic sense. "Expound to me"?! The contrast between "Sweetly and forgetfully the dim years fall from off me!" and "How sweet it is to forget my old age" is comparable to that between poetry and prose, or traditional art and contemporary, or genius and…no, not even talent! The lines sometimes end on inappropriate words: for example, "untiringly / beating the earth". As far as I'm concerned, an adverb shouldn't modify a word on the next line (unless it's necessary to complete a rhyme). In short, the whole thing is a hack-job!

I know there is such a thing as *vers libre*. I can't say I understand it, but I recognize its value in the hands of masters like Eliot. However, when translating classics it is surely meet to versify in the manner of the old poets.

April 25

The Bacchae is quite an appalling play. I prefer Aristophanes' Dionysus to Euripides'—the fool to the tyrant, who deprives a man of his reason and then has him killed for it.[1] (He manipulates Pentheus into spying on the sacred Bacchanalian rites and subsequently orders Pentheus' own possessed mother and aunts to tear him limb from limb, after which his severed head is borne proudly by his still-senseless parent.) It's doubtful that Aeschylus would have so vulgarized his poetry by describing in detail a murder and then having the murderess carry the victim's head onto the stage.

April 26

Alcestis is one of the few Greek tragedies that ends happily. (Apparently it occupied the place of a satyr-play when it was performed.) I was perceptibly relieved when Heracles brought the heroine back from the dead. *Medea*, on the other hand, is not so uplifting. It chronicles the story of a woman who, because her husband has married a young virgin of royal blood, kills the bride, her father and her own (Medea's) two children. Her one goal is to ruin her husband's life. The play left me feeling 'gross'.

[…]

Eleanor is visiting Wesleyan this evening, so she and Kaitlyn came to my house tonight. We had a lively conversation, wherein I described for them some of my recent social faux pas-es. They were highly amused. Afterwards we went to Tom's party across the street. Eleanor and I spent the whole time talking about philosophy, my thesis, the psychoanalyst Lacan and so on. I was an avid conversationalist, for it's rare that I talk to an easygoing girl who's interesting enough to care about the subjects I like. Most of the time I live under the impression that I'm a terrible talker, for I'm not the greatest chit-chatter and I don't know *anyone* who is, on the one hand, enthusiastic about philosophy, history, art and psychology and, on the other, easygoing and willing to get into a spirited argument. Andy satisfies the first criterion but not the second—though he would probably say the same of me. He's too sophisticated and self-conscious to be as animated as I like to be in intellectual discussions. Eleanor is not, so we had fun.

April 27

I don't like *Helen*. The fault may be Richmond Lattimore's, but the dialogue is stilted and awkward—*ridiculous* at times. I've noticed that Euripides has a few odd fetishes, traces of which are evident in many of his dramas: he has an unnatural fondness for cold, formal reunions between pining lovers or relatives, and he likes to end his plays with the trite message that the gods are unpredictable.

April 28

To 'console' me for not getting Honors Sangeetha told me that I'm still one of the smartest people she knows. "I know it's not much but I wanted you to know anyway." That was sweet. She's mistaken, of course—for if *I'm* all it takes to be intelligent, what an overrated thing is intelligence!—but I appreciate the compliment.

Perfect weather. Foss Hill. Heraclitus. (Excellent book by Dennis Sweet.) Pumped iron. Called Julie. Napped.

I repudiate most of the analysis of self-continuity I gave in the thesis. I've spent the last hour struggling for an understanding of what went wrong in my arguments, but the topic is more perplexing than any I've ever considered. There's something terribly inadequate about the concepts with which I'm forced to work. They're not sharp enough to penetrate the essence of the matter: however I use them, they lead

[1] And for his earlier defiance of the god.

directly into paradoxes. As a result, the outcome of my Sisyphean labors was the following balderdash: "It doesn't work to say that if there is existence (for 'this' self-consciousness) at a given time in the past or future then that self is *this* one, because obviously the existence in the past or future is 'for' none but *that* self-consciousness, and in the absence of memory there is no way to relate the two selves to one another (except to say that they occur in the same body, etc.), so there is no way to make sense of the statement that they're the same. Or rather, either they're *obviously* the same (because *all* selves are) or they're obviously different (because they exist at different times)." I was preparing to restate that in simpler language, after which I would elaborate and so on, when I realized that…oh, forget it. I'm too tired.

To refute the dogma of the equality of the sexes it is necessary only to consider that while men find sexy a naked woman standing next to a Porsche, women are turned on by a fully clothed man driving a Porsche. It must be infuriating for feminist philosopher-activists (unnatural hybrids of estrogen and testosterone) to be constantly reminded of the 'weaknesses' of their sex.

April 29

Heraclitean philosophy bears obvious similarities to the Upanishads, Buddhism, Schopenhauerian idealism, some ideas of Tung Chung-shu (e.g., social order and justice should be founded on the cosmic order—though Tung is far more explicit about this) and elements of Nietzsche's "military school of philosophy". ("War is the father of all"; "War is common and justice is strife, and everything is happening according to strife and necessity."[1]) Regarding the first three: (50) "Listening not to me [to my empty *words*] but rather to the *logos* it is wise to agree that all things are one." (8) "What is in opposition is in agreement, and the most beautiful harmony comes out of things in conflict (and all happens according to strife[2])." (6) "The sun is (not only) new each day (but is always continually new)." From the motive of self-apology I enjoy his elitism: (29) "The most noble people choose one thing against all else: ever-flowing glory among mortals. Most people, though, have sated themselves like sheep." (28) "The most esteemed man knows only imaginings, which he guards." (97) "Dogs bark at those they do not know" (i.e., only abject souls fear new ideas). (87) "A stupid person tends to get aroused by every word" because (19) "they know neither how to listen nor how to speak". Heraclitus' elitism is virtually identical to Schopenhauer's in the chapter "On Genius". Aristotle's distinction between form and content is implicit in such fragments as "One cannot step into the same river twice" and "Upon those who step into the same stream ever-different waters flow". H.'s ideas may be internally interconnected within each of his three categories (universe, politics and theology), but I think the interdependence of the latter is tenuous at best.

I hope David Gallop isn't right that Parmenides makes the following argument. (I fear he is.) "Where 'N' is any name of mortal speech with a determinate sense, we may say neither that N exists nor that it does not. Any attempt to say either of those things will prove to be incoherent. [Example: "In holding that hot exists here and now, mortals are committed to the belief that cold does not… But in saying of cold that it does not exist here and now, mortals are implicitly treating it as existent. For it has already been argued that the non-existent cannot be spoken or thought of. Hence in speaking of cold at all, mortals must be presupposing that it does exist, even in the very act of maintaining that it does not. Hence they are treating the non-existent as if it were existent."] N cannot be meaningfully spoken or thought of at all. Given such stringent criteria for what *can* be spoken and thought of, it follows that nothing in the sensible world is a possible object of speech and thought. There can be only one such object, and that is the unique reality (whose description occupies most of fragment 8)." Can you think of a more sophistical argument?

Gym.

Wednesday, April 30

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[1] The emphases on strife and necessity exist also in Schopenhauer.

[2] Buddhism: suffering (strife) is inevitable and, in this world, perpetual. (?)

Gym again. Sun again. Foss Hill again. Alone again. Parmenides again. Skipped classes again. That may not have been wise, for I learned afterwards that my Chinese take-home final exam was distributed two weeks ago and is due on Monday! It was by sheer luck that I learned this: I happened to ask a girl if she had gone to class, and she told me about the test.

I preface most of my activities with thoughts such as these: in spite of my desire for sex, I'll read Heraclitus. In spite of my desire for sex, I'll write in my journal. Because of my desire for sex, I'll go to Foss Hill. Because of my desire for sex, I'll work out at the gym. Lust is always at least *implicit* in my consciousness. –It's lucky I'm an expert at making myself laugh. Otherwise…who knows? I might be a misanthrope. Or a depressive.

…Now that I've read the first eight fragments of Parmenides' poem I can tell you that Gallop's interpretation is wrong in places. In fetishizing logic, he misses the *spirit* of the work. I'll start at the beginning.

The proem is unimportant, being more literary than philosophical. P.'s first claim is that there are only two ways available for thought: either there is existence (there is *necessarily* existence), or there is nothing (and it is *necessary*). He doesn't use the word 'existence', but it's clearly what he means: in the first line of fragment 6 he states that "it must be that what is there for speaking and thinking of *is*", and in fragment 3 he says "the same thing is there for thinking and being". The latter quotation means that thought is of nothing but what exists, so in the first quotation one can substitute 'existence' for 'what is there for speaking and thinking of'. Therefore, because it's obvious that the focus of P.'s inquiry is on 'what is there for speaking and thinking of', the relevant topic is existence [or the existent].

In fragment 2 he says that the proposition 'there is only and necessarily nothing'[1] is "wholly unlearnable, for you could not know what-is-not (for that is not feasible), nor could you point it out". That's true, but it doesn't establish that there is something—or, conversely, that there *isn't nothing*. It states only that we couldn't *know* nothingness, not that there *isn't* nothingness. The first line of 6 seems to make it self-contradictory to deny that there is being—for the phrase "what is there for thinking and speaking of" already presupposes that there is something—but that's because P. uses a clever little device to trick the reader. In making 'being' synonymous with "what is there for speaking and thinking of" and substituting the second for the first, he indirectly forces us to agree that there is being. But what if speaking and thinking are illusions?[2] If they are then there need not be anything for them to be of. The next line, however, contains a better argument: "nothing is not [there to be]". Fragment 7 repeats the point: "…never shall this prevail, that things that are not *are*". In other words, nothingness cannot exist, because then it would be something. Therefore, if nothingness doesn't exist, there must be existence. At first sight the argument has an uncomfortable feel to it, as though it's tautologous or sophistical, but I think it's sound. Its simplicity is profoundly elegant, especially since it demonstrates that there *must be* existence. The alternative is self-contradictory. In fact, the idea of nothingness is meaningless. The only reason it seems not so is that when thinking of it we usually picture in our minds a vacuum of space. But a vacuum isn't nothing. –If we reject the validity of concepts and logic as guides to discovering the nature of reality then the self-contradiction doesn't matter, but for now I'll follow P. in accepting them.

Where Parmenides goes astray is in rejecting negation, as well as the idea that things can evolve from being to non-being, on the basis of the recognition of nothingness. For I assume he does so when he refers disparagingly (in fragment 8) to the idea that things are able "to come-to-be and to perish, to be and not to be, and to shift place and to exchange bright color". He conflates the *absence* of something with the *existence* of nothingness. Because the sensory world is constantly changing, he is forced to deny *its* reality too. It is therefore appropriate that he describes 'true' being in absolutes like "ungenerated and imperishable, whole, single-limbed, steadfast, and complete". It also makes sense that it be timeless: "Nor

[1] I've rephrased the sentence "there is nothing…"

[2] One could invoke Cartesianism here, but because Parmenides, of course, doesn't I'll ignore it. [What I meant, I think, was that the existence of speech and thought *for us*, however illusory they 'really' are, means that there *really* is *something*.]

was [it] once,[1] nor will [it] be, since [it] is, now, all together, one, continuous; for what coming-to-be of it will you seek? In what way, whence, did [it] grow?" Immediately following is an argument against the possibility of its birth, but I'll insert my own first—not against its genesis but against its temporality. Gallop interprets the lines as meaning "it is not the case that it once existed (but does so no longer), or that it will (one day) exist (but not yet)", but I would pose to him one question: 'Since the passage of time requires that the past be no longer and the future be not yet, how could Parmenides consistently hold that being is temporal? On his understanding it would entail the existence of nothingness.' Against the possibility of its genesis P. asks why it would have arisen (from nothing) at *one* time rather than another. He also adduces his earlier arguments.

In lines 22 to 24 he makes statements that lack, I think, logical justifications: being is indivisible ("since it all alike *is*" or "since it is all alike"); it is not "somewhat more here, which would keep it from holding together, nor is it somewhat less, but [it] is all full of what-is". They're intuitively attractive, though. His next idea is remarkable and foreshadows both Einstein and Hegel: "…strong Necessity holds [it] fast in the chains of a limit, which fences it about. Wherefore it is not right for what-is to be incomplete, for it is not lacking…" That anticipates the Hegelian contention that the "false infinity", the one that extends in every direction limitlessly, is incomplete, while the 'true' infinity is an enclosed totality. "Since, then, there is a furthest limit, [it] is completed, from every direction like the bulk of a well-rounded sphere, everywhere from the center equally matched; for [it] must not be any larger or any smaller here or there; for neither is there what-is-not, which could stop it from reaching [its] like; nor is there a way in which what-is could be more here and less there, since [it] all inviolably *is*; for equal to itself from every direction, [it] lies uniformly within limits." That anticipates (sort of) general relativity, namely the idea that the universe is an unbounded finite space. The claim that every point is equidistant from the center is another way of saying that there is no center, which is similar to the general relativistic theory.

Gallop notes some contradictions in P.'s endeavor. First, he is explaining truth by means of speech, a medium of communication that he apparently thinks is nonsense. His decision to speak through the mouth of a goddess is therefore wise, for it allows him to retort that her language is divine and perfect. The objection that he denies temporality even as he uses terms like 'continuous' and 'now' can be answered (sophistically) in the same way. However, I'm having trouble settling accounts with the notion of the existence of nothing. I'm beginning to doubt what I wrote above: maybe P.'s argument *is* sophistical.

Well, it's 4:15 a.m. and I'm tired. *Bonne nuit*.

May 2

Reading Kreeft's *Summa of the Summa*, which is, briefly put, a summa of the Summa. Aquinas', of course. It's a translation of and commentary on the most important parts of the work. Kreeft's writing style is one of the most immature and annoying I've encountered among scholars, but his footnotes are useful.

Notes. Aquinas distinguishes between philosophical theology and revealed theology, the latter of which is necessary if we are to achieve salvation (because reason is fallible). It's a science because it's established on principles, as are all sciences. The difference is that its own are revealed by God (or the science that only God knows)—which means also that it's derivative in the way that the sciences of perspective and music are, which are based on principles revealed by geometry and arithmetic.

Although the principles of theology are known by faith, "sacred doctrine makes use even of human reason, not, indeed, to prove faith (for thereby the merit of faith would come to an end), but to make clear other things that are put forward in this doctrine." The only people whose doctrines are to be accepted by authority are the apostles and prophets.

The existence of God need not be self-evident to us, though it is self-evident "in itself" (because His essence is His existence, and thus the predicate is contained in the subject when one proposes that God

[1] Or "Nor was it ever…" Two possible translations.

exists). His existence—but not His essence—can be demonstrated through His effects,[1] though it can also be accepted on faith.

The speculative part of my mind keeps returning to the questions of the validity and foundations of logic. I don't trust what I wrote in the thesis on the Law of Excluded Middle.

May 3

Aquinas rightly rejects the ontological argument. His five proofs are cosmological. As Kreeft summarizes them, they're as follows: (1) since no thing can move (change) itself, there must be a first, Unmoved Mover, source of all motion; (2) nothing can cause its own existence; if there is no first, uncaused cause of the chain of causes and effects we see, these second causes could not exist—but they do, so It must; (3) contingent beings depend on a necessary being; (4) real degrees of real perfections presuppose the existence of that perfection itself (or, "better implies best"); (5) the argument from design. The last was refuted by Hume, the fourth is wrong (values are not objective), the third is dubious and ambiguous, and the first two can imply the conclusions of quantum mechanics. (The cause-and-effect relationship breaks down in the subatomic world.) A. answers the objection that invokes the existence of evil by saying that it is part of God's infinite goodness to bring good out of evil. The Crucifixion is an example.

May 4

For my Chinese history class I wrote an amusing little dialogue between Confucius, Lao-tzu and the Buddha. The level of my understanding of the three philosophers lies somewhere between 'meager' and 'nonexistent', and I haven't read enough of them to absorb their styles of speech, but this excerpt isn't awful. The Buddha speaks most clearly because he was the most rational of the three.

> **Confucius**: The people are confused, the government is corrupt, the towns are vice-ridden, and order is no more. The Way has been lost; the path of the sages is followed no longer. The great emperors of the Shang dynasty knew how to instill goodness and humanity into their subjects, for they were good and humane themselves. By their example they taught and led, and the people learned and obeyed and knew peace among themselves. People are like children: they act as their parents act, they want what their parents want. The emperor is their mother and father; he must do and desire what is proper, knowing that he thereby educates his subjects into propriety. Filial piety, the adhesive of society, will then be practiced. The sages knew this, but modern princes do not. Hence anarchy and war.
> **Lao-tzu**: The Way that you discuss is not the constant Way. It is not nameless and can be discussed, and thus it is not the Way. Your words are clever, but what is behind them? Delusions should not be preached to the people, empty nothings exhorting striving and struggle against the purity of the Way, for they breed strife and competition and tyranny. You think not, but you know not. Nature wants no 'ought', no elaborate program of rules and maxims or propriety; Nature is simple and innocent. Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. They sit in selfish selflessness, clothed and protected by the Way. Wherefore teachest thou blind prudence garbed in the mantle of wisdom? Would you lead the people away from Nature? Propriety, you say? Filial piety? Government? These are detours to suffering; the Way is to "live and let live". Less government, less propriety, less constraining filial piety: that is my teaching. The child's spontaneity should be the man's. The sage, like the butterfly, flits from breeze to wafting breeze, riding the currents of the wind and teaching through his silence. Thus is the Way lived.

[1] His essence can't because His nature isn't proportionate to theirs. He is infinite, they are finite.

Buddha: Both of you are insightful and have conceived original remedies to suffering. I'd like to hear more of your ideas, but perhaps you might hear mine first. It is always worthwhile to consider a position opposed to one's own. A life of observation and meditation has taught me that suffering is born from an attachment to the world. We crave and we cling to things, and we're inevitably disappointed. We fail to recognize the truth of *impermanence,* of continuous flux and the consequent futility of attachment. It is an illusion. Life itself is an illusion, a product of this desperate grasping of Maya: there is no self, no Atman. We are part of the ceaseless becoming of the One, and if we recognize this—if we *live* this—our suffering will end and we'll achieve Nirvana. There is a noble eightfold path that can lead us to that state, which I'll describe for you if you like.

Confucius: Wait a moment. You speak in riddles, and Lao-tzu speaks in poetical gibberish. What nonsense you're saying! But I think I have deciphered the gist of your ideas: you both are concerned with the individual first and society second. For you, the man is the parent and society the child. Is it not so?

Lao-tzu: In speaking, trustworthiness is good. Your analogy is feeble, but I trust it.

Confucius: You, Lao-tzu, wish that the gentleman return to nature, leave society behind, and thus escape suffering. You reject social obligations as the wild mare rejects captivity: you fear them, you fear they'll mean a loss of freedom, for your highest good is not humanity but a licentious liberty to do as you will.

Lao-tzu: My words are mysterious, so I understand your misunderstanding. But I too hate the immoral, as do you. The immoral is not natural; Nature is not profligate. I exalt not the freedom of the mare but the simplicity of the hare. Society need not be abandoned if a man wish to be a sage; he can be a good son without losing himself in rite upon rite. The people will live as they will, ignorant and rightly so, but the sage knows his place in the cosmos and does not need ceremonies to remind him. You, however, value "propriety" and the web of social responsibilities, divorced from nature, that it entails. You honor worthy men, thus teaching the people to compete. Propriety honors rare treasures, thus teaching the people to steal. I say the sage governs by emptying minds and filling bellies, as Nature ordains it…

Confucius: Nature! It's always "nature" with you! Humans are not nature; they are its sovereigns. If you were consistent you would tell us to scatter and live in the forest, with bears and bats for our companions!

Buddha: Calm yourself, Confucius. Detach yourself from anger. Your own ideas, which I do not yet comprehend, seem flawed as well. The people will not become good citizens merely if their emperor is a good ruler. They are too detached from him; their own worries and circumstances dictate their actions. They cling to themselves, so they suffer and act accordingly. Only if they renounce the illusion of the self will they act as a wise emperor would like.

Confucius: Tell me precisely how they would do that, Siddhartha. How is it possible that a person is not a person? When I was a youth I thought I existed; when I was a young man I thought I existed; now that I am old I know I shan't soon exist—but I believe I still do at the moment. Am I wrong?

Buddha: Siddhartha cannot and could not answer your question, but I believe *I* can. A person is a combination of impressions, thoughts and experiences; he is not *one*. He is born and dies every moment; he is not perpetual…

After I read more of the philosophies I'll revise and continue the dialogue. The rest of it is boring.

God isn't a body because He is the First Mover and Himself unmoved, which is possible only if he is a spirit (for every body is in motion only if it's *put* in motion). He isn't a soul, though, because the definition of that word is "the form and life of a body".

God is His own essence; he is not an individual that *has* an essence. He "transcends the distinction between universal and individual". He isn't matter but only form—which, however, "is individualized

precisely because it cannot be received in a subject [matter]".[1] He is also His own existence: whatever a thing has besides its own essence must be a result either of the "constituent principles" of the essence or of an exterior agent. Since God's existence can't be caused by something else, it is 'caused by' (or identical with) His essence.

May 5

I had my last class today: Greek Drama. It was a fitting end to the Wesleyan experience.

The nocturne in D-flat, op. 27/2, is obviously one of the most perfect that Chopin wrote. Not a single note is out of place: it reminds me of Hamlet's "to be or not to be" speech. Nor is there a more *aristocratic* and *polished* nocturne. Maybe that's one of the reasons I love it: my instincts are aristocratic.

…You condemn elitism, dear reader. But think about this: does not the existence of *prejudice* condemn the commoners [which includes most of the "elite"]? Does it not justify contempt of them? Racial prejudice is the most despicable of all. A prejudiced person…what value can he have as a human being? Perhaps some: it's possible for good and bad to exist together. Goethe was probably prejudiced against Jews and "savages"—but that was more forgivable in his time than in ours. Nevertheless, in the majority of cases prejudice coexists with overall less-than-worthiness.

Aquinas' equation of goodness and being—based on the proposition that "everything is perfect so far as it is actual"—is wrong.

I need a break from the saint. Hence I'm reading Longinus' *On the Sublime*. He thinks that "the effect of elevated language is not to persuade the hearers but to amaze them". In chapter 2 he says that the art of the sublime is based not only on innate genius but on rules and systems.

When I wrote that nothingness is inconceivable I forgot that it 'exists' before birth and (probably) after death. There was *nothing* until twenty-two years ago. It took me a long time to fall asleep last night because my obsessive-compulsiveness latched onto that paradox. …Uh-oh. Here it goes again. Swimming, drowning, choking… Nothing outside the universe? Universe is everything, creating its own space as it expands? The surface of a balloon in an extra dimension? No center? Unconceptualizable? What does that mean? How can something be beyond the powers of reason? As for the existence of nonexistence: it's true regarding the unicorn, so it's a pseudo-problem arising from language. The nonbeing exists only in the mind, not referentially or 'really'. What exists exists, and that's all that can be said without applying alien concepts like 'nothing' to the world. There is no Nothing in the world; there is Something and nothing else. But that doesn't help me tackle the problem of the Nothing before birth. –*That* nonbeing, however, is, once again, such only for *me*, now, not 'in itself'. But if it isn't being and it isn't nonbeing, it—isn't? But then it's nonbeing. Is logic inappropriate here? Was I right to reject the being/nonbeing dichotomy in my thesis? But then when is logic acceptable? More generally, how can we know whether *any* of its principles obtain in 'reality'? In the thesis I said we couldn't, but…where does that leave us? But that was a confusion: they obtain in the world of physical appearances and *not* in the worlds of quantum mechanics, relativity and metaphysics. But again: where does that leave us? If certain concepts become useless must we stop asking certain questions? Presumably.

Longinus' criterion for true sublimity is sensible: the same piece of writing reread multiple times must repeatedly be capable of touching the spirit of an intelligent and well-read man with a sense of grandeur, as well as leaving "more food for reflection in his mind than the mere words convey". If it loses its force after careful examination it isn't truly sublime. I wonder if I've ever written anything that can pass the test.

May 7

[1] The point is that most forms are individualized by matter, but God('s) is by His (its) *lack* of matter.

Last night I was about to go to the naked party (definition: everyone is naked) when I heard it had been broken up by the prudes in Public Safety. So I wandered about the campus with some CSSers, tipsy and bored, until I realized nothing worthwhile was happening and I might as well go home.

Finished Longinus today.

"In sublime passages we ought not to resort to sordid and contemptible terms unless constrained by some extreme necessity. We should use words that suit the dignity of the subject."

[…] It's midnight and I'm listening to Bach's Air on the G-String. You ought to know what that means. Drops of liquid sorrow streak my cheeks. "Sometimes your spirit hurts so much your body weeps." –I could write about it, try to write "sublimely", try to be poetic and eloquent and superficially profound, but I'm too confused. Why am I alone?

…Fifteen minutes ago I was full of self-pity. I wanted to fall asleep and either wake up in the arms of a girl or not wake up at all. Now I'm relatively happy. For no reason whatever. I'm just suddenly content. What grotesque fickleness.

May 8

Reading Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*.

Worked out this evening.

May 13

Finished the book. It wasn't nearly as satisfying as Dostoyevsky's and Tolstoy's novels, but all in all I liked it. Bazarov, though, is a bit of an ass.

Tonight I read selections from Petrarch's letters. I found that I have a great deal in common with him.

May 16

Reading Frege's *Logical Investigations*, edited by P. T. Geach. In the first few pages of the essay "Der Gedanke" there are ideas similar to ones I expressed in my thesis—but there are others quite absurd. Particularly the statement that "truth does not consist in correspondence of the sense with something else, for otherwise the question of truth would get reiterated to infinity". That proposition was defended by the author two paragraphs earlier, but the argument was sophistical (i.e., attractive, even irresistible, at first sight, but (1) only because it stays at the level of appearance and mere *words*, and (2) impossible to believe because it denies what is on another 'level' obvious). I'll quote it:

> A picture is meant to represent something. It might be supposed from this that truth consists in a correspondence of a picture to what it depicts. Now a correspondence is a relation. But this goes against the use of the word 'true', which is not a relative term and contains no indication of anything else to which something is to correspond. If I do not know that a picture is meant to represent Cologne Cathedral then I do not know what to compare the picture with in order to decide on its truth. [What in God's name…? How does that establish the previous sentence? If anything, it confirms (or presupposes) the *contrary*—that a relation is presupposed by the use of the word 'truth'.] A correspondence, moreover, can only be perfect if the corresponding things coincide and so are just not different things. [Silly. That reminds me of Kierkegaard's argument that sentences can only *approximate* reality, by virtue of the nature of language. I addressed that idea in my thesis, though admittedly not with analytical rigor, because I didn't think that was possible. "George Bush

> has a face" corresponds perfectly to reality, even though it is, in a sense, only an "approximation" of reality (since it's a *statement*, or 'rehashing', of it).] It is supposed to be possible to test the genuineness of a bank-note by comparing it stereoscopically with a genuine one. But it would be ridiculous to try to compare a gold piece stereoscopically with a twenty-mark note. [Blah blah. Stop embarrassing yourself. I wonder if Frege is playing 'devil's advocate' here and intends to refute these childish arguments later.] It would only be possible to compare an idea with a thing if the thing were an idea too. And then, if the first did correspond perfectly with the second, they would coincide. But this is not at all what people intend when they define truth as the correspondence of an idea with something real. For in this case it is essential precisely that the reality shall be distinct from the idea. But then there can be no complete correspondence, no complete truth. So nothing at all would be true; for what is only half true is untrue. Truth does not admit of more or less. –But could we not maintain that there is truth when there is correspondence in a certain respect? But which respect? For in that case what ought we to do so as to decide that something is true? We should have to inquire whether it is *true* that an idea and a reality, say, correspond in the specified respect. And then we should be confronted by a question of the same kind, and the game could begin again. So the attempted explanation of truth as correspondence breaks down. And any other attempt to define truth also breaks down. For in a definition certain characteristics would have to be specified. And in application to any particular case the question would always arise whether it were *true* that the characteristics were present. So we should be going round in a circle. So it seems likely that the content of the word 'true' is *sui generis* and indefinable. [I don't find these arguments compelling.]

Frege means by 'thought' something for which the question of truth can arise. It is the sense of an assertoric sentence. He thinks, problematically, that sentences in which one expresses (or 'vents') one's feelings are not assertions, so the question of truth can't arise for them—and therefore their senses aren't thoughts. (I find both alternatives—viz. that the question of truth *can* arise and that it *can't*—to be problematic. I cursorily addressed the topic in my introduction, effectively concluding that Frege's commonsensical way of treating such sentences is generally the correct one. We hardly ever intend expressions of feelings or wishes to be related to the true/false distinction—because their 'truth' just isn't relevant to us in the moment that we speak them—although their 'form' indicates otherwise.) "Sentences expressing wishes or regrets are ruled out in the same way." A yes-no question contains the same thought as the corresponding assertion; the only difference is that one "requests" and one asserts. On the heels of this distinction between assertion and thought Frege introduces another division, so that there are now three concepts: the grasp of a thought (thinking); the acknowledgement of the truth of a thought (the act of judgment); the manifestation of this judgment (assertion).

[…]

I've finished the essay. It gets rather convoluted in places. I still don't have a firm grasp of what he means by 'thought', but I'm not terribly bemused by it either. What bemuses me is…the essay as a whole. It seems to be peppered with so many little confusions, or obscurities, that I don't know what to make of it. What Frege says about the self is muddled and wrong. And the topic of idealism doesn't deserve all the attention he gives it: what I wrote in the thesis is enough to 'refute' it.[1] As for the two points that Leech summarizes in his preface, namely "(1) that any thought is by its nature communicable[2] and (2) that thoughts about private sensations and sense-qualities, and about the Cartesian *I*, are by their nature incommunicable", as well as their immediate implication, namely that "there can be no such thoughts"—which Frege never

[1] Idealism is so silly that to try to refute it is unnecessary. Just ignore it! (In any case, it can't be refuted. Berkeleian idealism, for instance, is logically impeccable—but it also belongs in the 'So Fucking What?' category. It's a dead-end.) The one argument for idealism that used to trouble me is "How can objects have appearances when they aren't being perceived?" But I've learned to ignore it, as being unanswerable and 'scholastic'.

[2] That sentence doesn't state what you think it does. Frege uses 'thought' in a very different sense than the rest of humankind does.

says, though Wittgenstein does (along with the idea that pain isn't a "private incommunicable somewhat", which I've never understood and I suspect is another instance of sophistry disguised as a grandiose self-consciously revolutionary attack on common sense)—as for those points, they don't ruffle my feathers for the following reasons: (1) I haven't mastered the notion of the 'thought'; (2) 'thoughts' about private sensations are *not* always incommunicable, since (i) it is at least theoretically possible—i.e. there is no reason that it should be *always impossible*—to understand someone's 'private' thought by applying a sentence spoken by him to one's own consciousness (and thereby experiencing the intuition he does) and (ii) the fact that we all know, for example, what physical pain feels like enables us to 'abstractly understand' or 'relate to' a person's pain (so that it isn't as utterly foreign to us as the experience of nirvana, for example, is to me); and (3) at a certain point—around 1:30 a.m. in this case—one realizes that only two words are necessary to answer the gibber-jabber I've been indulging in: *so what?*

[…]

Incidentally, Frege's insistence that true thoughts are *timelessly, 'eternally'* true echoes what I wrote when examining the Law of Excluded Middle. Schliesser had no idea what I was talking about, but he's an ass who's incapable of relating one person's ideas to another's.

May 17

I read most of the essay on "Negation". Frege's view is that the distinction between affirmative and negative judgments (or thoughts) is logically useless and can lead to endless, sterile word-disputes. Some terms simply can't be defined: 'judgment' is another example. He also argues (1) that a false thought isn't one that has no being—duh—and (2) that negation doesn't *split up* the contents of the thought (nor, indeed, anything else). In both essays he asserts that thoughts exist even before they have been expressed—which, aside from being a little confused, is similar to what I wrote toward the end of the first section of the introduction.

[…]

[Deleted entries.]

May 24

My last night at Wesleyan. This is it. Four years have gone by. I remember my first day clearly, "when hope was high and life worth living". No, just kidding. I won't experience Fantine's state of mind for at least another five years or so. Right now I'm just having trouble accepting that college is over. High school and college: eight years of self-discovery—possibly the most mentally tumultuous period of my life—are at an end. I'm on the brink of adulthood! (That's what I'm told, anyway.) Etc.

My family came this morning. I spent the whole day walking around the campus with them.

May 25

Graduation.

Tuesday, May 27

In the two days since graduation I've read volume 3 of Green's *History of the English People* and Luther's essay "Concerning Christian Liberty". The latter is repetitive, superficial and occasionally

contradictory. The gist of it is that *faith* makes the Christian, not works. There are more details and flimsy arguments that I don't care to repeat.

[…]

May 28

Last night I wrote a long email to Joe and Arash. The desire had been haunting me for weeks, and I finally succumbed. My motive was malice. I couldn't let them get away with such condescension and smugness. I wrote the email not with the savagery I had originally intended but with a condescending intellectualism: it always irritates people more to be looked down upon than to think they've 'gotten' to you. Arash bore the brunt of my subtle scorn: it's fun to prick the pride of a recent Oxford graduate. I ended the message with extreme politeness, for I had written myself into joy. Malice can be so rewarding!

Joe wrote back a few minutes ago. His civility was of course worthy of a courtier. He explained what he had meant by the Wittgensteinian criticism, though poorly and in disregard of what I had written. He thought I had equated 'understanding' with 'certainty' or an ability to evaluate claims by 'foolproof criteria', which isn't true. I'm not so philosophically unfledged. I know that the issue is the existence (or alleged nonexistence) of criteria by which to test one's understanding of claims that appeal to first-person authority. (I admit that in the earlier entry I thought the problem had also to do with the ostensible nonexistence of criteria by which to judge the *truth* of private, first-person statements.) *My* claims are, first, that there are criteria relevant to determining the truth of private intuitions; second, that there are ways to determine whether one understands statements describing one's own consciousness; third, that appealing to 'private experience' or consciousness (which includes using one's imaginative faculties) is an integral part of *many* areas of philosophy, so to reject it is to reject much of philosophy; fourth, that in one sense it's a triviality to say that private experiences are incommunicable, in another sense it's wrong (see the prior related entry), and in a third sense (relating to the possibility of someone else's experiencing an exact or approximate 'copy' of the perception) we can't know whether it's true or false, but it's highly likely that it's usually false. On the whole there was little of substance in the email, but at least Joe had the decency to reply, which I doubt Arash will.

I'm reading *The Sickness Unto Death*. Section A in the first chapter of part 1 contains a few ambiguities, but aside from those, the whole passage can be seen as an experiment in how far a philosopher can extend a maze of words without getting lost himself. Kierkegaard shows us that after a page and a half it's time to give up. One of the ambiguities I mentioned is the following: "If this relation which relates itself to its own self is constituted by another, the relation…is in turn a relation relating itself to that which constituted the whole relation. Such a derived, constituted relation is the human self, a relation which relates itself to its own self, and in relating itself to its own self relates itself to another." Why does an active, self-conscious relating-itself-to-itself imply a comparable relating-itself-to-another? Self-consciousness, which is what K. means by the self (for it is a "relation relating itself to its own self"), actively relates itself to itself, but it doesn't thereby actively, self-consciously relate itself to the Power which constituted it. There is no logical connection between the two. A second source of confusion (for me) is this sentence: "This formula [viz., that the self is constituted by another] is the expression for the total dependence of the relation (the self, namely), the expression for the fact that the self cannot of itself attain and remain in equilibrium and rest by itself, but only by relating itself to that Power which constituted the whole relation." Presumably K.'s ideal, the eradication of despair, is attained when the self "remains in equilibrium and rest by itself", but he says that the ideal is reached when the self has finally done that which he previously said it does merely by virtue of existing, viz. relates itself to the Power that created it. I.e., in the first quøtation he says the self relates itself to the Power by relating itself to itself, but in the second he says that only when it *learns* to relate itself to the Power can it be at rest. (He doesn't use the word 'learn', but it seems implied, because if in the context of the second quotation he means what he apparently meant in the context of the first, viz. that the self 'automatically' relates itself to its cause, what would be the point in saying that it's only if the self relates itself to the Power that it can be at rest? For it already does that when it relates itself

to itself!) So there are three options: he has expressed himself very poorly, he's confused, or I'm wrong that faith consists in the "equilibrium" of the self. I don't know what this means: "[the formula for the complete eradication of despair is as follows:] by relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself the self is grounded transparently in the Power which posited it." "Grounded transparently"?

…I hope the rest of the book doesn't follow in the footsteps of the first chapter. Does Kierkey expect to be understood?! What in God's name did I just read?! Ramble, ramble, bramble, bramble… Is this guy a genius or a kook?

…It appears that the whole book is "words, words, words!" Just words, no sense. And you thought the *quotations* were hard to understand! Søren probably had something in mind when he wrote the essay, but I won't return to it till I've read a scholar's interpretation.

In an email to Rebecca I told her she was my favorite person at Wesleyan since the day we met. I appreciated her stifled disconsolateness at my departure on Saturday.

May 29

I read Leibniz's *Monadology*. It's an impressive but extremely inadequate work. I confess that I don't understand everything in it—for example, its description of the monad—but I can't conceive that its conclusions are justified. Aquinas' arguments, which arrive at some of the same conclusions about God as do Leibniz's, are so much more rigorous that they make L's look comical. But even if L had argued more thoroughly I'd be intensely skeptical of his ideas, as I am of all metaphysical systems that don't rely on science. Metaphysics certainly isn't *dead*, but it's now more the province of science than of philosophy.

I've also read the first section of G. E. Moore's essay "A Defence of Common Sense". How best to describe it? Think of Kierkegaard's most repetitive and tedious writings, subtract whatever originality and interest they have, add a pathological obsession with *carefulness*, add a humorless self-deprecation, subtract wit, and you'll have a defense of common sense. Moore clumsily argues for what I thought was too trivial to haggle over in my thesis, namely that we *know* certain statements about the world to be true or false. When discussing the Law of Excluded Middle I illustrated a certain class of propositions with a sentence that I claimed we 'know' to be true, namely "Grass changes colors".[1] I recognized that the metaphysical existence of grass can be doubted, but this didn't matter because the grass I was referring to was the grass *that we see*, which therefore exists in the only relevant sense. Its existence in some other metaphysical world [nature-in-itself] doesn't matter; for us it is real, and we *know* it's real. Propositions comparable to "Grass changes colors" (in their referring to the same 'apparent' world, i.e. the world we can directly observe in order to judge the statements' truth or falsity) are the ones to which the Law of Excluded Middle is applicable. These thoughts and many others were all in my head when I wrote that passage; the conclusion of Moore's argument occupied only one of the logical steps, and I thought it was so unproblematic that I didn't even argue for it. –The difficulty with ambitious thinkers is that we tend not to argue extensively for the propositions we consider uninteresting or obviously true, nor to express every logical step, and this invites the parasites that proliferate around higher organisms to nibble at our ideas insatiately.

May 30

[1] The only reason why our knowledge that grass changes colors, while not susceptible of doubt given our common-sense way of experiencing the world (i.e., given the invariable 'existential orientations' and presuppositions of the philosophers themselves), isn't as unquestionable as our knowledge that we exist—or, more accurately, a description of an immediate experience that isn't also tautologous, as is 'I exist'—is that the first statement appeals to memory, while the second doesn't. Only statements that describe immediate experience are certain. In fact, it seems misguided to question them at all (as it is, in another but similar sense, misguided and futile to doubt that grass changes colors).

Moore certainly had patience and scholarly dedication, but he was an atrocious writer and a dull thinker. The maxim of his philosophy is "Let's state the obvious and legitimize it in technical jargon". I'm astounded that he was influential. Are academics really as unintelligent as they'd have to be to be influenced by his ideas? I don't even *want* to be 'recognized' by such people!

The worst flaw of my thesis is that it's imprecise. I tried my hardest to rectify that, but the issues are so esoteric that my failure was preordained. I *agonized* over its occasional lack of logical rigor, but I neglected to read analytical essays that would have taught me how to refine some of the sentences and ideas in the introduction. Even that, however, wouldn't have cured the problem.

Kierkegaard describes well the difference between genius and talent: "Talent is to be ranked according to the sensation it produces; Genius according to the opposition it arouses. Talent adapts itself immediately and directly; Genius does not adapt itself to the given circumstances. Talent warms up what is given (to take a metaphor from cooking) and sees to its appearance; Genius brings something new…"

The following extract from his journal is an eloquent expression of the thought that has occurred to me approximately a thousand times.

> In one of the Psalms it is said of the rich man that he heaps up treasures with great toil "and knoweth not who shall inherit them." So I shall leave behind me, intellectually speaking, a capital by no means insignificant—and alas, I know full well who will be my heir. It is that figure so exceedingly distasteful to me, he that till now has inherited all that is best and will continue to do so: the Docent, the Professor.
>
> Yet this is also a necessary part of my suffering—to know this and then go calmly on with my endeavor, which brings me toil and trouble and the profit of which, in one sense, the Professor will inherit. "In one sense"—for in another sense I take it with me.
>
> *Note*. And even if the "Professor" should chance to read this, it will not give him pause, will not cause his conscience to smite him; no, this too will be made the subject of a lecture. And again this observation, if the Professor should chance to read it, will not give him pause; no, this too will be made the subject of a lecture. For longer even than the tapeworm which recently was extracted from a woman…even longer is the Professor…

Of course, all the self-congratulation in which spirits like ours are wont to indulge is itself funny, but at least we're *aware* of that.

I read the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by Miller. I'm unclear on how Hegel proposes to avoid the problems he summarizes in the first few paragraphs, problems seemingly inherent in the division between knowledge and object. I know he wants to do away with that division, but *how?*

Emma Kirkby, you goddess, you! You're the only soprano I've ever heard whose voice is divine.

May 31

The Eleatic objection to Nothingness is a confusion arising from grammar. 'Before birth nonbeing exists.' So it does, but that general way of saying it (i.e., '[noun] *is*'), which is unavoidable, is confusing. Actually, the paradox reminds me of the ontological proof: it's a frivolous little word-game. What's more disturbing is the nonbeing itself. Try to think of it! Try to intuit what 'nothingess-for-oneself' means. Try to imagine the *reference* of that concept. 'Tisn't easy.

June 1

Yesterday I read Quine's paper "On What There Is". It's better than Moore's. However, I couldn't help thinking that the topics it confronts and some of its arguments aren't worth the attention they receive.

The paradox it sets forth at the beginning is similar to the old Eleatic one: "Nonbeing must in some sense be, otherwise what is it that there is not?" Quine imagines a discussion between himself and McTaggart (whom he calls "McX") wherein they debate their respect ontologies. McTaggart believes in things whose existence Quine disputes. However, this seems to involve him in a predicament. "I cannot admit that there are some things which McX countenances and I do not, for in admitting that there are such things I should be contradicting my own rejection of them." Right on, bro. One problem, though: there's a difference between existence as an independent, physical being and existence as an indeterminate intention. The idea of Pegasus periodically exists, but Pegasus itself doesn't exist (even if we construct physical models of it). When you say so you have in mind an 'indeterminate image'—which in fact isn't even an 'image' properly understood—of a winged horse, and you're denying that there is a live, physical incarnation of such a creature. What's so objectionable about that solution to the paradox? Kine [Quine], however, rescues himself from the oh-so-distressing predicament by invoking Bertie's theory of descriptions. As you may know, that theory provides a way to analyze descriptive phrases like 'the author of *Waverley*'. Thus: 'The author of *Waverley* was a poet' means 'Something wrote *Waverley* and was a poet, and nothing else wrote *Waverley*'. "(The point of the added clause is to affirm the uniqueness which is implicit in the word 'the', in *the* author of *Waverley*.)" If you say that 'the author of *Waverley* is not', what you mean is that 'Either each thing failed to write *Waverley* or two or more things wrote *Waverley*'. Hence in the first version you're not referring to a particular entity; you're *denying* it, as is obvious if we transfer "the burden of objective reference" from a name to a "bound variable", a variable of quantification like 'something' and 'nothing'. Therefore 'Pegasus is not' means (presumably) 'Either each thing failed to be a winged horse that was captured by Bellerophon or there were two or more winged horses that were captured by Bellerophon'. Eureka! I don't know what we've gained by this exercise in casuistry—for the concept of the winged horse (which doesn't exist) is still winking at us, hidden in the soothing language of modern logic—but at least it sounds impressively technical. The second half of the paper discusses whether there are such entities as attributes, relations, classes, numbers and functions. I found some of the paragraphs confusing and unsatisfying, but I did appreciate the history lesson near the end, in which Quine compares the medieval controversy over realism, conceptualism and nominalism to the modern one over logicism, intuitionism and formalism.

I've been given a job as an English teacher in South Korea next year.

June 2

No other fragment or piece of sacred music is as destructive a force [a comment meant in irony] as the Hallelujah chorus. I can picture myself having a heart attack while listening to it.

The extent of my worry over the fate of humanity is unjustified. We won't destroy ourselves. Only a natural catastrophe could destroy us. An observer of the demise of the Roman Empire might have thought that the human race was descending into chaos and Armageddon was at hand, but he would have been wrong. Appearances can be deceiving. We humans, the sovereigns of nature, crafted in the image of God, have millennia ahead of us. An age of glory awaits us. [Um, good luck with that.]

I read "Two Dogmas of Empiricism". I thought it was more convincing than the other essay, not least because I've always agreed with the thrust of its critique of empiricism. Radical reductionism, the doctrine that every meaningful statement is translatable into a statement about immediate experience, is just dumb. So is the verification theory of meaning (that "the meaning of a statement is the method of empirically confirming or infirming it"). Quine's arguments against the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements are fairly convincing, but I'm not willing to abandon the distinction so rashly. It's too important and intuitively attractive to be discarded before no effort has been spared in saving it. At the beginning of the paper Quine delineates two classes of analytic statements that I'll copy here because they're worth remembering: *logically true* sentences such as 'No unmarried man is married', which remain true under any interpretation of 'man' and 'married', and sentences that can be turned into logical truths by interchanging synonyms, such as 'No bachelor is married' (which becomes 'No unmarried man is

married'). The second class is the problematic one, for its definition includes the unexplained word 'synonym'. According to Quine, the verification theory of meaning supports the division between analytic and synthetic in this way: "as long as it is taken to be significant in general to speak of the confirmation and infirmation of a statement, it seems significant to speak also of a limiting kind of statement which is vacuously confirmed, *ipso facto*, come what may; and such a statement is analytic". However, I'm not sure why this defense of the division has to be based on the verification theory of meaning. Surely I can believe that an essential difference between a. and s. is the inconceivability of 'infirmation' or refutation of the former (unlike the latter) even if I don't subscribe to the verification theory of meaning.

[…]

June 4

I'm reading Ayer's good book *The Problem of Knowledge*. The conclusion of the first chapter is that "the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowing something is the case are first that what one is said to know be true, secondly that one be sure of it, and thirdly that one should have the right to be sure." If a superstitious person who after walking under a ladder was certain that something unfortunate was thereby about to befall him, and he subsequently turned out to be right, he nonetheless could justifiably be said not to have known that it would be so. He didn't have the "right" to say that he knew, because his grounds for believing in the occurrence were faulty.

June 8

Most of the paradoxes in which Ayer finds himself entangled when analyzing personal identity dissolve upon substituting my ideas for his. (I don't know how similar mine are to Sartre's, since I've forgotten the subtleties in *The Transcendence of the Ego*). His summaries and critical examinations of such debates as the private language vs. public language controversy, the supposed incommunicability of private experiences and the debate over physicalism (which argues that "to say anything about a person's thoughts, or feelings, or sensations, or private experiences of any kind, is always equivalent to saying something about his physical condition, or behavior, where this applies [both] to the statements that one makes about oneself [and] to those that one makes about others"), as well as the disagreements over the reality of the external world, the past and even experiences themselves, have not only enlightened me on the main contentions of the conflicting parties but have convinced me that these issues are vacuous academic exercises for bored minds. Gilbert Ryle, from what I've read, was a fucking imbecile. The whole analytic tradition, nauseatingly preoccupied with "proving" propositions, is almost as superfluous and philosophically emaciated as the Scholastic tradition was in the Middle Ages. Its chief merit has been to emphasize precision. A. J. Ayer is one of the few who understands the poverty of most counterintuitive analytic theories.

This evening we attended the annual Garden party at the Art House, where Grandpa Bob was honored for his artistic, scholarly and philanthropic achievements. I was surrounded by old geezers, but I occupied myself with the video camera.

June 10

Reading volume 4 of that history of England. I had a physical today, complete with rectal exam. Charming experience. Makes me wonder why people enjoy anal sex. Don't they feel disgusting?

June 11

When I listen to pieces like “Ev’ry valley shall be exalted”, “And the glory of the Lord”, “For unto us a child is born”, “Rejoice greatly”, “Hallelujah”, “Sinfonia”, “Sinfonia pastorale”—speakers blasting and eardrums bleeding—I feel like I’m ten years old. I giggle and have seizures of pleasure while I imagine I’m conducting the orchestra.

Reading *Heart of Darkness*. It’s intimidating to one who’d like to write literature some day. I’ll never be in (anywhere *near*) the same league as Conrad. “The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone pacifically; the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light; the very mist on the Essex marshes was like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds.” [Well, maybe that writing isn’t so great after all.]

June 13

I’m looking forward to being in California, though I’m sure I’ll get sick of my job quickly. I remember telling myself last summer “I’m never going to be a camp counselor again.” Yet here I am. Time heals all wounds. Besides, I’ll do anything to escape from the low level of depression I’ve been feeling since I got home. […] Tonight we saw a British movie called *Once upon a time in the Midlands*, which portrays the lives of a slew of depthlessly mediocre people, and I feel polluted.

I played Chopin’s Prelude in E minor, Op. 28 No. 4, over and over again until my gloom had spent itself. Reading *Heart of Darkness* continued where the piano-playing left off: I’m cheerful now.

June 18

Camp Mendocino is in the redwood forest. Though it hardly ever rains here in the summer, the vegetation is luxuriant. A little creek runs nearby.

The camp is a fraction of the size of Blue Lake. There are eighty staff members, thirty of whom are males. So the ratio of the sexes is favorable. Unfortunately most of the girls are not pretty: there are about ten to whom I’m attracted, and only a few of these have appealing personalities. The majority of the counselors are from England and Ireland, for some reason.

On the four-hour trip from San Francisco to the camp I talked to a cute girl from Oregon who sat next to me. Elizabeth. Intelligent and personable but has a ‘butch’ figure. In the afternoon I met the five counselors in my ‘tribe’ (Apache). The ‘chief’, who’s a 21-year-old Brit, is ‘daft’ and irritating, but he’s not a bad leader. The others are quiet and fairly slow-witted—with the exception of the veteran counselor, Mark—but they don’t seem arrogant, which is a rarity among guys. I don’t dislike them.

The camp isn’t very well-organized. Or at least it *seems* that way, because I can’t help comparing it to Blue Lake, which has affinities with a fascist dictatorship.

June 19

Last night the six tribes performed skits for each other. I had a shockingly good time. A football match earlier had energized me, so I enthusiastically participated in all the silly cheers. Watched Zoey, a junior, from across the amphitheater, jumping up and down and leading cheers, and I felt myself developing a crush on her. She’s so adorable!

Today included more meetings and icebreakers. A junior at Stanford named Hanna talked to me, which wouldn’t be noteworthy except that our interactions suggested she ‘likes’ me. Particularly during the afternoon hike she seemed unusually responsive to my inane comments. And she cast a hundred sidelong glances in my direction. The more I talked to her the more I liked her, to the point that I now can’t stop

thinking about her. It doesn't hurt that her mulatto body is perfect and her face is a porcelain doll's.

An Irish lass named Joanne. Her friend Nicola has attached herself to me, probably because I give her attention, which, being an ingenuous, plain-looking girl, she isn't used to. It's sad that she seems to mistake my friendliness for romantic interest.

June 20

My mercurial temperament has been acting up lately. Today it was infused with the spirit of Bacchus. We had breakfast at 8:30, per usual; I stayed half-asleep for much of the morning, per usual; I conversed with Hanna, per usual—but this time she let it slip that she has a boyfriend. The revelation was so imperceptibly inserted into the conversation that it couldn't have been said with the intention of warding me off. She must be blissfully ignorant of my ulterior motives in talking to her. My face masked my disappointment perfectly, but from that moment on I lost my desire to 'charm away' her reticence.

By the early afternoon I had been successively apathetic and energetic multiple times—moods catalyzed by events like a pick-up basketball game, a confab with Elizabeth, an inspirational meeting, my repeated recognition that no girls here truly interested me, and a meeting that addressed the severe behavioral problems of inner-city children. At 3:00 everyone took a swimming test in the arctic river that courses through our campground. […]

An Irish lad named Jason is my favorite person in the tribe. Soft-spoken, likable, quick-witted and funny. Quiet, but his subtle reactions to events are what crack me up.

June 21

The campers are here. Because it's the first session, there aren't many: I only have three in my cabin. 12- to 14-year-olds. They're good kids: Jerome and Matt are sociable, and Jordan is quiet and respectful. I'll have to exert an extra effort to make sure he's having fun.

June 23

Most of the kids are hoodlums. Luckily there are only fourteen of them. My cabin is better-behaved than the others, but because each counselor has to keep *everyone* under control that doesn't matter. Yesterday I broke up three potential fights between punks who have no respect for authority (particularly mine). They come from 'projects' like Sunnydale, which anyone in this area can tell you is a horrifically violent place. Ironically, these soon-to-be drug dealers were transported with innocent glee at the rantings of the staff on stage. Earlier in the day Jason and I played basketball with them for hours. It was the most fun I've had in weeks. The organized activities we went to (boating, swimming, horse-riding) were less enjoyable, but that was mostly because the brats wouldn't shut up when they were told to.

[…] A buxom 24-year-old Swiss girl named Sylvia is quite flirtatious with me, but that's probably how she acts around all guys.

Jerome is the best kid in the group. He never puts anyone down; he's immune to the mean-spirited, disrespectful atmosphere that surrounds him. It bounces off him harmlessly.

June 24

Three fights today, in all of which I intervened. One boy was kicked in the face. Another was thrown to the ground by a dumb goliath named Tony. The disrespect for counselors is staggering. Two hours ago a boy sprinted into my cabin screaming like a banshee; I grabbed him by the arm and pushed him

outside, not in the mood to reason with someone who doesn't recognize reason. He started cursing at me, threatening me and acting like he was back in the 'hood. I was angry myself, so I stupidly provoked him by being contemptuous. Half an hour later Steve found out about the incident and ordered the kid to apologize to me. Marcus was silent, so I apologized first and he reciprocated.

Fortunately I'm fond of a few counselors (and Jerome). Last night I socialized with two cute Poles for a couple hours in the staff lounge. Agata and Ania exemplify the kind of person who knows no dark thoughts but is somehow not thereby sickeningly saccharine. I love being in their presence. Gillian's too. I managed to steal an hour out of the day to talk to her (and weave a friendship bracelet at the arts and crafts area). She and I have two hours off tonight.

I treasure my music as I never have in the past.

June 27

There have been the usual fights and curses and threats and disobedience. We went on an overnight hike yesterday afternoon; no one enjoyed it. Swarms of mosquitoes made the kids cranky, though we distracted them from boredom with games like 'capture the flag'. I fell asleep to the gentle hum of "yo' mama" jokes.

…During siesta, as I was alternately dozing and reading Wittgenstein (in German), a fight occurred outside. It wasn't the ordinary scuffle that happens every ten minutes; it was a full-fledged battle to the death. Tony repeatedly swore that he would kill Jordan (a different one). I didn't know how serious the incident was until the very end, when I heard running and yelling. (That's when I heard the death threats too.) I sprinted outside to the basketball court, where I tried to stop Tony from chasing Jordan. Mark and Shane were already there. At first I was so preoccupied with defusing the situation that I didn't notice how severe Mark's wound was. But when the rivers of blood crossing his chest caught my eye, I followed them to their source and saw a deep gash behind his ear. He had been hit in the head with an iron rake. Tony was crying from sheer rage, but the three of us managed to bring him under control. Apparently the whole thing had started with *taunts! Taunts* had made him that rabid! He's gone home now, mercifully. –The lesson to be drawn from this is that I can't stay in my cabin during siesta.

[…]

July 3

If the world is a stage, the play is tasteless. I might as well beat my head with a rock over and over again. I'm tired of always being right. I'm tired of being justified in my disdain for people. I'm tired of having my points proven day after day after day.

The campers this session behave slightly better than those last session. As far as I know there haven't been any fights yet (though there have been plenty of conflicts). Nonetheless, I dislike all of these boys. Even Jerome continually whines like a little girl. The Apache counselors are overworked, underpaid and underappreciated.

Fortunately I've been designated the archery specialist, which means I can spend two hours in the morning and two in the afternoon away from the little shits, teaching archery to younger kids who obey their elders. My new position began today; my pupils were 7- to 10-year-olds. Not only did they listen to me; they also amused me and rejuvenated me. I laughed out loud when the girls called me "sir". As if!

…I'd like to quit this job, but that would be weak. And I'd have no place to go except *home*.

July 4

"Quit! Quit! Quit!" The voice in my head hasn't left me alone for a week. Today was especially hard. I have officially stopped caring about controlling the kids. It's impossible and I'm tired of shouting every minute. I'm only going through the motions now, biding my time until either something drastically changes or I leave. Apathy, fatigue and disgust tyrannize my thoughts. I'm going to talk to Lavina or James within the next two days. (Tomorrow's my day off.)

I had an hour-long break this afternoon. Agata and Ania passed me on my way to the cabin; they were headed to a secluded spot on the river. They asked me to come along, so I did. What a stroke of luck it was to meet them! They stripped to their bathing-suits, rubbed oil onto their svelte tanned bodies and asked me about my past and my interests.[1] After lying in the sun for half an hour we swam in the gelid water, I wearing jeans. Then we lay on the beach, and then I left. –It doesn't sound like much, but it was enough to dissolve the knot of anger that had been lodged in my chest the whole day. Ania and Agata aren't typical conceited attractive girls; they're quintessentially "sweet" Eastern Europeans, as I think I mentioned before. Merely listening to them is a great comfort.

In the evening there were various patriotic activities for the entire camp to take part in. I was probably supposed to focus my energies on supervising Apache twits, but instead I fraternized with young'uns. A little boy named Chris adopted me as his horse, which meant I had to gallop wherever he desired for thirty minutes. He twisted my head with his paint-smeared hands when he wanted me to change directions, and he kicked me in the ribs when I was going too slowly. It was a rude awakening to return to my own tribe later.

Tonight I told Steve I can't stay in this unit. Jessica happened to be nearby, so he called her over. I explained to them both that I'd be a far more effective and happy counselor with the youngest group. They were sympathetic. In two days I'll have a meeting with James and Lavina to sort out my situation.

July 6

Yesterday morning I took the "skunk train" to town. The first thing I did upon arriving was eat lunch with Margo and Christy at a Chinese restaurant. I found out that I'm a Monkey under the Chinese zodiac, but the meal was otherwise uneventful. When the two girls met up with Shay and her boyfriend I struck out on my own. This involved listening to music, eating pastries, eating ice cream and ambling aimlessly downtown. At 6:00 I walked a couple of miles to a salmon barbecue, hoping to meet the counselors there so I could have a ride home. But I encountered only two thousand hicks. Half an hour later I left, having decided that the white trash culture was not to my liking. So I walked another two miles, pausing awhile near the ocean to gaze at the horizon in wonder, lose myself in Water Music and cry from the painful beauty of it all. My ruminant mood left me when the music ended, so I resumed my quest for either my 'friends' or a hotel. I couldn't find the former, so I settled for the latter. But I couldn't even find *that* until 9:00, after I'd walked thirty blocks in a fruitless search for a cheap motel and had finally yielded to the inevitability of staying at an antique $90 hotel for the night. Oddly enough I slept fitfully in my unwontedly luxurious accommodations. Awoke at 9:00, ate a hurried but delicious meal, rode the train to camp and resumed work at noon.

July 9

I forget what happened on the 7th. Yesterday I got sick from eating the year-out-of-date meat we're fed. In the evening I staggered to the infirmary, threw up multiple times and slept on the couch. The vomiting was more repulsive than usual: not only did my half-digested food project from my mouth at such speed that my throat was deeply scratched, but when I blew my nose immediately afterwards large chunks

[1] The conversation was the only part I really liked. The sight of their bodies was just frustrating.

of tomato ended up in the tissue. Don't ask me how they squeezed through my nostrils. As I hugged the toilet I grew sentimental and sorrowful; I pondered the sufferings of humanity, the infinite *smallness* of the species, and I wept. Thought about how doomed and pathetic, but touching, is man's attempt to reconcile himself with nature. And in my poetical pose I recalled a line from *Don Juan*: when Byron describes the contrast between the feminine and the masculine experience of crying, he says, "For them 'tis a relief, for us a torture." He's absolutely right. Tears *sear* a man's face but *soothe* a woman's.

The night's repose substantially cured me. In the morning I packed my bags as the campers packed theirs, for Jessica had told me I could work in Cheyenne, which is the youngest boys' unit. I needn't tell you how thrilled I was to free myself from an asylum for young personifications of filth. A Cheyenne counselor named Benjamin fortuitously wanted to join Apache, so we switched places. Two hours later the new batch of campers arrived for the third session; there are only nine Cheyenne boys. So far I like most of them, with the exception of an obnoxious kid named Darius. They all seem to like me—frequently hold my hand when walking somewhere or beg to have a piggy-back ride. They never curse, they're respectful, they don't show any inclinations to fight, and they love to play games with the counselors—of whom there are ten. (Far more than at Apache, perversely.) There's a good rapport among the staff members, probably because half of them are girls. –In short, I've advanced from purgatory to…well, not paradise, but something like it.

July 11

It's my day off. I'm staying at the camp, since there's nothing to do in Fort Bragg. Woke up at 11:00; it's 1:30 now, and I'm sitting by a brook far away from all noise. The only sounds I can hear are musical: waters bubbling over rocks and breezes rustling leaves. Were I a wordsmith I'd paint for you the quiet splendor of the scene. Only a Keats could do it justice. –I'm skeptical that it was blind chance that carved this enclave of raw harmony.

A little snake is sunbathing on a floating branch nearby. If I weren't here it would be there in that identical coiled position, smelling the water with its forked tongue, eyeing minnows, ignoring dragonflies mating beside it—and no human being would see it. No one would know of its existence. Its place in the cosmos would be the same but radically different. I find that to be virtually imponderable, though I'm not sure why. I'm tempted to accept idealism only because it would be a tragedy for this scene to go unwitnessed.

People have arrived. I'll socialize briefly and return to myself in a minute.

[…]

July 17

[…]

The campers are still as fun as on the first day. I wrestle with them, play dodgeball every day, etc., and am more a friend than a superior. You might think that would be inadvisable, but you'd be wrong, for I'm able to switch into the drill sergeant role on the rare occasions when I have to. I especially like two brothers named Trave and Jairius, who are the wildest little whirling dervishes of delight you could ever meet. Their smiles stretch from ear to ear (almost literally), their wit is startling for their age, and their rambunctiousness finds an outlet in their obsessive attempts to twist my nipples. Because I'm the archery specialist I can't be around these fun kids all day long, but at least I see them during meals, in the evening and during siesta.

July 21

It was an uneventful day off. The fourth session began on the 18th; no campers "stayed over" except Trave. I wish Jairius had too. There are fourteen kids in the unit, all of whom are cute little guys who generally obey their counselors. A fat, awkward boy named Kevin has taken a liking to me. He's a social outcast who doesn't know how to relate to people: sometimes he hugs me and lays his head on my shoulder, while other times he fights violently with me, as if he's angry. Clearly he's desperate for affection, so I don't discourage him—though I'm repulsed by his obtrusiveness and his smell. Trave remains my favorite.

[…]

Late last night Christina and I ate at the staff barbecue. That may have been the reason I woke up in a great mood this morning. Drank coffee at breakfast for good measure. Isn't it interesting that jokes and types of behavior that usually don't even *occur* to you suddenly 'leap out' when you're feeling abnormally happy? I love it! I wish it happened more often.

July 24

Several counselors have quit recently. Hanna was one of them. I, on the other hand, could hardly ask for a more enjoyable summer than the last two sessions have given me. What a change from the first two!

[…] When I tell Gillian that classical music is more sophisticated than its competitors and she replies with "That's such an elitist attitude!", I can't help imagining a monologue in which I sneer at her, "You child. You haven't lived yet and you haven't thought yet. You don't know what you believe—though you think you do—and you never will. In the last eight years I've lived decades; centuries of cultural evolution have been compressed into one mind's process of maturation. I've thought so much that I sometimes fear I can no longer write anything that isn't a repetition of something earlier. Who are *you*? Why am I talking to you?" But my superego, that bland and compassionate preacher of equality, recoils and shouts, "You egomaniac! Hasn't experience taught you anything? Look in the mirror. Is your face really so unique? Is it *lived* in? No; it's young and pretty and soft. It's *equal*, as are you. You and Gillian have your ignorance in common, along with Socrates and Aristotle. So stop making a fool of yourself." But then my intellectual id appropriates that comment: "Your perceptiveness (which is also mine) refutes your point. How could we be 'equal' to Gillian if…[etc.]?" The dialogue could continue, but my sense of humor smothers it.

July 25

Friday. No work. Staying on camp. Walked half an hour toward Counselor's Rock, but directions were faulty. Morons. Furious for ten minutes, then sat in shade and read journal. Realized it's time I branched out. Document has proved invaluable for seven years, but adolescence is over. No longer need 'crutch'—or: no longer can let myself lean on it at all times. Must slough off old skin and grow. Journal provides no more avenues for growth. Isn't 'expansive' enough or 'grand' enough. Short stories, novels, essays, endeavors in science, philosophy, art, *human relationships*: these are my next evolutionary steps. Am approaching, or have reached, the natural conclusion of ceaseless self-meditations: self-consciously dubious self-knowledge. And *full experiential awareness* of the necessity of such dubiety. Wonder is the beginning and the end of inquiry. I began in wonder and now I end in it, only to begin again on the basis of that ultimate insight. My journal will now necessarily be repetitive, or consist in variations on old themes, because it isn't much more than a record of my progressive appreciation of skepticism and irony—so I'll relegate it to the status of 'one pursuit among many', all of which are grounded in the central fact of my existence: levitation. However I continue to grow, I cannot surmount the plane that my nobler thoughts have already attained. I can but try to live in harmony with them, which involves broadening myself.

Hopefully the move to Korea will facilitate the transformation that has in fact already begun.

…Last night we played games with the campers while sitting around the campfire. One of the games required that each person tell us his favorite superhero. Most of the kids reeled off names like Wolverine, the Hulk, Superman and Batman, but when it was Kevin's turn the name was "Chris". And he pointed at me.

[…]

July 29

Went to Counselor's Rock with Elizabeth and Christina. Elizabeth is the funniest girl I've ever known. (It isn't often that I meet genuinely funny girls. The sex is supposed to be more passive: its representatives—to speak on a simplified, animalistic level—merely approve or disapprove of men whose task it is to impress them, whether through humor or intelligence or anything else. It's a testament to mankind's elevation above animals that women are also required to impress men—for this indicates that sex isn't the 'highest good' for us men, while it is for male *animals*. In other words, we have standards.)

…How much more unambiguous would life be if faces were clear expressions of characters! But that would make ugliness far too common. Most people would have the aspect of the man I saw in Lisbon whose face was a mass of boils. Procreation would be impossible.

July 31

Finished reading the play, finally. I liked it. *Die Stücke von Max Frisch sind immer philosophisch und ziemlich melancholisch. Darum gefallen sir mir. Wenn sie keine 'Themen' hätten, würden sie mich nicht interessieren. Nun werde ich* Santa Cruz *wiederlesen*.

August 1

My pen is itching to write short stories. The moment I'm free I intend to write a satire on late capitalism that reverses and perverses the Biblical apologue of "Job". It'll be about the misfortunes that befall a man named Joe who worships the God Mammon.

…Cultured people are fond of the dictum that nothing is more difficult than to stand alone against the world. At the end of one of his plays Henrik Ibsen has the hero sum up his hardships with that maxim, and it's clear that the real speaker is Ibsen himself. But I disagree with him. To fight against the herd with one's heart and soul is actually quite easy, for it is essentially its own reward. Anything that is its own reward is not truly difficult, though it may require effort. I prefer the saying that such solitary struggle can be the most *valuable* thing in the world.

A little while ago, when I was listening to one of my CDs in Darik's cabin, I heard Jeff say right outside the door that he feels pretentious when he listens to classical music. My immediate thought was, "You asinine little boy! You just indicted yourself. Of *course* it's only a pretense for *you* to listen to high art. Nothing can act contrary to its essence." Then I smiled at myself and continued reading.

I'm savoring the anticipation of living in Korea. To be rid of the American culture! Not to be trapped in a closed community! O, to be free!

August 2

Logical fallacy: because I usually listen only to classical CDs I like no other kind of music. In reality I enjoy, in certain moods, almost everything that history has to offer music-wise. However, I'm bombarded with so much of the easy-listening stuff merely by virtue of living in this society that on my *own* time there's no need to listen to more of it. Instead I listen to the *other* kind of music, the kind that demands concentration (and intensive study) in order to be fully appreciated. For there is *classical* and there is *popular*—which includes virtually everything: rock, pop, ragtime, motown, gospel, rap, folk, hip-hop, jazz, etc. (To be fair, some jazz is too complex and intellectual to be considered 'easy listening'. My dual classification is simplistic, but it isn't entirely wrong.) The 'popular' music isn't always *bad*; it's just less sophisticated and less sublime. Even so, it can be wonderful to listen to.

Finished rereading the play. Now I'm going to read Wittgenstein's *Über Gewissheit*.

August 3

There are thirty kids in Cheyenne. They're the worst bunch we've had all summer. Apache en miniature. Absolute animals. They've made me so angry that I've been tempted to beat them multiple times. Smash them into the ground! Really *pulverize* them! I'm counting the days until I can leave this place, this first circle of hell.

August 5

I'm in the groove, so the shit I put up with doesn't really bother me anymore. The same old yelling, the same old fights, the same old longing to hear Handel's "Messiah"… The peculiar routine is actually somewhat exhilarating. I always have to be on my toes, and I'm generally energized in an angry sort of way. The evening heralded something new: while we were trying to prep the campers for the talent show they were so outrageously behaved that Peter and I took the fourteen worst kids on a steep hike in the forest and Allison planned the skit with the others. The boys complained and cursed the whole way—threatened to sue us, wished they were dead, wished we were dead, lamented "nature's fury" (!)—but all my pent-up aggression flowed into my legs, leaving ebullience in its wake. For forty minutes I smiled and laughed at the miasma of resentment that surrounded me.

August 8

The overnight hike was more fun than I'd expected. Peter and I led the campers on a supplementary evening hike that included ascents and descents of 80° inclines—dirt-slides, basically—where injuries were not only possible but probable. Because of the danger the boys set aside their mutual aggression and cooperated like a team of mountain-climbers, holding hands and helping each other up the mountainside. It was truly wonderful to witness. What a transformation! In the morning, however, they were back to their old selves. Not quite as bad as in the previous days—I'm even starting to like three or four of them—but not anything like respectful.

August 9

Day off. Fort Bragg. Warm weather. Alone. Need haircut. Salons closed. Tired. Want bed. Could read. But would. Rather not. Too dead. Want mo. Tel to. Sleep in. Right now. So bored. So sick. Of Camp. Mendo. Cino. Can't wait. To talk. To San. Gi in. Two weeks. Miss her. –Shut up. Voice of. Mono. Tony. You de. Press me. Too much.

…I really screwed myself this time. Sabotaged myself through a series of idiotic blunders. The first

mistake was to come to Fort Bragg again (only to get a haircut that never happened). The second mistake was to decide not to meet John, Shay and Robby at 4:00: they could have driven me home, but I couldn't stomach the thought of spending three hours with them first. The third mistake was to wait till the late afternoon to look for motels. The fourth was to *walk* to them instead of *call* them. The fifth was to watch a movie in the evening rather than eat dinner or continue searching for accommodations. (I was so frustrated and furious that I thought I needed to see *Pirates of the Caribbean* to calm down.) The sixth was not to inquire about a hostel or shelter until 10:00, which was precisely when its doors closed. Now the only option left is to sleep on the beach. Every motel I called (at 9:30) was full. I even called a taxi service, but the person had never heard of Camp Mendocino. –This is the kind of thing that could only happen to me, and that *never fails* to happen to me.

…I couldn't find the entrance to the beach, so I tried to sleep on a bench in the middle of town. That didn't work. It's too cold to sleep. It's 1:00 a.m. now; I'm going to wander the streets and listen to music. And then maybe read.

August 10

5:30. At 1:00 I went to a redneck bar, the only one still open. My favorite pastime, people-watching, was especially entertaining there. Unfortunately the bar closed, whereupon I had to venture into the chill night air again. Managed to fall into a light sleep until shouting teenagers woke me up; Wittgenstein accompanied me the remainder of the night. Now it's Beethoven's turn.

[…]

There's a good deal of intellectual pleasure to be had from watching the sun rise. All around you is peace, but you know that soon the little civilization will be bustling and the little people will be scurrying with childlike self-importance. Or you can watch the sky and reflect that what you're seeing is the result of the earth's rotation, a rotation so fast yet so imperceptible. "Miraculous" doesn't begin to describe it.

To be a young man is an experience I wouldn't trade for anything in the world.

The second movement of the fifth piano concerto speaks for itself, but I have to make one comment nonetheless. The *logic*, the *proportion*, the *restraint*, the *development*, the *beauty* rival those of the most flawless dawn. –How ugly life would be without classical music! How flavorless! How meaningless!

August 12

Session 6 hath begun. The campers are fairly well-behaved—as *anyone* would seem in comparison with last session's brats. My ability to discipline kids has been well-honed, such that now I can intimidate them into silence by looking intently at them or talking in a quiet but stern voice. It helps if I use mild threats.

August 14

The stated purpose of my reading *Über Gewissheit* is that it'll help me learn German, but an 'adscititious' purpose has crept in: as a philosophical text the book keeps me in that state of perplexity I so love. Or hate. It's quite frustrating to read for two contradictory purposes at the same time, one of which demands that I *trudge on*, paying attention only to grammar and vocabulary, the other of which demands that I interrupt myself constantly. I'll have to return to the book and read it on its own level, for its own merits. Most of the 250 sections I've read are interesting—far more so than Moore's pertinent essay—and address (obliquely or directly) questions I dealt with in the introduction to my thesis. I didn't pay as much attention to certainty, but I did to truth. If you compare the two pieces of writing you might be hard-pressed to find parallels, but I think they're more 'real' than 'apparent'. The broader themes and doubts are similar;

I just answered them more systematically and (perhaps) satisfactorily, relying less on pragmatism and behaviorism. This book, however, has of course renewed my doubts.

August 15

This is what I call a vacation. I'm in Mendocino, a quaint town on the coast that sits atop bluffs[1] which provide a panoramic view of the ocean. What a relaxing sight! *Look* at that placid sea out there, harboring secrets and immensities inconceivable to the human mind. What is it about the ocean that's so soothing? Is it the instinctive humility I feel when faced with infinity? Or is it the stretch of pale blue that intoxicates me? Maybe it's the sound of the surf, or the cool of the breeze. Or an amalgam of them all.

The myriad shops, located in buildings that were once saloons, are as charming as their reputation holds them to be. There's an excellent book store, a fudge store, a toy store, a blown-glass store, an art gallery, a hundred cafés and restaurants, an antique store, a "jam and preserves" store, etc. I'm staying at McElroy's Bed and Breakfast, where Mom was good enough to make a reservation for me. Unfortunately I arrived in town at 3:30 and have to leave at 8:00 in the morning.

Observing nature is like observing architecture: it can't be fully appreciated unless its principles and its history are known. My understanding is severely deficient in both areas.

This town is like a little utopia. The people are unusually friendly and polite, the streets are picturesque—irresistible—the food is delicious,[2] the scenic backdrop is breathtaking. It's significant that most of the residents were once hippies.

Poems:

in the dusk
a passing shade smiles
her twilit eyes

silvery and tremulous
is the moonlit avenue
to the horizon

the mercurial
flames embedded in the vault
look down on transience

the foghorn yawns,
a solitary Cyclops
that finds in me a friend

young couples amble
along the sidewalk, gambol
past a lonely bum

dew on a windshield:
nature kisses a machine
and hugs her prodigal son

[1] These constitute Mendocino Headlands State park, which is where I'm sitting right now.
[2] That's an essential part of a utopia.

August 16

the sun burns shafts
in the icy fogbank,
the fallen cloud

I'm stranded in Hicksville. I came back to Fort Bragg this morning, expecting to take a train to camp, but it appears there's a problem with the skunk's insurance company. So there's no train today. And I have no ride back. I'm about to call Lavina.

…Someone's going to pick me up. In the meantime I'm having breakfast in a diner on Main Street. What a grand mood I'm in! I feel so *free!*

It's weird beyond expression that I used to live in Mom's body and feed off a placenta.

As I watch the friendly hustle and bustle of Main Street I'm reminded of the short scene in *Amadeus*, just before Mozart meets his father for the first time, in which he is skipping along the street and enjoying the festive atmosphere of Rococo Vienna. In the daydream I, of course, am Mozart, listening to music in my head.

[…]

August 22

I'm in Fort Mason [in San Francisco], whither I walked from Pier 39 on Fisherman's Wharf. The view from this little park reminds me of Lisbon. Sort of. There are the same hills, the same white houses, the same palm trees and the same harbors—but not the same depth of character. It all seems too *new* here. Slightly artificial (though only slightly). Even so, I like San Francisco more than any other American city I've visited. Its great strength is that it's vaguely European: not all skyscrapers, mega-stores, flat landscape, über-civilization, a glorification of *function*.

[…]

Unrelated thought:—Mankind is not the end of evolution. It is not the Ultimate animal, after which nothing more can be said. It is not nature's supreme triumph. It is only a stage, a phase that will pass away and yield something new—neither better nor worse. It is an animal that's had spectacular success for a short while. That's all. Its whole global civilization will one day suffer the fate of the Pharaohs. So don't get too arrogant, okay?

August 23

In cities like San Francisco, Sydney, Paris, Vienna, Rome and the like, things that are in themselves unpleasant become interesting and add color to everything else. They're not only *necessary* but *good*. 'Bums' add flavor, bad music is charming, tourists are like well-intentioned children, overflowing crowds are exciting. Everything is justified from the perspective of the whole. The drawback of this Goethean perspective is that it treats people not as ends but as means. Their contributions to the totality are the only things that are considered. Of course, if the individual is seen as a microcosmic totally himself then he *is* an end—but there's also a totality outside him that he's a part of. It all depends on what perspective you adopt. As ends, all people should try to mimic the world (the *great* 'end') and be 'total', but as means only *some* should, and the multitudes should be as stunted as they are to provide the macrocosm with variety and contrast.

—Oh, why do I ever experiment with Goethean ideas? They never lead anywhere.

August 25

In the Kansas City airport I met a pretty young lady from Providence who had lived in San Jose for a year, working with the AmeriCorps program (which has recently been downsized due to Washington's conservative agenda). We talked for a while, shared a few laughs, and now I'll never see her again. "Ships that pass in the night."

Yesterday I read a book by the physicist Hannes Alfvén entitled *Worlds, Antiworlds: Antimatter in Cosmology*. It was written in 1966, so it's a little out of date and much of it seems like science-fiction, but it's fired my resolve to research cosmology and astronomy till I'm blue in the mind. I'm royally fed up with being ignorant of those subjects.

Speaking of ignorance, let me tell you what a childhood spent in the heart of a city can lead to: one night I was watching *Jurassic Park 3* with another counselor at camp, and out of the blue she said "Dinosaurs didn't really exist, did they?" I was stunned.

I've decided to divide every day of the next three weeks[1] into four parts: (1) read German; (2) read science; (3) practice the piano; (4) write or plan short stories. That's only a guideline, though. I've begun by setting aside Wittgenstein—after 400 sections I'm getting tired of him—and replacing him with a collection of short stories, *Aus Nah und Fern* (*From Near and Far*). Now I'm going to the college library to borrow books on astronomy and physics.

Yesterday I also transferred most of the summer's journal onto the computer. In the morning the whole family went to a beach in Tiverton.

…Reading *The Five Ages of the Universe: Inside the Physics of Eternity*, by Fred Adams and Greg Laughlin. It's a fascinating book: informative, fast-paced and intellectually adventurous. (Its predictions of the distant future are daring, perhaps recklessly so.)[2] The exposition is almost *too* rushed: at times when I was deciphering the first chapter I felt like I was reading mere words with no recognizable meanings. Of course, that's because many of the concepts are absolutely incomprehensible and have no relation to earthly experience. What does it mean to say that in the first quintillionth-of-a-second of the universe's existence its size expanded from that of a period at the end of a sentence to more than that of the current observable universe? What the *hell*? I *sort of* know what means, but not *really*. Or what about the theory that "virtual particles" continually flicker in and out of existence, leaving no trace and arising from nothing?[3] I won't even *try* to understand *that* one.

August 26

General relativity seems to imply that space itself is viscous, somehow. For how else can one visualize such theories as that galaxies aren't moving *through* space at speeds of many kilometers per second but are actually 'stationary' and *space* is expanding? Or that spacetime can be curved? Or that massive bodies revolving around a central one cause 'ripples' in the structure of spacetime? ("As a massive body moves through space, the curvature of spacetime must also move, and the movement sends disturbances traveling outwards through spacetime"—which are gravitational waves.)

Think of this: if you travel in a straight line across the universe (for trillions of years and at a very fast pace) eventually you'll come back to your starting point. For space isn't infinite, but it isn't bounded. It's like the surface of a balloon in three dimensions. Whatever that means.

…The last section of chapter 5 ("The Dark Era") blows my mind. The production of new universes

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[1] It'll take that long to get my visa.

[2] I haven't read them in depth yet. I've only read about the "Primordial Era" of the Big Bang and its immediate aftermath and the "Stelliferous Era" that we're currently experiencing. (This chapter was largely a review for me.) The other eras are the Degenerate, the Black Hole and the Dark.

[3] Strictly speaking, they're held to arise from "vacuum energy", but what is *that*?

is the subject. I'm left with the impression that "wormholes" aren't just fanciful products of an over-exuberant scientific imagination; they may be fact. Our own universe may have originated through a black hole in another. The authors even speculate that humans might eventually be able to *intentionally create* a child universe or set off a "cosmological phase transition" (which has something to do with changing the universe's vacuum energy state from its current 'artificially high' level to a lower and (slightly) more stable one, albeit one that would destroy everything as its expanding bubble shot through space). I'd love to become an astrophysicist just to *understand* all this.

August 27

Read chapter one of *Extreme Stars: At the Edge of Creation* by James Kaler—a more technical book than its hokey title suggests—and continued *Aus Nah und Fern*. Played the piano.

August 28

Practiced piano, read German, went to the dentist, picked up new pair of glasses, and read *Einstein's Greatest Blunder?: The Cosmological Constant and Other Fudge Factors in the Physics of the Universe*, by Donald Goldsmith. As you can tell from its title, it's a popularization, but it's a good one. My purpose in reading such less-than-technical books is that I want to know the state of cosmology as a whole before I delve into specialized debates.

I don't know what the general idea of the scientific community is regarding the nature of the spacetime curvature of the universe—whether it's flat, negative or positive—but it seems to me that it must be flat. Or nearly so. Why else would light always travel in a straight line (except when it approaches a massive body)? The closed spacetime surrounding a black hole bends light towards it; open spacetime (if it exists anywhere) presumably bends light away; flat spacetime must cause it to go straight. Am I missing something? Are there other theories for why light travels in a line? My idea is pretty attractive, at least to an ignoramus like me: it's simple and it kills two birds with one stone.[1]

But I'm probably wrong that the path of light would bend in a closed or an open universe. For *where* would it bend? Which direction? If the *whole universe* were curved, there's no *one* direction in which light would bend. The reasonable possibilities seem to be either that it would go straight or that it would bend *nowhere* (or everywhere), the peculiarity of which idea suggests that it could only go straight, and therefore that my explanation is wrong. Alternatively, it may be incorrect to draw an analogy between the curvature of all of space and the curvature of one region (e.g. a black hole).

August 29

I've broken with Sangeetha. As far as I'm concerned, our friendship is over. It wouldn't have come to this if she hadn't sent me an appalling email that was utterly scornful of my timid accusations that she had acted inconsiderately this past month (in a variety of ways). [Boring details follow of Sangeetha's terrible behavior, which led me to end our friendship. Though later it resumed, for a while.]

August 30

Finished Goldsmith's book. The poor man frequently attempts to be funny, but nerd-humor just doesn't cut it. (Example: the title of one chapter is "Hot dark matter, cold dark matter, what's the matter?"

[1] That's a rather grim expression.

'Galloping metaphors' are another favorite: "Let us examine this statement to see whether we can crack the mysterious shell of scientific talk to fry the yolk of understanding.")

I also practiced the piano, read two short stories by Hawthorne, read German and edited two philosophy papers that I'll send to graduate schools.

September 2

Parents bought me a laptop yesterday. Reading *Three Roads to Quantum Gravity*, written (badly) by Lee Smolin. Terry's first day of high school tomorrow. Poor kid. Worst years of my life.

September 3

Finished Smolin's book. Skimmed the last few chapters. Concepts not sufficiently explained to the layman. Mélange of exotic ideas like string theory, loop quantum gravity, spin networks, knots, links, supergravity, holographic principle, black hole thermodynamics, "Bekenstein's bound", discrete structure of spacetime, quantum chromodynamics, quantum electrodynamics, lattice theory… Space and time are not infinitely divisible. *Things* don't exist; only processes. (Heraclitus.) Space composed of relations between processes; not an absolute 'background' to them. (But where do the processes occur? Surely in space!)

September 5

Got vaccinations for Asia. Went clothes-shopping with Mom. Read Hawthorne and German. Exercised for the first time in months, to burn away lethargy. 'Twas effective. Must exercise every day from now on; otherwise no energy.

September 7

German. Rode bike to Colt State Park, sunbathed. Admired a middle-aged woman with spectacular legs and butt. Thought of a story, or a parable, about a Reclusive Poet and an Experiencer (a Don Juan-kinda guy, who just *lives* and doesn't poeticize about his adventures). Ostensible antipodes…but are they really? No, as I'll show. Was going to exalt the Experiencer—as a Greek, etc.—but decided against it. Will exalt neither at the expense of the other, though in the end the Poet will come out on top by virtue of having his name live on through the ages. Other morals besides that one. Already started writing.

[…]

September 8

German, though not much. Piano, though not much. Bach's Siciliano from sonata 2 for harpsichord and flute, transcribed for piano—a marvelous piece, delicate, with the density of air, tenuous as a wisp of smoke, dream-like. […]

…One of the reasons it was comical when I flirted with the idea of my being a "genius" is that the word is rather meaningless. It doesn't denote some real concrete quality. Imagine the young Nietzsche alone in his room trying to convince himself (as I'm sure he did on occasion) that he's a genius. Or Byron, that most self-conscious of poets. Introspecting painfully to isolate the magical quality and point to it. How ludicrous! At most, one can say, "If this man and this man are called 'geniuses', then I deserve to be too,

for my writings are comparable to theirs." But even that can be misleading. It's only through convention, i.e. not through a comparison with *objective criteria*, that works are said to be ingenious—for the word has no "reference" (see my senior thesis): nothing corresponds to it, nothing is pointed to. It's just an approximation, a way of saying that a work has impressed the person who is making the judgment.

September 9

I read Freud's *Leonardo da Vinci: A Study in Psychosexuality*. Parts of it are ingenious, i.e. imaginative, insightful, while other parts are wild flights of fancy. It begins by outlining some contradictions and mysteries of Leonardo's character, among which his obsession with scientific investigation is emphasized. This impulse was so strong that for decades it overpowered and eclipsed his desire to create art. What can explain it? After stating the methodological principles that psychoanalytic solutions to such problems are to be sought in the earliest childhood of the person and that "forcible impulses" like Leonardo's "draw upon sexual motive powers for their reinforcement", Freud notes that many children go through a period of infantile sexual investigation beginning with their third year. They ask questions like 'where do children come from?' If this period ends "through an impetus of energetic sexual repression, the early association with sexual interest may result in three different possibilities for the future fate of the investigation impulse." Either (1) the curiosity is inhibited, narrowing the free activity of the intelligence and possibly leading to a neurotic disease; (2) "the intellectual development is sufficiently strong to withstand the sexual repression pulling at it", in which case the suppressed sexual investigation sometimes comes back from the unconscious as compulsive reasoning toward a 'solution' which is never reached; or (3) the libido is sublimated into curiosity, and the investigation impulse is reinforced. This last result is compulsive, to an extent, but it isn't as neurotic as the second possibility because it's a *sublimation* rather than an "emergence from the unconscious". It avoids all sexual themes. This third type was the outcome of Leonardo's infantile development.

Freud needs some data, so he turns to a sentence in one of da Vinci's books: "It seems that it had been destined before that I should occupy myself so thoroughly with the vulture, for it comes to my mind as a very early memory, when I was still in the cradle, a vulture came down to me, opened my mouth with his tail and struck me many times with his tail against my lips." This, says Freud, is too outrageous to be a real memory; it's a fantasy formed later and transferred to his childhood. Clues to deciphering it are found in dreams: "tail" is a "substitutive designation" of the penis in many languages, including Italian; the action of the vulture corresponds to fellatio. So the fantasy seems homosexual. (We'll return to that later.) The reason it's displaced to the nursing period is that sucking the penis is similar to sucking the breast. But why is the mother replaced by a vulture? To answer this question it's necessary to know that the ancient Egyptians worshiped a motherly deity whose head was that of a vulture. The reason for the choice of the animal is that—as Greek and Roman texts tell us—the Egyptians thought the species consisted only of females. They're supposedly impregnated by the wind when they stop in mid-flight and open their vaginas. Leonardo must have known of this myth because (1) he was an avid reader of classical texts, and (2) the church fathers commonly used it as an argument against those who doubted the virgin birth. Freud reconstructs the origin of the vulture fantasy in this manner: "While Leonardo was once reading in a book of a Church father or in a work on natural science that vultures are all females and reproduce themselves without the cooperation of a male, a memory flashed through his mind which became transformed into the fantasy, but which wished to express that he too was such a vulture child, who had a mother but no father. [He was an illegitimate son. The interpretation of the fantasy presupposes that he lived alone with his peasant mother the first few years of his life, for only in this way could he have missed his father during his infancy and thus thought of himself as a 'vulture-child'.] An echo of the pleasure which he had once experienced at his mother's breast then associated itself to this fantasy in a manner as only such old impressions alone can manifest themselves. The allusions established by [certain] authors to the idea of the holy virgin with the child, which was so dear to every artist, must have contributed to make this fantasy appear to him valuable and important." The only hard data available record that Leonardo was living in his

father's house when he was 5; there is no unambiguous confirmation of Freud's belief that Leonardo moved there after having first lived with his mother for several years. But because the father was married to another woman in the same year as Leo's birth—a marriage that turned out to be childless—it seems reasonable to suppose that Leo wouldn't have been adopted until four or five years had elapsed and it had become evident that the wife's womb would bear no fruit. In short, Freud's ideas have led to the conclusion that the young boy had no father figure in the first, formative years of his life.

To answer the question as to why the fantasy has a homosexual character Freud first confronts the odd fact that the vulture-headed goddess of the Egyptians is portrayed as possessing both breasts and an erect phallus. (Numerous other goddesses of the ancient world have the same characteristic.) Now, why would a goddess who is supposed to represent the essence of motherhood have a penis? The reason is that when the young child is going through the stage of investigating his own genitals he assumes that everyone, including his mother, has one. This infantile assumption is the common origin "for the androgynous formation of the maternal deities and the vulture's tail in Leonardo's childhood fantasy." But it doesn't explain Leonardo's 'ideal'—not active—homosexuality (which was noticed and documented by his contemporaries). Freud now reverts to case-studies of his own homosexual patients. In all of them there was a strong early erotic attachment to the mother as a consequence of the father's weakness or absence. This was followed by its repression (because the love of the mother cannot continue to develop consciously). "The boy represses the love for his mother by identifying himself with her, and by taking his own person as a model through the similarity of which he is guided in the selection of his love-object. He thus becomes homosexual; as a matter of fact, he returns to the stage of autoerotism, for the boys whom the growing adult now loves are only substitutive persons or revivals of his own childish person, whom he loves in the same way as his mother loved him." Actually, his unconscious is so fixated on the memory of his mother that in pursuing boys he's really just running away from women who could cause him to become disloyal to his mother. Certain facts of Leonardo's life (that he only took handsome youths as his pupils, that he apparently never had a love affair with a woman, that he was once openly charged with being homosexual but was acquitted) make it reasonable to apply those ideas to him as an explanation of his actions. The analysis also explains a trivial but hitherto unsolvable problem connected with his diary, of which, however, I won't go into the details.

The last three chapters are less interesting and perhaps even more far-fetched. You might be more amenable to the first three if you read them in addition to my short summary of them, for I hardly did them justice. Nevertheless, you can surely divine my objections. They're probably yours as well.

September 10

I'm reading *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. **Notes**: The course of mental events is regulated by the pleasure principle, i.e. it's set in motion by an unpleasurable tension and leads to a lowering of that tension. Unpleasure corresponds to an increase in the amount of excitation present in the mind "but not in any way 'bound'", while pleasure corresponds to a diminution. To say that the pleasure principle is dominant in the psyche is to say that "the mental apparatus endeavors to keep the quantity of excitation present in it as low as possible or at least to keep it constant." (Entropy…) However, strictly speaking, it isn't "dominant". If it were, all our mental processes would have to be accompanied by, or lead to, pleasure, which is obviously not the case. There exists merely a strong *tendency* towards the pleasure principle, which tendency is opposed by other forces. One of them is the instinct of self-preservation: from its point of view the pleasure principle is inefficient and even dangerous, and it's replaced by the reality principle. "This latter principle does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands the postponement of satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long road to pleasure. The pleasure principle long persists, however, as the method of working employed by the sexual instincts, which are so hard to 'educate', and, starting from those instincts, or in the ego itself, it often succeeds in overcoming the reality principle, to the detriment of the organism as a whole." Another circumstance leading unpleasure is the series of conflicts coincident with the development of the ego into

"more highly composite organization. Almost all the energy with which the apparatus is filled arises from its innate instinctual impulses. But these are not all allowed to reach the same phases of development. In the course of things it happens again and again that individual instincts or parts of instincts turn out to be incompatible in their aims or demands with the remaining ones, which are able to combine into the inclusive unity of the ego. The former are then split off from this unity by the process of repression, held back at lower levels of psychical development and cut off, to begin with, from the possibility of satisfaction. If they succeed subsequently, as can so easily happen with repressed sexual instincts, in struggling through, by roundabout paths, to a direct or to a substitutive satisfaction, that event, which would in other cases have been an opportunity for pleasure, is felt by the ego as pain… There is no doubt that all neurotic pain is of that kind—pleasure that cannot be felt as such." A third cause is the perception of external danger.

Chapter 2 first discusses traumatic neuroses, specifically the fact that victims have dreams that repeat the experience over and over again. This contradicts the usual function of dreams, which is wish-fulfillment; Freud suggests that either the function of dreaming is upset in this condition and diverted from its purposes, or that the abnormality is a result of the ego's masochistic tendencies. He then discusses a child who's fond of playing a strange repetitive game in which he symbolically reenacts the painful departure-from-the-house of his mother every day, the conclusion of which analysis is that it's hard to tell if the game can be explained through the pleasure principle or if it arises out of another more primitive instinct.

In chapter 3 he notes that neurotic patients are often compelled to *repeat* their repressed experiences instead of *remembering* them. They're "acted out in the sphere of transference". To understand this compulsion to repeat, we must realize that the resistance to recollection isn't on the part of the repressed; it's on the part of the ego, which has both conscious and unconscious aspects. "Resistance during treatment arises from the same higher strata and systems of mind which originally carried out repression"—that is to say, the ego. The relevant dichotomy isn't between conscious and unconscious (because the ego's resistances are themselves unconscious), but rather between the ego and the repressed. The reason for the ego's resistance is that it seeks to avoid the unpleasure that would result from the liberation of the repressed. However, compulsive repetition is itself unpleasurable; what is its relation to the pleasure principle? You might think that although it gives pain to the ego it gives satisfaction to the repressed unconscious, but this is wrong because the primitive repressed instincts aren't actually being satisfied. For example, patients try to feel themselves scorned by the physician or discover objects for jealousy, substituting new objects for the original ones in their infancy. "None of these things can have produced pleasure in the past, and it might be supposed that they would call less unpleasure today if they emerged as memories or dreams instead of taking the form of fresh experiences. They are of course the activities of instincts intended to lead to satisfaction; but no lesson has been learnt from the old experience of these activities having led instead only to unpleasure. In spite of that, they are repeated, under pressure of a compulsion." Similar 'recurrences of the same thing' are observable in ordinary people. All these considerations, including those in the last chapter, lead to the conclusion that the repetition-compulsion overrides the pleasure principle. Of course, usually this compulsion isn't the sole cause of such actions. Children's play, for example, obeys the pleasure principle as well.

Chapter 4 features a long, detailed, scientifically antiquated investigation into the nature of the mind's protection against external stimuli. If the stimulus is powerful enough, and if the mind isn't sufficiently prepared for it by feeling anxious (which heightens the mind's energy level and thus reinforces its defenses), it can break through the psychological defenses and cause trauma. Freud speculates that recurring dreams "are endeavoring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis."

In chapter 5, after saying that repetition-compulsion has much in common with an instinct, he gives a general definition of 'instinct' as "*an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces…or, to say it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in life." It *may* be the case that certain instincts push towards progress instead of an earlier state, but for now Freud will carry his idea to its logical conclusion. If it has any basis in fact, organic development is a result of outside influences. Modifications in an organism

are accepted by the conservative instincts and stored for further repetition. "Those instincts are therefore bound to give a deceptive appearance of being forces tending towards change and progress, whilst in fact they were merely seeking to reach an ancient goal by paths alike old and new." If the instincts are conservative then the goal can't be something not yet attained; it must be an initial state from which an entity departed. Since everything dies for *internal* reasons, the goal is death. Instincts like self-preservation, self-assertion and mastery may have the function of ensuring that the organism will follow its own path to death, or of warding off "any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than those which are immanent in the organism itself." However, all this ignores the sexual instincts, which are the *life* instincts. They want to prolong it and assemble it into ever more complex structures. They operate in opposition to the rest: there's a constant war between them. Though it may seem that in a minority of humans there's an added drive towards perfection, in reality their striving is a result of instinctual repression. It continues unabated, never resting, because the pleasure *demanded* by the repressed instinct is different from the pleasure *achieved*.

Incidentally, Freud's hypothesis is more reasonable than you might think. When life originated, the law of entropy preferred a return to inanimate matter, while forces like electromagnetism fought to increase the complexity of the molecules. As applied to advanced organisms, though, the idea of a dichotomy between two sets of instincts sounds less believable. But it's aesthetically appealing.

Chapter 6 begins with another antiquated analysis of the assumption that, given time, every organism will die of internal causes. The conclusion is that in all entities, even protozoa, there do exist tendencies toward death. So Freud is free to continue his reflections. Next he summarizes the history of his libido theory. Early on he was aware of an opposition between sexual instincts, which are directed toward an object, and others that he called ego-instincts, which remained mysterious. Self-preservation was one of them. Later he realized that the ego isn't only a repressive, censoring agency; it's a reservoir of libido, namely 'narcissistic' libido. Thus the self-preservative instincts were seen to be libidinal. (This idea compels Freud to withdraw self-preservation from the community of death-instincts.) As for the rest of the ego-instincts, their nature has up to this point remained a mystery, because "psychoanalysis has not enabled us hitherto to point to any instincts other than the libidinal ones." In attempting to throw light on the theory of the instincts, Freud suggests that love and hate may correspond roughly to life and death. The sadism inherent in the sexual instinct may be "a death-instinct which, under the influence of the narcissistic libido, has been forced away from the ego and has consequently only emerged in relation to the object." Masochism might be a turning-back-toward-the-ego of the death-instinct, i.e., a return to an earlier stage of the instinct's history. Or it could even be primary (instead of a double displacement). Next, Freud reminds us that the goal of the pleasure principle (to reduce tension) is one of the strongest reasons for believing in a death-instinct. Lastly he flirts with Plato's idea that lovers seek to return to a lost state of union-of-the-sexes, because it provides a potential way to introduce the compulsion-to-repeat into the sex instinct.

Chapter 7 is only four pages long.

I leave on the 14th.

September 14

We drove to the airport at 7:30 this morning only to discover that my employer hadn't paid for my ticket, as had been promised in the contract I'd signed. I don't know who screwed up, but this time I know it wasn't me. Tonight I'll call Scott Kim, my immediate boss, to find out what happened. In the meantime I'm reading Freud's *Ego and the Id*.

While reading the essay on Leonardo da Vinci I recalled a distant memory, probably from the very early stages of childhood. I remember being confronted by the fact that women have vaginas and feeling thereby wonder/disappointment. It surprised me that that's all there is down there. But then I asked myself what I'd expected and could find no answer. I knew it was absurd to expect them to have penises. Still, I was disillusioned: I thought, "If that's all they have, then what's the big deal? What's so great about a slit?"

Thus, Freud's belief that male children are disgusted or contemptuous when they find out that their mother has a vagina--and that this (1) sometimes causes them to be misogynistic later in life and (2) is why ancient mother-goddesses were pictured with a penis--struck me as *slightly* less bizarre than it might have you.

In the beginning of the book I'm reading Freud distinguishes between two types of the non-conscious, viz. the preconscious and the unconscious. The former represents thoughts that are latent and can become conscious at any time; the latter represents 'thoughts' that are repressed and cannot become conscious except through therapy. But after he introduces the concept of the ego he is forced to extend the notion of the non-conscious once more. For the ego is the "coherent organization of mental processes" to which consciousness is attached; it is the agency which supervises itself and "which goes to sleep at night, though even then it exercises the censorship on dreams." It is what represses the unconscious--but the part of it that has this function is itself unconscious. Two consequences follow: the unconscious is extended to include not only the repressed but also the part of the ego that does the repressing; in analytic practice the antithesis between the coherent ego and the "repressed" which is split off from it is substituted for the earlier one between the conscious and the unconscious.

The main difference between an unconscious (Ucs.) and a preconscious (Pcs.) idea is that "the former is carried out on some material which remains unknown, whereas the latter is brought into connection with word-presentations." The question 'How does a thing become conscious?' is better stated as 'How does a thing become preconscious?', to which the answer is 'Through becoming connected with the word-presentations corresponding to it.' "These word-presentations are residues of memories; they were at one time perceptions"--auditory ones[1]--"and like all mnemic residues they can become conscious again. ….[O]nly something which has once been a conscious perception can become conscious, and anything arising from within (apart from feelings) that seeks to become conscious must try to transform itself into external perceptions: this becomes possible by means of memory-traces." Therefore, to make something that is repressed conscious we have to supply Pcs. intermediate links through the work of analysis.

(Note: "Unpleasurable sensations impel towards change, towards discharge, and that is why we interpret unpleasure as implying a heightening and pleasure a lowering of energic cathexis." See my notes on *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. A cathexis is a concentration of emotional energy on an object or idea.)

The ego includes the preconscious, the perceptual and the conscious systems. To account for its unconscious aspects Freud introduces the id: "The entity which starts out from the system Pcpt. and begins by being Pcs. is the ego, and the other part of the mind, into which this entity extends and which behaves as though it were unconscious, is the 'id'." The individual is an id upon whose surface rests the ego, which "is not sharply separated from the id; its lower portion merges into it." "But the repressed merges into the id as well, and is merely a part of it. ….The repressed can communicate with the ego through the id." "The ego is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world…. It seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavors to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns unrestrictedly in the id…. The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions." The ego tries to guide and restrain the superior strength of the id, though it must do so with "borrowed forces" (from the id itself). It's created by the perception of both the external and the internal worlds; i.e., it's a "bodily ego", derived from bodily sensations, "a mental projection of the surface of the body".

Chapter 3 begins with a peculiar discussion of the replacement of object-cathexes by the ego's identification with them. When an object is lost it's set up again inside the ego. "This transformation of an erotic object-choice into an alteration of the ego is a method by which the ego can obtain control over the id and deepen its relations with it--at the cost of acquiescing to a large extent in the id's experiences. When the ego assumes the features of the object, it is forcing itself, so to speak, upon the id as a love-object and is trying to make good the id's loss by saying: 'Look, you can love me too--I am so like the object.' The

[1] "In essence a word is the mnemic residue of a word that has been heard." (Not a good definition.) Visual components of word-presentations are secondary. By the way, "it's possible for thought-processes to become conscious through a reversion to visual residues", but this visual thinking is relatively primitive because it doesn't detect relations between the subject-matter of thoughts.

transformation of object-libido into narcissistic-libido which thus takes place implies an abandonment of sexual aims, a desexualization--a kind of sublimation, therefore." The origin of the super-ego is in a child's early identification with its parents. But that's simplified. What actually happens in the case of a young boy is that he identifies himself with his father and has an object-cathexis for his mother (which originally relates to her breast). But then he sees his father as an obstacle to his sexual wishes regarding his mother, and the son-father relationship becomes ambivalent. The Oedipus complex ends when the boy either identifies himself with his mother or intensifies his identification with his father.[1] The latter is more normal. (The bisexuality inherent in all children complicates the matter, but I won't go into that. It implies that there's also an identification with the mother.) This coincides with the creation of the super-ego, which is "a precipitate in the ego" consisting of one or two parental identifications, and which has the task of repressing the Oedipus complex. The more powerful this complex was, and the more rapidly it succumbed to repression, the greater will be the domination of the super-ego over the ego (in the form of a conscience or an unconscious sense of guilt). Mankind's "higher nature" (excluding, perhaps, science and art) has its origin in the super-ego, or in the process whereby we 'take our parents into ourselves'.

"The ego ideal [i.e., the super-ego] is therefore the heir of the Oedipus complex, and thus it is also the expression of the most powerful impulses and most important libidinal vicissitudes of the id. By setting up this ego ideal, the ego has mastered the Oedipus complex and at the same time placed itself in subjection to the id. Whereas the ego is essentially the representative of the external world, or reality, the super-ego stands in contrast to it as the representative of the internal world, of the id. Conflicts between the ego and the ideal will ultimately reflect the contrast between what is real and what is psychical, between the external world and the internal world."

In the first pages of chapter 4 Freud repeats what he wrote in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* about the life and death instincts. "Life is a compromise between the two trends….and the problem of the goal and purpose of life is answered dualistically." Love and hate he considers to be respective representatives of Eros and death, which may pose a problem: if love could in certain cases be seen to change into hate or vice versa, this would undermine a distinction as fundamental as that between the two instincts, "which presupposes physiological processes running in opposite directions." He concludes that there never is a direct transformation of one into the other. However, sometimes a quantity of displaceable energy is diverted from hostility to love because it has thereby a greater possibility of discharge. But what is this displaceable energy? "It proceeds from the narcissistic store of libido--it is desexualized Eros," answers Freud. (Almost all instinctual impulses and energies are derivatives of Eros.) It's active in both the ego and the id. (But how can desexualized Eros ever be used in the service of the death instinct? Or rather, how can Eros be desexualized, i.e., lose its essence? If it can be altered in such a way as to serve the death instinct, isn't the distinction between the two instincts undermined?)

The last chapter is an investigation of the super-ego and the unconscious sense of guilt that becomes pathological in cases of hysteria and depression.

I'm sick of reading Freud. I don't know how to evaluate his ideas. On what basis can I decide for or against them?

Sunday, September 21

Korea. The people are as friendly and polite as I expected them to be. I like being bowed to (and bowing in return). It's so civil! Scott Kim's a nice guy. My room is in a dorm-like building that houses eleven English teachers.

September 22

[1] The difference between this *parental* identification and the kind described above is that the former isn't a result of an abandonment of the object.

Yesterday afternoon two of my hallmates (Judy and Craig) and their friend (Glen) gave me a tour of the city. We ate lunch in a small Korean restaurant—had kimchi and other spicy delectables—then walked around downtown, which is where our dorm is. Window-shopped and drooled over the beautiful Korean girls. Everyone is thin here. Haven't met one fat Korean. There were no Westerners anywhere, so we were the object of friendly, curious looks. Later we took a cab to a bus station, where we picked up Craig's Korean girlfriend and continued to a mountain called Apsan. Took a "gondola" halfway up; hiked the rest. The view of Daegu was stunning: a sprawling city nestled in a large valley, with little islands of forested hills interspersed among the collections of high-rise apartment complexes. Mountain ranges in the distance. Our next activity was supper. It seems that many restaurants have small square tables with a stove in the center, where the food is sometimes prepared in front of the customer and sometimes kept warm after being prepared in the kitchen. One orders a single dish that comes with about eight small plates of side-orders like kimchi—and in the end there's barely enough room for everything on the table. I made a valiant effort to eat with chopsticks. Failed. Sampled a drink called soju, which is to Korea what sake is to Japan; it was foul. Tasted like a mixture of gin and vodka but without the potency of either, so there's nothing redeeming about it. Afterwards we roamed around downtown—"where the streets have no names"; it's weird—eventually to find ourselves in a bar. Drank for a while, then went home. We split up; I walked with talkative, fat, boring Judy, who is, however, friendly and helpful.

Incidentally, there are too many cars in Korea. And the drivers all seem to idolize Evel Knievel. Motorcyclists even drive on sidewalks.

Scott Kim went over administrative details with me this morning; we had lunch later. Sat cross-legged on mats and ate something tasty and healthy. Rice is served with every meal, apparently. The soup smelled like toilet water and contained all sorts of strange herbs. At 1:30 I went to an internet café with Judy: the old woman in charge looked at me suspiciously more than once, clearly displeased with what she saw. I smiled and bowed, but she glared back impassively.

In a few minutes I'll observe classes for four hours. Tomorrow I'll teach.

….I'm gonna like this job. For some reason I find Korean children cuter than Western ones. Maybe it's because they're friendly to foreigners….and they're good-looking….and their facial features are exotic. Most of the teachers (Korean and foreign) are extremely likable, though some are perky to a fault.

The redolent stench of sewage permeates the air of certain lucky spots around the city. I turn a corner and it slams into me. The system must be outdated. Another oddity: many places (outside) reek of marijuana, but I can never find the source. I suddenly walk into a cloud of it, and as suddenly it's gone.

September 23

I taught six forty-five minute classes; half were difficult and half were fairly easy. Many of the boys were wild and talkative, but I found it hard to be severe with them. That'll change soon. I tried to enliven the stale 'listen-and-repeat' lessons by skipping around the room (not literally), getting close to their faces and watching how their lips moved, speaking enthusiastically, drawing on the blackboard and sometimes making individuals read from the front of the classroom, but ultimately it all seemed nearly futile. In four classes they wouldn't stop chatting, and in *all* the classes I couldn't think of ways to keep them interested. Not even the games we played made much of a difference. At times I just stood there dumbly, totally lost, letting them converse as I desperately tried to improvise. The worst part is that they have virtually no command of English.

It's 10:30; I feel drained. Judy and Craig invited me to dinner, but the thought of spending time with them was so unsavory that I declined. So I'm hungry. But I'm too tired and depressed (lonely, stressed) to go outside. Maybe I'll just go to bed.

September 24

World War I was the most insane event of the 20th century. Look up 'absurd' in the dictionary and it'll say "See 'World War I'". The slaughter of millions, of an entire generation, isn't even the main reason; the fantastic *pointlessness* of it, the tragicomic *irrationality,* is what's unbelievable. One anecdote in particular is telling. It was Christmas day of one year, somewhere on the front; the German and French soldiers in the trenches had been bombing each other continuously for weeks. But today, suddenly, the bombing stopped. All was silent in No Man's Land. Eventually men on both sides climbed out of the ditches and ventured onto the stretch of frozen earth that separated them. Hundreds streamed out. When the enemies met in person they didn't shoot or attack; they shook hands, drank and played cards! For the whole day. Finally they returned to the trenches and resumed shooting.

….Today was better. The kids obviously find my antics amusing: they must think I'm crazy. I like them, but they're almost as hard to control as the Mendocino devils.

Saturday, September 27

Dinner last night with Judy and her middle-aged friend. Later went to an internet café and registered with a Korean dating service. At 11:00 in the morning a few of us went to a two-hour Korean language course, which was intimidating. But at least the teacher was angelically beautiful. At 1:45 I went to work—yes, there's school on Saturday—and I left at 5:30. 'Twas a good day: I was better prepared than in the past and was able to hold the kids' attention. The largest class, which is usually the worst, was today the best: I jumped around from the front to the back of the classroom, from student to student, speaking authoritatively without pauses, not giving anyone time to hold conversations, disciplining the trouble-makers without being mean. […]

September 28

Last night I bar-hopped alone and made no new acquaintances. It was thoroughly depressing. All these gorgeous Koreans were walking around the streets—mostly in large groups—and I didn't have the courage to approach any of them. They were too attractive! At 2:00, half-drunk and desperate for companionship, I went to an internet café and sent emails to ten random girls who were registered on that dating service.

Today I people-watched downtown while reading a Korean grammar book. Wanted to talk to a girl (a bakery employee) who always stares at me when I walk by her store, but the more I wondered what I'd say the less energy I seemed to have, and in the end I walked away disappointed and apathetic. –I hate this meditative shit. My whole body—my whole *being*—is congealed sex-instinct, with the exception of my shyness.

Wednesday, October 1

Last night I went to a taekwondo class to find out how much it would cost and whether it had 'socializing potential'. The answers were: 70,000 won per month, and No. There were only four students, and they were teenage boys. I also visited a place that has practice rooms with pianos. The way I'd discovered it was noteworthy: I was sitting in the teachers' lounge between classes and heard a Chopin étude being played somewhere. For a while I couldn't pinpoint its source—it sounded like a recording—but eventually I realized it was coming from directly overhead. Quite excited, I raced upstairs and saw ten practice rooms, most of which were being used. After a lot of effort, many gestures and the use of props I was able to learn from helpful Koreans that the players were waiting to be given a lesson by a teacher in the other room, and that I could use the facilities if I returned in the morning. But, predictably, in the

morning I didn't want to get up before 12:00. So I took a cab to the school two hours early, at 1:30, with my music under my arm. When I arrived, the practice rooms were swarming with little kids and I was politely told to leave. "No English, no English," the woman said.

October 2

Went to the bakery where the girl who "likes" me works. She was obviously delighted, though also nervous and uncomfortable. As I ate my cookie—feeling a bit uncomfortable myself—she stood nearby and alternately giggled with her coworker and watched me. I asked both girls if they spoke English; they didn't. Damned disappointing. One bag of cookies I'd bought tasted rather bland, so I gave it to her as a kind of primitive mating ritual. I'll go back in the near-future, carrying my grammar book as a conversation-starter.

[…]

Sunday, October 5

At 3:00 yesterday I was invited by the ol' Canadian gang to see a 5th-century burial ground in another part of Daegu. It consisted of a lot of mounds and some signs in Korean. In the evening we got drunk and had a good meal; later we went to a Western bar, which I soon vacated in favor of roving about the streets. Went home lonely and sad.

Today: watched a movie, visited an internet café, bought a Korean-English dictionary. It occurred to me I could meet girls by asking them for directions and starting a conversation if they spoke English. So that's what I did. (Yes, I'm really such a lunkhead I hadn't previously thought of that.) Talked to five or six, but none spoke English.

…Went to a bookstore to ask about Korean language lessons, but no clerks understood me. An eavesdropping man did, though. I gave him my number; he told me he'd find me a teacher.

Ohhh, the girls in Daegu! You haven't seen beauty until you've seen these girls! But you haven't known frustration until you've seen them either.

I just watched *Notting Hill* again. Julia Roberts is pretty, but she pales next to Koreans. –Women.… What pain they cause in my chest! I don't care what you say about Byron, Casanova, Don Juan or any other character, fictional or real: no man has ever been or ever will be more of a born lover than I. You might think I'd tire of adverting to this theme of love, of pining, so often, but every attack of it—so many times each day!—is fresh and new. All the previous states are forgotten, all their artless unsubtlety, all the unoriginality of the feeling, all the knowledge of its worthlessness in the grand scheme. I just *yearn*, and that's all I know.

October 6

It's as though something presses against my chest, something clogs it, it's opaque, hot, perceptible. When I talk about the Korean sex trade with Westerners I feel the discomfort almost as much as when I look at beautiful women. Tonight I walked downtown to the little bakery, carrying my Korean dictionary so I could point to words like 'lonely' and 'friends' when talking to the girl, but she wasn't there. Instead, a Canadian named Peter and his Kiwi friend bumped into me. Peter, a lively guy with a sense of humor, suggested I eat dinner with them at a "bulgogi" restaurant. This involved me in a long conversation about Korean prostitutes, bath-houses with exotic massages, bars with 'extra' services, etc. I'd already been informed by Craig of all these delights—which are deemed fairly respectable and normal in Korea—but Peter offered a more detailed account. For example, even men with wives go to bath-houses where, aside from sitting naked in a sauna and pool, they can get a full-body massage that includes a hand-job by a naked

woman. […]

Beautiful rape.— The lyricism of the first movement of Beethoven's 24th piano sonata should ravish anyone who sheds his modesty and opens himself to being violated.

Sublimation has run its course. I can't be productive again until Eros is satisfied. I just can't work. I can't do anything except love and fuck with a good conscience.[1] Solitude has lost its romanticism; it's stale. I spend my free time exploring downtown or watching movies because work has become something almost to be ashamed of.

Four of us teachers were driven by Scott this morning to the immigration office, where we paid lip-service to the bureaucracy. In the afternoon I took a cab to my usual school, only to discover I'd been reassigned. (New teachers are always shuffled around. My permanent position will be at a school called Chim-san.) I said good-bye to my precious kids with a heavy heart—no amount of bad behavior could stifle their cuteness—and found myself, thirty minutes later, at my new job for the day. The students there were *shockingly* respectful and truly in awe of my style of teaching. They were speechless. The girls also continued in the strange Yung-san tradition of modestly covering their eyes when I knelt down near them to watch their pronunciation. This common reaction isn't merely a result of embarrassment; most Western girls wouldn't behave that way. It's also somehow a result of their Korean upbringing, which ingrains in them a highly civilized, anti-arrogant timidity.[2]

According to Peter, Koreans have no tolerance for marijuana. It's seen as on a par with cocaine, and anyone found in possession of it is sentenced to years in jail. (The smell I've noticed is a spice used in cooking.)

October 9

On Monday, Wednesday and Friday I teach the same children; on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday I teach another group. Five or six classes each day. The kids today were so unlike the ones yesterday I might as well have been at a different school. Everything was transformed; I felt like I was back at Yung-san. The lobby and the halls teemed with little people intensely curious about me; the classes were larger, louder and absurdly more fun. […]

[…]

October 12

[…] Went downtown to meet people. Approached quite a few girls; got two phone numbers. The cashier's and Lee Eun-joo's. I met this lovely university student in a bookstore after stalking her for several minutes. […] "Would you like to go to lunch with me sometime?" She laughed sweetly and said yes. Then we had a short conversation, during which I learned that her personality is as enchanting as her looks. Like most Korean women she covered her mouth, turned her head and laughed when feeling embarrassed or flattered, a gesture that's just maddeningly cute. We exchanged phone numbers, shook hands—I liked the feel of her skin, her diminutive hand in mine—and she told me to call her. In spite of my composure I was head-over-heels in love when we said good-bye. I even permitted myself, by way of celebration, the indulgence of buying a Glenn Gould recording of some of Bach's Partitas, Preludes and Fugues. (Yesterday

[1] Writing sentences that have verve is fun. And often dishonest.

[2] That generalization is only partly true. For example, the Confucian value system sanctions an implicit social hierarchy in which different modes of behavior are appropriate to different levels.

I bought a CD of Liszt's Etudes. I wouldn't wholly discount the theory that Liszt, like Paganini, signed a pact with the devil.)

Downtown is a fantastic place. It's full of streets you'd think were meant exclusively for pedestrians, but cars constantly weave through throngs that treat the roads as extensions of the sidewalks. Bad Korean pop music blares from the speakers of guys stationed on street corners, selling CD's. Greasy indigenous food, such as ground fish-bone on a stick (which I've eaten), is sold in kiosks everywhere. Elderly shop owners squat next to stores and houses to wash vegetables or sell jewelry. I've often imagined them in the foreground of a scene the background of which is changed from a twenty-first-century city to an eighth-century farm, and they look exactly the same. All women walking with female friends hold hands or lock arms; even some men do, and it isn't considered gay. Women don't smoke in public. When I hear Western music emanating from stores I think it's lucky the words aren't understood by Koreans: noisome sentiments seem out-of-place in a land whose conventions are Confucian.

I met a friendly 24-year-old Canadian (named Freedom) this evening, who gave me his phone number. He lives two blocks away. I might use him to meet his Korean friends.

October 15

Ate dinner at Subway, asked the cute (and surprised) cashier if she wanted to exchange Korean lessons for English lessons, she said yes and suggested we meet tomorrow in a bar.

When I approach *hot* girls they're usually curt; when I approach *cute* ones they're friendly. More than friendly. Tonight when I started to ask a 'hot' girl for directions she gasped and ran away.

I learned recently that a certain kind of bishop is called a "primate". For two minutes I couldn't stop laughing. I *live* for little ironies like that!

Thursday, October 16

This was the best day I've had in a long time. Most of it was spent with Sin-ae. After meeting at 12:00 we walked to a coffee shop and talked—or tried to—until 4:00. Strangely enough, she did most of the talking—even though it was all in English and her command of the language is second-rate at best. I did a lot of concentrated listening and patient waiting for her to find words in her electronic dictionary. She's a student who has temporarily withdrawn from her university because she's changing her major from English to fashion-design, which she loves passionately. I asked her countless questions about her interest, not so much because it fascinated me as because I loved watching her talk. The smile, the eyes, the eyelids, the laughter, the mannerisms, the embarrassment: they were all entrancing. I was amazed she wanted to be with me for so long: I feared she was putting on an act. (After my experience with Allison I know how adept girls can be at dissimulation.) But that suspicion was proven wrong later. During our conversation, at moments when she was having particular difficulty expressing herself, she wrote in Korean on a piece of paper that she finally gave to me, with the advice that I give it to a friend who could translate it. At work I asked a fellow teacher and then some students to tell me what it said. Apparently its gist was that she likes me—or "loves" me, to quote the students. And *that*, you will understand, elated me.

My surplus of energy ensured that my classes were fantastic.

On my way home two girls I'd never seen before called out "Hello!" and then "Handsome!" as I passed. –Just goes to show how dependent on one's mood is one's attractiveness.

October 19

Today I really *felt* something for the first time in months. It was sadness, but at least it was an emotion. Caused by Sin-ae. Only an adorable, witty girl I'm truly fond of could have caused it. I met her

downtown at 1:00. She was dolled up in makeup and a skirt, her hair styled prettily. I was overjoyed to see her, not least because I'd forgotten how lovely she is. She has a comfortable face I could stare at all day, in spite of a patch of grafted skin below her jawbone—a relic of a burn she suffered while a child. I wanted to hold her hand as we walked but didn't. The movie we saw was *Matchstick Men*: it was good, but my enjoyment was marred by (first) my doubts about how I should behave and (then) my stupidity in behaving as I did. For twenty minutes after we took our seats I hesitated as to whether I should put my arm around her. I wanted to, and, from certain 'signals', I thought she wanted me to, but it was hard to muster the courage. I kept looking at her and thinking, "Okay, now! Do it now! She just leaned forward: maybe she wants to give me room to put my arm there. Go!" Finally I did, after I'd mentally twisted the situation into a sort of 'test' of my courage. As it turned out, I'd completely misinterpreted her. Right after I'd made the move I asked if it was okay; her answer was a confused look of surprise and discomfort. "No?" I said. The look didn't change, so I removed my arm. "Okay. Sorry." Two minutes of burning embarrassment, and then the feeling subsided into the intellectual equivalent of a dull pain. Afterwards we went to a 'traditional tea'….place, where the atmosphere was peaceful and accommodating to my mood. For an hour we drank our tea and ate kimbap, trying to converse but failing because of the language barrier. Under these conditions I despaired of our relationship, and I wanted to tell her so (in gentler terms). When she suggested she change her off-day to Sunday so that we could be together from morning till night I judged the moment opportune. "Why do you want to be around me? I can't speak Korean. It must be boring for you. Understand 'boring'?" Most of those words were over her head, but 'boring' wasn't. She adamantly denied the charge. "But we can't speak! I no Korean, you only a little English. We can't talk!" Etc. Her only answer was her forcefully repeated suggestion that we both study the other's language. I was so fond of her and so frustrated I could have cried! As I walked home alone I felt such an uncomfortable mixture of mellow contentment, proto-love and doubt-that-I'll-be-able-to-keep-her that my eyes welled up, but I willed them dry.

I've been galvanized. I'm inspired to learn Korean now.

….Studied for six hours straight. I think I'm starting to get the hang of this language.

October 20

At Subway tonight Sin-ae greeted me with a tepid "hello" and said hardly anything else personal. She muttered "fine" when I asked "How are you?". The moment I saw her I sensed the change and adjusted my behavior accordingly. Thus, we were both merely polite the whole time. When I finally asked her if she was free this weekend she reminded me of her fashion show. For some reason she said we could get together *next* week, but I knew it was a lie. A few minutes later I left. […]

I wonder what words passed between Sin-ae and her coworkers last night. When and why did she change her mind about me?

At least I can still look forward to my date with Eun-joo. I'm not sanguine, though.

The beautiful scene in the movie *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in which Oliver places flowers into the Lady's hair and onto her naked body, kissing her all the while, and then makes love to her….—that scene is a crude representation of how I'd treat any woman I loved.

October 25

Two nights ago I ate fried caterpillars. They tasted about as good as you'd expect. In the past month I've also eaten octopus tentacles, which were too leathery for my liking.

I took the GRE today. Did damn well, I think. I enjoyed work, from 2:30 to 7:00: in one class I let three of the students teach for fifteen minutes as I took their places and acted like an obnoxious ten-year-old. The kids *loved* it. They were positively rapturous. Unfortunately it was hard to bring them under control again.

It's amazing how forthright some teenage girls are here. Perfect strangers I meet on the street tell

me I'm handsome and then strike up a conversation! Why can't *older* girls be as amiable?

October 26

The last twenty hours have been eventful (by *my* standards). Late last night I felt distinctly "peck[er]ish", so I went to "Gypsy Rock", a Western club that's supposed to attract horny Korean girls. It was jam-packed and the music was eardrum-destroyingly loud, but by the time I'd consumed 25,000 wons worth of alcohol I felt grand. In the beginning I sat at a table and watched as G.I.s had sex with dancing girls while fully clothed. It was ridiculous. My thoughts hovered around two themes: 'how can anyone be so shameless?', and 'why can't that happen to me?' At 2:30 I walked home empty-handed (though with a phone number). In the morning I had a two-hour lesson with Bryan's wife, who's shy and not a great teacher. Immediately afterwards I met Eun-joo. We were together for three hours; they were the best three hours I've had since my first meeting with Sin-ae. Eun-joo's English is superb compared to Sin-ae's, so our conversation had *momentum*! (Imagine that!) The best part, though, was her reaction to me. I swear she looked like she was having the time of her life. *Constantly* laughing, repeatedly saying I'm a comedian (!) etc., actively engaging in the conversation despite her shyness, innocently flirting, and so on. For a while I thought our relationship had great potential to blossom into romance. Told her she was "kiopda" (cute) after she'd said that a girl loves it when a guy says that because it means he likes her. (Her reaction: blushing, smiling, covering her mouth, turning her head and saying "Thank you".) I'd figured her comment was an unambiguous hint for me to tell her she's pretty, but, as it turned out, I was wrong. Halfway into the afternoon I asked if she had a boyfriend,[1] certain the answer would be 'no'—but it was 'yes'! She's been involved with a guy for three years! That fairly knocked the wind out of me. Later she even asked if he could join us the next time we met (for dinner on Saturday); I was taken aback but agreed. How can girls be so oblivious? Their naiveté is unbelievable. Chris Rock has a simple formula for understanding men's behavior around women: every act of kindness is an offer of sex. "A man opens a door for a woman: 'want some dick?' A man smiles at a woman: 'want some dick?'…"

We parted after what would have been intimate expressions of budding affection if she hadn't had a boyfriend. I loitered downtown for an hour in the hope of….well, you know—but nothing came of it. The only noteworthy event was when a strange man asked me if I'd answer ten questions he was supposed to pose to a foreigner as his homework for an English class. When I said yes he guided me to a park where we could sit, all the while falling over himself with glee. 'A real live foreigner!' Despite my amusement I was wary of this odd fellow who surely had an ulterior motive in bringing me to a park—and who spoke nary a coherent word of English. But my suspicions were baseless: his mind really was as simple as his behavior. We sat on a bench, he gave me a pen and a sheet of paper, he stuttered his pidgin English, I wrote hurriedly, he had a picture taken of the two of us—and he insisted on taking me to a coffee shop. By then I wanted to get the hell away from this beaming freak of nature, but I consented. So he bought me a Cappuccino, we tried to talk, etc., and at last we left. He followed me part of the way home, but since his house was (mercifully) in a different direction I was soon rid of him. Just in time, too. A girl I'd met through Freedom caught sight of me and accompanied me the rest of the way home (her building being next to mine). Min-yeong. Not only is she gorgeous to the *n*th degree—heart-attack gorgeous; she's also the most easygoing Korean I've met, a student of English and German literature, and she loves—*loves*—to laugh. She must have some major flaw I haven't noticed.

[…]

Monday, October 27

[1] Questions like that are common and accepted in Korea, even between strangers, and apparently they don't imply anything.

Had a late dinner at the restaurant where Kang Shin-kun works (the boy who introduced me to his friends on the 23rd.) At 10:30 we met three of his friends—different ones—and sat in a coffee shop for two hours. It's startling how affectionate Korean men are with each other: repeatedly they told me they were really happy to have me as a friend, that I'm "honest"—I have no idea what made them say that—that I'm handsome, that they want to be "close" to me, and so on. One of them touched my thigh several times, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. They aren't gay; they have girlfriends. They just come from a culture that doesn't value aloofness as much as the American—that's less *suspicious* and *hardened* than the American. On Monday night they'll introduce me to a female friend of theirs, an English teacher.

I've never had such a network of friendships!

October 31

[…]

Around midnight I entered a bar and left two minutes later. Then I ambled along the streets, feeling restless but unwilling to get drunk alone, longing for excitement. Soon it came. In an asexual form. I walked past a girl who was craning her head back to get a better look at some stupid play-fighting ahead of me; I thought, "These Koreans. Anything out of the ordinary fascinates them. –But maybe it's a real fight?" I dismissed the idea until it was confirmed five seconds later. I saw two guys facing each other, just staring, motionless, and I walked past them. But suddenly they lunged, hitting each other in the face. Then I noticed blood running down the right temple of one. I walked back to them, conscious of a small crowd of spectators, hesitated for a split second, placed my beer on the kiosk beside which they were brawling, and interfered. I'm not sure why; I think I knew that if I didn't, I'd curse myself afterwards. And in the two seconds before I joined the fun I thought of a story Peter had told me: his friend Troy had once gone to a bar where the only other customer was a drunk G.I. The guy violently pushed a petite Korean away from him; Troy (a big man) yelled at him to get the fuck out of the bar, and he obeyed. When I heard the story I wondered if I would have acted the same way; tonight I thought, "Well, this is a step in the right direction", so I leapt into the fray. Those buggers were hard to pull away from each other. Soon a female friend of theirs raced over to help me, but she wasn't of much use. She just yelled and pleaded with them. A third man, who also seemed to know them, held one back as I held the other, and thus we finally separated them. Or so I thought. With an artificial calmness I fetched my beer and began to walk away. But in ten seconds they were at it again. This time all three guys were involved, knocking over various parts of the food stand (whose owner was happily watching the whole thing from four feet away) and risking their eyes' being poked out on the metal corners. The fight was vicious; it was drawing loud gasps from the mob. So I set my beer down again—somewhat miffed—ran over to the action and tried to end it. The frantic girl was in the middle of it, aided by a stranger who wasn't having much success. Two of the fighters had actually locked hands as they fought; the essential thing was to pry those hands apart. What a grip they had! Only when I used all my strength did they separate. Unfortunately the result was that one of the participants fell to the ground on top of the girl, who remained crying on the cement when he was off her. My immediate task was to bear-hug one guy until the remnants of the fight between the other two had been overcome through the efforts of a few newcomers. With that accomplished I checked on the prostrate girl by politely asking if she was okay—at the same time conscious of a hackneyed chivalric pride implicit in the act. She didn't respond, but she was obviously unhurt, so I grabbed my beer and left.

That was fun.

November 6

Getting tired of the language barrier. Less than 5% of Daegu's population speaks English, which severely limits the number of 'fish in the sea'.

Saturday, November 8

[…]

Work was fine, on the whole. Except for the last class. Which has a surplus of brats. […]

Wilted from exhaustion, I met Eun-joo and her boyfriend outside the bookstore. The guy was personable and curious about me, but it was Eun-joo who made the evening worthwhile. I've never met anyone sweeter, regardless of what her boyfriend said to the contrary. (I said I'd like to have a girlfriend similar to her, and he said, "She's fine *now*, but I know her better…[etc.]".) Her peaceful face and smiling compassionate eyes… She looked like a seraph the whole evening. I'd glance at her and she'd be looking at me with such baffling tenderness that I'd have to turn away out of embarrassment. Sometimes I'd smile back with a warmth that I thought her boyfriend would misconstrue,[1] but the intensity of her Christ-like expression was intolerable. It was as enigmatic as Mona Lisa's but far less sinister: I couldn't tell if it conveyed contentment, pity, yearning or adoration. Or nothing at all.

Young-yoon called at midnight. She's bringing her cell phone out of retirement so we can call each other whenever we want. (I'm buying a phone next week.)

November 11

[…]

The problem with most (not all) popular music is that once you hear it….you've heard it. It's all *right there*, in the open, buck-naked, indiscreet and immodest, unsubtle, lacking all subterranean methods of persuasion. It says, "Here I am! Take me or leave me, but be quick about it!" With the best classical music, on the other hand, when you hear it you've only *just begun* to hear it. There's a world beneath the sound. Secrets compounded on secrets, a tormented and profligate past, a creation of order out of chaos, an instinctive knowledge of mathematics that's tastefully hidden, rhetorical devices unknown to the listener but dominating him—all of which are concealed behind a simple and spontaneous idealism. In short, it's more life-affirming than popular music.

Thursday, November 13

Work was okay for most of the day, but in the last two classes all hell broke loose. […]

Because of the last ninety minutes it became one of those (ever-more-frequent) days that make me want to quit. On the way home, as I was brooding on life's cruelty, it occurred to me that if I were hit by a car tonight I'd be grateful to the driver for liberating me from this vale of tears. I don't even have anyone to come home to after a day like this! No one to hold and love! I'm alone.

…Writing that two-word sentence was the last straw. I burst into tears. Cried for ten minutes. Felt as though I'd have a nervous breakdown. Wanted a gun so I could give my life a theatrical end. I've been alone too long. Far too long. In my own mind I tend to make light of my troubles, but if I'm capable of such an attack of weeping as just happened they must be more serious than even *I'm* aware of. My cheerful anger at life must not be just an act, and it must be less cheerful than I thought. I *fucking resent* how life has treated me. I know it's given me happiness over the years, but it's withheld the only *real, secure* happiness, for the sake of which everyone looks for love.

…I'm content now, listening to Schubert and knowing I have friends.

November 14

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[1] Actually, he would have "misconstrued" it if he thought it was *innocent.*

Went to Subway because last night Sin-ae had asked me to. But she wasn't in the mood to talk. Was obviously depressed: her boss was angry at her for some reason, the problem with her boyfriend was obsessing her, etc. I didn't want to talk either, so I left. On the way home I was surprised that I had to fight back tears: I thought I was past all that! In the privacy of my room I lay down and cried again.

Thank God I have a three-day weekend. I'm too depressed to do anything active.

…Faust's curse against everything: that's what I feel like uttering right now. A curse against my "currently unavailable" internet, a curse against my fickle cell-phone, a curse against my job and my students, a curse against my hunger and my boredom, a curse against girls, a curse against myself, a curse against Koreans who can't speak English… I've been sitting in my chair for an hour, doing absolutely nothing.

[…]

At midnight Young-yoon called me; we talked for over an hour. She still seems smitten with me, always wondering what I'm doing at that particular moment, always wanting to see me, always feeling a great 'security' in our friendship. She thought I was hilarious tonight as I cracked jokes every minute—until the conversation took a grim turn when she said she'd often wanted to kill herself. At first I thought I'd misheard her; then I waited for the sound of laughter that would tell me it was a joke. But it wasn't. She's been so unhappy for so many years that suicidal thoughts have been common. I asked if they still were; she said no. But then she said she'd probably kill herself eventually, "since life is so long and hard". I was in shock—partly because this was all said so matter-of-factly—but I managed to mutter some sentences along the lines of "You should see a psychologist if you ever feel suicidal again" ("Yes, I've wanted to"), "It would give your parents great pain if you killed yourself" ("I know; that's why I haven't done it"), "You should talk to me whenever you feel sad", "I've contemplated the same thing occasionally, so you're not alone". When I asked if she was all right now she replied that it was enough that I cared about her. Then she said she wanted to see me tomorrow and Sunday, the first day at DD and the second to watch a movie with her coworker Hye-young.

[…]

The wretched thing about all moralities—even when they aren't moralistic *per se*—is that they demand continuous obedience. The slightest lapse is a sign of weakness. People are required to monitor themselves at all times. They have no room to stretch, no freedom. Most states of mind fostered by this self-cruelty are pathological in one way or another.

November 17

A series of thoughts relating to the movie *Amadeus* has been bothering me for months. I want to be rid of them, so I'll outline them now. –The title "Amadeus" is appropriate, but it's also misleading in that it draws attention away from the most intriguing themes in the film, those revolving around Salieri. In fact, it could justifiably have been "Salieri", for that man's agony is even more tragic and pathetic than the early loss of Mozart's genius. The religious imagery scattered throughout the film hints at Peter Schaffer's real intentions in writing the story (or, in any case, what *should* have been his intentions). Obviously Mozart is analogous to Jesus Christ: (1) the motif of the Cross is subtly included in many scenes, such as the one in which Mozart's body is thrown into the grave; (2) symbolic narration and dialogue are common, for example when Salieri says that Mozart was "split in half" when he wrote *Don Giovanni* and *The Magic Flute*—split between the oppressive memory of his dead father and his own hedonistic lifestyle, but also between the divine and the human, as was Jesus; (3) Salieri makes constant allusions to God and God's 'chosen one' in reference to Mozart, such as when he says that God would kill His own beloved rather than let a mediocrity share in the smallest part of His glory. The difference between Christ and Mozart is that God killed the former *because* he wanted mediocrities to share his glory, while he killed the latter to *prevent* them from sharing it. The meaning of God has been reversed in a self-conscious, humanistic age. He doesn't forgive and love everyone equally; he loves the few and despises the many. In an era devoid of collective

faith this is the natural interpretation of God, for it grows out of individualism and the universal pursuit of private happiness. Most people would take it to mean that God favors the wealthy and powerful at the expense of the poor and weak, but people who strive for greatness, like Salieri, take it to mean that God loves geniuses and hates the untalented. Therefore, Salieri must bear the awful burden of knowing that he is contemptible in God's eyes. Initially he revolts against this divine bias, which means that he revolts against God. It is he against the Almighty. Life is reduced to a power struggle. Nihilism is the immediate, instinctive reaction to the loss of religion: destruction of the beautiful (out of envy or resentment or contempt or sheer hatred of everything) becomes the goal of life. Values don't matter anymore. The most effective way to revolt against God is to do harm to his beautiful son, which Salieri thus tries to do. But he fails, because God beats him to it—out of pure malice. "I'd rather kill something beautiful myself than let you have the satisfaction of killing it." Thirty-two years later the seed of nihilism in Salieri has rotted away, having been suited only to a time of life when it could be nourished by passion. The old man is now sad and broken and regretful of his youthful selfishness. He tries to kill himself; then he scans the past, comprehensively, one last time; then he reaches the final stage of his life, which is also the last stage of history and the resolution of the dialectic: the serene affirmation of what is. Salieri takes this last step all by himself, without any help or hindrance from God, in a humanistic vacuum, as it were. He smiles peacefully and declares that he is the patron saint of mediocrities, that he is absolving all ordinary beings of the sin of being ordinary. This absolution wouldn't make any sense if it came from someone who was *so* unremarkable that he couldn't recognize real greatness; nor would it carry much weight if it came from someone who was so extraordinary that he had no acquaintance with the condition of mediocrity (for then it would be indistinguishable from pity and would indicate more about the man's own kindheartedness than whether the sinners really 'deserved' absolution[1]). Only a man familiar with both extremes of human nature, a Salieri, could utter such an absolution. He knows what it's like to be mediocre and he can appreciate and understand greatness, so he can 'weigh' both sides against each other and conclude that ordinary people aren't worthy of God's contempt, that they aren't sinners, that they're simply people who have been wronged by the Almighty (or Life).[2] This knowledge lets him feel a kind of Christian love for them, and it's through this love that he attains peace. He is the Christ of the masses, the Christ of modern society, the Christ whose Crucifixion (perpetrated by *God*) is his *existence*—the man torn between greatness and dullness as Jesus was torn between divinity and humanity. Mozart is the hated Christ who is worshipped and crucified in despair as modern man first examines himself and realizes that 'noble happiness' is achievable only by rare people. He represents the dialectical antithesis, the perspective that is overcome when all remnants of religion are cast aside (all 'idols') and an *honest equality* is established among men, heralded in the transformation of Salieri into the Christ of the modern masses. –But in the end Mozart has the last laugh. He knows he's the best; he knows all this reasoning is just so much rationalization for a lack of talent (though it's also *true*). So he happily leaves us to justify and forgive our own mediocrity while he goes on creating beauty.

November 22

Work was awesome. I played games and wrestled with the kids most of the time.

….This is one of those beautiful moments that remind me not to give up on life. They happen only at night, and they can't be communicated through writing. I wish a girl were with me.

–I don't know why I like girls. They're practically all I think about, and I don't know why. There's nothing logical about it; reasons are superfluous in love. But it doesn't matter. That's the most marvelous thing of all: I follow my feelings instinctively, not intellectually. I'm being *led* by a guide millions of years old, blindfolded but trustful. Something that *feels* so right must *be* right. I don't need a justification for it.

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[1] It would actually *enforce* the separation between the two types of people.

[2] A flaw in my interpretation is that *fundamentally* Salieri is unremarkable. There isn't enough genius in him to allow the 'downward' look that's necessary for absolution. It would make more sense for Mozart to absolve us than Salieri.

I know now that nothing except love can fill me with real *joy*. Nothing else comes close. I've written profound essays, but the experiences were anticlimactic. Only my time with Sangeetha came close to satisfying me.

November 27

Johann Sebastian Bach[1] is first among the gods in the shrine of music. He is so imposing a figure that not even Beethoven, not even the Ninth Symphony, overshadows him. *Nothing* can. If God pointed to the Creation and said, "You didn't do *that*!", Bach could retort, "But I recreated it and made it intelligible--and I *never rested*, unlike you!" He's *perfect*, if only by virtue of his power. He stands at the head of the most remarkable two hundred years in the history of music--and I can't think of a better herald of the Golden Age than a man who was more modern than modernity itself[2] yet more ancient than antiquity. His oeuvre is not only immortal; it is timeless. …I'm listening to the Chaconne from Partita No. 2 for solo violin. It bears the signature of Bach as clearly as the universe bears that of the supernatural.

…He's so *confident*! He never doubts himself. Even Mozart has moments of doubt--and makes juvenile mistakes--for example when he laughs too hard at himself in his music. (That's self-consciousness, and self-consciousness is a form of doubt. But Mozart is able to turn it into a virtue.)

Saturday, November 29

[…] While I'm copying things I might as well copy the two essays I'm submitting to graduate schools as "writing samples". They're a decent representation of my usual writing in college. They were written in my sophomore year, which explains most of their flaws (like superficiality).

A Refutation of Kantian and Benthamite Ethics
May, 2001

Bentham and Kant present two diametrically opposed theories of morality. Bentham's is consequentialist: it states that actions can be morally evaluated only on the basis of their consequences. (For example, lying is immoral if it leads to a person's death.) Kant's position is deontological: actions are intrinsically either right or wrong; their results do not matter at all. Since Kant's ethics are based on his metaphysics, and Bentham does not even have a metaphysical system, the former theory is more complex than the latter. But that does not mean it is more correct; indeed, Kant's ethics are more *incorrect* than Bentham's--though Bentham's are more superficial than Kant's.

Bentham has both a psychological and a moral theory. The first claims that humans invariably desire to maximize pleasure and minimize pain; the second claims that actions are good only if they result in an augmentation of pleasure and are bad only if they increase pain. The moral theory is what concerns us in this paper. By this theory, the words "right" and "wrong" are meaningless without reference to utility. (For instance, what is right is what promotes the general welfare.) In regard to actions that affect society as a whole, an individual should forsake his own pleasure for the greater collective happiness.

Kant, on the other hand, does not think that morality is even possible unless humans have free will. In other words, we cannot make use of practical reason, which is the branch of knowledge concerned with ethics, if we do not have the ability to govern our own actions. But this poses a problem: all of our experience leads us to believe there are causes determining how we think and

[1] His monumental human dignity demands that he be called by his whole name.
[2] He even has something for heavy metal, not to mention jazz.

act, so how can we be free and hence moral? Science teaches us that there are innumerable biological, chemical, and physical laws that determine how we act; experience teaches us that it is possible to feel *compelled* to do something to the extent of barely having free will (lust is an example); philosophers teach us that we are only deluding ourselves in believing in freedom. Kant responds to these objections by making a distinction between the thing in itself and the phenomenon. The first we have no access to; the second is everything we are commonly aware of, including facts that seem to refute free will. Now, according to Kant we are rational beings, and this means that in thinking or acting we cannot but assume ourselves to be free. (Philosophers may construct theories refuting free will, but it is impossible to *act* on this belief.) Kant discards the philosophical objections by relegating the debate between freedom and determinacy to the thing in itself, and hence to obscurity: theoretical reason cannot know anything about the thing in itself, so it cannot know if people are *fundamentally* ('in themselves') determined or free. This uncertainty is unavoidable, so we might as well continue to assume that we are free--because, as was already stated, we cannot act as moral agents except on the supposition that we have free will.

It is as rational beings that we think we are free; hence morality, being based on freedom, must be grounded in reason. We cannot pursue *ends* in our moral actions, for this would subordinate us to causes in the phenomenal world (in this case desires, which are extrinsic to pure reason) and hence destroy our freedom, so we must act only for the sake of acting rationally. This means that we must find the ground of our moral actions in reason itself, which gives rise to the categorical imperative: "act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." In other words, if the maxim of an action is contradictory with itself when universalized, it is wrong. Because the categorical imperative is the only moral law that pays no heed to consequences, it is the only one compatible with freedom.

On the basis of this theory Kant can criticize Bentham on the following grounds: (1) Bentham does not take into account the limits of theoretical reason (instead, he accepts the world as it appears to us and ignores the theoretical necessity of the thing in itself); (2) there can be no true freedom in Bentham's system, since people are motivated by consequences--which implies that Bentham's morality is not a morality at all. It is at most a convenient way of acting.

Bentham, on the other hand, criticizes Kant for the following reasons: (1) the categorical imperative, which requires people to act only for the sake of duty, is an impossible ideal (because people always act on empirical stimuli); (2) obeying the categorical imperative may result in actions that do not promote the greatest happiness, so it is morally repugnant. Of course, this last objection presupposes rather than establishes Bentham's own ethics, so it is useless. The first objection is an unproven psychological assertion. How do we know people cannot act solely on the recognition of duty? This claim is virtually impossible to prove, which is why Kant can resort to the argument that in cases where the only motive we are conscious of is the desire to act in accordance with duty, we can assume that we are indeed doing so (for the truth lies in the realm of the thing in itself).

On the whole, if we accept Kant's basic premises (e.g., the incapacity of theoretical reason to determine if we are truly free), it is difficult to refute his ethics. The reason is that he can always resort to the thing in itself: he can always say, "we don't *know* that we are unfree", "we don't *know* we can't act on duty alone". However, this response deteriorates into dogmatism: it ends all discussion. Even if the thing in itself exists, falling back on inarguable claims is philosophically unacceptable. If nothing definite can be said about the thing in itself, it ought to be ignored and "*phenomena*" analyzed instead. Thus we should follow Hegel (and Nietzsche) in judging that Kantian ethics are empty and unreal.

Bentham's ethics do not fare well either. His psychology, of course, is simplistic--it is a fact that people do not always act to augment pleasure and avoid pain--but his hedonistic ethics are distasteful as well. First of all, it is impossible to make interpersonal comparisons of utility. We have no access to each other's states of mind, so we have no idea how much pleasure other people experience. Secondly, Bentham does not provide a satisfactory argument as to why happiness should be pursued rather than pain, or why it should be pursued *at all times*. It is through pain that

we become stronger and that we acquire a greater appreciation of pleasure. Thirdly, pain and pleasure are sometimes indistinguishable from each other. For example, it is not always easy to decide whether one is happy or sad, or neither. Similarly, sadness can be gratifying, as when one enjoys it for its tranquillizing effect on the mind.

However, an important point is implied in Bentham's system: no absolute, categorical morality exists. Virtually every psychological and sociological investigation of morality lends support to the claim that morality, far from being required and determined by the nature of reason, is a relativistic human creation that is caused and influenced by innumerable social factors. There is simply no good reason to believe that certain actions are *inherently* right or wrong, i.e. that morality is *a priori,* like logic and mathematics. Hence there is no good reason to believe in a deontological ethical system.

To conclude, this paper has argued that both Kant and Bentham are mistaken in their ethics. Kant, it seems, eventually has to become dogmatic, since his theory cannot effectively be argued against, while Bentham ignores essential facts about human existence. Lastly, we have argued that there is no 'intrinsically right' morality, which implies that consequentialism (when not hedonistically utilitarian) is the best theory by which to evaluate the moral status of actions.

Marx's Critique of Bourgeois Rights
May, 2001

The term "rights of man" refers to the abstract entitlements that were delineated in the "Declaration of the Rights of Man". They include liberty, property, security, resistance against oppression, and political equality. Each one implies a freedom *from* something or somebody, even when it is expressed as a freedom *to* something. They all presuppose separation between humans and the universal pursuit of self-interest; that is, they *abstract* from social relations. In his essay "On the Jewish Question" (1843), Karl Marx criticizes this abstraction from reality, this reliance on the empty concept of *man* rather than the fuller notion of *social being*. This paper will expound and evaluate Marx's critique of the "rights of man", with some assistance from Durkheim.

In his "Theses on Feuerbach" (1845), Marx states that "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations." In other words, there is no abstract individual that represents the species, no 'general type' of humankind. The society in which one matures determines the kind of person one will be. Thus, it cannot be stated that humans are rational, self-interested beings, for--apart from the fact that these terms can have various meanings--not all societies have been characterized by universal rationality and self-interest. For example, India has not historically been an especially 'rationalistic' civilization; its religions have been predominantly mystical, and its ideal human being has been the Brahmin rather than the rational philosopher or scientist. An important reason for this, according to Marx, is that India's social relations have been more personal than 'legalistic' and impersonal; i.e., communal life has been the norm rather than self-interested isolation or the instrumental rationality of capitalism.

Marx thinks that the notion of 'right' itself is bourgeois. It presupposes private property, which is a historical development and not in any sense 'natural'. That is, the universalization of private property, which occurs with capitalism, sets every person against every other in the economic sphere and thus necessitates that, in order for the economy to continue functioning, the rules governing human interaction be based on *division* rather than *unification.*

Hegel and other early bourgeois political theorists might retort that these divisions between humans are resolved in the state, which transcends the particularities of civil society. In the state everyone is an integral part of the whole, no one is 'protected against' anyone else; i.e., there is no separation between individuals. But this is precisely what Marx denies. He does not think that the state can possibly transcend civil society or the economy; rather, every contradiction of civil society

is reflected in the government. Since the latter is only an instrument of the former, political emancipation (an essential part of the doctrine of human rights) is not *human* emancipation. It is, like all bourgeois rights, merely an abstract principle with no basis in reality or society. Thus, "human equality", the underlying thread in all bourgeois rights, is itself unreal.

In order for there to be genuine human emancipation, *real individuals* must not be pitted against one another for the sake of abstractly realizing their ostensible essence through the state. This means that private property must be abolished, because it is the cause of divisive social relations and the rights that correspond to them. Now, Marx's contention that we are creatures formed by society implies, according to him, a specific moral ideal: the universal realization of our social essence. This occurs in communism, the society in which people are no longer constrained by social relations they cannot understand or break out of. In communism we will develop ourselves in all directions, for private property--which is a power over us in capitalism, alienating us from our social 'essence'--will no longer exist. That is, human rights themselves will no longer exist [or be explicitly recognized]; they will simply be transcended ('unnecessary') in our relationships with others.

Durkheim disagrees with this theory. First of all, he thinks that the augmented division of labor in the modern world rather than capitalism per se is what ought to be the focus of analysis. The modern division of labor abolishes the mechanical solidarity of primitive societies, which is characterized by common interests and a common consciousness, but in doing so it constructs a more durable social bond: organic solidarity. This is defined by interdependence between citizens and a beneficial social hierarchy. Individual differences are highlighted; separation between people is the norm, and this is indeed good, for (1) it is only through separation that we become properly social, and (2) the recognition of rights presupposes solidarity. (That is, unless we were already in a social bond we could not invent rights that enforce separation.) Hence, abstract bourgeois rights are *good*: they enhance organic solidarity, prevent people from harming each other, and strengthen our pre-existing social bonds.

However, this critique of Marx is inadequate. Durkheim confuses the issue by conflating capitalism with its extreme division of labor. The two are, no doubt, intertwined, but private property in the means of production is by no means an integral part of any detailed division of labor. (There was no private property in the means of production in the Soviet Union, but there was a highly detailed division of labor.) This suggests that in a future communist society we could abolish private property--thereby the unnatural rights of man--and salvage the beneficial effects of the division of labor, such as interdependence. Thus, there would be a kind of social separation that increases solidarity, but there would be no abstract rights to undermine the latter. For, even if it is true that these rights do presuppose social bonds, it is also true that they *weaken* these bonds by encouraging political and economic conflicts. Aside from these practical errors, Durkheim does not even address Marx's philosophical claims--viz., that there is no human essence on which rights are based, and that rights (and the state) cannot transcend the contradictions of civil society. In short, Durkheim's critique of Marx fails to refute Marx's central claims.

Indeed, the only major flaws in Marx's arguments seem to be in his account of human emancipation. He claims that under capitalism we are alienated from our work, our fellow beings, nature, and our "species being" (our consciousness that we are part of a single species); under communism this will cease to be the case. This philosophical theory, even when fleshed out in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844), is vague and not sufficiently supplemented with psychology. After the discoveries of Freud and his successors, as well as philosophies like existentialism that emphasize despair and the irrationality of existence, it has become doubtful that it is *possible* to emancipate humanity collectively or individually. Suffering, for example, is inherent in the human condition, and it is suffering that leads to conflict between people. Since this suffering would exist even in a society without classes and a state, there would remain social ills that would probably necessitate a police force, which in turn would require the recognition of abstract rights. Moreover, we must agree with Durkheim that there is a kind of individual isolation

> that is a necessary part of existence: in a certain 'private' sense, individuals are more fundamental than the species. Hence there is something to be said for individual rights. If Marx would retort that rights would not have to be made explicit in communism because they would be automatically respected by everyone, we could, as already stated, rely on the fact of universal suffering to demonstrate that there will always be interpersonal conflicts that necessitate the articulation of rights.
>
> In any case, these considerations do not lessen the force of Marx's critique of abstract rights under capitalism. As this paper has argued, rights serve primarily as a veil over the conflicts inherent in civil society and private property; that is, they do not "free" humans to do as they want, as they are supposed to. Their social effects are largely illusory--for they are more political than social--which also suggests that they do not enhance organic solidarity.

I'm not looking forward to revising those papers.

December 1

[…]

I listen to Beethoven and to Mozart in different ways. Obviously in both cases I'm conscious of hearing equally great music.[1] However, when I listen to Beethoven I hear astonishing *hard work* and incredible *determination*, while when I listen to Mozart I hear something *natural* and *miraculous*. I can relate to the one, but not to the other. The one is human, the other isn't. Beethoven is more *admirable* than Mozart, but Mozart is more *extra-ordinary* than Beethoven. --That's splitting hairs, of course. Compared to the rest of us, both are gods.

Wednesday, December 3

I've already remarked that Koreans tend to be more polite than Westerners--sometimes obsessively so;--but they can also be more *im*polite. I don't understand it. It defies explanation. I'll give you two examples: last night at D.D. Y-y told me that H-y had been surprised the first time she'd seen my new haircut. I asked jokingly, "Was it a bad surprise?" Y-y answered, "Certainly", as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. This wasn't the answer I'd expected. Thinking she'd misunderstood me, I said, "She didn't like my haircut?" "Of course not." I hesitated in perplexity. "Uhhh… Haircut: bad--ugly--?" (with gestures for emphasis). "Yes." "…Oh. Okay." Then she elaborated on why it was so bad. Later Sin-young arrived. One of the few things she said to me--or *indicated* (with her hands)--was that I had a lot of pimples on my face. Y-y agreed. They also remarked that S-y had quite a few on her forehead, and they showed me. But…what the hell?? Who points that out to someone?! Especially when it has nothing to do with the conversation! Besides, I don't have *that* many! --I've decided that Koreans are more preoccupied with appearances than Americans.

Maybe that rudeness can be explained by the fact that Koreans are often less socially mature than Westerners, and since their minds are attuned to appearances, it's natural they'll analyze one's looks when it isn't appropriate.

December 5

I can't believe I have nine more months of this damned job.

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[1] I admit that many of Beethoven's compositions are more impressive than Mozart's, but that's because the former's talents had twenty more years to mature than the latter's.

December 8

Work went well. My unusual energy (lately I've been tired; my immune system is weak from the cold) lent me charisma (a loan I'll probably have to repay with interest tomorrow). Didn't even have to rely on games to consume the last five minutes of class. I simply *taught*, intensely. After work, went to D.D. because Y-y had asked me to. That was as blah as I'd known it would be. Two offspring of Aphrodite claimed a monopoly on my attention, but they didn't talk to me much. Were clearly good friends: laughed and played together rambunctiously as Young-yoon and I watched. "They're usually not so wild," she said. "I think it's because you're here. They're embarrassed. They want to talk to you, but they're shy." […]

Jeez, I just remembered that when I asked them if they spoke English they practically *hid* behind Young-yoon! They're twenty-two years old!

These days I spend so much time writing, reading and listening to music for one reason in particular: it keeps me from stabbing a knife through my panting heart. "Sssseeeeexxxx….sssseeexxxx," my chest whispers. "Llllooooovvvve…." I've always had monomaniacal tendencies—from 14-17, it was *self-change*; from 18-19, *Marxism*; from 19-22, *philosophy/journal-writing/acquiring knowledge* (with hundreds of ill-fated whims peppered across the years)—but rarely or never has the perpetual *idée fixe* of GIRLS not been offset by some other faddish craze like *Nietzsche* or *screenwriting* or *thesis*. Since I've arrived in Korea I haven't let myself read a single book in English, so I've had fewer defenses against myself than in the past.[1] It's been all *me me me*, i.e. *sex sex sex*.

Don't patronize me with your "You poor romantic fool, you think sex and love are something they're not. You're setting yourself up for disappointment. Neither is the source of happiness you seek. Sex isn't a 'miracle', as poets say; it's just a pleasurable experience. Love is almost as much torment as bliss." I know that. I know I'll be disillusioned. I know I won't stop feeling the pain I feel now. But this isn't some rational calculation of the best means to attain a desired end. This is *brute instinct*, in all its Faustian absurdity. I'm a machine, and that's all. –Besides, as long as I know the final result will be 'Moments of Ecstasy' I'm content to yield to the machinations of Eros. As long as I can take a break from sex in the middle of it and remember that *I'm inside a girl*, or pause while kissing someone to reflect that *at this moment I am* ***perfectly happy***, I'll have achieved something worthwhile.

Come to think of it, I'm pretty happy *now*. I'm listening to one of the six most sublime movements in Bach's collection of cello suites, namely the Prelude of No. 3, and I'm writing something artistic at the same time, while eulogizing love and savoring its anticipation with my whole being, as I become for myself an Other who is touched by God…

Another piece I love is Liszt's ode to passion called "Un sospiro".[2]

Tuesday, December 9

Trying to fall asleep last night was hellish. In addition to my usual insomnia, which ensures that it takes three hours for me to lose consciousness, I was plagued by thoughts of Dave having wild sex with his beautiful 22-year-old, contra-bass-playing sex-mate. She isn't a girlfriend—he says their casual relationship is already fizzling, after two weeks—but she *is* a lover, and a damned good one apparently. Most Koreans are supposedly timid in the sack, but this girl is so eager and tries so many positions that she wears her lover out. So last night as I thought about her I was agonized with lust. There was no way out of it: not even internet porn could save me. It was truly nightmarish. As I lay in bed, crushed by the eternity of those moments, my body acted out the frantic, surreal anguish into which my mind had contorted itself.

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[1] However, learning Korean has been an effective 'distraction,' as I implied in the paragraph's first sentence.

[2] Jae-eun has played both that piece and "Gnomenreigen". She's nineteen years old.

December 10

Last night Ji-su wrote in her email an odd question: "Chris, we are friends, right?" I asked if that question meant she wanted us to be *only* friends; her answer was Yes. Apparently she'd just met a guy she used to like who hadn't liked her, and he'd changed his mind: now he likes her, and she wants to be his girlfriend (even though he's leaving the country in February!). She apologized profusely, but that didn't allay the pain.

When I came home from work I felt so lonely that I sat down to write a short story describing a boy's daydream about a girl. Autobiographical, of course. (The girl is the one I saw in New Zealand on New Year's Eve, whose beauty stunned me so much I described it in my journal.)

I'm going to visit Jae-eun during my short Christmas vacation.

December 11

Karl Marx had one of the greatest names in history. Two syllables that are so aesthetically compatible they somehow seem to have a meaning. *Karl Marx*. If it's possible for a name to be pithy, his is.

Here's what I wrote last night:

> I saw her in New Zealand, on New Year's eve. In a town called Dunedin. To describe nature's handiwork in that privileged spot on the globe would be to insult it, for no description could do it justice. Dunedin itself is nestled in a valley whose walls are hills that hide the Pacific from view. One might lament this false modesty of Mother Nature, which contrives to conceal what is most over-awesome from splendor-starved human eyes, but that would be unjust: Her mischief was done with an end in mind. She knew that delayed gratification is *more* gratification—that a climb enables one to savor the pleasures of the summit more fully. In the meantime, there are the hills and the harbors to overawe one. For they are indeed overwhelming, though not in the sublime sense that the ocean is; they are instead merely *perfect*, that is, both epitomizing and existing outside human standards of beauty. Against the backdrop of this scenery I saw the girl who seduced and captured my imagination as fireworks streaked across the night sky, which loomed above us unperturbed.

Why can I not write good literature? I can't picture the great writers in history writing something like that. I don't know what it lacks, but it lacks *something*. I don't mean that the description is unnecessary and purposeless, for the end of the story will refer to the beginning, and all the sentences—from the one that starts "One might lament…." to the one that ends the paragraph (but especially the one starting "She knew….")—will be seen as symbolic and related to the main theme.[1] I mean that…does it come across as didactic? Is that its flaw?

December 14

In my short defense of the [anti-postmodernist] idea that the 'Indo-European logic' is applicable to every language [which I subsequently deleted because it was idiotic] I forgot to give a suggestive example: in English there are two uses of the verb 'to be', namely the one that means 'existence' and the one that attaches a predicate to a subject. ('I am' vs. 'I am a boy.') Although the same word is used in both contexts, its logical analyses are different. Now, if the Indo-European logic were indeed only Indo-European—as some authors I've read have suggested—is it likely that one of its most essential and obvious 'laws' would

[1] Theme: the longer I have to wait for love, the greater my happiness will be when I find it.

be equally essential and obvious in the logic of a language whose origin was totally separate from that of the Indian and European languages? No. Yet Korean not only relies on the distinction between *uses* of the verb 'to be'; it represents the uses by different *words*. Thus 'exist' is *iss-da* and the copula is *i-da*. Clearly that aspect of logic isn't Indo-European. Which leads one to think that the rest of it isn't either.

Anyway, if Asian languages were so fundamentally different from European ones as to be based on another logical system, communication between the races and translation of their languages would be impossible.

Yes, logic is as universal as math. (Is math *based on* logic? Reducible to it? Tough question.)

Monday, December 15

I like Eun-sung more every time I see her. Her sense of humor is her best asset: it's dry and perceptive. Similar to mine. She sees humor in all the situations I do.

…I can't even imagine the level of stupidity that must preponderate in an administration that begins a war *certain* of (1) victory, (2) extensive material destruction in the defeated nation, (3) fierce resistance by the defeated population, (4) prevailing poverty, poor education, and anti-Americanism, and, in short, (5) incalculably high costs of reconstruction after the war—yet unwilling to plan-in-advance how to address these problems, choosing instead the method of *ad hoc* experimentation while (meanwhile) chaos ensues, social upheaval occurs and the rest of the world looks on in contempt.

The deeper I delve into the Korean language…the deeper I sink into the mire.

What priceless cultural artifacts are languages! In the process of using them we're interacting with the past. If you really want to understand a culture (including its past) you have to learn its language. I've already learned so much about Korea!—about the importance of social status, the ubiquity of 'formal' politeness,[1] the ideas and professions that were admired in the centuries when the language was being formed, etc.[2]

December 16

[…]

Yes, it's a game. That's the first essential insight. Not until now have I really appreciated it. I've always thought, 'Be yourself and you'll find someone eventually', but that's a benighted view. If pretty and intelligent women are my target, I can't just be myself. I have to be manipulative (unfortunately!). I have to study them, know what they want and become that. I have to be an actor. To play the game well I have to be confident and 'hard to get'.

But that's only the beginning. There's a whole 'science' behind this Game of Romance, as I learned tonight while reading an online book about dating. The book is full of useful Machiavellian wisdom on how to manipulate girls into your bed and connive your way into their hearts. Though its style is amateurish and its author has no dignity, it's inspired me. I'm in the same 'from this day forward' mindset that caused me to spend so many hours of my adolescence forming 'resolutions'. The self of the past was romantically unfledged; the self of the future is a disciple of Don Juan. An arrow aimed at a bull's-eye. […]

The best part is, it'll be fun! It's what youth is all about! I remember when I was prematurely weary of the Game, before I'd even experienced it and understood it. I still haven't and don't, but at least I

[1] 'Formal' not as opposed to 'informal' but rather 'content'. For example, in speech there are four basic levels of politeness: the formal polite, the informal polite, the informal 'less' polite and the friendly, all of which are determined by sentence-endings. (Those levels are only the very, very beginning. The extent to which grammar/language is organized around the need to be respectful is astounding.)

[2] For instance, to be respectful to an elder you're supposed to call him "Teacher". Thus, I'm supposed to call my boss "Kim *Sonsaeng-nim*". Clearly, then, teachers were respected in the time of King Sejong.

understand it's invigorating.

It's also a bit nihilistic, but who cares?

December 17

Didn't fall asleep until 7:30 this morning. It's the same every night. My mind is hyperactive.

December 21

It's 5:00 a.m. Haven't been able to sleep; have written more of my pedantic story; have realized I've reached—or nearly reached—the pinnacle of romantic desperation. I'm ready to do almost anything to meet people. Tomorrow—I mean, today—I'll go to the bookstore and be friendly. Won't plan what I'll say beforehand: when I plan, I doubt, and when I doubt, I fail.

…Four hours of sleep, then a non-lesson with Bryan's wife, then a taxi ride downtown, then the revelation that I didn't have my wallet, then a search for eye-candy to talk to, then the irony that the one time I'm determined to approach it is the one time I can't find it, then the walk home, then the sigh of relief as I found my wallet in my room, then the listening-to-Chopin-as-a-soundtrack-to-depression. Now the return to the cold cruel world outside to reserve a train ticket to Seoul.

…I reserved the tickets. I also said "Do you speak English?" to about ten girls; only two did, but they gave me their numbers. They were browsing the English section of the bookstore, so it was a safe bet they knew the language. […]

Reimposing a daily regimen of exercise as part of my heroic effort to become a womanizer. *This* time I *promise* I won't quit. Within five months I'll be an underwear model.

December 23

Going to Seoul tomorrow morning.

…Insomnia is a curse I wouldn't wish on many people. Every night I lie in bed with eyes wide shut for hours, struggling to fend off Venus-begotten demons. I think about love, then I chase the thought away. Then it creeps back as a vision of me cuddling with a girl. Then I roll over and concentrate on the music I'm listening to…and then I wonder if I'm destined never to fall in love…or to hold a girl's hand while we're walking downtown…or to feel fulfilled. I wonder what Eun kyung thinks of me, whether I have a chance with such a pretty girl. I wonder how I should proceed when dating Koreans. I wonder how many people are having sex at that moment. Then I turn on the light and pace the room, cursing because I don't want to study Korean but there's nothing else to do, so I pick up a book and read it in the hope that drowsiness will soon ambush me, but it never does, it takes hours of false starts and teases before the final wave of slumber washes over me, and by that time it's too late to get a good night's sleep, even if I sleep till noon. So I'm tired the next day, and yet the next night I can't fall asleep till 5:00 because I woke up at noon, and so the cycle continues, even when I wake up at 10:00. Ahh, curse it all.

Saturday, December 27

When I saw Jae-eun in the train station I was disappointed. She was homely. A plain face with braces and no features that stand out in memory; a boyish, small body. Not only that; she was quiet. *Really* quiet. When I talked about music she just listened and muttered her assent; when I didn't talk at all, there was dead silence. It was terribly disappointing. We met her father in Lotte World (a gigantic mall-complex), where he works. Energetic man, thrilled to meet an American. He drove us to the motel where I was

supposed to stay, but its Christmas price was so exorbitant he offered to let me sleep in their apartment. When we arrived I was introduced to Jae-eun's mother and sister, neither of whom spoke English (nor did the father); then I was ushered into Jae-eun's room, where the two of us took turns playing her piano for hours. But most of the time *she* played. Her talent dwarfs mine. I'd already known, 'abstractly', what she was capable of, but when I heard her I was amazed. Though she doesn't practice more than a couple of hours every day, she was able to dash off piece after piece that would have taken me months to learn. She could even sight-read difficult pieces with few errors! Her modesty presented a comical contrast to the reality. Imagine Tchaikovsky insisting, in response to a fan's praise, "No, no, I'm not a better composer than Mussorgsky. I'm really not that good. God didn't bless me with much talent; Mussorgsky has more." Jae-eun's humility was almost equally ludicrous. She made Chopin's Scherzo in B-flat minor—and his Polonaise in A-flat—look easy. When I asked her to play "Gnomenreigen", which she hadn't touched for five years, she was so successful I was convinced that after two weeks of practice she'd be able to play it flawlessly.

Later that night her father brought home a cake. As we were eating it, sitting in a circle on the rug next to the TV, I began to understand Jae-eun's antipathy: he acted like a child. Aside from getting drunk on soju while telling me (many times) how much he enjoys its taste, he talked about absurd things like his friends' opinion that he looks like James Dean; he disrespected his daughter by explaining to me why he'd made her quit piano lessons two years ago[1] (as if she weren't there—even while she translated!), namely because she'd spent so much time playing that her grades had suffered; he fawned on me while ignoring his family; he kept the conversation focused on himself. I glanced at Jae-eun every few seconds; it was evident from her fidgeting and forced smiles that she was ashamed. Her mother was the docile servant of her father that most Korean women seem to be—"Do this. Get that." "Okay."—which was, perhaps, nearly as embarrassing to Jae-eun. (Several times that evening and during the next two days I tried to help the mother wash dishes or simply bring a bottle of water to the table, but the father gestured as if to say, "No, that's her job. Don't trouble yourself.") The contrast with *my* parents—with my mom's forceful personality and my dad's simple goodness—was extreme. I was relieved when I said goodnight to them.

Jae-eun had scoured the internet for info about a bus tour of Seoul, so the next day we braved the weather. The tour was pitiful. We walked around one of the old "palaces" that are scattered throughout the city, but, compared to European palaces, it looked more like a thatched-roof cottage than the residence of a king. We also saw a "traditional village"—which was a collection of eight "grand houses" rather than a village *per se*—but that was another waste of time. Seeing the War Memorial museum was an appropriately dull ending. After lunch/dinner, we took the subway to the concert hall where the Nutcracker ballet was to be performed. It was at this point that my Seoul trip finally became worthwhile—but not because of the ballet. Because Jae-eun grew a personality. She'd been making tentative attempts at breaking out of her shell all day long, but not until our two-hour wait for the ballet to begin did her sense of humor blossom. Our conversation revolved around…well, not a topic, but a style, namely "*witty repartee*". *Badinage*. That kinda stuff. Pure fun. Pure flirtation. I found myself attracted to her, not only because of her wit but also because when she laughs she's fairly pretty. By and by my thoughts coquetted with the idea of kissing her. I considered draping my arm across her shoulders when the ballet began, but my shyness prevented me. Until after the intermission. When we sat down for the second half I furtively lay my arm on the back of her seat…and wondered…and hesitated…and took the plunge and maneuvered it onto her body. She smiled at me and pulled it closer. '*Yessss!*' For the next hour I happily felt my arm tingle and then grow numb from its awkward position, as we savored the romantic Romantic music of Tchaikovsky and Jae-eun rested her head against my shoulder.

The next day brought more romance. We decided to stay home and listen to music in her room. Her mother having peeled apples for us, we snacked and talked happily while sitting cross-legged on the floor. Finally the anticipation grew unbearable; in a moment of laughter I leaned over to kiss her…and met her nose instead. Because she'd been laughing she was caught unawares and had instinctively, in a defensive motion, moved her head away. I retreated and asked if I might kiss her; she nodded. Then told me that was

[1] That's the main reason she hates him.

her first kiss ever. Her first kiss! I was chagrined when she followed up the intimate moment by playing silly little games with me, like 'rock/paper/scissors' and a staring contest, but after a while I put us back on track by kissing her again. From that time on we spent the whole day hugging, lying in bed, kissing, etc.

[…]

December 31

In the morning I felt healthy, so I went to work. That was my undoing. While in the unheated building I got so sick that I went straight home without eating dinner to lie in bed. Though it's New Year's Eve I'm confined to a sick-bed. But there's a silver lining in every situation. In this one it's that my physical weakness has had an oddly beneficial effect on my creativity. I lay in bed and let my thoughts scamper whithersoever they would; in time they alighted on a theme. Philosophy. I thought about Nietzsche's dictum that a philosopher who has traversed many kinds of health has passed through an equal number of philosophies. Then I remembered my terrible drunken episode at Wesleyan when it seemed I was flirting with death, and I thought of the thoughts that had crossed my mind then—the nihilistic truths I perceived and wished I hadn't. From there the parade of memories that marches past the mind's-eye of a convalescent became less fascist in its organization: each thought wended its way heedless of the others that nudged and jostled it. Memories of essays I'd written, ideas I'd had, conceits I'd spun crowded around each other… From the melee emerged tangible new entities that refused to live in a vacuum. Hence, I sat down to make them concrete.

I realized that the question of how philosopher-academics can all be wrong and *I* be right, which has pestered me for a long time, has a simple solution. You know I'm fond of belittling professors' pretensions to philosophy; you may not know that such disparagement has always been more polemical than 'seriously intended', as a simple statement of fact. I've certainly believed it, but I haven't *thought* about it. A moment ago I did. Now I finally understand that their self-stylization as philosophers has confused me: they really do have as little in common with the type as I've pretended to myself. They have different goals, different passions, different beliefs. Though they pose as inquirers determined to find Truth at all cost, wherever their journey may take them, be it into labyrinthine analyses of past thinkers, they're really just…intelligent *parasites*. They fritter away their lives in serious amusement that provides them with a paycheck. Along the way they get swept up in the grandeur of the themes that nominally fascinate them, and they come to believe that not only are they contributing "in their own small way" to the unveiling of truth, but that anyone who truly respects philosophy can show his reverence only by worshipping it in the way they do. 'Our way or none at all!' (How many times in history must that be the unrecognized creed of schools of ignorance?) The truth is that, in timidly aiming glancing blows at their target, they ensure they'll never hit it. They forget that a book can be packed into three pages, that truth can be packed into twenty. That it's permitted to bypass a whole *literature* as merely aesthetic. –In short, their self-frustrating over-cautiousness (which they think is the best way to philosophize in this day and age (—*therefore* I'm wrong)) stems from their having different ambitions from the philosopher's, ambitions grounded in skepticism and a passive nihilist's boredom. Their mistake is to measure my work with the yardstick by which they measure their own *discursive* work (one of the marks on which yardstick is that razor-sharp conceptual precision is an essential criterion for judging that a book is to be taken seriously).

…I'll write down my other, more interesting ideas later.

January 3, 2004

Unhappy all of yesterday. Felt as though I was incapable of loving another person, my mind being too *sick*; was certain I'd dislike sex when it finally happened; thought I'd become so contemptuous of

mankind one day that 'wormwood' would grow luxuriantly in my soul. Fortunately, as my health slowly returns those prophecies become proportionately less convincing.

Skipping work again today. Sore throat, earache and runny nose.

Nothing's good, nothing's bad, nothing's sad unless we make it so. My death could be tragic or it could be the most trivial incident of the day. Whatever you want it to be. Choose, and give me a destiny.

Jae-eun will stay with me for the lunar new year, which is three days long. I'm looking forward to seeing her. (I'm really starting to *miss* her, believe it or not!) But I wish she hadn't had to lie to her mother.

Cold sores are all over the inside of my mouth. Don't know why. It's a Korea thing—happens to Koreans more than Americans.

Wrote a long, uncharacteristically unpretentious email to Rebecca. We correspond, on average, once a month.

I might never write anything that's an "ornament of the world", and I might never *be* an ornament of the world. If true, that saddens me. I'll have failed at one of the four purposes of my life. But the target to which I pin my fate is no adornment, no (however necessary) superfluity. It has a predominantly utilitarian value. For I'd like to help make possible conditions that would (1) alleviate mass suffering and (2) allow the educated public to know the pleasures I know. And *more* besides. I would like a future version of myself to experience the pleasure of anticipating his favorite composer's next symphony, his favorite poet's next epic—without at the same time having to be callous toward the misery of a majority of the human race. Utopia, you say? Perhaps. Implausible…but not impossible. […]

On the other hand, that may all be moonshine. It's likely that mankind will come within a hair's-breadth of destroying itself in a catastrophic war that occurs right around the time when it's reaping the effects of global warming. There's no place for a postmodern intellectual in this scenario. Doesn't matter. I'm not that selfish. What matters is the aftermath of the war. How will our descendants pull their tattered species together? Will the old bloody cycle begin anew, with warlords and city-states vying for dominance? How will the hapless commoners have the energy to *do* anything, knowing that all this has happened a thousand times before? Won't they be *sick unto death* of their toil and pain? Won't they finally feel a kinship with history that no one has felt before? The *intelligentsia* will, but what good are they? So the question still stands: centuries after this war, how will the world look?

I don't know. But I'm getting so depressed thinking about it I have to stop.

January 4

I've been here three and a half months, and I've met no one, male or female, whom I *truly* like. With the possible exception of Jae-eun.

…As I was writing an email to the possible exception, feeling, as I have for three days, that I'm living in some kind of 'limbo', I thought of the inevitable nuclear war, and the tears flowed freely. My problems and mankind's cooperated in convulsing water out of my eyes. No self-pity—don't delude yourselves, you haters-of-me—but just a helpless *awareness* of it all. Merely an appropriate way of experiencing the knowledge that life is worthless.

My room is a cockroach sanctuary. And graveyard.

I didn't study much Korean last week, but tonight I've been making up for that. I'm so disgusted with myself for not being further advanced with this language *by now* that I'm going to study it intensely for weeks. My friends speak passable English, so our conversations are usually in only that language. But no longer. In the past two hours my intuition has been confirmed that I'm able to formulate 'intermediate' sentences if I take five or ten seconds to plan them in advance. It's remarkably satisfying.

If my computer's keyboard had the Korean alphabet on it I'd write half my emails in *Hanguk-mal*.

…Bought cockroach-spray and went on a killing spree. I have killing sprees every night—at 4:00 I turn on the lights, the room is swarming with critters, and I smash as many as possible—but this time it

was *systematic*. Must have killed thirty or forty. I also cleaned the room.

One of the boons of my Korea trip is that I don't have to be in America during the campaign season. It always makes me queasy: politicians are almost heroically cynical.

Going to the doctor tomorrow. Don't care about the expense. I want to eat again.

January 5

From what I've read of Howard Dean, he's the first gifted politician in decades to have some integrity. While his opponents—mediocrities like Kerry, Gephardt, Lieberman—play their old political game, saying anything and everything to bash the candidate they know is strongest, even if it means pandering to prejudice and conservative instincts in mainstream America ("'When you were asked by *The Concord Monitor* about Osama bin Laden, you said you couldn't prejudge his guilt for September 11th," Mr. Kerry said, scrunching up his face and turning incredulously to Dr. Dean. "What in the world were you thinking?"'[1]), Dean doesn't compromise his convictions, doesn't pretend to be a centrist and doesn't have to twist anyone's words to make him look idiotic. (His answer to Kerry: "As an American, I want to see Osama bin Laden get what he deserves, which is the death penalty. But I was asked that question as a candidate for president of the United States. And a candidate for president of the United States is obligated to stand for the rule of law.") While Gephardt says he's confident he can beat Dean—bullshit and more bullshit—Dean says that *he* (Dean) *isn't* confident of success. He elaborates: self-confidence leads only to laziness. I don't remember a politician ever saying he wasn't confident of success. It's refreshing. Another example (of good versus evil): Dean warned that if he isn't the Democratic nominee, thousands or millions of young people across the nation who support him will not vote in the presidential election. He's absolutely right. But his opponents interpreted that as a threat, ridiculed it, said it proved his ambition is personal gain rather than unity of the party. ("He's threatening to take his followers with him if he loses!", whatever the hell that means.) –How revoltingly hypocritical! If *their* ambition were party unity, they wouldn't be viciously attacking the man who has the best chance against Bush.

Anyhow, Dean will probably win the nomination (if he doesn't flaunt his "ultra-liberalism").

Got medicine for only $10. It must be some kind of a miracle drug: I've used it once and feel nearly cured.

[…]

Sunday, January 11

Went to the bookstore to meet people. The first attempt was unsuccessful, but the second wasn't. The girl I talked to was…a model for poetry.

Her eye (I'm very fond of handsome eyes)
  Was large and dark, suppressing half its fire
Until she spoke, then through its soft disguise
  Flash'd an expression more of pride than ire,
And love than either; and there would arise
  A something in them which was not desire,
But would have been, perhaps, but for the soul
Which struggled through and chasten'd down the whole.

[1] Yeah, it must seem incredible to you, Kerry, who'd *never* say something so honest, sensible, and scornful of public prejudice and patriotism. You'd "*pre*judge" anything if it would get you votes.

Her glossy hair was cluster'd o'er a brow
  Bright with intelligence, and fair and smooth;
Her eyebrow's shape was like the aerial bow,
  Her cheek all purple with the beam of youth,
Mounting, at times, to a transparent glow,
  As if her veins ran lightning; she, in sooth,
Possessed an air and grace by no means common,
Her stature…*small*—though not a dumpy woman.

Jung-hee is no typical Korean. She's outgoing, self-confident, funny, phenomenal at English, an independent girl who knows nothing of conservatism and is not at all concerned with appearances. The only trait she has in common with her countrywomen is her beauty. During our four hours together we had lunch and drank coffee—and talked, and talked, and talked. She dates only foreigners, incidentally; Korean men she considers bossy. We'll meet for dinner this weekend.

Ji-su happened to see us together, so she called me later to hear the details. I enjoy talking to her. I can say *anything*; she's absolutely without pretense or snobbishness. She's my confessor.

Cleaned my room. Got down on hands and knees and *scrubbed*. To prepare for Jae-eun's arrival.

Bought Korean tapes.

For years I've thought that Nietzsche, in spite of all his 'radicalness' in questions of moral and nonmoral value, wasn't nearly radical enough. Inasmuch as he unquestioningly made judgments about what is good or desirable or "needful" (aphorism 290, *La Gaya Scienza*) he remained a prisoner of conventional ways of thought. In reality, such judgments are always unjustified. Like the belief in truth (but *more* so), they're relics of *animality*. Think about that. Every aesthetic judgment, every moral judgment, every nonmoral judgment of value is ('in the final analysis') *groundless*. How can that knowledge be endured? How can we continue to live while knowing that? Only in one way: suspending the knowledge, 'dancing around it'. Living life in an extended suspension of disbelief. That's one of the themes of my philosophy (such as it is). The spirit of inquiry takes us to a point that can be only *intellectually* appreciated; we're forced to double-back on our trail because truth is unlivable. We can but peer at it from the shore and collect shells as souvenirs.

[…]

January 18

At 2:00 I met a girl who Ji-su had said wanted to go on a blind-date with a foreigner. When I saw her walk into Burger King (our meeting-place), not knowing she was the one, I thought, "Wow. Wouldn't it be wonderful if *she* were the girl?" Then she asked "Are you Chris?" –Donghee (or Lisa) is one of those exquisite beauties I see constantly on the street but assume I'll never meet.

I ate lunch as she…watched…and talked, fortunately. She seems to have been spared the congenital Korean disease of shyness: asked plenty of questions and looked relatively comfortable the whole time. Later we went to a coffee shop, then to her bus stop. […]

Went to Kyobo bookstore for two hours while waiting to meet Jung-hee for dinner. Read an introduction to *The Brothers Karamazov* that disturbed me so much I finally had to *force* myself to stop thinking about it. Probably you find it peculiar that I call a piece of literary criticism "disturbing", and I can give no reason for my judgment that you'll understand. In itself the introduction was perfectly harmless. Just a thoughtful interpretation of a novel. However, for *me* all forms of critical thought are so difficult, painful and oppressively urgent that I can't engage in them without longing for peace. That's the real reason I haven't read anything since September. In a way my life has been on hold for four months (really nine—

since I finished my thesis). I can tolerate this hiatus only because I know that soon, or eventually, it'll end and I'll again be wholly involved with the questions that obsessed Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche. Especially those related to the question "*How should I act*?" Is it 'better' to live for myself or for others?[1] If for others, I must devote myself to them completely; if for myself, I must never do anything for another person that requires self-sacrifice. (I already know my answer to this particular question will involve a compromise, but what compromise would be acceptable to my nature, which needs to do something—*be* something—*anything*, as long as it's—wholeheartedly?)

By the way, if I remarked last year that I. A. Richards' book *Principles of Literary Criticism* is too philosophical (or 'psychological', or whatever I said), I was out of my mind. Or I was looking at an old or expurgated edition. Today I skimmed a copy, and it was fascinating.

At 6:30 I had dinner with Jung-hee. Slow and uncomfortable at first, but things improved when we left the restaurant to play pool. (*Christ*, she's sexy! Bending over the table wearing her spandex…) Then we walked around aimlessly; then we went to a coffee shop and discussed philosophy, religion, and relations between the sexes until 10:30. That was the best part. Passionate conversation, especially on my side. […] And then criticisms of religion and the (astonishingly popular) idea that science and religion have two separate mental 'spheres' that are unrelated (and therefore that they don't interfere with each other, and therefore that they're compatible, i.e., that they can both be believed at the same time without the believer's being embroiled in contradictions)—for they make mutually contradictory claims about the nature of the world! How can someone believe that the universe was created in six days and that it was created in m(b)illions of years (or one second, depending on how you look at it)? Either *one* is right or the *other* (or neither)—and even *more* meager (practically non-) defenses by my (barely) religious companion.[2]

[…]

Thursday, January 22

Yesterday I still felt sick--and it was cold outside--so Jae-eun and I stayed in my room the whole day. Listened to music most of the time, but also watched two (musical) movies and read philosophy (she Nietzsche, I Hegel--or rather, Hyppolite's commentary on the *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's* ***Phenomenology of Spirit***[3]). True to form, she spoke about twenty sentences the whole day. Today we wanted to go downtown, but it's so cold we're staying inside again. During both nights we spent hours cuddling and doing all that stuff--not including sex. […] But my biggest gripe is: How can she write such great emails and be a total mute in person?

At least it doesn't take much to entertain her.

Part 1, chapter 1, section 2, subsection 2 ("The end point of the development of natural consciousness") is *for me* more important than the preceding pages because it contains more information I didn't know, and it tackles problems I have more trouble understanding. Sadly, it's also less comprehensible. Its basic purpose is to explain why "the goal of knowledge is fixed as necessarily as the series of progressions" in the development of consciousness, and why consciousness is impelled constantly to advance to new levels, but in the course of the explanation it touches on other questions. For example, it

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[1] The question is meaningless, but it has to be asked—and answered—because we're human beings. What is the best way to live, and why? The problem has been in the front or the back of my mind for nine years. I know that an attempt to answer it satisfactorily is foredoomed—no answer (even one attacking and 'refuting' the question) will give me a modicum of contentment—but an attempt to *ignore* it would be even *more* ill-fated.

[2] The idiotic idea is basically an *ad hoc* invention by and for the masses, who recognize the validity of science but don't want to abandon religion.

[3] An excellent book. After I read it I'll read Kojève's lectures. --I'm returning to intellectual matters. I'm tired of stalling and studying nothing but Korean.

describes how Kant overcame the problem that "if truth is defined as an accord between subject and object, it is not clear how this accord is ascertainable, since representation cannot step out of itself to give proof of its conformity or nonconformity to its object", namely through some strange conceptual maneuver that has something to do with "transcendental consciousness", so that in the end "the problem of truth is shifted away from the relation between consciousness and its object to the relation between common consciousness and that within common consciousness that goes beyond it--transcendental consciousness." It also tries to explicate Hegel's statement that "consciousness is for itself its own concept; it is therefore immediately the act of exceeding the limited, and, when the limited pertains to it, the act of going beyond itself." Hyppolite: "To say that consciousness is concept of knowledge is to say that it transcends itself, that it is *in-itself* what it must become *for-itself*." "Consciousness is not a thing, a determinate Dasein; it is always beyond itself; it goes beyond, or transcends, itself." In a footnote in the previous section Hyppolite had said "The self…in posing itself in a determinate manner contraposes itself to itself and thus negates itself and transcends itself." And now an extended quotation that will probably mean nothing to anyone who hasn't read the whole passage:[1]

> Common consciousness goes beyond itself; it transcends itself and becomes transcendental consciousness. But the movement of transcending itself, of going beyond itself, is typical of consciousness as such. Every consciousness is properly more than it thinks it is, and because of this its knowledge divides: it is certainty (subjective) and as such is contraposed to [itself as][2] truth (objective). Thus, since it must continually go beyond itself knowledge is disquieted. And this disquiet, which Hegel describes in existential terms, is unassuaged so long as the end point of the process is not reached, an end point set necessarily by the "given" of the problem: "The goal is the point at which knowledge need not go beyond itself, the point at which it discovers itself, and at which concept corresponds to object and object to concept. Hence, the progression toward this goal also has no possible resting place and is not satisfied with stopping prior to the goal." Consciousness' knowledge is always knowledge of an object; and if by concept we mean the subjective side of knowledge and by object its objective side, its truth, then knowledge is the movement of self-transcendence which goes from concept to object. But the whole of the *Phenomenology* shows, precisely, that this opposition is reversible. The object is the object *for consciousness*, and the concept is the knowledge of itself, the self-consciousness of knowledge. But this consciousness is deeper than it thinks; it finds the object insufficient, inadequate to it; and we can also say, even more properly, that it is the object which must be identical to the concept. In either case, this discrepancy, present in common consciousness itself, is the heart of the phenomenological development and directs it inexorably toward its goal. Thus, this whole development is characterized by an immanent finality, which the philosopher glimpses. Phenomenology is characterized in relation to ontology (the science of the absolute in-and-for-itself which will first be presented by the *Logic*) precisely by this discrepancy between consciousness and its concept, a discrepancy that is but the requirement of a perpetual transcendence. [In a footnote Hyppolite writes that "there are differences within the logos too, and there is a movement immanent in it, a dialectic different from the phenomenological dialectic. But the differences within the logos are differences 'in content itself.'"]

(A brief discussion of the respective meanings of 'death' for Dasein and for consciousness follows.) Copying all that helped me understand it. But I don't think I understand what Hyppolite means by "[the self-consciousness of knowledge] finds the object insufficient, inadequate to it; and we can also say, even more properly, that it is the object which must be identical to the concept"--for both statements, and the latter especially, seem obviously wrong. I'm willing to concede that the object of self-conscious knowledge may in some sense be inadequate to the knowledge. After all, the object is a 'finished', 'given' Dasein and

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[1] I might as well have quoted the whole passage to begin with.

[2] Translator's addition. I'm having trouble understanding the *reason for* and the *significance of* the addition.

knowledge is a dynamic, self-transcending activity. I'm also willing to concede (for now) that this inadequacy, as well as the 'anguish of self-transcendence' inherent in consciousness,[1] is what drives consciousness ever forward to new levels of truth and being. But I won't concede that knowledge *finds* its object inadequate to it. Knowledge blames its torment not on the object but on itself: it never doubts that its goal is to know the truth of the object, and therefore that it *itself* is inadequate rather than the object.[2] There's no imperative that the object, which is truth, become identical to consciousness; the imperative--the only *possible* "imperative", viz. the *conscious* one, consciousness's own self-imposed imperative--is that consciousness (knowledge) become identical to truth.

Moreover, it's surely perverse in this context to call the concept the "self-consciousness of knowledge". That's the concept of *consciousness*; the relevant concept here is that of the *object* (whatever it may be: nature, morality, God, etc.). The "subjective side of knowledge" isn't self-consciousness; it's the certainty attached to a particular concept of the object.[3] Sure, the object is for consciousness, but it is also *separate* from consciousness--as is presupposed by the very endeavor of seeking knowledge about it, about something external to knowledge--and its concept mustn't be confused with consciousness's. The concept of the object--even knowledge of the object--has (analytically speaking) nothing to do with 'knowledge of knowledge'; and since the object is what determines the truth of knowledge, self-consciousness is ("analytically") irrelevant to the truth of any kind of knowledge except that which is *of it* (though of course it's empirically presupposed and so on).[4] [5]

January 23

Last night we got naked, etc. At one point she asked me what love is, and what the difference between "love" and "like" is; I told her my thoughts and then she confessed her love for me. Her affection showed itself in other, physical ways too (aside from the usual kissing), which I needn't go into. In the morning we took showers in an inn nearby: the water hasn't been working in my building for two days.

[…]

In section 3 ("The technique of phenomenological development"), H. begins by explaining in what sense Fichte's and Schelling's idealisms are "subjective" and Hegel's is "objective": Fichte and Schelling think that "the I always remains occupied with itself", always reflects on itself. "It discovers itself in the object which it thought it had discovered, but in this way the object disappears."[6] The recognition of that disappearance is the endpoint of the development of common consciousness. In short, the first two philosophers (or at least Fichte) emphasize (1) the presence of the I in everything--that the I *is* everything--and (2) the philosophical methodology of focusing not on the object, which strictly speaking doesn't exist, but on the element of the self-reflection of consciousness which is in all experiences (because the

[1] Surely the two 'inadequacies' ought to be distinguished.

[2] (In retrospect, that statement seems foolish. I shouldn't make claims about what knowledge 'thinks' until I've followed it through its whole course of development.)

[3] There are two meanings of the word 'knowledge' that aren't distinguished in Hyppolite's discussion: the (usual) one relating to truth and certainty, and *awareness*. In some spots H. seems to have the first meaning in mind; in others, the second. Therefore I can't say with certainty that I'm not misinterpreting him by understanding 'knowledge' in the first sense. However, eventually--*continually*--the *Phenomenology* has to concern itself with that kind of knowledge, so my remarks aren't irrelevant.

[4] You may think that sentence contains a non sequitur or two--*I* did when rereading it--but it doesn't. It's a syllogism. (My mind loves to construct syllogisms unconsciously--and then tends to get confused by them, thinking they don't make logical sense because the wording is obscure or a few (implied) steps haven't been written down.)

[5] (Practically all of what I wrote was a result of ignorance and misunderstandings.)

[6] I can never decide whether to place the period inside the quotation marks or outside them. The former looks better, but the second is more sensible (1) when the original text doesn't contain a period and (2) because only a period *outside* the quotation marks is really an end to *my* sentence, which began outside them and must therefore end outside them.

philosopher already knows, before he begins his exposition of the history of consciousness, that recognition of the primacy of self-reflection is the goal of conscious development). Hegel, on the other hand, thinks that in order to be scientific the philosopher must surrender himself completely to the object and its "internal necessity". He may do no more than impartially observe the self-development of common consciousness; he may *not* 'externally impose' his own knowledge of the development's endpoint on his 'observations'. He must, in short, be objective. So much for the methodological difference. A long quotation will elaborate on the corresponding 'substantive' difference.

> It is quite true that [consciousness'] knowledge of the other is a self-knowledge. But it is no less true that this self-knowledge is a knowledge of the other, a knowledge of the world. Thus, we discover in the various objects of consciousness what consciousness is itself: "The world is the mirror in which we rediscover ourselves." The point is not to contrapose knowledge of knowledge to knowledge of the other but to discover their identity.[1] ….If we wish to conceive consciousness, we must ask what the world is for it, what it gives out as its truth. We shall objectively discover consciousness itself in its object, and we shall read its own history in the history of its objects. Inversely, and here subjective idealism is rejoined, consciousness must discover that that history is its own and that in conceiving its object it conceives itself. At the end of this phenomenology, knowledge of knowledge will not be contraposed to anything else; according to the very evolution of consciousness it will be in effect self-knowledge and knowledge of the object. Since this object, Hegel's absolute, is spirit in its full richness, we can say that it is spirit that knows itself in consciousness, and that consciousness knows itself as spirit. As self-knowledge, it will be not the absolute that is beyond all reflection but the absolute that reflects back on itself. It will thus be subject and no longer merely substance [as it is in Schelling].

Later Hyppolite summarizes Hegel's argument that the object, the in-itself, which for consciousness is truth, is not fixed but changes continually as consciousness tests its knowledge, finds it inadequate and rejects its old ideas for new ones.

> When consciousness' knowledge changes, its object also changes. The latter [was] the object of a certain knowledge; this knowledge having become other, the object also becomes other. In testing out its knowledge of what it took as the in-itself, what it posited as being the absolutely true, consciousness discovers the latter to have been *in-itself* only for it. This, precisely, is the *result* of experience: the *negation* of the preceding object and the *appearance* of a new object, which in turn engenders a new knowledge.

That's surely a confusion, however.[2] The idea of the in-itself is always the same, because it's nothing but the abstract idea of 'truth', of what is. There's nothing in it that can change. 'Nature', 'the absolute', 'God', whatever you want to call it or whatever form it takes in the various disciplines, it's merely the contentless ideal.[3] For example, the object of science, the in-itself which doesn't change and which is the truth that scientists throughout history have tried to express, is physical nature. These scientists have constructed models of nature that they have believed to be replicas of reality, and thus reality itself, but from the vantage-point of enlightened hindsight we can see it was a mistake and misunderstanding to call these models 'reality' (i.e. the in-itself), for they were in fact merely models. They were concepts believed to

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[1] Schelling recognized this identity, but in his hands it had an artificial and unconvincing form.

[2] (The reason I wrote so much about this "confusion" is that I think Hegel could use it to argue that there is no fixed in-itself or in-themselves separate from consciousness. If I'm wrong about his intention, and if he means only that the in-itself has a different *meaning* for successive stages of consciousness--and that this fact has implications for the growth and self-understanding of consciousness, etc.--then what I wrote in the following paragraph doesn't matter.)

[3] To say that more clearly: the truth has content, but until we discover that content the ideal of truth is effectively 'contentless' for us.

have been 'known'; they were not the object itself. Therefore, when they were rejected the *object* didn't change; *interpretations* of the object changed. It does make some sense to say that if the in-itself is understood in a different way it is a different in-itself, but that's misleading and not entirely true. It's also the *same* in-itself, for it's the same nature. --That applies also to the truth of philosophy, the truth of religion (God), the truth of the social sciences (the way society functions), etc. In short, the *object* isn't negated;[1] the *meaning* of the object for a particular moment of consciousness is negated.

There are other ambiguities in the discussion, such as that inherent in the word 'truth'. 'Truth' can refer both to the thing itself and to a true interpretation of it. (That ambiguity is more relevant than you might think.)

January 24

I'll backtrack in Hyppolite's book and comment on section 1, "The problem of knowledge". According to Hegel, "philosophy is not a logic, an organon, which, before knowledge, deals with the instrument of knowledge". It is a science of the absolute: it ought not to remain forever in subjectivism by "halting at the point of reflection, at the knowledge of knowledge", as Kant and Fichte did. "It is necessary to pass beyond the critical point of view and, as with Schelling, to start straight off with the absolute identity of the subjective and the objective in knowledge. The knowledge of this identity is primary and it constitutes the basis of all true philosophic knowledge." Hegel also argues that any philosophy which treats knowledge (or consciousness) as a medium through which truth reaches us is condemned to relativism, "for if knowledge is an instrument, [(1)] it modifies the object to be known and fails to present it to us in its purity, [and (2)] the subject and the object are separate. The absolute would then be distinct from knowledge. The absolute could not be self-knowledge, nor could knowledge be knowledge of the absolute."

In Schelling, phenomenal knowledge is cut off from absolute knowledge. He doesn't explain how it's possible to have the former once you have the latter. To avoid this dualism--and also to avoid the arbitrariness of a philosophy that begins abruptly with absolute knowledge, "rejecting different positions and declaring that we wish to know nothing about them"--Hegel returns to the point of view of common consciousness, "which assumes the distinction between subject and object", and tries to show how it leads to absolute knowledge. "Phenomenal knowledge will be the knowledge which the absolute gradually has of itself."

I'm unclear on how Hegel reconciles his statement that a philosopher must begin with the identity of the subjective and the objective with his statement that a philosopher must *not* begin with that identity but rather with the knowledge of common consciousness, which assumes a dualism. Presumably he means that the philosopher already knows the endpoint of consciousness's development and has that endpoint in mind when he retraces consciousness's history. But then another question comes to mind: how has the philosopher arrived at his knowledge of the identity of subject and object? He can't begin his phenomenological description (history) of the absolute without first knowing that the absolute is an identity, but (according to Hegel's own account) he can't arrive at that knowledge without first experiencing all the stages of consciousness. Maybe Hegel would brush aside the question by changing the 'he' in that sentence to 'spirit' and declaring that spirit already *has* gone through all stages of consciousness (the proof of which is precisely that it (read: Hegel) has become aware of the absolute identity at its heart), but this is a specious defense, for, again, it presupposes what hasn't been established yet, viz. that at least half of the absolute's nature is *subject* (which subjecthood is necessary in order for Hegel to be what his defense presumes him to be, namely the voice of the absolute). In other words, Hegel is caught in a vicious circle. He can't make the leap from the perspective of his own isolated individuality to that of spirit without presupposing that it's actually *spirit* that is making the leap (a less self-conscious spirit to a more self-conscious spirit). He postulates and describes the absolute, and then he says that he was able to do so because the absolute was

[1] Actually, in the case of religion it is: by atheists. For them, religious truth is the denial of religious truth (i.e., the denial of religion).

speaking through him (i.e., because the absolute's nature was as he described it). But that's a *petitio principii*. The only other defense I can imagine he'd give is that while *spirit* must pass through all stages of consciousness to become aware of its essence, the philosopher can arrive at that knowledge in a different way. But how? As far as I can tell, Hegel doesn't explain the origin of that knowledge, which means he doesn't provide a satisfactory explanation of why he's justified in starting straight off with the identity of subject and object. (What does it mean to say that that knowledge is "primary", anyway?)

By the way, in the course of writing that paragraph I lost my train of thought about thirty times, so I wouldn't be surprised if my original intentions were different from my final ones.[1]

Sunday, January 25

"*The spirit is history* for Hegel—this is a fundamental thesis identical to the thesis that *the absolute is subject*—but organic nature has no history." In nature, life repeats itself without really developing itself; it doesn't express itself in its history. It isn't "a self-sufficient system of figures [or stages]". Spirit, on the other hand, "has a past which it internalizes and a future which it projects ahead of itself because it must become for-itself what it is in-itself".[2] However, the *Phenomenology* isn't a history of the world, nor a philosophy of history. Nor is it, for that matter, entirely a record of temporal stages. For example, the three moments of consciousness, self-consciousness and reason are not a succession; "they are abstractions contrived from within the whole of spirit and studied in their separate development. Only the specific forms of these moments—sensuous certainty, perception, understanding, etc., which represent a concrete totality—can be considered to be successive within the moment of which they are a part." Thus the *Phenomenology* isn't a philosophy of history. However, in the chapters on spirit and religion there's a much closer relation to world history than in the preceding chapters, which were concerned only with abstractions of the spirit. In these later chapters "the development of the spirit seems to coincide with a real historical development", from the ancient polis to the French Revolution, from natural religion to revealed religion, stages which are "themselves real spirits, authentic real entities", as the prior *abstractions* weren't.

[…]

It's so exciting to read philosophy again! I'm in heaven! From now on…the cramming-of-knowledge-into-my-head will brook no interruption. (I'm 23; it's time I entered the ranks of the knowledgeable.)

Here's a thought-provoking passage from the preface to Hegel's book:

> The specific individual must pass through the content of the stages of the formation of universal spirit, but as figures already unseated by spirit, as stages of a way already traced and flattened out. Thus, we see that in the sphere of knowledge what absorbed adult minds in earlier ages is now reduced to something familiar, to school exercises, even to children's games. In pedagogical progress we see projected a sketch of the history of universal culture.

The individual contains history within himself; his task is to rediscover it, to 'remember' it. Hyppolite:

> Thus there is a certain relation between phenomenology and the philosophy of history. Phenomenology is the concrete, explicit development and formation of the individual, the rise of his finite self to absolute self. But that elevation is possible only through the use of the moments of

[1] I think that in the beginning I wanted only to write the last sentence (not the one in parentheses), but that somewhere between "But then another question comes to mind…" and "He can't begin his phenomenological description…" my intentions were garbled and changed.

[2] This is as good a place as any to note that the experiencing consciousness forgets the experiences that led to its present one (which is why its process of acquiring self-knowledge is so long and difficult). Only at the end of its history does it recollect them.

> world history, moments which are immanent in that individual consciousness. ….Hegel seems to set a double task for himself [in the *Phenomenology*]. On the one hand, he wishes to introduce empirical consciousness to absolute knowledge….on the other hand, he wishes to raise the *individual I* to the *human I*….the abstractly specific I to the I that encompasses within it the whole spirit of its time. ….When consciousness progresses from one experience to the next and enlarges its horizons, the individual rises to humanity and at the same time humanity becomes self-conscious. Spirit becomes the self-consciousness of spirit.

When the individual is raised to the consciousness of spirit, spirit becomes self-consciousness in the individual. (—A paraphrase of Hyppolite.) That's where spirit and individual meet, why each is necessary to the other. What takes place in individual consciousnesses is what allows spirit to ascend to absolute knowledge, and (world) spirit itself is not only an essential formative influence on the individual but also provides him with the way to become a universally human being. (To say it again: "absolute knowledge is not accessible to individual consciousness unless that consciousness becomes consciousness of the spirit of its times".)

Incidentally, it's now apparent that Hegel would say he *has* experienced all the stages of consciousness, for they're implicit within him, and that's why he's able to know the nature of the absolute. But as I said last night, that argument seems circular. (Maybe I'm wrong, but I'm not about to rethink all that shit.[1])

It's perhaps superfluous to note that in conceiving absolute knowledge in the way he did, Hegel was effectively translating the traits of modern society into philosophy. (1) Absolute knowledge—spirit's self-consciousness—is achieved in an age of which extreme cultural self-consciousness is one of the defining characteristics. (2) As absolute knowledge "transcends temporal development, surmounts time itself", so it seems to us that real, *creative* cultural development is a thing of the past, that historical time has come to an end. (3) Et cetera.

I haven't the faintest idea either *how* or *what it means to say that* consciousness can "surmount the continuous call to transcend itself, which is essential to it, and coincide absolutely with its truth while that truth becomes self-certainty". How can it overcome its essence? Doesn't it then cease to be consciousness?

Another problem is that if the route of spirit is littered with contingencies, how can it be called a science? One answer is that offered by Kroner:

> The *Phenomenology* appears as a science because from the route of the formation of individuality and historically conditioned consciousness it extracts the moments by means of which that path is simultaneously the path of the formation of consciousness to science, that is, the path through which consciousness becomes universal and rises above every conditioned situation.

In other words, Hegel ignores the contingencies. –Not a wholly satisfying answer.

Section 4 of the second chapter ends with an obscure discussion of Hegel's attempt to "gather up the universal and the particular into spiritual individuality", to show how they are united in consciousness, which is in fact "the unity of these two moments" (since in opposing itself it is universal[2]). Hyppolite follows Hegel in flinging around terms like "absolute consciousness", "universal consciousness", "individual consciousness", "particular consciousness", "abstractly universal consciousness", "abstractly individual consciousness"… My conclusion: If you eat horseshit, you're halfway down the road to becoming a Hegelian. Now all you have to do is excrete it.

Much of chapter 3 ("The structure of the *Phenomenology*") is concerned with answering the question of what the relation is between Hegel's book and the rest of his system. Hyppolite concludes that the *Phenomenology* of 1807 is an introduction to the system (containing both a phenomenology of

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[1] There's no need to, anyway. Hegel's defense can be that his *system* is the proof of his knowledge. In other words: 'Read the system, and then decide if you agree with me.'

[2] Whatever that means.

consciousness (in the first half) and a phenomenology of spirit (in the second)), but that in its revised and shortened form[1] in the *Encyclopedia* it's a specific moment in the development of the philosophy of spirit (viz., the subjective—phenomenological—moment, as opposed to the moments of objective spirit and absolute spirit). Nonetheless, Hyppolite believes that the *whole* development of spirit is in effect a phenomenology, for in all three moments spirit appears to itself in one form or another (as consciousness, as history and as spirit-in-and-for-itself).

H. provides a useful "schematic account" of the final system that I'll summarize. The three basic moments are logic, nature and spirit. "But subjective spirit itself is at first nature; it is the soul which does not yet distinguish anything about itself and which for us is only the reflection of events in the world, events which it carries within itself. This soul is spirit *in-itself*; it is not yet spirit *for-itself*. In order to become for-itself it must become consciousness." When this happens it becomes aware of an other, an object, which it considers the truth (so that it is no longer merely self-certainty). Thus begins the development of consciousness (subjective spirit), which is propelled both from the latter's self-transcendence and from its confrontations with the other (which are themselves possible and necessary because of consciousness' self-transcendence). This quotation summarizes the development:

> The stages of [the ascent of the I] are consciousness that is consciousness of an object (the object is a general other), self-consciousness (in which the object is the I), and, finally, reason (the unity of consciousness and self-consciousness in which the object is I as well as object). …Reason is the concept of spirit; truth which knows itself, which is no longer separated from self-certainty, is spirit in-and-for-itself.
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> This spirit, this unity of soul and consciousness, is in turn the subject of a psychology that leads to objective spirit, to spirit that is no longer merely internal but that has become a spiritual world existing in the shape of moral and political institutions, of peoples and states, of world history. Finally, the unity of subjective spirit and objective spirit is absolute spirit, revealing itself as art, religion, and philosophy.

The end of the chapter is a short outline of the *Phenomenology*.

January 26

Sensuous certainty. I've always wondered what the "concept" is that Hegel loves to refer to. Hyppolite has finally enlightened me:[2] it is "life" or "self-consciousness". "[The concept is] nothing other than the subject, that which is only by virtue of self-development, opposing itself to itself and rediscovering itself in that opposition."

Sensuous consciousness is immediate knowledge, knowledge of the immediate object (which is being, "or the universal opposed to determinateness or to specificity"[3]). In this consciousness, certainty is equal to objective truth—an equality that will also be the end of conscious development. "Whereas in sensuous certainty the immediate is, in the last chapter it has come to be what it is: it has actualized itself through an internal mediation.[4] In the first chapter, truth and certainty are immediately equal; in the last chapter, certainty, i.e., subjectivity, has posed itself in being, posed itself as truth, and truth, i.e., objectivity, has shown itself to be certainty, self-consciousness. Identity is no longer immediate; it comes to be by

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[1] The last three chapters are taken out.

[2] I suppose Findlay has an explanation of it, but I've forgotten everything in his book.

[3] Determinateness will be introduced with perception, when "the object becomes the thing, tied to its properties, the universal combined with the particular."

[4] Sensuous certainty is an objective knowledge; its truth is the (certainty of the) object. The immediate actualizes itself when it realizes that it is self-consciousness, that truth is not the object but self-consciouness. (The object isn't the truly immediate, though sensuous consciousness thinks it is; self-consciousness is the immediate.)

means of the whole prior development. The true is then posed for consciousness as subject, and consciousness itself is this true… Thus we can consider the sensuous certainty with which consciousness starts as at once its highest truth and its greatest error."

"Since sensuous certainty rejects any mediation or abstraction that might alter its object", it doesn't recognize diversity in the external world. It can't say that this table is black, because that would be to introduce qualities, "which presuppose comparisons and words and thus introduce mediation into knowledge". Such concepts are abstractions, i.e. negations,[1] for "night is what is not this or that particular night". The concept is night in general rather than *this* night; it stands "not only for what I experience immediately but also for other nights", and is thus forbidden in sensuous certainty. Hence almost all of language is impermissible in sensuous consciousness. Only sentences like 'It is', 'Here is', can be uttered.

Immediately after stating that such sentences are possible, Hyppolite/Hegel says that sensuous certainty is ineffable, on account of the fact that if it names its object it introduces a mediation. There is no contradiction between their statements, because the sentences of sensuous consciousness contain no names and are thus not meaningful. The following quotation from Hegel expresses basically the same thought (that in using words like 'this' and 'it' to express itself sensuous certainty is merely "voicing" its object rather than "portraying" it (naming it), which means it isn't saying anything meaningful):

> Assuredly we do not *portray* the universal this, or being in general, but we *voice* the universal. In other words, we do not at all speak in the same way that we *intend* in sensuous certainty. But, as we see, language is truer. It allows us to go so far as immediately to refute our *intention*, and since the universal is the true of sensuous certainty and language expresses only the true [?], it is certainly impossible for us to name a sensuous being that we intend.

Anyway, the point is that for Hegel the ineffability of this certainty shows its impotence. "That which is ineffable is only aimed at but never reached. What I experience but am unable to express in any way has no truth. Language is truer." Hence sensuous certainty can only *experience* the object in its "ineffable uniqueness". The object is universal, abstract being, but it's also a specificity[2]—though not an *authentic* specificity (which is the *negation of negation*, i.e. the concept). It's only an immediate, positive, indeterminate specificity identical to the universal (while opposing it).

> By saying about something only that it is an actually real thing, an external object, we say only what is most universal and we thereby state the object's equality with everything much more than its difference. If I say "a specific thing", I express it rather as completely universal, for every thing is a specific thing.

The most precise—'now', 'here'—is also the most vague, because it can designate any moment in time and any point in space. Therefore immediate being is everything and nothing, which means it's negation,[3] which means it's identical to nothingness. "The positing of being refutes itself."

The essential point is that "the specific aimed at by sensuous certainty is in fact its own contrary: it is the most abstract universal. To be sure, consciousness aims at something else, but it cannot say what it aims at, and it therefore fails to reach it." Implicit in all this is a criticism of mysticism—any philosophy that tries to bring us back to pure being—which "can give no proofs and cannot even test itself lest it give up its immediateness". It feels infinitely profound to itself, but in fact it's infinitely superficial.

However, all these descriptions of sensuous consciousness are from a perspective outside of it. "It is essential that this consciousness itself discover the poverty beneath its apparent richness" in order for it to have its own internal dialectic. How does it do this? Well, somehow—I'm not sure how—it becomes

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[1] Sensuous certainty is only an affirmation, so every kind of negation is foreign to it.

[2] After all, for sensuous certainty it's *one thing* (supposedly concrete but not really), albeit *everything* (and nothing, since it has none of the determinations that 'real' objects do and is thus purely abstract).

[3] "…rather than merely positing, as was affirmed at the beginning."

aware of the distinction within it between knowledge and object, and of the requirement to determine the essence of its knowledge. Once this distinction between subject and object is known and consciousness recognizes that it has certainty only through the mediation of an other—while that other is in certainty through the mediation of *it*—it's inevitable that it will direct itself sometimes toward the object (which it then considers essential) and sometimes toward itself. The first moment is that in which the object is considered essential; the second is when the subject is; and the third is when they both are, together. The third leads to the next stage, perception.

In the first moment, being is privileged over knowledge because of its permanence. Like Parmenides' being, it is necessary. "It is because it is."[1] "Sensuous knowledge experiences its own inconstancy with respect to being", but an analysis of this inconstancy tells consciousness that being is its essential truth only by "the artifice of negation", and therefore that, rather than being immediate existence, being is the abstraction we've already seen it to be. Hegel examines the concepts 'here', 'now' and 'this' in presumably the same way that sensuous consciousness does. (—First a defense of using terms like 'night' and 'tree' in the following exposition, terms which are outside the vocabulary of sensuous consciousness. Hegel's justification is that….'well, goddamn it, I *have* to use them, otherwise I can't *get* anywhere!' While s.c. can't use those words, it can be aware of what they designate, which is all that matters.) Briefly stated, Hegel's conclusion is that the now, the here and the this are different from themselves, i.e. that negation lies within them. This is because they perpetually change. In one moment the now is nighttime, in another it's daytime; the here is a tree and then (when you turn around) it's a house; the this is a tree, and then a house. Hence the now and the here, which are the two aspects of being, are not existents. They are abstractions, negations—of, for example (in the temporal sphere), day and night (for the now "is neither night nor day, and yet it can be night as well as day"). At this point we encounter the first definition of the universal: "an entity which *is* through the mediation of negation, which is neither this nor that but can be equally this or that, [is] a universal". Thus the universal is the true of sensuous certainty. This truth is indeed being (and universal space and time), but being isn't the immediate given it claimed to be. It *is* because something else is *not*.

So, my friends, we have seen the miraculous take place: specificity has transformed itself into its opposite, universality. Quality (which existed in the "ineffableness of the sensuous this") has been negated, and what remains is the abstract here and the abstract now, i.e. a dialectic of *quantity*, of heres and nows which are identical but different.

In the second moment consciousness reverses its first hypothesis. *Knowledge* is now essential. There is being because, and insofar as, I have knowledge of it. "Sensuous consciousness expects to preserve its immediateness by abandoning the dogmatism of being for a subjective phenomenalism: 'the strength of [sensuous certainty's] truth is now found in the I, in the immediateness of my sight, my hearing, etc.' The 'now is night' no longer means the immediate being-in-itself of night but its being-for-me. Truth is what I experience immediately, insofar as I experience it." (Protagoras) Of course, this position is doomed, too. It succumbs to a dialectic similar to that which put an end to the dogmatism of being. If truth lies in the I, which I does it lie in? '*I* see a *tree* here, but *you* see a *house*.' "Each one of these truths is swallowed up in turn by the other; what remains is no longer this I, unique and ineffable, but the universal I which with regard to the subject matches the universal this, now, and here." "I indeed intend a specific I, but I can no more say what I intend about this I than I can say what I mean about the now and the here." Similarly, each I thinks it's unique, but in fact "when I say I, this specific I", I say every other I.[2] In this way my specificity becomes universality.[3] Although this dialectic may not seem to take us beyond the point reached by the

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[1] Uhh….(See YHWH's "I am that I am!")

[2] See my thesis, the discussion of Parfit's thought-experiment in the chapter on time. I cannot be defined, because any definition of me would define all other selves as well. (Apparently Aristotle said something similar, though not identical.)

[3] Another way is that "each I says the same"—that it's alone and unique. If we're all saying the same thing, we're all, sort of, one. Incidentally, "the interaction of specific I's at this stage of consciousness prefigures a higher dialectic, that of the unity of specific I's in the universal I."

dialectic with regard to the object, it does: "between the individual I and the universal I there is a deeper tie than in the case of the spatiotemporal object. There is not so much a juxtaposition between the universal and the specific [as there was between the universal and the specific *being*] as a more intimate interpenetration, and this interpenetration is the concrete truth toward which we are aiming."

You may be wondering, as I was before I had read the whole section, why individuals in the second moment don't conclude that other individuals opposing them are mere appearance, along with the house and the tree and everything else. The reason is that this resolve fails before the "solidity of the other I". They all oppose and limit themselves in each other, which is an important step forward. The mediation between the universal and the specific is no longer 'lifeless' (a mere juxtaposition), as it is in the object, but vital.

To summarize, both the object and the I began in immediacy and ended in abstract universality. All we can do now is return to the starting-point, i.e. "pose the relation of knowledge and its object without trying to distinguish which of them is essential and which inessential. The essence is only the unity of this simple relation: 'The now is day (and I know it as day)'. I refuse to leave this specific certainty and to consider another now or another self." What is perceived is neither the work of the object nor the work of the subject but a result of the interaction of both. By this means mediation enters sensuous certainty; it is no longer something outside of it. Another mediation is introduced by temporality, into the very heart of the "claimed" immediate: "We are shown the now, this specific now. But now, when it is shown, it has already ceased to be; the now which is, is immediately other than the now that was shown, and we see that the now is precisely what no longer is when it is." In other words, "what is posed no longer is as soon as it is posed, yet in its very disappearance it still is." This is expressed in the following dialectic:

1. I pose the now as truth, and I negate it; it no longer is;
2. I pose as truth that it is not, that it has been;
3. In a negation of the negation, I negate this second truth [because now I'm aware of a new now], which apparently brings me back to the first truth.

"Apparently", but not really. The first truth is on a higher level now, a more 'self-reflective' level. I'm aware of the second and third truths now, so rather than returning to the naïve position of the first I become aware of the multiplicity of nows in the now that always is (the present). "From this point on, we are dealing not with a unique and ineffable now or here but with a now or here that includes mediation within itself, that is a thing including both the unity of universality and the multiplicity of specific terms. ….the object is a *thing* with *multiple* properties. …What is henceforth posed is multiplicity in the unity of being, or being that has negation within it; it is multiplicity in the I, or the I that includes negation. Such is particularity, the second moment of the concept."

Tuesday, January 27

I'll meet Lisa on Saturday.

If I had more free time I'd meet friends more often. But my work schedule and my sleep schedule are so unusual they get in the way of everything. Nevertheless, I'll have lunch with Jenny tomorrow, for the first time in weeks.

In Korean culture, the ideal woman is beautiful, skinny, obedient and '*cute*'. Cuteness is important. A cute voice, cute mannerisms, cute shyness, cute emotional immaturity, cute everything. (The 25-year-olds act like the 15-year-olds.)

Perception. "To perceive is no longer to remain content with the ineffable of sensuous certainty but to move beyond this sensuousness and to reach what Hegel calls the universal." The ('thingness' of the) object is the universal, for it can be many things—have many attributes—without actually *being* them. It is not its attributes, but at the same time it *is* its attributes, as this table is brown, large, etc. Therefore, "the act of indicating [an object] effects a mediation: it culminates in a *simple* term which, however, encloses a

multiplicity." The simple term is the 'here' or 'now' or 'this'; the multiplicity is the properties that coexist in it. "They participate in universality because they express thingness"; thus, they are themselves universals, but determinate universals (particulars), for they are negations. White negates (excludes) black, large negates small. Thingness is simply the 'substance' in which they exist. –Which brings us to another point. We don't perceive only thingness; we perceive also *this* thing. *This* thing is a manifestation of the determination (in thought) of "pure uniqueness", a determination which is manifested "neither by substance in general nor by attributes, but rather by its mode insofar as it is the negation of the negation". I'm not sure what the first negation is that it's negating,[1] nor what the precise signification of the word 'mode' is, but the point is that this negation-of-negation, which is "negation bearing on itself, [expresses] the activity of the substance as an internal activity, as subject. Thingness is determinate in-and-for-itself only as a unique thing…which excludes from itself everything else…" In short, negation (as determinateness) is united with the immediateness of being.

The case is similar with regard to the perceiving consciousness. The soul is conceived as an aggregate of faculties (such as memory and imagination), as the object is composed of attributes. Refutable fictions are invented to explain the coexistence of the soul's qualities in one place.

Common consciousness believes that in perception there is a synthesis of the object's diversity and that the object itself is a similar, "congealed" synthesis. Now, perceiving consciousness considers the object to be truth and itself to be inessential. Moreover, it thinks that the criterion of truth is self-identity, "the equality of the object with itself and the exclusion from it of any otherness". The object must be noncontradictory. If there *is* a contradiction somewhere, it must be in consciousness. Several contradictions are immediately obvious. The first is that the object is simultaneously *one* and *infinitely divisible*. (On the one hand, it must be a simple; on the other hand, any simple shows itself to be a composite.) The second contradiction is one we've already encountered (albeit implicitly), viz. that the perceived object is a "mingling" of both sensuousness and abstraction—for properties are abstract, in that they extend beyond the unique thing. 'Whiteness' is a universal; thus in judging an object 'white' we go beyond the object. The third contradiction is another we've already implicitly seen: how can a variety of properties coexist in one thing?

> Either the thing [a salt crystal, in this case] is one and properties merge in it, or it is multiple: white, and also savory, and also cubical. In the first case, the properties are no longer each for-itself in their indifferent universality but are interpenetrable, and they reciprocally negate each other; in the second case, we would be dealing with a composite. A number of "matters"—caloric, chemical, electrical—are grouped in this particular enclosure and are there juxtaposed. Yet how can they be next to each other? They must occupy each other's interstices. [The perceiving consciousness thinks that each piece of matter is infinitely small. But in that case] the unique thing is lost and we return to objective essence, a dust cloud made up of parts that are not the parts of anything and that are themselves infinitely divisible into parts.[2] …Hence [perception] considers [sensuous properties] in the medium of the entity without bringing itself either to merge them or to distinguish them absolutely. It is left, then, with properties taken each for itself—the whiteness, the alkalinity, the cubical shape of the salt. But considered without their medium of thingness and without the unity of the thing, these properties are no longer properties since they are no longer inherent in a medium,

[1] Maybe it's the determinate universal(s) (the attribute(s), the particular(s)). But that doesn't make any sense. What would it mean to say that the determinate universal is a negation of the universal substance, and that the specific is a negation of the determinate universal? For neither of the two negations would "exclude" the preceding term. They all coexist; they're not contradictory, as white and black are. It's far more justifiable to think that the first negation is the universal substance, not only because that's a negation of the ineffable of sensuous certainty but also because the specific really would, in a way, be a negation of *it*.

[2] Hyppolite notes that this contradiction is unavoidable because the sensuous property with which we start is both determinate and universal. In its determinateness "it is specific and excludes otherness", and in its universality it is "firmly anchored in thingness….it is substance."

> and they are not determinate since they do not exclude each other. Perceiving consciousness…returns to a subjectivism of the second degree. This crystal is alkaline only on my tongue and is white only to my eyes. [The reason why I'm not forced by this subjectivism back into the dialectic within sensuous certainty that leads to perception is that] this subjectivism allows me to become aware in myself of my reflection in coming to know the thing; it will lead me to a critical position [viz. the distinction between thing-in-itself and thing-for-us]. The thing will always be the real thing, equal to itself, but the knowledge I gain of it will be disturbed by my reflection within myself. [My perception will be considered not as a pure apprehension but as an apprehension that changes the object, and thus consciousness will be considered illusory.] But consciousness is mistaken if it imagines that truth thus simply falls outside it. Since consciousness itself determines the respective proportions of its reflection and of objectivity, it unknowingly becomes the very *measure* of truth. Our starting point, according to which the perceived object was the essence and the perceiving consciousness the inessential, is already transcended, if not for consciousness which effects this critical discernment, then at least for us who philosophize. Do we not already know that the universal, the principle of all perceiving consciousness, is as much the I as it is being, and that the rigidity of the thing that sets itself up over against consciousness is merely the projection of the I outside itself?

I quote all that because it's important and it's relatively easy to understand.

"Consciousness now undergoes a double experience": first it appears to itself as the passive milieu in which properties exist. The thing-in-itself is without variety; it creates variety in us because we have multiple senses by which to perceive it. "The coherence of the thing is saved in this way, and its truth of being an entity is preserved." However, this theory doesn't account for the possibility of distinguishing between objects, because objects are distinguishable only insofar as they intrinsically have particular properties.[1] Thus we are led to the second experience, in which consciousness attributes diversity to the object and thinks that it itself is what gives the object unity. "The thing-in-itself is white, cubical, savory, etc. …its unity is created by an act of the spirit, uniform in all its perceptions. …To avoid contradiction in the object we say that the thing is white insofar as it is not cubical and is not savory insofar as it is white." Hence it ceases to be an entity and is instead a collection of properties, or rather the 'also' that allows them to coexist[2] (the "surface that envelops them").

Reflecting on its double experience, consciousness realizes that the object is different for-us from what it is for-itself—in that "it is at times single when it appears multiple, at times multiple when it appears single"—and that it therefore contains within itself the contradiction of "being simultaneously for-itself and for-an-other" (and of being *different* for-itself from what it is for-an-other).

> This new opposition of form (being-for-itself, being-for-an-other) replaces the opposition of content (single being, multiple being). But can we not still avoid it and keep truth pure of any contradiction by saving the *coherence* of the thing? The thing, as we have said, is at once for-itself and for-an-other—two diverse beings—and it is different for-itself from what it is for-an-other. That is, the thing becomes thinkable as a multitude of things or of monads which exclude contradiction from themselves by assigning it to the intercourse among them. In this manner, monism becomes pluralism. …[Each monad is a] unity within itself in its own determinations, a determinateness which is suitable only to it and which constitutes its essence. No doubt, there is also a diversity in it, for how could it be determinate without that diversity which is its being-for-an-other? But this diversity is inessential to it and is its exteriority. Contradiction is indeed avoided by this distinction between *essential* and *inessential*, an inessential that is always necessary (which is a new, concealed contradiction). But contradiction reappears in its definitive form, for this thing

[1] "If the thing is indeed determinate it is because it is determinate *within itself* and this complete determinateness is not possible without an intrinsic variety."

[2] 'It is white; it is *also* cubical.'

> which is equal to itself and is for-itself is such only in its absolute difference from every other.[1] And this difference implies a relation with other things, a relation which is the cessation of its being-for-itself: "It is precisely by means of its absolute character and its opposition that the thing relates to others and is essentially only this process of relating. But this relation is the negation of its independence, and the thing collapses due to its own essential property." Thanks to this dialectic we proceed from *thing* to *relation*, from the thingism of perception to the relativity of understanding. …What disappear in this movement [from thing to relation] are the artifices that common consciousness uses to preserve the single and independent thing: the distinction between essential and inessential, the separation of being-for-itself and being-for-an-other. "From one and the same point of view," Hegel writes, "the object is the opposite of itself, for-itself insofar as it is for-an-other, for-an-other insofar as it is for-itself."…
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> …Perceiving consciousness has been transcended. Since the thing is contradiction, it dissolves as thing equal to itself and becomes phenomenon. The mingling of the sensuous and thought, which the sensuous property constitutes, has decomposed into its extremes, the "also" and the "entity", being-for-an-other and being-for-itself. And these extremes have become identified with each other in a universal that is unconditioned (by the sensuous). This universal is the new object of consciousness, which has become understanding.

I imagine it's easier for me to understand all this than it is for you, since I have the book in front of me and you have only my short summary. Nonetheless, I don't understand *all* of it. I'm uncertain of the exact nature of the monad. How can its essence be its uniqueness? What does that *mean*? Aristotle said, I think rightly, that an object's uniqueness can't be part of its definition. –I'm beset by scores of confusions, but it's late and I'm tired, so good-night.

January 29

Understanding. Perceiving consciousness failed because it was unable to reconcile the two moments of being-for-an-other and being-for-itself. For this consciousness, the moment of thingness expressing itself in properties and the moment of the unique thing *excluding* properties were contradictory. Understanding, on the other hand, sees their unity as what constitutes the unconditionality of the universal, and it has made their "transition into each other" (their connection), in which they "transcend each other", an object of reflection, whereas in the previous stage it was merely the *movement* of a consciousness that fluctuated back and forth between the two moments. Nevertheless, even for understanding this transition still takes not a subjective but an objective form, viz. *force*. One essential difference between force and the 'thing' is that the latter has no link to its properties, while force "makes sense only insofar as it manifests itself and poses what is inside itself outside itself". Hence it's a unity of being-for-itself and being-for-an-other--and is thus the *concept*, though in an un-self-conscious and objective form.

Understanding first believes that there are two moments of force: "force as externalization or expansion of itself into the realm of differences, and force 'driven back on itself', or force proper." The first is its reality, the second is its possibility. However, these differences exist only in consciousness; force is actually a unity, identical to its manifestations. Therefore we're still dealing with its mere *concept* rather than its reality. In reality, the independent moments of force, which are contrary to its essence, "transcend" (*aufheben*) themselves in accordance with the following dialectic: force is initially posed as the infinite expansion of itself, "but in order to exist as force driven back on itself [as possibility], an other must make it turn in upon itself…and [contrariwise] in order for it to exist as externality it must be called forth by an other", which can only be another force. Therefore each force presupposes another that opposes it,[2] and "to

[1] That is, the essence of the monad is its determinateness, its separation from other monads, which means that its being-for-itself is its being-for-an-other (i.e., that its essence is a relation).

[2] That's also how the matter of the universe is prevented from coagulating at a single point.

every attraction corresponds a repulsion". But that wording is misleading: these forces are in fact absolutely interdependent, such that they are a unity and exist only in their contact. Since the phenomenal world is thus an "interplay of forces", it is an "incessant exchange of determinations, a perpetual instability whose unity and consistency lie only in thought". --Hyppolite emphasizes that the real significance of this dialectic, which to him seems "empty and forced," is that it shows us the dialectic of intelligence in the dialectic of the real. Later we'll see a similar interplay of self-consciousnesses, and *then* the dialectic will be more profound and convincing.-- Anyhow, what we have now is an unstable phenomenal world the truth of which is apparently 'internal' to it.

This truth is the universal, but as it stands it is a kind of 'nothingness'. For it is the beyond of consciousness, and we can know nothing about it. However, because it's posed through the mediation of the phenomenon, "the phenomenon is its essence and, indeed, its fulfillment. The extrasensuous [the interior of things] is the sensuous and the perceived posed as they truly are. But [their truth] is to be phenomenon. Hence the extrasensuous is the phenomenon qua phenomenon."[1]

> [We thereby] see the world as it genuinely is--as the movement by which it continuously disappears and negates itself. What subsists throughout this instability of the phenomenon, throughout the continuous exchange of its moments, is indeed difference, but difference taken up into thought and become universal, that is, the *law* of the phenomenon. In this way, the universal is no longer the nothingness beyond the phenomenon; it carries difference, or mediation, within itself, and this difference at the heart of this universal is difference become equal to itself, the simple image of the phenomenon. This difference is expressed in law as the "invariable image of the ever-unstable phenomenon." The extrasensuous world is thus a calm realm of laws. "These laws are, no doubt, beyond the perceived world--for this world presents law only through continuous change--but they are also present in it and are its immediate and immobile copy."

They aren't a *complete* copy, though. The phenomenon is infinitely diverse, while laws are "the abstract unity of abstract difference". They provide a *skeleton* of nature; between them and the real thing lies an abyss. This is a problem because the extrasensuous is supposed to be the essence of the phenomenon and vice versa, but laws 'are' the extrasensuous, and hence if laws don't adequately portray the diversity of the phenomenon then part of the latter is unconnected to the extrasensuous, in which case the two realms *aren't* a unity.

Hegel begins his resolution of the problem by criticizing the explanations offered by understanding, which, "in search of [a necessary relation between laws and phenomena], discovers that necessity only within itself, in its own tautologies, while leaving its object unchanged". Hume wrote that everything (in representation) that is different is separable; "by the fact that one term is posed, the other is not posed". Hegel thinks that in this case he was justified in denying necessity, because "necessity is only substance envisaged as relation, as the being-one of opposite determinations which are not [absolutely separate], but are in-themselves [i.e., in their essence] such as to [affect] another".[2] --This quotation, by the way, already implies Hegel's solution of the problem of 'necessity', which will be to deny Hume's assumption that objects (determinations) are separate from each other and instead to maintain that they are infinite, i.e., other-than-themselves (*for-an-other* in their *essence*).[3] This will in turn provide him with a solution of the original problem, because the reason why the question of necessity arises is that in laws of nature the terms are separate from each other, and *this* is because the totality of the phenomenon is not expressed in laws

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[1] That argument, specifically the penultimate sentence, strikes me as sophistical.

[2] I'm reminded of the monad, which has its being-for-itself in its being-for-an-other. The obvious difference is that the essence of the monad is to be *independent*, while the essence of these determinations is to be *interdependent*.

[3] Thereby "relation is no longer imposed on substantialized determinations from the outside; it is the very life of these determinations [and is hence infinite]"--which must be the case in order for it to be *necessary*. Kant failed to answer Hume because he too assumed that the relative terms were indifferent to each other, which meant that relation was imposed from outside them and thus that it was not infinite (necessary).

(which was the original problem).[1] The part of the phenomenon that's left out from them, namely its instability and development, is precisely the part that is needed to render the relations between things necessary (for instability and development are results of the essential interconnections between things).

To get back to the point: Hegel criticizes the explanations that understanding puts forward by drawing attention to their tautological nature.

> Seeking the necessity of law, understanding creates a difference that is not a difference and, recognizing the identity of what it has just separated, ends up with simple tautologies which it calls necessity… Why do bodies fall according to the law? Because they undergo the action of a force, weight, that is so constituted as to manifest itself in precisely this way. In other words, a body falls in this way because it falls in this way. …the procedure of explanation is a very general one: it goes *from the same to the same*. It establishes differences which are not differences in order then rigorously to demonstrate their identity. This is the formal movement of understanding, a movement that is expressed in the abstract equation $A = A$, in which A is distinguished from A in order then to be identified with it. Every explanation, then, is tautological, or formal… Cold comes from the loss of heat, etc…
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> …In contrast to content, which remains unchanged, the movement of explanation, then, is a pure movement, a formalism. But this formalism already contains what its object (the world of laws) lacks: it is movement within itself. "In it, however, we recognize precisely absolute change itself, the lack of which was felt in law. Indeed, considered more closely, this movement is immediately its own contrary.[2] It poses a difference where there is none; it quickly identifies what it has just distinguished. It is the contentless instability of pure form which is straightway its own contrary. When we say "*A* is *A*," we both distinguish and identify. The equal to itself repels itself but also unites itself.

The difference between content ("the interior") and form is thus overcome: "content, which is noticed through the at first formal movement of understanding, becomes the opposite of itself, and form, in turn, becomes rich with content". Presumably, because Hyppolite calls content the "interior", it is the extrasensuous, and form is not only the *movement of thought* but the *phenomenon*. So the opposition between the two is transcended.

The last four pages of the chapter on understanding are an inquiry into what Hegel calls "the inverted world", the "upside-down world". Although essence and appearance have been identified, from another perspective they are absolutely different: essence is the *inverse* of appearance. Initially, when we invented laws to express the differences inherent in the sensuous world in a 'universal' way, these differences weren't modified profoundly; now they are. Difference is the negation of difference (i.e., it isn't *really* difference, though it appears to be), and thus appearance is the opposite of its essence. "Anything in-itself is the opposite of what it appears to be for-an-other." By "anything" Hyppolite really does mean *anything*: for example, criminal punishment is essentially the opposite of what it appears to be, for, while it appears to dishonor a man, "it becomes in the inverted world the grace and pardon which safeguard the man's essence and render him honor". Therefore, "the difference between phenomenon and essence,

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[1] *That* is because laws are "the first immediate elevation of the sensuous world to the intelligible". In other words, the apparent diversity of and separation between phenomenal things is preserved in laws that are immediate expressions of them.

[2] In other words, insofar as it is envisaged *only* in our understanding, the movement of our thought which establishes laws and *explains* them is formal. It is tautological: we distinguish in order then to show that what we have distinguished is identical. But insofar as it is viewed as a movement of the thing itself it becomes synthetic, for it is the thing itself that opposes itself and unites with itself. [That is, the concrete movement which is *implicitly* described in explanations ('implicitly' because the purpose of the explanation isn't to *describe a thing's movement* but (effectively) to *define a term*) actually takes place in the thing itself.] Explanation, then, is no longer *our* explanation; it is the very *explanation* of being that is identical to the self. Thus, thought and being are one. [--Hyppolite. I quote it because it's important and enlightening once it's understood.]

between apparent meaning and hidden meaning, has become so profound that it destroys itself; it is, in effect, absolute opposition, opposition in-itself, that is, *contradiction*". "Each determination destroys itself and becomes its other; it is thought through as infinity…" This opposition, though, doesn't mean that the two worlds are opposed "substantive elements"; they are rather both contained in the phenomenon, which is a difference between itself and itself: it is one with essence but *appears* different from its essence. It is "simultaneously itself and its other and is grasped in its phenomenal entirety as 'absolute concept', or infinity". Stated differently, it is self-negation, "mediation of the immediate with itself". But then it's already self, because that "mediation" is precisely what the self is.

> The absolute concept is universal life, the world soul… It is manifestation that is manifestation of self by self, mediation of the immediate with itself. It is already self. But if this is so for us, and if the concept, as universal life, presents itself to us, then consciousness has reached a new stage in its ascent; it has grasped manifestation as its own [i.e., manifestation's] negativity instead of distinguishing it from both itself and its intelligible object. This dialectic of self-identity within absolute difference at first appears to consciousness in an immediate form as self-consciousness. In self-consciousness, indeed, the I is absolutely other, and yet this other is the I. Consciousness has become self-consciousness.

January 30

I'm having trouble understanding why Bush isn't being held accountable for his scores of political fraudulences and mistakes. The enormous deficit is only the most public one; every day I'm confronted with fresh examples of his administration's dishonesty, unscrupulousness and shortsightedness. Reading the *Times*, even the *front page*, has become something I dread but do anyway out of fascination with a country--and a world--spiraling to its doom. (Actually, reading the news has never *not* depressed me.) If Clinton had been guilty of even the most harmless of Bush's baleful idiocies he would have been skewered. Part of the explanation for Bush's unaccountability is that the Republican party is inherently more conspiratorial, unprincipled and ruthless than the Democratic, but another part is the culture of fear that has been engendered by Bush's crusade against terrorism. Also, the federal government, and especially the administration, is more monolithic than it was in Clinton's time, and thus it has substantial control over the flow of information within and without it. A fourth reason is that Americans don't have the appetite for an extensive investigation into what could be--*should* be--dozens of scandals, having recently experienced the poisonous political climate created by (conservative) scandal-mongers. A fifth is the ever-increasing prevalence of apathy in a culture sick unto death of itself and everything that composes it and everything that *op*poses it--in short, *everything*. (I'm curious what stage of consciousness follows this in Hegel's phenomenology.)

The image of an orchestra playing the third movement of Beethoven's ninth symphony brings tears to one's eyes. Imagine a multitude of musicians playing in such exquisite synchronicity that they are *one being, one supra-human being*, composed of sounds as humans are composed of cells, a being that exists only in its self-expression, that vanishes when the instruments are put down but is vitally alive when they are picked up, that is the pure movement of a divine mind externalized. Imagine the *cooperation*, the *sensitivity*, the *feeling for the sublime* without which this being could not exist. Imagine the *discipline* necessary to submerge oneself so completely in collective harmony.

--"Individualism" be damned. The weak selfishness of vulgar minds--that is "individualism".

The movement of consciousness to self-consciousness. The first section, which is basically an exposition of the interpretation of Kant's philosophy that German idealists chose, is illuminating as a ('decomposed skeletal') outline of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in its own right. Two or three points were new to me. Heretofore I was unaware of the distinction between noumenon and thing-in-itself;[1] I thought

[1] I still don't know what it is, since Hyppolite only mentions it and doesn't describe it.

they were two words for the same thing (of the nature of which I'm still uncertain). Also, I've always thought that the phenomenality of nature was a result of the subjectivity of the "categories," but Hyppolite denies this: "insofar as it is transcendental, this subjectivity is identical to objectivity". I don't understand what he says it *is* a result of, but it has something to do with the "nontranscendental subjectivity of matter….the passivity, the receptivity, which understanding cannot do without". "The finitude of our knowledge [which Hyppolite equates with the phenomenality of nature] exists because understanding conceives the idea of an unlimited understanding but finds itself limited [by its passive reception of the object]. The object of a finite subject must itself be finite."

Having arrived at this finitude of the subject, Hyppolite notes that it is different from the finitude of the object: the limit of the object is external to it (the object) and unknown by it, whereas "the subject continually seeks to transgress its limit", thereby tending toward infinity, "the unconditioned". For Hegel, it isn't the concept of reason that regulates experience; it is the idea, which is "an infinite practical task in relation to which all knowledge and all knowing are organized". Self-consciousness ("the truth of consciousness") is essentially practical, a never-ending attempt to transcend itself, "the negation of all finitude and, therefore, of any consciousness of an object". *Consciousness,* which is of an object and thus finite (limited), is theoretical, while *self-consciousness* is infinite and practical.

To restate what I wrote at the end of yesterday's entry, understanding "becomes able to think the self--which by posing itself in a determination negates and transcends itself--by thinking through [the determinations of nature] and discovering in them the movement by which they become their own contrary". That's how it rises above itself.

Hyppolite thinks that the fundamental intuition from which Hegel's philosophy proceeds is not that of the motion of life but that of the self's "disquiet". His philosophy 'starts' from a conception of the human being--that it is always other in order to be itself--and then projects this conception into universal life, which is therefore also "always other in order to be itself". Life and self-consciousness are related in this way. Moreover, because life's essence is the self's essence--i.e., life *is* the self--"it reaches itself only in self-knowledge". Truth is not outside of life, and neither is it outside of self-consciousness.

If self-consciousness is the truth of life, spirit is the truth of self-consciousness. For the latter is ultimately the self-consciousness of spirit. When raised to consciousness of itself spirit is for-itself the entity, the I, of the process of multiplicity and unity in nature.[1] It manifests itself in specific "modes" which are also the negations of themselves, that is, the negations of their separation from the absolute (which separation is itself a negation), and in this negation-of-negation return to the unity of life (the absolute). Their deaths appear to be the result of an "alien negation, as though the universe were suppressing a living individuality", but in fact death originates in the individuality itself, which, insofar as it is the process of life--the unity in multiplicity, the absolute, the universal 'self' of nature and man--"must die in order to become". "Its emergence vis-à-vis the whole is its own negation and its return to unity." In non-Hegelian language: death is the absolute saying, "Come back to me, so I can grow some more."

Time for bed. In the past week I haven't gone to bed earlier than 5:00 each night.

Saturday, January 31

Self-consciousness and life: the independence of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is desire. We have seen the world become mere phenomenon, which "subsists only in relation to self-consciousness, which is its truth". Self-consciousness is made possible by the existence of otherness, which thus in one sense exists, but only as "an object that must be negated in order [for self-consciousness] to establish its own unity with itself". "The unity of the I is reconstituted by [the negation of] being-other"; desire is this negation, for it appropriates otherness and makes it its own. "Desire presupposes the phenomenal character of the world which exists for the self only as a means."

[…]

[1] Nature 'for-itself' isn't spirit, because it isn't self-conscious. It is (a dormant) spirit only in hindsight.

The essence of desire isn't what it appears to be. The goal of desire isn't really the sensuous object; it is the unity of the I with itself. The sensuous object is only a means. Stated differently, self-consciousness seeks itself in its desire, which means that it seeks itself in the other (the *object* of desire)--which we already knew was the case, anyway--which means that its other must ultimately be another self-consciousness. It can't be phenomenal sensuous objects that exist for it only as means to an end, as things that will no longer exist once it satisfies its desire, i.e., things that are not independent; it has to be an *existent opposed* to self-consciousness, that is, another self-consciousness as independent as it is itself.

> In other words, life is the medium in which self-consciousness experiences and seeks itself. Life constitutes the first truth of self-consciousness and appears as its other. As we ourselves have grasped it as the result of the previous dialectic [i.e., the dialectic of understanding], it is the term that corresponds to self-consciousness…. Life in general is genuinely the other of self-consciousness. What does this opposition mean, concretely? What I, as self-consciousness, find facing me is life, and life is simultaneously irremediably other and the same…. Considered as other, it is the element of substantiveness with which I cannot completely merge insofar as I am a subject; it is "the universal, indestructible substance, the fluid essence that is equal to itself." But self-consciousness as reflection signifies the break with life…. Self-consciousness, "specificity" in Hegel's terminology, opposes universal life; it claims to be independent of it and wishes to pose itself absolutely.[1] Nevertheless, it will encounter the resistance of its object. Thus the object of consciousness is as independent in-itself as consciousness is.

The experience that reveals to consciousness that the object is independent of it results from the continuous succession of desires and objects--objects that are negated and desires that are satisfied but keep returning nonetheless. "During the course of this experience, I discover that desire is never exhausted and [therefore] that the object is needed so that self-consciousness can negate it. ….[Desire's] reflected intention leads me to an essential otherness", which can only be another self-consciousness because both I's are for-themselves, i.e., exist in absolute opposition and are thus 'essential others'.

February 1

Like the forces and monads we encountered in the dialectic of understanding, self-consciousness is for-itself only in being for-another. But its being-for-the-other is not the same as its being-for-itself: for itself it is absolute self-certainty, but for the other it is a living thing seen from the "outside". It can find its truth--find itself in being, manifest in the medium of life its own essential negativity of never being what it is, of always being beyond itself--only through being recognized by the other as what it is for itself, as self-certainty. Conversely, it (or its subjective self-certainty) can become truth only if the *other also* presents itself as pure self-certainty, i.e., if self-consciousness encounters itself in the 'objective' world, the world of life. In short, self-consciousness must recognize itself in the other and be recognized by the other.[2]

What thereby ensues is the struggle of each against all, the purpose of which is to be recognized (as an autonomous self-consciousness) by the other. "One can prove [one's autonomous self-consciousness] to oneself only by proving it to others and by obtaining that proof from them." That one risks one's life in this struggle shows that its goal isn't life itself but something 'higher', viz. recognition. Self-consciousness is raised above life; its desire isn't life but its desire for desire (i.e., itself[3])--which is what distinguishes it from animal consciousness. What emerges from the struggle is the experience of mastery and servitude.

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[1] That is, as specificity it initially opposes universality, but (as I wrote yesterday) it will eventually negate its own negation and return to the absolute.

[2] Hegel says that neither can *exist* without recognizing and being recognized by the other, but I don't understand why that is.

[3] Recall that it *is* desire.

Not every consciousness risks its life in the struggle. The master does, preferring death to a life without recognition, but the slave doesn't; he prefers servitude in life to liberty in death. The master rises above animal life, while the slave is consciousness in the form of 'thingness', of life's positivity, of Dasein. He is the master's *thing*. He recognizes the master, but the master doesn't recognize him. While the being of the slave is life, "the master has shown himself raised above that being; he has considered life as a phenomenon, as a negative datum, which is why he is the master of the slave by means of thingness. ….he can enjoy things, negate them completely, and thus affirm himself completely. For him, the independence of the being of life and the resistance of the world to desire do not exist. The slave, on the contrary, knows only the resistance of that being to desire and cannot, therefore, attain the complete negation of this world. His desire encounters the resistance of the real, and he is able only to elaborate on things, to work on them.… The master consumes the essence of the world; the slave elaborates it. The master values negation, which grants him immediate self-certainty; the slave values production." All this implies that the master's autonomy, as well as his relation to Dasein, "depends on the mediation of another self-consciousness, that of the slave. Thus his independence is completely relative.… [Moreover,] the truth of the master's consciousness lies in the *inessential* consciousness of the slave [inessential because it represents not the essence of the *self*,[1] which is negation-of-life, but the essence of life; i.e., "it is alien to itself.…its being lies outside it", in life, in animal existence]." It lies in the consciousness of someone he doesn't recognize, his possession. And what's the point of being recognized by someone who is essentially a "thing"? The master has failed to reach the goal he had in mind when fighting to the death, viz., to be recognized by *another man*. (This failure was inevitable, because the only way he could have been recognized was to be a master, and the only way he could be a master was to enslave the other.)

In spite of his debasement, the slave comes to be for-himself, to see his own essence in himself rather than in the master (who is the self-consciousness that the slave is not), through a dialectic that has three moments: fear, service and labor. In his "primordial" fear of death, in that "fundamental anguish, all the moments of nature to which he adhered as a consciousness immersed in animal existence dissolved.… The master did not fear death, and he raised himself immediately above all the vicissitudes of existence; the slave trembled before it, and in that primordial anguish he perceived his essence as a whole. *The whole of life* appeared before him, and all the specificities of Dasein were dissolved in that essence." (This is indeed why the slave's consciousness, in spite of its immersion in nature, contains in-itself being-for-itself--i.e., because being-for-itself is the negation of all determinate content, which is precisely what the slave experiences in his mortal terror.[2]) The totality of man's being never appears to him in "organic life", for in that life "nothingness [which is the essence of self-consciousness] does not exist as such". The consequence of the slave's fear is his service to the master,[3] and in this service he disciplines himself and detaches himself from Dasein. In labor, however, he actually "imprints the form of self-consciousness on being [which results in his evolution from being nature's slave--in his animalistic fear of death--to being its master]. In the product of his work he finds himself.[4] The master attains only a transitory enjoyment,[5] but the slave.…externalizes himself.…passes into the element of permanence.…[and] thus attains the authentic realization of being-for-itself in being-in-itself." Life is no longer separate from consciousness; it is "dominated by a consciousness which is not content to negate it but discovers itself within it.… Self-

[1] The self is represented by the master.

[2] The reason why the slave isn't being-for-itself *for-himself* is that fully realized being-for-itself is an awareness of the self's autonomy, its "human dignity". The slave sees himself through the eyes of the master--who represents the humanity that he (the slave) isn't--as something dependent and "thingish".

[3] As Kojève notes, in his fear the slave "understands" (unconsciously) the "vanity" of all determinate conditions of existence (like the master's), and he becomes willing to do anything demanded of him. In his very being he becomes change, transcendence, transformation--while the master, not having experienced the slave's fear of death, remains stubbornly fixed to a given condition (and thus has less insight into his humanity)--and that's why the future of the dialectic is in him rather than the master.

[4] He is also changed by his work. For example, it causes him to overcome his fear of death and his enslavement to nature.

[5] "Mastery is a dead end in human experience."

consciousness has thus become self-consciousness in universal being: it has become *thought*." Thought is the freedom of the stoic, which is the next stage in the dialectic.

Incidentally, labor without the previous moment of fear is merely a specific skill that doesn't dominate life and humanize nature. The entire content of natural consciousness must be "shaken" in order for consciousness to become separate from determinate being, in order for it to become pure "negating-negativity" (pure being-for-itself that can remake nature in its own image[1]). (But once labor has been carried out on nature--once nature has been humanized--the fear of death is overcome, because it was caused by the fear of a foreign reality that appeared overwhelming.)

February 2

Korean pop music, but especially rap, is even more ridiculous than American. It's more childish, innocent, rhythmically and harmonically simplistic, as though it hasn't yet reached the cynical stage of its American counterpart. The mere fact of its existence, moreover, is ludicrous. When I watch Korean rappers on television I have to laugh: their voices, their movements, their attitudes, their rhythms are taken straight from what I've seen in America, and they don't ring true. Angry Korean rappers?? What do they have to be angry about? Their country is on too small a scale! It has none of the schisms and prejudices, the poverty that clings to tens of millions, the jaded apathy, the anguish of universal confusion that America has. It's a peaceful little world of homogeneity, of cuteness and shallowness and harmless ignorance. For it to borrow from my culture is totally inappropriate--but totally inevitable.

The liberty of self-consciousness: stoicism and skepticism. Because the slave's consciousness is "able to become an object to itself without thereby losing itself and vanishing"--as a result of its externalization in nature--it becomes a *thinking* consciousness.[2] (Also because it has to think in order to work.) To think is to unify being-in-itself and being-for-itself: it means that one is an object for oneself, not as an abstract I but as an I that has content, that is in-itself as well as for-itself. The *concept* is both in-itself and "my pure being for me". I may appear to go beyond myself when I think, but "the distinction is resolved as soon as it is made. The I discovers itself in being and consequently remains close to itself in that otherness"--and thus the being of life is no longer an absolute other. Moreover, a thinking self-consciousness is *free*: "In its highest form, thought is will because it is the self-positing of self. And will is thought because it is [aware] of itself in [thought]." To be free is to "behave as a thinking being in all circumstances".

The reason why this stage--in which the I rediscovers itself in being, is externalized without thereby "leaving itself"--isn't the end of the *Phenomenology* is that the unity realized in it is only *immediate*. "The concept is not yet the penetration of thought into the variety and the plenitude of being. As yet, that penetration is only *postulated*." Therefore, the liberty of the I exists only in thought: it "leaves existence on one side and poses itself on the other". The stoic's liberty abstracts from--negates--prior relations like master and slave, rich and poor; its goal is nothing concrete but simply "the equality of thought with itself" (rationality?), or "the coherence of thought through all the various contents of experience". It is "indifferent to natural Dasein", which is why it exists only in thought and not actuality. That "the genuinely free man rises above all the contingencies and determinations of life" implies that "pure form [thought] separates itself from things, [which] manifest themselves as opposed to thought", and thus that the content of thought isn't really the content of thought. The two are *juxtaposed* rather than *merged*. Stoic doctrines, for example, are particular determinations that have been arbitrarily raised to dogma; they have no necessary connection to their form. Indeed, the two are opposed. Eventually this duality between "thought which is equal to

[1] And that *has* to, because it knows that the natural world is hostile, deadly, unsuited to satisfy it.

[2] One question: haven't all the preceding consciousnesses *thought*? (Hegel would say that question is based on a misunderstanding. Because the *Phenomenology* isn't a history, the "previous" consciousnesses haven't been chronologically earlier. But what does it mean to say that they're logically prior but chronologically later? Especially if the unfolding of history is the unfolding of an ontological logic.)

itself"--i.e. (presumably), the abstract idea of contentless thought (or thought uncorrupted by an involvement in the determinations and contingencies of life)--and a "content it doesn't engender" manifests itself, and skepticism is born.

I'm a bit confused by Hyppolite's analysis. Aside from my persistent inability to see all the connections between all of Hegel's ideas, I can't help thinking he's contradicting himself. ….No, on second thought, he isn't. He's just glided over an important (but obvious) point: the doctrines of stoicism contradict not only their *form* but also their *content*. For their content exalts pure form and deprecates content even as it *is* content. That is, in the act of expressing itself, (Hegel's interpretation of) stoicism contradicts itself.

"The same relation pertains between stoic self-consciousness and skeptic consciousness as between master and slave. The master was only the concept of independent self-consciousness; the slave was its actual realization…." As the master was unable to actualize his independence in the midst of life, so was the stoic unable to penetrate life's determinations with the I; they retained their absoluteness. The slave, on the other hand, imprinted himself on the world, as the skeptic "dissolves" all of life's determinations in self-consciousness. The world is nothing but a creation of consciousness; it doesn't independently exist. This doctrine logically grows out of stoicism, for it is the "actual experience of the freedom of thought". Moreover, form is the "absolute concept, and, as such, it is the negation of every particular determination". Stoicism didn't recognize the true nature of form; its form was something *positive* opposed to something positive--when in reality form is never 'opposed' to anything; it is the universal, which can be everything. So, the skeptic's self-consciousness reaches absolute certainty of itself, in that it negates all otherness. This isn't the 'theoretical' negation we've encountered before; it's a *self-conscious act* with a different purpose from the 'subjective idealistic' negations that happened in the first two chapters. Those were positions that consciousness was reluctantly forced into, without knowing how or why; this is a defiant and happy assertion of the liberty of self-consciousness and the vanity of everything else. However, because it is merely a joy in destruction, skepticism still presupposes the other (since it has to *negate* it). Its duality must eventually manifest itself. And so it does: on the one hand self-consciousness rises above Dasein, and on the other it is constantly immersed in Dasein.

> The same is true of the man who proclaims that all is vanity…. In this very thought he rises above all vanity and poses authentic self-certainty in its sublime grandeur, but at the same time he himself appears as a contingency. By lowering himself he rises, but as soon as he rises and claims to reach that immutable certainty he descends anew. His immutable certainty is in contact with ephemeral life, and the eternity of his thought is a temporal thought of the eternal. Thus the subjectivity of self-consciousness is a double consciousness. [While it rises above the world it is caught in it as a "contingent fragment".] Self-consciousness, then, is the pain of the consciousness of life which is simultaneously beyond life and in it. But skepticism is not yet this consciousness, for it does not gather up the two poles of this contradiction into itself. ….Unhappy consciousness is the explicit consciousness of the internal contradiction of consciousness. Henceforth it will no longer be the case that an I will confront another I in the midst of universal life, or a master oppose a slave from the outside; with stoicism and skepticism the two consciousnesses have become the split of self-consciousness within itself. Every self-consciousness is double for itself: it is *God and man* at the heart of a single consciousness.

Tuesday, February 3

Unhappy consciousness. Consciousness becomes unhappy because it is aware of the nothingness and the contingency of its life. It is just *one* point of view among *many*--each of which is as valid as it is itself--and it must be recognized by these others in order to exist (?). It is split between awareness of its contingency (its involvement in life) and its intuitive feeling of separation from life, of being 'higher' than life--of being infinite and essential, the opposite of life's contingency and inessentiality. Thus it contains two self-consciousnesses within itself, both of which 'look into' the other but can't be unified. They indeed

exist in a unity--in *one* self-consciousness--but their opposition predominates. The dialectic of unhappy consciousness has three moments: first, consciousness is changeable "in the face of an immutable consciousness"; then it recognizes this immutability as inside it but still opposed to it; finally, the problem of the union of reality and self-consciousness is posed. A historical example of the first moment is Judaism; an example of the second is early Christianity.

Initially consciousness appears to itself to be on the side of the *inessential* rather than the essential, because it is the consciousness of the contradiction within it. "By recognizing the duality of the extremes [of self-consciousness], I stand with the nonessential. I am merely nothingness; my essence is transcendent." This is the consciousness of the Jewish people, "which alienates its own essence and poses it as a transcendent term". However, since it is itself the unity of the two extremes[1]--and since it is continuously trying to ascend to the immutable--this consciousness is bound to lead to the consciousness of Christianity, which is symbolically aware that its infinite, self-certain essence is *within* it but at the same time eludes its grasp.[2] Because the unity of the specific and the universal is "immediate"--unmediated, a mere "contact" ("as much external as internal") between God and man, or Christ and man--it can't be grasped, which means it isn't free from contradiction (opposition).

Before proceeding I'll follow Hyppolite in recapitulating the meaning of this dialectic. Jewish consciousness thought that essence was the "formless immutable", the abstract universal, and its anguish was its knowledge that this lay beyond it. It was compelled to project its essence into a beyond because it couldn't find it in the vanity of life, which it experienced itself as a part of.[3] With Christian consciousness, the meaning of unhappy consciousness changes: it realizes that its essence is the unity of 'for-itself' and 'in-itself'; i.e., its anguish is that of all consciousness: to be split, unable to attain itself, unable to be for-itself and in-itself at the same time. "Self-consciousness wishes to be self, to pose itself in its identity with itself. But this identity is not given as a thing; everything that is given is negated by self-consciousness. Thus, self-certainty experiences itself as a changeable consciousness, as a consciousness which can never wholly be itself." However, in the development of unhappy consciousness self-certainty will eventually renounce itself (by alienating itself in being) and "through this self-negation reestablish an objectivity [which] is no longer the pure and simple in-itself [but] a substance that is at the same time subject, a substance that poses itself as what it is." This will be the union of the in-itself and the for-itself.

Christian consciousness, though, is unable to *think* that union; it can only *feel* it, feel a "pious fervor which is pointed in the direction of thought but is not itself the thought of existence". Hence it doesn't possess the union--doesn't possess *itself*--as an "authentic truth, a truth that would be its own knowledge". Having failed to think through Christ's spiritual significance conceptually, consciousness falls back into a "separation from its essence". "Self-consciousness remains unhappy because its essence--the unity of the immutable and the specific--remains a beyond for it [in Christ]…."

February 4

There are three moments in Christian unhappy consciousness. The first is the "immediate encounter of the beyond and the here-below", the *feeling* of being one with essence (by being recognized by God).[4]

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[1] It's a unity not *for*-itself but *in*-itself.

[2] Christ is the union of God and man, of universality and specificity, of essence and nonessence. Hyppolite spends a lot of time describing the metaphor, but I won't. It's just a historical illustration (admittedly important to Hegel's arguments) of Hegel's ideas, a *metaphor* which, moreover, occasionally seems heavy-handed and hard to swallow. ('As the essence of self-consciousness eludes its grasp, so Christ "eludes the grasp" of his disciples because he is *out there*, in space and time, a "sensuous and opaque entity, with all the rigidity of an actual thing".')

[3] That explanation is equivalent to saying that the projection was an expression of consciousness' experience that it could never truly be itself--an experience which it at first blamed on the (vanity/contingency of the) world rather than on its own 'negative', self-transcending nature, which is the real cause. Christian unhappy consciousness is different from the more primitive one, in that it is (at least symbolically) aware of its true nature.

[4] For *us* (in-itself) the feeling is of unity with essence, but for-itself it is of contact with God.

The second is a consequence of consciousness' continued unhappiness (from its awareness of still being separate from God--especially after the death of Christ):

> Consciousness returns within itself and manifests itself externally only as negativity, in desire and in labor…. [This time, however, its desire and its labor are not negations of the world, whose goal is that self-consciousness find itself.] The world has itself become a figure of God, since God has embodied himself and presented himself as a specific self-consciousness.[1] ….Sensuous existence becomes a symbol. It is not what it is, and if it yields itself to consciousness it does so because the immutable itself makes a gift of it to man. Consciousness, therefore, does not attain through its action a feeling of absolute domination over the here-below.

Consciousness humbles itself, because it feels separate from essence.[2] It renounces its freedom and its independence, in that it considers its acts to be directed by God and itself to be dependent on God. At the same time, the world--being, life--is resurrected from its former position of inessentiality to a being that partakes of the universal, that is not 'vanity' or sheer meaningless illusion. Clearly the dialectical movement that is taking place is that self-consciousness is repudiating its earlier arrogance vis-à-vis the rest of existence: it is striving for a negation of its earlier negation of the world. "Negation must go so far as to negate itself in asceticism and alienation--to be the negation of the negation--and, by so doing, reestablish the universal." Self-consciousness used to think that specificity (negation of the universal)--or more precisely, the for-itself--was essence; now it thinks that specificity is opposed to essence, so it wants to negate it (i.e., itself, its own negation). Thus, the meaning of its desire and labor is the opposite of what it once was: *now* its goal is to turn negation back on itself (self-consciousness). When it has completely negated itself, completely humbled itself, it will no longer be specificity "as such" but the universal 'manifested in' specificity, the unity of in-itself and for-itself.

Man doesn't realize this ideal in the second moment, for in his self-humiliation he in fact elevates himself. *He* poses God. He poses his own passiveness. He *freely* renounces freedom. Moreover, he intuitively feels his independence. "Consciousness feels itself here as specific existence, and it does not allow itself to be duped by the appearance of its renunciation. For the truth of this consciousness remains the fact that it has not abandoned itself." Specificity has not yet been overcome.

In its struggle to suppress itself, consciousness evolves to the third stage, in which the ascetic and the medieval church are the main characters. The ascetic is aware of the "vanity of his self"; his action is the "action of nothing"; his enjoyment is the "feeling of his misfortune". Action itself has become something "evil", something to be overcome as an expression of specificity. Tirelessly the ascetic combats his own nature, but his struggle for self-abnegation is doomed. On his own, he can't stifle himself. Only through the mediation of the clergy and the church--a mediation between specificity and universality--can individuality be negated.

> At first, [consciousness] rejects itself qua specific will, it abandons its freedom of choice and of decision. Then, through the sacrament of penance, it frees itself from the guilt of action: "When action consists in following an alien decision, it ceases--with respect to acting and to the will--to be the particular action of the person." The fruit of its labor, and enjoyment, are still retained by consciousness, but it renounces these in part through almsgiving and fasts. Consciousness ends by surrendering its very independence, agreeing to what it does not understand.[3]

"The medieval church prefigures modern reason [the union of in-itself and for-itself], for it is a form of

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[1] Hegel: "This actual reality is a figure of the immutable. For the immutable has received specificity within itself, and since qua immutable, it is a universal, its specificity means in general actual reality as a whole." In other words, because the universal encompasses everything, when it became specific it became the whole world.

[2] As I've already stated, it also feels united with essence, but only in an immediate, incomplete way.

[3] Church rites and ceremonies in Latin.

concrete universality." Reason, which is born in the Renaissance, takes over the church's role as mediator between the individual and the universal.

I've finished the chapter on unhappy consciousness. Its conclusion, in my opinion, is too optimistic: being-in-itself and being-for-itself can never be united. The idea of their union is ridiculous and meaningless. Self-consciousness cannot overcome itself. Absolute knowledge, absolute happiness, absolute anything is impossible, and history will never end. Until it ends.

In spite of the fact that his system was a total failure, completely "contraposed" to common sense, practically incoherent and fundamentally intellectually dishonest, Hegel may have been one of the greatest thinkers of the millennium. His imagination….there's no word in the language to describe his imagination. His intellectual acuity as applied to most problems was miraculous. It's hard to believe that an intellect of his magnitude ever existed. *[But most of what he wrote was so damn absurd!]*

February 5

Reason and idealism. In reason, "knowledge of an object is self-knowledge, and self-knowledge is knowledge of being-in-itself". "Reason signifies a content which not only is in our representations but also contains the essence of things, a content which is not alien to the I, given from without, but is produced by the I". Reason is idealism. Hegel's idealism, however, is different from Kant's and Fichte's (for example) in that it doesn't exalt the point of view of the *individual*; it stresses the *universality* of the I, the relation and the communication between *all* I's. The I is a we, and the we is an I. Mutual recognition raises each self to a universal self. What Hegel means by this is elucidated by his comment that "this (universal) self-consciousness is the basis of every virtue, of love, honor, friendship, courage, self-sacrifice, and fame". It reminds me of Marx's idea of the "species-being".

Reason is not yet spirit because it isn't completely aware of itself, it doesn't exist "for its own sake". It does, however, signify "consciousness' certainty that it is the whole of reality, the whole of truth, [its] certainty that this truth is not beyond but is immediately present to consciousness". "Consciousness knows that it can discover itself in the world, and it undertakes the conquest and the science of the world." Nonetheless, insofar as they have forgotten their process of development, reason and idealism are flawed. For consciousness "caught up in experience" they are immediate truths, mere assertions that haven't been thought through dialectically. "The development of a truth is the in-itself of that truth, and in the absence of the movement by means of which it arises, it is merely an assertion." If it considered its preconditions--its 'prehistory' in the dialectics of consciousness and self-consciousness--idealism would come to a fuller understanding of itself: it would realize, first of all, that it is a phenomenon in the history of spirit, not a 'static', abstract truth discovered by a few intellectuals.[1] Subjective idealism--Fichte's, for example--is nothing but a modern form of skepticism, or of unhappy consciousness "which oscillates endlessly between two irreconcilable terms [I and other]". "The result of this formal idealism is an opposition between an empirical realm that lacks unity--a contingent multiplicity--and an empty thought [that I = I]."

> Idealism falls into this contradiction because it affirmed as true the abstract concept of reason, the unity of reality and of the I in the still abstract form of the category. Genuine reason, which we are studying at this stage of the *Phenomenology*, is not so inconsistent. It knows that it is only the (subjective) certainty of being all of reality, and does not yet take that certainty to be truth. It seeks to test it out, to raise it to truth. In this attempt it sets about learning about the world and acquiring genuine content. Concrete reason moves from the certainty of being all of reality to its truth, which is knowledge of reality. It builds up a science of nature and observes nature so as to discover itself within it and thereby advance to truth what at first was only a subjective certainty.
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> The difference between idealism (a philosophical system that gives out as truth a certainty that

[1] See my journal entry from a few years ago in which I tried to explain Hegel's originality--no doubt obscurely and 'skeletally', but not incorrectly.

> is still subjective) and the concrete reason of the *Phenomenology* is clear. In the *Phenomenology*, reason seeks its truth, whereas idealism proclaims that truth without having tested it out and without having justified it historically. Thus idealism is abstract; it remains at the stage of the category--the unity of being and I--and does not know development. It does not transcend the opposition between the a priori and the a posteriori, and it does not know genuine synthesis, which is the synthesis of the a priori and the a posteriori itself. But reason that is actually engaged in knowing nature and action will be able to discover itself and to substitute for formal idealism a concrete idealism in which the I and the universe are adequate to each other in a monism of spirit.

I don't understand how reason can search *inside* and '*behind*' things, which it does in science, and yet believe that the other is the I. If it has to investigate things themselves in order to discover their truth, how can its self-certainty be their truth? That they require laborious investigation means that they are opaque to it, and thus that they are not it.

Enough of philosophy for the moment. I haven't mentioned my job for a long time. Every day continues to have its ups and downs; no day is great, no day is completely bad. I've outgrown my initial romantic desire to 'impact' my students' lives; now what keeps me going each day is the knowledge that in a few hours I'll be free. I'm still giving private lessons to the 19-year-old. Today's was the best yet: she talked the most she ever has.

Friday, February 6

The observation of nature. The science of the modern world "is interested not in the sensuous as such but in the concept that resides in the sensuous. Reason is not passive vis-à-vis reality: it questions experience, and by questioning nature it manages to discover in experience a concept, which is nothing other than the presence of reason itself in the midst of the content. In the world that is offered to it, reason discovers itself; the knowledge of experience is a self-knowledge."[1] This science isn't a reproduction of the dialectics of perception and understanding, though at first it may appear to be. The purpose of the section on reason in the *Phenomenology* is to find in nature an image of reason, while the purpose of the sections on perception and understanding was to eliminate the thing-in-itself (by showing it to be constructed and repeatedly changed by consciousness (which, in my opinion--as you know--is a confusion)).

In the beginning, reason wants to find itself in nature as an "immediate reality". Genuine unity, however, will be dialectical rather than immediate (which 'immediacy' entails a transposition of reason into *being*, as a thing, and a loss of its *active* nature), because nature isn't self-conscious, as the I and reason are. (I don't mean that reason is initially conscious of *itself*, for if it were it would bypass the detour of observing nature--an alienated self--and simply observe itself (or self-consciousness) instead. I mean that it presupposes and is united with self-consciousness.) For now we'll have to humor it and follow its phenomenological development through natural science.

First reason *describes* things and names them. It quickly reaches the limit of this knowledge, which can't know whether what appears to be in-itself is a contingency or something more essential. So it *classifies* things next, analyzes their "characteristic signs". This form of knowledge is inadequate too, for two reasons: systems of classification are an "ideal order which nature does not realize" (boundaries between species are sometimes blurred, distinctions in reason do not exist in nature), and classification cannot proceed below the level of plants because there are not independent objects at that level but only relations. A science of *laws* is born. Eventually this science rises to an expression of the concept, viz. that nature is dynamic; it moves beyond the "static universal of description and classification". "The concept is relation, but it is also unity, the return to itself from being-other. ….this unity within relation appears to consciousness as a new object: the organic. The organic is no longer law as the relation of terms which lose themselves in each

[1] Later we'll see that it isn't a complete self-knowledge, and theoretical reason will be forced to become practical reason. When *that* is seen as inadequate, the two will be united in spirit.

other. It is law as the unity of a process which preserves itself in its becoming-other." Law expressed the diversity in the concept; the organic expresses the unity in it.

….Haven't been this happy in a long time. Had dinner a few hours ago with Ji-su and her best friend. I hadn't known she was bringing someone; it was a surprise blind date. And what a surprise! Her friend, Hyejin, who's 26 years old, is not only impossibly cute but friendly, intelligent, inquisitive and (seemingly) guileless. After Ji-su left we had a labored but fun conversation--her spoken English isn't very good, but she understood me--during which she repeatedly said she was having a great time.[1] We promised to study each other's language intensively in the next few weeks, starting tonight. We'll meet again for dinner tomorrow, with Ji-su. When I came home I called my informant, who'd already spoken to her 'source'; she imparted valuable intelligence about the state of mind of my potential agent of love.

Wow, I really had a good time tonight. You don't understand; you can't. You've read the words, but you can't appreciate the feeling. This girl is adorable! I felt *possessed* as I watched her speak and reflect on how to formulate her sentences. My imagination unleashed itself from my reason. I'd be embarrassed to tell you the romantic thoughts it conceived.

I told her I'd study Korean tonight, but I can't. I feel too….ethereal, too 'light'. And *this* lightness of being is far from unbearable. I think I'll return to my story and see if I can put my mood into words.

….(4:30; can't sleep.) The section on organic being, life, is hard to understand, and I doubt it's worth the effort of deciphering. It's all pseudo-science, after all, and it's less interesting than Hegel's ideas on humanity. Most of Hyppolite's discussion is concerned with the ostensible contingency inherent in life. An animal's adaptation to its environment, according to Kant, is contingent, in that it could have happened another way. There's no necessary connection between, for example, the concept of air and the concept of the structure of birds. In order to "banish" the contingency--in order really to *explain* nature--we must put forward a teleological explanation, which, in rising above the related terms (air, bird), doesn't invoke laws. The "concept" then ceases to be law and becomes *goal*. Because Kant defined nature as the "ensemble of phenomena governed by laws" he was forced to locate this goal, or goals, outside of it, in a divine understanding. Hegel, on the other hand, "tries to show that the concept is immanent in organic nature, and that the goal, the end, is neither outside nature nor outside human understanding". What is this goal? Why, spirit, of course![2] Spirit (which is self-conscious wisdom) is somehow "immanent" in inorganic nature (which is unconscious wisdom), and it leads nature to the level of organic life, which, apparently, is *also* the goal. ("Organic being is in fact the real goal; and it is its own end, preserving itself in its relation to others.") In any case, the upshot of Hegel's pseudo-science is that the "instinct of reason"--so-called to distinguish it from self-conscious reason--cannot fully discover itself in nature, because "the goal immediately falls outside the thing and implies an understanding [viz. spirit, of which reason is still unaware], [but] at the same time it is objective, present to self-consciousness as a thing, [and thus] it eludes self-consciousness' consciousness and appears to it to have its meaning in *another* understanding [as Kant thought]". The instinct of reason doesn't know that nature is one vast self, and hence that its necessity is the "immanence of the self in its development, its selfsameness". Therefore, "nature is not apprehended as a first reflection of reason". Only at the end of its development will spirit/reason recognize itself (its past) in nature.

Saturday, February 7

My dinner-date was cancelled because Hyejin had to go to Seoul for some reason. I ate alone, as usual, and now I'm going to bed. Or, soon. Early, for once.

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[1] That's a part of Korean culture I like. Koreans aren't afraid to be honest in situations in which Americans would feel compelled to 'play the game', to hide their real thoughts.

[2] Or rather, "in the concept of goal organic nature *refers* to another essence, spirit". Don't ask me what this "refers" means. (Incidentally, Hyppolite notes that if another essence has to be referred to, the first essence doesn't truly contain its goal within it.)

The remainder of Hyppolite's chapter on nature is too incomprehensible for me to waste time on. I've read it only once, but I'm not going to read it again.[1] All I clearly recall is that Hegel critiques the popular scientific law in his day that "the exterior is the expression of the interior" and shows that it's "hollow", because in organic being there's no distinction between exterior and interior. Organic being is the concept; it's a fluid movement; there are no fixed determinations like 'interior' and 'exterior'. The conclusion of his intricate argument(s) is that "unlike the life of spirit, organic life is not a history that unites specificity and universality in a universal specificity. And for this reason, the instinct of reason which seeks itself in being must move from the observation of organic nature to the observation of human self-consciousness."

….I slept for three hours but woke up to take a piss. And now I'm not tired anymore. So….I'll read the chapter on the observation of human individuality. Observing reason is bound to fail especially in this sphere, because its practice of "immobilizing and congealing the content that it claims to grasp" ensures that it cannot grasp the nature of spirit and consciousness, which is pure movement, reason itself rather than a *thing*, a *being*. Before discussing physiognomy and phrenology Hegel briefly criticizes formal logic and empirical psychology, both of which consider the basic elements of their subject matter in isolation instead of unity--the laws of thought, on the one hand, and human faculties on the other. He also says that psychology is mistaken in postulating that the individual is determined by his environment, because the environment that acts on him isn't 'in-itself' but '*for-him*'. "The world that acts on us is already 'our world'; we see it through ourselves. And we can come to know an individual's world only if we begin with that individual. We can specify an influence only if we know the person who undergoes it, and thereby determines it." (This idea seems to make sense, but if we recall that the individual is formed by his environment primarily in the early stages of childhood, when he's still scarcely an individual (or at least one who's impressionable, whose development can take many paths), we'll see that Hegel isn't entirely correct. No doubt by the time of adolescence the individual is determining the experiences that influence him, but there is nonetheless a *reciprocal* determination--the individual of his experience and the experience of the individual.) Given this criticism of psychology, the next logical question is that of the "basic nature" of individuality. "Does something of this sort exist, and can the self be reduced to a nature that it has not itself created?" Observing reason again bases its theories on the law according to which the exterior expresses the interior, which is to say that it focuses on the body, which expresses both the *innate* nature of the individual, which he hasn't made, and his *acquired* nature, his being-for-himself. (Reason formulates this opposition as that between the individual's innate nature and his "active putting into play of that nature".) The face, for example, indicates a person's innermost thoughts. Hegel rightly says this is false: the face "can dissimulate as well as convey thought". His second criticism is that any psychology that makes *intentions* the essential interior of a person and neglects the completed act as being a comparatively inessential exterior is "forever lost in an infinity of nuances, nuances which are never adequate for stating the interior as such. This conjectured interior is ineffable and inexpressible by its very nature. The pure interior is malleable, infinitely determinable: *it transcends its false indeterminateness only through action* [Hyppolite's italics]. 'This false infinity is annihilated in the accomplished act. ….the individual man is what the act is.'" In short, one cannot know man by analyzing his intentions "without respect to deeds and actions", but one *can* know man by analyzing his actions, because "the interior is immediately the exterior and vice-versa".

Phrenology is patently absurd, and Hegel has no difficulty in exposing its flaws.[2] It is yet another manifestation of reason's dogma that the exterior expresses the interior. However, it does intuit one truth (albeit perversely): the identity of thought and being. This is idealism. Phrenology's mistake is to not understand that "the identity must be taken as a concept and not as a portrayal". (Thought isn't *portrayed* in being.) Reason finally recognizes the falsity of phrenology, and in so doing it recognizes the falsity of its attempt to discover an immediate unity of itself and nature. For phrenology is the logical conclusion of

[1] Generally I reread all the chapters at least once before quitting them.

[2] His criticisms aren't the ones that we would offer nowadays. For example, he objects to its division of the spirit into "ossified faculties" (corresponding to parts of the skull).

that attempt: in its judgment that "the spirit is a bone" it expresses the unmediated identity of being-for-itself and being-in-itself. Hence reason will now proceed to a level corresponding to self-consciousness, to an *active* position vis-à-vis being-in-itself--in which it seeks to 'negate' the world, as self-consciousness did earlier--and will abandon the perspective of consciousness, in which it sought to discover itself in being.

Another reason why reason becomes active reason is that with the advent of phrenology "observing reason discovers the self as a being, or a thing presupposed by its endeavors, and it therefore turns away from this positing of self, which is a negation of self, and becomes active reason". I'm not sure what the relation is between *this* reason (for observing reason's 'self-transcendence') and the one I explained in the last paragraph.

February 8

Every day I reflect that I'm grateful for not living in a time or a place in which religious or political persecution might cause me excruciating physical pain, through torture or war. Being burned at the stake, having my nose or ears cut off, having doctors do unanaesthetized 'experimental' operations on me, being forced to starve in a concentration camp, being forced to go to battle with nothing but a shield and an axe to defend myself--all these and hundreds of other misfortunes *could* have happened to me, but they didn't. For that I am grateful. Because nothing is worse than extreme physical pain.

I never cease to be amazed at the cruelties humans are capable of inflicting on each other. A species of animal that was merely cannibalistic would be far nobler than *homo sapiens*.

Byron's poem "Darkness" is so disturbing because it's true.

[…]

I was supposed to meet Jung-hee for dinner, but she cancelled again. Instead I ate with Ji-su. When I mentioned Hyejin, Ji-su revealed the reason for her trip to Seoul: she wanted to meet her ex-boyfriend, with whom she'd been in a relationship for three years and had broken up with *last week*! That fairly crushed me. I hadn't expected something like this: I'd really hoped it would work out between us. Spent the whole dinner in a haze of dejection. Asked for more details, attacked Hyejin's character--for she'd "led me on"--and complained bitterly about my luck. Later we went to a coffee shop for a couple hours, where I continued to speculate on Hyejin's intentions. Not even Ji-su knew them; she was as confused as I. On Friday night, apparently, Hyejin had been so happy with our evening together that she'd told Ji-su she wanted to get a U.S. visa!, that she was determined to learn English, etc. But the very next day she'd gone to Seoul to get back together with her boyfriend. It was hard to understand, though we thought of two or three theories. Mine turned out to be the right one. Hyejin was scheduled to be on a train to Daegu that evening, so Ji-su called her to find out what had happened in Seoul. Was told they'd finally separated for good (= for now) and that Hyejin wanted to see me again. […]

In short: I've regained hope. A shred of it.[1]

Monday, February 9

I forgot to tell you I was *nervous* on my blind date with Hyejin. That's newsworthy because it's never happened before. I'm nervous *now* too, thinking about our date on Thursday. --Please, God, let this relationship be a success!!

In spite of my tendency to be fascinated with my "dark side", I'm well aware it's less dark than most people's. It *could consume* me if I wanted it to, but I exercise such self-control--or whatever you want to call it; maybe it's cowardice, maybe complacency, maybe laziness--that it hardly exists in comparison with other people's. Theirs is a fact, in plain view; mine is a potential. They scarcely conceal, for example, their selfishness, greed, idiocy and dormant brutality; all such traits are implicit in both their daily acts and

[1] I know it's petty to write in such detail about my social life, but I have to.

those they *wish* could be daily, like suing someone who accidentally spills hot coffee on them. (Such lawsuits are a particularly vulgar manifestation of the modern mind, which pays heed to nothing but its *appetites* and its *ulterior motives*. Individualism has the potential to be a noble philosophy, but in coarse hands it becomes a detestable creed whose sole adherents are half-wits and half-men (= businessmen)--i.e., 90% of humanity.)

[…] Goethe was congenitally incapable of thinking profoundly: he considered deep thought a sign of "hypochondria" (though he phrased his opinion differently).

--Nietzsche remarks somewhere in *The Gay Science* that he doesn't trust Rousseau's autobiography.[1] I disagree. I trust *The Confessions far* more than *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. I'm inclined to think that Goethe's whole autobiography is nothing but a monumental embellishment of the truth. He was a vain man, after all, vain to the core. As a joke he even confessed his dishonesty in the title! "Poetry and truth" equals "fiction and truth" equals "not all of what follows is true". The first sentence announces that his autobiography has one of the same purposes as Hitler's, viz. to propagate a myth of himself: its gist is that 'I was born under a favorable alignment of the stars', which translates as 'I was destined for greatness from the very beginning'. Insipid little man! There's more to being a great human being than having poetic talent, talking well, being emotional and dabbling in pseudo-science. A great man shouldn't be super-endowed with complacency, vanity, arrogance, pettiness, self-blindness, intellectual shallowness, an intolerance of criticism and views opposed to his own, a Herculean capacity for unfaithfulness to his wife and perverse love-affairs with 20-year-olds when he's 70.… Nevertheless, I'll concede that Goethe was "great" if Napoleon, Byron, Beethoven, Mozart and others were too. They were all terribly flawed people--if by 'flawed' we mean 'not virtuous', and if by 'virtuous' we mean 'living *approximately* in accord with the basic ideals posited in almost *all* value-systems'--but they had talents that elevated them above the masses and caused them to impact history, so they're considered great. Not noble. It's extremely rare that a person is great *and* noble. Gandhi was [no, not true], and Buddha, and Jesus.

I'm not noble either (whatever that word means). But at least I *admit* it! I don't like intelligent people who live in self-delusion.[2]

February 10

Active reason and modern individualism. In the beginning of the chapter there's a footnote that I'll quote here:

> [Active reason produces itself by means of the negation of the world, an alien being.] This "alien being" is no longer alien in the way that it was at the stage of simple self-consciousness, a stage that has long since been transcended. It is alien only inasmuch as it is immediate, and rational self-consciousness knows that this immediateness is a pure appearance that will be transcended: "It is a certainty for which the immediate in general has the form of something transcended [*aufgehoben*], so that its objectivity is valid now *only as a superficial layer the interior and the essence of which are self-consciousness itself*".

Reason knows it is the world, but that knowledge isn't yet *truth*. It is only subjective certainty. Reason

[1] Nietzsche's insolence to that thinker, as to most thinkers, is misguided. So is his adulation of Goethe.

[2] I don't mock Beethoven, Napoleon, Mozart and the rest because they didn't have the self-delusions that Goethe did. They knew they were flawed--and they didn't care. (That's also a more *manly* attitude.) Goethe portrayed his flaws as signs of his 'strength', and he was even proud of them because they made him a "totality". Aside from the philosophical indefensibility of that idea, its apparent 'loftiness' is vitiated by its hidden purpose of self-aggrandizement. --On the other hand, it remains an attractive ideal: the 'complete' person, acquainted with a little of (almost) everything. But in order to be a *defensible* ideal, it has to be formulated more scientifically than it was by Goethe and Nietzsche.

"rises to its truth only when it is actually realized, and it is actually realized only in the development of *objective spirit*"--when it becomes what it is, viz. all of reality, which happens when it becomes spirit ("spiritual substance", "objective spirit", the "ethical world", a collective organization of individuals). "Spirit is reason that is no longer merely subjective certainty but also truth and substance." It cannot emerge (become for-itself[1]) until specific consciousness has undergone a series of experiences that raise it (consciousness) from its isolation to spiritual substance. --To be precise, Hegel traces the path by which the individual first rejects immediate (unreflective) ethical harmony, ethical substance (objective spirit)--i.e., the path by which he "cuts the tie that binds him to the whole", of which he has hitherto been an 'unreflective' part--so as to be "self-sufficient in setting his own end", and then through his experiences "*reflectively* reconquests ethical substance" and rises to *morality*. The other path that the individual can take[2] is that according to which he is "posed in his isolation and reaches substance by transcending his impulses" (for happiness, power, etc.), but in this case the result is immediate ethical substance, which is the beginning of the first path I described. I don't know the relation between the two, though Hegel insists they're equivalent: "We can just as well say that the individual detaches himself from the whole of which he is a part and shatters that immediateness so as to pose himself for-itself, as that he gains immediateness by engendering spiritual substance through his own movement: the two representations are equivalent." They seem not to be: the second, surely, is logically and chronologically prior to the first. Anyway, Hegel chooses to follow the first way, "explaining that it is more appropriate to the spirit of the times".

I should think that spirit isn't for-itself until it "reconquests" ethical substance and rises to a self-conscious *morality*, but judging from what Hyppolite has said, Hegel thinks spirit is for-itself even in naïve, immediate social organizations like the polis (because it doesn't really *exist* until it's for-itself, and it exists (in some form) in the polis). (I think that every social organization except the final one represents a kind of 'limbo' between spirit unconscious-of-itself--in nature--and spirit completely conscious-of-itself. How these degrees of self-consciousness are possible, I don't know.)

Individuality initially wants to enjoy its specificity, its uniqueness, which means it wants to "pose itself in being". 'Being' refers here not to nature but to the social world. Self-consciousness has abandoned understanding and science; it now wants to "discover itself" in the other. It has become reflectively aware of its formerly unconscious purpose in describing nature, which was to assimilate being to itself; thus it sets about realizing itself immediately in the world. It wants to assimilate other selves, "to become a specific essence in the other self-consciousness, to reduce that other to itself." It wants to abolish the being-for-others of the other self and become *one* with it. It knows that it has the same essence as the other; its task is to *realize* that sameness concretely. The happiness it has in mind is love, the union of two human beings. It can never really attain that happiness, though, because in every moment its specificity is destroyed, "shattered against the universal", which in this case is time. Every instant is a death; in all enjoyment, in every moment, *we* "consume" our specificity, for we are universality as well. "The tragedy here is that this necessity appears incomprehensible to man": he doesn't recognize himself in it, he doesn't realize that he (self-consciousness) is the cause of it. To him, this constant abolition of his specificity, of his enjoyment, is an "absurd power" that has no meaning. However, eventually he must "assume responsibility" for it, since it is, after all, *for consciousness*. "But in taking responsibility for it, consciousness transcends [hedonism, the pursuit of an unreflecting enjoyment of the world]….and a new figure of consciousness appears in which the universal is immediately bound to desire." *Desire* is now universal because it confronts the universal destruction of individuality and hedonistic enjoyment. "….Necessity no longer appears as an inexorable destiny outside self-consciousness;" it becomes the necessity of the *desire for happiness*. This desire has "universal value"; it is valid for everyone, and self-consciousness knows it as such. "The universal has passed over into self-consciousness rather than remaining external to it." Self-consciousness has thereby risen above its initial specificity, and its advance is manifested in its conviction that everyone should follow the "law of the heart", viz. that "we must unhesitatingly follow our natural inclinations, that what drives us to pleasure is never bad so long as we have not been perverted by society". Individuality

[1] It has always been in-itself.

[2] Hyppolite says that the two paths are effectively the same, but I don't see how.

hasn't yet overcome its naturalness, its immediateness, so it thinks that the first impulse is always good. "If each person follows the promptings of his heart, everyone will partake of the immediate joy of living." Unfortunately, the law of the heart comes into contradiction with the established social order, which consciousness concludes is only an apparent order because its laws are arbitrarily separated from the individual heart. Therefore the individual decides that the law of the heart must be realized in the world. This desire, too, cannot succeed, because the law is "valid only insofar as it is bound up with a specific heart. No sooner is it actualized than it escapes the particular heart that gave it life.…'it takes on the form of being and it becomes a universal power to which the particular heart is indifferent. Once the individual establishes his own order, he can no longer recognize it is as his own.'" Since his action is both his own and external to him--since he has "realized himself as an individuality that wishes to be universal"--he becomes a stranger to himself, he is *alienated* from himself. He is also no longer convinced of the innate goodness of other people: because their hearts oppose his, he finds them detestable. But through his experience he has learned that the social order is the "expression of universal individuality, or of the interplay of individualities exposing the content of their own hearts, each claiming universality." What he is faced with, then, is himself. "The social order is my deed, though it is no longer consonant with my heart." I discover that, because I act, the social order is my own essence and deed just as my 'heart' is my essence. Essence is nonessence and nonessence is essence. To save itself from madness, from complete self-contradiction, consciousness invents the fiction that "contingent individualities [like fanatical priests and corrupt despots] have introduced this ill into a humanity that was naturally good". Its explanation is obviously worthless, since contingent individualities can't externally impose a social order on mankind, but consciousness is at least saved from "madness" by the fabrication.

This social order is both stable/universal and perverse. It appears to be consistent and regular, but it is also "a conflict of each against all….the interplay of uneasy, ever-changing individualities, each of which seeks to assert its wishes and collides with the wishes of others". Consciousness that is cognizant of both the order's universality (its in-itself) and its inconsistency (its manifestation)[1] thinks that "to realize the truth of this in-itself [viz., the universal order] is simply to set aside the individuality that perverts it. The new figure, then, is virtue, the consciousness that wishes to annihilate individual egoisms in order to allow the order to appear as it is in its truth."

Hegel isn't fond of the virtuous consciousness. He thinks it does little but make "pompous and hollow speeches" as it "vainly struggles against the way of the world [viz., the conflict of each against all]". Virtue denounces egoism and believes that the individual should sacrifice himself completely for the greater good. Whereas in the way of the world individuality predominates over law, virtuous consciousness emphasizes law over individuality (thereby, of course, distinguishing the two, which the "law of the heart" didn't). "For virtue, the good, the universal (law), is [an as yet unactualized] in-itself. Virtue can only believe in its ideal; this faith is the consciousness of a nonpresence." In admitting that the phenomenal manifestation of the world is not good--that the for-itself isn't (yet) the in-itself--virtue is making a merely verbal distinction, "for if the in-itself is not for-an-other it is a pure and simple abstraction. What does not manifest itself does not exist. The essence of essence is to manifest itself--and the essence of manifestation is to manifest essence."[2] There is no invisible, 'true' realm of universal goodness that must eventually manifest itself. Moreover, virtue "can be actual only by dint of individuality",[3] which means that it "is inextricably linked with the way of the world, [and therefore that] the good that it proposes already exists (inheres in ethical substance)". When the virtuous consciousness finally recognizes its inseparability from the world it admits that "the way of the world is not as bad as it seemed, since it is the realization of a virtue which without it would slumber forever in some nether region". Virtue's ideal already exists in the way of

[1] As we'll see, consciousness is wrong to set essence and manifestation against each other.

[2] The obvious implication of that last statement is that if the world appears chaotic or bad, its essence has more in common with chaos or badness than simplicity and goodness.

[3] Remember that individuality is the very thing virtue opposes. Virtue fails to reflect (until the end of its development) that it is itself a part of the world, and hence that in order to exist it and goodness must be potentialities in the "way of the world".

the world; otherwise virtue would never have appeared. Hence virtue "vanishes into the way of the world"--and, conversely, the way of the world can no longer be thought of as being-for-itself distinct from being-in-itself. For, although individuality may think that it acts purely egoistically, it's wrong. When it acts it transcends itself and actualizes potentialities of which it was unaware; i.e., in its act, what was in-itself becomes actual (for-itself). (The in-itself is simply the potential, the "disposition", that is actualized.) "I imagine myself to be limited to my own individuality, but in fact I more or less embody a universal that transcends me." Both *I* and "*the way of the world*" are not only being-for-itself but also being-in-itself, "the reality that creates itself". At this point we reach a new synthesis: the individual's action is simultaneously in- and for-itself. We have advanced to the final stage of reason.

At the end of the chapter Hyppolite inserts a useful footnote:

> The three experiences that we have considered can be summarized as follows: Individuality began by contraposing the *for-itself*, as a *goal*, to the *in-itself*, the given reality. This *for-itself* grew progressively richer, and in the last experience (that of virtue) the *in-itself* became the *goal*. But at that point the *goal* rejoins *given reality* and the distinction between them becomes a mere abstraction. We return to actual reality, but to actual reality as *action.*

Wednesday, February 11

If I commented on every piece of music that made an impression on me I'd be writing forever. It's arbitrary which ones I single out to praise. With that said, I'm going to be arbitrary yet again: Bach's Partita No. 5, as played by Glenn Gould, is sheer perfection. The first movement in particular. I often listen to it four times in succession, trying to appreciate its harmonic intricacies and lose myself in the sound at the same time. It's so light-hearted! It makes me feel so carefree!

Bach's facility with contrapuntal harmonies is simply beyond belief. More often than not, the bass is singing a lovely melody of its own while the treble is getting all the credit.

February 12

Date with Hyejin— Waited for her in BK, stomach bubbling with nervousness, watching people walk by, expecting to see her any second, torturing myself—but fifteen minutes later my butterflies had flown away. (Har-har.) We'd written questions to ask each other in the other's language, but that proved unnecessary.

Even so, I doubt this thing will work out. Hyejin is frustrated at not being able to communicate fluently. So am I, but…. Oh, this is a nightmare! It's the Sin-ae debacle all over again! The worst part is I'll have to live in doubt for the next week or two. Already it's agonizing. I guess it was a good sign—but *only* a "good sign"—when she suggested we write letters to give each other on our next date.

I wish someone had told me that no Koreans speak English. It was a mistake to choose this country.

I'm so sick with worry I'm going to read philosophy.

Can't read philosophy now. Have to get this weight off my chest. Will write more of my story.

….Tired but can't sleep. How will I endure this night? I can't banish thoughts of Hyejin, nor can I put them to good use, since I'm too tired to write.

Few things are worse than this kind of impotent despair, a despair whose object is both the specific and the universal. A girl and life.

February 13

The Fates were obnoxious today. I had to substitute-teach at a school for the children of Belial—

and I wasn't in the mood to work anyway. Sincerely wanted to quit my job. I'm sick of it. Tonight I asked Lisa if she still wanted to go to Busan next Saturday; she said she had an interview that day, so she couldn't! I was royally pissed, since I'd already arranged to have Saturday off. She had waited for me to call her to say she'd broken her promise.

From now on—for a while, at least—I'm going to spend all my spare time learning Korean. Reading newspapers, reading children's books, reading websites, reading textbooks, listening to tapes, talking to friends, writing down new words. Hyejin is my best chance for happiness. –Suddenly I'm inspired! (Nothing inspires like love or its prospect.)

Saturday, February 14

Went to a coffee shop and a bar (or club) with Ji-su after work. Observed the mating rituals of *homo sapiens* for an hour—surely the most bizarre behavior of any species—and then went home and called Mom to say, "Happy Valentine's Day!"

I'm desperate for something *real* in life. All my experiences are fake—as are those of most people. They're an act; they can be turned on and off; they have no meaning; they're meant to pass the time. My relationships are and have been lies, in spite of my fondness for my friends. In one moment we can be intimate and seemingly important to each other; in the next we can be mutually disdainful or even hateful. We lie to each other and ourselves, and life lies to us. Passion is surely the only thing that can put a temporary halt to the deception.

This is so depressing. If I can't love, why should I live?

February 15

[…]

Although I know it's impossible to learn Korean in seven months, I won't give up yet. My goal isn't to speak it fluently; it's to understand it when others speak it. When Hyejin speaks it.

….Obviously when I've used the word 'master' in this journal I've meant it in a different sense than Hegel did. *My* 'master' is someone from whom people want recognition more than others. In the language of folk psychology it's a person who dominates and is respected (if also often disliked) to a high degree. Bill Clinton is such a man, to an extreme.

Monday, February 16

Human works and the dialectic of action. The individuality that is "real in-and-for-itself" no longer opposes the world or wishes to negate it. It knows that it is "directly in the midst of the world [that the "world" is really nothing but the world of individuality] and it wishes only to express itself…. Thus, what is essential is to act for the sake of acting; to manifest on the outside, in the pure element of exteriority, what the individuality already is within itself, its *basic and determinate nature*. Insofar as individuality is this basic nature, it is in-itself; insofar as it expresses it, it is for-itself…. The objective world and conscious individuality are now conjoined in one reality. This reality is the deed (*Tat*)." As I wrote earlier, the in-itself of the world is simply the potentiality that is realized in action[1]—or rather, it "*changes* from potentiality to action in its manifestation", and thus it is essentially action. "There is not a world in-itself and an individuality for-itself; the world is the world of individuality, and individuality is the meaning and the expression of the world."

In action, individuality is constrained by its own nature, its in-itself. The individual can't transcend

[1] So, if something isn't realized, then it wasn't a potential. As Hyppolite remarks, that's an easy way out for Hegel.

himself; he can only actualize himself. However, self-consciousness doesn't feel any limitation on itself, for it is purely the act of relating to itself. It is the movement of negativity. Therefore, when the *deed* confronts it—the deed which is a determination existing "in the element of being"—a determinate Dasein (that expresses the nature of the individual), self-consciousness instantly becomes 'universal' in relation to it and ceases to see it (the "work") as its own. "A difference between the work and acting consciousness [which is the pure movement of action, i.e., negativity] is introduced, a difference which contradicts the concept consciousness had of itself [viz., that consciousness—and hence action—was all of reality, that its goal was itself (the realization of its potential)]." The deed is a particular determination, different from the "self-equality of self-consciousness".[1] "I go beyond my work, which is to say that I transcend my originarily determinate nature and find it inadequate to my action qua action." But it isn't only the *content* of my work that opposes me; it is also the *form*, which is "*the determinateness of all reality, contraposed to the movement that determines*". Once again, the whole of reality opposes me. (Recall that in previous dialectics this was the starting-point, and unity was the result; in this dialectic, (the conviction of) unity was the starting-point, and opposition is the result.) Needless to say, this opposition was implicit in the fact that the in-itself is a determination and action is "form equal to itself", the negation of all determinations.

"Deposited in the alien milieu of reality, the work is shown to be contingent." The means chosen might have been inappropriate to the task, or the goal might not have corresponded with my nature (with possibility), or "chance" might have frowned on me. At this point Hegel introduces the concept of the "thing itself", which is the unity of being and self-consciousness. He acknowledges that each work is negated and, to an extent, contingent, but he points out that works (and actions) exist in a continuous 'stream' of disappearance and new appearance, a series which is itself one large and *necessary* work uniting being and action. It is "the necessity of action, the necessity of the unity of being and action. Works appear in reality as actions. They are negated by other works; they vanish. But what subsists and becomes actual reality is precisely this *negation of negation*, this infinite movement which transcends each particular deed by integrating it into a *universal essence*." "The 'thing itself' is actual reality envisaged as the work of self-consciousness." It isn't yet spirit, though (a concrete subject). It's still a "universal predicate", the predicate that consciousness attaches to each of its ephemeral actions to "grant them validity". For example, a scientist may say that his purpose is to advance knowledge; he thereby appeals to the universal *process*, i.e., the universal. However, he isn't being completely honest; he's really interested in the work not for its own sake but because it is his own. Therefore he isn't interested in the "thing itself", which he said he was. Everyone is guilty of the same dishonesty, though in different ways. On the other hand, from another perspective everyone *is* interested in the thing itself, for he enjoys creation and work for their own sake: while working he forgets his own self-interest and is absorbed in the work. The contradiction between work-as-my-thing and work-as-thing-in-general "must be resolved in a higher synthesis, in which the thing itself rises from being an abstract predicate to being a concrete subject. It then becomes the thing which, by being my thing, is everyone's as well." It is "a common work, in which individualities and the interplay of their mutual deceits are transcended [and] in which each rediscovers itself as universal self". Individuality becomes aware of its participation in a common project. The thing itself ceases to be a predicate and becomes a universal subject, a *self-consciousness*. "The universal is no longer contraposed to specific consciousnesses; rather, it finds in them its own concrete content." It is no longer *form*, the abstract 'process' in which all actions are submerged; it is now *content*, the movement of consciousness itself. It is also truth, which is thus identified with *certainty*. Truth is the "ethical world in which being is simultaneously [universal] self".

However, the individual self isn't yet a part of ethical substance. The laws that it's supposed to obey, such as "Everyone must tell the truth" and "Love your neighbor as yourself", seem arbitrary and contingent, because they're expressed by a particular consciousness. (A particular person(s) formulates them.) Hence individuality examines the laws to decide whether they're valid; Kant's rule "that proclaims the general condition in which a maxim can be established" is such a 'test' of the validity of laws. But it yields only tautologies. Moreover, an examination of morality is itself already the beginning of immorality, for it signifies a separation from absolute laws and a judgment of them as "arbitrary and alien". In reality,

[1] The *act* is the transition from the possible to being. It isn't a determination, but its product is.

though, “law is the pure absolute will of everybody, and it has the form of immediate being. This pure will is not thereby a command which simply ought to be; it exists and it is valid. It is the universal I of the category [or the “concept”?] that immediately is actual reality. And the world is nothing else but this actual reality.” Thus, because law exists, it is valid. It is valid *as* an existent. Consciousness (apparently) recognizes this eventually, and in so doing it becomes the self-consciousness of ethical substance. With this development we reach spirit.

Wednesday, February 18

I think I’d be happier dead than alive. Hyejin’s refusing to see me this week; her excuse: she’s studying for an exam.

….According to Ji-su, Hyejin thinks I’m going too fast. And that my ‘speed’ is the result not of deep fondness for her but loneliness. She’s right, of course.

Actually, in America my behavior would be fairly normal—all I did, essentially, was invite a girl on a third date and give her an extra prod after she’d declined—but because I’m in a city that’s thirty years behind the times (the American times) I’m going ‘way too fast’. Girls here want to be *friends first.*

Tomorrow I’ll resume the quest to make more friends—a second batch of friends—which is equivalent to the quest to find English speakers. In a week, Ji-su and I are going to join a gym; *there* I’ll meet people. Unless the Higher Intelligence that foils all my plans persists in its malice toward me.

February 20

I’ve decided there’s no point in trying to learn Korean. So yesterday I bought *A Moveable Feast*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and *The Power and the Glory*, by Graham Greene. I’ll read the first one first.

Saturday, February 21

This was one helluvan awesome day. I met Hye-gyung, the bookstore girl, at 12:30; we were together for the next seven hours. Our conversation was somewhat ‘manic’ until I loosened things up by singing from a pop song she said she likes. She lost her inhibitions and sang too; from that point on we didn’t stop being perfectly comfortable. Nor did she stop laughing.[1] She’s an intelligent, mature, movie-star-beautiful, flawless-English-speaking 21-year-old who studies economics and English literature. Her sense of humor is brilliant. Best of all, she doesn’t have a boyfriend. “Why not?” I asked. “Men are blind,” she answered laughingly. We began the day at a coffee shop, had lunch in an Italian restaurant, saw a movie and finally had dinner. It seemed obvious there’s potential for a relationship, but the girls here are inexplicable, so I can’t be certain. Anyway, at the very least I’ve made a good friend.

….It hasn’t even been two hours, but I miss her. I’ve been reading *A Moveable Feast*, which is an intimate collection of tender memories of Hemingway’s life in Paris in the 1920s, when he was a young man married to a charming wife and lived in simple happiness. It makes me think of a rich impressionistic painting temporally conceived. Its mood is quiet, a little sad and nostalgic. The warm memories of his wife make me envious.

February 22

After immersing myself again in Hemingway’s nostalgia, I ate lunch alone and went to the

[1] That isn’t literally true.

bookstore. The first person I met was an insensate middle-aged lawyer whose pastime consists in going to bookstores to annoy foreigners with his questions and his ideas on North Korea. At length I interrupted his speech with "Yes, I agree with you. But I have to meet a friend. It was nice talking to you." Hurried away; a few minutes later I surreptitiously reentered the English section to continue reading and hunting for prey of my own. For a while the situation wasn't promising—it didn't help that I had to be vigilant in dodging the lawyer's gaze—but finally I spotted a friendly-looking girl who was alone. At that moment Judy and another teacher espied me; they came over to talk. To my dismay. The American she was with (yclept Jim) was an avatar of charisma, but I kept half my attention focused on not letting the Korean out of my sight. Eventually I told them frankly that I was stalking this girl; they applauded my morality and let me go. So I walked over. Waited for her to separate herself from the group she was next to. To my surprise, *she* approached *me*! I was standing near the Harry Potter section; thinking she wanted to browse it, I asked—

"Do you like Harry Potter?"

"I've never read it. But I've seen it."

"Oh, you've seen the movies?"

"Yes." She paused. "I've seen you before. Do you remember me?"

"No. We met? Where?"

"In a bookstore. A long time ago. You wanted a teacher to teach you Korean."

I laughed in pretended embarrassment. "Oh, you saw me asking someone for lessons? Yeah, I used to want to learn Korean. I *did* learn it for a few months, but I've given up. It's '*numoo aryuwahyo*'." She appreciated my lambent wit. "But I do still want to make Korean friends. Would you like to go to lunch sometime?" I thought my warm smile would disarm her; it didn't. I pressed her. "It's so hard to meet English speakers here!"

"Well, I have plans now…."

"Oh, I didn't mean now. Sometime later. Maybe….could I have your phone number?" She gave it to me and I said I'd call her (after getting her name: Hye-eun). I returned to the two foreigners. Had coffee with them.

February 23

Finished Hemingway's book. On the whole, I like his writing-style—simple, reduced to the essentials—but there's room for improvement. His favorite word is 'very', which is not a good word.

Last night Hye-gyung had the great idea that we write emails to each other. She sent me her address and asked for mine. = Good sign. At 4:00, in the warm and fuzzy embrace of insomnia, I wrote to her. Her response was a sophisticated version of 'yada-yada-yada'—but a few sentences were encouraging: "To be honest, I had sort of prejudice toward American due to political or historical reasons between Korea and the U.S, but you are making me think about it different way. You are so funny and impressing me. Actually, seeing the movie 'Lost in translation', I didn't have really good idea about the movie. I was just a bit bored.^^[1] Your kind of interpretation was impressing me. You were like critic or something.^^" I'll see her on Saturday.

On Friday, dinner with the girl I met in the bar (on the 19th).

By the way, the Korean school year starts in March. Winter vacation has lasted two months; it's almost over. In a week the bars will be teeming;—they're empty now.

Yojum I often have dinner with Ji-su.

Read more of Hyppolite.

Tuesday, February 24

[1] In Korea, ^^ = ☺.

Reading Graham Greene.

A moment ago I discovered a website that contains complete translations of and commentaries on scores of ancient texts from every major civilization in Europe, Asia and Africa. Philosophers, historians and poets are represented.

Anaximander, who lived at the time of Thales, was the first Greek to write a philosophical treatise, *On Nature*. In it he proclaimed that the Boundless (which is a type of matter, probably) is the origin and principle of all things. He adduced at least two arguments: (1) the Boundless itself has no origin, while everything else does; (2) in order for generation and decay to be perpetual, their source must be inexhaustible. The "eternal movement" of the Boundless somehow caused the birth of the world. Anaximander had three principle ideas on astronomy: (1) the celestial bodies make full circles in the sky. The stars, the moon and the sun all describe circular paths. (2) Earth floats unsupported in space. (It has a cylindrical shape, and we live on its flat top.) It doesn't fall because "that which is situated in the center [of the universe] and at equal distances from the extremes has no inclination whatsoever to move up rather than down or sideways; and since it is impossible to move in opposite directions at the same time, it necessarily stays where it is". (3) The celestial bodies lie 'behind' and 'in front of' one another; i.e., the universe is three-dimensional. The sky is not the two-dimensional vault that it is in Homer. He thought the stars were nearest to us, then the moon, and then the sun. He also made a map of the world. He considered life to have begun from the moisture that covered Earth before it was dried up by the sun. The first animals were a kind of fish, from which men developed. Oceans are what's left of the "moisture".

February 25

Anaximenes, who was probably a pupil of Anaximander, thought that air is the source of all things. When it's rarefied it becomes fire, and when it's condensed it becomes wind, then clouds, then water and then earth. He gave a couple of empirical examples to support his claim. He also associated air with the soul, and thus with life and intelligence: he seems to have thought it was capable of directing its own development, as the soul controls the body. Earth was formed from air and now floats on it; the heavenly bodies were formed from evaporations from Earth, and they too float on cushions of air. He interpreted natural phenomena in accordance with his basic principles: for example, hail is frozen (condensed) rainwater, and "earthquakes are caused by the cracking of the earth when it dries out after being moistened by rain". He may have been a material monist—'air is the only substance; everything else is composed of it'—rather than a believer that air simply changes into different matters, but we can't be certain.

Anaxagoras was born around 500 B.C. He wrote a treatise on nature. He thought there's an infinite number of independent elements called "seeds", which are indivisible and imperishable, the ultimate components of combination, and which differ in shape, color and taste. Fire, earth, air and water are composed of them. Before the world was created, "all things were together, infinite both in quantity and smallness". This original mass was infinitely divisible, but no matter how much it was divided, every part of it would still contain a portion of all things. Thus everything has 'portions' of everything else in it. Seeds are distinguished from one another in that some have more of one thing and others more of another: for example, snow is both black and white, but it is more white than black. In other words, opposites are contained in everything (or rather, everything contains its opposite). The original mass became reality through the intervention of mind, which, as the source of motion, is a sort of 'fluid'. It's the thinnest of all elements, and it's the only thing that doesn't contain portions of other things. From its purity derives its 'mastery'. Inasmuch as mind enters into certain matters and not others, nature is divided into the categories 'animate' and 'inanimate'. Mind formed reality by introducing a rotary motion into the original matter; this motion ordered the world. Anaxagoras may be called the founder of theism, for he thought that mind (the source of motion and knowledge) is the only God.

Thales was born around 600 B.C. Aristotle considered him the founder of natural philosophy, since he was the first not to invoke mythology in his explanations. He founded the Milesian school, which included Anaximander and Anaximenes. (The first was a pupil of Thales; the second was a pupil of

Anaximander.) His most famous philosophical idea is that water is the nature and originating principle of all things. Many facts support his belief: the sperm of all animals is moist; water can, more readily than other elements, be observed to evaporate and condense; islands in the Mediterranean were observed to be slowly increasing in size, by which it was inferred that water was changing into earth; "warmth [which is associated with life] is generated by moisture and lives by it", to quote Aristotle; metals can be heated into liquid; the ancients thought that spontaneous generation could take place in water; etc. Thales said that Earth floats on water, due to its wood-like buoyancy. In believing that Earth is less dense than water he may have had in mind examples of pumice-like "floating islands" which were seen and documented by ancient writers. Earthquakes he explained as results of the rough movements of oceans. He probably thought the earth is spherical, because this is the best explanation of many phenomena he would have observed as an astronomer. Apparently he predicted a solar eclipse in the year 585, though it isn't known how, and he theorized that such an eclipse is the result of the moon passing between the earth and the sun. He determined the dates of the solstices and discovered—or heard from the Egyptians—that the year is 365 days long. It's thought that he introduced geometry into Greece by visiting Egypt, which had invented it much earlier for the purpose of land measurement. He's also credited with five Euclidean theorems, which he 'proved' by repeated demonstration rather than logic.

Empedocles was an Eleatic, a follower of Parmenides. He accepted the doctrine that *what is* is uncreated and indestructible, but he avoided Parmenides' unacceptable conclusions by assuming the four elements of fire, water, air and earth. Love and Strife are what explain the attraction and repulsion of different types of matter. In the beginning all was one, "a God eternal and at rest", in which all the elements were held together by Love. Strife prevailed, though, and the elements separated themselves. Organic life arose through Strife. Eventually this world will succumb once more to Love and everything will be reduced to chaos, but then a new world will be formed, and so on forever. The elements are everlasting; their combinations are not. Fire, as the rarest and most powerful, is the chief element, "the soul of all sentient and intellectual beings which issue from the central fire, the soul of the world". The senses cannot apprehend the perfect unity of the four elements because Strife has separated them; Empedocles therefore trusted only the intellect. He distinguished between the world of the senses and its "type", the intellectual world. (Uhh, was Plato a plagiarizer?)

February 26

I'll ignore Pythagoras; I already know enough about him.

Zeno was an Eleatic. Through his paradoxes he tried to refute such fundamental facts about the world as motion, space and time. For example: "If there is such a thing as space, it will be in something, for all being is in something, and that which is in something is in some space. So this space will be in a space, and so on ad infinitum. Accordingly, there is no such thing as space."

Leucippus was the founder of Atomism. He agreed with Parmenides that if there's no such thing as a void there can be no motion and multiplicity, so he concluded that there must be a void. He didn't identify it with the nonexistent, as Parmenides did; he said it's a vacuum. Inside this empty space is an infinite number of indivisible atoms which are invisible because of their smallness. Their motion results in the combinations we perceive with our senses. They're different sizes, which accounts for the phenomenon of weight. He didn't think 'absolute' weight exists: weight isn't a primary property of bodies. It's only relative. (Epicurus was the first to ascribe weight to atoms.)

> The first effect of the motion of the atoms is that the larger atoms are retarded, not because they are 'heavy', but because they are more exposed to impact than the smaller. In particular, atoms of an irregular shape become entangled with one another and form groups of atoms, which are still more exposed to impact and consequent retardation. The smallest and roundest atoms, on the other hand, preserve their original motions best, and these are the atoms of which fire is composed. In an infinite void in which an infinite number of atoms of countless shapes and sizes are constantly impinging

> upon one another in all directions, there will be an infinite number of places where a vortex motion is set up by their impact. When this happens, we have the beginning of a world. It is not correct to ascribe this to chance, as later writers do. It follows necessarily from the presuppositions of the system. The solitary fragment of Leucippus we possess is to the effect that 'Naught happens for nothing, but all things from a ground (*logos*) and of necessity'.

I'll quote a paragraph on Democritus, who was a disciple of Leucippus:

> Democritus expanded the atomic theory of Leucippus. He maintained the impossibility of dividing things *ad infinitum*. From the difficulty of assigning a beginning of time, he argued the eternity of existing nature, of void space, and of motion. He supposed the atoms, which are originally similar, to be impenetrable and have a density proportionate to their volume. All motions are the result of active and passive affection. He drew a distinction between primary motion and its secondary effects, that is, impulse and reaction. This is the basis of the law of necessity, by which all things in nature are ruled. The worlds which we see--with all their properties of immensity, resemblance, and dissimilitude--result from the endless multiplicity of falling atoms. The human soul consists of globular atoms of fire, which impart movement to the body. Maintaining his atomic theory throughout, Democritus introduced the hypothesis of images or idols (*eidola*), a kind of emanation from external objects, which make an impression on our senses, and from the influence of which he deduced sensation (*aesthesis*) and thought (*noesis*). He distinguished between a rude, imperfect, and therefore false perception and a true one. In the same manner, consistent with this theory, he accounted for the popular notions of Deity; partly through our incapacity to understand fully the phenomena of which we are witnesses, and partly from the impressions communicated by certain beings (*eidola*) of enormous stature and resembling the human figure which inhabit the air. We know these from dreams and the causes of divination. He carried his theory into practical philosophy also, laying down that happiness consisted in an even temperament. From this he deduced his moral principles and prudential maxims. It was from Democritus that Epicurus borrowed the principal features of his philosophy.

Protagoras was a Sophist. He was interested in the correct uses and meanings of words--and is thought to have written the first grammar book--but he's more famous for his idea that "of all things the measure is man, of the things that are, that [or 'how'] they are, and of things that are not, that [or 'how'] they are not". Truth is relative to each person. Judgments about qualities are not objectively valid; what is true, or good, or beautiful, or just for one person is not for another. Therefore Protagoras taught that it's permissible to criticize and change laws, which have evolved and are not absolutely valid. He also was an agnostic.

Cynicism was a school of thought founded by Antisthenes in the second half of the 400s. It was more a way of life than a philosophical system. "The key ethical doctrine of the Cynics, inspired by Socrates, is that living virtuously is both necessary and sufficient for attaining happiness. One must live virtuously in order to be happy, and living virtuously guarantees that one will be happy. Virtue can be taught." If something is pursued other than for the sake of virtue it will lead to harm: it will 'ensnare' the person. Conventional values like wealth, pleasure, power and propriety are worthless; the good life is one lived simply and according to nature. Antisthenes supposedly said he'd rather go mad than experience pleasure. Diogenes of Sinope was another famous Cynic. These "philosophers" were usually beggars. They were also anti-intellectual: they held that knowledge and art have no value. Only ethics is important. Cynicism influenced the history of philosophy by being incorporated into the more sophisticated system of Stoicism.

Zeno of Citium founded Stoicism around the time of Aristotle. The philosophy is divided into three areas: physics, logic and ethics. Stoics were material monists. They thought that only things which act or are acted upon exist, and only bodies satisfy this criterion. Nothing incorporeal exists; even mind, reason and God are material. (However, they allowed that there are other ways of being part of nature than by

existing. Time doesn't really 'exist', so it is incorporeal.) If immaterial substances existed there would be no way to explain the interaction of mind and matter, for it is impossible that something physical can act on something nonphysical.

God is both eternal reason and "an intelligent designing fire that structures matter in accordance with Its plan. This plan is enacted time and time again, beginning from a state in which all is fire, through the generation of the elements, to the creation of the world we are familiar with, and eventually back to fire in a cycle of endless recurrence. [Subsequent worlds are identical.]" Since God is omnipresent reason, the world has order and beauty and is universally governed by the law of cause and effect. Fire and air (the active elements) combine to form breath or pneuma, which is the "sustaining cause" of all bodies and which directs the development of animate bodies.

> What is a sustaining cause? The Stoics think that the universe is a plenum. Like Aristotle, they reject the existence of empty space or void (except that the universe as a whole is surrounded by it). Thus, one might reasonably ask, 'What marks any one object off from others surrounding it?' or, 'What keeps an object from constantly falling apart as it rubs elbows with other things in the crowd?' The answer is: pneuma. Pneuma, by its nature, has a simultaneous movement inward and outward which constitutes its inherent 'tensility.' (Perhaps this was suggested by the expansion and contraction associated with heat and cold.) Pneuma passes through all (other) bodies; in its outward motion it gives them the qualities that they have, and in its inward motion makes them unified objects (Nemesius, 47J). In this respect, pneuma plays something of the role of substantial form in Aristotle, for this too makes the thing of which it is the form both 'some this,' i.e. an individual, and 'what it is' (*Metaph.* VII, 17). Because pneuma acts, it must be a body and it appears that the Stoics stressed the fact that its blending with matter is 'through and through'.

In animals, pneuma is called 'soul', and in rational animals it's also called the 'commanding faculty' (reason). "Unlike the Platonic tripartite soul, all impulses or desires are direct functions of the rational, commanding faculty. ….[Sense-perceptions] are affections of the commanding faculty. In mature rational animals, these impressions are thoughts, or representations with propositional content. Though a person may have no choice about whether he has a particular rational impression, there is another power of the commanding faculty which the Stoics call 'assent', and whether one assents to a rational impression [i.e., judges its content to be true] is a matter of volition." Because the impression and the assent are functions of the same faculty, it's possible to avoid falling into error if our reason is sufficiently disciplined. Moreover, there are no impulses to have or do something unless one assents to an impression, which means that all desires are (at least potentially; see below) *acts of reason*. In spite of their materialistic theory of the mind, some Stoics (like Chrysippus, a pupil of Zeno) held that after wise individuals die their souls continue to exist until the final conflagration--perhaps because their pneuma has a sufficient "firmness" to subsist as a body on its own.

Stoicism's logic is similar to Aristotle's. However, by the term 'logic' Stoics understand also rhetoric, language, truth, grammar, perception and so on. Chrysippus's theory of the criterion of truth is that it's an impression (called a "cognitive impression") that produces an intense feeling of conviction that can be caused only by a *real* object. This cognition, though, isn't in and of itself knowledge; knowledge is cognition that is "secure, firm and unchangeable by reason….and worked into a systematic whole by other such cognitions". Mere opinion involves weak assent and changeable assent (assent to a false impression). Skeptics, such as Arcesilaus, denied the existence of cognitive impressions, saying that "no impression arising from something true is such that an impression arising from something false could not also be just like it". Their arguments are compelling, and Sextus Empiricus, a later Roman Skeptic, proposed that a Stoic sage, who never errs, can therefore not assent to any impressions (because it's possible they'll deceive him). He must suspend judgment, like the skeptic.

A slightly less reliable internet article on Stoicism has its own version of Stoic logic:

> All knowledge enters the mind through the senses. The mind is a blank slate, upon which sense-

> impressions are inscribed. It may have a certain activity of its own, but this activity is confined exclusively to materials supplied by the physical organs of sense. [Chrysippus disagreed with Zeno's 'imprint' metaphor for sense-impressions. He thought that the latter are *alterations* of the commanding faculty.] This theory stands, of course, in sheer opposition to the idealism of Plato, for whom the mind alone was the source of knowledge, the senses being the sources of all illusion and error. The Stoics denied the metaphysical reality of concepts. Concepts are merely ideas in the mind, abstracted from particulars, and have no reality outside consciousness. Since all knowledge is [ultimately] a knowledge of sense-objects, truth is simply the correspondence of our impressions to things. How are we to know whether our ideas are correct copies of things? How do we distinguish between reality and imagination, dreams, or illusions? What is the criterion of truth? It cannot lie in concepts, since they are of our own making. [The foundation of knowledge is] sense-impressions, and therefore the criterion of truth must lie in sensation itself. It cannot be in thought, but must be in feeling. Real objects, said the Stoics, produce in us an intense feeling, or conviction, of their reality. The strength and vividness of the image distinguish these real perceptions from a dream or fancy. Hence the sole criterion of truth is this striking conviction, whereby the real forces itself upon our consciousness, and will not be denied.

The goal of life is happiness. Whatever is good must benefit its possessor under all circumstances. Things like health, pleasure and wealth can conceivably be bad for their possessor; hence they aren't good but are merely indifferent. Conversely, sickness, pain and poverty need not always be bad, so they too are indifferent. "The only things that are good are the characteristic excellences or virtues of human beings (or of human minds): prudence or wisdom, justice, courage and moderation, and other related qualities." However, Stoics distinguish between what is good and what has value: wealth and the like may not be good, but they have value for self-preservation (which is the original impulse of creatures) and are thus preferable--other things being equal--to their opposites. The Stoic injunction to live according to nature means that one should rationally select things that have value, which means that they should be selected "in accordance with the virtuous way of regarding them". When they come into conflict--for example, when one can choose either to be wealthy or to preserve someone else's health--the way that is most in line with nature's rational plan should be chosen. But it's important to note that the *possession* of these things doesn't bring happiness; rather, the virtuous selection of them does. The ordering of one's preferences makes one happy. When I perform an action that is valuable (or "according to nature") I perform a "proper function", i.e. something that nature intends me to do. All animals and plants have proper functions peculiar to them. When I perform a proper function virtuously, I perform a *perfect* function or right action. Only the wise and entirely virtuous person has this kind of 'moral knowledge'; the rest of us are equally vicious and ignorant. (That follows from the idea that virtue is the only good and vice the only evil. Since there are no gradations in goodness or virtue, people are simply either *virtuous* or *vicious*.) The sage--who is incredibly rare--subordinates himself to the universe and recognizes that he is basically nothing. Suicide, by the way, is permissible in some circumstances because life isn't a 'good'.

Stoics distinguish two primary passions: appetite and fear (which are related to what is pleasurable and distressful). They are "excessive impulses which are disobedient to reason". They're also opinions, i.e., assent to false impressions--because the only time that something 'good' or 'bad' is really present is when something favors or threatens virtue. Everything else is indifferent and so shouldn't cause excessive desire or fear. The wise man feels only well-reasoned emotions like "joy, watchfulness and wishing"--so that kindness, for example, results from the knowledge that other people are 'valuable', 'appropriate to one's nature'. Later Stoics modified these severe doctrines of Chrysippus.

I'm confused about two things: how can irrational emotions be expressions of a rational commanding faculty? Maybe this objection can be answered by recalling that emotions are *errors*, and having a rational faculty doesn't imply infallibility. However, they're also said to be "disobedient to reason", which seems contradictory in a rational faculty. Secondly, if Stoics believe that humans necessarily live in accordance with the laws of nature, which are rational, what does it mean to exhort people to live rationally? Their (inadequate) answer is that, although we will always act as the necessity of the world

compels us, we can *assent* to our involuntary obedience and thus follow the law consciously and deliberately.

Epicurus was born seven years after Plato's death. He agreed with Democritus that indivisible atoms are the basic constituents of the world and that they exist in empty space--because (1) without empty space, movement wouldn't be possible and (2) if compound bodies were infinitely divisible they would dissolve away into nothing. He also agreed that the universe (which is unlimited in size) has always existed, because it's impossible for something to emerge out of nothing. *This* universe, however, is a temporary one; gradually it will dissolve and a new one will be formed, and so on. To answer the question of why atoms move at all, Epicurus postulated that they have an absolute weight that pulls them in a downward direction. His second departure from Democritus was in his idea that atoms do not only fall downward; they also occasionally swerve to the side and thereby collide with each other. (Otherwise they would never meet and compound bodies wouldn't exist.) This idea of random atomic motion also allows for human freedom, which was denied by Democritus. His third departure was his avoidance of Democritus's skeptical conclusions, which resulted from his distrust of the senses and his belief that qualities are unreal, existing merely as perceptions and not in things themselves. (The conclusion in question is that senses cannot give us reliable knowledge.) Epicurus agreed that properties don't inhere in things, but he thought that objects do have inherent 'potentialities' for causing certain perceptions--potentialities based on their atomic structures. The tendency of his philosophy is to explain natural phenomena mechanistically rather than teleologically, so that, for example, lightning is the result not of gods but of atoms, and the apparent purposiveness of nature is due to a process of natural selection. Through arguments like these, as well as the argument that if the world were under the care of a loving god it wouldn't contain so much suffering, Epicurus finally relegates gods to the status of blissfully happy beings who are unaware of our existence.

The mind is located in the chest, and mental processes are atomic processes. (If they were incorporeal they couldn't act on the body.) A consequence of this union of mind and body is that death is annihilation. The atoms composing the mind disperse. Because death affects neither the *present* self nor the *dead* one--which doesn't exist--it shouldn't be feared. Epicurus explained perception in the same way that Democritus did. His anti-skeptical faith in the senses derived from his belief that only *judgments* can be in error, since sensation is a passive reception of data. All ideas are formed ultimately on the basis of sense-experience. (There are no innate ideas, as Plato thought.) Epicurean ethics are hedonistic: pleasure is intrinsically good and pain intrinsically bad. Like Benthamite ethics, they're based on a theory of psychological hedonism, viz. that pleasure is the only thing people pursue for its own sake. Hence virtues should be followed only for the sake of 'prudence'. Two types of pleasure are distinguished: 'moving' pleasure and 'static' pleasure, the process of satisfying desire and the cessation of desire. An example of the first is the activity of eating, of the second the subsequent state of satiety. The second is superior. Thus tranquility is the greatest pleasure. To attain it we must overcome our anxiety about the future, which is the greatest destroyer of happiness. We must also reduce our desires to an easily satisfied minimum, i.e., suppress vain, unlimited, unnatural desires like those for fame and wealth. Epicurus had a contractarian theory of justice: he defined it as an agreement "neither to harm nor be harmed". People enter into communities for the sake of protection and justice, and justice exists only in those communities. He praised friendship highly, as providing men with security and happiness. A wise man should even be willing to die for his friend.

Friday, February 27

There were two forms of ancient skepticism: Pyrrhonian skepticism, nominally founded by Pyrrho (who was born in 365) but really founded by Aenesidemus, which flourished between the first century B.C. and the third century A.D., and Academic skepticism, which flourished between 273 and the first century B.C. I'll discuss the Academic variant first. After Plato died, his followers in the Academy directed their efforts toward developing an orthodox Platonic metaphysics. The sixth head of the school was Arcesilaus; he turned it toward skepticism, largely by attacking the Stoic idea that sense-perceptions are infallible. His

argument may be summarized as follows:

> For any sense-impression S, received by some observer A, of some existing object O, and which is a precise representation of O, we can imagine circumstances in which there is another sense-impression S', which comes either (i) from something other than O, or (ii) from something non-existent, and which is such that S' is indistinguishable from S to A. The first possibility (i) is illustrated by cases of indistinguishable twins, eggs, statues or imprints in wax made by the same ring (*Lucullus* 84-87). The second possibility (ii) is illustrated by the illusions of dreams and madness (*Lucullus* 88-91). On the strength of these examples, Arcesilaus apparently concluded that we may, in principle, be deceived about any sense-impression, and consequently that the Stoic account of empirical knowledge fails. For the Stoics were thoroughgoing empiricists and believed that sense-impressions lie at the foundation of all of our knowledge. So if we could not be certain of ever having grasped any sense-impression, then we cannot be certain of any of the more complex impressions of the world, including what strikes us as valuable. Thus, along with the failure to establish the possibility of katalepsis [--which is a mental grasping of a sense-impression that guarantees the truth of what is grasped--] goes the failure to establish the possibility of Stoic wisdom.

Because of this lack of knowledge, and because Arcesilaus was able to argue convincingly for both sides of every position, he concluded that we should suspend judgment about everything. (Of course, this is itself a judgment and is thus self-refuting, which is why some commentators think that Arcesilaus was concerned only with refuting the possibility of *Stoic* knowledge, not of *all* knowledge.) In response to the Stoic objection that life can't be lived in a perpetual suspension of judgment, Arcesilaus said that a person can do what is merely *reasonable* rather than *certainly right*.

Carneades was an eminent skeptic who lived almost a hundred years later. He adopted the dialectical method of his predecessor, according to which he argued for both sides of a position. Attacked not only Stoicism but every Hellenistic philosophy that claimed to have certain knowledge or to have discovered a criterion of truth. He argued, first of all, that there can be no certain truth because reason, the senses and everything else sometimes mislead us, and, secondly, that impressions are not completely objective but rather reflect their own subjective nature as well as the nature of reality. According to Sextus Empiricus, his practical advice for living in a philosophically defensible way is that we should trust most sense-perceptions because they're *plausible*: not only do they feel convincing, but they've been repeatedly tested. They may be wrong, but practically that's irrelevant: what matters is that they "hold" for the most part. Thus, Carneades (probably) admitted that certain sense-perceptions *may* be true. (Some commentators think that Carneades was so much of a dialectician that he didn't believe even these views; he merely proposed them for the sake of argument. On this interpretation he was a 'negative' skeptic, i.e., he held no positive views whatsoever and thus avoided the inconsistency that Arcesilaus fell vicim to.)

Philo was head of the Academy in the first century B.C. He thought that some sense-perceptions may be true but that we have no way of knowing which they are. He also believed that truth must exist if some things are held to resemble it, and he advised that people should *tentatively* accept philosophical positions that are well supported. Cicero was his student.

Aristocles reported the following about Pyrrho's beliefs:

> [Pyrrho] himself has left nothing in writing, but his pupil Timon says that whoever wants to be happy must consider these three questions: first, how are things by nature? Secondly, what attitude should we adopt towards them? Thirdly, what will be the outcome for those who have this attitude? According to Timon, Pyrrho declared that [1] things are equally indifferent, unmeasurable and inarbitrable. For this reason [2] neither our sensations nor our opinions tell us truths or falsehoods. Therefore, for this reason we should not put our trust in them one bit, but we should be unopinionated, uncommitted and unwavering, saying concerning each individual thing that it no more is than is not, or it both is and is not, or it neither is nor is not. [3] The outcome for those who

> actually adopt this attitude, says Timon, will be first speechlessness, and then freedom from disturbance.

Thus, Pyrrho abandons philosophy. His position, incidentally, like Arcesilaus's, seems self-refuting. Why should we arbitrarily exempt *its* propositions from the otherwise universal law that propositions are neither true nor false? If things can't be "measured" (described), how is it possible to say they can't be measured? Even if the metaphysical interpretation of his thought is rejected--according to which things *really are* undefined--in favor of the claim that he's describing only appearances, he isn't saved from self-contradiction, for he's still making a definite statement about them when he says we can't make statements about them. Moreover, how can you live if you don't trust your senses? Timon suggested that the Pyrrhonian *does* guide himself by appearances and therefore doesn't completely mistrust them (nor sentences that describe them); he mistrusts metaphysical statements based on them. But that surely contradicts the fragment above.

Anyhow, in the first century B.C., Aenesidemus, a philosopher in Plato's Academy, revived Pyrrhonism as a reaction against the Academy's dogmatism which confidently affirmed some beliefs and rejected others. His alternative was not to assert anything unconditionally, not even the claim that he asserts nothing unconditionally. "The Pyrrhonist will only assert that some property belongs to some object relative to some observer or relative to some set of circumstances. Thus, he will conditionally affirm some things but he will absolutely deny that any property belongs to anything in every possible circumstance." Aenesidemus refused to say that anything *by nature* has a particular quality. He advanced a set of ideas called the Ten Modes to elaborate his basic hypothesis. Briefly, they are as follows: 1. The world appears different to humans and to animals, and there's no reason to think that one is more 'accurate' than the other. 2. How it appears to some people is different from how it appears to others. (This targets the endless disagreements among dogmatists as to the nature of the world.) 3. At times, objects appear to the senses of an individual in incompatible ways. Perfume is pleasant to smell and disgusting to taste, so in itself it is neither pleasant nor unpleasant. 4. A person experiences the world differently according to his emotional and physical state. 5. Appearances vary according to the position of the object. An oar looks bent in water and a pigeon's neck changes color as the pigeon moves. Why should we privilege one appearance over another? 6. Nothing is ever experienced in its purity; it is always mixed together with other things. Hence we are unable to experience the nature of things. 7. Different effects are produced by altering the quantities of things. (A grain of sand is rough but a pile is smooth.) 8. Something appears to have a property only relative to certain features of the subject or the object. (This is a paradigm of all the modes.) 9. The frequency of encountering a thing determines how it appears to us. 10. The value of things differs from person to person. For some people homosexuality is good while for others it is bad. Things are not good in and of themselves; hence we should suspend judgment about them. The relativism of these attacks on Essentialism is probably epistemological rather than ontological: Aenesidemus meant that we can't know the essences of things, not that they don't have essences. Like Pyrrho, he thought that a suspension of judgment would result in tranquility. We must accept our limitations.

Sextus Empiricus lived in the second or third century A.D. He distinguished three types of philosopher: "dogmatists, who believe they have discovered the truth; Academics (negative dogmatists), who believe the truth cannot be discovered; and skeptics, who continue to investigate, believing neither that anyone has so far discovered the truth nor that it is impossible to do so". However, he claimed that even if he discovered a philosophy that apparently had no faults he wouldn't believe it because it might be disproved in the future. So, practically speaking, for Sextus it seems impossible to discover truth.

> According to Sextus, one does not start out as a skeptic, but rather stumbles on to it. Initially, one becomes troubled by the kinds of disagreements focused on in Aenesidemus' modes and seeks to determine which appearances accurately represent the world and which explanations accurately reveal the causal histories of events. The motivation for figuring things out, Sextus asserts, is to become tranquil, i.e. to remove the disturbance that results from confronting incompatible views of the world. As the proto-skeptic attempts to sort out the evidence and discover the privileged

> perspective or the correct theory, he finds that for each account that purports to establish something true about the world there is another, equally convincing account, that purports to establish an opposed and incompatible view of the same thing. Being faced with this equipollence, he is unable to assent to either of the opposed accounts and thereby suspends judgment. This, of course, is not what he set out to do. But by virtue of his intellectual integrity, he is simply not able to arrive at a conclusion and so he finds himself without any definite view. What he also finds is that the tranquility that he originally thought would come only by arriving at the truth, follows upon his suspended judgment as a shadow follows a body.

Arriving at definite views is one of the main sources of psychological disturbance. Sextus reported a second set of modes called the Five Modes of Agrippa (with which he may or may not have agreed):

> Agrippa's Five Modes relies on the prevalence of dispute and repeats the main theme of Aenesidemus' Modes: we are frequently faced with dissenting opinions regarding the same matter and yet we have no adequate grounds on which to prefer one view over another. Should a dogmatist offer an account of such grounds, the skeptic may then request further justification, thereby setting off an infinite regress. And presumably, we should not be willing to accept an explanation that is never complete, i.e. one that requires further explaining itself. Should the dogmatist try to put a stop to the regress by means of a hypothesis, the skeptic will refuse to accept the claim without proof, perhaps citing alternative, incompatible hypotheses. And finally, the skeptic will refuse to allow the dogmatist to support his explanation by what he is supposed to be explaining, disallowing any circular reasoning. And of course the skeptic may also avail himself of the observation that what is being explained only appears as it does relative to some relevant conditions, and thus, contrary to the dogmatist's presumption, there is no one thing to be explained in the first place.

Sextus extended Aenesidemus' suspension of belief, which countenanced relativistic beliefs like 'in its nature X is no more F than not-F, though it is F in these circumstances', to apply also to *those* beliefs. He didn't allow us to believe even that X is no more F than not-F. Thus his form of skepticism is more a practice than a doctrine, since it rejects all doctrines. (That isn't strictly true, of course: unless a philosophy has *some* kind of a doctrine it isn't a philosophy. Sextus' doctrine, put crudely, is that all doctrines ought to be rejected. Thus, like other skeptics, he is inconsistent.) But the question arises of how the skeptic can live if he rejects beliefs. Sextus had an answer: "the skeptic will guide his actions by (1) nature [=perception and thought], (2) necessitation by feelings [=hunger, thirst, etc.], (3) laws and customs [which tell us how to evaluate things appropriately], and (4) kinds of expertise [=trades and professions, i.e. *skills* that don't rely on theories]".

To conclude, "a unifying feature of the varieties of ancient skepticism is that they are all concerned with promoting, in some manner of speaking, the benefits of recognizing our epistemic limitations. Thus, ancient skeptics nearly always have something to say about how one may live, and indeed live well, in the absence of knowledge." Secondly, ancient skepticism is more radical than modern skepticism: it isn't afraid to hold extreme views like the idea that every impression and opinion is false (which Xeniades of Corinth believed). Thirdly, although it seems as if ancient skepticism is fatally inconsistent--in that, for example, it suspends judgment on all questions while making the judgment that there are equal arguments for and against every position[1]--that's possibly wrong, because this kind of skepticism denies *realist* truth (that

[1] That may be a bad example. For if there is a good argument for every position we will be forced to suspend judgment, whether or not we articulate that necessity. It's peculiar, to say the least, to call an *expression* of an absolute necessity 'inconsistent' while the necessity itself (when not articulated) is not called into question. The necessity is granted by everyone--at least, it makes no sense *not* to grant it given the premise--but its verbal expression is attacked. What's disturbing about this is that I understand why the statement is criticized (it's a definite position and thus apparently contradicts the resolve not to have a definite position) and I also understand why it's perfectly in order and ought not to be criticized. Maybe the point is that the complete justifiability of their advice testifies against the skeptics that it's

there are truths which correspond to an objective world)--the only form of truth that was recognized in that age--and doesn't take into account other kinds of truth invented in the modern age. Therefore, truths affirmed by skepticism are perhaps not realist but anti-realist ('coherentist', maybe, or pragmatic), and thus skepticism's arguments might not apply to them. I don't think this idea has much potential, though.

February 28

I can't describe my pain, so I won't. Had dinner with Hye-gyung and then we saw a movie and then we drank until midnight. When she told me she doesn't want a boyfriend I fell into sadness, and it showed. She asked what was wrong. For a while I said nothing, but finally I was honest and said I didn't understand Korean girls and I liked her and had hoped we could date and why didn't she want to and why is it so hard in Korea. She said something about Korean stereotypes of Western guys as only wanting sex or being relentless pursuers of women and I answered that everyone tries hard to find someone and sometimes s/he succeeds and sometimes s/he doesn't but the pursuit itself isn't bad it's universal, but she told me a story of a Canadian guy who liked her and when he was turned down he said the same things he'd said to her to another girl he met and that was where she'd got her stereotype from and that I've probably said *my* things to other girls here and therefore don't mean them and I said well sure sometimes a person meets someone he likes and sometimes not and sometimes several people in succession and if so what's wrong with wanting to be intimate with a girl after a previous one has turned him down and it doesn't mean I'm not sincere and besides I've only "liked" a couple others here before her so I'm not a "playboy" but a person who wants *love*, not sex for its sake, and I'm not like other guys who chase girls for sex. [Hmm…] But before all that she told me she doesn't know me and therefore we shouldn't date and I laughed and she said why and I said that's not a reason for not dating but for seeing me more and she smiled but didn't have an answer. And then came her spiel about stereotypes that she admitted to having. And then we talked more about the same things and a few others and I had to fight back tears the whole time. She wanted to discuss something else like philosophy but I was in such pain I couldn't give it up, though I acted very detached and intellectual and uninsistent the whole time. She said some stupid nonsensical things that made me think maybe she's right we wouldn't be good together, and her callousness and idiocy finally showed so clearly that I gave up trying to understand her. We talked about other things, she was oblivious to the pain I was in or maybe chose to ignore it, and then we left and I walked her to a taxi and didn't talk and we said good-night. We'll meet again on Tuesday and she'll introduce me to her friend, but the senseless things she'd said had made me lose respect for her and affection and I don't care anymore and there comes a point at which the pain all bleeds together, all the different kinds of pain, and the complaints lose their point because they're superfluous and totally inadequate to the pain which is no longer common and vulgar but sublime and elevated and universal and beautiful but ugly enough for suicide. The pain the envy the frustration the anger the contempt the self-contempt the boredom the floundering the hateful irony the separation from everyone the uncertainty about everything the concerted divine effort to slam me again and again.

No more meetings in bookstores. Only bars.

I have to get out of this country.

It's so tempting and so easy to end oneself. What holds me back? Why do I grasp tenaciously a life that brings me sorrow? The reasons are foolishly optimistic, though one is selfless and pessimistic and surprisingly powerful: my parents.

I've never *really* been *really* close to another human being.

….Great, now I can't sleep. I'm desperate to be unconscious as the only remedy for my torment, but my torment is precisely what prevents me from being unconscious.

There are a dozen thoughts (unrelated to the preceding) that I want to unburden myself of, but instead I'll summarize more ancient philosophy to wear myself out. Origen, who was born in 185 A.D.,

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possible for doctrines and maxims to be *incapable of being wrong* (given certain premises, which in this case are not in question--and that's another inconsistency in the skeptic's position!).

was “the first systematic theologian and philosopher of the Christian Church” and composed the “seminal work of Christian Neoplatonism”, his treatise *On First Principles*. In the beginning of this treatise he introduces the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which hearkens to his Platonic heritage. (Platonism made much of the “divine hierarchical triad”.) But rather than calling the three principles “monad”, “dyad” and “world-soul”, he calls them “Father”, “Christ” and “Holy Spirit”.

> The first of these principles, the Father, is a perfect unity, complete unto Himself, and without body--a purely spiritual mind. Since God the Father is, for Origen, "personal and active," it follows that there existed with Him, always, an entity upon which to exercise His intellectual activity. This entity is Christ the Son, the Logos, or Wisdom (*Sophia*), of God, the first emanation of the Father. The third and last principle of the divine triad is the Holy Spirit, who "proceeds from the Son and is related to Him as the Son is related to the Father" (A. Tripolitis 1978, p. 94). Here is Origen explaining the status of the Holy Spirit:
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> > The God and Father, who holds the universe together, is superior to every being that exists, for he imparts to each one from his own existence that which each one is; the Son, being less than the Father, is superior to rational creatures alone (for he is second to the Father); the Holy Spirit is still less, and dwells within the saints alone. So that in this way the power of the Father is greater than that of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and that of the Son is more than that of the Holy Spirit, and in turn the power of the Holy Spirit exceeds that of every other holy being.
>
> This graded hierarchy reveals an allotment of power to the second and third members of the Trinity: the Father's power is universal, but the Son's corresponds only to rational creatures, while the Spirit's power corresponds strictly to the "saints" or those who have achieved salvation.

God’s first creation was a collectivity of rational beings. (Although they had a beginning, they weren’t created *in time*--whatever that means.) Their number was limited because an infinite creation would have been incomprehensible and unworthy of God. His intention was that they should “explore the divine mysteries in a state of endless contemplation”, but gradually they grew tired of this contemplation and ‘fell’ away from their creator. (That was when they acquired material bodies.) This fall wasn’t the result of an inherent imperfection in them; it was the result of a misuse of “God’s greatest gift”, their freedom. The only creature who escaped the fall and remained with God was Christ. His soul was no different from ours; he merely made a different choice than the rest of us.

Origen didn’t believe that sinners will suffer in hell for eternity. Having been created in the image of God, they will eventually choose salvation over oblivion. Even the devil will. This inevitability may seem to contradict free will, but Origen’s conception of freedom was Platonic: it is the ability to choose the good. Because evil is merely the absence of good and thus has no real existence,[1] “to ‘choose’ evil is not to make a conscious decision but to act in ignorance of the measure of all rational decision, i.e., the good”. Some souls require a longer time than others to be educated on the good (because God allots different abilities to different individuals), but since God created them they’re bound to learn someday. Multiple lifetimes are necessary for this education; hence Origen believed in the transmigration of souls. At the end of history everyone will be reunited with God, and things will be the way they were before the original fall.

Regarding freedom, the following is illuminating:

> Origen recognized freedom only in reason, in rationality, which is precisely the ability to recognize and embrace the good, which is for him God. Irrationality is ignorance, the absence of a conception of the good. The ignorant person cannot be held responsible for his ignorance, except to the extent that he has been lazy, not applying himself to the cultivation of reason. The moral dimension of this conception of freedom is that ignorance is not to be punished, but remedied through education.

[1] I’ve often wondered what the idea of evil as “nonbeing” means and how it originated. Now I know.

> Punishment, understood in the punitive sense, is of no avail and will even lead to deeper ignorance and sin, as the punished soul grows resentful, not understanding why he is being punished. Origen firmly believed that the knowledge of the good (God) is itself enough to remove all taint of sin and ignorance from souls. A 'freedom' to embrace evil (the absence of good) would have made no sense to Origen who, as a Platonist, identified evil with enslavement and goodness with freedom. The soul who has seen the good, he argued, will not fall into ignorance again, for the good is inspiring and worthy of eternal contemplation.

Origen was perhaps the first philosopher of history, for he understood it as a process that leads to a final culmination. (It isn't the orthodox Christian culmination of a divine judgment and revelation.) He didn't agree with Platonism that a knowledge of the good brings complete rest; he thought that souls will eternally engage actively with God, whose infinite nature ensures that his mysteries are inexhaustible to finite beings like us.

The Church condemned Origen in the fifth century, so most of his doctrines fell out of favor with theologians. But they were revived during the Renaissance and by some Christian Existentialists, for whom his emphasis on the unique nature of every individual was attractive.

Sunday, February 29

I may or may not have mentioned that Eun-sung went to Thailand in January. Today I saw her again (and Eun-young); we had lunch. While waiting half an hour for E-s in the coffee shop I befriended a four-year-old boy—bounced his balloon on his head, tickled him, chased him; he finally came to like me so much that he sat on my lap and wrestled with me, his family sitting nearby laughing. Until playing with him I talked to E-y listlessly, depressed and lonely and wanting her to know I was depressed and lonely, which she did most emphatically. I felt a refreshing equanimity in her company and the company of my pain (to which, like Nietzsche, I've given the name 'Dog', in honor of its loyalty), not caring about acting the 'right' way but not being rude either. E-s apparently has no compunctions about being rude—to children, anyway: my new friend continued to toss his balloon at me and gibber at us after E-s had arrived, so she shooed him away with a cruel "Go! Go!" Distasteful. I can't like someone who doesn't like children. –But I'll meet the two Euns every Wednesday and Friday for dinner and a bar.

After lunch I slowly ambulated home, wanting to stall the return to solitude; just as I was about to have to enter my dreaded dorm I spotted Judy and Jim on the same street. That was the first time I've ever been glad to see Judy. They were on their way to dinner, so I joined them. If I were a female I'd be infatuated with Jim. We ate delicious bulgogi. Peter and fat slob Troy met us in the restaurant—which was irritating: I wanted to go to a bar with Jim and they wanted to go to a 'board game café'—yes, that's what it is—to play Risk. We were there for two hours before my armies were annihilated, which gave me a good excuse to go home, being bored out of my skull. Called Jean to confirm the details of our Busan trip tomorrow. (We and her friend and anoth
er teacher (Greg) are going to the coastal city for a day.)

In *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway's writing doesn't always come across well. He tries to be witty, but the words drag their feet and he seems more obtuse than funny. At those times his style doesn't compare favorably with Nietzsche's, which sprints effortlessly ahead of the led [lead] eye and gives the impression of lightning wit.

March 1

We left at 9:00 in the morning and returned twelve hours later. Jean's friend, Jamie, is personable and cute. Made too much of an impression on me: I dreaded the moment when I'd have to leave her. Jean said hardly twenty words the whole time, but Jamie compensated for that.

When we arrived we went to Busan Tower first, from which there's a panoramic view of the city; then we went to a famous beach, which couldn't compare to the best beaches in America; then we had an expensive lunch at Bennigan's; then we went to a spectacular aquarium that had sea-creatures from other planets; then we went to a park on a mountain (the whole city is mountainous/hilly); then we had a small dinner, and then we went home. On the way home we played cards and had a grand ol' time. Poor Jean was upstaged the whole day by her friend.

Tuesday, March 2

Didn't do much today. Stayed inside except to eat meals and register/exercise at a health club. Skimmed articles in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: logical positivism, Carnap, Derrida, functionalism, etc. If I could find English books in this country I'd read those instead.

Here's a succinct summary of the differences between rationalism and British empiricism:

> Two key points distinguish Rationalism from British Empiricists. The first involves differing theories about the origin of ideas. Rationalists believed that an important group of foundational concepts are known intuitively through reason, as opposed to experience. Descartes describes such concepts as innate ideas, the most important of these including the ideas of oneself, infinite perfection, and causality. British Empiricists staunchly rejected this view, and argued that all ideas trace ultimately trace back to experiences, such as sense perceptions and emotions. The second distinguishing feature between Rationalism and Empiricism concerns their differing methods of investigating problems. Rationalists maintained that we could deduce truths with absolute certainty from our innate ideas, much the way theorems in geometry are deduced from axioms. Mathematical demonstration was seen as the perfect type of demonstrating truth and, accordingly, mathematical proof became the model for all other kinds of demonstration. Although empiricists also used deductive reasoning, they put a greater emphasis on the inductive method championed by fellow British countryman Francis Bacon.

It isn't easy to extrapolate from the article on Derrida the essential aspects of deconstructionism--probably because deconstructionism claims not to have much of an essence in the first place. It's really just a critical analysis of texts, in which alternative 'unconscious' meanings are elaborated. Its purpose, insofar as it can be said to have one, is basically to reveal and undermine "dualistic hierarchies" that have permeated Western philosophy since its inception.

> Derrida, like many other contemporary European theorists, is preoccupied with undermining the oppositional tendencies that have befallen much of the Western philosophical tradition. In fact, dualisms are the staple diet of deconstruction, for without these hierarchies and orders of subordination it would be left with nowhere to intervene. Deconstruction is parasitic in that rather than espousing yet another grand narrative, or theory about the nature of the world, it restricts itself to distorting already existing narratives, and to revealing the dualistic hierarchies they conceal. While Derrida's claims to being someone who speaks solely in the margins of philosophy can be contested, it is important to take these claims into account. Deconstruction is, somewhat infamously, the philosophy that says nothing. To the extent that it can be suggested that Derrida's concerns are often philosophical, they are clearly not phenomenological (he assures us that his work is to be read specifically against Husserl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty) and nor are they ontological.
>
> Deconstruction, and particularly early deconstruction, functions by engaging in sustained analyses of particular texts. It is committed to the rigorous analysis of the literal meaning of a text, and yet also to finding within that meaning, perhaps in the neglected corners of the text (including the footnotes), internal problems that actually point towards alternative meanings. Deconstruction must hence establish a methodology that pays close attention to these apparently contradictory

> imperatives (sameness and difference) and a reading of any Derridean text can only reaffirm this dual aspect. Derrida speaks of the first aspect of this deconstructive strategy as being akin to a fidelity and a "desire to be faithful to the themes and audacities of a thinking". At the same time, however, deconstruction also famously borrows from Martin Heidegger's conception of a 'destructive retrieve' and seeks to open texts up to alternative and usually repressed meanings that reside at least partly outside of the metaphysical tradition (although always also partly betrothed to it). This more violent and transgressive aspect of deconstruction is illustrated by Derrida's consistent exhortation to "invent in your own language if you can or want to hear mine"…. In suggesting that a faithful interpretation of him is one that goes beyond him, Derrida installs invention as a vitally important aspect of any deconstructive reading. He is prone to making enigmatic suggestions like "go there where you cannot go, to the impossible, it is indeed the only way of coming or going", and ultimately, the merit of a deconstructive reading consists in this creative contact with another text that cannot be characterised as either mere fidelity or as an absolute transgression, but rather which oscillates between these dual demands.
>
> ….Deconstruction contends that in any text there are inevitably points of equivocation and 'undecidability' that betray any stable meaning that an author might seek to impose upon his or her text. The process of writing always reveals that which has been suppressed, covers over that which has been disclosed, and more generally breaches the very oppositions that are thought to sustain it. This is why Derrida's 'philosophy' is so textually based and it is also why his key terms are always changing, because depending upon who or what he is seeking to deconstruct, that point of equivocation will always be located in a different place.

Deconstruction(ism) both *reverses* hierarchies (such as speech vs. writing, where speech is considered more "pure" than writing, which is "derivative") and attacks the oppositions on which they're based.

I don't understand the 'theory' and I'm bored. I read too much philosophy today.

….5:00 a.m. After I discovered the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, which is better than the other one, I rewrote my summary of Stoicism. Tomorrow I'll revise what I wrote on Skepticism.

March 6

Evening with Ji-hong. After dinner, bookstore; then a board game café. 'Twas one of those nights that can redeem a misspent year. I think I'm getting a crush on this girl. I haven't had a crush in years. We had so much proto-romantic fun that the logical conclusion, in my mind, was *at least* to kiss. In America we might have done just that, but in Korea I have to walk with baby-steps. We bought each other gifts; I gave her a Rachmaninoff CD, since she likes classical music. I'll tell you more about her: she's 22, she's a nurse who works with cancer patients six days a week, she gives private lessons in math and science to kids six days a week, she hasn't used English since high school but can speak well, she goes swimming three times a week, her sense of humor is spirited and cheerful, the irises in her large eyes are almost as dark as her pupils, her nose is as long as Liszt's but flatter, her smile is so broad it effects a revolution on her face, her silken hair reaches to her shoulders, her face is narrow and her body is slight but fairly tall. She certainly qualifies as 'stunning'.

[…]

Wednesday, March 10

Health club. While waiting for the bus that was to take me to work I talked to a fluent English-speaker. Easy and friendly conversation. But she wouldn't give me her phone number. Her reason: "I've

never been met this way before." At work I finally introduced myself to a two-week-old employee; she wants to have dinner.

Relativistic theses take the form of 'Y is relative to X'. X is the independent variable--usually a broad "framework" like culture or language--and Y is the dependent variable. "*Descriptive relativism* is a family of *empirical claims* to the effect that certain groups in fact have different modes of thought, standards of reasoning, or the like." "*Normative relativism* is a family of non-empirical *normative* or *evaluative claims* to the effect that modes of thought, standards of reasoning, or the like are only right or wrong, correct or incorrect, veridical or non-veridical, *relative to* a framework."

> Each species of normative relativism is a Janus-faced view. First there is an *anti-realist face*. The normative relativist about morality, for example, agrees with the anti-realist about morality that there are no absolute, completely objective, framework-independent facts about moral truth or moral justification. Similar points hold for normative relativism and anti-realism about other things like epistemic standards or truth. But, second, each species of normative relativism also has a *realist face*. Its message is that *once we relativize things to frameworks*, there *are* facts about morality, epistemic justification, truth, or the like.

In some cases it's hard to explain what it means for there to be a normative "fact" about something *within* a framework but not *outside* of it.

Relativism presupposes a kind of realism, viz. that there are objective causal connections between frameworks and dependent variables.

A version of relativism is said to be *local* if it applies only to limited aspects of cognitive life, e.g., moral values, and *global* if it applies to broad areas like epistemic standards or truth.

The rest of the article is concerned only with specific theories included in the category of Relativism.

Started to read the article on Plotinus; stopped when I realized I wasn't interested at all. The man's ideas are weird.

Saturday, March 13

Yesterday and today were shit. On top of the fact that I'm starting to really fucking loathe my job, Ji-hong decided against seeing me this weekend.

Dinner with the two Euns; afterwards we went to a "song room"--karaoke room (norae-bang). Song rooms are frighteningly popular in Korea. They're *everywhere*. It was the first time I've been to one. At 10:30 I met Jim. Bar.

….Finished my story. Don't know what to think of it.

Toward the Summit

> I saw her in New Zealand, on New Year's eve. In a town called Dunedin. To describe nature's handiwork in that privileged spot on the globe would be to insult it, for no description could do it justice. Dunedin itself is nestled in a valley whose walls are hills that hide the Pacific from view. One might lament this false modesty of Mother Nature, which contrives to conceal what is over-awesome from splendor-starved human eyes, but that would be unjust: Her mischief was done with an end in mind. She knew that delayed gratification is *more* gratification—that a climb enables one to savor the pleasures of the summit more fully. In the meantime, there are the hills and the harbors to overawe one. For they are indeed beautiful, though not in the sublime sense that the ocean is; they are instead merely *perfect*, that is, both epitomizing and existing outside human standards of beauty. Against the backdrop of this scenery I saw the girl who seduced and captured my imagination as fireworks streaked across the night sky, which hung above us unperturbed.

People milled about the square, staring at the sky, jostling one another as they simultaneously fought against and surrendered to their quieter side, feeling an instinctual sympathy with the stars. Their thoughts were erratic—now lofty, now earth-bound—but beneath them was a self-consistent Order that absorbed and reconciled all paradoxes. A flowing, vital order that drained itself into the world and replenished itself from the same; that was in constant flux; that was discrete in each mind yet infinite; that monitored itself so meticulously as to be in continuous concord with everything while being grounded in contradiction. It was unknown and unfelt, but it was as real as the invisible night that enveloped us. We who sat on the wet grass with our heads upturned, feeling peaceful in the contemplation of that immensity—featureless but for pinpoints of molten alabaster—were unaware that in those moments our inner strife had slackened, had flowed into the night air and left in its place the soft psychic soil of a child's mind, ready to be imprinted with any impression that was strong enough to take advantage of our defenselessness.

I began to daydream, drowsily. Lazy thoughts wormed their way around and through each other. For a while they privileged the presence of the pulsating body around me, which pressed upon itself in fluid unrest, but soon they forsook it for a more elevated and worthy object of attention. A shooting star flickered in and out of existence; its residual trail in my mind became its offspring, which I grasped as it sped me across the sky, past Moon and Earth and Sun. Past planets, stars and galaxies. Past stretches of desolation conceived by no mind. My journey took me to the heart of the nocturnal void, where the secrets of an empty world were revealed to me and I recoiled in uncomprehension. Eternities of nothingness flowed past; I shrank from them in disbelief. A moment later my comet returned me to Earth and evaporated, leaving me sitting on the dewy grass and smelling the cool air. I inhaled it deeply and felt a swell of freshness in my chest. Suddenly I sensed an amorphous current of electricity passing through the atmosphere; the hairs on my arms tingled and I looked around in exquisite contentment. At that moment I saw the girl, standing four feet away, her face inclined as mine had been a minute earlier.

What struck me first was her this-worldly otherworldliness. She looked serene and contemplative, unaware of the subdued hubbub around her, but at the same time she looked childlike enough to enjoy nothing more than laughter. Her beauty was a portrayal of the same schism. Strands of russet hair dangled playfully onto a forehead the embryonic ironic wrinkles of which suggested a wise and compassionate skepticism; her eyebrows, arched and amused, possessed a comparable wisdom. Her smile, though, was just a little too broad to be merely ironical. An imperceptible widening would have changed it into suppressed laughter, not dry but exuberant. Her eyes were as mysterious as eyes are wont to be; they were clearly suspended between the divine and the human, like all her features. I continued to gaze at them as she ended her meditation, if such it was, to look curiously at the people who momentarily had no significance for me. I tried to read her thoughts on her face, but all I could glean were potential personality traits. Was she an introvert or a reflective extrovert? Was she intellectual or artistic? Was she a poet or a child? I couldn't decide, and I would have talked to her had I not been intimidated. I was worried she would walk away in a moment from boredom of being the passive stimulant of my imagination, to find a more active activity, but my fear was proved baseless when she sat down on the grass beside me.

"It's a beautiful night, isn't it?" she said. I was grateful. A breeze rustled the leaves on the trees and disarrayed the tresses on the girl's head.

"Yes," I said. "It's a good night for the start of the new year. Did you see the shooting star a minute ago?" Her fingers played with threads of grass and seemed to flirt with the thought of pulling them from the ground.

"I imagined it carried me far away from here."

"Where?"

"I don't know. A bright place. Heaven, maybe."

"I imagined it took me to hell. Or something like it." Her fingers had stopped playing with the grass and were resting quietly on her lap.

"I wish it were quieter. There are too many people."

"They don't matter. They don't exist if you don't want them to."

"And how is that?" She smiled, her eyes calmly expectant as if they already knew the answer and wanted to see how I'd express it.

"Only let the night exist for you. Ignore the rest."

"Can you do that? Ignore it?"

"In some moments. Not in all." Her look was inquisitive and intense, as mine had probably been a moment earlier. Perhaps it still was. The momentary silence drew me to her, and I thought again of her enigmatic beauty.

"If I concentrate I can't. It has to come suddenly, by itself, and I can't think about it."

"Right. The whole point is to lose yourself." As I said it, I felt that sentence was too didactic, that it betrayed the mood of the night sky and made it a means to a vulgar end, but the soft presence of the girl neutralized it. She was content to raise her eyes toward the blue-black canopy and sit in silence. I tried to do the same, but my equilibrium was gone. She had banished it. I could think only of her.

"I wonder how far away they are," she said at last. "The distances we're told have no meaning." Her eyes didn't waver from their transcendent object.

"It almost makes you want to believe in God, doesn't it?" I smiled lightly. Hers was more of a sigh.

"Yes…" Her hands suddenly felt the ground, as if they needed reassurance.

"But we don't need him." Mine sat still on my crossed legs.

"So it seems…" She watched treetops sway with a gust of wind.

"There's enough beauty without him." I leaned closer to her half-consciously.

"How much is enough?" She turned to me in response.

"If it makes me happy…" I could see the tiny blemishes on her skin.

"Does it make you happy?" The movement of her lips was soundless.

"Love does." The words hovered momentarily in the air.

"Have you been in love?" Her voice was thicker.

"I sometimes think so." Mine was quieter.

"Some people think love implies God." Her hands had frozen.

"I think it implies nothing but itself." I was aware of nothing but her.

"I think you're right." A wisp of hair fell into her eye unnoticed.

"And another human being…" I felt disembodied.

At that moment a guy came over to us, looked curiously at me and told the girl it was time to go. She was reluctant but followed him. She looked back at me, an almost blank look that hadn't had time to create itself, that reflected my stunned silence and equally blank thoughts. There was nothing to say and no time to say it. So we extended imaginary arms and touched imaginary fingertips in farewell. A minute later she was lost in the crowd, as I was lost in my solitude. I sat dumbly there on the trampled grass and groped for a thought appropriate to my feeling. Futilely. 'And so the vision dissipates…,' I ended, '….and the world with it.' I returned to the stars. They looked placid, flickerless, inhumanly constant; I could find no companionship there. I looked at the bobbing heads around me, sitting and standing, shaking and nodding, smiling and frowning. They wore masks painted in chameleonic colors; I could find no companionship there. I looked inward, toward an infinitesimal self, toward sadness and the asceticism of self-sufficiency, but then there was nowhere to go. There was no companionship. Again I thought of the dissipated vision, and suddenly blood rushed to my face, pressed behind my eyes and helped me recall, softly, Byron's line, "The tide rises in my altered eye…"

Sorrow, anger and nascent love merged in my mind. The tide continued to rise, delicately, pushed by the absence of the nameless girl, and finally spilled over, blurring the world. I made no attempt to dry my face. My chin quivered, my lips curled, I felt alone. Deprived of something precious. Terribly alone. I remembered the dream I'd had of nothingness and realized there was nothing phantastic about it, nothing except its presumed distance from me. It was at the center not

> only of the universe but of *me*. I was a mere elaboration of a mathematical point. I was hollow. I envied the bustling people around me who were ignorant of themselves, not-hollow because they didn't know they *were*. Such blissful passionlessness! Such innocent contentment! Virtuosic in self-denial. Among them, though, walked an angel, a girl who had thrilled me, who had given me *substance* for a moment—and who was now walking hand-in-hand with a mortal who didn't understand her. Was she thinking of me? Was she as forlorn as I was? Or did I mean nothing to her? Would I ever see her again?
>
> I thought along those lines for a while, unconsciously curing myself, through catharsis, of despair. At length I felt calm enough to gaze at the reassuring sight of the hills that hemmed us in and concealed the Pacific from view. I wished I could see the waves lapping at their base, or the watery horizon at the far end of the ocean's moonlit avenue. I felt that would have coaxed tears out of me for an altogether different reason than they had been coaxed earlier. But I lay back on my elbows in resigned contentment, even happiness, and mentally traced the silhouettes of the hills around me. After all, I thought, it's probably better this way. Easy exposure to the sublime numbs one to it: in the absence of effort one loses one's respect. In the absence of suffering one forgets the ideal. The summit is indeed demanding: unless one is prepared for a climb, one will never reach it. Fortunately, a generous amount of beauty exists beneath it as well, and the climb is not fated to be a wholly unpleasant one. I could see this clearly as I surveyed the lively scene lit up by fireworks. We were all happy down here, down under, happy to live our lives against the backdrop of such perfect scenery. We were all dancing, motionlessly but exuberantly, joyfully even when sorrowfully, freely, *chaotically*—dancing together as, high above us, the sky hung comfortably, unperturbed.

The paragraphs are all approximately equal lengths to contribute to the overall tranquilizing, surreal effect—or what I *intended* to be a tranquilizing, surreal effect. I don't know how well I succeeded. As I said before, the story strikes me as pedantic and sentimental.

I got impatient at the end.

Didn't go out tonight. Instead I took advantage of my appalling loneliness to write the last three paragraphs.

March 14

The sheer magnitude of my pain does make me feel strangely noble, but that doesn't make it any less unbearable. It's as though everybody is cooperating in ignoring me, in shunning me and behaving maliciously towards me. […]

I'm turning into a vessel for anger. I have to smash something, smash the world out of existence.

I'm also angry with myself for being too shy to talk to random people in the street.

I wanted to release my anger in the gym today, but it was closed.

I'm so depressed I might call in sick tomorrow.

I don't want to be alive; I'll try to sleep.

....Just remembered that I have Bach's Chaconne to keep me company! I don't know how it sounds on the violin, but on the viola it's memorable. To say the least.

I'm glad that episode has passed. I feel better. I feel--nothing. Perfect apathy.

Monday, March 15

I can go the whole day feeling nothing but love for people--my students, my coworkers, my friends, the female sex--but when I come home I can suddenly revert to anger.

….I watched *Thirteen Days*. Assuming the movie is accurate, I'm amazed at how close the world

came to nuclear war. Through the merest *chance*--a series of chances--and the efforts of three or four men we're alive now.

While I was watching, it occurred to me, for some reason, that *every single person* has problems and *every single person* is liable to concentrate on them while forgetting his 'comforts', his happinesses and successes. These aren't revolutionary truths. Though I've always known them, I ignore them in the ecstasy of sadness--when I most need to remember them. I *choose* to ignore them, precisely because of the ecstasy of sadness. But henceforward I'll make an effort not to. There's no reason to envy JFK his popularity with the ladies, because for him that was a *constant*, something he took for granted, and as such had less meaning than suffering. It's comparable to my freedom from financial problems, which isn't a positive happiness but a freedom from pain. It's a negative happiness, the effective function of which is to make room for *other* pains. If my erotic desires were fulfilled they would gradually lose their significance[1] and I'd concentrate on other invented problems, losing sight of my good fortune. Hitherto when I've thought of that I've thought, "Yes, but requited love--or even lust--is such a pleasure that in its presence no problem would have the emotional power of my current one." But even then I've known I was deceiving myself. Undoubtedly love is happiness, and for a while it eclipses almost everything else, but eventually pains will creep up and infiltrate my mind. Undoubtedly it's a *positive* happiness, but so are many other of my daily experiences. And not even love is a *constant* positive happiness that 'crowds out' pain.

Thus, the best criticism of envy isn't that it's *petty* or *weak* (for it's an understandable and human emotion); the best criticism is that it's *ignorant*. It's ignorant of the conditions of life. It thinks that some people really are much happier than others, and that happiness is a constant in one person and is not in another.[2] It makes wrong judgments about the *quality* and the *quantity* of happiness. In extreme cases it's right--in cases of suicide and the like--but those are rarer than you might think.

I have to be stronger. Less indulgent of my whiny side. I have to *act*, not *brood*.

[…]

In any case, all this doesn't take into account that suffering has its beneficial sides too. You shouldn't envy a lack of suffering because that leads to such unenviable things as complacency, weakness, a loss of perspective and a loss-of-touch with life.

March 16

Lunch with Ji-su. It was the first time we've seen each other in two weeks. (She's never not busy.) Wasn't much fun, but I hadn't expected it to be. At 9:00 I met Ji-hong. The conversation was slow, but that hardly dampened our pleasure in being together. I experienced the predictable loss-of-self looking at her face as she talked with those delightful mannerisms and accents unique to her. She gave me a couple of small presents. We'll meet again on Sunday.

Thursday, March 18

I'm reading Kojève's lectures on Hegel. I'll return to Hyppolite someday, but now I want to read

[1] Even when they're *being* fulfilled, in an erotic act, they lose their significance for me!

[2] That assumes that in envying a particular experience or character trait you're ultimately envying the happiness it brings rather than the experience or trait 'for its own sake' (whatever that means). Surely it isn't a problematic assumption. After all, the reason you want the experience or trait is for the sake of the pleasure it would bring. --You might call the assumption into question by noting that if you see an apparently happy man who possesses (is in love with) a physically undesirable woman and then you see a man who possesses a beautiful woman you'll envy the second but not the first, because this seems to suggest that you envy not the man's *happiness*--since they're both happy--but his *possession*. I think that's wrong, though. The point is that *you* couldn't be happy with the first woman while you could with the second. Maybe on an unconscious level you even doubt the first man's happiness.

something more general, i.e., interesting.

The first chapter is a translation of and commentary on the master-slave dialectic.-- Man is self-consciousness. To understand his origin is to understand the origin of the word 'I'. It arises in the moment of desire. The man who *contemplates* is "lost" in the object, absorbed by it; the man who desires thinks "I…." and thus asserts his self-consciousness. Hence man's self is the self of desire, and his existence must be a biological one. But that isn't a *sufficient* condition for his existence. In moving man to act, desire causes him to negate/transform the object, which at the same time is a transformation of himself because he "assimilates" the object and makes it a subjective reality. In the act, the empty I of desire "receives a real positive content" through this assimilation of an external element--and its content is a *function* of the content of the negated non-I. Therefore, if the desire is directed toward something "natural" (biological), the I will be merely natural, i.e. animal. "The I created by the active satisfaction of such a desire will have the same nature as the things toward which that desire is directed: it will be a 'thingish' I, a merely living I, an animal I." This I will not attain self-consciousness because its object is not self-conscious.[1] In order for the self to be human, desire's object must be non-natural, i.e. desire itself--which, in being "the revelation of an emptiness, the presence of the absence of a reality", is the only thing that is not natural, not identical to itself. A desire that desires desire will give rise to an I that is essentially desire (because the content of the I is a function of its object). "And since desire is realized as action negating the given, the very being of this I will be action." It will not be equality to itself, like the animal I, but "negating-negativity". "In other words, the very being of this I will be becoming, and the universal form of this being will not be space, but time." The I is "intentional becoming": "the act of transcending the given that is given to it and that it itself is".

Since human desire is directed toward another desire it can exist only in a multiplicity of desires. "That is why the human reality can only be social." In saying that humans desire each other's desire Hegel means that they want to be *recognized* in their human value. For example, in the relationship between man and woman, desire is directed toward the possession not of the other's body but of his/her desire; it is a wanting to be desired, to be loved, to be recognized.

> Likewise, desire directed toward a natural object is human only to the extent that it is "mediated" by the desire of another directed toward the same object: it is human to desire what others desire, because they desire it. Thus, an object perfectly useless from a biological point of view (such as a medal, or the enemy's flag) can be desired because it is the object of other desires.

A man is truly human only if his human desire "wins out" over his animal desire, which is for the preservation of his life. Therefore, he completely affirms his humanity only if he risks his (animal) life for the sake of his human desire (for recognition). (Incidentally, a more precise definition of the desire for recognition is that it is "a desire to substitute oneself for the [supreme] value desired by [another] desire", i.e., to represent the other's self-ideal, that which he wishes *he* could be.) However, not everyone is willing to risk his life. Indeed, if he were then all the fights for recognition would result in the death of either both adversaries or one--in both of which cases the realization of the human being would be impossible, since either everyone would be dead or there would be no one left to recognize the final survivor. Fortunately for the continued existence of mankind, some people are cowards. They fear their adversary and refuse to risk their life for the sake of recognition. In so doing they give up their desire and recognize the other as their Master.[2]

Thus, in the beginning of his history man is never simply man. He is necessarily either Master or Slave, because this is the only way the human reality can come into being.

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[1] "The animal raises itself above nature that is negated in its animal desire only to fall back into it immediately by the satisfaction of this desire."

[2] It's funny that Hegel ignores women. They don't exist!

Saturday, March 20

Worked at a different school today. Delightful kids. Was supposed to meet Hye-gyung, but she cancelled because of a "serious family problem".

I won't summarize all of chapter 2, since much of it isn't new to me.

The explanation of self-consciousness as desire for desire intrigues me. But it's hard to evaluate.

Kojève has a different spin on Hegel than Hyppolite does (or, *many* different spins). First of all, he emphasizes that the end of history is universal recognition, and that the desire for recognition is what continuously propels humans to create their history. He also says that all of history is created by the slave who desires recognition from the master. (Both the master and the slave exist through the whole of history, but one is idle--merely negates--while the other is productive.) When the master and the slave are synthesized, when they cease to exist as such, history will come to an end.

Kojève portrays the stoic, skeptical and Christian consciousnesses as reactions of the "educated" (through work) slave against his continued slavery. In order to *realize* his newly formed idea of freedom--formed in the crucible of work done for a master--he will have to fight against the master, "risk his life in a fight for freedom". But before he dares to do that he imagines ideologies "by which he seeks to justify himself [and] his slavery, to reconcile the *ideal* of freedom with the *fact* of slavery". The first of these is stoicism. "The slave tries to persuade himself that he is *actually* free simply by *knowing* that he is free--that is, by having the abstract *idea* of freedom." The real conditions of existence don't matter; he is independent of them. This ideology, which justifies the slave's inaction, fails because, in the end, it's *boring*. Man is fundamentally an active creature: if he doesn't act--if he remains identical to himself, does not negate (which is his essence)--he becomes bored. Therefore, he moves on to the next stage, that of skepticism-nihilism, in which "he is content to activate his thought in some sense", viz. by making it negate the given world. This attitude culminates in solipsism: "the value, the very reality of all that is not I is denied". However, it's impossible to live while believing this, since it doesn't allow for action. When the slave becomes aware of the contradiction--which is still essentially that between his idea of freedom and his reality of slavery--he invents the Christian consciousness, in which he justifies 'his' contradiction by saying that "*all* existence necessarily implies a contradiction".

> He imagines an "other world", which is "beyond" the natural world of the senses. Here below he is a slave, and he does nothing to free himself. But he is right, for in *this* world *everything* is slavery, and the master is as much a slave here as he is. But freedom is not an empty word, a simple abstract *idea*, an unrealizable ideal, as in stoicism and skepticism. Freedom is *real*, real in the *beyond*. Hence no need to fight against the master, since one already *is* free to the extent that one participates in the beyond.… No need to fight to be recognized by the master, since one is recognized by a God. ….One can maintain the stoic attitude….without being bored, for now one does not eternally remain the same: one changes and one *must* change, one must always go beyond oneself in order to rise above oneself as something given in the real empirical world, in order to attain the transcendental world….

Thus the Christian obtains equality with the master. Inequality is an illusion. This ideology persists through the centuries, but Hegel rejects it because it doesn't take into account that originally the slave was made such because he refused to risk his life, and that he will *continue* to be a slave *until* he risks his life (against the master)--until he accepts the idea of his death. Moreover, the Christian frees himself from the human master only by enslaving himself to the divine master, God. "He is the master's equal only in absolute slavery." And the new master "is such that the new Christian slave is even more a slave than the pagan slave". *Furthermore*, he accepts his slavery for the same reason that the pagan slave did: fear of death. Before, it was for the sake of *biological* life; now it's for the sake of *eternal* life. The motive has always been "the slavish desire for life at any price".

Consequently, in order to realize freedom, one must accept the idea of death and thus atheism. This is what happens in the French Revolution, when Christian theology is overcome and the Christian era (the

heyday of slavery[1]) comes to an end, giving way to the third and last historical period, in which *realized* freedom is conceived by philosophy (German philosophy, and ultimately Hegel). In order for the Christian ideology to be transcended, its ideal must be realized on earth. Everyone must be recognized. To explain how this can happen and what it means, Kojève gives an historical analysis of the pagan state. But first he says that, because a man wants his own *particular* value to be recognized *universally*, he can be satisfied only in a society that has a universal State that recognizes each person's unique value and in which (society) he recognizes everyone else through the medium of the State. "Such a synthesis of the particular and the universal is possible only after the overcoming of the opposition between the master and the slave, since the synthesis of the particular and the universal is also a synthesis of mastery and slavery." (See the next paragraph.) That's why it's impossible in the pagan and Christian eras.

The pagan state is dominated by masters. Only masters--warriors--are citizens; only they are recognized. Now, the master represents the element of universality, because the only reason he is recognized is that he risks his life, and the man who risks his life is (by that act) no different from everyone else who has done the same. To the state he is merely an anonymous warrior; his "particularity" means nothing. Hence he cannot be satisfied--because man's desire is to be recognized as an individual, not as a function of the State. The slave, on the other hand, represents particularity. Work is an essentially particular activity because it depends on the concrete conditions in which it is carried out. Moreover, "it is by work that the differences between men are established, that the 'personalities' are formed". (Therefore it is the slave who becomes conscious of his personality and imagines individualistic ideologies.) The slave isn't satisfied because he's the only one to recognize his particular value.

There is indeed a "particular" aspect of the master's existence: his family. It doesn't satisfy him, though. He's recognized (loved) in it not as who he is but as *existing*. Because he exists, he's loved. His actions don't much influence this love one way or the other. In short, his human value isn't recognized; his biological being is.[2]

[If nothing else, these summaries of Hegel's thought are useful for showing how incredibly absurd idealism is.]

Sunday, March 21

I met Jung-eun, the girl I work with, for lunch. Her personality is a massive expression of extroverted self-confidence.

In principle, a synthesis of the familial Particular and the political Universal could satisfy man, but it's impossible because the two entities have different supreme values. The value for the family is the life of its member; the value for the state is the *risk* of his life. His death serves the universal cause. "To fulfill the duty of the citizen, therefore, is necessarily to break the law of the family; and inversely." This conflict is inevitable, and in the end it causes the ruin of the pagan world. "In the final analysis, the pagan world perishes because it excludes work. But the immediate agent of its ruin is woman. For it is the woman who represents the family principle--i.e., that principle of particularity which is hostile to society as such and whose victory signifies the ruin of the state." The young military hero who comes to power is still under the influence of woman and the family, and "he tends to transform the state into his private property, into a family patrimony, and to make the citizens of the state his own subjects". He succeeds because the state excludes work. As the stronger state swallows up smaller ones it becomes an empire, and the masters, being too few to defend it, are pushed into the background by mercenaries. Eventually war is conducted almost exclusively by mercenaries, and the masters lose their power to resist the particularism of the emperor (because, again, they don't *work* either). They become his "slaves".[3] (In the Greek city they were "citizens";

[1] The pagan world was the heyday of mastery.

[2] That's why parental love has never truly satisfied me and why I attach so much significance to the other kind of love. I want to be loved for who I am, not *because* I am!

[3] In effect, they already *are* slaves, since they've ceased to risk their lives.

in the Roman empire they're "subjects".) Therefore they accept the ideologies of their slaves, and the pagan world evolves to the Christian one without a violent revolution.

The former masters are not slaves properly so-called, for they don't work in the service of another. They're "pseudo-slaves"--as are their former slaves after they've freed them (which they do on a large scale). The Roman world becomes a society of pseudo-slaves, whom Hegel calls "bourgeois", private property-owners. Even the emperor isn't a true master, since he doesn't risk his life; he's a bourgeois. The character of Roman civil law supports Hegel's analysis:

> The fundamental notion of Roman legal thought, that of the "legal person", corresponds to the stoic conception of human existence, as well as to the principle of family particularism. Just like the family, civil law attaches an absolute value to the pure and simple *being* of man, independently of his actions. And just as in the stoic conception, the value attributed to the "person" does not depend on the concrete condition of his existence: a man, and every man equally, is everywhere and always a "legal person". And we can say that the bourgeois state founded on the idea of civil law is the real basis of stoicism, of stoicism taken not as an abstract *idea*, but as a social, historical *reality*.

Similarly, private property is the real basis and the reality of nihilistic skepticism, for the property-owner subordinates everything, even the state, to the absolute value of *his* own property.

To explain how Christianity was made possible by Roman society, Kojève describes the existential plight of the bourgeois. To be a truly human being he must *work*, like the slave. But he doesn't work for another; he believes he works for himself. According to Hegel, work is a specifically *human* action only if it is carried out in relation to an *idea*, "something other than the *given*, and, in particular, other than the given that the worker himself is". The slave was supported by the idea of the master, but the bourgeois has no such idea. He doesn't even have the idea of the State, because the bourgeois world is an agglomeration of private properties without a true community. His problem, therefore, is that he needs to work for *another* but can work only for himself. The idea of property resolves the problem: the bourgeois works for property that has become money. He works for Capital. In other words, he alienates himself by projecting himself into the idea of capital, which (while being his own product) "becomes independent of him and enslaves him just as the master enslaved the slave; with the difference, however, that the enslavement is now conscious and freely accepted by the worker". (Thus Hegel 'agrees with' Marx that not only the poor man but also the capitalist is enslaved by capital.) This bourgeois alienation is reflected in the dualistic Christian ideology. The transcendent world of Christianity corresponds to Capital, to which man is supposed to devote his actions and for the sake of which he sacrifices his sensuous, biological desires. The structure of the Christian Beyond is formed in the image of the relations between the emperor and his subjects. The reason why the religion is accepted by the pagan "master" is that he is politically impotent and has nothing to lose by accepting a theology in which all men are equal.

If the bourgeois property-owner is particularistic (along with the slave and the family), so is Christianity (because God is incarnated in Jesus Christ and He has a direct relation with each man taken separately, "without passing through the universal--i.e., social and political--element of man's existence"). However, it is also clearly a *synthesis* of the universal and the particular. As such, it finds the solution to the pagan tragedy. "Since the coming of Christ there is no longer an inevitable conflict with truly no way out." The problem now is to realize the Christian idea of individuality (its synthesis of the universal and the particular, which is supposed to occur in the Beyond). According to Hegel this requires that man liberate himself from God. Individuality cannot exist in the "Beyond" because the conception of Heaven presupposes immortality, which is incompatible with the essence of the human being. If it is to exist it must be on earth, which means that the universal God (who recognizes the *particular*) must be replaced by a universal on earth, which can only be the State. The absolute State that realizes the Christian kingdom of heaven is Napoleon's empire.

> The history of the Christian world is the history of the progressive realization of that ideal State, in which man wil finally be "satisfied" by realizing himself as individuality…. But in order to realize

> this State, man must eliminate the Christian idea of transcendence. And that is why the evolution of the Christian world is dual: on the one hand there is the *real* evolution, which prepares the social and political conditions for the coming of the "absolute" State; and on the other, an *ideal* evolution, which eliminates the *transcendent* idea…. This ideal evolution, which destroys Christian theology, is the work of the intellectual. Hegel devotes all of chapter V [to a discussion of the Christian or bourgeois intellectual].
>
> This intellectual can subsist only in the Christian bourgeois world, in which a man is able not to be a master--that is, not to have slaves and not to fight--without thereby becoming a slave himself. But the bourgeois intellectual is nonetheless something different from the bourgeois properly so-called. For if, just like the bourgeois, he is essentially peaceful and does not fight, he differs from the bourgeois in that he does not work either. Hence he is as stripped of the essential character of the slave as he is of the master.
>
> Not being a slave, the intellectual can liberate himself from the essentially slavish aspect of Christianity, namely from its theological, transcendental element. But not being a master, he can preserve the element of the particular, the "individualistic" ideology of Christian anthropology. In short, being neither master nor slave, he is able--in this *nothingness*, in this absence of all given *determination*--to "realize" in some way the desired synthesis of mastery and slavery: he can *conceive* it. However, being *neither* master *nor* slave--that is, abstaining from all work and from all fighting--he cannot truly *realize* the synthesis that he discovers: without fighting and without work, this synthesis conceived by the intellectual remains purely *verbal*.

In the French Revolution the conditions were created in which this synthesis would be possible. Work was joined with the fight for life and death: the working bourgeois became a warrior while knowing that he was mortal. The fight wasn't between master and slave, though, because there *were* no masters. The bourgeois is his own slave, since he is ruled by Capital. "It is from himself, therefore, that he must free himself. And that is why the liberating risk of life takes the form not of risk on the field of battle, but of risk created by Robespierre's Terror. The working bourgeois, turned revolutionary, himself creates the situation that introduces into him the element of death." Thanks to the Terror, the final synthesis is realized. The State that will liberate man is born, and it comes to maturity in Napoleon's empire. Napoleon, however, isn't conscious of his historical role--the State and the society aren't "self-conscious"--which is why Hegel is necessary to complete history.

Chapter 3 of Kojève's book is a three-page long interpretation of the chapter on religion in the *Phenomenology*. It's enlightening, but I won't summarize it.

Spent the evening with Ji-hong. The main reason I like being with her is that her beauty shames Kate Moss's. But her personality is great too. When we were walking to the subway station at the end of the night I asked about our relationship for the first time. She didn't give a clear answer. Said she likes me but it's hard to communicate. "So….*chingu man*?" I asked. (Friends only?) "No," she answered. "But if we were a couple, communication difficult." There was no conclusion because she was in a hurry to catch the last train.

I gave her a birthday present: a CD of Chopin's nocturnes. And I'm letting her borrow *The Gay Science*. In the middle of dinner she suddenly ran outside with no explanation: five minutes later she came back with a box of cookies for me.

March 22

Health club. Work was surprisingly fun--surprising because I was so tired. (Somehow I transform when I enter the classroom.)

Last night Ji-hong wrote something in Korean on a napkin and told me to ask a friend to translate it. Today I did. It was along the lines of "Thanks for always being so kind to me. We have trouble talking, but just being together makes me very happy."

Chapter 4 expounds the Hegelian conception of the wise man. I'll give the barest outline. Wisdom has three common definitions. The first is perfect self-consciousness, which implies the ability to answer in a comprehensible manner all questions concerning one's acts--which, in the end, is the ability to answer *all* questions. The second is that wisdom consists in being perfectly satisfied by what one is. (The wise man desires nothing, wants to change nothing, and no longer *becomes*. He simply *is*.) The third is *moral perfection*. Hegel tries to show that the second definition is equal to the first and the third is equal to the second, and therefore that all three are equal to each other, and therefore that there is only *one* possible type of wisdom. I won't reproduce Kojève's arguments--with one exception--because this all seems rather scholastic to me. Here's the exception:

> The wise man is the perfectly self-conscious man--that is, the man who is fully satisfied by what he is--that is, the man who realizes moral perfection by his existence, or in other words, who serves as the model for himself and for *all* others. ….[He is] universally recognized. This is to say that there is only one possible type of wisdom[--which is in contradiction with the widely held ideas of relativism]. [Hegel proves his thesis by] starting from the first definition of wisdom, put as an axiom. As for the proof, it is very simple. Let us admit that the wise man is *perfectly* self-conscious. We have seen that perfect self-consciousness equals omniscience. In other words, the wise man's knowledge is *total*, the wise man reveals the *totality* of Being through the entirety of his thought. Now, since Being obeys the principle of identity to itself, there is only one unique totality of Being, and consequently only one unique knowledge that reveals it entirely. Therefore there is only one unique possible type of (conscious) wisdom.

Kojève adds the parenthesis because it's possible to deny--and it has been denied (by Hindu thinkers, for example)--that satisfaction-perfection is identical to self-consciousness. Hegel cannot really argue against these people, because they already place the highest existential value on silence or unconsciousness and thus have no reason to engage in discussion. Hence the Platonic-Hegelian ideal of wisdom is such only for a person who already values self-consciousness most, i.e., a philosopher. This philosopher is distinguished from the wise man in being discontented, in *asking* questions rather than giving them the answers that the wise man does, in wanting to change himself, in *striving* for wisdom. Philosophy is meaningful only to the extent that it is guided by the ideal of the wise man. Now, there are two attitudes toward this ideal: one can believe, with Plato, that its realization is humanly impossible, or one can believe, with Hegel, that it's possible. (Hegel in fact thought that *he* had realized it.) If it's impossible, then the philosopher is either a madman who wants to be what one can *not* be (and he may even *know* that one cannot be it), or he is not a madman and he thinks that his ideal is realized by something nonhuman, that is, God. But in that case he's a theologian. Therefore, in order to believe that philosophy is separate from theology, one must accept the possibility of some day realizing wisdom. Hegel provided the first-ever criterion of absolute self-consciousness (or wisdom): circularity. "To start with a question and to proceed logically [must] lead to the starting point"--only thus is it clear that "all possible questions-answers have been exhausted", i.e. that the knowledge obtained is total. Indeed, Hegel thought that circularity is both the necessary and the sufficient condition of absolute truth. However, he also thought that circularity could be realized only in a perfect, universal, homogeneous (conflictless) society, because the wise man, in no longer *becoming* (i.e., in knowing everything and thus being entitled to a circular wisdom), has passed through all stages of consciousness, which is possible only at the end of history and in a perfect society.

Chapter 5 is on time, specifically the relation between time and the Concept. The Concept is the "coherent whole of conceptual understanding that lays claim to the truth", "the integration of all concepts, the complete system of concepts, the 'idea of ideas'", "the Logos, the *word*--or discourse endowed with a meaning". In the preface and the last chapter of his book Hegel defines time as "the Concept itself which exists empirically". To explicate this statement Kojève proposes to review the Platonic, Aristotelian, Spinozistic and Kantian solutions to the problem that Hegel wants to resolve. He begins by noting that there

is only a limited number of possibilities: either the Concept *is* eternity[1] (and *relates*--or "corresponds"--to nothing), it *is* time[2] (and relates to nothing),[3] it is *eternal*, or it is *temporal*. The fourth possibility is a skeptical abandonment of philosophy, for it means that truth *changes*. If the Concept is eternal it can relate either to time or to eternity, and eternity can exist either *outside* of time or *in* it. Spinoza (and Parmenides) think that the Concept is eternity. Hegel thinks it is time. Plato thinks it is eternal and relates to an eternity *outside* of time. Aristotle thinks it is eternal and relates to an eternity *within* time. Kant thinks it is eternal and relates to time.

Kojève discusses Plato's view first. Existence is essentially change; it is temporal. In fact, it is time itself, because change is *only* in existence. The Concept (truth), on the other hand, does not (*essentially*) change, which means it is other than temporal and other than time. It is eternal. (Concepts are eternal, though they exist in time.) Being eternal, it is related to eternity rather than time--and, furthermore, eternity is outside of time. The relation between the eternal Concept and eternity (or an eternal entity) has two aspects: the Concept's meaning reveals the eternal entity, and the entity gives the Concept its meaning. To take *a* concept as an example: "the word 'dog' reveals the *essence* of the dog, and without this word this essence would not be revealed to man; but the essence of the dog is what realizes the meaning of the word; the *dog* is what allows man to develop the word 'dog' into a judgment, saying 'the dog is an animal with four feet, etc.'". "Generally speaking, there is a movement from the word to the thing, and a return from the thing to the word." This double relation is the only thing that constitutes the truth or the revelation of reality. Truth has no relation to time, even though it exists in it.

Incidentally, any philosophy that doesn't *identify* the Concept with eternity or time--that says that the Concept is merely *related* to one or the other--is necessarily transcendentalist, in that it situates reality outside of knowledge, outside of discourse. It defines truth as correspondence. The two philosophies that are *not* transcendentalist are Spinoza's and Hegel's. Kojève calls any system that relates the Concept to an eternity outside of time--which eternity can be described (as it cannot in mysticism)--"theological".

The next question he asks is "what does the theological system mean for understanding of the temporal world?". His long answer isn't easy to understand, partly because the doctrines it attributes to various philosophies are ridiculous. First he says this:

> In principle, *everything* can be said about the world and man. Knowledge that relates to them is *total*. However, in itself, knowledge relating to time and the temporal remains relative: it is a *doxa*. [?] Only by relating it in its entirety to *eternal* knowledge related to eternity can one say something *definitive* about the temporal.

Then he says that, in theology, the only science of the world can be geometry, because everything else is temporal or presupposes time. Arithmetic (for example), as Kant showed, relates to time; geometry relates to space, which is nontemporal. Thus, you can say that the earth is round, but you can't say *why* it is round, or why it attracts heavy objects, or anything else that relies on the concept of force (which presupposes not only space but time). In short, "theology's" explanation of the natural world is totally inadequate. It's the same in the case of man. "There is [absolute knowledge] concerning him only to the extent that he is related to eternity." The existence of God can be proven because he is an eternal truth, but the existence of man cannot (because he isn't)--unless man conceives of himself as an eternal idea in God. "In short, there is an absolute knowledge in and through consciousness, but there is no absolute knowledge in and through *self*-consciousness." Theological (i.e., Platonic) anthropology is equally problematic, for it cannot really explain freedom.

> The free act is situated outside of the line of temporal evolution. The *hic et nunc*, represented by a point on this line, is *determined*, *fixed*, *defined* by the past which, through it, determines the future

[1] Or an eternal entity.
[2] Or a temporal entity.
[3] Time and eternity, being essentially different, are not related to each other.

> as well. The *hic et nunc* of the free act, on the other hand, is *unexplainable*, on the basis of its past; it is not fixed or determined by it. Even while existing in space-time, the being endowed with freedom must be able to detach itself from the *hic et nunc*, to rise *above* it, to take up a position in relation to it. But the free act is related to the *hic et nunc*: it is effected in given determined conditions. That is to say: the *content* of the *hic et nunc* must be preserved, while being *detached* from the *hic et nunc*. Now, that which preserves the content of a perception while detaching it from the *hic et nunc* of sensation is precisely the Concept or the Word that has a meaning. (This *table* is bound to the *hic et nunc*; but the *meaning* of the *words* 'this table' exists everywhere and always.) And that is why everyone agrees that only a *speaking* being can be free.

Now, because the Concept is eternal and related to eternity, which is outside of time, the free act--like the Concept--is impossible in (or *unrelated to*) a temporal world. "In and by the free act, man relates himself to something that is situated outside of time." The free act, the choice, is made outside of temporal existence, "which is absolutely *determined* in its evolution". Because in the Platonic system the nontemporal admits of no variations, the choice must be *one unique act*. After this choice has been made--Plato says in a myth that the soul chooses its destiny before its birth, that is, outside of time--the person's existence is *determined*, and he can never act freely again. He is who he is; his destiny has been chosen. (Origen might say that in one decision, outside of time, the soul chooses to stay with God or to reject him.) Obviously, this theological conception cannot adequately explain history: history becomes essentially a comedy rather than a tragedy, something without meaning and value, something unfree. The "tragic" act, the free act, is outside of temporal life. (Don't ask me what it means for an *act* not to be *temporal*.)

In conclusion: the Platonic system must be discarded because it can explain neither the natural world (except its geometry) nor human existence.

Tuesday, March 23

In defining eternity as *outside* of time, Plato reasoned as follows: "All real dogs change; the concept 'dog,' on the other hand, remains identical to itself; therefore it must be related to an eternity situated outside of real dogs--that is, outside of time." Aristotle answered, "the concept 'dog' is indeed related to eternity; but eternity subsists *in* time; for if real *dogs* change, *the* real dog--that is, the *species* 'dog'--does not change. Since the species is *eternal*, even though it is placed *in* time, it is possible to relate the Concept to eternity *in* time. Therefore there is an absolute knowledge relating to the temporal world, to the extent that this world implies eternity." The *telos* of plants and animals and things is what is eternal. But so is the Cosmos, which means that time itself is eternal--and that the Cosmos has the same structure as does the animal. "The Aristotelian system thus gives an explanation of life and a biological conception of the world." However, it doesn't explain man's historical existence, his *individual* existence. The eternal truth is the species, the *telos*, not the individual. The system's failure is seen more clearly if we again pose the problem of freedom. Quite simply, freedom is impossible in Aristotle's system: a *creative* God cannot exist because "eternity in time signifies *eternity* of the world, *return*, and *eternal* return". If God isn't free, neither is man: "man undergoes history but does not create it". In fact, because for Aristotle eternity is in time, there is no possibility even of a *transcendent* free act (outside of time), as there is in Plato.

March 24

Parmenides and Spinoza think that being and thought (or the Concept) are the same. In Spinoza's words, thought is the attribute of substance, and substance is not different from its attribute. As in Hegel's system, absolute knowledge that reflects the totality of being is just as "circular" as being itself in its totality: "there is nothing outside of the knowledge, as there is nothing outside of being". The difference between Hegel and Spinoza is that the Concept-Being of the former is time, while that of the latter is eternity.

"Consequently, Spinozist absolute knowledge must *be* eternity", which is to say that it excludes time, which means that the *Ethics* must be thought, written and read "in a trice". And that's absurd. Admittedly, it could be written by a being outside of time, that is, God, but it wasn't; it was written by a temporally existing man. It's inconceivable because it's not a pantheism (as is usually thought) but an a-cosmism, that is, its universe is reduced to God alone, a God without world and without men. (The *Ethics* describes men, but it cannot account for them. By rights they shouldn't exist.)

Kojève illustrates all his ideas with drawings (and detailed explanations of them) that represent and compare the systems he's discussing. They're illuminating, but I won't try to reproduce them.

"The Parmenidean-Spinozist (and Hegelian) Concept, which is not *in relation* with a Being *other* than itself, but which *is* Being revealing itself to itself--this Concept is called the 'transcendental I' or the *transcendental synthesis of apperception* in Kant." The transcendental is what makes experience possible, and since experience is temporal, it is what makes the temporal possible. The transcendental entity is outside of time; it is eternal or *a priori*. "To say that there is absolute knowledge is to say that there are universally and necessarily valid concepts--that is, concepts that on the one hand are valid at *every* moment of time, and on the other hand *exclude* time from themselves (that is, can never be *modified*); therefore, it is to say that there are *a priori*, or transcendental, or *eternal*, concepts."

The transcendental I is not merely eternal; it is eternity. This is because it is the origin of the eternal Concept, and such a Concept is eternal not in and by itself but through its *origin*--that is, because it comes from eternity--and therefore the transcendental I must be eternity. This means that Kant's "transcendental self-consciousness" is Parmenides' Substance conceived of as spiritual subject (God). "It is the real eternity, which reveals itself to itself in and by the Concept [as Spinoza's and Parmenides' eternity did]. It is the source of all Being revealed by the Concept, and the source of all conceptual *revelation* of Being; it is the *eternal* source of all temporal Being." Kant's twelve categories (Being, Quantity, etc.) are the twelve aspects of the self-conscious unity of eternity. They precede time and everything in it; they are *a priori*. Spinoza's and Parmenides' mistake consisted in believing that these eternal concepts are *attributes* of eternity rather than mere 'creations' of it--i.e., that they "determine" eternity, that eternity can be described by them (= by the Concept), that they *are* eternity. Kant, on the other hand, agrees with Plato that nothing can be said of eternity (the One). Plato's reason was that speech presupposes time (and therefore the Concept cannot be eternity); Kant's reason is more complex:

"A determination of eternity by the eternal concepts-categories would be possible only by an understanding through the *self*-consciousness of which the whole Manifold would be given at the same time", i.e., "an understanding which, by thinking of *itself*, thinks of *everything* that can be thought, and which creates the objects thought by the sole act of thinking of them." (In other words, God.) I'm having trouble understanding why. But all of this is scholastic anyway, so who cares?-- For us who are not God, to apply our concepts to God is to relate them to something they aren't. Only God can apply concepts to himself; *we* cannot apply them to him. But who's to say Spinoza wasn't God? Well, Kant says he couldn't have been, because man's self-consciousness is empty: the manifold content of the world must come from somewhere else. That is, in order for there to be *true* knowledge, the object that man thinks of must *exist*, and it must exist *independently* of his thinking of it. Thus, there are two elements in consciousness: there is the Concept, and there is the Intuition that presents to man a content not produced by him. Hence, "the Concept possessed by a being that is not God is a *relation*."

The last four pages of the section on Kant are pretty dense; I won't spend hours deciphering and regurgitating them.

I remember way back in the beginning of my Korean sojourn how necessary I thought it was to clarify my purposes in teaching children. Was I doing it for them or for me? For *their* growth or for *mine*? The question bothered me because, as I remarked in January, I'm similar to Alyosha Karamazov in that I crave a *wholehearted* involvement in whatever I'm doing. I need *certainty*. I never answered the question, though; I got into a routine ('I teach because it's what I'm paid to do') and occupied my mind with other things. I guess my answer now would be: the fundamental purpose is self-growth--self-perfection--and one measure of this growth/perfection is the extent to which I educate and connect with the children. Thus the

main reason for (beneficially) impacting their lives is selfish.[1] But I do have a genuine urge to help them, an urge separate from my knowledge that it reflects well on me, a spontaneously compassionate desire to improve my students in whatever way I can. I'm not sure of the depth of the desire, since I never think about it. But when I'm teaching at least some of the kids I know from the way I *feel* that I care about them and would gladly spend hours tutoring them. A third reason for my "altruistic" desire is less noble than even the first (though it's related to it): when Dave worked with me I sometimes felt as though I was competing with him; therefore I had to teach the kids as well as I could and preferably get them to like me in the process. (I really wanted to be liked! I still do, but I care less than I used to.) I was conscious, as always, of Foucault's "panopticon": I wanted to do a good job in the eyes of God (or, me and my imaginary observer). The all-seeing eye is also an impetus behind my desire to be a "great man"--and it's even more a method of monitoring my progress toward the ideal, or of keeping myself on the right track. "What would an outside observer think of this?"--whatever "this" is. That thought follows me like a shadow (though I tend to ignore it). Taken to its logical conclusion it would turn into a ceaseless self-vigilance, akin to that of a Christian ascetic, which would in the end leave me no peace (no time alone) and maybe drive me insane. For we all periodically need a break from our ideals. --The contradiction in morality is that if a person tries to abide by it at all times--not just superficially but consistently and *severely*--he will in all likelihood lose his mental balance or even kill himself, in both of which cases it will no longer be possible to be moral. So its triumph is its defeat. For it to be *realistic* and, indeed, *possible* it must coexist with amorality or immorality. In fact, the best morality would allow for and incorporate elements of what has traditionally been called the negation of morality, that is, *normality*. Not only would they be "acceptable"; they would be desirable, considered an *achievement* (as long as they were offset by their 'opposites'--the rationale of which 'offsetting' (and the reason for the judgment that they were achievements) would be to realize an approximate *totality* in oneself).

"Totality"--*breadth* and *depth*--is the most mentally healthy ideal.

The problem is, it's dishonest. For it's sort of an excuse to indulge in our weaknesses. Hopefully it induces us to moderate them--but if we do, it's probably not because of our self-proclaimed ideal but because we already feel a little disgusted by them, as if they're bad 'in themselves'. And if we feel that way, we're bringing another ideal into the mix (because 'totality' in and of itself is neutral toward the question of whether an action is virtuous or not). Several ideals will always coexist in every psyche, and the conflicts between them will always cause doubt and confusion.

Thursday, March 25

Kojève has shown that philosophers who do not identify the Concept and time cannot give an account of freedom and history. Hegel's principal aim, then, in identifying the two is to explain history. The time he has in mind is historical time, not cosmic or biological time: in fact, in the *Phenomenology* he denies the existence of all time except the historical kind, when he says that "nature is space, whereas time *is* history". Without man, nature would be only space. "Only man is in time, and time does not exist outside of man." (See below.)

Historical time is characterized by the primacy of the future. In pre-Hegelian philosophy, the movement of time was from past to present to future; in Hegelian time the movement is from future to past to present. "The movement is engendered in the future and goes toward the present by way of the past." It arises from human desire, which, in desiring another desire, is directed toward an absolutely nonexistent entity (the only such entity in nature, since it is a negation, the presence of an absence). The future is also nonexistent, since it does not yet exist and has not existed. Hence desire and the future are essentially similar. Therefore, acting in terms of the desire for a desire, which is acting in terms of what does not exist, is essentially acting in terms of the future. Animals, on the other hand, desire something that *is*, for example,

[1] On the other hand, I never think about "self-growth" when I'm teaching. I never think, "Well, at least I'm broadening myself." The desire is always directed toward the future; I ignore it when *acting*.

water, which means that they act in terms of the present. For the human being the future has primacy over the present.[1] Furthermore, because the desire for desire is the desire for recognition, and this desire engenders history, the time in which the future takes primacy creates history and lasts only as long as history lasts (or as long as the desire for desire lasts, which is the same thing).

"Desire is necessarily the desire to negate the real or present given. And the *reality* of desire [i.e., its satisfaction][2] comes from the negation of the given reality. Now, the *negated* real is the real that has ceased to be: it is the *past* real. Desire determined by the future appears, in the present, as a reality (that is, as satisfied desire) only on the condition that it has negated a real--that is, a past. The manner in which the past has been (negatively) formed in terms of the future is what determines the quality of the real present." In this (historical) time, action "realizes in the *present* a project for the future,[3] which project is formed on the basis of knowledge of the *past*."

Hegel says that time empirically exists. This statement can be deduced from the preceding analysis. "Time in which the future takes primacy can *exist* only provided that it negates or annihilates." For it to exist, therefore, there must also be something other than time, viz. space. For space to be negated it must *really exist*--i.e., "*resist*"--i.e., be full of matter--and thus the existence of the empirical world can be deduced. "Time annihilates this world by causing it at every instant to sink into the nothingness of the past. Time *is* nothing but this *nihilation* of the world; and if there were no *real* world that was annihilated, time would only be pure nothingness: there would be no time. Hence time that *is*, therefore, is indeed something that 'exists empirically'--i.e., exists in a real space or a spatial world."

To repeat: time *is* man and man *is* time. A nature without man would be space, for it would be identical to itself, and human time, arising from the desire for desire, is *not* identical to itself. It is a negation, made possible by the *desire* for negation (desire). (Kojève admits the possibility--the *probability*--of biological time, but he agrees with Aristotle's conception of it as circular, as eternal return, as a time in which everything changes only to remain the same.) The only thing left to be explained is what Hegel means by identifying the *Concept* and time.

March 26

The reason it's possible for there to be abstract concepts, whose meanings are, strictly speaking, not in empirical beings but in the concepts themselves, is that the empirical beings to which the meanings 'refer' are constantly annihilated by time. If, for example, dogs were immortal--lived outside of time--it would be impossible to detach the meaning of the concept from the dogs themselves, because to detach the meaning is to "cause the meaning that is embodied in the *real* dog to pass into the *non*living world--into the *word*". Thus, empirical beings must die in order for there to be abstract concepts of them. Their death occurs not only at the end of their natural lifespan but in every instant: in every instant they disappear into the past, they are annihilated.

> At the moment when the present Real sinks into the Past, its Meaning (Essence) *detaches itself* from its reality (Existence); and it is here that appears that possibility of retaining this Meaning *outside* of the reality by causing it to pass into the Word. And this Word reveals the Meaning of the Real which *realizes* in the Present its own Past--that is, this same Past that is "eternally" preserved in the Word-Concept. In short, the Concept can have an empirical existence in the World (this

[1] In my thesis I wrote that protention is a 'product' of--or coexists with--self-consciousness, i.e., that it makes possible the specifically human way of experiencing time. Retention, I said, is present in animals, though it takes a different form than it does in humans. (Its different form in humans is due precisely to the presence of protention, viz., an awareness of the immediate future.)

[2] Desire isn't empirically "real" until it's been satisfied because it's an *absence*, a negation, something negative rather than positive (or real).

[3] That is, the purpose of the project is to be realized in 'a' present.

> existence being nothing other than human existence) only if the World is *temporal*, only if *Time* has an empirical existence in the World. And that is why it can be said that Time *is* the empirically existing Concept.

Three long footnotes elaborate on the identification of the Concept with time, the first two by comparing it to Aristotle's and Kant's ideas. Aristotle thought that the concept of "dog" was possible because there is an "*eternal* real dog",[1] which is the *species* and which always exists in the present. Hegel thinks it is possible because the real dog is a *temporal* entity that is constantly annihilated. Time is this nihilation, but, in a way, the Concept is too, for it is the 'negation' of *real being*. Approaching the issue from another perspective, Kojève says in the third footnote that in order for there to be time there must "be" a past, but something *is* only in the present, and the presence of past being is the Concept--and therefore the Concept actually makes time possible. (Kojève doesn't explicitly draw that conclusion, but it's implied. It's also wrong.) Moreover, both the Concept and time are the existence of the past in the present, which seems to imply that the two are equivalent. (The rest of the third footnote and the one on Kant are too involved for me to summarize here.) Of course, in spite of what Hegel and Kojève say, it's obvious that the two are *not* strictly equivalent. For example, Kojève isn't entitled to his conclusion in the passage I quoted. "It can be said….": yes, it *can* be said, and it has *some* support from the analysis, but it's really just sloppy thinking and isn't even enlightening. The argument is that because the Concept presupposes time, time *is* the ("empirically existing") Concept. Clearly that's flawed reasoning. In the third footnote, (part of) Kojève's argument implies that *time* presupposes the *Concept*, but this conclusion is a result of the mistaken premise that the Concept is the only thing that preserves past being in the present. *Memory* does so as well, and it's really *memory* that time relies on. Not *words*. Also, in saying that both the Concept and time are the existence of the past in the present--and in using that premise to draw his conclusion--Kojève ignores his own previous analysis of time, in which time was seen to be much more than merely the coexistence of the present and the past. Time is *negation*; and if the Concept is also, in a way, negation, it is so in a less 'active' way than time is. It is really a negation that is *made possible* by temporal negation. My last critical point is that there isn't much theoretic value in identifying time and the (empirically existing) Concept. It doesn't *tell* us anything (partly because it's so vague). All the philosophically rich ideas come before that one; we might as well stop with them rather than proceed to a problematic and virtually empty conclusion for the sake of theoretic symmetry.

Kojève disagrees with Hegel that dialectic (which is a *temporal* understanding and supposedly results from the identification of the Concept with time) reveals not only history but also nature. In fact, Hegel was inconsistent: he said that nature is space, but he examined biology as a temporal phenomenon. Kojève thinks that Hegel was right to say that truly human existence is possible only by the *negation* of (biological) life--in the fight for recognition--and he concludes from this opposition that life is not "historical" (i.e., temporal in the human way) and that therefore a biological dialectic is impossible. I think I agree with his conclusion, but for different reasons.

Saturday, March 27

Since reading Hyppolite's book I've thought that Hegel's system implies a kind of realism. Kojève agrees. While many of his ideas embody a Kojèvean philosophy *based on* Hegel, and are probably not Hegel himself, this opinion is surely pure Hegel. Otherwise Hegelianism is incoherent. (It *is*, but for different reasons.) For it posits a dialectic between the object and the subject and a synthesis of them at the end of history, and in order for both the opposition and the "synthesis" to exist there must be a real object that exists independently of the subject. A distinction between man and nature permeates the whole *Phenomenology*. In fact, in his philosophy of nature Hegel describes what nature is independently of humans! That Spirit is the synthesis of objective being and subjective revelation doesn't mean that the

[1] "Eternal" in the literal sense, since there is eternal return.

former exists only in the latter (as Fichte and, in a way, Schopenhauer believed). I don't know *what* it means, but presumably it has something to do with nature's being the externalized or alienated essence of Spirit and collective humanity's self-consciousness's being the 'authentic truth' or goal of Spirit. Spirit is absolute Being--which (along with its implications) is where the designation of Hegelianism as "idealist" came from--but man is only the self-conscious part of Being. However, because Spirit is (in the end) self-conscious, man is the essential part of it.

Incidentally, I don't blame Schopenhauer for his diatribes against Hegel. I might have behaved the same way. The *Phenomenology* is practically gibberish: it's a miracle that anyone was able to glean concrete, systematic thoughts from it.

Hegel's realism is new in that it opposes space and time rather than being and thought. That opposition might seem equivalent to the second if you remember that, for Hegel, space is objective being and man is time, but actually it's more insightful. It explains *why* man and being are opposed, namely because man (time) exists in space but annihilates it. He is a "hole" in space. It also implies that man is necessarily Error: "a thought that does not coincide with being is false", and if man annihilates being he most certainly does not coincide with it. With the arrival of the Science, then--i.e., absolute truth--man ceases to exist as man and history comes to an end. Man (action, time, work) is overcome in favor of static being. No more self-consciousness; man regresses to an animal. *This*, incidentally, is another of the many absurdities that plague Hegel's system. An overcoming of self-consciousness and time on the basis of *acquired knowledge*? *Huh??* Did Hegel think that was possible?? Did he think he had overcome self-consciousness? And if he didn't, why not? His absolute knowledge necessitated it. So either he was a madman or he was inconsistent. (It amazes me that Kojève agrees with Hegel about the nature of "post-historical" man.)

March 28

Last night I got the phone numbers of two employees at a restaurant (the sandwich place where I often have lunch because of the *delicious* egg toast). College students.

On Friday Eun-sung told me I might be able to meet people if I posted a message on her university's website advertising myself. There's a bulletin board where students write questions or ideas or try to recruit members for clubs and so on. I wasn't able to access it because I'm not a student, but I emailed Eun-sung my message and she'll post it for me.

Met Ji-su and Jim last night. Until 2:00 we roamed the streets and explored bars. Again I felt 'uplifted' talking to Jim--self-confident, funny, etc. It's incredibly rare that I meet someone as intelligent and easygoing as he.

I've started an essay on literary criticism.

March 29

Already, eight readers of my bulletin board message have contacted me, and I've received an offer to work part-time at another English school. Tomorrow I'll meet a girl who wants private lessons.

[…]

Tuesday, March 30

[…]

Work was bad today (though great yesterday). I sympathize with Wittgenstein's reason for quitting his job as an elementary school teacher: he got so angry he wanted to beat his students.

I've long since decided that Ivan Karamazov was wrong to reject the Christian belief that even

children are tainted with sin. They may be somewhat innocent, but the seed of devilry is planted deep within them.

The gym is starting to lose its charm.

March 31

Dinner with the Euns was a good antidote to work.

I'd gladly have simple conversations with the students or do anything to branch out from the usual lesson plan, but most classes are so noisy that if I tried to be creative all hell would break loose. And since they speak English as well as I speak Greek, I can't explain even the simplest rules of a game or carry on the most rudimentary conversation.

Another problem is my insane desire to *teach* them rather than just pass the time, as other teachers do, by playing games unrelated to the lesson. Fortunately, I think I'm outgrowing my quixotism.

[…]

April 5

Lunch with a 25-year-old named Hyunmi and her friend, both of whom are married. Kyungbook university afterwards; toured the campus. Pristine weather--cloudless--cherry-blossoms everywhere--children on the swings. Board game café in the evening.

No work today or tomorrow: Arbor day.

Korean high schoolers go to school at 7:00 a.m. and come home at 10:00 p.m. When they're seniors they come home at 12:00 a.m. In elementary school, students are busy till late in the evening (going to private schools that specialize in English, music, math and science after they leave their public school in the afternoon). In college they wake up early in the morning and study till late at night. --Koreans are machines. Why? Because after they finish their education they have to worry about their social status. They spend their whole youth preparing for the TOEIC. In their last year of high school they take a single test, offered on *one day*, which determines what university they'll attend and what major they'll study. They have no choice: their score determines their future. If they don't do well, they go to a bad school and study a bad subject. Eun-sung and Eun-young were assigned German literature--though they wanted to study English--because their scores were mediocre.

Tuesday, April 6

Lunch with two women, 26 and 27. From their behavior I would have guessed they were 6 and 7. They didn't talk. Their excuse: lack of English--though they've studied it for fifteen years and majored in it in graduate school. I gave up trying to have a conversation. Wanted to get away from them, but they prolonged lunch by ordering coffee again and again--forcing us to sit in silence and try not to look at each other. Then they took me to a beauty salon, where I had my hair cut as they waited. Couldn't go home afterwards--that would have been bad form--so I suggested the next best thing: go to a movie. *The Passion of the Christ*. It was a helluvan experience. The most brutal movie I've ever seen. But the controversy surrounding it is unreasonable. Mel Gibson's intention was to portray Christ's last hours realistically, and he succeeded. Admittedly, even in art that's supposed to be realistic there ought to be *some* subtlety. At times we were hit over the head and I grew numb to the violence, which means that, from an artistic point of view, there was too much of it. But the *moral* objections to the movie are silly. The most common one is that it'll fuel anti-Semitism around the world. Aside from art's having nothing to do with morality--"That

an artist is a poisoner is no argument against his prose"--it's idiotic to think that the movie will give anti-Semites ammunition or that it will convert people to anti-Semitism. It's a *movie*, for God's sake! "When I saw this movie I realized how bad Jews really are, and I decided to go out and kill a few." America is the home of the Prudish. Morons like William Safire who fume over an ambiguous gesture at racism when the real point is that what was done to Jesus actually *happened*--and *happens*! Mankind is at the same time so barbaric that disgust is overwhelmed and so noble that salvation isn't an empty word. The movie left me feeling not *anger*, as one critic said--anger is totally inadequate to the experience--but *awe* and *pity* and an emotional knowledge of pure suffering. I even came close to feeling forgiveness for the Roman soldiers, forgiveness resulting from horror so profound, from disgust at brutality so extreme, that it made me realize the soldiers were *animal* enough to "know not what they did". Had there been English subtitles I probably would have felt the same, but more so.

You want to talk about prejudice, Safire? Talk about the furor over gay marriage. Talk about how the "constitutional" objections, the religious objections, the social objections are masks for visceral prejudice. Talk about a prejudice that actually *does harm* rather than a prejudice--*not* represented in a *harmless movie*.

April 7

I'm taking the plunge. I've half-abandoned hope that I'll ever not be lonely in Korea, but an intensive search for a soulmate is itself somehow satisfying. It's a victory over shyness, it gives me a mission, and it puts sheer numbers of experiences under my belt, which you know I've always wanted. The more experiences I have, the more self-satisfied I am! No more dilly-dallying. No more not putting my heart and soul into it. If I don't have a girlfriend by the end of this month, it won't be *my* fault. That's my goal. To be able to say that. I'll talk to people everywhere—in bookstores, in restaurants, on the street, in buses. I talked to three today. Yesterday I would have been too shy. It got me nothing, since they didn't speak English—nothing, that is, except certainty. Had I kept silent the question would have always been there, "What if I'd talked to them?"

Reading *Dubliners*.

April 8

When Peter told me at work today that Jim had been "ambushed" by two women at the nightclub he and the rest of the group had gone to on April 4th after I'd left them, I realized that only if I frequent clubs will I, possibly, get laid. (Not bars!) When I've gone to them in the past I haven't had success—and haven't enjoyed myself—but if I go often enough I'm bound to meet someone eventually. There are only two or three good clubs in Daegu, but they're within walking distance from home.

Tonight I'm meeting Joo-hee, a girl who wants English lessons. Maybe later I'll go to the club I *should* have gone to on the 4th.

Last night began a story based on a childhood incident. It's written in a different style than the last, similar to Hemingway's. Sort of.

Friday, April 9

After the Joo-hee hooey I went to the club for almost four hours, maugre my bad cold.

There's a new teacher at work, an American my age. Bobbi. Like most Western girls in Daegu she's blobby and unattractive—and she talks too damn much.

Dinner with the Euns and their friend (Hyo-jung). Then board game café. I always have (some) fun with them because it's easy to make them laugh. When I was about to take a taxi home I heard someone

say, “Hi Chris!” It was Jamie, Jean’s friend. That fortuity pleased the hell out of me. We exchanged phone numbers.

Sunday, April 11

The romance of life is slowly disappearing for me. “The canker and the grief are mine alone.”

Wrote more of the story. Excruciatingly slow process. Dinner alone, then bookstore, where I talked to an unfriendly girl before I saw Denise, a fellow teacher. I’ll ask her to dinner soon.

Writing stories is how I wring pleasure out of life despite loneliness.

It was intimidating to read in the bookstore the melodious letters V.S. Naipaul wrote to his father when he was 18. His talent soared above mine. (Admittedly, he had a much better education than I did. And his father was a brilliant mentor. One thing I can be proud of is that to an unusual degree I’ve *created myself*. I’ve had no mentors, no exceptional teachers, no classical education, as so many writers and thinkers have.)

Monday, April 12

There are two reasons why I don’t want to leave this country immediately. First, I don’t want to have to say that my Korea trip was an unmitigated failure. I keep hoping that something will happen to redeem it. Second, if I stay at my job a whole year I’ll get severance pay and a free flight home.

I spend all my waking hours in a state of depression. When I walk by cars and stores I want to smash a window because I’m so angry. I picture myself thrusting my fist or my foot through the glass.

Wrote an email to Sofia complaining about this state of affairs. She’s in Spain now; has found a Spanish boyfriend. I’m happy for her.

On Thursday night I’ll meet a 25-year-old guy named Jae-woon.

…When you need excitement and can’t find it in respectable channels you must turn to the disreputable. I *could* live for years without sex and love, I *could* go on as I’ve been going on, but that would be a betrayal of myself. I’ve been inactive too long. I’ve pined too long. I’ve *hesitated* and *hesitated* my whole life. No more. If the world would deny me a taste of the sublime, I will steal a touch of the salacious. Nihilism is my religion, hedonism my sect. I am forsaking myself and becoming myself. Prostitution and its relatives are for me.

I’ve been reluctant to take this step because I haven’t wanted my “first time” to be with a hooker. But that’s sentimental rubbish. I lost my virginity years ago. This is a formality.

Mankind is a whore. If I go through with this, it is an act of rebellion against the great hypocritical Whore. It is an act of despair, appropriate to a despairing time of life.

First I’ll sample a taste of it at a massage parlor. Maybe tomorrow.

I would have you know that *my* and *your* inaction is not a manifestation of high moral principles. It is a manifestation of laziness and cowardice. It is a manifestation of the bourgeois curse of the Monotone Existence. To indulge in one’s instincts when one is a domesticated dog is *strength, courage*. To descend to the carnal is to rise to the human. It is also a step along the path to totality.

I feel liberated now that I’ve made a decision. Inspired. Tomorrow will be a good day because of this decision.

A few weeks ago Jim and I discussed prostitution. Part of the conversation—all in jest—went like this:

Jim: “If you went to a prostitute no one would have to know. Just keep it a secret.”

“Well, it would be in my journal.”

“Then don’t let anyone read your journal.”

“That’s possible, I suppose…. ”

"Or don't write it."

"No, I'd have to write it. It might seem strange to you, but it would be impossible for me not to write it."

"So just don't let anyone read it."

"The problem is, when I'm 70 or 80 I want to publish it."

"Oh! Well then you *need* a prostitute in there!"

"Hey, that's a good point!"

Tuesday, April 13

I have trouble coming to terms with my youth. Especially with my never having experienced the innocent pleasure of Don Juan and Haidée or Don Juan and Julia. Two young lovers ignorant of the artifices of love, certain only of pure joy in the other's presence. I've never known the bewildered happiness of a loss of virginity when one is still a virgin in the true sense, the confusion, the fumbling, the glorious awkwardness. And I never will, because now I'm too old. Life has made a cynic of me. Eden is gone forever. Spring is passing into summer.

Among my several comforts is one that stands out: I still have the ability to love. It may not be the lily-white love of a 16-year-old, but *as* love it can lead me to a surrogate childhood.

Another comfort is that my youth hasn't been a waste. I've accomplished a lot, not just in philosophy and writing. I've *experienced* a lot. I have regrets but not many. And I'm still fairly young.

….When I got off the bus on the way home I walked to the first massage parlor whose location I could remember. It was closed. I looked for others. Found one. Descended stairs to a small platform surrounded by doors. One mysteriously opened and I was let in. Inside was dark and close; the moment I stepped over the threshold I felt sleazy. An elderly woman asked "Service?" to clarify whether I was there for a haircut or a massage. I assumed "service" meant massage, so I said yes. She said it cost 80,000 won, which is $80, which is too expensive, so I left. Ten minutes later found another place. It looked more respectable, but I still felt dirty. Waited in the 'lobby', on the walls of which were pictures of naked women, and watched as businessmen emerged from the interior. Finally a man came over, I thought to tell me the price, but really to shoo me away. Evidently foreigners aren't welcome. Annoyed but relieved, I hailed a taxi and went home.

Had the price been reasonable I would have gone through with it despite the seedy feeling that clung to me. I might try again somewhere else, but if so I'll have to *force* myself—though part of me is eager. *Two* parts are: the frustrated id and the part of me that values the accumulation of experiences. I'd prefer not to go alone, though!

I'm glad I feel uncorrupted again. It took a confrontation with the underworld for my good side to remember itself. I doubt—*highly*—that I'll lose my virginity with a prostitute. [Whoops. You were wrong.] I was doubtful even as I wrote yesterday's entry, though at the time I thought I could *force* myself to do it. I still think I can, but I don't think I will. Cowardice? Call it that if you want, but at best it's a half-truth.

In short, I'm not ready to declare war on myself.

Thursday, April 15

One of the essential ingredients of the fascination and love that men have for women is also one of their most common criticisms of them: they're like children. They're adorable, innocent, gay, 'weak'—which means they're fickle, juvenile, whiny, needy. (At times.) But we still love them, because their good can outweigh their bad. A man's attraction to children and his attraction to women share many features, which is why pedophiles are not at all rare. Both objects of love inspire the urge to *protect*, both can make us feel strong, and both charm us with their adoring ingenuousness. Last night when Hyo-jung and I were watching *Taking Lives*, she instinctively grabbed my arm in a moment of shock. *That's* what I'm talking

about. A child would do that and a woman would do that.

I'm still bothered by one of the problems I wrote about in Austria: what's the relation between phenomenological, empirically psychological, and biological explanations of human actions? How do they fit together? Considered in isolation, each seems to have explanatory precedence: Hegel's ideas (and my slightly derivative ones) are intuitively compelling; explanations invoking instincts like sex seem *obviously* true; biology is surely the basis of the mind, so its explanations *must* be essential. How can order be imposed on this theoretic mess?

Ji-su called last night during the movie; she wanted to go dancing. Today I was startled to receive this message on my phone: "I wanna apologize for everything. Sorry. You are such a good guy." I have no idea what provoked that. We'll probably go clubbing tomorrow.

(5:00 a.m.) I'm reading Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism*, which was first published in 1924. Chapter 1 places the book in the context of a "chaos" of literary theories from Aristotle to the twentieth century. No satisfactory answers have been given to such basic questions as What makes a poem good? and How is one (literary) experience better than another? and What is value? and How can experiences be compared? Because the last question is preliminary to literary criticism it must be answered first. One might think that because isolated words arouse such different reactions in readers it is impossible to compare experiences and therefore criticism is stillborn, but this conclusion is unwarranted. Words in an elaborate context like a poem cause (in competent readers) a more limited range of responses than isolated words do. The context restricts the possible range. Hence, experiences can probably be compared.

Chapter 2 objects to the idea of a *sui generis* aesthetic state, a mental state unlike any other. The origin of the mistake was in Kant's distinction between sensuous pleasure, emotional pleasure, and aesthetic pleasure (which he said was disinterested, universal, and unintellectual), as well as in his division of the soul into the faculties of knowledge, desire, and feeling. The judgment of beauty was a function of the latter. While his postulated connection between beauty and feeling was abandoned (?), his tripartite division between the faculties was not. The aesthetic was distinguished from the theoretic and the practical faculties, though its nature wasn't clearly understood, and the aesthetic *state* was described as detached, impersonal, and serene. The point is that all this is a confusion. There is no good reason to focus analysis on an aesthetic state, and there are several good reasons *not* to. Aesthetic contemplation is not a unique experience; it's similar to ordinary mental states.

Friday, April 16

Every single morning since the day I arrived in this perverse country I've had to listen to the loudspeakers on small trucks that drive through the streets selling fruits and vegetables. The messages are recorded: "Here are strawberries! Here are strawberries! Here are strawberries! Here are strawberries!…" The trucks drive at one mile an hour and frequently stop for five minutes, near my window—often right below it—while I'm trying to sleep. I wake up to something that sounds like the German propaganda vehicles of the 1930s, with the difference that it's more annoying because I hear the same sentence *over* and *over* and *over* and the truck doesn't pass quickly. It incenses me every time.

Chapter 3. Qualities like beauty don't inhere in works of art. When we say that something is beautiful we're really saying that it causes a certain experience in us, even if we *mean* that the quality of beauty is embodied in it. The only sense that our judgment can have is that we like the object; the typical intention behind the statement, practically forced on us by the form of language, is incoherent. Criticism is not primarily concerned with works of art themselves; it is concerned with states of mind. For example, if someone says that the masses in a painting of Giotto's exactly balance one another he isn't talking about a canvas and pigments; he is obliquely referring to his state of mind upon observing the painting. This applies to all such terms as 'form', 'balance', 'plot', 'character', 'design'—in short, most words that are supposed to name objective qualities in works of art. However, the critic also describes features of the object that cause its effect on him, and, while this kind of criticism is of the utmost importance, it can be truly useful only if the object's features are carefully distinguished from the experience of contemplating them. The

description of the *value* of a work of art refers to experiences, and Richards calls this the *critical* part of criticism; the description of the work of art itself is the *technical* part and doesn't refer to experiences. The two are often blended together. For example, "Meter is more suited to the tender passion than is prose" is a technical remark that contains a hidden critical element. "All remarks as to the ways and means by which experiences arise or are brought together are technical, but critical remarks are about the values of experiences and the reasons for regarding them as valuable."

…I was supposed to meet Eun-jin for dinner, but at 5:00 she cancelled because she wanted to study for midterm exams with her friends. It was beyond predictable. It was inevitable. I'm glad it happened, though, because it allowed me to meet a lovely girl (named Eun-jin) on the street on my way home. I'd talked to her last week; tonight we met by coincidence. She lives near my dorm.

All university students have been studying for midterms for three weeks. They study day and night and can't have dinner with friends because they have to study. For three weeks. Such dedication is not *admirable*; it's *insane*. When I had exams I studied for two hours, if that. They study for two hundred.

Chapter 4. Although artists ought to be thought of as communicators, they usually aren't consciously concerned with communication (or communicative efficacy). They want to get the work 'right', or they want to amuse themselves, but they don't tend to emphasize the communicative aspect of their work. Nevertheless, the main purpose of art *is* communication, and a theory of criticism must rest on an account of it (as well as an account of value). Artists are wise not to concentrate on the communicative aspect of their work because for it to succeed it must accurately portray their *own* "experiences"—mental states or ideas—which the reader can then 'identify' with. "The degree to which the work accords with the relevant experience of the artist is a measure of the degree to which it will arouse similar experiences in others." Criticism isn't concerned with the artist's private, conscious motives; it is concerned with how well and what he communicates. And in most cases he communicates best if he doesn't worry about communicating.

Sunday, April 18

Chapter 5. Criticism ought to be grounded in a general theory of value, not only because it constantly makes value judgments but also in order to rebut attacks on the arts by inept censors and moralistic puritans. People who think that the arts are of value ought to be able to defend their position.

Chapter 6. G. E. Moore's opinion that 'good' is an irreducible, unanalysable quality is objectionable. He thinks that we know by immediate intuition what things are intrinsically good—for example, knowledge—and that if we try to explain value in terms of something else (e.g., approval) we can immediately tell that the two are different, because the statement 'This is good' is different from the statement 'This is approved'. Moreover, that one can ask 'Is what is approved *good*?' shows that approval is not the meaning of good. The same applies to all possible 'reductions'. The problem with this refutation (according to Richards) is that people who hold a psychological theory of value—which is considered by modernity to be the most plausible alternative to Moore's position—might deny the premise that the statement 'This is good' is different from 'This is approved' (or 'This is desired', or what have you). Richards elaborates and gives a few more arguments, but they aren't convincing. The two statements, in fact, really are different, simply because 'good' is so much vaguer than 'desired'. (Of course, Moore is wrong to think there's some kind of universal "immediate intuition" that tells us what's good.)

I met Ji-hong this evening. During dinner we didn't have much to talk about, and I decided we had nothing in common and was no longer interested in her. When we went shopping, though, my lust was kindled. Lust and *affection*, I should say. She was so cute advising me on what clothes to buy and following me and touching me and joking with me that I admired and resented my self-control at not kissing her. 'We'd be such an adorable couple!' I thought. Later we drank in a bar. The flirting continued; what was novel was that she asked meaningful questions. One regarded my impressions of Korean women. I gave a muddled, embarrassed, blundered answer, trying to be honest yet delicate. She told me she thinks she's different from other girls, and I agreed sincerely. […]

Chapter 7. Both parts of Moore's position—which is the only plausible alternative to a psychological theory of value—have been rejected. (1) We can't justifiably conclude that good *necessarily* can't be reduced to something else, and (2) good is not a quality revealed to us by immediate intuition. (Notions of good are determined by social conditions; we ought to distrust "immediate intuitions".) Richards now offers a utilitarian theory of value. First he says that anything is valuable which satisfies an "appetency", whether it be conscious or unconscious. Next he says that people always prefer to satisfy *more* appetencies rather than *less*, which causes him to extend his definition of value: "anything is valuable which will satisfy an appetency without involving the frustration of some equal or *more important* appetency". Thus, morals are purely prudential. Later he defines the importance of an impulse as "the extent of the disturbance of other impulses in the individual's activities which the thwarting of the impulse involves". If many impulses are frustrated by not satisfying a particular one, then it is important. Hunger is an obvious example, but because humans are complex, even apparently minor impulses may in fact be important. The merit (or rather, the defectiveness) of a "systematization" or organization of dispositions is judged by "the range of impulses it thwarts or starves and their degree of importance", i.e., the extent of the loss which the organization entails. The "debauchee" and the "victim of conscience" live in a "muddle" of impulses, and many are frustrated, which means that the psychological organizations are bad. The best person is one whose psyche is well-ordered. Richards expands on all this, but I'll quote only the end of the chapter because it reintroduces the arts into his discussion:

> We pass as a rule from a chaotic to a better organized state by ways which we know nothing about. Typically through the influence of other minds. Literature and the arts are the chief means by which these influences are diffused. It should be unnecessary to insist upon the degree to which high civilization, in other words, free, varied and unwasteful life, depends upon them in a numerous society.

Richards' idea(l)s are obvious and attractive, but they're hard to apply to concrete situations. We don't know enough about the psyche. Nevertheless, they're so irresistible that versions of them have been put forward repeatedly throughout history, and they'll always be around. Goethe, Nietzsche, Bentham, the Greeks and God knows who else favored them. Richards states them in a comparatively scientific form.

I wrote more of my story. It's almost finished.

Monday, April 19

Dinner with various fools and losers. Fellow teachers who live in my dorm. We went to Bennigan's. The poor waitress had to put up with the boorishness of the curmudgeon sitting next to me. I made sure to be exceptionally kind to her and dull the edge of his insolence by following up his demands and complaints with helpful elaborations. I wanted to talk to her but couldn't because I was stuck with all those hicks.

It's sadly appropriate that Mozart's last composition was the first eight bars of the "Lachrymosa". Süssmayr did a fantastic job of completing it.

Chapter 8. From the last chapter we know that a good experience is one in which the impulses that make it are fulfilled and successful. Now, there is no one 'best' systematization of impulses. "Men are naturally different and in any society specialization is inevitable. There are evidently a great number of good systematizations and what is good for one person will not be good for another." Nevertheless, the artist's experiences "represent conciliations of impulses which in most minds are confused". His work and (some of) his experiences are orderings of what is typically disordered, and in that respect he is superior (because confused impulses are frustrated, while ordered impulses are satisfied). Moralists have been wrong to find value in a "conformity to abstract prescriptions and general rules of conduct"; "it lies in the 'minute particulars' of response and attitude", which the artist is an expert in.

> Since the fine conduct of life springs only from fine ordering of responses far too subtle to be

> touched by any general ethical maxims, the neglect of art by the moralist has been tantamount to a disqualification. The basis of morality, as Shelley insisted, is laid not by preachers but by poets. Bad taste and crude responses are not mere flaws in an otherwise admirable person. They are actually a root evil from which other defects follow. No life can be excellent in which the elementary responses are disorganized and confused.

I enjoy Richards' elitism and disdain for philistines. But I'm skeptical of his notion that artists have uniquely ordered impulses, even in moments of creation. Most artists are frustrated and *dis*organized. I don't even think their *unconscious* urges are satisfied.

Chapter 9. A possible misunderstanding of Richards' position is that the arts are "merely concerned with happy solutions and ingenious reconciliations of diverse gratifications". Their essential purpose isn't to delight or to instruct. It's wrong to think that the satisfaction of an impulse is the same thing as 'pleasure'. (This will be elaborated in a separate chapter.) Tolstoy's theory of art, according to which only that work is valuable which directly unites all men through certain feelings it provokes, is one of the possible bastardized versions of Richards' theory (which, like Tolstoy's, appeals to ordinary values).

Tuesday, April 20

Most Koreans are interested in me only because I'm a foreigner. I'm an object of amusement and fascination for them, something exotic, not a real friend. A novelty.

For weeks I've only been going through the motions at work. I can truthfully say I don't care anymore if the kids like me. I have no new ideas and if I did I wouldn't have the energy to apply them: the ten- and fifteen-person classes are too loud and obnoxious. Work is just something I have to do. I go there, go to the classes and teach (almost) colorlessly, try to impose a structure on the little shits, don't play with them, don't show much personality because I'm not inspired and I don't like them and they don't like me and they wouldn't understand anyway, leave the classrooms gratefully, leave the school gratefully every day. When I do play with them or act silly it feels unnatural because my heart isn't in it.

Thursday, April 22

I think that if I had sex regularly I'd act differently much of the time. At school I'd be more energetic, in society I'd be more confident. To a degree, unconsciously, I'm introverted because I don't have sex—and I don't have sex because I'm introverted! It's a vicious circle. Were I capable of feeling pride (I rarely am, or only in a fickle, fragile way; pride is irrational), I'd be proud that I'm good-natured despite ten years of relentless sexual frustration.

Friday, April 23

Finally finished that damned story. Was getting sick of it.

The Passing of Spring

> It was spring. It was a fresh spring, and winter's memory had dissolved in the sunlight that mottled the leaves of old trees reborn. Packs of schoolchildren erupted every time the last bell rang every day and streamed into the streets as one. It was early afternoon and they were free for the rest of the day to roam and explore and play and fight and huddle in shadowed corners to kiss their sweethearts. –Chaos ensued when the last bell rang, screaming running joyful chaos across the schoolyard on the way home to old New England houses with spacious backyards with gardens

tended scrupulously. Mothers and fathers could be found outside on their hands and knees on the dirt planting flowers, pulling weeds, trimming bushes, waiting any moment now for the front door to burst open and their child to announce his presence. He would race outside upon hearing their voices and ask them what they were doing, whereupon he would not wait for an answer because he had to meet his friends in the field near the forest where they would play football or cops and robbers. The daughters and their friends would assemble somewhere, most likely in secret, to gossip and tell each other who they liked, after which they would ride their bikes on the trail that followed the contours of the harbor and ended in a park where they could watch their boyfriends play soccer and maybe join in. The little soccer league was one of the hubs of the town's culture, an attraction for all ages, from 5 to 85. The parents of the children were often more interested in the games than the children were, shouting at them and cheering wildly when their son did something that looked good, as if their dreams of glory rested on the shoulders of this little boy who knew only that he was having fun. Fun was his categorical imperative. All else was subordinate.

One boy who lived in an otherwise childless neighborhood had his own peculiar brand of fun. While his peers were mimicking hyenas laughing and scavenging the resources of the town for their spiritual sustenance, he was akin to a solitary owl perched on a thin branch far away from the trunk and staring with globes for eyes at the world that fascinated him. He would hurry home from school not to hurry away from home but to sit in a lawnchair on the patio beside the glass table and gaze into his cracked terrarium that housed animals of all kinds. Beetles, worms, centipedes, a tarantula, sometimes a snake—but his favorites were jumping spiders and praying mantises. He was enthralled by their intelligence, their lightning speed, the thrill of their kills, the ability of the mantis to cock its head and eye him suspiciously as he moved. He would sit back luxuriously and watch the plot of the drama he had set in motion unfold, while on his lap lay *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* which he would peruse in moments when the plot was dragging. He understood it not at all except that between him and Stephen Dedalus was a kinship he could not have described but he knew with a sixth sense existed. The light sorrows of his seclusive soul he mingled with the heavy musings of Stephen's without knowing he was doing so. But then his peripheral vision would glimpse the pensive swaying of a mantid back and forth with pincers cocked as though praying and he knew without thinking that a kill was being pondered and he dropped his book to feel the suspense and crouched closer as the predator inched toward its prey with superb patience, finally to unspring its claws in a fraction of a second and pierce the body of the victim and draw it toward its mandibles and begin eating. Then he would exhale. After the meal was consumed he would jump up from his chair, grab his small net and bound across the driveway to catch another bluebottle fly, Dedalus forgotten. For hours he would do this, day after day.

Some days, though, were special. Some days he came home with a friend or with someone he hoped would be a friend and they played together the whole afternoon until supper. Today he was with a boy named John. This boy was quiet like him but in a different way, a more confident way. He had many friends. He was also a talented athlete, which won him the starry-eyed affection of many girls. The two boys had an instinctive liking for each other.

"We're here, Mom!" Adam shouted as he pushed open the front door expansively. "John's here too."

"Hi Adam! Hi John!" she yelled back from the kitchen. "Come in. How are you?"

"I'm good thanks."

"You boys are home early."

"Yeah, we took the bus," Adam said. "What are you cooking? Macaroni and cheese?"

"Yes, I thought you might be hungry when you got home. It smells good, doesn't it?"

"Yeah," Adam said. "I'm hungry."

"You want some too, John?"

"Yes please."

"Okay, just a few minutes. Want a hotdog too?"

"Yes please."

"Adam, could you get out the hotdogs and the ketchup? They're in the top drawer. We'll put 'em in the microwave so it'll be faster."

As the boys waited for their afternoon snack Adam's mother conversed like a good hostess with John, who answered her questions about school and sports in shy monosyllables. Adam, who was brimming with delight at having a friend in his house, was happy to relieve the pressure on John by volunteering answers himself. He talked about how Eric had put a piece of chalk between the folds of the blackboard eraser and when Mrs. Wood had tried to erase something she had discovered that her eraser had been sabotaged and then she demanded who was the culprit and no one answered and she yelled. He talked about how noisy band practice had been today with everyone playing at the same time and no one knowing what notes to play and the conductor yelling at them to *practice practice*. He talked about playing tag with John and other boys during recess when he saw two girls fighting over a boy, pulling hair and clawing and scratching and screaming. His mother and John listened attentively and Adam basked in the glow of their attention.

Afterwards they went outside onto the patio and sat in the soft green lawnchairs because neither knew what to do.

"What do you want to do?" Adam asked.

"I don't know. What do *you* want to do?"

"I don't know." Silence. "I have a baseball and two gloves. We could play catch."

"Yeah, let's do that! Where are they?"

Adam ran into the garage and rummaged through the abandoned sports equipment in the basket that was as tall as he was. He had to stand precariously on the rusty canoe propped against the wall in order to reach into the basket and search with his hands more than his eyes for the gloves and ball he hadn't used in months. Bat…tennis ball…racket…soccer ball…croquet mallet…wicket… Finally he felt the gloves and grabbed them. A moment later he found the ball.

"Okay, where should we go?" he called out. "In the driveway or the lawn?"

"The driveway's good."

"Okay, I'll stand at this end and you can stand over there." After being thrown his glove John moved into position. "Ready?" Adam said.

"Yep!"

Adam was no baseball player, but he knew how to throw and catch. Nevertheless he was nervous as he readied for the pitch, afraid he would throw the ball too high or too low and look stupid. He was painfully conscious too that his throw was girly. Fortunately it was accurate. "Good one!" John said. Adam was extremely pleased when he caught the ball on John's first throw. His newfound confidence lent him extra strength and in his next throw the ball flew a bit too high and too hard over John's head and down the driveway into the street a hundred feet away. "Oh sorry!" Adam said. "I'll get that, don't worry!" But John got it, dodging cars, and hurried back to his spot. After that there were no more mishaps and soon they got into a rhythm, comforting, relaxed, hypnotic—throw catch…throw catch…throw catch…throw catch, with grounders interspersed for variety. Not much talking was involved, for there was nothing to say, and anyway Adam felt it would have disrupted the rhythm and made him concentrate less on the satisfying *slap* of the ball in the glove. He was aware that this situation was making him quite content, this formula of friend plus ball and glove, which he was unused to. He wondered if John was getting bored and if he should suggest that they do something else even though he didn't want to, but he was too affected by the symmetry of the game to open his mouth. At length another accident occurred that forced them to stop playing. John threw a particularly fast groundball that Adam crouched to catch on one of its erratic jumps, but he didn't foresee that it would hit a bump on the pavement and leap up prematurely over his glove and hit him on the nose. The sharp pain made his eyes water. He checked to see if his nose was bleeding but it wasn't, so he looked up at John and gave a feeble smile.

"You okay?!" John said while running to him.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"Is it bleeding?"

"No."

"Good. Maybe this is a good time to stop."

"Okay." Adam was still tending his wound, so John put the gloves and ball back where they'd come from, whence they wouldn't emerge for months.

"What now?" John asked.

"I don't know."

"You have no ideas?"

"Not really. Do you?"

"Can't think of any."

"I have some board games inside."

"No, it's too nice to go inside."

"We could take them out here."

"Nahh."

The mid-afternoon sun was scorching the black pavement and Adam felt the heat rising through the soles of his sandals into his feet. He gazed obliquely at the blinding sphere as though hoping it would illuminate an idea of an activity. Suddenly it did.

"Have you ever roasted ants?" he said.

"Roasted ants?"

"With a magnifying glass."

"Oh yeah! I've done that. You got a magnifying glass?"

"Yup! One second." He raced into the house to get the magnifying glass he typically used to observe small spiders. He had received it at a nature camp he'd attended last year; it was a prized possession.

"Now let's look for ants," he said. They weren't hard to find.

"Here's one!" Adam ran to John and gave him the magnifying glass. Placing it a few inches above the ground he manipulated the refracted beam of sunlight into a tiny, intensely hot point that he carefully moved onto the body of the ant. It scurried away, but the beam of light chased it until finally the heat had made it too weak to attempt escape. As John kept the dot pinpointed on the ant, its abdomen swelled to such a size that it popped. This delighted the boys, who promptly sought and found another victim. Adam let his companion have most of the fun, explaining that he had done this before and would rather watch. But the real reason was shown by the happiness on his face as he observed John's glee. He could think only that he was playing with a popular boy in his backyard and they were having fun and he had made a good friend that day. He had so few good friends that to make a new one was momentous. He couldn't stop grinning. What'll we do next? He didn't know but he didn't want to think about it because he was too happy. Maybe we could toss the football or climb trees. Or look for snakes at the river. Or— "You smell that?" John interjected.

"Yeah."

"Do they always make that smell?"

"Yeah. I don't know why."

"Maybe it's some kind of chemical reaction."

"It must be."

"You wanna try now?"

"Sure." Adam took the glass out of a sense of duty more than anything else, since the only reason he wasn't bored was that John was having such fun burning ants himself.

"I wish I had a magnifying glass at home," John said.

"You don't have one?"

"No."

"Well then you can have this one."

"Really?"

"Yeah, I have others," he lied.

"Wow, thanks! Cool!" Adam gave it to John, who resumed his roasting of insects. He had by now broadened his range of prey to include not only ants but also spiders, worms, beetles and anything else he could catch, which Adam found rather disconcerting but didn't contradict for fear of offending his new friend. As he sat on the ground in a posture of patience he recalled their past interactions at school, their shy respectful smiles and hellos and nods to one another, each esteeming the other's intelligence and kindness. Their relationship would have remained on this level of warm politeness had Adam's mother not encouraged him to invite John to his house. It hadn't been easy. He had procrastinated and made fruitless attempts to marshal his courage for days until finally last week during recess, after a game of football with the other boys, he had as casually as possible suggested that John come home with him one day because he had lots of sports equipment in his garage. John had looked pleasantly surprised and had agreed.

This reverie was interrupted by Adam's mother.

"What are you doing?" she asked upon opening the back door and seeing the boys sitting on the ground.

"We're cooking ants," Adam said.

"Oh! Is it fun?"

"Yep. Except it makes a bad smell."

"I'll bet. John's mother just called. She said that Eric, Greg, Jeff and some other boys are playing football in the field near the playground and they want you to join them. But it looks like you're having fun here."

"Yeah," Adam said.

"Anyway, if you get bored you can go over there."

"Okay."

After she'd left John said, "Wanna go over there for a little while?"

"Do you?"

"Maybe for a few minutes. Just to see what they're doing."

"Okay." John put the magnifying glass in his pocket and they walked the short distance to the field. Adam felt trepidation.

"You know how bad I am at football, right?" he said.

"No, you're not bad. I've seen you make some good catches. But you should play more. You usually watch us and don't play."

Within a few minutes they were approaching their friends and could hear shouts carried on the wind. "Offsides!"…"Five yard penalty!"…"Third down!"…"Here! I'm open!"… John smiled and quickened his pace; Adam frowned and quickened his too. There was a nervous fluttering in his stomach.

"Here they are!" shouted Jeff. "Hi John! Hi Adam! Glad you could come!"

"We're playing four on four now," said Greg, "so one of you can join each team. You want to play, right Adam?"

"Sure. Yeah I can play."

"Good. Why don't you go on Eric's team and John can be on our team."

"Okay."

"John, you're over here."

"Hey, what have you and Adam been doing all day anyway?" Simon interjected.

"What do *you* care?" John said.

"Just curious."

"We were just playing catch and eating lunch," John replied curtly.

Adam noticed that he didn't mention the ants.

"Okay!" Eric said. "Let's go." The boys assumed their positions. "Ready, set, *hike*!" Eric's team dispersed across the field, running in every direction to flee opposing teammates who guarded them. Eric looked frantically for anyone who had a reasonable chance of catching the ball. He found James, who caught it and was tackled. "Second down." The boys lined up behind their quarterback.

"Ready, set, *hike*!" They sprinted and dodged their opponents but someone said "Blitz!" and Eric was chased and tagged and his team lost ten yards. "Third down!" They assembled at the line of scrimmage. "Offsides!" someone shouted pointing at Adam. He backed up behind the quarterback. "Ready, set, *hike*!" Everyone zig-zagged across the field and yelled at Eric that he was open, but the blitz having been already used, Eric could take his time. Adam repeatedly outran his opponent, but Eric didn't pass to him. He was waiting for Jeff to be open. The moment he was he hurled the ball in his direction and Jeff caught it and ran five feet before being tagged. Eric's team assembled for the last play. "Fourth down. Everyone go long. Ready, set, *hike*!" They ran towards the endzone. Adam was the only one whose attempt to escape his follower was half-hearted. He was afraid of being thrown the ball because at this distance he thought he'd drop it, so he paid lip-service to the appearance of being a dedicated player while carefully contriving not to stray far from his counterpart. Suddenly, though, he found himself alone: the other boy had collided with someone. Eric scanned the field one last time and threw the ball to Adam, who turned his head just in time to see it hurtling toward his chest. He prepared for the catch with all the anxiety he was capable of feeling in that moment. But as the ball was about to land in his hands another body appeared out of nowhere and snatched it from him. Somebody yelled "Interception!" and Adam grabbed the body with both his hands in shame. He glanced at Eric who looked angry and at John who didn't look anything and at his teammates who looked disappointed and he blushed. The other team lined up now and his was on the defensive. Greg took the ball from Eric and the play began…

The game dragged on for an hour. Adam's thoughts continually wandered toward his home—his books, his piano, his animals, his homework, his mother's cooking. He watched with impatience the sun send incarnadine veins across the sky. What's for dinner? he wondered. The player he was supposed to be guarding caught the ball and almost scored before he was tagged. I wouldn't mind this game, Adam thought smiling, if I were any good at it. I wonder what the score is. Why is a touchdown worth seven points? The boy next to him caught the ball in the end-zone. "Oh, come on!" Eric shouted, jerking him back to reality. "Sorry," he said. "I suck," he added, hoping to mollify his teammate. "Yeah, you do," Eric answered, surprising him. "Hey, you don't have to be a prick!" John yelled at Eric; "what's your problem? It's just a game." Eric was silent, too sullen to respond. Bastard, Adam thought, stung by the insult. When is this gonna be over? Aren't they bored yet? The teams walked to the far ends of the field for another punt. Adam saw with jealousy that John was talking and laughing with Greg. He wondered what was so funny and wished he were in on the joke.

"Ready?" Eric yelled. "Let's go! Kick it!"

"No," Jason yelled back. He walked closer. "We figure there's no way you can possibly win. Let's go home."

"You're forfeiting?" Eric said gleefully. "If you forfeit you lose!"

"Whatever. I'm hungry. And tired. And the score's 35 to 14. Give it up."

"No. We'll *never* give up, right guys?" Eric asked his team. They laughed.

"I'm with Jason," Alex said. "It's getting dark."

"Eric's just a bad loser," said John, to laughter. The consensus was forming that they should go home.

"Where are you headed, Jason?" someone asked.

"My bike is over there."

"Mine too."

"Where are you going, Adam?" asked John.

"Back home I guess."

"Okay. I'm gonna follow these guys."

"Okay."

"See ya tomorrow."

"Have a good night."

"Bye Adam," said various voices. The boys separated, most walking in a group towards

> the playground, a couple walking towards the harbor, Adam walking across the field. He turned around in case John was waving to him, but he wasn't. The evening was windy and Adam shivered, but his steps remained slow and heavy. He looked at the boys again as they stood next to the bikes talking. After a minute John and Greg left together as the others rode their bikes home along High Street. Adam continued to put one foot in front of the other. Suddenly he felt a hard object on the ground. He knelt to see what it was. The magnifying glass. It must have fallen out of John's pocket. He picked it up and put it in his own.
>
> At length he stepped off the dark field onto the sidewalk that led to his house. He wondered if his father was home yet. I'm glad I still have the magnifying lens, he thought blankly. I would have had to buy another one. I hope we're eating chicken tonight. I wonder if John's taking Greg home for dinner. Adam thought contentedly of the Nocturne lying on the piano bench and the Sherlock Holmes stories lying next to his bed. And the praying mantises in the terrarium. I'll take them inside tonight, put them on the plant in the living room. He thought of the day spent with John. It was okay. Don't let it bother you. He's a cool guy. I'll see him tomorrow anyway. I'll watch them play football at recess.
>
> His pace quickened. He inhaled the night air. It's spring, he thought. Think of the months ahead!

It's not a mistake the story is called "The *Passing* of Spring". Its end refers the reader to the title, and if he's intelligent he should realize that the title goes beyond the story. The story is about spring, but its real purpose—or its second purpose—is to depict the tragedy of the *end* of spring, when the thought of the "months ahead" is not comforting (making possible *endurance*, which Adam, the outcast, needs) but sad. However, it depicts it without containing a single word depicting it. The device is very subtle and is perhaps the more effective for its subtlety. In the story there isn't one word relating to its ultimate meaning. Its meaning is in the space between its title and itself. But I allow less perceptive readers to feel uplifted by the more obvious, happy theme(s) of innocence and resilience.[1]

Saturday, April 24

Obviously my emotional problems can be reduced to one: a lack of recognition. Sex is recognition, love is recognition, friendship is recognition. Spurting one's juices into/onto a girl is practically claiming her as one's property: it is quintessential recognition, half-similar to the kind involved in the Master-Slave dialectic.

Sunday, April 25

Chapter 10. The formula "art for art's sake" is wrong. Art cannot and should not be considered in isolation from its 'ulterior' effects on the mind, such as softening of the passions: these effects are part and parcel of the artistic value of the work. Some ulterior ends (e.g., the artist's fame) are irrelevant to the value of art, but others (e.g., those for which the New Testament was written) are essential to it. (I don't understand that. Why can't there be a purely aesthetic or poetic approach to the "Sermon on the Mount", "by which no consideration of the intention or ulterior end of the poem enters"? Surely its poetic qualities can be judged in abstraction from its edifying purpose! Richards thinks, though, that if we distinguish between the poetic value of an experience and 'ulterior' values, in most cases "the word 'poetic' becomes a useless sound". One of his defenses for this idea is that the experience of reading a poem in fact draws on the 'ulterior' ingredients of more common experiences, so that to suggest there are two types of experience is to make a spurious distinction. I'm not comfortable with Richards' conflation of poetic value and poetic

[1] [On second thought, the distinction between the title and the story doesn't work.]

experience, i.e., his insistence that the first depends entirely on the full content of the second.)

Monday, April 26

I have such trouble thinking of ideas for short stories that I've decided to go about it differently. I'm going to choose a word in Eugene Ehrlich's "dictionary for the extraordinarily literate" and invent a story around it. 26 stories in all. When they're published, they'll be arranged in alphabetical order based on their (one-word) titles. They'll all be satires, partly because such a comical method of writing is compatible only with comical *content,* and partly because of the symbolism of 'A to Z'. I'm making fun of everything. The first one will be called "Atrabibulous"—a combination of atrabilious and bibulous. Its target will be melancholic drunks.

I've started to resent my job for a new reason: it's a waste of time. I could be *writing* in those hours when I'm at work.

Researching jobs in India and the Philippines. Don't want to teach again—'tisn't my bailiwick—but don't know what else I can do.

Friday, April 30

Currently I have no interest in life. Absolutely none. I could live, I could die….it's all the same to me. It would help if I had definite plans for the future, for the rest of my life. But I haven't any idea where I'm headed.

On top of everything, the Forrest Gump clone I work with, Bobbi, has been sick lately, so I've had to teach *her* classes as well as mine.

Saturday, May 1

Last night I went to Pizza Hut with Hyo-jung, the Euns and their friend Byung-su. He's a personable, goofy, entertaining guy, and he doted on me. Speaks English well. After dinner we drank until 1:00—played a drinking game, which got us all drunk. Then we went to Gypsy Rock and danced till 3:30. […]

There seem to be two basic kinds of Korean popular music. There's the genre that tries its best to copy Western models (whether they be rap, pop, or rock), and there's the genre that mingles traditional Korean music with Western pop. Both are awful to listen to, but the second is noxious. The wobbly voices, the caterwauling, the non-melodies…. Traditional music here is infuriating. I want to scream in protest or plug my ears when I hear it. How can it be popular??

Classical Asian music is quite uncivilized compared with classical Western. It's—*childish* compared to the massive, intricate constructs of musically ingenious Western minds.

Another oddity is the Korean (or Asian?) obsession with karaoke. There are actually radio stations devoted to karaoke—*and people like listening to them!*

Monday, May 3

I've almost finished *Dubliners*. Its stories, especially "The Dead", seem perfectly written. Joyce never fails to find *le mot just*. I can't help comparing my writing with his and being ashamed by the contrast. I ask "Would Joyce have written this paragraph?"—and the answer invariably is that he would have improved on it. Or when reading his book I ask "Could I have written this paragraph?"—and the answer is No. I keep hoping that a few years of practice will turn me into something of a great writer. Or at least a

good one.

Tuesday, May 4

Hung out with the Euns. Thank God I know Eun-sung! Though she isn't a truly *close* friend—we can't communicate well enough for that—she's probably my best friend in Daegu. That would surprise her. It's rather sad, in fact. I don't have much to show for seven months of continuous effort.

No work tomorrow and Thursday. Because of Children's Day, a Korean holiday. As if children need their own holiday!

Thursday, May 6

I read the first two books of Augustine's *Confessions* on the internet. The Harvard Classics edition. It's an intensely poetical work. Truly great literature. I could do without the incessant obsequious prayers, but they aren't as bothersome as I'd feared. I can forgive piety.

I also wrote.

Friday, May 7

[…]

I tentatively ate a bowl of ramyun in a restaurant downtown, worried I'd vomit it out, but since it stayed down I went to the bookstore to skim a book on the Philippines. […] I read till 7:30, postponing the return to Timonism as long as possible, dreading the remainder of the night—but suddenly Hyo-jung called me to ask if I wanted to meet! It was a blessing from heaven. I took a cab to the university and had dinner with Hyo-jung; then we met Eun-sung. Played pool and spent the rest of the night (until 2:00) in a bar. 'Twas highly enjoyable.

My diarist's conscience insists I describe for you the ways in which a Korean nightclub differs from a Western one. First of all, it's more expensive. You sit down at a table shrouded in darkness, around which are many other tables, and a free pitcher of beer is brought to you. If you want to dance you go to a stage, where the DJ is, and where there are lines of people facing each other, separated by five or ten feet of no man's land, barely dancing out of shyness. You feel damn awkward, especially since you're the only foreigner who's been there in the last year and everyone's gaping at you. After twenty minutes slow music comes on, for the sake of couples, and everyone leaves the stage. This is the time when you can ask the waiter to bring to your table a girl you've seen who interests you and whom you want to meet. He goes to her table and tells her your request; she accepts and sits next to you, because this scenario is a common custom. It is, indeed, the reason why you've come to the nightclub in the first place. Predictably, she doesn't speak English, so after a few minutes she politely takes her leave and you ask the waiter to bring you someone else—who doesn't speak English either. Then loud music begins again and dancers trickle onto the stage until there are several long lines opposite each other. Finally you get tired and go home.

Sunday, May 9

[…]

The nodes of emotional response in me have calcified, so my evening with the girl [Ji-hong] I'll probably never see again didn't upset me much. She seemed distant from the moment I saw her. I've always known her personality is rather chilly, but usually it's thawed frequently by bursts of warmth. Not tonight. She had little to say, so I tried to sustain a conversation alone. We ate in a Vietnamese restaurant, then

circumnavigated the downtown area because she didn't like my suggestions of activities, then went to the bookstore so she could buy a book for her student, and then she went home. We were together for an hour. I wasn't surprised when she said, "I'm very sorry, but I want to go to my house". Nor did I try to dissuade her. I was relieved. As I started to walk home, drizzle began to fall, as though on cue. I was without an umbrella; when the drizzle turned to a downpour and I was sprinting through the streets, I couldn't help smiling at the cliché I'd become. I was the hero of a parody of a *comédie larmoyante.*

We haven't one thing in common.

She returned *The Gay Science* to me. It was a symbolic act.

Listening to "Un sospiro" for an hour has coaxed me into an agony of platonic heartache—agonizing not least because it's only platonic.

Edward de Vere had reached the worldly wisdom I have when he wrote this poem:

> If women could be fair, and yet not fond,
> Or that their love were firm, not fickle still,
> I would not marvel that they make men bond
> By service long to purchase their good will;
> But when I see how frail those creatures are,
> I muse that men forget themselves so far.
>
> To mark the choice they make, and how they change,
> How oft from Phœbus they do flee to Pan;
> Unsettled still, like haggards wild they range,
> These gentle birds that fly from man to man;
> Who would not scorn and shake them from the fist,
> And let them fly, fair fools, which way they list?
>
> Yet for disport we fawn and flatter both,
> To pass the time when nothing else can please,
> And train them to our lure with subtle oath,
> Till, weary of their wiles, ourselves we ease;
> And then we say when we their fancy try,
> To play with fools, O what a fool was I!

Monday, May 10

Dinner with the Euns and Hyo-jung, in an Italian restaurant. (I'm sick of rice.) Later we drank in a pub. I entertained them with stories of all the "crazy" girls I've known in this country. (Koreans' favorite English words are 'crazy', 'psycho', 'baby' and 'monkey'. Nobody knows why, but when they hear them they collapse in laughter. So I use them a lot.) As usual, Eun-sung was the only one who talked with me. At 11:00 we parted, I satisfied with my charismatic performance (rare as such). At 11:30 Hyo-jung sent a message saying she was sad and wanted to talk to me. When I called her to arrange the meeting-place she told me it was too late, that she'd wanted to talk to me alone before I'd left but hadn't had a chance to say so. Apparently her sadness had to do with loneliness and her frustration with her poor English. I consoled her, enjoying my role as the respected friend to whom she was obviously attracted. We agreed to meet tomorrow night.

I read a slew of 19th century poetry today. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, Browning, Whitman, Poe, Longfellow, Emerson, Arnold…. I've decided that Byron was the greatest English poet of the 19th century. I'll tell you my reasons later—but they should be obvious if you read the poetry [especially *Don Juan*] yourself.

Tuesday, May 11

Generally I meet friends purely for nepenthean purposes. Tonight as I talked with Hyo-jung the waters of Lethe diluted the acid memories of work.

Thursday, May 13

These days I have a fever to *write* and a fever to *learn*. I'm humbled by Byron's erudition. When I'm too tired to write I stay up late reading classics—but I haven't done it systematically. Now I will. I hate reading on the computer, so I'm going to buy whatever classics I can find in the bookstore. I'm tortured by my lack of literary knowledge. It shames me. Last night I read Byron's satire *The Vision of Judgment*.

The motto of AA is "One day at a time". My motto at work is "One minute at a time". With this attitude I might persevere through the next four months.

I've been reading the *Collected Poems* of A.E. They're short, lyrical, wistful, mystical, and pithy. Almost too pithy: I have to reread them several times to grasp concretely what's being communicated, and even then I have difficulty. They're full of rich images that often don't seem logically connected. I suppose their purpose is primarily to evoke and pay tribute to certain moods rather than to express a series of definite *thoughts* (as Byron does, for example). Their rhythmical regularity is impressive—and I appreciate it, because when reading poetry[1] (if paying undue attention to the meter) it's frustrating to interrupt myself in the middle of a line and start at its beginning because I've placed the accent on the wrong syllable. A.E. consistently maintains the same meter, whether it's iambic, trochaic or even anapestic. (I suppose I shouldn't read poems in that puritanical way, but when I read slowly—which I usually do—it's hard to resist the temptation.)

Wrote emails to Jae-eun and my parents. Edited Eun-sung's resumé for an internship in the U.S.

Friday, May 15

I'm reading (a selection of) Montaigne's *Essays*, which I bought at the bookstore. Also bought *Ivanhoe* and Tacitus's *Histories*.

Saturday, May 16

Montaigne, the precursor of modernity, insists on the fickleness of the self, the impossibility of pinning down its traits and thoughts, which are always changing. This capriciousness was what compelled him to write the essays in the first place: he was going through a "crisis of melancholy" caused by his retreat from the public sphere to his private estate and the consequent array of contradictory thoughts that beleaguered him in his idleness. His eighth essay remarks on the danger inherent in idleness, when the mind isn't occupied by one pursuit but can follow its whims and thus ranges over everything indiscriminately, getting lost. The first essay points out that through different means we can attain the same ends (again, because humans are inconsistent and unpredictable): e.g., while submissiveness and supplications are the means most commonly employed to "soften the hearts" of people who are angry with us, often the opposite measures have a stronger effect: in war the victor is sometimes moved to mercy by displays not of weakness but of bravery and defiance. Montaigne gives anecdotes to support all his arguments.

….Disgust with my faineant lifestyle pervades my thoughts night and day. My mind is idle, my body is idle, my passions are idle. Nothing I do has direction or purpose. It's like I'm sleepwalking—except

[1] Especially lyric poetry.

that this somnambulism isn't of the body but of the soul. Yet it's so powerful it extends to the body as well, making me tired all day long. It prevents me from writing: it saps my mental energy and drains whatever molecules of inspiration are perspired by the ever-sanguine little man inside me. It's why my students sometimes dislike me—while they are partly why *it is*—and it's why I'm not very personable with my coworkers and it's why I no longer try to meet strangers. It's a component in my precocious Byronic cynicism—which, incidentally, is why I dislike 'introspecting' in my diary. (Introspection demands a self-centered naïveté, a fascination with oneself that has withered in me.) The universal doubt in which I live is making me wonder again why I don't end this hovering and instead embrace the only life I'm capable of embracing at this time, the life of dissipation. It would at least give me a purpose and a degree of pride, and it might catapult me back to health.

Sunday, May 16

I skipped to Montaigne's last essay because I wanted to read the culmination of his wisdom, his ideas on how one ought to live. Not surprisingly, he praises the Mean in all things. He defends the pleasures of the body against philosophical contempt for them, but, like Socrates, he prefers those of the mind "as having more force, constancy, suppleness, variety and dignity". Yet he knows that the two go hand-in-hand. He believes that the great-souled man lives according to nature—according to what nature obviously intends—neither getting lost in intellectual pursuits and ecstatic reveries nor treading the "primrose path of dalliance". Accomplishing something glorious and immortal is merely an accessory to the most important task facing us, which is "to live our life fittingly"—not striving for greatness or trying to exceed our own abilities, but simply managing and examining our lives. Socrates is his ideal man. Old age and illness and other unpleasant necessities we must learn to accept with grace, even to be grateful for them. The last essay—indeed, the whole book—pullulates with epigrammatic gems of wisdom, tidbits of humane advice, charming and skeptical self-descriptions, cheerfulness in adversity—and nowhere is there a hint of self-righteousness. Montaigne was a man of whom Emerson and Nietzsche would surely speak with reverence.

His frank discussions of sexuality are remarkable for the age in which he lived.

….I wrote a few paragraphs of the story. Now I'm reading *Ivanhoe*—an activity far more congenial.

Tomorrow, Massachusetts, which has always been the most progressive state, will become the first to allow gay marriages. I love you, Massachusetts!! In thirty years, such marriages will be allowed in most states. In the meantime, though, I can't read about opposition to gay marriage without wishing for the demise—by any means necessary—of its opponents. Their bigotry and lack of historical perspective are stupendous. Were I a columnist for the *New York Times*, the opprobrium I'd heap on them would have no bounds.

Monday, May 17

Byung-su is going to Thailand for a year on Thursday; he met us—Eun-sung, Hyo-jung and me—one last time tonight. I won't *miss* him, but I do wish he weren't leaving. He's a character. Reminds me of a hyena.

[…]

Thursday, May 27

The first few classes today were wonderful. The last was pandemonium. I didn't lose my temper, though, because….I've lost my 'caring' faculty. After work I met the Euns and Hyo-jung. Soon they started

speaking only in Korean (arranging their schedules for our planned trip in June). I sat there helplessly and dwelt on thoughts by no means foreign to me. Was conscious of *absolute isolation*, and the inability even to talk about it to my friends because they wouldn't understand me (and, besides, I'd feel weak and burdensome and…I don't know….overly serious, *romantic*, Chateaubriandesque, as though made of clay). As we walked to the taxi Eun-sung remarked that I looked tired and cynical; I said I was, and added the word "horribly". In the taxi, which we took together, she tried to comfort me. Despite my disguising it and making light of it, she could see the pain I'd lived in for months. I was so unaccustomed to such expressions of sympathy that the calluses on my soul melted for a moment and threatened to give way to tears, but I held them back. She suggested we go to a traditional Korean market someday soon.

I'm setting my alarm for 10:00 tomorrow, so I can go to the gym early. This time I'm doing it not out of optimism, as I was in March, but out of pessimism. I'm a force for the Negative—so that even something as inherently positive as exercising is done for the sake of its *destructive* element. I want to feel pain, I want to express my contempt for the world somehow, I want to *war*, push myself beyond my physical limits. Everyday I want to do it. Create for the sake of nihilating. No breaks, no comforts, no slothfulness, no *softness*.

If hope wasn't strong enough to keep me doing something I dislike, maybe *hate* will be.

Friday, May 28

Went to bed at 1:00 and fell asleep at 5:30. Woke up at 9:30 and went to the gym. Now I need a nap.

Worked at a different school than usual. Excellent students. Denise worked with me. Invited me to the salsa lessons she takes (for five hours!) on Sundays and Thursdays; I said I'd come this Sunday.

Almost done with my story. Another week or two. Can't wait to be rid of it.

Sunday, May 30

My plans are always foiled. The salsa lessons were cancelled. Now I have nothing to do but write.

Mozart is the Shakespeare of music. He's the most human of composers, the ablest at portraying humanity in music. He's also the most concerned with beauty. Even Beethoven wrote *ugly* pieces of music, however brilliant. (Listen to the final string quartets, the last movement of the Hammerklavier sonata, and parts of the Diabelli variations.)

The state of mind from which I'm never free, despite cynicism, anger, and reason, is perfectly described in Keats' poem "Woman! when I behold thee flippant, vain". The pure light of chivalry is lodged forever in my breast. –That's why what I wrote on Thursday was only a half-truth. I want women to like me, so I can express *my love*. Hope is still an important reason for tearing my muscles. (I couldn't say that on Thursday because it would have adulterated the literary effect I was aiming for.)[1]

Monday, May 31

Yesterday evening Denise called me: the salsa lessons were happening after all. I met her and her friend Daniel (a Korean) near the bar "Salsita". Inside were about ten couples dancing to Latin music. They were intimidating. How are the men able to improvise their moves? Denise and I drank and spectated for a while, till Daniel pulled us out and introduced us to each other. As we danced, so did he; I tried to copy his moves, though my failure was as complete as you'd expect. Fortunately Denise has a sense of humor. Later

[1] I meant what I wrote, but, you know, there's always the knowledge that when something is completely one-sided it's only half the truth.

Daniel gave me a systematic lesson on the basic moves of the salsa and the merengue. I wish I'd joined the group in the beginning of May: now it's in the middle of a two-month session and the next won't begin till July. But I'll keep going: some dancers are nice enough to teach me individually. After a few hours everyone left to eat ice cream, whence they dispersed, homeward bound. Denise, a Korean and I drank at a bar till midnight. […] Indeed, I like Denise more than any foreigner here except Jim. She's neither dull-witted nor requires that her friends have loud personalities—which are the two almost universal faults I've noticed among Westerners. Usually if someone is immune from the first, he isn't from the second. Denise asked if she could sleep in my room; I certainly had no objections to that, so I took her home. We stayed up most of the night playing card-games and discussing ourselves. Her ambition is to be a Latina, to live in Guatemala (where she taught for nine months before coming to Korea) and "date assholes"—and, in general, have a wild life. That's why she's learning Latin dancing. After telling her I'd majored in philosophy and history I launched into an exposition of Marxism, with barely a segue—probably an incoherent exposition, since I was wholly inebriated—but it seemed to impress her: at the end she said I'm a totally different person than she'd thought I was. Whatever that means. […]

Wednesday, June 2

Last night I met Jim at a bar. We got hammered. Gripping conversation, as always. Went to Bubble Club. Mistake. Neither of us wanted to dance—though I did for a few minutes, alone, feeling like the butt of a joke every second—so we drank for an hour and lusted after the beauties around us. When we left we had a bite to eat—Jim schmoozed with the friendly Korean who served us, as well as others, while I said something here and something there. At 3:00 we were in no mood to go home; I suggested we go to a massage parlor, though I didn't know where to find one. After some discussion he agreed. The adventuresome aspect is what we'd latched onto. To my amazement we found a place ten minutes later…but the proprietor told us it was full. I waved my two hundred thousand won at him and Jim accused him of lying, but he didn't let us in. We continued walking along the street next to the Lotte department store, which is in a prostitution district. I was having a grand ol' time—uncertain of what was to come—whether we might even end up in a brothel—and loving the company of this guy who's unlike anyone I've ever known. Finally we entered another place, where we weren't shooed away. The price was 60,000 won, which we paid without a second thought. The man led us into a dark, long room curtained off from the lobby. There was a row of cots, on which were lying about twenty sleeping men. Hardly a word had been spoken to us; we hadn't the foggiest idea what was going on. More than once I had a barely repressible urge to giggle. The situation was so absurd! Jim and I were guided to neighboring cots (separated by a partition), though neither of us knew it. The man gave me a loose shirt and a pair of shorts, which I took to mean that I was supposed to disrobe. I lay down and he put a cloth over my eyes. Then I waited forty minutes. Soon it occurred to me that, in this vulnerable position, someone could easily slit my throat (I was still a bit drunk, remember), so I took off the cloth and looked around. Saw nobody but the sleeping men at first; then silhouettes of two women appeared. One of them came to the cot next to mine—not Jim's—and proceeded to give the man a long massage. I sat up to get a better look, but it was still obstructed. So I lay down again and grew feverish with impatience. I thought they'd forgotten me. Making noises like finger-snapping and sighing loudly accomplished nothing. *At last* a woman came. I got one brief look at her and threw the cloth back over my eyes: in that split-second I'd seen an old hag, maybe sixty years old, and I was worried that if I looked again I wouldn't be able to go through with this. I didn't lift the cloth again until she'd left, which allowed me to fantasize that my eyes had played a trick on me. But I soon stopped caring. Although her hands were rough, her skill was consummate. It was a hard, vigorous massage. First she worked on my legs for what seemed an eternity; then she kneaded my arms and chest (straddling me, twisting my legs around her fat hips). After thirty minutes my muscles felt like liquid. And she hadn't come to the best part. Earlier I'd heard a slurping sound coming from the cot next to mine, which I'd known could mean only: blowjob. Sure enough, it happened. My first professional blowjob. […]

Jim is my best friend in Korea. He's one of those friends I've always wanted who can reduce me

to delirious laughter continually. And he's more than that.

Friday, June 4

Went to the salsa bar last night. Girls in flamboyant dresses and iridescent skin-hugging pants and bikini tops were laughing and pirouetting around the room as their partners spun them. It was hard to believe that this haven of color and vivacity was in Daegu. I felt as though I'd walked into Latin America. The dancing itself was as *unbelievable* as it had been on Sunday. I sat and drank for an hour or two, until I asked someone to give me a short lesson. Then I practiced with Denise, which was awkward enough. Learned a couple new moves. I don't actually *enjoy* it yet—I doubt I ever will—I feel ridiculous doing it—but I'll keep trying anyway. Maybe I'll wait till the next session starts in July.

This morning, Yunhee, Sunhye, Bobbi, Elias (an American teacher who came here two months ago), and I took a bus to Gyungju. This city, which was the capital of the Silla dynasty fifteen hundred years ago, is a popular tourist attraction and has a reputation for beauty. It's surrounded by mountains and is littered with rice paddies, but, from what I saw, it isn't much to boast of. Sunhye was our guide; she first took us to a museum of ancient Korean history and the Silla dynasty. The best part of that was its scenic location. Next we had lunch in a Korean restaurant; later we went to Anapji pond, which was dug in the 600s to commemorate the Silla unification of the Korean peninsula. The original palace is long gone. It's a pleasant little spot—the pond (still edged by the original stones) is large—and there's a trail around it through a small forest, which we walked along. The sweltering heat was (somewhat) neutralized by the breeze. Our last stop was the amusement park. Best part of the day. I could have got whiplash from the rollercoaster, though. (In America the park would be sued in a flash.)

Now I'm going to the club Funkaholic. I don't really want to, but Jim convinced me. (His tactic was to call me a pansy.) You never know what'll happen at night.

Saturday, June 5

Yes you do. I got drunk. And that's all.

Gym Thursday and today. Afterwards sat in the park and watched children chase each other around the fountain and play with their young mothers. They were so simple and happy in their blissful ignorance of suffering that I couldn't help feeling quite tender towards them. Not envious, because they have a lifetime of sorrow ahead and I would *never, never* want to be a child again—and I never want life again, I want this life to end and I want never to wake up from oblivion. But I was happy watching them, bittersweetly happy. I knew that I'd lost my innocence, that pain is inseparable from every second of existence, but the mere sight of untarnished joy coaxed tears from me. Later I bought a couple of shirts; then ate dinner in a restaurant I've gone to more than once where a lovely teenage girl works who likes me. […]

And let me tell you something else: in the end, nobody has anybody but himself to rely on. Friends don't mean a thing. They're gone in a flash and they'll hardly ever stick their necks out for you, or even do the slightest thing to help you.

Wednesday, June 9

It's hard to motivate myself to finish the story. Writing dialogue ain't easy, especially when one's talent is Salieriesque.

I ought to be careful lest [my] life's loss of its once-sapid savor brand me with a seeming normality in your eyes, reflective of your own robotic self-pleased uncomplexity though caused by my lack of interest in presenting my foibles in a personal document the original purpose of which was precisely the artless honesty that can exist, I've learned, only so long as an excess of experience has not caused one to reach the

plateau of disillusionment that has been substituted in my life for the "Blue Mesa" on which I was once so grateful to live. […]

Thursday, June 10

I'm in love. Or something like it. Kate—or Sun-hyun—barely fits the label 'human being', being too *good*. Though her beauty (which is more *angelic* than *sexy*) might have easily coaxed her into vanity and self-conceit in a life of twenty-two years, she seems perfectly down-to-earth. Laughs often, has a subtle sense of humor—which was unfortunately dulled by her imperfect English—is intelligent and isn't shy. We ate dinner and then went to a bar, where most of the prior awkwardness evaporated. What remained was caused by the language barrier. We had to keep introducing new topics of conversation because the old ones petered out. It was clear she liked me, but I don't think it was in the romantic way.

I miss her already.

[…]

Friday, June 18

I'm reading Tacitus's *Histories*, which tells the story of the "Year of the Four Emperors"—A.D. 69.

[…]

Here's the story: (I'll polish it in the future)

Atrabibulous

Tristan Malincauley had a face that looked as if it had been withdrawn prematurely from the divine kiln wherein faces are seared onto clay. It was in a permanent state of partial liquefaction. It dripped and drooped but never quite dissolved. The nose was a frozen stalactite formed from a primal rivulet down which had coursed excess flesh from the forehead, the remaining trace of which was a delta of wrinkles between the eyebrows. The tip of cartilage overhanging the mouth was a flabby hawk-like hook caused apparently by the momentum of the flowing flesh. The corners of the mouth didn't end till they'd reached the bulbous chin, which was complemented by the thick hanging lobes of the ears. The jutting eyebrows cast shadows over the sagging eyes, making them look like cavernous pits with small sunken eyeballs in the back. In short, Tristan Malincauley's face resembled an oversized anthropomorphized teardrop.

He hovered over his beer as he sat at the bar in the bar he frequented, "Lonely Hearts Commune". It was early on Thursday night and he was the lone customer. Around him were tall upholstered chairs placed neatly alongside oak tables shadowed by lights dimmed for atmosphere. On the wall were small cork bulletin boards to which hundreds of napkins had been pinned, most bearing inky messages advertising love and sex and beer and the good life. The bartender, bored, was reading them and chuckling, though he had read them a hundred times before. "When I'm sad I drink—and get sadder." "Hello Julia my darling." "I love you!" "Wherefore art thou, beer?" "Delicious in a most bittersweet way." "Youthful follies. Only youthful follies." He wondered who had written them and why. What histories were hidden behind them? What straits would drive a man to write on a napkin "I'm tired of all this living"? He himself had never known such despair as would cause him to write that on a napkin. It's appalling, he thought. But this is at least the proper place for it. He peered at the rotting rafters crisscrossing the ceiling, their corners covered in cobwebs; he looked at the rotten wood in crevices in the decaying walls; he saw the warm light of the lamps spread in ugly splotches across the floor and tables; and he regretted having accepted

this job. Suddenly he remembered his customer and returned to the bar. A woman opened the door, stepped over the threshold, let the wintry air seep in, and left as abruptly as she'd come.

"Give me another," Tristan said.

"Here you are. Not too much tonight, okay?"

Tristan didn't answer and gulped half the glass. He licked the fringe of foam from his upper lip and then absently wiped the lip dry with his finger. One hand still grasped the handle of the glass, unwilling to relinquish it; his eyes were focused listlessly on the liquid inside, the color of urine. He didn't notice a second customer sit down across from him. She looked curiously at his face, almost startled by the saturnine features, and suppressed a giggle that bubbled up like a hiccup. She had an urge to talk to him, to find out what kind of person this unique specimen was, but he was evidently brooding on something, so she ordered her beer and let her mind wander. Tristan took another sip, slowly, pensively. This time after letting his arm with the glass sink onto the counter he ran his coarse fingers through his hair, greasy and matted, wearily, and let them stop in the middle, so as to rest his head on his palm. It lay there, cocked to one side, motionless and silent, while his long face sagged softly. His eyes, glistening, were downcast, the lids heavy, half-shut. His hands were still, his breathing imperceptible.

* * *

He was recalling an incident twenty years ago, an incident from his youth. He was a college student then; it was his nineteenth birthday. His friends were dragging him to a party on the campus, in somebody's house. There was to be free liquor, and their goal was to get him drunk. He had never been drunk. He was apprehensive, but also, though he tried to conceal it, excited. He had tasted alcohol before and found it rancid, but his intoxication with the idea of being drunk, which his imagination had inflated to a semi-divine state of blissful freedom, overwhelmed his squeamishness. They arrived at the party overflowing onto the street, and jammed a path through the people crammed into three small rooms. Clouds of smoke inhaled from dwindling cigarettes and exhaled from stained mouths through half-open stained lips into the reeking air trailed them as they nudged and prodded their way into the kitchen. Fellow hopeful drunks were clustered around the table upon which was cluttered a miscellany of bottles and glasses and paper cups and cigarette butts and puddles of spilled beer. Tristan's friend pointed to a bottle of rum and yelled something, which Tristan took to be an invitation to drink. With some effort he gained the table and poured himself a cup. His friend did the same, and after toasting alcoholism, they downed their shots. Tristan's face reflexively shriveled in protest and he shook his head as if to shake the taste from his mouth. It's vile, he said. This his friend found amusing but ignored as he poured another cup. I don't want another. Yes you do. Drink. Tristan drank.

Hours later he had lost count of how many shots he had drunk. He didn't care. He was too caught up in the joy of chaos, the delirium of his senses. He felt as if he were swimming, but in an ocean that offered no resistance to his strokes. He forgot time even as he remembered it. He was outside of space even as he passed through it. Never had he felt so inexplicably free, free from the burden of social norms, from his shyness, from the structures of rational consciousness he had always thought to be impenetrable. His whole life he had been a slave to convention. Maybe he had never been happy, except in the Eden of early childhood, in the arcady distant from the bustle and anxieties of society. Yet now, suddenly, for the first time, he felt he could forsake the whole charade. He could act however he wanted, on any whim, heedless of people's opinions because they hardly existed, they were but illusions in heads whirling around him, heads attached to bodies with limbs gesticulating stupidly. He meandered through the crowd, tottering occasionally but undaunted in his new, thickly sensuous aloofness, thrilling with the novelty of the experience. He closed his eyes and felt himself sinking deliciously, falling, hurtling through mental space, his stomach somersaulting as on a rollercoaster, his body balanced on a wobbly world that would toss him in any moment—and when he opened them he was back in the smoke-filled room. He found himself sitting on a couch staring at a voluptuous girl who was talking to someone. He couldn't hear her and had trouble seeing her, but somehow he knew she was intelligent and beautiful. Her

carefree laugh absorbed him, as did her blonde hair tied in pigtails flopping against her neck. She's Pippi Longstocking, he thought, minus the freckles—and everything else. Look at her legs. Wow they're long. And her graceful piano fingers. I wonder if she plays. We could play together if she plays. (He was having trouble stitching his thoughts together.) Chopin? Chopin doesn't have duets. Mozart does. Delightful ones, not too hard. With such melodies… I love Mozart. So much better than this crap we're listening to. Compare the Jupiter symphony with punk rock. Ha! What's happened to music? Why can't I see? What's wrong with my vision? Depth perception, something about depth perception. What was I thinking about? *What*? Don't know. It's gone. Look at all these people, sweaty bodies. Smoking. Heads swimming. It's so fun! Weird! Can't explain it. Who's this girl here? Pippi Longstocking. Except I don't see any stockings. But I shouldn't trust my eyes now. (He giggled.) I wanna talk to her. But she's still talking. -He closed his eyes and laid his head on the cushion. Sinking, sinking… The somersaulting grew intolerable and he opened his eyes and raised his head to look at the girl. She was alone. He swimmingly stood up and approached her.

"Hi," he said.

"Hello…?"

"You sound a little suspicious. Do I look menacing?"

"Ha! No, I'm not suspicious. But you do look…unusual. No offense."

"Huh?"

"I've seen you around campus. You're easy to spot. Your face is unique."

"How so?"

"I don't know. It has a lot of character. It looks 'lived in', you know, even though you're young."

"Oh. Thanks, I guess." He was taken aback by this girl's forthrightness.

"No! It's a—compliment. It's good to be different. It's attractive." She looked shyly at the floor.

"Oh, in that case, I'm flattered. You know, you look unusual too." She jerked her head up, smiling curiously. "Well, not unusual. Just not like everyone else. You remind me of Pippi Longstocking. Though I don't know who that is. This is my first time being drunk, by the way."

"Your first time?! How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

"Oh. You're young."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty," she said.

"Wow, a lot older than me. How often do you drink?"

"I don't know, not very often."

"It's a really bizarre experience. Before, I thought it would be—I didn't know what it would be, but—I thought it would be less confusing. I didn't know I'd have no depth perception!"

"No depth perception? You mean you can't see?"

"Not very clearly."

"Yeah, I guess I know what you mean. The brain can't integrate the two images. So they hover around each other."

"But I'm not complaining. I love it. Usually I'm a bumbling fool, but now suddenly I'm…well, I probably still am, but anyway I don't *feel* like it."

She laughed. "You're funny. When you drink anyway. You should drink more often."

[Deleted more meaningless dialogue--the point of which, admittedly, was its meaninglessness, but still, it's bad writing.]

"Yeah, well… I don't know. I guess so. What were we just talking about?"

"You forgot?"

He smiled. "I think so. It's my drunken stupor. Actually I have no idea what our whole conversation has been about. Has it been fun?" He tried to smile charmingly.

"For *me* it has. Though apparently not for *you*." She smiled back. "It's only been five

minutes long though."

"Oh, so I haven't missed much." Trisha tucked her hair behind her ear, adorably, as it seemed to Tristan. Exhausted by his effort to talk intelligibly, and beginning to feel sick, he wanted only to kiss her, to lie down with her and end this pointless conversational charade. Suddenly he remembered her lovely fingers. "Do you play the piano?" he asked.

"A little. Why?"

"Your fingers are a pianist's fingers. Slender and graceful." He took them in his hand. "How…how long have you played?"

"Maybe four years."

[…]

"Maybe we could, uh, play together…sometime. A duet."

"I'd love to!" She smiled up at him broadly, sweetly. "Why don't we continue this conversation in my house? It's nearby. It's too noisy here."

"Okay…" Tristan was vaguely aware that this might be an offer of sex, but it didn't register. The world was cloudy, spinning. He felt as if he were falling backwards in a viscous liquid. He closed his eyes. The moment he did so he lost his balance, stumbled and almost fell.

"Are you okay?!" Trisha grabbed his arm to steady him.

"I…" He looked at her blurry face and tried to smile. He succeeded only in grimacing. "I…I don't feel so…" A wave of nausea passed through him. "I think I should go… Is there a bathroom?"

"Yes, over here." Holding his hand she weaved through the mob that spilled into every nook and cranny. Tristan caught snippets of conversations as they passed: "I told her she was pretty, which was unoriginal but it did the trick, because the next thing I know she…" "Tomorrow night we're gonna smoke in my room if you wanna…" "The Bulls, on the other hand, are good but—well, like the Yankees, they're good but nobody likes the Yank…" "Want another? I'm going to the kitchen now. How 'bout a beer?…" "You are the sexiest girl I've ever—especially in that skirt…" "Sex? I don't know. Ten times maybe? I was drunk half of them. But I remember pretty…" "I gotta hurl. Too many shots. Wait a…" Tristan felt sicker every minute. Several times he leaned against the wall to still his churning stomach.

"Are we almost there?" he said finally.

"Yes, but there's a line. You'll have to wait."

"Ooohhhh… Forgive me if I…I'll try not to, but…"

"Don't worry. It happens to everyone."

"If I don't make it to the bathroom."

"Don't worry."

"I'm worried. How many…people…"

"Four or five."

He groaned and bent over, supporting himself with his hands on his knees. He saw Trisha's diminutive feet half-concealed in her high heels, her toes wriggling as she changed her position to caress his back. She said something. Her voice was distant and thin, an angel's voice, or a herald of doom, calling upon him to do penance for his sins and vanities. She was taunting him, he thought, taunting him in mellifluous tones while caressing him, two-faced—anyhow she was laughing at him in her *thoughts*. He had been so stupid, so stupid to drink so much, to be so weak and listen to—who was it?—to let himself be pressured to drink so much. Such a noxious drink, nauseating, he had drunk again and again, brutishly, bingely, masochistically. Now he was paying the price. He was going to vomit on those pretty feet down there, those dainty alabaster feet with their little toes. That would be bad, but it would come to that. It was coming. It was coming.

"It's your turn."

"Huh?"

"It's your turn. Go in."

He staggered into the bathroom. On the floor was a splash of some thick colorful liquid; he

stepped over it and lunged to the toilet, where he wretched repeatedly. He didn't know how long he stayed there, hugging the toilet as though clinging to existence. He was aware of nothing but nausea. Somewhere behind him was banging on a door, muffled voices, sounds from another world, perhaps an imaginary one. Everything seemed imaginary. He stood up with effort, swayed with the swaying of his vision, wiped his mouth and drank from the faucet in the sink. He looked in the mirror. An embodied ghost stared back at him. He groped to the door and opened it and pushed past the throng in the dark hallway. Murkily he remembered that a girl had been standing out there—waiting for him?—somewhere, but he didn't see her and forgot about her. Mechanically putting one foot in front of the other he made it outside to the cool fresh air, away from the sickening smells and sounds within, and the press of hot bodies, but his misery didn't abate. Hidden behind bushes around the corner of the house he convulsed and wretched again. Tears discharged with bile streamed down his cheeks, gobs of viscid spittle hung from his lips. He rested his head against the side of the house for what seemed an eternity, taking care not to move lest his stomach erupt, wishing for a return to sanity in muddled self-forgetfulness. Apart from this wish his mind was empty. Dimly he perceived people passing him, walking home or to their cars, probably staring at him. Spoken sounds struck his eardrums and left no mark on his mind.

"Hoozat"
"Dunno"
"Yokay"
"Izzycrying"
"Jussic"
"Olook"
"Isee"
"Itsgross"
"Watchyershoos"
"Itsonispants"
"Wherdyaliv"
"Forgitit"

Tristan stood stock-still for an hour. The shivering leaves on the trees moved more than he did. His breathing was measured and regular as he waited patiently for a convalescence that never came. Indeed, he felt the burden on his mind increase as the minutes passed in a surreal succession that was rather an intermingling than a sequence. The past weighed heavily on him, obliterating all knowledge of the future. During this lull in the tumult of physical distress he let his mind roam around memories that savored of the Dionysian but contrasted with the ignominy of his present state. He remembered his first bewildered acquaintance, at the age of eight, with a nude beach on the Greek island of Paros. He smiled as he recalled the baffling but delightful welter of thoughts and feelings that had arisen in him, from disinterested curiosity to feckless sexual arousal to undisguised revulsion, and that had left their imprint on his mind ever since. His first kiss had been a less ambiguous experience. More experimental than passionate, it had nevertheless filled him with elation, not only from the electric pleasure of two tongues flirting inside one mouth but also because his partner was a close friend on whom he'd had a crush. While his hands felt her hair and timidly ran along her back, hers rested on his shoulders, as though moving them would have distracted her from the very serious task in which she was immersed—and his knowledge that those wonderful little hands were sitting right there beside his neck gave Tristan almost as much joy as the kiss itself. Later in the night, when his dazed memory had exhausted the sexual motif, he thought nostalgically about his adolescent attempts to write literature—about the surges of inspiration he'd felt and the equally sudden and frequent desiccation of the creative wellspring. Though his situation had at times been similar to that of a fluttering leaf at the mercy of a capricious breeze, his artistic whims had at least made him feel *alive* and *healthy*. Musing on this lost happiness, which he saw as lost innocence, he grew melancholy. Slowly his melancholy turned to real despair. At length he raised his head in an effort to come to himself.

His stomach seemed to be settling. Waves of unrest ebbed and flowed, but they were less frequent than they'd been an hour ago. He backed away from the house, stumblingly and lethargically, his vision and his mind still thick. The word 'molasses' entered his thoughts and was gone instantly. Turning the corner of the house he saw a porch, towards which he fumbled and tripped, a fall threatening at every step. He managed not to collide with anyone, for, although bodies milled about the lawn, the party was waning and the crowd thinning. People were walking home in pairs, some holding hands. In shadows couples kissed noisily as spectators greedily took in the sight and sighed. One boy was sucking the neck of a girl who was reputed to be promiscuous; another was kissing a girl who periodically turned her head to kiss a second girl, who then kissed the boy, and so on, the group composing a threesome that titillated onlookers. Tristan was one of the few who wasn't watching; all he saw was the clouded vision of the porch. He collapsed onto it and sunk his head in his hands. The black world swirled, but he didn't open his eyes. He was past caring about dizziness; all he felt was shame, remorse and self-contempt. The couples continued to kiss in carnal ecstasy; he cursed life in carnal despair. A well of sorrow rose in his throat, mirages of memories flitted by, imagined cares oppressed him. All his past follies drummed against his brain, as his past pleasures had earlier. He remembered the time he'd smoked marijuana in the dark room with his friend and had felt only boredom and an acute consciousness of wasted time; he remembered his abortive attempts at romance, the time he'd finally found a girl who liked him in high school and they'd gone to a movie but he'd been too shy to kiss her or even talk much and she'd left early feigning dislike of the movie but barely concealing dislike of him; […] and then he remembered swallowing cup after cup of rum. Self-pity perverted into self-hatred collected in his eyes and overflowed onto his face buried in his hands. The world was collapsing on him, it seemed; his life was coming to pieces all around him, he was ruined, and deservedly. I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, he wept absurdly, forgive me! I didn't know what I was doing. I was weak I was weak, but it wasn't malicious it was stupidity, forgive me! Peer pressure, weak peer pressure, friends didn't care, I was alone I didn't know what to do, just wanted to try. (A car started somewhere nearby but it melted away.) I wanted to try it once—why, why—innocent, I was innocent, a child, weak, I'm a baby, an infant out of the womb, stupid stupid, what was I thinking? Was I thinking? No I was an animal, I am an animal, animal lust in dirt, base—nothing, dust clay and dirt, not human inhuman. Nothing nothing, death. What have I done? What have I done? He saw the benevolent image of his parents who had done so much for him and sacrificed so much, his mom smiling at him, loving him blindly, blindly because he was contemptible and unworthy of love, smiling and hugging him, placing hopes on him he'd betrayed, failed, he'd been a bad son. How could he have been so stupid? This was the culmination of a worthless life, meaningless, floundering, a metaphor for how he'd lived, an appropriate ending to a life littered with mistakes. (Flashing self-consciousness—"Overreacting!"—the silliness of taking himself seriously.) He had reached his end, he was drowning, and all he had accomplished was vanity. […] Why me? Selfish I'm so selfish—and a good actor, I'm only acting now of course charade but that's just more selfish, selfish that's why I did it, care only about myself, just wanted escape from my life, this—mistake of a life, only mistakes, only floundering, drowning, sadness, tears all these tears, people staring but I don't care, they're happy and I'm not, happiness what a joke a sham nobody's happy we're all lost, lost in the—drowning in tears this vale of tears veiled eyes in tears dripping cheeks, crying stupid I drank had rum horrible, and now a fool no worse a fiend, ungrateful brat spoiled human sapienspoiled crying baby O God look at me what I've come to, abject selfhatred selfmortifying sadness on burning cheeks flushed—this is stupid what am I doing lying here in a puddle of piss of my own making and rum rum rummy game its a game all a game meaningless and Im the loser undisputed everyone knows the peeping toms staring at me laughing the neckcraners neckcraning exulting in misery fellowmisery on the road highway accident death mort blood more blood and gore more we love it relish grim reapers reaping sorrow pain suffer I suffer unto beer suffer it not to come to me hatefull fathomless hatefull ocean of hatefull drown sinking down abyssmal panicstricken against tides toeing under toes her were small dainty white pretty under loved them

clean vomited over toes splashed chunky orange wriggling pieces of gobby spit in poison inhaled like air at the behest of mine enemy despite death likely coming to bingers not thinking on consequences always heres mine suffocation in rum and swirly whirlypool nauseous careful dont move abstain from motion abstinent motion shunned sex in toegirl caressed me fluently massaged back along thighs nakedless with no stockings but pigtails pointy and pippy at me like two hard nipples I want lick but cant have for now she ran fled the freak drooling tears maudlin mudtears slimy down slick bile slipped on it grassly and splashed on pants soiled good clean earth cool in moonlight with dew on fingers wet with vomitjuice slimy like cuntjuice in trishasvagina who wanted but didnt me from rum that rooned and reduced to bibbling drunkin despair saddy for lovelost in mommy as child grateless child still child yet playacting allways in sick and in health yet still real painfull misery misery soleful agony save him

Something jabbed Tristan's shoulder. Without turning his head to see what it was he pitched forward and stood up. The earth rushed at him and he recoiled instinctively, in the process almost falling back onto the porch. He shuffled forward, hunchbacked, a ghostly misshapen figure illuminated by livid moonbeams, of which his face shared the hue. His cheeks were sodden with tears, which he had, however, forgotten, in his peremptory desire to be unconscious in bed. He fell against a parked car, supporting himself on it before embarking on the trek home, which was to last fifteen minutes though normally it would have taken five. Days later he had no recollection of walking or reaching his home or unlocking the door or falling onto his bed. All he remembered was waking up consumed with nausea, noticing vomit on the floor beside his pillow, and spending the next two days in a levitation between life and death, during which he felt such misery that he longed for the struggle to be decided in favor of death. His torment was not only physical; it was mental. As throes of hunger can impart unnatural keenness of sight to the sufferer, so Tristan's illness, it seemed, provided him with terrifying insights into the essence of life. The convulsions he underwent as his body purged itself contradicted his humanity, pressing on him the horror of his animality. He was a beast, a brute relocated from the ranks of nature but not thereby less natural. Life, founded on pain, had no value. Resistance was futile, ideals were ignorant, hopes were misguided, pleasures were delusional, and life was a hoax. Tristan saw this and succumbed to a prolonged depression.

* * *

He looked up from the empty glass before him. "Give me another." The bartender obeyed. Tristan was oblivious of the swelling numbers of customers and the drone that emanated from them. They, in turn, were oblivious of him, this solitary hunched man whom the world seemed to have forgotten. Only one person noticed him: the woman who sat across the bar and couldn't refrain from peering inquisitively at his face. From watching him the whole night she knew beyond doubt that this was someone in need of comfort. Her heart went out to him as she saw him wipe his eyes for the third time. Shyness had prevented her from acting on compassion, but now she resolutely flung it aside and walked to the empty seat beside him, not knowing what she'd say but knowing something had to be done.

"Excuse me," she offered timidly, "sorry to bother you, but I couldn't help noticing that you look a little sad. I know it's not my business, but…" She paused, suddenly afraid her pity would offend him. "May I sit down?"

Tristan looked at her apathetically. "Sure."

"Do you come here often?"

"Yes." He sipped his beer. "Too often."

"Why here? I find it rather depressing." She smiled. "It's old and creaky and…dilapidated."

"I wouldn't say that. It's not so bad. Anyway, some people are more at home in 'dilapidated' conditions than in others."

"I must admit it has character. It makes me think it has a *history*, maybe not a great one, but at least a long one. I wonder when it was built."

"Yes. It looks ancient doesn't it?"

"But look at those cobwebs on the ceiling! Why doesn't someone clean them out?"

"Because they give it character." Tristan smiled, a fragile smile that evaporated almost immediately.

"So you say you're comfortable here?"

"Yes, I am, disconcertingly so."

"You must be a pretty grim person to come here often!" She laughed as if to reassure him it was a joke. But he only mumbled, "You've hit the nail on the head, my dear." She eyed him quizzically. "What do you do?" she asked.

"What do I do? I sit here and dwell on things. Usually the past. But as for my job, I used to work in a bank, doing God knows what. Now I'm unemployed." He cast a sidelong glance at her once or twice as he talked. "What do *you* do?"

"I'm a student in graduate school. Studying literature."

"Really? There was a time when I wanted to study literature. But I gave it up, stupidly. What kind of literature do you study?"

"English, mostly nineteenth century."

"I like Shelley. 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!' Poor Ozymandias forgot about time. Time…"—he looked at his drink—"which has such a muddled relationship with this poison." He sipped it again and sighed.

His companion looked at him wryly. "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.' But apparently you don't agree."

Tristan raised an eyebrow. "Touché! I might have seconded that opinion when I was your age. How old are you, anyway?"

"Twenty-eight."

"And what's your name?"

"Maria. What's yours?"

"You'll laugh. Tristan. Tristan Malincauley. I think my parents had it in for me when they named me."

Maria giggled. "At least your name and—forgive me—your face go well together. They both have character, like this old building. Imagine if you were called John—how boring that would be!"

"I'd prefer that kind of boredom to being branded from birth." He chuckled. "I've been told more than once that my face resembles the living dead. A dubious honor, don't you think?"

"Whoever said that didn't know what he was talking about. You're much more attractive than the living dead!—who probably have rotting flesh hanging off them and no teeth."

"No, no, you flatter me. But thanks anyway." He laughed for the first time. "The teeth, though, you're wrong about that. They have teeth. Just not pearly white ones like mine—or rather, yours. You must brush them three times a day!"

"No, they're just naturally flawless." She smiled and raised her glass. "To flawlessness!"

Tristan frowned. "Flawlessness doesn't need to be toasted. How 'bout…to lawlessness!—of the psyche. It's a more realistic goal than perfection." Maria hesitated, but Tristan clinked his glass with hers and they drank.

"I drank to flawlessness, by the way," she said a moment later.

"Okay. You're entitled to your idealism."

"Lawlessness…mental lawlessness can't be a goal. It's the opposite of a goal. It's painful and useless. Chaos—what's so great about chaos?"

"Nothing's great about it." He looked at her intently. "But if you want to take a stand, and you want to have intellectual integrity at the same time, then I think you have to go with the lawless despair. Because that's what life is." He turned away sadly, his moment of levity pushed aside by this short speech, and ordered another beer.

"Life is despair?" Maria looked at him pityingly. "I don't want to pry, but—how did you reach that conclusion?"

"By living."

"You must have had a hard life. A lot of disappointments."

"I've had my share."

"No, you must have had more than your share! I don't know anyone who thinks like you."

"Lucky you."

"I have friends who've failed in most things, but even they manage to hold onto some happiness."

"Lucky them."

"I know someone," she continued, ignoring his brusqueness, "who dropped out of college to be an actor, failed in every audition he ever had, became an alcoholic, worked at a restaurant for a couple years, got married and divorced soon after, and is now a construction worker, which he complains about whenever I see him. But even he has a positive attitude most of the time…somehow."

"Lucky him."

"I hope I don't sound like I'm criticizing you. I'm not. I guess I *am* being a little forward…"—she paused, as if the thought had startled her and she suddenly regretted everything she'd just said—"…but beer loosens my tongue. Anyway, I only want to understand what you mean."

"And why is that?" Tristan turned to her with an expression of cynical amusement. "Why do you care so much?"

"I don't know. Curiosity?"

He snorted and turned away.

There was something rather pathetic, Maria thought, in this man who seemed to have no pride. She felt strangely comfortable with him, and at the same time was increasingly interested in him.

"Well, why are you so sad?" she asked. "Can't you tell me, a little?"

He raised his eyebrows. "Sure. No reason not to. But it's always the same. It's always gradual—it sneaks up. Disappointments pile up. Time bears down and suddenly your youth is gone."

"So you think you're getting old? You're nostalgic?"

"No, no, that's not it. And stop acting like a psychiatrist. I don't even know why I'm saying this to you, a total stranger." He grunted and smiled, crookedly, at the absurdity of the situation. "It isn't a mystery, for you to figure out. The simple fact is that things haven't gone my way. I was married once, and that ended badly, partly because of this vile drink. I've hated my jobs, they've been more soulless than construction work. I never had the ambition or energy to follow my 'dreams', so-called; instead I frittered away years making money. Following the road *more* taken. Besides, unlike your friend, I was a depressive to begin with. It's who I am."

"Well, you still look fairly young. In your thirties probably. Right? Why don't you…I don't know…do something—go somewhere—start again—see if you can do what you wanted to do when you were younger—whatever that was."

He laughed. "At my age? No way."

"Well you're obviously intelligent. I don't see why you can't—"

"Because you need more than intelligence. You need energy."

"And you've lost yours?"

"Yup."

"Maybe coming to this place all the time has something to do with it."

"No, when I started coming here the damage was already done."

"When was that?"

"A year ago."

"I wonder if…" She tried to think of a way to phrase it delicately. "I wonder if this 'vile drink' has anything to do with the rut you're in."

Tristan stared blankly at the napkins pinned on the wall. For a while he didn't answer. "When you came over here," he said at last, "I was thinking about the time I lost my virginity." Maria looked puzzled, but he didn't notice. "Not the sexual loss, that *formality*, but the *real* loss, the fall from—grace, such as it was. I got wildly drunk one night, horribly sick. For two days I didn't get out of bed. The whole time I was thinking that life is worthless. A bad joke. We're all pawns in the hands of…some animal force, some physical, defecating nature. Consciousness and everything 'noble' is superimposed on *shit*. I saw it clearly. Wanted to kill myself. But I recovered. Physically. I forgot about the physical pain and remembered the mental. So I kept drinking. Living like a libertine. I got into this routine, a materialistic thing I thought was a phase, but it lasted longer and longer, and finally it dominated me. I…lost myself…and finally I realized I'd squandered myself…and I ended up here. *Here*." He turned away and drank more; Maria saw that his eyes were misty. He wiped them with the back of his hand but tears continued to accumulate. Maria's instinct was to look down on someone with so little dignity, but she also liked him. She liked his potential charm, his sense of humor, his self-knowledge. She thought she could see an intelligent, strong person underneath the ignoble exterior. She wanted to help him.

His tears stopped after a minute and he turned to look at her—for the first time, really. He saw this lovely girl with black hair and a kind face, who was looking at him with compassionate eyes. He couldn't fathom it: why would anyone look kindly on an embarrassment like him? Might as well be fond of a dirty secret. He smiled at her sheepishly and cast his eyes downward.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I usually don't do this. I guess I drank too much. All these people are laughing at me, I suppose. Staring, anyway. "

"Don't worry. It doesn't matter. I just feel bad you've had such a troubled life. I wish there were something I could do."

"No, there's nothing. I have to help myself, nobody can do it for me." He paused. "You know, you're a very kind person. Nobody's ever been so concerned about me—no stranger, anyway. I don't understand it. You're like an angel!"

She laughed quietly. "No, I like you," she said.

"You like me?"

"You're more interesting than most people I know."

"Thanks. But enough about me." He laughed. "*More* than enough. What about you? The only thing I know about you is that you can quote Keats. And that you think the truth of life is beauty… But tell me more about yourself."

Her smile made Tristan think of a young girl's first confused experience with flirtation. "Well, where should I start? I'm single, I want to be a writer, my favorite poet is Keats and my favorite novelist is Tolstoy, I live in an apartment around the corner, and…what else do you want to know?"

"It's funny, but I wanted to be a writer too. I tried my hand at poetry when I was still fresh, but it wasn't very good. What do you write? Poetry? Fiction?"

"I like writing poetry. Especially haiku."

"Yeah, Eastern poetry is wonderful. I love Li Po. There's one poem called 'Self-abandonment'; it goes something like…

'I sat drinking and did not notice the dusk,
Till falling petals filled the folds of my dress.
Drunken I rose and walked to the moonlit stream;
The birds were gone, and men also few.'"

Maria was silent. "I know that drunken feeling of isolation," Tristan continued. "Usually it isn't quite so poetic, though."

"But you can *make* it so! That's the beauty of writing. You can transform any situation into whatever you want it to be!"

Tristan smiled. "If you have the talent."

[Deleted stuff.]

Maria hesitated, and the smile faded from her face. “Actually, I’m tired. Maybe I’ll go home. But if you want—you could walk me there…”

His eyebrows moved imperceptibly. “Sure, I’d love to.”

They paid for their drinks and walked outside. Snow was falling faintly, laying a *tabula rasa* over everything in sight. Even the crumbling rooftop of the old building they had left behind was buried in purity and freshness. Their footsteps fell soundlessly onto the padded sidewalk. A seductive, sensuous silence hung over the empty streets as Tristan and Maria walked without talking. Their hearts were beating quickly and purposefully. Both were wondering what would happen when they’d reached Maria’s apartment—and both were hoping it wouldn’t be a simple “goodnight”. Maria was thinking that she’d never met anyone like this man, intelligent, worldly wise, melancholy and interesting, and she was fascinated by him. Her pity only intensified her attraction. Tristan, on the other hand, was increasingly enamored of the young woman whose compassion and vitality were able to cure him temporarily of his depression. Walking by her side he felt strangely happy and hopeful. The past seemed far away, dreamlike and unreal. What was real—the only reality—was this girl here. Maria. Maria and the falling snow, washing over him, intoxicating in the still night, were all that mattered. They were *here*; the rest was nothing.

They reached her apartment. Shyly she invited him in, on the pretext of getting warm. They sat down on the couch. Their conversation was innocuous. Both were embarrassed and uncertain of what to do. Tristan had had one-night-stands before, but he hadn’t respected those women and there had been no awkwardness. Maria he not only respected but felt very tender towards, and he didn’t know how to proceed. It had been so long since he’d experienced this emotion that he was lost, his mind swimming, confused. He wanted only to kiss her, to embrace her. Lovingly he gazed at her face and lips as she talked while trying to pretend that nothing was out of the ordinary. His words gradually seemed less his own as his impatience dominated him. She, too, looked increasingly expectant. Finally Tristan overcame his nervousness and leaned forward to kiss her lips softly. He cringed momentarily at the thought that his comical face was about to be joined with Maria’s, thus contaminating her beauty, but he forgot that concern when he felt Maria returning his kiss. They hugged tightly, each absorbed in the other. Tentatively but excitedly they began to shed their clothes. Tristan’s heart was racing, bursting as he kissed Maria’s naked shoulders and breasts and caressed her body with his rough hands. […] He was lying nearly naked next to this woman who *wanted* him, who liked him and wanted to be with him, who wanted to see not only his body but *him* naked, as he did her, as he cared only about her and knowing her and feeling her…

But it wasn’t working. That was obvious by now. It was paralyzed. It was dead. It was hopeless. Tristan sat on the bed naked, ridiculous, broken. Maria hugged him gently and whispered words of comfort, but he was inconsolable. Tears ran down his sagging cheeks.

Tristan isn’t modeled after me, not even his youth. A sentence here and there does apply to me—and the drunken episode is based in part on what happened to me in my sophomore year—but I’d like to think I’m *very* different from him.

One of the purposes of the first dialogue is to show that drunkenness isn’t an escape from the Great Charade, as at first it seems. One of the purposes of the whole thing is to contrast various forms of ‘intoxication’, the healthy and the unhealthy.

Sunday, June 20

I’ve been reading the Book of Job to prepare for writing the Book of Joe. It won’t be easy. In fact, I know I’m not equal to the task.

I’ve started writing. The hardest part is staying close to the original text—using some of its ideas and modes of expression—yet at the same time distancing myself from it.

Thursday, June 24

I'm back [from Jeju Island, where Eun-sung, Hyo-jung and I went for a few days]. Too tired to rehash all the details. We climbed Mt. Halla (a volcano), walked through caves made of petrified lava, went to parks, beaches, waterfalls and traditional villages. The weather gods doted on us until today, when a storm killed our plans to see the little island of Udo. While Jeju-do's beauty, culture and whatever don't compare with those of most countries I've been to, it does have majesty and charm and more attractions than any other place in Korea. (So much the worse for Korea.) We spent most of our time driving—well, the girls drove; I don't have an international license. Those hours on the road were hard for me. Eun-sung is the worst driver I've ever encountered, Hyo-jung the second worst. We almost crashed a dozen times, almost ran over a little girl once, didn't park the car correctly more than a few times. My eyes were riveted to the road ahead of us the whole time, as much to prepare myself for the inevitable crash as to point out to the driver that we were in the wrong lane and a car was speeding for us headlong. By the way, this was the first time I've experienced the wonders of the GPS navigation system. We had only to touch a few numbers on a remote control and there would appear on the small screen in front of us the route we had to take from our present location to our destination! When we had to make a turn a tinny voice would tell us so! I was blown away. *How—how* is that possible?? How is such technology *possible*? Am I to believe that a satellite orbiting Earth is watching us, able to pinpoint our *precise* location and send us electronic directions through the atmosphere every half-a-second? I'm pleased that maps are going out-of-date, since I'm retarded at reading them, but I'm frightened that we humans are fast losing our ability to operate independently of machines—partly because independence is fun—as it's fun and satisfying to plan a trip while huddled over an old map uncrumpled on the kitchen table—and to have need of a (human) navigator in the passenger seat—and to have the stress of getting lost in an unfamiliar country and having to rely on your own wits to save yourself.

The companionship on this trip could have been closer, and would have been had we spoken the same language—and *wasn't*, I'd like to think, *only* because we don't speak the same language—but it wasn't *all* 'them against me':—we talked occasionally, joked a lot, suffered almost no awkwardness—though often I was pissed at being ignored by Eun-sung, who's less friendly and more moody than Hyo-jung—and whose *prima facie* unpretty face grew in ugliness as unpleasant character-traits manifested themselves—but she always returned to gaiety after the clouds had passed—as societies pass through upheavals and catastrophes like those that happened to Rome in 69 but always return to stability in the long run—the Shakespearean theme that's truer than his idea that murderers are tortured by their consciences—for they aren't, unless they're Raskolnikov or Macbeth—and that is, I suppose, why they become murderers in the first place. But getting back to the trip….what made the greatest impression on me was the Yakcheonsa temple, which we saw at night: its size was "heavenly" (to quote Schumann's judgment of the length of Schubert's last piano sonata), but that wasn't its most awesome aspect—or rather, *none* were, in isolation, for *all* its aspects—its size, its artistry, the gold leaf on the walls, the silence inside as old women knelt to pray on cushions and stood up to bow to the giant Buddha and knelt again and stood up again hundreds of times (literally), the semi-nirvana that washed over me as I washed away into nothingness and prayed and bowed myself to enter fully into the spirit of the place—all these things, taken together, were over-awesome and made the experience what it was—a sudden and shocking refascination with Buddhism, with escape from noise and strife, which those old crippled women had left behind them in the simplicity of their faith in those moments of undegrading, dignified prostration before the smiling idol on the altar—*so* dignified, *so* voluntary in comparison with the abject submission to God and Prejudice sermonized in most Christian churches, where there's a mediator between the high and the low (despite the pretensions of Protestantism) who somehow by his mere existence detracts from the human dignity (autonomy) of people who *could* have a direct relationship with nirvana if they so chose by worshipping in the cacophonous silence of temples rather than communally in the sanctimonious air of *good God-fearing citizens* being harangued by a holy fool who by forcing his own (bigoted?) ideas on them saves them from the hardship

of having to work things out for themselves. I wanted to spend hours in the temple, but the girls wanted to leave after a few minutes. When I'm an old man—when the "passions of youth" have subsided and the time is right for tranquility—I'll write my own interpretation of Buddhism and become a revisionist Buddhist myself.

On July 9th Eun-sung is going to New Zealand for a year. I'll never see her again. Oh well.

Saturday, June 26

Returned to work today.

Finished Tacitus's book. Reading *Frankenstein* now. Written when the author was 18 and 19. Her talent was unparalleled.

Tuesday, June 29

Drank with Sun-hyun after work. Conversation a little difficult. I like her a lot, more than most Koreans, but….oh, I wish she were fluent in English!

Frankenstein is annoying. That over-literary, over-ornate, gushing, *false* style of writing is hard to read.

I want to read more modern stuff. I want to know *what's going on*—what's *been* going on for the last sixty years. I just read a review of a collection of short stories by David Foster Wallace called *Oblivion*, and then I read various webpages about him, as well as excerpts from his frenzied and brilliant stories, and I realized that I'm living in a vacuum. I've been mimicking—and cheapening—the literary styles of dead white aristocrats whose talents are in any case beyond mine and, besides, are totally alien to this world that demands a different language, but one that I'd like to think could be more accessible and aesthetical than Wallace's overwrought and turbid albeit original and exuberant idiom that is peculiarly adapted to the fecundity of his mind, next to which my own has the creative power of soil tilled for a decade. No more! No more of "dappled the blank slate of consciousness in unharmonious hues" and "flaming tendrils licking the air as though consuming it" and any other sappy false romantic slobber.[1] No more, no more! Better Wallacean über-intellectualism than that Mary Shelleyan triteness.

Thursday, July 1

I bought *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Herzog* by Saul Bellow, and an anthology of poetry from the last six hundred years. Reading the first now.

Sometimes I think that irony is turning into a cliché. Our society has passed or is passing that stage. Even satire is…superfluous. Maybe sincerity is the way to go again. Maybe seriousness is coming back into fashion. D.F.W. thinks so. And if seriousness, maybe…dare I say it?…reform?…radical reform?…sometime in the near future, perhaps? Doubtful. But possible.

[…]

Wednesday, July 7

In the last few days I reread my entire Korean journal. As usual, I felt like I was reading about

[1] [Those quotations were from "Toward the Summit" before I deleted them.]

someone else. Not me. Some person who's sort of talented as a writer and thinker but just isn't fleshed out as *me*. It's a strange feeling, like a losing-touch with reality or a sudden epiphany that changes the way you think about things. Combined with my impressions from reading Marquez's book it's given me a perspective, a broad perspective, that's told me I'm preoccupied with something that doesn't warrant preoccupation: sex and romance. I mean, *who really cares*? Marquez treats sex as something casual, more than casual, almost a non-event, and he's right. Why have I insisted on being so *sensitive*? What's going on with me? I'm not a *victim*, not a prisoner with no options. If it bothers me I can stuff my wallet and take a taxi to a whorehouse. There's always a way out. Do I *like* wallowing in victimhood? Is that why I do it? No, I hate it, as far as I know; it seems forced on me. It's like, if you exert every ounce of effort there is in you to achieve something and you fail again and again and again you'll start to grow a little resentful and bitter, especially if you've done the best job you know how to do and it's better than most other people's who are more successful than you, you'll start to think a lot of it has to do with bad luck, as though the cards are stacked against you as they were against me in the poker game I played, and you'll get illusions in your head that always have a basis in fact but are magnified in those moments when you write down your thoughts (often only for aesthetic reasons) so that you come across as someone full of self-pity even though you know that's far from true and that you *hate* being a defeatist and that your instinct is to rise above it all but that you're hampered in acting on your instinct because for some reason your best-laid plans keep coming to grief. You know the whole time that there's an easy way to cheat and its prospect becomes tantalizing, but still you don't want to from rosewater notions of honor and the sanctity of your goal in its unbastardized form. But underneath it all you know that your problem is really just that you're looking at the world through a microscope that magnifies some things and minifies others, and that if you could attain a Marquezian lucidity marvelous for its unsentimentality you'd realize you're unfairly magnifying the significance of your goal as well as the harm in cheating. And then you work yourself into such a state that even *thinking* about any of this seems tantamount to making mountains out of molehills, and you give it up with a laugh.—

I have to agree with critics that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is one of the greatest books of the twentieth century. I haven't read even half of it yet, but its greatness is obvious. It describes most things that are possible in life (and many that aren't), and that with perfect objectivity, without a single judgment anywhere. It's poignant but not melodramatic; it's tragic and comic; above all, it's humane. It's easy to read, unlike many great novels; its sentences are more poetic and haunting than those you'll read in most of the romantic authors (who think that poetry consists of aureate prettiness or emotional-aesthetic self-indulgence), not to mention realists like Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Dickens and Balzac. Marquez is a realist too, an uncompromising one, in that he presents vast stretches of human existence with unflinching honesty, exactly as they are, but he manages to inject his prose with a magical, naïve quality, partly because he dryly describes fantastic episodes like a priest's levitating by eating chocolate and an insomnia plague in a village, and partly because he has a gift for creating sentences that leave an aftertaste of *pith* in the mind, even if they aren't quite 'pithy' in themselves. And what an imagination he has!

Friday, July 9

Gym yesterday.

Last night Jim and I had dinner, drank a lot of soju, and went to a prostitution district near downtown. I'd suggested we go whoring, and, although he was worried about STDs (as I was, despite my condoms), he latched onto the idea. So we walked the gauntlet of ten or so prostitutes stationed on a two-hundred yard stretch of the sidewalk, who pulled our arms and basically begged for sex. That was the getting-oriented trip. Then we wandered through dark alleys for a while, wondering what to do. He was nervous and we both felt sleazy, and I thought it would be anticlimactic for my first experience to be with a hooker. […] So we decided on a massage. Took a taxi to Chil-gok, where he lives; went to a massage parlor, where two women worked us over—massage and blowjob—my girl interrupted her BJ to tell me to hurry up and come!—and then she spent most of the time trying to talk to me, which made it hard to

concentrate on the massage—which wasn't all that good anyway. At 3:30 I went home.

[…]

The cult of experience is bullshit. Experience? It teaches you to be callous; and when it finally happens it isn't that special anyway. The cult of innocence makes more sense.

Sunday, July 11

Ohh, the canicular heat of the Daegu summer!—the dead air, the sodden air!

Worked this morning. Was supposed to go to salsa this afternoon but took a nap instead. Energyless as usual.

Jim came over tonight, just got back from his trip to Seoul with his parents who are visiting him. He loved it there. Said we made a mistake in choosing Daegu to live in. I've always known that. […]

Monday, July 12

Worked at Samduck today. The first class was a private lesson with a 23-year-old girl and her 19-year-old brother. I didn't care much about him—he said nothing, knew no English—but *she* impressed me. First of all, and most importantly for first impressions, she's possibly the most beautiful girl I've had personal contact with in Korea. Second, she speaks pretty good English, not great but not bad; third, although she's shy she isn't afraid to ask questions and talk; fourth, her personality's appealing. And she doesn't have a boyfriend. But wants one. At times our conversation was rather strained—to be expected—and I had moments of lostness and stupidity—to be expected—but an hour and a half went by pretty quickly and I think we enjoyed ourselves, even the boy. I tried to talk to him, and I tried to play down my love-at-first-sight for his sister, both with questionable success. I got her phone number, suggested we meet again, gesturing at her brother too as if to include him in the next meeting but secretly praying he wouldn't come. My God this girl is a bombshell. Her name is Joo-yun. I felt a surge of amorphous inspiration afterwards.

Tuesday, July 13

Writer's block for the last week or two. Almost done with Garcia's book.

I was reading the preface to *The Fountainhead*. Stunned, once again, by Ayn Rand's obnoxiousness and obtuseness. The misinterpretation of Nietzsche didn't surprise me—he wasn't a "mystic" and an "irrationalist", but the opposite—in fact, none of it surprised me—but what made an impression on me, too much of one, so that it became redundant, like *The Passion of the Christ*, like being hit over the head too many times—even in those few pages—was the brutal insistence on the worthlessness of people who don't try to achieve greatness. 'Only the great people, people like me, matter; the rest of you are contemptible revolting scum.' It wouldn't have grown tiresome so quickly if it weren't such a trite and intellectually futile opinion. And self-aggrandizing. Her arrogance shone through every sentence. Even Nietzsche had the good taste to hide the size of his ego, except in *Ecce Homo*, but there he's magnificent and funny and eloquent, while Rand is boring and really has nothing to say. It amuses me that someone as intelligent as she could be self-deluded for an entire lifetime.

Wednesday, July 14

I have trouble with artists who subordinate art to philosophy, like Ayn Rand and Sartre and to a lesser degree Camus. It shouldn't be a medium for the communication of a philosophy. It seems less *serious* that way, less rich, less exuberant, less take-what-you-want-from-it, more *propaganda*. It can still be rich

and satisfying, but behind the richness is its being an extension of a philosophical system and thus less dignified—not an end in itself, as it is or seems in most great artists. Art should really be a "stimulant to life", subordinate only to *life*—and even then, in a way, above it—and to be a good stimulant it has to be chaotic and saturnalian, not systematic and lifeless (or utilitarian).

[…]

Wow it's extraordinary how lost I am. Not often has depression turned me into an insomniac. I just—can't—take it—anymore. Fuck whores, fuck that idea. What a stupid fucking idea. […]

If you don't already know what this is like you can't, and if you do, you do, so there's no reason for me to describe it. *I* know what it's like, and I'll *always* know what it's like, so there's no point in trying to illustrate it with metaphors and images that I can read in fifty years so as not to forget what I felt when I was 23. I really want to, just because that's how I deal with pain, but out of consideration for the reader and my own legacy I won't. I want to ramble and ramble, write until I have no thoughts left, thoughts that pop up and pop halfway up but can't come out the whole way because they're locked in my repressed and repressing ego, or some other psychobabble that has no meaning for *me* anyhow because nothing does these days not even—not even myself. It's just a floating world, a floating future, the only certain thing of which is its uncertainty—yeah, even a floating past, it can be interpreted however you want and in the end nothing's certain except immediacy, immediate subjectivity, objectivity is Doubt, intense immediacy is all you can be sure of, and what is intense immediacy but love and, ya know, passion and all that nice stuff that's hard to take seriously on paper but hard *not* to in life. So I sit here and feel all this and you read all this and you think shut up fool I'm tired of your sensitiveness and I think yeah I'd feel the same way if I were reading it and tomorrow I will but *now* I can do only what I can do and this is all I can do.

Friday, July 16

Last night Jim called me at work, asked me to meet him and three of his adult students (two pretty girls) at Chilgok. I went to the school, waited for their class to end, and then we went to a pub. The Korean guy, a big, boisterous fellow, was enamored of Jim, couldn't stop touching him and saying how much he liked him. Pretty entertaining. I felt out-of-place, like an observer. The girls were too, but that's what girls do, so it was okay for them. Gary, a teacher in his 60's, came later—friendly, likable guy. We drank ddong-ddong-ju and soju till we were sufficiently foggy-headed to go to a norae-bang. I wish I knew more songs. Had to sing Billy Joel and a few others I could barely recall. We left at 2:00. The rest went home, Jim and I went to a massage parlor. His idea this time, since he knew of one that includes sex. It was basically the same old thing, the same mediocre massage given (this time) by a large woman (not unattractive) with callused fingertips. But after the massage she took off her underwear and climbed on top of me, and, well, the rest is history. My virginity, such as it was, is gone. I didn't know what to make of it. The sex itself wasn't different from what I'd expected. Wasn't spectacular, of course. It was nothing, really. A nice sensation—rather amusing—but nothing to write home about. I'm glad it happened, just so I can stop bugging myself about that 'knowledge of sex as the mass public's obsession'-induced sense of inadequacy that isn't. I wish it had been with Sofia when I was 21—would have been more meaningful—hell, I *really* wish it had been with Sangeetha, but that was out of my control—but I'll settle for the prostitute. I did, in fact.

So….that's it. Funny how life works.

In some ways America reminds me of ancient Rome at the end of the Republic. But there are too many differences to draw conclusions from that.

….Listening to the third movement of Beethoven's ninth and the second movement of Tchaikovsky's fifth symphony. Listen to it—the beginning—and there'll be no reason for you to read the rest of this entry. I'm sitting here in a kind of swoon of nostalgia for my fetal Platonic wisdom. The passivity that suffuses my mind and permeates the air around me, the languorous summer air, the troubled passivity born from incipient spiritlessness. When I turn off the lights and lie down in a restless repose amidst the silence I feel it. I was thinking that the worst thought is knowledge of contingency, and the best is that life's

windings are necessary. The second is a comfort and a lie, the first a sorrow and a truth. What happens is contingent, and when you look back on your life at the end you can see only a string of *what-ifs* and *whys*, more a vacuum than a plenum, more a question than an exclamation, not death but not life. And you could look back and regret without end, pile regrets in heaps and stack them into a mountain on the summit of which you perch yourself, but that would be as foolish as asking yourself what it all meant and inventing a significance to tie it all in a bundle. Both are tempting, both are futile. Silence is the answer. When words fail you have silence to fall back on. Renunciation. When your ambitions crumble, as mine are in the process of doing, and you can't ground yourself in anything, and you feel like you've lived a dream, you can take comfort in abandonment and sleep and, as your consciousness is becoming fluid and more fluid, the knowledge that this is what life is—*this is what life is*—and nothing can be done about it, and you've understood it by not understanding it, and there's nowhere else to go. In a way that's comforting. Renounce it all, if only for a moment.

Saturday, July 17

Still spending hours looking for jobs on the internet, preferably freelance writing.

Finished the novel. Writing a critique of it now, partly because I have nothing else to do and partly because of the satisfaction I'll feel upon finishing my first formal foray into literary criticism.

Sunday, July 18

Met Joo-yun for lunch. She didn't bring her brother, thank God. We were together until 4:00 (when I went to salsa). Had a good time. I can't say she seems terribly intelligent, but she's not stupid either. And she talks a lot—asks a lot of questions, doesn't let the conversation dry up. But I doubt this'll lead to anything special.

Monday, July 19

Last night Jim installed LimeWire on my computer, which, if you've lived under a rock your whole life like me, is a program through which you can download music and movies. It sucks up hours and days of your life if you let it. I wasted the night fiddling with it. Downloaded a lot of Eminem. Brilliant wordsmith. Vicious, but—whatever. Doesn't bother me, though it doesn't reflect well on him.

Work was good today. The kids liked me.

Monday, July 26

Conservatives versus liberals. It's startling how much one major political group can be in the wrong and another can be in the right. It's ignorance and prejudice vs. (comparative) truth and justice (with some exceptions). There's hatred of abortion and gay marriage, obsession with "values"—"family values"—religious fanaticism, defense of big business against the common man, obsession with the right to bear arms, fiscal irresponsibility, disregard of environmental problems….and then there's—common sense.

Tuesday, July 27

I ended the essay abruptly tonight after reading it and deciding I'd basically failed to communicate my ideas, or to communicate them in a way that doesn't make the reader think I'm so high on

methamphetamines that any attempt to understand them is doomed. It seems to consist mostly of hints and suggestions each of which could be elaborated on for pages but which I glide over either because I don't have the discipline to do that or I don't know how or maybe both.

> *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, has been an object of almost universal reverence among reviewers, whose written reactions to it pullulate with superlatives and an intemperate use of vague but impressive-sounding words like 'magnificent', 'unforgettable', 'irresistible', 'fecund'. Bill Clinton called it the best novel in any language since Faulkner died. It has been translated into dozens of languages; it has been compared with *Don Quixote* and its Nobel Prize-winning author with Cervantes; it is certain to be one of the enduring classics of the twentieth century. So the question naturally arises, 'What's all the hype about?' Once you've read it you ought to have a fairly firm intuitive grasp of the answer, but its complexity and richness are such that you may have difficulty not only giving a well-reasoned explanation of your admiration but also ordering your impressions and placing them in the tidy schema one desires whenever one finishes reading a thought-provoking work of art. The purpose of this paper is to help you with the task of assimilation and interpretation.
>
> Now, in offering interpretations I might be assumed to be speculating on the author's intentions, but, strictly speaking, that is not my purpose. It seems a less dignified, more picayune endeavor to ask unceasingly 'What did the author mean here?' than simply to formulate your own ideas of what you think *should* be, or *could* be, the significance of the passage in question--because, after all, if you care so much about what the author was thinking you might as well just ask him and save yourself some time. Of course, wondering what the author meant is precisely one way to arrive at your own ideas, but as a *goal* of literary analysis (rather than a means) it seems fruitless and degrading, since it implies an exaltation of a *person* rather than of his creation--admittedly, a person with a privileged perspective and perhaps more insight than you, in that he *wrote* what you're only *reading*, but nevertheless a person whose interpretation is merely one among many and is not The Interpretation. Any work of art is independent of its creator, and a knowledge of his conscious intentions is at best a good starting-point for gleaning all that the work can say to us.[1] In regard to the justifiability of *praising* him for ideas and themes that a reader has imposed on the work it is indeed important to know whether he in fact had those ideas and themes in mind when he wrote it, because if he didn't it makes no sense to praise him for them[2]--though it *does* to praise him for having created a work that is rich enough to be susceptible of such and so many interpretations. However, this concern with praising and criticizing the author, as irresistible and sensible as it is, is really superfluous and has nothing to do with literary criticism, which is concerned only with the meaning and value of the *work* (and with the author insofar as his comments illuminate possible interpretations). Thus, I'll refrain from speculating on Marquez's purposes and making unnecessary judgments about his talents, confining myself to suggesting themes and meanings that can plausibly be read into the novel.
>
> *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is, first of all, a history of a mythical town named Macondo, founded sometime in the 19th century by José Arcadio Buendia, his wife Ursula, and a group of young families who leave their old homes to embark on their adventure with Buendia. The story

[1] Psychologically it is difficult to separate the creator from the creation, partly because when the reader makes judgments like 'The purpose of this scene is…' and 'This character symbolizes…', the way he phrases them suggests the existence of an intelligence that originally intended the purpose of the scene (for example) and the symbolism of the character, and to which he must defer. But both implications are unnecessary. The judgment can as easily and more justifiably be 'The most aesthetically appropriate purpose of this scene, the purpose that *I choose* based on my knowledge of the rest of the work, is…', and in that case there's no omniscient authorial intelligence before which he must prostrate himself.

[2] In the actual practice of literary criticism it can be assumed that the author did have in mind most of the reader's ideas.

traces the growth of the village from a tiny settlement of twenty families to a bustling and prosperous town, and then its decline to a dusty outpost with hardly any inhabitants that finally succumbs to oblivion. On another level it is the history of the Buendia family, in relation to which all the action in the novel takes place. On a third level it is an allegory of human history, from its 'idyllic' beginnings (modeled after the Book of Genesis) to its extinction. This symbolism is clearly the main purpose of the book, and much of the action has a broad historical significance. To give only a few examples, in the beginning José Arcadio Buendia represents Eve, for he strives passionately to attain scientific knowledge, to become wealthy by mining for gold, to invent a powerful weapon of war, and to realize schemes the unbridled ambition of which is essentially the same force that will cause Macondo's loss of innocence and its eventual downfall. Ursula represents Adam, the archetypal character by whose homely industry mankind remains grounded in reality and doesn't succumb--at least not for a while--to the well-intentioned but ultimately pernicious plans of the dreamers who drive history forward. The whole book mirrors history in revolving around the dialectic between these two spirits (the first of which is embodied in the male characters, the second in the female--but especially Ursula). Another example is Colonel Aureliano Buendia's twenty-year-long civil war, the futility and destructiveness of which are obvious indictments of real wars. The meaningless political struggle between Liberals and Conservatives, which is, significantly, nothing but an *excuse* for the war,[1] serves the same allegorical purpose. The occasional impositions of martial law, as well as the slaughter of the three thousand workers at the train station, symbolize the evils of authoritarianism. The American banana company that invades Macondo, and through the harshness of its treatment of the natives it employs causes labor strikes and eventually (in a Conservative reaction) mass slaughter, is a portrayal of imperialism. The historical stage of industrialism is represented in the construction of the railroad. The constant necessity of the Buendias to defend their house against voracious red ants and termites, the threat of which intensifies at the end of the novel (when the town itself is falling apart), reminds the reader of the age-old battle between man and nature, as well as the knowledge that nature must triumph in the end--which of course it does in the book, when the ants finally disintegrate the house and the winds obliterate the town, thereby erasing the memory of man from the annals of time. Similarly, the characters are in some cases symbolic of universal 'types': José Arcadio is the restless, untamed adventurer, the 'proto-male', the hunter-gatherer; Colonel Aureliano Buendia is the Latin American dictator, the warlord, the man obsessed with glory and made brutal and solitary by his quest; Melquiades is the personification of timeless wisdom; Aureliano Segundo is the libertine, the glutton and the spendthrift; Amaranta Ursula is the sexually liberated, self-confident modern woman; Aureliano Babilonia is the hermitic scholar. Even the characters who don't seem to represent a 'type' are obviously symbolic on occasion: for example, Remedios the Beauty ascends to heaven because she is impervious to the temptations and passions of the world (despite the fact that they literally clamor after her) and thus lacks a distinctive mark of humanity.

The book's symbolism, however, is not always so cut-and-dried, and even the foregoing sketches are simplistic. The characters are not, as in the dramas of Goethe, merely representative types devoid of real life; they have too many idiosyncrasies and their fates are too involved. The same is true of the action: individual episodes are usually too particular to bear on universal themes in a clear and direct way. Practically every page furnishes examples. To approach the book with the idea of seeing in all the characters and all the plot some kind of deep and obvious allegorical meaning is not to do it justice. I made that mistake occasionally, misled by the few episodes that *are* clear commentaries on broad swaths of life, and as a result I found myself bewildered and uncertain of what was being said. When I tried to decipher the hidden meaning behind such incidents as José Arcadio Buendia's insanity and Rebecca's obsession with eating dirt and chips of

[1] Aureliano Buendia says at one point that the reason he's fighting is his *pride*. And he starts the war not as a Liberal but as a private citizen outraged by the murder of a woman, which, it so happened, was committed by Conservative soldiers.

whitewash off the walls I had so much trouble that in many cases I decided there *was* no deep symbolism, that these details existed only to give the characters depth and to make the story interesting. Most of the time they seemed thematically irrelevant. So I thought there was tension in the book between its macrocosmic allegorical plan and its microcosmic personal narratives. This seemed all the more likely in that it has at least three major levels of meaning. I was wrong, though. The plot of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is not supposed to be like that of *Crime and Punishment* or *Anna Karenina* in always bearing *directly* on the overarching themes--or, to be more precise, in its details it is (generally) not supposed to be directly symbolic of abstract categories of real-life situations or to make judgments about them (as it is and does in its totality). Rather, it describes a separate world, a world that is an explicit and self-conscious symbol of discrete categories of *our* experience only in its outlines and in scenes like the massacre at the train station and Remedios the Beauty's ascension to heaven--scenes that have a 'universal', 'symbolic' feel to them, or to which symbolism can be applied fairly easily. The rest of the plot is there to create a world that only in the fact of its *richness* hearkens to ours. It reminds us that life is a subtle, morally ambiguous, comical and tragic phenomenon, that an awesome complexity characterizes the life of the collectivity and even of individuals and their families, that history is made by collisions between the most diverse types of people and events. The reader should not constantly analyze personal narratives to understand their 'deeper meaning'; they exist, on the whole, only to replicate the wealth and diversity of life. It would indeed be easy to draw facile parallels between the characters and vague archetypes like 'the religious bigot' or 'the star-crossed lovers' or 'the pedophile', but in most cases that would be pointless and contrary to the spirit of the book.[1] Even some of the examples given above are rather gratuitous than insightful. It doesn't much matter that José Arcadio can be considered to represent 'the adventurer'; what matters is the way his character develops, and the scope and complexity that he adds to the novel. On the other hand, the symbolism of Amaranta Ursula is significant because it tells the reader that the description of her is a description of the 'modern woman'. The reader must rely on his own discretion--his aesthetic sensibility--when deciding whether to apply such abstract symbolism to a character or a scene. Another example of an incident to which it can be related is Colonel Aureliano Buendia's gift of the Aztec shawl to Amaranta and the funny stories he tells after fighting his war for many years, which are "simple leftovers from his humor of a different time", and which draw attention to the demoralizing and transforming effect that the war and glory have had on him and thus tie into the thematic condemnation of violence. On the other hand, Aureliano José's passion for Amaranta doesn't seem to have an obvious 'thematic' significance besides its contribution to the book's realism.

Thus, there is no tension between the concreteness of the characters and the vast allegorical sweep of the novel, between the seemingly opposed imperatives of uncompromising realism and symbolism, because there are two types of symbolism: it can be a 'hidden meaning' behind the words--behind individual episodes and characters (in which case the text is less concerned with being perfectly and impartially realistic)--a hidden meaning pointing to, and saying something about, classes or aspects of experience; or it can be a simple, judgment-free reconstruction of reality (that doesn't break up experience into classes but acknowledges its fluidity and reconstructs *that* instead). *One Hundred Years of Solitude* makes use of both, but it places an emphasis on the second. Many scenes apparently lose themselves in the story (so that it feels like you're brutalizing them if you force some kind of allegorical 'meaning' on them), but that isn't a flaw because in their aggregate it allows them to recreate our world without bias, objectively. One of the reasons why the second type of symbolism seems more prevalent than the first--why episodes seem to "lose themselves in the story"--when you read the actual sentences is that they embody a seamless realism that almost never pauses for philosophical or psychological reflections and almost never includes judgments about what is happening in the story. Sometimes judgments are buried in the sentences, barely noticeable, as in the example given above of Colonel Aureliano Buendia's gift to Amaranta,

[1] See the next paragraph for what I mean by 'contrary to the spirit of the book'.

but even that is rare. Most of the time the book just *describes*, and the author's thoughts and biases are absent. The reader gets the impression that to impose an easy symbolism on most of the plot is to be *crude*, not to appreciate the book's subtlety, not to treat it as it *wants* to be treated, so that most conjectured 'meanings' behind characters and incidents feel forced and unnatural. One of the measures of the book's greatness is that despite its epic scope, which encompasses six generations and the communal life of a town, each character has a complexity that forbids simple interpretations, a complexity that mirrors life.

Another measure is the 'haunting' quality of the sentences, which exists, in part, precisely because of their remarkable objectivity. The literary style of the book has been called "magical realism", because unbelievable events are related in the same "brick-faced" way as ordinary ones. An insomnia plague in Macondo is treated like something common and unexciting, as is a priest's levitation after eating chocolate, as is a gypsy's making himself invisible by drinking a potion. Its combination of exceptional realism and a plot that includes miraculous events sets *One Hundred Years of Solitude* apart from other novels I've read, and it makes the novel itself unreal and magical. But what thematic purposes does the inclusion of supernatural events serve? For one thing, in giving the book a mood of fantasy it lays across all human history a halo of unreality. If the novel is a dream--or dreamlike--so is our world. One quality of dreams is transience; another is a delicate equilibrium: both of these qualities are transferred to humanity. History becomes a brief, miraculous but tragic affair, full of hope and beauty but, as it turns out, destined to end in misery and ignominy. Our last descendants will, like Aureliano Babilonia, finish deciphering the parchments we've left behind at the moment when the "city of mirages" (our global civilization) is being wiped away by winds,[1] to be forgotten for eternity, as if it had never happened. This is the main thematic reason for the book's "magical realism", though other reasons can be thought of. (For example, the equality of the amazement with which Macondo's citizens greet wonders of technology and wonders of magic tells the reader that really it is arbitrary for him to believe in the first kind and laugh at the second, and that technology (and the natural world) itself is remarkable and beautiful. Thus, the greatness of our potential highlights the tragedy of our fall.)

Closely related to the use of magic is the vague sense of time in the novel (which is another reason why it's so haunting). Although on a broad scale it's clear that time is progressing conventionally--linearly, year after year--on smaller scales the book is reminiscent of Melquiades' parchments, which "[did] not put events in the order of man's conventional time, but concentrated a century of daily episodes in such a way that they coexisted in one instant." It is often impossible to tell over how many months or years a particular episode takes place, and even *when* it's happening, for events continually overlap. The tenuousness of this reality calls to mind Ursula's idea that time is progressing in circles, that it keeps returning to earlier points. She realizes that fundamentally her family does not progress; themes recur, the same failings appear again and again. Macondo experiences a historical progression, in that it starts out as a primitive village and gradually absorbs technologies and cultures and increases in complexity; therefore, the book's macrocosmic structure incorporates a linear notion of time, appropriate to the fact of Macondo's historical development. But within this general 'linear' background--primarily in the life of the Buendia family--is temporal repetitiveness, temporal ambiguity, temporal uncertainty. José Arcadio Buendia goes insane when he decides that time is no longer passing, that it has stopped, that the world is locked in a perpetual Monday. He perceives that recently there has been no change in the natural world; likewise, history brings no real changes in the human world, in how people interact, in what they think and feel. People remain essentially the same generation after generation; what changes is the technological and thus 'social' backdrop against which they act, and that is why ambitions that failed once may succeed later, and catastrophes that didn't happen in the beginning happen in the end. Because the Buendia family represents concrete humans, the building blocks of society rather than society (and history) itself, temporality on its level is muddled and

[1] It's significant that wind is the most 'magical' and 'ghostly' or 'ephemeral' destructive force in nature.

> circular and abstract, overlaps itself and never seems palpably to *pass*; things don't happen in an obvious succession but instead have a dreamy quality, in that they seem to happen at the same time as one another. *This* dreaminess, incidentally, is reminiscent of the *magical* dreaminess: the two reinforce each other.
>
> The rest of the book's symbolism I'll let the reader interpret however he wants. The purpose of this essay was only to sketch a few general themes and lay a basis for whatever detailed meanings may be read into the novel.

Pretty funny ending. A dejected ending.

Sunday, August 1

I just made the somewhat idiotic and desperate move of paying $200 for a detailed professional analysis of my screenplay.

Yesterday I went on an outing with some teachers and two new guys—linner, then bookstore where I almost bought *The Elegant Universe* but decided not to because these days my focus is literature and reading *that* would be a waste of time and I'd forget it all so I'll read it when I enter my science phase, whenever that is, so I bought *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* instead, then worked out at the gym, then went home alone, but Jim called me to call me back to them at the bar, which was okay until I drank so much that I hurled in the bathroom and left in a stupor without saying bye to anyone and walked home, where I was sick all day today in bed. Looked closely in the mirror for many minutes and saw eyes that looked back at me deadly, tired baggy eyes that have cried too much and will cry too much and cried then too much because my resistance falls off me when I'm sick and the scruffy tired face that I realized was mine startled me and I thought this is how I'll look when I die. Don't care much now, the past doesn't matter and I can forget about it, it's the future that worries me, the abyss of the future. But I'm fricking hungry but it's too late to eat anywhere.

My narcissism[1] bothers me and makes me constantly doubt the sincerity of my friendships and their durability because I can see Jim and the others throwing me away if they knew how "lame" I am how lame self-involved and weak. Or maybe it's just my depression speaking, my tears, and I'm really wrong. All I know is that I fear I lack something most people have, don't know what it is but it has something to do with the ability to love and be close to people and get past all the doubts.

I read the first pages of the novel. Insightful interpretation of Nietzsche's eternal return that I hadn't considered. Kundera's right that nothing matters in a world of transience where everything happens once, and "everything is pardoned in advance and therefore everything cynically permitted". It's all over after it's happened, so it doesn't matter anymore. Time takes away the meaning from everything, as I've said before. But if that's true it makes no sense to care more about a society to come than this one and to use that as a justification for what's done in this one, because the society to come will end too, though we tend to think of it as somehow more permanent or important than this one. I guess if the "long run" lasts longer than the present it isn't totally senseless to use it as an excuse (for the war in Iraq, for example), because in that case more people will benefit 'later' than are suffering now—but the problem is that the long run is never here, it's always in the future and so there's always an excuse for unending misery. But that reasoning taken to its conclusion would condemn all pain suffered for the sake of the future, which is too extreme a condemnation. But when the pain isn't chosen but imposed the conclusion probably holds. So our Iraqi venture isn't morally justified. But neither is inaction when people are terrorized as they were by Saddam.

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[1] Whenever I use this word I mean it in something like Christopher Lasch's sense (if I remember), namely as denoting a fixation on oneself that is closely related to excessive self-doubt mixed with excessive self-love, as well as the desire to be the center of attention (and yet, sometimes, a dislike of being the center of attention). Other authors associate it with a hugely over-inflated ego, a love of lying (even to oneself), a charismatic personality, a lack of empathy, social exploitation of others, envy, haughtiness—none of which applies to me.

[…]

Wednesday, August 4

It's pathetically easy to reverse hierarchies of values, as Nietzsche did and postmodernists like to do. To argue for the 'other side': to show that strength is actually weakness, arrogance is actually insecurity, progress is actually regression, genius is actually immaturity, love is actually selfish, and to invent a thousand other 'actually's that may be interesting in the beginning but quickly become banal.

Friday, August 6

Gym. Dinner alone. Don't want to go out tonight. Too tired.

….Nights are hard. So hard for me. All the pain that's repressed during the bustle of the day pushes its way to the surface. And there's nothing I can do. Can't sleep, can't write, can't think except to regret and panic. My problem is neither that life is unbearably light nor that it's unbearably heavy: it's both. It's heavy because it's my only life—every moment is heavy because it's gone—it's irrevocable—and I feel under constant pressure to *live*; but life is light because it's all luck, contingency, it's meaningless; and its lightness makes it even heavier, increases the pressure on me, highlights the burden of time and the necessity but impossibility of triumphing over chance. I have the feeling that no matter what I do after I leave Korea—and I really haven't any idea where I'll be two months from now—I'll regret it. Kundera is right that life is essentially a rehearsal for itself, which is the comedy and the tragedy of it.

My ambitions, which are as boundless as the sky and as undefined, have always conflicted with my knowledge of my own limitations. That adds to the weight I have to bear. Basically my existence is founded on conflicts and schisms—within me, between me and the world, and between the world and itself (I internalize those conflicts and they're reproduced in my psyche, in my dreams and thoughts and confusions)—but in the absence of these conflicts I'd have no reason to live, so in a way I'm grateful for them, though I also hate them and am driven to despair by them. My life is one great hunk of metaphysical weight, made heavier by its infinite lightness.

Nevertheless, I'm comforted by Oscar Wilde's claim—made when he was in prison, after two years of soul-crushing isolation—that he'd rather be a prisoner than a businessman. I too would rather experience these moments of intense, painful beauty than go out with everyone and get drunk. I've done that, and I've even liked it, but right now I'd rather be here.

Sunday, August 8

The Unbearable Lightness of Being is unlike other novels I've read in a lot of ways. I like the philosophical digressions that aren't really digressions because they fit so well into the self-consciousness of the book and its being a "novel of ideas" rather than characters and plot—or characters only insofar as they illustrate ideas. I love the discussion of kitsch. But at times (like in part 7) the writing is pedantic and plodding—labors the point—does too much explaining. But the end is touching. The two main characters find happiness—they wish for repetition,[1] which (wish) is how Kundera defines happiness—wish for the repetition of their life in the countryside, its eternal repetition, because they're together and away from the vagaries of chance and they've finally found peace. So Kundera says that although we can't live again and again eternally and thereby have a 'weighty' life, if we *desire* this situation forever we'll escape from unbearable lightness and find meaningful happiness. (= Nietzsche) And he says also that although the path our lives take is horribly contingent, contingency can lead us to happiness, as it did Tomas and Tereza, even

[1] That's the meaning of the butterfly flying in circles around their room.

if it forces us to abandon what seems to be the "*Es muss sein!*" of our fate, as Tomas was forced to give up his destiny of practicing medicine by a series of chances that started with Tereza's arrival in his life. Indeed, such chances can conceivably make us happier than following our inner imperatives can—as Tomas was unhappy being an "epic womanizer", even if he was addicted to it. But T. and T.'s life together was governed not only by lightness but also weight, by constant doubts about each other's love, by unbearable pain (in Tereza) and unbearable compassion (in Tomas)—and hence both lightness and weight were essential in guiding them to happiness. On the other hand, Sabina was forever unhappy with her 'light' life, her betrayals and lack of lasting attachments—and Franz was unhappy with the weight of his loyalty to Sabina's memory, the weight of his love, and in the end it caused his death. So Kundera's answer to the question that opens the book—Is lightness better than weight or vice versa?—is that neither is better: both can be bad and both good, both are risky, and both are necessary in order for us to achieve happiness. But happiness itself is more like heaviness than lightness—meaning than meaninglessness[1]—and so the two happy lovers die "under the sign of weight" (by being crushed under a truck).[2]

Now that I think about it, it's truly a beautiful ending and a beautiful book. Philosophically more fertile than Marquez's, and equally symmetrical, though not as well-written. Its poetry is in its ideas and the ways they play out rather than its sentences. I should have written a critique of this book instead of the other one.

Lately I've woken up a few times and been unable for two minutes to lift myself an inch off the bed. Still very groggy, I am physically unable to raise myself. I am, in fact, paralyzed, as though trapped under something incredibly heavy. I panic and exert a tremendous effort to move, but it's useless. The experience is terrifying like nothing else. Finally, by sheer force of will, I succeed in lifting myself. I can't even begin to imagine what it must be like to be *really* paralyzed.

The children cackling like jackals buzzing around carrion make me hate children and doubt I'll ever want to have one not only because of the clatter but also their living in filth and the having to deal with dung and piss and all the shit that my kitschy life is organized to deny.

Thursday, August 12

Gym yesterday.

The review of my script was mostly negative. A lot of its criticisms I was already aware of. The writer thinks that in order to make it more dramatic I should focus on Marx's early years and his development as a character. Since he stayed the same guy for the rest of his life he gets a bit monotonous in the script. And there has to be something driving the action, some thread around which the story is organized. That's the main thing that's always bothered me about it. If I hadn't written it when I was only 19 and with no prior experience I would have made sure to clarify that all-important element.

Had dinner with Sun-hyun after work. On Sunday we're going to a national park somewhere (with her friend). She's applying to be a flight attendant—has already submitted (unsuccessful) applications—so tonight she asked me to proofread her cover letter and resumé. At dinner I edited the latter; at home I totally rewrote the former.

[…]

[1] But it's a 'light' meaning, not a heavy one. A simple acceptance and love of the way things are. Living according to a "mission" (like Tomas' medical vocation) would be a heavy meaning, and Tomas condemns the idea.

[2] Obviously another reason for the nature of their death is that the unbearable type of weight is what characterized most of their life together.

Sunday, August 15

If I ever put an end to the celebration of pain that is called my life, my journal will be my suicide note.

Sun-hyun called me at 8:30 this morning, when I was supposed to meet her. I was still asleep (having got to bed at 5:30). Threw on clothes and ran to the meeting-place. We met her friend, Eun-ran, and took a bus to Juwang Mountain National Park. The friend was—how can I describe her?—she was *eine kleine Nachtmusik* of a girl who spoke decent English. I was happy being around these two fine examples of nature's craftsmanship, and two wonderful human beings, as far as I can tell. My happiness gave me energy and they obviously had fun too. We ate lunch outside a restaurant in the park—beneath the beaming sun in its "cloudless clime"—and then hiked along the mountain trail for hours. Nice scenery, but Eun-ran was the object of my attention (though I didn't let that show). She flirted with me shamelessly despite her shyness and eventually led me to believe she was attracted to me. In America her behavior would have screamed "I have a desperate crush on you!" By the end of the day I was looking forward to asking her out—a little worried about the language problem, but hopeful that that could be forgotten through passion. I was developing a dangerous fondness for her—she's so "sweet"!—and constantly wanted to sweep her up in my arms and lock her lips against mine, but Sun-hyun was with us so I couldn't. I settled for imagining the happiness of that kiss. We took a bus back home at 6:00; slept part of the way. (Three-hour trip.) Suddenly I awoke from my doze to hear Sun-hyun telling me "We have good news!" Oh yeah? I thought. Only if it's that Eun-ran wants to see me again tomorrow. "Eun-ran's boyfriend is picking us up at the bus station!" Oh. Even better. Yeah, that's good news all right. "Great!" I said mechanically. "That *is* good news. Good." I turned away from them and pretended to fall back asleep. The pressure that had been on my chest for the last four hours, the pressure of desire, changed into the pressure of heartache. I grew very sad. Gave up initiating conversation and sat there hopelessly. Then more passengers came and Eun-ran had to move over to my side of the aisle, but I still didn't say anything. At last she said something and we started talking about movies, and I mentioned Michael Moore's and launched into a diatribe about the current factious but fascist state of America, masking my bitterness as cultural outrage. Later we had a more intimate pseudo-conversation about our private lives—especially mine—resting our heads against the back of the seat and looking into each other's eyes dreamily—or what would have been dreamily in any other country—and then I gave it up and stared out the window. Finally we arrived. Walked to her boyfriend's car, and went home. In my room I couldn't hold it in longer. The tears were excruciating.

Today I kept thinking 'Finally maybe I have something that'll get me through the next month, something that'll make me happy.' I was excited even though I knew it probably wouldn't work out. I told myself that but I didn't want to *feel* it, so I made myself emotionally vulnerable.

Monday, August 16

Dreamt about her of course and still feel miserable but have to work. Soon I'll invite Sun-hyun to dinner to talk about my problems because I need sympathy as a plant needs sunlight. Two days ago after a lot of introspection I decided to apply to the Washington Internship Program that costs a shitload of money and doesn't pay me any but through which I'm "guaranteed" an internship of my choice which would be in journalism but which I doubted I had the energy for being so depressed and loathing the prospect of getting up early everyday and interviewing Congressmen and having to write two articles a week and being under constant pressure but I decided I wanted to do it anyway for the "experience" and to see if I liked it but now I'm not so sure anymore because my depression just jumped to a new level and I think that in order to have the necessary inspiration to carry out that job I'd have to have a girlfriend first even if only for a month and even if I won't see her again after leaving Korea.

[…]

Tuesday, August 17

And no, this year wasn't a waste. Nothing's ever a "waste", but a year spent in a foreign country at a job one has never had isn't even *remotely* like a waste. It's hard to pin down in what ways I've truly benefited from it….but it hasn't been entirely bad—and I've broadened my perspective on the world (as ho-hum as that sounds)—and I've earned the money with which I can live in D.C.—and my 'inner being' feels more mature than it felt in September. Etc.

Thursday, August 19

Hyo-jung called me today. We had dinner. Discussed Korean women. She confirmed my impression that even if I spoke their language perfectly, they'd be wary of dating me just because I'm a foreigner. On the other hand, if I were a Korean man, even an ugly one—as most of them are—it would be a cinch to date women all the time. There'd be nothing to it. It's easy to be envious of those guys, those jerks who don't appreciate their women and treat them badly, but I imagine that if I were in a relationship with cuteness personified I'd lose interest sooner or later, because when cuteness is personified that's all the person is. […]

The human spirit is truly a meisterwerk. You can feel old and ready to die, certain you'll never be happy again, but in the blink of an eye you can be ready to seize life and celebrate it.

Saturday, August 21

I'm worried about Jim. For the last week he's felt so fatigued he's been worried he caught HIV from the masseuse. He took a test and the result was negative, but it can take six months for the antibodies to appear. I saw him on Thursday and he looked fine, but now I hear he didn't show up to work yesterday and today, he's moved to his sister's home at the army base and he hasn't called anyone. His phone doesn't work, so no one can call him. Unless some new development has occurred there's no reason for him to go to such extremes—so maybe there's been a new development.

In retrospect I'm surprised we were stupid enough to do what we did.

Went to a DVD room with Bobbi, Eun-jung and a new teacher named Chris, a friendly guy my age. Watched a Korean romantic comedy, one of the worst movies I've seen in my life. The popular phenomenon of obnoxious, insipid slapstick comedies that have characters with whom it's impossible to sympathize supports my impression that Korean culture is in some ways at the stage of America in the 1950s. It's interesting to observe the paths that collective consciousness follows, which in their broad strokes seem preordained because countries developing at different speeds nonetheless experience the same progression from unsophistication to a more nuanced and critical understanding of the world, which may include an increase in forms of activism, and then to cynicism and apathy, which may be punctuated by outbursts of fanaticism that are actually manifestations of lostness and despair. On one side of the Pacific is the interaction of a sort of 'earlier' collective consciousness with modern conditions and ultramodern consciousness—which (interaction) is of interest in its own right—while on the other side is the future of this society, more or less. The past and the future coexist, united by the similarity in material conditions and the trappings of government but essentially at different historical stages—which makes genuine cultural understanding between them difficult. They have very different outlooks on the world.

Sunday, August 22

[…] Late at night. It's raining, it's been raining all day. A cold, sad inundation from a gray sky,

cutting us off from one another. Outside somewhere someone is wailing, a prolonged moan utterly without hope. It goes on and on. The voice is sexless. No sense of urgency, just a quiet articulation of a soul's agony.

I slatterned away the whole day. –Okay, enough. I've wasted too much time lately. If I'm too cramped in this city, this country, this job, this room to create anything of my own, I'll at least treat my mind as a receptacle for something more estimable than jokes on Comedy Central. (Been watching the *Daily Show*.) I've skimmed passages in the poetry anthology I bought; from now on I'll read it systematically and write memory-buttressing comments in this 'ere journal.

The selections from William Blake don't much resonate with me. His language isn't as elevated as Byron's (and Keats's), though the sentiments are more so. Too many trite rhymes, occasionally too ponderously metaphorical (as in "To Spring"). I don't mind the nature-worship—I like nature, nature's nice—but it's dangerous in that it degenerates easily into simplistic schlock. I guess it made sense in those times, but it tends not to age well (unless expressed by, e.g., Keats). Sure, I like sunflowers that strive after sweet golden climes, and lambs are indeed blessed by God, and tygers are fearsome creatures when they burn brightly in the forests of the night, but….this all reminds me of *René* (if I remember rightly), a mite too much so. But Blake is no Chateaubriand, and he manages to avoid raving romanticism. Simplicity is his thing (in these short pieces)—no excess (or very little). So: kudos, William! You're not Keats, but you're not bad.

I have nothing against promiscuous women. If it's okay for men to be sluts, then it's okay for women. Nor will I judge prostitutes. What a waste of mental energy. They can do what they want. The world is too ambiguous for me to judge anyone other than people who judge.

Monday, August 23

Still no word from Jim. I wonder if *I* have HIV. The thought has been weighing on me. Haven't had any symptoms, but sometimes they don't show up for 10 years. The odds that I have it are vanishingly small.

I don't want AIDS to be my contribution to Jim's life.[1]

Among the poems of Tennyson that I've read, my favorite is "Ulysses". Both the language and the themes are heroic. Blank verse is the perfect medium for the communication of its ideas; rhymes would be a distraction and probably a trivialization, and pentameter is more 'driven' and (potentially) impassioned than alternatives. The section on Telemachus provides both a relief from the powerful expressions of an intrepid spirit—which is artistically desirable, as is shown more clearly in the 4th movement of Beethoven's 5th symphony—and a foil to the character of Ulysses, highlighting his restlessness. Also, it divides the poem into two parts: complaints about the idleness of the homestead, and the resolve to set out into the world again. The last part has the best lines:

> Come, my friends.
> 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
> Push off, and sitting well in order smite
> The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
> To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
> Of all the western stars, until I die.
> [….]
> ….and tho'
> We are not now that strength which in old days
> Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,--
> One equal temper of heroic hearts,

[1] In fairness to myself, one night he went to a masseuse alone and had sex with her.

> Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

"Tears, Idle Tears" has wonderful pathos without being self-indulgent. There's barely a hint of sentimentalism. Tennyson's fairly easy to read and is skilled at a large variety of poetry. The meter is regular. I like him, though he doesn't overawe me in the way that Donne, Pope, Dryden, Milton, Byron, Keats and others do. (To be fair, I haven't read his longer poems.)

John Donne. Certainly not as easy as Tennyson. It can be hard to follow the course of his poetic arguments. But his talent is dazzling and he's one of my absolute favorite poets.

Milton:

> How soon hath time, the subtle thief of youth,
> Stol'n on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!
> My hasting days fly on with full career,
> But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.
> Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth
> That I to manhood am arriv'd so near;
> And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
> That some more timely-happy spirits indu'th.
> Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
> It shall be still in strictest measure ev'n
> To that same lot, however mean or high,
> Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heav'n
> All is, if I have grace to use it so,
> As ever in my great task master's eye.

I've read ten or twelve poems by Milton, including "Lycidas", and I've decided that I prefer Donne. He's funnier, wittier, easier, more passionate—his love poems rival Byron's—and, I think, more impressive in his word-play (though Milton's language is more lush). He also makes more sense (and he's more a *thinker*: he has an insight into psychology and life that Milton either lacks or can't express with Donne's subtlety and precision). "Lycidas" has passages that are practically incoherent, not only in their use of several voices but especially in the length and obscurity of their sentences. I should read the poem again. An internet article I skimmed suggested that "the irreducible plurality of *Lycidas* accurately represents the complexity and plurality of the human consciousness, and especially the human consciousness suffering the destabilizing pain of grief. [The poem is a lament for the death of Milton's friend.] Moreover, it embodies the indeterminacy of meaning, the distance between sentence structure and truth."

Tuesday, August 24

Sent my application, along with $675—that's only the beginning!—to the Washington Internship Program.

I want to have my blood tested, but I should wait a month or so. The waiting isn't great. If I had HIV I'd deal with it, I (probably) wouldn't go berserk or anything—my parents would be more upset than I—but on the other hand it's not on my list of things to experience. The thought of the day after the test, when I'm waiting for the outcome, borders on harrowing. I never would have considered any of this if it hadn't been for Jim's imaginings. I wonder how he's doing. I read yesterday that some victims have a week of mono-like fatigue about a month after contracting the virus, which happened to him. I don't know if it happened to me. I've been fatigued for months, so I might not have noticed it.

This seems almost like a dream. It can't be reality! My life is too *ordinary* for this! I would never get AIDS! –But part of me thinks that if something like HIV *can* happen to me, it will.

Arrgh, curse that night!

I can't get past the feeling that it's *inevitable* I was infected. It's too good to be true that I wasn't.

As I was reading Yeats I asked myself whether a work of art can be considered 'worse' if the reason for its structure or content isn't the author's *choice* but his lack of talent. If the reason for Yeats' relative disregard for stringent requirements of form is simply that he didn't have the discipline or genius that Pope had (for example), rather than that he decided 'an obsession with meter and all types of formish consistency is inartistic' or whatever, is his poetry less great than it would be otherwise? This question boils down to whether the artist can be separated from his art. I took a stab at an answer in the thing I wrote on Marquez's book, but I wasn't satisfied with it. It seems wrong (and certainly very difficult) to separate the two, to judge them separately, to ignore or pay only slight attention to the artist (his abilities, intentions, mental state during creation) when judging his work. On the other hand, to mingle the two elements seems foolish, because then you get into a hopeless muddle and it's a bottomless pit involving psychology, ephemeral mental states, questions about the process of creation, comparisons between artists, extensive research into everyone's statements about his own work, the question of his self-knowledge and self-interpretation, etc. –But this is all artificial. Judging has no 'rules'. –Maybe the reason it 'feels' important to keep the artist in mind is that one of the questions you ask when analyzing art is how well it realized its creator's purposes. That's the subjective aspect, and it's one good way of critiquing it. That's the one time when it's necessary to take into account the artist's intentions. (–No no, you can also judge whether the intentions themselves are 'artistic'.) But there's also an objective aspect, according to which you apply 'external' standards to the work, whatever they are, in disregard of the artist's subjectivity. –But what if, say, Milton didn't care about portraying the plurality of the human consciousness and the destabilizing pain of grief and the indeterminacy of meaning in his poem, and he just wrote with no plan, and when he finished it was a barely coherent jumble with no justification or 'form' as far as he knew? Well, then, from the subjective point of view the poem is a failure, because it's undisciplined, it doesn't embody a plan, it's chaotic. But 'objectively' it isn't a failure? Because interpretations can be thought of to justify its chaos? Whaaaa….? And how can you say a work is *in any way* a failure just because its author didn't have a plan or a clear purpose for it? –Suddenly I don't know where I am and I want to get out.

….It's hard to sleep. Why? Guess. I pass from moments of great stress to moments of absolute relief. I can't think about anything else. If I don't have it—ah, if I find out I don't have it I'll be the happiest person alive! I'll feel like the Hallelujah Chorus from the *Messiah*. The antibodies start showing up after six weeks, and that's about how long it's been, so I *could* get tested this week.

Wednesday, August 25

I was accepted into the program. Now comes the hard part: cover letters, resumé-editing, writing samples. They'll be edited by the agency before they're sent to companies.

Blood test tomorrow. Nervousness.

What I wrote yesterday about the subjective aspect doesn't have to refer only to the subjective. You can also extrapolate purposes from the work while paying no heed to whether they were intended by the creator and then decide whether it fulfilled them and also whether they were worthy of being fulfilled. But but but if the author's purposes were different from those that seem most appropriate, does it make sense to ignore them and say Well he's wrong, *these* are the themes.? No no there's a confusion here; you can judge the author and the success of *his* enterprise and you can judge the work and the success of *its* enterprise. They don't have to succeed or fail together, nor do you ever have to *ignore* one. And besides in many cases he can't be 'wrong' or even 'less insightful' (than you, who supposedly know the most plausible themes of the work) because often there isn't a 'most appropriate' set of themes. (So you have to take them *all* into account when critiquing the thing.) –Aaaaah, what…?

Thursday, August 26

It'll take two days to get the results. Grrr.

….Tired and depressed at work. (Nothing new.) I keep imagining the phone call and the words "Your blood tested positive". Dwelling on the negative is I guess the mind's way of preparing itself for the worst. Both the good and the bad result seem impossible, the one too good and the other too bad. Well at the moment the good seems like the obvious one, not 'too good' but *normal*—but in other moments I panic. And even if I'm okay the *possibility* will have been there, I will have come close to wrecking my life on the merest whim, a chance event that's meaningless but could have determined the entirety of my future.

Two days from now this doubt is over. It's in the past, and I'm either looking back on it and laughing or looking to the future and sighing miserably. But in a way that sigh would be easier than this: it would be *certainty*, and I'd have to adjust myself to the way things are instead of *wondering* and *wondering*. A world in flux can be worse than a bad world in stability. Besides, it might not be so bad. I think I'd handle HIV well: I have the sense of humor and the strength not to get bogged down most of the time or give up on life. Maybe the opposite would happen. I might start living more zestfully. I might lose my inhibitions. HIV would put everything in perspective, all the misfortunes and successes that life throws at me. It might allow me to shuck off my sickly narcissism. It might wake me from my slumber, my years-long slumber. I could see it as an *opportunity to be seized* rather than my death-knell. An opportunity! It could turn out to be the best thing that's ever happened to me. It would certainly *test* me, force me to confront my boundaries, the limits I never perceive because ordinary life is a well-oiled machine. I'd learn more about myself and experience a more surreal side of life (at least for a while).

But I'd still rather not have it.

This situation itself is pretty surreal. But I'm *making* it so. It's my subconscious choice. Because, let's face it: I don't have HIV.

The terror is gone.

Friday, August 27

Jeong-young called me out of the blue. We hadn't seen each other in months. Went to a coffee shop for a couple of hours. I said something offhand about a girlfriend—I forget what, probably some cynical remark—and she said "How 'bout me?"—giggled, then said she was joking. But then told me she'd like to date a foreigner. Etc. So I think she's interested in me. Too bad I already told her I'm leaving in September. I wish I'd called her months ago. I'd love for us to be a couple. She's nice-looking and the sweetest girl imaginable, with a good body I wouldn't mind fucking. We'll see a movie on Sunday. I wonder if we could have a fling…?

Nothing's more predictable than that I'd finally find a girlfriend right before I left the country.

I like Yeats a lot. His poetry is somehow 'heftier' than that of most others I've read. More serious. Maybe because he doesn't feel compelled to force it into an external, inessential form: the meter doesn't have to be completely regular, the rhymes don't have to determine the content, the verse doesn't have to be 'pretty'. It often is, but even then you can tell that the prettiness of the words isn't the emphasis of the poem. The *thoughts* are, and they're expressed in fairly common language because….that's all they require. Though I don't always know what it is that Yeats is trying to express—there are obscure parts in such poems as "The Tower", "Among Schoolchildren" and "The Statues"—I know he's expressing something definite, something valuable. And though he's almost always able to find a rhyme, it's clear that if he weren't it wouldn't matter because the rhymes aren't the point. The essence of the thought is communicated and nothing more. No excess, no romantic indiscipline in even the most potentially mawkish poems (because of their subject-matter)—like this one ("Aedh Wishes for the Clothes of Heaven"):

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths

Of night and light and the half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

Very simple, yet thereby more effective. The romantic poets might have extended that poem into stanza after stanza—while exchanging its unadorned language for baroque prettiness—but all it needs are those eight lines.

A. E. Housman wrote mostly ballads. Wasn't a very versatile writer, but his poems are fairly ingenious. Ballads are charming and easy to read—rather 'light', even when their subject-matter is deadly serious, as in Housman's many poems about war and death. He's able to inject humor into a predominantly gloomy mood; he often puts something like a punch-line at the end, as in "Is my team still ploughing?". I wouldn't say he's on the level of Yeats and Tennyson, but he's a brilliant wordsmith.

Saturday, August 28

Last night wasn't easy. Got to sleep at 6, after much terror at the thought of what today would bring. Woke up early. Waited impatiently every minute for the phone call. It grew unbearable. I couldn't sit still. I knew that *the* climacteric moment of my life could happen any second. Finally I went to the doctor's office and asked for the result. The nurse told me to wait. I sat there consumed with dread, laughing because otherwise life would have become intolerably serious. She walked towards me, then turned around and walked back behind the curtain, then came out again, and I looked at her with bulging eyes. Her gestures and stuttering, which required interpretation, told me that…I didn't have it! The result was negative! I cheered, thanked her, and strutted out to the elevator as though on Ecstasy. What a relief! I feel exuberantly healthy, electrically alive, better than I've felt in a long time. A whole healthy life is ahead of me!

I've learned my lesson.

…Work sucked away my good mood. But now that I'm alone it's back. I'm going to bed early for once.

I heard that Jim returned a few days ago.

Sunday, August 29

I remember reading somewhere that Robert Browning's poetry is "spontaneous". I agree. Much of it has the breezy insouciance and the freshness of *Don Juan*. Even the most serious poems and the passionate love poems have a conversational tone (partly because many of them are narratives told in the first person). That doesn't mean they're always easy to understand. Browning is also a master of a wide variety of forms (like Tennyson), some of them apparently 'experimental' (as in "Love among the Ruins").

…It pays to gamble. There were awkward pauses during dinner, and I started to think I'd been all wrong about my feelings for Jeong-young and hers for me, but in spite of that I said, at last, that I thought we'd be a good couple. (This is how it's done in Korea, believe it or not. Through *talking*, not through kissing in a highly charged moment.) She agreed. But we didn't know where to go from there, so we talked about something else. I thought 'There must be a *but*, which she didn't say because of her shyness.' Afterwards we walked to a park and looked for a suitable bench for ten minutes. Too much noise and too many people. But we sat down anyway. Once the conversation got into gear it stayed there; the occasional silences were, for the first time, comfortable. I entertained her pretty well, such that eventually she said she wanted to be my girlfriend. This time it was obvious there was no 'but' (mainly because I asked and she said no). Then we talked about Korean dating for a while. It was all surreal, but happy. Very happy. I ached to envelope her in my arms. After an hour of sitting in a haze of sexual tension thick enough to be cut with

a knife, we walked to her bus stop. Held hands on the way. Great great happiness. That petite hand in mine, those small legs walking in step with mine… It looks like my last month in Korea will be the best.

Her summer vacation ends tomorrow. She's a sophomore (21 years old).

We also saw a movie, a bad one. (*The Terminal*)

People never call Lord Byron by his name: George. His name was George. George Gordon. No matter how hard I try, I can't picture that man's name as George.

Monday, August 30

I'm surprised at how easy it was to woo Jeong-young. After two dates we're a couple. I called her tonight and asked when she wanted to meet; she left the decision up to me, saying she was free everyday. So we'll meet tomorrow. She'll have to wait for two hours after her classes end, but she doesn't mind.

She's reading English literature in her spare time so we can talk about it.

Andrew Marvell, who lived in the 17th century, wrote some great poetry, but compared to Donne's it's softer, less masculine, less perceptive, less philosophical, less *meaty*. More romantic. I like "To His Coy Mistress" because it has a *message*—a real thought is behind it—and not some clichéd nebulous sentiment(s) about love.[1] This fluffy but dense romantic stuff can wear on my nerves.

My favorite poetry is the traditional kind from the 18th and (especially) 19th centuries, not the modern 'uglier' creations, even if they're Yeats's.

Wednesday, September 1

Wordsworth's poems don't interest me much. They're boring. They treat of the "sublime", but they aren't sublime themselves. The incessant nature- and innocence-worship seem obtuse and unconvincing because the language is prosaic. As Byron wrote, "[Wordsworth,] both by precept and example, shows / That prose is verse, and verse is merely prose."

[Went to a DVD room wth Jeong-yeong, etc.]

Byron, and me: "This journal is a relief. When I am tired…out comes this, and down goes every thing. But I can't read it over—and God knows what contradictions it may contain. If I am sincere with myself (but I fear one lies more to one's self than to any one else) every page should confute, refute, and utterly abjure its predecessor."

Thursday, September 2

We learn from Horace, Homer sometimes sleeps;
  We feel without him: Wordsworth sometimes wakes,
To show with what complacency he creeps,
  With his dear '*Waggoners*', around his lakes;
He wishes for 'a boat' to sail the deeps—
  Of ocean?—No, of air; and then he makes
Another outcry for 'a little boat',
And drivels seas to set it well afloat.

If he must fain sweep o'er the ethereal plain,
  And Pegasus runs restive in his 'waggon',
Could he not beg the loan of Charles's Wain?

[1] Maybe they weren't clichéd in his time, but they are now.

Or pray Medea for a single dragon?
Or if too classic for his vulgar brain,
He fear'd his neck to venture such a nag on,
And he must needs mount nearer to the moon,
Could not the blockhead ask for a balloon?

Friday, September 3

[…]

I read Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Don't know what to take from it. That it's bad to kill animals? That life is sacred? Or that seafaring can be quite an adventure? That darkness lurks behind everything, even a wedding ceremony? That the forces of nature are bound in such a unity that if you interfere with one you upset them all? Or is it just a fanciful tale with no purpose worth mentioning? (The "life is sacred" theme, though explicit, is a molehill that can't possibly support such a mountain.)

[…]

I haven't mentioned my job in detail lately because, like Nietzsche, "I want never to paint another image of torture." Work is something I barely survive each day.

Saturday, September 4

My chronic lassitude is debilitating. It's hard not to spend all my spare time lying in bed or watching TV. I want to write a story, and I have a vague idea for one, but doing so would require concentrated thought.

….I can't bear the thought that I'm fated to enter the ranks of the *fairly talented*, the mass of people who are in not the first tier but the second or third. Even the first tier wouldn't satisfy me. I have a neurotic need to be God. I must forge the destiny of my race or not live at all. I want to freeze time so that I always exist and multiply it so that I *am* existence. The prospect of passing gently into that good night paralyzes me—the prospect that I'll be only a name and then not even a name. I want to be an *awesome being*.

But I know fame wouldn't satisfy me. I'm like the Ancient Mariner, doomed to roam from land to land, telling my "ghastly tale", but for a different reason than he did his.

It's odd that I care less about the present than the future, and that I see the present through the prism of the future.

Monday, September 6

Yesterday afternoon Jeong-young and I shopped for clothes for me. Didn't buy any. I suggested we watch a movie in my room—rent a DVD—she liked the idea—so we walked to my house, around the corner of which I thought was a video store. There wasn't. We stood there at a loss. Suddenly Bobbi showed up; she didn't know where the place was but offered to give me one of her movies. So we watched *Pirates of the Caribbean* with no subtitles. Poor Jeong-young. I don't think my explanations of the plot were of much help. We sat on the bed and stared at my computer; I periodically tried to move my arm into a comfortable position on her body. It was weird. Finally at the end I kissed her with no warning. She kissed back. Then we really started slobbering on each other and hugging and necking and all that. During the pauses when I looked up at her—she was in that surely uncomfortable position that's great for guys, with the girl sitting on his thighs and her legs curled around his back—she was unable to look back serenely but had to turn her head cutely from side to side avoiding my eyes timidly, as I told her not to worry and tried to caress away her doubts. She liked hugging best, so we did that mostly. The necking provoked the trembling comment "Isn't it too heavy?" […] "I've never kissed a foreigner!" She didn't think we ever

would. Why? Because I'm a foreigner. She thought we'd do nothing but hold hands for a month! I don't understand females. We had samgyupsal for dinner—delicious!—and then she went home. I didn't and don't feel much of anything for her—I think she's a good person and love holding her hand because it's a hand to be held and kissing her because it's a face to be kissed—and her femininity is attractive—but at bottom we mean nothing to me. I enjoy our time together despite my having to perform what usually amounts to a monologue because physical contact is nice and affection for and (lesserly) from me is gratifying and she's a girl who for a while is mine. I hope she isn't too sad when I leave….but on the other hand all people must on some level want others to be upset when they say good-bye because humans are selfish and vain….but I don't care much either way 'cause I'll never see her again.

I ran into Jim on my way home. First time I'd seen him in weeks. Talked in a coffee shop until 1:30 about HIV and his relative certainty that he has it because of all his symptoms. I did my best to comfort him. He called me today and we had dinner, talking about HIV again most of the time. Lately I've had a stiff neck and a lot of red bumps on my arms, which may be mosquito bites; those symptoms have been worrying me, and our conversations haven't helped. I'll have to get another test, probably two more. Not looking forward to it.

Tuesday, September 7

Dinner with Sun-hyun, the model.
Reading Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*. It's as magical as the other one.

Wednesday, September 8

Not a good day. While doing errands downtown I was assaulted by the preternatural beauty of the ladies and my unslaked lust devoured me alive. It rarefied my consciousness to a state of pure agonized yearning. I sat in a park so that my exhausted soul could exhale freely, undistracted by the city's sights and sounds. At work I had barely enough energy to walk around the classroom.

Thursday, September 9

Met Jim after work. Drank at a bar. More like a restaurant. The DJ did some kind of an auction for three bottles of exotic beer—it took us a while to figure out what was going on—the customers kept shouting amounts of money—I was tempted to join in—and Jim goaded me until I did—"*i-chun won*!"—'Ah, the *waeguk-in*, oh, how funny, look the *waeguk-in* is bidding!'—then somebody else, then me, then somebody else, and on and on until I reached "*man won*!", i.e. 10,000—and I won the beer—which was only the beginning. The DJ called me up to the stage and gave a spiel of which I understood nothing, except that he asked for my age, but at last he gave me the beer—but then took it away and made various motions that gave me to understand I was supposed to give it to the girl I liked best in the whole place—so I walked to an unattractive one and gave it to her—figured the pretty girls didn't need more attention—she was thoroughly embarrassed. The guy talked to her; apparently she had a boyfriend, so whatever would have happened if she hadn't didn't. I sat down, confused about why I hadn't gained a beer. But then he called me up again and gave me another, which I was supposed to give to someone else. I did, this time to a gorgeous one. More cheers and instructions and chaos followed. By now I was hoping to get some hooking-up out of this. I waited and stood there foolishly until he gave me the third beer. I didn't know what was going on and I was tired of this game, so I gave it to a boy and sat down with Jim again, who was crumpled over with laughter. In the end I was able to choose one of the beers for myself, a good brew from the Philippines. Then we resumed talking about the Daily Show and HIV and Korea's cultural immaturity and whatever else occurred to us. We'll be "HIV buddies" if we both have it. That'd be kind of fun. Permanent

friends united by a shared disaster.

I'll get tested again next week.

Ten days left!

It'd be amusing and ironic if my parting gift were HIV.

Friday, September 10

Dinner with Jeong-young. Then board game café. Jokingly I suggested we stay up all night—"Tell your mom you're at a friend's house! Let's live it up!" At first she laughed at the idea, but later she latched onto it. I didn't entirely want to but acquiesced, hoping for some lovin'. As we drank in a bar my fatigue nearly overcame me, but walking outside in the fresh air under a blanket of drizzle rejuvenated me. I danced around her and skidded on the paths and compensated for her reticence by making the most noise I could. Then we sat on a bench and barely talked. I was bored, despite my happy-go-lucky act. But I kissed her anyway. Tenderly and passionately, as if she were the love of my life. Like the last time, she seemed distant and passive. I asked her about it. After a lot of hemming and hawing she said she doesn't really like kissing because it makes her fond of the kissee and she's afraid of being hurt. Later she said we're not a true couple—which has always been obvious: we're too different—but it surprised and hurt me anyway. She'd wanted to try this relationship out of *curiosity*. The rain continued to pelt our umbrella and soak my shirt. She said she wouldn't kiss another boy until she'd left college because she wants to focus all her energy on studying, and a boyfriend would be a distraction. After minutes of silence we decided to go home. Lifelessness had grabbed hold of me. Two hours later I'm still locked in its vise-like grip. But now the cause isn't so much Jeong-young—who never meant much to me anyway—as certainty that I have The Disease. Which one? Good question. I have so many it's impossible to tease them apart. But this time I'm referring to the virus. The rash on my shoulders is not reassuring. I like listening to Freddie Mercury, the HIV victim who rose above it. "Under Pressure", while an apt description of my state of mind, is an inspiring song and helps me resign myself to the inevitable. I listen to it and can accept my lot with composure. I've seen too too too much of life not to be calm in the face of every conceivable misfortune. I've weathered so many storms that I can handle anything. At this moment I don't have ambitions, I don't have dreams, I don't have doubts, I don't have anything less than complete fate-loving humane but cynical wisdom. Nothing matters to me. It's all a grain of salt. Why torture myself?

Saturday, September 11

I got the blood test. Last night before falling asleep at 6:30 I decided I had to get it over with. The result won't be ready until Wednesday.

I'm exhausted but it'd be useless to go to bed. There's no escape from wakefulness. I'm trapped in a sleepless nightmare.

Sunday, September 12

Jeong-young and I spent the evening together, shopping, eating dinner, and movie-watching. In the DVD room we inched our bodies closer, then she held my hand, then she lay her legs across mine and rested her head on my shoulder, and finally she asked if she could hug me. I closed my eyes and tried to savor the moment.

Recently she told me that the reason Koreans dislike sarcasm—why their sense of humor hasn't evolved to the West's level—is that it's impolite. The result is that slapstick and silliness are the preferred forms of comedy.

Thursday, September 16

At the clinic the nurse made me wait fifteen minutes to hear the judgment Life or Death. I placed my hand on my chest in a vain attempt to calm my thumping heart. When they brought me into the doctor's office—which they hadn't done at the other clinic—I expected the worst. Why would he want to see me if the result was negative? But it was. I was in the clear. He asked me some questions—"Do you have an unusual coitus history?"—"You mean aside from losing my virginity to a hooker?" I wanted to say—and told me I should get another test in six months.

For three weeks I've had wretched allergies. My life has been a series of sneezes.

Friday, September 17

Jeong-young wanted to help me pack. Came to my room and folded clothes for me and stuffed them into suitcases—much more efficiently than I could have done. We had fun together. Silly, silly fun. I didn't want her to leave—didn't want to be alone again—but her mother called after midnight and demanded she come home.

Lunch with the five teachers I work with. Tomorrow's my last day.

I'm sad and happy. Mellow. I'll never see the students again. Though I'm tired of them, we had good times together and they were a big part of this chapter of my life. The farewells to them today were bittersweet.

You spend a year of your life around the same people constantly but when it comes time for the good-byes it's all over in ten seconds. The good-byes are what relationships come down to—and the depth of the relationship is revealed in the nature of the good-bye. You know how much you mean or don't mean to someone by how he acts when you leave. That's why goodbyes can be awkward: the mask comes off (or it's less concealing than normally).

Sunday, September 19

Last night I had dinner with Eun-young. Then took a nap in a coffee shop before seeing Yu-mi one last time. Around midnight I met Jim, Scott and Bobbi; we drank.

So. It's over. Tomorrow I'll fly to Vietnam; twelve days later I'll go to Thailand. On October 15th I'll come back to Daegu to get my luggage and I'll fly home on the 17th.

I wish I had some deep conclusions I could write about this year. I'm not in the mood to think, though. Something like a resigned, confused sadness has taken over.

[…]

Dinner with Sun-hyun downtown. Walked in a park after. Fountain gushing under the moon—'this is the last time you'll see this, Chris—drink it up—live it up—quietly but not less drunkenly—you may never be here again—though you hope to—so—etch it into the river of your memory.' [Intentionally clashing imagery.]

Stairway to heaven, an ocean of sound rubbing out blemishes of discursion.

Nothing's left. Nothing but names writ in water and shadows and sand-blown souvenirs.

September 27

[…]

But first impressions [of Vietnam] are one-sided, often meaningless. Hanoi is…. I don't know.

What is Hanoi?— Thousands of motorcycles on every street weaving and dodging pedestrians who are weaving and dodging motorcycles. Drivers chasing tourists yelling "Hello! Motorbike?"—most taxis aren't cabs. Vendors beckoning you incessantly to rip you off if they can. Opportunistic friendliness. Few English-speakers. A sprawling confusing Old Quarter from colonial times with crumbling European architecture—kept nice-looking in parts—and narrow streets and few traffic lights. Organized chaos. Every man for himself—good luck not getting run over! Astonishment at the ability of this city to function. —The invisible hand guides human pawns even here.— Sultry weather that doesn't deaden the vitality that seeps from their pores like sweat. Great palpable crystallized love of life around every corner in the gutter and the wrinkles on the elderly and the cigarette smoke. A determined optimistic carpe diem character like Lisbon's.

I'm staying in the Old Quarter—haven't been anywhere else—don't care to see ugly communistic capitalism—living on a street with lots of vendors selling toys. A man nearby is playing with a wooden life-like snake on the street; two girls screeched and jumped when they saw it. People here are fascinated with toys.

What seem to be peasants walk with their conical wicker hats carrying a device over their shoulders—a stick with rope from each end on which hangs a bucket on each side that they put fruits and vegetables in. Men pedal things like rickshaws alongside cars (which are rare) and motorcycles. Old Europe in the buildings and new/old Vietnam in the streets. –This country is a collision of worlds.

September 21: explored the neighborhood—took motorbike to the lake—walked to Dan chu hotel for hour-long naked massage. My guesthouse manager (my age) asked about my plans—I said I had none—he suggested three or four places to visit and said he'd arrange the trips—I was hesitant but he pushed and pushed and finally convinced me—so I gave him $400 to pay for all the train, bus and plane tickets he was to schedule. Friendly guy. "You like boom-boom?" he asked. "What do you mean? What's boom-boom?" "With a girl…"—various gestures. "Oh. Yeah that's fun." "I go to nightclub. Boom-boom. You want to come?" "Uhh…okay…maybe later." I left the possibility open.

–Might as well finish the story now instead of continuing chronologically. Today he asked again—said we could go this evening before I take the train to Danang. I thought about it. For a long time. But I guess I knew the answer right away. After a couple of beers we drove to a brothel. In the inner chamber six or seven girls stood on display. I had to choose one. Felt remarkably idiotic. Nervous, too—a little. Chose the prettiest girl, who took me to a bedroom/bathroom where we showered. Then she undressed and…etc. We tried only the missionary position. (She didn't want to do anything else.) It wasn't great.

Hard work. All that pumping! (Strange how the body automatically takes over when you're nearing the climax.) And silly. Like wasting time. Fleeting pleasure just isn't a good enough reason for the time and effort it takes. I assume sex with a loved one is much more satisfying.

But *now* at least, for the moment, when I look at girls I can think 'You're sexy but I know what that amounts to even in the ultimate moment, and I'm not as tormented as I've been.' I can think: *who cares*?

September 29

Took overnight train Monday evening to the coastal town of Hoi an. Met a Malay and two Brits at the station. Friendly people but typical budget travelers: pushy, rude to natives and maniacal about saving a buck. I followed them around the hotel neighborhood for an hour as they sniffed out the cheapest place. Had I been alone I'd have chosen the first one I saw, as I usually do. (Bargaining is another thing I'm bad at—especially with women. Money matters so little to me that I have trouble acting *serious* enough to insist on a low price.) I haven't seen them since we got our rooms. Wanted to be alone—didn't like their control-freakish style—and hate all groups anyway. Uneventful evening. Didn't explore much of the town. –By the way, the reason Hoi an is worth seeing is that it used to be the main international port in S.e. Asia, 500 years ago. So it was a crossroads for the Chinese, Portuguese, French etc. cultures. The old section is famous and why I came. –At night the Viets had their autumn festival—a 2- or 3-day celebration around the country—in honor of those days' being the exact middle of the something in the lunar calendar—good

timing for my trip b/c the festival is a unique chance to see Viets let loose. I saw it in Sapa—more on Sapa later—and Hanoi—more on Hanoi later—and now here. As I was eating dinner some guys playing drums and cymbals marched past, an elaborate dragon composed of two costumed men dancing in front of them. *Several* dragons, actually. They stopped walking and performed for a crowd, impressively twirling and jumping and rearing like horses. The guy in the front was the head and neck, the (crouching, hidden) guy in the back the arse. Wearing golden, red, blue, green… cloths. The Viet crowd just ate it up. They liked it more than the tourists did! For hours the show went on—actors taking turns to catch their breath—the procession (with its huge entourage) marching ten steps, then performing for ten minutes (drumming and dancing), then marching ten more steps and so on, making its way around the town. The daredevils climbed on each other's backs until there were three levels, the top being the head half of the dragon twisting and barely keeping his balance, potentially falling face-first onto the cement. But the dangerous part was a different set of acrobats nearby breathing fire out of their dragon costume. You know, that thing you've seen a thousand times with the torch and the gasoline-drinking and the spitting it at the fire. The spectators were enthralled like no one I've seen in the West. They were most delighted when the head caught fire and the spitter threw it down from his perch on shoulders into the crowd, where, still flaming, it was kicked around and trampled on by bare feet and could have caused a tragedy. The people laughed and cheered and didn't give a hoot that it was fire they were kicking at each other. Then it was doused and the danger started all over again, the mask eventually catching fire and being thrown into the crowd. No policemen around. The behavior of the masses was exactly the opposite of what it would have been in all but the most insane Western social gatherings. Even grandmothers were screaming with glee. I was like 'Hey people—ya know—that flamy orange stuff there—that's, um—that's fire—ya might wanna stay away from it.' But I learned that at the heart of this culture, despite poverty and oppression and the past, is a carefree Latinish love of fun and pushing the boundary. (I guess that used to be at the heart of our culture too (sort of), but in this age of litigation and P.C.ness it's been mostly killed.) Developing Southeast Asian countries tend to have that optimistic character.

Ultra-heat today. I walked through the Old Town drenched. Extraordinary number of art galleries. On the river, boats similar to the one in *Apoc. Now* that has the puppies and the Vietnamese who are killed by Martin Sheen's gunners floated, waiting 4 tourists. As always, everybody wanted to sell me something and I had to say no to each person 10 times—you think I exaggerate—before he'd leave me alone—and as it was I gave away a lot of money out of compassion. Saw some Chinese architecture—two communal buildings or meeting-places or temples or something—in courtyards—peaceful and indescribably beautiful. Later I rode a bike 3 miles to the beach on the S. China sea. Palm trees, white sand, the soughing of the gentle water—old ladies walking around wearing heavy clothes and wide-brimmed hats as protection against the sun selling pineapples and bracelets and blankets. Whole pineapples that they cut up and carved in front of you and you ate like an apple with an irregular shape.

October 1

Doing nothing today. Waiting in Hanoi for the plane tomorrow to Bangkok. But I want to go home. –Existential nausea.

Watching TV in my guesthouse.

October 3

Bangkok. Exploring the area around Wat Po (which is a temple with a colossal reclining Buddha, symbolizing his passage into nirvana). It's more incredible than anything Korea has, but it doesn't really impress me—almost nothing does—I'm as hard as the tile-fragments that encrust the roofs of the temples—and everything I see reminds me of what I don't have—and I'm just wandering around because that's what I'm supposed to do, and my heart isn't in it. Tonight I'll take a bus to the southern beaches and islands of

Thailand. I arrived here yesterday. Bangkok isn't as crazy as Hanoi—well, it's very different—and more Western from what I've seen, with more and better restaurants, and more cultural attractions, so I like it better. A taxi drove me to various sites, waiting as I looked at them—and offered to take me to a massage parlor, showing pictures that made my mouth water—but I've had enough of prostitution—loveless love—so I turned it down.

October 5

Ko Pha-Ngan. It's raining. No electricity today on the whole island and Ko Samui too. Watched TV yesterday. (Arrived in the afternoon after 20-hour trip.) Reading now. Desire nothing more than to be far away from third world countries (Korea included, with its backward *culture*). My toilet doesn't flush; no hot water; few comforts; no English anywhere—but at least Thais are quite friendly. I should have spent a year in Bangkok, not Daegu.

October 8

I have to get my life back on track after its year-long hiatus. Having access to books in English will allow me to resume my education—my first priority. Since I'll be writing for a political publication I'll have to learn about society—economics especially but also the history and current policies of the U.S. government. I'll put philosophy and art on hold. That makes sense pragmatically too b/c anything philosophical I write will be more appreciated after I've already made a name for myself, which is easiest to do in relation to politics. Besides, philosophy is harder, and it'll take years to learn enough to expand and improve on the ideas in my thesis (and delve into other areas). I can sort of tolerate my constant questions if I know that sooner or later I'll answer them. (Same with my interest in science.) It doesn't matter *when* I understand humanity and its history as long as *someday* I do. The tasks of the immediate future are to educate myself and, in the process, make a name for myself.

I've been reading Noam Chomsky on the web. Can't comprehend the sponginess of his mind.

–Who am I kidding? It'd take me decades to make a name for myself in journalism. I'd be a bad journalist anyway. But I'll try it and see how far it gets me.

Maybe I should live at home for a few months to teach myself the basics of economics.

October 15

On the 13th I rode an overnight bus from Krabi to Bangkok. Arrived at 5:00 a.m.; went to a guesthouse, slept until 11:00; slouched around the neighborhood of Khao-san, not knowing what to do until my flight to Seoul at midnight. Didn't want to see more temples. One activity I considered deeply for hours was a massage with sex. Wouldn't have thought seriously about it had my ridiculous misadventure on Ko Phi Phi--more about which later--not left me reeling in the mists of blocked lust. Until the evening I sat on benches, walked through parks, walked through markets, walked in circles, approaching the question from every angle. The Vietnamese hooker had been disappointing, but I wondered if that had been a fluke and not a typical hooker experience. Wanted to be sure one way or the other. But I was nervous, didn't want to spend $60, and couldn't imagine that the simple act of handing money into someone's hand prior to sex *doesn't* necessarily eliminate the eroticism of the act, making it utilitarian. I imagined myself in the bathtub with the girl and getting massaged by her naked and lying beneath her to predict my probable reactions. I remembered that the predecessor had taught me how little pleasure means to me; I knew that I wanted sex really for an emotional connection that would be impossible with a prostitute; I knew that filthy lucre not only distances but also debases the *buyer* as much as the seller; I thought I might be proud of myself for laughing in the face of temptation. So finally I decided against it. Then I had dinner. While eating I watched

a beauty catwalk past me with feline grace and I abruptly changed my mind. Hailed a taxi. Inside the brothel was a lobby facing a glass window behind which were seated twenty girls in bathing suits with numbers on them; I had to choose one. Chose the cutest, who was also, it turned out, the shortest. The establishment's classiness didn't mitigate my discomfort, but I put on a bold face. She led me upstairs to a room with a bathtub and a bed. I talked to her as much as I could, trying to break the ice, but her English was minimal. She was only 19. We both undressed and climbed into the bathtub half-full of warm water. She lathered me up--which was more *weird* than sexual. Then we toweled off and went to the bed. No massage. Only foreplay and the real thing. She wouldn't let me kiss her. I couldn't do much, in fact--as with the Vietnamese--because almost everything sexual is more intimate than sex itself [?] and she didn't want intimacy. So my body did one thing and my mind another. It was lonely and seemed more like a task than recreation. A good feeling, to be sure, but she was down there with her eyes closed, gasping and groaning, and I was up there looking at her disinterestedly, and we were in two separate worlds. Afterwards we lay down for an hour and dozed, holding hands. Her fingers twitching frequently, randomly, were more memorable than the humping. I looked at her tranquil face and felt her twitching fingers and was struck that this was probably the best part--the most human connection (for me, at least). But I was still sad, from the whole situation. Later the real meaning of the ritual was revealed in all its crassness, when she insisted on an extravagant tip.

Downstairs I noticed that the receptionist was more desirable than the other girls and, having learned nothing, wished I could have been with her.

I left Southeast Asia dismally, without pomp and circumstance. Couldn't sleep in the plane. In Seoul I grabbed the first taxi I saw, which, despite the meter, ended up costing $60 for twenty-five minutes. Furious with myself, I told him to drop me off at the subway (rather than the train station), where the revived memories of this year took advantage of my anger to try to make me cry. But I beat them back! (It was hard with the radio playing "Send in the Clowns".) In Daegu I learned that my flight would be on the 19th. Wrote an email to Jae-eun; called Jeong-young, who invited me to a classical guitar concert tomorrow.

I was on Ko Pha-Ngan for three days. Typical tropical and poor island. The best day, because the least rainy, was the 6th, when I lay sprawled on a beach for four hours reading. That was one of the few times I actually sat back and realized I was on an island in Thailand. Ko Samui was the next stop. Three days again. Rain at all times except the late afternoons. Spent most of my time on the primitive resort isolated from the rest of the island. (Well, the whole island consists of places isolated from each other, with small highways and dirt roads between them, and forests and mountains.) The day I went to Chaweng--a shopping district near a famous beach of same name--there was a downpour that turned the streets into roaring rivers. Damn-near catastrophic, though brief. Water eight inches high and cars trying to drive through it. As usual the rain came in spurts, and it was clear again for enough time for me to do nothing on the beach. A small elephant was being shown off by its owner; I'd never seen one. It must not be very comfortable to ride one of those, with their long prickly hairs and tough rawhide. An amazing sight though. Among the most comical-looking of animals.

Next: Krabi, a town on the Andaman coast. Sunnier skies. On the first day I took a boat to Railay beach. Bad sunburn. But good foot massage in the shade by a Thai lady with a degree in it--or a certificate, or something. On the second day I took a ferry to Ko Phi Phi, probably the most beautiful of the islands I saw. I was supposed to go back to Krabi the same day, but a girl I met persuaded me not to. […]

In the morning I learned with horror that it was the 13th, the day I was supposed to take a bus from Krabi to Bangkok! For some reason I'd thought I had an extra day when I'd chosen to stay overnight. Bought the earliest boat-ticket to Krabi (1:30), hoping the bus left late in the day. Knocked on Natalie's door at around noon, but she wasn't in. So I left the island $30 poorer and no sexual experiences richer. Made it to the bus with only half an hour to spare.

Sunday, October 17

Es gibt nothing to do, so I'll jot down memories of the days I didn't write about.

September 22: took a bus in the morning to Halong Bay. Vietnamese tour guide, woman, aged 27, married, cute, is permanently in my memory as having the most personality of any Asian girl I've met. Bearabilized the cramped trip in a bus bursting with fifteen people's luggage by singing for us, talking about herself and asking each of us to introduce ourselves--which would have been the tedious "My name is so-and-so, I'm from this place, I have a job as such-and-such, I'm in Vietnam for this amount of time…" if she hadn't intuited our not-caring-about those details and instead interrogated us on our relationships past and present and advised that we acquire Viet girlfriends b/c they're devoted and they like handsome Western men and besides it's good to "experience" the women of every country you go to--and she herself is often tempted to sleep with Western men but has to remind herself that she has a husband--and her observations on the appearance and personality of each of us were consistently incisive and funny. We split up at the ferry; she went with another group. Three Aussies and I were placed together--talkative guys; we had a good time--along with a bunch of people we hadn't met, mostly Japanese. I don't know how the bay was formed, but it's unlike anything else in the world: thousands of towers of stone and small mountains covered with foliage jut out of the water, little islands arbitrarily stuck here and there, a majestic sight especially when you're reclining in a chair on top of the ferry under a radiant sky listening to Handel on your headphones. The boat stopped for a while so we could swim in the saltiest water I've ever tasted--or maybe Fiji's was worse. I followed the others in jumping off the top of the boat once, twenty or thirty feet high--not easy for me--I'm still surprised I overcame the reluctance of my gut. We also walked through an enormous cave that had sheltered the Viet Cong's wounded during the American War as bombs were dropped all around outside: it must have been pitch-black and terrifying. And now thirty years later it's a tourist site. Everything yields to tourism in the end (meaning 'eventually' *and*--in the *end*). The ceiling of the cave was rippled like water, with aspiring droplets frozen in stone. We stayed in a hotel somewhere on Cat Ba island.

September 23: went back across the bay, took a bus to Hanoi. It made a stop at something like a handicraft manufactory, where sixty girls sat at tables creating paintings in thread, heedless of the swarming tourists who watched them and walked around the adjoining shop that sold thousands of products they'd made. One girl noticed I was looking thoughtfully at some bracelets and came over to sell me one. Spoke good English. Petite, warm-hearted, friendly, lovely; she asked where I was from, how old I was, whether I had a girlfriend--the stock questions--but with more interest than I'd come to expect. A fondness for her grew in me and I couldn't bear the thought of leaving in a few minutes. Instantaneous emotional connection between us. I said I was in Vietnam for only ten days; she wished I could stay forever. I wished I could take her home with me--and later I wished I'd said so. My remaining hour on the bus was defined by sadness. That evening I rode a night train to Sapa. The Korean girl in my compartment was shocked to learn I spoke her language.

September 24: Sapa is a poor town in the north of Vietnam near the Chinese border. A mountainous region. I arrived at 6:30, ate breakfast in the hotel, and was assigned a guide who would lead me and two Japanese on a hike that day and the next. Hundreds of little kids from tiny neighboring villages ran around the town in their colorful tribal clothes selling trinkets to tourists, speaking English well--having learned it from the tourists themselves, school being not a very serious pursuit in the middle of nowhere. While hiking I saw a couple of schoolhouses--I *think* that's what they were--near the villages several hours away, but they were so small and dilapidated that I'm sure not much learning goes on there. That day my group walked two miles into a valley and out the other side. On the way down, as we grew distant from the vestiges of civilization in Sapa, we passed a single family's home, a corrugated-roofed two-roomed hut with no beds, no kitchen, no bathroom that I saw, and a porch where a young mother was holding her baby and a grandmother and three or four other people were sitting. It seemed inappropriate to invade their home like this, with the guide explaining to us in his Englimese their customs and how they lived. But I soon realized they appreciated our presence: it was a chance for them to sell the bracelets and necklaces they'd made. For fifteen minutes they trapped us inside their house and reiterated robotically the one phrase they knew and could barely pronounce: "Hello you want this, hello you want this, hello you want this, hello you want this". When I said no and tried to turn away they grabbed me and out came "Hello you want this". It was impossible to discourage them. Finally I bought something from one, which encouraged the others who

redoubled their efforts--the guide just standing in the background oblivious to our desperation. Somehow we pried ourselves from them.

The landscape reminded me of New Zealand, but on a larger scale. The terraces on the mountainsides covered in yellow stalks of rice added a human element to the grandeur. Hundreds of terraces everywhere, golden horizontally and green vertically, steps nearly to the summits of hills, perfectly geometrically regular, carved by plows pulled by oxen, a periodic human figure wading in the grass to harvest the rice. Beside the river running through the valleys stood men shaking bowls of rice to separate the chaff in the wind. The whole scene was from a different time, an *epic* time, though rumblings of tractor-trailers and jeeps and dynamite explosions in the cliffs where a road was being built proved that modernity reaches even into the bowels of the wilderness.

That afternoon, without my knowledge, the guide--a boy my age who'd spent much of the trek talking to me about sex and how promiscuous Vietnamese women are--told the hotel receptionist that I'd said she was beautiful and wanted to meet her. She offered to give me a tour of the town. Unfortunately when she finished work she couldn't find me. And that was the end of that. Later I watched a traditional-music-and-dancing show in a bar.

The next morning I was sick. Contemplated staying in bed and skipping the six-hour hike, but that didn't seem right. So we set off at 9:00. Soon I realized I'd made a mistake. The terrain was rough and it rained off-and-on and I didn't have an umbrella or a jacket. Hour after hour dragged by as I worsened, barely able to walk. Aching muscles, fatigue, runny nose, fever, nausea, chills, hacking cough. Staggering along absorbed all my energy, so I couldn't talk. We passed villages and a lot of cultural oddities I took no notice of. At lunch I suggested I had malaria; one of my companions agreed and put forward many arguments in support of it. I had all the symptoms; I was in a malaria-infested region; I hadn't taken my pills (left them in Korea); I remembered being bitten by a large mosquito the previous day, and he said it was only large mosquitoes that carried the disease (--probably bullshit). Finally we made it to the jeep that drove us for an hour on a distressingly narrow road along a cliff back to town. The weather was cold and I was shivering uncontrollably and beginning to have serious worries. Told the guide I thought I had malaria; he didn't understand. (His English was awful.) Told him I wanted a blood test; his response was "Buh-lut? What? Buh-lut?" He took me to a pharmacy where I bought medicine. But I insisted on going to the hospital. I was in a foul mood and desperate to find somebody I could talk to. He took me to Sapa's hospital, which seemed more like a place to die than to get healthy. Fairly large--an open-air building with a courtyard in the middle and two floors--but almost empty and very unsanitary. After roaming through hallways looking for a doctor we found a nurse who said he'd gone home for the night. Yes. The *one* doctor was gone, leaving his patients to fend for themselves. With gestures I told her I wanted a blood test; she showed me to a room and asked me to wait. On the counter was a stray needle and small bottles of medicines, like morphine. My guide asked me which I wanted. I stared at him in disbelief. I was supposed to choose my own medicine, which would be administered on me by that lone needle, and which I didn't even want in the first place. "No medicine! Blood test! Take blood out! Blood!" Gestures simulating extraction. "Buh-lut?" The nurse came back and took my temperature. More discussion between them, more anger from me, more uncommunication between us. Finally I left. Rode a motorbike to the hotel. But first I went on the internet to learn what I could about malaria. None of the information was reassuring until I read that it takes at least seven days for the symptoms to appear. In my case there'd been only one day. Phew! That night I heard drums and yelling on the streets: the autumn festival. The receptionist wanted to go to a bar with me but I was stuck in bed for fifteen hours.

September 26: hiked again with two Israeli girls and a Kiwi guy. Still sick but not as much. More of the same sights. Villagers shrunken and prematurely aged from malnutrition. 30-year-olds looking like 50-year-olds. But friendly and cheerful. Chickens and naked little boys hopping around. Great open spaces in the valley--a lot of farmland, where men were harvesting crops--and occasional villages with eight or so homes, people waving to us outside or watching TV inside--in houses that barely had places to sleep and nothing but a hole in the ground for a bathroom, and no toilet paper. (Strange priorities they have.) Took a train to Hanoi that night--worse than a Portuguese train, slower and more cramped. Ate prison food for breakfast: plain rice, leaf soup and bean sprouts.

Asked the guide if villagers get married and where they have sex in such close quarters. If I understood rightly, he said that on the weekend there's a "love market": young girls and boys come to town and display themselves to each other. If they like what they see they go off to rut--I don't know where--and if the girl is impregnated they get married. I wasn't satisfied with that explanation but couldn't understand anything else he said. --That custom certainly has the benefit of simplicity. None of this complicated "relationship" crap.

I finished *Love in the Time of Cholera*. How anyone can write that well is beyond me. Now I'm reading *Candide*. And I bought a collection of stories by Kafka. Reading *The Metamorphosis* first.

Monday, October 18

Above when I wrote "sand-blown souvenirs" I was referring to the "sands of time", not just creating a meaningless pseudo-alliteration.

Last lunch with Jeong-young.

It's encouraging that millions of people love Eminem. It shows there's still authenticity in the West, that the Britney Spears-'N Sync-Backstreet Boys sugary pop machine isn't the hegemonic cultural expression of post-postmodernity. There's still mass *anger* and *hatred* and the nihilism that negates everything and is only one step away from the desire to change everything. The bombardment of sex appeal hasn't brainwashed everyone.

Met Jim tonight.

Goodbye Korea! I leave you on good terms and wish you the best. No hard feelings. I've forgiven and forgotten--well, not forgotten. But I don't hate you; you're not a bad country and your citizens aren't bad. Just immature and irrational.

Saturday, October 23

I'm home. In America, the land of the ugly. Where are all the pretty ladies I'm used to seeing?

Reading the macroeconomics textbook from my college course, which I didn't read when I was supposed to. And playing the piano fanatically.

Monday, October 25

Candide hasn't aged well--not nearly as well as *Rameau's Nephew*. I had to *force* myself to finish it. "The world is incredibly, incredibly bad, and everyone is unhappy. And I'm going to jackhammer that message into your skull, reader."

Saw Steiner today. He gave me new meds. Anxiety-reducing, energy-boosting (or so he says).

Reading Pascal's *Pensées* when I need a break from the dismal science.

Thursday, October 28

Only have three chapters left in the textbook, but today suddenly in a moment of boredom I was inspired to write a book in Nietzsche's aphoristic style on the state of the modern world and so I'm setting aside economics for the time being and concentrating on that. I think the inspiration came from my taking one of my brother's Adderall pills. I sat down at the computer more revved-up than I've been in weeks. Had no idea what to write, but after a couple of sentences--with no plan--the rest just flowed, more or less. Hours later I'm still propelled by adrenaline.

Interview for internship in D.C. Easy and short. Accepted to a paper called *The Hill*, which reports on….the Hill. I'll start in the beginning of December.

Monday, November 1

Adderall has its unpleasant side-effects. (Loss of hunger, difficulty sleeping, depression when it wears off.) I need something else.

The book isn't coming along well. I don't have enough to say. Nietzsche already said too much; Christopher Lasch too. So I returned to economics.

Here are a few of the barely readable sections I wrote, in no particular order:

> *First principles*.-- In a book you want to start with first principles. Not in Descartes' sense, but in common sense's sense. You want to say, "Here's the problem, here's the method, and eventually I'll reach the goal that you, reader, have been waiting for." You crave those premises, those tenets, those axioms and proofs that finally lead you to a tidy little climactic conclusion after which you radiate a seraph's smile at the thought that certainty has been attained--sweet certainty! we humans want nothing more!--or if not certainty then the happy permission granted by yourself to sit back and luxuriate in your newfound complacency which although an outgrowth of prior intellectual restlessness discourages you from further inquiry for a time because few pleasures are greater than the proud and conscience-pang-free moment of leisure that follows the completion of a grueling intellectual task, comparable to the exhausted rapturous repose that succeeds a purging bout of love-making when you're lying in bed and thinking silence. You anticipate the climax with more relish than even the reader--because for you it *is* a climax, an ecstatic end to your tormented philosophical musings, a glorious moment of enlightenment in which everything ties together if you're lucky and you've reached wisdom. Your world is for once circular. Complete in itself and self-revealing. Semi-Hegelian in its self-evolution from embryonic mental stirrings to exponential crystallization in the written word to divine revelation in the final synthesis that may after all be a mundane compromise but is no less *certain* (as existing) for that. Your world--shut off from the outside, teeming reality. Above all internally consistent, in your mind, from its first principles to its logically unfolded culmination. What is foreign to its symmetrical beauty you ignore for the time being. You pretend your thought-processes are orderly and artificialize them on paper and present them to the public and sweep the discarded intellectual shavings under the rug and try to forget about them because they corrupt the certainty that you've convinced yourself you've embodied in your work.
>
> But now your brainchild is at the mercy of the vultures that throng around its still living carcass, picking it to pieces, digesting and regurgitating it, mauling it until its form is barely recognizable even in your eyes. You return to it heartsick; what you see is no longer what you saw; and you're disillusioned. It failed to survive out there, among the wolves; its supposed value has been vitiated, its ideas attacked and left in tatters. Your self-enclosed world has been ripped apart, doubt assails you yet again, logic has failed you yet again. Your premises were flawed; presuppositions were unexpressed; counterarguments were forgotten; your prose was obscure; you were too ambitious; you ignored implications; your conclusions were simplistic. Your whole enterprise was an abortion. Systematizing died a century ago and you stupidly tried to resurrect it. You thought you could invent a coherent intellectual universe--whether micro- or macroscopic--you, with your boundless naivete and your Christ-complex that takes you as a vessel for truth. Truth? No no, it's fruitless, don't even try, it doesn't exist, there are too many variables, the world is too ambiguous, too many critics, too many viewpoints, too many agendas, too few facts. You look upon the book that others have spat upon, your beloved theories, and you decide that your goal was impossible, maybe there is no objectivity and metaphysics is a sham, and your creations are nothing but and *must* be mere psychological whims providing more insight into the mind that begot them than the world they

tried to unravel. You abandon hope and renounce your dreams and sink into a relativistic quagmire that at least offers the consolation that *no one* is right and you are not alone, because everyone manipulates experience and ideas in such a way as to confirm his innate prejudices and preconceptions, and everyone is bombarded by critics and opposing ideas that claim a monopoly on truth.

You observe society and see that process played out with comic regularity and un-self-consciousness. Academics, following in the footsteps of their forebears the Scholastics, pen tomes wrangling over the minutiae of a centuries-old thinker's ideas and abstruse technicalities accessible to a few people on the planet; economists espouse every doctrine from the classical to the Keynesian to the monetarist to the--who knows?--the mercantilist?; psychology is and always has been in a state of pluralistic anarchy; philosophy has all but died in this climate of intellectual specialization. And then there are the culture wars, the vicious polarized culture wars, within countries and between countries, verbal and physical. The mass floundering. Nothing apparently is on firm ground. You aren't alone in your anguish; the only difference is that you're aware of it, while others aren't of theirs.

So you stew in your confusion, wondering how it all came to such a pass and if there's a way out.

First love.-- "As I watched I couldn't help thinking they cared less about knowing truth than about being right." "You're a poor observer of human beings. They care less about being right than about being theatrical."

The naïve idealist's despair.-- Philosophy! My eyes glisten at the sight of your death throes! What treasures the Greeks and Romans bequeathed to us, and the ancient Aryans and the Europeans!--what treasures have we buried! The vast thoughts of the Upanishads echoing through millennia, echoing in the orotund voice of primeval civilization, reverberating insights into our selves, our origins, from beyond time's chasm. The pioneering logical rigor and skeptically confident, ambitious idealism of Plato. The heroic struggles of Nietzsche to overcome the nihilism attendant upon God's death by destroying and creating edifices of ideas couched in luminous prose. The noble if quixotic attempts to scale the vault of heaven and look Creation in the eye. The sheer desperate determination to *plow on* in the face of all odds and pierce the veil of Maya just to catch a glimpse, however fleeting, of truth--propelled not by any utilitarian consideration but simply by the mind-devouring obsession to consummate this Wonder that never relinquishes its grip on consciousness. The taming of the turmoil of experience into a *Weltanschauung* and the brief triumphant respite as the thinker contemplates the world he has created, knowing full well that soon his Homeric restlessness will reassert itself, the prospect of adventure and thrilling discoveries will tantalize him, and he'll set solitary sail on seas of uncharted peril. He may not reach his destination--may have to settle for collecting shells on the shore of the ocean of truth--but the *quest* is what electrifies and justifies him. He needs nothing else; and if he is deprived of it he *is* nothing, in his eyes and the world's. He is ignorant of the force that compels him so relentlessly toward his Faustian destiny, but he has no choice but to do its bidding, as a leaf is carried on the wind.

His spirit has dissipated in postmodernity. Now we have the hordes of scribblers scribbling critiques of critiques of dead philosophers' ideas from their spiritual cubicles and receiving a paycheck in return. Immersing themselves in the sacred texts but unable to imbibe the Dionysian essence that wafts from the words to anyone with unslaked thirst for meaning in life. Such empyreal joy is unnatural in a society that worships money, that prostrates itself before The Corporation, and has been bureaucratized into a minutely organized division of labor—a division of labor that places intellectual worker-bees in isolated combs with high walls that prevent them from seeing their aggregate, crushing their latent ambition, if indeed it was latent at all. –Yes, modern bureaucracy has crowded out philosophy and left room only for "scholarship."

An economics equation.-- Late capitalism = subordination of human values to money = subordination of the complete human being to his social function = subordination of the passionate and honest thinker to the service he provides for the System = thinker's resultant fragmented view of the world = thinker's lack of homogenizing influence on mass ideology = chaos of competing values and explanations of everything = widespread doubt and subliminal despair (sometimes dressed up as fanatical certitude) = mass anger with no outlet and nothing to blame it on = incipient nihilism, hatred of the status quo and desire to destroy it with no idea of what to substitute for it = in the end, (one form of) terrorism.

A more Marxist (and realistic) alternative.-- Late capitalism = astonishing technological sophistication and abundance of material wealth = highly evolved divisive economic relations and ever-increasing intricacy of the international (or "social") and the production-process's (or "material") division of labor = continuous exponential enhancement of technological capacity = [1] (a) increasingly labyrinthine social relations that intimidate thinkers into submerging themselves in minute details of scholastic theories--but also, and more importantly, (b) an intrusion of a profusion of inventions into households for every conceivable purpose but especially mindless entertainment, which now becomes the opiate of the masses = (i) deterioration of communal ties[1] and (ii) the cultural centrality of mere images and sound-bites and instant gratification = politicians' pandering to the whims of the rabble even more than they did in the past, before the advent of mass media….*all* of which = increasing irrelevance and anachronism of traditional value-systems (= religion) that *used* to be opiates = the nagging perception among many that life is losing its "spiritual meaning", that boredom is creeping into the daily routine, that the youth culture of prurience is undermining "morality", that homely stability, complacency, simplicity and certainty (= "family values" and "God") are under attack = panic at the thought of their lifestyle eroding away = massive reaction of Christian fundamentalist fanaticism against the secular society = another ingredient tossed into the boiling cauldron of Western culture….*ALL* of which ingredients = (a) rabid conflicts between social groups and underlying collective uncertainty/apathy/cynicism despite the bold faces exhibited from all sides and (b) an aggravation of inner-city (and rural) despondency obviously due to poverty, a lack of opportunities for advancement, poor parenting, poor education, boredom--and all of which = *a society sick unto death*; [2] constant development of global economic interdependence = insidious extermination of precapitalist ethoses and social organizations = large-scale acceptance by developing nations of the loss of much of their former identity, but resistance from the few whose governments disseminate anti-liberal propaganda, as well as from reactionary terrorist organizations = initially an *ideological* war of civilizations (especially the Islamic against the American) but now a *violent* one = in the end, the demise of Islam (due mainly, however, to the "peaceful" spread of capitalism)….all of which, and more, complicate the circumstances listed after "[1]", which complicate the circumstances listed after "[2]", and, you will admit, make for a fairly ugly picture of the world.

Wednesday, November 3

The great Nausea. At being a citizen of such a country. [Bush was just reelected.] Where prejudice against gays and abortion has power over reason. My need to live a life of theoretic activism grows out of *sheer hate*.

It's comforting that millions of Americans are as disgusted as I am.

At this point any effort to "save" America is probably doomed in the long run. This country is on the decline. Nietzsche might have compared its decadence with late-19th century Germany's. But we can still try. And even if there's little hope for the country, there's still hope for the world.

[1] Of which (b) is, of course, only one cause. I need hardly point out that this whole passage is a simplification.

But then there must be hope for America in the *very* long run (because whatever affects the world ultimately affects every society in it). Maybe when this identity crisis passes things will get better. They'll probably keep deteriorating for decades, but after a sufficient number of convulsions maybe we'll learn to cooperate in order to survive.

'Have you learned nothing from history, Chris? *Cooperate in order to survive*? What a utopian dreamland you live in!'

Thursday, November 4

I'm not at all disillusioned—disillusionment is impossible when you've already fallen off the cliff and hit bottom—and I was fully prepared for a Bush victory—but my anger and sense of disempowerment have, I think, paralyzed my creativity. The election has made them worse, but they've been there for years. I can't motivate myself to achieve anything difficult and idealistic; The Man is too powerful. The cynicism of critics would crush anything I wrote. It isn't a conscious decision of mine, but an unconscious absorption of the trends of my culture.

I cannot abide the rigmarole about the greatness of America, the goodness of all its citizens. I cannot abide politicians like the "most respected"—and "honest"!—John McCain, that opportunist who rejected Kerry's overtures so as to position himself for a shot at the presidency in 2008. I cannot abide people who treat bigoted Midwesterners and their "commitment to moral values" with a grain of seriousness. I cannot abide the conventional wisdom that Bush will make America safer. Indeed, the notion of "conventional wisdom" itself is repugnant.

What I can *least* tolerate is the rhetoric about "reconciliation", the need to "heal the divides", "reach across the spectrum" and so forth. What this election has proven, if anything, is the need for radical social change and the *widening* of the cultural gap to the point of civil war.

Glimmers of light: Californians' approval of $3 billion for stem-cell research. Massachusetts' acceptance of gay marriage. New York's support of Kerry by a margin of 70%. Jon Stewart. –Flickerings of humaneness.

Friday, November 5

Finished the economics book two days ago. Reading Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.

Monday, November 8

As I read Pascal I'm stimulated to my own thoughts and am tempted to write them down, but I don't because it would be only for the sake of receiving congratulations from my imaginary readers. It wouldn't be for the sake of inquiring into truth or arriving at valuable ideas, or for soothing myself, which are the only estimable reasons for writing nonfiction because others grow out of the desire for fame. But even the 'soothing myself' reason is corrupt in its essence, because the relief sought-after functions precisely through the thought that a reader would congratulate me. In any case, I don't write down my ideas because they're superfluous to the quest that guides my efforts, though they might be illuminating to you and would reflect well on me. If a similar variant of the idea has already been communicated by a previous thinker, the person stimulated to its new wording might as well keep it to himself. That's the 'noble' thing to do.

On the other hand, the baseness of the motive shouldn't obscure the greatness of the consequence, and the latter should be most important. Though the motive for my writing the preceding paragraph was basically the desire for recognition—which is the motive for *this* one too—the *effect* of it might be beneficial to the reader (by provoking him to think and so on). So that even though (in this kind of context) the motive

is almost invariably vain and valueless by any objective measurement (which understands the frivolity and impossibility of satisfaction on the basis of recognition), the thought itself should be communicated if there's a likelihood that it'll enlighten or please the reader. And for any other effects it might have, perhaps on the writer. Besides: being contented, even if for a reason that we feel instinctively to be trivial, isn't necessarily something to laugh at, considering that it happens (in my case) almost never.

Having said all that, I'm still standing by my decision not to record my stimulated thoughts. It would take up too much time. As long as you know I have them, and that I'm even *more* admirable for not writing them, I'm content.[1]

Trying Ritalin now. Scatters my thoughts. Can't concentrate well. Hard to philosophize. Gives me energy, but not the kind I want: it's a sort of restlessness in my chest and stomach that could be confused with nervousness.

Maybe the biological reason—i.e., the *real* reason—that I feel better after I've written an idea that's been bugging me for a while is that the *unexpressed* idea is a form of tension in my brain, pent-up energy, and as Freud said, pleasure is a lowering of "energic cathexis". Psychologically you could say I'm happy because I've done something to satisfy my desire for recognition, and both explanations may be true, but the biological one is surely less ambiguous and more 'basic', whatever that means.

This Ritalin chases away the wordless intuitions that usually accompany what I write—those comforting intuitions that give *substance* to my ideas and convince me of them. It's a very unsettling feeling.

Section 205. The question I've asked a thousand times but have never encountered in anyone else, until now.

Tuesday, November 9

Reading the textbook on international economics by Krugman and Obstfeld.

Wednesday, November 10

They say that when a country's interest rates increase, its currency will appreciate relative to another given currency[2] because, other things being equal—e.g., assuming that the expected future exchange rate isn't affected by the change in the current exchange rate—its expected rate of depreciation against the other one will thereby increase (since a hike in its current value means there's a greater distance for it to fall (if the expected future exchange rate is based on a projected depreciation of the currency) or a shorter distance for it to rise (if the future exchange rate is thought to be based on an appreciation) in order to land on the constant expected future exchange rate), reducing the 'real' (as opposed to nominal) profit to be made from investing in the currency with the higher interest rate[3] (because its now-higher projected depreciation against the other currency will reduce its real value and partly offset the profit from its higher interest rate), thus enabling companies with unwanted holdings of the second currency (which 'has' the comparatively low interest rate) to sell it in exchange for the first. In other words, those companies won't be able to find buyers of their currency unless they sell it at a depreciated rate against the first currency, because the more they 'depreciate' it the higher the buyer's real rate of profit will be in the future (for the reasons given above). But surely it's less complicated and equally true to say that by buying the second currency at a depreciated rate, companies can acquire more of it with less of their money holdings, which means that what the second currency lacks in favorable interest rates it makes up for in the greater amount

[1] Sarcasm doesn't come across well on paper.
[2] Actually, all others, but it's simpler to take only one as an example.
[3] Or, to be precise: buying assets that yield the higher interest rate, which are denominated in that currency.

that it allows companies to buy. That is, its buyers give up the first currency's higher interest rate but acquire more of the second currency than they had of the first, which means that (at the market equilibrium) they earn as much from the second as they would from the first. This explanation has nothing to do with the expected future exchange rate, which was integral to the first explanation. I don't know what the relation between the two is.

[…]

Thursday, November 18

Economics is killing me. Hate it. In the beginning it was cool but now I hate it. Returning to Shakespeare—*The Merchant of Venice*. I decided that since I have no motivation for anything I might as well pass the time enjoyably instead of walking from room to room like a ghost haunted by the past.

Saturday, November 20

Now *Julius Caesar*.

Tuesday, November 23

Reading Kierkegaard's *Johannes Climacus*. Then I'll reread the *Philosophical Fragments*, of which I've read only fragments.

That philosophy constantly revisits old themes and thus seems—*seems*—never to progress proves only that people in all ages must rediscover for themselves the same thoughts that occupied individuals in previous times. It doesn't prove e.g. the richness of the Greek philosophical mind and the paucity of cultures that followed it. –To be sure, most 'thinkers' have these thoughts rediscovered *to* them, by reading, half-mindlessly regurgitating and so on, while a few of us rediscover them *for ourselves*.

The first chapter of the book is a superfluous discussion of the relationship between these two theses: Philosophy begins in doubt, and Modern philosophy begins in doubt. Climacus hears them uttered indiscriminately, as if they're equivalent, by many people; he alone recognizes that they differ. The second one in particular bothers him because he thinks it's either a pointless truism that follows from the first (in which case: why does everyone assert it with such gravity?) or, if it's not a truism, it contradicts the first because it states that modern philosophy is unique by having begun in doubt, which means that earlier philosophies *didn't* begin in doubt, which means that philosophy in general doesn't begin in doubt. K. leaps into a characteristically long and awkward debate with himself to solve this problem, raising all sorts of extraneous questions that hide their insignificance behind big words like 'eternity'. But obviously the solution is that 'doubt' is meant in a different sense in each statement; a different idea is being emphasized, however superficially the two resemble each other. (What the ideas are is clear if you know anything about modern philosophy.) K. may have understood that and chosen to indulge his addiction to verbosity simply because it suited his greater purposes for the book.

Saturday, November 27

The only part of the book that interested me was the unfinished second part. Don't want to read the *P. F.* Instead skimmed Hilary Putnam's *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* today. Boorrriiing.

Sunday, November 28

One of my favorite recreations is to read Plutarch's *Lives*. (The Dryden translation, revised.) Coriolanus and Alcibiades today.

And Montaigne's essays. Very funny. "On some lines of Virgil".

Sangeeetha and I are corresponding regularly. Good! Our friendship hasn't died. She lives near D.C., so we'll probably meet sometime.

Monday, November 29

Read Emerson's essay "The Over-soul". Vaguely Schopenhauerian and mystical. "Transcendental" indeed. The "demonic" in Goethe. He was an elevated spirit but not a rigorous thinker. Nietzsche said "in Emerson we have *lost a philosopher*"—lost him because his education didn't prepare him for philosophy but could have. I understand Carlyle's opinion that there wasn't enough in Emerson for him to 'sink his teeth into'; he wasn't pithy like Nietzsche but diffuse. Nevertheless inspiring and a great man. I read him and my thoughts soar above Putnam and his ilk. E.'s ideas weren't very 'American'—I don't know why Harold Bloom calls him "America's thinker"—aside from their emphasis on individual realization (conceived differently than the archetypal American would conceive it). He's too (—here comes that dreaded word—) elitist!

I read "Heroism" also. Every paragraph anticipates Nietzsche. Makes me love life and myself and the future, less out of self-love than hu*man*-love, *nature*-love, *war*-love. The thrill of reading those passages! The vigor of prose that punches you in the gut! Emerson's writing is the element in which I thrive.

As for its "truth": while modern scholars and scientists may have a firmer hold on theoretical *veracity*, Emerson comes closer to grasping existential *truth*. He inspires; and if inspiration best grows in the soil of heroic myths, so be it. Self-realization—being true to yourself—raising yourself to your ideal—actualizing your potential—is a form of truth; if you require a scientific 'falsity' to spur you to your heights, if adhering to technical scholarship stifles you, then, by all means, be "untrue"! Let others laugh at your "illusions" while you laugh at their impotence.

As for me, I laugh at the illusions even as I cherish them.

Tuesday, November 30

Rereading Leibniz's *Monadology*, and other writings.

Wednesday, December 1

[…] Reading Lukács's *Realism in Our Time*, a thought-provoking and informative book, though outdated in parts (particularly the last chapter). He was one of the most erudite men in history.

Going to D.C. in a couple days.

Sunday, December 5

Living in the former mayor's mansion with about nine others my age. Rooming with two guys. Watching TV seems to be the favorite activity around here. Not much privacy, so I can't spend hours writing. 'Twould look strange. Can't look at internet porn either. Bummer. The Prozac is helping a little with social interaction.

Tuesday, December 7

My favorite person in the house is Abbey, a pretty, bright, articulate, friendly girl who lives on my floor. She towers above everyone else as a human being. Warm and kind and funny and brilliant.

Wednesday, December 8

Work at 10:00 everyday--or: on the days when I work, which will usually be from Monday to Wednesday. I'll have a part-time job on the other days. If I can find one. Finish work between 6 and 8. Wrote an article today on the history of the Inaugural ceremonies and what the schedule will be this year. Have two other assignments. Called various congressional offices and press secretaries--e.g. the one for the JCCIC--felt very journalistic and cool. I actually *enjoyed work*! At 5:00 went to the Canadian Embassy for a party all interns were invited to; about thirty came; I didn't know any of them. […]

Friday, December 17

Went to Ted Kennedy's Christmas party; he and a woman (his wife?) did a clever skit mocking Bush, DeLay, Schwarzenegger and other Republicans. They asked us not to report it to the press. Which was funny, because a lot of us *were* the press. I appreciated their trust. I shook Ted's hand and said a few words; wanted to talk to him longer but he was busy. He looked old and tired but still vital and intimidating. It's a strange sensation to be in the presence of history—and an even stranger to discover that history has a hunched back. You think of people like him as giants, larger than life; it's almost surprising to realize they're just humans, as fragile as the rest of us. A single bullet in the head would kill him. It amazed me that such fragility has lasted seventy years. He hasn't been assassinated. That seems remarkable, considering the world we live in. Maybe the world isn't as bad as everyone thinks.

Still working out every day. Miraculously.

Tuesday, December 21

Reading books on Congress and the American government. Also, Jon Stewart's *America (The Book)*, Tom Robbins' *Still life with Woodpecker*, Meg Greenfield's *Washington*, and Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, which is a record of his experiences in a concentration camp and an introduction to his theory of "logotherapy" (touted as the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy, after Freud's and Adler's). Abbey recommended it.

Frankl writes that when he lost the manuscript of his nearly completed book in Auschwitz he asked himself if his life was thereby rendered meaningless. After all, if he died in the camp, which he thought he would, he would leave no mark on the world—no books, no children. But he realized that the remainder of his life could still be meaningful if he treated his imprisonment as a chance to *live* his thoughts instead of merely writing them on paper. Auschwitz became for him a *challenge*, a way to test himself, and that's how he reconciled himself to it. When I read that I thought about my own desire to leave something behind me and understood for the thousandth time how pointless it is. To seek any kind of immortality through recognition-from-others (which is the only way humans can achieve 'immortality', whether it be biological or cultural) is misguided;—or, rather, to think that only *thereby* is one's life meaningful is misguided. It doesn't matter if one's achievements are lost when one dies or if they endure for millennia, influencing all of history; the point is that, no matter what, they will eventually be forgotten. *When* that happens is irrelevant. Whether instantly or in a million years, the event means the end of immortality; and when it

happens, all the fame one has already achieved means nothing (because the past means nothing[1]). Where's the sense in trying to conquer one's mortality by means of beings who are themselves—and whose *species* is—mortal? A better goal to strive for is simply the realization of one's potential, or the achievement of something worthwhile for its own sake, or love of another person—anything but immortality, which is, indeed, also *irrelevant*. –To attain peace of mind you have to live well, whatever that means for you; the prospect of being forgotten after you've died—which you *will* be, *inevitably* (and that knowledge should itself be comforting, in a way)—has nothing to do with any of this. At the end of my life I'll be happy if I've made the most of it because I'll be *recognizing myself*, and *that's* ultimately the root of happiness—not recognition by others, which is only a means to that end—and if I foresee that I'll be quickly forgotten it won't affect me because I'll have done all I can do and I'll understand the value of my existence and *that's all that matters*.

Wednesday, December 22

The book is impressive for being written by a common thinker, but it's hardly luminous. Frankl says he wants to "humanize" psychotherapy. Beware of mixing humanism and science! It's like trying to reconcile superficiality and depth. Frankl is a naïve child when he dabbles in metaphysics, religion, and ethics, invoking them in his psychological theories. –Just so you're not completely in the dark, the central claim of logotherapy is that man's basic motivational force is his search for meaning. He *needs* his life to have meaning, which ultimately takes precedence over pleasure and everything else. Frankl of course elaborates on this and provides compelling arguments—which convinced me that Freud had oversimplified—but beneath it all is a lack of analytical rigor. He's useful in the way that Feuerbach was to a generation reverent of Hegel: negatively, as a corrective to Freud; not quite for his own sake. But I won't deny that some of his insights and clinical anecdotes are startling.

I wish I'd taken notes as I read. I don't want to go back and do it now.

As a result of last night's entry (which meant more to me than to you because I *intuited* it), I've realized that I crave understanding not primarily for the sake of communicating it (i.e., for fame or out of altruism) but for my own sake. If I were alone in the world I would in fact work *harder* to understand it than I do now, rather than give up from my awareness of death. –That's the test of the true Yes-sayer to life: that he try to achieve as much as possible despite knowing that upon his death all he's done will be forgotten.[2] For then he's living his whole life *in life*, not comforting himself by imagining a Beyond (whether in Heaven or on an Earth that will continue to be occupied by people in whose memories he'll live). *Nietzsche*'s test ("the greatest weight"…) has more of the precision of a categorical imperative, but it's also impossible to live up to—so that *no one* (including himself) is a Yes-sayer by his standards, except in certain moments. Moreover, it creates the debilitating burden of feeling the need to affirm everything, and of asking oneself in every instant "Do I will this eternally?" (At least, that's its logical conclusion.)

Wednesday, December 29

I read Thomas Mann's "Death in Venice" and "The Blood of the Walsungs". I wouldn't say they're gripping stories, but they make you think. Partly because their meanings aren't perfectly clear. Also wrote these haiku:

the sight of flurried
snowflecks riding wind-currents
onto window-panes

[1] That statement is ambiguous, and in some contexts obviously untrue—but not in this one.
[2] (By humans, by "God", by existence…)

ice-rocky river
gliding past ice-stones smoothly
underneath the moon

armless birds making
unintelligible sounds
symbolize nature

a metal lamppost
scrapes unfeelingly against
the azure cloud-whiffs

I'm handicapped as an artist in that I don't know how to judge my work. I'm better at judging other people's works, though even then my opinions feel totally subjective and I'm rarely convinced of them. But regarding my own, if they're longer than haikus I don't how to decide whether they're lousy or masterful. (Well, no: I know when they're lousy; I *don't* know when—supposing they're not lousy—they're excellent or on the good side of mediocre.) If a reader who was qualified to judge told me that the beginning of the Book of Joe had promise I'd tackle it again; I quit only because I didn't want to continue a story of whose worth I wasn't sure. If someone could only reassure me that I have talent, I wouldn't need objective confirmations of the value of every project I begin in order to finish it; I'd proceed on faith, trusting that person's faith in me.

Friday, December 31

Writing an essay for grad school applications—writing from scratch, not using those two essays I showed you earlier, which are shit. Doing a textual analysis of aphorism 344 of *The Gay Science*. No, "textual analysis" sounds boring; I'm writing an *exegesis*. I'm exegecizing, as it were. Got my inspiration from Nietzsche's comment at the end of the preface to the *Genealogy of Morals* about the art of aphoristic exegesis.

Saturday, January 1, 2005

Every day I'm reminded that, living in this house, I'm surrounded by pygmies. (With the exception of Abbey.)

I always find it amusing when I'm in clubs that play mostly hip-hop and the DJ suddenly switches to classic oldies and everyone dancing cheers and all the people sitting down run over to the floor to dance. What could be more convincing evidence that people find earlier music more enjoyable than contemporary stuff (despite their continuing to insist that they really do like hip-hop and the rest)?

–What a mistake of an era we live in.

Tuesday, January 4

I'm starting to think that people's lack of interest in me is the clearest sign that I'm an excellent person.

Thursday, January 6

Saw *Eyes Wide Shut* again. Understood for the first time its artistry and richness. It's one of my favorite movies now. In the top ten.

I'm wasting my talents in this internship. I ought to be an art critic—as well as a philosopher, historian, psychologist, biologist, fiction writer, and musician.

One cannot understand this world without living life as a skeptic.

…Suddenly I panicked, aware that I've been wasting myself. So I studied music theory on the internet for a couple of hours. –What a resource! From now on I have to take advantage of it. It can allow people to be more educated than they've ever been in history. (Funny that it tends to have the opposite effect. –A reflection of the people who use it. Every great idea is corrupted upon contact with the masses. [No. Capitalism, not the masses.])

Monday, January 10

I do a good job of writing as colorlessly as I can for *The Hill*, but sometimes I insert a dab of color just to make it more readable. It's never offensive; it's usually funny or poetic. But it can't get past the censor. Mary Lynn erases everything that adds meat to the skeleton; what remains is a sack of bones barely held together. 'The blander, the better!' is her motto. She reworks it all, too, so that the end-product is nothing like what I wrote. And then I take no pride in it. –Well, I took no pride in it to begin with, but by the end I'm *ashamed* of it and don't even want to put my name to it.

Most journalists are wimps. They let the corporate culture castrate them as an offering to the Status Quo.

Tuesday, January 11

I feel a duty to describe for you what a good person I am. [Some irony intended there.] A duty not only to myself, but especially to you. After all, it might benefit you to know that a person as considerate as I walked the planet once. I fill every day with hundreds of little kindnesses that I hardly notice anymore because they're so habitual. To give you some examples— If I'm having a conversation and my partner involuntarily looks away from me for half a second because he feels shy for some reason—usually the result of his difficulty in maintaining eye-contact—I'll instantly look away too, simply to spare him the embarrassment of knowing that I caught his moment of weakness. I'd rather look weak myself than look into the hurt eyes of someone who's embarrassed. Or if he says something that sounds stupid I'll be extra-careful to respond appreciatively, to chuckle at his inane joke more than I would normally. I rarely ignore people's comments. I'll be in a room with eight others and somebody will say something and I'll be the only one to acknowledge him. I'm almost always 'diplomatic,' unless I know the person can handle it. I'm perfectly willing to let people think they know more about some given issue than I do, even when I'm vastly more knowledgeable than they. –The list could go on.

On the other hand…(you knew there had to be an 'on the other hand', didn't you?)…all that goodness is inseparable from a degree of timidity. Goodness = weakness, much of the time. When I'm in assertive, outgoing, energetic moods I'm less of an angel than normally. (I'm also more fun.)[1]

Twenty-four years have taught me that goodness in itself isn't rewarded. Only goodness that's flaunted is rewarded. I'm modest; I don't make a show of it. And so it goes unnoticed. –In return for my not 'judging' the unperceptive people who have always surrounded me, they can't resent it if I don't shower them with praises when they do some obtrusively kind act in front of a crowd, like make breakfast for their housemates. In that situation I'll thank them a couple times and remark about how lazy the rest of us are,

[1] But you're wrong if you think that "normally" I let myself be trampled on and am incapable of being stern. Quite the contrary.

and that'll be it. Everyone else will be like "Oh my god! You're so wonderful!"

–One can't describe oneself without being dishonest. The act of description overlooks millions of exceptions.

Wednesday, January 12

Partita No. 1, BWV 825. Glenn Gould. The fourth movement isn't the most fun, but it may be my favorite because of its dignity in ecstasy, its simplicity in passion. But no, I can't choose between the movements, they're all perfect.

I don't understand how people can be journalists their whole lives. Writing soulless shallow articles all the time, under a thousand ridiculous constraints, having to suppress themselves in their writing until they only *nominally* exist as autonomous subjects with opinions and personalities. It's like death. I sit at my desk and write as badly as possible and think 'This is what death must be like'. Menial work is worse when it's intellectual than when it's physical or mechanical. I prefer the part of my job that consists of transferring articles to the newspaper's website to the part that consists of being [mentally] a passive conduit of information.

Thursday, January 13

Writing about aesthetic value. You know I tackled the issue before; this time I'm going about it in a different way. A less ambitious way.

Friday, January 14

Today was an "adventure", if you understand that word in the loose sense in which, um…one of the characters in Sartre's *Nausea* understands it…I forget his name…he's somewhere in the middle of the book…a guy the main character meets—I forget his name too—it begins with an R—but I think the first guy is a socialist or something who spends all his time studying in the library and doesn't have much of a life and he asks R (with a hint of envy) if R has a lot of "adventures" (because R has spent years traveling around the world) and R asks what he means by that and etc. etc. So…I did something out of the ordinary today. It's a good story. A long story.

Linda Bayer is the head of my program. She's the one who found me my job. She lives across the street, though we don't see her often. The first time I ever saw her was on Hanukkah. She's Jewish, as are many of my housemates, and we had a quiet Hanukkah celebration together. From our phone-conversations I'd expected Bayer to be a dominating, confident, modern businesswoman who wears a suit all the time. I couldn't have been more wrong. She's a short, frumpy, pudgy, unattractive bohemian type, socially unperceptive, an incessant talker. That was my first impression. Today I was able to fill out the portrait. Abbey works for her; two days ago she asked me if I wanted to pretend to be a W.I.P. staffer for an afternoon. "Uhh… Huh?" She said that Bayer had to make a presentation to representatives from the Korean government who were thinking about sending two hundred interns to her program. It was a very big deal. Bayer wanted to give the best impression possible, which involved renting office space downtown for the day, pretending it was hers and showing it off, and hiring fake staffers. Yes. That was her plan. (It's like something out of *The Sting*!) She judged rightly that the Koreans wouldn't be impressed with her real headquarters way out in Silver Spring, in her house where dog-stench clings to the furniture. So she hired Eric and me to be her accomplices, in addition to Abbey and a few other real employees. I went to her house at around 1:00 today. Her presentation was set to begin at 2:00. She wasn't even dressed. She and another woman were frantically running around stuffing boxes with diplomas, pictures, books and anything else

that could be used to decorate offices. At the same time there was some problem involving an extension cord that wouldn't work. At the same time Bayer learned that Mary, the Korean in our house, who was supposed to describe her internship experiences at the meeting, was too sick to go. So Bayer called another Korean and asked her to substitute. But it turned out that this girl had some unfinished business with Bayer, having to do with money that was still owed to her for recruiting someone to the program, and so Bayer had to listen to her explain all the details—which went *on* and *on*—even as she was rushing around barking orders to us fake staffers about what to do with the extension cord and where to take the boxes and when to let the dog into the house.

Now, to appreciate the humor in the situation you'll have to picture to yourself a comically accurate personification of a control freak. Place this image in the most disorganized setting you can imagine. Keep in mind that today is not just any day; it is the most important day of the year for this panic-prone control freak. Who isn't even dressed, though her meeting is in forty minutes. And add the following: the inherent absurdity of the undertaking; the over-the-topness of it all (—large boxes overflowing with diplomas from Harvard and every other college attended by her and her children, photographs of family and weddings, copies of books she'd written, artifacts from African countries she'd visited, Christmas cards, a letter from Laura Bush, an autographed picture of Al Gore, reams of informational pamphlets); a young Israeli woman who works there part-time, obsequiously following the boss and occasionally hinting delicately that maybe it isn't necessary to take the bongo drums; a girl on the phone complaining about a totally unrelated problem; a young man wearing the Washington Internship Program t-shirt he was given standing quietly observing the scene, ready to help should his assistance be requested but firmly convinced that the best policy for now is to get out of the way and not contribute to the mayhem; another young man (Eric)—a real piece of work, absolutely imbecilic in social situations, possessing a degree of intelligence but psychologically unbalanced, off in his own zone most of the time, muttering incoherently, who has full-body nervous twitches and likes to stuff his hands down the front of his pants—entering and exiting the house repeatedly because he keeps forgetting things in his room, pacing and mumbling to himself detached phrases—"I don't know…" "you're awake now…" "and then I said…"—oblivious of the goings-on.

The Korean girl wasn't shutting up, so Bayer thrust the phone into my hand, saying "She's telling a long story. I can't get her to stop. Find out how much money she wants and make sure she knows where to meet us in an hour"—meanwhile I could hear the voice in the receiver continuing its tirade unfazed by the fact that no one was listening to it. I put the phone to my ear and let the voice wear itself out. When the girl heard a strange masculine voice speaking she changed her tone, so that it was gentler, and started her story from the beginning;—I periodically murmured assent (having no idea what she was talking about)—but soon she thought better of it and said she'd discuss it later. Then she asked about the meeting, said she didn't know how to get to the place, so I ran upstairs to Bayer (trying not to breathe through my nostrils: her room smelled of rank dog-sweat) and asked what was the closest metro-stop, etc. etc. Eventually Don came, a middle-aged guy who provided the only voice of reason but whose lungs were no match for Bayer's, with the result that he could only timidly offer a word here and there as she paused for breath in her rants. He didn't think all the boxes were necessary, but she overruled him, so we lugged them out to the car and finally got underway, having waited an extra ten minutes for her to slather a coat of Elizabethan-style makeup on her now-glowing face. The twenty-minute trip was another source of delight for me, as I listened to Bayer nag and worry and plan and give orders in that clueless, hard-to-take-seriously way of hers. You had to submit to her not because she had a commanding presence but because she just *didn't take breaths* as she talked!

We arrived. Called Abbey, who was already upstairs in the office, to find out if the Koreans had arrived yet. If they had, we were in trouble: we were carrying boxes full of African totems, which might have aroused suspicion. Fortunately they hadn't. We raced upstairs—it was an impressively professional and phallically imposing building—and learned from the receptionist in the lobby that the Koreans were waiting in the conference room. Uh-oh. We snuck past, walked down the corridor to the two offices and unloaded everything. Bayer was in her frantic mode again, entreating us to hurry up so the meeting could begin. I was given papers to pass out to the two Koreans currently being entertained by Abbey. We entered the conference room en masse…and I had the pleasure of witnessing my first board-room meeting. It was

awesome. With the introductions over, Don launched into his Bayer-boosting speech: "Dr. Bayer's reputation certainly precedes her. She studied at Harvard, she was a strategic analyst on the staff of the Clinton administration, she's done this and she's done that…" It was indeed hard to believe that this small neurotic Jewish woman had accomplished so much. She spoke next—spoke very well, did a great job—"deserved an Academy Award", as Eric said. Nevertheless, the tension in the room was at a dangerously high level. The stiffness and formality of the whole charade were terrifying. With the exception of Eric, who was yawning, rolling his eyes and fidgeting—and, to an extent, the Koreans, who sat there mutely and listened—we were robots programmed to smile on cue and nod gravely and grunt in agreement and raise eyebrows in admiration. It was all I could do not to leap onto the table and rip off my shirt and beat my chest while screaming Tarzanishly "Ohahohahohahohahhh!!!"

Four of us were allowed to leave; we hung out in the offices. Abbey, Eric, the Israeli and I. Poor Eric. Made a fool of himself, as usual. But worse than usual. To give only one example: we were discussing Abbey's study-abroad in Costa Rica and the Israeli's plans to teach English in Ecuador, commenting on various cultural differences, and Eric blurted out:

"Yeah, I was raised by penguins in Antarctica. So just imagine what a huge cultural shock it was to come to America!"

"What?" the Israeli said.

"I was raised by…penguins. In Antarctica. It was really cold. So…coming here…"

Silence. "That wasn't funny," she said, brutally. But then she laughed and apologized for her bluntness. To make the sudden awkwardness even worse, Eric acknowledged it. "That moment wouldn't have been so awkward if I hadn't said the joke twice."

Two hours later the meeting was over. The final joke of the day was that the Koreans never asked to see the offices, which made all our work meaningless. But I was paid $100.

Sunday, January 16

Reading *Waiting for Godot*.

When I write original essays, like the one I'm writing now, I realize I have the potential to be an impressive thinker. Only when I'm not writing them do I lapse into mediocrity and self-doubt.

I've always had a guilty conscience about doing all my writing on the computer. It seems improper to change the way writing is done so late in history. What right have I to reject the tradition of millions of artists? If longhand worked for them and it doesn't for me, there must be something wrong with me; I must be inauthentic somehow. Still, I can't abandon the word-processor: it's faster, editing is easier, there remain no records of wretched first drafts, the process of watching text unfold on the screen—line by line, word by word—is addictive—almost beautiful—and the word-processor distances my creation from me, allowing me to respect it as I can't something written by hand. Writing manually is so cumbersome by comparison that I can't understand how people used to have the patience to write books.

Renée Fleming is the best soprano I've ever heard. Emma Kirkby may be equal…but I don't think so…the soulful beauty of Fleming's voice moves me to tears.

[…]

Monday, January 17

Sometimes I get tired of not allowing myself unjust thoughts. I get tired of being understanding, of knowing that to understand is to forgive. I hate being equal. I want to be able to look at a person and think "You are contemptible, you are *bad*, I'm *better* than you"—to be able to think that with full conviction. I want the freedom of not living scientifically. Too much knowledge is unhealthy. Knowledge is power, yes,

but to know is to know that you're powerless. Knowledge is like the panopticon. I haven't been able to think that *liberating* thought for maybe a decade. Do you know what that's like? To have to look on people like Jason as brothers, to know that you can't rightly think "What a loser!"? Do you know what it's like not to be able to revenge yourself for a life of isolation with the sweet malice of pride? To be so honest that you can't help being honest with *yourself*? (—the most devastating and rare kind of honesty.) To *always look at yourself*??

But then the thought creeps up, "You're admirable for having such knowledge, for being so honest." No! I'm not! You're wrong! "And you're even more admirable for refusing to believe something so flattering." No! 'Admirable' has nothing to do with it! I refuse to be labeled 'admirable'! "And you're even more admirable for drawing out your idea *ad infinitum*, for being the best kind of stubborn." No! What do you mean, 'best kind of stubborn'? 'Best' doesn't exist! "And you're even more admirable for having the insight that every advance you make, every refutation you make of my 'therefore, you're better', invites precisely my 'therefore, you're better'. For knowing the irony in the fact that knowing you shouldn't be called admirable is itself a reason for calling you admirable. For knowing the contradiction…"—the *maddening* contradiction!—"…at the very center of human life, the contradiction that, insofar as one is human, one must e*valu*ate every fact, including the fact that one knows every e*valu*ation is meaningless. And when I've stopped speaking you're going to scream 'No!', and that will merely invite another compliment because we're humans and we can't not judge." No! No! No! If I can't escape the judgment that even *I* must make, I'll at least know that in the world of truth, I'm nothing, and in the world of truth, there is no 'good' or 'bad', and in the world of truth, we're all wrong. And although that means I'm forced to live a split life, I will rise above the pain; I will rise above the shallow compliments; I will rise in the only way one can: *by laughing*.

—And those two paragraphs contain the rational meaning of wisdom,[1] and you haven't understood me.

Tuesday, January 18

Today I represented *The Hill* at a luncheon/fashion show sponsored by the California State Society. Being from the press, I sat in the V.I.P. section with congressmen and other V.I.P.s. My mom would have been awestruck by the sumptuousness of it all, but I was only amused. Congressmen gave short speeches, a priest or reverend or something said a prayer or something for Californians, we gave the pledge of allegiance to "the greatest country in the world"—I couldn't decide whether to laugh at *that* or at the fact that no one else laughed at it—then we had lunch, and then we watched a long fashion show that I couldn't have tolerated had I not been drunk. (Drank two bottles of wine. –Everything was free, of course. It always is at these parties.) I realized that the purpose of fashion shows isn't to admire clothes but to admire bodies. I doubt anybody gave a shit about the clothes; the *models*, though…our eyes were glued to them. When the first men came out after a round of women, all the women in the crowd whistled and cheered, of course. (Which the men hadn't done for the female models.) At the end of the show they all dressed up as soldiers and patriots and carried a huge flag. The photographer I was with, Patrick Ryan, told me that every show he's seen since 9/11 has ended that way. Christ Almighty.

The wine oiled the gears in my tongue-muscles; I used them to have a great conversation with the girl sitting next to me.

Incidentally, I've attended other events I haven't told you about. Like the press conference at the Mandarin Oriental hotel in honor of the $200,500 Inauguration package they're offering any couple, which includes five nights in the presidential suite, a private jet to and from D.C., 24-hour butler service, and too much other stuff to list. (I wrote a little piece about it in the paper, which Mary Lynn blanderized.) Free food, delicious, and a tour of the presidential suite. *C'était remarkable*. Something out of a movie. A television crew was filming a segment on it. Funny to watch. Went like this—

[1] The existential meaning is different. It can't be communicated.

Correspondent guy (staring into the camera as we stared at him): "I'm here at the presidential suite of the Mandarin Oriental hotel, where a lucky couple is going to spend four days and five nights. It's like paradise here. This is the living room that I'm standing in; you can see already what a magnificent place it is. And just think: it could all be yours! Hi, I'm Brick Shetland, and in the next few minutes I'm going to give you a private tour of this little slice of heaven. –Okay, let's do it again. Didn't feel right. I was too fast…"

Dozens of policemen and a S.W.A.T. team made us evacuate the building tonight as we were preparing the paper for its publication tomorrow. Presumably a bomb threat. For the last few hours I'd been struggling through detailed technical web-work while drunk. Did a darned respectable job, too.

Wednesday, January 19

Got a job today. Busboy at a restaurant. Training shift next week.

[…]

Sunday, January 23

Finished *Waiting for Godot*. Didn't really enjoy it, but appreciated its existentialist meaning.

Once again, I feel as if modern technology is allowing me to cheat. If I want to describe a rundown church, for example, I can look on the internet to find the right words and then write something like "Corinthian columns with chipped curlicues and severed acanthus leaves"; in the past I would've had to have a large vocabulary. It makes me feel like a hack.

Still, this story is better than anything I've ever written.

Wednesday, January 26

On the way home from work today, while I was on the subway, an Asian man standing near me broke into song. He just…started singing. A nicely dressed, normal-looking fellow. He was reading the words from a book; they were in a different language. It was weird at first. A man sitting next to him, a crotchety old guy with a surly expression seared onto his face, instantly covered his ears. His reaction, in fact, may have been stranger than the actual singing: he didn't look surprised, he didn't look puzzled, he didn't look disgusted; after the first two notes he simply put his fingers into his ears and kept them there. Later he walked away. No one said anything for the duration of the (long) song; I observed everyone's reaction, and it was, almost without fail, blank. The situation struck me as surreal. But after the first two minutes, in which my one thought was "What the hell?", I started to enjoy it. The fellow had a good voice. This a capella performance on a subway where everyone else was silent, everyone in his own world, thinking his own thoughts—steered by music into a virtually preordained vein:—it was moving. It was spiritual. We were all the same distant atoms as usual, but we were drawn together. I sensed the walls between us dissolving; I sensed my own shyness dissolving; and I wanted to sing myself, or at least speak to everyone as a brother. I realized…'We're just people…they're just people…what's the point of all this isolation?' The meaning of the song was appropriate: in answer to a question, the man said it was a prayer, and that each day he prayed as often as he could.

Thursday, January 27

D.F.W. has more talent than I do, but he doesn't use it wisely. Judging by the excerpts I've read, his stories won't be timeless classics. They have the mark of *machinery* written all over them, the heartless technological age. D.F.W. is a wizard, but, as a *New York Times* critic wrote, "maybe the wizard should grow a heart".

My hope is that my excess of heart will disguise my lack of wizardry.

Friday, January 28

Began work at 6:00 p.m., ended at 1:30. First day. Not fun. Busboy. Popular, busy Irish pub. Coworkers seem to be jackasses, with a few exceptions.

Saturday, January 29

This job isn't hard. It's just clearing tables, setting tables, and constantly taking care of odds and ends in the back. But seven hours exhaust you, especially on a busy night when you're hurrying back and forth—squeezing through crowds—every second.

Sunday, January 30

On Friday night Sangeetha called me. At around 11:00, when I was working. When I heard the words "It's Sangeetha" I shouted in jubilation, unable to control myself. They must have given me an adrenaline rush or something: for the next five minutes I talked so fast and so much she could barely get a word in. –Or maybe I consciously didn't let her, thinking that's what she wanted, since she seemed sort of shy. She sounded different than I remembered—more like a mature woman. Talking to her lifted me up, so that I finished the night on a second wind. It was a natural high, like being drunk without alcohol. I felt like smiling the whole rest of the night.

Yesterday everyone except Jason accompanied me on my makeover day. Kara and Abbey's idea. They thought it was time I changed my hairstyle. I needed a cooler one. So we went to Pentagon City, found a beauty salon, and I was transformed into an object of lingering looks from girls. Seriously. Abbey and Kara observed the whole metamorphosis. My stylist was a divinely inspired crazy woman. She chattered away the whole time. She loved it; loved remaking someone so out-of-touch with pop culture into a clone of the lead singer of Bare Naked Ladies. I sat there passively, letting her do whatever she wanted, asking for advice occasionally from Kara and Abbey, trusting them more than myself. It seemed to be the highpoint of their week. –Funny how women who normally don't take much notice of you invest a lot of psychic energy in changing the way you look if you so much as say, "Sure". Every other priority of theirs, including their own shopping needs, suddenly pales in comparison to making you hip.

After that little adventure we went clothes-shopping for me. It seemed to make them so happy that I decided not to be stingy with my money.

John was the only other guy with us. I was grateful of his company.

I barely socialize with the people at work. They don't interest me. Essentially I spend seven hours in silence.

…Spoke too soon. Met two new ones tonight. Friendly.

Monday, January 31

There are three newspaper issues a week. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. The only days I work, coincidentally. Every day one of my jobs is to put all the articles onto the website. All of them! It takes

forever. It isn't hard, though. I used to respect people who do that sort of thing, thinking it requires a lot of technical skill and ingenuity. It doesn't.

[…]

Reading Eugene O'Neill's play *Long Day's Journey into Night.*

Tuesday, February 1

Called Sangeetha. Lively conversation. She's as effervescent as I remember. The one intelligent, pretty girl I've ever had a real connection with. We're as comfortable with each other as we were four years ago. We might meet this weekend. Or next.

I'm glad Dean is going to be the DNC chairman. I used to worry he was too liberal to fit into the system, but I've decided that "too liberal" is a contradiction. What the party needs is a vision; Dean is the best person to provide that. He'll give it direction. The reason we lost the election isn't that we're too liberal; it's that Kerry's team was incompetent. The two things we need are a simple, compelling message, and a grassroots organization (enter Dean).

Besides, Dean is the only politician I admire (from what I know of him). –No, that's not true. Obama. I hope Obama and Dean represent the future of the party. [Ugh. It's hard to reread this stuff.]

Thursday, February 3

Nine hours of bussing.

Friday, February 4

Eminem. Such *energy* in his voice! That's a major reason he's popular. And he enunciates, unlike every other rapper I've heard. "The Way I Am" has always intrigued me by virtue of its explicit nihilism. All his songs are nihilistic, obviously, but in that one he says "I am whatever you say I am…I don't know, it's just the way I am". *I am whatever you say I am*. In that sentence is a world of despair. He has given up trying to define himself; he doesn't care anymore. He's so cynical that his identity and his morality are matters of unconcern to him. He *has* no identity; he *has* no morality; and he doesn't give a shit. And he is the spokesman of an entire culture.

Saturday, February 5

But what a fuckin' whiner. Whines about everything. […] –In interviews M&M complains like a child about all the pressure he's under. In one of his songs Freddie Mercury complains about the same thing, but in an uplifting, inspirational way. I'm not thinking of "Under Pressure"; no, I'm thinking of "We are the champions": "I've taken my bows - And my curtain calls - You brought me fame and fortune and everything that goes with it - I thank you all - But it's been no bed of roses - No pleasure cruise - I consider it a challenge before the whole human race - And I ain't gonna lose." See, he construes it as a challenge, not as an excuse to be an asshole.

I'm making a great effort not to moralize in my story. I don't want it be a black-and-white contrast between bad Western civilization and good Sapa backwardness. (It takes place in Sapa, though I don't name the town because I take liberties in describing it.) I want it to be ultimately a sad portrayal of man's fate, of the fact that the Demon who has corrupted society is latent in everyone, even in simple Sapa villagers; and in the end all you can do to avoid anguish is to seek a kind of immortality in the grandeur and simplicity of nature.

A problem I have with Nietzsche's *amor fati* is that…if you're grateful for everything that happens to you, doesn't gratefulness lose some of its force? No matter what it is…you're grateful for it. That kind of gratitude seems forced, insincere, as though it arises from some ulterior motive—as indeed it does, namely the desire not to cry all the time. The tacit reasoning behind it is 'How can I be happy? Oh!—here's a good way! I'll tell myself that everything that happens to me is in some way beneficial.' That gratitude originates in sickness, as Nietzsche surely knew. He knew he was a decadent, after all.

On the other hand, *amor fati* needn't be an all-encompassing love. In fact, it isn't. It's just a vague outlook on life, a mode of experience grounded in self-confidence and self-love—which is also love of life. Love of life isn't love of *everything in* life, every piece of ugliness. I needn't be "grateful" for all my pain in order to have *amor fati*—though I can't be bitter, either. I have to accept it. I have to accept it with a forgiving smile, knowing that I've learned from it, that it's given me satisfaction, and that it's played a part in the formation and perpetuation of my good will towards myself (and thus life).

As for Nietzsche's equation of strength with love of life....I think he may have been wrong. Was Flaubert weaker than Goethe just because he wasn't as well-disposed towards life? What does 'weakness' mean? An inability to accomplish great things? Well, Flaubert did accomplish great things (though not as great as Goethe's). Is it resentment, bitterness, a lack of self-confidence? Surely that begs the question. Besides, such qualities can give their bearer a fierce determination, i.e., a kind of strength. –Anyway, no one has real control over whether his dispositions say Yea or Nay.

Tuesday, February 8

Joined JDate: Jewish dating. Kara and Abbey have been doing it for a while and they said it's worth the price, and Match.com was yielding zero results, so I let optimism win out over cynicism for the billionth time in my life and paid $35. It was the first good investment I've made in ten years. Already received emails and IMs. I'm actually excited! When was the last time I was excited?—not including moments of inspiration while writing stories. When…? Lord knows. I'd forgotten what it felt like to be excited over something involving girls.

Thursday, February 10

Talking to Dorothy is both a delight and a source of pain. She has the mannerisms of most Korean women, which I can't resist. She's unaware of her cuteness, which I can resist even less. She's intelligent, personable (though shy), has a beauty made earthy and intimate by its flaws. But she has a boyfriend in Korea, and her English isn't fluent, and I live with her—all three of which do not bode well for the possibility of a relationship. She asked her mother to send her a Korean textbook she could use to teach me the language. Seems excited. It boggles my mind that girls can get pleasure out of relationships they perceive as totally asexual. –Well, even with Koreans there's always sexual tension—*more* so than with Americans, ironically—…but they're somehow unconscious of it, or it doesn't mean the same thing to them that it does to Westerners.

Sometimes I wonder why *I'm* always the one who has to rise above his humanity, to forgive and be kind and understanding and never do anything morally questionable. I think, if everyone else can be flawed, why can't I? So I do things that my instincts revolt against, like visit prostitutes.[1] But in my better moments I realize that I should try to be excellent precisely *because* few others are. I should take advantage of the unique combination of elements that compose me to prove that integrity and goodness *are* possible—to use *myself* to convince myself there's hope for mankind. But then I think, 'I know I'm capable of living as if under the eye of the Moral Panopticon. And being *capable* is all that matters, for my purposes.

[1] What Montaigne said of himself is true of me: my reason is more depraved than my instincts.

Knowing I'm capable of "integrity" and "goodness" implies that integrity and goodness are possible. I also know I'm capable of something approximating evil. So what's the point of living a saintly life under these conditions? Doing so has no bearing on the question of whether you're a "good" person,[1] or whether humans in general are good, because (1) you already know you *can* be, and (2) you know you can be a bad person as well. So, whether you live morally or not, you remain the same kind of person 'underneath it all'. The appearance may change, but the essence is the same. And that makes you think "Why should I go to the effort of changing my appearance (the way I act) if that won't affect my essence (my potential, the way I *am*)?"' Thus I persuade myself it's acceptable to be amoral, or even immoral. But of course it doesn't feel right. And that reasoning has some pretty scary logical consequences, for example that rape is okay. –But you could insert the caveat '…unless your action harms someone', as paying a prostitute does not. (Yes yes, I know one could quibble about that, but that's the least of the problems facing the 'immorality is okay' argument.) That, however, is only a postponement of the inevitable, namely the realization that (1) maybe acting virtuously at all times *could*, in the end, change who you are (your dispositions), and (2) even if it couldn't, by living a morally impeccable life (i) you'd confirm what is, after all, at the moment only a belief (that you're capable of such a life), and (ii) you'd feel good about yourself, and (iii) you'd set an example for others, and (iv), depending on how dedicated you are, you could make the world a better place…. But in spite of all that, if I see a box of cookies that isn't mine lying around the house it's possible I'll take one of them, thinking 'Who cares?' But I'll know I shouldn't. I might not understand why, but I'll 'know' it. Ultimately, that intuition should be all that matters. Arguments will always be available for either side, for and against it, but the intuition itself cannot be argued away. And generally speaking, you should trust your intuitions more than your reason.

Friday, February 11

Finished *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Now *that* is what I call good drama. To do it justice, to fully understand it, you'd have to be O'Neill as he wrote it, weeping convulsively, his tears smudging the ink on the paper. Clearly it was written for no one but himself—and maybe his wife—but it contains universal philosophical themes nonetheless. Its metaphysics is like Faulkner's in *The Sound and the Fury*: the past is the present and the future; there is no escape from it. We live in the past, even if we try to ignore it. The present is essentially only the edge of the past; the future will be the present and is therefore dominated by the past. Psychologically it's an extraordinarily complex play, revealing the contradictory essences of each character—his strengths, his flaws, his hopes, the experiences that have made him what he is—in dialogue that faithfully depicts the innate volatility of people—the way they'd act if they didn't have to wear masks. It's a tragedy in the grand tradition. All its characters are tragic: having virtues but forced by circumstances to succumb to their weaknesses, and to turn against each other, and to deny themselves even as they have deep self-understanding and know they're denying themselves—and that they can't do anything else. It's free will versus fate. Fate wins.

Reading it, I was amazed at how contingent an individual's identity is. Had I lived O'Neill's childhood, who knows what kind of person I'd have become? Probably suicidal, like him. –But then again, a core of me would have been the same as it is now, a genetic core.

Sunday, February 13

I'm making a great effort to avoid an excess of sentiment in the story. Sentimentality has always been the literary fault I'm most prone to; with this story I want to put it behind me.

[1] Most people act morally just because they want to think of themselves as a 'good person'—even though, if what's true of me is true of them (as I'm sure it is), acting morally has no bearing on the question of their worth.

I write as Tom Robbins does (according to an interview I read).[1] I begin with only the vaguest idea of what's to follow. In this case I began with the idea that an American tourist would spend a few days in Sapa, and I'd use his experiences to write a final farewell to a world of simplicity and beauty that's being killed by capitalism. I also wanted to incorporate somehow the notion that the pure ideal of Woman is equivalent to the ideal of Nature. To love one is to love the other. The beauty of each is the beauty of the other. I started with a stream-of-consciousness passage because I was in the mood to write a stream of consciousness. I rationalized that mood by thinking 'I'll write about a dream he has in a hotel in Sapa, and in this dream will be a condensed version of the story's themes.' To rationalize my inclination to write lucidly and beautifully rather than in the cryptic but realistic style of Joyce, I thought 'The whole point of the story is to praise beauty, so thematically it makes sense for me to write an (unrealistically) eloquent dream.' I started the dream with a description of an (Asian) girl's hair in language that evokes nature—e.g., a man is walking through a forest of black trees on scalpish white flaky soil, etc.—then I broadened it to encompass all of nature—even the universe, where the man can "breathe as on Earth without struggle" because he *is* the universe, he is a natural being like the girl (who, however, represents specifically the *aesthetic* side of nature)—and at the end I brought it back to the girl, again describing her features with terms borrowed from nature (like 'obsidian', 'chestnut', 'alabaster', 'raven', etc.), and the man is full of love for her (and thus nature). Then I thought, 'Okay, what now? Hmmm… [Five minutes of thought.] – He gets woken up by the telephone, his wake-up call to get ready for the tour.' When I wrote that the phone's ringing "jarred" him, I realized (taking my cue from the unpleasant connotations of "jarred") that 'I can have technology represent Western civilization! And throughout the story there can be a conflict between technology and nature! Yay!' The boy hangs up the telephone and slides back into his dream as he turns the pillow over to the cool side—which is a simple pleasure, sensuous, and therefore in opposition to the telephone's (technology's) brutal complexity.[2] I wanted to have two Japanese girls accompany the boy on his tour because that would give me an opportunity to write about women. I added Clyde as The American. I went through a long debate with myself, which lasted for several pages, as to whether the Japanese girls would ultimately be the female prototype I needed. I decided they wouldn't, because otherwise I'd be mixing Japan with Vietnam—two very different cultures—and contaminating the purity of the 'Vietnam is awesome' theme. But then…how could I justify having those girls in the story? I realized they could represent what happens in the first few decades of capitalism's invasion of a formerly traditional society: they'd retain some feminine virtues (like beauty and a degree of innocence), but their corruption would be starting to show itself. As evidenced in the clothes they wore, their shallowness,[3] etc. I'd need a Vietnamese girl to be the prototype of Goodness (or Woman, Instinct, whatever you want to call it—as well as Vietnam itself, because (in my story) Vietnam is Nature…and Nature is Woman, so Woman is Vietnam. Vietnam is a frail, transcendent woman, sickly but otherworldly.). Some villager Martin would meet later. When I wrote the dialogue between Martin and Le I wanted to portray (1) the lack of self-consciousness of tribal Viets—as opposed to the self-consciousness of American tourists—(2) the friendliness, sincerity and warmth of people who haven't been hardened by Western civilization, and (3) the fact that greed is inherent even in simple peasants—and thus that the seed that sprouted capitalism (that's always sprouted strife) is latent in Vietnam too, so its corruption is inevitable. These three were supposed to be themes running through the whole story. But soon I grew disgusted with the dichotomy that was developing between 'good primitiveness' and 'bad civilization'—even when tempered by theme (3)—and I went through a crisis of writer's block—right around the time when I was writing Martin's reflections on Western society, which were becoming too moralistic—and I decided I had to be more unbiased—had to acknowledge the strengths and flaws of each civilization—and the real tragedy (or, perhaps, tragedy #2) could be mankind's inability to unite the respective strengths in one culture. I proceeded with Martin's analysis of the West until, upon

[1] To understand this paragraph you'll have to skip ahead to the copy of the story I'll eventually put into this journal.
[2] By the way, 'cool' is a recurring motif. Whenever you see that word, think 'The author approves of this situation.' Think 'fresh', 'alive', 'pleasant'—or, in short, 'the area around Sapa', i.e., majestic nature and deep living.
[3] You'll notice that most of the tourists are shallow. Like the guy who says "Wow" when he sees the church and takes a picture of it.

rereading everything, I saw that in the context of the story it popped out of nowhere and didn't make sense. So I inserted the part about the traditional-music concert. That had to be the prelude to the discussion of Western music. (I'd originally planned to have the order reversed, but it wouldn't have worked.) That's as far as I've gotten. –The point is that after almost every paragraph my conception of the story changes. And I never know what's coming next. It's all improvisation. And I often get my thematic ideas from accidents in the process of writing—for example, a certain sentence will trigger ideas that'll change my perspective. It occurred to me today out of the blue that I could introduce the Female as a performer in the concert, whom Martin would meet again (fortuitously) later.

I still don't know how I'll order all the themes that keep bouncing around. But, you know, if I get into a bind I can always rely on the cop-out 'Let the reader take from it what he will.' …It just occurred to me that the plight of Vietnam, in being the plight of beauty in modernity, can also be the plight of the ancient concept of 'woman'. Its death can be the death of the "chauvinistic" but poetic ideal of women, bound up with some of the assumptions of chivalry that are no longer politically correct. Maybe *that's* the way I can link Woman, Vietnam, Nature and Beauty. They're all otherworldly, they're all tied up with instinct and the primordial, they're all dying.

…No, it's too early to go off on thematic rants like that. Screw the 'Woman' idea. Screw the pure symbolism. The story is more complicated than that. The characters are characters, not just symbols. I have to let the themes appear when they're ready. They show themselves only when they want to; it's useless for me to plan ahead. My job is to write the sentences, not to create the meanings. (They use me as a vessel.)

…It's obvious to me that there's something deeply impious about sex. How can Christians fail to see that?[1] Any kind of sex is impious. It's depraved, barbaric, degrading; it certainly turns one's eye away from God. […]

Also, sex is inherently somewhat degrading to women. Penetration is violation. Thus, if morality is something like a duty to uphold human dignity, sex is immoral. (Which shows you how silly, from one perspective, the idea of morality is.)

Monday, February 14

I'm sure that most people who've read it haven't understood Nietzsche's claim that he writes because he wants to be *rid of* his thoughts. They've skipped over it, as they skip over everything he writes. But he has a point: in the case of certain people, a single idea will continually reappear in their minds until they write it down. It'll pop up randomly day after day, week after week, month after month....but when it's been written, it's gone, perhaps forever. Extraordinary, isn't it?! Some people have a *need* to write; if they can't, they live in agony. How can that be explained? What's the biological/psychological cause?

You know what faith I have in the power and truth of instinct. Initially I'm always skeptical of it, but after analyzing it I generally decide there's some kind of validity to it or a 'reason' for it. Genius is instinct, goodness is instinct. Even ordinary everyday intuitions, as in understanding a joke or in judging a person's qualities, usually are true. That's why I'm distrustful of my merely *reasoned* objections to women's instincts in deciding what men they want. I argue that their choices tend to result from a lack of insight into character, but it's hard to believe that nature would implant in hundreds of millions of young women what I've thought is a nearly complete incompetence when it comes to choosing their mate. Nature usually does a good job. So maybe they're right: maybe I am at heart an unimpressive person they can't love. Maybe they have more knowledge of me than I do myself. This possibility is the main reason I let my rejections get me down. But there are plenty of arguments against it: for example, women didn't like Nietzsche, and look how wrong they were! He was not only a genius but a kind, brave, loyal man. Another example: when I'm outgoing, women suddenly are attracted to me—even though I haven't really 'changed' in any way: I'm still the same person; I just act with less regard for others' opinions/feelings than normally. (Put differently, I'm

[1] Unconsciously they do see it, as is obvious from all the restrictions they place on sex.

less kind to myself and to others.) As if that were a good measure of my worth, or even of my ability to protect and provide for a girl! (which—let's face it—is the only thing nature cares about in this case) Besides, if it *is*, in some twisted way, a measure of my overall 'worth' in nature's eyes (—and, you have to admit, who could be wiser than nature?) or of my ability to provide for a woman, the point is that it's been in me all along, latent. Therefore, it seems after all that women's intuitions, even when they bear on something as important as the mate they choose, are often wrong.

I'm not trying to shift the blame, though. I understand, in spite of all that, that much of it lies with me.

—Don't take any of this too seriously, I beg you. I'm just bored. I'm at work, waiting for articles to be written so I can post them on the website.

Tuesday, February 15

You read Dylan Thomas and you think 'Here's a good writer (albeit too fond of word-play); he must have been an Other, someone you'd look up to and want to impress'; then you look at his picture, and you think 'Maybe I spoke too soon. He must have been an eccentric nerd with not a very strong character, judging by his weak chin and flabby face.' And you realize: someone can be an exceptionally talented writer and thinker--not that *he* was--and yet not be a person you'd admire. You might not even care what he thinks of you. Generally you care only in the case of someone who has charisma. *Charisma* is the all-important element. It is what defines the true Other. Now, such a person is someone whose recognition you seek. He is your link to immortality (since being recognized is the only way you can be immortal). I.e., in order for recognition to really satisfy you--in order for it to validate in your eyes your human worth, through which validation you achieve a kind of immortality--it has to be by someone with charisma. The more he has, the more 'validating' his opinion is. (Think about it: would you really cherish fame that lasted for centuries or even millennia if it were only in the eyes of retarded people? Or ugly bookish nerds? Or idiotic obnoxious cowboy-types (who, as I understand the term, don't have 'charisma')?[1] No. That immortality wouldn't be *real* immortality, the kind that actually *means* something, the kind that's validating.) Now, one of God's functions--perhaps his main one--is to be the being whose recognition you most seek, the truest avenue to immortality. He is, as it were, infinitely charismatic. He's more self-confident, more wise, more good,[2] more powerful than anyone. --The logical implication of all this is that charismatic people are closer approximations to God than anyone else. Said in a more general way, we instinctively judge them as more valuable human beings than others. This is why I wrote all that crap yesterday. Most of the time I'm not very charismatic, and therefore, on the level of instinct, I'm not perceived as 'valuable' or God-like. Unfortunately, I trust instinct/intuition more than reason. Especially in this case, since almost everything humans do is done indirectly for the sake of immortality [no: recognition] and thus (assuming God's nonexistence) for the sake of charismatic people's opinions. Value justified by *reason*--as in, 'he's intelligent, creative, curious..., therefore valuable'--rather than intuition has no force and is only paid lip-service to. E.g., when people say 'Chris is a really good person, very smart, interesting, and kind'...and then ignore me when I talk to them, while paying close attention to an extroverted guy across the room. They instinctively respect him more than me, and they want him to think well of them more than they want me to. He's an 'end in himself'; I'm a…'respectable means', or something like that. Of course, if you analyze these intuitions you can find no logical basis for them: 'Self-confidence? Wit? Isn't it arbitrary that these are subconsciously equated with value?' But no amount of reasoning will destroy the feeling that *something* about such a person, something compelling, makes him an Other, someone people respect. --Moreover, I can't help thinking that such a person is what makes the world exciting, what gives the *world* value (in our eyes). Without him/her there'd be nothing to fight for (because that's always done for the sake of recognition), there'd be no reason to act morally (" " " " " " " " "), there'd be no reason to create art or

[1] I'm using the word in a loose sense. It's hard to explain.

[2] Goodness isn't necessarily implied in 'charisma', but it doesn't hurt.

science or make cultural advances (“ “ “ “ “ “ “ “ “). Certainly we don’t consciously think of these people when we do such things; they’ve been internalized. (Or it may be that one’s *parents* have been internalized... That’s probably what it is. But, judging from introspection, I think that respect for ‘charismatic’ people unconsciously becomes an increasingly important motive as one grows older.) --I’m being too subtle, though, or not subtle enough. Most people have *some* ‘charisma’. It isn’t just a *few* who give the world value (i.e., whose recognition really means something); it’s mankind as a whole, even the ‘ignorant masses’--who, after all, are not *completely* ignorant: they’re not *animals*; they’re humans, who can think and judge and idolize--and even on an instinctual level, the most ‘elite’ strivers-for-immortality want their approval and want to affect them. (Surely on the level of reason, in most cases, they do also.) --I don’t have the time to sort through this shit. I’m at work. And by the time I get home, I won’t even be able to stand *reading* it, much less thinking about it. So I’m done.

I can’t believe America has a president who prides himself on not reading newspapers.

Wednesday, February 16

The virtue of the vicious.— To feel kinship with people because I grew up under the same government as they? Because I must abide by the same laws as they? Because we’ve been taught that we have a “common history”, whatever that means? Because a line has been drawn between the expanse of land we live in and the expanse of land ‘other people’ live in? Am I really expected to place my hand over my heart and give a solemn oath to renounce reason?

Here’s the paradox: people say, think, and do things that make you contemptuous of them, but you say, think, and do those things yourself—or you *could* do them while remaining essentially the same person you are. If a guy on the highway cuts you off you think ‘asshole’, and you’re convinced of your judgment. But you could do and probably have done the same thing, even though you know you’re not an asshole.[1] So why is *he* an asshole and you’re not? (Don’t say you’d never do such a thing. If you actually believe that, stop reading this journal. You haven’t evolved to the point where you can understand it.) Maybe you’ll say, ‘My opinion that he’s an asshole is an outgrowth of anger, and I don’t really mean it.’ No, but you *do* mean it. In the moment when you think it, you’re sure of it. You’re disgusted and dismissive of him. ‘He’s an asshole!’: *that’s what he is*, that and nothing else. He doesn’t merit further thought because he’s an inferior being. You’re wrong, though, as you recognize when your anger has subsided. –Similarly, in thinking that George Bush is an asshole because of his actions and beliefs, you’re making a mistake. Aside from the fact that ‘asshole’ and ‘bad person’ and ‘evil man’ have no meaning,[2] you’re writing him off as ‘*this, and only this*’—you’re ignoring his individuality, his humanity, treating him as a *thing* (in true Sartrean fashion)—before trying to understand his position or the experiences that have led him to it. You’re *wrong*. He’s not a ‘bad person’. To understand is to forgive. –And yet, I, more often than most people, feel palpable hatred and disgust for conservatives like him. That implies that I’m passing judgment on them, I’m treating them as ‘things’—because whenever you pass judgment, you treat the judged as a thing (as *set, finished, immoveable, able-to-be-pinned-down*). In order to live in truth, you cannot judge people. You cannot even say that a person is ‘kind’, or ‘shy’, or ‘intelligent’, or anything static like that, because it’s a lie. –But, goddamn it, it’s *fun* to despise conservatives! Like Tom DeLay. I *love* hating that man. And Sean Hannity. What a *dick* he is! And Ann Coulter! What a repugnant person! Seriously, part of me can’t understand how such people are *not* ‘bad’, bad in their essence. –I’m trapped between these two extreme positions. It’s distressing. I fluctuate from one to the other, and I’m never sure of myself. –‘Those people

[1] What’s that you say? You think you are an asshole? No, don’t lie to yourself. You know you’re not an asshole, no matter how much you may tell yourself you are. No one can pass judgment on himself in the ‘conclusive’, ‘dismissive’, ‘contemptuous’ way that he passes judgment on others.

[2] See the essay on values I still hope to finish writing.

must be 'bad' (for a variety of reasons), but they *can't* be 'bad' (for an even greater variety of reasons).' Somebody help me!

Thursday, February 17

I'm amused by the fact that pop culture—almost everything in pop culture—movies, music, shows—revolves around the act of putting a penis into a vagina. However, it's only in the case of soap operas, sitcoms like "Friends", and teenie-bopper dramas like "Dawson's Creek" and "The OC" that I'm carried away by the hilarity of it. What happens on those shows is deadly serious to the characters, even though it all translates into "I want you inside me"; "No, I don't want to be inside you"—or the opposite. That's why millions of people watch: sex is just beneath the surface. All the drama and interest of the shows exists because viewers empathize with the characters; and they empathize with the characters ultimately [unconsciously] because sex is at stake.

To return to what I wrote yesterday: the troubling thing is that people want to feel anger at someone who 'cuts them off', or who disagrees with them, or who treats them rudely…but in a sense they're wrong. Because when they're angry they're passing judgment on the person. They're angry not at his *actions*, but at *him*. Of course, it's because of his action that they're angry, but the act makes them angry not at itself but at the person who did it. When I'm walking across the street because there's a green light but a car runs its red light and drives right in front of me, I'm mad at the *person*, not at what he's done. I don't think "That act enrages me, but it doesn't necessarily reflect on the character of the person who did it, and I fully respect him and feel no resentment"; I think "What a bastard!" But, of course, I'm capable of doing the same thing he did, and I don't think of myself as a bastard. So, at the very least, I'm being inconsistent.

On the other hand, if we never have the right to be angry at anyone (because of the 'static' judgment implied in the anger), neither do we have the right to *love* anyone—because of the static judgment(s) implied in it. 'She's a wonderful girl—outgoing, funny, intelligent…' Those are generalizations, and as such are not entirely true. "Okay," you'll say, "fine! But what if I insert the word 'usually' before each of those adjectives? No longer is the judgment 'static'. No longer is it a generalization. *Now* do I have the right to love her?" –I don't think I like your tone, mister, but I'll pass over that.– Yes, I suppose you do. –But something's strange here. It seems to me that even though love and anger are both emotions, they have to be treated differently in this context. "What do you mean?" …Give me a minute, I'm thinking… Yes! I've got it! Anger/hatred/contempt posits a division between the angered one and the object of his anger, which (division) is based on the perception that the first is superior to the second; love/respect/understanding posits a unity.

–Wait. Before I finish that thought, I should mention (lest I forget) that I can't help thinking that some actions *do* reveal a lot about one's character. They can't just be done by anyone. But which are they? Any list I made would be fairly arbitrary and subject to disagreement. *Another* side of me (as you already know) thinks that *every* action/thought, taken in 'isolation', can be done by anyone; i.e., everyone has the potential to murder, to steal, to act stupidly in given situations, and therefore when you judge someone who actually does one of those you're tacitly judging yourself. It doesn't matter that you haven't done it; the point is, you *could*, if you willed it. –But, you'll say, you *haven't* willed it, and that's the difference between you and him. –But, damn it, you could! –But you haven't! –But you could! –But you haven't! —The problem is, I understand both arguments, and I can't decide in favor of one or the other. They both make sense. –Besides, eventually there has to be a limit to what you have even the *potential* to do. You can't do *anything*. So that brings me back to the initial question: where is the limit? Where do I draw the line between *his* character and *mine*?

To finish the other argument: Emotions/judgments that imply that you're 'looking down' at someone, that you're treating yourself as superior, are wrong, because…etc.[1] Emotions/judgments that imply respect for a person are not wrong—or are *less* wrong, in the case of broad generalizations like 'He's

[1] See the foregoing, and past entries.

good' or 'He's intelligent'—because to respect/forgive is to understand[1] (for all the reasons I've set forth in the past), and to understand is to have knowledge (i.e., to be right). And understanding/respect/forgiveness have more in common with positive generalizations like 'She's good' than negative generalizations like 'She's a bitch', and therefore positive generalizations are 'less wrong' than negative ones. That's why anger and contempt are less justified than love and respect.

By the time I finish this journal, it will be the single most intellectually fruitful document in history. And the single most *humane* document, as in 'laying bare humanity'—and *understanding* it—and *loving* it, despite everything.

The problem from three paragraphs ago.— Maybe the difference between you, who don't steal even though you can, and someone who *does* steal, is that (chances are) it's easy for him, while it's not easy for you. You have to *will* it, because you don't want to steal; he *does* want to, and therefore stealing is easy for him. So you're not necessarily wrong in coming to conclusions based on a single action. You can't be *certain*, but there's a high probability you're right. Of course, the more actions you observe, the better qualified you'll be to judge what kind of person he is. Still, to pass a sweeping judgment on his worth as a person is too easy and tempting (and 'static', i.e., unmindful of his dynamic humanity) to be justified (even assuming—what is doubtful at best—that 'worth' is a meaningful concept).

Sometimes a person's opinions reveal his character more than his actions do. His opinions are sincere; his actions need not be. Tom DeLay's homophobia reveals a lot about him. Homophobia is based on ignorance; therefore, insofar as he's homophobic, he's ignorant. However, that doesn't necessarily mean he's 'bad'. Or…does it? Is he 'bad' to the extent that he's homophobic (because ignorance, especially when it harms people, is bad)? Philosophically and scientifically, no. ('Bad' is meaningless, etc.) But in the way that the word is commonly used—to signify heartlessness, ignorance, prejudice, and so on—it does apply to him (in this context). Now, to think that heartlessness and the rest are bad is wrong or confused, because, again, 'bad' has no clear meaning, but those qualities certainly tend to have harmful effects, and intuitively we 'know' they're somehow not good, and therefore there *is* some substance (though only *some*) to the judgment that DeLay is bad insofar as he's homophobic. Not that that has much practical relevance. It's just satisfying. What really matters is that his opinion is wrong and must be fought against.

Sunday, February 20

I hate to keep harping on this theme, but I'm tired of being pestered by a thought that interrupts me when I'm trying to write the story.— Women want it both ways. They want to be treated like princesses, i.e., coddled and doted on like children, but they also want to be thought of as completely equal to men. I'm sorry, but…it's one or the other! Are you children, or are you men? Choose! *Or*, if you're so inclined, you can be *honest* and admit that you're neither one nor the other: you're *women*, with your own peculiar strengths and weaknesses, different from men's—and therefore you're not "equal" to [or rather the *same as*] us, whatever that means. My advice to you is to stop trying to be men. Accept yourselves! Love yourselves! I'm 100 percent in favor of women as politicians and businessmen and scientists and philosophers and everything that's traditionally been thought of as a man's jurisdiction. I'd vote for Hillary as president partly because she's a woman. I wish *every* person in government were a woman, if only to see whether they could do a better job than the men have. But, for God's sake, judging by all the evidence, you have different needs and, to some extent, abilities than men. […]

Basically, the impulse that produces a Mary Daly is the refusal to be labeled. People are dynamic, changeable, and shouldn't be judged as '*this*'. Becoming such an object, something essentially *frozen*, is, surely, a negation of one's humanity! Nobody wants to be frozen! –It's the thing Sartre described in his mystifying way. (The "look", etc.) The impulse is commendable. Futile, but commendable. Try 'refusing'

[1] Or, at least: to understand is to respect/forgive.

to be labeled ‘shy’ or ‘kind’ or ‘boring’ and see how successful you are:—not only are you destined to fail, but, more importantly, those labels are based on reality. They may be insensitive and ‘over-generalizing’, but usually they have some basis in fact. You aren’t so dynamic that you can change your identity on a whim: you have innate dispositions that determine, to a great extent, who you’re going to be. […]

I’m nervous. Tomorrow I’ll meet a girl I’ve been emailing through JDate. Trina. Lives in Bethesda. She’s scarily intelligent. Writes well. Her emails are as formal as letters. We have personalities and interests in common, but…that could turn out to be bad. I’m worried our mutual introvertedness will clash. I’ll have to drink a couple of beers before I go.

Judaism is very important to her. She was upset when she found out I’m not Jewish. Said she’s never dated a goy. But still feels “very compelled” to meet me.

Monday, February 21

Intellectual conversation for the first time in months. Quite articulate on both sides. We liked each other, but I don’t think we clicked romantically. (She doesn’t laugh enough, isn’t silly enough, isn’t feminine enough.) I can’t read her, though. She’s too introverted. And mellow. Not quite my type. Made me mellow too. But I want to see her again.

Talking to Trina (who was granted a fellowship to do research on schizophrenia in the National Institute of Health) jolted me into recollection of the fact that, even though I can’t contribute to neurology and therefore have nothing ‘legacy-wise’ to gain by studying it, I find the brain so fascinating that I have to educate myself on it. Ergo: I’m using the internet to give myself a crash course.

She’s also volunteering at a battered women’s shelter.

And she’s one of the most intelligent, interesting people I’ve met.

Tuesday, February 22

What have I been doing these past few years?! Not learning about biology?! How is that possible?! *How*—and *why*—have I been *avoiding* myself? Reading this stuff is like listening to Bach! The same disbelief, the same insights into essential reality.

Wednesday, February 23

Need a break from biology. Learning about computer science. *Finally*. I decided to stop postponing the inevitable.

‘What’s it like to be an artist?’ you ask. ‘Why do they write so much? Why do they feel the need to create?’ –If you want the psychological and neural causes, you’re asking the wrong person. But I can tell you how they translate into subjective experience;—how the artist feels his ‘need’: the longer he abstains from writing, the more restless he is. When you’ve been watching TV for five hours and *have* to get outside and do something…that’s sort of how I feel when I haven’t written anything for five days. Especially if there’s something in particular I’ve been meaning to write. In that case my feeling will be like the one you have when you’ve just hung up the phone and realize there’s something you forgot to say to the person on the other line. Another way to think about it: writing ‘calms’ me.

Thursday, February 24

Computer science quickly loses its charm.

Mozart's Fugue in C-minor for two pianos was, obviously, centuries ahead of its time. I'm not surprised that Beethoven was so disturbed by it that he felt the need to copy the entire score, just to understand its harmonies.

That nature produces people like Mozart proves it loves mankind.

On the other hand, that it produces people like L. Brent Bozell III, president of the Parents Television Council, proves it has a wicked sense of humor.

Yes, some acts *do* reveal more about one's character (personality) than others. There are two kinds: those that are idiosyncratic, like being witty, creative, skilled at something—acts to do which you either *have* the potential or you *don't* (for example, it's impossible for me to be as witty and self-confident as Jon Stewart)—which category includes the way you *feel* when you do certain things (like, whether you enjoy them), because other people simply might not have the *ability* to feel the same way; and those that continually recur. Some people are always kind, or they're always mean. Everyone has the ability to be kind or mean on occasion—and one can always *force* oneself—but not everyone has the *inclination* to be kind or mean (which inclination translates into repeated acts of either kindness or meanness). …I suppose this second category is essentially the same as the first. In both cases, an individual either *is* or *isn't* a certain way; he has no control over it.

See the third chapter of my senior thesis.

Friday, February 25

As you know, my talents aren't a source of much pride. But for some reason, my *body*—after I've worked out for a few weeks—is. On some level I'm more proud of having a muscular body than of being philosophically, musically, literarily talented. Probably b/c I'm used to having those skills, so they don't excite me anymore. Also because, insofar as I'm a man, *feeling* like a man is the greatest source of pride. Just as feeling like a woman is a source of pride to women. –But the situation isn't quite parallel. Although women do want to feel like the stereotypical 'woman'—i.e., feminine, pretty, giggly, relatively receptive and passive[1]—they also want to compete with men. They want to be independent, strong and masculine: they want careers, they want to be go-getters, they tire sometimes of being insecure, vain and makeup-y. The two ideals conflict and cause, most likely, a great deal of anxiety. If a girl is *pure woman* she's probably a bit self-contemptuous (or at least very insecure); if she's *pure man* she may be a bit self-disgusted. Men, however, want only to be men. We suffer from no conflict between a feminine and a masculine ideal. [See Simone de Beauvoir's thoughts on how men, unlike women, are not "divided," which I quote in the third chapter of *Notes of an Underground Humanist*.]

Trina and I are going to the National Gallery of Art on Sunday.

Here's another thing I'm proud of: I can rap all of "White America." As a connoisseur of words, it's impossible for me not to enjoy Eminem.

Saturday, February 26

Reading about all of human biology, not just nerve cells. Concentrating on genetics for now. Some review of high school science—it's amazing how much information is still stored in the memory cells after years, after you thought you'd forgotten it all, when in fact all you needed was a stimulus to call it to your mind—but a lot of it is relatively new. *Finally* I'm beginning to understand the relation between Mendelian

[1] Even the most independent women—typified by Hillary Clinton—want a man they can look up to, who's slightly 'above' them in some way [literally and figuratively], who is periodically able to make them feel 'lesser' and dependent. That's why Hillary fell in love with Bill, who, as everyone recognizes, is more charismatic and dominating than she.

genetics and molecular genetics. That's always confused me.

To try to describe my awe would be futile. My awe at what evolution is able to accomplish. It isn't just 'surprise' or 'wonder' or 'shock'; it's a *destructive force*, a life-altering revolution. Even though I've known about this stuff for years, every time I think about it a new mental revolution occurs. My world-view is turned upside-down.

Tonight at work my presynaptic neurons allowed the serotonin they'd fired to linger for an unusually long time in the synapse before re-uptaking it, with the result that I was happy and confident the whole evening. Whenever I act that way I'm startled by how much it *feels right*—how much it *is who I am*.

…I'm both grateful to Nietzsche and angry at him. He's made it easy for me to be who I am—which is good. But, on the other hand, he's made it easy for me to be who I am—which is bad. He's made it *too* easy! If he hadn't existed, I would have been alone. I couldn't have followed in anyone's footsteps. I would've had to be completely original—not necessarily in my *ideas* but in my *being*. I'd've had Marx to idolize, yes, but he was too different from me to truly *identify* with. Sometimes I think I'm Nietzsche's reincarnation. Not because I want to think well of myself; simply because we're quite similar.

Sunday, February 27

Date went well. Better than first.

What possible significance can *anything* I've cared about have in comparison with intimacy?

Monday, February 28

For the past few minutes I've been asking myself when was the last time I was this happy. I can't remember. Being happy… How refreshing it is!

I'll see Trina on Thursday. So far I haven't dared to hope that it would turn out well between us, but I can't stop myself anymore. I hope. And I *think*— I think we'll get together. We're (almost) perfect for each other. I have no reason to be pessimistic this time.

Halle-fucking-lujah!

She was one of the valedictorians of her class.

Our conversations are remarkable. We each write a short essay every time we speak.

Tuesday, March 1

I have to agree with my thesis: there's no 'dualism' between empirical and phenomenological psychology. And, after talking to Trina, I'm not worried anymore about the biology-psychology 'dualism'. She easily explained why it isn't problematic. Ironically, her arguments were ones I'd suggested in my thesis; apparently I decided somewhere along the line, after I'd written them, that they weren't sufficient. But I was wrong. I have no idea why I made such a big deal over nothing.

Wednesday, March 2

Reading about everything from the immune system to Boolean logic to cancer to CDs.

Why am I attracted to women and not men? …I don't know. It's an unconscious response that can't be 'felt' on the level of consciousness. All I know is that when I see a pretty girl, for some inexplicable reason I want to kiss her. I'm aware of nothing between the cause and the effect—no intermediary (such as a 'feeling') that can logically link the two. Prettiness triggers an arbitrary desire to kiss it. There's no

phenomenological explanation for that absurd reaction. –Christ, this is maddening! To want something but not to know why! For months I've been bothered by this problem. –Incidentally, if you'll say "The reason you want to kiss a pretty girl is that it'll be pleasurable", or, alternatively, "The reason is that you have an X and a Y chromosome rather than two X's, and therefore…[etc., etc]", you're missing the point. The pleasure of the kiss has nothing to do with it. If it did, my desire would be a rational calculation—a means to an end—something *a posteriori*, based on knowledge acquired through experience. But the desire is not rational. I wanted to kiss girls long before I knew that kissing was pleasurable. It never enters my mind that 'to kiss her would feel good'; I think only 'I want to kiss her'. The biological explanation, on the other hand, has nothing to do with my desire to kiss. Doubtless it's the fundamental cause of it, but as far as I'm concerned—as far as my consciousness, or my desire, is concerned—I couldn't care less whether my chromosome is an X or a Y. So, to repeat: the desire is sui generis. It exists in a vacuum; it has no meaning.

…I think I'm confusing two aspects of the problem. But I'm tired, so I'll continue this in the morning.

Thursday, March 3

We decided we couldn't overcome the lack of chemistry.

Although the decision was mutual, I was disappointed.

We're still 'friends'. We enjoy each other too much to end the relationship.

Don't want to write about the details. Don't care enough. Deep down I always knew I was wrong to hope. And from now on I'll know I'm wrong to hope.

This should indicate to you how hateful life is to me right now: I'm not going to write about it.

Friday, March 4

15 hours of bussing.

Sunday, March 6

I'm going to try to be objective for once.-- Am I glad I was born? Tough question. Sometimes I am, sometimes I'm not. But when not swayed by emotion I can look at everything in perspective and decide that, ultimately, I don't care one way or the other. Both happiness and suffering are insignificant. For a moment we're happy, for a moment we suffer--whether that 'moment' be seconds or years--and only after it's gone do we understand that it amounted to nothing. Precisely because it's gone. "But you're forgetting the 'warm glow of memory'." No I'm not; *you're* forgetting that the warm glow of memory is itself gone--even as it's happening. The instant before we die we look back on life and think, "So that's what all the buzz was about. *That*. And now it's nothing." Or we can think, "What a great life I had! I'm glad I was born!"--and then promptly die: an event that disintegrates our last thought and therewith every experience whose shadow still lived in our memory. In being forgotten, life is rendered meaningless, for meaning exists only in human consciousness. --What does all this mean? It means humans are equal; it means envy is short-sighted; it means pride is misguided; it means all emotions, which implicitly presuppose the permanence of themselves and of their object, are senseless.

It means that the central tenet of Buddhism is true.

Yet its truth doesn't mean you ought to live your life by it. Not only is 'ought' a futile idea--as is shown by the foregoing itself--but there are plenty of arguments in support of doing the *opposite*: of ignoring this 'truth' and living a 'lie'. E.g., nature programmed us to forget the fact of universal transience, and thus to ignore it (transience) is to live 'according to nature'--which is, in a way, synonymous with 'living truly'.

The song "Light as the Breeze"--which I've praised before ("it exalts Woman as the final resting-place of the soul", "Woman is what's left of God", or some such crap)--touches on the contradiction between Ideal and Real inherent in love. "She says [to her lover], 'Drink deeply, pilgrim, but don't forget there's still a woman beneath this resplendent chemise.'" As a man, when your love is truly ecstatic you love the chemise; as a woman, you love the…I don't know…the warrior, or his strength, or whatever it is that women love. Both men and women tend to ignore the person beneath the image (although the image is based on the person). This isn't the case at all times--at 'mundane' times--but at the happiest moments it is. The beloved becomes a Platonic Form in the eyes of the lover, a 'principle'--such as Beauty or Strength--a personification of the ideal. Maybe you'll object that, on the contrary, he/she is loved as a *person* who happens to *have* these qualities, but you're wrong: the beloved's status as an autonomous, full person is overlooked. In loving him, the lover is loving all that's good in the world. Any beauty that life has is *in him* (the beloved), magnified. Nothing else has meaning. His flaws don't exist--or if they do, they merely add to his perfection. The lover is happy that he possesses something perfect. Furthermore, he's equally in love with the knowledge (however half-conscious) that the beloved is his *possession* as he is with the beloved himself (--though obviously in different senses of the word 'love'). That is, his love would have a radically different character if he didn't *possess* the Other: it would coexist with despair rather than happiness, and would thus *itself* be very different. --So, this is what's meant by the saying 'We kill that which we love'. We see it not as an autonomous living being but as an embodied principle;[1] moreover, in *possessing* the principle, we negate the person's individuality in yet another sense. What about the well-known phenomenon of 'If I can't have her, I'll kill her!'? --Why kill her, you ask, when it's seemingly so contrary to love? Well, surely it's a striking parallel that to possess *is*, in a sense, to kill. It suggests that the will to power is behind the will to love: you have 'power'[2] over the beloved by making her yours, as you have power over her by killing her. I hate that 'will to power' formulation, though: it smacks of 'This term sounds so cool I'm going to make it the central doctrine of my philosophy!' And it's too pat. I'd rather reduce it to something more fundamental and less vague--and less metaphorical--like the desire for immortality or 'meaning'. That is, requited love is recognition from someone you esteem more than anyone else, and being recognized by such a person is a way of overcoming time/death. That's why requited love feels so much better than unrequited love: in the latter kind, the lover isn't being validated and is thus a slave to time and death. He has no control over his passage through time; he continuously dies and is reborn only to die again--whereas in love he never dies; yet he feels as if he's being perpetually reborn. The moment is always fresh and new to him. Death isn't even on the horizon, much less defining him in every moment. (Of course, it *is*, for he hasn't transcended the human mode of consciousness, but he's less aware of it than normally. Why? Because he's intoxicated with his 'respect' for the beloved?--and especially with his validation *by* her? No: the lover is fixated on the Other, not on his validation.[3] --Well, that's not a good argument.[4] He's equally obsessed with the Other when his love is unrequited as when it's requited; the only difference between them is that in the latter case he's loved (validated), and so this difference must be why requited love is pleasurable and the opposite kind isn't, which means that part of him *is* fixated on being validated--a half-conscious part--and this fixation plays the decisive role in making him happy. But still…this is a poor explanation of the pleasure that love bestows. Love is a compelling physical pleasure; the satisfaction gained from the knowledge of being validated, however, can only be intellectual. --Neurotransmitters and

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[1] Remember what Aristotle said about the concept 'dog'? It can't exist unless the dog dies. I.e., the concept is a negation of the living dog. –Applying that idea to this context involves a slight distortion of it (and I'm not referring to the substitution of 'person' for 'dog'), but still, it's kind of cool that Aristotle's intuition supports what I'm arguing.

[2] I put scare-quotes around that word to remind the reader—who I hope doesn't need reminding—that it's a much more subtle idea than the one commonly associated with the word 'power'.

[3] By the way, I'm not going to close the parentheses.

[4] (Now that I stop to think about it, I can see that I anticipated the following sentence in the one that began "Furthermore, he's equally in love with the knowledge…" (as well as the one that followed it). The difference between the two is that earlier I talked about the lover's possession of the beloved, whereas now I'm talking about his validation by her. The two terms refer to the same phenomenon.)

"action potentials" and the like are the direct biological cause of the lover's euphoria, but to rely solely on them in an explanation (i.e., to ignore psychology) is a cop-out, because you haven't made any headway toward understanding the psyche. What you've understood is the biological *basis* of the psyche, not the psyche itself. --So…I don't know where this leaves me.

Incidentally, I now think that the "striking parallel" I mentioned above is nothing but a coincidence, founded on my use of a particular metaphor.

Monday, March 7

Had a fight several days ago with a housemate named Rose. Nineteen-year-old self-centered bimbo with a nasal voice. I wanted to watch the Daily Show, she wanted to watch Sex and the City—as usual. As the argument escalated I stopped caring about the show and wanted only to teach this spoiled little brat a lesson. What makes the incident interesting is that we both were—and are—convinced of the other's inferiority. (Ignoring what I've written about value-judgments,) I *know* I'm a better person than she is—in most ways—and she *knows* she's a better person than I am. In a sense, we're both wrong. But in another, 'human-centric', unphilosophical, sense—manifested in the fact that the majority of people would side with one or the other of us—one of us is right. And that one is me. 'But how do you know?' you ask. 'You're just being arrogant and closed-minded. After all, she thinks the same thing: *she's* right. Why are you so sure you have more insight into the matter than she does?' But if she thinks she's right, then, by your logic, she's being arrogant and closed-minded too. The reason it doesn't occur to you to apply the same criticism to her is that, in her not having my inquisitive mind, she doesn't feel the need to validate her spontaneous dislike by explicitly telling herself she's right. If she *did*, then you'd say to her what you said to me. –But there's something idiotic about a position that allows one to think that someone else is inferior—as yours does—but doesn't allow one to reaffirm the spontaneous judgment by telling himself he's *right* and the other is *wrong*. The 'reaffirmation', after all, is implicit in the spontaneous judgment. So by rights you should criticize the initial judgment, not the 'after-the-fact' opinion that it's right. But you don't; you think not that the mutual conviction of the other's inferiority is closed-minded/arrogant but rather that the mutual conviction that one's own 'prior' conviction is *true* is closed-minded/arrogant. Why? Surely because you yourself constantly judge a person's worth—and you *don't* follow that up with a reassurance to yourself that you're right—and thus to criticize such a judgment would be to criticize yourself. On the other hand, in this age of political correctness, there's something unpleasant about a person's being convinced he's right and the other is wrong; therefore, you indiscriminately condemn all such convictions, without knowing that you yourself constantly have them. –In short: that both Rose and I think we're right doesn't mean I'm being narrow-minded by telling myself on a 'second-order' level that, despite our equal self-certainty, she is in fact wrong—just as it isn't narrow-minded to believe on a 'first-order' level that she's inferior to me in many ways. If there's a truth and a falsity, then one of us is right and the other is wrong—and it just so happens that I (who have a mind more capacious than hers and can thus evaluate arguments more disinterestedly) am right and she is wrong.

But if we both equally 'know' we're right—if we're both equally certain—and yet she isn't, then my 'knowledge' must be just as fallible as hers. Which means we're back at the beginning: despite all the arguments I've put forward, as well as ones I haven't, there's no reason to think I'm right. The obvious way out of this dilemma is to recognize that my experience of knowledge is different from hers. It's 'clearer', broader, more self-conscious, and based on good arguments and close observations. Hers is only an unreasoning dislike that doesn't even ask itself if it's justified. [These speculations broaden beyond that one trivial example.]

Tuesday, March 8

What is existential "meaning"? Nothing but the power to produce effects. An experience has

meaning if it has an effect: e.g., Frankl's life in Auschwitz had meaning because he could use it to teach himself facts about the world. He gave it meaning: that is, he decided it would cause a particular psychological effect. If an experience has no effect on anything, it has no meaning. –You can argue against that hypothesis all you want, but in the end, if you're honest, you'll have to agree with it. Therefore: in the long run, life has no meaning, because it ceases to have effects.

Wednesday, March 9

This just became the best day of the week. I received the CD I'd ordered of Yo-yo Ma playing Bach's cello suites.

Thursday, March 10

It's humbling to reflect that the social conditions that allowed for the highest possible realization of musical genius--the conditions that prevailed in 18th and 19th century Europe--were contingent. A New World didn't *have* to be discovered; the colonies didn't *have* to produce enough cotton to jump-start the Industrial Revolution; feudalism didn't *have* to decay in the ways it did. All these circumstances were accidental. Yet their artistic byproducts were, surely, *necessary*. I can hardly imagine a world without classical music. Surely everything that existed prior to Bach is justified only as a necessary precondition for his music! The music of those two great centuries cannot have been a historical accident; it cannot have been merely a superstructural expression of inessential social developments! It's too logically beautiful! It's too aesthetically perfect! Without it there'd be only a long dreary record of musical *attempts*. Few *achievements*. With its arrival came the solution to the question of how the grandeur of the human tragedy could be portrayed in symbols. Through such pieces as the Sarabande from S. 1012 mankind succeeded in grasping the infinite and playing it on an instrument.[1] --And yet the music was accidental. --That means *we* are accidental. And that means there is no God.

Is it really the case that we needed *those* conditions to produce such art? Isn't it possible that in the future we'll be able to do it again? Or is the opportunity gone forever?

Friday, March 11

This morning I woke up at 5:00 thinking I had to finish the book of 'aphorisms' I'd started. I must have been dreaming about it, because the second I was conscious I had this epiphany. It would be a way to sum up my youth; it's the only book I'm capable of writing at this time of my life; excerpts from my journal would provide over two hundred pages of it. Didn't fall back asleep until 8:00. Couldn't get my mind off it. --'How would I begin it? How would I organize it?' Etc. I'm excited. Nothing like it has been written in a hundred years. But I'm impatient. I want it to be finished. I'm obsessed with the need to make the world *feel* again. And *think* again. It's been running on autopilot for too long.

Saturday, March 12

I've been going about this book thing all wrong. I've been trying to write the sections in the order they'll appear, with the first one first and so on. No headway made. But Nietzsche's way is better: write down the thoughts as they come to you and put them in order later. Just write down scattered thoughts.

[1] That isn't just a rhetorical exaggeration. It's the truth. If you could listen to the Sarabande in such a way as to appreciate its perfection, you'd transcend human consciousness.

…I've reached the point in my life when writing, in and of itself, doesn't provide me with much relief. It used to be that if I wrote something in my journal I'd feel satisfied and 'rested'. Journal-writing would be enough. But no longer does it alleviate my restlessness. Even the instant after I finish a philosophical entry I still feel 'bottled up'--and as the satisfaction of writing wears off, minute by minute, my restlessness increases. In general, my thoughts seem to crave a more exalted arena. They want to burst out into the world. They want to roam freely in minds other than my own.

This situation has come about abruptly. Four weeks ago it was merely nascent. The more I wrote of the Vietnam story, though, the more I realized I had to publish a book in order to be (temporarily) happy.

Friday, March 18

Wasn't accepted into Tufts or UW Madison.

Saturday, March 19

I don't feel the need for a girlfriend anymore, now that I'm writing this book. The book is my girlfriend. And my daughter. –I have an incestuous relationship with it.

I think about it constantly. Always composing aphorisms in my head.

Tuesday, March 22

Lately I haven't had the need to eat as I've been writing. My hunger has never been more than mild; I've been eating one-and-a-half meals a day. I keep postponing each meal:—'I'll eat after I finish this paragraph…'

When he was writing, Yeats's family members had to remind him periodically to eat. He actually forgot about food. For the first time I understand that.

Saturday, March 26

Reading about structuralism, poststructuralism and deconstruction. Derrida, Foucault, etc. I can't ignore these topics in my book.

Monday, March 28

The day before yesterday I was certain of my mediocrity. Yesterday I was confident of myself. Today I'm doubting myself. –Back and forth, back and forth. It's hard to be me. Maybe I'll take a nap. I find that's the most profitable thing to do when I'm self-dissatisfied.

The task I've set myself is overwhelming. *Nobody* can achieve it. –And yet, I can feel the potential within me. I just don't have sufficient knowledge yet. I have to acquaint myself with all of 20th century philosophy. Damn! I wanted to publish this book sometime in the next couple of years.

After reading about Gould's theory of punctuated equilibrium I'm inclined to accept natural selection and random variation. P.E. answers most of the questions I had.

A main reason that philosophy interests me more than (most) science is that it's so much harder! Philosophy lacks science's support system: empirical observation. E.g., given the fossil record, punctuated equilibrium seems *obvious*.

Tuesday, March 29

When I've tried to educate myself (like in Korea) merely for the sake of having knowledge I've lost interest after a few months. Only if my goal—my *immediate* goal—is to *create* (as it is now) can I motivate myself to learn as much as I have to. In the last few days I've been reading obsessively. And I'll keep doing it. Just because I want to get the reading part of my task over with.

Jacques Lacan is quite interesting.

An analogy: Nietzsche is to Derrida as presence is to absence.[1]

Here's an intriguing profile of Lacan that, crudely, applies to me as well:

> Lacan seems above all to have been one of those intellectuals who have become completely unhinged from their own emotional life and from ordinary human relationships. The tragic predicament of such thinkers is that, driven by terrifying feelings of insecurity and emptiness, they mistakenly conclude that intellectual truths can be an adequate substitute for emotional warmth. Craving distinction and imagining that abstract intellectual formulations can alone fill the void they feel within them, they develop a voracious appetite for such formulations, anorexically judging their goodness by the degree of difficulty or abstraction they possess. Believing that what they have devoured is intrinsically nourishing, they are impelled to share their 'truths' with others. Like a starving man who compels others to eat the diet of stones he believes has saved him, they give abundantly of their poverty out of a genuine conviction that they are enriching others.

We *are*, though, damn it! We're not forcing people to *eat stones*; we're *encouraging* them to *learn* about themselves!

Sunday, April 3

I saw Sangeetha last night. It was a disappointment. She and a few of her friends were at her boyfriend's apartment. I was bored. Judd, her boyfriend, didn't seem very interesting. Which is why I thought they were a good match.

Tuesday, April 13

There's no way around it. I have to acquaint myself with philosophies of language before continuing my book. My ideas in this sphere will influence the mode of presentation of my ideas in all other (philosophical) spheres.

One lesson I've learned already is that if 'solutions' are going to be reached for many of the problems that occupy academics, they will somehow have to *cut through* those problems rather than treat each of the (more valuable) discussions individually.

It seems to me that if the notion of *intuition* is explained, a good many problems will evaporate. People commonly say things like "it's intuitively plausible", and the sense of a sentence is provided by intuition, and intuition yields insights more quickly and powerfully than chains of logic do—and so there's something very fundamental about intuition. –But Bergson didn't know what he was talking about.

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[1] [The presence/absence dichotomy is important to Derrida.]

Thursday, April 14

I just discovered an online research library called Questia. Thousands and thousands of books, articles, encyclopedia entries… I'm in heaven.

Friday, April 15

Reading Noam Chomsky's *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin, and Use*. Good book. (Occasionally tedious.) I agree with basically all of Chomsky's ideas (all the ones I've read). It seems to me, though, that his criticisms of Saussurean linguistics (as narrow, etc.) are ill-founded: *langue* surely is similar to "I-language", while *parole* is similar to "E-language". Saussure's ideas are inadequate in other respects, e.g., in the too-imprecise distinction between signifier and signified. (It's unclear whether the latter refers to—in Fregean terminology—sense or reference or "ideas" or all three.)

…Reading writings of Michael Dummett on Frege.

The more I read, the more my mind brims over with ideas. I've been making a terrible mistake in not acquainting myself with contemporary philosophy (particularly the analytic tradition).

Tuesday, April 19

P. F. Strawson's paper "On Referring" is an excellent refutation of the theory of descriptions. Strawson seems to have been one of the few analytic philosophers who has/had common sense. –Russell's reply to Strawson is bizarre, apparently based on misunderstandings.

What Kierkegaard said of Hegel's ideas applies to the theory of descriptions: to refute it, only common sense is necessary. It's perverse to call the statement 'The King of France in 1905 was bald' false rather than neither true nor false.

Friday, April 22

I never take my own writings as seriously as I take others'. I can happily read a book by, for example, C. G. Prado, but when I turn to what *I've* written, I no longer care about any of it. Knowing that I've written it makes me despise it. How can anyone possibly respect anything he's written??

Saturday, April 23

Althusser's article on ISAs, while poorly written, is profound. Very thought-provoking.

Monday, April 25

At work today I wrote a short poem about BWV 999. Each line has one syllable more than the previous—and in the last half, one less. Thus: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3. The first and last lines are simply the number of the piece. The problem was, I didn't know which BWV it was—so I was reduced to hoping that its number could be expressed in three syllables. When I got home I checked;—and it turned out to be 999. The *perfect* number! (If you read the poem [below], you'll know why it's perfect.)

Thursday, April 28

I'm looking forward to graduate school, if only so I can talk to intelligent people again. People in the real world are hateful and don't have minds.

Friday, April 29

I started my new job today—at a restaurant in the Hotel Monaco. There's no comparison between it and Finn Mac Cool's. It's professionals vs. amateurs. The people are nicer and the pay is better.

Sometimes I forget how great people can be. When I'm confronted with assholes for weeks on end, I forget that not *everyone* is an asshole.

Sunday, May 1

I've been jumping from subject to subject—linguistics to Marxism to feminism to psychology and back to linguistics…—but that's the wrong way to proceed. I'll try to focus on each for a fairly extended period of time before I succumb to the desire for something new. I wanted to stick with Marxism for a while, but while writing the section "In defense of historical materialism"—specifically, after reading Althusser's article—I realized that the discussion of ideology presupposes a knowledge of psychology;—and those two subjects are so broad that it'll take me a while to read everything I have to. So I'm back to the philosophy of language. A week or two ago I took a break from it when confronted with the related problems of the nature of intuition and the indescribability of most mental experiences (such as intuitions). What really confused me, and still does, is that certain sensations seem to be describable in informative, meaningful ways, while others don't. What's the difference between them? I think this is the issue that Wittgenstein grappled with in (parts of) the *Philosophical Investigations*. At the moment I'm reading Jerrold Katz's book *Sense, Reference and Philosophy*. It's more interesting, and its ideas more plausible, than anything Bertrand Russell ever wrote.

Monday, May 2

My feelings for Noam Chomsky approximate reverence. He's one of the very few *sensible geniuses* of the twentieth century. He's always been there on the side of common sense versus obscurantism or irrationality. Chomsky against behaviorism. Chomsky against Foucault. Chomsky against deconstructionism. Chomsky against empiricism. Chomsky against the U.S. government.

It's comforting to know I can email him whenever I want (though he'd ignore me [not true]). To have such easy access to such a person!

Tuesday, May 3

I wrote a few limericks. It was damn fun.

Wednesday, May 4

I want to write a poem about Farah Ahmedi. The 17-year-old girl who, years ago, stepped on a land mine in Afghanistan, lost her left leg and had the bones of her right leg fused together, then lost her father and two sisters in a bomb that destroyed their home, then repaired her prosthetic leg with tape and glue and

climbed the mountains with her (physically and emotionally frail) mother into Pakistan, then (to avoid living in refugee tents, which she thought would be bad for her mother) took a job as a servant in someone's house, then applied to the World Relief and emigrated to the U.S., then won an award for 'best autobiography' and is now somewhat of a celebrity. Through it all she stayed optimistic.

Writing books and poems (especially limericks!) seems frivolous—*contemptible*—when you read about someone like that. So much so that I've lost my ability to write for the rest of the night. I guess I'll watch TV.

Monday, May 9

I'm more interested in psychology than the philosophy of language—and I have a better chance of contributing something interesting to the former discipline in an absence of technical expertise than I do to the latter—so I'm focusing on psychology now. Reading about Kohut, Lacan, Adler, Jung and others.

Wednesday, May 19

The "Book of Joe" is becoming a strange, delicate mixture of satire and sincerity. To write in the Biblical style without occasionally being forced to sound tragic (as opposed to comical) is impossible. It's still mostly satire, of course; even the 'sincerity' is made somewhat vulgar by its proximity to vulgarity. Joe rises periodically to tragic heights, but he can't distinguish between his noble and his base impulses, so they run together; one follows the other as if they're of equal value. An obvious theme (or several) can be extrapolated from this.

No matter what I write, philosophy always manages to creep in—through no effort of mine.

Thursday, May 20

Example: Joe periodically lets slip his self-loathing (as when he denounces the "wealth-monger"), which many businessmen unconsciously have.

Saturday, May 28

Whenever the characters rise to nobility in their sentiments and modes of expression, they suddenly fall back into mediocrity by a single word or sentence. --In this age (in *every* age, but especially this one), nobility is a short-lived, self-contradictory thing; no one can remain 'noble' for more than a brief period of time before returning to reality.

Occasionally Joe nearly realizes the error of his crass ways and repudiates Mammon, but each time his mind is brought back to money. And in the end, after he has come within a hair's-breadth of understanding the true meaningfulness of life--which would entail his continued (financial) abasement, and thus that the satire become a tragedy--he will be restored to his former prosperity and therewith his trivial existence.

Of course, the redemptive power of suffering--and the wisdom it can impart--is primarily what's hinted at in Joe's gropings toward enlightenment.

(The pagan imagery is significant as well, though for different reasons.)

Sunday, May 29

For the past year or so--or maybe two years--my nightly sleep has been "unrefreshing". I wake up tired. And then, as I've told you before, my tiredness persists through most of the day. If the world and I didn't hate each other, probably none of this would be the case.

Monday, June 6

Skimming *The Antichrist*. Brilliant perspective on Christianity. By no means the 'definitive' one, but highly original and thought-provoking. It is also, of course, flattering to me, as are all of Nietzsche's writings. Section 57, for example (the second half).

Other sections are too "shrill" for my taste. Like 59. Too much hatred of Christians. Too much idealism of the past. Too much Hegelianism—'history is moved by mind, not by economics or anything materialistic and mechanistic'. But I understand Nietzsche: his physical and emotional misery were the reasons for these flaws. 'I know of no more heart-rending read than Nietzsche: what must a man have suffered to have such need of being vitriolic!' [A paraphrase of something Nietzsche said about Shakespeare.]

Wednesday, June 8

I'm extremely bothered by the imperfection of Joe's Book. I constantly reread it and change a word here, a word there; I want it to be incapable of being criticized in any way. But in order for that to be possible I'd have to read all of Shakespeare's works, all of the Bible, all of Milton and Dryden and Pope and Donne and Byron and Keats and hundreds of others and assimilate their expressions and create my own from this fertile soil. That every passage I've written could have been written differently without necessarily sacrificing its quality *appalls* me. Unless it's *necessary*, it's *worthless*. Therefore, it's worthless.

Any chapter I write that doesn't cost me many hours of painful effort…I don't trust. The chapter on the Muslim was uncomfortably easy; I'll make sure that no others are the same.

Thursday, June 9

I'll get tuition remission next year by being a TA. 'Tis a relief—though I'm not confident in my TAing skills. I think I'll go to a therapist regularly in the fall, simply because it's time I started living.

…A third of my life has passed. A third!! Death is going to hit me before I know it.

–Ah, but when I listen to Paul Simon it doesn't really matter.

I'm going to start drinking protein shakes everyday and working out again. The 'muscular' feeling is an essential part of happiness.

I've changed my mind about Lacan. He doesn't impress me.

Friday, June 10

I need a break from the satire. Returning to psychology and sociology. I read a little today (Margaret Mead et al) and realized that, once again, I'll have to revise—no, *rewrite*—most of my book, to make it more scholarly.

Sunday, June 12

Maybe you think it's a sign of my immaturity that I want my book to deal with everything from linguistics to Marxism to psychoanalysis to religion to the philosophy of art… [Yes. I do think that.] But really the main reason for this ambition is that I can't address any of these topics satisfactorily without addressing them all. Whenever I write about one, I find myself inadvertently crossing over into another.

Wednesday, June 15

Tonight I passed a beautiful girl on the sidewalk walking her dog; I hesitated for an instant as if to talk to her, but….then I walked on. I don't know why. It was a case of love at first sight, and afterwards I could have died with regret. And in fact, I will: I *will* die with regret, when I die. A lifetime of regret will pass away in that moment. Wasted opportunities, chances at happiness brushed aside. So much cowardice…. So instead of running back and introducing myself to her I put on my headphones and listened to Scott Joplin's "Solace".

Now there's no longer the same emotional pain, but there's still the uncertainty—the 'what would have happened if…' uncertainty. Maybe that girl would have been the love of my life. I'll never know.

I'm tired of myself. I've lived too long in this body, this psyche.

Frege was the last of the truly great (profound, 'pithy', epoch-making) philosophers. The 20th century didn't produce any—with the possible exception of Wittgenstein. He was extremely confused (especially late in life), but he had periodic flashes of profundity. Still, even Wittgenstein wasn't a Frege.

Heidegger? Sartre? Husserl? Any of the great logicians? No, no, no, no.

I'm simply not interested in most people. That's a major reason I'm shy/introverted. And I've gotten into the habit of not initiating conversations—which is ironic, because once the other person has said something as simple as "hello" I'm usually good at continuing the conversation, and even being the one who carries it. This anti-social habit is hard to break out of. I simply lack the 'impulse', or the 'energy', to start a conversation. When I saw that girl tonight I thought, "Tell her her dog is cute." And, of course, it wouldn't have been hard for me to do that. I wasn't 'afraid' of it; I wasn't worried or nervous; if she'd said something first I would have talked with enthusiasm, animation and (maybe) charm, as I usually do with people in whom I have some slight interest. But the *inertia* of my introvertedness got in the way. That's really all it was. –But then again, there may have been *some* fear. I suppose I was worried I wouldn't be entertaining. I'd ask her what kind of dog it was, etc., not caring at all (which was possibly another element in my reluctance to talk)…but where would I go from there? That kind of worry wouldn't occur to me, though, if I had *energy*.

Saturday, June 18

Working out every day, drinking protein shakes, eating more. I wish I'd done this in college. It would have made life easier.

Sunday, June 19

Unless you've tried it yourself, you can't imagine what an effect 'working out' has on your mind—your wit, your self-confidence, your happiness. It's like I'm taking a (not very powerful) drug.

Thursday, June 30

Canada, Holland, Belgium and Spain have legalized same-sex marriages. It has become a world movement—or, at any rate, a Western one. America, being the most prejudiced, will be the last country to follow the trend, but eventually it'll have to.

…One of my goals is to surpass Swift as the foremost prose satirist in the English language. It shouldn't be hard. "A Modest Proposal" is heavy-handed, and *Gulliver's Travels* has much that is unnecessary, even poorly written.

Saturday, July 2

Working out is bullshit. After the first week it stops having an effect on your mindset (and behavior), and it no longer even builds up your body. And the lifting itself is fucking incredibly unpleasant. I almost threw up yesterday after I was done. Leaned over the toilet, etc. It took me two hours to recuperate.

If I continue, I'm going to do it with less frequency. From what I've read, that might help. Less frequency but more intensity (if that's possible). –And yet, Ed Norton apparently gained thirty pounds of muscle in three months (for *American History X*) by lifting weights non-stop and drinking protein shakes. Besides, it seems like common sense: the more you work out, the more muscle you'll build.

So maybe I'll *increase* the frequency. I'll work out not only every day, but several times each day.

…Yeah, I'm starting a new routine. The old one never worked for me—the hour-long sessions four times a week. Instead I'm going to do short ones (thirty minutes or so) twice a day, focusing on 'heaviness' and few reps (6-8) rather than a lot of reps (12-20) and less heaviness. Also, more protein-drinking and -eating.

Thursday, July 7

Imagine if somebody wrote something comparable to the Ninth Symphony nowadays. If he took a poem written a few decades earlier and set it to music like that. Imagine… What would that be like?

What a time that must have been, when geniuses all lived together and audiences could hear poems written by Schiller and Goethe in the music of Beethoven and Schubert. They'd go to a concert and be like 'Hey, that's one of Schiller's poems! Cool, man!' The poet would perhaps be in the audience, and the composer might be conducting the orchestra, and at the end they'd both be congratulated, and everyone would feel this natural but strange (to us) intimacy… Audience members could go right up to Beethoven and ask him questions about the piece, about his intentions…[1]

That was the culture to live in.

Tuesday, July 12

For weeks I haven't been writing (the theoretical part of) my book. Only the satire. And I've been reading;—reread Therborn's book from my summer in Madison, and just finished Piaget's *Psychology of the Child.* Etc. Skimmed various writings of Winnicott's, which didn't seem very valuable.

…I repudiate the story I wrote in Korea called "Atrabibulous". I can't even read it anymore.

Saturday, July 16

[…]

The manager gave me the day off. It feels like I've been given a second chance at life—a reprieve

[1] (Maybe writing their questions on a piece of paper, or shouting in his ear.)

from a death-sentence.

Reading a collection of Jung's essays, *Contributions to Analytical Psychology*.

One of the things I've been worried about in my satire is whether the Mammon = God equation is clear enough in the beginning, or whether, if it's clear, it seems forced. And when religious characters enter the scene, the situation becomes more complicated: they don't identify God with Mammon. At the end I hope to justify the assumption throughout—which is really the backbone of the satire—that Mammon (i.e., not just money but also greed, selfishness, etc.) is God, by the long speech he'll give to Joe describing his power.

Thursday, July 21

The poet's chapter is the hardest yet. While it's difficult to write in the biblical style without sounding absurd and artificial, it's almost impossible to do so in the romantic style. You can see from the poetic line I dissected on July 13th [in a deleted entry] that *sheer shit* is usually the result. When you're in the process of writing it, it doesn't always seem that bad; but when you come back to it a few hours later, you can barely read it without averting your eyes or keeping a straight face. Lines like this--"What need of Cupid's shafts when one's beloved hath eyes that pierce the heart?"--come dangerously close to the borderline. They're (possibly) acceptable in my satire only because it's a satire. (A bit of exaggeration is essential to satire.)

Friday, July 22

Jung wasn't a very good writer. E.g., it takes him forever to get to his point. Freud comes right out and says what he wants to say; Jung goes through pages and pages of verbiage, which include stupid apologies, disclaimers, hesitancies, irrelevances, bad metaphors, philosophical digressions, and a lot of repetitiveness.

Watched a documentary about Tupac Shakur. The guy was amazing. What would he be doing now if he hadn't died?--at 25. *25*!! He was still a boy! But his charisma was that of a mature movie-star.

Thursday, July 28

I wrote a little story, below. (There are three levels of significance to the title.) The protagonist is vastly different from me, just so you know. He represents certain cultural trends, etc.

Everyman Comes

> He looked in the mirror. With his hair slicked back and his shirt unbuttoned at the top, so that a tuft of chest hair stuck out, he looked good. He looked sort of like how he'd looked a long time ago, when he was a child, on one Halloween--maybe he was about thirteen years old--and he'd dressed up as a vampire, with his hair slicked back (with so much gel it gleamed in the bathroom light) and blood seeping from his mouth and eyes as he curled his lips wickedly, to pose for the picture his mother was taking. "Wow, you're scary!" she'd said. He'd liked how he looked and wanted to keep the same hairstyle everyday, but his mom wouldn't let him. "It's too sleazy!" she said. But now as he looked in the mirror he thought Aaaah, fuck her. I was right; it looks good. I'm gonna keep it this way from now on. Maybe this way I'll get more women. --Nahh, fuck it, I have too many already.
>
> He walked out the door and swaggered down the hall. No one was there to see him. He went

into the elevator. He saw his reflection on the bronze-colored doors as they closed--a little smudged, but actually he looked even better that way. It was something about the lighting and the smudge; maybe it was the lack of detail in his image that made it more attractive. Soft lights and shadows are generally best, but metallic smudges work too. He stepped outside. The street was crowded. *I'm home again,* he thought. --Damn, that was a fucking good movie. *I'm home again*. And Chris O'Donnell is like, home? We're in a hotel room, man. In the middle of New York, nowhere near your home. Crazy blind man. But Al was right. And now here I am. God must have been a fucking genius. Two breasts perking out at you--two! Not one, not three, but two! Look at all these fucking breasts, man, bouncing along past. And these legs, and all these asses! "Hey babe, what's up?" No answer. Bitch.

He walked towards the subway. He chose his path carefully: behind girls wearing shorts that got wedged in their butts as they walked. Or skirts that ended where the thighs began. That little fold where the buttock started--that was his favorite spot on a woman's body. Her whole essence was contained in that fold, that cute, provocative, soft, sweaty, paradoxical fold. A girl with long hair wearing a lacy top and a sparkly silver mini-skirt undulated past him; he turned his head so his eyes could follow her till she turned the corner. God *damn*, I wouldn't mind fucking that. But there are more where that came from.

A homeless man was curled up in the fetal position on a bench, his head resting on a plastic bag stuffed with something. People walked past without noticing him. He was shaking slightly--sobbing, maybe? Poor guy. Somebody ought to shoot him, put him out of his misery. That'd be compassionate. And it would save us from the pain of compassion, too. And there'd be one less bum. I wish I had a gun. --No, I don't. Don't need it.

He walked on, following the girl in front of him.

On a whim, he took a detour. Down an alley--dumpsters crouching in the shadows. The smell was bad; it kind of made him choke. Electrical wires hung overhead. A boy and girl were kissing somewhere; he could hear their whispers and gropings. And slurpings. Maybe the boy was getting a blowjob. Yeah, the slurping was rhythmic. Now he could hear groans and words of encouragement. He figured they were behind a dumpster somewhere. Then he saw them--the girl kneeling, her head bobbing mechanically, her cheek bulging out absurdly; the boy grimacing, his eyes closed tightly, his hands resting stupidly on her mechanical head. She turned to look at the stranger who was standing there smiling, still with the erect appendage in her mouth, and a hilarious look of mortification widened her eyes. "Sorry!" he said, "I'm leaving. You're doing a good job. Keep it up." Stupid girl. If you weren't already embarrassed you shouldn't be now. Having a cock in your mouth. What could be more disgusting? --I can't wait five hours. I need some now. Just to tide me over. Just a short one.

It took a while to get to the place. All the alleys he walked through were dark and cluttered with dumpsters. The smell was stifling. He was relieved when he saw the girls up ahead with their skimpy clothes; the air was fresh there. "Hey ladies!" "Hey sexy." "What's up?" "Damn, you're gorgeous." "Over here, baby!" "You want some of this?" "You look ready, all dolled up." "You want to come inside with me?" He picked one and they went inside.

The hall was close and musty, with yellowing strips of wallpaper peeling off the walls. Made him kind of claustrophobic. They entered a small room with a small bed and a chair next to the wall. "Okay honey--you look good tonight--you want the same thing you got last time?" Her curtness was unattractive. "You're not very romantic tonight," he said. "I'm sorry baby. I'm just tired." "That's okay. I'll do the work this time. Just a quickie. I'm going clubbing." "Okay." She pulled the t-shirt over her head, exposing her pert little breasts, and then she stepped out of her skirt. It fell to the floor in a heap and lay there motionless, in a rumpled circle around her feet. She had a beautiful body. He had a sudden urge to slather it with oil; he thought it would look irresistible all shiny like that. She sat on the bed and unzipped his pants. Then she pulled them down and set to work hardening his piece of flab. He rubbed her breasts at the same time; it helped. He thought about her nakedness, and about the story in the Vagina Monologues (which he'd recently seen)

about a woman who liked it when her boyfriend stared for hours at her cunt, fascinated by it. This aroused him quickly. He raised the girl and put her on the bed in the doggy-style position. She moaned and gasped as he thrust in and out rhythmically, feeling her cleft with two fingers. It was hard work in the beginning, as always, but at the end his reflexes took over and the thrusts became very swift and mechanical. Afterwards they lay together on the bed in silence.

He was glad when he left the hallway that smelled of vomit and emerged into the cool air. The street was full of people with dicks and people with vaginas displaying themselves; he smiled and said hello to passing ones. Then he walked to the subway. She's a fucking fine girl, he thought. Next time I'll pleasure her more. She was faking, I know it. Sucks when I don't pleasure the girl. Even a hooker. It's more fun that way anyway.

He got into the train and looked out at the dark tunnel as it sped by. Electric lights shined in random spots. He saw his reflection in the window and noticed that the sex had messed up his hair; he reshaped it until it reminded him again of his old Halloween costume. Slick. Cool. Confident. It looks good, he thought. Looks like the time I lost my virginity, with that girl--what was her name? She was so cute and innocent. Wasn't as wild as I'd hoped. Kind of boring, actually. Sort of. I was nervous. Eager to please. Both of us were. Timid, hesitant. But passionate--in a quiet way. Really turned-on. The noises she made! Squeaking, squealing, like a little doll you squeeze and it lets out air. I was careful not to hurt her.

He sighed and was sad a moment. The train stopped and he went up the escalator to the surface. On seeing all the made-up girls with their boyfriends feeling their asses he thought Yeah, *this* is what I'm *talkin'* about! Look at all these sexpots just itching for it. He walked to the club where he was meeting his friends. Hip-hop music was blaring behind the neon lights. He looked through the windows at the dance floor, where people squirmed and grinded against each other, barely able to move from the crush of bodies. He could almost smell the sweat. And he knew he'd be tasting it soon, along with shots of vodka. Smiling broadly he thought *I'm home again*, and strode with a swagger into the pumping chaos.

Part of me agrees with Goethe that an artist shouldn't assist in the interpretation of his work. The reader will be less impelled to probe the themes of a work if the artist has already told him what (he thinks?) they are. Thus, the reader may, paradoxically, get less out of the work than he would have otherwise. But this is unsettling. It means that the profundity of art—its ability to make us think—is based primarily on ignorance of the creator's intentions. We have an ingrained assumption that art isn't completely separate from the artist, but the only reason that it really means anything to us is that it *is* separate, in a way. That is, one of the supposed fundamental characteristics of art would vitiate it if the spectator could ever fully appreciate it (the characteristic)—i.e., see it 'played out' in a particular instance (by knowing the artist's intentions, etc.). Therefore, a devastating contradiction is at the very center of a work of art. The latter's fulfillment—viz., a 'spectator's' complete knowledge of how it relates to the artist[1]—is at the same time its (partial) negation, in that it thereby ceases to be thought-provoking.

Maybe that's wrong. Even if we knew what, say, Marquez's intentions were in his story "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings"—even if he told them to us and assured us that he had had no other intentions besides those—we could still try to glean more themes from the work. But the point is, would we have a *reason* to? Not really, because there'd be no reason to expect that there would *be* any more. The work wouldn't exist if the artist hadn't created it, so why should we look for meanings other than those intended by the artist? It's his baby, not ours (despite what postmodernist literary theorists—rebels without a cause—would have you believe). If a machine randomly created a piece of writing, would we labor to discover its "meaning"? Would we have any reason to? No. We think an artwork has (a) meaning only

[1] I call this a 'fulfillment' because, by looking to the artist for the meaning of the work (which we invariably and inevitably do), we presuppose that the artist's subjectivity is itself essential to the work. (You'll object that we don't "invariably and inevitably" etc., but you're an ass. Unconsciously, intuitively, irresistibly we look to the artist for an explanation of his work—even if we (like Barthes) pretend not to.)

because it was created by a being that can create meaning; therefore, in looking for meaning, we're tacitly looking for the *artist's* meaning, the meaning intended by the being who gave the work meaning (or, less ambiguously, whose (past) existence (i.e., whose authorship) alone justifies our conviction that the work has (a) meaning—which suggests, strongly, that the meaning we're looking for is in fact the one intended by the artist (because, again, his having created it is the only reason we think it has a meaning)).

Nevertheless, we should, of course, continue to analyze art as we always have, paying scant attention to the artist's subjectivity, because this method allows us to get the most out of it. It may be an 'illusion', but so is everything that makes life worth living and gives humans dignity.

Sunday, July 31

This was my last day at the restaurant. The goodbyes were unsatisfying. Short and abrupt. A trifle awkward. Not that I'd expected anything else.

Tuesday, August 2

I'm bothered by the randomness of the literary references in my satire. A few are thematically justified—the Ecclesiastes ones, the Jeremiah, the Donne, the *Timon of Athens*, the Keats, the Koran, the Ovid, the Gospels—but even these are essentially random. There's no method behind my choices; I just take what seems appropriate, as sort of a nod to my betters. What's the point? Why don't I just make the whole thing my own? What has the inclusion of literary allusions to do with the purposes of the satire? Justifications can be thought of, but they're contrived. What it comes down to is that the display of erudition is self-indulgent and pretentious—though it also enriches the work.

Wednesday, August 3

Another chapter of my life is over. Another chapter that has meant little to me. Tomorrow I'll leave D.C.

Sunday, August 7

Truly, it's fun to be alive. It's amazingly enjoyable! Just to have a future stretched before you—and to read, or write, or talk—and to think—and just to *exist*. Existence itself is somehow satisfying.

We're in New Hampshire, in a cottage on a lake somewhere in the mountains. It's surprisingly fun so far.

Thursday, August 11

I've been trying to write poetry lately. It isn't quite as bad as the 'poetry' I used to write in college, but I don't think it's very good. Why not? Why is it impossible for me to write poetry? I'm pretty good at prose, but I feel a 'block' when I try to poeticize. (Less so in the 'free verse' style, which is really just prose written in short lines.) I won't give up yet, if only because I want to be *certain* I have nothing to contribute to the medium. (In general, I'm bothered less by the knowledge that I lack a given talent than by the belief that I have it but am wasting it.)

Examples of my "poetry":

New Hampshire

alone in the night
on the rock beside the black glass lake rippled by loons
two hours ago,
disturbed by a plash and a plash, and a cricket over there,
and the purple-yellow moon-smudge double-image sinking
towards an unattainable convergence in the black of the curve of the hills,
and the sandbar-island fading into the thick flat gray of the night
(tree-like shadows jutting up to an interruption of the sky),
the thickening gray of the night presided over by a few transient stars
stilly,
and the shore's dirt-sand coolly damp on the rough sensitive skin of the
sole
of the foot,
lit up gloamingly by a lantern in the cottage,
as the dirty peeling paper of the birch trees behind me falls
without noise
into the green carpet of vinca vines
beside the sturdy, stoic gray white trunk…

above the imagined lake shine stars unhindered by the moon;
the lantern has gone out,
all that remains is the still sand and the single splash and the descending black
and the blanket of nature's nocturne…

999
the Prelude to
a minor sadness
guitar-strummed Bachishly
in my wraith-like, waif-like soul
that shudders on the major third
after minutes of minor sadness
and thinks of the virgin's quiver in her
expectant naked lover's silent arms,
the soundlessness of Venice at dawn,
the flap of the butterfly's wing,
the dying gasp of Jesus,
the sweet surcease of strife
and we are at one
in the forlorn
999

time
grimly
pressing on,

on, on, on, on,
mowing down our love
of love and life and self,
impersonal, disdainful,
proud, yet life-uncomprehending,
lonesome in its omnipotency,
pitiful in its self-destructive zeal
fueled by self-hate, rancor, envy
of unmechanical beings
who have knowledge of *passion*—
a lingering moment
whose memory is
forever and
overcomes
deathly
time

birth
of love
turmoiling
in a death-heart
bled dry of wet hope
and tears and all feeling
pleasure-killed by brutal life
a universal murderer
is a violent shocking redemption
that dissolves the calluses on my soul
painfully in a deluge of tears
wetting the face of love's midwife
holding my new newborn heart
in her caressing hands
caressing new life
from old stale death
which has died
in re-
birth

The Fall

I rise from dreams in a grog-haze,
Stumbling from my feet to the ground
And to my feet again, and to the ground,
The shadows playing on the sun-brown dirt—
Rise and swirl, disappear, reappear, whirled world.
Sit, not stand, on the sun-blanched knoll
Atop the sunny hill
Above the low ant-civilization below,

For if I fall I shall fall *there*.
Sit, not stand; my dreams have left me reeling,
Feeling for unreal feelings, groping
In the dark effluence of memories,
Alone in shadows under the singing thrushes,
Pasty-faced at break of day.
I listen swimmingly to the singing thrushes,
Swaying motionlessly to their song,
But dare not raise my eyes for vertigo.
Am drunk from the night's orgies,
From naked nature-solitude and midnight
Moon-singing; I cannot face the sun,
Nor soberness, nor the drying-up of feeling—
Nor the low ant-civilization below.
The languor of the senses is not that of the mind.
In yellow puddles my claret mind imbibes
Itself (the self-intoxication of the night),
In dusk-yellow puddles made shallow in me.
Dissipant haze around me, sun-dispelled,
Tasting of autumn, damp leaf-decay,
Strong wet soil, gray dawns gone.
Waving shadows tossed in the wind;
Hanging willows blown in the wind;
Dandelion down dead in the wind,
Whispering passively past my ears.
Whispering…
Rise to my feet, stand on the hill's edge,
Looking down, balancing—trying—
Beaten by sunbeams, drawn to singing,
Pulled by the cacophony of the real below,
Tumbling in whirling confusion,
And I fall…
And I fall.

Unfulfilled love

I trace my finger along the curve of your back,
the cruel curve of your back,
wracked with the longing to *be* the curve of your back,
to fill with love love's lack.

I kiss your wet, fresh, shower-scented hair,
your streaming, maddening hair,
my lips longing to be *one* with your hair—
but cruel life doesn't care.

the night hour—

the hour of searing tears
and soothing despair

music reminds me
“At least I have suffering!”
and *amor fati*

whispers come floating
from fluid sleep-consciousness
to a drifting me

the sunset’s sunburn
soothes itself with its frozen
splash of soft colors

worm-devoured corpse,
eye-sockets mud-encrusted,
dew on the nose-tip

glistening green fangs
spread apart, piercing the fly,
dissolving it

pink petals
of the plucked blossom
drift to the ground—
silently

There once was a leader named Bush,
Whose brain had less sense than his tush;
He was elected twice
As we all cried, “Christ!”—
But Christians told us to shush.

The not-so-noble lie

"America is a democracy!"
—So says our aristocracy;
But I disagree:
It seems to me
That our country's a 'corporate theocracy'.

Or perhaps it's an ochlocracy;
It sure ain't a meritocracy,
With Bush at the top
And power with the GOP.
Actually, I'd prefer a 'gynocracy'.

"Revolutions now and then,"
Said Thomas Jefferson,
"Are desirable:
For a hierarchy
To become entrenched is a sin!"

A social ill

The disease of the 'academic'
Has become, by now, systemic:
An *irrelevance*
That's proud of its
Status as an epidemic.

Actually, as *teachers*
I do respect these creatures;
As *thinkers*, though,
They're very low—
They seem to me like leeches.

I had a strange dream last night:
The world was engulfed in white light,
And we were made deaf
By a thundering laugh—
"You people are not very bright!"

I once knew a man from Hong Kong
Whose schlong was not very long;
Still, women loved him
Because he rubbed them

In ways that were downright *wrong*.

Of every man—to be honest—
I'm by far the most Don Juanest;
Were 't not for my shyness
(A barrier to vaginas),
Women would find me the funnest.

Said to me once a joker,
"With a woman, first you must *stoke* her
(Unless I'm a liar,
A woman's a fire);
Only *then* will she let you poke her."

Yes, women are vain and fickle;
Yes, their psyche is quite a pickle;—
But I love them regardless,
As much for the sex
As for their adorable giggle!

A shameless trivialization of great music

I'm fond of passing judgment
(As should be by now apparent),
And so I will
Apply my skill
To a critique of music's parents.—

I'll start with Bach—the dude
Who mastered the art of fugue:
His polyphony
Kicks homophony's
Ass (not to be rude).

Vivaldi is much too simplistic—
Aside from th' ingenious "Four Seasons",
A piece that sings 'Italy!
Italy!' —So prettily!
Not to listen is masochistic.

Schubert: of melodists,
He may have been the greatest.
(In this respect,

He's among the select
Of all the classicists.)

While I prefer Mozart to Haydn,
In that he was more of a fightin'
Man (—was against
Trite conventions),
Haydn was still a Titan.

As for the romantic Schumann,
(Whom Nietzsche considered a woman),
His tunes sound like *chopping*
Compared to Chopin—
But listen to Op. 92, man!

I've reservations 'bout Brahms:
His music is made of bronze;
Heavy, metallic,
And far too phallic;
And yet, it has its charms.

I'll 'pass' on Debussy:
His music is none too '*juicy*';
In "La Mer",
There's nothing there!
(I'm rather choosy, you see.)

[Deleted one on Wagner]

But Georg Handel…ahhh!
I love (most of) the "Messiah"!
And the Arriving
Of Sheba's Queen:—
That music screams *Hallelujah*!

I'm in love with Amadeus:
His music is my Deus;
It fills with mirth
Even stones and earth,
Like that of Orpheus.

Rossini's a vulgarized Mozart—
The masses were fond of his art;
And yet, I admit,
When I listen to it
A *race* takes place in my heart.

Dvořák can be *sublime*—
Though rarely; most of the time
He's not. But still…
I *adore* "Měsíčku

Na nebi hlubockém".

And what about Franz Liszt?
—I think too *virtuosic*;
But I like "Les Préludes"
Better than the Études
(*Ausser* the Paganini Variations).

I can't forget Chopin!
—Of whom I'm the greatest fan:
Ballades, Scherzi,
Nocturnes, Concerti…
Everything is a gem!

From the country of the Russky,
None compares with Tchaikovsky—
Not Rachmaninov,
Not Prokofiev,
And certainly not Mussorgsky!

I haven't heard much Verdi,
But what I have, is worthy:
Vibrant, virile,
Vivid, vital;
I'm moved to tears by *Aïda*.

I know even less Puccini,
But what I've heard is *dreamy*:
Arias of
Pining love;
Thus, "Nessun Dorma" (e.g.).

The 'tonal' tradition's demise
Occurred with Schoenberg's rise;
The twelve-tone scale
Was the coffin's nail.
—That music gives me hives.

I've saved the best for last:
Ludwig! –Hear the brass
Band's fanfare!
Hark!—waving banners!
That man was simply the Master.

Monday, August 15

I'm at the university. It's wonderful to be back in this setting. This liberal arts setting. Where I'm *free*. I've been running away from myself these past two years. This is where I belong. --And I'm friendlier in a university environment than outside it (though I'm friendly there too). Around young, intelligent people who are here for the common purpose of being educated. In short, "I'm home again!" --Or rather, 'for the

first time' (seeing as, when I was in college, I didn't *know* that was my home[1]).

I can tell I've matured since I left Wesleyan. This whole situation feels infinitely more comfortable and 'easygoing' than it used to. (My increased muscle mass has something to do with this. Vanity, thy name is *homo sapiens*!)

Thursday, August 18

Spent the day preparing for the online telecourse on art I'm teaching. –It's bizarre that I'm a college teacher. What's the world coming to?! Someone as not-strict, as *goofy* as I teaching a course?? No! The System is flawed when it allows that to happen. But it's going to be fun impostoring as an authority-figure.

People go through years of training to be professors, but they hire people with no training whatever to teach their courses. In other words, the trained ones don't teach, while the untrained ones do. That's fucked up.

Late in life I won't give a damn about my theoretic contributions. I'll care only that I temporarily improved Jae-eun's life, and Sofia's, and had an impact on Sangeetha and others. Truly, that's all that matters. Philosophy? A diversion. Even art is preferable: it makes life bearable.

The only thing that matters in life is confidence. If you're not self-confident your life will be hard; if you are, people will like or least respect you. It's a goddamned idiot's world.

Friday, August 19

My unproductiveness has its origin in the agnosticism of my society. I can't read anything anymore without yawning. Nothing has meaning—nothing has the *weight* to have meaning.

I spend a lot of time staring at the wall.

If I make it to the end, the achievement of which I'll be proudest is having made it to the end. And my greatest claim to fame, for better or worse, will be my journal—because it's the journal of a disease. The most complete self-diagnosis of a disease *ever*.

What is there left to do?? What is there left to feel?? What is there left to hope for?? This malaise, this malaise! Love is a cliché, inspiration is dead, social reform defeats itself. Civilization has defeated itself.

Saturday, August 20

I just read about the debate (in the 1980s) over Richard Serra's sculpture *Tilted Arc*, the 120-foot-long, 12-foot-high slab of rusted steel that reached across a popular plaza in Manhattan, partially obstructing the entrance to the federal building next to it and completely wrecking the public's enjoyment of the plaza. *Tilted Arc* was eventually destroyed, thank God. What an (ob)noxious creation it was! And what a pretentious cretin Serra was! This notion that if something, no matter how puerile or ugly or simplistic, can be given a profound-sounding justification ("I am interested in creating a behavioral space in which the viewer interacts with the sculpture in its context… The arc divides space against itself… We can learn more about ourselves, about the nature of our social relations, and about the nature of the spaces we inhabit and depend upon by keeping *Tilted Arc*…") it has the dignity of great art is symptomatic of our cultural decline.

[1] Youth is wasted on the young.

Minimalism is how 'equality' and nihilism manifest themselves in art. Something like *Tilted Arc* requires no talent and only a nominal amount of creativity.

Sunday, August 21

I could read *Don Juan* for hours—days—weeks—months. Its sentiments are so in tune with mine—its Ecclesiastical sentiments—and its style—that its genius is but a secondary reason for my infatuation. But what genius! It's a poem unlike any in the English language—any in *any* language—surpassing even Pope's *Dunciad*. Yes, its power is a negative one, unlike Shelley's or Keats's, but I don't consider that a point against it. It's still as timely as it was when written, and it'll *always* be timely, because life, after all, *is* nothingness. And yet beneath the sophisticated cynicism is a heart-rending despair, and an idealism, and a passion for life, and a yearning for salvation.

Monday, August 22

Reading (a condensed version of) Gibbon's history of Rome.

…Couldn't believe my eyes when I read this: after the murder of Pertinax by the Praetorian Guards, they held a public auction, where Julian bought the empire for two hundred pounds. I'm not exaggerating. He acceded to the throne solely because his bid—of *two hundred pounds*—was the highest. (Three months later, of course, he was murdered.)

Tuesday, August 23

Session with a therapist.

The good person who goes astray from being tired of his goodness. The good person who wants to be bad, so he can go back to being good with a good conscience.

The romantic desire to be bad enough to need redemption—and yet to have the capacity for it (to have a fundamental goodness). Byron. Wanting to be God and Satan—*everything*. Wanting to create the world, its evil and its good. (Extreme narcissism.) But not very self-conscious in him: 'I'm deep and complicated; I'm admirable because I'm bad yet *yearn* to be good.' In me: 'I'm deep and complicated; I'm admirable because I'm good yet want to be—and have the ability to be—bad, so that I can (have the need to) reaffirm my basic goodness through redemption and thus be *transcendentally* good.' Divine narcissism.

—Two motives: to be complex and to reaffirm primitive goodness.

—Wanting to sound existentialist and obscure. Sartre in *Baudelaire*. (Sartre *everywhere*.)

Gibbon: writing = the foundation of civilization, culture.

The conflict b/w wanting to be great and wanting to have fun; wanting to write/create and wanting to live. The first is morbid (from death), the second life-affirming. –The ordinary man as the lover of life? No, usually not. As automaton;—but for the 'great man' (a certain kind) life isn't enough: he devalues it. Cares more about death (immortality). The machine vs. the denier: what's worse?

Thursday, August 25

Most of what I wrote for my book will have to be taken out of it. It's too similar to what Nietzsche did, and it's juvenile and vain (and repetitive). But I don't want it to be lost forever, so here are a few selections, ordered randomly:

The dialectic of the 'thinker'.-- This dialectic has three stages.[1] The first is the most common and natural: it consists in the pursuit of objective, 'eternal' truth. A reality is assumed to exist independently of one's interpretations; the task of the thinker is to reproduce it in language, to provide a logical 'picture' of it in propositions. This is possible because (to borrow from the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) propositions--those that have 'sense'--are supposed to have the same logical structure as the world.[2] This first dialectical stage conforms to common sense, but it is based on errors, or at least unquestioned assumptions: (1) that the truth or falsity of a proposition is determined by its correspondence or lack thereof to an objective reality;[3] (2) the law of the excluded middle (that every proposition is either true or false);[4] (3) (*in most cases*) that, because certain propositions relate to a metaphysical world (i.e., a world not accessible to empirical observation), such a world exists.

The second phase is a reaction against the first. It is the phase of skepticism. It has several manifestations: it may reject the idea that truth is 'fixed' and eternal; it may deny that humans can know truth; it may assert that truth exists but that it is relative to individuals or to cultures; it may 'deconstruct' the notion of truth itself, declaring that it is senseless or based on 'binary oppositions' that are culturally fabricated. Such thinkers as Aenesidemus, Carneades, Sextus Empiricus, and--in more modern times--Derrida, Foucault, and their fellow poststructuralists/postmodernists have been skeptics.[5] One of the unifying features of their positions is that they are self-contradictory. For example, the Pyrrhonian skeptic believes that judgment ought to be suspended on all questions (because, e.g., everything is relative to one's subjective nature and the concepts one employs in judging) even as he makes the judgment that everything is relative to one's nature and the concepts one uses. Put differently, he thinks it is true that one cannot know truths.[6] Similarly, in the act of proposing the idea that every perception of reality is determined, at least in part, by the discourses or languages one happens to be formed by, the postmodern philosopher is positing that this particular perception of reality is an exception. Otherwise there would be no reason for him to believe it. Why should he believe in the truth of an idea that only expresses some arbitrary discourse or culture? 'It is a fixed truth that there are no fixed truths.' That is his position, in a nutshell.[7] In deconstructing truth(s), this philosopher is constructing new ones--which, as such, have the form of eternity[8] and thus contradict his determination not to believe in eternal truths.

The third stage involves the recognition that the skeptic's ideas are not as radically different from those of the 'dogmatist' (for want of a better term) as he believes. Both consist of fixed truths.

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[1] What follows is, of course, merely an approximate characterization, a somewhat artificial schema that bears little relation to historical chronology. [I now (a year later) understand how inadequate this section is.]

[2] While this idea is not always made explicit, it is a presupposition. Thinkers describe states of affairs (or 'facts') by relating concepts to one another in ways that are supposed to reproduce the relations inherent in the states of affairs--which is possible only if the theoretical edifice has essentially the same structure (whatever that word is taken to mean) as the 'real' one. See the next section for a discussion of 'concept'.

[3] Even Kant and Hegel presuppose this notion. In fact, every thinker does. I'll explain why later.

[4] The reason why this law is presupposed is that if reality has the same structure as propositions, it must either contradict or agree with them.

[5] No doubt the latter would contest that claim, but essentially it is true. Poststructuralists/postmodernists use different arguments (or, in some cases, the same arguments, but with more modern language) than their ancient forebears did, but their outlooks on the world have much in common with those of ancient skeptics. Richard Rorty, for example, thinks that "there is nothing beyond vocabularies which serves as a criterion of choice between them" (Rorty, 1989:80). In other words, there is no reality outside discourse. Now, if that isn't skepticism (relativism, nihilism), I don't know what is.

[6] Various philosophers have tried to salvage the skeptic's position by claiming that he rejects only realist truth (truth that relates to a real, objective world), rather than truth based on anti-realist theories like coherentism, pragmatism, etc. This defense is sophistical, as I'll argue later.

[7] No artificial, ad hoc Russellian invention can provide a way out of this "paradox of self-reference". To postulate a "hierarchy of languages" is futile, because in natural languages there is no such hierarchy.

[8] See the next section, in which I argue that truth is necessarily 'fixed'.

In this stage, the philosopher will appreciate the irony--the *absurdity*--inherent in the situation of any thinker: the nature of language and cognition compels him to have beliefs and act in ways that he may want to oppose. He may believe that the idea of truth is meaningless, but in expressing his belief he is describing a truth. He may even supplement his position by saying that the idea that truth is meaningless is itself meaningless (because it is expressed as a truth)--but then *that* statement becomes a truth. And so on, ad infinitum. He has no way out. He is *forced* to believe in the existence of truth. Similarly, if he believes that truth does not consist in correspondence with reality, or that values are meaningless, or that the self does not exist, he cannot act on his belief (as I'll explain later).[1] He may think that there is no metaphysical reality--but this is a metaphysical statement, in that no empirical observation can be relevant to it; therefore it is self-contradictory. In short, he understands and accepts that his skeptical ideas refer to themselves;--and he accepts that (if the history of philosophy has shown *anything*, it is that) in many contexts it is impossible to be certain if/when one has achieved 'knowledge';--and he accepts that doubt is inevitable--and that he believes what he doesn't and he doesn't believe what he does--and that his goal of understanding truth is probably unrealizable. And yet in spite of all this he will continue to philosophize--but for a different reason than philosophers did in the past. All the absurdities that plague the activity of thinking will finally convince him that it's a *comedy*--that *life* is a comedy--that humans are trapped in the space between truth and ignorance, reason and unreason--that the most appropriate reaction to all this is *laughter*--that *laughter* is the most sensible mode of existence--and that, far from worshiping this trickster called 'truth', his best policy is simply to pursue self-ennobling self-expressions. Why? Because that's all that's left for him. And because that's what his theorizing ultimately was anyway. And because his intuition tells him that such self-expression functions as an end in itself (in that it 'affirms' him and gives his life 'meaning'). And because it's the only way he can, at least on one level, prevent himself from continuing to be tricked by language and life. In other words, the only way for him to accomplish his goal of understanding truth is to *live* it. Many truths are opposed to life, but this one, the most fundamental, *is* life.

Certain thinkers have foreshadowed the third stage of the dialectic. Hegel was the first: the revolution he inaugurated in philosophy consisted in his recognition that thinking is self-expression, that every system of thought is an expression of a culture and of the individuals who believe in it (the system). Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and various poststructuralists incorporated Hegel's insight. All of them, however (with a couple of exceptions)--including Hegel--failed to take the idea to its logical conclusion: they took their ideas 'seriously', as if they were products of pure reason, forgetting that they were primarily effects of psychological, social, and biological forces--and thus these thinkers remained partial prisoners of more primitive ways of thinking and succumbed to self-contradictions. The only two who carried Hegel's idea to its conclusion were Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. Even Nietzsche, however, occasionally forgot Hegel's lesson (which he had independently rediscovered and taken in a different direction); Kierkegaard made the opposite mistake when he insisted that 'objective thinking' by its nature *lied*, that language could never be more than an 'approximation', that only *subjectivity* could be absolutely true (because it does not describe anything; it simply *is*). Contrary to Kierkegaard, the 'thinker of the future' will understand that in some contexts objective descriptions are true and can be *seen* as such, but that in many, doubt will remain.

There is both a factual and a normative dimension to our resolution of the dialectic. We have analyzed the factual; the normative is equally important.-- Knowledge is worth seeking not for its own sake nor for the sake of its utility, but solely for the sake of affirming one's humanity. This insight has been appreciated all too rarely in the past. As soon as the pursuit of truth becomes spiritually deadening, a different activity should be chosen. If one finds oneself growing *stunted*

[1] That's true of the last two examples for different reasons than it's true of the first: in their case it has nothing to do with the problem of self-reference. But they're relevant because they illustrate the paradoxes into which the thinker is forced by language and the nature of human life.

from too much analytical philosophizing, one should take a break from it. If one has a guilty conscience from probing too long and too deeply into nature, one should seek relief in superficiality. There is nothing intrinsically valuable about truth; to seek it at all costs is both misguided and dangerous.

--The thinker of the future will be both philosophically and 'humanely' advanced over his predecessors.

Outline of a theory of language.-- What is a word? What is a concept? What is a sentence? These three questions will guide the following discussion.

Ferdinand de Saussure's investigation into the nature of a linguistic sign is a good starting-point. He defines morphemes, words, and sentences as signs, and he divides the notion of a 'sign' into two constituents: the signifier and the signified. The former can be called the "sign vehicle" (Hanks, 1996), or the physical manifestation of the sign: it is the "sound-image" which, in itself, has no meaning, but acquires meaning by being associated with a concept, i.e., a signified. By "sound-image" Saussure does not mean "the material sound [or the written representation],[1] a purely physical thing, but [rather] the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses" (Saussure, 66). This is, unfortunately, a bad way of expressing his idea. What is the psychological imprint supposed to be? One's awareness of the signifier? What are the characteristics of this imprint? Is it some kind of an intuition? Moreover, how can such an imprint be a signifier? Does Saussure mean that the experience of recognizing the "physical thing" is *itself* the signifier? No. Clearly he means that the physical thing itself is the signifier, but only by virtue of its relation to consciousness. Before it enters into this relation it is merely a series of vibrations passing through air; it can be a potential bearer of significance only if consciousness is aware of it (and can thus associate it with a concept). --The difference between the sound itself and the sound-image is admittedly subtle. They are both meaningless. However, inasmuch as the sound-image (viz., the sound as consciousness experiences it) has the potential to become part of a sign, unlike the 'sound-in-itself', it can be meaningful. Of course, as the signifier *in itself*--i.e., as abstracted, conceptually, from the signified--the sound-image remains meaningless, but in the concrete reality in which consciousness experiences it, it is part of an 'immediate' synthesis between itself and a concept and is thereby interpreted by consciousness as having meaning. --The objection may be raised that this 'revision'[2] of Saussure's position implies that when a person thinks a sentence without saying it, he is not thinking a sentence, because (as I have defined them) no signifiers/signs are coming into play. The answer to this criticism is that the 'internal images', the 'conscious residues' of the signifiers, which pass through the mind of the thinker, themselves function as signifiers.[3] This is intuitively obvious and need hardly be argued for. The residues can be called 'derivative signifiers'.[4]

The sign is a union of the signifier and the signified. The latter is the concept to which the former has been psychologically attached. It is not the *reference* of the concept (if the concept indeed has a reference; see below). But what does 'union' mean in this context? According to William B. McGregor, the linguistic sign is composed of a "structural link", an "indissoluble link", between the concept and the sound-image (McGregor, 1997). While this does not *define* the union, it at least *describes* it. The union is so close that when a signifier is spoken, it instantly conjures the

[1] Saussure seems to privilege the spoken variant of the signifier over the written, virtually to the point of ignoring the latter. I, however, will understand 'sound-image' to refer to both the acoustic and the written signifiers. Nevertheless, for the sake of brevity I will generally discuss only the acoustic version.

[2] It really is not a revision.

[3] The vagueness of 'internal images' is not a flaw in that argument: the objection has already presupposed their existence, and therefore to answer it I need not define them.

[4] In a moment I'll inquire into the nature of such 'images' in consciousness.

associated concept. For example, I find it impossible to separate the sound 'tree' from the concept 'tree': as soon as I utter the word--even if I make an effort to ignore the concept and concentrate only on the sound(-image)--I am aware of some kind of a conceptual overtone. The link is effectively indissoluble: to dissolve it is beyond my power. (Clearly the reason is grounded in biology: neural mechanisms 'fix' the two components together.) On the other hand, in the case of this particular word the indissolubility operates in only one direction: I can think the concept 'tree' without uttering or imagining the sound-image, simply by 'intuiting' the idea of a tree. Likewise with 'table', 'grass', 'paper', and many other nouns. Somehow I can make myself aware of the concept without at the same time being aware of the word.

I cannot proceed with this discussion, however, until I have clarified a few things. While the foregoing usage of the word 'concept' may be consistent with the way it is commonly used, I shall revise it. [....]

My method.-- No doubt you think that my use of the aphoristic style is naked apery of Nietzsche--that, being a mere boy of 24, I'm letting my adolescent enthusiasm for (one of) my idol(s) unhinge my reason, which should tell me that I'm effectively plagiarizing him. As my defense, I won't dwell on the fact that a literary style's use in the past is not an argument against its use in the present. Rather, I'll point out that this is the style most appropriate to extreme philosophical skepticism--and therefore that for me *not* to use it would be both an artistic and a philosophical blunder. I freely admit that I'm unsure of my beliefs. My life consists of intellectual levitation. I have absorbed the trends of my culture and hover between conflicting world-views. I recognize the truth in every philosophy from Marxism to psychoanalysis, from Hegelianism to poststructuralism; I recognize the value of every ethical position from Christian morality to nihilism; I have sympathies for every political doctrine from democracy to benevolent despotism. I cheer the march of science even as I fear it. I support globalization even as it horrifies me. I am a mess of contradictions. --Under these circumstances, you can hardly blame me for rejecting the academic tradition of patient scholarly rumination and submersion of oneself in texts. Doing that would get me nowhere.

In an intellectual climate as uncertain of itself as ours is, disjointed reflections such as these are a representation of content in form. Any argument that any thinker proposes nowadays (outside of the natural sciences) is open to attacks from a hundred fronts; if it is not demolished, it is ignored. All other theorists will continue going about their business, writing articles and books that have no effect on anything. Including--in most cases--the pursuit of truth. So I'm following a different tack. I'm working out my ideas atomistically, proceeding through the disciplines randomly, in the hope that by the end I'll have made some slight contribution to pointing the way towards a single coherent *Weltanschauung* (which will, in fact, have to be a combination of many). This method seems to have the potential to be more fertile than the academic one.

A self-contradictory thought.-- The act of thinking posits control over itself. Even the act of thinking that the act of thinking does not control itself posits control over itself.

A phoenix out of the ashes.-- This thinker's intellect is in a ferment; this *society's* intellect is in a ferment as well. But there is a difference: the second is the ferment of decline, the first that of ascent.

We must not let 'humanism' die.-- That the questions I'm asking may already have been well-answered is not a reason for me not to ask them. As humanists, we must never cease independent thinking, no matter how much science has explained or how superfluous such thinking seems.

Insofar as it cultivates the self, it is valuable. Insofar as it prevents the self's dehumanization in this alienated age, it is necessary.

The goal is the journey.-- The purpose of asking questions is not to find answers. The purpose is to ask questions.

Don't "love life for its own sake".-- Every great achievement has its origin in a lack of love for mere *life*.

Incoherently coherent.-- Richard Rorty is, if nothing else, consistent: if everything is merely a "vocabulary," and if vocabularies as such as not *true*, then it's pointless for Rorty to try to advance a defensible philosophy. Hence, he doesn't.

Apologies for a lack of will.-- People who deny the possibility of, or the need for, a global theoretic perspective--a perspective that understands the world as a totality and attempts to reproduce the outlines of this totality in thought--forget that their position is a reflection of them. It says something about them. "What does it say?" It says they have no intellectual ambition.

Weaklings.-- Postmodernists operate under the ridiculous delusion that they are continuing in Nietzsche's footsteps. They think Nietzsche was a relativist! They think he would have approved of them! The truth is, he would have contemptuously repudiated the likes of Derrida and Rorty, for not having a will to truth. (Even if their ideas are true--which is inconceivable--their lack of ambition would have damned them in Nietzsche's eyes. He cared less about knowing truth than actualizing will.)

A prerequisite for aesthetic appreciation.-- Why do most people not like classical music? I've never understood it. Often I've tried to imagine being another person just to imagine myself not liking Chopin. People say it's because such music is "boring", or because it "doesn't have words", or because it's "too quiet". But this is precisely what I don't understand. Much of it, I admit, is indeed boring and ponderous--Wagner comes to mind, and some Strauss, and some Brahms--but how can such pieces as Tchaikovsky's first piano concerto not thrill the listener, or such pieces as Chopin's Nocturne in D-flat major (op. 27, no. 2) not transport him to a realm of aristocratic delicacy of feeling, or such pieces as the first movement of Beethoven's seventh symphony not make him want to dance and jump around the room? I suppose the answer is partly that, in *any* kind of music, you must first become 'acclimated' to it through repeated contact before you know how to interpret it--before you're 'open' enough to it to allow it to govern the way you feel while listening. You have to have assimilated it. This is why I truly enjoy a piece of music only after I've heard it at least twice. I have to 'orient' myself in it first; I have to have a vague idea of what's coming next, and where it's headed. During the first exposure I always feel 'guarded' against it, as if I'm challenging it to impress me. "Do your best!" my subconscious says. "I'll find flaws! I'll find passages that feel forced." Only after it has convinced the skeptic inside me can I let down my defenses. Then, even the passages that I thought initially were 'forced' (or 'awkward') feel more and more natural, until finally the whole piece takes on an air of necessity. The changing of a single note would damage it. --The appreciation of *styles* of music operates by much the same principle. Currently I have a deep aversion to most traditional Asian music, but if I listened to it day after day for months I'd

probably learn to enjoy it.[1]

Too sophisticated.-- I suspect that a certain degree of intelligence in the listener is essential if he is to enjoy classical music. Because it generally lacks the simplistic lyrics of pop music--*any* lyrics, in fact--the use of one's imagination takes on a central role in the act of listening. One must be susceptible of subtle emotions and subtle stimuli; one must have an attention span that most people lack. The *complexity* of such music heightens the necessity of intelligence. To follow diverse threads and motifs through a long piece is not easy. Thus, one reason classical music is associated with elitism is that elitists typically have the mental capacity to appreciate it.

No joy without sorrow.-- The heights appear as such only when we look at them from the depths. To test the truth of that hypothesis, I suggest you listen to pop music (in the 'Britney Spears' sense) for a few minutes; then listen to Franz Liszt's piece *Les Préludes*. If you have a poetic soul, the sudden change from ingesting dirt to imbibing a vintage wine will intoxicate you. Your appetite for life will grow tremendously. You may not be able to contain your enthusiasm; your heart will leap to your throat and you'll start shouting senseless noises of jubilation. The finale of Liszt's piece may give you a heart attack: the notes rushing to their climax, pounding on your ears like drums, and then the horns that blare a single note (--that single note which is both a call to battle and a signal of victory!--) as the rest of the orchestra continues its climb to the final triumphant chords… You'll realize that pop music is redeemed by virtue of its function as a reminder of the muck that humans can and must rise above in order to achieve moments of immortality.

The significance of art.-- The overture to *Fidelio* would violate artistic principles in its shamelessly unsubtle glorification of life were such glorification not the most important principle of all.

The pinnacle of wisdom.-- No philosopher has expressed more insight into the nature of life than Beethoven did in the second movement of his last piano sonata.

An effect disproportionate to its cause.-- The pain of loneliness is rarely acute--it's a gentle pressure on the chest that ebbs and flows--yet it causes a longing for death.

A cause disproportionate to its effect.-- The pain of a splinter jammed under a fingernail is excruciating, yet to wish for death as an escape from it would be ludicrous.

Two possible explanations.-- (1) One knows that the pain of the splinter is temporary; one *feels* that the pain of loneliness is permanent. Why? In being less urgent than the other, it allows one's thoughts to roam, to regret, to predict, while in reaction to the stabbing pain of the splinter one feels only an immediate and forceful *rejection*. (2) In spite of the softness of loneliness, it is intense. For it is more a phenomenon of *consciousness* than physical pain is, and as such it has more proximity to the self.[2] As an emotion it floods and drowns one's thoughts in an ocean of sighs.

[1] To be honest, that seems impossible. But it probably isn't.
[2] I don't know what "proximity to the self" means.

My gratitude to music.-- Music has allowed me to maintain the illusion that my pain is noble.

My masochism.-- It is precisely in those moments when my pain is at its peak that I think I want never to be contented again.

The loner.-- He who lacks relationships with people manufactures relationships with thoughts.

Unity of opposites.-- A woman nursing her baby feels as if that animal act is the pinnacle of her humanity.

From the outside.-- A being not from our species observing a rock concert would conclude that we are creatures who operate on the level of instinct and have no notion of free will. When *we* watch a community of monkeys scream and go berserk in the excitement of a hunt we think, "How bestial!", forgetting that their excitement is based on utilitarian concerns and is thus rational, while *ours*--in a rock concert--looks equally bestial and is senseless to boot.

From the inside.-- A dog sees its fellow dogs as we see our fellow humans.

Homo sapiens in its natural habitat.-- In communities of apes, the dominant male gets the most sex.

The laughing-stock of the animal kingdom.-- The mating rituals of *homo sapiens* are surely the most bizarre of any species. Have a look inside a nightclub to verify this.

The human tragedy.-- In trying to raise himself above nature, man has lowered himself beneath it.

God as Shakespeare.-- My love for humanity is not admiration of beauty; it is pity for a tragic hero.

Two instincts: to enforce equality, and to idolize.-- He who aims to rise above the crowd faces opposition from all sides, which, however, has a common source: the universal desire to keep him at one's own level;--not to let him think he is superior. The most extravagant means will be employed to keep at bay his ambitions. But if he perseveres and triumphs, he is revered as a god.

My arguments for and against Nietzsche.-- Pro: he's made it easy for me to be myself. Con: he's made it easy for me to be myself.

A science that isn't.-- That my reflections are not superfluous is a rebuke against the "science" of psychology.

The pitiless sex instinct.-- The vindictiveness of women towards one another, even when not for the sake of a man, originates in their Social Darwinistic competition for a mate.

In praise of folly.-- The more seriously you take yourself, the less seriously you should be taken.

Dare I hope?-- Is it really the case that only an aristocratic society evolving from feudalism to capitalism, throwing off the dead weight of institutionalized religion, reveling in its newly discovered individualism, could have produced classical music? Isn't it possible that in the future we'll be able to do it again? Or is the opportunity gone forever? What's the connection between the social conditions of premodern Europe and its art? Hundreds of fortuitous concurrences were necessary to produce that kind of music, as they are in the case of every social phenomenon. The growth of technology, the development of science, the development of commerce, the duality between sacred and secular traditions, the role of patronage, the use of monophonic and polyphonic musical styles, the adoption of the well-tempered scale, the increasing sophistication of musical notation--all this and much more contributed to the birth of baroque music and its evolution to classical and romantic. So it is indeed likely that only *that* society could have invented such music. But that doesn't mean that the opportunity to compose it is gone! And yet it seems to be: though geniuses on the level of, e.g., Schubert have surely been plentiful in the last hundred years--as they surely were in the eons before the Enlightenment--not one has realized his potential--as none did before the Enlightenment. That suggests that somehow our culture nips Schubertian genius in the bud--that not only does it *discourage* it; it *kills* it. (After all, if it merely discouraged it, a few people would probably have managed to rise above the rest.) --'Somehow'? No; the cause is obvious: in his childhood and adolescence the would-be composer internalizes what he hears--rock 'n' roll, pop, jazz, whatever--to the extent that in the end he can't reproduce music from two centuries ago.

Still, nothing is inevitable. I'll hold onto my irrational hope.

A meaningless word.-- What is forgiveness? What does it mean if someone "forgives" me? "It means he no longer feels resentment towards you for a transgression you committed," you'll say. You're wrong. His lack of anger (or resentment) is only an *implication* of his forgiveness. The direct meaning of it constitutes a *judgment* of someone. To forgive is to judge that a given person does not deserve to be an object of resentment or anger. But what does *that* mean? Why doesn't he "deserve" it? Because--according to the forgiver--he is not a 'bad' person. His transgression was not a result of some innate evil; rather, there were "extenuating circumstances", or he was subject to a momentary lapse of reason, or he didn't "mean" it (if 'it' was, for example, an insult). But we have already seen that 'bad' is meaningless. Therefore, forgiveness is meaningless. This can be seen more clearly through an example. If I 'forgive' Bill Clinton for not sending troops into Rwanda during the genocide, what have I done? What is different now, after my act of forgiveness? The only difference is that I'm no longer angry at him. The forgiveness *itself*--the judgment--is meaningless; it posits no 'concrete' or 'observable' change in a state of affairs. In other words, the sentence 'I forgive you, Bill' has no obvious content, no content that can be pinpointed or 'clearly grasped', as the meaning of 'I'm not angry at you' can.

Furthermore, what *right* has anyone to forgive another person?--to judge that he's 'not bad'? Such a judgment can come only from a perspective that takes itself as superior to the judged. Whether or not the judger actually *thinks* he is superior, the act of judging a person's worth presupposes that one has the *right* to such a judgment, i.e., that one has immediate and infallible knowledge of what is good and bad--and, moreover, that one is oneself 'good' (because, *in the*

instant of the act, without such an assumption the judgment has little force). But these two presuppositions are clearly fallacious.

--In short, forgiveness is nothing but a gesture towards reconciliation. The concept of forgiveness originated because such a gesture is essential to communal living.

God's gravestone.-- 'Here lies One Who had a pathological obsession with possessing absolute power, such that when He lost it He died of a broken heart. C. 900 B.C.E. to c. 1790 C.E.'

A distinction.-- Modesty is dishonesty; humility is enlightenment.

Clothed animals.-- During conversations one should make it a habit to picture one's interlocutor naked. This will make the conversation much more entertaining.

Love and the inequality of the sexes.-- A woman wants to attach herself to a man. A man wants a woman to attach herself to him.

A living God.-- If God were not dead, he would be *death*. An oppressive death.

Remarks overheard in the subway.-- Two men sat down next to me, clearly of the blue-collar class, one of them holding a copy of a newspaper on which was printed a giant, unflattering photograph of Joe Ratzinger (looking fairly agèd). The man looked at it. "That the new pope?" "Yup." "He ain't gonna last long." "They keep picking these dudes that ain't gonna last long." Then they talked about basketball. --I realized that, sometimes, the less education one has, the more sensible one is.

A remarkably idiotic idea.-- I'd like to know who first conceived this notion.-- Science and religion are compatible: one is concerned with truth (reason), the other with faith. They have two separate mental 'spheres' which are unrelated, and hence their ideas can be believed at the same time without the believer's being embroiled in contradictions. It is consistent to believe both that the world was created six thousand years ago and that it was created fifteen billion years ago--that a man named Jesus Christ was once resurrected and that resurrection is impossible--that a woman named Mary gave birth to a child without having had sex first and that sex is necessary for a woman to give birth to a child--that there is a place where we reside after death called "heaven" and that such an idea is senseless. Reason rejects ideas that faith salvages merely by virtue of naming them "objects of faith". If they're "objects of faith"…then it's inconceivable for anything to be wrong with them! By applying the magical phrase "object of faith" to any idea, one can raise it to such a level of intellectual respectability that even to *argue* against it is futile. --Even (so-called) scientists and philosophers subscribe to the belief!

Catholicism's lack of a fashion sense.-- The awesome power of religion is revealed in the fact that the pope consents to look like a clown in the name of God.

But that's also a *refutation* of religion. If God existed, he wouldn't let his representative on Earth deprive himself of dignity.

(Nor would he let a senile, decaying old man represent him. He'd choose someone young, like

Jesus.)

***Pity** the handicapped, don't **mock** them*.-- Sometimes I feel guilty making fun of conservative Christians. Wouldn't you? Wouldn't you feel guilty (eventually) if, for example, you repeatedly pushed a young child who was learning how to walk, so that he kept falling down and getting up and falling down again? Or if you ridiculed the way a sufferer from Downs syndrome talks? Wouldn't you think, "This is unworthy of me. I'm being cruel and unfair."? You should *help* such a person, not *laugh* at him!

The impossibility of two consciousnesses.-- I've never understood why you aren't flabbergasted by the fact that more than one person exists. You are a world unto yourself, without boundaries; yet there is not only *one* other such world: there are over six billion! Or, more accurately, over *sixty* billion! Somehow, an unbounded world is finite: it is compatible with the existence of billions of others. The same paradox operates in general relativity: even though the universe is unbounded--it has no center, no 'edges'--it's finite (it doesn't extend in an infinite straight line in any direction).[1] Each of us is, quite literally, his own universe.

Do you understand the paradox? To describe it is difficult. Essentially it is that, from the perspective of one's own consciousness, it's inconceivable for there to be *another* consciousness. And yet there is. Which means humans will never completely understand the world.

Unconscious philosophers.-- We're all solipsists, whether we know it or not.

The self-identity of banality.-- Mediocre minds think alike even more than great minds do.

A lesson learned from observing Dubya.-- Stupidity is as predictable as genius isn't.

To retain the spectrum but lose its extremes.-- My hope is to bridge the gulf between the academic specialist and the herd animal, while lopping off the two ends.

So-called opposites.-- In narrowing himself to the point of self-oblivion, the specialist merges with the commoner.[2]

The art of living in society.-- I've perfected the art of pretending to be superficial around people.

The counterintuitiveness of compassion.-- It is less humane to try to raise others to one's own level than it is to lower oneself to their level.

"Football + beer = happiness!"-- The male's love of watching sports is more incomprehensible to

[1] If you travel along a straight line for a long enough time, you'll eventually return to your starting-point.
[2] There are exceptions. Example: Noam Chomsky.

me than the female's love of shopping.

Almost too obvious to be argued for.— Political correctness frowns on the notion that women are somewhat passive in relation to men. The conventional wisdom is that because people are molded by their social conditions, neither males nor females have anything like an intrinsic essence—and that even if they do, passiveness has nothing to do with the nature of women. Several facts support that thesis: (1) in some relationships the woman is more dominant than the man; (2) in some cultures, women have been held in high esteem; (3) in the last century, Western women have become increasingly political, professional, and independent. On the other hand, facts can be found that support the opposite thesis: (1) the vast majority of cultures, and arguably *all* of them, have been rather patriarchal, including ones as varied as Sumer, China (throughout its history), India (throughout its history), Japan, ancient Greece, ancient Egypt, Rome, Europe (throughout its history), the Middle East (throughout its history), the Incan and Mayan civilizations, the Native Americans, the United States, New Guinean tribes, traditional Samoa, etc.;[1] (2) women are physically weaker than men; (3) men have always been attracted to relative weakness and vulnerability, while women have always been attracted to strength; (4) social customs have nearly always dictated that, in the sphere of romance, men are supposed to approach women, not vice versa; (5) in ballroom dancing, men are the 'leaders' and women the 'followers'; (6) in the act of sex, the man is the aggressor, the penetrator; (7) women have always been associated (by both sexes) with children; (8) languages include thousands of subtle references to female passiveness—e.g., the term 'womanizer': the notion of a '*man*izer' is considered laughable, because men are rarely passive enough to be romantically manipulated or 'swept away' by a charismatic woman; (9) women have almost always been expected to decorate themselves, to treat themselves as ornaments and objects—and generally they've *enjoyed* this (and still do); (10) in accusing men of imposing their ideas on women (ideas of how they should look, how they should behave, how they should think), feminists have assumed that women are inherently more passive than men;[2] (11) the increase in their civic participation during the twentieth century is by no means an argument against women's being *relatively* passive compared to men; (12) women naturally tend to be relatively 'communal', while men tend to be more individualistic and competitive; (13) it isn't even remotely conceivable that men could let themselves be treated—for millennia—the way women have let themselves be treated, all over the world. I could extend this list for pages. The point is that every significant culture and, it seems, virtually every individual in history has been *saturated* with the idea that females are more passive than males. The idea is inseparable from the way that humans think and act, and it shows itself a thousand times each day.

But what does 'passive' mean? Several things. Physical weakness, for example (relative to men).[3] And (comparative) unaggressiveness, unassertiveness. More generally, it means that men have a more substantial otherhood than women do. […] –The popularity of the show "Sex and the City" was a testament against radical feminists. Why did women like it? Because it was silly? Because they felt better about themselves after seeing how vain and shallow *other* women are? No. Because they identified with it! They identified with a show that was, essentially, middle school with adult language. […]

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[1] Helene Cixous acknowledges this in her essay "Sorties" in *The Newly Born Woman* (1975). Of course, she denies its significance. "History has never produced, recorded anything but [phallocentrism]. Which does not mean that this form is inevitable or natural." No argument is offered in support of that claim. Now, I admit that *political* patriarchies are neither inevitable nor 'natural', per se; however, the idea that men are relatively active and dominating is far more natural than 'vaginocentrism'.

[2] Otherwise, how would men have been able to be the tyrants that feminists say they are? It had to start somewhere! There has to be some natural basis for it! Otherwise it's inexplicable.

[3] Obviously there are women who are stronger than, say, me. But this is irrelevant.

That makes sense biologically. Nature wants each woman to find a man who loves her, because if he does he'll probably stay with her and take care of her and her child. On the other hand, nature doesn't necessarily want a man to love the woman he has sex with, because in staying with her he won't spread his seed in as many women as he might have otherwise--which means he'll beget fewer children--which nature frowns upon. "Be fruitful and multiply!" is the categorical imperative that men are programmed to follow. "Be careful in your choice of lovers!" is the imperative that women follow.

A refutation of the dogma that the sexes are "equal."-- The definitive relationship between man and woman is the romantic or erotic one. And who would deny that in this relationship the woman tends to be the relatively 'weak', 'vulnerable', 'submissive' one? [Again, I'd remind you of the mechanics of the sex act.]

Another refutation.-- It's easy to forget that the human species has lived out 95% of its history in hunter-gatherer societies. Clearly our biology was designed for such a state. The differences between the sexes are explained by the fact that they were useful in our original state of nature. Unfortunately they occasionally conflict with the values of modern society.

It's ironic that feminists tend to congratulate themselves on their historical perspective (which they equate with the idea that social conditions determine behavior--i.e., that as history progresses, human behavior changes). In fact, historical perspective is precisely what they lack. If they could 'take in the whole picture' […] --if they studied in depth the thousands of societies that existed after the superseding of mankind's primitive state, societies in which women were *still* restricted to the domicile and its corresponding 'passiveness';--in short, if they looked at *all of history* and then 'opposed' to it the 'modern age',[1] i.e., the last forty years (and mainly in the West), in which women have become relatively career-oriented, and in which relativistic (politically correct) philosophies have been invented that are supposed to represent the pinnacle of human knowledge, and are treated as such by feminists, but are actually nothing but byproducts of our culture's divisiveness--and, thirdly, in which (culture) women continue to be seen by everyone as innately passive/weak/submissive in comparison to men (a view not always explicit, but which is revealed by behavior);--if feminists could appreciate all this, they'd understand that their radical philosophies are fatuous.

The 'femininity = relative passiveness [or receptiveness]' equation is, in Jungian terminology, an archetype shared by everyone, including feminists. To imagine a society in which it doesn't exist is as impossible as imagining a society whose members lack the sex instinct.

It is certainly true, however, that societies have tended to exaggerate the extent of female passiveness, inasmuch as they've assumed, e.g., that women don't have the ability to compete professionally with men, or that their only proper role is inside the home or (earlier) working the fields. The last forty years have invalidated these assumptions and exposed them for what they are: cultural fabrications--which, however, are grounded ultimately in the biologically determined natures of women and men.

Another refutation.-- *Ex nihilo nihil fit.*

The 'gender = social construction' myth.-- "Science is wrong, anthropology is wrong. Humans are a *tabula rasa* that passively absorbs cultural trends. Empiricism, yay! Common sense, booo!"

[1] Which cannot be 'opposed' per se, since it shares every previous society's preconceptions about gender.

Huh?-- There is something extremely comical about a sex that feels it is perfectly natural to think and act in a certain way but accuses you of misogyny when you point out that it tends to think and act in this way.

Phallocentric historical progress.-- If reason and logic are phallocentric, then thank God for phallocentrism! Without it we'd be living in the Dark Ages.

A random question.-- Why do women commonly have long hair and men short hair? How did this originate? Surely it isn't biologically innate--and yet, as far as I know, there has never been a culture in which women had *short* and men *long* hair. But what possible point could there be for an innate tendency in relation to *hair*? --Probably the reasons for the universality of sexually differentiated hair lengths are that (1) it makes the task of immediately distinguishing between the sexes easy and (2) long hair is more easily manipulated in aesthetically pleasing ways than short hair, and since there *is* a culturally universal expectation that women beautify and decorate themselves (so as to attract mates), it's natural that women rather than men have long hair.

Maybe the fact that men often become bald also has something to do with it.

Another question.-- Why is facial beauty (feminine and masculine) important in attracting mates? What evolutionary advantage does such beauty have? If you'll say that people unconsciously make the connection between a beautiful mate and beautiful children (the implication being that they want attractive children, so that *they* can find mates), you're begging the question. Beauty isn't like the feminine instinct for nurturing or the masculine instinct for dominating, which serve obvious purposes; universal ugliness would surely not be disadvantageous in the way that a universal absence of the maternal instinct would. In fact, it would have no practical effect whatsoever. --The solution to this problem may be that we unconsciously associate a good face with healthy genes (which can be passed on to our children). This, in turn, may be because (1) beauty projects self-confidence (which, as we have seen, is also related to the universal desire for recognition and is therefore, in addition to its importance as an indicator of gene quality, desirable 'for its own sake', i.e., from the 'self-centered'--or, 'not child-related'--perspective of the potential mate, which consists in his desire to be recognized); (2) a pretty face may, for whatever reason, be unconsciously interpreted as *directly* signifying health and good genes; and (3) the good body that generally comes with an attractive face *does* directly signify healthy genes. Moreover, such a body has clear functional benefits: for example, large breasts are 'maternal', and, in the case of a man, a muscular body is related to the ability to protect and dominate. (In this connection it must be noted that a pretty face *in itself* does not have great force in triggering sexual attraction; only if it coexists with an acceptable body is it essential to such attraction.) Also, beauty is associated with youth, which is associated with health and the ability to impregnate/be impregnated. --On the other hand, there are plenty of ugly young people. But maybe we unconsciously interpret the youthfulness of a beautiful person as more pronounced than that of an ugly one.

You see I've approached the original question from a functionalist perspective. One could also approach it by describing the biological mechanisms of attraction to beauty. Or one could analyze the psychoanalytic/psychological causes. Or, lastly, one could ask what are the *phenomenological* causes--the 'subjective' reasons that are (or *should* be) immediately evident to us (such as a 'feeling' that occurs when one looks at a beautiful face).[1] These explanations, however, would

[1] That question is the most difficult and provocative of all. See the next section. [But not the next in this journal.]

presuppose the functionalist as the most 'fundamental', given that most species-behavior seems to have evolved on the basis of its relevance to an individual's survival and the perpetuation of the species.

On beauty.-- Facial beauty cannot be described or conceptualized. Recognition of it is solely intuitive. If you try to describe an attractive person by saying, "She has prominent cheekbones, full lips, tanned skin and sultry eyes", you have not explained why she's beautiful. Any of these features is compatible with ugliness--even all the features together. Beauty is holistic: it consists not in an aggregate of isolated features but in the totality of relations between them--relations which, to repeat, are not conceptualizable or denotable. We grasp them in an instantaneous intuition, but cannot really reproduce them in words.

Indeed, this is true of *any* kind of beauty: musical, poetic, 'sculptural', natural… To say that the beauty of some given thing consists in symmetry, or in vibrancy of color, or in the pithiness of its words, or in a perfectly balanced composition, is only to *hint* at it--to 'gesture' at it; we can never fully explain it.

What is the significance of this?

(is that true of *all* aesthetic qualities?)

A whisper from the divine.-- People sometimes wonder why God is silent. They devote themselves to him, they supplicate tearfully for the sake of a beloved one, but he doesn't answer. In their agony, in their loneliness, they may come to doubt his existence. But I say, "Take heart, faithless one. Listen to the Adagietto from Georges Bizet's L'Arlésienne Suite No. 1. God will be speaking to you. And he will heal you."

Draw your own conclusions.-- During my first sexual experience I remained excited and fully aroused as we kissed. But after our clothes had come off and I'd made my way down to her nether regions, my interest suddenly waned. As soon as I was confronted with "it",[1] I became bored. Even disgusted. With the whole situation. I wanted to stop immediately. --Lest you think otherwise, it wasn't, as far as I know, from nervousness. My only thought was, "What a waste of time!"

Man alone with himself.-- There's something poignant about masturbation.

A "closed-minded elitist"?-- This elitist is more open-minded than anyone he has ever known. His knowledge of this is precisely why he's an "elitist".

Compassion in nakedness.-- The great Charade that defines human life is not only irrational; it is harmful. The fanaticism with which we conceal ourselves from each other is as baseless as a puritan's prudishness--and it allows for hatred and complacency, which allow for misery. I'm never more fond of people than when I'm walking in the middle of a crowd and suddenly realize that beneath our clothes are naked bodies, that within our minds are silly thoughts. I stop short as if thunderstruck; I look around at the bustle, my gaze riveted to everyone and no one, and a calmness

[1] Aaaaahhhhh! Horror of horrors! "IT"!

passes over me. All my petty quarrels dissolve in a transcendent love. No object of hate remains for me but the universal love of privacy. For those few moments I'm impervious to any concern, and my only desire is to devote myself to altruism. Knowing that *we're all the same* is a wonderful, liberating experience.

But in order to stop hiding ourselves from each other we must first stop hiding ourselves from ourselves. That is the source of our societal charade: our *inner* charade. [Nope. That's backwards.] We all think we're superior to others--which itself shows that we *aren't*. The sciences have demonstrated that we're equal; our intuition supports that claim. So why do we ignore it? --If we could live according to truth, life would be much better than it is now.

(against liberalism, privacy, etc.)

A plea.-- We're alone. As far as we know, we're *alone* in the world. We have only each other. We have no God, we have no heaven, we're aware of no extraterrestrial companions. Try to imagine that. In the crushing darkness of the universe there's a speck of a planet on which live specks of life, carrying on as if existence revolves around them, as if they have the luxury of time and strength and they can bend circumstances to their will. They fight each other, they hate each other; their brutality has no bounds. In their laughable self-importance they think they have the *luxury* of being able to hate each other! They can't see that in the immensity of an inhuman cosmos they rise and fall together, that their only chance for survival is to cooperate. Is it not enough that the *universe* is callous to us? Must we be callous to *ourselves* as well? Despite everything we've been through, we remain as ignorant as in the beginning. We *still* refuse to try to understand each other! --Maybe nature wanted it this way. Nature wants us to compete, as she wants all animals to compete. But, for God's sake, we aren't mere *animals*! We have free will; we have dignity. We can turn around in our tracks and spit in nature's face, shout "I'm tired of you pushing me down this road! I'm setting off on my own!"--leave nature behind, work together to build an *unnatural* society, be *humanists* for the first time ever! We can rise above ourselves! That's what makes us human. And now we finally have the means to do it. Technology has placed the ideal within reach. Soon we'll be able to do the unthinkable--*if we work together*--: overcome economic scarcity! Make greed superfluous! Make money superfluous! Make the world *human*! It's in our power; whether it's in our *will* is another matter.

Or…-- If we so choose, we can be complacent, accept the ways of history but not learn from them, follow tradition, and commit collective suicide in a series of nuclear wars--right as we're reaping the effects of global warming.

Against Nietzsche.-- The goal of humanity *can* lie in its end, if we want it to.

My love of mediocrity.-- I'm grateful that most of the human race is insipid. I like watching clowns perform. They frighten me sometimes, but ultimately they're merely funny. Without them, my life would be too serious: I'd have too much respect for the world; I wouldn't laugh nearly as often as I do. Yet at the same time my life wouldn't be serious *enough*: I would have no opponents, nothing to fight against, no goal to work towards. The best argument against a utopia is that it would be boring. Without conflict, what value can life have? Inherent in self-consciousness is an element of dissatisfaction--of emptiness, of otherness, of 'compulsion' toward something outside of consciousness. In Hegelian terms, the nature of consciousness is to transcend itself, to always be

beyond itself, oriented toward an Other (which can be itself, because it is its own other). Thus, conflict is at the heart of the self. Conflict *is* life. As we've seen, the universal need for recognition results, at least in part, from this dialectical nature of consciousness. The culmination of recognition is when the other acknowledges your superiority vis-à-vis him--when you become that which he wishes he could be. Through the desire to be recognized, then, the conflict inherent in the self is projected into the world as the conflict of each against all. Everyone implicitly wants to be better than everyone else. Hence, it pleases me that in some respects I'm 'better' than the majority of people;--and I want to *continue* to be better, even in a utopia. I want to be God, in fact. [Cf. Sartre's ideas. To some degree, the urge is implicit in us all.]

So it seems I'm being self-contradictory in hoping for the creation of a better society than the current one. I *could* answer this by invoking the fact that I'll be dead when the new society is born, so it won't affect me, but there's still a contradiction: I hope for this society because I think it would be good for mankind, even though, if what I wrote above is true, that's wrong. Apparently, then, in being warm-hearted I've proven myself unintelligent, in accord with Nietzsche's formula in section 235 of *Human, all too human*. My last attempt at self-defense is to say that I don't want a true "utopia", whatever that word means; I want merely a world that is no longer a home to billions of oppressed people. [....] The point is that oppression, on the scale it has always existed on, is unnecessary for spiritual well-being and can possibly be eliminated if the good portion of mankind works together.

But not self-contempt either.-- Pride is somewhat irrational. The prouder you are, the less reason you have to be proud.

A necessity.-- All the beauty of life means nothing if you cannot see your *own* beauty.

Egoism parading as altruism.-- My self-centeredness/desire-to-be-thought-well-of takes unusually subtle and sophisticated forms. It understands that in order to be liked, it's imperative that you give the impression that you like/respect the other. If you catch him in a moment of weakness, he'll probably resent and dislike you for having embarrassed him. If, on the other hand, he catches *you* in a moment of embarrassment--provided it doesn't happen too often--he won't like you any less for it. My subconscious, in having appropriated this insight, causes me to act accordingly. Thus, I'd rather look weak myself than look into the hurt eyes of someone who's embarrassed;--and if I do, it torments me afterwards. Why? Not primarily because I pity him; rather, because I know that he resents me. So, for example, if I'm having a conversation and my partner involuntarily looks away from me for half-a-second because he feels shy for some reason--usually the result of his difficulty in maintaining eye-contact--I'll instantly look away too, simply to spare him the embarrassment of knowing that I caught his moment of weakness. Or if he says something unintelligent--especially if I have the impression that he instantly realizes it was unintelligent--either I'll be careful to respond appreciatively, to chuckle at his inane joke more than I would normally, or I'll immediately follow it up with a comment that takes attention off of *his*. This kind of behavior may seem wonderful and altruistic, but it isn't. --Admittedly, *in the moment,* on one level, it is altruistic--inasmuch as I'm conscious of no selfish motives; as far as I'm concerned, my act is a spontaneous expression of compassion (unmediated by ulterior motives)--but unconsciously it *isn't* altruistic. Sometimes my mind works fast enough for me to be aware of this even before I react to the embarrassing situation: an instant after I perceive the (potential) source of embarrassment, it flashes through my mind that I'll feel uncomfortable unless I deflect his and my attention from what just happened, so I improvise some kind of distraction. Granted, the discomfort that I try to forestall isn't *necessarily* a result of my (half-conscious) knowledge of the other's

resentment against me; it might be, for example, a result of a sincere desire on my part that he not be embarrassed, which in turn results from 'pure' altruism. But this is implausible--largely because "pure altruism" seems meaningless.

I won't deny that it's possible there's another reason for my altruistic behavior in this case; I *will* deny that my desire to be liked has nothing to do with it.

Causes.-- How can there be multiple causes of phenomena? How can, say, one's desire to have sex be caused by the sex drive and *also* by one's desire for recognition? What does this 'also' mean? How do the two causes interact? What is the relation between them?

how can motives we're unaware of explain our behavior?

Wonder vs. knowledge.--

> "Science! true daughter of Old Time thou art!
> Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.
> Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,
> Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?
> How should he love thee? or how deem thee wise,
> Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering
> To seek for treasure in the jewelled skies,
> Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?
> Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car?
> And driven the Hamadryad from the wood
> To seek a shelter in some happier star?
> Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,
> The Elfin from the green grass, and from me
> The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree?"

The poet in me understands Edgar Allan Poe's bitterness toward the scientist. The poet cherishes life only so long as he can marvel at it. He prefers myth to "dull reality", wonder to knowledge. His ignorance of truth allows his fantasies to roam freely, unencumbered by the pangs of a guilty intellectual conscience. The 'scientist',[1] on the other hand, (in his pure form) cares nothing for flights of fancy; he wants only to chase away the confusion of not knowing truth. He hates living in doubt; he feels as if doubt forces him to put his life on hold. To always speculate on the causes behind phenomena is debilitating.

I'm neither one nor the other, though I share traits with both. I relish the experience of wonder: it gives *magic* to life; it substitutes the Universe for God. Through wonder I can *strive*; I can worship a world that is beyond me--beyond my existence and my limited capacities for understanding. But unlike Poe, I don't enjoy not having knowledge. I have little need of romantic self-delusions. In other words, he hates reality and wants to avoid it; I love reality and want to seek it--but never to attain it completely, because then life would cease to be 'beyond' me, superior to me: it would be *equal* to me and thus unworthy of being respected. No longer would I have goals: in *understanding* them (their causes, their mechanisms, their transience) I would despise them. So I work feverishly to gain knowledge even as I hope that I fail. And yet, I can't tolerate living in confusion--which means I hope that I *don't* fail. Which is worse: living in confusion or understanding everything?

[1] By that I mean the philosopher, the psychologist, the natural scientist, the social scientist, etc.

Which is better: knowledge or wonder? Admittedly, the two aren't always mutually exclusive--in fact, an increase in knowledge can often increase wonder; for example, the more I learn of neurology, the more stupefied I am--but, ultimately, the perfection of knowledge is the negation of wonder. I suppose the answer is that, inasmuch as I'm human and not divine, I'd rather continue to live in confusion (i.e., wonder) than know everything.

Lessing was right to choose the hand that offered striving rather than truth.

The will to achieve.-- Goethe was right: "lack of time" is a poor excuse for not realizing one's ambitions. Life is long. If one is sufficiently determined, one can accomplish almost anything.

The world is waiting for someone to tie together all the threads of human thought.

Nature vs. historical progress.-- As far as nature is concerned, we're still in a hunter-gatherer state. Always remember that. Your understanding of yourself and of society will benefit immeasurably.

Sublimated blood-lust.-- When I watch pro-wrestling I'm reminded that only the effeminacy of our culture's ideologies prevents a return of gladiatorial games. (The difference is that *atheists*, not Christians, would be thrown to the lions.)

History loves gays.-- Insofar as the word 'inevitability' has any meaning when applied to historical events, it's inevitable that gay marriage will eventually be permitted in most or all states. Alexis de Tocqueville hit the nail on the head when he said that the movement of history is towards equality. There are indeed periodic regressions, but they don't last forever. Equality always finds a way to triumph. If homophobes weren't blinded by their bigotry they might see this.

Excuses.-- The "constitutional" objections, the religious objections, the social objections to gay marriage are nothing but masks for visceral prejudice. They're weak attempts to lend an aura of respectability to an irrational, disgusting hatred. I look at Tom DeLay and I see a man who would have been a fanatical segregationist in the 1950s.

Why does equality win?-- Most likely because the downtrodden masses--people with a vested interest in making social conditions equal--are willing to fight until they've achieved their goal, no matter how long it takes. That their numbers usually overwhelm those of their oppressors is an added advantage. But a more complete explanation may be that as a society's technology develops, it (the society) becomes increasingly urbanized, which highlights (and sometimes enhances) distinctions in wealth/power and fosters a collective consciousness among people in similar conditions, which leads to mass movements, which leads to equality.

A very pious person.-- Nihilism is my religion, hedonism my sect.

Religion as a hypothesis.-- Atheists may, after all, be wrong. God may be laughing at me even as I write this. "Ha ha!" he chuckles. "Guess where *you're* going in sixty years!" But I laugh right back at him, "Even if you exist, we don't need you! At this stage of history you're an afterthought. We're doing a fine job of understanding the world without having to invoke a Divine Paradox. Science

has proven its power; religion has no arguments in its favor: we might as well ignore it. Maybe in the future we'll learn of a critical gap in science that can be closed only with the help of religion, but for now we're doing okay on our own."

No respect for the dead.-- I feel like I'm beating a carcass.

Nietzsche said it best.-- "When we hear the ancient bells growling on a Sunday morning we ask ourselves: Is it really possible! This, for a Jew, crucified 2000 years ago, who said he was God's son? The proof of such a claim is lacking. Certainly the Christian religion is an antiquity projected into our times from remote prehistory; and the fact that the claim is believed--whereas one is otherwise so strict in examining pretensions--is perhaps the most ancient piece of this heritage. A god who begets children with a mortal woman; a sage who bids men work no more, have no more courts, but look for the signs of the impending end of the world; a justice that accepts the innocent as a vicarious sacrifice; someone who orders his disciples to drink his blood; prayers for miraculous interventions; sins perpetrated against a god, atoned for by a god; fear of a beyond to which death is the portal; the form of the cross as a symbol in a time that no longer knows the function and ignominy of the cross--how ghoulishly all this touches us, as if from the tomb of a primeval past! Can one believe that such things are still believed?"

Two very different sources of respect.-- Knowing that the great men of the past would approve of you more-than-compensates for a lack of approval by your contemporaries.

Technology in the service of humanism.-- If someone like Friedrich Nietzsche had been told that in a hundred years there would be an electronic network around the world allowing billions of people to share information at rates of speed measured in fractions of a second--and that this network could store nearly infinite amounts of data, including millions of books, and that it could all be accessed with a few movements of one's fingers--his reaction might have been to shudder with joy and envy at the thought of the vast education that one could acquire by not even budging from one's chair. --The internet has made it possible for humans to be exponentially more knowledgeable than they have ever been. Funny that it tends to have the opposite effect. --A reflection of the people who use it. (Every great idea is corrupted upon contact with the masses.)

Hateful people.-- Without our ability to forget, misanthropy would be universal.

A strange reaction.-- Why does "rolling one's eyes" universally signify that one considers a given idea or person idiotic? How can there be a connection between that judgment and the tilting of one's eyes in a vertical direction? Is it genetically innate? That seems unlikely. But how else is its universality explicable?

Another strange reaction.-- In the movie *Shrek 2*, when Puss in Boots gives his 'puppy dog' look Shrek can't resist cuddling him. Everyone, from every culture, understands Shrek's reaction (on an intuitive level). Why? Why do we instinctively recognize 'cuteness' when we see it?--and why does cuteness cause an urge to hug it?--and why do we interpret the 'puppy dog' look in particular as cute? Genetics is the answer. [??] Both the human recognition of cuteness and the common

reaction to it serve essential evolutionary purposes: they cause the parent to love his child, to feel tender towards him, to show him affection, which he needs in order to become a well-functioning adult. If children were not cute, parental love would be difficult; parents could not forgive the child for all the hardships he causes them. (The parent's knowledge that he *made* this being is also an important source of love--in that it validates the parent's worth in his own eyes; i.e., the child is a crystallization of the parent's human value--but without cuteness, that knowledge would have little force. For who wants to be the creator of something unattractive?)

The character of the puppy-dog look isn't obviously explicable in these terms. No human child ever exhibits that expression. The best explanation for our reaction to it is that it's a relic of an earlier evolutionary stage that has not been completely overcome in our psyches.[1] (Our possession of the reptilian brain is a parallel). Other animals evidently rely on this adorable look as a cause of the affection *they* feel for their young; their reaction persists in us, which is possible because we evolved from them. This suggests, by the way, that the way we feel (in this case) is similar to the way *they* feel.

What is cuteness?-- We say that young children are cute, but also that octogenarian couples walking hand-in-hand are. We say that an attractive woman is cute, but also that an attractive man is. A squirrel nibbling an acorn is cute, but so is a young woman studying her homework intently. Actions can be cute, and so can facial features. --What properties can possibly be shared by such a wide variety of situations? One's first inclination is perhaps to deny that there are such qualities. One might adopt Wittgenstein's stance and say that these situations share only "family resemblances", i.e.,

Common sense.-- Insofar as common sense is common, it is not sensible; insofar as it is sensible, it is not common.

The usefulness of weakness.-- If most people were not cowards, society would be ungovernable.

Nausea and love.-- When I think about people abstractly--when I read the newspaper, when I watch television--I usually agree with Shakespeare's Coriolanus:

> Who deserves greatness
> Deserves your hate; and your affections are
> A sick man's appetite, who desires most that
> Which would increase his evil. *(Act 1, scene 1)*

That's putting it mildly. At such times my disgust suffocates me. I rival Timon of Athens in my misanthropy. I can't bear to live in a world where every little mediocrity feels as if he is interesting enough to write his "memoirs" or to expose every revolting detail of his wretched life on "reality shows" with names like "Fat Actress" and "Trading Spouses"--a world in which people know and care more about the lives of Hollywood celebrities than they do about their own--the word 'shame' having no meaning to them--*especially* shame in front of oneself;--a world in which the adjective 'stupid' would be the most universally applicable if it weren't such an understatement;--a world in

[1] If you'll say, on the contrary, that its helplessness is why the look is irresistible, (1) my explanation doesn't contradict yours, and (2) you've explained nothing. The question is, why does that look seem helpless? And why do we have such a reaction to helplessness?

which a midget like George W. Bush can become leader of the most powerful nation, in which the citizens of this nation have more concern for the life of a vegetable like Terri Schiavo than for the suffering of billions of people around the world and politicians are so hypocritical as to preach gospels of love and life with the fervor of proselytes while simultaneously snatching love and life from whoever happens to be a convenient political target--like homosexuals, like Iraqis, like "suspected" terrorists;--a world that has learned nothing from five thousand years of slaughter and misery and will *never* learn *anything* because its inhabitants are apes who think they're gods.

But then I walk outside, away from the bitterness of solitude. The sunlight quickly dispels my hate. [I've deleted the rest because it was too sentimental.]

In defense of historical materialism. Part 1.-- In its broad outlines, historical materialism is correct. Marx's utopian hopes may not come to fruition, but they don't logically follow from the basic theses. --Or rather, the latter can be revised so as not to incorporate the idea that communism will necessarily occur, or that it will occur only after a revolution that culminates in a dictatorship of the proletariat. Such a revision might look something like the following.

The first and most essential task for any animal is to secure the means of its biological existence. Man is unique in that he is able to modify nature in order to achieve his goal: he is able to use tools. Indeed, in most situations he is *required* to use tools. Therefore, the nature of the methods he employs to produce his food is based on the given state of technological development. (I.e., because he has to use tools, whatever tools he has at hand will determine--or rather, condition--the nature of his production methods.) If, for example, technology is on the order of bows and arrows--and tools for agriculture have not yet been invented--the mode of production will necessarily be 'hunting and gathering'. On this primitive level there will be very little flexibility between possible relations of production: they will be primarily cooperative, with few distinctions in status among the productive members of society. A leader or two may emerge, but given the society's degree of poverty they will have few exclusive privileges. They will essentially be 'first among equals'. Relations of production as advanced as those of slavery (for example) will be impossible, because there are not enough resources to support a class of idlers as well as the 'police-force' needed to keep the slaves under control. If, however, a "social surplus product" exists--if technology[1] has advanced to such a point that it allows for the production of more resources than the community must consume immediately in order to survive (thus making it possible to store an excess)--cooperation ceases to be the necessary rule governing relations of production. Fewer people need be directly involved in the production process (the process of harvesting crops, hunting animals, building shelters, etc.). The possibility of *directors* emerges: a class of people who oversee the production process without taking part in it. Slavery becomes possible. --In short, (1) the degree of technological development influences the character of production relations more than the latter does the former, and (2) the former is the fundamental force conditioning the latter.[2]

Man is a social animal: he lives communally. An important reason is that his best chance for survival is in communal living: it offers him protection, cooperation in the struggle to feed and shelter himself, etc. His biological existence is rendered more plausible by his living with others. That being the principal function of the community, the community will be organized so as to allow for the perpetuation of the existing methods/relations of production.[3] This perpetuation is an

[1] Or, as Marx would say, the "forces of production". For the present I'll assume that these terms are synonymous. Later we'll see that labor-power and the physical sciences are also forces of production, albeit derivatively.

[2] For a closer examination of the definition of 'production relations', as well as 'mode of production', 'means of production', 'superstructure' and so on, see the following sections. (Incidentally, I will answer objections to all these ideas later. At the moment my purpose is only to give a broad overview of the theory.)

[3] In relatively advanced societies, the process of instituting and 'reproducing' this organization is by no means as simple as that sentence makes it sound. See below.

absolute imperative. The social structure will thus grow (organically and unconsciously) out of the relations of production.[1] In prehistory, this causal mechanism is fairly easy to see. It should not, however, be understood as operating chronologically: social relations (political, legal, familial) and production relations come into existence at the same time. But because the range of feasible relations, or methods, of production is already directly delimited by the existing conditions of technology—while the set of possible social relations is not; productive technologies can bear on social relations only via an intermediary, namely the production relations themselves—other social relations cannot influence methods of production as much as the latter can the former. Nevertheless, relations between the two spheres are reciprocal (or "dialectical"): each conditions the other. As society becomes increasingly complex, this becomes more obvious. In fact, the thesis that production relations are the basic determinant of social relations grows a little more dubious--partly because the distinction between the 'social superstructure' and the 'economic foundation' becomes less clear (the two blend into each other), and partly because the relations between the two become more noticeably dialectical. For instance, a political event such as the invasion of a country may result ultimately in an alteration of its technology and economic structure. Still, what was a historical law in the beginning (for hundreds of thousands of years) must *remain* a law. Nor does it stop being logically compelling as it becomes less empirically verifiable (or falsifiable). Thus, if one analyzes any given 'slice' of historical time in a particular society--for example, France under Louis XIV--one will find that, on the whole, the social relations seem to be 'harmonious' with the production relations and the state of technology. (For example, the asymmetry of the relations between serf and lord under feudalism made political democracy extremely unlikely, even impossible; the more natural organization was an aristocratic hierarchy, with a monarch at its head.) To suggest that this is because, e.g., the nature of an 'already given' political order required a certain set of production relations--in other words, that the *latter* were derivative--is intuitively absurd.

Historical evolution--by which I mean the increasing complexity of social structures, within societies and between successive ones[2]--is made possible by two facts: (1) natural resources, totally unmodified by humans (through hunting or agriculture or whatever), do not exist in a sufficient quantity to satisfy man's desires, and (2) people have a compulsion to be recognized by the Other. (Neither of these factors could result in historical progress without the other.) The desire for recognition has many behavioral manifestations, varying from person to person and within each individual, as well as many degrees of force. Some people, for example, are perpetually dissatisfied with themselves; if they have talents, they may use these to convince themselves and others of their worth.[3] If their talents are political, economic, scientific, or militaristic they may end up directly contributing to historical evolution. Now, the scarcity of resources ensures that there will always be a demand for inventors. In some eras, of course, it will be more pronounced than in others: for instance, in relation to capitalism it is both a prerequisite (since this dynamic society cannot come into existence except on the basis of a relatively sophisticated level of material and theoretic inventions) and built into the system (for without continual invention, capitalism could not perpetuate itself[4]), while in feudalism it was unnecessary (indeed, dangerous). However, there will never simply stop being a use for it. Thus, there will always be people willing to be 'inventors'--theoretic and practical--in order to achieve recognition [not only in the narrow sense of *fame*, but

[1] However, it will not 'mirror' them (whatever that metaphor is supposed to mean): the State and all cultural institutions have a degree of autonomy from the production relations, and cannot be wholly explained by them.

[2] That is a narrow definition of historical evolution, inasmuch as it ignores 'micro-evolutions' from year to year. However, one cannot provide a single general explanation of the latter, since they are made possible purely by the particular circumstances that obtain in a particular society at a particular time. [But it's (stupidly) narrow in another way too: it doesn't apply to the disintegration of societies, since generally this isn't accompanied by an increase in the complexity of "social structures".]

[3] They need not be aware of that motive.

[4] The reasons for that relate to economics, and as such lie outside the purview of this book.

more broadly, including 'self-recognition']. In certain societies, invention will proceed at a slow pace because there is not much demand for it; it may even, for all intents and purposes, cease. If this happens, the evolution of the social structure *in toto* will effectively cease as well, because--this is the main point--social relations become noticeably more complex only as technology and production relations do. (Empirical investigations would support that claim.) That is, society evolves only *as a whole*, and fundamentally on the basis of an economic evolution made possible by the assimilation of new technologies invented by people who want recognition. The role of individual inventors (not only in the 'Thomas Edison' sense, but also in the modern 'Research & Development' sense, and in the 'Albert Einstein' sense, etc.) is, therefore, more important than orthodox Marxists have admitted--which implies that the role of individuals in general is more important,[1] which means that historical trajectories are not inevitable (because 'inevitability' requires deterministic scientific laws and denies the importance of individual initiative).

As we have seen, the nature of a particular set of production and social relations may halt the development of technology. No right-minded Marxist would deny this, provided we qualify 'halt' with 'temporarily'. He might say that *obviously* the growth of technology can be obstructed--in fact, it *must* be, eventually, because it is a *progressive* force (with no intrinsic limitation on itself) and, as such, will come into conflict with the *conservative, 'inertial'* production relations[2]--but that, given enough time, it will push the obstruction out of the way by some means or another. If the production relations continue to impede the growth of technology, the conflict between the two will result in a revolution which will overturn the existing relations of production and substitute new ones in their place; under these new relations, technology will resume its temporarily fettered development. (And, of course, new social relations will grow organically out of the new production relations.) This is all supposed to happen purely on the basis of the internal functioning of the society, i.e., not by means of an 'external' catalyst such as an invasion or the discovery of new resources. If such a catalyst is required, then inevitability cannot be said to apply to historical progression--or, at any rate, to historical progress as Marxists conceive it. We have already rejected the idea of inevitability, however; likewise, we shall reject this schematic account of the nature of revolutions. It is largely futile to speculate on the question whether, given enough time, every society must undergo such an experience as was just described; however, common sense, logic, and empirical investigations suggest that the answer is 'No'. Would feudalism have made the transition to capitalism if the New World had not been discovered? One cannot say for sure. What is clear is that no society is a closed system--that 'external' forces come into play constantly--and that to ground the notion of historical progress in the concept of inherent 'contradictions' between categories of a society smacks of the Hegelian idealism that Marx rejected. It is, ironically, an ahistorical reification, in that it applies a notion derived from logic to every society that has existed;--and, as such, it betrays the spirit of Marxism, which insisted originally (in *The German Ideology*) on the particularity of *men* and eschewed talk of *Man* (or *Society*; it amounts to the same thing). Thus, we must revise Marxism in order to save it from itself.

Certainly there are *tensions* between elements of a society; this is practically a truism. The stronger, and (in most cases) mistaken, claim is that there are *contradictions*--between, first of all,

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[1] I'll expand on that theme in subsequent sections.

[2] The characterization of production relations as inertial is misleading (as Michel Pecheux notes in his essay "The Mechanism of Ideological (Mis)recognition"). Their perpetuation (or 'reproduction') does not proceed by itself; it is not a 'given' that continues indefinitely unless something occurs to disrupt it. Rather, it is a dynamic process that requires active consent on the part of the masses and dissemination of particular ideologies through such "ISAs" as the educational system and political apparatuses. There is always the potential for conflicting social forces (especially between classes, but in general between groups of any kind) to tear apart the society; thus, the reproduction of the economic structure is anything but a given. Nevertheless, inasmuch as a revolution is far more difficult to achieve than the mere continuation of the status quo, the economic structure can be described as 'inertial'. Our later analysis of ideology will provide insight into why the maintenance of the economic and political status quo tends to be fairly unproblematic (from the perspective of those in power).

the demands of technological development and those of production/social relations, and, secondly, between the economic class that represents the nascent mode of production and the class in whose interest it is to perpetuate the *existing dominant* mode of production--contradictions that are necessarily resolved in the same way every time, viz., the 'progressive' way. Admittedly, the idea of continual technological development does conflict with the idea of the permanence of a given mode of production. Technology could not have reached its present state if the 'hunting and gathering' mode were still dominant, or if feudalism were still dominant. However, this contradiction has rarely mattered to societies--which is to say that it has rarely manifested itself, which is to say that it has rarely concretely existed. The vast majority of social organizations have been revolutionized (or destroyed) not from some apocalyptic conflict between the growth of technology and a conservative culture, but from military invasions. Ancient Rome succumbed to barbarian incursions precisely because an industrial revolution *failed* to occur--because, that is, the production/social relations became so stagnant that industry could not take hold. In this case, the 'inertia' of the economic structure and its 'corresponding' culture proved more powerful than the supposedly intrinsic tendency (as G. A. Cohen calls it) of technology to develop. The reason, of course, is that technology in itself *does not have* such a tendency; as a byproduct of the human urge to be recognized, its character depends on the acts of individuals, which means that an element of contingency is inescapable (given free will[1]). Indeed, unless the society places (or is beginning to place; see footnote _) an economic and cultural value on invention, production relations *in toto* will never be revolutionized as Marx said they would (i.e., 'from within'). Perhaps only once in history has the Marxian doctrine been borne out: in the Western European transition from feudalism to capitalism. That was the only time that a society, of its own initiative, revolutionized its production and social relations on the basis of a technological foundation developing so rapidly that a complete societal change was virtually inevitable.--Or, more accurately, the contradiction was not between the *technology* and the *production relations*, but between, on the one hand, the new technology and its 'corresponding' production relations developing in the interstices of feudal society and, on the other hand, the old production relations that still predominated.[2] All other economic revolutions have either been imposed (externally, as in colonialism, or internally, as when Stalin enacted his Five-Year Plans) or have been lengthy (millennia-long) processes resulting from complex

[1] Before you raise the inevitable objection, let me explain that I'm not making a metaphysical claim. In this context, 'free will' means only 'the ability to make choices'--e.g., the ability to choose whether to invent a piece of technology. 'Choose' implies a type of freedom, namely the self-evident type that accompanies every intentional act. (A robot programmed to act in a certain way cannot properly choose.) If you're going to deny that some kind of self-evident freedom accompanies (self-)consciousness, then I have no recourse but to state the obvious: you don't know what you're talking about. You're focusing on mere words rather than trying to understand what they refer to. (See the above quotation from Heraclitus.)

[2] One may object that the technological growth was originally made possible by means of the new production relations themselves--and that therefore those were the fundamental determinants of the revolution--but I'd counter that the relations of production had come into existence only because agglomerations of former serfs (etc.) in towns had given rise to new conditions/means of production. The issue, as you can see, is subtler than 'Either this determined that or that determined this'. The collective process was in increments; at each step, technology and production relations influenced each other. This was possible because, as I wrote above, before the society as a whole adopted the new production relations, they spontaneously developed 'en miniature' in the interstices of feudalism. The more they developed, the more technology did--and the more technology developed, the more they did. Social relations in the towns necessarily evolved at the same time, becoming more egalitarian, etc. (because the production relations were more egalitarian). This process worked its way insidiously through the society until it had finally made obsolete the feudal production, political, and legal relations; a political/social revolution ensued (in France and England), with the result that ultimately the new mode of production with its 'corresponding' superstructure was dominant. (However, Althusser is right that such a revolution never overturns all social relations: residues of the previous era cannot be eliminated.) --Underlying the whole process, though, was the fact that, because production involves tools/machines, production relations presuppose (are based on) the state of technology. [This historical description is of course inadequate, but it has elements of truth.]

interactions between social forces and the natural environment--interactions which, although they have been based on the given state of technology, have had little or nothing to do with pressure placed on the existing mode of production by nascent relations of production that permitted relatively more rapid technological development.

Thus, Marx's theory of revolution applies only to the modern age, and even then its application is limited. The reason why the transition from feudalism to capitalism is the only event it describes more or less accurately is that this was the only time in history when technological development 'snowballed'--proceeded more and more rapidly and extended farther and farther--changing social relations in its wake--until finally an effective feudal reaction against it was impossible, and a complete social revolution was necessary. (The reasons for the uniqueness of Western Europe between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries are irrelevant to the present argument; they involve the fact that the discovery of the New World and the decay of feudalism coincided). The theory is relevant only to circumstances in which technological growth is so precipitate that it is headed for a collision with the prevailing production relations (which, as we have seen, are inherently conservative, functioning to perpetuate themselves). Empirical verification of its tenets will be possible during the transition from capitalism to socialism (on which, see below).

We have yet to examine the idea that social being determines consciousness. This is essential to historical materialism, especially if by 'consciousness' we mean not only the literal phenomenon that takes place inside the head but also the cultural phenomena of art and ideologies. We shall refine our definitions in the following sections; for now we'll say that the superstructure (a potentially misleading term) consists of educational, political, legal, and artistic *institutions*, while 'consciousness' refers to the sets of *ideas* that are current in those institutions (as well as in economic institutions)--and in society as a whole. The institutions are composed of relations between people: [this is as far as I got]

The death of Marxism?-- I laugh whenever I hear the pronouncement that Marxism is dead, that it's no longer relevant. Because most people have ignored it for fifteen years, it's considered dead. Fifteen years! Not even *fifty* would justify that judgment. Philosophies rise and fall and mutate and rise again, depending on social circumstances. According to the intellectual eunuchs who hate Marxism, fifteen years is the same thing as eternity. "When the Soviet Union died, Marxism died." What a confusion! The Soviet Union's existence was an argument *against* Marxism. Its death was Karl Marx's *triumph*--his vindication over Lenin and Stalin, who perverted his doctrines.

That so-called Marxists have taken seriously the conventional wisdom shows how little they understand Marx. They haven't even absorbed his idea that ideologies grow out of "social being". The anti-Marxian dogma is part of the ideology of late capitalism. Marxism itself is an ideology, of course--albeit a comparatively scientific one, in that it is a result of sustained analysis of history and society--and in its original form it was appropriate to a set of conditions that have passed. Given the existence of new conditions (scientific, political, economic), the ideology must be revised to take account of them;--and eventually the revision will have to be revised, etc. This necessity of revision doesn't mean that the theory's basic intuitions aren't 'true', in some sense; it means only that new experiences always yield new insights[1] and hence require refinements even in modes of thought that approximate truth. Marxism will continue to evolve because truth is opaque, and no society will ever achieve complete knowledge.

A distinction, however, must be made between two types of ideologies. The first includes such phenomena as the natural and social sciences, and any mode of thought that results from an effort to penetrate appearances and understand essences; the second includes modes of thought that grow 'spontaneously' out of social conditions--i.e., that are adopted by the masses. Marxism as the brainchild of a few intellectuals who wanted to understand reality belongs to the first type; Marxism

[1] That's why the progression of history is, on a broad scale, a progression towards truth.

as the belief-system of millions of Russians belongs to the second type. The popularization of any philosophy is its vulgarization. Supposing, for the sake of argument, that it were possible for a system of thought to be absolutely true, and supposing that Marxism (in the scientific sense[1]) were able to realize this truth, at the moment it did so it would cease to evolve. In its *other* manifestation, however--its popular manifestation--it would continue to evolve as long as society existed, because changes in conditions would necessitate changes in the ideology. --It may seem a meaningless verbal dispute to call the 'scientific' variant of any philosophy an "ideology", but inasmuch as superfluous controversies raged throughout the twentieth century on the scientific pretensions of Marxism--"which is, after all, merely an ideology, and therefore, by its own ideas, not 'true'!"--my distinction is worth keeping, as showing that such controversies are products of confusion.

Delusions of grandeur.-- In every writer is a partially suppressed sense of greatness. (The publishing of a book is a remarkably presumptuous act.)

To simplify.-- To idolize is to misunderstand.

Indirectly proportional.-- The larger a woman is, the smaller she is as an 'other'.

Return to an earlier theme.-- Do I believe any of these thoughts I'm writing? Or am I just 'expressing' myself--getting things off my chest--unconcerned with their truth or falsity? Do I 'transcend' everything once I've written it? Leave it behind me? Or do I carry it with me? --The details of my thoughts I leave behind: not only do I forget them, but when I reread them I tend to be skeptical of them. I also tend not to care anymore. Once they're on paper, I have no use for them. And yet, despite my philosophical skepticism, it doesn't seem possible that most of my ideas are wrong. My worldview is unassailable. The whole thing makes perfect sense and is borne out by hundreds of observations I make everyday. It doesn't matter from what angle I attack my major beliefs: they remain impervious--given, that is, mankind's current body of knowledge and experience. Inasmuch as new historical experiences will always yield new insights, and new scientific theories will necessitate revisions in older ways of thinking, my worldview is vulnerable and amounts merely to a historical phase. --But that doesn't bother me. My goal, after all, isn't to find truth. It's to encourage you to find it for yourself.

The more treason, the merrier!-- I admire traitors (as such) more than patriots (as such). Traitors stand apart from the mob.

How I justify revealing intimate details of myself to the world.-- If Montaigne could do it, then so can I.

[1] I mean 'scientific' in the loose sense of 'concerned with analyzing reality'. Social sciences can rarely aspire to be scientific in the sense of the natural sciences, the hypotheses of which can be subjected to tests designed either to falsify or to substantiate them. (Karl Popper was an ass to think that that fact somehow invalidates social sciences.) Even so, many Marxist ideas can be falsified. For example, I limited the range of applicability of the theory of revolution because most historical events have contradicted it.

From the phenomenologists.-- In every human consciousness (excepting cases of pathology), there is a pre-reflective self-consciousness. It accompanies every experience, such that in being aware of the principal object of the experience, one is implicitly aware of the experience itself, as well as of the *awareness* of the experience, and of the awareness of its object. This means that one is aware that the experience is one's own even without thinking "The experience is mine". "Every positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself. …[If I am, for example, counting the cigarettes in a case,] it is very possible that I have no positional consciousness of counting them. Then I do not know myself as counting. Yet at the moment when these cigarettes are revealed to me as a dozen, I have a non-thetic consciousness of my adding activity. If anyone questioned me, indeed, if anyone should ask, 'What are you doing there?' I should reply at once, 'I am counting'" (Sartre, 1956, liii). Imagine, for example, the consciousness of an animal: it is clearly aware of its experiences (otherwise it would be unable to react to them), but it is surely not even *implicitly* (non-positionally, non-thetically, non-reflectively) aware of being aware of them. Therefore it has no conception of the experiences as 'its own'; it has no conception of itself. When I listen to a melody--when that's my *primary* activity, i.e., I'm not at the same time focusing my attention on reading or writing--I am reflectively aware of the melody and pre-reflectively aware of (1) listening to it, (2) my awareness of listening to it, and (3) my awareness of the melody itself. They're all bundled together in the same intentional act, and together they allow for my pre-reflective knowledge that the experience is my own.

Admittedly, when I'm absorbed in listening to a melody I am, properly speaking, not really aware of being aware of it--nor even of listening to it; I'm aware only of the melody itself. Sartre's example, however, shows that in some indescribable way, dubbed "pre-reflective", I am aware of the experience and of my consciousness and of its being mine. For, if somebody asks, "What are you doing?" I'll respond without a moment's hesitation, "I'm listening to a melody." That it's impossible to describe an awareness (except by using the ambiguous term 'pre-reflective') which is both self-conscious and unconscious points to an inadequacy in language--a *necessary* inadequacy--which cannot conceivably be remedied, due to the fact that logic opposes consciousness to unconsciousness and rejects the idea of a state in between, which is both conscious and unconscious, or 'partly conscious', or 'pre-reflective'. Intuitively, any intelligent person should know what is meant by 'partly conscious'--e.g., in a riveting conversation I'm partly but not wholly conscious of myself--but logic rejects the possibility of such a 'half-existence', a 'half-consciousness';--and since language is based, ultimately, on logic, language will never be able to describe it without using words that, in themselves, do not have a clear meaning. Thus, the inadequacy of language is fundamentally that of logic: logic denies the possibility of an experience that is self-evidently possible. Its inadequacy is something with which phenomenologists must cope, relying on the intuitive/imaginative talents of the reader to bypass logic's superficiality.

The other type of self-consciousness is reflective. It is explicitly self-conscious; it has consciousness as its object in much the same way that, in the example cited above from Sartre, the cigarettes were the object of consciousness. However, there is a difference: a clear demarcation does not exist between the observing and the observed consciousnesses--in fact, they are one and the same--while it does between consciousness and the cigarettes. Similarly, there is no clear boundary between reflective and pre-reflective self-awareness. Nor do those two terms do justice to the full range of possible degrees of self-awareness. They all 'blend into' each other: in different situations I'm aware of myself to different degrees. To argue for that is difficult, but fortunately unnecessary: one has only to observe one's consciousness at various times to verify its truth. Of course, as soon as one observes consciousness one is already reflectively self-aware, which means it is inherently impossible to 'observe' *pre*-reflective self-consciousness, but the latter kind can, to an extent, be 'verified' by *recalling* it an instant after it has passed.

There is also a pre-reflective and a reflective awareness of the body, but I'll pass over those for now. I'll say only that the reflective awareness of the body is not what I'm referring to here by 'self-consciousness'; I'm referring to consciousness of consciousness.

Given the foregoing sketch, what is the relation of the self to the 'two' types of self-consciousness? Quite simply, it *is* the two types. […]

Values are meaningless.-- This has been understood by a select few for centuries, but in our sanctimonious culture it's worth reiterating. Both moral and nonmoral values are meaningless, or at least semi-meaningless. 'Good', 'bad', 'right', 'wrong', 'beautiful', 'sublime', 'ugly'--in short, any concept that implies either approval or disapproval--'good' or 'bad'--'ought' or 'ought not'--has no concrete meaning. However, past thinkers have made this categorical declaration and have thereby gained nothing. Logical positivists, for example. In his book *Language, Truth, and Logic*, A. J. Ayer arbitrarily asserted that "a sentence is factually significant [i.e., meaningful] to any given person if and only if he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express--that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true or reject it as being false." On the basis of this dogma he proceeded to reject metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics as being meaningless blather, since no observations can verify or falsify their claims. What he failed to notice is that they aren't meaningless blather. There's a difference between "Raphael's painting 'School of Athens' is a masterpiece" and "wergju tillek schinzovitch lulu friggledeegorp". One is meaningful and the other isn't. Ayer apparently didn't recognize this, or he didn't feel the need to explain it. I don't feel the need to explain it either--that isn't my goal at the moment--but, if you say each word slowly and focus your attention on how your consciousness feels as you do so (*explore* your consciousness), you'll see that a barely perceptible 'intuition' corresponds to each word--while, when you say 'friggledeegorp', you can perceive no such intuition. It 'reaches out' to nothing (no other ideas) in your consciousness--it coexists with no intentional 'overtones'--while words do.[1] In Saussurean terminology, this is because a word is a union of a signifier and a signified: a "sound-image" and a concept.[2] 'Friggledeegorp' is a sound-image but not a concept; it neither is a signifier nor 'indicates'/is a signified. Value-words are and do, which is why value-judgments are not completely meaningless.

However, they are not completely meaning*ful*, either. This is illustrated by the possibility of the following dialogue.

A: "Raphael's painting 'School of Athens' is a masterpiece."

B: "What do you mean?"

A: "It's beautiful."

B: "What do you mean?"

A: "It's a sublime work of art."

B: "What do you mean?"

Only if A says something like "It's perfectly symmetrical" (which it isn't, incidentally) can B say, "I understand!" But then B can retort, "Your identification of beauty with symmetry is arbitrary, and I disagree", and once again they'll be back where they started: in a debate over the meaning of 'beauty'. It may seem that this debate exists because 'beauty', like all 'value-words', is simply *vague*, but that isn't a sufficient explanation. After all, terms like 'capitalism' and 'socialism' are vague as well, and yet it's conceivable that the debate over their meanings may one day be resolved--as it *isn't* conceivable that the debate over the meaning of 'beauty' will ever be resolved. It's been going on for thousands of years, and it will continue until our species

[1] Academics will laugh at the vagueness of those two sentences--'What is "intuition"?', 'What is "intention"?', 'What is "overtones"?', 'What is "ideas"?'--and they have a point, but the partial validity of their objections doesn't mean that my description has no value. There comes a time when one has to stop insisting on "logical precision at all costs!" if one wants to make any progress whatever. After all, academics have been insisting on it for decades, and look how little headway they've made! Anyone who is honest and intelligent will admit that he has an intuitive understanding of what I mean by the disputed terms.

[2] See my prior discussion of those terms.

extinguishes itself. --So what's the difference between the two types of words, between value-words and all others?

Before answering that question it may be wise to elaborate on the preceding. Any given value-word can be defined in two ways: (1) by reference to another value-word. For example, 'good' means 'not bad', 'hideous' means 'very ugly', 'ingenious' means 'extremely intelligent', etc. These definitions accomplish nothing. An ambiguous term is substituted for an ambiguous term. (2) A word with an agreed-upon definition can be substituted for the disputed word. This substitution, however, is necessarily arbitrary. For instance, one can declare that artistic beauty consists in 'realism', or that moral goodness consists in 'compassion', but if someone asks "why?" no satisfactory answer can be given. The conclusion that "compassion has more value than hate" cannot be reached through a process of purely logical reasoning (unless you start with premises that are themselves not grounded solely in logic or facts). At some point in the argument a "leap of faith" (to quote Kierkegaard) must be made. --What this amounts to is that value-judgments are never logically justified. They have no validity [except *relative* validity, relative to certain values].

The reason for this is that they commit the fallacy of inferring from the fact of one's aversion or attraction to a given thing that the thing objectively possesses the corresponding property (of--to simplify the matter--'badness' or 'goodness'), the property that provokes the reaction. Now, it does indeed have properties that provoke the reaction--it must; otherwise the reaction would be inexplicable--but it does not have a property that is effectively a crystallization of the reaction. The tacit reasoning behind such statements as 'The painting is sublime' is that because it inspires awe it has the intrinsic property of inspiring awe, which is called 'sublimity'. Of course, the judger may protest that he means only that *he* finds the painting sublime, not that he thinks it is 'objectively' sublime and that everyone should agree with him, but his objection is futile. The form of language forces on him the idea that the painting has the property of sublimity. '*It is* sublime', not '*it makes me feel* sublime'. It doesn't make a difference if he rephrases his opinion to "*I think* it is sublime"; the new phrasing means 'I think it objectively has sublimity'--which it doesn't and can't, because sublimity is merely the projection of a reaction in the perceiver. Therefore, no definition we give to the word will be satisfactory: the definition isn't the problem; the word *itself* is. Any definition will be disputed because there is no analytic connection between it and the word, which is because the word has no 'analytic' connection with concrete objects or concrete descriptions, which is because it refers to a nonexistent reification of the feeling of approval or disapproval.

But what does it mean to say that a word/sentence is only a *little* meaningful? How can it be partly but not wholly meaningful? The answer: in the case of a word, it has meaning inasmuch as it is associated with a concept, but it lacks meaning inasmuch as the concept is not clearly differentiated from other ones. For example, the concept 'meaningful' is itself not very meaningful, since it can be used in a variety of dissimilar contexts and is thus associated with a variety of dissimilar words (which are more clearly defined than it is).[1] (One may object that, e.g., 'hard' can be used in very different contexts even though its definition is fairly clear; my answer is that the word 'hard' signifies not *one* concept--like 'meaning'--but *several*: e.g., difficult, not-soft, etc.) Value-judgments, on the other hand, are meaningful inasmuch as they're composed of concepts related to one another in accordance with the syntactic rules of a given language; they're meaningless inasmuch as the key concept in them--the 'value-concept'--is supposed to refer to (or

[1] Examples: 'Life is meaningless' can signify (1) 'Individual lives don't have a purpose', (2) 'Life is fragmented; there is no thread that ties it all together', (3) 'Humans are merely effects of mechanistic physical forces', (4) 'Heaven doesn't exist, so whatever we do in this world ultimately has no consequence', (5) 'There is no grand narrative behind history', etc. 'This movie is meaningless' can mean (1) 'The plot is incoherent', (2) 'There is no "message", no "theme", being communicated', (3) 'It isn't relevant to reality', etc. Thus, in Saussurean language, the concept 'meaning' lacks 'value' (or meaning) to the extent that it cannot be differentiated from other words--which is related to its possible use in different contexts--which is related to its inability to be clearly defined--which is related to its lack of a definite 'signified'. (clarify!!!)

'name') a definite quality in an object, which quality, however, doesn't exist.

The following sections will present additional arguments against the meaningfulness of values.

Paradoxical.-- Though Hegel was an intellectually dishonest thinker (which, however, didn't prevent his being one of history's greatest philosophers), his fundamental intuition was right: mankind is nature's self-consciousness. In our attainment of power over nature, nature has achieved power over itself. That's commonly understood, in an abstract way, but rarely is it *imagined*. *Intuited*. Think about this: when you study neurology, billions of cells in your brain are trying to understand themselves. They're looking at pictures of themselves, they're learning how they operate--they're learning that dendrites are stimulated by neurotransmitters released into the synapse, that action potentials traveling along axons are sped up by a myelin coating on the cell--and then they cooperate with each other to feel collective amazement at the fact that these impossibly intricate biological processes are occurring inside them, and then they reflect that despite all this newly acquired knowledge they still manage to delude themselves by maintaining the appearance of a single self that is doing all their thinking for them… They ascribe all these ideas to *us*!--to self-consciousness!--to consciousness of consciousness! We get all the credit for their work! I almost want to reprimand them: "You should have more self-respect, guys!"--until I remember that this would really be *them* reprimanding *themselves*; I'm just the (nonexistent) intermediary they create so as to perpetuate their own existence (because without the illusion of a self--i.e., without self-consciousness--this being that is called 'me' couldn't survive, since humans rely on communication, and communication relies on self-consciousness). And through these cells nature has reached the point at which it can control itself: it can genetically engineer organisms, it can self-consciously create new elements, it can revel in its newfound power by blowing up nuclear bombs. --For all we know, bombs are nature's way of partying! Maybe wars happen because nature gets bored occasionally and wants to pit itself against itself and see who wins. --In the end, it will probably be able--through us--to decide the course of its own evolution. 'I want to create a race of supermen. The movies I've made exploring the horrors of this scenario are, after all, only movies: in reality I'll be able to do it better.' And so nature, in its over-confidence, will end up destroying the animal that allowed it to realize itself, and it will have to start from the beginning again, propelled by its will to power.

Yes, nature has its demon, just like we humans.

Nature's desire for recognition.-- Had man never been created, what a ridiculous comedy the universe would be! All this pageantry, all these spectacles, all this beauty for nothing! It would be a play performed for no audience, with no purpose. The beauty of the sunset, of Vietnam's landscape, of an evolutionary equilibrium that is an *artistic masterpiece* would have no observer, no 'other' to appreciate it! It would not exist; it would be dead. A brute fact opaque to itself. *Man* created it. In nature's creation of man, nature created itself. Perhaps that's why *homo sapiens* was born: nature had reached the point at which it was no longer merely *in-itself*; it was becoming *for-itself*, in the evolution of progressively higher intelligences. Man was the necessary culmination. – Just as humans need an other, so nature needs an other. We are nature's other; we are what allows it to fully exist, as we are what allows *us* to fully exist, as self-conscious beings.

We are the most advanced crystallization of nature's will to power over itself!

What is charisma?-- Goethe tried to explain Napoleon's phenomenal rise to power by invoking a mysterious force called the "demonic". The idea had existed since the time of the ancient Greeks (though its meaning had changed over the course of millennia). Although Goethe couldn't give a precise definition of it, he often identified it with the creative power of "geniuses", a power that

couldn't be reduced to rational causes. When applying it to people like Napoleon, however, who weren't creative geniuses, he meant the following (from *Dichtung und Wahrheit*): "[Men possessed by the demonic] are not always superior in mind or talents, seldom do they recommend themselves by the goodness of their heart. Yet, a tremendous power goes out from them; they possess an incredible force over all other creatures and even over the elements; nobody can say how far their influence will reach. …the masses are always attracted to them." Aside from the reference to the elements--where Goethe went a little over-the-top--the description fits men as varied as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Hitler, Gandhi, Napoleon, and Martin Luther King, Jr. They have some ineffable quality in common; they possess some unconscious, unrational force: the "demonic". Goethe's mistake was to suggest that it is qualitatively different from similar, but less powerful, traits in other people. We moderns have substituted the (somewhat different) idea of "charisma" for the idea of "the demonic", but we remain ignorant of its nature.

The first important insight is that charisma isn't 'one' quality. It's a combination of several. The most obvious, and most essential, is self-confidence--or the *projection* of self-confidence. Every charismatic person has this. Most such people are also skilled with words, and they intuitively 'know' what a given person (or people) wants to hear. That is, unconsciously they have a deep understanding of human nature. This contributes to their persuasive powers. People enjoy being near them; it tends to make people feel good about themselves. Their sense of self-worth is validated when a charismatic person takes notice of them. If, for example, he expresses gratitude to them, they feel important. If he assigns them a task, they go above and beyond what is requested. If, on the other hand, he criticizes them, they feel crushed.

To say that such power derives from self-confidence, from skill with words, from intuitive knowledge of humanity, explains little. *Why* does it derive from self-confidence? To understand this, we need to have a fairly firm grasp of human nature. The philosopher Hegel may be of use here. By Alexandre Kojève's interpretation of him, Hegel believes that the desire to be recognized is what propels humans to create their history. By 'being recognized' Hegel means 'having one's self-worth be confirmed in the mind of another human being', i.e., 'having another person affirm the value of one's humanity'. Everyone seeks recognition; everyone wants to be seen as valuable. The logical conclusion of this desire is the desire to represent another's[1] self-ideal, that which he wishes *he* could be. (This desire can be compared with Nietzsche's "will to power".)

To elaborate on that.-- Most human cultural activities--i.e., *not* biological ones like eating and defecating[2]--are done ultimately, or at least *partly* (which is, admittedly, a vague word), for the sake of recognition. People participate in the business of society because they want to be recognized. Lawyers, doctors, businessmen, artists, even janitors pursue their various avenues to recognition, whether it be through wealth, power or simply the possession of a respectable job. Everyone cooperates (and competes) to create history on the basis of this desire.

Now, what Hegel and Kojève fail to note is that we crave recognition from certain people more than from others. Instinctively[3] I respect, e.g., Jon Stewart more than Michael Bolton, Bill Clinton more than George Bush, an adult more than a child. In turn, I'd like to be respected by one more than the other. The reason for both judgments, 'in the final analysis', is that Jon Stewart, Bill Clinton and an adult are, respectively, more charismatic (in a sense) than Michael Bolton, George Bush and a child. Their charisma causes me to believe on an intuitive level that they're 'valuable': unconsciously I judge that their value is equal to or greater than my own. What this value consists

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[1] Incidentally, in Hegelian terminology another person is called simply "the other", because he exists in opposition to the self. (As I'll explain below, one is one's own other as well.) I'll follow his terminology. I'll use the term 'Other', with a capital 'O', to refer to the idea of 'others'--as a single all-encompassing abstraction--rather than to a specific individual.

[2] The case of sex is more complex. I'll return to it.

[3] The significance of that word will be understood when I return to it in subsequent sections.

in is a question with which my intuition is unconcerned.[1] It recognizes only that, somehow, these people are 'valuable'. But a vague definition can be extrapolated from the intuition: Bill Clinton, the quintessentially charismatic person, is *more* of an 'other' than most people are. Phenomenologically speaking, his otherhood has more 'substance'; he seems outside of mundane life somehow--larger than it, independent of it. He's a *principle* rather than a mere mortal. [I don't mean *morally*.] By impressing him I'm impressing a being whose subjecthood is so 'heavy' that it's actually 'objecthood', that it represents something (perceived as) nearly immortal, that it's an ideal rather than a human animal who is doomed to die. The basic source of his charisma--of *any* charisma--is his self-confidence; his talents, such as his conversational skill, merely add to the perception that he's supremely confident. The reason for the importance of self-confidence is that it's the one characteristic that creates the impression that its bearer is independent, autonomous, that he is above life by not needing recognition from others to validate his own self-certainty.[2]

The question can still be asked, however, "Why do we want recognition especially from a person we perceive as 'above life' or 'above us' or 'immortal' in some way? Indeed, why do we desire recognition at all? What is the *fundamental reason*?" See the next section [never written] for the answer.

Wisdom rarely increases with age.-- Why do adults think they have the right to laugh at the "silly" games of children? "Oh, how cute, he's playing 'cops and robbers' with his friends!" "Look, he's building a fort! Isn't that precious?" "The little angel is playing with her dollhouse!" --What condescension! What smugness, disguised as fondness! I'm inclined to think that children have more right to laugh at *us* than we do at *them*. A ten-year-old peeking into a bar through a hole in the wall might say something like "How charming! That woman who's wearing a tight shirt to show off her breasts is giggling at whatever idiotic thing that man just said. Oh look, now he's whispering to her, with his hand on her leg. Ha! They're so innocent! All that flirting, all that fun pretense, simply because there's a chance his penis will be in her vagina later--and they both know it, but they can't say it because that would ruin the game! Jeez, they're even more engrossed in it than I am when I'm building my fort! --What's wrong with that guy over there? He's singing loudly and falling against tables. Not even little Jimmy is that wild!" I shudder to imagine what a child in a casino would think of us. Thank God the wisdom of children is tempered with innocence!

"The child is father to the man."-- Adults are more childish than children. After all, the latter are perceptive enough to *know* they're children!--which is more than I can say for adults.

Nietzsche was right. Again.-- Anyone who is strong enough to accept suffering should not accept Buddhism.

Quotations from Roosevelt.-- "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." "The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today." "The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have little." --Noble sentiments, which we respect until we're asked to act upon them.

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[1] You can examine your own intuition to confirm that.

[2] It's irrelevant that such a person does in fact want to be recognized (often to an abnormal degree). The point is that he seems certain of himself.

Most of that was nothing but the prelude to the main course. The *hors d'oêuvre*, if you will. I was purging myself of the *ad hominem* drive before hunkering down and getting scholarly.

What I wrote on historical materialism was a little confused. For example, Marxists wouldn't say that every (major) civilization, "given enough time" (i.e., left 'undisturbed' by accidental external influences), would undergo an economic revolution in the manner that Marx outlined. They'd say instead that if it didn't, it would eventually collapse. So my Rome example actually provides *support* for this aspect of orthodox Marxism. I also failed to explain why "snowballing" technological development has the power to break through conservative social and production relations. (Reasons can be easily thought of, though.)

I'd intended to address such problems as the nature of functional explanations, the definition of 'contradiction' and 'tension' (and all the other terms), the issue of methodological individualism versus holism, the mechanisms through which functional explanations work, etc. etc., in the following sections.

Friday, August 26

Can't stand being alone anymore. I'm around people so often here that when I return to my room it feels like a cave. –Dinner with Sandy, the German, last night in the city. Wednesday night went to a bar with philosophy professors and students. This morning went to the gym with Kate, the Brazilian. "MTV beach party" tonight. Cocktail party in the phil. dept. this afternoon. Dinner with Miho, the Japanese girl, tomorrow. Grocery shopping with foreigners today.

Courses: phil. of art, phil. of social sciences, epistemology proseminar.

Coming from the MTV culture, it's refreshing to be sweetly sad and alone again.

I'm sick of pretending to be cheerful and youthful when all I want to do is lie in bed peacefully with someone I love.

Saturday, August 27

Reading an anthology called *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (eds. Steup and Sosa) for the proseminar. Halfway through the Dretske, which argues against the principle of closure (= the idea that if S knows that P is true and knows that P implies Q, then, evidentially speaking, this is enough for S to know that Q is true). I think all the controversies over the definition of knowledge and the definition of the terms one uses to define knowledge and the question of how one knows when one has knowledge and so on are misguided. Knowledge is a semi-meaningless idea. Its definition, vaguely stated, should be unproblematic: one has knowledge when one has a true, justified belief the truth of which one is certain. (Even "Gettier-style counterexamples"[1] and "Goldman's barn case"[2]—as my prof explained them/it—don't pose a problem to this definition, because in both cases one can say that the belief in question, in being *accidentally* true, isn't completely justified (due to the believer's not having all the relevant information) and is therefore not, strictly speaking, known.) But the ideas of 'certainty' and 'adequate justification' cannot themselves be defined except in ways that beg the question, such as 'certainty = the absence of doubt'. (What is doubt?)

[1] Example of such an example: "Suppose your colleague Brown tells you that he owns a Ford. You infer: (1) Someone in the office owns a Ford. You believe (1), and your belief is justified. Suppose, however, that unbeknownst to Brown, he went bankrupt. The bank confiscated the Ford. But another colleague Smith happens to own a Ford. Then (1) is true. Yet it seems that you do not know it." Right. Because my belief wasn't justified enough for me to claim to know it.

[2] "S is driving in the country and stops in front of a barn. Unbeknownst to S, S is looking at one of the few genuine barns in an area spawned with barn facsimiles. The facsimiles are so realistic that if S had stopped in front of any of them, S would have been tricked into thinking he was looking at a real barn. But by luck S has stopped in front of one of the few real barns left in the area. The standard intuition is that S does not know he is looking at a real barn, because he could easily have had the same belief while looking at a facsimile."

Thus, knowledge can't be clearly defined, and skepticism is ineluctable.[1] –In any case, the idea of 'knowledge' (the senseless rigor of which is highlighted by the fact that the term '*absolute* knowledge' is effectively its synonym) is, practically and philosophically speaking, irrelevant. *Who cares* whether (we know that) our beliefs, or *any* beliefs, are incapable of being wrong? It doesn't matter! The corollary of this is that skepticism[2] too has no great relevance; the impulse to defeat it arises from the valueless longing for some kind of unattainable psychological security. It's fanciful and shouldn't be taken very seriously—but, nevertheless, it can't be refuted. Descartes' evil demon exists as a permanent, though ridiculous, possibility.

…'Knowledge' has a subjective and an objective aspect. On the one hand, it's a mental state—a strong version of 'belief', namely *certainty*—while on the other it presupposes that the proposition of which one is certain is objectively true. Now, both sides are open to attack. 'Certainty' is the absence of doubt; but what does this absence mean? If I see a spot and say "I see a spot", is it possible for me to doubt it (by asking whether I *know* it)? Yes and no. Inasmuch as it occurs to me that I may not be seeing a spot, that I'm being "massively" deceived, I do doubt it. My doubt may be unclear and apparently 'empty', but since the proposition's negation occurs to me, there is, in a sense, doubt. I think 'In some metaphysical world, I may somehow be wrong'. But my doubt can't be effectively *grasped*, as it can when I doubt whether I'll ever get married. I can easily understand what it would be like to remain a bachelor; I can't understand how I could be wrong about the spot. Nevertheless, since the 'abstract' possibility of my wrongness flits across my mind, I do in a sense doubt the proposition. So I don't have *complete* certainty, and I don't have knowledge. What about the person to whom it doesn't even occur that his belief is wrong? Assuming such a phenomenon is possible (which I doubt[3])—i.e., assuming he really does have "certainty"—does he have knowledge? No, because his belief might not be true. Can a belief *ever* be determined as true beyond a doubt? In the most rigorous sense, no. But, again, the doubt will often appear meaningless.

Does my loose definition of doubt seem perverse? Probably. But it's necessary: how else can one account for the existence of these sorts of questions? Clearly philosophers have *some* kind of doubt—and *all* kinds are incompatible with knowledge in the strictest sense.

The idea of 'justification' is problematic also. Surely I'm justified in saying "I see a spot", but am I justified in saying "I know I see a spot"? If what I wrote above is true, then I'm not (because (1) I doubt the proposition and (2) there's no way to determine *conclusively* its truth-value). But it's odd to say the first proposition is justified and the second isn't, because in saying the first is justified I'm effectively saying it's true, which would appear to mean both that I know it's true and that its truth-value can be determined (and therefore that the second is justified as well). But do I *know* the first is justified? As soon as I add the word 'know', I become doubtful. That's always the way it is, in every context! I consider myself justified in saying (it's true that) the table is brown but *not* justified in saying I *know* the table is brown. Why? Because my uttering the word 'know' introduces an element of doubt (really *confusion*) that has its origin in the meaninglessness of 'know' (as used in this context).

…Ever since skimming *On Certainty* (at Mendocino) I've been attracted to Witt.'s idea (—Does he make it explicit? I forget.) that most of the paradoxes and intuitions and counter-intuitions about knowledge can be explained-away/reconciled by hypothesizing that there are two kinds of knowledge: the 'commonsensical' and the (almost meaningless) philosophical. The duality, I think, arises from the schism in our nature between the animal mode of apprehending reality and the 'intellective' mode. Expressed in linguistic terms, it's the 'ordinary language vs. philosophical language' dichotomy.

(I wish the library had a copy of W.'s book!)

Miho's a nice girl, but she's an airhead. I asked her what her greatest passion in life is; her answer was "shopping".

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[1] Maybe that conclusion doesn't follow.

[2] The thoroughgoing kind that questions even ordinary knowledge.

[3] It could be argued that in affirming a proposition, one 'implicitly' recognizes the possibility of its falsehood. Would that be doubt? In the (almost meaningless) exclusively philosophical sense, yes.

Sunday, August 28

Contemporary epistemologists are confused. They're going about the problem(s) in the wrong way. As I said a while ago, the only way to a solution is to *cut through* the difficulties, to get *below* them, as Wittgenstein tried to do.

Ridiculous that people are still doing philosophy in this age! It's dead! Look around: there's no place for it, and there's nothing exciting to say anymore anyway. All we philosophers are obstinate deniers of reality. We might as well embrace pop culture or dehumanizing science and wait for the nuclear war.

Dretske's strategy, more or less, is to argue that an abandonment of closure is the only way around skepticism. But his arguments are muddled. He thinks that "closure tells us we have to know there is an external world in order to see there are cookies in the jar [that we're looking at]", but he's wrong—in a sense. I can "see (hence, know)" there are cookies in the jar without knowing there's an external world if I define cookies not as mind-independent objects but simply as 'those things I see (which may, after all, be mind-dependent)' (because in this case my knowing there are cookies wouldn't imply there are mind-independent objects). On the other hand, if I define cookies as mind-independent (as D. seems to do), then yes, I do have to know there's an external world in order to know there are cookies, because the existence of mind-independent cookies logically entails there are mind-independent objects. If I can't know there are mind-independent objects, and I define cookies as such, then—oh well—I can't know there are cookies. Dretske may be right that an abandonment of closure is the only way around skepticism, but he's wrong that closure can be abandoned. Doing so is tantamount to denying logical entailments.

–This is what Dretske's position comes down to: 'Even though q follows from p, and I know that p is true, it's possible that q is false'.

Friday, September 2

Suicidal thoughts. Same old same old same old.

Leaf-lonely,
lilac lay lovelessly,
lacking life's lively lilt,
looking
dead.

In a paper by Denis Dutton on artistic forgery, he writes the following: "Consider for a moment Smith and Jones, who have just finished listening to a new recording of Liszt's *Transcendental Études*. Smith is transfixed. He says, 'What beautiful artistry! The pianist's tone is superb, his control absolute, his speed and accuracy dazzling. Truly an electric performance!' Jones responds with a sigh. 'Yeah, it was electrical all right. Or to be more precise, it was electronic. He recorded the music at practice tempo and the engineers speeded it up on a rotating head recorder.' Poor Smith—his enthusiasm evaporates." Would your enthusiasm evaporate too? My guess is yes. But why? What does that say about your expectations, and the way you experience art? –It says your enjoyment is intimately connected to your assumption that it's a human being that performs/creates whatever it is you're admiring. (Your reaction would be the same if you were looking at a magnificent painting or sculpture etc. and learned that a machine had created it.) Unconsciously you expect art to 'glorify' him who creates it (and thereby mankind). If it doesn't do so (as in Dutton's example), it doesn't interest you. Whether it does so through hatred or ugliness or beauty or love is secondary; the main point is that it be an *achievement*. Because the *David* is a greater achievement than, say, *Tilted Arc*, or Duchamp's *Fountain*, it's appreciated more—and it fulfills art's most immediate

purpose more effectively. (Maybe you'll ask what it means for something to be an 'achievement'. You'll say "You're begging the question!" In the way I'm using the word, the impressiveness of an achievement is a quality we—crudely—understand through intuition. It refers to the complexity, the ambition, the skill displayed. We intuitively see that the Eroica symphony is a greater achievement than the Pathétique sonata; this is the main reason for our judgment that *as art* it's more impressive. Obviously, though, this mode of evaluation isn't adequate. Other criteria have to be introduced to clarify and refine our judgments.)

Saturday, September 3

I have no qualms about saying, "I know there's a desk in front of me". The 'I know' part seems unnecessary and strangely meaningless, but I feel entitled to it. However, if someone asks me, "But do you *know* there's a desk in front of you? Do you *really know* it?", I'll start to have doubts. I'll think 'maybe, after all, I'm wrong somehow'. –In short: I know there's a desk here, but I don't *know* it. The emphasis changes the word's meaning—even though it remains, on some level, meaningless.

The reason that *absolute certainty* is impossible (indeed, inconceivable (hence meaningless)) is that self-consciousness can't help positing an external world (or rather, the externality of the world), i.e., an external truth. Because it's both of itself and of an object—a world—'opposed' to it, it's aware that this object is outside of it, and that it can never have direct, intuitive access to the interior of this object. The division between self-consciousness and the world (which is also that between self-consciousness and itself, since it's aware of two things at once) is what makes negation not only possible but implicit in the nature of consciousness—and this permanent presence of negation, as I wrote earlier, is why we can't overcome doubt. As long as we can imagine an alternative, we can doubt. When I 'naïvely' affirm a proposition, as in the above example, I'm concentrating on what I'm 'naïvely' aware of. But when I ask myself whether I truly know I'm right, I'm concentrating—possibly in a confused, half-conscious way—on the dualism between myself and an objective reality. I'm concentrating on the possibility (really the *necessity*) of negation.

Am I justified in my belief that Bush went to New Orleans after hurricane Katrina had devastated it? Yes. I read it in the *Times* and saw photographs. Do I *know* he went? No. It's possible the information I read was mistaken. And anyway, I'm not in a position to decide whether I know it; only someone who has immediate evidence of, or access to, the truth can decide that (because knowledge isn't knowledge unless the belief is true). –Now, that my belief is completely justified as a belief but not as knowledge—i.e., that I'm being entirely rational in being convinced of its truth even though (I recognize that) its falsehood is a possibility—is a strange contradiction, which shows that, in a sense, the concept of knowledge is superfluous, or at any rate, not very useful.

Monday, September 5

Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (—reading it makes you grateful for the death of the author); alternative title: "Rolando Furioso", in honor of its author's chugging along blithely through a minefield of logical fallacies and confusions. Four pages densely packed but somehow void of meaning.

Bell, "The Aesthetic Hypothesis" (—yes, it's a *pretty* hypothesis, but that's all); alternative title: "How Not to Have Common Sense". Oh Clive, you cute little Brit;—'I fancy theory, my dear; what say you? Shall I try my hand?' 'Nay, love, 'tis time for tea!' 'Ah, right then. Cheerio, my good friend!'

Collingwood, "The Principles of Art" (—you *won't* find them here); alternative title: "I Have No Idea What I'm Talking About". Art isn't a craft; it's an *idea*! Yea, and an expression of emotion! There is no technique in art; and the only kind of art is *good* art! (But clearly good *theory* is *not* the only kind of *theory*.)

throat parched with slakeless thirst for facile fame,
a desert-fountain whose truth is
a cruel longing to die
in others' minds
and thus
be
reborn
in this cruel life,
but it's a delusion,
for the desiccate springs of joy
can be replenished only from *within*

Tuesday, September 6

What insane instinct drives philosophers to go to preposterous lengths to find a way around skepticism? It's like they shudder even to *think* about it. Nerds. Says Dretske: "[Skepticism] is a last resort. If the only choices are skepticism or the rejection of closure, then—too bad—we had better learn to live without closure." Yes, it's better to throw aside logic than to accept (the impossibility of refuting) skepticism.

The Republican party is straining its sinews to dismantle the country. Everything it does is counterproductive. The "Homeland Security Department" takes funding away from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and what's the result? Catastrophe on a biblical scale. It's foreseeable and preventable, but Incompetence is the malevolent despot that oversees our safety. And now the deficit is going to be astronomical—as it already was—and Congress will continue to insist on cutting taxes (or at least expenditures), and on crusading against gay rights, and on legislating Creationism, and on ignoring prophecies of global warming, and on driving this country right into the shitheap of history.

I find it all terribly amusing. It's happened a thousand times before. How can you not sit back and laugh at the rodents scurrying pellmell into the trap? Look at Bush! Look at "this coward we have empowered"![1] *He's* leading us! King Rat! It's the blind leading the sighted! And we can't do anything about it!

Still, as I said, it's a great show.

Man is a disease. He must be quarantined from himself.

Wednesday, September 7

Reading Norman Mailer's *Advertisements for Myself*. Ought to have read him years ago. My writing might have benefited; it might even—dare I say it?—have been something not to be disowned.

He criticizes passages of his as poorly written, which when I read leave a decidedly favorable impression. What does this mean? Is he being dishonest or do I lack the critical faculty?

I can't imagine that the overripeness of our culture doesn't make every esoteric project otiose. I can't fathom the relevance anymore of art and intellectual matters. Philosophy, let us admit, is in its yellow leaf; this is uncontroversial, though painful for me, given that philosophy is, was, or would have been my vocation. Psychology and the social sciences don't fare much better, given the imperative of specialization as well as the public's apathy. Literature is passing away, losing its powers to engage society's imagination

[1] From Eminem's song "Mosh".

and tap the vein of rebellion—or (at any rate) discontent. Music died decades ago. Even political activism founders on the rock of the System. My floundering, my depression, itself seems merely comical and narcissistic. When everything is pointless and society has reached the end of time, and whatever one does will not matter in the long run, is it not presumptuous to ascribe *weight* to oneself? Truly, I might as well follow Byron's example and give myself up to masochistic hedonism.

And yet none of this matters. I am who I am: my "evil hours" notwithstanding, I'll never stop fighting.

Thursday, September 8

I reread the last two years of this journal. Though its onanistic excesses made me see myself as God sees mankind, I've profited from the activity. I know better now how to craft these entries in such a way that the reader isn't led to prefer Pepys's diary over mine. I'll be more careful from now on.

Friday, September 9

Evening with lovable anarchist Sandy. (A common occurrence.) She made dinner. Funny happy passionate girl. Invited me to San Francisco with her and her European friends during Thanksgiving.

We discussed examples of New Orleans-style anarchism. Hundreds of people with no money getting together to form makeshift communities—which were then, of course, destroyed by officials. Here's an account that should set you smoldering, if there's an ounce of humanity in you:

Hurricane Katrina-Our Experiences
Larry Bradshaw, Lorrie Beth Slonsky

> Two days after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, the Walgreen's store at the corner of Royal and Iberville streets remained locked. The dairy display case was clearly visible through the widows. It was now 48 hours without electricity, running water, plumbing. The milk, yogurt, and cheeses were beginning to spoil in the 90-degree heat. The owners and managers had locked up the food, water, pampers, and prescriptions and fled the City. Outside Walgreen's windows, residents and tourists grew increasingly thirsty and hungry.
>
> The much-promised federal, state and local aid never materialized and the windows at Walgreen's gave way to the looters. There was an alternative. The cops could have broken one small window and distributed the nuts, fruit juices, and bottle water in an organized and systematic manner. But they did not. Instead they spent hours playing cat and mouse, temporarily chasing away the looters.
>
> We were finally airlifted out of New Orleans two days ago and arrived home yesterday (Saturday). We have yet to see any of the TV coverage or look at a newspaper. We are willing to guess that there were no video images or front-page pictures of European or affluent white tourists looting the Walgreen's in the French Quarter.
>
> We also suspect the media will have been inundated with "hero" images of the National Guard, the troops and the police struggling to help the "victims" of the Hurricane. What you will not see, but what we witnessed, were the real heroes and sheroes of the hurricane relief effort: the working class of New Orleans. The maintenance workers who used a fork lift to carry the sick and disabled. The engineers, who rigged, nurtured and kept the generators running. The electricians who improvised thick extension cords stretching over blocks to share the little electricity we had in order to free cars stuck on rooftop parking lots. Nurses who took over for mechanical ventilators and spent many

hours on end manually forcing air into the lungs of unconscious patients to keep them alive. Doormen who rescued folks stuck in elevators. Refinery workers who broke into boat yards, "stealing" boats to rescue their neighbors clinging to their roofs in flood waters. Mechanics who helped hot-wire any car that could be found to ferry people out of the City. And the food service workers who scoured the commercial kitchens improvising communal meals for hundreds of those stranded.

Most of these workers had lost their homes, and had not heard from members of their families, yet they stayed and provided the only infrastructure for the 20% of New Orleans that was not under water.

On Day 2, there were approximately 500 of us left in the hotels in the French Quarter. We were a mix of foreign tourists, conference attendees like ourselves, and locals who had checked into hotels for safety and shelter from Katrina. Some of us had cell phone contact with family and friends outside of New Orleans. We were repeatedly told that all sorts of resources including the National Guard and scores of buses were pouring in to the City. The buses and the other resources must have been invisible because none of us had seen them.

We decided we had to save ourselves. So we pooled our money and came up with $25,000 to have ten buses come and take us out of the City. Those who did not have the requisite $45.00 for a ticket were subsidized by those who did have extra money. We waited for 48 hours for the buses, spending the last 12 hours standing outside, sharing the limited water, food, and clothes we had. We created a priority boarding area for the sick, elderly and new born babies. We waited late into the night for the "imminent" arrival of the buses. The buses never arrived. We later learned that the minute the arrived to the City limits, they were commandeered by the military.

By day 4 our hotels had run out of fuel and water. Sanitation was dangerously abysmal. As the desperation and despair increased, street crime as well as water levels began to rise. The hotels turned us out and locked their doors, telling us that the "officials" told us to report to the convention center to wait for more buses. As we entered the center of the City, we finally encountered the National Guard. The Guards told us we would not be allowed into the Superdome as the City's primary shelter had descended into a humanitarian and health hellhole. The guards further told us that the City's only other shelter, the Convention Center, was also descending into chaos and squalor and that the police were not allowing anyone else in. Quite naturally, we asked, "If we can't go to the only 2 shelters in the City, what was our alternative?" The guards told us that that was our problem, and no they did not have extra water to give to us. This would be the start of our numerous encounters with callous and hostile "law enforcement".

We walked to the police command center at Harrah's on Canal Street and were told the same thing, that we were on our own, and no they did not have water to give us. We now numbered several hundred. We held a mass meeting to decide a course of action. We agreed to camp outside the police command post. We would be plainly visible to the media and would constitute a highly visible embarrassment to the City officials. The police told us that we could not stay. Regardless, we began to settle in and set up camp. In short order, the police commander came across the street to address our group. He told us he had a solution: we should walk to the Pontchartrain Expressway and cross the greater New Orleans Bridge where the police had buses lined up to take us out of the City. The crowd cheered and began to move. We called everyone back and explained to the commander that there had been lots of misinformation and wrong information and was he sure that there were buses waiting for us. The commander turned to the crowd and stated emphatically, "I swear to you that the buses are there."

We organized ourselves and the 200 of us set off for the bridge with great excitement and hope. As we marched pasted the convention center, many locals saw our determined and optimistic group and asked where we were headed. We told them about the great news. Families immediately grabbed their few belongings and quickly our numbers doubled and then doubled again. Babies in strollers now joined us, people using crutches, elderly clasping walkers and others people in wheelchairs. We marched the 2-3 miles to the freeway and up the steep incline to the Bridge. It now began to pour down rain, but it did not dampen our enthusiasm.

As we approached the bridge, armed Gretna sheriffs formed a line across the foot of the bridge. Before we were close enough to speak, they began firing their weapons over our heads. This sent the crowd fleeing in various directions. As the crowd scattered and dissipated, a few of us inched forward and managed to engage some of the sheriffs in conversation. We told them of our conversation with the police commander and of the commander's assurances. The sheriffs informed us there were no buses waiting. The commander had lied to us to get us to move.

We questioned why we couldn't cross the bridge anyway, especially as there was little traffic on the 6-lane highway. They responded that the West Bank was not going to become New Orleans and there would be no Superdomes in their City. These were code words for if you are poor and black, you are not crossing the Mississippi River and you were not getting out of New Orleans.

Our small group retreated back down Highway 90 to seek shelter from the rain under an overpass. We debated our options and in the end decided to build an encampment in the middle of the Ponchartrain Expressway on the center divide, between the O'Keefe and Tchoupitoulas exits. We reasoned we would be visible to everyone, we would have some security being on an elevated freeway and we could wait and watch for the arrival of the yet to be seen buses.

All day long, we saw other families, individuals and groups make the same trip up the incline in an attempt to cross the bridge, only to be turned away. Some chased away with gunfire, others simply told no, others to be verbally berated and humiliated. Thousands of New Orleaners were prevented and prohibited from self-evacuating the City on foot. Meanwhile, the only two City shelters sank further into squalor and disrepair. The only way across the bridge was by vehicle. We saw workers stealing trucks, buses, moving vans, semi-trucks and any car that could be hotwired. All were packed with people trying to escape the misery New Orleans had become.

Our little encampment began to blossom. Someone stole a water delivery truck and brought it up to us. Let's hear it for looting! A mile or so down the freeway, an army truck lost a couple of pallets of C-rations on a tight turn. We ferried the food back to our camp in shopping carts. Now secure with the two necessities, food and water; cooperation, community, and creativity flowered. We organized a clean up and hung garbage bags from the rebar poles. We made beds from wood pallets and cardboard. We designated a storm drain as the bathroom and the kids built an elaborate enclosure for privacy out of plastic, broken umbrellas, and other scraps. We even organized a food recycling system where individuals could swap out parts of C-rations (applesauce for babies and candies for kids!).

This was a process we saw repeatedly in the aftermath of Katrina. When individuals had to fight to find food or water, it meant looking out for yourself only. You had to do whatever it took to find water for your kids or food for your parents. When these basic needs were met, people began to look out for each other, working together and constructing a community.

If the relief organizations had saturated the City with food and water in the first 2 or 3 days, the desperation, the frustration and the ugliness would not have set in.

Flush with the necessities, we offered food and water to passing families and individuals. Many decided to stay and join us. Our encampment grew to 80 or 90 people.

From a woman with a battery powered radio we learned that the media was talking about us. Up in full view on the freeway, every relief and news organizations saw us on their way into the City. Officials were being asked what they were going to do about all those families living up on the freeway? The officials responded they were going to take care of us. Some of us got a sinking feeling. "Taking care of us" had an ominous tone to it.

Unfortunately, our sinking feeling (along with the sinking City) was correct. Just as dusk set in, a Gretna Sheriff showed up, jumped out of his patrol vehicle, aimed his gun at our faces, screaming, "Get off the fucking freeway". A helicopter arrived and used the wind from its blades to blow away our flimsy structures. As we retreated, the sheriff loaded up his truck with our food and water.

Once again, at gunpoint, we were forced off the freeway. All the law enforcement agencies appeared threatened when we congregated or congealed into groups of 20 or more. In every congregation of "victims" they saw "mob" or "riot". We felt safety in numbers. Our "we must stay together" was impossible because the agencies would force us into small atomized groups.

In the pandemonium of having our camp raided and destroyed, we scattered once again. Reduced to a small group of 8 people, in the dark, we sought refuge in an abandoned school bus, under the freeway on Cilo Street. We were hiding from possible criminal elements but equally and definitely, we were hiding from the police and sheriffs with their martial law, curfew and shoot-to-kill policies.

The next days, our group of 8 walked most of the day, made contact with New Orleans Fire Department and were eventually airlifted out by an urban search and rescue team. We were dropped off near the airport and managed to catch a ride with the National Guard. The two young guardsmen apologized for the limited response of the Louisiana guards. They explained that a large section of their unit was in Iraq and that meant they were shorthanded and were unable to complete all the tasks they were assigned.

We arrived at the airport on the day a massive airlift had begun. The airport had become another Superdome. We 8 were caught in a press of humanity as flights were delayed for several hours while George Bush landed briefly at the airport for a photo op. After being evacuated on a coast guard cargo plane, we arrived in San Antonio, Texas.

There the humiliation and dehumanization of the official relief effort continued. We were placed on buses and driven to a large field where we were forced to sit for hours and hours. Some of the buses did not have air-conditioners. In the dark, hundreds if us were forced to share two filthy overflowing porta-potties. Those who managed to make it out with any possessions (often a few belongings in tattered plastic bags) were subjected to two different dog-sniffing searches.

Most of us had not eaten all day because our C-rations had been confiscated at the airport because the rations set off the metal detectors. Yet, no food had been provided to the men, women, children, elderly, disabled as they sat for hours waiting to be "medically screened" to make sure we were not carrying any communicable diseases.

This official treatment was in sharp contrast to the warm, heart-felt reception given to us by the ordinary Texans. We saw one airline worker give her shoes to someone who was barefoot. Strangers on the street offered us money and toiletries with words of welcome. Throughout, the

official relief effort was callous, inept, and racist. There was more suffering than need be. Lives were lost that did not need to be lost.

Sunday, September 11

Massive wet t-shirt party last night in the backyard of a frat house. It was like one of those "Girls Gone Wild" porn videos. They danced on a catwalk, hundreds of people looking up at them, and, in the course of the night, tore off their soaking shirts, their dresses, their underwear, making out with each other, "eating each other out", bending over to give us some nice views of their unmentionables. Remarkably good bodies. I forced myself to leave with Sandy before I wanted to. (In fact, it was I who suggested we leave. I don't know why.) Apparently last year they made use of cucumbers in some Amsterdam sex house-ish ways. The women in the crowd enjoyed the spectacle as much as the men, yelling at the girls to "take it off!", etc. (The male version of the exhortation was "Eat it! Eat it! Eat it!") –Yes, women like being objects. –I got quite "hot and bothered". Didn't dwell on the fact that I'd become an animal.

Earlier in the day, went to the Forest Park art museum with Sandy and two friends.

How do you explain the female enjoyment of wet t-shirt parties? Men would be repulsed watching fellow men strip-teasing. Or would they? I suppose it isn't hard to imagine men on the sidelines cheering, in jest. But they probably wouldn't yell anything like "Take it off!" And they wouldn't be as eager, as invested in the situation, as women are in the parallel case. To say that homosexuality, or at least bisexuality, is more natural for women than it is for men isn't a good explanation (though it's probably true). A better one might be that women (have been conditioned to?) see themselves from the male point of view, as objects, and thus unconsciously identify with the exhibitionists;—but that still isn't (remotely) adequate. (What does 'unconsciously identify with' mean? Etc.) Both factors, and surely others, are relevant.

Monday, September 12

Taking Paxil again. And going to therapy. Maybe the combination will have an effect.

If I can't stamp myself into the social order, what's the point of doing anything? This is the problem I've been struggling with.

Saturday, September 17

I saw the movie *2046*. Its effect on me is comparable to the effect that the song "Gloomy Sunday" had on Germans in the '30s: I'm in the mood to kill myself. Not in the *ugly* sad mood, but the *beautiful* one. Partly because I'm in love with Ziyi Zhang. But the movie itself was a masterpiece. 'We all exist in the past; our memories guide us through life, try as we might to escape into the future, away from them. They always find a way to pull us back.' And what music! Not only the aria "Casta diva"; the whole soundtrack transports the film to the realm of immortality (as if it even needed this extra polish!). It's a cinematic opera, an infinite work of art.

Oh, but Ziyi… Luckily the Sarabande gives a purpose to my pain.

Monday, September 19

Reading *The Naked and the Dead.*

Sunday, October 2

Reading Sylvia Plath's journal. A history of narcissistic misery. No one as pretty as she should have been allowed to suffer so. [Ironic humor, obviously.]

And *On Certainty*, partly so I can talk to Sandy in German. (A refresher course.)

My therapist = young lovely lively lady, psych grad student. Enjoy our sessions, in which I spiel about myself in great detail, laying it all bare. They're of no use to me except in that to confide in someone is de-burdensome (especially a laughing girl like Mika). Told her that it's a strange world when you have to go to a therapist just to talk about yourself, since you'd be a bore if you did so with your friends.

Been active lately. Moved to an apartment with an Indian roommate. Partied with philosophy professors two nights ago. Saw Count Basie Orchestra perform last night with Sandy, Jennifer, *jolie* Delphine (*français*), and two others. (Very skilled band but a let-down: tuneless jazz.) Frequenting the gym. Drinking every weekend of course, and often during the week. Going to the Homecoming dance on Saturday, Sandy's birthday party on Friday. U.s.w.

Graded my first batch of papers. Felt like my father. But it ain't too exciting.

Am Anfang war der Zorn.

Monday, October 3

(Some) skeptical hypotheses are really quite muddled. It may indeed be the case that a demon is deceiving me by making me think that the things I see constitute an external world or whatnot, but it's nonsensical to suggest that I may 'actually' be a brain in a vat. The I that I am is *right here*; the word 'I', as applied to myself, has no meaning outside of my immediately existing, immediately self-present self here in this world. I can't be two beings at once: I can't be *this* self *and* a brain in a vat somewhere in the 'background'. It may be the case that a brain in a vat is producing all my experiences, but *I* am not that brain. –How terribly obvious this is! Yet philosophers seem not to take it into account.

So then do I *know* I'm not a BIV? Meaningless question. Because certainty is meaningless, and because I don't have direct access to truth (and in order to know something, I have to have access to metaphysical reality). The most I can say is that my being a brain in a vat is inconceivable. (Though it's not inconceivable that a brain in a vat may be producing my experiences.) –Again, the question doesn't *seem* meaningless because 'know' has meaning in certain (unphilosophical) contexts.

But it seems that if I don't, after all, know something, then I'm doubting it—even where (as here) doubt has effectively no content and no force. So am I doubting the proposition that I'm not a BIV? I guess so—but only in the sense that I recognize that a metaphysical world of truth may be hidden from me, a world in which, perhaps, logical self-contradictions (like the one in question) may somehow be true.

Wednesday, October 5

Read *Stanford Encyclopedia* entries on formal logic (modal, etc.). Eventually had to stop, so as not to asphyxiate in the miasma.

Thursday, October 6

Listened recently to an interview with Norman Mailer in which he discussed two "immensely useful" expressions he'd learned from someone: 'Work is a blessing', and 'No one ever said it had to be fair'. The contexts: when he's sick of working on a novel, dispirited, eager for it to be finished, Mailer tells himself "Work is a blessing", and his attitude immediately changes. And when he's feeling sorry for

himself, is perhaps weary of life, he says "No one ever said it had to be fair". I can confirm that these two sayings are immensely useful. I've taken to murmuring them when I feel a twinge of self-pity, because it vanishes. In the past, in life-disliking, self-pitying moments I've told myself "Aaah, it's all bullshit anyway", and this has comforted me (on account of its truth), but I prefer "No one ever said it had to be fair". It's more encouraging. –Still, I can't help myself from uttering the 'bullshit' phrase many times a day.

Sunday, October 9

A passage from Emerson's journal, tapping the androgynous wisdom of the Gnostics and Carl Jung and Virginia Woolf, and full of psychological truth: "A highly endowed man with good intellect & good conscience is a Man-woman & does not so much need the complement of Woman to his being, as another. Hence his relations to the sex are somewhat dislocated & unsatisfactory. He asks in Woman, sometimes the Woman, sometimes the Man."

Read articles on set theory (supposedly the foundation of mathematics), Gödel's incompleteness theorem, the analytic/synthetic distinction, Putnam's refutation of the BIV argument (groan, yawn), usw.

Monday, October 10

Reading *Philosophy of Mathematics* (eds. Putnam and Benacerraf), a large selection of classic writings. My appalling perplexity about mathematics, logic, the *a priori*, analytic statements and so forth drove me to it.

Why is the idea of death terrifying? Partly because nothingness is inconceivable. The only thing we can relate it to is sleep, but we have no conception of what *sleep* is either (because, properly speaking, *we* don't experience sleep). Actually, the idea of sleep is itself scary;[1] it doesn't usually seem so because it's such a common occurrence and is so obviously harmless (given that it's always succeeded by consciousness) that we don't dwell on it. But we shrink from the idea of an eternal dreamless sleep. So, aside from the unpleasantness of our knowledge that something we've never experienced (and can't even make sense of) is going to happen to us,[2] why are we disturbed? Probably also because the notion of eternity is essentially as frightening as that of nothingness. (An eternal life may be as terrible a prospect as an eternal death.) Why *this* is so, I don't know. And what the *other* reasons are for our fear of death, I don't know. In fact, I doubt that there *are* other ('rational', 'conscious') reasons. Nature simply hardwired us to have a visceral fear.

Biological explanations like that are unsatisfying.

By the way, the absence of a sufficient rational justification of our fear shows how little autonomy we have, how little free will.

Tuesday, October 11

We consider Giordano Bruno admirable, even heroic, for consenting to be burned at the stake rather than recant his Copernican beliefs; yet we consider Galileo much more sensible for choosing such a recantation over death. It seems almost *stupid* to suffer an agonizing death for the sake of an abstract principle, but at the same time it's more admirable than the alternative. Strange, *n'est-ce pas*? I suppose it makes sense, though. Prudence, common sense, reasonableness are qualities we all have, and are therefore

[1] Every night in bed I'm appalled, and fascinated, by the thought that soon I'll be unconscious.
[2] Though, of course, it won't happen to us, since we'll be dead. But this is part of the paradox.

not noteworthy; irrational courage is rare. Hence we admire its possessor. –Of course, analytically speaking, Bruno's choice is not necessarily more 'noble' than Galileo's. The motivation behind Bruno's courage is something like fear of being humiliated, fear of self-contempt. So in a sense ('in the long run') the 'cowardly' way is actually more courageous (provided one has the capacity to suffer from humiliation and self-contempt).

Wednesday, October 12

Excerpt from one of Joyce's letters to Nora:

> Darling, do not be offended at what I wrote. You thank me for the beautiful name I gave you. Yes, dear, it is a nice name. 'My beautiful wild flower of the hedges! My dark-blue, rain-drenched flower!' You see I am a little of a poet still. I am giving you a lovely book for a present too: and it is a poet's present for the woman he loves. But, side by side and inside this spiritual love I have for you there is also a wild beast-like craving for every inch of your body, for every secret and shameful part of it, for every odour and act of it. My love for you allows me to pray to the spirit of eternal beauty and tenderness mirrored in your eyes or to fling you down under me on that soft belly of yours and fuck you up behind, like a hog riding a sow, glorying in the very stink and sweat that rises from your arse, glorying in the open shame of your upturned dress and white girlish drawers and in the confusion of your flushed cheeks and tangled hair. It allows me to burst into tears of pity and love at some slight word, to tremble with love for you at the sounding of some chord or cadence of music or to lie heads and tails with you feeling your fingers fondling and tickling my ballocks or stuck up in me behind and your hot lips sucking off my cock while my head is wedged in between your fat thighs, my hands clutching the round cushions of your bum and my tongue licking ravenously up your rank red cunt. I have taught you almost to swoon at the hearing of my voice singing or murmuring to your soul the passion and sorrow and mystery of life and at the same time have taught you to make filthy signs to me with your lips and tongue, to provoke me by obscene touches and noises, and to do in my presence the most shameful and filthy act of the body. You remember the day you pulled up your clothes and let me lie under you looking up at you while you did it? Then you were ashamed even to meet my eyes.

Mailer called Joyce the only genius in the 20th century to have written in the English language.

Friday, October 14

Had I a gun, I'd have to follow Tolstoy's example and hide it from myself.

It's paradoxical to think that if I killed myself, despite oblivion the world would go on and my parents would never be happy again. The possibility of oblivion and existence coexisting is incomprehensible.

I'm glad I'm not naïve enough to care that hardly anyone would care if I died. The desire to be mourned is not only selfish and vain but ignorant. Even your closest friends would mourn you for only a short time. Your team would keep ploughing without you.

Saturday, October 15

Returning to the question from Thursday [deleted]: I'd feel a similar but milder shame (or guilt?) if I were unjust to, say, Jim or Sandy behind their backs. A possible reason is that I'm accustomed to thinking of them fondly, so the expression of 'dislike' would produce a kind of cognitive dissonance.

Biologically speaking, this might be caused by a circumvention of the established pathways between the clusters of neurons associated with Jim or Sandy and those associated with approval and disapproval: the bypassing of the deeply ingrained connection between 'Jim' and 'fondness' in favor of a new connection between 'Jim' and 'dislike' causes an unpleasant sensation in consciousness that we have labeled 'shame' (or guilt). This sounds fanciful, though[1]—and in any case it can't be the whole explanation, for a variety of reasons. E.g., I don't feel the same self-displeasure when *thinking* the 'unfaithful' thought as I do when *saying* it. (According to the explanation, this shouldn't be the case.) The presence of another person who hears the statement is an essential (part of the) cause of my shame.

Maybe it's as simple as: I "half-consciously" recognize that the person I'm denigrating would think less of me if he were there to hear me; and because I like and respect him, his tacit disapproval makes me insecure. (What the mechanisms are, I don't know.) This insecurity is what we call 'shame'. –While I'm skeptical of that account, its plausibility is heightened by the self-evident fact that in situations of *acute* shame (as when I was caught stealing a magazine all those years ago), one is terribly insecure. Still, it seems as if insecurity isn't the only ingredient in that emotion; there's also a self-disgust and so on, which is of course caused by the other's disgust—and which is, therefore, I suppose, merely a component in the overall insecurity.

And yet, when I said that stupid thing about [blah], I had the distinct sense that I'd done something wrong—which was related to my feeling a little sorry for him. Self-insecurity was the furthest thing from my mind. I was more pained by (what I imagined as potentially) *his* insecurity, *his* embarrassment. […]

Philosophers who try to define causality make Sisyphus's task seem rational. Not to mention easy. No definition could possibly be adequate, i.e., a *substantive explanation*. Here's a recent attempt, the virtue of which was supposed to be its enshrinement of common sense: "*c* causes *e* if and only if the intrinsic relation that typically accompanies causal dependence holds between *c* and *e*." Very enlightening. Here's another (very famous) one (David Lewis's): "where *c* and *e* are two distinct possible events, *e* causally depends on *c* if and only if *c* occurs [funny arrow-shaped thing with a circle attached to it] *e* occurs and *c* does not occur [funny arrow-shaped thing with a circle attached to it] *e* does not occur." The '*c* [funny arrow-shaped thing with a circle attached to it] *e*' relation is defined as 'If *c* were (or had been) the case, *e* would be (or have been) the case'. Expressed in a human language, Lewis's definition is essentially "If *c* occurs, *e* occurs, and if *c* had not occurred, *e* would not have occurred." Again, you can see how tremendously illuminating that is. Lewis's theory is an influential version of the (—prepare to be impressed by a big word—) "counterfactual theory of causation". [This theory, in any case, is wrong, or overly simplistic. Read Michael Scriven's paper "Causes, Connections and Conditions in History".]

The point is that all such definitions are either circular (in some cases) or simply uninformative, given that we can't understand them without reverting to our intuitive understanding of causality (which, moreover, has somehow, inexplicably, more *content* than they do). The causal relation is essentially unanalyzable, irreducible—which makes sense, given that it structures experience. I'm also inclined to think that the proposition "In order for something to happen, it has to be caused" is synthetic *a priori* (since it makes a claim about experience but is obviously justified on some other 'intuitive', 'innate', 'logical' basis than experience—as is evidenced by our conviction of its *necessity*, i.e., our inability to conceive of an uncaused event).[2] In other words, causality is a form (or rather *foundation*) of experience that we don't

[1] Why? (Why is it intuitively implausible?) One reason (there are many!) is that the creation of a new neural pathway is surely painless! Why? Because it happens all the time, yet I'm never conscious of corresponding pain. So my reasoning is inductive: based on a variety of particular examples, I've made a general conclusion (viz., that the forging of a neural connection is always painless). –My social science and epistemology courses have taught me to be curious about the methods of reasoning I employ. (Incidentally, I still agree with my conclusion from years ago: *a posteriori* intuitions like the one in question are an instantaneous 'processing' of reasons, which one can then 'unpack'. I suppose *a priori* intuitions, like 2 + 3 = 5, are the same—which means effectively that in most cases they're an understanding merely of the necessity of a given proposition, since the reasons for it are, essentially, the necessity itself.)

[2] I can hear you say "but what about quantum mechanics?" I answered this objection years ago; here it is again: we don't, and can't, experience or intuit the world of quantum mechanics, so your objection is beside the point. Similarly

learn *from* experience but bring *to* it, ontogenetically and epistemologically speaking. [This doesn't mean that causality doesn't hold in the world-in-itself. There's nothing inconsistent about saying both that the idea of causation is justified *a priori* and that causation applies to the world independently of us.]

By the way, Bertie Russell thought we could dispense with the notion of causation altogether. He seemed not to recognize that we can't.

Sunday, October 16

What am I going to do with my life? What am I going to do with my life? What am I going to do with my life? What am I going to do with my life? What am I going to do with my life? What am I going to do with my life? What am I going to do with my life?

Tuesday, October 18

Sat on the couch for four hours and thought about the meaning of art (and 'game' and 'play') and what the rules are for determining the extension of the class 'aesthetic qualities'. […]

Lay down in darkness on the rug on which I sleep (for lack of a bed) and got to thinking unwittingly about Sangi sweet Sangi and the night we lay together whisperlessly in the hotel in Berlin and when she asked if she might hug me and I said yes and when she kissed me against her conscience and struggled with herself as I lay there quietly letting her sift through her feelings because her torment was too private for words to have been humane and my desire was too strong for words to have been honest. But her regret passed and so we lay there happily, and in Freiburg we were happy and in Paris we were happy and in Venice we were happy, and I was never happy again.

Wednesday, October 19

–Aaaaah, rhetoric. The night will do strange things to you.

To be honest, I've been quite happy lately. (The past week was an exception, for trivial reasons.) And I think that in the following months I'm going to be happier than ever, for the excellent reason that I'm popping pills like Eminem's mother. I started yesterday. Went to Walgreen's and bought several bottles of strong energy pills, which I'm taking with my regular (unauthorizedly high) doses of Paxil and Wellbutrin. I've also discovered an energy drink that makes "Jolt" seem like water. Drank too much of it yesterday, which resulted in three hours of sleep and the uplifting thing I wrote above.

(Btw, no more useless therapy.)

Bill O'Reilly, the human stain, was on the Daily Show. Watching him was of course like having adrenaline injected directly into my heart. Murderous thoughts placed my hands around his neck. But how do I justify my anger? Its *causes*, after all, are irrational enough: physical stimuli + neurons etc., or unconscious psychological reactions etc. The question is, is it rational? (Or: can it be *made* rational?) –On second thought, that's not what's bothering me. Anger is *necessarily* 'irrational' [or rather unrational, since it isn't self-contradictory]. *This* wouldn't bother me if I believed with an acceptable degree of certainty that the convictions by which I (delusively) justify my anger are truer than his. You ask "What, you seriously

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with all those non-Euclidean geometries and relativistic structures of spacetime and whatnot, which are supposed to refute Kant. Kant's claim (about causality and the synthetic a priori structure of space and time, etc.) applies only to experience, not to the world "in-itself". You can't tell me that it's possible for a human being to experience a world in which causality doesn't hold, in which 7 + 5 doesn't equal 12, in which space has four dimensions.

think *he* may be right and *you* wrong?!" Well, I simply can't understand how a man with some intelligence could be vehemently certain of beliefs and yet not be 'justified' in them (in some loose sense of the word). This question is at the heart of the uncomfortable doubts I've felt for eight years about the justifiability of my world-view. (I've often told you I'm never "sure" of my beliefs. Well, this (question) is a major reason for that.) Unless I can explain how, or why, billions of people (Christians, conservatives, etc.) are wrong and I'm right, I'm being somewhat intellectually dishonest by continuing to believe as I do. What I have to understand is *what allows* all these people to be as terribly wrong as they are. If they in fact are, then they must 'lack' something that I have, some capacity. Or maybe I lack something they have. The point is, there's an 'inner' difference between us. What is it? It's easy to say they're "stupid", or, more rigorously, that they have some kind of 'mental block' that prevents them from being wholly rational about certain things, but that explains nothing.

The apparent (superficial) validity of the postmodernist position disturbs me: everyone has his biases, everyone has had his beliefs formed in and by a certain environment; therefore, it's probable that no one is more justified ('objective') than anyone else. The conclusion doesn't logically follow, but it's natural to be led to it by the premises. What does it mean to say it's wrong, though? How *can* it be wrong? We all do have biases; we all do have 'extra-rational' inclinations and influences that lead us, more or less, to our beliefs. The postmodernist might say that my biases just happen to be more 'accepting' and 'tolerant' and 'less misanthropic' than O'Reilly's; that doesn't mean I'm right (because such qualities have nothing to do with truth). –The obvious answer to this is that *some* biases (a better term is 'psychological conditions') are more conducive than others to an objective inquiry into truth. For example, O'Reilly justified his hatred of the French by invoking the fact that even though "we bailed them out of World War II", they aren't loyal to us [to the U.S. government, that is]. From this premise (and maybe one or two others—e.g., their ostensible arrogance), he concludes that they're hateful or whatnot. I, on the other hand, justify my neutral attitude toward the French by invoking the 'facts' that (1) WWII was a long time ago, and (given the disappearance of prior generations and the birth of new ones, as well as the constant emergence of new cultural movements, etc.) it's unreasonable to expect a country to act gratefully to another forever;[1] (2) in the case of such decisions as whether to go to war (in Iraq), it would be irresponsible for politicians to let considerations of 'gratitude' override legitimate qualms (moral or otherwise) they might have about military action; (3) if French arrogance is systematically compared to American arrogance, the latter will probably be seen to be *at least* as extreme as the former; (4, 5, 6...) a blanket condemnation like O'Reilly's is the most indefensible kind of inductive conclusion,[2] no nation is perfect, America has plenty of faults... In short, if O'Reilly's arguments and mine were lined up and compared, mine would trump his. –If I systematically refuted all his beliefs like this, the (inductive [*abductive*]) conclusion would be that my '*a priori*' psychological conditions, while themselves as extra-rational as his, make possible a more generally valid deployment of the principles of logic and induction than his do, which would effectively mean that I have a firmer grasp of truth than he does. (It could also be said—though it would be unnecessary and

[1] This is the argument set out (fairly) explicitly: (1) WWII was sixty years ago; (2) sixty years is a sufficiently long time for the 'collective consciousness' of the people of most countries to lose its memory (or at least its belief in the relevance to contemporary affairs) of an event; (3) this loss of memory will cause any country not to take into account the event in question in its dealings with other countries; (4) a consequence of premise (3) is that if the event in question would seem to suggest that the country in question should act gratefully to another, it will not; (5) to single out one country on the basis of a fact that applies to many (or all) is groundless; therefore, the country in question should not be criticized for not acting gratefully to another on the basis of the event in question. O'Reilly's argument is this: (1) Any country that has been liberated from an oppressor by another country should act gratefully to the latter for at least sixty years; (2) the French have not done that; therefore, (3) they are not acting as they should; therefore, they are, on the whole, bad people. Now, premise (2) in my argument is an inductive generalization, and as such is fallible; however, O'Reilly's argument begins with an arbitrary premise and ends with a more fallible inductive generalization than the one I used (in that mine is extrapolated from a greater variety of phenomena). (I won't cavil about the meaning of 'bad'—but, strictly speaking, any value-judgment is problematic.) Therefore, my argument is stronger.

[2] This criticism of his induction has a different foundation than the one offered in the previous footnote.

redundant—that, postmodernist relativism notwithstanding, my mind is more 'objective' than his, which allows for its greater insight into truth.) The answer to the question, then, as to what it is that I have and he lacks, is: a better understanding of induction (and maybe logic in general), made possible by, for example, my comparative patience and dispassion.

Incidentally, my original question ("How can an intelligent man be certain of his beliefs yet not be 'justified' in them?") was a poorly phrased dead-end. 'Intelligence' is a useless concept in this context. O'Reilly is 'intelligent' in some respects but not in others.

What about my atheism? It's based on the argument that there's no reason to believe in God and many reasons not to. This is, of course, abduction again. For instance, in all of science and all empirical observations (that *I've* made) there is nothing that logically implies (or even inductively (strongly) suggests) a divine intelligent being; hence, I conclude that the concept of God is superfluous. Maybe you'll say that Einstein thought differently, and therefore etc. But why did Einstein think differently? Let's say it was because he thought the universe was too wondrous a thing to have been produced by chance. I say in response: there's nothing, logically speaking, that links 'wonder' or 'awesome beauty' or 'perfect mathematical consistency' or whatever to 'intelligent creator'. All we have to go on are a hunch and a few feeble analogies refuted by Hume in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Or maybe Einstein would say that free will can't be accounted for on the assumption of a mechanistic universe. My answer is, Why not? Sure it can! There's no contradiction in the thought that the brain causes actions which we mistakenly interpret as having been directly caused by intentions. Admittedly, this raises the question of epiphenomenalism and so on, and it may even prove to spawn too many problems for our meager intellects to solve, but even this wouldn't be a reason to reject it. We'll never understand the exact workings of the nervous system, but we don't conclude from this that there *aren't* "exact workings of the nervous system". –Maybe that argument isn't convincing. Here's another: our difficulty in understanding my hypothesis is due ultimately to the paradoxical nature of consciousness, which both the theist and the atheist have to deal with. So it isn't *my* problem; it's *ours*. –Anyway, what all this comes down to is that (my cast of mind is such that) I need a logical or inductive reason for all my beliefs, while, in general, the Christian doesn't. Or, more accurately: some Christians may, but their reasons are less sound than mine, which means (if you want) that, in a sense, they're less intelligent (or rational, or analytically minded) than I am. Most Christians, though, don't even need a (rational, i.e., logical or inductive) reason for believing in God; they just....*believe*—because it's comforting.

Thursday, October 20

Haven't been tired during the day for weeks. *Es ist ein sonderbares Gefühl*.

I've come to appreciate for the first time how much of my thinking is done unconsciously. Generally I'm aware only of an argument's conclusion and one or two of its premises (or none at all), when there are ten or more.

Friday, October 21

See entry August 17, sentence 3 ("if my memory doth not greatly err"). Erstwhilely it misliked me to *lesen* the tabloids *weil* to be informed of the latest debaucheries of the most pampered people on the planet was less than uplifting; howbeit, *jetzt* I perceive that learning of *z.B.* Brad Pitt's undeservèd happiness with Mlle. Angelina *Jolie!* maketh me to rejoice, for that I am involved in Mankinde and shall nevermore gleefully send to know for whom the bell tolls. *Ich gratuliere dich*, Brad! *Und du, das Leben, ich liebe dich leidenschaftlich! "Warum?" fragst du?* Because I am but a machine stimulated by chemicals, which are themselves stimulated by pills. *Ich bin nun wie der Dalai Lama, der jeden liebt, und den jeder liebt.*

The universal prejudice that it requires "character" (and is thus *admirable*) to take pleasure in

another's pleasure is the opposite of the truth. Unless "character" means "happiness" and happiness is admirable. Sympathetic joy is nothing but a symptom of self-centered joy. People who don't feel it shouldn't be *criticized* but *pitied*. Bill O'Reilly should be pitied.

The one problem with these pills is that they kill my appetite. But that's a small price to pay for having an insatiable appetite for life.

During Rita, the lone FEMA worker in New Orleans sent frantic emails to Michael Brown pleading for help, describing the terrible conditions in the Superdome. In one of them he wrote, "Sir, I know that you know the situation is past critical. The sooner we can get the medical patients out, the sooner we can get them out." A short time later [reports the *Times*], Brown's press secretary, Sharon Worthy, wrote colleagues to complain that the FEMA director needed more time to eat dinner at a Baton Rouge restaurant that evening. "He needs much more that (sic) 20 or 30 minutes," Worthy wrote. "Restaurants are getting busy," she said. "We now have traffic to encounter to go to and from a location of his choise (sic), followed by wait service from the restaurant staff, eating, etc. Thank you."

–"Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job!" said Bush.

Saturday, October 22

People tend not to take seriously Freud's idea of female penis-envy, but I think it may have a kernel of truth. Women, after all, tend to be more insecure about their genitals than men do (see Joyce's letter to Nora): they're shyer about them, are probably more disturbed (though they might not know it) by their 'dirtiness' or whatever, and see them as something of a weakness. That the vagina is a hole, an ugly smelly bloody hole, seems somehow important to female insecurity.

If you think about it, the act of hugging is absurd. Even more absurd than sex. Extending your arms, walking towards someone until there's not an inch of space between you, closing your arms around his back and holding them there tightly for a while, your cheek rubbing against his, and then backing away from him and letting your arms sink to your sides. What is the point of this bizarre ritual? It seems utterly random and senseless. Of course the answer is, "It feels good; it's a way of demonstrating affection; it has important social functions; etc." But beneath these answers lies the stubborn fact of its senselessness, its bizarre animality.

Sunday, October 23

Went to a state park in Illinois with Sandy and her friend Josh and hiked around the hills through forests. I was full of energy, forging trails through thickets (thistles sticking into me, burrs covering me), climbing up small cliffs, walking faster every time I felt my heart wheeze and gasp. Sandy was pleasantly surprised, while Josh—this big sturdy guy my age, nature-lover and frequent camper—straggled behind, whining about our pace. He was kind of annoying the whole time, making childish jokes and generally having a weak personality (which I enjoyed dominating). When we stopped to take breaks or to take in the vista from designated peaks, my energy predictably left me and I was left yawning and yearning for bed. But as soon as we started up again I became the trailblazer (avoiding the beaten path). Sandy observed, perceptively, that I'm bipolar. I observed, silently, that hiking is my favorite activity.

Although it was a good day and I was quite happy (not least because of Sandy's flirtatiousness and obvious attraction to me), I didn't let myself feel anything like untarnished contentment. I never do. Whenever I see that I'm the object of undue attention, that everyone seems to like me, that girls laugh at every lame joke I make, my cynicism asserts itself and tells me that people are fickle, that my popularity is only temporary, that my personality can't support it for more than a few hours. I even start to feel a little contemptuous of these people who gravitate to me like iron filings to a magnet, these people who aren't

perceptive enough to see that I'm *always* 'this way', who will leech onto some other guy as soon as they sense my wit flagging and my confidence waning. I tell myself how contingent and silly is the charade!—how little meaning it has! And how much effort it takes to master! So I stop trying, I self-consciously stop trying to justify the attention. Whenever I'm at the top of my game I quit arbitrarily. "Don't let yourself be giddy and happy, Chris. It's naïve."

I was in rare form at the party on Friday night. Got two phone numbers. Girls who play classical piano, a French and a Vietnamese.

Wednesday, October 26

Finished *The Naked and the Dead.* Written when the author was my age, it's a striking achievement. Mailer's knowledge of life and humanity wasn't much deeper than mine, but his skill with words was.

It's possible to have two or more thoughts in the same instant. (E.g., self-awareness, awareness of the piece of paper in front of you, and a vague thought about someone you know.) Indeed, it's possible we're *always* having two or more thoughts in the same instant. That people don't realize this—and that it's hard to decide for or against the hypothesis in the last sentence—*and* that logic seems to suggest that having two thoughts at once is nonsensical—shows that there's something radically misguided about how we conceptualize consciousness and the self, and that logic is provisional (though also *a priori*).

Reading things by and about Wittgenstein reminds me of Prado's book on Foucault. In expositing Foucault's notions of archeology, genealogy, ethics and so on, Prado returns half-a-dozen times to the question of whether F's claims about truth are cogent. The problem is that, given F's disavowal of the project of understanding "ahistorical" truth, how are we to interpret his own ideas? Are they not supposed to be true? Are they, as F seems to suggest, merely alternative "fictions", or narratives meant to undermine prevailing power-structures, or "problematizations of established truths" undertaken purely for the sake of problematizing established truths (whatever that means)? Prado repeatedly acknowledges the force of the "relativism" charge, and he repeatedly postpones answering it. Again and again he offers tentative, 'experimental' defenses of Foucault, but always he implicitly recognizes their inadequacy and says effectively "Keep reading; I promise to get to the bottom of this!". His postponements eventually become comical. In the penultimate chapter, devoted solely to the Foucauldian conception(s) of truth, he fails to come to a conclusion, instead saying, *again*, "I'll return to this in the last chapter". When finally he has to face the music and tell us why we should take Foucault seriously (as a philosopher), he gives the following hilariously pitiful answer: "The point of [Foucault's] ceaseless problematization of established truths and knowledges is to enable us to resist being wholly determined by power-relations.... [The purpose is to] 'promote new forms of subjectivity', [which] can be accomplished only by changing the truths, knowledges, and discourses within which we are defined and in terms of which we define ourselves. A novel Foucauldian construal is not a thesis to be assessed for truth; it is an opportunity, a perspective-shifting idea that, like a concept as understood by Canguilheim, admits of quite diverse development. The construal's cogency, then, is not a function of its initial content, but of how it is taken up." In other words, the only value of the ideas is in their usefulness in fighting the Man!

—My point is that Prado's tap-dances have forerunners in Wittgenstein's and his expositors'. You could read about Wittgenstein all day and come away with nothing but a question-mark. All this mumbo-jumbo about conventions, games, linguistic "rules"—Why in the hell have philosophers seized on this "rules" idea like it's too brilliant for words?!!—all this shit *cannot* be as ingenious as everyone says if it can't even be coherently expressed! Whenever you read about the "private language argument"—of which there are as many interpretations as there are interpreters—you're assured it has some kind of earth-shaking significance even as the interpreter's account fails to be minimally intelligible or defensible. Any objection you have to it—to *anything* Wittgenstein says—is answered with "You're misunderstanding him!" "But—

" "No, you're misunderstanding him!" Chomsky is right that ideas worth expressing can be expressed in fairly clear language.

Thursday, October 27

I can't help being impressed every day by how *easy* and *fun* life is when you're confident and popular. Responsibilities don't bother you, nothing is stressful, boredom is rare (because friends are distractions).

Getting drunk now. And every night this weekend.

Saturday, October 29

Chopin's 19th nocturne. Near the end, about 2 min. 20 sec. into it, when it gets quieter (and also at around 1 min., briefly). Makes me think of the cover of Rubinstein's CD of Chopin selections, the photograph of him wearing a straw hat in a sunny climate, smiling. Think of lying on a beach under a palm tree, the susurrus of the wind caressing you.

Maureen Dowd—for whom, admittedly, I have not a particle of respect—agrees with me (in a *Times* "essay") that the feminist movement has long since been waylaid by vaginal vanity. This is the considered opinion of a self-proclaimed forerunner of Sarah Jessica Parker's Carrie Bradshaw: "It was naïve and misguided for the early feminists to tendentiously demonize Barbie and Cosmo girl, to disdain such female proclivities as shopping, applying makeup and hunting for sexy shoes and cute boyfriends and to prognosticate a world where men and women dressed alike and worked alike in navy suits and were equal in every way." So, at least Dowd's honest, if nothing else: women have "proclivities" toward—*cough*—objecthood (i.e., subordination).

Monday, October 31

Natural-selectively speaking, what's the functional explanation of why women laugh more than men, and why men are expected to make women laugh (far more than vice versa)? Well, the main function of laughter is obviously to encourage 'fellow-feeling', communal bonding and so on. (Laughter is essential to raising the comfort-level of a social gathering—probably because it's a 'relaxing' discharge of energy that would otherwise be occupied in self-consciousness and mutual distrust/desires-to-dominate—and the more people laugh, the more they like each other.) This ties into the sexual relationship in that the male's job is to make females comfortable with him, so that they not only want to fuck but want to have this man around always to protect them and their child. It's far less important for the female to make the male comfortable, because, from his perspective, all that nature wants him to do is fuck her and move on.[1] His 'comfort-level' is irrelevant to whether he'll be successful in cock-impaling her. A second aspect: females want a male who dominates, and the ability to make people laugh is intimately related to the ability to dominate.

But what *is* laughter? And what causes it? In every context I can think of, being funny involves being unexpected and/or being (socially) inappropriate. (Examples: punchlines, the diarrhea song, someone's slipping on a banana peel.) Often there is an element of "being *schadenfroh* with a good conscience". As[2] I said above, I think laughter signifies mainly a reduction of tension, even when it happens

[1] From the female's perspective, of course, nature doesn't want him to move on.

[2] I added the following sentences when I was writing my book *The Humanist's Manifesto*, since I thought I was going to put these reflections in it.

in solitude. Or, in less mechanistic terms: it is a means toward community—which probably in some way accounts for the pleasure inseparable from it. From infancy on, smiling is intrinsically pleasurable, and laughter is just smiling taken to an extreme. Our biology must be such that from the first days when we learn how to smile we 'instinctively' know that it means a connection with another being—and these connections, be they manifested in whatever way, are *always* pleasurable. (The reason we're able to smile and laugh even when not in the company of another person (with whom to make a connection) is that our self-consciousness effectively provides us with this other person. In being aware of ourselves we're aware of an other. We smile with, and for, this other.)

–I can't enlarge on these ideas now. Have to go to a "Busta Rhymes" concert.

Ughh. After that experience, not even the Jupiter symphony can make me feel human again.

Tuesday, November 1

Location of "concert": the local watering-hole. About three hundred people. It "started" at 9, though Busta didn't come out till 11:30. Highlight of the night: "the hip-hop violinist", Miri Ben-Ari, 27-year-old Israeli classically trained beauty who at one point incorporated "Für Elise" into a riff. Busta came out with his minion Spiff or Spoof or Spit or whatever and proceeded to disappoint his audience. –Unless they'd come there to see their hero spend half the time screaming hate and misogyny (and the other half screaming hate and misogyny to a beat). His hostility toward his fans was shocking. Anyone who didn't raise his arms and sway them to the music—hell, anyone who didn't spend the whole time dancing!—was singled out and mocked till he conformed. (Sandy and I refused to play along; I half-hoped I'd be picked on, just to see if my will was as strong as that of a mob and its coked-up leader screaming at me.) Afterwards I lashed out at Tim, the dingleberry who'd brought us there; couldn't provoke him into an argument, though.

Wednesday, November 2

2 + 3 = 5. –Analytic or synthetic? Both options are tempting: synthetic, because I can see why Kant thought that the concept of 5 isn't contained in the concept(s) of 2 + 3; analytic, because what the equation says is really only ||+|||=|||||. From this perspective, it's sort of a tautology.

I have to do a lot more reading before I think about this stuff.

2nd movement of B's 8th.[1] Quintessentially classical in spirit, the more so b/c B had abandoned the classical spirit by the time he wrote it. The ticking of the metronome, the simplicity, the breezy rhythmic structuring of a rhythmless world. Return to Winckelmann's Greece—not "shallow out of *profundity*" but out of the happiness of the noble savage. The noble savage whose savagery has decadently come to outweigh his nobility and so he turns back to his imagined arcadia, thus surpassing the classicism of the classicists even as—*because*—he knows it's hopeless.

Being a leader is anticlimactic. (Like everything else.)

(Late at night. Forgive the sentimentality.—) *To my future love*: If you have read this journal, and if you have come to know me, you know what mood I am in now. Insomniac otherworldliness.... You know I cannot write as Joyce or as a poet, and you know I cannot express my love for you and my gratitude, but you know none of this matters anymore. If I am in your arms I have lost all ambitions and all regrets and especially all memories, and my self-love has died in your eyes. I am tired of living at the age of twenty-five and were it not for my dreams of you I would lose my ability to laugh. I love you, I love you not "more

[1] As interpreted by Pierre Monteux and the Wiener Philharmoniker.

than life itself" but more than I long to *transcend* life itself, more than I long to sigh away into music, more than I love music. I love you and will love you and will die loving you more than the breath of life loved its first creation.

Thursday, November 3

It's official: I've entered a new stage of my life. The change from my August self to my autumn self has been as sudden and radical as any in my past.

I don't know what I meant by those thoughts above on the symphony. The second movement is just a frolic! That's all. Nothing deep.

Sometimes I worry that as I mature I may lose my primeval wonder at the fact that people see me as an object in the world. This wonder has always been related to my introvertedness and hence my insecurities, so it isn't necessarily a good thing. But it's part of me, and it differentiates me from others, and it makes me more profound than others—or so I've always thought—and so as I lose my insecurities and thereby my solipsistic wonder I feel like I'm losing myself. I *want* to lose this wonder, but I *don't*. My hope is that I'll finally lose it when around others but I'll be able to hold onto it when around myself.

Friday, November 4

I don't even know what I want. *I don't know what I want!* I don't know if I want to give away my possessions and become a Buddhist monk, or if I want to walk over to my so-called friends' apartments and tell them I despise them and everyone, or if I want never again to be unkind, or maybe I want to blow my brains out, or I want to understand everything and die an instant later, or can it be I still want to love? […] It would breed that delicious confusion that makes me remember I exist and is always incubating in my subconscious womb to explode periodically like warm semen spurting over your hand only to incubate some more in your testes and then spurt forth again like the messy confusion spilling around all over my mind and congealing in little stains on the written page and making me hate my existence my fucking existence like I hate fucking women with their smelly dishonesty and sloppy self-confusion and anal shopping-fixations and hideous shallowness which contrasts hatefully with my hideous selfish self-loving self-loathing which self-loves itself into sterile-smelling orgasm spraying sickish-soulless spirit-semen across the knuckles of my subconscious seediness seeping scary desires of rape and lust and murder into the sanctuary-of-moral(istic)-leprosy that is my self-consciousness such that super-egoistically I repress it too self-knowingly so that it does no good and stays on the surface beneath pretenses of goodness beneath pretenses of badness cultivated skillfully to seduce the sexual sex who self-delusively select scoundrels to have sex with as the most sinful scoundrel of all sits like Narcissus solitary before his semblance simpering sickeningly through sweetly syntaxed sentences spurted jerkily into daily spots of scholarish swill across swaths of spotless tabula rasas that are thus stained with the sour thoughts of a sullen selfish somber self who tells himself he's God's sole son the self-caused antichrist the sower of despair the Universal Solitude that sneaks up silently on unsuspecting humans in their moments of weaknesses and their final instants of existential instantiation (in this cemetery of existence) sapping their sagging spirits of sappy stupid enthusiasm the slag that settles at the lowest levels of the soul like sediment in a wineglass or settlements of squirming maggots on the underside of a squirrel's carcass yes enthusiasm is the symptom of the philosophically supine soul which refuses to scale the slopes of life's essence to see the summit of truth and sadness (because it lacks the spirit's spur of suffering) but instead survives at the subsistence level of "sacred happiness" and sleeps smugly in the sensuous atmosphere of skin-sucking sex-scheming sylph-dreaming milf-reaming cunt-screaming sweet-seeming swinish salivation and spittle-dribbling exhalations as the Christ-despiser sips from the chalice of sacred malice naked malice life-giving malice the *real* phallus

the solace of the solid seeker of self-dissatisfaction the juice that sluices through the sewer of the psyche to stimulate the sexless sperm to spark the process of sexless (self-)creation which specializes in paralyzing the moralizing hypocrasizing sermonizing of Christ-utilizing life-despising self-stylizing 'sympathizers with celestial saintliness' who seem rather like 'sycophants with sovereign servility' and suggest to me a confusingly self-unaware cerebral impotence or something like a wetless feckless female who worships her own fecklessness in the name of the Spirit up there who dicks himself all over the world smearing his gospel into soft minds like mine deep in confusion and self-doubting hatred of all that obtains.[1]

Saturday, November 5 (3 a.m.)

The moments when you feel the pressure of lusty tenderness but you aren't in the mood to jerk off and yet you keep thinking of the girl whose image chokes your heart like a wrung sponge and you have to wriggle from its grip and claw out from beneath this damned anvil crushing you but you can't because the sexual release of whipping your cock to congestion has no relation to the required release of constipated tenderness, tenderness—tenderness.

Sunday, November 6

It's incredibly annoying that there are people with more talent than me. (That long stream of self-indulgence above is something I should be ashamed of for its puerile pleasure in pleasant sounds, paltry alliterations.)

But it's *horrifying* that we're all just little hamsters running in our wheels to project our shadows onto the cave wall. If we succeed and the image stays there awhile and other people see it, we're happy. That's all it takes, and that's all it is.

Tuesday, November 8

My first paper in grad school:

The (anti-)definition of art

In his paper "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," Morris Weitz argues that philosophers of art have been chasing a chimera in their attempts to discover the necessary and sufficient conditions for calling something 'art.' Inspired by Wittgenstein's critique of the concept 'game'—according to which, no definition can be given of 'game' that applies to all and only things that are commonly called 'games'; rather, such things share a variety of "family resemblances"—Weitz argues that, apropos of defining art, philosophers can only list properties that *by and large* apply to artworks; none of them applies to *all* artworks. In his paper "Family Resemblances and Generalizations Concerning the Arts," Maurice

[1] An alternative ending is: "…wetless feckless female whose frigid field above her fissure lies fallow though fecund fetors float from far within her fraud-vagina like ("divine") flatus from her 'fairy-fragrant' anus fraught with flowing 'fairy-fragrant' feces like fluids filling her fleshy fracture fingered fuckishly till frenziedly a fountain spouts out about the mouth of the lout whose snout routs out rotted trout from out the mound plowed by the proud Roustabout up there who dicks himself all over the world smearing his gospel into soft minds like mine deep in confusion and self-doubting hatred of all that obtains." 'Divine flatus' is an allusion to the term "divine afflatus", i.e., divine inspiration. Obviously one of the themes of the whole thing is the dichotomy between the 'high' and the 'low', and the interplay between them, and the hypocrisy of the human species (which denies and ignores the low). That's why I use so many religious words. By the way, after my roommate Will had read that passage he observed that all the 's' sounds suggest the serpent in the Garden of Eden, which I hadn't thought of.

Mandelbaum attempts to refute Weitz's conclusion by exploiting the parallel he (Weitz) draws between the concepts 'art' and 'game' (both of which, Weitz argues, are "open" rather than "closed"), namely by demonstrating that Wittgenstein's original analysis of 'game' was unclear, question-begging, and ultimately mistaken (and that, therefore, there *is* a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for calling something 'game,' and, by implication, (potentially) for calling something 'art'). If Mandelbaum is right, such theorists as Arthur Danto, Jerrold Levinson, George Dickie, and Richard Eldridge have been justified in continuing to strive for a single comprehensive definition of art; if he is wrong, these subsequent attempts have been doomed from the start. We shall argue that Mandelbaum is wrong.

Wittgenstein's doctrine of family resemblances may be stated as follows:[1] "one need not suppose that all instances of those entities to which we apply a common name do in fact possess any one feature in common. Instead, the use of a common name is grounded in the criss-crossing and overlapping of resembling features among otherwise heterogeneous objects and activities" (Neill, 194). In relation to the concept 'game,' such features might be, for example, the presence of rules, of competition, of more than one player, of 'fun,' of "absorbing non-practical interest" (Neill, 197). If this list were comprehensive, Wittgenstein would say that every game has one or more of these properties, but not necessarily all of them: some games may lack rules, others may not be fun, others may involve only one player. It may even be the case that the only 'game-ish' properties one game has are that it is organized by rules and that it is fun, while the only properties of another are that it contains an element of competition, that it involves more than one player, and that it is of absorbing non-practical interest (but is, perhaps, not properly called 'fun'). These two games have no game-ish properties in common (except the vague one that they are of non-practical interest), yet they fall under the same class—because the properties they have are conventionally associated with the concept of game.

To forestall an objection that Mandelbaum might raise, we should point out that although it is plausible to suppose that all games are indeed of absorbing non-practical interest, and that therefore this property might be taken as the defining one, it is in fact, at most, merely necessary. It is not sufficient, because games are not the only things that are of non-practical interest. (Art is, for example.) Wittgenstein's contention is that there is no necessary *and sufficient* condition for naming something 'game.'

Mandelbaum's main objection to Wittgenstein's theory is that, as an explanation of why one thing is called a game while another is not, it begs the question. Given that many activities are, e.g., fun and have rules and yet are not games, the "family resemblances" idea provides us with no criteria for determining whether to call something a game. Mandelbaum gives two examples (Neill, 195): (1) a person who appears to be playing the form of solitaire called "Canfield" is in fact 'reading fortunes' from the cards. The two activities are very similar (both in their "manifest" and "non-manifest" properties), but one is a game while the other is not. Why? They both, after all, have rules and can be construed as fun, and, moreover, they 'look' alike. Wittgenstein's theory offers no solution. Mandelbaum's second example is of the same kind as the first: a wrestling match is similar to a fight (in both its manifest and non-manifest properties[2]), but the activities belong to different classes. How shall we account for this?

There are two replies to this objection. Before outlining them, though, we should note that the similarity between the *manifest* characteristics of two activities, one of which is a game and the other is not, is irrelevant to the problem at hand. As Mandelbaum himself states, it is extremely likely that the only properties relevant to defining 'game' are not manifest—such properties as 'competitive' and so on. Therefore we can disregard the 'observable' (or 'sense-perceptory') parallels between, e.g., fighting and wrestling.

The first (and less fundamental) reply to Mandelbaum's objection is that Mandelbaum himself (or anyone who believes in the existence of necessary and sufficient conditions of 'game') is in the same dilemma as Wittgenstein. He too cannot unravel the quandary. For his solution could be only to enumerate the necessary and sufficient conditions of 'game,' which no theorist has yet succeeded in doing. The second

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[1] I am basically ignorant of the doctrine of the "cluster concept", but what I have read suggests it is very similar to Wittgenstein's idea. I'll ignore it in this paper.

[2] For example, fighting, like wrestling, can be understood as involving competitors and as being fun.

reply is more substantive: Wittgenstein would deny the need to discover criteria by which activities that are similar to games can be distinguished from them. Indeed, the overall framework of his theory implicitly contains an explanation of why this *cannot be done*: such linguistic practices as naming objects and categorizing them operate through conventions, which tend to include an element of arbitrariness. One may, admittedly, doubt whether the rules of logic and mathematics are arbitrary, but it is at least plausible to suppose that the convention of calling a given activity a 'game' does not originate through logical necessity. Rather than insisting that the explanation of the inclusion (or exclusion) of something from the class 'game' be wholly philosophical, or 'analytical,' as Mandelbaum seems to do, one should adopt a more sociological/historical perspective. For example, to the question "Why is fortune-telling not a game?," the following answer might be given: in the society in which fortune-telling originated, it was an extremely serious, non-competitive, non-'game-ish' activity, and so the label 'game' was naturally denied it. Since that time, societies into which it has been introduced have persisted in the convention of not calling it a game, largely because of tradition. Now that the social conditions that once led to its being taken seriously as a way of prophesizing have disappeared, fortune-telling is considered merely an amusing way of passing the time. Because Mandelbaum takes into account the latter fact without recognizing the former, he demands an ahistorical, philosophical answer to the question above—failing to see that if linguistic traditions did not have the (partial) autonomy from social conditions that they do, Western civilization today *would* call fortune-telling a game. Indeed, it is perfectly conceivable (though Mandelbaum apparently disagrees[1]) that one day such expressions as "I'm playing fortune-telling" or "The game of fortune-telling is more fun than solitaire" will be permissible and common.[2]

Mandelbaum's second example, invoking the parallels between wrestling and fighting, is different from the first in that our intuitions more strongly support the 'category-distinction' between the two activities than they do with regard to solitaire and fortune-telling. We all agree that fighting should not be called a game. "Why not?" Mandelbaum asks. The obvious answer is that its properties are not sufficiently game-ish. "But you're begging the question!" says Mandelbaum. So we say in response, "More specifically, fighting is too serious, too intense, not really 'competitive'—it does not involve 'players' *per se*—and not really 'fun.'" But Mandelbaum retorts, rightly, "That answer is inadequate. What does 'too serious,' 'too intense' and so on *mean*? Your criteria are so vague that they themselves are question-begging. Moreover, one can think of games that are as serious as—if not more so than—fighting. For instance, Russian roulette is considered a game, though it is a life-and-death matter and is rarely fun for the players. And in this case you cannot rely on your historical analysis as an explanation of why it is (still) called a game in our society, because everyone still thinks it *should* be called a game." Mandelbaum has unwittingly backed himself into a philosophical truth—precisely the one he argues against in his paper: there is never a complete 'analytic' explanation of why a given activity is called a game. Expressed differently, one can never *fully* explain what it means to call something a game. In other words, the concept 'game' is not determined by necessary and sufficient conditions—which, of course, is what we have been arguing all along. If someone asked what it meant to call a person a 'bachelor,' it would indeed be absurd to say (in the spirit of our answer to Mandelbaum's question about the definition of 'game'), "It means he has the properties of a bachelor," because 'bachelor' is a closed concept (i.e., it can be exhustively defined by invoking a list of properties). But in the case of open concepts, this type of answer is the best we can do. For instance, if I call someone 'intelligent' and am asked why (or rather, what it means to apply that word to him), I shall say, "Well, he has a quick mind, he's creative, he's witty, *and so on*." In other words: "He has *enough* of the properties associated with the concept 'intelligent' to be called intelligent." This kind of answer is not viciously circular as long as it is supplemented with a list of examples of such properties as are associated with the concept in question.

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[1] See Neill, 195.

[2] This fact itself testifies against the idea that 'game' is governed by necessary and sufficient conditions, because if it were, presumably it would not be possible for the same thing to be (commonly) called a game at one time and (commonly) not called a game at another.

One may ask, though, how it is known that enough of the relevant properties are present. In fact, we may construe Mandelbaum's questions above in this manner. "What justifies you," he asks again, "in saying that wrestling is sufficiently game-ish while fighting is not? Granted, for the sake of argument, that there are 'degrees' of game-ishness, and that, from this perspective, the properties of fighting—while *somewhat* game-ish—are not '*sufficiently*' game-ish. If you cannot say, however, *precisely* what it is about wrestling that justifies calling it a game, nor *precisely* what it is about fighting that precludes calling it a game, how do you know that wrestling should be called a game while fighting should not?" This question is at the heart of Mandelbaum's challenge to Wittgenstein, and it is here where Wittgenstein finally fails to provide a satisfactory answer. In a situation in which our intuitions are clear about whether a given thing should be classed as a game—as they are in this case—the only adequate answer to Mandelbaum's question is that intuition itself is the criterion. That is, intuition is the factor which militates against our dubbing fighting a game, and which causes us to dub wrestling a game. –Or, expressed more clearly: the only reason we deny the label 'game' to fighting is—crudely speaking—that the alternative "just doesn't sound right"; the reason we call wrestling a game is that it *does* "sound right." We may try to justify the latter intuition (after the fact) by invoking the circumstances that wrestling has rules, that it is fun, that it is competitive, that it is spectatorial, but these criteria are inadequate. As we noted earlier, fighting too can be fun, spectatorial and competitive; it can even involve rules.[1] Thus, if we followed the method (of deciding whether something is a game) advocated by Mandelbaum—the method that works well vis-à-vis closed concepts like 'bachelor'—of drawing up an extensive list of a given activity's properties and comparing the list to a definition of 'game' in order to see how well the two 'match up,' there would be no way to guard against our making a mistake[2]—a mistake that would probably be *intuitively* obvious (if, for example, we observed or experienced firsthand the given activity and relied on our intuition to decide whether to call it a game).

It may be asked, however, why the society that invented wrestling chose to call it a game. After all, since it was an entirely new activity, its originators quite possibly did not have a "clear intuition" that it be called a game. Therefore they must have *analytically* (as opposed to intuitively) considered its properties and decided on that basis that it warranted being called a game. This suggests that 'game' is definable using necessary and sufficient conditions. –This objection, though, is feeble. For the sake of argument we shall accept its unrealistically ahistorical account: if wrestling was "conjured out of thin air," its inventors did indeed possibly lack a clear intuition that it be categorized as a game. But there is no reason to suppose that they so categorized it only after comparing its properties with a necessary-and-sufficient definition of 'game.' Rather, they simply *stipulated* that it be called a game, on the basis of its properties' status as being *reasonably* game-ish.[3] Eventually (perhaps over the course of a generation or two) people became so accustomed to thinking of wrestling as a game (due to the convention of calling it such) that this classification sounded *intuitively obvious* to them, as it has ever since. –In this speculative history, no mention is made of necessary and sufficient conditions.

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[1] The fights in the movie *Fight Club* had to follow a set of rules, yet surely they would not properly have been called games.

[2] In much the same way as (Frank Sibley notes that) reading a list of the properties of a painting may lead one (not having seen it) to decide mistakenly that the painting is, e.g., graceful—and which mistake one will instantly recognize upon actually viewing the painting. The difference between the two examples—between the concept of game and any aesthetic value—is that values are not condition-governed, while 'game' is. In other words, 'game' is comparable to 'intelligent': if enough properties are listed, eventually it will be impossible to deny that the thing under consideration is a game, even if one has not actually 'experienced' or 'seen' it (which is not true of values: no list of an artwork's properties, however long, will justify beyond doubt the application to it (the artwork) of a given aesthetic quality). Still, the method of comparing the 'list' to a definition will not be foolproof (as it is not foolproof in the case of 'intelligent'), because no definition is necessary and sufficient. One will, again, have to rely on the intuitive compatibility between the list and one's understanding of 'game.'

[3] Perhaps, for example, wrestling had a lot in common with some other activity that was already called a game, and so to call wrestling a game was a natural extension of the concept.

Two issues require clarification, namely, (1) what exactly it is that we are "intuitively" understanding in calling something a game, and (2) what the word 'intuition' itself means. Regarding the second, there is no clear answer. Various kinds of mental states may be taken as falling under the concept 'intuition.' For example, sense-perception has in the past been (misleadingly) called a form of intuition; so has the sudden, perceptibly 'revelatory' moment of insight that occurs when one, say, (finally) understands a mathematical proof. In the context of this essay, we mean by 'intuition' only the unproblematic, common-sensical kind of certainty involved in calling, e.g., poker a game, or croquet a game, or Russian roulette a game. In nearly all cases, the person who makes such a judgment simply 'knows,' somehow, that the activity is a game; he relies on no chain of logic, no analysis of properties. This instantaneous insight (which we cannot clarify further because psychologists do not understand it) is what we call intuition.

The first question is more problematic. One's instinct may be to say (of something that one knows is conventionally thought of as a game),[1] "When I intuitively understand that this is a game, I understand simply that it has the properties of a game!" –Or, amended in light of the prior discussion, "I understand that it has enough of the properties conventionally associated with 'game' to be called a game." This answer, even if supplemented with a list of examples of properties associated with games, is not quite satisfactory, because, psychologically speaking, our intuitions are not 'directly connected' with this sort of conceptual analysis. They are not really intuitions of the logical compatibility of a given thing with the concept 'game.' Rather, they are intuitions that *society calls* this thing a game—that the relevant linguistic community to which one belongs calls this activity a game. In most cases, the person making this judgment is not self-consciously thinking that "I am calling this thing a game because society does so"; nevertheless, this relation between him and society is the causal mechanism not only of why he calls the thing a game but of why he '*instantaneously*' *knows* that it is a game. His intuition (or knowledge) was forged through experience in his linguistic community, through internalizing linguistic conventions; thus, it is an intuition of (or knowledge of) his linguistic community's convention, and not of any strict logical or analytic similarity, *per se*, between an object and a concept. Still, it may be asked why the convention has evolved; and the (philosophical) answer to this question has to be that the object has, through various historical processes, been determined as having enough properties in common with the concept 'game' to be judged a game. In more sophisticated language, one may say: of any given thing that the person (the 'judger') in question intuitively knows to be conventionally thought of as a game,[2] his judgment that it is a game means, "This thing is conventionally classed as a game by the linguistic community to which I belong; it has been classed as such because the set of its properties has, through whatever social mechanisms, been deemed as having enough in common with the set of properties conventionally associated with the concept 'game' (which set includes, among others, the properties *x*, *y*, and *z*[3]) to merit inclusion in the class 'game.'"[4]

It is time we explained the motivation behind restricting the foregoing ideas to things that convention dictates be called 'games.' –The reason is that the concept 'game' is used differently in different contexts (for example, metaphorically[5] and 'stipulatedly') and that things which are in one context called

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[1] We'll explain in the next paragraph the reasons for inserting this caveat. –Incidentally, in this context 'knows' should be understood loosely. The knower may not know that he knows that the given thing is conventionally called a game, but his knowledge can be extrapolated from his behavior. It is a kind of 'unconscious' knowledge—which may at any moment become conscious, given the appropriate stimulus—similar to the unconscious knowledge we may be said to have at a given moment that the room we are in has four walls or that the computer we are typing on is a laptop.

[2] That is, he knows that, according to the linguistic conventions in which he was brought up, his judgment that it is a game is appropriate.

[3] Appropriate properties may be substituted for the letters; the criterion for determining which properties are so substituted is that they be conventionally associated with games.

[4] The question of whether this definition is viciously circular will be answered below, in the discussion of art.

[5] An example of a metaphorical use of 'game' is the statement "Life is a game." There is, however, no simple criterion for deciding when the word is being used metaphorically as opposed to literally. The most reliable 'criterion' we have is our intuition: we intuitively see that "Life is a game" is a metaphor, without, however, being able to say exactly why it is. (We may give approximate explanations, but none of them will provide a wholly satisfactory way of determining, in all contexts, where the boundary is between metaphorical and literal uses of 'game.') In limiting our

games may in another not be (so that in order for them to continue to be called games, a new definition of 'game' must be stipulated—a definition that will apply only to this activity in this particular context).[1] It is only to contexts in which the application of the concept is uncontroversial (i.e., obviously consistent with conventional usage) that our definition of game applies.[2] As an example of a controversial context,[3] let us look again at Russian roulette. This game consists of a person's placing a bullet into a revolver, spinning the cylinder, putting the revolver against his head and pulling the trigger. If he has witnesses, say, in a bar, who are perhaps gambling on the outcome, he is thought of as playing a game. If he is alone, though, suicidally depressed and not considering his activity to be at all 'game-ish'....one hesitates before saying that he is playing Russian roulette. That is, one has an intuition that the conventional use of 'game' is not entirely appropriate here. One may say, "*In a sense* he is playing Russian roulette, but *not really*. Not in the more obvious sense in which the guy in the bar was." If, in the end, after considering the matter, one decides to *stipulate* that the suicidal man's activity be called Russian roulette, our preceding definition of game is no longer useful (because, again, the ordinary use of 'game' is being stretched—and the person in the example can see this). A new definition must be invented, specifically for this context.[4] It will be something like "an activity that does not have enough game-ish properties to be unproblematically (conventionally, intuitively) classed as a game but does have enough properties in common with a given conventional game [in this case, Russian roulette] to be called an instance of this game, and is thus itself a 'game' in a derivative, indirect way.[5]" What is being claimed is not that the activity under consideration is a game in the *conventional* (unproblematic) sense, but that it is a game *unconventionally* (i.e., 'not in the full, or intuitive, sense'), due to its having certain properties in common with a conventional game.

Let us proceed now on the assumption—or rather, presumption—that we have more or less refuted Mandelbaum's criticisms of Wittgenstein. In the remainder of this paper we shall argue that 'art,' like 'game,' is an open concept. Morris Weitz's aforementioned paper sets out several reasons for regarding 'art' in this way; the following passage provides an example:

> I can illustrate this open character of "art" best by examples drawn from its sub-concepts. Consider questions like "Is Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* a novel?," "Is V. Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* a novel?" [....] On the traditional view, these are construed as factual problems to be answered yes or no in accordance with the presence or absence of defining properties. But certainly this is not how any of these questions is answered. Once it arises, as it has many

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definition above to contexts in which people intuitively understand that the word 'game' is used literally rather than metaphorically, we have taken account of this element of vagueness. [It seems that in this footnote I unwittingly "explained the motivation behind....etc."—but from the perspective of 'taking-account-of-metaphors'. In the remainder of the paragraph in the text I gave an explanation from the perspective of 'taking-account-of-stipulations'.]

[1] Incidentally, the following discussion provides additional evidence against the idea that there can be necessary and sufficient conditions for calling something a game (because if the same activity can be a game in one context but not in another, it would seem that 'game' cannot be defined using necessary and sufficient conditions).

[2] We should remark further that the definition does not apply if the speaker (or 'judger'), notwithstanding the conventionality of the context (i.e., of the game's being called a game in the conventional sense), actually intends that his use of the word 'game' to characterize the given game be understood unconventionally—e.g., metaphorically, or on the basis of some definition of 'game' that he has stipulated. In this case, it is self-evident that the speaker is not using 'game' as we have defined it. –Anyway, the reason we incorporated the first-person pronoun into the definition (and qualified the latter with the clause that preceded it in the text) was precisely to make it clear that 'game' was being understood conventionally.

[3] [On her copy of the paper, Ross said that a clearer term might be "borderline case".]

[4] Of course, in a real-world situation it probably won't be explicitly formulated. It is merely a logical implication of how 'game' is being used in this particular context.

[5] That is, it is considered a game not on the basis of the intrinsic game-ishness of its properties, but rather on the basis of their similarity to the properties of another activity whose properties are sufficiently game-ish for it to be an obvious example of a game. (As we have already explained, the "intrinsic game-ishness" of properties is judged intuitively, once the speaker has learned his language competently.)

> times in the development of the novel from Richardson to Joyce [....], what is at stake is no factual analysis concerning necessary and sufficient properties but a decision as to whether the work under examination is similar in certain respects to other works, already called "novels," and consequently warrants the extension of the concept to cover the new case. (Neill, 188)

Weitz goes on to argue that sub-concepts of art (such as 'tragedy,' 'poetry,' 'painting,' and 'sculpture') are open in this way, and (therefore) that 'art' itself is. Intuitively this seems extremely plausible. However, neither the argument that art's sub-concepts are open, nor that (by inductively generalizing from that argument) 'art' itself is open, is logically conclusive. Mandelbaum is right to deny the validity of Weitz's conclusion, which is as follows:

> What I am arguing, then, is that the very expansive, adventurous character of art, its ever-present changes and novel creations, makes it logically impossible to ensure any set of defining properties. We can, of course, choose to close the concept. But to do this with "art" or "tragedy" or "portraiture," etc., is ludicrous since it forecloses on the very conditions of creativity in the arts. (Neill, 189)

As Mandelbaum states, "....the question of whether a particular concept is open or closed....is not identical with the question of whether future instances to which the very same concept is applied may or may not possess genuinely novel properties. In other words, Professor Weitz has not shown that every novelty in the instances to which we apply a term involves a stretching of the term's connotation" (Neill, 200). Mandelbaum's argument is borne out by the initial intuitive plausibility of both George Dickie's and Jerrold Levinson's definitions of art, which may be stated as follows:

> (Dickie) "A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public" (Neill, 222).

> (Levinson) "*X* is an artwork at *t* = df *X* is an object of which it is true at *t* that some person or persons having the appropriate proprietary right over *X*, nonpassingly intends (or intended) *X* for regard-as-a-work-of-art—i.e., regard in any ways (or ways) in which artworks existing prior to *t* are or were correctly (or standardly) regarded" (Neill, 230).

These definitions (which, despite appearances, are not viciously circular[1]) allow for the "adventurous" character of art, even though they invoke necessary and sufficient conditions.[2] Their greatest deficiency—and that of any conceivable 'closed' definition—is not that they preclude artistic creativity, but that they do not capture the vagueness of the word 'art.' Since they are intended precisely as accounts of how 'art' is ordinarily used, this inadequacy is fatal. Numerous thought-experiments illustrate it. For example, suppose two people are eating at a banquet in the dining hall of a palace. Lavish chandeliers hang from the ceiling. The following dialogue takes place:

"Those chandeliers are masterful works of art!"

"Yes, they are beautiful—but I wouldn't consider them works of art, unless you mean it metaphorically."

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[1] The authors explain why in their papers.

[2] We must admit, however, that Weitz is right with regard to definitions that are not recursive. For example, Leo Tolstoy's, Clive Bell's, R. G. Collingwood's, and Richard Eldridge's definitions do "foreclose on the very conditions of creativity in the arts," and are thus invalid. For they define art in terms of properties that are not present in all (commonly accepted) artworks, i.e., in terms (effectively) of what they (the theorists) think are the properties of good artworks. Only recursive ('non-substantive') definitions do not delimit the class 'art' in such a way that certain possibilities of creativity are ruled out.

"Why not? Just look at the craftsmanship, the exquisite detail! Whoever designed them was obviously almost as creative and talented as the Greek sculptor Phidias!"

"Well, I wouldn't go that far. But it doesn't matter anyway. They were created not to be artistically appreciated, but to be mere practical adornments in a room whose purpose is purely practical."

"That doesn't matter, even if it's true (which I doubt). If Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes are art, then, for God's sake, these chandeliers are!"

"You're conflating beauty with art. The two are independent. Warhol's works are art because that's what they're supposed to be. These chandeliers have the same function as wallpaper."

"No, you're wrong, and there's no way you're going to convince me otherwise."

Now, if Levinson's or Dickie's definition were true—if it were an accurate description of how 'art' is understood by competent speakers of English—this dialogue would probably never take place. And it would be obvious to the reader that, given the information he has in this example, the chandeliers ought not to be considered art. Neither of these circumstances, however, obtains. The dialogue is pretty reasonable, and the debate seems unresolvable. In other words, our intuition tells us that there is no apparent way to decide for or against the judgment that the chandeliers are art—which would of course not be the case if 'art' had a compact, closed definition.

Such examples could be multiplied indefinitely. This is because, as stated a moment ago, 'art' is a vague concept—i.e., it can be used appropriately in many dissimilar contexts. Indeed, it is *so* vague that its metaphorical (or "evaluative") use seems to 'blend into' its literal (or "descriptive") use. For instance, in the above example, by calling the chandeliers 'artworks' the first speaker is simply stating what is to him a fact: that they literally belong in the same category as Shakespeare's plays and Raphael's paintings and Warhol's pop art. On the other hand, by the term 'work of art,' the second speaker means only that they are impressive creations, not that they belong in, e.g., the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Thus, it is perfectly possible for people to use the same term ('work of art') in the same context yet understand by it different ideas, and thereby fall into mutual confusion. Clearly, if everyone understood 'art' to mean what Levinson or Dickie says it means, such confusion would not be possible (because people would agree on the appropriate application of the word in its descriptive, or literal, sense).

If this Wittgensteinian perspective has any validity, the question arises as to what properties are conventionally associated with art. Why is a sculpture considered art while a television is not? It is in answering this question that both traditional and contemporary theories of art are of use. For instance, some theories highlight the importance of self-expression; others focus on the role of 'representation' (in the sense that artworks are *about* something; this is Danto's approach); others invoke beauty; recursive definitions, which are probably the best (in that they are the most inclusive, and are therefore most consistent with ordinary usage), tend to involve intentionality and artworks' *origins*. All these properties, and many more, "criss-cross and overlap" throughout the diverse realm of art. –Still, this hypothesis, however true it may be, does not address Mandelbaum's objection to Wittgenstein, which we have answered as regards 'game' but not yet as regards 'art': namely, how is it that we so often know when to class something as art and when not to? Or, stated more loosely and ambiguously (and not quite correctly): what is the definition of art? We shall offer one modeled on that which we gave of game: "For someone to name something that is conventionally classed as an artwork[1] by the linguistic community to which he belongs 'an artwork' (on the basis of his instantaneous, commonsensical intuition or 'knowledge' that the given thing belongs in this category) is to say that this thing is conventionally classed as an artwork by the linguistic community to which he belongs, and that it is classed as such because the set of its properties has, through various social mechanisms, been determined as having enough in common with the set of properties conventionally associated with the concept 'art(work)' to merit inclusion in the class 'artwork.'"[2] This

[1] Or, if the given community is unaware of its existence, would be classed as such.

[2] See footnote [x + 4]. We should also point out that the converse of the definition is true: when a person 'unthinkingly' (on the basis of his 'instantaneous intuition' or knowledge) judges that a given object is not art, he is denying that the above definition applies to it. For instance, if I say of my telephone, in an 'automatic,' 'thoughtless' kind of way

definition, like Dickie's and Levinson's, is not viciously circular: it does not define an artwork as 'something having the properties of art,' but rather as 'something that (among other conditions) is *judged* to have the properties of art.' Being-judged is an essential part of it. Thus, the definition is not wholly uninformative, as it would be if it were viciously circular.

The case of transgressive, revolutionary art (such as Dada art in its early years) is to be handled in the way that we handled the case of the suicidal man 'playing' Russian roulette: namely, by *stipulating* that the revolutionary art be called art, on the basis of its relevant similarities to more conventional art. As you'll recall, in our first quotation from his paper, Morris Weitz argues that revolutionary art (such as *Finnegans Wake*) has been, in fact, handled in this way. When it is still so new that people in the relevant community are uncomfortable calling it art, it is art in a different way from that in which traditional art is. In other words, when it is labeled as art, the label has a (*slightly*) different meaning than when it is applied to traditional art: it means that the object to which it is applied is art *derivatively*, on the basis not of its properties' similarity to the conventional understanding of 'art' but rather of their similarity to properties of certain other objects, which (properties) have enough in common with the conventional understanding of art for *their* bearers to be '*direct*' examples of art, 'intrinsic' and unproblematic instantiations of the idea. Eventually, of course, the community grows accustomed to thinking of the revolutionary art as art; it becomes 'conventional,' unproblematic art.

The very first historical examples of art—"*ur*-art," as Levinson calls them—do not pose a problem for our theory, because it is conditional. To object that it does not properly characterize the way the word 'art' was used in the beginning of history is pointless: we have already stated that the theory is not true under all conditions, but only under those described above. It is not hard, though, to give a speculative account of what happened in prehistoric communities: when the concept of art was first used, it denoted already-existing objects that were of a different character than others—namely, of (what we would call) an artistic character. Cave paintings, for example, had no practical purposes, as did most other objects; with the increasing sophistication of language, the word 'art' was invented to denote such objects that were irrelevant to the task of acquiring food but were interesting to look at and fun to make. This was, indeed, possibly how artworks were defined: they were objects that were pleasant to look at—of "absorbing non-practical interest"—which were also, perhaps, used in religious rituals. As language and culture developed, the category of art broadened, such that it could no longer be limited to religious objects or non-utilitarian objects. It was then that the definition we have given began to be more appropriate than a 'closed' definition like Clive Bell's, or even a closed *recursive* definition like George Dickie's.

Now, wherein lies the superiority of our definition over Levinson's?[1] Its relative virtues are (at least) threefold: (1) its conditionality—i.e., its appropriateness to only one kind of context (albeit the most common)—ensures that it more accurately reflects actual linguistic practice, given that the word 'art' is used in different ways in many contexts; (2) it bypasses the troublesome issues of (firstly) a proprietor's intentions[2] and their relation to the public's perception of the object to which they apply, and (secondly) the nature of artistic appreciation and what it means to regard a work of art "correctly"; (3) it does not have the unpleasant implication (as does Levinson's) that the public may be wrong in universally regarding a given object as an artwork:[3] in other words, in denying that there is an 'objective truth' external to linguistic conventions of whether a given thing is an artwork, it avoids the counterintuitive essentialism to which Levinson's definition falls victim.

Let us provide an example of how our account is more satisfactory than Levinson's—and, by implication, any definition of art in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. The following passage is taken from Levinson's paper "Defining Art Historically":

(without focusing my attention, e.g., on certain of its features I deem ugly and taking these as the reason for my judgment), "This is not art," I mean that the definition given above does not apply to it.

[1] Dickie's definition has been criticized persuasively by other authors—see, e.g., Neill, 225—so we shall ignore it here.

[2] For example, it may in some cases be unclear who the proprietor is.

[3] See Neill, 229 for Levinson's admission that his theory has this implication.

> Given a proprietary-right condition, it is somewhat problematic whether curators, promoters, exhibitors can turn nonart objects of the past into art objects of the present as blithely as is usually allowed. Imagine an art museum having mounted for regard-as-a-work-of-art a strange ornate receptacle whose original purpose is unknown. The object comes from an ancient Mexican culture thought to have died out. However, a well-documented descendant of the tribe, armed with full knowledge of its customs and practices, appears and successfully demands the removal of the receptacle from public view (it is apparently a sacred ritual object, used for nocturnal royal baptisms, and not in any sense for appreciation). I maintain that the object in question does not just revert to being nonart—it never was art at all, because our present art establishment unknowingly lacked the right to make it such. This sort of case may be more prevalent than is generally imagined. (Neill, 229)

In other words, while the object was on display in the museum, everyone was wrong to regard it as a work of art. 'Objectively' speaking, it was not an artwork. Now, if one considers the matter closely, one will probably come to see an element of truth in Levinson's account. From this perspective, it will be intuitively plausible that, in a sense, the object never really was art. On the other hand, one will also have to admit that, in another sense, the object *was* art: it was classed as such by the community, according to conventions, because it was relevantly similar to other such artifacts which had themselves been classed as art. To deny the label 'artwork' to this artifact while applying it to others would have been arbitrary and unjustifiable. Therefore it was art—and yet, as we noted, at the same time it was not. The only way out of this dilemma is to recognize that 'art' can be understood differently, depending on the context. Its definition changes according to its use. The definition we gave above is effectively how the community understood (or used) the word 'art' in calling the artifact an artwork before the tribe's descendant had come forward; afterwards, 'art' was understood in a more essentialist way, so that Levinson's definition was more appropriate than our own. From this example it is clear that in some contexts, 'art' may indeed be defined by necessary and sufficient conditions; however, in most cases such a definition is not useful. In fact, often[1] it is unclear in *what* sense the word is being used: the speaker himself may be confused, such that he does not really know what he means. If we were pressed, though, to give a generalization about the meaning of 'art,' we should say simply that it is governed by family resemblances.

The reader may wonder whether our account has implications for the question of what it means to *evaluate* an artwork—to apply aesthetic values to it, such as 'good' or 'ugly' or 'beautiful.' It seems probable that the only implication is that there is no "fact of the matter" as regards the application of an aesthetic quality to a given artwork (because the multitude of definitions of 'art' surely necessitates that there be many standards of artistic worth). However, this hypothesis can be established on independent grounds, and is in any case very complex, so we shall not argue for it here.

*

It plays the academic game passably well, don't you think? –Except for the absence of a conclusion. 'We deemed it unnecessary.'

By the way, one of the conclusions to draw from it is that the question 'What is art?', or 'Is this particular thing a work of art?', is not interesting. Of far more interest is the question of artistic values.

Spinoza was obviously right that mind and body are aspects of the same thing. (I've insisted on this for years. See ch. 3 of my senior thesis.) The question is, how is that statement to be interpreted? We'll never have a wholly satisfying answer—the intuitive incongruence of the categories precludes that—but

[1] As in our 'dialogic' example.

it's likely we'll one day have a 'schematic', 'abstractly conceptual' (though not concretely intuitive, i.e., wholly comprehendable) one.

Wednesday, November 9

A species whose individuals are hurtled into life, through no fault of their own. No choice in the matter. Nature chose you. You were selected for an eighty-some-odd-year life; now make the most of it. "Well, I still have fifty years to go. I guess I might as well *do* something, to pass the time...." You were allotted some literary talent? Fine, as time passes you might as well entertain yourself: write a little. Above all, try to enjoy this world while it lasts. –Because in your last moments you'll think....*What the hell was **that**?*

Thursday, November 10

The pills seem to be nothing more than an extreme version of coffee: they cause my hands to quiver, like I have Parkinson's. And my heart beats like I'm sprinting.

It doesn't matter. Destroying yourself is what youth is all about.

Friday, November 11

The best word to describe me is 'uneven'. In all its connotations, that word is perfect.

For example: last night. At 7 I took a nap, having strained my body to its limits at the gym. Wasn't really in the mood to drink, but at 8 I went to a German girl's birthday party. Over the course of the night I drank about ten beers, had four or five jello shots, and I'd guzzled vodka before leaving my apartment (as I always do when I go out)—all on an empty stomach. Understandably, this extreme contempt for my body put me in a marvelous mood. We all went to a club; what followed can with justice be called an "orgy" (though, sadly, not literally). I had obscene fun. While dancing, every so often I'd look around at all of us and deflate with laughter, for two minutes. I laughed harder than I ever have. Seizures of laughter. But it all ended abruptly, from a single look. I was dancing with a girl I know, vainly pleased by her evident pleasure. I shouted some joke in her ear, to which she seemed to react favorably. But a moment later she walked over to talk to a friend of hers standing behind me, who, I think, had been doing some kind of striptease act with his scarf. It occurred to me that she'd probably been looking over my shoulder earlier, laughing at him rather than me. This was humiliating, but I shrugged it off. Went to the bathroom a minute later. There, I was ambushed by sadness. It was pretty strong, so I went outside to let it pass. Walked around the neighborhood. It was black and empty, except for cars, with lots of shadows. The symbolism wasn't lost on me: I began to cry. Really cry. Despondently. I found it truly amazing and ascribed it to the maudlin influence of alcohol—the fountain of alcohol I'd drunk. Walked for a long time, sat behind bushes somewhere, sat in a big stone doorway, the crying coming and going. At last I returned to the club. Had trouble finding it; when I did, it was closed. But the door was open, so I walked in to get my coat, which I'd left on a table. Guys were cleaning up, sweeping the dance floor; they said I couldn't come in. I told them why I was there and ignored their protests. But the coat was gone. One of the employees came over and ordered me to leave; we had a stimulating discussion, the upshot of which was that he pushed me towards the door, grabbing my arm. I told him to fuck off or something, or that I could find my own way to the door, and pushed his arm away. Unfortunately he was twice my size. He made the interesting remark "Don't touch me" and then put me in a headlock, which it was futile to try to get out of. Shoved me outside. My drunkenness had dulled my capacity for rage, which was a blessing: otherwise I might have fought back. Found my way to the metro somehow, where the trains had of course stopped running. (It must have been about 2:30.) The schedule said they started at 4:15. So I lay on a bench, feeling appropriately sorry

for myself. The air was freezing and I'd lost my coat. I thought awhile and started to cry again, the tears running down my cheeks from the outside corners of my eyes (since I was on my back). I thought it was funny that if any of my friends or my family had witnessed this scene they'd feel effusive pity, and that a good many girls might suddenly be interested in me—as Kanchana was that night when she and Lily came upon me throwing up in the shadows, and then I threw up again at the base of that old tree with Kanchana standing next to me stroking my back as I probed my throat with my middle finger, and for a moment she actually laid her head on my shoulder as a girl does on her boyfriend's, while emitting an emotional groan[1]—but that because no one was watching me, this incident really wasn't happening and meant nothing. Which of course made me even sadder. At 4:15 the train didn't come. A woman told me it was because this was a holiday (Veterans Day?); the train wouldn't come until 5:00. That was welcome news, since it gave me a chance to be harassed by a random homeless guy who insisted on giving me his sweater because he could see I was frostbitten and he was wearing three layers. I refused—he insisted—I refused—he insisted—for ten minutes. He made me take it, threw it at me, but I gave it back. Soon I learned it wasn't just generosity on his part: he wanted seven dollars in exchange, for breakfast. I gave him five and walked away without the sweater. He followed me, and the surreality began again. At last the train came.

[…] Anyway, the point of all this is that I'm uneven.

Thoughts on coherentism (which the prof liked; otherwise I wouldn't have thought them interesting enough to be put here):

> How can a coherentist know that coherence is the criterion for truth without first adopting a perspective outside the system, or the "web of belief", from which to determine by what criteria the system ought to be judged? In other words, whenever a coherentist argues for coherentism, he is necessarily arguing from *outside* of coherentism. He offers his arguments as candidates for truth not solely on the basis of their internal coherence, nor on how well they cohere with his other beliefs—for then he would be begging the question—but on the basis partly of independent criteria such as inductive validity, logical force, and conclusions drawn from empirical observation. More generally, any argument that a coherentist proposes is (tacitly) supposed to be judged not merely by how well it fits into a web of belief, nor even by how mutually coherent its premises and conclusions are, but by many other factors as well. (What would it be like to judge an argument solely on the basis of the coherence of its internal and external relations??) What applies to individual arguments should apply to the system as a whole: i.e., the system is true not only because it is consistent etc. but also because it corresponds accurately with observations etc.
>
> What is the *point* of coherentism? What is the point of denying the obvious relative importance of such "foundational" propositions as those of logic, and such foundational "deliverances" as sense-perceptions? Certainly sense-perceptions are judged true partly by how well they cohere with, e.g., scientific theories, but it seems wrongheaded to place them on a more or less equal plane with the latter. It is *not* the case that "they owe their epistemic status to their place in our evolving understanding of the world and our modes of access to it", nor that "the justification for privileging perception derives [solely] from the relation of perceptual judgments to the rest of our theory of ourselves as cognitive agents interacting with a mind-independent world" (Steup, 163). This is so obvious that one wants to know what possible motive there could be for denying it.[2] Is coherentism's *raison d'être* merely

[1] That's females for ya. Be a charming, intelligent guy and they want nothing to do with you, but throw up in front of them and you've captured their hearts.

[2] [It's not much of an argument to say, "This is obvious." But apparently what I was thinking was that perception is the ultimate court of appeal. Even in science, in almost every instant we're relying on sense-perceptions, both to test hypotheses and to construct hypotheses. Sense-experience is the crucible in which we *test ideas*, for we can't even

the intractability of the regress problem? If so, then foundationalists would be well-advised to stop expending mental energy on refuting its perverse doctrines and instead to focus on showing how foundationalism[1] provides a solution to the regress problem, and thus to pull the rug out from beneath the coherentist's feet.

Saturday, November 12

Went to a concert with Sandy, Brandy and Jennifer. Mozart's 17th concerto, Beethoven's 7th symphony, and a collection of noise by some contemporary guy. Small orchestra, made smaller by the power of Beethoven's music. Unusual interpretation of Mozart: romantic, rubato. Second movement played more slowly than I've ever heard; the rests lasted fully five seconds each. It might not work well on a CD, but in the concert setting it was electrifying. I felt like I was listening to nirvana (the peace), a nirvana substantiated through passion. The first and third movements weren't as good: not crisp enough. Still, nothing could muffle the power of the music. (No one compares with Mozart for writing dialogues into melodies and harmonies; and of course the piano and the orchestra were having a conversation—a private conversation the audience was allowed to eavesdrop on.) The interpretation of the symphony was sensible: it made one recall Wagner's label "apotheosis of the dance". Unfortunately the trumpets upset the balance at critical moments—and at the end of the first movement the double basses weren't loud enough, nor was the second half-step descent accentuated enough.[2]

I'd forgotten how emotionally jarring the second movement is. Its first three minutes sound like the soundtrack to history.

I emerged from the experience unhappy. Maybe because I'd shared it with no one. Brandy and Jennifer are rocks when it comes to music—granite, not pumice—and Sandy was more entertained by my behavior. (Closing my eyes, moving my hands, etc.)

Sunday, November 13

I think I've been deceived in kowtowing to the received view that the longing for (biological) immortality is a human instinct, and in reducing the desire for existential meaning (and recognition) to the desire for immortality. In truth, I don't believe I want to live eternally, not even on an instinctual level. My real "passion" has always been (the "useless" one) to be (in Sartrean language) the in-itself and the for-itself at the same time. I've wanted to see myself as an object, a principle, a concept, an other—something I can pin down. I imagine myself from the other's perspective so that I may achieve this stasis. It's plausible that my desire for "recognition", or fame, or popularity, is derivative of the (oxymoronic) desire to be a frozen self-consciousness, because fame is nothing but a frozenness in being-respected. If everyone saw me as an '*admirable thing*', it would be easier for me to see myself as such (since self-perception depends largely on how others perceive one), and thus to calm a little my unrest (my striving, my always-evaluating-myself, which is, perhaps, coextensive with self-consciousness itself, to varying degrees in different people). If these desires exist, more or less, in the rest of mankind (which is probable: it's hard to believe that desires so fundamental—so fundamental as to be phenomenological analogues of biological

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judge the results of experiments without assuming the reliability of our perceptions in that moment. –Maybe that's one of the reasons the statement seemed so obvious to me. I suppose I also meant there's a kind of immediacy and certainty in sense-perceptions—not that the objects they present to us independently exist, but that *we are presented with* particular appearances—that is very different from scientific theories.]

[1] [I didn't mean foundationalsm in the sense of building up an edifice of knowledge on the basis of something absolutely certain, incorrigible. That sort of foundationalism is obsolete.]

[2] I neither know nor care what Beethoven's instructions are on the score. I love that bass line, and I want to be able to hear it.

instincts[1]—would exist in one mind but not in another), then the common positing of an instinct for immortality may be a confused interpretation of the desire for self-conscious stasis, or for being a for-itself-in-itself (because this would be a timelessness, and timelessness is a type of immortality). In other words, people in fact don't want to live for an infinite number of years; they want instead to live *outside* of 'years', outside of time. The obviousness of the universal desire to live immortally *after death*—through fame or the continuation of one's genes or whatever—has added to the confusion, for it is an easy logical step to infer from the desire for this kind of immortality the existence of a more basic desire for *real* immortality, real (biological) never-dying, the impossibility of which is suggested as why we 'settle' for the other kind of immortality, the eternal 'living on in people's memories after I die'. What is overlooked is that the two kinds of immortality essentially have no relation to each other: neither is derived from the other. A person's tangible existence is a wholly different kind of thing from his existence in an other's mind, i.e., from his desire for recognition, i.e., from his desire to be remembered after he dies, i.e., from his desire for the kind of immortality that is supposedly grounded in a desire never to die. But this latter desire doesn't exist, as I've argued; thus, the former is actually a sublimation of the (incoherent) desire for a static self-consciousness, or a "self-conscious stasis". Now, what's interesting is the affinity of such a state with death. The only difference between the two is that a static self-consciousness would be a *life-in*-death (or a death-in-life). It would still be a death, though. This implies that the common postulate of a desire for immortality is simply a misinterpretation of the desire for (a type of) death. (Ironic!) It also suggests that Freud's postulate of a death-instinct and Sartre's postulate of a "useless passion" to be a for-itself-in-itself are grounded in the same psychological fact(s).

The sex instinct would probably be independent from a desire for death-in-life, which would corroborate Freud's intuition that humans are determined by Eros and Thanatos. Still, the more psychically accessible effects of these instincts (such as daily social interactions) would probably be determined by a merging of the two, given that the sex instinct seems to imply some of the same desires (such as for recognition) that grow out of the "death-in-life" instinct.

What I haven't explained is why we want only *positive* (self-)recognition, positive "stasis". In other words, the recognition-desire has more conceptual content than the for-itself-in-itself-desire, which makes me think the former isn't a sublimation of the latter.

(By the way, none of this runs counter to the fear of death. This fear is compatible with my ideas.)

That's all mythology, of course.

I subscribed to *Scientific American* online.—

Why do animals yawn, and why are yawns contagious? Scientists don't have a complete explanation. The only theory whose partial truth I can attest to is that yawning brings in extra oxygen: sometimes I can cut off a yawn by inhaling deeply and quickly.

Why is television addictive? An article in the February 2002 issue gives a series of convincing neurological explanations. I recommend you read it. It's scary. (But I'm really more interested in the fact that there is no 'place' in consciousness where the addiction *is*. It's weird.)

An article in the December 2005 issue argues that spacetime may have a fluidlike, granular structure. Another argues that gravity and three-dimensional space are, in a sense, illusions. They're somehow the products of quarks and gluons interacting on the boundary of a two-dimensional, gravityless universe. Another article proposes, on the basis of string theory, that the big bang didn't start from a singularity, and that the universe existed long before it. Indeed, it has possibly always existed. –The point is that I'm tired of reading.

No, the real point is that, even if cosmologists someday reach unanimity, the task of *explaining* will not even have begun. In fact, it will be more incomplete than it was in ancient Greece: then, at least, people still thought there *was* an explanation!

[1] I don't mean that in their content they somehow correspond to particular instincts, but that their power is comparable.

Monday, November 14

Today I felt like killing life. Self-revulsion. Little narcissistic thoughts. Anger at my brain for depriving me of serotonin and dopamine. (The supplements have become useless.)

I'm going to start searching actively for street drugs. A couple of my friends/acquaintances have told me they used to have contacts but don't anymore. In the meantime I'll drastically increase the Paxil/Wellbutrin doses. I've also ordered something called "BrainQUICKEN", which, from all I've read, isn't as scammish a drug as its name would make you think. Anyway, it doesn't matter. I'm in the mood to experiment.

How absurd is this. I am a phenomenon of consciousness, a will-o'-the-wisp, an ignis fatuus, to which have been attached a body and recollections of experiences in order to trick me into believing that I'm....—I don't know—*something*—something substantial and metaphysically real—some kind of spiritual substance corporealized—a "***SELF***"—and I know this, I can intuitively *see* that Chris—the Chris who acts, that is; the one who thinks and does and so on, not the one who's nothing but an abstraction from experiences—Chris, writing right now, this active **I** who no longer cares about anything except falling in love—I am literally nothing but *looking-at-myself*, a mere fold in consciousness, a brain-produced, brain-controlled, invisible glint in its [i.e., the glint's] own eye.

I don't understand how any criticism of me can have force—or, more accurately, I don't understand what it would *mean* for a criticism to 'have force', or to be 'true'. I am who I am; to say that certain things I do are, for instance, 'weak' or 'petty', or that my personality isn't appealing, or that I'm not a 'strong' person, is ultimately nonsensical. The same is true of compliments. What does it mean to class a person or some aspect of him under some evaluative property? 'He's arrogant.' Okay… He thinks he's better than other people and sometimes acts like it. So what? What is really being said? The implication is that, insofar as he's arrogant, he's unpleasant or 'bad'. Arrogance is a flaw. But flaws or strengths are such only from an external viewpoint, an 'otherly' viewpoint. From the perspective of the subject, the interior, they have no significance. No meaning, in fact. I can think of people who might call me a jerk, or others who might call me admirable or brilliant. But from my own perspective, these words 'wash over' me. They can't stick, they can't mean anything; and to say they're 'true' would be an empty statement. This applies to everyone.

Thoughts like these are hard to pin down. All you can do is grope towards them.

Tuesday, November 15

Walking home tonight on the side of the road a car sped past me five inches away. I'd been about to step onto the road to avoid a puddle. Had the car driven by one second later, I'd be in a hospital right now. Maybe DOA. –And thus would I have ended. Thus would have ended this non-life.

The incident made me think about contingency. I think about it every day, but this time it was more intense. Well, intense isn't the word. Its emotional associations are inappropriate. In fact, immediately after the experience I was laughing, laughing at how tragic it would have been, and how funny, and how *perfect*. The perfect end to my life. Symbolically perfect, that is.

Back to oblivion, whence I came!

So it was all cerebral for a while, an academic meditation on how random life is and how worthless. Gradually it evolved into a mood. But even in this half-moody despair, I knew that if a friend suddenly appeared and we talked awhile I'd be refreshed and happy. It would take something as mundane as a short conversation for me to go from one extreme to the other. I was on the verge of happiness even as I was on the verge of suicide. And I felt this. I felt as if my progressively strengthening mood was just waiting for an object to latch onto, be it a pleasant one or an unpleasant. Since no pleasant object materialized, all this libido (in Jung's sense) finally poured out as tears. It was a peculiar experience. I kept trying to hold back

the tears as they came, determined not to sink to this womanishness yet again; the combination of my willed refusal and the obstinacy of my tears made for a wonderfully intense bout of near-nervous-collapse. I recommend you try it sometime. In the midst of a crying-session, battle against yourself, your weakness. You'll feel like you're milking your despair for every last drop of *life* that lies within it. There's no question I was capable of killing myself in those moments. No question. I could see my hand holding a gun, raising it to my temple, pulling the trigger. And yet at the same time I knew I'd never do such a thing, for the obvious reason that it would hurt my parents. It would be a weak, selfish thing to do.

[…] Nor can I talk to the prescription-dispensing nurse, because she'd refer me to a therapist and would reduce my meds, when what I really need is more of them—or more of *something*. As for therapy, that's a last resort. It probably wouldn't accomplish anything.

I can't turn to my friends (?) for comfort either, because their attention spans are short. They'd give me a few words of advice and tire of the conversation.

How strange it is that I can sense pure happiness directly under the sadness! A trivial event could make me happy again.

I know that these problems are all "in my head", that they're fabrications of a sick mind, but that does me no good. What it comes down to is that my brain is sadistic. Withholding the chemicals that make happiness possible! What meanness! What gratuitous malice!

That and the low self-esteem. Which comes and goes.

Wednesday, November 16

Wrote Sofia an email. We haven't corresponded in a long time, but she's the only one I could talk to. In the entire world, she's the only one. Everyone else would judge me, and I'm tired of being judged (mostly by myself). Sofia is that amazing rarity, that rarest of rarities: the loyal friend. The non-judgmental friend. The friend who can half-understand her friend. She's my Augusta.[1] In her answer to my first (merely friendly, non-revealing) email, she wrote something that improved my mood:

> […]
> I have to tell you something. Few month ago I read the letter you wrote me when we were together in salzbourg. do you remember you? the letter is one of the kindest letters I even got in my life. Even till up to now the letter is touching me and nearly i had to cry. it was a great time we spent together. I am happy to got to know you. It was my first semester in Salzburg and you made my life her more worth to be live.

People rarely remember that a lifetime of meaning can lie in a moment of "Hello..."

I'm taking advantage of my neutral mood to examine my psychology of the last few days. Purely out of intellectual curiosity.

Beginning around November 8th, the drugs stopped having nice effects. Instead, they left me with an ugly nervous feeling in my chest and frequent twitching in my limbs. So I stopped taking them. This was the same time I began to see that most of the people I'd thought were my friends were really no more than close acquaintances, excepting Sandy. The incident on November 11th didn't help matters. I found myself spending more time alone. I started thinking. (That was my downfall.) Philosophically, I'd been trying for a few weeks to wrap my mind around the possibility that solipsism is false. Solipsism is ridiculous, of course, but so is the opposite position. They're both equally ridiculous. The idea that other people are outside me, looking at me, hearing my words but not experiencing my mind, makes no sense. I am all that existence is: this 'looking out' at other people is the only existence. How can there be two existences, two worlds, looking at each other? How can there be other consciousnesses exactly like mine,

[1] And I'm her B—ob Southey. [See Byron and Augusta.]

as immediate for them as mine is for me, judging me, having the thoughts about me that I'm having about them? In other words, *where are they*? They don't exist in the world that *I* live in; therefore, they don't exist. Naturally I associated this abstract problem with the other intense aspect of my life: my social life. For the first time ever I really made an effort to see myself from the other's perspective: I looked in the mirror for long periods of time, trying to imagine myself outside of myself so I could decide what I'd think of this person; I imagined social situations from the other's perspective rather than mine; etc. One night as I was falling asleep—I was in that long ambiguous state between life and death—I thought about Wesleyan, about how I must have seemed to the people I knew. My mind rehearsed all the embarrassing things I'd done and understood how 'weak' I must have looked. […] But now I saw a future desolate of relationships, desolate of a profession I could hold down, desolate of happiness, and a death when I'd survey the past and see a life lived only in a journal, a life crowded out by a journal, and I considered how contemptible these thoughts were too, and that I couldn't justify myself by invoking my creativity or whatnot and echoing the mantra "Artists are always depressed" because, first, I'm not an artist, and second, creativity is an accidental fact, which if I lacked would mean I'm nothing but a sad little self-obsessed man, and I thought about how little progress I'd made after all from my college years to now and how the falsity of solipsism means I'm merely a face among billions with nothing special about it and probably a good many things wrong with it and how I was 25 and my life had passed in a flash and when I died I would see that my life had passed in a flash and I'd return to the horror of the absence of horror and that I no longer cared a jot about being a great man because that too was contemptible and moreover false and I started to fall into confusion and suspension-of-the-will because I kept looking at myself from outside and felt like I was splitting apart into a part that smiled its way through the day and a part that judged this part from every angle and every person and although I kept screaming at it "Every judgment results from ignorance and no judgment is valid and knowledge is compassion!" I couldn't suppress the nagging doubt that this wasn't quite right and besides it didn't matter because people would keep judging me no matter how ignorant I knew they were and so when the car almost hit me I thought "Maybe that wouldn't have been a tragedy after all" and I kind of overflowed and would have come loose if my self-consciousness hadn't held me back.

That's sort of how I felt.

I wonder if you'll take my side by saying all the predictable things about how I'm not like this or that kind of person, I'm "different" or whatever. But that's crap. Philosophically, psychologically it's crap. You're judging people just like everyone else. "You're unusually intelligent, kind, sensitive, blah-blah." That's all irrelevant. I am who I am, and people are who they are, and that's all that can be said. Compliments and insults are false/meaningless, vague, ignorant *a posteriori* categories jammed down into the *a priori* fluidity of the mind. Hitler was just *that way*, not "bad"; he had been "determined" by the typical determinants, and the "free" choices he made had been determined by the second-order determinants, and the most you can say is that he should have been killed because it would have benefited mankind.*

But then you'll say, "So why do you care about being judged etc.?" Usually I don't.

*But where does that leave us? In a fairly untenable position. For if it's true, why should we refrain from doing certain (bad) things, etc.? I wrote about this months ago. 'We can't stop judging, but judging is pretty deluded. So what now?' Accept it and rise above it. Keep living—i.e., judging—but know "in the back of your mind" that what you're doing ultimately makes no sense. Live morally not because it's "right" but because it's the only way to live in harmony with others (which, after all, is why nature gave us the capacity for morality). Live morally because if you don't and you're discovered you'll feel shame.

[…]

Thursday, November 24

A week in San Francisco with twelve people. Good and bad, mostly good. (Frequent mood-swings.) Best American city. Bike-riding, Alcatraz, Redwood forest, Golden Gate Park, usw.

Friday, November 25

The pleasure principle is misleading. A person wants to have sex not really because he anticipates pleasure, but because he wants to see and feel his partner naked. The desire is "I want to be inside you!" (or "I want you inside me!"), not "I want the pleasure of being inside you!" Maybe you'll object that he wants to be inside her precisely because of the pleasure he'll feel. And indeed, this is how he'd explain his desire to himself if he were asked about it. But this is only an 'after-the-fact' justification; it isn't the real reason, the psychological cause (and phenomenological meaning) of lust. Admittedly, once sex has begun, people keep doing it largely because it feels good and because their bodies anticipate the pleasure of orgasm. But these factors are irrelevant to the initiation of sex. The phenomenon of pornography corroborates this. People enjoy it because of their fascination with the naked body, with sex; after a few minutes of voyeurism, they masturbate to it not because they're aware of the pleasure they'll feel but simply because they want to be involved in the sex act they're witnessing. They're aroused by it. That's the only reason. They just—want to be involved, for no apparent reason (and certainly for no reason they're aware of).

Sunday, November 27

Besides, when *you* judge people you're convinced of your judgment, you write the person off as an idiot or a jerk or whatever, and "That's that!" So what do you mean when you say "Don't care what people think of you"? *You* care what you think of people. Are you saying that your opinion is the only one that matters, that they should care what you think of them but you shouldn't care what they think of you? – Because, of course, you do want them to care what you think of them. You know you're right in your judgments of them, so who's to say they're not right in their judgments of you? So you're being inconsistent. Either you admit that your judgments are not worth shit, or you admit that you should care what people think of you. It's one or the other. You know the option I've chosen—the true option: your judgments are not worth shit; *therefore*, don't care what people think of you. But don't care what you think of them either: i.e., don't make judgments with the seriousness you usually do. That's the only way to live honestly.

Second paper:

The (anti-)definition of knowledge

Upon surveying the contemporary epistemological scene, one is struck by how many debates involve disagreement about the definition of 'knowledge'. The internalism-externalism debate, for example, is made possible by conceptual ambiguity. Pure externalists claim that one need not have reasons (in the standard sense) for a belief in order for it to count as knowledge; what matters is that there be a certain kind of causal connection between the belief and the world.[1] Internalists, on the other hand, believe that the notion of knowledge implies that the believer has access to good reasons for his belief. Another example is the debate between contextualists and invariantists. Contextualists actually incorporate the ambiguity of 'knowledge' into their position: they claim that the standards of knowledge-attributions vary with the attributer's context. This means that the truth-conditions of such attributions change, which means, effectively, that their meaning changes as well. Invariantists, of course, deny this; knowledge has the same standards in all contexts. More generally, philosophers tend to bandy about the word 'knowledge' as if its meaning is unproblematic; a typical example is this sentence of John Hawthorne's: "Someone might know

[1] See Richard Feldman, "Justification is Internal," in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, eds. Mattias Steup and Ernest Sosa (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 272, 273.

that his partner will never leave him and this may entail that she will never leave him for Mr. X".[1] What does 'know' mean here? No explanation is offered. In this paper I will attempt to remedy the situation by giving an original analysis of knowledge, the main conclusion of which will be that if the word 'knowledge', as used in ordinary contexts, is taken to its logical conclusion, it is meaningless, and hence unachievable. I will then apply my ideas to a few standard epistemological problems.

The definition of knowledge

The best method of defining a word is to observe how it is commonly used. 'Knowledge' is used in fairly specific ways, which should make the task of defining it straightforward. In the sense in which we are interested in it, only propositions that are believed (and perhaps facts as well) can be objects of knowledge. The propositions must, moreover, be true: I cannot know that p if p is false. The third condition is that the believer not have any doubt about the truth of the proposition in question. For if I doubt its truth, I can hardly be said to know its truth. So, my feeling *certain* is the third condition for attributing knowledge to me.[2] The fourth is internal justification. The following dialogue illustrates this. *[I deleted the dialogue because of its excessive length.]*

[…]

In short, the fourth condition of knowledge is that the knower have the ability to (truly and justifiably) attribute knowledge to himself, which requires (1) that he be aware of all the information relevant[3] to his belief, and (2) (by implication) that he base his belief on the right reasons. In other words, for knowledge to be justifiably attributed to him, he must be able to know that he knows. In this context, "be able to know" means that in the moment in which he knows that p, he has access to all the evidence, all the information, all the reasons relevant to his knowledge that p, such that if someone asked him "Do you *know* that p?", he would be able to adduce everything in p's favor and everything against it and explain how it is that he knows that p.

The reader may object, "What are your reasons for introducing this severe fourth condition of knowledge (viz., that the knower be able to justifiably attribute knowledge to himself)? You still have not argued for it." Actually, I have. I noted in the dialogue above that people do not commonly attribute knowledge to infants and animals (except in a loose sense); the reason can only be that infants and animals cannot know that they have knowledge. If they could (i.e., if they were self-conscious), then surely there would be no reason not to attribute knowledge to them. Now, in order for a being to know it has knowledge that p, it must have access to all the facts relevant to its knowledge that p: it must know, for example, what were the direct causes of its belief that p, what justification there is for believing that p, and so on. –More generally, however, my argument for the fourth condition is simply that people use the word 'knowledge' in such a way that this fourth condition is implied. For instance, imagine this dialogue between Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld:

Dick: "John knows that we manipulated the intelligence we used to justify the war in Iraq."

Donald: "Actually, he doesn't know it yet. He *thinks* we did, but he can't prove it."

Although Dick and Donald know that John's belief is true, they refrain from attributing knowledge to him because they know he does not attribute knowledge to himself. The implication of this example is that, in order for someone to have knowledge, he must be able to say, justifiably, that he knows he has knowledge.

The reader may have noticed that the fourth condition is suspiciously similar to the third: a knower's ability to ascribe knowledge to himself seems equivalent to his certainty that his belief is true. There is a

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[1] John Hawthorne, "The Case for Closure," ibid., 40.

[2] It is unclear why most epistemologists have not recognized this. For the concept of *certainty* has no place in their definitions of knowledge.

[3] Whether "relevant" should be understood narrowly or broadly need not concern us here. The point is that the knower must be aware of all the information that might conceivably bear on the belief in question (i.e., that he would need to know in order to make an informed and correct decision for or against the belief).

subtle difference, however. As mentioned above, certainty is a purely subjective state, while justifiable self-ascription of knowledge is both subjective and objective. It is a unity of the two: it is subjective awareness of the objective validity of one's judgment that one is in a state of knowledge. The fourth condition implies the third, but the third does not imply the fourth.

I will anticipate here the later discussion of internalism and externalism, because otherwise the reader might object that I have ignored externalism in my definition of knowledge. In truth, I have merely combined the two opposing positions: I have incorporated externalism into an internalist definition. "Which form of externalism?" asks the reader. "Not any form in particular," I reply. The knower must simply know all "external" facts relevant to his knowledge that p: for example, that it is not accidental that he is right about its being the case that p.[1] It would be superfluous, however, to list all the conditions commonly invoked by externalists in order to describe what it is that the knower knows; the point is that he has perfect knowledge of the portion of reality that bears on his belief that p. Similarly, anyone who justifiably attributes knowledge to him must have the same complete knowledge that he has. This criterion of "omniscience" (with regard to a particular aspect of reality) is not arbitrary or absurd; it is implied by the meaning of the verb 'to know'.

The meaninglessness of knowledge

Having outlined the definition of knowledge, I will now expound its implication—viz., that knowledge in the strictest sense is impossible for humans to achieve. The reason for this may not be evident: it is not that omniscience (in the limited form under consideration) is impossible—for, after all, this is not necessarily the case—but rather that it is in the nature of *homo sapiens* not to be able to know if/when omniscience has been achieved. This is due to the peculiar nature of consciousness. Humans, unlike other animals, are self-conscious: they are aware of themselves. In being self-aware, they are also necessarily aware of the externality of the world that confronts them. They are aware of it as an "other" thing, a thing to which they do not have the same direct, intuitive access that they have to their own consciousness. That is, they do not have (intuitive) access to the "interior" of this object, as they do to their (self-)consciousness. Because the world (i.e., reality[2]) is necessarily seen by self-consciousness as external to it, truth is seen as external—for truth is but a propositional expression of (a given aspect of) the world. This means that the negation of a given proposition is always conceivable. Even propositions about (self-)consciousness can conceivably be negated, because, although consciousness has intuitive access to the "interior" of itself (as it does not to that of the external world), it is also its own other. It observes itself, it is opposed to itself; therefore, it is "opposed to" (or outside of) any truth about itself, and thus any proposition. Now, to say that the negation of a proposition is always conceivable is to say that the person who asserts the proposition may be wrong, which is effectively to say that he may not be aware of all the facts relevant to the truth or falsity of the proposition. This is, moreover, intuitively compelling. We can never know whether we have grasped all the facts relevant to a given proposition, because, as already stated, facts are external to us; thus, we would have to step outside ourselves to determine (beyond doubt) whether we had understood a given aspect of reality. We would have to attain a God-like perspective, from which negation would be inconceivable.[3] Because this is impossible—because, that is, negation is always conceivable—knowledge is impossible.

There is another argument for that conclusion, though it amounts to the same thing as the foregoing. Certainty, as we have seen, is a necessary condition for knowledge. In other words, S does not know that p unless S has no doubts that p. What does it mean to doubt that p? It means to be aware of the possibility that p is false. Now, we have seen that in the case of every proposition p, it is possible for S to be aware

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[1] See Robert K. Shope, "Chapter 1: Conditions and Analyses of Knowing," in *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, ed. Paul K. Moser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35, http://www.questia.com.

[2] Or, as Wittgenstein defines it, "all that is the case".

[3] If God existed, he would not be able to think false thoughts. He would see reality—he would be reality—in its totality and nothing else; thus, negation would not exist for him.

that p may be false, simply by imagining not-p. Whether S is *in fact* aware of this has no bearing on the question of whether S has knowledge, because the relevant condition for knowledge is that S can *justifiably* attribute knowledge to himself, not that S *does* attribute knowledge to himself. All that matters, then, is that S *can* conceive that not-p: this is enough to show that S cannot know that p (because imagining that not-p is equivalent to doubting that p, and doubt is incompatible with knowledge). In fact, complete certainty is, arguably, inconceivable, and hence meaningless. What would it be like not to be aware of the possibility that any proposition p can be false? All that is necessary for this awareness is that one understand the meaning of not-p; but what would it be like not to understand the meaning of not-p? That seems unimaginable, meaningless; thus, complete certainty is meaningless, which means that knowledge itself is. –In short, it will always be possible to doubt that p (and an absence of doubt is meaningless); therefore, it will never be possible to know that p—and, moreover, knowledge that p is meaningless.

Maybe my definition of doubt seems too loose. It permits such statements as "I see a computer in front of me, but because I can conceive the truth of the proposition 'I do not see a computer in front of me', in a sense I doubt there is a computer in front of me—even though I believe there is." It seems strange to believe a proposition but doubt it at the same time. Nevertheless, there is nothing paradoxical about this. I believe that the universe was created in a "big bang" but admit I may be wrong—which means, effectively, that my belief is subject to doubt. Similarly, it is possible to believe that I am writing on a computer and yet to doubt it, albeit in some nearly "empty" way. In any case, the fact that philosophers debate these sorts of questions—that they ask themselves, "Do I *know* there is a computer here?", "Do I *know* I am not a brain in a vat?"—proves they have *some* kind of doubt—and, as we have seen, *all* kinds are incompatible with knowledge.

The question remains, however, why these epistemological problems—namely, the debates over skepticism, over internalism and externalism, over contextualism, over the proper definition of knowledge—have proven as recalcitrant as they have. Why has so little progress apparently been made by epistemologists in the last forty years? The answer is that they have been approaching the problems from the wrong angle. They have been searching for a (*single*) account of knowledge that can both preserve our knowledge of ordinary truths and explain the power of the skeptic's intuitions. They have been trying to formulate a single definition of knowledge—and justification—that would provide a way around skepticism and Gettier-style problems while permitting people to retain their belief in ordinary, commonsensical knowledge. This project was doomed from the start. No definition can serve both purposes, for 'knowledge' is not used in the same way in the skeptic's context (or, in general, the epistemologist's context) as it is in the ordinary context. One has only to read Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* to see that he would have predicted the theoretic floundering of the last few decades, for the simple reason that epistemologists have ignored his main insight: philosophical knowledge is meaningless. Unfortunately, he did not express his insight with precision. Although the concept of knowledge is, in a sense, meaningless, it is not *completely* meaningless. It is not gibberish. Its meaninglessness is analogous to that of my doubt that I am not a brain in a vat: this doubt is not fully conceptualizable, not *imaginable* in the way that my doubt about the origin of the universe is. Rather, it is merely an awareness of the abstract possibility that in some metaphysical world I am somehow a brain in a vat. Similarly, I cannot imagine what it would be like to have knowledge in the strict sense in which I defined it above; I can only abstractly conceive the possibility of not having doubts, of having direct access to metaphysical truth. Epistemologists have gone astray in thinking that literal knowledge (as opposed to "loose", "metaphorical" knowledge; see below) is possible; their attempt to justify this conviction has led them into quagmires of casuistry.

Wittgenstein was wrong, however, to think that the origin of all this philosophical confusion was that philosophers had taken the word 'knowledge' out of its ordinary context and given it a new meaning (if he did in fact believe this). In reality, they had simply had the audacity to take the word seriously: they had tried to give it a consistent meaning that adhered to the ways in which ordinary people used it. This task was impossible, because ordinarily 'knowledge' is used in a loose sense—one might almost say a metaphorical sense. If you asked a normal intelligent person if he agreed with the definition of knowledge as "a true belief the truth of which one is certain, on the basis of his internal justification for the belief", he would say, "Yes", because that is how the word is used. But if you observed how he used the word in his

daily interactions, you would see he understood both "certainty" and "internal justification" loosely. For instance, suppose you said, while indicating an object in the distance, "You know that's a tree over there, right?" He might say, "Of course I know it! It's tall, it has leaves, and it's brown." Upon approaching it, though, he sees it is a papier-mâché model of a tree. "I guess I didn't know it was a tree after all," he says. His judgment that he had known it was a tree was false, because, first, his belief was false, and second, his internal justification was not sufficient. This kind of outcome is conceivable in every scenario, which means that people never have knowledge (for they are never in a position to ascribe knowledge to themselves). It is conceivable even with regard to the statement that I know I have hands, because the division between me and the objective world (or objective truth) ensures that my internal justification is not sufficient. (I may, for example, be deluded by an evil demon, à la Descartes.) Even the statement that I know I exist is subject to doubt, because I can imagine the possibility that in some metaphysical realm I do not "really" exist in the way I think I do. In other words, that I can imagine the truth of not-p (where p is the proposition in question) is sufficient to rule out certainty.

The different kinds of knowledge

It would be impracticable, however, to stop using the word 'knowledge' in social interactions. Thus, we are forced to posit two kinds of knowledge: that which is impossible and that which is presupposed in daily life. We may call the first kind "reflective knowledge", or "absolute knowledge", and the second "conventional knowledge". The second is not knowledge *per se*, but, loosely speaking, it can be called such. To try to analyze in detail the standards according to which conventional knowledge-attributions are made would be difficult, because they vary between contexts. Broadly speaking, though, S has "conventional knowledge" that p if S is fairly certain that p and S has some sort of compelling internal justification—and, in some contexts, external justification (see below)—for believing that p. Examples of such knowledge would include my beliefs that the earth is approximately spherical, that I live in St. Louis, and that I will spend Christmas in Rhode Island. I "know" each of these statements. Notice that beliefs need not be true in order to count as (conventional) knowledge. Only in retrospect is the truth-criterion relevant: if I learn that the earth is not spherical, I will think, "Obviously my belief that the earth was spherical did not count as knowledge"; still, at the time, it did. Otherwise we are never justified in attributing knowledge to ourselves (since we are never in a position to decide, beyond doubt, that a given belief is true). The reader may find it problematic that the same belief can count as knowledge at one time but not at another—because people are inclined to think a belief is either true or false, and therefore that it either *is* knowledge or *isn't*—but this ambiguity in my account accurately reflects the ambiguity in the common use of the word 'knowledge'. According to the precise definition of the word, the reader's intuition is indeed correct; but according to the word's conventional use, there is no "objective truth" about whether a given belief is "*actually*" known. Rather, it is known if someone believes it is known. Conventional knowledge exists only by convention, only in and through the ways in which the word 'knowledge' is conventionally used; therefore, it is as logically imprecise as convention. The essentialist definition of knowledge I gave above is the logically (and intuitively) valid, but unrealistic, extrapolation from convention; the non-essentialist definition is the logically (and intuitively) problematic, but realistic, extrapolation. It will collapse in logical paradoxes if examined too closely, but to examine it closely would be, effectively, to misunderstand it.

I should note that on the extreme end of the spectrum of forms of conventional knowledge—which spectrum ranges from the most lenient to the most stringent criteria for knowledge-attributions—is knowledge that satisfies Gettier requirements. "Goldman's barn case" is a kind of Gettier example:

> S is driving in the country and stops in front of a barn. Unbeknownst to S, S is looking at one of the few genuine barns in an area spawned with barn facsimiles. The facsimiles are so realistic that if S had stopped in front of any of them, S would have been tricked into thinking he was looking at a real barn. But by luck S has stopped in front of one of the few

> real barns left in the area. The standard intuition is that S does not know he is looking at a real barn, because he could easily have had the same belief while looking at a facsimile.[1]

If the (potential) knowledge-attributer is aware of all the information, unlike S, he will not attribute knowledge to S because the truth of S's belief is accidental. Only if S has all the relevant information will knowledge be attributed to him. This kind of knowledge falls under the concept "conventional knowledge" (despite the stringency of its conditions as compared with those of knowledge-attributions in more mundane contexts) because, like all conventional knowledge, it is merely an approximation of absolute knowledge, such that neither S nor the attributer can ever be sure he has *all* the information. Even if S is aware of the Gettier conditions that the knowledge-attributer is aware of (and thus, according to the attributer, has knowledge), they both may be unaware of other (relevant) conditions that might conceivably exist, and which therefore vitiate S's knowledge. Hence, even knowledge that (from the attributer's perspective) satisfies "Gettier clauses" is fallible, like all conventional knowledge.

The distinctions I have made suggest solutions to several traditional epistemological problems—for example, the controversy surrounding Academic Skepticism (to use the terminology of Sextus Empiricus[2]). Academic Skeptics claim we cannot have knowledge of "epistemically interesting" types of propositions, that is, propositions that are "generally thought to be known given what we ordinarily take knowledge to be".[3] According to the arguments I have proposed, skepticism cannot be refuted. People cannot have reflective (or absolute) knowledge. Perhaps the reader will retort that I am contradicting myself: "you say we cannot have knowledge, but clearly you think that that proposition itself can be known!" While I do think the proposition is true, I do not think it can be known for certain. So I am not contradicting myself. "So you accept skepticism? Does it not disturb you that all your beliefs may be false?—that you have no knowledge?" No, it doesn't disturb me in the least. I must admit that I have never been as terrified of skepticism as most philosophers are. That I do not have absolute knowledge vis-à-vis any of my beliefs seems to me like a purely scholastic problem. It does not mean, for example, that my beliefs are probably false. Skeptical possibilities (such as the "evil demon" and the "brain in a vat" hypotheses) are so ridiculous that I feel entitled to ignore them, even while knowing[4] that they remain possibilities. Moreover, they are often patently delusional. For instance, to suggest that I may be a brain in a vat is effectively to suggest a self-contradiction. The I that I am is *right here*; the word 'I', as applied to myself, has no meaning outside of my immediately existing, immediately self-present self here in this world. It is absurd to say I am two beings at once—I am *this* self *and* a brain in a vat somewhere in the 'background'. Nevertheless, because I acknowledge the possibility that in some metaphysical world hidden from me self-contradictions may somehow be true, I cannot say that I *know* I am not a brain in a vat. –In short, skepticism is irrefutable, but, generally speaking, it should be ignored.

The internalism vs. externalism debate is another pseudo-problem. As we have seen, the two positions are united in the true definition of knowledge, such that the debate between them becomes moot. The internal justification that is a prerequisite for knowledge incorporates external justification: i.e., in order to know that p, one must have perfect knowledge of everything that directly relates to one's belief that p. Regarding conventional knowledge, we have seen that S's possession of internal justification is almost always a prerequisite for attributing knowledge to S; in many cases (such as Gettier contexts), the attributer requires also that S be externally justified. If asked, most people would probably say that external justification (such as that the truth of the belief in question is not accidental) is *always* necessary; however, in practice people often ignore this criterion when attributing knowledge to themselves and others. Because the nature of conventional knowledge varies between contexts (since people do not always use 'knowledge'

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[1] Berit Brogaard, "Can Virtue Reliabilism Explain the Value of Knowledge?"

[2] See Peter Elien, "Chapter 11: Skepticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, ed. Paul K. Moser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 337, http://www.questia.com.

[3] Ibid.

[4] In this context (as in most others), I use 'knowledge' in the sense of 'conventional knowledge', not 'reflective knowledge'.

in the same way, with the same criteria determining their attributions)—in other words, because there is no "truth of the matter" about whether a given person has knowledge; rather, he has knowledge simply if someone attributes it to him—we are forced to say that external justification is sometimes necessary and sometimes not. It depends on the context and on the knowledge-attributer.

My position may seem similar to contextualism; however, the parallels are superficial. A contextualist thinks that if the attributer is in a low-standards context, the person to whom knowledge has been attributed does indeed know that p; if, on the other hand, the attributer is in a high-standards context, the person does not necessarily know that p (even if the 'p' in question is the same proposition that the low-standards person knew). According to my position, neither person has knowledge in the strict sense, but in the low-standards context, the person does have conventional knowledge. The reason, however, is that we have done away with the truth criterion (except when the attributer has it in mind); if we had not, even in the low-standards context the person would not necessarily have knowledge. This is the flaw in contextualism: it forgets that truth is unaffected by a lowering of standards. That I lower the standards for my knowledge-attribution does not make it any more likely that the person to whom I am attributing knowledge has grasped truth. We may illustrate the point by taking an example from John Hawthorne's paper "The Case for Closure"[1]: a newspaper prints the statement that Manchester United beat Coventry City. According to contextualism, a reader who does not consider the possibility that the statement is a misprint knows that Manchester United beat Coventry City, while a reader who does consider such a possibility does not know that Manchester United beat Coventry City (because he is unsure whether it is a misprint). As it turns out, the statement was a misprint; thus, the reader in the low-standards context could not have "known" that the statement was true, if knowledge implies the statement is in fact true (as a contextualist thinks it does). Nevertheless, a contextualist is committed to saying that he did know it; therefore, contextualism is false. The position I have outlined is more tenable, in that it denies that (in every context) p need be true in order for one to know that p. This does seem counterintuitive, but it adheres to conventional practice.

If my account is correct, where does it leave epistemologists? For one thing, it means that many of them have wasted the last forty years. Not all have, though. The foundationalism-coherentism debate is left intact, as is the empiricism-rationalism debate. These issues are unrelated to the definition of knowledge; they bear only on (an individual's or a community's) *understanding*. Understanding should be distinguished from knowledge (in both of its senses): it is a "system" or a "schema"—though not necessarily a well-organized, consistent one—that both *is* an interpretation and serves as a *framework* for interpretations of experience. It can be loosely defined as the collective body of "knowledge" of a given entity (whether individual or communal); however, it is not necessarily *true*. The areas of epistemology that are involved in analyzing the structure of understanding, but not in asking whether we *know* a given proposition, are left unharmed by my arguments.

"Still," the reader may ask, "are you saying we don't *know* that, e.g., 5 + 2 = 7, or that trees generally have leaves, or that bachelors are unmarried adult males? If so, what do you mean?" Basically, the thrust of my arguments is that to ask such questions is misguided. To say we don't know that p, when p is something like "5 + 2 = 7", is largely meaningless. Nevertheless, the existence of these sorts of questions (and their stubborn resistance to being answered) shows that, in a sense, we do not, after all, *absolutely know, beyond any conceivable doubt*, that 5 + 2 = 7.

It may help, in this context, if I make use of one last classification, one last category of knowledge. (I probably should have introduced it earlier, but—better late than never.) Aside from knowledge in the strictest sense ("absolute knowledge", or "reflective knowledge") and knowledge in the loosest sense ("conventional knowledge"), there is knowledge in the sense of 'My doubt that p is empty, meaningless, in that I cannot imagine what it would be like for p to be false'. We may call this "unconditional knowledge", since there are no conditions under which we can concretely imagine it is false. It can be subdivided into two classes: statements whose justification is *a priori*, and statements whose justification is *a posteriori*.

[1] See *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, eds. Mattias Steup and Ernest Sosa (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 39.

Such propositions as “Grass turns green in the spring”, “All cubes have twelve edges”, and “I have hands” are unconditionally, and conventionally, known, though not absolutely known. (Unconditional knowledge may be seen as a subclass of conventional knowledge, since it too is but an approximation of absolute knowledge.) The criteria for unconditional knowledge-attributions are that both the attributer and the person to whom knowledge is attributed have internal justification and certainty so overwhelming that they cannot imagine “what it would be like” for the proposition in question to be false. If it were, their entire “*understanding*” would be thrown into confusion: their cognitive/conceptual framework for interpreting experience would collapse, and they would lose faith in all their former beliefs. Even a proposition like “President Bush went to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina hit the city” is unconditionally known (by me), because if it were false I would lose faith in the methods I use to interpret experience, the methods of collecting evidence and forming beliefs, and thus I would come to doubt nearly everything I had formerly known. Examples of propositions that are conventionally but not unconditionally known are “I will spend Christmas in Rhode Island”, “I will go to class on Thursday”, “The common belief that there are nine planets in the solar system is correct”, and “Geologists are right that the earth is about four billion years old”.

It may be asked, “Are statements that satisfy Gettier-clauses unconditionally known, or merely conventionally known?” This question is difficult to answer; however, it is also insignificant. It treats classification as an end in itself. If one’s goal is to attain insight into the nature of knowledge, there is no point in trying to decide whether statements that pass Gettier-standards satisfy the criteria on which unconditional knowledge-attributions are based. What matters is that these statements are not *absolutely* known, nor are they as fallible as the loosest kinds of conventional knowledge. The notions of conventional and unconditional knowledge are not—and need not be—defined with complete precision, in an attempt to make them somehow “correspond” to an objective reality; they are merely useful tools for conceptualizing knowledge-attributions.

Incidentally, it would not be futile for epistemologists to analyze—as they are apt to—how it is that people come to have unconditional knowledge (or even conventional knowledge) of certain beliefs; however, I think that this task might be more appropriate for psychologists than philosophers. Or maybe they could work together. I do not think, though, that the dialogue (between philosophers, psychologists, or whomever) should be framed in the dogmatic way it has been in recent decades; rather, it should be informed by an open-minded, “relativistic” attitude, grounded in recognition that knowledge-attributions do not, and should not, adhere to a single set of criteria (be they “internalist”, “externalist” or whatever). But regardless of the ways in which epistemology will proceed in the coming years, its practitioners have, for the past few decades, been misled by a lack of preciseness and a conflation of categories. In order to make progress they should start defining their terms more carefully, by observing how they’re used in ordinary contexts and making explicit all the implicit dimensions of such a concept as ‘knowledge’.

This paper has left some questions unanswered; its purpose, however, was only to sketch the framework of a way out of the confusion that defines the contemporary epistemological scene.

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I should have followed more closely the guidelines of the assignment. But I don’t like writing papers that aren’t original contributions. Nor will I use contemporary jargon, if I can help it. I made a point of not mentioning Dretske’s “conclusive reasons” or Nozick’s “truth-tracking” or Sosa’s “virtue reliabilism” or blah blah.

Did you notice the Sartre I inserted in there? Uniting Sartre and Wittgenstein: that’s interesting.

Wednesday, November 30

You shouldn’t care what people think of you. Why? Because, presumably, their opinions usually aren’t “right”. (Or, at least, they “aren’t the whole story”.) For if they were, then surely you’d have a reason

to care about them. At any rate, you'd be self-deluded and callous if you didn't. Therefore, if the advice is to have any soundness, it assumes that judgments are generally ignorant and unperceptive. Including your own. So you're being hypocritical in thinking that your judgments of people are right. (Obviously this isn't a blanket condemnation of *all* judgments. Some are manifestly true. I'm questioning only the problematic ones, which tend to have an element of 'good' or 'bad'.)

Or will you say that even if his opinion is right you shouldn't care about it? –Because you're free, because everyone has flaws, because you can't spend your life worrying about what every passerby thinks of you. (That's less a justification than a motivation. But it's also a justification, albeit a weak one.) Everyone has flaws: that's an acceptable argument. That and the other are sufficient to justify the advice.

Thursday, December 1

I'm tired of experimenting. Tired of taking Nietzsche's maxim to an extreme. It ain't worth it, even if it does bring life closer. For nearness to life is by no means a desirable experience. I took Ginseng pills this morning; they had no effect until the afternoon, when in the middle of class I suddenly lost my ability to talk. My tongue caught in the back of my mouth. It felt like if I said one more word I'd explode, either in tears or in a panic attack. Or I might just choke. A very surreal experience. And very scary. I thought about fleeing the room. Later, on the way to the gym, as I was walking in the night I hallucinated a writhing mass of translucent worm-like things—two sets of them, one in the foreground and one in the background. I could reach out and touch them. But as suddenly as they'd come they vanished. This got me to thinking: how far would these symptoms go? Would I hallucinate more and more and finally go blind? You laugh at the idea, but at the time, in my state of mind, it seemed eminently realistic. After all, I didn't know how Ginseng reacted with Wellbutrin and Paxil. Maybe blindness was a side-effect. I panicked, which is rare for me. Bothered by all sorts of ideas. Looked in the mirror a few inches away, examined my eyes: bloodshot. Lifted a lid and looked underneath to see the naked eyeball vulnerable, completely vulnerable, open to being plucked out. *Horrifying*. I thought of the scene in *Kill Bill 2* when Uma plucks out the eye of her adversary, who flails and screams. I could see myself doing that. Reaching in there, yanking it out and squishing it between my toes; then going berserk. Kept looking at the mirror, fascinated. The loss of control, the loss of being-human, the becoming-an-animal. Felt strangely pulled to do the unthinkable as the sight of the animal overtook me. Something so different from what life has always been—so intense, *real*, I was riding a whirlpool down to oblivion. So close, my hand just waiting for the go-ahead.... So I backed away. Didn't trust myself.

Home, I sat on the rug, hands shaking. Thought, thought. How unreal it all is! Wouldn't the world stop existing if I did? Why did I worry about my parents? They wouldn't exist anymore! Everything was literally imaginary. Suicide as an experiment! Suicide from philosophical skepticism. Thoughts kept bouncing from epistemology to loneliness to unreality to epistemology. Tears came, from the drugs. Very severe. Intolerable. Hands pressed against forehead, forcing it in, trying to crack it like an eggshell. I couldn't stop these thoughts from coming! Thoughts like observing myself, knowing I'd write all this, knowing I'd look at it later disinterestedly, knowing I'd look fondly on this agony and smile but so sad now but *wanting* to be sad (or maybe not), relishing the reality of the experience yet wondering if it was real or an act, wondering if I was in fact relishing it or was this too only another act, thinking of the future reader, *lonely lonely* and thinking of all these people thinking how hard it must be to have a mind that is *never satisfied*, one fleeting thought after another, first-order second-order third-order, each an observation of the last order, wondering what is the explanation of tears (water leaking from the eye?!!), hating my curiosity, thinking of Sandy's repudiation of our friendship due to one night when I was glum and acted so, the fragility of friendships. But mostly just *Get away from me, mind!* I was really fed up.

Enough with the drugs. My ordinary mental state is bliss compared to the drug frenzy.

[...]

Saturday, December 10

Some esoteric questions that don't want to be answered turn out to be pseudo-problems, arising either from the deceptive nature of language or from the solution's being available only from a perspective that's so obvious it's overlooked. I've probably mentioned in the past my confusion about how it's possible that I can find mankind at once so despicable and so lovable (and pitiable). Or how I can dislike a person one day and adore her the next day. "Those reactions must be totally irrational, nearly groundless, if I can fluctuate from one to the other!" In a sense, of course, they are. But a rational justification can be invented for them (and that's all I need). Namely, some of people's traits are likable, or forgivable, and others aren't. People are often 'innocent', ignorant only because of their innocence (i.e., lack of experience/intelligence), rarely have control over who they are—and then there are all the qualities that are positive in themselves. On the other hand, insofar as there's such a thing as free will, people don't try hard enough to be empathetic, kind, informed (whether interpersonally, politically, economically, artistically) and so on. And obviously they're capable of the most barbarous sadism. And they're just plain stupid.[1] So my love focuses on the first class of traits, my dislike on the other. That's the explanation.

My faith in the power of reason is totally anachronistic, and even contradictory with myself. I'm the bastard child of a union between the Enlightenment and Existentialism—the Masculine and the Feminine.

Monday, December 12

My admiration of Bach consists primarily in the fact that he was the composer least susceptible to sentimentalism, yet, along with Mozart and Beethoven, most prone to passion.

But also, he operated by instinct to a greater degree even than Mozart. The prelude completed by Gounod and named "Ave Maria" testifies to this: its harmonies, which Bach composed, are so mathematically perfect that one of the most beautiful melodies in musical history—one of the most natural, most symmetrical, most logical—was latent in them. We have Gounod's genius to thank for the melody, but we have Bach's to thank for its substance.

In short, Bach was nature's chosen vehicle for the musical expression of its physical principles.

Friday, December 16

Here's another paper:

Holism in the Sciences

The debate between methodological individualism and holism has lasted well over a century, and a consensus will probably never be reached. The questions involved have, until recent decades, tended to be conflated: ontological claims have been equated with explanatory claims, which have been equated with semantic claims. In his book *Varieties of Social Explanation: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Social Science*,[2] Daniel Little distinguishes between three main questions: "What sorts of things is society

[1] Their stupidity, though, provides fuel for both reactions. Since they don't have control over it, it's forgivable. It is in fact a wrong that nature has perpetrated, and as such can induce me to feel pity and compassion (for our poor, wronged species).

[2] (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), p. 183, http://www.questia.com.

composed of?", "What do societal concepts mean?", and "What method should be followed in explaining social phenomena?" The individualist gives the following respective answers: (1) society is simply an aggregate of individuals; (2) the meanings of such collectivist concepts as 'state' and 'class' can be reduced to concepts about (interactions between) individuals; and (3) social explanations can be—as J. W. N. Watkins puts it—"deduced from (a) principles governing the behavior of participating individuals and (b) descriptions of their situations".[1] The holist, on the other hand, answers, more or less, as follows: (1) society is composed not only of individuals, but also of relations between individuals (to quote Louis Althusser); (2) the meanings of societal concepts are not reducible to individual-level concepts; and (3) social relations—or, ultimately, macroscopic tendencies—have explanatory primacy. Now, the same kind of answer need not be given to all three questions. An individualist's ontology, for example, does not entail an individualist's theory of meaning—because the meaning of a given concept (which is determined by the ways people use it) has nothing to do with insight into the true nature of the world (because neither does conventional linguistic practice)—nor does it entail an individualistic methodology—though I shall have to argue for this claim later, due to its complexity. Daniel Little argues convincingly against the individualist's theory of meaning; in this paper I'll answer the ontological and explanatory questions, defending the holist's position (while qualifying it in minor respects).

Ontology

Here are two classic statements of methodological individualism, the first by Watkins, the second by Karl Popper:[2]

> ....[T]he ultimate constituents of the social world are individual people who act more or less appropriately in the light of their dispositions and understanding of their situation. Every complex social situation or event is the result of a particular configuration of individuals, their dispositions, situations, beliefs, and physical resources and environment.
>
> ....[A]ll social phenomena, and especially the functioning of all social institutions, should always be understood as resulting from the decisions, actions, attitudes, etc. of human individuals, and...we should never be satisfied by an explanation in terms of so-called "collectives"...

The first point to be made is that Popper is not entitled to his conclusion. His methodological claim does not follow from his ontological one. This is because (assuming Popper's ontology) it is possible to sum up the micro-level, atomistic facts of a given macrocosm and extrapolate tendencies that we then phrase in collectivist terms. In other words, we can legitimately abstract features of a collective without invoking the individuals who compose it. For instance, as a partial explanation of George W. Bush's reelection in 2004 one might say, "His support among the Hispanic population was important". "The Hispanic population" is a collective, yet the explanation offered is satisfactory. One can in this way abstract a plethora of features of any collective from the innumerable microstates that compose it, whether it be an economic class, a group of individuals with the same occupation, an ethnicity, or a social institution. "The bureaucracy of the State department is inefficient." Even assuming an individualist ontology, this holistic claim is perfectly legitimate. Indeed, it would be absurd and otiose to say, instead, "The individuals from whom—or from whose acts—the concept of the 'bureaucracy' is abstracted operate in such a manner that it takes a

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[1] J. W. N. Watkins, "Ideal Types and Historical Explanation," in *The Philosophy of Social Explanation*, ed. Alan Ryan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 88. Friedrich Hayek expresses the principle differently: "there is no other way toward an understanding of social phenomena but through our understanding of individual actions directed toward other people and guided by their expected behavior". (Ibid., p. 121.) Both Watkins' and Hayek's statements amount to the idea that explanations must begin with the acts of individuals considered atomistically. They are then 'added up'. (See below.)

[2] Quoted in Steven Lukes, "Methodological Individualism," ibid., p. 121.

needlessly long time for a directive by one of their superiors to be actualized." To expunge references to collectives from explanations would be to make explanations far more verbose than they have to be.

Perhaps Popper would object to the latter example, since it is not an explanation *per se*. It is merely a description, and so his stricture does not, strictly speaking, apply to it. (This would be a sophistical objection, but I'll ignore that.) Here is a better example: "The state typically adheres to the interests of the capitalist class, because this class wields far more economic power than any other, and economic power yields political sway." It is hard to see how Popper's social ontology is incompatible with that statement, even though it makes no reference to individuals. Indeed, it refers only to collectives and relations between them, both of which concepts ('collective' and 'relation') are deemed not to 'really' exist. Its concepts could be translated into individualistic ones—thus: "Politicians generally act according to the interests of their capitalist donors...."[1]—but there seems little point in carrying out this reduction.

However, this whole discussion is confused (mirroring, in this respect, the historical debate between holism and individualism). If individuals and their actions were indeed the only socially relevant things that existed, then obviously social explanations would necessarily invoke only individuals and their actions. If there were no such things as relations, collectives and so on, theorists could not refer to them. But then there would be no debate between individualism and holism: all theories would, by necessity, be individualistic. This is not the case, however, so relations and collectives must in some sense exist. In some 'abstract' way, there clearly are such things as relations between people. Not even Popper would deny this. But what does it mean? This question cannot be answered in an intuitively satisfying way, although it has preoccupied philosophers for millennia. The medieval scholastics, for example, were divided into three positions: realism, according to which such 'universals' as relations exist outside the mind; conceptualism, according to which they are mind-made; and nominalism, according to which they do not exist at all. In his paper "On What There Is", W. V. Quine respectively associates each of these with the modern doctrines of logicism, intuitionism, and formalism. The point is that none of these answers (to the question of what it means for relations to exist yet not to exist in the same way that material objects do) is relevant to the philosophy of social science. That is, it does not matter which of them is true: it will not change the opinion of either an individualist or a holist. Suppose it turns out that social relations do (metaphysically) exist outside the mind; the individualist will say, justifiably, "Well, they don't *really* exist! They don't exist in the way that people do!" On the other hand, if it turns out that relations do not exist at all (whatever that would mean), the holist will say, with justification, "Well, since we can coherently talk about them, obviously it isn't senseless to say they exist. So I will stick to my original claim (viz., that social relations not only exist but determine the nature of social interactions)." Now, because these three ontological positions are exhaustive,[2] there is no relevant answer to the question. Therefore, to argue for or against the doctrine that social relations exist is misguided. It is based on a misunderstanding; whatever one's position, nothing substantive is said.[3] Thus, the ontological question itself is misguided.

That argument may have been too quick. I have another, though. Louis Althusser goes so far as to say that society is composed *only* of relations:[4] "What constitutes society is the system of its social relations in which its individuals live, work and struggle".[5] Similarly, Karl Marx says (in the *Grundrisse*) that "society is not composed of individuals". To a dogmatic individualist these statements must seem perverse, just as, to a dogmatic holist, it must seem outrageous to say that only individuals constitute society. However, with a sufficiently open mind, both doctrines are understandable. It is possible to shift from

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[1] Incidentally, that translation presupposes social relations. It might be possible to express these relations in terms only of individuals' behavior towards one another, but, again, no explanatory purpose would be served in doing so. Invoking relations is a legitimate and useful way of expressing—and explaining—human interactions. –But I'm getting ahead of myself.

[2] For universals either do not exist, exist only in the mind, or exist outside the mind. There are no other options.

[3] To repeat: both sides accept that social relations exist but do not exist (in the 'concrete' way of material objects). The individualist merely emphasizes their non-existence, while the holist emphasizes their existence.

[4] Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984).

[5] Ibid., p. 85.

agreeing with one to agreeing with the other simply by experiencing what Thomas Kuhn might call a "gestalt switch". From one perspective, Marx and Althusser are right; from another, Popper and Hayek are. One might even say that society is composed of traditions, or of norms, or of institutions, or of roles, or of whatever concepts can justifiably be abstracted from people's modes of interaction; and one would be right. A societal ontology can include virtually whatever one wants it to include (within reason).

In any case, the ontological thesis of the individualist is vacuous. We have seen that he would agree with the holist that social relations abstractly exist; by arguing, then, that only people (and their actions, thoughts, etc.) exist, he is really arguing that people are the only concrete existents. He is saying, in effect, that the only things that concretely exist are things that concretely exist, namely people. He is stating a truism. No rational person, after all, would deny that "Every complex social situation or event is the result of a particular configuration of individuals, their dispositions, situations, beliefs, and physical resources and environment". What follows from that? Nothing.

Methodology

The individualist's methodology is more substantive than his ontology. Admittedly, at first glance it may seem equally truistic: to say, for example, that a theorist must look for the explanation of a bureaucracy's inefficiency in the behavior of the individuals who compose it is, in a sense, to say not much at all. No holist would disagree with that statement. He would insist, however, that the bureaucrat's behavior is itself explainable through more fundamental facts—facts rooted not in the bureaucrat's psychology but in his location within a nexus of relations that extends through the whole of society. The individualist denies this—or, at most, qualifies his agreement by saying, perhaps, that these relations are explained by human psychology and people's reactions "toward others....guided by their expected behavior". The holist retorts, e.g., that psychology cannot account for the differences between societies and that the nature of people's "reactions" depends on where they are located in the system of social relations. Then the individualist responds by invoking environmental conditions, etc., as an explanation of the differences between societies, and says that a person's location in the system of social relations depends on his psychological characteristics and past actions, etc. And in this way the debate goes around in circles, beginning to seem uncomfortably similar to the "chicken or the egg" problem.

To find a way out, we must clarify wherein lies the confusion. This entails clarifying the disagreement. What does it really mean to say that the individualist's perspective is atomistic? What does "atomism" mean? Hayek might say it means that "individual actions" are the fundamental level of analysis. But what does that mean? In itself, the principle that "there is no other way toward an understanding of social phenomena but through our understanding of individual actions directed toward other people and guided by their expected behavior" says nothing controversial. One can be a holist—a structuralist, a functionalist, a Marxist—yet subscribe to it, as far as it goes. It does not contradict the methodological injunction that relations, and the macroscopic structures they constitute, should be the focus of analysis, because the holist can consistently maintain both that a person's behavior is causally influenced by the character of the social relations in which he is embedded[1] and that the properties of a given social phenomenon supervene on the actions of individuals. Indeed, to deny that they do so "supervene" would be ridiculous: it is obvious that if the behavior of a group of people changes,[2] the nature of the social phenomena that are related to it will change (and the latter will change only if the former does). This claim is essentially equivalent to Hayek's idea that in order to understand a social phenomenon one must understand the actions in which it is instantiated (—or, at any rate, each idea implies the other); and neither idea implies that actions cannot be understood from a holistic perspective.

So we still do not know exactly what the individualist is saying. Let's look at Watkins' account of the theory: social explanations can be "deduced from (*a*) principles governing the behavior of participating individuals and (*b*) descriptions of their situations". This statement is stronger than Hayek's. A holist would

[1] I'll explain below what that means.

[2] Or, to satisfy Popper et al: the behavior of the individuals from whom the notion of a 'group' is abstracted.

not subscribe to it. It states that there is a set of principles (by which Watkins means *psychological* principles) that governs the behavior of all individuals, and that in order to understand a given social phenomenon the theorist must apply this set of principles to each relevant individual's behavior, on the basis of a description of his situation. Now we finally know wherein consists the atomism of methodological individualism: social phenomena are explained by 'summing up' the psychological explanations, and the histories, of each relevant individual's behavior. This interpretation is supported by Watkins' frequent use in his aforementioned paper of the concept of a person's "dispositions". Dispositions (to act a certain way), he seems to say, are what matter most.[1] Thus, methodological individualism, if it is to have any substance at all, is essentially a familiar form of reductionism: the reduction of sociology to psychology.[2]

Reductionism in most forms is not currently fashionable among scientists or philosophers. It isn't hard to see why: its program is unrealizable, due to practical and theoretic difficulties. Practically, the task of collecting enough data to explain, for example, the beating of a heart in terms of the movements of its molecules—or, more relevantly, a social phenomenon in terms of the psychology and the actions of all its participants—is impossible. But theoretically, most forms of reductionism are indefensible anyway, simply because when lower-level constituents combine to create a new entity, the latter has "emergent" properties that do not fit into the framework of the micro-level theory that describes the entity's constituents.

[…]

The situation is different on the level of social science. While the states of a given macrocosm still supervene on the behavior of individuals, the latter do not exist in the same kind of physical, deterministic network in which lower-level constituents exist in biological, chemical and physical entities. This is why methodological individualism is espoused only in relation to social systems: it is palpably false vis-à-vis deterministic systems, in which the interconnections between things are obvious. The existence of a psyche—that is, consciousness and will (free or otherwise)—in humans and animals somehow 'softens' environmental causality, so that it becomes mere *influence*. Thinkers are thus able to refer to the actions of "atomistic individuals", which would be an absurd turn of phrase in the natural (i.e., deterministic) sciences.

Nevertheless, emergent phenomena abound in human communities (though less so in animal ones, since social relations are extremely rudimentary). Wherever there is a social structure—a hierarchy, a network of relations, a system of roles—there is emergence. This fact in itself implies the falsity of the individualist approach. One wonders why so many thinkers have overlooked it. Have they actually failed to see, for example, that the market economy has structural tendencies? Or that the behavior of social classes follows patterns? Or that a bureaucracy is, in a sense, more than the sum of the bureaucrats' activities? Obviously not. They have been misled, I think, by the irresistible, albeit shallow, logic of their methodology. For instance, upon reading the following statement from the economist Kenneth Arrow, one's first inclination is to think its ideas are self-evident:

> A full characterization of each individual's behavior logically implies a knowledge of group behavior; there is nothing left out. The rejection of the organism approach to social problems has been a fairly complete, and to my mind salutary, rejection of mysticism.[3]

"Of course!" one thinks. "What could be more obvious?! Groups are nothing but people; once you understand the people, you understand the group!" It is strange, though, that none of these thinkers had the suspicion that this reasoning was too pat, too easy. It does suggest a useful methodological principle (on which, see below), but, as I have already noted, it does not rule out the existence of structural factors which, while supervening on people's behavior, constrain and guide their behavior as well. I think it is the

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[1] Recall too that Adam Smith, another methodological individualist *[well, that's arguable]*, grounded his system in the psychological postulate of a "propensity to truck and barter".

[2] It is ironic that Popper, in one of his rational moments, praised Marx for helping to establish the autonomy of sociology from psychology. He seemed not to realize that, in his advocacy of methodological individualism, he was effectively fighting against this autonomy.

[3] Alan Garfinkel, *Forms of Explanation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 53.

invisibility of this dialectic between relations and agents that mystifies individualists and causes them to ridicule holism. My task, then, must be to elucidate it.

The methodological principle I referred to a moment ago is something we have already encountered: namely, the injunction to find concrete mechanisms whenever there is causation due to the emergent properties of a social group. The reason for this principle is that the emergent properties do not exist in some mysterious Platonic realm, but rather in the concrete mechanisms themselves. (Or, more accurately, they are extrapolations from the latter.) For example:

> Consider the proto-capitalist market, the ur-market of the early classical economists like Adam Smith. Its essential features are that it is a collection of small entrepreneurs in a competitive market, a homogeneous collection of traders engaged in competition with one another for resources or markets. The crucial fact about this situation is that it is unstable. In fact, as the degree of competition sharpens, the homogeneous situation becomes less and less stable. Many factors contribute to this situation.[1]

Garfinkel proceeds to outline four such factors, one of which is the existence of economies of scale: "large-scale production is more efficient than small-scale; more automation can be used.... Hence a small advantage tends to become bigger." The phenomenon being explained, viz., the instability of an economy, is emergent, in that (1) it is a macro-state that is unintentionally produced as people pursue their own private ends, and (2) it cannot be derived from the sum of atomistic descriptions of each individual's behavior. It is exclusively a relational fact: it exists 'in' the relational interstices between entrepreneurs. What matters, therefore, is not how this or that entrepreneur behaves, but how his behavior affects others. We want to know his behavior not for its own sake (as the individualist assumes), but for the sake of how it makes someone else behave; and we want to know this other person's behavior only so that we can see how it bears on another's behavior. And so on. The holist's methodology, then, is a sort of negative methodology: he wants descriptions of the 'positive' or the 'present' (i.e., observable behavior) purely so he can understand the 'negative' or 'absent' (i.e., unobservable relations)—because, although it is the positive/present that concretely exists, it is the negative/absent that determines the dynamics of society. And this is because the negative determines the positive—or, less obscurely: relations 'determine' behavior. Thus, the individualist has it backwards: he adds up activities, when what must be 'added up' is how the activities *bear on one another*. He forgets that if social phenomena were mere sums of parts, mere aggregates—in the way that, for example, "taxonomic collectives" are,[2] or a herd of buffalo is—there would be no substantive relations between people, and so there would be no society.

To return to Garfinkel's example: the question we are trying to answer is how emergent properties manifest themselves. It must be in concrete mechanisms, such as those that account for the frequent superiority of economies of scale to small-scale production. It is easy to imagine the specifics of how an economy organized around the latter could evolve to one organized around the former: an entrepreneur who had the benefit of economies of scale could lower his prices, thereby forcing his competitors either to follow suit or to go out of business. This process would gradually spread through the entire economy. The individualist might invoke psychology to explain why certain entrepreneurs were successful (as in a Social Darwinistic way), or he might note the importance of luck,[3] or he might invoke rational choice theory or game theory; and from each person's perspective, his account might (*possibly*) be correct. The problem is that it ignores the essential question, namely, *why is there a pattern*? If he answers, "The pattern is simply

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[1] Ibid., p. 120.

[2] Andrew Sayer, *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1984), p. 109.

[3] Garfinkel refers to a study by C. Jencks, the conclusion of which is that luck is more important than intelligence and education in explaining the economic success of particular individuals. Chance acquaintanceships, for example, or the range of jobs that happen to be available at a particular time, or various other accidents. Garfinkel's point is that, from the individualistic perspective, luck is essential. The individualist's "hyperspecific" focus precludes his explaining *patterns*, which are necessarily holistic.

an aggregate of all these microstates" he is begging the question. The point is, what makes it possible that all these microstates can occur (in such a way that a pattern results)? Granted that, in each case, the more efficient entrepreneur will 'drive out' the less efficient; what is important is that whatever factors explain the possibility of this relation between entrepreneurs are the factors that explain the virtual *necessity* of the pattern. The individualist, if he is to be consistent with his methodology, cannot even ask the relevant question[1] (due to his hyperspecific focus, which prevents his seeing the phenomenon), much less answer it; the holist answers it by appeal to emergent properties, which manifest themselves in—one might almost say, *as*—the very microstates we are trying to explain. There is no other answer to the question that began this paragraph. Thus, an irreducible circularity characterizes society, between micro-level relations and emergent properties.[2] This circularity may be a philosophically obscure notion, but as a methodological postulate, it is necessary.

For further illustrations of the inadequacy of methodological individualism, I refer the reader to Garfinkel's book *Forms of Explanation*, which includes scores of arguments from a holistic perspective. The ideas set forth in this paper have been, admittedly, far from complete, consisting mostly of suggestions and hints, but I hope they have at least cast doubt on individualism—the only valid doctrines of which, I have argued, are the idea of supervenience, the injunction to look for concrete mechanisms, and the emphasis on "human nature" as setting the range of possible social organizations. (This emphasis, however, should not, as it were, be over-emphasized.)

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Not very well-written, but most of its ideas are true. Still, I'm bothered by the unconceptualizability of the various "dialectics".

Sunday, December 18

My second art paper: [I'm rewriting it, so I've included only the beginning here.]

The Solution to the Paradox of Horror

I have often wondered how it is that unpleasant emotions can be enjoyed. Sadness, anger, disgust, hatred, resentment, regret: they can all be "relished", depending on the circumstances. In what sense are they unpleasant, and in what sense gratifying? What does it mean to call them such? Similarly, in the realm of art, tragedy and horror movies are enjoyed by mass audiences, despite the negative connotations of 'pity' and 'fear' (which are the characteristic emotional reactions they provoke). How is this paradox to be explained? I am basically ignorant of the literature on the subject, having read only Berys Gaut's paper "The Paradox of Horror" and a few pages of the excerpt from Noël Carroll's book *The Philosophy of Horror* in the anthology *Arguing about Art*, but I would like to offer a few ideas. I'll take it as axiomatic that the true theory must apply to both manifestations of the paradox (namely, (1) pleasure as derived from emotions whose objects are *real,* and (2) pleasure as derived from emotions with *fictional* objects). The reason is that the phenomenologies of the two manifestations are essentially the same: the (implicit) thought "I want this feeling to continue" is directed towards an emotion that one would normally not want to experience. Doubtless there are certain unique features of the art-manifestation that require a supplement to the explanation of the reality-manifestation; nevertheless, the overall framework of the theory will apply to both situations.

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[1] Namely, "What is it that makes all these microstates possible?"—or, more clearly, "What is the nature of this economic structure? (And why does it exist?)"

[2] As a Marxist, I would say there is a third circularity: between the economic base and the cultural superstructure. (It is an 'asymmetric' circle, however—if that term makes any sense.)

One of the reasons why the paradox has remained unresolved since Aristotle addressed it in his *Poetics* is that philosophers have misunderstood the nature of the problem. In being confused by the possibility of finding pleasure in pain, they have thought that the solution lay in an explanation of the *causes* of the pleasure. Thus, Aristotle invoked catharsis, Hume pointed to the importance of an engaging narrative structure, and Carroll describes the fascination attendant upon the violation of one's normal conceptual categories. (See below.) While these are plausible psychological explanations, they miss the point. The main question is not 'What are the psychological causes of the pleasure?'; this question could easily be answered by an empirical investigation—a neurological and psychological investigation. The "paradox", then, would really be no more than a reflection of the incompleteness of our scientific knowledge. The main question, instead, is '*What does it mean* to feel pleasure in a painful emotion? *Where is* the pleasure? What are the criteria by which it can be pinpointed in the mind? How can pleasure and pain coexist in the very same mental phenomenon?' The main question is phenomenological rather than psychological, for the origin of the paradox lies in the paradoxical phenomenology of consciousness. Previous philosophers have been misled into asking a psychological question because the problem they were addressing is conceptually hard to grasp. The obscurity of the phenomenological intuition that piqued their curiosity (—the intuition, namely, that the pleasure is introspectively 'ungraspable', seemingly nonexistent) led them astray into formulating the wrong question. Admittedly, the psychological question is very interesting, and I'll return to it below. In order to give a full solution to the paradox, however, I must first inquire into the phenomenology of pleasure and pain in general, so as to understand why *this particular* manifestation of pleasure (namely, the horror- and the tragedy-manifestation) is problematic.

Qualia

The unique nature of qualia is at the heart of the paradox. By 'qualia' are meant the phenomenal aspects of existence, such as headaches, tastes, colors and sounds.[1] They are unusual in that they are private to the person who experiences them: no one but I has access to my qualia. In order to clarify the status of pleasure and pain as qualia, we shall first have to inquire into the processes through which qualia are named.

One's instinct may be to think that a sensation is given a name—or *could* be given a name—through a private act of ostension: one directs one's attention to a sensation and makes a sound as one does so, with the intention that from now on this sound will be the name of that sensation. For example, I press my hands together while saying "pilb", thus naming this sensation 'pilb'. So, in the future, whenever I press my hands together I say, "I feel pilb". Eventually, perhaps, this terminology becomes so popular that my word is universally accepted as having a definite meaning, comparable to 'itch' or 'burn'. This hypothetical account, however, is flawed. The problem is that no matter how often I use my new word, it will never acquire a meaning. It will never develop conceptual content; it will remain an empty, meaningless sound that I arbitrarily say whenever I do a certain action. This is intuitively obvious. The question is, *why*? Why does my word fail while other words like 'warm' and 'dry' succeed? They both name sensations, after all. What have I done wrong?

The answer may emerge if we look at another example. Suppose I define color-names through private acts of ostension. Whenever I see a shade of color that seems to be the same shade I earlier named 'dolp', I say, "This is dolp". And I do that for a variety of colors. By the end, what have I accomplished? Nothing. I have done something totally senseless. None of my names has conceptual content; they are all empty sounds, and will necessarily remain so. All I have done is make a random sound while telling myself inwardly that the color I am looking at reminds me of the color I looked at a moment ago. The difference between my artificial names and real names like 'brown' and 'red' is that the rules which govern my use of the latter are imposed on me; I do not create them, as I do with regard to my invented names. My belief that a given splotch of color should be called 'red' instead of 'brown' is almost entirely involuntary: it is determined through intuition (my intuitive response upon seeing the color), and I cannot consciously 'guide'

[1] It is controversial which features of experience satisfy this definition, but for our purposes, anything that is 'felt' (or seen or heard, etc.) is a quale.

my intuition. The essential fact here is that I come to associate various shades of color with one another during the process of learning color-names: the name 'red' applies to a given range of colors, as does 'brown' and so on.[1] How far each range extends is out of my control (except in rare 'stipulatory' cases involving unclear boundaries between the extensions of color-names). This is necessarily not true of such artificial names as 'dolp', the extension of which is subject to my whim. If I can choose what the denotation of a word will be—i.e., if I can guide myself in determining how to apply the word, and there are no restrictions on how I so guide myself—the word is meaningless. Its use is not rule-governed. (If a word has a meaning, its use is necessarily rule-governed, because the word's meaning determines the word's application.) But since there is implicit in the concept of red a negation of the concepts of brown and grey and green and so on (which, again, is due to the fact that 'red' picks out a range of colors from which are excluded the colors associated with other names), the use of it is governed by a rule, and so it's a meaningful word.[2] This is how it's possible for the statement 'That object is red' to be informative, rather than just a rephrasing of 'That object has the color that it has'. For, in saying the color is red, I'm bringing it into a relation with a *class* of colors—which I'm *not* doing by saying it is "dolp" (while concentrating on my memory of a prior act of ostension).

In other words, the point of applying a name, a universal, like 'red', to a quale is not to record the fact that this quale is similar to another that one has in the past called 'red'; it is to *abstract* the element that this quale has in common with a range of other qualia. It is an act of *violence*, as a private act of ostension is not. In the latter case, the repeated use of a name betokens a passive act of recognition that a given quale strikes one as exactly similar to another; in the former case, the purpose of naming is to *introduce* a common element in qualia which may, after all, be very different from one another. (For example, brown has a wide variety of shades. When I name two different shades 'brown', I am both recognizing that they are similar and forcing them into the same category despite their differences.) To speak in Hegelian language, the significance of my using a (universal) name is that I introduce an element of mediation into an unmediated situation: I relate two or more unmediated items[3] with one another, thus changing their essences (for me) from unmediated brute data into mediated concrete instances of a concept. *This* is the function of naming;—to introduce mediation into unmediation, thus eliminating the unmediated, i.e., assimilating it to the human mode of experience, by applying human-invented categories to it (which, pragmatically speaking, allows humans to *act* on it—to appropriate it and use it for their own benefit). For example, if we did not name qualia we would find it very hard to perceive similarities and differences between them: we would be aware only of a chaotic array of sounds, sights, tastes, smells and feelings. Our recognition of any ordering properties they had (i.e., their similarities and differences) would be muddled and half-conscious. (See the next paragraph but one.) –Private ostensive definitions can accomplish none of this. They are a pointless, passive recording of brute data.

We can see now that in our earlier example, 'pilb' differed from, say, 'headache' in many ways. Or rather: the meaning of its difference is expressible in many ways, for instance by saying that its use was not governed by a rule, or that 'pilb' applied only to a single specific quale (located in a specific part of the body) rather than to a range of qualia, or that conceptually implicit in 'pilb' was no negation of other types of qualia, or that the use of it did not introduce mediation into an unmediated quale, or that designating a sensation by 'pilb' did not bring the sensation into a conceptual relation with other sensations.

[....]

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[1] The impreciseness of the boundaries between color-categories is irrelevant to my discussion.

[2] [The first clause in that sentence may seem unnecessary, in that it really doesn't say anything that the clause in the parenthesis doesn't say also, but I included it because I wanted to tie Saussure's idea into all this.]

[3] That is, items (in this case, qualia) which are simply given to me, as brute data.

I suppose it's intolerably dense. (*I* certainly can't stand reading it.) But it's fairly original at least. (It stumbled on ideas Wittgenstein had grappled with in his *Investigations*.[1])

Monday, December 19

The second movement of the Pastoral symphony. The passage from measures 86 to 90.[2] It makes me think of Matthew 26: 36-46 and 75—not of the words but of the situation. The mortality of beauty. The sorrow of love, and the long sighs; yet the serenity. But only if my headphones are of good quality: I'm pressing them hard against my ears, the volume on maximum; my teeth are clenched because I've never encountered anything quite so painful as this music. Repeating it ten times, twenty times. Crying, of course. The violins descending in broken thirds, the violas sympathizing with them, and the flutes and oboes agreeing pithily, and then the gentle pluck of the bass after its silence, conscious that the resonance of its contribution consists in its laconic authority; but the oboes and flutes are swept up in the current and, satisfied no longer with passive assent, converse together lyrically, the violins too murmuring trills, sweet and light; the bassoons and clarinets are aroused to song, exhorting their companions with their poetry, and as the bass is carried away by this love for all that is, all is submerged in a purple cloud of harmony. A melody would disrupt the balance; harmony is everything, and there are no individuals.

Berlioz has some ideas on the third movement I hadn't thought of:

> The poet [Beethoven] now brings us in the midst of a *Joyful gathering of peasants.*[3] The dancing and laughter are restrained at first; the oboe plays a cheerful refrain accompanied by a bassoon that can only manage to produce two notes. Beethoven's intention was probably to suggest in this way an old German peasant, sitting on a cask with a decrepit old instrument, from which all he can draw are the two principal notes of the key of F, the dominant and the tonic. Every time the oboe plays its naïve and jolly tune like a girl in her Sunday clothes, the old bassoon blows his two notes. When the melody modulates to a different key the bassoon falls silent and quietly counts his rests, until the original key returns and he is able to interject again unruffled his F, C and F. This burlesque effect is wonderfully apt but the public seems to miss it almost completely.

Now that I've read this, whenever I hear that part of the movement I won't be able to suppress laughter.

An addendum to the first paragraph above: I hope you can get your hands on a copy of Monteux's recording in 1970, '71 (Decca), so you can hear what is to me the most moving single second in the whole second movement, namely when the oboe plays its three notes in the second half of measure 88. The notes that pierce through the collective fog of the harmony. Derivatively, the following three groups of three notes each. And in measures 86 and 87, the three trills in the violins with the octaval leaps. The contribution of these leaps, once the listener has picked them out, to the beauty of the passage is a compelling argument for the Shaker principle that simplicity is a gift.

Tuesday, December 20

The "educated elite" (monkeys who know big words) are easily blinded by the glitter of a thinker's aura. They attribute more to him than is there. If Nietzsche's ideas are distilled into their essence, divested of their decorative eloquence, they become no more than *interesting perspectives*—and there become fewer

[1] I haven't read that book in years, so I wasn't plagiarizing.
[2] Again, Pierre Monteux's interpretation.
[3] This is Beethoven's title of the movement.

of them.[1] If Wittgenstein's unusual personality is ignored as the irrelevance it is, his mystique dissipates and his thoughts are shorn of much substance. [....] G. E. Moore, of course, was barely a thinker at all. In the last three centuries, the only famous thinkers (outside the natural sciences) of whom the spectacle hasn't outweighed the substance are Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Hegel (possibly), Marx (possibly), and Frege. [And Chomsky!]

Suppose I say, "Marx makes pygmies of the rest of us". If you're intelligent and have a sense of humor, you'll react with something like a chuckle and a nod of agreement. But if Marx himself says, "I make pygmies of you people", you'll object violently, throw at him (self-defensive) aspersions like "deluded!" and "vain!". What is the explanation of the inconsistency? It would seem, after all, that in both cases you're being devalued. Why should you accept the first but not the second? A possible reason: because in the first case I'm including myself in the class of pygmies, you half-consciously sense that I don't mean what I'm saying. I'm saying it only jokingly, so you can agree with it with a good conscience. In fact, in nearly all such situations, the judgment has an air of the comic about it, even if it is said in sincerity. If I say, "We aren't very impressive compared to Marx", you may agree, but your agreement is little more than a shallow tribute to his name. It has no implications; it is not thought about, it is not taken seriously. Only when I am noticeably depressed do others take my judgment wholly seriously. And in that case, they argue against it. Similarly, if Marx says, "You people are inferior", you think he means it, so you argue against it. Anything but admit that you're inferior!

On the other hand, inferiority is bearable as long as you aren't the only one who's inferior. When saying the above statement I'm positing a communal bond between myself and my listeners; this bond, perhaps, is what disposes you to agree with me. It may even allow you to feel, without pain, a deep conviction that you're inferior to Marx—because you know that I consider myself inferior to him as well. Community is what you value most, not abstract superiority over another. (This latter desire may arise only in an era—such as the last five to ten thousand years, but especially in advanced civilizations—in which the health of the community is not, by necessity, the (*incomparably*) overriding concern of the individual. The community, by its mere existence and his participation in it, used to provide all the emotional security a person needed, such that he did not have to prove himself better than or equal to others in order to feel good about himself; when the community began to deteriorate (in the Neolithic age), the individual began to seek his former security in *competition*—paradoxically. The paradox is superficial, though. Before I explain why, I must clarify a few things. (What I'll call) communal security (i.e., the psychological state, not the material one) can be analytically divided into two factors: (1) the intrinsically satisfying social interactions, which consisted of a *closeness* to people, an emotional closeness, an 'openness' with everyone, an unadulterated pleasure in social happenings (which was possible because there were no such things as ulterior motives or social niceties, no reasons to dissemble, no reasons not to trust (life was too simple)—and maybe no one even *knew how* not to trust). It was the satisfaction inherent in the desire/need to be with others (and, of course, in the actual *being with* them). (2) Holistically united with it—i.e., an implicit component of it[2]—was self-respect. Without self-respect, communal life would not have been very enjoyable; but it was precisely this communal life that was (broadly speaking[3]) the necessary and sufficient

[1] His style of writing doesn't lend itself to a disinterested pursuit of truth.

[2] Which, however, can, for the purposes of analysis, be distinguished from it.

[3] Ignoring exceptional cases like emotionally debilitating intra-/inter-tribal disputes. Even if disputes were common, they weren't usually as psychologically damaging as they are nowadays, because people were less sensitive back then. They weren't adept at questioning themselves, at being dissatisfied with themselves. This is because, as I said above, life was pretty simple (there were fewer contexts in which one could question oneself). Also, the fact that life was relatively nasty, brutish and short meant that most mental energy was expended in securing the means of existence, not in evaluating oneself. But more relevantly to the present argument, the universal perception of essential equality between (the human value of) each tribe-member ensured that another's (temporary) harsh opinions of one did not generally make one feel insecure or 'less valuable'. The subtle gradations in worth between individuals that we civilized people are constantly (half-consciously) aware of and adjusting our behavior to did not exist back then. (See the next paragraph.) Communal life was essentially an interaction between equals—in fact, individuals were barely

condition for self-respect. The latter had two manifestations: during a particular social interaction, the individual's pleasure was fused with his self-respect; in solitude he was not riven by self-doubts, but was instead (on a fundamental psychological level, despite whatever momentary concerns of daily life might have been bothering him) content with himself, his half-conscious knowledge of his self-worth. This second manifestation of self-respect was derivative of the first, and of (1) above: it was a comparatively abstract residue of (—or one's half-conscious knowledge of—) one's favorable reaction to the other (or Other, i.e., all others) and his favorable reaction to oneself (which reactions were, as we have seen, inextricably united with (the first manifestation of) self-respect, such that it was a component in them and they were a component in it).

(Security achieved through competition, on the other hand, was weaker, more fragile, and less satisfying than communal security. It necessitated that one prove oneself equal to or better than others in order to gain their respect, and thus in order to feel 'secure'[1]. The pleasure of social interactions, of communal life, was no longer spontaneous and unmediated; no longer was it the case that the individual (was) spontaneously loved and needed (by) other people. Instead, the pleasure deriving from a given interaction was mediated by the individual's (half-conscious) concern with whether the person to whom he was talking was equal to or better (i.e., 'more impressive', more respected/respectable) than him. If he was approximately equal (or even a little inferior), the other man felt both the intrinsic satisfaction of interacting and the self-respect that is, on the whole, fused with it; if this other man sensed that the person to whom he was talking was superior, or felt himself superior, his satisfaction was marred by, first, the perception that he had to work hard to be impressive, and second, his relatively high self-consciousness (and consciousness of his own inferiority). (Obviously the "first" and "second" are closely related.)[2] The difference between competition- and community-security can be stated like this: the latter is (and is derived from) an immediate, intrinsic pleasure in social interactions. It is a pleasure in *one's own reaction to the other*. Its immediacy (intrinsic-ness) is made possible by the fact that there are no underlying mutual evaluations going on; everyone is equal, so there is no need to impress people, no need to worry about the impression one is making. The nature of the other's reaction is already known; there is no uncertainty; therefore, the inherent pleasure of interacting can be enjoyed. By contrast, competition(-derived)-security[3] is a kind of negative satisfaction. First, equality must be established—*relaxation*, *comfort*, *unconcern-with-being-judged* must be established; *then*, the inherent pleasure of interacting is allowed free reign. But, again, it is no longer really inherent—or rather, its inherentness is overpowered by the need to establish equality first (i.e., to negate self-consciousness). In situations in which there is no equality, various forms of self-consciousness drown out the inherent satisfaction of interacting.[4] –In other words, this kind of security is initially a function of the other's reaction to oneself, and secondarily of one's reaction to the other; the

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individuated from each other (as we individuate nowadays, such as through personality-traits)—and so self-respect was not fragile.

[1] To repeat: security can be loosely equated with self-respect. The two aren't identical—the latter is usually taken to denote a specific mental state, with fairly specific intentional content, while the former is more like a vague well-being—but they're closely interwoven. (Self-respect is sometimes thought of as precisely the "vague well-being" that I have said is called security, but due to the narrower *strict* connotations of the word 'self-respect', it is advisable to distinguish the two so as not to get confused.)

[2] The flip side is that if he perceived the person to whom he was talking as significantly inferior, he gained little enjoyment from the interaction. It should be noted that in both cases—i.e., with the superior interlocutor and the inferior one—satisfaction is a function of the strength of the communal bond. In both cases, equality is lacking, so there is little satisfaction. Self-consciousness (in two different forms) interferes with the communal bond, with equality.

[3] A better expression is: security in a competitively organized society. The expression in the text is misleading, for reasons I won't go into.

[4] A less ambiguous way of saying it is: the "inherent" satisfaction does not exist except when there is equality (or mitigated self-consciousness, or whatever you want to call it). But then it ceases to be inherent, properly speaking. Besides, my reason for originally using the word 'inherent' is that interactions '*in themselves*', *ceteris paribus*, are satisfying.

communal kind is a function solely of one's reaction to the other (because the other's reaction is a given). The first kind is conditional, the second is not.[1]

(In short, there is no paradox. Competition is a means toward community[2]—the only possible means in an age in which the processes of production have undermined the immediateness, the homogeneity, of the community. The individual will do anything to regain this homogeneity in some form, even if it means furthering its destruction *on the level of appearance*. Competition appears to fragment the community, but for the individual its purpose is to raise him to equality with everyone else—i.e., to reinstate the community.) So if you're in a community, Karl Marx's "abstract superiority" over you does not affect you.

What all this means is that our resistance to (or resentment of) a person's belief that he is better than us is a function not so much of our desire to be equal to or better than him, but of his sundering the communal bond between himself and us. More accurately, we do want to be respected by him—we do want to be equal—but not for the sake (merely) of being respected by him, nor even fundamentally for the sake of self-respect. It is instead for the sake of being in a community with him. This is an end in itself. There is nothing higher, nothing to which it is a means (unless you want to say, "It is a means to the emotional pleasure from which it is inseparable", but then you're missing the point. Pleasure, or satisfaction, in whatever form, is always implicitly the goal—of everything. The question is "What is the surest way of attaining emotional satisfaction?" Community.). The weird thing is that the satisfaction derived from a communal bond is direct: communal bond ⊃ satisfaction. If A, then B. There is no 'inner' mediary in consciousness, no phenomenologically detectable element that mediates between the bond and the satisfaction. Self-respect, for example, is not *felt*, nor even thought about (except rarely). The connection between the A and the B, it seems, is magical. Just like the connection between the pretty girl and the desire to have sex with her, and the TV-watching and the compulsion to keep watching. [See the later entries on Saul Kripke's book *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*.]

Thursday, December 29

Reading Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*. Excellent book. His method is similar to mine: intuitive. He criticizes the Frege-Russell view of names, according to which "a proper name is a definite description abbreviated or disguised". For example, 'Walter Scott' literally is nothing but an abbreviation of some such description as 'the man who wrote *Waverley*' or 'the Scottish author who lived in such-and-such a place at such-and-such time and wrote the following books....'. It does not "rigidly designate" an individual (i.e., designate the same individual in all possible worlds[3]); instead, it is synonymous with a description of the individual (in *this* world). The motivation behind the theory is the need to explain how names can refer to anything. On J. S. Mill's view, names have no descriptive content (they are empty,

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[1] The first does allow for one possibility that the second doesn't: one can contemplate with an abstract intellectual pleasure that a given person (or many people) think well of one. With communal security this does not happen. It would be absurd: the (meager) pleasure of such contemplation makes no sense except against a backdrop of self-doubt, or potential self-doubt, which exists very rarely where there is communal security.

[2] Ultimately, of course, it is a means toward [psychological] security, or satisfaction. But we have seen that a person's security—if 'security' is taken in the weakest possible sense, namely as self-respect—presupposes *at least* his equality, and that his *satisfaction* (insofar as the word can be thought of as denoting something more positive and 'forceful' than "mere" self-respect) presupposes that he does not see himself as extremely superior. So the goal of "competition" must be equality. Community. (Sorry for the confusion. I've been treating the goals of security and satisfaction as synonymous, but that wasn't quite right: 'security' can be understood in a weak sense, a negative sense (viz., the absence of self-doubt), while satisfaction can't. In its negative sense, security is compatible with seeing oneself as extremely superior; satisfaction is not. *Positive* security, i.e., satisfaction, is man's goal.)

[3] For example, the "possible world" in which Walter Scott did not write *Waverley*, or in which he decided not to become an author at all, etc.

meaningless)—so it is a mystery how anyone can ever know to whom or what a name refers (except in cases of ostension). Frege and Russell solve the problem by arguing that names do have descriptive content.

Now, this theory is the kind of rubbish I'd expect from Russell, but not Frege. I'm disappointed in him.[1] Its philosophical problems are insuperable (e.g., What is the 'true' description of a given individual? How can we know what it is? How can that notion even make any sense? The "cluster concept" idea (viz., that what is associated with a name is not a single description but a family of descriptions) is, as Kripke argues, inadequate.), but its denial of common sense is a good enough reason to reject it. How warped must a man's mind be for him to think that a name has a *meaning*, that a name fixes its referent by way of the description(s) of which it is literally an "*abbreviation*"?![2] Like many of Russell's dogmas, this is nothing but a denial of common sense. And Kripke's book is nothing but a defense—an ingenious defense—(and elaboration) of common sense. Which is why it is valuable. (Philosophers, after all, are defined by their lack of common sense.)

Returning to the paper I wrote above: most forms of explanatory reduction are motivated by the fact that a given phenomenon is ontologically reducible to a collection of microstates. Cells are composed of molecules, organisms of cells (and whatever else), societies of individuals and their behavior. From this is inferred that "the phenomena of the first kind [e.g., cellular] are explainable from the theory of the second kind [e.g., molecular]" (Garfinkel, 49). This kind of reduction—inferred from ontology—is false; I argued against it above. Another type of reductionism is: 'Everything in society, "in the last analysis", "is just" economics', or 'Human behavior "is just" an expression of primitive drives', etc. (Garfinkel, 49). This is always simplistic: it places an undue emphasis on one causal factor among many. A third kind of reductionism is unique: mental [or rather, *conscious*] states are physical states. This is an ontological claim, and it is wrong (or, at least, stated too simplistically -- categorically). It implies, or seems to imply, that consciousness is somehow an illusion, a complete illusion. All mental states are 'in fact' physical. They're just particular arrangements of, and relations between, molecules, cells, electrons, etc. This is stupid. The mere fact that there is a debate—that reductionists understand their opponents' position well enough to argue against it—shows that there is some kind of a difference between the body and consciousness. Besides, language presupposes the difference. The sentence "I feel"—or even "There is a feeling"—logically implies a mental state, i.e., something more than a chain of causation between cells.

Nevertheless, in another sense, mental states [I meant states of consciousness] *are* reducible to physical states. But not in the way that physicalists think, nor as a whole is to its parts. (Like a cell is to molecular processes.) –Before proceeding, we have to clarify a few things. A mental state is an emergent phenomenon, like a cell, a molecule, an atom, an organism. It is caused by processes on the cellular level: millions of interactions among neurons result, *as a holistic totality*, in a given mental state. The latter *is* the holistic totality of these processes. (See below.) It is all of them 'taken together', as one, in much the same way as a cell is the totality of its underlying processes. But there is a difference between the two: each microstate is a part of the cell—i.e., the cell is a whole which can be ontologically reduced to its parts and their interrelations—whereas each neural microstate is *not* a "part" of the mental state. The latter cannot be ontologically reduced to "its" parts, to *any* "parts", as can all other emergent phenomena in nature (and even society). The only thing it can be "reduced to" is the holistic totality of interactions among the participating neurons—but this is not really a reduction. The only reason it seems to be is that by "holistic totality [(which is (or results in?) an emergent phenomenon)] of neural interactions" we tacitly understand not "holistic totality" but "*aggregative* totality", the *sum* of neural interactions. We think, "A mental state is just all these neural processes put together", i.e., "summed up". We may even think we *don't* mean "summed up", even as the image we have before our minds is of a bunch of neurons interacting with each other—i.e., an *aggregate* of neurons. We cannot avoid this way of looking at the issue (of 'picturing' it), because, (1) since we know that mental states *supervene* on neural microstates, we half-consciously think

[1] Actually, I suspect that Frege's version was better than Russell's.

[2] Another kind of description theory admits that names aren't disguised descriptions, but maintains nonetheless that they fix their referents by way of the latter's descriptions.

each microstate is an essential *part* of the mental state,[1] and (2)—more importantly—we naturally assume a dichotomy between the mental and the physical, the subjective and the objective, the inner and the outer: when we hear the phrase "holistic totality of neural interactions" we think of the "other side" of the mental phenomenon, the objective side, which, we think, cannot be identical with the subjective. It must be something physical, some physical fact distinguishable from the mental state. But it is not. The latter just *is* the emergent neural phenomenon. It is the inner and the outer. The only sense in which there is an objective fact, a physical state distinguishable from the mental one, is that the mental *supervenes* on physical microstates to which we have no immediate subjective access. It is caused by millions of microstates, microprocesses, interacting. But it *is* the *totality* of these processes, the phenomenon that 'emerges' from their interactions—as a cell is the phenomenon that emerges from the interactions among the microstates on which it supervenes. The fact that cells and mental states are profoundly different is due to the cell's being *composed of* physical processes, not just *supervenient on* them. That is, even from the ontological perspective of the cell (i.e., considering it as a single thing, a unitary, concrete, causally efficacious datum), it contains [*extended*] *parts*, which can be analytically distinguished. The mental state does not. Consciousness isn't divided into parts in that way. This also accounts for the (deterministic-)causal impotence of the mental state: since it lacks [extended] parts, there are no micro-level mechanisms through which it can act and react against physical bodies.[2]

Maybe you wonder how quantitative changes can lead to a qualitative one. How is it that, given enough neural interactions, suddenly a phenomenon is produced that is not properly called physical [in the ordinary sense] (though it is, nonetheless, the holistic totality of these physical interactions)? It would be well to remember that a similar feat of ontological magic occurs whenever there is an emergent phenomenon possessing some kind of causal power. When a sufficient number of molecules get together in a sufficiently cooperative way, a cell is the result. A new entity, an ontologically distinct thing—a qualitatively different thing from its parts. This magic is *constantly* occurring in nature and society, *everywhere*. While it takes different forms—for example, an emergent fact in society is not an ontologically distinct, 'real' or 'concrete' thing, though it does possess (non-deterministic) ('top-down') causal powers and is in that sense somewhat mysterious—it is more or less as conceptually problematic as the emergence of a not-properly-physical fact from a group of physical facts. –Still, it is clear that the emergence of mind from brain is a little different than the emergence of, e.g., a cell from molecules. In fact, with the exception of mental states, all deterministic emergent phenomena in nature exist in the same Spinozistic mode (physical—physical) as their constituents.[3] Again, what the problem comes down to is the partless nature of mental states. This is their central paradox, from which derive all others (such as the impossibility of defining or describing them [as, e.g., colored, two centimeters long, located at particular spatiotemporal coordinates, etc.]). I can't even begin to explain it—primarily because I don't know what there is to explain. ("Why are mental states partless?" How would one go about answering that question? "How is it *possible* that they can be partless?" What does that question mean? "What does it mean for them to be partless?" Just look inside your consciousness. While that is not an explanation, there is no other.)

[…]

The mental state is a new thing, a 'concrete' (though not really physical), real thing. In all *other* cases, the newness of the thing consists in its possession of causal powers not possessed by the microstates that give rise to it; in *this* case [i.e., that of the mental], the newness consists in the thing's [e.g., the thought's] not having [deterministic] causal powers. Regarding all other deterministic emergent phenomena, an "ontological relativism" obtains (as I argued in my paper): they can be analyzed either from the perspective of their parts or from the perspective of themselves (the whole); in the former case they are

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[1] Just as an electron is part of an atom, an atom is part of a molecule, a molecule is part of a cell....

[2] Actually, I think the defining property of a physical object is precisely its deterministic-causal efficacy. (On the other hand, I'm not sure that the latter idea can be defined without invoking the idea of a physical object, in which case my definition is circular.)

[3] Lest there be confusion: mental states are, in this context, as deterministic as all other emergent phenomena, in that they result from, or are 'expressions' of, deterministic physical processes.

not ontologically real, while in the latter they are. Ontological relativism does not apply to mental states, though, because they do not have parts[1]—because, that is, they have no causal efficacy. They are *not* "from one perspective" nothing but neural interactions to which we have no access while "from another perspective" they are the states we experience. They are, instead, just what they are: the states we experience. The only sense in which there can be something remotely like an ontological reduction is that they are *caused by*, and *supervene on*, physical processes—but, of course, this is not an ontological reduction. When I say, "They are the holistic totalities of neural processes" it may seem like I am reducing them to something physical, but I'm not: the holistic totality is not physical [in the usual sense, which refers to extension and so on], though the *aggregative* totality is.

[…]

On the basis of these ideas, one can see that the problem of epiphenomenalism isn't much of one. [Wrong!] While mental states are not the direct causes of anything—the deterministic causes—they are essential in order for there to *be* "direct causes". Without corresponding mental states (intentions, feelings), many physical acts would not occur. I don't know the exact biological relationship between the two (because no one does), but the point is that, since mental states *are* emergent neural states, and neural activities are the direct causes of actions, there is obviously some intimate and necessary connection between mental states and the causes of actions.

(I don't feel like going further into it now.)

The fourth kind of reductionism is the troublesome one: psychology is supposed to be reducible to biology. This is unlike the first and third kinds in that it has nothing to do with ontology. First of all, the mental can be, in a way, distinct from the physical yet be explanatorily reducible to it. Second, this [viz., the idea of psychology's being 'reducible to' biology] is also not a reduction of the whole to its parts: neural activities, whether taken as a holistic [emergent] system or not, are not "a part" of the mental. I suspect this type of reductionism is true in some sense, but that for most phenomena psychology can provide 'parallel', and adequate, explanations. Not always, but usually. Still, it should ideally be supplemented with biology—because, although the mental is not ontologically identical with physical things, it is caused by them and supervenes on them.

Friday, December 30

Arthur Rubinstein is to Chopin as Glenn Gould is to Bach. They both have an uncanny way of lingering on certain notes (sacrificing the tempo) and whisking through certain passages. And so the music fills with flair.

Sometimes I repent of giving mankind something as valuable as this journal. It's like buying an exquisite porcelain doll for a child you know will break it.

I was writing in the living room when my brother came in to play the piano. He really is a bad piano player, though no one ever tells him so. But I was in an ugly mood, and his playing made it worse, so I said, "Terry, you can't play for shit. Give it up." He said, "Yes I can!", to which I replied, "And stop deluding yourself, too." "Shut up", he mumbled—after which, for the first time ever, he actually tried to play well (and succeeded, comparatively speaking). Clearly, then, he was hurt. He also became mellow—a rare occurrence!—and a half-hour later I heard him complaining to Dad that I make just as many mistakes when I play as he does. The point is that all this made me feel a little ashamed. (Or maybe not *ashamed*; maybe I just felt bad for him and wished I hadn't opened my mouth.) I thought, "Obviously I was a jerk when I said that. –But if I was a jerk, then there is, after all, substance to the claim that a given person is a jerk. But what *kind* of substance? I suppose it just means that he treats people badly, which itself is a bad thing, and so, to that extent, he's a bad person. But everything gets muddled when the word 'bad' comes into the mix.

[1] [I should have said *extension*.]

The situation can't be saved by substituting the word 'unpleasant'. The mere judgment that he is unpleasant, while true, does not have the force of 'bad', the universal(istic) and absolutist implications of it; to say that a person is unpleasant is not really to condemn him, not in any effective way. But the thrust of the word 'jerk' is condemnation, absolute unequivocal condemnation, not something relative and feeble like 'unpleasant'. So it seems that the word 'jerk', insofar as it's condemnatory, is meaningless, and insofar as it's meaningful, is not truly condemnatory. Still, no one wants to be a jerk, because he thinks it reflects negatively on his human worth. Can this impression be given a rational justification? It would seem not. Or maybe the point is that if he acts in a jerkish way even as he knows he is doing so (and knows he shouldn't be doing so), he must have a lack of self-control—and this, according to mankind's basic conceptions of what it means to be a worthy person, does reflect badly on him (because a lack of self-control is universally thought of as a powerful indictment of your value as a human being—of your freedom, your autonomy, your self-determination—more so than a mere acting-unpleasantly is, or even a mere not-being-sensitive-to-a-person's-feelings). But this isn't a satisfactory justification either, partly because it presupposes what is dubious at best: that the jerk wants to act differently but can't. In the end, we just have an intuition that to treat people badly reflects badly on the treater. We should follow our intuition and leave it at that." (All those thoughts took the form of non-propositional intuitions, so they went through my mind quickly. Too quickly for elaboration.)

What moves you?— People taking simple pleasure in simple things, unconcerned with their motives and with implications. Thoughts of simple pleasures are the most beautiful thoughts.

January 1, 2006

"Quinn Hepworth" wrote this to Marilyn vos Savant:

> In reply to a question about whether mental illness ever causes a notable good deed (the way it sometimes causes destructive behavior), you wrote: "Mental illness has something in common with an unhappy childhood. On rare occasions you can blame it, the vast majority of the time you should not, and it never deserves credit for the things you stand up and do right." First, if mental illness comes from an unhappy childhood, most people would be suffering from one malady or another! And second, Winston Churchill suffered from depression, yet wasn't he a great man? Please re-think both of your statements.

Whoever Quinn Hepworth is, he or she should be put in a lab and studied, like a rat. The reason I'm drawing attention to this little creature is not to point out that the fact that *A* has something in common with *B* does not imply that *A* is caused by *B*. Rather, I want to understand how it is possible to make this mistake. I have to assume that if this "Quinn" creature sat down to think, it would agree that it had made a logical fallacy. I suppose the reason it did is that it was thinking quickly and carelessly; but the mistake itself is telling. The masses have a tendency to confuse *similarity* with *causation* (and also *correlation* with causation). If *A* is similar to *B*, the instinct is to assume a causal link. This is closely related to the assumption that two things that are similar in appearance are similar in essence. (What is the exact relation between the two beliefs? I don't know.) The latter mistake, by the way, is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for the primitive ideas of animism and many other mass ideologies.

On pages 144-155 of the 1980 edition, Kripke argues forcefully against mind-brain identity theorists—who, in this day and age, are materialists. I'll give a very condensed summary of his account (skipping much of it) so I can show why it isn't damaging to my own resolution of the mind-brain problem.— Earlier, Kripke argued that, if A = B, their identity is necessary, because identity statements are

between objects rather than just their names (as some theorists think[1]), so that to say that Cicero is Tully is to say that the man referred to by 'Cicero' is the man referred to by 'Tully', which means, effectively, *this man is this man*, which is a necessary truth. So, if, for example, heat is identical with the movement of molecules, heat is *necessarily* identical with the movement of molecules. The identity statement is saying that the phenomenon referred to by 'heat' and that referred to by 'the movement of molecules' are one and the same—and obviously a given phenomenon must be identical to itself. The explanation of the fact that the identity of heat and molecular motion seems to be contingent—in that it was empirically discovered, and could conceivably have been otherwise—is that, in making this judgment, we implicitly conflate 'heat' with the '*feeling* of heat'. The feeling of heat is indeed not identical with the movement of molecules; in another possible world, a being could have a sensation identical to our heat-sensation even when not in the presence of molecular motion, in which case the sensation is not caused by heat (i.e., molecular motion). Therefore, it seems to us, mistakenly, that the identity of heat and molecular motion is contingent. The identity theorist, aware of the common intuition that mental states are not identical to physical states—and that, if they are, the identity is a contingent relation—and, moreover, recognizing, with Kripke, that identity claims applying to objects denoted by rigid designators are, if true, *necessarily* true, understands that if his own identity-claim is correct, it must be *necessarily* correct, and thus that the common intuition (of the *contingency* of mind-brain identity) has to be explained away. He might be tempted to do this by saying there is an analogy between the mind/brain identity and the heat/molecular-motion identity: we think of the latter as contingent, despite its necessity, because we conflate heat with the *perception* of heat; similarly, we think the mind-brain identity is contingent despite its necessity because we conflate mental states with our....perceptions of them? But he sees immediately that there's a problem. The analogy does not hold up. Mental states just *are* our perceptions of them, while heat is not our perception of heat. The distinction between heat and our perception of it was essential to the explanation (and explaining-away) of our belief that the equation of heat with molecular motion is contingent; since there is no distinction between mental states and our perceptions of them, the identity theorist cannot explain away our troublesome dualistic intuitions by invoking such a distinction. Therefore, it seems that there is a mind-body dualism after all.

My position is neither dualistic nor monistic (properly speaking), but it has affinities with both. Mental states are emergent neural states, and emergent neural states [of the relevant type[2]] are not "physical" [as, say, a protein molecule's interaction with a cell is]. So there is a kind of mind-brain identity here; but it is immune to Kripke's criticisms. For, in order for it to be true, our common Cartesian intuitions need not be explained away. It acknowledges their truth: neural processes 'in themselves'—i.e., considered as an *aggregate* of chemical releases and action potentials, an atomistic aggregate—are not mental states. This is as far as the intuitions go. They have no implications regarding the idea that the *emergent state* of neural processes is the mental state. There is no common intuition that this emergent state can be only contingently identical with a mental state—largely because no one has any idea how to conceptualize the "emergent state" of a neural system. Nevertheless, there *is* such a state (there *must* be); and it is none other than our mental experience—our mental states—which, of course, themselves cannot really be conceptualized, which is yet another argument for my ideas. (Emergent state: unconceptualizable. Mental state: unconceptualizable. ∴ It's possible that mental state = emergent state.)

Damn it, man, it would be refreshing to be *wrong* for once!

By the way, as I sped through that Kripke summary I felt like Will Hunting in the scene with the projector, talking to mediocrities like Rouse and Horst and everyone else who spends his academic life immersed in other people's ideas: "Do you have any idea how *easy* this shit is for me? It's a *fucking joke*!" That's the kind of thing they're impressed with, that regurgitation. 'You can start doing original work, if

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[1] I.e., some theorists think that the statement "Cicero is Tully" says only that 'Cicero' and 'Tully' are names of the same man, rather than that the *man designated by* 'Cicero' is the man designated by 'Tully' (in other words: this particular man is this particular man). [Surely, however, a statement like "Cicero is Tully" can be interpreted in both ways, in Kripke's way and in his interlocutors' way.]

[2] [There are, after all, different kinds of neural states/processes, some of which are involved in "mental life", some of which are not.]

you're lucky, when you're studying for your doctorate. But not before.' Fucking nihilists. If you display a firm grasp of someone else's philosophy, you've earned their respect. But as soon as you venture into uncharted territory, where there are no famous names by which they can get their bearings, no theoretic landmarks, they decide you're lost and abandon you. Rouse's favorite page in my senior thesis was the summary of McInerney's summary of Husserl. Why? Because it was the only thing he could relate to.

By the way, in that long entry above I not only put forward a new theory but explained the appeal of old ones (like materialism). That's what you have to do, if you want to be thorough.

Monday, January 2

It may be that a version of Kripke's criticisms applies to my ideas. We think that, if an identity relation happens to hold between a particular neural state and, say, the sensation of pain, it is contingent. It could have been otherwise.[1] Let's grant for the moment that, for the reasons given by Kripke, this intuition of contingency is problematic for the identity theorist. Is it also problematic for me? Yes and no. No, insofar as by "neural state" we do not understand "*emergent* neural state" (which is the relevant concept in my account) but rather a mere aggregate of physical states. If you ask a hypothetical person, "Is the identity of pain with an *emergent* neural state contingent?", he will be less quick in his answer (than he was in the case of etc.). He will ask, "Well, what do you mean by 'emergent neural state'?" You answer, "That's precisely the question. If I told you its meaning (more specifically, the phenomenon it refers to)—which I don't know any more than you do—that would be to beg the question against my original question. So you just have to answer the question based on your intuitions, as you did when I asked, 'Is the identity of pain with a (mere) *neural state* contingent?'" Then he'll say, "But I don't *have* any intuitions about *emergent* neural states!" "Okay, then obviously you find it neither contingent nor necessary that pain be identical with a particular emergent neural state." And so Kripke's objections don't bear on my ideas.

On the other hand, they do. For an emergent neural state is, after all, a neural state. What applies to the latter should apply to the former. The word 'emergent' just gets us flustered. –But then again, the reason it does so is that it seems to mitigate the physicalistic overtones of "neural state". In other words, it isn't the neural state as such that can be only contingently identified with pain; it is its *materialistic* aspect. But since I have done away with its exclusively materialistic aspect, there is no reason to think that its identification with pain is merely contingent. –Aaaaaah, fuck it. My original intention was to say: "In any case, I disagree with Kripke's criticisms of materialism". Unfortunately I'm having a hard time pinning down my intuition that he's overlooking something.

Another possible objection hit me as I was reading an online article about the concept of emergence. "The theory of mind called functionalism based its argument for the irreducibility of psychological and sociological categories on the fact that there are too many different physical ways that functional predicates could be instantiated for them to be reduced to single physical predicates. This makes it impossible to formulate what are called 'bridge laws', i.e., logical identities between entities in the reduced and reducing domains." I'm not sure how to interpret the first sentence (or, for that matter, the second one). But the point is, it made me wonder whether the possibility that mental states are "multiply realizable" in physical systems means that a given mental state cannot be *identical* with a neural state. Actually, forget about "possibility". That word is ambiguous. Let's suppose there is an actual case of a creature made of silicon chips that has pain-sensations exactly like our own. Does this mean that our sensations cannot be identical with (emergent) neural states, or that the creature's sensations are not identical with silicon states? No. There is no *a priori* reason to think that processes occurring in two different kinds of substances cannot

[1] And not only in the epistemological sense of 'possibility', i.e., the sense in which our former ignorance of the relation between mind and brain left open, *to us*, the possibility that mental states are not the same thing as brain states. Unfortunately I'm not clear on the nature of metaphysical possibility. What does it mean to say, metaphysically speaking, "It could have been otherwise"? See Kripke's book.

create—and *be*—the same type of non-physical emergent state (precisely because it is non-physical[1]). At most, the thought-experiment shows that I should distinguish between "type" and "token": a given type of mental state is identical not with emergent *neural* states but rather with emergent *physical* states 'of a certain kind',[2] while the particular instance of this type that occurs in humans is identical with an emergent neural state (because neural systems are the proper kind of physical system). –But I'm attributing too much importance to an outlandish functionalist thought-experiment.

Tuesday, January 3

Skimming through a book that skims over the philosophy of mind: Jaegwon Kim's *Philosophy of Mind* (1998).

My version of "emergentism" is different from other versions, judging by Kim's descriptions.

I admit that emergentism, or holism in any form, has counterintuitive elements. Downward causation, which holism is surely committed to, is paradoxical. Unconceptualizable, even. But to have an *a priori* conviction that all modes of interaction between things in the world are susceptible of conceptual explanation is nothing but a prejudice.

[…] Functionalism in general, by the way, is something of an embarrassment to philosophy. Not as much as behaviorism is, but nearly. Putnam, Armstrong, Lewis: your place is in the classroom, not the study.

I won't even argue against it. It'll die out someday.

"Why," you ask, "why—*why*—do you write and write? Can you really think that someday your thoughts will be picked up and made much of? Do you really think you're bestowing a great blessing on mankind?" I write only for myself. I don't much care whether people read. Life has given me nothing but writing and music.

A long time ago I asked why the world is structured in "binary oppositions"—or, as I said, "dualities". Man/woman, mental/physical, light/dark, right/left, up/down, ugly/beautiful, stupid/smart, good/bad, sun/moon, heaven/earth, cause/effect, appearance/essence, inner/outer, existence/nonexistence, truth/falsity.... I never answered the question (or so my unerring memory tells me). The first thing is to separate the accidental from the necessary. The sun/moon opposition is accidental; there could have been two moons. As for the *necessary*— I get the impression that rationality is somehow closely connected with the number 2. It's hard to say why. It just seems as if the ability, for example, to distinguish physical objects clearly, or to think clearly, is related to 2 and not to 1 or 3 or any other number. (Yes, I'm being serious.) Also, it seems like the series of natural numbers should be understood as an endlessly repeated repetition of 2 (or rather, a repeated application of the conceptual foundations of the number '2').[3] –Let's clarify a few things. An animal's consciousness is analogous to the number 1. It is an undifferentiated unity: physical objects are not seen as separate things; instead, consciousness simply focuses on....one thing, then another, then another, then another, without being [explicitly] aware of any differences between them (without, that is, being aware that it is focused on different things). Human consciousness is analogous to 2. It recognizes

[1] Are you still going to insist it is incoherent to say that a physical process (*emergently*) is (and, considered as a mere aggregate, *creates*) a 'non-physical' state? Well, the microstates in a cell not only (as an aggregate) *create* the cell but also (as a holistic totality) *are* the cell. Emergence is magical.

[2] I.e., not just any physical system can create mental states. It has to have special properties, such as those possessed by neural systems.

[3] I'm almost certain I didn't read any of the following ideas in the book on mathematics (of which I read only a fraction), but if I did, I'm not *consciously* plagiarizing.

difference—it *is* (a) difference; it is a difference between itself[1]—and 2 is nothing but an implication and a presupposition of difference. (2 logically follows from difference, and difference logically follows from 2.) I'm not sure what the relation is between the two concepts, nor even exactly what they (*a*) mean (since neither can be defined in a non-question-begging way) and (*b*) *are* (because the same is true of the word 'concept' itself), but I don't care.[2] The point is that, even before language arose eons ago, the notions of difference and 2 were 'implicit' in human consciousness—which means that (*a*) the sequence of real numbers was implicit (because it is essentially a repetition of the pure idea of difference: 2 is a single difference from 1, 3 is two differences from 1 and one from 2, etc.[3]); (*b*) logic was implicit (because, like mathematics, it is an elaboration of (the implications of) difference—as in the law of non-contradiction); and (*c*) it was inevitable that mankind would organize its language around differences.[4] But not only its language; its *conceptual system*. The organization of concepts is necessarily dualistic, because, although there can be differences between three and four and five things, the notion of 'dualism' is implicit in the concept 'difference'—is part of its meaning. Three and four and five are not. So, since the totality of concepts is necessarily organized around differences between them (otherwise there couldn't be *different concepts*), it is natural that many concepts will be "opposites". In other words: consciousness sees the world according to differences; 'difference' is a fundamentally dualistic concept; therefore, the simplest, most natural—not to mention most practically useful—way of interpreting reality is through dualisms.

But not only that. The world itself—in itself—seems to be structured dualistically. Assuming, of course, that causes and effects, inner and outer, male and female, positive and negative electric charges, and other fundamental dualisms that apply to nature really do exist 'out there'.

All this explains the dialectic as well—even the "synthesis" part (which obtains only sometimes), which can be seen as man's reaction against his all-too-hasty initial instinctive leap from one extreme to the other. (That isn't a thorough explanation, though.)

[Written years later: All I really had to do to explain the ubiquity of binary oppositions was to note that differentiation is negation. The more negation, the more differentiation, i.e. content. Opposites are mutually negating, so it's natural for humans to structure their understanding of the world around the principle of oppositeness. Of p vs. not-p. That amounts to the maximum degree of differentiation, which entails the maximum degree of content.]

When I gave my vague definition of rationality in my thesis and earlier in this journal, I instinctively understood the foregoing. Rationality is an instinctual, intuitive recognition of the law of non-contradiction (which, as I said above, seems to be the foundation of mathematics and logic) and its implications.

Thursday, January 5

At dinner I got us into speculations about what the coming hundreds of millennia would bring. Few people think about it. It upsets me. Dark ages are coming. Dark ages that will put the Middle Ages to shame. Why don't people open their eyes? Think of the suffering that is to come.... Suffering that will put to shame

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[1] To speak more clearly: since 'difference' is an abstract idea, it can be only *presupposed* by consciousness; it cannot *be* consciousness. But since consciousness is self-consciousness, and self-consciousness is a difference between itself and itself, one can say that, in another sense, consciousness *is* a difference.

[2] [If you think I'm being too quick with all this, you should know that I thought about the questions asked in that sentence for over an hour before ending it with "I don't care" (because I wasn't making any headway). In general, you should know that despite the quickness of my style, it takes me hours to write a paragraph like the one above.]

[3] You'll say I'm begging the question by formulating the issue in this way. (3 is two differences from 1....) But that's unavoidable. The structures of thought "beg the question" against themselves and each other. They are a holistic totality; none of them can be explained without invoking the others (which can't be explained without invoking the original explananda).

[4] See Saussure. Linguistic meaning is not possible without differentiation. The more differentiation there is between two words, the more meaningful they are.

all the suffering man has ever known. There will be pockets of resistance, pockets in which people cling desperately to old traditions like music and poetry and love. But the world will be an abyss.

If only love had the powers ascribed to it! If only it were a thing that could be pointed to! I would carry around my love on my shoulders, like a hunk of amber mined from deep in the earth.

Friday, January 6

I read David Lewis's article "An Argument for the Identity Theory" (1966). It didn't change my opinion of him. He makes the mistake of trying to *define* (types of) experiences, such as pain. "The definitive characteristic of any experience as such is its causal role." Sorry, you're wrong. Experiences don't have (non-circular) definitive characteristics. Read the paper I wrote. The definitive characteristic of pain is that it hurts, not that it causes certain kinds of behavior, etc. His argument, as he summarizes it, is: "The definitive characteristic of any (sort of) experience as such is its causal role, its syndrome of most typical causes and effects. But we materialists believe that these causal roles which belong by analytic necessity to experiences belong in fact to certain physical states. Since those physical states possess the definitive characteristics of experience, they must be the experiences." What a boring doctrine.

I can't find a copy of Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, but Ruth Millikan writes this about it:

> Kripke places a great deal of emphasis on the failure to find anything that "justifies" my proceeding as I do when I follow a rule, and he seems to think of a "justification" as something that must be, by its very nature, open to or within consciousness. Similarly: "Even now as I write, I feel confident that there must be something *in my mind*—a meaning I attach to the 'plus' sign[1]—that *instructs* me what I ought to do in all future cases. And "The idea that we lack 'direct' access to the facts whether we mean plus or quus[2] is bizarre in any case. Do I not know, directly, and with a fair degree of certainty, that I mean plus?" Indeed, many passages in Kripke's essay suggest that what bothers him the most is not that nothing seems to determine what rule I am following, but that nothing *before my mind* determines it. The feeling is conveyed that Kripke finds the real blow to be that the intentionality involved in rule-following does not reside *within* consciousness. If *that* is what Kripke takes to be the root "Wittgenstein paradox", then all will agree that Wittgenstein made no attempt to give a "straight solution" to it. Nor will I.

Wise of you, since there is no solution. This is exactly the kind of thing I've been writing about for months. The difference is that I have mentioned it not in the context of rule-following but in the context of girl-kissing, girl-fucking, TV-watching, feeling shame, being drunk, communally bonding, and what have you. It is also related to what I wrote in my second art paper. Trying to characterize the phenomenology of mental states by means of everyday concepts and the principles of ratiocination is abortive. –Here's how intentional consciousness works: you just *do* stuff, without having motives and explanations of your acts before your mind; it is said that you "intend" these acts solely because their fulfillment in a given case does not surprise you. You 'accept' them and 'go along with' them. That's what it means to "intend" something (such as getting a glass of water). There is not some sort of deeply explanatory 'content' in your consciousness as you get up out of your chair to get a glass of water: you just *do* it, and your consciousness *accepts* it. (I.e., you don't have thoughts that object to it. Your thoughts just take it as a *given* that you're getting water right now.) Rule-following, as in arithmetic, functions the same way, since it involves an intentional consciousness. There is no "justification" before your mind, no genuine understanding of the

[1] Kripke is discussing what it means to follow the rule of addition.
[2] "Quus" is a made-up mathematical operation.

meaning/logical foundations of your act. You just *do* it. Similarly with feelings. Even feelings like the strong desire to keep watching TV once it is on. While these are not, strictly speaking, cases of actually "doing" something, the peculiar character of each feeling is experienced in a way comparable to the experience of rule-following: you know what it is you're feeling (doing)—namely, *this*—and yet you don't know. You can't get *underneath* it, as it were. You can't reproduce the experience in concepts, by putting concepts into certain relations with each other. Because the required concepts do not exist. Because there is really nothing for them to be concepts *of*. Consciousness is empty. Yet it isn't. –"Aye, there's the rub!"

Thursday, January 12

Extension of the December 20th entry.— Since antiquity, people have valued freedom. Slaves have always wanted to be free, subjugated nations have always wanted to cast off their yoke. Why? A desire this universal, this ahistorical, must have a universal and ahistorical cause. Rousseau might have said it has to do with *amour-de-soi*, which, under the barbaric conditions of civilization, becomes *amour-propre*. Self-respect, or self-regard, gives birth to a refusal to be downtrodden; vanity, or selfishness (?), sharpens this refusal. The idea has merit, but I think it just formulates the question in a different way: why should oppression signify an affront to self-regard or vanity? "Because it means that someone else, or some other entity, has control over you." But what's so bad about *that*? Or rather, what is the explanation of its badness?

Here's how I interpret the desire for freedom: as a manifestation of the desire for community. Oppression, generally speaking, occurs only in an age in which the community (the "Community") has already lost its primordial homogeneity; people are already in the *amour-propre* frame of mind, more or less. They want respect from others, they try to earn it; they don't take it for granted, as their ancestors did. I.e., there is already an other—an Other, and lots of little others (within the community as well as outside it). In desiring respect, or recognition, the individual is pining after his lost community: he wants to be an equal among equals, a lover among lovers (though a *slight* differentiation in worth is permissible, as long as he's on the upper end of the scale). Along comes an Oppressor. The oppressors bring to the community a schism between the masters and the slaves. There are, in fact, two communities, living either side by side or together. In the mind of the trampled one, the oppressors become lumped together as an Oppressor, a vague superior thing that looks down on its subjects and constantly mocks their ambitions for equality. And each time an oppressor is met, his glance is a taunt. The confinement to physically unpleasant roles like servant and slave, or to physically unpleasant regions of the country, and to poverty, just heightens the oppressed one's consciousness of his subservience. (Doubtless, if the conditions are bad enough, a separate explanation of the desire for freedom is the desire simply not to be physically miserable. This will often take precedence over the psychological cause, the burdensome knowledge of another's excessive pride and his disdain for the subaltern.[1]) –Actually, this kind of psychology may be specifically a symptom of colonization (the 'black vs. white' thing, which makes possible the inferiority complex of the colonized people); oppression in general just fosters resentment and envy (and frustration and humiliation, etc.), rather than an inferiority complex *per se*. But even without an inferiority complex, resentment is still resentment of *inequality*. The conquered one's pride (self-respect; *amour-de-soi* and *amour-propre*) is wounded. Because all he wants—whether he knows it or not—is to be in a community of approximate equals, of people each of whose otherhood has the same approximate weight, so that no one—and least of all *him*—is looked down upon. Resentment and envy are two of nature's ways of making the individual feel the absence of community—lament it—and of making him do something to remedy it. They are self-

[1] While I'm on the subject of exceptions: you might think that the fury of a rebellion, or the lust for violence of a frustrated people, signifies the *opposite* of a "desire for community". But you have to distinguish the appearance from the essence. The same underlying psychological fact can have different effects when it interacts with different conditions. Frustration and humiliation, as such, must presuppose a longing for equality/community. Besides, a violent uprising, while destructive of the (already nonexistent) "community" with the overlords, forges powerful bonds between the uprisers, and so corroborates my ideas.

preservation instincts. They keep him firmly in the fold of the community. Certain bonds are broken—that is, certain forms of otherhood are established—....so the individual is tortured. In wanting "freedom", he wants respect (from self and other); in wanting respect, he wants community. His perception of a lack of respect is nothing but the absence of togetherness as intuitively ("instinctively") interpreted from the individual's (Individual's) perspective. The individual's problem is the flip side of the community's problem; the Rousseauean motive is the flip side of *nature's* motive, viz. the restoration of the community. To preempt your objection: the reason why the schism in the community doesn't cause the *oppressor* to try to heal it (as, according to my ideas, it should, and as it does the oppressed) is that he already has his community, his superior community. The inferior, subjugated one doesn't concern him; it is beneath him, so he doesn't trouble himself about its opinions of him. (Except, of course, for the purposes of policing and so on.)

Yes, there are many inadequacies in that.

"I want to be free!" That is, "I want to be in thrall!"

[…]

Tuesday, January 17

Think about the poignancy of this situation. In a civilization where communities have been shredded by technology, millions of young people find ways to construct artificial communities by using this very technology. They spend hours every day interacting electronically. They become virtual zombies, obsessed with the tenuous human connections they've made in cyberspace. –This is what communities have been reduced to.

Sunday, January 22

Taking Analytic philosophy, Metaphysics, and Formal Logic. Reading articles for the first two that will go down in history as forgotten. Examples: "A Puzzle about Ontology" by Thomas Hofweber, "A Defense of Presentism" by Ned Markosian. Ontology isn't a substantive discipline, and the debate between presentism and eternalism is silly.

I'm also reading Lyotard's book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. I find it totally unconvincing—and ambiguous and, in most parts, empty. The dichotomy between narrative and scientific knowledge is simple-minded. It arises from Lyotard's habit of calling them "language-games": narration is one language-game, while science is another. If they're different language-games, then they must be *essentially* different, right? Wrong. As Andrew Sayer says, different "problematics" or "paradigms" have a lot more in common than relativists think. Similar standards apply to them; they can be involved in a dialogue, since they share common ground. (They all aim at truth; they all presuppose logic and arrive at their conclusions through (some form of) argumentation; etc.) Anyway, I don't know what Lyotard is arguing for. He just vomits verbiage.

Monday, January 23

I recommend Gogol's "Diary of a Madman". Comedy and tragedy are united seamlessly: the more comical it becomes, the more tragic. Reminiscent of *Don Quixote*, except more moving. A civil servant who has been ground into dirt for decades, treated as a nobody, his sole purpose in life to sharpen His Excellency's quills and copy out documents—becomes obsessed with His Excellency's daughter. He starts

having conversations with her dog, to find out more about her. The more debased he is, the more his humanity rebels: he has been so degraded that he comes to believe he is King Ferdinand VIII of Spain, waiting for the deputation that will take him to his new kingdom. Instead it takes him to an insane asylum (which he thinks is Spain)—after he has finally, in his own eyes, regained his dignity by behaving like a king with the clerks at his office. His delusion has even given him the courage to declare his love to the girl. (Courage required delusion, because of the delusive trappings of society.) But in the asylum they manage to strip him even of his life-saving insanity: he cries out that he is a miserable wretch, that he longs for his mother in his old peasant hut. "Give me a troika with horses swift as the whirlwind! Climb up, driver, and let the bells ring! Soar away, horses, and carry me from this world!" But after this piteous speech, the last sentence of the story is the comical non sequitur, "And did you know that the Dhey of Algiers has a wart right under his nose?" The man is obsessed with little things like that, little flaws in appearance, little gradations in rank, because that's what his society is obsessed with. And that's the tragedy of it. He has been made incapable of seeing his humanity, even as he screams inwardly that he is a man!

You see, appearance is everything. Social status determines all. It takes a change in his self-perceived status for the man to finally put an end (in his own eyes) to his dehumanization. That's the only way people know how to, in this world. There's no such thing as humanizing yourself, because the only way to do so is to play the game of social rank, which is a dehumanizing game. You can't break out of the framework; the charade has become the cast of your mind. So even if you're a king, you're still dehumanized.

And obviously the dog is symbolic.

What a masterful story! Totally free of bathos—totally lighthearted—but infinitely tragic. It forces the reader to rely on his imagination, to imagine the real situation behind the character who writes such silly journal-entries. At forty-two years of age he goes insane. Think of all the pain behind that! We're forced to *imagine* the pain, though, which makes it more effective.

Speaking of charades, I just read "The Death of Ivan Ilych". Old Tolstoy was no lover of rituals. Detested niceties. Evidently thought that "death is terrifying because it is the one event in life which is real". The two short stories I read today are thematically similar: normal life is dehumanizing, etc. In the first, the protagonist was driven to insanity by all the alienation; in the second, he was driven to agony—until the very end, when he glimpsed heaven. Unfortunately it's an unrealistic ending—or, at any rate, the happiness glimpsed is not a Truth but a momentary illusion produced by unusual neurological processes.

The situation depicted at the end is frightening. As you know, all my thinking and striving are but a preparation for those final moments: I've always been terrified of having regrets at the end of my life.

Tuesday, January 24

"The Overcoat" is weird. I ought to read it again more carefully.

Wednesday, January 25

What is a community? In its strictest sense, it is a mutual desire for one another, a desire to be with one another. A psychological need for one another. Everyone in a community belongs in that community.

Hegel defined self-consciousness as desire for desire. While I don't subscribe to that definition, I think that "implicit" in self-consciousness is this desire for desire. What does "implicit" mean? Only that everything you do is oriented toward this desire in some sense. It is a kind of presupposition behind all your actions. It is coextensive with self-consciousness: just as (to quote Sartre) you can be non-thetically self-conscious, so you can have a non-thetic desire for desire. And you do have this non-thetic desire at all times, in that if you reflect on it you will be immediately aware of it. Even if you think you aren't, you are on a more basic level, because desire-for-desire is the structure of human consciousness. It isn't the *definition*—

which is simply consciousness-of-(it)self—but, inasmuch as self-consciousness necessarily reaches out for another self-consciousness, it is the structure of self-consciousness (even though, from another perspective, "self-consciousness" is itself the structure of self-consciousness).

Thus, a community is the fulfillment of self-consciousness. But this fulfillment is also its negation, because if one's desire for desire has been satisfied, one no longer has the desire. The more acute the desire is, the more 'full' self-consciousness is; hence, if the desire ceases to be the restless demon that it is in civilized conditions, then self-consciousness, in some sense, diminishes. –But this discussion is ambiguous. Since man emerged from the primeval swamp, he has obviously remained self-conscious even in his communities. The latter haven't negated his self-consciousness; they have 'negated' only its manifestation under conditions of extreme individualism. The desire for desire has persisted even as, in a way, it has been satisfied. (People continue to want recognition/love even if they already have it.) If the community were *really* going to be complete—if, that is, even the *potential* for its deterioration were to be negated—then self-consciousness would have to be negated. But that can't happen once man has become man. The most that happens is that 'individualistic self-consciousness'—in which the individual is extremely aware of his existence as a separate individual, which entails that the implicit nature of self-consciousness becomes more explicit (e.g., the individual develops a pathological fixation on his desire for desire)—is superseded[1] in favor of a more secure, serene, stable, communal, less-selfconscious self-consciousness. Even in specific social interactions, the pleasure is proportionate to the reduction in (one's fixation on) self-consciousness. The reduction is a 'relief', as it were—because, to put it Kojèveanly, the desire for desire is being satisfied.

So, man is most fully man in a community, when the desire that defines him is being satisfied. […] How is the desire for freedom related to all this? The hatred of oppression, or the dislike of working at certain jobs, or, in general, the not-being-able-to-do-what-you-want: how are these related to the foregoing? The first is a different phenomenon from the second two, although, to the extent that oppression consists in a restriction of movement, it can be analyzed similarly.

I'm having trouble answering the question. The reason is that I don't even know what it means to want freedom. I don't know how to conceptualize the desire. Again, this is because the desire has no "justification" in consciousness—no real *presence* in consciousness, aside from the empty thought that 'I want to do what I choose'. Even in concrete situations, such as when I don't want to go to the restaurant and wait tables, my desire is just *given*, just *there*; it has no meaning or explanation in consciousness. This, of course, has to do with what Kripke talks about. (I still haven't read his book.)

The weird thing is that most of my phenomenological analyses are of mental states that are in more or less the same situation as this desire for freedom. Somehow I'm able to attribute phenomenological meaning to certain states but not to others. Why? And what does that mean? Are my explanations purely imaginary? I don't think so. But then you'd think there would be explanations of all these other phenomena (like rule-following and whatnot)—and yet there aren't. So mental states have to be divided into two classes: those that are phenomenologically explicable—at least, partially so—and those that aren't. But why would there be these two classes? *How could* there be? It doesn't make sense.

On the other hand, even those things to which I've applied phenomenology are, *in the moment*, just as '*sui generis*' as the other seemingly inexplicable facts. They always just appear out of nowhere, and we act in accordance with them. So maybe what it comes down to is that my imaginative powers have been equal to the task only on certain occasions and not on others. In other words, it must be possible to apply at least a limited phenomenological analysis/explanation to all states of consciousness, even though on another level the conscious facts are also explainable by biology and underlying psychological factors. Of course, the phenomenological factors are themselves "underlying", in that we are hardly ever aware of them despite their continuous existence; but they're underlying in a more accessible way than biological and psychoanalytical factors are.

And yet, given that consciousness is an emergent neural state, biology and phenomenology must overlap. *More* than overlap. The latter must be just a 'part' of the former, or a translation of part of it. This would sort of explain how phenomenological factors that we aren't explicitly aware of can determine our

[1] Or, more accurately: is not allowed to emerge.

acts (because biology determines our acts even though we aren't aware of it). It would also, obviously, make possible the reconciliation of biology and phenomenology.

There's something very confused about all my ruminations on biology vs. psychoanalysis vs. phenomenology. Maybe Trina was right after all. (I'm sure she was.) Still, there are problems in fitting all the theories together.

Reading Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*. He thinks that the fundamental philosophical question is "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Says that philosophizing is always ultimately addressing this question. The question preliminary to it is "What is the nature of being?" Before I read any more I'll say that my initial answer to this second one, which a moment later I realized to be inadequate, was that "to be" is essentially *to manifest oneself to another* (whether in consciousness or through causation, or in whatever other way). Then I decided that the question—both questions—are futile and unanswerable.

Thursday, January 26

The structure of Western musical harmonies—their tonality, their modes, the tonic-subdominant-dominant structure, with all the hundreds of rules it involves—is not a mere "social construction". It came into existence through historical processes, but it obviously has a universal physical/mathematical basis. […] Be that as it may, tonality is grounded in the nature of the physical world. Pythagoras's experiments established that. What I want to understand is *how*. More specifically, why does a transition from a certain tone to another have the character of a "resolution"? How is this possible? The physics of sound must provide an explanation, in terms of frequencies and wavelengths and harmonics and whatnot. But what is the basis of the explanation? What does it say about the world? Moreover, why do certain modes sound gloomy, others cheerful? Etc.

Phenomenological psychology is deluded.

Friday, January 27

So is Heideggerianism. I just looked that word up in the dictionary; it is defined as "a systematic elaboration of empty thoughts; a puerile philosophy related to the question of what 'Being' means; see Kaufmann: 'Heidegger is always on his way towards a point from which one day it will be possible to ask a question'". Heidegger, the Nazi[1] who thought that the unfolding of Being is somehow tied to the historical development of Germany, was as empty a thinker as Moore.

By the way, my answer to his preliminary question was similar to one of his own. He says that an essential part of being is appearance. "The essence of being is *physis* [i.e., emergence and subsequent endurance, or "standing-there"]. Appearing is the power that emerges. Appearing makes manifest. Already we know then that being, appearing, causes to emerge from concealment." And he talks about the necessity that in order for something to be, it must limit itself. Being *is* this self-limiting, in a way. (He says that "being *is*" a dozen different things.) All of his ideas, incidentally, are borrowed from the Greeks. And he never answers his original question. And he is far more skilled than Kierkegaard at repeating himself.

Maybe I should give you an update on my living situation. I have a new roommate, an American named Charles, thirty years old. I have furniture now too—a bed and desk, though no chairs. Charles is a nice guy, though a sleazebag (a self-proclaimed "man-whore") in love with himself—which makes him popular with the ladies, despite his chubbiness and dull face. (In the last week two girls have spent the

[1] He even sported a Hitler mustache.

night.) He's a former philosophy major, now a film buff who's pursuing a career as an independent filmmaker. He's one of those people who, in intellectual conversations, can never admit he's wrong. I'm working out at the gym often, determined to complete my transformation into an underwear model.

If what I wrote above has an ounce of a foundation in reality, it sort of explains the communal nature of women: on the whole, they're more self-conscious than men, which means their desire for desire is stronger, which means they naturally bond with one another fairly easily—and yet are more sensitive than men, and are thus more vindictive. ('Sensitive' means that their desire for desire—which I prefer to call desire for recognition,[1] since Kojève's explanation of the term makes it seem to revolve around competition, which isn't necessarily the case for the *Sache selbst*[2]—is not easily satisfied (or that if it is, it is easily disappointed as well). This leads to vindictiveness/cruelty because....I don't know....but probably because revenge establishes equality again. If a woman thinks she has been injured she'll brood and brood on it; she'll want to return the injury because that will enable her to stop dwelling on it, i.e., on her perceived inferiority, her selfconsciousness-from-the-perspective-of-the-other. She won't be aware of this motive, but it does underlie her behavior.)

By the way, the last three sentences explain why unrequited lovers sometimes kill their beloved.

The pleasure of television is somehow related to the pleasure of community. The phenomenology is similar. But not identical. There isn't the same recognition ('interaction'), so television isn't as satisfying. It can be more *entertaining*, though, for unrelated reasons (having to do with plot-structure and so on). – The central paradox in all this stuff, which we have to accept and move beyond, is that conscious states feel different from each other and yet they don't, because, in a sense, there is really nothing to feel (except in the case of physiological sensations). Wittgenstein emphasized the latter fact at the expense of the former; Sartre and other phenomenologists emphasized the former at the expense of the latter.

Saturday, January 28

Let me give you an example of a conscious state that, viewed from one angle, has no content, but from another angle does. I tell someone, "I resent what you did to me"; my consciousness in the moment of the assertion does not provide a "justification" of it, in that it does not elaborate on the meaning of the sentence. If you look into my consciousness, you won't see what I mean by 'resentment'. It is just a word I say, a word I am accustomed to and therefore do not find problematic. But if you look at the matter closely, you will see that 'beneath' my consciousness, as it were—right on the edge of it, hovering between

[1] I use 'recognition' rather than 'respect' because the latter is too unsubtle. 'Respect' suggests a specific state of mind in the one who respects, and a specific kind of behavior; 'recognition' is more general, and can obtain even if there is, strictly speaking, not much respect *per se*. But of course, respect is ultimately desired, since it is really a variation on recognition. (There is recognition, for example, when someone laughs at a joke one has made; but this can't really be called respect.)

[2] I say "not necessarily" because I don't *know* if it is. It may, after all, be that, on the deepest psychological level, *community* is desired, *equality* (as I wrote above), but that in civilized conditions this desire takes the form of the will to power (the desire for desire, the desire to be another's self-ideal), because the differentiation among people, which has been 'absorbed' in everyone's psyches, ensures that the ideal of (living in) a pure community can't even take shape in the psyche, and that ('therefore') the nearest approximation to the phenomenology of consciousness-in-conditions-of-a-pure-community is the phenomenology of knowing (or intuitively feeling) that one is, more or less, the self-ideal of another. (This is an approximation in that it (causes/is a state of mind that) is similar to the lack of reflection-on-oneself-from-the-perspective-of-the-other (i.e., a certain kind of acute self-consciousness) characteristic of a self that lives in a pure community.) The point is that the phrase "desire for desire" is more ambiguous than "desire for recognition", since it can be interpreted in two distinct ways—a competitive ("I am your self-ideal, i.e., I am better than you") and a non-competitive ("You desire me, i.e., you desire to be with me")—while the latter has only one meaning, which however has a broad range of manifestations, from being-equal-with-another to being-superior-to-another; and therefore the latter is more useful than the former.

consciousness and unconsciousness, as a kind of logical and phenomenological presupposition of my judgment—is my perception that my self-worth has been slighted, that I have, in a sense, been devalued, that (perhaps) something has been attributed to me that was beneath me, or that something has been done to me that betokens a lack of respect for me. In all likelihood I am not actually thinking these thoughts (or even intuiting them non-verbally) when I make the statement; nevertheless, they are there, somehow. And they are what justify my statement.

Let's look at addition, the rule-following process that messed Kripke up so much. When I perform the operation 29+47 on a piece of paper, what is "justifying" my act? In what does my rule-following consist? (Those questions are equivalent because my act is ultimately justified by my following a rule.) The second question seems misguided. My rule-following is just my carrying-out the act, combined with the certainty that attends it—the involuntariness of the popping-into-my-mind of 16 and the necessity of carrying the 1 and of combining 1 and 2 into 3 and 3 and 4 into 7, and thus arriving at 76. The intentionality of the rule-following is the involuntary (and full-of-certainty) coming-into-my-mind of the numbers and of what I have to do with them. So the rule-following consists in the nature of my intentionality. –But that's not quite right. Rather, the nature of my intentionality *indicates* that I am following a rule, and it is what immediately justifies my act. The rule-following itself is nothing but the acting in accordance with rules I have been taught, (solely) *because* I have been taught them. (One can determine when a rule is being followed—and which rule—by looking at the causal and intentional history of the relevant individual, to see if he was taught a given rule and is acting on its basis (because he has 'internalized' it).) So what's the big deal?

Sunday, January 29

Another example: why do I constantly seek knowledge? The answer I'm looking for has nothing to do with neurology or depth psychology. The question isn't just idle curiosity about the ultimate (and possibly introspectively inaccessible) causes of my behavior; it is an *imperative* question, something that presses on me and demands an answer if I am to reject the possibility that I am a machine. As a human being, everything I do is (supposed to be) subject to my will. I do it because I want to, because there is either a reason or a cause for it—an *introspectively accessible* reason or cause. If there is no such explanation—if I don't know why I do it—the implication is not merely that I don't have complete control over my acts. The really disturbing implication is that I am not a fully substantial self. I become a bare fact of *supervenience*: a surface phenomenon, comparable to the play of light on waves determined by currents beneath them. The really *substantial* intentionality of my acts is suddenly relegated to an unconscious realm; my own intentionality is nothing but an awareness that I am acting in a certain way, and perhaps an empty desire to act in this way. The desire has no real content; it is just an inexplicable desire to act thusly. So you see, phenomenological psychology is nothing less than the attempt to give man a measure of dignity (of selfhood), or rather to prevent him from losing it.

Having said that, I'll say that the attempt cannot be successful. It is destined to fall halfway short of its goal, because our ordinary consciousness almost never has the phenomenological content that is being sought. The content is right on the edge of it, if indeed it exists at all: it has to be drawn painstakingly into the light. If it exists, it only half-exists. It is not wholly conscious, nor is it wholly unconscious. –To be clearer: while it is still conceivable that all acts are phenomenologically explainable, the explanation is not an articulation of what is present in ordinary consciousness. It is an attributing to ordinary consciousness of explanatory factors that are absent from it—absent but, presumably, implicated in it, as 'unexpressed potentials'. The only way to decide whether the proffered explanation is the correct one is to determine whether it has intuitive force. If it does, then the phenomenologist concludes that he has expressed a given 'potential'—or rather an actuality that normally exists in the form of a potential (in that we are unaware of it). Still, phenomenology cannot save the substantiality of the self (in fact, it is the prime mover in stripping bare the illusion); all it can do is meet the self halfway. 'You exist, but you are not what you think you are.'

To return to the question: why do I seek knowledge? ....I don't know.

The reason we aren't usually bothered by these sorts of questions is that the ways in which we choose to act are gratifying—or, in the case of rule-following, we simply *know* that what we are doing is right (as in arithmetic, or in speaking a language)—and this is enough of a reason for us. This kind of 'self-evident' reason is satisfactory. But if you think about it, the introspective absence of a reason why a given act is gratifying (or why you want to carry it out), or why a given instance of rule-following feels obviously correct (obviously the right way to follow the rule), is a terrible violation of rationality. It isn't just a conundrum; it's a *rape*. It means there is nothing that 'grounds' our intentions/acts. When the thought occurs to me that I feel like looking at porn, nothing 'underlies' my desire; I just....feel like looking at porn. When I add up numbers according to the rules of addition, I do not know what these rules are. I know only that, say, 7+9=16, or 3+5=8, or whatever. Nothing *grounds* my act, nothing justifies it in the sense that I can look at a list of criteria to make sure I have done the operation correctly. There are no criteria involved when I feel like jerking off, no items I can check off to determine that I really do want to jerk off, and *why* I do, and *what it means* that I do.

This is all very elusive.

Monday, January 30

In other words, we just *do* things, without having a delineable 'understanding' of them. Our understanding is somehow not located in consciousness (even though it also, somehow, is) but rather in the brain—which only means that it isn't 'understanding' in the conventional sense. We understand words, numbers and acts on something like a behavioral level only—and this is testified to by the facts that, for example, we can't say what numbers are, and that we can rarely sense 'contents' in consciousness. In fact, ontology in general (and much of metaphysics) exists only because philosophers, as people, have an irresistible temptation to attribute a kind of 'substance' to everything—to relations, numbers, concepts, properties, etc. Humans are always seduced into thinking in terms of 'correspondence': a concept corresponds to something real. Understanding corresponds to a conscious state, numerals correspond to 'entities' or 'facts', propositions correspond to facts, the concept of the self corresponds to something real.[1] This just means we (are tempted to) attribute substance to everything—to the self, to the eyes (their pupils), to shadows, to bodies of water. (See the thoughts I wrote in Norway, when I was on the ship on the lake.) So platonism never dies, and nominalism, while seemingly obvious on one level, is hard to accept on another. And so the controversy never ends—because we are pitting two primitive intuitions against each other, intuitions that cannot be argued away. The platonist intuition is grounded ultimately in the intuition of the self's substantiality, which is both fictive and true (self-consciousness can be interpreted as a substance, in something like Aristotle's sense (*parousia*; see Heidegger, chapter 2), while it also is an emptiness, a negation, a self-difference), whereas the nominalist intuition is grounded in the insight that, after all, nothing in our experience *does* correspond to the disputed concepts. (We have no experience of an abstract entity called 'dog'.) Yet nominalism is unattractive because concepts are more than just empty words; they have some kind of *content*, they seem to *denote* something, some abstract thing (and to *be* this thing).[2] But this thing cannot be pinpointed. Neither a rule nor a concept nor any kind of understanding has a denotable reality. And yet it does: consciousness has a half-determinate, half-indeterminate conception of it; it is this conception that platonists reify, confusedly. Insofar as consciousness understands something, it ascribes a certain substantiality, a determinateness, a '*right there*'-ness to its understanding and to the concept understood (—'understanding' itself is thought of as a denotable event or process in the mind,

[1] Clearly the internalization of language has contributed to this state of affairs (since declarative sentences purport to refer, and many concepts refer to concrete objects).

[2] For example, the concept 'dog' is supposed to denote some abstract prototype of a dog, but at the same time, it *is* (supposed to be) this prototype. [NB: When I wrote all this I didn't have a thorough understanding of the ontologies I was discussing. But I succeeded in communicating a few insights, in my obscure way.]

especially when the word is introspectively contemplated[1]); platonists seize on this conviction of substantiveness and turn the latter into a mind-independent thing. That is, the concept itself is turned into a mind-independent thing.

–And all because consciousness misinterprets itself (i.e., the self).[2] It is in fact a necessary misinterpretation, since human experience and knowledge would be impossible without the constant 'background presence' of a substantial self that organizes and assimilates all the impressions (or: whose existence *permits* the organization and assimilation (into a self-centered unity) of impressions). Without such a self, communities could not take the form they do (as collections of more-or-less distinguishable individuals), which means that *homo sapiens* could not have persevered (because its specifically human communities were what allowed it to triumph over other animals). (Of course, it wouldn't even have *existed* in its present form.) So you see, platonism and many other philosophical mistakes are made virtually inevitable by the nature of the natural selective mechanisms through which man triumphed.

Tuesday, January 31

I'm finally reading Kripke's book. As before, I have the impression that Kripke may be the only contemporary philosopher worthy of the name. (He also vindicates me: again and again he emphasizes the importance of intuition.) But I'm having a hard time agreeing with his arguments. Some. Like his idea that there is no way to tell whether I mean plus or quus by the '+' sign. Surely my reason for saying I don't mean quus is that, when I've done addition, I've never had a particular large number in mind (Kripke uses '57') beyond which all sums add up to '5'. Had I meant quus all along, I would have told myself when doing an addition problem that 'because the numbers in this problem are less than 57, I can ignore the rule that the sum of numbers higher than 57 is always 5'. That I have no memory of having given myself such instructions is why I think that my present act accords with my past intentions. (As Kripke says, the unreliability of memory is not the issue here. We're assuming that memory is reliable.) Do I *know* it accords with them? What does 'know' mean? In its (largely) meaningless sense, no, I don't know it. But in its meaningful (less rigorous) sense(s), I do 'know' it. I know that, in adding 57+68 to get 125, I am following the same rule (called 'addition') that I've always followed when confronted with a plus sign. My criterion (my reason) for ascribing knowledge to myself is that my memory tells me my past intentions never involved reference to a quus function, or to any other function that isn't addition. Similarly, I know I don't mean quus *right now*, as I carry out this addition problem, through the fact that nowhere in my consciousness is there reference to a quus function, as there is to a plus function. So, in a sense, there *is* a 'fact of the matter' about what I mean (contrary to Kripke). But in another sense there isn't: strictly speaking, this fact is nothing but a vague, paradoxically indeterminate '(non-)presence' in my consciousness. I am aware of carrying out the problem in an 'additive' way, but I am not really aware of the additive function itself. I just do the problem automatically. It could almost be called a fact of *behavior* rather than of *consciousness*, though this would be misleading (and unhelpful vis-à-vis Wittgenstein's skeptical paradox—as Kripke argues).

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[1] Of course, this is also when it becomes most clear that understanding really *isn't* (usually) a perceptible event—or, to be clearer, doesn't *coincide with* such an event. (But if for the purposes of clarity I have to alter the word 'is' to the words 'coincide with', what then can actual *understanding* be? That is, if the concept of understanding necessarily does not denote an event or process, but instead a more *abstract* kind of fact, what can it be? Nothing. Nothing in reality corresponds to understanding—although, of course, *something* does. But this something is nothing. It isn't really there.)

[2] Actually, this shouldn't be interpreted as a foundational cause. The mind is holistic: the self's self-misinterpretation presupposes other facts (like the existence of the "deep structure" of language in our neurology) which themselves presuppose the misinterpretation. Nevertheless, the latter can be (misleadingly) treated as fundamental in that it existed, to an extent, even before language was explicit, and also because the illusion of the self is what permits the organization of an individual's experience(s) (i.e., what makes the experience possible in its specifically human form). Etc.

On the other hand, it seems true that if "whatever seems right to me *is* right", we can't properly talk about 'right'. But is it the case that whatever seems right to me is right? In terms of what my intentions are, one would think "Yes". How can I think I'm doing addition when I'm actually doing "quaddition", or multiplication or whatever? How can I be deceived about my own intentions like that? "You may be on a drug", Kripke says. "Or you may be having some kind of psychotic episode." I'm not sure I agree with that. It doesn't seem at all possible that I'm undergoing a delusional experience right now. I think that if I were undergoing one, I wouldn't have the kind of certainty I have right now. This clear-headed, rational, self-conscious mode of consciousness is surely different from the consciousness I'd experience during a delusional episode. But how do I know that? I don't *know* it. But I can't non-emptily doubt it. –So where does that leave us? It appears to mean that whatever seems right to me is right. But that can't be right.

Grrrr.

Maybe these confusions—which I can't see any way around—merely confirm my idea that there both is a fact and isn't a fact about whether I mean addition. There is: i.e., I can see unproblematically that I'm right (that I'm doing addition). There isn't: i.e., the impossibility of having any criterion for thinking I'm right other than my own feeling of certainty means that we can't talk about 'right' here, which means that there isn't really a 'fact' to be examined here. But that's freaking weird. But it also makes sense, and fits into everything I've been saying for years.

"The basic point is that I follow rules 'blindly', without any justification for the choice I make" (p. 81). This is true in a sense, but misleading. In the cases Kripke has been discussing, we *have* no choice in the matter. We don't make an arbitrary, unjustified choice; we are *forced* to act a certain way. Because we can't even conceive of an alternative, we're certain that we're right in our rule-following. A rule, as Wittgenstein says, must guide us; so if whatever *seems* right to us *is* right—if, that is, the only criterion is our feeling of certainty—it would appear that we aren't following a rule (because it appears that we aren't being guided). But he overlooks that we *are* being guided. Not, indeed, in the choice we make; rather, in the range of possible choices that are laid out for us. And there is *no* range: when we see a plus sign, we have no choice in the matter of how to interpret it (unless, of course, we self-consciously stipulate that it will not mean addition—but in this case we know we are flouting the rule). Thus, we are being guided. Which means we are following a rule. This is why we can speak of 'right' here, why there is a fact of the matter. Our rule-following is right because it has been imposed on us, outside of our will; it *seems* right to us precisely because we feel that we lack a choice—i.e., because we know that, in a different sense of 'seems', whatever 'seems' right to us is *not* (necessarily) right.

"To think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately'; otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it." The first sentence is true on one understanding but not on another. If my obeying is not forced on me, then my thinking that I am obeying is indeed not obeying. But if it *is* forced on me—if I am 'guided' into obeying it, in an *a priori*-esque way—then I am *necessarily* obeying a rule, and so I *think* I am and cannot be wrong (because I know that I am being forced to act in this way).

Hence, it is possible to obey a rule privately (if I understand that word correctly)—namely, if the rule is *a priori*.

But since Wittgenstein was skeptical of the *a priori* (—a lot of this paradoxical stuff is motivated by familiar empiricist qualms about *a priori* certainty), he was blind to the above arguments.

Wednesday, February 1

Still, it does seem that "no mental state of mine guarantees my correct behavior" (p. 95). And yet, my 'mental state' when doing 11+34=45—that is, my consciousness of carrying out the problem and checking it—is surely such that I know I am following the right rule, and following the rule rightly.

Grrrr.

Maybe, again, this just has to do with the half-meaninglessness of knowledge. For it also seems (contrary to Wittgenstein) that no amount of communal agreement that I have done the calculation correctly *guarantees* that I have done it correctly. After all, if we're using Kripke's skeptical framework, it may be that the whole community has gone insane, like me: they think I'm following the right rule even though I'm not. In fact, it seems like *nothing* can "guarantee" my correct behavior.

While my arguments may be flawed (I keep questioning them as I read), there's one thing that surely ensures the falseness of Wittgenstein's skeptical problem. The problem has *some* content, but not enough to justify his conclusions. Consider: "We cannot say that we all respond as we do to '68+57' *because* we all grasp the concept of addition in the same way, that we share common responses to particular addition problems *because* we share a common concept of addition. For Wittgenstein, an 'explanation' of this kind ignores his treatment of the skeptical paradox and its solution. There is no objective fact—that we all mean addition by '+', or even that a given individual does—that explains our agreement in particular cases." Now, as a thinker I am peculiarly amenable to holding paradoxical beliefs; but *this* one, even *I* consider to be preposterous. We *can* say what the first sentence denies; and we *can't* say what the third sentence affirms. There *is* a fact. The only element of truth in Wittgenstein's ideas is that this fact does not have the form we commonly assume it to have. We grasp the concept of addition, but not as a 'substantive', 'concrete' datum in consciousness. Our understanding is not something that can be, in a way, 'pointed to' or 'observed' (as we're inclined to think); it does not concretely manifest itself in consciousness. And yet, since it is, after all, '*understanding*', it *does* manifest itself in consciousness. Otherwise it couldn't be called 'understanding'. *This* is the paradox—this contradiction between the presence and the absence of understanding in consciousness. It is misleading to say that the paradox (*my* paradox, anyway) is the absence of a *fact*. For there *is* a 'fact', in a way, which makes it true that we all grasp the concept of addition in the same way.

My paradox, which is extremely broad and resists clear formulation, is the ultimate reason for the endless superfluous debates over presentism and eternalism, and actualism and possibilism, and endurantism and perdurantism, and almost all metaphysics. Almost all *philosophy*. And much of psychology (especially psychoanalysis and phenomenology).

A week or two ago I "got high" with Charles and a friend. It was really the first time ever. We watched *Irreversible* at the same time. Which was, uh, memorable. (That movie is *fucked up*.)

(2 a.m.) Permit me my evil hour.— How is it that a 25-year-old can feel like a 75-year-old? Even as he also feels like a 25-year-old. Meandering through life....a Eugene O'Neill without the dramatic talent.... I doubt I'll ever fall in love. It's *humans* I have to deal with, after all.

You think about this world and you have to laugh, because you have nothing to do with it. You had no part in creating the universe. What *right*—what *right* did the universe have to create me? To violate my individuality like that? To steal from me self-determination? It is beyond disrespectful, beyond presumptuous: it is immoral. To conjure me out of the darkness:—*I did not give my permission!* But it sits up there, out there, laughing at me, at what it did to me, laughing at the little trick it pulled. Nero's sadism was child's play, crude and embarrassing: Nero was no Universe. What fascinating sadism.... To create a being and give it just enough insight so that it knows it is worth nothing, it will die and be forgotten, but not enough to understand *why*; and to make this being so that it is obsessed with an unattainable happiness, and an unattainable togetherness, with stifling distaste for the universal isolation in which it must live.

I could be angry. I could be full of anger, like I've been so many times. But it has been months, maybe years, since I've been angry. I don't have the spirit for it anymore. Life has won.

Thursday, February 2

I learn from the *New York Times* that Einstein was a music-lover. I think that instinctively I already knew this. Somehow it was necessary that he love music. He was a skilled violinist, and Mozart was his favorite composer. He saw the mathematical beauty of the universe reflected in Mozart's music.

We would have gotten along famously.

I've been trying to explain behavior solely in terms of degrees of self-consciousness (e.g., the lessening and heightening of it), but I know that won't do. This is upsetting, though; self-consciousness is the only easily observable and fairly conceptualizable phenomenon of consciousness. If it is inadequate to explain behavior—if other phenomenological factors must be introduced—I run into the paradoxes I've been discussing. For example: if lust can't be adequately described as, say, a desire to merge one's self(-consciousness) with the other, what other elements are present in its phenomenology? I.e., what is the phenomenological (as opposed to neurological) cause of the desire for sex in a given case? (The two questions are the same. To ask about the content of a mental state and the explanation of a desire/intention that 'inheres' in it (or an action to which the desire led) is the same.)

....There's something confused about my whole framework. But it's hard to know what.

Friday, February 3

Maybe this has something to do with it: much of the "content" of an intentional state is unconscious. In other words, at this moment, most of my conscious mental state is unconscious. That seems like a contradiction, right? But it's true. By definition I am aware of my consciousness, but *in* my consciousness are facts I am not aware of. Desires, conflicts, etc. It is misleading for psychoanalysts to say that these are unconscious; *in a sense* they are, but not in the sense that they are wholly *outside* of consciousness. This is evidenced by the fact that if somehow you become aware of a desire that, according to psychoanalysis (which ultimately means according to phenomenological analysis), had been influencing your behavior for a while—and if you really think about this desire, if you grasp it in intuition—you will think, "My God, of course! That's been obvious all along! It was in my consciousness all along. I just wasn't aware of it." Paradoxical but true. Theoretically, then, it is possible to come up with a 'meaning' of conscious states simply through self-analysis, by intuiting their phenomenological (psychoanalytical) foundations. […]

Saturday, February 4

Reading a biography of Freud. Learned that his emphasis on the sex-instinct has been misinterpreted. He writes: "[Sexuality should be] divorced from its too-close connection with the genitals, and [seen] as a more comprehensive bodily function, having pleasure as its goal and only secondarily coming to serve the ends of reproduction. ...the sexual impulses are regarded as including all of those affectionate and friendly impulses to which usage applies the exceedingly ambiguous word 'love'."

I think this is right. All affectionate impulses are surely related to sexual ones (or, as Freud might say, *are* sexual ones, in the broader sense of 'sexual'). But they are also related to the recognition-urge, because the paradigm for recognition is communal interaction (i.e., communal 'affection'), of the kind that existed in certain regions a hundred thousand years ago. In November I interpreted the recognition-instinct as a "death-in-life"-instinct (an in-itself-for-itself instinct), but I think that was wrong. There is no such instinct. The misinterpretation is due to the fact that in our post-prehistorical times (but in particular the alienated era of capitalism) people objectify themselves in acutely individualistic, self-conscious ways—i.e., they are extremely focused on the other and on themselves (or, better: on themselves from the perspective of an observing other)—such that, to inquiring minds, it seems as if people have an instinct to be an object, a 'frozen' object (which is nonetheless conscious). After all, they're fixated on objecthood, otherness; so a psychologist living in this time will think that human consciousness has an inherent tendency to overcome itself, to turn itself into a permanent *thing*. In truth, the alienated kind of consciousness, the

insecure, isolated kind, characteristic especially of capitalism but more generally of historical man, does have a "tendency" (or desire) to overcome itself, but not in the direction of permanent thinghood; rather, in that of community-hood. The modern other-fixation is just the wound of the loveless psyche. The too-self-conscious psyche. (Self-consciousness, in this peculiar form, is itself the wound. Or, if the wound is seen, from another angle, as the deterioration of the community, then self-consciousness is its *symptom*. As well as its presupposition.[1]) Its being a compulsive partial-otherness-to-itself does not signify a *desire* to be a *complete* otherness-to-itself. What the psyche desires is a lowering of the boundaries between self and other. This is what the sexual instinct amounts to, and what the recognition-urge amounts to, and therefore what the (metaphorical) 'immortality'-urge amounts to[2] (a *biological* immortality-urge doesn't exist). All these instincts are essentially the same. They are grounded in the same psychological tendencies.

I think that the pleasure I get from writing and reading and thinking is related to all this. It really does seem like a sublimation. When I was happy with Sangeetha I had no desire to read or write; only when she returned to India did I return to my journal and books. –Then again, love can be an *inspiration* for creation—usually artistic creation. A lovelorn person might turn to creation as a substitute-gratification; a happily passionate lover might turn to it for the same reason—say, if he happens to be away from his lover and is obsessing over her. Writing might provide him with something vaguely similar to the pleasure of her company, or the pleasure of community in general (the pleasure of talking about her). –The phenomenon can also be formulated in terms of energy-levels: creation can be an outlet for the excessive psychic energy associated with passionate love. […]

The problem is that when you start talking about energy you've jumped to a different level of explanation, closer to the biological level. This isn't allowed. Whatever paradigm you start in, you have to stay in.

Sunday, February 5

Watching Dane Cook, I see that stand-up comedy is less about the humor than the charisma. This is true of all forms of comedy, whether at parties, with your friends, on talk shows, wherever. That is, the audience's reaction is largely a function of the delivery, not the intrinsically humorous content of what is said. Much of the time, what it comes down to is the sex appeal of the comedian (which is another way of saying his charisma). Listen to the women screaming at Dane: most of them would gladly sleep with him. And so they can't stop laughing, because laughter is both a sign of being drawn to someone and a drawing-oneself to him (as well as, on a weaker level, a drawing-him to oneself). Thus it makes sense that the delivery is often more important than—or at least, as important as—the content: laughter means a heightening of community,[3] which is largely a function of personal magnetism.

[…]

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[1] There is a circular relationship: the community's disintegration leads to insecure self-consciousness, while the latter reinforces the community's disintegration.

[2] See my entry on its derivation from the desire for recognition.

[3] Not always. And that's simplistic anyway. But the 'unexpectedness' factor in laughter (in humor), and the 'inappropriateness' factor, are related to the increase in community. Being 'taken off guard' interrupts one's composure, one's self-consciousness—it 'lowers one's defenses', or "the boundaries between self and other"—and thus bolsters community. Said differently: it diverts a portion of psychic energy from self-control (self-censoring, self-observing, self-monitoring) to contemplation of something else than self, and to (half-conscious) appreciation of the other's company, and by so doing reduces psychic tension. This is the essence of an increase in community. "Psychic tension" is just bottled-up energy. The higher the self-consciousness, the higher the tension (and vice versa). For to the extent that energy is denied an 'external' outlet, consciousness must become more fixated on itself so as to give the energy *some* kind of outlet. Because it has to go somewhere; it can't stay *totally* bottled up. And yet, in a sense, it is being bottled up if it's devoted to self-consciousness—at least more so than if it were devoted to attraction-to-another.

The existentialist emphasis on "anguish over the inevitability of death" as a cause of man's malaise is mistaken. Most people feel little anguish at the thought of death. As for the ones who do: they misinterpret their anguish. While the thought of death no doubt disturbs them, perhaps even to the point of obsession, their fixation on it is just a symptom of their fixation on themselves. This is the real problem. This is the real source of their anguish. A person thoroughly integrated in a community is not preoccupied with death. At most, he occasionally contemplates it and becomes sad for a moment. But his communal activities ensure that he is mentally healthy, confident and happy.

Likewise, the emphasis on man's knowledge of the absurdity of existence, and of its contingency, is misguided. This knowledge is not what causes modern-day neuroses or any other psychological ailments. A preoccupation with what may, indeed, be an "objective truth" of absurdity and contingency is symptomatic of a deeper sickness: the loss of community. Goethe was right that too-deep thinking betokens a kind of sickness. It is the *dwelling* on absurdity, not the absurdity itself, that is the problem. The healthy psyche does not 'dwell' on *anything*, least of all itself or its absurd conditions of existence.

Sex can't be completely assimilated to "affection" (or, affection can't be assimilated to sex). I have no desire to have sex with my male friends. Different chemicals and reactions, surely, are involved in lust than are involved in friendship. Nevertheless, sex and love are, in a sense, just friendship taken to an extreme. The motives for them are the same: recognition, togetherness. (*These*, not sex, should be seen as the framework for human behavior, the overarching goals/orientations within which behavior takes place. Freud's formulation is misleading, even if sex is understood broadly.) It just so happens that these goals are paradigmatically achieved in different ways for the different sexes. In the throes of lust one doesn't desire merely the partner's body; one desires also his consciousness (his recognition, togetherness). If the body were all that mattered, life-size sex-dolls would be far more popular than they are.

Now, I'm not saying that everyone *consciously* wants to be integrated in a community. I, for example, don't. Last night I saw the movie π; the main character certainly preferred solitude to society. But then again, he was tortured. And at the end, after he'd given himself a lobotomy, he preferred society, and was finally happy. And I too, on a somewhat less accessible level than my immediate consciousness, would *much* rather be integrated in a community than be alone. With few exceptions, artists and thinkers who live in relative solitude are unhappy. Even if they don't live in solitude they're unhappy, because they're narcissistic (fixated on themselves, schizoid, etc.). Even more tellingly, when they create they almost always have in mind a potential audience. Obviously, then, their consciousness is oriented toward the community. What they want is togetherness; their problem is that their aptitudes force them to try to achieve it in different ways than normal people do. Hence, they are conflicted. One part of them, the most universal part, the species part, desires love and community and whatnot; another 'part' shuns it, probably considers it contemptible ("The masses! Ugh!"), because a third 'part' of them is organized in such a way that togetherness is difficult for them. The reaction of the second 'part' is explainable as a community-oriented (other-oriented) reaction to the fact of their enforced solitude. It is something like an identity-reinforcing (self-protecting) defense mechanism. Such a mechanism must be other-oriented because the wound it is intended to heal is precisely the lack of recognition from the other. But the 'other' in question now (in the defense mechanism) has to be the artist himself, because the *other* other, the community, has rejected him (which is of course what caused the problem in the first place). The artist must become his own community, his own other. Understandably this substitution is unsatisfying—he cannot be an other for himself in the way that the *real* other is—so he remains unhappy. Finally he cuts off his ear and kills himself.

So you see, when man, phylogenetically speaking, became his own other—when he became fully self-conscious—it may have been in reaction to the deterioration of the community. His self-consciousness was the psyche's attempt to heal itself, by giving itself the recognition, the togetherness, it had formerly received from the community. On the other hand, self-consciousness was also the wound itself, for the wound was precisely the separation of the individual from the community, i.e., his becoming self-conscious. (How very Hegelian of the psyche!)

If this is true phylogenetically, it must also be true ontogenetically. The child comes to full self-consciousness only upon confrontation with the other—with, for example, the lack of constant loving

attention from the mother. The self is formed partly to compensate for the absence of togetherness, to give *itself* togetherness, to be a surrogate mother to itself, a surrogate other. Presumably in Paleolithic times the process of self-(consciousness-)creation in the child ended at an earlier stage than it does now, such that his sense of selfhood was vaguer, less defined, than it is now.

So, in a sense, the conventional wisdom is true that people's basic desire is to return to the womb. Oneness. Union with the mother. It's like the story from the *Symposium*, the hermaphrodite story. Sort of. But not really.

Monday, February 6

It occurs to me that I don't know what I'm trying to explain.

Tuesday, February 7

The feeling of having a lot of energy is almost always pleasurable. Does the pleasure consist in the "release" of the energy? I don't think so; *having* the energy, while it does impel towards discharge, is itself enjoyable. The 'potential' energy, not yet released but 'bubbling up' inside, is a source of pleasure. A nearly universal characteristic of this state is that the psyche desires interpersonal interaction; it is through such interaction that the energy is to be released. There is no compulsive self-consciousness, no fixation on being an object—on wanting to but dreading to (see R. D. Laing, and me); there is only an irresistible impulsion toward togetherness. Now, a state that gives such great pleasure is surely, in a sense, a 'goal' of the psyche. And the more this state occurs, the 'healthier' is the psyche in which it occurs. But an appeal to pleasure here isn't even necessary; it's obvious that such a psyche—such an energetic, not-compulsively-self-conscious, community-oriented psyche—is fairly healthy and happy, well-adjusted. Why is it obvious? Because each of us knows from introspection that in such states one feels no psychological conflicts, no burdens; one is 'light': selfhood does not weigh down on one. So from introspection we know that the main goal is to escape a preoccupation with selfhood. D.h.: to escape selfhood itself (because selfhood is defined as a preoccupation with itself, an awareness of awareness).

I think the theoretic divorce between psychic and bodily energy is mistaken. The two go hand-in-hand; they increase and decrease together.

God *damn*; Liszt's piano version of *Erlkönig*—I haven't heard Schubert's original—is awesome. Especially the part about a minute-and-a-half into it when it goes major and treble. The melody. What a melody! And Liszt's transcription of the *Trout*. Superb. Wonderfully playful.

(I make all these references to specific classical pieces because I want you to listen to them. Seriously, that's the reason. Also, I have a strong urge to release my pent-up appreciation, and since I don't know anyone who sympathizes with it I have to express it here.)

I think Freud's mechanistic framework is wrong. The emphasis on instincts, on "discharge", on opposing "forces" (id and superego). Humans do have instincts, but they don't operate as Freud thought.

Wednesday, February 8

darkness

partygoing downtown in the club rousing
termites from anthill lairs crawling

backwards through space and time driving
uphill through space and time thumping
wildly wildly rumping to death beating
death pulsing oozing crud of spirit bumping
against sides of wet sweat fat-plowed hardly sticking
to sticky palms of sweat-smeared soul-thudding
sound beating like a meat mallet your pounding
head to pulp inside out from soul to body crushing
bodies in a slimy mass of slippery groping
under and over and outer and in her quivering
lips soaked with fat-perspiring
blood-condensing hip-grinding mouth-salivating
movement wrecking you in throes of deadening
ecstasy through screams of banshee-worshipping
dancers who scream like raping
raping in thuds of hollow violence killing
killing in the dark of drunken nausea ripping
knife-like through the mass of teeming
congealed shots of liquor

I eat the sweet meat of your deep treat as you beat me; then I lick your teat as we weep, in heat.

The Blessed

I wake up happily beside your back,
Its naked shoulderblades as near as dusk.
They sway ever so lightly as you breathe—
A motion imperceptible did I
Not know so well the rhythms of your body.
You're sleeping; I can hear the whisk of breath
From out your nose—the quiet rush of warmth
Warming your upper lip (perhaps a bead
Of moisture lingers there)—it sounds just like
The sighing of a distant breeze! So quiet....
To think that sound could be so quiet, and yet
Be heard! Or is it my imagination?
Perhaps I am so rapt that I imagine....
Your hair is knotted on the pillow, tangled
In piles tickling my lips, which kiss
The strands in bunches (since their counterparts
Upon your face—though longing to be kissed—
Are turned away and inaccessible).
Clichéd it is, but....I inhale your hair.
It is a kind of secret, guilty pleasure,
Which I permit myself occasionally.
And then I touch your back, a timid finger
Afraid to mar the skin, which looks as if
It's made of fairy-tales solidified.
How can there be such symmetry in life?

—Except....yes, I see an auburn fleck
On one side of your back, right near your neck.
It's almost hidden by the hair; to touch
It I must move the tousled mass aside
—Though slowly, carefully. You mustn't wake.
Who knows what dreams are passing underneath
Your darting eyes (for surely they are darting,
Bird-like, as I have seen them do before)?
Oh, how I'd like to see your face right now!
A glimpse only....perhaps of just the dimple
That bunches up the right side of your face
(It's deeper than the other, prettier).
Or maybe just your lips—or your eyes,
Those sapphires that I sometimes dream about.
But I must lie here restlessly, in rapt
Anticipation of the moment when
You'll wake. To look into your droopy eyes,
To be the being they see first, as sleep
Still clings to them.... Your sluggish smile will be
The answer to my expectant grin. And then
Together we will sit outside, beneath
The dogwood tree, and watch the setting sun.

Thursday, February 9

A Garden

This is a vision.— I am sitting on the rug
In my bedroom, my back against a pillow propped
Against the bed (the maroon comforter),
Shoes off, shirt off (except a t-shirt), legs extended
Far off into forgetfulness, laptop on lap.
My laptop!—(What a name! "Laptop". Suitably
Poetical.)—'What would I do without thee, dearest?!
"How do I love thee? Let me count the ways...."' No;
That were—I mean, would be—to make this poem (so-called)
Excessively didactic (though I fear the damage
Is done already). Even so, I love you, laptop.
—Where was I?— Here I sit (or rather, *lie*: my grade
Of incline is closer to forty-five degrees
Than ninety), with my blaring headphones safely snug
Against my grateful ears (they're being damaged, but
They don't object); Beethoven is shouting—pounding
His silver hammer like a Nietzschean against
The anvil of Platonic Beauty, so that sparks
May fly—into my willing mind, or soul, or brain,
Or what-have-you. It's a symphony—the sixth,
To which I'm partial. (Debussy once asked why this
One in particular is so beloved by all;
His answer....had something to do with the idea

That man and nature are divided by a gulf
Unbridgeable, and that the wonder which man feels
For something so mysterious and charming is
Communicated in this symphony. I think
That this is sheer bullshit. “Mystery”? And “gulfs”?
And metaphysical “wonder”? No! Philosophy
Has no place in the Kingdom of the Musical;
It is a trespasser—and it had best beware
Lest it be instantly revealed as a fraud,
A charlatan, a loathsome brute, when placed beside
The comely maiden, the Cinderella that is music.)
My mood is not....the other one, the offspring of
The *Marche Funèbre*; it is the radiant sister of
The cisalpine sunrise, or of Venice at dusk.
This solitude is far from loneliness; I *crave*
It, more than poets crave love—than Byron craved freedom.
To sit here on this rug—this drab and threadbare rug—
With music in my mind and freedom in my thoughts,
Is something more than paradise. —“Paradise”?!
I pity those poor souls in Paradise, if it
Be not a room, a rug, a bed, a pen, and music!

I’m reading Erich Fromm’s massive *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*.

Friday, February 10

The Death Leap of Alfred Kubin

Bullet-rigid, headless as a bolt of lightning,
lock-kneed, jointless like a solitary stick,
he dives in-voluntarily horribly
stricken with death-fever life-lustfully,
arrowed-armed as a spear reaching for its prey.
His hairless body a naked chisel he drills
for the open gash,
a miner brandishing his pickaxe
deep in Mother Earth.

Night

The wind throttles the tree, tears its dead branches,
Bangs my broken window;
A woman fights it, tears stuck on her face.

Saturday, February 11

Salvation

Before I met you
in the transcendent meadow
where grass grew tall and concealed us
I noticed often
while looking under rocks
and peering through overgrown vines
That things were empty
beneath their shiny shells
with colors calculated to deceive
And threats were empty
because their promised poison
was less potent than observation
And there was no flight
that weak and injured insects
could hope to use as an escape
From broken wings
destroyed in daily life
through constant unrelenting probing
Of broken souls
and broken buds of life
with nothing of value left to offer
So I began
in this state of fatigue
and tired disillusionment
To doubt my searching
which had led me nowhere
except to thoughts I longed to forget
And closed my eyes
to stop the inquisition
and kill obscure hope of truth
In loneliness
in this withered desert
where I had lived and grown old
But then I met you
in the eternal meadow
where grass grew tall and concealed us
And I was saved.

Sunday, February 12

I'm surprised—though not really—that I've never encountered among scholars the insight that, in his chapter on "The Body" in *Being and Nothingness,* Sartre's thoughts sometimes mirror Wittgenstein's. Like on pp. 454 and 455.

On pp. 729 and 733 Sartre makes similar points to the one I made on the 3rd about "unconscious" thoughts being present in consciousness in some way, though we don't have "knowledge" of them (Sartre's terminology). He doesn't think the dichotomy between consciousness and knowledge is problematic. I should read his Introduction, where he establishes the distinction. (To me it's inexplicable, though it obviously exists. It reminds me of our never having explicit awareness of all our physical sensations at a given time, despite the fact that, inasmuch as they are sensations, we *do* have some vague awareness of

them. But not until we focus our attention on them do they become genuine objects of "knowledge" for us, i.e., of "explicit awareness".)

Monday, February 13

Epiphany time: my mental 'illness' is nothing but lack of sleep. I need nine hours of sleep. If I get nine hours of sleep I'm a different person. I slept nine hours last night and now I feel like a cannonball. Bouncing around the rooms. But how fucking sad is it that all these years I've been sad mostly because I haven't had enough sleep!! And how stupid is it that I've never taken sleep seriously! Oh well. I'm too happy to have regrets.

Tuesday, February 14

Went to a yoga class. It's a weekly thing.

Wednesday, February 15

within and without the sacred spheres, the millennial lightning storms rained down on us dashing brain into asphalt sheening the sidewalks like sweat on the forehead of Michelle Kwan outside her shimmering brain oily pussy-like (for I indeed do want to fuck) upon the ice radiating shards into the air sounding the empty gale at the center of the empty wail which is a whale in whom I am the Jonah drowning in nothingness the void that is my self my high self flying away into the dusk of my firefly dust-eyes sailing away into the dusk of my life lord god I write in my sublime state of yearning for thy perfection which however I am experiencing now in my trippy state of mind nirvana-like if you keep your eyes semi-closed better than yoga surreal like time goes so slowly like an eternity in a moment so many thoughts passing through my mind like conflict between the self and consciousness I am being forced back to the past that night when I wept suicidely but I'm not unhappy I delight in life except I would appreciate sleep now while listening to Indian music

Sunday, February 19

I wrote that while high as a kite on pot. Closed my eyes and just listened to my unconscious flow, with a few interruptions to savor it. Suurrrrreeeeeaaaallllll....

Reading Frege's *Foundations of Arithmetic*.

Thoughtless

I see her without closing my eyes,
she sits right there in front of me,
her eyes reaching for my fingertips,
her tiny smile hugging me.
Neither of us talks, though we want to:
words would be dangerous.
I cannot bring myself to smile,
though hers is unwavering
and tries to reassure me.

She is barefoot, as so often;
her unbroken skin is barely pale.
The tear in the knee of her jeans
makes me think of wet grass
and the day I met her there
a long time ago.
Her eyes drop, the smile fades;
she leaves me.

Rachmaninov's Moment Musical No. 5 put me in the mood. (There are subtle hints that she was killed, maybe in a car accident.)

the
lady
who stole my
autonomy
from me heartlessly
did not have the kindness
to tell me that she would leave
when I could not live without her—
when her absence would cut life from me.
She *knew* it—she *knew* it—she *must* have known!
Could she not feel it cutting her up
inside, *inside*, inside herself?
I will not forgive you, love!
Never! You have killed me!
And yet she was all—
her memory
is all I—
she was
the—

Friday, February 24

I'm in that phase of What's the point of thinking? that hits me periodically. I haven't thought for a long time. Just having a good time going through the motions and meeting people and getting drunk (like tonite and yesternite and tomorrow and Tuesday—Fat Tuesday). I don't know what to think about. Want to write poetry but can't. Been thinking about a girl named Maria, a student who came to my office-hours and we had a good time and I saw her later at lunch and we've been emailing and her paper (on Van Gogh's *Stairway at Auvers*) was the best I've read in both semesters and she studies history and art and we have a lot in common—like beauty: she has it and I love it—and I'm trying to stifle my hopes. (After meeting her for the first time I sang all across the parking lot "Maria! Maria! I just met a girl named Mariiiiiia!")

There's the same lack as always but I'm happier (=more confident) than usual.

But if there's no "instinctual", unconscious yearning for eternal life (as there is, say, for community), why have religions always attracted people by the promise of eternal life? Well, for one thing, the eternal life in question isn't just a continuation of what we experience on Earth. Most people wouldn't want to live forever if it meant more of the same (suffering, ennui and so on). What they want is eternal *oneness*: perfect communion with God, or with Being, or with Seventy Virgins. So the power of the promise of eternal life is actually another piece of evidence for the Marxist hypothesis (of community etc.).

In any case, insofar as people do want to live eternally just for the sake of living eternally, their desire is only a *reasoned*—a poorly reasoned—reaction to their indubitably instinctual fear of death. This *fear* is ingrained, but the desire it provokes is not. It exists on the level of shallow reason. People think momentarily, "Wouldn't it be great if I could live forever?"....and then forget this thought and go about their daily activities. The desire has no manifestation in the unconscious. Properly speaking, it isn't even a 'real' desire; it's just a passing whim. Fear of death doesn't entail or presuppose the wish to live forever.

In fact, the tragedy and comedy is that neither of these options, which are exhaustive, is desired. People want neither death (though they may think they do) nor eternal life. It's Scylla and Charybdis.

Sunday, February 26

you
I love
sun-harnessed
power of life
glowing tides of tears
moon-begotten through you
star-yearning astronomer
drifting buoyant through galaxies
distant star-beaded light necklaces
enwreathing invisibly your white neck
radiating sun-kisses through space
reaching from your unbounded eyes
outside temporal vacuums
inside concrete worlds
where bland life happens
which I reject
just because
I love
you

The psychological state portrayed in *Notes from Underground*, and in Sartre's chapter on bad faith, and in *No Exit*, and in numerous entries from this journal—the state of insincere sincerity, in short—seems to be a modern phenomenon. In all of history, the first unambiguous reference to it that I know of is in *Rameau's Nephew* (if my memory doth not greatly err). In no ancient writings that I know of is self-consciousness taken to this extreme, this extreme of doubting whether experiences can ever be sincere—and whether this word 'sincerity' indeed has any meaning. As far as I know, Sartre fails to appreciate the historically conditioned character of bad faith. Or would he say it has always existed 'unconsciously', or half-consciously, but that earlier writers were not perceptive enough to diagnose it? This may be true. In a sense, it must be: the intrinsic nature of consciousness has not undergone radical changes since Cro-Magnon man. But the reason the phenomenon was not noticed until recently is that it was not a problem until recently. It did not pose a threat to mental well-being until recently.

—To speak more clearly: the condition that Sartre analyzes in his pages on the waiter and the coquette has always been implicit in consciousness. Consciousness has always been more or less the way Sartre describes it. It transcends itself, it is not what it is and it is what it is not; it continuously anticipates the immediate future (in "protention"; see my senior thesis), and consciousness-of-the-immediate-future is the way in which consciousness prereflectively experiences (the fact of) *possibility*. Implicit in awareness of possibility is negation of the real; implicit in negation of the real is awareness of its transience or non-inevitability (or non-absoluteness)—i.e., protention, which is implicit in self-consciousness. So implicit in self-consciousness is awareness of possibility, of the fact that whatever is being experienced not only can

but *will* (*immediately*), in a sense, be otherwise[1]—and thus *is* otherwise, because included in this very moment is anticipation of the next, i.e., implicit awareness of the absolute transience of this experience. For an experience necessarily exists in a given moment—it itself is a part of the moment—and a moment is necessarily 'passing' or 'dying' the instant it appears—and so the experience is 'passing' along with the moment, which means that, in order for it to persist for a certain length of time, it must in a sense be *willed* to persist. Otherwise it will vanish the moment it appears. In this willing consists the insincerity of 'sincerity'. Said differently: insofar as consciousness ignores its own transience, its own possibility-governed character, its own *freedom*—that is, insofar as it ignores the fact that it *wills* every experience, and instead treats experiences as *happening to* it—it is being a little insincere, is existing in "bad faith".

All this, however, is rarely an object of knowledge. The subject is ignorant of it, and so the subject cannot be blamed for it (as Sartre seems to blame him, in using, for example, the value-laden term 'bad faith'). –Be that as it may, as an *object of knowledge* this phenomenon is historically conditioned. In itself (as coextensive with consciousness) it is not blameworthy or 'sick' or a symptom of narcissism or any other illness; it becomes such only when it becomes an object of knowledge. Only the (mildly or severely) sick individual—the narcissist (or, more generally, the person who is excessively aware of himself)—is aware of the insincerity of his consciousness, which he understands as *necessary*, as something he cannot overcome. (This kind of psychological acumen is almost always a symptom of sickness.) That this person has become more and more common with the onset of modernity is a clear sign of the sickness of the times. If mankind ever evolves to a healthier era, the phenomenon that Sartre analyzed will probably again cease to be an object of common knowledge (except maybe in an academic—i.e., not intensely *experiential*—way, when people, say, read Sartre's books), though it will still be a condition of consciousness. Fewer people will be (as) bothered (as I am) by their "bad faith", because, in being well-integrated in their communities, they won't be impelled to probe themselves compulsively.

Tuesday, February 28

Jackhammer

come in said the voice huskily
come in here where it's dark
so I went in the dark
with cold trepidation
legs hot and stiff
I's shut widely
tremor her
her fur
spur
her
her
hurt
spurt

[1] Even if, in another way, it won't. The point isn't that in every moment, the experience in the next moment will literally be qualitatively different; rather, the moment's transience—its never being wholly and simply present but always consisting partly of an *anticipation* (of the next moment)—which is synonymous with the perpetual fact of possibility, means that the experience of this moment is never wholly and simply just what it is, but that it exists in a kind of limbo, in which the possibility of its negation is always half-consciously present in consciousness. The moment is constantly having to be posited; a new moment is always coming into existence. So the next moment (which exists right now, in the midst of the current one) will be a different moment from the current one, which means that the nature of the experience of this moment is not necessary, not permanent, but conditional and temporary.

in the dark
make it hurt
make it hurt *hurt*
in herrrrrrrrrr

Sartre's phenomenological analyses in *Being and Nothingness*, while brilliant, necessarily fail. They try to capture in concepts the whole content of mental states, which is impossible because all types of consciousness have an unconceptualizable element. Concepts can characterize them *to an extent*, but not completely. For example, shame is more than just "the attitude by which I recognize the Other as the subject through whom I get my object-ness", and arrogance is more than just "the attitude by which I apprehend myself as the free object by which the Other gets his being-other" (p. 386). Even in context—i.e., together with everything else Sartre writes—these descriptions are inadequate. The words have an ambiguity that the attitude itself lacks. I can cognize them in ways that don't imply the full content of the attitudes they're meant to express. This is essentially the problem I mentioned, e.g., on February 2nd: the content of these states isn't exhausted in analyses that invoke only subtleties in the concept of self-consciousness; they have also an 'emotional' *force* (or, better: a primitive, conceptually irreducible character), which isn't strictly implied by, or deducible from, mere descriptions of the way one cognizes oneself or the Other. Precisely because there's really 'nothing in it' to be deduced! –Said differently, states like shame and arrogance are susceptible of more than one kind of phenomenological description. I might, for instance, say that shame includes a perception of inferiority which, strictly speaking, isn't 'deducible from' (or 'contained in') any half-conscious perception I have that "the Other is the subject through whom I get my object-ness". In themselves, these words don't necessarily have a negative connotation—which shame does. The perception of self-inferiority in shame is "sui generis": I just....'look down on myself', whatever that means. I just....perceive the Other as superior, whatever that means. It can't mean only what Sartre says it does, because of the ambiguity of his descriptions (which is the ambiguity of *all* descriptions). (I don't mean 'obscurity', by the way; I mean that, even when his obscure sentences are understood, there remains an ambiguity.) In other words: in order to understand Sartre's sentences, the reader has to bring to them what he already intuitively knows of the mental state under discussion. A reader unfamiliar with shame—a Martian, say, who understood our language—would not fully understand it on the basis of Sartre's descriptions.

Still, they have an element of truth.

the tiny
mucous

peckerwood

spitting sap into the
c
o
n
G
E
a
L
e
d
wind
smells of
p

(You sort of have to step back a ways and squint, and maybe cock your head. The shape is supposed to be evocative without being as obvious as the first one.)

Thursday, March 2

Last night I acted in a short movie Charles made here in the apartment with a girl and a friend of his. It was a mini-movie set, complete with lights and a sound-boom-thing and a white umbrella-thing to soften the light. I was the sicko who stalked her and stabbed her to death in the bathtub. The actress: 19-year-old Erin, a bimbo Charles has fucked more than once (who likes to strut around bare-breasted). He's told me anecdotes about her, like how during that time of month when blood comes out of her vagina unless it's absorbed by a wad of cotton stuffed in there she refused to let him bang her, so he just played little games like pulling on her tampon by the string.

No pleasure like sitting here listening to Liszt's *Au bord d'une source* and *Liebesbotschaft* and *Die Loreley* and *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este*. Unless it were to listen with Maria next to me.

One thing is needful.— The only way to stay alive for an entire lifetime is—not to live. Most people have an unconscious understanding of this, so they watch television.

Blindly living

The drone drums on outside in the day—far away,
in the bright wilderness of the day,
I can hear buzzing and talking and mechanical sounds,
like every day, every other day.
Outside this night is a bath of warmth, a freeness, quick-paced,
and lots of light. I can feel it—almost.
There's nothing I can't hear.
Tied up in here I hear running dogs sniffing and growling
(I imagine they are playing together),
children running and leaves falling from trees
which feel rough and scarred and old.
Fast people with fast voices conscious of fast time pass me
because they are late probably for appointments.
I can feel things like stares and self-conscious ends of stares,
for they are rude, but I feel the pity not ending,
for pity is not rude and is allowed (death is polite).
Starers see me my windowless face and close their windows,

but pity glows from the shutters which I see and they do not.

Tap-scrape-tap, I hear my cane test the sidewalk
scraping past cracks. Tapping heels of shoes and saying
Sorry I'm Sorry, and the turning around and saying quickly
It's Okay (what a friendly voice!....).
Swarms of voices, friendly voices all around, helpful
and kind
and soft with good intentions, waiting gratefully
for gratitude.
—Yes, they are more grateful than I, far more
(So cruel are you, society, so miserly!),
and so I repay them smilingly (because we play games even at night!)
and give them what is expected. I must. We all must.
And so they....leave....and I watch them go....

Every day. Every day.
All you people, you kind people with faces and eyes,
you fake people, you ethereal threads of sound with colorless flesh,
you ungrateful frivolous people: every day you live
amidst the unliving!
I do not live, I *crawl!*
I am locked in wakeful sleep—a crawling contradiction!
I want to see! I want to see this famed "sunset";
I want to see this woman who smells pleasant;
I want to see this stump that trips me and lands me on the grass
(blades of grass between my teeth),
so I can count its rings and see how old it is.
But the world is blind to me, all its facets black,
and I must stumble on without end.
Every day.

Friday, March 3

Apparently John Searle thinks that "mental phenomena are caused by neurophysiological processes in the brain and are themselves features of the brain....: 'mental events and processes are as much part of our biological natural history as digestion, mitosis, meiosis, or enzyme secretion.'" "Mental phenomena are realized in the structure of the brain. ....The feeling of thirst is localized in the hypothalamus and visual experiences are right there in the brain where the firing of a vast number of neurons at literally millions of synapses have brought them about." Moron. If consciousness is in the brain, point to it. Show me where it is. "But at least you can't deny that it's located somewhere in the *head*! It's intuitively self-evident that consciousness is in the head, as opposed to outside the head. And if it's in the head, then surely it's in the brain (because the brain is the part of the head that controls thinking). So it must be in the brain." No. It's a mistake to apply the concept of location to consciousness, or to anything else non-physical. Consciousness isn't located anywhere. Not even 'in the head'. "But that's absurd!" It seems absurd because we're in the habit (actually, more than habit—I'm not a Humean—; we're in the *conceptual compulsion*) of thinking that everything has a location, even concepts. (Hence Platonism. Hence "Goddammit, *what are* concepts?! *Where* are they? They have to be *somewhere*, goddammit!") And also because it's intuitively obvious that consciousness is right there behind the eyes. Yet, strictly speaking, it isn't. It doesn't have a particular location. It's an emergent neural phenomenon many of whose features are outside our conceptual scheme.

Applying certain concepts to it gets us into insoluble paradoxes. This makes sense, since language wasn't designed for philosophy; it was designed for practical use, for use in the exoteric world. –Admittedly, my Wittgensteinian ideas are unsatisfying, because it'll always seem obvious that consciousness is 'in the head'; still, they're right.

Another testament to the fact that Saul Kripke and I are practically the only philosophers left: the debate over the meaning of self-continuity. The main problem (which I struggled with in my senior thesis) is that it's impossible to distinguish selves from one another. There isn't a criterion; every self is exactly the same as every other, except that it's separated from them. (This is just a brute datum of experience.) Hence it's meaningless to say that *this* self is the same as the one two hours ago. (One of) the reason(s) it doesn't seem meaningless is that there's a continuity linking this consciousness to the one two hours ago (as I said in my thesis). This temporal continuity is made possible by protention and retention, i.e., by the fact that the previous 'moment' and the following 'moment' are both somehow phenomenologically present in *this* 'moment'. (This is also what "temporal continuity" *means*.) In my thesis—if my memory doth not greatly err—I went so far as to say that continuity of consciousness (expressed propositionally) is the *meaning* of the judgment "It was I who had that experience back then". That was wrong. Such continuity—or rather, the memory of such continuity—is merely a reason for affirming the judgment. The judgment itself means only that "this (self-)consciousness was the one back then, temporally displaced". But this is truistic. Inasmuch as consciousness is always consciousness, every consciousness is going to be every other one "displaced" (temporally or spatially or whatever). But then—because the judgment is a truism—it doesn't succeed in distinguishing between people, which is what it purports to do. The absence of a criterion for distinguishing between consciousnesses—between 'mine' and 'someone else's', which means: between *me* and *someone else* (because the self is self-consciousness)—makes the judgment meaningless. It *seems* to have meaning, but if you look closer, the meaning evaporates.

Still: "*Obviously* that was me two hours ago and not you!" In order for that statement both to have meaning and to be true, we must interpret it differently than we did above. It has to be understood as a confused way of saying some or all of the following: that that consciousness existed in this body, that I remember the experience I had two hours ago, that the general 'tenor' of that consciousness—i.e., the thoughts it was prone to, etc.—was the same as the tenor of this one, that the personality-traits possessed by the 'consciousness-body' (the *whole* 'me') then are essentially the same as those now, etc. In some circumstances, certain of these will be absent (e.g., memory), but because the rest are present the judgment will still be affirmed. For example, if I say "I was the person who smashed his face on the road when he was eight", the sentence will be considered true even if, say, my personality has completely changed since then, because that consciousness will have been in 'this' body (insofar as that eight-year-old body would evolve into this one), and because I remember the experience. If I didn't remember it....actually, the statement would probably still be considered true. So I guess that when long spans of time are under consideration (and maybe even short spans), physical continuity is the most important criterion.[1] ('Physical continuity' doesn't mean that the body's properties haven't changed. It means that during the process of change, the part of the body which is, at any given time, thought to be the 'most important' one—i.e., the 'main' part—i.e., 'the body'—remains intact at that time,[2] all the way up to the present.)

When someone says, on the other hand, "I wasn't the same person back then; I wasn't the person I am now", he usually means that his personality was different. So, strictly speaking, he *was* the same *self*—i.e., he has memories of the experiences back then, his current body directly evolved from the earlier one, etc.; he merely has different characteristics now. (Of course, we've seen that, in the *strictest* sense, it's meaningless to posit an identity between two selves.)

I've thought of objections to the foregoing, but....me-no-likey objections.

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[1] In the case of very short time spans, my half-conscious memory of the temporal continuity of my consciousness becomes important.

[2] [In other words, if, for example, I lose my hand in an accident, the requisite bodily continuity still exists because the '*main* part' of my body remains intact. But the whole discussion above is simplistic.]

You can't deny that Chomsky is (always) right: intellectuals have a duty to dredge up the truth about politics. A duty to fight the Establishment. For they have access, time, money and intelligence. 'Either you're complicit or you're a hero': that should be the motto of every intellectual.

Obviously I don't live up to my standards.

–I would, though, if I thought there were a publication that would print something I wrote. But institutions, as a rule, don't speak truth to power.

Where the Stoics went wrong.— Nothing encourages stoicism like *never being wrong*.

"*What is truth?*"— The only way a philosopher can be a philosopher is to live in ignorance [of society]. Otherwise his humanity will rebel.

(↑) I saw *Lord of War*. Not a great movie, but a little disturbing. "Lights a fire under your ass." If only documenting crimes weren't so tedious and dehumanizing!

Seriously: although, in a sense, an intellectual can be said to have a moral obligation to do as Chomsky does, doing so will prevent him from cultivating himself in 'beautiful' ways. What he does will be noble, but it will also be, kind of, a neglect of his creativity. It will turn him into little more than a data-spitting robot. He may indeed delve into theory as a result of his investigations, but to the extent that he does so he becomes less "moral". –Well, that isn't necessarily true. Theories can be of practical use. But usually they aren't.

And let it not be said that the intellectual who accepts his moral obligation needn't devote *all* his time to exposing crimes or remedying them. If we're assuming morality, then morality is absolute. If a certain act is moral, then it's *right*—not because it's right but because it's good. Morality must be founded on compassion, but whatever is compassionate is *right*, and not just 'good' or 'better'. An alternative isn't 'worse' but *wrong*. (In the moral world, everything is necessarily black and white. Otherwise there are no moral imperatives, which means it's permissible in every situation to invoke "extenuating circumstances" as an explanation of one's not acting morally.) Therefore, someone who has access and resources is acting wrongly in every moment that he doesn't contribute to the alleviation of suffering.

Ehhhh, that's simplistic. But there's a kernel of truth in it.

She nettles my bristling vanity, but I settle for whistling "Inanity!"

Saturday, March 4

The foundation of morality, in the broadest sense, is the imperative to improve life. The desire to improve life is an integral part of what distinguishes humans from animals: humans, in being self-conscious, are conscious of suffering, of death, and thus are constantly trying to make their lot more bearable. Morality is the 'imperative' to make *other people's* lives more bearable. (It makes no sense to say that a person who fails to make his own life happy is being immoral. One can act morally only in relation to others.) And yes, it's an imperative; otherwise it's nothing. A mere 'suggestion', which has no force. So on this construal, artists like Mozart—who provide people with a happiness than which no other can be deeper—are acting morally by creating art. Anyone who creates anything that can be construed as improving life can be called "moral". Of course, this position quickly degenerates into relativism ('What makes me happy makes you unhappy.'), and it doesn't take account of people's motives or of ambiguities in the notion of "improving life"—but morality is ultimately an incoherent idea anyway. It can be easily applied only in the most clear-cut situations, like those involving atrocities and the imperative to fight against them.

But does this mean that everyone in a position to fight against them, however indirectly, must do so? Yes. Insofar as he doesn't, he isn't being moral.

I hate reading the machine-written research papers that pass for philosophy nowadays. It's like they've been stenciled in from the same universal cookie-cutter template. It's like they've been written by intelligent undergraduates. —"It is a commonplace that 'world-talk' plays an important role in modern philosophical discourse. Philosophers have proposed analyses of modality, counterfactuals, propositions, and more in terms of possible worlds, and philosophical arguments are conducted on the basis of such analyses. But are there any possible worlds? And, if there are, are they adequate for the tasks to which philosophers have put them? These are crucial questions for the worlds theorist. In this paper, I am (primarily) concerned with the second. In particular, my concern is to address the question of the relevance of possible worlds to modal truth—where the modality under consideration is *metaphysical* modality." –In other words: "General introductory sentence. More specific introductory sentence elaborating on an idea in the first introductory sentence. Hint at the question this paper is supposed to answer. Embellishment on the hint...."

By the way, this huge controversy over "possible worlds" and "genuine modal realism" and all the David Lewis-spawned shit in metaphysics makes me think the masses are right about philosophy.

Sunday, March 5

To Ilan Halimi

processions of stains of tortures of Jews
marching single-file the rank and file
of bitterest hate human-stained
human-fabricated hate
past the wide judgment-eye
glaring all the time
and all the while
hideous
death-throes
throw
death to
history
and all kindness
maimed mutilated
marching armies across
envy-sown battlefields
soaked with bloodlusting sadism
ripping apart Innocence's corpse
as Love's wide judgment-eye looks on and cries

Maria has a boyfriend. Luckily I hadn't allowed myself to hope.

The young man sitting on his once-white
bedsheets which were now as almost-brown
as three-day-old slush in the gutter in the street
clung to his computer like he was still in the
womb floating with his stubby hands pressed
tightly against his tumid head because there was
outside a certain malformed beast called reality

which screamed like nails scraped down
a wall of glass leaving long white cuts shrilly
at him to come and join the crowd before it died.

Thursday, March 9

Why are people horrified at the thought of mankind's extinction? Their fear has no rational basis. It isn't as if life is an unbelievably good thing, so good a thing that it would be terrible for potential future people not to experience it. Life sucks. We'd be doing those future people a *favor* if we killed the human race. What's so terrible about nothingness? It's better than this fucking shit we have going on here. Bertie Russell said that one of the three principles by which he had lived his life was "unbearable pity for the suffering of humanity". But someone who really felt that kind of pity—and who, moreover, prided himself on his ability to reason logically—would be most consistent if he advocated extermination of the species. Think of the billions of potential future people who would be spared pain! If extermination could be carried out in a physically painless way, one can argue it would be a good thing. Besides, the species is going to die out anyway, and when that happens, everything that came earlier will effectively not have happened. So we might as well get it over with!

Friday, March 10

I've been reading stuff on the mind-body problem. The more I read, the more convinced I am that (an elaboration of) my solution is the only sensible one. It avoids the identity theory's problem of "How can a *public* brain state be identical with a *private* mental state?"[1]—as well as all other problems, except for a few inevitable paradoxes (which aren't peculiar to my solution; they're inherent in the nature of consciousness). In fact, in one fell swoop it bypasses most of the last sixty years of discussion, as being irrelevant. Once you've understood it, for example, most of the papers in the anthology *Modern Materialism: Readings on Mind-Body Identity* (ed. John O'Connor) suddenly become academic exercises with no bearing on reality.

Maybe you think it's hubristic of me to think I've laid the framework of an answer to a problem that's been around since Descartes. But I have so little respect for "philosophers" and mankind in general that it doesn't surprise me at all that finding an [approximate] answer to this "most difficult of questions" would be anticlimactic. *Everything* is anticlimactic; why should this be any different? Besides, my solution is so hard to grasp conceptually that for it to be *the* solution would make sense—because if the solution were as simple as most thinkers have thought (—thus, for example: 'Mental states are physical states. Period. Simple as that.'), why would the problem have been around as long as it has? Obviously the problem has something to do with the fact that concepts (like 'mental' versus 'physical'[2]) are not wholly adequate for describing consciousness (i.e., consciousness cannot be adequately described)—the recognition of which fact is integral to my solution.

I mean, for Christ's sake: you have Richard Rorty saying that sensations actually don't exist, and that the only reason we think they do is that to eliminate talk about them from our language would be "impractical"—and so, in short, sensations are really nothing but physical [not 'qualitative'] processes—

[1] In my theory, the brain state isn't public. The '*aggregate*' of the neural activities is, but their emergent result isn't. (The aggregate is the exclusively physical side of the activity, so it's public; the emergent result is the mental side—which is also, however, physical, in some strange incomprehensible way—and the mental is private.)

[2] And, even more pertinently: the *single* concept of 'mental versus physical'.

and then you have me putting forward a theory so nuanced[1] (yet elegant and systematic)—and to understand which requires such powers of intuition—that I won't even describe it here. Who do you think is right?

Still, as I said above, there are unresolved issues. Like: since there are different kinds of emergence (at least, there seem to be), and since emergence in general is a very strange thing, it would be good to have a fuller account of it than I've given.

Sunday, March 12

The cry of impotence

If a tenth of the time I spend thinking of death
I spent thinking of life, I would be full of life.
If I thought to myself how little eternity means
and believed it,
I could live eternity every moment.
And I wouldn't have to write like a wailing infant,
nor pretend to be weak because weakness was fun.
This damn sickness of having to need "perfection"
or prettiness because nothing matters
and everything changes
and everything dies
would no longer infect me
and I could live like someone in 18th century Vienna
when the most unpleasant thing was horseshit on the street.
Just to not wonder why I so long for eternity and fullness
and have been birthmarked with this senseless yearning
for something outside the bounds of sense.

I wish life were easier.

I was sitting on the couch, looking at the ceiling with my head resting on the cushion, making the squinchy bizarre faces I make to myself whenever I feel good, and I suddenly realized: "What freedom! I can make these faces whenever I want to! I can manipulate my face in any way I want! And I can jump up and move my body however I want! And right now there's a mass of cells in my head! Life is *awesome*!" Weird epiphany.

Monday, March 13

Reading Schiller's essay *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*. Also, Vasari's *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*.

Met with one of my students, a Marine who's being deployed to Iraq for the third time. Asked him about his experiences and impressions. He was in Fallujah; said he was in charge of a machine gun but had knifed people to death also. Enjoys it—the adrenaline—despite having lost many of his friends.

[1] So nuanced that it can account for the appeal of all other theories—or at least 'make room for it'. (On the other hand, it's also the only one that isn't totally stupid. Like behaviorism, functionalism, physicalism, dualism, and Searle's "biological naturalism".)

A piece of advice

Despite the past, despite the pain,
Despite life's driving you insane,
Live full, live deep, be gay and merry
—But still, 'round women, I advise: be wary.

The meaning of life

Whene'er you think that "life ain't fair!"
(Whilst tearing your hair in great despair),
Reflect, ere reaching for your gun:
If life were "fair," it wouldn't be fun!

Dear God

It's said you're full of love for us
And wish us all the best;
—Okay, supposing it is true,
I have just one request.

To help us humans have good lives,
Please *break religion's spell*;
In other words, please kill yourself!
—And send yourself to hell!

The fruit of life

They taste so good, these ripe grapes!
And their texture—softly ribbed, fleshy.
But my favorite is the stalk that grows between them,
Which when you squeeze leaks sweet juice
—Well, it's tasteless, and smells like bleach,
But I like to lick it anyway.

I love Robert Browning's short poems. They're passionate but restrained, simple in sentiments but rich in imagery. Their language is neither flowery nor prosaic:

Meeting at Night

The gray sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
As I gain the cove with pushing prow,
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.
Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;

> Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
> A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
> And blue spurt of a lighted match,
> And a voice less loud, through its joys and fears,
> Than the two hearts beating each to each!

I wish I could write like that!

Wednesday, March 15

Reading Stephen Barker's *Philosophy of Mathematics*, an excellent introduction to the subject. Provides a broad historical perspective. I might even call it a thrilling read. (History is thrilling no matter what it's a history of.)

Also rereading parts of Putnam's *Philosophy of Mathematics*. And Max Black's *The Nature of Mathematics*. To prepare for a paper I want to write on ontology.

I was watching a sitcom. The episode was about a fat man who kept eating more and more despite the pleadings of his friends, who couldn't understand why he insisted on risking his health. What made it even stranger is that he was lonely and obviously would have appreciated a girlfriend, but the more he ate, the less attractive he became to women. So he was just shooting himself in the foot. Eventually they realized that this was the whole point: women rejected him, so he had unconsciously 'decided' to justify this rejection, to give them a *reason* to reject him—a reason *he* had chosen. By gorging himself, then, he was making a virtue of necessity: he was choosing to be rejected, which made the rejection bearable. 'If they don't want me, well, fuck 'em! I don't *want* them to want me! I'm happy with who I am.'[1] But he was unaware of all this unconscious reasoning; as far as he knew, he just wanted to eat a lot. But his unconscious motivation revealed itself in the virulence with which he rejected his friends' attempts to look out for his welfare: he found it disloyal of them not to accept him as he was. He explicitly told them that. "Why can't you accept me as I am?!" (This ejaculation, of course, can be construed as an inadvertent revelation of his real motives—an accidental 'slipping-out' of the emotional pain behind his gluttony. All he wants is acceptance, though he doesn't know it. His determination to eat is a way to hide his pain to himself and others—hide it behind a mask of pride.)

As always, I want to understand how this is possible. How can the unconscious have this kind of intentionality? Assuming the explanation is true—and it seems plausible—how can the unconscious display this sort of Hegelian "cunning of reason", by which it achieves its ends through actions of whose meaning the actor is unaware? If I could only understand this I'd be very receptive to psychoanalysis!

Thursday, March 16

At lunch I saw a flyer advertising an event tonight having something to do with dating and sex. I thought 'Okay, what the hell' and went to it. Maybe I'd meet somebody. Turns out it was a meeting for members of some weird underground cult that does nothing but preach about how inferior we all are to

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[1] Alternatively, he was just depressed, and through some unconscious mechanism this led directly to his over-eating as a way of coping, rather than a way of 'rebelling'—of finding unconscious comfort by *choosing* his situation. That is, maybe the element of choice is irrelevant; maybe there's some direct connection between over-eating and depression. This seems likely, at least in many people: you always hear of people eating loads of ice cream and cake and junkfood when they're depressed (though *I've* never had the urge to do so). But this may be due to their energylessness—their lack of energy to cook real meals—and if so, it isn't related to the case at hand, because the fat man had plenty of energy—enough to support righteous indignation at his friends for wanting him to change his unhealthy ways.

some guy named "Jesus Christ". I felt like Indiana Jones in that scene in *The Temple of Doom* when he observes the ritual of the Thugee cult—the zombies intoning meaningless sounds as a human is sacrificed into the fire pit. "No one's seen anything like this for a hundred years!" That's what I was thinking.

It began innocently enough. I walked into the large room, which was absurdly empty (evidently the cult isn't very popular), and stood there wondering what I'd got myself into. I didn't yet know it was a Christian Conference, but I could tell I was about to be underwhelmed. Some girl involved with the show came up to me and started a conversation. Quite pleasant. We were both friendly; I was starting to think that maybe this wouldn't be so bad after all—when, in answer to my question about what all the musical instruments on the stage were for, she said, "We're going to start out with some worship music." A single thought flashed through my mind: 'Uh-oh'. "Worship music?" I asked. "Well, no...." she said, "just some music." Hmm. A few minutes later another guy came over and introduced himself—very friendly again—and then two other guys—very friendly. I was getting suspicious. After I'd heard a few references to the Church, my suspicions were confirmed. "So....this is sort of a religious thing?" I asked. "Yes!", with an amused smile. Then it took off. I was told all about this little group that goes around spreading the Word, and I was told to go to Bible study tomorrow at noon, and there's a fancy dinner tomorrow night, and etc. Then the pastor came over and we talked. Finally the production began—with half an hour of songs and prayers about how unworthy we are of God's love. It was a sing-along; we stood up and clapped along and sang to the lyrics on the video screen in front of us. (It was a Powerpoint presentation.) Guitar, synthesizer, bongo drums, accompanists with microphones. Ugh. Those songs lasted forever! Each was at least eight minutes long. And there were only about two verses to each song, so we sang each verse about ten times. Audience-members were closing their eyes, raising their hands to the heavens—and keeping them suspended in air for minutes at a time; it was strange—bowing their heads and saying "In Jesus name! In Jesus name!" as the rest of us kept the melody going. Twenty-five minutes into it I got to thinking that it wouldn't be so hard after all to come to believe in this stuff if it was regularly pounded into you like this. Still, I could see that they meant well, and that they were good people. 'These are the *good* Christians,' I thought, 'the ones it's easy to forget about.' –That was a rather naïve opinion, as I came to realize.

It all stayed innocent and somewhat charming for a while longer. There was a mimed drama that portrayed Jesus (dressed in white with a red paper-heart stuck on his chest and paper hearts taped to his palms that you could see when he raised his arms in that expansive 'I love all of you' way) saving four tormented souls (dressed in black with masks on their faces;—I didn't catch the symbolism)—by slapping hearts onto their chests, which caused them to jump up and down with glee and whisk their masks off and dance around the stage. 'At least their intentions are good,' I thought again.

Then it was time for the entrée. Our guest speaker was going to talk about sex and love in our sinful society—"Is true love still possible?" etc. (I'll spare you the suspense: yes.) Skilled speechifier that he was, he started off with jokes to lighten the mood. Here's a sample: There were two brooms in a closet. They were getting married. So there was a bride broom and a groom broom. (That drew laughs.) They went to a party shortly before their wedding; the groom broom made some remark that I've forgotten (it had something to do with asking his betrothed if he could "whisk her away"), to which the bride broom responded with "Are you kidding?! We haven't even swept together yet!" Har-har. That provoked the universally accepted reaction to bad-pun jokes: a collective good-natured "Awwwhhh!" (like: "Oh *man* that was bad, ha ha, but it was funny too, ha ha"), a few chuckles, and a lot of turning-the-heads-to-neighbors-and-shaking-the-heads while smiling;—"Aww, that mischievous ol' guest speaker with his bad-pun jokes!"

Okay; now it was time to get down to business. The speech began poignantly: he described his near-suicide in college, after his fiancée had broken up with him. For a week he'd planned it out, down to the last detail; but one night in a park, while he was trying to make the final decision for or against death, God spoke to him. That was his rebirth, etc. Now he was a marriage counselor and a preacher (or pastor or reverend or one of those things). The rest of his speech was about the greatness of love—and abstinence until marriage—and the sinfulness of flesh-pleasures—and the inadequacy of evolution ("We're all descended from muck, just by chance?! That doesn't account for *love*! Science can't account for love!")—and the sinfulness of society. It turns out that the cause of all the world's ills is sex before marriage. The speaker himself had had sex with his fiancée before she'd dumped him; *this* was the reason for his suicidal

pain. Satan had possessed him, and the result was despair. (Lust, you may know, is the work of Satan. Love is the work of God.) We have to love Jesus. If we love Jesus with our heart and soul, etc. etc. And besides, if we abstain from sex until marriage we'll enjoy it a lot more when it finally happens. (He emphasized this pragmatic concern quite a bit.) "Is love temporal or eternal?" Well, according to him, lust is temporal, but love is eternal. And the precondition for love is that women save their "precious jewel" for marriage. The speaker threw out all sorts of statistics that drew oohs and ahhs from the audience—like, for the last five years, 100 Japanese young people have killed themselves every day (often during big internet "suicide parties"), and 80% of people who have sex before marriage end up divorcing, and one out of five women are sexually abused in childhood, and one out of five pastors are addicted to pornography.

An hour of this. This palaver. By the end I couldn't stop thinking about *Inherit the Wind*, which I'd seen the previous night. All these people sitting here absorbing this stuff and nodding and shaking their heads—this stuff that was becoming more ignorant and bigoted by the minute—these people had been so kind and pleasant just two hours ago, but now they were haters of evolution, of science, of gays, of the irreligious. They would have denied that, but obviously missionary zeal was not foreign to them. And what else is missionary zeal but intolerance of dissent? That's clearly the motivation behind it most of the time—the desire to impose oneself on the other. In the 1920s these people would have lived in Heavenly Hillsboro and happily thrown the free-thinking heretic into jail. All because of their infinite love, their eternal love. It was all right there below the surface. This absolute faith in their own rightness.... And yet they were so agreeable as conversationalists, and I could see they were fundamentally kind! This is the paradox that's always disturbed me. The intermixture of good and bad, a mixture so perfect that there's really no distinguishing between the good and the bad. The bad exists in the good and vice versa.

Equally frightening: I can sense the rudiments of hateful missionary zeal within myself. As I walked home tonight, feeling so corrupted—almost *physiologically* corrupted—that I could think of little else but the Mozart I'd be listening to in a moment, I could tell I had the potential for atheistic fanaticism. I knew that the only reason I'd never succumb to fanaticism is that I'm *aware* of my fanaticism. My self-consciousness is all that prevents me from sliding into the pit of disguised jihadism.

Also, the obvious insight once again occurred to me that historically the role of "confessors" has been to function as therapists in an age that didn't recognize psychology. Conversely, therapists are just confessors for the modern age. *Talking* about problems (like guilt; hence "Have you sinned recently, my child?")[1] in itself somehow relieves their burden. (Clearly by establishing a community with the listener. But this isn't really an explanation.)

Hollow

In cemeteries I have a way
of being content,
and sitting on the grass against a gravestone
finding the melancholy peaceful.
Not feeling so would seem sacrilegious.
Sitting in the shade of the junipers,
I think of the squirrel looking at me
as he holds his partially eaten acorn.

[1] One reason Christianity has been psychologically powerful is that it first burdens people with guilt and then gives them the means to overcome it. It *separates* them from the community (with God, etc.) only to draw them more closely into it. (Guilt is just a form of isolation, of self-fixation.) That is, it creates a community by promising that only through this community can one reach the *ideal, eternal* community—by transcending one's original guilt ("sin"), which is essentially one's original *individuality* or *isolation*. For sin is just the stain of original separateness. The stain of *personality*, of concrete, bodily existence. Salvation means overcoming the particularities of concrete existence.

At parties I have a way
of being unhappy,
and in my can of beer is a half-emptiness.
The cluttered noise around me is strangely measured,
like a row of gravestones in a park.
I sip my beer and contemplate
the woman staring across from me,
and smile at her
hollowly.

For each person there is a particular era into which he ought to have been born—and it's rarely the one in which he lives. His talents are most suited for a single culture and a single time, and his weaknesses will be most noticeable in a different culture and time. So, somewhere in time there's a culture that will make possible the perfect compromise between his talents and his weaknesses, a culture that will best allow the flowering of his talents while hiding the extent of his weaknesses. For example, had I lived in the 19th century I would have been a terrible poet, much worse even than Oscar Wilde. My innate sentimentalism would have been given free rein, and my difficulties with rhyme and rhythm would have convinced me to give up any poetic ambitions. But my aptitudes are well-adapted to the 21st century: rather than being a terrible poet, I'm an *average* one. So it's conceivable that people might someday consider me a better poet than Oscar Wilde, which is absurd. In the romantic style he surpassed what I could have done, and in the free verse style....who knows what he might have been capable of?

N.B.: I'm irritated that I used not to want to write free verse. I valued only the traditional stuff, which effectively prevented me from writing poetry during those many dark nights in Korea and in college, when I was most in need of poetry's therapeutic effect. Not only would I have enjoyed myself more, but I probably would have written a lot of readable poems.

Saturday, March 18

The Rossini in the sky

In the sunlight poking its fingers through the blinds in my room
I think I hear murmurs of a *valse brilliante,* Chopin-style;
(I'm listening to that piece now, so it comes to mind—
Ah, what a welcoming way to wake up each morning!)
Or maybe it's a duet, or a fugue, or a symphony....
I'm curious now and anyway want to hear the music outside,
So I raise myself (this necessitates that I pause the other music—
It's Mozart's Sunshine Concerto now, No. 17—but I trust
The substitution will be worth it)
And I pull the little string with the little plastic cone on its end
And the blinds magically raise themselves.
The sunlight withdraws its fingers and steps into my room
Uninhibited, body and soul.
It's blinding.
There's no subtlety here; it's clearly a fanfare I'm listening to.
Pure joy in the cloudlessness of the sky (which is immeasurably blue).
It's Beethoven's Fifth, fourth movement: "Wake up! Wake up!
Wake up while there is such a day to be seized!"
I smile and throw on my clothes and step outside,

Body and soul.

It's uncanny how true the conventional wisdom is: the longer you live, the less you care about achieving perfection. Life somehow kills the desire—kills desire in general.

There are certain combinations of talents that are not suitable for life. We experimental people are proofs of nature's failure as an architect.

Dear PETA.— If nature can experiment on humans, why can't humans experiment on nature?

Monday, March 20

Schiller's insistence on the necessity of uniting "simplicity" and "sentimentality" in order to achieve a "beautiful humanity" reminds me of Jung's idea that a healthy psyche makes use of all its faculties. (Also: Goethe's ideal, and the Greeks' ideal, and Nietzsche's *Übermensch* (sort of), etc.) Well-roundedness is the meaning of both ideas. Simplicity = immediate experience, "spontaneous activity", an unreflective harmony among all the faculties—a harmony in which "the whole object possesses one", such that one doesn't dwell on one's subjectivity; sentimentality = reflectiveness, romanticism, a division between the faculties, a self-conscious love of feeling, a dwelling in the realm of the ideal. Both individuals and historical epochs are dominated by one or the other of these tendencies. Taken to extremes, both are unhealthy (because they stunt humanity). Schiller's essay revolves around the idea of 'poetry as a metaphor for life': the different kinds of poetry are correlated with different kinds of life.

I think the explanation of the general, though only approximate, truth of the suggestion that each historical era is dominated by one or the other tendency is that social organizations can be (crudely) classed into two kinds: those that encourage the individual to be integrated in the community, and those that encourage him to feel separated from it—to feel his own separate identity. In the first case, generally speaking, his personality will be primarily active: his self-consciousness (his reflective side) will be overpowered by his urge for action, for experience, for being at the center of communal life. He will, in all likelihood, see nature mainly as an extension of human society, or vice versa (because, due to the lack of a duality between him and his community, he won't have the psychological motive, or ability, to posit a duality between society and nature); thus, his religion will probably be animistic or polytheistic (though it needn't be). Examples of such a society are Greece in the Archaic and Classical periods,[1] India at the time of the Vedas, the society that produced the earlier books of the Old Testament, the society in which the Koran was written,[2] and the society in which *Beowulf* was written. And of course all prehistoric cultures. On the other hand, there are cultures in which individuals don't feel very integrated in the community; the result is self-consciousness, insecurity (often), nostalgia for simpler times, a clearer distinction between nature and mankind, a fondness for wallowing in one's subjectivity, etc. Examples are Rome during and after the demise of the Republic, Greece in the age after Alexander, China during the T'ang dynasty (see the poetry of Li Po), Europe and America during the last three or four hundred years (or more). Mankind will surely return to the simpler age eventually, but not until the current civilization has destroyed itself.

I'm reading a bunch of books on ontology and the philosophy of math. *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mathematics*, by Klenk, *Abstract Particulars*, by Campbell, *Number: The Language of Science* (a history of mathematics), by Dantzig, *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction*, by Armstrong, *Realism in Mathematics*, by Gaddy, *Frege and the Philosophy of Mathematics*, by Resnik, *Essays in Ontology*, by Allaire et al, et cetera.

[1] But even at the time of Euripides and Socrates, Athens was evolving away from simplicity and into sentimentality.
[2] Communal integration doesn't imply the absence of war.

Saturday, March 25

I recommend Dantzig's book. To quote Albert Einstein, "This is beyond doubt the most interesting book on the evolution of mathematics that has ever fallen into my hands." What's more, the author has that precious quality lacking in so many scholarly authors: wit. Here's an example (the second paragraph):

> It is significant that we owe the first explicit formulation of the *principle of recurrence* to the genius of Blaise Pascal, a contemporary and friend of Fermat. Pascal stated the principle in a tract called *The Arithmetic Triangle* which appeared in 1654. Yet it was later discovered that the gist of this tract was contained in the correspondence between Pascal and Fermat regarding a problem in gambling, and the same correspondence which is now regarded as the nucleus from which developed the theory of probabilities.
>
> It surely is a fitting subject for mystic contemplation that the principle of reasoning by recurrence, which is so basic in pure mathematics, and the theory of probabilities, which is the basis of all inductive sciences, were both conceived while devising a scheme for the division of stakes in an unfinished match of two gamblers.

That reference to mysticism ties into the author's earlier ridicule of it.

Most of Wittgenstein's ideas on mathematics are perverse. But that's obvious and I won't waste time arguing for it. Instead I'll mention a criticism of his theory of meaning that's bothered me since I first read *Philosophical Investigations* years ago: to say that the meaning of a sentence is its use, or that it's the rules that govern when it can be used, or that it's its "assertability conditions", or that it's the role it plays in a language-game, is very imprecise. What does it mean? How can the sentence's *meaning* be any of these? It may be intimately related to them, but it can't *be* them. The meaning of 'The house is on fire' is not the fact that this sentence serves as a warning not to approach the house. That wouldn't even make sense. Its meaning, rather, is its truth conditions: that the house be on fire. If someone asks me "What do you mean?" I'll say "I mean the house is on fire!" Cf. Tarski's example: "'Snow is white' is true iff snow is white." Why? Because the statement that snow is white is what the sentence *means*. Admittedly, in my commentary on the *PI* I somewhat misleadingly insisted that the meaning of a sentence is the 'intention' that invests it with—meaning; but I did so because of my intuitive awareness that the intention (i.e., the thought) is '*of*' the truth conditions. In other words, it's only because I was unaware of the Fregean terminology that I didn't express my correct intuition more felicitously. (Of course, this analysis of meaning applies only to a certain kind of statement. The meaning of performative utterances is not 'their' truth conditions, precisely because they don't have any. –On the other hand, maybe I shouldn't adopt the fashionable Austinian view just because it's fashionable. No doubt the function of performative utterances isn't to state a fact; still, their meaning is what they assert, and what they assert is a fact. If I say in a moment of passion "I love you!", my statement's purpose (i.e., its "role") isn't to communicate a fact. It's to express a feeling, or something like that. Nevertheless, the sentence's *meaning* is the fact stated—i.e., the sentence's truth conditions. The role or function must be distinguished from the meaning.)

Sunday, March 26

I'm grateful to Jay for drawing my attention to the Swingle Singers, an a capella group that sings classical music, from Bach to Debussy. They're amazing. E.g. their version of Clair de lune. (Seriously: angels.) But the Largo from Bach's fifth piano concerto, with the translucent, vulnerable voice of the female lead, lonely and resigned but so beautiful.... How can one not cry listening to this? It's just so penetratingly sad I can't help closing the door to my room and crying a little.

In the entry on January 30th I was also arguing against Frege's conception of a "third realm". Or rather, I was trying to explain its intuitive irresistibility. (To argue against it would be stupid, because it's an inevitable product of the structure of the human mind and language. Besides, there's no *reason* to argue against it; it serves essential logical purposes, though it's also basically a myth. A necessary one.) My talk about the "substantiveness" of concepts and the like—i.e., their 'abstract entity'-ness—can be translated into talk about their objectivity, their 'third realm'-ness. Thus: there's the physical world, there's the mental world, and there's the world of propositions, numbers, concepts, and so forth. The latter is objective but not physical. 'Objective but not physical' has no clear meaning, though; it's an inexplicable paradox, which is why I consider it a myth and argued against it[1] (albeit in a sympathetic, non-argumentative way) on the 30th. In other words, numbers and concepts etc. are themselves myths, in that our half-conscious intuition of their ontological status is mistaken. We use them as if they're *fixed, objective, substantial* somehow, when really they can't even be conceptualized. They exist yet don't exist; they're in consciousness yet they aren't; they have well-defined meanings and yet are indefinable. But it would be senseless to deny on this basis the existence of "universals" like red and justice and triangle and pain. These things (which are vaguely similar to names) can be used to describe or denote a large number of things in spacetime. We use them in a 'universal' way, so there's no point in denying universals. We simply have to be careful how we interpret their ontological status.

Though I haven't known it, the theme running through many of my philosophical reflections since the beginning of my senior year has been the attempt to carve out a position between the *Tractatus* and the *PI*. Both extremes have insights but go too far; a position must be found that incorporates the good and leaves out the bad. (Apparently Wittgenstein thought that the only conceivable alternative to his later work was his earlier work, but that can't be right.)

The psychological problems of middle-class Americans—their narcissism, their TV-obsession, their celebrity-obsessions, their apathy—come down to this: the demise of illusions. Like religion. Religion's corpse is already half-decomposed. And there's no more faith in science, nor faith in great men ("genius"), nor faith in democracy, nor faith in prophetic social visions. Nobody believes in the illusion of eternity anymore: nothing lasts, everything changes all the time. Marx diagnosed the disease in 1848: capitalism has destroyed every object of worship but the cash-nexus. Which no one really worships anyway. They just think they do. (*They* worship it, but their *psyche* doesn't.)

Nietzsche was wrong: his *Götzen* hadn't *dämmerunged*. He still had his own private *Götze*: genius. The myth of the *Übermensch* sustained him. But that myth is not tenable, so there's nothing to anchor us.

....I've never been a fan of Quine. He has little of value to say. Penelope Maddy calls him, amusingly, "the master". An example of his masterly thinking is his "stunningly simple counter-argument" to the belief in universals: "We want to say that Ted and Ed are white dogs. [Do we? Okay, sure.] This is supposed to commit us to the universal 'whiteness'. But for 'Ted and Ed are white dogs' to be true, all that is required is that there be a white dog named 'Ted' and a white dog named 'Ed'; no 'whiteness' or even 'dogness' is necessary. [Therefore there's no reason to believe in universals.]" –Now, this, my friend, is why you're right in turning up your nose at philosophy. This less-than-thinking.

Honestly, it enrages me. It's bad enough that intelligent people spend years thinking about this *meaningless academic shit*; but when they're also as confused as this "stunningly simple counter-argument" shows them to be, and yet are totally unaware of their confusion—are in fact proud of their clear thinking, smug in their ivory towers—they deserve to be hauled out into the square and stoned. "No 'whiteness' or even 'dogness' is necessary." Brilliant. Except that you just referred to their whiteness and their dogness. You said they're white dogs. So I guess whiteness and dogness are necessary after all.

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[1] I'm not a "fictionalist", though. From what I've read of it (very little), fictionalism is stupid. 'Statements about numbers and necessity and possibility and the like are merely useful fictions.' Huh? That reminds me of instrumentalism, 'than which nothing could be stupider'.

Universals are nothing but a certain kind of concept. If the *concept* "subsists", then the *universal* does. And no one's going to deny that the concept 'dog' "subsists"; therefore, there's a universal.

I sympathize with Carnap's belief that ontology is mostly empty. But I disagree with his reasons. (The "linguistic frameworks" idea.) I also, by the way, disagree with his conventionalism. Of all the idiotic ideas I've encountered—!

Another thing: deflationary theories of truth are stupid. 'There's no need to rely on the notion of correspondence. To say that a proposition is true is redundant. The proposition that snow is white is true iff snow is white. That's all there is to it.' Okaaayyyy.... But snow is white "iff" *snow is white*! The statement *corresponds to* a fact! The question that has to be answered is *what makes a proposition true?* The correspondence theorist isn't denying that the property of 'being true' is, in a sense, redundant; but it's redundant only because every proposition implicitly asserts its own truth. By denying the substantiveness of the question 'What does it mean for a proposition to be true?', you're denying the substantiveness of the question whether {insert proposition here}. In other words, you're refusing to answer the very question that started all the trouble in the first place.

Tuesday, March 28

Trapped behind bars

At times when the light is on in my bedroom
and the night outside is blue and I look
through my barred window at the blue night,
I see strips of infinity across the sky.
And between them I can see my cloudy profile
repeated and distorted again and again
from the horizon to the apex,
like in the distorting mirrors at amusement parks.
It's almost unrecognizable, but because I want
to see it I see it.
It's there, stamped into the blue clouds in front of the moon.
(I want to *blot out* the moon, that serene patch!)
And I try to engrave that distant image of myself
into my mind, before I go to sleep every night,
but I never can.
And I realize how frightening it is to be alone.

Thursday, March 30

I miss Jim. He's always reminded me of Jon Stewart. And Dane Cook. The same charisma, the same style of humor. The kind of guy who somehow makes the rest of look like we live in black-and-white, while he has color. I wonder if he has HIV. That would make sense, since it's usually the best people who suffer the worst misfortunes.

I've often envied Teiresias. Except for the fact that the poor guy was the victim of a female: he said that women enjoy sex nine times more than men, so Hera blinded him. (*What the fuck?* Isn't enjoying sex nine times more than men *good*?) But to be both a man and a woman—to see what it's like to be a member of the second sex—that would almost be worth blindness.

"To play with fools, O what a fool was I!"

[…] I know that most intelligent people are aware of mankind's idiocy/dishonesty but are able to shrug it off. I'm not, unfortunately. Or rather: my constant shrugging-off is only on the surface.

Since I rarely tell you about the little daily incidents that drive me to this journal-venting you probably think etc. In this case it's because for the last few days I've been sending pleasant little emails to girls on the 'Yahoo personals' website, which I joined out of boredom, but only a single one has responded. Even though each of them can see from my profile that I have a dozen things in common with her, and my pictures are, in all honesty, pretty good. *Their* profiles, of course, are all full of "Are you the one? I want to meet a kind, intelligent man! Email me if you want to know more!" Arrgh.

The one is named Lauren; we have everything in common. But we'll see.

The formula for sexual tension: male confidence + female openness to it.

Friday, April 7

[…]

Sometimes religion and music belong together. And without them one is lost. [See Mozart's *Ave verum corpus*.]

Ave verum corpus natum de Maria Virgine,
Vere passum immolatum in cruce pro homine,
Cuius latus perforatum unda fluxit et sanguine,
Esto nobis praegustatum in mortis examine.

My only paper of the semester. The product of a week-and-a-half of intellectual distress:

Abstract

In this paper I argue that much of ontology is confused. I criticize the notion of 'abstract object' (or 'abstract entity') while yet explaining its theoretic appeal. This leads me to reject both realism and nominalism, and, more fundamentally, to argue that ontological questions tend to be "pseudo-questions". Along the way I discuss both the phenomenology of consciousness and Saul Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein, because they bear on my arguments. This paper is unusual in that it also embodies 'programmatic' intentions—namely, to unite the analytic tradition with the Continental, or, in other words, *intellectual cleanliness* with *ambition*. The result is necessarily (in an essay of this length) little more than an outline, but it may nonetheless be a useful corrective to the über-specialization that obtains in contemporary philosophy.

A Refutation of Ontology

Ontological questions have a venerable history, having been in circulation among philosophers for 2400 years. Nevertheless, in this paper I shall argue that many of them are pseudo-questions. More specifically, the question whether abstract entities exist—whether there are 'in reality' such objects as numbers, relations, properties and propositions—is based on confusions. Surely this claim ought to be uncontroversial. When a philosophical problem is actively debated for nearly one thousand consecutive years, refusing to be resolved despite the best efforts of the best minds, the possibility that it has been incorrectly formulated ought to be considered a probability. Ontologists should thus change their focus from attempting to answer the question directly to trying to explain in what sense it may be an illusion.

Of course, there is not just *one* question. There are many. Indeed, upon glancing over the contemporary ontological literature, one is struck that there may be an *infinite* number of questions.

Literally: there seems not to be a limit to the number of questions that can be posed, nor the number of ways they can each be dealt with. New problems are constantly being brought to light, and each proposed solution is merely fertile ground for the sprouting of new problems. The more that ontology progresses, the less it does. Any disinterested observer who read all the books, all the journal articles, all their rejoinders, all the rejoinders to the rejoinders, might well decide that the participants had given up the attempt to find answers and had resolved, consciously or unconsciously, just to continue writing for the sake of writing.

Obviously there's something wrong. Ontological theorizing ought not to be so technical that only a few specialists can understand it, nor should answers to its questions appear farther away the closer one gets to them. Wittgenstein once wrote that the purpose of philosophy is to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle. With regard to ontology, I agree. In this paper I'll try to explain the source of all the confusion, thus, hopefully, freeing the fly. Or at least uncorking the bottle.

An overview of ontology

I find myself already confronted with a dilemma. I have to provide some background for the reader, but the relevant 'background' is the whole of ontology. Which is a large subject. So I'll have to compromise: I'll try to give the reader a sense of the issues at stake, but I won't be able to touch on *all* the issues.

A good place to start is David Armstrong's formulation of what he calls the "Problem of Universals": What distinguishes the classes of tokens that mark off a type from the classes that do not?[1] (A token is an instance of a type. For example, a single banana is an instance of the type 'banana'.) This is an ontological question because whatever it is that distinguishes things from each other must obviously *exist*, and it must also be the fundamental organizing principle of our experience. So in asking for an account of it, we're asking for an account of arguably the fundamental class of existents, the class that structures our experience.

Each traditional answer to this question falls under one of two categories: nominalism or realism.[2] Penelope Maddy characterizes the realist position as follows:

> We all agree that there are many red things—red roses, red houses, red sunsets—but the ancient question is whether or not there is also, over and above this lot of particular red things, a further thing they share, namely, redness. Such an additional thing—redness—would be a universal. The most basic difference between particulars and universals is that a universal can be present ('realized', 'instantiated', 'exemplified') in more than one place at a time, while a particular cannot.[3]

Thus, properties and relations are universals, in that the same property or relation can be shared by many particular objects. Now, this ontology suggests the *substance-attribute* theory of Locke and (arguably) Aristotle: particulars are substances, while the universals that are exemplified by particulars are attributes of the substances.[4] For instance, Aristotle called an individual thing, together with its properties, a substance.[5] But this begs a question: what is it that distinguishes a given substance (i.e., a particular) from another? Why is this banana different from that one, if they both instantiate the same universals? Clearly a particularizing element is needed; this is what Locke called the "substratum". So, a substance is a substratum plus the universals it instantiates. But what is a substratum? It must be a "bare particular", a particular without properties, because whatever properties it has can be ontologically distinguished from it.[6] But the idea of a propertyless particular is very strange. Moreover, if substrata have no properties then

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[1] David Armstrong, *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction* (London: Westview Press, 1989), p. 13.
[2] For the moment I'll ignore conceptualism. I'll explain why later.
[3] Penelope Maddy, *Realism in Mathematics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 11.
[4] As Armstrong notes (op. cit., p. 62), this theory would have to be extended to account for relations.
[5] See Armstrong, op. cit., p. 60.
[6] Keith Campbell, *Abstract Particulars* (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1990), p. 7.

they are indistinguishable from one another. But in that case, how can there be more than one of them? What is it that distinguishes them? By definition there is nothing that fulfills this role (because they lack properties); therefore, there can be only one substratum. But this is absurd, because it entails that there is only one concrete particular in the whole world.

The substance-attribute theory is subject to many similarly devastating criticisms,[1] but since my purpose at the moment is only to provide a context for my later discussion I'll pass over the others.

Historically, the British Empiricist tradition reacted against Locke's substance-attribute theory by adopting a *bundle theory*, according to which a particular is identified with the bundle of its properties.[2] The idea of the substratum is rejected as unnecessary and paradoxical. Berkeley's phenomenalism had affinities with a bundle theory (though Berkeley was a nominalist), but Bertrand Russell put forward the most famous version. He suggested that properties are universals, and particulars are bundles of "compresent" properties. This means that no two particulars can be composed of the same properties, for if they were, they would necessarily be the same particular. The bundle theory, therefore, is committed to Leibniz's principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles, viz. that if two things have the same properties then they are the same thing. This principle, however, does not seem to be true. There are various counter-examples to it: for instance, Nietzsche's suggestion that the world exists in a cycle of eternal recurrence, in which everything that has happened will happen again an infinite number of times. This may not be true, but it is at least possible. Since it implies that Leibniz's principle is false, the bundle theory must be false as well.[3]

Let's look at versions of nominalism. Keith Campbell describes the main thesis of nominalism as follows:

> There are only concrete particular objects—rabbits and foxes, chairs and tables, and so forth. These objects fall into groups resembling one another more or less closely. Such objects have in common their membership of sundry classes, but no genuinely common univeral element. In a medieval version, all that rabbits have in common is that they are described using the same *common name* 'rabbit'—hence the label 'nominalism' for this group of doctrines. ....*To have a property* reduces to belonging to appropriate classes or glorying in appropriate descriptions. *To be a property* is to be an open class of concrete particulars.[4]

One might with justice say that the unifying thread among nominalist theories is their denial of abstract entities (in particular, universals).[5] Class Nominalism ("the view that for a thing to be of a certain type is nothing more than for it to be a member of a certain class"[6]) and Predicate Nominalism (the view that for a thing to be of a certain type is for it to be named by a certain predicate) have been effectively criticized by Armstrong,[7] but it would be worthwhile for us to look at one or two other versions. Let's start with Resemblance Nominalism.

This theory reduces membership in a class (e.g., the class of bananas) to certain relations of resemblance between the members. These resemblance-relations are not reduced to relations between properties possessed by the individuals; instead, they are primitive. They are just brute facts about the

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[1] See ibid., pp. 7 – 16.
[2] Armstrong, op. cit., p. 61.
[3] See ibid., pp. 70 – 74 for more problems with Russell's bundle theory.
[4] Campbell, op. cit., p. 17.
[5] This isn't entirely true, though. Nelson Goodman's nominalism, for example, differs from the traditional kind in that it countenances abstract entities (because he thinks that these can be construed as 'individuals'). See his article "A World of Individuals" in *Philosophy of Mathematics*, ed. Putnam and Benacerraf (Eaglewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964), pp. 197 – 210.
[6] Armstrong, op. cit., p. 8.
[7] See his *Universals and Scientific Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), chapters 2 and 4.

individuals.[1] In H. H. Price's version of the theory, yellow things, for example, are called yellow because they sufficiently resemble "a small group of standard objects or exemplars" of yellowness[2]—what is often called the "paradigm group". This paradigm group might be a particular banana, a particular patch of color, and the paint on a particular wall. Other objects are called yellow if they resemble the paradigm objects at least as closely as the latter resemble each other. Properties, or the individuals' instantiation of universals, need not be invoked to explain these resemblances.

While this theory, if fleshed out, may initially seem attractive, it is not. In denying properties, it foregoes a very useful explanatory tool. The positing of properties is necessary in order to explain, for example, causal relations. "Things act in virtue of their properties."[3] Indeed, from what I've gathered while reading about this theory, it actually denies *relations* as well (as indeed it must, if it denies universals and does not replace them with tropes). But I fail to see how a theory that must invoke the relation of resemblance can coherently deny the existence of relations. –In any case, this form of nominalism is refuted by common sense.

Trope theory is a more promising form. A trope is a particular instance of a property or relation. The red of a particular apple—the color that one can actually *see*, as opposed to the concept of the color, or its universal—is a trope; the specific relation of similarity between two particular apples is also a trope. Tropes have often been called abstract particulars, because each exists in a particular spatiotemporal location and yet can be brought before the mind only through a process of abstraction from other localized properties.[4] A concrete particular is nothing but a collection of these properties. It is a complete group of compresent tropes.[5] On this scheme, there is no substratum mysteriously lurking behind appearances, no problematic instantiation of universals (because there *are* no universals), and no reason for the theorist to implausibly deny properties.

Of course, I am again, of necessity, oversimplifying. There are many kinds of trope theory: some retain primitive particulars, others retain universals, others reduce both particulars and universals to collections of tropes. This latter kind, though, is the 'classic' version of trope theory, and it is probably still the most popular. G. F. Stout, Donald Williams and Keith Campbell are well-known advocates of it; they favor it largely because of the theoretic economy introduced by its one-category ontology. This enables them, for example, to analyse the statement "All bananas are yellow" analogously to the Resemblance Nominalist's analysis: the statement means that the yellow trope of each banana sufficiently resembles the yellow trope of every other banana for all the bananas to belong in the same class. Williams and Campbell take this resemblance-relation to be primitive (unanalysable), but they avoid the problems that beset the Resemblance Nominalist because they are willing to invoke properties (since properties are tropes), as he wasn't.

Nevertheless, there are problems with trope theory. For one thing, it seems odd to say that collections of compresent properties are capable of independent existence, in the way that we commonly think of concrete particulars as independently existing. For a banana to be *nothing but* a bunch of properties somehow bundled together offends our common sense intuitions. Properties just aren't 'substantial' enough. They need to inhere in something. To get around this difficulty—i.e., to add a little spatiotemporal 'heft' to properties—a trope theorist might try to ascribe shape, size and duration to tropes, but, as Armstrong notes, these are themselves properties and "therefore ought to be tropes themselves alongside other property tropes".[6] Besides, this *ad hoc* solution would still not answer the question of what it is that the properties inhere in. This question, of course, is *necessarily* unanswerable—or unaskable—within the framework of Williams' and Campbell's trope theory, because their ontology recognizes only one category.

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[1] *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction*, p. 15.
[2] Ibid., p. 47.
[3] Ibid., p. 50.
[4] I think the term 'abstract particular' is misleading, though, since it can be construed as naming *abstract entities* that are particulars rather than universals. See below for examples of this kind of 'abstract particular'.
[5] Campbell, op. cit., p. 21.
[6] Armstrong, op. cit., p. 115.

Maybe they would reply in quasi-Berkeleian fashion: there is no need to posit an underlying substance or substratum, because no matter how deeply we analyse any concrete particular, all we ever encounter are properties. Even on the subatomic level, we encounter only mass, velocity, electric charge, etc.; subatomic particles are essentially composites of these properties, just as bananas are composites of their properties. Moreover, we have already seen the problems with a substance-attribute view. Hence, it is better to deny substance altogether. –These replies are not obviously flawed. What they show, though, is not that trope theory is unequivocally good, but simply that it may be the lesser of two evils. In other words, we seem to be stuck with a 'Scylla or Charybdis'-situation. And that's a sure sign that something's wrong.

I'll pass over the other problems with trope theory and proceed to the philosophy of mathematics. The realist position is described by Penelope Maddy as follows: "mathematics is the scientific study of objectively existing mathematical entities just as physics is the study of physical entities. The statements of mathematics are true or false depending on the properties of those entities, independent of our ability, or lack thereof, to determine which."[1] The analogy with realism about universals is clear: as universals are supposed to be abstract entities that have being independently of the mind,[2] so are numbers. It may be asked whether numbers are universals or 'abstract particulars' not capable of multiple instantiation. This question is not easily answered. If numbers are defined as sets (as they often have been)—so that, for example, the number 0 is the set of all empty sets—then they are particulars, because sets are not multiply instantiable.[3] On the other hand, it certainly seems as if, e.g., the number 2 can be instantiated an indefinite number of times. (There are two pencils in front of me, I have two brothers, etc.) Rather than attempting to answer the question here, let's just acknowledge that it's a difficult one and move on.[4] For our purposes, it's enough to note that a realist believes that numbers are independently existing abstract entities.

Gottlob Frege was a famous mathematical realist, who extended some of his ideas to language in general. He suggested that numbers, concepts (or "functions", as he called them) and propositions (or "thoughts") all exist in a "third realm":

> [Frege] thought that these entities [viz., thought contents, numbers and functions] are non-spatial, non-temporal, causally inert, and independent for their existence and natures from any person's thinking them or thinking about them. Frege proposed a picturesque metaphor of thought contents as existing in a "third realm". This "realm" counted as "third" because it was comparable to but different from the realm of physical objects and the realm of mental entities. ....Entities in the other realms depended for determinate identities on functions (concepts) in the third realm. Since logic was committed to this realm, and since all sciences contained logic, all sciences were committed to and were partly about elements of this realm.[5]

Not all realists have subscribed to this doctrine of a third realm, for it is considered extremely platonistic and somewhat implausible. A common objection to it is that our ability to interact with the third realm—i.e., to have thoughts of numbers or propositions—is inexplicable, since the realm is causally inert and outside our experience. Frege's late paper "*Der Gedanke*" did not do much to clear up the issue:

> Thoughts are not wholly unactual, but their actuality is quite different from the actuality of things. And their action is brought about by a performance of a thinker; without this they would be inactive, at least as far as we can see. And yet the thinker does not create them

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[1] Maddy, op. cit., p. 21.
[2] Cf. Quine, "On What There Is", in Putnam and Benacerraf, op. cit., p. 192.
[3] A set is determined by its elements: i.e., two sets are identical if and only if they have the same elements. Thus, a specific set cannot be instantiated by another entity.
[4] Its difficulty should in itself make us suspicious of it, and thus of the meaningfulness of the categories 'universal' and 'particular'. But more on this later.
[5] Tyler Burge, "Frege on Knowing the Third Realm", *Mind*, Vol. 101, No. 404, p. 634.

> but must take them as they are. They can be true without being grasped by a thinker; and they are not wholly unactual even then, at least if they could be grasped and so brought into action.[1]

This all seemed very obscure to many philosophers, even some realists. I have to agree with Frege, though. While the details of his formulation may have been flawed, it seems obvious to me that any kind of realism about abstract entities is committed to the doctrine of a third realm, since abstract entities can be neither physical nor mental. If they were mental, they would be merely thoughts in a person's mind, which would mean that any statement about numbers or concepts or propositions would be a statement about the 'intuitions' or 'ideas' passing through a given person's mind at a given moment. To quote Frege: "If the number two were an idea, then it would have straight away to be private to me only. Another man's idea is, *ex vi termini*, another idea. We should then have, it might be, many millions of twos on our hands."[2] This is clearly absurd. Therefore, if we allow that the concept of two exists, it exists in a third realm. Similarly with all universals and propositions.[3] Exactly what this theory *means*, though, is a question that will have to be postponed until later in the paper.

Historically, realism in the philosophy of mathematics was associated with logicism, viz., the attempt to reduce mathematics to logic. More specifically: "according to [Frege's version of] the logistic thesis, the laws of arithmetic and the rest of the mathematics of number are related to those of logic in the same way as the theorems of geometry are related to its axioms."[4] Logicism and realism do not necessarily stand or fall together, though—which is good for realism, because logicism is generally thought to have failed. Still, realism faces difficulties. The objections that can be raised against it are similar to those that can be raised against Frege's "third realm". How should we understand the statement that numbers, or mathematical structures, exist independently of us? How do we acquire knowledge of them? Paul Benacerraf introduced the 'causal inertness' argument against realism (paraphrased by Maddy):

> What makes '2 + 2 = 4' true is the nature of the abstract entities 2 and 4 and the operation plus; for me to know that '2 + 2 = 4', those entities must play an appropriate causal role in the generation of my belief. But how can entities that don't even inhabit the physical universe take part in any causal interaction whatsoever? Surely to be abstract is to be causally inert. Thus, if Platonism [or realism] is true, we can have no mathematical knowledge. Assuming that we do have such knowledge, Platonism must be false.[5]

This argument applies also to realism about *any* kind of abstract entity, not just numbers. All abstract entities are causally inert, since they do not exist in spacetime. Hence, it would seem that if we adopt the realist's point of view, propositions, for example, can play no role in our acceptance of them. But this is absurd, so realism must be wrong. There must be a better account of numbers, propositions and concepts than to say that they are mind-independent abstract entities.

Nominalist theories about numbers are of course analogous to such theories about properties and relations. But if numbers are not abstract entities, what can they be? The most widely accepted nominalist position has been formalism, which Quine describes as follows:

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[1] Gottlob Frege, "Thoughts", in G. Frege, *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984); 351-72.

[2] Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, trans. J. L. Austin (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), p. 37.

[3] I haven't read much about Fodor's representational theory of mind, but insofar as it identifies concepts with mental representations, it surely falls victim to Frege's criticism quoted above. See Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence, "Concepts", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2006 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2006/entries/concepts/>.

[4] Stephen Barker, *Philosophy of Mathematics* (Eaglewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 80.

[5] Maddy, op. cit., p. 37.

> The formalist keeps classical mathematics as a play of insignificant notations. This play of notations can still be of utility—whatever utility it has already shown itself to have as a crutch for physicists and engineers. But utility need not imply significance, in any literal linguistic sense. Nor need the marked success of mathematicians in spinning out theorems, and in finding objective bases for agreement with one another's results, imply significance. For an adequate basis for agreement among mathematicians can be found simply in the rules which govern the manipulation of the notations—these syntactical rules being, unlike the notations themselves, quite significant and intelligible.[1]

Thus, not only are numbers not abstract entities; strictly speaking, "such questions as 'What do the laws of number mean?', 'How do we know whether they are true?', and 'Do numbers exist?' all evaporate and cannot even be asked, if the view of mathematical systems as nothing but formalized systems is adhered to. The formulas of such a formalized system do not mean anything, they are neither true nor false, they embody no knowledge and no claims about the existence of anything."[2] But this is odd, to say the least. For one thing, it apparently implies that numbers are just *numerals*, i.e., the marks we make on paper. But that can't be right; when we speak of the series of natural numbers, we aren't talking about a series of notations we just made with a pen. We're talking about something else, something more 'abstract'. Moreover, it seems manifestly false to say that numerals are meaningless. Nor is it clear how mathematics could be as scientifically useful as it is if it were nothing but a "play of insignificant notations".

Intuitionism is the third major school of mathematical philosophy. It is associated with the ontological theory of conceptualism, which states that abstract entities exist but are mind-made. In medieval times, this position was a popular attempt to deal with the problem of universals, but its support has dwindled since then. I haven't talked about it because it isn't very influential anymore—and also because, frankly, I have never really understood its analysis of universals. (For instance, I have often read that conceptualism holds that concepts exist only in the mind. But then how they are to be distinguished from subjective ideas and impressions is a mystery.) Be that as it may, intuitionism, which was developed originally by Brouwer, was inspired by Kant's transcendental idealism. Its association with conceptualism derives from its Kantian thesis that "mathematical objects such as numbers and sets are abstract entities brought into being by thinking".[3] That is, the *intuition of counting* is supposed to be the source of numbers and sets. The process of doing mathematics is a process of creation rather than discovery: the mathematician, guided by certain logical constraints, *creates* mathematical truths.

This doctrine has dramatic methodological consequences. For instance, it has led to the intuitionists' rejection of the law of excluded middle: a mathematical statement is not true or false independently of its proof or disproof; it is true if and only if it has been proven. Statements that have not hitherto been proven, such as Goldbach's conjecture,[4] are therefore neither true nor false. Also, intuitionists reject impredicative definitions, as well as Cantor's important theory of transfinite numbers (because it relies on the intuitively ungraspable idea that an infinite number of mathematical steps has been completed)—and, indeed, much of classical mathematics is thrown out. It is not surprising, then, that the mathematical community has almost universally rejected intuitionism.[5]

The view that numbers are properties of external things was effectively criticized by Frege in his *Foundations of Arithmetic*,[6] and I shall not repeat his criticisms here. The view that numbers are sets or classes has been useful in the philosophy of mathematics, but as we have seen, it conflicts with certain of our intuitions. Sets and numbers just do not seem intuitively identical. (Even analytically—i.e., by

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[1] Putnam and Benacerraf, op. cit., p. 193.
[2] Stephen Barker, op. cit., p. 98.
[3] Ibid., p. 72.
[4] Namely, that every even number can be expressed as the sum of two prime numbers.
[5] Cf. Ernst Snapper, "The Three Crises in Mathematics: Logicism, Intuitionism, and Formalism", *Mathematics Magazine*, Vol. 52, No. 4, p. 211.
[6] See §21 – §25.

comparing a list of their respective properties—numbers and sets can be distinguished from each other. For example, the set of all sets with two members—which is supposed to be the definition of 2—lacks certain properties that the number 2 has, and vice versa. 2 may be *extensionally* equivalent to this set, but intensionally it is not.) —In short, no matter what definition of number is offered, nor in what philosophical framework (the realist, the nominalist or the conceptualist)—and no matter what the nature of mathematical activity is held to consist in (whether in the discovery of abstract truths or in their *creation* or in the manipulation of meaningless symbols)—it seems subject to effective criticism.[1]

I have yet to touch on the problems surrounding the nature of propositions. Above I stated, somewhat offhandedly, that if concepts exist then they must be abstract entities, and hence must exist in a third realm. I would say the same thing about propositions, on the basis of the argument I took from Frege. But there is another argument that appears to establish the mind-independence of propositions:

> The proposition that there are rocks does not entail the existence of any beings that have or are capable of having mental states. It entails this neither in a strictly or broadly logical sense. That is, it is possible in the broadest sense for 'there are rocks' to be true in the absence of all mental states. But now, if this proposition is possibly true in the absence of mental states, then it possibly exists in the absence of all mental states, and so is mind-independent. This is an easy argument for the mind-independence of at least some propositions.[2]

"This argument seems to rule out any kind of conceptualism about propositions." It is such an easy argument that many philosophers have been convinced there is something wrong with it; however, their attempts to invalidate it have not, as far as I know, been successful. Other philosophers have accepted it but have been so averse to platonism that they have thus been led to deny the existence of propositions. This position is not very plausible, though. As Matthew McGrath points out, it seems *obvious* that "beliefs have sharable objects which bear truth values"—i.e., propositions. 'Snow is white' must express a proposition because it has a truth-value, and only propositions have truth-values. So there would seem to be such abstract entities as propositions. On the other hand, the belief in abstract entities is, as we have seen, not free of difficulties. The Benacerrafian argument cited above is but one such difficulty.

In short, ontologists are in a muddle.

An attempt to think outside the box

I was at pains in the foregoing to ignore common sense—which is generally what one has to do when doing ontology. Contemporary philosophers, unconsciously aware of this, have made an art of ignoring common sense. They are also singularly bad at 'thinking outside the box'. Let's see if we can do any better.

The peculiar nature of abstract objects (or "entities") is at the root of many problems. These objects seem both unavoidable and inexplicable. Our first task, then, should be to explicate them. A good place to start is Saul Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein, as expounded in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. My conclusion, briefly stated, will be that the confusion about abstract objects is an inevitable product of the paradoxical nature of 'understanding', which itself is grounded in the paradoxical nature of consciousness.

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[1] There are a few theories I have not considered, among them conventionalism and fictionalism. But as I warned at the outset, I did not intend to give a thorough analysis of every ontological position. My purpose in this first section is to provide only a background.

[2] Matthew McGrath, "Propositions", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2006 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2006/entries/propositions/>.

I'll ignore the question of whether Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein is accurate. I happen to think that he gives Wittgenstein too much credit in attributing to him an overarching, coherent plan for the *Philosophical Investigations*[1]—which has always seemed to me little more than a record of confused (albeit occasionally brilliant) gropings around thoughts whose main unifying thread is that they are intended to undermine the apparently natural and obvious world-view expressed by the *Tractatus* and hidden behind the incoherent prejudices of common sense[2]—but this is irrelevant. I am concerned only with the insights into what it means to 'understand' something.

Kripke's book is divided into two parts. In the first part he analyses what it is to understand and to 'mean' words and sentences. He concludes that there is no "fact of the matter" about what such understanding or meaning consists in. My knowledge of how I am supposed to carry out an operation like '68 + 57 = __'—i.e., my understanding of its meaning—is not a denotable fact, introspectively or extrospectively accessible; it is *sui generis*. It cannot be reduced to some such fact as my behavior or the nature of my intentions; it exists neither in my consciousness nor outside it. This is paradoxical because its existence seems obviously inferrable from my behavior: I am said to understand the proposition above because I know how to complete it, namely by writing '125' after the '=' sign. So, *obviously* I understand it! But then, where *is* my understanding? It is nowhere. Therefore, there can be no understanding (or, said differently, "there can be no such thing as meaning anything by any word"[3]).

But this is absurd. The paradox must be resolved. Kripke undertakes its resolution in the second part of his book. Since he has effectively shown that language is impossible given our common understanding of meaning, he must revise our understanding in order to account for the meaningfulness of language. Now, common sense takes the meaning of a sentence to be the truth conditions of the proposition expressed by that sentence. For example, because 'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white, the meaning of 'Snow is white' must *be* precisely that snow is white!—i.e., the truth conditions of the proposition. Indeed, it seems as if this Fregean/Tractarian account of meaning scarcely needs to be argued for, it's so obvious. Nevertheless, it must be wrong, because it is what got us into all the trouble in the first place. Our conclusion that assertions are meaningless was based on two premises: "facts, or truth conditions, are of the essence of meaningful assertion",[4] and there are no facts about what is asserted (or understood). In order to reject the conclusion, we must reject one of the premises. We cannot reject the second, because Kripke's arguments have established it; therefore we must reject the first. This means that the truth conditional analysis of meaning is mistaken. Kripke replaces it with an analysis based on "assertability conditions": an utterance has meaning if and only if it has been uttered under the right circumstances, or in the right "language game". Truth conditions have nothing to do with meaning. Given this new theory of meaning, we can answer the skeptic as follows: "In a sense, you're right that there is no fact about a person in virtue of which he means one thing rather than another by a given utterance. But in another sense, made possible by our new theory of meaning, you're wrong. A person means, say, addition if and only if the community to which he belongs judges that he is following the rules for addition correctly. His use of language is always subject to correction by the community. Communal linguistic practice is what determines the meaning of any utterance, in that the meaning is whatever the community agrees on."

—That's the book in a nutshell. I disagree with much of it, and I'll explain why shortly. But first I have to embellish a few points. The question whether a given statement has meaning or is understood correctly is closely related to the issue of rule-following, because to participate in language is to follow rules (syntactical, semantic, etc.). When I write the equation '68 + 57 = 125', I am following mathematical

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[1] In fact, I think that philosophers in general give Wittgenstein too much credit. He wasn't some sort of semi-divine thinker with a mystical insight into truth. If the *Philosophical Investigations* doesn't prove that, the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* does.

[2] To clarify my opinion of common sense: there's the good kind and the bad kind. The good kind, which philosophers no longer heed, militates against intellectual perversity. The bad kind is mankind's common stock of wisdom. I.e., it's a collection of idiocies.

[3] Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1982), p. 55.

[4] Ibid., p. 77.

rules, in particular the rule of addition. The skeptic's argument can be restated in this way: rule-following presupposes that there are ways to check whether the rule is being followed correctly. There must be criteria relevant to determining what counts as 'following the rule correctly'; otherwise the notion of following a rule does not make sense (because if there are no criteria then the rule can be 'followed' in whatever way one wants to follow it, which of course would mean that one is not following the rule). As Wittgenstein says, "To think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately'; otherwise thinking one was obeying the rule would be the same thing as obeying it" (*Philosophical Investigations*, §202). The skeptic, however, says that there are no criteria relevant to determining whether I have done an addition problem the right way, or whether I have understood a proposition the right way. I just go ahead and do the problem, automatically and blindly, following only my own sense of certainty. The same is true when, for example, I say that a given patch of color is green. I am not following any criteria; I am simply, as it were, doing what I feel like doing, while feeling sure, somehow, that I'm doing the right thing. Here again Wittgenstein says that "whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right'" (§258)—i.e., that we can't talk about following a rule. There is no "fact of the matter" about wherein my rule-following consists. This means we can't talk about speaking a language, which means we can't talk about *understanding* a language, or about the language's having any meaning. Thus we arrive at the skeptic's conclusion via an alternative route. (The solution to the paradox, of course, is that it is not possible to follow a rule privately. The criterion for rule-following is communal agreement that the rule has been followed correctly.)

Let me return to the phenomenological aspect of the paradox. This is the most direct and intuitively disturbing way to approach it, because it assaults our most deeply held beliefs and intuitions about what the activities of consciousness consist in. To quote Kripke:

> This, then, is the skeptical paradox. When I respond in one way rather than another to such a problem as '68 + 57', I can have no justification for one response rather than another. ....there is no fact about me that distinguishes between my meaning a definite function by 'plus' (which determines my responses in new cases) and my meaning nothing at all.
>
> Sometimes when I have contemplated the situation, I have had something of an eerie feeling. Even now as I write, I feel confident that there is something in my mind—the meaning I attach to the 'plus' sign—that *instructs* me what I ought to do in all future cases. I do not *predict* what I *will* do....but instruct myself what I ought to do to conform to the meaning. ....But when I concentrate on what is now in my mind, what instructions can be found there? How can I be said to be acting on the basis of these instructions in the future? ....What can there be in my mind that I make use of when I act in the future? It seems that the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air.[1]

The point behind all this is that it's possible—indeed, necessary—that in the very same moment I have perfect understanding of what I'm doing (viz., adding) and yet I *don't*. My understanding is both fully conscious and *not* conscious, in that it cannot be 'pointed to' in my mind. I just—*act*, seemingly without justification, yet with absolute certainty that I'm justified.

Where I disagree with Kripke is in his argument about "quaddition". This is his main argument in support of the skeptical paradox, but it seems to me neither necessary nor convincing. The *quus* function is an artificial mathematical function that Kripke invents for the sake of argument. This is how he defines it:

$$x \textit{ quus } y = x + y, \text{ if } x, y < 57$$
$$= 5, \text{ otherwise}$$

[1] Ibid., pp. 21, 22.

In other words, if x and y are both less than 57, the '+' sign is to be interpreted as we normally interpret it, namely as denoting the additive function. But if x or y is greater than 57, then the '+' sign changes its meaning: it now means that the outcome of the operation is 5.

Kripke argues that there is no way for me to know whether I mean plus or quus when confronted with a mathematical equation in which the '+' sign occurs. This applies to both the past and the present: I cannot know what I meant in the past nor what I mean right now. Perhaps I have meant quaddition all along. The point here is not that memory is unreliable; this has nothing to do with the paradox. Even if I have perfect memory of my past intentions and actions, I cannot be certain that I have always understood plus by '+'. Kripke asks, "What is the fact about my past usage that refutes the possibility that I meant quus rather than plus?"[1] Moreover, what is the fact about my *present* usage that refutes the possibility that I mean quus? There is none, he says. I may mean quus even without knowing it!

Now, I may just be obtuse (this is indeed a possibility), but I don't see what all the fuss is about. The 'quus' possibility is refuted by the fact that at no time when writing out the equation, for example, '13 + 25 = 38' do I think to myself "Because 13 and 25 are both less than 57, I have to interpret '+' as meaning plus". I'd have to *think* this in order for quus to be a possibility. Because I have never thought about quus, as I have thought about plus (many times), I have never meant quus. Kripke doesn't even consider this answer to his skeptical question, despite its unbelievable obviousness. This leads me to think I may be misinterpreting him. But I can't see how: nothing I've read in the text justifies a more charitable interpretation. So I suppose this was simply a bizarre lapse in his thinking.

I also disagree with the argument that we cannot be said to be following a rule when doing, say, an addition problem privately, or when judging that a given patch of color is blue, because I think there *is* a criterion in these cases. Kripke writes that "the basic point [is] that I follow rules 'blindly', without any justification for the choice I make".[2] Also: "The entire point of the skeptical argument is that ultimately we reach a level where we act without any reason in terms of which we can justify our action. We act unhesitatingly but *blindly*."[3] This blindness is supposed to imply that private rule-following is impossible. And, in a sense, Kripke is right: we *do* act blindly, or 'automatically'. But this by no means entails that we lack justification for our action. The reason it seems to is that Wittgenstein and Kripke formulate the issue in terms of *choice*: we are said to *choose* blindly. And a blind choice, of course, is an arbitrary and unjustifiable one. But the fact of the matter is that when using language (be it mathematical or any other kind) we do not choose how we act. Our action is *forced* on us. It simply 'comes' to us that 2 + 2 = 4 and that a given spot of color is red and that a given sensation is called 'pain' and that the right grammatical form of a given sentence is so-and-so. The criterion for our rule-following is that we *cannot act any other way*—i.e., that we are *unable to choose* what seems right to us. Because we can't even conceive of an alternative, we're certain that we're right in our rule-following.

In other words, while Wittgenstein is right that a rule necessarily guides us, he is wrong to think that when we act 'privately' we are not being guided. We *are*, though not in the 'choice' we make; rather, in the range of possible choices that is laid out for us. And there *is* no range: when we see a plus sign, we have no choice in the matter of how to interpret it (unless, of course, we self-consciously stipulate that it will not mean addition—but in this case we know we are flouting the rule). This is why we can speak of 'right' here, why there is, in a sense, a fact of the matter. We know we are following a rule because we sense that whatever seems right to us will *not* necessarily be right. It has to be *forced* on us first. The feeling of rightness has to be involuntary.

Thought-experiments have been proposed to show the untenability of any kind of 'inner feeling' as a criterion. A common strategy is to say that, for all we know, we are "under the influence of some insane frenzy, or a bout of LSD",[4] and thus misinterpret our own consciousness. But there is something odd about this argument. I'll pass over the fact that we should be suspicious of any argument in support of a

[1] Ibid., p. 9.
[2] Ibid., p. 81, footnote 70.
[3] Ibid., p. 87.
[4] Ibid., p. 9.

Wittgensteinian idea that Wittgenstein himself would have considered ridiculous.[1] Instead, I'll point out that anyone who has actually been insane or under the influence of LSD or marijuana or any other mind-altering drug will know that his consciousness during these episodes is radically different from his ordinary consciousness. It's so different that, practically speaking, it is *not* a possibility that when we experience the 'lucid', 'objective', 'rational', 'clear-headed' state of mind that is called ordinary we are actually experiencing some sort of insane frenzy. Hence this argument is not persuasive. It does remind me, however, that I should be careful in how I formulate my ideas. Instead of invoking only the feeling of 'involuntarily being guided', which, after all, can exist in some strange way even when one is under the influence of a drug, I should adduce also the 'lucidity' with which this feeling coexists in the ordinary, non-drug-stuporous consciousness.

In any case, we have to distinguish between following a rule and *correctly* following the rule we *think* we're following. I may have made a mistake in a calculation even though I feel sure I haven't, but I am nonetheless justified in believing that I was following a rule while doing the calculation, because I did not say to myself something like, "Okay, 93 ÷ 75? Ehh, what the hell, let's say 6." In that case I would not have been following a rule. But because the calculation 'guided' me, albeit incorrectly—and my consciousness was not of the drug-stuporous kind—I was following some sort of rule. Still, it may be objected that we need a criterion for *correct* rule-following; Kripke argues that communal approval (of an individual's linguistic practice) can be the only such criterion. The individual himself cannot privately check whether he has followed a rule correctly (even though, as we have seen, he *can* 'check' whether his actions were rule-governed). –But why not? Indeed, that statement has very odd implications. Consider:

> [The following are] rough assertability conditions for such a sentence as "Jones means addition by 'plus'." *Jones* is entitled, subject to correction by others, provisionally to say, "I mean addition by 'plus'," whenever he has the feeling of confidence—"now I can go on!"—that he can give 'correct' responses in new cases; and *he* is entitled, again provisionally and subject to correction by others, to judge a new response to be 'correct' simply because it is the response he is inclined to give.[2]

In other words, if I say that 2 + 3 = 5, I have to patiently wait for you to decide whether that's right. My certainty is only provisional. Suppose you're busy doing something else; the longer you keep me waiting, the more unbearable will be my doubt that I've carried out the operation the right way. Finally you come over and look at the equation and say, "Yes, that's right", and I heave a sigh of relief—because, according to Kripke, I was not entitled to judge that I had given the right answer until you agreed with me. –And that's just weird.[3]

On the other hand, there *is* something compelling in the objection that one's own private certainty is not enough to establish that one has followed a rule correctly. The reason, of course, is that people have been known to be wrong from time to time. So we find ourselves torn between two intuitions: the intuition that certainty *is* a sufficient criterion for correctness in cases like 2 + 3 = 5, and the intuition that certainty is *not* sufficient in other cases. Said differently: in some cases it is acceptable to say, "I just *know*!" in answer to the question "How do I know I'm right?", while in others it is not. The question naturally arises, then, "Where is the boundary between these two categories?" There does not seem to be a clear boundary, however, which should lead us to think that this whole formulation of the problem is wrong.

I'll try approaching it from a different angle. I have already noted my disagreement with the quus argument. This means that I *can* know I don't mean the quus function. I mean the plus function. But what

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[1] He did not have much sympathy for these kinds of skeptical thought-experiments, involving 'possibilities' that we're insane or drugged-up or dreaming or aliens on another planet or what have you.

[2] Ibid., p. 90.

[3] It is also, ironically, not very Wittgensteinian. Wittgenstein would ask "*What would it be like* to doubt that 2 + 3 = 5?" Since a substantive doubt is inconceivable here, he would disagree with Kripke that one's feeling of confidence is provisional. Therefore, Kripke's whole interpretation of Wittgenstein must be flawed in some way.

is this? The skeptic is right that there are no instructions in my head with which the plus function can be equated; there is, rather, simply an awareness that 2 + 3 = 5, and 7 + 8 = 15, etc. But this absence of instructions that can justify my belief that 2 + 3 = 5 does not mean there is no such thing as addition, nor that I have no understanding of it. If we reformulate the mathematical proposition we can get a clearer understanding of it: '2 + 3 = 5' is a restatement of ||+|||=|||||. It is, in a way, a tautology, in that it equates |||| with |||||. The reason there are no instructions in my head is that the plus function is too 'primitive' to admit of being analysed into a list of instructions. The same is true of multiplication, division and subtraction. It may indeed take a while to find the solution of, e.g., 210 ÷ 39, but this does not mean that the division function *itself* is some kind of complicated 'composite', some list of instructions. My understanding of it is unanalysable because the function cannot really be reduced to anything.

So, strictly speaking, the criterion for the correctness of one's claim that 2 + 3 = 5 is not one's certainty; it is that '2 + 3 = 5' can be analysed into '||+|||=|||||', which is self-evident. It would not make sense to seek a criterion for the correctness of *that* proposition (i.e., a criterion for the truth of the judgment that one is correctly following the rule of addition).[1] Therefore, private rule-following is possible.

To clarify all this: because I have rejected the quus argument, I can reject Kripke's rejection (on page 13) of the suggestion that the main skeptical question (the question that leads to the repudiation of private rule-following) can be reformulated as "How do I know that 68 + 57 is 125?" Since I have reformulated it this way, I can re-reformulate it as the question of what justifies my certainty. And the justification is that the proposition can be restated in a form that is even more self-evident than the form that relies on Arabic numerals (namely, the '||+|||' form). At this point we have to stop inquiring further—by asking, for example, why the new proposition is self-evident. It just is. (As Wittgenstein said (*PI*, §1), explanations must come to an end somewhere.)

But what about statements in which a sensation or a spot of color is named? What criterion do we have for their correctness? In the case of the private individual, there is none. To justify them, he can invoke only their self-evidence. Ultimately he'll have to stand trial before the tribunal of communal judgment. But surely it speaks in favor of the possibility of private rule-following that 99.9% of the time, the community will agree with him. (There may be some slight doubt with regard to borderline cases, in which, say, one person considers a spot to be red while another considers it pink, but in these cases the correctness of the rule-following is not in question. Indeed, it is not obvious that there *is* a 'correct answer' here. This fact may be of significance, but I don't think its significance bears on the question of whether rules can be followed privately.)[2]

These issues and related ones could be dissected for many pages, but I have already strayed too far from the subject of this paper. I think that, in the end, Kripke's book is incoherent, but I'll pass over its other problems[3] and get to the main point: the rejection of the truth conditional analysis of meaning is wrong. For one thing, we have seen it to be unnecessary: there *is* a fact about what I mean by a given utterance such as 2 + 3 = 5. For another, it defies common sense. If I say, "The house is on fire", I mean that the house is on fire. I.e., my meaning is the relevant truth conditions. Nevertheless, as I said above, I agree with a *version* of Kripke's skeptical paradox, a watered-down version. While I think that sentences

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[1] Admittedly, one could explain the proposition's truth by lining up both sides of the equation in a one-to-one correspondence (which, of course, is what we have already implicitly done by equating the two sides). But then there is no 'criterion' for the truth of the statement that they have a one-to-one correspondence. It's just self-evidently true. So at some point we have to stop looking for a criterion other than 'self-evidence'.

[2] For an alternative and, I think, more plausible interpretation of Wittgenstein's private language argument, see Norman Malcom's paper "Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*", in Harold Morick ed., *Wittgenstein and the Problem of Other Minds* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1967), pp. 45 – 81.

[3] There are many. For instance, Kripke cannot account for communal agreement in rule-following. If there is no fact about what addition is, why do we do addition problems in the same way? Consider (p. 97): "We cannot say that we all respond as we do to '68+57' *because* we all grasp the concept of addition in the same way, that we share common responses to particular addition problems *because* we share a common concept of addition. ....There is no objective fact—that we all mean addition by '+', or even that a given individual does—that explains our agreement in particular cases." Aside from being fairly preposterous, this position leaves it a mystery as to why we would agree.

have meanings (viz., the truth conditions of the propositions they express[1]), our understanding of them is an obscure phenomenon, conscious yet unconscious. Understanding can be neither a sensation in consciousness—nor a *fact* in consciousness, because *where is* the fact?[2]—nor merely behavioral. To make the point in a catchy aphoristic style reminiscent of Wittgenstein: while we understand sentences, we don't understand our understanding. It is *sui generis*, a half-nonexistent—half-behavioral and half-conscious—state. Any person with an iota of introspective skill should see this. Moreover, I can appeal directly to "the master" himself: in a number of sections in the *Philosophical Investigations* he grapples with the question of what understanding could possibly be. His not finding an answer corroborates my idea.

As it happens, I think that this 'paradox' is merely a manifestation of a much broader paradox grounded in the nature of consciousness. I won't delve into it deeply, but I will say that its essence is the fact—articulated first by Fichte[3] (or maybe Kant), then Hegel,[4] then Kierkegaard,[5] then Marx,[6] then Sartre[7] and the existentialists—that human consciousness is a self-negation, a self-difference, a relation to itself. Human consciousness is self-consciousness, i.e., consciousness of consciousness, and is, moreover, always focused on an object (whether the object be itself or something else), which means it is always transcending itself, which means it is never just *itself*. It is never simply identical to itself; it is, rather, in continuous contradiction with itself. Thus, it is both a frenzied activity, a 'fullness', and an emptiness, a nothingness.[8] This paradoxical nature is the origin of the fact that consciousness *itself* (and not merely understanding, as I argued above) is not 'locatable', not denotable or 'able-to-be-pointed-to', but rather a mysterious non-present presence. A substanceless substance.

Now, abstract objects share this quality. Intuition interprets them as 'substantive' in some way, though at the same time it denies them substance. Any concept is an example. The concept of '2': when contemplating it, one cannot help feeling as if there's *something there*, some 'abstract content' that does

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[1] Maybe the reader will adopt the Austinian view and argue that performative utterances must be distinguished from constative ones. The 'truth conditions'-analysis of meaning, he'll say, is not appropriate for performative statements, only (perhaps) for constative ones. He'll say that the meaning of the former is the *role* they play in social interactions. The meaning of "I love you!", uttered in a moment of passion, is not the sentence's truth conditions, but its role, or its function (viz., to express an emotion). This view hearkens to Wittgenstein's theory that meaning is *use* (or "assertability conditions", or the statement's role in a language-game, or whatever). But I've always found these ideas confused. While Austin's distinction is useful, to say that a sentence's *meaning* is something like a "role" in a "language-game" makes no sense. The meaning of "I love you!" cannot be stated as "Expression of emotion!" Rather, the meaning is the truth conditions—namely that *I love you*. Thus, a statement's role is different from its meaning. –Still, one might object that the speaker's purpose is not to state the proposition which is expressed by the sentence 'in itself' (together with the context in which it is spoken—because context is relevant to a proposition's meaning. See the footnote in which I mention the "problem of egocentricity"), but rather to perform an act. "I now pronounce you man and wife", said at a wedding, can indeed be understood as stating a proposition with a given truth-value, but that is not its role in the language-game. –But I don't deny this. I am concerned not with the *speaker's purpose* but with the meanings of declarative sentences in abstraction from the language-game in which they are spoken; that is, the meanings of the sentences 'in themselves'. Since declarative sentences posit truth conditions by virtue of their form, their meanings must be directly related to these truth conditions.

[2] And yet, of course, it *is* a fact in consciousness. It must be, because by definition it is a conscious state.

[3] See his *Wissenschaftslehre*.

[4] See, for example, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

[5] See Section A in the first chapter of *The Sickness unto Death*.

[6] See *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, specifically "A Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole".

[7] See *Being and Nothingness*.

[8] Its nature is at once infinite and yet 'self-limiting'. The Ancient Greeks, who defined being as a kind of self-limiting, would therefore have considered self-consciousness to be the being *par excellence*. Their term "*parousia*", which is usually misleadingly translated as "substance" but signifies rather a "self-enclosedness", a "standing presence", and which they understood as the essence of being, would apply to self-consciousness. And yet self-consciousness is also an emptiness. Hence the paradox. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 61.

not quite let itself be grasped. Say the word to yourself several times and examine your consciousness as you do so. If you have a knack for introspection, you'll notice that you feel as if you can almost 'reach out and touch' the concept, as if you can point to it. "It's *right there*!" 'Dog', or 'dogness', has the same unsettling, elusive, half-concrete half-illusive feel. So does the proposition "The dog is running". If you contemplate that sentence, reflect on the 'eternal', 'objective' yet strangely ungraspable nature of its propositional content—you'll be nonplussed.

Since the platonic "third realm" is necessarily the home of these abstract objects, it is closely related to the paradox I am discussing. But before I elaborate on that, I should dispose of traditional arguments in support of the claim that there are no abstract objects.[1]

Carnap considered such questions as "Are there numbers?", "Are there relations?", and "Are there properties?" to be pseudo-questions.[2] I agree, though not with his reasons. He divided ontological questions into two categories: internal and external. By "internal" he meant *internal to a given linguistic framework*. An example of this kind of question would be "Is there a number x such that $x + 13 = 13$?" This is substantive and answerable, because it presupposes the linguistic framework of numbers and asks whether there is something within this framework that satisfies certain criteria. On the other hand, there are questions that effectively call into question entire linguistic frameworks, though they seem to be about the existence of entities. The three questions asked above are examples. They are not substantive, because while they are supposed to be questions of fact—"Are there *really* numbers?"—they in fact merely call for a decision, namely, the decision whether to adopt a given linguistic framework. So they are trivial: "Yes, there are numbers if you adopt that framework, because—you've adopted the framework of numbers! If you choose not to, then there are *not* numbers." In other words, all questions are necessarily internal to certain linguistic frameworks; but ontologists think they are asking *external* questions, and so their questions do not have the meanings they are thought to have. [3]

My disagreement with this account stems from my skepticism about the idea of linguistic frameworks. First of all, I don't think they're explanatorily necessary. We need not posit a specific "framework" for speaking about, say, properties, because in any language, talk about properties is unavoidable. Surely no separate "framework" need be introduced in order to speak about properties, because in nearly every sentence, some kind of property is spoken of. Moreover, what would count as 'inside' and 'outside' a given framework? How would one know when one had stepped outside the 'properties' framework, or stepped back inside it? What *is* a framework? Thirdly, the implication is odd that a decision can be made about whether to adopt a certain framework. One cannot just choose to reject numbers, in the sense of *not even recognizing that people talk about them*. If one understands what someone means by '2', then one has already 'decided' to adopt the numbers framework. But of course no decision is involved here; acceptance of numbers (in this not-necessarily-abstract-object sense) is natural and necessary. Fourthly, I think that certain ontological questions *are* substantive—or, at any rate, there is at least one such question: "Do physical objects exist?" That is, "Do the objects we perceive exist independently of us, or are they merely 'in our minds'?" Carnap's theory is not nuanced enough to allow that some ontological questions are substantive while others are not. Lastly, the association of Carnap's theory with his conventionalism makes me suspicious of it, since I find conventionalism a very implausible doctrine. It may be that the two theories are logically separable, but—anyway, I'm suspicious.

My own argument is simply that it makes no sense to reject abstract objects on the basis of traditional nominalistic arguments. Such a rejection reminds me of Richard Rorty's asinine denial of sensations, and his argument that we think they exist only because "elimination [in language] of the referring use of 'sensation' would be in the highest degree *impractical*."[4] Behaviorism and nominalism: two extremely confused and tellingly similar doctrines. Penelope Maddy quotes with approval this

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[1] I say "traditional" because, as will be seen, I think the conclusion is true *in a sense*.

[2] See his article "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology", in Putnam and Benacerraf, op. cit., pp. 233 – 248.

[3] Cf. Thomas Hofweber, "A Puzzle about Ontology", pp. 24, 25.

[4] Richard Rorty, "Mind-Body Identity, Privacy, and Categories", in *Modern Materialism: Readings on Mind-Body Identity*, John O' Connor ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1969), p. 153.

"stunningly simple counter-argument" to the belief in universals, taken from Quine: "We want to say that Ted and Ed are white dogs. This is supposed to commit us to the universal 'whiteness'. But for 'Ted and Ed are white dogs' to be true, all that is required is that there be a white dog named 'Ted' and a white dog named 'Ed'; no 'whiteness' or even 'dogness' is necessary. [Therefore we need not invoke universals.]"[1] Maybe I'm confused, but it seems to me that Quine and Maddy have overlooked the fact that they just used the concepts 'whiteness' and 'dogness', namely by saying that Ted and Ed are white dogs. 'White' and 'dog' are concepts; one does not suddenly change their essence by adding '-ness' at the end. With or without the suffix, we're dealing with concepts, which means we're dealing with things that are neither physical nor mental. I have already explained why concepts cannot be mental entities; if the reader would ask why they cannot be physical, I would—not know how to respond. I might note that Frege considered the view that they are physical to be so obviously wrong that he didn't even mention it. Or I might note that the dog I see in front of me is not the same thing as the concept (or, if the reader is allergic to that term, the 'word') I apply to him, viz., 'dog'. This word can apply to many objects, many particular dogs; therefore it is a "universal", and an abstract object. A universal is nothing but a word, or a concept, that ranges over many entities;[2] and surely it will not be denied that there are such words. 'Red', 'dog', 'number', 'large', etc. To be horrified by the "prodigiously teeming Platonic Heaven"[3] to which this acceptance of universals apparently leads is a rather strange reaction, because it is effectively a horror at the existence of words. And where would philosophers be without words?! (Maybe in Diogenes's barrel, since they certainly couldn't earn a living.)

I'll consider shortly the problems that nominalism is supposed to resolve. For now, I merely want to point out how unjustifiable it is to deny abstract objects on the basis of arguments like the foregoing: in doing so, one is really denying words, because words are concepts[4] and concepts are abstract objects (because they can be neither mental nor physical).

So: to say there are words and to say there is a third realm are essentially the same thing. But what does this mean? It means that concepts and propositions—or, in general, the "senses" of sentences (to quote Frege)—are objective but not physical. (They cannot be subjective, as Frege argued.) Their objectivity is what makes communication possible. But what is this objectivity? This question has two answers: the platonic and the phenomenological. The platonic, however, is not really an answer, but a restating of the question. The platonist is content to define abstract objects negatively, as *not* physical and *not* mental. He cannot say what they are *positively*, because humans can have no conception of something that exists outside space and time. Therefore the platonist says that concepts exist in a third realm and leaves it at that, without telling us what that means. The phenomenological answer, on the other hand, is the truly explanatory one: the objectivity of propositions (and concepts) is in a position analogous to that of understanding. As understanding is phenomenologically both present and absent, so is the objective meaning of propositions. In order for them to *have* a meaning, of course, it must be accessible, in some way, in consciousness, because otherwise people could not communicate (they would not know the meanings of utterances), and language would have no purpose.[5] Nor does it make much sense to say that words have a meaning outside consciousness—outside of how they are interpreted by consciousness. Whatever meaning they have must somehow be in consciousness. Moreover, it must be in the consciousness of every person who competently uses the language, because, since objective meanings (rather than subjective ideas associated with them) are what make communication possible, anyone who communicates

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[1] Maddy, op. cit., p. 13.

[2] I'll address the question of uninstantiated universals later.

[3] Goodman, op. cit., in Putnam and Benacerraf, op. cit., p. 200.

[4] To be precise: words 'incorporate' concepts. In Saussurean terminology, a word is a union of the signified and the signifier, or the concept and the "sound-image". See Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale.*

[5] Kripke and Chomsky and others have demolished the behaviorist analysis of meaning in terms of "dispositions" and whatnot. Meaning must be accessible *in consciousness* for it to be meaning. [That's debatable. Chomsky, who understands the importance of unconscious cognitive structures, would likely disagree with it.]

must have access to these meanings. Now, we have seen that a proposition's meaning is its truth conditions.[1] Hence, an awareness of the truth conditions is what is half-present when someone understands a proposition.[2] This awareness is *all that exists* of the ("abstract") truth conditions, i.e., the objective meaning, i.e., the abstract object. The meaning "in itself"—whatever that phrase means—does not exist, because whatever exists exists in spacetime. Therefore, the "third realm", and abstract objects, and concepts, and propositions, and words, are all myths, albeit necessary ones.

I am inclined to think that the phenomenological impetus behind platonism is the obscure nature of understanding (i.e., of linguistic and propositional meaning[3]). This obscurity is especially noticeable with regard to isolated concepts. As I noted above, when I say 'tree' slowly while concentrating on the mental state that accompanies the act, I am tempted to believe that the word has more abstract content than I can phenomenologically grasp. It has an objective conceptual content, of which my understanding (of the word) is but a shadow. Its *full* content lies somewhere else, somewhere outside of me, in some eternal Paradise of logical forms. It isn't hard to believe that Plato and Frege and other realists were led to posit a third realm partly by virtue of some unconscious mechanism relating to the peculiar phenomenology involved in understanding concepts and sentences.

Be that as it may, their hypothesis was not only psychologically natural but epistemologically necessary, in that it is a presupposition of the belief in words, which are themselves a necessary condition for highly evolved communication. Without the belief that 'tree', no matter how often it is used, is always the same word, language would have no consistency; it would be so variable as to be useless. It could not even be learned in the first place. Any given sound-image, such as 'tree', must develop a fixed significance in consciousness for it to be of use; this significance is what leads people to posit a thing called 'the word's meaning', which is nothing but the abstract object, or the concept, which the sound-image is supposed to designate. In other words, *everyone*, even the dullest person on the street, as well as nominalists, implicitly believes in a reification called 'abstract objects', because everyone believes in words and words incorporate such objects. Strictly speaking, however, words do not exist, because (1) all existents are in spacetime, as words are not (though the sound-images are), and (2) no single 'significant sound-image' (such as this particular meaningful mark: 'tree') is ever used twice. Each meaningful sound-image is unique; no two are ever the same, even 'tree' and 'tree'. They look and sound the same, and we interpret them as having the same significance, but they cannot be called instantiations of a single word because the notion of an abstract object is impenetrably obscure.

What I have said about words applies also to propositions. Whenever we utter a proposition we are positing its objectivity, its truth, its abstractness. This is because language necessarily *refers* [or represents]: a proposition posits a reference (viz., its truth conditions), and since the reference is always 'fixed' (unchanging), it must be abstract. (After all, nothing concretely existing is ever *fixed*. Things change in every instant, whether through movement, through destruction, through birth, or whatnot.) This referential [or representational] character is also why we are psychologically incapable of interpreting concepts as

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[1] The 'truth conditions' analysis in itself does not provide a satisfactory account of interrogative statements or imperatives. But I think it could be extended to do so. For truth conditions give a kind of 'picture' (in a sense similar to that in which the early Wittgenstein used it in his theory of meaning); and I think that a 'picture'-oriented theory of meaning could potentially do justice to imperatives and interrogatives. I also think it could elucidate the problems of synonymy ('How is synonymy possible? What does it mean?').

[2] Lest I be misunderstood: it isn't that a person only half-understands any given proposition; rather, his *complete* understanding is unanalyzable. It is neither perceptible (in the manner of sensations) nor spatially qualified. It is just mysteriously '*there*'. Thus, I say in this paper, somewhat misleadingly, that it "half-exists".

[3] Many philosophers think that linguistic meaning should be differentiated from propositional meaning. This is because of what Russell called "the problem of egocentricity". (See his paper "Mr. Strawson on Referring".) The sentence "It is raining now" has the same linguistic meaning no matter where it is uttered, but if I say it in St. Louis and then say it in New York, its propositional content seems to change (for it may be true in St. Louis and false in New York). While this argument seems powerful, there are others that undercut it. I cannot discuss them now, though; suffice it to say that a declarative sentence's linguistic meaning is not unrelated to truth conditions.

mere 'names', or empty 'classes' devoid of conceptual content: in referring, language is saturated with an objective character.

So, the way we (necessarily) use language entails that there are abstract objects, but there are not, so our use of language is deluded. In other words, to believe that communication is possible we must 'half-consciously' believe in abstract objects—because otherwise, so it seems, all we have are ideas "private to me only. Another man's idea is, *ex vi termini*, another idea. We should then have, it might be, many millions of twos on our hands." If humans are to understand each other, a *universal sense* must inhere in a given word or sentence. When using words we automatically interpret this sense as being an abstract object, but in reality it is merely the fixed significance attached to a given type of sound-image in the minds of people who speak the same language. Evidently the human mind is such that this sort of universal consistency in understanding is not only possible but necessary. Thus, there is only *one* concept '2' because every person's immediate intuition of that sound-image is qualitatively the same (both between people and between times in one person's life)—and, moreover, the 'meaningful sound-image'[1] has a referential character, as do all words (though not in as intuitively obvious a way as propositions do)—and therefore the sound-image is inevitably taken to denote a given abstract entity. Epistemologically speaking, though, we need not invoke abstract entities in order to account for communication[2]; it is enough that humans have consistently similar understandings of each 'type' of sound-image (such as the type 'tree').

In short, both nominalism and realism have elements of truth. Nominalists point out that if concepts do not exist in spacetime they do not really exist. Realists, on the other hand, realize that to deny the existence of concepts is a flagrant violation of common sense, since people use concepts all the time. So, they are right to emphasize (unknowingly) the elusive phenomenological abstractness/objectiveness of words and sentences—but they are wrong to turn it into a mind-independent thing. And yet their doing so is perfectly natural, since in everyday life we half-consciously believe[3] in abstract objects, due to the referential character (and ultimately the 'truth conditions' analysis) of language. Indeed, the reader will notice that, given my ideas, I cannot help contradicting myself at every turn: in using 'meaningful sound-images' (like the ones on this page) I cannot help 'assuming' that each is an instantiation of a *word*, which I have argued is an illusion. But insofar as one uses language, one falls victim to this illusion.

Therefore, such questions as "Are there properties?" are misguided. They have two answers: the trivially true and the trivially false. That is, there are properties insofar as we talk about them and can intuitively see that their existence is self-evident. But if we then ask, "Do they *really* exist, though? Are there *abstract objects*?", it is unclear what is meant. Since the only conception we have of real, mind-independent existence is spatiotemporal, yet abstract objects are by definition not in spacetime, the answer to this second question must be that their existence is trivially false. Or else that the question is absurd and empty. Platonists, admittedly, think that abstract objects are explanatorily necessary, but we have seen that this is wrong. It is enough that our linguistic understanding is so similar, or 'fixed', across time and between people as to entail that we half-consciously posit abstract objects.

One of the advantages of my theory is that it avoids the 'causal inertness' problem of abstract objects—by getting rid of them. (At the same time, it explains their philosophical appeal.) So Benacerraf's argument has no relevance anymore.

Incidentally, it is interesting to speculate on the broader significance of my suggestions. While I cannot go into details here, I might point out that humans' self-understanding is afflicted by the same delusions that characterize their understanding of language. To invoke Fichte, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marx, Sartre and other phenomenologists again: not only is it the case that the human mode of consciousness is self-consciousness; the self *itself* is self-consciousness. It is just immediate consciousness of consciousness;

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[1] I'll keep calling such sound-images 'words', since my intention is not to reform language. But the reader should keep in mind the ways in which I have qualified the use of 'word', as well as 'concept' and so on.

[2] As I said above, however, we do have to invoke a half-conscious belief in abstract entities in order to account for people's unreflective *understanding* of language.

[3] This 'half-conscious belief', while paradoxical-sounding, is analogous to our half-conscious understanding of any word or sentence.

there is no other 'substance' to it, though we intuitively think there is. Wittgenstein thought that an experience of the self is not included in human experience—he thought that the self was merely the "boundary" of experience—but this is only another example of his sloppy thinking. In truth, the self is *necessarily* included in our experience, because it is what organizes experience into a cohesive whole 'belonging' to one person. Without the illusion of a substantival self, human experience would have a vastly different form than it has. Complex societies would be impossible, complex communication would be impossible, and we would exist at the level of the higher animals. In other words, our mode of experience and knowledge would not be possible without the continuous 'background presence' of a substantival self that organizes and assimilates all the impressions (or rather: whose existence is a *necessary condition* for the organization and assimilation (into a self-centered unity) of impressions). Communities could not take the form they do (as collections of more-or-less distinguishable individuals), which means that *homo sapiens* could not have persevered (because its specifically human communities were what allowed it to triumph over other animals). But this substantival self—this "spiritual substance"—is a myth. There *is* a self, in a way, but it is not what we think it is. It is substanceless; it is consciousness reflected back on itself.

In short, platonism and many other philosophical mistakes are in fact virtually inevitable by the nature of the natural selective tricks through which it was possible for man to triumph over other animals. –Nature *tricked* man into triumphing. That's what it comes down to.

Conclusion

Let's apply our ideas to some of the problems outlined in the first section above. We have seen that the existence of concepts and propositions is both trivially true and trivially false (or, if not false, then the question is empty). This means that the existence of *universals* is true and false as well, because universals are a certain kind of concept. –Actually, it is not entirely clear which concepts are to be called 'universals'. Bertrand Russell thought that "substantives, adjectives, prepositions and verbs stand for universals".[1] I don't know whether most philosophers (realists, anyway) agree with this statement, but it seems sensible. However, we saw above that it isn't clear whether numbers should be called universals or particulars. Arguments can be conceived for and against both sides. Frankly, I think that this debate is rather sterile. I have a similarly low opinion of the debate about "uninstantiated universals": "Is a universal necessarily instantiated by at least one particular, or can uninstantiated universals exist?" I suppose, however, that for the sake of thoroughness I should address these subjects.

First, numbers. In his paper "On What There Is", Quine says that the word 'existence' does not have spatiotemporal connotations.[2] The cube root of 27 exists, though it is not in spacetime. I will not deny this. What I'll deny is that it makes sense not to distinguish between this kind of existence and spatiotemporal existence. As we saw above, it is trivially true that numbers exist, since we use them all the time. But the statement that the cube root of 27 *abstractly* exists has no definite meaning. The number 3 is just an 'internalization' of ⎪⎪⎪, so to speak. –Of course, stated like that, the proposition is refuted by Frege's argument. This is (one of the reasons) why the myth of abstract objects is necessary. For communication to be possible we have to posit common objects, fixed abstract objects that we can talk about. Still, when someone talks about 3 he does not have an abstract object in mind; he is merely 'half-consciously' aware—or has a 'half-understanding' (see my version of Kripke's paradox[3])—of some inscrutable, unconceptualizable internalization of ⎪⎪⎪. This is all that anyone ever 'has in mind' when talking about 3, or any other number. So the myth of the third realm is necessary on one level but

[1] Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 93.
[2] Putnam and Benacerraf, op. cit., p. 184.
[3] It entails that *all* understanding is a "half-understanding", a half-existence, like consciousness itself. (This makes sense, because consciousness, while temporally qualified, is not spatially qualified.)

unnecessary on another: to talk about numbers we need it, but to *explain* our talk about numbers, we do not.[1]

Thus we see that both mathematical realism and nominalism are false. Nor do I have much sympathy with intuitionism, conventionalism, or Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics (such as it is). I don't know much about fictionalism, but I doubt it's right. ("Numbers are useful fictions"? How could that be true? What does it even mean?) I do have other positive ideas, but it would take me too far afield to develop them.

As for the question of whether numbers are particulars or universals, it is, to an extent, moot. It presupposes, of course, that numbers are abstract objects, which we have seen is not true (because, in the sense that is meant, there *are* no "numbers"). Nevertheless, insofar as we are generally forced to believe in abstract numbers, the question can be asked, as it can be asked of properties and relations. Unfortunately it cannot be answered. Our intuition vacillates: it is first drawn to "particulars!", then to "universals!", and then back again. Clearly this is because, for example—in support of the "particulars!" hypothesis—||| is a definite, exact (number of) thing(s) (unlike, say, red, which has many different shades, and is considered a universal); while, in support of the "universals!" hypothesis, the number 3 can be manifested an indefinite number of times in collections of objects. Since there is no decisive argument for either position, and the debate itself seems merely academic (I cannot think of any explanatory purpose it serves), I propose that the question be ignored.

This is not, by the way, a cowardly side-stepping of the issue. It is a tacit recognition of the fact that the universal/particular dichotomy is not a fundamental truth grounded in the nature of reality itself—a truth comparable to, say, the law of cause and effect. Rather, it is a philosophical fabrication, an artificial construction devised to facilitate clarity in ontological discussions. There is no *a priori* reason to think that every concept is necessarily *either* a particular *or* a universal, such that in different contexts it cannot be used sometimes as a particular and sometimes as a universal. When the dichotomy is more of a hindrance than a help, it should be ignored.

The question of uninstantiated universals is another pointless one. It strikes me as a terminological dispute. For example, in Armstrong's discussion of it[2] (as in most of his other discussions in the book cited), he does not give the reader a reason to care. There is no broad perspective on its implications, no sense that the question has *meaning*. This is, indeed, the fatal flaw in much contemporary philosophical literature. Philosophers get so bogged down in casuistries that they can't see the broader picture: their assumptions must be false if they result (as they usually do) in apparently unresolvable deadlock between opposing positions. In this case, the false assumption is realism. Because abstract objects do not exist, the category of 'universals' is merely a heuristic device, an aid to our understanding of how we use language. It is therefore a non-question whether there are uninstantiated universals.

A more interesting question is how to characterize concrete particulars. We looked at the substance-attribute view, the bundle theory, Resemblance Nominalism and trope theory, but all were seen to have flaws. When thinking about them in detail it is easy to get lost in minutiae and lose sight of the larger qustion, so we would do well to remember it: "What distinguishes the classes of tokens that mark off a type from the classes that do not?" When the question is formulated succinctly like this, the answer is obvious: "properties and relations". Nominalists contested this answer because of the difficulties that realism encounters. I have argued, however, that properties and relations are not abstract objects, even when formulated in 'universal' terms (such as 'red', as opposed to *this particular trope* of red). We naturally *interpret* them as abstract objects—e.g., there is a *concept* 'red', a *concept* 'small'—and in order to talk about them we necessarily 'act' as if they are abstract objects, but to *explain* our talk about them we need not invoke such objects. Psychology and neurology and similar disciplines can provide adequate explanations of our behavior in these contexts; we need not bring in ontology. We should *explain away* the

[1] (I know these thoughts are difficult; I'm trying hard to express them clearly. But it may be that what Wittgenstein said with regard to his *Tractatus* applies also to this paper: "This book will perhaps only be understood by those who have themselves already thought the thoughts which are expressed in it—or similar thoughts.")

[2] Armstrong, op. cit., pp. 75 – 82.

controversial ontological presuppositions of the ways we talk, as I have tried to do in this paper. We should not argue about ontology *on its own level*, because, by and large, it is composed of pseudo-questions, which arise from deep confusions in how we interpret the world and use language.

Thus, there are tropes of properties and relations, but there are also general terms that range over a wide variety of tropes. We use these terms as concepts, but to explain our use we need only invoke 'internalizations' of rules for applying certain sound-images to concrete particulars—rules learned primarily in childhood. (And, as I argued above, contrary to Kripke's Wittgenstein, we can follow these rules privately.) Regarding the question of whether we need to invoke substances as bearers of properties, I would suggest that we follow scientific realism (as being the view that best explains all the evidence and does the least damage to common sense): let's rely on the explanations that science gives us of the nature of matter and of differentiation between natural classes.

In this paper I have not discussed the philosophy of modality, nor the ontology of time, nor various other issues—nor (obviously) have I given a completely satisfactory account of even the problems outlined in the first section—but, as an excuse, I would plead exhaustion. I think that my suggestions could be extended to these other topics as well, but that task will have to be left for another time.

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By the end I didn't care anymore, so I barely proofread it. Which means there may be minor inconsistencies. [The problems I discussed are rooted in the very nature of human consciousness and reason, so, despite my insights, the exposition wasn't satisfactory.]

I made an effort to play the academic game by pretending to be erudite.

By the way, here's my rough 20-minute outline of the other paper I was thinking of writing:

> In my paper I'll examine the controversy between endurantism and perdurantism. My thesis will be that the issue has been framed unclearly: in one sense, it is true that objects are their spatiotemporal "worms",[1] but in another sense it isn't. Generally, when a person refers to an object he isn't referring to its entire lifespan; he is referring to its present manifestation. (When I talk about Pavarotti I have in mind the *present* Pavarotti, not the past and the future.) So perdurantism begs the question: while objects can be construed as their complete temporal extensions, such a construal is not enlightening. The question is, what makes a given object in this moment the same object in the next, despite whatever changes it may have undergone? To say that 'strictly speaking, the object is its past, present and future; each temporal stage is just a *part* of it' says nothing. It just reformulates the problem into the question of what connects *this* instantaneous temporal sliver of the object with the following and the past temporal slivers. Endurantism and perdurantism are both silent on this issue.
>
> My critical task will consist in an elaboration of the foregoing; my constructive task will be to answer the question that both sides of the controversy inexplicably leave unanswered. (It's inexplicable because originally their whole *raison d'être* was to answer that question!)[2] I'm not sure how I'll do that, but it will probably involve a return to the thoughts of the great philosophers of the past.

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[1] [Seriously, that's the technical terminology. Perdurantism is often called "worm theory". That name in itself refutes it.]

[2] [Actually, it isn't inexplicable. Schopenhauer would have no trouble explaining it: the perdurantist solution is attractive on a *verbal* level. 'Each temporal stage is just a *part* of the total object, the total worm! As spatial parts are unproblematic, so are temporal parts.' Since most academics can't get below the level of words, many have accepted this position. –To be honest, I think the problem is neither substantive nor interesting, which is why I didn't write my paper on it.]

Tuesday, April 11

Reading R. D. Laing's *The Divided Self*. Brilliant book. He has the intuitive powers of a genius.

Here's something funny: when I sleep I tuck my hands under my chin, like a fetus. I've seen pictures of myself as an infant—a cute little infant sleeping in his crib with his tiny hands curled up under his chin. The child is father to the man. (I am the child of that child I used to be.)

I was talking to Peter, a philosophy grad student who also happens to be as fat and ugly as a hippopotamus. But he's fairly intelligent. He was telling me about the metaphysics paper he's writing for our class, shouting and heaving and spluttering in his excitement (as usual). It was something about mereological sums and unrestricted mereological composition and Socrates and how because of unrestricted mereological composition the name 'Socrates' could theoretically denote Socrates *plus* any object—say, a turnip. So when saying 'Socrates' we may actually be saying 'Socrates and this turnip'. –I was used to all this jabber from the metaphysics class, so I just looked at him with an expression of concentration and intense interest, nodding periodically, saying "Ah, I see!", "That's interesting!", while thinking 'Wow, look at him go! –Can't you see I don't give a shit?' Nothing unusual in any of this; it's what I hear and do all the time in class. But then, at the end: "And so, of course, the funny line [in his paper] will be that 'People would be surprised to know that all this time they've been referring to Socrates plus a turnip! And Xanthippe most of all [would be surprised]!' Hahaha!" Yes, he laughed. So I laughed with him. "Heh-heh! That's pretty funny!" I smiled as best I could.

The point is that, outside of philosophy, this guy has a good sense of humor. He's hilarious sometimes. But now here he was all full of glee at the thought of the 'joke' he was going to include in a paper. All contemporary philosophers have that same trait—at least, the ones who have a sense of humor. They may be funny in other contexts, but suddenly in philosophy they can't distinguish funny from nerdy. […]

My personality has schizoid characteristics, though they're mild. You want an example? Okay. I live in a fantasy world. z.B.: I often think I don't want my philosophical writings published just because if philosophers notice them and critique them, they'll be brought down to earth. Even if they become famous, they will have been made earthly. Picked apart, masticated and digested into little brown turds. I won't have the heart to defend them, because that would be to admit that they're just as real as everything else—as ordinary and flawed. Dissection is always disgusting. (Cf. Wittgenstein's reaction to a philosophical discussion about the *Tractatus*: "Stop! What I wrote was a *poem*! I didn't mean for people like you to pick it apart!") I couldn't stand to see something I wrote published in a scholarly journal.

This is why I've always striven for "greatness", and why I can't fully accept its demise. Greatness, or immortality, is my fantasy world—the thing that keeps me interested in life, even as I recognize its incoherence. In short: I live in the schizophrenic's schism between fantasy and reality.

Anyway, just read the book and then read this journal (November 3rd, November 18th, December 1st,[1] and every other day) and you'll see hundreds of parallels. Like this:

> If the patient contrasts his own inner emptiness, worthlessness, coldness, desolation, dryness, with the abundance, worth, warmth, companionship that he may yet believe to be elsewhere (a belief which often grows to fantastically idealized proportions, uncorrected as it is by direct experience), there is evoked a welter of conflicting emotions, from a desperate *longing* and yearning for what others have and he lacks, to frantic *envy* and hatred of all that is theirs and not his, or a desire to destroy all the goodness, freshness, richness

[1] The pills brought out what was latent.

> in the world. These feelings may, in turn, be offset by counter-attitudes of disdain, contempt, disgust, or indifference. ....This emptiness, this sense of inner lack of richness, substantiality and value, if it overweighs his illusory omnipotence, is a powerful prompter to make 'contact' with reality. The soul or self thus desolate and arid longs to be refreshed and fertilized, but longs not simply for a relationship between separable beings, but to be completely drenched and suffused by the other.

Remember my freshman year, with Rebecca? Remember the entry in which I waxed eloquent over love and my need for oneness and used the word '*aufgehoben*'? (That's all I remember about it.) On the other hand, the parallels shouldn't be overemphasized. In a lot of ways I'm normal. The Zoloft helps, too.

Laing has also given a possible explanation of why I so hate doing practical things—why I postpone paying bills until the day before they're due, and why I hate looking for jobs online, and why I hate thinking about money, and why I hate doing coursework. These things aren't just *annoying*; I sometimes have almost a *physical aversion* to them. The thought of them can really depress me. The explanation is in fact rather obvious: they're a violation of my freedom. They're "reality impinging on" me, my self, my autonomy. The schizoid self prizes its freedom, its isolation from reality, above all else. Only through this freedom does it feel relatively secure. [That's stupidly oversimplified.]

Friday, April 14

The chapter on self-consciousness is amazingly insightful. And bold. Laing doesn't have the self-doubt of the academic; he marches on confidently, not wasting time on trivial scholarly conventions. Has some of Freud's improvisational skill, the knack for experimentation.

Summerjob interview. Canvassing for environmentalism. Must have made a good impression, since she wants me to be a field manager. (Some sort of director.) I'll start in May.

I'm 25. The macrocosmos is my clam.

"The sense of identity requires the existence of another by whom one is known, and a conjunction of this other person's recognition of one's self with self-recognition." Very suggestive.

All I want, all I've been looking for, is an Archimedes' point in the psyche.

While Laing's ideas are brilliant, he leaves it a mystery as to how it all works. He describes what goes on in the schizoid self, but not *how* it goes on. No underlying mechanisms, no exact chains of cause and effect. The reason is that he *can't*: these things aren't explicable in his humanistic, phenomenological framework. We have to bring in biology, I think.

Tuesday, April 18

Immersing myself in info on global warming to prepare for summer job. (GW is going to be the focus of MoPIRG's efforts this summer.) Starting with the EPA website and its hundreds of links to governmental and scientific documents. (Also, SciAm's website.) Example: the *Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2004* is very useful. *Time* just published a special report on global warming, so I'm reading that. Within a month I hope to be an amateur expert.

Terror. Global warming is *the* problem of the 21st century. I don't see how I can, in good conscience, become a professor of philosophy when life on Earth is being destroyed.

Sterile

The crust of wasted semen on the carpet
full of dust and weeks of dryness
and particles of toilet paper, wasted,
scrapes against the bottom of my foot.
A tuft of old carpet, unvacuumed, stiff and upright
with a coating of wasted sperm no longer squirming
hopefully towards an egg.
Frozen there and dead and motionless.
Once so slimy, sticky, sweet and optimistic;
then sopped up and dropped into the toilet, and flushed
into the sewer,
or smeared across the carpet carelessly
(What care I for the thrashings of potential life, my child?)
and left to petrify on the filthy carpet.
Crusted and forgotten; futile thrashings forgotten.

Spring, *je t'aime!! Je t'adore!!*

I've finally taken a close look at the arguments for and against ANWR drilling—looked at a lot of websites, read a lot of testimony by scientists, read up on the history of the oil fields in Prudhoe Bay and their impact on the environment, read about the "2000 acre" myth that oil-advocates trumpet—and I've decided: against.

The more I read, the more invested I am in environmentalism. I've always been an "environmentalist", obviously, but in name only. Now I can foresee a day when it'll be an essential part of my identity. Environmentalism is the new Revolutionary Marxism. Anything approximating a 'good society' can be achieved only via environmentalism. Energy efficiency; beneficial technological development; the fight to preserve global-warming-endangered species, and human health, and the environment, and sea-level cities like Venice; social movements like feminism, democracy, anti-racism, anti-terrorism;—they all tie into environmentalism, which ties into Marxism (prescriptively and descriptively). I can't sit on the sidelines anymore.

Yes, I'm still appalled by the contingency of everything, by the fact that the future of civilization is being decided by a few prejudiced, ignorant men in Washington, D.C. who care only about making a buck—and I still don't care ultimately one way or the other, since I know that life is senseless and tragic and transient and nothing can ever change that—but somehow, above or beneath all this negativity, I feel driven to work for a positive goal.

One just has to 'bracket' all the absurdity. Don't dwell on the fact that a 5-4 vote in the Supreme Court can determine the election of a president and thus *directly* the fate of millions of people and *indirectly* the fate of civilization. Don't dwell on the fact that if a person named Clinton hadn't stuck his dick in Monica's mouth, the nation might have elected Gore. Take the perpetually optimistic "tree-hugging" activists as your role-models; don't let the likes of Ted Stevens ruin your day.

I wonder if propositions just *are* the truth-conditions (understood in the mode of "abstraction", as opposed to the *concrete instantiation* of the truth-conditions) of an utterance. So, to speak of a proposition's truth-conditions is misleading. "The dog is running" is an utterance; {*dog-running*} is the proposition. (If it just *is* the truth-conditions, it can't be expressed. It can only be *shown*. (Cf. Frege.) So in 'expressing' the proposition I have to write something like "{*dog-running*}".) If I remember rightly, Frege thought that the *sense* of a proposition is what is "shown", while the proposition itself can be *said*. If my ideas are right, that's wrong. The proposition is what is shown. And the *proposition* is the sense of an utterance; there's no other mysterious 'sense' distinguishable from the proposition. This revision, which was implicit in my paper, might allow a dissolving of the paradoxes involved in "egocentricity". (E.g., what does it mean for the propositional content of a particular sentence to vary according to where the sentence is spoken?)

Thursday, April 20

Hour-long presentation on my paper in Metaphysics. Amazingly, it wasn't a catastrophe. (I think that my having done many many pushups right before it played a part in that.) I probably could have explained myself better (judging by the questions they posed), but—whatever. I learned long ago that people don't understand my ideas; this doesn't bother me anymore. I'll let posterity interpret me. "History will judge!", to quote the man I'd like to put a bullet through the head of.

To be or not to be?

The pulsing of the sun determines life
Amongst us earthlings; we're beholden to
A trillion nuclear explosions. Flares
Upon the solar rim determine cloud-
Movements and weather patterns and daily life
Here on the earth. Millions of miles away
Our future is decided, *pre*decided,
Concocted in a boiling brew of atoms.
—One knows not how one should react to this.
Is horror most appropriate? Or awe?
Or wonder? Or is fear more sensible?
Or maybe suicide is suitable,
Since life in such conditions is for naught.
A "floating" Earth—embedded in a viscid
Cosmos—which travels on a curved straight line
Around a (literal) space-coagulation
Unendingly—or, *billions* of times—
Is quite indifferent to the destiny
Of helpless little lice inhabiting
Its many tufts of hair—which they call "forests",
And which, stupidly, they shave away,
Thus leaving only a bare scalp with scars
All intersecting, grey, ugly;—and yet,
At least, they give the lice the means to keep
Proliferating parasitically
(Because of some bizarre connection between
Such scars and liceal regeneration).
And so, in short, the black enormity
Of crimes perpetrated by space and time
On us poor lice, together with our crimes
Against ourselves as well as gentle Earth,
Lead one to think that....—no, just to despair!
There is no point in thought, nor action! We
Can only sit in immobility,
Thoughtless, despairing immobility,
And wait in trepidation for the end.
—Right? ....No; I disagree. I choose to live
In wonder, and in awe all full of love.
Yes, love! That thing poeticized to death,

Yet utterly deserving of the praise.
Forget about the horror! Think, Chris, of Lauren,
Your "soul-twin"—or the Vietnamese angel
You talked to yesterday, while your heart
Grew wings! Think of when she bent over,
And her....—well, yes, it was a pretty sight.
(That's all that need be said.) I wonder when
I'll see her next. Tomorrow? Saturday?
I wonder if she's interested in me.
And when will Lauren come to St. Louis?
I wonder.... Ah well. Earth, keep orbiting!
You have permission to ignore me. But
My fellow lice, *you* do not! I want
Your love, because I love you—stupidly,
It's true, and mindlessly, instinctively,
And blindly, but....well, after all, I'm just
A louse! You can't expect *too* much from me!
Blind love is all you're gonna get. Blind love
And blinder wonder. –So say your prayers and love
Your neighbors, and live Christ-like lives (—Good luck!),
And love your cosmic insignificance
Because it means you're just a visitor,
A tourist without responsibilities!
And Lauren: I'll see you soon, I hope, and when
I do I'll let you tear apart this poem.
(Your critical sense is more refined than mine.)

I'm not a pervert, I swear!

Should this journal chance to fall
Into my mother's hands,
I'd tell her: 'Mom, I'm still your "doll"
Who liked to draw with crayons!
Ignore these vulgar words: they're all
Just ways for me to—dance!'

Sunday, April 23

Reading Searle's *Mind, Language, and Society*. [For those readers who are sensible enough to ignore contemporary philosophy: John Searle is very famous.] I just started it, but I think I'm gonna like it. First of all, it seems like Searle has common sense. (I.e., he's a realist, a correspondence theorist, etc.[1]) Even more importantly, he has ambition. In this little book he sets out to explain "the structural features of mind, language, and society, and then show how they all fit together. My aim, then, is to make a modest contribution to the Enlightenment vision." I wish he hadn't used the word 'modest', though.

[1] He rightly makes the Wittgensteinian point that these positions are not so much "common sense" as necessary background assumptions to most human behavior, but, as you should know by now, I use the term primarily for its *ad hominem* value. (It's fun to accuse people of not having common sense.)

Most of his arguments against anti-realism were expressed in this journal four years ago, though with more pizzazz.

The book I skimmed through on March 3rd was right, and so was I: biological naturalism is confused. "Consciousness is a higher-level feature of the brain in the same way that digestion is a higher-level feature of the stomach, or liquidity a higher-level feature of the system of molecules that constitute[s] our blood." No. Digestion is the totality of processes that take place in the digestive system, and liquidity is a physical property of a system (namely, the mode of interaction between its molecular constituents). Neither is comparable to the other, nor to consciousness.

Searle's argument against epiphenomenalism is stupid too. I agree with his conclusion (consciousness is not epiphenomenal) but not with his reasons. My own reasons are more subtle.

Many of Searle's arguments, by the way, are very philosophically naïve.

He agrees with me that the mind-body problem is related to the inadequacy of our conceptual apparatus, but he doesn't really explain how or why, as I did above. He just says, "The solution is to shift the categories around so we recognize that consciousness is at one and the same time completely material and irreducibly mental. And that means we should simply abandon the traditional categories of 'mental' and 'material' as they have been used in the Cartesian tradition." But he doesn't explain what he means in the first sentence! He just leaves it at "completely material and irreducibly mental"! Very enlightening.

I'm also reading Boswell's *Life of Johnson*.

I was wrong. Searle's book is totally uninteresting.

Thursday, April 27

Reading the anthology *Theories of History*, edited by Patrick Gardiner. It goes from Vico to Watkins. Also, William Dray's *Philosophy of History*, and an anthology he edited called *Philosophical Analysis and History*.

Free will. A problem even more intractable than the mind-body problem. I haven't read my senior thesis in years, but from what I recall, I still agree with the main tenets of its solution. Free will is a psychologically (phenomenologically) necessary illusion, fabricated in the deterministic workings of the brain. Since brains are a part of physical nature, this commits me to the view (ignoring quantum mechanics) that if a being with perfect, God-like knowledge of the nature and movements of every single particle (or string or whatever) had existed at the dawn of the universe, it could have predicted that I would type these words right now. Pure determinism (again, ignoring quantum mechanics) is committed to that view. You may find it unattractive, but the alternative is far less attractive. For many reasons. First of all, the idea of free will is incredibly obscure, paradoxical, almost meaningless; so it is philosophically *far* more tempting to deny free will's reality, and to treat our vague intuition of "self-control" as an illusion. Admittedly, it would be mistaken to say, without further qualification, that the illusion is *totally false*. For, in any given moment, we do 'anticipate' or 'expect' any given action of ours, and we often *consciously decide* on a certain course of action. So in this sense we do control ourselves. It can be argued, moreover, that our intuition of free will extends no further than this;—that it has no implications with respect to an underlying deterministic causation of our intentions. In other words, in this limited sense, free will is actually compatible with an underlying physical determinism. What I am denying is the "metaphysical" truth of free will. Our decisions and actions are not "metaphysically" free, whatever that's supposed to mean, because they are the direct outcomes of deterministic neural processes. Or rather, our consciousness itself *is* (some of) these neural processes (as I said in my thesis)—but considered as emergent phenomena rather than aggregates of physical states. To say that it's '*substantively*' free, then, doesn't make sense, because neural processes cannot be "free".

Secondly, my solution fits nicely into my evolving worldview. Thirdly, it is more theoretically economical than any alternative, especially one that (like Kant's) brings in religion. Fourthly, it does little damage to common sense and scientific realism.

But what about quantum mechanics? How does that fit in? Me not know.

In my epistemology paper I should have said, with Kierkegaard, that experience itself is immediately certain, no matter what experience it is. Uncertainty comes into play only when language does, because that's when mediation does, and mediation brings doubt. So my experience of typing on a computer is immediate and certain, but if I say, "I am typing on a computer", doubt is introduced. The reason is that no concepts are directly involved in the experience itself. The experience is just a *doing*, or a *feeling*. It has no room for doubt. Doubt becomes conceivable only through language, because language relates immediately present things to things that aren't present. It abstracts from the given; it goes beyond "sensuous certainty".

Hegel's shadow still looms large over us.

Saturday, April 29

I can't read my poems after I read Samuel Johnson's.

I have much marveled at Boswell's use of a common colloquialism of ours, to wit, the substitution of 'pretty' for 'quite' or 'somewhat', as in "Johnson used to be a pretty frequent visitor at the house of Mr. Richardson". Is it not queer that such a sentence should have been produced in the 18th century?

The Caterpillar

I saw a caterpillar today. In the parking lot.
I had a plastic bag of garbage in my hand—trash
From my apartment. Carried it at arm's length, from the smell.
It *overflowed* with stench and waste, degrading human waste—
Like cardboard cartons for frozen food, and decaying plastic plates,
And partially eaten store-bought apple pie (now feeding fungi),
And empty cereal boxes (Frosted Flakes, Cheerios),
And plastic forks and spoons and cups and cartons of skim milk.
All rotten, curdled, fly-encrusted. So I approached the dumpster.
While deftly dodging stationary cars (which wasn't easy:
I had to run while carrying this huge and bulging bag,
Arms quivering with the strain), I looked down at the crunching gravel,
Just for a second, and saw a tiny spot of green—light green.
But not just "*green*", drab green; it looked almost iridescent,
A little neon light that flashed my mind back to the coral
Reef off Australia's coast, where I had scuba-dived one time.
I dropped the bag. Knelt down to get a closer look. It looked
So isolated there, atop a mound of pebbles! Squirming,
Its head high in the air, blindly squirming helplessly
—Yet hopefully. It hoped for help, apparently. So I
Lent it my index finger, which it gratefully accepted.
The pile of trash beside me beckoned with its pungency,
But I ignored it; the half-inch turquoise avatar of trust
And steady confidence worming its way across my skin
Was more deserving of attention. For it made me think....
I sat upon the grass—it was quiet all around;
Not even cars passed on the street—and watched the caterpillar
Contract, expand, contract, expand, so *slowly—patiently—*
Across my hand. "I could end you," I whispered, "but I won't...."

> I placed it on a blade of grass. I had to go to class.
> The trash, and its unsavory scent, still beckoned me, so
> I did my duty. My dumpsterial duty. –But the blade
> Of grass I'd favored quivered as the caterpillar crawled....
> And so I left them, quivering in quiet harmony.

Well the sun gets weary and the sun goes down, ever since the watermelon.

"Buckets of Rain" = good song. (Dylan) And "Most of the Time".

I'm even better now than I ever was at entertaining myself by myself. And I'm not talking about masturbation. Nay, 'tis instead so-called *spiritual* passing-the-time methods to which I refer (though verily I do still appreciate the delights of porn). Porn! I enter your immortal shrine in a spirit of penitence for my wayward non-sexual profligacies, and I do castrate myself—I mean, prostrate myself before thine altar! With a Zossiman fervor and a Zossiman stench wafting from my unwashed genitals, I kiss thy feet, immortal god of Porn!

I'm trying to evaluate Hempel's influential "deductive-nomological" model of scientific explanation. Since I'm in an altruistic mood I'll give the reader some background. According to Alan Donagan,

> the cardinal tenet of the Hempelian theory is that all scientific explanations have a common form. A scientific explanation must be such that what is explained may be logically deduced from it; a weaker connexion[1] would invalidate it. There are two kinds of scientific explanation, differentiated by the kinds of thing they explain. The first of these is the explanation of individual happenings: a landslide, say, or a political murder, or a victory in battle. Explanations of this kind have two components: (1) statements of other prior or simultaneous happenings, and (2) general laws established by empirical evidence. General laws admit no exceptions. ....The second kind of explanation is of general laws. Explanations of this kind consist solely of general laws other than those which are explained. In both kinds of explanation, and especially in the second, the logical derivation of what is explained from its explanation may require dexterity and even deep insight. (Gardiner, 428)

Okay, no more altruism. You should read Michael Scriven's paper "Truisms as the Grounds for Historical Explanations". He criticizes deductivism. I agree with him that universal laws are often unnecessary in explanations and indeed unavailable. (Especially in history.) But I accept Donagan's defense of deductivism: "If it is supposed that an explanation need not logically entail what it explains, but may be consistent with several other possibilities, then it will fail to explain why one or other of these possibilities was not realized, i.e. it will fail to explain why what it purports to explain should have happened rather than something else." Scriven thinks, with Andrew Sayer, that induction (or "abduction") is all that is needed in certain explanations. *I* think that, while Hempel's version of deductivism should be thrown out, *some* version is necessary. No doubt scientists arrive at their hypotheses through induction, but in order for explanations to entail their explananda—i.e., to *explain* them—they must be formulable so as to *entail* them!—i.e., so as to *deductively imply* them! Scriven's examples rule out only the deductive-*nomological* model, not the deductive model.

Consider Cortes's third expedition to California, after the first two had failed. What explains his decision to try a third time? Plausibly, the facts that he was greedy and that he was confident of success if *he* led the expedition this time. But our intuitive provisional acceptance of this hypothesis is based on the tacit premise that, with respect to certain people, greed and confidence of success are sufficient motives for undertaking dangerous expeditions for plunder. Thus, the fact is deducible from the following premises:

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[1] Oh Alan, you silly Brit! Spelling 'connection' with an 'x'!

(1) the premise I just stated; (2) Cortes was one of these people; and (3) Cortes was greedy and confident of success in this particular expedition. These three premises entail his setting out for California. No doubt a thorough explanation might involve a few more premises, but the point is that it would also involve deduction. Typically we ignore some of the premises because of their triviality (which, however, is not *emptiness*); still, logically speaking, they're necessary.

Another example. I accidentally knock my knee against the desk and spill an ink-bottle onto the carpet, thus staining it. What's the explanation for the stain? Stated with *some* thoroughness, it is: (1) if ink of a certain quality is spilled onto a carpet of a certain quality, a stain will result; (2) my knee's knocking the desk caused the ink to spill onto the carpet; (3) the ink and the carpet in question were of the right quality. This explanation entails that a stain resulted. Ordinarily, though, we would invoke only the second premise, because the others are assumed.

Note that—contrary to Hempel and Popper—predictive success doesn't play an essential role in explanations. At most, one can say that "*If* such and such conditions are fulfilled, such and such an outcome will necessarily result". There's no reason to demand that we be able to *categorically* foresee a given event (as opposed to hypothetically), because our ability to perceive the occurrence of all the requisite conditions prior to the occurrence of the event does not bear on our understanding of the event. Theoretically we can understand it perfectly well and yet not be able to predict its occurrence (perhaps because of the complexity of the environment, or because of free will,[1] etc.).

Note also that this form of deductivism has little bearing on the methodology of the social sciences (because the premises necessary to complete any given deduction are usually implicit anyway). Nor does it invalidate their scientific pretensions (if adherence to deductivism is the sole criterion for assigning the label 'scientific'). At most, it encourages social scientists to make explicit the tacit premises involved in particularly complex cases. This might, moreover, stimulate them to look for explanations of these taken-for-granted premises.

Note also that the foregoing ideas provide yet more support for my conviction that the answers to philosophical questions about the methodology of *any* field rarely have an impact on the methodology of that field.

Note also how pretentious I sound when I write "note also".

Last night

My head lay stiffly on my insomnia-soaked pillow
and my eyes bored into the ceiling which I could
see because the moon was awake too.
I looked up as always and thought about sheep
climbing fences and bleating with the strain
or grazing on ancient Scottish farmland swamped
in a soupy fog, like that day my family and I stood
on Hadrian's ruined wall (now just Roman stones
strewn unlawfully about) as sheep roamed nearby.
I hopped over from England to Scotland and back
and shouted, "I'm in England! I'm in Scotland!"
I was not tired then as I was now, nor did I
have to look at the obnoxious monotony of a ceiling.
In the skeletal silver light I heard soft voices outside
on the grass beneath my window.

[1] As Scriven says, we might not know a man is capable of murder until he commits murder. So although we knew he had a motive for murder prior to the event, and we can give a good explanation of it afterwards, we couldn't predict it because we didn't know whether he was "capable" of it. His free will got in the way of any predictions.

Murmurings of a female and a male together.
I leaned closer into the sound but could not distinguish
words or even him from her.
I raised myself and went to the window
into the moonlight and the whisperings below
and saw two silhouettes looking at one another.
It was quiet as they kissed and I could hear nothing.
And moments later I was asleep on my pillow.

Tuesday, May 2

Plekhanov's essay *The Role of the Individual in History* isn't terribly impressive, but it communicates a few insights. (Mostly in its second half.) *The Materialist Conception of History* is a good overview of the subject. Most of its ideas are obvious, though not always expressed well. (Sartre wouldn't like the deterministic phrasing.) It leaves all the interesting and tough questions unanswered—and mostly unasked. But it's just a short pamphlet, so you shouldn't expect much.

A soft, green heart

This artichoke heart
hemmed in by layers
of barbed defenses
which you pick off
and throw away
so nonchalantly
tastes delicious.

Friday, May 5

This is the happiest time of my life. What with the spring, my freedom, my confidence, my daily working-out, the protein shakes, my Japanese friend Masa who lives right below me, and my intellectual curiosity and confidence.

[…]

Yes, one might say that love is the meaning of life. Love, recognition, respect. It's more important than the satisfaction of mechanical "instincts". It isn't the whole story, of course, but it's the background. The Prologue in Heaven.

A bothersome fact: neither Nothingness nor Somethingness makes sense. It so happens that Somethingness exists rather than Nothingness, but it is no more comprehensible than the latter.

I tried to read Raymond Aron's *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (Aron was a famous French philosopher in the days of Sartre) but didn't get very far. It reminded me of the scene in *Anna Karenina* when the slick young doctor comes to the family, examines the patient, talks for twenty minutes about the diagnosis and prognosis and possible remedies, and when he's gone they all ask each other, "What did he say? I don't know. He talked for twenty minutes without really saying anything." That doctor is Mr. Raymond. How can a person write for three hundred pages without *saying* anything?

Monday, May 8

Reading *Climate Change: Five Years after Kyoto*, a collection of papers. Also, *Global Environmental Outlook* (a U.N. report), *Alternative Energy: Facts, Statistics, and Issues*, by Paula Bernstein, *America's Environmental Report Card*, by Blatt, and *From Resource Scarcity to Ecological Security: Exploring New Limits to Growth*. The National Resources Defense Council's website is another good resource. So is the Sierra Club's.

Also reading Albert Schweitzer's *Out of My Life and Thought*.

His interpretation of Bach reminds me of Glenn Gould's. "Whereas down to the middle of the nineteenth century Bach, curiously enough, was generally played staccato, players have since that date gone to the other extreme of rendering him with a monotonous legato. That is how I learned to play him from Widor in 1893. But as time went on, it occurred to me that Bach calls for phrasing which is full of life. He thinks as a violinist. His notes are to be connected with each other and at the same time separated from each other in the way which is natural to the bow of a violin. To play well one of Bach's piano compositions means to render it as it would be performed by a string quartette." This is pure Gould. (heh-heh)

Tuesday, May 9

Schweitzer strikes me as a very simple man, albeit intelligent. He was lucky enough not to have a personality full of contradictions, nor prone to torment, but constant and certain of its convictions. Lifelong steadiness and self-sacrifice are achievable if one has a placid character, a primeval gentleness stronger than any restlessness. Schweitzer wasn't a great thinker, but a few chapters in his book—especially the Epilogue—are inspiring. The ethical ideals they articulate are obvious and not new, but the mode of expression is fairly poetic. And its repetitiveness is strangely effective.

> The world does not consist of happenings only; it contains life as well, and to the life in the world, so far as it comes within my reach, I have to be in a relation which is not only passive but active. By placing myself in the service of that which lives I reach an activity, exerted, upon the world which has meaning and purpose.
>
> The idea of Reverence for Life offers itself as the realistic answer of the realistic question of how man and the world are related to each other. Of the world man knows only that everything which exists is, like himself, a manifestation of the Will-to-Live. With this world he stands in a relation of passivity and activity. On the one hand he is subordinate to the course of events which is given in this totality of life; on the other hand he is capable of affecting the life which comes within his reach by hampering or promoting it, by destroying or maintaining it.
>
> As a being in an active relation to the world he comes into a spiritual relation with it by not living for himself alone, but feeling himself one with all life that comes within his reach. He will feel all that life's experiences as his own, he will giving it all the help that he possibly can, and will feel all the saving and promotion of life that he has been able to effect as the deepest happiness that can ever fall to his lot.
>
> Reverence for Life contains in itself resignation, an affirmative attitude toward the world, and ethics—the three essential elements in a philosophy of life, as mutually interrelated results of thinking.
>
> Objection is made to this ethic that it sets too high a value on natural life. To this it can retort that the mistake made by all previous systems of ethics has been the failure to

> recognize that life as such is the mysterious value with which they have to deal. All spiritual life meets us within natural life. Reverence for Life, therefore, is applied to natural life and spiritual life alike. In the parable of Jesus, the shepherd saves not merely the soul of the lost sheep but the whole animal. The stronger the reverence for natural life, the stronger grows also that for spiritual life.

The critic can cavil with all this—he can protest, with Nietzsche, that life is not will-to-life but will-to-power—but the universal validity of the sentiments remains. (This accounts for their ancient origins, in the Vedic texts.) And the validity is not only philosophical; more importantly, it is grounded in psychology. The reason Reverence for Life makes possible great happiness is that it fits perfectly into the communal orientation of the psyche. It is this that matters most in life; this is the ultimate end of our strivings. The satisfaction of the communal urge. Most psychic disorders or conflicts are, at bottom, explicable in terms of the frustration of this urge.

How miraculous it is! Not only has nature potentially given us the ability to understand its deepest truths in their formal aspect (mathematics); it has also programmed us so that our greatest happiness lies in affirming nature's own works.

("The miraculous" is simply that which isn't explainable in terms of the conventional categories of thought. Life is miraculous because it can't be subsumed under any concepts or theories or methods of theorizing 'without remainder'—without an intuitive remainder, which can't be grasped conceptually. This magical, obscure feeling we have that there is *something* about life THAT is incomprehensible—as there is something about the existence of matter that is equally mysterious—this feeling is the origin of the Miraculous.)

I don't understand the popular belief that religion encourages the feeling of wonder. If I thought there were a God, I would *lose* my wonder. I'd think, "Oh well, an intelligent being designed all this, so it isn't that amazing after all." God *himself* would remain something of a mystery, but not an exciting one. His status as an intelligent being would deprive him of mystery. He would just be *me*, on a grander scale; my awe of him would be little more than glorified respect. Moreover, knowing that someone else understood the universe—that he had *created* the universe—would sap my wonder of grandeur. It would no longer implicitly glorify me, because I would know that I was inferior to someone. (Part of the excitement of feeling wonder is that it half-consciously places the wonderer on a pedestal in his own mind, as someone capable of a rarefied intellectual emotion. If he knows that his object of wonder has been *intentionally designed*, there is not an implicit contrast between him and an inferior brute force called 'chance', and so he cannot implicitly respect himself by virtue of this contrast.) My place in the cosmos would be demoted to that of a little being who was too insignificant to understand his Master: my awe would amount to the plea, "Tell me, please, Excellency, how you did all this! I'm exceedingly curious and very impressed." –But, in general, everything would cease to be miraculous: it would be explainable in terms of reason and intelligence and other such mundane concepts.

....I'm reading Charles's *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*. I wish I'd read it earlier: Charles is moving out, so I won't have access to it for long. I'm also reading Michael Meyer's long book *Poetry: An Introduction*. (It's unfortunate I don't really like reading poetry.)

Christ, it's depressing to read about the government's environmental and energy policies. I can't stand it.

Wednesday, May 10

I'm surprisingly optimistic about the prospects for more enlightened environmental policies. It's getting harder and harder for Congress to persist in its obstructionism. Even the conservatives are starting to see the light. Even major corporations are pressing them for changes, and making changes on their own.

The Bush administration represents the last hurrah of massively backward conservatism. (For a few decades, at least.) [Typical leftist over-optimism.]

By the way: unquestionably the worst administration in history, at the worst possible time.

But as Ted Kennedy said, the situation can only get better from here. We're on the cusp of an age of progressivism.

(I want to remind the reader—just so he never forgets what a *fucking moron* Bill Frist is—that three weeks ago Frist proposed a $100 rebate to all American families as compensation for the high price of gasoline. I'm serious. He thought it was a great idea. –A hundred years from now, people reading this paragraph will be like "Is that *true*??!" And don't forget his role in the Terri Schiavo comedy. Nor his comment on Stephanopoulos's talk show that HIV can be transmitted through tears. He's a medical doctor.)

I wish gas prices were $5 or $6 per gallon. *That* would spark change.

This is something to keep in mind: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." (Margaret Mead)

The Prophet

I opened my ears and heard the past
sobbing
and the people in the past
sobbing
and I closed my eyes and saw the future
screaming
and the people in the future
screaming
and the bloody bodies slickly dying in heaps
and the suffocating
and the sobbing

Reading *Residence on Earth*, a collection of poems by Pablo Neruda. And Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*. (And of course all the books I mentioned above. I don't jump from one book to another after having read only a dozen pages.)

I could have used this little book six years ago. It might have brought some comfort. As it is, I'm too old for it to speak directly to me. I no longer need consolation; I've assimilated all of Rilke's insights—and filtered out his exaggerations—on my own.

The last sentence of this quotation is very beautiful:

> Do not observe yourself too much. Do not draw too hasty conclusions from what happens to you; let it simply happen to you. Otherwise you will too easily look with reproach (that is, morally) upon your past, which naturally has its share in all that you are now meeting. But that part of the errors, desires and longings of your boyhood which is working in you is not what you remember and condemn. The unusual conditions of a lonely and helpless childhood are so difficult, so complicated, open to so many influences and at the same time so disengaged from all real connections with life that, where a vice enters into it, one may not without more ado simply call it vice. One must be so careful with names anyway; it is so often on the *name* of a misdeed that a life goes to pieces, not the nameless and personal action itself, which was perhaps a perfectly definite necessity of life and would have been absorbed by it without effort.

Thursday, May 11

The midnight-aura

In the liquid sugar of this fantasia
I sing my dripping heart into the air
onto the frost-paned crystal that hovers and kisses me
its crisp threads weaving slowly web-like around me
round my molten-glass breath warm-blown
through chandeliers of lavender whispers
whispered
like a melting icicle
into the silent shivers of me
whence I sing
with the heart of Chopin beating in my outstretched
hand
hotly

Reading Charles Bukowski's collection of poems called *The Flash of Lightning Behind the Mountain*. Very easy to read, of course, but not very impressive. To compare Neruda and Bukowski would be a little like comparing Nietzsche and Baudrillard. They aren't even in the same galaxy.

"I have a foolproof way to become famous! I'll write lots of little meditations in ordinary prose but then make it look like poetry by putting only a few words on each line! People will say it's revolutionary!" He was right.

It's easier to criticize poems like mine than Bukowski's, because....there's nothing to criticize in the latter. They're so unambitious, so formless, so disdainful of literary canons and ideals, so whatever-they-want-to-be, that there's no place for criticism to get a foothold. It's like when you're trying to scoop up that last little pea on your dinner-plate; it keeps rolling away, refusing to be pinned down. Poetry that aims only for irony and cynicism and humor and moments of nonchalant profundity, all in the easiness of prose—casual, too street-smart to be overly concerned about anything, least of all standards of criticism (and so any criticism "misses the point!")—this poetry, while entertaining and even valuable in some ways (as social commentary, as symptomatic of a certain state of mind, as pushing the boundaries of literature), isn't particularly impressive or interesting.

Neruda, on the other hand, reminds me of Marquez. And Jean Toomer. The same hauntingness, nostalgia, the surreality and the exquisite use of language. Inimitable imagery. The images are so unusual, so startling, that to really appreciate the poems you'd have to read them at the pace of a child learning a language. Just to absorb the images.

The long poem "Spain in Our Hearts", written after the civil war, is beyond words.

Friday, May 12

An illustration

In six hours I'll be having
dinner
with the Asian chick,
charming
her pants off,
speaking my filtered
cock
between mouthfuls of fish.

Her smile
will be as unwavering as
my desire, which will be
as unwavering
as my erection.
Maybe I'll
mention
my adventure with
malaria in Sapa,
a stupid
overreactive
episode
which will not fail to garner
applause.
(Every time a female laughs
is
another notch in your belt.)
Or maybe I'll talk
about
how much rice I had to eat
in Korea,
rice twice, thrice,
a day,
for a year,
and she'll laugh laugh ha ha.
Meanwhile I'll eat my
fish.

I wonder
what Vietnamese pussy tastes
like.

See?

I must admit I like Bukowski's poem "nice guy". Not necessarily because I see myself reflected in it (though I do); mostly just because it's true. It's deeply, profoundly, unequivocally true.

Quietly

close the shades
narrow the sunbeams
still the hum of life

Saturday, May 13

It's encouraging that someone who knows more about poetry than I do agrees with me. Here's an excerpt from Lauren's last email:

> I can't stand Bukowski. He's a horrible man and I don't like 99.9% of his writing. Anyone that would try to turn raping a woman into a work of art disgusts me. I bought "The

> Bukowski Reader" a few summers ago and it was such a waste of money. Not to "diss" your roommate [who likes Bukowski], but I've found that most of the people that read Bukowski are desperately trying to cultivate that indie pseudo-intellectual/pseudo-communist/pseudo-slacker image. "I'm cool and different, I listen to bad music that no one knows about and read Hunter S. Thompson and Bukowski." I love love love love Pablo Neruda. His love poems are....breathtaking. Sigh. I don't like My Big Fat Greek Wedding either. I thought it was sort of insipid. I much prefer romantic comedies that appeal to my brain just as much as my heart...though I will admit that teen date movies amuse me.

We continue to have everything in common.

She's right about my (ex-)roommate, by the way.

Insofar as—or, *if*—there is an innate psychological basis for the inequality in artistic production between the sexes, I think it has to do with the peculiar self-centeredness, the individualistic nature, of men. The somewhat condescending attitude they naturally take towards women—their instinctual comparative self-confidence and self-sufficiency—allows them to be productive during months and years of loneliness, to take advantage of whatever psychic ailments they may have. Men who personify masculinity are too focused on themselves from the perspective of *themselves*—too immersed in their would-be manliness, in their worldly ambitions and sexual desires, their self-certainty—to be great artists, while women who personify femininity are too focused on themselves from the perspective of the *other* (i.e., too insecure, self-doubting, invested in their appearance and eager for approval). The former lack the element of self-consciousness, of insecurity and unrest, which is necessary for the production of great art (—art is created in sustained solitude, which necessarily brings unhappiness and a kind of self-doubt), while the latter lack the element of self-confidence, the innate predilection towards *self-assertion*, the sense of self-worth (however vague and riddled with doubts it may be in certain men, like the past version of me), which would allow them not only to tolerate but to make productive use of sustained solitude. Artists must have both feminine and masculine traits; but it seems that men have the feminine trait(s) more often than women have the masculine trait(s), which would (partially) explain the relative abundance of male artists and philosophers. (In the last century, though, women have become more self-confident/self-sufficient than they used to be, so there have been more female artists than in the past.)

Obviously there are other necessary conditions. (Education, intelligence, opportunities, etc.)

Sunday, May 14

bullet through his eye,
Laura Bush vacant-screaming;
peace in the heavens

a secret service
to allay Earth's agony—
Damiensified

Merapi

shaggy sheep clouds skating down Bald Mountain
while a thousand white eyes look down
unblinkingly,

in wonder unblinking,
the rabbit-fur of Earth's innards sleek and grey
and impatient beneath the unmoving night.
hot atmospheric felt caressing
kinetically frozen stone (white heat) eons-old
and doomed trees gasping.
raucous neon saffron-gash boiling,
liquid petrifaction (Earth's candle, volcanic wick) oozing
up from under into
down feather-pillows of smoke
sweeping the complacent forests,
bleeding scattered life.

"Shaggy sheep clouds" is (according to the *Post*) the villagers' name for the smoke-billows.

Reading parts of *Problems of Literary Evaluation*, an anthology.

Wednesday, May 17

First day of work yesterday. 1 to 11. Ten to twelve hours every day. Five hours of door-knocking; the rest of the time is spent traveling to and fro, eating lunch together, role-playing, drawing out the turf, etc. Awesome coworkers. Today was supposed to be my first paid day, but I forgot to bring two forms of ID to the office, which was required for tax purposes and whatnot. I only had my license. So I was told I couldn't go canvassing, unless I went back home and got my SS card and came back, within one hour. So I ran the five blocks to the metro station, took the fifteen-minute trip, ran to my apartment, searched everywhere....only to find that the card had been in my backpack the whole time. I'd had it with me in the office! "Sheesh." By now it was too late to get back there, so *tomorrow* will be my first day. […]

Thursday, May 18

First paid day. I raised $130, which I'm told is good for a first day. This is by far the best job I've ever had—largely because of the coworkers, but also because meeting forty to a hundred people a day is fun. There are plenty of jerks, but there are quite a few supporters too. And every so often you'll meet someone who's really friendly and you can have a short conversation with. Even the jerks I don't mind, because they can be amusing and I've grown a thick skin in the last year or two. Some of them yell "Go away!" or "I'm not interested!" or "I really could[n't] care less!", or think of more creative ways to say "no", but it's very easy not to care. I'm also good at giving the canvasser-spiel conversationally rather than robotically.

I'm reading various papers in various volumes of the journal *Marxist Perspectives*. (William Styron called it "the most impressive journal of intellectual opinion to have appeared on the scene in years", and he was right.)

Sunday, May 21

Friday wasn't great. A lot of apartment complexes, which are difficult. (More doors, fewer people, more assholes.) Only $100. Yesterday I spent nine hours at Six Flags with Nguyen and five friends.

Ah, I feel like a worthlessness. Dust-particles on the computer screen heralding two millennia in the future. I hate all this shit, having to live. I just want to sleep, or drown. Fuck it all. Jobs, relationships.

Poetry is masturbation beautified.
What is it like to have sex with a beautiful girl?

Saturday, May 27

I raised $690 yesterday, thanks largely to a guy who gave me $500. He lived in a mansion, so when he asked me for a suggestion I said "500 dollars?". His hesitation lasted about one second. I should have asked for $1000. –What a character this guy was! Big and boisterous, constantly talking. Gave me his email address and insisted I come to the huge party he's hosting this summer (every summer), the pool party with all his rich buddies and girlfriends.

Usually I'm incapable of being polite to people who are rude. Sometimes they make me so angry that I longingly imagine vandalizing their house. Spray-painting it or something. This job can get discouraging once in a while. Every day is *no no no no no no no no no no no yes no no no no yes no no no no no no no*.... Most staffers last about three days. It's unfortunate, because a lot of them are great people I'd like to work with. Today a sweet and sexy girl named Katie quit.

On the whole, though, I think the job is quite easy. The only problems are the St. Louis heat and the fatigue that attends an 11-hour day.

the community

apathy-baked blisters
popping open
in the leaden heat of tradition-drenched climates
across the canvas of American suburbia,
neighborhood-wide blisters
that ooze "*no*"s and "*I don't care*"s and
such polluted cynicism.
knocking on doors and opening pores
that seep fetid
selfishness—*smellable*
selfishness
in the curled snarls
on the fat and aging faces, gargoyles
twisted into the woodwork.
splintered faces—blistering.

I can't decide on the significance of the repudiation of femininity by both sexes. Men repudiate it wholeheartedly [as regards themselves], while women do so half-heartedly. They're caught between the desire to be as autonomous, rational, dominating and self-confident as men, and the desire to be cared for, protected, loved and spoiled by a man. They always have been; the main difference between the past and modernity is that the desire to be man-like is more socially accepted and pronounced now than it used to be. It used to be more 'unconscious' than it's become. This makes sense, because capitalism has intensified the competition-element of civilization, and masculinity has always been identified with competitiveness and individualism. So, in a sense, capitalism epitomizes masculinity—even though, in other (more ideological, less purely economic) senses, modern culture is more effeminate than ancient culture. But the masculine, atomistic, rationalistic[1] mentality derived from the economic sphere necessarily permeates all other spheres, and so everyone partially succumbs to it (even more so because it resonates with people's transhistoric psychological needs, in particular their need for recognition and respect. Of course, it couldn't

[1] 'Masculine' doesn't imply 'rationalistic' and 'atomistic', but these traits are more naturally masculine than feminine.

become culturally predominant in the first place if it didn't so resonate). Including women. Hence, modern women are even more ambivalent toward femininity than pre-modern women were. But there was always this ambivalence—at least, since the dawn of civilization. See my thoughts of December 20th.

It would be interesting to trace the accidental parallels between, on the one hand, the biological predispositions of the sexes and, on the other, the structures of societies. Certain ideologies and social structures can be called more masculine (or feminine) than others. But I don't know how theoretically fruitful it would be to draw such parallels.

By the way, I think that people tend to overestimate the historical differences between "East" and "West". And to underestimate the differences between Eastern cultures and between Western cultures.

Pascal's question—"Why do I exist *now* and *here* rather than at a different time and place?"—is puzzling precisely because it's unanswerable. This can be seen clearly if you ask the same question of, say, a dog or a plant. Why does this particular plant exist now and here? "Well.... It just *does*! There's no *reason*. The seed just happened to produce this plant rather than another." Same with people.

Still, there's something unsatisfying about that. The question is meaningless, but not *completely* meaningless. For example, it surely was possible that my parents' first son would be not me but someone else (say, if a different sperm had reached the egg). Let's suppose for the sake of argument that this other son would have had a personality nearly identical to mine. So if you compare the actual world to this possible world, my parents can't distinguish between the actual me and the other possible son. He could have been me, or I could have been him, without their being any the wiser. In fact, for all they know, I *am* him, and not myself! For *I* might not have existed even as someone with an identical personality did ('in my place').

But this is all very weird. As I've said before.

Eternity

In the village hut,
Below the scalding metal roof
Below the crushing Laotian sun,
In the dark,
A blood-drained woman lies, leather-skinned,
Legs spread apart,
Dying, shrieking soundlessly, frozen
To her stillborn son in her arms.

But the waning day has no remorse,
And the coming night is empty
And not soothing,
And nothing—nothing changes.

On the fresh-tarred street,
Sprawled in the gutter beside the curb
With frozen mud in his hair,
Fingers rigid,
Lies a starved, bloodless man, homeless
Formerly,
Now nothing but something unpleasant
Which must be taken care of.

But the waning day has no remorse,
And the coming night is empty
And not soothing,

And nothing—nothing changes.

In the Adriatic,
Rusting, rotting like the hull
Of a submerged titanic ship,
In the dark,
A ruined palace of a city sleeps,
Unconscious
Of the irony, its famed canals
And piazzas home to memoryless creatures.

But the waning day has no remorse,
And the coming night is empty
And not soothing,
And nothing—nothing changes.

Monday, May 29

Reading short stories in the anthology by Ann Charters.
Here's an uplifting one I wrote today:

The Joy of Life in 2006

It was a joyous day when I finally moved into my new house. I had lived in that rotten old apartment for years, and it had long since kept me day and night in depression. It was dark, first of all, windowless except for one in the living room (which was more like a closet for a television than a room to live in). And even that window had a nauseating yellowish tint, probably because of the pollution from all the cars on the highway below. That highway, by the way, had made me miserable when I'd first moved in, but I'd become used to it. The noise no longer bothered me—at least, not on a conscious level. I wouldn't be surprised if the monotonous roaring had somehow *unconsciously* poisoned me. But I don't know about that. All I know is that that damned apartment was gloomy, and I had to get out of there. So when I realized that I'd finally saved up enough money to buy this new house I felt almost reborn.

This house wasn't what you'd call a mansion, but it was inhabitable. It was out in the suburbs, in a pleasant neighborhood with pleasant people—and nowhere near a highway! The people were very friendly, helping me carry in my furniture (what little there was) and advising me where to put it. This one little girl was adorable, running around the house and shouting, "Over here! Put it over here! And that desk should go in that corner below the window, because the light will make it look nice! You need light if you're gonna write there, right?!" I obeyed all her orders, not so much because I thought them sensible as because I couldn't imagine *not* obeying them.

Anyway, I was proud of my little house, and pleased with its location, and I thought that all was well. "At last!" I thought, "at last I can be happy and content! No more constant tiredness and messiness and apathy just because I live in a gloomy old hell-hole!" This house was what a woman might call "cute". The kitchen, for example, reminded me of those toy kitchen-sets for children. It was essentially an adult version of those, with its small blue cabinets and pink counters (—yes, *pink*; but I was okay with that) and diminutive table in the middle of the room. The living room had a comfortable couch and large windows facing east, so sunlight flooded the room in the morning. Every morning I would sit on the couch, sip my coffee and listen to Mozart laughing from the stereo. (Mozart was my only connection with high culture.)

During the honeymoon period, my mental health returned. I also made friends with a number of dogs in the neighborhood. (The only problem with that was that I had to wash my hands after I touched them. That sweaty-dog-smell is quite terrible.) And, as I said, I liked the children, who played frisbee in my

backyard—I always joined them—and street-hockey when cars weren't driving past. I regained my native optimism and began looking to the future, making plans. I was ambitious and confident I could rise high in the company I worked for, since I was becoming an expert at manipulating office-politics. I even started to fancy myself a budding politician. Maybe I could do some good for the world, "work for the common weal"! The thought was seductive. But most importantly, I wanted to fall in love and find a wife. I was already thirty-four years old, and I figured it was time I made something of myself.

But then things started to go wrong. The house wasn't as ideal as I'd thought. When it rained, leaks developed in the ceilings. There was even one above my bed! I woke up one night in a puddle of water! (That was unnerving. Only after smelling it was I reassured it wasn't my fault.) The leaks wouldn't go away, no matter what I did to fix them. Another problem was the peeling paint on the outside of the house and even in one or two rooms. It was unsightly. Soon I learned that the house was infested with termites. (The real estate agent had been smart enough not to tell me that.) And when the weather got cooler, most of the rooms became drafty. In short, complications piled on complications.

One unpleasant incident turned the neighborhood against me. (These suburban neighborhoods, by the way, are all cotton candy on the outside and bitter licorice on the inside.) I was slumped over in my kitchen chair one day, brooding on my recent failure to be promoted to office manager—which I had thought was a sure thing—when a baseball crashed through the window and landed on the floor in front of my feet. It very nearly gave me a heart attack. I heard giggling outside, so I ran to the window in a fury. Cindy, the little girl who had helped me move in and whom I genuinely liked most of the time, was holding a bat while sporting a guilty smile. Her friends all pointed at her laughingly and said, "It was her! It was her! She aimed right for your window!" "I did not!" she shouted back. It didn't matter; I was furious and had been in a bad mood already, so I cursed at her. Called her a name I don't care to repeat here. Then I said I was keeping the ball and told her to get the hell out of my yard. So she did. But not before making it clear, with her eyes, that I had suddenly become her implacable enemy. And that I was soon to be her *parents'* implacable enemy as well. And thus the whole neighborhood's. Though I apologized afterwards, none of them ever looked at me the same way again. And so I felt like I no longer belonged there. I had violated suburbia's sacred code of *saccharinity*, and was ever after an outcast.

All these troubles dampened my enthusiasm about my 'new' life (which was by now several months old). I grew sick of it all. I couldn't stand this house anymore—those pink Formica counters were *awful*; the kitchen table was far too small; the wintry weather was inescapable even in the warmest rooms of the house; I had neither the energy nor the money to restore whatever architectural integrity this one-story mockery of a house had once had—and I felt like an outsider in my neighborhood. (Not just because of that one incident. I had discovered that my neighbors were boring people, who watched TV too often and had nothing interesting to talk about.) On the whole, though, it was mostly my crappy house that made me increasingly miserable.

Seriously, after six or eight months of living in that cramped house I felt myself losing my ambition again, all my lofty hopes of what I'd accomplish in life. There's something about one's living situation—even in its purely physical aspect—that influences what kind of person one is. My personality was growing as constricted as my house. And I was lonely, and none of the women I spent the nights with could cure me.

One day, as I was seeking solace in a bookstore, I came across a book called *Walden*, by Henry David Thoreau. On a whim I bought it. Read it that night. A lot of it was over my head, but it inspired me. "Simplicity!" Yes, simplicity! That would make life so much easier! "Our life is frittered away by detail." Yes! I had been bogged down so long in such deadening concerns as how best to kill off termites and whom to hire to paint the house and repair the leaks and how to reconcile myself with my dreadful neighbors that I was unknowingly frittering away my life, and before I knew it I'd be five years older! I realized I had to break out of this cycle. I had to save myself, before I became one of *them*. (My neighbors, that is.) I had to follow Henry's lead and break with my lifestyle, at least for a short while. But how? *How?* That was the only problem.

I couldn't build a cabin in the middle of a forest, because, first of all, I wasn't an architect, and secondly, where would that get me? I'd have to quit my job and sell my house, and then when I decided to

rejoin society I'd have nothing to do and nowhere to go. And no money. So that was out of the question. But I really did need a break from the constant daily hassles and stresses and the tedium of life. I could no longer stand the sight of my house—nor, for that matter, the thought of having to go to work everyday, nor the incessant polite conversations that were the price of admittance to society. I needed a vacation. A long vacation.

But my boss wouldn't give me one. So I was apparently trapped. I thought and thought, but no solution to my "existential anguish" presented itself. In the end, therefore, I was compelled to remain in that damned house. I dealt with the termites and the leaks, and I accepted the neighbors for what they were—namely, sources of amusement, people to make fun of and occasionally complain to about my job—and I even got married, hoping this would calm the restlessness that still asserted itself periodically. It did, for a while, but not for long. Neither did having children. (That just made it worse.) And now here I am, fifty years old, still living in this damned house.

*

I don't have the endurance to write anything that takes longer than a few hours. I'm too lazy. And I never feel inspired anymore.

Once in a while I read a blog entry or a letter to the editor by Richard Dawkins, the great crusader against stupidity. He takes it upon himself to try to use rational argumentation to convince Christians that they're wrong. Daniel Dennett did the same thing in a book he recently published—which he wrote specifically to be read by Christians—that attempted to debunk Christianity by speculating on its genealogical history, à la Nietzsche. (Or so I've heard.) I would suggest to these two men that they give it up. Let history deal with Christians; philosophers will get nowhere with them. How can you argue with people the premise of whose belief-system (insofar as they really believe it) is that evidence counts for nothing and blind devotion is the highest virtue? The 'blindness' part is absolutely essential to Christianity; not because one has to be blind in order to believe in it, but because faith is supposed to be an act of "infinite trust", based not on logic but on a *leap of love*. The more one *argues* for Christianity (in the mode of science or philosophy), the less one understands it. This is why people who always fall back on the stock answer (to rational queries) "God works in mysterious ways" are right to answer so. The spirit of their religion demands that they not take part in philosophical cerebration, lest they disrespect their god, who demands blind obedience. At the core of Christ's teaching is the precept, "Have faith in me for the *sole reason* that it is for your own good"—though this may be expressed in loftier-sounding ways (for example, by saying that since God loves you, you should love him back). In other words, being a Christian means, by definition, suspending rational thought (such as the search for evidence)—which indeed helps explain why not a single verse in the Gospels praises intelligence. (Intelligence is dangerous to Christianity! This belief-system is intended only for people who need comfort, i.e., for the "meek".) The impossibility of fulfilling the Christian project has made inevitable the many philosophical and 'scientific' defenses of it that have been proposed over the centuries. (The only philosopher who really understood it was Kierkegaard. Hence his never arguing for it, except from an anti-scientific perspective.)

This is predictably ironic, by the way. An atheist understands Christ's teachings better than most Christians.

Certain episodes in the Gospels are as beautiful as anything in literature. The woman caught in adultery, in John, ch. 8. That scene is immortal. If we had no other record of Jesus but those eleven lines, he would be nearly as compelling and enigmatic a figure as he is now.

Reading the anthology *Wittgenstein and the Problem of Other Minds*.

Thursday, June 1

I'm meeting Lauren tomorrow. (Getting the day off work. I'll have to make it up on Saturday.) She's quite excited. Unfortunately I no longer know what 'excitement' means, but I'm looking forward to seeing her. (I'm tired of writing emails every day, though.) Her latest idea is that we read the same book at the same time so we can talk about it in our emails. We've decided on *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.

One of the advantages of this job is that it gives you insight into the fanaticism of greed. You meet the scum of the earth, especially in the wealthy neighborhoods. Today I canvassed such a neighborhood: mansion after mansion. Ninety percent of the residents were misers. One old man seemed interested in donating, so he took out his wallet and looked through it. I glimpsed a few twenty dollar bills and a hundred dollar bill. But when I suggested he give "30 to 60 dollars, or whatever you can afford", he said "No, I can't give that much. But I can write a $10 check." So he went into the house, climbed the stairs to the second floor—a slow process—came down again a few minutes later, went into another room, and emerged a minute later to ask who he should make it out to. I said MoPIRG. He was hard of hearing, so I repeated it and spelled it. About five times, because he couldn't remember the P-I-R-G part. At last he finished it, so I thanked him and left, muttering "Fucking ass". Still, he was one of the generous ones. The rest were not only miserly but obnoxious. (I did meet one woman who gave me $100. She was a wonderful person, friendly and supportive. She even had the common decency to remark on my soaking hair and clothes, due to the thunderstorm.) So I lost my politeness. One woman answered the door and interrupted me with "The climate goes in cycles! You should read up on the science." (That's a common response. Self-proclaimed scientists often tell me that.) This time, instead of letting it go, I said, "You should watch Al Gore's new movie." She scowled. "I wouldn't waste my time! And this is a private street. You can't be soliciting here." "I'm not soliciting." "Yes you are." "No I'm not." (Apparently she didn't know what 'soliciting' means. The Supreme Court has ruled that political canvassing of this sort is not 'soliciting'.) Then she waved her hand, as if dismissing me. So I mimicked her scowl and waved my hand back, in disgust. She slammed the door.

My 18-year-old coworker had a terrible night. She reported, for example, that a rich old shylock had said, in reference to her "ignorance" of "science", "Do your fucking homework!" Which, together with the rest of her night, had made her cry.

Well, at least the two directors of the office, 24 and 23 years old (Erin and Jackson), are amazing people—*inspiring*—and my other coworkers are good too.

Friday, June 2

I ought to have made clear in my ontology paper that there are two senses of 'blind rule-following' that have to be distinguished. After reading Norman Malcolm's paper I can see that Kripke confuses the two,[1] and that Wittgenstein's point is consistent with my own position. On the one hand, if we privately denote a given sensation by, say, "lidge", and tell ourselves that we're feeling "lidge" whenever we think we feel this sensation, we're applying our name *blindly*. We think we're following a rule, but we're not, because whatever we think is the correct way to apply the name will *be* the correct way, and that means our act is not rule-governed. We can do whatever we want, and nothing can show us to be incorrect except our own feeling that we've applied the name incorrectly. On the other hand, we use a *real* rule like addition blindly inasmuch as we use it 'by compulsion', i.e. without having any choice in the matter and without having any conscious justification for our use except that we feel it *must* be this way. The difference between the two cases is that in the former, choice is everything—there is no *involuntariness*, no *compulsion* to our application of the name—while in the latter there is no choice whatever in our application of the rule. Kripke confuses the two senses of 'blindness', and thus thinks that the second method of rule-following is as unjustifiable as the first. (To express it without the 'blindness' metaphor: in the first example, the reason

[1] Actually, I saw this a few months ago, but then I forgot.

that whatever seems right to us will '*be*' right is that there is no way for us to check whether we have used the name "lidge" correctly; in the second example, the reason is that the nature of the 'seeming' is itself the means by which we can 'check' our application of the rule. The involuntariness of the seeming tells us that we're following a rule we've internalized, while the criterion of one-to-one correspondence tells us that we're following the specific rule of *addition correctly*. I discussed all this in the paper.)

Also: Kripke doesn't appreciate that Wittgenstein holds the sensible opinion that certain statements and beliefs are incorrigible (as is evidenced by Kripke's invoking the LSD thought-experiment). If I say, "I'm in pain", and I mean it, I can't possibly be wrong. Being wrong here would make no sense; we can have no conception of error in such a case. Therefore, a person uttering such an avowal can 'know' that he is "following a rule" correctly (i.e., that he is using 'pain' in the right way) without relying on the testimony of someone observing his behavior (as Kripke would have it). The problem, though, is: which utterances are incorrigible and which aren't? Surely there isn't a clear boundary. –But this is all related to my thoughts on knowledge and certainty. Maybe it goes back, somehow, to the meaninglessness of certain forms of doubt. Or maybe there *is* a clear boundary between corrigible and incorrigible statements (i.e., statements with respect to which doubt can be substantive and those with respect to which it can *not* be substantive).

Damn it, there's *something* about the problem of certainty (and its derivatives) that is misguided. I don't think I've ever quite put my finger on it, because I keep returning to these questions.

I met Lauren today, at the Forest Park art museum. Her parents were with her—very nice people—but after the greetings we split up. Toured the museum, then walked around the park. Perfect weather. Fountains, lakes, rivers, ducks, picnickers, small woodsy areas, couples lying on their blankets together in the shade, the Shakespeare festival (*Julius Caesar* hip-hoppified; Caesar was a pimp); we sat on the grass near a lake with canoers. After a minute of hesitation I kissed her, which she wanted and was expecting, and we kissed awhile. She was wearing a lovely summer dress, beige with flowers woven in. I'd forgotten how fun kissing is. Then we lay there and talked, and then we met her parents again and parted. She's pretty (not beautiful), and laughs and talks well.

It was a strange experience to kiss. I'd gotten into the habit of assuming I'd never kiss anyone again.

Saturday, June 3

Wittgenstein:

> A doctor asks: "How is he feeling?" The nurse says: "He is groaning." A report on his behavior. But need there be any question for them whether the groaning is really genuine, is really the expression of anything? Might they not, for example, draw the conclusion "If he groans, we must give him more analgesic"—without suppressing a middle term? Isn't the point the service to which they put the description of behavior?

That reminds me of what I wrote above: "The weird thing is that the satisfaction derived from a communal bond is direct: communal bond ⊃ satisfaction. If A, then B. There is no 'inner' mediary in consciousness, no phenomenologically detectable element that mediates between the bond and the satisfaction[, that *explains* the satisfaction]." In Wittgenstein's example, it never occurs to the doctor or nurse that groans signify pain. Their reaction is 'conditioned', sort of; they don't rationalize or justify (even to themselves, even inwardly) their giving the patient analgesic. They just do it automatically. Pavlovian dog-ly (though not *quite* to that extreme). Obviously both the satisfaction and the decision to administer more analgesic can be explained *neurologically*, but that's beside the point. The point is that *phenomenologically*, neither the doctor nor the person in a communal bond is aware of the reason for his reaction. His reaction just 'happens', 'comes naturally'. (The doctor's inclination toward the decision to give more analgesic is almost as involuntary as the person-in-the-other-example's satisfaction.) In both cases, there is no middle term in

their consciousness, although logic says that this middle term is necessary and implicit. But for it to be *phenomenologically* implicit, as opposed to explicit, doesn't make much sense. (It's the paradox of "half-consciousness" that I've described.) —The reason all this is interesting is that it does violence to our intuition that we have a self (which is the foundation of our intuition that we have free will and that our actions and mental states necessarily 'pass through' the self), for the "implicit" middle term is what relates the consequent to the self. (In the first example, the middle term would be something having to do with the communal bond's effect on one's self-consciousness or self-respect; in the second example, it would make clear the connection between groaning and pain, thereby relating the doctor's decision to use more anesthesia to the *patient's* self. But this relating, if the doctor actually reflected on it, would also relate his decision to *his own* self, namely by filling in the logical gap(s) in his course of action (in his own mind), thus reinstating his (specious) autonomy, his (illusory) self-determining self.) This may not be exactly why Wittgenstein found it interesting, but it's the real reason.

I wish I could explain myself better.

Sunday, June 4

(A return to something I've written about before.—) If people didn't have names, it's possible they wouldn't have a very secure sense of themselves, of their identity. Names help cohere personalities into a unity despite all their contradictions. Despite the fact that I'm an inordinately complex person, I will always remain *Chris*, and will thus always be *one person*. *Chris* has hundreds of contradictory traits; *he possesses them*. He is at their core, their center; and when his sense of himself starts to become a little slippery he can reassure himself that he will at least always be *Chris*. If he didn't have a name, then, he would have a less sure sense of himself, and would thus have a less sure sense of his status as an *individual separate from others*. I wouldn't be surprised if the invention of names coincided roughly with the beginning of the Neolithic age, because civilization is characterized by heightened self-consciousness and diminished group solidarity (caused by changes in the social structure that accompanied the Neolithic revolution).

Thursday, June 8

A couple days ago when I was canvassing in Rock Hill a woman with a flabby pockmarked face got into an argument with me. "Do you have a permit to solicit?" she demanded. Once I saw I wouldn't get any money from her I ended the conversation, but then she must have called the cops, because ten minutes later two of them showed up. One on a motorcycle, one in a car. The first one wanted to see my permit, which I didn't have because we hadn't received them yet. I told him we'd called City Hall and they'd given us permission to canvass, but he said I had to get a permit and come back the next day. I started to argue with him. Something about cops always infuriates me, and I can barely prevent myself from being as much of a dick as they are. "Go back to your car and leave!" he said. So I walked towards it, and they left. And I resumed door-knocking. Two hours later he came back to the neighborhood, spotted me and threw a hissy-fit. "Hey you! I told you to leave! Do you think I talk just to hear myself?! Do you think I'm stupid?! Because I'm beginning to think you're stupid! Go back to your car immediately and leave or you'll go to jail!" I didn't say a word but walked slowly to the car as he followed me on his motorcycle, calling for backup. When it arrived he left, and my new friend followed me in his car to make sure I left the neighborhood. But I was feeling a strange lack of respect for authority, so I drove slowly around the neighborhood in a circle (or a square), back and forth, with the cop following me. Once he caught on to the game he flashed his lights and did the siren thing, so I pulled over and waited for the tongue-lashing. But it never came. After sitting there a minute he suddenly peeled out and drove past me and out to the highway and out of my life. I could have stayed in the neighborhood but decided that might not be the best idea and instead went to a different one, where I continued canvassing. (It was all to no avail. Only one person donated that day.)

I was tempted to tempt the coppers even more than I did so I could experience a night in jail just to see what it's like, but I figured it would have been more trouble than it was worth.

One's immediate, intuitive, ineffable sense of self is a social and psychological construct. So is one's *discursive* sense of oneself, one's self-description(s). But (self-)consciousness itself is a biological phenomenon, which doesn't involve idiosyncratic 'psychological' facts (though it coexists with them in consciousness). Admittedly, it's originally created in social interactions during early childhood (primarily with one's parents); still, once infancy is over—once consciousness has, to some degree, become aware of itself—self-consciousness has no need of one's *psychological sense of self* in order to exist. In real human beings, the latter is indeed an important part of consciousness—for instance, the 'flavor' of my consciousness is a disinterestedness, a perpetual observing even in the midst of acting, a certain light-heartedness, and (this applies to everyone) a half-consciousness of the inner contours of my face as well as an ever-present expectation of how I'll act and a lingering memory of how I just acted, etc.—but self-consciousness, which is the core of one's (sense of one)self, is just a bare fact which is, as such, the same in everyone. (Obviously by 'self-consciousness', in this context and most others, I don't mean consciousness of one's identity or "sense of oneself" or one's past or whatever, but simply consciousness of consciousness, consciousness of existence, which is the kernel of *empirical* human consciousness, i.e., any given person's experience (of consciousness)[1] in any given moment. This pure self-consciousness is an abstraction from real empirical consciousness.)

So in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Pirsig's current self is different from Phaedrus, 'his' earlier one (which of course isn't 'his', but simply existed in 'his' body), because Phaedrus had different memories, a different intuitive sense of himself (which was largely conditioned by—and even immediately involved—his memories), and discursively identified himself (and his goals in life, etc.) in different ways than Pirsig does. Pirsig has no recollection of being Phaedrus. He has only occasional memory-fragments that have survived the shock therapy. As far as Pirsig knows, that is the extent of the psychological continuity between him and Phaedrus. Now, because a person's self is, for him and for others, not just the bare fact of (self-)consciousness but a fusion of 'characterological' intuitions (which, as I said a few days ago, coalesce around a *name*), Pirsig *is* a different person than Phaedrus. From an 'objective' viewpoint they may share a number of traits and inhabit the same body, but this doesn't mean they're the same person, because in a concrete human being (as opposed to the abstract idea of one) the "self" is primarily the (self's) "*sense* of self", even if the self's kernel is consciousness of consciousness, and as such is the same in everyone. "Sense of self" can't be precisely defined because it's intuitive and ineffable. Of course, one might think that, as a mere "*sense*" (composed of memories and so on), it cannot really be *active*, the '*I*' that *acts*, and thus violates one of the criteria I chose in my senior thesis for identifying the 'true' self. But its necessary activeness is provided by self-consciousness, which, as I have said, is the 'center' of the empirical self (viz., a person's full and active intuition of himself). Because the self as a whole includes this psychological self-perception, Pirsig and Phaedrus are different people even though they share the same body and some of the same traits, as well as—necessarily—the same "bare fact" of self-consciousness.

(When I wrote above that the essence of the self includes both self-consciousness and one's inner awareness of one's face, I was confusedly anticipating these ideas.)

This is all verifiable not only through intuition but also common sense. When a philosopher asks himself, "Who am I? *What* am I?" and is tempted to respond, "Well, I'm just *me*!", he is corroborating my ideas. The only way he knows how to answer the question is to invoke his consciousness of himself. This is what the circularity of his answer signifies. It doesn't mean that the answer is utterly trivial, as he's inclined to think (since he has been trained to think that circular answers are uninformative). Instead, the significance of his being able only to point to his self-consciousness by way of an answer ("I am myself") is that he has unwittingly shown that self-consciousness *is* the self. He thinks he isn't answering the question by saying "I am I", but in fact he has given the only possible answer. "I am 'my' self-consciousness." *That's*

[1] That parenthesis is a redundancy.

what he has said, though he doesn't know it. But by "me" or "myself" or "I" he doesn't mean self-consciousness as I've defined it, an abstraction; he means his full, empirical self-perception, his full self-intuition at any given moment. This has been shaped over his lifetime; it's related to his perception of his body, to his memories, his habits of thought, etc. The only reason it makes sense to say that it is *himself*, i.e., an active, self-present being, is that consciousness of consciousness lies at the heart of it, and consciousness of consciousness is really the only 'act-ive' (self-present) thing in the psyche. In normal people, this full and active self-perception is so integrated with itself that it's very hard for them to abstract, in thought, the element of pure self-consciousness from the rest—which is why they can't give a coherent answer to the question "What is the self?". In some people, though, self-consciousness more or less splits from the other components in the self-perception, and looks on them as a foreign object. It sees them as a second self, a false one. It can't split entirely, however, because then in its full empirical existence it would be *nothing but* consciousness of consciousness, which is absurd. Consciousness always has other thoughts, or 'awarenesses', passing through it. So the self-consciousness that has split from the properly *psychological* self-perception with which in most people it is fused associates itself with other traits/intuitions, with a *new* self-perception, such as an unnatural contemplativeness, an emptiness, a loneliness (it feels like it has lost its content, as if it is now just a husk, observing the *other* self, the *non*-active self (which, ironically, is in a sense much more active than the "active" self, the self that feels it is the *real* self)). But then it may come to think that this new, emptier self is itself false,[1] a mere 'act', and it will dissociate itself from it. This will result in even more emptiness and uncertainty, more alienation. The self will realize that the process of self-splitting can never end. It will probably lose all sense of self-identity and self-continuity, since, even though it tries to dissociate itself from everything that has content, it cannot do so completely (—as an empirical phenomenon it necessarily has *some* content; it can't be just self-consciousness and nothing else); and so it's thrown between all kinds of 'contents', identifying itself now with one and now with the other—now with emptiness, now with love, now with an idyllic childhood, now with old age. –Of course, "self-consciousness" itself (in the 'abstracted' sense) isn't doing this identifying, since self-consciousness is nothing but consciousness of consciousness and as such cannot "identify" with anything except itself; but this just reinforces my point that self-consciousness necessarily empirically 'includes', or coexists with, some thought or other[2] that isn't itself—in this case, precisely the thought that it doesn't own any of the thoughts that pass through it or any of the actions that it 'approves' but looks on as alien. 'It' might think, for example, that "None of these thoughts I'm having is really *mine*. I go from one to the other—from wanting to rape a girl to wanting to die for her sake—but none of them belongs to me. Not even *that* thought belongs to me!" The once-full and -robust (sense of) self has been virtually reduced to its core, self-consciousness. The psychological, identity-constituting intuitions and self-perceptions that the robust self included have been repudiated; virtually all that's left of the self is self-consciousness. (This makes sense in the context of my ideas. The self has been reduced—as much as is empirically possible—to its core, which as I've said is self-consciousness. Since one's perception of having an identity doesn't come from bare self-consciousness but rather from the sense of having a consistent psychology—and since one's psychology has been repudiated as foreign, as not belonging to the self—this loss of any anchor for the (sense of) self besides self-consciousness itself results in a loss of identity, a constant self-doubt and inferiority complex.)

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[1] Obviously, it's a "new" self in a different way than Pirsig is a "new" self relative to Phaedrus. Pirsig and Phaedrus are quite literally two different selves; on the other hand, the self that feels itself split is *one* self, albeit one that is aware of psychological divisions within itself. (In other words, it doesn't fully identify itself with certain of 'its' psychological aspects, even though it recognizes that these aspects are also somehow intimately related to it. There's an intimacy but also an alienation, neither of which is understood. Hence the identity crisis.)

[2] Actually, there are many. Most of them, however, are half-conscious—half-conscious perceptions of oneself, which make up much of the "(sense of one)self" I referred to earlier. Their status as half-conscious helps explain the remarkable vagueness of the empirical (sense of one)self.

(Charles took R. D. Laing's book from me over a month ago, but clearly it made an impression on me. I'm extending his account by annexing to it my own metaphysics of the self, thus giving it a philosophical foundation.)

Saturday, June 10

They pulled me crushed and bleeding from the mines; the shock of the open air killed me.

The Storm

The earth is black. Sky-waterfalls have drowned
The day, so that it's night already. Night....
Cascading roars self-tumble down the night,
The rolling echoes of cloud-timpani
Careering through the dark, like massive mold-
Besotted logs that thunder down a hill
Unstoppably. They quake the earth. It shakes.
Its shivers, friendless in the deluge, are
Illumined by the sky's electric rage:—
The lightning-bullets penetrate the mud!
They splash the night a bluish glare and then
Are gone, as if to prove that ghosts exist.
The sudden frozen sky-dividing flare,
Night's guillotine—scaffold-skeletal—
Is echoed in the boom that cracks, ruptures
The caul of Chaos, all birth-bloody and hideous.
A branch smashes a window somewhere near,
Wind-torn from its old socket in a tree—
Or maybe lightning-severed. The telephone-line
Outside explodes in sparks, thus cutting off
Communication and reducing life
To huddled silence dimly candle-lit.
Cowering in the corner, far from windows,
And cringing when the cannons overhead
Let loose their rounds. There is no sleep tonight.

Taking into account the narrative in his book, we colloquially say that Robert Pirsig was a certain way in the early part of his life—intense, obsessive, depressive, irascible, always hovering on the fringes of sanity, etc.—and very different in the latter part of his life, after his shock therapy. Pirsig, however, would say that he wasn't just "different"; that earlier person wasn't even *him*. It was someone totally different, as different as, say, I am from Nietzsche, except that the earlier person existed in Pirsig's body and some of his memories have carried over into Pirsig himself. If pressed, he would admit that there's a more intimate relation between him and Phaedrus than there is between Nietzsche and me, but he would still maintain that they were two different people. And he'd be right. *We'd* be right too, though. From the outside, we see obvious continuities between Phaedrus and Pirsig, between their personalities, their experiences, and their physical existences. The two of them constitute, in a sense, one person, whose peculiar psychological history has split him up, *'for himself'*, into two people. This paradox of two contradictory reports' (Pirsig's and ours) both being true is due to the ambiguity of the concept 'person'. The concept 'self' is less ambiguous, which is why we're more willing to admit that Pirsig and Phaedrus

are (or 'have') indeed two different selves.[1] We recognize that 'self' is purely an inner phenomenon, a phenomenon of the consciousness of a given person, and as such is not essentially related to 'accidental', 'external' physical or psychological continuities—continuities obvious to outsiders but less so to the person himself. The self is an intuitive, phenomenological construct, while the person is largely a behavioral, physical construct. Still, due to the ambiguity of 'person'—like 'self', its usage is related to a person's *inner* experience of himself, though less so—we can also appreciate the truth of Pirsig's belief that Phaedrus is a different person. He *is* and he *isn't*.

I should note that there are physical criteria relevant to the proper use of 'self' also, though they come into play only in exceptional circumstances. If I remember being Julius Caesar I might say that he and I are the same person, and have the same (sense of) self (in that 'my' self is a continuation of 'his', as it's a continuation of my self at the age of 15); you'll say I'm wrong, because there's no spatial or temporal continuity between us, and so my self can't possibly be a 'continuation' of his. In this case my consciousness isn't what matters most, even though we're talking about my sense of self. External physical facts prove me wrong.

Suppose Ed Norton's character in *Primal Fear* really did have the personality disorder he pretended to have. His two personalities would correspond to two selves, because they correspond to two totally different consciousnesses. One could also with justice say they were two *people*. And yet one could say they were two aspects of the same person, a person who had such-and-such a kind of brain and such-and-such a kind of personality disorder. Both uses of the word 'person' might sound a little odd, a little artificial, but that's because the various conceptual undertones of 'person' pull the word in both directions. Some of its undertones pull it toward the 'two people' hypothesis, while others pull it toward the 'one person' hypothesis. There's none of this ambiguity when it comes to 'self', though. In my thesis I thought there was, but, as I recall (vaguely), I approached the problem then from the wrong direction. I was blinkered by my obsession with the self as being bare self-consciousness and my understanding that, as such, it's the same in everyone. Since the self is in fact one's *sense* of self, one's psychological intuitions of one's boundaries (which intuitions—to repeat—are centered around self-consciousness (without which there would be only a selfless 'bundle' of perceptions, as in animals) but always embellish it, so that it never exists in its pure form), there *are* differences between my self and your self, and between the two selves of Ed Norton's character. It *isn't* a total mystery what it means to say that the two selves of that person are

[1] The grammatical conflict between 'are' and 'have' is a product of the conceptual differences between 'person' and 'self'. 'Person' is a broader concept, comprising not only my intuition that *I am I* but also 'external' facts like physical and psychological continuity. 'Self', on the other hand, takes account only of my sense that *I am I*. 'Objective' or 'external' continuities have nothing to do with it. As a person, I *have* a self (I am 'broader' and more 'objective' than my (sense of) self); as a (sense of) self, I *am* a (sense of) self. 'Person' is more behavioral, i.e., more from-the-perspective-of-the-other; 'self' is more phenomenological, i.e., more from-the-perspective-of-oneself. I experience you as a person; you experience yourself as a self (though you also partly assimilate my experience of you as a person, i.e., as an object for other people—which explains Pirsig's admitting that there's a more intimate connection between him and Phaedrus than there is between Nietzsche and me. As far as his immediate intuition of himself goes, there isn't, but insofar as he sees himself from an external perspective he can see that there is.). In my senior thesis I explained the 'are/have' ambiguity by saying that self-consciousness, the essence of the self, is molded through experience in such a way that the 'self' of which it is 'consciousness' includes the body, memories, etc.; and therefore, from the perspective of this broad empirical sense of myself I say that I (viz., my empirical totality) *have* a self, by which I'm referring (whether self-consciously or half-consciously) to the purer essence of myself, my consciousness of consciousness, while when I say that I *am* a self I'm speaking (again, whether I know it or not) from the perspective of this purer self-consciousness, rather than from the perspective of my total empirical existence (as I was in the first case). But no, this is wrong. At the moment I wrote it, in the intensity of introspection, it may have been an apt description of what I was doing, but ordinarily people don't distinguish, even half-consciously, between meanings of the word 'self'. Still, my suggestion was a confused grasping of the truth. As a *person* I'm *broader*, more '*external*', than my inner sense of self is; as a *self* I'm *narrower,* more *subjective*, than my personhood is. –Incidentally, this footnote illuminates the point I'm making in the text too.

different from one another, because, while their analytical essence is identical, their full empirical reality is not.

Since I don't have the thesis in front of me I haven't been able to put myself into the confused state of mind I was in when I wrote the chapter on the self, so I may have missed the point of the confusion.

Pirsig's philosophical investigations leave a lot to be desired. (The classical-romantic dichotomy, for example, is simplistic, though it does highlight certain contrasts in ways of thinking.) But the book isn't a philosophical treatise, so I guess that's forgivable. Actually, I don't know what it is. A collection of an amateur philosopher's amateurish attempts to philosophize, interspersed with descriptions of a father-son relationship. Not a novel, not an essay; sort of both.

quiet soft body
lying on the wet red ground,
smashed car next to it

throbbing heart sinking
beneath purple-layered breaths,
evaporating

warm exhalations,
pleasant and reassuring,
from the computer

Tuesday, June 13

I was wrong: our intuitions about the self do sometimes pull us in opposing directions. If I'm confronted with irrefutable evidence that I did a certain action but don't remember doing it, I might not think 'I' was the one who did it. I won't feel a sense of ownership. Yet I'll have to accept that I was the one who did it. –This may just reflect the vagueness of 'person', though, as opposed to 'self'. I was, in a sense, the person who did it, but that person didn't necessarily have this same *self*. But what does that mean? Obviously, for all intents and purposes, he *did* have the same "(sense of) self" (assuming I don't have a personality disorder)—with the exception that I don't remember being him.

These problems aren't really substantive […].

nipple lips kissing
cool sweat of the cupped palm warm
soul undulating

Friday, June 16

Last night I fell asleep wondering what part of the psyche the "imp of the perverse" lives in. Why does he exist? What's the fascination with horror, with tragedy, with mayhem and torture? I tried to answer this question in the second paper I wrote for my Philosophy of Art class, but since I'm still in the process of rewriting it I haven't found a solution. (I haven't looked at the revision in months.) Freud might have

said something about the id and so on, but that isn't really an explanation, even if humans do have "instincts" for violence etc. What's needed is an explanation that relates the explanandum to the *self*. Something relating it to the phenomenology of consciousness (because that's the level we exist on; that's the form of explanation we intuitively want, a form involving our *consciousness*), for example by saying it's "pleasurable". But the whole point is that it *isn't*, so an alternative explanation is needed.

One of the reasons for, or symptoms of, the psychological subordination of women is that they're constantly being thrust back onto their bodies. They can't escape the body. They simply have *more* of it than men, literally and figuratively. Literally: breasts and hips, etc. Figuratively: menstruation, pregnancy, menopause, the necessity of beautifying themselves, etc. (It's a "necessity" because that's how they attract mates. Men, on the other hand, operate under the necessity of being confident and dominating, because that's how *they* attract mates. The gender roles, in these broad senses, are a result of biological facts and tendencies, though their cultural manifestations vary.) Since women identify with their bodies more than men do, they are *objects* more than men are. I don't mean that term in only the popular sense, the "sex object" sense; I mean it in the sense of 'women "look at" themselves more obsessively than men look at themselves'. They live in objecthood (i.e., self-consciousness), partly self-inflicted, to a greater extent than men do. This is probably one reason they have a greater need for community—for love, emotional relationships—than men do.

It's unfortunate that this kind of honesty about women is called misogyny, because then everyone is misogynistic. For everyone understands these truths on some level, consciously or half-consciously. Feminists think that "gender stereotypes" of this kind are historical creations rather than biological ones, but actually *their* label of "misogyny" is the historical creation. Every society in history has manifested some variation of these archetypal gender roles, but only in recent times has it occurred to people to label them misogynistic. For thousands of years they were simply common sense. Admittedly, the common sense generally went too far in the "misogynistic" direction, but its archetypal content, shorn of culturally produced prejudices, was correct. *Necessarily* so, because, after all, it was archetypal!

Sunday, June 18

If you're in the mood for Bach, I recommend the Organ Sonata in C (first movement, I think). I don't know the number, but it's the really cheerful one. The one that goes "bup-bup-bup-baaa, dadadaaa...."

I wrote a story about canvassing. Every word of it is accurate, except for a couple descriptions of me.

A Day in the Life

"I'm not interested."

"Okay. But are you with us on the issue?"

"I don't know."

"Well, why don't I give you this pamphlet here. We have a website too, and you can donate online if you change your mind."

"Uh-huh."

"Thanks. Have a good day!"

John walked down the steps, toward the sidewalk, as the door closed behind him. The air was heavy, and sweat ran down his temples to his chin and soaked his hair. Casually he wiped his face; he looked at his hand and chuckled. "Well, at least it's not hot," he muttered ironically. "Where to next?" He squinted at the address of the next house (he'd lost his glasses a few days earlier) and wrote it down on the paper on his clipboard. "Onward, men!" he said to himself. "Onnnwarrrd, Chrissstian so-o-o-o-ldiers...." (He'd forgotten the melody but remembered those three words from Sunday school fifteen years ago.) The

next house was another mansion, like the last four. He was in a rich part of town, which was also rumored to be politically liberal. Most of the houses were in the Greek Revival style, with large porches, columns in the Ionic or Corinthian mode (the Doric was too plain), elaborate balustrades along the staircases and decorative cornices completing the roofs. This particular house was at the end of a long brick walkway, which was reminiscent of the red carpets laid out for royalty and celebrities.

A large man answered the door. "Can I help you?" he said.

"Hi! My name is John; I'm with MoPIRG, the statewide environmental group, and right now we're focusing on global warming." The man kept staring at him, so he went on. "Scientists say that 2005 was the hottest year on record, and here in Missouri, global warming means more air pollution and more severe heat waves. The Bush administration is refusing to act, but we really need to get serious about cutting pollution from cars and power—"

"What's your point?"

"Well, the point is that we can lead the way in this effort if we keep building a lot of public support—and that's why I'm here. This is our Statement of Support; it outlines our work." He handed the man his clipboard. "Actually, the best way for you to support the effort is to become a member of MoPIRG, which you can do either through our monthly giving program or—"

"No."

"Well, you could also give us a one-time contribution, of whatever you can afford. We suggest 50 to 100 dollars. 75% of our money goes directly to—"

"No, I don't have any money. Thanks." He closed the door. John stood there, nodded his head and laughed. "Another devoted citizen." He turned around and left.

At the next house a woman answered the door. "Hi! How are you?" John said. No answer. "My name is John, and I'm with MoPIRG. We're the statewide environmental group, and right now we're fighting against global warming."

She waved her hand dismissively. "Don't give me that global warming shit! The climate goes in cycles."

"I see.... Well, here's a pamphlet you can look through, about our organization. Thanks." He walked away, not in the mood for real politeness. His soaking hair and sticky clothes were bothering him. He looked up at the sky and saw grey clouds collecting, and remembered he didn't have an umbrella.

No one was home at the next three houses, but at the fourth an old man was sitting on the porch. His house was less massive than the others, but it was stately. Instead of columns it had pilasters projecting from the wall, and there was no intricate ornamentation anywhere.

John waved as he approached the porch. "Hello, sir! How are you?" No answer. "My name is John, and I'm with MoPIRG, the statewide environmental group...." This time he was allowed to get through his entire speech: the man just sat there in his rocking chair, rocking back and forth, listening with half an ear. At the end he stood up and took out his wallet. "Let's see what I have...." he murmured. "Great!" said John. "Thanks so much for your support! We suggest 30 to 60 dollars for the one-time contribution...." He caught a glimpse of the cash inside the wallet: several twenties and a hundred. But the man looked up abruptly: "No, I can't afford that much. I'll write you a $10 check." "Actually, the minimum for membership is $15. Members receive email updates on our campaign...." But the man was already inside the house (to get his checkbook), and was ignoring him.

John followed him in as he waited for the check. Like nearly everyone else in the city, the man owned a dog. A frantically barking dog, jumping around to greet the newcomer. But at least this one was playful and not mean. John rubbed its stomach and petted its head as it gazed affectionately at his face, licking his hand.

The man was disabled and used a cane, so he moved slowly. First he trudged up the steps to the second floor, where he remained a minute or two. Then he trudged down and walked back into the kitchen, where he stayed for a short time. 'What's going on?' thought John. "Who should I make the check out to?" called the man. "MoPIRG! M-o-p-i-r-g." Silence. "Who?" "MoPIRG! M-o-p-i-r-g." Silence. The man appeared, carrying his checkbook. "Who did you say I should make it out to?" "MoPIRG." "MoPRIG?" "Mo*PIRG*." "How do you spell that?" "M-o-p-i-r-g." "M....o....p....what?" "I....r....g." "I...r....g." "Yep." He

handed over the check. “Thanks,” said John. He patted the dog affectionately one last time, while cursing the old man under his breath.

Outside, the drizzle had started. But the heat wasn’t letting up. Emerging from the cool house, John found it unbearable. And his mood was worsening. “Fucking miser. How is it *possible* to be so greedy? Writing a $10 check!” He wasn’t feeling self-righteous yet; he was just discouraged. He had thought this neighborhood would be better than the middle-class neighborhoods, which typically gave him about $140 a night. Instead it was worse.

As he labored under the humidity he reflected that the so-called “emotional satisfaction” that’s supposed to come from jobs like this isn’t all it’s reputed to be. He rarely felt particularly righteous or proud or optimistic. Especially not optimistic. He had simply settled into the rut of a routine. In the beginning he had been excited, having immersed himself in literature on global warming. He’d been excited and terrified, and his excitement had been fed by his terror. The thought of millions of human deaths due to rising ocean levels, a possible Ice Age in Europe and the spread of disease was horrible, but almost equally terrible to him was the probable loss of such “immortal” cities as Venice, London, Lisbon and Shanghai, as well as the loss of the world’s coral reefs and millions of animal species. He had snorkeled once in the waters of the Great Barrier Reef, and the memory of that future ghost town haunted him. He remembered the turquoise water, the sunbeams slicing through it to become spectral shards illuminating the fish (iridescent), the anemone swaying in the current, the neon coral themselves. His head underwater, he’d heard a constant muffled swishing and munching sound, probably the fish munching on vegetation. It had mesmerized him. But he had also seen masses of blanched, dead coral, killed by the rising temperature of the water. Apparently much of the reef had already died.

So he was very dedicated to environmentalism. This job was going to be his first serious foray into activism, and he was looking forward to it. Though he had no illusions about how much of a “difference” he was going to make—twenty-five years had turned him into a stoic, if not a cynic—at least he’d be doing something community-oriented for a change. And he could finally sleep at night, with a good conscience. No more incessant solipsistic intellectualizing.

After four weeks he still liked his coworkers and thought the job was more enjoyable than any he’d ever had, but his initial passion was gone. He no longer read about the science of global warming, because such detailed knowledge wasn’t necessary for the job. He no longer read much about related political events, because his two directors kept their staff apprised of relevant developments during their announcements each day. He no longer felt the inspiration to *fight* and *fight without end*, because his routine was stultifying, as routines always are. His went something like this: *wake up at 10:00; go to work at 12:00; draw the daily maps and do administrative stuff until 2:00; participate in ‘announcements’ and leave with his group at 2:30; drive to the Neighborhood-of-the-Day and have lunch until 3:30; canvass from 4:00 till 9:00; drive back to the office, count up all the money and take care of administrative stuff; go home at 12:00, after drinks with his coworkers; go to bed at 1:30*. That was his routine. It was better than a lot of others he’d had in the past, but still, it was a routine, and as such it bred an awareness that he was a mere cog. A person with no real effect on anything, an expendable individual.

But that was okay. The routine itself made it okay, by encouraging him to ignore it. He just “minded his business” and got through the day, content that at least he was making a token effort to improve the world.

Later that day he found himself, with a sigh of relief, in a more middle-class area. With a couple of exceptions, all the wealthy folk, snug in their architecturally manifested vanity (as he saw it), had refused to donate any money. They had put him in a foul mood, and, with the rain, it had become a failed day. The storm had dwindled to a drizzle, and the heat and humidity were no longer intense, but he was drenched and feeling distinctly misanthropic. Not one person had so much as remarked on his soaking clothes; many had simply shut the door in his face upon learning he was from an environmental group. One conversation in particular had him still fuming:

A woman had answered the door. “Yes?” she said.

"Hi! My name is John." He forced himself to smile pleasantly. "I'm with MoPIRG, the statewide environmental group, and right now we're focused on global warming. Scientists say that 2005 was the hottest year on record, and here in—"

"How can they know that?"

"Well, I'm sure they have ways. I don't know their exact methods, though."

"Global warming doesn't exist. The climate goes in cycles. You should read up on the science."

"You should watch Al Gore's new movie."

She scowled. "I wouldn't waste my time! Al Gore is a liar. He thinks he invented the internet! By the way, this is a private street. You can't be soliciting here."

"I'm not soliciting."

"Yes you are."

"No I'm not. The Supreme Court has said that political canvassing isn't solici—"

"I don't care what the Supreme Court has said. You can't be here."

"Umm, *yes*, I *can*."

She scowled again and waved her hand as if shooing him away; so he scowled back and made a gesture of disgust, after which she slammed the door. Together with all the events of that day, the exchange left him in a murderous mood.

As he walked around knocking on the doors in this new neighborhood, keeping his clipboard carefully protected from the rain and periodically running his hands through his hair so it didn't plaster to his head, he wondered what it was like to be that woman whose time was too precious for her to watch one movie. What was it like to be willfully close-minded? He really did want to understand how it was possible to be like that. That woman felt certain she was justified in her attitudes, that her beliefs were indubitably correct, that the young man she had just talked to was insolent and ignorant and pernicious (as a "liberal")—and yet she was wrong. *He* was right; *she* was wrong. *She* was the ignorant one. There was no question. So, what was it like to feel certain of oneself when one was totally in error? He couldn't fathom it. But it fascinated him—and infuriated him.

While occupied in these thoughts he managed to raise forty dollars. One old lady launched into a diatribe against Bush, which he could only listen to while smiling and nodding in agreement. He also met a friendly young woman who looked with horror at his sopping hair and offered him a towel. "You poor thing! Here, dry your hair with this!" He handed it back to her gratefully. "I'm sorry," she said, "I wish I had money to give you—you're out here in this weather!—but I just lost my job and I have a newborn baby, so I really can't afford it." "Don't worry!" he said happily. "The towel was enough. I really appreciate it!" A few minutes later the rain stopped, as if on cue. The sun came out for the remainder of the evening and his clothes began to dry.

Gradually his mood improved. The cool night air felt good on his wet skin after the heat of the afternoon. He looked at the sheet on the back of his clipboard, adding up the numbers. "Ninety dollars. Not so bad. And there's still an hour left." The many rejections didn't faze him anymore; he returned to his cheerful ironic self-comments, interspersed with snatches of tunes he sang to pass the time. He'd forgotten his former rage.

He went to the house of a woman who had donated in the past. Her husband answered the door. "Hi! My name is John; I'm with MoPIRG. Is Martha home?"

"No."

"Oh. I just wanted to thank her for her contributions in the past. Also, we're going around the neighborhoods asking past members to donate to our campaign this summer, on global warming."

"Well, she isn't home. But I'll tell her you stopped by."

"Great! Thanks. Actually, maybe you could give her this pamphlet. It has some information on the issue."

"Okay."

"You don't know when she'll be back, do you?"

"No."

"Well, do you think I could stop by again later?"

"I'd rather you didn't."

"Ah. Okay. See ya."

He left. About five minutes later, though, he saw her car pull up in the driveway. He ran over to talk to her before she entered the house.

"I think I just sent in a check recently," she said. Her arms were full of grocery bags, but she smiled and stood there patiently.

"Really? That's weird; they should have told me that. –I'm sorry, I'm keeping you outside! You can go in and unload all that stuff. I could help..."

"Well, I may be wrong. I'll go look at my checkbook. Come on in." John followed her, though he suspected her husband wouldn't be pleased. He was right.

"I thought I told you not to come back!" the man said after seeing him behind Martha.

"Sorry," John said, "but I just saw your wife drive up, so I thought I'd run over and talk to her." He walked into the hallway and waited. Martha set down the bags on the kitchen table and rummaged through her purse.

"I told him not to come back," the man said to her. Then he caught sight of the cat and frantically ran towards it, since it was moving in the direction of the door. "Don't let the cat out! Don't let the cat—Close the door!" But it was closed already. So he went back to the kitchen. "I told him not to come back. You don't listen very well, do you?" he shouted over his wife's head. John ignored him. "Don't give him any money. MoPIRG is a waste of an organization. Please, just leave! Leave!" he called again. John waited for an indication from Martha, but she was silent. Her head was turned away, turned down toward her purse. She seemed embarrassed and ashamed, so John excused himself. "Yes, I think I sent a check recently," she said quietly. Her husband chimed in, "Go! Please, leave!"

Outside, John stood still in puzzlement. "That was odd." But he laughed and walked on.

The last house. Finally! It was a decent-sized middle-class home, with a large white porch and a swing-set visible in the backyard. As he knocked on the screen door he heard kids laughing and running around inside. It sounded like two girls. Their mother came to the door.

"Hello!" she said. "Are you with MoPIRG?"

"Yeah."

"Great! We've given money to you in the past. We were just recently thinking of joining up for the monthly program you have."

"Really? That would be terrific! Monthly members are the—"

"Honey!" she called. "Come down!"

"So anyway," John said, "this summer we're focused on global warming."

"Oh it's terrible isn't it! We just saw Al Gore's movie. Terrifying. But very good."

"I've heard a lot of good things about it. Haven't seen it though."

"It makes Gore look like some sort of heroic figure, fighting against all odds. Which he probably is. Honey!" she yelled again. "What are you doing?"

"Coming, coming!" It was from the second floor. "Just playing with the kids." A portly, laughing man appeared, with a young girl by his side. Adorable, smiling.

"Hello!" John said to her, waving. "What's your name?"

"Rachel," she said shyly.

"MoPIRG!" interrupted the man. "We love you guys! We were just talking about joining your monthly program. We saw Al Gore's movie a few nights ago."

"I'm gonna finish cooking," his wife told him.

"Okay. Let's go outside." Rachel ran back into the living room while her father joined John outside. "Christ!" he sighed. "They're a handful."

"You have two daughters?" The younger one was peeking around the corner of the doorway, smiling mischievously. Suddenly she burst into a sprint towards the living room.

"Yeah."

"I wish I had kids. I like children."

"You want 'em?"

"Sure! I've always wanted daughters."

"Of course you have. You know why?"

"Why?"

"'Cause you don't have any." The man sank into a chair and laughed. "By the way, my name's Tom. So did she say how much she wanted to give?"

"No, she didn't."

The man leapt up and yelled through the screen door, "Hey!!" No answer. "Come on inside. My wife's cooking spaghetti."

"I smell it. I forgot how hungry I was." They stepped inside and walked to the kitchen, past the living room. The two girls were on the floor together, giggling. "Sorry to invade your home like this," John said.

"Nonsense!" said the woman, who was stirring a pan of meatballs. "I love showing off my cooking."

"Stay and have dinner if you want! We'll be eating soon."

John laughed. "I'd love to—haven't had good food in months. But my boss might not be so pleased."

"So how much did you want to join for?" the man asked his wife. "Ten a month?"

"Yup."

"Great. Where do I sign?"

John explained all the details. After he'd had time to gather his thoughts he felt compelled to vent his gratitude. "It's so refreshing to meet people like you! Supportive people. This neighborhood isn't very liberal, you know."

"Oh, I know. We got a lot of Bush fanatics around here."

They chatted awhile, commiserating over the state of politics. John was struck that they treated him like an old friend, repeatedly inviting him to stay for dinner and not at all embarrassed by the chaos of the household. (The living room was littered with half-naked Barbie dolls; the girls were screeching and chasing each other in disregard of their father's good-natured shouts; their mother was haphazardly setting the table and plopping spaghetti onto each plate.) 'If only everyone were like them!' he thought. 'Friendliness is so rare!' At length he left, thanking them profusely. They had nudged him into his old love of mankind.

He walked to the car parked several blocks away. The neighborhood was mostly quiet, except for the sounds from the house he'd just left and the rustling of leaves in the breeze. It was a strong breeze. Clouds above blew by impatiently; the moon was visible in the spaces between them. It was nearly full. He couldn't see any stars, but he decided that was because the streetlights were too bright. The stars were up there all the same, hidden somewhere in the dark. He tried to imagine the distance between them and the earth, knowing it was impossible but enjoying the challenge anyway. It felt sort of 'mind-stretching', as if he were stepping outside himself and into the night.

He remembered the woman who had so enraged him, and the old man who had written the $10 check and the younger man who had pleaded with him to leave his house. John smiled, no longer upset. The question occurred to him again: How was it possible? How were *they* possible? But it no longer was colored with bitterness, nor even mild resentment. There was only pity. He understood they were not 'bad' people, nor stupid, but only victims of some accident or other that had toppled them into a ditch, a mental rut. They had long ago become victims of *routine*. Their attitudes and thoughts and personalities had been routinized, to the extent that they could no longer evaluate old situations in new ways or adjust old ways to new situations. They lived their routines and had lost the ability to really question them, and the desire. 'Money is precious'; 'privacy is sacred'; 'time is money'; etc. Their 'certainty' was just the lazy certainty of routine. They were casualties of modern life.

He looked back fondly at the last house and decided, then and there, that that would not happen to him.

*

Probably you think I'm exaggerating. "Casualties of modern life"? But a person's character can be revealed by a single act.

The Reunion

your hand,
tiny, entwined
in mine, our fingerprint-
grooves all fitting together, is
lovely.

Apparently that form of poetry is called a "cinquain".

Death

I killed
the chickadee
with a stone, even though
it was pretty....and with its death,
I died.

Tuesday, June 20

Today, while walking around zombie-like in the heat and conservatism of Kirkwood, I realized that I'd enjoy myself more if I composed "epigrams" while walking. So I thought of a few: [I deleted some]

If ever you think that your attitude towards mankind isn't jaundiced enough, try canvassing. That'll give you all the jaundice you could possibly want.

The most dangerous kind of amnesia.— The faster that society evolves, the shorter is its collective memory.

"Why is absent-mindedness perceived as endearing?" Because it makes the perceiver feel superior.

I've almost finished reading Pirsig's book. The philosophical parts are pretty stupid. Embarrassing, even. I could point to dozens of inadequacies. For instance, its extremely un-Marxist ideas. And its vagueness. And its ignorance of the history of philosophy. And its self-congratulation. ("Phaedrus was unbelievably original!" "No one had ever thought of this before!" "He was certain his ideas were revolutionary!" "He kept finding parallels of his own thoughts in Plato's writings!" "His insanity was due to his heroic rejection of his culture's *mythos*!" "Quality! Quality! Yay for Quality! Quality is like the Hindu's *dharma*, and the Buddhist's *One*, and the Greek's *aretê*! It unites Eastern and Western thought! It's earth-shaking!" "Phaedrus was a madman!"—i.e., a really cool genius! Actually, Phaedrus was an imbecile.) People who love this book are just in love with the idea that they've learned a little philosophy. They'd never read real philosophers, though, because they're "boring".

This should be the book's title: *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance; or, Philosophy for the Masses*. (Zen = philosophy; Motorcycle Maintenance = the masses.)

One guy I talked to today said (after I'd suggested he give $10), "I'd be glad to do that if I wanted to, but I don't want to." He was smiling and thought he was being friendly—not trying to be funny. He

didn't see how idiotic his statement was. An old woman who listened to me for a minute or two turned down my request for money by saying, "I have to leave town at 10:00 tomorrow, and I don't have a minute to spare." "Even ten dollars....?" I said. "Nope." A bunch of people said, "I won't give you any money, but I really support what you're doing!" One guy interrupted my speech with "You can't be soliciting here." So I frowned and made a gesture of contempt and walked away; he shouted at my back, "Don't wave at me!"

Psychologically/phenomenologically, how can the obsession with private property be explained? What is it about walking on someone's lawn that makes him angry at you? It's just *grass*, for God's sake! Maybe it's something about your not appreciating a thing he's spent a long time making pretty. "Have the courtesy to admire my lawn! That's why I've taken such good care of it, after all—so that people will admire it, not walk on it!"

[Or rather: "It's *mine*. You're showing disrespect towards me by walking all over it."]

Saturday, June 24

On Phaedrus's experience of Quality.— If Enlightenment is something you attain while lying half-conscious in a pool of your own piss after prolonged sleep-deprivation.....I think I'll pass.

Cosmic insects.— Yesterday as I was walking through a suburban neighborhood I heard a chorus of cicadas. It started off slow and quiet, then crescendoed to an almost deafening roar while quickening its tempo, and finally sank to a whimper and stopped. It was an unintelligible noise, insistent and annoying, but brief. –Suddenly I realized that the furious sounds of man's own history must seem like the cicadas' chorus to Earth.

Amusing encounters with mediocrity.— "....and this summer we're focusing on global warming," I say. "Awwhh!" she says. "There's no such thing as global warming! In 1988 *Newsweek* had a cover that said, 'Is a new ice age upon us?' Trust me: global warming doesn't exist. Just believe me." Or the old man who says, "Global warming is *shit*! It's a fad!", whereupon I walk away, as he yells at my back, "And stop that! Stop promoting the idea of global warming!" Quite amusing.

Rudolf Schramm as the prototype of the contemporary conservative American.— "A rowdy, loudmouthed and extremely confused little mannikin whose life-motto came from *Rameau's Nephew*: 'I would rather be an impudent windbag than nothing at all.'"

On Pascal.— "Men are so necessarily mad, that not to be mad would amount to another form of madness." Hypocrisy is but ignorance of this maxim. So is contemporary Christianity—though original Christianity was but a profound acceptance of it.

I'm reading Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, Cornel West's self-edited anthology *The Cornel West Reader*, and Julius Sensat, Jr.'s *Habermas and Marxism*.

I have the feeling that Cornel West's personality is as overwrought as his writing. (Style reveals personality.) But at least he means well. –On the other hand, the road to literary hell is paved with good intentions. "My painful quest for wisdom is an endless journey that tries to delve into the darkness of my soul to create a more mature and compassionate person." "I am primarily a dramatist of philosophic notions and historical narratives that partake of blood-drenched battles on a tear-soaked terrain in which our lives and deaths are at stake." "The distinctive mark of modernity is to pursue the treacherous trek of dialogue, to wager on the fecund yet potentially poisonous fruits of fallible inquiry, which require communicative action, risk-ridden conversation, even intimate relation." –Not *terrible*, but not great. His rhymes and alliterations and parallelisms are too self-conscious; his imagery is too grandiloquent; his inflated self-

esteem is too noticeable, though he makes feeble attempts to hide it. The best writers are those who, like West, have the talent and perhaps inclination for semi-persuasive bombast but, *un*like him, are able to curtail it.

....Well, he ain't as bad as all that, I guess. He's actually pretty good in his academic pieces, where he has less of an opportunity to wax lyrical. But the *substance* of his writings doesn't seem very interesting or original.

I just had a thought: maybe the first principle of literary criticism, implicit in most (if not all) other principles, is that the work in question not show signs of self-consciousness. As in daily life, the imperative is to project confidence, sureness of purpose; the cardinal sin—in both realms—is to hint at premeditation, hesitancy, to show signs of 'trying too hard' or being too preoccupied with self-observation. Whatever it is, it must appear *natural*, *unconscious* (or at least not *self*-conscious), *spontaneous*, virtually *inevitable* in its progression from one moment to the next. Whether it's social interaction or literature, it should seem *sincere*. (Again, that's a quality opposed to self-consciousness.) Hence the injunction against, for example, literary sentimentalism, i.e., forced and unconvincing emotionalism, i.e., self-conscious, non-spontaneous emotionalism. Cheap literary effects like facile alliterations and parallelisms betoken a lack of involvement on the part of the author in the content of his writing, which means an over-involvement in himself and the effect he's creating on the reader. Every reader indeed knows that every author is concerned with his effect on his audience, but the point is that the reader doesn't want to be reminded of that, because then he'll wonder why *he* should immerse himself in the text if the *author*, of all people, didn't! If it seems like the author didn't believe in what he was writing—wasn't *totally convinced* of it in *every moment*, and instead focused unduly on something external like style—the reader will find himself detached from the work, uninspired by it. Only if the *author* was persuaded will the *reader* be persuaded too.

Granted, some great works have self-consciousness and self-detachment woven into them (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being* comes to mind), but in these cases their self-consciousness is integral to their content and themes. It's part of their content, essential to it, rather than being an encumbrance that distracts from it. (The less essential it is, the more it's a flaw. A case could be made that the self-conscious digressions in Kundera's book are flaws, if indeed they interrupt the book's flow and its themes.)

Of course there are other important principles too, like simple 'readability' (rhythm, stylistic consistency, felicitous syntax), but to an extent these can probably be related to the principle that all hints of self-consciousness be avoided.

And surely these general principles are common to every culture of any sophistication. –Why, I don't know.

Friday, June 30

Yesterday I wrote a poem while canvassing, to rejuvenate myself after two hours of "Go away!"

Fighting against global warming

As I talk to this person
full of sincerity and urgency
(human connectedness is urgent)
her eyes leak deserts of starch
onto my soft words
and in them
I see
a deserted future....
Human kindness has been milked dry.

How to tell when you're getting tired of being single.— When every girl you talk to for two minutes stays fixed in your mind for half an hour afterwards, you know you're ready for a relationship.

I had a long debate with Jackson about the merits and demerits of postmodernism. Specifically cultural relativism. Relativism in science, etc. He was pro, I was con. Very lively discussion. Jackson's awesome. One of the best people I've known, brilliant and funny and likable. We have a lot in common (absent-mindedness, easygoingness, intellectualness, senses of humor), with the exception of his overflowing charisma. He reminds me of Jim, but without the occasional assholishness. And with a passion for social justice.

For a while I've been puzzled by the modern woman's apparent self-ambivalence. Her enjoyment of (half-consciously) semi-subordinating herself in relationships with men, of decorating herself and being a decoration herself, of following men and wanting to be with men who dominate, of having children and spending most of her time with them—and yet her complaints about being the second sex, about having to decorate and beautify herself, about not being able to have a career unhampered by child-bearing. In short, she's torn between the love of being an object [or rather, being half-passive] and the hatred of being an object—the love and the hatred of being unequal. She wants to care for and to be cared for, yet she envies the male's carte blanche to be aggressive in all areas of life. I've wondered, "Can it really be that women have an innate half-desire to be male? A natural 'penis-envy'? Are they really conflicted between a masculine and a feminine self-ideal? Is Adler's 'masculine protest' natural in women or just a modern confusion? Is it indeed a *masculine* protest, or is it a *human* one, which has for some reason become associated with men?" I was confused, though. I hadn't questioned my assumptions.

The modern self-ambivalence of women—their ambivalence about their social roles, and even about their biological position vis-à-vis men—is not transhistorical. Nor is it anything like penis-envy or an unconscious desire to be male. It's the psychological result of the deterioration of the community, the fragmentation of social life, caused in part by (and manifested in) the rise of the nuclear family. For hundreds of thousands of years there was no "nuclear family", at least in the form it's taken in the last thousand years (and especially the last few hundred). There were strong communal ties, whether structured along lines of kinship or in other ways, and both men and women played important parts in communal life. Women were indeed comparatively confined to the homestead—caring for children, etc.—but they also were involved in food-gathering, in agriculture, in the political life of the community (such as it was). And the "homestead" wasn't what it's become, a single house shut in and shut off from the neighborhood; it was the community itself, the whole area where everyone lived (as opposed to the wilderness where men hunted). All activities took place in the context of an open community—there were no doors to be closed on neighbors, no walls—and everyone shared his or her belongings, and children were raised communally, and loneliness was unusual (perhaps almost impossible). Then, all of sudden, in a mere five thousand years—or really five *hundred* years—economic life becomes fragmented, the nuclear family becomes the basis of the social fabric, men take over politics and most of the economy, and women are confined increasingly to limited roles in the household. These roles aren't "spiritually fulfilling" because of their isolation from the community. (It's a cruel twist of irony that the female sex is the one that most craves emotional connections and care!) So women become much more attached to their male partners than they used to be, because their partners are their closest remaining ties to communal affection. And what was innately a slight difference in needs and abilities between the sexes becomes a chasm, and women become increasingly subordinate to men in almost all spheres and increasingly reliant on their husbands (and children) for their emotional well-being. Thus they develop a cloistered outlook on life and an inferiority complex vis-à-vis men. Is it any surprise then that when political liberalism arrives on the scene, women finally come out and say they want a bigger role in the community? They want careers, they want respect, they want to participate in society. This isn't a "masculine" protest; it's a human one, grounded in the human need for community [or recognition]. It happens to look masculine because of the way gender roles have been structured. After some years women find that careers aren't as satisfying as they'd hoped—which is predictable, since job-relationships have become as fractured and schizophrenic as relationships outside

of jobs—so they re-embrace their traditional roles at a man's side and in the home (hence the contemporary reaction against feminism). But this isn't satisfying. So they're caught between two undesirable options.[1] Real happiness won't be possible until the social structure is revolutionized—until, that is, communities become the norm again.

Civilization and the Jews.— Monotheism is the predominant form of religion today. Aside from Zoroastrianism, which died out long ago, Judaism is the oldest form of monotheism. Christianity was conceived by Jews, and Islam was inspired by the prophets of the Old Testament. So the hegemonic modern moralities and belief-systems were created or inspired by Jews. With respect to intellectual life, three Jews did more than anyone else to carve modernity: Marx, Freud and Einstein. We're still living in their shadows. —Someone should write a book called *The Creative Genius of Jewry*.

Sunday, July 2

I got four books at the library today: *Women's Mysteries,* by Downing, *Analytical Marxism: A Critique*, by Roberts, *Female Sexuality*, edited by Bassin, and *Psychoanalytic Versions of the Human Condition*, edited by Marcus and Rosenberg. I love going to the library. I get excited seeing all those books everywhere, thousands and thousands of books. Why? I think because they represent *freedom*. I can be totally *myself* in a library; I can immerse myself in an object, without having to worry about playing a part in society. My heart leaps to my throat as I look at all the books, read their titles and imagine the content between their covers. And I can stay there for hours, for as long as I want, without worrying about responsibilities.

—Or, as Winnicott might say, I can "play". "Cultural experiences are in direct continuity with play, the play of those who have not yet heard of games." I like this way of conceptualizing it. Play is light-hearted, enjoyable, free and creative. Play is freedom, freedom *to* and freedom *from*—from responsibilities, from burdensome and external norms, from anything 'external' and constraining. Play is an assimilation of experience to the self (its desires, its sense of itself), and of the self to experience. It's a sympathetic appropriation of experience—a molding of experience into one's own idiosyncratic framework for experience, for interpreting life (not discursively but *actively*, through "praxis"). This is what it means to enjoy oneself, and what it means to be free. Freedom is an interiorizing of the exterior, and an exteriorizing of the interior. This is what infants are doing when they play—this adapting of the world to themselves and vice versa, as they freely explore their environment—and it involves smiles and laughter because no external obstacles are getting in the way of their activity, their free self-expression. Their desire is being fulfilled; there's no division between them and their environment, no source of frustration—no 'blockage' or 'deprivation' obstructing their spontaneous self-assertion. (Incidentally, this mechanistic language—this talk of "frustration" and "blockage" and "tension"—suggests Freudianism, with its talk of instincts and the id and the pleasure principle vs. reality. The main flaw in many of Freud's ideas may simply have been the unfortunate terminology in which they were expressed—the scientific framework in which they were formulated. Taken out of this framework and reformulated accordingly, they may be true.) As for the *cognitive* significance of infantile play, see Piaget.

I want to make one more point: these reflections suggest the association I made above between freedom and community. But now *play* has been added into the mix. Psychological freedom (or the phenomenological feeling of freedom—*positive* freedom) signifies a lack of separation between the self

[1] In all this doubt about what lifestyles they want and what kind of people they want to be, and all this universal loneliness (afflicting both sexes), and all the modern collisions of ideologies and new scientific discoveries, is it any wonder that women misinterpret themselves? Some of them think they want to be (or *are*) totally "equal" to men, equally "aggressive" and "autonomous", equally career-driven, but generally these are exaggerations that shouldn't be taken at face-value. These truly *masculine* protests are confusions, predictable in an age of extreme freedom and despair. Every social group is experiencing identity-crises.

and its environment—a lack of an *experienced* separation, that is.[1] (Logically and epistemologically there's always a dualism between the self and its environment, but this dualism need not always be experienced, or 'felt', in consciousness.) Since play is an expression of freedom, it's also an expression of "community"—i.e., of the self's perception of harmony or sympathy between itself and its environment. Thus, 'freedom is play is community', or 'community is freedom is play', or what have you. They all imply each other. And cultural experiences are just sophisticated manifestations of infantile play. They proceed from the same motives and have largely the same psychological and cognitive functions. Artists and thinkers, and people who appreciate their work, are literally adult infants. To an extent, though, we *all* are.

This human need to assimilate experience to the (cognitive and emotional structures of the) self has other manifestations too. For instance, think about how frustrating it is when you hear a familiar tune but can't remember where you heard it first, or you can't remember its name or who wrote it. Or when you see a familiar face but can't think of the name that goes with it. "It's right on the tip of my tongue! Damn it!" The power of your frustration shows how powerful is your need to *order* the world. Play, freedom and community signify a temporarily perfect ordering of your world, a harmony between the self and its environment.

Obviously all this ties into Marxian anthropology (the young Marx's emphasis on our need to humanize nature and on our self-creation through labor,[2] etc.). It also reminds me of Nietzsche's will to power.

So, it may *look* like someone is being very serious and academic and doing something that's totally the opposite of playing (say, reading a book on philosophy), but actually his activity is essentially similar to the child's playing with toys.

These thoughts may hold the key to the common observation that highly endowed people tend to act like children in some respects. For example: me. I'm very silly, unpractical, absent-minded, good-natured, emotional, self-absorbed, but very intelligent and creative. I'm like the child that loves to explore its world and 'play' with new objects and ideas. Artists and thinkers have a greater capacity and need for play than other adults—because, presumably, in some respects they've evolved out of childhood less than others have. (I wonder why. Probably both nature and nurture.)

I should make a revision: there are two forms of play, namely the kind that signifies an already-achieved harmony with the environment (in which case the play is really nothing more than a wallowing in this harmony, this freedom), and the kind that signifies an attempt to achieve this harmony. –Or maybe both kinds presuppose a certain degree of harmony or freedom, but the second kind (an example of which is the philosopher's struggle to sort through ideas) is an attempt to achieve harmony on a higher level. It couldn't take place if there weren't already some freedom, some 'sympathy' between the player and his environment (a sympathy that gives him the freedom to play in the first place), but in another sense he still hasn't psychologically, or cognitively, assimilated his environment, so he 'plays' with ways of assimilating it. Like I'm doing right now. This kind of play seems different from the kind that presupposes 'superfluity', like when children play cops and robbers. In the latter case there is no struggle to assimilate the environment; there's only the enjoyment of an already-accomplished assimilation. Both forms of play are enjoyable, but in different ways: the first is more serious, more urgent, less purely pleasurable. Art, on the other hand, generally seems to have more in common with the second kind. (This explains why I think of art as more 'fun' and 'free' than philosophy, even though it can also be very difficult.)

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[1] "Separation" as in frustration, confusion, alienation, boredom, self-consciousness, stress, etc.

[2] Through "labor", or praxis—which often takes the form of play—we accommodate ourselves to [and *create*] our environment and thus achieve freedom/community and thereby self-creation (for we effectively create the conditions of the self's equilibrium with itself and its environment). But the self-creation of course enters on other levels as well, such as in the fact that through labor we learn about ourselves, and we transform the environment in such a way that gradually it transforms us as well (and so on *ad infinitum*).

I'm very happy sitting here reading this book on psychology while listening to Beethoven's 4th. (I think the reason why the music adds to the enjoyment is partly that it makes the situation more *my own*, more familiar to me, as mine. I.e., it adds a further element of play, of assimilation.)

By the way, unpleasant emotions, from anger to hatred to boredom, imply a conflict between the environment and the self, a lack of assimilation of the first to the second (to its desires, expectations, categories of understanding); this accounts for their unpleasantness. The pleasant emotions are essentially forms of play—or at least are usually *manifested* in play.

Play is the psychological goal of humans. A person is mentally healthy to the degree that he's capable of play.

Tuesday, July 4

In the natural sciences it's possible to reach a single true explanation of a given phenomenon. The physical world theoretically admits of one complete explanation, and there are ways to tell when this explanation has, beyond reasonable doubt, been reached. The social sciences (including psychology) are different. Theories will always and necessarily continue to evolve, because they can't be stated with mathematical precision and they can't be tested by an *experimentum crucis*. Social scientific theorizing involves finding *more adequate* ways of conceptualizing phenomena, rather than finding the *only true* way of conceptualizing them (which is what natural science aims for). Adequacy is determined by the criteria I listed in my senior thesis, namely intuitive plausibility, success in prediction, breadth of explanatory power, consistency with widely accepted scientific theories as well as the "web of belief" in general, etc.

On the other hand, it does seem like the implicit goal of the social sciences is to find *the truth* vis-à-vis a given phenomenon—*the* correct way to conceptualize it. Or maybe the position I took in my thesis is better: theories aim for the *best* explanation rather than the *correct* one. Many theories might be correct, as far as they go, but theoretically there's only one *best* one, one that succeeds better than all others at satisfying the criteria for adequacy. If the phenomena under consideration have any sort of complexity and breadth this ideal theory will never be attained, but it remains the implicit goal of theorizing. (In the natural sciences, the goal of *correspondence with reality* is more easily conceptualizable—even *directly observable*—than it is in the social sciences. Concepts and theories are, in this case, ostensibly just linguistic expressions of actual 'observable' facts in the physical world. When concepts and conceptual relations have been found that correspond to physical facts, there's nothing more for theorists to do. Since physical facts aren't what the social sciences are supposed to explain, but rather nebulous causal links mediated by nebulous psychological states, these sciences have much more room for conceptual vagueness, for manipulation and evolution of concepts, for degrees of theoretic accuracy, etc.)

The problem with the social sciences is that their subject-matter is ultimately buried in the human brain, deep in the subconscious and the inner workings of the psyche. All the social interactions they study work their causal magic through the deepest layers of the psyche. […]

Aufschwung

Schumann,
like Icarus,
flew too close to the sun;
his sanity melted and he
died young.

A Perfect Night

This night
would be perfect

if it weren't hot, muggy,
buggy, noisy, and I weren't so
tired.

The Omen

I see
skulls in the sky,
in the clouds, staring down
grimly at our future, our past
future.

I'm tempted to agree with Laing's belief that deception (self- and other-) is the main cause of psychological illness. After all, for hundreds of thousands of years there was no such thing as deception—there couldn't be; life was too simple and communal—but then suddenly in eight thousand years it became an essential part of life. That's bound to have psychological effects. Having to conceal things from people isn't healthy: it sets up divisions in the community, fosters a sense of isolation that can lead to loneliness; it militates against the possibility of naïve 'play' with the other and with oneself, that carefree acceptance, trust and love that is essential to happiness. And it leads to self-deception, which posits divisions in the self. (By acquiring the ability to deceive the other, you've laid the foundations for the ability to deceive yourself. You just have to do to yourself what you've done to the other.)

I like Heinz Kohut's self psychology. It melds nicely with my own views. Here's a useful comparison between Kohut's and Freud's basic premises (Freud's first):

> The infant is born with the innate propensity for incestuous lustfulness, pleasure seeking and murderous wishes as primary and basic, and these are from the beginning on a collision course with the culture and society (represented by the caregivers) into which the human infant has to be civilized. ....This taming, controlling and proper channeling of the drives occurs against the infant's and child's will and selfish interests. The results are at best an acquisition of a thin veneer of civilization that can, and frequently does, easily peel off, laying bare the original lustfulness and bestiality beneath. ....To restate it in theoretical terms: the human infant born as a "bundle of drives" evokes the caregiver's efforts at curbing, controlling and channeling these drives. This leads inevitably to conflicts between the drives and the representatives of culture. Conflict is thus built into the mental apparatus from the very outset and culminates in the prototypically conflict-ridden Oedipus complex. From then on this conflict pervades every human activity in health and disease.
>
> The human infant arrives into this world preadapted—we might now say "hard-wired"—for the capacity to elicit the needed responses from its surroundings. Hence the infant's primary need is for connection and for response. ....To express this in theoretical terms, the infant is born, with all of its biological givens, into a "self-selfobject matrix" in which an empathically responsive milieu will provide physically, nutritionally, and emotionally what it needs for its prolonged development. The infant is thus a social being to begin with, reaching out actively to a harmonious and receptive rather than to an antagonistic and coercively civilizing environment. So there is no built-in primary pathogenic conflict in the human psyche. However, conflict is inevitable because the milieu can never respond perfectly to the needs of a budding self. Hence, there will always be conflict. Such conflict becomes pathogenic or pathological, however, only if, in response to empathic failures of the selfobject milieu, the development and consolidation of the self is thwarted.

Kohut's vision is more compelling than Freud's, not to mention more uplifting. Here are more of his insights:

> Viewed from a broad perspective, man's functioning should be seen as aiming in two directions. I identify these by speaking of *Guilty Man* if the aim is directed toward the activity of his drives and of *Tragic Man* if the aims are toward the fulfillment of the self.... Guilty Man lives within the pleasure principle; he attempts to satisfy his pleasure-seeking drives, to lessen the tensions that arise in his erogenous zones. The fact that man, not only because of environmental pressure, but especially as the result of inner conflict, is often unable to achieve his goals in this area, prompted me to designate him Guilty Man when he is seen in this context.... Tragic Man, on the other hand, seeks to express the pattern of his nuclear self; his endeavors lie beyond the pleasure principle. Here, too, the undeniable fact that man's failures overshadow his successes prompted me to designate this aspect of man negatively as Tragic Man rather than "self-expressive" or "creative man".
>
> Freud's is a conception of man as endowed with either a well functioning or malfunctioning psychic apparatus—of man spurred on by his drives and shackled by castration anxiety and guilt. It is a concept that does adequate justice to the problems of the structural neuroses, and, *in the broad arena of societal and historical development, encompasses the conflicts of Guilty Man.*
>
> Classical theory cannot illuminate the essence of fractured, enfeebled, discontinuous human existence: it cannot explain the essence of the schizophrenic fragmentation, the struggle of the patient who suffers from a narcissistic personality disorder to reassemble himself, the despair—the guiltless despair, I stress—of those who in late middle age discover that the basic pattern of their self as laid down in their nuclear ambitions and ideals has not been realized. Dynamic-structural metapsychology does not do justice to these problems of man, cannot encompass the problem of Tragic Man.
>
> I have a new roommate. Vikram, 23. Good guy.

Thursday, July 6

Why are sports fun? *Where* [in mental space] are they fun?

Imagine how healthy our culture would be if clothing were optional! There wouldn't be any mass fetishizing of sex; people would have fewer insecurities, especially about their bodies; we would all naturally feel closer to each other than we do now.

Whoever wrote the Book of Genesis was both wiser and more confused than he thought: self-consciousness is heightened by the dictate to cover one's natural physical state. (The Biblical fable confused the cause and effect.[1])

Melanie Klein's theories don't grab me. Though there's probably a kernel of truth in all psychoanalytic systems, hers seems far-fetched at times. And I don't know what to make of Wilfred Bion's. It's just strange.

Sunday, July 9

[1] (Obviously it's more complicated than just "cause and effect".)

As a thinker, Jon Elster seems as boring and shallow as his friends the game theorists.

I went to a PIRG camping retreat this weekend with a few coworkers and dozens of canvassers from the region. Fun.

Another long debate with Jackson. Going round in circles, as with most debates, but exciting and thought-provoking.

I'm reading Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer's 1985 paper "'Everybody Must Be Just Like Me': Observations on Female Castration Anxiety" (in the *Female Sexuality* anthology). After three pages I'm already struck by its ingeniousness and originality. So much so that I'm going to quote it at length.

> Emily, a bright little girl of 20 months, for the first time commented on the matter of sexual differences to her mother with the following series of remarks. "Mummy," she began, "*Mummy* has a bottom....and Mummy, *Daddy* has a bottom....and Mummy, *Emily* has a bottom." Emily's mother assented to each of these observations and Emily thoughtfully continued, "and *Mummy* has a vulva....and *Emily* has a vulva....but Mummy, Daddy has something *funny* in his vulva!"
>
> Emily, like Freud's prototypical little Hans, has made a simple assumption about the nature of genitals: "everyone is and must be like me." But unlike Freud's little Hans, this assumption has led her to believe that everyone has and must have a vulva. (Emily is a child of the 1980s; she has been taught a word which explicitly denotes her external genitalia.) Emily's new observation is that Daddy has something funny *besides*—and, she imagines, *inside*, although more of that later.
>
> A number of female patients have reiterated to me a view of men in which certain stereotypic features recur: men, these women assert, are emotionally closed, unable to be receptive or empathic, and without access to inner feelings or inner sensations. The absolutism of these characterizations, their repetitiveness, their frequency, and the stubborn determination with which they are retained, have struck me as requiring explanation. As I have investigated such women's characterizations of men, I have been impressed that certain themes recur. In brief: these women are determined to believe that men are lacking something crucial; they associate the missing something with what are explicitly described as "feminine" capacities; these women are at some level deeply anxious about their own capacities to be feminine; and they ultimately report versions of a fantasy that the capacity to be *genitally open* is a capacity that can be endangered, can be lost, and indeed *has* been quite literally lost by the male sex. Their characterizations of men as emotionally closed appear to represent derivatives of an unconscious conviction that men have actually been closed over genitally, and that men therefore represent the frightening possibility that such a thing could really happen *to a woman*. While the defensive functions of such material have been frequently pointed out in the psychoanalytic literature (i.e., "something's wrong with *him*, not with *me*; *he's* the one who's missing something!"), I believe that there may be additional ways of understanding such material that could contribute to our comprehension of female psychology.
>
> The remarks of little Emily may prove illuminating in pursuing this line of thought. I believe that we can observe in her reflections a phase of female psychosexual development that invites further investigation, particularly in its clinical implications. I would like to suggest that, given the egocentric nature of small children, the vicissitudes of the girl's later development will rest on her early conviction that boys as well as girls have female genitals, much as we are accustomed to assuming the importance to the boy of his early conviction that everyone has a penis. Thus, according to Emily, Daddy *must* have a vulva for his penis to be *in*. Certainly it has been widely demonstrated that the little girl's first perception of a penis leads her to wonder at her lack. Relatively unemphasized

> has been her response to noting that the boy does *not* have what she has, a vulva, a parting between the labia with the potential for an opening and for something inside. But, I suggest, this first awareness of the possibility of being without a vulva may contribute to the development of a true female castration anxiety. As such, it would have decisive influence on the course of female development and would affect also the ways in which girls perceive boys (and women perceive men). It would constitute an observation that must be worked over repeatedly as solutions to each phase of psychosexual conflict are attained by the girl.
>
> It is my impression that such a female castration anxiety may be observed clinically, and that it is distinct from the female castration complex as that complex has been widely described in the psychoanalytic literature. I suggest that *castration anxiety* in men or in women, is anxiety over losing that genital which is actually possessed. It bears a particular relationship to oedipal conflicts and is given great force by perception of the opposite sex as lacking one's valued genital. The *castration complex*, on the other hand, has traditionally referred to the girl's fantasy of having had a penis that was lost. Such a definition of the castration complex implies an essentially phallocentric experience and resolution of female castration complex. Though important, I believe it describes only one dimension of how girls may experience and cope with those concerns. So, for purposes of clarity in this paper, I will refer to that set of fantasies as the *phallic* castration complex. I will use the term female castration anxiety to refer to anxiety, in girls or in women, over the fantasied loss of *female* genitals. Clinical manifestations of female castration anxiety and the phallic castration complex may merge, but I believe that the phenomena themselves have distinct origins, follow distinguishable developmental lines, bear a complicated relationship to each other, and are certainly not exclusive of each other....

Note Mayer's powers of intuition as well as her skill at exposition—her ability to get to the point. I'm excited to read the rest of this paper. *[Um, you can see from this excerpt how unscientific psychoanalysis is. It's mostly a lot of untestable guessing and, frequently, attributing more significance to little childhood experiences than they probably have.]*

Apparently just before she died she finished writing a book called *Extraordinary Knowing: Science, Skepticism, and the Inexplicable Powers of the Human Mind*. A random website describes it thusly: "She became interested in coincidence in 1991 when she was searching for a stolen family possession, according to published reports. On a dare, Professor Mayer sought the aid of a self-described psychic who lived 800 miles away. The man was able to tell her precisely where to find the missing object. Professor Mayer began more than a decade of research seeking a scientific explanation for what had occurred. She began working with Robert G. Jahn, a science and engineering professor at Princeton University, who published an article exploring similar territory in 2001. In their view, the unconscious mind absorbs bits of information that rise into awareness, producing the phenomenon commonly called clairvoyance. At the same time, the unconscious may be able to alter the physical world." I wanted to order the book immediately, but it won't be available until February!

As I read about the psyche I despair of ever reaching anything like understanding. It's too complex. And, moreover, psychoanalysis is just plain *hard*: it relies on intuition/introspection/empathy like no other discipline [except phenomenology, surely].

Monday, July 10

Question and answer.— A: "It's amazing how *boring* people are! How can they live with themselves?!" B: "It's precisely *because* they're boring that they're able to live with themselves."

A definition.— "I'm not some dirty, naked savage! I'm *civilized!*" I.e., "My mind has been colonized in such a way that I have to cover myself in shame!"

In all humility.— Far be it from me to criticize nature's genius in creating man, but, still, I must admit...."the painting would have been better painted had the painter taken more pains."

Tuesday. July 11

Skimming through the book *Women's Mysteries*, I'm struck by how right I was that women are largely defined by their bodies. Their monthly blood-letting, their ambivalence about the vagina, their ambivalence about motherhood and children and menstruation and breasts and the penis and everything else. They're so dark to themselves! I could pick hundreds of passages from the book that seem to point to the centrality of women's genitals in determining their outlook on life. For example:

> In a female ritual context menstruation means more than the beginning of reproductive capacity; it means initiation into shared sisterhood with all who bleed. I know women who have sought to create menstrual rituals together. They save their blood and pour it onto the earth. They break the taboo against this blood by doing this not alone but in each other's company. They tell each other their stories of first bleeding. They welcome one another into the circle of women, knowing many were not welcomed when that blood first flowed. They tell one another the stories of the humiliation of the blood....
>
> ....From a series of letters written to me over the course of years I have culled these reflections:
>
> "I write today as I bleed. The first day and the heaviest flow. I write feeling my weightedness, the drag of my uterus. Feeling my wound, my incapacity. All the changes in my body—my voice flattened, my belly swollen, my clumsiness, a flood of dreams I cannot bring back to consciousness.
>
> "How difficult it is to stay in the body. I get up, get to the bathroom, reach into my vagina for the menstrual sponge—a bloody mess! Squeeze the blood into a cup. It splatters everywhere.
>
> "Can I write this to you? Am I so crazy I don't even know it? Today I feel such self-doubt.
>
> "The knowledge of taboo returns. The blood is not to be touched, let alone saved.
>
> "Even what we value of menstruation—are our bodies there? We value the rhythmic cycle, the feelings, the dreams, the bond. We talk and interpret. Analyze dreams. Theorize. Baroque elaborations. Virginal fluffy clouds. Ascending out of the blood, the mess, the ache, the wound.
>
> "Even this writing. How difficult for me to stay with my body. My feelings of vulnerability. My tears that I had hoped were past, falling again. Fears and doubts.
>
> "Here I am. The ache in my lower spine is sensual, as is the openness of my vulva, my blood slipping in my vagina.
>
> "A wound not to be healed—but attended to—felt, touched, smelled, seen. Received."
>
> Merida's words remind me of how our monthly periods open us to our vulnerability, our tears, our doubts, our fears, to a sense of wounds as not to be fixed but attended to. She encourages us to honor our dreams, the dreams we have that prepare us for our bleeding, the dreams that accompany our bleeding, the dreams that warn us we may cease to bleed....

> Because we are wounded creatures, we tend to fear being further wounded, to fear otherness, to fear dependency, and to misconstrue interdependence as domination. Because the differences between another and myself may seem to be so great as to be well-nigh intolerable, in seeking to establish a relationship I may try to make that other more like myself. Because we can't tolerate the heterogeneity, we may seek to dominate or destroy the otherness of the other. Thus heterosexual encounters often come to be contaminated by patterns of dominance and submission—even when we may all want something quite different.

I suppose it's foolish of me to point to all this, since by doing so I'm arguing with the imbecilic masses rather than the few intelligent people in the world. But, men: imagine what it's like to be so wedded to one's body! We men hardly ever really think about our bodies, unless we're thinking in passing "I wish I were more muscular/thin", or "I'm proud of how muscular/thin I am". Thus, it's more natural for us to be self-confident, to be "rational" or "intellectual": the body doesn't constantly press itself on us, so we're able to focus on the body of the other—and on things other than the body. The other, by contrast, is constantly reminded of her own body (and thus of her*self*), through the looks of men, the jiggling of her breasts (probably not as trivial a factor as it sounds), the menstruation cycle, her primordial fascination with it (her body, that is), etc. On top of that, her psychosexual development is more complex and potentially traumatic than men's (read Mayer's paper and others). Therefore her relationship to herself and the opposite sex is more complicated and ambivalent than it is for men, and she tends to be more self-conscious and insecure. ("Insecure" = preoccupied with how the other perceives you, and with the question of your place in the community.)

Wednesday, July 12

People

People are like
ostriches,
long necks with little heads stuck
in the sand.
Very good at hiding
and
running away.
Not so good at having
brains.

Idiocy

The miser
said
he would not donate money
because
apparently he is in favor
of pollution
and
hates
democracy
(not to mention mankind).

Thursday, July 13

Thoughts.— Compared to emotions, thoughts are mere epiphenomena. I talked to an Eastern European mother and daughter tonight—14- or 15-year-old daughter—sweet and pretty as the mist after the rain—and afterwards I forgot how to think the thoughts I'd been thinking earlier, about women and their weaknesses. I just wanted to brighten up the rainy night in their apartment, ask about their experiences and make them laugh.

Friday, July 14

Excerpts from an informative passage from Roberts' book (pp. 68 ff.):

> ....According to the positivist conception of science—explicitly avowed by Acton; implicitly conceded by Cohen—technological determinism will qualify as a genuine scientific theory only if empirically testable and predictive hypotheses can be deduced from its core propositions. Should there be some internal, necessary relationship between forces [of production] and relations [of production], then there can be no external, explanatory relationship—at least, of the required kind. Marxism's analytical critics had argued that the general theory of history was therefore unscientific. The forces, relations and superstructure could not be independently identified; the fundamental concepts in Marx's theory of history were logically related in a way that precluded any causal relationship. Other positivist critics of Marxism—most prominently, Popper—further argued that the theory tended to circularity in another, closely related, sense: what appeared to be bold empirical hypotheses not infrequently turned out to be mere tautologies. Consider the claim that, if the existing relations of production have become fetters on technological development, then this will bring about an 'epoch of social revolution'. This is a bold and testable conjecture only if the antecedent condition (the 'fettering' of the productive forces) is identifiable independently of the consequent 'social revolution'. Presented with this claim, the positivist social scientist will be unable to test it until he is told what level of 'fettering' will be sufficient to bring about a social revolution. But, or so their Anglophone critics claimed, Marxists simply denied that there was fettering in the required sense unless and until social revolution actually occurred. In the 1940s and 1950s, Marxism's critics argued that the general theory of history was either demonstrably false or vacuously tautologous.
>
> ....[Miller, however, disagrees.] If scientific positivism is conceded, he argues, then Marx's theory of history would be indefensible. But it should not be conceded. ....Circularity—understood as the identification of 'internal' relationships between the central explanatory concepts within a scientific research programme—is not a problem at all: 'it is typical of the most interesting scientific theories that phenomena which are connected by way of explanation are also connected, to some extent, by definition'.
>
> Miller develops this point through a discussion of Darwin's theory of evolution. ....If this 'massive Ism' had suffered the indignity of being hauled up before Ryle's 'court of law', then it too would have been convicted of non-scientificity. Consider the central proposition of the theory of evolution: 'when the selective advantages of the traits associated with new genetic material are great enough in the population, it comes to pervade the gene pool; if enough new traits accumulate a new species emerges'. But this is pure tautology: 'in these principles, "enough" in the antecedents means enough to produce the changes described in the consequents'—for example, 'enough' new traits have

> accumulated to produce a new species if, and only if, a new species is produced. Compare this, then, with Marx's claim that if the fettering of technological development by the relations of production is severe enough, then there will follow an 'epoch of social revolution'—this is tautologous: fettering is severe enough if, and only if, revolution occurs. Miller makes no bones about the fact that the core propositions of his 'mode of production' theory are also transparently tautologous: 'basic change in economic structure occurs when the mode of production gives rise to conflicts severe enough to produce such change'. As Darwin's theory of evolution, so too Karl Marx's theory of revolution.
>
> Why have positivist philosophers of science displayed such an uncompromising hostility to the common practice of research scientists in both the natural and social sciences? The answer is, in part, that they have tended indiscriminately and universally to appeal to a particular model of the nature of scientific practice. On this view, the business of science is to make *predictions*, and to test these predictions through rigorous empirical research aimed at the confirmation or disconfirmation of a particular hypothesis. Science predicts, then tests. But, just as Darwin's theory does not enable us to predict the emergence of a new species, Marx's theory of history does not enable us to specify in advance the conditions under which a social revolution will actually materialise. Only after the event, as it were, does Darwin's theory connect the emergence of a new species with a process of genetic mutation, or Marx's theory of history connect social revolution with the fettering of the productive forces. Yet, while these theories are not *predictive*, they are clearly *explanatory*. It would be absurd to suppose that a general theory of history of the kind developed by Marx could or should be able to produce predictive empirical laws of the form 'when social conflict reaches degree X, there follows the revolutionary transition to a higher mode of production'. But while Marx's theory cannot make predictions, it seeks to explain epochal social transformations. It tells us *why* social transitions occur—due to contradictions between the forces and relations—and it tells us *how* they are achieved—through the medium of class conflict.

I'm not sure I agree with the parallel drawn between Darwin and Marx, but it's thought-provoking. The Marxist theory of history, as stated in the famous Preface, is inadequate (though not for the reasons Popper thinks), but since it's suggestive it must be substantive.

I'm amazed at the extent of our culture's cult of secrecy in matters of the body. Even in *this* age, people find it terrible to speak of women's bodies! Menstruation is unmentionable, except maybe in intimate circles of liberal-minded people. What dishonesty! How can women not see that "anatomy [or biology] is", more or less, "destiny"?! Freud exaggerated it, but his view has a kernel of truth. I can use one of their own "against" them:

> Having wombs reminds us of how much we are part of the ever-ongoing cycle of generations, how much we are used by nature as simply the instrument of her self-continuation. Having wombs reminds us of how much human activity is creative, generative. ....Having wombs reminds us of the womb which gave us birth and also, inevitably, of the womb-tomb to which we will return.
>
> [Conception] is followed by the mystery of *gestation*—the slow growing within our body of another life. This for me was an even greater mystery, the most powerful experience I've known of my body knowing how to perform a miracle about which "I" didn't have a clue—and the experience of coming to feel that the real "I" was precisely the knowing body. The excitement of feeling the changes month by month. The changes in my body's contours and responses. The experience of feeling the new little creature within grow and move and assert its presence. The strange sense of an intimacy of connection to

> this other who was also still partly myself. The mystery of knowing that I, too, had begun as a being living within my mother's body.
>
> ....Sometimes the child within feels like an invader. Sometimes it feels as though one's body is betraying one, that more radically than ever before it feels "not-me". And sometimes things go radically wrong—and then there can come a terrible feeling of unworthiness and failure. We're "supposed" to know how to do this and to do it easily and well. This sense of failure may then expand and seem to apply to all of our lives, initiating a crisis of depression and self-denigration and despair. How vulnerable our bodies make us.
>
> The first meaning breasts have for us is nurturance. We received it (or didn't receive it) from our own mothers, and then if we become mothers ourselves, find ourselves expected to play the role of nurture-giver in our turn. Those of us who actually breast-feed our babies (as I did) may receive deep delight from doing so. The closeness of holding the child so recently within our bodies at our breast, feeling the liquid flow from our bodies into theirs, symbolizes that the connection remains. I remember the bliss of feeling the child become satiated, utterly content, and then falling asleep with my nipple still in its mouth—and my own empathic drowsiness. I knew I wasn't supposed to bring my babies into my bed, to let them lie curled against my own recumbent body for those middle-of-the-night feedings, but I couldn't always resist. It was too delicious, too beautiful. I remember, too, the sweetness of their smiles of grateful pleasure when in response to their cries I'd begin to open my blouse, and their eyes so loving fixed on mine as they sucked away.
>
> Even as I write this, more than thirty years since I last nursed a child, I feel the tightening of my nipples, the responding pulse in my vagina. There's a kind of female eroticism around breasts, a from-within not a looking-at eroticism, that is as compelling as any I know. A lover sucking at my breasts has great power to arouse me sexually, to fill me with delight in being touched there and with longing to be touched below and entered—but powerful as that lover's touch may be, it does not stir me as deeply as my babies' sucking.

A being with a body like that and a biological role like that—how could her self-conception not be fundamentally oriented around her body, more so than it is in men? And her biologically ordained semi-passiveness (see especially the second and third paragraphs, but don't forget about menstruation and the other changes during puberty)—her *felt knowledge* of it, of her otherness-to-herself, more profound than the man's otherness-to-*him*self—how could this not influence her attitudes toward herself and toward the other sex, the more 'autonomous' and less biologically 'passive' sex?

Sunday, July 16

I got some books from the library. First of all, I'm rereading Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, since I never finished it. I also took out her *Sex and Temperament*, Leopold Pospisil's *The Kapauku Papuans of West New Guinea*, H. G. Barnett's *Being a Palauan*, Winnicott's *Playing and Reality*, Kohut's *Self Psychology and the Humanities*, and two anthologies: *Foundations of Social Inequality*, edited by Gary Feinman and T. Price, and *Man Before History*, edited by Creighton Gabel.

One of the things that impressed me when I first read Mead's book is that young children take care of the youngest children. Six-, seven-, eight-year-olds are responsible for two-, three-, four-year-olds. This fact, together with the apparent 'healthiness' of the society, suggests that psychoanalysts have tended to

overestimate the infant's need for properly *maternal* care.[1] (Also, modern Western children raised in households of gay men seem to become well-functioning adults.) Young (female) children do the housework as well:

> As soon as the girls are strong enough to carry heavy loads, it pays the family to shift the responsibility for the little children to the younger girls and the adolescent girls are released from baby-tending. It may be said with some justice that the worst period of their lives is over. Never again will they be so incessantly at the beck and call of their elders, never again so tyrannised over by two-year-old tyrants. All the irritating, detailed routine of housekeeping, which in our civilization is accused of warping the souls and souring the tempers of grown women, is here performed by children under fourteen years of age. A fire or a pipe to be kindled, a call for a drink, a lamp to be lit, the baby's cry, the errand of the capricious adult—these haunt them from morning until night. With the introduction of several months a year of government schools these children are being taken out of their homes for most of the day. This brings about a complete disintegration of the native households which have no precedents for a manner of life where mothers have to stay at home and take care of their children and adults have to perform small routine tasks and run errands.

Men and women share duties in the household and on the plantations.

W. R. D. Fairbairn's ideas, which are exceedingly complex, seem sensible. Some of them are quite suggestive. For instance, Grotstein writes in his paper on Fairbairn that "[the infant] does not operate primarily from the pleasure principle but defaults into using the pleasure principle when object relations are realized to be untenable". Possibly a half-truth, but suggestive. Here are others:

> ....An intrinsic part of the schizoid personality is a withdrawal from untrustworthy interpersonal relationships, which are then taken into the patient's internal world where they constitute internalized "object relationships".
>
> In other words, the infant needs a "satisfying person" on the outside. Failing that, he introjects the image of that person into his internal world as an unsatisfying object. This unsatisfying object, in turn, is identified with an unconscious aspect of the ego. Thus, the internalized object is treated as if it is indistinguishable from the ego itself. This unsatisfying object is then split and divide into a rejecting object and an exciting object. Along with this, the unconscious object splits and becomes an antilibidinal ego, which is identified with the rejecting object, and the libidinal ego, which is identified with the exciting object.
>
> I shall go into Fairbairn's endopsychic structure shortly, but for now I should like to discuss his view of internalizations and identifications. One of the most evocative of Fairbairn's conclusions, and one that has paradoxically remained largely unnoticed, is his concept of internalization and identification. Unlike virtually every other theoretician, Fairbairn states that only bad objects are internalized; good objects do not have to be because they are satisfying. Thus, from Fairbairn's point of view, all identifications can be thought of as actually or potentially pathological. I think Fairbairn would have exempted trial identifications, that is, identifications that were transitory and not permanent. Freud himself hinted at this when he said that the shadow of the object falls on the ego. If we follow that metaphor to its conclusion, we see that the ego must conform to the shadow of its object, thereby restricting its own agenda in favor of the object's. The infant introjects the badness of the object because the object is needed, and its badness in the external object is all the more threatening. On the inside of the self it can be controlled, albeit in phantasy.

[1] Until the infants are weaned, though, mothers are mainly responsible for their care.

> What does the infant or, for that matter, the normal person of any age do with good objects or the goodness of the object? Fairbairn states that the goodness of the object does not have to be internalized. He does not explain this fully, but one inference is that the goodness of the object produces good experiences that allow the infant to grow properly. An analogy would be that infant must take in the milk from the breast, but not the breast itself unless the breast is felt to be bad and therefore must be taken in.
>
> An offshoot of Fairbairn's ideas of introjection and identification is his concept of the moral defense, or the defense of the superego. The infant takes in the badness of the parent, as mentioned above, in order to control it within and also to restore the external object to a suitable state. In other words, the infant takes over (that is, takes over the responsibility for—by identifying with) the parent's badness in order to "cure" the parent, that is, to "launder" the parent's image so as to have a fictively reconstructed parent that is serviceable for the infant's needs.
>
> Fairbairn believed that the objects that were taken into the internal world, along with the dissociated egos that joined each of the objects, constituted "endopsychic structures" that, in turn, related to each other as unconscious dynamic structures....
>
> Why, for instance, do people who are raped or severely traumatized feel guilty and/or ashamed, especially when they are innocent in the first place? Fairbairn's answer to this paradox is unique. One who is overcome by trauma feels "broken" by the abuser and retroactively (as well as retrospectively) reconstructs a belief about oneself that one is inhabited by bad objects with *whom one is identified*! Shame emerges from the retroactive and retrospective emergence of the sense of being unprotected by good objects and laden with bad ones with whom one is in identification.
>
> [And again:] The relationship between these endopsychic structures helps us understand why, for instance, children who are abused or molested have such a difficult time discussing it with others, including therapists. The sense of shame is enormous. They believe they are identified with bad objects, retrospectively. Yet another aspect of this situation is that many of these children may take on the so-called martyr defense. That is, they may introjectively identify with what is felt to be the bad or cruel external object, experience self-abuse, act the loser, avoid success, and carry out other forms of self-punitive behavior, but in such a passive-aggressive way that one quickly realizes that their guilt has a projectively provocative effect on their caretaking objects. Often behind this unconscious action is narrative is the hope to "bust" their parents, that is, to bring them to the public at large by virtue of the suffering victim's agony.

I'm tired of reading to no end. There's no point anymore, this attempt to find truth in a world that doesn't care. I don't know where I'm headed in life.

Tuesday, July 18

Thoughts thought in the heat:

A woman who puts on high heels has already subordinated herself to men. (It's self-objectification.)

If *I'm* this bored—after only 25 years—imagine how bored the *universe* must be! Supernovae may be the universe's attempts to amuse itself.

A dangerous temptation for people like me is to treat non-conformism as an end in itself. It isn't. It's just a means.

If there is a God, he's a nihilist.

I was talking to my roommate about philosophy—he likes broaching the subject (or that may be my influence on him)—and although our conversations are never nearly as satisfying as those I have with Jackson, who's the only über-charismatic guy I've known who's also philosophically informed, they are engaging—and without knowing it I said that the reason consciousness is indefinable is that it's too *immediate*, i.e. lacks properties, i.e. can't be related to anything else. That isn't completely true, though. Or maybe it is. Consciousness has *negative* properties, and can be *positively* described *indirectly* (e.g., "It is implicit in the concept of experience") and *metaphorically* ("It is transparent"), but it has no genuine properties *per se*.

I don't know why I wrote all that. It's identical to what I wrote months ago.

Sunday, July 23

The storm that hit St. Louis on Wednesday is being touted as the worst disaster in the city's history. Three hundred thousand people (including me) are still without power. It's global warming's fault, I tell you. I was in Ladue, town of misers, when it happened. It was strange: ominous clouds appeared out of nowhere and then the temperature dropped thirty degrees in five minutes, and then the wind started. Ninety miles per hour. I took shelter in someone's yard under a tree-canopy till the rain got bad; then I hid in a shed. The lightning was spectacular! So was the destruction of yards. "God's wrath is upon you, Ladue!" I shouted. "Damn Ladoosiers!"

The penultimate chapter in Mead's book is excellent. (All the chapters are.) It's both a summary and an explanation of the differences between the Samoan and American cultures. Why are Samoan adolescents so well-adjusted while Americans are tormented?

> The Samoan background which makes growing up so easy, so simple a matter, is the general casualness of the whole society. For Samoa is a place where no one plays for very high stakes, no one pays very heavy prices, no one suffers for his convictions or fights to the death for special ends. Disagreements between parent and child are settled by the child's moving across the street, between a man and his village by the man's removal to the next village, between a husband and his wife's seducer by a few fine mats. ....Love and hate, jealousy and revenge, sorrow and bereavement, are all matters of weeks. From the first months of its life, when the child is handed carelessly from one woman's hands to another's, the lesson is learned of not caring for one person greatly, not setting high hopes on any one relationship. ....So, high up in our list of explanations we must place the lack of deep feeling which the Samoans have conventionalized until it is the very framework of all their attitudes toward life.
>
> And next there is the most striking way in which all isolated primitive civilizations and many modern ones differ from our own, in the number of choices which are permitted to each individual. Our children grow up to find a world of choices dazzling their unaccustomed eyes....
>
> ....Little Samoan children pass apparently unharmed through experiences which often have grave effects on individual development in our civilization. Our life histories are filled with the later difficulties which can be traced back to some early, highly charged experience with sex or with birth or death. And yet Samoan children are familiarized at an early age and without disaster, with all three.

> ....The organization of a Samoan household eliminates at one stroke, in almost all cases, many of the special situations which are believed to be productive of undesirable emotional sets. The youngest, the oldest, and the only child, hardly ever occur because of the large number of children in a household, all of whom receive the same treatment....
>
> The close relationship between parent and child, which has such a decisive influence upon so many in our civilization that submission to the parent or defiance of the parent may become the dominating pattern of a lifetime, is not found in Samoa. Children reared in households where there are a half dozen adult women to care for them and dry their tears, and a half dozen adult males, all of whom represent constituted authority, do not distinguish their parents as sharply as our children do.... It is interesting to note that a larger family community....seems to ensure the child against the development of the crippling attitudes which have been labelled Oedipus complexes, Electra complexes, and so on.
>
> The third element in the Samoan pattern of lack of personal relationships and lack of specialized affection, is the case of friendship. Here, most of all, individuals are placed in categories and the response is to the category....[and] considerations of congeniality, of like-mindedness, are all ironed out in favor of regimented associations.
>
> Drawing the threads of this particular discussion together, we may say that one striking difference between Samoan society and our own is the lack of specialization of feeling, and particularly of sex feeling, among the Samoans. To this difference is undoubtedly due a part of the lack of difficulty of marital adjustments in a marriage of convenience, and the lack of frigidity or psychic impotence. This lack of specialization of feeling must be attributed to the large heterogeneous household, the segregation of the sexes before adolescence, and the regimentation of friendship—chiefly along relationship lines....
>
> The next great difference between Samoa and our own culture which may be credited with a lower production of maladjusted individuals is the difference in the attitudes towards sex and the education of the children in matters pertaining to birth and death. None of the facts of sex or of birth are regarded as unfit for children, no child has to conceal its knowledge for fear of punishment or ponder painfully over little-understood occurrences. ....Furthermore, the Samoan child who participates intimately in the lives of a host of relatives has many and varied experiences upon which to base its emotional attitudes....

Mead also notes the absence of a rigid dichotomy between work and play. You should read the whole chapter.

Roberts' book raises interesting questions, but they're too difficult for me to discuss.

At the library I got Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* and a compilation of George Herbert Mead's writings called *Mind, Self, and Society*.

Monday, July 24

Still no fucking power. Those fuckers at AmerenUE restored electricity in Ladue and U. City and the other wealthy neighborhoods within two days, but in the poor areas it's been a week and we've still got nothing. (What could be more predictable?)

The two worst inventions in history were the nuclear bomb and human beings. Of the two, though, the second is far more destructive.

R. P. Dore's article "Function and Cause" (in *The Philosophy of Social Explanation*) is, on the whole, very good. I think I agree with his critique of functionalism. What we need are *causal* explanations.

Functional explanations are useful primarily insofar as they enumerate some causes of the *persistence* of institutions, as opposed to their *origin*. (See the article on the distinction.)

The old debate over the separation between sociology and psychology seems sterile. Sociology has to borrow a lot from psychology, but since its subject-matter is interaction among *groups* of people—whereas psychology is concerned with the individual—it isn't "reducible" to psychology.

Tuesday, July 25

Good day. Proof, written earlier:

Ode to Clayton.— Clayton, city of angels, neighborhood of nice old people: you make my heart sing! You make everything *groooooovy*!

"You gotta feel the ***groove****, man!"*— Sex is like jazz. Like improvising. First of all, the rhythm has to consume you. It has to flow out to your consciousness from deep instinctual reservoirs, unthinkingly. Syncopation is acceptable only as long as you continue to feel the beat and master it. Secondly, you have to know the art of crescendoes and diminuendos in excitement, of building the tempo and slowing it and letting the suspense develop its own momentum. It builds nearly to a climax and then sinks, then falls to a whisper and builds again. Several false climaxes, several real ones, until the eruption near the end. Thirdly, you need a sensitive touch. You have to know when pianissimo is called for and when mezzo-piano; your sensitivity has to send shivers through the listener. Pain and dissonance are good as long as you know how to resolve them, caress them away in a single breath *à la* Mozart. Most importantly, though, you have to lose yourself in the music. Let go of everything; sacrifice yourself and *become* the music. She'll love you for it, trust me.

Sheer misery.— Now that I have self-confidence, my worst experiences are when I fall in love with a sweet-looking girl I talk to or pass in the street. A girl who looks slightly naïve but intelligent, passionate but self-possessed, sexy but self-respecting. Wearing a skirt or shorts—or pants, it doesn't matter; it's all in her face and the way she carries herself. The level-headed girl whose beauty suggests there's something poetic in her personality.... In all seriousness, such encounters really are painful for me.

For humans, there is something absolutely fundamental about *rhythm*. It's manifested everywhere. In biology, in sex, in music, in dance, in play, in infancy. (Piaget's studies attest to the significance of rhythm for the young child.) There's something profound in that, though I don't know what.

Wednesday, July 26

One of the good things about this job is that it always gives me time to write:

Outward harmony, inner war, between the sexes.— My relationships with women are just now starting to become healthy, because only now is my self-confidence *in relation to* them.

The naysayer speaks.— "I don't respect people unless they admit their inferiority to me."

The Culture of Neuroticism.— When you sit on the border between someone's lawn and the sidewalk and he tells you to get off his property, the reason for his remark is clearly that your presence makes him insecure in some way. But what does "insecure" mean? It's just a word, an empty word that doesn't capture the concrete fact behind it. I think his insecurity is phenomenologically comparable to a form of mild obsessive-compulsiveness. The kind I used to have, which made me, for example, place a

dollar bill right side up when I saw it tossed carelessly onto a table, or adjust books so that their edges were parallel to the edge of the desk they'd been placed on. Your presence on the man's lawn just—*bugs* him, as the crumpled dollar bill bugged me. It's a nagging at the edge of his consciousness. As such, it means he lacks a certain carefreeness, a casualness—a togetherness-oriented outlook on life. In a sense, in that moment he's fixated on himself (through that which is his, his property), on the separation between the two of you, like I was fixated on myself in the years of my obsessive-compulsiveness. In fact, the latter was an *expression of* my self-consciousness, as well as an unconscious reaction to it. (That may seem weird, because there's no apparent connection between self-consciousness and obsessive-compulsiveness, but pathologies work in mysterious ways.) Likewise, the man's neurotic 'psychic tick'—his fixation on his private property—is an expression of and reaction to his habit of thinking […]

Thursday, July 27

Day of shit. No money in Rich Prick Land. I had an encounter with obnoxiousness personified. (Interestingly, obnoxiousness takes the form of a wrinkled old geezer.) More or less verbatim as follows:

[…]

One-Dimensional Man is irritating. Sloppy thinking, and it's hard to know what's being said. Frigging Continental philosophers write arguments that aren't arguments. Still, Marcuse manages to communicate insights once in a while.

The greatest country in history.— Americans fetishize all seven of the deadly sins. Greed: look at Enron and the rest of corporate America and politics. Sloth: television is no longer just the masses' opiate; it is *reality*. Gluttony: Americans are fatter than any people in history. Vanity: women have become nothing but creatures of their bodies, and the cult of appearance is corrupting men too. (The obsession with "working out".) Lust: pop culture revolves around sex. Envy: movies, magazines, individualistic ideologies all encourage interpersonal comparisons and dissatisfaction. Pride: Americans as such are at least as arrogant as Romans were in their day. –No wonder Christians have their persecution-complex! They can see that their religion has become irrelevant.

Sunday, July 30

In her book *Sex and Temperament*, Mead describes three tribes in New Guinea whose gender-relationships she thinks challenge Western preconceptions. Amongst the Arapesh, both men and women are maternal, gentle, etc; amongst the Mundugumor, the sexes are aggressive and masculine; amongst the Tchambuli, the men are comparatively passive and "feminine". I've skimmed only parts of the book, mostly in the section on the Tchambuli people because it's potentially the one most damaging to my beloved prejudices. (When it comes to innate predispositions, I'm more committed to ideas on the *relative* roles of men and women rather than to ideas on *absolute behavioral patterns*.) Her account is fairly compelling, but its cogency seems diminished by articles I've read that criticize her methodology. But it's too complicated (and probably hopeless) a task to determine where the truth lies, so—that's that.

Still, it must count for something (in my favor) that the men in this supposedly role-reversed society were neurotic and mentally unhealthy, as she admits.

In dubious company.— The Marquis de Sade would have approved of my "free-spiritedness", which tips its hat to him as its great forerunner. (Guillaume Apollinaire called de Sade "the freest spirit that has yet existed".)

the tiredness in the sadness

in the happiness in the love....
such is my life

Howard Zinn's book is excellent. It's a dreary record of injustice and inhumanity, as any true history must be. It ought to be required reading for all politicians, who, out of ignorance of history and the conditions of society, invariably repeat the mistakes of the past. [Nope, this is psychologism and idealism. Institutions are the main problem, not ignorance.]

Leopold Pospisil's analysis of the Kapauku, with their "primitive capitalism" and secularism, is fascinating. The people recognize a mind-body dualism and are apparently even more individualistic than Americans.

Today I got Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, John Murphy's *Pragmatism: From Pierce to Davidson*, William Gorton's *Karl Popper and the Social Sciences*, Howard Marshall's *The Great Economists: A History of Economic Thought*, Ernesto Screpanti and Stefano Zamagni's *An Outline of the History of Economic Thought*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Hitler's Secret Conversations 1941-1944*.

Rorty, ch. 1: "I hope I have said enough to have incited the suspicion that our so-called intuition about what is mental may be merely our readiness to fall in with a specifically philosophical language-game. This is, in fact, the view I want to defend. I think that this so-called intuition is no more than the ability to command a certain technical vocabulary—one which has no use outside of philosophy books and which links up with no issues in daily life, empirical science, morals, or religion." My *intuition* of the difference between body and mind is merely an *ability*?? How can an intuition be the same thing as an ability? The first is a specific event, the second a descriptive extrapolation, something like a disposition. (This is of course one of the problems with behaviorism. Mental *events* are not behavioral *dispositions*.) Granted that Rorty expressed himself badly, his position still doesn't make sense. When I intuit the body/mind dichotomy, I'm not using concepts. Indeed, that's the distinguishing mark of an intuition: it isn't discursive. Furthermore, is it likely that people in the Kapauku tribe are "commanding a certain technical [philosophical] vocabulary" when they intuit the mind-body dualism? (Pospisil notes that they're a very unphilosophical tribe, almost exclusively concerned with amassing wealth.) It may—*possibly*—be true that in some cultures the dualism is unintuitable because of primitive social conditions and a corresponding unsubtlety of thought (John Searle remarks that in a certain African language it's impossible to communicate the mind-body problem—which, incidentally, doesn't imply that the people can't *intuit* [or at least 'vaguely understand'] the distinction), but given the sophistication of our culture, the mind-body division is most definitely intuitable outside philosophical language-games, and most definitely links up with issues in daily life, science, morals and religion.

The next sentence in the quoted passage is this: "In later sections of this chapter I shall sketch a historical account of how this technical vocabulary emerged, but before doing so, I shall beat some neighboring bushes." Apparently he wants to beat some neighboring bushes—neighboring, I suppose, the desk where he's writing, or the house he lives in. While I do find it a childish activity to hit bushes—what, is he *angry* at them?—and I consider it an irrelevant piece of information in the context of the passage, I freely acknowledge his right to beat bushes and I hope he has fun doing so.

Rorty is right that it's somewhat arbitrary to class intentions and phenomenal states together as "the mental". They share only negative properties, such as 'of a different intuitive and ontological character than the body'. They're different species of emergent neural phenomena; a conceptually more precise language wouldn't classify them both as "mental" and leave it at that.

....I hate reading philosophy. It's frustrating to indulge the attempts of intellectual midgets to muddle helplessly through simple problems.

Rorty on the ontological dualism implicit in the mind-body problem (specifically on the question of why we think of the phenomenal as immaterial, to which he gives the answer "because we think of pains as *universals* (and universals are immaterial)"):

> As long as feeling painful is a property of a person or of brain-fibers, there seems no reason for the epistemic difference between reports of how things feel and reports of anything else to produce an ontological gap. But as soon as there is an ontological gap, we are no longer talking about states or properties but about distinct particulars, distinct subjects of predication. The neo-dualist who identifies a pain with how it feels to be in pain is hypostatizing a property—painfulness—into a special sort of particular, a particular of that special sort whose *esse* is *percipi* and whose reality is exhausted in our initial acquaintance with it. The neo-dualist is no longer talking about how people feel but about feelings as little self-subsistent entities, floating free of people in the way in which universals float free of the instantiations. He has, in fact, modeled pains on universals. It is no wonder, then, that he can "intuit" that pains can exist separately from the body, for this intuition is simply the intuition that universals can exist independently of particulars. That special sort of subject of predication whose appearance *is* its reality—phenomenal pain—turns out to be simply the painfulness of the pain abstracted from the person having the pain. It is, in short, the universal *painfulness* itself. To put it oxymoronically, mental particulars, unlike mental states of people, turn out to be universals.

This is the sort of sophistical trash that passes for philosophy.

In a passage on the Greek image of the Eye of the Mind as a metaphor for knowledge—"knowledge [is interpreted] as *looking* at something"—Rorty says he doesn't know how the image originated nor why it caught on. He doesn't even offer a suggestion. Being Richard Rorty, he's content to admit it's a mystery to him. In a book whose main purpose is to criticize the "mirror" image of philosophy—i.e., representationalism, the correspondence theory of truth—this is quite a lacuna. I'm a nice guy, though, so I'll do Rorty's thinking for him. He should have been struck by the parallel between Plato's metaphor and Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning. And then he should have realized that the essence of both is *correspondence* (both a picture and sight are *of* something). And then he should have noted that language has a referential [or representational], self-transcending character,[1] that every statement (even an imperative) posits a state of affairs[2]—that it's a *picture* of a state of affairs.[3] And then he should have noted that knowledge itself is always *of* something, that it implies correspondence with something external to it. And finally he should have seen that the ocular metaphor is the best possible one, related as it is to pictures (of states of affairs), to representations of an external world and thus to knowledge and the correspondence theory of truth. At this point he should have stopped writing his book.

I get the feeling that Rorty is succumbing—or is going to succumb later in the book—to the common mistake made by readers of Kuhn and postmodernists in general, that because certain modern ideas are products of "gestalt switches" that occurred between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, they have only relative validity. This conclusion doesn't follow from the premise, unless you add the further premise that no revolutionary idea that partly *bypasses* previous questions rather than directly answering them can be true outside the culture in which it arises. But this is absurd. It implies, for example, that general relativity, if true, is true only in Western culture. (Alternatively, it implies that general relativity *can't* be true, for the simple reason that it resulted from a gestalt switch.) In any case, the rejection of an old "vocabulary" and adoption of a new one whose categorial framework is, *to an extent*, incommensurable

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[1] Suggestive remark: in this respect it's similar to consciousness.

[2] The order "Go over there!" posits the state of *you being over there.*

[3] This is the implicit ideal, at least. The more 'abstract' a statement is, the harder it is to see its pictorial element. This indeed accounts for the difficulty of such abstract disciplines as philosophy and economics: the mind finds it harder to grasp the logically implicit "pictures". This is also why the correspondence theory of truth seems to break down in such realms. It remains the logically necessary ideal, though. We're forced to orient our theoretic efforts towards it. (See the first chapter of my senior thesis.)

with the old one[1] and thus leads to totally different questions may after all signify a more adequate conceptualization of the subject-matter and thus an advance towards truth. The whole point of philosophy is to find the subtlest, most fine-grained conceptualizations of phenomena so that our "representations" of them can have the most explanatory power. This is also, of course, the goal towards which Rorty and all postmodernists are (despite themselves) looking: they want to *represent* their subject-matter in the truest way possible.

The farthest I'm willing to go down the road of relativism is to say that there are *degrees* of truth. But I've been saying this all along (see my thesis), and anyway it isn't relativistic. It's simply a recognition of the fact that languages are rough-hewn out of the raw material of experience—i.e., that they evolve in usefulness and thus truth. The implicit goal of linguistic and theoretic evolution remains correspondence with that towards which the given utterance transcends itself.

Ultimately I have to agree with Rorty that "'sensation' and 'brain process' are just two ways of talking about the same thing"—which isn't a *third* thing (in addition to mind and body), since 'sensation' is just an emergent aspect of bodily processes—but his claim doesn't make sense except on the basis of my arguments. For he doesn't suggest any way to conceptualize it. He simply says, "It would be better at this point to abandon argument and fall back on sarcasm, asking rhetorical questions like 'What is this mental-physical contrast anyway? Whoever said that anything one mentioned had to fall into one or other of two (or half-a-dozen) ontological realms?'" (That isn't sarcasm, by the way.) He does admit that that tactic seems disingenuous, since "it seems obvious that 'the physical' has somehow triumphed", but in the end he leaves it at that. His final argument is that "if knowledge is not a matter of accuracy of representation, in any but the most trivial and unproblematic sense, then we need no inner mirror, and there is thus no mystery concerning the relation of that mirror [viz., the mind] to our grosser parts [viz., the body]". Oh-so-cleverly he thus connects the mind-body problem with epistemology, which is conveniently the subject of the next part of his book. (He also has cleverly obscured the fact that his solution to the mind-body problem is the prosaic materialistic one, namely by arbitrarily and inexplicably declaring that we have to drop the "whole cluster of images" inherited from the seventeenth century. If we just "*drop the images*", the problem will be solved![2])

Schubert is incredible: his pieces change keys more often than those of any other composer. He's an ancestor of the atonalists. The difference between him and them (aside from the obvious) is that his concern throughout was to make *music*, while theirs was to make a *statement*, a *theoretic revolution*. He let

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[1] I say "to an extent" because, as Andrew Sayers says, there is always *some* continuity between two given "vocabularies", *some* way of arguing between them. This is because, insofar as people follow the most basic rules of logic (which they have to if they speak a language), their methods of finding truth are essentially similar. Newtonians can argue against relativists; Western scientists can demonstrate to Papuans that the latter's explanatory myths (of, say, an eclipse) are incorrect. (Insofar as people use language, i.e., are "rational", they must accept and utilize evidence in support of beliefs. And the scientist's evidence—his whole *framework*, in fact—is more compelling than the Papuan's, for many reasons I won't go into. If despite overwhelming evidence the Papuan persists in his mythical beliefs, he is to that extent irrational. (An example of a 'framework-neutral' criterion for deciding between theories is predictive ability. Even Papuans want to be able to predict phenomena, like eclipses and weather-patterns. To the extent that the scientist is better able to predict these things, his theories are better than the Papuan's.))

[2] He's right that in a sufficiently different language and conceptual framework the problem wouldn't arise, but it doesn't make sense to assume that *therefore* the problem is a verbal illusion. For it may be that our language and conceptual system are subtler and more faithful to differences in the *Sachen selbst* than the other language is. For example, the Greek idea that sensation belongs to the body rather than the mind is indeed an interesting alternative to our Cartesian intuitions, but it's probable that philosophical argument would conclude that our intuitions are more faithful to differences in the 'raw material'—differences that are merely "potential" (for us) until they're made "actual" in our awareness. How else would our intuitions, our "whole cluster of images", have persisted for centuries if they didn't correspond to distinctions in the raw material of experience? —Anyway, all this is academic, because my solution to the mind-body problem accommodates both the Greek and the Cartesian intuitions. It explains in what sense mental phenomena are physical and in what sense they aren't.

his instincts guide him; the atonalists were guided by their self-consciousness. Hence they're less interesting. (And their music, of course, is ugly.)

Monday, July 31

I left my job on Friday. Couldn't tolerate the misers anymore. I raised about $5000 over the summer.

Rorty: "I shall try to back up the claim (common to Wittgenstein and Dewey) that to think of knowledge which presents a 'problem', and about which we ought to have a 'theory', is a product of viewing knowledge as an assemblage of representations—a view of knowledge which, I have been arguing, was a product of the seventeenth century. The moral to be drawn is that if this way of thinking is optional, then so is epistemology, and so is philosophy as it has understood itself since the middle of the last century." It's optional? Granted. There is indeed such a thing as history, congratulations on the discovery. But it's a non sequitur to go from "optional" to "wrong". (I'm not necessarily defending the self-conception of philosophers. I'm attacking Rorty's postmodernist, fallacy-ridden method.)

> The crucial premise of [my] argument is that we understand knowledge when we understand the social justification of belief, and thus have no need to view it as accuracy of representation. Once conversation replaces confrontation, the notion of the mind as Mirror of Nature can be discarded. Then the notion of philosophy as the discipline which looks for privileged representations among those constituting the Mirror becomes unintelligible. A thoroughgoing holism has no place for the notion of philosophy as "conceptual", as "apodictic", as picking out the "foundations" of the rest of knowledge, as explaining which representations are "purely given" or "purely conceptual", as presenting a "canonical notation" rather than an empirical discovery, or as isolating "trans-framework heuristic categories". If we see knowledge as a matter of conversation and of social practice, rather than as an attempt to mirror nature, we will not be likely to envisage a metapractice which will be the critique of all possible forms of social practice. So holism produces, as Quine has argued in detail and Sellars has said in passing, a conception of philosophy which has nothing to do with the quest for certainty.

As you know, I agree with him that the quest for certainty, for foundations of knowledge, should be abandoned. I think, though, that, like the later Wittgenstein, he sets up a false dichotomy between an implausible realism and an anti-representationalist pragmatism. There's a path midway between the early and the late Wittgenstein. The notion of truth as correspondence is implicit in all theorizing, but our philosophical *self-understanding* can incorporate the fact that the social sciences are less exclusively 'representational' or 'mirror-like' than the natural sciences, in that the reality they purport to describe, lacking a physical aspect, doesn't clearly and directly confront us. We have more freedom to *create* in the social sciences; we can't constantly test our theories in the crucible of physical nature. Still, in the end even our self-understanding has to make room for 'truth-as-correspondence', because, after all, we are trying to describe an external reality, albeit an invisible one. (It asserts its presence in the form of logical (and inductive) persuasiveness, of regularities in human behavior, of indirect empirical evidence for theories, etc.)

I skimmed Gorton's book. It didn't cure me of my Popper-disdain. I have yet to be impressed by any of his ideas.

Notes on the two economics books:

Mercantilism. The surplus or the deficit on the balance of trade between countries is what makes the exchange rate vary. But rather than worry about the exchange rate, the state should encourage exports and discourage imports. The excess of sales over purchases is thought to be the sole origin of profit (for

nations as well as individuals), so the goal of maintaining a favorable balance of trade should guide the state's economic endeavors. Therefore, protectionism! High import duties and no export duties. The mercantilists also wanted population to increase so there would be a sufficient labor supply for the expanding industries. They formulated the first quantity theory of money: the higher the gold in circulation, the higher the prices. Later on they modified the theory to state that the increase in money supply stimulates economic activity (i.e., *output* increases). There are two reasons for this: (*a*) incomes and consumption increase with the increase in money supply; (*b*) the interest rate lowers at the same time (because "when money is plentiful it is more easy to find some to borrow"), thereby reducing the price of credit and thus the cost of financing investments, which encourages economic expansion. The mercantilist theory of value relied on utility rather than the costs of production. It can be summarized as follows: "First, the natural value of goods is imply represented by their market price. Second, the forces of supply and demand determine the market price. Finally, the use value is the main factor on which the market price depends."

Tuesday, August 1

Sorry to be repetitive, but I can't help it: Rorty refutes himself. The methods he uses contradict his conclusions. Like any theorist, he makes use of rational argumentation, logic, induction and so on to adjudicate between competing positions. He necessarily approaches his material from a "common ground"; the problem is that he's arguing for the impossibility of a common ground. Even someone arguing for a paradigm-shift, as he's doing, adopts a meta-level perspective outside the two competing paradigms. To quote Scheffler (who's commenting on Kuhn): "the comparative evaluation of rival paradigms is quite plausibly conceived of as a deliberative process occurring at a second level of discourse....regulated, to some degree at least, by shared standards appropriate to second-order discussion". Rorty himself "deliberates"—necessarily—"at a second level of discourse". This is the trap into which every relativist, every deconstructionist falls. Even anti-correspondence theorists and anti-representationalists fall into the trap of self-contradiction, though less obviously than Rortyan pragmatists. (In the latter case the contradiction is between the form of argument and the content of the theory; in the former case it's between the form of *language* and the content of the theory. Language implies correspondence and representation (reference).)

I just got a CD of Beethoven's early piano trios. I can't believe I hadn't heard them before. I pity my past self. "You silly, silly guy, past version of me! What were you *thinking*?"

Oh great, here we go with the "winner writes history" argument for relativism: "We are the heirs of three hundred years of rhetoric about the importance of distinguishing sharply between science and religion, science and politics, science and art, science and philosophy, and so on. This rhetoric has formed the culture of Europe. It made us what we are today. We are fortunate that no little perplexity within epistemology, or within the historiography of science, is enough to defeat it. But to proclaim our loyalty to these distinctions is not to say that there are 'objective' and 'rational' standards for adopting them. Galileo, so to speak, won the argument, and we all stand on the common ground of the 'grid' of relevance and irrelevance which 'modern philosophy' developed as a consequence of that victory. But what could show that the Bellarmine-Galileo issue 'differs in kind' from the issue between, say, Kerensky and Lenin, or that between the Royal Academy (*circa* 1910) and Bloomsbury?" Good question. Maybe the fact that certain practices, called "scientific", give us the technical ability to manipulate nature, to predict events, and can be evaluated for truth by standards shared by thinking men across cultures and paradigms, while other practices, called "political", are concerned mainly with the power-relations between individuals in society.

'Power-relations are reality itself! There's nothing outside power-relations! (—except for that sentence)' Foucault and Rorty, sitting in a tree, k-i-s-s-i-n-g, first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Rorty's mental miscarriage.

Rorty talks a lot about hermeneutics (as a supplement to epistemology, etc.). Here's what I think of the debate between hermeneutics and positivism (or, more generally, Anglo-American philosophies of science): any explanation, be it of nature or society or individuals' actions, looks for causes. It isn't complete

until it's stated in a deductive form, no matter whether the subject is psychology, sociology, history or physics.[1] (The form needn't always be "nomological".) Hermeneutics, whatever the hell it's supposed to be, can be divided into two classes, or uses: those in which it contributes to causal explanations (as in history or certain anthropological contexts), and those in which it's used for translation just for the sake of translation. (Translating a text or a verbal utterance.) Thus, it doesn't conflict with scientific explanation. It supplements it. In fact, it's a necessary explanatory tool in the human sciences because acts are oriented around *meanings*, in contrast with events in the natural world. In social contexts, understanding meanings is part of understanding causes. So, in its explanatory uses, hermeneutics is a tool for arriving at possible causes, which are then placed in a deductive argument. (Deduction, incidentally, doesn't in itself ignore the fact of human freedom. Whether *reasons* or *causes* are invoked in a "causal" explanation, the deductive model allows for human freedom because *laws* needn't play a role in it—and laws are what really deny subjectivity, in that they're universal.)

William Petty. He abandoned the subjective theory of value, replacing it with the concept of "natural value", viz., the costs of production. The prices of commodities tend to adjust to the natural value by means of small oscillations. The costs of production are the utilization of land and labor, but labor (embodied labor) is by far the most important. "[Petty's] search for a unit of measure to translate the value of land into labor is interesting, because in the process he managed to define the natural price of labor. In fact, that unit of measurement consisted of the average daily amount of food necessary to sustain a worker. [Anticipation of Marx.] But Petty did not explain how and why wages tended to adjust to the subsistence level...." He anticipated the classical economists with his concepts of rent and of surplus (which he interpreted as a product of labor, since it was obtained only by the application of human energy).

John Locke, as you know, used Petty's labor theory of value to justify private property. (Individuals have a right to their labor and to the products of their labor, etc.) *Dudley North* anticipated liberalism in his idea that "harmony of interests is derived solely from the fact that nobody is able to look after the interests of an individual better than the individual himself, so that if individuals are left free, they will prosper. On the other hand, any measure that interferes with the individual's attempts to pursue private goals hinders the achievement of the public interest. [Therefore,] the best policy is no policy, no laws to regulate trade, none to regulate the interest rate, nor to control the money supply." *Richard Cantillon* borrowed Petty's theory of value but clarified the distinction between "intrinsic value", which depends on production conditions, and "market price", which depends on the forces of supply and demand. "His explanation of the adjustment of the latter to the former was based on the hypothesis that the market price is fixed by the seller and dynamically modified on the basis of his estimate of the demand."

François Quesnay and the physiocrats. "Three points in particular are worth underlining: (*a*) the new, revolutionary concepts of productive and unproductive labor, which were introduced in connection with a new concept of wealth (a concept by which the real source of wealth is the *net product* obtained by applying labor to land); (*b*) the idea of interdependence among the various productive processes and the related idea of macroeconomic equilibrium; (*c*) the representation of the economic exchanges as a circular flow of money and goods among the various economic sectors." Agriculture is the only real source of wealth. Society is divided into three classes: farmers, the productive class; manufacturers, the "sterile" class (so called because the value of their output is equal to the overall value of the inputs); and landlords, the "distributive" class (—by the expenditure of their rents, they get the circulation process of money started). Because the circular flow of wealth throughout the economy has its own logic and equilibrium, *laissez-faire* is the best political policy.

Ferdinando Galiani. Value depends on the utility and scarcity of goods; it derives from the choices of economic subjects. "*Value is an idea of proportion between the possession of one thing and that of another in the mind of a man*." Since utility and scarcity depend on the needs of individuals, "the same good has different utilities for an individual according to the quantity of it that he has already consumed.

[1] Restating it in a deductive form will often seem trivial, but it's necessary for completeness because at least one *general* premise is always implicit in the argument.

The more of the good consumed, the lower the utility will be, up to the point of becoming zero." This is a theory of diminishing 'final' utility, anticipating the marginalists. Other Italian economists (Beccaria, Verri, Ortes) anticipated Malthus and Bentham, and even Smith (in his criticisms of the physiocrats).

David Hume. Because of the price–specie-flow mechanism, a surplus on the balance of trade doesn't produce permanent benefits, since it automatically activates a re-equilibrating process. "The inflow of gold generated by the trade surplus causes prices in the country to rise, while it decreases those of the competing countries in deficit. Owing to the consequent changes in competitiveness, the trade balances gradually adjust. The free trade implications of this theory are obvious." Hume recognized that the mercantilists were partly right in at least one of their theories: although prices rise (in a 'transmission' process from sector to sector) with an increase in the money supply, output also increases in the short term, because as expenditure incrementally rises with prices, production and employment expand.

> Hume also attacked on two fronts, and succeeded in both. First, he denied that the volume of international trade was fixed [as the mercantilists had thought], and therefore that one country could increase its wealth only at the expense of another. Rather, he maintained that an increase in the wealth of one country—to the extent that it was an increase in real wealth, namely in the level of output—would lead, through imports, to a parallel increase in outputs in other countries. Second, he denied that the rate of interest would necessarily vary inversely with the money supply. Instead, he observed that it was the increase in economic activity itself that, by increasing the real capital stock of a country, would cause a decrease in the rate of profit and, as a consequence, a decrease in the rate of interest.
>
> Hume's four fundamental arguments—the price–species-flow mechanism, the quantity theory of money, the theory of the growth of the volume of international trade, and the explanation of the diminution of interest as a real phenomenon—were to be accepted *en bloc* by English and European thought, and were to form the pillars (even if in revised and corrected versions) of nineteenth-century free-trade theories.

James Steuart. The quantity theory of money is wrong; what matters is the velocity of circulation, which, "by means of variations of the amount of money hoarded, continually changes in such a way that the quantity of money in circulation is always adequate for the needs of trade". Laissez-faire is *not* the way to go, because demand for goods isn't always sufficient to guarantee full employment. Furthermore, the introduction of machinery can create unemployment, in that "the reabsorption of the work-force into other sectors doesn't occur immediately." It's the government's job to ensure reabsorption, just as the government should encourage exports to bring about full employment.

The following are discarded notes I've written over the last couple of years. Most of them are from my stay in D.C.

Quid pro quo.-- I allow you your stupidity and conformism; it's only fair that you allow me my delusions of grandeur.

Music as superior to words.-- After I've been writing for hours, sitting in an empty silence, listening to music feels like a return to myself. The words lose significance; they become mere relics of an alien intellectualism, a shadow of real experience. They're *frozen, lifeless*. Abstract. Purely symbolic. As such, they lie. (A truth long recognized, of course, but worth recalling.) Life is movement, unrest; for thoughts to be crystallized in the written (and spoken) word is for them to be betrayed. The essential element of *consciousness*--of *intuition*--is absent in the word; what is present is something 'given', something 'universal': a meaning fixed by convention, agreed-on by everyone, callous toward one's idiosyncrasies. Music, on the other hand, respects the individual. As I already stated, time is of its essence, as it is of the

self. It flows from happiness to anger to sadness to fear to love, and that with all the indeterminacy of consciousness itself. --But why does it have this quality of manifesting emotions? What connection do *sounds* have with *feelings*? As far as I can tell, the only connection is that in childhood, humans learn to associate particular vocal modulations with certain emotions. For whatever reason, our vocal cords are affected by our state of mind: sorrow changes the quality of our voice, as does excitement, as does anger… An art, therefore, that consists of manipulating sounds produces in the listener involuntary associations with emotions. This also explains why a given musical passage can rarely be definitely associated with only one emotion--why there's always a slight ambiguity (unless the passage is *sung*). The reason is that the timbre of the human voice is different from that of the notes played on an instrument.

Hmmm...-- And yet, that explanation is woefully inadequate. The relation between the sound of crying and a minor key is unclear. Both produce associations with sadness in the listener--but the parallels end there. Why do we tend to associate a minor key with sorrow and a major key with happiness?

I suspect that this question, too, can be answered only with the help of physics and biology.

Words as superior to music.--

Darthusianism.-- I've never been satisfied with Darwinism. Natural selection as the mechanism of evolution? Scarcity of resources as the engine that drives nature forward? 'In a given environment', so the theory goes, 'there are enough resources to support the existence of only a certain number of animals. Population always tends to be higher than the given resources will support, so some individuals are destined to lose the struggle for sustenance. The weak ones starve or are killed; the better-equipped ones prevail. Thus, the DNA of the former dies out, while that of the latter endures. Sometimes the fight is between different species--such that the weaker is eventually killed off--and sometimes between members of the same species, when there's been a random mutation in the DNA of a small number of them. If the mutation allows for a better adaptation to the environment, the mutants may eventually succeed in wiping out the normal ones, which effectively changes the genetic code of the species and is an example of evolution. Over the course of millions of years, these slight genetic variations accumulate, and new species are born.' That's the theory. Now let's attack it.-- (1) Environments are rarely 'closed'. If certain animals aren't successfully competing for resources, there seems no reason why they can't migrate to another area and find their food there. (2) More fundamentally: why should we take Malthusianism seriously? Is there sufficient evidence across a wide spectrum of species to justify the conclusion that parents produce more offspring than can survive? Doubtless, insofar as offspring sometimes prematurely die, that hypothesis is true. But do they die because there aren't resources to support them? Surely that occurs only in exceptional circumstances. Nature tends to be bountiful. (3) It's hard to believe that a DNA mutation in one or a small number of individuals would--even after millions of years--result in their descendants' killing off everyone else in the species. For it to accomplish that feat, it would indeed have to be quite an impressive mutation. Moreover, the mutant allele would probably have to be dominant; if it were recessive, there's a good chance it wouldn't appear in the offspring's phenotype, and would thus have a fairly insignificant cumulative effect. (4) I'm skeptical that evolutionary advances as awesome as the move from *Australopithecus afarensis* to *Homo sapiens* could have resulted from random genetic variation. With hindsight, one is tempted to attribute the advance to some kind of teleology. I realize that 'hindsight' is distorting--that there are many evolutionary failures for every success--but, still, something tells me that random variation is a facile explanation.

Unfortunately I haven't anything to offer in its stead.

Faust without Mephistopheles.-- That philosophy constantly revisits old themes and thus seems--*seems*--never to progress proves only that people in all ages must rediscover for themselves the same thoughts that occupied individuals in previous times. It does not prove, e.g., the richness of the Greek philosophical mind and the paucity of cultures that followed it. --"All of Western philosophy is merely a footnote to Plato and Aristotle." That well-known quotation (paraphrased) is intended to denigrate the achievements of later

thinkers relative to those of Plato and Aristotle. I interpret it differently. Setting aside its hyperbole, I find that it does equal honor to subsequent thinkers as it does to the two Greeks. Philosophers who followed them refused to accept their ideas, their answers, and did not hesitate to begin from the beginning as many times as was necessary--knowing that their own answers would one day be questioned--that at times they would question them themselves--that they were not 'final'--but having to seek them anyway because it was in their *nature* to seek--because the process of asking-and-answering-and-asking was its own end--because their creed was "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield!"--not to yield even to their *own* answers. The spirit of history does not rest when knowledge has been attained; neither should the spirit of man.

And thus he will forever ask himself the same questions, long after he has found adequate answers. --Why? Because he can.

Who am I?-- Are we our *acts* or our *potential*? Marxian anthropology would have us be only our acts; common sense would, surely, have us be also our thoughts and the acts that we're *capable* of committing but rarely/never do. In a certain sense, this question is merely verbal: we can define the self however we want--as its acts or its potential or its thoughts or a combination of them. The question is ambiguous, also.

Two kinds of alienation.-- There can be no doubt: inasmuch as the word 'genius' has meaning, David Foster Wallace is a genius. But, as a literary reviewer once titled an article criticizing the novelist Thomas Wolfe, "genius is not enough". Wallace's writings reek of *machinery*--of our heartless technological age. They will never be timeless classics. Only *human* works can be classics;--only works that can be enjoyed outside the social context in which they were created. Poststructuralist literary theory is right to emphasize that the meaning of a text is, to a degree, culturally specific, that it may vary between cultures (and readers), that what Aeschylus meant to an ancient Athenian is different from what he means to an American--indeed, that there is no '*true*' meaning to *any* text--but what defines a literary classic is that its 'language', while conceived in a specific social milieu, resonates in all others as well. It does this by describing conflicts that humans, as humans, can understand. If the forms of alienation it depicts exist in only one society--if they are caused, for example, solely by an unprecedented growth in technology--the text will eventually cease to be of all but historical interest. I fear that Wallace's genius will suffer this fate.

Even the author may be unable to decide between multiple meanings. But more importantly, it doesn't matter what meaning he 'decides' on: language is a collective process, and as such it is susceptible to as many meanings as the community can give it. There is no single 'privileged' meaning--not even the one that the author consciously intends.

The thinker's most difficult thought.-- Being human is more important than knowing truth. Expressing oneself nobly is better than expressing oneself scientifically. Having breadth and depth while being 'ignorant' is better than having knowledge while being stunted.

Ideally, however, one should achieve both humanity *and* knowledge--because the latter is an extension of the former.

The meaning of music.-- Individualism has no place in music. To the extent that the boundaries of one's self persist as one experiences this art, music has failed in its purpose. Unless one's self-consciousness is overcome, one does not know the power of music. Dionysus is its symbol, as Nietzsche perceived. The merging of self-with-object is its culmination.

That is impossible, of course. In Sartrean language, the "For-itself" cannot merge with the "In-itself". Consciousness cannot become its object (in the relevant sense). Hence, the goal of music is an illusion--a negation of reality--an *escape*. Music is Escape. From what? From the self,[1] i.e., self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is inseparable from time (as I'll argue later). Therefore, music is escape

[1] See section __.

from the self and time. How does it (attempt to) achieve this escape? Ironically, it is one of the few art forms that relies wholly on time in order to manifest itself. The others are drama, dance, and the purely verbal arts. (Sculptures, paintings and so on are '*given*', in one moment; there is no 'development' as one experiences them.) Drama and dance are more closely involved with the visual sense than with the auditory sense. [....] Music is thus in its own category as an art form. That it is the only one whose purpose is complete loss-of-self[1] is due to its having no relation to the visual sense. Sight posits a division between the subject and the object; there is no such division in sound--or rather, *logically* there is, but *phenomenologically* (i.e., in consciousness) there is not. The self assimilates the sound as *part* of itself, while it does *not* assimilate the *seen* as part of itself. Now, the self can 'lose itself' only in a *part* of itself; it cannot lose itself in an object that it sees as divided from it. For example, it cannot lose itself in a photograph or in a poem, while it *can* in emotions, in thoughts, in physical sensations--and in music. --So we understand how it is *possible* for one to lose oneself in music; how is this actually supposed to come about? Clearly by one's listening to a (relatively) *continuous* stream of sound, which is why a musical piece never has long periods of silence.[2] Ideally, all of one's thoughts are focused on the stream of sound, such that one no longer has 'room' in his consciousness to be aware of himself. Strictly speaking, in a fully developed human being this lack of self-consciousness is impossible, but it can be approximated. 'Beautiful' and 'thrilling' pieces of music are most successful at coaxing a listener into this nirvana-like state.

I never plagiarize.-- Despite my seeming erudition, I really haven't read much. If my thoughts sometimes coincide with those of another thinker, unless I've cited him it's an accident.

All truths are 'fixed' or timeless. "What does that mean?" It means they don't vary with time; what's true today is true always. If it's true that the sun is shining today, then tomorrow it's true that yesterday's thought "The sun is shining" was true. Similarly, if the meaning of 'truth' changes as history evolves, such that what was once true is no longer so, then it's *always* true that truth changes--that it isn't fixed. (You can thank the paradox of self-reference for the truth of that self-contradictory statement.) The first example illustrates the reason *why* truth is fixed: sentences refer beyond themselves, such that they involve some kind of a reference [or representation]--and the reference is, in a way, a *part* of the thought that the sentence expresses, so that the thought 'The sun is shining today' has two different meanings if spoken on two different days (i.e., it isn't the same thought). I'm using the word 'thought' in the sense that Frege did. But what sense was that? This is an issue of some difficulty. He says that the same thought can be expressed in different ways. For example, "Ice is less dense than water" expresses the same thought as "Ice is not as dense as water" and "Water is denser than ice". All three mean the same thing, and have the same sense. The question is, how? What is 'sense'? What is a thought? What makes a thought different from another? Before answering these questions, it may be useful to explicate an entity more fundamental than a thought--namely, a concept. After all, thoughts are, among other things, a combination of concepts; to understand the former, then, we must understand the latter.

Before continuing I must make a terminological distinction. To prevent confusion between Frege's conception of 'thought' and the common one, I'll capitalize the word when I'm referring to Frege's idea. This device is, no doubt, rather comical, but it's the best one I can think of. The term 'proposition', for instance, as a substitution for (Frege's) 'thought' will not do: 'proposition' refers to the meaning of a sentence, while 'thought' refers to the *sense* of a sentence. The difference between 'sense' and 'meaning' is subtle but important, as is evident from the fact that, e.g., the two sentences 'The morning star is a body illuminated by the sun' and 'The evening star is a body illuminated by the sun' may be thought of as meaning the same thing, viz., that the planet Venus is illuminated by the sun--and therefore the propositions they express may be considered one and the same--while their senses are said by Frege to be different. I.e.,

[1] There is *partial* loss-of-self in the others--particularly in drama--but nothing comparable to that in music. One cannot get 'drunk' on them, as one can on music.

[2] If it does, it isn't music. Example: John Cage's 'piece' "Tacit", which is four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence.

'proposition' is used in a more general sense than 'Thought'.

To return to the argument.-- I'm not using 'concept' in Frege's sense (as described in his article "On Concept and Object"). As I understand it, its extension is far more inclusive. For example, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are all concepts. But that statement is ambiguous. To clarify it I'll borrow Saussure's distinction between the signifier, the sign, and the signified.[1] Morphemes, words, and sentences are signs signifiers:[2] "sound-images" which, in themselves, have no meaning, but acquire meaning by being associated with a signified. By 'sound-image' Saussure doesn't mean "the material sound [or the written mark], a purely physical thing, but [rather] the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses" (Saussure, 66). This is a bad way of expressing his idea. What is the psychological imprint supposed to be? One's recognition of the signifier? Or of the signifier *as such*? Or perhaps some kind of an intuition that one has? Moreover, how can such an imprint be a signifier? Does Saussure mean that the experience of recognizing the "physical thing" is itself the signifier? No. Clearly he means that the physical thing itself is the signifier, but only by virtue of its relation to consciousness. In itself it is a meaningless physical phenomenon; to the interpreting consciousness, however, it signifies something. By calling the sound/written marks 'meaningless' I'm using the term in a different sense than when I call the *sound-image*[3] meaningless. The sound in itself is merely a series of vibrations; the sound-image is the vibrations as consciousness experiences them. The subtle difference in degrees of meaning between the two is illustrated by the fact that the sound cannot potentially signify anything; the sound-image, though--*any* sound-image (in fact, *anything* as it 'impresses' itself on consciousness) *can*. The sound-image of someone tapping his fingers on a table can potentially be a signifier, even though in itself it is meaningless. --The objection may be raised that this 'revision'[4] of Saussure's position implies that when a person thinks a sentence without saying it, he isn't thinking a sentence, because (as I've defined them) no signifiers/signs are coming into play. The answer to this criticism is that the 'internal images', the 'conscious residues' of the signifiers, which pass through the mind of the thinker, themselves function as signifiers.[5] This is intuitively obvious and need hardly be argued for. The residues can be called 'derivative signifiers'.[6]

The sign is a union of the signifier (sfr.) and the signified (sfd.). The latter is the concept that the former signifies, or 'means'. It isn't the *reference* of the concept (if the concept indeed has a reference; see below). But what does 'union' mean in this context? According to William B. McGregor, the linguistic sign is composed of a "structural link", an "indissoluble link", between the concept and the sound-image (McGregor, 1997). While this doesn't *define* the union, it at least *characterizes* it. The union is so close that when a signifier is spoken, it instantly conjures the associated concept. For example, I find it impossible to separate the sound 'tree' from the concept 'tree': as soon as I utter the word--even if I make an effort to ignore the concept and concentrate only on the sound(-image)--I'm aware of some kind of a conceptual overtone. The link is effectively indissoluble: to dissolve it is beyond my power. (Clearly the reason is grounded in biology: neural mechanisms 'fix' the two components together.) On the other hand, in the case of this particular word the indissolubility operates in only one direction: I can think the concept 'tree' without uttering or imagining the sound-image, simply by 'calling to mind' an 'intuition' of a tree. Likewise with 'table', 'grass', 'paper', and most other nouns. Somehow I can make myself aware of the concept

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[1] The following discussion isn't meant to be a comprehensive analysis of the 'sign'. My intention is to clarify it only to the extent that is necessary for a basic understanding of words and sentences.

[2] The "…or signifiers" seems to imply that I intend 'sign' and 'signifier' to be synonymous, which Saussure would contest: he thinks that a sign is a union of the signifier and the signified. Now, while I don't believe that 'sign' and 'signifier' are synonymous (--and in that respect my "…or signifiers" is, admittedly, misleading--), I do believe that the connection between them is closer than that between sign and signified. I'll explain why later.

[3] I understand that word to refer to both the acoustic and the written signifiers, whether or not Saussure did. For the sake of brevity, though, I'll generally discuss only the acoustic version. (Incidentally, the vagueness of my definition of 'sound-image' is not damaging to my present argument(s).)

[4] I put that word in scare-quotes because it really isn't a revision.

[5] The vagueness of 'internal images' is not a flaw in that argument: the objection has already presupposed their existence, and therefore to answer it I need not define them.

[6] Later I'll inquire into the nature of such 'intuitions' or 'images' in consciousness.

without at the same time being aware of the word. I call this kind of awareness 'intuition'. --Admittedly, *all* (intentional) awareness can be called an intuition--an intuition of the world, of experience, of a particular object, of a sensation, of an idea, etc. However, I'll use the word in a narrower sense, closely related to that of 'imagination' or 'inner perception', in Brentano's sense. I should note that the existence of intuitions is not in question; their *nature* is, though. I'll examine it later. For the moment we'll take it for granted.

To resume.-- We've seen that in some cases, at least, the union inherent in the linguistic sign is indissoluble only from the side of the sfr.; the sfd. can be separated (in thought) from the sfr. What this amounts to is that it can be separated from the sign (because the sign is a *union* of the sfr. and the sfd.).[1] The sfr., on the other hand, *cannot* be separated from the sign, because it cannot be separated (in thought) from the sfd.;[2] conversely, the sign cannot be separated from the sfr., because without its (the sign's) physical components (viz., the sounds/written marks, or the sound-image) there would be nothing that could signify anything--whereas in this respect the sign *can* be separated from the sfd., because if it were somehow deprived of its sfd. its physical manifestation would persist.

Having established that the concept (the sfd.) is not always inseparable from the sign, two questions arise: under what circumstances is it separable, and--even more fundamentally--what *is* it? I'll address the second question first. It may be useful to begin with a simple concept like 'tree', which we know can be studied in abstraction from its sign (possibly unlike other more complicated concepts). I wrote above that, with the use of intuition, I can "think the concept 'tree'" without representing it in a sign. What does that mean? First of all, what is an intuition? "An 'inner perception'." What is that? "An immediate cognition or apprehension, as opposed to a process of reasoning." What is an "immediate cognition"? "Something similar to a use of the imagination." What does that mean? "A kind of pseudo-visualization." What is that? --Etc., etc. Obviously, neither the concept 'intuition' nor a particular intuition can be defined or described in the way that, e.g., the concept 'house' can be defined or a particular house can be described.

[…] Why is this? It's true not only of 'intuition', but of *every* kind of mental occurrence. For example, the same problems arise when I try to define 'pain' or describe a particular pain. Similarly in the case of happiness, sadness, anger, physical pleasure, a physical sensation (such as touch or taste), the state of drunkenness, and so on. None of these can be adequately defined or described. In his book *A Moveable Feast*, Ernest Hemingway tried to describe the experience of eating an oyster:

> As I ate the oysters with their strong taste of the sea and their faint metallic taste that the cold white wine washed away, leaving only the sea taste and the succulent texture, and as I drank their cold liquid from each shell and washed it down with the crisp taste of the wine, I lost the empty feeling and began to be happy and to make plans.

It's poetic and moving, but intuitively one can see that it doesn't quite grasp the essence of the experience. "Strong taste of the sea", "faint metallic taste", "succulent texture", "crisp taste of the wine"--one has the impression that all these attempts are not 'direct' but *oblique*, merely approximations. They *glance off* the sensation; they sketch its *boundaries* but can't reproduce it, as the image of a house can be 'reproduced' by a masterful word-painter. In other words, due to the paucity of adjectives that apply literally to the sensation of taste (sweet, salty, bitter, sour, spicy, and a few variants), Hemingway is compelled to use metaphors and analogies: his description, like most descriptions of mental events, has the form of 'It's *like* this, it's *like* that'. 'The taste is *like* the sea, *like* metal, *like* something crisp.' To *literally* describe it as 'metallic' or 'crisp' makes no sense: these words refer to solid objects, which taste isn't. However, even a literal adjective like 'sweet' or 'salty' is inadequate, though for a different reason: in its inability to communicate the immediacy of the sensation, it is necessarily construed as being extremely vague and therefore unable do

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[1] This possibility of separation is also evident from the fact that the same sfd. can be 'included in'/'referred to by' different signs. For example, 'less dense than' and 'not as dense as' signify the same concept. I'll return to this issue. –As for the paradoxical dichotomy 'included in'/'referred to by', it is implied by the current argument in the text. The linguistic sign both *incorporates* and *refers to* the sfd.

[2] The sfd. can be separated from *it*, but *it* can't be separated from the sfd.

justice to the idiosyncrasy of the experience. This is, ultimately, the reason for the imperfection of every characterization of a mental state;--not so much the vagueness of the descriptive term (e.g., 'inner perception', 'hurt', 'cold'

Briefly stated, a thought is a postulation of certain relations between its conceptual components. A sentence, on the other hand, is a 'grammatically correct' expression of the thought. In the above examples, the concepts 'ice', 'dense' and 'water' are related to each other in a definite way, which is expressed, however, in *three* ways. The concept 'dense' is subsumed under (or, is a part of) the concept 'not as dense as', 'less dense than', and--when the order of the nouns is reversed--'denser than'. What makes a combination of words a concept?

All truths are necessarily 'fixed'. Their linguistic expression--in declarative sentences--has an atemporal form, because sentences are structured in such a way that they negate temporality. In referring beyond themselves--in being "signifiers" of a "signified"[1] (unlike, for example, music, which refers only to itself)--they cut across time: the signified is atemporal, because the relations between the words[2] are.

The thinker has no choice but to accept that language has this power over him. It forces him to presuppose the existence of fixed truths. Thus, in the 'third epoch of the thinker' he will continue to theorize as if his only goal is to understand the world (in the act of theorizing this will be his goal), but when he steps back and reflects on his single-minded pursuit of knowledge he will understand that in most contexts it is probably, to an extent, futile--that many of the ideas he arrives at will one day be superseded--that in these contexts[3] there is possibly no such thing as "objective truth" (even in contexts in which poststructuralists operate--and thereby contradict themselves), and that if there *is* he can never be certain that he has reached it--that the *real* purpose of his philosophizing, the only one which is not possibly an illusion, is self-affirmation through self-cultivation. This realization will necessitate that he live in constant uncertainty, but eventually he will come to be *grateful* for his doubt, for his 'hovering': he will recognize that if he achieved his goal of knowledge, life would be rendered *infinitely banal*. His uncertainty is a blessing. It allows him to be cheerful--and to luxuriate in wonder.

[…]

Political correctness is the religious fundamentalism of liberals. It's a disguised nihilism, an explicit relativism--a relativism that *struts*, proud of itself, of its shallow respect for cultures and minorities purely by virtue of their status as non-hegemonic--a respect based on a *lack* of understanding. It thinks that to refrain from "judging" is equivalent to showing respect.

It seems to me that America is undergoing--or is on the verge of undergoing--a crisis, which reaches into every nook and cranny of the society. (1) The educational system is obsolete. It doesn't prepare students for competition in a global economy; its all-important propagandistic functions (to "manufacture consent" and so on) are increasingly ineffective, as apathy and cynicism take hold of young people, who, as a result, tend to spend more time watching TV and playing video games than studying; grade inflation is rampant (especially in universities); physical conditions in public schools are deteriorating, largely because devoting resources to the military is politically more feasible than vastly increasing educational funding. These problems will not be solved within the next few decades, due to political pettiness/deadlock and to the immensity of the task of reform. (2) Partly because of the insolubility of the educational problem, America's jobs will continue to be outsourced to countries with a more capable and cheap workforce.

As the years go by, this draining effect will begin to have momentous economic consequences: masses of people will be thrown out of work--not cyclically (i.e., from business cycles), as has usually been

[1] I'll delve into these concepts later. I don't mean them in exactly the same way that Ferdinand de Saussure did.
[2] In Saussurean terminology, the "syntagmatic" relations.
[3] Later I'll attempt to provide a list of them.

the case in the past (during recessions and depressions), but structurally (i.e., from changes in the economy's structure, such as the mismatch between the needs of employers and the skills of the workforce). This will have a ripple effect through the economy, such that businesses will start to go bankrupt from an insufficient demand for their products, which will itself have a ripple effect, until finally a severe recession occurs.

When you read the writings of feminists[1] you can't help being startled by how confused some women are about themselves. […] First of all, there's the opposition between two broad species of feminism, summed up by Julia Kristeva in this excerpt from an interview (Courtivron, 1980): "There are two extremes in [women's] writing experiences: the first tends to valorize phallic dominance, associated with the privileged father-daughter relationship, which gives rise to the tendency toward mastery, science, philosophy, professorships, etc. This virilization of woman makes of her, ideally, a typical militant who can, in fact, become a veritable striking force in the social revolution (just as it was in the USSR, and just as it is today in China)… On the other hand, we flee everything considered 'phallic' to find refuge in the valorization of a silent underwater body, thus abdicating any entry into history." Thus, many American feminists proclaim that women are just as rational as men and can do anything that men can do (provided, of course, that the social order is revolutionized). French feminists, on the other hand--e.g., Irigaray and Cixous--believe that rationality and logic are phallocentric, that women are naturally less rational than men--or that in order to 'realize' themselves they cannot stay confined within the "phallogocentric" masculine mode of being and thinking and writing. They must "write their body". Says Cixous: "More so than men, who are coaxed toward social success, toward sublimation, women are body".

Intellectual quixotisms.-- I half-admire the tenacity of militant feminists and preachers of political correctness. Every step of the way, they're arguing against common sense. It's an uphill battle--yet they never quit! They trudge on, inventing new 'arguments'--or (what is more common) simply repeating their beliefs again and again, as if that will make them true--impervious to reality. Don Quixote lived in a fantasy world but was thereby rendered strangely 'heroic' (in a perverse, comical way); these postmodernists are the new Don Quixotes.

The explanation for their stubbornness is that knowing truth is not their goal. If it were, they would take the time to analyze their opponents' arguments and respond to them honestly rather than write them off as "phallocentric" or "logocentric" or "Eurocentric".[2] Their goal is to eradicate inequality. Equality is their highest value. It is the be-all and end-all of postmodernism. (It is, indeed, the source of postmodernist nihilism. If values, cultures, philosophies, and individuals are 'equal'--i.e., they're 'merely' social constructs, (which is supposed to mean that) none has more 'validity' than any other--nihilism cannot be avoided.) In my discussion of Marxism I'll explain the social mechanisms through which the pursuit of political, social, economic, and philosophical equality has emerged as, arguably, the main cultural phenomenon of the entire world (certainly of the West, and soon of the 'East' and everywhere else). Here I would like to inquire into the *psychological* causes.[3]

The origin of the holy fool.-- The crusade against evolution, in backward places like Kansas and the Bible Belt, is shockingly dishonest. This whole vehement defense of God is based on people's misunderstanding of themselves. I know it's futile to argue against them--after all, they're conservative Christians, i.e., prejudiced animals who consider rationality dangerous--and so I won't expend energy on pointing out that, for example, God can surely take care of himself--that he doesn't need an army of ants to defend him--but

[1] By 'feminists' I never mean women who fight against their political and economic oppression. That kind of feminism is old news--and it's so obviously sensible and worthwhile that very little can be said about it in a book like this.

[2] This is their formula for creating an argument: add the suffix '-centric' to any given term, apply it to an opponent's ideas, and--presto!--you've refuted them.

[3] The two spheres (social and psychological) are not completely independent, in that each influences the other, but at a level of abstraction they can, without distortion, be treated as such--provided that their interrelationships are clarified as well.

nonetheless, I'd like to explain to them that they really couldn't care less about "God". (Many of the more intelligent ones already know this; they're simply taking advantage of mass stupidity to gain money and power.) They don't know who or what he is; they don't know what doctrine they "believe in"; they don't know *why* they believe in it; they don't understand how incompatible it is with their entire lifestyle. In most cases, the only reason they're "Christian" is that during childhood they absorbed certain religious tenets--in a process akin to osmosis--and, since their "minds" subsequently ossified, couldn't (didn't try to) challenge them. There was no reason for them to do so--or, more correctly, no *cause*[1] that provoked them. From the very beginning they were sunk in the mire of routine; since then, they've come to believe that their routine is the best (and so they try to impose it on everyone else, as a way of self-validation). Why do they believe this? Because of the desire for recognition. I've said enough about this already. No one wants to think that his lifestyle/belief-system is wrong, because it would reflect badly on him. The difference between the conservative Christian and, for example, the enlightened philosopher is that the latter, despite his opinion that his way of life is the best,[2] recognizes the value of diversity, the fact that different lifestyles are appropriate to different people, and the fallibility of his beliefs. In other words, he's more *reasonable*. (The 'laws of reason' are *good*, despite what postmodernist pseudo-intellectuals would have you believe.)

So, what it comes down to, I suppose, is not that the anti-science, anti-gay, anti-abortion, etc. movement is *dishonest*; rather (like most mass movements of cruelty), it originates in *irrationality*, in an inability to question and revise one's beliefs. Dishonesty presupposes an awareness of truth (of the fact that one is lying), which most social conservatives do *not* have--because, again, their minds are governed by necessity rather than freedom.

A definition of stupidity.-- A lack of intellectual freedom rooted in a deficiency in the capacity for using logic.

Maybe you'll say that in my fight against religion, pro-lifers, anti-gay marriage activists and so on (read: in my desire to stomp out prejudice and superstition), I'm "imposing" my ideas on others, and that therefore I'm guilty of precisely what I accuse conservatives of. To this charge I can answer only: Yes, I'm guilty, but in a fundamentally different way than *you* are. My fight is based on the motto "Live and let live!"; yours is based on the motto "My way or none at all!"

-people want to 'beat you down'. they don't want you to rise above them. competition…
-'distance' = respect
-why hasn't it been answered satisfactorily?
-temporarily abstracting from abstruse philosophical skepticism
-can't write elegantly when discussing the self in depth. (why?) anyone who *does* isn't discussing the self in depth. (--twist professors' criticisms of Hegel into criticisms of *them*)
-thinking of yourself as a great human being feels weird b/c you're looking at yourself from the outside? or b/c you're placing yourself decisively *in the world*, when automatically you feel outside of it? --b/c you're treating yourself as a thing?--something finished? or b/c you don't *feel* great?
-Nietzsche says striving is great. why?
-I can't see anything 'happening' in consciousness. it's empty. and yet it's not. how??
-in the hope that at length a grand vision will be illuminated?
-I'm aware of being self-aware to varying degrees at various times. how? implications for logic?
-the odds of being born are infinitesimal? it required *this* sperm and *this* egg? wow!
-interesting that I involuntarily write more formally in long sections than in short ones
-living late in history is good b/c you can take what you want from the past…
-what's so great about self-realization?
-how do I live while disbelieving in god? montaigne said religion was his 'cushion'; he needed it, otherwise

[1] "Reasons" have no force with such people. Only causes do. Mechanistic causes.
[2] He can't *not* believe this, on some level.

he would have been lost in doubts.
-but not *too much* assimilation! [in the context of listening to music]
-even in this late era idealism isn't dead. what does that say about humans?
-post-post-everything. historical consciousness…
-what does 'one meaning' *mean*? how *can* there be one meaning?
-there's only one meaning--viz., the words themselves--but when they're rephrased there are many meanings
-aroused by the animality of sex
-self-realization or social solidarity?
-public vs. private: what should we answer for publicly? should every cruel act be publicly punishable?
-the same act can be described in different ways. it's a 'different' action from different viewpoints. --significant?
-we're often not (self-consciously) aware of the desire that causes an action, but it exists anyway. how? where?
-communal nature of women, individualistic nature of men?
-no need to *argue* for self-expression
-the converse of the section "paradoxical"
-how is it possible to go beyond me? what's left for thinkers to do?
-strive single-mindedly for truth, but know in the back of your mind that the *real* reason is self-expression?
-no reason to justify self-cultivation with the will to power
-friendships--no "tangible feeling"? shallowness?
-meaninglessness of forgiveness
-what is a concept? (mental internalization of a specific use)
-"write one's body", "write one's self" [?!]--feminine writing = poetic, masculine writing = scientific?? a bisexual writer??
-why binary oppositions? why dialectic?
-that the development of technology will overcome the fetters of property relations has nothing to do with the fact that the latter are formed on the basis of the economic structure (i.e., technology). the logical precedence of technology doesn't imply that it can burst through property relations.
-creative geniuses have for too long congratulated themselves. their talents are merely a certain kind of talent--that's all they are
-it fascinates me that people can be certain they're right and yet be wrong
-the poet and the scientist really aren't so different
-why do intellectuals hate 'hovering'? why do they need certainty?
-postmodernists think they affirm, but they don't
-read *Maxims and Reflections*!
-Dylan Thomas as the model for feminists like Cixous
-what is 'charming'?
-what is chemistry?
-why is it disgusting to think of your parents as 'biological' beings?
-why don't we care about representing the self-ideal of charismatic and famous people? because they are immortal, and the goal in being recognized is to be immortal--and thus simply to be recognized by such a person is already to be immortal?
-why am I so original?
-the rights of the genius
-picture theory of meaning
-different types of intuition
-same thought expressed in different sentences. how?
-in a way (intuitively), a person knows himself better than anyone else does--but in another way (analytically), someone may know him better than he knows himself
-why are some (internal) experiences impossible to describe?

-‘the (something)’ implies a reference. why?
-a sentence with a predicate affirmed of a nonexistent subject with a definite description is neither true nor false. --even with an indefinite description? yes
-the second movement of Schubert’s sonata is lovely, but I’d disrespect it if Yanni had written it…
-is the existence of a thought intermittent? it exists only when I think about it?
-why do cartoonists write a more ‘cloudy’ bubble around thoughts than around statements? because thoughts are comparatively indeterminate? (less defined)
-what is negation? what is a question?
-ambiguities in ‘thought’
-why does raising your head curtly constitute a greeting?
-language, logic, music = mathematical. the initial state (UG) is organized mathematically?

DUMMETT
-sense can only be shown, not stated. significance?
-Davidson: a theory of truth *is* a theory of meaning. that seems to make sense
-you grasp the thought if you know what would determine it as true?? -(b/c) the thought expressed by a sentence is the thought that the truth-conditions are fulfilled? --every sentence posits its own truth, yes, but the thought is what’s communicated, not that it’s true!
-you express a belief *by means of* a sentence: i.e., the belief, in an ‘intuitive’ form, is prior to the sentence
-the choice between explaining thought in terms of language or language in terms of thought seems misguided: they both explain each other

-why do people want to destroy what they don’t understand?
-why does it look feminine to cross one’s legs? (*what is it* about crossing legs that looks feminine?)
-what makes someone good-looking?
-the concept ‘intuition’ is also the reference. that’s unique
-by definition, social conservatives have no historical perspective
-why does the adjective ‘literally’ apply to the sensation? what makes it literal?
-two kinds of good humor: Nietzschean and Fodorean.
-why are there so few words that describe perceptions and ‘inner’ experiences?
-“Alice believes that the morning star is a body illuminated by the sun. The morning star=the evening star. Therefore, Alice believes that the evening star is a body illuminated by the sun.” in a way (the objective referential way), yes. in another way (the subjective referential way), no. (?)
-‘I promise I’ll go tomorrow’: neither true nor false. implications?
-even Austin is presupposing the truth/reality dichotomy: he’s describing the way things are
-my synthesis: language as action and creation rather than revelation of truth--but, by embracing creation, the philosopher is embracing truth. this is all similar to the early Marx. …tension between static truth and dynamic truth (or truth as dynamism); two kinds of truth, but knowledge of the second (dynamic) made possible by knowledge of the first (static). so static is still ‘fundamental’--although dynamic is fundamental in a different way
-performatives don’t refer
-meaning of a segment of a proposition derives from its context in the proposition. in some cases this is more true than in others. or rather, some concepts have easily identifiable meanings outside of sentences, but even *these* meanings ‘change’ somewhat in a sentence: they become parts of a single object referred to by the sentence
-is the sign the physical thing or the conscious impression? maybe the primary/derivative dichotomy is reversed
-I tend to hypostatize society;--it has a spirit
-torment in knowing that acting well doesn’t necessarily reflect well on you
-it’s good I live nowadays, when thought is fragmented, there are no great movements, I can ponder freely and not feel the need to conform to anything (because there’s nothing to conform to). it’s a bad age and a

good age for a thinker
-'it's true that ahistorical theories cannot be true'; 'it's ahistorically true that ahistorical truth doesn't exist'. 'it's true' can go before every proposition without changing the proposition. therefore Foucault is a moron
-give a concrete example of relations between all the elements of a society
-misleading metaphor (see the last sentence): "It is easy to see that this representation of the structure of every society as an edifice containing a base (infrastructure) on which are erected the two 'floors' of the superstructure, is a metaphor, to be quite precise, a spatial metaphor: the metaphor of a topography [*topique*]. Like every metaphor, this metaphor suggests something, makes something visible. What? Precisely this: that the upper floors could not 'stay up' (in the air) alone, if they did not rest precisely on their base."
-*no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses*. [Duh! Althusser is of little interest.]
-it is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that 'men' 'represent to themselves' in ideology, but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there.
-"ideology = an imaginary relation to real relations"
-we are subjects = the elementary ideological effect
-…the (scientific) knowledge of the mechanism of this recognition. Now it is this *knowledge* that we have to reach, if you will, while speaking in ideology, and from within ideology we have to outline a discourse which tries to break with ideology, in order to dare to be the beginning of a scientific (i.e. subjectless) discourse on ideology.
-"ideology exists only by constituting concrete subjects as subjects"
-any ideology as believed in by the masses is false consciousness. but even true systems of thought are ideologies, inasmuch as they 'constitute' subjectivities. ideology is a blanket term with two main classes
-"ideology does not invariably constitute persons; it can also de-constitute them. For example, the laws of *coverture* precluded women from personhood on entry into marriage. It is more pertinent to claim that ideologies function to differentiate persons from not-persons (for example, children, married women, slaves and aliens). These remarks raise the traditional philosophical problem of whether subjects require bodies and, indeed, what 'bodies' are."
-Althusser's formulation seems to imply that any experience/practice that constructs subjecthood is an ideology. obviously absurd. must distinguish between types of subject- (or self-?)constructing things
-"A major problem with Therborn's account of class ideologies is that he does not adequately explain *why* he chooses certain ideologies as functionally necessary". which ideologies are necessary?
-mechanisms of functional evolution, e.g. in the Marxist idea of revolution
-"for Therborn the creation of subjectivity actually involves two processes: of subjecting the subject to a particular definition of his role, and of qualifying him for his role. The reproduction of any social organization requires some basic correspondence between subjection and qualification. However, there is an inherent possibility of conflict between the two. For instance, 'new kinds of qualification may be required and provided, new skills that clash with the traditional forms of subjection'"
-"the difficulty with Therborn's account here is that he does not provide a convincing theoretical discussion of alter-ideologies. They are seen as logically an inevitable consequence of positional ideologies which produce differences, but there is no sociological account of how they are maintained and have effects in social struggles."
-"There are two reasons why we believe that ideological variation increases with the development of late capitalism: (1) 'dull compulsion' in everyday life is adequate for the subordination of the worker; and (2) there is no economic requirement for a dominant ideology. In short, capitalism can 'tolerate' contingency far better than any other mode of production."
-"Perhaps the mode of production ought to be regarded as establishing certain broad parameters which set the limits of ideological variation. In early capitalism, for example, the relations of production require certain legal supports in terms of private property and stability of economic contracts, but these may be guaranteed by a variety of legal systems. At the level of the social formation, ideology can be studied only, following Weber, in terms of certain historically specific, preexisting ideologies which may or may not

contribute to the growth of capitalist culture (the Protestant Ethic thesis). Ideology does not simply incorporate classes; it is, rather, a 'resource' of collective action. For example, as Marx noted, the bourgeoisie, having mobilized individualism against feudalism, finds 'civil liberties' employed by oppositional groups against capitalist domination. Individualism can thus be regarded as a resource of political struggle. Furthermore, as we argued earlier, ideology, in the form of individualism, may be effective in actually forming the specific shape of capitalist society. It does not, however, *necessarily* have that function."
-"There is no general theory which can specify the functions and content of ideology for different societies."
"It is not evident, in any case, that societies require the level of ideological support implied by Therborn. As Foucault argues, the individuation, construction and discipline of individuals can be secured by regulatory practices and institutions (panopticism) which do not require subjective consciousness on the part of individual persons."
-"…on the relationship of the implicit functionalism of subjectivities to the contingent qualities of ideology, on the precise role of the economy, and on the mechanisms of the overdetermination of non-class ideologies by class."
-"AHT conclude that 'late capitalism operates largely without ideology' and, leaning upon Max Weber's economic sociology and an expression of Marx, that 'the coherence of capitalist societies is produced by the "dull compulsion of economic relations"'"
-"Social classes do have different and conflicting ideologies but are, nevertheless, bound together by the network of objective social relations."
-Marx didn't think that the dominant bourgeois ideology was believed in by the proletariat. the cohering of capitalist society had nothing to do with a dominant ideology that commanded assent from subordinate classes. (on the other hand, there's a quotation that suggests the opposite)
-we will not abolish private property until the end; it will be abolished gradually, as happened in the transition from feudalism to capitalism
-the best way one can defend one's morality and political ideals is by saying that they're closer to most people's basic intuitions of what is good than alternatives are
-"Thought, we might say, is at once cognitive and creative: in the act of understanding its real conditions, an oppressed group or class has begun in that very moment to fashion the forms of consciousness which will contribute to changing them. And this is why no simple 'reflection' model of consciousness will really do. 'Thought and existence', Lukács writes, 'are not identical in the sense that they "correspond" to each other, or "reflect" each other, that they "run parallel" to each other or "coincide" with each other (all expressions that conceal a rigid duality). Their identity is that they are aspects of one and the same real historical and dialectical process.' The cognition of the revolutionary proletariat, for Lukács, is part of the situation it cognizes, and alters that situation at a stroke. If this logic is pressed to an extreme, then it would seem that we never simply know some 'thing', since our act of knowing is has already transformed it into something else. The model tacitly underlying this doctrine is that of self-knowledge; for to know myself is no longer to be the self that I was a moment before I knew it. It would seem, in any case, that this whole conception of consciousness as essentially active, practical and dynamic, which Lukács owes to the work of Hegel, will force us to revise any too simplistic notion of false consciousness as some lag, gap or disjunction between the way things are and the way we know them." --paradoxical
-you change the object in the act of contemplation. (right?) how can performative be reconciled with constative?
-eagleton: "ideology, like social class itself, is an inherently *relational* phenomenon; it expresses less the way a class lives its conditions of existence than the way it lives them *in relation to the lived experience of other classes*."
-relation between ideological and political domination?
-poor feminists. no matter what they do, they're defining themselves in relation to men. if they embrace traditional ways of thinking/writing, they embrace "masculinity"; if they try alternative ways, it's because they don't want to be men. there's no way out! --seriously: what's the solution to their dilemma?
-cixous criticizes classic representations of women while reproducing them in her own obscure way

-even feminists *reason* in their writings. (they try not to, and it comes out in the quality of their arguments, but they do) it's virtually impossible not to. is rationality phallocentric? if so, then women are inevitably phallocentric
-some things are culturally fabricated. like the taboo against female masturbation. feminists confuse the biological with the cultural
-generalization: "Her speech, even when 'theoretical' or political, is never simple or linear or 'objectified', generalized: she draws her story into history."
-one gets the impression that the imperative of "writing one's self" is nothing but an excuse to ignore objective standards of quality
-"[woman] writes in white ink", i.e., milk
-descriptivism: properties pick out the bearers of names. absurd
-sense determines reference? whaaaa? *definition* determines reference, but sense (intension) isn't definition. (and the definition doesn't 'express' the sense either)
-I have to agree with Dummett that Fregean sense can only be shown. it's a mode of presentation!--not a 'hidden' description or definition. (it can't be 'decomposed' into a definition) but then how does it determine reference?
-I refuse to believe that philosophy has to be technical and boring, or even completely precise. precision is exalted because no one has imagination or ambition nowadays
-the significance of the death of religion. what does the non-necessity of religion imply as regards the psyche? (explore the death of religion from every side. is religion socially necessary, etc.)
-why do adults automatically talk in a different tone of voice to infants than to fellow adults?
-why don't we remember anything from the early stages of childhood?
-with some people I'm incredibly personable, with others not. explain!
-why are men attracted to innocence?
-gender attitudes = archetypes!
-why do young children 'withdraw' from strangers? (archetype. but why and how? -essential to survival to be able to distinguish between friend and foe)
-why are people who aren't one-sided often more mentally healthy than people who are? the search for meaning? what does that mean?
-why is the sense of meaninglessness the "general neurosis" of the age? we're alienated from our archetypal nature? life isn't 'spiritual' enough?
-a lack of self-esteem as a lack of psychic enegy. when I have more energy, I'm more self-confident.
-principles of entropy and the conservation of energy in the psyche
-the nature of the social mask we all wear. its origin, relation to the psyche, consequences on the psyche
-psychic balance is the purpose of life? (the universal human, etc.)
-"the direction of the psyche towards its goal of wholeness is itself archetypal, that is, it is an aim that is an *a priori* human disposition, and *the archetype of wholeness is the archetype of the Self*."
-Jung's inductive reasoning isn't convincing. maybe the belief in God is common not because of an archetype but because of a lack of scientific knowledge, or because of tradition. freud's ideas are also an explanation (though an implausible one)
-why are dreams of falling so common?
-individuation. the natural desire to integrate the conscious and unconscious (so as to establish a psychic equilibrium)
-meaninglessness as a separation between Self and ego ([or?] as an insufficiency of psychic energy in the conscious, and a concentration of it in the unconscious)
-distinction between form and content appropriate to all archetypes
-"another strange reaction": how does *love* result from being validated? an emotion from an intellectual satisfaction?
-our perception of cuteness is both a source and a product of love
-people say the Koran preaches compassion and mercy--and they think they're respecting it by saying that. it's conditional and partial respect. if it didn't preach those things, they wouldn't respect it; and they respect

it only inasmuch as it preaches those things. I.e., they respect it only to the extent that it's compatible with the modern world
-people think you have to believe in God to experience wonder. why?
-why does everyone interpret sighing as meaning that you're tired or something's wrong?
-what is resentment?
-I feel lazy and 'cowardly' when I write art: I'm escaping from the harder task, viz. to understand the world
-the antichrist, sec. 57: "The fact that a man is publicly useful, that he is a wheel, a function, is evidence of a natural predisposition; it is not *society*, but the only sort of happiness that the majority are capable of, that makes them intelligent machines. To the mediocre mediocrity is a form of happiness; they have a natural instinct for mastering one thing, for specialization."
-why do women get angry when you say "oh, is it that time of month again?" in response to their mood swings? surely because you're impugning their independence, their rationality, their self-control, and thereby their self-worth. but they're unaware of this motivation. their anger is purely spontaneous. how can such a motivation be the cause if they're unaware of it? more generally, how can effects have 'psychological' causes if we're unaware of them? what are the mechanisms through which they (unconsciously) influence us?
-therborn… subjection-qualification: does ideology really 'qualify' people for their social positions? qualification involves an acquisition of skills, which seems to be unrelated to ideology; or rather, ideologies provide the intellectual basis/justification for modes of education, but the education itself isn't ideology, and therefore ideology isn't what 'qualifies' people for their professional etc. roles. it's indirectly related
-subjectivity: "acting as a particular subject in a particular context". "forms of human subjectivity are constituted by intersections of the psychic and social, and may be seen as the outer, more conscious, and more socially changeable aspects of the person" --therborn
-significance of the correlation of intelligence with personality traits and interest in the interests of the opposite sex? see Readings on the psychology of women, ch. 6.
-little boys build things, girls play with dolls. extremely significant! is the doll-fixation simply a foreshadowing of the maternal instinct? or is it a reflection of girls' apparently greater need to be affirmed through interpersonal relationships than boys?
-why different classes have different ideologies. (b/c: different conditions of life, etc.)
-things we STILL don't understand: why do I care about my friends? why do I like reading (or writing or playing sports or whatever)? why is gossiping fun? etc.
-"every totality is incomplete; therefore a 'totalizing' system like Marxism is invalid." refute. (at any given moment, society is a totality. it's everything that exists and falls under the rubric of 'social'; the definition of society may be ambiguous, but that's unrelated to this particular criticism)
-lust isn't for the sake of pleasure, as everyone thinks…
-difference between intelligent people and e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses: the minds of the former have evolved to a more 'self-decentered', 'objective' point than those of the latter. see Piaget. their perspective is broader, etc.
-maybe some analytic truths are a priori and others are a posteriori

On the other hand, how can 'There is a brown table in front of me' be wrong if I see the table? If by 'table' I mean a mind-independent object, then the possibility I'm wrong is obvious. But surely that's not what I mean! I just mean *that thing I see*. Can I be wrong that I'm seeing *something*? No, that's absurd! Can I be wrong that it's a table--an object that has all the features people associate with tables (aside from mind-independence)? How *could* I? I know what a table is! Can I be using 'brown' incorrectly? Can the table 'really' be *green*? How could I be wrong? "What would it be like" for someone to correct me? And yet it seems strange to say that my judgment is infallible. If I said 'The table is beige', someone might say that I was misunderstanding 'beige' and show me what beige really looks like. In that case I'd be wrong. But I'm so certain of what 'brown' is that I consider my judgment infallible--even though, in a sense, it isn't… Witt. was right that there's something misguided about these kinds of questions.

What makes self-deception possible is that thoughts are often indeterminate. Their content, that is. Their form is always indeterminate. But their content is *usually* not a single differentiated meaning, a "proposition" (or question or whatever). […] This is how consciousness can seem opaque, even as, in another sense, it can't be (because whatever I'm conscious of, I'm conscious of). It can be the case that I don't really know what I'm thinking, or that a given state of consciousness seems empty even though, obviously, it can't be (because consciousness is never "empty"). The indeterminate form also has a role in these paradoxes: it is presupposed by the content's indeterminacy (because whatever has a form must, presumably, have *some* kind of content), […]

(from my journal--august 27) In a way it's *obvious* that we know things about our material surroundings--"that (when we see them for ourselves) there are cookies in a jar, zebras in the zoo, people in the room, and cars on the street". We *know* these things, period. But from the philosophical perspective we don't: there could be a Cartesian "evil demon" deceiving us. Both alternatives are equally obvious--equally *true*, in fact--when you examine them from within their respective 'perspectives'--the perspectives that produce them--just as both are equally doubtful when you look at them from the opposing perspective. From the philosophical standpoint, ordinary knowledge is dubious; from the ordinary standpoint, the skeptical position that ordinary knowledge is dubious is itself ridiculous, because the reasons that cause the skeptic to doubt ordinary knowledge are fanciful and have no force in comparison with the overwhelming power of ordinary knowledge. 'There is a bed in my room': in one sense I know that's true--I *know* it: I'm 'immediately' certain that my belief is justified and true--yet in another sense I know that I *don't* know it. (Do I *know* that I don't know it, or do I merely *believe* I don't know it?) This contradiction boils down to the conflict between my animal and my rational 'experience-processing-capacities'. They can't be reconciled

I have yet to touch on modality. This is another thorny issue, which revolves around the question "What is it by virtue of which modal claims are true or false?" When I say, "It's possible that there are black swans", what does that mean, and how can I know if it's true? Similarly, what is necessity, and how can we judge the truth of claims of necessity?

As far as I can tell, variants of realism are the dominant positions in the philosophy of modality. What they have in common is that they assume the existence of possible worlds—though they analyze the meaning of 'existence' differently. According to David Lewis's "genuine modal realism", for example, modal claims are analyzable in terms of concrete possible worlds to which *our* world has no spatiotemporal access. For instance, the statement that black swans possibly exist entails that there is a real world—a "maximal spatiotemporal region"[1]—in which swans are black. The *actual* world, the one in which we live, has no spatiotemporal connection to this possible world, but the latter is nonetheless 'actual' for the beings that exist there. In other words, "every way the world can be is a way some world is; and modal statements are to be construed as quantifications over these worlds."[2]

On the other hand, there is the view that Lewis calls "ersatz modal realism": possible worlds are "certain *abstract* objects that somehow manage to be complete representations of different ways the world could be. These abstract objects then count as the 'worlds' for the purposes of modal analysis."[3]

[from the paper on the paradox of horror] I should embellish on a suggestion I made a moment ago, because it is relevant to the paradox I'm discussing. I noted that without a language one would have trouble differentiating qualia. This would be especially true of physiological sensations, such as warmth, softness and dryness. It may seem counterintuitive, but in the absence of a language one could literally not learn to distinguish the different properties of a sensation such as pressing one's hands together—the properties,

[1] Alexander Rosenberg, "Is Lewis's 'Genuine Modal Realism' Magical Too?", *Mind: New Series*, Vol. 98, No. 391, p. 411.
[2] Tony Roy, "Worlds and Modality", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 3, p. 336.
[3] Ibid.

namely, of smoothness, softness, warmth, dryness and so on. (Or, at most, as I said, one would have only a muddled, half-conscious comprehension of the differences between them—between, for example, warmth and softness.) The important thing to understand here is that the distinction I made between the unmediated and the mediated color-qualia is manifested here, in the fact that sensations can be divided into two categories: the unmediated and the mediated. Feelings like (*a particular instance of*) a headache, or (of) grabbing one's foot, or (of) placing a hand on one's chest, are unmediated: they are just *given*; we do not rely on language in order to be aware of them. In other words, rather than being 'universals', they are 'concrete particulars'. Each instance of them is a complete, 'self-enclosed' sensation in and of itself, such that no act of abstraction is necessary in order to concentrate on it. On the other hand, a particular instance of a feeling like coldness, wetness, or hardness is—to borrow a term from trope theory—an 'abstract particular'. This is an appropriate name because, although such a sensation can indeed be construed as a '*concrete* particular' (in that it has a particular location in spacetime), in order to pick it out, one must *abstract* it from the unmediated sensation in which it exists.[1] It's true that we commonly think of these abstractions as sensations in their own right—which explains our use of such expressions as 'the sensation of warmth' and 'the sensation of pain'—but this should not obscure the fact that their status as sensations (or as qualia) is categorially different from the status of a sensation like that of pressing hands together. *This* is the kind of sensation that could be denoted (though futilely, as we have seen) by a private act of ostension—the *only* kind of sensation that could, because in order clearly to pick out the other kind, an act of conceptual abstraction is necessary.

This issue of mediated versus unmediated qualia is complicated, though. *All* qualia—even the 'mediated' abstractions like warmth—are in a sense unmediated, in that they exist outside of language. The act of naming them cannot in itself bring them into existence. What it can do, in the case of some, is give us a clearer perception of them, by helping us focus our attention on them in opposition to a 'broader' quale in which they are included (as warmth is included in the feeling of pressing one's hands together). But when I describe this criterion for determining which qualia are to be called 'mediated', I am not suggesting that by saying, "I feel wetness in my hand" when I pour water on it, I will thereby make clearer my perception of the wetness. Rather, I mean that in the absence of *any* (public[2]) *language at all*, one will have a less clear sense of the difference between, say, wetness and softness than if one spoke a language—which is to say that one's perception of wetness will not be as clearly defined as it would have been had one spoken a language. Once a language has been internalized, it doesn't matter much (with regard to the nature of one's experience of a quale) whether one actually makes the effort to name, or to 'pick out', a given quale when one is experiencing it, as in "I am experiencing wetness now".

An air of ambiguity surrounds unmediated qualia as well, because, after all, they become mediated (i.e., brought into relation with other qualia) as soon as they are named or described. Nevertheless, our learning a language does not really have an effect on our perception of them—i.e., it does not make us more clearly aware of them—so I call them 'unmediated'. They are unproblematically 'given' to us in themselves (outside of language), clearly and absolutely, as mediated qualia are not. Said differently: they are not phenomenologically included in a more basic, more 'brute' sensation than they themselves.

Let's look at a few examples. Is an itch a mediated or an unmediated sensation? Clearly unmediated, because it isn't merely a part of another sensation. It's always isolated and wholly concrete, like a headache. No act of abstraction is involved when one concentrates on it. The feeling of tiredness is a similar example. Likewise, any sensation to refer to which one must start out by saying "the sensation of...." (as in, "the sensation of punching someone") is unmediated. The fact that a description of an action is necessary in order to refer to the feeling is a sure sign that a feeling *as a whole* is being referred to—because such a description is incapable of denoting only *part* of a sensation (that is, an abstraction from it).

On the other hand, there are borderline cases, in which a quale whose name would lead one to think that it (the quale) would be an abstraction from another quale seems to have a full-fledged independent-quale status. For instance, suppose I burn my hand on the stove. Because in its less extreme manifestations,

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[1] Again, to speak in Hegelian jargon: one must introduce mediation into an unmediated datum of perception.

[2] See four paragraphs below.

the feeling of heat is merely an abstraction from a 'broader', more basic sensation (such as that of placing one's hand on a warm radiator), one might be tempted to say that in this case too, the hotness is just an element in a broader sensation. But this wouldn't be right, of course. It is possible for a sensation whose name typically denotes a mediated sensation to be so predominant or overpowering that it effectively becomes 'unmediated'; i.e., it ceases to be a part of another sensation. This is what happens when I suffer a severe burn, […]

Before I end these preliminary remarks, I ought to explain how it is that humans acquire words, specifically qualia-names. If the answer is not 'through private ostensive definitions', then what is it? Obviously, 'through publicly correctable uses of words that we, as children, learn from adults'. We observe how adults use words like 'pain' and 'hot', and we mimic them. If we use them in the wrong circumstances—if our behavior seems incongruous with our verbal expression—we are corrected. If we say, "This hurts!" while happily eating ice-cream, someone corrects us: "No, say 'This tastes good'." Being guided by an external authority is essential, because it's the only way we can develop our own *internal* guide. Our internal guide, however—once it comes into existence (i.e., after we have learned to use a language properly)—does not operate 'after the fact', as does the external one; it guides us *before* we speak. It determines what words we use when confronted with a given quale; it automatically 'presents' the words to us, as it were, in intuition, such that we have no choice in the matter. Our prior internalization of the external authority's behavior (or instructions) is such that the appropriate words in a given context occur to us involuntarily. Thus, our 'following a rule' consists precisely in our lack of choice as to which verbal expressions seem right to us.

[from an earlier draft] The reason why the paradox in question has remained unresolved since Aristotle addressed it in his *Poetics* is that the conventional ways of talking about feelings are misconceived. Such words as 'pleasure', 'pain', 'satisfaction' and 'enjoyment' (and their corresponding adjectives) are not only vague but deceiving. They are distinguished from words that name particular emotions (such as 'anxiety', 'anger', 'fear'), which, while vague, are not really deceiving. The difference between the two classes is that the terms in the former are more general than those in the latter: they are used to characterize a huge variety of mental states, while the latter apply to a comparatively narrow range.[1] For example, sadness (a word that belongs to the second class) is said to be painful, but so is anger. Likewise, joy is pleasurable, but so is the feeling that corresponds to malice. The generality of the words in the first category is deceptive in that it posits unities among the most diverse phenomena. More specifically, each word is supposed to name a single quality that inheres in every phenomenon to which the word applies. Philosophers are thus led to look for the common quality, and when they cannot find it they declare that a paradox has been discovered.

For instance, in attempting to account for the pleasure that can accompany sadness, they analyze the state of sadness to try to find wherein it is similar to something like happiness. They may, perhaps, introspect when they happen to be in a sad mood (or they may 'imaginatively reproduce' it, abstractly conceiving its essential features), or they may undertake a conceptual analysis of emotions in general. In either case, they assume that the meaning of 'pleasant' is fairly unproblematic. "A given thing is pleasant insofar as one desires that it continue", they might say. Or maybe they would say, "A mental state is pleasant if and only if (loosely speaking) it feels good". The problem is, there is no way to define pleasure *except* by "speaking loosely". Because 'pleasure' is used in such a way that it denotes inner sensations, an intuitively satisfactory definition would 'reproduce' in concepts the inner sensations deemed pleasurable. The point of a definition of a noun, after all, is to portray in concepts the thing to which the noun refers: 'bachelor', for example, is defined as 'unmarried adult male'. The definition 'picks out' the denoted: it allows a person to *point to* the referent, by stating the criteria by which the referent is distinguishable. Thus, a complete definition of 'pleasure' would set forth a series of criteria that would make possible in all

[1] Such words as 'emotion', 'feeling' and 'thought' are as vague and deceptive as those in the first class, but I omit them from this discussion because their deceptiveness is of an irrelevant kind. Only words conceptually related to 'pleasure' and 'pain' play a role in the resolution of the paradox.

contexts an unambiguous decision as to whether a given state was pleasurable or not; the criteria would be "internal" because 'pleasure' denotes an internal state. (The same applies to 'pain' and its offshoots.) No such definition exists, though. Nor is it possible. *Emotions* cannot be conclusively defined either. That is, no (nontrivial) set of necessary and sufficient conditions can be stated that allows one to determine whether a given state qualifies as 'anger' or 'sadness' or 'envy'. The difference between pleasure and pain, on the one hand, and emotions on the other, is that while the latter have properties,[1] and can thus be given partial definitions,[2] the former do not. There is literally not a single nontrivial property that can be pointed to

[…] The point is that we have no clear idea what pleasure is, except that we recognize it when we feel it.

—Or do we? In fact, the crux of the problem is that we don't. We cannot tell whether sadness "*really is*" pleasant sometimes, or whether fear provoked by horror movies "*really is*" pleasant. –Or rather, we cannot tell *in what sense* it is (which amounts, more or less, to the same thing). That's why there is a paradox. We are conflicted: these emotions are pleasurable "in a way", but also painful. The solution lies in the fact that when we think of ourselves as "enjoying" "unpleasant" emotions, we understand 'pleasure' not in the (indefinable) sense of some kind of intrinsically positive feeling, unmixed with pain, but rather as I defined it above, namely as a mental event the continuation of which is desired for its own sake. We want the feeling to continue even though we do not think it is completely, "intrinsically" pleasurable. The reason for our desire (in the absence of an unambiguously positive feeling)—in other words, the solution to the paradox I'm dissecting—is simply *emotional inertia*. This is intuitively verifiable. What is also verifiable is that *during every occurrence* of a negative emotion, one wants it ("in a way") to continue. For example, when I'm in a self-pitying mood, or when I feel sad for whatever reason, or bitter or angry, I want the mood to continue *just because I'm already in that mood*. Even if, say, my parents died, and I were at their funeral, I would, in a sense, want to persist in that state of sorrow. So would everyone else. This probably seems counterintuitive, though. "Are you crazy?!" objects the reader. "It's absurd! Nobody but a masochist would want to stay sad if his parents had died! Just look at the movie *High Fidelity*: after the woman's father has died, when she is in the car with Rob, she turns to him and says in desperation, '*I want to feel anything but this*, Rob.' And then she asks permission to have sex with him, just so she can feel something else." Nevertheless, I maintain that she partly enjoyed her sorrow, though only because she was already experiencing it.

In order to de-perversify my ideas, I must borrow a few from Berys Gaut. According to the "evaluative theory of the emotions", emotions are not mere "phenomenologically characterized feelings", distinguishable from thoughts; rather, they are cognitive, "essentially incorporating evaluations" (Neill, 302). "Thus to fear something involves evaluating it as threatening, to be angry with someone involves evaluating his actions as wrong....". Now, this theory is true in most circumstances, but not all. It is possible for an emotion to exist and yet for there to be no corresponding evaluation. For example, I sometimes find myself suddenly feeling exuberant for no apparent reason. No particular thought is involved; I just feel, inexplicably, joyful. My bodily sensations are suddenly very pleasant. It may be objected that my implicit evaluation is some vague thought like "I love life!"; but this objection is trivial. The point is that my emotion has no definite object. Similarly, I am sometimes depressed even though I don't know why. Still, in most circumstances the theory is true: emotions are essentially united with evaluations of a given object. Gaut proceeds to argue that "one emotion is to be individuated from another in terms of the evaluations involved, rather than by the particular features of the physiological state or of the associated bodily sensations, for there is no pattern of physiological changes or set of sensations peculiar to each emotion...." (Neill, 302).

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[1] For example, a particular instance of anger may involve a restless feeling in the chest and a desire to punch someone.

[2] Such a "definition" might, perhaps, describe the feelings coextensive with a given instance of anger, without saying that these feelings are coextensive with *all* instances of anger. (That is, they are merely an example. The point is that other examples of anger will be *similar* to this.) Incidentally, shortly I'll provide a partial, inadequate definition of pleasure, the existence of which will not, however, contradict the point made here, because the inadequacy of the definition will consist in its reliance on external criteria, while the inadequacy of a definition of any emotion consists in its ability to provide an exhaustive list of all *internal* criteria.

Therefore, the painfulness of an emotion is a function of the negative evaluations it incorporates, not of the "intrinsically painful" nature of the bodily sensations. Given the limit I have set on the applicability of the first doctrine, this second doctrine has a limit as well. And even in those emotional states that include negative evaluations, the bodily sensations are sometimes also intrinsically unpleasant. Nevertheless, generally speaking, the theory seems true.

Evaluations have degrees of strength: some are very negative, others less so. For example, if a college student has failed a course, the thought that is united with his emotion will be fairly negative but (probably) not acutely so; if one's parents have died, the thought *will* be acutely negative. This will make the emotion extremely unpleasant. In the former case, if the student is palpably depressed and reflects on the depression, it will seem strangely pleasurable: in that moment, he will not really want it to end immediately and suddenly, to change from sadness to happiness in a short span of time. The evaluation, though, insofar as it can be considered in abstraction from the (holistic) emotion, will be unambiguously painful. It is the evaluation that accounts for the overall painfulness of the situation; the "inertia" of the emotion is what accounts for the pleasure. The death of one's parents, or one's spouse, will (presumably) result in severely negative thoughts, such that one will not even want to think them. Even though, upon insightful reflection, one will detect a hint of satisfaction in the emotion, the painfulness of the thoughts will so overpower the satisfaction that one will, like Rob's girlfriend, want to feel *anything else*.

As I have already remarked, these ideas apply to all negative emotions. It is strange, then, that people acknowledge only that such emotions are *sometimes* pleasurable, in "atypical" situations. How can this be explained, if there is always a slight degree of pleasure?[1] The answer is that people are not typically self-aware. Rarely do they reflect on their feelings. In the powerful immediacy of an emotion, they are consumed by its object—its "unpleasant" object. They are not reflectively abstracting from themselves, 'stepping back' in order to observe exactly how it is that they feel. Thus, the atypical nature of the situations in which negative emotions have an element of pleasure consists precisely in the fact that the person feeling the emotion is reflecting on it.[2]

Philosophers, in short—or, at any rate, a few of them—have been misled by language into looking for a single determinate *internal* property, a property of the *sensations*, shared by such feelings as joy and pity. There is, strictly speaking, no such property. But there are two reasons for this, the first of which is the one I had in mind at the end of the second paragraph of this paper: (1) the sensations generally associated, for example, with joy and pity have no similarities,[3] and (2) feelings *do not have* properties in the first place. As we have seen, they are "irreducibly holistic", un-denotable by criteria: isolated (or even analytically isolatable) properties 'in' them cannot be described or pointed to. This is extremely paradoxical, because it means that reason #1, which presupposes the possibility of similarities—i.e., of similarities *among properties*—contradicts reason #2. (Or at least it *seems* to contradict it.) Even more disturbing, it is intuitively obvious that there are such things as similarities between feelings: for example, between my joyful sensations yesterday and my joyful sensations today. Or between the sensations associated with ecstasy and those associated with happiness. They are similar. But we cannot explain how, because feelings have no properties. They just—*are*. They are ineffable. The only way we can know whether a feeling is similar to another is by introspecting and

that's ambiguous: we should be speaking not of isolated 'properties' (which, as we have seen, feelings never have; they are "irreducibly holistic") but rather of similarities. The only (relevant) property

[1] By the way, I'll conclude my discussion of the ambiguity of 'pleasure' momentarily—the discussion I interrupted when putting forward my solution to the paradox.

[2] This raises the question whether it is possible to feel pleasure without being aware of it. However, I have no intention of getting stuck in the mire of this issue. I think that it is indeed possible, just as it is possible (as Gaut notes) to be deceived about the contents of one's belief that *x*. In fact, the notion of self-deception seems as philosophically problematic as that of 'un(self-consciously)felt pleasure'.

[3] Except, perhaps, in exceptional circumstances, such as when a Christian with a mystical temperament is so overwhelmed by his pity for humanity that he experiences something like joy.

these emotions share is an external one, i.e., one that has to do with their (psychological) *effects*, and is defined through behavioral notions: viz., they provoke the desire that they continue. –Maybe it will be objected that desire is itself internal, even if it is preeminently a behavioral notion (a reason for *acting* a certain way)—and so philosophers have not really been misled, as I have said. I might reply by saying that the desire is from a perspective external to the feeling: it is not really a part of the feeling, but is projected onto it. At any rate, I don't insist on this. Maybe philosophers have not, after all, been *wholly* misled; this has no significance for my arguments. Regarding the question of what it means to divide pleasure into two categories (as I have done)—viz., 'positive pleasure', an intrinsically good feeling, such as joy, and 'negative pleasure', i.e., the pleasure of inertia—I have no answer. It is and will remain a complete mystery what the phenomenological meaning, or essence, is of both kinds of pleasure. They (and pain) are *sui generis*. Ineffable.

Incidentally, I have a suggestion as to what the psychological explanation of inertial pleasure is. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud writes that "unpleasurable sensations impel towards change, towards discharge, and that is why we interpret unpleasure as implying a heightening and pleasure a lowering of energic cathexis". When one is psychically immobilized by a compelling mood, the mood's 'energy' (or the neurological chemicals, or the relevant electrical current in the brain, or whatever) is effectively insisting that it have time to 'spend' itself. One does not really want to advance suddenly into a different, happier mood because there is still a quantum of unspent energy—a quantum of the peculiar type of energy associated with this particular mood. –That's only a suggestion, though.

As I noted at the beginning, I must supplement my theory to account for the pleasures of tragedy and horror. These art forms have narrative structures, characters and so on; the enjoyment we derive is related to these features. As Noël Carroll argues, in the case of horror there is an element of fascination: monsters (and, I might add, gruesome spectacles) violate our normal conceptual schemes—they "transgress our categories of thought"[1] (Neill, 287)—and thus fascinate us. And fascination is, for whatever reason, enjoyable. On the other hand, monsters are disgusting, and so we are also repelled by them (and hence by the horror genre). The suspense in these movies is another reason for our enjoyment: we crave the plot's eventual resolution (and also our *anticipation* of its resolution), as well as the eventual revelation of whatever horrifying being is causing all the mayhem (for movies often delay revealing both the monster and the *explanation* of the monster). Again, what the phenomenological and the psychological meanings are of our enjoyment of suspense is a mystery (though the second meaning is theoretically discoverable[2]). In any case, the paradox of tragedy is explicable along similar lines. That is, the experience of spectating has painful and pleasurable aspects, but the pleasurable outweigh the painful.

This kind of explanation is clearly adequate up to a point: tragedy and horror are obviously painful in some respects and enjoyable in others; the claims of the latter must trump those of the former. But it is not thoroughly satisfying.[3] Gaut's theory is based on the idea that people can actually *enjoy* being scared, disgusted, sad and so on. In other words, Carroll thinks their enjoyment is *in spite of* their disgust and fear; Gaut thinks it is (often) *because* of their disgust and fear. He does not explain how this is possible, though. His solution is merely the following: no emotional-types are intrinsically unpleasant (rather, the unpleasantness of a emotion is a function of the negative evaluations it incorporates); therefore, the emotions associated with tragedy and horror are not *necessarily*, in all people and at all times, unpleasant (because people need not always be thinking negative evaluations when watching tragedy or horror); therefore, there is no paradox of tragedy and horror. The problem is that Gaut leaves it to empirical psychology to explain why certain people enjoy fear and others do not (i.e., why certain people do not attach negative evaluations to fear while others do). But this begs the question, in a way. If negative emotions are

[1] Gore doesn't really transgress categories of thought, but it does grate against our normal ways of experiencing the world. Therefore it is fascinating.

[2] If Freud's ideas have any validity, the psychological meaning might have something to do with our anticipation of the discharge of psychic energy that occurs at the plot's climax, i.e., at the moment of "recognition" (in Aristotelian language).

[3] It's kind of boring, too.

almost always experienced as painful (as Gaut thinks), why, and how, are they *occasionally* experienced as pleasant? Gaut does not give an answer. He says only that, somehow, in atypical situations, people do not attach negative evaluations to fear. My solution is better: *everyone always* has a slight enjoyment of fear and disgust and sadness; some people, though—i.e., those who dislike horror and/or tragedy—(1) direct more attention to the corresponding negative evaluations (and less to the interest in the plot, or the 'thrill' of having one's conceptual categories violated) than others do, and (2) are less susceptible to the pleasures of emotional inertia (partly, indeed, because they focus intensely on the negative evaluations, and partly, perhaps, because their physiological sensations are unusually disagreeable[1])—and therefore these art-forms are not universally beloved.

In short, my theory incorporates aspects of Carroll's and Gaut's, while adding other ideas that satisfy the requirement (the "axiom") I mentioned in the beginning—namely, that the true solution explain how it is that negative emotions with *real* objects are pleasurable.

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That last stuff was from the original version of my paper on horror. You can see why I took it out. It's confused, wrong, badly written.

Here's the crappy ghost story I started and will never finish:

Fathers and Sons

The gray sepulchers lie exposed beneath the encroaching tenebrious sky. Mounds of earth are etched against the swirling mountainous clouds. Hoary redwoods stand fearless against the threatened tempest as their fatidic leaves shiver in the blustering wind. Dustclouds rise and wreathe in the electric air above impassive gravestones. The ghosts of bodies buried below shriek and writhe in a macabre dance on their eternal tombs. Distant rumblings tell of future horrors…

I push open the gate with a hand that grasps a rusted iron spike projecting from the top. A bar in the latticework shakes loose and rattles to the ground. I look around to see if anyone is watching or has heard the squeal of the hinges—or the bang of the gate slamming against the metal fence. But I am alone; none would venture out on this night. A thick layer of forest insulates me from civilization, and the terrors brewing in the sky have tripled the remoteness of my solitude. I pick up the shovel, trembling, and step onto the dirt hallowed by rotting flesh. Gray marble eyes lodged in the ground stare at me unblinkingly, accusingly. The gate clatters behind me, endued by the wind with a will of its own—certain that evil is afoot.

It is a moonless night. The only light out here is the dim reflection from streetlamps on the undersides of clouds. Without my flashlight I would be blind. I shine it in front of me; its weak yellow beam (the batteries must be dying) lands on a small tombstone engraved with no name. Time has corroded it off: all that remain are pits and stains. Somewhere down below is an anonymous decomposing skeleton. For an instant I'm overcome by a perverse, wild desire to laugh—uncontrollably, hysterically—at the absurdity of this deformed stone sticking up out of the earth as a solemn reminder of the final resting-place of a forgotten piece of worm-pabulum, whose loved ones are surely dead and forgotten as well. But I suppress the wild urge. As soon as I do, though, I am conscious again of the fear. The throat-constricting, limb-freezing fear. It has been with me (in various forms) since I left the house. I was able to ignore it as I walked through the streets, where the lights from houses and the people on the sidewalks kept my imagination at bay. As I reached the outskirts of the town I felt it creeping from my heart—which beat a

[1] It is probably superfluous to remind the reader of an implication of my having qualified the evaluative theory of the emotions: we can desire the continuation of a disagreeable emotion even if both the evaluation *and the physiological sensation* are inherently unpleasant. This may seem paradoxical. However, the paradox is mitigated by the fact that physiological sensations dubbed 'emotional' are almost never *unambiguously, 'truly'* painful. Their painfulness (when it exists) is always fairly tolerable.

little faster—to my throat. In the dark of the forest, with the lonely cries and the crackings underfoot, it turned nearly to panic…

Wednesday, August 2

Adam Smith. The circle of economic growth: a greater division of labor leads to an enlargement of the markets, which leads to an increase in labor productivity, which leads to a greater division of labor. Capital is divided into *fixed capital* (machinery, buildings, etc.) and *circulating capital* (which is used to buy raw materials and pay for labor). The *wages fund* is the part of circulating capital that pays the workers. The bourgeois class has a high propensity to save, since it wants to increase productive capital. Consequently, "the higher the proportion of the national income going to profits, the higher the growth in the wealth of the nation. The general interest of the nation, therefore, coincides with that of the bourgeois class."

A good doesn't have value unless it was produced by human labor. And the value of a good is *measured* by the quantity of labor it exchanges for. Under capitalist conditions, in which "capitalists and landlords take part in the division of the product, the exchange value of a good must be such as to allow the payment of a profit and a rent besides a wage. This implies that the quantity of labor the good can pay for must be greater than that employed to produce it. In a capitalist society, therefore, embodied labor isn't a good measure of the exchange value of goods." A commodity's price is the sum of the incomes paid to produce it, namely wages, profits and rent. There's a difference, however, between the market price and the natural price: the former is the real price of a good at a given moment, and depends on the forces of supply and demand; the latter is what would allow for the payment of workers, capitalists and landowners at normal rates of remuneration. It is, "as it were, the central price, to which the prices of all commodities are continually gravitating" because of competition. (High demand = high market price; excess supply = low market price.) Competition (under certain ideal conditions) continually drives the market towards equilibrium. There's a tension in Smith's work between 'objectivist' and 'subjectivist' orientations—roughly, the macroeconomic and the microeconomic sides of his work. For example, an explanation of wage differentials is the "agreeableness or disagreeableness" of the work: the more disagreeable, the higher the wage will be. On the other hand, another explanation is the high or the low cost of training: the higher the cost, the higher the wage. The first is a subjective, the second an objective determinant. Neoclassical economists seized on the subjective, microeconomic aspects of Smith's thought, while Ricardians and Marxists were more interested in the objective, macroeconomic aspects.

Jean-Baptiste Say formulated Say's Law: a general glut is impossible because supply creates its own demand. "Say first restricted himself to observing that the value of the aggregate production is necessarily equal to the aggregate value of the distributed incomes. This is an accountancy identity that nobody would object to. As incomes are purchasing power, it is also possible to say that the produced goods always create the purchasing power corresponding to their value. From here to say that the production always creates its own demand may seem a small step. In fact it is enormous. One must add that incomes are entirely and immediately spent."

This is by far the best time of my life. I'm always happy, always wanting to have fun. Talkative, confident, fun-loving yet mature. Always feeling silly and totally forgetful of past woes. […]

Method in the social sciences.— First formulate a question. An example would be "Why are there higher proportions of blacks than whites in poor inner city neighborhoods?" Then, using your intuitive skills of induction, list categories of possible causes—but be sure to distinguish between causes of the phenomenon's *origin* and of its *perpetuation*. In fact, you should divide your question into two: "How did the phenomenon originate?" and "Why has it persisted?" […]

Thus, one's intuitive understanding of society is essential for inductively arriving at general hypotheses. The question of why induction actually *works* is indeed puzzling, since it isn't based on logic,

but psychologically it's explicable: in the course of life we 'internalize'—or become 'unconsciously accustomed to'—or acquire the ability to automatically intuit—causal connections between phenomena, by learning how people behave under certain conditions, by noticing regularities in their behavior, by learning which factors and institutions have the greatest causal power in given conditions, etc. Induction isn't 'magical'; it's a semi-creative, discursively manifested processing of past encounters between a person and his environment, and of theories he may have unconsciously assimilated during the process of his education, and so forth.

With the help of empirical data you should choose specific causes that you think are the most important. Unlike natural scientists you won't be able to state precisely the relations and interactions between them, or between them and the events you're explaining, because human behavior doesn't conform to laws[1]—and certainly not mathematically formalizable laws. Human interaction isn't deterministic; the existence of freedom (i.e., of a psyche complex enough to be self-conscious) will always vitiate any attempt to formalize social causes and formulate social laws (except in uninformative, truistic ways). So the best you can hope for is an *approximation* of the true, complete explanation.[2] Be as precise as possible, but know that absolute precision is impossible.

It isn't necessary to write your final argument in a deductive form, because the implicit premises are almost always trivial. Just use a lot of evidence and remember to anticipate objections and argue against opposing theories. In the end you'll simply have to appeal to the reader's own inductive abilities, because in social science it's rarely possible to test hypotheses empirically.[3]

There's another kind of theory in social science, a more general and abstract theory. When a thinker asks "How does the economy work?" or "What direction is society headed in?" or "Are there general 'laws' that explain historical evolution?", he is asking this kind of question. The difference between the two kinds isn't absolute, but the distinction is useful. In one case you start out with general ideas, educated guesses that guide you in your research and eventually lead to more concrete hypotheses; in the other case you don't want to descend to concrete facts except insofar as they help you arrive at abstract theories. Your *goal* is the abstract theory, the theory that applies to more than one specific set of circumstances. After you've stated it, of course, you should apply it to specific phenomena to test its explanatory power—and indeed, in the process of refining it there's a constant interplay between the concrete and the abstract, as you focus your attention first on one and then on the other—but ultimately your goal is a general theory that provides a framework for more detailed and concrete ones.

It's hard to describe a general path to this kind of theory. Different thinkers proceed in different

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[1] [I think that when I drew a logical connection between the two clauses in that sentence my reasoning was like this: the natural scientist's ability to give a precise explanation of, say, the orbits of planets is based on his ability to use general laws (like Einstein's equations) in his deductive or mathematical explanations. I suppose the connection between laws and explanatory "preciseness"—by which I mean articulation of all the relevant causal steps, all the mechanisms—is that laws apply only to deterministic phenomena, and only with respect to deterministic phenomena is explanatory preciseness (thoroughness) possible. Since the subject-matter of the social sciences isn't deterministic, i.e., isn't subject to laws, complete theoretic preciseness is impossible.]

[2] Only natural science (an incredibly sophisticated and probably unattainable natural science) could give the complete deterministic explanation of a social phenomenon. –Yes, I said "deterministic", despite what I said above about freedom. For there are two levels to human behavior: the biological and the psychological/phenomenological (by which I mean also the sociological, anthropological and so on). The former is the deterministic aspect, the latter the 'meaning-full' aspect. In principle, biology and chemistry can give a complete explanation of human behavior—and they are the only disciplines that can; the human sciences can but approximate, because of freedom. The *brain* is ultimately where causal interactions between 'social forces' take place and so determine the individual's behavior, and thus society's. (The reason for the "thus" is that society supervenes on individuals, even though the latter are influenced by holistic forces.)

[3] In certain cases, such as some psychological or economic explanations, you'll have to presuppose a broader theoretic framework. To be thorough you might want to defend this framework, but usually you can get by with defending your ideas just in the context of the particular phenomenon you're discussing. Keep in mind, though, that your decision not to defend the framework will make it easier for people to attack your position (if they think, for example, that in other contexts the "framework" is inadequate).

ways. A common theme is that they have to rely, through intuition, on induction. Yet even this isn't equally true of them all. An economist might, as J. S. Mill advises, abstract important features from economic life (be they regularities or mere similarities or whatever) and then deduce implications or induce presuppositions. Induction can play a role in both steps or only in one or the other. A psychoanalyst, on the other hand, might use nothing but induction: he induces causes of behavior partly on the basis of its similarities to other behavior of which he already has an explanation, or he notices that a particular form of behavior is common and, drawing intuitively on his general conception of human nature, induces an explanation. The test of his theories is how well they fit together logically, how fruitful they are and how much predictive power they have, how consistent they are with commonly agreed-upon behavioral facts or probabilities, how simple or unnecessarily complex they are, how well they fit with natural science and anthropological discoveries. Throughout all this, intuition plays a major role, but it can always be backed up with arguments.

As for Milton Friedman's famous argument that scientists should and do base their theories on unrealistic assumptions—"Truly important and significant hypotheses will be found to have 'assumptions' that are wildly inaccurate descriptive representations of reality, and, in general, the more significant the theory, the more unrealistic the assumptions (in this sense)"—it's wrong. So is its corollary: "The only legitimate way to criticize an economic theory is to point out that its predictions are at variance with the facts". In his article '"Unreal assumptions in economic theory: the F-twist untwisted', Alan Musgrave explains why. I wrote an outline of the article for my social science course:

I. Criticism of Friedman: he is unclear about the status of assumptions in theories.
    A. There are three different kinds: negligibility assumptions, domain assumptions, and heuristic assumptions.
II. Negligibility assumptions.
    A. A scientist declares that a given factor that might be expected to influence the phenomenon he's investigating has in fact a negligible effect.
        1. Example: Galileo assumed that air resistance has no detectable effect on bodies falling through short distances.
    B. Friedman is right that a theory containing a negligibility assumption can be evaluated only by testing its consequences. [I disagree.]
    C. He is wrong that a good hypothesis must have descriptively false negligibility assumptions—or, as he puts it, "the more significant the theory, the more unrealistic the assumptions". For negligibility assumptions need not be false.
    D. Thus, he is wrong to conclude that theories do not even *aim* to be accurate descriptions of reality (a view called instrumentalism).
III. Domain assumptions.
    A. These are used to specify the domain of applicability of a theory.
        1. The same wording is used to express a negligibility assumption as a domain assumption. Example: "assume the government has a balanced budget" may mean either that an actual budget imbalance has a negligible effect on the phenomenon in question or that it has a *significant* effect, and that the given hypothesis is therefore valid only if there's no imbalance. In this latter case, the assumption restricts the theory's domain.
    B. The presence of a domain assumption, in making a theory less realistic, makes it less testable.
    C. Therefore, concerning domain assumptions, Friedman's statement that "the more significant the theory, the more unrealistic the assumptions" is wrong. On the contrary, the theory is significant if it's more widely applicable.
IV. Heuristic assumptions.
    A. These are ways of simplifying the exposition of a theory.
        1. Example: when Newton wanted to discover what his theory predicted

> about the solar system, "he first neglected interplanetary gravitational forces by 'assuming' that there was only one planet orbiting the sun". This was a heuristic assumption.
>
> B. Friedman's central thesis is wrong in this case too.

When an economist "abstract[s] important features from economic life", he's basically making negligibility assumptions: the things he's abstracting from are negligible,[1] at least at this point in the exposition of his theory. (In this respect he's also making heuristic assumptions—provided, that is, that he intends to explain the phenomena abstracted from later on, once he's laid the foundation of his theory.) Marx's use of abstraction signifies a combination of negligibility and heuristic assumptions.

Malicious well-wishers

"Climb
the stairs
to heaven!"
we're told daily
by people who would
rather see us in hell
(because it would prove them right).

Thursday, August 3

Contemporary journalists and editors are gutless wonders. They're "yellower" than William Randolph Hearst himself.

Bought CDs of John Field's Nocturnes and his 4th and 6th Piano Concertos. I think this culture could use a little more John Field and a little less Dr. Dre.

Funny story: "Field spent a season in Paris in 1832-33; there he received much acclaim, but also some criticism from the young Turks of the piano, whose style was more aggressive or more brilliant than his own flexible, lyrical approach. (After hearing one of Liszt's assaults on the keyboard for the first time Field asked his neighbor, 'Does he bite?')"

David Ricardo. He was the first to formulate the doctrine of comparative advantage, or at least to bring it to relative maturity. (If one country is more efficient than another at producing both wine and cloth, both countries will nonetheless reap advantages if they each produce only the good they're most efficient at producing. So one produces wine, the other cloth.) Whereas Smith was preoccupied with the problems of production, Ricardo was more concerned with distribution. How are the payments to land, labor and capital determined?

> As capital accumulated, the demand for labor would increase, bringing with it an inevitable rise in money wages. This increase in the market price of labor would lead in turn, just as Smith had suggested, to a rise in the population, with an eventual expansion in the labor force. But here Smith and Ricardo parted company. For where Smith had seen the rise in the supply of labor acting as a restraint on higher wages, Ricardo saw the expansion of the total population as impinging on the means of subsistence. Just as Malthus had pictured the growth of the population as leading to an ever rising cost of living, thus worsening the standard of living for the majority of population, so also did Ricardo fear the effects of this

[1] To be clearer: they're '*comparatively*' negligible. They may actually be important, but they're not as important as the features he's picking out for analysis.

> expansion in population.
>
> Wages would not be restored to their previous lower levels by the increase in the size of the labor force. Why not? Because the added numbers made necessary a permanent rise in the cost of living. Since the natural level of wages was geared to this cost of living, a rise in that cost would inevitably produce a rise in the natural level of wages. As the natural rate of wages was thereby increased, the rate of profits would inevitably decline. The time would eventually come when the rate of profit would decline to the point where no further accumulation of capital would take place. When this happened, all economic growth would cease and the stationary state would emerge.
>
> The capitalist would not benefit from this process because his rate of profits declined steadily as the process continued. The worker would not benefit in the long run either, although he might benefit for indeterminate periods as the market price for his services soared above the natural subsistence wage. In the long run, wages would settle to the subsistence level. It was the third class, the landlords, who really benefited. As the demand for the means of subsistence rose, increased cultivation of both and intensive and extensive nature became necessary. The more fertile lands were increasingly capable of yielding a surplus paid to the landlord in the form of rent.
>
> In capsule form this is the essence of Ricardo's famous theory of rent. Note its dependence on the Malthusian principle of population. If higher wages did not produce an expansion in population faster than the means of subsistence were able to be increased, the entire picture would change....

Rent is the result not of fertility itself (as Malthus thought) but "of the fertility of one piece of land when compared with others also under cultivation".

Value is determined by the amount of labor in a product. (Capital is merely stored-up labor.) Ricardo thus rejected Smith's labor-command theory of value in favor of his "labor-jelly" theory. Specifically, value is determined by the amount of labor expended on the "final unit of the commodity"—i.e., the labor under the most difficult, least efficient conditions of production.

I'll finish Ricardo later.

Friday, August 4

From a book of reminiscences: *"Tolstoy says, 'Tchaikovsky's dead'—and two huge tears rolled down his great cheeks."* (My italics.) I just listened to the Sixth Symphony. Without exaggeration, it's the most devastating piece I've ever heard. (Even on my miserable little headphones.) When I first heard it years ago I didn't like it, and it's taken me awhile to get used to it, but now that I have I love it. The first movement in particular affects me. The passage in the middle that starts with the epic crescendo on the timpani and continues on to the furious trombones and/or tubas—*dum duuuum, dadaaaa!*—that passage is colossal. Paralyzing. I want to buy a stereo-system just to listen to it! It sounds like the end of the world. And then the romantic melody with the glissando in the strings, after the world has ended.... And finally the plucked diatonic descent under the cadence in the brass and woodwinds, capacious as joy in sorrow....

The end of the last movement is quite shattering too. The dead pulses in the double bass, and the dark stabbings of life's last flickers, and the final four heartbeats, and then death. Those pulses sound like time, the tickings of mortality—death calling you...."*bump bump, bump bump, bump bump*...." The two lines in the music, the underworld tickings and the descending melody, are death and life, inevitability and the final hopeless succumbing to it. Those ticks really do sound like inevitability. They just keep going, undisturbed by the drama playing out above them, patiently waiting to claim their own.

In his personality, Tchaikovsky reminds me of myself between 14 and 24/25.

Went to a party with Vikram and former coworkers. Got drunk and took one gigantic hit of pot that messed me up for quite a while. It would have been great at the *end* of the night, but since it was at the

beginning it ruined everything. I was just *swimming* for a while; lost all my quick-wittedness and energy. I've reached the stage of life where I have more fun sober than drunk. I feel so *natural* all the time now that alcohol just interferes with it, makes me dull.

MoPIRG had something to do with this, I think. Aggressively talking to thousands of people who want to slam the door in your face gives you a "devil-may-care" attitude with everyone else.

Good. Every year from now on I'll celebrate this day, my liberation from the alcoholic's philosophy of life—of using alcohol as an escape. I no longer need an escape.

Saturday, August 5

I've never seen Noam Chomsky lose a debate. Foucault, W. F. Buckley, Richard Perle....he trounces them all. Even when being talked over, ignored, not allowed to get a word in, as in the "debate" with Buckley, he wins. –Buckley, the arch-stereotype, the self-parody of the smug British intellectual. [Actually he was American; he only affected a British accent.] Unbearable to listen to, impossible to watch. Rude, overbearing, astronomically pretentious, smirky and smarmy.[1] Speaks through his nose. And ignores the facts. Chomsky, on the other hand—soft-spoken, courteous, willing to listen and engage with arguments, unbelievably knowledgeable.

When are debates useful? Almost never. They get sucked into a Battle of the Egos, because at least one of the participants is always either easily riled or a pompous dick. Mindful of his image over his argument. The single exception seems to be Chomsky.

Mead reminds me of both Wittgenstein and Sartre,[2] though obviously he's very different from them. His approach to psychology and sociology is congenial to mine, for example in its emphasis on holism and in its conceptualization of the self. He insists—again and again and again; he's Kierkegaardian in his repetitiveness—that the "vocal gesture" evokes the same responses in the person making it as it does in the other, i.e., that both individuals understand it in the same way. This is what I said about words in my paper on ontology. Through repeated interactions their meanings are fixed in consciousness(es), so that everyone comes to understand a word like 'tree' the same way, *exactly* the same way. They may attach different associations to it, when explicitly reflecting, say, on the images it conjures in their mind, but the word itself is just the word itself and is understood as such. (In my class presentation on my paper, the infant thinkers I was talking to made an uproar about that idea. "People understand words differently! Nobody understands a word exactly as another person understands it!" You see, their minds have been saturated by relativistic ideologies, by multiculturalism and pop-anthropology and ideological schisms and late-capitalist skepticism, so they refuse to recognize commonalities between people, unaware that if everyone understood words differently, communication would be impossible.[3]) Actually, I think Mead's meaning is a little different from mine, and I'm not sure he's right. —But this is all out of context, so I'll shut up.

Songs like "Most of the Time" are good for me because of the vicarious hurt they give. Eyes leaking, face red, I can almost feel like I know the sweetness of the pain of loss. Remembering, say, being

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[1] At one point he actually gave a sly wink to the camera, pleased with his witty remark. What a clown. Putting on a show.

[2] "When one is running to get away from someone who is chasing him, he is entirely occupied in this action, and his experience may be swallowed up in the objects about him, so that he has, at the time being, no consciousness of self at all." Pure Sartre. Mead relies a lot on phenomenological descriptions.

[3] "How do you account for misunderstandings?" The words themselves, in their immediacy, are not misunderstood—*cannot be* misunderstood, because otherwise the fluid communication we engage in wouldn't be possible. Instead, the misunderstandings arise when people try to translate utterances into their 'equivalents', or try to state their presuppositions and implications. This is when the element of *choice*, of *interpretation*, enters. The speaker, for example, may have left unexpressed the logical or emotional connections between his sentences, thus exposing himself to misinterpretation.

happy with someone who still means something to me, or being sad with someone who still means something to me. I can almost feel like I know how that feels. Just to get away from the lightness of life and pretend to actually care about something, someone, for a moment, no matter how depressed that might make me—that's good.

Went to a party, didn't get drunk but didn't have fun. Feel a peculiar anger against the world.—

The candle is flickering because it's getting dark, and people are flickering with it, away into the rabid black night, swallowed and hopefully digested; rage drips from my skin and I try to stomp it out but can't, it's there in the sheen on the black tar and trails me home, a stench of burning flesh hovering over it; the calluses on my eyes have blinded me so I rely on instinct to find my way back, but everywhere I turn I slip on puddles of rage; meanwhile I think of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton and Hart Crane and Kurt Cobain and suddenly my fist clenches with fingernails digging in, and I raise the gun and blow my brains out.

Sunday, August 6

Nassau Senior is most famous for his capitalist apologetics: profit is a reward for "abstinence" on the part of the capitalist, namely the abstinence involved in his postponing pleasure for the sake of investment.[1] (The authors call this theory the "mother of all the neoclassical theories of capital".) He also anticipated the principle of marginal utility. *Samuel Bailey* criticized Ricardo's cost-of-production theory of value; he thought that "the value of a good is nothing more than the valuation given to it by economic agents, and that, as a consequence, 'value' only denotes an effect in the mind". *Hermann Heinrich Gossen* shared Bailey's preoccupation with utility:

> He formulated two laws that still today form the basis of the neoclassical theory of consumer behavior. The first law establishes the principle of decreasing marginal utility: the pleasure obtained from a good decreases as the amount consumed increases until, eventually, satiety is reached. The second law is more important. It states that the individual will choose to demand the various goods in such proportions that the satisfactions they give him are equal at the moment at which he stops consuming them; or, rather, that the individual will continue to exchange two goods until the values of the last units he possesses of them become equal. ....Gossen had in mind what today is known as the theorem of equality of the weighted marginal utilities.

There were many other forerunners of neoclassical theory.

John Stuart Mill. His goal being mainly to clarify and modernize established theory, he wasn't extremely original. He agreed with Ricardo's theory of rent (viz., that rent is due to differences in fertility). He accepted Malthus's population theory and considered the law of diminishing returns "the most important proposition in political economy". He also adopted Senior's "abstinence" theory of profit, while at the same time recognizing that profit is due to the surplus produced by labor. As for wages: he held a "wages-fund" theory, according to which capitalists, through their abstinence, stockpile money for wages. In fact, "capital itself is nothing else but the wages fund set aside in preceding periods in order to sustain the workers who produce the means of production". Since the size of the wages fund is at any given moment predetermined

[1] See Marx's footnote in *Capital*: '....In the "Letters on the Factory Act," [Senior] makes the whole net gains including "profit" and "interest," and even "something more," depend upon a single unpaid hour's work of the labourer. [See the section in *Capital* called 'Senior's "Last Hour"'.] One year previously, in his "Outlines of Political Economy," written for the instruction of Oxford students and cultivated Philistines, he had also "discovered, in opposition to Ricardo's determination of value by labour, that profit is derived from the labour of the capitalist, and interest from his asceticism," in other words, from his "abstinence." The dodge was an old one, but the word "abstinence" was new....'

by the amount of capital accumulated for wage payments, the level of wages depends on the number of workers employed: the more there are, the less will their average wage be. This idea has quite a few implications that I won't go into. (Mill eventually decided he was wrong.) He held a cost-of-production theory of value. And he believed in Say's Law. And he agreed with his colleagues that the ultimate future of the economy lay in stagnation, because "As the population increased, the cost of the means of subsistence would gradually rise. With this rise would come the need for higher real wages and such rises could be achieved only at the expense of profits. As the rate of profits declined, a point would come when further new investment would be unprofitable and at this point progress would cease." I'm tired of writing these short summaries.

Children who like to point to things and say, "What's this called? What's that called?" Verbally inclined minds. But the principle is operative in all children. Higher mental capacities (human, linguistic) emerging vis-à-vis lower mental capacities (animal, pictorial-reflexive). Need to assimilate, get comfortable, 'accustomed to the situation', to feel free and in control, able to 'play' with the situation, to be uninhibited by something external to the self—'in opposition' to the self, because foreign and strange—and the self arises through "verbal gestures" in society (gestures that force the speaker to respond to himself as the listener responds to him, because they both hear the same thing, the same sounds, in the same way; and so the speaker necessarily experiences himself (*originally* through these so-called gestures, later also through introspection) as an other, thus allowing for his sense of self) and is therefore a fundamentally linguistic affair, in its very essence and origin, and so it makes sense that the child's need to assimilate the environment would manifest itself through language. In any case, there's no other way to 'take up into the self' a foreign object than by naming it—except maybe by simply encountering it again and again, or by studying it or destroying it—or, I suppose, by *doing* something with it, *using* it—so I guess there *are* quite a few other ways—but naming it is the easiest and most efficient. Thinkers, by the way, are evidently the people who most desire to assimilate the world, attain power over it, impose themselves on it by remaking it in thought. This isn't necessarily praiseworthy; all it means is that they feel confused more often than other people, and so have to do a little extra work to reach the desired state of play, or harmony with the environment. (As I said earlier, serious thought can itself be considered a form of play, but it's really only *half*-play. *Half*-freedom. Phenomenologically, it may be comparable to the child's consciousness when he says "What's that called?", except that it's both more unpleasant and more satisfying, because more creative. Like play (which is always creative), there's an element of 'for-its-own-sake', an element of pleasure; unlike play, there's an element of restlessness and displeasure, which one wants to conquer in order to reach the state of harmony- or equilibrium-with-the-environment that is implicit in play.)

Monday, August 7

I'm skipping ahead to the marginalists. Later I'll pick up where I left off.

The neoclassical system. "One characteristic of the new system was the disappearance of interest in economic growth, the great theme of the economic theories of Smith, Ricardo, Marx, and all the classical economists. Attention, instead, was focused on the problem of the allocation of *given* resources. ....The central argument of the theoretical research in this period was the study of a static equilibrium system." The revolutionary aspect of the system lay not in the argument that the prices of goods are determined by utility (since this idea had been formulated much earlier), but in the principle that "human behavior is exclusively reducible to rational calculation aimed at the maximization of utility". Marginalists considered this principle universally valid. (That is, they were vulgar Benthamite utilitarians.) Since the economic agents had to be capable of making rational decisions to maximize utility and profit, the collective agents—social classes and political groups—that the mercantilists and classical economists had placed at the center of their systems disappeared in favor of decision-making units like households and firms. (Marginalism, therefore, served useful ideological purposes, in that it deflected attention from class conflict.) Also, economic laws attained the status of natural laws, comparable to laws in physics, universally valid because of the eternal

nature of the problem posed by neoclassicism, viz., that of scarcity. "Thus, while individualistic reductionism had led to the elimination of social classes, the anti-historicist reduction led to the elimination of social relations—which obviously meant that the study of their change also lost importance." Adding yet another idiocy into the mix, marginalists substituted a subjective theory of value for an objective one; they argued that all values are individual and subjective.

> The principle of subjectivity implies that a value is such because somebody has chosen it as an end; whereas the principle of individuality postulates that there must be a particular individual to which that end can be attributed. In the opposite conception, that of objective value, values exist independently of individual choices. The individual can accept or reject values but he is not able to establish their cogency. An important consequence of the neoclassical approach in regard to the question of value is that the theory of the distribution of income becomes a special case of the theory of value, a problem of determining the prices of the services of the productive factors rather than of sharing out income among the social classes.

Lastly, the neoclassical *method* is distinctive. It's based on the "substitution principle": "in the theory of consumption, the substitutability of one basket of goods for another is assumed; in the theory of production, the substitutability of one combination of factors for another. The analysis is carried out in terms of the alternative possibilities among which the subjects, both consumers and producers, can choose. And the objective is the same: to search for the conditions under which the optimal alternative is chosen."

Another way to conceptualize marginalism is to say that it adopted the opposite perspective of Ricardo vis-à-vis the Smithian theoretic dualism: whereas Ricardo had tried to free the macroeconomic element in Smith from the microeconomic, the marginalists tried to do the opposite. "Their revolution consisted in this: they freed microeconomics, understood as a theory of rational individual choices, from classical macroeconomics."

William Stanley Jevons. One of the three founders of marginalism; mentally retarded. Possibly his most impressive work was in his studies of business cycles, which he attributed to solar disturbances (sunspots). "Two explanations of this interrelation were deemed possible. Either the sunspots produced alternating waves of optimism and pessimism in businessmen, thus leading them to overexpand and overinvest, with a subsequent period of retrenchment and caution to follow, or the sunspots caused variations in agricultural productivity, which in turn produced repercussions in the industrial sector." This fruitful hypothesis has unfortunately proven difficult to test.

He was a fanatical laissez-fairean, believing that all conflicts of interest between capitalist and worker could be resolved through competition (!). "Competition would cause capital to be remunerated at the market rate of interest, while the worker would receive 'only the value that he has produced'". Hence, the natural state of a market economy is social harmony. Problem solved. (Obviously he "criticized the Ricardian theory of the inverse relationship between profits and wages as 'radically fallacious', wishing in this way to demolish the theoretical foundation of class struggle".) Not surprisingly, his idols were Malthus, Say, Senior, and Bastiat.

He finally solved the problem of value that had baffled economists since William Petty, namely by taking the bold step of ignoring it. He simply equated value with price, thus throwing the issue out the window. And then he stated categorically that "value depends entirely upon utility". He made much of the principle of marginal utility in explaining the behavior of individual consumers, and he also tried to use it in an explanation of exchange on the market. Unfortunately he didn't explain how prices are determined, instead taking them for granted. He used his concept of the increasing marginal *dis*utility of labor to explain how the amount of production of any good is determined: "Labour will be carried on until the increment of utility from any of the employments just balances the increment of pain." Okayyyyyy....? Soooooo....? (I gotta admit, I've never quite understood the significance of the concepts of marginal utility and disutility. They seem either truistic or wrong.)

Mead's concept of the generalized other is fruitful. "The organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self may be called 'the generalized other'. The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community." "It is in the form of the generalized other that the social process influences the behavior of the individuals involved in it and carrying it on, i.e., that the community exercises control over the conduct of its individual members; for it is in this form that the social process or community enters as a determining factor into the individual's thinking." The ideological mechanism of *interpellation* that Althusser talks about operates by means of the generalized other: you're molded into a subject—in both senses of the word—by being directly "addressed" by representatives of the generalized other, such as TV, politicians, movies and advertising campaigns. The power that these forces exert over our subjectivities would be impossible if we didn't unconsciously interpret them as spokes-things of the community, the generalized other. (I should make it clear that this "other" isn't the actual concrete aggregate of people in the community; it's the community as an abstract 'presence' in an individual's consciousness. It's the Eye that implicitly looks at you whenever you're experiencing the self. Its existence is a necessary condition for your adherence to morals and mores. And, in a way, it's you yourself. (*You* are the "abstract Other" I've talked about in past entries;—or, rather, this Other is one 'side' of you, implicit in your self-consciousness.) The confusing thing is that, although the generalized other is fundamentally nothing but a phenomenological construction out of your self-consciousness, 'derivatively' it can be understood as the community made into a single abstract 'actor' that confronts you and judges you, an actor with more or less well-defined attitudes. —This is all quite confusing. I doubt, though, that sorting it out would be a profitable activity.)

I wonder if the source, or meaning, of charisma is our perception that the charismatic person best represents the attitudes of the generalized other. Since we want recognition from this other, it stands to reason that we'll want recognition from the charismatic person. While I'm sure this has something to do with it, it obviously begs the question: what is it about self-confidence etc. that makes a person seem to represent the generalized other?

If I really thought about this problem I'm sure I could find an answer, but I ain't in the mood.

"In abstract thought the individual takes the attitude of the generalized other toward himself, without reference to its expression in any particular other individuals; and in concrete thought he takes that attitude insofar as it is expressed in the attitudes toward his behavior of those other individuals with whom he is involved in the given social situation or act. But only by taking the attitude of the generalized other toward himself, in one or another of these ways, can he think; for only thus can thinking—or the internalized conversation of gestures which constitutes thinking—occur."

....Actually, I think that, once again, Mead's idea is a little different from mine. Or maybe he's just confused, like me. In some passages he sees the generalized other as the social group itself, with its attitudes and behavioral patterns; at other times he seems to interpret it as our *internalization* of the social group. This internalization, moreover, has two aspects: the personality-traits and structures that are formed in us, and the phenomenological half-perception of a general, abstract other.

Of course, it goes without saying that from an analytical point of view Mead's theories leave a lot to be desired.

But I'm impressed with his discussion of play and games. He approaches these activities (which he distinguishes) from a perspective I hadn't thought of, namely by considering their contributions to the formation of selfhood. According to Mead, play means successively adopting concrete individual roles (the mother, the policeman, the Indian); since selfhood results from and implies one's taking the role of the other—the generalized other—toward oneself, play is a first step toward selfhood. Games are a second step. In games, the child has to learn rules, he has to continually take the attitudes and roles of the people he's with (so as to interact, and to understand what's going on); his role-taking is now more abstract and general than it was during play, and his sense of self is correspondingly more advanced. (He adopts roles in other parts of his life too, but focusing on games is useful for the purposes of illustration. By "adopting roles", Mead means that the individual understands himself and his "gestures" in the same way that the other person does. –Read the book if you care.)

I read an article about a middle-aged Lebanese man who had lost his wife, daughter and granddaughter in an Israeli airstrike. "Mr. Samra had been sitting with friends elsewhere. He raced to the building and frantically began to dig. He found his 5-year-old daughter, Sally, torn apart. Her torso and an arm lay separate from her legs. Another daughter, Noor, 8, was moving under the rubble. His granddaughter Lynn, not yet 2, had part of her face smashed. His wife, Alia Waabi, had died immediately." After reading an article like that you have three options on how to live the rest of your life: you can accept that these things occur but detach yourself from them; you can spend every day until you die in rage and despair, from a too-deep knowledge that John Donne's 17th Meditation expresses timeless truth; or you can emotionally detach yourself from the knowledge but devote every waking hour to fighting against war. When you remember that the article pointed out that the demolished building was the main office for the city's emergency workers, and that it was targeted because a single Hezbollah official was suspected of living there, you'll probably be tempted to choose the second option—with the emphasis on *rage*, though. Still, the only option you can choose with a good conscience is the third.

Ehud Olmert is a monster. The problem with him and most people in power is that they're bureaucrats. Bureaucrats and technocrats. Living in their bureaucratic bubble, they forget their responsibilities and let their egos seduce them into neglecting their duties or actively overseeing crimes against humanity. Like the European monarchs in the 18th century, they see politics and war as games—extremely serious games, involving clever maneuvers for the sake of power and respect. One could draw parallels with chess. The world of these people really is nothing but a stage, and they are among the most dehumanized individuals on the planet.

Tuesday, August 8

Compared to most music from the 1980s, Paul Simon's *Graceland* has aged remarkably well. It's always been one of my favorite albums. In this skeptical age, its insouciance plays well.

Léon Walras. While he was one of the originators of the concept of marginal utility, he's most famous for his theory of the general economic equilibrium. Given his assumption of perfect competition, the theory is simply common sense, i.e., a collection of trivialities.

> An economy is in a *Walrasian competitive equilibrium* when there is a set of prices such that: (1) in the each market the demand equals the supply; (2) each agent is able to buy and sell exactly what he planned to; (3) all the firms and consumers are able to exchange precisely those quantities of goods which maximize, respectively, profits and utilities.
>
> ....The markets must be interrelated so as to make the choices of all the economic subjects compatible. A subject who is unable to achieve the goal of maximizing his satisfaction (or welfare) will have excess demands for some goods and excess supplies for others. By means of exchange, the individual will use the excess supplies to eliminate the excess demands. A state of general economic equilibrium is one in which the prices are such as to allow all individuals to maximize simultaneously their own objectives, with excess demand vanishing.
>
> The model of price-formation underlying Walras's theory of exchange is one of competitive bargaining. According to this model, markets are conceptualized as *auctions*, in which there are, on the one hand, stockbrokers and, on the other, the auctioneers. [The auctioneer shouts prices; if at the shouted price there's excess demand, he'll lower the price, and if there's excess supply he'll raise the price, until supply and demand are in equilibrium.] Let us now turn to the 'Sisyphus entrepreneur'. Walras considered that a firm is in equilibrium when the profit is reduced to zero owing to the competition among entrepreneurs.... "In a state of equilibrium in production, entrepreneurs make neither profit

> nor loss", writes Walras. Profit depends on exceptional circumstances; from a theoretical point of view it must simply be ignored.

Profit, the *raison d'être* of capitalism, should be ignored. –What would Marx have thought of these economists! 'Business cycles are due to sunspots, social harmony is the natural state of the market, economic laws are eternal, profits should be ignored!'

I'm glad I Am *Not* a Walras.

These sentences got me thinking about methodology again: "Menger [supported] methodological individualism, the view that all propositions about the behavior of collective agents must be reducible to propositions about the behavior of their individual components. [According to] *holism*, the collective terms of social science represent social entities which are absolutely emergent with respect to their individual components. The classical economists and Marx, according to this point of view, were supporters of methodological holism: they believed that it is impossible to understand the operation of the economic system on the grounds of a theory of the behavior of single agents, and this would explain their use of the category of social class." While I still find it hard to conceptualize emergence, I remain convinced that it's necessary. How else can you explain business cycles? (Surely it's significant that neoclassical theory, far from explaining business cycles, doesn't even address them! —The only time it does, in the sunspot "theory", it has to look for a cause *outside* the system, a cause that acts 'individualistically' on each businessman.) Anyhow, philosophical qualms should be less important than explanatory success; and Marx's holistic theories are far more fruitful and predictively accurate than marginalism.

Carl Menger. He explained both supply and demand in terms of marginal utility. While Jevons and Walras had focused on demand, Menger wanted to show that production and demand were two sides of the same problem, both explicable through the concept of utility.

> With his theories of *imputation* and *opportunity cost*, Menger resolved costs into utility. His starting-point was a classification of goods according to their distance from final consumption: the "higher-order goods", or the "factors of production", derive their utility from the goods of the "first order" (consumer goods) they contribute to produce. This indirect utility can be *imputed* to each productive factor by taking into account the marginal contribution it makes to the production process. In this way the actual cost sustained to produce a certain good becomes an *opportunity cost*, namely the cost represented by the sacrifice of utility of those other goods that could have been obtained from the resources actually used to produce the good in question. The production costs are evaluated no longer in absolute but in relative terms, i.e. in terms of sacrificed alternatives.
>
> [Menger's theory also explains the formation and distribution of income, since] what is a cost for the firm is an income for the owners of the productive factors. Wages, profits, and rents depend, ultimately, on the demand and the prices of the consumer goods and are therefore determined by utility. In this way the distribution of income ceases to be a separate chapter in economic theory, as it was in the classical approach, and just becomes a section of the chapter dealing with theory of prices.

Answer me this: how is it possible for a thinker to spend his entire life mulling on methodology? Doesn't he ever want to branch out into *substance*? People like Popper and Rorty—not so much *thinkers* as *slowly hardening pieces of clay*. 'Hurry up and mold it before it gets dry! It can't change its shape afterwards!' Even *philosophy* as a lifelong pursuit is too narrow! I have to go from psychology to economics to history to anthropology to poetry just to stay interested.

By the age of thirty I'll have surpassed Nietzsche in the number of fruitful thoughts I've had. [That's probably a little too ambitious, Chris.] This isn't a *goal* of mine, something I think about in my spare time—'I'm almost there! Just a few more thoughts to go!'—(in fact, I hadn't thought of it before now); it's simply a consequence of the roving character of my mind. 'Live rovingly or die!' is my mind's motto. I've given

up competition in favor of curiosity.

Mead's doctrine of the "I" and the "me" is obscure. It doesn't seem very valuable.

the sempiternal monumental feet of his half-jointed bloodstream continue to choke my frozen atmosphere of lovely-bridled death inside the strain of happiness on a star shooting towards Mercury and dripping hail all across the icy pathways of space and time dreadfully empty and cold into my dampened soul which hovers faithlessly in the air underneath God's epic feet wingèd and spritely having sex too far deeply into the moon of the darkness of my eyes and pupils undilated into the flower-like languor of time and eternity stretched out from here to there and in the center of black holes there are worms itching my testicles growing sac-like into elephants dragging the trunks of giant penises through the sterile dirt in rivulets into psyches of marginalism crying out for salvation from homo economicus travestied masterfully by runts in theoretic-pigsties rutting with themselves begging to be slaughtered for their bacon how unfertile though they are as willow-down floating down the breeze above the stream into my open mouth with flies buzzing nearby around the sunflower dotted with the foul stench of sunflower seeds strewn about stamping on the ground killed by moles burrowing blindly poor moles swallowed snakewonder jiltedthroats poisonedapples jampacked gulletfrenzy

(mostly stream of my consciousness, little forethought)

New Life

Life had a simplicity before I met you,
darling,
a simplicity I loathed yet
loved.
Life could be counted on
to give me Cheerios in the morning and
insomnia at night,
to take me to class day in and day out,
to be full of highway-noise and simple wallpaper,
big smiles and pleasant pleasantries and sameness.
Life was the hours of idleness, the
cockroach on the wall,
the cut while shaving in a fogged-up mirror,
the daily muscle-fatigue in the gym
for the sake of girls who never cared.
Life was a pleasant blur, and I was a tin man.
Now everything has changed.

I love you.

Wednesday, August 9

The Banality of Evil? What a discovery, Hannah. Welcome to the modern world. –Well, almost. You still have one foot in the Middle Ages, since you think "evil" exists.

At the library I got Joseph Smith's *The United States and Latin America: A History of American Diplomacy, 1776 – 2000,* A. H. Johnson's *Whitehead's Theory of Reality,* selections from Kierkegaard's journals, and volume one of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. I was going to get books by analytic philosophers until I realized that mutual masturbation doesn't interest me right now.

Quine, Rorty, Davidson, Dennett, Sellars, Putnam, Armstrong, Searle, Lewis, *et hoc genus omne* =

malleable minds that have been successfully processed through the "Ph.D. mills".

I bought the stereo-system I mentioned. For twenty dollars, it's awesome.

"Toward the beginning of the eighteenth century, there emerged a political, economic, and technical incitement to talk about sex. And not so much in the form of a general theory of sexuality as in the form of analysis, stocktaking, classification, and specification, of quantitative or causal studies. This need to take sex 'into account', to pronounce a discourse on sex...." It had never occurred to me that the phrase 'take into account' comes from the economic meaning of 'accounting', but obviously it does. Marxism corroborated yet again!

Vikram's sister is married and has two children, a boy (two and a half years) and a girl. The girl likes to play chess and the boy watches her sometimes, so he knows what the pieces are. As his mother was bathing him one day he pointed to his penis and said, "Mom, look, I have a bishop!"

It occurs to me that young children think of similarities between objects as identities. They have a hard time distinguishing the two. "Daddy's vulva has something funny in it!" "Mom, I have a bishop!" This makes sense; at that age their understanding of the difference between self and other is similarly immature. Their cognitive abilities evolve at the same pace as their psychological/emotional knowledge. Another interesting fact is that most adults exhibit a comparable naïveté regarding the distinction between similarity and identity, and correlation and causation. They do have more discernment than the child, but only up to a point.

Thursday, August 10

Whitehead's was a silly and pointless philosophy. Or so it seems from Johnson's terrible book.

with a single glance
into my stunned, frozen eyes,
or a light caress,
she gently plucks the worn strings
of this tired violin-soul

drifting tufts of wheat
through shy gusts of evening wind
along the cool beach....
as the waves lap at my feet
I hear tufts of air passing

computer-powered
I sit here robotically
day in and day out,
airplanes roaring overhead
as Field's nocturnes console me....

death-defying love
enveloping one's little
space upon this earth,
all-consuming blessedness—
that is what I'll never have

the Adagio,
a waltz wailed by violins
in loving despair—
I could dance this dance of death
in terrible ecstasy

smiling at the child
giggling pink life-bubbles
naïvely to me;
they all pop and pass me by,
but I am happy for her

Tanka. "Danke, tanka!"

Saturday, August 12

Foucault's book is interesting but not excellent. The theme running through it is opposition to a "straw man" argument, namely that for the last few centuries sex has been repressed, mainly for the sake of preventing society's labor capacity from "dissipating itself in pleasurable pursuits". What a crude functionalist position! *Obviously* it's a simplification, desperately in need of elaboration and supplementation. But Foucault's book itself contains plenty of simplistic hypotheses. Moreover, he constantly finds himself compelled to admit, without saying so, that the "repressive hypothesis" is partly, if not wholly, true. For instance, he repeatedly acknowledges that after the sixteenth century, sexual prohibitions were severe, and propriety demanded that one maintain a certain silence about sex, and so on. More importantly, "the multiplication of discourses concerning sex" which took place in "the field of exercise of power itself"—the "institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; [the] determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause *it* to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail" (he discusses at length the significance of the confessional, and of the new theoretic discourses concerning women's sexuality, childhood onanism, population control, sexual perversities like homosexuality and sodomy, etc. etc.)—this "steady proliferation of discourses", which demanded that individuals and families monitor themselves, discipline themselves, divert their sexual energies into normal reproductive functions, surely fostered a tremendous anxiety about sexuality. Whether the anxiety was caused by enforced silence/censorship/prohibitions (which Foucault denies) or by excessive "multiplication of discourses" (which Foucault affirms) seems less important than the fact that there *was* this anxiety, this "repression" (which he seems to deny). (Anyway, the anxiety was obviously caused by *both* the silence/prohibitions and the discourses. The two went hand-in-hand: had there not been so many discourses there wouldn't have been so many prohibitions, and vice versa.) No doubt Foucault is mostly right in his history of the "*scientia sexualis*" that overtook Europe with the onset of capitalism; but, if anything, his history *supports* the "repressive hypothesis"—or the "anxiety hypothesis", as I'd prefer to call it, since the word 'repression' has overtones of silence.

Still, there has been and still is a shroud of silence concerning sex, despite what Foucault says in the last pages of his book. The "proliferation of discourses" doesn't negate the fact that it ain't *easy* to get sex—that most people (especially women) are still uncomfortable talking about it, that women tend to consider it a shameful secret (whence—partly—their insecurities), that coquettish sexual games which lead nowhere are ubiquitous in our civilization. There's far more sexual frustration and anxiety in the West than in the remaining primitive societies (not to mention extinct prehistoric societies). As for Foucault's idea that "sex" is simply a historical fabrication, an "imaginary element" that's subordinate to sexuality and

power-relations: it's perverse. "The theory [that there is such a thing as sex] performed a certain number of functions that made it indispensable. First, the notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning, a secret to be discovered everywhere: sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signified." (Yes, there we go again with the poststructuralist obsession with signifier/signified.) First of all, I fail to see how the unity thus constructed is "artificial", and in any case, Foucault hasn't argued for his claim. Second, this passage hints at the favorite—fallacy-saturated—method of postmodernists, which runs through Foucault's book as a whole: to argue that because a certain position has a history and serves some function or other, it isn't true. This conclusion is never stated explicitly, since it's absurd, but the methods and rhetorical devices peculiar to postmodernists tend to get their force from the implicit appeal to that argument. Foucault, Rorty, Derrida and all the others seem to think that by focusing attention on the process of philosophical creation—the vagaries and vicissitudes of it—and on a philosophy's uses to a given power-structure, they can invalidate the philosophy itself. That just ain't so. At most, it encourages the philosophy's defenders to be extra-rigorous in their defense.

At the MoPIRG party last night I read part of Barbara Ehrenreich's book *Nickel and Dimed*, which is a record of her experiences in the lower class. For months she was an undercover investigator of conditions at low-paying jobs (waitressing, Wal-Marting, cleaning-ladying); she wanted to see what life is like for the "other half". Turns out, it sucks. It really, really sucks. The book is eye-opening; you should read it. Be prepared to get angry, though.

Increasingly I fail to see the point of most endeavors in the social sciences and humanities, especially history and philosophy. Rarely do they have practical effects; they're just attempts to allay curiosity. People sitting in their ivory towers, theorizing for no apparent reason.... How idle theory is! On the other hand, why should practical applications be the be-all and end-all of human pursuits? Can't intellectual stimulation be considered respectable for its own sake? "No, for the sake of self-cultivation!" you'll say, quoting me. Fine. But then ultimately we aren't theorizing for the sake of *truth*, as (during the activity itself) we think we are. So there's self-delusion.

I could continue, but that would be—pointless.

Alfred Marshall. "The method of partial-equilibrium analysis was his great invention and personal contribution to economics." It involves confining the analysis to a particular commodity produced by the average firm in an industry small enough to leave the rest of the economy unaffected by changes in output. (I.e., the prices of other commodities are assumed to be constant.) Walras and Marshall differed in how they conceptualized perfect competition (the notion of which, by the way, is attributed originally to *Cournot*).

> In the Walrasian conceptualization, the agent in perfect competition is a price-taker: he considers the prices as given and not capable of being directly influenced by his own behavior. Marshall, on the other hand, believed that a perfectly competitive market is one in which a large number of agents operate; each has objectives which conflict with those of the others, and will try to pursue them without entering into coalitions or blocs and without using special bargaining powers. Marshall's 'perfect competition' does not presuppose that each agent takes the prices of goods as given, nor that the firms are identical (even though they must be 'similar'). The small differences among firms play, in Marshall's system, the same role as that of the genetic variations in Darwinian theory.

Marshall is the guy who made famous the demand and supply "scissors". In the very short-run, price is set by the level of demand because supply is perfectly inelastic. In the long run, though, value comes close to the cost of production, as the classical school thought, because supply approaches perfect elasticity.

Marshall recognized that there were forces acting to increase the size of firms. They were of two

kinds: internal economies and external economies. The former include efficiencies associated with large-scale production, mass advertising and so on. The latter result from the expansion of the relevant industry or from economies experienced by supplying industries. He attributed business cycles to the mismanagement of money and credit. He thought they were exceptional; the normal state of the economy approximates equilibrium. He believed in the quantity theory of money. All in all, his importance is that he systematized and popularized neoclassical thought—and communicated a few important insights in the process.

Arthur Pigou. Marshall's student. He was a welfare economist, which means that he acknowledged, with Marshall, the existence of market failures and thought that governmental intervention could correct them. Interpersonal comparisons of utility, he thought, are possible, and he based his theories on this Benthamite assumption. He distinguished between the private costs and the social costs of the production and sale of a commodity: the former are those borne by the producer, the latter those borne by the society. The problem is that social costs are sometimes greater than private costs. (For example, smoke from a factory is a social cost.) Whenever this is the case, the government should intervene. Taxes and subsidies are desirable if they encourage industries with increasing returns to become larger and discourage industries with decreasing returns from becoming larger. However, since Pigou thought (with Say) that savings are all channeled automatically into investment, he warned against taxes that might threaten savings, such as property, estate, and progressive income taxes. Redistributions of income are also risky, in that they might diminish incentives for investment and thus hamper economic growth. In general, "the output of the economy is maximized when private net product and social net product are equal, and costs are best allocated when marginal private cost equals marginal social cost". (Whatever that means.)

Sunday, August 13

Going home for a week.

Mellow. Looked at pics of Rachel McAdams online and now have a crush on her. That damn tender mood where you want to do nothing but sit with a girl while listening to music. (Paul Simon's "Homeless" is playing right now.) It's amazing how hard it is to meet people in this world.

Another thing: I love the female voice. Love it love it love it. "Of all the arrows in Cupid's quiver...."

Monday, August 14

I finished *The Great Gatsby*. *C'est un roman magnifique.* One of my favorites. A masterpiece that's also a page-turner! Who'd have thought! I want to write about it like I did with Marquez's book, but I'm tired after the trip home and then to Bob and Betty's. I think I'll read critical essays and then write my own.

2046 succeeds in expressing "Casta Diva" cinematically. I want to express it in writing. I want to write a story that evokes a casta-divan mood.

Detachment

Drippingly rain cuts the dirt
darkening it dissolving it
running it off into the splashed streets
sadly beneath absurd rubber tires
and the sky is white with the passed storm
and I am white with detachment

The Lento from Dvořák's "Spring" quartet.

Sublimity

To think that all this pain is for the sake
Of nothing but a succulent vagina!
How I do flatter those ugly little things!
And why?! These poems, these feelings, these white thoughts!
I'd feel ashamed were't not that—women want *cocks*!

Memory

The purple trails of my sluggish tears,
streaks to my chin,
red-faced bursts of burnt flowers in my eyes—
my lemon-stung eyes cry for you, darling.
Acid visions blurring; love-stained spring dresses twirling,
hair-twined daisies spinning, air perfumed with feminine laughter
fresh as the dew-scented sun.
The warm coconut-milk of your feet spills gently
onto the trampled daisies, which drink it up like flowers.
I want to see you, darling, once more, before you
leave—but you have left. I left your funeral
because I heard you talking to me, quietly like
the drumming rain. And in the shade
I saw you, a raspberry I wanted to pick,
to ingest and live warmly forever in your eyes
—they were blue like sapphire-berries and I
loved them.
(More lavender bursts of memory.)
Picnicking under apple trees,
pears redolent of lovemaking in apple-strewn meadows,
lips and lips kissing earth-ground blanket
naked as the clear sky,
flushed with cheeks breathless in their hot love
and desire ripe as female breasts.
Soft and comfortable your lap like a bed of honeysuckle.
No rain, no sorrow, no regret was there....
no tears and there was no time.

The 4th movement of Mahler's 5th symphony. And Schumann's Romance Op. 28 No. 2.

Wednesday, August 16

Anti-Comte.— Polytheism is more civilized than monotheism. Egypt, Rome, Greece and the other polytheistic civilizations never fought wars for the sake of religion, as Christians, Muslims and Jews have. Instead they fought for the more sensible motive of acquiring territory and wealth. They lacked the moralistic fanaticism of the Judaic tradition, probably because (*a*) it's hard to associate a single morality with a heterogeneous community of gods and (*b*) these gods, perpetually misbehaving, aren't great role-models, as are Allah and YHWH and Jesus Christ. They're reflections of humanity and its weaknesses, and

so to fight for the sake of spreading their creeds would be senseless. Polytheism is therefore more humanistic, rational, life-affirming and—ironically—peaceful than monotheism.

3:00 a.m. While lying in bed waiting for sleep (usually if I try to compose a short poem I fall asleep faster) I wondered what I was going to do with my life. Teach philosophy?? I've never been able to see my interest in philosophy going beyond the level of a hobby. To adopt a career teaching it seems impossible. And then suddenly I had an epiphany: I'll study politics. Something related to politics. Maybe international relations. I'll finish my UMSL degree and then put philosophy behind me. Living a life of philosophy would be idiotic: philosophy's dead and the world is in crisis. I can't revolve around myself. I have to try to make the world an easier place to live in. Fighting conservatism would be more satisfying than teaching philosophy. Besides, studying international relations (or whatever) would give me a broad array of possible career-paths. And it would give me opportunities to actually *take part* in the world.

The book on Latin America had a hand in this.

Thursday, August 17

Also, it'll give me an excuse to read economics, history, sociology and politics. It'll be a way to organize and justify my empirical interests. I'll always read philosophy, literature and psychology for their own sake—and write them too—and transmit whatever insights I have to posterity, but it's harder to justify economics and political history as hobbies, since they're preeminently practical. If I'm going to study them I want to have an immediate and practical pay-off.

In other words, having a career in international relations would be not only spiritually but intellectually satisfying, for two reasons: it would help me impose order on my interests, and it would allow me to indulge my interests without a bad conscience. For example, suddenly I'm motivated to do what I've wanted to but haven't been able to justify to myself: finish reading Howard Zinn's book. And totally immerse myself in history.

Sunday, August 20

Reading *The Affluent Society.*

Wednesday, August 23

Reading *Necessary Truth: A Book of Readings* on the *a priori* and the analytic-synthetic distinction. I might write my thesis on this stuff.

I ought to have written a book by now. Any kind of book. I'm 25!

Here's my dilemma: on one hand, I'm interested in pure theory (in all areas) but deplore its practical irrelevance; on the other hand, I'd like to work for concrete solutions to real problems but deplore the corresponding lack of intellectual stimulation.

I'm taking Ethical Theory (text: *Moral Discourse & Practice*, edited by Darwall, Gibbard and Railton), Philosophy of Language (supplementary text: *Philosophy of Language: a contemporary introduction*, by William Lycan), and Philosophy of Science (*Philosophy of Natural Science*, by Hempel, and the anthology *Scientific Inquiry*, edited by Robert Klee). I'm TAing two classes.

I will say this about Moore: he's easy to read. Also, the hyperbole in my statement "G. E. Moore, of course, was barely a thinker at all" was a little *too* hyperbolic. He had a certain meek originality, a weak forcefulness of thought.

I'm worried that my journal will be destroyed in the nuclear war.

Sunday, August 27

At Jason's party last night I drank too much, got a little sick. Around 3:00, he, his roommate and I went to some creepy guy's apartment and snorted coke. Four or five lines each. It felt like an extreme version of Ritalin and I wasn't entirely a fan. Made me jittery, sobered me up right away and gave me more self-confidence/carefreeness. But coming down from it wasn't pleasant; it took a few hours, during which I was very hungry but not at all, very tired but not at all, and had that annoying jittery feeling in my chest. I doubt I'll do coke again. Drugs aren't worth it—except insofar as they teach you to appreciate being happy and healthy after they wear off.

Courtship is such a ludicrous hassle. I'm courting a Chinese girl named Lin I met two days ago. Lovely sweet girl. Our conversations are fun and all, but there's no getting away from the constant game of manipulation. Even when I'm being perfectly natural and myself, I'm being manipulative. I always have to anticipate her reactions, judge how best to make a good impression, generalize from experience with other girls, make her think I like her but not too much, be diplomatic but not too much....

Here's one of the many parallels between Marxism and Meadism: "Human society, we have insisted, does not merely stamp the pattern of its organized social behavior upon any one of its individual members, so that this pattern becomes likewise the pattern of the individual's self; it also, at the same time, gives him a mind, as the means or ability of consciously conversing with himself in terms of the social attitudes which constitute the structure of his self and which embody the pattern of human society's organized behavior as reflected in that structure. And his mind enables him in turn to stamp the pattern of his further developing self (further developing through his mental activity) upon the structure or organization of human society, and thus in a degree to reconstruct and modify in terms of his self the general pattern of social or group behavior in terms of which his self was originally constituted." (*Mind, Self, and Society*, p. 263) Social being determines consciousness more than vice versa, but there is nonetheless a dialectical interaction. (If you'll ask, with Hume, how there can be a causal relationship between things that are logically implied in each other—namely, social being and consciousness—I'll answer, first, that that's a misleading way of framing the issue, and second, that Marx's claim can be made more convincing by being made more precise. The character of one's social activities influences the character of one's 'inner life' (thoughts and emotions). If, for example, there's a social hierarchy in one's society—say, a caste system, as in India—one will internalize this system and come to interpret the world and organize one's life along hierarchical lines. Only with a supreme effort can one mentally rebel against the system, and even in that case one has already been decisively influenced by it (and will, moreover, surely never be rid of certain prejudices). It's true that thoughts etc. are logically implied in activities, but since activities are not *merely* thoughts—they're also physical forms of life, unconscious internalizations of the environment, responses to the other, and so on—they can causally influence mental life in the long run, more than vice versa. This isn't just a terminological dispute, by the way. Social being is a broader concept than consciousness: it includes societal activities, structures, institutions and patterns, and, to an extent, the ways they react upon the individual's psyche. Therefore, if social being can be structured differently than in capitalism, consciousness can be different than it is in capitalism—and with a different consciousness will follow different ways of 'being social', which will themselves further influence consciousness, etc. *ad infinitum*.)

Gone are the days when a thinker could write a book that would have an impact on society.
Unfortunately I still crave fame.

Wednesday, August 30

In the last week my historical consciousness has become stronger than ever and I feel like I've lost my ideals. I can't get myself to do anything, because I know how transient and meager it would be. I've lost my curiosity too. You could say I'm in a kind of despair.

(A person who wants greatness won't settle for anything less, and sometimes ends up doing nothing.)

I'm leaning towards philosophy again. I thrive on ideas, not on empirical (political or economic) research.

I plan to read a shitload about the philosophy of language this semester so that my final paper can be of some value.

Monday, September 4

Got Searle's anthology *The Philosophy of Language*, A. P. Martinich's anthology of the same name, Juan Roederer's *The Physics and Psychophysics of Music: An Introduction*, Peter Isard's *Globalization and the International Financial System: What's Wrong and What Can Be Done*, and Downing Thomas's *Music and the Origins of Language* (a study of Enlightenment thought). (I actually wrote 'Doubting Thomas' first, without knowing it.)

I'm finally writing a book that will sum up all my 'wisdom.' This time I won't quit. I'm going to get this thing published.

Tuesday, September 12

The unfortunate thing is that I can never stand to reread anything I've written.

Wednesday, November 8

I think I might actually end up being *somewhat proud* of this book!

[Deleted entry.]

Sunday, February 18

Wow, I was about to complain about people again, having forgotten that my last entry had been the same kind of thing. Damn. But it's true: I can't stand ordinary life. Ordinary people are fine in small doses, but if you live with them it sucks. There's nothing *to* them. They're fucking robots. If only I could meet a girl I could read poetry with!—or read my poetry to, or discuss philosophy with, or just sympathize with.

Monday, February 19

Fuck this shit. Fuck the world, fuck life, fuck ambitions. Fuck everything and everyone. Fuck friends too, friends are shits, little fucking dishonest selfish shits. Fuck television, fuck the internet, I'm

sick of fucking relying on email to stay interested in life, I'm sick of fucking jerking off every night to porn, […]. Fuck drugs, fuck hopes, fuck writing, fuck poems, fuck Yahoo Personals and the bitches who use it, fuck philosophy above all, fuck this whole goddamned world and every piece of shit in it. Except music. Music is the one thing I've never cursed and never will curse, I couldn't fucking live without music.

The older I get, the harder it is for me to cope with the fact that there are rapes, murders, tortures going on somewhere every minute of every day. And starvation, disease, suffering of all kinds. Sometimes I just sit here and imagine it. And I can't do anything about it. Except—donate money. I'm going to start doing that more (more than my measly MoPIRG donations). I'm starting with the 'sponsoring a child' thing—in Uganda, a little girl named Sylvia.

It's terrible to be powerless as the likes of George Bush rule the world.

Saturday, February 24

Heavenly love

Ribbons of eroding moss sinking from the sky
down upon white lily-petals of cloud,
snowy ferns rainbow-flowing,
rain-feathers brushing my warm cheek to your blushing
lips.
Rushing, snow-melting streams of woman's body
meet my open soul, drench my open heart,
pool in my palms (cupped openly) from which I sip
as breathing wintry air.
Your soul-puddle ripples in my hands.
I drink you, drink your liquid hair, your liquid eyes,
your snowy breasts and moss-soft skin,
and slowly together we dissipate skyward—
earth-memories evaporating.

Eternal streams of stars engulf the night, swallow
the world; there we hover blackly, stilly.
There we hover.

Monday, February 26

Reading P. F. Strawson's book *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. (The only course I'm taking this semester is on Kant. Also I'm writing a thesis on the mind-body problem; my advisor is a douchebag Gen-Xer functionalist with idiotic scorn for Kant named Gualtiero Piccinini—I can't stand him with his academic smugness, so I inserted a few jabs at his functionalist "lack of common sense" and his idols Dennett and Armstrong *et hoc genus omne* in the rough draft I gave him four days ago. The result was that he wrote this:

> I've read your paper. I'm sorry to say that it is not what you were supposed to do. The reason why I asked you to write an outline is precisely to avoid this kind of situation.

> The main problem is, I do not detect any significant original contribution made by your paper. It reads as a very basic, and not entirely competent, discussion of emergence and the mind-body problem, with a few (mostly unsupported) opinions expressed here and there. You like to refer to "this age of philosophical shallowness", but this piece is considerably shallower than the work of the authors you criticize.
>
> You said you were going to criticize the O'Connor model of emergence on the grounds of an elaboration of Kim's arguments. That seemed like an entirely worthwhile and feasible project. Now you say that you are no longer interested in that, but you haven't replaced that with a different project. You have simply resorted to expressing your opinions about a wide range of subjects, without offering any in-depth discussions or arguments.
>
> Before we discuss how to proceed, perhaps I should ask you again whether you actually want to write a real philosophy M.A. thesis. If not, we shouldn't waste each other's time. If yes, we need to go back to searching for a suitable project. If you still want to work on emergence, we can talk about whether there is anything salvageable in this paper.
>
> Best,
> Gualtiero

So then I wrote this:

> Yeah, I had a feeling you wouldn't like it, since you seem to have functionalist sympathies. Unfortunately you appear to have read it quite uncritically - perhaps just skimmed it - given that you've written off the whole thing without paying any attention to its arguments. Admittedly, the arguments can be rather dense at times, such that if one doesn't pore over them it may seem as if nothing is being expressed at all; nevertheless, that's wrong.
>
> Actually, it's mind-boggling to me that you think there are no arguments in the paper. Did you even read it? The whole point of having a thesis advisor is presumably to work with someone who will critically examine one's arguments and suggest improvements; instead, you sweepingly throw them all aside - ad hominemly label them "opinions", as if that itself constitutes a philosophical argument - and triumphantly declare that I have to start all over again - without giving any indication whatsoever that you have engaged with the paper or adhered to the "principle of charity" that academics always preach to their students but rarely respect themselves.
>
> Perhaps you take too personally my contempt for the contemporary verbose perverseness that passes for philosophy. So I'll reassure you that I fully respect you and your fellow academics. You're doing your thing as best you know how. But what I dislike is the smugness that is manifested in the injunction to "do it my way or not at all!" - to be as tedious and unproductive as other philosophers these days. It strikes me as unfair that you should penalize me for being 'existentially committed' to philosophy (and hence writing in a somewhat personal and dense style) rather than treating it as a verbal game, like most people do. My writings are more intuitive than discursive, which is probably why professors have trouble understanding them. (And yes, *that* is what is at issue here, much as you may deny it.)
>
> On the other hand, I suppose you're right, insofar as you're the voice of the system (which demands that one play the academic game, go through the right channels and so on): it does seem as if no "committee" would approve of my paper. It isn't tedious enough or derivative

> enough. (Its original topic, which you so loved, was totally derivative: it consisted of applying some other thinker's arguments to another person's paper. How would *that* permit of originality and creativity on my part? It would be just a meaningless little game that neither contributed to knowledge nor assuaged my philosophical curiosity.)
>
> Well, I guess I'm fighting a losing battle here. You're right: I do have to write a piece of derivative crap in order to complete this Master's program. I tried that and it didn't work, but now that I appreciate your narrow-mindedness I'll try it again. So....back to the drawing-board, I guess. This time I'll make a supreme effort to adhere to my original topic, i.e., to be as uninteresting as possible. I won't fail you this time, I promise. I'll have an outline within a week.
>
> Best,
> Chris

That was fun.) So far it isn't bad—quite illuminating at times—but some of Strawson's criticisms of Kant are asinine. It enrages me when he makes objections I disagree with, when he casually dismisses whole portions of the *Critique*. There are problems—'incoherencies'—involved in the idea of the noumenon, but Strawson attacks other things that, as far as I can see, don't deserve to be attacked. Anyway, there isn't the slightest possibility I'll read the whole book. Skipping ahead, I see that most of it consists of belabored masturbation.

By the way, I wrote my book and sent queries to agents and no one has responded, so now I'm hoping to build up credentials by being published in journals. For three weeks I've been submitting poems to magazines across the country.

Also reading volume one of H. J. Paton's commentary on *Kant's Metaphysic of Experience*. Excellent.

Sometimes I think that *stupidity* is the main source of the world's ills. Mere stupidity. Hitler was *stupid*, because prejudice is stupid. Obsession with making endless amounts of money is just plain senseless. Fanaticism is foolish, no critical thinker can be a fanatic. Radical thinkers like Marx are fond of saying it isn't the people themselves but the *system* that is at fault; however, if the people weren't morons, the system couldn't manipulate them in the ways it does. Most conformism is made possible by a lack of critical thought.

That interpretation is simplistic, though.

But just to illustrate the level of stupidity that is overtaking the world (as if it needed illustrating): there's a new gameshow on Fox (where else??) called "Are you smarter than a fifth-grader?", in which middle-aged contestants have to answer questions like "What is a pronoun?" –Ugh, am I really a citizen of this country??

Tuesday, February 27

You're curious about the paper, aren't you? Okay, here it is, as far as I got before the bureaucrat nixed the project. [I've edited it a little and added a pat conclusion.]

Emergentism, a Partial Solution to the Mind-Body Problem

The mind-body problem—which Jaegwon Kim characterizes as the problem of "finding a place for the mind in a world that is fundamentally physical"[1]—has been puzzled over for centuries, and is unlikely

[1] Quoted in Barbara Montero, "Post-Physicalism," *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2001): pp. 61-80.

to be resolved any time soon. The reason is that apparently every possible solution has inadequacies. Anyone familiar with the philosophical literature is aware of all the problems with Cartesian substance dualism, reductive physicalism, eliminative materialism, behaviorism and functionalism, non-reductive physicalism and emergentism. One is tempted to agree with Colin McGinn that the cognitive apparatus of humans is intrinsically inadequate to the problem of explaining the relation between the mind and the brain.[1] How something like consciousness can emerge from something like the brain seems totally inexplicable.

I suspect that *complete* understanding of the mind-body relationship is impossible, just as it is impossible with respect to the hypotheses of quantum mechanics and general relativity. "Formally"—mathematically, conceptually—we may be able to understand the latter theories, but "intuitively" they're a mystery to us. We can't visualize the worlds they describe, worlds of eleven dimensions or multiple universes or a finite but unbounded cosmos. Our possible experience is bounded, as Kant argued; we cannot intuitively conceive of indeterministic physical structures or of space in anything but three dimensions. Similarly, understanding the exact causal relationship between the brain and consciousness may, for whatever reason, be beyond our cognitive horizons. However, it might be possible to reproduce the reality in some sort of vague conceptual sense, by means of such concepts as, e.g., emergence, downward causation, and so on. These concepts are somewhat mysterious and will probably remain so, but if we can use them in a "solution" more plausible than any alternative—perhaps by removing their apparent incoherence—then we might be justified in supposing that we have gone some distance towards understanding the mind-brain connection.

In fact, I think that some version of the emergentist approach is the only possible quasi-solution. Nothing else is remotely plausible, as I'll briefly argue below. Unfortunately, as it stands, emergentism is not yet a polished theory. This will be evident as I look at a couple of recent proposals on how to conceptualize it. I choose Roger Sperry's version as well as the version put forward by Timothy O'Connor and Hong Yu Wong in their paper "The Metaphysics of Emergence"; I have found their defenses of the theory to be fairly sophisticated.

O'Connor has criticized reductive accounts of consciousness, which propose that consciousness "really is" something else, something physical. He rightly notes that they are deeply counterintuitive. "The claim that 'token' mental states—i.e., particular, concrete mental occurrences—just are complex electrochemical events (which just are complex microphysical events) implausibly denies that there is anything distinctive about mental activity in the world."[2] Consciousness cannot be something other than *what it is*, namely thoughts, sensations, phenomenal experiences, etc.—not neurons firing. Consciousness is private, while physical, electrochemical events are (at least in principle) publicly observable.

Indeed, any theory that tries either to "eliminate" consciousness or to reduce it to something else—something public, be it physical states, behavior, functional roles, or whatever—flies in the face of incontrovertible intuitions. Despite the efforts of such sophists as Daniel Dennett[3] and Richard Rorty[4] to deny that there are qualitative, phenomenal, private or first-personal aspects to experience, it remains *intuitively* evident that mental experience has to be characterized in mental language, because it is private and qualitative. Phenomenal experience cannot be adequately described in anything but phenomenal language, and the same is true of intentional experience. No other sort of language, such as that of physics, does it justice, or is true to what we perceive.

Consider functionalism. Functionalists define (types of) mental states in terms of their functional roles, thus effectively denying the importance of the state's private features, be they phenomenal or

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[1] See Colin McGinn, "Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?," in *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, eds. Ned Block, Owen Flanagan and Güven Güzeldere (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 529–542.
[2] Timothy O'Connor and Hong Yu Wong, "The Metaphysics of Emergence," *Noûs*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (1990): p. 660.
[3] See, e.g., his article "Quining Qualia," in Block et al., *The Nature of Consciousness*, pp. 619–639.
[4] See his paper "Mind-Body Identity, Privacy, and Categories" (1965). He argues there that sensations don't exist, and that the only reason we think they do is that to eliminate talk about them from our language would be "impractical." In other words, when he feels pain he doesn't feel pain, but it's useful to talk as if he does.

intentional. In his article "What is Functionalism?", Ned Block writes that "according to functionalism, the nature of a mental state is just like the nature of an automaton state: constituted by its relations to other states and to inputs and outputs. All there is to....being in pain is that it disposes you to say 'ouch,' wonder whether you are ill, it distracts you, etc." By reducing the mental (the private) to something else, functionalists try to eliminate the mind-body problem. David Lewis, for example, writes that "The definitive characteristic of any (sort of) experience as such is its causal role, its syndrome of most typical causes and effects."[1] But he is wrong: types of consciousness cannot be defined in a non-circular way, a non-mental way. The definitive characteristic of pain is not that it tends to cause a certain behavior, but simply that it hurts. The definitive characteristic of pleasure is that it feels good. In a deep sense, *consciousness is private*, and one cannot define (or "adequately describe") the private in terms of the public. This is the essence of the "explanatory gap," the essence of the mind-body problem—which can also be called (and *should* be called, for clarity's sake) the private-public problem. Functionalists and behaviorists (and eliminative materialists, reductive physicalists, etc.) try to solve the problem by eliminating the private or reducing it in some way to the public, but they fail because there is manifestly a private realm of experience with its own *sui generis*, "first-personal" properties and features. None of the verbal legerdemain of contemporary philosophers has been able to get past that simple fact.

Frankly, I have never been able to understand how someone can be, say, a functionalist. Or a reductive physicalist. Does this person not have sensations? Is he not conscious? Is he a "philosophical zombie"? Can he not see that only *he* has the ability to perceive "from the inside" what is going on in his own mind, what thoughts and sensations he is having? To say that "*all there is* to being in pain is that it disposes you to say 'ouch'...," or that pain is *nothing but* a series of neuronal firings, is to deny that pain is qualitative and private. But this is to deny pain. –In order to recognize the falsity of functionalism (and reductive physicalism), it isn't necessary to be an expert in analytic philosophy. One needs only a bit of rational common sense.

In short, O'Connor is right that the mind-body problem cannot be solved—cannot even be *formulated*, i.e., recognized as a genuine problem—unless one has first acknowledged that mental life is irreducible to publicly observable properties, be they physical, functional, or behavioral. But by acknowledging this, one has already thrown out the majority of proposed solutions to it. (Of course, they couldn't be solutions anyway, because they amount to a denial that there is any problem at all. For if consciousness "just is," e.g., electrochemical activity, then there isn't a mind-body problem after all! That leaves it a mystery, though, as to why philosophers have thought for four hundred years that there is.) The correct theory has to be non-reductive. That leaves only substance dualism, some form of non-reductive physicalism more sophisticated than functionalism, or emergentism (which can in fact, I think, be considered a version of non-reductive physicalism).

It has long been recognized that substance dualism is problematic. The notion of two fundamentally different kinds of substances, which have nothing in common yet somehow interact, is virtually incomprehensible. Its explanatory advantages, if there are any, are far less compelling than its disadvantages. So it has rightly been discredited.

All that's left is some sort of physicalism that acknowledges the "non-physical," and in general the non-publicly observable, properties of consciousness. As I have said, this rules out functionalism. For, while functionalists admit that mental properties (such as painfulness) are not identical to physical properties (such as C-fiber stimulation), they think that the former *are* identical to *functional* properties (such as causal roles). But this cannot be true. Mental properties, like mental particulars, are private, or immediately accessible only to the consciousness that experiences them, whereas the property of fulfilling a causal role can be exhaustively analyzed and understood through public language. In other words, there is nothing it is "like" to be a cause or an effect as such, while there *is* something it is like to be in pain. Pain, then, cannot just be a cause of so-and-so and an effect of so-and-so; there is something more to it than "its syndrome of most typical causes and effects."

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[1] David Lewis, "An Argument for the Identity Theory," in his *Philosophical Papers Vol. 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

Another candidate is Donald Davidson's anomalous monism. Insofar as Davidson adopts the Spinozistic position that a mental event is simply a physical event described in mental language, and vice versa, without explaining precisely what that means and how it can be possible—how, that is, a private, mental event can be identical to a public, physical event—his monism is unsatisfactory. It is incomplete. To be plausible, a physicalist theory (such as Davidson's) has to do more than just say that a mental event is "also" a physical event. It has to give a precise account of the relation between physical (public) and mental (private) aspects.

Now, only one theory that I know of has offered such an account. That is, only one theory promises to explain *in what sense* a neural event is also a private mental event. It is the only theory that accommodates our Cartesian intuitions while explaining in what way they are wrong. In fact, if one accepts that consciousness is private (subjective, intentional, qualitative) but also that it somehow arises out of the brain (which is *not* private in the same way, but in principle publicly observable—e.g., during surgery or under the microscope), this theory is all that's left. It has to be accepted; it is the only explanation.

The theory, as I've said, is emergentism. There is more than one version of it, but common to every version, at least implicitly, is the idea that an event in consciousness can be considered from two perspectives. The first is the perspective from which neurologists consider it, namely as consisting of a series of neuronal firings and electrochemical processes. From this neurological viewpoint, what is looked at is the *aggregate*, the "series," of physical processes that "correspond to" the conscious state. The processes are atomistically "summed up," so to speak: "first *this* happens, then *this*, then *this*...." A given state of pain or pleasure or whatever is considered as being a particular series of electrochemical events.

The other perspective is *holistic*. The neural events are considered together, as mutually contributing to some "larger" state. This holistic state, the *unity* of all the events in their interactions, is precisely the conscious event.

"Holistic" interactions are ubiquitous in biology. The cell is an obvious example. Each cell is constituted by molecules and molecular processes; in a sense it can be reduced to nothing else but these molecules. And yet it is also its own entity, an entity distinct from its micro-level constituents, possessing its own causal powers. (It can interact with other cells, for example.) Holistically, all the molecular events on which it supervenes interact to produce this new thing, the cell, which has causal powers that are not just the sum of the causal powers of its constituents (considered in themselves, isolated from their cellular environment). And so the cell is *emergent*.

But what exactly does that mean? The relevant definition of "emergence" is a matter of some controversy. There is a consensus, though, that various definitions have to be distinguished from each other. In the weakest possible sense, emergence is virtually ubiquitous: wherever there is a physical structure that has properties not possessed by its "micro-level" constituents in themselves, there is emergence. The mass of an object, for instance, is not an emergent property, even in this weak sense, for it is merely the sum of the masses of its constituents. By adding up the latter, one arrives at the former. The shape of a wheel, on the other hand, is emergent, in that it depends on a specific arrangement (or set of possible arrangements) of the particles that constitute it. In this incredibly weak and uninteresting sense of emergence, everyone is an emergentist. As J.J.C. Smart, a reductionist, puts it, "in saying that a complex thing is nothing but an arrangement of its parts, I do not deny that it can do things that a mere heap or jumble of its parts could not do." "Smart admits," writes Tim Crane, "that objects can have properties and powers which their parts do not have. But this doesn't mean that these powers or properties are not reducible to the powers or properties of the parts. The very most it means is that the properties need not be reducible in the 'additive' sense."[1]

It is worth noting that even in these cases, there is, or there can be, a kind of downward causation. (The notion of downward causation—i.e., of "causal influence from the macroscopic to the microscopic levels of nature [such that] how things are at a higher level of complexity affects what happens at a lower level"[2]—is typically thought to be a defining feature of emergence.) Consider Roger Sperry's example of

[1] Tim Crane, "The Significance of Emergence," p. 8.
[2] Ibid., p. 15.

a wheel rolling down a hill.[1] The properties of the wheel broadly supervene on the properties of the molecules within the wheel, and yet the former are able to influence the latter. For, while the downward motion of the wheel doesn't cause "reconfiguration" of the wheel's molecules *relative to one another*, it does reconfigure them relative to the rest of the world. At one moment a molecule is at a particular location relative to the grass; at the next moment it is at a different location. Thus, there is a kind of downward causation: certain properties of the macro-structure determine certain ("relational") properties of the micro-structures.

The example of the biological cell is a little different. The cell is a living thing that actively plays a role in its environment, by excreting and "ingesting" molecular structures. Likewise, inside the cell are constantly occurring coordinated chemical processes. These processes are not purely random and accidental, as in the case of a non-living thing; they are tightly controlled, carefully "monitored" by means of unfathomably complex communicative mechanisms between all the molecular structures involved. The mechanisms and all the activities they regulate are ultimately caused by one factor alone: the holistic character of the system, the "web of interactions of the whole system"[2] itself. They are caused, that is, by the emergent structure (the cell) itself. This isn't efficient causation; it is something that is harder to grasp conceptually. Something like "structural" causation, in the language of the Marxist Althusser. The efficient cause of a given cellular event is, of course, some other cellular event, some micro-level event or series of events. But all these events happen only because their totality constitutes an emergent entity, a holistic system (or structure) that itself makes possible the events, by organizing them in the way they're organized. The properties of the whole, the cell, supervene on what is happening at the level of its constituents, but what is happening there is brought about through the "holistic" influence of the system, the cell.

All this is rather obvious, but it's hard to conceptualize. It reminds one of the "chicken or the egg?" dilemma. You can't have the cell without its constituents and their interactions, but you can't have their interactions without the organizing principle that is the cell. Each factor, in a way, seems to cause the other. No wonder, then, that Jaegwon Kim, in his article "Making Sense of Emergence," doubts the coherence of this reflexive variety of downward causation:

> How is it possible for the whole to causally affect its constituent parts on which its very existence and nature depend? If causation or determination is transitive, doesn't this ultimately imply a kind of self-causation, or self-determination—an apparent absurdity? It seems to me that there is reason to worry about the coherence of the whole idea.[3]

What ensures the logical possibility of this sort of downward causation is that it is not quite the kind of causation Kim has in mind in the quotation. It is not efficient (in Aristotle's sense); it is not even on the same order of causation to which the question of whether it is "transitive" can be applied. Instead, it is "structural": its causal influence is manifested through the micro-level states in (the totality of) which the holistic structure consists. Structural determination is, indeed, manifested in every cellular event. What this means is that the web-like structure of the "web of interactions" is ultimately responsible for the overall pattern of the interactions. To put the point paradoxically: the web-like structure is responsible for itself.

But not even *this* kind of emergence is the kind directly relevant to the mind-body problem. I have discussed it mainly to show that philosophers' attacks on the notion of emergence are misguided. Roger Sperry is right that emergence abounds in nature, and that it in no way contradicts the causal closure of physics or is a totally mysterious property. An emergent structure's downward causal influence occurs through the activity of the micro-constituents themselves. "Microdeterminism," writes Sperry, "is not so

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[1] See Timothy O'Connor's paper "Emergent Properties," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (1994): pp. 91–104. Cf. also Richard Campbell and Mark Bickhard, "Physicalism, Emergence and Downward Causation," p. 26, where they give a fuller treatment than I do. (http://www.lehigh.edu/~mhb0/physicalemergence.pdf.)

[2] Campbell and Bickhard, "Physicalism, Emergence and Downward Causation," p. 25.

[3] Jaegwon Kim, "Making Sense of Emergence," *Philosophical Studies* 95 (1999): p. 28.

much refuted or falsified as it is supplemented."[1] That's why physicists and biologists have rarely felt the need to invoke the concept of emergence to explain an event: physical events can be explained "reductively," so to speak, even as the reductive explanations would literally have nothing to explain were the phenomena to be explained not embedded in a holistic environment. This environment is what makes the phenomena possible. Holism, or emergence, is a *philosophically* necessary concept, though not, in most cases, a *scientifically* necessary one, inasmuch as scientists can get empirical results simply by focusing on the individual chemical and physical events through which emergence manifests itself.

To explain consciousness, however, it is necessary to invoke a stronger and more mysterious kind of emergence. The type I've been describing—the type manifested in the cell—is, I suspect, essentially what Mark Bedau has in mind in his paper "Weak Emergence," as when he writes "[emergence] involves downward causation only in the weak form created by the activity of the micro-properties that constitute structural macro-properties."[2] He contrasts his conception with O'Connor's stronger version, which he thinks is inexplicable or "magical." I'll look at O'Connor's conceptualization shortly, but first I want to explain what motivates it. That way we'll be able to understand it better, and also what's wrong with it.

First let's recall the intuitive attractiveness of dualism. "The irreducibility of conscious experience and self-determining action already commits one to a kind of dualism, a duality of physical and conscious properties."[3] But this dualism is not of the typical non-reductive physicalist sort, according to which mental features are in some unexplained way "realized in," while supervening on, physical processes. Rather, "the dualism we must accommodate is ontological."[4] We cannot just sidestep our intuitions, which are dualistic in a robustly ontological way. Functionalists and their ilk are inclined to do just that (i.e., to ignore intuitions), but the result is necessarily an unconvincing philosophy. What we have to do is find a middle way that avoids the extremes of substance dualism and reductionism of any sort, the first of which falls victim to logical puzzles and the second of which falls victim to both logical puzzles and irresistible intuitions.

In this age of philosophical shallowness, it is useful to keep in mind exactly why Descartes postulated dualism in the first place. In his *Meditations* he wrote the following:

> On the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of my body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. ....There is a great difference between the mind and the body, inasmuch as the body is by its very nature always divisible, while the mind is utterly indivisible. For when I consider the mind, or myself in so far as I am merely a thinking thing, I am unable to distinguish any parts within myself; I understand myself to be something quite single and complete. Although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, I recognize that if a foot or arm or any other part of the body is cut off, nothing has thereby been taken away from the mind....

He recognized that consciousness is partless or "non-structural," unextended, unlike the physical objects of our experience. This means that it cannot be composed of physical things, as the cell is. Instead, it has to be emergent in some way. But its "emergence" is very different from the cell's structural emergence: while the cell is indeed a new "thing" with its own emergent causal powers, it is not a new *kind* of thing. But consciousness is.

I said above that consciousness can be analyzed from two perspectives, viz. the physical and the non-physical. The former is the scientist's approach when he considers consciousness as a series of neuronal firings and other electrochemical events. His approach is the "additive" one, the atomistic, non-holistic, aggregative one. As far as he is concerned, action potentials and excreted neurotransmitters and so forth are

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[1] Quoted in O'Connor, "Emergent Properties," p. 24.
[2] Mark Bedau, "Weak Emergence" (1997), p. 3, at http://people.reed.edu/~mab/papers/weak.emergence.pdf.
[3] O'Connor, "Groundwork for an Emergentist Account of the Mental," *PCID* 2.3.1 (October 2003): p. 4.
[4] Ibid.

the building blocks of consciousness. He is not entirely wrong. For, while consciousness is not "made out of" them in the way that a cell is made out of molecules (i.e., structurally), when they interact together in a single holistic state they "produce"—or, from the holistic perspective, they *are*—a given conscious state, like pain. The *neural impulses* are not the mental state, but the holistic, emergent totality of their interactions is. This totality can and should be considered a physical phenomenon and, in a sense, a neural one. However, its privacy, and its intentional and qualitative features, distinguish it from apparently every other physical phenomenon in the universe; and this is the sense in which we are committed to dualism. Not *substance* dualism, though, because it is misleading—indeed, meaningless—to call consciousness a substance. Such terminology serves no purpose; it only propagates misunderstandings. Nevertheless, what we are confronted with is a kind of dualism, involving a phenomenon (consciousness) that can be analyzed from both physical and non-physical viewpoints, or additive and holistic viewpoints. –This is the only plausible way to conceptualize consciousness. Whatever difficulties it gives rise to, the greater difficulties of every conceivable alternative make the emergentist approach the most appealing.

No doubt Colin McGinn is right when he says that, insofar as emergentism doesn't conceptually explain how the brain can give rise to consciousness, it is unsatisfactory. It leaves the mystery of how the subjective can possibly come from the objective mysterious. No amount of philosophical elaboration on the theses of emergentism can overcome that fact. It does no good, for example, to adopt Roger Sperry's line:

> Instead of following the usual approaches that tried to inject conscious effects into the already established chain of microcausation, the logical impasse was resolved by leaving the microcausation intact but embedding it within higher brain-processes having subjective properties with their own higher-level type of causation, and by which the embedded micro-events are thereafter controlled.
>
> ....[E]xcitation of a cortical cell is enjoined into the higher dynamics of passing patterns of cognitive activity. A train of thought with one mental thought evoking another depends throughout on its neurocellular physiology and biochemistry. Nevertheless, like molecules in passing waves in a liquid, the brain cell activity is subject to higher-level dynamics which determine the overall patterns of the neuronal firing, not relative to other events within this particular brain process, but relative to the rest of the organism and its surroundings.[1]

However true those ideas may be, they leave the basic mystery of the mind-body problem unsolved. They don't help to bridge the gap between the private and the public. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to reject emergentism for that reason. For it isn't as though the emergentist says *nothing*. His theory is not totally uninformative. While it cannot resolve the intuitive paradox of the mind's emergence from matter, no other theory can either. But its advantage over other theories is that it acknowledges its limitations, unlike, say, functionalism, which in effect—by denying the significance or existence of the "private" dimension of experience—pretends that the basic mystery doesn't exist.

I have not yet said very much, however, about what the theory entails. Unfortunately this question is not easy to answer—precisely because the relationship between consciousness and the body is difficult to understand. Consciousness is emergent, but does that mean it exerts downwardly causal influence on the electrochemical processes that are responsible for it? The cell's emergence is characterized by downward causation, but consciousness is not a structural entity. It is partless; it is not composed of molecules but rather of awareness, intentionality and qualia, which, as O'Connor notes throughout his work, are non-structural phenomena. So if it exhibits downward causation, it must do so in a different way than the cell does. But what way is that? And if it doesn't, is it not then epiphenomenal? How could mental states have causal powers if not by influencing the neural states on which mental states are known to supervene?

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[1] Quoted in O'Connor, "Emergent Properties."

Let's look at this question more carefully. A mental state, I have said, is a neural state—a "radically emergent" one, but a neural state nonetheless. So, when saying that it "supervenes" on neural states, what I am really saying is that it supervenes on neural events considered *additively*, as individual firings of neurons and particular interactions between neurons. In other words, the macro-level holistic state supervenes on the micro-level neural events. (An (imperfect) parallel is the cell's supervenience on molecular processes.) Both "levels" consist of neural events, but one is holistic while the other events are "additive." Given the causal closure of physics, it is through this series of micro-level events that any causality is manifested. The *holistic* neural event (e.g., a particular sensation of pain) cannot be the direct mechanistic cause of a succeeding event (such as the act of removing one's hand from the fire), because all mechanistic, physical causation operates through individual "micro-level" neural events. There has to be this micro-causation.

Admittedly, it is conceivable that the act of removing the hand from the fire was "overdetermined," in that it was caused *both* by a chain of neural events *and* by the sensation of pain, but this hypothesis is philosophically unattractive. It is uneconomical and counterintuitive. Kim rightly rejects it in his paper "Making Sense of Emergence." It's implausible to think that an event has two independent causes that operate at the same exact time. One cause does all the work necessary.

Similarly, it's absurd to say that the mental state somehow directly causes the neural events on which it supervenes. This form of downward causation is incoherent. It is literally senseless, for it entails causal circularity.

So then are mental states epiphenomenal? Are they mere side effects of underlying neural processes, possessing no causal powers of their own? O'Connor tries to avoid that conclusion in "The Metaphysics of Emergence." He provides the reader with an elaborate diagram meant to show the (probable) relationship between mental states and neurophysiological events, according to which diagram a given mental state is the result of a complex array of neural events and mental states that somehow "work together" to produce the state in question. "As a fundamentally new kind of feature, [an emergent state] will confer causal capacities on the object that go beyond the summation of capacities directly conferred by the object's microstructure. Its effects might include directly determining aspects of the microphysical structure of the object as well as generating other emergent states."[1] Thus, an emergent state (says O'Connor) can be responsible for another emergent state as well as for the microphysical events on which such states supervene.

In his paper "Emergent Individuals" he describes his position as follows:

> Since the....emergent states themselves will help to produce similar subsequent states—possibly resulting in a complex, stratified range of such states—the microphysics alone will *not* determine these later states. Likewise, emergent states will work in tandem with the underlying *micro*-states to determine later micro-states, manifesting a sort of "downward" causation. Hence, the existence of emergent states is contrary to the assumptions of much contemporary metaphysics and philosophy of mind, assumptions which typically include the truth of some fairly strong mental-physical supervenience thesis and the causal closure of the microphysical realm. Neither of these assumptions will hold if there are emergent states as here defined.

This conclusion itself makes O'Connor's position unattractive and implausible. For scientists have accumulated no evidence to suggest that physics, or the microphysical realm, is causally incomplete. But there is another reason to reject O'Connor's ideas: they entail causal overdetermination. If micro-states *and* emergent states determine micro-states, then Kim's old objection is relevant again: the "activity of the emergent property" seems "redundant."[2] Consciousness cannot *directly* determine a micro-state, in the way

[1] O'Connor and Wong, "The Metaphysics of Emergence," p. 665.
[2] Ibid., p. 670.

that prior microphysical events determine it. Sperry had already rejected such a theory when he rejected the attempt to "inject conscious effects into the already established chain of microcausation."

Indeed, I find Sperry's conceptualization more plausible than O'Connor's. Sperry acknowledges the causal closure of physics: on his version of emergentism, as I said, "microdeterminism is not so much refuted or falsified as it is supplemented." The way it is supplemented, argues Sperry, is similar to the way it is supplemented in the case of the cell: while the cell's properties supervene on the properties of its constituent molecules, the latter properties are diachronically determined by the holistic state of the cell. Its overall state in a given moment determines (through molecular processes) the molecular processes in the succeeding moment, on which processes supervenes the cell's "overall state" in that moment, which determines (through the micro-level events) the molecular processes in the next moment, etc. Similarly, it's plausible to suppose that "individual nerve impulses and other excitatory components of a cerebral activity pattern are simply carried along or shunted this way and that by the prevailing overall dynamics of the whole active process"[1]—dynamics that are integrally related to the emergent neural states that are the mental states supervening on the nerve impulses in question. Precisely what the relation is between these "overall [cerebral] dynamics" and the conscious states is unclear—Sperry himself seemed to identify the two—but it's likely that as neurophysiology progresses, that question will become less mysterious.

Experiments have shown, for example, that dogs that cannot feel pain willingly stick their snouts into fire and casually withdraw them. In general, a creature that doesn't feel pain acts differently from one that does. So sensations appear not to be epiphenomenal. It is plausible to suppose, then, that consciousness as a whole is not epiphenomenal. The question is *how* it isn't. How does it interact with neural events, and how does it determine an individual's behavior?

Such questions, in fact, bring us to the controversy over "free will" and its meaning. And here we are in a philosophical quagmire from which there is, in all likelihood, no escape. From the perspective of natural science, acts are determined by biological processes; from the perspective of the self, acts are determined by desires and reasons. Can these perspectives be reconciled? One is deterministic, the other not. According to one, there is no place for "self-control"; according to the other, there is. It is hard to see how such opposed viewpoints can be made compatible with each other. Either consciousness and the self have causal power or they don't. The biological sciences at least implicitly deny that they do (because the sciences reject attempts to "inject conscious effects into the already established chain of microcausation"), whereas our self-experience at least implicitly affirms that they do. And both frameworks for interpreting ourselves seem to have irresistible power. So we appear to be at an impasse. It seems both obvious and impossible that consciousness is epiphenomenal.

It is possible, though I think unlikely, that sometime in the future scientists and philosophers will find a way out of these paradoxes. For now, though, we are compelled to invoke the wisdom of Aristotle: as philosophy begins in wonder, so it ends in wonder.

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Yes, I know, too ambitious and a little disorganized. But it was a rough draft.

Piccinini suggested I take two extra courses and drop the thesis (which was worth two courses). It's a good idea. (In his reply he wrote, like, one sentence.)

February 28

Taking a Plato course now—it's refreshing to get back to basics—and a course on "computer ethics".

[1] Sperry, quoted in "Making Sense of Emergence," p. 26.

Gorgias 482d to 486d—Callicles's speech. Nietzsche could have stolen from there his ideas on masters and slaves. "With dialectics the masses always end up on top", or however it goes. N.'s defense of the Sophists, his criticisms of Plato and Socrates, etc.—Callicles (i.e., Plato himself) anticipated it all. – And scholars swoon over Nietzsche like he was the most original thinker in history.

His "revaluation of all values" was essentially a return to the common sense of the ancients. That's all it was. Just a sophisticated defense of what had been the received wisdom for millennia. (Obviously he himself knew that. It's his fans who lack historical perspective.)

Oh Socrates, what a sophist you were!

What Mozart's death was to classical music, Tupac's was to pop culture.

March 1

I doubt that my paper on values will get published, so I'm putting it here. (I wrote it last semester.) The professor gave it an A-, and he ignored my emailed request for comments or criticisms.

[*Years later I posted most of it on my blog, with this prefatory note appended*: Back in my twenties, when I wrote this paper, I was consumed by philosophy, jumping from topic to topic in an effort to answer an implausibly wide range of questions. Unfortunately, my writing wasn't always "polished"; it was intuitive, dense, rough, difficult to read, not nearly as discursive and diffuse as that of most academics. So it was rarely publishable. The excerpts below from a long paper on values are an example. They're in the anti-"objectivist" spirit of these simpler thoughts. I hadn't read J. L. Mackie's classic *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, but, in retrospect, my arguments were broadly in agreement with his. There are no "objective truths" about values, about which values are right and which wrong, which good and which bad. People can have whatever values they want: they can believe Hitler and Stalin were *good*, and they aren't "wrong"—except in relation to other values, such as being compassionate, not killing millions of people, etc. There is no such thing as (literal) "evil," a remnant of theology: *objectively bad* is as meaningless as *objectively good*. We're dealing with subjective reactions here, subjective orientations toward a given object; the universal mode of experience according to which the value we assign to something *actually inheres objectively in it* is mistaken. Beauty, ugliness, goodness, magnificence, badness, and other such values are things we subjectively project into something; they aren't there independently, even though it may seem when you look at a beautiful face or painting that its beauty is objectively given, so to speak, just as objective as the measurements between features or the various colors that strike the eye. We think of the serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer as somehow *bad in his essence*; but in reality he was just someone who had a taste for killing and eating people, as others have a taste for gardening or growing their own vegetables or playing tennis or whatever. It is we who assign the negative value to Dahmer's activities, as we assign a positive value to, say, a medical doctor's activities. There would be nothing incoherent or objectively wrong about reversing the value-judgments: we're free to value whatever we want. It so happens, fortunately, that the vast majority of people share common intuitions about what is good and what is bad, so we all agree Dahmer was bad. But the only *genuine content* of our judgment is that *we don't like* his behavior. Our judgment has an "objective" form ("*He was*..."), but really we're mostly saying something about ourselves, not him.

[In fact, the fundamentals of how we experience the world are mistaken. One might subsume them all under the category "objectivist fallacies." Our brain constructs our experience on the basis of a wealth of sensory information that it organizes according to innate and acquired schemata, principles/rules of perception, cognition, emotion, aesthetics, and so on. This is the central lesson of the brain sciences and psychology. "In itself" the world is an incomprehensible, colorless mess of elementary particles, electromagnetic waves, atoms and molecules built up into larger structures, sound waves, dark matter and dark energy, infinitely many things zipping around, colliding, attracting, etc. Out of this welter of confusion, the brain constructs our ordered experience. (Evidently all our brains operate in virtually the same ways, since we all have virtually the exact same perceptual experiences. We're genetically almost identical to each

other, with variations around the edges.) Our experience of the world is more immediately our experience of our own minds, the perceptual, cognitive, and emotional architecture of our minds. Thus, when you emotionally or aesthetically react to something—like when you react to a person in some context, your reaction is a function of your mood, your expectations, the impressions you've already formed from previous encounters, whether he or she reminds you of other people you've known, etc. There may be *some* validity to your judgment—for example, insofar as others would agree with you—but ultimately it reflects *you* as much as the other.

[We interpret things as being *out there*, but in a sense they're really "*in here*." Here's a mundane example: sometimes if I'm reading a passage really fast I see a word as such-and-such, like, say, 'cautious.' But then I reread it and I see it's really 'caustic.' I remember having *actually seen* the word 'cautious,' but now that word has suddenly turned into 'caustic.' And I'm made vividly aware of how completely the brain *constructs* everything I experience. I thought the word was *out there*, on the page, but it's really *in here*, in my mind—as, indeed, is the page itself, the page as I perceive it, along with all other objects. The world *as it is in itself* doesn't have a white page with black marks on it; it has only the entities that physics postulates. (As you can see, I'm a scientific realist, a position that strikes me as common sense. See also these reflections.)

[Anyway, in the excerpts below I go into some detail about the nature of values and their lack of objectivity. I also discuss the nature of reason, in part because that topic, too, was obsessing me but also because I thought it bore on the question of values. Specifically, questions about practical reason, as opposed to theoretical reason, bear on values, on action, and on justifying or criticizing courses of action. When and how can we criticize someone for acting irrationally or holding irrational values/desires? What does that mean? In brief, I argue that a person's values can be irrational *only in relation to each other*; for example, it's irrational for me to value Donald Trump's presidency if I also value democracy, compassion, and the well-being of humanity. In that sense, practical irrationality is possible (contrary to what David Hume thought). A person can also demonstrate *theoretical* irrationality by denying a sound chain of reasoning, for instance, or deriving a conclusion through a faulty chain of reasoning. (Actually, I think this is also a type of practical irrationality, inasmuch as everyone fundamentally values, whether they know it or not, logic and the idea of being correct; so they're acting in contradiction to this more basic value by disregarding logic in a particular instance.)

[There's a lot of lengthy, and doubtlessly excessive and repetitive, probing of various issues, such as the falsity of realism about values, the consequent semi-meaninglessness of value-judgments, the notion of "psychological consistency" (as distinguished from strict logical consistency) that I introduce to explicate practical irrationality, the nature of action, Kant's ethics and why they're wrong, and, at the end, certain implications of my arguments.

[Just one more anticipatory note: the reason I say value-judgments are half-meaningless is that their 'objective,' 'representational' linguistic form contradicts their actual content, which is really the statement that the object elicits a certain reaction in the speaker. "The painting is beautiful" isn't a wholly meaningful statement; more meaningful would be to say "I find the painting aesthetically pleasing" or something like that. The latter focuses attention on the main point of the utterance, namely the speaker's subjective response; the former statement pretends that something called "beauty," whatever that may be, is *in the painting*, an essential quality of it. The very word 'beauty,' like 'good,' 'bad,' and all other value words, isn't wholly meaningful, being an illusory reification or hypostatization of a subjective reaction. You can spend hours thinking about the word 'beauty,' reflecting on it, introspecting, intensely contemplating it, trying to get clear on exactly what it means, what it *is*—"because it's so abstract, you see!"—but you won't get very far. The problem isn't its abstractness; the problem is its contradictory fusion of subjectivity and objectivity—a state of mind reified into a supposedly objective thing, a thing whose essence it is is to cause that particular 'admiring' state of mind. No such thing exists; the very idea of it is meaningless.

[More generally, platonism is wrong, though a rather psychologically natural philosophy.

[In short, we're all walking around utterly deceived about the true significance of an enormous range of our experiences and judgments. The very phenomenology of our experiences deceives us. The human mind was made to deceive itself. We ourselves are not what we think we are, as I've argued

elsewhere; we are not substantival selves. The Buddhists are right about that. The external, mind-independent world isn't what we think, objectively full of colors and smells and tastes and sounds; it is the exotic world of physics and chemistry, not the world of our brain-constructed experience. It's as if Descartes' famous "demon" is systematically deceiving all of us about almost everything—except the demon is just the human brain, deceiving itself, so to speak.

[I hope you find some of the following at least mildly thought-provoking—not to mention decipherable.]

The Meaning of Norms and Values

The concept of normativity presents a number of philosophical problems. For example, what is the relation between values and norms? Are there objective norms, objective values? What does that mean? *What is* normativity, and *what are* value-judgments? What do they really mean? Is there an important difference between norms of reason and other kinds of norms? What is the difference between practical and theoretical reason? Is it possible to be *motivated* by *reasons*? If so, how? If not, what are the implications? Are moral values part of the "fabric of the universe", or are they purely subjective? If they are, does that vitiate morality? –The list goes on and on. The sheer number of questions might seem daunting, quite aside from their intrinsic difficulty. Nevertheless, in this paper I'll try to answer many of them.

If that seems over-ambitious, I would respond that the answers to such questions are necessarily interrelated; any thinker, therefore, who wants to answer *one* question—with any thoroughness—must answer many. On the other hand, undertaking such a systematic endeavor in one paper means that the arguments will at times be sketchy.

1. Preliminaries

What kinds of norms are there? Prima facie, there are moral norms, aesthetic norms, social norms (including norms of etiquette and the like), norms of contemporary science, epistemic norms, norms of reason, and so on. It's worth noting that scientific and epistemic norms (and norms of social science, of philosophy, of psychology, etc.) are actually norms of reason in disguise. That is, they are supposed to be derivable from the basic rules of reason as applied to distinct states of affairs and types of truth (be they psychological, philosophical, scientific or whatever). It seems, then, that there are but four major normative categories: moral, aesthetic, rational, and social, by which I mean all the myriad rules about how, in light of propriety, it is appropriate to act in certain situations.

Normative judgments are expressed through the words 'ought' and 'should'. They are prescriptions. As such, they are closely related to values. One cannot prescribe something without thereby valuing something. Every prescription is, in fact, either a kind of restatement of a value-judgment[1] or based on the consideration that the prescribed thing is the means to an end (or *constitutive of* an end[2]). By 'restatement of a value-judgment' I mean something like 'the "flip-side" of a value-judgment'. For instance, "One ought not to lie" is, in a sense, another way of saying "Being honest is better than lying". By saying the former, you commit yourself to the latter; and by saying the latter, you commit yourself to the former. This is shown by the fact that if someone said "Honesty is better than lying" but followed that up with "Nevertheless, I don't think people should be honest", you would surely accuse him of inconsistency. You would say he was contradicting himself, in that he expressed disapproval immediately after expressing approval. And you'd wait for an explanation from him. If none was forthcoming, you'd say he was being irrational.

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[1] In most contexts in this paper, by 'value-judgment' I mean a statement in the form of "So-and-so is bad [or good, etc.]", not a statement like "I approve of such-and-such".

[2] For example, "say that my end is outdoor exercise; here is an opportunity to go hiking, which is outdoor exercise; therefore I have reason to take this opportunity, not strictly speaking as a means to my end, but as a way of realizing it". See Christine Korsgaard, "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason", p. 215.

Evidently the reason a particular prescription is associated with a particular value-judgment is that they both express approval (or disapproval) of the same object. In themselves—i.e., without adding a middle premise—they aren't *logically* related, but the middle premise is supplied so automatically by speakers that statements like the two in my example are treated as if they logically entail one another. Hence, someone who asserts one and denies the other is seen as irrational, insensitive to logic. Strictly speaking, though, he is simply denying the premise that one ought to do whatever is good; and if he denies the premise, he is logically free to deny the conclusion (in this case, that people shouldn't lie). It would, therefore, be better to say he is acting in a *psychologically* self-contradictory way, so to speak, rather than in a *logically* self-contradictory way. For he is being inconsistent in his attitude towards honesty: he approves of it and disapproves of it at once.

To take another example, suppose I exclaim, upon seeing Michelangelo's *David*, "This is beautiful!"—but then proceed to smash it into bits with a sledgehammer. You will probably call me irrational, not because I have done anything *logically* 'self-contradictory' but because my mental states are flagrantly inconsistent with each other. In less than a second, after all, I went from extreme approval to extreme disapproval. That this still strikes us as an example of irrationality (even though nothing *logically* inconsistent has been done) shows that practical rationality involves not only respecting logic and induction but also being *psychologically* consistent. If you approve of a given object, such as a sculpture, unless you act according to what are generally thought of as the psychological implications of your attitude of approval, you will justifiably be called irrational.

Perhaps, though, there is a way to assimilate this sort of irrationality to logical inconsistency. Perhaps people implicitly assume that everyone accepts the middle premise in any given case—for example, that one ought to do whatever is good (and so, if one believes that being honest is good, then, on pain of logical inconsistency, one has to believe that people should be honest). This is plausible. Nevertheless, in principle it's possible that someone could deny the middle premise and so deny the conclusion. And yet it still seems to us that he would be acting irrationally. This shows that, at least with respect to *practical* reason, mere logical (and inductive) consistency is not the only relevant factor.

I'll return to these thoughts when I discuss practical reason in depth. For now, my point is, first of all, that particular value-judgments are tied to particular prescriptions (and vice versa) via the relation of psychological consistency. 'Prescriptive (or normative) implications' of a value-judgment are, first and foremost, psychological implications, though they can be made logical *per se* by supplying one or more missing premises. Secondly, one way of being irrational is by violating psychological consistency. Insofar, then, as someone doesn't adhere to the prescriptive implications of his value-judgment, he is being irrational. If I have as an end financial success but don't take the means to achieve my end, I am to that extent being irrational—because I am being psychologically self-contradictory.

It is misleading, and probably incorrect, to say (as some philosophers do) that by having an end, I have a *reason* to take the means to my end. To speak of a 'reason' here is superfluous and wrong. Rather, *just by virtue* of having some end, I implicitly posit 'prescriptions', or 'regulations', on my behavior. Or, to make the point in broader terms: insofar as I value something, I posit corresponding norms (which can be 'psychologically derived'[1] from my value-judgment) to regulate my behavior. These norms are psychologically implicated in my value-judgment. If I flout them, I am being inconsistent with myself and hence irrational.

It seems, then, that we already have a preliminary answer to the question of what explains normative force—i.e., the question of what normativity means, of what 'ought' signifies and where its force comes from. At least with regard to value-judgments that one makes oneself, one ought to respect their prescriptive implications just to the extent that one values *rationality*. Exactly what rationality is will be the subject of a later section, but it's clear that it involves, at the very least, basic self-consistency. One's attitudes, beliefs,

[1] I'll discuss later exactly what that term means.

acts, values and so on cannot be explicitly mutually self-contradictory—in either a logical or a psychological way[1]—if one is to be properly called 'rational'.

2. A digression into the philosophy of language

Before continuing, I should clarify some things about value-judgments. From what I've seen, ethical theorists haven't appropriated the lessons of recent philosophy of language: most of them still speak of value-judgments as if they were not context-sensitive—as if they were a more or less homogeneous mass. 'Something is either a value-judgment or it isn't; there is no in-between.' Such an approach is wrong. Different utterances display different degrees of 'valorization' or 'de-valorization'. For the sake of clarity, we should distinguish between the various classes.

First of all, some statements that seem to be value-judgments are actually pure (non-evaluative) 'descriptions' in disguise. They are based on an (implicit or explicit) application of a given set of criteria to an object; and they are true if this object satisfies the criteria. For instance, suppose I say, "Parmigianino's painting *Madonna with the Long Neck* is a good example of the Mannerist style of art". Certain criteria define, however vaguely, the school of Mannerism; insofar as Parmigianino's painting exemplifies these criteria, the statement is true. In fact, while it superficially seems to be a sort of value-judgment, in that the word 'good' is central to it, the statement is not really such. It can be rephrased as "*Madonna with the Long Neck* typifies Mannerism", and this is clearly not a value-judgment. Any such statement, therefore, we can ignore.

As for utterances that include an element of (de-)valuing *per se*—that is, a conceptual element of approval or disapproval—some should be considered value-judgments and others shouldn't. Some are primarily evaluative and some are primarily descriptive. But there is no clear separation between the categories; there is a 'merging' between the class of description and that of full-blown valuing. This may seem counterintuitive, since we're in the habit of thinking that declarative statements are *either* value-judgments *or* neutral descriptions (depictions of states of affairs). But the fact is that we have to rely simply on our linguistic intuitions in deciding whether a given utterance is 'primarily' evaluative or 'primarily' descriptive. We have to ask the question, "Is the intention that's expressed in this utterance mainly to convey approval or disapproval, or is it to convey *information*?". That is, "Can this utterance be rephrased using entirely non-'evaluative' words without suffering a loss in its essential content?". If the answer is affirmative, then the utterance is not a value-judgment.

I'll give examples in a moment, but first I want to note that the *context* of utterance is very important. The same sentence uttered in one context may express a value-judgment while in another context it doesn't. Whether it does depends on the conditions in which the speaker utters the sentence.

It will be useful here, as I said, to borrow some ideas from the philosophy of language. A sentence is said to have an invariant "semantic content", a linguistic content that does not vary across contexts. What this content is may in any given instance be a matter of controversy, but no one doubts that it exists in some form. Scott Soames has written a paper called "The Gap Between Meaning and Assertion", in which he argues that semantic content should be understood as "least common denominator": it's "what is common to what is asserted by utterances of any given sentence in all normal contexts in which [the sentence] is used literally" (p. 4). What he means by "normal contexts" needn't concern us here; the point is that what is asserted by a particular utterance of, say, "It's raining" has something in common with what is asserted by all other possible utterances of that sentence, provided it is uttered literally. This is surely an uncontroversial claim.

So there is a "least common denominator", an invariant content, to any given sentence understood literally. There are also, however, such things as "conversational implicatures" and "conversational implicitures",[2] which embellish the bare-boned, basic linguistic content of an utterance. The notion of

[1] As will be seen (and should be clear already), psychological consistency is the broader category. Logical consistency is merely the most obvious aspect of it.

[2] See Kent Bach's paper "Conversational Impliciture".

conversational implicature was analyzed by Paul Grice and J. L. Austin decades ago; an example would be my statement "It's raining" in response to a friend who says, "Let's go for a walk". In a sense, I have said simply that rain is coming down outside. More pertinent, though, is the implication of that basic statement, namely that we shouldn't go for a walk because it's raining. This implication is a proposition that is separate from what I have explicitly said (the explicit words), albeit more relevant to the situation than the brute observation "It's raining". Many speech acts exhibit implicature.

Conversational *impliciture* is somewhat different. It doesn't involve a separate, implicated proposition, but rather the *completion* or *expansion* of what is explicitly uttered. It is the contextually determined 'filling in' of an incomplete proposition.[1] Kent Bach gives some examples, with possible completions given in brackets: "That lamp is cheap [relative to other lamps]", "Strom is too old [to be a good senator]", and "The princess is late [for the party]". Depending on the context, the phrases in brackets are appropriate—and *already implicit*—completions of what is asserted. There wouldn't be a complete proposition without these 'insertions'; and the only reason why the speaker/listener thinks that there is a complete proposition even in the absence of the explicit insertions (given in brackets) is that the latter are understood to be implicit. –The phenomenon of impliciture is so ubiquitous that we scarcely notice it.

The reason it is relevant to my paper is that certain kinds of value-judgments exhibit features similar to the (particular forms of) conversational impliciture that Bach analyzes. That is, whether a given sentence of this type expresses a value-judgment depends on the nature of its contextually determined "pragmatic enrichment".[2] But these value-judgments don't qualify as *implicatures*, since they are not separate propositions implicated by that which is explicitly uttered; instead, they're *implicitures*, in that they're implicit in the (saying of) the speaker's utterance.

I'll discuss these peculiar value-judgments in a moment. First, though, I want to point out that some sentences don't exhibit this ambiguity: they're *always* used to express a value-judgment (provided they're spoken literally), no matter what the context is. Moral judgments are the best example. "Murder is wrong" always is (or expresses) a value-judgment; the statement cannot be adequately rephrased without articulating an attitude of disapproval, and in every context it articulates such an attitude. "Hitler was evil", "Honesty is morally good", "Theft is bad"—they're always value-judgments. There is no ambiguity about it. Morality is the quintessential sphere of approval and disapproval—*absolute* approval and *absolute* disapproval—and as such is the quintessential sphere of valuing.

The status of (assertions expressed by utterances of) sentences related to aesthetics is more variable. Even here, however, certain words have unambiguous uses. The word 'beautiful' is always used to express a value-judgment. That is, the content of any assertion that predicates beauty of an object is essentially related to approval of the object's appearance. The *point* of the assertion is to express approval. With 'ugly', the situation is reversed: the point of the assertion is to communicate disapproval. 'Ugly' means 'not attractive', 'not (aesthetically) approved of'; the concept's essence, therefore, is always evaluative.

But that isn't so with 'sublime'. This word can be used in different ways, with correspondingly different definitions implicit in the usage. Usually 'awe-inspiring' is understood as a satisfactory synonym for 'sublime', but it too has conceptual nuances that vary according to context. Sometimes it is used unambiguously to express a value-judgment, as in "Wow, that symphony was spectacular—magnificent—awe-inspiring!" In this case, the speaker's intention is simply to articulate approval. But suppose I say, "The destructive power of that hurricane was awe-inspiring". Is this a value-judgment? Not really. Rather, I am saying that the hurricane had great destructive power, that it caused a lot of damage. No valuing is involved

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[1] Bach also describes another type of impliciture, which "occurs when the utterance does express a complete proposition....but some other proposition, yielded by what I call the process of *expansion*, is being communicated by the speaker" (ibid., p. 2).

[2] Pragmatic enrichment involves body language, physical circumstances, the character of immediately past utterances, a background of presuppositions shared by the relevant actors, and other pragmatic (as opposed to semantic) conditions. (See Jason Stanley's paper "Rigidity and Content" for the meaning of the term 'background of shared presuppositions'.) Pragmatic enrichment is what makes it obvious that, say, a particular utterance of "It's raining" is actually being used to communicate the thought that we shouldn't go for a walk outside.

here. Or suppose I say, "I walked through a dense forest yesterday, a dark, dank place with overgrown vines twisting around the massive trees. And I thought, 'This place is terrifying and sublime....'". Here, 'sublime' means something like 'otherworldly', 'unreal'. So that statement is not a value-judgment.

Aesthetic concepts can also be used in such ambiguous ways that it's simply unknown—indeterminate—whether they're being used to express value-judgments. Imagine that someone who has suffered terrible accidents while climbing Mount Everest says, with a wistful look and a voice that trails off sadly, "The grandeur of the Himalayas is sublime....". Is this a value-judgment? Is the speaker saying that the Himalayan grandeur has some sort of *value*? He himself might not know. He has terrible memories of the time spent in that region—perhaps he lost a limb, or his friends—and he shudders to think of it, but at the same time he remains overawed by his memories of the Himalayan countryside. Part of him, then, doesn't mean to express any sort of praise or approval of the Himalayas; he hates them, he hates even their majesty. And yet another part of him is irresistibly attracted to their majesty—loves it, admires it, wants to praise it as one might praise God. In the moment, he commits neither to one side nor to the other. The content of his utterance has a certain indeterminacy, such that any 'after the fact' attempt to make it more precise does violence to it.

Perhaps the reader will say that if the statement is in any way indeterminate, it isn't complete—it isn't a proposition. It's just a 'gesture' at a proposition. For if its content isn't completely precise, it can't have a truth-value, which means it isn't a proposition. And so philosophers need not take it seriously. –I must agree, however, with Saul Kripke: it may be that "the apparatus of 'propositions'....break[s] down" in certain areas of philosophy.[1] It has led to apparently insuperable problems in the philosophy of language, of modality, of metaphysics in general; I think that philosophers would do well to experiment with unorthodox positions. In fact, I'm inclined to think that contemporary Anglo-American philosophy is misguided—that its valorization of symbolic logic and analytic methodologies has led it astray. While I can't argue for all this here, I would suggest, first of all, that the law of excluded middle be discarded. Assertions need not be either true or false; their truth-value can be indeterminate. Indeed, with most assertions it is. What led Aristotle to formulate the law of excluded middle in the first place was his insight that declarative sentences implicitly posit their own truth—that their *form* admits of no possibilities but truth and falsity. In this sense, the law of excluded middle is obviously right. Declarative sentences have the form of positing truth-conditions; hence, they succeed in expressing a proposition when they succeed in positing genuine truth-conditions. But it doesn't follow that every property predicated of something in fact either does or does not apply to that thing.[2] There can be truth-conditions without necessarily a truth-value to go along with them. After all, many (perhaps most) properties have an element of vagueness, such that the truth-value of the proposition in which they occur may be indeterminate. Likewise, certain *entities*—actually existing things—are 'ambiguous', as quantum mechanics has shown. Humanly understandable concepts do not apply to them. Also, assertions expressed by sentences the subject of which does not refer to anything existent—such as "The king of France in 2006 is bald"—seem to be neither true nor false, despite Bertrand Russell's paper "On Denoting".[3] –In this paper, however, I am not going to embellish these claims, nor will I explore the implications of the repudiation of Aristotle's law, because this would take me too far afield.

I want to return now to the issue of conversational impliciture and its relation to value-judgments. Above, I mentioned cases in which words associated with aesthetics acquire slightly different meanings depending on the context in which they're used. 'Sublime' and 'awe-inspiring' were my examples. In some contexts these words are value-laden, in that the speaker uses them mainly to express approval of the object—i.e., to attribute to the object some kind of value—while in other contexts they are value-neutral. But there is another category of words, a broader category, which comprises words that have firmly fixed meanings but also a conceptual 'overtone' of approval or disapproval. Their primary meaning is value-

[1] *Naming and Necessity*, the last paragraph of the preface.
[2] See John Dewey's paper "The Sphere of Application of the Excluded Middle", *The Journal of Philosophy* 26.26 (1929): 701 – 705.
[3] For criticisms of it, see P. F. Strawson's paper "On Referring".

neutral, but in certain contexts their value-laden overtone has prominence over their value-neutral meaning, in which case the sentence in which they're embedded is being used to express a value-judgment. Examples are 'kind', 'cruel', 'weak', 'stubborn', 'sophisticated', and 'interesting'. These differ from 'sublime' and 'awe-inspiring' in that their (slightly more determinate) meanings are not primarily value-laden. 'Kind' means something like 'respectful of people's feelings', 'interesting' means 'attention-grabbing', etc. In themselves, the meanings aren't necessarily value-related. But over the course of time they have developed a natural association with being-approved-of or being-disapproved-of, such that now this derivative significance can, in an act of assertion, sometimes take precedence over the original meaning. When this happens, (a version of) conversational impliciture is coming into play. If the word is, say, 'kind', its semantic content is still 'respectful of people's feelings', but its implicit association with goodness is now the motivation behind the speaker's assertion. The implication that kindness is *good*, and that the object of which it is predicated is therefore good, is the main force behind the assertion, its primary content; the fact that this goodness happens to take the form of respect toward people's feelings is less relevant. In other words, the brute fact that the person is respectful is less relevant than the fact that he is *good* for being respectful.

So, with regard to sentences like "He is kind", "He has a weak personality", "The floor is dirty", and "It's frustrating to talk to her"—i.e., sentences the relevant concepts of which can be understood sometimes as value-neutral and at other times as evaluative—the nature of the pragmatic enrichment in a particular context determines whether or not they are mainly value-judgments. Let's look at a concrete example. If I'm having a conversation with people who are effusively praising a certain person and I say "He's kind, too!", my statement is primarily a value-judgment, in that my intention is not to make the disinterested observation that he treats people with respect but rather to say that he's a good person for doing so. Now, the reader will perhaps say that this latter proposition—the proposition that he's a good person—is not *implicit in*, but rather *implicated by*, the proposition that he's kind, and hence that it's an example of conversational implicature rather than conversational impliciture. In other words, he might say that an utterance of "He is kind" or "The floor is dirty" is, in itself, *never* a value-judgment, but instead can, depending on the pragmatic features of the context, *imply* a *separate* value-judgment. I think this is wrong, though. As I said a moment ago, I think that many words, whose basic semantic content is value-neutral, have nevertheless acquired an implicit association—even outside of any particular context of utterance—with either a positive or a negative value. The value is almost *logically implicit*: no matter in what context the word is used, it will retain its conceptual overtone of either goodness or badness. It seems, therefore, not quite right to say that in the above example, the utterance "He's kind, too!" merely *implicates* that he is good; rather, the proposition that he is good seems *implicit* in the proposition that he is kind. It is *fused* with it, more so than Grice's examples of implicature are 'fused' with the propositions that imply them. The implication, say, that you should close the window is not as intimately related to the utterance "The window is still open!" as the assertion that "He's good (because he's kind)" is related to the assertion that "He's kind!" in my example. –Admittedly, Bach's account of impliciture is quite different from what I am calling 'impliciture' here. Still, the phenomena he discusses have in common with the ones I'm discussing the fact that they are not examples of *logical* impliciture. The relevant entailment-relations are merely '*conversational*'. So I think I'm justified in using the term 'conversational impliciture', even if my application of the concept amounts to an *extension* of Bach's.

This paper, however, isn't supposed to be in the philosophy of language. Let's forego a detailed analysis of the linguistic niceties of utterances involving value-judgments. The only reason I've already spent so much time on them is that I'm arguing that, with the exception of moral judgments and propositions involving unambiguous words like 'beautiful' and 'ugly'—i.e., words the semantic content of which is precisely the attribution or denial of value to an object—philosophers cannot rightly speak of entailment-relations between propositions that *apparently* involve reference to value (such as "The painting is sublime") without considering the particular context (with all its pragmatic enrichment) in which the proposition is uttered. "The painting is sublime" might entail that the painting has value or it might not, depending on the context and the way in which it is uttered. Similarly with "John is kind", "James is weak",

and so on. Most of the time, what proposition is implicit in another cannot be ascertained in abstraction from the context of utterance.

This is true of judgments involving norms of rationality, too. When I say, e.g., that something or someone is irrational, am I thereby saying that it/he lacks some kind of value? Or am I merely claiming that, as a (value-neutral) matter of fact, he fails to live up to certain criteria by which we judge rationality? Again, the answer depends on the context and the way in which I make the assertion. Sometimes the answer will not be clear—it will be indeterminate whether I am attributing or denying value to the object—while at other times the answer will be obvious. (That is, the presence or absence of the relevant entailment-relation will be obvious.) Either way, the question is unanswerable in abstraction from a particular context.

—In retrospect, it may not have been necessary for me to write this section. But I think the ideas are interesting in their own right.

3. Value-judgments and reason

Given that a particular assertion attributes or denies value to something, what exactly does such an attribution or denial consist of? In other words, what is a value-judgment? It's useful to note that every value-judgment can be rephrased as "[The object] *has* [the value]". "The mountain is beautiful" = "The mountain has beauty"; "The theory is right" = "The theory has the property of truth". Every value-judgment ascribes a property to an object. "It is wrong to lie" means "Lying exhibits the property of moral wrongness". Value-judgments, therefore, cannot be merely 'disguised' emotive utterances like "Boo lying!" or "Yay for this theory!", as theorists like A. J. Ayer would have it.[1] In fact, any kind of noncognitivism faces the difficulty of having to explain how it is that value-judgments can be so formally similar to scientific propositions while not aspiring to objective truth. Prima facie, both kinds of statements exhibit truth-conditions; both, therefore, are implicitly meant to describe truth, reality. They both '*reach out* for' [or *represent*] a fact, a fact independent of the speaker's mere attitude or feeling. Lying *is wrong*, kindness *is good*. These statements can be rephrased using the word 'objectively' without any apparent violation of meaning: lying is (*objectively*) wrong. Noncognitivists may be right, say, that moral judgments involve accepting certain norms, or that they involve an expression of a certain state of mind, but it's counterintuitive to deny that they also aim for objective truth in the way that scientific assertions do.

Perhaps that position is controversial. It's significant, though, that people act as if their value-judgments—especially their moral judgments—are objectively correct. People are as committed to their moral beliefs as they are to their scientific beliefs and their religious beliefs—that is, their beliefs about the way the world objectively is. They're even committed to their *aesthetic* beliefs and values in that way. If you disagree with them that a certain song is beautiful they might well argue with you, try to convince you that you're wrong, as a scientist might try to convince you of a particular hypothesis. In more philosophical moods they might say that judgments of beauty are merely subjective reactions with no claim to objective truth, but they almost invariably *act* as if their aesthetic judgments are objectively true. And as I said, this reaction is even more pronounced in the case of moral judgments.

In his paper "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It", Ronald Dworkin argues against moral skeptics who try to differentiate between two spheres of moral discourse, namely our ordinary, first-order, substantive judgments about which acts are right and which wrong, and the philosophical, second-order judgments about the claims to objectivity of the first-order judgments. Such skeptics deny that their arguments apply to the first-order judgments; their position is supposed to be neutral with regard to these. It's only the meta-level philosophical claims they want to contest—claims involving phrases like 'it's really true', 'it's true independently of us', 'it's objectively true'. In short, these theorists profess to be skeptical only about the possibility of objective moral truth, and they maintain that such second-order positions are logically separable from first-order moral discourse (which they want to leave untouched). Dworkin disagrees, though. He thinks that second-order judgments are merely reaffirmations of the first-order ones, and that therefore the skeptics are inadvertently attacking the latter by attacking the former.

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[1] See his book *Language, Truth, and Logic*.

> The most natural reading [of such claims as "My moral beliefs are really and objectively true"] shows them to be nothing but clarifying or emphatic or metaphorical restatements or elaborations of the proposition that [e.g.] abortion is wrong. If someone thinks abortion morally wrong, he might well say, for example, in a heated moment, "It is just true that abortion is wrong". But that would be only an impatient restatement of his substantive position....[1]

I mention Dworkin's argument because it supports my own. Implicit in ordinary moral judgments is the positing of their objective truth.

Let's assume, then, that value-judgments involve a claim to objectivity. To deny that would be to fly in the face of common intuitions as well as some fairly persuasive arguments.[2] In this respect, then, value-judgments are comparable to scientific hypotheses. So let's look at the latter. Scientists believe that the most well-established hypotheses are universally valid, that they hold true for everyone because they hold true of reality itself. The truth of Darwinian evolution doesn't depend on a person's subjective reactions to it. Given its truth, scientists conclude that everyone *ought* to believe in it. Where does the 'ought' come from? Clearly by adding the further premise that people ought to believe true propositions. This premise, in turn, comes, via the mechanism of 'psychological implication', from the idea that it is good for one's beliefs to be true. But at the moment, the relevant idea is that not only a scientist but *everyone* thinks that truth "lays claim to everyone's assent"[3]—that it ought to be believed by everyone.

This is somewhat reminiscent of Kant's idea that judgments of taste are universalizable, in that they make a claim on everyone. "In this respect, [they] are like ordinary statements of fact. Both are either correct or incorrect ('valid') independently of who makes the judgment ('universally')."[4] Moreover, as Kenneth Rogerson points out, judgments of taste are, according to Kant, imperatival, just like judgments of morality and, as I noted in the last paragraph, judgments of what is true. In saying that something is true or moral or beautiful, we effectively demand that everyone agree with us. In fact, I think that in *most* cases, the act of 'judging' something has an imperatival element, in that we not only expect but 'demand' (implicitly) that others agree with us. Admittedly, Kant disagrees. He distinguishes between judgments of taste (and morality) and others:

> …Many a thing may be attractive and pleasurable to him; no one cares about that; but if he declares something to be beautiful, he expects the very same pleasure of others, he judges not solely for himself, but for everyone, and then speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. Hence, he says, the *thing* is beautiful, and does not count on others agreeing with his judgment of pleasure because they did so occasionally in the past; rather he demands this agreement from them. He censures them if they judge differently and denies them taste, which he yet demands they should have.[5]

His distinction, though, between attractiveness and beauty seems spurious. As far as I can tell, the difference between them isn't of kind but of degree: in saying that an object is attractive I'm saying much the same thing as when I say that it's beautiful, the only difference being that I'm a little less committed to the former assertion than the latter, because my 'aesthetic admiration' is more pronounced with respect to the latter. If my expectation/demand that other people (will) agree with me is less pronounced in the case of attractiveness, it's simply because I'm less committed to the aesthetic worth of the given object than I am

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[1] Ronald Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1996): 97.
[2] [See also J. L. Mackie's classic *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (1977).]
[3] Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, translated by Walter Cerf (Indianapolis, 1963), p. 18.
[4] Kenneth F. Rogerson, "The Meaning of Universal Validity in Kant's Aesthetics", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 40.3 (1982): 301.
[5] Quoted in ibid., p. 304.

if I say that the object is beautiful. I can, after all, intelligibly disagree with and argue against someone who denies that a given object is attractive, as if *demanding* that he agree with me; it's simply not very likely that I will, because the aesthetic worth of the object doesn't strike me with as much force as it would if I said that the object is beautiful.

The reason I harp on this is that I want to say that the imperatival element in certain assertions (in *most* assertions) comes partly from the form of declarative sentences themselves, which posit their truth and their own truth-conditions. Even when the speaker doesn't act as if he expects or demands that people agree with his utterance, I want to say that he has the linguistic 'right' to do so—that, given the necessarily truth-positing form of declarative utterances, it's perfectly natural for a speaker to hope that others will agree with his assertion. For the form of his assertion posits its objectivity—its truth independent of the speaker's attitude—and something that is objectively true is, as I noted a moment ago, thereby supposed by everyone to be a reasonable and virtually obligatory object of belief.

Before proceeding, I ought to return briefly to the point that Kant makes above about pleasure. He says that if I say something is pleasurable, I don't thereby expect or demand the same pleasure from others. My pleasure exists only for me; it isn't universalizable, as judgments of taste are. –First of all, I think he's wrong. If I judge something pleasurable and somebody disagrees with me, I may well get frustrated with him and say "How can you possibly disagree?! You don't think massages are pleasurable?! What's wrong with you?!" But insofar as Kant's point has plausibility, it is because saying that something is pleasurable is to say that it *gives me* pleasure. It is thus different from a statement like "It is attractive" or "It is beautiful", for these statements cannot be rephrased as "It gives me attractiveness" and "It gives me beauty". In short, the subjective, relativistic standpoint is *built into* the assertion that something is pleasurable. And yet even then we often demand that people agree with us that an object is pleasurable! (That is, we often 'universalize' our sentiments about what is pleasurable.) This fact is significant.

Part of its significance is that it supports one of my arguments, namely that implicit in the 'representational' form of assertions is objectivity and, ultimately, 'universalization' (a "lay[ing] claim to everyone's assent"). But there is also a psychological significance, which harmonizes well with the philosophical one. For the example above hints at a broader phenomenon, viz. that a person spends his whole life in essentially the infantile state of mind, according to which "everyone must be like me".[1] His experience is, naturally, the center of his world, which naturally leads him to interpret it—almost unconsciously—as the center of *the* world, at least the human one. People are, quite literally, self-centered; they therefore rarely understand people with experiences and traits substantially different from their own. And they unconsciously project their own attitudes and beliefs onto (into) other people. So it's predictable that they often call people irrational who disagree with them—for anyone who has the same experiences *they* have (e.g., the same experience of what a massage feels like) should apparently draw the conclusions *they* do (that massages are pleasurable). If they don't, it would seem that they are failing to make logical connections, draw logical inferences.

Thus, just as the nature of language commits us to the objective truth of many of our utterances, so the nature of experience implicitly commits us to the objective, 'universal' truth of our beliefs and attitudes. We may not recognize this on a conscious level, but our unconscious or half-conscious commitment to the objective truth and universal validity of our attitudes is revealed in the fact that we tend to get angry at, and treat as irrational, people who disagree with us. We treat it as a kind of imperative that others agree with us—albeit an imperative that is easily forgotten or ignored in social life, since life requires that we get along with people who are different from us. And while in the immediacy of social interaction we may not frown on mutual disagreement—may even encourage it—in the reflectiveness of solitude we may well have disdain for, or be bewildered by, people who don't hold our views on things. We will most likely consider them somewhat irrational.

But what is rationality? Earlier I made a few suggestions about it; but now it's time I addressed the question in more depth. Philosophers usually distinguish between theoretical reason and practical reason:

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[1] See "Everybody Must Be Just Like Me", by Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer, in *Female Sexuality: Contemporary Engagements*, edited by Donna Bassin (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1999), pp. 377 – 403.

the former is concerned with standards for seeking truth (about the way the world is), the latter with "rational standards that apply directly to conduct".[1] Or, as Carl Wellman says, "practical reasoning is using and following practical arguments, arguments that bear fairly directly on practice, on the pursuit of goals and the choice between alternative actions".[2] Despite the ambiguity of the words 'fairly directly', this formulation may seem clear enough. Theoretical reason relates to what *is the case*, while practical reason relates to what *ought to be done*. Nevertheless, several philosophers have argued that the distinction between the kinds of reason is illusory—or at least, not as important as one might think.[3] Before continuing, therefore, we should clarify what we're talking about.

Consider the question of whether to classify instrumental reason as practical or theoretical. The instrumental principle states that one ought to take the means to one's ends; instrumental reason relates to the question of what are the best means to achieve a given end. The instrumental principle itself appears to qualify as practical reason, since no amount of word-twisting can reformulate it as an answer to the (theoretical) question of what is the case. Of course, one can say, "It is the case that people ought to take the means to their ends", thus apparently assimilating the principle to theoretical reason, but this is pure sophistry. Edgley remarks, rightly, that the move fails because "answers of the sort 'So-and-so ought to be done' are not answers to the question 'What is the case?'....".[4] But because it strikes us as irrational not to take the means to one's ends, we are inclined to say that the instrumental principle is a norm of reason; and since it isn't theoretical reason, it must be practical.

On the other hand, instrumental *reason* is surely a manifestation of theoretical reason, in that it answers the question "What is the case?" In order to bring about a certain state of affairs, logic and induction tell us that so-and-so has to be done. Value-judgments do not come into play here; we are asking only what causes will produce what effects. We are logically and inductively inferring conclusions from premises, and doing nothing else; we are asking what *is*.

Prima facie, then, there are two basic kinds of reason. So what is the connection between them? Let's look at the instrumental principle more closely, since it is, so far, the only example I have given of practical reason. What is the source of its normativity? How can the principle that one ought to take the means to one's ends have normative force? For, as Christine Korsgaard points out in her paper "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason", the principle construed a certain way is an analytic truth. "To will an end just is to will to cause or realize the end, hence to will to take the means to the end. This is the sense in which the principle is analytic."[5] In other words, committing yourself to realizing an end logically entails committing yourself to taking the means. But if so, how can it make sense to *prescribe* that people ought to (try to) take the means to their ends? That follows tautologously from their commitment to their end. It's like saying, "You should do what you are determined to do", which sounds odd, to say the least. Korsgaard uses some verbal legerdemain to avoid the natural conclusion that the instrumental principle is not really normative, but I think she fails.

An example might highlight the paradox. Suppose I intend to rent a movie tonight but refuse to go to the video store. "I'm going to buy a movie," I say to my friend, "but I'm not going to go to the store." "Huh?" my friend says. He won't think I'm being sincere, or else he'll think I'm leaving out a piece of information. No matter how much I insist on my two contradictory intentions, he'll think I'm just joking. The reason is that it's *psychologically impossible* to commit oneself to an end without committing oneself to the means (the means, that is, that one knows one has to take). People never exhibit this kind of irrationality, unless, perhaps, they're hopelessly insane.

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[1] Christine Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reason", in *Moral Discourse and Practice*, edited by Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 373.
[2] Carl Wellman, "The Justification of Practical Reason", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 36.4 (1976): 531.
[3] See, e.g., R. Edgley, "Practical Reason", *Mind* 74.294 (1965): 174 – 191.
[4] Ibid., p. 174.
[5] Korsgaard, "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason", in *Ethics and Practical Reason*, edited by Garrett Cullity and Berys Gaut (New York: Oxford University Press/Clarendon), p. 244.

The solution to the paradox is simple, though. The instrumental principle intuitively seems normative because we ordinarily have a loose understanding of the word 'ends'. We take it to mean something like 'things that one strongly desires'. On this understanding, it's actually fairly substantive to say that people should try to bring about their ends, since what is being said is that they should try to bring about what they *strongly desire*. It's psychologically possible for me to yearn for something while doing nothing to bring it about—but it also seems irrational. Understood in this way, the instrumental principle is both obvious and able-to-be-broken, which is what we intuitively want.

The question now, of course, is why it should be a requirement of reason that one do what one strongly desires. There is, after all, nothing analytic about *this* principle—and since 'abiding by reason' is supposed to mean 'abiding by logic (or induction)', it would appear that by violating this principle I am not violating reason. So perhaps the instrumental principle, understood in the vague way we usually understand it, shouldn't be normative after all. –The way out of these difficulties is to acknowledge that practical irrationality is not a matter of violating only logic. As I said in the beginning, there is a kind of psychological inconsistency which is the true intuitive basis for the judgment that someone is being irrational. If I have explicitly conflicting attitudes (or values, beliefs, intentions, etc.), or I act in ways that imply that I have obviously contradictory values or intentions, I will be (justifiably) called irrational.

Clearly the notion of 'psychological consistency' is vague. Much vaguer than that of logical consistency. Its vagueness, however, is a strength of my account, because it mirrors the vagueness of our ordinary intuitions about when someone is being irrational. Suppose, for example, I'm sitting at home, bored, and I turn on the television. I start watching *Entertainment Tonight*, a show I've always hated. I know there's nothing intellectually or emotionally redeeming about watching it, and I know I'm wasting time, and I know I should be working, and I'm not even really being entertained—yet I keep watching it, inexplicably. The question is, am I being irrational? There are plenty of reasons for me to turn the TV off and apparently none for me to keep it on—but is it right to say that by keeping it on I'm being irrational? One is tempted to say, "In a sense, obviously you are. After all, you're not being motivated by reasons that you acknowledge *should* motivate you. But in another sense, you're being rational. For you clearly don't want to do work, and there's nothing you'd *rather* be doing than watching TV, and apparently you just don't care that you're wasting time—and perhaps you actually are being a little entertained, despite your refusal to admit that to yourself. So you're being both unreasonable and reasonable." In this case, intuition hesitates. I'm being both rational and irrational—consistent with myself and inconsistent with myself. Obviously there is a part of me that does prefer to keep watching, as opposed to getting up and doing work; otherwise, of course, I would get up and do work. So in this sense I'm simply doing what I want to do, which means I'm acting rationally. But there is another part of me, as I said, that's disgusted and so forth; inasmuch as I am acting contrary to the desires and reasons of *this* part, I am being self-inconsistent and hence irrational.

The same considerations apply to the example Korsgaard gives in her paper "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason" of the man who, because of a disease he has, must get a series of injections in order to live past 50. He wants to have a long life, but he is also terrified of injections. He's so terrified, in fact, that he refuses to get the treatment, even while knowing that it will mean his early death. "He agrees that a long and happy life is a greater good than avoiding the injections, but he still declines to have them."[1] Intuition hesitates here in the same way it did in the other case: from one perspective, the man's fear is clearly causing him to be irrational (to act contrary to what he acknowledges is his greater good); from another perspective, he is being perfectly rational, since *right now* his strongest desire is to avoid the injections rather than have a long life, and he is acting in accord with that desire.

Philosophers discussing the status of reason tend to use as thought-experiments examples, like the foregoing, that involve instrumental reason (or constitutive reasoning). But I think that the normative foundation of the instrumental principle is really the same as that of the 'principle' that, say, you shouldn't destroy the *David* if you think it's beautiful, or you should be honest if you think being honest is good: by making a value-judgment, you posit certain norms on your behavior (which aren't *logically* related to your

[1] Korsgaard, op. cit., p. 227.

judgment); if you flout these norms, you're exhibiting irrationality (insofar as you still hold the value in question when you flout the norms). Particular norms are the *psycho*logical 'flip-side' of particular value-judgments. What establishes the connection between the norm and the value-judgment is, I suspect, the universal properties of intentionality and action, and their relation to value-judgments. I'll return to this question below. My point right now is that philosophers should focus more on value-judgments in general and less on questions about desire and instrumental reason, because desire, after all, is but one kind of value-judgment. (In desiring something—say, financial success—I am valuing the thought of experiencing whatever it is I desire.) And the instrumental principle is but an example of the fact that value-judgments have prescriptive implications. Practical irrationality, then, means violating the prescriptive implications of one's value-judgment.

I agree with Korsgaard that a good way to characterize irrationality, whether practical or theoretical, is as the "fail[ure] to be motivationally responsive to the rational considerations available"[1]. I simply think that her idea of what qualifies as a 'rational consideration' is too narrow. A rational consideration isn't necessarily a matter of adhering to logic and induction;—or rather, in the sphere of *theoretical* rationality, it is. But in the sphere of practical rationality it has more to do with what I have called the 'psychological implications of a given value-judgment'—implications that can be logical[2] but need not be. What they have in common with *logical* entailments is that, like logic, they are grounded in the principle of non-contradiction. If the injunction to avoid self-contradiction is virtually the guiding law of theoretical reason, so it is with regard to practical reason. The only difference is that what counts as a self-contradiction is somewhat broader in practical than in theoretical reason.

Now is a good time to note that Wellman's statement that 'practical reason is using arguments that bear fairly directly on practice' is fairly worthless.[3] Theoretical reason (which relates solely to what is the case) can be, and usually is, inextricably linked to action. For example, suppose I'm angry at my girlfriend because she did something cruel or inconsiderate. So far, I'm being theoretically rational: I have a logical or inductive reason to believe that my girlfriend was intentionally cruel, so I *do* believe that. (My anger, in itself, is neither rational nor irrational. As an emotion, it's 'non-rational'.) In other words, I'm being motivated by logical considerations. But if I learn that she had no choice but to act as she did and yet I remain angry with her, I am being irrational, for I'm ignoring a consideration that absolves her of blame. That is, I'm blaming her for something I know she was not responsible for; I'm being unreasonable. –In this example, pure theoretical reason bears *very* directly on practice. Wellman's criterion, then, for the distinction between practical and theoretical reason is wrong. I have given my own criterion and will elaborate on it periodically in the following.

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[1] "Skepticism about Practical Reason", p. 378.

[2] For instance, sometimes a value-judgment logically entails another one. I'll give examples later.

[3] It's also as good a time as any to note that the word 'irrational' has a secondary meaning also (secondary, that is, to the definition by Korsgaard I quoted in the last paragraph): a person who isn't "capable of performing logical and inductive operations" (Korsgaard, op. cit., p. 379) can be said to be irrational. Strictly speaking, though, this usage doesn't seem quite right. Moreover, the quoted phrase is ambiguous. It can mean either that the person has some kind of mental disorder that renders him incapable of performing logical operations, or it can imply a (momentary or sustained) lack of intelligence. In neither case does it seem truly appropriate to say that *irrationality* is being exhibited. But ordinary usage is vague here. For example, in one context it might assimilate the "incapability" to irrationality, while in another context it might assimilate it to unintelligence. An anti-Semite could be considered either irrational or unintelligent: if he is aware of the reasons that militate against anti-Semitism but ignores them (say, because of the overpowering nature of his hatred), he is being unequivocally irrational; if he isn't at all aware of the reasons, he's exhibiting a lack of intelligence (because the ignored rational considerations have to be "*available*", in some sense, if the person is to be called truly irrational). But colloquially we might well say even in this latter case that he's being irrational, despite the fact that, upon reflection, that usage doesn't seem intuitively correct. Still, it's well-established in the language, so we might as well consider it a secondary meaning. –Incidentally, all this is further evidence for what I argued above, that it is sometimes irremediably unclear whether a person is acting contrary to reason.

Now, David Hume looked at all this in a slightly different way than I have.[1] He seemed to think that there is no such thing as practical reason. (I doubt he even thought that *instrumental* reason is practical reason, since he knew that such reasoning is a disguised form of finding out what is the case—i.e., what cause will bring about a desired effect.) Reason, he thought, cannot in itself motivate anyone to act. Only desires can motivate, and desires are neither rational nor irrational per se. "Reason can teach us how to satisfy our desires or passions, but it cannot tell us whether those desires or passions are themselves 'rational', that is, there is no sense in which desires or passions are rational or irrational."[2] Even outrageous desires cannot be criticized as irrational. To quote Hume:

> 'Tis not contrary to reason for me to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. 'Tis not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian or person wholly unknown to me. 'Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledg'd lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter.[3]

I have already explained in what sense I disagree with these ideas. I think that our acts may well conflict with what we value on a reflective level—say, if we are overwhelmed by fear and therefore act contrary to the (prescriptive implications of the) value-judgments we're reflectively committed to. This, I maintain, should be called a form of irrationality, partly because we intuitively think it is such and partly because it involves blatant self-contradiction: I am acting contrary to what my reflective value-judgments prescribe. If I'm not really committed to them, then perhaps it isn't quite correct to say that by acting contrary to them I'm being irrational; if I am committed to them, though, then I *am* being (practically) irrational. My irrationality is practical because it isn't a violation of logic or induction but rather of the rules of 'psychological entailment' (which decree, for example, that if I value the thought of not watching *Entertainment Tonight*, I ought to stop watching it)—in other words, because it doesn't relate to what is *true*, as theoretical irrationality does.

From another perspective, though, Hume is right that practical irrationality is impossible. For every act (and intention) is the expression of a value-judgment. It presupposes, and can indeed be called the 'actualizing' of, a value-judgment.[4] For instance, by writing this paper I am 'expressing' or 'demonstrating' my (commitment to the) value-judgment that writing this paper is good, i.e., that I ought to be writing this paper. Similarly, insofar as my watching *Entertainment Tonight* can justifiably be called an *act*, it presupposes the (not fully conscious) value-judgment that watching it is good, at least in the circumstances in which I find myself at that moment. In short, as an agent—i.e., as someone with free will, which means that a given act is done because one values it or something it will lead to (or is constitutive of)[5]—one values, in some way or another (whether implicitly or explicitly), acting in whatever way one is acting in a given moment. Hence, one is necessarily always abiding by the prescriptive implications of the value-judgment that overrules all others in that moment. And this means that one is never being practically irrational.

I suspect, however, that Hume didn't have such considerations in mind when writing the passage above. Instead, he was articulating the implications of the fact that 'ought' cannot be derived from 'is', that a value-judgment/prescription is not logically inferable from what is the case. He may have been the first person to discover this truth, but he was by no means the last to emphasize its importance. His point harks, for example, to Kierkegaard's insistence that every decision, every act—even the act of accepting a conclusion validly derived from premises (as well as the act of thus deriving it)—involves an element of

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[1] As will be seen, though, I agree with much of what he had to say.
[2] Korsgaard, op. cit., p. 374.
[3] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1888), p. 415.
[4] In a more direct sense, of course, it is the actualizing of an *intention*.
[5] The reason why the idea of self-control entails *that* idea is that it entails that what I do is done because I want to do it, i.e., because I value it or something it is a means to (or constitutive of).

freedom, a "leap of faith".[1] Hume doesn't explicitly focus on the element of freedom, but he clearly has it in mind (however obscurely) in denying that 'ought' is derivable from 'is'. He is insisting that there is a gap, a gap of freedom—of non-rationality—between a reason (properly so-called)[2] and a value-judgment, which is basically equivalent to saying that there is a gap between a reason and the carrying-out of an act, because an act is the actualizing of a value-judgment (or its prescriptive implications). Therefore, acting contrary to theoretical reason (or to what is true) is impossible. Meaningless. Since Hume thought that theoretical reason is the only form of reason, he thought that it's impossible to act contrary to reason, i.e., truth.[3] –To say it one more time, the reason I partially disagree with him about the possibility of practical reason, even though I agree with him that 'ought' cannot be derived from 'is', is that I recognize a form of reason which is not really assimilable to the category of 'is': it consists in the fact that insofar as I value something, I psychologically (or perhaps it's better to say *phenomenologically*) commit myself to acting a certain way. As Korsgaard might say, *I prescribe a law* (or laws) *for myself*. If I value Schubert's piece *Erlkönig*, I implicitly 'prescribe' that I will not throw away the CD it's on, that I will not go around telling people it's a terrible piece, etc. For any given value-judgment (whether implicit or explicit), there are a number of normative implications. If I violate any of them—and if my violation doesn't grow out of another value-judgment that has temporarily trumped the earlier one—I'm being to that extent irrational. But this kind of irrationality is not a violation of logic or induction; rather, it stems from my acting contrary to the nature of action itself. In violating the normative implications of my value-judgment, I have 'negated' (contradicted) the value-judgment itself—even as I still profess to be committed to it—and since the act of valuing is really the basis, and meaning, of action itself (in that implicit in every act is a valuation, and every act is a realizing, a manifesting, of a particular valuation), I have 'negated' or contradicted *action*. My two relevant acts (the valuing and the ignoring of the normative implications of this valuing) are mutually vitiating, as well as—in combination—contradictory to the universal meaning of action itself.

In any case, I noted earlier that it seems almost psychologically impossible to act in this way. It's scarcely conceivable that a person could contradict himself in the way I imagined him to in the 'renting a movie' example above (as well as in the 'valuing a painting but destroying it' example[4]). At most, *partial* practical irrationality is possible—as when I keep watching *Entertainment Tonight* despite my belief that my 'greater good' would be to get some work done.

As I was saying, though, the element of freedom, of non-rationality, in action, which is also that of value-judgments, entails that 'ought' cannot be derived from 'is'. For instance, one cannot legitimately do what Schopenhauer did in justifying an ethics of compassion through the metaphysical consideration that everyone is part of an undifferentiated thing-in-itself behind appearances (and so by treating people compassionately we're acting in harmony with our mutual oneness). –Or rather, one can 'justify' one's morality however one likes, but (1) if the justification proceeds directly from what is to what ought to be,

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[1] Kierkegaard thus anticipated Lewis Carroll's argument in his famous paper "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles", in *Mind* 4, No. 14 (April 1895): 278-280. Carroll pointed out the difference between the *acceptance* of a logical rule (such as *modus ponens*) and the *application* of it. The latter is a second act, different as such from the first act of accepting the logical rule in question. One can accept the logical rule but refuse to apply it, because every act, according to Carroll and Kierkegaard, involves non-rationality, or freedom.

[2] By 'reason' here I mean a conclusion derived from logic or induction.

[3] He recognized, of course, the possibility of theoretical irrationality—but, as will become evident three paragraphs later in the text, he didn't really have the 'right' to acknowledge the existence of theoretical irrationality. For this kind of irrationality is just a matter of the motivational force of an end (namely, knowledge) failing to transmit to the means necessary to achieve the end (namely, adhering to logical and inductive rules). In other words, it is a kind of instrumental irrationality, which itself is a manifestation of *practical* irrationality. So theoretical irrationality is a manifestation of practical irrationality. But since Hume rejected the possibility of the latter, he had no right to accept the possibility of the former. (See below.)

[4] It is of course possible to value something and yet treat it badly, but in doing so, one shows that he values something more than the thing he's treating badly. He needn't necessarily *think* he values it more, but inasmuch as a person does what he wants to do, and what he wants to do is what he values at that moment, *this* person (the one who doesn't think he really values what he is doing, even though he has chosen to do it) is deluding himself.

then there is no logical connection between it and the morality, and the justification fails; or (2) if it deduces the morality from a more basic set of values, then the logical leap (from 'is' to 'ought') occurs in the justification of the more basic set, and so, again, the justification of the morality fails. That is, it's conditional upon the acceptance of the set of values from which it is deduced—and a conditional justification isn't what one wants in a justification of morality. I'll return to this point later, but the relevant conclusion to draw from the gap between 'is' and 'ought' is the one that Hume draws in the passage above: desires, or more generally values, are not criticizable as violating 'truth' (whether logical, scientific, metaphysical or whatever).

But given the gap between 'is' and 'ought', how can theoretically rational considerations motivate? And how is it possible to be theoretically irrational? The answer is that one's responsiveness to theoretical reason must come from another source, albeit a source that decrees that such reasons will be capable of motivating. For example, suppose I value knowledge. I desire to know truth. My value itself, like all values, is neither reasonable nor unreasonable; it's just a brute psychological fact. But since I know that the way to pursue knowledge is to carry out logical and inductive processes of reasoning, I will be motivated by such reasons. In themselves they can't motivate, but given my value, my desire—my 'end', namely knowledge—they can motivate. Actually, I'm basically adhering to the instrumental principle by being motivationally responsive to theoretical reasons: careful reasoning is related to the attainment of knowledge as means to end. And as philosophers know, instrumentally rational considerations are able to motivate because the motivational force of the end gets transmitted to the means necessary to achieve the end. –This shows, incidentally, that theoretical and practical reason are very similar, despite my efforts to differentiate them. For the instrumental principle is a manifestation of practical reason. And so, oddly enough, the motivational force of theoretically rational considerations is grounded in practical rationality (in the imperative—which, as Korsgaard says, is constitutive of action as such[1]—to respect the normative implications of one's value-judgments), even as the *meaning* of *practical* irrationality (viz., inconsistency with oneself) is but an extension of the meaning of theoretical irrationality. Both kinds of reason presuppose the other.

Indeed, in daily life people muddle them together. A person is said to be irrational both if he obviously contradicts his own values and if he fails to be motivated by logic or induction. Both types of irrationality, though, are ultimately considered ways of being insensitive to truth, because, as I said earlier, even practical irrationality amounts to self-contradiction, and anything self-contradictory is instinctively felt by everyone to be 'wrong'. The reason, then, why it's considered a harsh criticism to call someone irrational is that everyone, even the most unintelligent guy on the street, is committed to being right (and thus to not being self-contradictory). His commitment is revealed in his actions, for example by his getting frustrated with people who disagree with him and trying to convince them that they're wrong. Indeed, as I mentioned above, the commitment to this value of 'truth' is forced on us by the nature of language: assertions posit their own truth and truth-conditions, so in asserting them we're saying that what we're saying is true. –Thus, any given person wants his beliefs to be true and his reasons for action to be good, and he thinks they are. When you call him irrational, you're saying that reasons are readily available to him for not doing what he's doing—for not valuing what he's valuing—and yet he's ignoring them. He's ignoring either obvious logical and inductive inferences or obvious normative implications of his value-judgments. The reason he *ought not to* is that, in valuing truth/rationality—in wanting his beliefs and his reasons for action to be true, or 'good'—he ought to value good ways of arriving at truth, as means to an end.[2] In not adhering to rational considerations he's exhibiting something like instrumental irrationality with respect to his end of having true beliefs and good reasons for action. He's ignoring the norms, or the 'laws', he has given himself by valuing rationality (consistency, truth, self-justification).

So, how does one go about justifying a particular act? One cannot appeal solely to what is the case, because there is no logical connection between 'ought' and 'is'. Rather, one has to appeal to what is the case *in combination with* other values that one holds. (More precisely: one's other value(-judgment)s will

[1] See, e.g., "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason", p. 249.

[2] Alternatively, they can be thought of as constitutive of his end. For, arguably, the desire to be right is basically the desire to act rationally (or to be rationally justified).

themselves be included in the consideration of what is the case, since, after all, they exist.) Much of the time this justification will proceed along instrumental lines. I can justify eating at McDonald's by invoking the facts that I'm hungry, i.e., that I value the thought of eating food right now, that the prescriptive implication of this value is that I find a place to buy food, and that McDonald's is the only place nearby. – Justifications involving the instrumental principle are easy and unproblematic.

Suppose, on the other hand, you want to justify your approval of a particular movie. How should you do this? First you have to note that you have certain other relevant values, such as a complicated plot-structure, rich characterization, thematic significance, and lush cinematography. Then you argue that the movie manifested these qualities. If you're right—if you do a good job of arguing that the movie epitomized your values, such that, perhaps, you convince other people to agree with you—then the value-judgment that you set out to justify is justified. Notice, though, that it's only conditionally justified. It wouldn't necessarily be irrational for someone to reject the values that provided the basis for your approval of the movie. It *would* be irrational if this other person shared with you an even more basic value, from which the values that he has rejected can be easily derived.[1] This circumstance is unlikely, though. It's more likely that he happens to have different values than you, in which case he isn't being irrational because he isn't failing to be motivated by rational considerations. If you don't have a relevant value in common with him, from which the four values I mentioned above can be deduced, it's senseless for you to try to convince him that he's wrong or irrational. For values can be deduced only from other values, not from what is the case.

If the two of you do get into an argument about whether the movie was good, it's likely that you're really trying to convince him that, despite his denial, he actually does have the relevant values that you do (such as lush cinematography). He just doesn't realize it at the moment, so you're trying to coax him out of his momentary confusion or ignorance of his own values.

—I could continue embellishing all these ideas, but the purpose of this paper isn't to clarify rationality. I've been discussing it mainly so as to have firmer ground to stand on in the following. Hence, I won't investigate the relations between the other meanings of 'rational' and 'reasonable', nor will I show to what extent ambiguities in natural language are responsible for confusions about the notion of reason. (It's easily confused with that of intelligence, which is even *more* ambiguous, as well as with intellectual creativity. And 'irrationality' can be confused with a reliance on mistaken premises, or with deficiencies in such non-rational faculties as aesthetic sensibility.) The immediately relevant point is that in criticizing people for exhibiting irrationality, we assume that one of their most fundamental value-judgments is that it's good to have knowledge, it's good to be justified in one's acts and beliefs. Hence, our criticism has nothing to do with "external" reasons[2] or non-motivating "reasons of rationality"[3] or anything like that. We're simply criticizing someone for not adhering to the prescriptive implications of *his own* fundamental value-judgment. We're criticizing him for not wholly abiding by something like the 'principle of constitutive reasoning' (that you do whatever it is that constitutes your ends—even if they're largely unconscious, as in this case). That's why our criticism has force: he recognizes that, if it's true, he's failing to act in accordance with one of his own values, and is thus being irrational.

The circularity of this situation is a little paradoxical. We criticize someone for not being motivated by reason, which he should be because, as a human, he wants to be justified in his acts; and he (perhaps) heeds our criticism just because, in acting contrary to his value (of being justified in his acts), he is being irrational. That is, the reason he doesn't want to be irrational is that it's irrational to be irrational. There is no other reason to adhere to reason than the fact that *not* to adhere to it would be contrary to reason. This fact somehow strikes us as bad enough in itself; no other justification is needed for our acting rationally.

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[1] An example of such a value is music that sounds gloomy. Given that minor modes sound gloomier than major modes, it's inferrable from the judgment that 'gloominess is good' that pieces in a minor key are preferable to pieces that aren't. This second value, then, can be derived from the first. If someone holds the first but not the second, he is contradicting himself and is therefore, at least prima facie, exhibiting irrationality.

[2] See Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons", in *Moral Discourse and Practice*.

[3] See James Dreier, "Humean Doubts about Categorical Imperatives", in *Varieties of Practical Reasoning*, edited by Elijah Millgram (Cambridge: MIT Press).

We value it for its own sake. This is surely related to the fact that rules of reason are *logically* self-justifying too. As James Dreier says, "there is no sense at all to be made of the question of whether we have any reason to follow the rules of rationality".[1] These rules (norms) are therefore unlike other rules, such as rules of prudence or morality, in that they are their own justification. One cannot ask for a reason to act rationally without presupposing norms of rationality—just as one, almost of psychological necessity, is committed to the *value* of being rational(ly justified in his acts).

These ideas have implications for morality, but I'll postpone that discussion until I've finished the analysis of values in general which was interrupted by the analysis of reason. I was in the middle of pointing out that we implicitly 'assume', in the act of utterance, that the assertion we make is true. We may recant later, but when we utter it we obviously think it's true and justified. Language forces this fact on us, as does our own unconscious view that "everyone must be like us" (that our own experience is somehow universal), as does our foundational commitment to rationality. Kant's focusing on beauty, therefore—on our how we universalize judgments of taste—was somewhat misleading: we posit the objectivity of *all* our value-judgments, and we reason (or argue) about them as if there is an objective truth to the matter. Our basic desire to be right, or at least justified, in our acts is the reason for this. The question is, is it right? Are values and their corresponding norms somehow objective? Can they be 'true'?

Before answering that, I should describe the realist's position more fully. I'll quote Korsgaard's definition: "realism is the view that propositions employing [normative] concepts may have truth values because such concepts describe or refer to normative entities or facts that exist independently of those concepts themselves. We have the concepts in order to describe or refer to those facts."[2] I have said that realism is implicit in our ordinary use of language, because propositions, in positing truth-conditions, 'refer' to [or represent] an independent reality. Realism, therefore, is the commonsense view. It's also the view that people find most attractive, because it (potentially) justifies their certainty about their own values. That is, since people like to think they're right, a position that holds out the possibility that their value-judgments are objectively true is seductive. Is it correct, though?

It should be evident from the foregoing that I answer that question negatively, except with respect to norms of theoretical reason (and mathematics, which is just a special kind of pure reason).[3] But that's because these latter norms, unlike others, are concerned not with what is *good* but with what is *true*. This unique property is manifested also in the fact that they're categorical: they are their own justification. We can't question them without presupposing them. This is why Aristotle said that in order to win an argument with someone who doubts the principle of non-contradiction, all you have to do is get him to assert something.[4] Basic rules of reason, then, are self-justifying, which distinguishes them from all other sets of rules—whether they be 'derivations' from the instrumental principle (like prudential maxims) or norms that are the direct flip-side of value-judgments (like "One ought not to murder", which is the 'flip-side' of the judgment "Murder is wrong"). One can coherently argue for or against these other sets of rules, as one *cannot* argue for basic rules of reason. But prescriptions of instrumental reason,[5] while derivative of basic norms of rationality, have more in common with the latter than they do with norms that are the flip-side of value-judgments, for they are concerned solely with how to cause a given effect, while the others are normative entailments of value-judgments.

It is these norms, and the values they presuppose, that cannot be 'objective' or 'true' in the way that norms of rationality are, precisely because they are not self-justifying (or—in the case of 'prescriptions of instrumental reason'—deducible from self-justifying rules in combination with given states of affairs). In other words, it's because there is a gap of freedom between what is and action (i.e., what ought to be) that these norms/values cannot be a part of reality, for they are nothing but actions in the form of

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[1] Ibid., p. 29.
[2] Korsgaard, "Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy", *Philosophy in America at the Turn of the Century* (2003): 100.
[3] The *value* of reason is not somehow 'objectively true', but *rules* of reason are.
[4] See "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason", p. 248.
[5] For example: if your goal is to eat food, go to the kitchen and get some food.

'potentiality'. (Remember I said that implicit in every act is a corresponding value-judgment, and every act is an expression of a value-judgment. Similarly, every value-judgment/norm is an unactualized act. "It's wrong to murder" is an unactualized refraining-from-murder; "one ought to be honest" is an unactualized being-honest. It is a positing-the-act-of-being-honest.) They are, in fact, posited modifications of reality: after all, they are merely what *ought to be*, as opposed to what *is*. By definition, then, values and norms (except norms of reason) cannot be objectively true. Like actions, they are expressions of freedom; and freedom, as Sartre argued, is essentially a negating of the real. In acting (i.e., being free), I am modifying reality, I am asserting myself. I am changing what is the case at that moment. Since value-judgments, and their normative implications, can be thought of as unactualized acts, and acts, in being expressions of freedom, are negations of what is real, value-judgments are negations of objective reality. By definition, then, value realism and normative realism (excluding realism about norms of rationality) are false.

There are many more arguments one can bring against them. Consider John Mackie's famous "argument from queerness":

> If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else. ....[On this view,] an objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, not because of any contingent fact that this person, or every person, is so constituted that he desires this end, but just because the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it....[1]

Values motivate the person for whom they are values. If they were objective, as 2 + 3 = 5 is objective, or as "In order to eat food, one must put it into one's mouth" is objective, they would still have to motivate. But neither of the propositions I just mentioned *motivates* (the second might seem to, but it actually derives its motivational force from the *value* attached to the thought of eating)—and, in general, I can't conceive what it would be like for an objective truth to motivate. The idea doesn't make sense. But of course this fact is predictable, given that value-judgments and acts are *negations* of the real, i.e., assertions of freedom. For something real (true) to have to-be-pursuedness built into it would be a negation of its realness, since action is a negation of what is. So Mackie's argument from queerness is actually an argument from self-contradictoriness.

Or suppose we talked to a classical utilitarian, who would argue that "an agent is obligated to perform an action when there is a rule specifying that actions of that kind are to be performed. [This rule, according to the utilitarian, is] the principle of utility. It is because of the existence of this rule that we characterize actions as obligatory or forbidden." The problem is that one could intelligibly say, "Why should I care if there's such a rule? What's it to me? It's just some external norm that I reject." Or, as Korsgaard says, "Are we obligated to obey the rule? If one is obligated to obey the rule, then the notion of obligation exists prior to the existence of the rule. We cannot explain obligation in terms of the rule, as something that arises from it. On the other hand, if we are *not* obligated to obey the rule, then it seems we may permissibly ignore it, and so we have not after all explained why the actions it directs are obligatory."[2] This argument works against a great many moral theories. I'll explain why in a moment.

Another consideration against realism is that human beings currently have no obvious criteria for what would constitute a truth about values or norms. Science and philosophy have criteria for determining truth, but what sort of criteria could we use to decide whether a moral claim is true? Perhaps agreement among everyone? But this fact in itself would have no bearing on moral truth. The implicit premise that the more people agree with a claim, the greater is its likelihood of being true is not necessarily plausible. Moreover, it's perfectly conceivable that nearly everyone could agree that a certain state of affairs is morally acceptable even though it isn't. Think of slavery in ancient Greece, or in the American Confederacy. In any

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[1] From *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, in *Moral Discourse and Practice*, pp. 96, 97.
[2] Korsgaard, op. cit., p. 111.

case, it's a vast logical leap to conclude that murder is wrong from the fact that all cultures *think* it's wrong. But what other criteria are there? –The point is that, if there isn't a way to confirm its truth, it's unclear what is being said in saying that a value-judgment (or a norm) is true.

Notice that no *argument* can establish the truth of a given value-judgment. Suppose I say, "Raphael's painting 'The School of Athens' is beautiful", and someone asks me why I think so. I might say, "It has a certain symmetry, its use of perspective is realistic, and it shows an incredible amount of detail". But my interlocutor can simply deny that these factors entail its beauty. He can say, with G. E. Moore, that it's an open question whether symmetry etc. is beautiful. If he were philosophically sophisticated he might invoke Kant: judgments of taste are not logical per se, i.e., not based on conceptual relations, but are intuitive and subjective. One has to *experience* the object in order to decide whether it's beautiful; one can't judge (or defend) its beauty simply by considering its properties in abstraction from the object—i.e., by considering a *list* of them.[1] However, the 'open question' argument applies to *all* value-judgments, not only judgments of taste. If someone says that an act was good because it demonstrated sensitivity for a person's feelings, it's intelligible to ask whether such sensitivity is itself good. This fact is simply another manifestation of the gap between 'is' and 'ought'. One cannot justifiably conclude from an object's (or action's) 'natural' properties that it is *good*.

On the other hand, if I justify my value-judgment by invoking other evaluative words—if, for example, I say that Raphael's painting is magnificent, sublime, awe-inspiring, and hence beautiful—someone can challenge the value-judgments from which I deduced the one I was arguing for. He can say that *those* judgments are problematic, inasmuch as they are made on the basis of the object's possessing certain natural properties (whether they be colors or shapes or whatever). So, once again, the gap between 'is' and 'ought' entails that a value-judgment is not logically justified.

To say it differently: evaluative words like 'good' and 'beautiful' and 'unjust' are action-guiding. Which is just to say that a judgment in which they occur is an 'unactualized act'—or acts—of some sort. (I say 'acts' because a value-judgment can have more than one prescriptive, or normative, implication.) Non-evaluative words are not action-guiding. So the difference between the two categories is basically the difference between a [factual] proposition and an act. Clearly *these* categories are radically different; the one is (supposed to be) a replication of reality—a reproduction of it through the medium of language—while the other is a modification of reality, an intruding-of-oneself into reality. To say, then, that one is 'implied' by the other—that an act, or a value-judgment, is implied by a truth—is virtually meaningless. What would it be like for an act to be logically entailed by something (aside from another act or a value-judgment)? Acts are essentially free. They can be *causally* necessitated—say, by the firing of particular neurons—but, first of all, this isn't logical necessity, and second of all, acts are so necessitated only insofar as one abstracts from their *act-ive* character.

But if acts cannot be 'logically entailed' by a truth, they cannot be truths themselves. (A truth, after all, entails itself.) This accords with ordinary usage of the word 'truth'. We don't say that an act is true, only that a proposition is. But if acts are value-judgments 'actualized', then such judgments themselves cannot be true. They aren't the sort of things to which the property of 'truth' applies. It certainly *seems* they are, though. The form in which they are asserted posits their truth. But if this is so, their form contradicts their content. Their content cannot be true—just as the content of an act cannot be true—but their form requires that they be capable of bearing truth-values. This conflict between form and content means that, in a way, they are self-contradictions. Not in the way that "The cat is not a cat" is a self-contradiction, however: *that* statement has a self-contradictory *content*. The content of a value-judgment contradicts not itself but the form in which it is expressed—the 'referential' form, the form of referring-beyond-itself-to-an-independent-reality, which is implicit in declarative utterances.

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[1] See Frank Sibley's excellent article "Aesthetic Concepts", in *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern*, edited by Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995), pp. 312 – 331. He argues that aesthetic properties, even non-evaluative ones like 'graceful', 'delicate', 'elegant', and 'garish', are not condition-governed or rule-governed. They're intuitive: we apply them to an object on the basis of how it intuitively strikes us. –Kant was onto something when he contrasted the aesthetic faculty with the cognitive.

What this self-contradiction means is that, just as "The cat is not a cat" is in some sense meaningless, so are "Lying is wrong", "The painting is beautiful", and "One ought not to murder". These statements don't seem as meaningless as "The cat is not a cat" because their content contradicts not itself but its form, and so they aren't as blatantly self-contradictory as "The cat is not a cat". Still, they have an element of self-contradiction; and it is partly this fact that accounts for the common intuition that, when someone says, e.g., "Lying is bad", or "Hitler was evil", it isn't entirely clear what he is saying. The meanings of 'bad' and 'evil' are....strangely meaningless. For these words too, like the value-judgments in which they're embedded, implicitly 'refer' to something else, in this case to a concept that's supposed to have some kind of descriptive content;—in other words, to a property of certain things in the world. Hitler had the property of being evil, lying has the property of being bad. Properties are supposed to exist in the world, just like the truth-conditions of propositions. (For example, colors are 'out there' in the world, as are shapes. We even implicitly interpret *sensations* as being 'in' the objects that cause them: an ice cube *is* cold, fire *has the property* of being hot.) But an object or act cannot *have the property* of badness or goodness, because values are merely the essential components in value-judgments, which are acts in the form of 'potentiality'—and an act isn't the sort of thing that can be a 'part' of something in the world. It's inherently a *changing* of the world. Therefore: values, like value-judgments, contradict themselves. Their content contradicts their linguistic form.

But what exactly is the content of a value or a value-judgment? I have said it's an unactualized act, but this is vague. A better way to say it is that a value-judgment is essentially the speaker's subjective reaction to the given object projected onto the object—imaginatively made into a property of the object. But the projected thing isn't precisely the reaction itself; rather, it's the property of 'causing this particular reaction', the reaction that the value-judgment manifests. The speaker effectively reifies his reaction and projects its 'objective referent' (so to speak) into whatever it is that he is judging. If he says that lying is bad, he is projecting into the act of lying some such property as 'inherently causing disapproval'. This, however, is really just the property of 'inherently not to be done', which is why my two accounts of the content of value-judgments amount to the same thing. For 'inherently not to be done' is a posited action, an unactualized action (or, in this case, *refraining* from action—which is itself, of course, action).

I suppose this second account is a version of projectivism. We project the 'causal flip-side' (or 'objective referent') of our reaction onto objects, treating it as if it adheres in the object like any other property. The wrongness of murder is (supposed to be) what explains my belief that it's wrong; the beauty of a painting is what causes [or justifies] my belief that it's beautiful. In fact, of course, there are features of the object, in combination with my psychological and social conditioning, as well as my biology, that give rise to my value-judgment; however, these features are not what I unthinkingly think they are when I utter my judgment. They aren't wrongness or beauty or ugliness or goodness or whatever; they're facts that science can explain, such as the effects that certain visual or auditory stimuli have on my nervous system, etc. Since science and psychology can explain the causal mechanisms through which I make value-judgments, there is no explanatory role for any kind of realism in the sphere of norms and values (excepting norms of rationality). All vestiges of realism are merely redundant and implausible relics of "common sense" and ordinary language use.

What exactly the "reactions" I've mentioned consist of has been a matter of debate among philosophers. Are they beliefs, feelings, preferences, attitudes, or inclinations? (I think they can be all five.) Whatever they are, though, the value-judgment/normative statement is in some sense an expression of them. The expressivists, then, are partly right—as are, incidentally, most other schools of ethics. Noncognitivists, cognitivists, realists (but only insofar as they describe the attitude implicit in our ordinary value-judgments), emotivists, intuitionists, "sensibility" theorists (like John McDowell[1]), and constructivists. Construed in a certain [limited] way, none of these positions precludes the others. They merely emphasize different aspects of what it means to make value-judgments. After all, no type of act is a simple affair, something that can be adequately explained from only one perspective. There are multifarious intentions involved, behavioral dispositions, intuitions, logical implications and presuppositions, physical movements, perceptions of

[1] See his "Values and Secondary Qualities", in *Moral Discourse and Practice*.

objects and reactions to them, neural mechanisms. Even the phenomenology of a single act is an extremely complex thing. Especially when you recall what I argued in the first part of this paper—that whether a sentence expresses a value-judgment depends on the context in which it's spoken, and that utterances can have evaluative features without really expressing value-judgments per se, and that sometimes it's impossible to tell whether a given utterance expresses a value-judgment or a purely *descriptive* proposition—you'll realize that the truth cannot be *only* projectivism or *only* constructivism. Maybe one theory does a better job of explaining *this* particular utterance than *that* one, such that a different theory is more appropriate for the latter (because its context differs from that of the former). Open-mindedness should reign in every intellectual field, but especially in philosophy.

I won't show the precise ways in which all these theories can be reconciled, since this paper is supposed to be only a sketch and it's already too long. Instead, I'll argue in more detail about why morality in particular cannot be meaningful, or at least as meaningful as it's taken to be.

Everyone agrees that something about morality distinguishes it from other spheres of values and norms. Most importantly, it seems as if moral values are somehow more 'absolute' and 'obligatory' than, say, aesthetic values. This intuition is manifested in the conviction that there is such a thing as moral *rightness* and *wrongness*, as opposed to mere *goodness* and *badness*. Ugliness, for instance, is bad, but few people would call it *wrong*. That word sounds too forceful for aesthetics, too categorical. On the other hand, murder is indeed called 'bad', but more often it's called 'wrong'. So moral values are supposed to be more binding than aesthetic values. In fact, their obligatoriness differs in kind, not in degree.

Another way to say this is that moral norms are *duties*. They're *imperative*. This criterion is what we use to distinguish mere social norms of how to treat others from moral norms. For example, kindness isn't usually considered a moral value, because behaving kindly is merely *good* rather than *right*. It isn't a duty. Not to lie, however, is considered a duty, so it's a moral norm. Insofar, then, as a given type of social behavior doesn't seem intuitively to be *imperative*, or *right*, it doesn't fall under the heading of 'morality'. It's merely a common run-of-the-mill value.

So morality, by definition, consists of duties. This doesn't, by the way, foreclose any possibilities about the *content* of morality. It doesn't, for instance, rule out Carol Gilligan's "ethics of care", which is supposed to be contrasted with Kant's deontological system. Care, compassion, empathy: nothing in principle rules them out as maxims of morality. They simply have to be called duties. It has to be a *duty* that people act with compassion and empathy. Otherwise such acts can't properly be called moral. –This conception of morality isn't a stipulation; it's implicit in the way we talk.

The question is, what is a duty? The most obvious way to define it is in terms of other normative words. A duty is something that people are obligated to follow; it's an imperative. But what does *that* mean? Evidently if we define that in normative terms, we'll run into the same problem again. Its meaning won't be clear. –This problem, of course, is just an implication of what I've been arguing. Normative and evaluative terms are not fully meaningful, given their [semi-]self-contradictory character. They implicitly pick out some independent reality even as their only real content is their action-guidingness, their positing of an act—which amounts to their reification of an attitude of approval or disapproval (in the person who speaks them). They implicitly project their action-guidingness into the world, which is a contradiction because action is inherently free, i.e., reality-negating. For a posited act (i.e., 'action-guidingness') to be *in* the world is a total contradiction, virtually meaningless. Therefore, normative and evaluative words intuitively strike us as somewhat lacking in content, though we have trouble pinpointing exactly *how* or *why*. But I have clarified the matter, at least in outline.

Again, these facts explain why any definition of 'duty' in terms of *non*-normative words must fail.[1] Such words, by definition, lack the element of action-guidingness, which means they fail to capture the

[1] E.g., "any act that adheres to the principle of utility is a duty". There are of course other, unrelated, problems with this utilitarian definition, but the fact that it falls victim to Moore's argument—which, by the way, basically consists of asking the question "Why?" ("Pleasure is the good." "Why?" or "The good is what we desire to desire." "Why?", etc.)—is itself fatal to it. In any case, this definition doesn't explain what the word 'duty' *means*; it says only which acts are duties. But the task that has to be preliminary to enumerating the various duties is clarification of 'duty' itself.

force of normative words. G. E. Moore's 'open question' argument, I have said, consisted of nothing but a muddled intuition of this fact—i.e., of the difference between 'is' and 'ought'. 'Ought' is self-contradictory (except when it's an 'ought' of *reason*), while 'is' is not; hence, the former cannot be defined except in terms of other normative/evaluative words, which capture both its element of self-contradiction and its action-guidingness.

There is, however, one substantive way to define 'ought': namely, the way in which I defined the 'ought' of reason. Reason justifies itself—its basic norms are self-justifying—and any imperative of reason (such as an imperative that grows out of the instrumental principle) is ultimately justified by, or deduced from, rules that are self-justifying [or self-evident]. To say, therefore, that one ought to act in a certain way because reason dictates it is just to say that the act is deducible from fundamental principles of logic in combination with a description of the relevant state of affairs; it is, in other words, to say that *this is the way reality is*. To achieve an end, one *must* act in such-and-such a way; to do this mathematical equation correctly, one *must* add so-and-so together. 'Oughts' of reason are actually 'oughts' of 'is', which is why they are not meaningless. They are deducible from self-justifying rules.

It was Kant's genius to understand all this without understanding it (or, at least, its anti-moralistic implications). This is why he defined duties as principles of reason, as self-justifying maxims of practical reason. One ought to follow a duty just because it's a duty—that is, because it's self-justifying. His answer, then, to what a moral imperative is and why we ought to follow it is that it's a *categorical* imperative, like imperatives of reason, and hence its truth is self-evident. Like logic, it doesn't depend on our subjective desires or our historical circumstances. It's an *a priori* truth, like 2 + 3 = 5.

Kant's answer to what moral imperatives mean is the only possible substantive one,[1] the only one that neither defines 'duty' circularly (in terms of other problematic normative words) nor falls victim to the 'open question' argument. Indeed, any answer that succumbs to Moore's argument (i.e., the is/ought dichotomy) is flawed not only for that reason but also because it fails to answer the main question, which is how the concept of 'duty' (or 'moral imperative') *itself* should be defined. Theories that succumb to the is/ought distinction consist in saying that such-and-such an act is a duty. Hobbes's social contract theory is an example, as is Bentham's utilitarianism. Rather than giving an intuitive description of the meaning of 'duty', they stipulate that certain acts are duties. In other words, they define the concept extensionally rather than intensionally. The intensional definition, which is what we intuitively want, has to be something like 'a self-justifying maxim of action', 'an intrinsically right rule to live by'. It has to make some reference to reality or objective truth, because, given the referential [or rather, representational] nature of language, our intuitive understanding of normative words involves some reference to 'truth'. Realists like Samuel Clarke and Richard Price[2] understood this, but Kant gave the definition in question its most sophisticated form.

It isn't necessary to discuss Kant's answer to what the proper formulations of the categorical imperative are, because there are fatal flaws even in his framework. The first arises from the fact that norms of reason, while categorical in themselves, are hypothetical with regard to our explicit *application* of them. A person need not and does not follow them at all times—indeed, this is what makes (theoretical) irrationality possible—because, as I argued earlier, rules of reason are not intrinsically motivating. They can't be: action-guidingness cannot be a part of reality or truth(s of reason). It comes from values. Therefore, we guide ourselves according to (conclusions derived through theoretical) reason only insofar as we value truth.[3] The value transmits its motivational force to the rules of reason, such that we are "capable of being motivated by rational considerations". But these considerations *in themselves* are not what motivate us;—or rather, they motivate us only on the basis of our valuing them (i.e., their truth), not somehow

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[1] Excepting the theological one, which defines duty as anything that God commands us to do. To abide by a duty, then, is simply to do God's will. This would be a good definition if it weren't for God's nonexistence. (Also, the idea of God is full of contradictions.)

[2] See, e.g., Martha K. Zebrowski, "Richard Price: British Platonist of the Eighteenth Century", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55.1 (1994): 17 – 35.

[3] For instance, it can be argued that being Christian is theoretically irrational (though not necessarily practically so), as is being anti-Semitic, as is being prejudiced or superstitious in any way.

'intrinsically'.[1] If we don't value them, we don't treat them as categorical. In a sense, then, they're optional, as it's optional to 'take account of' *any* aspect of reality.[2] We do so only insofar as we value that aspect, whether as an end, a means to an end, or constitutive of an end.

Thus, even if the categorical imperative were categorical in the sense that the rules of logic are, our use of it would necessarily be hypothetical. Our intrinsic phenomenological freedom is the reason for this. It's meaningless to say that we *have* to (choose to) follow the categorical imperative, just as it's meaningless to say that we *have* to (choose to) follow the norms of logic. Whether the norms of logic are somehow innate in our brain [i.e. in our cognitive wiring] is another matter; and it may, in this respect, be true that, descriptively speaking, we 'have to' follow the rules of logic, just because they structure how we think. But this isn't true of the categorical imperative. Its premise—which is morality's premise—is the existence of free will. Therefore, our ability to choose whether (i.e., to what extent) to follow reason is also our ability to choose whether to follow the categorical imperative.

Another way to say this is that, while the *truth* of the categorical imperative might be self-justifying, or rather self-evident (which it isn't, by the way)—as is the truth of rational norms—the necessity of its application is not.[3] It cannot be, given what 'application' means in this context. For it presupposes choice, that is, non-necessity. Thus, to say that the categorical imperative—or, in general, a moral duty—is categorical in the sense required for morality, i.e., categorically applicable, is self-contradictory and basically meaningless. *Nothing* is necessary in this way. Nothing *can* be, because the idea doesn't make sense. The notion of duty amounts to a conceptual fusion of free will with necessity, which is senseless because the two concepts are negations of each other. –Basically, 'duty' is like any other normative/evaluative word, but to an extreme. It involves a reification and projection of *absolute* approval, as contrasted with a form of approval that's less imperative.

A third way to express the impossibility of moral duties is to return to the point I made above: Kant's answer to what duty means is the only possible meaningful one. He intuitively understood that the only meaningful form of 'ought' is the ought of reason, so he modeled his conception of moral duty on the latter notion. But with regard to reason there is no gap between 'ought' and 'is', as there is with regard to values. A value is defined by its action-guidingness, which amounts to its negation of what *is*. Since reason is a component in what is—on account of its objective truth—values involve a negation of reason. Insofar as one values something, one is not following pure reason. Since moral duties are also moral values, by their very nature they cannot be imperatives of reason. In short, the only possible substantive answer to what duties are has, ironically, almost nothing in common with what a duty would have to be. Which is why it is, in the end, a virtually meaningless answer.

The failure of Kant's project is exhibited by the fact that he had to argue extensively for his definition of moral duty. If his definition had really been a self-evident *a priori* truth, like norms of reason, argumentation would have been basically superfluous. (Also, it would have been a mystery why it had taken

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[1] In §344 of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche emphasizes that even the "scientist"—i.e., the person who prides himself on his objectivity, his commitment to truth—has a fundamental non-rational faith, viz. his faith in the value of truth. This is what motivates him, this faith, or value-judgment, which is, as such, comparable to the priest's faith in God. The section is interesting as revelatory of Nietzsche's quasi-Humean conception of reason. I think that the speculations on the origin of the commitment to truth (he considers it a manifestation of the commitment to morality) are problematic—at any rate, very imprecise—but the section is thought-provoking.

[2] Dostoyevsky has his protagonist in *Notes from the Underground* rant against the necessity and so-called value of 'reason'. Freedom is a higher truth than something as 'necessary' as mathematics. "....Two times two is four is a most obnoxious thing. Two times two is four—why, in my opinion, it's sheer impudence, sirs. Two times two is four has a cocky look; it stands across your path, arms akimbo, and spits. I agree that two times two is four is an excellent thing; but if we're going to start praising everything, then two times two is five is sometimes also a most charming little thing." (From the translation by Pevear and Volokhonsky.) Of course, even if we try to reject reason we can't do it completely. Our thought-processes are saturated with the rules of logic—which is also to say that implicitly we 'value' them, even if we try not to.

[3] Of course, its truth would consist precisely in the universal necessity of its application, but this is exactly why it's meaningless.

mankind until the 18th century to articulate the truth.) Moreover, as I've said, his failure was preordained as soon as he had set himself the goal of defending a set of values. No argument that he or anyone else, such as the neo-Kantian Korsgaard, could have put forward would have established his values, or any values, because at some point in any such argument there occurs a leap from what is to what ought to be. Even supposing (what is false) that someone could prove that a particular value logically followed from a truth, we would still have to value truth in order to value that value. So, no matter what, it's always 'permissible' to reject a given value. Nothing can obligate us to follow it, because 'obligation' is meaningless.

One should keep in mind that values and norms (except rational norms) don't have to be genuinely meaningful in order to do their job, which is to facilitate a particular kind of communication. Simon Blackburn has argued that objective-looking normative (or evaluative) predicates, like 'good' and 'ugly', are a necessary prerequisite for "serious, reflective evaluative practice, able to express concern for improvements, clashes, implications, and coherence of attitudes". Without evolving such predicates we would have remained on the level of interjections like "Boo!" and "Yay!", which would have severely hindered complex processes of economic production. Perhaps such production would have been impossible, thus making impossible social evolution. We also could not have articulated 'obligations' between people: rituals like making a promise would have been mute, and thus impossible.[1] To develop them we had to "invent a predicate answering to the attitude [in question], and treat commitments as if they were judgments, and then use all the natural devices for debating truth".[2] Only comparatively late in human evolution could we start asking misguided questions like "Is lying *truly* bad?"

But where does all this leave us? If value-judgments are ultimately not rationally justified [or justified purely by reason], and if we know this, how can we go on believing them? After all, in believing them we are believing in their truth. Especially with respect to morality, the truth is far more relativistic than we want it to be. Not only is murder not always bad, but, strictly speaking, it isn't *ever* 'bad'. 'Bad' is meaningless. As are 'evil', 'wrong', 'ugly', 'beautiful', and all other evaluative words. (Words that have a primarily descriptive content but evaluative overtones, like 'interesting', are basically meaningless insofar as they have evaluative overtones. They may also, of course, lack a clear *descriptive* meaning—'intelligent' is an example—but this is a separate issue.) They do have *some* content, but to the extent that they're supposed to be objective, they're meaningless. Knowing this, how can we with a good intellectual conscience continue making value-judgments? Are we condemned to self-delusion?

To a large extent, yes. Most people will always believe in the objective justifiability of their value-judgments, thus deluding themselves. Those of us who have intellectual integrity, however, are condemned neither to self-delusion nor to cognitive dissonance: we can navigate these shoals by relying on the fact that certain value-judgments are deducible from others. If we value, say, alleviation of suffering more than life for its own sake, then we're being irrational if we aren't pro-choice with respect to the question of abortion (because abortions are done for the sake of alleviating some kind of suffering). Indeed, one can even argue against pro-lifers if one shares a more basic value with them, such as well-being, from which a pro-choice position can apparently be deduced. Since self-conscious inconsistency is irrational, and people tend to value rationality, by convincing them of their inconsistency one may be able to convince them to change their minds about an issue. Most people do, in fact, share basic values, even apart from rationality; and it is rational to argue with them on the basis of these shared values. One's value-system cannot, strictly speaking, be *correct*, but it may be more consistent and to that degree more rational than one's opponent's.

Suppose I want to argue that Tchaikovsky's fifth symphony is better than Beethoven's second. In the light of this paper, the real content of my claim has to be that the former exemplifies the set of criteria I use to judge musical worth better than the latter. I may not be exactly clear on what my criteria are—perhaps I'm just intuitively more moved by the former than the latter, or its harmonies seem more sophisticated, or maybe I have critically analyzed the scores and decided that Tchaikovsky makes more

[1] See Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* for speculations on the historical and 'moral' importance of the making-promises ritual.

[2] Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Clarendon, 1984), p. 195.

creative use of the sonata form than Beethoven does—but, whatever they are, if you share them while disagreeing with me then we can have a rational argument. If we don't share all of them then I might try to deduce the criteria we don't share from the ones we do, or from other value-judgments we have in common. Ultimately, though, my judgment is nothing but an expression of subjective approval, and as such doesn't have much force. It has force only to the extent that others agree with my criteria. If, say, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky had substantially the same goals in mind when writing their music—e.g., critical approbation, creative manipulation of the sonata form, and avoidance of bombast or any kind of "florid and superficial" beauty[1]—and if their goals are my criteria, then my judgment bears on the question of whether one composer achieved his purpose more fully than the other. These conditions, incidentally, are not unrealistic. Artists, even between genres, tend to measure their work by the same standards; for example, an aversion to sentimentalism is almost universal—across cultures, too. If the common purpose of art is something like connection with as wide and intelligent an audience as possible, then standards can be rationally justified on this basis (i.e., as means to an end). Sentimentalism is bad because it hinders the spectator's identifying with the artist and his work; creative fecundity is good because, among other things, it precludes boredom in the spectator.

Indeed, the presence of common purposes and standards makes possible cross-cultural artistic comparisons. Classical Indian music is inferior to classical Western insofar as it is less creative, less instrumentally rich, less ambitious. It isn't '*objectively*' inferior, though, unless that term means that Western music exemplifies the common criteria more satisfactorily than Indian music. But nothing necessitates that these be the criteria used; one can adopt any criteria one wants. One's value-judgment, however, will have interpersonal force only to the degree that others share one's standards (because, again, people value rationality; if they think their judgments are mutually inconsistent, they'll change them accordingly). –It certainly seems, by the way, that the human psyche has common aesthetic standards virtually hardwired into it, seeing as particular artworks resonate through the ages.

I agree with Ronald Dworkin that ethical and aesthetic relativism are pernicious, perfidious things. "It is now strenuously argued," says Dworkin, "that since there is no objective truth about interpretation or art or morality there can be no standard of merit or success in artistic or moral or legal thought beyond the interest a theory arouses and the academic domain it secures."[2] Postmodernism is a mendacious creed—a philosophical nihilism that criticizes everything but itself. That there is no objective truth about which values are best does not mean that mankind can have no universal ethical and aesthetic standards. Given that the vast majority of people have common intuitions about what is valuable, we might as well take these intuitions at face-value and adhere to them. Murder is 'bad', theft is 'bad'; excessive sentimentalism is bad, inauthenticity of any sort is an artistic crime. Prejudice is bad not only morally but also with respect to reason: it entails an insensitivity to rational considerations. People across cultures share the intuition that whatever exalts humanity is for that reason good, while whatever degrades or demoralizes it is bad; and they agree, to a large extent, about what it is that thus exalts or debases. "The general principles of taste [and ethics] are uniform in human nature: where men vary in their judgments, some defect or perversion in the faculties may commonly be remarked; proceeding either from prejudice, from want of practice, or want of delicacy...."[3] That there is no 'objective truth' about these matters can and should be ignored, except insofar as it militates against zealotry.

Indeed, I suspect that the views outlined in this paper have implications vis-à-vis our substantive moral judgments. We should, perhaps, jettison such terms as 'right' and 'wrong', in that they sound more objective than words like 'good' and 'bad'. Nothing is [absolutely] *right* or *wrong*; it is merely good or bad (relative to something else), and there are gradations in its goodness or badness. Moral absolutism can seem lofty and noble, but it is simpleminded. Objective-sounding norms like 'justice' are, as Hume said, artificial; the real substance of morality consists in its prescriptions for well-being and against suffering. These are, by and large, the only ethical norms we ought to take seriously, given the comparative unpretentiousness

[1] Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste", in *The Philosophy of Art*, p. 262.
[2] Dworkin, op. cit., p. 89.
[3] Hume, op. cit., p. 265.

of their pretensions to objectivity, as well as their immediately concrete implications and their direct relation to universal intuitions. Abstract principles, such as Rawlsian justice and Nozickian liberalism, have an air of 'objectivity' about them, as if they are justified by pure reason—which is impossible. Every such justification presupposes values and is merely an elaboration of values. Why not, then, forego the involute philosophizing, the building castles-in-the-air, in favor of alleviating suffering and promoting well-being on a case-by-case basis? Let's forget about meaningless abstract principles like "Life for its own sake!" or "Marriage is a timeless institution between blah blah blah": let's be pro-choice and pro-gay marriage, because these positions are not self-delusively 'objective' or 'abstract' but instead promote concrete well-being, which is all that matters and is the only real substance to morality. And in any case, let's abandon the enterprise of grand ethical system-building, which gets us nowhere.

A complete elaboration of the foregoing thoughts would occupy several books, but I hope I have at least sketched a few solutions to some of the perennial problems of moral philosophy. The main point of this paper has been to show that the dichotomy between 'objectivism' and 'relativism' is false; a third way is available.

*

The paper teems with suggestions each of which the glorified bureaucrats in academia could expand into a long article. And I wrote it in ten days. In a flurry of genius.

It was, indeed, an agonizing process. I *thought* and *thought* and *thought*, for hours and hours at a time, desperately trying to get clear on all the issues—especially in the section on practical and theoretical reason; that was the hardest—and rewrote passages again and again, rethinking them almost endlessly. But I had faith in myself and the power of reason. That's why I've never failed in any intellectual endeavor I've seriously undertaken.

One of the reasons the world is worth anything at all is that it produced me. (Cf. Hegel: after rebelling against the world, the virtuous consciousness—or whatever he calls it—finally realizes that society can't be *all* bad, since it produced the virtuous consciousness itself!)

March 3

Critical note I wrote on Kant:

> In the Refutation of Idealism, Kant's purpose is to argue that "the mere....consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me". His argument, however, is unclear, and in any case fails to establish the thesis no matter how it is interpreted. It establishes, at most, only that we are, and have to be, immediately conscious of physical objects as existing independently of us, not that we're *right* in being so conscious.
>
> "The consciousness of my existence," writes Kant, "is at the same time an immediate consciousness of other things outside me." This statement he had in fact proven in the Transcendental Deduction, where it is argued that self-consciousness (apperception) necessarily involves the synthesis of the intuitively given manifold into a unitary 'objective world' determined by the categories. The transcendental unity of apperception is ultimately responsible for our being phenomenologically confronted by an objective world (as well as for the unity of this world). The unity of apperception entails, and *is*, the unity of the *object*. Thus, self-consciousness has to be immediately conscious of itself as separate from an object (nature, the objective world); in other words, it has to be conscious that this object exists independently of it. –Notice I haven't said that this object has to actually *exist*; I have

said only that consciousness must unreflectively perceive it as existing. This conclusion is all that is strictly said by the quotation above.

However, the argument that Kant himself uses to justify the first sentence of the previous paragraph does not work. He states, first of all, that all time-determinations presuppose something permanent in perception. I won't argue with that, though I haven't decided whether I agree with it. But let's assume it's true. The next sentences are as follows: "But this permanent [thing] cannot be an intuition in me. For all grounds of determination of my existence which are to be met with in me are representations; and as representations themselves require a permanent [thing] distinct from them, in relation to which their change, and so my existence in the time wherein they change, may be determined." Kant is not entitled to say that representations require a thing distinct from them, a thing of which they are representations. Admittedly, the *word* 'representation' does presuppose an object represented, but surely this tautology is not what Kant is arguing for. Rather, he is saying that the appearances given to us must be appearances of something outside us; and he has not offered any convincing arguments for that claim. It's conceivable that the appearances given to us are 'spontaneously' produced by consciousness, through some process of which we are unaware. (After all, we need not be explicitly aware of everything 'within' consciousness. In any given moment, for example, we are having sensations of which we are not fully conscious.)

Incidentally, on his own Critical principles Kant cannot justifiably speak of representations as being determined by something outside them—being 'caused' by it, or 'influenced' by it, or 'dependent' on it, or even *of* it at all. For these expressions presuppose causality—i.e., causal interactions between the thing-in-itself and the representation of it—which Kant has argued is nothing but a category in the mind, inapplicable to the noumenon. It would seem, indeed, that Kant is not entitled to the thing-in-itself at all, that it merely mucks up his whole theory. He cannot both speak of objects as existing independently of the mind and at the same time claim that the categories are not valid independently of the mind, for if appearances are representations of something outside them then evidently the categories (causality, etc.) *are* applicable to an external world. –In any event, the thing-in-itself seems unnecessary on Kantian grounds.

To repeat, no arguments offered in the Refutation of Idealism prove the necessity of the thing-in-itself. They don't refute idealism. Kant can claim only to have established (perhaps) that appearances necessarily have an object-ive character. But I see no reason why Descartes or Berkeley would have to deny that.

I'm not sure I agree with the writer that Kant isn't entitled to the noumenon. For one thing, he was obviously *right* about it; there obviously *is* something in the world that we can't intuit, namely the realms of quantum mechanics and general relativity. [Or rather, the world-in-itself.] Our cognitive apparatus is inadequate, or structured so as not to intuitively or conceptually understand these things. By the way, I want to reaffirm my commitment to the idea of a "pre-established harmony", pre-established through evolution and natural selection. The modes of our "understanding" probably do harmonize in some way with aspects of the way the world is in itself. (The universe is almost completely "flat", in the relativistic sense, which is why Euclidean geometry—'flat' geometry—describes it [or at least our region of it] well. At least, that's what I recall thinking after reading books years ago.) I've never encountered a good argument against pre-established harmony. It has to be true. It's the only thing that makes sense. Given that there is synthetic *a priori* knowledge and that we can manipulate the world scientifically, the world's spatial and temporal 'forms', or forms analogous to them, have to be hardwired into us.

In his comments on my paper, the professor remarked that "the 'outside' reality Kant is citing in the Refutation of Idealism is not the thing-in-itself but *material substance*, which is a phenomenal reality". This is what I've never understood about Kant (and Schopenhauer). Phenomena are supposed to be dependent on the mind—they're nothing but appearances, representations; their spatiotemporal form is

imposed by the mind—yet they're also supposed to be outside the mind, independent of it. This book I see, or the organs in my body, or any physical objects, exist in the world even when I (and others) are not perceiving them; yet the form of their existence, says Kant, is imposed on them by the mind. So evidently they *don't* exist independently of the mind! It's a blatant contradiction in his philosophy. To be consistent, his idealism would have to be Berkeleyan. Objects exist only insofar as minds posit them. –That idea is ridiculous, of course, but it's surely what Kant, in spite of himself, is committed to.

Obviously objects *as we see them* don't exist outside minds, but *scientific* realism is true. Arthur Eddington was right: the table I see is not the table 'as it really is', independently of how my mind structures experience; the real table is mostly emptiness, consisting of particles (electric charges, protons, neutrons, all the subatomic theoretical entities) flying at each other, hitting each other and so forth. Carl Hempel (in *The Philosophy of Natural Science*) stupidly criticizes Eddington's distinction between the real and the apparent,[1] or the outside world as it is in itself and what I see, but, then again, Hempel was an analytic philosopher, so what do you expect?

Everyone knows that secondary qualities (taste, color, smell) don't belong to objects in themselves. Kant thought that the same is true of primary qualities (shape, extension, etc.), and that space itself is a product of the mind. Eddington and I differ from him in thinking that space and time do exist, in some way or other, outside the mind, and that extension and shape probably do as well—at least up until the subatomic realm—but we agree that the world as unperceived by minds has a radically different 'appearance' than it does when perceived. Of course, to speak of 'appearance' here isn't legitimate, since nothing is being appeared to—but this fact is, ultimately, the source of all the confusion! We want to know how the world appears when no one is perceiving it—i.e., "what it is in itself"—but the very idea of appearance seems inadmissible then. And yet we can't get away from it.

From the perspective according to which well-roundedness is the pinnacle of human existence, it's great to be me. Not necessarily because I'm well-rounded, but because the world forces me, more than it does others, to develop multiple sides of my personality. Innately I'm fairly developed in the artistic and intellectual spheres; my weaknesses are in the practical sphere. But the world forces me, as it does everyone, to acquire skills in this sphere too. Gradually I become more or less as skilled as everyone at socially interacting, at finding my way around cities, at taking care of responsibilities, all of which areas I'm innately deficient in. The result is that I become a much fuller human being than others.

I sometimes fantasize about living in some small town in the Alps, far away from civilization and disgust. Just spending the rest of my life in the Alps.

March 6

The pills I'm taking work well—not the insomnia pills, the other ones—but they prevent me from being melancholy at night. Which means I can't write poetry. I'm too 'contented'. The poem I wrote above was the product of four days without pills, when the nightly melancholy had started coming back (not every night, but occasionally). But since I have two dates this week—Yahoo Personals—I feel like I should keep taking the pills. But damn it I want to write poetry.

My students recently had to write a paper about downsizing in businesses, and Marxism was one of the theories they had to mention. To criticize it or whatever. But they all agreed that Marx was mostly right about capitalism. (Remember, these are *business* students.) –It's a sign of the times. Everyone is disaffected.

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[1] Those terms can be misleading. In a sense, the table *really is* the substantial, colored object I see, inasmuch as the appearance *really exists* 'in' (or 'because of') my mind; outside my mind, though, the table is not colored. Its mind-independent 'appearance' is not at all what appears to *me*.

Poems I wrote earlier this year (last year):

My friend

We're friends, and that's how we both want it,
but I love her like a sister.
And when I feel like the blue of Picasso's early phase,
I think of her.
And when I'm too dead to leave my bed,
I wish she would appear in my room.
Her laugh is like the warmth of clothes newly laundered
when you bury your face in them—
the comforting warmth, like her laugh.
She is thoughtful, too.
She calls me sometimes at night
just to talk, feeling lonely
or knowing I am alone too.
And I tell her I love her like a sister, and we laugh.

Thoughts in December

It's funny: although the December wind shakes
the window frame and seeps in and the snow
is monotonous as always and I have been alone
all my life;
although the music is no longer as comforting
as it once was and the ignorant child is building
his snowman below the window where I have sat
all my life;
although I can see his mittens flecked with cold
white flakes of hope and I do not envy his youth
for youth is the prelude to a sadness that has lasted
all my life;
although the wind rattles the window frame;—
I am resigned and content, as I have been
all my life.

A November day.— Sitting here in front of my window as it rains outside, with the dark clouds overshadowing the day and the autumn wind blowing leaves from trees, the warm light in my room softly contrasting with the dark outside as I listen to the first movement of Schubert's piano sonata D. 894 (a piece simple in its beauty)—I feel comfortable and cozy, and I don't remember the last time I was this contented.

Nature's humaneness.— When one has been attached to a girl for a long time but not in a relationship with her, but has held out hopes that she might someday change her mind and perhaps give one a hug or a kiss or something and even slip her hand into one's own as one is walking beside her in the park like one does so often—the shaded spot in the park is a good place to be happy, especially in this spring air—and when one has thought about the feel of that dainty hand in one's own with a certain longing, simply because the

girl is lovely and talks with a voice that sounds like liquid crystal, but suddenly one realizes that she will never, ever consent to a kiss because her every thought is not of this girl whose voice sounds like love, or how love must sound.....one is glad that there is such a thing as sleep, and that someday there will be a longer sleep, a very long and happy sleep without dreams....

Watching hip-hop videos on Youtube—Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Eminem and all the homeys—with all the naked chicks swarming everywhere like flies around shit, it makes you want to fucking vomit, and yet I'd love to be in the position of those money-squandering pimps who live like fucking Roman emperors—at least for a few months, I'd like to experience the life of musical whoredom just so I could move beyond it—and also, yes, for its own sake. Fucking what a world.

People who believe in the dignity etc. of mankind don't take a broad enough perspective on the species. We're like monkeys screaming and running around, male monkeys strutting so they can look dominant and female monkeys taking off their clothes and "presenting" their vaginas to the males—bending over, dancing and swaying, begging to get nailed by the dominant males. Like monkeys hypnotized by the rhythm, the pulsating bass, the primal urges, the deep vibrations arousing them so sex-lubricant oozes from their holes smelling of shit and piss, and the males rubbing up against them all cocky and rough. Monkeys wearing shiny rings and cloths they've found somewhere, mesmerized by the shininess of these stones they carry around, like chimps that collect shells or male birds that decorate their nests to attract females. And the chimps that go on wild rampages around the forest destroying branches and trees to show off their strength—it's just this fucking hedonistic hip-hop culture, this pop culture, this animal world.

And then I read philosophy! What a charade!

March 7

Aaaaaah, how shallow writing is. It can't communicate spontaneity. Which means it can't communicate *me*. I am nothing but spontaneity (except when I'm not).

Here are some random discarded notes I wrote for the book:

....I'd advise the same optimism to writers of fiction and poetry—*serious* fiction, not Dan Brownian crap. But Dan Brown's popularity shows that, despite what I wrote in the Introduction about the demise of narrative, people still enjoy reading books for the plot. And they still like to identify with a protagonist, and have the world interpreted for them by the narrator, and experience a Beginning and an End despite the simplicity of that notion, and in general to escape once in a while from the oppressive spirit of "seriousness". That is, people like to *play*, to *enjoy* themselves, and they always will, no matter at what age and in what era. To fantasize, to be taken to a different place and time by a narrator manipulating your consciousness into temporary forgetfulness of stress and time and all cynicism, is a delight. There are plenty of novels that are neither purely commercial nor purely intellectual (i.e., on the "cutting edge" of literature) yet borrow elements from both the high and the low—for instance, the beautifully constructed sentences and thematic significance of the high, but the so-called "inauthentic" narrative elements of the low—plenty of novels with these features that become popular, critically acclaimed and commercially successful. There is no need to despair, then, if you're a writer. Fiction is indeed held in more contempt (implicitly) by our culture than by any in centuries, perhaps millennia, but it is still enjoyed. It has to be, and it always will be.

A great writer, a writer on the order of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, who is not merely 'challenging' but also suspenseful and enjoyable, epic and universal—who writes books with a hero....[etc.]....can craft scenes as beautiful as Ras. & Sophia..... and the ending of B. K....., with its final jubilant "Hurrah for Karamazov!"—as life-affirming as Levin's mowing in the famous scene with peasants.....—he can still exist in this culture. Such a writer would necessarily have contempt for the postmodernist's contempt for narrative; he would reject the self-consciousness of a novel like *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* as

being symptomatic of a societal malaise and as such parochial; he would reject opinions like Richard Gilman's, that narration is "precisely that element of fiction which coerces and degrades it into a mere alternative to life, like life, only better of course, a dream (or a serviceable nightmare), a way out, a recompense, a blueprint, a lesson"[1]—or rather accept them but reject their hostile undertone, saying in response, "The conviction of the inauthenticity of narrative and all fiction arises precisely from the inauthenticity of the culture whose conviction it is, from the self-consciousness and universal doubt of a self-hostile age, which doesn't realize that life itself should be an alternative to life, that philistine 'seriousness' is in the spirit of *death*, that life, with all its unhappiness and joy, should be grounded in the spirit of play—of luxury, of superfluity—and not in any sort of mimesis of the dull nihilism of the universe or of life 'as it is in itself', 'as it really is'—'absurd', 'senseless', 'meaningless', 'fragmentary'—and that fiction in the grand old style, from this perspective, is indeed the fulfillment of life!" The fragmented, self-skeptical postmodern novel has its strengths, but it is something that has to be superseded. Its insights have to be taken up and transcended, in the Hegelian fashion. A great writer in this post-postmodern age would make allowances for our self-consciousness, our 'sophistication', giving it its due, but ultimately in the epic sweep of his novel would leave behind its nihilistic implications. He would, that is, abandon postmodern fragmentedness—with its solipsistic wordplay, its indeterminate meanings, its competing and irreconcilable voices, its unstructured structure—in favor of a vast unity (though not necessarily a "univocal" unity) that includes fragmentedness as a "moment" in the whole.

Narrative can never really die, the novel can never die. They're too essential to the good life. They may suffer temporary eclipse in a culture characterized by the eclipse of humanistic confidence, but even then they'll enjoy a sort of underground popularity, as they do now—a popularity outside the main stream of culture. A writer who would reclaim the primeval nobility of his vocation would not be ashamed of his instinct for narrative, nor of his instinct for synthesis. For synthesis is the imperative in all spheres of life. Analysis, yes; rebellion, yes; but ultimately synthesis. Unification, self-unification (one of the manifestations of which, I noted earlier, is self-*diver*sification). When reading literature, one doesn't necessarily want to be reminded of one's inauthenticity (the inauthenticity of one's society), i.e., one's lack of self-unification, one's "decenteredness"—one's doubts about selfhood, about the comprehensibility of life, about the existence of truth; one may, instead, want to partake in the imposing of order on life. Order is ultimately the only real 'authenticity', for the alternative to order is doubt—chaotic self-consciousness—which, as Hegel said, "alienates" one from oneself, separates one from one's free nature. Order is true freedom, in the old Goethean formula. This is not just a meaningless humanistic slogan; it expresses a profound truth. For freedom is self-control, self-appropriation, the owning of one's acts and consciousness; it is feeling-at-one-with-oneself, not being coerced by either an external or an internal force. Freedom amounts to mental health, which is just self-integration and self-order—having an intuitive 'core' self that can assimilate experiences and sort them out, relate them to one's sense of self and thus appropriate them, making them one's own and 'explaining' them by reference to the schema that one's psyche (of necessity) imposes on the world. –My point is that, in literature, narrative—i.e., the relating of a succession of events from a perspective that at least partially 'transcends' them, from which they can be interpreted and sorted out, their interrelations remarked on, etc.—is analogous to real authenticity in the self, to freedom and autonomy, self-determination. The ability to enjoy narrative is an indication, though not proof, that one is not divided against oneself—that one can step outside oneself […]

*

On Women

Lord Byron said once that the company of women always made him feel 'soft' and 'gentle' somehow, semi-purified of his vulgar masculine traits. He could be joking bawdily with his male friends, but a woman enters the room and he suddenly feels civilized. Involuntarily so.

[1] Quoted in Trilling, op. cit., p. 135.

I've always liked John Keats' poem "Woman! when I behold thee flippant, vain". Despite its literary flaws—its mannerism, sentimentalism, exaggerations—and its condescension, I consider it a wonderful and fresh expression of the masculine love for women. It rings true.

How many times have I burned with the sentiment that animates Andrew Marvell's poem "To His Coy Mistress"! *Carpe diem*, woman! But too often I have sat alone with cheeks burning as I thought of my vanishing youth. Damn time and its "wingèd chariot"! […]

[…]

This sort of lyricism is frowned on in our culture, which no longer trusts such pure feelings—it calls them "sentimental" and laughs at them—and, besides, hates the political incorrectness they can easily fall into. For it is but a small step from them to the idea of the Eternal Feminine, the notion that women are ideally beautiful, pure, innocent beings before whom the conscience-stricken man (tormented by dark, unmentionable Byronic crimes) falls to his knees in worship. No matter that many women are secretly attracted to this vision. It isn't socially acceptable, and in any case is simplistic.

The Eternal Feminine is, no doubt, a Goethean myth, an idealization invented by "beautiful souls" *for* "beautiful souls". It isn't reality: women aren't eternal and they sometimes aren't even feminine. Like most ideals, though—and stereotypes—it has a kernel of truth.

Is there such thing as a female (and male) 'essence'? Do women—and men—tend to share traits across cultures, biologically determined traits? I think so. It must be emphasized, though, that insofar as they do share qualities, the latter are not 'absolute' but only *relative* to the opposite sex. It would be asinine to say that women are "passive" and men "active"; that's a stupid prejudice. It's even meaningless. But if you qualify that statement by saying that women have *tendencies* to be *relatively* "passive"—in some unspecified sense—in comparison with men, it starts to become less obviously wrong. [One clear example: in sex, the woman is the receptive partner.]

It's unfortunate that the search for commonalities between women is quickly labeled by feminists as symptomatic of the male's desire to dominate. They equate this kind of psychology/social science with the transparent manipulation of power-relations. Even if I point out that I have the same ambition with regard to the male sex (that is, to understand it), they retort, "Well, unconsciously you think that by lumping together women you'll have more leverage for oppressing us". But this is little better than name-calling. Serious, disinterested analyses, like Freud's or D. W. Winnicott's, should be examined on their own terms, refuted or confirmed analytically, not *ad hominemly*. I suspect, in fact, that some radical feminists suffer from something like *ressentiment*, bitterness toward both men and women for the latter's subjection to male power-structures, such that they care more about fighting the tyrannical Other than seeking truth.

Or maybe some feminists will say that, though I may not actually want to *oppress* women, I unconsciously desire the comfort of being reinforced in my prejudices about gender-roles by masking them in the guise of scientific respectability. Therefore I want to believe that women have innate tendencies in relation to men, and my investigations will inevitably lead me to this conclusion. I think this is mistaken, however. I have no love of societal roles. I'm tempted to advocate, say, that only women be allowed to enter politics, in the hope that they would do a better job than men have. And I would happily spend my life fighting the oppression of women if I thought I could have any impact whatever. At the moment, though, I want to take my fight against hypocrisy into the sphere of political correctness itself.

By the way, this feminist suspicion of the quest for sex-knowledge is part of the unfortunate legacy of Foucault and Derrida. "There is no truth! There are only power-relations! Nothing exists outside power-relations!" Not only is Foucauldian and Derridian pseudo-philosophy self-refuting, in that its position can be stated, essentially, as "*The truth is that there is no truth*," but it is dishonest and self-uncritical. At least the ancient Greek skeptics and the early modern skeptics had intellectual integrity; they didn't hide their doctrines in obscure prose. They said what they meant and confronted its implications. Postmodernists look askance at intellectual integrity, for they think that motives are usually selfish and grounded in the pursuit of power.

Let's leave this cynicism behind and confront honestly the question whether women and men are, to an extent, genetically determined in their modes of interaction—and if they are, to what extent. In other words: nature or nurture? [Of course, anyone with a few functioning neurons in their head knows that both

nature and nurture are relevant.]

Before I address that question directly I'll give the reader some sense of what philosophical feminism is, so he knows what we're up against. It is quite different from the old political movements for suffrage and equality. It aims instead to show how gender-relations and -roles are socially constructed, and to illuminate what it means to be a woman in the modern world. A lot of it borrows from Derridian deconstructionism, Foucauldian discourses on power, and Lacanian psychoanalysis—probably because these philosophical currents naturally lend themselves to challenging the Establishment. (Lacan, for instance, reinterpreted Freud in ways that harmonized with Derrida's attempts to subvert the Western philosophical, male-dominated tradition.) Feminism has become so diverse that it's hard to characterize it in general terms; certain feminist currents are in direct opposition to others. For example, some feminists—like Hélène Cixous, Alice Jardine and Luce Irigaray—imply that women are essentially and universally different from men in their behavior, their desires, their self-understandings, and that the masculine order has deceived women about themselves for centuries—although I usually find these feminists' arguments to be unclear and hard to follow. (In this respect they follow in the footsteps of their poststructuralist forebears.) Others argue that there are really no innate differences between men and women, that there seem to be such only because the sexes have been socialized into gender-roles.

In general, though, there tends to be suspicion towards 'masculine' modes of being and writing. Carol Gilligan has argued for an ethic based on the feminine notion of 'care' rather than the masculine one of 'duty'; Cixous admonishes women to oppose masculine forms of writing, with their representationalism and logic, and instead to write "with their bodies", to write "in white ink". Like a good Derridian, she points out that language is saturated with "binary oppositions" such as nature/culture, man/woman, activity/passivity, speaking/writing, cause/effect, mind/body. She thinks that this has helped sustain male privilege. Women ought therefore to reject binary oppositions in their writing, which means writing poetically. Prose is too masculine, too objective and logical.

This hatred of binary oppositions is a common theme in French feminism, as it is in poststructuralism generally. These oppositions are attributed to the Western "phallocentric" and rational way of being; they're opposed because they are said to conceal value-judgments—in that typically the second term (woman, passivity, effect, body) is valued less than the first (man, activity, cause, mind)—and because this reinforces the marginalization of minorities. In many writers this critique of binary oppositions leads to a critique of logic, of reason, of the notion of truth, etc. These ideas are all masculine, simplistic and Eurocentric.

Now, the ubiquitous presence in language of conceptual dualisms is indeed a striking fact, and one that demands explaining. Not surprisingly, however, few of these thinkers have made an honest attempt to explain it. Nor does it occur to them that in *all* languages—or nearly all—dualisms play an important role. Cause/effect, man/woman, false/true, good/bad, knowledge/ignorance, nature/civilization, space/time, presence/absence: such fundamental oppositions are universal, not just Western. This means that invoking "Western culture" isn't sufficient to explain them. The critiques of logic and truth are similarly superficial, and ultimately self-refuting. Necessarily so. Logic may in some respects be more masculine than feminine, but this is far from being an argument against it or its necessity (if there is to be such a thing as language and thought)—just as it isn't an argument against Gilligan's ethics that they're more feminine than masculine.

You can see already, though, that recent feminists have been confused about what their theoretic ambitions are. Politically, they all agree that women should have an equal status with men, that they should have as much political and economic power as men. Theoretically, however, there is nothing like a consensus about what the agenda should be. Some proudly affirm that women are inherently more emotional, nurturing, bodily oriented, 'non-rational', and empathetic than men; others, especially in America, think that, aside from their physical differences, women are not inherently different from men. They have been *socialized* to be "feminine", i.e., emotional, passive, nurturing, etc. (These theorists fail to explain how the vast differences between gender-roles could have evolved on the basis of substantial biological similarity.) One of the few things most feminists can agree on is that woman aren't inherently

passive. 'Passivity' has an unpleasant sound, after all; no one wants to be called passive.[1] There is also a general aversion to "essentialist" formulations, because of their association with such horrible things as the Enlightenment, progress, rationality, "totalizing visions", "meta-narratives" and so on.

I'm putting most of my arguments for the innate differences of men and women later in this chapter, in the disjointed-thoughts section. So I apologize if I end up repeating myself. At the moment I'm going to try to describe, in very broad strokes, the female psyche and its differences from the male. Everything I'll write is a mere hypothesis, something to which I've been led by armchair psychologizing and to which I am by no means wholly committed. I undertake this exploration purely to counteract the superficiality and confusion that reign in writings on sex and women, and especially in all politically correct discourse.

The relative 'passiveness' and communal/nurturing tendencies of women (which, again, I think are only *tendencies* true of *women in general, in relation to men in general*)—in both their transhistorical and their culturally specific manifestations—are intimately related to women's experience of their bodies. Psychoanalysis has insights to offer in this connection,[2] but, on the whole, I won't make use of them. For three reasons: I don't have the expertise; I'm suspicious of the scientific pretensions of psychoanalysis, and in any case am uncertain what criteria to use (apart from intuitive introspection) in weighing one theory against another; and I want to approach the issue from a purely phenomenological perspective. I don't want to wade into the mire of childhood sexuality. Instead, I want to sympathetically enter into the experience of a woman (as such), to see if I can unravel the myriad puzzles and paradoxes she presents to a typical male. I have no interest whatsoever in "judging" women, only in understanding them.

Where to begin? I can think of no better starting-point than the testimony of a woman. Christine Downing, a respected academic, is noteworthy for her honesty and introspective powers. The following passage, which points to the importance of menstruation for women's self-conceptions, is from the book *Women's Mysteries*.

> In a female ritual context menstruation means more than the beginning of reproductive capacity; it means initiation into shared sisterhood with all who bleed. I know women who have sought to create menstrual rituals together. They save their blood and pour it onto the earth. They break the taboo against this blood by doing this not alone but in each other's company. They tell each other their stories of first bleeding. They welcome one another into the circle of women, knowing many were not welcomed when that blood first flowed. They tell one another the stories of the humiliation of the blood…
>
> …From a series of letters written to me over the course of years I have culled these reflections:
>
> "I write today as I bleed. The first day and the heaviest flow. I write feeling my weightedness, the drag of my uterus. Feeling my wound, my incapacity. All the changes in my body—my voice flattened, my belly swollen, my clumsiness, a flood of dreams I cannot bring back to consciousness.
>
> "How difficult it is to stay in the body. I get up, get to the bathroom, reach into my vagina for the menstrual sponge—a bloody mess! Squeeze the blood into a cup. It splatters everywhere.
>
> "Can I write this to you? Am I so crazy I don't even know it? Today I feel such self-doubt.

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[1] Incidentally, I haven't encountered a single feminist text that distinguishes between *absolute* passiveness and *relative* passiveness. Every writer laughs at the idea of *absolute* passiveness, but none considers the more plausible notion of passive *tendencies relative to men as such*, which is very different. No one, after all, would deny that individual women can be extremely active, dominating, etc.

[2] See, for example, the anthology *Female Sexuality: Contemporary Engagements*, ed. Donna Bassin (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1999).

> "The knowledge of taboo returns. The blood is not to be touched, let alone saved.
>
> "Even what we value of menstruation—are our bodies there? We value the rhythmic cycle, the feelings, the dreams, the bond. We talk and interpret. Analyze dreams. Theorize. Baroque elaborations. Virginal fluffy clouds. Ascending out of the blood, the mess, the ache, the wound.
>
> "Even this writing. How difficult for me to stay with my body. My feelings of vulnerability. My tears that I had hoped were past, falling again. Fears and doubts.
>
> "Here I am. The ache in my lower spine is sensual, as is the openness of my vulva, my blood slipping in my vagina.
>
> "A wound not to be healed—but attended to—felt, touched, smelled, seen. Received."
>
> Merida's words remind me of how our monthly periods open us to our vulnerability, our tears, our doubts, our fears, to a sense of wounds as not to be fixed but attended to. She encourages us to honor our dreams, the dreams we have that prepare us for our bleeding, the dreams that accompany our bleeding, the dreams that warn us we may cease to bleed…

How ridiculous it is that even in our sex-obsessed culture, such confessions make us blush! Sexuality is *still* thought of as sinful! (Many thanks, Christianity.) This is of course part of the reason for the modern woman's insecurity: in our prudish, puritan culture, where everyone is "sanitized and deodorized"[1]—dehumanized—menstruation will tend to make women a little ambivalent about themselves, consciously or unconsciously. Particularly in their younger years, when they're still learning about their bodies. The mess itself, in any cultural context, might be enough to induce a little shame and self-ambivalence. But in the context of enforced privacy—in the bathroom, that most sterile of places—as well as the silence, the secrecy (more or less extreme according to the girl's family and education, but unavoidable due to the societal framework), menstruation becomes even more significant. And given the young girl's intuitive knowledge that her blood-letting is a momentous event, that it signifies something of profound importance for her sexuality and her self, that it means she has reached a new stage in her life—and that this new stage is centered around her vagina, this mysterious and forbidden little hole—all these positive and negative factors, some culturally conditioned and some transhistorical, will combine to create in her a sense of self-awe that is unlike anything a boy experiences. (The comparable event in a boy's life, viz. the first time he ejaculates, is less momentous and purely pleasurable.)

It is odd that America, which may be the most prurient nation in history, still suppresses public dialogues on these darker sides of sexuality. Despite all the magazines devoted to sex and sexuality, there is still something like a conspiracy of silence about them. It is more pronounced in certain geographical regions than in others, but, as far as I can tell, it reigns almost everywhere. Sex-education programs are helpful in counteracting it, but they can't dissipate the atmosphere of conservatism that saturates the culture. This 'atmosphere' cannot really be pinpointed; it is more a state of mind and behavior—a state of the collective mind—than anything else. It manifests itself in repressive standards of propriety, in the awkwardness or laughter that results if vaginas or penises, or even breasts, are mentioned, and in the patterns of reporting by America's mainstream media. Reporters never say 'penis' or 'vagina' on television, and they try to avoid the subject of sex altogether; nudity, of course, is forbidden. Most important, though, is the girl's family situation. Downing writes of how her mother treated the onset of Christine's menstruation as a shameful secret to be kept from her brothers and father. It was too repulsive to be discussed openly. Had the family been more open and easygoing, Christine's mature attitudes toward herself and her sexuality would have been less conflict-ridden than they were. Her sense of self, in other words, would have had a more secure, proud, self-accepting foundation; she would have been less self-conscious, self-doubtful and "vulnerable" than she was. In being more comfortable with her monthly bleeding, she would have been

[1] Paddy Chayevsky's words.

more comfortable with her self.

Women, indeed, seem to be more complicit in the silence about sexuality than men: they often take offense far more quickly than men if sexuality is talked about in a social environment. They may giggle at first, but gradually in the course of a conversation they may well become uncomfortable and finally demand a change in topic. For the most part, they simply tend not to like talking about vaginas or anything sexually explicit. It seems to make them self-conscious. And their self-consciousness reinforces itself: modern women in particular are ambivalent about their sexuality—embarrassed by it, insecure about it, but also proud of it and deeply attached to all its facets—so they manifest their ambivalence in public (wearing tight, skin-exposing outfits but pretending to be pure-minded), which itself reinforces and propagates (to young girls) their ambivalence! Their attitude results in behavior that reaffirms their attitude. It's a vicious circle.

The "conspiracy of silence", though—i.e., the deleterious psychological effect of a young woman's having to sort through her confusing, 'embarrassing' sexuality in relative privacy, rather than in a communal atmosphere of understanding and acceptance—is only one aspect of the problem. Equally harmful is pop culture. The magazines, the movies, the television shows, the fashion trends. What is *said* (and shown) is as harmful as what is *not* said. Young women are taught by example, and by the magazines, that sex, youth and beauty are the highest values in life, that womanhood is nothing but pure femininity (i.e., beauty, innocence, passiveness, self-consciousness, sex-objectness), that whatever doubts they have about themselves are probably right—but that they can be fixed, namely by embracing femininity—that cleanliness is godliness, etc. If they show a lot of skin but not *too much* skin, if they're thin but not *too* thin, if they're clean and pretty and sweet and childlike and extremely sexual, they'll find a good man and thereby happiness. All this is calculated to increase self-consciousness and insecurity. Even the "advice columns" in magazines, the 'sympathy' that certain television programs and magazines exude for young women's doubts, are ultimately harmful. For they serve indirectly to bolster doubts, namely by focusing attention on perceived weaknesses and emphasizing that if women *really try*—if they (nearly) *obsess* over their flaws—they can conquer them. Pop culture does have a few redeeming aspects, such as its propagation of the idea that female masturbation is normal, but on the whole its influence is pernicious…

To return to the phenomena of repression.— It's easy to blame Christianity (Puritanism, etc.) for the repressive atmosphere that persists in America despite pop culture, but this wouldn't be entirely correct. There is no question that the Puritanism of the early colonists still reverberates, but I think that deeper biological/psychoanalytic factors are responsible for at least a portion of the revulsion we feel for all things sexual and animal-like. Indeed, repressive movements like Puritanism would not conquer so many minds were there nothing in '*human nature*' with which they resonated. They simply accentuate and exacerbate already-existing tendencies that are grounded in the nature of the human psyche. History and anthropology provide support for that hypothesis. Look at the Old Testament. Leviticus, in particular. It says there that "if a woman have an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be put apart seven days: and whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean until the even [etc.]". Similarly: "if a woman have conceived seed, and borne a man child, then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean". With regard to men: "if any man's seed of copulation go out from him, then he shall wash all his flesh in water, and be unclean until the even." Lest you think these proscriptions are a peculiarity of the Judaic tradition, I'll tell you…to read about other societies. You'll find comparable practices.[1] In any case, the facts that even people in archaic societies cover their genitalia and have sex and defecate in private (usually) show that humans are somehow instinctively 'self-conscious' vis-à-vis sexuality and defecation. They see these things as ineffably *other* than they themselves.

One wonders why. When did this self-consciousness originate (phylogenetically and ontogenetically)? *How* did (and does) it originate? Is it purely biological? 'Hardwired' into us? Or is it a result of inevitable childhood experiences? Maybe both: maybe early experiences call our latent self-knowledge out of its latency. Probably psychoanalysis and biology are both relevant to this question. But whatever the answer is, even young children somehow know that the sexual organs are special. And they

[1] [I wanted to provide a broad survey of societies but didn't have time.]

have a vague idea of their purpose. Before they have been taught anything about sex, they 'experiment', or they want to. They find a willing playmate and kiss, fondle, etc. Even at 6 or 7. (This fact in itself refutes traditional empiricism, viz. the theory that all knowledge derives from experience. Sexual knowledge is innate, and is merely 'triggered' by experience.)

Especially when one reflects that many studies have established the remarkably early emergence of stereotypical gender-roles—for instance, infant girls playing with dolls, infant boys playing with cars and blocks; infant girls clinging to their mother, infant boys demonstrating greater independence; girls doing more spontaneous smiling and being more attentive to faces—*and* on the fact that anthropologists have discovered uncanny parallels in gender-roles between cultures—all these considerations give support to the idea that the greater 'self-consciousness,' sensitiveness, and timidity of girls as contrasted with boys is not just a reflection of our Christian, capitalist, individualist, repressive culture. It is partly innate. And part of the reason for this is humans' apparently innate self-consciousness in relation to their "private parts"—their knowledge of the categorical difference between, say, an innocent body-part like a leg and a "dirty" one like the vagina, the penis, or the anus. For, since girls are already imbued with this knowledge, the onset of menstruation (this messy, bloody, 'animal-like' thing involving their private parts) will be all the more meaningful for them. Potentially traumatic, but at the very least *meaningful*. More so than puberty is for the boy. It will make the girl more conscious of her body than the boy is of his. Even the growth of his penis doesn't have comparable significance, for this is a gradual process that is, moreover, inherently prideful, whereas menstruation is a sudden event that can, surely, be as traumatic as it can be prideful. In fact, as I stated above, I think it is necessarily both: it causes satisfaction (if the girl understands its full significance) as well as doubt, or fear, or confusion, or revulsion, on a conscious or half-conscious level. It makes the girl very aware of her body (for she now sees her body as less under her control, more an 'other' that has its own will), which feeds into her growing self-consciousness and helps advance it beyond the level of the boy's.

[…]

To continue.— Another factor in the young woman's self-consciousness is her breasts. The experience of the growth of her breasts, as well as of the breasts themselves once they have grown, is inevitably going to make her more self-conscious than the young man. There are several reasons. First of all, she can see that breasts demarcate her from the opposite sex, thus reaffirming her already-growing sense of community with other women (due to menstruation and other factors). In demarcating her from one group and tying her closely to another, they give her, perhaps, a more defined sense of self than the boy has[1]—i.e., they focus her on herself. But her sense of self is not only more 'defined' ('pronounced', 'intense', 'self-fixated'); it is also more *insecure*. And its insecurity is inseparable from its self-fixatedness. That is, she is fixated on herself because she is insecure about herself; and the more confident she is, the less self-fixated she is. Now, insecurity as such incorporates a value-judgment, namely that one deserves to be criticized (by oneself or by others). So the young woman, consciously or half-consciously, is self-critical. Why? Both nature and nurture come into play. I argued above that menstruation both *naturally* and *culturally*[2] can cause insecurity or self-criticism; nonetheless, I think that the cultural element is far more important than the natural. Certainly there must be natural causes to explain why young women in so many cultures (*all* of them, apparently) display self-consciousness and passiveness relative to men, but given this minor natural element, the character of the particular culture can exacerbate or mitigate the problem. Western culture happens to exacerbate it; Samoan culture (as described by Margaret Mead) apparently eased it. More on that later.

But the point I'm making[3] is that breasts add to the insecurity—again, for both natural and cultural reasons. They're bound to make the girl more self-aware than the boy (*ceteris paribus*), if only because

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[1] To quote Spinoza: *determinatio est negatio*. The more differentiation, the more content. In any context. (Cf. Ferdinand de Saussure's ideas on the meaningfulness of language as being due to the differentiation between concepts.)

[2] I.e., due solely to the nature of the particular culture.

[3] I keep interrupting myself. Sorry.

they're a new body-part. The boy doesn't gain body-parts during puberty; he gains only hair, height and penis-size. If he *did* gain a set of body-parts, you can bet he'd feel pretty aware of himself and fascinated by himself, as the girl is (by *her*self). But self-awareness does not entail, in and of itself, insecurity (though it does raise its likelihood). The latter is caused by several factors: first, breasts probably tend to reduce physical activity, due to their jiggle and the mass they add to the body. I can only imagine how self-conscious a running girl must feel, with her bouncing breasts. And I imagine that this self-consciousness would make physical activity less intrinsically fun than it is for the male. As for why women would therefore be relatively less confident than men: physical activity releases endorphins, which partly account for its pleasure and the self-confidence that goes with it. The less active a person is, the less confident he or she is (*ceteris paribus*). Thus, female biology indirectly causes women to be less self-confident than men.

Related to that is women's physical weakness and smallness. Other things being equal, the weaker someone is, the less he will enjoy being physically active (showing off his prowess). Furthermore, weakness and smallness in themselves lead one to devalue oneself vis-à-vis a strong, large person. The strong one dominates, the weaker is dominated. It doesn't matter that because women know they have no control over their relative lack of strength they shouldn't, 'rationally speaking', criticize themselves. […] Even so, on an unconscious or half-conscious level, they necessarily see themselves as physically 'dominated' by men, the stronger sex. And this equals—in this regard only—a lack of confidence. Men, on the other hand, are (stupidly) proud of their strength, which equals self-confidence.[1]

Another advantage of men's is that they don't have to deal with stares. With the constant looks that men aim at women—the surreptitious glances, the snickers, the comments and jokes. Read Sartre's analyses of the look, in *Being and Nothingness*: the look has an enormous power to generate self-consciousness in the looked-at. Women are bombarded with looks, as well as whispers, jokes and so on. Not only in our culture; in *all* cultures (though especially in ours). It's a biological fact: male sexual arousal operates largely by virtue of the look, the look at a beautiful woman, a naked woman, a scantily clad woman. Women are aroused by touch, emotional intimacy and male assertiveness; men are aroused, partly, by sex-objecthood in the woman. So the male look is inevitable in all cultures. Hence, female self-consciousness is to that degree inevitable in any society.

But I haven't yet connected this 'being-looked-at' form of self-consciousness with insecurity. (I noted a moment ago that self-consciousness per se is different from insecurity, because the latter implies a value-judgment, unlike self-consciousness.) The connection is clear: the look is dehumanizing. The look that says "you're a sex-object" ignores the subjectivity, the spontaneous and active selfhood, of women in favor of their body. The objectified woman senses that her personhood is being devalued. When this happens to her as often as it does in modern society, she may begin to internalize the devaluation. She will see herself as the other sees her, namely as a sex-object. She'll lose her self-respect; she'll think she *is* what she is for the other, an object, not a subject (an active self). She is a *thing*, something to be looked at, not something that does the looking. Since this is what she is for others, this is what she becomes for herself. The fact that the other affirms her only insofar as she plays the role of sex-object well will give her an added impetus to play this role—because she desires recognition from the other. So, in the extreme case, she will come to identify herself as a sex-object. Even in this case, though, a resilient core of her humanity will revolt against its dehumanization, and she will develop schizoid tendencies. At times she'll act angrily and aggressively, i.e., spontaneously, in a manner relatively unmediated by awareness of, and concern for, the other; at other times she'll be very calculating and manipulative—and self-dehumanizing/-objectifying—in her efforts for approval. She'll ignore 'good' men who treat her as a human being rather than a sex-object, because her self-conception (as an object) will seek to justify itself and affirm itself by receiving recognition from 'bad' men, i.e., men who reinforce the dehumanized self-conception. –For an analysis of the schizoid personality I suggest you read R. D. Laing's book *The Divided Self*.

Subjectivity as such resists being labeled, 'pinned down', turned into an object, a static thing like

[1] I admit that all these ideas sound silly. Common sense and intuition verify them, though. Their silliness proves only that *homo sapiens* is a silly species.

a mannikin or a doll; it is inherently alive, flowing, changing from moment to moment. It is active, and it *wants* to be active, because activity is, in most circumstances, pleasurable (self-affirming).[1] This is indeed partly why women vehemently deny the obvious—that, on the whole, they are more 'receptive' and even naïve than men. Not only do they think these terms conceal value-judgments, but they intuitively 'know' that they (women) are *many* things, not just *this* and *this*. They can be 'passive' and they can be 'active'; they can be weak and they can be strong. "I am whatever I want to be! I am a self-actualizing woman! An empowered modern woman!" Doubtless there is much truth in what they say. Consciousness *does* change from moment to moment; a degree of self-assertiveness *is* part of human nature. Nevertheless, labels can be justified, if qualified. Stereotypes can be defended, as long as one remembers that they are generalizations. But even more paradoxically: people can *enjoy* being 'objects'. A woman can relish being looked at as an object, even though she may also dislike it.

How is that possible, though? In what sense does she enjoy it? Well, in approximately the same sense that a man may enjoy being seen as a sex-object by women. If a group of women ogled me after I worked out I'd feel pretty good, despite the fact that they were treating me less as a human being than as something pleasant to look at. For I'd like the attention, the recognition—even if it is a somewhat 'dehumanized' form of recognition. Similarly, women like being admired for their bodies and their beauty. Hence they dress revealingly. And so they participate in their partial self-degradation, because it yields a form of self-affirmation[2] (through the covetous looks of men, the appreciative comments from both sexes, etc.).

Well then in what sense do they dislike it? First of all, because female sexuality is not oriented primarily around sight, as the male's is, men don't have to live with daily monotonous stares. Stares from women are actually rather rare—though I'm speaking only for myself—so when they do happen they're ego-boosting. They aren't common enough to make the man feel as though his active, spontaneous subjecthood is being denied or ignored, so they don't cause insecure self-consciousness. The female experience is different. Most women grow accustomed to the looks, so they become less satisfying and more annoying (dehumanizing). Their psychological effect persists, though: namely, the woman's preoccupation with her appearance—her internalization of the other's attitude—and her consequent insecurity (due partly to the suppression of her free, active, spontaneous selfhood, and partly to the other's critical look[3]).

[…]

Incidentally, Andrea Dworkin's rants against pornography contain an element of truth. "The force depicted in pornography is objective and real because force is so used against women… The idea that pornography is 'dirty' originates in the conviction that the sexuality of women is dirty and is actually portrayed in pornography; that women's bodies (especially women's genitals) are dirty and lewd in themselves."[4] As I have said, there is indeed something about sexuality, about genitals and the mess they cause—and therefore especially about women's genitals, which are, as a matter of fact, in some ways 'messier' than men's—that makes humans self-conscious, no matter in what culture they live. And obviously sex involves a little force against women. The penis has to be plunged into and out of the vagina (in case you've forgotten), and this is a forceful act. Pornography tends to take these facts, together with the importance of sight for male sexuality, and exploit them, magnify them. In so doing, it reduces both female and male sexualities to caricatures of themselves. And, you know, caricatures operate by magnifying the *essence* of their object[5] to the exclusion of all else. So, yes: stripped bare of all complicating factors, male sexuality, as such, is relatively active and female sexuality, as such, is more passive, submissive. In certain societies, though, like old Samoa and the Tchambuli people of New Guinea, intersexual relations

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[1] *Free* activity, that is. Chosen, not imposed.

[2] A degenerate form, though, in comparison with the self-affirmation implicit in *creative activity*.

[3] The two causes interact, of course—for instance, the look is the reason for, and reinforces, the woman's suppression of her active selfhood—but they should be analytically distinguished.

[4] *Feminisms*, eds. Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 326.

[5] That is, the essence *in relation to* other features. The *relative* essence. This qualification is important.

are organized in such a way that women are not alienated from themselves (and men)—from the active, spontaneous, confident sides of their personalities. Social structures *are* possible that integrate women's passiveness with their activeness, rather than setting the two against each other, as is the case in the modern world.

One of the facets of this passiveness is that men tend to have a more substantial 'otherhood' than women. What this means, in brief, is that men are generally more self-confident and dominating than women, for all the reasons I've been setting forth.[1] This has been so since the dawn of the species, although social conditions can accentuate the natural differences. […] Therefore women will seek the more dominating men, whose recognition most validates their sense of self.[2]

A shy man is not only not much fun to be with, but his approval doesn't intuitively mean much to the approved one (which is, indeed, partly why he isn't much fun to be with). She may think, "This shy guy likes me. So what? That's not very exciting." It doesn't satisfy her, as, say, the approval (or recognition, love) of a charismatic man may. If *he* likes her, she'll feel that her sense of self is being deeply affirmed. Partly because other people too like him, and partly because his self-confidence itself gives him an inherent phenomenological heft, i.e. more of a "self" than the shy man has.

But then, if they date, she may start complaining about his insensitivity to her feelings. She'll say she wants a *sensitive* guy, that he's not sensitive enough, etc. He's fun but he doesn't respect her, communicate with her. These complaints may seem paradoxical, given that she has just rejected the sensitive, respectful guy in favor of the charismatic, cocky guy, but one can intuitively see that she is being perfectly consistent. For her desire throughout is that her sense of self—her self-conception—be affirmed. This is why she prefers the self-confident guy, and this is why she wants him to be sensitive to her feelings—while not losing his self-confidence. If she has to choose, she'll probably pick the self-confidence over the sensitiveness—because, again, recognition from a sensitive weakling is not satisfying, not very 'affirming'—but obviously she'd prefer to have both qualities in the same man.

Incidentally, all these considerations demonstrate that Mother Nature knows her work well. For she has designed the woman in such a way that she desires to be with a self-confident, strong man, i.e., one who will protect her and her child from whatever dangers threaten them in the hunter-gatherer wilderness. In pursuing her own happiness, the woman is simultaneously (unconsciously) furthering the cause of the species.

Speaking of which, I should briefly discuss women's experience of sex. This is important to their self-conception, as the man's experience of it is important to his. In this society, and most others, men are encouraged to think of sex as a test of their masculinity. Their ability to please a woman redounds to their value as men, largely because it is men who have to do much of the exhausting work during the act.

Women, on the other hand, have quite a different experience. Let's consult the Sumerian goddess Inanna:

> My vulva, the horn
> The Boat of Heaven,
> Is full of eagerness like the young moon,
> My untilled land lies fallow.
>
> As for me, Inanna,
> Who will plow my vulva?
> Who will plow my high field?

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[1] To forestall an inevitable objection: particular women may be more self-confident etc. than particular men, but in the minds of both men and women there remains the (natural, "archetypal") idea of the relatively dominant male and the less dominant female.

[2] The fact that such men are often the 'bad' (insensitive) ones relates to what I said earlier about the dehumanized self-conception of some women. They want this self-conception to be validated, even though it is in some sense painful, so they seek these dominating "bad boy" types.

Who will plow my high ground?

[she finds someone to plow her field]

He stroked my pubic hair,
He watered my womb.
He laid his hand on my holy vulva,
He smoothed my black boat with cream,
He quickened my narrow boat with milk.
He caressed me on the bed.

Sumerian porn. Not bad for history's first attempt.

Maybe you'll say that "Inanna" was probably some male scribe—maybe history's first transsexual—and so we shouldn't take her words too seriously. Still, I think that many women, if they're honest with themselves, will find the sentiments familiar. And the reader will find them strikingly *passive*—'he did this to me; he did that to me'—as well as self-fixated.

Before continuing, I feel obliged, lest people slander me, to point out again that everything I'm writing is an *observation*, not an *accusation*. I find nothing wrong with self-fixation, especially when one has little control over it. (Self-fixation isn't selfishness.) Men are a certain way and women are a certain way, and I want to understand in what ways they're the same and in what ways they aren't. Both men and women have little control over their characters, so to "blame" either sex for the way it is, or to criticize it, would be senseless. Actually, I respect women more than I do men. Women are, on average, more intelligent in some ways and more humane. I like this quotation from *The Second Sex* [no, I think it's from *All Said and Done*]:

> [Ingmar] Bergman's interest in women delights me: for him they are not objects but sensitive, intelligent subjects, and he is very good at drawing the relationships between them: friendship, complicity, hatred. As he sees it, their only weakness is that propensity which urges them towards those pitiful creatures, men.

Hear, hear! Were it not for that propensity, I would have nothing but praise for them. Their susceptibility to manipulation by sleazebags is the only thing that diminishes them in my eyes, though it is in fact a symptom of that which draws me to them: their sensitiveness, their naïveté, their good intentions, their intelligent love of the emotional life.

Despite my good intentions, though, my insistence that there is something like a female essence relative to men (on average) is starting to sound petty. I don't care enough to keep arguing for it. So let's put an end to this discussion.

Before doing so, however, I should address the subject of pregnancy and the mother-child relation, since this is an important part of what it means to be a woman. Let's see what Christine Downing has to say again.

> Having wombs reminds us of how much we are part of the ever-ongoing cycle of generations, how much we are used by nature as simply the instrument of her self-continuation. Having wombs reminds us of how much human activity is creative, generative. …Having wombs reminds us of the womb which gave us birth and also, inevitably, of the womb-tomb to which we will return.
>
> …[Conception] is followed by the mystery of *gestation*—the slow growing within our body of another life. This for me was an even greater mystery, the most powerful experience I've known of my body knowing how to perform a miracle about which "I" didn't have a clue—and the experience of coming to feel that the real "I" was precisely the knowing body. The excitement of feeling the changes month by month. The changes in my

> body's contours and responses. The experience of feeling the new little creature within grow and move and assert its presence. The strange sense of an intimacy of connection to this other who was also still partly myself. The mystery of knowing that I, too, had begun as a being living within my mother's body.
>
> …Sometimes the child within feels like an invader. Sometimes it feels as though one's body is betraying one, that more radically than ever before it feels "not-me". And sometimes things go radically wrong—and then there can come a terrible feeling of unworthiness and failure. We're "supposed" to know how to do this and to do it easily and well. This sense of failure may then expand and seem to apply to all of our lives, initiating a crisis of depression and self-denigration and despair. How vulnerable our bodies make us.

As Downing hints at, the miracle of pregnancy is yet another factor that causes women to view themselves and their bodies from the perspective of an outsider, i.e., as an object, an other, rather than a subject. It enhances their self-opacity, their fascination with themselves, and thus their self-preoccupation. In feeling as if nature is working its magic through them, they feel closely united with the natural world and all its miracles—and in so doing associate themselves with an *object* (nature), thus placing relatively less stock in their subjective autonomy, their self-determining independence, their subjecthood.

Also, their altered physical appearance—and its inherent *inner feeling*—is bound to make them self-conscious, self-fixated, in a non-*dominating* way. Whether it also makes them generally insecure depends on the particular woman and her body.

[…]

There are still two things I want to mention. First, women's communal tendencies. The close bonding that occurs between them, as well as the frequent reactions against it—the pettiness, back-stabbing, cruelty, mutual hatred. How bizarre this behavior must seem to most men! Totally paradoxical. It isn't, of course. It does, however, grow out of the paradox I've been analyzing, namely that women have a more intimate relationship with their bodies than men do with theirs even as they see their bodies as more of an *other* [of course not a conscious other] than men do. This otherness is indeed *why* they are so preoccupied with their bodies—their appearance, their rhythms, their discharges, their mysteries. Their bodies assert themselves in more ways than men's do, in both pleasant and unpleasant ways; this causes women to be more aware of them, which allows them to be more ambivalent towards them than men are towards theirs. They love them but they can also hate them—and they love and hate *themselves* to a similar degree. The correspondence is especially true in our culture, which emphasizes sex and physical appearance so much that women relate them to their self-conceptions more than they probably did, say, ten thousand years ago in Mesopotamia.

It's only natural, then, that women will bond with one another. They'll seek friends who understand their situations as women, their dilemmas, doubts and insecurities. They'll seek people with whom they can discuss themselves and their bodies without shame, i.e., without having to worry about the value-judgments of the *true* 'other' (namely, males). They want sympathy, in short, and women themselves are in a privileged position to give it.

Downing offers some interesting ideas in connection with this:

> Because we are wounded creatures, we tend to fear being further wounded, to fear otherness, to fear dependency, and to misconstrue interdependence as domination. Because the differences between another and myself may seem to be so great as to be well-nigh intolerable, in seeking to establish a relationship I may try to make that other more like myself. Because we can't tolerate the heterogeneity, we may seek to dominate or destroy the otherness of the other. Thus heterosexual encounters often come to be contaminated by patterns of dominance and submission—even when we may all want something quite different.

Women are infused with self-otherness more than men are; in seeking same-sex friendships or love-affairs they want to escape this self-otherness and insecurity—and thereby the 'gaze' of the true other, males (in the abstract). They want simple, easygoing affection; they want to escape the heterogeneity of the other (and the 'heterogeneous' consciousness he causes in them[1]) by immersing themselves in homogeneity, which lets them temporarily forget otherness and the insecurity that sometimes goes with it.

Friendships between men in fact have a similar function. It's nice to be able to relax and have an easy conversation with a couple of guys, not worrying about impressing them. You can talk about whatever you want, whatever vulgar or stupid thought enters your head. With women, however, you have to censor yourself more, because you want to impress them—because they're the true other, the other whose approval you most desire. The difference between men and women in this case is that the 'relief' of same-sex friendships seems to be greater for women than it is for men. Heterogeneity, otherness, isn't usually frightening for us men. […]

All these considerations help explain why both men and women have always associated men with rationality, objectivity, logic, independence, power, and women with subjectivity, emotionalism, passiveness, interdependence and irrationality. […]

On sexism.— Feminists are fond of laying the charge of "sexism!" at society. I agree wholeheartedly with them. Society is sexist, intensely so. When a man opens a door for a woman, he is being "sexist". When he compliments a woman on her appearance, he is being sexist. When he looks at a woman, he is being sexist. As soon as he wakes up in the morning, "sexism" is implicit in his consciousness. And the same is true of the woman's.

"Modern women" continued.— It's significant that the notion of romantic love, and poetic tributes to it, have become more widespread as history has progressed. For a long time in India most marriages were arranged; erotic love was relatively unimportant. And as you'd expect if my ideas are right, communities were tightly knit. A person's sense of self was affirmed and bolstered by all his communal ties; he didn't require romantic love in order to be happy and have a secure identity. In fact, arranged marriages are far more frequent in 'primitive' cultures than in 'advanced' ones. Conversely, Western poets began *en masse* to write love poems from the Renaissance on—from Petrarch on to contemporary times. And of course it was during the Renaissance that individualism started to became a European ideology (especially once the Reformation got underway)—suggesting that communities were becoming less tightly knit, and hence that people would turn increasingly to their lovers for 'recognition'—and contemporary society is characterized by extreme atomization, which partly explains the ubiquity of love poems and love songs. People crave togetherness. In short: one can take as a working hypothesis that a culture's emphasis on romantic love is directly proportional to its degree of communal fragmentation.

*

....Anyone who wants to understand this country should read Alexis de Tocqueville's brilliant book *Democracy in America*. It is still basically as relevant as it was in the nineteenth century. Tocqueville understood both the advantages and the dangers of demotic politics, and he knew it was where Europe was headed. (He didn't know why, though. For that, it is necessary to supplement him with Marx.) It's where the whole world is headed, in fact. Certain traditions are peculiar to America—for example, the puritanism that still persists and is manifested in such organizations as the Christian Coalition and the Parents Television Council—but, nonetheless, an analysis of the American experience would be valuable to the countries developing in its direction. It would also, of course, be valuable to Americans themselves.

[1] That is, the otherness of consciousness to itself. The otherness of the self to itself.

I won't undertake that analysis here. At the age of 25 I don't have the patience for the necessary research. I intend only to ramble awhile, in the hope that I'll stumble across a few insights.

I suggested a moment ago that American arrogance may mask some kind of inferiority complex. That isn't right, though. While an *individual's* arrogance may often have such a function, the situation is more complicated with communities. Sometimes, admittedly, patriotism or nationalism grows out of a community's insecurity vis-à-vis other nations. German nationalism comes to mind. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Germans had a strong desire to 'catch up' with Western European nations. They longed to surpass the latters' economic, military and political achievements, to be major players on the world stage. Germany, after all, had been politically fragmented until Bismarck united it in the 1860s; it was economically backward—especially in comparison with England—until the end of the nineteenth century; it had been humiliated by Napoleon in his wars. The pride that Germans felt from their cultural superiority (made possible by their many great composers, great philosophers and great poets) made their shame and bitterness in other areas all the more keen. Bismarck was therefore able to fan the flames of German nationalism such that the country eventually became the preeminent militaristic power in Europe, leading indirectly to World War I. And then Hitlerism happened—again, because of the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles, and the economic depression of the 1920s and '30s. So in this case the hypothesis of an "inferiority complex" is relevant.

Not in the case of America, though. We in this country seem to be genuinely pleased with ourselves. We know we have the most power in the world; we know we have probably the most freedom (in some respects) and one of the better political systems. We grow up being taught that we're the best and luckiest, and we believe it. It's all the more surprising, then—and gets us all the more angry—when someone dares attack us. We flare up in righteous indignation, unite as a population, and seek revenge on the attackers. Our capacity for self-critical, independent thought is submerged in our quasi-emotional state of mind, which sees the attack as a personal affront against us as individuals—against all we stand for, all we believe in. In violating our communal integrity, it infuriates the individual who identifies with the community—because, insofar as he identifies with it, his sense of self is *as* a member of the community. And so his sense of self has been violated too. This is why he takes the attacks personally, and *this* is why he is able to muster such passion for total revenge.

[…]

In a nationwide climate of this intense feeling, rationality and critical thought are forsaken. Conservatism is embraced; instinct, tradition and self-preservation are embraced. Intellectual nuances have no psychological power in comparison with the urges to assert oneself, to affirm oneself and to preserve oneself. In this case, the urges are mediated by one's consciousness of belonging in a community, so the community unites against the evil Other that wants to destroy each individual and hence each individual's sense of self (which is, from the individual's point of view, approximately as terrible a threat as his actual biological destruction). In a really severe case, the community might feel so threatened that it desires the genocide of the Other. The complete destruction of the thing that threatens the self's integrity. Once this thing is destroyed, the community will cease to be united and will revert to its earlier fragmentation, because people's sense of self will again be secure enough for them to compete with one another, etc. That is, they will no longer feel so vulnerable as to desire that their self-conceptions be reinforced through their agreement with the self-conceptions of everyone else in the community. Since the part of them that self-identifies as a member of the community is no longer threatened, they are free to 'take it for granted' and act in individualistic ways that would have been unthinkable earlier, when there was an Other that disrespected their self-conceptions.

(Actually, the phenomenological mechanisms of a person's heightened identification with the community are quite complicated. For example, just as the enemies are melded into an abstract Other, whom each individual enemy simply *represents*, the people in the community are merged (in a person's mind) into a single vast entity that affirms one's sense of self.)

[…]

But it's this damned atomization I keep talking about, this homegrown American alienation. The country is too atomized for collective action. Nothing is more harmful to democracy than an atomized civil

society, because of the apathy that comes with it. Nobody cares about participating, and a democracy can't function properly without mass participation. It deteriorates into an oligarchy, which is what America has become. The few at the top are obsessed with maintaining the status quo because of the power it has given them, and the many at the bottom are too atomized to do anything but go to work and watch TV (or surf the internet). –*What a sick society!* And yet apparently nothing can be done to cure it. The nature of its illness precludes a cure, because a cure would have to be communal in origin. All it can do is keep evolving on its economic foundations and hope that by some miracle it will evolve its way into rejuvenation.

[Blah blah…]

On television and the internet

I'll be the first to admit that TV is addictive. Which is why I never watch it. I could watch Seinfeld and The Family Guy for hours, and afterwards I'd be disgusted with myself. And yet the next day I might do it again, having learned nothing. There's something about the flickering televised images that grabs your attention and holds it, even if the show you're watching is unimpressive. You turn your head away or walk out of the room, but the sounds pull you back. 'I know it's a waste of time,' you tell yourself, 'but....I just have to see what all that laughter is about! What are the characters saying right now? I have to see how the show is going to end—just *this* show, just five minutes more. *Then* I'll stop!' […]

What is the explanation of this? Why is television addictive? I've read articles in *Scientific American* that give convincing explanations in terms of neurology. –So, there's your answer: neurology. The addiction has something to do with neurons and brain states. This bunch of synapses over here fires in this way, involving all these neurotransmitters, and those neurons over there are called into action, and the visual cortex is stimulated, and so on. Satisfied? No, of course not. Biological explanations are never satisfying; they always leave you wanting more. You want an *intuitive* explanation, a psychological or phenomenological one. The latter is most intuitively satisfying, because it involves a description of your *consciousness*, which is precisely the thing you don't understand. You don't understand *in what sense* you enjoy watching TV and in what sense you don't. Both your pleasure and your displeasure are inexplicable to you. They're *sui generis*; they're just *there*, somehow, apparently unanalyzable.

You'll get a better idea of what I mean if I discuss a similar paradox, namely the paradox of horror. Which is closely related to that of tragedy. Millions of people enjoy watching horror movies—they enjoy the fear, the adrenaline rush, the violence and gore—despite the fact that fear and terror are generally regarded as painful emotions. In what sense, then, do horror-fans enjoy these emotions? How is that possible? *Where* (in their consciousness) *is* their pleasure, and where their 'pain'? I enjoy thrillers and even some horror movies, but I have no idea what my pleasure consists in. Similarly, tragic plays have been popular ever since Aeschylus, but pity and sadness (the emotions they provoke) are not usually considered pleasant. So why are tragedies popular?

Equally paradoxical is the possibility of enjoying emotions like depression, anger, hatred, and jealousy. It's possible to *wallow* in these feelings, to let them consume you for hours or days at a time. Goethe wrote poems about the ecstasy of despair, and I can attest that sadness is intoxicating. When you're in its throes, you're tempted not to make any effort to overcome it but just to languish in it for weeks, even though you feel miserable.

Philosophers have tried to give psychological solutions to the paradoxes of tragedy and horror. Aristotle attributed tragedy's popularity to its cathartic function—its "purging" the audience of pity—while David Hume attributed it to its engaging plots (its narrative element). In more recent times, Noël Carroll, a famous philosopher of art, tried to explain the phenomenon of horror by invoking the element of fascination: monsters (and gruesome spectacles) violate our normal conceptual schemes, "transgress our categories of thought", and hence fascinate us. The suspense in these movies, he thought, is another reason for our enjoyment: we crave the plot's eventual resolution, as well as the eventual revelation of whatever horrifying being is causing all the mayhem (for movies often delay revealing both the monster and the *explanation* of the monster). So we enjoy horror *in spite* of our disgust and fear. Berys Gaut has argued, on the other hand,

that we enjoy it *because* of our disgust and fear. His theory incorporates the idea that emotions are not merely physiological feelings; they're also intimately tied with evaluations of whatever object of thought one has in mind. To fear something involves evaluating it as threatening, to be envious of someone involves desiring that his situation be yours, etc. The unpleasantness of an emotion is a function of the negative evaluations it includes, rather than of its physiological sensations per se. So people are able to enjoy horror because their evaluations of the movie-situation are not as negative as evaluations of frightening situations in "real life" are. They enjoy the physiological sensations, and psychologically they feel secure because they know it's just a movie.

All these theories have elements of truth, but they aren't broad enough to be satisfactory in themselves. They can't account for the pleasure of *real* sadness, anger and so on. At best they're special cases of a more general explanation. It seems to me that all these paradoxes are related to the fact of *emotional inertia*. Simply by virtue of experiencing a particular emotion, we want it to continue. This is intuitively verifiable. To *remain* in a feeling, no matter what it is—even if it feels like a *lack* of feeling, as when you're sitting on the couch doing nothing, just being at rest and letting your mind roam—is comfortable; it is the path of least effort. In enjoying something like sadness, we're enjoying not the emotion per se but rather our *persisting* in the emotion. All emotions have this inertial element, though 'painful' ones like depression also incorporate negative thoughts (and perhaps even intrinsically unpleasant physiological sensations) which account for the sufferer's partial desire to be in a different mental state.

Obviously I'm not being philosophically rigorous here. (I want readers, after all.) To give a full treatment of these emotional paradoxes I'd have to discuss the elusive phenomenology of consciousness, of pleasure and pain and their interrelations, and how it is that we come to label states *in general* 'pleasurable' or 'painful', etc. My point is that all these questions and paradoxes are related to the question of television's addictiveness. Phenomenologically speaking, though, our 'inertia' while watching TV is different from emotional inertia: it is more closely related to the *object* than the *feeling*. There doesn't even seem to be a true, perceptible 'emotion' when watching TV, as there is (sometimes) when watching horror or being moved by tragedy. In this respect, TV-watching is similar to social interaction. Rarely do we have a palpable emotion during casual interactions, and yet we find the activity pleasant. Both situations are satisfying and somewhat addictive. If we're alone and we hear talking in the other room, we'll want to see what's going on and join the fun. Or maybe we'll eavesdrop. Either way, our reaction is similar to our reaction when we hear the TV on.

So, the attraction of television is largely its quasi-social element. Watching characters interact is interesting, as are social interactions themselves. Admittedly, the incessant flicker of the televised images, and their colorfulness, is also relevant, for a field of vision that constantly changes is inherently attention-grabbing, but in itself this cannot fully explain our "addiction", for it doesn't explain why when we hear the television in another room we're curious about whatever show is on and want to go watch it. In the case of this desire, the flicker of the images is irrelevant; we must invoke the social aspect of the experience. – Okay; but whence derives our *dis*pleasure, our *dis*satisfaction? Well, evidently from TV's non-social aspects. It isn't hard to pinpoint these. There is no give-and-take with television; there is no element of 'recognition'. The characters on the screen are unaware of the viewer's existence; he just passively absorbs what they say and do. The pleasure of society is (on the phenomenological level) due mainly to its communal function, i.e., to the participant's implicit recognition of an other who he implicitly knows is recognizing him. Since this recognition is absent when you watch television, you don't get much "spiritual satisfaction" from it. And you turn it off feeling like you've accomplished nothing, because accomplishments in general are satisfying—i.e., have the character precisely of an '*accomplishment*'—due to the recognition they make possible for the person who has accomplished them (recognition either from himself—for, as we saw earlier, the individual is, in a sense, his own other—or from another person). Were there no recognition, there would not be the sense of an accomplishment. Since TV does not give the viewer recognition, he lacks the sense of having accomplished something. Hence he is dissatisfied.

The actual 'feelings' or 'states' of pleasure and displeasure are utterly mysterious to me in their phenomenological aspect (i.e., the way they *feel*, the way they *are*—their 'place' and 'quality' in consciousness). They can't really be analyzed, it seems. But this is a more general puzzle, not specific to

TV-watching. Another, similar puzzle applies to the phenomenology of such states as shame, envy and lust: these feelings are both perceptible and not perceptible. We can feel them and yet, in another sense, we can't, simply because there is really nothing there to be *felt*. –These problems are truly baffling, not least because they're so hard to get a clear grasp of. But this isn't the place to discuss them. The point is that at least we have some intuitive idea of the *causes* of the satisfaction and dissatisfaction produced by TV. (I don't mean the neurological causes, but the phenomenological ones.)

[…]

Scholars, incidentally, have sometimes wondered how it is that the ancient Athenians were able to retain their affirmative attitude toward life despite their acute knowledge of life's tragic character. Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides testify to the Athenian's preoccupation with fate, with the individual's impotence vis-à-vis his destiny. And yet Athens was the most *affirming* culture in history. It gave birth to the philosopher, the artist, the statesman, the mathematician, the scientist—to virtually all that is noble. *How?* –First of all, I think this tribute to Athens is a little simple-minded. Be that as it may, Hegel's answer, which I've already mentioned, is insightful: Classical Athens existed between complete homogeneity and extreme individualism. The former would have prevented individual types like 'the philosopher' from arising because the individual would not really have existed as such; he would have been only a part of the community—his self-identity would have been as such. The latter, on the other hand, (that is, extreme individualism) would have coexisted with a collective cynicism too great for the community to have *originated* types like 'the artist' and 'the statesman'—to have been enthusiastic enough, naïve enough, to have originated these types and given popular recognition to their exemplars. In Athens of the 5th century B.C., communal integration, and hence the individual's self-consciousness as an individual, existed in the requisite 'happy medium'. In the Hellenistic era, on the other hand, which saw the decline of the Greek polis, the individual's self-consciousness as an individual (his self-fixation) became so extreme that it caused widespread existential anguish, doubt about where the world was heading, confusion, cynicism, a preoccupation with such darker aspects of life as death, disease, old age; art and philosophy, therefore, declined from their 'affirmative' heights in the Hellenic period. They reflected the community's fragmentation and the individual's consequent sense of living a meaningless existence. (Hence Stoicism, Cynicism, Epicureanism.)

On life

This is the chapter where I'm supposed to sum up everything, arrange it into easily digestible morsels of wisdom. Edifying epigrams. All the lessons I've learned from life and want to impart to the reader. I'm supposed to arrive at conclusions—inspiring ones, of course—that can help the reader in his "journey", like pills he takes in the morning or the coffee he's addicted to.

But the Age of Naïveté is gone. All saccharine life-lessons will now dissolve upon contact with reality. Nobody knows anything anymore, and I'm not going to pretend I do. There's no panacea for loneliness or depression or the gnawing feeling that life is meaningless; there will always be boredom, and there will always be despairing thoughts. The best you can do is to wait them out, to be patient and hope they'll go away. Because you can rarely banish them by sheer force of will.

So I'm not going to end this book with a didactic discussion of the best way to live—as if there is such a thing! […]

William James wrote in a letter to his wife that "I have often thought that the best way to define a man's character would be to seek out the particular mental or moral attitude in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensely active and alive. At such moments there is a voice inside which speaks and says, 'This is the real me!'" […]

In his excellent book *Character Styles*, Stephen Johnson distinguishes between three types of OCD: the most common type is characterized by "an excessive fear of physical harm or danger to one's self, or others, or property", which may result, for instance, in constant worry about getting HIV, or an obsession

with one's "hostile impulses"; the second type involves "a vague sense of unease rather than actual danger in the face of normal exposures"; the third type is "distinguished by continual striving for perfection and symmetry". I belonged to the third type. Johnson describes the symptoms:

> Some such patients may need, for example, to have each shoe tied to the same degree of tension or need to walk through a doorway precisely in the middle. Religious or other rituals may have to be done with perfect attention to every detail and sequence, or one's desk may need to be arranged with complete orderliness and symmetry with every object at its exactly prescribed angle. For the most part, individuals with this diagnosis also find their compulsive behaviors to be irrational, ego-dystonic [i.e., in conflict with one's ideal self-image], and intrusive, yet they feel compelled to do them. A common exception to this generalization, however, is that their perfectionistic standards are often ego-syntonic [the opposite of ego-dystonic].

That's virtually a description of me. I had to tie my shoes repeatedly until the tension was equal in both—and if I felt them getting loose later in the day I had to retie them—and everything on my desk had to be symmetrical. Books had to be right-side-up; if their cover was face-down it somehow *bothered* me. I can't describe the feeling. My facial tics were, I suspect, closely related to my OCD. I hated all my compulsions, but I had to indulge in them. Otherwise I would get an intense feeling of unease. Indulging in the tics and the compulsions made me feel secure again.

[…]

Many adolescents suffer from this kind of self-dissatisfaction. They dislike their apparent self, the one that others see; in wanting to be someone different, they really just want to become what they (probably) see as their *real* self (i.e., their potential self, their ideal self). They have a more or less definite self-ideal, whether it be as a thin person, a beautiful person, an outgoing person, a virtuous person; in trying to become this person, they're trying to realize their potential self. And in the process to discard their contemptible *apparent* self, who isn't really—or *necessary-ly*—them. (They may indeed identify with him, as I did, but they are more committed to their identification with their ideal self.) Their ultimate goal is to recognize their full sense of self in their behavior and in the reactions that others have to them;—to see themselves reflected in the social world, recognized and respected. This will validate their sense of self, will give them self-esteem.

One of the sources of their insecurity, though, as I hinted at in the quotation above, is their doubt about whether their ideal self is in fact who they really are—i.e., a potential self within them. Maybe it isn't potential. Maybe they're just deluding themselves: maybe they *really are* the objectionable person that appears to the world. This possibility is terrifying, for it threatens their sense of self, which is intensely attached to the possibility of "becoming who they are" potentially. I myself used to think that I'd rather die than not achieve my self-ideal. Adolescents stake their sense of self-worth on the possibility of achieving the ideal (which they hope and think is the real), and so the nagging doubt that it's a delusion is destructive of their mental well-being. Nevertheless, they can't escape this doubt, consciously or half-consciously, which makes their desire to change themselves all the more frantic. For they have to prove to themselves that their sense of self is justified, lest they become even *more* insecure (self-contemptuous).

After all, the reason they have an ideal self in the first place is as a defense-mechanism. When they were younger, before they had this self-ideal, their self-esteem was high enough for them to accept themselves. They didn't have to try to be someone else. But as they got older they became more aware of themselves, of the differences between themselves and other people, especially the opposite sex. This is true of all adolescents. The difference between the healthy ones and the unhealthy ones is that the self-consciousness of the latter is compulsive and critical. *Why* this is so has to do with the intersection between genetics and psychology, and isn't well-understood. It doesn't matter for our purposes, anyway. –Now, in being critical of themselves, these adolescents already implicitly recognize a disjunction between who they are and who they want to be. However, they may not yet be *explicitly aware* of their self-ideal. They know only that others ignore them or seem to disapprove of them, and this causes them to disapprove of

themselves.

Sooner or later they'll formulate for themselves, and 'flesh out', the implicit self-ideal. It will be a function of such things as what (type of person) they perceive that society rewards, and what values they have been taught, and what their innate aptitudes are, etc. The 'defense mechanism'-aspect exists insofar as they integrate into their sense of self the ideal that they have formulated. This ideal becomes *part* of them, a semi-imaginary part they're determined to realize in practice. They think it is their potentially *real* self, which has for whatever reason been suppressed by circumstances. By deciding that they can become this idealized person, they are protecting their sense of self from disintegration in the face of the other's perceived contempt (which is really their own). –That is, to protect their self-conception they are, seemingly paradoxically, forced to adopt as their own the other's ideal (society's ideal, properly adjusted to fit this particular individual). The paradox is superficial, though, for, after all, self-esteem is largely a function of the other's reaction to one.

The reader may have noticed that Laing's analysis of the schizoid individual in *The Divided Self* is in some respects applicable to the kind of person I'm discussing. Laing distinguishes between the inner, 'true' self and the outer, 'false' self (or selves) and dissects the multifaceted relationship between them. There are indeed certain parallels between the true and false selves, on the one hand, and what I'm calling the ideal and apparent selves, on the other, but the differences are more significant. I'll briefly describe them, in the hope that this will illuminate my own ideas.

According to Laing, the schizoid individual experiences both an inner self, which is the *real* 'me', and an outer self (or selves), which is the persona adopted around other people. This false self is treated virtually as another person, a thing foreign to the true self, which may look on it with detachment, hatred, tenderness, etc. The false self is the one that has interpersonal relationships; the true self cannot, because in the presence of other people it is masked by the false self. So, in the 'ideal' case, it does not have direct contact with people; it simply observes the behavior of the false self. "The imagined advantages [of this system] are safety for the true self, isolation and hence freedom from others, self-sufficiency, and control."[1] The inner self fears relationships as threats to its identity, its integrity; it fears that it will be submerged in them, or that the other's look will turn it into a *thing*, an *object* without subjectivity. Hence it tries to protect itself from people. The main *dis*advantage of this desire, on the other hand, is that the self is haunted by a sense of futility, of deadness and unreality, since it is isolated from the richness and concreteness of interpersonal experience. It doesn't act in reality but only in fantasy, in its imagination and its self-related thoughts, and it is therefore unreal, perpetually frustrated. It may even react against its isolation by seeking relationships with people;—but then, by opening itself up to interpersonal contact, it feels vulnerable and threatened. In short: Scylla and Charybdis. The schizoid person cannot be content with himself.

Laing's analysis is so rich and subtle that any brief summary is inevitably going to be a parody. Nevertheless, the preceding paragraph is enough to show that the main themes of Laing's discussion are different from my ideas. The "apparent self" is not really *false*, at least not necessarily. Most adolescents partly identify with the persona they disapprove of; I certainly did. […] I just didn't think it was the *necessary* expression of my self. I thought there was a better personality somewhere inside me, waiting to be coaxed out. This better personality was not Laing's "true self" or "inner self"; my inner self was, you could say, caught between my apparent and my ideal self. It was neither one nor the other: it was the arbiter in the dispute. (The biased arbiter.) Yet it overlapped with both, for it identified with both. It (that is, I) knew that its current personality was an expression of itself, but it had a very definite and opposing notion of what its ideal personality was. –The inner self is on a different level than the apparent and ideal selves: while the latter two are basically *personalities*, the former is an *awareness*, an *active thinking* and *evaluating*. It is the self (the *I*) in the deep, active sense.

[…] Most self-conscious adolescents are indeed sometimes susceptible to the schizoid experiences of inner deadness, a sense of futility and despair, perhaps unreality and excessive freedom (see below), but these can be simply symptoms of acute loneliness, and need not indicate a truly schizoid personality.

In our civilization, virtually everyone's personality has mildly schizoid characteristics: everyone is

[1] *The Divided Self* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), p. 78.

self-conscious to the point of slightly altering his personality depending on his company. He is rarely able to be fully spontaneous; either he isn't comfortable enough with himself and others, or his many social roles force him to act differently depending on the circumstances. Around a friend he'll act a certain way, around a coworker he'll act differently, with his family he'll feel less inhibited, and in solitude he'll feel free to act however he wants. He will thus have not only a true, inner self, but also a personality he considers more his own than the others—*traits* he considers the 'truest' expressions of himself. For he feels most comfortable, most natural, acting a certain way. It may be with his family, with his friends or his 'significant other', or with himself and no one else. These traits are associated with his inner self: i.e., just as he has a true *consciousness*, so he has a (more or less) true mode of *behavior*, which is an expression of his true consciousness. For example, my inner self tends to be good-natured, contemplative, ironical, affectionate, forgiving; behavior that reflects this is, therefore, my truest 'personality'.

Modern people are somewhat schizoid in another way, too: they tend to be more or less self-ambivalent, self-confused. Sometimes they can't decide who they 'really' are—i.e., which 'personality' or 'role' is their *true* one. They have too many, or they don't receive sufficient recognition from others to have a secure sense of self.

Rarely, however, do these disorders evolve to the point at which the inner self radically differentiates itself from outer, false selves, and comes to be so attached to its radical freedom that it dreads being 'seen' or 'pinned down', like a thing without subjectivity, by the other—even as it *desires* to be the object of another's attention for the sake of feeling really *alive*. (The schizoid self thinks that, unlike itself, the other is 'full of being', truly alive, and that by being the object of the other's look it will itself participate in this being, which it fervidly desires on account of its inner emptiness and deadness. And yet at the same time it fears the other's look.) Not even the adolescents I'm discussing suffer from this *extreme* form of self-consciousness. They can indeed be called more 'self-fragmented' than the healthy person, inasmuch as their inner self partly dissociates itself from their apparent personality (or body) and clings to the vision of an ideal personality (or body) which it identifies with or *wants* to identify with, while in the healthy person the apparent coincides with the ideal. Nonetheless, their partial dissociation is for the sake of approval from the other (the other *in themselves* as well as actual other people)—for the sake of love, affirmation, esteem. They are not conflicted about this desire; they do not love the freedom, the autonomy, of their inner self—because the self *isn't* autonomous. It is attached to a particular self-conception, namely the ideal one, and it wants to realize this in practice. Also, it recognizes that the contemptible apparent self is an outgrowth of the inner self, however much the latter wishes it were not. The schizoid person does not identify with his outer self, and in this respect he's different from the people I'm talking about. He can be considered an extreme version of them: their partial self-dissociation has evolved, in him, to virtually complete self-dissociation. (In the schizophrenic, the self-dissociation is complete.)

In many adolescents, the disjunction between the apparent and the ideal results in eating disorders (anorexia nervosa, etc.), through which they try to remake the apparent in the shape of the ideal. In me, it resulted in obsessive-compulsiveness.[1] More precisely, my obsessive-compulsiveness was my psyche's way of protecting itself (its sense of self) from self-disintegration. Each time I experienced that intuition about what I would do in a particular situation or what I would have done in a situation if I could repeat it, my sense of self was shored up against the encroaching looks of the other. The *critical* looks, which ascribed to me an identity (a 'weak', objectionable identity) that I felt intuitively was not the *real* me, the me I wanted to be and thought I could be. Of course I only imagined them—the critical looks were simply 'the other' *in me* criticizing me—but that made them no less threatening. For they were experienced as (potential) devaluations from other people. […] I couldn't change my behavior just by willing to, nor could I say to people that they were wrong, that I was a valuable person. And the mere act of *telling* myself such a thing would have no psychological force. So my psyche manufactured this OCD, this *intuitive* means of asserting my sense of self.

In other words, my irresistible craving to imaginatively enact or reenact my behavior until I reached

[1] Actually, anorexia, pathological gambling, compulsive self-mutilation and so on should probably be considered forms of OCD, as Johnson suggests (p. 269).

that intuitive *click* of being satisfied with myself signified my unconscious need for affirmation from the other. By imaginatively behaving as I wanted to in reality, whether in a retroactive or an anticipatory way, I achieved a substitute for the real thing. (It reminds me of Freud's theory that dreams are substitutes for 'real' wish-fulfillments.) I affirmed my sense of self, recognized it in my behavior, in *imagination*—which was the only option for me, since I didn't recognize my sense of self in my *real* behavior.

[…]

As a college freshman, my frequent meditations led me to the conclusion that words, labels, concepts are ultimately half-meaningless. Or at least deceptive. The act of judging people in particular is deluded, based on ignorance of the other's condition. The inner life is fluid; there is no such thing as "arrogance" or "hypocrisy" or "selfishness", much less "badness" and "evil". There is but a continuous movement, a flowing in and out of transient mental states. Static judgments are artificial; language is artificial. Music is the only authentic mode of communication, due to the absence of 'conceptual frozenness', which is unreal. […]

Arrogance, self-contempt, happiness, unhappiness.... It all ran together in my mind; the quest for certainty was utterly hopeless. I was too mutable. […]

What a year that was, that freshman year! Had I read Sartre then, I would have sympathized with his belief that humans are absolutely free. Reality didn't feel real to me. The self I presented to others felt 'falser' than it had in high school; I identified with it less than I had before. But I didn't know what I wanted to put in its place. Sometimes I thought that nothing but my own inertia or cowardice was constraining me from being anyone I wanted to be. And who I wanted to be depended largely on the last book I had read. When I read *Crime and Punishment* I identified with Raskolnikov and wondered whether I ought to kill someone out of intellectual curiosity. When I read about the Dalai Lama I thought *that* was how I wanted to live my life. Usually I read about Marx, though, so his memory dominated my self-musings.

I really ought to have read more about Hegel then. That might have helped me get some self-clarity. I would have seen that one of the reasons (to repeat—for the last time, I promise!) that social interaction is pleasurable and reassuring is that the other's reactions to you, as well as your own natural reactions to the other, reaffirm your reality, your existence, your sense of self. They reaffirm the latter's apparent necessity, its (and your) *concreteness*, by forcing on you the fact of your being. "I am a being among beings, a thing as real, necessary—and hence valuable—as this person I'm talking to." Feeling (on a deep, intuitive level) as if you can *choose* your identity is unnerving, because it implies that your current sense of self is unnecessary, accidental, and hence valueless. Even worse, it implies that *any* sense of self is contingent—that any identity you choose is going to be accidental. So you feel trapped in this prison of freedom. No matter where you turn, you can't escape the doubts, the contingency of it all, because you could always be other than you are. What this means is that your sense of self is inevitably going to be 'up in the air'. Insecure. Nothing is more disturbing than that knowledge.

So, even as I fervidly desired to make a decision about who I was and wanted to be, I hesitated to do so and constantly postponed the decision. Half-consciously I think I knew that it would inevitably mean the embrace of contingency, of a contingent identity; therefore I unconsciously chose to remain in this disturbing postponement of (what I thought was) the inevitable—the inevitable confrontation with myself. I preferred my negative freedom to a decisive embrace of a determinate contingency, because then there would be no turning back. (Or, if I did turn back, I would feel disgusted with myself.) I was living in "bad faith", as Sartre might have said. But I couldn't do otherwise, simply because it wasn't up to me to choose my identity. That's where Sartre was wrong. Humans cannot choose their personality, broadly speaking; at most, they can choose particular actions. But—except in highly stressful, life-and-death situations, such as obtained in Nazi Germany—there is no real necessity to make a choice (like the choice that Raskolnikov made, which resulted in his killing two women). In all healthy individuals and societies, the epic choice of *Either/Or* is unnecessary. For the dichotomy is seen as a false one. One can try a little of this, a little of that; no aura of moral heroism hangs around The Decision, for nothing necessitates that a Decision be made. Instead, the person simply follows himself, becomes himself relatively conflict-freely; he unconsciously understands that he is who he is, that he has neither a reason nor the ability to choose what kind of person he is going to be. His character will unfold spontaneously, nourished in its communal environment.

So the emphasis on freedom is a symptom of sickness. A healthy person understands that, while life does have a great deal of contingency, his own identity is largely necessary. It was not a real possibility that he be radically different from what he is. I could not have been a Jon Stewart, nor was there any particular reason for me to *try* to be a Raskolnikov or even a Karl Marx. The best way to live, on the whole, is simply to "become who you are" spontaneously, neither to seek out self-conflict nor to avoid it. Just do whatever feels most natural and sustainable, whatever makes you happiest. The Sartrean morality of freedom is a pathology, appropriate only to the most pathological of times. Most of the time there is nothing particularly heroic about committing oneself irreversibly to a course of action. That sort of commitment strikes me as stupid and unnecessary in this life of "rich ambiguity"; it's symptomatic of a neurosis.

Part of me understood this, but another part was romantically attracted to the idea of a Decision—and perhaps even believed that ultimately I would *have* to choose, at least if I was to retain my integrity. So I agonized over what belief-system I should have and what personality was best. […]

I think that half-consciously I often felt dead inside. When I acted spontaneously I felt alive, but the more I scrutinized myself, the emptier I felt. I would realize "There's nothing there! There's nothing inside me! I'm just this bare *awareness*; there's nothing behind it or within it. So how *could* I have an identity? There's no substance for the identity to inhere in!" If taken seriously, such thoughts are very disturbing.

I used to scoff at Goethe's idea that profound philosophers are, in a sense, hypochondriacs, thinking he was making an excuse for his own lack of profundity. But, while he surely was, he was also right. If you're fascinated by your own nothingness, as I was, then—there's something wrong with you. (Obviously.) That's okay, though. As long as you can supersede your obsession with attaining knowledge, it can in fact, in the end, be beneficial. For it is appropriate to a certain stage of life, and a certain stage of history. Despairing youth and late capitalism: they're an odd couple, but in a sense they belong together, for they're both antitheses in a dialectic. At least, they can be construed as such. First there is naïve pleasure in life, the childhood of simple affirmation and joyful egocentricity; then there is a confrontation with disillusioning reality; and finally there is a sophisticated and rich humanism. This dialectic, in some form, is constantly being played out on microcosmic and macrocosmic levels; and though its manifestations are never identical to one another—there is always some variation or other—its truth is profound and universal. The turbulence of youth is superseded by a self-assured adulthood; the nihilism of late capitalism is superseded by something socialistic. And perhaps, ultimately, by something approximating communism (the adulthood of mankind).

Being a Marxist, I was aware of this dialectic. Being a confused young kid, though, I wasn't very comforted by it. I was preoccupied with the "antithesis" over the "synthesis"—the absurdity of life over its joyful aspects. Hence my concern with Hegel's 'self as self-consciousness' definition, which implied that I am essentially a nothingness, and thus served as a philosophical justification of my self-floundering. When I discovered that definition, my prior uncertainty about who I was—and my belief that it was impossible *ever* to "be" someone—became even worse. "I am nothing, so how can I 'be' something?" No one *is* himself, I thought; he is a nothingness and he has several 'personalities', all of which are accidental. They could have been otherwise. Personalities (I thought) are determined by accidental encounters, accidental life-paths, and inertial tendencies within people. Since I wasn't anyone in particular, my interactions with others necessarily consisted of my putting on a series of masks. Even if they felt sincere at the time, I decided later (in the tortured introspection of solitude) that they had been an act.

[…]

But I saw absurdity and contingency everywhere. I've explained in what sense I doubted the authenticity of my self and selves in general, but I had other doubts too. Of course, my whole belief-system was up in the air, but aside from that I doubted the meaningfulness of life. Had I read Milan Kundera, I would have agreed with him: because of the passage of time, life cannot be meaningful. Nothing matters in a world of transience where everything happens once, and "everything is pardoned in advance and therefore everything cynically permitted".[1] It's all over after it's happened, so it doesn't matter anymore. Nero's

[1] From *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

barbarism, for example, doesn't matter now; the Thirty Years' War doesn't matter; the bombing of Hiroshima is in the past, so it doesn't matter. All that suffering is gone! Time takes away the meaning from everything.

[…]

—Action, I should point out, always involves at least a slight disregard of reason. It involves a "leap of faith" (to quote Kierkegaard)—an element of *choice*—a gap (of freedom) between the conclusion of the argument in favor of the act and the actual carrying-out of the act. In other words, even when one spends a lot of time debating whether to undertake a certain act before actually undertaking it, action is premised on an element of non-rationality, of a resolute cutting-off of the process of reasoning. After all, with regard to any given act, reasoning *could* go on forever, the debate between arguments and counter-arguments never ending, precisely because of our freedom—i.e., the gap between the conclusion of an argument and the carrying-out of an act.[1] If we were perfectly, infinitely rational—a condition that is inconceivable (self-contradictory), because then we would never be able to commit the *act* of considering a reason for something—the debate between arguments for and against an act would indeed never end, and nothing would get done. In reality, though, because of the fact of freedom we always act on the basis of an incomplete rationality, an incomplete process of reasoning.[2]

Anyway, the point is that one manifestation of the incompleteness of our rationality is our generally ignoring reasons pertaining to death, to the vastness of time. Nature was, on the whole, wise to implant in us this unrationality; without it, as I said, we would be obsessed with the meaninglessness of life, and happiness would be impossible. In fact, this obsession can be construed as an antithesis in the sort of dialectic I mentioned above. The 'thesis' is the naïve love of life, the childlike immersion in the moment and all its excitement; the antithesis (or the "negation", in Hegelian language) arises upon the discovery of death and time—*vast* time, with the ultimate futility of human striving that it entails. It arises, that is, with the first stirrings of (idealized) self-consciousness, which, in being a reaction against the previous stage, are negative and life-denying. But then there is the synthesis, or the "negation of the negation", as Hegel called it: we must accept that in order to live, we cannot constantly think about how futile, in the long run, is everything we humans do. We should self-consciously embrace the conditions of life that nature has hardwired into us, namely (in this case) the spontaneous conviction of our own importance, our own worth. Besides, it's impossible for us to appreciate the enormousness of time and the universe, and thus our own insignificance. Even if we try, we can't; time and the universe are beyond our comprehension. So we might as well accept this fact and use it to our advantage: it provides an excellent, honest excuse for doing what *feels* right, namely living life to the fullest. "I can't comprehend the immensity of time, so why try? I'm bound to fail. Hence, I might as well accept my ignorance and go on living—living well and affirmatively, as nature intended." In short, the 'synthesis' amounts to a return to the attitude of the 'thesis' but on a higher, more self-conscious level. It is profounder than the attitude of the antithesis in that it is more reflective: it is justified by deeper processes of reasoning, which don't take account only of the vast nature of the universe and the inevitability of universal death; instead, they also invoke the necessary conditions of human life, such as our incomplete rationality, our inability to appreciate the magnitude of time's nihilism, and our instinctive intuition of what is the best way to live. These 'deeper processes of reasoning' give a good philosophical justification for the act of affirming life, which we all want to do anyway.

[....] In other words, sages and philosophers have throughout history tacitly recognized the truth of the dialectic I've been outlining. Human life may, in the long run, be futile, but forget about it! That doesn't

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[1] There's a paradox here. For the process of reasoning is itself a series of acts. As such, it presupposes a setting-aside of reason. That is, when I give a reason for something I am not considering the reasons for and against giving the reason. (That sounds silly, but there are reasons for and against *any* act, be it physical or mental. Insofar as one does not consider the reasons, one is being unrational.)

[2] Incidentally, this doesn't mean that every course of action is as reasonable as every other. Likewise, certain people, while not *completely* rational, are *more* rational than others. (That is, the courses of action they take are more reasonable.) The ideal Marxist is more rational than the ideal Republican, because he has more, and more logical, arguments in favor of his beliefs and acts.

matter to *us*, who are living right now. What matters is our own happiness, our self-growth, our living well. This attitude is not only the sensible one but can also be construed as the *heroic* one: despite our depressing knowledge of the "big picture"—despite the universe's callousness to us—despite life's absurdity, we'll continue to love life, just because we can! Nothing can bring us down! We will assert ourselves no matter what! Man is in fact greater than the universe, for despite knowing that the universe will someday crush him and all his achievements, he continues to love himself and to heap contempt on this vast destructive force.

[....]

Anyway, before that interruption I wanted to point out that, my advice to 'ignore' universal death notwithstanding, we should also try to keep it in the back of our minds. For if we do, inhumane excesses will perhaps be avoided. Napoleonic excesses, Hitlerian excesses—excesses of ambition. They will be seen as partly delusive, since, in the end, the best that the conqueror can hope for is a sonnet written three millennia later that's devoted to the futility of his conquests. Rather than try to create a name for oneself, one should try to alleviate suffering—make the world a better place—since the *here and now* is what matters. Glory is illusory and temporary; suffering is real.

We always dedicate our efforts to the *future*. The present, we think, will pass, but the *future*—the *future* is somehow less transient, more permanent. It matters more than the present. We always justify present misery by appealing to the future. "The current suffering of the Iraqis will make possible a better future." But how idiotic that is! For the future is as transient as the present! If we're going to care about *one*, we might as well care about the *other*. We act as if the present doesn't matter at all; it's just a means to an end. The future is the end. But this attitude is backward. [....]

As I was saying: I think we should live in the moment more than we do. This is an element of Buddhism I agree with. Rather than immerse ourselves in plans, which we're constantly doing—(truly: we spend so much of our life preparing for the future that we hardly even notice it)—we should remember that the future matters as little or as much as the present. Most people acknowledge the wisdom of that lesson, but usually the acknowledgement is superficial and abstract instead of *intuitive*. Think about it deeply for a moment. Remember when you were a child in awe of adults? It was like they lived in a different world, like you would be in your own world separate from them forever. But now you're an adult yourself, and you realize how silly your former attitude was. There is nothing particularly special about adulthood, this present that was once the future. The only thing unique about it right now is its reality. For you feel like the past is just a blur, like you jumped from your first moment to this moment and, in a sense, skipped over everything in between. And yet, the moment before you die you'll feel, again, like life didn't really happen, like you just skipped over it all and arrived at this last moment of life, and this is all there ever was. It was always just this moment; this is all that's ever existed, and everything else was something like a dream. – Future moments, in short, are identical to past moments and present moments, and so the common attitude that treats them as more special or important or permanent is both deluded and harmful. We sacrifice present happiness for the sake of what amounts to future *un*happiness, because in the future we'll again be sacrificing present happiness for the sake of the future.

I have to admit that I may be guiltier of this than most people. I've always cared less about the present than the future, and I tend to see the present through the prism of the future. I'm never satisfied in the moment; I'm always looking beyond it. To an extent, this 'looking beyond' is inherent in the human condition. It's part of our self-consciousness: it's a reflective extension of what Edmund Husserl called "protention", viz. our continuous non-reflective anticipation of the *immediate* future, an anticipation which is inherent in self-consciousness.[1] Nevertheless, our *reflective* anticipation can be mitigated. And it should. Try not to worry about the transient future: it'll come and it'll pass, and it's as unimportant as the present. –Living for the future does have its time and place, but living for the present is generally better for mental health.

[1] For instance—to take Husserl's example—when you listen to a melody your consciousness is somehow oriented toward the immediate future, toward the note or phrase that will follow the one that's playing right now. He called this phenomenon "protention" and contrasted it with "retention".

In this respect, Buddhist philosophy is excellent. I disagree with it that we should try to detach ourselves completely from life, from the past and the future, because I think we should have different attitudes toward life at different *times* of life. In childhood: naïve trust and carefree play. In youth: mild hedonism, self-exploration, attachment to worldly things. In middle age: awareness of responsibility, devotion to family. In old age: gradual acceptance of death, detachment from the world. On the whole, we should do what feels most natural rather than exert ourselves at all times to overcome 'attachment' and thus suffering. Save the life-renunciation for old age, when you're already becoming less attached to begin with. –Nevertheless, Buddhist practices, and those of Eastern religions in general, are a good corrective to capitalist ones. Which explains why so many people in Western societies have turned to yoga and the like in recent decades.

[....]

While I'm on this subject I'd like to give some advice to my fellow members of the 'intellectual class'. The future's transience notwithstanding, a writer's fame is good for at least one thing: the longer it lasts, the more valuable, probably, is the work on which it is based. Long-lasting fame indicates that the work resonates with many people across cultures, and therefore that it means something to humanity as such—and *therefore* that it's valuable. So I think it's salutary for writers, when they're writing, to anticipate possible reactions to their work a hundred years in the future. Will it be seen as a mere historical curiosity, or will it be thought to have intrinsic merit? This projection-of-oneself does require imagination, but writers, after all, are supposed to be imaginative. Can they imagine readers in any cultured culture reacting favorably to their work? For example, people like Putnam, Dennett, Searle, Armstrong—not to mention lesser names—will be mostly forgotten in a few decades, which suggests that their works are not very valuable. Likewise with Stephen King, Tom Clancy, John Grisham, Dan Brown. At best, their books will be seen as intriguing relics, superseded by more recent fads. [....]

It's amazing how many different perspectives one can adopt vis-à-vis existential questions about death and time—about their implications for how to live. At certain times it's good to remind yourself of death, at other times it's best to forget about it. In your lifelong quest to make an 'art of living', the lessons of time are invaluable. I find it odd that Nietzsche, who was so concerned with drawing morals about life, rarely discussed issues related to mortality. The only instance I can recall off the top of my head is in *The Gay Science*, in a section in which he remarks how bizarre it is that people generally ignore the fact that they're going to die someday. They spend their whole lives avoiding the thought as much as possible! – Actually, now that I refer to the section (278), it reminds me of what I've been writing. "....Everyone supposes that the heretofore was little or nothing while the near future is everything: and that is the reason for all of this haste, this clamor, this outshouting and overreaching each other! Everyone wants to be the first in this future—and yet death and deathly silence alone are certain and common to all in this future!" "How strange it is that this sole certainty and common element makes almost no impression on people, and that nothing is *further* from their minds than the feeling that they form a brotherhood of death!" It is indeed strange, though quite natural from nature's point of view. In the next sentence he writes: "It makes me happy to see that men do not want at all to think the thought of death!"

In his commentary, Walter Kaufmann notes how different is this attitude from that of the existentialists. They were well-nigh obsessed with death, and found it, understandably, quite depressing. I think, however, that neither Nietzsche nor the existentialists got it quite right. Death need not be depressing. Even in youth. The thought of it can impart an element of lightness to life. For it provides an excuse for the joyous attitude of 'not taking oneself seriously'. It permits one to laugh at oneself. […]

Admittedly, Montaigne and Pascal needed God. But I think that in a culture less atomized than the American—or the French during the Reformation—people wouldn't need religion in order to be content with themselves. The positing of God is a symptom of man's fall from grace. As I've explained, "God" means nothing but the individual's eternal communion with an other. Monotheism is grounded in the human need for community.[1] If we could just get rid of God once and for all and focus our energies on the here

[1] Its historical origins are telling in this respect. The Jews were slaves in Egypt, and Christianity was popular among Roman slaves. That is, people exiled from the community.

and now, we might be able to arrange things so that we no longer could be seduced by prospects of immortality (religious, biological, political or whatever). We might be able to get along with each other—and to laugh at ourselves now and then.

[…]

[…] In any case, we men love women partly for their passive participation in Creation—for the *passivity* of their participation, that is. It's well known that husbands sometimes find their wives more attractive when they're pregnant—not because of any rational considerations about the miracle of life and whatnot, but simply because of the woman's weakness and vulnerability, which the husband (flatters himself that he) is responsible for. "*I* did that to her. *I* made her big and happy like that. Look at how vulnerable she is! Because of *me*! And I'm the one who has to protect her now!" Maybe there are pheromones or whatever chemicals the woman's pregnant body emits that attract the man to her more than usually, but the point is that implicit in his *consciousness* is this self-flattery that makes him fond of the impregnated one. –Love in general is a kind of self-flattery, like all other pleasurable states of mind. (Despite his cynicism, La Rochefoucauld was right about most things.)

[…]

Women also, of course, tend to be sensitive, somewhat insecure, fickle, easily heartbroken, but these aren't really flaws. They're simply manifestations of an attachment to life—of a genuine and deep desire for happiness. What's wrong with that? They're a corollary of women's excitable nature: the greater the capacity for joy, the greater the capacity for pain. This is virtually a law of the psyche. Men are usually somewhat dull, capable neither of great heights nor of great depths (though this is less true the more intelligent they are—and the more womanly). This is one of the reasons they're attracted to women: in the presence of the softer sex, they feel themselves rejuvenated. To criticize women, then, for their "drama" is a little disingenuous, for it is effectively a criticism of that which men love about women, namely their childlike immersion in life, their adorable naïveté and 'joi-de-vivre'. Their *spontaneity*. –You can't have the good without the bad.

[…] Matthew Arnold didn't have to look to Goethe and Wordsworth to find his "sweetness and light"; he could have looked to the woman in his life, his wife Fanny. Or to any other pretty young lady. Dostoyevsky is said to have fainted occasionally upon looking at a particularly beautiful woman.... Think of the girl in the mall who falls in love with the pink skirt in the window and has to buy it to show her boyfriend;—or the woman giving birth to a new life;—or the girl ignored by the man she loves but still loyal through all her tears;—or simply a naked young woman looking at herself in the mirror, fascinated:—something strangely inexpressible and beautiful unites these visions. Something that's a cross between the aesthetic sense and human 'fellow-feeling'. Something ideal and pure, which can be partially expressed also in music and nature.

–All things considered, it is of course a little stupid to view women this way. To see a contradiction between them and mundane reality. Women are humans. As ordinary as everything else. Goethean thoughts, like the ones I've been expounding, are always unscientific. Nevertheless, it can be enjoyable to fantasize along these lines. For it adds romance to life. In general, dwelling in the ideal is an essential part of a truly human life—though only a part, for anything taken to extremes is unhealthy. But there's a little bit of the ideal in everything people do, a little bit of illusion. […]

(By the way, Sartre misinterpreted this side of human behavior. Being a product of his self-conscious times, he thought that people have an *innate* fascination with being an object (of another's gaze), a *real* object like a table—but with the important difference that they also want to remain self-conscious. So he thought that people want to be *self-conscious objects*. They want to be a For-itself-in-itself. An object as such, however, is not self-conscious, which is why Sartre called man a "useless passion"—a self-contradictory passion. But in fact, as I've said repeatedly, the modern fascination with self-conscious objecthood—with fame, respect, sex, love, and so on—arises from the innate desire for community. It arises from the desire for complete accord between your sense of self and the other's reaction to you:—in other words, from the desire for his unreserved, transparent affirmation of your transparent sense of self. In an

earlier chapter I outlined the mechanisms by which this primordial desire is transformed into the confusing and contradictory array of modern mass-obsessions.)

How ought one to live? In this world of petty responsibilities, of frustrations and moral doubts, how ought one to live? Should you follow the Taoists in their withdrawal from society or the Confucians in their social activism? Should you live for God or for man? For yourself or for society? Hedonistically or altruistically?

I think that such questions are false dichotomies. Life is long; there is sufficient time to try more than one way of living.

On the self and the community

The nature of the self has been an object of philosophical analysis ever since ancient Greece—and arguably even before then, from the time when the Upanishads were written. It is likely that questions about selfhood will persist as long as there is such a thing as philosophy. This does not mean, though, that progress does not occur, that our understanding of the self must always remain as incomplete as it was in ancient Greece. On the contrary, our understanding has grown exponentially, especially in the last two centuries. Psychology, philosophy, anthropology, neurology have all contributed to it. We are light-years beyond where we were a hundred years ago.

Unfortunately, it has proven difficult to consolidate all the insights into a single theory. It may prove impossible to do so, but no one seems to have tried, so we can't pass a definitive judgment yet. Many people, indeed, think there is no point in trying to come up with a comprehensive theory; they think either that it's hopeless or that the contemporary fragmentation is theoretically healthy. In their book *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self*, Raymond Martin and John Barresi argue that "before any unifying theory emerges, current occasional expressions of concern about the problem of fragmentation and the still-lingering hope for eventual reintegration will be replaced by the recognition that the multi-faceted threads of debate and theorizing are never going to be woven together completely....". They also think a "strong case" can be made that "the current state of theoretical and methodological pluralism is healthy".[1] Many philosophers would agree with them. After all, pluralism presumably encourages freedom and creativity.

To an extent, I agree. I also think that a truly 'comprehensive' and detailed theory will never be reached. The task is too difficult; there are too many questions and data to take into account. Nevertheless, the fact that what is being analyzed is a single reality—namely, the 'self' and everything that directly pertains to it—implies that a single comprehensive theory is at least *possible*. We cannot rule it out on *a priori* grounds. In fact, such grounds would surely suggest that if people were sufficiently brilliant and determined, a grand synthesis could sum up all that is valuable in current theorizing about the self. Such a synthesis could continue to evolve, of course, and perhaps later we would come up with an even grander synthesis, etc.—but in any case, unified theories seem possible.

I also think they're desirable, as long as they don't stultify further research. Theoretic chaos, such as exists now, is never satisfying to the inquisitive mind. The mind always wants to synthesize, integrate, impose order on experience; it doesn't like the feeling of being lost at sea. One wants to know precisely how what is true in psychoanalysis relates to what is true in neurology, and how that relates to what is true in phenomenological psychology. Surely it is possible, at least theoretically, to integrate, or 'reconcile', the results of all these approaches!

If it is, I am not, at the moment, the one to carry out the project. My knowledge is too limited. Still, I would like to offer some speculations, if not to pave the way then at least to calm the restlessness of my creative urge. For ten years I have been bothered by a number of questions about selfhood, and I would like to temporarily put them behind me. Questions like: "What is the self? Is there such thing as a self? Does each person have only one self? What is the relation between the present self and the past self? What does

[1] *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 300, 301.

it mean to be oneself? Does a person have one identity or many? Is there any substance to the notion of 'authentic' selfhood, as opposed to 'inauthentic' selfhood?" In a single chapter I cannot give thorough answers to all these questions—and there are many more questions I can't even touch on—but I'm going to do the best I can. My hope is only that I'll come across a few insights which will be of use to others.

Ours is an age, obviously, of grave theoretical and practical doubts about selfhood. "Modern man is afflicted with a permanent identity crisis, a condition conducive to considerable nervousness."[1] The condition is conducive also to the common theoretical doubt that each of us has (or is) a "unified self". It will be useful to quote again from Kenneth Gergen's book *The Saturated Self*:

> In an important sense, as social saturation proceeds we become pastiches, imitative assemblages of each other. In memory we carry others' patterns of being with us. If the conditions are favorable, we can place these patterns into action. Each of us becomes the other, a representative, or a replacement. To put it more broadly, as the century has progressed selves have become increasingly populated with the character of others. We are not one, or a few, but like Walt Whitman, we "contain multitudes". We appear to each other as single identities, unified, of whole cloth. However, with social saturation, each of us comes to harbor a vast population of hidden potentials—to be a blues singer, a gypsy, an aristocrat, a criminal. All the selves lie latent, and under the right conditions may spring to life. ....The relatively coherent and unified sense of self inherent in a traditional culture gives way to manifold and competing potentials. A multiphrenic condition emerges in which one swims in ever-shifting, concatenating, and contentious currents of being.[2] One bears the burden of an increasing array of oughts, of self-doubts and irrationalities. The possibility for committed romanticism or strong and single-minded modernism recedes, and the way is opened for a postmodern being.[3]

And so on and so forth. There is a kind of seductive appeal to the superficial dogmas of postmodernism—as there is to despair of any kind—which we must do our best to oppose. We should do so systematically, starting from the ground up, as it were, until at last we have the conceptual tools with which to expose the one-sidedness of Gergenism, and perhaps to give the self-doubting individual a little therapeutic comfort at the same time.

If the above quotation is too academic for the reader to relate to, maybe I should quote something more personal, to show just how common is the typical 'postmodern' disorder and how imperative it is that it be understood. In his book *The Disowned Self*, Nathaniel Branden relates the following anecdote:

> One afternoon I was lunching in a small, rather elegant restaurant, when I fell into a conversation with the owner, whom I knew slightly. An attractive man in his late thirties, he projected a restless, buoyant energy, a facile glibness and an aggressively colorful style of dress, all of which seemed clearly intended to fulfill the image of a jet-set playboy. In the midst of a long, nonstop monologue about his recent trip to Las Vegas and his problems with his tailor, interspersed with random references to sex, Vietnam, and a new discotheque in Acapulco, he interrupted himself suddenly to say—with desperate earnestness, and with eyes that were dark holes of screaming pain—"Nathaniel, I've got to talk to you. Let's have lunch one day. I can't stand this hollowness inside of me"—he brought his hand to his chest—"Man, it's killing me—it's one big emptiness inside—nothing here—know what I mean?—I don't know how to describe it—there's nothing there—*no feeling*—listen, we've

[1] Kenneth Gergen, op. cit., p. 73.
[2] Well done, Kenneth! The reader enjoys nothing more than to swim in the ever-shifting, concatenating and contentious currents of your alliterations.
[3] Ibid., pp. 71, 80.

> got to have a talk."[1]

Turns out they didn't have their talk, since the "jet-set playboy" was immured in his glib lifestyle. But that's the point. We've become prisoners of ourselves. Narcissists, schizoid patients. The first step towards liberation is self-understanding.

Much of this chapter will be rather academic in style, but that's unavoidable. I want to speak to specialists as well as the general public, so you'll have to forgive me if the discussion gets a little dry at times. (Likewise, I ask the specialist to be lenient in his criticisms of whatever lack of rigor my arguments show.) Part of the philosophical confusion is that the word 'self' is used in a number of different ways: some theorists, for instance, deny its existence, while others say it represents a lifelong *task*—something to be *achieved* over the course of one's life—while still others think that everyone *obviously* has, or is, a self. These latter theorists use the word to denote the 'I', the immediate and indubitable sense of self that a person has, which sense cannot be denied unless we are going to deny consciousness itself, which would be ridiculous. Since this is the most immediate manifestation of the self, I'll discuss it first.

It might be wise to adopt the method Thomas Aquinas used in his *Summa Theologica*, namely to preface my discussion with brief summaries of theories that I disagree with. David Hume proposed such a theory when he denied the existence of selves. In his *Treatise of Human Nature* he wrote, "For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception." "The soul, so far as we can conceive it, is nothing but a system or train of different perceptions." I think he was confused, as I'll argue later; nevertheless, his intuition was, in a sense, right. The Buddha agreed with Hume: he too denied the existence of a substantial, persisting self. He thought there is only consciousness, the body, perceptions, etc., but no *self*, as our intuition says there is. The main difference between them in this respect is that Hume found his conclusion depressing, while the Buddha found it liberating.

Some contemporary philosophers use less plausible reasoning to arrive at a conclusion similar to Hume's. These philosophers, influenced by Wittgenstein, think that because "the substantival phrase 'the self' is very unnatural in most speech contexts in most languages", the self itself is an illusion—"an illusion that arises from nothing more than an improper use of language". Galen Strawson, from whose paper "The Self" these quotations are taken, persuasively argues that that position is untenable:

> The problem of the self doesn't arise from an unnatural use of language which arises from nowhere. On the contrary: use of a phrase like 'the self' arises from a prior and independent sense that there is such a thing as the self. The phrase may be unusual in ordinary speech; it may have no obvious direct translation in many languages. Nevertheless all languages have words which lend themselves naturally to playing the role that 'the self' plays in English, however murky that role may be. The phrase certainly means something to most people.... It is too quick to say that a "grammatical error....is the essence of the theory of the self", or that "'the self' is a piece of philosopher's nonsense consisting in a misunderstanding of the reflexive pronoun".[2]

We should take as our starting-point the sense of self that everyone has, the self-intuition. We shouldn't explain it away before even acknowledging its existence.

Daniel Dennett occupies the dubious position of trying to explain away our sense of self without knowing he is doing so. Specifically in his *Consciousness Explained*. Somewhere in that thicket of verbiage he manages to say that he thinks there is a self—indeed, that it's *obvious* there is a self, for, after all, *someone* (namely, the author) is wondering right now whether there is a self—but that it's neither some kind of spiritual substance nor something corporeal: it is one's "center of narrative gravity". It is "an

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[1] Branden, *The Disowned Self* (Los Angeles: Nash Publishing, 1971), pp. 1, 2.
[2] Galen Strawson, "The Self", *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 5.6 (1997): 405 – 428.

abstraction defined by the myriads of attributions and interpretations (including self-attributions and self-interpretations) that have composed the biography of the living body whose Center of Narrative Gravity it is".[1] The self is an abstraction, an idea, a narrative nucleus. Since Dennett is a clever sophist, he is able to hide the fact that he has effectively defined me—and you—as a metaphor. *I*....am nothing but a metaphor, a center of narrative gravity. This person who is writing, who has thoughts. I am not *active*, as my intuition tells me I am; I'm an abstraction, literally a metaphor. –If you find this idea at all coherent, I commend you.

As for the popular physicalistic idea that the self is the body or the brain, the fact that I can coherently say, "This is *my* body, *my* brain" is enough to refute it. I must be something over and above my brain if I can refer to it as mine....

....The philosophical method of intuition or introspection, or "phenomenology" (understood broadly), is not popular nowadays. Few theorists have the capacity for it, judging by their writings. Nonetheless, if one's goal is to elucidate the ordinary intuition of the self, introspection is essential. We have to consult our consciousness to see what is 'in' it. Hume took this for granted (as is evident from the above quotation), as did Descartes, Fichte, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, the young Marx, William James, Franz Brentano, Husserl, George Herbert Mead, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, Paul Federn and countless others. They thought that because one's sense of self is a phenomenon of one's consciousness, if one can 'unpack' what is implicit in consciousness, one will have made progress towards understanding the self. –At any rate, this is the approach I'll adopt; if it gets me nowhere, then my method is wrong.

I had intended to include my ideas on the mind-body problem in this book, but I've had to abandon that idea on account of the book's length. This chapter has the relatively modest aim of defining the self and answering various questions, psychological and philosophical, that arise out of my formulations. I will, however, be more ambitious than Hume (who wrote in the same passage that I quoted above, "If anyone, upon serious and unprejudiced reflection, thinks he has a different notion of *himself*, I must confess I can no longer reason with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continued, which he calls *himself*; though I am certain there is no such principle in me."[2]): I'll assume that the conclusions I draw from my own experience (as applying to *me*) are true of the reader as well, whether he knows it or not. Most people have meager introspective powers, however they may delude themselves into thinking otherwise; their disagreement with me is, in itself, by no means proof that I'm wrong. *Homo sapiens* is so constituted that its individuals are essentially similar in the ways I'll discuss. (The self of Paleolithic man, though, may have been slightly different from that of modern man. I'll offer speculations later.)

Before I begin I have to introduce a concept that will be of some importance throughout my investigation. The concept, namely, of 'half-consciousness'. I mean this term to denote a state of mind of which one isn't explicitly conscious, as I am conscious right now of typing on my keyboard (because I am explicitly thinking about it), but which is nonetheless 'implicitly' or 'obscurely' in one's consciousness. For example, five minutes ago I was implicitly, half-consciously aware of my existence; right now I am *explicitly* aware of it, because I'm thinking about it. I'm (aware that I'm) reflecting on it. The idea of half-consciousness may remind you of Sartre's "pre-reflective" consciousness in *Being and Nothingness*. He gives there the example of a man who is counting cigarettes on a table: he has laid out the cigarettes one by one and is counting them. He is wholly absorbed in his activity, not reflecting on himself at all. Nevertheless, if a passerby says, "What are you doing?" he'll instantly answer, "I'm counting my cigarettes". The immediateness of his answer, which uses the concept 'I', shows that in a sense he was aware of himself even while wholly engaged in counting. He was pre-reflectively self-conscious, 'half-consciously' self-conscious. Thus, "in pre-reflective self-awareness I am not confronted with a thematic or explicit awareness of the experience as belonging to myself. Rather, [I am experiencing] a non-

[1] Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), pp. 426, 427. This book, full of irrelevant cutesiness and empty of ideas, is embarrassing.

[2] On the other hand, given his wry sense of humor, he was probably being facetious.

observational self-acquaintance."[1]

So why don't I use Sartre's term? First of all, I suspect that Sartre intended it to be a modifier primarily of the word 'self-consciousness', while I want to say that one can be half-conscious of many things, not just one's existence. Second of all, there are *degrees* of half-consciousness, whereas Sartre may not have recognized degrees of "pre-reflective" consciousness. (I don't know if he did.) For instance, consider this example from Wittgenstein:

> A doctor asks: "How is he feeling?" The nurse says: "He is groaning." A report on his behavior. But need there be any question for them whether the groaning is really genuine, is really the expression of anything? Might they not, for example, draw the conclusion "If he groans, we must give him more analgesic"—without suppressing a middle term?

Maybe this example doesn't make much sense out of context.[2] At any rate, Wittgenstein wanted to draw a behavioristic implication from it, viz. that the question of whether the patient's groans signify that he is feeling pain is irrelevant to the situation. Neither the nurse nor the doctor reflects on the "middle term" that the reader naturally supplies, namely that groans imply pain, which calls for analgesic. They just automatically, unthinkingly associate groans with the necessity of giving him analgesic. The association has been 'conditioned' into them, as it were. –Wittgenstein is arguing somewhat along those lines, to further his overarching anti-mentalist agenda. I want to draw a different conclusion, though. Wittgenstein may be right that neither the nurse nor the doctor is explicitly thinking about the patient's pain; still, they are *half-consciously* aware of it. If someone mentioned it to them they would immediately, unthinkingly agree, thus bringing their knowledge (of the patient's pain) out from its 'latency' somewhere in or behind their reflective consciousness to full daylight in the glare of self-aware thought. To call their 'latent' knowledge "pre-reflective", though, would, I think, do violence to the phenomenologist's conventional use of the term. Ergo: I'm calling their knowledge 'half-conscious'.

The relevance of the example to my argument is this: the nurse and doctor's knowledge of the patient's pain is, I think—in that moment—'closer' to their explicit consciousness than, say, their knowledge of their existence. Should someone walk in and say, rather than "That man looks like he's in a lot of pain!", "You people are aware that you exist, right?", they would look at him like he was crazy. Before he said that, they were, in a sense, implicitly aware of their existence, but *less* so than they were aware of the patient's pain. This is why they're baffled at the man's irrelevant comment. –Hence, there are degrees of half-consciousness. That is, the typical phenomenologists' dichotomy between 'reflection' and 'pre-reflection' is simplistic. There are *degrees* of reflective awareness, which, if 'laid out side by side', would constitute a continuum, from virtually no reflective awareness to an *intense, obsessive* awareness.[3]

This phenomenon of half-consciousness (or implicit consciousness) is paradoxical, but it certainly exists. It isn't, by the way, the same thing as a person's 'unconscious' or 'dispositional' beliefs, such as my belief that no lions are forty feet tall, or that there are more than three people in the world. Before I mentioned these two beliefs I had never thought about them; they weren't even somehow implicit in my mind. I wasn't half-consciously aware of them in any way.

Nor is half-consciousness the same thing as Freud's "subconscious" or his "preconscious". (He

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[1] Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, "Phenomenological Approaches to Self-Consciousness", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2006 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/ entries/self-consciousness-phenomenological.

[2] On the other hand, it doesn't make much sense *in* context either. See Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), p. 179.

[3] Phenomenologists speak of reflection as being a second-order level of awareness. But there can also be reflection on reflecting on reflecting. There can be third-order, fourth-order levels of awareness. While these can, from one perspective, be considered merely species of second-order reflection, they are in fact more reflective than, say, awareness of looking at an object, and as such should be differentiated (in some respects) from '*immediately* second-order' awareness. –But the notion of a second order, insofar as it implies some sort of reflective leap between itself and a first order, is itself simplistic.

distinguishes between the two concepts. See his *Ego and the Id*, chapter one.) Repressed memories, for example, are surely *sub*conscious, not half-conscious. In any given moment, we aren't even implicitly aware of them. .....Actually, now that I've refreshed my memory about the (somewhat different) notion of the *pre*conscious, I have to admit that it seems pretty similar to what I'm talking about. Freud defines the preconscious as comprising thoughts that are latent but can become conscious at any moment, if we focus our attention on them or if they 'pop up' into consciousness. This is essentially what I mean by 'half-conscious thoughts'. Nevertheless, I'll stick to my own terminology, to avoid any Freudian baggage.

Moreover, I want to emphasize the paradox that we are somehow *partly aware* of these thoughts. They are not completely *outside* of consciousness (i.e., *pre*conscious); they are on its 'boundary', its 'horizon', as it were. The boundary between consciousness and unconsciousness. In order to understand and appreciate this fact you'll have to introspect a little. So I'll give you one more example. Suppose I say to you, in an angry way, "I resent what you did to me!" What am I saying? What does 'resent' mean?—what do I *think* it means in the moment that I make the utterance? Wittgenstein, who spent many pages in his *Philosophical Investigations* trying to wrap his mind around the paradox I'm discussing, might have said that nothing *in my consciousness* provides my utterance with a meaning. *At that moment* I don't 'think' the statement means *anything* in particular. My consciousness is 'empty'; there is no 'feeling' that imparts an intentional content to the word 'resent'. To paraphrase Wittgenstein, if God looked 'into' my consciousness and examined everything in it, he wouldn't find anything to justify an exclamation like "Aha! *That's* what Chris means by 'resent'!"[1] 'Resent' is just a word I say, a word I am accustomed to and therefore do not find problematic. Wittgenstein's conclusion would be that my utterance is essentially a behavioral fact, not a fact of consciousness; the statement's meaning exists only in the way I *use* it (in my behavior).

I disagree, however. First of all, Wittgenstein's behaviorist conclusion is deeply counterintuitive, which is why he himself grappled with it for so long. It's also why Saul Kripke wrote a book on it.[2] To use Kripke's language: to think that nothing in my consciousness "justifies" my utterance, in the sense of giving it a meaning, is intuitively appalling. I *must* mean something, something concrete and specific, by what I say, just as there must be a specific reason why I say it. This reason, in fact, must be intimately related to the meaning, the justification, I have in my consciousness. But then what is the meaning (of "I resent what you did to me!")? –The obvious answer, reachable through introspective examination, is that I feel as if the person I'm talking to has slighted me in some way, offended my sense of self-worth, done something that indicates a lack of respect for me. In the moment that I make my exclamation I may not be explicitly thinking about this perception, but I am, nonetheless, 'assuming' it in the back of my consciousness. It *grounds* my statement. I could at any moment call it explicitly to my mind, in which case it would be fully conscious rather than just half-conscious.

As you might imagine, this phenomenon of half-consciously being aware of something—of being neither *totally unaware* of it (as I am right now unaware of certain memories from my childhood) nor fully, self-consciously aware of it—is very common. At any given moment during the day, there are many thoughts we are half-consciously aware of. The phenomenon is also of philosophical importance: for example, I think it plays a central role in resolving the paradox of how it's possible to be—and *what it means* to be—subject to self-deception.[3] For the purposes of this chapter, though, its relevance is that some of the analyses I'll propose are in a sense already an object of our awareness. The essence of the self is neither totally hidden from us in our subconscious nor at all times an object of explicit awareness. Indeed,

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[1] Cf. ibid., p. 217.

[2] *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Kripke's focus was different from mine, but his intuition was basically the "paradoxical" one I'm discussing. You should read my paper "A Refutation of Ontology" in the appendix for an analysis of the paradox from a different perspective, as well as for an argument against the main theses in Kripke's book. See also the section "On 'half-consciousness'" in the appendix.

[3] For example, a person might be obscurely (half-consciously) aware that, say, his love for a particular woman was tinged with hatred; insofar as he didn't *reflect* on this hatred—i.e., didn't become fully, self-consciously aware of it—he might be said to be deceiving himself.

the fact that there is such a thing as half-consciousness is what makes possible the introspective method itself. For the introspecting philosopher is trying to bring half-conscious, implicit thoughts to the light of day. He is trying to 'discursively unpack' what is implicit in consciousness. The test of his theories' truth is whether the intelligent reader can look into himself and say, "Yes! That's exactly what *I* perceive too! That perception has always been implicit in my consciousness; I simply haven't discursively brought it to my attention."

Let's begin: what is the nature of human self-intuition? What is this sense of self that almost everyone seems to have? First of all, it involves *continuity*. We perceive ourselves as being the same person from moment to moment and day to day. In other words, there is a certain stability and permanence in our self-intuition. Secondly, we sense that we're *active*, that we're (usually) in control of what we do. We have free will, we're self-determining. When I read a book, I am *choosing* to do so.

These two facts (our continuity and our apparent self-control) are the most important phenomenological causes of the belief in a substantial, metaphysical self, a "soul". "*I* am something *permanent*," we think, "some kind of spiritual substance, some sort of *entity* or *thing*. This is intuitively obvious! It just *feels* that way." When I introspect, I feel as if I am some kind of ineffably substantial thing, even as I cannot get a clear grasp of whatever it is that 'I' am. This is the sense in which Hume was right: no graspable entity corresponds to our 'substantial' self-intuition. Simply stated, there is *nothing there* (in consciousness), nothing that would qualify as a self. Nevertheless, the irresistible power of our self-intuition has led many people, including philosophers, to assume that each person 'has' or 'is' a *soul*, or a Transcendental Ego, as Kant called it—some sort of self behind appearances. Our self-intuition gives us access only to the *tip*, as it were, of this Transcendental Self. The rest of it is located mysteriously 'within' or 'behind' us. When we die, this thing is supposed either to have an afterlife or to be reincarnated, depending on one's religion.

I, however, am going to follow the Buddha, Hume, William James and Sartre in saying that the notion of a substantial self is a confusion, and a philosophically inelegant one. For it clutters up our conception of man. If we can provide a good explanation of psychic life without invoking a "soul", we should discard the idea as violating the principle of Ockham's razor. So for now I'm going to say that my, and your, self-intuition is deceptive: while it implicitly points to some sort of entity—a concrete *Self*—there is no such thing.

Indirect evidence exists for that conclusion. Consider the pupils of your eyes (or anyone else's). Ordinarily—say, when you look casually at a mirror—they appear ineffably substantial, as if they're a *presence* rather than an *absence*. This makes sense, since we intuitively perceive the eyes as being the gateway to the soul (or the self). When we're having a conversation, for example, we look at the other person's eyes: this is significant because we think of ourselves as communicating with *him*, with his *self*; and so if we naturally look at his eyes, then the obvious conclusion is that we naturally associate his eyes with his self more than we do his other facial features. Literature, of course, bears witness to this conclusion. ("Darling, your eyes are like the sunset! Your smile, your lips, your hair.....but oh! your *eyes*! Your soul sparkles through them!") And yet—the pupil is an *absence*, a hole for light to enter! Our eye-intuition is mistaken! This is indeed horrifying, though most people don't think so. But try this: get so close to the bathroom mirror that your nose is almost touching it, and look intensely into the pupil of your eye for a while. Keep looking until you suddenly get the horrible intuition that your pupils are a *nothingness*. Then back away, and they'll revert to 'substantiality'.

When I conduct that little experiment I always 'see' that there is no substantial self behind my eyes. For a brief moment I see it with irresistible force. And then when I back away I always find it disturbing that I involuntarily return to the old misperception that the pupils are a presence. Evidently our brains are hardwired such that we naturally have this misperception, just as we have the deluded intuition of a substantial self. (Interestingly, we also misinterpret shadows: we see them as a presence when in fact they're an absence (of light).)

So I'm rejecting the strange and probably incoherent notion of a substantial self, something like "a spirit or thinking substance", to quote Bishop Berkeley. But then what is this sense of self that we have? I

can see that I exist; but what am *I*? Above, I made light of Dennett's definition of the self as a metaphor, an abstraction, because it neglects the self's *active* nature. It is one-sided. All definitions of the self as some kind of idea suffer from this deficiency. They avoid Berkeley's and Descartes' mistake of attributing to the self a substantiality (which would imply an implausible mind-body dualism), but they sacrifice the insight into the self's essential activity. As Berkeley wrote in the *Third Dialogue Between Hylas and Philonous*, "I my self am not my ideas, but somewhat else, a thinking active principle that perceives, knows, wills, and operates about ideas". This active thing is what we should analyze first. (Later I'll explain in what sense Dennett's ideas have merit. For they are relevant to another aspect of the sense of self—just not its active aspect, i.e., that which sees itself as controlling itself.)

In his *Principles of Psychology*, William James gives a multifaceted definition of the self. The part I want to mention now is what he calls the 'I', as opposed to the 'me'. The I, or the "pure ego", is the "active principle" in oneself, i.e., "that which at any given moment is conscious". But what is this if not "the entire stream of personal consciousness" itself?—or, at any rate, the present segment of it. What else can be conscious but consciousness itself? "The I is a *thought*." "The consciousness of self involves a stream of thought, each part of which as 'I' can remember those which went before, [and] know the things they knew...."[1] James is adhering to the principle of theoretic economy: rather than positing a cumbrous division between thought and thinker, or activity and substance, he is fusing the two. The I is not separate from thoughts; "the thoughts themselves are the thinkers".[2] If this fusion does the work that we need a philosophical theory of the self to do, then it should be accepted as true.

But what exactly is James saying? The self, the I, is a thought, the present thought in a continuous stream of thoughts. But which thought is it? It can't be the entire stream of consciousness, for the self feels itself as wholly existing in each moment, whereas the stream of consciousness extends over a period of time. Nor can the self be (every thought in) the entire state of consciousness at any given moment, for included in this state is an awareness of things like one's environment, one's body, etc. The self, in its most immediate manifestation, is neither its environment nor its body, nor the *thoughts* it has of its environment and its body. It is just *itself*. But what is this? Well, if the self is a thought rather than a substance, then it can be nothing but the *thought of itself*. In other words, it is *self-thought*, or *self-consciousness*. *I am self-consciousness.*

Now we're in the territory of Fichte, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Sartre and other early phenomenologists. They defined the self as self-consciousness. Kierkegaard, though—at least until Sartre came along—may have been the one who most appreciated the paradoxical character of his definition. It truly is a paradox. For self-consciousness, as such, is a relation—a relation of itself to itself—and a *relating* of itself to itself—and is thus both a self-difference and a 'self-differencing'. As he wrote in the beginning of *The Sickness Unto Death*, "The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself...." In other words, while the self (i.e., consciousness of being conscious) is, from one perspective, a relation, it is really an activity, and as such it cannot be a mere abstract relation. It has to be a *relating*, a relating itself to itself. Moreover, this is *all* it is. It is just a self-relating—an awareness of awareness, a *thought of thought*.

I have to be careful how I express myself here. For there are many different kinds of self-consciousness. There is consciousness of one's past, one's personality-traits, one's emotions, one's nervousness in social interactions, etc. These are not directly entailed by the kind of self-consciousness I'm referring to. For the moment I'm ignoring them. Instead, I'm talking about the most universal and immediate manifestation of self-consciousness, namely awareness of being aware (of an object). Fully developed and healthy human beings share this awareness at any given moment of the day. Sometimes it is merely half-conscious or 'pre-reflective', while at other times it is explicit and reflective. But in some form it is always present, this self-consciousness or sense of self. Gerald Edelmann describes the phenomenon well: "[implicit in] conscious awareness of objects is the *immediate experiential apprehension* of oneself

[1] William James, *Psychology* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1948), p. 215.
[2] This statement, of course, is an anticipation of Husserl and Sartre. No wonder, then, that Sartre spoke admiringly of James.

aware of them. Even when our attention is not on ourselves but on what we perceive, conscious perceptual awareness includes awareness of our own perceiving."[1] What I'm saying is that, almost by definition, to the extent that there is this "awareness of our own perceiving", there is a self—i.e., a sense of self.

It's worth noting that this account of the self is virtually, or completely, tautologous. By discarding the idea of a substantial self ('behind appearances'), we have accepted the idea that the self just is the *sense* of self. And what can the sense of self be but self-consciousness? The two terms are synonymous. Since the most immediate and necessary manifestation of self-consciousness is consciousness of consciousness, the self—i.e., the I, that which sees itself, in any given moment, as having self-control or free will—must be consciousness of consciousness. Moreover, this definition is useful in that it explains our perception of free will: self-consciousness, in being *of itself*, necessarily sees itself as existing through itself, as being the cause of itself, as having self-control.[2] It must see itself as positing itself, just as each person—each I—sees himself as positing himself and his acts, or as having free will. Another advantage of the definition of the self I've given is that it explains Hume's confusion. The reason it didn't occur to Hume is that it's so phenomenologically *obvious*. His probing of his consciousness was too *deep*: he searched all its nooks and crannies (his perceptions, his memories, etc.) for some obscure thing corresponding to a 'self', when in fact it was right there in broad daylight. One cannot 'search carefully' for the self without thereby passing right through it. Self-consciousness attends every thought; it is the human mode of consciousness, such that to look '*within*' consciousness is effectively to look *past* self-consciousness, and hence the self.

Now, many philosophers think that consciousness *as such* must be self-conscious(ness). They think that if it isn't somehow conscious of itself, it's unconscious, and an unconscious consciousness is a contradiction. Sartre was a famous defender of this doctrine, from which he deduced that the Freudian notion of the unconscious is a self-contradiction. One wonders, however, what he would have said about animal consciousness.[3] Or the consciousness of someone suffering from Down's syndrome. Such a person is not as self-aware as a normal individual. (One has but to read the first part of *The Sound and the Fury* to get a sense of the mentally retarded person's consciousness. I'll return to this point.) Maybe Sartre would have said that such a person, as well as a higher animal like an ape or a dolphin, is at least a *little* self-conscious. 'Pre-reflectively', perhaps. Indeed, Sartre even thought that when people dream at night their consciousness is conscious of itself as dreaming. As Kathleen Wider summarizes his argument, "my reflective certitude of dreaming is proof that dreaming consciousness is consciousness of dreaming. I can have such reflective certitude, Sartre contends, only if 'my primitive and non-reflective consciousness [of dreaming]....[contained] in itself a sort of latent and non-positional knowledge which reflection then made explicit'".[4] This "latent and non-positional" self-consciousness might be something like that of dolphins and chimps, who are able to recognize themselves in the mirror, as well as mentally retarded and autistic people. It might also be vaguely similar to the consciousness of "a long-distance truck driver who, after driving for a long period of time, suddenly 'comes to' and realizes that he has been driving for some time apparently without being aware of what he's been doing".[5] This example is popular in the phenomenological literature. Was the truck driver pre-reflectively self-conscious before he 'came to', or was he unconscious? David Armstrong and others argue that he couldn't have been completely

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[1] Quoted in Kathleen Wider's *The Bodily Nature of Consciousness: Sartre and Contemporary Philosophy of Mind* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 146. Incidentally, if my book were a work of academic philosophy, I would be constantly quoting many other contemporary studies that support my claims. The only reason I'm not is that that would make the book boring to write and boring to read.

[2] Cf. Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre* (New York: Meredith Corporation, 1970), p. 97: "The *self posits itself*, and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it *exists*; and conversely, the self *exists* and *posits* its own existence by virtue of merely existing. It is at once the agent and the product of action; the active, and what the activity brings about; action and deed are one and the same, and hence the 'I am' expresses an Act....".

[3] I've always found it odd that he ignored animals in *Being and Nothingness*. After all, an analysis, however crude it would have to be, of their consciousness would probably have some implications for the analysis of human consciousness.

[4] Wider, op. cit., p. 94.

[5] Ibid., p. 97.

unconscious, because, after all, during his apparently self-oblivious period he had to steer, use the brakes, use the clutch, etc. He must have had a perceptual consciousness, even if he didn't have an 'introspective' consciousness. Still, it does seem odd to say that he was pre-reflectively self-conscious, since his consciousness was so different from that of our ordinary consciousness at most times of the day.

Such examples—of animals, of the truck driver, of a person with Down's syndrome, of dreaming-consciousness—further support my abandonment of the rigid dichotomy between reflective and pre-reflective self-consciousness. For instance, it would be misleading to call the non-positional self-consciousness that must characterize the consciousness of a chimpanzee 'pre-reflective', because phenomenologists use that term to describe a kind of *human* consciousness. But we can't call it reflective, either. I think, therefore, that it would be best to make do with my own vague terminology, namely with the claim that a chimp is 'obscurely' self-conscious—*half-consciously* aware of its existence. Similarly with the truck driver. Since there must be some sort of a self-givenness to his consciousness—otherwise, as Sartre said, he would necessarily be *un*conscious—we might as well just say that he was half-aware of his existence and be done with the whole debate. He was more self-aware than a dolphin but not as self-aware as a person in the midst of a heated debate. We should acknowledge, then, that self-consciousness is characterized, as it were, by a *continuum* rather than a division between 'pre-reflective' and 'reflective': both between species of animals and between moments in an individual's life, the self-givenness of consciousness exhibits many different shades and colorings, many degrees of richness and paucity. A bonobo is more self-conscious than a raccoon,[1] which is more self-conscious than a dog, which is more self-conscious than a fish. Similarly, it has been established through empirical studies that human infants already have a proprioceptive form of self-consciousness,[2] which isn't properly 'pre-reflective', though.

Anyway, the relevant point for this chapter is that, to the degree that there is consciousness of consciousness, there is a (sense of) self. Since humans are the only animal capable of a deep, reflective self-consciousness, they're the only animal that has a self in the full sense.

There are several respects in which human consciousness is more reflective or self-conscious than that of other animals. (In other words, its self-consciousness manifests itself in several ways.) I'll distinguish between four main categories of the self's relation to itself and the world, but the reader should keep in mind that these categories, as such, are simplifications, merely heuristic devices intended to simplify my discussion. There are no mutually differentiated 'categories' in concrete consciousness; everything exists in an immediate holistic unity. Indeed, this is the case with regard to any object of analysis, be it in economics, psychology, biology or whatever: the object is always a holistic whole, its analytically differentiated facets thoroughly interrelated and interpenetrating, each empirically presupposing the others. The act of distinguishing them is an act of theoretic violence, which, however, is necessary if we are to understand the object. For understanding consists in placing concepts in such relations to each other that they 'mirror' the object of analysis in as detailed a way as possible.[3]

The four categories I'll briefly discuss comprise four different kinds of relations between self-consciousness and the world: namely, its relations to *time*, to the *body*, to the *external world* and particular objects in it, and to *itself*. The latter category ultimately includes the others, but it's useful to distinguish it from them. One of the themes of my discussion will be that in each 'mode' or 'category' of experience,

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[1] Bonobos—and apes in general—are amazing animals. They can learn American Sign Language, they can recognize themselves in the mirror, they can apparently empathize with fellow primates, they seem to be capable of envy, love, anger, forgiveness, friendship, and so forth. Any skeptical reader has but to watch one of PBS's documentaries on the subject or read a book like *Bonobo: The Forgotten Ape* or *Chimpanzee Politics: Power and Sex among Apes*. (I once saw a documentary that described how a captive female bonobo communicated with a female zookeeper. The bonobo had, through ASL, expressed anger when the woman showed up late once for her daily confab with the ape; the woman then signed that she had had a miscarriage that day. So the bonobo expressed sadness, by making the sign for tears. Together they talked awhile about the subject, commiserating over the travails of pregnancy.)

[2] Gallagher and Zahavi, loc. cit.

[3] Many philosophers would contest this 'representationalist', 'correspondence-theory-ist' way of describing what it means to theorize, but anyone whose mind hasn't been warped by philosophy will agree with it. I argue against postmodernists and their ilk in the appendix.

self-consciousness conflicts with itself—or rather, features of its experience conflict with each other, ultimately because self-consciousness is self-negation. I'll use my analysis later in the chapter to make some sense of human relationships, including the individual's relationship with himself.

The first mode of experience I'll mention is the temporal one. Briefly stated, human consciousness is temporally more extended than, say, a dog's. That is, the present moment as experienced by a human is more extended, more 'pre-reflectively temporal', than is the moment experienced by a dog, which is characterized by a kind of brute immediacy. Likewise, the consciousness of a healthy person is more aware of time *as* time than is the consciousness of someone with Down's syndrome. William Faulkner portrays this fact well in part one of *The Sound and the Fury*, which is written from the perspective of a mentally retarded thirty-three-year-old named Benjy. Benjy is not capable of reflective self-consciousness; neither is he aware of the immediate past (or the distant past) *as* immediately past (or distantly past). Time does not exist for him, and he does not fully exist for himself. As Faulkner said in an interview, "To that idiot [Benjy], time was not a continuation, it was an instant, there was no yesterday and no tomorrow, it all is this moment, it all is [now] to him. He cannot distinguish between what was last year and what will be tomorrow, he doesn't know whether he dreamed it or saw it."[1] The fully developed person retains the just-past in his consciousness—and is pre-reflectively, or half-consciously, aware of it as just past—even as he anticipates or 'protends' the immediate future. This phenomenon can be expressed in Husserlian language: the retentional and protentional structures of consciousness are more prominent in a human than in, e.g., a dog.[2] Peter K. McInerney summarizes Husserl's theory of time-consciousness as follows:

> A perceptual act-phase (an instantaneous slice of a perceptual act) has one feature that retains earlier phases of the perceptual act, another feature that perceives whatever is present, and a third feature that protends later phases of the perceptual act. ....Although retention is actual at one time, its intentional object is at an earlier time. Retention reaches to earlier moments in time and directly intuits earlier moments as *earlier*. ....protention portrays the future emptily....as indeterminate and open.[3]

Gallagher and Zahavi elaborate:

> The retentional structure of experience, that is, the fact that when I am experiencing something, each occurrent moment of consciousness does not simply disappear at the next moment but is kept in an intentional currency, constitutes a coherency that stretches over an experienced temporal duration. Husserl's favorite example is a melody. When I experience a melody, I don't simply experience a knife-edge presentation (primal impression) of one note which is then completely washed away and replaced with the next knife-edge presentation of the next note. Rather, consciousness retains the sense of the first note as I hear the second note, a hearing that is also enriched by an anticipation (protention) of the next note (or at least, in case I do not know the melody, of the fact that there will be a next note, or some next auditory event).

Perhaps you're wondering what the relation is between all this—this discussion of the temporal structure of consciousness—and self-awareness. Gallagher and Zahavi explain the connection:

> The temporal (retentional-impressional-protentional) structure of consciousness not only allows for the experience of temporally extended objects or intentional contents, but also

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[1] David Minter, editor, *The Sound and the Fury: A Norton Critical Edition* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), p. 238.

[2] Bill Maher, the political comedian, was once attacked by the politically correct media for saying that a mentally retarded person is in some ways like a dog. He was more right than he knew.

[3] McInerney, *Time and Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 98 – 100.

> entails the self-manifestation of consciousness, that is, its pre-reflective self-awareness. The retention of past notes of the melody is accomplished, not by a "real" or literal re-presentation of the notes (as if I were hearing them a second time and simultaneously with the current note), but by a retention of my just past experience of the melody. That is, the retentional structure of consciousness captures the just-past qualities of intentional content only by capturing the just-past experience of that intentional consciousness. This means that there is a primary and simultaneous self-awareness (an awareness of my own identity in the ongoing flow of experience) that is implicit in my experience of intentional content. At the same time that I am aware of a melody, for example, I am co-aware of *my ongoing experience of* the melody through the retentional structure of that very experience—and this just is the pre-reflective [i.e., half-conscious] self-awareness of experience.[1]

Thus, our advanced temporal awareness is one manifestation of our advanced self-consciousness. For it involves the half-conscious (pre-reflective) perception that our present self is a continuation of the immediately past self, and that the immediately future self will be a continuation of the present self. In being aware of the *moment* as extended, we are aware of *ourselves* as extended. This also makes possible our reflective awareness of our distantly past and distantly future selves as being, in a sense, *us*.

One of the 'paradoxes' of the temporality of human consciousness is that the retentional and protentional features of experience exist 'together', as it were—indeed, together with the impressional feature. All three are somehow immediately united in consciousness; there is no temporal succession between them. A second paradox (closely related to the first) is that the present moment is both *fleeting* and *extended*. The reader has but to introspect to see how the moment is extended: it is experienced not as a discrete fraction of an instant but as a continuity. This property, I have said, is explained by the presence of retention and protention. At the same time, though, there is the property of *fleetingness*: reflectively we know that any given moment can be divided into tiny instants, which can be measured in milliseconds or less. But even pre-reflectively there is a fleetingness, as indeed there has to be if we are to be pre-reflectively (and reflectively) aware of the temporal structure of every moment. This pre-reflective fleetingness is not obvious when reflection first tries to discern it, because the pre-reflective continuity is more noticeable. But try doing this: say the word 'now' many times, four times a second or so. "*Now—now—now—now—now—now...*." Although the perception of temporal continuity remains, there is also a perception of fleetingness, manifested in the fact that you experience each 'now' as instantaneously prior to the next (and later than the previous). The continuity and fleetingness exist together on a pre-reflective level, such that there is a sort of temporal contradiction at the heart of self-consciousness. This isn't just an 'objective' contradiction that we don't subjectively experience until we reflect on it; rather, it exists at the very heart of our subjective, pre-reflective experience. Every waking moment is characterized by it. In every moment, then, self-consciousness exhibits a temporal restlessness: continuity opposes fleetingness and vice versa; retention opposes protention and vice versa. Self-consciousness, or the self, is never at rest under such conditions.

The relations between self-consciousness and the body are similarly paradoxical. There is a pre-reflective awareness of our separation from the body, but there is also an awareness of our union with the body. Both these awarenesses have been analyzed by past philosophers: on the one hand, phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty have examined the ways in which consciousness is united with the body. (See, e.g., the *Phenomenology of Perception*.) Merleau-Ponty pointed out that there is a kind of bodily self-consciousness, a bodily intentionality "present in motor activity and in perception"—"a form of intentionality that underlies the intentionality of the mental and of language".[2] And Gareth Evans notes that "perception involves the subject's awareness of himself as a sensorimotor organism acting in the world. There can be no perceptual consciousness of the world without consciousness of oneself as embodied."[3] In general, I am aware of my body not only as *mine* but also as, in a sense, *me*. *I* am, e.g., thin, muscular, healthy, strong. I look in the

[1] Gallagher and Zahavi, loc. cit.
[2] Wider, op. cit., p. 122.
[3] Ibid., p. 129.

mirror and see my*self*. But while the whole body is experienced as me, the face is especially important. For the face most directly manifests states of consciousness. The experience of sadness consists partly in the experience of one's face as twisted into a frown; the pleasure of laughter is a result partly of the pleasure of smiling. The face is a direct 'objectification' of the self, and the inner perception of facial expressions is an essential component in consciousness. (The universal preference of prospective lovers for good-looking people would be inexplicable were the face not half-consciously seen as the person, or the self, himself. When looking at the face and body we are looking at the person himself; the idea of a self 'behind' the face doesn't even enter our thoughts. Therefore, a good-looking face signifies a good, or desirable, person. Unfortunately the correlation is not perfect.)

Moreover, in many modes of experience, the body is experienced almost unambiguously and immediately as the *subject* of consciousness, rather than as an object in the world. For example, when one is engaged in strenuous physical activity, one has effectively become one's body acting on the world. One's consciousness has become practically one's *bodily* consciousness. This example is yet another illustration of the 'intermixture' between consciousness and body.

On the other hand, I am not really, strictly speaking, my body. The mere fact that I am reflectively able to distinguish myself from it is significant. Evidently there must be some difference between it and me. Dualists like Descartes have expounded the differences, but even pre-reflectively everyone distinguishes himself from his body. One of the reasons is that consciousness looks out at the world from 'up above', from the head and the eyes, while most of the body is located down below. So there is even, to an extent, a physical separation between consciousness and the body.[1] The 'pre-reflective' duality which this separation supports is what makes possible our reflective awareness of the body as an object, as something in the world which is different from the subject (the I) that is our immediate self-consciousness. But we even half-consciously distinguish ourselves from our *face*: while its contours and expressions, as inwardly experienced by us, are important components of our consciousness, the mere fact that we can't see it without using a mirror or some sort of reflecting device is enough to support our not completely identifying with it, since we *can* 'see' our self at all times—and indeed we *are* seeing it at all times, in that we always have a sense of self. Others, not us, see our face; we, not others, see our (sense of) self.

In short, self-consciousness has a complicated and paradoxical relationship with the body it inheres in, in that it is pre-reflectively aware of both its separation from it and its fusion with it. This relationship, however, does not signify quite the same self-restlessness and self-opposition as is implicit in the self's temporal relations with itself. The latter are essential to the very notion of self-consciousness, its very activity—the activity that constitutes self-consciousness as such. The former relationship, on the other hand, is between self-consciousness and something external to its self-constituting activity. Even so, this relationship can be the source of much psychological conflict and pain, depending on what a person thinks of his body and on how much he identifies himself with it. If his body is obese, for example, his body-image might be extremely important to his sense of self even as he doesn't want it to be, with the result that his sense of himself will be ambiguous and conflicted, fickle and insecure.[2] At times (in moments when he identifies utterly with his body) he may be self-contemptuous, while at other times (when he rebels against such an identification) he may feel self-righteous and angry at the world. One doesn't have to be obese, though, in order for the inherently ambivalent relationship between the self (i.e., oneself) and one's body to cause psychological problems. I myself used to resent the fact that girls seemed not to consider me very desirable on account of my unimposing physique—my skinniness, that is—and their reaction, combined with my knowledge of my skinniness, made inroads on my self-esteem, though I fought against that through the consideration that skinniness isn't who I am. Now that I'm bulkier and women find me desirable, I tend to be a little contemptuous of them, since their desire—like their former lack of desire—is not based on insights into who I really am.

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[1] I'm not saying that consciousness has a physical location. It doesn't. It isn't the sort of thing to which the predicate of 'location' applies. Nonetheless, the head is in some sense (perceived by it as) its 'home'.

[2] The astute reader will notice that I'm using the term 'sense of self' here in a slightly different way than I have hitherto. I'll clarify the matter later.

The third main 'category' of the self's experience is made possible by awareness of its separation from the external world. Everything in the world confronts consciousness as an external thing, an other, whether it be as a brute object (like a table or a stone) or as another self. A great deal has to be said about the self's "being-in-the-world"; I'll do so later in the chapter.

The fourth and final universal category of self-consciousness's experience consists of the free will that I mentioned earlier, which, however, is shot through with unfreedom. Let's look at the freedom first.—The I perceives itself as controlling itself, which is to say that a person half-consciously experiences himself as free. He chooses his acts, he even posits his own existence. His existence, as Fichte said, is experienced as an act of his: he 'exists himself'. At any particular moment he is actively 'throwing himself' into existence, into the world, both through his physical activity and through the phenomenological structure of his self-consciousness. Actually, the two aspects are interrelated, since the self partly identifies itself with the body. In immersing myself in some activity or other, like writing or playing soccer or cooking dinner, I am throwing myself into the world, embracing my existence—bringing it to pass, in fact, causing myself to act and to exist. (Obviously I am not literally doing so, but this is how I experience it.) I am 'acting myself', acting my body—which is, to an indefinable extent, *me*—as well as my self-conscious being itself. For self-consciousness, even when it's occupied in acting-on-the-world, always, as such, is acting on itself, simply because it is *of itself*.

At the same time, though, it is passive, precisely because it is 'of itself'. It is its own object; therefore it is unfree, just insofar as it is an object for itself. Inasmuch as it observes itself, it is free and active; inasmuch as it is observed by itself, it is unfree and passive. We can use the terminology of Martin Heidegger (the Hitler-idolizing Nazi[1] who liked to think of himself as a philosopher[2]) to express the point. Heidegger emphasized man's "thrownness", his "always-already thrownness" into the already-existing world. Man finds himself in the midst of a world he didn't create, embodied in a body he didn't create, possessing a personality he didn't choose, accompanied by a self he didn't create (namely, himself), saturated with an unfree facticity. To quote Magda King:

> By "thrownness", Heidegger does not mean that man is cast into the "natural universe" by a blind force or an indifferent fate, which immediately abandons him to his own devices, but means: his own "real" existence is manifest to man in the curious way that he can always and only find himself *already* here, and can never get behind this *already* to let himself come freely into being. But although he can never originate his being, yet he is "delivered over to himself": he *has* to take over his being as his.... Tuned by moods and feelings, man finds himself in his thrown being, in the inexorable facticity "*that* I am and have to be", delivered over to myself to be as I can, dependent upon a world for my own existence.[3]

Thus, the individual exhibits a certain passiveness in his relationship with the world. He doesn't create it; it is always already there, as he himself is already here. He is therefore not *absolutely* free. This fact is a precondition for the sense of alienation or dehumanization that can afflict people, though, as we shall see, it is not the *cause* of the alienation (much as existentialists might have disagreed). –Be that as it may, there is a kind of dialectic here, between the self's freedom and its thrownness. There is an opposition, a self-

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[1] The jackass even sported a Hitler mustache.

[2] This isn't the place for a polemic against Heidegger, which would in any case be an unprofitable activity. I'll say only that the fundamental question on which he based his so-called philosophy, and such so-called metaphysical investigations as *Being and Time* and *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (which may be the most sloppy, repetitive, empty book I've ever read), viz. "What is the nature of being?"—and also "Why is there something rather than nothing?"—is a pseudo-question, abortive and unanswerable. Which is why he never answered it. Walter Kaufmann remarked somewhere that Heidegger is always on his way towards a point from which one day it will be possible to ask a question.

[3] Magda King, *Heidegger's Philosophy* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1964), pp. 77, 78.

opposition. The self feels itself free to do as it pleases; every act and thought feels as if it's chosen, such that in its very existence (i.e., its being conscious) the self seems to choose itself. But at the same time, it doesn't: the self is already here and can't do anything about it. It never makes the choice to exist, nor to exist in the *way* it exists (possessing a certain body and personality), and on some level, in every moment, it obscurely recognizes this fact. The two contradictory terms in this dialectic (the freedom and the unfreedom) always exist in an immediate synthesis; they aren't separated concretely, in consciousness, but only conceptually. They do, however, make for a certain half-conscious restlessness in the self, comparable to the restlessness inherent in the self's experience of time.

The individual's unfreedom and facticity are brought home to him especially forcefully in moments of self-dissatisfaction. Indeed, all unhappiness is first and foremost consciousness of unfreedom. There are, of course, always other conceptual and phenomenological elements in a particular experience of unhappiness, but the unifying thread through all such experiences is awareness of a frustrated desire (i.e., of unfreedom). –This is merely an incidental note, which I'll elaborate on later.

Anyway, the paradox of these self-oppositions is, in a way, not very paradoxical, for, as I have said, self-consciousness itself is a self-opposition, a self-difference. It relates itself to itself; it is both subject and object—its own object—i.e., active and passive, free and unfree. In other words, it is not completely identical to itself, which apparently means it violates the law of identity. Sartre agreed. He embraced this violation of the law of identity and made it the foundation of *Being and Nothingness*, in that it explains the distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-itself. A chair or a tree, for example, is identical to itself; self-consciousness is not. Indeed, there are *two* reasons it isn't: the first, I've said, is that it 'steps back' from itself and observes itself. "The for-itself exists as presence to itself. ....To be present to something requires separation from that to which one is present. So there must be a separation of consciousness from itself. 'If being is present to itself, it is because it is not wholly itself.'"[1]

The second reason is more general: consciousness is intentional, which means it is self-transcending. Awareness is never just itself, just pure awareness (of nothing). It is *of* something (as indeed the grammar of the word shows). As such, it transcends itself toward an object. It 'goes beyond' itself. "Consciousness is not a thing, a determinate Dasein; it is always beyond itself; it goes beyond, or transcends, itself."[2] Or, as Wider says: "a phenomenological description reveals, for both Sartre and Husserl, that consciousness cannot exist without an object. Consciousness must always be of something.... [Indeed, it] must always be of that which is not itself, even when it takes itself as its own object."[3] Its content, then—i.e., that of which it is—is, of necessity, not itself. Hence, consciousness is not self-identical.

Many philosophers have objected to that Sartrean (Hegelian, Kierkegaardian) claim. After all, it throws out logic! Or at least it limits its range of applicability. Their objection is misguided, though. For they're objecting to self-consciousness itself, not to a deficiency in the arguments of any philosopher. No one can plausibly deny that consciousness is necessarily of an object, nor that *self*-consciousness, as such, involves a separation from itself. This is just the way it is, the way it logically has to be. In giving his 'paradoxical' formulation in *The Sickness Unto Death* (which I quoted earlier), Kierkegaard was simply articulating what is logically implicit in the notion of self-consciousness. It has to be a self-relation, a self-difference; and consciousness of whatever kind involves an element of self-difference, because it is of something other than itself. Thus, the law of identity does not apply absolutely to everything.[4]

However, Sartre didn't seem to appreciate the sense in which the law does apply to consciousness. For, after all, insofar as we speak of something, it is (identical to) itself. Otherwise we couldn't speak of it. Insofar as some given thing changes in every instant or is necessarily different from itself, it is senseless to

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[1] Kathleen Wider, op. cit., p. 52.

[2] Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 16.

[3] Wider, op. cit., p. 42.

[4] Quantum mechanics provides more evidence for that claim. I think that logical laws in general, while *a priori*, are merely provisional. Whether they are true of some entity 'in itself' is always an open question. (See the appendix.)

speak of *it*.[1] Self-consciousness is, therefore, tautologously identical to itself: it is ('identical to') this thing that is a separation from itself, a presence to itself. The lack of self-identity is simply a property of this (self-identical) thing. Formally, that is, self-consciousness is just itself; its content, though, is (of) something that differs from itself.

All these ideas will be useful later, when I indulge in a bit of phenomenological psychology. Before I do that, though, I have to at least sketch answers to the questions I posed at the beginning of the chapter, in order to mitigate postmodernist doubts about the nature of the self.

The 'sense of self' I keep referring to—self-consciousness, the I—never exists in its essential purity, as bare consciousness of consciousness. But neither does any thought, as such, really exist. A thought, considered as a single 'determinate' thing (a definite, clearly defined thing), is an abstraction from reality. There is never such a thing as 'a thought', a single thought existing in isolation from others. The 'thought' of, e.g., this table exists in an empirical unity with many other thoughts, which all merge together in the same state of consciousness. Any given state of consciousness comprises a number of thoughts. For example, right now I'm aware of the computer I'm writing on, the music I'm listening to, the feel of the keyboard on my fingertips, the itching in my leg, the desire to be doing something else besides writing, etc. One never experiences a single ('pure') thought of some object, because consciousness is a holistic whole. Hence, while we are always conscious of consciousness, we never experience self-consciousness 'purely' or 'in itself'. It is always merely implicit in our awareness of other objects, as Kant saw.[2]

In short, the consciousness of which we're conscious in any given moment is never just pure consciousness; rather, it includes many thoughts and many phenomenal states. The latter are produced by our body and its interactions with the environment; the former grow out of our idiosyncratic psyche and its interactions with the environment. Together, in combination with our underlying consciousness of consciousness, they constitute our intuitive sense of self in a particular moment. This sense of self can be only imperfectly described, for it is fundamentally intuitive. It's extremely complicated, too, to the degree that *consciousness* is complicated. For William James was right, in a sense: the self is just the present state of consciousness, because (human) consciousness is self-consciousness. He was wrong, though, or at least imprecise, in that he didn't specify that not *every* thought in consciousness is the self, but only one: viz., the thought of consciousness. Since this thought accompanies all others, we can say, albeit imprecisely, that the self is the entire state of consciousness at a particular moment (or the "*stream* of consciousness", depending on how you look at it).

Included in this state is a perception of psychological and physical continuity over consecutive instants, made possible by protention and retention. I already noted that self-consciousness is (or experiences itself as) temporally extended; now I'm saying that the other aspects of one's being, such as the body and one's personality, are temporally extended as well. The reason is that they are objects of (self-)consciousness, and insofar as consciousness is extended, its objects are too. Including the body and its actions and sensations, as well as emotions and thoughts. These things differ from other objects of consciousness in that they are, crudely speaking, the main features of the world to which self-consciousness has an immediate 'affective' attachment (such that it pre-reflectively sees them as 'its own'), with the result that they are experienced by (self-)consciousness as the concrete, empirical aspects of the self. Since, via protention and retention, they persist over time, the self in its full concreteness persists over time. (That is, I see myself as the same person right *now* as I am right *now*, and *now*, and *now*.... Across short time-spans like this, protention and retention account for my perception that I remain the same self.)

I fear that I'm being unclear. What I've been saying all throughout this chapter is that the essence of the self—the active kernel, as it were; the I in its most essential and immediate manifestation—is pure

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[1] Nietzsche recognized the degree to which language and thought presuppose stasis in (or the self-identity of) what is thought about, and therewith all the other logical laws. See *The Will to Power*, §520—or, indeed, the whole of section 5 in Book Three. For an account of self-consciousness that remedies the one-sidedness of Sartre's, see Hegel's *Encyclopedia*—or Robert R. Williams's book *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 69 – 72.

[2] See Wider, op. cit., chapter one.

consciousness of consciousness. When a person reflects on himself (on his sense that he is an I), this self-consciousness is, first and foremost, what he is reflecting on. But pure self-consciousness doesn't really exist, in the way that an entire state of consciousness (with all its thoughts, phenomenal impressions and so on) exists. It's an abstraction, albeit an *active* one. It isn't an abstraction in the way that a concept is, like the concept of 2 or the concept of a tree. These are passive abstractions, as it were. They cannot *act*. Self-consciousness, though—even considered in its abstract purity, in isolation from other thoughts—is active, like the thought I'm having right now of this table, even though in order to consider it as *a single thought* I have to abstract from reality, i.e., from the holistic state of consciousness in which it occurs.

Since self-consciousness is not 'pure' but instead interpenetrates and is interpenetrated by every other thought and sensation in a given state of consciousness, such that it is implicit in each of them and each of them is implicit in it, the real (sense of) self that someone has (or *is*) in a particular moment is the entire state of his consciousness.

I've already explained, albeit briefly, what accounts for the perception that one is the same self between consecutive instants. Namely, protention and retention. The perception that one remains the same self between longer spans of time is explained in much the same way, namely through memory. In his book *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit distinguishes between "direct memory connections" and "continuity of memory".[1] It is a useful distinction. There are direct memory connections between my present self and me as a fifteen-year-old if I can remember having experiences that I had then; there is continuity of memory if there has been an "overlapping chain of direct memories" between my past self and my present self. "In the case of most adults, there would be such a chain. In each day...., most of these people remember some of their experiences on the previous day." Both kinds of memory-experiences are relevant to the perception of self-continuity. The reason I think that the I that I experience now is the same one that I experienced then is both that I remember certain experiences I had when I was fifteen (—would that I didn't![2]) and that I know there has been an unbroken continuity of memories between then and now. Moreover, I can see from photographs that there was a body then that looks almost identical to mine now, from which I conclude that *I* 'inhabited' (and, to an extent, *was*) that body.

This common way of thinking is confused; I'll explain why in a moment. First, though, I should answer the inevitable objection that 'I' cannot be equivalent to 'this (self-)consciousness',[3] as I have apparently been saying it is, because it makes sense to say "*my* self-consciousness", which implies that I must be something over and above self-consciousness. Furthermore, in any ordinary utterance, the words 'this self-consciousness' cannot be substituted for 'I' without a significant change in sentential meaning. Therefore, they cannot mean the same thing.

My answer to this objection is that, partly because the presence of memories establishes a connection between a past self and the present self such that the latter 'appropriates' the former to itself, and hence sees itself as persisting across time, consciousness 'reifies' itself, sees itself as a sort of substance, an entity, a unifying principle, a thing-like 'I' that is both within and without consciousness.[4] Self-

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[1] *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 205. This book has been much eulogized in the philosophical literature. It is indeed impressive in some respects, for example in its scope and clarity. But I should limit my praise to the single statement that it's a masterpiece of discursion. It is verbose, superficial, and boring. Like almost all philosophical texts published in this most unphilosophical of times, it is characterized by a purely discursive method, in that it remains on the level of mere words and shows evidence of no ability to penetrate to the intuitions that alone give, or should give, theories life. –To quote Karl Marx, with some liberties in translation, "On a level plain, simple mounds look like hills; and the insipid flatness of academia is to be measured by the altitude of its 'great intellects'." Or, said more succinctly, 'Mr. Derek is a genius in the way of academic stupidity'. (Cf. *Capital*, pp. 654, 759.)

[2] Do your job, subconscious! Repress painful memories!

[3] Partly included in which consciousness, I noted earlier, is the body. Its sensations, feelings and whatnot are in consciousness, and so the latter experiences the body as ineffably a part of it, though also something external to it.

[4] There are many other causes of this self-reification. I'll note here only that the assigning of a "name" to each person at birth is well-calculated to coax his consciousness eventually into self-reification. He will see himself as something

consciousness locates itself outside itself and yet inside itself. It projects itself beyond itself into a sort of 'active concept', namely the concept of oneself—of "Chris Wright", in my case—which is constant and unchanging amidst all the shifting determinations of bodily and mental states. I, Chris Wright, am always Chris Wright, the same Chris Wright ten years ago as I'll be ten years from now. Insofar as I am unchanging in this way, I am really nothing but a concept, albeit an active one, a concept that is free and can act. But this is absurd, of course. No concept can act. The only reason it seems as if the concept that is Chris Wright can act is that self-consciousness is what is doing the acting. Self-consciousness—a fairly reflective self-consciousness[1]—conflates itself with the concept that is Chris Wright (for example in its assent to the statement "I am Chris Wright"), such that it makes itself into an 'active concept', as I said. It reifies itself, turns itself (for itself) into an unchanging thing which functions as the bearer and unifier of physical and mental states and acts across a lifetime.

A moment ago I realized that Sartre anticipated these ideas in *The Transcendence of the Ego*. So I'll quote him:

> The ego is a virtual locus of unity.... Consciousness projects its own spontaneity into the ego-object in order to confer on the ego the creative power which is absolutely necessary to it. But this spontaneity, *represented* and *hypostatized* in an object, becomes a degraded and bastard spontaneity, which magically preserves its creative power even while becoming passive. Whence the profound irrationality of the notion of an ego.[2]

In other words, when I reflect on myself, implicit in my consciousness is awareness of myself as something 'over and above' my immediate consciousness, something that remains the same not only between instants but also between minutes and hours and years, something that Sartre called an ego. This thing—in its active aspect[3]—which I see as being *me*, has free will, temporal awareness, self-awareness, is fused with the body but is not merely the body—in short, has all the properties of self-consciousness and would *be* self-consciousness if it didn't have the added property that it is self-identical and unchanging. Self-consciousness is not. It exists only in the moment, and to say that *this* self-consciousness (in this moment) is identical to the self-consciousness of ten minutes ago is meaningless. It is either truistically false or truistically true: true because self-consciousness as such is *always* the same—it is, after all, just consciousness of consciousness, it is never anything else—and so to say that two instantiations of the concept of 'self-consciousness' are the same is tautologously true; false because two instantiations are, in being *two*, not one and the same. In other words, two self-consciousnesses are always *qualitatively* identical but never *numerically* identical. However, the 'ego' is both qualitatively and numerically identical to itself across spans of time, no matter how vast. It must, therefore, be a concept, since a concept is always numerically and qualitatively self-identical. (The concept of 2 has never been anything but the concept of 2.) "The ego, being an object [i.e., a concept], is passive."[4] But it isn't *merely* a concept, because I am not merely a concept (much as Dennett would disagree); I am also active. What the ego is, then, is a fusion of passiveness and activeness, of conceptness and self-consciousness. "The ego is an irrational synthesis of activity and passivity."[5] This is why I said that self-consciousness locates itself both within and without itself. Self-consciousness, which is the self in any given moment, doesn't see itself as mere self-

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that coheres around his name—"I am Chris. Chris Wright. That is *who I am*, that entity called 'Chris Wright'."—and will thus 'substantialize' himself, or see himself as a substantial self. I'll return to this point later in the chapter.

[1] "The ego [e.g., 'Chris Wright'] is an object apprehended, but also an object constituted, by reflective consciousness." Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1957), p. 80.

[2] Ibid., p. 81.

[3] See several paragraphs below on the distinction between its active and passive aspects.

[4] Ibid., p. 79.

[5] Ibid., p. 83.

consciousness; it sees itself as an ego, a fusion of activity and passivity. It sees the ego as the self;[1] and since it also sees itself as the self, it sees itself as the ego. Which means it sees itself as not-itself, or rather as *more* than itself.

Sartre's analysis in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, while brilliant, is flawed. My main criticism of it is also one of my criticisms of Anglo-American philosophy: it looks for precision where there is none, or where our concepts are inadequate to the phenomenon. It is too analytical. Sartre postulates absolute distinctions between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness, between the "I" and the "me"—which are aspects of the "ego"—between impersonal and personal consciousness, between spontaneous and active consciousness, etc. etc. What Wittgenstein wrote about William James might apply also to Sartre:

> ....William James got the idea that the 'self' consisted mainly of 'peculiar motions in the head and between the head and throat'. [But] James' introspection showed, not the meaning of the word "self" (so far as it means something like "person", "human being", "he himself", "I myself"), nor any analysis of such a thing, but the state of a philosopher's attention when he says the word "self" to himself and tries to analyse its meaning.[2]

Granted, Wittgenstein may be the most overrated philosopher in history, with the exception of Heidegger. And he is wrong if he means that intuitive, phenomenological analysis is pointless. Still, I suspect that Sartre read too much into his introspective mental states. Not only is the consciousness of an introspecting philosopher different from ordinary consciousness (such that the philosopher's conclusions might not be as widely applicable as he thinks), but the entire stream of consciousness is an extremely 'vague' 'continuum' between varieties of experiences. It is so vague, so hard-to-pin-down, that I think the honest philosopher is forced to make frequent use of such inexact qualifying terms as 'to an extent....', 'in some respects....', and 'partly....', as I have been doing.

With that said, the reader may forgive me for not trying to give an exhaustive analysis of the ego in all its phenomenological permutations. I'll confine myself to saying that, to the extent that there is self-consciousness, there is awareness of the ego. The two are virtually indistinguishable. Awareness of the ego is in fact implicit in human self-consciousness,[3] because the latter sees itself not as what it really is, namely a fleeting phenomenon that lasts as long as the 'moment' (the "specious present") lasts, but rather as a continuous, self-identical entity. During certain activities there is virtually no awareness of the ego, as there is little awareness of self; in other activities—for example, when introspecting—the ego is most definitely in some way an object of consciousness, since consciousness itself has become its main object. The reason we have to distinguish between the ego and self-consciousness despite their mutual inextricability is that the first, unlike the second, is a fiction. It is, as Sartre said, an irrational synthesis of activity and passivity, an artificial construct. It is the substantial self that we all unthinkingly think we are, the self that is not only philosophically inelegant and unnecessary, as I wrote earlier, but also completely self-contradictory and impossible. Self-consciousness, on the other hand, while undoubtedly the victim of delusions, is just as real as consciousness itself.

Sartre is right that the ego, or 'oneself', can be considered from various angles. There is the immediate, active aspect, which is self-consciousness (as it experiences itself, not as it is 'in itself'[4]) or the

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[1] Reflectively, the self takes the form of *one*self. Which is just to say that it takes the form of the ego. Hence, the sentence "Reflective self-consciousness sees the ego as the self" can be rephrased as "When I explicitly think about myself, I see myself as Chris Wright, an unchanging self (an ego) extended through hours, days, years".

[2] *Philosophical Investigations*, §413.

[3] Said differently: self-consciousness, for itself, takes the form of an ego.

[4] One of the reasons this subject is extraordinarily difficult, probably the most difficult in all philosophy, is that one has to distinguish between (self-)consciousness's unthinking self-intuition and what it really is in itself. And when the person doing the analysis is himself, like all selves, really nothing but consciousness, what is going on is that a particular consciousness is probing itself in an effort to distinguish itself from itself, i.e., its truth from its false self-intuition. This is not easy. Incidentally, the distinction between self-consciousness *in* itself and its nature *for* itself, while hard to understand, was essential to Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology*. See Hyppolite, op. cit., chapter one.

I; there is the psyche and the body, or the "psycho-physical" aspect, which Sartre calls the me; there is the past ego and the future ego. One has to admit that anything that comprises such diverse things as the present subconscious, the past and future subconscious, the present, past and future body, and all conscious states across a lifetime is quite an artificial construct. Everyone interprets it as himself in his totality, but this self-interpretation is incoherent. There is no such thing as a single entity in this sense; there is only a vast, disorderly collection of states, acts and thoughts, which are all thrown together under the heading of a single ego ("Chris Wright") largely because the consciousness 'in' which they have existed sees itself as a continuous, self-identical thing, on account of such facts as protention and retention and the continuity of memory (as well as "direct memory connections").

It is also pertinent to note the difference between the concepts of the self and the person. Sartre writes that "the ego is outside, *in the world*; it is a being of the world, like the ego of another",[1] but he is surely mistaken (unless I'm misinterpreting him). 'My' ego is experienced differently by me than it is by you. It is more 'intimate' for me than for you, more personal and private. This can be expressed by saying that, for myself, I am a *self*, while for you I am a *person*. For myself too I am a person, but not in quite the same way as I am for you....

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Well, there it is. Some of it. All those words, and more, written for no apparent reason.

March 9

Date with April. No chemistry. It was the same with the girl I met in December. In a few days I'll meet Kim, the librarian. People never ask questions; they always talk about themselves. April is intelligent, but the date consisted mostly of her complaining about her family. It was like a therapy session. (Part of that was my fault. Since I saw that she liked talking about it, I let the conversation stay there. In my defense: she didn't let me get a word in, except when I interrupted her.)

Took a bus through East St. Louis. It's a ghost town at night—a God-forsaken industrial desert, desolate as a fresh battlefield.

I can no longer read Goethe without feeling a certain aversion. His arrogance and narcissism, not to mention shallowness, shine through. Nietzsche, on the other hand, was a real man, full of integrity and honesty, determined to understand life.

I'm always amazed that although the odds were infinitesimal that I would be born, I was born anyway.

Reading Huizinga's brilliant book *Homo Ludens*.

gravel, fucking shards of rock
shoved down my throat,
slicing it into gills.
gurgling bloodily.

The critical burden

fuck the critical faculty

[1] Sartre, ibid., p. 31.

fuck having to write prettily
fuck not writing shittily
fuck the critics' fiddling,
their fucking piddling "poem"-peddling—
middling little shits scribbling, meddling,
belittling your word-whittling—but it's soul-settling, that's all!—
soul-bettering, pain-tempering—
little literary rules are irrelevant, it's self-expression;
you're like Hessian mercenaries you fucks but less,
scribbling critical dribble for a paycheck.

Actually, I pretty much have only two regrets: I haven't loved enough, and I haven't debauched myself enough.

Eminem has influenced my writing a little. I could never rap like him, but, in short bursts, I can sometimes write a little like him. Sort of. (My poems in that style have to be read aloud. Like that long thing I wrote two Novembers ago.)

March 13

I'm 151 pounds. But that's still nine pounds less than I want to be. Whenever I finish working out I look like Brad Pitt in *Fight Club*. (Or so I tell myself.)

"Go melt back in the night; everything inside is made of stone."

Fuck it angers me that all through autumn and winter I was taking those pills and ergo wasn't writing poetry. All that wasted time!

> the staring at my calf, the muscle, newly carved, old clay come to life (I am my own Pygmalion), sculpted beneath the skin the pockmarked skin, the staring at new creation ex nihilo ad nihilo, creatine-creation my calf my newborn baby, beautiful as the cut from the cow (dead now) on the dish—or in the dirt so to die as the diet of worms ('From clay, to clay returned.')—the staring, the stupid caring....

I've never had a formal lesson in creative writing, how can I judge the worth of my poems? (I was going to write more above but got sick of it.)

The last survivor of the massacre at the village of El Mozote in El Salvador—the massacre of 1981 carried out by the El Salvadoran army, which had been trained and equipped by the Reagan administration in order to keep the corrupt and murderous government in power (it would have been overthrown by radical guerrillas otherwise)—a woman named Rufina Amaya, who witnessed the whole slaughter behind a tree and told reporters about it—and was subsequently vilified in the U.S. media as a liar, as having made up the story of watching her husband and four children be butchered with bayonets—died today.

Strictly speaking, it isn't *people* I hate—or even *most* people—or even the *people in power*. It's the *complacency*, *cowardice*, *stupidity*, *inhumanity* of most people—or the people in power. That's what I hate.

Almost everyone can be a monster given the right circumstances. The best we can hope for is to prevent those circumstances from arising.

March 14

The more I work out, the more I have a habit of cursing. Probably because of the self-confidence etc. In general I feel like I want to lead a rebellion against the government, or fuck three women at once. Testosterone, I love you.

Philosophizing during youth, or during a period of healthiness, just ain't right. Callicles was right. *Action* over *reflection*.

Marx would have had a field day with this article in the Times: "Can Your Dog Humanize the Office?" Evidently employees often take their dogs to work, in order to—humanize the place. You know alienation is running rampant when dogs are seen as more human than humans themselves.

By the way, why do you think *everyone* these days has a dog? Because we Americans are starved for affection. There are 300 million of us, and we're all lonely as fuck.

O these halcyon days of youth, these days of *freedom*—I *love* this shit!!

Here's a short and unsatisfactory paper I wrote for my Kant course:

A summary of Kant's Transcendental Deduction

In this paper I'll give a brief exposition of the ideas that animate the Transcendental Deduction in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. This section is probably the most difficult, but also, I suspect, the most rewarding, in the entire book. Even after two hundred years its insights remain fresh and compelling. So this paper is not a mere academic exercise. The Deduction can teach us a lot about how our minds work and how experience is constructed; its lessons reverberate through a number of disciplines. Cognitive science, for example, has incorporated many Kantian insights about how the mind (or the brain) synthesizes experience. My purpose is but to restate some of these insights, while offering a few pertinent speculations and alterations along the way.

I presuppose a reader acquainted with Kant—with, for instance, his distinction between sensibility and understanding, between phenomena and the thing-in-itself, and with certain other fundamental doctrines that I cannot discuss in detail.

Probably the central idea of Kant's epistemology is that the mind structures experience—that it combines the representations intuitively given to sensibility into the synthetic, unified whole of which we are aware. The Transcendental Deduction is supposed to explain how this happens.

Sensibility is "the capacity (receptivity) for receiving representations through the mode in which we are affected by objects" (p. 65). It is the initial 'filter', so to speak, through which both outer and *inner* experience passes. ('Inner experience' includes bodily sensations, mental states, etc.) I use the word 'filter' for two reasons: first, assuming the soundness of modern science, a great deal of what happens in the physical world—both inside the body and outside—is not perceived by people. Only certain wavelengths of light are processed through the eyes; only sound waves of a certain frequency are sensed through the ears; and people are not conscious of most of the processes occurring in their bodies. Thus, sensibility 'filters out' (or is the result of a neurological filtering-out of) much of what occurs in the world. Secondly, Kant argues that, while sensibility is indeed more passive than the understanding, it imposes the forms of space and time on its representations. So it is not *completely* passive; it is also active.

Of course, on the neurological level, virtually nothing that corresponds to sensation can properly be called 'passive', as Kant says that sensibility is. Sensory neurons are *activated*, so to speak, by a stimulus; and the brain's processing of the stimulus is at all points fundamentally *active*. This fact is irrelevant, though, to the Kantian thesis. Kant is not talking about biology but psychology, "transcendental psychology". He is trying to explain, on a psychological level, how experience is possible; and, as he sees it, experience manifests both passivity and activity. Psychologically the passive component in experience is constituted by the mind's receptivity to impressions. But since impressions (according to Kant) are received in the modes of space and time—which modes have to be fixed *a priori* in the mind, for reasons that Kant elaborates in the Transcendental Aesthetic—even the passive faculty that is sensibility includes an element of activeness.

On the other hand, we must admit that Kant's account of sensibility, and of its relationship with the understanding, is unclear. Sensibility intuits representations; the understanding *thinks* them. It applies certain "categories" (such as causality, substance, existence, and so forth) to the appearances given to sensibility, and in so doing imposes on them the form of 'objecthood'.[1] In any given instant, prior to the work of the understanding it is not *objects* we are aware of but merely *intuitions*, which as such do not have objective validity. They are merely subjective impressions, with no reference to an objective, external world. The understanding subsumes them under concepts—i.e., it exercises its power of *judgment*—and thereby elevates them to the status of real objects that, as such, are opposed to apperception (self-consciousness). In other words, the understanding creates the world of nature—not, indeed, its *matter*, but only its *form*, its most general laws—by synthesizing and 'conceptualizing' the appearances (or intuitions) that are supplied through sensibility.

The details of this process are extremely complicated, but even its outlines, as provided by Kant, are obscure. Let's try to sort them out.— From much of what Kant says in the *Critique*, it would seem that he considers the intuitions of pure sensation ('prior to' the understanding's activity) to be largely unconscious. And yet he also writes a good deal that would suggest the opposite. For example, in the *Prolegomena* he writes, "When an appearance is given us, we are still quite free as to how we should judge the matter. The appearance depends upon the senses, but the judgment upon the understanding....".[2] His language here suggests that we are fully conscious of the appearance even before it has been manipulated ("judged") by the understanding (before, that is, the categories have been used to synthesize the appearance into a representation of an objective world). And the activity of the understanding seems to consist in a wholly conscious, free and abstract 'judging' of what is intuitively given to us. On the other hand, in the *Critique* he writes at one point, "Synthesis in general is the mere result of the power of imagination, a blind but indispensable function of the soul, without which we should have no knowledge whatsoever, but of which we are *scarcely ever conscious*".[3] Here it seems that the activity of the understanding (which includes that of imagination, as I'll explain later) is either always or almost always unconscious. This means that the appearances we're aware of must have already been worked on by the understanding—and therefore that our sensible intuitions must themselves be unconscious. So Kant's analyses can be unclear, and even apparently mutually inconsistent.

I think the most plausible interpretation of him is that he is discussing phenomena that are mostly unconscious. The "appearances" given immediately to sensibility—as Kant uses the term—have to be unconscious. Our conscious experience has to have been already synthesized imaginatively and conceptually, for it is coherent, structured, and displays all the characteristics that Kant says emerge out of the understanding. But if we are unaware of the 'original' representations given to sensibility[4] (insofar as they can be called 'representations' at all)—i.e., the representations as they are before they have been synthesized by the understanding—then evidently sensibility cannot be the source of the pure intuitions of space and time. For Kant undoubtedly thinks that these intuitions occur in consciousness, even if we are not clearly aware of them. Geometry, after all, is based on the *conscious* intuition of space. An unconscious intuition of space would be as good as nothing. It seems, then, that space and time, like the categories, have to grow out of the understanding, inasmuch as it structures consciousness.

However, I suspect that something like our conscious intuition of time—a primitive, unconscious version of it—is necessarily present in sensation. It has to be, for representations, even unconscious ones, must succeed one another. Consider the consciousness of a newborn baby. Its experience is probably analogous to the content of sensibility (in an adult) before it has been synthesized by the understanding—because, after all, a newborn has no "understanding" in the Kantian sense. Its experience consists of what

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[1] Throughout this paper I'll speak mostly of representations of the external world. To speak also of *inner* sense would complicate the discussion.

[2] *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), p. 31.

[3] *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 112. Italics added.

[4] The idea that we are unaware of them is contrary to Kant's intentions, at least in some passages. But I'm trying to make certain parts of his doctrine more consistent and defensible than they are in the *Critique*.

is immediately, unstructuredly given to sensibility. Now, in its consciousness there is surely no intuition of space; there is but a "blooming, buzzing confusion", something vaguely similar to (though less structured than) an adult's consciousness as he dreams during sleep. But while the baby has no awareness of space, it must have a confused half-awareness of time, just insofar as its conscious states temporally succeed one another. Not until its understanding develops, though, is its intuition of time (and space) as full and rich as that of an adult.[1]

Be that as it may, my point is that sensibility is even more passive and unconscious than Kant thought. Not only the "categories" but also space and time, in the way we are aware of them, originate in the understanding. –Incidentally, one cannot reasonably object that there is no such thing as the "understanding" or "sensibility", that these concepts are mere fabrications. On the contrary, they are philosophically and psychologically indispensable. They embody a psychological interpretation of what occurs on the biological level, unconsciously. Any neurologist knows that a given state of consciousness has been synthesized by the brain prior to one's awareness of it. Well, Kant is—or can be understood as—analyzing this process into its passive and active elements. Data are given to the brain; it then structures them according to spatiotemporal, causal principles. It is "sensibility" vs. "understanding".[2]

The process works approximately as follows.— The original, unstructured data (e.g., the colors of objects that are not yet conceptualized as objects) are given to sensation. In a particular instant, we are not aware of them in their initial chaotic state. Kant doesn't explicitly acknowledge such a state, but in the light of modern science it's necessary. He says that this primordial "appearance", which contains a manifold of different [soon-to-be] "perceptions",[3] has to be combined into a unity (an "image") by "imagination". This act of combination is called apprehension. So, in other words, the imagination, by apprehending the initial sensory manifold, synthesizes it into a unitary image, thus injecting some degree of order into it and preparing it to be acted upon by the understanding.

I differ from Kant in thinking that all this is, so far, unconscious. Certainly the original sensory data have to be combined into an image, or a series of images (such as a house, a plant, a door) in one total 'image' that is given to consciousness, but what we are aware of is only the end-result of the process, namely the spatiotemporal, conceptualized whole. Moreover, the combination of the data into an image is surely inseparable from the act of the understanding itself, whereby it imposes the categories on the data given to it. There can be no coherent, unified image outside the spatiotemporal, causal framework created by the understanding.

Also, in general I think that Kant's use of the language of "faculties" is unnecessary and confusing. While he is right to distinguish between the mind's passive and active aspects, and he has every right to call them "sensibility" and "understanding" respectively, his concepts start to become a little artificial when he introduces "imagination" as the mediator between the senses and understanding. Such a mediation is unnecessary. Dividing functions into "faculties" is at best a convenient way of talking; when taken too far, or taken too literally, it leads to superfluous conceptual clutter.

However, Kant is right that appearances have to be momentarily retained, or immediately "reproduced", in consciousness if we are to have experience. This is the second aspect of the "threefold synthesis" he discusses (the first aspect of which is the synthesis of apprehension I mentioned above).

> Experience as such [he argues] necessarily presupposes the reproducibility of appearances. When I seek to draw a line in thought, or to think of the time from one noon to another, or even to represent to myself some particular number, obviously the various manifold

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[1] Jean Piaget's studies attest to the fact that the understanding's development takes place over many years. At the age of seven, children have spatial intuitions that they lacked at five; at thirteen they can have intuitions they were incapable of at ten.

[2] Kant also uses 'sensibility' in another sense, according to which all representations we're aware of exist in sensibility. (I.e., our awareness of them is itself a function of sensibility.) While this is a legitimate use of the word, and is related to the other use, the two meanings should be distinguished. Otherwise a great deal of confusion results.

[3] "What is first given to us is appearance. When combined with consciousness, it is called perception." Ibid., p. 143.

> representations that are involved must be apprehended by me in thought one after the other. But if I were always to drop out of thought the preceding representations (the first parts of the line, the antecedent parts of the time period, or the units in the order represented), and did not reproduce them while advancing to those that follow, a complete representation would never be obtained: none of the above-mentioned thoughts, not even the purest and most elementary representations of space and time, could arise.[1]

It's worth noting that by the concept of "reproduction" he foreshadows Husserl's notion of "retention", which denotes exactly the same thing. (Husserl opposes it to "protention", thus advancing beyond Kant in his analysis of self-consciousness.) Kant claims that imagination—which he defines as "the faculty of representing in intuition an object that is not itself present"[2]—is responsible for the reproduction of appearances. Accordingly, the synthesis of apprehension and the synthesis of reproduction are inseparable, being carried out by the same faculty at the same time.

Kant argues that these empirical syntheses presuppose a *pure* synthesis—viz., the synthesis of space and time, which the imagination is constantly undertaking. (This synthesis is manifested in pure mathematical intuitions, the intuitions that bear fruit in geometry and arithmetic.) Without such a pure synthesis, a synthesis of spatiotemporal images in consciousness would be impossible. The *pure* intuitions are the basis for the *empirical* intuitions. –This doctrine is surely defensible. The empirical intuitions of space and time are but the intuitions of objects (and mental states) *in* space and time; underlying, or implicit in, the perceptions of these objects are obscure intuitions of the epistemological necessity of spatiotemporality, of causality, of matter and its conservation, etc.[3] Such "obscure" (essentially unconscious) intuitions are what Kant calls "pure".

This is another area where I disagree with Kant. He claims that only space and time are intuitions; all the categories are mere concepts, under which we bring representations so as to form full-fledged "objects" interacting in a spatiotemporal framework. I, on the other hand, think that such "ideas" as causation and the other categories can be intuited no less than space and time. Insofar as space and time are represented to the mind, so is, e.g., causality. Schopenhauer was right that Kant had placed too much emphasis on abstract conceptualization and not enough on the more primitive fact of intuition(s).[4] After all, sophisticated language-acquisition was a relatively recent event in human evolution, perhaps occurring as late as 50,000 years ago. Are we to believe that before concepts had been 'invented', people were unaware of objects? On Kant's theory, though, this would apparently be the case, since he argues that it is only when the understanding *judges*, by means of "universal" concepts, that a person can be aware of the objective world as such. –Actually, there are a couple of defenses Kant could use against this Schopenhauerian objection; but before I mention them, I should explain why Kant attributed such importance to concepts, as opposed to intuitions, in the first place.

We have seen that there is, according to Kant, a synthesis of apprehension and a synthesis of reproduction, by which syntheses the imagination unifies, or "holds together", the manifold given to the senses. The third element in the threefold synthesis is the "synthesis of recognition in a concept". This is the culminating act of the understanding, the act that makes possible knowledge of objects—and thus experience itself. It involves the recognition of particular representations as being empirical objects in the world—or, alternatively, pure *a priori* objects, like those of geometry (a triangle, a square, etc.)—objects

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[1] Ibid., p. 133.

[2] Ibid., p. 165.

[3] On a reflective, intellectual level, one can indeed deny or ignore the necessity of such 'principles'—as traditional Chinese science, according to some scholars, ignored causality (or didn't attribute much importance to it)—but on a deeper, unreflective level, these intuitions are innate in humans. One has only to refer to Piaget's experiments with young children. At a certain age, for example—perhaps six months or so; I forget—infants that see a ball rolling behind a screen expect it to appear momentarily on the other side. They intuitively understand causation, inertia, the conservation of momentum and matter. Kant was right that these "principles of pure natural science", which Newton brought to our attention, are innate in our mind (i.e., are necessarily imposed on experience).

[4] See the appendix in volume one of *The World as Will and Representation*.

that fall under a concept. The concept is "something universal which serves as a rule", namely a rule for synthesizing the manifold in a certain way. "The concept of body, for instance, as the unity of the manifold which is thought through it, serves as a rule in our knowledge of outer appearances."[1] It unites outer appearances as instantiations of the concepts of extension, impenetrability, shape, etc. (which are all implicated by the concept of body). –Thus, the mind creates objects as such, and thereby empirical knowledge, by thinking representations under the appropriate concepts.

The essential point here, and throughout Kant's discussion, is that there has to be a synthetic unity in our consciousness of the intuitively given manifold. Experience is and has to be united in a single consciousness; all representations have to be mutually related in and by this consciousness. There cannot be simply a diverse and chaotic play of appearances in our minds, as there is for a newborn child; there have to be *rules* synthetically uniting appearances. Concepts are these rules—both *pure* concepts (such as the categories) and *empirical* ones. In particular, the deployment of the categories by the understanding is what gives order to experience in general. It is the necessary and universal condition for experience—the condition that constitutes the objective world, i.e., nature (the postulate of which is presupposed by the unity of appearances).[2]

The *subjective* side of this unification is the transcendental unity of apperception. Empirically, apperception is always changing and is merely transient; no "abiding self can present itself in the flux of inner appearances". But such a self is necessary in order for experience to be possible, since experience always belongs to *one self* (namely, me, or you, or whomever). So the unity of apperception has to be *transcendental*—that is, not directly experienced. It is in fact the *basis for* experience, which means it must "precede" experience.

Transcendental apperception, says Kant, is precisely the understanding itself. It is the 'source', or (in some sense) the 'meaning', of the categories-in-use: insofar as transcendental consciousness is unified, the categories are being used to synthesize *a priori* the manifold of appearances. Their synthetic *a priori* unity is how the unity of apperception manifests itself. That is, it manifests itself in the indeterminate (non-empirical) idea of nature,[3] which is constructed by the categories and is what coheres appearances together—ensures that they are appearances *of* something, namely of *objects*, and ultimately of nature itself. The unity of the objective world, or nature, is (constituted by) the unity of apperception. And so the unity of apperception consists essentially in the deployment of a pure *concept* (viz., (the necessary unity of) the objective world), which consists in, and is made possible by, the deployment of the "pure concepts of the understanding" (the categories), which synthesize and structure the sensory manifold (which has already been 'preliminarily' synthesized by the imagination, through the syntheses of apprehension and reproduction).

"Concepts" are, therefore, essential to Kant's explanation of the possibility of experience. They are no less than the universal and necessary rules that make experience, and knowledge, possible. Insofar as I see a house I judge that it is a house (i.e., I invoke a concept); and presupposed by my judgment are the pure concepts of the understanding.

If the reader would object that one does not always explicitly *judge* a representation to fall under a particular concept—that, on the contrary, one is merely *intuitively* aware that a given representation is in fact (the appearance of) such-and-such an object—Kant would reply that the understanding's judging-activity is usually "obscure" or unconscious. We need not be *aware* of using concepts. Nevertheless, we are, constantly.

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[1] Kant, op. cit., p. 135.

[2] Nature is the object to which appearances immediately refer [or that they represent], to which they 'point', so to speak. They *are* it (or at least that's how we necessarily unreflectively see them). We are not aware of nature as it is in itself, but its concept is the "transcendental object" that unites representations—that relates them to one another, or provides the spatiotemporal 'framework' in which they are so related. The transcendental object that is nature is the 'place' in which objects are supposed to exist together; and hence the concept of nature gives objective unity to all the appearances in consciousness.

[3] I'm using the word 'idea' in Kant's technical sense, which is not synonymous with 'concept'.

As I said above, this is one of the places where I part company with Kant. At the very least, his presentation of his doctrine is misleading, inasmuch as it suggests that human experience was impossible before words, or concepts, had been invented for kinds of objects. From both a phylogenetic and an ontogenetic perspective, humans were/are aware of objects before acquiring the full conceptual equipment of language. They can distinguish objects from one another; they can intuitively understand causation without recognizing a concept for it.

Kant's position could be defended, though, from a Chomskyan perspective. The reason we need not have formulated a language in order to have experience (*pace* Kant (at least prima facie)) is that there is a "deep structure" of language hardwired into us—a Universal Grammar that is biologically innate. It is this cognitive apparatus, which is deployed step-wise during childhood, that synthesizes experience for us. Natural language is but a putting-into-verbal-use of the "concepts" and syntactical structures (or, more generally, the cognitive structures) that are buried deep within our psyches and make possible experience. It is, so to speak, an 'articulating' of them. Hence, we need not explicitly have concepts in order to have distinctively human experiences; the "pure concepts of the understanding" are actually not originally "conceptual" *per se* but biological and intuitive—functions of our innate cognitive equipment.

To return to an earlier point: Kant is doubtless right that intuitions of space and time are on a different 'order', as it were, than intuitions of (the necessity of) causality and so on. They are somehow more general and perhaps more concrete. Nevertheless, I would suggest, contrary to Kant, that all such fundamental cognitive intuitions (or functions, concepts, etc.) originate in basically the same "faculty", the same underlying cognitive apparatus. Our experience of space and time is wholly, inextricably bound up with our experience of causality.

That concludes my short exposition and totally inadequate critique of the fundamental doctrines of the Transcendental Deduction. In a longer paper, of course, I might have been better able to do justice to the richness of Kant's theories.

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Curse time for denying me the opportunity to have a conversation with Kant. Such a simple, honest man, who happened to be a genius.

It gives me a perverse satisfaction to think that most twentieth-century philosophy will be increasingly ignored in the future, as the world wrestles with the gigantic problems created by late capitalism. The writings of Quine, Dennett and all those robots will be buried beneath the rubble of civilization. Lost in the conflagration, like the fire that destroyed the ancient library in Alexandria. After it's all over, not even the "philosophers" will be in the mood anymore for the microscopic logical investigations that once counted as philosophy.

This world is going to hell in a handbasket. There's no point anymore to anything (to say it again!). I wish people would accept that we're all primates, that even Plato and Kant were primates. Nothing is worth anything but compassion. If humans were as civilized as bonobos they might understand that.

Most people think of ambitiousness as a virtue. I don't. If I'm ambitious, it's only because I'm unhappy. The unambitious people are the ones I respect—the people who don't thirst for stupid fame or money, or "truth". They're happy in their own skin, they don't need the illusions that I need. Actually, as I get older I get less ambitious. I get wiser. I'm starting to think I'd be content working anonymously my whole life in some poor third-world country, if only to make conditions a *little* better. It would be good for me too, to get away from America and bureaucracy. –To live Taoism and Confucianism together, the return to nature and the social activism.

To give up the obsession with recognition is not to accept failure. It is to embrace life.

March 16

I called her [some girl], invited her to a Tchaikovsky concert tomorrow night. But she has to work (at a restaurant). On Sunday too.

Fuck I'm lonely.

Imagine if my journal gets destroyed before anyone has had a chance to read it. How absurd that would be! Were it not for my journal, my life would have been utterly pointless so far. (Like everyone else's at my age.)

Ten years of writing—philosophy, psychology, poetry, and almost everything in between—and virtually no feedback from anyone at all. If what I have written is flawed, then I alone bear the blame; if it is worthy, then I alone deserve the credit. [Not true.] –There *is* something new under the sun, Ecclesiastes!

Watched a movie (*Stranger than Fiction*)—good, except it made me fall in love with Maggie Gyllenhaal, which isn't good because I don't know her and she'll never love me back. Also it put me back into that sad mood I'd transcended with the [deleted] poem above, so now again I feel like preparing for death. (Plato is right that philosophizing means preparing for death, but he's wrong about the reasons. See the *Phaedo*. Poetry too is preparation for death, at least nowadays.)

March 17

Quotation from Francis Bacon: *Poesis doctrinae tamquam somnium. Poetry is like a dream of philosophic love*.

It's amazing how much of my life consists in sheer play. All this journal-writing, philosophy-writing (mostly), piano-playing, weight-lifting (?), all my listening to music and singing, everything I do with friends.... It's mostly in the spirit of superfluity, of freedom. Life itself is a luxury and should be treated as such.

Why do you think people sing or whistle while they work? To add an element of play. To make it their own *chosen* activity, as opposed to something compulsive. They thereby thrust themselves into their work, make it truly *their own*. People are always trying to make their environment less foreign, whether by laughing, by singing, by playing games, or by scientifically understanding it. Pleasure is usually just a symptom of having assimilated an object, i.e., of having imposed oneself on it. The need for recognition is obviously another manifestation of this "instinct for play", or for freedom and self-assertion. It is in fact the same thing.

I met another yahoo girl, to see a movie—with two male friends. It was totally bizarre. She's 24, but she's really 14.

The fact that pride necessarily eludes me is a source of my torment. I will never be pleased, say, that I've lived a rich and full life, even if I succeed in doing so, because I know that chance plays a role in everything and my own little life means nothing in the Grand Scheme. The fact that I've become a real *man*, confident and good and willing to stand up for myself and others, doesn't make me proud, because I know it results in part from lifting weights and building body-mass. What absurdity! What a silly thing is man if recognition can come from something as easy as lifting weights!

I read Karl Popper's book *The Poverty of Historicism*. It isn't terrible, but it isn't very interesting. It discusses a wide range of issues somewhat glibly. In any case, now that we're in the 21st century, its interest is purely academic.

I'm facing a distinct problem in my efforts to publicize my book: I'm starting not to care anymore. I've passed the stage of life in which I was fervently committed to that project. I don't need an all-encompassing two-volume work anymore; for some reason it doesn't strike me as important. I'll probably change my mind again in a few months, though.

I'm sure it won't get published, so here it is: (the unfinished rough draft, much of which won't be new to you)

The Humanist's Manifesto
Volume 1

Introduction

I remember a time (seems like decades ago) when I still had something like hope. I wanted to write a book that would serve as a wake-up call to the world, a book that would lay bare the absurdities and hypocrisies of our civilization. Sort of in the manner of Nietzsche. Writing it was a delight. All the invective, the glib reflections on human stupidity and conformism, the epigrams on religion and politics and women. Periodically I wrote substantive analyses of society and psychology, delved into philosophy and history, even literature. On the surface the book was a sprawling mess, but in its essence it was to be a "dialectically articulated artistic whole". Basically I was striving for greatness. I wanted to catapult myself into history by resurrecting the spirit of Marx and Nietzsche. These pusillanimous times, I told myself, demanded nothing less.

You see, for a while—when I was still very young—I was preoccupied with the thought of my genius. Or lack of it. I wasn't sure that life was worth living unless I could achieve genius. Mediocrity was the morass I was constantly clawing out of. I *had* to have potential, I just *had* to. I *did* have potential, in fact—I *was* the next [*insert famous name here*]—no, no, I *wasn't*, I was just a hack, a talentless impostor—and yet, I was obviously so *different* from everyone!—surely I had the potential to *become* a genius, at least in the public eye (for I knew even then on some level that the idea of "genius" or "greatness" is dishonest and empty)—etc. etc. I was neurotic, riddled with doubts and ambitions and self-contradictions, self-conscious to the point of doubting my self-consciousness. I saw myself as postmodernity personified, both in my personality and my beliefs. To quote my former self:

> My life consists of intellectual levitation. I have absorbed the trends of my culture and hover between conflicting worldviews. I recognize the truth in every philosophy from Marxism to psychoanalysis, from Hegelianism to poststructuralism; I recognize the value of every ethical position from Christian morality to nihilism; I have sympathies for every political doctrine from democracy to despotism. I cheer the march of science even as I fear it. I support globalization even as it horrifies me. I am a mess of contradictions.
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> My faith in the power of reason is totally anachronistic, and even contradictory with myself. I am the bastard child of a union between the Enlightenment and Existentialism—the Masculine and the Feminine.

If I start analyzing myself, though, I'll never stop, so let's just say I had a deep need to be affirmed by myself and others, and I overcompensated by trying to create in my own mind a potential myth of myself. I knew I was overcompensating even as I did it, and I knew how ridiculous my self-absorption was, but, perversely, I interpreted this knowledge as confirming the truth of my delusions: if my self-awareness was so keen as to see through itself—to diagnose itself—well then, I must indeed be pretty special! I must have some remarkable intuitive abilities! And so the very knowledge that I cherished self-delusions saved me from having to acknowledge their delusional character. I was deluded, but I wasn't.

Anyway, even back then, at the age of 19, I recognized the absurdity, the contingency, of life. Nothing was real, everything was to be doubted (even the injunction to doubt everything), everything was paradoxical, life was wonder. So I didn't take this stuff too seriously—although, of course, on another level I did. –But the point I'm making is that despite all my torments I remained enough of an idealist to think I could have an impact on society by writing a book.

Luckily I came to my senses. Books are dead. Philosophy is dead. The humanities and the social sciences are dead, at least in their purely theoretic aspect. Idealism, high culture, nobility of soul, spiritual ambitions, naïve existential wonder—they're all dead. I'm not saying they'll never live again; in fact, they definitely will, whether in the next fifty or the next five hundred years. As things are now, though, social life is too atomistic, too materialistic for anything esoteric to really matter.

You disagree? Just look at the state of contemporary literature. V. S. Naipaul, surely an authority on the subject, has said that the novel is dead. (T. S. Eliot even said it had ended with Flaubert and James.) Fiction is no longer relevant. The first thing to go was the art of narration, of telling *stories*, in the manner of Balzac, Dickens, Flaubert, Hugo, Tolstoy, James and the like. Modernism and postmodernism abandoned it as hopelessly old-fashioned, since it seemed to presuppose that life is comprehensible—even *simple*, '*linear*'—that there is such a thing as truth and authentic selfhood. "There is something inauthentic for our time", wrote Lionel Trilling in 1969, "about being held spellbound, momentarily forgetful of oneself, concerned with the fate of a person [namely, the main character of the narrative] who is not oneself but who also, by reason of the spell that is being cast, is oneself, his conduct and his destiny bearing upon the reader's own. By what right, we are now inclined to ask, does the narrator exercise authority over that other person, let alone over the reader: by what right does he arrange the confusion between the two and presume to have counsel to give?"[1] In retrospect, the modern contempt for narrative necessarily prefigured a contempt for fiction, given that the essence of fiction throughout most of history has been narrative. Ergo: fiction itself has come to seem inauthentic and somehow frivolous. Which is why serious writers write intentionally frivolous or barely readable things—writers like David Foster Wallace, who, while clearly a genius, writes *clever* books that reek of machinery and dessicated life. Philip Roth and others who still cling to a lofty vision of literature are merely relics of a more idealistic past. People just don't seem to *care* anymore. – And what about poetry? Well, when a man like Charles Bukowski is revered for writing cheap prose and breaking it up into short poetic-looking lines;—when there's no longer a difference between prose and poetry, and most professional poets are barely even on the *fringes* of cultural consciousness:—something's wrong.

Or look at the state of theory. Philosophy, psychology, sociology, economics. Far from being original or ambitious or interesting, they aren't even readable anymore! Philosophy has deteriorated into "research", in the process becoming so technical and tedious that it's a terrible bore to read. (I should know: I'm studying to become a philosopher.) Academia is an incestuous little community whose members live in a perpetual orgy of mutual intellectual masturbation; they promote each other, playfully argue against each other in their endless scholarly journals read only by themselves, and they seem oblivious to the fact that what they do has, on the whole, become irrelevant—even to the search for truth! They tend to treat it all like a game, as Schopenhauer said, a word-game, a sophisticated version of Scrabble. 'Who can use the biggest words? Who is most adept at symbolic logic? Who can cite the most authors?' The whole charade makes me think, for some reason, of the rotten limbs of a leper waiting to fall off his body. Or of decadent, diseased Venice in Thomas Mann's story "Death in Venice"—except that academics are *parodies* of Aschenbach, worshipping not beauty or youth but simply their own complacency.

The only books that seize the popular "imagination" are perfidious things written by the likes of Ann Coulter, Michael Savage, Bill O'Reilly, Byron York. (Or shallow things written by Dan Brown, John Grisham and so on.) But of course even they don't have a significant effect on the public's consciousness, since this is shaped by television—and since people read only the books that confirm them in their own prejudices. (How many Christians are going to read a book by Daniel Dennett explaining to them why they're wrong?) By the way, America has a president who prides himself on not reading newspapers. Need I say more?

In a moment of sadness once I wrote this:

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[1] Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 135. I cannot refrain from saying that this little book is remarkable. It is lucid, a pleasure to read, yet challenging—thought-provoking as few books are.

> I can't imagine that the overripeness of our culture doesn't make every esoteric project otiose. I can't fathom the relevance anymore of art and intellectual matters. Philosophy, let us admit, is in its yellow leaf; this is uncontroversial, though painful for me, given that philosophy is, was, or would have been my vocation. Psychology and the social sciences don't fare much better, given the imperative of specialization as well as the public's apathy. Literature is passing away, losing its powers to engage society's imagination and tap the vein of rebellion—or (at any rate) discontent. Music died decades ago. Even political activism founders on the rock of the System. My floundering, my depression, itself seems merely comical and narcissistic. When everything is pointless and society has reached the end of time, and whatever one does will not matter in the long run, is it not presumptuous to ascribe *weight* to oneself? Truly, I might as well follow Byron's example and give myself up to masochistic hedonism.

So then why am I writing this book? If I no longer have any illusions about the power of writing in generating social change, what's the point? Well, honestly, I'm just bored. I'm tired of endless reading, endless thinking, endless journal-writing; I'm 25 and I want my fifteen minutes of fame. It would distract me, at least, from "existential nausea" (to quote Sartre). […]

I wanted to write something that would have theoretic value. I wanted to write a defense and revision of Marxism, and to sift through psychoanalysis for insights into the human condition, and to elaborate a philosophy of language, and to explain why religions are already dead despite what Americans and other fanatics think, and why morality is philosophically meaningless, and what the methodology of the social sciences should be, and so on *ad infinitum*. I'd intended to cull my journal for such worthies as its attack on the mind-body problem and its outline of a refutation of ontology (specifically of the meaningfulness of questions about the existence of "abstract objects", such as numbers, properties, relations and propositions). Unfortunately, it is an iron law that the popularity of a book is inversely proportional to its philosophic value. So if I want to make some money off this investment I have to dumb it down. I've decided, therefore, to divide the work into two volumes, the second of which will be the philosophical and academic one. The first, on the other hand, is semi-autobiographical, in honor of our great American tradition of narcissism. This volume is my answer to Montaigne's *Essays*. […]

On academia and philosophy

On controversy.— *No being will fly whose feathers have not been ruffled.*

American culture, and increasingly global culture, comprises, arguably, more schisms than any in history. Even societies torn by civil war have not had as many schisms as ours does. Theirs have simply had more dramatic consequences. The "culture wars" that afflict America and the world—between religions, ideologies, ways of life—are merely one manifestation of late capitalism's divisive character, and not the most fundamental. Not only has every major empire suffered from culture wars of some sort; more importantly, they're an utterly predictable reaction to the international hegemony of a single country. After all, a nation's imposition of its economy and culture on the rest of the world is bound to have repercussions. The American empire is the most powerful and wide-ranging in history, so the ideological conflicts caused by its advance are naturally going to be widespread and recalcitrant. To be surprised by them, or to treat them as signs of the apocalypse, is to be myopic.

Similarly, the so-called culture wars in America, exemplified by the debates over gay marriage, stem-cell research, abortion, and evolution, are not particularly shocking or ominous. They're just another manifestation of the millennia-old conflict between tradition and progress. Fanatical Muslims fight against capitalism and equality, fanatical Christians fight against science and equality. Religion is usually

conservative, like most humans (who remain enmeshed in tradition their whole lives). Progress always triumphs, though; mere bigotry cannot indefinitely dam the flood of technological and scientific advance, nor of the social equality that tends to follow in its wake. Conservatives are always, in the long run, on the wrong side of history.

So, I'm not referring primarily to ideological schisms. I don't find them particularly disturbing or even suspenseful; I think that wise political leaders could temper their vehemence significantly. And economic evolution will, in the long run, tend to reduce cultural differences anyway.[1] My concern in this chapter is with a more fundamental kind of schism, grounded in the nature of the economy rather than the thoughtless inertia of humanity. Far from being mitigated by economic progress, it is exacerbated. In a word, I mean *atomization*. Atomization between individuals, and between professions, and between facets of the individual's psyche/personality. Such divisions are closely interrelated and mutually reinforcing, and are grounded ultimately in the economy's demands on culture (or social life).

Atomization is the real neurosis of the age, the fundamental cause of all the others. The "culture wars" are comparatively transient and unimportant; in fact, one of the unconscious functions of an individual's immersion in an ideology is precisely to escape atomization. The psyche will construct labyrinthine defenses against the loss of community, elaborate illusions to hide it from view, artificial means to restore interpersonal bonds, but "neuroses", on an individual or collective level, are always in some way a reaction against communal deprivation.

What do I mean by "atomization", "loss of community"? I'll address this question in volume two; for now I'll let the reader rely on his intuitive understanding. He has but to open his eyes to see examples of the problem. Communities all over the world are deteriorating every year; video games, television, the internet, urbanization are all causal factors. Similarly, schizoid personality disorders are increasingly common, far more so than a hundred years ago. (One has only to compare the psychoanalytic literature of both eras. Freud treated more cases of "hysteria" than schizoid-related disorders; recent psychoanalytic theorists, like R. D. Laing, Heinz Kohut, W. R. D. Fairbairn and D. W. Winnicott, have been more interested in the schizoid/schizophrenic and narcissistic personalities.[2]) As the community disintegrates, so does the self.

In this chapter, though, I want to focus on the other form of atomization I mentioned, namely professional specialization. Which generally amounts to specialization of the personality. People embark on a career, develop a few skills to machine-like perfection, and let the rest of their potential atrophy. Even in fields that would seem to lend themselves to, or even to require, a breadth of competence in their practitioners, such as political punditry or, indeed, any kind of intellectual endeavor, few people break out of the narrow mold. There is very little mingling between professions. An economist doesn't write about psychology; a poet doesn't write philosophy; a politician doesn't write at all (except puerile polemics or memoirs). People are becoming more specialized every year, less intellectually and 'spiritually' ambitious, more dehumanized.

Yes, specialization is a form of dehumanization. It is a form of the dehumanization that Karl Marx saw was a product of capitalist economic forces (with the intensification of the division of labor that they entail). For the narrower are one's activities, the less one is exploiting one's human potential, and the less one feels like a human being. A person, after all, has almost limitless potential with respect to intra- and interpersonal modes of activity. This is the glory of being human. One can spend the morning playing sports, the afternoon reading or writing, the evening conversing with one's family and friends about whatever subject is agreeable, and the early night playing the piano or reciting poetry. And the next day one can do something totally different (like, say, go to one's job). The possibilities are endless; and the

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[1] This is partly why some Muslims embrace jihad. They resent America's cultural imperialism, i.e., the erosion of traditional ideologies, and so they fight it. Ultimately they're impotent, though: nothing they can do (short of nuclear war) can stop globalization. [Needless to say, American foreign policy is the major cause of Islamist terrorism.]

[2] See also Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), pp. 34 – 43—or, indeed, the whole of chapter two. Lasch's book is so insightful that one is left resenting the author for writing a work that relegates one's own attempts at analysis to comparative sterility.

more you exploit them, the more satisfied you feel with yourself. This is just common sense. It's a shame, then, not to take advantage of living in a society that allows for more leisure time than any other in history, and is constantly allowing for more leisure time as economic productivity increases. It's a shame to conform and fall in line with everyone who lets himself be stunted by the habits of social life.

For the masses of the poor, who have to work all day in a mind-numbing job just to make ends meet, capitalism is a curse. It ruptures the communal support-system that the peasantry traditionally enjoyed and doesn't compensate that loss by permitting an all-round development of the individual. The laborer's life consists of ceaseless drudgery, thankless chores, an unremitting struggle to escape from poverty. One has but to read Barbara Ehrenreich's book *Nickel and Dimed*—or just try washing dishes in a restaurant eight hours a day—to see how appalling are the lower class's working and living conditions in even the most "civilized" of countries. These are the people on whose shoulders rest all the affluence and leisure of the privileged classes; and one cannot expect them to do anything but what they have to do to survive.

But even—or perhaps *especially*—when one's life consists of unending drudgery, a diversity in occupations is infinitely more satisfying than staying chained to a single activity. Consider these observations of a French worker in the 19th century who traveled to San Francisco during the gold rush: "I could never have believed that I was capable of working at all the trades I practiced in California. I was firmly convinced that I was fit for nothing but the printing of books.... Once I was in the midst of this world of adventurers, who change their jobs as often as their shirts, then, upon my faith, I did as the others. As mining did not pay well enough, I left it for the city, and there I became in succession a typographer, a slater, a plumber, etc. As a result of this discovery that I am fit for any sort of work, I feel less of a mollusc and more of a man."[1] No matter what one's station in life, a breadth of experience is almost always more satisfying, and ultimately more human, than narrowness.

Psychoanalysis also upholds that claim. Carl Jung's notion of "individuation" is relevant here. The individual, he thought, must become, as it were, an in-dividual: he must integrate himself, all the unconscious facets of his psyche and his latent capacities, into a coherent whole. He must realize himself, in all his potential breadth. This process is, to an extent, inevitable and involuntary as the person lives more and gets older, but by bringing it under his conscious control he can forestall neuroses and realize himself more completely and happily. Individuation is indeed, in a sense, the meaning of a person's life, of *every* person's life. It is, on the deepest level and of necessity, his main existential project, though it is never completed. No one ever fully realizes himself; his potential is too great. But some people do a better job than others—people like Goethe and Da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson, Simone de Beauvoir, even Albert Schweitzer. It is they who should be our role-models: we should adopt more or less the attitudes toward life that they adopted. (I say 'more or less' because they too were a little stunted. Athletics, for example, is as important for mental health as—if not more so than—art and thought. Mankind was meant to live mostly outside, not cooped up in a study.)

These thinkers themselves have self-consciously pursued the ideal of self-breadth. From Confucius to Montaigne to J. S. Mill, philosophers have understood its value and preached it—preached the gospel of self-cultivation, self-realization. No one expressed it better than Nietzsche in §290 of *The Gay Science*—where he put a slightly different spin on it than I have—but they've all had essentially the same idea in mind: the idea, namely, of creating and controlling oneself, of 'molding' oneself in as many directions as possible and thereby affirming one's humanity. Intuitively everyone understands the value of this ideal. It's sad, then, that few people follow it in practice.

One of the crimes of our social system is that it prevents millions of people from enjoying the freedom without which genuine self-realization is impossible. These unfortunates are like the French worker quoted above before he had come to San Francisco, when he was forced to print books day in and day out. Not only have communal bonds been shredded by the division of labor, but the individual, in being denied means for the development of his personality, has been denied the opportunity to achieve self-respect. However, even the privileged among us—the intellectuals, the successful businessmen, the white-collar workers—succumb to the dehumanizing effects of money-driven routine, thus ensuring that our self-

[1] Quoted in Karl Marx, *Capital* (London: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 618.

respect is more fragile and fickle than it has to be. In atomizing social relations, economic relations have also divided us from ourselves—from our psyche's self-imposed imperative to "Become who you are!"—with the result that we don't *deeply recognize* ourselves in our work or our relationships, or even in most of our leisure-activities. We do things just because we have to, whether to make money or to get momentary release from the daily grind. They aren't experienced as spontaneous expressions of our sense of self, as intrinsically enjoyable affirmations of who we are, which make us feel "less of a mollusc and more of a man". –We're alienated, in short, from ourselves, from our work, from the community.

In order to attain the complete self-respect or -contentment that we're always half-consciously hankering for amidst our daily frustrations, we have to experience our life-activities as freely chosen by us—as free 'objectifications' of our ideal self-perception, which is intuitive and never fully articulated. These objectifications would bolster our concrete sense of self, bringing it closer in line with how we ideally (would like to) see ourselves and our potential. But our potential—not only objectively but also as we subjectively experience it—is broad, branching out into many different spheres of inter- and intrapersonal interaction. The more we 'diversify' ourselves, then—the more directions in which we develop ourselves—the more we'll feel as if we're integrating our real, concrete self with our ideal self(-perception), and are thus "in-dividuating" ourselves (unifying ourselves). We'll come to recognize our full sense of self in the world, in our activities and in how people react to them; and the recognition (of who we ideally/concretely are) that others will show us will contribute greatly to our rich self-respect. It will, in fact, be perhaps the *foundation* of our self-respect, and as such will be an important cause of our ever-greater self-diversification (which is not only a cause, but also an effect, of deep self-esteem). More generally, though, individuation is nothing but the process of becoming profoundly well-disposed toward oneself, which, for reasons I'll go into later, requires that one be well-disposed toward others, which in turn requires that one be recognized or affirmed by them. For all these reasons, individuation can fully occur only in a fairly tightly-knit community, a community not riven by divisions, selfish competition and atomization.

As it is, though, what Marx wrote in 1844 is still true in 2007:

> ....What, then, constitutes the alienation of labor?
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> First, in the fact that labor is *external* to the worker [whether blue-collar or white-collar], that is, that it does not belong to his essential being [i.e., his sense of his ideal self]; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel well but unhappy, does not freely develop his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker, therefore, feels himself only outside his work, and feels beside himself in his work. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His work therefore is not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labor*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need, but only a *means* for satisfying needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that labor is shunned like the plague as soon as there is no physical or other compulsion. External labor, labor in which man is externalized, is labor of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Finally, the external nature of labor for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in that labor he does not belong to himself but to someone else [or to some company]. Just as in religion, the spontaneous activity of human imagination, of the human brain and the human heart, operates independently of the individual, i.e. as an alien divine or diabolical activity, so the worker's activity is not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is the loss of his self.
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> The result, therefore, is that man (the worker) feels that he is acting freely only in his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his shelter and his finery—while in his human functions he feels himself nothing more than an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.[1]

[1] *The Portable Karl Marx*, edited by Eugene Kamenka (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 136, 137. The thoughts in that passage are dramatized in many pop-cultural creations, for example in the popular show "The Office".

(If anything, this description is more universally true now than it was in Marx's time.) The unfree character of most work, which consists in its not being desired for its own sake—i.e., in its not emerging organically from an individual's "sentiment of [his] being" (in Rousseau's terminology)—causes the individual himself to feel unfree, which means that he does not experience himself as truly himself, which means that he is not in-dividuated. He feels conflicted with himself, because he is conflicted with his activities, his objectifications—which in turn is because social relations have been atomized.

I'll expand on all these thoughts in subsequent chapters, especially in the second volume. As I've said, my purpose right now is to look at a specific form of dehumanization (or atomization), namely the modern stultifying of the individual's potential breadth. This amounts to suppression of the individual himself, suppression of individuation or self-realization or self-affirmation or whatever you want to call it. Whether through direct economic coercion, as in the case of the lower classes, or through the insidious influence of economically conditioned social habits and pressures, the individual is prevented from achieving himself (so to speak). He is practically forced to specialize, both in his job and in his leisure-activities (which usually consist of watching TV or surfing the internet)—the latter because his whole way of being is saturated with a kind of self-laziness and one-sidedness. The type of social conditioning that results from (and *is*) "bureaucracy, the proliferation of images, therapeutic ideologies, the rationalization of the inner life, the cult of consumption",[1] the hectic pace of modern life, the commercialization of sex and love, the constant forging and breaking of shallow friendships, the deterioration of education, the widespread retreat into video games and television, the degradation of politics into spectacle, and the fact that all these developments (and more) have become common knowledge and are widely deplored but seem impenetrable to understanding and cannot be remedied—indeed, are intensified every year, snowballing according to their internal logic—all this conditioning churns out individuals who suffer from a certain shallowness and discontentedness. They have but a tenuous grasp of themselves, are prone to self-doubt and anxiety. They haven't the self-confidence necessary to explore different, even apparently 'conflicting', facets of their being—propelled to do so from within themselves, as it were—to spread themselves out into the world. For, as I said a moment ago, self-broadening is not only a cause of mental health; it is also an effect. It arises partially from the feeling of freedom, from the intoxication of being (at one with) oneself and one's activities (which is really what the terms 'self-confidence', 'self-esteem', 'self-respect', 'mental health', etc., in their deepest meaning, signify). A person who enjoys such a state will want to assert himself, to be *active*—not in one limited sphere but in several, as if he were 'overflowing' into the world.

If the compulsory nature of work in Marx's day was the main factor that made people feel unfree, in our own day other causes have been added: namely, such developments as those I just listed. We feel buffeted by forces beyond our control; we don't feel at home in the world. And so we don't feel at home in our own skin, since, after all, our being is defined and determined by its situation in the world (as Martin Heidegger saw). We're anxious about how others perceive us, and we're so self-conscious that we constantly worry about how we perceive ourselves. Hence all the self-help books. Our lives are fundamentally divisive; we can't decide who we really are, because our lives are too cluttered. There are too many responsibilities, too many options, too many influences from too many directions. We don't have time, as it were, or stability enough, to lay out an abiding foundation for our identity, on the basis of which we could act in the world in a basically (self-)affirmative way, by aggressively exploiting our potential in ways that might even appear to be (superficially) contradictory. That's the paradox of self-realization: if it is undertaken on the basis of some sort of durable, intuitive sense of self, no amount of apparent conflict between the ways in which we realize ourselves can cause identity-crises. We can be athletes, poets, musicians, activists, parents, lovers, without ever wondering what our 'true' identity consists in. If, on the other hand, our psyche has not had an opportunity during its youth to construct a durable sense of itself—due to constant social conflicts, responsibilities, all the distractions in which contemporary life consists—then sometimes we can't even have a single job and a single child without feeling torn apart by conflicting loyalties and identities. Far from being able to luxuriate in multifarious self-molding, we can barely do what

[1] Lasch, op. cit., p. 32.

survival dictates without succumbing to neuroses or psychoses. We just go to work, pay the bills and then watch TV, grateful for a respite from ourselves and the dissatisfaction we hide behind our masks.

A certain kind of person has managed to cope by making a virtue of necessity: he embraces the modern person's insecurity, his obsession with how he is perceived by others and his consequent lack of an authentic self (i.e., of a firm sense of himself), by attuning his whole being to "the signals sent out by the consensus of his fellows and by the institutional agencies of the culture, to the extent that he is scarcely a self at all, but, rather, a reiterated impersonation".[1] In *The Lonely Crowd*, David Riesman called this kind of person "other-directed", contrasting him with the "inner-directed" person. "What is common to all the other-directed people is that their contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual.... This source is of course 'internalized' in the sense that dependence on it for guidance in life is implanted early. The goals toward which the other-directed person strives shift with that guidance: it is only the process of striving itself and the process of paying close attention to the signals from others that remain unaltered throughout life."[2] For whatever reason, this kind of person is able to adapt to the schizophrenic conditions of modern life less painfully than other people are, though he too lacks a secure sense of himself—i.e., a palpable "sentiment of being", of being himself in and through all his activities, of being fundamentally free on account of his sense that his acts are his own. Indeed, "one prime psychological lever of the other-directed person is a diffuse *anxiety*".[3] That he is able to make some constructive use of his anxiety does nothing to refute the fact that he has not attained authentic selfhood, which always has an element of inner-direction. Thus, far from being (able to be) well-rounded—which he often seems to be—this person doesn't even know who or what he is, and is therefore fundamentally alienated from himself.

It's time I ended this preliminary discussion, since it is a mere prelude (hardly even *that*) to the sequel of this book. I'll make only one more observation, or rather a response to a possible objection. I can imagine a postmodernist intellectual shouting at me, "You keep talking about self-realization, individuation, authentic selfhood and whatnot, but it doesn't even occur to you that the self is a fiction! There is no entity called the 'self' behind appearances!" This objection is confused, like all postmodernism, but it obscurely grasps a truth. The injunction to "Be true to yourself!" is misguided, for it postulates a dualism: it assumes that there is a specific self to be true to, a self that is somehow buried within each person and just requires a little coaxing to show itself. There is no such thing, no 'already-given' self. Nietzsche's "Become who you are!" is better—as is his statement that "Your true nature lies, not concealed deep within you, but immeasurably high above you, or at least above that which you usually take yourself to be". These maxims, rather than encouraging you to navel-gaze ("Who am I *really*? Am I being true to myself right now? If I could only introspect deeply enough, I would know who I really am!"), encourage you to fix your gaze on something outside you—on the world, on your activities, on your freedom to throw yourself into life. One can realize one's potential in many ways. Authentic selfhood is not a matter of acting in a way that accords with some sort of deeper, truer self; it is, rather, defined by an attitude one takes toward oneself and the world. This attitude isn't chosen; it spontaneously emerges in the course of a healthy life. It is opposed to what Trilling, following Hegel, calls the disintegrated consciousness—the anxiety-ridden, self-doubting, self-contradictory, overly self-conscious consciousness, the alienated consciousness. The consciousness, in short, of modern man, who is what he is not and is not what he is (to quote Sartre). The "authentic self" is such not by being true to itself but by being well-disposed toward itself, by being one with itself and its objectifications.[4] –Questions surrounding the concept of authenticity have fascinated such diverse thinkers as Rousseau, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Sartre, and a number of poets, and I cannot settle them in one paragraph, but suffice it to say, for now, that the truly 'authentic' self is integrated with itself and the world, is far along on the path of individuation, recognizes itself in its environment, has the capacity to exploit all its potential, and feels free in everything it does—approaches life in the spirit of

[1] Trilling, op. cit., p. 66.
[2] David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1953), p. 37.
[3] Ibid., p. 41. Riesman's italics.
[4] There are in fact several kinds of authentic selfhood, primitive and sophisticated kinds, which I'll discuss later.

play, of spontaneity. The most 'authentic' person is he for whom questions about authenticity don't even exist, being totally superfluous and unconsciously understood as basically meaningless (especially for him).

Having tantalized you with these thoughts on selfhood, I'm going to proceed to the main topic of this chapter, namely 'Academia as a Case-Study in Stuntedness'. I choose academia as my target for two reasons: I'm intimately acquainted with it, and its framework is such that the people who spend their lives in it have more opportunities than anyone else in society to realize themselves in all their potential. Especially their intellectual potential. And yet they usually don't: they tend to be somewhat unambitious, intellectually and spiritually stunted. They are über-specialized and complacent. Their attitude toward intellectual matters is not entirely healthy, I think. They are at the same time not serious enough about such matters and too serious: on the one hand, they seem to have lost the desire to really understand the world, choosing instead to write masses of technical papers *[I was thinking of philosophers]* in an effort to build up their curriculum vita; on the other hand, they approach their professions in the spirit of drudgery, as if writing articles is a necessary chore, a necessary part of the academic game. There is no spirit of play[1] or spontaneity in any of their writings; they just write and write, like automatons, because it's something they have to do to rise in the academic world. Ironically, they themselves are often the first to admit it is all a meaningless "game"; yet they continue to go along with it. Of course, if they don't, they might not be promoted, or they might lose their jobs.

The ancient quest for truth has suffered a rather ignominious demise, at least temporarily. Consider any of the postmodernist texts that proliferate in academia. Like Kenneth Gergen's book *The Saturated Self*, which, when it was published in the 1990s, was heralded as a godsend by philosophical nihilists everywhere.

> ....Most of the cherished beliefs that undergird the traditional goals of research and teaching are in eclipse. Some consider the demise of the traditional assumptions to be an event little short of catastrophe; to part with the longstanding ideals of truth and understanding is to invite chaos, first in the academic world and then in society more generally. Others feel an innervating sense that history is at a turning point, that a new and exciting era is in the making.
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> ....The crisis in the academy about beliefs in objective knowledge has profound implications for beliefs about the self.... In large measure[,] [traditional beliefs about the self] derive their credibility from the assumption that they are objectively true. But....there is ample reason to doubt such claims in the case of human personality. The present crisis in the academy presses the argument to its radical extreme. We are not dealing here with doubts regarding claims about the truth of human character, but with the full-scale abandonment of the concept of objective truth. The argument is not that our descriptions of the self are objectively shaky, but that the very attempt to render accurate understanding is itself bankrupt. And if objective accounts of human personality are beyond possibility, then why continue the search for human essence? Whatever we are is beyond telling.[2]

Gergen's book is not only among the silliest I've ever read but is "saturated" with self-contradictions. Its continued popularity testifies to widespread intellectual despair. As does the popularity of Jean-François Lyotard's version of postmodernism:

> "How do you prove the proof?" or, more generally, "Who decides the conditions of truth?" It is recognized that the conditions of truth, in other words, the rules of the game of science, are immanent in that game, that they can only be established within the bounds of a debate

[1] By that term I'm not referring, e.g., to the undignified cutesiness of a Daniel Dennett.
[2] Kenneth Gergen, *The Saturated Self* (New York: Basic Books 1991), p. 82.

> that is already scientific in nature, and that there is no other proof that the rules are good than the consensus extended to them by the experts.[1]

Most Anglo-American philosophers recognize that Lyotard's famous book, and postmodernism in general, displays an impressive lack of intellectual integrity. (I explain that remark in the appendix.) Analytic philosophers usually still believe in such quaint notions as truth, intellectual rigor, deductive reasoning and standards of rationality, and recognize logical fallacies when they see them.[2] Indeed, they are fanatically committed to logical rigor—which is, in a sense, precisely the problem. For their commitment is so obsessive that it manifests itself in an exclusive concern with scholarly minutiae, mind-boggling technicalities, preciseness for the sake of preciseness.[3] While their substantive positions are not as idiotic as the postmodernist's....one is hard-pressed to *find* their substantive positions. When they exist, they're often hidden beneath a lot of verbiage. The point is no longer to find the truth about the self, or the mind-body problem, or ontological confusions, or—in the sphere of social science—the causes of a given historical event, or the workings of the economy; the point is to debate endlessly about methodology, or about what past thinkers really thought, or about the proper definition of a concept, and in general to indulge in mere intellectual exercises. Few people are confident enough anymore to attack substantive questions head-on, and few are presumptuous enough to think their work will have lasting influence. Effectively, therefore, even academics[4] with intellectual integrity don't believe in real 'truth', since they don't act on that belief.

"But the world is so *complicated* these days!" I hear someone shout at me. "There are so many theories, so many things to sort out! To get clear on the kind of 'substantive truth' you're talking about is too hard!" First of all, 'hard' doesn't mean 'impossible'. No doubt it is exceedingly difficult to attain even a passable understanding of something like the self; it is not impossible, though. There *are* truths.[5] The successes of natural science have demonstrated this, at least beyond a reasonable doubt. How else could scientists act on the world—make correct predictions, etc.—if not by having understood it in some way or other? How else could the application of psychological theories result in the restoration of an individual's self-esteem if it weren't that the theories manifested some insight into the way the psyche *really works*? Or will it be denied there is such a thing as the 'psyche in itself'? It *will*, by many anti-realists. Such people oppose representationalism, or the correspondence theory of truth, with neo-idealist arguments like 'Reality is socially constructed'—thus, incidentally, confirming (some version of) the correspondence theory of truth. For their own theory is intended to portray 'reality' in propositional form, namely the 'reality' that there is no world-in-itself, no reality independent of interpretation. Any denial of truth is self-refuting in this way, not to mention contrary to common sense (which upholds the existence of facts, or states of affairs, whose truth doesn't depend on whether people are aware of them as facts). Philosophical truths are admittedly not as purely 'representational' or 'referential' as natural-scientific truths, in that they don't refer to (i.e., portray) physical states of affairs, but they too are explications of the world that can be evaluated on the basis of cross-cultural standards of reason.

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[1] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), p. 29. The pernicious influence of Wittgenstein is evident in that quotation.

[2] For example, the main argument running through Gergen's book can be stated as follows: people are confused nowadays; therefore, there is no such thing as truth.

[3] Herbert Marcuse already remarked on that over-preciseness in *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). Criticizing the Austinian style of linguistic analysis, he asks (rhetorically) "Are exactness and clarity ends in themselves, or are they committed to other ends?" (p. 176). But compared to *contemporary* philosophers of language, who can spend dozens of pages writing about nothing, Austin was practically an avatar of ambitiousness. Incidentally, later I'll try to explain the irony that despite the contemporary philosopher's obsessive concern with logical analysis, his positions, such as they are, are frequently muddled and superficial.

[4] I mean people in the 'soft sciences', not the natural sciences.

[5] I'm talking about truths beyond facts like 'George Bush is the president of the United States (unless I've simply been having a nightmare for the last seven years)'. Presumably not even postmodernists would deny that fact. (But this already shows that there are 'objective truths' of some elementary kind.)

I'm not going to delve deeply into questions about the nature of truth right now. My point is only that the goal of understanding truth is implicit in all theorizing, even that which denies truth, and that there is at least potentially a 'best interpretation' with regard to any object of analysis. The possibility of one is implicit in the fact that we can rank opinions in terms of rational justifiability. For example, the belief that the global economy is kept in motion by millions of fairies who sprinkle pixie-dust on money is less justified than the belief that international exchange-rates have a lot to do with it. The second interpretation is better than the first, which means that it's possible for interpretations to be ranked according to their justifiability, which means there is *potentially* a best interpretation of economic functioning. Doubtless we'll never realize this ideal interpretation, this 'truth', in practice, since there are too many variables that come into play, but we can approximate it. And we can approximate it to ever-greater degrees. –Unless, of course, we lack the will to truth.

[…] If academics really cared about truth they would take an interdisciplinary perspective on things, to see how they all fit together. The philosophy of language bears on epistemology; psychology is relevant to sociology; anthropology can contribute to the philosophy of history. Everyone knows this, but almost no one acts on it.

Admittedly, the situation isn't really anyone's fault. Ultimately, systemic factors are responsible for it. It's impossible to untangle all the specific causes—there are too many of them, and social science rarely has recourse to the reliable methods of natural science[1]—but their general outlines are intuitively obvious. As scientific technologies and the global economy have grown in complexity, greater specialization between industries and between jobs in a given industry has been necessary. This has led to greater economic productivity,[2] which has stimulated the growth of industry and thereby intensified the division of labor, in a self-reinforcing cycle. Contemporaneous with these developments has been an intensification in the division of labor between the ideological (academic) professions, for the changing material conditions have led to a correspondingly more intricate and nuanced understanding of the world. –This is just elementary Marxism. As social relations have grown more complex and interdependent, so have relations between ideas. At the same time, there has been a growth in population, a migration to the cities, an extension of university education to more and more people, and thus an expansion of the university. All this has meant more specialization between disciplines and more competition between practitioners of these disciplines (competition for jobs, for prestige, etc.). To 'get ahead', academics have to compete, and they have to compete according to the rules of the system, one of which is ever-greater specialization—until the system has finally reached the point where an economist, for example, can lament that

> Economics has....become so broad and so complicated that, within the fields, one group of specialists barely speaks the same language as the Ph.D.s across the hall. And so much of what is published seems more to proselytize for an ideology than to make sense of the chaotic world.... It's no wonder that a single economic development can be interpreted as a godsend or a disaster, depending on the interpreter's frame of reference.[3]

And yet, from the scholar's perspective, by 'specializing' he is just being intellectually honest and thorough. For each subfield in each discipline is so complicated that he has to be extraordinarily cautious and subtle in his reasoning, and he can't be too ambitious because his colleagues will invariably find a way to

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[1] For example, experimentation and the formulation of general laws. The basic reason for this deficiency in social science is that its subject-matter—namely, society and its interactions with the human psyche—is not purely deterministic, as is the subject-matter of the natural sciences (quantum mechanics notwithstanding). The psyche somehow 'softens' causality, such that *laws*, testable through experiments, cannot accurately describe it.

[2] From Adam Smith's day (and even before then) it has been known that "the division of labor, so far as it can be introduced, occasions, in every art, a proportionable increase of the productive powers of labor [i.e., productivity]". See *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 13.

[3] Quoted in Gergen, op. cit., p. 83.

contradict him. The more ambitious he is, the more opportunities there are to find weaknesses in his arguments. Unless he is already famous, people will probably treat his ambitiousness as naïve. So the best, and apparently most 'disciplined', thing to do is for him to write narrow papers and gradually build up an extensive CV, at the same time contributing to the evolution of knowledge 'in his own small way', through his relatively unambitious but respectable (closely reasoned) articles.

In light of all this, where is the academy headed? Well, clearly the process I just outlined will continue. No end is in sight. The global economy is growing every year; universities are still expanding, hiring more professors and more *specialized* professors all the time. And scholars, virtually of necessity, continue to do what the system asks of them, so that they can feed their families and hopefully get recognition. It seems like nothing can stop this evolution except some kind of economic or military catastrophe, such as a nuclear war…

There may be other, happier possibilities, but I'm not competent to speculate. What is certain is that the university-system as it exists now in America will straggle on for at least a few more decades, as our society straggles on. Costs will continue to rise, the quality of education will continue to decline, and the 'research' that is pumped out annually will become more and more repetitive, tedious, technical, and 'careful'.

The professional demands of academic life, together with the complexity of the subject-matter, are not the only causes. The cynicism, the discontentedness, that wafts through the cultural milieu, or rather *saturates* it, such that even the inert matter of an office-building or a university's student-center is soaked in it, is also a factor. I mentioned this discontentedness earlier, in a slightly different context. Professors are no more immune to it than the average blue-collar or white-collar worker. All the impersonal vastness of the contemporary social world, which, by means of newspapers, television, constant financial imperatives and so on, confronts the individual as an impenetrable objective force—as a kind of malicious Other that is unaware of his existence but nevertheless bombards him daily with its inhuman demands, its sensory overload, its frenetic movement, its pervasive cruelty and senselessness—all this external compulsion and insensitivity, which makes each of us acutely aware of the littleness of his life and turns him into an insecure yet self-defensively egomaniacal little narcissist, pushes us into a strangely dissatisfied self-complacency. We're so unhappy and dehumanized that we finally settle into our imposed routines without much resistance—resignedly, as it were—content to do what we all but *have* to do, yet at the same time not content with that at all. And so we passively embrace the one-sidedness, the alienation, of modern life, since there seems to be no other option—and since, at any rate, the nature of modern life has sapped our vitality. The result, in much of academia, is disregard for the very goal of all analysis, namely understanding the world. And if people went into academia with the bright attitude of the disinterested truth-seeker, they emerge from it disabused of idealism—including self-idealism. For, far from attaining their intellectual ends, they have had to play the game of petty scholarship. And they have ended up not realizing all their talents, or their desires.

Maybe you'll say that if most academics don't make more of themselves, it's because they don't have much talent to begin with. To some limited extent, you may be right. Hegel was on to something when he said "the inner is the outer". José Ortega y Gasset, that old warrior on behalf of all that is good in man, would have subscribed to this interpretation, judging by the following passage:

> For me, then, nobility is synonymous with a life of effort, ever set on excelling oneself, in passing beyond what one is to what one sets up as a duty and an obligation. In this way the noble life stands opposed to the common or inert life, which reclines statically upon itself, condemned to perpetual immobility, unless an external force compels it to come out of itself. Hence we apply the term mass to this kind of man—not so much because of his multitude as because of his inertia.
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> As one advances in life, one realizes more and more that the majority of men—and of women—are incapable of any other effort than that strictly imposed on them as a reaction to external compulsion. And for that reason, the few individuals we have come across who are capable of a spontaneous and joyous effort stand out isolated,

> monumentalised, so to speak, in our experience. These are the select men, the nobles, the only ones who are active and not merely reactive, for whom life is a perpetual striving, an incessant course of training…[1]

Ortega would say that most academicians live common, inert lives, condemned to immobility. So would Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and many others. These thinkers were contemptuous of the "scholar"—and even more so of the "mass man"—for his apparent lack of talent and existential ambition. They thought it was in his nature to be self-satisfied (in the bad sense), lazy.

I cannot agree with such opinions, fun as they are. They're unscientific. Too easy. And too self-congratulatory on the part of the person who opposes himself to the academy, and to the masses…

Schopenhauer wasn't completely justified in all the scorn he heaped on "philosophasters". Many of them, of course, are extremely intelligent, very dedicated to their craft, dedicated to intellectual integrity and the search for knowledge. They simply go about it in the wrong way, in an overly specialized way. It may be true that the academic system as a whole demands specialization and conformism; still, *individuals* can break out of the mold. Individuals can fight against stuntedness, can work passionately to synthesize disparate spheres of analysis and at the same time facets of their mind. And the more people do it, the more people will follow them, perhaps eventually bringing about a far-reaching change in the decadent world that is academia. [Ha! A remarkably naïve opinion.]

On the other hand, as I said above, anyone who experiments with breadth and ambitiousness in his work will probably be quickly cut down to size by his colleagues. Or he'll be ignored. Thinkers—at least, the only ones worthy of the name—have become fond of razor-sharp preciseness, such that if a Hegel, a Kant, a Sartre, or a Nietzsche were to exist in this day, his work would be torn to shreds. In that respect, ours isn't a good age for a thinker. One can't make much progress without confronting a wall of analytical objections. But does this mean that no one should even *try*?—that no one should try to synthesize, or to be intellectually daring and experimental? I don't think so. Even if his effort is bound not to be completely successful, it might be illuminating in some respects. It might illuminate hitherto-unnoticed connections between areas of knowledge, thus contributing to the evolution of truth. In any case, the example would be useful as, if nothing else, a corrective to contemporary specialization.

–In the end, though, not much can be done by individuals to remedy the 'academic epidemic'. The system's logic is inexorable, and people are currently too complacent anyway. It's a pity, because these intelligent people have a lot to offer the world. Even apart from the pursuit of knowledge. They could, for instance, contribute also to the pursuit of justice. They could focus their energies on exposing the crimes of the government (à la Noam Chomsky), or they could work together for social change. Chomsky is right that intellectuals, with all their freedom, their financial security, their intelligence and access to resources, have a moral obligation to advance the banner of humanity. One needn't argue for that claim; it's pure common sense. Intellectuals can and should be at the vanguard of progress. They should band together and launch assaults on the kind of idiocy that, say, opposes stem-cell research and gay marriage; they should aggressively advocate for renewable energy, for political transparency, for human rights. Above all, they should use their resources to counteract the propaganda of the mainstream media…

Continental philosophers like Sartre and Herbert Marcuse used to deplore the analytic philosopher's lack of social engagement. This analytic, Anglo-American philosopher himself tended to be less politically engaged than his continental counterpart, but even his theorizing was divorced from material conditions and concrete applications. It was, so to speak, a flight from reality, from commitment to any social agenda, from even the attempt to understand philosophy's relation to social conditions. Nothing was more foreign to the spirit of this philosophy than the Hegelian and Marxian sentiment that "the world of immediate experience—the world in which we find ourselves living—must be comprehended, transformed, even subverted in order to become that which it really is".[2] The order of the day was to separate philosophy's domain from that of other disciplines (psychology, sociology, etc.), to reduce its sphere of influence—

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[1] Ortega, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1957), p. 65.
[2] Marcuse, op. cit., p. 123.

(Wittgenstein, for example, proclaimed loudly and repeatedly that philosophy "leaves everything as it is", that its purpose is only to "show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" so that it can go on living its life not vexed by philosophical questions)—to reduce it to a mere sustained analysis of language, in the hope that such an analysis would dissolve all philosophical questions (which were supposed by many to be unanswerable, to be pseudo-questions arising from confusions in language). These analytic thinkers (e.g., in the '40s and '50s) wanted to 'purify' philosophy, to remold it in the image of symbolic logic, or at least of close, careful reasoning about elementary linguistic utterances. The logical positivists of the '30s even went so far as to deny the meaningfulness of statements in metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics, as being "unverifiable". (A statement, they thought, is meaningful if and only if it is verifiable.) In a way, their project was similar to Edmund Husserl's: both programs—the analytic and the phenomenological—were 'foundational', in the sense that they wanted to 'get back to basics' and build philosophy up from the ground (or knock it down, as the case might be).

But Husserl's method was very different from theirs, and in the end, I think, more fruitful. It was (is) in fact similar to the method of all great philosophy as such, namely that of intuition. It is intuition taken to an extreme, raised to the status of a self-conscious method.[1] Of course, in his attempt to make phenomenology scientific, Husserl formulated many doctrines that were not explicitly held by earlier philosophers; nevertheless, virtually all "great" philosophers would have respected the intuitive core of phenomenology, since their own ideas have been arrived at primarily through intuition (though not necessarily phenomenological *introspection*) and their analyses have tended to proceed along intuitive lines (embellished discursively). Thinkers as diverse as Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, James, Bergson, Heidegger, Poincaré, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Kripke—and many others—have explicitly relied on intuition in their investigations. Analytic philosophy, however, distrusts intuition, as being too 'private', 'subjective', and 'obscure'.

It's difficult to say what it is about intuition that makes it so fruitful and essential to philosophy—indeed, to all critical thought—but the point is that it somehow seems to permit an approximation of 'direct insights' into a phenomenon. It is sort of a bypassing of logical processes, or rather of such processes on the *conscious* level (for they must occur unconsciously[2])—a cutting-through them and getting to the 'thing itself'. The insights that are thus made possible are not always wholly true or adequate—they may be one-sided—but the fact remains that great philosophy is merely a discursive elaboration on, and embellishment of, fruitful intuitions. And these pithy intuitions animate all the great philosophers' writings. One has but to read them to recognize the truth of that claim. (Kant's writings are a good example.) It is odd, then, that analytic philosophers are usually contemptuous of 'intuition'. They treat it as some sort of mystical, unscientific notion that has no place in real philosophy, when in fact it is the very heart and soul of real philosophy. Ironically, I can use one of their own against them: Saul Kripke, a universally acknowledged genius. In both his *Naming and Necessity* and his *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, he states more than once that the whole force of his argument is intuitive, and that unless the intuition is grasped the argument will not be understood. Schopenhauer had said the same thing more than a century earlier. Without the preliminary, pithy intuitions, philosophy would be an empty husk, an endless flow of empty discursion.[3]

As I said, one of the goals of analytic philosophy used to be the somewhat masochistic one of making philosophy self-contemptuous—that is, of turning it into a mere instrument of "therapy", which

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[1] "[Phenomenology's] essential way of proceeding is by intuition." Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1957), p. 35. The precise definition of intuition has always been controversial, but these remarks will suffice for now: an intuition "is an act of consciousness by which the object of investigation is *confronted*, rather than merely indicated *in absentia*. Thus, it is one thing merely to indicate the Eiffel Tower (merely 'to have it in mind', we say), and another thing to confront the indicated object by an act of imagination or perception. The indicative act is 'empty'; the intuitive act of imagination or perception is 'filled out'." Ibid., p. 110.

[2] See chapter three.

[3] Cf. Kant's epigram: "Concepts without intuitions are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind." His understanding of 'intuition' was different from mine, but the quotation aptly expresses my own views.

would allow us poor bedeviled intellectuals to calm our roving minds so that we could get on with ordinary life. Philosophy was conceived as (arising out of) sheer confusion. Said Wittgenstein: "A philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about'". Also: "Philosophy only states what everyone admits".[1] It cannot contribute positively to life, it cannot help right wrongs, it has nothing to say about anything that really matters to people. Alternatively, some philosophers imagined that their task, in the modern age, was simply to adjudicate disputes between the disciplines, to clarify which explananda came within the purview of which discipline, and to clarify the epistemological relations between the sciences. Philosophy's task, then, was primarily methodological. It could perhaps settle, for example, the sociological debate between methodological individualism and holism, and it could set up models of how the sciences work, but it couldn't say anything about *substantive* questions. –Here again, philosophy was aloof not only from all social activism but even from any substantive question about society and humanity.

To read about the history of philosophy in the twentieth century is like reading about the identity-crises of a schizoid person. In this modern, technical age, philosophy has had a hard time finding its niche. In America it has often debigrated itself vis-à-vis the 'hard' sciences, while in Europe it used to ignore the sciences and concern itself with the human condition, the condition of the 'spirit'. In recent times, its self-skepticism has mutated into a particularly virulent strain, in Rortyan relativism. Academic philosophy is no longer as tormented as it once was about its place relative to other disciplines, but this is largely because it no longer has any sort of a 'united front', no clear agenda or direction of progress. It is floundering, flailing its arms about everywhere, perhaps as a signal for help. Everyone is doing his own thing, in his own little area with his own little clique of interested colleagues. Far from philosophy's having become more self-confident, more ambitious, since the days of logical positivism and Wittgensteinian ordinary-language-analysis, it has become so atomized, technical and isolated from the world (from life) that people outside the academic bubble are hardly even aware there was once something called "philosophy".

Not only is it specialized, though; it has also become more superficial than it used to be, despite—or because of—its greater logical rigor. This development is the logical conclusion of the discursive methods of analytic philosophy, which have come to dominate the scene. Formalization was always a fetish of thinkers like Bertrand Russell; they wanted to bring formal logic, symbolic logic, or at least obsessive exactitude, into all areas of philosophy, in the hope that this would make them more objective and precise. It may possibly have made them more precise, but I doubt it made them more objective. In any case, the more one emphasizes form, the less one emphasizes content. The result has been that writers pay more attention to the discursive surface of an argument than to its intuitive content. Symbolism is used all the time—x, y, z and so on ("Necessarily, x is part of y at t iff x and y each exist at t, and x's temporal part at t is part of y's temporal part at t"[2])—because this makes arguments look more mathematically precise; arguments that have already been stated clearly are restated in the jargon of symbolic logic, for no apparent reason other than to exclude non-specialists; unnecessarily abstruse terminology is used, again to prove one's credentials (to prove that one is 'part of the gang'); the writer cites a large number of articles in his paper, to show he is aware of the literature; arguments are evaluated on the basis of their *consistency* rather than their plausibility. This last trend is the worst, for it leads to real shallowness. Often the reader loses a sense of what is being argued about, of what precisely is at stake, because the writer rarely keeps the discussion on the level of easily grasped, intuitive concreteness. I have actually listened to my professors and fellow students debate for hours about metaphysical issues, such as the presentism/eternalism debate or the perdurantism/endurantism debate (see below), even as they obviously had no concrete idea of what was being talked about—precisely because the debates themselves are fairly empty, excessively abstract. Which is because the concepts are not backed up by intuitions. All that matters is consistency, not intuitive plausibility or real *understanding*. The exclusive concern with consistency leads philosophers to take seriously positions that are positively perverse, positions that anyone with a shred of common sense would laugh at.

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[1] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §123 and §599.

[2] That's a simple example, from Ted Sider's paper "Four Dimensionalism".

For example, David Lewis's famous theory of modal realism, proposed decades ago, is still debated, despite its absurdity. For the benefit of those readers who have not had to endure a course in contemporary metaphysics, I'll briefly describe it. It was proposed as a solution to the question of how modal claims can be true or false. For instance, what is it that determines the truth of the statement "It's possible that there is extraterrestrial life", or "A square circle necessarily doesn't exist", or "I will probably not go to class tomorrow"? Given that modal statements (i.e., statements involving the concepts of possibility and necessity) can be true or false, what is it that determines their truth or falsity? *Intuitively* we usually have no problem judging their truth-values, but intuition, in and of itself, is not a very rigorous method. Moreover, *what does it mean* to say that a certain thing is possible (or necessary, or impossible)? What exactly is being said? Various theories have been offered, but David Lewis's is the most famous. Its basic idea is that for every true modal proposition, there is a world somewhere—a *real* world, a concrete world like our own, which is, however, spatiotemporally unconnected to our universe—in which the state of affairs that the proposition posits actually does exist. And that world is exactly like ours except for the one difference posited by the proposition. So if I say, "It was possible for me not to have been born", that proposition is true because there is a world somewhere in which I do not exist. Similarly, the statement "I will possibly become a novelist" is true because in some world I *will* in fact become a novelist. –"But how," you ask, "can *you* become a novelist in *another* world if you're here in *this* world right now?" Good question. Evidently Lewis's theory is also committed to the idea that we have 'counterparts' in other worlds—in fact, an infinite number of them (for there is an infinite number of possible states of affairs, and thus worlds). That is, the only reason why the concept of possibility can be used to describe my situation is that there literally are other Chris Wrights on other planets spatiotemporally unconnected to our universe. Billions of them, trillions of them. And the *meaning* of modal claims about me is related to my counterparts. "I may become a novelist" means (roughly) "I have a counterpart in a possible world who will become a novelist [or who is a novelist]".

You're right that this is all pure fantasy, concocted by nerds. Unfortunately it isn't treated as fantasy by these nerds. They actually take it seriously. The arguments that David Lewis brought against alternative theories of modality were powerful, so his colleagues have felt compelled to come to terms with his own ideas. And they devote *books* to this Lewisian drivel! They cannot see that if they are apparently forced to take his theory seriously as a way to account for modal truths, there must be some gigantic, foundational flaw in their method of philosophizing.

And of course there is: they are too fond of formalization, and of mathematical preciseness. Lewis's theory is useful in various technical ways relating to modal logic and possible-worlds semantics. Even better: it seems internally consistent. Most philosophers don't agree with it, since it's wildly implausible, but they take it seriously. What they *should* do, I think, is to 'explain away' all questions that permit of answers as silly as Lewis's. I'll clarify what I mean by 'explain away' in a minute.

Not only are philosophers preoccupied with formalization at the expense of content and intuitive understanding; they also have a love of classification, of labels of all kinds. Indeed, they have internalized their society's and their profession's atomized structure so completely that they delight in setting up conceptual divisions for their own sake. This has been a characteristic of analytic philosophy almost since its inception. (I say 'almost' because its founder, Gottlob Frege, was a pioneering genius with that rarest of traits among philosophers: intellectual common sense. His thinking was more intuitive than discursive, so it was sensible and fruitful.) One could perhaps argue that this delight in labels has been a characteristic of *philosophy* since its inception, and hence is not merely a modern trait. That may be true. Even so, contemporary philosophers have raised it to a new level. Their sophistries, their labyrinths of casuistry, benumb the mind. I said a moment ago that philosophers now are no longer as concerned as they once were to clarify, for example, the differences between philosophy and psychology, and between psychology and sociology, etc. This could be seen as a positive development. Unfortunately, there are many, many other ways in which one can manifest one's love of labeling. In whatever subfield of philosophy you research, you'll find that most writers care more about differentiating opposing positions than actually finding the truth.

For instance, there is currently a debate in metaphysics over the question of how it's possible for an object to persist through time—i.e., to undergo changes while remaining the same object. In what sense does it remain the same and in what sense does it change? A candle melts but it remains the same candle, even as it somehow changes as well. How can this phenomenon be explained? The dominant positions are "perdurantism" and "endurantism". The perdurantist thinks that the candle is temporally extended: it is actually 'its' entire lifespan; it has temporal parts just as it has spatial parts. So the answer to the question is that modifications can occur in its temporal parts, as they can in its spatial parts, while the candle itself persists (or "perdures"). The endurantist, on the other hand, thinks that the candle is wholly present in each moment. It doesn't have temporal parts. It is able to change in that its properties, like the candle itself, exist only *at specific times*. Rather than being, say, red *simpliciter*, the candle is red *relative* to a particular time. In other words, there is no such thing as being red; there is only being *red at* (a particular time).[1] –Now, in their preoccupation with drawing distinctions between these positions, writers have failed to see that both perdurantism and endurantism don't really answer the main question. It's unenlightening to say (with the perdurantist) that, "strictly speaking, an object is its past, present and future; each temporal stage is just a part of it—and so, while there can be differences between its temporal stages, it itself remains the same object". What verbal legerdemain! It says nothing. The real question is what it is that connects the object's instantaneous temporal slivers with each other, such that in their aggregate they form one persisting object. Nobody, as far as I can see, has given an answer. Instead, everyone has focused on how to differentiate the two positions, thereby remaining on the level of sophistry.

This example illustrates something else too: the triviality of the questions that occupy many philosophers. A few of these questions are interesting enough to ponder for short periods of time, perhaps even to write a paper or two on, but to spend years of one's life wondering how the candle can stay the same candle from t to t´ borders on insanity. It strikes me as a kind of masochism. In any case, this sort of philosophy is not an active, passionate search for truth; it is a quibbling, a kind of pettiness. Far from elevating one's outlook on life, which philosophy should always do, it narrows, stultifies the mind, and stunts the personality. –With regard to problems like these, the philosopher should take Nietzsche's advice: "treat them as a cold bath—quick in, quick out".

My conception of philosophy is quite different from the popular one. I should note, though, that it represents only my personal opinion, and that I don't think it is necessarily the 'correct' one. Philosophy is an unusually broad and indefinable discipline, which is why philosophers so often agonize over its proper place in relation to the other sciences and humanities. Of no other discipline could so many irreconcilable definitions be offered; only philosophy is amorphous enough to persist through millennia, changing with the times. Therefore, no definition is 'absolute'. However, I prefer to look at philosophy in a certain way, because it strikes me as a 'lofty' conception that does justice to the richness of the philosophical tradition.

First of all—to repeat—I think the method of *intuition* is essential to real philosophy. I like Heraclitus's advice: "It is wise to listen not to my words but to the Logos". He understood that words, in themselves, are deceptive, shallow. On the level of words, his own philosophy seems utterly self-contradictory, as does that of Hegel and that of certain Eastern religions. What is important is not the words in which the thoughts happen to be expressed but the thoughts themselves. The intuitions. Words are useful in that they allow the thoughts to be communicated and thus argued for and against, but without the primary, non-discursive intuitions, philosophy would just be the series of intellectual exercises it has become. In truth, the process of doing philosophy should consist of a constant interplay between intuition and ratiocination, the intuitions guiding us and the reasoning honing our insights to relative exactitude. An overemphasis on either element vitiates philosophy. Intuition without reasoning gets you mysticism; reasoning without intuition gets you academic philosophy.

Bergson once said that "the essence of philosophy is the spirit of simplicity. [From whatever point of view we look at it,] we always find that its complication is superficial, its constructions mere accessories,

[1] Cf., e.g., Mark Hinchliff, "The Puzzle of Change", *Noûs* Vol. 30, Supplement: Philosophical Perspectives, 10, Metaphysics (1996): 119 – 136.

its work of synthesis an illusion: to philosophize is a simple act."[1] I think he may have overstated his case there, but his essential insight is sound: all the complexity of philosophy, of *real* philosophy, is supported by a foundation of utterly simple intuitions—as all intuitions are simple, being nothing but momentary intellectual perceptions. This doesn't mean it's easy to understand precisely what an intuition *is*, for, on the contrary, that is extraordinarily difficult. Nevertheless, any thinker who knows what it is to have an intuitive insight into a problem—an imaginative, 'perceptive' insight, as opposed to a purely discursive 'insight'—knows that intuitions, whatever they are, are fairly simple and yet often profound (or fruitful). Much academic philosophy, on the other hand, is extremely complicated yet superficial.

More generally, by "philosophy" I understand something that the intelligent, informed layman can comprehend, something he can be *moved* by. Technicalities, logical symbolism, and so on are at best supplementary tools; philosophy ought not to revolve around them. It ought to be nothing more nor less than an intellectually honest engagement with the perennial questions of life. It ought to *inspire*, as Nietzsche inspires, Marx inspires, Kant inspires; it ought to broaden your vision, impel you to think on your own. As Aristotle said, philosophy arises out of pure wonder. It is man's original and instinctual attempt to intellectually assimilate the world—his primordial impulse to ask questions, to bring order out of chaos. All the sciences emerged from it. They are extensions of it.

Thus, as I see it, philosophy does not have just one special function, as the old analytic philosophers thought and some still think today. It does not exist just to provide an epistemological 'grounding' for the other sciences, or to show how certain questions are merely confusions arising from language, or to oversee methodological issues in other disciplines. It is neither subordinate to the other sciences nor truly 'superior' to them. Insofar as it can be distinguished from them at all, its distinction is its breadth. No programme can be imposed on it, in the mode of Wittgenstein, in some *a priori*-ish way; nor is its place ever 'fixed' vis-à-vis other sciences. It is fluid; it evolves with the times, going wherever society's drive to knowledge wills it. It adopts both meta-level and first-order perspectives, depending on what questions are asked.

Moreover, it bleeds into the other sciences. It borrows from psychology and physics while undertaking its own phenomenological and logical investigations. At times it must cede its former territory to newly developed disciplines with their specialized techniques, but it never relinquishes its right to an examination of their results for logical carelessness or for further insights into the human condition. It is the most self-conscious and self-critical of disciplines, for self-consciousness and self-criticism are among its methods. Poetry and fiction and nonfiction can each exemplify philosophy in its own unique way.

For example, Percy Bysshe Shelley was, in a way, a philosopher. Not only in his prose, but also in his poetry. So were Wordsworth, Milton, Shakespeare, Whitman, Dickinson, even Wilfred Owen. And many others. Analytically they weren't *rigorous* thinkers, but the spirit animating their writings was philosophical. Wonder, awe, despair at universal absurdity, joyfulness in *living*, the drive to understand. The true philosopher has a mind so expansive that he is often dissatisfied with himself; and his dissatisfaction drives him to push the boundaries of thought and life. He may be called a "genius", but he is really just a thoughtful person who, because he can't find contentment in ordinary life, spends his time contemplating himself and the world. Indulging his fascination is what makes him happy.

In this broad sense, philosophy is rebellion against the status quo. And philosophers are necessarily rebels. They have to be, because they are *individuals*—individuals who, moreover, have something important to say. Social conditions are never modeled on 'truth', so the thinker is bound to come into conflict with them, since he pursues knowledge and criticizes that which is false. Especially in a world where alienation is the norm, where power-structures suppress the individual's development as well as his understanding of truth, philosophy must take on the character of rebellion. It must be socially critical and engaged; but it must also be *lived—passionate*, for it requires passion to subvert ossified ways of thinking and being.

In its confrontation with the apologetic character of ideologies and the oppressive character of social structures, philosophy is nothing but the "critical theory" associated with thinkers like Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and Fromm. *[That's sort of true, but it's much too narrow a conception. "Critical*

[1] Quoted in H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), p. 200.

theory" per se was rather silly and masturbatory; what I really meant was all "theory" that is critical of present society.] Critical social theory is one manifestation of philosophy. Theorists used to debate the epistemological status of critical theory (and Marxism), some arguing it was merely another ideology as 'uncritical' as others, while its adherents argued it was different from, say, bourgeois ideologies, in that it was more scientific and signified a union of theory and praxis. I think its adherents were right. While critical theory, like all theory, is indeed guided by particular interests, and to that extent is as partisan as all ideologies, its interests are precisely societal understanding and emancipation. Bourgeois ideologies, by contrast, serve the narrower and less 'philosophical' or 'universal' interest of maintaining the social order, of defending it against those who have the temerity to point out its flaws. Critical theory—i.e., the enterprise of understanding society—can be more quasi-scientific in its methods than bourgeois ideologizing because its goal is to understand, not to defend the status quo; but given that understanding must criticize and dissect anything that militates against understanding, critical theory necessarily involves criticism of the oppressive and opaque elements of the social order. Which means that its interest coincides with the interest of mankind, its emancipatory interest.[1]

Be that as it may, my point is that philosophy, being the broadest, oldest, most ambitious, and arguably the most 'human' of disciplines, should reclaim its rightful place at the forefront of human knowledge, life, and progress. We should stop wondering what is and what is not philosophy—how to delimit its sphere of influence, as if it has a clearly defined subject-matter. It doesn't. It isn't even really on the same level as the other sciences. It exists in its own realm of thought, which extends from art to religion to science even as it transcends them all. In this age of money and specialization, we forget philosophy at our peril. We 'fragment' it at our peril. If philosophy is in danger of perishing, so is the individual.

I have sometimes heard the term "cutting-edge philosophy" tossed around by my professors. They exhort their graduate students to read up on the most recent scholarship so that they can contribute to cutting-edge philosophy, cutting-edge metaphysics. And every time I hear that word, I feel myself become momentarily hollow, as if a draft of nihilism has passed through me. It's an uncanny feeling, an emotion that makes me hate life, like extreme boredom. "Cutting-edge philosophy" is an oxymoron, a self-vitiation, like "contemporary classical music" or "that mediocre poem the *Bhagavad-Gita*"—a manifest contradiction-in-terms. The more common this attitude towards philosophy becomes—this 'scientistic', 'technologistic', 'mathematical', 'research-paper-ish' attitude, which uses words like 'cutting-edge'—the more I know that philosophy is in danger of dying. And that idealism itself is undergoing something of a crisis. Philosophical scholars may be adept at reasoning, but their technical jargon as much as their actual positions proves that their approach, on the whole, is not quite correct. It's fine to think that the activity of doing philosophy is merely 'interesting' and 'entertaining', as most professionals think; I don't condemn that attitude. I say only that when it becomes as widespread as it has, it signifies a degradation of philosophy. The motto is no longer Husserl's "*Zu den Sachen selbst!*" ("To the things themselves!"); it's *Zum Wörterbuch!* Discursiveness, analytics! Intuition—be gone with you!

…Without intuition, what you get are mostly the "philosophasters" of whom Schopenhauer spoke, people like Daniel Dennett, David Armstrong, Karl Popper, Hilary Putnam, Derek Parfit. (See the chapter on genius.)

And the specialists. Nietzsche had this to say about "specialists":

> Almost always the books of scholars are somehow oppressive, oppressed; the "specialist" emerges somewhere—his zeal, his seriousness, his overestimation of the nook in which he sits and spins, his hunched back; every specialist has his hunched back. Every scholarly book also mirrors a soul that has become crooked; every craft makes crooked.[2]

To be sure, a few paragraphs later he rightly qualified that negative assessment. There is much that is good and honorable in the "specialist", for example his honesty, his intellectual integrity, his dedication to his

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[1] See Julius Sensat, Jr., *Habermas and Marxism* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979), chapter two.
[2] *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, §366.

craft. Nevertheless, at least in his current philosophical manifestation, he cares more about arguing for its own sake than about truth…

Philosophy as I interpret it is unique. It is totally affirmative of our humanity, not only in its depth and spiritual significance but also in its breadth. Its breadth mirrors, more or less, the breadth of the individual's potential. While a person who occupies himself exclusively in philosophical pursuits is stunted, in the cognitive sphere at least he is not. Or he need not be, because in order to do *good* philosophy—original, interesting philosophy, which, as such, *synthesizes*—he has to be partly educated in the other sciences as well. And the humanities. Synthesis, breadth, is so definitive of philosophy that the latter must draw from all areas of knowledge in order to 'get the job done'. The narrow thinker is necessarily not a good philosopher. Hence, true philosophy, far from being a victim of academic specialization, should serve as an antidote to it.

In other words, in the academician's effective disregard for (broad) philosophical truth, he disregards also his human potential—what can be called his *existential* truth, his psychological truth. Conversely, I might go so far as to say that the ideal philosopher is a well-rounded person, simply because philosophical insights can be gained from living life to the fullest. Nietzsche would have been a better thinker had he experienced a woman's love; he might then have softened the exaggerated elements of his philosophy, and in any case he would have had a more comprehensive outlook on life. Hegel would have been a better philosopher had he been more sympathetic to Newtonian physics, that is, to *science* (as opposed to the pseudo-science that mars the *Phenomenology* and his later works). –In general, the breadth and depth of philosophy, and its universality (across cultures) as well as its life-affirmative character, suggest that philosophers should aim to be the vanguard of humanity, of its potential. They should 'lead the way'; they are most qualified to, and their vocation demands that they do.

But if, in pursuing this ideal of philosophy, one finds oneself becoming stunted from too much thought, my advice is to temporarily, or even permanently, resist the lure of 'philosophical truth' and reform one's ways. If immersion in analytic philosophy becomes dehumanizing, one should take a break from it. Take up poetry or music or sports, or something else. Self-realization, self-affirmation, is, as I see it, perhaps the foremost imperative in life; not even the search for knowledge trumps it. Should the two ever conflict, the first has priority over the second. For knowledge is not an end in itself. It has value only insofar as it affirms one's humanity, either directly or indirectly (as in the beneficial practical effects of science). Nietzsche was right that truth is not intrinsically valuable, and that treating it so can be dangerous. What beauty would there be in life if everyone devoted himself at all times to dry *understanding*? How could we *affirm life* in such circumstances? What a desolate thing it would be! To have an appetite for knowledge you have to be willing once in a while to live in ignorance.

But insofar as you remain a philosopher, you should follow the twin imperatives to *subvert* and to *integrate*. Or, in blander language: analyze and synthesize. (I prefer 'subvert' and 'integrate', though.) Philosophy ought to *engage with society* rather than imprison itself in an ivory tower. It ought to be readable and compelling, not boring and unambitious—and Lewisianly perverse. If you find yourself getting lost in endless technicalities—or getting bored to tears—then you're probably approaching the question wrong.

Indeed, that's how I monitor myself and my arguments when doing philosophy. If I'm getting overwhelmed in the complexities of a thought I'm pursuing (or if I find an idea totally uninteresting), then I decide the thought is probably wrong. Ockham's razor, after all. The simpler, the better. "The essence of philosophy is the spirit of simplicity." At such times I take a break from thinking about the problem and then return to it later with a fresh mind. But instead of plunging right back into the argument, I revert to *intuition*. I sit back, spend hours *imagining* the problem—trying to 'picture' it—non-discursively approaching it from various angles, until suddenly a 'picture' of the solution hits me. I can't really describe the process, but the intuition itself is always very simple. Then I embellish it in arguments. When, again, I lose my way in the arguments, I sit back for a while or pace the room while waiting for a new intuition that will show me the way out of the muddle. At such moments I know I'm doing philosophy—I can *feel* the philosophy. It's when I get lost in tedious ratiocination that I realize I've ceased philosophizing for 'sophisticizing' (for lack of a better word).

For example, one of the ways I know that traditional and contemporary approaches to ontology are wrong is that they all lead to casuistry—over-subtleties, debates about such abstruse concepts as "uninstantiated universals" and "Lewisian possible worlds". The correct approach will *cut through* all the shit, the centuries of verbiage; it won't argue with it on its own level. (The later Wittgenstein understood this, but the sloppiness of his thinking handicapped him.) It will explain the *deeper sources* of the confusion—therapeutically, as it were. The linguistic or the phenomenological sources. Ontological questions like "Do properties exist, and if so, in what sense?", or "Do numbers exist? What are they?", are fundamentally misguided. They are hardly even real questions, as I hope to explain in volume two of this book.

This is the sort of circumstance in which Wittgenstein-esque therapy is valuable. Insofar as one has to separate the substantive questions from the word games, Wittgenstein's project of "showing the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" is a genuinely philosophical project. His "ordinary language" approach has value, not only as a corrective to academic technicalities but especially because the emphasis on our ordinary use of language is a promising way to illuminate the intuitive conflicts and cognitive dissonance that give rise to many philosophical (particularly metaphysical) questions. Especially in this age, this crisis of philosophy, brutally honest therapy is necessary. We have to reinvigorate philosophy, make it an existential and vital activity again. But this involves not only cutting the dead wood from the live; it also entails making philosophy relevant to society. We have to show how ethics can settle concrete doubts about life, and how the death of religion is not the death of values. We have to engage with politics through Marxism and other theories of history. We have to make *action* philosophical. Philosophy, after all, grows out of social conditions; it's only natural that it should also contribute to them.

Social activism, if justified philosophically/'scientifically', is itself a form of philosophy, for it is emancipation. It is the *real-ization of understanding*. Or, at least, we ought to think of it that way. Plato did. He wanted a Philosopher-King! Like Marx, he wanted to unite theory with praxis. Why do we ignore his vision? If we're going to call ourselves philosophers, we ought to *do philosophy*. *Actualize* it. We ought to take up arms against ignorance, like Richard Dawkins and Noam Chomsky; we ought to fight all bigotry and conservatism. If we have the talent, we ought to go into politics—subvert the system by means of the system. "To ruthlessly criticize everything existing!"[1] is the philosopher's creed. Apathy, complacency, is philosophical treason.

In a civilization that has become fragmented into a thousand ideologies and is in danger of perishing someday in a nuclear holocaust, perceptive critical analysis—translated into activism—is imperative. Not only is it not 'obsolete', as the postmodernist would have it; it is essential. But we need thinkers with the talent to synthesize—to overcome specialization—and the passion to *act*. Thinkers who aren't seduced by the academic love of technicalities and discursiveness into thinking that truth is unknowable or that it has to be expressed in a technical and obscure way. In fact, whatever is worth saying can always be said fairly clearly. We need people who can unite the erstwhile ambitiousness of European thought with the analytical carefulness of Anglo-American thought. Otherwise philosophy—and probably the social sciences in general—*will* become obsolete, and the grand tradition will disintegrate in the nihilism of a Kenneth Gergen.

I'm only sketching a vision here. I can't go into details, since this book is aimed at the public rather than merely the academy. [?!] My purpose in this volume is not to 'explain the world' but only to remind people (including myself), in my inadequate way, of old ideals, ideals that are on the defensive now that capitalism is at its zenith. Truth, creativity, love, poetry, music, community, etc., all of which have been corrupted through commercialism and the culture it has spawned. The only way to bring them back—to overcome the atomization and bureaucratization of life—is to understand the dynamics of society and to manipulate social progress along an enlightened path. Not to *obstruct* it, as conservatives would do, but to push it even harder to realize its potential. Especially its economic potential. Marx was the first to see the

[1] That was the motto of the early Marx.

possibilities unleashed by capitalism, the productive possibilities, which are (or will be) the basis for amazing cultural opportunities…

[An epigram I was going to put somewhere at the end of all this: *To alienate an alienated world is just to be human*.]

Brief reflections on historical consciousness

> ***The most dangerous kind of amnesia***.— *The faster that society evolves, the shorter is its collective memory.*

Anyone who keeps pace with the march of history knows that, in America, time has stopped. Historical time, that is. And since America is where the rest of the world is headed, time has effectively stopped for the entire world. We have lost the consciousness that we're a part of history. Instead, we're intensely focused on the moment, on what's happening *today*—and tomorrow we forget what happened yesterday. Ironically, it's partially because life proceeds with unprecedented speed that we seem forever stuck in one moment, poised on the edge of time. The incessant bombardment of images, of factoids, of advertisements, of new technologies, of sexual innuendo, of synthesized music and constant noise, all combines to foster a timeless surreality, a suspension of cultural memory and the sense of continuity with the past and future. It doesn't even seem like there *will be* a future: all that will ever exist exists right now, in some sense. Cultural evolution has come to a standstill. In an 'abstract' way we do know that new inventions will arise, that cloning and genetic engineering will be perfected, that wars will always occur and capitalism will spread and pseudo-democracy will follow (eventually), and maybe one day we'll experience something like the *Terminator* scenario, but this knowledge is dry and bloodless, so to speak. It's something we're able to *tell* ourselves simply because, despite the best efforts of the Establishment, human rationality cannot be wiped out. On an intellectual level we know that history won't end until it ends (which it won't for thousands, probably millions, of years), but *intuitively* we don't believe this. We *live* as if history is effectively over. '*How could* history go on much longer?! What more can be done?! We've done everything! All that's left is scientific progress, continued globalization, and war.' Just look at our culture's cynicism; look at shows like *The Daily Show*. I remember a clip was played once of Bush saying that Social Security would be bankrupt by 2048 (or whenever); Jon looked incredulous and said, "*2048*?! That's like, generations from now! Everyone knows the world will be over by then!" (Paraphrase.) The audience laughed because they knew the sentiment was absurd and yet sympathized with it.

More keenly than at any time in the past, we feel as if everything is transient. Nothing lasts, especially in a world of terrorism and nuclear proliferation. Even fame, or any kind of individual immortality, is pointless. Thus arises despair:

> Under the present dispensation, human mortality has acquired an entirely new meaning—it is only today that its ultimate horror is brought home to us. To be sure, even previously no one was exempt from mortality; but everyone regarded himself as mortal within a larger whole, the human world; and while no one ever explicitly ascribed immortality to the latter, the threat of its mortality stared no one in the face either. Only because there was such a "space" within which one died, could there arise that peculiar aspiration to give the lie to one's mortality through the acquisition of fame.... Today our fear of death is extended to all of mankind; and if mankind were to perish leaving no memory in any being, engulfing all existence in darkness, no empire will have existed, no idea, no struggle, no love, no

> pain, no hope, no comfort, no sacrifice—everything will have been in vain, and there would be only that which had *been*, and nothing else.[1]

While most of us do not think that mankind will become extinct any time soon, the possibility, at least, is real. But our knowledge of this possibility is merely an aggravating factor in our malaise. Perhaps more important is our atomization as such. Christopher Lasch recognizes that this proceeds not so much from the sense of impending catastrophe as from the structure of society itself.

> To live for the moment is the prevailing passion—to live for yourself, not for your predecessors or posterity. We are fast losing the sense of historical continuity, the sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future. ....The 'worldview emerging among us', writes Peter Marin, centers "solely on the self" and has "individual survival as its sole good". In an attempt to identify the peculiar features of contemporary religiosity, Tom Wolfe notes that "most people, historically, have *not* lived their lives as if thinking, 'I have only one life to live'. Instead they have lived as if they are living their ancestors' lives and their offsprings' lives...."[2]

The contemporary illness is virtually unique in history (although something like it may have been experienced in Greece during the Hellenistic period and in Italy near the end of the Roman empire).

Remember Francis Fukuyama's unjustly famous article "The End of History?" (1989)? Liberal democracy, he suggested, is the last ideology. The final form of government. Progress can still occur only in implementing the principles on which it is based, namely liberty and equality. The principles themselves are the endpoint of ideological development. I think this idea is simplistic, and I'll explain why later, but right now I want to point out how obviously correct it seems to most of us. In this respect, we think cultural evolution has stopped. But there are other respects too. In literature, for example. Insofar as literature is still taken seriously at all, we think that the only thing left is to continue experimenting with old forms—with free verse, occasionally with traditional forms like blank verse or sonnets or whatever, maybe integrating them in new ways; expanding or attenuating the novel and short story, trying new variations (à la D. F. Wallace); perhaps more writing in the vein of Hunter S. Thompson. Or painting and sculpture—what remains in these forms? More minimalism, more graphic design? A return to austere Renaissance techniques as a reaction against technological sophistication? (I have a vision of some guy painting the ceiling of a new city hall, determined to be the next Michelangelo.) And what of music? More Britney Spearsian crap for a while, more hip-hop, probably attempts to unite the musical styles of various cultures (such as already exist in East Asian pop music), probably many resurgences of techno. Classical music will tire of minimalism—though never completely—and composers will, perhaps, seek a return to old styles. (Billy Joel, for instance, has tried this.) But that'll go nowhere. And what about the wonderful world of *fashion*? More of the same. Maybe we'll try mass nudity, as the earth heats from global warming. I suspect that cultural confusion—e.g., the coexistence of primitive and sophisticated, of conservative- and liberal-minded, of religious and secular—will keep increasing until finally our problems are temporarily solved in the mass destruction of a nuclear war.

My point is that whatever happens will be—so we think—merely an extension of the present. Our 'collective consciousness' won't undergo major changes; it is no longer naïve enough to have much *room* to change. We've become too sophisticated for our own good. –So, in short: *this is it!* This is the end of history! We've made it to the end! Congratulations!

But that's ridiculous. If common sense is right that some of us will persevere through whatever suicidal ventures mankind undertakes, our species probably has millions of years to go. Which means we're still in our prehistory! Thousands of years from now, our descendants will look back on us and shake their

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[1] Gunther Anders, "Reflections on the H-Bomb", in *Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society*, edited by Eric and Mary Josephson (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 291, 292.

[2] Christopher Lasch, op. cit., pp. 5, 6, 7.

heads in nostalgia. “How simple life must have been back then!” But *their* descendants will say the same about *them*. These time-spans are hard to fathom, but, after all, we easily forget that mankind has already existed for hundreds of thousands of years. What we call “history”—the last five thousand years—has been ludicrously short, barely a *blip*.

Most theorists who have noted our lack of historical perspective (i.e., of an awareness of historical continuity) have, like me, attributed it ultimately to technological advances occurring in the social framework of late capitalism. That’s sort of truistic, though. Uninformative. What are the *social mechanisms* that allow technological/economic progress to have this deleterious effect? I think they revolve around the fragmentation of communities caused by economic progress. Such progress has made the individual increasingly autonomous, increasingly house-bound, since he has everything he needs at his fingertips. Television and video games provide him with entertainment; the news provides him with information from the outside world; the internet provides him with a virtual community and an infinite number of commodities. Even if he spends much of his time with people (his coworkers, friends, family), he is still isolated from the “community”—for the relevant community has, in an era of globalization, become the entire world. People know that they live in an intricately interdependent world, that what happens in Asia can immediately affect what happens in America; their perspectives on life are thus ‘broader’ than ever before. The immediate community has lost its primordial importance. Whereas the individual’s consciousness was once closely identified with that of the group—the tribe, the clan, the village—such that he lived *in* and *through* the group, and the group’s past was his past, and there was nothing outside this group except a vast inhuman world, the modern individual really has no ‘groups’ to identify himself with. His desire to so identify himself is evident in the continued popularity of religion despite the fact that economic conditions have superseded it. Nationalism and patriotism are other manifestations of the desire for community. But, as Marx saw, all these movements are at bottom reactions—ultimately futile ones—against a basic fact of life in capitalism, viz. that communal ties are dissolved by the imperative to accrue profits and the constant accumulation of capital. In the long run, all else is subservient to this accumulation.

People still join communities all the time (church groups, neighborhood groups), and fanatics still submerge their identities in collective movements, but nothing any longer provides the psychological security that our Paleolithic ancestors derived from their little groups. This is what we seek, and this is what we will not find. A ‘community’ in the truest sense is something that one wholly belongs to, that circumscribes the boundaries of one’s life and consciousness, such that nothing outside it is considered relevant to oneself. In a real community, one is saturated with all the affection and security one needs. And one identifies with the community so completely that it isn’t seen as having much of a history outside one’s own history. This is the extreme of historical continuity—of the sense of connection with the past and future. One’s horizons are so limited that ‘the past’ and ‘the future’ are effectively just the past and future of oneself and one’s kin. This fact also presupposes the extreme slowness of historical evolution: millennia pass without major changes in the conditions of life. The world is perceived as static; historical knowledge is limited to vague myths and traditions handed down.

The other extreme is what we approximate in late capitalism: social atomization. The “communities” in which people live have more in common with mere aggregates than with communities in the original sense. People live near each other but not *with* each other. Social life is organized around the nuclear family: most things social are filtered through the family. All else is relatively artificial. Apart from the family, people are forced to *act*, to put on social masks and subtly change their personalities depending on who they’re with.

The real picture is of course complicated. Many people feel more comfortable with friends and acquaintances than with their family. Likewise, the individualism of the culture infects the family situation, so that people feel compelled to ‘*act*’ with their family members, as with their acquaintances. I’ll return to all this in volume two. What matters now is that ultimately the individual is thrown onto his own resources, such that, while the nuclear family is the basic unit of society, the individual is nonetheless atomized even in the family. He may come to feel ‘alienated’ from his parents or siblings—‘*different*’ from them. Being

with them is no longer very rewarding. He seeks solace in video games, television and the internet, which serve to increase his atomization (alienation). Thus ensues a self-reinforcing cycle of communal alienation.

The sense of separation from the immediate community results in disconnectedness from the past and future. For the community's past does not feel like one's own past, nor the future like one's own future. It is a foreign thing, something that one observes or anticipates but does not take part in. One is forever an outsider to the community and its history. Indeed, as I said above, the *real* 'community' has become the entire world, i.e., a vast, abstract Other, a gigantic impersonal thing with its own impenetrable internal logic. This is to say that the community is no longer a human one, a transparent organization of particular people full of 'fellow-feeling' for each other, but an inhuman one, associated with an intricate global economic logic that governs people's lives. The past and the future are of *this thing*, this collective abstract thing (which we might call, somewhat misleadingly, 'mankind', or 'society'); they are therefore perceived as detached, impersonal, inhuman. In other words, they are reified, treated as strange external objects—external to the individual. And the future never comes to pass; it is always something beyond the present, beyond experience. Experience is one long present (in a non-truistic sense)—the same thing again and again, an unchanging, monotonous present.

The phenomenon of 'reification' is an important, and underappreciated, component in the problem. Karl Marx formulated the idea in *Capital*, in the section on commodity fetishism; it was later taken up and embellished by such thinkers as Georg Lukács (in *History and Class Consciousness*) and I. I. Rubin (in *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*), who recognized it as a brilliant and immensely fruitful tool of both social and economic analysis. Right now I'm interested in its sociological aspect.

First, though, I have to describe its economic meaning.— Any economist knows that a commodity has two aspects: its use-value (its utility for the consumer) and its exchange-value (the price it commands). Marx points out that, as a use-value, the commodity is something natural and particular, concrete, while as an exchange-value it is purely the proportion of goods it can be exchanged for. It 'embodies' this proportion, so to speak; it is an abstract thing, a quantity, and as such is qualitatively equal to every other commodity. In this sense, commodities are abstract and comparable with each other; as use-values, though, they are just themselves, i.e., their manifold concreteness. They therefore have a dual phenomenology: they can be experienced as themselves, as things that were produced to have a specific *telos* and with whose natural properties one interacts, or they can be experienced as 'alienated' from their utility-essence, by being viewed as a mere quantity of value. This second, alienated, aspect is the form they take in the marketplace.

The exchange-values of commodities appear to the consumer to be objective, "socio-natural" properties of the things themselves. Thus, commodities, as exchange-values, seem to take on a life of their own: price-movements are mysterious objective facts, things that just 'happen'—spontaneously, as it were—determined by forces outside people's control, by mysterious interactions between the things themselves when they enter the market. Exchange-relations between commodities confront the producer and the capitalist, and the seller and the buyer, as brute facts, impersonal and seemingly inexplicable. In reality, of course, exchange-relations are in no sense properties of the things themselves; they do not exist outside social relations, as appears to be the case, but rather *express* them. Exchange-values are really expressions of relations between individuals—between producers and other producers, capitalists and other capitalists, producers and capitalists, etc. Movements of prices, which are determined by the fluctuations of supply and demand, serve to allocate social labor, by providing economic agents with information they need to make economic decisions. For example, when the demand for a product increases, its price will rise because selling that product has become more profitable. At the same time, the seller will demand more of the product from its manufacturers (so as to sell more of it and make a higher profit), who will therefore move proportionately more labor into its production than into the production of other goods (because they can make a higher profit by increasing its production). Hence, in the economy as a whole, a change takes place in the allocation of labor. The higher price of the product expresses the higher value of the labor that goes into producing it—that is, the now-greater social necessity of employing labor in production of this particular commodity. So its price is basically a monetary expression of the changed relation between spheres of labor, and between individual laborers, even though it *seems* to express only a relation between things themselves.

Incidentally, most of the time-worn criticisms of Marx's labor theory of value rest on misunderstandings. Marx's purpose was to explain how labor gets allocated in a capitalist society; the "labor theory of value" grows out of the understanding that the price-mechanism is the primary instrument by means of which social labor is apportioned between industries and between areas of a particular industry.

Anyway, the point is that relations between people are, in capitalism, reified into relations between things. And these thing-like relations are seemingly subject to their own laws of movement. The result is that "a man's activity becomes estranged from himself, it turns into a commodity which, subject to the nonhuman objectivity of the natural laws of society, must go its own way independently of man just like any consumer article".[1] Social activity in general develops more and more this alienated character, this appearance of being determined by strange forces outside the individual's control. One can't find a job in a certain sector, so one has to enter another until something happens and one gets laid-off, etc. etc.; relations between friends and family members are conditioned by the impersonal functioning of the economy, and one feels increasingly like a cog. One is compelled to take jobs one doesn't want; one desires, and takes advantage of opportunities for, mindless enjoyment and release from the unpleasant "realm of necessity" (hence the love of video-games, television, the internet); and one's relationships become increasingly dysfunctional. Ultimately, "just as the capitalist system continuously produces and reproduces itself economically on higher levels, the structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply, more fatefully and more definitively into the consciousness of man",[2] such that life becomes more stressful, more mysterious, more dehumanized and atomistic. It comes to be dominated by the half-conscious perception of a vast impersonal Other which gets associated in one's mind with the faceless strangers he sees, with the company he works for, with his boss, with his dissatisfaction and his unfulfilled desire for recognition (for freedom). One develops an amorphous hostility, sort of an indiscriminate distrust—epitomized in the hard "fuck you" attitude exhibited by New Yorkers in the street—which colors his relationships with people.

Money is the symbol and the *sine qua non* of all this reification and atomization. It gets between people, between social relations; it 'lubricates' them, so to speak, and makes them possible; everything gets translated into monetary terms (e.g., "Time is money"), such that the individual cannot take up his life into himself, as purely *his own*, something that is one with him, but rather treats it more and more as he treats money, namely as something that opposes him, as a *thing* that he doesn't really understand. It *confronts* him; he has to *conquer* it (lest it conquer him), which is to say that he has to struggle to make it his own. And in doing so he tends to adopt the acquisitive attitude, because money is both the threat and the promise, the thing that oppresses him but can liberate him, which symbolizes and is the meaning of life's present otherness from him but can potentially signify his appropriation of (his) life. For by acquiring money, he acquires the power to make things his own, to attain power over the world and force people to 'recognize' him. Unfortunately, he finds that this recognition is not satisfying, for it is not a recognition of him himself but only of his economic power. Therefore, the wealthy person comes to feel alienated from people and himself (i.e., his sense of who he is or wants to be)—perhaps even more so than the poor person, who at least knows that the people who love him love him for himself and not for his power over them or as a means to an end. –Acquisitiveness is the truly alienated and quintessentially capitalist attitude toward life, which fetishizes mere *things* and devalues human relationships, including the self's relationship with itself. The more acquisitive we are, the less human we are; and an acquisitive society is not a human one.

So, in short, just by virtue of the economic laws of motion of capitalism, people develop the perception of being pushed and pulled and harassed by nothing in particular—by some invisible incubus pressing down on everyone—although features of life peculiar to late capitalism have aggravated the perception. This fabrication of an abstract 'Other', manifested in numerous ways (e.g., in our awareness of mankind as a vast aggregate and our corresponding awareness of the littleness of ourselves), proceeds apace with communal disintegration, such that neither is possible without the other.

Incidentally, a particularly telling manifestation of reification (atomization) is the common use of the word 'they' to refer to some mysterious social entity that has power over oneself. For instance, someone

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[1] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971), p. 87.
[2] Ibid., p. 93.

might say to his friend, "If you don't pay your taxes, they'll catch you and send you to prison". Who are 'they'? 'They' are the Other, the impersonal system which is associated with politicians and all authority-figures, and which is constantly coming between the individual and himself—his self-expression, his life, his relationships, the fulfillment of his desire for recognition and freedom. 'They' will do this, they will do that; they are a constant threat, something breathing down your neck, waiting to punish you, watching you wherever you go and whatever you do, like Foucault's "Panopticon"—to the extent that they are internalized, such that the individual is incessantly watching himself, feeling separated from himself and his acts. But 'they' are not really concrete *people*; they are the structure of society itself, which compels one to act along narrowly conformist paths and is always ready to punish transgressions. 'They' are economic imperatives, bureaucratic dictates, ideological and legal institutions, the media, social mores, most of which disrupt spontaneous communal life and propagate anxiety. Consistent with Marx's analysis, all these things—these concepts and habits and institutions—are "personified", becoming a '*they*', i.e., something with a will and intelligence and evidently a deep-seated maliciousness, while people themselves are reified into mere numbers, statistics, objects, obstacles that have to be overcome or irrational things that have to be placated.

Capitalism's laws include not only commodity reification, with everything it directly and indirectly gives rise to, but also incessant *change*, an incredible dynamism that comes to permeate life itself. Of economic necessity, the means of production are constantly being revolutionized, along with the material conditions of life. Contemporary society exhibits this dynamism more completely than any in the past. The result, I have said, which is also the result of reification as such, is an impoverished sense of historical time.[1]

It's ironic, but dialectically predictable, that the phenomenology of the ancient community and the modern anti-community are in this respect similar: life is static, history is static. The present is always just itself, just the same dreary present. And this despite (or rather, (partially) because of) the incredible speed at which modern civilization evolves! Change is so prevalent that it ceases to be change; it is the norm. Life is a blur of scientific change, technological change, political change, cultural change. Every day brings new changes. And so, paradoxically, nothing really changes. *Real* change won't happen until the incessant change stops—until, that is, some kind of cataclysm grinds the gears of globalization to a halt, or else man seizes the reins of social progress in his own hands and consciously determines the direction of history. (The former event might be a prelude to the latter.)

To sum up: Historical consciousness (in the way I'm using the word) is virtually perfect in the Paleolithic community: the past, present and future are barely distinguished in the mind of the individual, since change ('history') is virtually nonexistent. Life is an indiscriminate melding of past, present and future, for there *is* no past in any meaningful sense, nor will there be a meaningful future; there is just *sameness*, universal homogeneity. Homogeneity between oneself and other people, between the community and nature, between man and animal. Man is barely self-conscious [especially not as an *individual*].[2]

Modern man, on the other hand, is exquisitely self-conscious, in two ways: the individual is intensely preoccupied with himself, and an unprecedented number of people are also preoccupied with the situation of the species as a whole. An indirect cause of this self-consciousness, I have suggested—as well as a symptom of it—is the disintegration of the community that has proceeded steadily since the end of feudalism. (Of course, the community in the original, complete sense disintegrated with the onset of

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[1] Alexis de Tocqueville already observed (in the mid-1800s) that Americans were disconnected from history. "The woof of time is every instant broken and the track of generations effaced. Those who went before are soon forgotten; of those who will come after, no one has any idea: the interest of man is confined to those in close propinquity to himself." Quoted in Lasch, op. cit., p. 9. American capitalism then was in some respects more 'pure' than even that of England.

[2] Even as late as Cro-Magnon times (about 40,000 years ago) he was relatively un-self-conscious, at least judging by his art. His cave paintings were of buffalo, deer and other animals rather than of human beings, suggesting that he didn't clearly differentiate himself from animals. He was focused more on them than on himself, unlike modern man, who has posited an unbridgeable gulf between the human and the natural worlds and is decidedly more fixated on the human.

agriculture, i.e., the Neolithic age.) In the community's place has arisen the awareness of an abstract Other called 'mankind'; and it is *this thing* that has become the subject of history. History is no longer something that happens to one's immediate community; it happens to something so vast that one is scarcely a part of it. One participates neither in history nor in the community of which it is a history; one is an outsider observing history, looking back on it and looking forward to it.

Between the two extremes (the Paleolithic and the modern) are varying degrees of cultural self-consciousness. Thirty thousand years ago, the collective consciousness (that is, the consciousnesses of individuals insofar as they tended to share thoughts and dispositions) was closer to that of Paleolithic man; two thousand years ago in Greece it was closer to that of modern man. Five hundred years earlier, though, Greek consciousness would have been less easily assimilable to our own. For as Hegel said, Archaic and Classical Greece (up to, say, 400 B.C.) existed in the happy medium between an undifferentiated communal whole, in which the individual is so submerged in the collective that he lacks an independent identity, and the extreme self-consciousness of modernity. Athenian self-consciousness was 'naïve': people were aware of the separation between nature and civilization, between the individual and the community, but they were not nearly as fixated on it as we moderns are. Nevertheless, their state of mind was obviously closer to our own than to that of Cro-Magnon man.

In this context it's interesting to read the essay *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, by Friedrich Schiller, the German poet. He argues there that the ideal life—as well as the ideal *society*—consists in a fusion of 'simplicity' and 'sentimentality', i.e., unreflectiveness and self-consciousness, spontaneity and premeditation, classicism and romanticism. Both individuals and historical epochs are dominated by one or the other of these tendencies. Archaic and Classical Greece, up until (approximately) the time of Sophocles and Euripides,[1] was dominated—so Schiller thinks—by simplicity, 'immediate experience', the unreflective unity of the individual with the community and the community with nature; the Europe of Schiller's time was dominated by self-consciousness, the divisions between the individual and the community as well as the community and nature. I might add that, according to Schiller's schema, 'simple' cultures would probably include India at the time of the Vedas, the society that produced the earlier books of the Old Testament, and the society in which *Beowulf* was written. Self-conscious cultures would include Greece in the age after Alexander, Rome during and after the demise of the Republic, and China during the T'ang dynasty (judging by the sentimental poetry of Li Po).

My reason for mentioning Schiller is that his ideas illustrate my own. While I disagree with their details, as well as his conception of Greece—I think Hegel's was more realistic (namely, that Greece was neither 'simple' nor 'sentimental', but somewhere in between)—his basic intuition was similar to mine. Various cultures, like individuals, exhibit various degrees of self-consciousness. Their literature provides excellent clues about their collective state of mind. I am extending Schiller's argument to illustrate the disjunction between self-consciousness and the sense of historical time. Because the Greeks were more self-conscious than earlier societies, Herodotus was able to become the first self-conscious historian. Like his contemporaries, he was less immersed in historical continuity than, say, the Sumerians had been; he was aware of the immediate past as such, as having led to a different present, and he wanted to understand what the *human-centered* causes of recent historical events were. After him came more scientific historians like Thucydides, who did not invoke gods and myths as valid historical explanations, which Herodotus had still occasionally done, but concentrated exclusively on human agents. These scientific, secular historians were, like Herodotus before them, made possible by the individual's ever-increasing awareness of his separation from the immediate past—an awareness due to the evolving trade, the increased pace of life, Athens' evolving cosmopolitanism, etc. Indeed, we may make the rough generalization that the more historians (per capita) a society has, the more alien does its collective consciousness feel to its immediate past (measured in years, not centuries), and the more quickly is historical evolution proceeding.[2]

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[1] Even with Euripides, though, it was succumbing to sentimentality.

[2] By 'historical evolution' I mean roughly the increase or the decrease in the complexity of a social structure—i.e., in the intricacy of its interrelations, the interdependence of its actors. This definition applies both to Classical Athens,

The deterioration in the individual's sense of continuity with the past has proceeded, with many interruptions and regressions, from Neolithic times to our own day, in which there is virtually no continuity at all. This isn't to say, though, that our collective consciousness is constantly *changing*—that our national 'mood' changes frequently, from, say, optimism to fear to cynicism. It doesn't. Even 9/11 didn't cause a major change in our consciousness. The brief national unity and anger it caused didn't amount to anything, except ultimately a rise in cynicism. (I remember pundits predicting the "death of irony" and the "death of satire" as a result of the attack. Such myopia has always amazed me.) By 'lack of continuity' I mean only that our collective consciousness is defined by *immediacy*, a focus on the moment, an alienation from the past. It is defined by temporal and interpersonal fragmentation.

There will, of course, always be at least a 'predetermined' minimum of historical continuity in any collective consciousness; otherwise societal functioning would be impossible. Societies will never become totally amnesiac. Indeed, I think that our state of mind in these initial decades of the twenty-first century will be more or less as 'historically disconnected' as is humanly possible. It doesn't seem likely, after all, that any culture will ever evolve much more quickly than ours is evolving. These decades right now are, on a global scale especially, the fastest in history. Different 'social structures' around the world are growing and deteriorating with unprecedented speed.

My year-long visit to South Korea was illuminating in this context. I was 23, that is, too young and stupid to do much research on where I was going. So I ended up in Daegu, the most conservative city in a culturally conservative country. Not a soul spoke English there, but that's another story. (A somewhat bitter one.) The point is that I found Korean culture to be in many ways at the stage of the U.S. in the '50s. I'll quote the relevant journal entry:

> ....Examples of the '50s-ish culture: the popular phenomenon of obnoxious, insipid slapstick comedies that have characters with whom it's impossible to sympathize; the explicit social ideal of the cute, innocent, childlike woman whose purpose in life is to be an ornament (although this stereotype is changing); the cautiousness and slowness of dating (often it takes two months before a couple will even kiss!); the immaturity of popular music; the ubiquity of cultural optimism. Traits are strikingly consistent across regions and individuals. There is, for example, a broadly 'Korean' sense of humor: slapstick, silliness, good-natured joshing, as opposed to sarcasm. Most Koreans find sarcasm rude. People enjoy more or less the same kinds of music, namely poppish crap like Justin Timberlake and Britney Spears and high-pitched girly singing—though they also like Eminem, probably because they don't know what he's talking about. There are fewer fads in Korea than in America: styles and tastes remain basically the same from year to year. *Subtle* changes only. The cultural homogeneity is remarkable.
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> It's truly exciting to observe the paths that collective consciousness follows, which in their broad strokes seem preordained because countries developing at different speeds nonetheless experience the same progression from unsophistication to a more nuanced and critical understanding of the world, which may include an increase in forms of activism, and then to cynicism and apathy, which may be punctuated by outbursts of fanaticism that are actually manifestations of lostness and despair. On one side of the Pacific is the interaction of a basically primitive collective consciousness with modern conditions and ultramodern consciousness—which (interaction) is of interest in its own right—while on the other side is the future of this society, more or less. The past and the future coexist, united by the similarity in material conditions and the trappings of government but essentially at different historical stages—which makes genuine cultural understanding between them difficult. They have completely different outlooks on the world.

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with its creative advances, and to the collapse of the Roman Empire, with its deterioration in the byzantine social structure of Rome.

In the coming years, the differences will narrow. There will be a fairly clear thread of Korean cultural evolution—musical, literary, cinematic, political. People's senses of humor will become more sarcastic as they themselves become more jaded. Women will become more promiscuous and more self-confident. Music will grow in sophistication. Political activism will increase. The reason it's possible to make such predictions—as it isn't possible in the United States—is that Korea's collective consciousness has not yet reached the stage of heterogeneity. Which is a virtually inevitable stage. Every substantial culture (provided it isn't destroyed by invaders) progresses from homogeneity to heterogeneity, from community to fragmentation. Schiller's "simplicity" characterizes the former, his "sentimentality" the latter. This explains Korean optimism and naïveté: the community is still relatively intact, so people still receive the recognition, the affection, they desire as human beings. They are less insecure than we Americans, hence less cynical, less bored. As they become Americanized, they can look forward to these feelings.

Why do societies tend to progress in this manner, from homogeneity to heterogeneity? Because of the nature of technological and economic progress. Every society tries to attain power over nature; some are more successful than others. Insofar as they're successful, communal integration deteriorates (because the division of labor [and marketization, privatization] intensifies), which has a variety of effects. For example, the ideology of individualism tends to be emphasized; the individual becomes increasingly insecure about his place in society and the cosmos; societal evolution proceeds faster; the past and future seem increasingly alien to the society's collective consciousness. That all these effects are exceptionally predominant in our own culture is consistent with the facts that technological development and communal disintegration are greater than ever.

In the chapters on the self and the community I'll go into greater detail, making use, for example, of Émile Durkheim's distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity. I'll also go into greater depth with respect to the theory of reification, to make it more precise and general. (I don't think it applies only to capitalism, though its extreme manifestation has been reached in this society.) I want to conclude these brief reflections with remarks on the Fukuyaman belief that we have in some sense reached the end of history—specifically, of ideological development.

Fukuyama's aforementioned article is in fact an amateurish and crude elaboration of what has been a crude popular opinion since the 19th century, namely that capitalism and liberal democracy are the most "natural" way of organizing society, the best way and the final way, the endpoint of historical development. Marx was already criticizing such ideas in the 1840s. Fukuyama's position, far from being original, is barely even derivative. It's just a pseudo-philosophical formulation of our culture's conventional wisdom. But since most of us implicitly adhere to it, I'd like to explain its absurdity.

Writes Fukuyama (in 1989):

> What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. This is not to say that there will no longer be events to fill the pages of *Foreign Affairs*'s yearly summaries of international relations, for the victory of liberalism has occurred primarily in the realm of ideas or consciousness and is as yet incomplete in the real or material world. But there are powerful reasons for believing that it is the ideal that will govern the material world in the long run.

It is somewhat embarrassing that, so long after the Marxian critique of bourgeois "rights", and the Durkheimian critique of "liberty" (as promoting anomie, lostness), and books like Robert Paul Wolff's essay *The Poverty of Liberalism* (1968), someone like Francis Fukuyama can still make a name for himself defending liberalism without even mentioning its repeatedly criticized contradictions and inadequacies. Evidently academia, like the larger culture of which it is a part, has a very short historical memory.

Ancient Greek intellectuals thought that Athens embodied the highest principles of justice. In his wars, Alexander was, they thought, spreading the final achievements of culture and ideology to the world, namely democracy and freedom—liberating the Persians and Indians from despotism. Romans thought that

their empire was the endpoint of historical development, for not only had it united much of the known world, but it was organized around sophisticated (and modern) principles of law and civic order, beyond which no advance was conceivable. Feudal lords and serfs could not even fathom the possibility that their society and ideology were merely a stage of history, something that would pass away, as opposed to the ideal and natural way of organizing civilization. No one in the year 1200 could have imagined capitalism. Florentines during the Renaissance thought of their democracy as the pinnacle of historical evolution, of freedom and culture.

Is it surprising, then, that people have for two centuries thought of capitalism and liberal democracy as natural, permanent and perfectly just? Every culture has thought that its way of life is the best, the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution". Material and social conditions circumscribe the boundaries of a society's consciousness; substantial advances beyond concrete conditions seem inconceivable. People literally have trouble imagining what form a future society would take, and so they think that nothing is possible beyond their own. But history has proven that the possible is not limited by the conceivable.

Liberal democracy is just the old Greek, Roman, German, Florentine, etc. ideals of freedom and democracy adjusted to capitalist conditions. The two animating principles have been around for millennia; they have traveled the world many times over, been reborn and reconceptualized thousands of times, such that evidently they grow out of human nature itself. Humans want to be free, and they want to have some say in how they organize their society. This is just to say that they want to be recognized and respected for who they are. The liberal ideas of "freedom from government intervention", of "private property" and the "rule of law", of "inalienable rights", of the separation between the public and the private spheres, of "tolerance", are just the ancient principles of freedom and democracy recast in the framework of capitalism—in its atomistic, competitive and individualistic framework.

As long as capitalism exists, liberal democracy will be essentially the best possible organization of society—the ideology that best reconciles the individual's desires with the desires of other individuals. It represents the best merging of the idealistic and the realistic, which is why it is still respected by Westerners (and increasingly by the rest of the world) a hundred and fifty years after John Stuart Mill. But it can last only as long as capitalism lasts. And capitalism itself will last only as long as the scarcity of essential resources lasts (or, alternatively, until some global catastrophe causes the collapse of civilization). When capitalist dynamism has finally established an abundance of resources—when science and technology have evolved to such a point that humanity can, for example, clone as much food as it wants, genetically engineer its nutrients, satisfy all its energy needs through renewable sources of fuel, etc.—then liberal democracy will, I suspect, become obsolete, because economic processes will take a vastly different form than they do now. One cannot predict what form they will take, since imagination, as I said, is largely limited by material conditions, but economic rationing will probably no longer be necessary (except with regard to luxury goods), which means that money and private property will be, on the whole, superfluous. Again, it is impossible to predict what cultural and political changes will result from this economic evolution, but evidently liberalism—premised as it is on scarcity—will be seen as an absurd philosophy.

In any case, my point is that history is not over. Neither is ideological development. As economic conditions evolve, so will politics and culture. Sooner or later the modern person's alienation, partially manifested in his disconnectedness from time, will evolve out of existence. How long this will take, I don't know.

On genius and greatness, and value

The word 'genius' has a magical sound. *Genius*. "He is a genius." It's redolent of the divine, or at least the über-human. A genius isn't quite human; there is something mysterious, almost mystical, about him. People speak of him in reverend tones. Einstein is the prototypical example. All his eccentricities, his absentmindedness and childishness, and even his selfishness, are forgiven him, for he was a *genius*. "What is it like to be a genius?" "It must be so hard to tolerate people!" "The genius is immortal."

In an interview once, David Foster Wallace recalled a day in college when a professor of his had told him he was a genius. It was the happiest day of his life. "I thought I'd never have to go to the bathroom again," he said. In my younger days, I myself used to take pleasure in basking in thoughts of self-flattery. I would read Schopenhauer's many passages in which he waxes rhapsodic about the genius, describing him in rich detail and contrasting him with the average dullard. The genius, he says, is like a child, emotional, fickle, prone to alternating bouts of joy and melancholy, absentminded, fascinated by the world, self-absorbed, sensitive, lonely, careless with money, good-natured but easily disappointed in people. I was pleased that every facet of his descriptions was true of me. My absentmindedness, for example, has always been comically severe. Sometimes I accidentally try to brush my teeth with a pen I've picked up from the counter, or I try to drink a yoghurt I've just taken from the refrigerator, assuming it's a cup of juice. And I'm incurably lackadaisical about practical things like money, in which I have no interest whatever.

As I grew older (21, 22), I came to understand the silliness of Schopenhauer's thoughts about the extraordinariness of the genius. For those of you not acquainted with his ideas, I should say that he thought geniuses had some kind of privileged access to the thing-in-itself, the inner essence of the world. In ecstatic moments of artistic contemplation other people can sometimes approximate this, but not to the extent that the genius can. He literally has intuitive "knowledge" of the way the world is in itself. –Pretty fanciful, eh? The funny thing is that our ordinary linguistic usage accords well with what Schopenhauer said. We half-consciously think of the genius as possessing some sort of divine insight into reality—or, if he is an artist, as possessing a half-divine, half-mad sympathy with beauty/creativity. The word itself has these conceptual overtones.

To glance over the concept's history is enlightening in this regard. The ancient Greeks didn't have a word for genius, but they understood the difference between a merely talented artist and a supremely gifted one. In his dialogue *Ion*, Plato had this to say about the great poets:

> None of the epic poets, if they're good, are "masters" of their subject; [instead] they are inspired, possessed, and that is how they utter all those beautiful poems. The same goes for lyric poets if they're good: just as the Corybantes are not in their right minds when they dance, lyric poets, too, are not in their right minds when they make those beautiful lyrics, but as soon as they sail into harmony and rhythm they are possessed by some Bacchic frenzy. …A poet is an airy thing, winged and holy, and he is not able to make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his mind and his intellect is no longer in him. …The god himself is the one who speaks [through him].

Thus Plato originated, or at least popularized, the theory that the creative genius is a vessel for some higher force, something over which he has no control—that during his creative episodes he experiences a kind of madness. Many artists have latched onto this conception (no doubt because they find it flattering); Percy Bysshe Shelley, for example, was sympathetic to the Platonic vision, ostensibly because he himself felt as if his poems came from "outside" him, or from an unconscious source. And Nietzsche described his experience of writing *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in a similar vein:

> Has anyone at the end of the nineteenth century a clear idea of what poets of strong ages have called *inspiration*? If not, I will describe it.— If one had the slightest residue of superstition left in one's system, one could hardly reject altogether the idea that one is merely incarnation, merely mouthpiece, merely a medium of overpowering forces. The concept of revelation, in the sense that suddenly, with indescribable certainty and subtlety, something becomes *visible*, audible, something that shakes one to the last depths and throws one down, that merely describes the facts. One hears, one does not seek; one accepts, one does not ask who gives; like lightning, a thought flashes up, with necessity, without hesitation regarding its form,—I never had any choice. A rapture whose tremendous tension occasionally discharges itself in a flood of tears, now the pace quickens involuntarily, now it becomes slow; one is altogether beside oneself, with the distinct

> consciousness of subtle shudders and of one's skin creeping down to one's toes; a depth of happiness in which even what is most painful and gloomy does not seem something opposite but rather conditioned, provoked, a *necessary* color in such a superabundance of light… Everything happens involuntarily in the highest degree but as in a gale of a feeling of freedom, of absoluteness, of power, of divinity… The involuntariness of image and metaphor is strangest of all; one no longer has any notion of what is an image or a metaphor, everything offers itself as the nearest, most obvious, simplest expression. It actually seems, to allude to something Zarathustra says, as if the things themselves approached and offered themselves as metaphors…

Aristotle emphasized the kinship of genius with madness. "No excellent soul is without a tincture of madness." This brings me to the historical connection between the concepts of genius and the demonic. The latter has a complex history. Even in ancient Greece, the word 'daimon' already had multiple connotations. While it *denoted* a semi-divine being who interfered in human affairs, often with destructive ends, its *connotations* were more controversial. Aeschylus, for example, interpreted the daimon as essentially tragic and destructive: in *The Persians*, the Queen attributed Xerxes' ruinous hubris, his delusions, to a daimon that had taken away his judgment. But even in Aeschylus there are ambiguities, for in the same play a ghost (a daimon itself) says that Xerxes' daimon *is* his hubris, his hubris that led him to defy the gods. Heraclitus had this same psychological understanding of the demonic element: it arises from man's own self. "Man's character is his daimon" (fragment 119). And, like Aeschylus's daimon, it determines man's tragic fate. Socrates, on the other hand, conceived of the daimon as a positive power, a supernatural element that keeps man within the fold of rational self-determination. It is an "inner voice" that warns him whenever he is about to do something irrational or harmful. In his paper "The Demonic: From Aeschylus to Tillich" (1969), Wolfgang Zucker summarizes the conflict between Socrates's benevolent conception and Aeschylus's tragic one:

> For the tragedies, the daimon's distinctive power is the result of man's alienation from the objective world order; therefore the demonic appears as an avenging and hostile force. For the rational philosopher in an age of demythologization, the demonic appears as a benevolent helper toward his self-realization, consenting to man's autonomy as long as he does not lose himself to his passions or contentiousness. The Latin interpreters showed a perfect understanding of what Plato had in mind when they translated the word as "genius."

We see here that 'genius' denotes a benevolent spirit, the guiding or tutelary spirit of a man. In Roman mythology, every man had a genius. Originally, the genius was an ancestor who watched over his descendants, but over time the concept evolved to denote a personal guardian spirit that granted intellect and prowess. The distant origins of the modern word are evident.

In any case, the Socratic understanding didn't last long. I won't trace the entire history of the word 'demon,' but during Christian times it signified a devilish spirit, a manifestation of evil. This is what it meant throughout the Middle Ages. Finally in the eighteenth century the concept regained some of its original, Greek meaning. I'll quote the whole passage from Zucker:

> …The rediscovery of the demonic as a force that cannot be measured in terms of good and evil was due to the anti-rational cult of genius at the end of the eighteenth century. It was the expression of a fundamental opposition against the Enlightenment, against the utilitarian middle-class concept of order, and against the prevailing moralistic and intellectualistic theology. Such expression needed as its social precondition the breakdown of the old social system and the emergence of a new marginal class of artists who were no longer merely skilled artisans. It is at this time that the designations *artiste* and *Künstler* came in use, designations which did not mean simply specific occupations, but a way of life outside the hierarchy of social and economical values.

> At the same time, poets began to see their kinsmen and associates in the visual artists and musicians rather than, as before, in philosophers and scholars. Precisely because secular and clerical princes lost the means for guaranteeing employment and income for the painters and musicians of their households, the practitioners of the various arts became free agents and developed their own ideology of genius.
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> According to this new viewpoint, the artist was no longer a man who simply had learned the use of brush and chisel or could play different musical instruments, but he now was gifted with some supernatural power; he had genius, or even he himself was "a genius." A genius is not an ordinary human being; he belongs to a different order and can neither be understood nor judged by society. His acts do not conform to the norms of accepted behavior, but also his work has a superhuman quality that makes it incomparable with the work of other men. Thus the artist can neither share the comforts and rewards of socially useful occupations, nor does he feel compelled to submit to the restrictions and prescriptions of social conventions.
>
> The essential point, however, is that this extraordinary, this marginal position of the artistic genius is not the result of free choice, but the effect of being possessed by a semi-divine power, namely "genius." The exercising of an artistic endowment is therefore not an achievement, an action of man, but a painful suffering, a passion. Therefore the usual categories of good and evil, of useful and useless, do not apply to the genius. What he does and what he suffers is his fate. He is not a genius because he is an extraordinary artist; rather, he is an artist because he is possessed by a genius. Raphael would be the great artist he was, even if he had been born without hands.

Raphael was possessed by a demon, a genius. Goethe's famous interpretation of the demonic unequivocally associates it with geniuses (the people, not the spirits). The creativity of great men is demonic; the personalities of men like Napoleon and Byron are demonic; nature itself has elements of the demonic; fate is demonic. Thus the genius is intimately related to fate, to the cosmic order. In his autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe describes the demonic as "[representing] a power which is, if not opposed to the moral order of the world, yet at cross-purposes to it; such that one could compare the one to the warp, and the other to the woof. …[People who exemplify the demonic] are not always men superior in mind or talents, seldom do they recommend themselves by the goodness of their heart. Yet, a tremendous power goes out from them; they possess an incredible force over all other creatures and even over the elements; nobody can say how far their influence will reach…" While the word 'genius' isn't mentioned, clearly Goethe would classify demonic men as, in some sense, geniuses, due to their unconscious, supernatural power. And when discussing demonic men he always refers to people like Mozart, Byron, and Caesar—i.e., "geniuses." At other times Goethe, like most Romantics, attributes to the genius special rights, exemptions from duties to which the mass of men must adhere. Ordinary morality doesn't apply to him. Geniuses are "permitted" to be selfish, immoral, cruel, for the sake of realizing themselves, simply because this is what they are *driven* to do. They *have* to do it; they have no choice in the matter. Nietzsche (who ironically was critical of Romanticism) elevated this myth into a philosophic vision, namely that of the *Übermensch*. The *Übermensch* can act immorally in the name of a higher morality, viz. that of the will to power. Realizing one's will to power is *the* imperative in life; the genius has a qualitatively greater will to power than the average man, so he has a qualitatively "higher" morality. (See, for instance, the section in the ironically named *Twilight of the Idols* entitled "My conception of the genius.") –It's a tribute to the power of all these Romantic writers that their ideologies still captivate us in our unguarded moments, and that, to an extent, their ideas have seeped into the very meaning of certain words.

Such beliefs in the genius's extra-ordinariness tie into the association of genius with madness. Madness, after all, is not ordinary. This should also remind us of the ancient idea that insane people, or people under the influence of drugs, have insights into the divine, the inner essence of the world. Oracles were in fact susceptible to moments of "insanity," or at least were "beside themselves" in their oracular moments. Perhaps we moderns are not entirely free from this pagan deification of madness.

Be that as it may, we have to admit that creative "geniuses" (scientific, artistic, and philosophical) have tended to be psychologically unhealthy and unsatisfied. –This brings me to the men of genius themselves, as opposed to the ideology. We have gained some idea, hopefully, of the nature and origin of the myth; now we have to see how well the myth accords with reality. To what extent are so-called geniuses extraordinary? What does it *mean* to call them "great"? If in fact the notion of genius is misguided, where does that leave us who idealize it?

To answer the question of whether geniuses are really "different" from ordinary people, we have to ask how it is that someone is labeled a genius in the first place. And here we encounter the first premise in the debunking of the myth. For the process by which people are labeled geniuses is not at all scientific. Even if we leave aside such secondary uses of the word as "Bill Clinton has a genius for politics" and concentrate on people famous for their *creativity*, there is nothing like a consistent standard in applying to someone the coveted label. The application results from a series of cultural accidents; deserving people are often denied the label while undeserving ones get lucky. For example, in part because of accidental historical circumstances (such as the opposition of the Church), Charles Darwin is called a genius, despite the fact that his main theoretic contribution was the single, simple idea of "natural selection by means of random variation"—which isn't nearly as impressive as Archimedes' or Max Planck's or Ernest Rutherford's achievements.[1] (Darwin wasn't the first to propose the theory of evolution.) Yet Rutherford is not commonly called a genius, despite his amazing accomplishments. […]

It will be objected that this argument shows only that popular recognition is sometimes mistaken, not that the *real* geniuses don't deserve their title. Besides, there are many examples of public recognition that is both widespread and justified. In literature: Shakespeare, Keats, Shelley, Goethe, Heine, Nietzsche, Faulkner, Joyce, and so on. –But then what are we saying in calling these men geniuses? What do we mean? And what are the criteria?

The ideology of genius that I've outlined is premised on the belief in a qualitative, categorical difference between the ingenious and the merely talented. That is, they can't be differentiated merely by *quantity*, such as the genius's greater productivity or his somewhat greater creativity—unless, of course, the quantitative differences are so great that they amount to a qualitative difference. I doubt, though, that anyone would want to defend the Romantic ideology anymore. People might say simply, "A genius has extraordinary creativity and great intuitive powers." But in fact I think that this definition, which does adhere to the word's ordinary usage, itself implies that there are "qualitatively distinct" attributes of genius. "A genius is a *great human being*, 'higher' than the rest of us." My goal in the following will be to refute this conception—that is, to show that nothing in particular distinguishes "geniuses," or "great men" in general, from everyone else. Later I'll suggest why this issue is significant.

Incidentally, I'm using the word 'genius' as it was used by the Romantics, and as it's still used in most contexts. It is now also taken to denote people like Marilyn vos Savant, who have extremely high IQs but are not known for their creativity, or people like Kim Peek, who have astonishing memories. I have no quarrel with this usage, because it's relatively empty and doesn't involve the notion of *greatness*. It doesn't incorporate a value-judgment—"This person is more valuable than the rest of us"—as does the other conception. It's basically the idea of greatness that I'm arguing against. To do that, I'll first argue against the meaningfulness of the concept 'genius,' and then I'll extend my critique to the notion of 'greatness.'

Not only philosophical and scientific, but even artistic geniuses are held to have great powers of intuition. So what is this thing that everyone praises? What is intuition? Briefly stated, it is a non-visual form of seeing. A non-discursive insight. A non-tactile mode of perception. It somehow involves imagination, though not all imagining is called intuiting. Maybe it should be, but both terms are so vague, virtually indefinable, that a demand for perfect consistency in their use would be misplaced. Moreover, I think there are subtle differences in how we use the words. For example, in many contexts, 'intuition' seems

[1] The biologist Thomas Huxley's reaction to Darwin's idea was appropriate: "How extremely stupid not to have thought of that!" It's just an *obvious* theory, almost a truism. (Essentially it says: those variations that increase the likelihood of an animal's survival will tend to survive and be passed on.) Incidentally, Alfred Russel Wallace conceived of it around the same time Darwin did, but few people think of him as a genius.

to connote that its object is *truth*, in some non-verbal form. One can supposedly intuit another's state of mind or the solution to a problem, intuitions that aim for truth. The contrast with 'imagination' is obvious.

Be that as it may, the power of imagination is at least a prerequisite for the power of intuition. Geniuses are said to have both. Because their imaginations are so active, their intuitive powers are remarkable. Mozart, for example, is said to have had a unique musical imagination, as well as an ability to *intuit* his music. In his self-descriptions he says that he could somehow hear an entire piece in a single moment, all jumbled together in his mind. This idea makes (partial) sense only if we interpret it metaphorically: he isn't hearing all the individual notes together, which would be an intolerable dissonance; he is "imaginatively" understanding the thematic development of the piece, its structure and outline. A parallel would be the philosopher's intuition of a particular theory—say, Saul Kripke's intuition of the fact that proper names are "rigid designators." (See his book *Naming and Necessity*.) Or Hegel's intuition of the fact that the self is self-consciousness. These two men, in having great philosophical imaginations, can experience potent intuitions.

To give a precise definition of intuition is impossible, because the word itself is very imprecise. Very nebulous; hard to get a grasp on. When I introspect, I experience my own philosophical intuitions as a distinctive manifestation of imagination, an unconceptualizable "seeing" of the truth (or what *seems* to be the truth), unmediated by words. I really can't say much more about them. A good way to describe them, perhaps, is to call this type of intuition *intentional perception*, as opposed to *phenomenal* perception (such as physical sensations). This definition, vague though it is, at least emphasizes the elements of *depth* and *force* in intuition, as well as the element of mental perception. When I have a quick thought about a person who isn't present I don't feel particularly as if I'm experiencing a perception, an *intuition*. I just interpret myself as *thinking* about him, that's all. When I purposely empathize with someone, on the other hand—when I "place myself in his shoes," by imagining my reactions if I were in his situation—the intuitive element is present. I'm having an intuition in the full sense, for my empathic insight *strikes* me, with a certain force. There is a "suddenness" to this kind of intuition.

Since there are not clear boundaries between the various types of intuition (insofar as there are such types), my distinguishing a particular class of thought is inevitably going to be somewhat arbitrary. It's useful, though, and necessary, for when people attribute to the genius intuitive abilities, they're tacitly doing the same thing. They're demarcating a class of "full" intuitions from the commonplace thoughts we all have most of the time, which themselves have intuitive features. This fact itself should make us wary of positing a categorical difference between the genius and the ordinary person. But at the moment I want only to emphasize that, even under the restrictive definition I gave in the last paragraph, "ordinary people" commonly have intuitions.

I suspect the reader will grant me this. He may say, though, that geniuses have intuitions more often. However, he has already significantly weakened his defense of the genius by admitting that the average guy on the street can have one of his supposedly defining experiences, namely that of intuition. By claiming that geniuses have intuitions more often than others, he has reduced his case to the belief in a merely *quantitative* difference between the two types of people. And the conclusion has to be that there is no fixed, "essentialist" difference, in this respect at least. There is but an unclear, blurry merging between the two "categories"—which effectively refutes the Romantics' conception, and thus the implicit significance of our conventional linguistic usage. Even great personifications of genius, like Mozart, Kant, and Newton, are in this respect merely uncommon examples of ordinary people, in that they have the ordinary experience of intuition relatively often.

Of course it will be objected that, in giving a *phenomenological* analysis of intuition, I've ignored what is really unique in the genius's intuitions. While his *experience* of them may be similar to the ordinary person's experience, their *content* is different. For example, while the philosopher Derek Parfit's intuitions may, for him, feel similar to the way Kant's intuitions felt to him, Kant's were more fruitful, pithy, etc. This is why he is called a genius, while Parfit is not.

This objection is perceptive, in that it links intuition to creativity, which is another criterion in the definition of the genius. A man like Kant has intuitions with more creative potential than a man like Parfit.

Consider the following quotation from Henri Poincaré, who was a mathematician of undisputed genius, in which he describes the experience of profound mathematical creation:

> …Most striking at first is this appearance of sudden illumination, a manifest sign of long, unconscious prior work. The role of this unconscious work in mathematical invention appears to me incontestable, and traces of it would be found in other cases where it is less evident. Often when one works at a hard question, nothing good is accomplished at the first attack. Then one takes a rest, longer or shorter, and sits down anew to the work. During the first half-hour, as before, nothing is found, and then all of a sudden the decisive idea presents itself to the mind. It might be said that the conscious work has been more fruitful because it has been interrupted and the rest has given back to the mind its force and freshness. But it is more probable that the rest has been filled out with unconscious work and that the result of this work has afterwards revealed itself to the geometer just as in the cases I have cited… These sudden inspirations never happen except after some days of voluntary effort which has appeared absolutely fruitless and whence nothing good seems to have come, where the way taken seems totally astray. These efforts then have not been as sterile as one thinks; they have set agoing the unconscious machine and without them it would not have moved and would have produced nothing…

This is quoted in Hans Eysenck's book *Genius: The Natural History of Creativity* (1995). Eysenck summarizes the passage: "This quotation well describes what countless mathematicians, scientists, writers, artists, and composers have described somewhat less clearly. There is the preliminary labor; the incubation period; the sudden integration, owing its existence to inspiration rather than conscious logical thought, and finally the verification or proof, perfectly conscious…" (Chapter 5.)

It would seem that most people rarely experience this kind of intuition, the kind that results from sustained conscious and unconscious work. Correspondingly, they're called less creative than people like Poincaré. The creativity of the latter is closely related to the content and origin of their intuitions; otherwise they would, supposedly, be merely *talented*. The talented person may be industrious and productive, but his work is less instinctual or unconscious than the genius's, and this results in its relative mediocrity. (The obvious hidden premise is that, for whatever reason, if significant unconscious work—and consequent intuitive illumination—is involved, the product will likely have more value than if the work all takes place on a conscious level.)

But here the question arises: is it the nature of the activity or the worth of the work that determines the genius? If the former, then whether the final product is intrinsically valuable is irrelevant; the point is that it has been arrived at through a process akin to that described by Poincaré. If the latter, on the other hand, then the nature of the creative process is irrelevant; what matters is only the intrinsic value of the work. Neither option seems very satisfying, though. Poincaré might respond, "Both aspects are important: you can't have the intrinsic value without the unconscious, intuitive creative process." But is this right? There seems no way of knowing.

Perhaps it's best just to stipulate—for the sake of definitional clarity—that the class of *true* geniuses includes only those people who are creative in a Poincaréan, intuitive and unconscious way. This appears to capture the essence of our ordinary use of the word 'genius,' since, after all, it isn't a contradiction to say that a particular man was a genius who unfortunately produced only mediocre work. He had the *potential* for brilliant work, due to the nature of his creativity, but he failed to realize it. Thus, the direct criterion for true genius is not the value of the work but the fecundity of the mind—a fecundity revealed by the nature of its creative process.

Even apart from the further testimony of "countless mathematicians, scientists, writers, artists, and composers,"[1] that claim is justified by the intellectual character of the most uncontroversial geniuses, such as Shakespeare, Byron, Mozart, and Einstein. We've already seen what Mozart said about his creative process; Einstein has written somewhere that in the moment of his decisive insight into the theory of relativity, he felt as if something had "snapped" in his mind. He was overcome by elation; his momentary intuition, after countless hours of conscious work, was the most powerful experience of his life. As for Byron and Shakespeare, one has only to read their works to see that their unconscious is responsible for them. (*Don Juan*, for instance, is ridiculously brilliant. It's a poem unlike any other in the English language—in *any* language—surpassing even Pope's *Dunciad*. Clearly no merely conscious manipulation of words could have created it.)

In short, we're back to Plato, Shelley, and Nietzsche, albeit made a little more precise and quasi-scientific. The creative genius is defined as a person whose mind is fertile in such a way that much of its work is done on an unconscious level, and that once the unconscious work is finished, the result intuitively appears to the conscious mind and is then crafted and manipulated. I think that this argument, and this definition, is the strongest one possible in support of the claim that geniuses really are categorically, "*substantively*" different from ordinary people. For it claims that implicit in our ordinary linguistic usage is the notion that there is an *essence* to the genius, an essence that other people lack. This is what the Romantics argued, and it is what I am denying. The definition links intuition and creativity in a plausible way, thus uniting the two main criteria in people's understanding of what genius is. (Geniuses are, of course, held to have other qualities, various personal idiosyncrasies, but these are not *criteria*.)

So my task is to show why that argument is mistaken. I have to show that our admiration of "true" geniuses is misguided. First I'll point out that even on the restrictive definition I've given, the class of geniuses has a far greater extension than is commonly supposed. There are thousands or hundreds of thousands of so-called geniuses in every generation in the U.S. alone. Many or most poets, novelists, mathematicians, theoretical physicists, and others qualify, because their creative process is essentially the same as Poincaré's. It's wrong, then, to think that geniuses are spectacularly unusual, that there are only several in any given generation. This fact in itself serves as an argument against the attribution of semi-divinity implicit in our use of the term.

Similarly, there is nothing particularly remarkable about the behavior of a genius. People tend to associate certain stereotypes with the concept, such as: irritable, impatient, eccentric, absentminded, half-insane, depressive, self-absorbed, socially naïve, or having an unkempt appearance. These stereotypes heighten the concept's mystique. They do seem to have *some* empirical basis, but, first of all, if we're assuming approximately the definition I gave above, it may well be that most geniuses do *not* exhibit these traits (any more than the average person). Secondly, even the ones who do—such as Einstein, Van Gogh, Byron, Beethoven, Wittgenstein—don't exhibit them to the extent that myth suggests they do. In his lifetime, for instance, Byron enjoyed the reputation of being full of passion at all times, a Don Juan pining for love and happiness. His poems were the basis for the myth. And while it flattered him, he had enough intellectual integrity to remark that the myth was absurd: no one is as passionate as he was reputed to be. The vast majority of the time, he said, he was utterly ordinary, as passionless as anyone else; it was only in rare moments that he felt lonely or intensely in love, and it was then that he wrote his poems. Similarly, if you had followed Van Gogh around every day, or Einstein, you would have seen that there was nothing especially sublime about them. Van Gogh, you might think, was kind of a bore, a little too gloomy at times, while Einstein was just a fairly pleasant man with unusual hair. Perhaps moody, perhaps a bit odd in some respects—but who isn't? Everyone has idiosyncrasies. The main reason it seems as if "geniuses" have more than most people is that people pay more attention to their behavior than to that of others. People write about their experiences with the "great man"; every unusual act of his is recorded, and the consequent impression is of a unique and fascinating person. But if you met him without knowing who he was, the

[1] See, e.g., Coleridge's description of the circumstances under which he wrote *Kubla Khan*, and A. E. Housman's statement to the effect that sometimes, when he goes for a stroll outside, an entire stanza of a new poem suddenly appears before his mind, fully worked out.

odds are overwhelming that you wouldn't find him particularly memorable. –Napoleon was right that "no man is a hero to his valet." Familiarity breeds contempt.

It may be true, though, that people called geniuses have tended not to be "well-adjusted." Many of them have been narcissistic, schizoid, (manic-)depressive, or simply lonely. Some have ended up insane. Others have committed suicide. Artists in particular appear to suffer from erratic mentalities. They're often overly sensitive and unhappy, except, perhaps, in moments of creation. One wonders why. What is it about this kind of creativity that makes the creative person susceptible to mental illness? The most obvious factor is loneliness. When your innate aptitudes are different from most people's and your interests are not theirs, you're going to feel different from them and hence lonely. It will be rare that you find a true companion. Eventually you'll learn that you feel more "fulfilled" and happy when you're being productive than when you're with other people, so you'll spend much of your time creating work in solitude. And while this will, in a sense, make you happy, it will also probably contribute to your unhappiness, since what humans desire more than anything else is "recognition" (love, etc.). No matter how good your work is, as long as you live and work in relative solitude you will be unsatisfied, possibly neurotic and depressed.

So, part of the problem is simply that the highly creative person often doesn't feel comfortable with most people, which means that the part of him that craves validation and affection is frustrated. He may therefore have a fragile sense of self, which depends too much on people's reactions to him and his work, and his self-esteem might be inadequate even as he becomes somewhat egomaniacal due to his isolation, his comparing himself with past great men, and his self-righteous conviction that "despite what they all think, I am a genius, I am ahead of my time!" (which conviction is partly a defense-mechanism against psychological insecurity—i.e., an attempt to give himself the recognition he doesn't receive from others). He will finally come to see the justification of his existence in his work, because his work is the only thing that allows him to recognize his sense of self in the world—to see it objectified and thereby confirmed.

The issue can be approached from a neurological perspective too, namely by asking what are the neural causes of the connection between certain types of creativity and mental illness, but the foregoing suggestions are sufficient to show that the so-called genius's pathological state of mind is thoroughly earth-bound, with fairly ordinary causes. It isn't (only) that he sees so much ugliness in the world that he despairs, having a soul so noble that he pines for Beauty while the cruel world crushes his hopes. There is nothing particularly sublime about his "madness."

So all the mystique that hovers around the "genius" because of his supposedly eccentric behavior is based on illusions. People misunderstand both themselves and geniuses by attributing to the latter exceptional personal qualities. In general, this idolization is almost as unfounded as the idolization of celebrities: it reflects the peculiar human tendency to pick out a certain person or group of people and look up to them, model oneself after them, praise them and seek their affection, attribute to them supposedly unique qualities many of which are in fact possessed by everyone. This tendency first shows itself in childhood, when one admires one's parents as if they were perfect all-knowing beings; later it takes other forms, such as hero-worship and the idealization of unusually creative people.

Doubtless John Dryden was partly right when he said, in *Absalom and Achitophel*,

> Great wits to madness sure are near allied,
> And thin partitions do their bounds divide.

This idea is quite interesting, insofar as there is some truth to it. Aside from their both sometimes being absentminded, socially awkward, withdrawn, tormented, and so on, the exceptionally creative and the "insane" can have deeper similarities too. For instance, they both tend to interpret reality differently from how others interpret it, e.g., by perceiving logical and causal connections where others wouldn't. Likewise, obsessive thinking is a common experience in some types of insanity. People suffering from a psychosis may have compulsive thoughts, delusions of grandeur, hallucinations, severe depressive tendencies, paranoid thoughts—all of which have been associated with genius. Creative people often think compulsively about themselves and are driven compulsively by their creative urge. If they're in the process of creating something, they'll feel strangely "haunted" or "bothered" until it's finished. It will feel like their

lives have been put on hold until they're satisfied with their creation, because they just can't stop thinking about it—about getting it *right*, about the absolute necessity of getting past their doubts and moving on with life. (See §93 of Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*: "…But why, then, do you write? –A: Well, my friend, to be quite frank: so far, I have not discovered any other way of getting rid of my thoughts. –B: And why do you want to get rid of them? –A: Why do I want to? Do I want to? I *must*.")

But, of course, whatever seemingly unusual quality one wants to assign some category of people is to a degree possessed by many others as well. Even such meritorious traits as having an impressive work-ethic or a wide-ranging curiosity or great intellectual integrity are dispersed widely through the population. High creativity itself is universal, inasmuch as it is human nature to be astonishingly creative—in the use of language, for example, or in thinking of new ideas, or in interpreting new experiences, or in pursuing whatever talents one has. It may even be misleading to speak of someone's "exceptional creativity"; it seems exceptional to us because it takes a slightly different form than it does in most people, but others are, in their own ways, probably just as creative. We attribute too much creativity to some people and too little to the rest of us—especially given that, in many cases, the difference is simply that the former are more privileged than the latter, having more money or leisure time or a job that allows them to indulge their creative side more than most jobs do.

Anyway, we have to reject the argument that there is an *essence* to genius, because people use the word in too many disparate contexts for it to have a single, coherent definition. Its denotations and connotations are associated through "family resemblances" (to quote Wittgenstein) rather than "necessary and sufficient conditions." That is, its uses merely *resemble* each other; they don't have some clear definition in common, as do, say, the uses of the word 'bachelor.' Even with regard to the *creative* genius, common use of the term doesn't justify defining it in some such essentialist way as the Poincaréan definition I gave above. People disagree on who counts as a genius, and they disagree on what it is about someone that justifies pinning the label on him. The label, in fact, is really little more than an honorific, whose application depends largely on accidental circumstances, the vagaries that determine popular recognition. As we saw earlier, it is merely an *ideological construct*, not a scientific one, and so suffers from a basic meaninglessness at its core.

"Fine!" you say. "I've agreed with your conclusion all along! Now tell me why I should care." First of all, I think that questions about the nature of genius (or lack thereof) are interesting in their own right. But more importantly, I want to extend my critique to the idea of greatness. I think that this idea is even more meaningless than the other one, and for similar reasons. For one thing, we use the word in so many contexts that to extrapolate a satisfactory definition is impossible. A great person is one who, through whatever circumstances—not all of which redound to his credit—has managed to achieve something that impresses society, causes his name to trickle down through the various social classes. The criteria for attributions of greatness differ from person to person; the concept is so vague that nothing really substantive or "definite" determines its use. The person called great isn't somehow "above" the rest of us (whatever that would mean); he isn't "better" than us. The most that can be said in his favor is that certain qualities are, perhaps, more well-developed in him than in most people, while others are probably less so. Often his "greatness" is due to his flaws, whether they be childishness, narcissism, arrogance, or selfishness. Charles de Gaulle is sometimes considered a great man, but he was arrogant, vain, ridiculously conservative, self-deluded—all of which qualities made possible his "strong will" and thus his rise to power. Napoleon was selfish and brutal. Albert Schweitzer, on the other hand, was just an intelligent, good man who understood that humans, as such, have obligations toward each other, and acted on that knowledge.

People called great are often surprised at their reputation. They know they're basically ordinary; they think that all the adulation they receive is silly, though they may play along with it because of vanity. Goethe, for example, insisted he was "extraordinarily ordinary," just as human and flawed as everyone else. But because he wrote and talked well, people thought that he himself must be comparably great. That's the main confusion: people confuse a person with his objectifications. They confuse Mozart with the *Jupiter* symphony, Byron with his passionate poems, Martin Luther King, Jr. with his powerful speeches. These people are as human as the rest of us, but their distinctive talent makes them seem extraordinary, namely because we look at a few objectifications and think we see the entire person. If certain objectifications seem

more impressive than those of most people, we think that the person responsible for them must be that much more impressive as well. But really, the inner, subjective differences, and the biological differences, responsible for the different objectifications are minuscule. And, as I said, they often include traits that are considered weaknesses. –Humans are more or less similar. They're fundamentally equal, however their self-expressions may occasionally suggest otherwise.

Incidentally, everything I'm arguing here is, in a sense, merely an articulation of what has become implicit in societal conditions, in social relations. The structure of late capitalism, with its submersion of the individual in the mass, its commodification of the human personality, its worship of science, and its puerile pop culture, is such that 'greatness' and 'genius' have become empty words, ludicrously romantic and anachronistic, to which people nonetheless continue to pay lip-service. Anyone who still truly believes in the possibility of greatness—the sort of hallowed immortality that people still reflexively attribute to, say, Lincoln, FDR, or Gandhi—is behind the times. People are molded by their circumstances far more than they can ever mold them. Greatness, this strange midpoint between the earthly and the divine, is a myth, just as the divine itself is a myth. The Great Man theory of history is dead; the spirit of Thomas Carlyle is foreign to the spirit of late capitalism.

The history of languages proceeds on the basis of social evolution: new concepts emerge, new modes of communication appear on the basis of new institutions, new modes of life and production. And once particular concepts or ideologies have arisen, they will remain in circulation until *after* concrete social relations have made them obsolete. Only gradually will society slough off ossified ways of thought and communication, namely when it can no longer postpone its "ideological" adaptation to new circumstances. This is why the notions of greatness and genius are still taken as semi-seriously as they are. They're relics of a more romantic, idealistic age than our own, though when they'll effectively die out is impossible to say.

In some respects this state of affairs is desirable, but in others it isn't. Human life has need of *some* illusions, after all. They need not be as patently delusive as, say, Christianity, but they have to function as tonics, as things that make life bearable. Nietzsche, for example, thought of art as such a tonic, a sort of Platonic lie that is, however, believed in by its *creators* more than anyone else. (Nietzsche thought that artists are mostly actors: through their work, they lie to themselves and others, by idealistically pretending to be something they're not.) The belief in great men and geniuses has a similar function—not, admittedly, for most people, who have family, love and, in some cases, religion to make them happy, but for the less well-adjusted, who cling to the illusion of greatness desperately. Nietzsche, ironically, was an example. As are many artists. Their commitment to the illusion is a symptom of the unhappiness I mentioned above—the loneliness, the self-fixation. "If our contemporaries don't recognize us," they think, "well then, posterity will! We'll have the last laugh! (After we're dead, though.)" Such people are frequently more committed to their works than to life itself, or even to the lives of their children. Consider Montaigne's observations:

> Now once we consider the fact that we love our children simply because we begot them, calling them our second selves, we can see that we also produce something else from ourselves, no less worthy of commendation: for the things we engender in our soul, the offspring of our mind, of our wisdom and talents, are the products of a part more noble than the body and are more purely our own. In this act of generation we are both mother and father; these 'children' cost us dearer and, if they are any good, bring us more honor. In the case of our other children their good qualities belong much more to them than to us: we have only a very slight share in them; but in the case of these, all their grace, worth and beauty belong to us. For this reason they have a more lively resemblance and correspondence to us. Plato adds that such children are immortal and immortalize their fathers—even deifying them, as in the case of Lycurgus, Solon and Minos.
>
> …Few devotees of poetry would not have been more gratified at fathering the *Aeneid* than the fairest boy in Rome, nor fail to find the loss of one more bearable than the other. For according to Aristotle, of all artists the one who is most in love with his handiwork is the poet.

Such people can be so in love with their works, and the potential immortality that lies in them, that they exhibit total despair upon losing them:

> [The enemies of Labienus, a man who "excelled in every kind of literature,"] prosecuted him before the Roman magistrates and obtained a conviction, requiring several of the books he had published to be burnt. This was the very first case of the death penalty being inflicted on books and erudition; it was subsequently applied at Rome in several other cases. …Labienus could not bear such a loss nor survive such beloved offspring; he had himself borne to the family vault on a litter and shut up alive; there he provided his own death and burial. It is difficult to find any example of fatherly love more vehement than that one…
>
> A similar misfortune happened to Cremutius Cordus, who was accused of having praised Brutus and Cassius in his books. That slavish base and corrupt Senate (worthy of a worse master than Tiberius) condemned his writings to the pyre: it pleased him to keep his books company as they perished in the flames by starving himself to death.[1]

It seems that a certain kind of person, blessed with a Protestant ethic, will always see more merit in his "works" than in his "faith"—precisely because his works are what make possible his faith (in himself). He has to creatively "objectify" himself—project himself into the world, see his sense of self reflected and confirmed outside himself. Everyone needs this, but some people evidently need it more, or rather in different ways, than others. Accordingly, they will use their talents, perhaps to the point of obsession, to get the self-confirmation they desire—because knowledge of their talents has become the most essential component in their self-regard.

But what is this identification with "great" objectifications if not identification with greatness itself? The objectifications are what raise the creator (in his own eyes) from the level of the mundane, which he hates, into the level of the semi-immortal. Without them he is just ordinary, and so his sense of self—which is committed to his extraordinariness—is not confirmed or recognized. But *with* them he is this being that can put beauty and profundity into the world. He so invests himself in his objectifications that he is able to live, in a way, *outside* himself; he doesn't have to face the fact that he is just a human among humans, as mortal and earth-bound as everyone else. He can ignore his obviously animal nature. Schopenhauer and Wagner can be seen as the prototypes—those two brilliant, deluded men. Schopenhauer did more than any other thinker to propagate the myth of genius, the conception of which he basically modeled after how he perceived his own personality: the genius is the man whose intellect is so powerful and energetic that it has been effectively detached from its service to the will (i.e., to the individual's practical interests, his will-to-live), which in the average person is its sole function.

> …The gift of genius is nothing but the most complete *objectivity*, i.e., the objective tendency of the mind, as opposed to the subjective directed to our own person, i.e., to the will. Accordingly, genius is the capacity to remain in a state of pure perception, to lose oneself in perception, to remove from the service of the will the knowledge which originally existed only for this service. In other words, genius is the ability to leave entirely out of sight our own interest, our willing, and our aims, and consequently to discard entirely our own personality for a time, in order to remain *pure knowing subject*, the clear eye of the world… For genius to appear in an individual, it is as if a measure of the power of knowledge must have fallen to his lot far exceeding that required for the service of an individual will; and this superfluity of knowledge having become free, now becomes the subject purified of will, the clear mirror of the inner nature of the world. This explains the

[1] Montaigne, *The Essays: A Selection* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 165, 166, 167.

> animation, amounting to disquietude, in men of genius, since the present can seldom satisfy them, because it does not fill their consciousness…[1]

Such panegyrical passages go on for pages in Schopenhauer's books; and while I enjoy reading them, they're obviously fantasies. Wagner didn't think so, though. Like so many other Romantics, he adored Schopenhauer and his philosophy because it flattered him—specifically because of the privileged place that Schopenhauer accorded music. This art, he said, is superior to all others, since it is the most immediate and abstract manifestation of Will, i.e., the essence of reality. This theory gave Wagner the philosophical justification he needed to think of himself as the most monumental and metaphysical of geniuses, a self-conception that comforted him amidst all the suffering and toil that went into his composing. As Nietzsche remarked,[2] it's likely that Wagner needed his self-idealism, which he enshrined in his philosophical essays, in order to create. But in this respect he was just an ordinary "genius" taken to the extreme.

Self-idealism is ubiquitous, though it isn't usually taken to the excesses that Wagner took it. The very illusion that one is a substantival self—"Chris Wright," "John Smith," "Nancy Jones"—rather than merely a piece of matter with consciousness and memory-fragments is an example of self-idealism; so is love, which ascribes great value to the beloved; so is the attribution of some sort of importance to oneself. Everyone, of necessity, shares these illusions. Human life would not be possible without them. The brain naturally manufactures them, and they're what keep one interested in life. Scientific understanding, as Nietzsche and Max Weber saw, does not itself give rise to values, and indeed tends to show they don't have the "objectively justifiable" status we think they do but are mere projections of our own subjective attitudes. Nevertheless, we need values, we need self-love and self-idealism, and we need to idealize others. The notions of genius and greatness are ultimately senseless, but they can be of inestimable value in stimulating certain people to action, such that it can be very cruel to try to prove to someone that his idolization of a "hero" or so-called genius is a delusion.

The example that comes to mind is that of the young, talented person whose idealization of some hero gives him the inspiration to create. The young Nietzsche is his spokesman:

> Your true nature lies, not concealed deep within you, but immeasurably high above you, or at least above that which you usually take yourself to be. Your true educators and formative teachers reveal to you what the true basic material of your being is, something in itself ineducable and in any case difficult of access, bound and paralysed: your educators can be only your liberators.[3]

This hero-worship is another of the illusions in which human life consists. Without it, a lot of young people would find life boring and pointless. *I* certainly would have. My idolization of particular "great men" gave substance to the (self-)ideals without which I would have found life dull. If I had thought that everyone is basically similar and equal—if, that is, I had truly, intuitively understood humanity—such that I hadn't looked up to anyone as superior to the rest of us, it's doubtful that I could have had my ideals. It would have seemed futile to strive for anything if I weren't basically striving for the approval of past great men. How *boring* it would be to strive for the approval of the average person!—or of someone like me! No satisfaction would come from that kind of recognition. I had to think there were people greater than I, whose judgment I trusted more than my own. Whether I had value as a human being depended on whether they would have thought I had value. –On an *intellectual* level such people may recognize they're the victim of an illusion, but implicitly they still have to believe in it.

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[1] *The World as Will and Representation* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969), 185, 186.

[2] "Let him [i.e., Wagner] have his intellectual tempers and cramps. Let us, in all fairness, ask what strange nourishments and needs an art like [his] may require to be able to live and grow…" *The Gay Science*, §99. (Kaufmann's translation.)

[3] Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, Part Three, "Schopenhauer as Educator."

Incidentally, if they actually met the person whom they idolize, they would likely be disappointed. Not necessarily because he wouldn't measure up to their expectations, but just because he is as human as they themselves. Similarly, people who meet a celebrity are sometimes taken aback that he is just an ordinary person. "He's easygoing and pleasant. He even goes to the mall! Just like everyone else!" The reason they're surprised is the reason why the hero-worshiper may be disappointed upon meeting his idol: they've come to identify the famous person with his *name*, the *idea* of him. They see him not as something concrete and ordinary but as a sort of abstract concept, a *principle* as it were, just like the abstract Other in consciousness that drives us to seek self-confirmation. This famous person has become (for them) ingrained in the structure of reality, of social reality; he, or his "concept," is a component in the cultural or psychological background against which they live their lives, like a philosophical or aesthetic idea—with the decisive difference, though, that *this* "concept" is also a *self*. Bill Clinton, say, or Barack Obama, or some other famous person, is part-*self* and part-*concept*—part-*other* and part-*object*. His otherness, or selfhood, means that he is the kind of thing from which one wants validation, namely a human being; his "objecthood" (his being a cultural concept) means that he is more permanent than the rest of us, as though he is a part of reality itself.[1] The result is that he is implicitly perceived as more than human. In being recognized by him—or in identifying with him or with some past "great man"—one is recognized by or is identifying with a part of (social) reality itself, which of course is very affirmative of one's sense of self.

These fragmentary reflections, I hope, help explain humans' odd fascination with genius, greatness, and fame. My main concern, though, has been to show that the former two qualities are mere projections of the admiring person's attitude, not substantive, coherent properties in and of themselves. Widespread appreciation of this fact would facilitate a healthy equality among people.

[The above is an edited version. Here's an unedited continuation of the original.] So much for the discussion of genius and greatness. These properties are mere projections of the admiring person's attitude, not substantive, coherent properties in and of themselves. If this fact were widely appreciated it would facilitate a healthy equality among people. People might stop denigrating themselves vis-à-vis famous artists and celebrities.

But 'genius' and 'greatness' are just special cases of a more general phenomenon, namely that of values and valuing. In order to live in a true, and a healthy, equality,[2] we have to understand that value-judgments as such are not 'objectively valid'. Humans will always praise and condemn each other; this is both necessary and desirable, to an extent. It would be best, though, if we kept it in the back of our minds that the act of judging a person, including oneself, should be approached with a skeptical attitude, in that the judgment cannot be 'correct' or 'objectively true'—whatever that would mean. It is almost meaningless to say that someone is bad or good or stupid or foolish or wonderful; there is no 'objective fact' to which these judgments can correspond, as there is with regard to a descriptive statement like 'He has brown hair' or 'He wants to go to college'. We think we're saying, e.g., 'He objectively has the property of being an idiot'; but, insofar as the word 'idiot' has evaluative overtones, there is no such property. What there is, instead, is an attitude of disapproval towards him. We reify this attitude, so to speak: we attribute to him the intrinsic property of deserving-disapproval (i.e., of '*being-an-idiot*'). But there is no such property. So our judgment is largely deluded.

No one, strictly speaking, is 'better' or 'worse' than others, because the concept of value that is assumed in such evaluations is essentially meaningless.

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[1] A better way of saying it may be that he is effectively a concrete version—an especially valued or "impressive" one—of the abstract other from which one is always seeking recognition/validation; hence the excitement of meeting him. His social importance creates the aura around him of a kind of "self-certainty," a particularly powerful kind of substitute self-confidence, a *reality*, recognition from which/whom can prove one's own reality, i.e., the validity of one's implicit self-love.

[2] There is also an unhealthy kind of equality, such as that which infects pop culture. This is not the place to discuss it, though.

Nevertheless, we cannot stop making value-judgments altogether. That would be humanly impossible. The best we can do is to adopt, in general, a more skeptical attitude towards them. We should take them a little less seriously than we usually do, since we know that they cannot, strictly speaking, be *true*, given that they're almost meaningless. Another positive side-effect of our adopting this 'non-absolutist', 'skeptical', 'non-judgmental' attitude would be a lessening of self-righteousness and zealotry.

However, while our value-judgments cannot really have the objective, 'true-or-false' character that we think they have, they can be true or false relative to criteria. If our criteria for human worth are, e.g., compassion, empathy, thoughtfulness and tolerance, then, insofar as someone does not exhibit these qualities, we can with justification call him 'bad'—relative, that is, to the collective standards of goodness. Dick Cheney, then, is, on the whole, 'bad', at least as far as these criteria go. Albert Schweitzer, on the other hand, was relatively good.

—Because the topic of values is extremely complicated, I would refer you here to the paper I wrote on morality. This chapter is mainly a supplement to that paper, which itself is merely a sketch for a comprehensive analysis. The following discussion is going to be very brief, non-technical and non-philosophical.

In fact, I'm getting tired of writing in this pseudo-academic style. And I suspect you're getting tired of reading it. So instead I'm going to copy a few hopefully thought-provoking reflections I've written over the years, which are in a more informal style. [See my first book. I've deleted some of the reflections here.]

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"Don't care what people think of you," you say to the person who's sensitive to other people's opinions. And you're not saying it only to comfort him; you think you're right, because you yourself live by your advice. "Those people are wrong. Ignore them. Their opinions don't matter. Just be yourself." But when *you* judge people you're convinced of your judgment, you write off the person as an idiot or a jerk or whatever, and "That's that!" So what do you mean when you say "Don't care what people think of you"? *You* care what you think of people. Are you saying that your opinion is the only one that matters, that they should care what you think of them but you shouldn't care what they think of you? Because, of course, you do want them to care what you think of them. You know you're right in your judgments of them, so who's to say they're not right in their judgments of you? So you're being inconsistent. Either you admit that your judgments are ignorant, or you admit that you should care what people think of you. It's one or the other. The option that *I've* chosen—the true option—is that interpersonal 'judgments' are ignorant; therefore, don't care what people think of you. But don't care what you think of them either: i.e., don't 'judge' with the seriousness you usually do. That's the only way to live honestly.

*

"When John McCain praises Jerry Falwell, is he not being dishonest and hypocritical?" Yes. In that respect we can criticize him. He is not abiding by standards that humans have set up as 'good', and to that extent he himself is not 'good' (by those standards). But if you could be him for a day, you would understand why he acts contrary to his convictions. He thinks, for example, that, in this case, the ends justify the means; for he wants to be nominated as his party's candidate for president, and so he has to be accepted by conservatives. You yourself think that in many circumstances, the ends justify the means. And you yourself have done many things you're not proud of, many things you would condemn if done by someone else. But sometimes circumstances practically compel one to act in a less-than-exemplary way. Politics is replete with such circumstances. No politician, not even Lincoln or Jefferson or Washington, can avoid compromising his integrity constantly. Otherwise nothing would get done, and no politician would be able to effectively pursue his ambitions. It's a sacrifice one makes for what may, after all, in the end turn out to be the greater good. –My point is that, while it's good to criticize McCain for his dishonesty (lest he lose sight of himself and of higher values), it is also not entirely fair, at least not if the criticism is supposed to justify disgust or contempt for him.

*

Wisdom means acknowledging that ideals and values are illusions, that everything and every beautiful thing will die eventually, that life is fundamentally meaningless—and yet continuing to have ideals and values, indeed committing oneself to them *precisely because* life is basically meaningless.

*

(From a later journal entry.) Value characterizes a relation between a subject and an object. It's incoherent to say that an object is valuable in itself, i.e. with no reference to a subject (a subject's purposes, attitudes, etc.), because this contradicts the nature of value. But this is basically what one is doing when one makes a value-judgment. The statement "That painting is beautiful," by virtue of its form, ascribes value (a value-property[1]) to an object in itself—without reference to a subject—which is incoherent. The meaningful way of expressing the same sentiment is to say something like "That painting is such as to induce a feeling of aesthetic pleasure in me," or to list the criteria by which one judges aesthetic merit and then say that that painting fulfills the criteria.

But don't forget that all such philosophically problematic statements are unproblematic on the level of common sense. They serve their purpose in that context and are just as meaningful as they have to be given the functions of ordinary communication. (Cf. what I've written about such things as the "external world," the self, free will, linguistic meaning, the mind-body relationship, truth, etc. On the naïve level all this is unproblematic, but when you start to dig you see it all crumble beneath you until you're left with little more than illusions or contradictions or empty '*behavioral*' phenomena.)

*

Simplifying somewhat, true statements about humans are (directly or indirectly) a function either of their biology or of the social structures, conventions, ideologies and so on that have molded individuals. But so-called moral truths can be justified by neither. Consider biology: no researcher has ever learned by studying DNA that it's wrong to murder. Likewise, it's ridiculous to say that given our biological constitution, or our patterns of behavior, humans have an inalienable right to freedom. So moral truths are not biological or "natural." But they can't be conventional either—their truth can't result from the fact that society is organized in a particular way. Why? Because that's as absurd as arguing for them on the basis of biology. Moreover, it actually contradicts the essence of moral truths: it means they can't be "absolute" or anything like natural laws, but are relative, changeable, like society itself. –Thus, to talk about moral truths is to not know what one is talking about, since they can be neither 'natural' nor (by definition) merely conventional—but these are the only two options.

In another sense, though, a non-normative sense, moral truths are a function of *both* biology and social organization: our endowment predisposes us to (valorize) compassion, cooperation, respect for others, and the organization of our society results in our belief that particular rules are moral absolutes.

So the proper way to conceptualize ethics is to think of its practitioners as simply trying to find the best way to frame the normative dimension of human relations. Not as trying to find "moral truths."

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[1] This property (in the context of a statement) combines ordinary description with evaluation—a 'cognitive' stance with a 'noncognitive' one—which is incoherent. The statement posits its own truth, like any descriptive statement, but it can be neither true nor false because its real content is simply an expression of approval. So it contradicts itself. That is, its form suppresses the subjective perspective—denies its relevance, so to speak, in favor of positing an objective fact that has nothing to do with the subject's attitude—whereas its content is constituted by precisely this subjective perspective, the subject's reaction to what he is seeing.

I should say, however, as I've said repeatedly, that, given certain basic values and assumptions, there *are* moral absolutes. If you reject the former, or somehow qualify your commitment to them, it's perfectly rational to reject the latter.

—Such truths have been known for centuries by humane thinkers. It's time they were accepted by everyone.

[Deleted the other chapters.]

***

March 19

I can't in good conscience live an easy life. I can't live in material comfort without giving back to the oppressed billions on whose backs my comfort rests. Somehow I have to make their lives better. So, while I'm spending the first part of my life making contributions to culture, the second part will be occupied mainly in making the world a better place. (Albert Schweitzer was a simplified version of me. See the book I quoted from a long time ago, the part about the two phases of his life.)

Merely fighting ignorance, Dawkins-style, doesn't really make the world a better place, since people are as rational as Koko the gorilla. Nothing one can say will change their minds about something they don't want to change their minds about. Besides, philosophical activism can't *concretely* benefit anyone. Nor is revolutionary activism appropriate at this stage of history. Capitalism isn't ready to wither away yet. I'm a consistent Marxist, so I'm happy to let society keep evolving naturally on its economic foundations until the time is *really* ripe. The only kind of activism left (apart from the Chomskyan sort, which doesn't interest me right now) is the direct kind—the direct or relatively direct improving of individuals' lives.

I simply cannot spend my life teaching or writing philosophy. First of all, I'm not sure I'd be a great teacher; second of all, philosophy is over. It has ended with me. [!] (At least for a long time.) –How appropriate, then, that with me it has transcended itself! It has understood that it can go only so far as a philosophy of life: in the end it has to rejoin the world—turn its back on itself and return to life. For I have found answers to all the original questions, the ones that occupied Plato and the ancient Indians—regarding death, "the soul", religion, values, knowledge, virtue, the best way to live, the nature of history, the nature of man, the nature of the universe.[1] In broad outlines, I understand most things. As for the details, they will *never* be understood—but I understand the reasons for that too! So I might as well give back to this world that has permitted me the satisfaction of knowing truth.

I'm instinctively suspicious of anyone who has been successful in this world.

I just read Gilbert Ryle's reflections on "Achilles and the Tortoise" in his book *Dilemmas*. "I shall now discuss a dilemma which I imagine is familiar to everybody. It is quite certain that a fast runner following a slow runner will overtake him in the end.... Yet there is a very different answer which also seems to follow with equal cogency from the same data. Achilles is in pursuit of the tortoise and before he catches him he has to reach the tortoise's starting-line, by which time the tortoise has advanced a little way ahead of this line. So Achilles has now to make up this new, reduced lead and does so; but by the time he has done this, the tortoise has once again got a little bit further ahead." I think you see where that's going. It's Zeno's old paradox, to which I've never encountered a solution. It seems to manifest an "antinomy of pure reason", and as such is unresolvable. One can look at the situation either from the perspective of the relative speeds, according to which Achilles will overtake the tortoise, or from the perspective that focuses

[1] Obviously science, not philosophy, deserves the credit for some of this knowledge.

on the infinite divisibility of space, according to which Achilles will not overtake the tortoise. It's an infuriating little problem, simple yet strangely elusive.

Ryle's discussion, unfortunately, is more like an extended joke or self-parody than a serious analysis. It's a preposterous exercise in repetitiveness and emptiness. And it stinks of that rotten Cambridge air, that Russellian-era chumminess that makes me want to vomit. (The best thing about Wittgenstein is that he couldn't abide Cambridge.)

The ending of *Homo Ludens* is remarkably beautiful. I'm tempted to quote it. But I'll quote only the sentiment that has always motivated the light-heartedness of my toying with truth. "....The human mind can only disengage itself from the magic circle of play by turning towards the ultimate. Logical thinking does not go far enough. Surveying all the treasures of the mind and all the splendors of its achievements we shall still find, at the bottom of every serious judgement, something problematical left. In our heart of hearts we know that none of our pronouncements is absolutely conclusive. At that point, where our judgement begins to waver, the feeling that the world is serious after all wavers with it. Instead of the old saw: 'All is vanity', the more positive conclusion forces itself upon us that 'all is play'."

Here's an example of Strawson's ineptitude. (He's criticizing Kant's antinomies of reason.)

> The thesis of the first antinomy is that the world has (1) a beginning in time and (2) limits in space. Let us give Kant's arguments, as regards the first part, a more concrete form with the help of the supposition that for as long as the world has existed, a clock has been ticking at regular intervals. Then the argument goes as follows. If we assume that the world has no beginning, but has existed for an infinite time, then it follows that up to the present moment, or up to any previous historical moment, an infinite number of ticks has occurred, an infinite series of ticks has been completed. But this, by the very nature of an infinite series, is impossible. "The infinity of a series....consists in the fact that it can never be completed through successive synthesis." Therefore it is impossible that the world has existed for an infinite time. It must have had a beginning.
>
> The argument seems plainly invalid. [!] We can indeed validly argue that, since the series of ticks has a final member, it cannot be the case both: (*a*) that it has an infinite number of members and (*b*) that it has a first member. Either (*a*) or (*b*) must be rejected. But since the argument is supposed to be based on the hypothesis that (*b*) is false, it is clearly (*b*) that must be rejected and not (*a*).
>
> How did Kant come to advance such an argument?....

None of Strawson's speculations in the subsequent paragraph redeems him. The rest of the chapter is similarly blank.

I remember having a conversation with my dad when I was 8 or 9 on the differences between physical and logical impossibility. At some point in the discussion, one of us remarked that the universe could neither have begun nor not begun. (Or, rather, neither possibility was conceivable by reason.) For if it began, it would have had to come from nothing, which is inconceivable. (If it had come from *something*, then that something would obviously have been part of the universe, due to its participation in the chain of causation.) But it couldn't have existed forever, because then we never could have arrived at the present moment. This fact seemed so intuitively obvious to me that I don't think I even argued for it. I just *saw* that the infinite series of moments could not have been completed, since it would have had to stretch eternally into the past.

Well, Strawson evidently lacks the philosophical ability of a nine-year-old.

Contrary to Kant, I think that the universe did indeed either begin or not begin. I simply accept that human reason cannot comprehend either possibility. The truth lies in the domain of quantum mechanics, which is not bound by the limitations of ordinary reason.

March 20

Reading selections from the *Journal des Goncourt*. (Written by two literary brothers—and then only one—at the end of the 19th century.) One of the more fascinating diaries in history, what with the anecdotes about such cultural figures as Zola, Flaubert, Renan, Turgenev, Manet, Degas, Saint-Beuve, and the ironical observations on human folly. Hopefully it will exert unconscious influence on me.

I'm thinking about writing a historical novel. With history, after all, one doesn't have to worry about plot. (Shelley said that the one real deficiency in his imagination was his inability to construct plots.)

Also reading John Dewey's *Reconstruction in Philosophy*.

Edmond seems like nothing but a half-talented dandy, decadent and aimless as *fin-de-siècle* Paris, but as a diarist he has no peer.

"This morning in the garden we talked about copulation, the insipidity of it with a woman who is dressed, and the glorious frenzy of it with a woman who is naked, a woman one rolls on top of and covers with kisses: copulation as practiced by artists, men of passion, men who really love women.... This conversation led us on to a recognition of the strange and unique beauty of the face of any woman—even the commonest whore—who reaches her climax: the indefinable look which comes into her eyes, the delicate character which her features take on, the angelic, almost sacred expression which one sees on the faces of the dying and which suddenly appears on hers at the moment of the *little death*...."

March 21

The worst thing about this age is that it's more 'Marxist' than any in history. Ideas have lost whatever power they once had. Philosophy has become the backwash of social change; economic movements (and their political repercussions) are the only reality. [....]

Dewey's book, while diffuse, unrigorous and confused (e.g., idealistic in the anti-Marxian sense), has one or two merits—insofar as it echoes one or two thoughts I set out in my book. For example: "Government, business, art, religion, all social institutions have a meaning, a purpose. That purpose is to set free and to develop the capacities of human individuals without respect to race, sex, class or economic status. And this is all one with saying that the test of their value is the extent to which they educate every individual into the full stature of his possibility. Democracy has many meanings, but if it has a moral meaning, it is found in resolving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all-around growth of every member of society." His conception of philosophy (of its role) also is similar to mine.

Consolation.— It's comforting to know that if I die tomorrow, I will not have lived in vain.

Skimming through Frans de Waal's *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*, the thesis of which is that morality is not only a product of culture but also an evolutionary adaptation, which is present in rudimentary form in other animals. (Revolutionary idea! –Actually, I'm told by professors at Harvard and Yale that the book is "provocative" and "exceptionally challenging". Shows how easy it is to impress a Harvard professor.)

I just realized that I want a pet chimpanzee. It would be better than having a dog or a cat:

> If I pretend to be crying, close my eyes and weep, Joni [her young male chimp] immediately stops his plays or any other activities, quickly runs over to me, all excited and shagged, from the most remote places in the house, such as the roof or the ceiling of his cage, from where I could not drive him down despite my persistent calls and entreaties. He hastily

> runs around me, as if looking for the offender; looking at my face, he tenderly takes my chin in his palm, lightly touches my face with his finger, as though trying to understand what is happening, and turns around, clenching his toes into firm fists.

How adorable is that!

March 22

Reading Robert Graves's historical novel *I, Claudius*.

At the library I read a little by and about Norman Mailer. While he was a very talented writer, I always find his style to be somewhat unhealthy. Decadent. Shrill. Especially when he writes about himself. It's too intense. Feverish. Sickly. There's none of the calm and easy assurance of, say, Tolstoy—or even Dostoyevsky. Even Dostoyevsky wasn't as shrill as Mailer. (Except in *Notes from the Underground*, but there his stylistic sickliness was intentional.) Mailer clearly had a febrile mind, but that doesn't necessarily make for immortal literature.

Also, the feminine self-absorption of his kind repulses me. All those literary figures from his generation—from *any* generation, I suppose—but especially his—and especially *him*—the focus on one's own little self is ridiculously immature. Childish. The craving for fame, for attention of any kind; the insecurity and the constant comparing of oneself to other writers, evaluating everything all the time, reevaluating, readjusting one's place in the cosmos every month, desperate to prove oneself over and over again. Mailer's obsession with proving his own masculinity was indeed well-founded, given that his personality screamed *Vagina!* like few others'. (For example, his fascination with sex. His stabbing his wife because she'd impugned his manliness. His insecurity.) To compare Noam Chomsky to Norman Mailer would be like comparing a man to a woman, or an adult to a child. [Yes, politically incorrect, etc. But it's important to have a sense of humor.]

Doubtless my own personality has more than a few points of contact with his. But as I get older I move away from the dark side. That's why I get terribly uncomfortable reading Mailer's self-advertisements and Goncourt's self-anecdotes: I feel like I'm regressing to an earlier stage of life—polluting myself. I try to avoid reading anything that reeks of narcissism, lest the stench cling to me.

Xi's roommates, Wen-hao and Feng-li, are, I learned today, taking up my cause with her. They're pushing her in my direction, though I haven't asked them to do anything of the sort. But I appreciate it.

Rondo in A, KV 386 (piano concerto), Alfred Brendel: the passage from about 2.13 to 2.40 has always struck me (literally, it *strikes* me, with the force of a woman's perfume) as.....well, something you should listen to.

I want to write, but I'm too happy (for no reason). An artist can't write lyrically when he's just plain happy.

March 24

Reading Albert Camus's notebooks (not as interesting as mine) and an essay by Eduard Hanslick called *The Beautiful in Music*.

To stroke the brunet hair of Sarah, the hair as long as she is petite. To look closely into her big eyes and not look away, and to kiss those tanned breasts.

The happiness of the man who loves women as works of art. The love of beauty, of *active beauty*. (Active passiveness.) Woman the greatest art form: beauty become self-conscious. Better than music, and more inexplicable. More *challenging*, because active and self-conscious.

Passiveness and absence (genitalia) somehow intrinsically connected. Activeness and presence are connected. Why? Metaphorical similarity. Nature and nurture: innate cognitive structures (experiential analogues are hardwired into us—natural associations between concepts, like passiveness and absence) interact in a complex, interdependent give-and-take with culture, and so types of culture can influence cognitive development, gender roles.

Going to New Orleans early tomorrow morning with a lot of UMSL students for five days, to help rebuild the city. Sarah, the hottie I met tonight, convinced me to go (by saying that she herself is going).

Camus: "We [moderns] read more than we meditate. We have no philosophies but merely commentaries. This is what Gilson says, considering that the age of philosophers concerned with philosophy was followed by the age of professors of philosophy concerned with philosophers. Such an attitude shows both modesty and impotence. And a thinker who began his book with these words: 'Let us take things from the beginning', would evoke smiles. It has come to the point where a book of philosophy appearing today without basing itself on any authority, quotation or commentary would not be taken seriously."

The necessity of uncertainty in social life. Never know what the other is thinking, always have to impress him. A sort of competition—tension, uncertainty, released by laughter. It's *play*, like a game. (Cf. Huizinga's definition of play. Tension; limited in space and time; constrained, voluntarily, by implicit rules; release of tension at the culmination of the game.) The game of socializing is constantly ending and beginning anew—ending with the laughter, beginning immediately afterwards, only to end again momentarily with more laughter. Someone who can't make people laugh isn't a good "player" (cf.: "He's a playa! What a playa, getting women all the time!"); he's a "loser". –Socializing is the very essence of what it is to be human, and most socializing is essentially play; therefore…

What I was going to say in the chapter on the self is that, while the degree of cultural 'reification' varies between historical epochs, inherent in self-consciousness is an element of reification. For example, the ego (the "self") is partly a mere concept, i.e., a 'thing', different from the immediate activity of consciousness. As such, it gets in the way of interpersonal (and intrapersonal) interactions. It gets in the way of spontaneous *play*, of recognition, even of freedom. With human self-consciousness comes consciousness of an other, the very notion of which involves reification (thing-ification). The 'thing' that is the other is always just beyond oneself, forever keeping the full attainment of recognition out of reach. There is always this other that cannot be assimilated entirely into one's consciousness, as one assimilates certain aspects of the environment. There is always this thing beyond one's consciousness which one is forever trying to conquer or assimilate (through play, through anger, through love, etc.)—this maddening element of foreignness, of unfreedom. One wants to be the entire world but cannot, because of reification.

Self-consciousness is at the same time what gives rise to the desire and what frustrates it.

March 30

Sarah reminds me of Sangeetha. Petite, pretty, charismatic, witty. Her father is Pakistani, her mother English; she has six brothers and sisters. Likes to sing fetches of songs when landscaping the grounds of a New Orleans school; has a vast repertoire from which she can draw at will to suit any given occasion. Likes to laugh and laughs well (easily, vivaciously). Twenty years old but seems older. Is a born leader, despite her five-foot stature. Somewhat excessively giggly at times but can also be serious and philosophical. I may be developing a crush on her.

So much to write about, but so little desire to write. The week was fun. I was with a Christian group (Campus Crusade for Christ): intelligent, friendly people who didn't push their beliefs on me. I attended a worship service: pleasant and inspiring. We went to the French Quarter—my impressions were as you'd expect (i.e., I loved it). On the second-to-last night, after coming home late from dinner, I stepped into a conversation in the hotel lobby between a dull German atheist pseudo-intellectual and a reasonable Christian girl—well, they were the main protagonists, but a bunch of other Christians were taking part. I

heard the German guy speak a few sentences and immediately sat down on the couch to interrupt him and save him from continuing to make a fool of himself. He said something about how Kierkegaard had said that Christianity is "dumb", so I shut him off there—politely—and took over by laying out Kierkegaard's real position. For the next forty minutes or so, Lisa (the atheist-turned-Christian who had been the Germ's target) and I discussed arguments for and against Christianity, and more generally God's existence. We both lack the pious fanaticism of, say, Wesleyan students, so the debate was totally civil and pleasant. Immediately I slid into philosophy-mode and managed not to make a fool of myself. Gradually people congregated around us until there was a small crowd. Highly gratifying to my vanity: they all seemed impressed by my "articulateness", however unjustified that reaction was. It helped that I was the only atheist there. And that I showed a perfect understanding of the Christian position, anticipating all the arguments against my arguments.

I hadn't talked to Sarah much in the previous days, so it ticked me off that she wasn't there to watch me strut my feathers. Luckily the next day as I was landscaping under the heavy heat with forty other Christians I got into a conversation with Brent, a 27-year-old intelligent soon-to-be pastor. Great guy, truly a beacon to the fallen or whatever. Talked and talked for a long time about Christianity and modern Pharisees. Somehow eventually it got into that atheist vs. Christian thing again, though he approached it from a more sophisticated perspective than Lisa had—a less 'argumentative' ('evidential', 'logical'), more Kierkegaardian, perspective, emphasizing that doubts about God's love and fairness cannot be resolved except through the figure of Christ, who was susceptible of doubts just as we are. ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" I've always found that naked cry to be one of the most magnificent moments in the Gospels, revealing as it does Jesus's character—his humanity, his humility, his despair, his devotion to God.) Again, we became the center of attention, this time with Sarah watching. I honestly don't know how Brent and people like him have the presence of mind not to get even a little flustered in that kind of situation. (I lost my train of thought once, when the knowledge of those spectators got in the way.) Anyway, it was fun. Brent managed to sharpen my understanding of, and respect for, Christianity.

I always make it a point to light-heartedly deprecate my own beliefs in such debates, acknowledging the possibility of error and so on. Otherwise what you get is *Crossfire*, or William Buckley or Bill Bennett or any of those abortions. Even when my opponent's target is something like evolution, I don't show a hint of scorn for him.

I like landscaping. I painted too (locker rooms), but that wasn't as fun. Being outside, working hard—sweating in the heat, getting sunburned, drinking water like it holds the key to eternal life—is really living.

I'm reading Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*.

March 31

Xi and I went to the Botanical Gardens. I think she wants to go out again, and so do I, but I can tell we're not quite right for each other. She barely has a personality, it seems. And her English isn't fantastic.

Later I went to a Mexican club with Ashley, Sarah, Megan and others. More fun than American clubs. Live band, better music. And Latin dancing is fun, especially with Megan's body pushed up close against mine so that I can barely hide my erection. We danced together almost the whole time. Fairly mature and beautiful 19-year-old Christian.

Gilbert Ryle's thoughts on "The World of Science and the Everyday World" in *Dilemmas* are typically shallow. Like all non-thinkers, he takes forever to get to the point; and when he finally does, the point isn't worth the time it has cost the reader. It's imprecise and confused.

What a name. Gilbert. Gilbert Ryle. Uncannily appropriate for an effete British intellectual.

I'm reading *Reaganism and the Death of Representative Democracy*. I quoted the book in my chapter on political activism, but I hadn't read it at all then. I had just looked for a couple of quotations so I could seem erudite.

Huizinga's thoughts on the origin of philosophy are convincing. (Sacred rituals involving riddles posed to an 'opponent'. Sacred games, contests of wit between wise men.) The whole book is amazing, despite a few inadequacies near the end.

Says Schopenhauer, with some justice: "The truly stoical indifference of ordinary persons to noise is amazing; no noise disturbs them in their thinking, reading, writing, or any other work, whereas the superior mind is rendered quite incapable by it. But that very thing which makes them so insensitive to noise of every kind also makes them insensitive to the beautiful in the plastic arts, and to profound thought and fine expression in the rhetorical arts, in short, to everything that does not touch their personal interest.... Actually, I have for a long time been of opinion that the quantity of noise anyone can comfortably endure is in inverse proportion to his mental powers, and may therefore be regarded as a rough estimate of them. Therefore, when I hear dogs barking unchecked for hours in the courtyard of a house, I know what to think of the mental powers of the inhabitant. The man who habitually slams doors instead of shutting them with the hand, or allows this to be done in his house, is not merely ill-mannered, but also coarse and narrow-minded. That '*sensible*' in English also means 'intelligent', 'judicious', accordingly rests on an accurate and fine observation."

Interesting thought in Theodor Reik's book *The Many Faces of Sex*: "The oral origin of curiosity is rarely recognized even by psychoanalysts. Yet you can easily observe that when little boys and little girls are astonished they stand there with open mouths." Very significant truth. (Think of animals that test objects with their mouths. *Most* animals do that, actually. So did *homo sapiens* throughout most of its history. Taste and smell are the most intimate of the senses, the most associated with "assimilation" and hence curiosity.) Reik's book, by the way, is useful as a reminder of the many, *many* differences between the sexes. (Reik was a psychoanalyst.)

Interesting epigram: "Many girls marry not because they are looking to the future but because they are running away from the past."

"A woman always likes to be treated with respect by a man except in one place: in bed. When he shows respect for her there, she loses all respect for him."

"Most women have the worst opinion of members of their own sex—a much lower opinion than even cynical men have. Why? Because women know women better."

"Reaching two hands back to unhook a brassiere is one of the most graceful movements a woman can make. But it is only after what appears as the result of that movement that one can judge whether the action was worth it."

"A Catholic patient remembers how often and how passionately he prayed during his adolescence, asking God to take away his doubts, especially his doubts about God's existence."

A marital misunderstanding.— The wife is the boss, but only because the husband lets her be. Patience and high-mindedness alone prevent him from having his way with her.

A bond forged in the birth-canal.— A woman can forgive her son that which she would forever hold against other men, including her husband.

April 3

I read C. S. Lewis's little book *The Case for Christianity*. It's very good, but not convincing. Makes some interesting points in the beginning (which don't succeed in refuting atheism) but gets sillier near the end, when discussing specifically Christian doctrines.

Example of an interesting thought: "There are all sorts of reasons for believing in God, and here I'll mention only one. It is this. Supposing there was no intelligence behind the universe, no creative mind. In that case nobody designed my brain for the purpose of thinking. It is merely that when the atoms inside my skull happen for physical or chemical reasons to arrange themselves in a certain way, this gives me, as a byproduct, the sensation I call thought. But if so, how can I trust my own thinking to be true? It's like

upsetting a milk-jug and hoping that the way the splash arranges itself will give you a map of London. But if I can't trust my own thinking, of course I can't trust the arguments leading to atheism, and therefore have no reason to be an atheist, or anything else. Unless I believe in God, I can't believe in thought: so I can never use thought to disbelieve in God." It isn't a valid argument, but at least it's fairly original.

Lewis makes a Kantian move in claiming that the existence of the Moral Law within us presupposes God. But I'm steeped in naturalism: I think that the existence of the "moral law" has a purely naturalistic explanation, involving both innate psychology and social upbringing. Indeed, there is no "moral law" per se.

Reading *The Elegant Universe*, by Brian Greene.

At the speed of light, time stops. As far as light is concerned, there is no such thing as time. (Light from the Big Bang is not an instant older now than it was at the Big Bang.) The ripples of gravity through spacetime travel at the speed of light. Gravity, in fact, is nothing but warps in spacetime. So spacetime itself 'travels' at the speed of light. It *exists*, so to speak, at light-speed. Therefore, in a sense, with respect to the fabric of the universe—spacetime 'in itself'—there is no such thing as time. Time is an illusion. Moreover, in black holes, which are nothing but spacetime 'turned in on itself', there is no time. Surely that's significant.

"The only thing we know with any certainty is that quantum mechanics absolutely and unequivocally shows us that a number of basic concepts essential to our understanding of the familiar everyday world *fail to have any meaning* when our focus narrows to the microscopic realm." In other words, Kant was basically right. The categories *have no meaning* when used to describe the thing-in-itself. Quantum mechanics describes the most basic level of the thing-in-itself (i.e., reality), and so it can't use any ordinary concepts.

April 6

Didn't get into Syracuse either. Zero out of six. Surprise, surprise.
So, what am I gonna do with my life? No idea. Maybe I'll travel the world like the Ancient Mariner.

Thank God there is such a thing as sleep. *Real* sleep, I mean. Sleep that lasts forever. Honestly, it's a happy and comforting thought. I'm not just saying that to sound sad or dramatic. Nothing is more comforting than to think that all pain and loneliness will *end* someday.

April 10

Looking for jobs for next year. There are so many opportunities out there that you get a sort of *vertigo* researching them. Thousands and thousands.... How am I supposed to decide? I don't *really* want to do *any* of them, but I *sort of* want to do a *lot* of them. It's dizzying, and depressing. It's mostly luck, whatever I do and whether I enjoy it.

What's really sad is that there are so many women out there who are perfect for me, who love classical music, poetry, maybe philosophy, have good personalities and would love me (my silliness, my sense of humor), but whom I'll never meet. In the end, though, it's okay, because when I die it'll all have been empty and temporary anyway.

Ashley and Lisa, two of my Christian friends, have insisted that I read C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*. It's a famous book, I'm told. Actually, it's just the other one I read plus a lot of extra stuff on Christian behavior and morality and the idea of faith. If you ignore the absurdity of the premise(s), it's a

good book. (I still fail to see how a mature human being, especially one whose intellect is as mature as Lewis's, can take Christianity seriously. That religion is infantilism. Besides, everything that is valuable in Christianity can be arrived at through a chain of dispassionate philosophical/psychological analysis. For example, the contempt for pride and the emphasis on forgiveness.)

April 14

From a *Stanford Encyclopedia* article: "Note that, while Chomskyans may be as methodologically empiricist as any scientists ought to be, they emphatically reject empiricist conceptions of meaning and mind themselves. Chomsky himself explicitly resuscitated Rationalist doctrines of 'innate ideas', according to which many ideas have their origins not in experience, but in our innate endowment." Believe it or not, Chomskyan rationalism is still controversial! Jaakko Hintikka remarks in an article on philosophers' use of intuitions in their arguments[1] that, "unlike his contemporaries, Chomsky could have a good intellectual conscience in appealing to grammatical intuitions, for he is a self-acknowledged Cartesian. He believes in innate ideas, at least in the form of an innate universal grammar.... Philosophers' surprise and dismay at the discovery of Chomsky's rationalism is in evidence in the historical Chomsky-Putnam-Goodman symposium on innate ideas", where Chomsky, as usual, dominated and won (judging by the excerpts I read in a book last semester). Why do most "philosophers" find it so hard to accept anything that smacks of rationalism? It's as if they have an instinctive commitment to the least plausible position in any given debate.

April 15

Anger. Cocaine.
Kurt Cobain.

Feelin' uninspired
Think I'll start a fire
Everybody run
Bobby's got a gun
Think you're kinda neat
Then she tells me I'm a creep
Friends don't mean a thing
Guess I'll leave it up to me.

You fuckin' pansies who misunderstand me, collegial Nancys dancing with hands down your pants, your panties wet as you fancy you've advanced beyond me with your fancy 'zombie'-analyses;—you fucking ants, entranced by your fancy terminologies: "My apologies," but *I'm* the Ramses of philosophy, the hundred-fold ancestor of all things worthy; my family tree, my genealogy, reaches through eternity, turning all you inbred Hanson Nancys of Academe into antique memories of transient fads. Faggots. The day you understand me is the day the planets collide.

It's fucking hilarious to read the critics' over-analytical essays on bands like Nirvana, attributing to them all these highfalutin philosophical ideas about revolution and Meaninglessness and modern life. The reason I respect Cobain is that he had no illusions, unlike critics and academics.

[1] The article is called "The Emperor's New Intuitions". I hate nerd-humor.

Is life "good"?— Even if every person but one were happy, that one person's misery would serve as a universal indictment of life.

Being respected by all mankind has ultimately no significance. It doesn't bring happiness, it doesn't mean you're "good" or "impressive", and it is in no way a meaningful validation of who you are. Only God could meaningfully validate you.

April 17

Watching Richard Perle, that disingenuous neoconservative (well, that's redundant), defending the Iraq war, traveling around the world to spread his gospel of "freedom", is more than I can take. I don't know how Chomsky does it! Reading people like that all day long! At his age, how does he not have a heart attack from the sheer *rage*?

Perle was driving through a town in Iraq, a vibrant marketplace like one of those areas you'll see in Thailand and Vietnam and most other "third-world" countries. "This is capitalism!" chuckled Perle self-congratulatingly. "Look at it! Capitalism!" Yes, didn't you know? Capitalism is defined as: a free market. Wherever there is a "free market", for example in this particular town or on that stretch of road, there is capitalism. Ancient Greek city-states were capitalist, remote villages in Myanmar have a capitalist economy. –*Fucking morons*. Capitalism, apparently, is defined as a certain type of distribution (namely, the "free" type). Modes of production have nothing to do with it. Wage-labor and capital have nothing to do with it.

Of course, Perle and his ilk are not to be taken seriously. Still, it's hard not to get angry, in a contemptuous sort of way.

I'm reading *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self*, by Raymond Martin and John Barresi. It's an intellectual history. Insightful and thorough.

On profundity.— Nietzsche had the good fortune to be miserable.

I have a bad conscience about something I wrote in my book. In the chapter on genius, the part where I mention "the ironically named *Twilight of the Idols*"—I laugh at Nietzsche there, make fun of him for not understanding the way things are even as he makes fun of everyone else—for committing that most comical and ironical of sins in a psychologist, namely of putting himself on a pedestal above humanity from which he flatters himself he sees everything, all the shadows and valleys, unaware that someone else is looking at *him* from an even higher vantage-point, perceiving that the exalted psychologist unknowingly stands in a shadow of his own. Few things are more amusing than the self-glorifier who doesn't know he is being watched and judged. Still, I feel as if I've wronged Nietzsche, even though he brought it on himself. It *cuts* me to think of Nietzsche sitting alone in his misery, penning his hard-won laughter at the world, unaware that he is wrong—that he has become, or is perilously close to becoming, an object of pity. I can't tolerate the thought of pitying Nietzsche—it's too condescending—and yet, given his self-delusions, I can't help it. He was a sick man, a good man scorned by the world, who tried to make himself healthy—convinced himself he was healthy—but who remained sick and died—wrong. All his self-glorification, his "ecstatic reveries about *genius*" (to quote his own ridiculing of Schopenhauer)—while justified on one level, it was ultimately wrong, and terribly ironic. Poor Nietzsche....

I do, however, have one consolation: he was a better writer than I'll ever be. In that respect, he was divine.

As for me: my [future] writing myself into the mythology of great philosophers provides little joy. For I am the "last man", the last philosopher, precisely because I have destroyed the myth. The myth that began with Plato. From now on, "we have to make do with the earthly".

April 19

Reading *The Birth of Tragedy*. I've wronged the author, my 26-year-old elder brother, in not having read it yet. (Actually, it's good that Nietzsche wasn't my brother: I would have suffered from an inferiority-complex my whole life.)

The pituitary gland as philosopher.— I don't so much *argue* against errors—*refute* them *logically*—as *grow out of* them.

On profundity.— Kant had the good fortune to live in an unsophisticated age.

Here's a little paper I wrote for my worthless class on computer ethics:

Ethics quasi improvisando

In our computerized, digitized, technologized world, a number of moral questions arise that could scarcely have been imagined fifty years ago. We are constantly confronted by them, so much so that we hardly even notice them. We ignore them, probably because of their ubiquity. I may illegally download a song from the internet without paying for it; I may burn a friend's CD, thus wronging the artists who would have received royalties had I bought the CD myself; I may copy my friend's software, thus wronging the company that sells it. The opportunities for such behavior multiply as technology advances. Even apart from these new moral dilemmas, though, there remain the old ones, the minor transgressions people have always allowed themselves. For example, someone eavesdrops on a conversation between his parents; or he surreptitiously takes a cookie from the package his roommate has bought; or he slips a piece of candy into his pocket while leaving the grocery store. People act immorally like this quite frequently, and they don't seem to care....

Of course, one can argue that some of these acts, despite appearances, are not immoral. An anarchist might reject the idea of private property, arguing, with Proudhon, that property is ultimately theft (from the workers or from the poor), and so by disregarding property laws one is merely refusing to comply with institutionalized injustice. While this argument may seem weak at first, it could no doubt be embellished in ways that would make it more defensible. The problem with such a wholesale condemnation of private property is that it necessitates a thoroughgoing contempt for *all* (or virtually all) property. If it is supposed to 'excuse' a particular instance of theft (such as the theft of the cookie, or the illegal downloading of music), it must excuse all theft. In fact, unless the anarchist is prepared to be hypocritical and inconsistent, he must make the extraordinary effort to live his life in complete disdain for the law, for social mores and for public opinion, all of which are organized more or less around the concept of private property. Otherwise his justification for any given instance of 'theft' on his part is not so much a principled defense of an alternative, anarchistic morality as a dishonest rationalization, an ad hoc means of assuaging the pangs of his conscience.

One could also argue, for example, that it's permissible to download music illegally because CD prices are outrageously high, or because the corporate executives are already rich enough or whatever. But then someone could come up with a counter-argument, for instance that artists too are being deprived of remuneration when you download their music;—that, after all, they created it, so they deserve some sort of reward, in particular the reward that the law allows them. Or maybe someone will argue that all copyright law regarding intellectual property is fundamentally flawed, that it stultifies creativity and invention, that everyone should have easy access to software because this would allow technological development to flourish. But then any number of counter-arguments could be adduced to show that, despite its faults, it is in fact better to respect copyright law than to flout it.

In general, arguments, even *compelling* arguments, are available on both sides of a moral position. One could argue endlessly over whether burning a CD illegally is immoral. In the end, however, the fact remains that some people will feel bad burning a CD while others won't. The question whether the act is "immoral" is, in a sense, a side-issue, a game that the intellect plays in order to reconcile itself with the voice of society or authority (one's parents, one's friends, the law, etc.) echoing at the back of one's consciousness. No matter what I say or do, I'll always feel a little bad eavesdropping on someone or disrespecting his property. –Are those acts "immoral", though? That question is pointless, a diversion, not only because the idea of "morality" is empty and confused, nor because the potential endlessness of arguments on each side of a position ensures that ultimately one just has to 'make a leap'—a leap *into* or *away from* a given act—but especially because I know I'll always *feel* the same about the act in question. I may steal, but I'll 'know', on some level, that I shouldn't; I may cheat on my girlfriend, rationalizing it in various ways, but in the end I'll 'know' it isn't the 'right' thing to do. I may not know why, or even what that judgment means—what does 'right' mean?—but I'll have this inarguable intuition regardless.

To call something "immoral" is, in the end, little more than to express an attitude of disapproval. The actions described in the first paragraph are "immoral" just because, and insofar as, virtually everyone thinks they're problematic. Even people who disagree, who argue that they aren't immoral, nonetheless 'understand' the opposing position—find it comprehensible and not totally absurd—i.e., can understand why their opponents feel the way they do (and then can argue on this basis that their opponents are wrong). The vast majority of people will always think, and have always thought, that certain types of behavior are somehow bad—among them stealing, lying, etc. Rather than arguing that they're wrong, that one's own moral intuitions are wrong—e.g., that burning a CD or copying software is "in fact" not immoral—the honest thing is to accept one's intuitions, accept that by acting in a given way one is not acting as (one thinks) one should, and to face up to whatever this entails. If it entails that one is not (in one's own eyes) an ideal person, then so be it. If one simply doesn't care that this particular action 'feels' wrong, then one should honestly acknowledge this fact instead of trying to convince oneself that the 'intuition' of the act's immorality is unjustified. I consider illegal downloading of music to be disrespectful of artists and the wrong thing to do; nevertheless, if I want a song, I'll download it. I don't approve of my action, but, honestly, that doesn't bother me much. I know I'm not a perfect person—which is to say that I don't always respect others, I don't always act as my 'moral' intuitions tell me I should—but because no one is perfect, and because I see my transgressions as minor, and because I know I can take principled moral stands when I think it matters, etc., my knowledge that I'm not completely virtuous doesn't upset me.

In short, I think it is an unprofitable activity to indulge in extended debates, extended and subtle speculations, on whether such-and-such behavior is moral or immoral. In most cases, I suspect that such meditations signify nothing loftier than self-indulgence, rationalizations, attempts to make one feel better about oneself. If you intuitively think that a certain act is problematic or wrong, then, in most cases, by trying to convince yourself that actually it *isn't* wrong, you're merely taking the dishonest, cowardly way out. You should, rather, accept who you are, accept that you fall short of whatever intuitive ideals you have—or, on the other hand, take these intuitions seriously and behave accordingly, "morally".

Henry David Thoreau thought that the U.S.'s war with Mexico was unjust, imperialistic, and he resolved not to pay his taxes in protest. He didn't invent all kinds of excuses to avoid the unpleasantness of spending time in jail—excuses like "I'll accomplish nothing by not paying my taxes except upset my friends and relatives", or "Perhaps, after all, it's better if the U.S. annexes territory from Mexico, since our democratic government is bound to govern the territories more wisely". Instead, he stood by his intuitive conviction. We ought to follow his example—forego any moralizing or anti-moralizing casuistry. Either act "morally" or don't; make the choice and don't shrink from its consequences.

*

Obviously that's only part of the story.

April 20

In *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses*, Laurence BonJour makes an important point that I've always considered obvious but have never encountered in any other author. He notes that, even if something like Frege's definition of an analytic proposition is accepted, namely as being either a substitution-instance of a truth of logic or a proposition transformable into such a substitution-instance by having one or more of its component concepts replaced with synonymous concepts, the truth of *logical truths* remains unexplained. In other words, any view (which BonJour calls "moderately empiricist") that tries to explain *a priori* justification by reducing the proposition in question to a truth of logic—that is, by claiming it is "merely analytic"—leaves it a mystery why we're justified in accepting logical truths. It just takes them for granted. But in so doing, it tacitly allows that *intuition* can be a criterion for truth. Intuitively we *know*, without argument, that modus ponens has to be true. Its falsity is inconceivable. But since we can't *argue* for modus ponens (without presupposing it)—we simply 'see' it is true—and since its truth doesn't depend on definitions or synonyms or substitution-instances or meanings or anything like that, we're forced to adopt the rationalist perspective in order to explain our 'knowledge' of modus ponens. In a sense, of course, rationalism leaves it a mystery too. But at least the rationalist is honest with himself—he has intellectual integrity. He acknowledges that ultimately there have to be foundational, non-inferential insights; he sees that without such basic intuitions, thinking itself could never get off the ground (since it presupposes them).

> tonight, while looking out at the black sky, I heard the North Star drip into my eyes, and for a moment I was free of the longing for death because I felt I knew what death was like, and it was like the wind flowing past the teardrop on my cheek

How did Schumann live as long as he did?

April 21

I need to be validated. Every moment of the day I need validation. Tonight I went to a barbecue at some rich old guy's house—there were a lot of Asian students with us, hot Asian chicas—and I snuck into the living room to play the piano but was espied by some girls who came in to listen to me and were followed by other girls until there was a small crowd I had to entertain, so I chose the old crowd-pleaser the E-flat nocturne. Uncomfortable as always but enjoyed it at the same time. Uncomfortable with all the questions and looks afterwards, tried to get the attention off myself by asking my admirers if they could play, etc. Later I played Joplin's rag named after the leaves on maple trees, another crowd-pleaser. But it occurred to me that I get validation all the time, that even in high school I was regularly "validated" by my musical admirers and people who respected me for my niceness and smartness—and so it struck me that my insecurities are groundless etc., "than which nothing can be more obvious", but I'll never be satisfied anyway. And later I wrote an email to Simran, the Indian girl I met on Yahoo whom I've been writing to for a while—she's in Delhi now—it's pointless, but it's fun to get emails even from someone you've never met, as long as she's pretty (which she is).

I have a strange recurring dread of being like a homeless guy ignored on the street. I take it only half-seriously, like everything else.

I was surely right when I connected the child's desire to know the name of an object with the thinker's desire to conceptualize the object. The thinker has all these concepts rolling around in his head, like everyone else, and as he learns more and gets new concepts he feels the need to put them in relation to each other so as to order his world, so he thinks and thinks about how they fit together like a jigsaw puzzle

and eventually he creates a system with elaborate architectonics (tables of categories, symmetrical divisions, parallel dialectics with all-encompassing scope), thus fulfilling his regressive old childlike desire to make the world a familiar and comprehensible place. We all remain children our whole lives, but the thinker in particular does. The artist too, in a different way. He who is both a thinker *and* an artist is the ultimate adult child—and is therefore the ultimate human being.

He has to *synthesize* his experience. Conscious cognition grows out of unconscious cognition, which is what synthesizes *a priori* our experience. See my paper. All cognition is synthesis—and analysis is only for the sake of an eventual synthesis. It is a means to an end. Imagination is synthesis too. Everything human is synthetic.

April 22

The "higher/lower" distinction is just as fundamental as the self/other distinction. The problem is to understand that, and to understand why.

> [1]I'm horny. Going whoring shortly—touring the town for tail—to fornicate with jailbait ('Hey whore, got a hole I can gore? C'mere!');—no, no whoring, it's boring—choring—the same story, the same warring with my yearning pouring from my pores, even as I pour spores into her—come into her cunt, plunge into her sponge, her rank dungeon—lunge, lunge, lunge—spank, yank, crank....lunge—punch this fuckin' prison open, pistons runnin' on rage, pissin' on this civilization, frustration sex-fueled spillin' out through masturbation, it's amazin' what I'll put up with—(Asians, patience, sex-starvation, *-emaciation*, nascent hatred)—and what I'll plug you up with, bitches, it's *amazing*—this fuckin' cock right up your cunny, your runny "tummy" running out honey under my tongue tonguing your funky phlegm-hole, your fucking soul-whole, your "holy" hole poled up to your colon—"Hold up! You've stolen my hold on myself!—told me I'm nothing, I've sold my soul to whoredom, but you...."—"But I what?! I'm horrid? A boor? Rotten to the core? Or I'm—spitting oratory, no more? Being witty, writing pretty? Fuck no, this shit ain't *wit*; it's legit. Most of it is a post obit for my past *hope*, my lost soul; I couldn't cope otherwise, given the *crying lies* society lies in lazily, the *despising* I live in;—I'd give in, yes, listless, fistless, if I couldn't diss this dickless 'civil society' this way—piss in its eye this way, inveighing—slaying Lois Lane-types through language. –Ehh, fuck it—"

April 24

Now that I think about it, I've experienced in my life many beautiful, profound moments. Moments of aesthetic beauty, of soulful beauty, of deep philosophical beauty (understanding). The problem is that I have rarely experienced them *with another person*.

Quixote no. 2.— He was seduced by the past, by the romance. He thought he could resuscitate it. The world taught him otherwise, and he died alone.

Yes, individuation is the cause of life's sorrows. Apollo, you are the god of pain.

April 27

[1] (Just a reminder: writing like this is better if it's read out loud.)

Simple pleasures.— Headphones—listening to Schubert. Looking out at the cars passing below on the rain-slick road. Grey skies before a storm. Sliding into bed on a cold night. Looking forward to seeing your friend this evening. Cracking open a new book, reading the first sentence. Playing the piano alone in a pensive mood. Thinking of Chopin writing one of his nocturnes. Quietly wondering what the future has in store, mixing apprehension with hope. Remembering your first kiss. The soft haze of emotion after watching *The Shawshank Redemption*. Reflecting that perhaps you are wrong—perhaps there is a heaven after all. Thinking of the pride and joy your mother felt when she watched you take your first steps as a child. Holding your lover's hand, not saying anything. Snow at midnight. Looking at the stars, imagining the immensity of the universe. Writing a good sentence. Stepping under a hot shower. Seeing a familiar face in a crowd of strangers. Air-conditioning. A breeze that is neither too strong nor too flat. Drifting to sleep on your cool pillow.

May 1

My whole life has been a question mark. I haven't the faintest idea what or who the fuck I am, or where I'm going or why I'm here. What a fucking *absurd farce!*

(I'm no one, of course. I'm just a state of consciousness in the specious present, though memories etc. make me think I'm a "self" by cramming all sorts of baggage into this state of consciousness. –That's the solution, by the way, that being *nothing but* a fleeting state of consciousness. We have to get away from thinking of ourselves as static entities of some sort, spiritual substances possessing identities, *selves* denoted by *names*, and instead—not think of ourselves at all. Just throw ourselves into activities, like animals. Reflectiveness is bad. We have to forget that we have minds, lose the very concept of consciousness. Then there will be no more identity-crises, no more alienation. The less we think of ourselves as selves (as '*identities-in-motion*'—'*active concepts*'), the less we'll be aware of consciousness as distinguished from body and ourselves as distinguished from the world, and the less self-divided (and community-divided) we'll be. Self-division is basically division between immediacy—immediate, active consciousness—and the reified concept(ion) of ourselves, the half-conceptualized self-accretions of the past. There's an irremediable conflict there. In fact, I think *that's* the essential conflict in self-consciousness, that conflict between the active and the passive, or consciousness and the self-concept (the "ego"-concept). Yes, the conflict isn't between consciousness and *itself* but between consciousness and the 'identity-concept', or the ego-concept, it has formed of itself over the years. The reason the self can never be one with itself is that it is both an activity and a passive (self-)conceptualization, as I wrote in my book. We have to get rid of names, as well as dualisms in general, so that we can be pure immediacy only vaguely conscious of itself.)

Lust. Like Earth revolving around the sun four billion times, and the sun revolving around the galaxy, and the galaxy traveling at the speed of spacetime. Lust. Like my nirvana-longing. Like Socrates, out of control as a young man.

Love. In me. The soil edging the Nile fertilized anew each year but barren of seeds, when one seed would sprout a sprawling Eden.

Wright contra Nietzsche.— My greatest danger lies not in pity but in contempt. I am in danger of becoming frozen, frozen in an inhuman identity.

May 2

I have some advice for all those poor sensitive young men, like my former self, who at one time or another are rejected by a girl they feel they could love in favor of some charismatic dirtbag who treats her like a plaything, which of course just makes her 'respect' him even more and obsess over him even more.

The painfulness of that poor sensitive guy's unrequited love is due in part to his thinking that she thinks he isn't good enough for her, he isn't enough of a *man*, he is maybe a child or only good enough to be a mere friend. It's such a terrible pain—such deep resentment but also self-loathing and longing and sheer *misery*. I would tell this guy to remember that the girl who has rejected him, far from being some kind of ideal being (as he thinks), some angel whose love would permanently make his life meaningful, his divine Judge whose judgment is infallible and ultimately means life or death (as a man, that is)—this girl is *nothing*. She doesn't even have the *right* to 'judge' him or 'reject' him. She has no knowledge, she has no insight, she is nothing but *congealed weakness*. She is weak-minded, weak-willed, weak-limbed. She's a sweet, innocent little ball of confusion. She doesn't know what the fuck she wants or needs, what the fuck is good or bad, what is right and what is wrong. She needs *guidance*, but she's too goddamned stupid to accept it—has to go off and discover for herself, time after time, that her "feminine intuition" is wholly wrong, short-sighted, and immature. She's a creature of instinct, nothing more, guided by her sex-instinct, nothing more. (It can disguise itself cleverly, so that she attributes nobler motives to herself.)

So don't feel bad, former Chris. Intellectually, at least, you know that young women are always confused and nothing but confused, about everything.

—What set me off on that was reading passages from Robyn Harding's novel *The Secret Desires of a Soccer Mom*. My god it's amazing how shameless women can be, revealing like it's "light reading" all the weaknesses of their sex, the selfishness, self-contempt, the sex-crazedness of their sex, caricaturing themselves—and then expecting their culture not to be misogynistic! […]

I wonder why it is that when I'm in a bad mood I feel the need to write, but when I'm in a good mood I don't. Maybe because in my good moods I'm too manic to do anything but sing and thrash my head around.

Here's the Plato paper. Dad was good enough to suggest that I write it on Plato's ideal state. (I was truly having an impossible time thinking of a topic.) It's kind of lame.

A critique and defense of Plato's "just state"

One of the purposes of Plato's *Republic* is to expound a conception of the just state. Plato describes how such a state would be organized, who would govern it, what sort of education the children would have, and so on. He goes into great detail, laying out ideas that at times strike the modern reader as wrongheaded, petty, or even immoral. Karl Popper, for instance, argued in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* that Plato's ideal state is totalitarian, with little freedom of expression allowed, little diversity, and a perverse commitment to a Spartan-like regimentation of social life. Others see evidence of democracy in Plato's description, for instance in the egalitarianism that characterizes certain aspects of his educational program. The question I want to ask in this paper is whether, and to what extent, Plato's vision is still relevant—whether it has anything valuable to say to us. Is the Platonic state just or unjust? Is it entirely impracticable, or are there elements that can and should be put into practice? How adequate is the theory of justice on which it is founded? After discussing these questions I will briefly consider the form that a modern utopia might take, drawing on Marxian conceptions.

Plato's definition of justice

"To do one's own business and not to be a busybody is justice." (433b) This is the definition Plato offers, which the modern reader may find odd. Justice consists in *specialization*, in fulfilling one's proper role—realizing one's potential while not overstepping it (by doing what is unnatural, i.e., contrary to one's nature). This applies both to the just state and to the just individual: in the former, each class and each individual has a specific set of duties, a set of obligations to the community, which if he and everyone fulfill will result in a harmonious whole; in the just individual, every part of the psyche accomplishes its natural function easily and well. Conversely, in the ideal society each individual gets his "just deserts" (as does

each class): by doing what he is supposed to do, he receives whatever credit and remuneration he deserves. If he fails to do his task, he is appropriately punished.

Thus, justice is "the having and doing of one's own and what belongs to oneself" (434a). Excess and deficiency of any kind are unjust. In this formulation, the Platonic definition seems plausible. A thief, for example, is unjust because he wants to have what is not his own. A doctor who does not care about curing his patients of illnesses can be called unjust because he is disregarding his proper role. A murderer acts unjustly insofar as he deprives his victim of that which rightly belongs to him, namely his life. In general, unjust people are those who either treat someone worse than he deserves or do not realize the virtues/duties proper to their situation in life. An unjust state, similarly, is one that fails to accomplish the functions of a state—which, according to Plato, include making possible the conditions under which everyone can feed, clothe and shelter himself, as well as seek the "good", i.e. realize his potential.

Plato's conception of justice is informed by his conviction that everything in nature embodies a hierarchy. Nature is ideally a vast harmony—a cosmic symphony—every species and every individual serving a certain purpose. Anarchy is the supreme vice, the most unnatural and unjust state of affairs. The just state, then, is hierarchical, like nature: individuals are ranked according to their aptitudes and placed in a definite location in the social hierarchy. The individual soul, too, is hierarchical: the appetitive part is inferior to the spirited, which is inferior to the rational. Yet each has a necessary role to play. Reason should govern the individual, but the appetites must be heeded as well (to an extent) if the person's soul is to be harmonious and not in conflict with itself. The virtuous individual has a well-ordered soul, which is to say that he knows what justice is and acts according to his knowledge. He knows his place in the cosmos and in the state; he knows what his aptitudes are and puts them into practice; he adheres to the dictates of reason, which means that he does everything in moderation. (If every aspect of the soul accomplishes its task well, or fittingly, the result is necessarily a 'moderate' and ordered state of affairs.)

The Platonic worldview is quite foreign to the modern liberal-democratic capitalist one. We are accustomed to a dynamic, free, at times chaotic society, which at least ideologically is skeptical of rigid hierarchies, be they social or natural. Individual liberty is extolled as perhaps the highest value; people are not supposed to be ranked according to their intrinsic value or their value to society, and so any philosophy that reeks of a caste system is decisively rejected. We are committed to no parallels or analogies between nature and society; we do not think of the world as a "harmony", even ideally (partly because our conception of nature is mechanistic, not teleological); we like order but do not consider it supreme among values; we admire ambitious, 'driven' people, not those who are at peace with themselves or do everything in moderation. Plato, on the other hand, lived in a society (Athens in the 5th century B.C.) that, to his chagrin, was becoming increasingly heterogeneous, was in danger of losing its cultural and military preeminence, and was succumbing to disintegrating influences from abroad and from within. He had lived through the terrible time of the Thirty Tyrants and the Peloponnesian War, and therefore had intimate experience of the horrors of anarchy. In short, he saw an older, 'better' world crumbling around him, and he wanted to understand what had gone wrong and how it could be fixed. The result was that he upheld tradition; he emphasized order and homogeneity, the claims of the state over the claims of the individual (while thinking that ultimately, in the just state and the just individual, the laws of the former would harmonize with the desires of the latter). Justice, for him, was to be sought in the old, in the static—the submersion of the individual in the community—not in the new or the dynamic.

Thus, despite whatever superficial similarities there may be between Plato's definition of justice and our own intuitive idea, fundamentally it is different. The worldview of which it is a part is diametrically opposed to our own. We conceive of justice as oriented around the ideas of individual freedom, the priority of the individual over the community, respect for *rights* (with less emphasis on duties and even virtues), a healthy dynamism, and we consider it not only sometimes permissible but often even meritorious to disobey the state's laws (if they violate certain intuitions about individual rights); Plato's conception of justice is inspired by his conviction that the *collective* takes ethical and ontological precedence over the individual, that there is a cosmic order that each person is supposed to fit into—which he upholds by fulfilling his natural roles—and that virtue, and to an extent duty, is far more important than "rights". While in a

particular case, such as that of the murderer, Plato might judge as we do, both his explicit definitions of justice and the deeper intuitions that inspire his definitions differ from ours.

The differences become apparent when we look at larger scales than individuals' transgressions. Plato and we agree that the thief is unjust and that the professional who ignores his duties can be called "unjust". We also agree that the political tyrant is unjust. But in this case, our respective judgments are based on different reasons. *We* would say the tyrant's injustice consists in his suppressing freedom, his killing innocent people, his disregard for democracy and self-determination. Plato, on the other hand, would say the tyrant is unjust insofar as his acts promote anarchy and prevent his subjects from seeking the Good and living in harmony with themselves and the community. The tyrant upsets the natural order of things. While Plato valued freedom, he did so much less than we moderns do (as evidenced in his not emphasizing it in his discussions of justice).

Another illustration of the difference in our outlooks is in our respective conceptions of the ideal, or the "just", person. According to Plato, the philosopher is the best person, since his soul is in complete harmony with itself. His rational faculty governs his passions and appetites, never allowing them free rein but, still, respecting their claims on him and indulging them whenever necessary or desirable. He has knowledge of himself and society; he knows what it is to be virtuous; he has a certain amount of equanimity, and he never loses control over himself. The unjust person, on the other hand, can in fact scarcely be called a person, he is so divided against himself. Like the state that is at war with itself, he is torn between his passions and his appetites and has no respect for reason, which alone could unify his soul such that he would be an *individual*, in the full sense of the word. ('In-dividual.')

Our notion of the best person, on the other hand, is far less specific than Plato's. It does, to an extent, incorporate the notion of 'virtue' (as does Plato's), but virtue is conceived simply as treating others well. Our ideal can be called more 'relational' than Plato's, in that it emphasizes how others should be treated rather than the intrinsic character of one's psyche or soul. In general, our society places little emphasis on a specific ideal, choosing instead to censure types of behavior that interfere with other people's "pursuit of happiness". This mainly negative conception of the ideal grows out of the liberalism that, even after two hundred years, remains the dominant ideology.

Given all these differences, the obvious question is "Which concept of justice—or, more fundamentally, which worldview—is better, Plato's or ours?" While I have discussed neither of these in great detail, I'd suggest the following answer: neither Plato's nor our own vision is satisfactory, but each has its strengths. The most defensible notion of justice—of the just society and the ideal individual—would be a combination of the two, selecting the strengths from each and reconciling them. To speak generally, it would emphasize both the importance of community and the importance of the individual, while succumbing neither to the potential totalitarianism of the *Republic* nor to the excessive and unhealthy individualism of modern capitalist society.

In the following I'll briefly describe Plato's utopia, and then I'll consider the question whether it would be desirable for any of it to be put into practice.

Plato's ideal state

Every reader of the *Republic* knows that Plato's intention in discussing the just state is to illuminate the nature of the just soul; for he argues that the latter is analogous to the former. The divisions in the state, for example, correspond to the divisions in the soul. But since the soul is difficult to analyze, Socrates says he will first speculate on the state—which is the soul writ large, so to speak—and then rely on his speculations to illuminate the nature of justice in the individual.

It appears, then, superficially, that the lengthy discussion of the state is primarily a heuristic device. Clearly, though, it is also more than that. Plato may not have believed his utopia would actually work in practice, or even that it would be desirable to institute some of his more radical suggestions, but he certainly attributed some value to his discussion independent of its heuristic function. Judging by Socrates's language, it is reasonable to suppose that Plato would have liked to have seen some of his ideas concretely realized in a city-state. He was dissatisfied with the city-states of his day, and he proposed an alternative in

his dialogue. We would be remiss, I think, not to treat it as such—that is, as an outline of what is supposed to be a truly just society, and what *would* be, on the whole, a just society if it, or something like it, were realized.

So let's look at its details. There are three major classes, corresponding to the three parts of the soul. The guardians, who are philosophers, govern the city; the "auxiliaries" are soldiers who protect and defend the city; and the lowest class comprises the workers (farmers, artisans, etc.). The guardians and auxiliaries have the same education during youth, which begins with music and literature and ends with gymnastics. The arts to which the children are exposed during their education are censored: any poetic writings that attribute ignoble doings to the gods cannot be taught; only that which nourishes the budding virtues of the pupils can be part of the curriculum. Similarly, the musical modes that sound sorrowful, soft and womanish are banished from the education of the guardians, which apparently leaves only the Dorian and the Phrygian modes. Socrates approves of these because they incite the listener to courage, to temperance, to harmonious living. Certain instruments, such as the flute, are also forbidden from the city, as are certain poetic meters, since Socrates associates them with vice. In general, all the arts in the state are to be strictly censored.

Indeed, the life of the whole state has affinities with life under a totalitarian government. The laws that Socrates suggests are repressive: only that which conduces to temperate living is encouraged; excess and vice of any kind are strongly discouraged. (For example, neither wealth nor poverty is permitted, as each conduces to vice.) People are allowed to have only one occupation, namely that for which they are best suited by nature. Evidently there is no division between the public and the private (that division so dear to liberals).

Socrates's thoughts on women and children are as uncongenial to the liberal as the foregoing. He argues that the family, in its traditional form, should be done away with. Men should have women and children in common, such that no man knows who his children are or has excessive love for one woman in particular. Even mothers are not allowed to know who their children are. (Their children are taken from them, and they are given other children to suckle as long as they have milk.) The principles of breeding sound ominously like Nazi ideas and Spartan practices of killing all weak and deformed infants. For example,

> ...the best of either sex should be united with the best as often [as possible], and the inferior with the inferior as seldom as possible; and they should rear the offspring of the one sort of union, but not of the other, if the flock is to be maintained in first-rate condition. Now these goings-on must be a secret which the rulers only know, or there will be a further danger of our herd, as the guardians may be termed, breaking out into rebellion...

As usual, Plato goes into a lot of tedious detail, which we'll pass over. He recommends that the rulers lie to their subjects when it is in the latter's best interest. More acceptable to modern sentiment is his suggestion that women in the guardian class receive the same education as men, so that the best of them can assist the men in war and governance.

In general, the goal that Plato is aiming at is that everyone in the higher classes (the auxiliaries and the rulers, or the guardians) thinks of everyone else as a member of his family, such that there is little or no strife between them and they all desire the same thing, which is harmony, temperance, gentleness toward fellow citizens and harshness toward people from other states—a unified front on all issues, as it were. There is no private property or money (except, insofar as it is necessary, among the lower classes); therefore there will be no disputes about what belongs to whom—just as there will be no disputes about which *women* belong to whom, and who one's children are and so forth. The health of the community is the overriding principle in all spheres of life. All of Plato's radical prescriptions follow from that one principle.

The foregoing may suffice to characterize the various laws and prohibitions Plato wants to enact. The question is, what are we to make of them? Do they represent a mere historical curiosity—a way of gaining insight into Plato's mind and the society he came from—or do they have independent philosophical and political merit?

My own opinion is that their obvious totalitarianism makes it a very good thing they were never enacted. This is where my fidelity to modern ideologies shows itself. I think Hegel was right in his assessment of liberalism (and modern consciousness in general): it has 'discovered', so to speak, subjectivity, the individual, and thus serves as a corrective to Platonic excesses. The individual is not ethically subordinate to the community; his health and *freedom*, especially, are no less important than communal harmony. Indeed, unless he feels free, he cannot be psychologically healthy. Plato underestimated the value of self-determination—its foundational importance to self-respect, and hence to "justice" even in his sense of the term. The philosopher, perhaps, (as Plato conceives him) exhibits the virtue, and enjoys the satisfaction, of self-determination, but everyone else in Plato's utopia is to be forced by the philosopher-king(s) to occupy a certain place in the social hierarchy and live his life in a fundamentally unfree (un-self-determined) way. He will therefore lack complete self-respect, self-contentment; the mere knowledge that he is in an inferior position relative to others will likely breed discontent, which will upset his psychological 'equilibrium' (the harmony of his faculties/desires with each other, and with his place in the world)—i.e., set him at war with himself and with the state—and will accordingly, in Plato's conception, make him an unjust individual. In other words, this utopia, in denying most of its citizens freedom, or the opportunity to discover themselves and their talents unhindered by oppressive laws promulgated by an oppressive regime, will make inevitable their dissatisfaction with themselves and the community, which is bad not only from the perspective of their desire for happiness but also because it means they are "unjust" (self-divided). The Platonic utopia makes impossible the very virtues it was meant to promote.

The basic human psychological need is for recognition, or self-confirmation. People want to recognize their sense of self in their activities, in the world, in other people's reactions to them; they want to feel respected, indeed loved, by themselves and others. But no one who is conscious of externally imposed restrictions on his behavior can think that his deepest, self-loving sense of himself is being recognized by the community—this community that feels the need to censor him! He may well be full of resentment, tormented by repressed desires, desperate to break free of the shackles and *spontaneously affirm* himself—*actualize* his full, rich sense of who he is and wants to be. Freedom has always been desired by people because genuine self-confirmation is impossible except on its basis. Any social order that does not allow substantial freedom among its participants is inherently unstable and has the potential for rebellion built into it. Every major society in history, then, has been erected on a tenuous and transient foundation; but Plato's utopia in particular would soon collapse.

However, Plato was right that the interests of the individual ultimately coincide with the interests of the community. For a community is only as 'healthy' as the people who participate in it. And vice versa. Where Plato went wrong was in failing to understand the prerequisites of the self-harmony that he rightly thought constituted individual and communal happiness;—the prerequisites, namely, of freedom and of the perception that one's full sense of self is recognized by others. Modern liberal ideologies compensate for the deficiency in Plato, but they *over*compensate. That is, they have an impoverished view of what freedom is and why it is good, for they exalt the abstract concept of an isolated, ahistorical individual who needs nothing but *protection* from other people rather than genuine and durable ties with them. They forget that protection is of secondary importance; the essence of freedom, the reason it is desired in the first place, is that in its full, concrete reality (as opposed to the liberal abstraction of "political and economic liberty", which exists in the ethereal realm of *law* rather than the concrete reality of social life) it is inseparable from interpersonal union, from mutual recognizing-of-the-other—recognition of his self-determined activities as being *his*, as being *him*. In a truly free society there is no atomization, no such thing as "political rights"—no *need* for them; there are no artificial legalistic barriers to interpersonal understanding and recognition, to communal self-realization. People live *in* and *through* the community. Far from needing protection from it, they feel deprived without it.

Socrates remarks in the *Republic* that although his utopia may be unrealizable, it is at least useful as an ideal, a standard by which we can criticize existing institutions. While I disagree with his version of "Utopia", I agree that it is a worthy task to formulate social ideals. In doing so, we at least posit an endpoint of historical progress, a state we can strive to realize even if in its details it is impossible. With that in mind,

I would suggest that something like Marxian democratic communism is the ideal we should look to in criticizing the present. For it reconciles Plato's emphasis on the community with the modern emphasis on the individual (i.e., freedom).

Indeed, the Marxist utopia is not merely "Marxist" *per se*; it is, in a way, heir to both the Platonic and the liberal utopia. This statement may seem paradoxical, for, as we have seen, Platonism and liberalism are diametrically opposed—and so it sounds odd to say that one vision can be the heir to, or the fulfillment of, both. But consider what is involved in the Marxian ideal. First of all, classes do not exist. This conception is perhaps not as blatantly incompatible with Platonism as it seems, because, for one thing, the Marxian definition of class is very different from the Platonic one. The latter, as we have seen, incorporates a fusion of political and economic criteria: the lowest class is involved in productive economic activities but has no political power; the highest class has all the political power; and then there is the class of soldiers, who have, properly speaking, neither a strictly political nor an economic role. For Marx, on the other hand, the definition of class is exclusively economic, based on the group's role in the process of production and, correspondingly, its ownership or lack thereof of the means of production. So for Marx, in capitalism there are two essential classes, namely the capitalists and the workers.

Clearly Marx departs from Plato's 'hierarchical' ideas in fundamental ways. My point is, first, that rather than directly contradicting Plato, he simply adopts a different starting-point and proceeds on that basis. He has little to say about Plato's tripartite division of society, except insofar as he assumes it is morally unpleasant and will be superfluous in a communist society. This brings me to my second point: while communist ideology does contradict Platonism in its classless and democratic ideals, it does so on the basis of a deep sympathy with the goals that Plato had in mind. Both Plato and Marxists are concerned with the health and wholeness of the community, the durability of its social structures, the happiness of its citizens and the justice of its political and economic arrangements. To that extent, communism is a successor to Plato's republic. It too is an ideology built on the conviction that the community has, so to speak, ontological precedence over the individual—i.e., that it is an organic whole and not merely an aggregate of individual atoms, and therefore that social *structures*, the *relational ties* between people rather than the positive ("free") behavior of some abstract atomized individual, take priority both in a scientific analysis of society and also in the formulation of an ethical ideal.

Where communism differs from Platonism, then, is not in its communitarian goal or inspiration but in the means it chooses to realize its goal—or, rather, in the structures it posits as constitutive of that goal, viz. democracy, economic and political cooperation, an absence of coercive social mechanisms, and so forth. These notions have much more in common with liberalism than with Platonism. Marx rejects all the liberal talk of "rights" and "the rule of law", as well as liberalism's emphasis on market-based competition, but he does so precisely because he understands it is symptomatic of the incomplete realization of the original liberal goal, namely individual self-determination. In order for "liberalism" (i.e., this pure version of liberalism, according to which freedom is the highest good) to achieve its ideal, capitalism—characterized by coercion, exploitation, and dehumanization, according to Marx—must be transcended, together with its ideologies exalting private property and private rights, and so on, which suppress and alienate humans' *social essence*. From this perspective, indeed, Marx can be seen as trying to save liberalism from itself, just as he can be construed as saving Platonism from itself (that is, as retaining some of its intuitions while discarding the totalitarian doctrines that would actually make impossible the achievement of Plato's 'perfect community', for reasons stated above).

There is no need to elaborate on the communist vision further. My intention in discussing Marx was to show that despite all the differences between Plato's conception of justice and our own, elements of his philosophy can be reconciled with elements of our liberal democratic ideology. I have also suggested that Plato's 'communitarian' intuition was largely right, even if his suggested means of realizing it were dangerously wrong. Likewise, the ideal individual should indeed be self-unified and have self-control; and Plato was right that, generally speaking, such individuals will not arise except in socially harmonious conditions.

In the end, I think we should do as Marx did. That is, we should adopt these general features of Plato's notion of justice while discarding the moralistic undertones they have in the dialogues. If we treated

them only as nonmoral values, while yet taking them seriously, I suspect that life would become a little better than it is now, in our confused and atomized world.

*

I brought in a bit of Marx on the Jewish question.

May 5

It's all been said before, it's all been lived before, it's all been condemned before, so—fuck it. Fuck the restlessness and fuck the desire to express it in words. I ought never to have been born. If this contentment is all I'm ever going to have, then fuck it.

As I was reading *Camus: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Germaine Brée, an amusing image struck me. I imagined hundreds of chimps in their jungle, dressed in clothes, wearing glasses, huddled over manuscripts they were all writing about one chimp in particular, who had died decades ago. They were describing what he was like, describing his oddly contemplative character, his anti-chimp personality, his gentleness toward his fellow chimps, as well as certain discoveries he had made about the harshness of life in the jungle, the dangerous animals that lurked in shadows, the forbidding height of certain kinds of trees, the pointlessness of swinging gaily on vines and jumping from branch to branch while screaming like monkeys. All these chimpanzees sitting in trees silently, scribbling praise of this other chimp who had, like them, sat in trees away from his playmates scratching his head while watching the action below, occasionally baring his teeth. And then I thought of other chimps writing about one who had compared chimps to monkeys—intelligent thoughtful chimps to rhesus monkeys, with their funny ears and light-colored hair! And then I put the book down.

Bach's Magnificat. Quia fecit mihi magna. The beginning of that piece, with the bass, is so *manly*! Quia fecit mihi magna! Terse, dignified, unadorned.

My dreams at night are still always corrupted by visions of torture, violence, and blood. Every night I wake up fascinated with the gruesome plots my subconscious has spun out. I also dream about people I respect, like Chomsky. Discussed politics with him last night.

I never cease to be impressed by the difference between people's socially competent personalities and the cognitive abilities they display when they write. Whether it's my students' papers or people's comments on blogs or the emails I get, people simply cannot write and can barely think through arguments. Their spelling and grammar are atrocious, and they find it difficult to follow the thread of even a simple argument. No wonder the world is full of Christians and conservatives!

[…]

(I'm sure you think this is all melodrama. You label "melodrama" anything you can't identify with. Fuckin' robot. God damn it, I'm so inexplicably sad right now after briefly talking to Sarah on the phone even though I seriously don't have anything like a crush on her.... Overflowing, overflowing, just have to overflow once in a while, maybe the tears will come in a few minutes, come on tears you know you want to. "I do not want life *again*!" cried Nietzsche in despair. What's the point of being "interesting" if it leaves you cold to yourself? And all you fucks see me as an *other*, an unhappy person who finally died but left a legacy or whatever you want to call it, and then you stop thinking about me and go on with your day, go on laughing and forgetting about me——well fine, you *should* forget about me, I should forget about myself because I *am not* myself. What am I? What am I?)

I'm going outside for a walk. There are no cars around, it's after midnight thank God.

May 6

My second Kant paper [below]. It's improvised and not wholly consistent with itself. But it makes some good points and points to confusions in the standard philosophical literature.

[*When I posted it on my website years later I wrote this prefatory note that might be helpful*: Here's a paper I wrote many years ago in which I tried to clarify some issues around the philosophical distinction between analytic and synthetic statements. I wasn't familiar with all the literature—e.g., at one point I referred to Jean Piaget, whose work on cognitive development had been outdated for decades—but I think I made a few points of interest anyway. One point I definitely *should* have made, which would have clarified some confusions, is the one I subsequently made in footnote 11, namely that *'synthetic' has two meanings that must be distinguished*. Philosophically, it can mean, in effect, *empirical*, or it can mean *the mental act of synthesis*. (I am unaware of this important distinction having been made in the philosophical literature.) I wonder how many confusions have arisen since Kant because of the conflation of the two meanings...

[I'm not a philosophical empiricist, which has always struck me as an absurd thing to be (in light of modern cognitive science, and for other reasons), so I criticize Quine in the paper. Kant, not Quine, was on the right track, though the convoluted philosophy Kant laid out in *The Critique of Pure Reason* is of little more than historical interest given the modern brain sciences. (For his time, Kant had interesting suggestions about how the mind synthesizes experience. But cognitive science has made all his speculations hopelessly outdated and primitive. I know there are philosophers who would say I'm confusing the issue by thinking *empirical science* is of any relevance to so-called *transcendental psychology* (or transcendental idealism), but they're the confused ones. What should interest us, and what interested Kant, is how the mind constructs experience. Today, "mind" equals (certain capacities of the) "brain." The whole edifice of transcendental idealism was left in the dust by science a very long time ago.)

[Anyway, by way of warning, I should also note that in the paper I make the highly contentious claim that logic is, like mathematics, actually *synthetic*—but in a slightly different way than math is. Neither logic nor math is *empirical*, so in that respect they're the same (and not synthetic). But I'd say they do both involve the mental act of "synthesis," synthesizing cognitive constructions. And yet math is not reducible to logic—as the historical failure of logicism showed—so the natures of the "syntheses" they respectively involve must differ in some way. It seems to me that mathematical reasoning is more clearly "synthetic" than logical truths are, in that, e.g., getting 5 by adding up 2 and 3 *obviously* involves a mental act, or acts, of synthesis. (If that doesn't seem obvious to empiricists, well, so much the worse for them. 2 is a (recursive) synthesis of 1 and 1, 5 is a synthesis of, say, 2 and 3, etc.)

[When you start reading the philosophical literature, all these issues get pretty confusing. And I was probably confused in some way or other. But at least I wasn't as wrong as Quine.]

Thoughts on the analytic/synthetic distinction

The distinction between analytic propositions and synthetic propositions was first explicitly formulated by Kant. For a long time afterwards, philosophers universally believed it was not only useful but fundamental—though indeed they revised Kant's account of it and rejected certain conclusions he had drawn, in particular that a proposition could be both synthetic and a priori. But then Quine published his paper "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", in which he argued that the analytic-synthetic distinction is illusory, and ever since, Kant's intuition (which is shared by most people, including non-philosophers) has been under attack. In this paper I'll argue that Quine was wrong, that Kant's distinction is worth keeping. I'll also make some observations on the synthetic a priori, again defending the Kantian position.

Rather than reviewing the history of the concepts in question from Kant to the present day, I'll start out by defining 'analytic' in what I think is the simplest and most common way: an analytic proposition is true by virtue of its meaning alone. Said differently—Fregeanly, so to speak—an analytic proposition either is a substitution-instance of a truth of logic or can be transformed into such a substitution-instance by

replacing one or more of its component concepts with synonymous concepts.[1] (For example, "All bachelors are unmarried" can be turned into a logical truth by substituting 'unmarried adult males' for 'bachelors'.) It could be argued that these definitions are not equivalent, but I think that ultimately they amount to the same thing. Neither, for example, explains why logical truths and logical laws themselves are true, but instead takes them as "primitive". (The law of identity is simply self-evident; its truth does not depend on meanings or definitions.)

Quine holds that, despite intuitive appearances, there is no boundary to be drawn between analytic and synthetic statements. "All bachelors are unmarried" does not, then, differ in kind from "There are brick houses on Elm Street"; the difference is only of degree, namely of the degree to which the first statement is more important to our linguistic community's "web of belief" than the latter. We can revise the latter without having to revise many other statements in our community's vast and intricate web of belief, for not many statements are related to the fact that there are brick houses on Elm Street. (In other words, if it turns out there are *not* brick houses on Elm Street, this has very few implications with respect to the rest of our commonsensical and scientific worldview.) On the other hand, we cannot revise the statement "All bachelors are unmarried" without having to make fundamental changes in our beliefs about our understanding of language, about the reliability of empirical evidence and perhaps memory, about a variety of concepts related to 'bachelor', and so forth. So-called "analytic" propositions, then, are simply propositions that are relatively difficult to revise ("difficult" insofar as such a revision requires many other revisions)—and so it is simpler and easier to continue to believe them.

Essential to Quine's theory is the argument that there are no criteria for determining whether a given proposition is analytic. Synonymy, for example, is not a good criterion, nor is definition, nor is "interchangeability *salva veritate*". All such concepts are ultimately circular, in that they presuppose either the concept of analyticity itself or other problematic and related concepts (e.g., necessity).[2] What this means, says Quine, is that no philosopher has yet succeeded in making sense of the notion of analyticity—because to do so would be to give a satisfactory definition/criterion, which has not been done. As matters stand, then, it doesn't make sense even to say there *could be* analytic propositions, since analyticity is an incoherent concept. Now, Quine claims that his "web of belief" theory, sketched above, can explain our intuitive conviction that there is an analytic/synthetic distinction. Therefore, it is theoretically economical simply to discard the postulated distinction, which has been shown to be senseless (at least "so far"), and to accept Quine's own account. But because he is an empiricist—he thinks that analytic propositions, if they existed, would be the only a priori truths—an implication of his view is that a priority itself is an illusion. All epistemic justification is either directly or indirectly empirical.

Quine's position led to his later belief in meaning-indeterminacy—and ultimately in meaning-eliminativism (in *Word and Object*)—because, if there is no "fact of the matter" about whether two given linguistic expressions mean the same thing (i.e., if the notion of analyticity does not make sense), then these two expressions cannot have determinate meanings. For if they did, then obviously either their meanings would be the same or they would be different. But Quine rejects the question itself, and so he rejects both possible answers, which implies that words do not have "determinate" meanings—which apparently is just to say they do not have meanings at all. This position is paradoxical, to say the least.

In fact, the counterintuitiveness of Quine's overall view is extreme. Synonymy, insofar as the concept makes sense at all, is conceived as a posteriori, depending not on word-meanings but on facts in the world. Even logic and mathematics are a posteriori. *Everything*, every true proposition, is true, "in the last analysis", solely by virtue of "being an element of a system of beliefs, some of whose members are appropriately related to experience and which as a whole satisfies certain further criteria, such as simplicity,

[1] Taken from Laurence BonJour, *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), p. 87.

[2] See "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", in *Necessary Truth: A Book of Readings*, eds. Sumner and Woods (New York: Random House, 1969).

scope, explanatory adequacy, fecundity, and conservatism".[1] Quine is a thoroughgoing coherentist and empiricist—as well as, incidentally, a behaviorist and a nominalist. It is hard to imagine a more *totally false* combination of views.

Over the years, a number of devastating criticisms have been made of the Quinean philosophy. I'm not going to rehash them all here. Instead, I'm going to make a few simple observations about analyticity.

The all-important "criterion" that Quine sought unsuccessfully is in fact something he didn't even consider: namely, intuition. Or, rather, a combination of intuition and 'verification in practice'. The question, remember, is how we know that 'bachelor' is synonymous with 'unmarried adult male'. (For we *do* know this, despite Quine's attempt to argue the contrary.) The answer is that our intuition, or 'immediate understanding', tells us so. Intuitively—immediately, non-discursively—everyone knows the two linguistic expressions have the same meaning. He experiences what Descartes would call a "clear and distinct perception" that the definition in question is true.[2] Of course, intuition in itself is not always reliable: someone can have an "intuition" that something is the case and yet be wrong. So, while intuition in *this* instance (involving the concept 'bachelor') is extremely compelling, almost as compelling as it is in the case of '2 + 3 = 5', it is not quite sufficient by itself to establish *conclusively* that 'bachelor' means 'unmarried adult male'. However, when the second criterion is added, namely that this particular use of the word will be accepted universally by people in one's linguistic community, we are justified in saying we have established the analyticity of "A bachelor is an unmarried adult male". Everyone would agree that (his intuition establishes that) no experience could undermine or refute the proposed definition of 'bachelor', for the obvious reason that the proposition in question is not about experience or the world but about *meanings*. To say that the difference between the analytic statement above and "There are brick houses on Elm Street" is merely one of *degree* is preposterous. The latter statement says nothing whatever about word-meanings; the former is *wholly* about meanings.

What analytic philosophers like Quine often seem to forget is that ordinary language is not an exact science. It is misguided to seek a *precise criterion* by which one class of propositions can be distinguished from another—as it is misguided to think that analyticity is senseless absent such a criterion. No doubt the idea of "cognitive synonymy", which is implicit in analyticity, is elusive, perhaps necessarily so. But this fact itself is not as mysterious as philosophers have thought, nor does it invalidate the concept. The reason for the elusiveness of all such concepts—e.g., synonymy, meaning, definition, analyticity—is that linguistic meaning is a phenomenon of consciousness, and consciousness itself is remarkably elusive and difficult to analyze. What we intuitively want in an explanation of synonymy is an account of some sort of *underlying fact*, some quasi-mathematical equation that both *proves* the identity of 'bachelor' and 'unmarried adult male' and explains precisely in what sense they are "identical";—an underlying "fact of the matter" which a particular person's understanding more or less approximates. We want to *see* the identity laid out before us, as we can literally see that 2 + 3 = 5, namely by making two marks and then three marks and then adding them together. In the mathematical case, though, the identity depends only on the cognitive faculty of *synthesis*, of synthesizing *abstract forms*; not so in the case of linguistic meaning. Thus, what the mathematical equation states is really:[3]

$$\begin{array}{ccccc} (1+1)+[(1+1)+1] & = & [\{[(1+1)+1]+1\}+1] \\ 2 & + & 3 & = & 5 \end{array}$$

[1] Laurence BonJour, "In Defense of the a Priori", in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, eds. Steup and Sosa (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 105.

[2] This Cartesian criterion for knowledge has been much maligned over the centuries, many philosophers arguing that intuition is too vague and subjective to do the epistemological work that Descartes wanted it to do. Nevertheless, no one can plausibly deny that when he assents to the common definition of 'bachelor', he does so just because he 'sees', non-discursively, that it is true. Whether his intuition justifies *absolute certainty* is another question; my point is that it is generally the criterion we use in judging whether two expressions are synonymous. Moreover, it does seem to be overwhelmingly reliable, especially in simple cases like the one I'm considering.

[3] See *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses*, p. 90.

The parentheses, the brackets and the plus signs signify the mental act of synthesis (of "pure synthesis", in Kantian language), which is essentially all that the equation involves. It is but a mobilizing of the synthetic faculty in its purity, unadulterated with any empirical content.[1] An analytic proposition, on the other hand, involves "meanings". It is tempting to ask the old question "What are meanings?", but this question is itself, in a sense, symptomatic of the misunderstanding of language that led Quine to seek an "underlying fact" about (any given case of) analyticity/synonymy, a "criterion", a sort of mathematical certainty. Intuitively we think of—or *want* to think of—meanings and concepts as something like "entities", "abstract objects", things to which words "correspond" somehow, a correspondence that would allow us to find a deeper fact of the matter—to get "below" linguistic expressions to their *essence*, and then compare these essences to see if they are "identical" (thus confirming the analyticity of the proposition in question). And then when we discover, inevitably, that there is no such criterion, no such essence or literal abstract object, we are tempted to conclude, with Quine, that words do not have meanings at all. But this too is wrong. Both platonism and nominalism are wrong. Words do have meanings—'bachelor' *means* 'unmarried adult male'—but the latter are not what our philosophical intuition wants them to be. There is no deeper explanation of the synonymy-relation that holds between 'bachelor' and 'unmarried adult male'; the "fact of the matter" is simply that we use those two linguistic expressions in the same way and intuitively they strike us as meaning the same thing, and that's all that can said. That is why Quine could not find a criterion for analyticity: there simply is nothing "over and above" (or "underneath") our concrete uses of words, which are context-dependent, intuition-dependent and inexact.

Indeed, the concept of 'bachelor' is unusual in its clarity: most words, like 'intelligent', 'interesting', 'house', 'chair', 'plant', 'bad', etc. cannot be defined by invoking a clear set of conditions that apply in all contexts. There is an element of vagueness to most words. Again, though, this does not mean it is wrong or meaningless to say that a particular sentence does a good job of articulating the meaning of, say, 'chair'. The criteria for its doing so are, as in the case of 'bachelor', the intuition of the native English-speaker and/or the agreement of most (or all) other English-speakers. (If ever these two criteria should 'conflict', so to speak, surely the second has priority over the first. After all, in saying that two expressions mean the same thing, one is basically saying that the linguistic community uses them in the same way.) Above all, we should resist the temptation to seek a precise "standard" we can use in defining words—or in deciding whether, e.g., this object here should "really" be called a chair even though intuition hesitates, as if there is a deeper, underlying fact about what the term 'chair' denotes. We do not need a precise standard or criterion like that in order to make sense of analyticity and synonymy: to say that two expressions are synonymous is just to say that, generally speaking, they are used similarly in similar contexts, not that they literally share some sort of common essence or abstract object.

It is different in the case of arithmetic, which consists of synthetic a priori propositions that posit literal identity-relations. One side of an equation is literally identical with the other—but not in the same way as in a tautology, viz. a wholly uninformative equation of a thing with itself. But then how is '2 + 3' identical with '5'? Well, evidently insofar as combining 2 and 3 is a way of arriving at 5. In this equation, 2 (like 3) is conceived as a single concept, an "abstract object" identical with itself; yet it is also a synthesis of two units. 3 is a synthesis of three units. So when you add these two concepts together, or 'synthesize' them (so to speak), you get five units, which is to say you get a new concept, a new unity/synthesis, the number 5. 5 represents a unity in a plurality; it *is* such a unity, but it is also a plurality. It is different from the other side of the equation ('2 + 3') insofar as it is one concept, while '2 + 3' involves two concepts (plus the 'concept', or rather the *operation*, of synthesis); 5 does not exist (in this case) until 2 and 3 have been combined in intuition, which means that they are, in a sense, prior to it. On the other hand, it is *identical* to the other side of the equation insofar as the synthesis of 2 and 3 (which is what '2 + 3' denotes) is, in fact, 5.

In short, "2 + 3 = 5" is not tautologous, at least not in the vacuous way that "An unmarried man is unmarried" is, but it is nonetheless a literal identity. Nor is it a mere definition, i.e., a phenomenon of

[1] I'll discuss synthesis below.

analyticity,[1] and thus of meaning and convention; rather, it involves a sort of *cognitive violence*, a pushing-together of two concepts and ending up, of necessity, with one. There is no such "cognitive violence" in any definition, nor the element of absolute a priori necessity that characterizes "2 + 3 = 5". There is merely a making-explicit of what is already and unproblematically ('conventionally') implicit in the definiendum—i.e., of the conditions under which the definiendum can be properly used.[2] The arithmetical proposition, then, in being neither strictly tautologous nor analytic, yet, like these two types of proposition, expressing an a priori identity-relation, has to be synthetic and a priori.[3] It cannot conceivably be revised through experience—it is *necessary*[4]—and so it is a priori, or 'prior to experience'; but it presupposes the cognitive faculty of synthesis—it is in fact nothing but this faculty exercising itself in abstraction from empirical conditions—which means it is "synthetic", i.e., is not a strictly logical or tautologous truth.[5]

The view expressed here, incidentally, is the best explanation of a phenomenon that has puzzled empiricist philosophers to no end. "Why?" they have asked themselves, "is it so hard for young children to learn arithmetic? It takes them *years* to master this most simple of all mathematical subjects!" If empiricists were right that arithmetic deals only with definitions or conventions or tautologies or generalizations from experience or anything like that, the phenomenon in question would indeed be inexplicable. It would be a mystery why children are able to master the enormously complicated apparatus of language by the age of four or five, even as they cannot master arithmetic (this subject that supposedly deals with mere tautologies or definitions!) for several more years. The solution, of course, is that arithmetic is not quite as simple as empiricists think. It cannot be fully learned until the cognitive faculty of intuitive spatiotemporal synthesis has reached a certain level of maturity, a level that is not reached until around age 8 or 9, or even later.[6] Arithmetic involves, as it were, a cognitive smashing (or 'mashing') of number-concepts together to yield new ones (as well as the reverse of this process, namely the breaking-up of quantitative concepts into 'smaller' ones), a process that does not make logical sense and cannot be adequately analyzed through formal logic—as shown, perhaps, by the failure of logicism, Frege and Russell's attempt to reduce mathematics to logic. The child understands, or internalizes, logic at an early age (since he understands language and can, to some degree, draw conclusions through valid arguments) but not arithmetic, evidently because two distinct modes of cognition are involved. With arithmetic he has first to grasp the concept of *numerical identity*—between, say, two (or three, or four...) groups of dissimilar objects, such as pencils, apples, flowers, and everything else—which is a highly abstract concept and presupposes extremely

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[1] Philosophers might take exception to the implication that a tautology is not an analytic statement, but it seems to me that their thinking has been confused on this subject. I'll briefly discuss it below.

[2] Formal logical definitions are quite different from definitions in natural language. They are not analytic, properly speaking—i.e., they do not involve *linguistic meanings*, or *linguistic convention*, or synonymy-relations between expressions that denote concepts with real *content*—but are instead tautologies.

[3] Below I'll argue that logical laws are also, in a sense, "synthetic a priori", but that they are so in a different way than mathematical propositions are.

[4] The necessity of analytic statements, by contrast, is, as I said earlier, not unconditional. While "intuition" may force one to assent to a particular definition of bachelor, there remains the tiny, barely conceivable possibility that one's assent is mistaken (i.e., does not adequately reflect the community's use of the word). But even this small possibility does not exist when one assents to "2 + 3 = 5" after having carefully considered what the sentence expresses.

Incidentally, I am aware that Saul Kripke has argued that not all necessary statements are a priori—that some are a posteriori, for example "Water is H_2O". But actually, the a posteriori character of these exceptions is deceptive: the reason for their necessity is that they are disguised *tautologies*—tautologies whose truth has been discovered through experience. In other words, the reason that "Water is H_2O" is necessarily true is that science has shown that the proper definition of water *is* H_2O, and so what the statement says is really "H_2O is H_2O", which is a tautology. So, strictly speaking, the necessity of even these Kripkean "exceptions" is a priori (since the necessity of a tautology is a priori).

[5] *[Here's a point I **really** should have made in the paper: the fact that the word 'synthetic' has two meanings is confusing. It can mean the brain/mind's **synthesizing**, so to speak, of cognition, such as mathematical truths, but it also denotes, in the philosophical literature, statements that are true by virtue of facts about the world. In other words, empirical statements. Mathematics isn't synthetic in this way, but it is synthetic in the other way.]*

[6] See Jean Piaget's studies, for example *The Psychology of the Child*.

sophisticated cognitive equipment; then he has to learn to manipulate, in abstraction from empirical objects, these very abstract numerical concepts he has formed, each of which consists of a mysterious, intuitive unity-in-plurality (which unity and plurality are likewise totally abstract)—and, therefore, each of which is a pure intuitive synthesis, the "manipulation" of which consists in synthetically relating it to other such concepts in myriad ways, the results of which manipulations are, again, synthetic unities-in-pluralities (i.e., numbers). In short, the whole arithmetical process, from the original forming of number-concepts to the skillful manipulating of them, is saturated with constant cognitive syntheses, syntheses that finally become a priori in that they (1) are carried out with no reference to empirical objects and (2) are justified purely through intuition, through the intuitive *necessity* that characterizes them. The reason, then, for the inordinate length of the child's arithmetic apprenticeship is that he is developing his synthetic faculty (in relation to *numbers*, that is), which is to say he is honing his ability to carry out mathematical operations on an a priori, intuitive basis.

However, while logical truths, and thus logical laws (such as modus ponens), apparently do not directly rely on quite the same cognitive faculty as mathematics—for logical truths are tautologies, whereas mathematical truths are not—it seems to me that even logical laws presuppose some sort of spatiotemporal synthesis, and are in fact merely 'projections' of such a synthesis carried out in the mind. The law, for example, that a thing is necessarily identical to itself grows out of the a priori structure that the mind imposes on experience—the structure according to which, e.g., the world is populated by objects that abide from moment to moment, remaining the same object despite the flux of appearances and their changeability. An empiricist philosopher might raise objections here, but in so doing he would be placing himself in opposition to modern cognitive science and developmental psychology. At any rate, the Kantian view I'm defending at least has the merit of being able to explain why logical laws strike everyone as self-evident: namely, because, like true arithmetical propositions, they are manifestations of synthetic a priori cognition, the cognition that structures experience for us. In assenting to the law of identity, or to the law of contradiction, I am basically "assenting" to the way I necessarily experience the world (given the structure of my mind).

I consider it misleading, therefore, to say that logical laws and logical truths are "analytic", as philosophers tend to think. An analytic proposition is true by virtue of meanings, and thus convention. When I say a bachelor is an unmarried adult male, I am describing how English-speakers use the word 'bachelor'. My assertion is about nothing but meanings; I am saying only that two linguistic expressions have the same meaning. If, on the other hand, I utter a tautology, such as "An unmarried adult male is unmarried", I am, strictly speaking, saying nothing about meanings; instead, I am saying that a particular kind of thing is identical to itself. "A man who is unmarried is unmarried": this statement is not about words, nor linguistic conventions; it says that a specific kind of thing is itself, that A = A, so to speak. It is a matter of logical form; therefore word-meanings have nothing to do with it—except, of course, in the truistic sense that the meanings of the words involved have to be understood in order for the proposition to be understood. In short, tautologies are true not because (like analytic statements) they correctly describe conventional linguistic use or articulate what is implicit in a concept, but because they are grounded in logical laws, such as the law of identity. With respect to logical laws, however, linguistic meaning is *totally irrelevant*. It does not even have the minimal level of relevance it has in the case of tautologies. In this regard, then, logical laws are similar to mathematical propositions—a fact that is itself suggestive. "What does it suggest?" asks the reader. It suggests the thesis I am arguing for, namely that logical laws are "synthetic a priori" (though in a slightly different way than arithmetic propositions are). Analytic statements, by contrast, are a priori but are not "synthetic", which is effectively to say that their truth is determined not by the nature of human cognition but by the nature of the linguistic conventions relevant to them.

In the end, I have to agree with Quine that the analytic/synthetic distinction is simplistic—not because there is no "difference in kind" between, say, "Running involves moving your legs" (a statement that would be called analytic) and "There are trees on Elm Street", but because each class comprises propositions that may well be, in some respects, more heterogeneous with each other than they are

homogeneous. For example, it seems to me that a statement like "Running involves moving your legs" has, on one construal, more in common with tautologies than with "A bachelor is an unmarried adult male", in that the latter is mainly a description of how two linguistic expressions are conventionally used, whereas the former states that in this activity of 'traveling quickly by moving one's legs rapidly' one is moving one's legs. In other words, the definition of bachelor describes the meaning of a word, while the statement about a person running describes a *state of affairs*, not a meaning. It says, essentially, that the activity of quickly moving involves movement, which is just to say that the activity is identical to itself. ('Movement involves movement.') On the other hand, the statement "Running involves moving your legs" can also be construed as *giving the (partial) meaning of a word*, namely the word 'run', rather than as describing an activity—in which case it has more in common with the definition of bachelor than with any tautology. So, actual linguistic practice is so complex and nuanced that any such dichotomy as "analytic vs. synthetic" is bound to be inadequate.

To give one more example: if someone says—perhaps to a person learning English—that a bachelor is an unmarried adult male, he is both giving an analysis of the concept 'bachelor' and saying that English-speakers use this linguistic expression in a certain way.[1] On the first interpretation, though, his utterance would commonly be called a priori, while on the second interpretation it would be called a posteriori (since its truth depends on a particular fact in the world, namely whether English-speakers do indeed use the word 'bachelor' in the way described). Thus, the utterance is both a priori and a posteriori—for, in saying that a word has a certain meaning, one is essentially saying that people use the word in this way[2] (which is an a posteriori statement). So even the a priori/a posteriori distinction is not quite as absolute as one would think.

Nevertheless, it is worth keeping, as is the analytic/synthetic distinction. But both should be recognized as what they are: not absolute, fixed dichotomies but merely useful philosophical tools, useful insofar as they help illuminate differences between propositions. Sometimes, adhering to them is counterproductive and can obscure understanding of the epistemological and linguistic facts (to which *context* is usually extremely important, more so than a simple overarching categorical dualism would seem to allow); but the fact that they highlight differences between types of cognition is a sufficient justification for retaining them. Some propositions and modes of cognition are unequivocally a priori (and synthetic); others are unequivocally a posteriori (and synthetic); still others can be interpreted as both a priori *and* a posteriori (as well as analytic *and* synthetic)—which suggests that, in these contexts, the distinctions should be ignored.

Quine was, therefore, wrong, though he made some interesting points.

*

I might have written more if it weren't that I find this stuff boring. Exhausting to think about—confusing—and not very rewarding. Already I'm noticing flaws in what I wrote, even apart from the obvious oversimplifications.

May 11

Reading *D'Alembert's Dream* (by Diderot). It isn't nearly as brilliant and entertaining as *Rameau's Nephew*, consisting of outdated philosophical and scientific speculations that occasionally seem very silly.

Went to a New Orleans reunion party (barbecue) last night at Lisa's farm. Good turnout—many people, all of them delightful to be around (at least in that situation). Truly the most fun I've ever had at a party. Mostly because I played an unusually active role in it, talking a lot, being-laughed-at in the good way, even at one point debating Marxism with Sarah (*she* brought it up, not I)—and later there was a sort

[1] Indeed, I argued earlier that to do the former is to do the latter.

[2] In other words, to say that a word has such-and-such a meaning *is* to say that it is used in such-and-such a way (i.e., under such-and-such conditions).

of surprise farewell-party for me, complete with a large cake they had written on, a t-shirt they had all written on for me, and some presents—they all sang that old "For he's a jolly good fellow" song as I sat there laughing—it was quite overwhelming and for a second I thought I was in danger of letting drops of water escape from my sight-holes. Earlier I'd convinced a few guys to buy a thirty-pack with me (it was Christians, you know, so beer wouldn't have been on the agenda otherwise); that livened things up. Great night, really a good memory.

Although it's tempting to have contempt for nature for being meaningless, mechanistic, cruel, we have to remember that nature produced us—that we *are* nature. All the beauty and love we have introduced into the world belong to nature. *Human society is nature*. It is impossible to rise above nature, to cast judgment on it; there is *nothing but* nature. Someday, perhaps, mankind will realize this ancient insight and learn to live in it.

The perfect humanist would be the most natural man. [Double meaning.]

listen....

listen, listen to the bleeding lake of ancient regret;
listen to the lake running away into the dusk,
the swollen river overtopping every memory;
listen closely to the crying swelled-up dark flow
ceaselessly through heart-torn avenues, ancient kisses
time-submerged;
listen to the bleeding eyes of ancient smiles kissing

May 13

Anyone who thinks humans are innately good has not read the "comments" posted on YouTube.

Reading *Sincerity and Authenticity*, which I only skimmed when writing the book. (All that stuff about "authenticity" I wrote was inspired by a cursory reading.)

Also rereading *Rameau's Nephew*. Unquestionably the greatest "dialogue" I've ever read. Schiller, Goethe, Hegel, Marx and Freud were right about it.

Another song I've always liked: "Dreams", by the Cranberries. Admittedly a guilty pleasure.

You should take care to know your friends. Know them like yourself—their strengths, their weaknesses, their likes and dislikes. That way you'll know best not only how to entertain them but also, and more importantly, how to encourage them (without their knowing it) to become who they are. How to nudge them toward themselves, toward their ideal selves. For example, I know Ashley very well. I know what makes her happy, I know she has great inner resources—her life has been hard and seems to get harder by the day, but she is usually buoyant and optimistic—and I know she is a Christian with a not-too-bright mind. So today when I went to the bookstore to buy her a farewell present I gravitated to the section on religion. Someone less in tune with people than I but who, as a friend, had noble intentions might have considered giving her Dawkins' book on religion or Christopher Hitchens' recently published book, or rather something a little less inflammatory (out of curiosity I looked at a couple pages of each of these books today—but to a person who instinctively adopts History's perspective they're unreadable, *embarrassing* even), so as to guide her towards truth or whatnot. To open her mind, etc., thinking he was doing her a favor, and also because she had just given me C.S. Lewis's book. Dawkins himself is probably such a "friend"—a dogmatic self-righteous unsympathetic one-track personality. (Hitchens isn't even worth speaking of.) But I possess that rare quality—*none* is rarer, especially among intellectuals: to wit, *humanity*.

So I bought her something called *Ten Prayers God Always Says Yes To: Divine Answers to Life's Most Difficult Problems*, which appears to be well-written and perfectly suited to allay Ashley's anxiety concerning her Mexican illegal immigrant boyfriend who might get deported in the coming weeks because the authorities have rooted him out—among other doubts and problems she's having. I know it would be hopeless and even cruel to argue with her against Christianity; that route would not help her become who she ideally is. So I try to *shore up* her faith, since it's the source of her strength. Everyone needs some illusion or other.

May 17

Back home in RI.

Reading *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Whatever purpose God may have served originally, he has become mainly a symptom of our awareness that things as vast as society and the universe exist. Because we know these things exist, our need for recognition cannot be satisfied by concrete interactions with people. We need more. We need a recognition more abstract, universal and permanent, to compensate for our abstract awareness of the universal and permanent cosmos. God will not wither away until society ceases to be atomized—a reification, that is, a static reification. Self-consciousness has to move beyond its present alien-ated, individualistic form. I'm inclined to think that the very concept of society has to wither away, or at least become inessential to common thinking, which can happen only if societal processes are transparent. Essence has to become appearance. Otherwise we'll continue to feel alien-ated from the world ("as it really is, in its essence").

Marx may not have been the "greatest" thinker of the last millennium, but he was the only one who basically got it right (notwithstanding a few obvious errors).

When Churchill, FDR, Eisenhower and their fellow bureaucrats (particularly Air Marshal Arthur Harris[1]) decided to fire-bomb Dresden [and many other cities], they became apprentices in evil. Lesser versions of Hitler and Stalin. A hundred and thirty thousand people incinerated and a beautiful city destroyed. And then the fire-bombing of Tokyo. And Cologne. And Hamburg. (That happened before Dresden.) Totally unnecessary, gratuitous evil. Stalin and Churchill—and Harris, of course—were apparently the main advocates of the Dresden bombing. What a repugnant man Churchill must have been, an alcoholic close-minded reactionary megalomaniac. Practically a barbarian, an untamed incarnation of the forces of darkness that will someday destroy civilization. FDR, on the other hand, simply lacked a conscience. He was weak-minded and conscienceless. (He let himself be pressured into the Japanese internment camps, into the bombing of Dresden, etc.) Truman, too, by the way, had no conscience, as evidenced by his remark that *not once* in his life had he been bothered by his decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He *never questioned* it, not even for a moment. The reason is that he had no moral imagination. –Oscar Wilde was right that hate, or more generally the absence of love and compassion, is based on a lack of imagination.

Slaughterhouse-Five is quite good, though perhaps a little overrated. It's a true postmodern novel, with all the strengths and weaknesses that that label connotes. (Strengths: thought-provoking, faithfully portrays the culture's consciousness, avoids "florid and superficial" beauty, "tells it like it is" without

[1] One of the great villains of the 20th century. On the bombing of Dresden: "Dresden, the seventh largest city in Germany and not much smaller than Manchester, is also far the largest unbombed built-up the enemy has got. In the midst of winter with refugees pouring westwards and troops to be rested, roofs are at a premium. The intentions of the attack are to hit the enemy where he will feel it most, behind an already partially collapsed front, to prevent the use of the city in the way of further advance, and incidentally to show the Russians when they arrive what Bomber Command can do." The city had no military importance, was used only for refugees, POWs and hospitals.

romantic excess, etc.; weaknesses: lack of realism (in terms of life's *richness*), characters don't have much depth, not much plot, one-sided, etc.)

May 22

Writing more of the Book of Joe. But when I return to it day after day each day I get a small nauseated feeling when I look at it, can't bear to look at it because it seems full of 'mannerisms'. Dreadful, dreadful. A sort of constricted, claustrophobic feeling. Each day I literally postpone clicking on the desktop icon as long as possible; I manufacture distractions; finally I think "Okay, well, I guess I might as well get back to it....oh boy, here it is....oh my god that line is terrible I have to change it....well, you know what, maybe I'll go practice the piano and return to this later...."

I wish I could write like Whitman.

I sent another email to Chomsky, just for the hell of it—quoted the thing I wrote after watching his debate with Buckley, etc.—and he wrote back:

> Very much appreciate your reaction. Naturally. What you couldn't know is that at the end of the program Buckley was purple with rage, walked off shouting that he'd get me on again right away and teach me a thing or two. I said politely that I'd be delighted, enraging him even more -- and of course never heard from him again. These people are mostly schoolyard bullies, not to be taken seriously.
>
> I hope you're right about the way the wind is blowing. If not, the species has a grim future ahead.

Amazing guy. The most down-to-earth important thinker ever.

I read *The Theory of Democratic Elitism: A Critique*, by Peter Bachrach.

Character.— What is "strength of character"? Knowing who you are and acting in accordance with that knowledge. Never betraying your ideals—especially your self-ideals—and, even more fundamentally, having a clear sense of what those ideals are, what your sense of self is grounded in. What values you cherish. Not being constantly susceptible to self-doubt, nor living life as if committed to no deep abiding sense of self that illuminates, so to speak, all your acts—shines a light on them, *your* light, the light that lets you see yourself reflected in them. The "authentic" person has strength of character, for he has a sure sense of himself and his world.

This explains why both the disintegrated Rameauian consciousness and the (anti-)Heideggerian technologized, socialized, other-directed consciousness are called inauthentic. For, while they seem quite unlike each other, they have in common their flightiness, ungroundedness, their tenuous grasp of themselves—their lack of a self that integrates (or signifies an unconscious integration of) experience through the deployment of certain durable and intuitive principles, broad intuitive 'categories' that amount to an aggressive self-assertion of the individual's psyche. The authentic, integrated self—or some unconscious part of it—commits itself to certain values and self-interpretations, which it then imposes on experience, thus ordering its world. The inauthentic, disintegrated self lives in a disorderly world, unsure of what it values and who it is.

We should not, by the way, interpret all these terms moralistically. "Strength of character" is not necessarily a moral notion. So-called "bad" people can have strong characters in a sense. Conversely, in some manifestations the inauthentic character can almost be called admirable, if it has intellectual integrity and an uncompromising honesty. Rameau and the Underground Man are examples. Ultimately this alienated selfhood is but a stage, both in *society's* and in an *individual's* evolution; still, Hegel was right that it has value. In the self's final stage, which it reaches after transcending its disintegrated state, it does

not need a rigid and primitive 'schema' in order to cope with the world (and there are infinitely many such 'schemata': the Enlightenment's, the Stalinist's, the Nazi's, etc., as well as the one adopted—unconsciously and intuitively—by any particular person on the street); it has the strength to be flexible, to be able to change its opinion of any given aspect of reality without thereby undergoing an identity-crisis. For it is strong enough not to depend on labels anymore. It is who it is and remains such through all external vicissitudes. (It's likely, though, that this psychological state presupposes a continuing commitment to the same broad values and self-interpretations—because, after all, if values and self-interpretations change *too* much, or too suddenly, the self will experience a 'rupture' between its present and its past.)

May 24

Reading *Law and Economic Policy in America: The Evolution of the Sherman Antitrust Act*, by William Letwin. Also reading parts of Alexander DeConde's massive *History of American Foreign Policy*. I want to steep myself in contemporary issues, I know not for what purpose. But my fling with philosophy has passed its honeymoon period, so I need something to take its place. Creative writing is one avenue I'm pursuing; empirical studies is another.

Every day I reflect on how unfortunate it is that God doesn't exist, just because that means there is no one whose approval can satisfy my God-complex. All this self-perfecting is ultimately pointless: nothing of value is appreciated in this world.

June 3

Living in Boston. Near Harvard Square. Three roommates, two Harvard grad students and an older guy in charge of a vast student-run community service organization. I'm working for Save the Children. Street-canvassing, fundraising.

Sometimes I think I have Carl Jung's curse: I can't take anyone seriously. I am "the only living boy in New York", the fusion of every character-type in history. How can such a person take others seriously? I judge the world through the prism of my millennia-distant descendants, and the drama that plays around me is sterile. I foresee its finale, I understand too well the characters' motivations—and the whole unedifying plot revolves around petty misunderstandings! The more influence and/or fame a person has, the less I respect him. Only he who does nothing, who sits in a monastery muttering monosyllables, has my respect.

June 5

Ughh, this job. Ain't easy. See for yourself:
"Hello sir, I work with Save the Children. We're the second biggest—"
"Sorry, don't have time."
"Excuse me miss, my name is Chris and I work with—"
"I have to get home."
"Hello sir, can you spare a minute to save a child's life?"
"No."
"Hi! How are you? Do you have a minute to save a child?"
"Umm, well, sorry...."
"Hi! I work with Save the Children—"
"Fuck off."
"Hi! I work for Save the Children. Have you heard of us?"

"No thanks."

"Excuse me sir, I work with Save the Children, and we're trying to get people to sponsor a child in Africa—"

"Not now."

"Hello ma'am!"

"No."

"Excuse me miss—"

"I'm on my lunch break."

"Hello—"

"Nope."

"Excuse—"

"No thanks."

"Ex—"

"Nope."

"Hello sir! How are you? I work for Save the Children; we're an international charity that helps children in poverty—"

"It's a good cause, but I don't have time now."

Four hundred of those plus people who stop and listen to you but don't donate. If you talk to five hundred people in a day, you'll be lucky if you get contributions from three. I didn't get any today. (The donations have to be at least $28 per month.)

June 7

Not listening to music for three days and then listening to Bach first in the night is a revelation. Like the Fugue in G minor for the organ, called "Little". Ecstasy.

Reading *Tristram Shandy* on the web. It reminds me of *Don Juan*, for obvious reasons.

June 11

This job can be quite fun if you're in the right mood—talking to every stranger who passes by, happily unconcerned with his or her opinion of you, not fearing rejection in the least. It's also a good way to get chicks' phone numbers.

June 12

I quit the job. Wasn't getting enough donations. And it's annoying to canvass people from 12:30 to 7 and get only "NO"s even though you're friendly and smiley and cute.

One of the roommates had a girl over last night—squealing, giggling and other girly noises. He had picked her up a week earlier in the street by telling her she had a "beautiful presence" and then walking home with her and kissing her even though she'd told him she had a new boyfriend and didn't want him to hit on her, but she kissed back etc. and then later said she wouldn't have dumped her new boyfriend for him if he hadn't kissed her against her wishes. Plato was right to be grateful he was born a (hu)man rather than a woman.

The shallowness—that is, the conforming-instinct—of intellectuals is revealed in the disparity between their judgments of two thinkers of equal caliber, one of whom is famous while the other is not.

Nearly everyone respects authority more than talent—precisely because society's criterion for talent is authority. But that is a poor criterion.

Reading *The Woman's Bible*, by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. "This clarion call to action, assembled by Stanton and a committee of prominent feminists, consists of a book-by-book examination of the Bible, placing events in their historical context, interpreting passages as both allegory and fact, and comparing them with the myths of other cultures."

Profound thoughts: "....[David] was ruled entirely by his passions. Reason had no sway over him. Fortunately, the development of self-respect and independence in woman, and a higher idea of individual conscience and judgment in religion and in government, have supplied the needed restraint for man. Men will be wise and virtuous just in proportion as women are self-reliant and able to meet them on the highest planes of thought and of action.

"No magnet is so powerful as that which draws men and women to each other. Hence they rise or fall together. This is one lesson which the Bible illustrates over and over—the degradation of woman degrades man also. 'Her face pleaseth me,' said Samson, who, although he could conquer lions, was like putty in the hands of women."

A person cannot be his ideal self and free unless all people are their ideal selves and free. This fact is rooted in the nature of the desire for recognition. In the company of the degraded, one feels no qualms in degrading oneself. (Cf. Nietzsche's statement to the effect that in the presence of the ugly (i.e., the spiritually stunted), one becomes ugly.) Man is impelled to spiritual heights, and to the heights of self-respect, through his desire to be respected by the other—by the *dignified* other (for an 'undignified other' is not an *other* in the fullest sense; he is merely something to scoff at, something to laugh at or to enslave).

The fate of the self is the fate of the community. I.e., the macro is in the micro. I.e., the community is the self writ large. Etc.

One of my roommates, named Chris, a Harvard divinity student, is obsessed with himself to the point of having almost no social self-consciousness. He is intelligent and knowledgeable about many things, and appears to have a phenomenal memory—he also claims to have a "high genius I.Q.", such that "I could easily get into Mensa if I felt like applying"—but because of that one flaw in his personality he is as boring to talk to as Forrest Gump. It feels like I'm talking to a wall, albeit an intelligent wall. And an exceptionally pretentious wall. This guy does nothing but show off his knowledge at every chance he gets—boast and brag without really knowing he's doing so. The impression is ultimately of a knowledgeable dimwit, who can do nothing but parrot other people's ideas.

Oh you silly Harvard windbags. "Amusing and perfectly *un*-self-conscious charlatans." (Noam Chomsky has said that Jacques Lacan, whom he met more than once, seemed to him an amusing and perfectly self-conscious charlatan. –Incidentally, the most striking thing about Lacan's famous dictum that "the unconscious is structured like a language" is how meaningless it is. What does it mean to say that the unconscious is structured "*like*" a language? That doesn't make sense! Or, at best, it can have many meanings. I have never encountered an explanation of that thought; writers simply parrot it uncritically.) Actually, I suppose most Harvard bums are more self-conscious than "Chris".

Noam Chomsky: the single living intellectual I revere. Just because he is both brilliant and down-to-earth. Has no illusions.

I feel like I've attained some sort of nirvana, or anti-nirvana. I have no desires and no ambitions, no illusions, no attachments. I am not of this world.

June 16

I really ought to take advantage of Bartleby.com. Right now I'm reading Carl Van Doren's study of *The American Novel*, which "is meant to serve as a chapter in the history of the American imagination". It's quite interesting and informative. Perhaps has too much minute literary criticism.

I'm also reading Mill's autobiography. (Printed on *real paper!*—Dad's copy, since I'm spending the week with the family and Uncle John and Jesse at Martha's Vineyard.)

And Hegel's introduction to his lectures on the philosophy of history.

Our culture's disagreement with Hegel can be expressed in one sentence: its conception of the world, and of history, is not teleological.

I just played Chopin's scherzo in B-flat minor, which I haven't played in years. Strange to say, I still have most of it memorized. Lordy, that ending—those last two pages, with the climactic build-up, it's almost more than I can take. Crashing on the piano, pouring sweat, playing it over and over so I can enjoy the adrenaline-rush.... "Cannon buried in flowers" my ass! (That's how one of his contemporaries judged Chopin.) There ain't no flowers there. Only cannons.

June 19

Nothing left to say. And I've said *that* before too. Nothing left to say but "I love you" to some woman, and nothing to do but inhale life for the first time. To live with a woman, *for* a woman—with a family, for a family, for a daughter. Everything else is an ornament; only love matters. Immediate unreflective love.

I want to evaporate right now in the [Martha's] vineyard air under the yellow moon. And I'm tired of writing poetry in prose and tired of trying to communicate myself to an abstract entity, and I'm tired of having to humor myself and others and not just being able to live through feelings and be happy in them. And I'm tired of charming girls but not getting below the surface so I can lose myself in their softness and fairy-voice-ness.

June 21

Despite what I wrote about "the acquisitive attitude" in the section on historical consciousness in my book, my own attitude toward life is basically acquisitive. You know this. (Susan Sontag, too, remarked that she had a passion for "*accumulating*" experiences. Not just having them but accumulating them.) I hoard experiences and girlfriends and books (not literally, of course)—I constantly want to read a new book and get through it quickly so I can read another one—and I especially hoard my writings and take excessive care that they'll go on forever. This acquisitive passion in my case has something to do with time's fleetingness and my excessive self-consciousness.

J. S. Mill wrote in the olde English foppish style and was a singularly boring thinker compared to my three idols, Kant, Marx, and Nietzsche.

Reading *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, the famous contemporary book on world history.

June 22

love-
less I

lack a life
outside the knife-
sharp stabs;—picking scabs
off crust-dry bloodless wounds
to watch them bleed self-pity,
self-pity dammed back long eons
before this agonizing moment
let flow the flood of bloody self-pity;
and yet the agony is life's blood,
my life-blood, without which I'd curl
up, shrivel and char to coal-
black insipid "real life"
of talking, smiling,
laughing without
knowing why....
—O, to
love!

June 24

One of the great love songs of all time: "You don't know me", sung by Ray Charles (the live version). The voice, the man, is 90% of what makes it great. There's no one like him.

It's a soul-eruption, his singing that song. Reminds me of the scene in *It's a Wonderful Life* when Jimmy Stewart is in the bar crying his prayer to God alone amidst the noise and rowdiness. One cannot not cry listening to that song. O the torture of unreturned love! Luckily I have rarely experienced it.

June 27

Discovered a brilliant website called Going.com, full of events happening in Boston all the time and hundreds of people I can connect with. Going to a free private screening tonight of the new Don Cheadle movie, where hopefully I'll meet some of the people I've met online and then chill with them at the post-party afterwards. Also, got a phone number of a Taiwanese girl named Zor;—pretended to be lost, asked her for directions, we started talking, etc. I should do that more often.

July 1

Last night was eventful. I went to a "bar crawl" starting in the afternoon; didn't have much fun for a while. Then females started showing up, and things got better. To make a long story short, an Indian named Ranjana drove home with me at around 3 a.m. (that was a long drive, frustrating because we couldn't figure out where the hell we were) and we got naked and did all sorts of fun stuff. Spent the whole morning in each other's arms on my bed. Would have had sex but of course I couldn't find my condoms. But she certainly enjoyed herself sufficiently: there are infinitely many ways to please a woman with only one's mouth and hands. (I definitely "spoiled" her, as she said. "How do you find these spots, Chris?" she gasped. "Trial and error," I muttered.) She's intelligent too: we talked about deism, Buddhism, etc. I have nothing like a desire to date her, but hopefully we'll stay in touch.

[…]

It's funny how you can have a one-night stand (or something like it) and yet come away feeling only ordinary friendship-affection for your partner.

July 7

Last night I went to a karaoke bar, drank a good amount, sang Joel's "The Longest Time", met a Chinese girl named Monica—I'll call her soon—went home with Ranjana again (33 years old) and we did our usual stuff, very pleasant. […]

Reading *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (Camus). Impressive book. Tries to answer the question I was preoccupied with for a while, to wit: given Absurdity, how ought one to live? How can one affirm life while retaining intellectual integrity? Is it possible? The answer I gave was Yes.

N.B.: What I have meant by "absurdity" is not quite what Camus means by it. My idea is broader. He characterizes the absurd as revolving around the human mind's inability to fully understand the world, to rationally digest all its facets. The human mind demands that the world meet the expectations of reason, but it fails to do so; hence there is intellectual despair. Much of life is incomprehensible, for example time, death, the metaphysical (ontological) foundations of the world, the self's relationship with itself; humans have been thrown into this strange world and cannot wholly reconcile themselves to it. *My* conception of absurdity is a little broader, taking account not only of the *natural* world's strangeness (i.e., 'irrationality') but also of the *social* world's. Or the 'moral' world's. Life depends to a horrible degree on chance, and the way it is ordered has nothing to do with justice. People are irrational; their behavior is not what a thoughtful man would expect it to be, based on understanding and compassion.

Anyway, Camus's book, while thought-provoking, is little more than an exemplary product of its time. I've only just begun it, but I can already tell it doesn't belong in the first rank of philosophical works. Part of the reason is its lack of analytical precision. More important, though, and theoretically culpable, is its quasi-theological, ahistorical attitude toward modes of experience that arise largely from particular social conditions. Despite having been written long after Marx, it displays a complete ignorance of the Marxian viewpoint. In this respect it is inexcusably shallow—for, as Sartre said, "Marxism is the philosophy of our time" (and still is, despite people's unawareness of that). Camus approaches the alienated attitude as if it is necessarily the 'truest' attitude, without really arguing for that assumption. He just takes it for granted! It may be true that the world will never be fully understood, or that mankind will never wholly transcend Wonder and Incomprehension, but this inadequacy of reason doesn't 'naturally' or inevitably imply the estranged attitude, the self's insecurity or debilitating confusion or perception of not belonging in the world. These latter things are (at least implicitly) valuations, which as such do not logically (or 'organically') follow from any fact, as Camus seems to think they do. For by giving the relationship between "reasonable" man and "unreasonable" world the tendentious label of "absurd", he is sneaking in a value-judgment, which as such cannot be true (as the hypothesis of the-inadequacy-of-reason-to-understand-the-world *can*). In other words, his position is a confused fusion of a possible truth and a valuation (or set of valuations) that it is thought (incorrectly) to necessitate. The set of valuations grows out of the atomized, schizophrenic social conditions of the time, while the possible truth in question—i.e., the strictly *cognitive* element of Camus's position (as opposed to the evaluative element)—doesn't.

Consider this passage:

> Men, too, secrete the inhuman. At certain moments of lucidity, the mechanical aspect of their gestures, their meaningless pantomime makes silly everything that surrounds them. A man is talking on the telephone behind a glass partition; you cannot hear him, but you see his incomprehensible dumb show: you wonder why he is alive. This discomfort in the face of man's own inhumanity, this incalculable tumble before the image of what we are, this "nausea", as a writer of today calls it, is also the absurd. Likewise the stranger who at certain seconds comes to meet us in a mirror, the familiar and yet alarming brother we encounter in our own photographs is also the absurd.

Note the word "lucidity", and the phrase "before the image of what we are". They show that Camus considers the alienated attitude—the alienated *valuations*—that he describes in this passage to be somehow the truest or best or most honest way of experiencing the world. But why should this be? He doesn't say why. He just takes it for granted. The reason, of course, is that he was obsessed with this alienated feeling; he couldn't stop thinking about it, and so it seemed to him to be obviously true. Also, admittedly the feeling does, by some psychological and/or biological mechanism, carry with it the sensation of lucidity, of clear understanding (as does despair: see Wilde's *De Profundis*). I know that from personal experience. Nevertheless, I realize that this attitude is, after all, nothing but an attitude, i.e., a vague evaluative cast of mind coloring experience, having no more objective validity than a joyful attitude or a loving attitude.

(The way I dealt with the topic of the absurd in the half-completed chapter "On Life" was more profound than the way Camus dealt with it.)

Incidentally, the human ignorance/incomprehension he speaks of can be invoked precisely in order to cast doubt on the "nauseated" attitude he exalts. For, given our ignorance of the world as it is in itself, it's possible that the whole "meaningless pantomime" is in fact meaningful—that there is some deep significance to everything we do, perhaps a religious significance (if you want to call it that). Who knows? There is no *a priori* reason why incomprehension (or knowledge of the vastness of the universe and time and death, etc., as against our own littleness) should justify nausea over, say, exhilaration.

The conviction that orients my worldview, and has always oriented it, is that nature is not incompetent. It could not have arranged things so that there is a fundamental, necessary disharmony between humanity and its cosmic environment. Whatever disharmony there is must come from the faulty arrangement of society, and hence must be temporary. (By "harmony" I don't mean utopian bliss or perfection. Harmony is perfectly compatible with certain kinds of suffering.)

July 8

Camus's mind wasn't very logical. (That isn't to say it was *il*logical.) It was lyrical and aphoristic, more 'aesthetic' than philosophical. His book isn't easy to read, because it consists not of arguments but of personal, semi-poetic grappling with existential confusion and alienation.

Still, I get the feeling that my thoughts of yesterday missed the point, though I'm not sure exactly how. Maybe they did, but maybe they didn't. The whole subject of the absurd is elusive.

Obviously in a sense there is some "disharmony" between man and nature; otherwise there would be no such thing as wonder or philosophy. But it's the "nauseated", the alienated, absurdity-obsessed disharmony I was referring to above.

July 11

Reading Charles Taylor's *Ethics of Authenticity*. It's not bad, but it's nothing to get excited over. (It's written in the bland harmless style of all contemporary philosophy and is full of bland harmless ideas.)

July 14

Went to my ESL orientation (I'll be teaching teenagers and college-agers for a month or more). This job is going to require a lot of preparation every day. I might even have to sacrifice some of my self-absorption and pointless brooding—pour my energy into these classes.

Meanwhile I'm still actively destroying my liver every weekend, hoping that in the process I'll meet someone worth meeting.

July 16

Went to a pub near the Haymarket area, met Niressa, Rima, Kevin, Paul, etc.; later Ranjana came. It would've been a failed night without her. Etc. etc. and then we got away at around 1:00 a.m., went to her apartment—she was a little annoying complaining non-stop about how Rima had been complaining earlier—but she settled down and then as we sat in her bedroom I broke down in tears: I had been getting sad as the night wore on (lonely, bored, tipsy, looking at all the couples forlornly) and felt a little suicidal, and frustrated as Ranjana kept complaining about petty shit, and anyway I couldn't hold it in and cried a while in her arms about my meaningless life and need for love and how long I'd been looking for a soulmate (about 14 years) without success, and so forth. She just listened and tried to comfort me, hugged me; it was nice. Later we cuddled in her small bed, fell asleep. More half-naked stuff in the morning, then she got up to "putter" around the house as I slept until noon. We spent the rest of the day together—lying in bed, eating at a great Mexican restaurant, driving around Waltham (where she lives), listening to her possibly favorite band the White Stripes, chilling in her living room drinking beer. She's very fond of me and I enjoy her company, her wittiness and easygoingness. […]

I'm very very glad I met Ranjana. She's a good friend. She's going away soon for a coupla weeks to see her family, says she's going to miss me terribly etc. and I'll miss her too, maybe not quite as much but enough.

Friendship is so important for mental health.

July 17

First day of teaching. Went well.

Yesterday I saw an interview downtown with the singer Mandy Moore, and she sang two songs afterwards. Very intelligent and mature for her age. But it's totally ridiculous, the crowds and television crews and the shameless TV-deceptions that her handlers engage in for the sake of corporate profits.

July 20

Coworker Hanife (Turkish, lives in Denmark)—talented professional artist, modelesquely beautiful, friendly and bright, probably will soon be the object of my crushish love. When she walks into the room my day brightens a little. A couple nights ago Ranjana and I made dinner at Ranjana's apartment, talked intimately about her dysfunctional family (because of the suicidal older brother) and also discussed the merits and faults of Oprah (I criticizing her, Ranjana defending her). Then [erotic fun].

By the way, another of my roommates is an utter douchebag. A fairly "nice" guy, but a buffoon. I told you about Chris; this other guy (black, good-looking, 30-something) is called Michael. Maybe I'll describe him for you sometime, but suffice it to say now that he has managed to combine in his personality most of the flaws of the female sex and few of its strengths (he's vain, gossipy, fashion-attuned, shallow, pop-culture-loving, lacking in self-insight—while, on the other hand, he is neither beautiful nor very 'understanding' of his (girl)friends)—and he constantly picks up women off the street and manipulates them into sleeping with him (or so he tells me in story after story)—and he's the most boring partially intelligent person I've ever known. (He's an entrepreneur and a grad student at Harvard.) His latest buffoonery has revolved around a puerile semi-autobiographical novel he's writing (a comedy) about a black effeminate cross-dressing bumbling detective who has various sexual escapades (modeled on Michael's) and accidentally picks up clues about his cases while on these adventures with hot women he meets in the street. Michael is kind enough to regale me with every delicious detail whenever he sees me—

because I'm kind enough to lend him half an ear. Once he even came over to my room giggling and bubbling with excitement at the thought of the hilarious passage he had just written, which he promptly read to me off his computer (after I had wearily followed him back to his room) while dissolving in fits of giggles that were accompanied by my strained feigned grins of appreciation (which were accompanied by my stupefaction that someone could think that what I had just heard was remotely funny). Why, oh why, is the world the way it is???

July 22

Met someone named Kelley at an Italian festival in Central Square. Then went to a club. What a total waste of time and money. But tonight I met a girl named Gina, from Thailand. Probably 28 or 29. Delightful, funny, goofy, talkative, easy to talk to. We sat in a park and talked for several hours. I'm looking forward to seeing her again.

July 28

I have about one chapter left to write in my satire. Can't wait to be finished. Upon rereading it I'm not terribly impressed—it's too short, first of all—but it's better than most stuff out there and it's quite original, and I guess that's good enough for me.

Reading La Rochefoucauld's *Maxims*.

If mankind understood itself and its motives, life would be unbearable. And social life would be impossible. For uncertainty is what allows us to think well of people, and of ourselves.

Sometimes one professes a belief just because others do not. It is as if one is trying single-handedly to remedy the one-sidedness of popular prejudices—by falsely admitting to opposite prejudices.

Reading Giacomo Leopardi's *Thoughts*.

[…] But tonight we [Gina and I] kissed. Good! It was lovely. She drove me home from the movie after we'd walked in the park at midnight under the full moon and as I was about to step out of the car I said, "In America this is the time when I'd kiss you, but don't worry, I won't do that" [I had tried earlier]—but she seemed interested, so I leaned towards her a little and she didn't back away, so I leaned in more and we kissed awhile. I'm a big fan of kissing, with the stroking the hair and the face. Afterwards she gave me that seductive feminine look with her head cocked to one side and her hair falling in her face and a secret tender smile, which I loved.

July 29

I enjoy Leopardi's book. (And La Rochefoucauld's, of course.) Love the cynicism and pessimism, partly because it's entirely justified and partly because of the evident pain and bitterness behind it. It's very human. Leopardi was a high-minded man who was disillusioned by people because people are contemptible, and he poured his hurt into this book—without making it overly personal, though.

"…Whoever wishes to rise, even by genuine merit, must banish modesty. In this respect the world is like women, for we get nothing from it by modesty and reserve."

Gina has called me a couple of times since last night, despite her dislike of phone-talking. Always giggling, laughing at everything I say no matter how unfunny it is.

August 2

I think I could fall in love, at least in a *kind* of love, with several girls at the same time. Talking to Gina on the phone, with her adorable voice and adorable idiosyncrasies combined with her adorable sense of humor, puts me in a very altered state of mind. I have to kiss her, embrace her and envelop all that adorableness in my arms, make it a part of me, so to speak. Maybe it's a kind of lust. A spiritual lust. I want her to be wrapped around me as we hug for hours. It both is and is not mere "infatuation". It's less than and more than infatuation. But then when I'm with other girls, like Hanife or my new student Mariela (in her twenties), I experience a similar, but different, form of attraction. They're so beautiful and spirited that I feel as if I could love them too. And Sarah, ol' Sarah—I could have this half-love, or transient whole love, for her too—and for a million other women. Think of Camus's thoughts on Don Juan. "It is not through lack of love that Don Juan goes from woman to woman. It is ridiculous to represent him as a mystic in quest of total love. But it is indeed because he loves them with the same passion and each time with his whole self that he must repeat his gift and his profound quest. Whence each woman hopes to give him what no one has ever given him. Each time they are utterly wrong and merely manage to make him feel the need of that repetition. 'At last,' exclaims one of them, 'I have given you love.' Can we be surprised that Don Juan laughs at this? 'At last? No,' he says, 'but once more.' Why should it be essential to love rarely in order to love much?" I have more than a little Don Juanism in my blood.

August 3

Spent last night with Gina. Various sexual activities. Her body is beautiful, a work of art. […]

Of course, I would have felt the same way with any number of girls. So in a way passion, even love, is a delusion, since it treats the beloved as somehow unique, as if this person is the only one you could love. There's no such thing as soulmateness.

The more women you hook up with, the easier life gets. The better you feel about yourself.

I'm reading *The Selfish Gene*, by Dawkins. Among its irritating features is its worship of Darwin, the thinker who got lucky. (People forget Alfred Russel Wallace, who came up with basically the same idea at the same time.) The essence of Darwinism is in this quotation from *The Origin of Species*: "As many more individuals of each species are born than can possibly survive; and as, consequently, there is a frequently recurring struggle for existence, it follows that any being, if it vary however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be *naturally selected*. From the strong principle of inheritance, any selected variety will tend to propagate its new and modified form." In other words, an animal that has traits more conducive to its survival than an animal that doesn't will tend to survive better than that other animal, and will thereby pass down its favorable traits through the generations. –Boy, that's brilliant, all right. Epoch-making. Its undeniable theoretical importance—its status as the foundation of the biological sciences—is directly related to its near-emptiness (because in order for a theory to be relevant to so many scientific fields, which display such a wide variety of content, it would have to be nearly empty).

In one of his endnotes, Dawkins reminds the reader that the story of Mary's virgin birth actually rests on nothing more "divine" than a mistranslation in the Septuagint (the pre-Christian Greek translation of the Bible): in Isaiah, the Hebrew word for 'young woman' was mistranslated into the Greek word for 'virgin'. Since the mistranslated sentence in Isaiah was a prophecy ("Behold, a virgin shall conceive.…"), and the authors of the Gospels were constantly on the lookout for ways to show that Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecies in the Old Testament, these authors wrote that Mary was a virgin, namely the virgin mentioned in Isaiah (in the mistranslated prophecy). The result of this farce is that billions of people

now worship an ordinary impoverished woman who died two thousand years ago, and who was deceitfully said to have been a virgin mother by a few writers a century or two after her death.

—The reason why *homo sapiens* is the species with the least dignity of any is that it has the potential to have the *most* dignity but chooses not to. Instead it allows its destiny to be determined by mistranslations and crude deceptions, and by provincial little fanatics like St. Paul.

August 5

Saw Gina last night. She suggested we take a walk to the Charles River. And then we came back to my place, listened to Chopin and looked into each other's eyes for a while. It was a lovely night, I enjoyed it. Like other girls I've been intimate with, she insists I'm "unique." Has never dated anyone like me. That's partly because, in between all our playful flirtation and silliness, I talk about pseudo-profound subjects with her like "the meaning of life"; and it's partly because I'm "gentler" than most men and more "emotional" and like classical music. In any event, I like spending time with her. She's a good person.

Chopin's concerto in E minor, second movement. …I have only fifty or sixty more years to go… I can probably make it.

The overall argument of Dawkins' book is fairly persuasive. It's interesting, too. It gives the reader a new perspective on life, even though, in a sense, the book doesn't have much that is particularly original. It simply draws attention to certain underappreciated consequences of the biology we already understand. (At least, that's my impression after reading a few chapters.)

August 7

Spent the night at Ranjana's place. Didn't do much. Not attracted to her and I wasn't in a good mood anyway.

I finally bought E. L. Mayer's book *Extraordinary Knowing: Science, Skepticism, and the Inexplicable Powers of the Human Mind*. I'm very excited. Can't wait to devour it.

I have great respect for Mayer. My respect comes infinitesimally close to admiration. (I don't truly *admire* anyone. Admiration seems misguided, confused. In fact, the concept is near-empty.)

Gina called at 8:30 to say she wants to come over and spend the night. That was unexpected, to say the least.

I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that I've lost whatever doubts I once had about ESP. It's definitely real, it definitely exists. I'm a little surprised I feel no resistance to believing in ESP—but that's probably because my new belief is on a purely intellectual level and has no direct relation to my daily life. (Also, my mind has always been unusually open to revising its convictions. I don't know why. That openness is simply the primordial 'structure' of my mind.) The task now is to understand what it is I believe in. And to fully absorb it. To let it alter the way I approach the world.

August 10

This ESP stuff may be the only part of the 'truth-seeking' enterprise that really interests me now. I'm too jaded and bored to actively pursue truth in any other area. In fact, I'm sure I'll soon get tired of learning about the paranormal too. –The low demand for my writings has led to a low supply of them.

I've lost a tiny bit of my respect for Mayer. Her book is enthralling for the facts it documents but it's repetitive, prolix, not very rich or original in its speculations, and too eager to avoid upsetting people. People are closed-minded and deserve to be upset.

Anyway, I finished the book. Now I'm reading Martin Buber's *I and Thou*. Also Crane Brinton's *The Shaping of the Modern Mind*, a history of ideas.

August 14, 15, 17, 18

Buber's book is—mystical mumbo-jumbo. Gorgeous writing and deep ideas, like in the Vedas, but way too vague.

[…]

Speaking of Gina, I spent last night at her place. Full nakedness, all joys are due to thee! […] She's dated many guys but has had sex with only six. (I'm the sixth.) "Why did I have sex with you?" she asked herself pensively. "Do you regret it?" I asked. "No, I'm just curious… Aha! I know why. It's because I'm so comfortable with you. I can be totally myself, I don't have to wear a mask. And also, you're interesting."

Went to lunch with Liz, a delightful soon-to-be teacher at urban schools in Boston who is attractively feminine with a soft voice and the ability to listen and laugh well. I'm going to ask her out again.

Went to the Harvard bookstore, browsed for hours, looked at philosophy, psychology, fiction, biology, wondered if I should study biology so I could get a prestigious job looking at DNA or whatnot, wondered what on earth I could do with my life that would satisfy my intellectual ambitions without making me feel like an irrelevant academic—all these books, thousands of them, they don't matter at all except to entertain semi-intellectual types who have too much leisure time; and yet I really do want to 'sum up' human thought, that's my true vocation in life—and I thought of the spiritual horrors of modernity, the impossibility of having an impact on anything anymore and the pointlessness of having an impact anyway. And so in the end I didn't buy a single book. Everything seemed futile. But I have to devote myself to something! I'm a volcano that's been plugged up. Maybe I'll try to write short stories, see if I get anywhere. Stories full of rage, stories that call for revolution.

I still think that the historical approach is the best way of understanding society. Start from the beginning, research social evolution, observe how economic categories (like money, price, interest, credit) emerged and what sorts of social/ideological conditions emerged with them, proceeding all through history up to the present day. This is the best way to understand how the modern world works and why it is the way it is (i.e., what are the factors conditioning it and how do they interact). What I'd most like to do, more than anything, is spend the majority of my life explaining humanity and society.

August 20, 23, 24

Bought *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Decided to apply to programs in biology.

Who would've thought?— The female sex has proven that it's possible to be complicated and boring at the same time.

Today was the last day for a Taiwanese student of mine, a university student named Yu-hwa. After taking my picture and so on (departing students often do that), she gave me a postcard on the back of which she'd written "Dear Chris, I'm so glad to be in your class. There is always fun and happiness in the class. Thank you very much. Welcome to Taiwan. I'll treat to you. Nice to meet you. I hope that I can meet you some day." That's always satisfying, getting a personal message like that. What a thoughtful girl!

Copying my Book of Joe here. [But first I'll copy a short description of it that I wrote years later, when I posted it online:

I think it would be wise to write a short preface to the following little piece I wrote back in 2005 or so. This literary experiment, basically a satire, is so odd that it's clear to me most readers won't know what to make of it unless it's at least partly explained.

***The Book of Joe**, the title of what follows, has to be read in the light of the Bible's book of Job. I still remember the day in the summer of 2003 when I conceived it while sitting in a cabin in a summer camp where I was a counselor. For some reason I was suddenly struck by the satirical possibilities of the book of Job, if it were transplanted in time and space—to modern-day America. A powerful satire of the modern world could be written in the form and style of Job, if the entire spirit of the work were reversed. The initial flash of inspiration came, I think, when I realized that Job expresses the **exact opposite** spirit of capitalist modernity: where Job was naïve, un-self-conscious, righteous, self-certain, wholeheartedly pious, the modern world is cynical, self-conscious, self-doubting, secular, money-grubbing. I was fascinated by the contrast between the culture of Job and the culture of the present.*

*Soon the satire took shape in my mind. All the characters had to be opposites of the original ones. The noble Job had to become Joe, a debased, miserly capitalist, who is the truest representative of our age and its ideals (just as Job was of his own age). The God who treated poor Job so badly, and who in the end spoke to him "out of the whirlwind," had to be not Yahweh, the personification of majesty and power, but Mammon, the god of our own world, the personification of the vulgar spirit of financial gain and market transactions. God's antagonist/interlocutor had to be not Satan (as in the Bible) but Justitia, the goddess of justice, who in **our** world is indeed seen—at least by the dominating institutions, namely corporations and the state (i.e., the spirit of Mammon)—as the Devil, the great antagonist of capitalism. And the characters whom Joe would talk to throughout the work (as Job did in the original) would be representative types of capitalist society, including Jim the Politician, Bob the Academic, Jon the Preacher, Dan the Lawyer, Abd the Terrorist, Jen the shallow young girl, Rob her besotted young lover, Dud the video-gamer, Meg the Activist, and Rod the Soldier. Joe's encounters with these people would give me opportunities to satirize all these types. (Even their dull names indicate their mediocrity, and highlight the contrast between the epic, mysterious culture of the early Bible and the mundane, monotonous, predictable culture of the capitalist present.)*

I decided the satire would proceed as follows. Justitia, who wants to punish Joe for his many moral and legal crimes but finds that the justice system (being run by capitalists) won't get the job done, contrives to trick Mammon, who loves Joe as the perfect embodiment of greed, into letting her take away all his possessions and accomplishments. She makes a bet with Mammon that Joe will "curse him to his face" when this happens, whereas Mammon is convinced he won't, that even when he is deprived of everything Joe will continue to worship money. This, of course, mirrors the bet between God and Satan in the Bible—except that in my version it turns out differently at the end. While Job never really cursed God, as Satan said he would, in the end Joe does, finally, curse Mammon, having learned through all his experiences that greed, money, and the urge for power are indeed evil. He thus redeems himself and vindicates humanity against its basest impulses. –But I'm getting ahead of myself.

*After the calamities befall Joe, his three friends (Jim, Bob, and Jon) come to comfort him. They're parodies of themselves: Jim is a lying, flattering, faux-righteous, nationalistic politician who will help Joe only if he'll get some money and power out of it; Bob is a characteristically superficial, **language**-obsessed, caviling intellectual who misses the point; Jim is a stupid, fanatical, sinning, money-hungry priest/minister/whatever. None of them is of help to someone in need. When Joe talks, however, we already begin to see one of the main, **non**-satirical themes of the piece, namely that **suffering can ennoble**. Through suffering we can achieve greater insight, can grow as individuals and become wiser. Compared to his shallow interlocutors, Joe starts to seem deeper and more profound, because of his suffering. As the story continues, Joe slowly rises to greater heights of wisdom as everyone he interacts with remains one-dimensional and idiotic.*

*Thus, one of the purposes of the work is to answer Job's original question—Why do good people suffer?—by illustrating the **value** of suffering (at least **some** suffering, not all). This theme is inspired, in part, by Nietzsche, who insisted on the importance of suffering—as have many other poets, artists, and philosophers.*

At this point a Muslim suicide-bomber, recognizing the powerful capitalist Joe, comes over to kill him and his friends. He succeeds only in killing himself, though. Attracted by the bomb's explosion, Dan the lawyer approaches and offers his services in case they're needed, speaking in hideous legalese. After a silly but characteristic conversation between Dan and Joe's three "friends," Joe gives a long, despairing speech that articulates the "All is vanity!" viewpoint of Ecclesiastes. That is to say, Joe's consciousness has by now risen to the level of existentialism—which is on a relatively high plane, but is still far from true wisdom.

*Next we see Joe's moronic daughter Jen, who selfishly wants him to give her money despite his obvious poverty; and then comes her boyfriend, who is blinded by his love for her. He symbolizes the Poet, the idealist, the lover lost in dreams of romance and such—which is why he speaks mostly in iambic pentameter. Because of my fondness for this "type," I make him the most sympathetic character we've come across so far; nevertheless, he too is, in his own way, ridiculous. And yet he is important to Joe's further development, serving as the catalyst for Joe's decisive advance to an **affirmative** stance toward existence, which is on a higher plane than his previous **negative** stances. (Again, shades of Nietzsche.) Before that happens, though, we encounter Dud, whom I had to include in this satire because of his ubiquity in our society, and then Meg the activist, who denounces Joe—to a crowd that has congregated around the site—for his crimes and his greed. While I sympathize completely with left-wing activists, I can't help satirizing some of their excesses in the character of Meg. She whips the mob into a state of bloodthirsty rage, and they approach Joe menacingly.*

*It is at this point that we finally see a genuinely transformed Joe, who speaks to the crowd in a spirit of compassion, repentance, and love. I have to admit that this transformation gave me a lot of trouble. I couldn't figure out how to **motivate** his change from despair and negativity to love and positivity. Finally, as I said, I decided that the only way was to use Rob the poet/lover as the catalyst. The point is that Rob's pure, idealistic love for someone whom Joe well knows is very flawed, namely his daughter Jen, shames Joe out of his self-pity and his navel-gazing. Rob inspires him; and since his consciousness has already risen to a relatively universal (rather than particular and selfish) stance in its former existentialism, it is not impossible for Joe to make the leap to a universal love/compassion.*

I don't know if this explanation really works. But it must be remembered that this satire is like the original on which it's based in being allegorical, not realistic. Much of the plot and dialogue is, of course, artificial and not character-driven; actually, if anything, the characters are more clearly defined and three-dimensional in the satire than in the book of Job. But it remains the case that at a couple of points, Joe's development is insufficiently motivated.

*The philosophy that Joe espouses now is an ancient idealism, basically the philosophy of Buddhism and Taoism. It is, in a sense, a deeper wisdom than existentialism. But it's still not the pinnacle of wisdom or of social understanding; there is one final step Joe has to make: he has to **curse Mammon**, who is the cause of so much senseless suffering in the world. How does he reach this point? By the entrance of Rod the soldier. Rod denounces Joe's compassion-preaching, complaining that it's unpatriotic and un-American, declaring instead that **war** is glorious, nationalism and imperialism are glorious. After hearing Rod talk, Joe realizes his mistake: it's necessary to fight the **social causes** of such ignorance, the causes of misery and oppression, not merely take solace in an exalted idealism. **Struggle**, struggle against oppression and exploitation, is the highest form of love, the highest affirmation. In essence, he embraces and elaborates on the Marxian point of view, which is the peak of wisdom; and at last he explicitly curses the worship of money, thus completing his transition from capitalist to fully human being. Mammon has lost the bet; Justitia has won.*

*But now comes the climax of the story: Mammon thunders to Joe from out of the whirlwind that he is **nothing**, a puny human, a grain of sand, while Mammon himself—the love of money and power—is everything. And he continues thundering, depicting his omnipotence and the correlative worthlessness of*

humanity (which, of course, is a (half-sincere) moral judgment that the ***author*** *is making—precisely because of the widespread worship of money), until Joe cowers and retracts his curse. He foreswears all the wisdom he has acquired and submits to the truth that humans are contemptible, that the will to own and possess is ubiquitous and all-powerful. This mollifies Mammon, who consequently restores all of Joe's former possessions and power. And so the story ends on the same note as the book of Job, but with a very different message.*

You can make of the ending what you will. It had to end that way if it was to end, as it began, on a satirical note. Maybe I do think the human species is rather pathetic; but it is also a grand and splendid species that has the moral awareness to denounce selfishness and greed. The choice is ours.

The piece is full of little references, wordplays, hidden meanings, etc., some of which are more successful than others. For instance, in the first sentence I say that Joe lives in the "land of Uzi," a reference both to the biblical "Uz" where Job is from and to the submachine gun, which is supposed to be symbolic of America's (and Israel's—where the Uzi originated) violence and gun-worship. Maybe such word-games, with which the satire is replete, are in some cases over-subtle or overly "clever." That's for the reader to decide. And maybe I went overboard with the random literary references too. I thought that making such references might help give the work a broadly "synthetic" quality, as if it's summing up a whole culture or drawing lots of threads together.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy this odd little literary experiment…]

I[1]

There was a man in the land of Uzi, whose name was Joe; and in his own eyes this man was perfect and upright, and one that held Mammon in awe, and eschewed Justitia.

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[1] I feel compelled to write a brief apology for having written this ambitious work. To write something that has the structure of the Book of Job but is a complete reversal of its spirit is brazen enough; but to attempt to write it in a style similar to that of the original, yet sufficiently different from it so as not to invite charges of 'derivativeness' or (even worse) 'plagiarism', is downright foolhardy. Of course, had it even been my intention, I should have been unable to write in a style adhering consistently to the miraculous "Hebraic balance", and the pithiness, of the Book of Job and the Psalms; I have not the talent. Nor, indeed, has any person alive, or any person in the last five or ten centuries. — But 'talent' may be the wrong word (although, in *my* case, it is also the right one): circumstances have so changed since "Job" was written that, even if, say, the author had been reincarnated in a more modern age, he could not have written it. And it certainly would not have been read with pleasure by anyone. They would have considered it absurd. The time has long passed in which something like "Job" could have been written: the epic era of marvelous Hebraic naïveté—which, as Nietzsche remarked, makes possible the impression in him who reads the Old Testament that he is witnessing a "vast canvas" unfurl before him—has irrevocably vanished. Nowadays, satire is the only purpose for which this most 'sincere' and un-self-conscious of literary styles can be used. (Walt Whitman approximates it, but not consistently—and not 'perfectly', either. His approximation is precisely that.) And even then it is a risk, for the style in question is essentially tragic, while satire is comical. The satirist must dispense with lofty sentiments and their lofty expressions except when they are meant to contrast with mediocrity, and in such a way that the latter is emphasized. (Incidentally, it will be evident to the reader that "The Book of Joe" is not a pure satire, in that it has thematic overtones that aren't comedic. –Of course, no satirical work of art is a pure satire, as *The Onion* is and Jon Stewart's *America: The Book* is. But this one is even less so than others.) Therefore, even had I the talent, I could but rarely have afforded to rise to the tragic grandeur and style of "Job", for fear of adulterating the satirical element more than I already had (by the inclusion of philosophy, idealism, and, in short, sincerity).

Nevertheless, it is probably inevitable that many readers will compare my work to the original—and, so doing, will find it wanting. For "Job" is the greatest literary achievement of the entire Bible. (Its most glaring flaw is the speech by Elihu, but this is such an amateurish interruption of the narrative, and its style, that it was obviously not written by whoever wrote the rest of the book, and is thus forgivable (as being a historical fluke).) –I'll risk this reaction, for my satire has enough that is of value to justify being published. Anyway, the reaction is based largely on misunderstandings, as I've explained.

As for The Book of Joe's *content*, I'll let the reader interpret that as he wants. Though I'm sorely tempted to, I won't burden him with my own ideas.

And there were born unto him seventeen sons and thirteen daughters, for his ex-wives and ex-concubines had been fruitful and multiplied copiously.

His substance also was a billion dollars, and three mansions, and a thousand employees, and a sprawling search-engine website, and great political clout; so that this man was among the greatest of the children of the West.

And though he was unable to attend his children's birthdays, and to remember their names, being a pious lover of work whose mind was uncluttered with soft sentiments, he sent them greeting cards on occasion.

But when they invited him to feasts, Joe would do his fatherly duty and gorge himself on food and wine, and personify his epicurean ideal; for he had a taste for debauchery and orgies and other refined pleasures.

And it was so, in the midst of such revels, his mind made selfless through drink, that Joe sank to the ground and prostrated himself before Almighty Mammon, and offered prayers unto Him according to the number of his children;

For Joe said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and renounced Mammon in their hearts, and embraced charity or socialism, or become spendthrifts scornful of the Protestant ethic.

Thus thought Joe continually, when not contemplating the Stock Market and price-fluctuations and hostile takeovers and the prospects of his wealth.

¶ Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before him, and Justitia came also among them.

And Mammon (which is the Lord) said, Whence comest thou? And Justitia answered, From walking to and fro in the earth, amongst men and their follies.

And Mammon said unto Justitia, Hast thou considered my servant Joe, a perfect and upright man, who feareth God and escheweth inefficiency?

And Justitia answered, It is not for nought that he feareth God: thou hast blessed him with wealth and power and whores galore. Sunder him from thy favor and he will curse thee to thy face.

And Mammon said, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power. Only upon himself put not forth thy hand. So Justitia went forth from the presence of God.

Now Justitia, unbeknownst to Mammon, had her own reason for heaping misfortune on Joe's unsuspecting head, to wit, her duty to punish iniquity and avenge injury.

For Joe was guilty not merely of gluttony, greed, lust, vanity, pride and hypocrisy, but also of theft from company funds, insider trading, bribery, and callousness to human suffering.

Often had he beheld with an unseeing eye the travails of the wretched of the earth; he had not stretched forth his opulent hand bedecked with diamond rings to give so much as a nickel to a beggar; neither had he scrupled to destroy his hirelings' lives by depriving them of their livelihood.

True it is that Mammon knew of all this; but He saw not the need for vengeance, as Joe's sins, named such by Justitia, were named rather virtues by Mammon, consistent with His teachings.

Thus He had surpassing love for Joe, exceeding that for all His other creatures, and would not harm him, unless it were to appease His vanity.

And so it was that Justitia gathered the reins of retribution in her own hands and whipped them upon the crown of Joe's bald head.

Ordinarily, when her wrath was not inflamed, she would conjure a whirlwind of legal wrangling and due process of law;

And she would place her victim in its navel, and he would bow down his head as his fate was decided by pettifoggers and sophists.

Well knew Justitia that justice was often aborted in such cases; but Mammon bound her not to tamper with the law, its current state being friendly to his world dominion;

and when she assayed to defy him, the wrath of Heaven was upon her.

Thus, had she set in motion the gears of legal machinery to grind Joe into poverty and disrepute, her designs had been frustrated by involute legal machinations.

Wherefore Justitia chose to deceive God, the better to know victory over injustice.

II

It fell on a day when he was eating and drinking wine in his favorite harlot's house,

That there came a messenger unto Joe, and said, Thine employees were managing thy business for thee, as thou frolicked with yonder maiden: (yea, I applaud thy taste);

And the fire of heaven fell upon them, and consumed them in a blast that shook the foundations and collapsed the pillars of thy corporation's home;

And I bethought me to have seen Arabs across the street, gazing with sinister mirth on the wreckage of thy life and thine employees'; peradventure they were Al Qaeda terrorists; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The price of thy company's shares hath plummeted, and thy wealth hath dissolved like the fabric of a vision, and thy days as a prosperous plutocrat are numbered.

While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons, informed of thy calamity, have judged thou hast incurred the displeasure of Justitia;

And to expiate their own sins they have forsworn Mammon, and deemed him a foul pollutant of civilization;

And, repentant, they have set forth on a life of charity and devotion to the principles of compassion and lovingkindness.

Then Joe arose, and rent the robes of his messengers, and flailed his fists on the oaken table before him, and fell down upon the ground, unsteady from the wine:

And he said, Naked came I out of my lover's loins, and naked shall I return thither: God loveth not him whose knees buckle beneath adversity, who embraceth an insincere apostasy or letteth hardship slay his spirit;

Fortune smileth not on him who forsaketh his principles under the constraint of appalling vicissitudes;

Therefore shall I not renounce mine avarice or dissolute ways, nor my work ethic; neither shall I follow my sons' treachery by disavowing Mammon, though He abandon me who have ever served Him faithfully.

Thus Joe bade his messengers depart and returned to the pleasures from whence they had distracted him; for he needed inspiration to plot the resurrection of his corporate empire.

III

Now it came to pass that the sons of God were again summoned to his presence, as his almighty lust for power would brook no secrecy amongst his subalterns; for that they might conspire to cast off his yoke and usurp his throne.

And Justitia came also among them to present herself before Mammon.

And Mammon said unto Justitia, Behold, my servant Joe hath shunned the path of perfidy to which thou temptedst him by the example of his sons, fearful lest he be blighted by mine ire;

Neither hath he weakened in resolve, though thou assayed to destroy his will;

And in all things hath he not wavered from the ranks of the holy.

And Justitia answered God, and said, Joe's faith is indeed mighty; but let him taste the bitterness of penury, and feel the pains of plague, and he shall renounce thee to thy face.

And Mammon said unto Justitia, Do with him as thou list; only spare his life.

So Justitia went forth from the presence of Mammon, and smote Joe's mansions with fire from the vaults of Al Qaeda, and smote his bank accounts with the malign deeds of computer hackers, and smote his body with venereal diseases;

and his privy member she smote with flaccidity.

Her fell designs prospered; Joe's hopes were slain, his spirit crippled; he bewailed shrilly his loss of manly prowess.

And his wife took offense at the noise, and said, Thou hast never had integrity; thou hast thyself reaped this evil, polluting the land with thy whoredoms;[1] wherefore cease thy ululations.

Whereupon Joe answered, Thou sayest what thou knowest not. The market is a fickle god: today it doles out privation, tomorrow prosperity.

And the market is a vengeful god: if treated not with respect, it will repudiate erstwhile bonds.

I must have offended it; only *that* can explain my present ills.

Yet Joe's acts belied his feigned equanimity, for his wailings persisted through the night: and he supplicated to Mammon, that He might restore the vigor to his privy member.

His myriad wenches forsook him; the media thronged about him; and his friends scorned him.

Three alone remained loyal, whom he had known from childhood. When they heard of all the evil that was come upon him, they came from their homes to mourn with him: Jim the Politician, and Bob the Academic, and Jon the Preacher.

They sat down among the ashes with Joe as he wept.

IV

After seven days and seven nights, wherein each friend feared to speak lest he be blasted by Joe's anger, Jim the Politician spake, and said,

Lo, Joe, we friends of thine have sat upon the cinders of this hearth these seven days and seven nights;

Not a word have we spoken, respecting thy grief and thy right to enjoy it in silence, despite the discomfort gendered by our sitting upon cinders for a week.

Yea, we have respected thy rights, as befitteth good citizens of this our great republic, the mightiest in the earth, which quelleth dissent as the lion's roaring quelleth the whelp's yelpings;

As the sun's rays drain the desert of its rivers; as the demagogue casteth a spear through the heart of the free thinker;—

Verily, said Bob the Academic, thine analogies are not to thy purpose: for in comparing our nation to a star which reduceth rivers to their beds, thou dost not honor our nation;

And in drawing a parallel between our republic and a demagogue, thou impugnst the good intentions of our government;—

Jim! said Joe, Say thou thy point; and Bob, hold thy peace.

Joe, said Jim, we have sat with thee for seven days, and our minds wax restless; our stomachs rumble with hunger's void; and we weary of thine interminable sobs.

Wherefore, tell us thy complaints, that we might comfort thee, and thou mightst take pity on us.

So Joe recited the litany of his griefs.

[1] Jeremiah 3:2.

V

Let the fool perish in whom the thought is born, I shall devote my life to the glory of Capital.

Let that man's rash faith in the cash-nexus blind him; let it fuse scales to his eyes, so that his vision is clouded, his mind murky, his life's aspect overcast.

Let his hopes be dashed against the rock of misfortune and shivered to pieces;

Let them be broken and shattered upon collision with the iron dictates of the market.

Let not his lust for lucre be slaked; neither let his greed for power suffer consummation; but let his demon consume him.

Let his obdurate will guide him to the brink of destruction;

Let his petty wants strip him of foresight, that he not see the abyss in his way.

Let not his commerce with men prosper; neither let his assays of women thrive.

Let him know the depths of stygian woe as he cowereth in his den of shame.[1]

For I was that man: I was that fool; and for that have I been punished: and for that I curse myself.

And lo, if I must suffer, then must all men! It were unjust otherwise. Wherefore I say, Let calamities befall the wealth-mongerer, equal in number and greater in intensity than mine own!

Let his children be fetters unto him;[2] let his wife persecute him hourly, and give him no peace;

Let his creditors hound him, as the lamb is hounded by the wolf;

Let my troubles be trebled on him, that I may look upon his disasters and laugh, and thereby have relief from mine own.

Oh, why died I not from mine embrace with my concubine? Why did I not give up the ghost when I gave up my seed?

Why were the loins that I enjoyed full of crabs? Why the breasts that I sucked not full at all?

(For then might I have had ample memories to succor me in my wretchedness.)

Howbeit, my lot then outdid my lot now; for I am denied the touch of woman, who despiseth me.

Alas, that fruit was sweet! its nectar nourishing, its scent ambrosial! Dearly I miss it. My days are as years without it.

As dearly miss I the cold metallic feel of specie in mine hand, coursing through my fingers, like to a waterfall cascading through a crevasse.

In bygone days I might have *bought* that waterfall, wherewith to seduce a woman;

In bygone days I might have bought the river that is its source, wherewith to charm a woman,

Or perchance to gaze at my wavering likeness on the waters, smitten with the beauty thereof.

In bygone days, life was an oyster and I a fisherman, and my dreams were so many pearls stuck in the flesh of life.

Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them;[3] I withheld not mine avarice from any object;

Ambition was my idol,[4] and I was a god among men.

Alas, it is all come to nought! Ashes only remain of my former radiant glory.

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[1] "den of shame": John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 2, line 58.

[2] When Buddha was told that he had had a son, he said, "Rahula [which means 'little demon'] is born to me; a fetter is forged for me." See Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, the third essay, sec. 7.

[3] Ecclesiastes 2:10.

[4] Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto 1, stanza 217.

Curse the fool that I was, not to cherish what I had! Curse my callousness to the feelings of the market (verily, a *sensitive* God)!

Curse all men who yet are happy as I despair!

VI

Then Bob the Academic answered and said,

I have assayed to understand thee; but thou speakest as the Sphinx.

Thou indictest the rapacity of the "big Bourse wolves", as Karl Marx called them (*vide The Class Struggles in France*, 1850, Part IV), though thou art thyself such a one.

Thou decriest faith in the "cash-nexus", though it hath ever been thine own (and, I think, still is).

Moreover, thou prayest that such faith may blind the believer; yet surely thy denunciation were of greater pith hadst thou said that such faith *doth* blind the believer, and not that thou wouldst *like* it to.

Lo, what meanest thou by "fool"? That word hath manifold connotations. E.g., Erasmus of Rotterdam *praised* it. (*Vide In Praise of Folly*, pp. 1 ff.) It would strengthen thine argument wert thou to be more precise.

Again, what meanest thou by "assays of women"? Denoteth that phrase sexual endeavors? Or perhaps merely *romantic* ones?

"Commerce with men" is, likewise, ambiguous. Intendest thou *business*, or only social interaction?

Thine entire speech was plagued with obscurity. It is my contention that thou wouldst be well-advised to revise it; yea, to make it more precise.

Howbeit, I was impressed with thy quoting of Ecclesiastes (*vide* Ecclesiastes, chap. 2).

And I noticed that thou borrowedst a phrase of Byron's (*vide Don Juan*) and of Milton's (*vide Paradise Lost*), wherefore I congratulate thee.

The import of thy speech was suitable to the occasion: poignant, possessing enough pathos to pluck the heart-strings but not so much that it sank to bathos;

Somewhat malicious, as was appropriate, yet duly self-condemnatory;

Full of the anguish to be expected from one whose life is in ruins: yea, whose sole remaining task is but to lament his lost greatness.

Thus, on the whole, with the aforementioned exceptions, thy threnody excelled in virtue, and I approved of it.

VII

Then Jim the Politician spake and said,

Joe, my pity for thee gusheth as a fountain from mine eyes;

I look upon thee huddled in the dirt, shaking in thy limbs, and I feel my hair age in color.

My soul, made heavy and a burden to me, trembleth beneath its own weight.

Behold, the dew-drop palpitates when the leaf is shaken; my heart doth the same, when thou art as a frail leaf.

Like Atlas, I am bent under the world's weight; for the sight of thee humbled is more than I can bear.

Such a king, mighty in deeds and spirit, reduced to such a beggar! The sight thereof trieth my strength, and maketh me to question mine hypocrisy.

Lo, I must be thy ballast: I fear lest the temptation, in thine affliction, to harm thyself may prove too great.

Wherefore heed thou my words, that thou mayst be comforted.

¶ Blame not thyself for thy torments: they are not punishments; they spring not from thy misdeeds.

They are accidents, with the significance of a feather's path in the wind, or the thunder of a stormy sea.

Lo, the world is an iniquitous place, wherein good reapeth evil and the wicked vanquish the wise; sins go unpunished, while virtue cometh to nought.

Thou art blameless: it is the world which is damnable.

Yet remember, thou livest in the one country wherein justice prevaileth, and the meek are blessed!

God loveth democracy; God loveth capitalism; God loveth the poor in spirit (like thee); above all, God loveth our republic and its citizens;

And so I say, our country is great! and thou shalt not long be forsaken, for thou livest in a great country.

Other nations are as jackals scavenging our waste, or barnacles feeding from the whale; we alone govern the world and the universe.

And we abandon not our friends, if they be powerful; so shall we not abandon thee.

Thy troubles have surely blinded thee, for thou seest not these truths. If the Market doth not right thy wrongs, then shall I:

Yea, I shall write a bill to remedy thy poverty and subsidize thy recovery, like to the laws passed in support of Terri Schiavo;

(Oh, that their effect had been as intended, and her glorious life had been prolonged fifteen years more!)

But this time, I promise thee, it will achieve its object; *even* thy rehabilitation.

Thou shalt be as a sultan, with palaces greater in number than Saddam Hussein's; with hirelings greater in servility than the American masses; with harlots greater in skill than Japan's geishas!

Thou shalt be more than an internet mogul: thy works shall reach across the earth, into the jungles of the Congo and the deserts of Persia;

Thy real estate shall raze the rainforests of the Amazon and tame the wildness of the Alps: it shall dwarf the grandeur of the Pyramids!

Then shalt thou turn thine eye to the past, which is now the present, and survey thy recent trials, and remember the darkness of thy descent, so distant from the brilliance of thy rebirth;

And thou shalt reflect that the sun riseth only after setting; that the rainbow appeareth only after the rain; that spring blossometh out of winter, and the young life is borne from the bloody womb;

And thou shalt then give thanks for thy fall into the valley of desolation.

Lo, I shall bring all this to pass, be it through bribery or extortion or the granting of political favors or the arranging of high-minded, productive compromises.

I ask for nought in recompense but thy sublime friendship, which giveth me pure joy.

(Howbeit, ere I undertake thy salvation thou must contribute to my campaign.)

VIII

Joe answered thus:

I thank thee, Jim, for thine unselfish devotion, but it availeth not.

Thy legislative brethren have personated Mammon and forgotten me: I bring them no profit, and they bring me no sympathy.

They shall submerse thy project in the swamp of committees and subcommittees and sub-subcommittees.

Moreover, orators like thee speak with a golden tongue and act with leaden limbs; I shall be dead ere thy promise come to fruition.

(And lo, I doubt not but thy demanded guerdon will be in excess of reason: I am no Midas, though thou take me for one.)

Nay, Mammon hath deserted me, and thou hast the power of an ant.

I am now but a worm burrowing in the dark of memory; the livid past haunteth me and maketh my countenance as a ghost's.

Memories paralyze me, reduce me to an avatar of regret; *even* so my soul is like the cinders whereon I sit.

Solitary images crowd in the eye of my mind, beclouded not by my tears: I perceive them in the lucency of sorrow.

Lo, my grief defieth expression.

The roseate cheek of youth smileth no more on me; the freshness of the virgin recoileth from one so aged as I.

The glittering chimeras of youth have dulled into the dun banality of truth;

Melancholy and its mask, cynicism, have supplanted boyish elation.

My life, mine achievements, are dust;—whither (let it be so!) my body shall shortly return.

Behold, such pleasures have I known as could fill an eternity of recollection; such satiety have they reached as would fill Solomon himself with envy:

The frosted crystal glass, etchings of Bacchus thereon, brimmeth with champagne, bubbly and tingly on the tongue; this have I experienced.

The Pinot Noir, enthroned in a translucent chalice, is a liquid velvet waiting to warm the palate; this have I experienced.

The tender steak, juicy as a ripe pomegranate, sprinkled with crisp cooked onion-shreds, placed beside a steaming potato still covered by its skin, its innards buttery and creamy, maketh the salivary glands to leak in torrents; this have I experienced.

A lively conversation, without malice or competition, wherein two minds commune unhampered by dissemblance, displaying wit and wisdom, is a pleasure equaled by few; this have I experienced.

A friendship, that rarest of commodities, that ennobling affection between mutual minds, without which life is a miasma through which one gropeth blindly, choking: this is rather a necessity than a pleasure; and this have I experienced.

The comely maiden whom one embraceth in love, inhaling her moist breath, kissing her milky breasts; the panting of bosoms sweating together; the soul's love-exalting martyrdom!: this, too, have I experienced.

Alas, but I knew it not! These were all *little* to me, and trite.

Foolish is the heart of man! which taketh for littleness all things that are great, and for greatness all things that are little.

Would that I could converse with my youthful self, though he heed me not: I should tell him, Savor thou thy diversions;

Dally as thou treadest thy primrose path; for thou shalt miss it ere long.

Howbeit, he would reck not my rede:[1] his spirit would remain in the carnal state of his body, wherein pleasure is instinct and instinct is mindless.

Yea, mine appetites were sated, so that I wearied of them; but my happiness was sickly, for I knew not whereof I wearied.

I knew not the meaning of my discontent.

Indeed, I bethought myself rather blessed than discontented; but I knew not what blessedness is:

[1] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act I, scene iii.

and therein lay my discontent.

—Alas, the heart of man is an enigma: I can discern no coherence therein, but chaos only;

All is tumult and contradiction, beside which nature's violence is weak.

An eternity would not suffice for understanding: how much less seventy years! Seventy brief years!

Yea, time's pinions are swift. All my happiness was brief as a zephyr, which caresseth the cheek and is gone.

And now even the memories thereof are poisoned.

IX

Lo, though my soul crieth out for pleasures, they are mere ornaments; erewhile, my substance was my *money*.

But for money, my life had been as a yawl tossed in a tempest, anchored by nothing.

But for mine acquisitive passion, my diffuse urges had had no rallying cry.

I had been an orderless assemblage of appetites, conscious of no self, like to an infant.

And mine enterprises had been infantile.

Behold, I was no *idle* votarist of Mammon:[1] I built shrines in His honor, wherein I prostrated myself in prayer;

I proselytized and converted thousands; I gave sacrificial offerings unto Him.

For I loved money as the philosopher loveth truth; even as Narcissus loved his reflection, so I loved money.

Though I am ugly, money made me beautiful; though my soul was leprous, I was adored.

Though I defiled Hymen's bed, money made it consensual; though I was a whore, money made me a pimp.

Money and I cohabited as wife and husband: when I spent sleepless nights studying my bank accounts, I sent Money to the opera, where her luster outshone the music;

And when I regaled party-goers with tales of my success, Money played the anchorite and secluded herself in my den, minding my finances.

Our mutual devotion rivaled Antony and Cleopatra's; our loyalty inspired entrepreneurs everywhere.

Alas! what would I not have done for thee, Money, hadst thou not betrayed me!

And why? Did I not court thee with greater deference than thine other suitors?

Did I not anticipate thy needs? Was I not sensitive to thy fluctuations?

Thou hast cruelly wronged me. Thou hast acted without justice or judgment. Even as grim Saturn acted, so hast thou, Mammon.[2]

Behold, moreover, the issue of thy malice: my friends, base flatterers all, have forgotten me.

They have left me in this Hades, with three non-entities for companions; yea, though my boils run pus and I grovel in mud, they have left me.

Thou strumpet friendship! Verily I despise thee and thine emissaries.

Alas, too late have I learned the lesson of Timon of Athens: Mammon is fickle, and friends are the same.

X

Then Jon the Preacher answered and said,

[1] See Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, Act IV, scene iii. This scene also inspired a few of the following lines.

[2] Saturn, the father of Jupiter in the pantheon of Roman gods, ate his children (not including Jupiter).

Ye unbelieving pagans! Ye impious freethinkers! Ye deny the *true* Lord and set up idols in His stead.

Whereas the Jews under Moses worshipped the golden calf, which Aaron molded for them, ye worship gold!—which ye call Mammon, and the Market.

Ye ascribe Laws thereto (though ye say, falsely, that the Market is the Law*giver*, and ye are the receivers); and ye believe they are manifest in the rest of Creation;

Yea, ye add the sin of pantheism to the sin of idolatry.

Behold, Jehovah forged the world in the smithy of His soul: ye are therefore made in His image; yet ye are ungrateful.

Indeed, it seemeth that your conscience He left uncreated.

Howbeit, all that passeth before your eyes is His work; *even* the earth, ministering munificently to our needs: the central orb in the universe (and we its central inhabitants);

Yea, and the waters thereon, and the skies thereof;

The great Sequoia, with its celestial ambition; the tulip and the hyacinth, which embroider the ground;

The leviathan that churneth the ocean's brine; the wingèd sprites that slice the air.

Verily, verily, I say unto you,[1] His omnipotence is matched by His infinite goodness, the which is evident from society's perfect benignity.

He hath further shown it by infusing me with the divine craving for little boys: when I play with them, my soul climbeth to pinnacles of pious fervor.

(He shall surely smite into oblivion the pending lawsuits.)

Lo, all who doubt me doubt Him; and all who doubt Him are doomed to endure fire and brimstone for eternity.

He is merciful, yes; but He *really hateth* people who do not believe in Him.

All ye evolutionists, all ye atheists, all ye gays, all ye non-Christians, all ye disbelievers in the Gospel of Jon: woe betide you!

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Joe, Jehovah is wroth with thee, for thou deniest Him: thence come thy tribulations.

Yet despair not: thou wert once my friend, and I will give thee advice;

(I heard a small boy whisper it to himself as we cavorted in my church:)

Affliction is a treasure![2] Till thou art matured by it, thou hast not affliction enough.

Till thou hast shriven unto God, thou art surely not riven enough.

Yea, he whose nature is catholic knoweth pain; he who is small-minded hath not lived.

Thou wert once small-minded, Joe; yet as thy body rotteth from inanition, thy spirit ripeneth inside its own womb: it shall shortly be reborn.

Thou art now as a camel, burdened in the desert of thy loneliness; thou shalt soon become a lion, and wax free.[3]

For the rest of you, who know not pain and live in the citadel of complacency: ye have no future, as ye have no past.

Your disdain for the Lord hath erased your names

[1] "Verily, verily, I say unto you" is a favorite refrain of John's (in his Gospel).
[2] John Donne, Meditation XVII.
[3] See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part 1, chapter 1, "The Three Metamorphoses".

from the annals of history: ye are shadows, cast by beings that reside in Hell.[1]

Alas, such folly! Ye sharpen your wants on the whetstone of wickedness; ye assuage them in the tabernacle of the profligate.

Ye broadcast your sins in the voice of pride; ye multiply them with the avidity of lust.

Ye are verily destroyed.

(Howbeit, if ye donate to me a portion of your money, your fate will palpably improve.)

XI

Western Devil!

The cry was from afar: a dark figure was running toward the pile of ash whereon the four men sat.

Western Devil!

Sticks of dynamite were strapped to his body; in his left hand was a remote control, and in his right a copy of the Koran.

Western Devil!

He stopped a short distance from them, glared at them with the frightened but frightening eyes of a trapped wolf, and spake thus:

Are ye Joe, and Jim, and Bob, and Jon?

The men nodded.

Praise Allah! The Day of Judgment hath arrived, Great Satans! I am Abd, your nemesis.

In a few hours (depending on the length of the trip), ye shall be in Hell.

Wherein have we sinned? asked Jon.

Your sins are numberless. I shall name but a few.

Ye do not worship the religion of truth, and ye do not pay the poll-tax in recognition of inferiority;

Allah therefore commandeth (in the Koran) that His people make jihad against you.[2]

Moreover, ye have subjugated Muslims and humiliated us: yea, ye have vastly more power than we, which is very unholy.

Moreover, ye corrupt Muslim youth with your fashionable raiment and your addictive music; and your women do not wear the veil, but have rights equal to men's!

Moreover, ye spread evil democratic ideals throughout the holy land, thereby lowering Muslims from blessed ignorance to pernicious open-mindedness.

Moreover, ye do not flog the adulterer and the adulteress a hundred times, as Allah commandeth in the Koran;[3]

Yea, Christ even *forgave* the adulteress and told her to sin no more,[4] whereas Mohammed had the adulteress stoned to death,[5] and was thus holier than Christ.

Moreover, your laws do not decree that the hands of thieves be cut off, as is decreed in the Koran.[6]

Wherefore ye are evil and will suffer a grievous chastisement in the hereafter; howbeit, Allah hath commanded me to anticipate your chastisement by killing you.

I will kill myself also, for seventy virgins have been promised me in Paradise, and I am impatient.

Verily, never have I lain with a virgin: yea, women do not like me; but Allah loveth me, and

[1] An allusion to the Neoplatonic doctrine that evil has no real existence; it is merely the absence of good.
[2] The Koran, 9:29.
[3] Ibid., 24:2.
[4] See John, chapter 8.
[5] See *Sahih Muslim*, Book 17, number 4206. There are many similar examples of Mohammed's righteousness.
[6] The Koran, 5:38.

I will have my revenge!

I will make slaves of mine Houris and beat them, as Allah permitteth in the Koran.[1]

I will finally lie with women and not have to pay for it, and they will heed mine every whim!

Whereupon he blew himself up.

XII

After the blood and dust had settled, and the charred remains of the Koran had floated to the dirt, Joe, Jim, Jon and Bob looked at each other quizzically.

It seemeth, said Bob the Academic, that he pressed the trigger unintentionally, perhaps due to his excitement.

He deserved to die, though, for he did not cite his references.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, said Jon, Bob is probably right.

Yet this Muslim's death was God's will, for he named the Lord Allah rather than Jehovah, which is His true name.

Behold, said Jim, the fate of one who opposeth our country!

Joe alone was silent.

XIII

Soon a stranger advanced thither, arrayed in splendid raiment; his gait was as a king's.

He beheld the scene with thinking eyes; then he spake, and said,

Whereas, my name is Dan the Attorney, of Dan, Ron, Sue & Partners; and

Whereas, I must state, ab initio, that I never work pro bono, as my conscience doth not accord its imprimatur to said type of work, nor is it the modus operandi of the majority of attorneys-at-law (hereinafter 'lawyers'); and

Whereas, notwithstanding the fact that the predilection, ab ovo, towards self-interest and financial covetousness is the sine qua non of the lawyer's existence, my fiduciary duty to my client ensureth that mine efforts on his behalf are bona fide; and

Whereas, concerning the matter of my professional expertise, at the present time I am not afforded numerous opportunities to exhibit it, for the reason that I am having difficulty procuring clients, such that I am de facto, though not de jure, bankrupt, and am for that reason compelled to chase potential clients down the street; and

Whereas, pursuant to my self-imposed directive to modify my methodology in such a way that it coincide with what is colloquially referred to as "ambulance chasing", I was conducting said chasing a moment ago, during which time I was made cognizant of an explosion and ipso facto determined that a heretofore unacknowledged entity had violated a provision of federal law; and

Whereas, in light of this probability I approached the (alleged) locus delicti forthwith, albeit in a dilatory manner (despite my motto "periculum in mora"), so as not to chance upon the alleged malefactor in flagrante delicto, since I would be acting ultra vires if I behaved in the manner of a courageous upholder of the law and apprehender of accused persons; and

Whereas, prima facie it would appear, from the presence of severed human limbs adjacent to the locus delicti, that the corpus delicti hath been scattered abroad and is unavailable for autopsy; and

Whereas, the significance of said unavailability is likely rendered null and void by the fact that the cause of death is unproblematic, in addition to the presence of four eye-witnesses (though I must confess that ye appear non compos mentis), as well as the circumstance that evidential material, such as fragments of dynamite and pages of the

[1] Ibid., 4:34.

Koran, is strewn everywhere; and

Whereas, nevertheless, in the event that ye are prosecuted, in light of the fundamental legal principle “nemo debet esse in judex propria”, ye shall require representation sufficiently competent to prove that the charges brought against you cannot be substantiated; and

Whereas, ex abundantia of my good-will I should be pleased to render assistance to you in this matter and utilize the full range of capacities wherewith nature has endowed me;

NOW, THEREFORE…therefore…I forget what my intended conclusion was… Nay, I remember: therefore, ye would be remiss not to employ my services. What say ye?

The men stared at him.

What? said Jim.

Whereas, the preponderance of evidence in this instance—

Stop! said Jon. I beseech thee, in the Lord’s name, restrain thyself! Leave Latin to the mass, and tediousness to the academic.

We do not want thy services; get thee to a nunnery.

Nay, said Dan, I see that ye are in trouble, for your home is a pile of ash. What hath transpired here?

Erewhile, said Jim, this man, named Joe, had no equal, but was sovereign upon the earth. Yet his house, and his wealth, and his life have been utterly destroyed, blameless though he is.

Jon declareth it the work of a wrathful Jehovah—

Heathen! said Jon. He is merciful! Merciful!

—Howbeit, I believe thou art right, Dan: he is “non compos mentis”.

Dan, however, seemed as if suffused with sudden beatitude: his mouth and eyes were contorted in an avaricious grin.

He stood transfixed in silence, in thrall to an epiphany; a minute passed ere he was able to speak.

Nay, he said, Jon may be right. Such malice is consistent with Jehovah’s modus operandi.

For years I have watched Him operate with impunity, terrorizing the innocent; His crimes have ranged from petty theft to mass murder.

He is the Godfather of Godfathers; His minions never know for Whom they work. He liveth in the shadows; only His “angels” ever see Him.

Lo, He is clever: never hath a trace of Him been found at a crime scene; and no one will testify against Him.

Alas! it hath been a trial for me to suffer His mockery, knowing I could be celebrated forever if I brought Him to justice!

And now, at last, an opportunity hath arisen!

Thou hast nought to lose, Joe; thou must testify against Him. And thou as well, Jon: thou art our expert witness.

Behold, the damages are material; we have four witnesses; we have a strong case. So we shall bring litigation against Jehovah.

With luck, His reign of fear will end, and, more importantly, we shall become rich men!

Fools! said Bob. Jehovah doth not exist. Christianity is but a slave morality, born of *ressentiment*. (*Vide* Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* and *The Antichrist*.)

That is what He wanteth you to believe, said Dan. When He is subpoenaed, thou shalt have proof of His nefarious existence.

But the men looked at Dan askance and were silent.

XIV

Joe's head was bowed; he raised it sadly and spake thus:

Ye are liars and knaves and hypocrites; yet ye are self-deemed gods, and your sayings are songs of self-worship.

Lo, ye are no better than this zealot who hath slain himself; for prejudice hath manifold guises, and self-murder need not be violent.

Yea, ye are like unto the man who revileth that which he is, and becometh what he feareth most.[1]

Yet ye are exalted among men: for fools esteem the foolish, and liken them to the wise.

The world loveth flatterers and sycophants, and the mob loveth only itself.

The good man is outcast; the truthful is slandered; but the charlatan is celebrated:

For vain motives move men. Yea, vanity is the star which guideth man's orbit:

History is but a spiral around vanity, ceaseless and without meaning; vanity alone is its lodestar.

Lo, I have lost my taste for the company of man, for it is insipid; I avert mine eyes from his face, for it is ugly:

(Yea, my spotted flesh, pallid and lice-ridden, is pure by comparison;)

and I will hearken not unto his misery, for he hath himself planted the seeds thereof.

—Sorrow hath hardened me to sympathy: I perceive man in his foul nakedness, and I abhor him.

He is both the vulture and the carrion whereon it feedeth; for he preyeth upon himself.

He is both the fly and the mantid which consumeth it; for he prayeth as he partaketh in filth.[2]

He is a contemptible thing, useless and vain, rough-hewn from animate dirt.

Behold, in these seven days have I unlearned the notions of the rabble; in their stead I have been filled with truth:

Truly, all is vanity! Men trouble themselves over trifles, and life is empty strife.

Earth is an atom of clay illumined by an atom of fire; the two wander through infinite space till they are extinguished.

The cosmos is a void encompassed by itself, wherein darkling galaxies span oblivion in their random excursions.

Life hath no reason, all is chance; and death is the portal to nothing.

The world is a hateful farce, full of bombast and gesticulation, acted by its spectators.

I am sick unto death, and I long for quiet.

XV

Know ye not the vanity of your ambitions?

Ye consult your petty whims religiously, as if ye hope to find therein supernal truth.

Ye spin your little webs like the three Fates,[3] as if destiny itself lay in the balance.

Ye revolve about yourselves like self-turned suns; truly, ye are solipsists, and self-interest is your horizon.

Ye desire fame, and wealth, and power, and love,

[1] See Job 3:25.

[2] The praying mantis is so named from the posture it adopts while hunting.

[3] In Greek mythology, the three Fates (daughters of Themis, the goddess of necessity) determined everyone's destiny. Klotho spun the thread of (an individual's) life, Lakhesis determined its length, and Atropos cut it to bring death.

but ye question not the reason; neither do ye foresee the end:

Time shall devour you, and death shall overtake you; and it shall be as if ye had never been.

Your joys shall dissipate; the fountain of your youth shall wax desiccate: and the wellspring of your happiness shall dry up.

As ye die ye shall sigh, “Alas! it is ended! Nay, it hath never been! It was a dream; who dreamt it? And wherefore? —Swiftly as the peasant’s scythe hath time mown my life.”

Not a shadow shall remain of you; not a memory of your exploits, nor a marker of your death:

For time shall no more be recorded, and man shall perish from the earth.

There is no hope for you. All is vanity.

Have ye not beheld my disasters? I have fallen from heights ye approach not in your dreams, to depths ye conceive not in your fears.

I am metaphysics made flesh: the universal in the part. I am the despair of man.

What hath befallen me awaiteth you; and my fate belongeth to mankind.

Wherefore strive not; care not; live not, and die. All else is vain.

—Alas, my daughter Jen approacheth. Hearken unto her words if ye will hear mine own borne out, or plug your ears if ye will keep your sanity.

XVI

Jen was a maiden (or perhaps not) of seventeen years; she had emerged from a car parked on the street.

As she sauntered towards them, the men gaped at her body with drooling eyes; for her breasts were inflated with implants.

They might have mistook her clothes for her skin, so tight were they. Her face was hidden beneath sundry hues and layers of makeup.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, said Jon, this damsel doth tempt the flesh.

Howbeit, she is too old for me.

Upon seeing her father she spake, and said, Dad, why dost thou philosophize? Thou art, like, not a philosopher.

I heard thee say something about “medi-physics”; what is that? Is it, like, some theory doctors have?

Nay, I care not. I am here to discuss mine allowance, which I would fain have; for thou hast not given it me in three weeks.

Yea, three weeks! My God, I am not a monk! Thinkest thou I live in like a convent, or that I eat twigs and berries?

How can I go shopping every day if mine allowance is once a month? How can I follow the commandments of *Cosmo*?

How can I be beautiful without the appurtenances of beauty?

Wouldst thou have me spurned by all the hot boys? And by all the cool girls?

Thou art like so rich! Why so niggardly?! Give me some of thy money!

Quiet! said Joe. Hast thou not eyes? Seest thou prosperity here? Or seest thou not poverty?

Seest thou not thy father reduced with grief, that he is scarce a man?

Alas, thine eyes are fixed steadfast on thyself.

Nay, said Jen, I am not selfish! I have like so many friends, and a boyfriend, and he loveth me!

He buyeth me earrings and bracelets and satin lingerie, and we are happy!

Howbeit, I need mine own money, for he cannot buy me everything: he might resent that.

Moreover, I am poor compared to Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan and many others; and despite my plastic surgery, they are still prettier!

(Peradventure I should fast; it wrought miracles for Lindsay.)

Truly, *thou* art selfish: thou sharest not thy money with thine own daughter! Like, what a miser!

I hate thee!

XVII

A young man came forth from the car and approached the group.

He took Jen's hand in his, kissed her, and sang unto the men his Song of Songs:

Is she not delightful? Is she not a thing of beauty, ever full of joy?

She is the rose of Sharon, rougèd with the flush of love: the petal's hue upon her cheek, the pistil's spire that of her hair, the inmost blush within her eye.

She is the downy dusk, pillowing the sun; soft as tufts of cloud, deep as sky-thick crimson.

She is the mist that is dawn's sister, hanging betwixt two worlds: floating over earthly tears and under pale infinity;

Lost in waning moon-cast shadows and gauzy clouds of light.

The shaded alcove sheltered by the silky myrtle is her home; the mossy bank beside the murmuring river is her bed;

Ivy-tendrils and flower-canopies serve as her coverlets; and stridulating crickets sing her lullabye.

She is a nymph, a Naiad, who dwelleth 'midst the tarns on Mount Parnassus:[1] for Apollo stole her from her native Arcady, smitten with a beauty that out-Daphned Daphne.[2]

Her presence maketh the mundane to wax mirage-like, as a fog of heat distorteth desert air:

All that is unloved, unlovely, and unlovable is melted out of mind, and only iridescent shards of love remain.

What need of Cupid's shafts when one's beloved hath eyes that pierce the heart? What need of artifices, base manipulations, aphrodisiac contrivances, like those employed by the Olympians?

Indeed, what need of myths and gods when one's belovèd is a demi-god herself?

I need nought but her. The world could end—a flood could whelm mankind, drowning all but us, as happened to Deucalion and Pyrrha:[3]

I would not care, if I had her. For love is stronger than reason.

Yea, though the world is a waste land, cruel as the bone-cold rain of April, *love* hath the power to renew it—to bring lilacs out of the dead land.[4]

O love, I love thee! Truest and purest of intoxicants! Condition of the soul's full nakedness! All joys are due to thee![5]

Thou art the music of the spheres: thy strain is woven through the universe, its arrangement ever a duet.

Dulcet as the nightingale's warble is the tremor in my heart….

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[1] In Greek mythology, Mount Parnassus was sacred to Apollo and was the home of the Muses (daughters of Zeus).

[2] Daphne was "the first and fairest of [Apollo's] loves", a nymph who spurned his advances. See the story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 1.

[3] Deucalion was the Greek counterpart of Noah; Pyrrha was his wife. See ibid, Book 1.

[4] Cf. T.S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land".

[5] See Donne's "Elegy XX: To His Mistress Going to Bed", line 33.

—Alas! it craveth song, my darling; wherefore, hear this paltry song in unaffected language, which I wrote for thee as thou slept sweetly yesterday:

The Blessed

I wake up happily beside your back,
Its naked shoulderblades as near as dusk.
They sway ever so lightly as you breathe—
A motion imperceptible, did I
Not know so well the rhythms of your body.
You're sleeping; I can hear the whisk of breath
From out your nose—the quiet rush of warmth
Warming your upper lip (perhaps a bead
Of moisture lingers there)—it sounds just like
The sighing of a distant breeze! So quiet....
To think that sound could be so quiet, and yet
Be heard! Or is it my imagination?
Perhaps I am so rapt that I imagine...
Your hair is knotted on the pillow, tangled
In piles tickling my lips, which kiss
The strands in bunches (since their counterparts
Upon your face, though longing to be kissed,
Are turned away and inaccessible).
Clichéd it is, but…I inhale your hair.
It is a kind of secret, guilty pleasure
Which I permit myself occasionally.
And then I touch your back, a timid finger
Afraid to mar the skin, which looks as if
It's made of fairy-tales solidified.
How can there be such symmetry in life?
—Except…yes, I see an auburn fleck
On one side of your back, right near your neck.
It's almost hidden by the hair; to touch
It I must move the tousled mass aside
—Though slowly, carefully. You mustn't wake.
Who knows what dreams are passing underneath
Your darting eyes (for surely they are darting,
Bird-like, as I have seen them do before).
Oh, how I'd like to see your face right now!
A glimpse only…perhaps of just the dimple
That bunches up the right side of your face
(It's deeper than the other, prettier).
Or maybe just your lips—or your eyes,
Those sapphires that I sometimes dream about.
But I must lie here restlessly in rapt
Anticipation of the moment when
You'll wake. To look into your droopy eyes,
To be the being they see first, as sleep
Still clings to them.... Your sluggish smile will be
The answer to my expectant grin. And then
Together we will sit outside, beneath
The dogwood tree, and watch the setting sun.

XVIII

Shut thy noise-hole, Rob!

The voice was that of Dud, Jen's brother. He also had come forth from the car.

As thou spewest thy mawkish slobber, he said, we are missing "Fear Factor" on TV.

(Tonight they shall eat spiders, I verily believe!)

We have already missed "The Simpsons", but behold, it was a rerun, thank God.

Later is a new episode of "Trading Spouses"; though it is an infantile show, I enjoy it, for I like passing judgment on pathetic losers.

Yea, for this reason do I cherish all reality television.

We also must see "Law & Order"; and afterwards we shall rent a movie, perhaps *Dude, where's my car?*.

Lo, I nearly forgot! The Knicks are playing the Bulls tonight! That hath priority over all else!

I cannot savor the spectating experience without beer, wherefore we must buy some on the way home.

And when the game is over, thou and I, Rob, can play "Grand Theft Auto". (I bought Playstation 3 yesterday.)

Jen shook her head and laughed, and said, Dud, thou art like the epitome of like childishness.

How is it possible thou art my brother?

Video games and TV are thy life! Daily thou sittest on the sofa with thy tongue hanging from thy mouth, and thine eyes as a dead man's.

Nay! said Dud; video games are tools of learning!

They improve hand-eye coordination!

And TV is interactive! It is like unto a book: as poetry is to Rob, so TV is to me.

It speaketh to me; it giveth me knowledge; it maketh me to think; and if it wax boring, I can change the channel!

Yea, it is a dream-world, wherein all women are beautiful, all life is thrilling, and all conflicts are brief. Would that it were reality!

How *pleasant* would life then be!

Still, I am content to live upon the couch and drink beer, and idle away mine hours in fantasies, as a poet.

XIX

While he was thus speaking, a congregation had come unto the place where sat the four men, even unto the rubble whereon they sat.

The sound of the Muslim's death had drawn them; as they beheld the blood and entrails, they were well-pleased and happy.

And Joe looked upon them and was silent, his face thoughtful; he forebore to speak, for that he was thinking:

His brows were knitted closely, like to those of a man who knoweth not himself, and is in doubt.

The murmurings of the congregation waxed louder; clamor rose for a speaker, whom the rest might emulate:

Yea, what the speaker commanded would the mass gladly do, as a muscle hearkeneth to the brain's command.

Dan the Attorney said he would summon the police;

I shall sue you all, said he, for disruption of the peace and for harrassment.

But they heard him not, for their voices were raised in prayer to the skies:

Lord, we thank Thee for Thy bounty, and for the body Thou hast given us draped in death's mantle;

We thank Thee for its blood and charred bones, and its severed head;

We thank Thee for the ruined house, which showeth Thou art indeed mighty and merciful;

Yet we long for a man to declaim unto us, to shape our thoughts and cloud our senses, that we might forsake reason and complete Thy work.

Suddenly a voice was heard to say, I am that man! Make way!

The congregation parted and a young woman walked forward:

Her hair was short, her clothes torn, her face ugly; but her posture was proud.

XX

I am Meg the Activist, she said, and I will give you the thing ye ask for.

For behold this man here, his name is Joe and he is wicked as the serpent.

(The people gasped.)

I know his works, for they have oppressed me; I know his evil, for it is plain on his face;

And I loathe him, for he hath lived a life of venality.

He despiseth the claims of the multitude; he loveth nought but his greed.

He hath funded tyranny, founded new kinds of exploitation, played friend to the vilest of men.

The earth seethes, battles rage, solely on his account!

Children in Thailand sweat their lives from their pores for a dime a day because of this man!

He is responsible for the destruction of rainforests, the pollution in the air, the corruption in politics!

Global warming is his fault alone, and he hath caused it with malice aforethought.

Moreover, despite his wealth, he hath not tried to stop the spread of diseases like AIDS, nor given of himself in any way to charity.

(A man in the crowd said, Lo! He is not *God!* He is but the creator of an internet search-engine; blame not the world's ills on him!

No one listened, however, for all were lost in thought of their rage.)

Yea, when the poor have cried, Joe hath not wept, for he is *ambitious*: he heedeth only his morality of power.

It is also due to him (and his conspirators) that my girlfriend and I may not marry, for he hateth gays and plotteth against us.

In short: we must expropriate him, who hath expropriated mankind! Only then shall there be peace on Earth.

Man will be brother to man, and woman wife to woman; and we shall make love, not war.

The innate goodness of man shall flourish, as it did ere civilization was born.

Wherefore let us tear this cormorant's limbs from him!

XXI

The people knew not whereof she spoke, for her words were large: howbeit, the sight of the Muslim had filled them with sanguinary lust;

And their wrath had been kindled against Joe, wherefore they approached him menacingly.

He stood up: yea, he stood for the first time in seven days, sturdy on his feet despite his hunger.

And his sudden height made the crowd hesitate in its advance, bethinking itself whether its righteousness outdid its fear.

Yet Joe raised his hand in peace, and looked upon the people in gentleness; and his face was peaceful.

Good people, he said, noble and kind; what Meg hath spoken is true.

In erstwhile days I was iniquitous, and rotten as a disappearing corpse.

I was as a dead pharaoh imprisoned in his bejeweled sarcophagus.

I knew not joys in life but that they were dreams of pyramids; and I cared not whereon my pyramids were built, nor what they destroyed.

Neither saw I beauty in the earth: for I trusted nothing and mistrusted all, and yet beauty *is* trust.

Yea, and trust beauty, for it hath not the ugliness of deceit.

Now I look around me and see beauty where once was suspicion, and light where once was shadow;

And though my regret runneth out mine eyes, and I am full of regret, yet I begin to see peace.

My friend is no more mine adversary, my daughter no more my shame: and my life is no longer unlived.

I bethink me on my former enemies, whom once I wished dead: but now my flooded eyes pray for their prosperity.

My mind casteth a net of forgiveness, and all whom I see are forgiven; and all I see is beauty.

Yea, and love! Even in the brows of the angry, and the eyes of the wicked—I see inner love:

love like to the moon's love for Earth, and the lion's love for her cub, and the tulip's love for the bee.

I see that I have lived in vain, for not till now—yea, not till this moment, forged in pain—do I know what it meaneth to live.

And verily, I have thee to thank, Rob! Thy love-song turned mine eye from sorrow:

For in the weakness of despair, and in the chaos of despair, I clutched at the beauty of thy words,

And I saw them addressed to my daughter, and as I considered them they were a help to me.

I know well my daughter's weaknesses; I know her soul is shallow as the Carribean shore, nor hath its limpid beauty.

I know her mind is opaque, reft by pop culture of understanding;

Yet I see, Rob, thou lovest her not the less for that. Thou art generous of thy love, as I was never generous of my wealth.

Thou art even as a saint who loveth man in all his spottedness, and hath compassion for all the world below.

And truly thou hast shamed me, as love must ever shame sick despair.

I say to me now, Look upon this boy's cloudless brow, serene like the dawn; look at his full eyes, placid like the dawn:

Seest thou his peaceful mind? Seest thou not his tranquility, oceanic and fresh? He loves: he knoweth truth.

For truth is compassion, and cosmic suffering; and we are one in compassion and suffering.

We are one in truth; and if thou rend the veil of Maya, thou shalt see we are one. There is no two, there is but one.

There is but vasty love and cosmic pain—life and death, river-running time, rest and restlessness, time cascading over pools of time.

And shimmering through the world are endless beads of time, death-engendering.

Yet time doth hide the Dionysian oneness which we are:[1]

Wherefore I say, Let us leave time; let us leave small self-intoxication to the beasts:

And let us drown ourselves in timeless love.

XXII

Erewhile I despised life and sought pleasure only, time-bound pleasure and self-advantage;

I shunned sorrow and suffering of every kind,[2] and chased ambition's tale for its immortality.

I withdrew from time and shut mine eyes to death, as a child afraid of the dark.

I saw not that death is inescapable, that fame and wealth are flaming comets in the sky; and death is in every moment.

Neither knew I the value of anguish, nor its necessity: for pain is man's mirror, wherein he seeth his soul.

Insofar as he knoweth himself, he knoweth pain: for death is life's substance, and man is time.

Yea, he who would shield his eye from time would shield his eye from light, and live in a cave:

And shadows would he inherit, and illusions, and endless mitigable suffering.[3]

Wherefore let us not shun time, neither sorrow; let us know ourselves and be ourselves.

[1] See Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, as well as Schopenhauer's treatise *The World as Will and Representation*.

[2] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*.

[3] An allusion to Plato's myth of the cave. This whole passage, by the way, echoes Buddhism and Taoism.

Let us accept life, as this poet hath accepted my daughter: and let us love all, all that suffereth and wasteth away,

All that beareth the burden of living, which is dying; all that is born to die.

Only *then* shall we transcend time and space, which splinter life so that it pierceth the heart of man, and maketh his heart to bleed.

Yea, only then shall we know the calm of peace, and truth.

Be calm, I say, be constant in thy love and love all equally, for all is involved in all: and nothing there is which needeth not the whole.

And if a man love himself, he loveth therein the world; for the world hath formed him, *even* all its elements.

And if a man hate another man, he hateth therein himself; for his essence is of a piece with that man's.

Individuality, I say, is mere appearance, as are time and space: for time and space are as the petals of the flower of individuality, making it what it is.[1]

—Lo, all this knowledge fell into my lap, plump and ripe, as I gnashed my soul in despondency;

But these strange gems of philosophy gleam all the more radiant for their alien origins, far from Western lands.

The West, I think, is over-fond of the earthly trappings of life; we immerse ourselves in life's tumult and seek ephemeral consolations.

And so happiness is like an eel, slithering from our desperate grasp: for the world is too much with us.[2]

We are too attached to things; yea, we are barnacles stuck on our possessions, which buoy us even as we drown.

We must detach ourselves from things, and from our selves. We must look past appearances, peer into the hidden essence of nature:

For only then shall life's vicissitudes affect us not.

XXIII

Lo, man's table of values[3] is corrupt, rotted through from termites and maggots.

It supporteth not the weight of the world's banquet, but sinketh and falleth under the weight.

Wherefore we need a new carpenter, who shall build a new table: and this table shall have integrity.

And behold, its integrity shall consist in *authenticity*: for their authenticity is the value of values, and authenticity is the highest value.

Truth is the highest value: self-truth, self-realization, and cosmic understanding.

Being one with oneself, one with nature, not at war with one's fellows: such is the gospel I preach.

And listen not to the music of your possessions, for it is dissonant, and maketh you dissonant within yourselves.

But listen to the melody of your soul, and hearken to it: thus shall ye be at harmony with yourselves.

¶ Now, formerly I thought life absurd. I said in mine heart that time and chance are life's substance, and man is nothing.

Life hath no meaning, I said; death happeneth to all, and Earth is an atom in the universe.

[1] Schopenhauer called time and space "the principle of individuation".

[2] See Wordsworth's poem "The World is Too Much With Us".

[3] A Nietzschean term. See section 9 of the Prologue to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

Man is out of joint in his world: he is as Sisyphus, condemned to push his boulder to no end.

Wherefore is the world, and wherefore man? To what end suffer we, who are mortal?

But such questions, I see now, cannot be answered, and should not be asked.

If life is a mystery, we ought to celebrate this and not bewail it. It is a blessing, for it holdeth man's interest.

Life is a miracle, never to be understood. We can but imbibe Wonder until we are drunk on it.

And in the meantime we ought to live well, not in despair: we ought to live as we see fit, staying true to ourselves joyously.

We ought to embrace life as a lover, and love its sorrows, its joys, its mysteries: for then shall we know fewer sorrows, more joys, and more wonderful mysteries.

Think not that the world is terrifying and vast: but know that ye are a part of the world, as a spot of paint is part of the mosaic,

And know that ye are bright as a supernova, and as beautiful; and that ye shall never die, being a part of life.

For in death there is life, even as in life there is death. The two are inseparable, one and the same.

Ye are miracles, people. Be like children, and commune with the ineffable.

XXIV

But Joe's words fell upon ears of stone, and no man understood him: but all stood still in dumb astonishment, as though a wall had fallen from the sky and stopped them in their path.

They were not angry or impatient, but only nonplussed: their blood-wrath having been blocked, a vacuum filled their souls.[1]

Howbeit, Joe's gentleness of temper, his warm lustrous presence (like unto the crimson-textured sun in purple twilight), his soft-cajoling words, the time-deceiving wisdom which echoed in his speech—all these things had made the people suspicious of him:

They saw he was not one of them, wherefore they loathed his speech and wished him dead.

A man came forward from this mass, sure of step and dim of eye; his raiment was of mottled greens and browns, drab like the dirt, the hue of death itself;

And he stepped in front of Joe and, bloated with pride, spake unto the gathering.

XXV

Fellow Americans! he said, I am Rod the Soldier! Hear my name and bow down before me!

And the people bowed and prayed before the neon(derthal) god they'd made.

Thou art our Savior! they cried; for thou comest not to bring peace but a sword, and to spread the American Way of Life!

Hallelujah, and praise be to Imperialism!

I have come from Iraq, said Rod; from the just and necessary war in Iraq, where I slew inhabitants in scores (much aided by my machine-gun).

Verily, video games are but a poor substitute for the real thing.

And as I beheld the ruins I had wrought, the collapsed buildings and the muddy blood-puddles, I was moved in my soul.

[1] See Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, the first paragraph of section 3.

For the blood was real, the bullets were real: and the death-shrieks in the dark were real.

And when I stabbed those men in the battle of Fallujah, I saw the life pass from them with the blood, spurting like the blood.

Yea, there was chaos all around, everywhere! And the noise was deafening, as if Armageddon had come!

(The crowd stared at him tensely, suddenly full of doubt—but clinging to his words like a leech.)

And in the war-sown chaos, I looked around me in a silent moment—like unto the moment in *Saving Private Ryan* when Tom Hanks scans the beach in astonishment—

and in that moment I felt like God surveying his creation, and, like God, I saw that it was good!

(The people cheered, full of relief.)

Yea, it was good, it was noble—but most of all, it was exhilarating! I felt *alive*, surrounded by death!

Moreover, each man I slew knew the wrath of the United States, and felt the hammer-blow of justice!

Each severed head redounded to the glory of our nation; each explosion proved its greatness.

Wherefore I echo the old truth, *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori!*[1]

This man here, though, called Joe, is of a different mind. He preacheth peace and love, harmony and brotherly love!

He esteemeth not glory or country; he esteemeth only temperance, lovingkindness, and other soft virtues—anti-American traits!

He is indeed a traitor: his words dilute the patriot's ardor, and corrode the foundations of the state.

His highest good is a tepid love for all living creatures; but my highest good is to follow orders:

And that is the highest good of all patriots.

It is ours not to make reply, nor to reason why; ours but to do and die.[2] For the true American doth not think for himself,

But he knoweth by instinct that America is glorious, and that to die (and kill) for what is glorious is itself glorious!

And he will gladly slay all enemies of the state, first among which is this philosopher Joe!

XXVI

But Joe answered and said, Friends, this man's speech hath made plain to me mine errors.

Peacefulness and equanimity are not enough, for ignorance is an ever-growing mountain, which hath a planet's inertia.

Its movement cannot be halted without fierce determination, and the might of many Samsons.

Now, verily, this worship of the State is a detestable idolatry, which profiteth no men but those in power.

What is the State, indeed? Effectively, the government. But what is the government? The rich and powerful.

Democracy, like God, is dead, at least for now: government is neither *for* nor *by* nor *of* the people, but only of the rich.

Think ye the rich care aught for you, or for your troubles? They do not. They heed only their morality of power: they do what flattereth their power.

[1] "It is sweet and dignified to die for one's country." Cf. Wilfred Owen's poem "Dulce et Decorum Est".

[2] From Tennyson's poem "The Charge of the Light Brigade".

For I once belonged in their ranks: I once swam in riches as in a sea, and drank of money as of water.[1]

I floated above the people's daily cares in my silver bubble; and my bubble's prismatic surface bent life's rays so as to dim the truth.

Why then flatter ye the rich with your nation-worship? The nation is a fiction: there is no such entity with singleness of interest,

But only discord, class war, mutual distrust, and lives that are solitary, poor, nasty and brutish.

Verily, there are a thousand Americas, not one; and each person is, for now, an atom, which striketh others but doth not bond with them.

Our enemy is not a man or group of men; it is the social order itself, which maketh all of us each other's enemies.

Indeed, a man hath become his *own* enemy: for he scorneth his fellows' brotherhood, which his deeper soul doth covet devoutly.

And so he ensnareth himself in himself, and maketh of himself a fetish.

—Behold: as the young man hath a hero, beside whom he despiseth himself, so the modern person is a golden fetish to himself.

He is his other, a self-hateful Narcissus: whence overfloweth discord into the world.

Conquer self-estrangement,[2] then, and its social causes: therein shall ye conquer your enemy.

And nation-worship, God-worship, money-worship shall cease: man shall not lower himself and raise his creations:

Neither shall he be slave to his property, nor wolf to his fellows, but he shall master his transparent fate.

He shall, that is, be *authentic*, undivided in himself, nor divided from his fellows.

XXVII

But we must battle the acquisitive spirit and the preachers of acquisitiveness: we must war on capitalism.

This society is inauthentic, self-divided, a slave to itself and its laws of economic movement.

No man steereth his life, but he is steered by fortune's invisible hand; and his world is strange to him, and unjust.

For the wicked person prospereth, and his works increase his renown; but the righteous man prospereth not,

For he is locked in a stockade and mocked.

Yea, he is handcuffed to the bars of bitter solitude, and mocked by his peers.

For righteousness hath not a home in capitalism. It is an anachronism, not only superfluous but counterproductive.

And democracy, too, is dangerous, unnecessary, and nearly impossible: the people, the wage-laborers, *must* have less power than the élite.

¶ Behold, in capitalism the multitudes toil in poverty and hunger. For Capital is a cruel taskmaster.

The West hath for centuries enslaved the world and murdered its people for the sake of one more dollar; and things do not change.

Injustice cannot remedy itself, but its nature is to worsen with time and the centralization of power.

[1] Cf. Job 15:16.

[2] Or "alienation". This is a Marxian concept. The concept of the "fetish", or the "reification", is also essential to Marxism. See, e.g., the first chapter of *Capital*, as well as I. I. Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* and Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*.

Its reforms through the years have been cosmetic: behold the state of Africa, South America, most of Asia, and the multitudes within *all* lands.

They sweat and toil and bleed for food, as their masters lay waste their lands; and "democracy" availeth not.

Wherefore we must overturn the system. We must change the world, so that money is superfluous and greed hath no dominion,

And man is no longer lashed to his possessions and broken thereon, like a prisoner lashed to the wheel.

We must, therefore, deliver mankind from economic scarcity, which breedeth money and greed, and war.

Only material abundance can deliver us from evil; only science and reason can deliver us from scarcity.

Not until the springs of cooperative wealth flow abundantly[1] shall humanity fulfill its destiny;

Not until society inscribeth on its banners, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!"[2] shall there be peace on earth.

For then money and the State shall wither away, and democracy shall flourish.

And machines shall no more erect walls between men; and wealth shall no more be the touchstone of worth.

And possessions shall no more be as persons, and persons shall no more be possessions. But people shall be free.

XXVIII

Then Mammon answered Joe out of the whirlwind, and said,

Who is this that gainsaith greed through words with knowledge?

Fondle now thy loins like an entrepreneur in the throes of speculation; for I will depict the power of Mammon.

Where wast thou when I planted empires across the earth? Truly, thou wert not a speck in nature's eye.

Where wast thou when Sumer sprang forth from an economic surplus, like Athena from Zeus's head?

Who built the pyramid of Giza, or the Great Sphinx? No pharaoh, no slave, but I alone.

For whose sake are wars waged, or dynasties founded; and who breathed inspiration into great Alexander?

My stage is world history, from the nomads of Asia to the oligarchs of America: thou art brief like an insect.

Thy works have the weight of willow-down in the wind, and they contend with a grain of sand for insignificance.

Canst thou with thy breath plant railways, or grow cities? and can thy breath level empires?

Hath love for thee alone made men blast granite quarries, and bridge Alaska with an oil pipeline?

Did love-of-Joe create the St. Lawrence Seaway, or impel the conquistadores to heights of heroic cruelty?

No! Love of money, love of power, is alone responsible for everything.

For my sake only do men subjugate the earth and slaughter their fellows; and I give them strength to subdue their own humanity.

I can give a mouse the power of a lion, wherewith to bend men to his will: behold George Bush, and Rupert Murdoch, and Donald Trump, and other such mice-become-lions.

[1] From Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*.

[2] Ibid.

I can alter hierarchies of nature, and make great what is small; I can reverse the order of things, and make order from chaos.

Behold: in the beginning was scarcity, and hunger; and from those wretched seedlings I have remade the world in mine image,

With the commodity as the foundation of society, and money as its pure form—the lubricant of social intercourse.

And though thou thinkest history is done, and my dominion at an end: verily, it has hardly begun!

The past is not long, the future is eternal; and my kingdom on earth is in its infancy.

My highest glories await me: and theirs shall rival the majesty of all creation.

XXIX

Lo, I shall shortly re-carve the face of the earth, and re-draw the lines of the continents:

For my minions have polluted the earth, and warmed its climate, which shall wreak revolution on man's little cosmos.

Millions shall perish, as in Noah's flood; your beloved "new world order" shall become a second Atlantis.

And then shall begin the reign of war, of global war: and it shall be my finest hour!

I will make the earth my mirror: anarchy and power-struggles shall be the naked law,

And each man will guard his plot of land as a tigress guardeth her young.

Then from the rubble shall rise another Rome, another Caesar, and Huns, Goths, Gauls, Franks, Vandals;

And Charlemagnes, and Tamburlaines, and Genghis Khans, and Suleimans; and civil wars, and slaveries, and genocides, and holocausts.

And thinly veiled capitalisms, and socialisms, and tribalisms, and globalisms: all, all shall go on, forever, until the sun swalloweth the earth!

For I am the one god, the sole god men believe in: I, Mammon, the Eternal One—the Will to Possess.

Thou wert indeed right, Joe: life is absurd, and history is absurd: it hath no meaning but me.

Ye are blades of grass, ye humans, and I am the wind which stirreth you; and I am the foot which trampleth you;

And I am the sunlight which sustaineth you, and the soil wherein ye are planted.

There is no *telos* of history, as there is no rest from me: for I am the way, the truth, and the life;

And behold, the truth shall make you free, should ye follow it as Rupert Murdoch hath done (in whom I am well pleased).

He who walketh in my footsteps, with will and knowledge, shall be as the mighty eagle, which owns the heavens in its solitary grandeur.

And I ask for nought in return but that he shun idols, be they named Compassion, Love, Generosity, or whatever.

Then the fate of mankind shall not burden him; the deathless cycles of pain shall not oppress him: for he shall have bought his happiness.

And as the walls of civilization fall around him, and the bleatings of the downtrodden rain as from the heavens, he shall be unencumbered:

In his stately pleasure-dome in Xanadu he shall perch himself, aloof from the tears of the blighted.

XXX

But thou, Joe, thou trafficker in pity, thou hast cursed me to my face, and transgressed against me.

Flightless insect, thou hadst temerity to mock my law, which is hoary as Hammurabi's Code.

My law is as durable as Stonehenge; thinkst thou it can be undone, or forgotten like the wind?

I make the earth tremble, and I revise its lineaments; I hasten geological change.

I place my footprint on the dust of the moon, and plant a flag therein; and my fingers reach through the solar system.

I am as the black hole at the heart of the Milky Way: for life turneth round me, and I am the gravity of civilization.

Moreover, all thy modern comforts, thy sumptuous American lifestyle, the miracles of technology that prop up American power,

And the inexorable whirlwind of science which hath blasted every nation in the world, shivering every monolith of ignorance and religious illusion,

Subverting every authoritarian ideology, scattering abroad the roots of democracy, which sprout as luxuriant weeds;

And the thought-patterns of individualism and equality, so cherished by you Americans, with their progeny feminism, socialism, pacifism, multi-culturalism;—

In short, everything people esteem in the modern world:

It all hath its origin in the power of the profit-motive, and of the capitalist mode of production, with its relentless expansion of the productive forces.[1]

For, as capitalist enterprise spreadeth its dominion, the multitudes flock to cities, seeking employment;

And since they inhabit slums together, they develop a class consciousness and begin to fight for equality;

And intellectual spokesmen appear, both bourgeois and proletarian, who trumpet the millennium: *rights*, universal *rights*, equality and liberty!

(*Bourgeois* rights at first—political equality of the propertied classes, freedom to have property, an inviolable right—and then *socialist*.)

Liberalism and democracy spread like conflagrations, even as capital and political power centralize, thus propelling technological and scientific conquests;

And the movement for equality spilleth into sex- and race-relations; and religion waxeth ever more impotent (notwithstanding fanatics), since it is superfluous to economic life;

And the world is created anew—solely because men crave profit and power.

So thy mind, Joe, and thy body, and thy newfound species-conscience, and thy very being hath grown in my fertile soil.

—Verily, Joe, I am thy father. Wouldst thou kill thy father? Thou needest me.

Nature hath decreed scarcity for all time, wherefore ye humans must ration your goods; and so I am immortal.

Resistance is futile: embrace yourselves, love yourselves, and so make permanent war.

XXXI

Then Joe answered the Lord, and said,

Ere now I did not know, Mammon, thou wert an actual being, like unto a god; but it surpriseth me not, for thy power is awesome.

[1] This is Marxism. See, e.g., Marx's Preface to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Marxism, by the way, is as relevant now as it has ever been, at least in its explanatory aspect (as opposed to its revolutionary).

I know that thou rivalest the sun in thy power, especially in modern times, and that thy power passeth understanding.

If thou smite billions of people and destroy their lives, it is not my place to question thee;

But I should rather rejoice for the few men upon whom thou bestowest all thy gifts: for they have truly *inherited* the earth.

Behold, I am vile; thou hast made me abhor myself, as thou makest mankind abhor itself (and rightly so).

Men arise and pass away like leaves, but greed and selfishness have no end.

¶ And it was so, that after Joe had spoken these words, the Lord said to Jim the Politician, Bob the Intellectual, and Jon the Preacher,

I have contempt for you, because ye have neither knowledge nor dignity;

And while Joe, too, hath not dignity (for that he is a man), at least he hath knowledge.

Therefore ye shall be the servants of Joe the Capitalist, like all your brethren, and offer up your minds to him.

And if ye stray from your appointed paths and disobey my commandments, ye shall be exiled from society and forced to live in a bathtub, like Diogenes the Stoic.

So Jim the Politician and Bob the Intellectual and Jon the Preacher did as Mammon commanded them.

And Mammon restored Joe to the oligarchy, giving him twice as much as he had before.

Then came unto him all his brethren, and all his concubines, and all his former friends: and they secretly bemoaned his good fortune, but comforted themselves that he had been miserable for a time: everyone also bribed him, which sealed their friendships.

After this lived Joe a hundred and forty years, due to the wonderful healthcare his riches bought, and he saw his sons, and his sons' sons, be raised up like their forebear. One of them even became president of America, although by then the country was a province of China.

So Joe died, being old and full of vice.

I like the hidden wordplays. As in the line "Beauty is trust, and trust beauty, for it hath not the ugliness of deceit". Obviously the second 'trust' is supposed to be both a noun and a verb. But also, the first two clauses hark to Keats's line "Beauty is truth, truth beauty", while yet surpassing it both aesthetically (in one way, at least) and in terms of psychological profundity. For absolute mutual trust characterizes the most beautiful, the most loving kind of relationship. Keats's line, on the other hand, is not so pithy or insightful: it's just a romantic platitude. (Even when Keats wrote it the sentiment was already a platitude, or nearly so. It was in the heyday of romanticism, after all.)

I had a date with Rebekah, intelligent ex-Harvard student doing genetics. Wants to see me again.

Of all the absurdities that occur in dreams, none is more absurd than dreaming itself. Even if the content of dreams were perfectly coherent and logical, or were an exact repetition of the events of the preceding day, dreaming would still constitute a flagrant violation of logic. For a dream is something that is both experienced and not experienced at all. The dreamer is simultaneously aware of his dream and unaware of it. He experiences it without experiencing it. What does that mean? How is it possible? Both conceptual and "intuitive" understanding are inadequate here—though the intuitive (imaginative) kind is

more nearly complete. (It consists in imagining yourself having a dream, imagining what that would be like.)

Freud's book is gripping. I love it. I only just finished the second chapter, but already I'm hooked. What a genius he was! [Calm down, dude. He wasn't that great.] I wish I were better able to remember my dreams in the morning, so I could analyze them in Freud's way.

August 27, 29, 31; September 2

Sad.— Dawkins is right: humans, like all animals, are nothing but survival-machines for their genes. Literally. To reproach them for having no dignity is silly. Who ever heard of a dignified machine?!

(I keep thinking of the end of *The Last Samurai*, when the restless American finally walks down into his valley of peace to live with his loved ones, never again to return to his diary.)

Moved to Brighton, near the school where I work. The apartment and the neighborhood are picturesque (suburbia), and the place is only $450 per month!

It's remarkable but predictable how big an effect a change in location can have on one's state of mind. The charm of my surroundings inspires me—to get healthy! I'm gonna work out again and I'm gonna start running, with the help of my iPod. (Running! I *hate* running! But it's such a lovely neighborhood…!)

[…]

Reading Camus's *The Fall*.

Knowledge of one's ignorance is knowledge indeed.

"…On my own admission, I could live happily only on condition that all the individuals on earth, or the greatest possible number, were turned toward me, eternally in suspense, devoid of independent life and ready to answer my call at any moment, doomed in short to sterility until the day I should deign to favor them. In short, for me to live happily it was essential for the creatures I chose not to live at all. They must receive their life, sporadically, only at my bidding." Yes, yes, yes. I sometimes reflect how unpleasant is the thought that women all over the world are falling in love with men other than me. […]

Sometimes, what a person needs most is a good dose of honesty. In this world, though, that's what he'll receive least. Everyone is too "good" to be honest anymore.

The narcissist attempts to justify himself.— "Everyone, nowadays, is a narcissist. In me alone, however, is narcissism justified."

Why is gossiping fun? First of all, there is the (listener's) spontaneous, irreducible pleasure of having curiosity satisfied. This pleasure is involved in any kind of storytelling, and indeed is (partly?) responsible for the pleasure of understanding something or of arriving at a solution to a problem. Secondly, though, there is the pleasure of being "in on it", of being in the know, of being deemed worthy of hearing this secret, and thus of being respected and validated. Of entering into a community, however short-lived, with another person, namely the person who is gossiping with you. (If you are the one who communicates the secret, your pleasure comes from the attention focused on you, the validation that is implicit in the attention. In other words, the favorable value-judgment on your worth, the judgment that you half-consciously know is being made.) The act of valuing (or devaluing) someone—including oneself—is at the very heart of what it means to be human, and of what drives humans to act in the bizarre ways they do.

It is easier to take offense at words than at actions, because words are more direct.

Having finished reading *The Fall*, I feel obligated to myself to make a few observations on the book's relation to me.

The narrator's successful, happy, easy life was interrupted one day when he realized that he was not as virtuous as he pretended to be. …On second thought, I don't feel like laying it all out for you. The point is that the narrator experienced a crisis when he realized he was not "an innocent man" but a guilty one, and that everyone is fundamentally guilty. The problem was, how would he live his life under the glare of this knowledge? How could he live in an unhypocritical way, in such a way that he could go on judging people as always, as everyone must (in order to think he's superior), without deserving to be judged by them at the same time and for basically the same reasons that he judged them? He wanted to have a clear conscience, to believe he was superior, as he always had, but by rights he couldn't. For a while he struggled with this problem, until finally the solution came to him: if he judged himself with sufficient severity ("*J'accuse*—***moi***!"), he could go on judging others and dominating them with a good conscience. If, from time to time, he "profess[ed] vociferously [his] own infamy", he could go on permitting himself everything (for example, the duplicity that he couldn't help practicing, being a modern man). The point seems to be that by repenting periodically, accusing himself, he salvages the craved conviction of his superiority (presumably because he knows that other people *don't* accuse *them*selves, and so to that extent at least he is better, or more honest and insightful, than them). "The more I accuse myself, the more I have a right to judge you."

This is all very similar to what I've said a thousand times. All these paradoxes, all these ironical self-justifications, are vintage me. I've even made exactly the same observations on guilt, judging, etc. as Jean-Baptiste Clamence did. The difference between us is that we adopt different "solutions". (Mine, needless to say, is better.) While Clamence judges himself mercilessly, thereby giving himself the right to judge others, I say that we simply have to go on living our lives as before, judging and so on, while remembering in the back of our minds that our judgments are ultimately mistaken and hypocritical. Indeed, the very act of judging is virtually meaningless. And yet at the same time I recognize something which Clamence doesn't, and which at least apparently can justify certain judgments: taking ordinary values as our yardstick—perhaps even clarifying them a little, making them more honest etc.—some people, after all, have more worth than others. Some are worse than others, some are better. Dick Cheney is worse, Albert Schweitzer is better. It isn't as though everyone is simply "*guilty*" (as Clamence thinks) and nothing else can be said on the matter. There are subtleties, there are gradations in worth. If all goes well, I myself am one of the good ones—and so to that extent I'm justified in putting myself on a pedestal and criticizing others. My solution is the better one because it's more subtle and insightful, less self-deluding, and more ironical.

September 4, 6, 8

[…]

Reading the fourth volume of Anaïs Nin's diary. Reminds me of the Goncourts, of all self-intoxicated artists. Not healthy. Cloistered. There are no vistas or open visions as in thinkers or masculine artists; everything is Ninnified—first masticated unconsciously and then ejected as a dark pink bolus all dripping with Nin.

Her world was different from mine, from the contemporary world. It was over-serious and over-artistic. Intense, everything was intense, and people were expected to have substance. Not anymore, though. Nowadays everything is either fun or political, those are the two poles—which, by the way, have one thing in common, namely cynicism. An aura of transience and resignation.

Reading *The Oxford Book of Short Stories*, edited by V. S. Pritchett. Hoping for some inspiration to write a story of my own.

Met Olga tonight, a Russian girl from Azerbaijan—petite, full of energy, full of wit that draws out my own so well I was practically a comedian. She's a systems analyst, whatever that is. In a few days I'm

meeting another Russian, Yulia, who's getting her Ph.D. in Renaissance poetry and is a devotee of Byron. Her favorite poem, and mine, is *Don Juan*.

What looks like weakness in some women is merely a sublime humanity.

I'm eternally grateful for my time spent at UMSL, if only because that was the first time I really pushed myself and realized my potential.

I'm meeting Gina later. She's a good friend, thoughtful and fun and charming (if sometimes ditzy, air-headed). Contagiously happy, contagiously flirtatious. The pleasures of such company never get old, at least not during youth.

When an artistic flaw is a human strength.— Artists can take it as a compliment when critics accuse them of being sentimental. For sentimentalism is but an extreme love of the truly human in life, of what connects people to one another and, in the end, makes life worth living.

It is surprisingly easy to forget that the future is going to be replete with pain.

One wonders how professional critics contrive not to have self-contempt.

"The point of life is but to *live*,
And *love*, and *laugh* until you *weep*,
And also, don't *receive* but *give*!"—
"No no," I say, "that wisdom's cheap.
Here's my advice on how to live:
Put down your pen and go to sleep."

September 9 etc.

I never tire of kissing Gina. –Our relationship is peculiar. We're just friends but occasionally, in the right moments, we kiss and hug and all that. We went to a club later; met four of her friends there. It was bursting at the seams with scumbags, so I had to be the bodyguard and constantly push pushy assholes away from the five of them (these five cute Thai girls). It was fun being the protector. Lord of the flies—swatting the flies away, the big burly drunk flies.

The running didn't last long, but I'm still exercising a little. In my room. Focusing on pecs, only pecs.

Glanced at my old story on the perils of drunkenness. Very bad. I ought to have taken a creative writing class in college. Norman Mailer says somewhere that those classes can be very useful. (On the other hand, I can at least say, as a result, that I taught myself how to write, which Mailer can't say. That's a vain pleasure, but all pleasures are vain.)

Night-feelings

I can't stop thinking of you, love. You're like
The rain tonight, which makes me think of you.
O what a night to write a poem for you!
It's raining just for you, only for you;
The sweet nostalgia pours down from the sky.
I can't help crying looking out there. Why?
Why should there be these tears? I'm so happy.
I'll let them come, though. If the sky can cry,

Then so can I. And I can sky-cry too,
With my whole body shaking like a cloud.
There is such rain in me—though only you
Can bring it out. Only the thought of you.
What are you doing now? Painting some street
Somewhere with dancing-in-the-night? Singing
Your sunny soul from off some night-drenched rooftop?
Or are you laughing with your sister like
A butterfly, a monarch sipping life's nectar?
Perhaps you're looking at the rain like me,
Quiet like me, thinking of me… We
Are all there is, we and this lonesome night
(Scented like an autumn fog). –And when
I think of all my past, and all I've suffered,
And all those years I longed for rest or death,
I listen to the calming rain, drumming
Like a massage, and I contemplate
The window-rivulets, which move and melt
Together, and I sit here silently
And think only of you, only of you.

Reading *The Rise of Christianity* by Rodney Stark, a sociological/historical analysis. It's thought-provoking. My only criticism is that insofar as Stark is a follower of Popper and is thus dismissive of theorists like Marx, Durkheim, Freud and Weber as being "unscientific", merely "metaphorical", the book is shallow. Luckily, Stark has substantive things to say and explanations to offer, unlike Popper. (Popper reminds me of professional critics. He spent his whole career methodologizing and 'apologizing'—see *The Open Society*, a defense of liberalism—criticizing real thinkers and not offering anything of his own—except principles by which to criticize them.[1])

I'm tired of Ranjana, don't care to see her anymore. She's moody, self-talkative, boring, insecure and overly sensitive, not very intellectual. […]

Advice from Gina on getting women: I should be less talkative, less easy to talk to, "calmer"; make them feel a little insecure, like "What's he thinking right now?", by talking more slowly and seeming not to care what they think of me. That just confirms what I've known, that I'm too friendly and likable, like a mere friend. I hope I haven't already ruined it with Olga by being a responsive guy who got along well with her. Talk slowly, talk slowly Chris! Walk slow, talk slow, do everything slow, project total control.

September 14 etc.

Liebesbotschaft

Some people need some things that I don't need.
Some people need to feel loved by all,
By everyone. They need the world to scream

[1] My contempt for that man has no bounds. Someone who glibly casts aside hundreds of subtle theories and suggestive insights just because they fall under the blanket term "psychoanalysis" or "Marxism", and who does so only on the basis of ridiculous straw-man arguments that none of his adversaries would ever put forward—and who, moreover, is so vain that he thinks he is one of the greatest philosophers in history and tells this to anyone who will listen (not in so many words, though)—someone like that is a clown. He is a college freshman with a love of facile generalizations, as well as a totally irrational love of himself.

Their names when they walk by and scramble so
To touch their hands. Others there are who need
To travel the continents, to migrate like
The albatross a thousand miles each year
Toward some receding point on the horizon.
Some people need to be immortal—to live
Far in the future, not the present;—still others
Are tormented with lust for perfect knowledge.
These people, all of them, are Fausts, Faust-clones,
Unhappy as the universe expanding
Into nothingness—as nothing as
The abstract needs these tortured people have.
But I, my love, I do not need such things.
They're nothing to me. For all I need, my love,
—And *all* I need—is in my arms right now.
And all I need is this soft shoulder, this
Soft cheek, these soft breaths exhaled with mine.
There's nothing else. So I will stay here forever,
Not thinking of those people who need things
That I don't need, since all I need is you.

Stark notes that "women in many different times and places seem to be far more responsive than men to religion". For example, in early Christian times women were more likely than men to convert to the new religion. In modern times, it has been reported that two-thirds of the Shakers were women, 75 percent of Christian Scientists were women (in the early 20th century), 60 percent of Theosophists, Swedenborgians and Spiritualists were women, and the majority of new Protestants in Latin America are women. (Apparently "an immense wave of Protestant conversions" is taking place in Latin America. That's not surprising, for many reasons.) So, why is this the case?

The answer isn't hard to think of. First of all, new religions, especially the religions that succeed, tend to promote equality, in particular sexual equality. Since they usually arise in social conditions of relative inequality, obviously women will favor these alternative belief-systems. (Christianity was born in the sexually unequal pagan world, and the sexual relations it promoted were extremely progressive. The same was true of Islam.) Secondly, women are naturally more attracted than men to the strong social networks that religions create, for reasons I discussed in the chapter "on women" that I wrote for my book, as well as in other places over the years. Religions appeal to emotional, communal, instinctual impulses over purely intellectual ones, so women will be especially attracted to them (being more emotional and 'communal' than men). And they will therefore be disproportionately attracted to *new* religious movements, since such movements, being full of renewed religious fervor, are usually revitalizing vis-à-vis communities—vis-à-vis, indeed, all social activities. They bring people together, which togetherness women crave. Also, one of the major functions of religions is to alleviate real suffering, and you can't deny that women tend to suffer more than men. (Loneliness, social insecurity, physical ailments, poverty, lack of opportunities for social advancement, the miseries of women's old age, etc.)

Those are the main reasons.

By the way, it was an exceedingly unpleasant thing to be a woman in Greco-Roman times, for ten thousand reasons. A particularly gruesome one is that abortions were very common and abortion techniques were very crude. Tertullian described an abortion kit used by Hippocrates: "…a flexible frame for opening the uterus first of all, and keeping it open; it is further furnished with an annular blade, by means of which the limbs within the womb are dissected with anxious but unfaltering care; its last appendage being a blunted or covered hook, wherewith the entire fetus is extracted by a violent delivery. There is also a copper needle or spike by which the actual death is managed." A Roman doctor writing in the first century gave the following instructions to his fellow doctors (paraphrased by Stark): "'after the death of the foetus' the

surgeon should slowly force his 'greased hand' up the vagina and into the uterus (keep in mind," says Stark, "that soap had yet to be invented). If the fetus was in a headfirst position, the surgeon should then insert a smooth hook and fix it 'into an eye or ear or the mouth, even at times into the forehead, then this is pulled upon and extracts the foetus'. If the fetus was positioned crosswise or backwards, then Celsus [the writer] advised that a blade be used to cut up the fetus so it could be taken out in pieces. Afterwards, Celsus instructed surgeons to tie the woman's thighs together and to cover her pubic area with 'greasy wool, dipped in vinegar and rose oil'." Christians were very sensible to outlaw abortion. They also outlawed infanticide, which was widely practiced by pagans.

Of all the romantic composers (except Tchaikovsky), from Weber to Schumann to Brahms, Liszt may have been the best at orchestration.[1] His orchestral intuitions in *Les Préludes* are masterly. The tone color of every instrument is perfectly appropriate to the melody or harmony it is singing. (Thus, you have the noble french horn introducing the noble theme, and then later after the storm of the middle section you have the calm and warm horn proclaiming the dawn, followed by an oboe—which Rossini, too, knew was perfect for painting the dawn, judging by his use of it in the William Tell overture—and a moment later the soothing and sweet clarinet, followed by the flute. The harp evokes heaven and angels after the violence of the middle section; it accompanies the violins, which play delicately in the upper register as if they are giving a benediction. A minute or two later, around 11:15, the woodwinds become playful as only woodwinds can. Near the end, the brass comes in majestically. And finally the trumpets and trombones and horns end the piece in the most overpowering way.)

Having been sick for over a week, I very nearly faint when listening to the end of that piece.

Today was a day of shallowness. First I had lunch with a 21-year-old girl who gives new meaning to the word 'uninteresting'. Then I had dinner with the air-headed Gina (though that was at least a little more fun). Then I read about rational choice theory in Stark's book. As I've said before, this set of ideas is a silly and superfluous bourgeois invention that explains virtually nothing. Stark wants to argue that religion is "rational", that it isn't based on "irrational" impulses (which social scientists, he says, have often argued) but instead on rational choice—which means that it "involves weighing the anticipated costs and benefits of actions and then seeking to act so as to maximize net benefits". Indeed, the proposition that individuals choose their actions rationally is (so he says) "fundamental to the whole of social science". "The assumption of rationality has numerous expressions in the social sciences. Economists speak of utility maximization; exchange theorists postulate that 'people are more likely to perform an activity the more valuable they perceive the reward of that activity to be'. Elsewhere I have proposed that 'humans seek to maximize rewards and to minimize costs'." In other words, to say that individuals choose their actions rationally is to say they act according to their preferences, or their "preference schedules" (to use economic jargon). They do what they think will be most rewarding. But individuals evaluate specific rewards differently; this is why a person like Mother Theresa acts differently from a person like Donald Trump, and why they both are equally rational (namely, because they find different activities rewarding).

These are all earth-shaking insights, as you can see. Diluted Benthamism is very interesting and theoretically powerful. Actually, the peculiar content of the "theories" that Stark is describing poses a question that philosophers like Christine Korsgaard have grappled with: if reason means acting in such a way as to bring about your ends (or to maximize rewards and minimize costs, or, in short, to do what you prefer to do), then how can reason be normative, as it's supposed to be? It seems impossible *not* to act rationally. Jeffrey Dahmer was acting rationally when he had sex with corpses before dismembering them and then dissolving them in a vat of acid, because he was maximizing his rewards—which is just to say that he was behaving as he wanted to. I tried to resolve all these confusions about reason in my paper on values (that paper which is too profound for its own good), so I recommend you take a look at it.

Having established conclusively that people tend to act as they want to, and that this proposition is of very great importance for the social sciences, Stark proceeds to argue that early Christians were, in fact,

[1] [You're forgetting Berlioz, idiot.]

acting as they wanted to when they became Christians. They were not acting irrationally; rather, they were—acting.

[…]

Had lunch with Yulia, the Harvard alum who smells of stale academe. We talked about old literature most of the time because Harvard students are limited by their specialties and talk mostly about themselves and aren't good at showing interest in other people. Luckily I'm *not* limited and I *don't* talk about myself much and I *do* show interest in other people, so the date wasn't as uncomfortable as it might have been.

Now that I'm not taking the pills anymore, I'm starting to be able to *feel* again. Feel lonely and melancholy but also pleasantly sentimental and nostalgic for nothing in particular. Just a diffuse misty nostalgia when I listen to, say, Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, Stevie Wonder ("I Believe"), the Foo Fighters ("Razor"), Fiona Apple ("Across the Universe"), and all the ordinary classical stuff. I'm on the bus or the train clenching my teeth, biting my lip, to hold back the mild tears, looking at the world pass by out the window.

Reading Maya Angelou's collected poems. I like them better than most contemporary poetry.

What are your thoughts?

What do you think of this?
A world in which people are dogs and dogs are people,
And the dog-days, the days, linger like dying.
A world in which the nights, the lone nights, are slept through
Alonely in beds for two (bookend beds) while censored dreams come through.
A world in which all wishes are for an immortality which no one wants,
And people know one thing only, and that is futility.
A world in which sleep is not rest and people are not genuine.
What do you think of this?

September 18 etc.

Double life

The sassy walk, saucy as these sultry summer nights,
hip-swaying entertaining "*your* eyes only";
The toss of the head coquettishly, her blond highlights glint
in "your eyes only";
The superfluous flirting of new love, like the pink
feather-tips laid over a lavender dawn;
The sweet naïve contrast between days and nights, new
days and new nights,
with the daytime smiles and the nighttime sighs
(deep soulful sighs breathed into breasts and arms);
The dancing naked shy near the edge of the bed,
young queen dancing for "your eyes only";—
This is what I miss, miss terribly, though I have never known it.

It's a pity I hadn't encountered Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* when I sat down to write my satire. My writing would have benefited.

Confession

(For Stephen Dobyns)

The Nazi within me wants to rid the world of vice,
which he defines as "everything different from me".
Specifically, bureaucracy has got to go, and people
who follow rules. Authority is always wrong.
The Nazi within me hates power and those who have it;
he thinks politicians should be lined up against a grey
wall and shot. (He is perfectly happy to do the shooting,
provided he is in the right mood.) The Nazi within me
hates people who are unkind, and he will strangle
anyone who is rude to that nice old Russian lady in
the bookstore. Tobacco and pharmaceutical executives,
and most people in show business, are to be sent to
Sudan to wait hand and foot on the natives; and
everyone in the Pentagon has been assigned to Cambodia
to clear the mine fields. (This decision cannot be
appealed.) The Nazi within me judges everyone, he is the
final arbiter of everyone's fate and takes great joy in
meting out punishment. For the crime of smugness you are
sentenced to ten years' hard labor in Somalia; for the crime
of honking your car horn when it does no good you are
sentenced to one year in the room where they test car alarms.
The Nazi within me hates falsity of any sort but insists that
when he passes people in the street they quickly step out
of his way and give a respectful nod, while wishing they
could be as good-looking and godlike as he is. As for
those who do not wish this: Siberia is their new home.

I just got the internet in my new apartment so I'm re-trying to get my writing published. In the next few days I'll start sending poems to journals again, and I'm also sending *The Book of Joe* to independent publishers.

The exception to Kantian morality.— A "great man" should not, and does not, treat himself as an end, but as a means. He has a violent, antagonistic relationship with himself: he exploits himself, enslaves himself, works himself to the bone. Every droplet of talent he has he wrings out, sweats out in exhausting self-floggings; and if his body cries out in fatigue he spits on it in contempt. And yet in another sense he is a perfect Kantian: *duty* is all that he respects. Duty to himself, the duty to become a god. Pity has no place in his morality.

September 23

Mozart's last piano concerto might be the most perfect, the most 'finished', concerto ever written. The one in C-minor is unique too. But I like his last one better because it seems more 'peaceful', it's more playful, and it's in a major key. (I prefer major keys.)

September 25 etc.

Beethoven showed us what he could do, what he was capable of. Mozart didn't. Mozart's very immaturity as an artist up until his 30s was a symptom of his genius: he reveled in his powers so much that he wrote frolics and fireworks, just having a good time. (Artistically there is such a thing as being *too* brilliant. Just look at *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce's genius was such that, arguably, it led him to write artistically flawed works—works that couldn't speak to others, works that were, at least apparently, undisciplined.)

Schubert didn't either, obviously. Imagine a Schubert who lived into the 1860s. Imagine how he would have changed the face of music. And then I dare you to tell me that this world isn't a tragic farce.

As I read contemporary poems—or, to be precise, as I *look at* them, since mostly they're unreadable—I think that maybe my poetry isn't as mediocre as I've thought. At least it isn't self-indulgent word-play: it communicates real thoughts, and it's animated by a single overriding vision. "What vision?" A vision of suffering, of restlessness, and of nostalgia for things spiritual.

Midnight. Miserable, restless, a little sick, depressed in my underlying soul. Have I lost the ability to love? Has this world taken it from me? Will I ever feel passion again?

I'm looking for a new job, since my mistake of a boss, having promised me in August that I could stay for the fall, has decided I have to go because the student numbers are too low and the place is over-staffed. […]

Went to a poetry reading at Harvard Square with two of my students. It was silly. Two male poets read without feeling their wordplay-experiments. The shit is too dense to absorb when it's being read at you, so you just sit there with your eyes closed and try to concentrate hard enough so that a few of the bizarre incongruous images conjured by the words will actually register in your mind before they're supplanted immediately by other bizarre incongruous images that don't seem to communicate any thoughts in particular. And you just know that these people reading and most of these people listening are the most pathetically self-overestimating pretentious little shits imaginable. –Charles Bukowski said that "poetry readings have got to be the saddest goddamned things ever". Yup.

September 30 etc.

I'm reading Hollister and Bennett's *Medieval Europe: A Short History*, Robert Lacey's *The Year 1000. What life was like at the turn of the first millennium: an Englishman's world*, and Tocqueville's *L' Ancien régime et la revolution*.

Sick with disgust that the universe doesn't know I exist.

Tocqueville points out again and again, in astonishment, that *nobody* foresaw the French Revolution, even on its very eve. He opens his book with this sentence: "No great historical event is better calculated than the French Revolution to teach political writers and statesmen to be cautious in their speculations; for never was any such event, stemming from factors so far back in the past, so inevitable yet so completely unforeseen." A hundred and fifty years later, Walter Laqueur, the political scholar, devoted much of his book *The Dream that Failed* to the question of how it was possible for Western academics to have failed utterly to predict the fall of the Soviet Union, even after glasnost and perestroika. Specialists on the USSR, people who *devoted their lives* to studying it, had no inkling whatever of what was about to happen. The *enormous industry* of scholarship on the USSR had not a single word to say about a REVOLUTION!!! or even the THOROUGHGOING DECREPITUDE OF SOVIET SOCIETY!!! until after the fact!!! –The moral of the story, kids, is that the academic community is not to be taken seriously. The "analyst", the "expert", who has real insight is an incredible rarity.

(Not to mention the "experts" who actually have a hand in guiding policy. The experts who led Kennedy into the Bay of Pigs, the experts who waged war on Vietnam, the experts who planned the Iraq war—a veritable army of them, in policy institutes, in the Pentagon, in the State Department, in the White House. It seems like the more educated you are, the less in touch you are with reality. Which isn't surprising, since "education" basically means "indoctrination".[1])

Though it's hard to believe, history is still very, very young. Civilization is still experiencing its birth-pangs, which began around six thousand years ago. We "postmoderns" are thoroughly embedded in history, just like the Vikings were and the Greeks. Ten thousand years from now humankind will be colonizing the universe, and *our* existence will have been forgotten.

People forget that the West, and thus indirectly the rest of the world, is still living in the shadow of the Middle Ages. Our world was carved out in the Middle Ages; it isn't as if we created it ourselves *ex nihilo* in the last three hundred years. Modern nations, modern prejudices, modern religions are all leftovers from the Middle Ages, from population movements and military invasions and the troubled evolution of Christianity. Not until national identities dissolve will we really start to transcend the legacy of medieval Europe.

Wikipedia is useful. I'm reading dozens of articles on the *ancien régime* and the Revolution to refresh my memory from the days of CSS. Also many other websites. The Revolution and its aftermath is a bewildering subject.

I love reading about history but I have a hard time justifying the activity. Knowledge of history doesn't really teach you about the future, as historians say it does—except insofar as you learn that misery and cruelty are probably ineradicable. A few general lessons can be gleaned from history, and political leaders would do well to study the mistakes of their predecessors, but history never truly repeats itself. So what's the point of devoting years of your life to an examination of, say, the causes of the French Revolution? How can that help us govern our own society better? The social structures have radically changed in the intervening centuries.

It drives me mad to live without recognition. I could do *so much* and have done *so much*, but when you know that society doesn't like originality and you won't get any credit for it you think *What the fuck is the point in trying?* I mean, look at this quotation from the impressive talker but middling thinker Jacob Bronowski, where he talks about Moore's "naturalistic fallacy" (itself unoriginal):

> …The argument is that from what is you cannot draw any information as to how you ought to act. And the transition from "is" to "ought" is usually called the naturalistic fallacy. I do not accept this.
>
> There are three different arguments against the naturalistic fallacy. Two due to other people and one due to me. I will briefly deal with those due to other people. The first simply says—and rightly—that every time you know something about the world there are certain forms of conduct which are obviously ridiculous. [Almost as ridiculous as this argument itself.] Once you know that gravity goes down and not up, it is ridiculous to build buildings in which you assume that it goes up. Once you know how gravitation works outside the earth, there are certain forms of spaceship which you will not build… I think this is perfectly sensible. I think that it is perfectly true that the more we know, the stronger we are in our choices. [No one's doubting that, Brownie, not Moore, not Hume, not me.]
> …

[1] Chomsky: "One reason that propaganda often works better on the educated than on the uneducated is that educated people read more, so they receive more propaganda. Another is that they have jobs in management, media, and academia and therefore work in some capacity as agents of the propaganda system—and they believe what the system expects them to believe. By and large, they're part of the privileged elite, and share the interests and perceptions of those in power."

> A more interesting argument…is: "Well, human beings are the way they are and we ought to act as human beings are." I think that is a good argument. [That's why you're not a philosopher.] I think it is very important to find what human beings are really capable of and to act accordingly. [For example, humans are capable of torturing children; therefore, we ought to torture children.] …
>
> …[The third argument] says simply that you cannot know what is true unless you behave in certain ways. What is the good of talking about what is, when in fact you are told how to behave in order to discover what is true. "Ought" is dictated by "is" in the actual inquiry of knowledge. Knowledge cannot be gained unless you behave in certain ways.

Muddled thinking, foolishness. As for the third argument, it's discussed far more deeply than Bronowski could ever discuss it in my paper on values, where I argue that norms of reason are the only norms in which 'ought' coincides with 'is'. Fucking I deserve to be the Philosopher-King.

October 10 etc.

I read Bronowski's *Origins of Knowledge and Imagination*. I'm told by one of its reviewers that "it's a gem of enlightenment… One rejoices in Bronowski's dedication to the identity of acts of creativity and of imagination, whether in Blake or Yeats or Einstein or Heisenberg", which makes me wonder whether I missed something, since I didn't find myself rejoicing very much as I read. Instead, I found myself wondering "What exactly is being said here? What is it that I'm reading? And why am I reading it?"

I'm going to the YMCA most days, lifting weights and doing cardio.

As far as I can remember, I've never read speculations on why it might possibly be true that when production relations become fetters on technological development, society overturns the production relations. This central Marxian thesis has never really been defended thoroughly!! (How is that possible?!) In any case, why would it be true? Society doesn't ever explicitly recognize that economic relations are obstructing technological growth, so there has to be something that connects the fettering with the conscious motivations revolutionaries have. But what would this be? Well, revolutionaries always want more social equality. (And liberty.) That's their main goal. So here's what I think: in fighting for equality, they're unknowingly fighting to overturn obsolete economic relations. They're fighting, that is, for higher productivity. There's a cause-and-effect relationship between technological progress and greater social equality. It's the Cunning of Reason: in overthrowing feudal social relations, the French revolutionists were unknowingly making possible greater productivity in the economy as a whole, which itself, too, eventually furthered their ambition of achieving equality and liberty! (since high productivity raised living standards, presented more opportunities to the masses, etc.) In other words, there *is* a 'mechanism' that mediates between the favorable, 'unconscious' outcome of *greater productivity* posited by the Marxist functional explanation and the quite different motivations that revolutionaries have: the latter want political and economic freedom and equality, which means overthrowing laws and property relations (production relations) that prevent the rising classes from achieving money and power, or freedom and equality with the ruling class. But by changing the old property relations etc. in such a way that the rising classes can pursue their goals of money and power with fewer 'legal' hindrances than existed before, these classes unwittingly promote a leap in the development of the productive forces. The greater and more universal economic freedom they desire entails an extensive and intensive 'spreading' (across society) of the means through which they achieve money and power, namely through the incentive *to realize profit by selling at the lowest price on the market*; and this leads to technological development (because that is ultimately how firms reduce their costs of input, i.e. by mechanizing, creating economies of scale, etc.). Stated more succinctly, greater economic/social freedom leads to greater economic dynamism, which leads to greater

technological development. By consciously fighting for freedom, revolutionaries are unconsciously, or rather 'accidentally', fighting for development of the productive forces.

I'm at the point where I want to write only things that I can immediately submit to journals. I want to write on commission, in fact. I want an element of security.

Reading Hobsbawm's *The Age of Revolution: 1789–1848*. I glory in descriptions of the French Revolution, that unique event in world history. It was the first rebellion that succeeded in crushing the powers that were crushing the masses. It succeeded! 1830 failed, 1848 failed, 1871 failed, and the only reason the Russian Revolution succeeded was that Russia was in tatters from the Great War. But the original revolution, the one that started it all, the one that marks the beginning of modernity and still echoes in ideologies and political reality, succeeded. (Until it failed, of course.)

The following is the beginning of another essay I wanted to publish until I realized it wasn't going to interest publishers. I'd intended to bring in some of my ideas in the chapter on history I wrote for the book (the ideas on reification and so on).

Thoughts on the intersections between Marxism and American culture

This may sound paradoxical, but, from a thinker's perspective, one of the worst things about our era is that in some ways it's more "Marxist" than any in history. Specifically, many of the basic tenets of historical materialism are borne out every day, to a comical and disheartening extent. Why disheartening? Because historical materialism is, after all, a less-than-romantic creed. Franz Mehring, Marx's first biographer, once asked rhetorically, "To a believer in historical materialism, what importance can the individual have?" The Marxist thinks that individuals are far less important in determining the course of history than social structures are—the totality of social relations and the mostly unconscious economic and political movements that push society along its evolutionary path. A person is influenced by his society far more than he can ever influence it. Similarly, ideas—ideologies—have ultimately less causal influence on historical evolution than economic practices do.[1] No doubt an ideology, for example Christianity, can have an enormous impact on history, but in the end it has to accommodate itself to economic processes more than economic processes have to accommodate themselves to the ideology. Surely this is common sense. (After all, the world of ideas is much more flexible and changeable than the world of materiality and production.)

Now, sometimes particular individuals are extremely important. Think of Jesus, Mohammed, or Hitler. This is rare, though. Strong individuals like that can appear only when society is going through, or is on the verge of, a crisis of some sort, for instance when there is a vacuum of power together with a lot of social unrest (which may lead to a demagogue's seizure of power). In most eras the economic and political infrastructure is relatively intact, and the elites have a firm grasp on power. At such times individuals, even the powerful, are definitely subordinate to the mechanical functioning of the system, in particular the economy. The dominant ideologies, too, have little importance then in comparison with mundane economic processes, serving a primarily apologetic purpose (rather than a revolutionary one). It is in these eras that the "materialism" of historical materialism is most obviously true. But never has it been more obviously true than right now.

Consider this side of Marx's theory:

> …In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation,

[1] Of course, economic practices are themselves associated with ideologies, but arguably a particular ideology serves more as a 'justification' and a source of personal motivation than as an integral, essential element of a given productive process. Analytically speaking, the productive process can be distinguished from the ideologies associated with it.

> on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness…[1]

Now consider the world we live in. Consider its culture. Not only is the "political superstructure", with its liberal-democratic practices and ideologies (which emphasize and exalt separation between individuals, atomistic rights of property, competition over cooperation), as clear a reflection as it has always been of divisive capitalist economic relations. More specifically, as capitalism has evolved towards an increasingly oligarchic structure dominated by a few dozen giant businesses, the government has become more oligarchical and less democratic as well. There is hardly any longer even an attempt to disguise its status as a servant of big business. It undertakes adventures in the Middle East for the sake of having control over oil; it refuses to take action on global warming because of the misguided belief that this will harm big business; most of its activities are organized around the principle that the tiny elite must retain power at all costs, and that the masses must be excluded from it. Since the economic status quo is oligarchy, the political status quo is as well.

Or consider mainstream intellectual life (such as it is). On a broad scale it consists of nothing but daily reactions to economic and political events. That's what intellectual life has become. There is no longer any autonomy, even *apparent* autonomy, from economic and political life, as there used to be in, say, the 18th and 19th centuries, when philosophy and art were still of mainstream interest. Thinkers have no real influence anymore; "consciousness" has become a one-dimensional reflection of "social being", i.e., of atomistic economic relations. Indeed, the unprecedented atomization of social life is an important reason for the deplorable sterility of culture—the sterility that consists precisely in our culture's utter lack of independence from underlying economic movements, from consumerism and commercialism.

Academia is a good example of what I'm talking about. It is well outside the mainstream, which means that academics have the freedom to pursue research not directly related to the economy or politics; still, it is situated in a society as holistic as societies always are, which means that it necessarily manifests certain fundamental traits of this society. And perhaps the most fundamental is fragmentedness. Atomization. The complexity of the social division of labor is the ultimate cause of this fragmentedness (the fragmentedness of civil society, of political life, of small-town communities, etc.), because, of course, it is in the nature of a division of labor to divide people from one another. To disrupt spontaneous communal life. *Ceteris paribus*, the more extensive is society's division of labor—the greater the differentiation between economic roles, the less people work together on the same tasks in a communal and friendly environment—the less integrated and homogeneous is social life as a whole, including intellectual and artistic life. That is, intellectual specialization, and ultimately fragmentation, becomes imperative as social relations become increasingly labyrinthine and interdependent—until finally academia arrives at the point it has reached today, when its mind-boggling fragmentedness mirrors the fragmentation of civil society, and ultimately of the economy.

Of course, it is impossible to untangle all the specific causes of extreme specialization between disciplines—there are too many causes, and social science rarely has recourse to the reliable methods of natural science—but, to repeat, their general outlines are intuitively obvious. As scientific technologies and the global economy have grown in complexity, greater specialization between industries and between jobs in a given industry has been necessary. This has led to greater economic productivity,[2] which has stimulated the growth of industry and thereby intensified the division of labor, in a self-reinforcing cycle. Contemporaneous with these developments has been an intensification in the division of labor between the ideological (academic) professions, for the changing material conditions have led to a correspondingly more

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[1] From the Preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

[2] From Adam Smith's day (and even before then) it has been known that "the division of labor, so far as it can be introduced, occasions, in every art, a proportionable increase of the productive powers of labor [i.e., productivity]". See *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 13.

intricate and nuanced understanding of the world. At the same time, there has been a growth in population, a migration to the cities, an extension of university education to more and more people, and thus, on the whole, an expansion of the university. All this has meant more specialization between disciplines and more competition between practitioners of these disciplines (competition for jobs, for prestige, etc.)—until the system has finally reached the point where an economist, for example, can lament that

> Economics has....become so broad and so complicated that, within the fields, one group of specialists barely speaks the same language as the Ph.D.s across the hall. And so much of what is published seems more to proselytize for an ideology than to make sense of the chaotic world.... It's no wonder that a single economic development can be interpreted as a godsend or a disaster, depending on the interpreter's frame of reference.[1]

This also relates to what I said a moment ago—that "thought" is no longer as powerful a force as it once was (during and prior to the French Revolution, for instance). It meekly and apologetically follows the lead of economic activities, rarely straying far from them except in the fantasies of an isolated academic here and there.

Consider, also, the state of literature. Fiction. There are still many authors out there—indeed, more than ever before—and they have their readers, but it is hard not to feel as if fiction, in these serious and troubled times, is somehow inauthentic and frivolous. Even boring. It can't sustain our interest as it could a century ago. V. S. Naipaul, surely an authority on the subject, has said that the novel is dead. All that remains is nonfiction, because, according to Naipaul, the world is too complex now for fictional narratives to be adequate to reality. [I was going to offer my own reasons for the decline of fiction, reasons that would have involved the psychology, the 'phenomenology', of atomization and the narcissism that results from it. The fixation of everyone on himself and his situation in life, his *real* ('serious', anti-fictional) situation.]

October 16 etc.

Here's something I wrote with the immediate aim of getting published:

A Meditation on John Donne's Meditation XVII

"…No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

This passage, from John Donne's 17th Meditation, is one of the most famous in all literature. Virtually everyone is familiar with it, especially in its heavily digested form "Ask not for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." And everyone instinctively recognizes that it expresses a noble sentiment. Few people, however, give any thought to it; and the ones who do probably decide that it doesn't have literal significance, consisting merely in a string of poetic metaphors. After all, how could another man's death really "diminish" me? In what possible sense could *his* misfortune be *mine* too? This misunderstanding in itself justifies a reexamination of the passage. But particularly in our troubled era, our age of universal atomization and apathy, it is imperative that we understand what Donne meant. Maybe then we'll appreciate the terrible moral implications of interpersonal atomization.

Donne embellished his thought by invoking God, but that isn't necessary. In any case, God is dead. (He was one of the unfortunates killed in the French Revolution.) The real meaning of the passage—or the *moral* meaning; there are others—is that what happens to other people has metaphysical implications with respect to the value of my own life. For other people *are me,* in some sense: they are self-conscious like

[1] Quoted in Kenneth Gergen, *The Saturated Self* (New York: Basic Books 1991), p. 83.

me, they have a sense of self like me, they inhabit the same world I do. What happens to them could have happened to me, and sometimes inevitably will happen to me. Their mortality is my mortality, because our essence is the same. They are me transposed in space and time, me in a different consciousness and set of circumstances.

When something terrible, unjust, happens to another person and his life is ruined, human life itself is made valueless. For in a world of injustice, in which destinies are determined by *chance*, life cannot have the value we privileged ones ascribe to it. The dictates of reason are irrelevant to it; truth is violated by it, and "necessity" is an empty concept. When I read in the paper that the family of an innocent Lebanese man has been killed by an Israeli bomb I recognize in his despair the worthlessness of my own life, its cosmic littleness—the total irrelevance to life of such notions as reason, truth, freedom, morality, necessity, justice. If I happen to live well and be happy that's only a function of chance, because I could have been that man. But, knowing this, how can I be truly happy? How can I be convinced of the value of my life, knowing that life itself is the sort of thing that doesn't have value?

What I'm talking about is *absurdity*, in the existentialist sense. Life is fundamentally absurd in a world of violence and coercion. A radical contradiction is manifested between what we, as human beings, demand of life and what is delivered. That's what absurdity is, that contradiction. It means we are alienated from life, we cannot identify with it or glory in it wholeheartedly, because it is a stranger to the human way of thinking. The *beautiful* way of thinking. An absurd life is scarcely worth living. Consider a man who is buffeted by forces beyond his control, who is compelled to adopt unfulfilling life-paths, who is beaten into a bland conformity. On a broad scale, it would seem that his life is not a very wonderful or valuable thing. But that man is all of us. He is Everyman. No doubt some of us manage to carve out a little niche for ourselves; but fundamentally we remain subject to chance, to coercive social mechanisms, and the possibility is always real that our peace of mind will be shattered in an instant.

That Lebanese man's situation is a microcosm of mankind's agony. It is our collective sorrow magnified to an intolerable intensity. It serves as a reminder that, as things stand now, we are not masters of our fate but are instead blown like willow-down in the wind of societal forces. Our "leaders" are in the same position as we, more or less (though they do have more opportunities than we to aggravate or mitigate our problems). But when the issue is something as urgent as the question whether life is to remain a tragic farce or is to become more in line with our notion of what is good, we can't rely on our leaders to act. We have to act ourselves, to do anything we can to push the world towards sanity. Indeed, if the concept of a "moral imperative" has any meaning at all, this is a moral imperative. This activism. It is not an option or a suggestion; it is absolutely necessary, if only because without such activism life will continue being the universally valueless, contingent, coerced thing it is now.

In other words, as long as irrationality and senseless violence are the prime movers of life and history, our own individual life will remain an essentially nugatory thing, no matter how happy and secure it seems. Only if we create a stable and just world, a place not ruled by radical contingency, will life stop being "absurd".

Probably you'll say that such a world cannot be achieved, that it's a ridiculous utopian fantasy. And you may be right. In the meantime, though, whenever you read the front page of the newspaper, you'll hear the bell tolling—for you.

*

So begins my downgoing.

(I don't know if I really believe all of it, but anyway it sounds good.)

By the way, what's that grey airy stuff called that floats in the wind? The seeds that some kind of plant sends in the wind. What the hell is it called? That line about the willow-down is stupidly poetic anyway, but I figure that magazine editors are literary enough to like it but not literary enough to realize they shouldn't like it.

I went to an Indian event downtown with Ranjana and others and made a few new friends. In particular one girl (Kanchana) I talked to almost the whole night about literature and writing etc.; she's a writer-architect-MBA student. Seems to like me; I think I've made a good friend. I have to hang out with more Indians: they tend to be real people, unlike most Americans I've met. (Kanchana is sending me two of her short stories tomorrow, to be critiqued.)

I was wrong that "the complexity of the social division of labor is the ultimate cause of atomization". That's an un-Marxian idea, and is therefore wrong. In non-capitalist conditions it's conceivable that an extensive division of labor wouldn't result in so much atomization. It's the capitalist framework, the commodified structure, that causes the atomization.

Why are we privileged people unhappy?

In this age of narcissism and collective discontent, it is worth remembering that some of the happiest people live in relatively poor societies.[1] We Americans, with our ubiquitous self-help books and our Faustian quest for personal fulfillment, have a lot to learn from the peasants of, say, Sapa, a small village in the north of Vietnam. During my time there a few years ago I was struck by the contrast between the region's great poverty and the *joie-de-vivre* exhibited by its inhabitants. People shrunken and prematurely aged from malnutrition were friendly and cheerful, full of energy, more in love with life, it seemed, than most Westerners. To anyone who understands human nature, this should come as no surprise.

Unfortunately such villages are rapidly disappearing, as are the pristine landscapes in which they are nestled. Indeed, the 'wholesomeness' of the natural scenery is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the relative happiness I saw. I took some notes after my time in Sapa:

> …The landscape reminded me of New Zealand, but on a larger scale. The terraces on the mountainsides covered in yellow stalks of rice added a human element to the grandeur. Hundreds of terraces everywhere, golden horizontally and green vertically, steps nearly to the summits of hills, perfectly geometrically regular, carved by plows pulled by oxen, a periodic human figure wading in the grass to harvest the rice. Beside the river running through the valleys stood men shaking bowls of rice to separate the chaff in the wind. The whole scene was from a different time, an *epic* time, though rumblings of tractor-trailers and jeeps and dynamite explosions in the cliffs where a road was being built proved that modernity reaches even into the heart of the wilderness.

Capitalism will eventually succeed, as it always does, in overtaking even these last holdouts of simple Tolstoyan life. So the question arises: is the unhappiness that capitalism has hitherto propagated, even in advanced societies, inevitable? Or is there some way to mitigate it, to spare our descendants the pain that we and our ancestors have experienced? Perhaps if we fully understand its causes we can provide solutions.

Of course, the spiritual malaise of late capitalism is quite different from the brutal and unsubtle misery of capitalism's early stages. Population upheavals, murderous and exploitative regimes, subsistence wages and all the other well-documented tragedies of early industrialism do not plague advanced societies to the degree or in quite the same way that they used to. Nevertheless, almost all the varieties of capitalist-sponsored unhappiness have something in common: namely, a loss of community. *Community* is what I saw in Sapa, in the richness of the scenery and the poverty of the villages. Until we find a way to reinstate community, we will remain as unsatisfied as we are now and have been for decades.

I need hardly argue that the communal urge is the most basic human desire. The need to give and receive affection, recognition and respect, is essentially what the need for self-esteem amounts to. Deep self-esteem is possible only on the basis of a fulfilled craving for love and respect. But this is what the early

[1] In 2003, for example, Nigeria was determined by researchers to be the happiest country in the world.

laborers of industrial capitalism did not have, being instead treated like cogs in a machine; and it is what we Americans do not have. Insofar as we are dissatisfied it is because we have neither the thoroughgoing unconscious self-harmony of self-esteem nor the deep and simple communal recognition that many villagers in, say, Kenya likely have. Both are necessary, for they go hand-in-hand. Individuals in the United States are self-conflicted (e.g., lonely and self-doubting), because their society is self-conflicted. They internalize the divisiveness of social relations and become unconsciously self-hating, or self-doubting, themselves.

On the most basic level, then, the 'self-dividedness' of the modern world consists in interpersonal atomization. Atomization is the real neurosis of the age, the fundamental condition for all the others—for all the "culture wars", for example. These wars between ideologies, such as Christianity and secularism, or Islam and democracy, are comparatively superficial; in fact, one of the unconscious functions of an individual's immersion in an ideology is precisely to escape atomization. The psyche will construct labyrinthine defenses against the loss of community, elaborate illusions to hide it from view, artificial means to restore interpersonal bonds, but 'neuroses', on an individual or collective level, are always in some way a reaction against communal deprivation.

On one level it isn't hard to see what causes this atomization or how it manifests itself. One has but to observe daily life to see its causes and how it plays itself out. The type of social conditioning that results from (and *is*) "bureaucracy, the proliferation of images, therapeutic ideologies, the rationalization of the inner life, the cult of consumption",[1] the hectic pace of modern life, the commodification and commercialization of sex and love, the ubiquity of *noise* ("noise pollution"), the strange necessity of going to work every day just to make money, the forging and breaking of shallow friendships, the widespread retreat into video games, television and the internet, the degradation of politics into spectacle, and the fact that all these developments (and many others) have become common knowledge and are widely deplored but seem impenetrable to understanding and cannot be remedied—indeed, are intensified every year, snowballing according to their internal logic—all this conditioning self-evidently churns out individuals who do not feel at home in their world, who are prone to self-doubt and anxiety and are alienated from their fellow humans. Much of it is due to the twin forces of commercialism and consumerism. These trends atomize society by commodifying everything—that is, by translating everything into monetary terms and framing it as a more or less successful means to instant gratification. They encourage, indeed compel, people to think of the world as their personal playground, as being full of things that can be *used, enjoyed*, and then discarded. In other words, this culture sets up a division between the individual and his world: rather than being *part* of him, an essential component in his identity, his world and his relationships are means to his ends. He half-consciously lives his life in this instrumental, quasi-mechanistic way, rejecting people if they don't please him. And the more he lives according to the creed of instant gratification, the more he craves it, precisely because this form of gratification is fleeting and leads to boredom. It is, therefore, self-propagating. People seek relief from the boredom of instant gratification by pursuing more pleasure, i.e., by immersing themselves increasingly in instant gratification. Thus their relationships with others are increasingly colored by the need to be *entertained* (and to entertain), poisoned by consumerism and commercialism.

At the same time, as I hinted at a moment ago, the compulsive and bureaucratic structure of economic life disrupts spontaneous communal life and recognition—frustrates people, frustrates their desire for freedom (to live as they spontaneously would like), pushes them into the half-conscious perception that the world is coercing them, and thus alienates them from society. Indeed, what Marx wrote in 1844 is still relevant, if not more so, in 2007:

> …What, then, constitutes the alienation of labor?
>
> First, in the fact that labor is *external* to the worker [whether blue-collar or white-collar], that is, that it does not belong to his essential being [i.e., his spontaneous sense of self]; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not

[1] Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), p. 32.

> feel well but unhappy, does not freely develop his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker, therefore, feels himself only outside his work, and feels beside himself in his work. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His work therefore is not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labor*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need, but only a *means* for satisfying needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that labor is shunned like the plague as soon as there is no physical or other compulsion. External labor, labor in which man is externalized, is labor of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Finally, the external nature of labor for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in that labor he does not belong to himself but to someone else [or to some company]. Just as in religion, the spontaneous activity of human imagination, of the human brain and the human heart, operates independently of the individual, i.e. as an alien divine or diabolical activity, so the worker's activity is not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is the loss of his self.
>
> The result, therefore, is that man (the worker) feels that he is acting freely only in his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his shelter and his finery—while in his human functions he feels himself nothing more than an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.[1]

The individual feels conflicted in himself (because he is conflicted with his activities, his objectifications) and divided from society, deprived of a free and spontaneous working community. Again, this is all essentially a result of commodification, in this case of the worker's being transformed into a commodity subject to the laws of supply and demand, and all the capricious dictates of the market. He feels himself dehumanized.

From these very brief reflections it seems that the main source of modern unhappiness may be universal commodification. So perhaps we should take a closer look at this phenomenon, to see exactly what it is and what it entails. What is the "phenomenology" of commodification? How is it experienced by people? What are the psychological mechanisms that connect it with unhappiness?

Our task is made easier by the fact that Karl Marx analyzed the phenomenology of commodification in *Capital*, in the section on commodity fetishism. I'll rely on his analysis, since it seems to me to be as important as it has been neglected. The decisive concept he introduced was that of "reification". In the early twentieth century this concept was embellished by such thinkers as Georg Lukács (in *History and Class Consciousness*) and I. I. Rubin (in *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*), who recognized it as a brilliant and fruitful tool of both social and economic analysis. Right now I'm interested in its sociological aspect.

First, though, I have to describe its economic meaning.— Any sensible economist knows that a commodity has two aspects: its use-value (its utility for the consumer) and its exchange-value (the price it commands)… [The next few paragraphs, which I've deleted, are taken from the chapter on historical consciousness I wrote for my book.]

…Consistent with Marx's analysis, all these things—these concepts and habits and institutions—are "personified", becoming a '*they*', i.e., something with a will and intelligence and evidently a deep-seated maliciousness, while people themselves are reified into mere numbers, statistics, objects, obstacles that have to be overcome or irrational things that have to be placated. The social world is turned upside down, and humanity becomes a slave to the social relations it has created.

In peasant villages there is no such slavery, no such atomization. Life is simple and transparent; individuals are the masters of their fate, and they work together to achieve a common end. No doubt there are a good many unpleasant features of village and tribal life, and it is surely not desirable for mankind to return to it. But by looking at that simple kind of happiness we can get a vague idea of what we need in order to be happy ourselves.

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[1] *The Portable Karl Marx*, edited by Eugene Kamenka (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 136, 137. The thoughts in that passage are dramatized in many pop-cultural creations, for example in the popular show "The Office".

So now that we have at least a rudimentary understanding of what has gone wrong, what is left for us to do? How does this knowledge help us? What it seems to suggest is that not without a complete social revolution will civilization become 'healthy' in some way. There is no reason to think the revolution has to be violent; it could be an evolution instead. But it has to result in a restructuring of social relations such that universal commodification and reification are eliminated, and the community restored. Prima facie, though, it seems as if a commodity-economy is necessitated by the fact of scarcity, i.e., by the need to ration scarce resources. The price-mechanism is probably the most effective and efficient way to do this, and the price-mechanism implies commodification. So as long as we use money—as long as we have to ration resources—it seems virtually inevitable that we will have a commodified economy.

What is not inevitable, I think, is that there will always be a scarcity in fundamental resources. This opinion must sound crazy, since we're so used to thinking of the world in terms of scarcity, but it isn't unheard of. Marx himself argued that true communism is impossible except on the basis of material abundance; and he thought that capitalism's historic function was to unleash society's productive powers and bring the world to the very threshold of this state of material abundance. It was the task of socialism to finish the job—to lead us to a society governed by the principle "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need". In his day the economy was nowhere near overcoming scarcity, as he liked to think; but in our own, the possibility seems a little less outlandish. Genetic engineering and cloning may conceivably allow us someday to actually manufacture our food, to clone as many animals as we need to feed everyone and to produce crops whenever and in whatever quantity we want. Renewable energy is, by definition, not scarce, so it isn't wholly unimaginable that we won't need to ration energy in the future. Luxury items will always be scarce, but with respect to necessities like energy and food, money may someday be superfluous. If and when this happens, the economy will take a vastly different form than it does now under capitalism. Cooperation rather than competition may become the norm, the most rational way of organizing economic activities; and commodification will end in all but a few minor spheres, because money itself will, on the whole, wither away.

It is futile, however, to continue these speculations. Such developments may come to pass or they may not, but what is certain is that the universal alienation and anomie of the modern world will not end until the present global economic order either evolves to some form of socialism or collapses into a state of primitivism, possibly as a result of global warming and/or nuclear wars. If this diagnosis seems bleak, then it's that much more important that we fight for a better future.

*

So continues my downgoing.

It's slapdash, I know. Sorry.

November 1 etc.

Constant rejection, non-stop. I think I'll start taking Paxil again. What I should really do is get the fuck out of this country, go to Europe where humanity still sort of likes itself.

Finally some good news: the magazine *Left Curve* wants to print a version of the essay on historical consciousness, and *Main Street Rag* wants to print a short poem. I'm still waiting to hear from about thirty other magazines I submitted to.

Reading John Reed's *Ten Days that Shook the World* (online).

Reading Rousseau's *Émile*. I share Rousseau's respect for nature, for the natural way. Where man is warped, he is warped by man.

No more *Émile* for now. I'll read it when I have a child. Instead I'm reading Robert Reich's *The Work of Nations*.

Finished it. Now I'm reading Fareed Zakaria's *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*. It isn't terrible, but it's not as good as Reich's book. One can see this even by looking at the back cover, which quotes praise from the likes of Samuel Huntington, Peter Jennings, and Henry Kissinger! If Kissinger approves of it, you know there's something wrong with it.

Zakaria, like Reich, belongs to the establishment. Unlike Reich, he doesn't have a very critical or analytical mind.

The prerequisite for lovingkindness.— Nothing assuages misery like the thought that others are miserable too. Conversely, nothing more delights the happy person than the thought of others' happiness.

Reading *Violence in America: A Historical and Contemporary Reader*, edited by Thomas Rose.

Reading *The Best American Essays: 1993*, edited by Joseph Epstein, and *The Cunning of History: The Holocaust and the American Future*, by Richard Rubenstein. The latter is a very interesting long essay on such topics as bureaucracy and "rationalization" (their dangers); its thesis is that the Holocaust should not be thought of merely as "a barbaric and retrograde policy that was thoroughly at odds with the great traditions of Western civilization," but rather as an expression of some of the most profound tendencies of civilization in the twentieth century. Its main ideas have always been obvious to me, but now that I see them on paper I'm thinking about them more clearly than I have.

November 25

Reading Barrington Moore's classic *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Almost finished. Also Ira Magaziner and Robert Reich's *Minding America's Business*.

While I was home for Thanksgiving I looked at some of my old college papers. Many of them are informative. So as not to lose them I'm putting a few here, mostly from my freshman and sophomore years. *[Out of consideration for the reader, I've deleted some of them.]*

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A Non-Eurocentric Model of History

Historians have for centuries attempted to build models of history that reveal the basic determinants of historical progress. Much of their energy has been consumed in explaining why Europe was the one civilization that forged ahead of the rest—developed a model of government subsequently imitated by most other cultures (viz., democracy), created a global economic system (capitalism), and ultimately conquered most of the world. The trap into which historians often fell was that of assuming an innate quality of European "superiority"—an assumption that logically implied a diffusionist and Eurocentric model of history. Recently, however, this Eurocentric model of history has been attacked by scholars like J.M. Blaut, who believe that it was only a special combination of circumstances at a specific time in history that enabled Europe to progress faster than any other civilization. Blaut, in fact, believes that it was solely colonization which gave Europe a decisive advantage in the social-evolutionary process. In light of these objections to the traditional diffusionist theory of history, it has become necessary to reformulate the theories of important scholars—namely Marx, Weber, and Eric Jones—who have operated on a model of intrinsic European superiority. We must integrate their perspectives with that of Blaut in order to devise a more inclusive model of history.

Karl Marx's philosophy of history had a materialistic basis. He was operating in a time dominated by the idealistic philosophy of Hegel, and his own philosophy was composed largely in reaction to Hegel's gigantic influence. Marx emphasized the influence of the means of production on the social and political structures developed by a society. He believed that the means of production determine the relations of production, which determine the economic structure as a whole, which determines the social and political life of a culture (as well as its values). He did not hold this model to be the only explanation for every cultural transformation; on the contrary, he recognized that the values of a society often have a minor causal influence on the material conditions of that society (McLellan, 173). However, he generally believed that the "forces of production" are more important.

Marx assigned five stages to the historical process (and these five stages "are just so many different forms of ownership" [McLellan, 161]). The first is tribal ownership, which "corresponds to the undeveloped stage of production, at which a people lives by hunting and fishing....or, in the highest stage, by agriculture" (McLellan, 161). The division of labor is essentially undeveloped. The second stage is the "ancient communal and State ownership" in which there is still no individual private property. The third stage is characterized by feudal ownership, in which serfs replace slaves. Capitalism—characterized by private property, a high division of labor, and the existence of wage labor—follows feudalism. Communism is the culmination of this historical process (McLellan, 161-163).

As is evident from this brief summary, Marx does not specifically identify Europe as the 'prime mover' of history. Individual cultures do not play a large role in his scheme (except to serve as examples of his abstract theories). It does not require much insight, however, to recognize that Marx was in fact a Eurocentric historian. In his analysis of capitalism he focused exclusively on Europe as the only civilization with "real" capitalism. His belief in a continuous evolution of historical progress, with capitalism as a higher stage in that process, implicitly committed him to the assumption that Europe is bound to bring communism—the "culmination of history"—to the rest of the world. In other words, his conviction that Europe will deliver capitalism and communism to all other "backward" cultures is simply a mild form of diffusionism and Eurocentrism.

It is also true, though, that Marx's theory does not logically commit him to the belief that Europeans are innately superior. In fact, he recognizes, along with Blaut, that "the discovery of America....opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East Indian and Chinese markets, the colonization of America....gave to commerce....an impulse never before known....and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development" (McLellan, 222). Whether or not Marx *personally* believed in the superiority of Europe does not matter; what matters is that his theory does not logically demand this belief.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* Max Weber hypothesizes that capitalism was born in Europe (as opposed to another part of the world) because of the religious revolution that occurred in the 14th century. Protestantism, with its emphasis on hard work as an indication of one's religious fervor, justified capitalism's need for hard-working entrepreneurs. It also paved the way for the practice of excessive economic "rationality" and ascetism—two qualities which were necessary prerequisites for the birth of capitalism. (Weber himself says that "rational book-keeping" [Weber, 22] is essential for the functioning of capitalism.) This kind of rationality did not exist anywhere outside of Europe in the 14th and 15th centuries; the reason for this phenomenon is, according to Weber, the shift in religion and mythical spirituality to ascetism and practical rationality in Europe. Weber recognizes that one of the reasons this shift occurred was because of the transformations already taking place in the social order (i.e. the decline of feudalism), but he emphasizes that the religious revolution was, to a certain extent, independent of the political and economic revolution—that it was in fact just as much a cause as an effect of the birth of capitalism. Thus Weber gives more emphasis to culture (as opposed to the economy) than does Marx, and since it can be argued that culture depends on 'inherent human qualities' to a greater extent than does the 'impersonal' economy, it may be an implicit assumption of Weber that Europeans were unique—that only *they* had the kind of mind which could create a rational religion like Protestantism. He was a Eurocentric and diffusionist historian.

Eric Jones does not merely *imply* that Europe has always been unique: he states it explicitly many times. His book *The European Miracle* contains a summary of virtually all the arguments that can be used to demonstrate the uniqueness of Europe: Europe has many well-placed rivers to facilitate trade; its soil is unusually fertile; its weather is not as extreme as that of Asia or Africa; it is less prone to natural disasters like earthquakes than Asia is; its wars usually were not as devastating as the wars between the great empires of Asia; its kings were not as shamelessly decadent as the "Oriental despots" were; the lack of a central authority encouraged competition between many nation-states, thus facilitating progress; it did not have as high a population density as the Asian empires did. The list goes on and on. Eventually it adds up to a fairly impressive array of arguments to support the existence of a distinctive, inevitable "European miracle." J. M. Blaut argues, however, that almost all of these advantageous qualities held by Europeans are in fact nothing but myths. European soil is not more fertile than Asian or African; tropical climates are not less favorable to the building of empires than are temperate climates; a low population did not play any significant role in the advance of Europe; even the existence of small, competitive nation-states did not (according to Blaut) propel technological, political, or economic progress in Europe. In short, Blaut believes that nearly everything Jones claims to be true is actually false. This interpretation is no doubt exaggerated and simplistic; we shall have to salvage a few elements of Jones' theory when we combine the four theories (Marx's, Weber's, Blaut's, and Jones'), but we can nevertheless accept that Jones does not provide sufficient arguments for his belief in a "European miracle."

Much of J. M. Blaut's book *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* is spent arguing against the theories of numerous Eurocentric historians. He claims that Europeans did not control their population growth any more than did foreign cultures; that the theory of environmental determinism (viz., the theory that tropical regions are not conducive to "progress" because of diseases, soil erosion, low population, etc.; that Asia is arid and despotic; that Europe has a temperate climate conducive to farming, individuality, and democratic forms of government) is unconvincing and has long since been shown to be untrue; that Europeans have never had a unique "rationality" which led them to the invention of sophisticated technology, the founding of democratic governments, and the birth of capitalism. Essentially he declares that every single Eurocentric, diffusionist theory is completely false.

The second half of his argument is based on the thesis that the *single* reason for Europe's rise to world predominance was the colonization of the Americas (followed by that of Asia and Africa). In 1492 Europe was at essentially the same level of evolution as every other important culture in the world: its navy was not significantly stronger than that of other civilizations; its trade was not more productive than that of foreign peoples; its population was *certainly* not more rational than those of foreign empires. The one advantage it had over other civilizations was its location on the globe: it was relatively close to America. Had any other society been located in this fortunate position, posits Blaut, *this* society would have discovered America and risen to world power. The sudden influx of gold, silver, fur, sugar, indigo, and many other raw materials gave European industries a vast supply of products to be manufactured, contributing immensely to their development. Capital could be invested in thousands of business ventures, many of which realized great profits. At the same time, the English and the Dutch, in order to compete with the Spanish (who had somewhat of a monopoly on early colonization), were encouraged to expand their industries. The constant selling of goods to Spain contributed to its massive debt and eventual downfall, while at the same time propelling the fledgling class of the bourgeoisie in Western Europe to economic power. The exploitation of foreign peoples helped to keep them economically and militarily backward, thus increasing the emerging gap between Europe and the rest of the world.

With the rise of capitalism in the 16th and 17th centuries came a continuous expansion of markets and demand. Africa, Asia, and America imported ever-increasing amounts of goods from Europe (Blaut, 200). This high demand engendered an increased productive capacity, which caused the birth and growth of the proletariat. At the same time, the bourgeoisie gained political power (starting at the end of the 17th century) and was thus able to use the bureaucratic machine—the government—to its advantage. "And an Industrial Revolution, a transformation of the methods of production so that output could increase at an even greater rate, became (one might say) inevitable" (Blaut, 201). In this way did capitalism result from colonialism.

Is it possible to synthesize the four theories of Marx, Weber, Jones, and Blaut into a non-Eurocentric, non-diffusionist perspective on the rise of capitalism? Marx's historical materialism and Weber's emphasis on culture (as opposed to economics) as a causal force in history are in fact not mutually exclusive. Nowhere does Marx say that the *only* cause of historical change is production and its social corollaries; nowhere does Weber say that production is not an important historical force. One merely has to acknowledge that the economy is the most influential social force—or even that it is *one* of the most influential forces—and that cultural expressions like religion are necessary to reinforce and propel historical transformations, in order to arrive at the skeleton of a theory integrating the Marxian and Weberian perspectives. Furthermore, Weber would have had no reason to disagree with Marx in the division of history into four major epochs (i.e., it does not *logically* follow from Weber's theory that Marx was wrong).

Marx was somewhat of a Eurocentric, diffusionist historian. However, one of his arguments that can be used to support this belief—that Europe would export communism to all other nations of the world—has been shown to be flawed. Russia developed a crude form of communism before Europe was able to do so, as did China, Cuba, Vietnam, and North Korea. [Um, no.] Furthermore, Europe would never have developed capitalism in the first place if it had not brutally exploited foreign peoples. In other words, no simple process of "diffusion" took place; whatever advantages Europe gained during the past few centuries were due to the exploitation of its colonies.

In the Introduction to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber lists a series of Western cultural attributes—under the headings of science, architecture, music, politics, economics, and "historical scholarship" (Weber, 14)—which he assumes prove that Europe is more "rational" and superior than other civilizations. For instance, he cites the highly sophisticated music of Europe to demonstrate the 'superiority' (or "rationality") of Western culture (Weber, 15). He interprets mere societal *differences* like this one to mean that one society is more advanced than another. All civilizations, however, have their own unique cultures; it is not possible to assert that one is more *advanced* than another. Thus Weber cannot with justification declare that the Protestant revolution in Europe proved that Europeans were more "rational"—more 'progressive'—than foreign peoples. Protestantism was simply a manifestation of Occidental beliefs, just as Buddhism was a manifestation of Oriental beliefs; and Eurocentrism is, once again, shown to be wrong. [?!]

It is more difficult to reconcile Jones' and Blaut's theories than it is Marx's and Weber's, since Jones and Blaut are arguing for completely different theses. Blaut argues *against* Eurocentrism and diffusionism, while Jones argues *for* Eurocentrism and diffusionism. Nevertheless, there are several aspects of Jones' theory that can be salvaged. An important one is his emphasis on Europe's lack of a central authority as a reason for strong competition between its states, and thereby a cause of its progress. Blaut rejects this statement as "Eurocentric", but there are two reasons why he is wrong: the statement is in fact true, and it is not Eurocentric. Competition undeniably influences growth; why else would corporations consistently strive to improve their products? The United States and the Soviet Union competed for forty years, and this was certainly an important reason for much of the rapid progress (e.g. in the "space race") that occurred during this period. Blaut is only fooling himself by asserting that competition was not an important cause of the rise of Europe. Furthermore, there is no *need* for him to assert this; all societies have their own advantages, and competition between nation-states was simply one of Europe's. Other cultures are blessed with, for example, unusually fertile soil and proximity to an abundance of natural resources.

Jones is also correct in emphasizing the importance of a relatively friendly natural environment on Europe's development. Japan and various parts of Asia suffered natural disasters—earthquakes, famines, swarms of locusts—more often than did Europe. (The Black Plague is an exception.) It is not in any way Eurocentric or biased to believe this, because although Europe's relative immunity to natural disasters may have assisted its rise to power, this "immunity" was certainly not a primary cause of European progress. The major reason for Europe's ascent was colonization; competition between nation-states and Europe's lack of natural disasters were merely added benefits that further stimulated progress.

Jones' other arguments for the rise of Europe—e.g. that it had fertile soil and controlled its population—are either Eurocentric and diffusionist or are simply wrong. Most of his and Blaut's arguments are opposite to each other, so it is not possible to reconcile them. The only task that remains, then, is to

reconcile the combined theories of Weber and Marx with the combined theories of Blaut and (what we salvaged from) Jones. Marx and Weber recognized that colonization played a momentous role in the rise of Europe, but they did not realize just *how* momentous its role was. Altering their theories so as to include the proposition that colonization was ultimately the major cause of capitalism does not fundamentally change their content. Marx's historical materialism is, if anything, reinforced by Blaut's emphasis on the discovery of America. Weber's stress on the role of culture in transforming social conditions is not undermined; the Protestant revolution can be seen as reinforcing and augmenting the social transformation triggered by colonialism. Even his highlighting of strict economic rationality as a European trait is not necessarily false, so long as we recognize that this "rationality" was solely a product of decades of social upheaval.

The synthesis of the four separate theories, then, is as follows: Production and the economy are the most important historical forces. They are the foundation of societies; ideologies, technology, the arts, politics, and all other social characteristics are generally the "superstructure" built on this foundation. Culture, however, does influence the economy, and is sometimes even a major cause of economic change. The birth of Protestantism is an excellent example of this thesis. It grew out of material transformations—social upheavals like the decline of feudalism—but also made possible the birth of capitalism by justifying the capitalist need for continuous monetary gain and contributing to the growth of economic rationality in Western Europe. It was, in other words, a cause and an effect of the new social order.

In the 15th century, feudalism was disintegrating. A 'new social order' was slowly arising from the ruins of feudalism in many parts of the world, but it was in Europe that this process was most successful. Europe's success, however, was not due to any intrinsic factors like 'rationality'; rather, it was due to European colonization in the Americas. The growth of industries was encouraged by the importation of an unlimited supply of raw materials, and the progress of foreign peoples was suppressed—leading to the domination of Europe in world affairs. The absence of a central authority in Europe caused nation-states to compete with each other, thereby giving added incentive for them to strengthen their economies and militaries. The comparative lack of natural disasters also aided in the necessary process of capital accumulation. Eurocentrism and diffusionism are therefore false, because Europe would never have progressed so rapidly had it not exploited foreign civilizations. Blaut's, Marx's, and Weber's perspectives on history are—with few exceptions—vindicated, and two of Jones' arguments are retained as well. We have succeeded in constructing a non-Eurocentric model of history.

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A Comparison between Lifton, Erikson, and Freud

Human history is an enigma. For centuries scholars have attempted to understand its intricacies, arguably with limited success. Hegel postulated the existence of an Absolute Spirit that unconsciously propelled history forward as It "realized" Itself; Marx believed that the forces of production are ultimately the foundations upon which the "superstructure" of society is built; psychoanalysis asserts that history is the result of conflicts inherent in the nature of the human spirit. Perhaps we'll never understand our own history, just as we'll never understand our own psyche. It is nevertheless undeniable that we have made much progress in these endeavors, and that psychoanalysis has been the most effective method [??!!] of sifting through the rubble of history—while penetrating ever-deeper into the dark recesses of the psyche—to unshroud the most profound truths of the human condition. Freud declared that the Oedipus complex—together with the castration complex, which leads to the perversion of the death instinct—is the root of repression, and thereby of sublimation, which ultimately creates culture and history. Erikson rejected the primacy of the Oedipus complex in the human psyche—as well as the omnipotence of the life and death instincts—and instead postulated that identity crises are the most important causes of history and culture. Robert J. Lifton asserted that it is not the identity crisis that is the critical factor in the human psyche; what is most important is the preoccupation with death and the need for "symbolic immortality", illustrated by phenomena like the "survivor syndrome". In our analysis of these theories we'll eventually have to discard

Freud's, retain Erikson's and Lifton's, and add a specific Jungian hypothesis regarding the theory of human drives.

The Oedipus complex is misunderstood: it is not a natural love of the mother, but rather "a product of the conflict of ambivalence [between life and death, union and separation] and an attempt to overcome that conflict by narcissistic inflation" (Brown, 118). The essence of Eros is a desire for union with the world (and the essence of Thanatos is individuality and separateness [Brown, 105]). At the mother's breast, the infant experiences this union; it does not yet distinguish between itself and the world of pleasure that surrounds it. At this early oral stage, the child already experiences repression: the repression of reality and the projection into the "repudiated external world anything painful" (Brown, 117). This 'projection into the external world' of anything unpleasant creates a conflict between the infant's desire for "narcissistic omnipotence" (Brown, 113)—Eros's dream of union with the world—and the fact of dependence on the mother. This conflict creates "antagonism in the dialectic of union and separateness, independence and dependence....the dialectic of life and death" (Brown, 113). In other words, the 'biological unity' of life and death is disrupted in the human species because of the child's absolute dependence on its mother. The child 'represses' separation from the mother (thereby repressing the death instinct) even at the oral stage.

In the second stage of childhood, the anal stage, "the dualism of subject and object is transformed into that of activity and passivity" (Brown, 117). The infant continues to deny its own dependence, but it does so now through aggression. Passivity is equated with death; activity is equated with life. In the third phase—the Oedipal phase—the child unconsciously desires to impregnate its mother so as to overcome the passivity it experiences as a result of its having been born from her. "The essence of the Oedipal complex is the project of becoming God" (Brown, 118). It is another manifestation of infantile narcissism, of omnipotence, of union with the world. To quote Norman O. Brown once more, it is "the quest to overcome death by becoming father of oneself" (Brown, 120).

None of this, admittedly, directly affects the progress of history and the creation of culture. It does, however, give rise to the castration complex, which is the culmination of infantile sexuality in that it finally represses both Thanatos *and* Eros, eventually leading to the inauguration of the sublimations that create culture. But what exactly is the castration complex?

The threat of castration that the boy fears is not due to any overt aggression the father displays against his child (Brown, 123). It is rather caused by the child's recognition that the mother is devoid of a penis. The former opposition to the mother is transformed into a preference for the sex opposite the mother's—a preference for masculinity (activity) as against castration (passivity). (For the girl the result is penis-envy.) The result of the interaction of the Oedipus complex with this recognition of sexual segregation is the destruction of the "bodily-sexual" character of the Oedipus complex (Brown, 127). Its legacy lives on, however: the adult's flight from death (Lifton's "symbolic immortality"—the immortality promised in religion, in the production of children, etc.) is simply a sublimation—a "desexualization" (Brown, 128)—of the Oedipus complex. In fact, all sublimations (i.e., all aspects of culture) are essentially desexualizations of this original flight from death, of this desire for union with the world, of infantile sexuality. Eros and Thanatos are both repressed: human life becomes a struggle against a perverted form of the death instinct, which is transformed into aggression, anxiety, and negativity (Brown, 117). Individuality, the death instinct's original and natural manifestation, is repressed. The id, however, does not forget the true nature of these instincts; it attempts to unify them (according to Brown) through sublimation. Human history and culture, then, are flights from 'death'—and are at the same time efforts by the subconscious to restore the two great instincts to their original, biological unity. In light of this interpretation of Freud, cultures differ from each other not in what *causes* them—infantile fantasies, flights from death, the struggle for instinctual unity—but in the various kinds of projections (sublimations) which are possible in a particular environment, technology, and society. Or what is perhaps the same thing, in the "various....levels of the return of the repressed" (Brown, 171). Thus culture is a complex interaction of repressed instincts with the existing material world (Brown, 128, 132, 170).

Erikson abandons Freud's belief in the simple duality of the life and death instincts, and instead emphasizes the intricacies and contradictions inherent in the child's psyche. Much of *Childhood and Society* is spent describing the important identity crises that most children experience, and how these identity crises

subsequently affect their adulthood. He suggests that dictators like Stalin and Hitler implement their brutal policies because of the identities they formed as adolescents. In Erikson's opinion, the Oedipus complex is merely a particular instance of the inevitable childhood identity crisis. But what exactly is this so-called "identity crisis"?

Erikson assigns eight stages to the development of human beings, one of which (the fifth) is called "identity vs. role confusion" (Erikson, 261). This stage occurs during adolescence. "In puberty and adolescence all samenesses and continuities relied on earlier are more or less questioned again..." (Erikson, 261). Nowhere does Erikson state that this identity crisis has anything to do with the Oedipus complex, much less with eternal human instincts called "life" and "death". He, along with Lifton, thinks that Freud's instincts sound somewhat old-fashioned, perhaps a little simplistic. They are too 'cute' to be taken seriously; the ego is far too complex to be a mere battlefield for two instincts. Instead, Erikson believes that society plays an important role in its own right (not just as a collection of sublimations) in fostering the growth of the individual. Adolescents need to feel that they have a 'continuous' meaning for others, "as evidenced in the tangible promise of a 'career'" (Erikson, 261), and often an indirect result of this need is the tendency for them to identify with certain 'heroes' or groups so much that they nearly lose their own individual identity. An excellent example of this phenomenon is Germany after World War I, when confused adolescents (and adults) who worshiped the Motherland over-identified with Hitler to the point of accepting him as dictator. Revolutionaries often experience this loss of individuality as well. In his interview with Mao Tse-tung, Edgar Snow observes several times (Snow, 129) that communist revolutionaries identify with The Cause so much that it becomes their life. They are no longer individuals after their adoption into this underground society; they are members of a group. Their abnormally severe identity crises have compelled them to permanently embrace the adolescent's solution—i.e. over-identification with a group—and to dedicate their lives to the achievement of communism. In some cases they are successful, thereby vindicating the claim that identity crises do often influence history.

Robert J. Lifton follows Erikson's example in discarding the life and death instincts. He further revolutionizes psychoanalysis by explicitly rejecting (1) the notion that the id, the ego, and the superego are the main structural components of the psyche, and (2) Erikson's model of the eight ages of man as too static and 'neat' (Lecture: "Lifton's Paradigm"). Lifton declares that the most important human activity is the formation of symbols representing life and death. Culture is primarily a collection of life imagery and death imagery; the need for "symbolic immortality", in other words, causes people to create culture. This sense of immortality can be expressed in five ways: living on through one's children, believing in life after death (theology), making an impact on the world through various achievements, knowing that nature will survive even after we die, and experiencing an intense state of mind in which the sense of mortality is no longer felt—a state called "experiential transcendence" by Lifton (Lifton, 32, 33, 34). This fifth way of experiencing immortality occurs in activities as varied as sexual love, childbirth, dance, battle, and artistic creation (Lifton, 34).

If one accepts Lifton's paradigm, superficial analysis suggests that culture is overwhelmingly an example of humans expressing their need for immortality through achievements—but theology and "experiential transcendence" are undeniably important elements of societies as well. (Buddhism is a splendid example of an influential religion that contains both a variant of the doctrine 'life-after-death' and the belief that loss of oneself (i.e., experiential transcendence) leads to perfect bliss.) Analyses of cultures indicate, in fact, that there is a good possibility that Lifton is correct in emphasizing the role of symbolic immortality in creating history. Furthermore, he suggests an interesting reason why millions of twentieth-century youth have become revolutionaries: in this age of total war and the threat of mass extinction, almost all the 'modes' of symbolic immortality—biological reproduction, long-lasting achievements, etc.—are threatened. Even nature might not last forever, due to the threat of nuclear war. The only mode that has not caused disillusionment is experiential transcendence. As a result, a high proportion of youth turned to communism during the Cold War because of the 'loss of self' it engenders—because it is possible and justified, even heroic, to dedicate one's entire life to this most worthy of causes (Lifton, 35). Thus Lifton too, along with Freud and Erikson, is able to use his theory of symbolic immortality to explain history and culture. Which of the three theories is the correct one?

Brown's reinterpretation of Freud makes the Freudian theories of the Oedipus complex, the castration complex, the life and death instincts, and sublimation, seem more realistic—but there remain unanswered questions. […]

If there is no castration complex and no Oedipus complex, does the Freudian theory of sublimation still make sense? Not in its original form. Sublimation, in other words, is not a continuation and desexualization of the Oedipus complex. Is it Eros and Thanatos projecting themselves into society? This theory seems more realistic—and it is certainly convenient for Freud that there is no way of disproving it—but we must agree with Lifton that it is too 'neat' to reflect the complexities of the human condition. The human psyche is composed of far more than drives for physical pleasure and flights from death. It is therefore necessary to reject Freud's theory of history and culture.

Erikson's notion of the identity crisis is much more realistic; it is, in fact, quite obviously true. Every adolescent can verify its truth. Interpreting culture and history through the polished lens of the 'identity' theory is useful in helping to understand why dictators and revolutionaries act the way they do, and why brutal ones (e.g. Stalin, Mao, and Hitler) are accepted by the people they govern. It is surely the case that without the requisite identity crisis experienced in adolescence or young adulthood, most people would not dedicate their lives to 'absolute' causes like communism, or would not identify themselves with monsters like Hitler, or would not even become the kind of person they turn out to be later in life. Since the identity 'crisis' has an enormous impact on adolescence, and adolescence has a profound impact on adulthood, and it is adults who create history, one must conclude that the identity crisis (although it is not always a crisis *per se*) affects history and culture. On the other hand, this is not the only factor that influences culture, nor even perhaps the most important one. Does Lifton's theory of symbolic immortality contribute significantly to our understanding of history?

The inevitability of death 'weighs like an incubus' on humanity's brain. Even in the conscious mind it often determines our actions; one can only imagine the effect it must have on the subconscious mind. But are our lives really as dominated by this fear as Lifton believed? Or more importantly, is culture created solely by this need for symbolic immortality? Certain aspects of culture—like religion—are indeed influenced by the fear of death, but people are often motivated simply by the love of work. Is it realistic to suppose that the reason Fréderic Chopin spent his life composing sublime music was because of an unconscious need for symbolic immortality? Why is it unacceptable to believe that a simple love of art was the only reason for Chopin's passion for music? Why must everything in psychoanalysis be reduced to all-encompassing theories that supposedly explain the entire spectrum of human behavior?

We have already established that identity crises often explain the actions of revolutionaries and dictators, but it is also evident that the need for symbolic immortality causes leaders to initiate immense projects of reform. Napoleon's ambition was a result of this need; Bill Clinton is obsessed with his "legacy"; Mao Tse-tung inaugurated the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward to ensure that the communist revolution—his legacy—would be permanent. Likewise, religions are formulated to counteract the inevitability of death, and "experiential transcendence" provides the motivation for the 'loss-of-self' required in so many revolutionary doctrines and Eastern religions. But to account for *all* of history it is necessary to follow Carl Jung's lead in postulating as the basic human drives hunger, sexuality, activity, reflection, and creativity (Marcus and Rosenberg, 41). Creativity explains the omnipresence of art in culture; reflection explains the existence of philosophers throughout history; activity explains the human compulsion to work. These need not be regarded as instincts; it is enough to assume that they are drives whose universality dictates many of the actions of mankind.

The three theories we have accepted—Erikson's 'identity crisis', Lifton's 'symbolic immortality', and an emaciated version of Jung's 'drives'—admittedly are not the sole causal forces of history. They hardly take account of man's interaction with his environment, and they certainly do not elucidate *all* of the psychological factors that cause people to create culture and history. Nevertheless, they are important starting-points for a more inclusive model of the human psyche as it relates to history. Lifton's theory of symbolic immortality probably does not unravel as many mysteries as he claims it does, but neither can it be denied that the subconscious (and conscious) preoccupation with death has a subtle effect on many aspects of human history and culture.

To echo the statement that began this essay, we may never understand the totality of the human condition, but these three theories provide an excellent foundation upon which to base future attempts to understand history. [Um, no.]

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Puritanism: Slave Morality
[Another hilarious paper]

Alexis de Tocqueville, in his book *Democracy in America*, attempts to explain the apparently contradictory coexistence among Americans of a powerful religious impulse and an obsession with freedom and equality. Throughout history, Tocqueville notes, religion and freedom have been incompatible (p. 47); why has the trend been reversed in the United States? Tocqueville's answer is that "religion regards civil liberty as a noble exercise of man's faculties...[and] freedom sees religion as the companion of its struggles and triumphs, the cradle of its infancy..." (p. 47). This explanation, needless to say, is inadequate in its vagueness and idealism. The true source of the harmony between religion and freedom—and equality, most importantly—is to be found in the psychological underpinnings of Puritanism, which was the religion that first gained hold in America. This essay will demonstrate that it was in fact the Puritans' "slave revolt in morals" (Nietzsche, 36) which predetermined that religion and equality would be complementary in the United States.

A brief account of the notion of slave morality is necessary for a proper understanding of its role in Puritanism. The main idea behind the first essay in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* is that humanity's most basic urge, the will to power, sublimates itself into two very different manifestations: master morality and slave morality. The ancient Greeks and Romans, with their collective self-confidence, pride, undeveloped consciences, 'noble' disdain for the weak, and desire for self-expression in whatever form it might take, were the quintessential examples of master morality. The Jews and Christians, who were obsessed with glorification of the weak, hatred of the strong—who would all one day go to hell—and their (the Christians') own inner, spiritual life, represent slave morality. Nietzsche argues that it was because of the Christians' inability to vent their hatred against their masters that they embraced the ascetic ideal by developing cruel consciences and imposing severe strictures on their own sensual pleasure—i.e., by being cruel to themselves. This inner cruelty was the opposite sublimation of the will to power to that of the masters, who were cruel to the weak rather than to themselves.

With the foregoing as a background, we can analyze the psycho-historical trends which led to the American obsession with both religion and equality. Puritanism arose out of the social and psychological anarchy during the Reformation; it was in fact a reaction against this (Barbu, 183). Barbu argues that the revolutionary assertion of individualism by Luther eventually led to a release of instinctual drives, which found their objective manifestations in the decline of feudalism, the rise of the towns, and various destructive wars; and their subjective manifestations in Shakespearean literature, psychological torment, an inability to maintain a balance between the superego and the id, and an overall lack of integration in the human personality (p. 183). Puritans compensated for all this by imposing on themselves rigid psychical and social organization, a "severe rationalization" in all areas of life, and a tyrannical superego to counteract the confusing array of recently unrepressed instincts (p. 183). Notice the similarities with Nietzsche's analysis of slave morality and the genesis of Christianity. Indeed, the only difference (morally) between Puritanism and early Christianity is that the former was a more intense version of the latter. A second reason for this peculiar intensity is that during feudal times the Catholic Church had, to an extent, substituted a degenerate form of master morality for its earlier slave morality. This authoritarian structure of the Church was, of course, a fundamental reason for Luther's revolt, but it was also a reason for the Puritans' need for an oppressive social order. They *needed* authority—they had lived under an absolute authority for centuries, they had become incapable of doing without one, they had proven too weak to sublimate their instincts properly—and so they projected their meager will to power into an unprecedentedly severe God who forced them all into equality. In short, their self-imposed hardships were an easy way to bring order into their

psyches, and their concern with equality was both a reaction against the authoritarian structure of the Catholic Church and an unconscious extension of it—but this time with God playing the role of the Church.

Hence when the Puritans founded colonies in the New World they based their ideal society on absolute equality and strict adherence to rules. These are cardinal symptoms of slave morality, signifying that Tocqueville's idealistic explanation of the harmony between religion, equality and liberty is incorrect. But how does liberty fit into slave morality? The Puritans did not crave liberty *for* themselves; they wanted liberty *from* societies that disapproved of Puritanism's aversion towards individual liberty!—that is, when used as a means to pleasure. Puritans wanted to have the freedom not to be free—or, rather, to be free to oppress themselves. This understanding of liberty is evidently due to slave morality (i.e., cruelty turned inwards because of outward impotence), and is also completely opposed to the future American one. But this does not imply that the latter is not itself a manifestation of slave morality.

So whence did this concept of political liberty arise? Originally it was a purely economic phenomenon, made possible by the recent Reformation, but by the time of John Locke it had penetrated the sphere of politics. Since psychological influences do not have a prominent place in its history, political and civil liberty were evidently reminiscent of slave morality only insofar as they were a reaction against the medieval aristocracy's 'authoritarianism' and ignoble master morality (as opposed to the noble one of the Greeks). The self-imposed cruelty of the Puritans had been discarded by the time America became a nation, implying that the United States was not founded on as pure a form of slave morality as was Puritanism.

Americans, nevertheless, retained the Puritan desire for equality. Tocqueville even notes several times that equality is a higher priority in the United States than freedom. The masses can only have insisted on equality so relentlessly for one major reason: the Industrial Revolution forced them to become machines even as it starved them, humiliated them, weakened them in every way—and *strengthened* the upper class. The notion of equality admittedly began with the bourgeoisie, but it reached its zenith due to the political influence of the workers in America. However, it was when the first rough stages of the Industrial Revolution had been superseded that social equality finally moved definitively into the realm of slave morality. Anyone who asserted his will to power by making the masses feel insecure in their own state of ignorance and weakness—such as certain intellectuals did, or the decadent bourgeois aristocracy did—was condemned or reminded that everyone is equal. Men like Matthew Arnold who emphasized society's need for high culture and who openly showed their contempt for the vast majority of people beneath them were seen as evil, as a threat to the weak. Over decades this obsession with equality, clearly due to the masses' hatred of their betters, became the American gospel to such an extent that today there is no longer even a hint of greatness anywhere in our culture. *Everything*—music, literature, politics, bourgeois economics—is mediocre and insipid. In short, our culture today, even more than in Tocqueville's time, signifies the complete triumph of slave morality in one of its manifestations.

To conclude, this paper has demonstrated that Puritanism was primarily a reaction against (1) psychical anarchy, intolerable to the weak-minded, and (2) the authoritarian structure of the Catholic Church. America's origin in the Puritan atmosphere of excessive asceticism no doubt had an influence on the further development of the ideas of equality and liberty in the United States, but it must be conceded that this influence was minimal. The primary indication of "slave morality" in America is the obsession with equality in every aspect of life, but again, this equality is essentially unrelated to the even baser Puritan fixation on it. Tocqueville argues the opposite, but he is wrong. Nevertheless, Puritanism and 'Americanism' do have one important thing in common: they are diseases of the mind.

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Social Democracies Are the Best Form of Government

Conservatives and other lovers of the free market have generally considered the welfare state to be a restriction upon individual freedom. The Lockean rights to private property and political liberty are, they declare, trampled on in economic systems such as Sweden's. Moreover, the evils of paternalism creep into the government when it is an extreme social democratic welfare state. These concerns, however, are

unfounded. As Esping-Andersen points out, the de-commodification of workers effected by a social democratic welfare state more than compensates for any adverse consequences of a large government. More importantly, this paper will demonstrate that freedom is actually *increased* in a welfare state—as are also equality and democracy. Further, the Swedish system will be seen to be the most effective and potentially most permanent.

In a liberal welfare state, according to Esping-Andersen (p. 22), needs-tests and meager benefits "strengthen the market since all but those who fail in the market will be encouraged to contract private-sector welfare." Both liberals and conservatives look favorably upon this as increasing individual freedom, but if we define freedom more inclusively—so as to additionally incorporate *social* liberties and opportunities—we will recognize that the opposite is the case. The impoverished do not have the freedom, for example, to gain a higher education. They do not have the freedom to choose to live in a suburban neighborhood. It may be objected that these are not properly *freedoms*; they are *opportunities*. But this objection is irrelevant: the point is that many people do not have the freedom to take advantage of these opportunities if the market is allowed to govern them. Thus commodification implies social slavery; if a welfare regime is able to de-commodify workers, it necessarily offers them liberation.

Another possible objection is that in a social democracy the rich lose their freedom to become even richer, or to totally run the country. This indeed is the case. But the sacrifice of liberties as superfluous as these is a small price to pay for greater freedom in the society as a whole.

De-commodification of workers, ending their reliance on the market, places them on a more equal footing with the wealthy than was the case when they were commodified. Thus there is greater social equality—which implies greater political equality. All citizens (aside from their political representatives) ultimately have an equal influence on the political process in this system. Such is not the case in liberal welfare states, of course, for these maintain the workers' reliance on the market. But corporate and social democratic welfare regimes are more successful at establishing economic and social equality. Arising from this equality, as was remarked previously, is the greater freedom of the citizenry as a whole. Thus equality and freedom are not, in a proper welfare state, incompatible.

Opponents of welfare states often warn that democracy becomes very fragile or non-existent when such a paternalistic, vast government bureaucracy runs the country. According to Max Weber, bureaucracy and democracy are irreconcilable: the one requires experts not democratically elected and an efficient mechanism for carrying out orders not susceptible to monitoring and control by citizens, the other by its definition implies leadership by the ignorant masses. However, since under a social democratic welfare regime there is more equality and freedom, the loss of democracy in the bureaucratic structure is partially compensated for by the increase of democracy in the public realm. The citizens are more interested in the political process because more of them feel that they're a part of it; thus more of them vote and voice their opinions. Additionally, as was noted earlier, they all have basically an equal say. Furthermore, although it may be true that democracy cannot penetrate the bureaucracy, it can and does exist outside it—to a greater extent than it does in liberal welfare regimes like the United States, which themselves have an equally vast bureaucracy. To cite one of Esping-Andersen's examples (p. 69), when the Swedish social democrats made middle-class standards the universal norm, the average worker experienced upward mobility, and thus there was a "consolidation of a vast popular majority wedded to [the] defense" of social democracy.

As for the accusation of paternalism, it is indeed possibly justified vis-à-vis corporate welfare regimes like Germany—although probably much less so than is thought. It is not, however, justified vis-à-vis social democracies, where the impetus for welfare comes from the citizens themselves rather than from the state. The red-green alliance in Sweden, which effectively initiated and prolonged its social democracy (with the eventual help of the "whites"), was entirely a popular movement. Hence its outcome cannot be labeled "paternalism", especially when it continues to be supported by all of the citizens.

This is indeed a significant reason for the superiority of the Swedish model over the German. Bismarck initiated his social programs mainly to prevent socialism from acquiring power; hence, his welfare state began as a paternalistic, corporativist method of counteracting a popular movement. This kind of deception would be impossible in a social democracy, where equality, freedom, and democracy are the guiding laws. If these three values are the primary criteria for judging the quality of a welfare state, then

clearly the social democratic one is far better than the liberal, in which de-commodification has not been achieved.

However, if the criterion is which type of welfare regime will last the longest, most people are inclined to believe that the liberal state is the best. It is flexible, it does not require the vast contributions from its citizens that the social democratic state does, it can devote its resources to more productive investments, etc. On the other hand, most citizens of a social democratic state are more satisfied and have a higher quality of life (on average) than the citizens of all but the richest liberal states, and so there is less chance of dissatisfaction and consequent alteration in the governmental structure. Moreover, if a social democratic state happens to be rich, there is a great possibility that it will be able to divert enough resources to productive investments for it to remain in existence. Evidently the primary variable determining the success of any type of welfare regime is the wealth of the nation; a poor liberal state is in most cases just as likely to go bankrupt as a poor social democratic state—and in any event, its citizens are more likely to revolt from sheer discontent. In other words, there are no overwhelming indications that a state on the Swedish model is not as likely to be long-lasting as is a state on the American model.

To conclude, social democratic welfare regimes are beneficial in nearly every way: they increase individual freedom, they augment social equality, they generally make democracy more effective (outside the bureaucracy), they are less paternalistic than corporativist welfare states, and they are potentially as permanent as liberal welfare regimes. Particularly if they are wealthy nations, it is difficult to find any major drawbacks of social democracies.

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The Marxist theory of the business cycle

Business cycles are entirely a modern (capitalist) phenomenon. In pre-capitalist societies, economic crises "took the form of *material destruction* of the elements of reproduction, whether simple or expanded, as a result of natural or social catastrophes".[1] Crises were generally caused by non-economic factors like exhaustion of the soil and wars. In capitalism, on the other hand, this material destruction of the means of production is the *result* of crises, not the *cause*. "It is not because there are fewer workers engaged in production that a crisis happens; it is because a crisis breaks out that there are fewer workers engaged in production."[2] This paper will explain why and how such a seemingly irrational sequence of events occurs in the modern business cycle.

The pre-capitalist crisis arises from an inadequate production of use-values. As mentioned above, external events like wars cause this under-production. In capitalism, however, there is an *overproduction of exchange-values*. Monetarily effective demand is not high enough to absorb the vast amounts of exchange-values that flood the marketplace: in other words, more than a socially necessary amount of labor (which in this case is measured by the effective demand for commodities) has been expended on the production of goods, so the profits of capitalists vanish—since their goods are not being sold—and they lose money.

This contradiction between supply and demand is possible because it is exchange-values rather than use-values that are distributed in capitalism. In order to consume a commodity it is necessary to possess the equivalent of its exchange-value; i.e., a good cannot be consumed if it cannot be bought. This clearly raises the *theoretical* possibility of business crises.

> If during the circulation of commodities *their price of production changes*, as a result, say, of the introduction of new methods of work…a large number of commodities no longer find their equivalent on the market, and a large number of debts cannot be met. It is enough for an income not to be spent today but only tomorrow for it to be incapable of buying the

[1] Ernest Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory*, p. 342.
[2] Ibid.

same number of commodities, if their prices have risen in the meantime.[1]

In other words, the theoretical possibility of crises can easily become a reality if commodity prices change without there being concomitant changes in incomes.

Vulgar political economy, represented by James Mill, J. B. Say and others, argued that such an incompatibility between commodity-values and the total incomes of the various classes of society that participate in production is impossible, for "the production of commodities is at the same time production of the incomes needed to absorb these commodities".[2] The problem with this pseudo-theory is that it assumes a static system rather than the dynamism inherent in capitalism. "It neglects the time-factor… Between the production and sale of commodities their prices can vary."[3] Moreover, incomes earned during one period will not necessarily be spent during the same period. Indeed, they will usually be accumulated and spent or invested much later. Hence Mill's theory ignores the realities of capitalism.

Since the introduction of machines and new production methods does not take place gradually but rather through sudden bursts, society learns too late that an unnecessary amount of labor has been used to produce commodities in the less technologically advanced industries and firms. When occurring on a vast scale, as it periodically does, this overproduction in one sector and waste of social labor in another results in the following symptoms characteristic of the business cycle.

(A) *Overproduction and slump*. As the new investments in the advanced industries increase the total production of society, the relations between supply and demand begin to change. It becomes apparent that the commodities produced in the least favorable conditions of productivity cannot sell at their prices of production (i.e., they cannot earn for the capitalist a profit). Nevertheless, the factories with adverse conditions of productivity continue to produce commodities by relying on the expansion of the credit system. Eventually, the gap between supply and demand—the former high, the latter low—becomes so wide that capitalists in technologically backward sectors are forced to lower the prices of their commodities and hence lose their profits. Many businesses are ruined.

(B) *Depression*. Henceforth only the productively efficient enterprises continue production. The firms that were once realizing super-profits can now earn only *average* profits. All investment activity slows down considerably: the activity of the enterprises in the capital goods sector is much diminished by the lowering of investment and by the bankruptcy of the inefficient factories; the production of consumer goods declines substantially as well, but not as much as that of capital goods. On the whole, the average rate of profit remains very low because effective demand has diminished from the average lowering of incomes.[4]

(C) *Economic recovery*. Part of production capacity not having been used for a while, stocks have been gotten rid of. The demand for goods now exceeds the current low supply. Consumer-goods sectors whose sales have not entirely collapsed are able to increase their activity. This is encouraged by the low prices of raw materials, the low wages, etc. Efficient factories reopen and are able to acquire large profits; less efficient factories acquire the average profit.

(D) *Boom and prosperity*. "All available capital flows into production and trade, in order to take advantage of the increase in the average rate of profit."[5] Investment dramatically increases as demand continues to exceed supply. The most technically advanced industries realize super-profits by increasing their productive efficiency. Eventually the more backward industries begin to lose their profits, for they are wasting labor in comparatively inefficient production, and the cycle begins anew.

This is a very brief summary of the Marxist doctrine of business cycles, discovered by Marx in the *early 1850s*. Now that the substantially correct theory has been laid out, it remains only to criticize a few superficial explanations put forward by bourgeois economists. H. L. Moore, for example, blames business

[1] Ibid., p. 344.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., p. 350.
[5] Ibid., p. 347.

cycles on the weather.[1] The problem with this idea is that it does not explain anything. How would Moore explain the proven fact that agricultural overproduction was an important cause of the Great Depression? Was there *too much* rain that year?

Pigou's theory is a little more sensible. He thinks that errors in the forecasting of profit opportunities are the primary cause of business cycles. (Modern credit arrangements, he thinks, tend to exacerbate depressions, in that banks withdraw rather than expand credit in times of crisis.) The point that Pigou overlooks is that 'over-investment' often *does* benefit the private entrepreneur; it is costly only to society as a whole. Each capitalist hopes that he will survive the ensuing crisis; he knows what he is doing when he increases the production and efficiency of his factory. His "error" is actually the error of the anarchy of capitalist production, in which every capitalist is forced to cater to his own well-being and neglect that of the society as a whole.[2] J. M. Clark recognizes this when he states that "the trouble seems to be not so much that businessmen mistake their interests…as that their [individual] interests lie in *doing the things which bring on the cycle*." This position is, of course, proto-Marxist.

To conclude, this paper has expounded Marx's explanation of the business cycle in opposition to Moore's and Pigou's. Cycles are inevitable, although their 'effects' can, through government intervention, probably be transformed from depressions into recessions. Overproduction, according to Marx, is inevitable under capitalism. Indeed, in a sense it is *good* in spite of its adverse effects on people's lives, for (1) it will one day cause an evolution to socialism, and (2) it is a powerful corroboration of the theory of historical materialism. (Schumpeter takes many of his ideas from Marx, such as "creative destruction".) Seen in this light, welfare economics is harmful, for in cushioning the effects of business cycles it postpones the realization of communism.

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The Benefits of Government Intervention

Should the government intervene in the economy, and if so, when? The answer to the first question is simple: yes. This will be elaborated later. The answer to the second question is a bit more complex, but tentatively it can be expressed as: sometimes. Or, even more precisely: often. Laissez-faire is an acceptable policy during highly prosperous times or when a developing country's economy needs to be jump-started, but it is an ineffective governmental policy when high unemployment is a political goal. [?] West Germany, immediately after its defeat in World War II, when it was still occupied by America and Britain, underwent an economic miracle by relying primarily on the mechanisms of the free market—i.e., on laissez-faire.[3] Indeed, within a few years the entirety of its productive activity went from consisting of a few million homeless people cleaning up rubble in cities, to consisting of an immense industrial economy that was more successful than France's. However, this occurred under exceptional circumstances, and thus corroborates the previous statement that laissez-faire usually increases employment only if a country has hit rock-bottom.

The Great Depression, that eloquent confirmation of central Marxist tenets, would not have occurred if laissez-faire had not been the economic policy of Herbert Hoover and his government. The stock market crash, the agricultural overproduction, the runs on banks, the reduction of incomes and laying-off of workers, the compounding of economic disasters upon more disasters—this was all possible because of laissez-faire. When Roosevelt experimented with his New Deal, which was manifestly not a laissez-faire policy, he was able to significantly reduce unemployment. His "Tennessee Valley Authority", for example, transformed a terribly impoverished area into a comparatively well-off region with plenty of jobs. This was possible through government spending, which meant government investment in the economy. Taboo though this was to capitalists, it saved them by preventing a proletarian revolution.

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[1] "Damn anti-capitalist weather!" I can almost hear him shouting in rage. "What's so great about the socialists that it has to support *them*?!"

[2] Ibid., p. 347.

[3] Walter Laqueur, *Europe Since Hitler*.

Similarly, after Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, a massive amount of government investment in the economy increased employment significantly.[1] Industries boomed, millions of workers found jobs, Germany's national pride soared, and the economy rocketed light-years beyond other Western economies.[2] This is the quintessential empirical support for the idea that high levels of government investment in the economy do have the potential not only to raise employment but to ensure the prosperity of a nation.

As a third example of the political effectiveness of Keynesian doctrines, social democracy can be cited. Social democracy is not only effective as a means of income distribution; it is also important for its investment in the economy. Thus, major industries are often nationalized, and the government itself employs a vast bureaucracy that provides incomes for many people.

After America's decade-long fling with neo-laissez-faire in the 1980s, what was the result? Recession. Unemployment. Millions of lost jobs and bankruptcies. When supply-side economics was abandoned, the economy recovered and eventually experienced a boom in the 1990s. Admittedly, Reaganomics was successful for a few years, but in the long run it proved that any kind of laissez-faire leads to high unemployment sooner or later.

In regard to the theoretical aspects of Keynesian economics, there are several points to be noted. First, cuts in wages are not an effective way to stimulate the economy. Contrary to what the neoclassical economists thought, cuts in wages do not necessarily lead to high employment.[3] What is important, according to Keynes, is that there be a large amount of spending and investment. Effective demand should be as high as possible; if, then, the wages of millions of workers are cut, the economy will suffer. If aggregate demand is very high, the expectations of entrepreneurs regarding their possible gains from extensive investment will be high, so they will invest more. On the other hand, if aggregate demand is much lower than usual, entrepreneurs will be justifiably concerned about the prospects of economic ventures, and aggregate investment will sink. This will provoke lay-offs, since less capital will be invested in fewer industries, and effective demand will sink even more.

In fact, Keynes generally emphasizes the role of psychological factors such as expectation as explanations of employment, business cycles, and other phenomena. For example, he says "today's employment can be correctly described as being governed by today's expectations taken in conjunction with today's capital equipment".[4] Moreover, there is another element to the psychology of the economy: the public's liquidity-preference. According to Keynes, the amount of money people hold is based on the inverse relationship between interest rates and the capital values on interest-bearing assets.[5] Understanding, with Karl Marx, that money is a store of value in addition to being a means of exchange, Keynes decided that in certain conditions it is prudent to hoard money as an insurance against risks of capital loss; liquidity-preference enters this scheme by fixing the quantity of money that people will hold when the rate of interest is given.[6] As interest rates fall, people will tend to hoard more cash due to pessimistic speculation.[7] Hoarding money is, of course, a horrendous thing to do, since it equals less saving/spending/investment.

Keynes did not think that monetary controls had much influence on interest rates, so he favored fiscal policies. When faced with volatile expectations, he argued, the government should deficit-spend to increase aggregate demand, and thereby increase investment. This implies that consumption should be maintained at as high a level as possible. So apparently Keynes thought Veblen's "conspicuous consumption" was good. If he was right, this is of course only another reason to wish for the demise of a system that requires intense materialistic consumption and drains life of its substance, its spiritual

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[1] Jackson Spielvogel, *Hitler and Nazi Germany*.
[2] Of course, the price to pay for these successes was the destruction of 80 million people. But then again, every policy has externalities.
[3] J. M. Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*.
[4] Ibid., p. 50.
[5] William Barber, *A History of Economic Thought*, p. 233.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Keynes, op. cit., p. 172.

pleasures.[1]

To conclude, this paper has argued that the government ought to invest in the economy—to become a vast consumer, as it were—in order to ensure a high level of employment. Not only does an immense amount of empirical evidence support this claim, but Keynesian theories do as well. Even more importantly, Marxian theories do. (The potentially stabilizing effects of planned government intervention in the economy are implicit in the Marxian theory of the business cycle, which emphasizes capitalist anarchy.) Anyhow, the entire history of the Soviet Union shows that government intervention can keep employment at a high level, for employment in that country was almost always higher than it was even in social democratic countries.

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A Defense of Marx's Theory of Value

All commodities have use-value and exchange-value. People try to obtain them because they have use-value, and this indirectly leads to their possession of exchange-value. But what *is* exchange-value? As defined by Smith, Ricardo, Marx and other economists, it is a measure of the amount of commodities that can be traded with another commodity. An object's exchange-value is indicated by its price, for the original function of money is to serve as a means for the circulation of goods. What, then, is *value*? Is it exchange-value or use-value or neither? Is the degree of a commodity's value a cause or an effect of people's desire for it, or neither? This paper will argue, with Marx, that (1) value is the amount of abstract, socially necessary labor embodied in a commodity;[2] (2) value is, under equilibrium conditions, the determinant of exchange-value; (3) demand influences exchange-value primarily in the day-to-day fluctuations of prices; and (4) the value of a commodity has no relation to whether people make an effort to acquire it (although its *exchange*-value does). [?]

Jean-Baptiste Say argues that the utility of commodities determines their prices. In other words, if there is a high demand for a product its exchange-value will rise, and if there is a low demand it will fall. Of course, production cost too is intimately related to prices, but Say's main point is that the classical economists underestimate the role of use-value in determining exchange-value.

Ricardo recognizes that use-value is essential to the *existence* of exchange-value[3] (for people would not buy commodities unless they were in some way useful), but he does not think that use-value is an inherent and permanent part of commodity prices, as Say does.[4] Nevertheless, he admits that temporary fluctuations in the relative values of goods are determined by demand and its relation to supply. His point is merely that the relative quantity of labor-time necessary for producing a good determines its exchange-value *in the long run*, i.e., under equilibrium conditions. He is justified in 'disregarding' the cost of capital and land because (1) he reduces capital to the labor that is necessary for producing it, and which is stored up in this capital, and (2) he does not see rent as a necessary part of price. Rent is just the cost to the capitalist of a landowner's monopoly over the land. Or, stated more adequately: "I consider [rent] as the result of a partial monopoly, never really regulating price, but rather as the effect of it."[5] In any case, Ricardo thinks there is a need to have a fundamental *basis* for exchange-value—as opposed to relying completely on the fickle relationship between supply and demand, as does Say—and his labor theory of value provides this basis.

However, his simple labor-substance theory of value (which sees in *concrete* labor an inherent "value") has its inadequacies. It is simplistic and cannot explain all economic phenomena. Marx's labor theory of value is the correct one. He discards Ricardo's emphasis on the *actual* labor contained in a

[1] I have to include a bit of communist ideology in every paper.
[2] This statement, however, will be slightly modified later.
[3] David Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, Ch. 1., sec. 1.3.
[4] Ibid., Ch. 4.
[5] Ibid., sec. 20.12.

commodity as the basis of value; instead, Marx sees *abstract*, socially necessary labor as objective economic value. By "abstract" he means simple human labor in general, qualitatively equalized (though not quantitatively, of course) by the constant circulation of commodities. The qualitative differences in labor between, for example, a shoemaker and a wine-grower are nullified in the great equalizer known as the market, which knows only commodities *as commodities*, as values that confront one another only as values and not as different kinds of values.

The term "socially necessary labor" refers to the amount of equalized, abstract labor that is necessary for the production of a given commodity under the given levels of technology in society. If it takes, on average, ten hours to make one pair of shoes, and a slow worker spends twelve hours making them, there is not more labor-value (or "value") in the shoes which have taken longer to make. Hence each individual quantum of labor is not, for Marx, *inherently* valuable; rather, since the purpose of his theory of value is to describe how productive labor is allocated in capitalism, he focuses solely on abstract labor.[1]

This enables him to bypass the question that Ricardo cannot easily answer: how is it possible for commodities to deviate from their "natural" price (or *intrinsic* value) for the great lengths of time that they often do? Marx's answer is simply that commodities do not have some sort of intrinsic value. They are able to deviate from their labor-values because there is no reason why they ever *must return* to these values, as long as they fluctuate around them. He recognizes, with Ricardo, that the interactions between demand and supply largely determine the day-to-day prices of commodities; but he is more concerned with explaining the foundation behind these prices. In rejecting Ricardo's theory, though, he comes up with his own: prices fluctuate around the "production price", which is a purely theoretical number that includes the costs to the capitalist of capital and labor, as well as the amount of surplus value produced by the laborers. This surplus value is equivalent to profit (although not in each individual case; only in the economy as a whole). The capitalist pays the worker for, e.g., six hours of labor, but the worker manufactures so many commodities in that time that he produces more exchange-value than he was paid by the capitalist. He is paid sixty dollars but the commodities he produces are sold for eighty dollars, since they contain the two hours of his labor that went unpaid. These two hours are of course invisible—he does not actually remain in the factory for two hours past the limit of his workday—but they exist all the same. They must, for otherwise (according to Marx) there is no basis for profit.

The labor-value of goods has no direct relation to their use-value, so it has no direct relation to the desires of people for specific goods. It is, nevertheless, the theoretical determination of prices under conditions in which demand equals supply. Many economists would criticize the elusive theory of surplus-value, with its corresponding theory of production prices, for its uselessness in explaining actual prices. They are probably right in their criticism. However, while Marx's theory may not be able to predict short-term economic trends, its virtue lies in its ability to explain the deeper movements of capitalism. Besides, it is not incompatible with the recognition that such factors as psychological preferences and cultural trends determine the short-term movements of the market.

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The Falsity of Malthus's Doctrines

Malthus wrote his *Essay on the Principle of Population* before the Industrial Revolution had overwhelmed the Western world, so any criticism of his doctrine ought to be contextual. It ought to answer two questions: (1) was he right in his own day? and (2) does his theory apply to the contemporary world? Of course, it is conceivable that some of his ideas are correct and others are not. For example, as is evident from the following quotation from *Capital*, Karl Marx accepts that overpopulation may be inevitable in capitalism (insofar as there will always be an industrial reserve army) but does not accept that this is an eternal law of nature or that it has the consequences that Malthus assumed it does:

[1] He also has a theory of complex, as opposed to simple, labor, but it is complicated and I don't fully understand it.

> The conservative interests which Malthus served prevented him from seeing that unlimited prolongation of the working day, combined with an extraordinary development of machinery…inevitably made a great portion of the working class 'redundant'… It was of course far more convenient…to explain this 'overpopulation' by the eternal laws of nature, rather than the merely historical laws of capitalist production.[1]

Nevertheless, this essay will argue that Malthus's theory has always been wrong in all its essential components, and that, additionally, the control of birth rates is *not* the key to economic development. [The topic of this paper was supposed to be "Are birth rates the key to economic development?".]

Before beginning the argument in earnest it will be useful to outline Malthus's general theory. Its core is contained in the following three sentences:

> The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man. Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio.[2]

From these premises he concludes that mankind is not "perfectible"—i.e., that there will never be an ideal state of society with the characteristics of utopian communism. Overpopulation will always weigh us down. It is true that Malthus names two factors that fight against this overpopulation: the positive and the preventive checks.[3] The first includes the automatic regulations of nature, such as disease; the second includes all *voluntary* ways of limiting a family's or a community's population. According to Malthus, these mechanisms are indeed effective, but only in cycles: when a nation's population has increased beyond the level at which everyone can be properly fed, the price of labor will decrease (since there will be an excess of laborers); this will encourage farmers to hire more laborers, thereby increasing the amount of produce in the country; and this, combined with population checks like diseases and smaller families, will balance out the proportion between population and subsistence until the next cycle begins.[4]

This brief analysis can be supplemented with David Ricardo's contention that the more land is used for cultivation, the less produce does it yield.[5] If this is true, it is both an added constraint on population growth and a positive check on overpopulation. Fortunately, now that genetic engineering is becoming an important method of growing food, Ricardo's contention is not much truer than are any of Malthus's ideas.

In the 18th century it may have been the case, as Malthus says, that unvirtuous men often did not get married because they could not tolerate this restriction on their sexual life, and so they pursued their desires with many other single women and thereby increased the population beyond a sustainable level. However, this consideration, if it ever was of any importance, is now of course nullified by birth control in all the wealthy nations.

Another, much more important, aspect of Malthus's theory that can be refuted is the following: "population does invariably increase where there are the means of subsistence".[6] In the United States, where there is manifestly the means of subsistence necessary to support a much larger population, the number of people is only slightly increasing—and mainly because of immigration.[7] On the other hand, in the poverty-stricken country of Somalia, for example, the population is growing at the rate of 3%—more than three

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[1] Karl Marx, *Capital* (London: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 666.
[2] Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, p. 4.
[3] *Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 301.
[4] Ibid., p. 303.
[5] David Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy*, chapter 2, p. 5.
[6] Malthus, op. cit., p. 11.
[7] The website of the World Factbook Demographic Information states that the population growth rate of America is only .91%.

times as fast as in America.[1] No doubt a Malthusian would say that Somalia's population has simply not reached the unsustainable level, so it continues to grow; but the fact remains that population growth-rates in the modern world are precisely the opposite of what Malthus predicted (i.e., more people in poor countries than in rich ones). While not necessarily diminishing the adverse effects of overpopulation, this does invalidate Malthus's hypothesis, since he bases his theory on the assumption that population does increase whenever there is the means for it to do so, and not when there is not the means. In other words, it is conceivable that if the world someday taps and distributes its wealth equally amongst all nations, its population will nonetheless stay at a constant level or even decrease.

In his essay *Population Growth, Economic Growth, and Foreign Aid*, Julian Simon argues against Malthusianism by making a distinction between the short-term and the long-term effects of population growth. In the short-run he admits that having many children may seem harmful, but he contends that in the long-run, the more people there are, the more ideas will circulate and the more *human* resources will be utilized.[2] He gives empirical evidence for this view: in studies undertaken by economists during the 1970s it was discovered that "higher population density in less developed countries is associated with *higher* rates of economic growth".[3] The data here may be misleading, for there could be a third variable affecting the high economic growth (as in the case of Hong Kong, which he cites: its economic success was probably due to its tutelage by Great Britain), but the studies have at least the merit of disproving Malthusianism (insofar as prosperity is shown to be compatible with an incredibly high population, as in Hong Kong).

However, Simon is wrong that birth rates are absolutely decisive for economic growth. It is absurd to believe, as he does,[4] that increasing the size of the multitudes has any kind of effect on the number of brilliant economic ideas that are thought of. These ideas come not from the disease-ridden wasteland of Somalia but from wealthy Western families with excellent educations. It is not for the young adults of poor neighborhoods in India to conjure up ingenious methods of genetically engineering crops; in fact, except on farms or other locations that require large families to do the labor, destitute parents ought not to raise many children solely on the hope that their kids will be able to provide for them in their old age. It is unintelligent on the micro-level, and on the macro-level (which is our main concern here) it is certainly rarely beneficial—usually it only promotes disease and more poverty—and is often quite harmful in less developed countries. India, for instance, clearly has too high a population density, especially in the thousands of villages. Where are all the great economic ideas that Simon expects from the millions of starving 'village idiots'? Evidently his thesis is as wrong as Malthus's.

To conclude, high birth rates have neither an unequivocally negative effect on economic growth nor an unequivocally positive one. Hong Kong is thriving with a dense population, while many African nations with populations just as dense are crumbling. The important variables for economic growth are education, a large amount of capital to begin with, incentives for investment, etc. (all of which Hong Kong had; hence its success). Moreover, Malthusianism—in particular the hypothesis that mankind is forever doomed to undergo periodic oscillations between population-sustainability and population-unsustainability—has been shown to be false. Because wealth does not necessarily provide incentives for high birth rates—indeed, the opposite is apparently the case throughout Europe and America—it is perfectly conceivable that one day mankind will achieve a harmonious proportion between population density and natural resources. Moreover, artificial resources are gradually becoming the norm, to the extent that in the future we might be able to manufacture all our necessities. In other words, Julian Simon may have been right in one important respect: humanity has an infinity of resources at its disposal.

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(I'm including this half-hearted paper here only because it's somewhat informative. Comparative

[1] This is stated on the same website.
[2] Julian Simon, *Population Growth, Economic Growth, and Foreign Aid,* p. 169.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., p. 171.

advantage is no longer the universally important factor in trade that it may have once been, since a country's endowment of natural resources is, perhaps, no longer the main determinant of its exports and imports, but the theory is still useful.)

The Brilliance of Comparative Advantage

Many theories have been devised as explanations of trade, and most of them contain a kernel of truth, for international trade is a complex phenomenon. However, there is a single factor, first articulated by Smith, Ricardo, and John Stuart Mill, that overwhelms and guides all other reasons for trade and causes of existing trade patterns. This paper will argue that the fundamental reason for international trade, and the origin of trade patterns, is comparative advantage.

John Stuart Mill, David Ricardo, and Bertil Ohlin all agree that comparative advantage is the most important reason for international trade. Their definitions of it, however, are rather obscure, so I shall define it myself with the help of an imaginary trading pattern between the United States and Germany, in which the U.S. sells Germany coca-cola in exchange for beer.

Let us suppose that it takes the U.S. one labor-hour to produce a single coca-cola and two labor-hours to produce a can of Budweiser beer. On the other hand, it takes Germany three hours to produce the coke and four hours to produce the beer. This information is summarized in the following table:

	United States	Germany
Coke	1 hour	3 hours
Beer	2 hours	4 hours

The U.S. has an absolute advantage in both goods, for it can make them in a shorter time than Germany can. But its comparative advantage is in coke, for the ratio between hours for coke and hours for beer in America is smaller than the same ratio in Germany: ½ is less than ¾. In America, making coke takes only 50% of the time it takes to make beer, whereas in Germany it takes 75% of the time required to make beer. Hence America is comparatively more efficient at producing coke than Germany is. On the other hand, since beer/coke = 2/1 in the U.S. and 4/3 in Germany, Germany is more efficient at making beer. (In America it takes twice as long to manufacture beer as it does to manufacture coke, whereas in Germany the ratio is only 1.33 to 1.) Each country manufactures the product that has a comparatively low cost. This example supports the traditional definition of comparative advantage—which is that countries specialize in those goods they can produce efficiently—with a concrete example of its usefulness for nations engaged in trade.

The reason comparative advantage is an important law of trade is, as Bertil Ohlin states, that nations have an inequality in their endowment of factors of production. "This inequality," Ohlin continues (p. 34), "is never exactly balanced by the same inequality in demand," so international trade arises. People in one country demand goods that another country produces; hence trade. In other words, it is because of an inequality in the endowment of factors of production that nations specialize in those commodities they can produce efficiently.

This is different from the mercantilist theory of trade, which is founded on the belief that all countries must compete against one another for gold. Mercantilists think that countries should specialize in those commodities that can be exported most often in exchange for gold, because gold is the measure of wealth. That is, whatever commodities are in high demand in other nations should be produced by the home country. This directly contradicts the theory of comparative advantage, which encourages specialization because it is beneficial for *all* parties involved. Countries ought not to specialize in whatever commodities can be exported most frequently, but in the commodities that can be efficiently produced by the available resources. This is because countries are not like corporations that have to compete with one another; the well-being of entire populations depends on international trade, so it is far more logical and beneficial for nations to 'cooperate' than to compete. Hence comparative advantage, unlike mercantilism, is based on

cooperation, or at least on a certain involuntary kind of cooperation.

Ricardo believes that international trade is especially beneficial for both workers and capitalists when it enables products necessary for the workers' subsistence to be priced more cheaply than they are in the domestic economy, for this allows the capitalists to lower wages without hurting the workers. This lowering of wages leads to an increase in profits, because Ricardo argues that the amount of profits ultimately depends only on the level of wages. The lower are wages, the higher are profits. Thus, importing cheap cotton from the United States can indirectly raise the profits of many domestic industries. This lucky byproduct of trade, thinks Ricardo, reinforces the law of comparative advantage's influence in determining trade patterns, for it is in the interest of both workers and capitalists to import from countries that manufacture goods cheaply and efficiently.

Indeed, even John Stuart Mill declares that this is a "direct economical advantage of foreign trade." In his *Principles of Political Economy* he argues the following, which upholds Ricardo's interpretation:

> Commerce is virtually a mode of cheapening production; and in all such cases the consumer is the person ultimately benefited; the dealer, in the end, is sure to get his profit, whether the buyer obtains much or little for his money. This is said without prejudice to the effect which the cheapening of commodities may have in raising profits; in the case when the commodity cheapened, being one of those consumed by labourers, enters into the cost of labour, by which the rate of profit is determined.

Put differently, comparative advantage enables commodities to be purchased more cheaply, which indirectly raises profits (as was explained above).

Another reason for the importance of comparative advantage as a kind of "invisible hand" regulating which countries produce which commodities is suggested by a quotation from the same text:

> The produce of a country exchanges for the produce of other countries, at such values as are required in order that the whole of her exports may exactly pay for the whole of her imports. This law of International Values is but an extension of the more general law of Value, which we called the Equation of Supply and Demand.

Since Mill thinks that exports pay for imports, it is evident that according to his theory countries can buy more imports only if they sell more exports. This will be the case most effectively if nations operate under comparative advantage, for they will thus produce and export what they can manufacture most efficiently. I.e., through comparative advantage they will export more and hence will be able to import poor.

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Explaining Hitler

Germany has suffered more cultural, social, and political agonies than has almost any other great modern nation. A survey of the history of Central Europe reveals an extraordinary number of devastating wars, fewer civil rights for a longer period of time than other comparably 'civilized' European countries, a tendency to resist any kind of progressive change, and, most importantly, the existence of a single people fractured for a thousand years into hundreds of insignificant, competing territories. After the cataclysm of World War I and the failure of the Weimar Republic, the German people, in desperation, rallied around Adolf Hitler. He promised them greatness; he promised them purity; he promised them a thousand-year long golden age when they would be ruled not by the encumbrances of their conscience but by the freedom of their instincts. They blindly followed him until the bitter end. What caused a people as great as the Germans to renounce their collective conscience so completely and to acquiesce to the ravings of a psychopath? Was it the sheer force of his will or did the miserable conditions of their society play a larger

part? This essay will demonstrate the following: the political and cultural history of Germany was an important reason for its acceptance of Hitler as a leader; the material conditions created by World War I and the Great Depression were just as significant as Germany's history in explaining Hitler's accession to power; Hitler's psychological conflicts are an important ingredient in unraveling the mystery of the Holocaust.

Germany was culturally unique in the 1920's—and, indeed, throughout the majority of its history. While other European nations in the 14th through 19th century, notably England and France, forged a national identity, strengthened their economies, conquered foreign peoples, industrialized and revolutionized, Germany struggled to emerge from the Middle Ages. Until the latter half of the 19th century it wasn't even a single political entity. Long after France and England had undergone their industrial revolutions, Germany still had an inordinately large peasant population dispersed through dozens of antagonistic, feudal-like 'states'. Despite its immense intellectual and cultural output—Goethe, Schiller, Kant, Hegel, Freud, Beethoven, Mozart, Bach, Schubert, and Wagner were all from Germany (or Austria)—it lacked a coherent set of values. This phenomenon can be explained by its social, economic and political backwardness, its perennial conflict (after the French Revolution) between intellectual radicals and reactionary social conditions, its constant importation of foreign values that disrupted national unity and frustrated the intellectual elite, and the disillusionment resulting from Germany's resistance to a 19th century liberal-democratic revolution. The importation of foreign values and lack of a tangible national frontier are particularly important in understanding the struggle waged in the German mind. Thus Erikson emphasizes its foreign influences: "from the west, sensual and rational France; from the east, illiterate, spiritual, and dynastic Russia; from the north and northwest, individualistic 'protestantism,' and from the southeast, oriental easygoingness" (Erikson, 348). There was not a national identity. This need for national unity, combined with the intellectual and spiritual tenor of the German people in the 19th century, became "a matter of the *preservation of identity*, and thus a matter of (human) life and death" (Erikson, 348). The need for a national identity was a reflection of the overpowering, largely unconscious, human need to belong to a group. Even after Bismarck united the Germans in the 1800's they lacked a true national identity, because the past was so fragmented and the present was so dominated by conflicting ideologies like socialism, monarchism, liberalism, democracy, rationalism, and romanticism. This young but powerful nation "felt vulnerable in its frontiers and undeveloped in its political core" (Erikson, 348), and after the World War I catastrophe—when Germany was territorially divided up, forced to pay staggering reparations, and compelled to form a comically weak democratic government—the fragile but passionate German pride was dealt a mighty blow from which it would do anything to recover.

To further understand how a man like Hitler could come to power it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the German psyche. Since the German culture's most important legacy was its prodigious output of *isolated* intellectual and artistic geniuses, the typical German felt an "awe of overpowering, lonely, and often tragic greatness, and [was willing] to sacrifice the individual's right in order to emancipate the greatness in his own heart" (Erikson, 350). Often he did not identify with the image of the democratic man—and never to the extent that Americans do. Usually he identified with his mystical idea of the creative, tortured genius who overcomes all obstacles through sheer force of will (hence Nietzsche's and Heidegger's worship of will as an end-in-itself). This partly explains the attraction of Hitler's domineering personality, his indomitable will, and his maniacal self-confidence verging on the worship of himself as God's messenger.

The German adolescent was passionately romantic; his world was filled with mystical entities like Nature, Motherland, and Art (Erikson, 335). He revolted against his harsh father, a man who had "betrayed youth and idealism and....sought refuge in a petty and servile kind of conservatism" (Erikson, 334). The confident adolescent would never submit to this humiliation; he would rather die than become a "mere citizen" (Erikson, 334). His undying love for the Motherland, his naive dream of greatness, his romantic love of everything mystical, governed him—that is, until he was slowly but surely transformed into the spitting image of the man who had so disgusted him when an idealistic youth (i.e. his father). Eventually the German adolescent himself became a "mere citizen", obedient and submissive to the government, a 'failure' who had relinquished his former dreams of grandeur. This "combination of idealistic rebellion and

obedient submission led to a paradox. The German conscience is self-denying and cruel; but its ideals are shifting and, as it were, homeless" (Erikson, 335). The German's cruel conscience leads to harshness with himself and with others, but since this harshness has no "inner authority", no coherent aim, no "coordinated ideals", bitterness, vindictiveness, and fear are the result (Erikson, 336). He is "apt to approach [many destructive aims] with blind conviction [and] cruel self-denial" (Erikson, 336) . The defeat of World War I sharpened this psychological conflict. Hitler, who exploited this conflict and resurrected the adolescent dreams of greatness felt by most Germans, rose to power in the atmosphere of confusion, misery, and anger bred in post-war Germany.

Hitler's regime was founded upon the exploitation of every major problem that had beset Germany for the past hundred years. He extended national frontiers. He declared an end to all the corrupting influences of the West—influences like democracy, socialism, and morality. He told the German nation that it would become an economic power, an intellectual leader, a military machine. He brought "racial purity" by exterminating Jews, thus exploiting the German feeling of vulnerability to foreign influences and lack of a 'pure' national identity. He took advantage of the unconscious adolescent dreams of middle-class Germans by promising national greatness, flaunting his defiance of authority, preaching to his followers that their hatred was justified. His message was all the more effective for its partial liberation of the powerful id and destruction of the cultural superego. In essence, he gave his people what they wanted most: a national identity based on the primacy of the will and the rule of the instincts.

Why did the Germans follow Hitler in his hatred and destruction of the Jewish population? Hitler's personal anti-Semitism is not so unbelievable, since it is universally agreed that the man was a sociopath. But it is more difficult to understand why an entire population would not object to the mass killing of an innocent race. Part of the answer has already been explained: due to its history, the German nation became self-conscious and resistant to foreign influences like the international Jewish religion. It desired national purity and a clear identity, of which one obstacle was Jewry. But this explanation alone is certainly not adequate.

Germany, beset on all sides by "corrupting" influences, struggling to find an identity, was particularly prone to an irrational fear of an ancient people who had so faithfully clung to their identity (Erikson, 354). The ancient heritage, the seemingly indestructible identity, of the Jews was seen by Germans as threatening. This in itself did not have much to do with the social and economic conditions after World War I and during the Great Depression, but it is nevertheless undeniable that many otherwise-decent citizens were engulfed in the unusually strong undercurrent of anti-Semitism during this period. As the German nation was falling to pieces, as unemployment reached record highs, as the atmosphere became thick with hate, the Jews perhaps seemed to flourish (in the eyes of Germans). The many political pamphlets issued during this period illustrate the extent to which anti-Semitism occupied the minds of intelligent citizens. In times of crisis the need for a scapegoat, the need to place the blame on *someone*, is overwhelming. Had the economic, political, and cultural conditions at this time of history been different, Germans never would have allowed the kind of brutality exhibited by the Nazis against Jews to continue.

In fact, Hitler would never have come to power in a more stable society. His doctrines of instinctual freedom, of racial purity, of world domination, of brutal suppression, of total war, would undoubtedly have been rejected by the German nation during a more prosperous time (just as they were ridiculed by most of the world during the 1930's). It is, however, also probable that if Hitler had not been born, even during the Great Depression Germany would not have followed the destructive path it did. This is why we must turn to an analysis of Hitler's psyche.

As an adolescent, Hitler was similar to many of his peers in his fanatical love of the Motherland and disgust with his own harsh but cowardly father. In him, though, the fanaticism was heightened by an unusually strong Oedipus Complex. His tyrannical father was twenty-three years older than his young, pretty mother. Erikson suggests that Hitler substituted peoples and nations for each of his parents, and this theory is indeed corroborated by quotations like the following (taken out of *Mein Kampf*): "*beloved mother*....the *young* Reich," and "the *old Austrian sham* state..." (Erikson, 328). One represents his mother, the other his father. Eventually the Jews became unconsciously identified with his father, thus contributing to his murderous hatred of them.

The use of a scapegoat often conceals feelings of self-hatred and inadequacy. Gordon Allport states that a vicious circle is created by this "projection": "The hated scapegoat is merely a disguise for persistent and unrecognized self-hatred. A vicious circle is established. The more the sufferer hates himself the more he hates the scapegoat, the less sure he is of his innocence; hence, the more guilt he has to project" (Waite, 203). Since Hitler frequently mentions "guilt" and "conscience" in connection with Jews, it seems likely that these terms caused a great deal of self-hatred.

He often declared that the Jews were an inferior race because of their 'disgusting' sexual practices, such as incest. It is ironic that many of his love interests were women who were actually related to him: his niece Geli, his half-sister Angela, and his mother (Waite, 206). This is a clear instance of projection. Furthermore, Hitler often looked at pornographic magazines (Waite, 206), and the fact that he vehemently accused Jews of sexual perversion suggests that he felt guilty about his own perversions.

All his life Hitler had had doubts about his masculinity and physical power (Waite, 210). Thus in 1942, when he realized that even if he did win the war his victory would not be as complete as he had hoped, he made the decision to kill all the Jews of Europe (Waite, 210). The doubts about his strength had reasserted themselves, and by 'defeating' the Jews he would prove to himself that he was in fact "hard as steel" and "brutal." His insecurities were, once again, the cause of his anti-Semitism and brutal war policies.

This very brief analysis of Hitler's psychological conflicts serves the purpose of further demonstrating that the objective social conditions were not the sole cause of Hitler's rise to power, of his anti-Semitism, and of the destructive policies of the Third Reich. The conflicts in his psyche would have dominated him even if Germany had not lost World War I or the Great Depression had not ruined the economy. It is, however, true that Germany's acceptance of Hitler as its leader was largely due to the material and historical conditions of that country.

In conclusion, the psychological character of the German people was an extremely important cause of Hitler's accession to power. The insecurities, conflicts, and utopian dreams which existed in the German psyche are essentially the following: Germany had a history of extreme vulnerability to foreign influences, rivalry amongst its hundreds of tiny states, and backwardness when compared with the West European countries it tried to emulate; since Germany's most important contribution to European culture was its prodigious output of isolated intellectual geniuses, German youth idolized the out-standing, powerful genius—thereby explaining the attraction of Hitler's dynamic personality; the contradictory culture and intellectual climate of this country—sometimes radical, sometimes reactionary—when combined with the failure of the adolescent dreams of greatness, produced a conflicting array of values that caused the German to be harsh with himself and with others, and often to pour all his energies into destructive pursuits like Nazism; the lack of national 'purity', of a national identity, caused Germans to become paranoid of corrupting influences like Judaism, preparing the way for their acquiescence to Hitler's policy of extermination.

[etc.]

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Dialectics in German History

Germany has had a troubled history. Throughout the Middle Ages and early modern times it was fragmented, being a loose confederation of states and principalities called the Holy Roman Empire (an ironic name, for, as Voltaire quipped, it was neither holy nor Roman nor an empire). Two large states, Prussia and Austria, had the most power in the confederation. In the early 1800s Napoleon invaded and ended the empire, but with his defeat at Waterloo and the convening of the Congress of Vienna in 1815, reactionary forces effectively restored Europe to the status quo. This meant that Germany remained fragmented for several more decades. At last, after Prussia's crushing defeat of France in 1870, Bismarck was able to unite the German states for the first time ever. Austria, which had remained Catholic while Prussia had become Protestant (in the 1600s), stayed outside the union. For over seventy years Germany was politically united, but its embrace of militarism and Nazism ultimately led to its partition after World

War II between the communist and capitalist camps. Yet until 1989, when the East and the West were united, West Germany was arguably the most "civilized" society Germany had ever seen. This paper will describe the startling differences between it and its predecessor and then briefly explain them within the broader context of German history.

The most obvious change between the Germany of 1871-1945 and its true successor, West Germany, was the progression from militarism to pacificism. One of the reasons, of course, for this change is simply that West Germany was not allowed to have a military immediately after World War II. This external consideration should not be overemphasized, though, for a military was introduced in 1956.[1] A more significant fact than the temporary banning of the military is that most of the population was opposed to its reintroduction. Despite all the safeguards enacted to prevent the military's abuse of power—e.g., it was to have a "purely defensive role" and be under parliamentary control (Fulbrook, 260); soldiers had the right to refuse an order if "obeying would mean committing a criminal act" (261); conscientious objectors could opt out of military service—the level of opposition to its reinstatement was extremely high. "There were considerable numbers who left to live in West Berlin in order to avoid military service altogether. …Peace movements were large and relatively well-organized…" (261). This was the complete opposite of the country's attitude before the two world wars, when it was a nationalistic state with a strong military. It was, after all, in the process of creating itself after centuries of fragmentation; indeed, a popular slogan before World War I was "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles!", which translates as "Germany matters above all else! We will fight to the death for our beloved homeland!" Militarism evolved to pacifism in the postwar Federal Republic of Germany.

Related to this decline in militarism was the abandonment by Germans of expansionist ambitions. They lived in an even smaller country than the one under Hitler (which had itself been reduced from its former size by the Treaty of Versailles), but they relinquished all desire for "Lebensraum" and revenge. This was, of course, eminently sensible and probably inevitable after the catastrophe of World War II. In any case, nationalism had ceased to be a reality. It had been taken to its logical conclusions under Hitler, and the result had been its demise.

Another departure from tradition was the political pluralism and toleration in West Germany. There was a Social Democratic Party, a Catholic party, a liberal Free Democratic Party, and in the 1980s a Green party. Mary Fulbrook notes that "in practice, while all citizens of course had the right to vote and were free to form pressure groups, some interest groups were, to paraphrase George Orwell, more equal than others" (254). However, this is true of every modern liberal democratic state. Some groups have more power than others. In the 1870s, on the other hand, Bismarck outlawed all socialist parties. And during the 1930s the Nazis effectively outlawed every party except their own. In fact, with the exception of the 1920s—which were an aberration resulting from the Treaty of Versailles—Germany prior to its division was characterized by an extremely powerful executive. First it was Bismarck, then Kaiser Willhelm II, then Hitler. The FRG, on the other hand, had a parliament that enjoyed most of the political power. Coalitions were frequently necessary after elections (254), and the need for coalitions is rarely a symptom of a strong executive branch.

The economy of the FRG was more "liberal" (laissez-faire) than that of its predecessor. The Nazi regime had had ultimate power over the economy: for example, the Reich Food Estate controlled the production, distribution and pricing of foods; after 1936 economic development was directed toward preparation for war (86), and so on. Even under Bismarck, economic development was largely directed and sponsored by the state, though to a lesser extent than it was under Hitler. The reason, or one of them, was that Germany had to compensate for its late industrial beginning—and economic backwardness in comparison with England—by planning and coordinating its efforts at modernization. This seems to suggest that West Germany, whose economy was devastated after World War II, would have followed Bismarck's example in *directing* economic recovery. But it did not. Instead, neo-liberal policies were adopted in the early 1950s: a freer rein was given to market forces, "with the state merely guaranteeing the conditions for productivity but not playing too interventionist a role" (182). Under the Adenauer government the economy achieved outstanding growth, which was surely one of the most important factors in the success of the

[1] Mary Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, p. 260.

postwar democracy.

On the whole, then, the FRG was more liberal and democratic than the old Germany. It was mostly rid of elements of fanaticism, of extreme racism and nationalism, of the inferiority-complex that had plagued old Germany beneath its displays of militancy and arrogance. After the shock of a catastrophic war, 'Germany'—at least its western half—was finally integrated successfully into the international community.

The most immediate cause and effect of this success story was a drastic change in the collective consciousness of the German people. Throughout their history they had been insecure about their position vis-à-vis foreign powers, since under the Holy Roman Empire they had been fragmented into thousands of principalities which had made concerted action impossible and political impotence inevitable. The predictable dialectical reaction to their former weakness was an emphasis on economic and military might under Bismarck—an emphasis that led to the first World War. The humiliating outcome of that war did not humble them but infuriated them; they wanted revenge, wanted to prove their power once again. Thus the old "inferiority-complex" still characterized the collective consciousness of the masses. A surge of unprecedented strength grew out of the rhetoric and policies of the Nazis, yet it too provoked only a terrible cataclysm, a near-apocalypse of the German people. At last, after all the earlier confrontational tendencies of German politics had been taken to the extreme in Nazi doctrines and practices, another dialectical shift occurred: fanaticism was abandoned for moderation. There were no other realistic options. The shift was a result not of economic tendencies, nor of objective structural changes in politics, nor even of conditions imposed by the Allies. It was a natural movement of (collective) consciousness: a movement from extremism and revolution resulting in total collapse to reformism and gradualism.

To conclude, this paper has (1) outlined some major differences between Bismarck/Hitler's Germany and the FRG; and (2) argued that the nature, indeed the existence, of West German democracy can be understood only in the general context of German history, for West Germany was primarily a reaction against this history and the "collective consciousness" it had engendered. The main differences between the two Germanies have been seen to be the greater militarism, nationalism, political repression and economic control (by the government) of the former—or, stated generally, the higher degree of tolerance and individualism in postwar Germany. The country's history had resulted in the suppression of the individual vis-à-vis the state; Hegel's philosophy, which argued that individuals were mere "accidents" in relation to the all-powerful State, had even reified this traditional attitude. The West German attitude, on the other hand, was the opposite: a major dialectical shift had occurred, whose essence was the subordination of the state to the citizen, i.e., the decisive defeat of fascism.

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(The following is an example of the papers I had to write for one of my history classes. We were supposed to choose controversial, indeed ridiculous, thesis statements to argue for and then follow a rigid formula in how we defended them. Three test-cases, three textual analyses (each of which was supposed to address six particular areas of interpretation, such as "symbolism", "internal logic of passage", "link to thesis", "language, tone, style, and bias", etc.), 25 footnotes, three counter-arguments from an imaginary opponent's point of view, 10 new words, a paragraph near the end devoted to personal reflections on the subject's relation to the writer, and so on. I wrote ten such papers that year. In this one I neglected some of the requirements, which made it a little more readable.)

The 1917-38 Revolution: Consolidation of Capitalism in Russia

The Russian Revolutionaries deemed themselves Marxists. In erecting Karl Marx as their idol, they forever associated his name with their revolution. However, one of Marx's cardinal rules in analyzing revolutions was not to trust the intentions of the revolutionaries; the objective historical forces are far more

important.[1] The Russian experience between 1917 and 1938 was not an exception: it was much more a capitalistic, patriotic drive to modernize than a Marxist revolution. Moreover, it was mainly the failure of the international socialist revolution after World War I that caused this degeneration from high Marxist ideals to low capitalist ones—thereby confirming one of the tenets of historical materialism, namely that capitalism is a necessary historical stage unless the proletariat seizes power on an *international* scale prior to the hegemony of bourgeois society.[2] This thesis will be tested by examining (1) Stalin's purges in the 1930s, (2) the 5-year plans, and (3) the Communist Manifesto.

In the 1920s, as it became evident that the European socialist revolution had failed, Stalin adopted the slogan "Socialism in One Country".[3] He would impose on Russia a policy of forced industrialization, evidently because his goal was the survival of the Soviet Union in a hostile capitalist world. Sheila Fitzpatrick summarizes the new attitude succinctly:

> National modernization, not international revolution, was the primary objective of the Soviet Communist Party. The Bolsheviks did not need revolutions in Europe as a prop for their own proletarian revolution. They did not need the goodwill of foreigners—whether revolutionaries or capitalists—to build Soviet power.[4]

Patriotism, modernization, competition—the traditional ideals of capitalist society—had taken the place of internationalism, welfare, and equality. Fitzpatrick's tone is a bit facetious in mimicking the boastful attitude of the Bolsheviks, and she oversimplifies in portraying all of the Bolsheviks as adopting this viewpoint, but most Communists certainly did hold these views in the late 1920s. Their lack of a distinction between revolutionaries and capitalists—evident from the last sentence in the quotation—is a good example of their abandonment of revolutionary ideals. In the Bolsheviks' insistence on designating their drive to modernize as a "proletarian revolution", this term must be interpreted as symbolic of patriotism, of Russia's new identity, of its strength, of a commitment to the supposed virtues of capitalism (such as wealth and national power). Hence the new attitude itself of the Soviet Communists after the failure of international revolution signifies their retreat from Marxism.

Furthermore, the *actions* of these Communists during the 1930s are a concrete instance of this 'retreat'. Stalin's brutality during the five-year plans and the Great Purge in particular was significant. The Great Purge in 1937-1938 methodically eradicated all remaining Old Bolsheviks,[5] all potential radical opposition—Trotskyites, for example, who still supported an international revolution—everyone who could recall the original utopian demands and what they had been reduced to. Fitzpatrick argues that the Great Purge was merely a final expulsion of revolutionary energy,[6] a 'renewal of the revolution', but such an interpretation disregards the purge's policy of obliterating only *Stalin's* opponents. For, to repeat, Stalin's real purpose in these purges was arguably to erase all memory of the demise of the socialist ideal and the erection of a 'nationalist', state-capitalist regime.

On the other hand, the interpretation of the Soviet Union's economy as state capitalism is by no means universally accepted: many scholars,[7] for instance, point out that the goal of the Soviet government was not profit but accumulation. The forms of distribution may have been bourgeois, but the mode of production was not.[8] Furthermore, ideals like wealth and national power are not necessarily capitalist merely because they exist in a capitalist era. They are compatible with genuine socialism (or as genuine as

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[1] Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West, vol. II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", p. 752.
[2] Ibid., "The Communist Manifesto", p. 680.
[3] Sheila Fitzpatrick, The Russian Revolution (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 114.
[4] Ibid., p. 114.
[5] Ibid., p. 165.
[6] Ibid., p. 150.
[7] See Ernest Mandel, Marxist Economic Theory (London: Merlin Press, 1968), pp. 565-575.
[8] Ibid., p. 570.

it can be in only one country). In addition, the collapse of the international revolution after World War I was not necessarily the cause of any shift in attitude that the Communists did experience; probably many of them had been secretly patriotic, hungry for a unique Russian identity, eager to catapult their country into the twentieth century through sheer force of will—a distinctly un-Marxian notion—even prior to 1917. From the very start, it could be argued, socialism served merely as a cloak with which to conceal their longings for a glorious "Mother Russia".

Such an argument, however, disregards the convictions of Lenin, who, in the interests of the international revolution, *wanted* Russia to lose World War I.[1] He despised the autocracy, he despised all Russians who did not despise the autocracy, and he despised Russia's proto-imperialism under Nicholas II.[2] Before the failure of international revolution, Lenin could not be accused of patriotism or capitalist leanings. This excerpt from his Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1920) demonstrates his internationalism:

> The tens of millions of dead and maimed left by the war...open the eyes of the millions and tens of millions of people who are downtrodden, oppressed, deceived and duped by the bourgeoisie with unprecedented rapidity. Thus, out of the universal ruin caused by the war a world-wide revolutionary crisis is arising which, in spite of the protracted and difficult stages it may have to pass, cannot end in any other way than in a proletarian revolution...[3]

The impassioned language ("downtrodden, oppressed, deceived and duped") and angry style of writing hint at Lenin's iron resolve—a resolve that can only be the result of an absolute belief in the rightness of his cause, of his substitute religion (Marxism). He clearly sees the millions of oppressed peoples around the world as symbolic of mankind's potential unity, of an international communism. Thus, prior to the failure of European socialism, Lenin was undoubtedly a dedicated Marxist in every sense of the word.

This is a crucial point, for after the Russian Civil War and the dashed hopes for German socialism, Lenin instituted the free-enterprise policy of NEP.[4] Although this did not signify a conversion to the principles of capitalism, it did betray an unconscious reversion to patriotism, a commitment to consolidating Russian power at all costs. Over time this became the revolutionaries' foremost goal. Stalin's five-year plans[5] were a prolongation of the trend begun with NEP and the re-consolidation of Europe's '*ancien régime*': their only purpose was to modernize the Soviet Union, to raise it to the status of a superpower. The Soviets' ritualistic repetition of the one word 'socialism' was merely a formality and a disguise with which they hid the truth behind the forced collectivization, forced industrialization, obsessive purges, and imperialism (especially after World War II): historical materialism was, indeed, confirmed, but only insofar as Marx had argued that a truly socialist nation was impossible in a world of capitalism, where all nations have to follow capitalist rules in order to survive.[6]

Nevertheless, the Soviets' partial repudiation of socialism cannot simply be assumed. The very essence of socialism as a transition to communism, according to Marx, is its expansion of the productive forces.[7] This is precisely what the five-year plans accomplished. Moreover, true socialism is supposed to build a new man, uncorrupted by greed and excessive self-interest.[8] Stalin admittedly failed at this task, but the creation of a new 'Soviet man' was nonetheless one of his ambitions during the 1930s and the five-year plans. The re-institution of patriotism in and of itself cannot be taken to imply that socialism no longer

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[1] Sheila Fitzpatrick, p. 37.
[2] See Lenin, Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism (New York: International Publishers, 1997).
[3] Ibid., p. 11.
[4] Fitzpatrick, p. 96.
[5] See Kingsbury, An Atlas of Soviet Affairs (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), p. 57 for an overview of major industrial areas in the Soviet Union.
[6] See the Preface to the first Russian Edition of the Communist Manifesto.
[7] David McLellan, Karl Marx: Selected Writings (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 569.
[8] Ibid., p. 569.

existed.

That argument may seem compelling, but I think it is wrong. Marx insisted throughout his life on the international character of socialism, on the mistakenness of blind national loyalty. In the Communist *Manifesto* (1848) he is uncompromising:

> The working men have no country... National differences...are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world-market... The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster.

The language in this brief selection is vague, but obviously Marx believes it part of the communist creed that proletarians must be loyal to their class before being loyal to their country. By "supremacy" of the proletariat he means their ideological control of the population, their political hegemony over their respective nations (and eventually the world), and their control of the planned economy. All three of these conditions were *formally* present in the Soviet Union during the Stalin era, yet intense patriotism, stronger than ever before, had captured the minds of the Russian masses. (Arguably, it was mainly from love of their country that they tolerated Stalin's brutal programs of industrialization.) This seemingly contradictory prevalence of patriotism does not demonstrate that Marx was wrong in his analysis of socialist ideology, for prior to the failure of the international revolution the Communists themselves believed as Marx did (as is evident from the above selection from Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism). Clearly the revolution degenerated into a nationalist struggle *solely for modernization* after Stalin rose to power.

It may be true that the intention behind the five-year plans was to industrialize and not to continue the socialist revolution, but Philip Pomper and Sheila Fitzpatrick would both disagree that this was a sharp deviation from the revolutionaries' earlier intentions.[1] Since the nineteenth century the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia had been acutely aware of Russia's backwardness in comparison with Western Europe: the Decembrists,[2] the Nihilists,[3] the Populists,[4] the Socialist Revolutionary Party,[5] the Mensheviks,[6] and even the Bolsheviks[7] wanted to propel Russia into the modern age without visiting upon its workers the suffering entailed in capitalism. This desire was, one might argue, merely augmented after the collapse of international revolution; it was inherent in the revolutionary movement from its inception.

Indeed, this objection is probably justified. History has a fundamental continuity: in this case, the Decembrists' patriotic dissatisfaction with Russia's backwardness was transmitted to all the generations of revolutionaries up to 1917. Even Lenin was probably susceptible to this divergence from Marxist principles. I myself know how difficult it is to free oneself from all traces of petty patriotism, for despite my qualms with America and the American public, I cannot discard a certain loyalty towards it. It seems ingrained in me, as it is ingrained in most citizens. Lenin, who was such a volatile thinker and politician, must have experienced many episodes of patriotic love even before the fall of Europe's revolution—for instance, in the midst of the Russian Civil War. Hence the thesis must be qualified by saying that the international revolution *intensified* trends, rather than initiating them, among the Bolsheviks toward exclusive preoccupation with patriotism and Russian modernization at the expense of communism.

With the above qualification, then, this paper has corroborated the thesis. The inevitability of the triumph of capitalist ideology in all major countries—unless an early international socialist revolution occurs, which it did not—has been demonstrated: international competitiveness, modernization for the sake of power, extreme patriotism, a desire for the accumulation of personal wealth, and production for production's sake are typical examples of capitalist politics, economics and ideology which survived in

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[1] Cf. Fitzpatrick, p. 9.
[2] Philip Pomper, The Russian Revolutionary Intelligentsia (New York: Thomas Crowell Company, 1970), pp. 9-26.
[3] Ibid., pp. 59-90.
[4] Ibid., pp. 101-140.
[5] Ibid., p. 161.
[6] Ibid., pp. 150-180.
[7] Ibid.

Russia after 1917. As previously stated, the only necessary modification to the thesis, a result of the counter-arguments to the first and third test-cases, is that the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia *throughout its entire history*—and not merely after the consolidation of bourgeois democracy in postwar Europe—was obsessed with the idea of modernization and competition with the West. Thus, Marx's statements regarding the global hegemony of capitalism (especially in light of the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991) have proven prophetic.

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"Does the Republic *provide an account of the development of the self?"*

The *Republic* does provide an account of the development of the self, but this account is very different from the answer that would be given by contemporary psychologists. The reason is that it is a response to a different question. Plato attempts to delineate the various stages that must be passed through for a remarkable person to fulfill himself—i.e., for him to become a philosopher. Thus Plato presupposes that a self, in a sense, already exists; the task for it is to unfold its potentialities. Contemporary psychologists, on the other hand, answer the question "How are selves developed?" by describing the process whereby a child begins to differentiate himself from his environment. On this score the *Republic* is silent.

A better formulation of the question that Plato answers is as follows: "Once a child has learned to distinguish himself from his environment, what is the ideal way in which he should proceed to fulfill all that is latent in him? How is a fully rational individual constructed?" The *Republic* describes how a *finished* self comes into existence—a fully harmonized, integrated personality that is a whole rather than a collection of parts. For example, in the metaphor of the cave it is implied that the people staring at shadows on the wall are unaware of their own potentialities, or of the true nature of the world, and so they are not genuinely harmonized selves. The few who escape to sunlight, however, acquire the ability to see deep within themselves—to rediscover what they have always known on one level, as Plato might put it—and thus to mold their own psyches into developed, self-aware personalities. In Plato's view a person has not realized himself until he has understood himself, and for this reason the end-product of education is the philosopher. This man has attained the height of reason, which is the only faculty that can unify both the spirit and the appetites and thus harmonize the individual *in toto*. Reason is the most completely human faculty; hence it is the faculty that must be most developed if humanity is to realize itself. Therefore the *Republic*, which provides an account of the unfolding of genuine rationality, describes how we can consummate our humanity and thereby *develop* our selves. In brief, it interprets the aforementioned question in a unique way, but answers it adequately all the same.

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Illusory Analogies

Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* undoubtedly borrows a great deal from Honoré de Balzac's *Père Goriot*. Striking parallels exist between many of the characters and much of the symbolism. For example, Razumikhin and Bianchon have similar functions in the two novels: they are simple but intelligent students who serve as foils for the complex, tormented heroes. They are not as ambitious and gold as the main characters: Razumikhin wants only to marry Dumia, and Bianchon will be content if he can eke out an existence for himself in the country (136). Likewise, Svidrigailov and Vautrin both represent the cynical sides of the two main characters, the amoral men whom Raskolnikov and Rastignac might become unless they suppress aspect of themselves. However, we should not get too carried away with the analogies. In spite of some obvious deliberate 'borrowings' on Dostoyevsky's part, many of the similarities are coincidental and superficial. This claim will be examined by outlining first the parallels between Eugene de Rastignac and Raskolnikov and then the significant differences.

The similarities are certainly manifold. Raskolnikov and Rastignac are young law students living in big cities who have recently abandoned their education. They are from poor families in the provinces, and their mothers and sisters depend on them for their future. They are intelligent, bold, ambitious, and calculating yet emotional young men. For instance, Rastignac asks for money from his mother after much deliberation regarding the prerequisites for his entry into society, but when he receives the money he feels "gnawed by a feeling of intolerable heat" and suddenly wants to turn his back on society (97). Similarly, Raskolnikov spends a month calculating every detail of his future crime, but immediately before and after it is committed he succumbs to attacks of depression, doubt, self-contempt and even insanity.

Another analogy is that both men have an innate core of compassion within them, which they begin to lose in their reactions to society's heartlessness. When Sonia enters Raskolnikov's room for the first time, in the middle of his conversation with his family, Raskolnikov "suddenly realized that this downtrodden creature was downtrodden to such a degree that he felt sorry for her. She made a frightened move to run away, and something inside him seemed to heave" (227). This is a perfect example of spontaneous compassion. Yet at other times, when he feels particularly oppressed by his conscience, Raskolnikov hates not only his family but himself and the entire world—which is a reaction to the grinding poverty that surrounds him and the terrible act it has driven him to. Rastignac, too, feels pity for the helpless Victorine, but he flirts with her in spite of the inevitable pain that love will bring her (170, 171). He does so because he thinks it will indirectly benefit him socially: i.e., the necessity for cold-heartedness upon entering the ranks of the aristocracy is what temporarily smothers his instinctive compassion for Victorine.

Further parallels between the two characters can be listed. They each have a friend who is simpler than they, who doesn't know the torment of soaring ambition. They each have their Mephistopheles (Vautrin and Svidrigailov), their cynical well-wisher who encourages them to forsake morality and instead act egoistically—to steal from the world everything it can offer them. They both are repulsed by these two men but feel a kind of fascination with them. (During Raskolnikov's first conversation with Svidrigailov—the conversation which so disgusts him—Dostoyevsky writes that "at one point Raskolnikov thought he might get up and leave and put an end to the interview, but a certain curiosity, even a certain self-interest, kept him awhile" (271).) They both experience a moral dilemma: Eugene wonders whether he would kill a Chinese mandarin if it would make him a rich man (135), and Raskolnikov *does* kill his "mandarin" in order to steal her money.

However, all these similarities disguise real differences in the personalities and *purposes* of the two heroes. Dostoyevsky's thematic concerns are not Balzac's. Intellectual subjects like nihilism, Christianity, redemption, murder, insanity and poverty occupy the Russian novelist, while Balzac mainly wants to describe society in a realistic and uncompromising way by tracing its effects on two 'good' men (Goriot and Eugene). Several facts can be adduced to support this claim. First, unlike Rastignac, Raskolnikov descends to the depths of society and the psyche: he is poorer than Rastignac, he is far more tormented and depressed, he murders two people, he nearly goes insane, he frequently hates the world. It is significant that his ambition, which is to be another Napoleon, is in a sense nobler and greater than Rastignac's (which is to join the aristocracy), and yet that he subsequently falls to the most abject conditions imaginable, which Rastignac does not. This suggests that Dostoyevsky's purpose is to portray the extremes of humanity—in this case, the extremes of an absurdly 'noble' ambition and a complete corruption, of hope and despair. Balzac, on the other hand, neither lets his character descend to such depths nor strive for such heights, and this narrows the scope of his novel. I.e., it results from an intention different from Dostoyevsky's.

Second, in the Epilogue to *Crime and Punishment* Dostoyevsky hints at Raskolnikov's "redemption". "He [Raskolnikov] knew that he was born again. He felt himself completely renewed in his very being… That is the beginning of a new story, though; the story of a man's gradual renewal and rebirth…" (522). On the last page of Balzac's novel, however, there is no hint of a redemption for Rastignac; quite the contrary. It seems as though Eugene is preparing for an assult on society, an irrevocable and permanent entrance into it—and we already know that society is not a heaven but a purgatory. This lends further credence to our claim that the differences between the two novels are more important than the similarities.

Thirdly, poverty does not play the central role in *Père Goriot* that it does in *Crime and Punishment.*

Admittedly, Balzac does constantly describe the miserable conditions of the tenants in Madame Vauquer's lodgings, but in his book poverty has an 'external', inessential air about it. It functions primarily as a contrast to the opulent conditions of the upper class, not as a governing force in its own right. For Raskolnikov, however, it does have this role. Were it not for his destitution he would surely never have killed the pawnbroker woman, for he would not have wanted her money. Moreover, it was actually his apartment that cast him into the dangerous state of mind in which he first contemplated murder—as is hinted at in the following lines spoken by his mother and him: "What a miserable apartment, Rodia. It's like a coffin. I'm sure your apartment is half the reason you're such a melancholic." "Apartment? Yes, the apartment had a lot to do with it… I thought of that too…" (223). Dostoyevsky, therefore, is analyzing the effects of poverty on the mind of an impressionable young man, which is quite different from what Balzac does. (Whenever Eugene notes his poverty it is only to remind himself that he wants to escape it.)

Now that I've touched on some differences in the characters and purposes of the two novels, it is appropriate to outline one of the possible themes Dostoyevsky had in mind when writing his book. (It may be a flawed interpretation, but insofar as it has plausibility it demonstrates the disparity between the authors' conceptions of their novels.) Simply stated, *Crime and Punishment*, unlike *Père Goriot*, raises a murderer and a prostitute on a pedestal and lowers a respectable businessman into the dirt. That is, Raskolnikov and Sonia have an 'instinct for life' in spite of what their actions might suggest. Peter Petrovich, on the other hand, is out for base material gain and is bereft of spiritual impulses. All he cares about are appearances (and, in fact, that's all that Napoleon cared about). The possibility of his salvation is eliminated from the beginning for the simple reason that he doesn't feel the need to be saved. He does not suffer, he does not doubt himself; he is shallow. Raskolnikov and Sonia endure wrenching psychic conflicts, self-contempt, despair, dissatisfaction with existence—and they survive it all because of their faith and passion. Sonia has a simple faith in God, and Raskolnikov has a subtle faith in himself and fate. They're both strong human beings who will appreciate salvation solely because they were baptized in fire. Dostoyevsky's point, I think, is that the only people worthy of salvation are those who desperately want it. Those who do not need it are ordinary. On this view, this reversal of Raskolnikov's judgment regarding the "extraordinary" man, Napoleon was ordinary—even worse than ordinary. He was naturally brutal and did not attempt to do what would have been most difficult, to *overcome* his brutality. This is what Raskolnikov begins to do in the Epilogue when he starts feeling "infinite love" for Sonia.

If that interpretation is sound, *Crime and Punishment* is so different from *Père Goriot* that its parallels shrink virtually to insignificance. Dostoyevsky took some of his characters from Balzac because he thought them to be, almost coincidentally, suitable for his own more disturbing and profound purposes, and not because he intended his novel to have many structural and thematic similarities to Balzac's.

To conclude, this paper has argued that the parallels between the two novels are misleading and fairly empty. Certain analogies between the characters of Raskolnikov and Rastignac have been outlined, and even though they have been seen to be quite striking, I have suggested that they do not indicate fundamental, deeper similarities between the novels. Dostoyevsky merely borrowed some of the character traits and motifs from Balzac, and purely because they happened to suit *his own* purpose. This purpose, unlike Balzac's has mostly to do with 'evil' and redemption, nihilism and Christianity. The themes of *Père Goriot* are less philosophical, more *realistic*. Divine imagery does recur throughout Balzc's novel—such as when Goriot is compared to angels or God and Vautrin to the devil—but the plot arranges itself entirely around 'realistic' matters like a young man's attempt to enter society. In other words, the spiritual imagery is more external to the action than it is in *Crime and Punishment*. For the latter is a novel of ideas, unlike the former.

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A Critique of Psychoanalysis: the Oedipus Complex, the Instincts, and Psychohistory

[…] The scope of this essay is far too limited for it to contain an all-encompassing critique of psychoanalysis, but it is my intention to demonstrate the following: there are not two basic human instincts,

but three—and the concept of the life instinct vs. death instinct is useless and ought to be discarded; the psychoanalytical interpretation of history is useful, but the notion of cultural repressed guilt is flawed; the theory of an Oedipus complex contains several unanswered questions that limit its credibility.

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, stated that there are two basic human instincts. The first is the life instinct (or the libidinal instinct) and the second is the death instinct (roughly equivalent to the aggressive instinct). The "life instinct" is divided into two conflicting forces: the ego-instincts which aim at self-preservation, and the object-instincts which are essentially feelings of love and desire for another person or thing. Aggressiveness was originally thought of as either a particularly violent portion of the sexual instinct or as a product of the conflict between the ego- and object-instincts. After much reflection, however, Freud posited the existence of a death instinct which is in permanent opposition to the life instinct, and which is manifested as aggressiveness and destructiveness. Freud found it difficult to explain the true nature of this death instinct, which he supposed "operated silently within the organism towards its dissolution" (Freud, 78); one could only observe its most obvious effect on the person's behavior: external aggression. "Any restriction of this aggressiveness directed outwards would be bound to increase the self-destruction" (Freud, 78). In other words, Freud believed that the death instinct was a source of aggression in its own right. It was this separate instinct of aggression that caused—through its repression by the superego which resulted in feelings of destructiveness being turned inwards—neuroses and most other psychological problems. The original duality between the object-instincts and ego-instincts was now regarded as essentially irrelevant: the important conflict was that between Eros and the death instinct. Freud regarded the evolution of civilization as "the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species" (Freud, 82). This is, according to him, the meaning of history.

Freud's theory of a life instinct that is divided into an ego- and object-instinct is compelling. An object-instinct (i.e., a sexual or love instinct) undeniably exists, as does a 'staying-alive' instinct. One could protest that this life instinct is more biological than psychological—that it involves the involuntary bodily functions like digestion more than it does the mind—but this objection is not valid. It rests on the failure to recognize that many processes of the subconscious mind exist in order to enable the individual to exist—e.g., the superego forces the necessary reconciliation of the individual with society. However, this objection does hold for the death instinct; it cannot reasonably be asserted that there exist tendencies of the psyche to return to a state of oblivion. There are undoubtedly "tendencies" of the body that lead to death, but these are purely biological. What possible purpose could a psychological death instinct serve? Every other human instinct has a recognizable purpose; this death instinct unnecessarily complicates the situation—an effect that Freud himself would oppose, judging by his statement that simplification is what scientists strive for in their work (Freud, 79). A much more fruitful theory is that there is an aggressive instinct that sometimes conflicts with the superego to such an extent that repression and neurosis are caused. I see no reason to hypothesize the existence of a death instinct; an aggressive instinct is enough to explain neuroses, and its existence is much easier to prove than that of a death instinct. I conclude, therefore, that three separate instincts exist: the sexual instinct, the 'staying-alive' instinct, and the aggressive instinct. (Although aggression can be associated with sexual desire, they are clearly not one and the same.) I have chosen to discard the theory that object-instincts and ego-instincts are both part of a "life" instinct because this 'discarding' simplifies the situation. What is the point of including the object- and ego-instincts under the banner of one 'mighty' instinct? What do sexuality and love (object-instincts) have to do with preserving the existence of the *individual* (ego-instinct)? Especially if they conflict (as Freud himself admitted [Freud, 76]), why are they ultimately part of one larger instinct called "life"? In light of these objections I have decided to abandon both the theory of a life instinct and the theory of a death instinct; they are unnecessary to an understanding of the human psyche.

Another Freudian theory that has aroused controversy is the application of psychoanalysis to groups. Freud believed that cultures generally exhibit the same characteristics as individuals: in a particular culture one can find repressed and repressing forces, a superego (or a group of individuals—often religious—whose high moral standards serve as a superego), suppressed desires and instincts that can be characterized as the id, and an ego which is embodied in the actual 'conscious existence' of the culture.

Thus Judaism, just before the advent of Christianity, was actually a powerful cultural superego; thus the repressed memory of the Hebrews' murder of Moses partially returned with the arrival of Jesus, who was sacrificed (according to Freud) in order to atone for the killing of Moses, a "father figure" (Lecture: "Shaping World History: Power Relations"); thus the Africans in the early 19th century symbolized the repressed cultural "id" of Europe, the feelings and emotions that had been neglected during the Enlightenment (Lecture: "Europeans and Africans"). Undoubtedly this psychoanalytical interpretation of history contains valuable elements. Most cultures do tend to neglect certain aspects of the human experience—e.g., the suppression of overt sexuality in parts of the Middle East—and the characterization of these "tendencies" as repression is more than merely symbolic. Individuals suffer repression through their culture's suppression of emotions and instincts, and the aggregate of these individual repressions can be defined as one giant "cultural" repression. The description of one aspect of a particular society as the "superego"—generally the society's religion—is also justifiable. The people measure themselves with this strict cultural yardstick, and the fact that they often find themselves inadequate reinforces the religion's similarity with the individual's own private superego. Moreover, as was just demonstrated with regard to an individual's repression, the person's own superego is in large part determined by the cultural superego. The "cultural superego" is, therefore, more than an empty, symbolic phrase.

[…]

A famous and controversial aspect of psychoanalysis is the theory of the Oedipus complex, according to which every child is sexually attracted to the parent of the opposite sex and feels aggression toward the other parent. According to Erikson, this aggression is sometimes so extreme that it includes a subconscious desire to murder the parent (Erikson, 87). Freud believed that in prehistoric times the children of tyrannical fathers banded together and murdered the father—and having done so, felt remorse resulting from the ambivalence between their love (the dominant instinct instantly *after* they had killed the father) and their hate (the dominant instinct instantly *before* they had killed the father). This remorse was the origin of the superego; it was also the origin of the sense of guilt, which persisted in each succeeding generation due to the suppression of the aggressiveness aimed at the father (Freud, 95). Whether one actually acts on the impulse to kill the father is not the point; the sense of guilt persists because of the existence of the 'omniscient' superego, which originally was formed through the ambivalence between the love and hate instincts, which are in turn expressed in the Oedipus complex (Freud, 95). As the child gradually encounters society as a whole (i.e., as he loses his complete dependence on the family), his sense of guilt is intensified due to the substitution of the *group* for the *father*. Often this increase of the sense of guilt "reaches heights that the individual finds hard to tolerate" (Freud, 96), perhaps resulting in neuroses, severe depressions, or general psychological unhealthiness. And, as was stated previously, these effects all result from the ambivalence of two instincts—an ambivalence expressed as the Oedipus complex.

It is difficult to criticize a theory based on the intricacies and contradictions of the subconscious mind. Nevertheless, several questions arise as one ponders the "Oedipus complex" theory. First of all, assuming that little girls are "sexually" attracted to their fathers (I have no way of disproving this since I'm not a psychoanalyst or a little girl), where does their sense of guilt come from? If they are attracted to their father then supposedly they do not feel any aggression towards him, so how do they form a superego and a sense of guilt? From the aggression they feel towards their mother? No; Freud believed that the superego originally was formed from the guilt felt by the sons after they had murdered their father. (In other words, the *original* genesis of the superego required more than a simple feeling of aggression toward the parent of the same gender.) However, in prehistoric times girls never banded together to kill their *mother*—and they never banded together to kill their father either. The necessary traumatizing murder never took place for girls. So why did a sense of guilt develop in them? As far as I can tell, Freud never addressed this question in his studies on the origin of the conscience.

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(This next one wasn't a great paper, but there's an insightful argument in the middle of the second paragraph. ("Hobbes seems to rest his theory…" and the following two sentences encapsulate Christine Korsgaard's criticisms of Hobbes. (I hadn't read Korsgaard.))

Is society based on a social contract?

The central tenet of Hobbes' *Leviathan*, the theory on which his entire treatise rests, is that society can be thought of as a contract between its citizens. The desire to protect themselves from the brutality of the state of nature causes people to relinquish many of their natural rights on the condition that everyone does so. They cede their collective power to the sovereign, who is thus able to act in any way he chooses (although his prudence dictates that he govern to the best of his ability). In order to maintain peace and to prevent a disastrous civil war, the citizens must obey the sovereign absolutely. If they rebel against him they are violating the social contract to which they have previously given their consent: they are acting imprudently by tacitly accepting and provoking a return to a state of nature, and they are acting unjustly by endangering their fellow citizens and reneging on 'promises' they have made in the past. Hobbes' account of a social contract at first seems plausible—after all, the chief justification for the state's existence is surely that it provides protection for its citizens—but upon closer analysis one discerns flaws that cannot be satisfactorily addressed within the confines of a social contract theory. Societies cannot be thought of as based on contracts.

Let us for a moment assume that it makes sense to speak of a group of people, formerly living in a state of nature, as gathering together to form a commonwealth. (In other words, it is possible for societies to be founded on a contract.) But does it truly make sense to speak of people who are born in a society as automatically consenting to it simply because it is where they live? These individuals have not *actively* consented to the social contract under which they live; they have passively accepted it. The two are very different. Perhaps they have decided not to rebel solely because they think that such an action would be futile. Hobbes thinks it is in everyone's best interest to abide by the social contract, but unless he refuses to grant them the liberty to decide for themselves whether they consent to this "contract", he cannot force them to or automatically assume that they do so. In fact, Hobbes seems to rest his theory on two arguments: everyone *should* consent to the contract because it is in his best interest, and everyone *does* (actively or passively) in fact consent to the contract—so he/she is being inconsistent if he/she rebels against the sovereign. The first argument is untenable on Hobbes' own grounds: there is no justice, no right or wrong, in the state of nature—and since people clearly cannot consent to a social contract unless they are already in a state of nature, Hobbes cannot say that they have an obligation to do so. (In other words, even people who are born in a commonwealth are living in their own little state of nature until they consent to the social contract, but since they are in a state of nature there is no obligation for them to consent to it.) The second argument has already been countered: people do not in fact assent to the contract merely by living in the society. If they did, after all, then revolutionaries too would be consenting to the contract by virtue of living in the commonwealth. But to believe that is silly. Clearly the notion of "consent" involves more than a passive *acceptance* of a society for the sole reason that there is no place else to go. Furthermore, at what point in their lives would it be official that people had "consented" to the social contract? Certainly not when they are children, for they would not understand what they were agreeing to. When they are adolescents? When they turn twenty-one? Any designation of a specific age is arbitrary. However, this ultimately does not matter, because (as is demonstrated in the following paragraphs) the assumptions on which Hobbes bases his very notion of a social contract are faulty.

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(This is a summary of *The Genealogy of Morals* that I wrote for a sophomore study group.)

<u>First Essay: "Good and Evil", "Good and Bad"</u>

1. The notion of good is derived from what slaves see as evil. Passiveness is good because the masters are strong and "evil". *Ressentiment*, resentment of one's superiors, is the origin of slave morality.
    A. Priests, who were powerless throughout much of history, argued that powerful people were evil.
    B. The Jews were the true founders of slave morality. They converted the idea that goodness is power, beauty, wealth, strength, into the idea that goodness is poverty, misery, weakness, suffering.
    C. The weak believe in free will partly in order to justify their condemnations of the strong.
        a. Thus, people who are too weak to get revenge on someone say that they are "unwilling" to pursue revenge. They are too "good" for that: "They speak of 'loving one's enemies'—and sweat as they do so."
    D. The Kingdom of God and the Judgement Day signify the revenge of the weak on the strong.
2. The masters can define words and create values. They create the conventions that constitute morality.
    A. Unlike the slaves, they start out from a notion of *good* rather than *evil*. *Bad* (not evil) is the derivative concept for them.
    B. The masters instinctively feel that they are good and noble. They affirm life. Slaves and weaklings are seen as bad, pitiable, etc.
3. Slave morality has triumphed over master morality, mainly because historically the oppressed have been far more numerous than the oppressors.

Second Essay: "Guilt", "Bad Conscience" and the Like

1. The conscience is the product of a long historical evolution.
    A. Man had to acquire the ability to make promises, which required the creation of a long-term memory.
    B. The way these capacities developed was through horrible suffering. Torture has been used throughout history as a way of forcing people to accept rules. After thousands of years these rules have been internalized.
2. The idea that punishment should be approximately equal to the magnitude of the transgression arose through the contractual relationship between debtor and creditor.
3. The bad conscience originated when people internalized the cruelty that they could no longer express outwardly upon others. This was especially true of slaves and their ilk.
    A. Christianity and all ascetic, selfless ideals are sublimations of cruelty turned inward.

Third Essay: What is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?

1. Ascetic ideals mean different things for different types of people—artists, philosophers, saints, etc.—but overarching themes can be delineated.
2. Arash's notes:
    A. Asceticism is a way of attaining power over something, namely oneself. It is sublimated cruelty, like the bad conscience.
    B. It is also a way to rationalize and give *meaning* to suffering. We cannot eradicate suffering, but we can *will* it, and thus gain power over it. This is what ascetics do.
3. The ascetic ideal has collapsed. God can't be believed in anymore. This can lead to nihilism, which repudiates absolute values.
    A. Science is based on a faith in truth, so it doesn't *create* values. It presupposes them.

Miscellaneous

1. There is no subject or self, according to Nietzsche. We are our actions.
2. We have no free will, partly because "we" don't even exist. Everything is determined by forces outside our control, such as the unconscious.
3. Nietzsche is a perspectivist, which means he thinks that there are no "facts" in the world, only interpretations. Moreover, an interpretation is based on an interest the person has in it.

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(The following is a paper I wrote for a freshman American lit. class. I had to write two stories in the style of two authors and then discuss them. [I've deleted the stories but kept the subsequent analysis.])

A Comparison Between the Styles of Hemingway and Crane

[…] The exposition of this critique will take the following form. First I will describe the main characteristics of naturalist literature, in particular that of Stephen Crane, whereupon I'll use this outline to analyze the second story. I'll subsequently do the same for Ernest Hemingway's style. In the final section I'll compare the two 'vignettes' I wrote.

Naturalism is, first and foremost, both an extension of realism and a reaction against it. Realism, in turn, is a reaction against industrial capitalism and the social fragmentation it causes. The realists attempt to solve the problems of capitalism within the framework of capitalism itself: their answer to "social fragmentation" and the resultant confusion is to embrace tradition, seek refuge in relationships with others, escape from the marketplace. Furthermore, they believe that escaping the marketplace is the only way to solve the manifold moral dilemmas that arise under capitalism. Commercial success and honesty are incompatible. Thus the realists are at bottom anti-capitalists.

Naturalists, however, reject tradition as a panacea for society's ills. Tradition is, by its very definition, backward, not conducive to progress. Moral dilemmas do not interest them either; their preoccupation is with self-determination, individual autonomy: 'How can I be a person who is in charge of my life? I am subject to forces outside my control; how can I overcome them?' The logic of the transition from realism to naturalism is apparent: a person's first reaction to his ambush by industrial capitalism is to wonder how he can escape it, how he can be reabsorbed into a community; as he begins to realize that capitalism penetrates every nook and cranny of life he grimly accepts his fate and wonders how he can maintain control over himself and participate in capitalism at the same time. Naturalists, as a result, are concerned with immediacy, with life and death, with objectivity, with the deepest truths of existence, rather than with the 'petty' and 'superficial' worries that occupy realists. Society and social conventions are inherently untrue. Reality is war. The only relevant question is how to survive.

Because of their identification of the 'truth' of life with brutality—because of their recognition that the only way to overcome the anarchy and war of capitalism is to rationalize society—naturalists stress the need for intelligence, for great willpower, and for cooperation between individuals who would otherwise be overwhelmed by the marketplace. Individualism is essentially death for the individual. Crane's story "The Open Boat" illustrates this: the men survive their terrible ordeal only through cooperation and intelligence (symbolized by the captain). They subordinate themselves to the common good. The oiler, who signifies mere muscle power, drowns because muscle power is destined to fail in modern society (partly because it is, in a sense, more 'individualistic' than mental power).

As a result of the different axes around which realists and naturalists organize their thoughts, their methods of narration are quite different. Action, not character development, is an obvious characteristic of naturalist fiction. Visual perspective is important. The plot is generally narrated 'objectively', rather than from the point of view of the characters. Dialogue is not especially important. The characters are narrow, not well-rounded, often unintelligent (which is what destroys them in the end). Immediacy is crucial to Crane's style. Sexual desire, an impersonal force that often prevents us from determining ourselves, is seen in a bad light. This last is particularly important because it has nothing to do with capitalism: it signifies the entrance of our instincts and our past into the naturalist scheme. "The traditions of the dead generations weigh like an incubus upon the brain of the living": this was said by Karl Marx, but it could just as well have been said by Stephen Crane or Frank Norris. The past—to a degree synonymous with our instincts—determines who we are to an extraordinary, unknown extent. It is impossible to resist sex and our other instincts; our only hope is to reason with them.

With the above in mind I will clarify how Peter's story relates to Crane's naturalism. In the beginning, the city is essentially symbolic of capitalism; the sky is symbolic of nature, the past, our instincts. The two oppose each other. In some respects they are incompatible. Capitalism, despite the obvious

presence of instincts as determining factors of our humanity, tends to overpower our instincts, sublimate them, sometimes exterminate them. The city is a greater threat to our self-determination than is nature, 'the sky'. This is basically consistent with Crane's decision to have Maggie succumb to poverty in "Maggie: A Girl of the Streets", whereas in "The Open Boat" the men are able to conquer nature by cooperating with one another. Humanity is represented by bacteria, which, of course, are not capable of self-determination.

Peter, we find out a few paragraphs later, is obsessed with Chigusa—or, more specifically, with her beauty. Thus the sexual instinct in all its adolescent fury makes its appearance. Rap music suddenly blows by, reminding us that even those people who are rebelling against the world are simultaneously contributing to its disintegrating effects on autonomy, on privacy, on the ability to think. The rappers are symbolic of *non-cooperation*, of pointless individualistic self-sacrifice, of the primacy of muscle power and its substitution for mental power.

At this point Peter enters the underground world of poverty. Poverty is the prime evil of capitalism: it does not merely control people; it destroys them. The parallel with "Maggie: A Girl of the Streets" is obvious. It incorporates and amplifies everything that the naturalists hate: self-determination is non-existent; people hate each other and isolate themselves from one another; mental power becomes useless—muscle power is worshiped and admired (cf. the fight scenes in "Maggie: A Girl of the Streets"); the instincts find their ultimate expression in poverty; the one redeeming quality of sex—procreation—is transformed into an evil as it increases everyone's misery. Even Peter, otherwise not a vile character, feels himself compelled to show *hardness* so as to create a distance between himself and the beggars.

Fréderic Chopin makes a brief appearance at this juncture. He symbolizes humanity's potential. He *is* humanity. Despair—which reaches its most perfect pinnacle in Chopin's inspired creations—is to be desired so long as it is the *beautiful* kind of despair, the kind that is heedless of capitalism and the ugliness of the world, the kind that loves itself, the *self-determining* kind. This is the only time in the story when Peter makes a semi-conscious attempt at autonomy, and, significantly, he fails. He seeks a form of salvation in beauty, but, tragically, he discovers that poverty is ultimately more powerful even than music.

At last Peter reaches his own street. It is presumably a kind of poor suburb, one in which all of the houses are similar and plain. Akin to Levittown, I suppose. Its primary function is to remind us that one does not have to live in poverty to be stultified. The people in this neighborhood are not autonomous or diverse: they are mediocre through and through. As he approaches his house Peter reflects on his father's job and concludes that a job at Stop & Shop would solve their problems. Once again, because of capitalism his thoughts are confined to a predetermined realm, a kingdom of mental slavery worse than any physical one: he cannot realize that Stop & Shop would only trap him and his father in a different way.

And now we come upon the three "hooligans", representative of children of the fashionable bourgeois world. Their idol is Puff Daddy; they mimic everything about him. They cannot think for themselves, but they unconsciously recognize that something is missing from their lives. So instead of confronting this "something" head-on they develop a "thin veneer of apathy". And now we get to the climax of the story. All of the naturalists' preoccupations come to the fore: sex governs the boys' thoughts, provoking them into a brutal fight—an analogue of life. Instead of reasoning with their instincts and cooperating with each other they resort to muscle power, which in the end destroys them (although after the story finishes). The fight ends, but Peter continues to be governed by his passions: he alternates between hatred of Chigusa and infatuation with her.

His conversation with Chigusa is the dénouement. Brutal truth slaps him in the face when he realizes that passion is not always a two-way street—but it is still just as crushing as it was before, if not more so! Peter cannot escape from his fate if he lets himself be determined by his sexual passion, which of course he is too weak-willed to resist. The ironic thing is that he *thinks* Chigusa is everything to him....but he is utterly wrong. The story ends with a final insult hurled at him by the clouds: while they may be weaker than the city, they are certainly stronger than him. Even the *clouds* are more autonomous than poor Peter!

The methods used to narrate this story are akin to those used by Stephen Crane. The diction in the dialogue is similar to his; the characters are superficial and stupid; the reader is on a different plane than the characters, who are trapped in their own little hell; action and immediacy are predominant throughout; sympathy is looked upon harshly, seen as a 'sham'; visual perspective is quite important; passages of

description alternate with brief passages of dialogue; we are witnesses to the characters' thought-processes, but through a thin veil of objectivity.

Modernism is, in a sense, a reaction against naturalism and a partial return to realism—although it transcends the latter. (It is dangerous to oversimplify, but one can hardly deny that history tends to progress in a dialectical fashion.) The 1920's were a conservative period, characterized by xenophobia and nativism. Immigration had gotten out of hand; many people wanted to "purify" America (as if the 'damage' wasn't already done) by expelling immigrants and embracing American culture. The chaos of World War I, the Gilded Age, industrialization and capitalism in general causes modernists to ask the questions, "Who am I? Do I have a real identity?" They argued that the answers to these questions are hidden in our collective heritage. Culture, tradition, provides life with meaning. The modern world they see as inauthentic, lacking culture, imitative—but since it is fundamentally culture that makes us who we are, it is only if we get in touch with our heritage that we can rediscover ourselves.

This statement must be qualified, though. The modern world is the world of the masses. It is not enough simply to rediscover one's heritage; one must at the same time find an antidote to all the boils that have erupted under the skin of society: excessive material wealth, commerce, rule by the masses, sex. Sex corrupts society by blurring the distinctions between various cultures and thus distancing people from their heritage. In fact, the only time it can be excused is when it is a form of incest: i.e., when it takes place between people of the same race or ethnicity or heritage. Commerce, on the other hand, has a disintegrating effect in another way as well: it undermines "paternal benevolence" by intermixing cultures and introducing vulgar *money*. It panders to the masses, who in turn ensure that society is in a constant flux between everything except those values which modernists cherish. The only way to escape the meaninglessness of modern life is to isolate oneself or, if necessary, to be friends only with people who understand and belong to one's own culture. Thus the philosophy of modernist literature can perhaps be summed up in two words: *No trespassing*.

Different authors confront the issue of heritage in different ways. Willa Cather, for example, believes that America's true culture is that of the Native Americans. Ernest Hemingway, on the other hand, does not seem especially enraptured with Native American culture; he is more impressed with the idea that one's heritage is simply one's home. Thus Nick Adams 'becomes himself' when he returns home in the "Big Two-Hearted River" stories.

Ernest Hemingway, particularly in his book *In Our Time*, writes in a disjointed, simplistic manner that is meant to evoke the disjointed quality of modern life. His novels are barren of unnecessary words, infinitely subtle, a reaction against the pointless extravagances of 20th century America. He does not devote passages to the description of his characters; we are supposed to learn about them almost inadvertently as the yarn unfolds. Hemingway's most famous characteristic is his machismo. This quality of his is misunderstood, however. Bull-fighting, for example, is an admirable activity not because it is gory and "cool" to watch, but because it is an integral part of Spanish culture. Again, violent crime—which most would see as "masculine" in some fundamental way—is seen by Hemingway as absolutely inexcusable because it is random and senseless. Consistent with his machismo is a certain misogyny that tends to forbid men to have sex with women or even to be friends with them. Women, who represent sex, instill corrupting influences into cultures.

With the above considerations in mind I shall describe how the first story is relevant to Hemingway and modernism in general. Upon referring to the first sentence a question pops into my mind: what do peaches symbolize? Anything? As far as I can recall, I introduced them in the first sentence only because they were a completely random method of description, one which Hemingway might have used. Chopin, on the other hand, has a definite significance. Throughout the story he symbolizes culture, our heritage, the modernist ideal. The fact that Peter associates Chopin with a Japanese girl demonstrates how misguided he is, how unaware he is of his culture and heritage.

The Mustang and the rap music represent money, sex, women, material extravagance, the masses, the disjointedness of American life. At this point Peter reflects on his father and the job he has; his lack of respect for him is apparent. What causes this lack of respect? Commerce and sex. It is reminiscent of

Hemingway's conviction that the modern world abolishes paternal benevolence and children's respect for their fathers. This impression is reinforced when we learn that Peter's mother had been involved in an affair with another man just before she died. Sex contributes to the break-up of families and the humiliation of fathers.

Peter's fight with the three boys includes a certain amount of machismo, but it is the harmful, pointless machismo to which Hemingway is averse. The fight is supposed to be representative of the predominance of crime in contemporary life, of the absence of culture. The three boys run away before they have a chance to get seriously hurt, but this simply shows what a thin line many people walk between violent life and violent death. After he shows his father a complete lack of respect by telling him to "go away", Peter thinks about Chopin once again (specifically, the sliver of paradise called *Berceuse*). He is semi-conscious that Chopin represents culture, salvation, his heritage, but his preoccupation with sex is such that he basically continues to identify Chopin with Chigusa—an impostor, a foreigner, a *trespasser*. In their short, ludicrously simplistic conversation Chigusa rejects him, but he does not seem to appreciate the significance of this. He is too preoccupied with her legs. The story ends as he enters his house to "piddle" on his Playstation, thus confirming the defeat of Chopin/culture and the victory of the masses/modern life.

With regard to Hemingway's specific literary style: the language in my little fantasy is very unembellished; the perspective is that of the main character (a device Hemingway uses sometimes); and Peter's thoughts are often disjointed and senseless.

In conclusion, Crane and Hemingway are very different writers, though they do have a few similarities. In general, their different philosophies are manifested in their different styles. At the risk of repetition, Crane's concern with immediacy, life and death, truth, brutality, poverty, self-determination, mental vs. muscle power, and powerful instincts like sex translates into a literary style characterized by action, violence, objectivity, paucity of sophisticated dialogue, lengthy descriptions of slum life, feeble-minded characters incapable of autonomy, a lack of character development, and the frequent presence of irresistible forces outside of our control. Hemingway's fixation on culture, heritage, paternalism, nativism, the lack of harmony in modern life, and the bad effects of commercialism, material extravagances, and sex translates into stories containing subtle but important descriptions of people's environments, an emphasis on the need for 'benevolent paternalism', a concern with the corrupting influences of 'outsiders', a lack of unity in characters' thoughts and the events to which they are reactions, an aversion to unnecessary words, and a tendency to denigrate women. The few similarities and many differences between Stephen Crane and Ernest Hemingway are evident. But it is also evident that the literature of these two men shares one overriding obsession: a hatred of capitalism and all its attendant evils. Perhaps their criticisms could apply to all historical epochs, but they apply with special force to the modern world, with its amplification of *every* divisive influence in history. Whether or not Crane and Hemingway consciously subscribed to the conviction, their philosophies in fact boil down to three words: *Death to capitalism*.

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November 27 usw.

Hitlers are rare only because few people have Hitler's talent for oratory. Himmlers are not rare at all. And Eichmanns are everywhere. [I don't mean people actually carrying out those roles, of course. I mean people who *could* easily carry them out if the conditions arose.]

I'm in such a great mood. Life is beautiful, it really is. Or at least it can be. How magical is it that human beings exist! There could have been nothing, but instead there is something.

I should have asked that waitress at Soho out for drinks. She looked exquisite. I think I'll go back in a few days. I'm going to start making a real effort (as opposed to mainly a web-based effort) to meet women in Boston. I've made a few new friends recently at bars etc.—went out with two females tonight—but I have to meet more beauties.

Reading Paul Krugman's *Peddling Prosperity: Economic Sense and Nonsense in the Age of Diminished Expectations*. Krugman is an ass in many ways, but his writings are informative.

I keep thinking that philosophy remains my true calling, and that by applying to programs in American History I'm making a bad mistake.

The main reason I'll never be happy is that there isn't a God. There isn't a "truth" in matters of value. No such thing as greatness or genius, because these things are values made into objective truths, which is impossible. But that's what I necessarily strive for, greatness and genius. So I'm plagued by this cognitive dissonance, this disjunct between my more primitive ambitious side, which can't be reasoned with, and my knowledgeable side, my reason (which tells me that my ambitions are impossible, indeed meaningless). If there were a God I could strive for his approval, which would be approval from reality and would thus objectively confirm my value. But because there isn't I'm destined to be restless and unsatisfied. Similarly, the absence of God, or of objective truth in matters of value, means that there's no point in seeking fame if that's done for the sake of confirming your value to yourself. Recognition (or fame, etc.) proves nothing, because there's nothing to prove. In short, God's nonexistence means that there's nothing outside of self-respect, no reality that one's self-respect can 'correspond to' or be justified by. Nothing can show that one's self-respect is justified (i.e., that one's belief in one's value is true), because there is no "truth" relevant to it. But we all think there is and we all act on that belief, trying so very very hard to prove our worth, or bolster our self-esteem by bringing our self-image in line with notions of the ideal human being. But there is no ideal in the sense we think, in the sense Schopenhauer thought or Goethe or Nietzsche thought or Salieri (in the movie) thought. It's all a mere projection, this value-talk (praising, condemning); it's all an illusion. But it's a psychologically inescapable one. Hence the Wise Man's cognitive dissonance.

All there is is people admiring you or you admiring yourself or whatever. There's only subjectivity here, no objectivity. There's only the attitudes, just attitudes and more attitudes and no firm ground anywhere and just a floating around in the fog of *attitudes*, a bottomless pit. It's maddening! I have to *stand* somewhere—I can't keep hovering here my whole life, it takes too much effort—but there's no ground anywhere! And I'm going to keep living my life trying to achieve certainty (repose) in this one area like everyone else but there can be no repose because we humans are irrelevant and superfluous like everything else in the universe. There is no meaning, it's all *de trop*.

I don't care whether you value me, yet, of course, I do. And I can't escape this sense of Someone or Something behind me or hidden from me whose existence provides my existence with sense and meaning, something smiling down on me, but there's nothing and we're all alone in the most horrifying cosmic way because there is no metaphysical truth. Only atoms and supernovae and galaxies and black holes and randomness.

I'm committed to the aesthetic ideal of the personality, but in reality we might as well live like Cro-Magnons. Happiness is all that matters, all that exists. The aesthetic ideal is a pointless source of torment.

(That's another, closely related, source of dissonance. I can't get myself to relinquish the ideal of "perfection", of the well-rounded etc. person who overcomes difficulties, but I know this ideal is merely a romance. It's a romance story. Yet it's extraordinarily attractive, and most great minds have been attracted to it. But really, happiness is all that should matter, brute animal happiness—and this heroic person is decidedly not happy in that sense. –Two ideals, one heroic the other "bourgeois", one unreal the other real.)

December 2

Gina called me. She was crying, terribly upset about her ex-boyfriend (the American I mentioned before) whom she'd seen the previous night. He'd told her there's no connection between them anymore, which broke her heart. So she cried and tried to talk and I listened and comforted her. This 24-year-old guy sounds like a total dick, amazingly inconsiderate and insensitive, but she still loves him even though she

doesn't want to and doesn't know why. Apparently she hardly ever even talks to him, just listens as he talks about stuff that doesn't interest her because they have nothing in common.

It's a horrible experience to have one's views on life and women and men and love confirmed day after day. Love is nothing, it has no validity or meaning, it's just an incomprehensible unconscious reaction to another person based on such meaningless phenomena as "chemistry" (—that's a play on words, haha). How can one take love seriously when women fall in desperate love with cruel narcissists and have no attraction to decent men? There's nothing intellectual or 'true' about love; it doesn't reveal one's worth or the worth of the loved one, indeed usually the worth of the loved one is inversely proportional to the degree of love felt for him (because the qualities that induce love, especially in women, are at best unrelated to, and at worst destructive of, the qualities that determine human worth, such as compassion, empathy, a feeling for beauty, and insight into the human condition). Generally I have more respect for people who are loners than for people who have lots of friends and lovers.

I must admit, though, that it's faintly painful to hear a girl talk about her love for, her near-infatuation with, some other guy as she thinks of you merely as a good friend. In some way, after all, she values that other guy more than she values you, no matter how much she may know on an intellectual level that as a person he's inferior to you. Her unconscious, unrational side values him more, but as luck would have it, the unconscious, unrational side is the one that people want to be valued by. It's more validating, because it has more force.

And so, well, you could lament the fact that no women love you, and you could envy those guys who have that intangible *je ne sais quoi* that attracts females to them,[1] but in so doing you'd be misunderstanding the nature of love. We're programmed to desire it because we implicitly think it shows one's worth, but of course it doesn't. In taking it seriously, you're misunderstanding it. None of this shit should be taken seriously, it's all a meaningless game. Caring about one's reception by others is stupid. The best thing to do is just not to think about it, to follow the dictates of reason. This is, admittedly, a defense-mechanism, for otherwise you'd be crushed by the despair of loneliness and the despair of passionately needing love and needing to be loved and knowing that the best years of your life are passing by as you sit here holding an empty conversation with the shadows in your mind, but at least it's a logically justifiable defense-mechanism. Anyhow, it's the only way to survive in this farce of a world.

Just think of Byron. (Always think of Byron when you feel yourself starting to take things seriously.) He used females for his pleasure and then forgot about them, ignoring their continued infatuation with him, because he knew it meant nothing. He knew you simply have to take from life what you can get before darkness falls again.

Glenn Gould intrigues me. I've been watching videos of him on YouTube. His talent was inexplicable. He said he didn't understand pianists who practiced hours every day, doing technical exercises and whatnot; he himself simply looked over a piece of music several times and was then able to play it. The speed, too, at which he was able to play defies belief. Intellectually he was very impressive: in his interviews he was unfailingly articulate, analytical, philosophical, and charming. On the other hand, so many of his opinions were outrageous. Like his statement that Mozart died too late, not too early! And his interpretations of many composers, especially the romantic ones, were just plain ridiculous, despite his profound understanding of music. He could have been the greatest pianist in history if he had only been more sympathetic in his interpretations, less idiosyncratic—downright weird, in fact. He wasn't flexible; he imposed his own ideas on the music rather than letting it speak for itself—letting its intrinsic 'spirit' come out through his playing. (Such a spirit does exist. There is a good way and a bad way of playing Chopin, a faithful way and an unfaithful way. Even his Beethoven and Mozart interpretations are too often incongruous with the music itself.) The major exception, of course, is his Bach interpretations, which typically bring out the contrapuntalism quite well. He could defend his idiosyncratic practices intelligently, for example by saying that there is no point in following the conventional interpretations anymore because they have been done so often and it's time for something new to be said. But there are ways to say novel

[1] What is it? Pheromones? Excessive self-confidence? A twofold insensitivity? What is it??

things without being downright perverse. Indeed, every great performer inevitably has his own interpretation of the music, so it isn't quite true to say that there are only two kinds of interpretations, orthodox and unorthodox.

On the other hand, there is some value in pushing the envelope. I heard him play the theme of the first movement of Mozart's A major sonata in the most maddeningly slow way, so slow that he himself admitted it was maddening. Moreover, it was obviously contrary to the spirit of the music. But he defended it by saying that, when followed by his interpretations of the variations, it brought out the unity of the piece—much as his second recording of the Goldberg variations, unique occasionally in its slow tempo, brought out the unity of the entire piece. Is this a sufficient justification? I suppose you have to take it on a case-by-case basis. It depends just how "maddening" the tempo is. If it can, after all, be listened to or gotten used to, then maybe he's right. But I still think you should pay at least some heed to the composer's intentions.

At any rate, Gould had an unparalleled intellectual and musical integrity. He refused to compromise.

It's incredible how you get the sense when watching him play that he isn't so much *performing* as *thinking*. He's thinking through his fingers. If Chopin was the poet of the piano, then Gould was the piano's philosopher.

(He was also, by the way, a magician. He never hit wrong notes. How that's possible I don't know.)

I've said it before and I'll say it again: my 'romantic' experiences have poisoned me. They've made my soul the counterpart of Viktor Yushchenko's post-poisoned face, all pockmarked and bruised.

December 4 usw.

Here's a great quotation from Benjamin Disraeli: "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damn lies, and statistics." For a minute after I read that I couldn't stop laughing. I love the distinction between lies and damn lies, especially because the respectable Benjamin Disraeli is the one who made it. "That's a *damn lie*!"

Excellent advice from Bob Dylan: don't let people see your true, your deepest self-conception. Don't put it out there but keep it locked up inside you—keep your innermost dreams and longings hidden inside you—because if you expose them to the light of day they'll be killed. People will kill them, by ridiculing them or analyzing them or just looking askance at them or ignoring them. *L'enfer, c'est les autres*.

I read *A Christmas Carol* for a book club meeting I'm going to in a couple days. Ernest Hemingway wrote in *A Moveable Feast*, in reference to Dostoyevsky, "How can such a bad writer, such an incredibly bad writer, make you *feel* so much?!" I could say the same about Dickens, about this book. Slapdashily written but full of feeling that charms the tears out of your eyes. (Astonishing how I wept reading it.)

There's a spontaneity in Dickens' writing that makes up for all its flaws. A spontaneity and an irresistible energy. In the end this may be more conducive to the making of great literature than all the fine and careful craftsmanship of contemporary writers.

December 9

I don't know how or when, but somewhere along the line I developed moderate social skills. I became somewhat of a talker. I'm fairly comfortable now in most situations, and people seem to like me. A refreshing change!

Went to a club with Gina, saw the dregs of the species yet again. But got drunk and danced, sort of fun.

Krugman's insistence that low productivity in the U.S. relative to other countries is irrelevant to the U.S.'s standard of living seems very implausible. His treatment of the whole issue is glib and unconvincing. How can it be irrelevant whether Japanese auto companies, because of their higher productivity and thus lower prices, are able to outsell American companies and gain larger market shares? First of all, because of their high productivity, Japanese companies can afford to pay their workers higher wages than American companies. Admittedly, in this case the Japanese advantage may be irrelevant to the relatively low American standard of living. (It isn't because of high Japanese productivity but because of their own low productivity that American companies have to pay their workers a low wage in order to make profits and stay competitive. Japanese practices, it seems, shouldn't affect this; it's purely a domestic problem, as Krugman says.) But in another way, Japanese practices are relevant. For if foreign companies can export their products at a comparatively low price (because of their high productivity), surely American companies will be driven out of the market, resulting in the laying-off of American workers and a decline in the U.S. standard of living.

I hate economics.

Reading *Freakonomics*, the insanely popular book on "the hidden side of everything", whatever that means. My first question is how the author, Steven Levitt, got away with being so unbearably and comically self-congratulatory. I can't even read this shit, it's fucking nauseating. "The most brilliant young economist—at least, the one so deemed by his elders—…", etc. etc. And there's a loathsome cutesiness to the writing, reflected in the title itself. (That title was almost enough to keep me from reading the book. But I wanted to see what all the hype was about.) The whole thing is decidedly pop cultural, i.e., shallow, glib, unserious, cloying, tongue-in-cheek, *clever*.

Schopenhauer was an optimist compared to me. For example, he had faith in truth—not only in its existence ('Truth is cut-and-dried, absolute, objective') but also in its eventual triumph. He comforted himself for his loneliness by believing that truth would inevitably win out, that someday he would be vindicated. I have no such faith, though. I'm more inclined towards the opposite view. Nietzsche, too, was an optimist: he still had his metaphysical article of faith and criterion for value, namely the will to power and the idea of eternal recurrence. He had his Archimedes' point. And he told himself he had value because, he thought, he had the strongest will to power in history. But I have seen through all the pageantry, and I know hedonism is the highest thing in the world. Mere *happiness* is what matters. Life has no grandeur, no metaphysical grandeur.

I've had enough of that book.

At the book club meeting I was reminded once again that intellectuals are usually silly, boring people. How much more fun I had at the Korean language meeting yesterday! Pleasant people, unpretentious, not in love with hearing themselves talk. Intellectuals should be banished to Siberia.

December 10

Reading Lessing's *Laocoön: An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry.*

The Plato paper I wrote at UMSL is a little silly. Shallow. Not at all Marxian, or 'Barrington Moorean', insofar as it directly compares ideas separated by two millennia of historical evolution.

Since at least 2000 B.C. (in certain societies), labor was seen as something undignified, something only the lower classes did. Noble people didn't labor but concerned themselves with philosophy, religion, politics, and war. Only in the last three hundred years has labor acquired dignity. It is now something inherently beautiful, life-affirming, noble. (Think of Tolstoy's paeans to the peasantry, or even Rousseau's respect for the simple, uncorrupted life.) What an incredible change!! It was recognized by Hegel and Marx; they were the first to understand what had happened. But only Marx understood *how* it had happened.

December 14, 15

Went to an EF "prom" last night with students and teachers. Exceptionally fun because of vodka tonics, a drink I love. Afterwards went back to EF with the students and hung out with Masato (my ex-student) and two of his Korean friends for hours. Great people.

Against idealism.— When I cry while listening to music or reading something memorable, I'm not crying because the beauty has overwhelmed me (although it has). My crying is just a strange psychological and biological reaction I'm having to an unusual kind of stimulus. Nevertheless, it *is* beautiful, and how could I live without this joy? This painful sort of joy is the only life I know.

Reading Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays*. It's wonderful to think that the publication (in 1966) of a book full of critical essays like this could have been seen as an important cultural event. What a different time that was from the present! Norman Mailer said that the Sixties were the only time he had ever felt like a human being.

Nowadays—jeez, nowadays it feels like the only thing that matters is, well, me. I am the tradition. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Lately a bunch of ideas have been fermenting in my head; they're not quite ripe yet, but when they are I'll write another paper that I'll send to journals for no reason in particular. –What sustains me is the knowledge that this civilization cannot last forever, and that when it dies something more healthy will take its place. And then I'll be read, posthumously but all the more reverentially for that.

To deeply understand the meaning (or lack thereof) of "value"—the absence here of truth, objectivity, and meaning itself—gives you a profound sort of wisdom and equanimity, because you understand there is little point in striving for recognition. Those Carlylean artists and philosophers who exalted "heroes" and derided "philistines" were themselves, in a way, philistines, in that they were prisoners of conventional thinking. Or, said differently, the most "heroic" person, the one who best fulfills the ideals of these worshipful thinkers, is precisely he who *rejects* their ideals, because he has overcome the last and most hallowed bastion of superstition, namely ideas about value. In detaching himself from the universal frenzy over "heroes" and "great men", he has triumphed over his very humanity and realized Truth.

The title essay ("Against Interpretation") provokes thoughts, but I don't find it convincing. From a philosophical perspective its brevity is lamentable, though from a literary perspective it isn't. (Sontag was a writer, not a thinker.) Interpretation is indeed "the revenge of the intellect upon art"—or it can be called such—but more generally it is simply a way of digesting the artwork, gleaning from it as much as possible. Digestion is not only an intellectual process; it is a human one. Art is a way of reworking and digesting the world; interpretation is a way of reworking and digesting art. The mind needs to assimilate, and as long as it has this need, interpretation will be inevitable. Why should intellectual assimilation be a vice if artistic assimilation is a virtue? Sure, interpretations can be facile and dull, in fact they usually are; but this is not an argument against interpretation itself. If done intelligently it can enhance one's experience of the work, bring out features that might have been overlooked otherwise and thus assist one in doing precisely what Sontag favors, which is to examine and appreciate the "sensuous surface" of art. The surface, after all, cannot be wholly separated from thematic elements below the surface, elements relating to "content" (as opposed to form, which is the surface). Sontag's seeming belief that it can—that themes and symbols and "meanings" and the like should not be the critic's concern—in fact upholds the dualism she deplores, the form/content dualism. (She says "Focus on form, not content!", while professing to believe that "ultimately" there is no difference between form and content.) Anyway, a literary criticism that devoted itself to describing and critiquing *form*, or the "sensuous surface" (such as techniques of narration, rhyme schemes, meter, the architecture of a particular novel) and said not a word about content would soon grow tiresome. Arguably the most interesting type of criticism is of content. Lukács certainly thought so. He thought that analyzing a work's content is enlightening in far more ways than analyzing its form is—in artistic ways, sociological ways, philosophical ways, psychological and biographical ways, historical and political ways.

Exclusive concern with form is a bourgeois decadence, for it turns your eye away from the work's interaction with social conditions. It's an anti-holistic way of thinking, a one-sided, virtually solipsistic, way of experiencing culture.

Besides, I'm skeptical of substantive rules on how people "ought" to do literary criticism. How can those rules be justified? All you can say is that critics ought to be erudite, patient, etc. I don't think Lukács is right either that there is a "good" way and a "bad" way of critiquing artworks (aside from obvious general considerations); there are simply different ways, different avenues toward assimilation.

"Interpretation, based on the highly dubious theory that a work of art is composed of items of content, violates art. It makes art into an article for use, for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories." Well, okay, if you put it like that it sounds bad. But that's a tendentious way of putting it. Really good interpretation can be almost as subtle and profound as the artwork itself.

Insofar as Sontag's position is compelling, it's because of our intuition that an artwork is a finished sort of thing, a 'superfluous', purely 'aesthetic' thing. The artist puts it out there for you to look at and admire. Staying on the level of form is the most blatant way of staying on the level of the exclusively aesthetic.

One has to give her credit for admitting in the Afterword, written in 1996, that she was partly wrong in her early criticisms of the Marxist, humanistic literary critics (Lukács, Benjamin, Adorno, *et al*). She had scolded them for being critical of most contemporary art, for being "insensitive to most of the interesting and creative features of contemporary culture in non-socialist countries". They criticized a lot of modern art as decadent, alienated, un-historical, allegorical, unrealistic, shallow, consumerist. They thought it was symptomatic of a culture in decline, while earlier realism was strong and vibrant, and morally uplifting. She thought they overemphasized the importance of content at the expense of form, and that if they corrected this one-sidedness they might better understand contemporary art, which has "rediscovered the power of the formal properties of art". "Even form is viewed by the historicist critics as a kind of content." (As well it should be, since their approach is holistic. One might almost call their approach sociological, as opposed to merely aesthetic. Everything in society is an expression of that society; everything is content.) But in the Afterword she admits that "we live in a time which is experienced as the end—more exactly, just past the end—of every ideal. (And therefore of culture: there is no possibility of true culture without altruism.)… [Back in the Sixties, even, something was happening,] something that it would not be an exaggeration to call a sea-change in the whole culture, a transvaluation of values—for which there are many names. Barbarism is one name for what was taking over. Let's use Nietzsche's term: we had entered, really entered, the age of nihilism." So in the end she agreed with the Marxist critics, who evidently had a keener sense of what was happening than she did. She even adopted their moralistic language, in direct opposition to her earlier self: "there is no possibility of true culture without altruism".

December 16

Sontag strikes me as a brilliant dilettante.

Speaking of which: I might be tempted to try my hand at art criticism if the activity didn't seem so masturbatory. Except when it's done on an extremely high level, a quasi-philosophical level (searching for insights into the human situation), criticism is pretentious and self-involved.

No doubt its 'self-referential' nature grows out of the self-referentiality of art itself, and is to that extent appropriate. Sontag is probably right that art, as art, exists in its own autonomous mental space, that insofar as we criticize it from a moral or sociological viewpoint we are not really criticizing it *as art*.[1] "The fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose." (Wilde.) The aesthetic experience refers only to itself. Cf. Kant. Still, something repels me about criticism as undertaken by most critics. Including

[1] Maybe that's wrong, though. Both Sontag's and Lukács's positions have appeal for me. –Well, Lukács's has more appeal, but I understand Sontag's too.

Sontag. It seems somehow decadent, cloistered, disengaged, Ivory Tower-esque, not to mention boastful and self-promoting. ('Look how many books I've read! Look how many parallels I can draw between all these works!')

Maybe that's all bullshit. Maybe what it comes down to is that criticism just doesn't interest me (most of the time). *L'art pour l'art*, and the sort of criticism engendered by that attitude, doesn't interest me much. I seek general truths in everything; but most artistic criticism is entirely specific, as if it's an end in itself.

Besides, surely the 'healthier' attitude is the Marxist, humanistic one, which sees art as an expression of social life and ideally a means of ennoblement. This is Nietzsche's position too. Its criterion for artistic worth isn't really a 'moral' one, as Sontag says accusingly, but a 'spiritual' one. Moral rightness and wrongness have nothing to do with it; what matters is the degree to which art enhances the feeling of living, the feeling of power. Does the work promote (or embody) a holistic engagement with life or a one-sided retreat from it? Is it unifying or is it fragmenting? Cross-cultural or parochial?

The humanistic attitude is more naïve, and thus more healthy, than Sontag's sophisticated 'formalist' attitude. Her approach, I suspect, allows for more subtle aesthetic analysis (which one might uncharitably call aesthetic casuistry) than does the humanistic one, but a tendency towards over-analysis is a symptom of a bored, worn-out civilization. Formalism is high intellectualism, and intellectualism, as she herself admits, betokens sickness, if not necessarily on the individual's level than certainly on the cultural level. (One of the manifestations of our culture's unhappiness and boredom is its over-intellectualization of things.)

Undoubtedly a work of art should be evaluated by other standards too, 'formal' standards etc. But it's a mistake to disregard the 'moral' or 'spiritual' standards. These are, after all, important in determining the work's longevity. (Bach will always be listened to and worshiped; Schoenberg will not. Eugene O'Neill will probably have more staying-power than Samuel Beckett. The former are uplifting and universal, the latter alienated and period-specific.) And everyone knows that longevity is one of the criteria for artistic greatness. Therefore, so are the humanistic criteria that Sontag deprecates.

As I read the essay "On Style" I can't help thinking "Too much intellectualism!" I'm suspicious of all this rationalizing, this overly subtle reasoning in defense of formalism. The naïve, instinctive view is usually the best.

I'm reading W. W. Tarn's *Hellenistic Civilization*. Also Howard Sherman and Gary Evans' textbook *Macroeconomics: Keynesian, Monetarist, and Marxist Views*.

I desperately need an organizing principle for my mental life. All I know is that reading is truly pleasurable only if I see a way to use the book (whatever it is) in my own writing. Maybe I should focus intensely on economics and see if anything comes of it.

Thoughtful comments from Sontag (at the beginning of an essay on Lévi-Strauss):

> Most serious thought in our time struggles with the feeling of homelessness. The felt unreliability of human experience brought about by the inhuman acceleration of historical change has led every sensitive modern mind to the recording of some kind of nausea, of intellectual vertigo. And the only way to cure this spiritual nausea seems to be, at least initially, to exacerbate it. Modern thought is pledged to a kind of applied Hegelianism: seeking its Self in its Other. Europe seeks itself in the exotic—in Asia, in the Middle East, among pre-literate peoples, in a mythic America; a fatigued rationality seeks itself in the impersonal energies of sexual ecstasy or drugs; consciousness seeks its meaning in unconsciousness; humanistic problems seek their oblivion in scientific 'value neutrality' and quantification. The 'other' is experienced as a harsh purification of the 'self'. But at the same time the 'self' is busily colonizing all strange domains of experience. Modern sensibility moves between two seemingly contradictory but actually related impulses:

surrender to the exotic, the strange, the other; and the domestication of the exotic, chiefly through science.

In defense of Rousseau.— "There were nearly twenty thousand of the naked, indigent, nomadic, handsome Nambikwaras in 1915, when they were first visited by white missionaries; when Lévi-Strauss arrived in 1938 there were no more than two thousand of them; today they are miserable, ugly, syphilitic, and almost extinct."

December 17

Buddhism and Epicureanism exhibit amazing similarities, for instance in their attitudes toward suffering and happiness. As I noted a long time ago, the Epicurean goal, like the Buddhist, is to be free of pain. Pleasure—not active pleasure but passive pleasure, the pleasure of tranquility—"repose, freedom from passions, desires, needs, above all absence of pain; the keyword of man's effort was [for Epicurus] *ataraxia*, escape from worry. Virtue was vital, but not, as the Stoics thought, for its own sake—that had no meaning. It was vital because without it happiness could not be. This constituted a doctrine of renunciation, a renunciation of active effort and positive happiness, and [Epicurus's] followers formed little isles of quietude apart, bound together by the friendship he so stressed. Except that they lived among their fellows and enjoyed family life, one might call them, spiritually, the first monks. They never influenced the great world; they had no wish to." This is also similar to Taoism, the retreat to nature. Stoicism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Epicureanism were all founded at about the same time, in or around the Hellenistic age, a time of increasing individualism, insecurity, the collapse of the age-old safe community. It was proto-globalization back then. An age of extremes, and of remarkable originality in all areas of culture. Aside from the ferment of philosophy, art, and science, there were, for example, the first attempts at real social revolution. In the third century B.C. the gap between rich and poor was growing wider as trade expanded and prosperity spread across the Mediterranean and western Asia. There was insane misery (e.g. among the slaves working in mines—slavery was the real economic foundation of the age) and obscene wealth. So "the fourth century was already obsessed by the fear of social revolution—one reason why the well-to-do turned to Macedonia as champion of the existing order. In the treaties between Alexander and the cities of the League of Corinth it was provided that Macedonia and the League should repress, in any League city, any movement for abolition of debt, division of land, confiscation of personal property, or liberation of slaves to assist the revolution; the constitution of Demetrius' revived League of 303 contained similar provisions. The revolution therefore had now a general program under four heads. The poor desired the land, but with the small men of every type the driving force was debt; simple communities may be patient of rude conditions of life, but they always hate the creditor… From quite another angle, philosophy made its contribution to the subject: the Stoic insistence on equality and brotherhood sank into men's souls, and inspired visions of something better than the existing order. Some took refuge from civilization in drawing fancy pictures of virtuous barbarians living according to nature, prototypes of Tacitus' *Germania* [and Rousseau's noble savage]; and Utopias began to appear… True modern Utopias [were] located on islands in the Indian Ocean; and in Iambulus' great Sun-state Communism appears full grown. The people were equal in all respects, even in wisdom; they lived in social bodies or 'systems' in which all worked equally and equally shared the produce; they escaped 'slavery to the means of production' because the island fortunately bore crops, partly by itself, all the year round; each in turn filled every duty from servant to governor, the governor of each system being the oldest member; there was thus no place for wealth, ambition, or learning, the foes of equality, or for class war, because there were no classes. Above all things the people prized Homonoia and were united in concord and love. What Iambulus and his fellows really aimed at was the abolition of that class war whose horrors many Greeks had seen… [In 279 there was a "proletarian" revolt, when Apollodorus of Cassandreia] made himself tyrant, tortured the wealthy, and gave part of their property to his followers…". There were short-lived revolutions in Sparta, indeed throughout the whole area, finally ending only under Roman rule.

Here are further useful remarks: "Man as a political animal, a fraction of the *polis* or self-governing city-state, had ended with Aristotle; with Alexander begins man as an individual. This individual needed to consider both the regulation of his own life and also his relations with the other individuals who with him composed the 'inhabited world'. To meet the former need there arose the philosophies of conduct [Stoicism, Cynicism, Epicureanism, etc.], to meet the latter certain new ideas of human brotherhood. These originated on the day—one of the critical moments of history—when, at a banquet at Opis, Alexander prayed for a union of hearts (*homonoia*) among all peoples and a joint commonwealth of Macedonians and Persians; he was the first to transcend national boundaries and to envisage, however imperfectly, a brotherhood of man in which there should be neither Greek nor barbarian. The Stoic philosophy was quick to grasp the concept, and Zeno, in his Ideal State, exhibited a resplendent hope which has never quite left men since: he dreamt of a world which should no longer be separate states, but one great City under one divine law, where all were citizens and members one of another, bound together, not by human laws, but their own willing consent, or (as he phrased it) by Love… Even the practical world was influenced, in spite of itself, by Zeno's dream, through the insistence of Zeno's school on certain notions of equality and brotherhood and by the fact that the 'inhabited world' or *oecumene* now began to be treated as a whole. The stranger could no longer be *ipso facto* an enemy, and Homonoia received perhaps more tributes than any other Hellenistic concept. Certain ideas of the interrelation of states, apart from actual treaties, began to emerge; and the germs of modern international law go back to third century Stoicism."

Those few centuries in that small area on the globe, from the Mediterranean Sea to India and up into China with Confucius, were the most creative in history—possibly excepting the Western centuries since the 1400s, ending sometime after the middle of the twentieth century, when everything became sick. For it doesn't seem like there's much more to say or do, except in science.

Anyway, we see that a rise in trade between different parts of the world is what fosters cultural creativity. Where there is "globalization", or rather the *onset* of "globalization" (internationalization), there is creative ferment; and where globalization proceeds too far and the status quo hardens a bit too much, making the world seem too 'vast' and the individual too small, there is cultural death. The society may linger, as it did in the later, cultureless, alienated stages of the western Roman Empire and as our own will surely do for at least a few more decades—because what causes societal collapse isn't a change in consciousness but a dramatic change in material conditions—but *culturally* there is death.

One can say that a culture has died or is about to die when it seems like there is no longer a clear direction to progress but everything is just a big ocean into which you cast your little contributions—your little books, your little songs, your little artworks—and then watch them immediately drift out to sea and get lost on the horizon, eclipsed by the new contributions of the next moment. The fads. There is no line of, say, philosophical evolution, artistic development, which you can further; there is just a big inhuman ocean of *everything*, all mixed up with no order. That's when sophistication has proceeded so far as to become cynicism on a collective scale. And cynicism is the end.

December 18

Youth and resilience. Amazing how I can feel like a boy again just by being with a delightful girl. I went bowling with Masato, Jenny, and Yuna (the two Korean girls I mentioned); very fun, good clean fun. And Jenny, the pretty one, is fond of me and isn't afraid to show it with her touchy-feeliness. Goddammit I wish she weren't leaving soon. I can see myself loving her, yes truly, there's that possibility.

What I love about baroque music is its virility. Handel, Bach, Vivaldi. The most virile music ever written. The magnificent vitality of the age is reflected in the self-confidence of its music.

Talleyrand once said that people who hadn't lived in the eighteenth century before the French Revolution could never know the sweetness of life.

Forerunner of Nietzsche's "eternal return": according to the Stoics, "the universe, at the end of every world-period—a recurring cycle of enormous length—was reabsorbed into the divine Fire, and then started afresh to run an exact repetition of its course. Ages hence another Socrates would teach in another

Athens, and there was no new thing under the sun; all had happened before, and history merely repeated itself…".

"Virtue was the central point of Stoic ethics. On this Zeno was uncompromising; the intention to do evil, he said, was equivalent to doing it… Man's means of getting into harmony with God were wisdom and virtue, and in both these matters progress was possible; the Stoic was thus led to examine the progress he was making, and the idea arose of conscious moral growth. Moreover the Supreme Power had had forethought for men, and they had an aid on the path; there now first appeared in philosophy the conception, heretofore a popular one, of conscience. Conscience and duty were the cornerstones of Stoic ethics. –The influence of those ethics on the world and on Christianity was to be great." How modern all this is! "The true Stoic was captain of his soul, sufficient to himself. And he was master of his fate; fate could not hurt him, for what it brought him was what he would have chosen. [*Amor fati*. Whatever happens is necessary. (Determinism.) The Supreme Power is all-wise and all-virtuous, and whatever happens is for the best. You shouldn't grieve for your son's death, etc., because everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. So, to be happy you simply have to want and appreciate what you have, and renounce all other desires. Again, Buddhism etc.] But to all people, strong and weak, it had a message, its insistence on the things of the soul. Whatever the world did to you, in one sphere the world had no power: you could withdraw into your own soul, and there find peace; for none could harm you *there* but yourself." Given all the philosophies and thought-systems that were circulating in the Hellenistic world, Christianity was not as original as people think. The individual, and even love (to a limited extent), had been discovered long before Jesus came along.

"It has been truly said that in the religious sphere the only vital things in Hellenism were philosophy and the Oriental religions. Twilight was indeed falling on the Olympians, in spite of external show… Many things conspired to decide the fate of the Olympians. They belonged to, and fell with, the city-state; philosophy killed them for the educated, individualism for the common man; he was no longer part of the city, content with whatever its corporate worship might be, but wanted something that spoke to himself." "A dominant factor of the time was the striving after one god… This might take the form of the national god claiming to be god of the whole earth, as Yahweh in Judaea; but another movement, very typically Hellenistic, was a great expansion of syncretism, the equation or fusion of one god with another as being alike forms of the one divinity behind them. Men would worship any god impartially [since they were merely forms of one deity]…". An important new god, by the way, was Fortune. That says it all, doesn't it?

For the common man, as the Olympians faded "a more real religious feeling began to develop, and the appeal of the intimate and confident oriental worships became irresistible. In this sphere the East led its [military] conqueror captive; and though the movement did not perhaps culminate till after the Christian era, it was gathering strength all through the Hellenistic period." The number of gods from region to region, or city to city, is altogether bewildering—as is the amount of borrowing between cultures, the ten thousand intersections. It was a frenzied time, maybe even more bewildering and confusing (for the participants) than our own time. For nothing remotely like it had ever happened.

Our dating system should really start around 500 B.C.

Astrology spread everywhere, as did, therefore, the idea of Fate (for your fate was governed by the stars), but I won't get into that. Magic too was very popular in the second century B.C., the sort of primitive magic discussed by Huizinga, which is supposed to give people power over the gods and fate and the elements. "Its root idea was that by employing proper means the hands of gods could be *forced*; a formula to compel the Moon says, 'You have to do it, whether you like it or not'. The god or demon could be compelled to alter your fate." It's the magical power of the *word*, that ancient belief and practice. "Your best hold over a demon was to utter his true name…". Philosophy and poetry themselves were, after all, remnants of ancient word-rituals—riddles especially—so it's only natural that magic itself would linger from time immemorial. A sort of vulgarized magic was popular amongst the masses, as a way "to get some material thing you wanted".

But more interesting are the Hellenistic mystery-religions, out of which Christianity developed. "Magic might alter your fate, but initiation [into a particular religion] lifted you above the sphere of Fate

altogether. The god could and would look after his own, and though the stars might work their will on your body, your soul, even in this life, was beyond their reach, and after death would rise above their spheres to the sphere of the divine and dwell with the gods; you were in fact 'saved'. The universal basis of the mystery-religions was that you sought this *soteria*, 'salvation', by personal union with a savior god who had himself died and risen again. To employ the well-known Orphic phrase, you ceased to be a worshipper, a rod-bearer, and became a Bacchus—you were as the god himself. Mysteries were an old phenomenon in Greece; what was new was the tremendous appeal which, with the breakdown of Greek religion, they now made… These religions brought to the aspirant a new sense of sin, a new conception of holiness; and the rite of initiation, culminating in the knowledge that you were saved, was undoubtedly an intense emotional experience. From the second century onwards men's religious sense deepened. There were many mystery-religions, each claiming to possess the original initiation and to be of universal force; each claimed that the others merely worshipped its own god under other names. The older forms persisted, and certain phrases of Orphism, with its religious ecstasy and its ideas of purity and the antagonism of flesh and spirit, obtained considerable vogue… In some mysteries the initiates witnessed the death and resurrection of the god, and heard the priest pronounce the message of consolation: 'Be of good cheer, mystae, the god is saved; even so shall we after our troubles find salvation'." The Egyptian mystery-religion was the most popular, and Isis was *the* goddess of the age. The cult spread everywhere, especially, it seems, among women. For "Isis was a phenomenon which had not appeared in the Mediterranean in historical times, but which, having once appeared, has never since quitted it: she was the woman's goddess. Half the human race had been badly off for a friend at the court of Heaven. Athena was uniquely a man's goddess; and if women cried to Artemis in childbirth it was largely because there was no one else. To the ordinary decent woman the main facts of life were that she was wife and mother; she had little in common with a virgin warrior who patronized art, or a virgin huntress, cold as her own moon; little with the fertility goddess of an old matriarchal age, and even less with Aphrodite, though doubtless people can spiritualize anything. But now she had a friend, and the greatest of them all; one who had been wife and mother as she was, one who had suffered as she might suffer; one who understood. Isis herself leaves no doubt on the point: she is the 'glory of women', who gives them 'equal power with men'. 'I am Isis' runs her creed, the Isis-hymn found at Ios; 'I am she whom women call goddess. I ordained that women should be loved by men; I brought wife and husband together, and invented the marriage contract. I ordained that women should bear children, and that children should love their parents…'. In that strength Isis swept the Mediterranean. When finally Christianity triumphed, and Zeus and Apollo, Sarapis and the star-gods, were hurled from their seats, Isis alone in some sense survived the universal fall: the cult of the Virgin had been introduced before the Serapeum was sacked, and Isis's devotees passed quietly over to the worship of another Mother—how quietly sometimes may be seen from this, that various instances are said to be known of her statues afterwards serving as images of the Madonna."

I'll quote Tarn's summary of his discussion. "The interest of Hellenistic religions is that they depict the world in which Christianity arose. That world provided more than the medium of the common civilization in which Christianity was to spread; it to some extent paved the way. Men were seeking the unity which must lie behind the different deities and their worships, even as Alexander had once called all men sons of one Father; while the terrible upheaval of the Roman civil wars greatly strengthened the already strong desire for a savior, for whom many were already looking beyond the sphere of mankind. But though Hellenism supplied the longing, and probably in some a quickened sense of purity (even if only ceremonial) and of faith, there were to be two vital things in the new religion which were not in Hellenism, quite apart from the figure of the Founder, Whose spirit Hellenism did not touch. Plato had declared that all souls were immortal, and a few Jews had grasped the same general idea, while the Stoics gave the soul of the virtuous a limited survival till the end of the world-period; but to Hellenism generally immortality was only for certain benefactors of their kind or the initiates in some mystery-religion. It was not for the mass of men, as their epitaphs reveal pathetically enough. And of all the Hellenistic creeds, none was based on love of humanity; none had any message for the poor and the wretched, the publican and the sinner. Stoicism came nearest; it did transvaluate some earthly values, and Zeno, at least, gave offense by not repelling the poor and the squalid who came to him; but it had no place for love, and it scarcely met the misery of the world

to tell the slave in the mines that if he would only think aright he would be happy. Those who labored and were heavy laden were to welcome a different hope from any which Hellenism could offer."

December 20

It isn't surprising that Ecclesiastes was written in the second or third century B.C., when the world was in flux.

"In one respect the Jew and the Greek had a parallel experience. As the political decline of the self-governing city-state after Alexander made individualism inevitable, so the destruction of the old national State and of the Temple had made it inevitable for the Jew: the idea of a blessed future for Israel was ultimately replaced by that of a blessed future for the Israelite. And as the Greek had his problems of individualism and universalism, so, on other lines, had the Jew: would Yahweh extend the hope of that blessed future to all mankind? Were men indeed to be brothers, not (as the Stoics hoped) in this world, but nevertheless at the end? In the second century the idea of personal immortality, or rather of resurrection from the dead, became firmly established in certain Jewish circles. It is strange that some should have believed that the Jew took his belief in immortality from the Greek, seeing that the Hellenistic Greek had no such belief: certain people might attain to immortality, but certain people only; the normal reward of a man was only everlasting remembrance. The vexed question of what, if anything, the Jews borrowed from Persia cannot be discussed here. More probably they evolved this belief for themselves, though opinions have differed as to their reasons. It has been attributed to Antiochus' persecution (for unless the dead lived again, the upholder of the Law who suffered martyrdom was worse off than the ungodly who conformed), to the growing consciousness that the Messianic kingdom could not be realized in this world, and to the growing experience of personal communion with God. *All* these reasons may well have contributed to the new belief."

Reading Maxim Gorky's *My Apprenticeship*, the second book of his three-volume autobiography.

The economic system of Egypt under the Ptolemies was "the most thoroughgoing system of State nationalization known prior to the twentieth century, unless conceivably the Peruvian". But it had a lot in common with feudalism too. Slaves were relatively rare; serfs and poor peasants were far more common. (Labor was so cheap and abundant that there was no need for slaves.) "As regards the fellahin [the peasants], the basis of the system was that each man had his 'own place', which he could not leave except by order or permission." The king, who was also an Egyptian god, officially owned all the land in the country, but he granted some of it to soldiers and officials, and there were temple lands too (which were, however, mostly cultivated by the king). "The entire land was divided into two categories only: King's land in the narrower sense, i.e. land in hand, and land in grant. King's land was farmed for Ptolemy by the 'royal peasants', the 'king's people'. These formed a substantial part of the fellahin population of the villages, and their ancestors had cultivated King's land for untold centuries. Many were small peasants, but among them were farmers of some substance. …As they could not leave their villages, were compelled to cultivate their land and could be compelled to cultivate more if ground fell vacant (for the State was built up on the maxim that the king's cultivation must be carried on), could have their animals requisitioned, gave compulsory labor on the dykes and canals, and could be turned out at any time, they differed little in fact from serfs." The king was in charge of most business too, and reaped the profits. The whole extensively bureaucratized system was quite oppressive, and full-blown labor strikes were not uncommon. Miners, quarry-men, boatman, workers of all sorts, royal peasants, retailers, police, even officials went on strike. "Workmen's strikes were not strikes for better wages or conditions, for there were none to be got; they were the product of blank despair… The men had one weapon which officialdom feared: they could throw the machine out of gear by leaving their 'own place'. A strike notice reads: 'We are worn out; we will run away'; and they usually took refuge in some temple with the right of asylum. Asylum has been called the Egyptians' *Habeas Corpus*: Ptolemy's power ended at the precinct wall, and the worried officials had no weapon but persuasion or some concession with which to get the men back to their 'own place'." I could keep quoting but that seems silly, seeing as I have the book.

Incidentally, the social position of women improved during the Hellenistic era. "Women could now get all the education they wanted; many philosophers numbered women among their hearers… Poetesses began to appear again in the third century… Some writers obviously wrote for female readers. Women now received citizenship and proxeny from other cities for the same services as men; and the women magistrates of the Roman period date back at any rate to the first century B.C., when a woman, Phile, held the highest office at Priene and built a new aqueduct and reservoir. The relations between the sexes became less cramped and more natural. Women founded clubs and took part in club life, though naturally to a less extent than men; there were clubs for women only at Athens and Alexandria."

Infanticide was very common. "More than one daughter was practically never reared, bearing out Poseidippus' statement that 'even a rich man always exposes a daughter'." Except among the Jews, no moral objections were raised against infanticide till under the Empire some Stoics spoke out against it. In any case, the Greek population declined as the age progressed, since more and more families refused to have more than one or two children.

December 21

Gorky's book is a reminder that there are two kinds of poverty, the humanizing and the dehumanizing kind. Sapa's poverty is humanizing, capitalism's poverty is not. Poverty in itself is neither one nor the other; what matter are the structural conditions in which it exists. –Reading Moore's book was useful inasmuch as it reminded me of the value of Marxist clichés, which are actually not clichés but pithy insights. Society's institutional matrix is what matters most, not its "culture" or ideologies, and certainly not its general "poverty" or "wealth" or "extensive division of labor"—phenomena that can be manifested in a thousand different concrete ways.

Excerpts from the last chapter of Moore's book: "…In considering the forces that aided or prevented the landed upper classes from taking up commercial agriculture, how much weight should one attribute to widely prevalent ideals, codes of behavior, or values in explaining the result? Though the evidence [from my investigation], I think, pointed in the direction of stressing as the crucial aspect of the explanation the situation that various groups faced, the attentive reader might suspect that ideas or cultural themes, to use still another term, have crept into the explanation somehow. His suspicions would be quite correct. I do not believe that they can be omitted and hold that there is a significant residue of truth in such explanations. My objection is to the way they are put into the explanation, which in my estimation creates a strong conservative bias under the color of scientific neutrality and objectivity…

"…Materialist efforts to exorcise the ghost of idealism in cultural explanations are chanting at the wrong spook. The real spook is a conception of social inertia, taken over probably from physics. There is a widespread assumption in modern social science that social continuity requires no explanation. Supposedly it is not problematical. Change is what requires explanation. This assumption blinds the investigator to certain crucial aspects of social reality. Culture, or tradition—to use a less technical term—is not something that exists outside of or independently of individual human beings living together in society. Cultural values do not descend from heaven to influence the course of history. They are abstractions by an observer, based on the observation of certain similarities in the way groups of people behave, either in different situations or over time, or both. Even though one can often make accurate predictions about the way groups and individuals will behave over short periods of time on the basis of such abstractions, as such they do not explain the behavior. To explain in terms of cultural values is to engage in circular reasoning. If we notice that a landed aristocracy resists commercial enterprise, we do not *explain* this fact by stating that the aristocracy has done so in the past or even that it is the carrier of certain traditions that make it hostile to such activities: the problem is to determine out of what past and present experiences such an outlook arises and maintains itself. If culture has an empirical meaning, it is as a tendency implanted in the human mind to behave in certain specific ways 'acquired by man as a member of society,' to quote the last phrase of Tylor's famous definition…

"The assumption of inertia, that cultural and social continuity do not require explanation, obliterates the fact that both have to be re-created anew in each generation, often with great pain and suffering. To maintain and transmit a value system, human beings are punched, bullied, sent to jail, thrown into concentration camps, cajoled, bribed, made into heroes, encouraged to read newspapers, stood up against a wall and shot, sometimes even taught sociology. To speak of cultural inertia is to overlook the concrete interests and privileges that are served by indoctrination, education, and the entire complicated process of transmitting culture from one generation to the next… Finally, to take values as the starting point of sociological explanation makes it very difficult to understand the obvious fact that values change in response to circumstances. The perversion of democratic notions in the American South is an all too familiar example, incomprehensible without cotton and slavery. We cannot do without some conception of how people perceive the world and what they do or do not want to do about what they see. To detach this conception from the way people reach it, to take it out of its historical context and raise it to the status of an independent causal factor in its own right, means that the supposedly impartial investigator succumbs to the justifications that ruling groups generally offer for their most brutal conduct. That, I fear, is exactly what a great deal of academic social science does today."

Why is it so difficult for the human mind to overcome uncritical, idealistic pre-Marxist doctrines? It's difficult even for me: I sometimes forget the lesson to look at the *concrete situations* of people, to focus on specifics and not just vague platitudes like "the complex social division of labor". One of the reasons is that the mind has an innate love of generalizing, of classifying phenomena under broad categories so as to assimilate them (the phenomena) to each other, making them easier to deal with. Honestly, it's just *hard* to probe beneath abstract concepts and look at the specifics of social life, and it's less satisfying than lumping things together. Framing explanations in terms of cultural values and abstractions like poverty or democracy is easy and satisfying.

Even a critical thinker like Moore tends to generalize too much. I'm suspicious of his whole project, the project of drawing general conclusions from the experience of five or six nations. In the context of a discussion of India's caste system and its deadly flexibility—of how it prevented a truly revolutionary movement from emerging among the peasantry, namely through the mechanism of any attempt at innovation, any local variation, simply becoming the basis of another caste, so that the caste system itself persisted—Moore says that "the general hypothesis that emerges…might be put the following way: a highly segmented society that depends on diffuse sanctions for its coherence and for extracting the surplus from the underlying peasantry is nearly immune to peasant rebellion because opposition is likely to take the form of creating another segment. On the other hand, an agrarian bureaucracy [like China's], or a society that depends on a central authority for extracting the surplus, is a type most vulnerable to such outbreaks. Feudal systems, where real power is diffused into several centers under the nominal authority of a weak monarch, belong somewhere in between. This hypothesis at least fits the main facts in this study. Peasant rebellion was a severe problem in traditional China and tsarist Russia; was somewhat less severe but frequently beneath the surface in medieval Europe; was quite noticeable in Japan from the fifteenth century onwards; and finds almost no mention in histories of India." His hypothesis is interesting, but in history such general theories are not sound. There may be enough similarities between societies to draw useful parallels between them, as Moore does, but there are also thousands of little differences that are always in danger of invalidating inductive generalizations.

December 22

I've had enough of ignorance about Indian philosophy. I'm going to read (skim) three books about it—*Indian Philosophy: A Critical Survey* (by Chandradhar Sharma), *Comparative Religion* (by A. C. Bouquet), and *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*—and summarize what I read. I'll forget it otherwise.

Unfortunately Indian philosophy is very rich. So I'll quote only the barest essentials. (What follows are mostly quotations from the first two books I mentioned, without the quotation marks.)

'See the Self' is the keynote of all schools of Indian philosophy. And this is the reason why most of the schools are also religious sects. Annihilation of three kinds of pains—sufferings (physical and mental) produced by natural and intra-organic causes, sufferings produced by natural and extra-organic causes, and sufferings produced by supernatural and extra-organic causes—and realization of supreme happiness is the end, and 'hearing the truth', 'intellectual conviction after critical analysis', and 'practical realization' are the means—in almost all the schools of Indian philosophy.

Perhaps the most deeply rooted idea in Indian thought (if we take the majority of Indians) is the lack of ultimate significance in the events of human life. The Indian, it is said, for the most part thinks of this world as a circular and unending journey, an ocean without a shore, a shadow-play without even a plot. The whole world of phenomena is simply the more or less purposeless and sportive energy of the Absolute Being, Who is beyond definition. Hence the ideal life is that of 'non-active Activity', the attainment by a well-defined technique of an exalted state of absorption in which one negates every moment of life, and becomes one with the changeless Absolute, beyond good and evil. Thus the world-renouncing ascetic is the type universally admired, and his renunciation is in no sense altruistic or philanthropic but is purely self-regarding… [That's probably a half-truth.] Self-forgetful service of others is a Christian, not a Hindu idea.

A well-accredited member of the British Civil Service once wrote: 'Asceticism makes an extraordinary appeal to practically all classes of Hindus. They feel that whatever their own manner of life, self-denial is better than self-indulgence, the suppression of passions and desires is better than their gratification… Otherworldliness is a higher calling than the management of affairs.'

(Evidently all the life-denying aspects of Indian tradition, as well as the superstitious and degrading religious practices, proceed largely from the caste system, its lack of dynamism, its oppressive structure, its eternal unchangingness. A society that worships Hanuman the monkey and Sabbala the cow, that countenances the burning of wives after their husband's death, is an inhuman one, in which man is subjugated both by the earth and especially by a caste-structured poverty.)

The Vedas. It is said [though the author disagrees] that we can notice a transition from the naturalistic and anthropomorphic polytheism through transcendent monotheism to immanent monism in the pre-Upanishadic philosophy. The personified forces of nature first changed into real gods and these later on became mere forms of one personal and transcendental God, the 'Custodian of the Cosmic and Moral Order', who Himself, later on, passed into the immanent Purusa. The Upanishads developed this Purusa into Brahman or Atman which is both immanent and transcendent. …The correct position seems to us to be that the Vedic sages were intensely spiritual personages who in their mystic moments came face to face with Reality, and this mystic experience, this direct intuitive spiritual insight, overflowed in literature as the Vedic hymns. The keynote of the Vedic hymns is the same spiritual monism, the same immanent conception of the identity-in-difference which ultimately transcends even itself, the same indescribable absolutism which holds both monism and pluralism within its bosom and which ultimately transcends both… If there were polytheism in the Vedas, how is it that the binding principle of this world, the Supreme Soul of this Universe, is so much emphasized and repeated? ...The gods are regarded as mere manifestation of the Supreme God so that when any god is praised he is not praised in his individual capacity, but merely as the manifestation of the Supreme God… Hence there is no development from polytheism through monotheism to monism, but only of monism from the first Mantra portion to the last Upanishadic portion.

Examples: 'The One Real, the wise declare as many.' 'The real essence of the gods is one.' 'Aditi, the Boundless, is the sky, the air, the mother, the father, the son, all the gods and all the men, all that is, all that was and all that shall be.' (from the Rg Veda, the oldest) 'All the gods form the body of the World-Soul.' 'He is immanent in all this creation and yet He transcends it.'

The Upanishads were written mostly in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. The hymns in the older Vedas are replaced here by more philosophical reflections, and ceremonialism, even caste duties, are subordinated to the supreme good of self-realization. Atman is the absolute Self, the cosmic reality in its subjective aspect; atman (with a lower-case 'a') is the individual self.— The individual self stands self-proved and is always immediately felt and known. One is absolutely certain about the existence of one's own self and there can be neither doubt nor denial regarding its existence. The individual self is the highest thing we know and it is the nearest approach to the Absolute, though it is not itself the Absolute. In fact it

is a mixture of the real and the unreal, a knot of the existent and the nonexistent, a coupling of the true and the false. It is, in a way, a product of ignorance. But its essence is the light of the Absolute, Atman. Its real nature is pure consciousness, self-shining and self-proved and always the same. The senses, the mind, the intellect, feeling and will, the internal organs surround the individual self and constitute its 'individuality', but the self really is above them, being the Absolute. [Cf. all my ideas, and Sartre's.]

The word 'Atman' originally meant life-breath and then gradually acquired the meanings of feeling, mind, self and soul. (Cf. the Greek 'pneuma', associated with air and the soul.)

The self is immanent in senses, mind, intellect, reason, but it is self-luminous. It can be directly realized only by transcending the empirical subject-object duality, because objects have content, which the self lacks. The goal of human life, then, is to become one with Atman, and thereby to transcend dualities and overcome karma. –Anyway, I already know enough about this side of Indian thought. I'll note only that the *objective* side of this ultimate reality is called Brahman, that which spontaneously bursts forth as nature and soul. It is manifested first as matter, but since matter is unconscious and dead Brahman cannot rest content with it; so then life evolves. "The purpose of matter is fulfilled only when life evolves." [A quasi-Hegelian conception: the truth of the lower is contained in the higher.] The destiny of life is fulfilled only with consciousness, and finally with self-conscious reason. But the highest stage of evolution is the non-dualistic bliss, identity with Brahman (and Atman). Brahman cannot be described; it is intuitive and ineffable. But "he who knows Brahman becomes Brahman. Only by knowing it can one cross the ocean of birth-and-death; there is no other way for liberation."

Hegel, Hegel, Hegel (except for the mysticism). Hegel thought that with absolute knowledge, one overcomes dualities and time and suffering. And Spirit objectifies itself first as matter, then as life, etc. It restlessly evolves, like Brahman, though not in quite the same way.

So, yes, Indian philosophy anticipates modern idealism and empiricism and rationalism and all that; but Hegel was right that when Spirit seems to return to earlier thought-patterns it is actually adding some new content to them. When I think the thoughts of my twenty-year-old self, they are far from identical with the former. They have evolved and become richer, broader.

The Bhagavadgita is a philosophical discourse to persuade a man, Arjuna, to fight. This man is appalled by the fact that he has to kill his friends and relatives, but the Lord Krishna tells him it is his duty as a prince and a righteous man to fight against evil and to restore order and peace. The book "is meant to lift the aspirant from the lower levels of renunciation, where objects are renounced, to the loftier heights where desires are dead, and where the Yogi dwells in calm and ceaseless contemplation, while his body and mind are actively employed in discharging the duties that fall to his lot in life." *Yoga* means the synthesis of knowledge, action and devotion, which is preached in the Bhagavadgita. But it is essentially the path of knowledge. Only through attaining true knowledge can we become Yogis and rise above desire and attachment. Says the Gita: "Even the most sinful man can cross over the ocean of Samsara by means of the boat of knowledge alone. As a fire well-kindled reduces fuel to ashes, so the fire of knowledge reduces all actions to ashes. The culmination of action is knowledge. Having obtained knowledge, one soon embraces peace. There is nothing purer than knowledge."

So the Gita doesn't preach inaction or escapism but rather *detachment regarding action*. We should never be attached to the fruits of actions and at the same time we should never be inactive. The perfect man works for the benefit of humanity in the spirit of selflessness—like the liberated cave-dweller in Plato, who returns to the cave to free others from suffering. Bhakti, or devotion, is defined in the Gita as disinterested service to God. ("So it is a form of Karma.") The object of devotion is the personal God, the Purusottama on Whose mercy the devotee has to throw himself utterly. Absolute dependence and utter faith are very necessary. The Lord says, "Merge thy mind in me, be my devotee, prostrate thyself before me, thou shalt come upto me. I pledge thee my word; thou art dear to me. Abandoning all dharmas come unto me alone for shelter; sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins." The love of God is the supreme love; union with him, i.e. with the spirit pervading the universe, is the ideal.

Materialism in India (the school called Charvaka) was caused by, for example, "the idealism of the Upanishads unsuited to the commoners, the political and social crises rampant in that age, the exploitation of the masses by the petty rulers". It arose before Buddhism, around 600 B.C. "But Materialism in Indian

philosophy has never been a force. Born in discontent, it soon died in serious thought… Jainism and Buddhism arose immediately and supplied the ethical and spiritual background which ejected Materialism." Unfortunately the founding text has been lost, so we have to rely on secondary sources.

Some of its doctrines: "perception is the only authority; earth, water, fire and air are the only elements; enjoyment is the only end of human existence; mind is only a product of matter. There is no other world: death means liberation." The soul is nothing but the conscious body. Death alone is liberation. There is no heaven, no God or soul, nor any being in another world; nor do the actions of the four castes produce any real effect. While life remains let a man live happily, let him feed on ghee even though he runs in debt… All the ceremonies are only means of livelihood for Brahmanas.

Its epistemological doctrine is that perception is the only means of valid knowledge. The validity even of inference is rejected; inference is just a leap in the dark. We proceed here from the known to the unknown and there is no certainty in this, though some inferences may turn out to be accidentally true. A general proposition may be true in perceived cases, but there is no guarantee that it will hold true in unperceived cases. Deductive inference is vitiated by the fallacy of *petitio principii*. It is merely an argument in a circle since the conclusion is already contained in the major premise, the validity of which is not proved. ("Inference cannot be the means of knowledge of the universal proposition—the major premise—since in the case of this inference we should also require another inference to establish it, and so on, and hence would arise the fallacy of an *ad infinitum* retrogression.") Inductive inference undertakes to prove the validity of the major premise of deductive inference, but induction too is uncertain because it proceeds unwarrantedly from the known to the unknown. In order to distinguish true association from simple enumeration, it is pointed out that the former, unlike the latter, is based on a causal relationship which means invariable association or vyapti. Vyapti therefore is the nerve of all inference. But the Charvaka challenges this universal and invariable relationship of concomitance and regards it as mere guess-work. Perception does not prove this vyapti. (All this anticipates Hume. There is nothing new under the sun.) Nor can it be proved by inference, for inference itself is said to presuppose its validity… Hence inference cannot be regarded as a valid source of knowledge. Induction is uncertain and deduction is argument in a circle. (A certain kind of Buddhism rejects the *ultimate* validity of both inference and perception, but, unlike Charvaka, it accepts their *empirical* validity.) All other Indian schools have criticized the Charvaka position, saying, e.g., that it is itself a product of inference, and that communication and thought are impossible without inference. This debate reminds me of modern debates between empiricism and rationalism, with Laurence BonJour defending the *a priori*-ness of inference and Michael Devitt denying it, thereby vitiating thought itself.

According to Charvakan metaphysics, everything that exists, including mind, is due to a particular combination of the four elements. Consciousness vanishes when the body disintegrates. "Matter secretes mind as liver secretes bile." God is not necessary to account for the world. Indeed, both God and values are mere phantoms, social conventions, products of diseased minds, and religion is but the means of livelihood for priests. Sensual pleasure is the *summum bonum* of life. "Can begging, fasting, penance, exposure to the burning heat of the sun, which emaciate the body, be compared with the ravishing embraces of women with large eyes, whose prominent breasts are compressed with one's arms?" "These fools [i.e., ascetics] conceive that you ought to throw away the pleasures of life because they are mixed with pain; but what prudent man will throw away unpeeled rice which encloses excellent grain because it is covered with the husk?" Sharma thinks that the main reason for Charvaka's downfall was its denial of all values that make life worth living. Other schools, for instance Buddhism and Jainism, do not believe in God, and some deny the soul, and others reduce the mind to matter, etc., but no others reject all values in favor of absolute hedonism.

Jainism, like Buddhism, originated in the 500s B.C. (The name is derived from 'Jina', which means conqueror—conqueror of passions and desires.) Like Buddhism and Charvaka, it rejects the authority of the Vedas. The Jainas classify knowledge into immediate and mediate. The former includes extrasensory perceptions, such as clairvoyance, telepathy and omniscience; it doesn't include perceptual knowledge, which presupposes the activity of thought—i.e., it must be given meaning and arranged into order through concepts—and so is mediate. Knowledge can also be divided into Pramana, or knowledge of a thing as it is, and Naya, or knowledge of a thing in its relation. (Most of these doctrines, by the way, were elaborated

in the Middle Ages, though they may have been obscurely believed earlier.) Naya means a standpoint of thought from which we make a statement about a thing. All truth is relative to standpoints, and reality is "many-sided". It expresses itself in multiple forms, such that no absolute predication is possible. (Most other schools, of course, believe that reality has only one true nature.) A thing can both exist and not exist in different ways, or it can be describable and indescribable, and so forth. Thus, it isn't contradictory to make contradictory predications of an object because each predication is made from a different perspective.

So Jaina metaphysics is a realistic and relativistic pluralism. Matter and spirit are independent realities; there are innumerable material atoms and innumerable individual souls, and each atom and soul has innumerable—infinite—aspects of its own. To know all the qualities of a thing is to be omniscient. Therefore the Jainas say that he who knows all the qualities of one thing knows all the qualities of all things. (Cf. Leibniz.)

A thing exists independently and is called substance. It persists in and through all attributes and modes (or modifications). Substance is defined as that which possesses qualities and modes. Out of these innumerable qualities of a substance, some are permanent and essential, while others are changing and accidental. The former are called attributes and the latter modes. Substance and attributes are inseparable because the latter are the permanent essence of the substance and cannot remain without it. Modes or modifications are changing and accidental. Viewed from the point of view of substance, a thing is one and permanent and real; from the point of view of modes, it is many and momentary and unreal. Jainism here becomes a theological mean, between Brahmanism and early Buddhism. Brahmanism emphasizes the one, the permanent, the real; early Buddhism emphasizes the many, the changing, the unreal; Jainism points out that these are two sides of the same thing…

(Much of that is Aristotle. The Jainas may have come into contact with Aristotelianism; I don't know.)

Almost all philosophical, ideological and religious differences are mainly due to mistaking a partial truth for the whole truth. Our judgments represent different aspects of the many-sided reality and can claim only partial truth. This view makes Jainism catholic, broad-minded and tolerant. It teaches respect for others' point of view.

Other schools have made the predictable objection that Jainism treats its own viewpoint as absolute. This is the same objection one can make against Skeptics, deconstructionists and relativists of most stripes. It's the paradox of self-reference. Thus, Jainas accuse other philosophers of mistaking relative truth for absolute truth, and they argue that Jainism is the only truly relative philosophy. But if so, then it is partly false. Or, on the other hand, Jainas say it is the only absolute truth—but then it contradicts itself. If relativity is the only truth, how can the Jaina teaching be absolutely true?

The Jainas, the Buddhists and the Vedantins agree that the world is neither absolutely real nor absolutely unreal. But whereas the Buddhists and the Vedantins say that because the world is neither real nor unreal it is indescribable and false, and ultimately is non-different from the Absolute where it is transcended, the Jainas say that because the world is neither absolutely real nor absolutely unreal it is both real and unreal from different points of view. They refuse to go higher… Their opponents argue that if you throw away the Absolute in your zeal to preserve the relative, you lose not only the Absolute but also the relative.

Consciousness is the essence of the self, or soul; its manifestations are perception and intelligence, or simple apprehension and conceptual knowledge. As I implied earlier, the relation between knowledge and its object is external if the object is physical, though not in the case of self-consciousness. In knowing any object the self knows itself simultaneously. [Cf. Kant, Hegel, Sartre.] The universe is brought under two categories, Jiva (conscious spirit) and Ajiva (unconscious non-spirit). Jiva is similar to Atman or the Purusa, except that it means *life*, of which consciousness is said to be the essence. Like the monads of Leibniz, the Jivas are qualitatively alike and only quantitatively different, and the whole universe is literally filled with them. They are divided first into those that are liberated and those that are bound. The latter are further divided into *mobile*—those with two senses (e.g., worms), three senses (e.g., ants), four senses (wasps, bees), and five senses (higher animals and men)—and *immobile*, which live in the atoms of earth, water, fire and air, and in the vegetable kingdom, and have only the sense of touch.

Every soul, from the highest to the lowest, possesses consciousness, though the degrees of consciousness vary according to the obstacles of karma. Purest consciousness is found in the emancipated souls, which have overcome karma. The soul is coextensive with the body, but really the body and the senses are obstructions placed by karma and hinder the souls in their direct knowledge. Knowledge is not a property of the soul; it is its very essence. Every soul, therefore, can directly and immediately know everything if it is not obstructed by matter. Freedom from matter means omniscience and emancipation.

Ajiva, on the other hand, is divided into matter, space, motion, rest and time. Matter consists of atoms, comparable to those of Leucippus and Democritus.

Karma is what unites the soul to the body. Ignorance of truth, and four passions (anger, greed, pride, delusion), attract karmic matter towards the soul. The end of our life is to remove this karmic dross and regain our intrinsic nature. Hence Jainism is primarily an ethical teaching, and its aim is the perfection of the soul. Since passions are due to ignorance, and passions are what attract the flow of karmic matter into souls, ignorance is the real cause of bondage. Here Jainism agrees with Sankhya, Buddhism and Vedanta. Now, ignorance can be removed only by knowledge. So right knowledge is the cause of liberation. This right knowledge is produced by faith in the teachings of the omniscient Tirthankaras (the liberated souls), so faith is necessary as well. And it is right conduct which perfects knowledge, since theory without practice is empty and practice without theory is blind. Right knowledge dawns when all the karmas are destroyed by right conduct. Hence right faith, right conduct and right knowledge together form the path of liberation.

Jainism is unusual for its extreme advocacy of non-violence, which issues in such practices as straining one's drinks to avoid swallowing organisms and filtering one's breath with a respirator for the same reason. The five virtues are non-violence, truth-speaking, non-stealing, chastity, and non-attachment to worldly things. It appears that Jainas were the first to make non-violence into a rule of life; they also may have been the first vegetarians. Jainism is a religion without a God.

The Jaina believes in reincarnation, of course, and spiritual advance across lifetimes (so that animals can be reborn as humans, women as men, etc.).

Buddhism originated in the sixth century. As everyone knows, Buddha himself was more a teacher and social reformer than a theoretical philosopher. He tended to dismiss metaphysical questions: "Philosophy purifies none, peace alone does." "Two things only do I teach—misery and the cessation of misery." Our duty is to overcome misery, not to philosophize idly.

After Buddha's death there were several Councils convened to establish the canon of the Vinaya, for instance one in 249 B.C. at the behest of Ashoka the Great. The Hinayana sect is distinguished from the Mahayana sect, which emerged later.

One of Buddha's core teachings is the Four Noble Truths: there is suffering (Samsara)—everywhere, even in the midst of pleasure; there is a cause of suffering; suffering can be suppressed, namely if the cause is removed; and there is a way to accomplish this. This way is the Noble Eightfold Path: right faith, right resolve, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right thought, and right concentration. Buddha's ethical 'middle path' is like the 'golden mean' of Aristotle. Self-indulgence and self-mortification are both ruled out, for the former is base and unreal, the latter gloomy and unreal.

The doctrine of Dependent Origination [or Dependent Co-production] is the foundation of all the teachings of the Buddha; it states that one thing is dependent on another, such that if you master the cause you master the effect. Given this universal empirical dependence, everything is relative, conditional, subject to birth and death and therefore impermanent. It is neither fully real nor fully unreal; all phenomenal things hang between reality and nothingness. All things pass away; nothing can resist death. The vicious circle of causation (and suffering), which has twelve links, ultimately starts with ignorance (which makes possible selfish craving), so it can be destroyed only with the destruction of ignorance. Only through knowledge can we overcome the ignorance-based *will to be born*. (Life is regarded by Buddha not as a product of the blind play of mechanical nature but as due to the internal urge, the life-force, the *élan vital*, the will to be born.)

All the other teachings can be deduced from the doctrine of Dependent Origination. The theory of karma is based on it, being an implication of the law of causation. Our present life is due to the impressions of the karmas of the past life, and it will shape our future life. Ignorance and karma go on determining each other in a vicious circle. Again, the theory of Momentariness is a corollary of Dependent Origination:

because things depend on their causes and conditions, because they're relative, conditional and finite, they must be momentary. To say that a thing arises depending on its cause is to say that it is momentary, for when the cause is removed the thing will cease to be. That which arises must be subject to death; that which dies is not permanent; and that which is not permanent is momentary. The theory of No-Ego, the theory that the individual ego is ultimately false, is also based on this doctrine, for the ego too must be momentary and not as permanent as we take it to be. Similarly with the theory of the unreality of matter.

Hinayana, a religion without a God, emphasizes self-help: the individual has to work out his salvation for himself (because Buddha taught his disciples to "Be a light unto thyself".) Its goal is the negative one of the extinction of misery. Mahayana, on the other hand, is less egoistic and negative; it believes that Nirvana is not the cessation of misery but a positive state of bliss, and its ideal saint is the Bodhisattva, who defers his own salvation in order to work for the salvation of others. In this sect Buddha is transformed into God and worshipped as such. He is identified with transcendental reality; he is the noumenon behind the phenomena, the Absolute Self running through all individual selves. The Bodhisattva is he who attains perfect wisdom and is so full of love for others that he works and suffers for their sake. The Mahayana religion has more missionary zeal than the Hinayana; it is more progressive and dynamic.

The original teachings of Buddha were not incompatible with the Upanishads—for instance, he emphasized Atman, the Great Self, and encouraged people to act under the light of that Self, to seek union with it—but his early Hinayana disciples (of the Sarvastivada, or Vaibhasika, school) changed that. In this school, the so-called soul is reduced to a series of fleeting ideas, and matter is nothing more than momentary atoms of earth, water, fire and air. Existence is an endless stream of becoming [cf. Heraclitus], and liberation is the extinction of desires and passions. There is no substance, no 'thing' which changes; only change itself. Similarity in things is mistaken for identity or sameness; a flame, for instance, is actually a succession of many similar flames, each lasting a moment. "The life of a living being lasts only for the period of one thought. As soon as that thought has ceased, the living being is said to have ceased." Buddha himself denied the ultimate reality of the empirical self but accepted its empirical reality: the soul is a bundle of matter, feeling, perception, disposition and consciousness. 'The soul' doesn't exist, only this aggregate of the body, the sensations and ideas.

Hinayanism admits action without an agent, transmigration without a transmigrating soul. It is the 'character' that transmigrates, not the 'soul'. Karma is an impersonal law which works by itself, not needing any agent or soul to cling to, as in Jainism. Nirvana is annihilation, the cessation of all activities and all becoming.

One Hinayana school believes in direct realism and may be called presentationist, while another believes in the 'copy theory of ideas' and may be called representationist. According to the first (Sarvastivada), external objects are directly known in perception; according to the second (Sautrantika), external objects are not directly perceived but are indirectly inferred. We do not know things-in-themselves; we know only ideas, which are copies of reality, and from these copies we infer the existence of the originals. The Sarvastivada responds that if we don't know the originals, we can't even say that our ideas are copies. (Cf. Berkeley.)

An ancient criticism of the Hinayana sect is that, if everything is momentary—if there is no self, or in each moment a new self is coming into existence—then the ethical theory of Karma is impossible. Bondage and liberation are impossible. Why should a person try to overcome suffering if he and his suffering will vanish in the next moment? Hinayana answers by saying that the preceding link does not perish before transmitting its content to the succeeding link and so the continuity is never broken. The successor bears all the burden of the predecessor. Etc.

As I read about Mahayana schools I'm struck by a single recurring theme: everything is unreal. Everything is relative, conditional, mere appearance. Even Nirvana is said to be mere appearance by some thinkers, and change is unreal, and everything is unreal! "Life is a dream", as Calderón said. Other schools deny the reality of everything except consciousness, so that even external objects depend on consciousness. Idealism is obviously the philosophy of choice for most Indian thinkers.

There are also a number of orthodox schools, so called because they take their inspiration directly from the Vedas, unlike Buddhism, Charvaka and Jainism. They were founded in the Hellenistic age or a

little earlier. (Vedanta, Yoga, Nyaya, etc.) "All the systems accept the view of the great world rhythm. Vast periods of creation, maintenance and dissolution follow each other in endless succession." All the schools, too, aim at the practical end of salvation. "The systems mean by 'release' the recovery by the self of its natural integrity, from which sin and error drive it. All the systems have for their ideal complete mental poise and freedom from the discords and uncertainties, sorrows and sufferings of life."

—Well, my summaries weren't great, but I'm tired. I'm not really interested in these philosophies for their own sake anyway, but only as manifestations of the human spirit and symptoms of a caste-ish social organization. It's fun to take a panoramic view of history and philosophy and see how the mind objectifies itself, and how similar are its objectifications across cultures. What will the following centuries, and millennia, bring? Will most of these philosophies, from Roman to Greek to Indian to Chinese to modern European, die out, or will they exist until the end of the species? What more can be said in these realms? I suppose that since the Hellenistic age it's been mostly a refining of thought-systems already invented, and that this refining will go on forever.

(Well, in philosophy that may be true, but probably not in economics and sociology and psychology. Totally new developments have occurred in these areas. But maybe this second Hellenistic age of the past five hundred years will end up being the last one, at least when it comes to the creation of original systems. For a qualitatively higher level, or rate, of material progress is surely not possible; and it was the exceptional growth-rate of capitalism that made possible Marxism, psychoanalysis, modern science, economics, etc. [by making possible industry, demographic growth, modern urbanism, and so forth]. Capitalism, at least on this scale, was thoroughly new; but a comparably dynamic system will never again be new. If it happens again, which it may not, it will take a form similar to modern capitalism. So how can truly original thought-systems ever arise again?)

December 23 etc.

Listening to *Les Misérables*. Soul-weeping.
What a mystery it all is. Nothing makes any sense, nothing is harmonious. The world is out of joint.
Wonder is beautiful, nothing is more beautiful. But I need rest, I need a break from wonder.
The chief virtue of Hegelianism is its beauty, its grandeur. It is a remarkable vision.
Writing is a substitute for love. I write and I wait.

Those thoughts at the end yesterday were naïve. What was I talking about? "Truly original systems"? Nothing is wholly original; everyone builds on the past. As for partial originality, I myself have come up with a great many partially original ideas—that is, ideas as original as almost any others in the last two hundred years. (My thoughts on ontology, for example.) That proves it can still be done. Even "original" systems, like Freud's, consist partly of corrections of previous theories. And in some ways Freud was anticipated by earlier thinkers, who themselves were anticipated by others. Few things are ever truly new, and yet progress happens all the same. That's the paradox.

Reading *Economics Explained: Everything You Need to Know About How the Economy Works and Where It's Going*, by Lester Thurow and R. Heilbroner. Taking a break from Sherman and Evans' book.

Reading *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, a famous book by Carlos Castaneda.

December 29

Castaneda's book is dull. Empty and repetitive. Its main idea seems to be that strange things happen when you're high on mescaline and mushrooms. (Surprise!) No wonder it was so popular in the 1960s.

Castaneda himself comes across as a witless child, a child who asks his "benefactor" question after question in the most stupid and naïve way, without self-consciousness or humor.

My parents bought me a subscription to *The New York Review of Books*, so I'll be reading that every month. The articles are sophisticated and informative.

I was in a terrible half-suicidal mood earlier tonight until I decided to re-begin the attempt to get published. About six magazines are going to publish a few of my poems and short articles, but I want more, so now I'm going to try to publish a poetry collection. So I sat down and chose fifty of my poems and arranged them carefully in order. I'll mail them next week.

For days or weeks I've been trying to think of something to write, something that could get published, be it an essay or a short story or a book. But my writer's block is as bad as it's ever been. It's maddening. I have an itch to write but I can't scratch it.

I'm reading Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*. It's a pleasure to read something that hasn't been "corrupted" by the contemporary world.

I'm tempted to think that somehow the human psyche has two parts, and it's this division that is ultimately responsible for our restlessness in civilized conditions. For in these conditions, the two parts 'separate' far more than they can in primitive societies, and then we're constantly trying to bring them back together. But that's impossible (in the individual's case) once the damage has been done. The two parts I'm talking about are, first, the part that desires and is satisfied by immediate recognition—recognition from the people one has immediate contact with, such as family and friends—and, second, the part that desires a more abstract, universal recognition, or a union with the world as a whole (as opposed to merely with one's immediate community). This second part hardly exists until societal differentiation emerges, and it comes to dominate as "reification", or its "objective correlative",[1] viz. social stratification and differentiation, intensifies over the course of history. Once upon a time people were not restless; they were perfectly happy in their little tribes and villages, secure in their comfortable traditions, and they didn't have the need to be loved by a God or by some comparably universal entity, like the whole human species. (The desire for fame is closely related to the desire for God's love. The two are manifestations of the same psychological restlessness.) If there was any religion back then it was animism, which has a very different basis and serves very different purposes than monotheism. (Ironically, animism is probably a more purely 'intellectual' set of ideas than monotheism. It's a way of imposing intellectual order on all the phenomena of nature, while monotheism is more 'affective' than 'cognitive'. It's a symptom of primitive alienation, a strategy for healing the phenomenological rift with the immediate community, while animism is practically the opposite.)

Then civilization happened. The first 'part', or 'capacity', I've referred to continued to assert its claims, and it will always do so, because humans need immediate, concrete affection and respect. That's a fact of our biology. But now the second capacity came into existence, in reaction to the destruction of mankind's original simplicity, the homogeneity of its communities. People became obscurely aware of a more generalized Other than before, and correspondingly they felt driven to seek recognition from this other, just as they had always sought recognition from their families etc. –Evidently the basic human urge is to overcome all separation between self and other; this is what 'recognition' means. The more generalized, or reified, is the other, the harder it is to achieve union (i.e., to overcome restlessness), because in the case of the concrete other—which is another human being—there is a direct give-and-take, an immediate *certainty*, while a mere idea (a reification) cannot stimulate or respond or provide certainty. In pursuing fame one is pursuing recognition by an idea, namely the idea of '*everyone*'; but an idea is not active, it cannot recognize. So one is doomed to disappointment, even if one does succeed, miraculously, in securing everyone's love. There will always be that *concept*, that generalized Other, which can't be conquered.

[1] T. S. Eliot's word, which he used in a totally different context.

Anyway, as civilization evolves, people become more (half-consciously) aware of their separation from others, and the idea of an abstract Other sinks deeper into consciousness. Psychological restlessness, the compulsion to *succeed* and *conquer* and so forth, gets worse and worse, even as it becomes more and more impossible to satisfy. It is this that explains (from the subjective side) the dynamism of certain societies. People still seek and achieve love from concrete individuals, but this no longer satisfies them; they need more, they need to *succeed on the world-stage* (professionally or whatever). It's quite poignant, if you think about it—like a dog chasing its tail, but infinitely sadder. These unfortunate civilized people are leading such restless lives only because they crave approval from that little idea in their head that isn't really an idea per se because it's so essential to their consciousness; it's more like a second self, it's really a *part* of them, but an abstract part, like a structure in their consciousness, which is why they'll never satisfy it, or themselves. (It isn't, by the way, the 'second part' or 'capacity' I mentioned above.)

So actually it isn't quite right to say there are two parts to the mind, at least if you take that idea literally. There are simply two different kinds of recognition that civilized people seek: the concrete kind and the abstract kind. Or, rather, ultimately we seek only *concrete* recognition (because that's the only kind that exists and makes any sense), but that has become split into two parts, one of which is feasible and the other of which is impossible, indeed self-contradictory.

I'd continue but I'm tired.

December 30 etc.

The reason that thinkers and artists get attached to the idea of posterity and feel as if they're creating for this abstract thing is that it gets identified with the generalized 'idea' of the Other. The two ideas have a lot in common, after all.

I understand why Marx wasn't a fan of Rousseau: the *Discourse*, at least what I've read of it, is amateurish and un-Marxian. (Granted, he lived in an amateurish and un-Marxian age.) Rousseau thought that man isn't naturally a social animal! In the state of nature people have no need of one another, they live in solitude! The whole of Part One is quite silly. And Rousseau's whole way of thinking is very one-sided. 'Civilization is bad, progress is bad, evil abounds.' He was a pessimist, while Marx was an optimist. That's the difference between them in a nutshell.

On New Year's Eve I went to a bar, a party I'd heard about. Met a pretty girl (who's a financial auditor—ugh) and her less pretty friend, spent most of the night talking to them. The pretty one (Kelly), who's my age and seems to have a good head on her shoulders, took an immediate liking to me; asked me suddenly in the beginning of the night if she could see me again sometime. "I hope this doesn't sound too forward, but…" Wow, "too forward", what an oxymoron. How refreshing it is when women stop playing their little games and speak their mind! Anyway, at midnight we kissed. A lot. Not the politest thing to do in the middle of all those people, but I sure didn't give a shit. It was a good way to start the new year.

Also, a Chinese girl I'd taught for one day a few months ago, when substitute-teaching, called me in honor of the new year. She went back to Hong Kong long ago and I thought I'd never hear from her again—after she left I was furious at myself for not having arranged to see her one last time, for the sake of 'closure' (because we were friendly for a short while). So it was very satisfying to talk to her.

John Field's nocturne in E-Flat (the longer one) is miraculously gentle and sweet, and I love it.

I have a good feeling about this year. It's the first day of the new year, it's raining quietly outside on the snow, I'm listening to music I love, last night I met a nice girl, and life is sweet. I'm sending emails to friends now, spreading the love. I'm going to try to improve myself a little this year, be a little less bitter in my journal and my thoughts.

I forgot that Rousseau was a conspiracy theorist. He thought that laws and lawful government had arisen when the rich deceitfully proposed a social contract to everyone else as a way to end the war of each

against all that had been the end-result of the establishment of property. It was deceitful because the rich, apparently, were clever enough to know it would mean their perpetual dominion over society, while everyone else was too stupid to see this.

Here's a summary of Rousseau's view of human history. "The development of human society is seen as passing through a series of revolutions: (1) Man, originally idle, discovers the utility of work and of collaborating with other men in such activities as hunting. (2) Man learns to build himself a dwelling and this transforms a solitary being, who had neither settled mate nor known offspring, into a family man and a patriarch. This period Rousseau considers the 'golden age' of the human race. (3) Men, by a 'fatal accident', discover the division of labor, which leads them to pass from a subsistence economy to a productive economy. Agriculture and metallurgy have the ruinous consequence of enabling men to produce more than they need for immediate consumption. Then they quarrel about what is left over. (4) Agricultural man can protect the produce of his labor only by enclosing the land he has planted. So he proclaims himself proprietor. But in the absence of a system of law, he has possession without rightful property, and here Rousseau joins Hobbes in envisioning a 'horrible state of war' of each against all. (5) In order to escape this state of war, men accept a 'social contract' devised by the rich to ensure peace for everybody and rightful ownership for those in possession, a 'contract' which the poor, desiring peace, are swindled into accepting. This produces, with civil society, the institution and enforcement of law."

January 2, 2008

It's sad that Kelly would probably not have looked upon me so favorably had I not worn those nice clothes and the brand-new $90 shoes I'd bought for myself after talking to girls who insisted my old shoes were absolutely unacceptable. Clothes, especially shoes, make all the difference when it comes to picking up women.

It's also sad it took me so long to see the light. Is it just a coincidence that the first night I dress really nicely with classy shoes is the first night I have success in a bar? Oh, the follies of youth!

But now I'm entering manhood, the prime of life. My gaze is directed forward, not backward.

Here's another, somewhat similar 'two parts' theory, or rather fact: part of me, the deeper and more primitive part, is very happy that this girl is giving me an immediate sort of affection. It's an intuitive, immediate satisfaction I'm experiencing. But the other part is cynical and doesn't care much, for a variety of reasons. (It won't last, she isn't quite 'adorable' enough, whatever.) This second part is a cultural accretion, a corruption of my original nature.

January 4

Reading (skimming) Bertrand Russell's *The Conquest of Happiness* (parts of it). I was curious about his thoughts on the subject. They're sensible, predictably, though not profound. The point of his book, simply stated, is to answer the question "What can a person in the midst of our nostalgic society do to achieve happiness?" "My purpose is to suggest a cure for the ordinary day-to-day unhappiness from which most people in civilized countries suffer, and which is all the more unbearable because, having no obvious external cause, it appears inescapable. I believe this unhappiness to be very largely due to mistaken views of the world, mistaken ethics, mistaken habits of life, leading to destruction of that natural zest and appetite for possible things upon which all happiness, whether of men or animals, ultimately depends." His position, then, not surprisingly, is idealistic in the anti-Marxian sense: he blames unhappiness on "mistaken views, mistaken habits", rather than objective social conditions. He emphasizes consciousness and ideologies over social being.

I don't understand why it is always so hard for intelligent people to accept the common sense of Marxism. Russell doesn't, and therefore he writes silly passages like the following (which is the conclusion

of a chapter in which he argues that people are too preoccupied with competition, with the goal of outshining everyone else).

> The trouble does not lie simply with the individual, nor can a single individual prevent it in his own isolated case. The trouble arises from the generally received philosophy of life, according to which life is a contest, a competition, in which respect is to be accorded to the victor. This view leads to an undue cultivation of the will at the expense of the senses and the intellect. Or possibly, in saying this, we may be putting the cart before the horse. Puritan moralists have always emphasized the will in modern times, although originally it was faith upon which they laid stress. It may be that ages of Puritanism produced a race in which will has been overdeveloped, while the senses and the intellect have been starved, and that such a race adopted a philosophy of competition as the one best suited to its nature. However that may be, the prodigious success of these modern dinosaurs, who, like their prehistoric prototypes, prefer power to intelligence, is causing them to be universally imitated: they have become the pattern for the white man everywhere, and this is likely to be increasingly the case for the next hundred years. Those, however, who are not in the fashion may take comfort from the thought that dinosaurs did not ultimately triumph; they killed each other out, and intelligent bystanders inherited their kingdom. Our modern dinosaurs are killing themselves out. They do not, on the average, have so much as two children per marriage; they do not enjoy life enough to wish to beget children. At this point the unduly strenuous philosophy which they have carried over from their Puritan forefathers shows itself unadapted to the world. Those whose outlook on life causes them to feel so little happiness that they do not care to beget children are biologically doomed. Before very long they must be succeeded by something gayer and jollier.
>
> Competition considered as the main thing in life is too grim, too tenacious, too much a matter of taut muscles and intent will, to make a possible basis of life for more than one or two generations at most. After that length of time it must produce nervous fatigue, various phenomena of escape, a pursuit of pleasures as tense and as difficult as work (since relaxing has become impossible), and in the end a disappearance of the stock through sterility…

Such racialist dreck is the product of a poor sociological imagination, which doesn't understand that social structures, material social relations, are mainly what explain a society's adoption of given philosophies of life.

A lot of what Russell wrote was wonderful and refreshing. Only an idiot would deny that. But whenever he undertook sociological analysis he was shallow. In the end, most of his books are good for light reading and that's all. They don't 'challenge' the reader, at least any reader with intelligence.

More interesting is Hans Furth's *Piaget and Knowledge: Theoretical Foundations*, which was glowingly reviewed by Piaget himself.

…On second thought, Furth's book is a little tedious. Besides, I'm not very interested in the details of Piaget's system. I just like that his research supports my Kantian, Chomskian intuitions. [Actually, Piaget was arguably more of an empiricist than a rationalist—and certainly much less of a rationalist than Chomsky. He was wrong about *a lot*.]

Also skimming Stuart Sim's book *Georg Lukács*, which is a critical overview of his works.

There are too many books in the world. Too many people and too many books. A person like me feels he has to read every relevant book, but that's impossible. In any case, the more you read, the harder it is to create.

Computers, too, are bad for creativity, I'm starting to think. I feel somehow 'impure', and creatively impotent, when I spend a lot of time writing on my computer.

Ranjana and I had a falling-out in December. It was mostly her fault, but she sent a sweet apology for her self-centered behavior, in which she cursed herself for (as she said) having destroyed the chance at a meaningful friendship, and I couldn't be angry at her. So in honor of the new year I decided to try to start our friendship again. Hopefully we'll meet in a week or two.

January 6

Somebody reviewed one of the essays I submitted to journals. That was nice of him. Here are his comments:

> Review comments on "Why are we Westerners unhappy?"
>
> The essay is a sharp and well-written critique of commodification and its alienating effects in Western societies. With the use of fundamental categories of community atomization, alienation of labor, fetishism, money, and exchange, the author analyzes the psychological consequences of social life under the conditions of capitalism. Updated slightly from Marx's original analysis, the author also considers Frankfurt-style reflections on the culture industry and the production of (false forms of) happiness, culminating in a "fame" impulse (which, it should be noted, is resolved in Web 2.0 applications such as Facebook). The author concludes with a moderate utopian speculation after the end of scarcity and the "withering away" of money.
>
> A number of concerns do arise, and points for further reflection. The author develops an analysis of "the they," the abstract other which is the personified social system. This of course echoes Heidegger's analysis of das Man, or Marcuse's reflections on "the Man". But it is also in tension with the concern most readers will have early in the essay, which is that the "we" is as much an alienated personification as is the "they." The use of "we westerners" is fundamentally overdetermining, since the phenomenology of westerners is differentiated geographically, historically, linguistically, and by many other social features. This problem of who the "we" is, then [—a problem irrelevant to the main argument of my paper—], is compounded by the contrast with the "them", which turns out to be "primitive" or nonwestern societies. Here, the author makes a crucial mistake, which is to posit "primitivism" in an untouched or natural state, to which "mankind" ought not "return." Surely, the author can see that this imprints "natural man" with a pre-civilized aura [yes; so?], and locates "mankind" in the realm of the western or social [?], and thus reinstates the fundamental colonial mindset back within the critique of commodification.
>
> The author also offers an overly general notion of happiness versus anonymity. The dysfunctionality of contemporary capitalist society is intertwined with forms of happiness—the stress, dehumanization, and atomism described by the author are not a universal experience; just as the so-called New York attitude is hardly generalized, even in New York! One can find "fuck you's" in many places at many times, and finds such in New York more often in the movies than in real life.
>
> Ultimately, the author should (1) consider which of numerous philosophers and theorists in the tradition of post-Marxist cultural pessimism—Adorno and Marcuse, Baudrillard and Dubord, Althusser and Foucault, Mumford and Martin—s/he wishes to follow, or at least incorporate some reflection on developments in theories of commodity fetishism and alienation, and (2) decide what precise scholarly contribution s/he wishes to make. An application of Marx's analysis of capitalism, or at least parts of it, is what one might call

> inherently good; however, to be publishable, it should affect some theoretical advance or transformation, or identify some underthematized phenomenon within capitalist society.

I ought to read more of those theorists he mentions. I've never read them seriously.

That's what I need, by the way, that feedback. If my writings are still rough, it's because I get no feedback.

That reviewer has inspired me. I'm going to focus my energies for now on this sort of cultural criticism. Until I can go to the library tomorrow I'm reading papers online, for instance Adorno's "Culture Industry Reconsidered" and Axel Honneth's "Reification: A Recognition-Theoretical View". I'm not a fan of Adorno's turgid writing, which seems to disguise a relative philosophical emptiness.

I know this is all masturbatory, but I have nothing better to do. Why is it masturbatory, though? Not because of any essential pointlessness in the subject matter, but because all intellectual activities are vitiated by the social organization of late capitalism. Even the creation of art and literature has become masturbatory in the context of this society.

If commodification is the main problem, then I ought to write a paper called "What is commodification, and why is it bad?" One has to get clear on the essentials.

Notes to self.— Why is contemplation, reflective detachment, unhealthy? How is it related to reification, recognition, selfhood? It is symptomatic of a reified, alienated attitude, and various dualisms. It is in a way "inauthentic", a pose. Self-consciousness is a division between self and other and as such is unhappiness, restlessness. (Happiness is an important concept for the theorist because it signifies the 'natural' state of the individual, the harmonious state to which psychic activity is always tending in some way or other. Granted, some kinds of unhappiness are totally natural; but the 'restless' or 'bored' kind, the unhappiness of modern self-consciousness, is not.)

You can get a sense of the degree to which experience is synthesized by the brain when you read a word wrongly. (I may have written about this phenomenon a year or two ago.) Like if the phrase "…the totality of…" is printed in a book but you read it as "…the tonality of…", you can see that the brain has just (mis-)created your reality. When I reread the sentence I can clearly remember *seeing* the word "tonality" the first time, even though now I see the word "totality". The 'n' was there, and now it's not. But it couldn't have been objectively there; as the letter 'n', it must have been a subjective creation. How unnerving that is! Reality as experienced exists only in consciousness, even though it seems to be wholly objective and external. But the *real* external world, the world of physics and chemistry, is radically different from the experienced world. We are prisoners of our minds, permanently outcast from reality as it is in itself.

There's a whole other world just beyond the tip of my nose, but I haven't the faintest idea what it's really like!

January 7

> Writing a paper. I feel creatively mediocre. My mind works slowly.
> I wonder if this is the beginning of the end of my mental powers. I don't feel as 'fresh' as I used to.
> It would be so much easier if I had a good memory!
> From Honneth's essay— (this is for me, not you)
>
> …We assert nothing less than that the human relationship to the self and the world is in the first instance not only genetically but also categorially bound up with an affirmative attitude, before other more neutralized orientations can subsequently arise. We can connect up with our guiding topic by pointing out that the abandonment of the originally given affirmative stance must result in a stance in which the elements of our surroundings are experienced as mere objective entities, as objects that are "present-at-hand." "Reification"

> correspondingly signifies a habit of thought, a habitually ossified perspective, which, when taken up by the subject, leads not only to the loss of its capacity for empathetic engagement but also to the world's loss of its qualitatively disclosed character. Before I can further pursue the question of whether this clarification could allow us to continue to employ the concept of "reification" today, I must first attempt to justify its foundational premise—that is, the assertion that the attitude of care enjoys not only a genetic but also a conceptual priority over a neutral cognition of reality. I intend subsequently to reformulate this assertion by cautiously replacing the Heideggerian notion of "care" with the originally Hegelian category of "recognition." In this way I believe it is possible to justify the hypothesis that a recognitional stance enjoys a genetic and categorial priority over all other attitudes toward the self and the world…

See also pp. 111 ff. The whole essay is good.

I hate computers! It's their fault! It's all their fault! I have to not look at my computer for months before I'll be able to write again.

And I want to study philosophy, not history! Damn it, damn it, damn it!

In Gorky's Russia, the mean-spiritedness of everyone was right on the surface, for all to see. In contemporary America, the mean-spiritedness is no less real; it is only less obvious. I've often had that feeling, as if everyone is nasty and mean just below the surface, and the nastiness comes out through the slightest provocation. Especially in pop culture (and politics); that's when it's really bad. Pop culture is a gigantic edifice built on the rock-solid foundation of human pettiness and envy.

January 9

Met Rebecca, Kelly and her friend last night for an Ethiopian dinner and a jazz club later. The upshot of the evening was that I went to Kelly's apartment and pelvis-pounded her. But I've decided I'm not interested in her: our personalities aren't wholly compatible. She gets too defensive, too sensitive, too dramatic, and we seem to have too little in common.

The pride of men who sleep with lots of women is brutish. It doesn't give me great pleasure that I have another notch in my belt, because…who cares? The pleasure is purely negative: knowing that a girl wanted to sleep with me entails a lessening of my former insecurity. But there is no *pride* in its place.

As for the sex itself…sex is sometimes a bit boring. *She* certainly enjoyed it ("You're amazing!"), but, well, to quote David Foster Wallace: what a writer wants to say after sex is, "Was it as good for me as it was for you?"

As for the pride of men who *please* women in bed, that's stupid too. It's stupidly easy to please a woman. All you have to do is be tender at first, then heat things up, then slow down, etc. It's mindlessly easy.

Reading *Adorno: A Guide for the Perplexed*, by Alex Thomson. (The Boston Library doesn't have any of Adorno's main books. It's quite a bad library, to be honest.) I'm not impressed with Adorno. Continental thinkers literally thought it a virtue for their work to be unclear, anti-systematic, imprecise: it meant they were mirroring the "dialectical" nature of reality. Morons. That word "dialectic" has in the last hundred years been used to justify the most egregious philosophical sins—sheer intellectual laziness. When these thinkers have actual thoughts, moreover, the thoughts aren't very interesting or original.

"The philosopher," says Thomson, in the voice of Adorno, "should not pretend to be able to provide a clear and rational explanation of the world, since the attempt to impose such patterns on the world is bound up with man's violent domination of nature." What! That's sheer nihilism! "Adorno's interest in dialectics means that he sees identity as relational. Concepts are not clearly distinct logical entities, but mobile and slippery forms for apprehending reality, whose interactions are always evolving. Rather than

seek to freeze this moment, the form of the essay should try to imitate it." That's a false dichotomy: either "freeze" reality in a simplistic and ahistorical way or write in a philosophical stream of consciousness. Neither option is good, or necessary. The best way is to define your terms carefully, argue carefully, and, if it's indeed true that concepts are always "evolving", explain carefully how they evolve. In any case, the clearer your concepts are, the more philosophical content there is in your arguments. Even Hegel understood that, what with his "*determinatio est negatio*".

As for the concept of the dialectic, with which Adorno, like so many European thinkers in the first half of the 20th century, seems to have been obsessed, it's fairly empty and commonsensical. What is Marxism's "dialectical theory of history"? Thomson gives an adequate definition: "the idea that history progresses through conflicts between different social forces, the resolution of which generates new antagonisms". Yup. That's the dialectical theory in a nutshell. Magnificent, isn't it? Dialectics means—development through conflict. No wonder it so appealed to European philosophers: it's as empty as their philosophies.

Most of the individual's spiritual and intellectual desires are ultimately a reaction against the primacy of the "generalized other" (not really in Mead's sense), which is a part of consciousness and thus makes impossible a full achievement of the concrete recognition that humans, as humans, desire. Only when we were not far removed from animals did we have no need for "certainty"—precisely because life itself was "certain". With self-consciousness, or the generalized [general, abstract] other, came all kinds of uncertainty,[1] which we have been unsuccessfully trying to remedy ever since. Culture itself—*civilization* itself—is an unconscious strategy for doing so.

(Against Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Good starting-point for more thinking.)

I should read more G. H. Mead. He was a real thinker, unlike the Continentals.

January 11

One of the reasons I dislike reading twentieth century philosophy is that it stinks of rotten elitism. It respects the authority-structures of the bourgeois world, the academic power-structures and the whole fame-game, even as it tries to rebel against bourgeois culture. The vast majority of even the famous thinkers, not to mention the hordes of puny scholars, have been incorrigible snobs, just like the bourgeoisie. Personally I'm more inclined to look for original insights—and intellectual enthusiasm—in the essays of talented undergraduates than in the writings of established authors, who have been indoctrinated into conformity.

In the same way, I respect and enjoy children more than adults, because children are more profound. They can see eternity in a grain of sand.

Reading *Habermas: A Very Short Introduction*, by J. G. Finlayson.

After you've looked at a philosopher's photograph it's hard to take him seriously. Almost invariably he looks commonplace, with a flabby, ugly, weak face. (The exception is Karl Marx, who looked like Moses. [Chomsky is another exception.]) Horkheimer, Adorno, Heidegger: silly self-deluded uglarians.

There is one reason why nobody is what he thinks he is: luck. Luck determines destiny. (Not entirely, though.) [But remember it's *luck* what genes you have and *luck* where you're born and whom you're born to, etc.]

From what I've read, it seems like Adorno and Horkheimer confused capitalism with "enlightenment". They criticized the whole mindset of "enlightened" thinking, the rational and scientific mindset—the instrumentally rational mindset in particular, which they saw as the paradigm—for having

[1] Indeed, real "certainty" is nothing but un-self-consciousness. In a self-conscious being it is, strictly speaking, impossible.

furthered man's drive to master and control his environment, both nature and his fellow men. Rational thinking, then, through its applications in technology and industry, has engendered irrational forms of domination, ultimately manifested in Nazism. "As industrialization and capitalism took hold in the 19th century, human beings were subjected to ever more pervasive networks of administrative discipline and control, and to an increasingly powerful and untamable economic system. Instead of liberating man from nature, the process of enlightenment imprisons man, who is himself a part of nature. Instead of economic plenty, there is misery and poverty. Instead of moral progress, there is regression to barbarism, violence, and intolerance. This is the 'dialectic of enlightenment' that informed Horkheimer's and Adorno's understanding of their social world…" "Enlightenment is both necessary and impossible: necessary because otherwise humanity would continue hurtling towards self-destruction and unfreedom, and impossible because enlightenment can only be attained through rational human activity, and yet rationality is itself the origin of the problem." No, no, no! This whole analysis is pre-Marxist, idealistic, one-sided. Jacob Bronowski was right: it isn't science and technology in themselves that are the problem, as most people think; it's something more fundamental. He said it was arrogance, ignorance and the desire for absolute certainty that had led to Nazism, and he was partly right. But equally, or more, important is the commodified, bureaucratized, coercified system of social relations. The scientific ideas and practices in themselves are *not* the problem! They're a problem only in the context of capitalism. How could A. and H. not have understood this?

Even admirers of Marxism fall victim to idealism!

"Domination and mastery are very close cousins of rationality. Not only science and technology, but rationality itself is implicated in domination." What is "rationality"? In itself it's an empty idea; it has no content outside a specific set of social relations, i.e., its practical manifestation. Do A. and H. equate it with *instrumental* rationality, or means/end reasoning? Okay then, sure, there is an element of "domination" and "mastery" in all means/end reasoning. But these concepts are not bad in themselves, as if they *inherently* tend to be realized in harmful, or even potentially harmful, ways. Whether an idea or an abstract method has harmful consequences depends on the dynamics of the society in which it is realized; and no social structure can be blamed on a set of ideas or an abstract scientific method. If scientific thinking has indirectly had horrible consequences in capitalism, it is not because of an intrinsic "dialectic of enlightenment"; it is because of the dialectic that enlightenment has manifested *in capitalism*.

Even if A. and H. would have, in the end, agreed with me, their framing the problem in terms of *enlightenment* rather than *capitalism* was gigantically misleading. (Nihilistic, too.) Enlightenment means a very broad set of ideas and thought-patterns, which can be realized, in more or less adequate ways, in any number of possible societies; capitalism means the actual material practices, the *real basis*, of a civilization that has committed by far the worst crimes in history. The real villain is the latter, not the former.

I guess I was right about Kelly. I could tell she had a nasty, spiteful, insecure side even before she wrote that rabid email. But something good came of it: it led to more insights on the relation between everyone's desire to be considered valuable and the generalized other. (I wish there were a better word than "generalized other", since Mead meant something different by it, but it's so perfect that I have to use it.) I saw that insofar as I was affected by her email, it was because I unconsciously thought of its attacks as judgments from the *generalized* [or *abstract*] other rather than simply a single pitiful individual. That is, if we're talking about the restless desire for self-esteem, which, as I said earlier, is a fairly recent product of historical evolution (like the truly generalized other itself), the opinions of one person *qua* one person—one external being among all external beings—cannot hurt; that's not how this part of the psyche works. Rather, the judgments of one person can hurt your self-esteem only to the extent that that person is unconsciously thought of as an instantiation of the generalized other. This is, indeed, how a given person makes his way into your psyche, how your psyche 'appropriates' him; this is the link between him and you (as well as the source of the 'separation' between you, the otherness that comes between you). He becomes a part of you—i.e., is important to you—insofar as you unconsciously (or half-consciously) identify him with the generalized other, which is itself directly a part of your self-consciousness, i.e., of you yourself. As I said a few days ago, this other isn't so much a mere concept as a fundamental feature of the

phenomenology of self-consciousness. It isn't '*out there*'; it's *in you*. You are a particular being, your self-consciousness is particular (individual) and private, only because it exists against the phenomenologically abstract coloring of this generalized other; its particularity is contrasted with the generality of the other, and this is precisely how your self-consciousness is able to exist. *Determinatio est negatio*. Insofar as there is differentiation, there is determination. You would not be the private self you are if there were not in your consciousness a generalized, 'universal' other with which you at all times implicitly contrasted yourself; and this is why the private self—i.e., the implicit consciousness of privacy—did not exist in prehistoric times in the way it does now (namely, because the generalized other did not yet exist in its fully developed form). We're never really aware of the generalized Other as we are of ourselves, but it is there all the same. It has to be. Otherwise self-consciousness wouldn't make sense, since a *contrast* is necessary for it to exist. It presupposes negation; it *is* a negation, namely the particular's negation of (or opposition to) the general. The meaning of existential restlessness, the undying quest for happiness, the desire for recognition—the meaning of this is the particular trying to abolish the general in itself, the generalized other, which prevents consciousness from being identical to itself. We're always trying to incorporate the Other into ourselves, to make it coincide with us by securing its absolute approval. That's the psyche's method for reducing the otherness of the other: it seeks recognition of its sense of self, its self-conception.

Because the generalized other didn't exist in its modern form in Paleolithic times, there was less consciousness of separation between people—but also, paradoxically, less potential for real 'intimacy' between them. Since selves were not as private as they are now, the appropriation, or incorporation, of another self in one's own could not go as far as it can nowadays. In other words, since the generalized other did not have the phenomenological primacy it has now, there was not such an opportunity for identifying a given person with the Other in oneself. And so one took up others into oneself less than one does now. There was, of course, less of a need to also, since the psychic wound that is self-consciousness, in being less painful, did not so need to be soothed.

I got off track there. I was discussing the mechanics of internalizing another human being, and then I went off on that long tangent. One of the things I wanted to say is that, given all these ideas, when you feel the need to defend yourself against someone who has criticized you you're not, on the most basic level, arguing directly against *him*; you're arguing against *yourself*. His criticisms have seeped into you, 'gotten under your skin' by being associated with the generalized Other,[1] as if the Other itself has made these criticisms or might possibly agree with them; and since the Other is a part of you, you're basically trying to convince *yourself* by defending yourself. It isn't really that particular person you're trying to convince (unless he has become very important to you, which is to say he has been highly assimilated into the generalized Other, his 'concept', or 'imago' (sort of), becoming an integral part of it); it is the Other itself, i.e., the dissonant part of you. After all, it's likely that you'll be satisfied simply if you have a good comeback to his insult, whether or not your comeback actually succeeds in eliciting an apology or retraction from him. And this could be the case only if the one you're trying to convince is you, not him.

There are so many threads in discussions like the foregoing that it would be virtually impossible to unite them all. Besides, concepts are simply not adequate vis-à-vis consciousness. They're clumsy, unrefined, ill-defined, vague. This inadequacy isn't something that can be rectified, though; it's inherent in the nature of concepts. For concepts are hammered out in interactions between people, and so they are appropriate only to the public, shared world. But I'm trying to apply them to the private world, the inner essence of consciousness, so they're bound to be inadequate.

January 12 etc.

I want to become the general Other, and I want the general Other to become me.

The Other gets associated in everyone's mind with certain attitudes, dispositions, beliefs, modes of behavior. This is partly how people become socialized to behave as society expects and demands. They

[1] By capitalizing the 'o' I'm merely emphasizing the other's abstract character in this context.

want to be accepted and respected by the Other (because, again, they want to negate the otherness of the Other), so they unthinkingly accept its attitudes etc., which is to say they accept social norms.

This helps explain why it's so easy to get people to accept bureaucratic roles unquestioningly, no matter how irrational or cruel their duties are. People do what they're told as long as it's a credible authority-figure who's ordering them—because authority-figures are identified with the Other, for several different reasons. The Other is really the tyrant of self-consciousness (precisely because it's so 'diffuse').

I'm sick to death of thinking.

I want the excitement of feeling like I'm *going* somewhere in life, like I'm working for career advancement or there's a definite goal I'm working towards. People who want to be, for example, a CEO are lucky: they have a goal towards which they can orient their life. But I don't have a goal. All I know is that I'll probably have to be an academic, and after that there's nothing. I don't have the talent to write a novel; my talents are in other spheres, namely those not valued by late capitalism.

It would be interesting to reinterpret and revise R. D. Laing's analyses of the schizoid personality in the light of my ideas.

"Language, Self, and Lifeworld in Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action,*" by Donald McIntosh. (Good.) "Toward the Redialectization of Historical Materialism: Labor and Language," by R. Kelly Washbourne. (Not as good.) "On the Incompleteness of George Herbert Mead's Theory of the Social Self as an Account of Intersubjectivity: Re-reading Henrich after Habermas," by David Vessey. "Reification: A Marxist Perspective," by Val Burris. ("This essay presents a systematic reconstruction of Marx's theory of reification.") "Nature and Narcissism: The Frankfurt School," by C. Fred Alford. Interesting observation: "For the Frankfurt School, the oedipus conflict is central to psychoanalysis because it is the tie to Marx. It is the father's deflection of the son's libido from the mother that prepares the son for a lifetime of labor. It does so by teaching him that libidinal pleasure must be postponed, and later confined to the genitals, so that the rest of the body may become an instrument of labor. Indeed, Marcuse draws the parallel between Marx and Freud so tightly that Marx's socially necessary and surplus labor become basic and surplus repression." Sounds silly. Further informative remarks: "In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud distinguishes three phases in the evolution of humanity's view of the universe: animistic, religious, and scientific. [Reminds me of Comte.] 'At the animistic stage men ascribe omnipotence to *themselves*. [Cf. the primitive, magical practice of trying to influence the gods by naming them, calling upon them, "binding" them to act in accordance with the tribe's wishes.] At the religious stage, they transfer it to the gods but do not seriously abandon it themselves, for they reserve the power of influencing the gods in a variety of ways. The scientific view of the world no longer affords any room for human omnipotence; men have acknowledged their smallness and submitted resignedly to death." Freud is wrong that a pessimistic, "resigned" attitude is inherent in the abandonment of religion.

After Freud's discovery of primary narcissism, "narcissism reflects another orientation to reality, one which engulfs its environment, rather than standing in opposition to it." "Originally the ego includes everything, later it detaches itself from the external world. The ego-feeling we are aware of now is only a shrunken vestige of a far more extensive feeling—a feeling which *embraced the universe* and expressed *an inseparable connection of the ego with the external world.*" (From *Civilization and Its Discontents.*) Cf. the first sentence of my entry on January 12th. We want to obliterate the Other as such, and the external world is an aspect of the Other, so we want to transcend the externality of the world. –Narcissism.

How can consciousness be aware of consciousness, as is the case in self-consciousness? Only if something comes between consciousness and itself, making it self-distant so that it can see itself. The generalized other is this thing that separates consciousness from itself, that introduces self-difference by introducing generality, or universality, or abstractness, into particularity. The generalized other is what explains the fact that I am my own other.

(Explain the relationship between reification and the generalized other.)

From Burris's paper: "…Reified consciousness, like all forms of consciousness, is determined by the concrete life-activities of which it is a part. For Marx, knowledge of social relations ('theory' in the broadest sense of the term) is constructed in and through the actions which produce, maintain, and transform

those social relations ('practice'). To the degree that human agents exercise autonomy over the production and reproduction of their social relations, the humanly produced nature of those relations will be readily accessible to them. On the other hand, when social actions are determined heteronomously, as an adaptive response to forces and circumstances over which the individual has no control, the dependence of social institutions on the ongoing constitutive actions of human subjects will be less accessible to consciousness. Reification can thus be viewed as a characteristic form of social consciousness under conditions of alienation and powerlessness.

"Marx is not the only theorist to see a connection between powerlessness and reified forms of social consciousness. Piaget (1960), in his studies of child development, notes the extreme reification (or 'realism') of the young child's conception of the social world and attributes this to the underdevelopment of the infant's sense of autonomous subjectivity. Confronting a system of pre-existing, external, and frequently coercive social institutions, the infant views the ontological status of these as equivalent to that of natural objects. Names, for example, are understood as belonging to the intrinsic nature of things and emanating from them. Moral norms are projected onto the objective realm and understood as categorical imperatives. Such reification declines as the child becomes increasingly autonomous of adult constraint and gains a stronger sense of his or her own subjectivity." That paragraph is thought-provoking. It supports my argument that a type of reification is inherent in the human condition. In self-consciousness, for example. The self is a partial reification. So is the generalized other. "Abstract objects", such as concepts, are reifications too. But only under certain social-structural conditions does reification become pathological.

"Alongside the fetishism of commodities, we [in contemporary society] now have a fetishism of technology, a fetishism of bureaucracy, and a fetishism of occupational credentials." Yup.

Reading Honneth's *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. It deals, first and foremost, with Hegel's early writings, but also with Mead, Marx, Sartre, Sorel, the object-relations theorists, etc.

Lorig called me; that was nice. She's the only coworker I really like, the only one I can talk to comfortably. And vice versa. We're practically soul-twins. We both would be happiest if we lived in Europe; America is everything we dislike. I'd say she's my best friend in Boston, if only because she knows how to listen and converse.

Interesting distinction: "Whereas self-respect is a matter of viewing oneself as entitled to the same status and treatment as every other person, self-esteem involves a sense of what it is that makes one special, unique, and (in Hegel's terms) 'particular'." "What distinguishes one from others must be something *valuable*." What does it mean for something to be valuable? Ultimately, it means that the other considers it valuable.

Once upon a time people had no desire to be considered special and unique. (Far from it! Such a desire was inconceivable.) Now, everyone does. When did the change take place? *How* did it take place? It's worth noting that the desire is probably bound up with the desire that one's life have *meaning*—another late historical development. Now that individuals exist as such, people are driven to assert themselves as against the other. Before, they were relatively at home in the "other" (insofar as it existed at all); when they became separated from it (both phylogenetically and ontogenetically) a dissonance developed within themselves, which guided, to a large degree, their actions from then on. They want to overcome the division in themselves, and one of the ways to do this, paradoxically, is to play into the hands of the very separation-between-individuals that gave rise to the problem in the first place. If you show that you're better than other people you'll get recognition from them, which will, as always, be experienced also as recognition from the generalized other, which will be a mitigating or overcoming of your self-tension, your self-dissonance.

Aaaaaah, I don't know…

Reminder: "As Hegel showed, recognition is worthless if it does not come from someone whom one views as deserving recognition." What determines whether one is seen as deserving it? (See my thoughts on charisma, a strong social presence, etc.)

Yes, I envy earlier thinkers, who had a wide-open field before them. They didn't have to master a vast academic literature. They didn't have to be obsessively precise in their arguments. They didn't have to conform completely to academic expectations. They lived in hopeful and youthful times. –They had it easy.

January 17

> If one generalizes this second thesis systematically, one arrives at the theoretical premise that the development of a subject's personal identity presupposes certain types of recognition from other subjects. For the superiority of interpersonal relationships over instrumental acts was apparently to consist in the fact that relationships give both interlocutors the opportunity to experience themselves, in encountering their partner to communication, to be the kind of person that they, from their perspective, recognize the other as being. The line of thought entailed by Hegel's argument here represents a significant step beyond the mere claim, found in theories of socialization, that the formation of a subject's identity is supposed to be necessarily tied to the experience of intersubjective recognition. His idea leads to the further conclusion that an individual that does not recognize its partner to interaction to be a certain type of person is also unable to experience itself completely or without restriction as that type of person. The implication of this for the relationship of recognition can only be that an obligation to reciprocity is, to a certain extent, built into such relations, an obligation that requires but does not force subjects to recognize one another in a certain way: if I do not recognize my partner to interaction as a certain type of person, his reactions cannot give me the sense that I am recognized as the same type of person, since I thereby deny him the characteristics and capacities with regard to which I want to feel myself affirmed by him. (p. 37)

I agree with the conclusion but not with the reason that Honneth gives in the last part of the previous sentence. Or, rather, that reason strikes me as superficial. Honneth doesn't explain why denying one's partner the characteristics with regard to which one wants to feel affirmed by him should cause one to feel that same lack in oneself. What is the *fundamental* reason for the necessity of reciprocity? After all, the necessity definitely exists. My friendship with Gina doesn't give me the sense that I'm an intelligent, interesting person, since she isn't. If I thought she were, then, through that fact (or through our friendship), I'd feel as if I were too. This is just another way of saying that one can be truly "recognized" (as a certain kind of person) only by people whom one judges as worthy of being recognized (as that kind of person). What is the reason? The only reason I can think of is that one has an already given, half-conscious, half-formed idea in one's head of the sort of person who is worthy of being recognized/respected—for example, an intelligent, charming, self-confident person—and this idea, I should note, is a sort of distillation of one's notion of the Other. Now, whatever characteristics one associates with the Other are the characteristics that one intuitively, half-consciously wants to have. That's a necessary fact of human psychology. So when you meet someone who instantiates your idea of the Other, who is, as it were, a concrete version of the Other, you seek his approval, since if you acquire it you'll acquire, at least to a degree, the approval of the Other in you (and thus self-approval). Then you'll feel as if you are the same kind of person as this other person you respect, who is a more-or-less complete instantiation of your idea of the Other. (The degree to which he is is the degree to which you respect him.) In other words, the 'mechanism' that connects the three facts Honneth is dissecting[1] is that insofar as you recognize someone you treat him as an incarnation of the Other, and so if he recognizes you in turn then you'll feel yourself recognized by the Other in you, which is the kind of person you want to be—and in knowing that the Other is attributing certain traits to you, you'll

[1] Namely: (1) you respect a person; (2) you know that he respects you; and therefore (3) you have the sense that you are the same kind of person as him, namely intelligent, valuable, etc. The question I'm asking is: What explains the 'therefore'?

attribute them to yourself (because the Other, after all, is a part of you, albeit a dissonant, often accusatory part). –This is the most plausible explanation I can think of. If you can think of a better one, my hat is off to you.

Another virtue of that explanation is that it ties into the premise that an individual is constantly (or almost constantly) seeking self-unity, seeking to overcome, in this case, the accusatory or disrespectful glance of the Other in him. If he can only bring himself over to his side, he'll be happy. The best way to do that is to bring others over to his side.

This dual 'identification with the Other' also explains the power of sexual love. I identify my partner with the Other as she does the same for me, and this allows me to identify myself with the Other at the same time. (Hence the self-love involved in sexual love.) But since I identify each of us with the same concept or structure of consciousness, I effectively—mediately—identify myself with her and her with me. We become one, so to speak.

January 19

Longevity isn't a decisive criterion of artistic, or even intellectual, worth. The 1812 Overture is still beloved even though it is by no means a masterpiece. Heidegger is still worshipped despite the near-emptiness of much of his thought.

Reading Honneth's essay on reification, I'm reminded of why I have a distaste for modern analytic thinking: it enervates philosophy, making it seem pallid and unexciting. (So much the worse for philosophy that logical clarity has such an effect.)

It's ironic that the only reason I'm mildly content with my lot is that I have contempt for most things. If I didn't, how could I endure life?

Scylla and Charybdis.— The only thing worse than women is men. It's weakness versus stupidity.

(On MLK day the staff had a teacher-training day; there was a presentation on the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. One of them was "Seek to understand, and then to be understood". In other words, listening is most important. The speaker gave an example from his personal life: before he got a divorce, everyday he would wake up, go to the kitchen, open all the cupboard doors looking for his coffee mug, and leave them open. Then his wife would come downstairs and complain about the cupboards being open. He didn't understand why it bothered her. "Isn't that what everyone does? Isn't it normal to leave the cabinets open? Why did she care so much?" So the next day—out of forgetfulness, perhaps—he did the same thing, leaving the doors open. And she would complain again. Eventually he decided to listen to her, to "seek to understand" her point of view, which led to his closing the doors after he'd opened them. –Wow. No wonder divorces are so common. Men have the interpersonal skills of an unopened can of tuna.)

One fact alone is necessary to refute all idealism about humans: Nazism happened.

Ode to music.— I was sitting here alone on a Saturday night hating the world until I remembered Beethoven's symphonies and started listening to one, and with the first note I became perfectly happy. This music makes me feel infinitely free, as if I've found a home. How silly to be self-pitying when you have this music to listen to whenever you want!

(I wish I understood music's power over me. It has something to do with the "affective response", but that explains nothing. What is the connection between music and affection, including self-affection? For I do have a more loving relationship to myself when I listen to beautiful music—because, I suppose, I have a more loving relationship to the world. The beautiful sounds *become* my world, more or less. Maybe that's the explanation. My world is no longer a half-assimilated external opposition to me; it is an interiority, something internal to my sense of self (because the latter already includes a love of the particular piece I'm

listening to). My world is not foreign anymore. That's not the whole explanation, though: it doesn't explain the beauty of beautiful music.)

Obviously the need for certainty, in whatever existential area, comes from the need to appease the Other. Most kinds of doubt can be reduced to self-doubt (self-conflict). Even philosophical confusion is ultimately a species of self-doubt.

Mead explained the emergence of self-consciousness on the basis of his theory about how a subject "arrives at a consciousness of the social meaning of its behavioral expressions." According to him, "one possesses knowledge of the intersubjective meaning of one's actions only if one is capable of generating the same reaction in oneself that one's behavioral expressions stimulated in the other: I can become aware of what my gesture signifies for the other only by producing the other's reaction in myself." This becomes possible through the evolutionary development of vocal, as opposed to non-vocal, gestures, since these have the special quality of affecting both the agent and his interaction in the same way at the same instant. "While one feels but imperfectly the value of his own facial expression or bodily attitude for another, his ear reveals to him his own vocal gesture in the same form that it assumes to his neighbor." This consciousness of meaning makes possible consciousness of oneself as a social object. "In perceiving my own vocal gesture and reacting to myself as my counterpart does, I take on a decentered perspective, from which I can form an image of myself and thereby come to a consciousness of my identity."

That's how the *epistemic* self-relation is established, how knowledge of oneself is possible. But the practical, or normative, relation-to-self develops too in the context of the self's relation to the other. "The child can think about his conduct as good or bad only as he reacts to his own acts in the remembered words of his parents." "By putting itself in the normative point of view of its interaction partner, the subject takes over its partner's moral values and applies them to its practical relation to itself." (Cf. my earlier observation: "What does it mean for something to be valuable? Ultimately, it means that the other considers it valuable.")

I have to agree with Honneth that "rights" are not merely bourgeois inventions. That's obvious. In every society that isn't utterly barbaric the individual has rights. They need not be legally enshrined, though, and they need not take a bourgeois form. "With the appropriation of the social norms regulating the cooperative nexus of the community, maturing individuals not only realize what obligations they have vis-à-vis members of society; they also become aware of the rights that are accorded to them in such a way that they can legitimately count on certain demands of theirs being respected. Rights are, as it were, the individual claims which I can be sure that the generalized other would meet." (The concept of the generalized other, for Mead, involves an "internalization of norms of action that result from a generalization of the action-expectations of all members of society." "In learning to generalize internally an ever-larger number of interaction partners to such an extent that a sense of social norms of action is acquired, the subject gains the abstract ability to participate in the norm-governed interactions.")

January 20 etc.

I will say this in favor of American capitalism: it has taught me self-reliance.

I'm trying Craigslist again, not the personals but the less sketchy ads for friends and activity-partners. Also, I discovered a website called Boston Linkup. And another one called IntellectConnect. ("It's a meeting of the minds.")

I want to understand why it's uncomfortable to talk about sex (and defecating) with one's parents. Everyone finds it uncomfortable, but no one can really explain why. I feel like the answer would reveal a lot about the essence of the parent-child relationship, and about the psychological significance of sex.

Maybe the question isn't so hard after all. Intuitively, the reason I wouldn't want to discuss the topic with my parents is that "sex is dirty", and that during the conversation I'd be half-thinking about the fact that they've had sex and they'd be aware that I'm aware of that. In other words, the parent-child

relationship is not the province of things dirty. They are banished from it, opposed to its spirit somehow. Why? Evidently because the child, when young, idealizes his parents as if they are pure, good, all-knowing beings, and the parents know that the child does this. For whatever reason, sex and the like are intuitively seen as dirty, i.e., the opposite of pure and good. Even the child, after a certain age, knows this. So when the subject comes up, both parties (the child and the parents) become uncomfortable, because both parties are aware of the contradiction between the child's idealized love and the dirty reality. Even when the child is an adult, the psychic residue of the earlier idealization remains.

Obviously that explanation is superficial.

Went to a BSO concert with a girl from Craigslist. Mozart's 23rd piano concerto and 36th symphony. The girl was dull, the music was good. (Mitsuko Uchida was the pianist.)

If you deeply appreciate the meaning and the power of the desire for recognition, your life is turned upside down. That's how you can tell whether you've understood the phenomenon. All great human endeavors are shot through with futility because they are directed at eternity. They are directed at a projection of the Other in the self, a projection that can be either explicit and obvious, as in "God" and "posterity", or implicit and indefinable, as when someone pursues his dream without having any particular abstract entity in mind. He just pursues it, "driven" to do so, driven by his un-self-conscious desire for objective confirmation of his self—i.e., for a suppression of self-consciousness. As I write this now I am necessarily assuming[1] universality, a universal other of some sort (hidden from me) whose approval gives my life meaning, gives this moment meaning for me. Without such an other—abstract or concrete, it doesn't matter as long as it is the measure of existence—life can have no "meaning", because what is meaning but an absolute standard by which we can judge ourselves and by which the noble among us strive to judge ourselves? If everything is "relative" and there is only subjectivity, the quest for greatness, which presupposes an objective truth in the realm of value, lacks a foundation, or an endpoint. It lacks *sense*; it lacks *meaning*. But greatness, or absolute recognition, is what we "great" ones need, the desire for which fuels us. The Other in us is tyrannical, and its confused objective projection (which is virtually indistinguishable from the Other itself) determines all our projects. It determines, indeed, many daily activities for everyone. When I obsessively check my writing for spelling errors it's because of the 'objective' in me, the Other, the one looking at me. And if I'm pleased with myself after writing it's because I feel like I've temporarily secured the approval of this projected objective self, this universal, self-less self. I'm writing for eternity, not for my own meager and fickle little self. Who cares what *he* [the little self] thinks?! I don't revolve around myself like an animal; I orient my efforts toward the Universal, as do all intellectual people (and, in a less extreme way, all people since the birth of civilization). This orientation is almost never an object of explicit consciousness, but it directs me all the same. It is woven through my being. It *is* my being.

Truth-seekers are always trying to reach the endpoint, but there is no endpoint. There is no rest on the horizon. That's what truth is, in the end: the merging of self with other, the overcoming of subjectivity, the union with reality, perfect recognition. Theoretical analysis is a means to that end. An exquisite sublimation. There is no truth because subjectivity is ineradicable, interpretations are endless and will never be exhausted. No doubt there are better and worse interpretations, more and less defensible ones; but there is no ultimate, final interpretation, because to achieve that would be to freeze fluid subjectivity and language.

Damn you, general other! I wish I were a cat.

Norms of reason are the closest thing there is to an absolute standard of value. Unfortunately, they are not self-conscious. If they were they would be God, or something like it.

[1] Double meaning.

January 25

Indian party last night at a bar downtown with Kanchana, whom I hadn't seen in months. Met a few girls etc., got invited to a birthday party tomorrow by a 25-year-old who gave every indication of looking forward to seeing me again. On the bus home I had Indians on the brain and had been socializing with a certain adeptness which had given me confidence, so I talked to a hot-as-lava Indian BU grad student who was standing across from me. Fetchingly shy and demure girl. She gave every indication of liking me so I asked for her phone number, to which she shyly replied she doesn't give out her number "too easily", and so I'll never see her again. As she left I wished her well in her studies, but my heart didn't put on such a brave face as my smile and I was sad as I thought about the mistake she was making. Surely it isn't hard to see that I'm a good guy with a good heart and a good mind.

"According to Winnicott, the child is capable of being 'lost' in interaction with the chosen object [the "transitional object", such as a blanket or a teddy bear] only if, after the separation from the symbiotically experienced mother, the child can generate enough trust in the continuity of her care that he or she is able, under the protection of a felt intersubjectivity, to be alone in a carefree manner. The child's creativity—indeed, the human faculty of imagination in general—presupposes a 'capacity to be alone', which itself can arise only out of a basic confidence in the care of a loved one." Thought-provoking.

The conflict is between the aesthetic ideal and the hedonistic ideal. (The ascetic ideal died even before the French Revolution—despite Gandhi and Mother Theresa—and its cousin, the moral ideal, is only paid lip-service to in a morally ambiguous and vastly impersonal world.) Grandeur, struggle, Faustian discontent versus happiness, love, satedness. Those are the only ideals that most people can still intuit. The masses, of course, follow the second and not the first, but they have instinctive respect for the Faust-type. (Look at their fascination with Tupac, who was hip-hop's Byron: tempestuous, dissolute, self-contradictory—"devil and angel"—artistically impassioned, revolutionary, hungry for knowledge.) And these two types, as abstract types, are not only mutually exclusive; they're opposites. Evidently they're anchored in two different aspects of the psyche.[1]

(By the way, invoking the psyche does not necessarily amount to psychologism, as sociologists might argue.)

It is possible, though, to go some way towards integrating the two ideals. The 'driven' person need not be miserable, after all, or tortured.[2] Such an integration would be a synthesis of the objective and the subjective, since the aesthetic ideal is fueled by the desire for recognition by some diffuse universal other—(it's closely related to the desire for fame)—while the hedonistic ideal has to do with more personal and intimate forms of recognition, like having a loving family and close friendships. (It's significant that men have historically been more attracted to the Faustian concept, and more generally to political power and world dominion, while women have pursued simple domestic happiness. Men tend to fixate, for whatever biological and/or social reasons, on the universal, the objective, the abstract Other, while women want recognition from a concrete other more than an abstract one. This partly explains why men have the reputation of being more restless and ambitious than women—namely, because, in wanting *concrete* recognition from an *abstract* (non-)entity, men are doomed never to achieve their goal, while women are not.) The integration would also, in a way, amount to a synthesis of the masculine and the feminine.

On a related topic, I can reflectively abandon my unreflective commitment to recognition from an all-knowing universal other without succumbing to nihilism or creative quiescence. The third way is to do all I can to enrich people's lives, as many as possible. This is the *real* content in the unreal desire, the rational kernel in the irrational compulsion. Unreflectively I will always have the irrational compulsion, but I can justify it through the consideration that it propels me to make contributions to culture.

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[1] Namely, the human and the animal. Human grandeur (recognition) versus animal satedness.

[2] Goethe, with his "Olympian tranquility", represented an integration.

We will never understand the relations between the sexes until we start being honest in our investigations and don't shrink from politically incorrect conclusions. It has to stop being considered a sound argument against a position if it savors ever-so-slightly of "sexism".

January 26

How is it possible for a person to identify with others, be they actual friends or merely members of an abstract community (say, a religious one) in which the person includes himself? How can one internalize other people like this? The only way is if the individual is his own other. His self-conscious particularity has to be fused with a universality, an internalized generalization of the sort of opposition-to-himself that concrete individuals are. As past thinkers have shown, this generalized [abstract] other arises in the context of the small child's separation from the mother, and of the child's increasing use of verbal gestures, and of the child's participation in, first, spontaneous play, and then in organized games in which he internalizes and can anticipate the participants' reactions to his behavior. Etc. I have nothing new to add to the account of what is empirically involved in the ontogenesis of the generalized other, i.e., of self-consciousness. Originally the infant's world, in particular his mother, is experienced as a part of the infant. There is no other. Then mother and child become less dependent on each other and move towards relative independence. The child becomes aware of itself as a separate being to the extent to which it becomes aware that other people are separate beings. But this evolution proceeds on the basis of—or rather is inextricably connected with—the distancing of the child from itself, which means the internalization of the opposition-to-itself that other people represent. This internalization is an *active* component of its sense of self, which is to say it is not merely 'opposed to' but is *included in* the child's self-consciousness. (Self-consciousness, after all, is an opposition-to-itself; this is possible because it is—or it is created through and is constantly re-created through—a generalized internalization of other people, who are 'primitively' [i.e., as a brute fact] opposed to the individual.) So now when the child develops an affective attachment to another person, its experience of this person literally becomes a part of its sense of self, because the person is experienced as a concrete instantiation of the generalized other, which, as I just said, is itself a part of the child's self-consciousness.[1] So "identification with an other" means that one's experience of the other is literally a component in one's sense of self. And this phenomenon is made possible through the 'mediation' of the generalized other, because this structure is the essential foundation of one's self-consciousness. (That is, by half-consciously associating a person with it, one is associating that person with one's very self.)

It's also interesting to note that two very different modes of identification with an other are possible: there is the undifferentiated unity in which there is no consciousness of an other, and there is the relating of the other to the self.

Honneth wants to argue in his book that many social conflicts can and should be conceptualized as struggles for recognition rather than as utilitarian conflicts over political and economic interests. "Motives for social resistance and rebellion…[often] stem from the violation of deeply rooted expectations regarding recognition". I agree with him, but his thesis isn't terribly interesting. Anyone with a shred of common sense knows that rebellions often, or usually, are fueled by experiences of collective humiliation, by rage

[1] There is an ambiguity in the idea of the generalized other, or at least in how I use it: sometimes I imply that it is a pure interiorization, a 'structure' in consciousness, while other times I imply that it is an objectively oriented projection of this interiorization. The distinction between the two uses is incredibly subtle, virtually imaginary, but it's analytically necessary. For example, in the sentence in the text I have in mind the "projection" when I say that a person is experienced as an instantiation of the Other, while I have the "interiorized" meaning in mind when I say that the Other is a part of self-consciousness. (The importance of the distinction is evident when you consider that a person cannot be experienced as an instantiation of one's own self-consciousness—because I myself am the only instantiation of myself—while he *can* be an instantiation of a *projection* of one's self-consciousness.) The reason I said the distinction is virtually imaginary is that, in the individual's immediate experience, there is *no* distinction. The only time there is is when a person 'focuses' the projection into a single abstract entity, like God or mankind.

at naked injustice and the simple desire to belong to a community that has dignity, freedom and respect. If academic social scientists have neglected this fact in favor of more Hobbesian or utilitarian interpretations, that's only because they're academics, i.e., bureaucrats. All you have to do is watch speeches by black civil rights leaders to see that the desire for recognition can have far more motivational force than the desire to possess more economic resources. In any case, the two categories of motives (the utilitarian and the 'Hegelian') are interrelated.

I'm reminded by the Christmas suicide of the thirty-year-old daughter of my mom's friend that the need for self-esteem, for self-recognition, can be even more powerful than the instinct for self-preservation. When faced with its own partial disintegration, the self often chooses non-existence (which is different from "disintegration").

January 27, 28

I won't be happy until I have something to fight for, and to fight against. That's the formula.

Philip Roth has said that in twenty-five years people will not read novels anymore. No doubt he's basically right. "The novel has had its day." Fiction has had its day. People don't realize it yet, but nonfiction too is declining. Books are becoming obsolete. Humanism is a worm-eaten carcass, eaten by the twin worms of commodification and mechanization. After I die it will be no longer. Culture is becoming more attenuated every year; the internet and television are taking its place. What is culture, after all, but a sort of "objective spirit" permeating the lifeworld and drawing people together, giving them a common heritage and a common spiritual substance? But television and the internet have the opposite effect, shutting people inside themselves and divorcing them from others.

Henry James once complained that the cultural 'atmosphere' in America is 'thinner' than in England, that it lacks the *palpable, tangible thickness* of tradition, which is a necessary prerequisite for the novelist's art. The atmosphere in England was somehow closer, more pressing and dense than in America, where everything was faster, thinner, spread apart, and change happened too fast. Well, America was the future, and the future was not in the humanistic imagination but in a complicated, fast-paced, globalized economic seriousness reflected in politics and what was still left of culture. Nonfiction is still popular but it's an anti-humanistic nonfiction, an increasingly blogified—ADD-ified—nonfiction, perversely appropriate to "the world's increasing gravity" (Nietzsche, *All Too Human*).

I'm affected by the situation as much as anyone. I don't claim immunity or superiority in that respect. Why else would someone like me, who loves reading, not truly enjoy reading fiction anymore? Society has made me overly "serious". Overly conscious of my own situation, so that I can't happily lose myself in the contemplation of a fictional scenario. The only way I can is if it's thrust on me, played out in front of my very eyes, on the screen. In sitcoms and movies. And then it's only for a short period of time.

I love myself but I dislike some of my qualities. But I wouldn't really want to change them, because that would be to change an aspect of my inner self, which I love. For instance, I wish I had the ability to organize people, to inspire them, to lead them; but if I had that ability then I would be a deeply different person than I am, which I don't want to be. It's a conundrum. I suppose that, in the end, I'm almost perfectly happy with who I am, despite a kind of 'external', 'artificial' wish for extrovertedness.

Rereading *The Brothers Karamazov* for a book club meeting in February with a slew of females. Going to a speed-dating event tomorrow.

January 30

The best test of a person's worth—that is, of his humanity, his free-spiritedness, his kindness and mental independence—is whether he is willing and able to examine rules critically in the light of reason and either obey them or not obey them based on their reasonableness. The slave is the one who does what he is told by authorities, who accepts their rules and orders unquestioningly even if they are irrational or they hurt people. The bureaucrat is the perfect slave. Only a liberated, humane person picks and chooses his rules for himself, guided by reason and compassion. I've noted before that the vast majority of Americans are slaves, no matter if they're educated or uneducated, intelligent or unintelligent. Remember the Milgram experiment in the 1960s? It showed that for most people in this society, the desire to follow orders trumps the desire to be kind to others, to not inflict pain.

Michael Moore's movie *Sicko* proves that, too.

Occasionally when I'm with my coworkers or friends I ask myself what kind of people they are, and almost always I'm dismayed to realize that they're probably bureaucrats, at least given the right circumstances. "That's the rule!" they'd say. "You can't do anything about it. It comes from on high. Don't blame me; blame my boss!" So that makes it harder for me to respect them. In a different society they might have been fascist functionaries.

The dating event was fun. Talked to seven girls for eight minutes each. I wouldn't say that vodka *transforms* me; it merely lets me be who I want to be. Beer and wine, on the other hand, tend to knock me out. –I wrote "Yes" for two girls; apparently they wrote yes for me too because I was emailed their contact info later.

February 2

"I think everyone should love life above everything in the world."

"Love life more than the meaning of it?"

—From Dostoyevsky's book. I like that last line, said by Ivan. *Love life more than the meaning of it!* Alyosha replies with "Certainly, love it, regardless of logic as you say, it must be regardless of logic, and it's only then one will understand the meaning of it." Pithy words.

Nietzsche's ideal of the *Übermensch* wasn't as original as he thought. It's just a variation on the aesthetic ideal of the personality, which has been around for a long, long time.

I spoke too soon when I said I don't enjoy reading fiction. For I like Dostoyevsky's masterpiece, despite its many flaws and excesses. It's suspenseful and thought-provoking.

Edgar Allan Poe wrote that the desire to do mischief is buried deep in the human psyche. To do evil, like carve out a cat's eye with a spoon—there's a fascination with it and a repressed desire for it. But can it really be somehow ingrained in the psyche? No, surely not. Poe was wrong. It isn't a spontaneous upsurge of the human spirit, of its darker side. It is but a reaction to circumstances. It arises, in fact, from boredom. "The imp of the perverse" is a manifestation of boredom—and curiosity, of course. It can have other causes too, but insofar as it exists generally among millions of people nowadays it's mainly a sublimation of boredom, or rather of the instinct for life in conditions of boredom. Yes, it actually arises from the desire to *affirm* life!—but at the same time from the desire to deny life, namely this particular boring life. It's a revolt from conventional modern life, that's really all it is. This fascination with the dark side isn't an eternal fact innate in the psyche. —Well, no, the fascination itself may indeed be such a fact, just insofar as the "dark side" is very different from ordinary life; but the desire to actively descend to the depths is not, and that's what Poe was talking about. This desire is a historical creation.

The passion to negate usually signifies a deeper passion to affirm, to reach out and remake the world in one's own image.

February 9

You'll never understand women until you know that on some level they want to be subordinate to [protected by, and weaker and smaller than, etc.] their man.

From the soul of atheists and free-thinkers.— The greatest sin in history was the invention of the idea of sin.

In the end, what sustains me in the face of Godlessness and allows me to escape the fate of Ivan Karamazov is my implicit faith in myself. I know, without doubt, that I am the measure of all things, the rightful judge of the world, the standard of value. I am not a person but a principle. I see through everything, the world is transparent to me and people are mere puppets moved by a hand that I alone can see. ("Invisible" to everyone but me.)

February 16

Reading Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence Man*.

Went to an EF party last night, danced and drank with the students etc., then went upstairs to the dorm rooms and made out with one of my students, a 24-year-old Argentine named Gimena. Very nice girl, nice body and pretty face; she seems to like me a lot, told me as she lay on my chest that she had butterflies in her stomach. We were together for hours as her roommates (who are also students of mine) came in and out and talked and were maturely unembarrassed by the situation. Gimena did the female thing right away and asked me questions like what I thought of her, how she compares to American girls, and so on. I wish I romantically "liked" her more, but it'll take a special person to fill my emotional void. For now maybe I'll just have a little fun, or maybe I'll nip this relationship in the bud. It can go nowhere, and it could get me in trouble.

I can neither express nor understand my love of the female body.

Why am I so bothered by the fact that nothing matters? I've never met anyone so morbid and yet so cheerful as I. I'm in a rut. The older I get, the more I need God. The idea of him would allow me to channel my mental energy, which currently has no outlet.

February 19 etc.

Mann's writing doesn't grab me. I couldn't finish *Doctor Faustus* and I can't finish *Felix Krull*. Instead I'm going to read Bill Freund's *The Making of Contemporary Africa*, which approaches history from a materialist perspective.

I still have the dream of reformulating Marxism in an analytically precise and empirically grounded way. Someday I'll do so—unless I decide that Marxism has too many flaws to be salvaged, or to be useful. I also want to write a synopsis of my philosophy, from epistemology to value theory to the self to psychology.

Reading parts of an anthology of Adorno's writings called *Can One Live after Auschwitz?* I may have underestimated Adorno. He's an eloquent writer, capable of pithy formulations. "The irrational nature of contemporary society inhibits a rational account of it in the realm of theory." "The failure to produce a theory of society runs parallel to the regression of society itself." "With the trend toward [political] intervention [in the economy], the system's resilience has been confirmed, but so, indirectly, has the theory of its collapse [because such intervention is necessary for the system's survival]." Etc. His statements can be suggestive and stimulating. In the end, though—at least in his philosophical and semi-sociological

writings—he traffics in generalizations and obvious theoretical contradictions that he tolerates, indeed celebrates, because they epitomize "dialectics", which is his method of choice. Much of his writing, as I said earlier, is virtually a stream of consciousness, devoid of analytical rigor and any apparent thesis to be supported. He just *works through* his thoughts. He writes the *thinking* of his thoughts and not simply the thoughts themselves, which makes his writing dense, aphoristic and verbose. If you were to rewrite some of his essays in an analytical framework, purging them of all their eloquence, vagueness and shallow paradoxes, they would be a lot shorter; in fact, not much of genuine substance would remain.

All in all, he seems pretty unoriginal and not very interesting, though he's a good enough writer to seduce the reader into thinking otherwise.

As for the endless fuss he made over Auschwitz as having all kinds of philosophical and existential implications—it strikes me as silly. Intelligent people know and have known for centuries, if not millennia, that life is meaningless and contingent, that society in its present configuration permits of absolute inhumanity. Maybe no one had really imagined that Auschwitz was possible, but its reality has only confirmed all the deep truths that have always been evident to thinking men. To obsess over its moral implications is, ironically, to remain in the "metaphysical" attitude that Adorno deprecates as having been made absurd by Auschwitz. For "absolute moral imperatives" (such as "the categorical imperative that we never allow Auschwitz to happen again"), like God, don't exist in a world where the Holocaust can happen. Adorno's grandiose and tragic stance is immature. "Can one live after Auschwitz?" Sure. Auschwitz proves that life has no value in itself, but it never did, so what's the big deal? Let's just go on trying to alleviate suffering, as always—even doing so with more energy than we did in the pre-Auschwitz world; but let's stop with the histrionics and the hysterics. Okay, Adorno?

Richard Rubenstein's reflections on the Holocaust were more profound than Adorno's. He understood that the Holocaust was but a dramatic expression of the bureaucratic dehumanization in which modern civilization consists. Even if the Holocaust hadn't happened, the catastrophe that it signified would have.

February 23, 25

Gimena slept at my place last night. She's a virgin and wants to remain so for a while, but I was happy kissing her and her beautiful body. We'll see a movie tomorrow. It's funny how a little thing like this can make you quite happy. I don't want to analyze it or her, I just want to enjoy it.

Women are so soft and exquisite, how can they not be acutely conscious of their sexuality at all times? They're saturated with sexuality.

Saw *The Magic Flute* at BU this weekend. That opera is tremendously appealing. Yesterday I went to the Isabella Stewart Gardner museum with a Taiwanese English student, a preposterously beautiful girl named Pei-yu. Masato had set me up with her. Sucks that she's a bad conversationalist (despite her intelligence) and doesn't reciprocate interest shown in her. Later in the night I met Gimena. Took her to my apartment after a long intimate conversation; we got naked and I treated her like a goddess. Like Aphrodite. […] I also enjoyed gazing at her beautiful vagina, though she was a little hesitant about that. "I shy," she murmured cutely while closing her legs. "Why?" I asked while coaxing them open again. "It's beautiful. You shouldn't be shy." "I shy…"

Reading *The Sickness Unto Death*, at least a good chunk of it (in an anthology of existentialist writings). It speaks to me. I understand the first two or three pages in a new way now, in light of my ideas on the generalized other. Kierkegaard can be "naturalized", as Mead naturalized Hegel (according to Honneth), and when he's translated into this naturalistic language you realize how right he is. Well, partly right.

Questions about free will and responsibility are somehow misguided. Is it true that I "choose" to be, say, in despair if I'm in despair? In a way, maybe yes. For if I really wanted to I might be able to temporarily banish despair from my mind, by distracting myself. And maybe if I exerted enough willpower I could overcome my despair in more constructive ways. But still, it isn't wholly true that I've chosen my mental state, and certainly not that I've chosen my personality. There's something strangely compulsory or half-compulsory about, say, sadness. I do partly choose it if I wallow in it, because I could probably change how I feel by doing something else, but I don't choose it in the way that I'm choosing to type on my computer right now. Concepts like freedom and unfreedom don't do justice to the indescribable phenomenology.

It's simplistic to say, with Sartre, that I'm absolutely responsible for the way I am and the way I act, even though it's true that at any given moment I'm choosing my mental state and my actions insofar as I'm implicitly making the judgment that this is how I want to be right now. If I'm comfortable being sad, as of course I am if I remain in sadness for a while, then somehow I'm choosing to be sad. 'At this moment I am content to be sad, so I won't resist it. I choose it.' Still, the freedom involved in my choice is not absolute. In some bizarre way it's a half-freedom, if that makes any sense. (Strictly speaking, I suspect it doesn't. But that only shows the inadequacy of the concepts of freedom and choice.)

Nor do I have perfect freedom in my interactions with society. There are limitations in my nature, conditions that make it 'easier' for me to do one thing rather than another. I certainly can't be whatever I want to be, or act however I want to act.

Similarly, it's a half-truth to say, as Sartre does in his essay *Existentialism,* that when I make a choice I'm choosing for all humanity. "If I want to marry and have children, I am involving all humanity in monogamy and not merely myself. Therefore, I am responsible for myself and for everyone else. I am creating a certain image of man of my own choosing. In choosing myself, I choose man." I'll pass over the obvious fact that, even if this argument is true, I am not thereby responsible for all *real* people, only for the abstract idea of humanity implied by my choice. But Sartre is overlooking one whole side of man's consciousness and concentrating on the universal side. Certainly universality is an element in consciousness, and to that extent perhaps he is right. But particularity is a no less important side, and to that extent he's wrong. The universal element in my consciousness implies that I 'unconsciously' assume my choices to be valid for all humanity, but the element of particularity, which is equally essential to the human cast of mind, limits my choices to myself. So there's a contradiction here, a tension. I can only be called *half*-responsible for humanity, insofar as I know at any given moment that my choice is meant only for myself and not for others. The other half, the universal half, the 'generalized other' half, is what explains the responsibility that I do have for mankind.

All this, by the way, harmonizes with our intuitions about human responsibility. It isn't cut-and-dried; it's complicated.

"Generally speaking, consciousness—that is, self-consciousness—is decisive with regard to the self. The more consciousness, the more self." That's exactly what I said in my senior thesis, and my professors thought it silly. I would add that the more consciousness, the more free will.

February 28

Sartre's philosophy is one-sided and simple-minded. His article inclines me to think it's incoherent.

I'm not very impressed with *The Sickness unto Death* either.

Reading *Rational Choice Marxism,* a collection of articles by people like Erik Olin Wright, Adam Przeworski and Michael Burawoy.

Why do I—very occasionally—semi-fantasize about killing people like Bill Kristol and Richard Perle (who have, in effect, killed so many others)? What accounts for the satisfaction of imagining that? Evidently such fantasies originate in some sort of psychological conflict. But the conflict ultimately has to be within my self, between me and myself. Doubtless it is a conflict between me and the other, the other

person, but it is at the same time and to the same degree a conflict between my self and my self. Acts and desires originate in the self; they are self-impelled, always, by definition. So if I desire to act aggressively towards someone, it's because I have internalized in some way the conflict between him and me. That means the conflict exists within me and drives me to act aggressively. Insofar as it exists *inter*personally it exists *intra*personally. This is possible because the other that is within me at all times gets identified, or partly identified, with the person in question. By eliminating him I'm eliminating the self-tension caused by his existence, by his holding views contrary to mine or by his condemnation of me or whatever. It follows that serenity is the attitude that signifies the most complete self-confidence, self-contentment, self-coincidence; a person susceptible to highly aggressive urges is necessarily highly sensitive to other people's valuations of him, and perhaps thus to self-doubt (or something like it). A sadist is consumed with destroying the hostile Other in himself, who is instantiated in the people he tortures. He lacks 'security'; his sense of self is fragile, unconsciously self-doubting. He can probably be said to hate himself on an unconscious or half-conscious level. By torturing and killing someone he temporarily restores the self-harmony he normally lacks; he brings himself back to himself, negates the Other (or rather the Other's negativity, i.e., the otherness of the Other).

It's possible that a sadist's ecstatic reaction to his glorious destruction of another person has elements in common with the way I feel immediately after writing something that I think has theoretical value. We're both creating, in a way (although the sadist's 'creation', or his fashioning the world in his own image, is destruction, destruction of something perceived as noxious and offensive because it has independent existence). We're both forcing the Other to recognize us, which gives us great pleasure.

March 1

I read "The Brenner-Wallerstein Debate" (1988), by Denemark and Thomas, in the *International Studies Quarterly*. I think it's hopeless to try to systematically explain society. Science can't penetrate the social world in the way it can the natural world.

Bought a year's subscription to the *New Left Review*. Very excited. There's an endless supply of excellent articles I'm poring through.

I can't help thinking that, despite the difficulty of formulating the theory in a precise way, Marx was right that the forces of production in late capitalism will someday outgrow capitalist relations of production and exchange. The latter will be sloughed off, as utterly inappropriate to a kind of technology and a society that demand cooperation and planning. (Consider the origins of, for example, the internet, computers, information processing, satellites, and lasers: they were developed in the public sector—the Pentagon, the National Science Foundation, places like MIT, etc. Only subsequently were they made available to private companies.)

In his article "After Dialectics: Radical Social Theory in a Post-Communist World", Göran Therborn mentions an interesting passage from E. O. Wright: "The work of Erik Olin Wright has played a central role in securing a legitimate location for Marxist class analysis within academic sociology. In a characteristically elegant approach, a recent contribution structures the issue by asking: if class is the answer, what is the question? Wright discerns six types of question which will frequently have 'class' as part of their answers:

8) Distributional location: how are people objectively located in distributions of material inequality?
9) Subjectively salient groups: what explains how people, individually and collectively, subjectively locate themselves and others within a structure of inequality?
10) Life chances: what explains inequalities in life chances and material standards of living?
11) Antagonistic conflicts: what social cleavages systematically shape overt conflicts?
12) Historical variation: how should we characterize and explain the variations across history in the social organization of inequalities?

13) Emancipation: what sorts of transformations are needed to eliminate oppression and exploitation within capitalist societies? (Erik Olin Wright, ed., *Approaches to Class Analysis,* Cambridge 2005.)"

In his entertaining paper "Rational Choice Marxism and Postmodern Feminism: Towards a More Meaningful Incomprehension", Alan Carling gives a short summary and critique of postmodernism. I'll quote some passages. "For Lyotard, the postmodern is defined as 'incredulity toward metanarratives', and he is clearly on the side of the oppressed discourses against their oppressors. In view of what he has said before about modernism, the postmodern stance implies a loosening of the boundaries of the academic disciplines, a reappraisal of the relationship of the secular to scientific culture, and a skepticism towards the truth claims of science—in short, a legitimation crisis for the knowledge institutions of the West. …Lyotard commends the playfulness of unanchored intellectual creativity ('paralogy'), and the proliferation of language games without a single center, free of domination by any master discourse, such as that imposed in a modernist culture by one of the grand narratives—Marx, Freud, the hermeneutics of meaning, and so on.

"…Leave aside the criticism that Lyotard's recapitulation of science since the Enlightenment places him squarely in the grand narrative business; if his argument is right, what does it show? [Nothing, says Carling. Sure, science is a social activity conducted by means of linguistic devices—rhetoric, metaphor, fable, as well as specialized vocabularies and techniques—which bear no necessary relationship to any 'truth of the matter'. But unlike vernacular discourses, scientific practice mobilizes language etc. behind a goal "conventionally called 'the pursuit of truth', where 'the truth' is provisionally recognizable partly on cognitive, partly on procedural and partly on pragmatic grounds."] …He goes so far in emphasizing how the conduct of science has changed as to prescind entirely from science as a social process. He 'expect[s] a thorough exteriorization of knowledge with respect to the "knower", at whatever point he or she may occupy in the knowledge process. The old principle that the acquisition of knowledge is indissociable from the training (*Bildung*) of minds, or even of individuals, is becoming obsolete and will become ever more so.' So meaning now bypasses human subjects, and inheres instead in mechanical systems?

"This nonsense alerts us to a curious feature of the postmodern debate: on the one hand postmodernism is the most extreme culturalism—it takes off from Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism and then tries to convert the relative autonomy of the superstructure into the absolute autonomy of the superstructure (a move made most shamelessly by Baudrillard). On the other hand, extreme culturalism consorts with the crassest expressions of technological determinism, in which the silicon chip transforms the basis on which any human knowledge can be gained: the typewriter gives you society with Virginia Woolf; the PC society with Janet Street-Porter. (At this point, and in an access of populist enthusiasm, I thought I should ask my computer for its opinion, so I have typed in 'what do *you* think?', and recorded the answer in a footnote.[1])

"…I have criticized postmodern theorists for combining extreme culturalism with crude technological determinism: they move directly from forces of production to superstructures without passing through the relations of production." That's a good point. Carling subsequently notes Fredric Jameson's interesting theory that three phases of culture are related to three phases of capitalist organization: realism, modernism, and postmodernism correspond to the market, imperialism, and late multinationalism, which are in turn related to the three phases of technological development that Ernest Mandel attributes to capitalism in *Late Capitalism*. Briefly stated, the three periods are "capitalism as a steam-powered realist market economy (1848-90), followed by modern electric imperialism (1890-1940), and thence a nuclear-powered multinational postmodernism (1945 to date)." Simplistic, but food for thought.

Here's a list—an 'ongoing' list—of some of the articles I've read in the *NLR*: Perry Anderson's "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci" (1976). Raymond Williams's "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory" (1973). Nicos Poulantzas's "The Problem of the Capitalist State" (1969). E. O. Wright's "Giddens' Critique of Marxism" (1983). Robert Brenner's "Structure vs. Conjuncture: the 2006 Elections

[1] (There was no reply.)

and the Rightward Shift" (2007). Wright and Andrew Levine's "Rationality and Class Struggle" (1980). Wright and Levine's "Marxism and Methodological Individualism" (1987). Therborn's "The New Questions of Subjectivity" (1984). Therborn's "The Rule of Capital and the Rise of Democracy" (1977). Therborn's "The Travail of Latin American Democracy" (1979). Aidan Foster-Carter's "The Modes of Production Controversy" (1978). Ernesto Laclau's "Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America" (1971). Norman Geras's "Althusser's Marxism: an Account and Assessment" (1972). Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas's "Women's Oppression Today" (1984). Fredric Jameson's "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984). Anderson's "Scurrying Towards Bethlehem" (2001), a history of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Anderson's "Jottings on the Conjuncture" (2007). Maurice Godelier's "The Origins of Male Domination" (1981). Michael Rustin's "A Socialist Consideration of Kleinian Psychoanalysis" (1982). Christopher Lasch's "The Freudian Left and Cultural Revolution" (1981). Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh's "Narcissism and the Family: A Critique of Lasch" (1982). Jean Roussel's "Introduction to Jacques Lacan" (1968). Jeffrey C. Alexander's "Honneth's New Critical Theory of Recognition" (1996). Godelier's "Infrastructures, Societies and History" (1978). Christopher Bertram's "International Competition in Historical Materialism" (1990). Ellen Meiksins Wood's "The Separation of the Economic and the Political in Capitalism" (1981). Wood's "Marxism and the Course of History" (1984). Eric Hobsbawm's "Marx and History" (1984). Caroline New's "Man Bad, Woman Good? Essentialisms and Ecofeminisms" (1996). Alex Callinicos's "The Limits of 'Political Marxism'" (1990). Joseph McCarney's "For and Against Althusser" (1989). Ernest Mandel's "The Role of the Individual in History: the Case of World War II" (1986). Jack Goody's "The Labyrinth of Kinship" (2005). Mike Davis's "Planet of Slums" (2004). Dylan Riley's "Democracy's Graveyards?" (2008), a review of Michael Mann's book *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*. Tariq Ali's "Afghanistan: Mirage of the Good War" (2008). Benedict Anderson's "Exit Suharto: Obituary for a Mediocre Tyrant" (2008). Aaron Benanav's "Kali's Prophet" (2008), a review of a book on Schumpeter. Gregor McLellan's "Among the Unbelievers" (2008), a review of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*.

March 4

Reading E. O. Wright's *Classes*, a sociological analysis.

Excerpt from Anderson's article: "…Nicos Poulantzas, whose work *Political Power and Social Classes* contains many critically acute comments on the Prison Notebooks, in effect dismisses Gramsci's concern with the problem [of why the masses consent to bourgeois ideology], remarking that the only novelty of this consent is its claim to rationality—i.e. its non-religious character. 'The specific characteristic of (capitalist) ideologies is not at all, as Gramsci believed, that they procure a more or less active "consent" from the dominated classes towards political domination, since this is a general characteristic of *any* dominant ideology. What specifically defines the ideologies in question is that they do not aim to be accepted by the dominated classes according to the principle of participation in the sacred: they explicitly declare themselves and are accepted as scientific techniques.' In a similar fashion, Ernest Mandel has written in his *Late Capitalism* that the major contemporary form of capitalist ideology in the West is an appeal to technological rationality and a cult of experts: 'Belief in the omnipotence of technology is the specific form of bourgeois ideology in late capitalism.' These claims involve a serious misconception.

"For the peculiarity of the historical consent won from the masses within modern capitalist social formations is by no means to be found in its mere secular reference or technical awe. The novelty of this consent is that it takes the fundamental form of a belief by the masses that *they exercise an ultimate self-determination* within the existing social order. It is thus not acceptance of the superiority of an acknowledged ruling class (feudal ideology), but credence in the democratic equality of all citizens in the government of the nation—in other words, disbelief in the existence of any ruling class. The consent of the exploited in a capitalist social formation is thus of a qualitatively new type, which has suggestively produced its own etymological extension: consensus, or mutual agreement. Naturally, the active ideology of bourgeois ideology coexists and combines in a wide number of mixed forms with much older and less

articulated ideological habits and traditions—in particular, those of passive resignation to the way of the world and diffidence in any possibility of changing it, generated by the differential knowledge and confidence characteristic of any class society. The legacy of these diuturnal traditions does indeed often take the modern guise of deference to technical necessity. They do not, however, represent any real departure from previous patterns of class domination; the condition of their continued efficacy today is their insertion into an ideology of representative democracy which overarches them. For it is the freedom of bourgeois democracy alone that appears to establish the limits of what is socially possible for the collective will of a people, and thereby can render the bounds of its impotence tolerable.[1]"

Weber's definition is good to keep in mind: "the State is the institution which enjoys a monopoly of legitimate violence over a given territory". This criterion is a useful way to separate State from non-State. Of course, on a more fundamental level there isn't a clear separation between civil society and State. Civil institutions are often effectively extensions of the State. (E.g., the modern school system.) Gramsci agrees, though probably he goes too far: "By the State should be understood not merely the governmental apparatus, but also the 'private' apparatus of hegemony or civil society." "In reality civil society and State are one and the same." By 'hegemony' he means the cultural hegemony of a class, the bourgeoisie.

"If we revert to Gramsci's original problematic, *the normal structure of capitalist political power in bourgeois-democratic states* is in effect simultaneously and indivisibly *dominated by culture* and *determined by coercion.*" "The normal conditions of ideological subordination of the masses—the day-to-day routines of a parliamentary democracy—are themselves *constituted by* a silent, absent force which gives them their currency: the monopoly of legitimate violence by the State. Deprived of this, the system of cultural control would be instantly fragile, since the limits of possible actions against it would disappear. With it, it is immensely powerful—so powerful that it can, paradoxically, do 'without' it: in effect, violence may normally scarcely appear within the bounds of the system at all." Nevertheless, the fundamental resort of bourgeois class power is coercion. See my brief jottings on Katrina. *The true character of a society reveals itself in "extreme" situations.* (See also one of Marx's articles on British rule in India.)

Three factors in maintaining the status quo: consent, coercion, and objective economic constraints. Gramsci emphasizes the first two, especially the first.

Williams notes that we should understand the base/superstructure distinction partly in terms of social intentions. "…[A]ny society has a specific organization, a specific structure, and the principles of this organization and structure can be seen as directly related to certain social intentions, intentions by which we define the society, intentions which in all our experience have been the rule of a particular class." Intentions can be 'read back' into the culture, inferred from it; the social processes that constitute the base can perhaps be identified through inference from people's behavior, or from the stress that society lays on specific institutions and practices.

He distinguishes between residual and emergent forms of culture, of both alternative and oppositional culture (as opposed to the dominant culture). Much art is of a residual kind, embodying values and meanings from earlier periods; some art is emergent. So one can't ask simply "What is the relation between literature and society?"; there are many different kinds of literature, which interact with the rest of society in different ways.

We should think of an artwork not as an *object*, something static, but as a *practice*, the embodiment of a *process*, involving intentions, norms, social relations, material conditions, etc. This approach might be

[1] A real and central belief in popular sovereignty can, in other words, coexist with a profound scepticism towards all governments that juridically express it. The divorce between the two is typically mediated by the conviction that no government could be otherwise than distant from those it represents, yet many are not representative at all. This is not a mere fatalism or cynicism among the masses in the West. It is an active assent to the familiar order of bourgeois democracy, as the dull maximum of liberty, that is constantly reproduced by the radical absence of *proletarian democracy* in the East, whose régimes figure the infernal minimum. There is no space to explore the effects of fifty years of Stalinism here: their importance is enormous for understanding the complex historical meaning of bourgeois democracy in the West today. [Irony: Stalinism, or the Cold War, almost certainly buttressed and stabilized capitalism in the West. It was a godsend.]

more fruitful from the Marxian point of view. The subtle change of focus it involves might yield new insights.

March 6

I have a lot of respect for E. O. Wright. He's a serious thinker. I'd like to talk to him again; I was too shy eight years ago to take advantage of the opportunity. Also, I hadn't read enough then.

Schopenhauer may have been right that the masculine form is more beautiful than the feminine. Each has its own unique beauty, but the beauty of strength and hardness, of *chiseled granite*, is perhaps more striking and somehow—nonsensically—'admirable' than the beauty of softness and passiveness. (Relative passiveness is embedded in the female form.)

Homo sapiens is the only *beautiful* primate. (The more hirsute a person is, the less beautiful he is.)

—Of course, chimpanzees would argue that chimpanzees are the only beautiful primates.

Cohen has an interesting take on the traditional Marxist view that capitalism can't make possible a true *abundance* of resources, and that socialism is necessary for this. He admits, *pace* Marx, that capitalism can lead to a virtually endless quantity of goods, but he denies that the output can be rationally allocated so as to create an abundance of goods for everyone. "…Because capitalism is production for exchange rather than use, capitalist relations of production have a built-in bias for using progress in productive forces to expand output rather than to expand leisure time (where leisure is defined as release from burdensome toil). Cohen writes: 'As long as production remains subject to the capitalist principle, the output-increasing option will tend to be selected and implemented in one way or another… Now the consequence of the increasing output which capitalism necessarily favours is increasing consumption. Hence the boundless pursuit of consumption goods is a result of a productive process oriented to exchange-values rather than consumption-values. It is the Rockefellers who ensure that the Smiths need to keep up with the Jones.'

"This generates an incompatibility between the forces and relations of production, not because productive power as such ceases to develop, but because it ceases to be rationally deployed: 'The productive technology of capitalism begets an unparalleled opportunity for lifting the curse of Adam and liberating men from toil, but the production relations of capitalist economic organization prevent the opportunity from being seized… It brings society to the threshold of abundance and locks the door. For the promise of abundance is not an endless flow of goods, but a sufficiency produced with a minimum of unpleasant exertion.'

"Cohen's Compatibility Thesis is thus equivalent to the claim that the relations of production become irrational with respect to a general notion of improving the human condition. In the past such improvement was achieved by increasing the level of development of the forces of production themselves; in advanced capitalism it is achieved by the rational deployment of the forces of production that already exist. 'Fettering', therefore, is ultimately a fettering of the possibility of rational action." That's an angle I hadn't really considered.

Wright's article provides a good critique of Cohen's obviously ahistorical positions.

Therborn's review. "Dominant ideology thesis." "There exists a widespread agreement among Marxists, such as Habermas, Marcuse, Miliband and Poulantzas, that there is a powerful, effective, dominant ideology in contemporary capitalist societies and that this dominant ideology creates an acceptance of capitalism in the working class. It is with this dominant ideology thesis that our book is concerned." The authors' rejection of it is less than convincing (says Therborn). While "dull economic compulsion" is, as they say, an important ingredient in the "integration" of capitalist societies, Gramsci was right that there's such a thing as cultural hegemony and that this plays a role in stabilizing societies. Nevertheless, it's easy to overestimate the importance of hegemony. The fragmentation of opposition, and the fragmentation of the citizenry as a whole, are major elements in the stability of late capitalism.

March 8

Like a bloated toad frowning at the world I sit here stoically, my darting tongue pulling in flies and mosquitoes.

From Wright's book (p. 74): "I think it is possible to restore the central thrust of the traditional Marxian concept of exploitation by making a distinction between what can be called 'economic oppression' and exploitation… Exploitation involves more than just economic oppression; it includes both economic oppression and the appropriation of the fruits of the labor of one class by another (which is equivalent to a transfer of the surplus from one class to another)…

"With this usage of terms, we can identify a fairly wide range of inequalities that we might want to condemn on the basis of economic oppression, but which are not examples of exploitation. The poverty of the permanently disabled or of the unemployed, for example, would in general be cases of economic oppression but not of exploitation… Now, it might be argued that the concept of economic oppression would be sufficient to provide the basis for a class concept, since it does define a set of objective material interests. What, then, is added by the distinction between economic oppressions that involve appropriation of the fruits of labor and those that do not? The critical addition is the idea that in the case of exploitation, the welfare of the exploiting class *depends upon the work* of the exploited class. In a case of simple economic oppression, the oppressing class only has interests in protecting its own property rights; in the case of exploitation it also has interests in the productive activity and effort of the exploited. In the case of economic oppression, the oppressors' material interests would not be hurt if all of the oppressed simply disappeared or died. In the case of exploitation, on the other hand, the exploiting class needs the exploited class. Exploitation, therefore, binds the exploiter and exploited together in a way that economic oppression need not. It is this peculiar combination of antagonism of material interests and interdependency which gives exploitation its distinctive character and which makes class struggle such a potentially explosive social force."

p. 72: "The central message of Roemer's strategies for analyzing exploitation is that the material basis of exploitation lies in inequalities in the distribution of productive assets, usually referred to as property relations. The asset–exploitation nexus depends in each case upon the capacity of asset-holders to deprive others of equal access to that asset, whether it be alienable [e.g., the physical means of production] or inalienable [e.g., skills I possess]. On the one hand, inequalities of assets are sufficient to account for transfers of surplus labor; on the other hand, different forms of asset inequality specify different systems of exploitation. Classes are then defined as positions within the social relations of production derived from the property relations which determine the patterns of exploitation."

A defense of the idea of skill-based exploitation: "To appropriate the fruits of someone else's labor is equivalent to saying that a person consumes more than they produce. If the income of a person with skill assets is identical to their 'marginal product', as neoclassical economists like to argue, how can we say that they are consuming 'more' than their own contribution? Through what mechanism are they appropriating the fruits of anyone else's labor?

"The answer to this question is easiest when skill-asset exploitation is based on *credentials* which have the effect of restricting the supply of skills. Let us compare two situations, one in which a mechanism for granting credentials is in operation which restricts the supply of a given skill and one in which credentials are absent. When credentials are operating, employers will bid up the wages of the owners of the credential above the costs of producing the skills. (In the absence of the credential-awarding process, additional laborers would acquire the skills if wages were above the costs of producing the skills, thus ultimately driving the wages down to those costs.) The result of this is that the *price* of the commodities produced with those skills will be higher than it would be in the absence of the credentials. In effect, we can say that while the possessor of a credential is being paid a wage equal to the *price* of his or her marginal product, this price is above the 'value' of the marginal product (i.e., the price of the marginal product in the absence of credentials). That difference is the exploitative transfer appropriated by the possessor of a

credential. For this reason, possessors of credentials have interests in maintaining skill differentials as such, in maintaining the restrictions on the acquisition of credentials."

In other words, if there were perfect competition, there would be no skill-based exploitation. Maybe this reflects the fact that skill-based exploitation is not intrinsically *capitalist* exploitation (see below); that is, it is not the basis of capitalist profits. (Profits are based on the capitalist mode of exploitation, which is to exclude workers from ownership of the means of production.) It belongs, strictly speaking, to a different mode of production from the capitalist. —Still, I have doubts about the idea's coherence.

My own affluence, such as it is, rests on exploitative power-structures, which means that I am complicit, if not actively then passively.

"In all capitalist exploitation, the mediating mechanism is market exchanges. Unlike in feudalism, surplus is not directly appropriated from workers in the form of coerced labor or dues. Rather, it is appropriated through market exchanges: workers are paid a wage which covers the costs of production of their labor power; capitalists receive an income from the sale of commodities produced by workers. The difference in these quantities constitutes the exploitative surplus appropriated by capitalists." As Wright says, this claim doesn't rest on the labor theory of value.

"Two different kinds of non-polarized class locations can be defined in the logic of [the "contradictory class locations"] framework: (1) There are class locations that are neither exploiters nor exploited, i.e. people who have precisely the per capita level of the relevant asset. A petty-bourgeois, self-employed producer with average capital stock, for example, would be neither exploiter nor exploited within capitalist relations. These kinds of positions are what can be called the 'traditional' or 'old' middle class of a particular kind of class system. (2) Since concrete societies are rarely, if ever, characterized by a single mode of production, the actual class structures of given societies will be characterized by complex patterns of intersecting exploitation relations. There will therefore tend to be some positions which are exploiting along one dimension of exploitation relations, while on another are exploited. Highly skilled wage-earners (e.g. professionals) in capitalism are a good example: they are capitalistically exploited because they lack assets in capital and yet are skill-exploiters [since their income rests on an enforced scarcity of the particular credentials they possess]. Such positions are what are typically referred to as the 'new middle class' of a given class system.

"…It is possible to distinguish within this framework a whole terrain of class-locations in capitalist *society* that are distinct from the polarized [bourgeois/proletarian] classes of the capitalist *mode of production*: expert managers, non-managerial experts, non-expert managers, etc. What is the relation between this heterogeneous exploitation definition of the middle class and my previous conceptualization of such position of such positions as contradictory locations within class relations? There is still a sense in which such positions could be characterized as 'contradictory locations', for they will typically hold contradictory interests with respect to the primary forms of class struggle in capitalist society, the struggle between labor and capital. On the one hand, they are like workers in being excluded from ownership of the means of production; on the other, they have interests opposed to workers because of their effective control of organization and skill assets. Within the struggles of capitalism, therefore, these 'new' middle classes do constitute contradictory locations, or more precisely, contradictory locations within exploitation relations."

Wright notes that the emergence of this new, contradictory middle class means that the proletariat is no longer the only rival to the capitalist class for class power. A different, less oppressed class could, and probably would, act as the midwife for the birth of a new society. Remember the historical lesson that the beneficiaries of social revolutions are never the oppressed classes of the prior mode of production but rather 'third classes'. The bourgeoisie, not [only] the peasantry, benefited from the French Revolution; the bureaucrats and managers, not the peasantry or proletariat, benefited from the Russian Revolution; and the same was true of China's revolution. This suggests that in a future revolution, the beneficiaries would be located outside the strictly defined mode of production that was previously dominant.

That's an important insight, and it probably qualifies as a fairly valid historical generalization. Beneficiaries of social revolutions tend to be classes that grew up in the *interstices* of the previous mode of production (or rather, in the interstices of the society in which that mode of production predominated).

As I read *Classes*, it feels almost as if scales are falling from my eyes. I wish I could convey a sense of the book's richness.

Doubtless there are other kinds of exploitation besides class exploitation. For example, gender exploitation (in which, say, husbands exploit the labor of their wives for domestic services), or racial exploitation. This complicates the issue. But ultimately the question is "Which kind of exploitation is most fundamental for understanding social conflict?" The answer, surely, is class exploitation, for many reasons.

"Actual societies can never be characterized as having only one type of exploitation; they are always complex combinations of modes of production." A mode of production is defined by its corresponding type(s) of exploitation. (I'm not sure such a definition is adequate. For how would you differentiate hunting and gathering from communism, in both of which there seems to be no exploitation? I'm inclined to say that specifying the associated mode of exploitation is *one way* of defining a mode of production.) "When we say that a *society* is feudal, or capitalist, or statist, or socialist, we are claiming that one specific form of exploitation is *primary* in the society."

March 9

From Therborn's article on the origins of full-fledged bourgeois democracy: "After the First World War the number of democracies increased from three to ten (with some qualification in the cases of Canada and Finland), and that of male ones from five to fourteen. By 1939, however, the number had fallen to eight and eleven, respectively. The big boom of democracy came in the aftermath of the Second World War, with only Swiss sexism and US racism holding out until the 1970s. The conclusion would appear to be that bourgeois democracy is largely a martial accomplishment.

"The victors of both world wars made ample use of democratic rhetoric, and none more than the least democratic of capitalist states—the United States of America. But no serious historian seems to have suggested that the wars were caused by a struggle for or against bourgeois democracy, or that Germany and her allies lost because they did not possess democratic régimes. Moreover, the crucial historical role of foreign wars provides strong support for the thesis that bourgeois democracy is largely contingent to the developed rule of capital. If this is true, then the fragility of bourgeois democracy in Latin America may be partially attributed to the fact that it was never drawn into the mass slaughter of two world wars."

But he then proceeds to argue that in only eight countries out of 21 was the outcome of world wars decisive in the installment of bourgeois democracy. In six other countries, the *national mobilization* for war played a large role in extending the franchise (which was either used as a means for uniting the country against the enemy or was an effect of the processes of military, economic and ideological integration). "Mobilization for national liberation and foreign war has thus, alongside military defeat, been one of the most important causes of the development of bourgeois democracy. It has been a crucial determinant of the timing of democratization and one of the reasons for the coincidence of war and democracy."

Inasmuch as democratization was propelled by factors internal to countries, "two internal factors seem to have been of the most immediate strategic importance: the independent strength of the agrarian petty and small bourgeois landowners, and divisions within the ruling-class (or power) bloc. This statement should at once be qualified by mentioning the enormous role of the labour movement. The Second International went down in ignominious disarray in 1914, but its contribution to the development of bourgeois democracy was certainly not insubstantial. Indeed, this may be said to have been its principal historical accomplishment. However, although the labour movement was the only consistent democratic force on the arena, it was nowhere strong enough to achieve bourgeois democracy on its own, without the aid of victorious foreign armies, domestic allies more powerful than itself, or splits in the ranks of the enemy.

"It is hardly surprising that the tiny privileged minority constituted by the mercantile and industrial bourgeoisie and the feudal and capitalist landowners should have been almost invariably hostile to democracy—hence the exclusivist outcome of the bourgeois revolutions [e.g., 1689, 1789/93, 1848]. By contrast, the urban *artisanat* and petty bourgeoisie generally tended in a democratic direction and provided

the striking force of both the Jacobins and the 1848 revolutions. But, as these examples also show, they were too weak to hold out against feudal and bourgeois reaction. The peasantry, however, constituted an absolutely decisive force in the still largely agrarian capitalist countries of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Now 'peasantry' is, of course, far too undifferentiated a notion. The landless peasants were, on the whole, still too oppressed to say or do very much, although in Finland the crofters very soon became involved in the labour movement and later played a heroic role in the civil war. The ones who really counted were the small and medium landholding farmers, patriarchal self-subsistence households, the agrarian petty bourgeoisie and the small and medium agrarian bourgeoisie (those using hired labour).

"The strength of these agrarian classes—and the degree of their independence from the landowning aristocracy and urban big capital—were crucial factors in the development of democracy." This interpretation comports with Moore's.

Therborn's article is excellent; I'm going to keep quoting it. "Bourgeois democracy has been attained by such diverse and tortuous routes that any straightforward derivation from the basic characteristics of capitalism would be impossible, or at best seriously misleading. Nevertheless, the facts that democracy in the sense defined above did not appear anywhere prior to capitalism; that some capitalist countries have experienced a purely internal development of democracy; and that all major advanced bourgeois states are today democracies—these naturally call for some elucidation of the tendencies inherent within capitalism…

"1. Bourgeois democracy has always succeeded mass struggles of varying degrees of violence and protractedness. The first inherent tendency, then, will be found in the conditions favouring popular struggle. Legal emancipation of labour and the creation of a free labour market, industrialization, concentration of capital are all intrinsic tendencies which simultaneously lay the basis for a working-class movement of a strength and stability inachievable by the exploited classes of pre-capitalist modes of production. In accordance with Marx's analysis of the growing contradictions of capitalism, the working class is, *ceteris paribus*, strengthened by the advance and development of capitalism. This explains the traditional sociological correlations of democracy with wealth, literacy and urbanization—factors which bear upon the relationship of forces in the class struggle. And, as we have already seen, the labour movement has itself played a vital role in the struggle for democracy.

"2. However, we also remarked that in general the working class has not won a share in the political process in the heat of battle. On the contrary, it has been more common for the bourgeoisie to make concessions after a period of successful resistance to reform. Apparently, working-class participation must in some sense be to the bourgeoisie's advantage. Although in Germany and Austria in 1918 and 1945 (possibly also in Belgium and Sweden in 1918) and in Italy in 1945 the alternative to bourgeois democracy was an attempted socialist revolution, actual defence against proletarian revolution does not seem to have been a directly determining factor. In all these cases, it was not the insurrectionary proletariat but foreign armies that overthrew the existing régimes, whereupon the old internal democratic forces at last got the upper hand. Of greater importance was the specifically capitalist art of industrialized warfare. The First World War was fought both with massive conscript armies and with whole civilian populations mobilized for military production. For this effort even the Wilhelmine Reich admitted the Social Democrats into the governmental machinery; against this background, too, the suffrage was extended in Belgium, Canada, Britain and the United States.

"3. National unification and liberation have everywhere been seen by the bourgeoisie as a strategic necessity for the development and protection of trade and industry and the breaking of feudal dynastic power. And for these aims it has often found it invaluable to enlist popular support. The extension of suffrage in Denmark, Germany, Norway, Finland and Italy (for the imperialist Libyan expedition) formed part of a process of national unification.

"4. Feverish development of the productive forces is another feature peculiar to the capitalist mode of exploitation. One of the main reasons why nineteenth- and early twentieth-century liberals could deny the compatibility of democracy with private property was their dread that popular legislatures and municipal bodies would greatly increase taxation. However, they were disregarding the elasticity and expansive capacity of capitalism. Higher levels of taxation have liquidated neither private property nor capital

accumulation. Rises in productivity make possible a simultaneous increase of both rates of exploitation and real incomes of the exploited masses. This is, of course, not in itself conducive to democracy. But it is relevant in so far as it provides the bourgeoisie with an unprecedentedly wide room for manoeuvre in dealing with the exploited majority.

"5. So far we have deliberately talked in very general terms of popular mobilization and incorporation of the working class into the political process. But such mobilization need not be democratic. In their very different ways, wartime Wilhelmine Germany, Fascism and third world 'populism' all testify to that. What makes capitalist democracy at all possible is a characteristic unique among known modes of production. Capitalism is an impersonal mode of exploitation, involving the rule of capital rather than personal domination of the bourgeoisie. It certainly does not function in the manner of an automatic machine, but it does operate as production for ever greater profit under conditions of impersonal market competition. The rule of capital requires a state—for both internal and external support and protection—but, as long as it upholds the separate realm of capitalist 'civil society', this state does not have to be managed personally by bourgeois. And in the long history of democratization, bourgeois politicians have learnt the many mechanisms at their disposal to keep the state in harmony with the needs of capital.

"6. This last-mentioned feature of capitalism may explain why the impersonal rule of a tiny minority is conceivable in democratic forms—why, for example, the rule of capital is compatible with a labour party government, whereas a feudal aristocracy cannot be governed by a peasant party. But a theoretical possibility is one thing, actual historical dynamics quite another. And we have seen that the fight of the working class for universal suffrage and freely elected government was never by itself sufficient to enforce the introduction of bourgeois democracy. This raises the question whether there are other internal tendencies of capitalism, which, under certain conditions, may generate forces of democratization apart from working-class struggle. One such tendency may be immediately identified. Capitalist relations of production tend to create an internally competing, peacefully disunited ruling class. In its development, capital is divided into several fractions: mercantile, banking, industrial, agrarian, small and big. Except in a situation of grave crisis or acute threat from an enemy (whether feudal, proletarian or a rival national state) bourgeois class relations contain no unifying element comparable to the dynastic kingship legitimacy and fixed hierarchy of feudalism. Furthermore, the development of capitalism has usually stimulated the expansion of petty commodity production, before tending to destroy it. Thus, the commercialization of agriculture transformed a self-subsistent peasantry into an agrarian petty bourgeoisie with distinct interests of its own.

"In the absence of a single centre, some kind of elective, deliberative and representative political machinery became necessary. Therefore, propertied republics or parliamentary monarchies developed at an early stage in the formation of capitalist states—for example, the Italian, German and Swiss city republics, the United Provinces of the Low Countries, Britain, the United States, France and Belgium (the latter after 1830). As regards freedom of the press, the material basis of its appearance was the launching of newspapers as capitalist enterprises like any other. This was still a democracy for the bourgeoisie only, and fractionalization of capital has only contributed to a democracy including the rest of the population in conjunction with the other tendencies referred to above. Thus, the decisive role in a number of instances of contingent military defeat shows that capitalism does not necessarily develop forces of sufficient strength to extend the basis of democracy to the masses."

If you want an even briefer explanation of the connection between capitalism/industry and democracy/equality, take a look at the paragraph I wrote years ago entitled "Why does equality win?" or something like that.

Therborn also asks why bourgeois democracy has been so rare in third-world capitalist countries. Here's his answer: "The *external* inducement of capitalism [in these countries] has had three crucial effects on the bourgeoisie. First, it has severely restricted the internal differentiation of the capitalist class, making it instead largely dependent on one external centre (factor 6 above). Secondly, the lopsided, externally dependent growth of petty and generalized commodity production has rendered the economic base extremely fragile and vulnerable to international crises, thus leaving the indigenous bourgeoisies little room for manoeuvre vis-à-vis the exploited classes (factor 4). The frequent intertwining of capitalist with feudal,

slave or other pre-capitalist modes of exploitation, as well as the combination of enclave capitalism with subsistence farming, has impeded the development of the impersonal rule of capital (factor 5) and a free labour market, thereby seriously limiting the growth both of the labour movement (factor 1) and of an agrarian small and petty bourgeoisie (factor 6).

"Furthermore, the national struggles of third-world countries were fought at a much earlier stage of development than in Europe. Consequently, there was either little need to involve the popular masses in struggle or not the same compulsion to cope with their specific demands in order to mobilize them, or both (factor 3). Nor, given their stage of development and geographical location, have these nations had to mobilize for the holocaust of industrial war (factor 2). And those which have had to wage a people's war to gain their freedom—which entails a class-explicit ideological mobilization—have not fought on a capitalist basis and have subsequently taken a non-capitalist road of social development."

I could go on, but I'll spare you.

"Democracy developed neither out of the positive tendencies of capitalism nor as a historical accident, but out of the *contradictions* of capitalism."

March 11

From Therborn's article on Latin American democracy: "…[History proves that] democracy is not *the* polity of a particular stage in the development of capitalism [as bourgeois theorists sometimes argue], but a conjunctural outcome. It is not a bourgeois or 'middle-class' creation, but the result of contradictions and conflict within capitalism. In Latin América as in the central capitalist countries, bourgeois democracy derives not from a single creator-subject, but from the historical rise of the class struggle under capitalism. The working class and the labour movement have not been as important and as self-consciously democratic, in the formal sense, as in Western Europe. But the overall pattern has tended to be similar: struggle of the working class and other popular classes for social demands and political representation; defeat by the ruling class; democratization on bourgeois terms, so far as both timing and form are concerned.

"The crucial question, of course, with respect to Latin American democracy is why it has been so rare?… 1. The basic explanation for the travail of Latin American democracy must be sought in the weakness of the working class and the petty bourgeoisie. 2. In order to account for the rarity, fragility and incompleteness of democracy in Latin America, it is essential above all to study the post-Depression conjuncture. 3. The frequency of putsches, dictatorships and electoral fraud have to be understood, first and foremost, as manifestations of an internal fracturing and feebleness of the bourgeoisie and its state."

Et cetera.

Foster-Carter's article addresses the question of how to explain the Third World's perennial underdevelopment. (By now, this whole issue is a little dated.) Is it merely a symptom of being in the early stages of industrialization and capitalist development? Or does it arise from an insufficiency of capitalist penetration? (To quote Kay: "capital created underdevelopment not because it exploited the underdeveloped world, but because it did not exploit it enough"—which he explains by arguing that the dominance of merchant capital (as opposed to industrial) was unduly prolonged.) Is it because capitalism in the Third World is externally oriented and dominated by the West, whereas early capitalism in Europe and the U.S. was fuelled by home-market demand? Or is the problem that capitalism and Third World feudalism somehow reinforce each other? This is Laclau's position. The "social formation" in underdeveloped countries is indeed predominantly capitalist, but "this level of operation is constituted by market relations: for Laclau, what is more important are relations of production, and on this basis he maintains that there were and are substantial elements of feudalism in Latin America. Yet—and here is the twist—these exist not exogenous to capitalism, nor as pockets of decline, but as an intrinsic and structured part of a wider system. In Latin America, as in the 'second serfdom' of Eastern Europe, it was precisely the impact of an external market which—so far from dissolving—intensified or even invented feudal and other precapitalist modes of production."

Pierre-Philippe Rey has a similar position. He would consider the quotation from Kay to be "inadmissible voluntarism, contradicted by '[the] fundamental law of capitalism, as true today as on the day when Marx discovered it: capitalism has as its final goal the destruction at every point on the globe of antecedent modes of production and relations of production, in order to substitute for them its own mode of production and its own relations of production.'" Capital is a constant, it always has the same tendencies no matter where it exists. It seeks to extract the maximum of surplus-value. So there can be no question of its 'not going far enough or deep enough'. It is always maximally aggressive. However, says Rey, "Capitalism can never immediately and totally eliminate the preceding modes of production, nor above all the relations of exploitation which characterize these modes of production. On the contrary, during an entire period it must reinforce these relations of exploitation, since it is only this development which permits its own provisioning with goods coming from these modes of production, or with men driven from these modes of production and therefore compelled to sell their labour power to capitalism in order to survive."

Most of the article is confused and bewildering. Excessively abstract—which reflects the excessive abstractness of the literature, criticized as such by the author. The more I read of this Marxist literature, the more I think it suffers from conceptual confusion. What are modes of production? What are relations of production? Some writers treat 'mode of production' as a *systemic* notion, as if a whole society has only one mode of production, while others treat it as something that can vary from micro-unit to micro-unit. Wright leans toward the latter, Wallerstein toward the former. Should methods of exchange and distribution play a role in distinguishing modes of production from each other? How can you locate the boundaries between modes, or 'kinds', of production? Such questions are both essential and yet, perhaps, ultimately sterile.

Were the slaveowners in the American South "capitalists" even though they didn't hire wage-labor? They were, after all, clearly a part of the capitalist world-system at the time. –This kind of question is basically a terminological quibble. The overall economic system was such that it had to be based on wage-labor, even if in certain agricultural sectors slaves constituted most of the workforce.

You just have to look at ideal types and then see how a given society (or "social formation") measures up to them. I agree with Wright that a particular social formation includes several different modes of production—it is never 'pure'—but that one always predominates. The *dynamics* of the system belong to one in particular. I also think that the concept of 'mode of production' somehow has to apply to both the macro and the micro. The macro is in the micro and vice versa—which means that even if some units of production are organized in an apparently non-capitalist way, in a broader sense they can be called capitalist given their participation in a capitalist economy. The logic of the economy has to apply to them.

Suggestive quotation from Marx: "It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers…which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure." It's statements like this that serve as my point of departure.

March 13

Capitalism is not defined by the presence of a market for commodities, or even by widespread production for profit. Otherwise the Roman Empire would have to be called capitalist, at least in large part; so would many other ancient societies. Capitalism is a mode of *production*. "For Marx, the accumulation of commercial capital is perfectly compatible with the most varied modes of production and does not by any means presuppose the existence of a capitalist mode of production." The mere presence of a market, of merchant capital, of an incentive for profit and accumulation, does not imply capitalism *per se*. On one level this is just a terminological question; but it's important to be clear on the meaning of the terms we use.

Interesting quotation from Marx, which confirms what I wrote in my last entry on American plantation-owners: "In the second class of colonies—the plantations, which are from the moment of their inceptions commercial speculation, centres of production for the world market—a regime of capitalist production exists, if only in a formal way, since slavery among the negroes excludes free wage-labour,

which is the base on which capitalist production rests. However, those who deal in slave-trading are capitalists. The system of production introduced by them does not originate in slavery, but was introduced into it. In this case the capitalist and the landlord are one person…" As Laclau explains, "what Marx says is that in the plantation economies the dominant mode of production is only *formally* capitalist. It is formally capitalist because its beneficiaries participate in a world market in which the dominant productive sectors are already capitalist. This enables the landowners in the plantation economy to participate in the general movement of the capitalist system without, however, their mode of production being capitalist. But what is the essential condition for such a situation is its exceptional character."

Here's another one from Marx: "…However, this error is certainly no greater than that of, e.g. all philologists who speak of the existence of *capital* in classical antiquity, and of Roman or Greek capitalists. This is merely another way of saying that in Rome and Greece labour was *free*, an assertion which these gentlemen would hardly make. If we talk of plantation owners in America as capitalists, if they *are* capitalists, this is due to the fact that they exist as anomalies within a world market based upon free labour…"

Laclau: "For Marxists feudalism does not mean a closed system which market forces have not penetrated [which is what Laclau's rival, Andre Gunder Frank, understands by the term, as well as 19th-century liberals], but a general ensemble of extra-economic coercions weighing on the peasantry, absorbing a good part of its economic surplus, and thereby retarding the process of internal differentiation within the rural classes, and therefore the expansion of agrarian capitalism. This is also what the French revolutionaries of 1789 understood by feudalism when they thought they were suppressing it by abolishing the *gabelles* and seigneurial privileges. When Lenin speaks of the growing weight of capitalism in the agrarian structure of Russia in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, his aim is to demonstrate a growing process of class differentiation which was gradually producing a class of rich peasants, on the one hand, and an agricultural proletariat, on the other. It would not have occurred to Lenin to base his demonstration of this process on a progressive expansion of production for the market, for such production had *precisely* formed the source of feudalism in Russia several centuries before, when growing opportunities for commercialized wheat production had led the landowners to increase—indeed to establish—the oppression of serfdom."

As I noted above, Laclau argues that production for a world market, far from dissolving feudalism in Latin America (as Frank thinks), actually intensified it, just as it had done much earlier in Russia. "The feudal regime of the haciendas tended to increase its servile exactions on the peasantry as the growing demands of the world market stimulated maximization of their surplus." In fact, the expansion of the dynamic bourgeois sectors of the Latin American economy was a function of the backwardness of agrarian relations of production. Development generated underdevelopment in this sense. This fact goes a long way towards explaining the schizoid character of Latin American politics, which is now democratic, now oligarchical, now dictatorial, now military junta-like, now socialist, etc. (See the extracts from Therborn's article above.)

Laclau's definitions of various terms: "We understand by 'mode of production' an integrated complex of social productive forces and relations linked to a determinate type of ownership of the means of production. From among the ensemble of relations of production, we consider those linked to the ownership of the means of production to be the essential relations, since they determine the forms of canalization of the economic surplus and the effective degree of the division of labour, the basis in turn of the specific capacity of the productive forces for expansion. Their own level and rhythm of growth depends in turn on the destination of the economic surplus. We therefore designate as a mode of production the logical and mutually co-ordinated articulation of: 1. a determinate type of ownership of the means of production; 2. a determinate form of appropriation of the economic surplus; 3. a determinate degree of development of the division of labour; 4. a determinate level of development of the productive forces. This is not merely a descriptive enumeration of isolated 'factors', but a totality defined by its mutual interconnections. Within this totality, property in the means of production constitutes the decisive element.

"An 'economic system', on the other hand, designates the mutual relations between the different sectors of the economy, or between different productive units, whether on a regional, national or world scale. When, in Volume One of *Capital*, Marx analysed the process of production of surplus value and the

accumulation of capital, he described the *capitalist mode of production*. On the other hand, when he analyses the interchange between Department One and Department Two and introduces problems such as rent or the origin of commercial profit, he is describing an 'economic system'. An economic system can include, as constitutive elements, different modes of production—provided always that we define it as a whole, that is, by proceeding from the element or law of motion that establishes the unity of its different manifestations.

"The feudal mode of production is one in which the productive process operates according to the following pattern: 1. the economic surplus is produced by a labour force subject to extra-economic compulsion; 2. the economic surplus is privately appropriated by someone other than the direct producer; 3. property in the means of production remains in the hands of the direct producer. In the capitalist mode of production, the economic surplus is also subject to private appropriation, but as distinct from feudalism, ownership of the means of production is severed from ownership of labour-power; it is this that permits the transformation of labour-power into a commodity, and with this the birth of the wage-relation."

Frank explains Latin American underdevelopment by reference to the continent's "dependence" on external imperial powers, and its exploitation by the latter. Dependence apparently means, or implies, the constant absorption by the "independent" region of the "dependent" region's economic surplus. (So of course, strictly speaking, there is interdependence.) This explanation does make some sense, since "reducing the economic surplus of the peripheral countries" indirectly causes their relations of production to be "fixed in an archaic mould of extra-economic coercion" and must "retard any process of social differentiation and diminish the size of their internal markets". This is more of a general 'framework', though, and it doesn't say very much. Specific mechanisms have to be identified.

Althusser was overrated. His thought was unrigorous and confused, though occasionally suggestive. He was a product of France's decadent intellectual culture in the '60s, '70s and '80s, the culture that produced Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Lyotard, Deleuze, Baudrillard and the others.

March 17

Liberty, equality, fraternity. Superficially they're three very different values, but on a deeper level they're closely interrelated. They're simply different ways of expressing the desire for freedom, for recognition. You can't have "freedom" without equality, without brotherhood, and without political liberty.

Jameson argues that in postmodern society there is no longer alienation *per se*, the alienation of Munch's *The Scream* or some of Beckett's work; there is instead fragmentation. The intense solitude, self-questioning, the morbid self-fixation of alienation isn't widespread anymore; the self is too fragmented, too much a pastiche of discourses and social relations and such. But this is itself alienation. A more advanced, more subtle alienation. Anxiety is still widespread, people complain of stress more than ever; but art and philosophy no longer give expression to it with even the limited coherence and self-confidence they once did. Much art even *celebrates* it, yes. Jameson is right about that. And culture takes existential predicaments less seriously than it once did, as Jameson says. Insofar as modernism was *serious* (philosophies of despair, artworks of despair and confusion, etc.), it has been largely transcended. Everything seems lighter and more temporary now, and writers with a pessimistic outlook, critical of society, are often accused of being "curmudgeons", intellectually or emotionally immature. Culture just isn't *serious* anymore; it's quite playful, in fact—or childish, ADDish—which reflects its total commodification. But therapy is more widespread than ever, people are unhappy even if they tell themselves otherwise, and fragmentation is the essence of alienation.

…Sure, postmodernism meant a strange euphoria, a sensation of novelty, an artistic and intellectual freedom. But this excitement was short-sighted and didn't last long, couldn't last long, because humans need stability and coherence. They'll never accept the death of the self (whatever that means) or of the notion of truth or knowledge. They'll go on ordering their world until their last day; and if they lose their bearings they'll despair. Postmodernism was never as profound or revolutionary or heroic as it thought; it

wasn't a thoroughgoing, principled rejection of all systems of meaning ("signification"), of narratives and foundations and truths, since that's impossible on this side of schizophrenia. Its euphoria was basically the intoxication of not having to think to the bottom of things anymore, of not having to work very hard at structuring things, and of (not) doing so with a good intellectual conscience because supposedly the truth of no-truths had been discovered and was being acted on. But that's a shallow, dishonest creed, fundamentally alienated from itself (i.e., self-contradictory).

The euphoria, the freedom of postmodernism was already understood by Hegel: it was the euphoria of *negative* freedom, of rejecting all rules and destroying everything. "The sole work and deed of universal freedom is therefore *death*, a death too which has no inner significance or filling, for what is negated is the empty point of the absolutely free self. It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water." He was referring there to the Terror of the French Revolution, but his point is roughly translatable to postmodernism. The discarding of the Signified in favor of playing with Signifiers is an empty move, since what is negated (incompletely) is the abstract idea of meaning itself while the self continues to live through concrete meanings in every moment. Postmodernism is an impossible, contradictory, empty project.

From Jameson's article: "…If, indeed, the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold, and to organize its past and future into coherent experience, it becomes difficult enough to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but 'heaps of fragments' and in a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory. These are, however, very precisely some of the privileged terms in which postmodernist cultural production has been analysed (and even defended, by its own apologists). Yet they are still privative features; the more substantive formulations bear such names as textuality, *écriture*, or schizophrenic writing, and it is to these that we must now briefly turn.

"I have found Lacan's account of schizophrenia useful here, not because I have any way of knowing whether it has clinical accuracy, but chiefly because—as description rather than diagnosis—it seems to me to offer a suggestive aesthetic model…

"Very briefly, Lacan describes schizophrenia as a breakdown in the signifying chain, that is, the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or a meaning. I must omit the familial or more orthodox psychoanalytic background to this situation, which Lacan transcodes into language by describing the Oedipal rivalry in terms, not so much of the biological individual who is your rival for the mother's attention, but rather of what he calls the Name-of-the-Father, paternal authority now considered as a linguistic function. His conception of the signifying chain essentially presupposes one of the basic principles (and one of the great discoveries) of Saussurean structuralism, namely the proposition that meaning is not a one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified, between the materiality of language, between a word or a name, and its referent or concept. Meaning on the new view is generated by the movement from Signifier to Signifier: what we generally call the Signified—the meaning or conceptual content of an utterance—is now rather to be seen as a meaning-effect, as that objective mirage of signification generated and projected by the relationship of Signifiers among each other. [This is a typically one-sided account of Saussure's position. The signified is just as important as the signifier.] When that relationship breaks down, when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers. The connection between this kind of linguistic malfunction and the psyche of the schizophrenic may then be grasped by way of a two-fold proposition: first, that personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with the present before me; and second, that such active temporal unification is itself a function of language, or better still of the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time. If we are unable to unify the past, present and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life.

"With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material Signifiers, or in other words of a series of pure and unrelated presents in time. We will want to ask questions about the aesthetic or cultural results of such a situation in a moment; let us

first see what it feels like: 'I remember very well the day it happened. We were staying in the country and I had gone for a walk alone as I did now and then. Suddenly, as I was passing the school, I heard a German song; the children were having a singing lesson. I stopped to listen, and at that instant a strange feeling came over me, a feeling hard to analyse but akin to something I was to know too well later—a disturbing sense of unreality. It seemed to me that I no longer recognized the school, it had become as large as a barracks; the singing children were prisoners, compelled to sing. It was as though the school and the children's song were set apart from the rest of the world. At the same time my eye encountered a field of wheat whose limits I could not see. The yellow vastness, dazzling in the sun, bound up with the song of the children imprisoned in the smooth stone school-barracks, filled me with such anxiety that I broke into sobs. I ran home to our garden and began to play "to make things seem as they usually were," that is, to return to reality. It was the first appearance of those elements which were always present in later sensations of unreality: illimitable vastness, brilliant light, and the gloss and smoothness of material things.' [From a schizophrenic's autobiography.]

"In our present context, this experience suggests the following remarks: first, the breakdown of temporality suddenly releases this present of time from all the activities and the intentionalities that might focus it and make it a space of praxis; thereby isolated, that present suddenly engulfs the subject with undescribable vividness, a materiality of perception properly overwhelming, which effectively dramatizes the power of the material—or better still, the literal—Signifier in isolation. This present of the world or material signifier comes before the subject with heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious charge of affect, here described in the negative terms of anxiety and loss of reality, but which one could just as well imagine in the positive terms of euphoria, the high, the intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity." Perhaps, but the author was showing keen psychological insight in describing the experience in negative terms, because a loss of meaning is ultimately horrible and unnatural.

I won't deny that Jameson's essay is suggestive and insightful. It illuminates both the strengths and weaknesses of postmodernism.

March 19, 20

Nietzsche described the loss of God (or metaphysical meaning) as liberating, but, first of all, that was partly wishful thinking—since he was obviously very disturbed by God's death—and second of all, it was liberating only insofar as it allowed him to create his own meaning(s). He didn't want to reject *all* meaning, *all* truth. That, he understood, would be nihilistic.

Althusser: ideology as the representation of the subject's *imaginary* relationship to his *real* conditions of existence. Fruitful or not? Ideological ways of constructing a subject (see Therborn's definition of ideology) are necessarily 'imaginary', insofar as the psyche appropriates them in an 'unscientific' way, according to its own internal dynamics and needs etc.? But some ideologies can be more 'scientific' than others, can come closer to approximating science than others. The idea is to come up with an ideology that is as close to the truth as possible, not only for the pure sake of knowledge but also because such an ideology would give the subject an almost perfect means of orienting himself in the world, which is the subject's intrinsic goal.

Marinetti's famous "Futurist Manifesto" (published in 1909) is a piece of second-rate writing, a self-conscious but naïve second-rate imitation of Nietzsche or at least his spirit, yet it does have the indirect merit of confirming Marx's doctrine that consciousness is, if not a reflex of social being, certainly a product of it. Futurism. Fascism. Militarism. Nationalism. Delusionalism.

How can you explain the fact that a woman's beauty can be almost *painful* to look at? Especially if she isn't your girlfriend, it's maddening to look at her beauty. Your whole being is in that moment oriented towards her, towards the blush of her cheek and her white teeth. If you could only possess her,

make her one with you, you would be complete. Your intense desire amounts to an intense feeling of lack in yourself, a need to appropriate the wonderful foreignness of this magnificent 'object.' The thought of its remaining foreign to you is nearly unbearable. So you want to kiss her and make love to her, since getting close to her is the best way of making her one with you.

But I think the pain is also related to your half-conscious knowledge that your desire can never be consummated. Even sex wouldn't be a consummation. She'd remain her own person; she wouldn't be a *part* of you, as you want her to be because she's just so beautiful.

Those of you who still admire or revere Winston Churchill (reverence is almost always based on ignorance) should consider this, from Anderson's article on Palestine: "Churchill's long-standing Zionism was based on racial rather than religious convictions. He expressed his social darwinist beliefs unambiguously to the Peel Commission in 1937, comparing Palestinian Arabs to the proverbial emblem of envious egoism in the animal world: 'I do not agree that the dog in a manger has the final right to the manger, even though he may have lain there for a very long time. I do not admit that right. I do not admit, for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America, or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher grade race, a more worldly-wise race, to put it that way, has come in and taken their place'." Churchill and Hitler would have got along well in different circumstances.

Speaking of Hitler…here are some tidbits from articles on the Holocaust: "Dr. Josef Mengele worked in Auschwitz. His experiments included placing subjects in pressure chambers, testing drugs on them, freezing them, attempting to change eye color by injecting chemicals into children's eyes, and various amputations and other brutal surgeries… 'I remember one set of twins in particular: Guido and Ina, aged about four. One day, Mengele took them away. When they returned, they were in a terrible state: they had been sewn together, back to back, like Siamese twins. Their wounds were infected and oozing pus. They screamed day and night. Then their parents—I remember the mother's name was Stella—managed to get some morphine and they killed the children in order to end their suffering.'"

"The Germans came, the police, and they started banging houses: 'Raus, raus, raus, Juden raus.'… One baby started to cry… The other baby started crying. So the mother urinated in her hand and gave the baby a drink to keep quiet… [When the police had gone], I told the mothers to come out. And one baby was dead… From fear, the mother [had] choked her own baby."

"I saw them do the killing. At 5:00 p.m. they gave the command, 'Fill in the pits.' Screams and groans were coming from the pits. Suddenly I saw my neighbor Ruderman rise from under the soil… His eyes were bloody and he was screaming: 'Finish me off!'… A murdered woman lay at my feet. A boy of five years crawled out from under her body and began to scream desperately. 'Mommy!' That was all I saw, since I fell unconscious."

—The power of ideology. [But even more, the power of bureaucratic dehumanization.]

A paradox of morality.— Given the absurd suffering in which modern life consists, it is surely immoral to have a child. I.e., one is wronging a person by—bringing him into existence. If one chooses not to create him, one is doing right by him, this person who does not exist; if one gives him life, one is acting reprehensibly. What an odd state of affairs! It's actually possible to act morally vis-à-vis someone who does not exist.

March 21, 22

Intriguing reflections from Anderson's "jottings": "Tom Nairn's account goes roughly like this. Marx-*ism* was always based on a distortion of Marx's own thought, formed in the democratic struggles of the Rhineland in the 1840s. For whereas Marx assumed that socialism was possible in the long run, only when capitalism had completed its work of bringing a world market into being, the impatience of both masses and intellectuals led to the fatal short-cuts taken by Lenin and Mao, substituting state power for

democracy and economic growth. The result was a diversion of the river of world history into the marshlands of a modern middle ages. But the collapse of Soviet Communism in 1989 has now allowed the river to flow again to its natural delta—contemporary globalization. For the core meaning of globalization is the generalization of democracy around the world, fulfilling at last the dreams of 1848, crushed during Marx's life-time. Marx, however, himself made one crucial mistake, in thinking class would be the carrier of historical emancipation, in the shape of the proletariat. In fact, as the European pattern of 1848 already showed, and the whole of the 20th century would confirm, it was nations, not classes, that would become the moving forces of history, and the bearers of the democratic revolution for which he fought.

"Hardt and Negri concur that globalization is essentially a process of emancipation, [but, unlike Nairn, they argue that nation-states will wither away]. Their story starts earlier, in the 16th century, when the liberating spirit of the Renaissance was crushed by a Baroque counter-revolution that erected Absolutism as the originating form of modern sovereignty. Inherited essentially unaltered by the nation-states of the industrial epoch, it is the passing of this legacy, with the dissolution of nation-states themselves into a single, uniform 'Empire', that marks the dawn of a new era of freedom and equality. The turning-point here was not the overthrow of communism in 1989—barely mentioned—but the decade 1968–1978, when anti-imperialist victory in Vietnam and revolts by workers, unemployed and students in the West forced a reconfiguration of capitalism into its contemporary universal guise. With the advent of universal Empire, classes too—like nations—fade away, as capital generates the increasingly 'immaterial' labour of a single, and no less universal multitude. The days of national liberation, of the working class, of revolutionary vanguards, are over. But just as Empire was created by resistance from below, so it will fall to such resistance, as spontaneous networks of opposition to it proliferate across the earth. Out of the spiralling actions of this multitude—demonstrations, migrations and insurrections—driven by a common biopolitical desire for peace and democracy, will flower a post-liberal, post-socialist world. Without the mystifications of sovereignty or representation, all will for the first time rule in freedom and equality. It could happen at any moment. 'Today time is split between a present that is already dead and a future that is already living—and the yawning abyss between them has become enormous. In time, an event will thrust us like an arrow into that living future'."

Personally, I think that global decentralization is the most likely long-term outcome. The nation-state will not last, nor will giant multinational corporations or the centralized economies of today. All the trends indicate such an evolution, for example the decentralized internet, the decentralized technologies of renewable energy, and the slowly increasing irrelevance of the nation-state.

From Godelier's article: "Generally speaking, matrilineal societies disintegrated much more rapidly than patrilineal ones; and fluid, egalitarian societies resisted the shock [of European colonialism] less well than hierarchically organized societies. In Africa, for example, the plantation economy and mining development called above all for male manpower and wage labour. The traditional economy gradually disappeared, or at least became centred on the nuclear family, which depended on men's labour for a wage. The overall framework, involving a new dependence of women on men, and of children on their mother, spelt the destruction of reciprocal economic ties within the hereditary line and between clans, as well as the loss of public positions and prestige by the women of society. Furthermore, Leacock herself has shown that in the 17th and 18th centuries, the Montagnais passed from a matrilocal to a patrilocal structure, and that this change resulted from the growth of an almost entirely male-centred trapping economy and fur trade. In the 17th century these Indians lived in fluid groups, mainly practising collective caribou-hunting in which men and women co-operated with each other. Kinship relations were of an undifferentiated, cognate type, albeit with a matrilineal inflexion. The bands were exogamous units. Today, they have become endogamous and patrilocal. The men have rights as individuals over the areas of common land on which they lay their lines of traps; and these rights are transmitted from father to son. Families live less and less from hunting and subsistence gathering, but depend on their dealings with the White trading posts, where they buy rifles, ammunition, traps, and lard and flour for the winter. For this reason, they leave their children at the school or mission built alongside the trading post. The historical pattern has thus broken up, and it is growing more difficult every day to reconstruct the male-female relations of pre-colonial times. For Leacock, however,

the course of the last few centuries points up a law of development which had its first effects thousands of years before the birth of capitalism.

"In Leacock's view, production for exchange, the breakdown of local solidarity, and the clash of interests between groups or societies, are all factors which long before capitalism gradually strengthened the social position of men. Following analyses by Judith Brown, she cites as proof *a contrario* the fact that woman's status in the matrilineal Bemba society of Africa is much lower than among the Iroquois. However, the Bemba have a hierarchical form of organization in which an aristocracy dominates the common people, and local family units produce wealth that is concentrated in the hands of this aristocracy. Gifts of food, far from elevating the prestige of women, actually raise that of their husbands. And part of the product is redistributed according to class relations, rather than relations between kinship groups or the two sexes. Leacock, then, is putting forward an overall view of historical development. Taking the Naskapi Indians as a model of primitive hunter-gatherers, she constructs a more general line of development: a line, that is, running from egalitarian societies in which men and women share the same status of public authority and enjoy an autonomy of their own, to the multiple forms of class society in which hierarchies favouring male power gradually emerge through the disintegration of community ties. One case in point is our own line of development, which constantly strengthens private appropriation of the land and the means of production. It is, indeed, within this framework that the monogamous family thrust itself forward and consolidated itself. Thus Leacock has taken over Engels's hypothesis which relates a worsening of woman's status to the emergence of class inequalities, and dominance of the monogamous family to the dominance of private property."

Godelier argues, however, that even though some primitive societies have been basically egalitarian, "in the last analysis" it is likely that men have always "occupied the summit of the power hierarchy".

Sexual inequality is related to conditions of material production inasmuch as the person who brings home the bacon tends to have the authority; and that person is usually the man, for biological reasons. (He is stronger and doesn't get pregnant or breastfeed children. He is more mobile than the woman.) There are other causal ties of course, but that one is the most important and direct.

Reading Engels' *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, on the internet. I don't like internet-reading, and I suspect it makes possible a less complete memory-absorption than book-reading does, but it's convenient.

Spent the night with Gimena in my room. As we were hugging I heard her whisper, "Stupid, so stupid…"; I asked her what was the matter and saw she was crying a little. "What's wrong, Gimena?" "I'm leaving…I'll miss you… I hate crying." She's going back to Argentina in a week. Later she let me tongue-probe her for a while, but she still wouldn't have sex, though evidently she wanted to. "You're incredible!" she whispered. […]

Engels had a rare wit. In a passage devoted to the ridicule of "moralizing philistines" who deny that humanity could ever have experienced a sexually promiscuous period millennia ago because that would be, well, *shameful*, Engels remarks, "If strict monogamy is the height of all virtue, then the palm must go to the tapeworm, which has a complete set of male and female sexual organs in each of its 50-200 proglottides, or sections, and spends its whole life copulating in all its sections with itself." Brilliant. The book itself is excellent. The variety of social organizations it details is astonishing, and gives the lie to the bourgeois clichés that humans are naturally egoistic, that private property is natural, that the nuclear family is natural.

"The history of the family in primitive times consists in the progressive narrowing of the circle, originally embracing the whole tribe, within which the two sexes have a common conjugal relation. The continuous exclusion, first of nearer, then of more and more remote relatives, and at last even of relatives by marriage, ends by making any kind of group marriage practically impossible." The various kinds of group marriage (and sexual promiscuity) and the "pairing marriage" (which is like an informal, easygoing sort of monogamy) correspond to primitive, natural communal property; monogamy corresponds to private property, as in Athens, where it signifies, as it always has, the subordination of women. "Monogamous marriage comes on the scene as the subjugation of the one sex by the other; it announces a struggle between the sexes unknown throughout the whole previous prehistoric period. …The first class opposition that

appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male."

Monogamy and male supremacy were established for the preservation and inheritance of property. "Monogamy arose from the concentration of considerable wealth in the hands of an individual man—and from the need to bequeath this wealth to the children of that man and of no other. For this purpose, the monogamy of the woman was required, not that of the man, so this monogamy of the woman did not in any way interfere with open or concealed polygamy on the part of the man." The reason monogamy was required for the woman is that group marriage etc. means that the man doesn't know who his children are, because the woman has sex with different men. In a propertyless epoch this uncertainty on the part of the man had no economic consequences;[1] but in a time when property had to pass from father to son, the father had to know that the son was in fact his. Therefore female monogamy was established. This explanation is functional, as you can see, and would thus be rejected by Jon Elster and others, but functional explanations are not in fact valueless. They're shorthand versions of complete causal explanations.

March 23

In Greece, "the rise of private property in herds and articles of luxury led to exchange between individuals, to the transformation of products into commodities. And here lie the seeds of the whole subsequent upheaval [whereby classes and the state were born]. When the producers no longer directly consumed their product themselves, but let it pass out of their hands in the act of exchange, they lost control of it. They no longer knew what became of it; the possibility was there that one day it would be used against the producer to exploit and oppress him. For this reason no society can permanently retain the mastery of its own production and the control over the social effects of its process of production unless it abolishes [commodity] exchange between individuals."

Suggestive: "The plain truth is that for two and a half thousand years it has been possible to preserve private property only by violating property." As Proudhon would say, property is theft. But Engels' statement is less ambiguous.

The parallels between the social organizations of the Iroquois, the Celts, the old Germans, the Greeks of the Heroic Age, the early Romans—indeed, the parallels between all "barbarian" societies everywhere, which Engels describes in detail—are breathtaking. It's another point for historical materialism, since among such societies the material conditions are similar. Apparently descent was always matrilineal at first and became patrilineal only after group marriage had died out and something like individual property was gaining ground; the gens, or the clan, was always the basis of social organization, right up to the threshold of "civilization", and primitive democracy took similar, gentile forms everywhere; women were always honored and respected before strict monogamy and private property were instituted. For example, "another relic of mother-right, which was still only in process of dying out, was the respect of the Germans for the female sex, which to the Romans was almost incomprehensible. Young girls of noble family were considered the most binding hostages in treaties with the Germans. The thought that their wives and daughters might be taken captive and carried into slavery was terrible to them and more than anything else fired their courage in battle; they saw in a woman something holy and prophetic, and listened to her advice even in the most important matters." This was around the time of Tacitus, but already you can see the distant origins of chivalry, which seems to have been a relic of the primeval reverence for women.

"In general, then, the constitution of those German tribes which had combined into peoples was the same as had developed among the Greeks of the Heroic Age and the Romans of the so-called time of the kings: assembly of the people, council of the chiefs of the gentes, military leader, who is already striving

[1] Incidentally, as Engels remarks, it explains why matrilineal descent was the norm, namely because the child's paternity was usually unknown. With the establishment of monogamy, descent was reckoned through the father, who now had undisputed authority over the mother.

for real monarchic power. It was the highest form of constitution which the gentile [i.e., clan] order could achieve; it was the model constitution of the upper stage of barbarism. If society passed beyond the limits within which this constitution was adequate, that meant the end of the gentile order; it was broken up and the state took its place."

The famous love of freedom, democracy, etc., which historians celebrate in the Germanic race and which made possible an eventual rebirth of civilization on a firmer basis than slavery, was, says Engels, nothing but a product of their old gentile constitution, which barbarians everywhere share. "What was the mysterious magic by which the Germans breathed new life into a dying Europe [after the demise of Rome]? Was it some miraculous power innate in the Germanic race, such as our chauvinist historians romance about? Not a bit of it. The Germans, especially at that time, were a highly gifted Aryan tribe, and in the full vigor of development. It was not, however, their specific national qualities which rejuvenated Europe, but simply—their barbarism, their gentile constitution.

"Their individual ability and courage, their sense of freedom, their democratic instinct which in everything of public concern felt itself concerned; in a word, all the qualities which had been lost to the Romans and were alone capable of forming new states and making new nationalities grow out of the slime of the Roman world—what else were they than the characteristics of the barbarian of the upper stage, fruits of his gentile constitution?

"If they recast the ancient form of monogamy, moderated the supremacy of the man in the family, and gave the woman a higher position than the classical world had ever known, what made them capable of doing so if not their barbarism, their gentile customs, their living heritage from the time of mother-right?

"If in at least three of the most important countries, Germany, northern France and England, they carried over into the feudal state a genuine piece of gentile constitution, in the form of village communities, thus giving the oppressed class, the peasants, even under the harshest medieval serfdom, a local center of solidarity and a means of resistance such as neither the slaves of classical times nor the modern proletariat found ready to their hand—to what was this due, if not to their barbarism, their purely barbarian method of settlement in kinship groups?

"Lastly: they were able to develop and make universal the milder form of servitude they had practiced in their own country, which even in the Roman Empire increasingly displaced slavery; a form of servitude which, as Fourier first stressed, gives to the bondsmen the means of their gradual liberation as a class; a form of servitude which thus stands high above slavery, where the only possibility is the immediate release, without any transitional stage, of individual slaves (abolition of slavery by successful rebellion is unknown to antiquity), whereas the medieval serfs gradually won their liberation as a class. And to what do we owe this if not to their barbarism, thanks to which they had not yet reached the stage of fully developed slavery, neither the labor slavery of the classical world nor the domestic slavery of the Orient?

"All the vigorous and creative life which the Germans infused into the Roman world was barbarism. Only barbarians are able to rejuvenate a world in the throes of collapsing civilization. And precisely the highest stage of barbarism, to which and in which the Germans worked their way upwards before the migrations, was the most favorable for this process. That explains everything."

One cause of the breaking up of the gens is the rise in "property differences within one and the same gens, [which transforms] its unity of interest into antagonism between its members" (Marx). The property differences grow out of the division of labor that results from the increasing productivity of labor, which results from the development of technology.

Another cause is the growing heterogeneity of the population in a given territory, which is due to the rise in trade, the establishment of slavery, etc. "The necessary condition for the existence [of the gentile constitution] was that the members of a gens or at least of a tribe were settled together in the same territory and were its sole inhabitants."

In short, "the gentile constitution had grown out of a society which knew no internal contradictions, and it was only adapted to such a society. It possessed no means of coercion except public opinion. But here was a society [namely, the emerging "civilized" society] which by all its economic conditions of life had been forced to split itself into freemen and slaves, into the exploiting rich and the exploited poor; a

society which not only could never again reconcile these contradictions, but was compelled always to intensify them. Such a society could only exist either in the continuous open fight of these classes against one another, or else under the rule of a third power, which, apparently standing above the warring classes, suppressed their open conflict and allowed the class struggle to be fought out at most in the economic field, in so-called legal form. The gentile constitution was finished. It had been shattered by the division of labor and its result, the cleavage of society into classes. It was replaced by the state."

Maybe one way of conceptualizing the priority of class over gender, race, ethnicity and so on is that the division of society into classes is what makes possible the conflict-focused orientation to the world which also manifests itself in racial conflicts, gender conflicts and the like. Differences in property, wealth and power create the envious (and jealous) mentality that originally shows itself in economic conflict but eventually in racial etc. conflicts too. Indeed, all these derivative conflicts exist only where racial groups or the sexes are divided by access to resources and power, a division that is a function of the economic formation and could not exist if there were no classes. Blacks hate and envy whites only if the latter economically oppress them,[1] and because the whites despise the blacks for being poor or slavish, i.e., part of the lower class. Certainly the difference in skin color accentuates the conflict, but this exclusively racial prejudice is obviously secondary; it presupposes the original material inequality. (Now that blacks have economic power and rights, racial prejudice is diminishing.) Much the same thing is true of gender. There is not some sort of spontaneous or genetic dislike of people different from oneself; collective prejudice is always sustained by some form of material inequality, by material hardship ultimately rooted in class conditions.

More examples of common sense: "As the state arose from the need to keep class antagonisms in check, but also arose in the thick of the fight between the classes, it is normally the state of the most powerful, economically ruling class, which by its means becomes also the politically ruling class, and so acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class. The ancient state was, above all, the state of the slave-owners for holding down the slaves, just as the feudal state was the organ of the nobility for holding down the peasant serfs and bondsmen, and the modern representative state is the instrument for exploiting wage-labor by capital. Exceptional periods, however, occur when the warring classes are so nearly equal in forces that the state power, as apparent mediator, acquires for the moment a certain independence in relation to both. This applies to the absolute monarchy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which balances the nobility and the bourgeoisie against one another; and to the Bonapartism of the First and particularly of the Second French Empire, which played off the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. The latest achievement in this line, in which ruler and ruled look equally comic, is the new German Empire of the Bismarckian nation; here the capitalists and the workers are balanced against one another and both of them fleeced for the benefit of the decayed Prussian cabbage Junkers." Even in these exceptional periods, though, the state exists for the sake of maintaining order, i.e., supporting those classes that already have power.

In 200 years Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, John F. Kennedy will be forgotten; Marx and Nietzsche will still be celebrated.

Lukács's essay "What Is Orthodox Marxism?" gives a pretty good description of what the dialectical method is, namely an approach towards understanding society on the basis of its *total development*, the entire history of the entire social totality. The part can't be understood until the whole is understood, and vice versa. By 'the whole' is meant both the present configuration of civilization and the latter's entire history (including its future—which means, of course, that a *full* understanding of society, at whatever stage, is impossible, since it never stops unfolding itself and its secrets). To understand a particular historical stage one has to look at its past and future; its future is its 'truth', as Hegel would say, but at the same time its future can't be understood except by understanding its past, its origins. This is why I wrote

[1] "Social" oppression, after all, transparently presupposes economic oppression.

eight years ago that the best method in social science is the historical method, the method which seeks to understand present-day society by reconstructing its entire past. For, first of all, what is extremely complicated now appears in a simpler, nascent form in earlier times; secondly, to understand how we got to where we are, i.e., the causes and nature of the current social structure, obviously we have to examine the past; thirdly,—I forget. Regardless, if this sort of thing is the dialectical method, this method isn't as unique to Marxism as Lukács would like to believe—or anyway it shouldn't be, since it's just common sense and doesn't seem essentially related to traditional Marxist concerns like class, exploitation, materialist theories, etc. Still, the holistic, structural, 'developmental' method (the method that concerns itself with *social dynamics*) has usually been associated with Marxism. Most bourgeois theorists have rejected it, for obvious ideological reasons. And maybe, after all, the method does naturally tend to confirm substantive Marxist theses. That's likely.

March 24

In some ways Gimena is a special girl, different from her Latin sisters. She's the kind of girl who partially restores my faith in women: she's surrounded all day by those handsome, dark-skinned, charismatic, loud Latinos who make most girls swoon, but she chooses me over them. It says a lot about her.

Perceptive remark from Charles Taylor: "Modern society, we might say, is Romantic in its private and imaginative life, and utilitarian or instrumentalist in its public, effective life." By 'Romantic' he means 'concerned with personal fulfillment, creativity, individual authenticity, self-expression'. He's certainly right that there's a semi-dichotomy. What explains it? What does it mean? Romanticism came on the scene when capitalism and industrialism were overtaking Europe. Hobsbawm argues that Romanticism can be partly understood as a reaction to the brutality, vulgarity, utilitarianism and materialism of the new industrial order; it was a retreat from the unpleasantness of the public realm into the autonomy of the private realm. Insofar as its legacy persists, then, it can be understood as a private, human reaction to inhuman public, economic conditions, such as bureaucracy. Utilitarianism and instrumentalism are not truly human, not deeply social; Romanticism, ironically, is (more so), despite its emphasis on individuality. But this emphasis is only superficially contradictory to social desires and needs, since it is precisely a reaction against social deprivation in society. 'If I can't express myself or be recognized as who I am in the public world, then I'll turn to the private world.' But, as Lasch argues, the private world is being increasingly infiltrated by the public, commodified world, and so therapy is on the rise and an attenuated ideology of Romanticism clings desperately to life despite its obvious inadequacy to contemporary conditions.

Romanticism is an alienated response to alienation.

Rustin argues for a theoretical interaction between psychoanalysis and Marxism, which have, of course, tended to be hostile toward one another. At one point he writes, "Timpanaro is asking that Marxists should address themselves to phenomena of feeling (concern with bereavement and loss, for example) which have been much more seriously addressed within Romantic literary work (and within psychoanalysis) than elsewhere in this culture." Okay, that's useful advice. But what can Marxists say about *feelings*? Every theoretic system has its subject-matter, and emotions are not the subject-matter of Marxism. One thing it can say is that feelings of loss may be more intense in class societies than in classless ones, since in the former the community is not as undifferentiated as it is in the latter, which means there is less of an emotional 'support-system'.

"I would summarize the Kleinian body of work as offering a view of human beings which in an intense and unusual way assumes them to be moral in their fundamental nature. It also, and in close relation to this, assumes them to be constituted as social beings in a primary and continuing interdependency with others. Kleinian theory is impregnated with moral categories, and its developmental concepts—especially those of paranoid-schizoid and depressive 'positions'—incorporate moral capabilities (notably of concern for the well-being of other persons) into their theoretical definition. A stage of development is partially

defined in terms of the moral capacities typical of it… Kleinian theory uniquely ascribes moral and altruistic capacities to human beings in its theoretical model of them… Innate concern for the well-being of the other, at a very deep level, appears to arise in this conception from the earliest lack of differentiation between self and other, and from the process whereby this differentiation comes about. Pleasure and pain are only slowly located in space and time, and in relation to whole persons. This intense experience of pain, as given and received, and this deep involvement with the caring person as the perceived source of all well- and ill-being, gives rise to the capacity to experience the pains and pleasures of the other with an intensity comparable to the pains and pleasures of the self."

All this strikes me as valuable and plausible. It reminds me of Honneth's insistence that an "affirmative" attitude toward the world is the natural one, the original and primary one. And of de Waal's argument that "morality" is a natural phenomenon, an evolutionary adaptation that can even be seen in apes. It's also useful as another basis for condemning capitalism, which stifles man's instinctive moral responses.

"What matters most to human beings is whether they stand in loving and trusting relations to others." Yep. In that sense there is not much difference between "masculine" and "feminine" desires/values.

I wonder how many papers I would have written this year if I had been accepted to a philosophy program… How much of my talent has been wasted in the last year?

It seems to me I haven't yet "settled accounts with my erstwhile philosophic conscience". Maybe I should focus on philosophy for the rest of the year instead of social theory.

March 26

'Each man is an Island, entire of itself'.— For most people, out of sight means out of mind. For most Americans, 'in sight' means—out of mind.

The model of virtue.— A person who tends to be honest [like me] usually lacks the imagination and self-confidence to tell a lie.

Natural beauty.— Low-minded though it seems, I'd rather look at a naked woman than watch the sunset from the peak of Mount Washington.

Against Popperism.— Arguing that the natural and the social sciences should have the same method would be sensible only if humans were atoms. In capitalism it may appear that they are, but, in fact, they aren't.

Life against death.— The nothingness of life is proven by the somethingness of death.

Fame.— People who are famous are overrated, and people who aren't famous are underrated.

Dangerous intelligence.— The greatest danger for the perceptive observer of humanity is that he'll become convinced of the smallness of life, and will thus retreat from a life of action into passive resignation.

Out of the elements.— There are people whose souls are too expansive to stay within the confines of Earth.

On the rack.— Only a writer can know what it means to write, as only a torturer can know what it means to torture.

Dialectical irony.— It is ironic that as man gains power over nature, it becomes increasingly alien to him. The more he imposes himself on it, the less he identifies with it. (And therefore, the less he identifies with himself.)

Philosophy, too, is "embodied".— Philosophy can be no 'nobler' than its practitioners. This is why it has become the shallow, base, meaningless thing it is today.

From Lasch's essay: "The conviction that unites thinkers as diverse as Herbert Marcuse, R. D. Laing and Jacques Lacan is that psychoanalysis traces the origin of intrapsychic conflict to the conditions under which social authority recreates itself in the unconscious mind, and specifically to the institution of the patriarchal family, which crushes the revolt of the son against the father, saddles the son with a guilty conscience, and makes him grow up to become a tyrant in his own right." The Freudian left, which emerged after the failures of early socialist revolutions (like the Russian, which succumbed to dictatorship under Stalin) and the experience of Fascism, was concerned to explain why people always seemed so resistant to change and liberation. Freud's work, they thought, provided a foundation for understanding the phenomenon, in that it attacked the illusion of psychic autonomy. "Men need masters because they are not masters of themselves: this became the central contention of the Freudian left. Freud's theory, in this view, provides the deepest glimpses into the divided self. It shows how society enters and deforms the individual psyche: not through indoctrination or cultural 'conditioning', but through the deeper mechanisms of repression and sublimation." These thinkers saw the task of liberation in terms of overcoming repression, which meant "abolishing the very distinction between work and leisure, making work into play, and getting rid of the aggressive, domineering attitude toward nature that informs the present organization of work. It was partly in order to explain the origins of that attitude that theorists of the New Left turned to Freud." But they did so through the prism of earlier socialist critiques of the patriarchal family, which made connections between the rise of monogamy and the subjugation of women. (Cf. Engels's book.)

Thus, "the various schools of thought on the Freudian left—followers of Marcuse, followers of Brown, Laingians, Lacanians, radical feminists, socialist feminists—all share the central premise that the patriarchal family is the root of organized oppression". This was already, by the way, a misunderstanding of Engels's position. Nevertheless the doctrine persisted, mostly because "it seems to explain the rise and persistence of Faustian, acquisitive, aggressive, domineering character traits". (Incidentally, all the phenomena that interested the Freudian left can be better explained by Marxism than psychoanalysis. The latter is more appropriate to analysis of the individual than to that of entire cultures, simply because individual psyches, and the situations in which they mature, vary enormously even within the same culture. Mass behavior and mass movements are explained by the structures and dynamics of a society, not by the private family-caused conflicts and repressions and neuroses of individuals.) Freud's speculations in *Moses and Monotheism*, which trace the Oedipus complex to the beginning of history, also had great appeal to these thinkers. But you already know about the Oedipus complex, and surely also that the theory's applicability, if it has any, is limited to families and a culture in which the father is a domineering and overbearing figure. In any event, the Freudian left was convinced that "repression originates in the subjection of the pleasure principle to the patriarchal compulsion to work", which is somehow tied to the Oedipus complex. Again, I would reply that the compulsion to work is not patriarchal but capitalist.

Anyway, the "patriarchal" family, as the overarching paradigm, has obviously ended. Culture has become more narcissistic than repressed. But exploitation, oppression, atomization, etc. persist. Indeed, as Lasch says, "I wish only to call attention to the irony that the values of mutuality and union with others [which Freudian feminists promote, and the suppression of which they blame on patriarchy] may have come closer to realization in the patriarchal societies of the past than in our own society".

Lasch sums up: "The point, I think, comes down to this: that although it is no longer difficult to imagine a society without the father, it is a serious mistake, perhaps a dangerous mistake, to confuse it with utopia. The Freudian left, which took shape in opposition to the old left with its economic determinism and its naive faith in material progress, has identified many of the central problems of our society and many of its central needs: in particular, the need to curb the spirit of acquisition and domination, the need for a more nurturant attitude toward nature, the need for a new relation between men and women. By directing so much of its criticism against the patriarchal family, however, the New Left has confused the issue. It has deflected criticism from the real problem to a pseudo-problem, from the corporation and the state to the family. The

worst features of our society derive not from the despotism of the authoritarian father, much eroded in any case, but from the regressive psychology of industrialism, which reduces the citizen to a consumer and bombards him with images of immediate and total gratification."

Barrett's article, written from the perspective of feminism, points to weaknesses in Lasch's worldview. (For example, in some of his writings he takes an ahistorical perspective, valorizing the 19th-century bourgeois form of the family and not considering other forms. And I would say he places too much emphasis on the Oedipus complex. He's too Freudian.) But he's probably right to stress the importance of suffering as a prerequisite for psychological maturity, and to argue that there is value in having to overcome obstacles in one's youth (an opinion that isn't shared by many leftists or even by ordinary people who approve of the paternalism of the welfare state). Socialists want to eradicate suffering, but that just ain't right. "Rugged individualism" appeals to me almost as much as the vision of a communal society. Maybe its appeal is mostly aesthetic, though. And narcissistic: I myself am an avatar of individualism.

By the way, I assume you appreciate the meaning of the title "Out of the elements" in the aphorism above? I meant, first of all, that these spiritual people are in some mysterious way composed of non-spiritual stuff, matter; secondly, that they actually exist *outside* of the elements, in the realm of spirit; thirdly, I was suggesting that here on Earth they are "out of their element", that they belong somewhere else. I figured that even though that last meaning might not explicitly occur to the reader it would at least have a subliminal effect on him, since the expression "You're out of your element" is so common.

March 28

Bertram's article argues for some revisions in historical materialism. Its thesis is that "international competition and conflict is the crucial mechanism in selecting social and political forms". This side of the matter wasn't emphasized by Marx; he usually spoke in terms of a society's endogenous tendencies of towards conflict and revolution, determined by the contradictions between its productive forces and social relations, and between its classes. But Bertram emphasizes competition between societies. "Competition and conflict among societies selects in favour of those social forms most appropriate for the development of the productive forces", because the society with the highest level of productive forces has, *ceteris paribus*, the greatest chance of surviving in its competition with other societies. Bertram's reasoning is basically Darwinian; its premise is natural selection between societies. Thus, for example, a society might permit its productive forces to stagnate indefinitely only in the absence of external competition. "The thesis advanced here expects and predicts that social forms that are relatively inefficient at developing the productive forces will be eliminated once they come into competition or conflict with more efficient forms"—through, say, conquest, or through a subtler economic undermining (with political repercussions) of the inefficient social form.

"It is not the countries that enjoy the most developed productive forces that will experience crisis and revolution, but, on the contrary, those on the margins of the most dynamic social system. The more advanced countries will tend to enjoy the fruits of their possession of advanced technology and a consequent level of prosperity that will make for social stability. Countries on the periphery, however, will find themselves economically undermined by the competition from countries enjoying higher levels of productivity. Social dislocation is more likely in such circumstances." The theory, then, obviously applies to the modern period, less obviously to pre-modern periods.

Stated more completely: "The 'theory' to be proposed here is, in essence, as follows. Particular societies exist in an environment that is both physical (geography, natural resources, and so on) and geopolitical (neighbouring tribes for some, rival superpowers for others). Unfortunately, the policy of peaceful co-existence sometimes endorsed by Soviet leaders has not been widely followed in human history. Countries and cultures have engaged in both economic competition of various kinds and in military conflict. In all these forms of conflict and competition, possession of a higher level of technological development increases the *chance* that a given culture or state will survive. (I put things in these

probabilistic terms because I want to insure against counterexamples where a culture with a relatively advanced level of the productive forces fails because of natural disasters, incompetent generals, and so forth.) Cultures may adopt social structures (and indeed legal and political superstructures) for all sorts of reasons. The proximate cause may be religious or political, for example. But those countries or cultures that fail to select structures conducive to the development of the productive forces will either be eliminated (or assimilated) by their rivals, or will undergo a crisis that will force them to select anew their basic structures. In either case, the unsuccessful, if they survive, will tend to adopt structures resembling those of their successful rivals. A pattern will emerge in history, as structures conducive to the development of the productive forces at a particular point of their development are diffused. Needless to say, those cultures for whom a type of structure is especially successful will not be thrown into crisis and will avoid structural change. In the vicinity, however, there may be societies which are unable to generate the same success from that type of structure. Such states may sometimes select a better structure (from the developmental point of view) than the dominant culture possesses, and, by making a quantum leap in productive development, may themselves become the dominant global or regional power. The new structure will in turn be diffused by emulation or conquest."

Bertram's hypothesis isn't necessarily incompatible with Marx's version of historical materialism. Both theories could explain a given society's adoption of new social relations. For example, the French Revolution could be seen as the result of both France's costly, destabilizing competition with England (which had a more efficient, better-organized social formation, and maybe a higher level of economic development) and also the three-way class struggle in France. In the last analysis, class struggles are surely more important in history than international competition, for instance because they tend to be more *immediately* implicated in societal disturbances. And because class conflict structurally defines the terrain of intra- and international economic life. Etc. But Bertram's perspective is useful to keep in mind.

The contradiction isn't between the new dynamic forces and the stagnant relations of production, but between, on the one hand, the dynamic forces and relations of production which are slowly emerging in the old social formation (and which exist in an inextricable unity) and, on the other, the old forces with their ossified relations of production. As E. M. Wood argues, forces can't be divorced from the social relations in which they're embedded: a contradiction can't exist between "material" forces (considered, somehow, independently of the social relations that are inseparable from them) and "social" relations (considered, somehow, independently of the material forces that are inseparable from them), but only between different sets of social relations with their different forces of production. I hit on this insight, if I remember rightly, in one of the footnotes to the thoughts "In defense of historical materialism" I wrote years ago.

There's something unsatisfying about that. For one *can* separate forces from relations. The tools and nature-knowledge of early man can be considered apart from the kinship relations that structured the ways they were used. And it's because the undeveloped nature of these forces of production was incompatible with the existence of classes that there were no classes then. A particular set of social relations was incompatible with material conditions (considered *independently* of the social relations that actually obtained). Maybe, though, this is a function of the undeveloped state of society. In class societies, forces of production can't be defined apart from social relations and vice versa.

Maybe that's all wrong.

Wood argues that the base/superstructure distinction is, strictly speaking, not valid. "Relations of production take the form of particular juridical and political relations—modes of domination and coercion, forms of property and social organization—which are not mere secondary reflexes but constituents of the productive relations themselves. It is no doubt possible, indeed necessary, to distinguish between juridical-political forms that are constituents of productive relations and those that are more distant from, or external to, these relations—even if there are no sharp discontinuities between them. There are certainly legal and political institutions that cannot be usefully regarded as *constituents* of productive relations even if they help to sustain the system of production and to reproduce its essential relations; and perhaps the term 'superstructure' should be reserved for these. However, not all legal and political principles can be relegated

to superstructure, since the material base itself is articulated through juridical-political forms. The 'sphere' of production is dominant not in the sense that it stands apart from or precedes these juridical-political forms, but rather in the sense that these forms are precisely forms of production, the *attributes* of a particular productive system.

"…There are, then, at least two senses in which the juridical–political 'sphere' is implicated in the productive 'base'. First, a system of production always exists in the shape of specific social determinations, the particular modes of organization and domination and the forms of property in which relations of production are embodied—what might be called the 'basic' as distinct from 'superstructural' juridical–political attributes of the productive system. Second, from an *historical* point of view even political institutions like *village* and *state* enter directly into the constitution of productive relations and are in a sense prior to them (even where these institutions are not the direct instruments of surplus-appropriation) to the extent that relations of production are historically constituted by the configuration of political power that determines the outcome of class conflict."

Godelier has a similar position. He argues, for example, that kinship relations in early societies are the form that production relations take. Production relations *are* kinship relations; this is why the latter dominate the society.

Wood, quoting Marx: "the 'innermost secret' of the social structure is the specific form in which 'surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producers'". Different social structures are based on different forms of surplus-extraction.

March 30

From Callinicos: "*Capital* locates capitalism's chronic liability to recurrent economic crises in the tendency of the rate of profit to fall—the form of the contradiction between the forces and relations of production specific to that mode of production." Interesting. Is the contradiction really between forces and relations of production, or is it rather a *self*-contradiction in the relations of production (and the social relations which are their extension)? In any case, the notion of "forces of production" is hard to define, and some of the controversies related to it are probably not very substantive.

Quoted in Wood: "The *real barrier* of capitalist production is *capital itself*. It is that capital and its self-expansion appear as the starting and the closing point, the motive and the purpose of production; that production is only production for *capital* and not vice versa, the means of production are not mere means for a constant expansion of the living process of the *society* of producers. The limits within which the preservation and self-expansion of the value of capital resting on the expropriation and pauperization of the great mass of producers can alone move—these limits come continually into conflict with the methods of production employed by capital for its purposes, which drive towards unlimited extension of production, towards production as an end in itself, towards unconditional development of the social productivity of labour. The means—unconditional development of the productive forces of society—comes continually into conflict with the limited purpose, the self-expansion of the existing capital. The capitalist mode of production is, for this reason, a historical means of developing the material forces of production and creating an appropriate world market and is, at the same time, a continual conflict between this its historical task and its own corresponding relations of social production."

I think the contradictions of capitalism are between *both* the forces of production and the relations of production *and* the relations of production and themselves. A productive force like the internet tends to foster social relations that undermine capitalist private property; and capitalist property (or production) relations themselves conflict with themselves in the holistic context of a society, leading to economic and political crises.

A useful reminder from Hobsbawm, which is similar to Bertram's position: "The mechanisms leading to the transformation of one mode [of production] into another may not be exclusively internal to that mode, but may arise from the conjunction and interaction of differently structured societies. In this sense all development is *mixed* development. Instead of looking only for the specific regional conditions

which led to the formation of, say, the peculiar system of classical antiquity in the Mediterranean, or to the transformation of feudalism into capitalism within the manors and cities of Western Europe, we ought to look at the various paths which led to the junctions and cross-roads at which, at a certain stage of development, these areas found themselves."

Sick. Sick of this hateful life.

March 31

Habermas was wrong to reject the task of analyzing consciousness as being part of an outmoded "philosophy of the subject". Insofar as humans are not automatons but exist for themselves and act through consciousness (so that their actions are not just externally 'caused' but grow out of desires and psychological conditions), it is necessary to theorize consciousness. One has to be careful not to succumb to idealism, to a privileging of consciousness at the expense of social being, but surely a happy medium can be found in which social being is given priority but consciousness too is given an explanatory role.

Reading Chomsky's pamphlet *Government in the Future*, which sets out to answer the question "What is the role of the state in an advanced industrial society?" He lays out four idealized positions: classical liberalism, libertarian socialism, state socialism, and state capitalism. "I think that the libertarian socialist concepts—and by that I mean a range of thinking that extends from left-wing Marxism through anarchism—are fundamentally correct and that they are the proper and natural extensions of classical liberalism into the current era of advanced industrial society." Incidentally, the latter (superficially counterintuitive) proposition is basically what I said in my paper on Plato, when I mentioned offhandedly that the ideology of communism rescues the essence of liberalism from its capitalistic mutilations.

"Classical liberalism asserts as its major idea an opposition to all but the most restricted and minimal forms of state intervention in personal and social life." This conclusion is well-known, but the original reasoning for it is not. Chomsky reconstructs it by looking at Wilhelm von Humboldt's *Limits of State Action*. I don't know anything about Humboldt except that he put forward a view which Chomsky later took up, namely that essential to language is *creativity*, the human capacity to formulate an infinite number of linguistic expressions using a finite set of resources (the basic elements of language). Humboldt's view of human nature shares this emphasis on creativity: "to inquire and to create are the centers around which all human pursuits more or less directly revolve". (I would add 'to love' to that list. To inquire, to create, and to love are the three main spontaneous expressions of humanity, at least in its original, uncorrupted essence. All three come from the drive to assimilate (and impose oneself on) the environment, to overcome its otherness.) Man's central attribute, then, is his freedom. Humboldt's discussions of—paeans to—labor recall Rousseau, and are striking anticipations of the early Marx. "It seems as if all peasants and craftsmen might be elevated into artists [says Humboldt]; that is, men who love labor for its own sake… Whatever does not spring from a man's free choice, or is only the result of instruction and guidance, does not enter into his very being, but remains alien to his true nature; he does not perform it with truly human energies, but merely with mechanical exactness."

Humboldt might then have agreed with Marx in his belief that the revolutionist is primarily a frustrated *producer* rather than a dissatisfied *consumer*. "This far more radical critique," says Chomsky, "of capitalist relations of production flows directly, often in the same words, from the libertarian thought of the Enlightenment. For this reason, I think, one must say that classical liberal ideas in their essence, though not in the way they developed, are profoundly anticapitalist." Only when, for example, the concept of the 'person' was redefined in the era of corporate capitalism (when corporations themselves became 'persons') could classical liberalism, with its emphasis on personal freedom and rights, be invoked in support of capitalism. All the Enlightenment thinkers would of course have condemned capitalist coercion and bondage.

From Mark Twain: “It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practice either of them.”

If you know Chomsky, you’ll know that most of the pamphlet consists in an empirically supported denunciation of U.S. power-structures.

If anyone ever tells you that radical democracy cannot work, tell him about Porto Alegre. In this Brazilian city of over 1.5 million people, it worked for more than a decade, and it solved problems of resource-allocation far better than earlier governments had.

I’m skimming Terry Eagleton’s *Ideology: An Introduction*, which traces the history of the concept from the Enlightenment to postmodernism. I’ll have to buy the book: it’s a good reference. I’ll quote here only a few remarks on the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who seems insightful: “[How does ideology take hold in everyday life?] To tackle this problem, Bourdieu develops the concept of *habitus*, by which he means the inculcation in men and women of a set of durable dispositions which generate particular practices. It is because individuals in society act in accordance with such internalized systems—what Bourdieu calls the ‘cultural unconscious’—that we can explain how their actions can be objectively regulated and harmonized without being in any sense the result of conscious obedience to rules. Through these structured dispositions, human actions may be lent a unity and consistency without any reference to some conscious intention. In the very ‘spontaneity’ of our habitual behavior, then, we reproduce certain deeply tacit norms and values; and habitus is thus the relay or transmission mechanism by which mental and social structures become incarnate in daily social activity. The habitus, rather like human language itself, is an open-ended system which enables individuals to cope with unforeseen, ever-changing situations; it is thus a ‘strategy-generating principle’ which permits ceaseless innovation, rather than a rigid blueprint.

“The term ideology is not particularly central in Bourdieu’s work; but if habitus is relevant to the concept, it is because it tends to induce in social agents such aspirations and actions as are compatible with the objective requirements of their social circumstances. At its strongest, it rules out all other modes of desiring and behaving as simply unthinkable. Habitus is thus ‘history turned into nature’, and for Bourdieu it is through this matching of the subjective and the objective, what we feel spontaneously disposed to do and what our social conditions demand of us, that power secures itself. A social order strives to naturalize its own arbitrariness through this dialectic of subjective aspirations and objective structures, defining each in terms of the other; so that the ‘ideal’ conditions would be one in which the agents’ consciousness would have the same limits as the objective system which gives rise to it. The recognition of legitimacy, Bourdieu states, ‘is the misrecognition of arbitrariness’.

“What Bourdieu calls *doxa* belongs to the kind of stable, tradition-bound social order in which power is fully naturalized and unquestionable, so that no social arrangement different from the present could even be imagined. Here, as it were, subject and object merge indistinguishably into each other. What matters in such societies is what ‘goes without saying’, which is determined by tradition; and tradition is always ‘silent’, not least about itself as tradition. Any challenge to such *doxa* is then *heterodoxy*, against which the given order must assert its claims in a new *orthodoxy*. Such orthodoxy differs from *doxa* in that the guardians of tradition, of what goes without saying, are now compelled to speak in their own defense, and thus implicitly to present themselves as simply one possible position, among others.

“Social life contains a number of different habitus, each system appropriate to what Bourdieu terms a ‘field’. A field is a competitive system of social relations which functions according to its own internal logic, composed of institutions or individuals who are competing for the same stake. What is generally at stake in such fields is the attainment of maximum dominance within them—a dominance which allows those who achieve it to confer legitimacy on other participants, or to withdraw it from them. To achieve such dominance involves amassing the maximum amount of the particular kind of ‘symbolic capital’ appropriate to the field; and for such power to become ‘legitimate’ it must cease to be recognized for what it is. A power which is tacitly rather than explicitly endorsed is one which has succeeded in legitimating itself.

"Any such social field is necessarily structured by a set of unspoken rules for what can be validly uttered or perceived within it; and these rules thus operate as a mode of what Bourdieu terms 'symbolic violence'. Since symbolic violence is legitimate, it generally goes unrecognized *as* violence. It is 'the gentle, invisible form of violence, which is never recognized as such, and is not so much undergone as chosen, the violence of credit, confidence, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, gratitude, pity…' In the field of education, for example, symbolic violence operates not so much by the teacher speaking 'ideologically' to the students, but by the teacher being perceived as in possession of an amount of 'cultural capital' which the student needs to acquire. The educational system thus contributes to reproducing the dominant social order not so much by the viewpoints it fosters, but by this regulated distribution of cultural capital. A similar form of symbolic violence is at work in the whole field of culture, where those who lack the 'correct' taste are unobtrusively excluded, relegated to shame and silence. 'Symbolic violence' is thus Bourdieu's way of rethinking and elaborating the Gramscian concept of hegemony; and his work as a whole represents an original contribution to what one might call the 'microstructures' of ideology, complementing the more general notions of the Marxist tradition with empirically detailed accounts of ideology as 'everyday life'."

That's all very compelling. Indeed, most of it is obviously true. I'll have to read Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice.*

Fruitful suggestion: "It is probable that what Freud points to as the fundamental mechanisms of the psychical life are the structural devices of ideology as well. Projection, displacement, sublimation, condensation, repression, idealization, substitution, rationalization, disavowal: all of these are at work in the text of ideology, as much as in dream and fantasy."

April 1

Reading Callinicos's *Making History: Agency, Structure and Change in Social Theory*.

The relation between theoretical and practical reason (a distinction formulated originally by Kant) wasn't clear until I wrote my paper on morality. That paper is the foundation for understanding both the relation between the two and the meaning of practical reason itself. (Briefly: theoretical reason involves the successful deployment of logical and inductive principles in the search for truth; practical reason involves a person's self-consistency, or his "prescibing laws for himself", based on his values, according to which he consciously or unconsciously determines his behavior. Both kinds of reason are inherently relational: the former involves the relation between a conclusion and a set of premises, while the latter involves a person's relation to himself. One can say that a particular act of valuing something, for example the destruction of the planet, is irrational only to the extent that it conflicts with other values that the person consciously or unconsciously has and by which he regulates his behavior; or, alternatively, the person may *justify* his value irrationally, if his chain of reasoning is strictly illogical. So a given act of valuation can be called, loosely speaking, either practically or theoretically irrational, or neither, or both.[1] On the other hand, a belief which doesn't have any evaluative content (i.e., which is not inherently action-guiding) can be only theoretically, not practically, irrational. I can be called "autonomous" insofar as I am practically rational, because that is the extent to which I thoughtfully guide my own behavior.)

Callinicos isn't a big fan of Foucault. But even he writes sentences like the following: "What makes Foucault so intriguing and challenging a thinker is his belief—evident in the attempt to write histories of the truth, sexuality, the subject—that what we think of as enduring and fundamental aspects of existence are nothing but historical constructs formed by a specific regime of social practices." Need I observe how unoriginal that belief is? It goes back at least to Marx and Nietzsche, who themselves theorized it in more compelling and plausible (less hyperbolic and simpleminded) ways than Michel did. "Put simply, it does not seem that Foucault can, even in his own terms, do without some account of the properties that all subjects share… That is, there are some aspects of human subjects which are not simply socially constructed and which may provide both motives for and means of acting." In other words, in the end it appears after

[1] [See the April 16th entry.]

all that there is such a thing as—biology. Who would have guessed! I've never understood the allergy that these pretentious French intellectuals have to the notion of human nature.

I might almost say that, barring natural catastrophes or nuclear war, something akin to socialism is inevitable. The forces of production are going to keep being democratized and decentralized, or socialized, and capitalist property-relations aren't going to be able to hold out forever. Either they will collapse and production will become socialized, or the capitalist world-system will deteriorate into interregional conflict and chaos. Those are the two options. Socialism or barbarism. Nothing is permanent, capitalism least of all. It's too unstable.

April 5, 6

(2:00 a.m. Drunk.) Writing is creating the object as oneself. Therein lies its pleasure, the pleasure of all free creation. Objectifying oneself. For one wants the world to be an extension of oneself, and oneself to be an extension of the world (as it was in the beginning, phylogenetically and ontogenetically). Strangely enough, as man collectively transforms the world he experiences himself as increasingly alienated from it; but this is because *individuals* are all that matter here, and there is no collective subject called 'man' that is 'objectifying' itself through science, technology, globalization, domination of nature. Individuals are the only beings that can objectify themselves (because, of course, they're the only beings), and the fact that mankind as a collectivity is remaking the world 'in its own image' does not mean that *individuals* are experiencing the world as being remade in their own image. Indeed, the opposite is true, because of commodification, fragmentation, reification.

Women must be affected by the softness of their bodies. The soft flesh, the fatty tissue, the bounciness and excess flesh, in combination with the physical weakness, must influence their way of seeing the world and acting. Firmness, leanness, muscular tautness, as in men (but also in women, when it occurs in them—e.g. in female body-builders), is experienced as meaning things like fighting against opponents, battling animals, running, being active, being mobile and strong; softness, plumpness, weakness, pregnant immobility are experienced as synonymous with relying on others to do the hard work, the physical labor, the protecting, the taming of the wild for the sake of the tribe or family. Relative "passiveness" and "activeness" are built into the bodily experiences of women and men.

Went to a bar several nights ago with Heidy, a sexy 30-year-old Guatemalan student of mine. Later I took her to my apartment, where we made out. I'm not very interested in her and she's leaving in two weeks anyway.

From *Wage Labor and Capital*: "The relations of production in their totality constitute what are called the social relations, society." Evidently, then, insofar as the characteristics of society are said to be determined by the nature of the production relations, the category of 'production relations' is being divided into two types, the primary and the secondary. Both this suggestion and the one in the quotation above seem to be useful ways of conceptualizing things. The problem is in being *precise*. This is the problem of Marxism in general. To make its hypotheses precise is remarkably difficult, perhaps impossible. Yet at the same time, much of Marxism is obviously true. Its intuitions are sound; its formulations are not quite adequate. This criticism, incidentally, applies to probably every social theory, not just Marxism. A barrier to a quasi-positivist analytical precision (at least, a precision manifested in hypotheses that are both plausible and substantive) is inherent in the object itself—because of freedom, "dialectical development", the overdetermined nature of human interaction, the indeterminate quality of conscious behavior and the shared background of an amorphous, 'intuited' culture (which is both material and ideal; there aren't clear boundaries between the two). There *is* a reality here, but in principle it isn't fully accessible to human cognition. The strangely indeterminate, 'undetermined' nature of consciousness and behavior (interaction, etc.) prevents it from being so.

Serving the status quo.— The most important role of leaders in history has been to delay progress, and to further the cause of oppression.

Androgynous.— The only woman I've ever loved is…myself. Unfortunately my love was unrequited.

Though God does not exist, one should act as if he does. *Pretend* there is a God, a superior, wise, moral, compassionate being whose approval you seek. Maybe then you will act honorably and be less demoralized by people's stupidity.

April 7

Out-of-the-ordinary day at work. An old teacher named Joseph was fired without warning two days ago, for, apparently, a series of minor administrative offenses. He had been with the school for eight years and was easily the most popular teacher among the students. Everyone liked him. He was their friend, their counselor, their drinking buddy, and EF was his only family. He was an institution there. I was given one of his classes today, an advanced discussion class. But after I'd told the students he had been fired, and had answered all the obligatory questions, three of the girls walked out, saying, "Don't take it personally, but I don't want to take this class if Joseph isn't teaching it." I chuckled and let them go. Later I let other students leave and ended the class early. But afterwards it occurred to me: that was a very rude thing for those girls to do, to walk out like that! It was breathtakingly rude. They're the sort of girls with forceful personalities, pretty, used to getting their way, heedless of the rules of etiquette; you can practically see it just by looking at them. The arrogant, insensitive personality-type I've always disliked.

None of the guys walked out. Only the girls. That's predictable. Men, in my experience, [excepting the primitive brutes] tend to be more respectful of people, more easygoing, better at hiding their true feelings and not acting impulsively (like those girls), certainly more discreet and less gossipy. They are better able to step back from a situation and consider it soberly, without flying into a rage and storming out of a room on the slightest provocation. Kierkegaard said it in *The Sickness unto Death*: men have more autonomy, more sober self-awareness and self-control.[1] [2] He mentions this in the context of a discussion about two kinds of despair, the despair of weakness (of not willing to be oneself) and the despair of defiance (of despairingly willing to be oneself). The first, he says, is feminine, the second masculine. Then he inserts a footnote:

"If psychologically one will take a look around in real life, one will from time to time have opportunity to convince oneself that this distinction, which is logically correct and so shall and must be pertinent, is in fact pertinent, and that this classification embraces the whole reality of despair… However, I do not by any means wish to deny that on the part of women there may occur forms of manly despair, and conversely forms of womanly despair on the part of men. But these are exceptions. And this is a matter of course, the ideal also is rare; and only in a purely ideal sense is this distinction between manly and womanly despair entirely true. Woman has neither the selfishly developed conception of the self nor the intellectuality of man, for all that she is his superior in tenderness and fineness of feeling. On the other hand, woman's nature is devotion, submission, and it is unwomanly if it is not so.[3] Strangely enough, no one can be so pert (a word which language has expressly coined for woman), so almost cruelly particular as a woman—and yet her nature is devotion, and yet (here is the marvel) all this is really the expression for the fact that her

[1] The exception is the savages who rape, who beat up women, who love war and fighting.

[2] Feminists too implicitly acknowledge this truth when they argue that "autonomy" is an impoverished ideal—i.e., that women live fuller lives insofar as they are less autonomous than men—and when they oppose a feminine ethic of care to the masculine Kantian ethic.

[3] It need not be devotion to a man; it could be to her children, for example.

nature is devotion… [Obviously much of this is exaggerated. He is discussing only ideal-types.] But the fact that devotion is woman's nature comes again to evidence in despair. By devotion [the word literally means 'giving away'] she has lost herself, and only thus is she happy, only thus is she herself; a woman who is happy without devotion, that is, without giving herself away (to whatever it may be she gives herself) is unwomanly. A man also devotes himself (gives himself away), and it is a poor sort of a man who does not do it; but his self is not devotion (this is the expression for womanly substantial devotion), nor does he acquire himself by devotion, as in another sense a woman does, he has himself; he gives himself away, but his self still remains behind as a sober consciousness of devotion, whereas woman, with genuine womanliness, plunges her self into that to which she devotes herself…"

Anyway, my point is that the masculine nature has a *soberness* that the feminine lacks, or has to a lesser degree. A hundred daily observations bear this out. The soberness, the relative lack of "devotion" or impulsiveness, of throwing-one's-entire-self-into-an-immediate-situation, is an essential element in the stereotypical masculine virtues.[1]

The Barnum & Bailey Circus for Philosophers.— When people like Stanley Fish exist, who needs clowns?

April 8

The self-realizing desire.— In most people, the desire to be exalted is pure vanity, vulgar and rude. In me, the desire itself is exalted, and in having it I have already realized it.

I think it's permissible to speak, as Marxists often do, of "false consciousness" and "objective interests". (Wright agrees with me. See pages 248 and 249.) There are several plausible ways of 'cashing out' those concepts.

On the use and abuse of nudity for life.— If women didn't have naked bodies under their clothes, men wouldn't enjoy interacting with them. On the other hand, if men didn't have clothes over their naked bodies, they wouldn't enjoy interacting with each other.

It is incredibly significant that the word 'subject' has the dual meaning of "I am a subject" and "I am subjected to…" Subject as opposed to object: autonomy, agency, activity, free will, the self. But subjection as opposed to freedom and autonomy. The two meanings are almost opposites, which seems quite paradoxical. But, as so often in language (as shown by etymology, philology), there is a deeper meaning and profound consistency. Consider Kant's position: a person is a subject only by virtue of his subjection to norms of reason. His freedom consists in his adherence to laws, laws that he gives himself. Insofar as he subjects himself to a law, he is autonomous; insofar as he follows the whims of the moment, he is heteronomous. (Cf. my note above on practical reason.)

Or think of this Althusserian, Therbornian theory:[2] a person doesn't become a subject until he is interpellated by the Other; and inasmuch as he is a subject, he is being implicitly or explicitly interpellated by the Other and by himself. (That last idea is my own addition.) This interpellation consists in being called, being addressed or recognized as a certain kind of person. "Interpellations unceasingly constitute and reconstitute who we are"; they give us identities and subjectivities. And we are, in a way, 'subjected' to them, i.e. subjected to the Other (his 'call', his gaze, his recognition, which is at the same time our own). Subjecthood means subjection, the peculiar subjection that constitutes freedom.

[1] [Including courage, at least in its deepest sense. See Paul Tillich's *The Courage To Be*.]
[2] [In fact it is ultimately Hegelian, since the concept of interpellation is a variant on the concept of recognition.]

In other words, self-consciousness (selfhood) is caused by and synonymous with a kind of subjection, or rather several kinds of subjection, which are closely related to the "generalized other" in consciousness.

After drinking.— When one has had a bit of alcohol, one understands how silly are all philosophical and scholarly activities.

Charisma vs. humanity.— On a quasi-instinctual level, charisma is the most important quality in a human being, and if he lacks it he is at a great evolutionary and interpersonal disadvantage. Only on the distinctively human level do reason, intelligence, kindness and so on matter; and on this basis one can rank people in terms of their humanity.

Why didn't industrialization happen before capitalism? What is so different about capitalism that it causes industrialization whereas no other mode of production does? According to Robert Brenner, in pre-capitalist modes the direct producers have access to (or partial possession of) the means of production, as they do not in capitalism; this necessitates that the exploiting class in pre-capitalist societies rely on extra-economic (e.g., political) coercion to secure compliance on the part of the producers. In capitalism, by contrast, the coercion is mainly economic. So in order for modern economic growth to occur, the workers had to be divorced from the means of production—because this made possible development of the productive forces based on *labor-saving* (i.e., profit-increasing) investment. An incentive for such investment (which leads to industrialization) is built into the capitalist mode of production itself, as it is not in earlier modes.

Section 4.4 of Callinicos's book, which draws its arguments partly from the work of Brenner, includes effective rebuttals against the common criticism that the nation-state's existence cannot be explained in terms of Marxism.

It's an odd sort of pain that never really goes away but almost never obtrudes itself nakedly into consciousness. It must be the past crying out not to be forgotten lest I become happy.

April 11

Gimena sent me this lovely email: "Guapo! Thanks for to be so patient with me. I think you had been a good boyfriend. I know that I don't have any opportunity with you, but I want to tell that I made me so happy there. I'll remember all my life each moment with you. I like you, because you made me feel so special, for a long time ago so good with a man. It is very deep everything that I wrote for you.

"I don't know if you feel or felt the same for me, but I don't care, I needed to tell everything I feel for you.

"I miss your body ☺, I can imagine it…naked, hahaha I'm just kidding. kiss, kiss, kiss and kisses! and hugs too."

This is the side of women I love.

Obviously Marxism has to be supplemented with "environmental determinism" (see *Guns, Germs, and Steel*), and no historical conjuncture can be explained only in terms of the class struggle. Critics of Marxism interpret these facts as "refutations" of Marxism, but, well, that's just stupid.

The reason for my discontent.— Most people prefer to have faith in humanity, but I see the seeds of fascism (a.k.a. militant conformism) everywhere. Whether they sprout has nothing to do with the goodness of humanity.

Majesty in the 'microscopic'.— The universe's most awesome achievement is to have created a being capable of contemplating the universe. A being that can *pass judgment* on the universe!

A consummation devoutly to be wished.— Sex occupies everyone's mind at all times. His consciousness draws libido from the well continually. If society were healthy it would tap into this fount of love and institute communal orgies.

April 12, 13

I wasn't accepted to nine of the ten schools I applied to. Still waiting to hear from UMass Boston. (If I go there it'll be for a Masters—in U.S. history—in preparation for a Ph.D. somewhere else.) I'm starting to realize that if I have any future at all, it'll be in writing. I was put on this earth to write, and that's the only thing I can do well. So I have to stop dawdling and get down to business. "Pursue my dreams" and all that crap. With that in mind I'm going to write another screenplay.

…All the same, I had a semi-epiphanous moment a while ago while walking outside in the April air listening to the birds in the small park I live near and thinking that…freedom is precious, life ain't bad, I'm very lucky, and sunshine is luminous. I'm a free, able-bodied young man who lives in a pleasant suburban neighborhood. All my senses are intact: I can smell the drizzle outside right now, hear the patter against the window-pane, taste the Italian dish I had last night, see the grey clouds slowly parting and the sunlight peeking through. I have partial control over my future; I'm not shut inside a prison or living under a totalitarian regime. I don't work in a cubicle-partitioned office, I'm not bent under the weight of responsibilities, I'm a bachelor who can go out tonight and party with friends and meet women. Life is not a burden.

Watching videos of former Marines testifying tearfully about their crimes in Iraq, crimes forced on them by their superiors—"The Marines made me into a monster, I killed women and children, saw beheaded bodies, massacred civilians"—it makes me think that nothing matters but radical activism. Maybe it's time I accepted the fact that I'll never approach anything approximating peace with myself unless I embrace activism. (It's a pity I lack organizational and communicative skills.)

April 14

Reading S. H. Rigby's *Marxism and History*, a critical discussion of historical materialism.

Marxist theorists talk as if *either* the productive forces explain the nature of the production relations *or* the relations explain the forces (that is, their rate of development). Either productive force determinism (Cohen, the Second International) or 'production relations determinism'. But the reality is neither, or rather both. See my footnote I mentioned earlier. There is a reciprocal, dialectical interaction, as there is with everything in society.

I'm going to try to take the gym more seriously than I've been doing lately. I'll try to go most days and drink protein shakes, just to see, once and for all, if I can gain 10 or 15 pounds. (I'm writing this down because otherwise I won't do it. If it's *here*, well then I have to follow through.)

You probably think that music is for me only a very pretty garnish on life, a way to escape from boredom or occupy my mind with something else when I'm lonely. But you're not quite right. In despairing moments like this one right now, when I'm thinking lovingly of the long knife in the kitchen drawer, music is literally my companion, someone who whispers to me as the tenderest of lovers. This is, indeed, the secret to my lifelong musical love-affair. It is as if a living being with violin-strings for vocal cords is talking to me, comforting me and telling me I am not alone. –There is no hyperbole here, no poetic license. I am just reporting my experience, my experience of the Adagio from Schubert's String Quartet in C, D. 956. My

girlfriend is talking to me softly through my headphones and I'm passively letting her caress away my sadness. Music is not only a stream of sounds for me; it is the speech of a person who communicates by *externalizing emotions*, *directly expressing* them, in Rousseauian fashion. Music is my ideal other, or the speech of my ideal other. When I'm lonely there is someone to sympathize with me, and when I'm happy I have someone to laugh with. That is the secret (or one of the secrets) of music's power, of its uniqueness among art-forms.

That was corny. Anyway, I was talking with Gimena online and it turned into sex-talk. The subject came up of my french-kissing her vagina, and she said something adorable. She was describing how wonderful it had felt, how no oral sex she'd had before had felt so amazing, and then she told me the reason she had made me stop after a few minutes: "I began to brief very fast… I had a revolution in my body." I'm not sure what the first sentence meant, but the second was beautiful. What a perfect way to describe the feeling! A "revolution". Evidently she thought the revolution had to be suppressed.

April 16

Obviously all my discussions of historical materialism have been analytically primitive. I have to define the forces and the relations of production. Rigby's book is useful in that regard, in stimulating me to clarity. For instance, the *technical* relations of production, the direct relations in the workplace, have to be distinguished from the *social* relations of production, which obtain between classes. Rigby thinks, I suspect justifiably, that the former relations are actually included in the *forces* of production. "The work relations of production are a fundamentally different concept from the social relations of production involved in the appropriation of surplus labor. Work relations are an inherent part of the organization of the labor process and a vital influence on the productivity of labor. There seems to be no reason why work relations should not be included in the category of society's productive forces, as one of the elements used in the production process."

Nietzsche: "It is the misfortune of active men that their activity is almost always a bit irrational. For example, one must not inquire of the money-gathering banker what the purpose of his activity is: it is irrational. Active people roll like a stone, conforming to the stupidity of mechanics." Nietzsche's intuition is mine as well, and probably yours. On one level, an individual's endless accumulation of money and capital is obviously irrational. But what does that mean? Is it theoretically or practically irrational? What explains the intuition? As Nietzsche says, it is based on the fact that there is, strictly speaking, no *goal* towards which the person is striving; there is no acknowledged purpose behind his frenzied activity. He is simply doing as he has been trained to do. He is like a gerbil running in its wheel. So his behavior is *practically* irrational: insofar as it is neither a means toward an end nor constitutive of an end it is contrary to practical reason, i.e. the nature of human action. An intentional act is the realization not only of an intention but also of a value (or desire) held by the individual at that moment; or, rather, the act is 'for the sake of' realizing the condition that is valued. But, as I've said, from a broad perspective the businessman's activity is not an expression of a particular value; it is not done for the sake of a particular end.[1] It just goes on and on mechanically; he just keeps doing it because others are doing the same thing and it is what he has been taught to do. To the extent that it is thoughtless it can be called irrational, which means it contradicts the nature of intentional action. That is, the businessman's acts aren't even really *acts* per se (according to Nietzsche); they are more like movements of the body. But they are intentional nonetheless: they are intentional non-acts, which is a contradiction. That's ultimately why we call them irrational.

To be sure, this complicated explanation isn't the reason we give explicitly. We simply say, "A money-gathering banker doesn't really know, on a reflective level, why he's doing what he's doing. He doesn't give himself any *reasons*: he is, therefore, acting contrary to reason, i.e. irrationally." (Whether that belief is true isn't the point now.) But that explanation presupposes a deeper one, the one I've offered. In

[1] [See the entry of September 3.]

saying he doesn't explicitly acknowledge reasons for his behavior we're saying that there is no *value*, or *end*, for the sake of which he acts. If we say that Bush's invasion of Iraq was irrational we're saying either that he didn't have a clear end in mind (a *good reason*) when he ordered the invasion or that by invading Iraq he was undermining other ends that were equally or more dear to him. In both cases (though in different ways) he is contradicting himself and the nature of action.

Of course, in the strictest sense it is impossible for an act to contradict the nature of action. That's why I wrote in my paper on values that true practical irrationality is never fully manifested; at most there is a hint of it, i.e. when the given act is considered from one particular perspective among others. So Nietzsche was quite right to qualify his statement with the phrase "a bit": active men act *a bit* irrationally. No one ever acts completely irrationally, not even a psychotic (because in that case action is not properly *intentional*, i.e. is not action, and so it cannot be considered irrational *action*).

My restlessness is not only a function of my self-conscious humanity, the "abstract other" or what you will. Everyone has that in some form, but not everyone is restless. Few people have the *spirit* to be restless as I am, the *spirit* that sets them at odds with life. I cannot be reconciled with the world, with fate and existence, for its senselessness seems impossible to me. I must be overlooking something, I tell myself. It is absolutely impossible that a single human life can be wasted or lived through in despair. This world of *les misérables* cannot really exist, it must be a play of shadows cast by eternity against itself. The dissonance, the jarring dissonance of my affection against my cognition is surely an illusion of some sort, perhaps a prelude to an afterlife in which there will be no absurdity. I love everything and everyone because they exist, but my intellect insists that life is not as perfect as it has to be, that nothing in fact matters and all is chance. My cognition rebels against religion and faith, but my affection requires both.

Nature could not have created a being so out of proportion with itself and the world as to demand universal love or significance and simultaneously to understand that its demand is misguided and hopeless. —Yes, I know Marxism's answer to my questions, but that answer is unsatisfactory. There is no justice in a history that ends with happiness for the lucky few who have been born then but gives misery to countless ancestors who die in squalor and disillusionment. If a single person is a victim of injustice and absurdity, injustice is eternal and there is no escape from it. If there is no compensation after death, the death-by-torture of a man five thousand years ago renders my own life metaphysically meaningless. And humans do need metaphysics, they have always needed to project their way of thinking onto the universe. Magic, ritual, animism, religion, philosophy—they are expressions of the same need, the need for "justice" and "harmony". Humans need the world to be human, and this need was implanted in them by nature; yet nature, it turns out, is inhuman, for it allows the inhuman to occur without consolation of any sort. Death itself is inhuman: it is a horrifying eternal mystery, like life. How could nature have implanted these imbalances in man?

Yet it has. I accept that, I have to. But I don't understand it, and so I don't accept the world.

April 18, 19

—Non-Marxism. It's fun to pretend.

I was laid off today. Not fired, just "laid off" because the student numbers are low. Didn't get a chance to say goodbye to my students because it happened after the school day: Kathy called me at home, said I wasn't on the schedule for next week. […]

Even though I divide reason into 'theoretical' and 'practical', you shouldn't forget that acting theoretically irrationally is actually a way of being practically irrational. By drawing invalid conclusions from premises one is acting contrary to one's commitment to truth, which everyone necessarily has on some level (given that everyone thinks his beliefs etc. are 'true'). In other words, by virtue primarily of one's

innate cognitive apparatus,[1] one's mental life is in large part structured rationally and one implicitly values norms of reason (as shown by the fact that one necessarily invokes them when justifying a particular belief or course of action). So, to the extent that one violates rational norms (i.e., theoretical reason), one is acting contrary to one's values, which is *practically* irrational.

Irrational action, then, always involves practical irrationality and usually also is related to theoretical irrationality.

April 22

Peter Kropotkin, the old Russian anarchist: "Sociability is as much a law of nature as mutual struggle… Mutual aid is as much a law of animal life as mutual struggle." That's true, and fascinating. It's true of every species. Life is an exquisite balance between struggle and a striving-for-unity. That could almost be called a metaphysical truth.

"The two great movements of our century—towards Liberty of the individual and social co-operation of the whole community—are summed up in Anarchist-Communism."

Mike Davis's astounding article on urban slums all over the world proves (as if there was any doubt) that this is the worst time in history for the overwhelming majority of people. The world will be in chaos by 2040 or thereabouts.

–How puny is the individual!

A religious irony.— If there is an omnipotent, omniscient, immortal being before whom people have the power of ants, the individual is *not* worthless; if there is not such a being but instead humans are the absolute sovereigns of nature, subordinate to no one else, the individual *is* worthless (ultimately).

On negativism.— Yes, La Rochefoucauld's cynical observations have a kernel of truth. But you can put a negative spin on anything. As well as a positive spin. It all depends on your attitude, which is to say, in the end, your *society's* attitude. La Rochefoucauld's attitude was and is the outlook of the modern world; that's why his maxims are almost as timely now as they were in the 1500s. But this negative worldview can be transcended.

Obviously the problem with Marxism is that many of its central explanatory concepts, like base and superstructure, apparently cannot be defined without reference to each other, thus preventing us from explaining one in terms of the other. Society is an organic whole. "The economic base of society is not 'something which can be clearly conceived, still less observed, apart from the legal, moral and political relationships of men'. The distinction between base and superstructure is untenable, so it is illegitimate to derive the latter from the former. Law and morality cannot be confined to the superstructure, but are constitutive aspects of all forms of social activity… Law, morality and consciousness are not simply derived from social relations but form an inherent part of those relations." (Rigby) This is an easy criticism to make and it isn't particularly interesting. The real problem for me is that because Marx's insights are intuitively compelling, indeed obviously correct, it *must* be possible to formulate them in a way that isn't vulnerable to the above criticism. But what way is that?

"There are two possible responses to [such] objections.... The first, by G. A. Cohen, is the traditionalist response that it is possible to conceive of the economic base independently from superstructural elements; the second form of reply is Godelier's revisionist solution which involves the redefinition of base and superstructure. Cohen argues that it is possible to distinguish base and

[1] Which, however, is possibly unable to *mature* in, say, certain prehistoric cultures, so that a Cro-Magnon man might conceivably not have known how to draw justifiable conclusions from arguments. But even that seems a little far-fetched. Surely any person who speaks an evolved language can intuitively understand norms of reason. (Yes, I know there may be rare pathological exceptions.)

superstructure by distinguishing between *de facto* powers and *de jure* rights. Relations of production may exist in *de facto* form before they are expressed in *de jure* property rights… [However,] even if we can conceive of relations of production separately from law, this does not mean that the relations of production may be defined separately from all superstructural elements, in particular from forms of consciousness. Cohen argues that social positions involve fulfilling a role within specific relations, a form of behavior which may be defined independently from ideas. Yet most social roles involve the internalization of norms and customs, i.e. they involve forms of social consciousness…"

I already mentioned Godelier's solution weeks ago, when discussing Wood's article. To say that something (for instance, religion) is socially dominant means precisely that it functions as a relation of production. "One institution, such as a religion, may thus perform a number of social functions. Religion may function both as a relation of production and as an ideology. In certain societies, there is a tendency for institutions to specialize in one function. Elsewhere, as in Sumerian society, one institution may carry out functions which are both 'economic' and superstructural.

"We have seen that certain ideas may form part of the productive forces because of their technological-productive function. Similarly, certain forms of ideology may form a constitutive part of the relations of production, as in the case of aboriginal kinship, whilst others, such as the doctrine of the divine right of kings, may form part of the ideological superstructure. If we conceive of the base and superstructure as separate *institutions*, then the apparent interpenetration of the two poses a problem form the primacy of the economic base, even when seen as part of a complex organic totality. If we define base and superstructure in terms of their *functions*, then the institutional interpenetration of the two no longer provides the grounds of objections of the type made by Acton and Plamenatz. This functional definition would allow us to include those aspects of politics or ideology which functioned as relations of production within the 'economic' foundation of society. The superstructure would not then consist of law or social consciousness in their entirety, but only those legal and political institutions and forms of ideology 'that cannot be usefully regarded as constituents of production relations even if they help to sustain the system of production'."

Unless you remember that 'base/superstructure' is merely a suggestive metaphor and not a *theory* in its own right, i.e. that it's no more than a *gesture* towards critical thought, you'll either remain confused or conclude that Marxism is indefensible.

April 26

Slept with an ex-student last night. A Korean named Ji-yun (27). […]

I was accepted to UMass Boston, thank God. Wasn't looking forward to teaching middle school next year. I was also given a lucrative TA position in the Classics department.

May 1

Dinner with Ji-yun, then we came back to my place and cuddled for a while as always […].

I know my virtually emotional love of Chomsky is somewhat irrational. I know there are thousands of dissenting voices in America, that his is merely the leading one. I know he is just an ordinary decent human being who happens to be brilliant. But there is something about his persona that is irresistible. He has an odd sort of anti-charismatic charisma, a self-deprecating grandfatherly sweetness. It's a humility, or humanity, that glows from his shy smile and his rumpled clothing. There are no fireworks about him, no honed maneuvers of manipulation and not a trace of self-aggrandizement; he is the opposite of everything pop-cultural. But of course the dedication to truth and justice is mainly what makes him one of the most beloved people in the world (notwithstanding the elite's hostility).

He also helps remind me that people are fundamentally good, because a world that loves him is a world that has moral value, a world worth saving.

Yes, he brings out the best in people, certainly in me. The people in whom he brings out the worst simply don't have the best *in* them anymore: it has been indoctrinated out of them.

(Consider, for example, the comments on his videos on YouTube, like this one: "Chomsky is a bitter old man who has made a fortune by hating America, I hope he burns in hell. I hope young college students eventually aren't instructed to read his hateful writings. I'm 30 years old and I would debate Chomsky anytime on the idea of America and its positive influence on the world. He has made a living denouncing America and would have done so had he lived anywhere else. Please note that he is a malcontent and would never be happy in any country. Noam lives off hate." Now that I've corrected all the original spelling errors, that's actually an articulate opinion compared to most of them. It perfectly expresses the sentiments and the reasoning—if it can be called "reasoning"—of most Chomsky-critics.)

May 8

The following is a story I'm submitting to the Wesleyan Writers Conference, which I'll attend in June. Its main purpose isn't to be autobiographical; much of it isn't true of me. The character, for example, is not as complicated as I am. [I've deleted it.]

May 9

I read André Gide's long short story "The Pastoral Symphony". Loved it. Also E. A. Poe's essay "The Philosophy of Composition". Reading an anthology of modern short stories.

Imprisoned in an ivory tower

He came back to himself and realized that for at least a minute he hadn't heard a word that had been said.

"So, when Ted Sider writes 'Necessarily, x is part of y at t if and only if x and y each exist at t, and x's temporal part at t is part of y's temporal part at t,' what does he mean by 't'? Does he mean like a minute or two minutes, or does he mean a fraction of a second?"

"That doesn't matter. The point is that given t, *whatever* it is, x is a part of y at that time if x's temporal part is part of y's temporal part at that time. t could be three minutes long or an hour long. This is just a definition."

"So this half of my pencil is part of the whole pencil right now because the temporal part of this half of the pencil is part of the temporal part of the whole pencil right now? Is that what he's saying?"

"Yes. That's a good example."

"Okay…"

"I know that the idea of temporal parts is hard to grasp, but remember that they're analogous to spatial parts. Objects extend through space by having spatial parts, and they extend through time by having temporal parts. At least, that's what the perdurantist, or the worm-theorist, argues."

"Remind me again why it's called worm theory?" someone chuckled.

"Because an object is conceptualized as stretching through time like a worm, a temporal worm. It has a beginning, a long middle, and an end."

"So my self yesterday and my self today are just *parts* of 'me,' of the *whole* me that stretches through time from my birth to my death?"

"Exactly."

"Isn't that counterintuitive? I feel like right now my whole self is present. Or, like, this piece of paper. This is the *whole* piece of paper right here; it isn't just a *part* of the paper. The paper isn't some sort of abstract object that exists for two years or whatever. It is just this thing right here!"

"Okay, so you disagree with worm theory. But you're just presenting an intuition, not an argument. David Armstrong and David Lewis have a different intuition than you. You have to defend yours with an argument."

"I have another question," someone said. "How can you tell when one part ends and another part begins?"

"Each part is instantaneous."

"But what does 'instantaneous' mean? How long is an instant?"

"That's a good question. It potentially poses a problem for the worm-theorist."

"Yeah. Because an instant would have to be infinitesimal, wouldn't it? If it weren't infinitesimal then it could, by definition, be divided into shorter instants. But then it wouldn't be a *single* instant. But on the other hand, if it is infinitesimal then that presents logical problems."

"Like what?"

"Well, a temporally extended worm would have to be composed of an infinity of instants if each instant is infinitesimal. But how could an object with a beginning and an ending be infinite?"

"You know, this reminds me," someone said, "of Kant's antinomies. It's a problem for both the perdurantist *and* the endurantist, isn't it? It's a problem with time. Time is illogical."

"By the way, how would the worm-theorist, or the perdurantist, deal with the problem of instantaneous minds?"

"What do you mean?" said the professor.

"If a mind is instantaneous, like this piece of paper is instantaneous, how is experience possible? Experience presupposes a temporally extended mind that can recognize the passage of time, doesn't it? An instantaneous mind can't recognize the passage of time."

"Some perdurantists address that problem by arguing that the instantaneous experiences of instantaneous minds actually occur within the temporal boundaries of a temporally extended experience—and this experience lasts as long as the temporally extended mind that experiences it."

"So, in other words, minds that have experiences are actually composed of several temporal parts? But then what connects those instantaneous parts to one another?"

"I don't understand your question."

"Actually, that goes to the heart of the problem I have with perdurantism. It doesn't seem like a very powerful theory to me."

"Okay… Yes, John?"

"Before you talk about that, I just want to get clear on how all this ties into the issue of mereological sums. In the article we read called 'I Am Not Now, Nor Have I Ever Been, a Turnip,' the author tries to put together, as he says, perdurantism and detenserism, which, he thinks, necessitates that one distinguish between sortal and non-sortal predicates. I have a question, though, about—"

"Wait, that's a little off the subject. We'll get to that. But first I want to discuss stage theory, which is different from worm theory. Stage theory emphasizes that instantaneous temporal slivers, or stages, of an object, stand in intimate causal relations to past stages and future stages of the object…"

Again, he came back to himself suddenly and looked around at the students scribbling in their notebooks. He remembered he had been daydreaming about that article in the *Post* describing the plight of the poor in India. His watch told him there was an hour left, and he sighed.

June 1, 6

Reading selections from a Norton anthology of short stories. Also two recent editions of *The Best American Short Stories*.

Dusk in Vietnam

Sleepfalling from the Milky Way through pearl-gray mist and periwinkle sky, floating as clouds in currents of wind, brightshining down upon mountain-peaks star-yearning, glow of the gloaming reflected in mountain-snow golden as sun-kissed ocean sheen to the horizon, undulating twilit horizon comforting sleep on the rocking waves like a lullabye, an eternal pendulum swaying back on waves of time in the water of the azure sky coursing toward land to sail in cerulean meadows, wade through waves of grain, walk through harvests of sunlight, drift on rippling tides of wheat moon-begotten in the silvery bloom of night, swimming motionlessly through clouds of dew yet to descend upon blades of grass in the pre-dawn stillness blanketing the land like a dream of womb-enfolded immortality or cosmic stasis in the spaces between stars where nothing hovers but three atoms of spacetime fused with a universal symphony of echoes of echoes of light spraying out to infinity in purple splashed on a canvas of clouds which are soaked in the crimson-flecked dreams of Earth's origins…

The phone rang. Stabbing him. He picked up the receiver, "It's eight o'clock sir, you wanted a wake-up call, time to get up, your tour starts at nine, breakfast is…" His eyes closed and he drifted into his pillow but not before turning it over to the cool side…

It was a chilly morning and the valley was shrouded in mist. Steam collected between the hillcrests, sank to the river, evaporated in the sky. It was mysterious, legendary. The sun did not warm him. He had forgotten his jacket. He stood with two Japanese girls and an American man waiting for their tour guide in front of the hotel on the edge of the town overlooking the valley.

"It's a cold one," the American said. The two girls whispered. "But what a view." The girls giggled. "What's your name? I'm Clyde."

"Martin," he said.

"My name is Midori," said one girl, "and she is Hiroko."

"Nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you."

"Are you from Japan?"

"Hai. Yes. Konnichi wa." She giggled.

"Konnichi wa."

"How long have you been in Vietnam?"

"Only one week."

"It's beautiful here."

"Yes very pretty."

"But too cold."

"I hope it warms up."

"Hanoi was warm, but up here I guess we're higher up."

"Yes."

"Are you girls in college?"

"Yes."

"What do you study?"

"Drawing. She study painting."

"I bet you'd like to paint this scene, wouldn't you?"

"Oh yes. So beautiful."

"I wonder where our guide is."

Tribal children from tiny villages in the valleys congregated around them, dressed in handmade and hand-dyed indigo cloth, speaking English, offering handmade necklaces and bracelets to anyone who would pay one dollar. The friendly ones shook hands with the Westerners, their small Vietnamese hands and dark Vietnamese skin callused from years of inclemency pressing against the cold white skin of the tourists. The weather didn't seem to touch them. They ran happily along the streets in the drizzle, into and out of internet

cafés and restaurants and hotel lobbies without self-consciousness, banging their palms against the windows of buses arriving with fresh loads of tourists, yelling "Hello! Where you from?" through the glass. Upon receiving no answer from heads turned self-consciously away they redoubled their efforts. Perhaps the diffident Westerners were put off by the irreverence, the mischievous delight that sparkled in the eyes of these children who seemed to be laughing not sympathetically with the excited newcomers but a trifle maliciously, as if they were looking at ugly foreign objects of contempt. –Probably, though, that was only a fabrication of the Western imagination, which felt at once superior to this backward place and beneath the people who lived here, who had never known modern comforts and thus were made of sterner stuff than overfed tourists. Even so, their enthusiasm proved infectious: skeptics found themselves being won over, rolling down their windows to say hi, making a few polite comments and being bombarded with questions in return.

Even at this early hour the town was full of movement. Dozens of motorbikes weaved around clusters of tourists—motorbikes being the preferred Vietnamese mode of transportation. The streets were too narrow for more than an occasional bus or jeep. Natives driving by paused to shout at tourists "Hello! Motorbike?", hoping someone wanted a taxi. If a pedestrian on the sidewalk briefly stopped walking, whether to stare at a beautiful Vietnamese girl or to admire the scenery, motorcyclists shot over to him. "Hello! Motorbike?" Two minutes later, if he was lucky, he might have succeeded in prying himself from them. His destination was in all likelihood the town square, which was edged by rows of weather-stained colonial houses adopted by the Vietnamese for their own purposes, whether as stores or as homes. These colorful, artificial, geometrically shaped relics of the European past might have struck visitors as out-of-place in a land so untamed, primordial, where myths still seemed to reside in the heaven-descended vapor—a land where the world was perpetually being reborn—if everything else did not contribute to the eclecticism of the environment. People wearing tribal costumes they had woven themselves talked to people dressed as gangsta rappers; concrete high-rise hotels towered above wooden huts; SUVs drove over paved streets as young children carrying logs hiked barefoot up mountain passes.

The buses pulled past an old church from the colonial period, still intact but beginning to deteriorate, its Corinthian columns marred by chipped curlicues and severed acanthus leaves, its gargoyles noseless or headless, its steps worn blunt by generations of feet. In the shadow of the ruins was a small marketplace composed of a dozen wooden stalls each with a makeshift roof sheltering an old woman from the heavy mist. Here and there a person dressed in American clothing pulled a bill from his wallet and handed it with a smile to the shopkeeper, placing papayas into his bag at the same time. She barely acknowledged him. He walked away with the same smile stuck on his face. He turned around and gazed up at the church. "Wow," he said. He took out his camera and took a picture of it; then he looked over his shoulder towards the old woman, gestured at the church and shouted "Very beautiful!" This time she granted him a smile.

The buses drove down the main road in the small town that served as the base for foreigners trekking through the mountains. Tourism was the main source of revenue for the area. Three hotels had been built in the last ten years; with the resultant influx of travelers, stores had sprung up quickly along the main road. Two internet cafés, several souvenir shops that also sold umbrellas, a pharmacy, five small restaurants, and three bars. Their owners spoke minimal English and the employees only a little more, but in the rare cases when gestures were not enough, children could be called in from the streets to translate. They had learned English not from books or in school, but from the visitors themselves. Since toddlerhood they had lived in the presence of the pale strangers, taking weekly or biweekly trips from their villages in the wilderness to the town. Over the years they had absorbed the foreign language, even some Japanese, with relative ease. This also partly accounted for their startling friendliness, more pronounced even than that of Western children, as the friendliness of the adults was greater than that of Western adults.

As Martin waited for his tour guide, one of the children engaged him in conversation. A young girl, not pretty, with splotches on her skin, but charismatic and excitable. She walked over to him and said "What your name?"

"Martin. What's yours?"

"Lê."

"Lê? What does that mean?"

"It mean…shy."
"That's not a good name for you!"
"Not good name? Why?"
"You're not shy, are you?"
"No, I not shy. I talk a lot. My friend say I talk too much. 'Shut up!' she say."
"Ha!"
"Where you from?"
"America."
"Oh! Where?"
"Near New York."
"New York! Big city. You big city boy."
"No no, small town boy. I'm from a small town."
"You like it here?"
"Yes, very much. You're lucky to live here."
"How long you stay here?"
"Only three days."
"O too bad. I wish you stay forever."
"Yeah, me too. We don't have places like this near New York."
"You live wit me in village."
"Would you let me live with you?"
"Yeh of court. My mom like American. Very handsome she say."
"Well, I'd love to live here," he said, "except it's freezing right now! I left my coat in Hanoi."
"Stupid."
"You're right. But Hanoi was hot. I thought I wouldn't need it here."
"I not cold. Warm."
"How?"
"Becaut my tough skin."
"You're outside a lot, aren't you?"
"Alway. Helping mother."
"What does she do?"
"She make bratelet. And clothe."
"You help her dye your clothes?"
"Yes. Hand very blue. And she keep animal."
"Farm animals? Chickens?"
"Yeh."
"How often do you come up here?"
"Every weekend. To sell bratelet. Then go back to village."
"Is it a long walk?"
"Many hour. Maybe eight."
"Why is everyone wearing the same blue clothes?"
"Color of Black Hmong. My people."
"Oh, your ethnicity! I forgot, this whole area is Black Hmong, isn't it? I love those big silver earrings all you girls are wearing."

The guide arrived. "So sorry, so sorry!" he said. "Ma name it Duong. Sorry for late."

"I have to go now," Martin said to Lê. "It was nice to meet you."

"Bye." Lê started a conversation with another American.

The four travelers and Duong set off. They walked for twenty minutes on a dirt road where their view of the surroundings was obstructed not only by the fog but also by large European houses, as it had been earlier by the three hotels located side-by-side on the edge of a cliff. The guide did not talk much, and when he did, it was hard to understand him: his Vietnamese twang was unusually thick, and he clipped words that ended in 's.' Midori and Hiroko whispered and giggled to themselves, too shy to approach the

Americans. Martin was absorbed in his own thoughts, most of which revolved around his forgotten coat in Hanoi. Clyde was the only one who talked continuously, alternately with the girls and with Martin. His pattern of conversation was to ask a question, such as "What countries have you been to?", and then to follow it up with a long discourse on himself. The girls were perfectly happy to listen and laugh after every sentence, but Martin found him tiresome and merely grunted during pauses. "I just came from Laos," Clyde said, "but I like Vietnam better because Laotian women are tiny." "Huh," Martin said. "I mean," continued Clyde, "Vietnamese women are small too, but differently. They're like petite. Lao girls are short and not so pretty." "Mmm." "But I remember—this is funny—I remember a time when I was taking a bus in Laos in the middle of nowhere, a long bus trip, like a day, over dirt roads and stuff, cliffs, and we got stuck in mud, a huge puddle of mud, and the driver just couldn't get us out for the life of him, and we were stuck there for like nine hours just standing in the road waiting for someone to come…" "Wow, that sucks." Martin wanted to talk to the girls, whom he found adorable, but whenever he tried to speak to them Clyde hijacked the conversation, his voice drowning out Martin's. So Martin contented himself with contemplating their features. Midori resembled a doll, with airbrushed cheeks and unwrinkled skin. Hiroko had a more mature look, as well as a more approachable, with a friendly smile always playing about her lips. She was tall and buxom; she wore tight clothes to accentuate her curves, a habit that seemed to contradict her shy personality. Midori had less to show off but followed her friend's example anyway, wearing skin-tight jeans and a tanktop that exposed her midriff. Martin couldn't help appreciating their wardrobe, though at the same time he thought it incongruous for such girls to adopt the attire of Britney Spears.

He remembered seeing them for the first time the previous night, a few minutes prior to his first real insight into Vietnam's tribal culture. They were dressed then for the chilly evening, wearing jeans and sweaters. He was sitting at a small table in the basement of his hotel, which served as a bar and restaurant and was decorated with oriental rugs and furniture. On this particular evening the rugs had been rolled up and the tables moved so that a large space in the center of the room was bare. Dim lighting created a sedate atmosphere, which was lost, however, on the young villagers scampering about the room, running outside and dashing in, laughing as they played games in disregard of the adults' solemnity. Twenty or thirty tourists and some Vietnamese were seated, sipping wine, waiting for the concert to begin. The two Japanese girls hesitated in the doorway as all eyes were momentarily fixed on them. They smiled nervously. Martin loved this Asian trait of modesty, this remnant of Confucianism, which was so becoming in women. The two regained their composure and walked to a nearby table.

Meanwhile the first performer had taken his place in the center of the room. He was a small, dark man, wearing the clothes of the Black Hmong; in his hand was a flute-like instrument made of bamboo. His leathery face bespoke a life lived in the wilderness, unaccustomed to recitals before American tourists. With no words he raised the instrument to his lips and began to play. A hush descended over the audience, even the children. At first, Martin heard only harsh exhalations, random, unmelodic and unmusical. They were crude and senseless, not beautiful. In some kind of ugly minorish mode. Neither legato nor staccato. Hollow, airy, lacking the liquid pith of the flute's tone. He looked around at other people's expressions; they were as blank as his. The performer himself looked blank: his eyes staring sightlessly ahead of him, his fingers the only part of his body that moved. He was just standing there mechanically. Martin continued to watch his fingers for want of anything else to do.

Suddenly he realized that those wiry fingers were the real music behind the notes. They were the theme, the melody. If they and the man himself were ignored, the sound could not be understood. It did not exist in a vacuum, unfolding impersonally through a mathematical logic that determined the proper chord-progressions and the nature of the climactic moments and the resolutions in the cadences; it was an expression inseparable from what was being expressed. In a flash, as he listened to the whispers rasping sweetly from the carved piece of bamboo, Martin saw that this music was not supposed to be "pretty." It was supposed to be a way of life. It was how the peasant conversed with nature, how he sublimated and humanized the forces he confronted daily. These tones that sounded so artificial and dissonant in a bar would have sounded harmonious if played among rice paddies beneath a starry sky.

Martin sat back and closed his eyes. He still did not really enjoy the music, but if he imagined it under the night sky it calmed him. Its very unpredictability and dissonance settled him. A moment ago he had been acutely conscious of his surroundings. He had scrutinized people's faces, he had wondered if the performer was nervous, he had wondered if the children were bored, he had ogled the two young women. He had told himself he needed a few shots of vodka to appreciate this music. Now, it seemed, none of those things mattered. He felt quiet not having to follow a melody. There was nothing in the world except darkness and rustic harmonies…

A minute later the man picked up something that looked like a banjo and placed a green leafy thing into his mouth. Without waiting for the applause to die down he started strumming the banjo and blowing into the leaf. The result was a noise that, under normal circumstances, would have so offended Martin's aesthetic sensibilities as to make him flee the room. The whistle shrieking from the leaf tried to follow the pitches being plucked on the banjo—successfully, most of the time, at least to the undiscriminating ear. The strings seemed out of tune, though: some were flat, some were sharp, and when their tones lingered a moment they sank. The melody sounded improvised. It wasn't even much of a melody, more like a repetitive series of notes in an exotic minor mode. The ensemble struck Martin as amateurish and childish, more than the preceding had.

When the man finished his song, another performer joined him in front of the audience. A young woman. She was holding a long bamboo flute, longer than the first one. No one noticed, however; all eyes were riveted to the girl herself. Something about her was transcendent. She was petite, probably just over five feet, frail, her skin opaquely translucent. Her body, while not emaciated, was unnaturally thin. Her bony arms were lined with shadows of her veins. Smiling, she nodded to her companion, who nodded back respectfully. The audience waited. Then, as the girl raised the flute to her lips, Martin realized what it was that gave her such an ethereal look: she was deathly pale! Her face was wan and sickly beneath its beauty. The angular cheekbones, which may have been visible due to malnutrition, gave her sharp, defined features that seemed to express a strong character. Yet she looked sickly, undoubtedly: the contrast between her dark costume and her skin color was appalling. It made her luminous, however; he felt as if he were in the presence of an otherworldly being. The impression was strengthened when he heard the first sounds emanate from her flute.

They were in a high register, the range of the piccolo—but with a full tone, reflective of the instrument's size. Not shrill, not harsh, but soft and gentle. Fluttering, from frequent tremolos. Feathery. They seemed to mimic a bird-call, though one with an exquisite timbre and an exceptional range. The melodic thread they spun was bright and pleasant, neither major nor minor. Again Martin felt that he was listening to something being played in a milieu alien to it, before an audience spectating stony-faced, approaching it with a critical Western eye; it belonged outside in daylight in a field of dandelions, with children dancing around it. Perhaps as men harvested crops nearby. Soon the male performer joined with his banjo and the solo became a duet. It was a contrapuntal interlacing of two lines borrowing motifs from each other, spontaneous but too harmonious not to have been thought-out beforehand. As the song meandered along, increasing in complexity but not thereby losing its charm, Martin saw that the people around him were beginning to enjoy it. There was still the same collective sense of 'I'm listening to this only because I'm in Vietnam and it's something that as a tourist I'm obligated to do,' but beneath this veneer of otherness was an instinctive reaction against it. The foreigners were engrossed in the primitive pastoral strains—and in the mystery of this small young woman standing in a halo of light as she conjured nature in the basement of a high-rise hotel…

"Look out!" Clyde shouted. "What are you doing, man?!" Martin raised his eyes from the ground just in time to see a jeep rumbling towards him. He ran to the side of the road. The jeep rolled past, bucking and lurching over the bumps and craters in the dirt. "Were you day-dreaming, dude?"

"I guess so," Martin mumbled.

"You gotta be careful."

"You okay?" Duong asked. "Very clote—clote call!"

"Sorry."

"When are we gonna be able to see the valley?" Clyde asked. "I'm tired of these houses and trees."

"Soon," said Duong. "After that bend ahead. Very clote."

Martin separated himself from the two men and walked over to the women. They were chattering in Japanese but stopped abruptly to smile at him.

"How are you?" asked Midori.

"Excellent! It's starting to warm up a little, don't you think?"

The girls looked at each other as they vigorously rubbed their arms. "No. It's cold!"

"Well, when you're wearing that! You look like you're going clubbing!"

"So sorry…clubbing?"

"I mean, like you're going to dance in a nightclub in Tokyo."

"Oh!" Hiroko laughed. "Yes. It was bad choice."

"You look like Britney Spears!" he said. They giggled, interpreting it as a compliment. "Do you like Britney Spears?"

"Oh yes. Very sexy. She so good dancer. I like American stars."

"Me too," interjected Midori.

"Ah. Yes," Martin said, "American music is popular everywhere."

"So, many Japanese listen to it. And try to play like them."

"Japanese people watch MTV?"

"Oh yes! Very much. Very cool!"

"You actually like it?" he asked, skeptical.

"Of course," said Hiroko.

Martin stared at them quizzically. He was about to follow up with more questions when a clearing appeared in front of them. No more trees, no more houses obstructed their view of the valley. They were silent as they contemplated the scene.

It was like New Zealand, Martin thought, but on a larger scale. The terraces on the hills covered in amber stalks of rice added a human element to the grandeur. They were geometrically regular, as if God had hired an architect to build a stairway to heaven, who had soon quit for lack of materials. The golden carpet of rice-stalks on the surface of each step lay at a hundred-degree angle to the green grass growing vertically, so that a color sequence of gold-green-gold-green undulated its way around the hillsides up to the summit. "Earth-waves," Martin whispered to himself. "Frozen waves undulating upwards." Periodic human figures waded through the gold fields to harvest the rice, which was then carried to the base of the valley, near a narrow river, and placed in shallow baskets that were shaken in the wind to separate the chaff from the grains. The whole scene, thought Martin, was from a different time, an epic time, though rumblings of tractor-trailers and jeeps and dynamite explosions in the cliffs where a road was being built proved to him that modernity reaches even into the bowels of the wilderness.

Soon they began to descend into the valley. They followed a winding dirt road of steep decline past half-naked children who stared at them curiously and endearingly. The Japanese girls took pictures constantly. After a while Duong told the four of them that they were about to see a family's house on the side of the road, where they could buy souvenirs or just look around.

"We'll stay there short time," he said. "We have many plates to go."

"Plates?" said Clyde. "Whadya mean?"

Martin translated. "He means places. We have to see a lot today, in only seven hours."

The house in question was a small hut, wood with thatched roofing. The four tourists walked onto the porch, where a young mother was holding her baby and a grandmother and five other people were sitting. Martin thought it inappropriate to invade their home like this, with Duong explaining to him their customs and how they lived as if they were exhibits in a zoo, but they didn't show the slightest embarrassment or irritation. Indeed, they appreciated the foreigners' presence: it was a chance for them to sell the bracelets and necklaces they had made. Martin and the others walked inside the hut to look at its two rooms, which were bare and comfortless, as the natives followed them and repeated robotically the one English phrase they knew but could barely pronounce: "Hello you want this, hello you want this, hello you want this…" "No thanks," said Martin, trying to turn away—but they grabbed him again and out came "Helloyouwantthis" as bracelets were thrust in his face. His buying one only encouraged the others to

descend on him. He looked over at Duong for help, but Duong just stood in the corner oblivious to Martin's desperation.

The hut, which was similar to all the huts in all the little villages that speckled the landscape, had a floor of hard dirt, a few wooden stools around two small fires, and two beds (or rather, platforms) with hard bamboo mats on which everyone slept. There was no chimney: the smoke seeped through the thatched roof. The guests found it a surprisingly cozy, if uncomfortable, home, providing adequate shelter from the wet cold outside. Duong told them that the women usually sat around one of the fires preparing food, while the men sat around the other fire and talked as they smoked tobacco and marijuana from long bamboo pipes.

At length the visitors succeeded in prying themselves from the natives, who were saying "Helloyouwantthis" as enthusiastically as they had been ten minutes before. The Japanese girls waved goodbye as they descended farther into the valley…

Clyde became less talkative as the morning wore on; he complained of aching muscles, fatigue, chills, a runny nose, nausea. "I wonder if I have malaria!" he said. "I haven't taken my pills in a few days, and I was bitten by a big mosquito yesterday! It's the mosquitoes that carry malaria, right?" Staggering along absorbed all his energy, which was perfectly fine with Martin. The group became quiet, sunk in the rhythm of the hike, as the sunlight warmed them.

They followed a path along the floor of the valley through fields of tall grass and hemp, which the villagers used to make their clothes. There were also wide swaths of green grassy land next to the river and ponds, where they rested periodically (sitting on large stones in the water or along the shore), watching men thresh and winnow the harvested rice nearby. As the baskets were shaken the husks floated away in the breeze; only the seed remained. A closer look was now possible, too, of the terraced paddies up above: men were cutting the stalks with scythes, then bundling them into sheaves. Duong told Martin that these sheaves had to be thrashed to get the rice out of them, after which it would be spread out on the ground to dry in the sun. The threshing and winnowing was the final step in the process.

"What are the earlier steps," asked Martin, "before the harvesting? What is the work like?"

"Hard. Many part. Make paddy, put water in, clean it…then make dry…use animal—buf'lo—make it flat and wet, make ready for rice, put seed…and many other part. Difficult to tell."

"It sounds like back-breaking work."

"Very hard and long time."

They continued walking. Hmong women passed them with baskets on their backs full of hemp or indigo plants or stalks of rice. They all wore the same dark blue clothes, the same large silver earrings, and some had colorful, intricately woven armbands. Midori took pictures of them, picture after picture, pictures of the male children bent low under stacks of wood, of the female children carrying infants on their backs, of elderly women hunchbacked like question-marks. Hiroko, too, was an appendage of her camera, pointing it at every plant and every person she saw. When they walked by a dilapidated school-building near an open field she ran inside to take a picture of the dark and empty interior.

Martin, for his part, was lost in thought, wondering what it would be like to live here where life was seasonal and cyclical and nature was a spirit to be worshiped. A place where the rhythms of life were the rhythms of nature and had been so for hundreds, thousands, of years, changing not with the centuries but with the seasons. What would winter be like here? What would it be like to construct terraced paddies year after year and plow them with buffalo and tend them for months until it looked as if they had been created not for one's sustenance but for purely aesthetic reasons, being as beautiful as anything Martin had ever seen? What would a sunset look like here, with warmth shining on warmth, gold on waves of gold, as vermilion streaks stretched across the sky from the sun low over the mountains? It would be a hard life, yes, and he did not envy these people; but it would have a simple beauty, a Tolstoyan simplicity. To the Western mind, in any case, the thought of being one with nature in the shadow of mountains had shades of sublimity.

And what was the mindset of these distant villagers? How did they experience life? Having lived in the pure air of the mountains in northwest Vietnam all their lives, closer by miles to the clouds than most of humanity—every morning breathing in thick white clouds that hung low until midday—their very

consciousness must have had little in common with Martin's. Until fairly recently their world had been a natural autarky, complete unto itself; the pale strangers who besieged them more and more each year and brought them plastic and electricity must appear to be aliens of some friendly species. How would an animistic mind orient itself toward cameras and jeeps? Probably it would be fascinated and frightened at first but would become bored as the novelty wore off. Eventually it would just try to take what it could from the newcomers to make its life more comfortable—as the natives wore plastic sandals now and some Western clothing. In many ways, Martin knew, these people did not differ from him, for instance in their ordinary desires and motivations, their love of love and friendliness, their fondness for bright colors and leisurely play; yet in other ways they inhabited a different universe, parochial and repetitive, but peaceful. To what extent did they understand sarcasm and cynicism? Did they experience adolescent existential doubts? Did they know the agony of unrequited love, or the spiritual pain of ennui? Were they still capable of being thrilled by pink feather-tips in a lavender dawn, or the gentle sunburn of a twilit sky?—or, indeed, the majesty of the very ground beneath and around them?

The travelers came to a village of six huts spread over seventy or eighty yards. Chickens, pigs, dogs, and naked children ambled aimlessly; a wizened old man sat on a wooden stool; an elderly woman sewed underneath six or seven pieces of indigo cloth hanging from beams attached to her hut; younger women welcomed the travelers with smiles and friendly questions. The huts here were larger than others they had passed and more sturdily constructed, with wooden, not thatched, roofs. Martin looked inside one of them and even saw a small television; middle-aged men sat around it in silence looking at the white images. He was amused that they had a TV but no bathroom: a hole in the ground behind the hut, not at all private, served as the bathroom. The kitchen (or what functioned as a kitchen) was only a few feet away, on the other side of some wooden planks.

He was struck by a thought, a question that demanded an immediate answer. He walked over to Duong, who was trying to comfort Clyde as he rested in the grass complaining about his condition.

"Duong," said Martin, "where do people have sex around here? There's no privacy! And what are relationships like? Do men and women get married?"

"Yeh. Married. Girl fifteen or sixteen, young."

"How do marriages happen?"

"Girl and boy come town, meet."

"What?"

"Love market in town on weekend."

"Love market? How does that work?"

"Boy see girl, if he like, sing to her and she sing. Next week see again—if parent say yes."

"So, girls and boys gather in the market and look at each other?"

"Yeh."

"And if a boy sees a girl he likes, he goes up and sings to her?"

"Sing and talk."

"And if they like each other they'll come back and meet again later, if they get their parents' approval."

"Yeh."

"Interesting. That's a lot simpler than in America! But where do couples have sex? There's no privacy here."

"Sex very quiet, in house."

"So a married couple has sex in the house where their children and parents live?"

"Yeah."

"Wow." It seemed these people did not have Western self-consciousness about their bodies.

In fact, the more Martin saw of them, the more he liked them. As he ate lunch in the village with Midori and Hiroko he had to answer dozens of questions from eager children and young women, questions about America, about his love life, about his impressions of this place. Occasionally the natives' imperfect English led to some amusing misunderstandings. At one point, a girl named Anh asked, "How old can you drink in America?" "Twenty-one," Martin said. She was shocked. "You can't have asshole until you're twenty-one?!" When Martin burst out laughing she realized her mistake, and everyone around them teased

her about it. Anh was very outgoing, but she was merely an extreme version of all the young people, who projected curiosity and wide-eyed friendliness—including the shy ones. The little ones were simply adorable, staring and smiling at him with as little self-consciousness as their older siblings. Even the adults, the elderly, the men—almost all were welcoming and cheerful.

Martin found it strange, indeed, that many of the adults seemed nearly as happy and bubbly as the children despite their shrunken size and premature agedness. Thirty-year-olds looked like fifty-year-olds, wrinkled, crooked, diminutive, half-toothless. Yet their smiles beamed like an eight-year-old's. Despite all the hardships of life up here in the mountains they seemed happy, childlike as Hindu sages. Martin called to mind, randomly, Maxim Gorky's autobiography—he had read it recently—which described the wretchedness of Russia's proletariat during the Industrial Revolution, and he realized that there were in fact two kinds of poverty: the humanizing and the dehumanizing. Gorky had grown up in a factory-culture for which humans were fodder like in a war, less valuable than a hunk of metal; Anh and Duong and Lê lived in a society that was poor, very poor, but was centered around a community of relative equals who lived in the lap of nature's luxury.

The sun had passed its zenith in the sky now and the day had gone from cold to almost-warm. The travelers pressed on, over fields and hills, up onto the terraces where men were working. There was a footpath beside the crops which they walked on. Martin took some pictures of the area from this vantage-point because he thought it looked like a three-dimensional painting, or a visual transcription of the second movement of Beethoven's fifth piano concerto. (That comparison seemed odd to him, but it surfaced in his mind so he wrote it down later in his journal.) He heard the noise of heavy machinery somewhere in the distance.

Later in the afternoon, when everyone was getting tired and the hike was almost over, they came to another village (the fourth they had seen). It offered the same sights and smells they had grown accustomed to, the not unpleasant earthy smells of old weather-exposed wood, fires in firepits and smoke soaked up by thatched roofs, mud and wet grass and autumn. Martin was about to rest on a stool when a young woman emerged from a hut and walked in his direction. He stood up. 'She looks familiar,' he thought. 'Have I seen her somewhere?' Then it came to him: she was the one who had performed in the concert last night! Her white face with its vaguely sad expression was unmistakable. Evidently she lived in this village. For a minute he stood there dumbly; she disappeared into a hut and reemerged seconds later. He was disturbed, again, by her wraith-like, ethereal beauty. She walked slowly with her bare feet barely making an imprint on the earth; she stopped and adjusted her black hair slowly, loosened it from its bun so that it fell over her shoulders. Just before she was about to reenter her hut Martin coughed and walked toward her.

"Excuse me," he said gently, "do you speak English?"

She turned around and smiled. "A little."

"I think I saw you last night in a concert. You were playing a flute or something."

"Yes, that was me." Her accent, surprisingly, was not very noticeable.

"You did a great job. That was the best part of the concert."

"Thank you."

"How did you learn to speak English so well?"

"I learned it from Americans like you. In the market. My parents helped me too."

"That was wise of them. They knew English would be a useful skill to have."

"Yes, it is more useful every year because of travelers."

Martin liked watching her talk. But he didn't know what else to say.

"How often do you go to the town?" he asked.

"Every weekend. I sell blankets that my mom weaves and I play music for people."

"Do you enjoy it?"

"Yes, I do." She smiled with her eyebrows wrinkled in puzzlement. Martin was starting to feel foolish and self-conscious. Why was he talking to her? What had he hoped to accomplish?

He looked around. Duong and the Japanese girls were off behind a hut talking to some women; Clyde was lying on the grass with his face exhausted from the strain of the hike. Men were still threshing rice hundreds of yards away even though dusk was approaching; some were singing, the wind carrying their

voices to the village. Their songs had no recognizable melody and seemed to interfere with each other, but somehow that was perfect. Any other way of singing would have seemed out of place. This was mountain-music, Martin thought—the spirituals of North Vietnamese peasants. Neither plaintive nor uplifting, they were a musical expression of the harvest.

Martin felt the rice wine he had been offered a few minutes ago swimming in his head. He hadn't had much but it was strong, stronger than Western wine. He turned to the girl again and looked at her thin face. That's why he had wanted to talk to her, he remembered: he wanted to say, for some reason, that she looked different from everyone here.

"What's your name?"

"Dào," she said.

He paused. He couldn't tell why he was so curious about her.

"You live in a very beautiful place, Dào," he said. "You're lucky."

"I think so."

"Is this your village?"

"Yes, I live here with my parents."

He was attracted to her, to her aura of separateness and aloofness. Suddenly he was sick of the pleasantries, the fakeness; he wanted to talk to her like a friend, a real human being. She looked at him expectantly, clearly wondering where this conversation was going.

"Sorry, I'm a little tired from the hike," he said. "I just wanted to say hi because I recognized you. And also, I can't help saying that you look—pretty, and…interesting."

"Thank you…" She smiled.

"I'd like to talk to you longer, but I have to go. Can I just ask… The reason I recognized you is because you look different from other people I've seen here. You're whiter…even whiter than me…and, I don't know, you have an unusual brightness and beauty."

Her smile slowly dissolved. She looked at him intently with sad eyes. "You're different from most people too," she said. "Most people don't talk about how I look."

"I'm sorry if…"

"No, it's okay." She looked away for a moment. It seemed to Martin that this girl was very self-possessed for having lived in the countryside all her life. "I look this way because I am sick. Very sick." She sighed and looked up at the layers of amber grass to her left, the terraces on the hillside. "I will die soon, I think."

Martin gaped at her. "What? You will die?"

"Yes. I am sick." She lowered her eyes as Martin stared in disbelief. Her words echoed in his mind: "I will die soon, I think." What? This situation had become suddenly surreal. Maybe the alcohol was influencing his thoughts too. But he felt inexpressible sadness as he absorbed what she had said.

"You…you…"

"I'm sorry, I have to go," she said. "I must help my parents." And she turned around and disappeared into her home.

'What just happened?' Martin asked himself. 'She's going to die? When will she die? Can she be helped somehow?' It was so unreal he didn't know what to think. Instead he just gazed at the mountains in the distance and listened to jeeps driving on dirt roads above, and dynamite explosions in the cliffs.

*

I wrote another email to Chomsky in which I quoted the "virtually emotional" thing I'd written about him and also expressed a concern or two about his constant less-than-critical defense of democracy. He wrote back the same night:

"Appreciate the very generous remarks (naturally enough). I think you're right to point out that democracy can have very serious flaws, and a properly functioning democracy should have built in constraints against the kinds of outrages you describe. But I think that ultimately we cannot go far beyond Jefferson, when he observed the failures of democracy in his later years, but concluded that the choice is

between ‘aristocrats and democrats,’ where the aristocrats are ‘those who fear and distrust the people, and wish to draw all powers from them into the hands of the higher classes,’ while the democrats, in contrast, ‘identify with the people, have confidence in them, cherish and consider them as the honest & safe, altho’ not the most wise depository of the public interest.’”

It’s the predictable response expressed in the predictably sophisticated Chomskyan way.

Good advice: unless the writer is interested, the reader won’t be interested. The writer should make sure at all times that he is engaged with his story.

I’ve been writing a story for over two weeks—it’s 10,000 words now—but I’m convinced it isn’t good. So, back to the drawing board.

June 16–18

I can’t help feeling as if all this to-do about “the craft of writing” is silly. People taking themselves and what they do too seriously, I guess.

Readings every night, usually by the famous writers here. Ravi Shankar, Alexander Chee, Josip Novakovich,[1] Katha Pollitt (annoying liberal feminist). But last night and tonight, readings by students. Much less well-attended, of course, than the celebrities’ readings. But in an odd way they’re more enjoyable, more affecting. All these diverse people, many of them shy and worn-down by life, all talented, all sharing their private lives with strangers. Brought together by a love of something the culture doesn’t love; the only common denominator a love of writing. People not famous, writing on faith. Predictably none of the famous people attend these readings, only a few students. But they’re so much more powerful than those other readings! Far more intimate, certainly more transporting because no ego is involved and no books outside waiting to be bought, only mysterious pasts like that woman whose every piece is about her son Simon who died young and those women who read quietly with head bowed low, their writing wonderful. What has brought them here? What pasts? Most of them will not be successful authors because they lack the will, but they continue writing anyway on faith.

Wherever there is deep feeling and unpretentiousness, I fall in love.

June 19, 21

It’s doubtful that the Ninth Symphony could have been written fifteen years later or fifteen years earlier. Only when it was written could it have been written. (The culture.) [Harold Schonberg wrote: Beethoven’s music is that of an indomitable hero, Mahler’s that of a psychic weakling. But the difference is not only, or even essentially, between the men themselves, but between their cultural circumstances, which the music expresses. Had Beethoven lived in the early 20th century, his music would have been not heroic but decadent, like Mahler’s and Webern’s and Strauss’s. It would have been overly subjectivistic, ‘individualistic,’ unbalanced, rather than fusing harmoniously the individual with the culture as in the 9th symphony and the works from Beethoven’s middle period. To say it again: the creation of the most universal artworks presupposes not only great talent but also a society that isn’t dehumanized.]

Nothing, *nothing*, is more magnificent than that symphony.

[1] That guy is hilarious, by the way. Probably a dick and a lecher (always hitting on girls, getting wildly drunk) but at least he has no respect for propriety and his sense of humor is spectacular. His brain lacks a censor. He belongs in the ’20s or ’30s with Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Pound and the gang.

Beautiful thoughts on writing from Elizabeth Gilbert, which echo what we were told at the conference by published writers:

> Sometimes people ask me for help or suggestions about how to write, or how to get published. Keeping in mind that this is all very ephemeral and personal, I will try to explain here everything that I believe about writing. I hope it is useful. It's all I know.
>
> I believe that—if you are serious about a life of writing, or indeed about any creative form of expression—that you should take on this work like a holy calling. I became a writer the way other people become monks or nuns. I made a vow to writing, very young. I became Bride-of-Writing. I was writing's most devotional handmaiden. I built my entire life around writing. I didn't know how else to do this. […]
>
> As for discipline—it's important, but sort of over-rated. The more important virtue for a writer, I believe, is self-forgiveness. Because your writing will always disappoint you. Your laziness will always disappoint you. You will make vows: "I'm going to write for an hour every day," and then you won't do it. You will think: "I suck, I'm such a failure. I'm washed-up." Continuing to write after that heartache of disappointment doesn't take only discipline, but also self-forgiveness (which comes from a place of kind and encouraging and motherly love). The other thing to realize is that all writers think they suck. When I was writing "Eat, Pray, Love", I had just as strong a mantra of THIS SUCKS ringing through my head as anyone does when they write anything. But I had a clarion moment of truth during the process of that book. One day, when I was agonizing over how utterly bad my writing felt, I realized: "That's actually not my problem." The point I realized was this—I never promised the universe that I would write brilliantly; I only promised the universe that I would write. So I put my head down and sweated through it, as per my vows.
>
> I have a friend who's an Italian filmmaker of great artistic sensibility. After years of struggling to get his films made, he sent an anguished letter to his hero, the brilliant (and perhaps half-insane) German filmmaker Werner Herzog. My friend complained about how difficult it is these days to be an independent filmmaker, how hard it is to find government arts grants, how the audiences have all been ruined by Hollywood and how the world has lost its taste…etc, etc. Herzog wrote back a personal letter to my friend that essentially ran along these lines: "Quit your complaining. It's not the world's fault that you wanted to be an artist. It's not the world's job to enjoy the films you make, and it's certainly not the world's obligation to pay for your dreams. Nobody wants to hear it. Steal a camera if you have to, but stop whining and get back to work." I repeat those words back to myself whenever I start to feel resentful, entitled, competitive or unappreciated with regard to my writing: "It's not the world's fault that you want to be an artist…now get back to work." Always, at the end of the day, the important thing is only and always that: Get back to work. This is a path for the courageous and the faithful. You must find another reason to work, other than the desire for success or recognition. It must come from another place.

> Quotation from R. W. Emerson: "That which we reject returns to us in alienated majesty."
> Jonathan Safran Foer: "Time heals all wounds. But what if time is the wound?"

June 23, 28

[…] Judgments of natural and artistic beauty, sublimity and so on come from the same faculty that judges masculine and feminine beauty. All such judgments are intuitive, not 'conceptual' or 'intellectual' or 'discursive.' (See the footnote in which I mention Frank Sibley.) A definition of these intuitive concepts has to be circular, uninformative, 'self-referential,' unlike the definition of, say, bachelor.

I thought I had more to say, but I guess not. The point, maybe, is that the primitive sexual layer of the psyche is closely involved in the higher aesthetic, artistic layer, as shown by the similarities between

(the nature of) evaluating/'desiring' human beauty and (the nature of) evaluating/'desiring' artistic beauty. (This is an un-Freudian, philosophical way of arriving at Freud's idea, or something like it.)

Infinite tragedy. Absolute futility of everything. A world too large, a collective mind too small. Tragedy like this cannot be possible; I must be missing something. I keep hoping it's all a dream, that I'll wake up momentarily at God's right hand or in some unfathomable dimension of existence.

In the end, as always, it's the irrationality of the social order that we have to blame.

Finally got another job. (I've been getting unemployment checks.) Teaching at an ESL school downtown. 100 minutes per class, which is long. But it's a good place; the students ("adults") seem better-behaved than EF's students.

If you saw how often comedians make fools of themselves, you would respect them as little as they respect themselves.

It's amusing and sad that millions of people think Obama can truly change America. It's the Bill Clinton phenomenon all over again. Massive disappointment is inevitable, whether Obama is elected or not. He's a politician, after all: an opportunist, a pragmatist, a centrist if need be.

I've been wallowing in ridiculous contentment for months.

[…]

July 5

While home for the 4th I read parts of Hilary Putnam's *Reason, Truth and History*. Thought-provoking book to which I'll return someday when I re-appraise the notions of my youth and re-present them in a more polished form.

Darius Rejali on the democratic origins of modern torture-techniques. Innovations in torture spread from democracies to authoritarian regimes. (Democracies want "cleaner" torture so there is less physical evidence that can later be presented to the public.)

Chomsky: "Propaganda is to democracy what violence is to totalitarianism." That's misleading insofar as it suggests that democracies don't use violence.

July 6

Today as I stood in line at Dunkin' Donuts I saw a tall, large-bodied, dull-faced jockish type in front of me. I thought, "With that height and that body he must get plenty of women." A moment later a petite redhead came up, touched him on the shoulder and said she wanted a latte. "I guess I was right," I mumbled. She turned around and I gave a half-smile to her because she was pretty. As I was smiling I realized I was looking at Olga, the Russian girl I'd met months ago who hadn't returned my second phone-call. The extraordinary control I have over my facial muscles allowed me to maintain complete composure, without a single muscle twitching in reaction to seeing her. But the shock of recognition seized her face utterly for one second; then she recovered and walked a few feet away. I smiled inwardly: "So this jock here is the type she prefers. I'm bowled over by surprise." Still, remembering that this beautiful girl had rejected me caused a minuscule twinge of hurt, and I remained in a mellow mood for over an hour.

For most Western females, the important element in being attracted to someone is feeling sexual tension around him. Being-attracted-to practically *means* feeling-sexual-tension. (That's less true of men.)

So if they don't feel sexual tension with him, they won't be romantically interested in him. This is one respect in which females are the sexual sex: their "feeling," as they always insist, is what determines whether they like a man, but "How does he make me feel?" is, to a great extent, just another way of asking "Do I feel sexual tension with him?", i.e. "Does he make me feel feminine and attractive?" Sexual tension is not quite as important for men, who will gladly have sex with any pretty thing they see. Even as a criterion for choosing a *girlfriend* it isn't as important as it is for women.

What determines whether a woman feels tension (i.e., half-consciously or unconsciously wants to have sex with the man she's talking to)? In truistic terms, she has to feel that he is projecting strength, confidence, power, masculinity. More precisely, she has to feel he is strong, confident, etc. *in relation to her*. If she feels that she is in some way dominating him, then there's little or no tension. But if she is being subtly "dominated," there is, quite possibly, exciting tension. If she feels as though it's totally easy to make him like and respect her—e.g., if he is very easygoing—then she will not feel much sexual tension.[1]

All this, by the way, complements the man's experience. He feels a sort of 'sympathetic sexual tension' if he senses that he is subtly 'dominating' the female, making her feel slightly subordinate, staying 'one step ahead' of her in the conversation, controlling her by making her laugh often. (On the other hand, the more 'impressive' she is, the more tension he'll feel—as long as he isn't intimidated by her!—because her impressiveness will make him have a correspondingly stronger desire to impress her. This reaction, I remind you, is due to the dialectic of recognition that I discussed when reading Honneth's book.) If *she* intimidates *him*, he'll feel no sexual tension but only emasculation; if *he* intimidates *her*, on the other hand, it's still entirely possible that she'll feel sexual tension. And she'll probably desire him, though she might not admit it to herself.

One of the qualities that the 'easygoing' person lacks is a sort of *detachment* from the situation he's in. This lack usually makes him likable but not charismatic. A man wholly immersed in what the woman is saying, listening to her intently, 'hanging on her words' so to speak, showing great respect for her and interest in what she is saying, does not thereby project confidence, independence, self-certainty, a dominating and commanding attitude, and thus is not fostering sexual tension. *Ceteris paribus*, then, she doesn't crave his recognition, precisely because it comes too easily. A man, on the other hand, who isn't *always* a great listener but instead periodically ignores the woman, talks over her, gets a 'distant' look in his eye, and gives the impression that he doesn't need this particular woman's approval in order to feel good about himself—this man probably makes her feel a little subordinate, and she desires his recognition (or, in Kojèvean language: she "desires his desire") because only then will her self-certainty be completely restored. This man is "mysterious," as women like to say. If she says to you, "I never know what you're thinking," perhaps with mild irritation, then you know you're doing something right.

Again, the female's reaction to this kind of semi-detached, self-confident person is actually a *human* reaction, not only a feminine one. Most men, however, are not as swayed by it as women are, at least with respect to women themselves. For a man usually wants his mate to "hang on his every word," to show complete respect for him, to look up to him, to seek his advice and comfort. (And the woman wants to look up to him too (figuratively and literally). She doesn't want *him* to look up to *her*!)

July 9, 15

Reading Sartre's *War Diaries*. Fascinating document.

I read a long article in the Britannica online about harmony, its theory and its history (from ancient Greece to the twentieth century). Now I'm going to read many more articles on all things musical. (The

[1] [Remember: as Johan Huizinga says, the presence of "tension" is one of the defining characteristics of *play*. And dating, like flirting, is essentially a kind of game—or rather it incorporates play(fulness). In the context of dating, tension takes the form of sexual tension. So if there is no sexual tension, the game isn't being played right and one or both of the partners will lose interest.]

incomparable delights of *learning*!) Classical music makes a lot of sense once you know how to make sense of it! You can listen to a piece with new appreciation for the composer's genius when you understand the theoretical principles behind the ravishing harmonies and melodies. (Schubert's D. 956, first movement. Hearing its theme for the first time months ago was a revelation and I couldn't get that melody out of my mind. I'm told that some music-lover was once so enamored of the melody that he asked for it to be carved on his gravestone after he died.) The greatest composers are the ones who respect not only the strictures of theory, such as Webern, Boulez, Nono, but also the listener's desire for engaging, assimilable sound of some sort. The task should be to use the *form* of abstract harmonic principles and structures to create the *content* of emotionally gripping sound.

On the other hand, you could scorn all manifestations of creativity, be they Schoenbergian serialism, Wagnerian chromaticism, Milhaudian polytonality, Debussian impressionism, Stravinskian neoclassicism, Schubertian tonal modulation, Bachian contrapuntalism, or Beethovenian heroicism, and choose John Cagean indeterminism, where the music is based on chance and anything *creative* is considered an imperfection in the composition. (*4'33"* is the logical outcome of this.) "Cage was influenced by the study of Zen philosophy: he determined that a quiet mind was one free of dislikes; but, since dislikes require likes, it must be free of both likes and dislikes. He once said, 'You can become narrow-minded, literally, by only liking certain things and disliking others, but you can become open-minded, literally, by giving up your likes and dislikes and becoming interested in things.' To escape being influenced by his own likes and dislikes, Cage then sought to remove the creative process from his composition, often relying on coin flips and dice rolls to decide where or how to place a certain note." Like his mentors the Zen Buddhists, Cage aimed at the extirpation of individuality, though in a less 'redeeming' and more nihilistic way than Buddhists. Fortunately his project was unfulfillable. Humanism cannot be killed so easily.

Anyway, I'm starting to understand the pleasure of *theorizing* pieces as opposed to just *savoring* them.

July 16

Today I was eating a sandwich on the edge of a pleasant stone courtyard in front of an office building next to the sidewalk. Standing there harmlessly eating a sandwich. A guy wearing a suit, coming back from lunch maybe, passed by me but stopped to ask if I was waiting for someone. "No." "Okay, this is private property," he said. I looked at him, took another bite of my sandwich, and slowly walked away. Furious inside. It occurred to me then that *Homo economicus* is the only *despicable* creature in the animal kingdom. That man's act, that petty little bureaucratic act, is the origin of all wickedness. Adolf Eichmann isn't far away. "I'm just following rules."

I don't deny that hearing Cagean music can be an interesting *experience*. Nor do I deny that the creation of such music was inevitable in the 20th century, or that Cage represents a somewhat important moment in cultural history. What I deny is that the music itself is aesthetically interesting, and that it is "good" or "great" art. Certainly by humanistic ("affirmative") standards it has little value.

I would say something similar about twelve-tone music, in which the composer is not supposed to use a particular note of a tone row again until after the other eleven notes have been used, thus ensuring that the composition has no hint of tonality. Each note is supposed to be as important as every other; there is no tonic, nor even a note that is used more often than the rest. This system is indeed noteworthy (so to speak), and the restraints it imposes must pose challenges for the composer. Still, it strikes me as creatively puerile and simplistic compared to the complex system of tonality that dominated the West for centuries. Whatever any defender of Schoenberg will say, it's undeniable that a piece as creatively mature as, say, the Diabelli Variations is impossible to compose in the twelve-tone idiom, or in any kind of atonality. The tonal system, despite or because of all its rules, is simply a more fertile terrain for composition than the organized chaos of atonality. Its musical products can, for one thing, be analyzed in more ways than the products of atonality; they have more harmonic and melodic material for the critic to chew over, and the composer has both more freedom (with respect to the direction he takes his piece, the many tonalities he can exploit along

the way, etc.) and less freedom than the atonal composer. Regarding this creative potential, it's significant that tonality has held sway for all of history while atonality essentially petered out after a few decades and was never even close to culturally hegemonic. The reason is that it's comparatively barren. There is less to be done with it, and people get bored with it more quickly.

By the way, I'm leaving out the obvious consideration that tonal music is far more accessible to listeners than atonal music, that it seems to resonate with the human psyche more, that it affects the emotions more and can sound more intuitively beautiful or sublime than atonal music can.

Said more simply: the greatest tonal compositions are far more impressive than the greatest atonal compositions, indeed any atonal composition conceivable. Even semi-tonality, as in Debussy, is by its nature inferior, because, ironically, it's more limited and limiting than tonality. Its composers have it both easier and harder than tonal composers, in ways that work to the advantage and glory of the latter.

The creations of tonal composers are more fully realized, usually, than atonal or half-tonal compositions, for *determinatio est negatio*. Tonality excludes more than atonality does. (That doesn't mean tonality is more "limiting" than atonality. The opposite is the case. Western tonality is an inconceivably rich terrain.)

July 17

Reading an entertaining, informative and accurate book on *Beethoven: His Life and Music*, by Jeremy Siepmann. The author is musically educated, so his brief discussions of particular pieces are enlightening. Thanks to him I've discovered the delightful Serenade in D major, Op. 25, for flute, violin and viola. Also the wonderful Septet in E-flat for violin, viola, cello, double bass, clarinet, bassoon and horn, and the "Archduke" Piano Trio with its unearthly slow movement.

The Beethoven that emerges from this unbiased book is immensely appealing and endearing. It is the Beethoven one wants to believe in. His own raw words are powerful, as in his rapturous love-letters, his "Heiligenstadt Testament," and his journal: "Submission, absolute submission to your fate, only this can give you the sacrifice…to the servitude—oh, hard struggle!—Turn everything which remains to be done to planning the long journey—you must yourself find all that your most blessed wish can offer, you must force it to your will—keep always of the same mind…O God, give me the strength to conquer–myself!" He was everything an artist should be. Goethe, by comparison, comes across as false and vain: "Goethe," he wrote after he'd met him, "is too fond of the atmosphere of the royal courts, more than is becoming to a poet. Why laugh at the absurdities of virtuosos when poets, who ought to be the first teachers of a nation, forget everything for the sake of glitter?" Beethoven's contempt for everything but the artistic, the metaphysical essentials of life is extraordinarily inspiring, absolutely *masculine*.

But that ugly episode with his nephew Karl exposes all his faults: his paranoia, his jealousy, his maliciousness, his cruelty, his selfishness. Had he lived in a later time he would not have been nearly so great a man in the eyes of posterity. (For one thing, his music wouldn't have been so great. It would have been closer to Brahms, or Wagner, than Beethoven.) Much of the blame for his faults, though, rests with his childhood and his deafness.

Now I'm reading Reginald Smith Brindle's *The New Music: the Avant-Garde since 1945*. (It was published in '87.) I want to understand this music so I can belittle it more intelligently. ☺

I do, however, admire a lot of twentieth century music. *Le Sacre du Printemps*, for example. I may not *love* it, but I recognize its genius. Its complexity and power.

July 20

I sort of like Alban Berg's piano sonata too, since, unlike much twentieth-century avant-garde music, it isn't only an intellectual exercise. It's barely tonal, so it isn't "pretty," but it's full of poetry and unrest. Profound spiritual turbulence reaching beyond the immediately given. It isn't at all masturbatory or

self-indulgent; it communicates. (And of course intellectually it is brilliant, like so many avant-garde pieces. Reading an analysis of it has convinced me of its exquisitely constructed coherence.)

I'm beginning to appreciate just how complex some avant-garde music is, how obsessively *controlled* and *precise* it is (or *was*). Integral serialism, which had its heyday after WWII, was the epitome of the drive to make music mathematically precise. Composers "predetermined" their compositions down to the last minute detail according to principles of total serialism. Note durations, dynamics, rhythm, pitches, tempi were all ordered in serial fashion, though not necessarily in the Schoenbergian twelve-note way. A series of notes, for example, would be explored in such a way that nearly all its possible permutations were exhausted by the end of the piece. Composers would use matrices of numbers to arrive at the series' inversions, the retrogrades of the inversions, their transpositions, etc. It was astonishingly complex and virtually unplayable music, or rather noise. Purely mathematical puzzles with little or no musical value.

Then composers reacted against this obsessive formal control by going to the opposite extreme: indeterminate, or aleatory, music. "Free twelve-note music" was popular too, in which there were no predetermined rules that dictated which notes you could use when.

I'm tired of reading about this stuff, though. Sure, it requires a lot of patience and study to write such music, but arguably it's more a *craft* than an *art*. It isn't as though a person is "born to write" this kind of music, as Mozart, Schubert, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov were born to write music. One isn't really *born* with atonal talent; one can simply learn all the necessary methods and formal rules, as one can learn to be an excellent photographer (but not a poet, not a painter, not a draftsman, not a sculptor in the grand old ways).

Most of these extreme "avant-garde" composers give form total priority over content, to the extent that content is externally, inorganically introduced for the sake of realizing a predetermined form. The older composers, on the other hand, tried to unite form with content, which meant disguising the fact that there was a separate "form" at all. Content organically grew out of itself—or at least seemed to in the listener's ear—and yet it did so according to the requirements of tonality (tension, resolution, all the harmonic principles of Rameau and his successors) and the sonata form, or the fugue, or the canon, or whatever. Content and form fit each other perfectly. But that ideal was lost in the twentieth century.[1]

Cf. Sontag's formalism. Formalism is decadent, a harbinger of creative exhaustion.

In the old music there was something for both the simple music-lover and the sophisticated critic: the "moving" content satisfied the former, while the masterful manipulations of form satisfied the latter. The intuitional aesthetic faculty, in other words, was as satisfied as the analytical intellect. That isn't the case with, say, Berio.

No modern composer pushed the boundaries of tonality more provocatively than Schubert did in his A major piano sonata.

What avant-garde composers did consciously and ridiculously, the old masters did, in a sense, unconsciously and sublimely.

(Of course it wasn't entirely unconscious. Just look at their notebooks.)

I'm reading some of Alfred Brendel's essays on Beethoven, Liszt, Schubert, etc. Also *An Outline History of Western Music*.

In the whole history of the world, music wasn't written down consistently until the Middle Ages in Europe. Before that, it was mainly a form of free improvisation based on melodic or rhythmic patterns. (The repetitiveness was supposed to have a hypnotic, magical effect.) The ancient Greeks knew of the twelve notes that constitute the modern chromatic scale: they were "derived from arithmetic computations that determined proportional divisions of the string to produce related pitches" on an instrument called the monochord.

I'm struck by the extent to which 20th century serialism was a return to the repetitional practices of late medieval and Renaissance musicians. (It goes without saying that there was also a return to polyphony.)

I'm a fan of Domenico Scarlatti. Through his sonatas I inhale the pristine air of the Baroque.

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[1] [That isn't really true. Stravinsky, Bartok, Shostakovich, Copland and many others wrote organically unified pieces.]

I find it diverting when I pass a woman in the street to visualize her vagina hovering beside her face, or stuck in her neck. It's the union of *identical opposites*: the greatest of paradoxes. The face and the vagina fused together. Unimaginable. The distance between them in the body mitigates the paradox, or hides it; but if you imagine the beautiful face and the not-so-beautiful vagina smooshed together you can't help being disturbed.

July 22

People who insist that women are ultimately just as "sexual" as men—that they want sex as much as men do, if not more—are right. Because female sexuality is relatively passive, though, its hidden maenadic nature can be overlooked. Few men can be as sexually frenzied as a woman can. Therein, ironically, lies the relative *activeness* of male sexuality—or, rather, that fact is symptomatic of it, as the sexual frenzy of a woman proves her "passiveness." For her frenzy is made possible by a lack of self-control or "soberness," or active and sober (self-)distancing from a given situation. A woman in the throes of ecstasy, screaming wildly as her body contorts, is in a state of passivity; the man thrusting himself inside her and gazing with wonder at this spectacle is the active one, however calm he may appear. He is more free than she is. Her consciousness, like her body, is contorted.

All trance-like states, even if they occur in men, are basically feminine, for they are passive and unfree. A man full of consuming rage is experiencing a feminine contortion of his consciousness; the most masculine man is someone like Noam Chomsky, who never loses his temper and is always quite rational.

(More accurately, the man who temporarily becomes a "raging bull" is both masculine and feminine: masculine insofar as he is exercising his physical strength on his environment by attacking it, forcing himself on it, bending it to his will, perhaps destroying it but at least *dominating* it; feminine insofar as he has lost all soberness and the ability to reason without being swayed by his emotions. Obviously everyone has both masculine and feminine elements in his or her personality.)

The fact that human behavior is largely shaped by social conditions doesn't mean you can't idealize "tendencies" that are more or less shared across cultures. In some cultures they may be more observable, in others less so, but inasmuch as they exist you can and should "idealize" them for the sake of intellectual clarity. Only keep Marxism in mind as you do so. Otherwise you'll become a simple-minded absolutist, maybe a misogynist or misandrist.

—On second thought, ignore all that (except the last few sentences).

July 23, 24

My first poetic mood in weeks… Sad and intimate, like the hair tucked behind Gimena's ear as she slept on my bed months ago… Simple, very simple. It's raining outside, appropriately. But my window is open anyway, the fan placed inside it blowing cool air into the room.

After my last class today I didn't ask Maria, the blonde Russian, to drink with me at a bar like I'd wanted to because our conversation was interrupted by another student—although I should have asked her anyway… So she left and disappointment flooded my chest cavity because now I had to go home alone. On the bus an Indian girl sat down next to me right before I had to get off, and she had the face of someone I would love but I didn't talk to her because I had to get off at the next stop. I wouldn't have talked to her anyway, of course. But I would have loved her… And then as I was about to cross a street in the rain, a car slowed down and stopped for me even though there wasn't a long line of cars behind it. And I realized that people are kind, and for a moment I loved the person driving that car because he was kind and let me pass.

The Andantino from Schubert's sonata in A: Oh…my…God. He wrote it a few months before his death.

A few weeks ago I went to a walk-in clinic at a hospital in Brighton because my right ear was blocked up. The staffers were unclear on how much it would cost, and I was too dimwitted to insist on clarity. I figured the cost would sort itself out somehow, as it usually does, either through my insurance or through a discount of some sort because I'm poor. I returned four days later because the prescribed treatment hadn't worked. Turns out there was simply a build-up of wax in the ear canal; the doctor "irrigated" it out with a syringe and warm water. Three weeks later I had the same problem, so I went back and they fixed it in the same way. Unfortunately, all these incredibly high-tech medical procedures (involving water and a plastic syringe) were more expensive than I thought they'd be: I was sent one bill for $479 and two for $414. Those were the hospital bills; there were also three physician bills, which were $152 each. My insurance, needless to say, didn't cover it. I wrote a formal complaint about the second bill because that visit had been a direct result of the doctor's misdiagnosis: she had thought I needed medicine, when really all I needed was an ear-cleaning. My appeal was rejected. I might be able to get a 30% discount on the hospital bills but there's no discount for the physician bills.

—Such are the fruits of America's healthcare system. $1763 for two five-minute ear-cleanings. Or $1371 if I get the discount. (Or, if I'm really lucky and get the second bill canceled, $929.) How can anyone deny that a system of social relations that props up such bureaucratic practices is barbaric and irrational?

July 26, 29

I'll say this about Philip Glass's minimalism: it's good music to fall asleep to.

Last night I met Wanni, a Chinese girl in her thirties who has lived in Boston for many years—we originally met at a party four weeks ago—went to a bar then at midnight danced outside in the middle of Harvard Square to live music, then we strolled around the Harvard campus and I kissed her and we kissed awhile. I stayed at her condo.

Tonight I met Ji-yun for the first time in a while. Went to a bar then I took her to my place and played some fine music for her. […]

Tomorrow I'm meeting another girl, Lucy.

Reading a collection of Leonard Bernstein's writings and talks called *The Joy of Music*. Also watching internet clips of him speaking. The man was incredible.

I guess the answer to the question I've asked before in my naïve way is simple: the sense of tension and resolution that pervades tonality, for instance when the tonic follows the dominant, is explained by the overtones that sound when a note is played. The second overtone is the dominant of that note. These overtones must be the foundation of tonality.

The pentatonic scale consists of the first five overtones of a given note. "This group of notes," says Bernstein, "forms the basis of almost all the folk music of the world. The five black notes of the piano happen to correspond (in a well-tempered way) to this pentatonic scale… As civilization progressed, more and more overtones were added, so that in the great flowering of Greek culture, for example, scales came into being that contained not five but *seven* tones."

I'm impressed by Schoenberg's *Verklaerte Nacht*, a string sextet written when he was 25. Passionate, rich, *tonal* music.

Even bitonality, polytonality is sort of okay with me (as I get accustomed to it and can understand it better). What I don't like is atonality, except in a few special cases.

Observation from Bernstein: "We always speak of 'playing' music: we play Brahms or we play Bach." Significant. Cf. Huizinga. (Bernstein goes on to say that "jazz is real play. It 'fools around' with notes, so to speak, and has fun with them. It is, therefore, entertainment in the truest sense.")

I can't get enough of Glenn Gould. Watching interviews online. I want to get *The Glenn Gould Reader*; it would challenge me, as his interviews challenge my conventional views. His explications of Webern, Schoenberg and other atonalists force me to take serialism seriously. I still think there's something

solipsistic about a type of music that is almost exclusively intellectual and virtually impenetrable to all but a few initiates, but at least I understand now that it merits study.

Anyway, I'm tired of making judgments like this. Condemning types of art, even on the basis of rational considerations, is not very interesting.

I like Gould's observation that Webern is the Samuel Beckett of music, or the Piet Mondrian. It's right on target.

"Genius is the capacity to take infinite pains." Remember that, Chris, you lazy ass.

Vaginomania.— Gustave Courbet painted a picture of a vulva and called it *The Origin of the World*. Alfred Kubin drew a picture of a tiny man diving into a giant vulva and called it *The Death-Leap*. The paradoxical thing is that they're both right.

Reading Oliver Sacks's *Awakenings*, which is about his experiences with post-encephalitic, Parkinsonian patients. It was the basis for the movie with Robin Williams and Robert De Niro. It's a good book, full of good thoughts and superb writing. Sacks emphasizes, as against his colleagues, that Parkinson's disease is an *existential* rather than a purely *neurological* illness. It affects the whole *being* and not just the *body*; it is holistic and should be treated holistically. The doctor should adopt a sympathetic, imaginative, therapeutic approach to it—to understand how it is *experienced*—rather than a mechanical, external, 'objective,' 'neuroscientific' approach, which won't be as fruitful. (If the patient, for example, is immersed in a warm and loving environment, his symptoms will be less severe than otherwise.) Sacks even suggests that Parkinson's has features in common with a neurosis or psychosis. He strikes me as the R. D. Laing of Parkinson's disease (though without Laing's intuitive genius).

"Our health, diseases, and reactions cannot be understood *in vitro,* in themselves; they can only be understood with reference to *us,* as expressions of our nature, our living, our being-here (*da-sein*) in the world. Yet modern medicine, increasingly, dismisses our existence, either reducing us to identical replicas reacting to fixed 'stimuli' in equally fixed ways, or seeing our diseases as purely *alien* and bad, without organic relation to the person who is ill… It is salutary to remember Pasteur's death-bed words: 'Bernard is right: the pathogen is nothing; the *terrain* is everything.' Diseases have a character of their own, but they also partake of our character; we have a character of our own, but we also partake of the world's character: character is monadic or microcosmic, worlds within worlds within worlds, worlds which express worlds. The disease-the man-the world go together, and cannot be considered separately as things-in-themselves." Words of wisdom, Eastern wisdom and Marxist wisdom, holistic wisdom.

I'm surprised that *Awakenings* was actually published, since it would seem to fall in the crack between pop culture and academia. (Sacks's colleagues didn't like it, ignored it because its philosophy was utterly foreign to theirs and its style was too literary.)

Here's a footnote that reminds me of Jung: "Instinctively and intuitively all patients [and all people!] use certain metaphors again and again. Thus, there are the universal images of rising and falling, which come naturally and automatically to every patient: one *ascends* to health and happiness and grace, and one *descends* to depths of sickness and misery… Another universal metaphor is that of *light* and *darkness*: one emerges from the darkness and dimness of disease, into the clear light of health." Jung would add to this last an array of other images, like the mandala. What explains their recurrence throughout history, in the most varied of cultures? "Archetypes" in the human mind? (Or is that hypothesis little more than a confession of ignorance, a sophisticated expression of "It's a mystery!"?) Jung didn't plumb the depths. Profound lessons are hidden in the recurrence, the *resonance,* of particular images.

July 30

"The power of music to integrate and cure, to liberate the Parkinsonian and give him freedom while it lasts, is quite fundamental, and seen in every patient. This was shown beautifully by Edith T., a former music teacher. She said that she had become 'graceless' with the onset of Parkinsonism, that her movements

had become ‘wooden, mechanical—like a robot or doll,’ that she had lost her former ‘naturalness’ and ‘musicalness’ of movement, that—in a word—she had been ‘unmusicked.’ Fortunately, she added, the disease was ‘accompanied by its own cure.’ I raised an eyebrow: ‘Music,’ she said, ‘as I am unmusicked, I must be remusicked.’ Often, she said, she would find herself ‘frozen,’ utterly motionless, deprived of the power, the impulse, the *thought*, of any motion; she felt at such times ‘like a still photo, a frozen frame’—a mere optical flat, without substance or life. In this state, this statelessness, this timeless irreality, she would remain, motionless-helpless, *until music came*: ‘Songs, tunes I knew from years ago, catchy tunes, rhythmic tunes, the sort I loved to dance to.’

“With this sudden imagining of music, this coming of spontaneous inner music, the power of motion, action, would suddenly return, and the sense of substance and restored personality and reality… [She could] move freely and gracefully… But then, just as suddenly, the inner music would cease, and with this all motion and activity would vanish, and she would fall instantly, once again, into a Parkinsonian abyss.

“Equally striking, and analogous, was the power of *touch*. At times when there was no music to come to her aid, and she would be frozen absolutely motionless in the corridor, the simplest human contact could come to the rescue. One had only to take her hand, or touch her in the lightest possible way, for her to ‘awaken’; one had only to walk *with* her and she could walk perfectly, not imitating or echoing one, but in her own way. But the moment one stopped she would stop too.

“…‘I can do nothing alone,’ she said. ‘I can do anything *with*—with music or people to help me. I cannot initiate, but I can fully share. You “normals,” you are full of “go,” and when you are with me I can partake of all this. The moment you go away I am nothing again.’

“Kant speaks of music as ‘the quickening art,’ and for Edith T. this is literally, vitally, true. Music serves to arouse her own quickness, her living-and-moving identity and will… Rhythmic impetus has to be present [in the music], but has to be ‘embedded’ in melody. Raw or overpowering rhythm, which cannot be so embedded, causes a pathological jerking; it coerces instead of freeing the patient, and thus has an anti-musical effect. Shapeless crooning (‘slush,’ Miss D. calls this), without sufficient rhythmic/motor power, fails to move her—either emotionally or motorically—at all. One is reminded here of Nietzsche’s definitions regarding the pathology of music: here he sees, first and foremost, ‘degeneration of the sense of rhythm.’ ‘Degenerate’ music sickens and forces, ‘healthy’ music heals and frees. This was precisely Miss D.’s experience; she could never abide ‘banging’ or ‘slush,’ and required a firm but ‘shapely’ music.

“Would any music, then, provided it was firm and shapely, serve to get Frances D. going in the right way? By no means. The only music which affected her in the right way was music she could *enjoy*; only music which moved her ‘soul’ had this power to move her body…”

Elsewhere he writes more about Edith: “‘When you walk with me,’ she said, ‘I feel in myself your own power of walking. I *partake* of the power and freedom you have. I *share* your walking powers, your perceptions, your feelings, your existence. Without even knowing it, you make me a great gift.’ This patient felt this experience as very similar to, if not identical with, her experiences with music: ‘I partake of other people, as I partake of the music. Whether it is others, in their own natural movement, or the movement of music itself, the feeling of movement, of living movement, is communicated to me. And not just movement, but existence itself.’ This patient is surely describing something transcendent, which goes far beyond any ‘contactual reflexes.’ We see that the contactual is essentially musical—as the musical is essentially contactual. One must be ‘touched’ before one can move. This patient, whether speaking of others or music, is speaking of just this, the mysterious ‘touch,’ the contact, of two existences. She is describing, in a word, the sense of communion.”

Remember what I wrote about music’s being like an “other,” or a being with whom one can interact conversationally? (It is both the being and the conversation.) This must be why it is able to assuage loneliness. In listening to Chopin’s nocturnes, the lonely person is engaging with a sympathetic spirit, thereby having his loneliness soothed.

August 3

Reading Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

Yes, women are more *body* than men are. (The ones who aren't, like some intellectuals, are simply–not women.) That may even be the origin, or the essence, of their so-called "weakness" or "inferiority."

It is possible—indeed, probable!—for someone to have exceptional literary talent and yet be intellectually, philosophically, stunted. One has but to read certain novels and then watch interviews with the author to observe this. The rarity is the person whose mind is at once profoundly analytical and profoundly literary.

Marx, Nietzsche and Sartre may be examples of that person (though each had unique strengths).

A strain of magic realism, à la Garcia Marquez, runs through *Beloved*. The ghosts that are accepted without question by people; the three shadows holding hands when the figures of which they're shadows are not, and Sethe's easy acceptance of that fact. Morrison fashions a magical, romantic world reminiscent of Toomer's *Cane*—or, somewhere between Marquez's Macondo and Toomer's Georgia—but even more full of horror. It's an unusual mixture of misery and wonderful romance. But it works. Magic realism both highlights the pastness of the past (by creating a world distant from the contemporary, full of naïveté and romance like the mists of history) and endues it with eternity, by fostering an air of timelessness and unreality. The result is a world both more real—vivid, immediate, meaningful, poetic—and less real than reality.

I'm struck by the parallels between *Beloved* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*, especially by the similar approaches toward time and tragedy. In both books, everything that happens exists forever in a temporal continuum. It is not gone once it has happened; it remains there forever, in the realm of 'spirits.' And in both books, we living ones have access to the past: in Morrison's we're tortured by it, by the ghosts of what has happened throughout history, and we cannot escape; in Vonnegut's the aliens are able to see the past, present and future all at once but can choose which moments they want to experience and ignore the horrifying ones, like the bombing of Dresden, even though the latter are just as eternal as the others. Regardless, both authors seem to realize (obscurely), with Milan Kundera, that our actions can have true moral gravity only if they do not pass in and out of time but exist forever, together with their consequences. "Nothing matters as long as we live in time, for everything is over right after it has happened." By peopling her world with ghosts and denying that events pass away in time, Morrison is able to emphasize *moral imperativeness* and *horror*, the horror of the past that presses on us constantly.

The difference between them, of course, is that for Vonnegut, but not for Morrison, the future exists just like the past. This allows Vonnegut to take refuge in the idea of "fate" (everything has already happened!) and to deny free will, which is comforting given all the evil in the world. For Morrison there is no such comfort.

August 4, 6, 8

Morrison's language reminds me of Neruda's. The delicate and pithy imagery.

Her decision not to use the past perfect tense (except when necessary for clarity) initially strikes one as strange, as unliterary. But of course it ties into the theme, the intertwining of past and present. The past perfect, by its nature, is used to distinguish between 'layers' of the past, but that isn't appropriate in this novel because the past is just the past (not the past-past), which is just the present. There is no linear temporal order in Sethe's world, no ordered series of events fading away one by one into the past like markers on a marathon fading into the distance according to mathematical laws of perspective. Everything blends together;[1] there is no '*x* happened after *y* had happened, and *w* was happening at the same time, which was before *z*…' All the happenings are a blur of time weaving in and out of itself, all simply the

[1] The flashbacks are seamlessly inserted into the narrative of the 'present,' so that there is no distinguishing between the narrative and the flashbacks.

ancient past and the ever-present present, sameness, eternity. *No* passage of time. Undifferentiated events, unhistorical history.

…The name 'Sethe' must come from 'Lethe.' Sethe wants to forget the past, she would do anything to be free of it, but it forces itself on her.

Growing a goatee and mustache because they make me look older and I notice that people respond positively to that, which boosts my confidence 10% which makes people respond even more positively, etc. A silly species it is, for sure.

It's true that the sexes are not "innately" what they become in society, that gender roles are not innate. That's obvious. Roles are *social* facts and thus, by definition, are formed in society. In their specificity they're socially constructed. But the sexes have always defined themselves in opposition to each other, and arguably that tendency is inherent in their biological makeup. (Such a conclusion is at least plausible, given the overwhelming inductive evidence.) And, male and female biology being what it is, it seems virtually inevitable that males will hold the balance of societal power, as they more-or-less always have. Gender roles are socially constructed, but biology—in combination with the fact of *scarcity* (in every sphere of life)—marks out the terrain (broadly speaking) of feasible social constructions.

Biology doesn't *determine* behavior, but it massively influences it. Given such biological phenomena as hormones, the peculiarities of male vs. female sexuality, and so on, people will behave—and develop their self-conceptions—in opposition to the other sex and in 'harmony' (or something like harmony) with members of their own sex. On the basis of these very general facts about nature and human biology, gender roles will naturally structure themselves not only complementarily but according to implicit power-hierarchies, which can, however, be almost unnoticeable, as they probably were during the eons before the agricultural revolution and perhaps even after it.

Against Freud.— To think that people desire *pleasure* more than *recognition* is ridiculous. Virtually every facet of society points to the priority of recognition over mere pleasure. Culture may be partly a sublimation of libidinal drives, but it is even more a manifestation of the human need for the other's esteem.

For the reader who's still a little confused about the concept of "recognition": "The Hegelian idea [is] that identity is constructed dialogically, through a process of mutual recognition. According to Hegel, recognition designates an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects, in which each sees the other both as its equal and also as separate from it. This relation is constitutive for subjectivity: one becomes an individual subject only by virtue of recognizing, and being recognized by, another subject. Recognition from others is thus essential to the development of a sense of self. To be denied recognition—or to be 'misrecognized'—is to suffer both a distortion of one's relation to one's self and an injury to one's identity." (From Nancy Fraser's article "Rethinking Recognition," in *NLR*.)

Let's unpack that. The self is self-consciousness, while "a sense of self," as Fraser uses the term, is a confident, secure self-consciousness. So there's a difference between the self *simpliciter* and a person's *sense* of self: everyone has (or is) the former, while not everyone has the latter. The latter is something that is *achieved*, that isn't inevitable in the way that mere self-consciousness is. It took me a long time to achieve a stable sense of self, but I've had (or been) a *self* since early childhood.[1]

Included in self-consciousness as such is opposition to itself. It is its own other; it *must* be in order to be aware of itself. But what constitutes its self-difference? Simply its fusion of universality and

[1] More accurately, the self originally comes into existence through consciousness's recognizing and being recognized by another consciousness. In this sense, one can say that the "sense of self" is indeed nothing but the self, or self-consciousness. And "mere" self-consciousness, of course, is actually a major achievement on the part of the young child. But in the quotation from Fraser—and in many other scholarly and 'colloquial' discussions of the topic—there's an ambiguity between this definition of "sense of self" and a definition according to which it signifies a positive, wholesome, loving relationship to oneself, something which is by no means implied in the mere existence of a *self*.

particularity. As *one consciousness* it is particular, it is *this* consciousness[1] and not another; as *self*-consciousness it is general or universal, which is to say that it behaves toward other beings (human beings) as if they are instantiations of itself. It sees them as just so many embodiments of itself, as replicas of (its) self-consciousness. In its particular aspect it is (aware of itself as) unique, but in its universal aspect it identifies itself with every human being it encounters. On this level there is no difference between them and it. Above, I called this component of human consciousness—this component that defines *self*-consciousness—the generalized other. Its presence characterizes any particular human consciousness, both making the latter different from itself and giving it the ability to recognize itself—its self-consciousness, that is—in other beings. (A given human consciousness doesn't recognize its *full self* in another being, for it alone is its full, particular self. What it recognizes is only its self-consciousness. *This* is identical in all fully functioning humans. Cf. my college thesis.)

—I've just begun, but this is harder than I thought it would be. I'm having trouble conceptualizing the relation between esteem/respect/love and recognition. Fraser ignores the problem, as does every other author I've read, but it's a major one. I've been confused about it at least since the abortive book I wrote in grad school. I want somehow to explain positive value-judgments in terms of recognition (of recognizing a given person's sense of himself), but what's the best way to do that? And why is esteem/respect/love so important to people anyway? Why does it make us so happy? How can I tie all this stuff together, all this stuff about self-consciousness, recognition, respect, love, the other? After two centuries it's still an appalling mess. (That's a sure sign that something is wrong with the project itself.)

From another of Fraser's articles: "Central to my framework is a normative distinction between injustices of distribution and injustices of recognition. Far from derogating the latter as 'merely cultural', the point is to conceptualize two equally primary, serious, and real kinds of harm that any morally defensible social order must eradicate. To be misrecognized, in my view, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down on, or devalued in others' conscious attitudes or mental beliefs. It is rather to be denied the status of a *full partner* in social interaction and prevented from *participating as a peer* in social life—not as a consequence of a distributive inequity (such as failing to receive one's fair share of resources or 'primary goods'), but rather as a consequence of *institutionalized* patterns of interpretation and evaluation that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem. When such patterns of disrespect and disesteem are institutionalized, for example, in law, social welfare, medicine, and/or popular culture, they impede parity of participation, just as surely as do distributive inequities. The resulting harm is in either case all too real.

"In my conception, therefore, misrecognition is an institutionalized social relation, not a psychological state. [That's a good Marxist, anti-idealistic idea. But surely the worst thing about misrecognition, the main reason it's bad, is the psychological pain it causes.] In essence a status injury, it is analytically distinct from, and conceptually irreducible to, the injustice of maldistribution, although it *may* be accompanied by the latter. Whether misrecognition converts into maldistribution, and vice versa, depends on the nature of the social formation in question. In pre-capitalist, pre-state societies, for example, where status simply *is* the overarching principle of distribution and where the status order and the class hierarchy are therefore fused, misrecognition simply entails maldistribution. In capitalist societies, in contrast, where the institutionalization of specialized economic relations permits the relative uncoupling of economic distribution from structures of prestige, and where status and class can therefore diverge, misrecognition and maldistribution are not fully mutually convertible."

August 9, 10, 12

Amusing quotation from William Blackstone in the 1760s, which highlights the poor social position of women then: "Husband and wife are one, and the husband is that one."

[1] Or *this being*, in more Marxist, less idealistic language.

Met Wanni last night at a bar, then went to her place [etc.].

She's an easygoing intelligent girl and laughs easily. Wants me to teach her the piano, so I told her to buy a John Thompson book and we'd go to practice rooms every week.

Tonight Jiyun came to my apartment; we watched YouTube videos of classical concerts and then etc.

As the Parkinson's patient is roiled by contrary impulses whose power petrifies him, so some people can suffer from the collision of contradictory creative desires until they are immobilized, which is really a state of *frozen turbulence*.

Reading Callinicos's *Marxism and Philosophy* (1983).

A useful reminder: "Before Descartes, the mind had been identified with the intellect, conceived as being inseparable from its exercise in the study of the external world; sense-perceptions, pains, dreams, etc. were not regarded by Aristotle and the medieval schoolmen as mental phenomena, but considered to be attributes of the human body. Descartes overturned this tradition, expanding the concept of the mental to include sense-impressions as well as reasoning, and asserting we are directly acquainted only with the contents of our consciousness; knowledge of the physical world is parasitic upon that of our inner states…"

Still, as I wrote in my critical notes on *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, the mere fact that there's a difference between the ways in which two cultures conceptualize the mental and the bodily doesn't mean that there is no "truth of the matter," or that the mind-body problem is a pseudo-problem. I think it really amounts to a "private-public" problem, as I argued in the paper that Gualtiero Piccinini, *il peggior fabbro*, didn't understand. The intuition that there *is* a mind-body problem is the intuition of the division between private and public, and of the mysteriousness of this division. If that's true, though, then Descartes' conceptualization is better than Aristotle's, because sense-perceptions etc. are as private as thoughts and should therefore, like thoughts, be called mental. The body is public, the mental private.

August 16

[A former professor] sent me this email:

Thank you for your close reading [of her book manuscript], Chris, and for taking the time to mark the changes. I used almost all of your suggestions. You have a good ear.

However, I am a little concerned that you do not believe in the high intelligence of the average person! [I had made a comment to that effect in her manuscript.] How does this square with your political views?

I am now counting the days until I send off the book manuscript. I no longer feel possessive of it!

Do stay in touch.

With warm wishes.

So then I sent her this one:

It's intriguing, isn't it, how one can feel intensely attached to one's manuscript for months and months, so that it's virtually an extension of one's self, and yet crave, or relish, freedom from it once the writing is (nearly) finished. I've noticed this myself. I suddenly stop caring about this troublesome child of mine and never want to see it again, as if I've purged myself of a neurosis and can get on with my life.

Those two questions you asked deserve a serious answer. I have to admit, though, that I don't understand how it's possible anymore to believe in the high intelligence of the average person! Most of the great cultural figures, of course, have agreed that most people are none too enlightened or intelligent, and, indeed, many leftists in modern times have probably sympathized with Rousseau's dictum that people must be "forced to be free" because, contrary to J. S. Mill, they are *not* always adept at judging what their own best long-term interest is. But I don't have to invoke these thinkers; I have only to point to modern society, or to history itself, that apotheosis of cruelty and ignorance. In any case, evidence abounds of people's stupidity, conservatism, lack of compassion, bureaucratic-mindedness, inability or disinclination to engage in (self-)critical thought. Even most educated people rarely question the beliefs or attitudes, the modes of thinking, that come naturally to them (i.e., into which they have been socialized or indoctrinated). Most people seem to have clay minds: impressions are stamped into them at an early age and, as these clay minds harden over the years, the impressions become more-or-less permanent.

The typical conservative Christian is a good example.

I've never actually taken the time to set out a thoughtful "reconciliation" of my political beliefs with my disdain for the greater portion of the species - including (or, *especially*) the elite, the educated (i.e., indoctrinated) classes - so I might as well use this opportunity to do so. To ease my intellectual conscience. First of all, what does "intelligence" mean? Howard Gardner distinguished between…I forget…seven? eight? kinds of intelligence. I'm aware that most people have a higher "spatial" intelligence than I do and probably more kinesthetic intelligence (I can't dance). But normally the bare word "intelligence" is used to refer to interpersonal, intrapersonal, and logical skills [and verbal too]. Interpreting data on an intuitive or analytical level. The interpretations are successful or "intelligent" insofar as they show evidence of getting beneath appearances (which, of course, are often misleading and merely superficial), of sifting through everything that is shallow or obvious and grasping a deeper "essence" or "reality." This reality could be, for instance, another person's masked desires or thoughts, or one's own unconscious motivations, or the deep social-structural factors influencing people's behavior, or the logical form of an argument, or whatever. Intelligence, as I see it, consists in a fineness of perception, an ability (and desire) to "read between the lines," to think through appearances so as to understand their causes and significance.

By the way, I would say that the difference between irrationality and unintelligence - two concepts that are rather similar - is that the former signifies a certain willful perversity, perhaps an act of self-delusion, while the latter signifies a mere inability, a lack of talent, so to speak.

Surely the average person, then, is rather unintelligent (broadly speaking) on an inter- and intrapersonal level as well as on the level of pure reasoning (deductive and inductive), i.e. of (1) coming up with arguments to justify a given belief and (2) following arguments to their conclusions - as well as, incidentally, seeing beneath the appearances of, say, typical political discourse. (I guess this latter inability would fall under the heading of interpersonal, and maybe logical, unintelligence.) Just spend a few hours in the nearest Department of Motor Vehicles and you'll see what the average person is like. It isn't a pretty picture. (I was at the DMV today; by the time I left, my hands were quivering with rage at the inhuman bureaucratic-mindedness, the proto-fascist total adherence to "The rules! I didn't make them, don't blame me!", of the people behind the desk. These bureaucrats are unkind, I think, partly because they're relatively unintelligent [unempathetic].) The average educated person is not very intelligent either, and also tends to be a bit irrational (self-contradictory) in the values and beliefs he holds. The average highly educated, highly intelligent person, on the other hand, is ultimately a moral coward, a conformist, narrow-minded.

I should say, incidentally, in my defense, that despite all this I still love interacting with people […] and I never take my judgments wholly seriously (because I don't take myself seriously). I'm not a Timon of Athens, or a Schopenhauer.

Getting back to what I was saying…I want to point out, lastly - (mostly for my own benefit; I want to sort through my thoughts) - that the most intelligent person considers things from every perspective, every possible viewpoint, including his opponent's; he is open-minded and imaginative inasmuch as he can imagine the feelings, the arguments, of the "other"; and so a narrow-, conservative-minded person, however educated or skilled with words, is necessarily lacking a bit in intelligence, or at least in a specific type of it. Religious fanatics, then, or people filled with hate, or people who, like Hannah Arendt's Adolf Eichmann, simply "follow orders" without considering their human consequences, can be called unintelligent in that they lack the (interpersonal) imagination to place themselves in the other's position. (I like Oscar Wilde's dictum in *De Profundis* that hate results from a simple lack of imagination. I'd add that "evil" does too.) Most people, though, would probably be good Eichmannian bureaucrats, in that they're more concerned to fulfill their designated social roles than to ease the suffering of their fellow humans; therefore, most people, even many "highly intelligent" ones like Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, or any other dehumanized high-level bureaucrat, are unintelligent in this very specific, "abstractly-interpersonally unimaginative" sense.

I would add to these speculations one more, as an interesting aside: the vast majority of people are also musically unintelligent, as shown by their infantile musical tastes and their total incomprehension of traditional classical music. This in itself isn't interesting; what intrigues me is that there may be a connection between musical unintelligence (i.e., bad taste, inability to appreciate real beauty, lack of "fineness-of-perception," lack of a critical ear) and inter-, intrapersonal unintelligence, and perhaps even logical (mathematical, philosophical) unintelligence. The connection between musical and interpersonal intelligence might be explained by the inherently emotional, expressive, "dialogical" nature of music. (Oliver Sacks's book *Awakenings* is illuminating in this respect when it describes the effect of music on Parkinson's patients. It turns out that, for certain patients, listening to good music has the same liberating, "relaxing" effect as interacting with an affectionate person. The reactions to the two different kinds of stimuli are identical.)

I'll anticipate an objection here: I understand that "intelligence" is not a purely biological phenomenon, determined only by genes; nor ought unintelligent people to be *faulted* for their lack of intelligence, for people ultimately don't have much control over the kind of person they are. Their character depends on their biology and the environment they live in. Modern society surely manufactures interpersonal unintelligence - and unkindness, selfishness, conformism, etc. - on the basis of its atomized relations of production and distribution; in a different society, it's conceivable that many people would be more "intelligent" than they are in capitalism. So it isn't as though I think most humans are necessarily, by their very essence, stupid; I think that widespread stupidity is partly a symptom of a malfunctioning society. It's similar to the increasingly high incidence of autism, schizophrenia, depression, Asperger syndrome, etc.: these are all, to a large extent, products of an improperly functioning, an inhuman, society.

That's a good segue into my answer to your second question, how I reconcile my political views with my unidealistic attitude toward the masses. If it's true that modern society keeps many people in a state of unintelligence (of whatever kind), and if one would like to see this rectified, then obviously one must advocate a fundamental transformation in social structures. With a few other premises added, one is led to radical politics, to left-Marxist ideals like Chomsky's anarchism. As long as I believe that most people are not *genetically* condemned to selfish stupidity but have been manipulated into it by social relations, I'll advocate a society along the lines of Marx's communism. So, in a way, my belief in the current stupidity of people is not only compatible with, but actually commits me to, my political views.

As far as present society goes, though, I think that real democracy (the sort we don't have in America) is good because the masses, despite their indoctrination and their relative lack of intelligence, have basically good values, in a very general, abstract sense: the majority of Americans believe, for instance, that universal health care would be good, that we should leave Iraq, that improving education should be a priority, that

the government should fight poverty, that America shouldn't engage in imperialism, that money shouldn't infiltrate politics as much as it does. On some issues, such as gay marriage or gun control, it's possible that the majority has mistaken values; still, by and large democracy is the best way that's ever been discovered of organizing society, because economic and political elites can't be trusted to do what's right on their own. Quite the contrary. I have more faith in the instincts of the public than in the "intelligence" of the elite, a sector that is certainly at least as selfish - and, in some ways, as stupid - as others. When they aren't being actively deceived by propaganda, most people tend to have good values, unlike the elite. (They may not always, or even *often*, exemplify these values in their concrete behavior, but at least on an abstract level they're usually more on the side of compassion than greed.)

I don't know if I've answered your questions adequately, but this email has gotten long enough. Thanks for having had the patience to read it!

Take care.

There are inconsistencies in what I wrote, but they're superficial.

Intelligence and rationality (or 'reasonableness') are inseparable, involved in each other, but they're not quite the same. The Nazis were unreasonable, irrational (theoretically—inasmuch as they blamed Jews for the world's flaws—and, to an extent, practically, inasmuch as their actions and values contradicted other values they had); they were also unintelligent insofar as they believed in their ideology. But then…what's the difference between rationality and intelligence? There isn't much of one. The more intelligent you are, the more rational you are;[1] and the more rational you are, the more intelligent you are? Is that true? Intelligence is a kind of talent, a capability; rationality exists only in its activity. It doesn't make much sense to say, "This person could potentially be very reasonable"; it does make sense to say, "He is potentially very intelligent, if only he would apply himself." Reasonableness isn't really a *capacity* that can be *latent*; it exists only insofar as someone motivates himself according to logical considerations. …Or maybe a better way to clarify the distinction is to say that intelligence has more to do with the ability to *understand* things, to *grasp* reasons, which is a true *capacity*; rationality, on the other hand, comes into play only after the reason in question has been grasped. It can characterize an unintelligent, unimaginative person who logically acts on the basis of whatever reasons he understands. So, strictly speaking, it isn't true that the more rational you are, the more intelligent you are. A dull person can be quite rational/reasonable. Just think of Charles Bovary: he's dull but reasonable—he acts (if my memory doesn't deceive me) on the basis of the few logical considerations and insights that he is able to understand, or that occur to him.

In ordinary usage, of course, the words rational and intelligent get hopelessly muddled.

Can you say that Donald Rumsfeld is very intelligent but not very reasonable? Can an intelligent person be irrational? Surely yes. But doesn't intelligence consist in *understanding*, especially in understanding *reasons*? If so, how can a highly intelligent person be highly irrational? Maybe he lacks a very specific kind of intelligence. Maybe, in fact, irrationality *is* a specific kind of unintelligence. Gardner didn't classify it as such, but maybe it should be, in that it signifies a sort of lack, a lack of sensitivity to reason.

Can you say that Rumsfeld isn't "abstractly-interpersonally intelligent," a lack that makes it possible for him to send, without a pang of conscience, thousands of people to their deaths? Can you call this a kind of un*intelligence*?

Similarly, is it reasonable to call someone who's governed by selfish, greedy motives somehow *unintelligent*? Well, anyway, his mind is deficient in a certain capacity or mode of activity, which Wilde might call "imagination." Selfishness is made possible by a lack of empathy (interpersonal imagination); someone like Chomsky has empathy, this specific form of intelligence, in spades. On the other hand, maybe

[1] [Maybe, on second thought, that isn't true. Rationality isn't proportional to intelligence, nor is intelligence proportional to rationality. See below. (Of course, it's impossible to empirically *measure* intelligence and rationality in these precise ways, but to get clear on their meanings it's useful to think about them as if we could.)]

it's possible for someone to have a deep understanding of others' suffering and yet simply not to care, so that his motivations are selfish. It doesn't seem like you can use the 'objective' value-standard of (a lack of) *intelligence* as a way to criticize this person, but are forced to fall back on the relativistic assertion that he merely has different values than you, values that are 'unpleasant' in that they're not compassionate. Or maybe, on the other hand, it's nonsensical to say that someone has deep empathy for, or understanding of, human suffering but doesn't desire to alleviate it; maybe the desire is inseparable from the understanding, and the lack of the desire proves the lack of understanding (i.e., of abstract-interpersonal intelligence). Is this a good objective, quasi-scientific basis for criticizing such a person? "You're *deficient*! Your mind lacks one of the most *human* of capacities!"

In any case, his *behavior* is not the behavior of a complete human being. He is stunted in a "species-being" sort of way. He also, necessarily, isn't as happy as he could be. The greatest happiness comes from Schweitzer's "Reverence for Life."

Ascriptions of value not only guide scientific behavior (so that a "value-free" science is impossible), but they are implicit in the ways we process sensory data. How we literally *see* the world is saturated with value-judgments. For example, American women love to wear high-heels—because, incidentally, according to a popular fashion magazine, "Every woman knows how sexy she feels in high-heels!"—and so Americans 'see' women wearing high-heels as normal, attractive, good. This fashion-style fits into our unconscious picture of the world, our unconscious judging-framework of what is acceptable, normal, good; therefore our eyes don't focus on high-heels and we hardly even notice them usually. They're deemed ordinary, so our eyes pass over to other features like the woman's face. Someone from a different society would see high-heels as bizarre, to say the least—that is, 'bad'—and the way he *saw* American society would be influenced thereby. (Sometimes, if I concentrate, I'm momentarily able to get past my social conditioning and I *see* how silly high-heels really are. An instant later I slide back into my conditioned way of viewing the world. It's like a gestalt-switch.)

A couple years ago I mentioned theories of causality. Callinicos has a nice summary of the most plausible theory of causality I've encountered: "Recent philosophical discussion in the English-speaking world has seen what Pierre Jacob calls a 'revival of realism,' particularly as expressed by [the following thesis: "the unobservable entities that science posits to explain the observable behavior of things exist independently of thought."]. On this version of realism, the world is composed of particulars possessing intrinsic natures constituted by certain powers and tendencies; observable reality is the manifestation of these natures and their interactions. One source of this view involves a critique of Hume's analysis of causality. On this account, very widely accepted by analytical philosophers, the causal laws typical of the sciences merely state that some event *a* is constantly accompanied by another event *b*. Any notion of a necessary connection between *a* and *b*, of the sort that common sense normally associates with the statement that *a* caused *b*, is dissolved by this analysis. Causal laws assert the existence of certain regularities among the flux of events. The connection of this treatment of causality to an empiricism which denies existence to anything but the observable should be obvious. It is vulnerable to the Humean problem of induction: how can a generalization which asserts that *a* will always be accompanied by *b* be validly inferred from a necessarily finite number of observations of *a* followed by *b*? The critics of this approach, notably Rom Harré and Roy Bhaskar, argue that such difficulties vanish once we see that such constant conjunctions are the manifestation of the intrinsic natures of powerful particulars. The task of science is to establish what these natures are. Once some well-corroborated hypothesis about the nature of a particular of kind X predicts that in given conditions such a particular will bring about the conjunction *a*,*b*, then *b* must follow *a* in these circumstances *of necessity*. If, in the appropriate conditions, *a* is not accompanied by *b*, then we must suppose either that the circumstances have been misdescribed or that the hypothesis that attributes the power to bring about *a*,*b* to particulars of kind X is false. But, provided that the hypothesis is not falsified, then we may say that *a* and *b* are intrinsically connected, bound together by a natural necessity which flows from the essential structure of particulars of the kind in question."

Now, tell me how it's possible not to agree with this realist theory. How is it possible to believe the Humean theory? It's so obviously wrong, I don't understand it.

August 17

No pain but women.— There are two options in my life: I can go out to society where I am confronted by a lack of access to the *beautiful other*, or I can stay in my room in the absence of the *beautiful other*. The latter option is the less painful of the two; my room is a haven from the *inaccessible beauty of the other*.

God, how can I meet these angels I see on the subway and the buses?! Curse that zone of unfriendliness, that twilight zone! That hard mindset of *I'm going somewhere and I won't talk to anyone, I'm not here to be friendly*. Those ears plugged into iPods, those hard stares fixed straight ahead to not make eye-contact with anyone. It's so hard to penetrate that force-field of unfriendliness!

[....]

People condemn men for thinking of women as sex-objects. But that isn't entirely fair. Do they actually think individual men are going to rise above their society by a sheer effort of will and be as pure-minded and wise as a child? If the society produces sex-objects, then people are going to see these sex-objects as what they are: sex-objects. The best you can ask of us men is that we *also* see them as human beings; to see them *only* as human beings is virtually impossible, since the individual is a product of his society. By the way, it is, or can be, a terrible contradiction in a man's mind to see women as both humans and sex-objects, and women are by no means the only victims of the social order.

Reading the Penguin Classics anthology of Hannah Arendt's writings.

Maybe it's possible to think of intelligence as signifying *individuality, creativity*. Consider this passage from the introduction to the anthology I'm reading: "[Arendt argues that] instead of the value placed on action and initiative, one observes [in modern culture] the mentality of the jobholder who identifies himself above all with the function he performs in the occupational structure. Instead of the equality conferred by the [idealized] public sphere, one witnesses the conformity of mass taste. Instead of the quest for distinction, one sees the predictability of imitative behavior." It seems intuitively plausible to think of these unpleasant modern phenomena, which manifest a lack of individuality and creativity, as manifestations also of unintelligence. An intelligent person is a free-thinking *individual* first and foremost; this can't really be said of an unintelligent person, who doesn't reflect much and usually does what is expected of him, thereby failing to assert himself in any real sense.

Notes on etymology, from Schopenhauer and Arendt: (1) the word 'sensible' means, among other things, "capable of receiving sensory impressions," a definition that leads to "receptive to external influences" (cf. 'sensitive'), which leads to "having, containing, or indicative of good sense or reason" (cf. 'rational,' 'reasonable,' 'sensible'). Schopenhauer notes that the connection between *sensation* and *intelligence* revealed by this etymology is significant. A stupid person, he says, doesn't have discriminating senses, so that, for example, loud noises don't bother him. My phrase "fineness of perception" is thus even more apt than I originally thought.

(2) When introducing her distinction between labor and work, Arendt notes that "every European language, ancient or modern, contains two etymologically unrelated words for what we have come to think of as the same activity: Thus, the Greek distinguished between *ponein* and *ergazesthai*, the Latin between *laborare* and *facere* or *fabricari*, the French between *travailler* and *ouvrer*, the German between *arbeiten* and *werken*. In all these cases, the equivalents for labor have an unequivocal connotation of bodily experiences, of toil and trouble, and in most cases they are significantly also used for the pangs of birth." Profound observations.

(3) "…something is of interest to people," Arendt writes, "[insofar as] it *inter-est*, it is between them." See how *wise* language is? *Inter-est*. Philosophy is *inter-est*ing, it *inter-ests* me.

Think of the origin of 'logic.' *Logos: Log-ic*, the adjectival form of 'Logos.' Logic, therefore—and mathematics!—is the key to the Logos, the structure of reality. (Continental thinkers might disagree, judging by their writings.)

Arendt's distinction between labor, work and action is interesting, but I don't think it's very useful or theoretically fruitful. It doesn't help that Arendt was anything but a precise thinker.

"A decisive flaw in Eichmann's character was his almost total inability ever to look at anything from the other fellow's point of view…" That's exactly what I said in my email. He had a lack of imagination. That's what it usually comes down to. "The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. From the viewpoint of our legal institutions and of our moral standards of judgments, this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together, for it implied that this new type of criminal, who is in actual fact *hostis generis humani*, commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that he is doing wrong." Atomization, commodification, reification, bureaucracy—these are the evils that have to be rooted out.

August 20

Encourage. En-courage. "I en-couraged him: I instilled courage into him."

Man never learns except through alienation. Through loss, he rises; and he doesn't rise except through loss. "Historically," writes Arendt in "What is Freedom?", "men first discovered the will when they experienced its impotence and not its power, when they said with Paul: 'For to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.'" The Greeks never became aware of the will as a distinct faculty, separate from the intellect and so forth, because they didn't experience impotence and alienation in the way that, e.g., the early Christians did. The more history progresses the more man alienates himself from himself, and thus the more he learns about himself. (Alienation = *objectification* under constrained, unnatural, fragmented conditions. *"Unnatural" objectification* is the key. The further we separate ourselves from nature, the more we learn about ourselves and nature.)

The free man doesn't recognize or appreciate freedom, the healthy man doesn't truly *know* health. Progress lies in the heart of the enslaved and the sick. (Think of Nietzsche, sick Nietzsche, and Freud, and Marx. And, of course, Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic.)

The feelings aroused by the sight of a woman crying are similar to those aroused by the sight of a crying child. It is a piteous but natural thing. The sight of a man crying, on the other hand, is bizarre, less natural, less piteous but more 'weighty,' '*pathetique*.'

Women and children embody the aesthetic virtues as opposed to the moral ones. Innocence, empathy, simple trust, sensitivity to new experiences, an affinity for (and with) beauty, a delight in simple pleasures, an ability to lose themselves in the moment, in laughter, in *love*. Men, on the other hand, are expected to do what is *right*, to follow their *duty*, to guide their lives according to *reason* and *truth*. This is morality, morality in its strictest, fullest, Kantian sense; the other path is *humanity*, instinctual and beautiful, *caring*. The ancient dichotomy between these two principles still holds true. Doubtless there are exceptions—most people are both masculine and feminine—and these principles are biologically grounded only in the flimsiest ways, but their vaguely 'human-natural' validity is shown by the fact of nearly every culture's implicit assent to them as well as the potency of our own intuitions in these matters. As history has progressed and the species has objectified its latent potentialities in ever-diversifying ways, we have deepened our knowledge of the duality, to the point, indeed, of exaggerating its importance. It'll take centuries more to reach a truly nuanced understanding of the differences between the sexes.

From Arendt's article quoted above: "[It is my contention] that the reason for the obscurity [of the philosophical question of freedom] is that the phenomenon of freedom does not appear in the realm of thought at all, that neither freedom nor its opposite is experienced in the dialogue between me and myself in the course of which the great philosophic and metaphysical questions arise, and that the philosophical tradition has distorted, instead of clarifying, the very idea of freedom such as it is given in human experience

by transposing it from its original field, the realm of politics and human affairs in general, to an inward domain, the will, where it would be open to self-inspection." Months ago, speculations led me to the first part of that thesis, but I was careful to note that what we experience in consciousness is at least *closer* to "freedom" than to its opposite. "As a first, preliminary justification of this approach, it may be pointed out that historically the problem of freedom has been the last of the time-honored great metaphysical questions—such as being, nothingness, the soul, nature, time, eternity, etc.—to become a topic of philosophic inquiry at all. There is no preoccupation with freedom in the whole history of great philosophy from the pre-Socratics up to Plotinus, the last ancient philosopher. And when freedom made its appearance in our philosophical tradition, it was the experience of religious conversion—of Paul first and then Augustine—which gave rise to it.

"…The freedom which we take for granted in all political theory…is the very opposite of 'inner freedom,' the inward space into which men may escape from external coercion and *feel* free. This inner feeling remains without outer manifestations and hence is by definition politically irrelevant. Whatever its legitimacy may be…it is historically a late phenomenon, and it was originally the result of an estrangement from the world in which worldly experiences were transformed into experiences within one's own self." Profound thought. "The experiences of inner freedom are derivative in that they always presuppose a retreat from the world, where freedom was denied, into an inwardness to which no other has access…"

Again, man's estrangement from the world led to an important insight into himself, but, as usual, he went too far in the direction of this insight. Especially with Sartre, who postulated absolute freedom. (Significantly, this postulate of absolute freedom took place in a profoundly alienated society, where the individual felt himself worthless. He was absolutely unfree in the social world—a stranger, *l'étranger*—but *within himself* he was absolutely free. The more inward, introspective, isolated your being is, the freer you think you are. See the entries from my first and second years in college. Also R. D. Laing.)

"The fact that a World War was needed to get rid of Hitler is shameful precisely because it is also comic."

I'm surprised that Arendt got away with her extremely unacademic way of writing. Few footnotes; frequent unsubstantiated historical assertions; apparently no overarching arguments connecting chapters together but rather a long stream of not-wholly-connected reflections on historical developments. A scholar who wrote like this now would have trouble getting published.

August 22

Arendt emphasizes the extirpation of individuality and spontaneity in the concentration camp. Human nature was literally refashioned in concentration camps; they were, and are, the only institution that can succeed in eradicating every vestige of human spontaneity and freedom. The camps "serve the ghastly experiment of eliminating, under scientifically controlled conditions, spontaneity itself as an expression of human behavior and of transforming the human personality into a mere thing, into something that even animals are not; for Pavlov's dog, which, as we know, was trained to eat not when it was hungry but when a bell rang, was a perverted animal." The camps are the "guiding social ideal of total domination. …Totalitarian domination stands or falls with the existence of these concentration and extermination camps; for, unlikely as it may sound, these camps are the true central institution of totalitarian organizational power."

The victims were turned into mere Pavlovian bundles of reactions and appetites, predictable reactions and animal appetites (for food and water). "Nothing then remains but ghastly marionettes with human faces, which all react with perfect reliability even when going to their own death, and which do nothing but react. This is the real triumph of the system: 'The triumph of the SS demands that the tortured victim allow himself to be led to the noose without protesting, that he renounce and abandon himself to the point of ceasing to affirm his identity. And it is not for nothing. It is not gratuitously, out of sheer sadism, that the SS men desire his defeat. They know that the system which succeeds in destroying its victim before

he mounts the scaffold…is incomparably the best for keeping a whole people in slavery. In submission. Nothing is more terrible than this procession of human beings going like dummies to their deaths…'"

"The society of the dying established in the camps is the only form of society in which it is possible to dominate man entirely… Pavlov's dog, the human specimen reduced to the most elementary reactions, the bundle of reactions that can always be liquidated and replaced by other bundles of reactions that behave in exactly the same way, is the model 'citizen' of a totalitarian state; and such a citizen can be produced only imperfectly outside of the camps.

"The uselessness of the camps, their cynically admitted anti-utility, is only apparent. In reality they are more essential to the preservation of the regime's power than any of its other institutions. Without concentration camps, without the undefined fear they inspire and the very well-defined training they offer in totalitarian domination, which can nowhere else be fully tested with all of its most radical possibilities, a totalitarian state can neither inspire its nuclear troops with fanaticism nor maintain a whole people in complete apathy. The dominating and the dominated would only too quickly sink back into the 'old bourgeois routine'; after early 'excesses,' they would succumb to everyday life with its human laws…

"It is in the very nature of totalitarian regimes to demand unlimited power. Such power can only be secured if literally all men, without a single exception, are reliably dominated in every aspect of their lives." Even spontaneously given support is dangerous, as dangerous as open hostility, because it's free and is therefore an obstacle to total domination. Conviction and opinion of any sort are ridiculous and dangerous under totalitarian conditions because there is no need for them, or of human help of any kind. "Men insofar as they are more than animal reaction and fulfillment of functions are entirely superfluous to totalitarian regimes. Totalitarianism strives not toward despotic rule over men, but toward a system in which men are superfluous. Total power can be achieved and safeguarded only in a world of conditioned reflexes, of marionettes without the slightest trace of spontaneity. Precisely because man's resources are so great, he can be fully dominated only when he becomes a specimen of the animal-species man."

"As long as all men have not been made superfluous—and this has been accomplished only in concentration camps—the ideal of totalitarian domination has not been achieved. Totalitarian states strive constantly…to establish the superfluity of man—by the arbitrary selection of various groups for concentration camps, by constant purges of the ruling apparatus, by mass liquidations." Such a state represents merely the intrinsic logic of bureaucracy taken to its ultimate, absurd conclusion. Power for the sake of power, following orders for the sake of following orders, treating every person as a cog that can easily be replaced. A cog in the machine, that is totalitarianism. And that is bureaucracy.

The only hope for the species is in decentralization. (It'd be nice, too, if we burned all the secrets of nuclear technology. For while it exists, the half-destruction of the species is only a matter of time.)

We literally could be experiencing, right now, the last few centuries of the human race. Maybe in two hundred years everything will be over. Wow. That blows the mind. All the pointless suffering of history… What a tragedy!

It doesn't reflect well on the masses that what Goering said of them is still true: "Naturally, the common people don't want war; neither in Russia nor in England nor in America, nor for that matter in Germany. That is understood. But, after all, it is the *leaders* of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy or a fascist dictatorship or a Parliament or a Communist dictatorship. …Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country." The Bush administration took its playbook straight from Goering.

Incidentally, these past seven years have been the closest America will ever come to being a totalitarian state. Think of Guantanamo and the Patriot Act and the constant fear-mongering and the widespread surveillance, and the expansion of bureaucracies, and the disregard for the population's well-being, and the common accusation of treason against political opponents, and the circumventing of due process and constitutional rights, and the propagating of enormous, appealing lies ("In order for a lie to be successful," said Hitler, "it has to be enormous.") to the point at which an entire alternate reality is

constructed for the sake of securing the population's submission—the people are explicitly treated as something that has to be tamed and manipulated, a potential enemy, an obstacle, a superfluity—and of course the intense efforts to program the populace to think in terms of good and evil, in apocalyptic terms, in ideological terms that have nothing to do with democracy or liberalism. A country steeped in liberal democracy can't get much closer to fascism than it has under Cheney.

August 23

In "What is Authority?", Arendt makes the initially surprising argument that "authority has vanished from the modern world." What she means is that traditional authority has broken down, that people no longer respect authority just because it is authoritative. Even in the family, it has broken down. The parents' authority is challenged by the children, the state, and pop culture.

She says the crisis is political in origin and nature: "The rise of political movements intent upon replacing the party system, and the development of a new totalitarian form of government, took place against the background of a more or less general, more or less dramatic breakdown of all traditional authorities. …Totalitarianism was best fitted to take advantage of a general political and social atmosphere in which the party system had lost its prestige and the government's authority was no longer recognized."

Authority, she says, is not some form of power or violence. (Surely it is a form of power!) "Authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority itself has failed. It's also incompatible with persuasion, which presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation. Where arguments are used, authority is left in abeyance. Against the egalitarian order of persuasion stands the authoritarian order, which is always hierarchical."

"Of tradition, religion, and authority, the latter has proved to be the most stable element. [But it too has finally deteriorated.]"

Her understanding of "authority," needless to say, is idiosyncratic. "All those who call modern dictatorships 'authoritarian,' or mistake totalitarianism for an authoritarian structure, have implicitly equated violence with authority…"

"I propose," she says, "to raise the following questions: What were the political experiences that corresponded to the concept of authority and from which it sprang? What is the nature of a public-political world constituted by authority? Is it true that the Platonic-Aristotelian statement that every well-ordered community is constituted of those who rule and those who are ruled was always valid prior to the modern age? Or, to put it differently, what kind of world came to an end after the modern age not only challenged one or another form of authority in different spheres of life but caused the whole concept of authority to lose its validity altogether?"

Authority exists insofar as the ruler derives his legitimacy from a principle transcending human society. This seems to be Arendt's basic definition of authority (in her peculiar sense of the word). Human affairs must be dominated by something outside their own realm, something like God or Plato's idea of the Good. The philosopher-king is an *authority* because he derives his legitimacy from possessing insight into the true nature of being. In the Roman Republic, the mythological *past*, the original *foundation*, was what conferred upon the Senate its authority. Later on in Europe, the divine right of kings is what gave them their authority.

In Plato, "the rule of the philosopher-king, that is, the domination of human affairs by something outside its own realm, is justified not only by an absolute priority of seeing over doing [namely, *seeing* the truth, the form of the Good], of contemplation over speaking and acting, but also by the assumption that what makes men human is the urge to *see* [truth, or the nature of being]. Hence, the interest of the philosopher and the interest of man *qua* man coincide; both demand that human affairs, the results of speech and action, must not acquire a dignity of their own but be subjected to the domination of something outside their realm." That's a very suggestive point. Her discussions of Plato and Aristotle are excellent.

"Authority implies an obedience in which men retain their freedom." This is what Plato was searching for in his political dialogues. "Plato hoped to have found such an obedience when, in his old age,

he bestowed upon the laws that quality which would make them undisputable rulers over the whole public realm." It reminds me of Kant: we are free insofar as we give ourselves laws.

(The second movement of Mozart's flute and harp concerto.)

The idea that "each body politic is composed of those who rule and those who are ruled" (Aristotle) is not quite as self-evident as it might appear. It was bequeathed to the Western tradition by Plato and Aristotle, who were at odds with the conventional wisdom of their day. Most people thought the polis was necessarily a democracy, a community of equals (excluding women and slaves); Plato wanted to introduce a concept of *authority*, a dichotomy between rulers and ruled. He hoped, in other words, to 'save the polis from itself,' by discarding democracy without, somehow, discarding freedom. (He wasn't really successful.) Aristotle's political theory suffered from a similar tension.

In Greek political life there was no concept of "authority"! That's very different from most pre-modern societies, including Rome.

The Romans placed enormous importance on the founding of Rome. The founders were legendary, mythical figures, and their authority transferred to the Senate, with the result that political and religious activity were considered almost identical. Religion was largely a way of worshiping past heroes. Indeed, the word 'religion' arguably derives from *religare*, or *re-ligare*: "to be tied back, obligated, to the enormous, almost superhuman and hence always legendary effort to lay the foundations, to build the cornerstone, to found for eternity. To be religious meant [for the Romans] to be tied to the past." And it still means that! Ha!

Many cultures have made legendary heroes out of their founders. Ancient and modern China, America, Latin American countries, Rome, old Japan, Russia, ancient Israel, all religions, etc. That's interesting. (Does it reveal something about the nature of the human mind? E.g., a fascination with origins?) And insofar as anything has "authority" anymore, its authority comes from its antiquity. The Constitution is authoritative because it's associated with the founding of the country; the founding fathers are authoritative because they were the founding fathers; the Supreme Court gets its power from its authority, which comes from its central importance in the Constitution.

There are too many freaks in the world. My new housemate (in his late thirties) makes Douglas look like the epitome of sanity. It's the paranoia, that's what it is: American society mass-produces paranoia. Douglas and Lauren are paranoid, they insist on keeping all the doors locked even when they're home. Car-alarms everywhere, security systems for houses, locked doors in every house, universal suspicion. The new guy, who replaced Lauren, is ten times as bad as her. You wouldn't think it to look at him, though. He doesn't look anything like a psycho.

Anyway, what happened is that I lost my key a week ago, so I asked the two housemates to leave a door unlocked most of the time until I got another key. One night I came home and all the doors were locked. I rang the doorbell etc., but no one answered. Waited outside for 45 minutes, hoping Douglas would come home. He didn't. Then I walked around the side of the house and saw a light on in the new guy's room. I threw pebbles at his window and shouted up at him, saying it was his roommate and I was locked out, but a few minutes later his light turned off. "What the fuck??" Kept throwing pebbles, then his light turned on again and then off, etc. So I rang the doorbell again. No answer. Rang it aggressively, repeatedly. No answer. Went to the back door, tried to kick it open, but it was too sturdy. Yelled at him again, threw more pebbles… Nothing. […]

Never forget that there's a kernel of truth in Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach: the individual is, from one perspective, an ensemble of social relations. He is an active, living collection of social relations; his personality reflects, or refracts, his environment. You can look at the typical personalities and 'consciousnesses' of a society and infer the nature of its social relations. (You can *in principle*, at least. In practice it isn't so easy.)

Consider a paranoiac or a schizophrenic or a narcissist or a misogynist or a revolutionist or whatever. Their behavior and consciousness reveal a lot about their society.

August 24 etc.

Compassion means *com-passion*, which means *with-suffer*. The compassionate person literally suffers with the sufferer. Pity, on the other hand, comes from *piety*. –Conventional wisdom is right, then, that compassion is nobler, more humane, than pity.

It seems to be well-nigh inherent in the human condition that people seek meaning in something *transcendent*. History and society don't derive their meaning, their justification and value, from themselves but from something outside them, be it God, immortality of some sort (e.g., fame), the lifetimes-long journey toward nirvana, etc. That is, mere living isn't good enough in itself; the human mind reaches beyond this mundane world to draw comfort from another.[1] The generalized other is essential to this phenomenon, in many cases *directly*, i.e. by virtue of its projections in "God" or "mankind" or "posterity." But there is also the sheer desire for *rest* rather than *recognition*, e.g. in a state of nirvana or heaven. (Heaven is both an escape from pain and a state of perfect recognition, i.e. an eternal confirmation of one's unique value; nirvana is simply an escape from pain. The desire for recognition has little or nothing to do with it.)

After World War I, World War II, the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, Vietnam, the Khmer Rouge, the Rwandan genocide, and countless other events, it is surely immoral to say that God exists. It shows an astounding lack of respect for the millions of victims, and an astounding lack of respect for mankind's suffering.

In a section of her book *On Revolution*, Arendt asks why the American Revolution succeeded while the French—and every revolution after it—failed. Her answer is that the Americans didn't have to deal with the misery and want of millions of people. (She also notes that the American revolution was merely political, that it didn't usher in the *novus ordo saeclorum*.) The French revolution and others after it couldn't be only political because the masses were starving, they wanted food and a degree of social equality. Robespierre, Saint-Just and others became concerned not with mere liberty, which could exist only for the privileged few, but with *happiness*, the happiness of the many. "After the downfall of the Gironde, it was no longer freedom but happiness that became the 'new idea in Europe'." In other words, *compassion* was *l'ordre du jour*; compassion was held to be the greatest virtue, and if you were suspected of not having it you were *beheaded*—"in the name of the people!" But the Jacobins' social project was unrealizable. It was too ambitious.

In the meantime, though, Robespierre justified his activities through Rousseau's notion of the general will. I'll quote Arendt's discussion because it's enlightening. "Rousseau took his metaphor of a general will seriously and literally enough to conceive of the nation as a body driven by one will, like an individual, which also can change direction at any time without losing its identity... [But what can possibly bind the many into one? To answer that question,] Rousseau took his cue from the common experience that two conflicting interests will bind themselves together when they are confronted by a third that equally opposes them both. Politically speaking, he presupposed the existence and relied upon the unifying power of the common national enemy. Only in the presence of the enemy can such a thing as *la nation une et indivisible*, the ideal of French and of all other nationalism, come to pass. Hence, national unity can assert itself only in foreign affairs, under circumstances of, at least, potential hostility. This conclusion has been the seldom admitted stock-in-trade of national politics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries [yes! yes! Bush and Al Qaeda, Truman and the USSR, Kennedy and Cuba, etc.]; it is so obviously a consequence of the general-will theory that Saint-Just was already quite familiar with it… Rousseau himself, however, went one step further. He wished to discover a unifying principle within the nation itself that would be valid for domestic politics as well. Thus, his problem was where to detect a common enemy outside the range of foreign affairs, and his solution was that such an enemy existed within the breast of each citizen, namely, in his particular will and interest; the point of the matter was that this hidden, particular enemy could rise

[1] [No, no, no. You know that's wrong, Chris. True only in certain societies for the last several thousand years. See below.]

to the rank of a common enemy—unifying the nation from within—if one only added up all particular wills and interests. The common enemy is the sum total of the particular interests of all citizens. '"The agreement of two particular interests,"' says Rousseau [quoting some guy], '"is formed by opposition to a third." [This guy] might have added that the *agreement of all interests is formed by opposition to that of each*…' Rousseau equates will and interest, you see. "If only each particular man rises against himself in his particularity, he will be able to arouse in himself his own antagonist, the general will, and thus he will become a true citizen of the national body politic. Every person must remain in constant rebellion against himself." This idea would be important for the revolutionary tradition. "The theory of terror from Robespierre to Lenin and Stalin presupposes that the interest of the whole must automatically, and indeed permanently, be hostile to the particular interest of the citizen." The theory of the general will (which is incoherent to begin with) thus ends up justifying Stalinism.

Anyway, for Robespierre it was obvious that the only force that could unite the different classes was the compassion of the privileged for those who were suffering. That was the general will, so to speak. "The goodness of man in a state of nature had become axiomatic for Rousseau because he found compassion to be the most natural human reaction to the suffering of others, and therefore the very foundation of all authentic 'natural' human interaction." Rousseau and Robespierre knew from inner experience that there's a conflict between reason and the passions, and also that there's an "inner dialogue of thought in which man converses with himself. And since they identified thought with reason, they concluded that reason interfered with passion and compassion alike, that it 'turns man's mind back upon itself, and divides him from everything that could disturb or afflict him.' Reason makes man selfish; it prevents nature 'from identifying itself with the unfortunate sufferer." The reason Rousseau captured the minds of the revolutionists was that he emphasized suffering and compassion in a society teeming with sufferers and barren of compassion. What counted during the Revolution was "selflessness, the capacity to lose oneself in the sufferings of others, and what appeared most odious and even most dangerous was selfishness rather than wickedness… Where passion, the capacity for suffering, and compassion, the capacity for suffering with others, ended, vice began. Selfishness was a kind of 'natural' depravity."

In her analysis of Dostoyevsky's *Grand Inquisitor*, she remarks insightfully that "The sin of the Grand Inquisitor was that he, like Robespierre, was 'attracted toward *les hommes faibles*,' not only because such attraction was indistinguishable from lust for power, but also because he had depersonalized the sufferers, lumped them together into an aggregate—the people *toujours malheureux*, the suffering masses, etc. To Dostoyevsky, the sign of Jesus's divinity was his ability to have compassion with all men in their singularity, that is, without lumping them together into some such entity as one suffering mankind." Yes, reification, depersonalization, is really the origin of "evil," and to the extent that even "good" people reify others they're not far removed from "bad" people. So, in a way, the hero of Camus's *The Fall* was right: in modern society everyone is guilty, because everyone necessarily reifies "man." Goodness is compassion, and compassion is concrete, not abstract. Pity, says Arendt, is abstract.

Montesquieu: Even virtue must have its limits. Saint-Just: Nothing resembles virtue so much as a great crime.

I'm reading *Max Weber and the Sociology of Culture*, by Ralph Schroeder. "Weber defines culture as follows: 'Culture is the endowment of a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of events in the world with meaning and significance from the standpoint of human beings.'" He conceptualizes the pattern whereby culture shapes social life as follows: '"Not ideas, but material and ideal interests directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the 'world-images' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest.'" Yeaahhhh… Whatever. Anyway, Weber's ontology of the social world is that beliefs and values are just as "real" as material forces. They're somehow independent (though not entirely) of the rest of the social world. "Somehow the non-ideational world can become transformed by the ideational one and vice versa. Weber is, in short, a 'social-ontological dualist'." This view, according to Schroeder, is incompatible with positivism, "which stipulates that there is only one—so to speak continuous—social reality." And of course it's opposed, at least in spirit, to the positions of Marx and Durkheim.

How are worldviews, or culture, and social life interrelated? There are three ways: the dynamic of charisma and routinization, the differentiation between the spheres of life, and the inner logic of world-views. These are arguably the essential constituents of Weber's account of cultural change. "The concept of charisma is used mainly to explain the origin of new systems of ideas." Then there is a systematization of the new belief-system so that it constitutes a coherent whole, and subsequently an accommodation of the system to the interests and predispositions of various strata of believers. The opposition between charisma and routinization is so important for Weber that one interpreter considers it to be the essential origin of all social change. Another says that "the concept of charisma is the core of Weber's world-view and appraisal of the historical process." Holy crap. As for "spheres of life," there are several: political, economic, religious, and intellectual. The religious and intellectual are the main sites of cultural change. "These spheres can either overlap, in which case beliefs in one sphere tend to reinforce those in another, or they may become differentiated and come into conflict with each other. Wherever the spheres of life become more differentiated, there is a greater potential for the impact of ideas. Conversely, an overlap between them typically means that ideas remain enmeshed within the social fabric. The differentiation between the spheres of life is thus an important indication of how much scope there is for cultural change." Those hypotheses are actually quite suggestive.

"The inner logic in the development of world-views is the result of a tension between world-views—which typically postulate that there is an overall meaning of the world—and the way in which reality encroaches upon this meaning." In other words, it results from the conflict between these views and…reality. Hehe. Weber distinguishes between three world-historical stages: magic, religion, and science. (They overlap a little.) "What sets magic apart from religion is that in magic, extraordinary powers are believed to reside within tangible embodiments… Also, magical powers are not unified within a single, all-embracing realm of the divine… The impact of magical forces on social life is one of promoting stability, or of reinforcing existing social relations by endowing them with sacred authority." "The world-religions, by contrast, reorient the believer's inner life in accordance with other-worldly or transcendent goals." They have the power to reshape social relations because this inner reorientation can change the person's outward behavior. Regarding the stage of science, Weber thought, of course, that it is characterized by a collective loss of meaning, a threatening of the norms that were internalized during the stage of religion, etc. His ethical ideal in this context is "the individual as an autonomous chooser of values" that he (the individual) uses to orient himself and maintain self-consistency amidst the various demands of a routinized, rationalized world.

"How does cultural change take place? The pattern that recurs throughout history is the struggle between charisma and routinization. The paradigm for this struggle can be found in Weber's *Ancient Judaism*, where the revolutionizing fervor of the prophets is eventually transformed into rabbinical legalism." I have to admit that a lot of Weber's ideas are extremely powerful. A peculiar one, though, is that "the predispositions of similarly located strata are, contrary to Marx, thought to be the same in all places and at all times. [Marx, of course, thought that the interests, or the "predispositions" in Weberian terminology, are dependent upon the mode of production.]" For example, peasants almost always adopt a magical world-view, the main effect of which is traditionalism.

An example of conflict between different "spheres of life" is the one that develops between the brotherly ethic of Christianity and the unbrotherliness of capitalism. "The religious demand to share material goods with fellow-believers can no longer be accommodated in the economic sphere of modern capitalism with its characteristic impersonality, its 'culture' of a 'vocational workaday life' and orientation towards profit-seeking." This conflict supposedly promotes social change. But if you want to explain why the Christian ethic inevitably tends to lose the battle, you have to turn to Marx. Weber can't account for it, unless he accepts central Marxian premises. Similarly, I'm doubtful that Weber can fully explain—without invoking Marxian patterns of explanation—why, at the stage of magic, "there is little differentiation between the spheres, so that for the most part, political, economic, and religious factors are closely linked," or why it was only with Protestantism that the religious sphere finally became completely divorced from the political and economic spheres.

"What accounts for the cultural distinctiveness of modern life?" That's Weber's big question. To answer it we have to see what he says about premodern and non-Western societies. First, magic. One of his ideas is like one of mine (from a long time ago): "magic and science share a purposive, practical orientation which sets them apart from the other-worldly aims of religion." That seems partly true. Religion is largely a response to alienation, to the need to give the world meaning etc., while magic/animism and science exist more for the purpose of gaining control over the external environment, obtaining worldly goods and security. "Magic has a rational aim which is pursued by irrational means, whereas religion is characterized by an increasingly irrational aim and increasingly rational means to salvation." The goals of magic (viz., external advantages like securing protection from evil) are rational in the instrumental, means-end sense. "'Magical behavior or thinking must not be set apart from the range of everyday purposive conduct, particularly since even the ends of religious or magical actions are predominantly economic." World-religions, by contrast, become increasingly oriented toward the otherworldly, un-"practical" or "instrumentally rational" end of salvation. The *means* used by magic, on the other hand, are irrational from the standpoint of modern views of nature because of their mistaken attributions of causality. Religious means to salvation are rational insofar as they consist of small everyday efforts that are not supra-human or extra-ordinary. The original source of charisma, by the way, is the belief that "magical power is embodied in a person who can bring about supernatural events by virtue of an innate capacity." Charisma is originally magical. It's like animism, "the belief that spirits, souls or demons inhere within certain tangible objects and thereby give them their efficacy." Suggestive observations. Polytheism seems to be an extension, a systematization, of magic. Why does magic have a stabilizing effect on social life? For many reasons. One is its predominantly instrumental nature, which causes it to "produce an increasingly extensive web of irrational powers and obligations which lend stability to social life." Anyway, I should read *Economy and Society*. Incidentally, it's significant that magic has been by far the most widespread belief-system throughout history.

With world-religions, however, the world must have a meaning outside of what is empirically given. There must be *transcendence* of some sort. This means that religion, unlike magic, has the possibility of tension or conflict (between two realms of reality) built into it, and so it can be a revolutionary force. Confucianism doesn't really qualify as a religion according to this criterion, and others; it has a strong affinity to magic, which causes it to impede social change. Moreover, "the differentiation between spheres of life [which promotes social change, as with the beginnings of Protestantism] is limited because no doctrine of salvation—and hence no purely religious aim—emerged in Confucianism. What did take place was a 'rational systematization' of magic." Politics and the religious sphere were united. Anyhow, I won't summarize the whole analysis of China's religions; I'll have to read Weber's original texts. I'll just say that he places a lot of emphasis on the individual's "inner orientation," "inward convictions," in explaining social change. Weber was definitely an idealist. ("The Protestant ethic produces 'inward compulsion'; the Confucian makes external formal demands" which manifest themselves in rituals, formalism, routinization.)

Ancient Judaism "'was free of magic and all forms of irrational quest for salvation.' It was the starting-point for the process of 'disenchantment' (the literal translation of the German term *Entzauberung* is 'de-magicification'), which distinguishes Occidental civilization from all others… Several elements of Judaism are antithetical to magic: the first is universalism. Yahweh was not a local or a functional god. Although he was originally seen as being at the helm of a political confederation, his powers were subsequently conceived of as reigning over all spheres of life and the promise of otherworldly salvation was open to all… Most important, however, was the fact that he controlled the whole course of history [unlike magical spirits]…[and, of course, he was *transcendent*, unlike such spirits]." Jews, unlike Hindus or Buddhists or Taoists, sought to understand God's mysterious yet intelligible purpose in letting history develop as it did. That is, there was an opposition between an omnipotent God and an imperfect world, unlike in Eastern religions where the world fit into a harmonious and eternal cosmic order and there was no single omnipotent God with whom a people had established a *covenant* that required them to act in certain ways in order to retain his favor. The covenant was a binding contract between Yahweh and his people; if they failed to be loyal to him, there would be consequences. So the possibility of *tension* was built into the religion. As the Jews' fortunes changed, the prophets could hold up ethical ideals which had

to be fulfilled in order for Yahweh to look favorably again on his people. In this dualistic system, "in which the deity determined the course of world-history and was at the same time completely set apart from an imperfect creaturely world, there could be no [stabilizing] magical compulsion. 'The world was conceived as neither eternal nor unchangeable, but rather as having been created. Its present structures were a product of man's activities and of God's reactions to them.'"

This notion of the covenant, of using a covenant as the basis for legal and moral relations between the divine sphere and the human (and within the human), was apparently unique to Judaism. It originated in an environment characterized by competition between magicians, oracle priests and prophets of war, as well as by the unity of religion and politics. "In this configuration, a novel and independent conception of religious meaning could evolve not only because of Israel's isolation from the other great cultural centers, but also in response to the constant political threat to which the political confederation was exposed." Moreover, in this primitive time—even later, during the time of troubles—the magical mentality still existed to an extent, and the 'contract,' the 'promise,' between God and his people must have been thought of as almost magically powerful. (To the primitive mind, words have awesome magical power.) If the people violated it…woe betide them! See *The Genealogy of Morals*.

Weber believed that "'charisma is the specifically creative revolutionary force of history.' Charisma and routinization/rationalization are world-historical forces which, being in permanent conflict, are the essential origins of all social change as such." This conception is illustrated in Weber's analysis of ancient Judaism. The evolution from divinely inspired prophets to legalistic priests. As the prophets made Judaism an ethical religion oriented towards salvation, and the collective fate of Jews was made dependent on their loyalty to Yahweh, and a meaning was given to the course of history (viz., collective salvation!), the possibility of something akin to the Protestant ethic of worldly asceticism arose, "with all the possibilities for cultural change that this implied for Weber." The reason this development didn't take place was, evidently, that charisma lost out to a baneful kind of routinization. The prophets, like the early Protestants, demanded an inward transformation, while the priests (whose rivals they were) emphasized ritual and ceremony. During the peaceful times under Persian rule, the severity of the prophets became less popular and external rituals, priestly legalism, held sway, which precluded the necessary inward transformation and "reorientation of conduct." "The means to salvation increasingly became narrowed to the formal observance of law and ritual." Yahweh changed from a wrathful god into a beneficent redeemer of the individual. And, while politics and religion had become separate during the heyday of the prophets, religion fused again with social life, thus reducing the likelihood of cultural tension and creative development.

Weber located the roots of Western rationalism not in the Reformation but in ancient Judaism. One commentator says, "If the nation or an individual suffered and God failed to help, that was a sign that some commandment had been violated. Which one? Irrational means of divination could not answer that question, only a knowledge of the laws and a soul-searching scrutiny of one's conduct. The idea of the covenant had thus led to a comparatively rational mode of raising and answering such questions." To locate the origin of modern "rationalism" in that fact, though, strikes me as far-fetched. Weber writes, "In all times there has been but one means of breaking down the power of magic and establishing a rational mode of life; this means is great rational prophecy… Prophecies have released the world from magic [*Entzauberung*] and in doing so have created the basis for our modern science and technology, and for capitalism." Wow. That's just…crazy.

Translating *Entzauberung* as "disenchantment" seems pretty damn stupid. The latter term contains a value-judgment, like "alienation," while the former doesn't (as far as I know). It's downright misleading.

Weber thought that early and medieval Christianity were a regression in the evolution from Judaism to Protestantism. "The most important feature of the Judaic and Protestant world-views was the unbridgeable gap between an all-powerful and inscrutable divine ruler and an imperfect and sinful humanity. Early Christianity, by contrast, bridged this gap through its doctrine that an 'unlimited' or 'unconditional trust' in an incarnate savior could produce salvation. The conduct that resulted from this view of salvation was indifference to the world on the basis of reliance on god's will. Christianity demanded only an inward devotion to the savior, rather than a radical reorientation of conduct." Its prescribed path to

salvation was through faith, magic and ritual, which are not rational. "Whereas Judaism and Protestantism could influence everyday life precisely because of the uncertainty about whether god's commands were being fulfilled or one's election was assured, Latin Christianity did not produce this kind of psychological pressure. Not anxiety, but unconditional trust in the savior's magical powers was the testing ground for salvation… The ethic that resulted was not an ethic of rigorous and methodical conduct, but of brotherly love and charity." Equanimity, indifference to politics and economics, peaceful faith and love. This religion was in fact similar to Buddhism. But it came to rely increasingly on external, "irrational," magical rituals; salvation depended less and less on the certainty of divine grace and more on institutions and external rituals like baptism and communion. Institutionalization and routinization made the demands of Catholicism contrast even more strongly with the inward ethic of Judaism and Protestantism.

Catholicism, in short, tried to bridge the gap between the divine and the human in various ways, for instance through institutions and rituals. And it's because the divine and the human were not fully separated—religion interpenetrating the political and economic spheres—that religious life promoted social stability, as it did in the primitive stage of magic (when there was no transcendent authority at all). With Protestantism, by contrast, the believer was forced to reorient his conduct dramatically so that it met the demands of a wholly *transcendent* authority. Transcendence, as you can see, is an absolutely essential prerequisite for, or component in, the full emergence of a dynamic rationalism. The alternative, after all, is magic, which, for various reasons, promotes social stability and irrationalism.

This Weberian "dialectic" between transcendence and magic is thought-provoking. Secularism and rationalization do logically seem to succeed a transcendent religious worldview: the more you separate God from the world, the closer you get to jettisoning the whole idea of God. Initially the divine (or "spiritual") and the earthly were united; as history progressed and people became increasingly alienated from society, the two realms slowly separated, so that "meaning" and "truth" and "harmony" became located in a transcendent world and *our* world was devalued. (Cf. Platonism also.) Finally with modern civilization a complete divorce was achieved, soon after which the transcendent realm simply became unnecessary and was forgotten because it was so different from, and irrelevant to, the concrete world. Yet people didn't thereby lose their innate need for "meaning" and existential harmony. (Originally—for most of history—they weren't fully aware of this need because it was wholly satisfied in their social structures and through their magical ideologies. Their later transcendent ideologies were supposed to satisfy it too, but the more transcendence was involved the less successful they were, because of the contradiction between people's social being and their ideological consciousness (which is greater to the extent that transcendence is emphasized). The existential, ideological need becomes more acute as social being grows more alienated—suffering from an insufficiency of 'immediate,' unconscious, concrete recognition—and this basic alienation remains[1] no matter how much love and recognition is projected by society into a transcendent realm. Generally speaking, comforting ideologies simply cannot compensate for a comfortless social life.) They need it now more than ever, precisely because "meaning" has become so transcendent it has effectively ceased to exist. So, yes, with complete, with *absolute* transcendence the world has become extremely rational, as it were, but it has also become extremely meaningless.[2] Where can it go from here? Society has reached the extremity of transcendence, which means the extremity of what has been the historical trajectory of ideology for thousands of years. Evidently the only possibility is to go back in the opposite direction again, in the direction of magic—but in the opposite way: meaning has to be invested in the world again, but on a *rational* level somehow. We can't simply return to an earlier stage of history; that's impossible. Therefore, barring some global catastrophe, in the next few centuries we're going to see mankind retreating from transcendence, from alienation, by reforming its social structures in collectivistic ways.

I want to be alive two hundred years from now!

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[1] On a *societal* level.

[2] By the way, the degree of cultural emphasis on (the) "transcendence" (of *meaning*) can be taken as a measure of the degree to which reification has proceeded. For reification is an essential part of alienation.

Weber is right that magic and science have similar instrumental ends. Magic, however, also has another end, or at least it fulfills another function: it makes sense of the world on a 'spiritual' level; it gives man the sense that he *belongs* in this world, that the world has meaning for him. Science fulfills no such function. Quite the contrary, indeed (at least in the last three hundred years).

Initially the central "postulate" of Protestantism was a completely otherworldly orientation, a radical devaluation of the world, which contrasted with Catholicism. The Catholic god had representatives on earth, institutions and rituals, saints, cathedrals with diaphanous interiors reaching toward the heavens, etc.; the world, therefore, was not completely devalued, nor was there a consistently otherworldly orientation. But in Puritanism, for instance, the external, sensuous world had to be mastered and overcome by a methodical lifestyle; the emotions and appetites had to be subjugated to impersonal and constant motives. Only thereby would salvation be gained. (Weber acknowledges the irony in the fact that such a world-denying attitude could evolve into an entirely this-worldly, capitalist orientation. "Such are the unintended consequences of ideas." Ideas? Sure, whatever.)

"With Luther originates the idea that salvation was foreordained by the unknowable will of god and that there was a 'calling' to realize his will. Weber stresses not only that the idea of the calling was radically new, but also that it is only through this idea that later forms of Protestantism can be understood. Luther's conception had not, however, been driven to its consistent conclusion, since his doctrine still allowed for a union with the divine. Despite god's transcendence, the Lutheran attitude was one of 'inward emotional piety' combined with a quietist indifference to the traditional social order. The world was not devalued because the believer was a 'vessel' of god, despite his absolute transcendence.

"Only with Calvin were these Lutheran ideas carried to their ultimate conclusion… His intensification of Protestant doctrine stemmed from his more radical separation of god from the world and from his notion that the creaturely world exists only for the sake of god… Whereas Luther still attached religious significance to subjective piety, the Protestant believer after Calvin could strive to achieve salvation only through mastery over the self and the world." It is at this point that "the great historic process of *Entzauberung*, which had begun with the old Hebrew prophets and, in conjunction with Hellenistic scientific thought, had repudiated all magical means to salvation as superstition and sin, came to its logical conclusion."

The common ethic underlying all forms of Protestantism was "an ascetic conduct which meant a rational planning of one's whole life in accordance with God's will." This ethic arose from permanent uncertainty about God's will and constant watchfulness over oneself. It proscribed, for example, ostentatious wealth and luxurious living, a proscription that encouraged the accumulation of capital.

Why did Protestantism become secularized so easily? Precisely because it demanded a change of conduct in the believer. "While concentrating on the means for achieving salvation, which were of a purely worldly nature, the believer could lose sight of the transcendent religious premise of his orientation. The capitalist entrepreneur might initially have been motivated by the quest for salvation, but with the loosening of all external religious ties, success in a 'calling' could eventually be adopted as a purely secular goal." That idea is a little silly.

"In the end, Weber thinks Protestantism merely provided the entrepreneur with a good conscience regarding restless economic activity." Also, of course, Protestantism fostered individualism. And its elimination of religious elements from social life left a vacuum that could be filled by secular forces, such as the impersonality of the market and the bureaucratic state. That is, in fostering differentiation between spheres of life—in effectively reducing the social, institutional dominance of religion—it made room for dynamic rationalism.

Comfort = *com-fort* = *strong-with*. Significant.

Con-fuse. "This is con-fusing."

August 28

The opposition between charisma and routinization is essential to Weber's political writings too, not only his religious ones. The typical Weberian idealism/superstructuralism is evident in this passage: "Bureaucratic rationalization revolutionizes with *technical means*…as does every economic reorganization, 'from without.' It *first* changes the material and social orders, and *through* them the people, by changing the conditions of adaptation… By contrast, the power of charisma rests upon the belief in revelation and heroes… Charismatic belief revolutionizes men 'from within' and shapes material and social conditions according to its revolutionary will." There is *some* truth to that, but the formulations are misleading.

The modern world has become almost entirely rationalized and "dis-enchanted" (which Weber doesn't think is necessarily good). The economic sphere, for example, has become rationalized by the "extension of the productivity of labor through the subordination of the process of production to scientific points of view." Weber deplored the diminishing role of charisma in modern life; the aim of his political sociology was to promote charismatic leadership within a "plebiscitary leader-democracy." He wanted strong leadership, and he thought democracy was best because, "under the social and political conditions of a modern bureaucratic society, it offered a maximum of dynamic leadership." "Democracy and demagogy," he wrote, "go hand in hand" in the modern mass state. A strong parliament, therefore, is necessary in order to demagogy from going too far.

Weber's political ideas are informed by this central question: "How can one possibly save *any remnants* of 'individualist' freedom in any sense" in a world dominated by the "irresistible advance of bureaucratization?" He was pessimistic, but he placed most of his faith in charisma. Probably a mistake, given Hitler and others.

Incidentally, an idea, a worldview, can have "charisma" too.

"The advancement of scientific knowledge," writes Schroeder, "bears the greatest responsibility for the onward march of rationalism and disenchantment." Weber emphasizes that science cannot give the world meaning. Science is indeed a worldview, but its content is purely impersonal. It demands objectivity, and this undermines ideologies that try to give the world meaning. (Again: idealism. Social relations, not science, are the main villain. I have to admit, though, that science does tend to erase the individual and subjectivity from the picture, quantum mechanics notwithstanding.)

Judging by Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer's book, there may be hope that, even according to "objective truth," the individual actually does matter in some way, that there is some underlying undifferentiated realm connecting subjectivities to one another and to the essence of the cosmos. Maybe there is even something like reincarnation.

"Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations." This echoes Hannah Arendt's belief that there is no longer a "public space," a genuinely political arena, in which people can meet and interact. ("Politics" comes from "*polis*," after all. And the modern world is nothing if not anti-"*polit*-ical" in this sense. The public, "*polis*-ical" space is the realm of "*action*," where people exercise their powers of agency.)

Weber is right that science is and has to be "value-free" in his sense. Reason cannot adjudicate between values, except on the basis of other values. (If you value *x* and *y*, then you are reason-bound to value *z* if it follows from *x* and *y*.)

The *inner logic* of worldviews. The inner logic of Judaism led to Calvinism, which led to secularization: "By contrast with the worldviews of the non-Western civilizations, which produced neither a systematic unification of the divine nor a radical tension between the divine and the world [though Islam may be an exception, he notes], the ancient Judaic prophets created a worldview in which the divine was endowed with all-encompassing powers and at the same time radically divorced from the world. This worldview was systematically unified in the sense that all worldly events could be interpreted as subject to the control of God. The stage was thereby set for the complete separation of the religious from the other spheres of life." The inner logic of that worldview, then, "culminated in the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, where the divine and the worldly became separated to the greatest possible extent. This complete separation was also a spur to the process of secularization since it meant that religion was no longer entrenched in the other spheres of life. Secularization, in turn, created a vacuum in the religious

sphere of life…" So the inner logic of monotheism led to its (self-)destruction. Overtones of Hegel. But I'm skeptical of developmental hypotheses relying on the "inner logic" of a belief-system. They smack of idealism, as though belief-systems evolve of their own accord based on their internal logic. I'd rather say that there's an inner logic to the development of social relations, a logic that is reflected in the ideologies fostered by those social relations.

Of course, strictly speaking there is no such "inner logic." But there are *tendencies*, *evolutionary pressures*, *influences* in certain directions.

The Jews and Christians represented the future because they were downtrodden, oppressed, more "alienated" than other peoples, and the future, over the long term, lay in alienation—because, with the development of technology and so on, social structures had to become more complex, more layered and coercive and impersonal, which inevitably estranged social groups and individuals from their world. It was virtually inevitable that monotheism would triumph, although it could have taken slightly different forms than Judaism and Christianity. Also, given social-evolutionary pressures, it was highly likely that monotheism would someday transcend itself, that it would fall away, so to speak, like dead skin off society's back. God *fell away* as the world matured underneath him.

Schroeder: "The impact of ideas on social life can be measured by the degree to which a worldview either revolutionizes or reinforces the (given) predispositions of believers." Their predispositions are based on their material and ideal interests.

I get the impression that Weber approaches the historical data with a preconceived end in mind, with hypotheses he's determined to prove, resulting in the corroboration of his hypotheses. He arranges the evidence so that it supports his ideas. This is inevitable, to an extent, in all scientific endeavors, especially social scientific ones, but Weber seems less unbiased and open-minded than he should be.

I need a precise definition of "alienation." It's a useful concept insofar as it denotes a condition that arises from a lack of "transparency" in social relations, or a lack of freedom, and especially the presence of reification. But all these concepts are pretty vague. By the way, alienation (in my sense, whatever that is) is by no means an unequivocally bad thing. Anyone who has read Hegel should know that. Without alienation—i.e., 'being a foreigner,' 'being an alien' (in some way) in one's environment—humankind would still be at the most primitive level, virtually undifferentiated.

August 29

Reading Alan Turley's article "Max Weber and the Sociology of Music" (2001). "Bureaucratization in the Catholic Church had a rationalizing/bureaucratizing effect on its music, and was eventually responsible for the music 'conventions' associated with European classical music. Examples of this would be notational systems, structured harmony, organized choirs, ensembles, orchestras, and the standardized construction of instruments."

"Rationalization is the universal historical process that is central to Weber's work." Yup, that's for sure.

"The move from ancient to modern music gradually eliminated the mystical and 'irrational' qualities of art and replaced them with rational qualities… The simple principle of distance between tones in the music that a musician might make or a singer might sing was replaced by the organized, standardized, 'rational' principle of chordal harmony." "Written notation and standardization of instruments [which were essential to the process Weber is describing] are rational outcomes in an organized society." Etc. Weber stressed the importance of commercialism and so on in calling forth a rationalized music.

Interestingly, and apparently in contradiction to Weber's theories, "music has become less bureaucratized from Weber's time to the present. Only classical music and opera possess the highly formalized, standardized, and bureaucratized structures Weber's theory describes and predicts." How should this fact be interpreted? Maybe it simply points to the inadequacy of a methodological approach that emphasizes rationalization above all else, as though it is the only important feature of modernity. Modernity isn't *only* about bureaucracy and rationalization; many phenomena are utterly opposed to such trends.

Nevertheless, "conductor-led orchestra *is* the most bureaucratized form of musical performance; each instrument is hierarchized from first chair to last, and all instruments are organized into sections or musical arrangements." Turley points out, though, that India, Egypt, China and Japan had bureaucratized music also, music that was highly formalized and "standardized."

Therborn defines ideology, according to Callinicos, as "the primarily discursive practices through which human beings live their relation to reality." Althusser: "Ideology is indeed a system of representations, but in the majority of cases these have nothing to do with 'consciousness'; they are usually images and occasionally concepts, but it is above all as *structures* that they impose on the vast majority of men." Callinicos elaborates: "More precisely, ideologies are practices which function symbolically, usually through the generation of utterances, subject to definite norms and constraints. Very often these norms and constraints derive from the prevailing structure of class power."

"Isn't the notion of reification idealistic?" you ask. No, because reification operates on an unconscious or half-conscious level, and it characterizes behavior as much as consciousness. People *act* in a "reified" way.

Marco Orru's article "Weber on Anomie" (1989). I'll have to quote a lot of it; otherwise I'll forget everything.

"To understand Weber's treatment of anomie it is necessary to frame it within his general discussion of the great world religions and their respective roles in China, India, and the West. For this purpose, Weber's identification of two ideal-typical religious reactions to the 'irrationality' of the world serves as a starting point. One reaction, asceticism, consists in the active control and mastery of the world in the interest of a religious idea; the other reaction, mysticism, consists in the contemplative flight from the world, which leads to the total devaluation and rejection of the world. The first attitude (asceticism) requires active ethical behavior, while the second (mysticism) is characterized by the extrusion of all everyday mundane interests.

"Weber conceptualized asceticism and mysticism as polar concepts that are differentiated into inner-worldly and other-worldly variants according to whether the mastery of the world (asceticism) or the rejection of the world (mysticism) is external (addressed to the outside world) or internal (addressed to the inner self). This differentiation generates four ideal types of religious rejections of the world, which can be demonstrated by the use of historical instances. The Protestant sects exemplify inner-worldly asceticism; the medieval monastic orders represent other-worldly asceticism; the Confucian Literati typify inner-worldly mysticism; and the Buddhist monks illustrate other-worldly mysticism."

In the context of anomie (which literally means lawlessness, the absence of ultimate guiding values), two of these types are significant: inner-worldly asceticism, "wherever it is capable of opposing an absolute and divine 'natural law' to the creaturely, wicked, and empirical orders of the world," and other-worldly mysticism, which springs from classical Hinduism. In this case, the tension between the world and its religious rejection disappears, since the mystic is not a tool for God in the world but a *vessel* for him. The mystic is beyond good and evil; his preaching has no bearing on the world. He is sinless; ethical, legal and rational considerations are meaningless to him, which means that he is in a state of "anomie" (lawlessness). Inner-worldly asceticism isn't as radical as such mysticism: it rejects the world and its laws, like the mystic, but in favor of a *divine law* which is supposed to guide conduct. The Judeo-Christian tradition, then, is not as anomic as the Hindu tradition. But there are exceptions, for instance Manichaeanism and antinomianism, which are influenced by Zoroastrianism. (The fight between good and evil, the challenge toward the categories of good and evil.) More recently, existentialism was a version of radical anomism.

This Weberian treatment of anomie is different from others, for instance the Durkheimian, which emphasize "the deregulation of ultimate values or the breakdown of institutional norms." It is also virtually irrelevant to Western society. That is, the total absence of ultimate values has not been a major problem for the West, which has tended to reject radical anomism. The Durkheimian analysis is more relevant, since it describes a society in which desirable goals and institutional norms are not fully internalized. "In *Suicide*,

Durkheim viewed anomie as a condition that occurs when economic materialism becomes 'an end transcending itself…the supreme end of individuals and societies alike.' Durkheim declared, 'It is not true, then, that human activity can be released from all restraint. Nothing in the world can enjoy such privilege.'

"Merton's conceptualization of anomie described instead the consequences of an instrumental imbalance between cultural values and social norms and the ensuing condition where norms lose their regulatory power for the individual. Merton clarified that, 'In no group is there an absence of regulatory codes governing conduct, yet groups do vary in the degree to which these folkways, mores, and institutional controls are effectively integrated.'"

"Max Weber as a Critic of Marxism" (1977), by Wolfgang Mommsen. "The separation of the workers from the means of production was to Weber not a specific feature of capitalism. He rather considered it an essential precondition of highly developed modern societies of whatever type…[i.e.,] a feature of all modern bureaucratic societies." There may be some truth in that. In the USSR, workers were separate from the means of production. The problem with modernity isn't private ownership of the means of production but "the omnipotent structures of bureaucratic rule."

Weber distinguished between formal and substantive rationality. Capitalism was formally rational (e.g., the workers are formally free, prices are calculated rationally according to market conditions, etc.) but displayed much substantive irrationality, as Marcuse would argue later. Weber: "Substantive and formal rationality (in the sense of exact calculation) inevitably do not go with one another; this fundamental and in the last resort inescapable irrationality of the economic order is one of the sources from which all 'social' problems originate, in particular, however, all varieties of socialism." The best way to organize society, he says, would be to make constant compromises between formal rationality and "substantive value attitudes."

I read Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Refreshing realism. (But) I can well understand why it was Hitler's bedside reading. Lenin and Stalin used it too. And Mussolini wrote his dissertation on it.

"I certainly think it is better to be impetuous than cautious, for fortune is a woman, and it is necessary to conquer her by force."

I was wrong to say that reification cannot become much more extreme than it has in the contemporary world. It *definitely* can! It can go on indefinitely, getting worse and worse!

August 30

Intimations of Hegel and Marx from Dante: "In every action what is primarily intended by the doer is the disclosure of his own image. Hence it comes about that every doer, in so far as he does, takes delight in doing; since everything that is desires its own being, and since in action the being of the doer is somehow intensified, delight necessarily follows… Thus nothing acts unless by acting it makes patent its latent self." Willhelm von Humboldt too. Dante was a monument to the mind.

Reading a chapter from Arendt's *On Revolution* called "The Revolutionary Tradition and Its Lost Treasure."

"Jefferson knew…that the [American] Revolution, while it had given freedom to the people, had failed to provide a space where this freedom could be exercised." The new democracy wasn't *rich* and *deep* enough; there weren't enough opportunities for the people to engage in political activity. This is why he favored rebellions every few decades, why he thought the Constitution should not be a sacrosanct document ("too sacred to be touched"), why he thought, in fact, that each generation should have the right to send deputies to a national political convention which would amend the Constitution! He wanted democracy to extend down to the very bottom of the body politic, down to the townships. Otherwise, he thought, the republic was doomed: it would become an oligarchy. And he was right. (It's doubtful, though, that anything the founders could have done would have prevented the oligarchy from appearing in the long run, since it emerged organically out of industrial capitalism. Economic structures would have corrupted and eroded genuine township-democracy.)

"His greatest fear was lest 'the abstract, political system of democracy lacked concrete organs'." His proposed solution was to subdivide all counties into wards ("little republics"). The idea of the ward anticipated later revolutionary organs like the *soviets*, the *Räte*, the councils, and the communes in France. Jefferson wanted as close an approximation to direct democracy as was possible in a modern state. "What he perceived to be the mortal danger to the republic was that the Constitution had given all power to the citizens, without giving them the opportunity of *being* republicans and *acting* as citizens. In other words, the danger was that all power had been given to the people in their private capacity and that there was no space established for them in their capacity of being citizens." He knew that the most likely source of "corruption and perversion" in the government would be the intrusion of private interests into the public domain. His "little republics" would guard against this. "'The elementary republics of the wards, the country republics, the State republics, and the republic of the Union would form a gradation of authorities…'"

"The basic assumption of the ward system, whether Jefferson knew it or not, was that no one could be called happy without his share in public happiness, that no one could be called free without his experience in public freedom, and that no one could be called either happy or free without participating, and having a share, in public power." Wise words.

Arendt's discussion of the councils, communes, etc. is very interesting. These were bodies that spontaneously arose among the masses during times of rebellion, democratic political organs with no precedent—and yet the revolutionaries were ambivalent towards them! Marx and Lenin were quite taken with them for a time, but in the end Marx decided they were merely temporary, initial stages of the revolution, while Lenin crushed the soviets during the Kronstadt rebellion (in which they had revolted against the party dictatorship). It is these political bodies that are the "lost treasure" of the revolutionary tradition.

"The one-party dictatorship, that is, the model of the professional revolutionary, eventually prevailed [after a revolution], but it prevailed only after a violent struggle with the organs and institutions of the revolution itself. The councils, moreover, were always organs of order as much as organs of action, and it was indeed their aspiration to lay down the new order that brought them into conflict with the groups of professional revolutionaries, who wished to degrade them to mere executive organs of revolutionary activity." Reading accounts of such extraordinary events and movements, you can't deny that "the people" are, after all, capable of governing themselves, that decentralized government can work in certain conditions, and that if the people are irresponsible and selfish and petty-minded it's because of their social environment and not any supposed innate stupidity.

You should read Reed's history of the Russian Revolution. Read his descriptions of the soviets. They're remarkable. As Arendt says, "Nothing contradicts more sharply the old adage of the anarchistic and lawless 'natural' inclinations of a people left without the constraint of its government than the emergence of the councils that, wherever they appeared, and most pronouncedly during the Hungarian Revolution, were concerned with the reorganization of the political and economic life of the country and the establishment of a new order." And think of the little communities, the "councils," that spontaneously emerged in New Orleans right after Katrina (judging by what those eyewitnesses wrote)—and remember how they were intentionally fragmented and destroyed by the power-structures, the police and the army! It's a poignant metaphor of how power always treats those beneath it.

Arendt: the party system vs. the council system. The problem with councils, she says, is that they are incapable of fulfilling administrative duties. "Workers' councils have again and again tried to take over management of the factories, and all these attempts have ended in dismal failure." Councils are appropriate for politics, not administration. The opposite is true for party apparatuses, which have oligarchic, bureaucratic structures. "Our whole tradition of political thought has concluded that the essence of politics is rulership and that the dominant political passion is the passion to rule or to govern. This, I propose, is profoundly untrue. …It is in parliament and in congress, where he moves among his peers, that the political life of a member of representative government is actualized, no matter how much of his time may be spent in campaigning, in trying to get the vote and in listening to the voter." Arendt thinks of politics in the old

Athenian way, before Plato and Aristotle had introduced the 'ruler/ruled' dichotomy into the Western tradition. Modern politics isn't politics in its truest sense.

I should read the whole book. And so should you.

August 31

Why is ethnic cleansing the dark side of democracy, as Michael Mann claims? Because the latter "is premised on the creation of an ethnic community that 'trumps' or 'displaces' class divisions." "Ethnic cleansing," for Mann, is simply the attempt to create mono-ethnic populations for a given political unit; "it isn't necessarily murderous, and may more often involve assimilation, whether coercive or not… Ethnic cleansing and democracy have an elective affinity to one another in two respects: first, most democracies develop on the basis of relatively mono-ethnic populations, and second, democracy carries the possibility that the majority might tyrannize minorities." Ethnic cleansing is generally perpetrated by democratic, or democratizing, regimes—where "democracy" is understood not as a concrete set of political institutions but as an ideology of equality. "This egalitarian concept threatens to undermine those forms of social stratification that restrain ethnic cleansing." (Think of the Native Americans, the Aborigines, Armenia, Hitler's Final Solution, Rwanda, Yugoslavia.)

"Ethnic conflict becomes murderous when key social forces, in multi-ethnic and geopolitically unstable environments, conceive of democracy as the rule of an 'indivisible, united, integral' people. In contrast, where the people is conceived of as 'diverse and stratified,' and class differences are politically institutionalized, the potential for mass ethnic killings is blocked by countervailing, non-democratic features of these societies. It is for this reason that neither pre-capitalist agrarian societies nor established liberal democracies tend to engage in ethnic cleansing…" There has to be cross-class solidarity for ethnic cleansing to occur. That is, ethnicity has to (tend to) trump class as the main form of social stratification. "The theoretical crux of Mann's argument thus seems to be that class conflict, especially when institutionalized, tends to undermine ethnic conflict." Riley argues against that thesis.

"Mann repeatedly emphasizes that modern democracies have grown out of processes of ethnic homogenization."

What is "organic democracy" as opposed to liberal democracy? And "organic nationalism"?

Murderous ethnic cleansing occurs in the context of war. So how does Mann explain ethnic warfare? "It breaks out either when dominant ethnicities believe they can successfully eliminate minorities, or subordinate ethnicities believe they can successfully establish their own state." But, more fundamentally, why do ethnic groups fight? "Mann's explanations tend to slide into group psychology. [He invokes] the psychological concepts of 'threat' and 'perceived threat'." Riley favors a sociological explanation over Mann's social psychological one.

Being a "nice guy" to a woman means being asexual. Politeness doesn't touch the reptilian, sex. If a woman shuns a nice guy it's because an asexual man does not affirm her self-conception, which is as a sexually desirable and desirous female.

Humans are reptiles first, mammals second, humans third.

The hours when I'm alone are the hours when I'm most (not-)myself.

It used to be that there was only one thing you wanted recognition from: your im-mediate community. Now there are two things you want recognition from: your 'immediate' community, and *everything else* (mediated).

Again, recognition doesn't manifest itself only psychologically, but also behaviorally.

The notion of a "social structure" is elusive, illusive and allusive. What exactly does it mean? A family, a town, a country and a society all have social structures. The term refers to the set of relationships between (groups of) people, or the roles they have to play. These roles are defined in relation to each other, which means the social structure is an "organic whole" and should be analyzed holistically. The causes (diachronic and synchronic) and nature of one set of roles can't be understood without understanding the causes and nature of all sets of roles. Their roles determine, or at least *strongly influence*, how people act; therefore, you can't *fully* understand how and why one person acts in a certain way without understanding how and why everyone acts as he does. A person can be said to internalize his role(s) to a greater or lesser extent. Sometimes the roles conflict with each other—that is, the duties etc. associated with one role cannot be followed without violating the duties etc. associated with another—and when this happens the individual may experience a psychological crisis of some sort, or, if it happens on a large scale, a societal change or crisis may occur. If, for example, male workers can't fulfill both their family and their employment obligations (roles), a social rebellion may ensue. This might eventually cause their roles—i.e., their relations(hips) to others—i.e., (from a 'total' perspective) the social structure—to change. A new set of roles, or norms, or societal duties, emerges.

The social structure is incredibly important in determining people's behavior, since people have an amazing capacity to define themselves according to their roles (i.e., to 'do what they're supposed to do,' to act as their roles require). Usually they aren't consciously aware of the myriad rules and norms that govern social interaction, but somehow they internalize them to an extraordinary degree, so that every little gesture, every utterance, every body-movement can be instantaneously filtered through the thick web of internalizations in their mind. An "intelligent" person, among other things, is someone who has internalized norms (e.g., "social cues," interpersonal expectations in given situations, etc.) exceptionally well and has an unusual capacity to act on that basis—i.e., to adopt the viewpoint of the other, which is a necessary viewpoint in the context of norms/roles,[1] and to be *creative* from that viewpoint—but can also shed these norms when he wants to, or 'see through' them and 'ignore' them, precisely on the basis of adopting the other's viewpoint. For sometimes roles are insensitive to the other. Bureaucratic roles are especially so.

"Role-model." A pithy term.

How do people internalize norms and roles? By 'retaining' people's reactions to their behavior; by 'taking over' these reactions inside themselves, as Mead described, and acting in accordance with them, that is, as dictated by their desire for recognition (or approval) in conjunction with the other's reactions which they have 'taken over' inside themselves by taking the perspective of the other. They want approval, so they will act in ways that get them this approval.

Went to dinner with April Lau, from high school. Good time.

"Schumpeter disagreed with Marx: 'Society is bound to grow beyond capitalism, but this will be because the achievements of capitalism are likely to make it superfluous, not because its internal contradictions are likely to make its continuance impossible.'" A position I hadn't considered. I suspect Schumpeter was wrong—or rather, he was right, but so was Marx. Marx would have agreed that capitalism would become superfluous, but then he would have said, "More importantly, it'll become *impossible* once the forces of production have been 'socialized'—through the evolution of capitalism—to an extreme, proto-socialist degree." And he would have been right.

September 1

[1] That's why most animal societies don't have elaborate systems of roles and norms: these animals mostly lack the capacity to view, and to act in, the world from the other's perspective—which is to say that the other is not *in* their consciousness, which is to say that they are not self-conscious. For self-consciousness is (made possible by) the other in consciousness. I should reread my notes on Mead. Incidentally, these reflections are helping me understand better why intelligent people are typically more "self-conscious" than unintelligent people, and what the psychological implications of that fact are.

Capitalism atomizes society, so how do the forces of production become increasingly 'socialized' and 'cooperative,' or the relations of production less and less class-stratified (in narrowly capitalist ways)? That's a paradox.

Capitalism is still thriving, which is to say that property-relations still divide society into classes that are, at least 'objectively,' mutually antagonistic. (The notion of "objective class interests" isn't as problematic as everyone thinks. Game theory is one way of cashing it out. See *Classes.*) People in positions of economic power understand this antagonism, as shown by the constant class war they engage in. (Class war is manifested not only in aggressive political lobbying, predatory lending, the hundreds of thousands of lay-offs that have been occurring recently, and so forth, but even in the ordinary practices of marketing and advertising, as Chomsky has pointed out. The goal of advertising, which is the goal of capital in general, is for money to be funneled from the pockets of the masses into the coffers of the elite. The goal, in other words, is profit, and profits are acquired through implicit class warfare, whatever outwardly benevolent forms it may take.[1] Capitalism, like most modes of production, is nothing but institutionalized class war.) However, […]

(Boccherini's Symphony No. 4. Borodin's Petite Suite. "Soave sia il vento" from *Cosi Fan Tutte.* Bach's Italian Concerto.)

Reading Amaury de Riencourt's *The Soul of China: An Interpretation of Chinese History* (1965). It's a flawed book in many ways [for instance in its Orientalism], but it's stimulating.

He attributes immense social and psychological importance to the Chinese language, which has essentially "no grammar [?], no alphabet, no spelling, no inflections, no declensions, no conjugations nor tenses, [and in which] every word might be a noun, a verb or an adjective… The Chinese remained staunch rationalists but lacked the feeling for logical sequence in any line of reasoning which is so familiar to Western thinking." The language's ideographic structure has stayed the same for thousands of years, "and its immensely conservative influence can never be overestimated. Languages and dialects could change, social conditions could undergo revolutions—but as long as the ideograms remained intact, the Chinese mind revolved within the confines of a rigid mold."

Chronological conception of time, deep feeling for historical sequence, burying the dead rather than burning them as in India—*duration*, not *obliteration*—ancestor worship as a way to remember the past and be remembered oneself, human-centered outlook rather than nature-centered as with Indians (who disregarded history, were interested in metaphysical questions)—Confucius was like Socrates, rejecting metaphysical speculations and focusing on virtue, society, etc.—but originally, as with the Greeks and all cultures, metaphysical questions were paramount (see the *I-Ching*): Yang vs. Yin throughout the universe, Heaven Yang and Earth Yin, everything founded on this dualism or on a unity of the dualism. Historiography became a substitute for true religion: mythical past figures were models for living an ethical life. "The true goal of the higher type of Chinese man was not self-realization through mystical introspection, as in India, but the securing of an honored place in the harmonious procession of historical personages. Spiritual realization came from 'duration,' triumphing over the corrupting process of *time* rather than escaping into *eternity.*" Clearly China had more dynamic social relations than India, frozen in the caste system and thus sublimating its spiritual yearnings into timeless states like nirvana. But in China, *philosophy of history* more than *religion*. Time is masculine (creative, active, spiritual), space feminine (receptive, passive, earthy).

Heaven and Earth are complementary halves, duplicates mirrored in each other. "Man is surrounded by incorporeal spirits and forces, and a complicated system of regulations is necessary to obtain satisfactory relations with these mysterious forces: rituals have to be performed…" Consistent with this interaction of

[1] For instance, it's true that, other things being equal, the interest of both the workers and the owners is that the firm does well, makes a lot of profits. In this sense their interests are the same. Nevertheless, it's always the case that the more resources go to one class, the fewer [at least relatively] go to the other. This basic antagonism can be glossed over and softened in various ways, but it can't be eradicated. And successful capitalists understand that fact, as shown by their business practices and political maneuvers.

Heaven and Earth is the fact that "The Book of Changes claimed that every occurrence in the tangible and visible world was only a symbol, an *image* of an abstract *idea* located in the invisible world. Every event that took place on Earth was a symbolic duplication of a thought originating in the spiritual world beyond man's sense perception, in Heaven…" Plato. Medieval Christianity, with its attempt to symbolize heaven in the structure of cathedrals and so on, to make social institutions a symbol of the divine order. The difference (or one of them) is that Christians strongly devalued the worldly, unlike the Chinese, who thought earth complemented heaven. In all these cases, though, an intuition of transcendence. An escape from the world into something beyond. But not yet *complete* transcendence, *complete* devaluation of the earthly. (That's what Weber would say, anyway. He'd be right insofar as earthly life was still interpreted as having meaning in some way or other. –What is "meaning"? Being part of something greater than yourself. Making an impact on something greater than yourself. Being recognized and valued by something that transcends you.)

This semi-Platonic metaphysics, upheld by Confucius, "implied also a rejection of *causality* in the Western sense of the word. Instead of cause and effect, the Chinese chose to study the coincidental relations between phenomena. Instead of the logical chain of mechanical *causation*, we have *association* between the apparently most incongruous elements; this association is based on their synchronization. In this type of 'associative thinking,' concepts are not logically deduced from one another but are placed side by side in a *pattern* and are *organically* related to one another. Already strongly pragmatic, the Chinese assumed that synchronism, implying parallelism rather than causal succession, must be meaningful: the *objective* phenomenon is somehow related to the *subjective* state of the observer at the time, and the whole of it is a symbolic reflection of an idea produced in Heaven… This peculiarly Chinese world-picture is essentially based on *magic* (which constrains the higher powers) rather than *religion* (which conciliates). Chinese rituals are based on…*sympathetic magic*, the fundamental *mimetic* principle that 'like attracts like.' …The universe is an aggregate of organic entities precisely fitted into one another, a spontaneous and harmonious super-organism in which laws, causes and supreme deities are unnecessary…[but] a refined form of magic is imperative because man has to be in control of his earthly habitat." Therefore: direct yourself to the rhythm of nature, the *Tao*; anything done outside this rhythm is *Li*, "tension or reason." "The greatest psychological characteristic of the Chinese is their close relationship with the earth and the molding of their energy on the normal pattern of nature." "History is an eternal recurrence, not a continuous development of life toward higher forms of life and expression. It has no depth but is projected on a flat, two-dimensional screen, as is [the Chinese] perspective-less painting."

The scholars. Successors to the priests, after religion was changed into ancestor worship long before Confucius. Their task was to memorize the ideograms etc. and preserve the traditional culture and moral code.

Confucianism: Heaven and Earth must submit to the Tao, which is the source of morality and the right way of government. The emperor, the Son of Heaven, has only to set a good example and the social order will fall into place. (A kind of mimetic magic.) "The family is the indestructible cell of society, to the interests of which the individual must sacrifice himself in all circumstances." The state is a political extension of the family. Just as the son can disobey a bad order from his father, the subject can disobey his emperor if the latter transgresses the moral law. Confucius taught that music is "the most powerful agent working for social and political harmony… 'When one has mastered music completely and regulated his heart and mind accordingly, the natural, correct, gentle and sincere heart is easily developed and joy attends its development.'" And "'The best way to improve manners and customs is to pay attention to the composition of the music played in the country.'" In other words, music has a utilitarian function. "The essence of Chinese music, like all Asiatic music, is the absence of harmony and the complete predominance of melody… It is essentially Tao-like, well-balanced, joyful and contented, neither longing for spiritual understanding as with Hindu music nor yearning for the three-dimensional infinite as with Western man."

"Under Confucianist influence, artistic creation became bound to social ethics." It became utilitarian, and might have become quite mediocre were it not for the influences of Taoism and Buddhism.

China produced hundreds of historians. India produced none until Islamic times.

Confucianism was born in the north, where barbarians threatened the social order and scholars were concerned with maintaining social stability. Taoism was born farther south amidst the beauties of nature, away from a threatened social order. Lao Tzu was a Chinese Rousseau, revolted at the artificiality of civilization, in love with nature, emotion, intuition, the individual, solitude, "non-assertion," "non-activity." He rejected history, like the Indians. The Tao, for him, has nothing to do with "morality," which is only a man-made set of rules; it is immanent in all things and can be approached only through mystical introspection. Taoism is pure individualism. (Ironically it gave rise to the Legalists, who were ruthless and fanatical and "left the individual alone and helpless, the perfect tool in the hands of the dictatorship called forth by the Legalists." The author compares this Taoist legacy to the relationship between Rousseau and Robespierre.) Confucius and Lao Tzu represent opposing sides of the Chinese character.

Taoism had vast influence on art and poetry. It called forth the mystical, timeless side of the Chinese. The painter losing himself in an aesthetic continuum without beginning or end, submerging his ego in the timeless essence of the universe, painting nature "from the inside," unlike the Western artist. A substitute for religion. The Chinese artist is a pantheist, or rather an *immanentist*, not a *transcendentalist* like Western man. (The Chinese artist's love of the *line* comes from calligraphy.) Poetry and painting were impressionistic.

Cultural insights can be gleaned from the traditional Chinese inability [or choice not] to paint human figures realistically. Good at nature, 'bad' at humans: less individualistic than the West, less scientific, less fascinated with psychology, less human-glorifying than the post-Renaissance West.

Chinese architecture inspired by calligraphy. Curved lines. *Rhythmic* architecture, not *dynamic* and full of tension like in the West. No will to dominate nature or aspire to heaven (as in Gothic architecture); contentment with the earth, serenity.

The art of gardening. Harmony between the spirit of the soil and the spirit of the human. French gardening, on the other hand, is resolutely geometrical, anti-natural, dominating, three-dimensional. The gardens at Versailles.

After Confucius and Lao Tzu, during the age of the "Hundred Schools" of philosophy (the Hellenistic age or thereabouts), there was great cultural ferment on the basis of economic and social changes. Mo Ti was a philosopher along the lines of Bentham: a crude utilitarianism was his creed. Everything was evaluated in terms of its economic usefulness. Music and art he regarded as wasteful, economically unproductive; material prosperity was what mattered.

"Mencius extracted from Confucius the useful and the practical." For instance, the people should select the ruler, and they could remove him if he was unsatisfactory. They had a "sacred right of rebellion." The good ruler would give up warfare and concentrate on abolishing poverty, regulating economic processes, instituting compulsory education. Other philosophers argued, against Mencius, that man was fundamentally bad. And so on and so forth.

An era somewhat comparable to early modern Europe. "Nation-states"—not really, though—emerging on the ruins of feudalism, a proliferation of wars, the rise of urban middle classes, "democratization" of social and political structures, social rebellions in some states. Hsü Hsing, a "barbarian" of the south, "advocated a thorough social revolution and the dictatorship of the working man." Legalism arose, advocating a strong centralized state under a dictator in which capital would be nationalized and trade monopolized by the state, and concentration of wealth would be forbidden. "Family solidarity, ancestor worship and every form of social tradition dear to Confucius had to be smashed [according to Han Fei-tzu, the main theoretician] to leave the individual 'common man' face to face with a mammoth state, alone and powerless." The rulers are wicked, he said, morality is nonsense, the people are not intrinsically good; effective laws are necessary, laws that recognize no social distinctions: "'whoever violates the interdicts of the state…should be guilty of death and should not be pardoned.'" Social equality in a "democratic" age was to be purchased with the loss of freedom. Ch'in, the strongest state in 'China' (Chin-a), adopted this idea of an all-embracing legal system and eventually imposed it on all the states when it absorbed them in 221 B.C.

The age of the Warring States. Two hundred years long. Hellenistic era. It's all strikingly modern, the improved technology, the massive brutality, the conscription, the total war. Ch'in won, uniting all of

China (in 221) for the first time under a single ruler. That legacy would last until 1911. Legalism died out after the death of the first emperor, and the Han dynasty was established within a few years. Confucianism was revived soon after, becoming, eventually, virtually the state religion.

Great contempt for economic pursuits all through Chinese history (except during the Warring States era). The merchant was the lowest of the low. True in Japan too. The profit motive was considered despicable.

The conservatism of traditional China resulted partly from the examination system that all scholars had to go through after the land was united under the Han. Many years spent mastering classical texts, memorizing poetry, steeping themselves in Confucianist orthodoxy and classical culture until it was reflexive for them, the very core of their being. And these scholars (*mandarins*) were, of course, the elite, more respected than anyone in the land. Everyone wanted to be them. Unfortunately, whatever creativity and originality they had was destroyed after all their years of study. Every generation studied the same texts, was subject to the same despotic brainwashing. This helped make the social order as unchangeable as it was. (There is truth in that much-maligned term "Oriental despotism," and Hegel's description of China wasn't wholly incorrect. Nor was Marx's, or Wittfogel's.)

The cultural ideal, to repeat, was the man who fit into the norm of the Tao, who was cultured but not exceptionally endowed, who epitomized the "golden mean," so to speak. The mandarin system could perhaps be called, in Weberian terms, the routinization of the original creative, charismatic ideas from Confucius and earlier figures. It was one of the most successful (that is, stultifying) routinizations in history.

Something that recurs throughout history, according to the author: "the inherent, fundamental socialism of the Chinese." Lack of true individualism, predominance of family and clannish collectivism, and the latter's transfer to the state once "Caesarism" came about. Compromise between family and state collectivism. Several great socialistic experiments, for example when one Han emperor established state ownership of all natural resources in order, apparently, to protect the lower classes against the greed of the wealthy. Prices were controlled, transportation projects were directed by the state, etc. A hundred years later, land reform: huge private estates were turned over to the state and given away to landless peasants. "State-owned communal farms were created; this in fact reduced the farmer to the status of a state slave and pleased no one." Banks were nationalized, wine, salt, copper and so on became state monopolies, etc. But, as always, it ended badly, in corruption and inefficiency, even rebellions. Once again a thousand years later (a very ambitious attempt that time). Then under the Ming. And finally under Mao—which, not surprisingly, failed as miserably as all the others had. "Of all civilizations, only the Peruvian Incas displayed greater instincts for socialism and schematic uniformity."

September 2

Chinese distaste for abstraction(s), for logic and reason, arising largely from their language. Intuition. Philosophies not theoretical postulates but ways of transforming the inner self for social and moral harmony. Essential Chinese pragmatism. "Recipes for action," concrete; distrustful of scientific, abstract theorizing. Synthesis, not analysis.

Man and nature form one single society, not two separate worlds.

Yin and Yang not opposed but complementary. Cooperative. No real *dualisms* in Chinese culture. No opposition between matter and spirit, since everything is interrelated. Matter is a symbolic reflection of spirit.

Another feature of traditional Chinese culture: "the complete indifference to the idea of *quantity* and the disregard for quantitative measurement." Numbers are *emblems*, used to classify and qualify times and spaces according to hierarchies. Labels for the ordering of things. A *cyclical*, not a *linear*, view of numbers. 1 is not the beginning of a series but the center of the mathematical world, the most highly rated number. A higher number like 300 is essentially peripheral, subordinate to the simple numerical emblems. Similarly there is never a *succession* of phenomena in nature but a mere *alteration* of complementary aspects. Not succession, not cause and effect, but interdependence. No *direction* in time or space. Cycles,

not linear development. Natural phenomena are not determined events but *symbols*, signals from heaven pointing out related phenomena, portents of things to come.

In observations of concrete things an extremely analytical mentality and a great empiricism, which made possible their discovery of gunpowder, printing, etc.

"A fantastic web of rites and obligations imprisoning the individual from cradle to grave and fettering his mind." The twin arts of rites and music symbolizing the interplay of, respectively, dissociation and union, two fundamental principles. Rites emphasize distinctions between people, music emphasizes their harmonic association. "'Music expresses the harmony of heaven and earth, ritual the hierarchic order in heaven and earth.'" "The Chinese etiquette was, in a sense, a definite religion in which God, Satan, the human soul, sin, hell and paradise were purely and simply ignored, a creed based on a complex set of *magical* relationships." All these "disciplines and obediences," all this self-control, this ability to integrate every aspect of human life, resulted in "a lack of individual personality and originality, a devotion to the concrete and singular welded to a repulsion for the abstract and general, a utilitarianism and thirst for sheer efficiency… The greatest weakness was the lack of religious feeling for the *transcendental*." He thinks this was one of the reasons that Western science never developed in China.

Their conception of law was different from the West's (except with Legalism). Not something to be enforced rigidly and mechanically, not concerned with abstract justice. Tradition and custom more than *law*.

Mahayana Buddhism came after the collapse of the Han dynasty (220 A.D.), when barbarians were invading. Societal upheavals, confusion, temporary eclipse of Confucianism, etc. Mahayana Buddhism was optimistic, a religion of salvation, "espousing the fundamental optimism and earthiness of the Chinese but adding an indispensable strain of mysticism and religiosity to soothe them in their great times of trouble." It completed Taoism, so to speak, by adding a profound metaphysical doctrine. Art and literature fell under its spell, as did millions of impoverished farmers ruined by wars, and especially women. Consoling message of reincarnation and karma which promised rewards and punishments after death. "Oppressors and exploiters would pay for their sins under the iron rule of karma, and the lower classes saw a ray of hope" in this religion that had shed the exhausted, pessimistic, agnostic character of original Buddhism. "Gautama's doctrine was the Indian counterpart of classical Stoicism, centered around man's suffering, aiming at putting an end to that suffering through voluntary annihilation in a voidlike Nirvana: he taught that there was no Brahman, no Atman, no Godhead, and made no room in his doctrine for love, pity or mercy. [That's debatable. It sounds more like Hinayanism than Gautama's original teachings.] The transformation of his philosophy into the Mahayana's Greater Vehicle was so complete that it amounted to the creation of a new religion, emotional and positive, endowed with a deep metaphysical doctrine…" The human desire for transcendence in times of suffering. Christianity, Mahayanism. But the otherworldly aspects of Buddhism ultimately didn't take root in China. Sages came to seek "the positive of Tao of nature rather than the annihilation of an Indian Nirvana. The fat, hilarious Buddhas of China had little in common with their ascetic counterparts in India. And in the moving poetry of Li Po and Tu Fu we find more cosmic wonder in the Taoistic strain than Buddhist melancholy at the impermanent illusion of this earth which the Chinese could never bring themselves to share."

Neo-Confucianist revival under the T'ang, the dynasty that "guided China through the most brilliant and refined age any civilization had ever known." Massive cultural flowering, economic prosperity and the use of printing. But from now on there was no more real *originality* in culture. Only appropriations of the past, syntheses. There would be more barbarian invasions (Mongols and so on), but China always eventually returned to the old order, absorbing the invaders into their traditional culture—unlike Rome, for instance. "The Chinese owe this amazing vitality and power of absorption to the family system… The extreme stability of the family, its complete, unquestioned devotion and obedience to the chief of clan, its yearning to procreate in abundance because of the increased power and prosperity reflecting on the family, the immortality conferred on departed parents and ancestors because of the pious homage still paid to their memory—all this seduced the barbarians…" And don't forget the sheer numbers of the Chinese, numbers overwhelming those of the invaders. "And so, Chinese history proceeded in a rhythmic, cyclic fashion, with the seemingly unending recurrence of barbarian invasions, their absorption by the Chinese and the

consequent injection of new cultural energy, then a few hundred years of prosperity until the gradual weakening and decay of the whole upper stratum of society called forth a new wave of northern barbarians…"

The perennial overpopulation intensified another Chinese trait: an exquisite, refined politeness that wasn't just a matter of form but was actually part of the essence of their being. Consideration for other people. Without this, living in such overcrowded conditions would have been unbearable.

The parallels between early Chinese Communism and the Legalism of the Ch'in are astounding. "History has come full circle." The ideologies themselves are different in many ways, but the historical processes that led to the institutionalization of these ideologies have a *lot* in common. The *goals* of the Ch'in and Maoist governments, too—the collectivistic, bureaucratic, (quasi-)totalitarian goals, the desired refashioning of human nature—these goals are like shadows of one another. So are the political policies. Think of the great burning of traditional books that the Ch'in emperor organized, the attempt to wipe out the past, as compared with the Communist burning of millions of unacceptable books and its own attempt to rewrite history. That's one example out of a hundred.

It's striking that only the modern West, out of all the cultures in history, developed three-dimensional painting and 'three-dimensional' music. "Rationalized" art. All previous music was, in a way, "flat and depthless"; the West injected a unique dynamism and individuality into its art. (Foreshadowings in antiquity, in the Hellenistic era. Some of the sculptures and, perhaps, architecture?) *Perspective*. The only art with *perspective!* In what way does a culture that knows nothing of perspectival painting *see* the world? Your internalized web of norms influences not only your behavior but how you absorb and interpret experience, how you *see* and *hear* things. ("The creation of the senses is a historical process." The young Marx.) A culture's art is a projection of how it assimilates the world. A projection of its *norms of perception*, its historically molded *senses*. Try to place yourself intuitively in the position of someone who views traditional Chinese painting as normal—the position, that is, of a person from that culture. Someone who feels *at home* when looking at such two-dimensional art with such oddly unrealistic human figures, art that is, for him, a fully comprehensible expression of his own (culture's) spirit. Or imagine what it must be like to delight in those flat, gold, almost monochromatic medieval European paintings of Jesus. How does, or did, such a person experience the world? How did his normatively structured modes of perception, and thus of thinking and acting, differ from yours?

I discovered why the Boston Public Library never seems to have any of the books I want to check out: there's a whole other section of the library, a research section, to which the public doesn't have access. If you want a book from it, you have to write out the call number and the title and give it to a librarian who will go into the stacks and fetch the book for you—after which you're not allowed to leave the library with it! It's only for "in-library" use, because they're worried about theft. What's the fucking point of having a library if you can't check out the books you want?

Max Weber's essay "The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism."

The editor points out that Weber had changed the tone of his theory by the time he wrote this essay (after the famous book): "Weber emphasizes that social organization and life conduct are the key, rather than religious doctrine. The sects downplayed the importance of doctrine… 'It is not the ethical *doctrine* of a religion, but that form of ethical conduct upon which *premiums* are placed that matters. (It has been the fundamental mistake of my critics not to have taken notice of this fact.)' The 'Protestant Ethic' is a way of behaving, more than a way of believing; and it is rooted in the distinctive organization of the group."

September 3

Connection between reification and rationalization. Two sides of the same coin.

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Around 1900 (when the book was written), business leaders, owners of capital, skilled laborers, etc. were overwhelmingly Protestant. In Europe, not only America. Why? Partly because when capitalism was expanding much earlier, the economically

advanced districts of Europe went over to Protestantism, and so their descendants are Protestant. But why did these districts become Protestant? After all, the change from Catholicism to Protestantism didn't mean a secularization of social life, as people sometimes think, but the opposite, a renewal and intensification of religion. No doubt a release from economic traditionalism would encourage a rejection of traditional authorities. But why did this early bourgeoisie, these "burghers," choose then to become Calvinist, which meant an almost tyrannical form of ecclesiastical authority? Shouldn't they have preferred secularization, freedom from all religious authorities? No. I suspect this issue is related to the human desire to be bound by norms, by rules, be they earthly or transcendental; the unconscious terror, that is, of anomie, lawlessness. This in turn derives from the need for *meaning* in life. Norms provide such meaning, in that they bind the individual to something larger and greater than himself, an authority that transcends himself (as the generalized other transcends himself), submitting to whose rules implicitly means recognition from this abstract entity. In other words: 'generalized other' leads to 'desire for recognition,' which leads to (or, ultimately, *is*) 'desire for existential meaning,' which leads to 'desire to submit to a set of imposed rules,' which leads to 'conversion to Calvinism,' particularly in the context (in early modern Europe) of a deterioration in traditional norms/values brought about by the rise of capitalism and urban living.

Fanatical, Puritan Protestantism eventually evolved into its opposite, secular Protestantism. Why? Because capitalism undermined both the credibility of transcendent (religious) authority and, in fact, the "human" need to submit to authority of some sort. This isn't a transhistorical, *human* need, but it's an extremely common manifestation—a very powerful, very 'tempting' manifestation—of the human desire for recognition. In societies characterized by some social fragmentation, including medieval Europe and Rome during its decline, the latter desire is sublimated into the voluntary submission to an authority, for instance the Church. But capitalism has undermined not only religious authority but *all* authority. That means it has undermined the force of social norms, and that has led to widespread anomie, which is to say a lack of virtually the only kind of 'societal' recognition that has been possible for the masses[1] living in (semi-)fragmented communities.

The reason I'm not affected by anomie, unlike so many of my spiritually minded peers, is that I have made *posterity* into my authority. I don't care what present society thinks of me; I care only that I become an idol for posterity—that *I* become an authority, in fact, in the eyes of my own 'authority' (viz., posterity). Ha! The intricate dialectic of the human spirit.

Think of the word 'normal.' Norm-al. Following norms. "He isn't norm-al."

Asceticism, including Puritan asceticism. Giving yourself laws. "Will to power"? Sure, but what does that mean? Why power? Because it confirms your value, your sense of self-worth. But why is that? Why doesn't being power*less*, or having *no* control over yourself (or the world), confirm your value? Because power, or control, means being able to actualize your sense of self in the world. Necessarily, that's what you want: you want to act as you want to act, you want to be what it is that you want to be, you want the relationship between you and the world to be the way that you want it to be. And so to have control means to make yourself and the world what you want them to be, which can only be done by acting on/in the world in accordance with your (desired) sense of yourself (which includes your sense of how the world should be), that is, by actual-izing, or real-izing, or object-ifying, or externalizing, yourself. When you recognize yourself in the world you thereby recognize your (externalized inner sense of your) value, because 'being valuable' means 'being (and acting) as one wants to be (and act).' Achieving your desired self means—achieving your desired self! I.e., your valued self! But, furthermore, to recognize yourself (your desired (sense of) self, your self-ideal, so to speak) is also to know that the other is recognizing your valued

[1] I say 'the masses' rather than 'people' because well-endowed individuals have always been able to sublimate their desire for recognition into, say, the desire to be a political authority or an intellectual authority or whatever. The masses, on the other hand, have had almost the sole recourse of being good followers of rules imposed from above. That statement over-simplifies, of course, but I'm in a hurry because I have to go shopping now.

self, i.e., is valuing your self,[1] since the other is in you, which means that what *you* think, so does the other (at least, as far as you're concerned). You have to externalize yourself because that's the only way to show yourself to the other, which means it's the only way to be recognized by him, and being recognized by him is the only way to be recognized by yourself (because the other is (also) in you, you are your own other; in wanting to recognize yourself in the world—i.e., to prove your value—you're wanting the other to recognize you). To show yourself to yourself—that is, to test yourself, to prove yourself, to confirm that you are what you want to be—you have to show yourself to the other. The other is in the world and in you; by modifying the world according to your (self-)desires, you're revealing yourself to the other in the world and the other in you, and thus to you yourself. These two others are really one, a single 'other' considered from two sides.

I am you and you are me, insofar as both you and I are my other. If I know that you disapprove of me, I, in some implicit way, necessarily disapprove of myself. If you insult me, I insult myself; and if I insult you, I insult myself. People are sensitive to insults to the extent that they internalize them, i.e. to the extent that they unconsciously see them as initiating from themselves.

I got off track. I was talking about asceticism. Why do people give themselves strict laws, laws that outlaw pleasure itself? First of all, you have to realize that it isn't merely *they* who give themselves these laws. The laws are sanctioned by some higher (imaginary) authority; this authority watches the ascetic over his shoulder, as it were. The authority is actually the one who demands the laws. It's significant that asceticism arises mainly when there is no credible external authority. Nietzsche thought that asceticism is cruelty turned inwards, and he was right insofar as the ascetic is masochistic. Maybe he was right even in other, less extreme cases. In a sense, of course, he's right 'by definition,' or rather if you see ascetic self-denial as cruel: if you think, in other words, that it's 'cruel' to deny yourself sensuous pleasure, well then, yes, asceticism is cruelty directed at yourself. Q.e.d. But Nietzsche's theory is more substantive than that. He means that the ascetic has aggressiveness in himself that he has to let out somehow, either on others or on himself. If I can trust a paper I wrote as a freshman, "Nietzsche argues that it was because of the Christians' *ressentiment*, their inability to vent externally their hatred of their masters, that they embraced the ascetic ideal by imposing severe strictures on their own sensual pleasure—i.e., by being cruel to *themselves* rather than their *enemies*." This theory isn't groundless.[2] But the way it's formulated is too Nietzschean, too 'slaves vs. masters'-esque, too psychologistic and idealistic, abstracted from social structures. Simplistic. What I would say is that "ascetics" of various sorts suffer from a kind of insecurity, which is, like all insecurity (in the last analysis), "ontological" insecurity. A deficiency in one's sense of being. The self's lack of fullness, its insufficiency of recognition. This is less a *feeling* than a *condition*, a way of *acting*: how one acts and how one 'feels' are inseparable, but the term 'feeling' misleads you into thinking that it's a pure state of consciousness divorced from your externalization of yourself. Maybe for most of history (prehistory) this insufficiency didn't effectively exist for humans, but in the last several thousand years it has emerged and gotten worse as social structures have become fragmented and coercified, reified. The other in you that transcends you and, for you, doesn't exist in you but in other people, in the world, has become associated increasingly with oppressive social relations, with the oppressive nature of social relations, with their dehumanization, their independence from and insensitivity toward the individual. Just as he internalizes these relations, so he internalizes their semi-hostile attitude toward him, which is to say that, since the other in him is somewhat hostile (refusing him recognition), he's half-hostile toward

[1] Kojève wasn't quite right to say that you desire the other's desire (i.e., that you want to represent his own self-ideal, that you want him to value you more than he does himself). Rather, you desire the other's positive valuation. Kojève's formulation implies that a fundamental conflict, an epic battle, is implicit in all human relationships, but I doubt that. Nature wouldn't have designed things that way, wouldn't have placed an essential *negativity* into all human interactions. Desiring the other's desire is, instead, symptomatic of some sort of sickness, an excess or a deficiency of some kind; it's an overcompensation for a lack of peaceful self-esteem. It's especially common in the modern age. (Like Sartre, Kojève confused a modern condition with the human condition.)

[2] [I wrote the rest of this paragraph on September 7th; it anticipates themes and concepts I addressed in the following entries. You should read those first.]

himself (since he is his own other). This colors his interactions with people—he treats them unconsciously as if they might be mildly hostile toward him[1]—and, as Nietzsche said, he comes to resent those in positions of power, since he associates them with the social order that is denying him recognition and reifying him.[2] More pertinently to the issue at hand, though, some people sublimate their lack of recognition, their ontological insecurity—i.e., the half-conscious or 'behavioral' consciousness that they don't fully exist, that they don't belong, that they don't have control in their life, that they're somehow contemptible—in an ascetic way. They want their implicit, their "desired," their implicitly self-valuing sense of self to be validated; to achieve this, they accept that in some way they are contemptible but they split off this contemptible part of themselves from what they see as their essence, their higher self, which isn't contemptible. Given that humans seem to have an innate consciousness that their "private parts" are somehow different from the *self*, somehow dirty and shameful, it's natural that the person who becomes an ascetic will, like so many philosophers and religious people have done, categorize this gross material part of himself as the contemptible part, the part that isn't really *him*—thus saving himself from the pain of true self-contempt, which might otherwise have been imposed on him by the nature of social relations. He internalizes society's lack of respect/esteem for him, but to save his (sense of) self he splits it into two, the *lower, inessential* part of which is indeed contemptible. After all, he can't simply choose to *reject* society's 'attitude,' its dehumanized treatment of him; society is *in him*, in the other. So he has to sublimate it. So he devotes his life to battling the lower part of himself, to overcoming it, so that the higher part can finally achieve the recognition it has been denied on account of its 'fusion' with the lower part. This fusion is what has to be overcome.

It's a very poignant state of affairs. "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!"

(Needless to say, those ideas are quite one-sided, and Protestant asceticism even in its extreme manifestations had other meanings too, more positive meanings and also more mundane 'material interest-bound' meanings.)

To recognize your self in the world isn't something that has only to do with *you*. Your "desired self" isn't the way *you alone* want to be, something that has nothing to do with the rest of the world; it incorporates a *relationship* between you and the world. To realize yourself (in the way you want to be realized) entails a change, a drastic change, in the 'external' world. For the world, after all, is a part of you, is the other in your consciousness. All things in the world,[3] but particularly the social world and the people in it, are (for you) instantiations of the other in you. Therefore, to recognize yourself entails that everyone and every institution recognize you as you want to be recognized, in other words that the world remodel itself according to your (half- or un-conscious) conception of how it should be, i.e. your conception of what its relation to you should be, which is also what your relation to yourself should be. And if you could, you would remodel the world yourself, as Napoleon and Hitler and others tried to do. In order for you to "become who you are," the world has to "become what it is" (for you). It's too bad that's impossible.

(Obviously it's practically impossible, but it's impossible in principle too. For your self-consciousness—that is, the other in your consciousness—'transcends' any concrete instantiations of it; it can't exhaust itself in any object or any number of objects. Even if you were emperor of the world, if everyone recognized your value and you had power over everything, there would still be a 'remainder' of the other in your consciousness, which is just to say you would still have a self. As long as you are your own other, you will never *completely* recognize yourself, because, in the end, to recognize yourself means to become one with yourself, which is impossible as long as you're self-conscious. Only in nirvana or

[1] Vicious circle there, by the way.
[2] That is, turning him into a *thing*.
[3] Well, maybe not plants or inert objects.

something like that would you "recognize" yourself, or be at one with yourself.[1] Humans, as they exist now, are condemned to self-division, condemned never to coincide with themselves absolutely.)

Being one with yourself means that the world is one with itself, and vice versa. For the world is in you, and you are in the world. (That sounds like a paradox, but that's only because you're "listening to my *words* and not the *Logos*.")

What does it mean to "overcompensate"? Narcissism, sadism, masochism, egomania…

In all honesty, I'm not particularly committed to the search for knowledge. It's just that I have nothing better to do. (So much free time! I'm a totally superfluous person.)

When a man talks in a woman's high-pitched voice (just for fun), he feels intrinsically frivolous and childish.

The spirit of capitalism, says Weber, is that the accumulation of capital is an end in itself. Whatever furthers this end is good; whatever hinders it is bad. It's a veritable *ethic*, an ethic of avarice. One's *duty* is to accumulate money. Everything is judged by whether it conduces to the accumulation of money. See Ben Franklin's *Necessary Hints to Those That Would Be Rich*.[2] From this perspective, I was wrong in my entry of April 16th: the reason for the irrationality of an obsessed businessman isn't that his behavior has no end, no goal, but that it is *its own* goal, namely to accumulate money—and (here's the crucial point) this goal does nothing to increase the man's happiness. The reverse may well be the case. But if it's true that everyone desires his own happiness, it's irrational to spend all of your time freely doing something that, far from making you happy, can well make you miserable. You're contradicting yourself; your values contradict one another. (At least, so it appears. But the appearance is superficial.)

Early capitalism needed an ideology that justified the endless accumulation of money. An ascetic ideology fit the bill. "Make money for the glory of God!" What'll they think of next?

September 4

Even in the 1300s and 1400s, commercial activity was still seen as ethically wrong or, at best, barely neutral. The capitalistic circles themselves thought of it this way. From the point of view of their eternal salvation, it was a definite risk. That's why they donated so much money to the Church at the end of their lives. Sort of an insurance. "Just in case, you know." Better safe than sorry. "Now, how could activity," Weber asks, "which was at best ethically tolerated, turn into a calling in the sense of Benjamin Franklin? The fact to be explained historically is that in the most highly capitalistic center of that time, in Florence of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the money and capital market of all the great political powers, this attitude was considered ethically unjustifiable, or at best to be tolerated. But in the backwoods small bourgeois circumstances of Pennsylvania in the eighteenth century, where business threatened for simple lack of money to fall back into barter, where there was hardly a sign of large enterprise, where only the earliest beginnings of banking were to be found, the same thing was considered the essence of moral conduct, even commanded in the name of duty. To speak here of a reflection of material conditions in the ideal superstructure would be patent nonsense. What was the background of ideas which could account for the sort of activity apparently directed toward profit alone as a calling toward which the individual feels himself to have an ethical obligation? For it was this idea which gave the way of life of the new entrepreneur its ethical foundation and justification." Fair enough. It must be said, though, that the colonists who came

[1] Above I said that nirvana signifies only an absence of pain, not a state of perfect recognition, but when I wrote that I had doubts about it, and it turns out those doubts were well-founded. The Buddhist nirvana and the Christian heaven are two interpretations of essentially the same state.

[2] To quote Weber: "The ethical quality of Franklin's sermon to young businessmen is impossible to mistake, and that is the characteristic thing. A lack of care in the handling of money means to him that one so to speak murders capital embryos, and hence it is an ethical defect." Great analogy! If you read the passages quoted by Weber, you'll see it isn't an exaggeration.

to New England around the middle or the end of the seventeenth century had come from a fairly bourgeois background in England, where capitalist activity had by then a definite foothold. The Pilgrims were immensely influenced by the economic conditions in England, and they carried the developing bourgeois Zeitgeist over to the New World. There's never a simple "*reflection*" of material conditions in thought; what there is is a mediation, a mediated transformation of material conditions into ideologies. And the actual thoughts and feelings that go through people's heads have their (ultimate) starting-point in (the physical processes and conditions that mediate) people's interactions with each other and nature, interactions that are basically *behavioral* instead of *'reflective consciousness'-generated*. Behavior, mediated by physical and economic conditions, comes first; then reflective consciousness and philosophies and ideologies.

There are several ways to establish historical materialism. You could, for instance, also appeal to ontogenesis.

How silly it is that Marxism still has to be argued for!

On the other hand, it isn't the sole explanation of everything. A *soupçon* of Weber has to be added to the *entrée* of Marxism. Idealism *and* materialism.

Have I ever mentioned that the Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations* fits peculiarly well with Marxism (if you discard all the useless scraps in that book)?

Luther's notion of the *calling*. Called by God. With the Reformation, "one thing was unquestionably new: the valuation of the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume. This it was which inevitably gave everyday worldly activity a religious significance, and which first created the conception of a calling in this sense. The conception of the calling thus brings out the central dogma of all Protestant denominations which the Catholic division of ethical precepts into *praecepta* and *consilia* discards. The only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. That was his calling." A fruitful passage.

You might ask if it was simply an astonishing coincidence that Protestantism fit the demands of emerging capitalism so well. The answer is, obviously, no. The ideology was functionally selected as appropriate to the 'self-justifying' needs of masses of people; it spread like wildfire. It may, perhaps, be a "coincidence"—though almost certainly it isn't—that this crazy man Luther (and, even more so, Calvin) devised an ideology compatible with a bourgeois order,[1] but it isn't a coincidence that his ideology spread so successfully. As Engels once said, what's important (from the perspective of historical materialism) isn't how one unusual individual came up with his ideas; what matters and has to be explained is why those ideas spread or didn't spread amongst millions of people. Gerrard Winstanley[2] was ahead of his time, so his utopian communist ideas fell dead-born from the press; Luther and Calvin were right in sync with their time. Whether ideas end up influencing society depends, in large part, on the relation between the ideas and "material" conditions, economic tendencies, etc.

Functional selection through causal mechanisms.

Losing yourself in love, love of God or of a person, fully believing in your worthlessness compared to this being, this being which has given you *grace* through no merit of your own—submerging your individuality, your sense of self, in this being, being filled with love and gratitude, exalting the other at your own expense, breaking down the distinction between self and other in a self-humbling way. This is basically what mysticism is, a state of mystical rapture; ordinary passionate love is related to mystical rapture. Despite appearances, this self-debasing person is glorifying himself, partaking in the glory of the radiant other who has deigned to recognize him. By exalting the other he is exalting himself—he is merging himself with the

[1] Instead, there were probably complicated unconscious mechanisms in Luther's mind through which (his experiences of) society's bourgeois practices passed and were psychologically filtered into this peculiar sublimation called Protestantism.

[2] [See September 7th.]

other—for, in being loved by an exalted other, one is exalted oneself (however much one "doesn't deserve it"). The way to recognition here is, paradoxically, through self-effacement; it is through self-degradation, for the less *you* are, the less self *you* have, the more the *other* is, this other who loves you and in whom you are merged. (And therefore the more *validating* is the other's love.) Moreover, the less self you have, the more you can *lose yourself* in the other, thus attaining fullness of self. Women are adepts in this underhanded self-glorification. So are Christians.

Calvinism is indeed a severe doctrine, which must have created "unprecedented inner loneliness for the single individual" in the time of the Reformation. Your eternal fate is predestined before your birth, because when God created the world he determined the course of everything in it. Nothing you do can affect your predetermined fate; you are a sinner, a contemptible creature who certainly cannot "change God's mind" regarding your fate by doing good things or participating in any rituals or sacraments or religious ceremonies (even at funerals!), which are all vestiges of magic and superstition. God is wholly transcendent; he cannot be influenced by anything that happens on earth. An elect few have been chosen for heaven (before they were born); the masses have been condemned irrevocably to hell. Calvinism decisively eradicated magic by establishing absolute transcendence, an absolute dichotomy between the sinful world and a God that humans cannot even understand, much less influence. And so no one can help you in your hope for salvation—no priests, no friends, no Church, even no God, since Christ died only for the elect and you don't know if you're one of the elect. You're all alone. Your purpose on earth is solely to work for the glory of God, work selflessly for his glory without caring a whit for your own because you're nothing and you can't change your fate anyway. The purpose of life, the purpose of everything you do, is to glorify God.

Calvinism was, therefore, individualistic, rationalistic, and anti-authoritarian (since it "undermined every responsibility for ethical conduct or spiritual salvation on the part of Church or State as useless"). Emotions were dangerous in that they could distract from service to God; excessive love of fellow men was dangerous. However, since God evidently designed the world so as to be useful to the human race—given the world's wonderfully purposeful, rational organization—one should serve in the interest of "impersonal social usefulness," since this is clearly in accordance with God's plan and so glorifies him. "Follow your calling! Labor in the interest of the community, i.e. of its rational organization!"

(You should love your neighbor only because it increases God's glory. –Mediation: God mediates between you and your neighbor. Transcendence, unspontaneity. Bad. Origin of wickedness.)

Ordinary believers couldn't follow Calvin in every respect: they needed reassurance that they were of the elect. So, naturally, they behaved as God-fearingly as they could, figuring that if they carried out all the duties of their calling they belonged to the elect. Good works, then, were a sign of election. They were the means not of attaining salvation but of getting rid of the fear of damnation. *Constant* good works. No release, no relief (in the manner of Catholics). Monitor yourself at all times, for the more care you take, the more certain you are of salvation. You're proving to yourself your election. "Fatalism is, of course, the only logical consequence of predestination. But on account of the idea of proof the psychological result [among Calvinists] was precisely the opposite."

In short: systematic conduct, methodical rationalization of life. Success in a calling was proof of God's blessing. Pietism adopted this asceticism too (on the whole—but with a greater emphasis on emotional states), as did other sects. Lutheranism, by contrast, was a more emotional, less ascetic belief-system, partly because it didn't emphasize predestination and so didn't foster the desire for "proof." It also was more well-disposed towards religious pageantry and institutions like the confessional. By the way, one of the reasons why so many sects formed around this time is that groups of people wanted to exclude the un-elected from their church. So they started new churches which catered only to the elect.

A result of Calvinism was that self-confidence became a religious virtue, being an indication that one belonged to the elect. Pietism, like Lutheranism, encouraged an attitude of humility, a desire to feel reconciliation and community with God in the present rather than a future life, as with Calvinism. The Calvinist oriented his efforts toward the beyond, the Pietist less so.

Methodism: Method-ism. Methodical, systematic nature of conduct. But major emphasis on feeling. Emotional act of conversion. Religious ecstasy. Sanctification in this life, possible freedom from sin. Un-Calvinist, less transcendental.

Weber's brilliant discussion.

Baptists and Quakers "repudiated all idolatry of the flesh as a detraction from the reverence due to God alone." With Quakers, refusal to bow, to kneel, to remove the hat, to use formal address. Only God deserves respect. "The basic idea is to a certain extent characteristic of all asceticism. Hence the fact that true asceticism is always hostile to authority. In Calvinism it appeared in the principle that only Christ should rule in the Church…" Origins of the nature of democracy in cultures influenced by Puritanism. Historical background for the American lack of respect for authority. –Plausible Weberian hypothesis.

Baptist sects rejected predestination. "The peculiarly rational character of Baptist morality rested psychologically above all on the idea of expectant waiting for the Spirit to descend… The purpose of this silent waiting is to overcome everything impulsive and irrational, the passions and subjective interests of the natural man. He must be stilled in order to create that deep repose of the soul in which alone the word of God can be heard." Obvious parallels with Hindu asceticism, *all* asceticism. "God speaks only when the flesh is silent… The radical elimination of magic from the world allowed no other psychological course than the practice of worldly asceticism."

"Ascetic conduct meant a rational planning of the whole of one's life in accordance with God's will. And this asceticism was no longer an *opus supererogationis* [as during the Middle Ages, with monasticism], but something which could be required of everyone who would be certain of salvation."

"Decided propensity of Protestant asceticism for empiricism, rationalized on a mathematical basis." Windelband: modern science cannot be understood as the product of material and technical interests. "Just as the Christian," argued the Protestant, "is known by the fruit of his beliefs, the knowledge of God and His designs can only be attained through a knowledge of His works. The favorite science of all Puritan, Baptist, or Pietist Christianity was thus physics…" From empirical knowledge of the laws of nature, ascend to an understanding of the essence of the world. Metaphysical speculation was inadequate for that.

Taking three classes. The English Revolution (or Civil War), a historiography class; American Society and Political Culture, 1600–1865; and Contemporary Europe. Also TAing a Classics class. Lots of reading. I'll mention only the better and more substantial texts here, in case I ever want to return to them.

Tanner's *English Constitutional Conflicts of the Seventeenth Century: 1603–1689*.

September 5

Seeking self-glorification through being "insignificant, despised and abased," as in many Christian sects. Splitting yourself into two parts, the lower and the higher. The lower you repudiate, the higher, the "spiritual," you embrace and hope for redemption. The higher is the essential part of your self, the lower virtually irrelevant to it. You want approval for repudiating it; that's why you repudiate it in the first place. Evidently this splitting can result in pathological states and conditions. Mystical ecstasies, hysterical disorders and such.

The circumstance to which the psyche is ever tending can be expressed in one word: immediacy. Un-mediation. The self seeks at the same time fullness of self and negation of self, for the two mean the same thing, namely immediacy. Union of the world with the self, of the self with the self, of the world with the world. It's probably a futile goal, but it can be approximated. —The "life" instinct *is* the "death" instinct. Eros is Thanatos.

Non-mediation. No language, no self–other, no time, no divisions. Something like music.

Bach was a good Protestant—a Pietist, if I'm not mistaken—in his overflowing productiveness, his methodical work-ethic, his composition after composition every week every day, every one of which for the glory of God. Weber was right and Bach was beautiful.

Not totally sober at the moment, so I'll take advantage of the opportunity and be honest. Saw a party going on next door—I'm in a new apartment, by the way, near Central Square, in a great neighborhood

with a delightful little park with a fountain where young mothers take their young children to frolic and squeal under the cold water spraying in high arcs above them with mist—"I see a rainbow, Mommy!"—and my quality of life has definitely improved, partly because my housemates aren't freaks—and so, since it's late at night, I heard and saw a party happening in the yard of the apartment next door. Waited and debated, then chugged vodka and grabbed a beer and went outside to join them. I'm fucking lonely and it seemed a sign from God to meet people. For the glory of God, therefore, I went outside to get drunk. MIT students, I was told; a department get-together. Wandered around a bit but felt like a stranger in a strange land (Lewis or Clark stumbling into brown-skinned natives war-painted playing beer pong) so I left. Still lonely, though, as lonely as last week and last month and three-and-a-half months ago and last year and ten years ago, so I called April just to say hi but I didn't have much to say after that (she was with a friend)—I'll see her again next Thursday at UMass, like I saw her two days ago there because she studies there—and then I called Nadine, my German ex-student (hot) with whom I've been hanging out lately but she didn't answer. Then: home.

Should I read the last chapter of Weber's book now? (Talking to myself, writing to myself.) A bit head-muddled but–all the better. (Posterity glorifies people who write to themselves in small candlelit rooms not knowing if their papers will eventually be lost and history will know nothing or if they'll be immortalized, it's a sham.) Alternatively, I could sit here and keep listening to Bach's cello suites. Or I could do both. Or—

whatever.

…I don't understand how, if you're as beautiful as so many women, it's possible not to spend three hours every day in front of the mirror loving yourself.

People are too eager to judge you. For some reason, Western capitalism puts this trait in people. The people I like most are the ones who haven't succumbed to it, the easygoing ones. Getting rarer every year. (And the so-called intellectuals are the worst. They label you after you've said two sentences.) A kind of unintelligence. Insensitivity.

Young pretty [American] women seem peculiarly susceptible to this weakness, this type of snobbishness and impatience.

For some important English Puritans in the mid-1600s, "Waste of time is the first and in principle the deadliest of sins. The span of human life is short and precious to make sure of one's own election. Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury…is worthy of absolute moral condemnation. [The Puritan] does not yet hold, with Franklin, that time is money, but the proposition is true in a spiritual sense. It is infinitely valuable because every hour lost is lost to labor for the glory of God. Thus inactive contemplation is also valueless…for it is less pleasing to God than the active performance of His will in a calling." "'It is action that God is most served and honored by… The public welfare or the good of the many is to be valued above our own.' Here is the connecting-point for the transition from the will of God to the purely utilitarian viewpoint of the later liberal theory."

Contemporaries thought that Puritans were melancholy and morose. That came from their strictures on spontaneity.

Labor is a good ascetic technique. That's another reason for the Protestant's love of it. –With Protestantism you can see the beginning of the change from "Contemplation is higher than labor!" to the reverse. "Labor came to be considered in itself the end of life, ordained as such by God… 'One does not only work in order to live, but one lives for the sake of one's work, and if there is no more work to do one suffers or goes to sleep.' [–Zinzendorf.]" Not *labor* but *rational* labor in a *calling*.

A lot of these Puritan doctrines are simply 'rationalizations' of capitalist practice. (Interest, profit, wealth are rationalized in obvious ways.) But rationalizations are necessary, and, if powerful, they can greatly influence practice.

Everyone wanted to be wealthy, so, naturally, a justification was found for wealth. Poverty became the sinful thing, wealth the virtuous thing. Begging was socially despised, so, naturally, Protestants found reasons why it was sinful. The specialized division of labor had become necessary, so, naturally, a "fixed calling" was interpreted as ascetically valuable, spiritually redeeming, a glorification of God.

Much of the last chapter reads like a defense of historical materialism.

Everything, everything, *everything* for the glory of God. Nothing for the sake of enjoyment. Acquisitiveness, not enjoyment! Save, don't spend! Middle-class capitalism, not extravagant feudalism!

Weber's brilliant discussion.

"The intensity of the search for the Kingdom of God commenced gradually to pass over into sober economic virtue; the religious roots died out slowly, giving way to utilitarian worldliness."

Puritanism and Kant. Deontology. Everything is done for the glory of God—or, in Kant, for the glory of reason. Not for love, only for abstract duty. –Reification. Legalism (not in the Chinese sense). Commodity-fetishism. Capital-fetishism. (God evolved into Capital, a transcendent entity which is the meaning of life (for a certain class of people). The parallel isn't exact, though: Capital, or Profit, isn't an *other*, it can't recognize you as God can. But by directing your efforts toward its accumulation you're trying to achieve recognition from an abstract other, a contentless remnant of God;[1] this other, which is closely associated with Capital itself, is the successor to God—in this context.) And rationalization. Successors to magic and authority-fetishism.

September 6

If you fail to get recognition from some person or group of people, you respond by denying that person recognition. You get yourself to have contempt for him, or you ignore him or whatever. What exactly is going on here? It's a defense-mechanism, but what does that mean? Well, it's pretty simple: you want to deny that the offending person is important to you, because the more important he is—i.e., the more valuable he is, or the more recognition you give him—the more painful is his lack of respect for you. You want to push him out of your consciousness, out of the *other*-part of you, the part you want recognition from because you recognize its value, its *absolute* value, its transcendence relative to you. When you recognize or value someone you are, to that degree, treating him as an instantiation of the (transcendent) other in you; therefore you want recognition from him in turn (to that degree), since you always want recognition from the other. If he doesn't give it to you then you withdraw your recognition from him as a way of preventing a lack of recognition towards you from the other, which is (experienced as) a terrible thing.

There's always a danger in these investigations that the language I use can be misleading, arising from the fact that the other is both transcendent and immanent in you. Obviously you don't want recognition from *your own consciousness*, insofar as your own consciousness is you. What you want recognition from is the *transcendent* part of your consciousness, or your consciousness insofar as it transcends you. The other in you is projected out of you, into concrete individuals, abstract ideas, etc. You identify it with these people (and, half-consciously, these ideas); that is, you identify this aspect of your consciousness with them, you invest it in them. You interiorize them by exteriorizing (into them) your self-consciousness, the other in you.

Nor is any of this idealism in the pejorative sense. All these processes go on unconsciously, half-consciously, 'behaviorally,' and without them, human behavior wouldn't make sense. We'd be robots. The choice is either behaviorism or this phenomenological psychology.[2] Either a denial of subjectivity, or

[1] It's hard to describe, since it's merely formal. It's *in* your self and *beyond* your self; in your consciousness and beyond it. In the world and outside it. In everyone and beyond him. Ultimately it's just the generalized other, the other in you (which, while merely "formal," can be associated with different ideas (not to mention, of course, concrete people), like God, mankind, posterity, capital-accumulation—and in this sense can take different "forms").

[2] Incidentally, there are other ways of expressing it—other 'vocabularies'—for instance in Freudian terms, involving cathexes and whatnot. But Freudian language is more mechanistic, less 'subjectivistic,' and thus, for humans, less interesting, less compelling, less 'in-our-own-terms,' less of an *explanation*. An explanation of the self and its behavior should be in terms explicable to the self, intuitively graspable, using concepts that can be intuitively related to experience. It shouldn't use mechanistic concepts.

subjectivity. There's no in-between. Unless you want to be a behaviorist, which is stupid, you have to take seriously these sorts of phenomenological investigations. (Behavior can also be explained biologically, of course, but that's on a different level.)

Met Nadine, showed her my new apartment, went outside to show her the little park on this half-misty, half-rainy night, saw the grass made golden by the street-lights, glistening, we kissed, then walked to the subway and kissed again—and she tucked her hair behind her ears in that beautiful feminine way. Nadine. Chopin-loving Nadine.

You can either spend most of your life ignoring mankind's suffering, or you can—never laugh again.

September 7

It's the little things that people do that are most revealing, the unnoticed things that reveal humanity. Like in the park today when the woman talking to her friend sitting on the picnic blanket burst out laughing very hard, tipped backwards and raised her legs in the air and kicked them gleefully in a vertical sawing motion for a few seconds. I saw that and said to myself, "That's a very natural, fun thing to do when you're sitting on the grass and laughing. Kick your legs up in the air! It doubles the pleasure of laughing. But why? Why exactly did she lean backwards and kick her legs in the air? It wasn't a considered, intended act; it was a spontaneous expression of glee. But why does glee express itself in that way? Waving your limbs about, running around, jumping up and down, just moving your body senselessly in any way can be a *joy*. Why? Because that's the way humans were meant to be: to be animals that take joy in their living, in their physical activity, in their *throwing* themselves into the world,[1] acting on it wildly like the wild frolicking animals they are." A whole world, a whole worldview can be contained in the simplest act of a woman on a picnic blanket in the park.

Dropping the English Revolution class because three classes is too many and anyway I can't abide the thought of immersing myself in historical minutiae that make contemporary philosophy seem riveting by comparison. But I'm reading Christopher Hill's radical history of the period entitled *The World Turned Upside Down* because it reminds me of E. P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*.

"There were, we may oversimplify, two revolutions in mid-seventeenth-century England. The one which succeeded established the sacred rights of property (abolition of feudal tenures, no arbitrary taxation), gave political power to the propertied (sovereignty of Parliament and common law, abolition of prerogative courts), and removed all impediments to the triumph of the ideology of the men of property—the protestant ethic. There was, however, another revolution which never happened, though from time to time it threatened. This might have established communal property, a far wider democracy in political and legal institutions, might have disestablished the state church and rejected the protestant ethic."

English Revolution = (sort of) earlier version of French Revolution.

"Spontaneously generated" embryos of democracy in Cromwell's army—similar to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in Russia in 1917. "The rank and file organized themselves from below, led by the yeoman cavalry regiments. Petitions were drafted, some of them dealing with political as well as military matters…" Hannah Arendt. Lost treasures of the revolutionary tradition, first appearing in mid-seventeenth-century England.

Levellers, Diggers, Ranters, Seekers, Anabaptists, Familists, Quakers. Gerrard Winstanley, remarkable man. Visionary genius. Communal cultivation of the commons as the basis for social equality. No private property. Property is anti-Christian. God is Reason, the law of the universe. Pantheism. Etc. Anticipates Spinoza, the Enlightenment, utopian socialism, even Marx in many ways, including, to an

[1] Take that, Heidegger, you pessimist!

extent, the class struggle. Gerrard Winstanley. Detailed, practical proposals for communism in England, pamphlets probably meant for Oliver Cromwell to read. Unparalleled visionary, magnificent, right on nearly every point. Read his pamphlets, reader.

Protestant ethic. *Choose* to labor, be a *fanatic* about labor, because then you'll be able to tolerate the enforced labor of the emerging capitalist order. Something initially unpleasant can become almost a joy if you merely change your attitude. Puritans literally making a virtue of necessity. But the lower classes tended to reject this ethic. Finally they had to be coerced into it through the Industrial Revolution.

You still see conservative ideologists preaching the same old Protestant ethic—work, work, provide for your family, do your duty and everything will turn out fine for you. The elect are those who work; if you're poor you probably deserve it because you're lazy. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps. It's a superficially powerful ideology, unfortunately.

September 8, 9, 10

Reading an excellent textbook on Ancient Greece for the class I'm TAing. In the past I may have exaggerated the differences between our prehistoric ancestors and us. The differences in consciousness and behavior.

Watched *Moulin Rouge* again. Near the end, when Nicole Kidman belts out "*Forgive everything!*" to Ewan MacGregor as he's walking away from her, I *bawled*. Like a God-filled mystic. So beautiful that moment. I want to watch the movie with Nadine.

Ah, sweet catharsis.

Nadine. Seeing her tomorrow at the Boston Music Festival, bands playing downtown, I'll find out then whether our kissing was a fluke or if it was meaningful—you'd think meaningful since we were both sober, and she waited for me to kiss her before we parted which must mean *something*, don't you think? But you never know with women. A mixture of doubt and delight in my mind. Want to write about it because I'm alone listening to Mozart's 24th concerto and Nadine isn't here to talk to—although, honestly, she isn't the greatest conversationalist; talks too much—but I'm in a happy mood and don't want to read about contemporary Europe but I suppose I will. Beautiful girl named Holly in that class, looks like my future wife (*sweet*-looking); I have her email address, hopefully we'll hang out sometime.

La vie, c'est souvent belle. J'aime la vie, oui, je l'aime. Even after 12,000 years, I still love life! This love, this love is nature's love for itself, and mankind's love for itself, in spite of everything, in spite of history! After all that has happened, the Spirit can still affirm living!—the World-Spirit embodied in me, it can survey its past and stubbornly refuse to be a pessimist! For Spirit is more than its tragic past objectifications. There is *hope*.

By the way, there are orders of magnitude more neural connections in the brain than there are stars in our galaxy. If that doesn't make you a humanist, then nothing will.

What's the relation between the other in the sense I've been implying and the other in the sense of a different group of people, as in East vs. West or European vs. Aborigine or Aryan vs. Jew or even, in a different way, man vs. woman? These two meanings of 'other' have some relation to each other, but I don't know what it is.

In a book called *Facing East from Indian Country*, the author remarks that "[With respect to Native American religious practice,] basic moral principles remained constant, but the beings with whom one dealt, and the ways in which one dealt with them, changed with time and situation in much the same way that human ties evolved over a life course. So Native religions were inclusivist, ready to incorporate new ideas and ceremonies, and generally tolerant of differences of opinion, as long as those differences did not result in perceived harm to other people. All of this was profoundly alien to the worldview of the European

Christians. Whether Catholic or Protestant, all Christians were exclusivist…" The opposing religious systems had utterly different premises, as Weber saw. Animistic, magical traditions were meant to influence the course of nature—to make crops grow or convince animals to give themselves up to hunters—by influencing spirit beings. The word *manitou*, for instance, referred to an "'impersonal force that permeated the world, observable in anything marvelous, beautiful, or dangerous.' Deceased ancestors, animals, trees, winds, waters—all were other-than-human persons with whom it was important to maintain mutually beneficial relationships because they possessed or controlled this power." Indians would freely adopt elements of Christianity if they thought that might have beneficial practical results. Christianity, on the other hand, was supposed to give life *meaning*, to provide comfort to the meek, the alienated, to make life bearable in a world of "sin." It gave people *hope*. Primitive magic had no such purpose, since societies that practiced it were in greater harmony with nature and themselves than Christians were, and so didn't need "hope." Indeed, if you look at it objectively, "primitive magic" was far more rational, more *this-worldly*, than Christianity, Judaism and Islam are.

(The arrival of Christians in America ended up creating a desire on the part of many Indians for Christianity, due to the social turmoil that accompanied the encounters between Europeans and Indians. Many of the latter turned to a religion that offered salvation from the suffering caused ultimately by its very emissaries! It could almost have been an immense, magnificent Christian conspiracy: 'If we cause war and turmoil in Indian societies, Indians will increasingly seek refuge in an ideology that exists precisely to comfort people experiencing war and turmoil! Their acceptance of our ideology will give us power over them.' It's brilliant!)

Iroquoian grammar is revealing. Transcendent, abstract ideas cannot be expressed in it; its whole structure, its orientation, is concrete, specific, designed to express concrete relationships. (In its concreteness it's like Chinese. And the Chinese people, like the Indians, didn't have a transcendent monotheistic religion or purely abstract philosophies. They were wholly *grounded, this-worldly, rooted in the earth*.) For example, you can't say "The Father, the Son, and the Holy spirit"; you have to say "*Our* Father, *his* Son, and *their* Holy Spirit." There's no place for transcendence or abstractness in the Iroquoian language. Nor in the society.

Nadine doesn't want a relationship now despite her sexiness because she's worried she'll be hurt when she leaves America in December. Hmph. I haven't given up yet. She almost cried while we were talking about our situation, said she's very sensitive etc. and doesn't want to get hurt. …Well, fair enough. I'll respect her wishes.

September 13

April spent the night here and most of today. No hanky-panky, only good old-fashioned talking. She's the exceptionally rare kind of person who is totally easygoing and intelligent and shares my dry, understated sense of humor.

K. Peter Etzkorn's "Georg Simmel and the Sociology of Music" (1964). "Simmel views music as an acoustic medium of communication which conveys feelings of the performer. 'Just as language is related to concrete thought, so is music related to feelings which are somewhat less precise. The first creates the second, since the second created the first.'" "Instrumental music represents to Simmel a more elaborated mode of expressing human emotions than can be gained through vocal music alone… It is much less direct [than vocal music] in expressing emotions…" "Sound patterns *per se* are devoid of meaning unless they are perceived as conveying learned emotive content." Societies become conditioned to associate particular instrumental sounds and techniques with particular emotions and kinds of behavior. "'Apparently [the style of] music is characteristic for the character of a people.' Variations in the appreciation of different musical styles might therefore be associated with social group differences. More specifically, Simmel stipulates that in order to become great art, music must embody national or social group characteristics. Only thereby will it have meaning for the members of the nation." These highly sensible remarks suggest that what was wrong

with much twentieth-century classical music was its separation from—i.e., its lack of an expressive relation to—the emotions and dynamic, 'emotional' ways of acting. It might not be going too far to say that such music tended to vitiate the nature of music itself—and that in this sense, at least, contemporary popular music (even hip-hop, heavy metal, punk) is more truly "musical" than a lot of high-brow avant-grade stuff is and was. On the other hand, Eduard Hanslick's essay *The Beautiful in Music*. Music isn't *only*, or perhaps even *primarily*, an "*expression*" of "*emotions*," but it surely has some essential connection to feelings, to affective states of mind and behavior.

Mark Leonard's *Why Europe Will Run the Twenty-First Century*. Makes a fairly convincing case that the decentralized nature of the EU represents the future of politics and the global economy.

Thought-spawning: "At the heart of Europe's strategy is a revolutionary theory of international relations. Many foreign policy experts argue that foreign and domestic policy are fundamentally different. Domestic policy, they say, is hierarchical. They argue that in domestic politics a centralized state makes the law and enforces it when it is broken. The classical definition of a state is a body with a monopoly on legitimate force. Foreign policy, by contrast, is anarchic: there are many competing states with no overarching government or global policeman to keep the peace.

"But Foucault shows us that this image of domestic politics is wrong. [No, it's right. As a description of how nation-states currently operate, it's right, at least as far as it goes.] The real reason that societies do not collapse into chaos is that their citizens do not want them to. [Um, what?] Order is not produced through hierarchy [huh?],[1] but because a majority of people have a stake in preserving order. [Those are not mutually exclusive.] That is why people internalize the rules and police themselves. [That is "*why*" they internalize rules? No. Logical fallacy.] The key to order, therefore, is co-opting people—or countries, for that matter—to uphold the rules themselves, rather than coercing them into submission. The same is true of the global system…" Behind the sloppy thinking and careless wording is the insight that there are other ways of guaranteeing social order than through centralized bureaucracies and hierarchies of coercion.[2] The most reliable means to "order" is *socialization*, or *internalization of norms*. In every ordered society there exists such socialization, which in itself relies only incidentally or not at all on the threat of force. Far more effective than force in securing consent and compliance are non-coercive mechanisms, such as (on the positive side) *ontogenetic learning* and (on the negative side) the possibility of *social rejection*. The more important the threat of force is, the more pathological and unnatural the society is. Totalitarianism is the extreme, in which the threat of the concentration camp is, as Arendt argues, the linchpin of social order. Undoubtedly Mark Leonard underestimates the importance of force in the liberal-democratic nation-state; he is right, though, that there is no *a priori* reason why the centralization and hierarchization of force should be a prerequisite for order in *any* technologically advanced, mass-populated society.

[…]

After all, it was easy to be a great humanist in the 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, even during much of the 20th, because in the former case(s) you were not really at odds with the major trends of culture and in the latter you had the immediate, glorious past of four centuries to support you in your opposition to bureaucracy and commodification. Erasmus, Da Vinci, Alberti, Michelangelo, Milton, Schiller, Goethe, Kant, Beethoven, Shelley were fundamentally in tune with their times (despite appearances), while Ortega, Adorno, Eliot, Sartre, Camus, Beauvoir and the rest were in tune with a huge, disillusioned portion of modern society. Only in the last few decades have the old ideals become totally unfashionable. Susan Sontag recognized this fact in the passage I quoted months ago.

"With Daniel Boone and his successors, a 'new man' appeared, created by the meeting of whites and Indians, a product of the violent absorption of the Indians by the whites." That's true: Daniel Boone

[1] He should have said: not *necessarily* produced through hierarchy.

[2] By "coercion" I mean the threatened withdrawal of conditions for the individual's or the group's (1) self-preservation or (2) non-enslavement or -imprisonment. Coercive methods rest, in the end, on brute physical force; non-coercive methods operate through the human desire for recognition/validation.

did represent a new ideal, a new man, just as the Protestant ethic represented a new ideal, and the Protestant a new man. Two new ideals that came together in America and fused, representing a new American ideal, the "American man." Boone was the adventurer, the wilderness-conqueror, the rugged, heroic individualist, an ideal that later metamorphosed into the adventuresome entrepreneur along the lines of Carnegie, Morgan, Ford, Rockefeller, and ultimately Bill Gates, etc. The good Protestant, on the other hand, was the hard worker, the man who pursued his calling with religious fervor—an ideal that later shed its religious overtones and became that of the hardworking, thrifty bourgeois who lifted himself up from poverty by his bootstraps. Two modern ideals, two (closely related) versions of individualism. They were mutually reinforcing; together they came to define "the American dream." This history is one of the reasons why the Protestant ethic has (had) an influence in America that it didn't (and doesn't) have in Europe, despite its having been founded in Europe. Another reason, of course, is that early American colonies were almost exclusively Puritan, with the result that there was far more social-structural and ideological homogeneity in America than in Europe. Und so weiter.

David Foster Wallace hanged himself. Forty-six years old. Yesterday as I was reading Mark Leonard's book, Wallace was preparing for his own death, perhaps placing his head through the noose and jumping down from a chair, then choking and twitching and suddenly seeing bulge-eyedly in the last flicker of consciousness the horror of what he was doing. As I was joking with April, his wife was finding his body.

September 14

Am I sad that Wallace is dead? No, I don't care much. To be sad means to feel something or at least to have one's behavior changed temporarily, and I neither feel anything nor am acting differently in any way whatever as a result of hearing the news. And yet it would be perfectly natural for me to say to someone, "I'm saddened by his suicide," and the person would surely believe me. But it wouldn't really be true. Yet in the moment of saying it, I would mean it. But essentially all I'd mean is "It's too bad he killed himself." It's a shame, it's a pity, etc. Trite things we say because we know others expect us to say them and we expect ourselves to say them and we're only following norms. I'm sad, I'm happy, I'm angry, I'm excited, I can't wait, I love you, I don't like her… Words, words, words. Words bind us to the (norm-governed) social order; uttering all the predictable responses, any predictable utterance in a given situation, reinforces our place in the social universe, keeps us securely and reassuringly in the fold of norms. Order, we need order, we want order, order, everything for the sake of order. Without order we have nothing, no self.

The tragedy of Wallace is that he wasn't able to rise above his anomic society. Neither in his writing nor in his life. He was fragmented. I know that's a cliché and impersonal, but like most clichés it has truth.

Bent Flyvbjerg's "Habermas and Foucault: Thinkers for Civil Society?" (1998). Not a very good paper that got published because it adheres to scholarly protocol. I appreciate Habermas's Kantian ambitiousness, his aversion to relativism, and he's far more stimulating than Foucault, but essentially it's all castles in the air. But why do people think Foucault is important? Everything substantive he says is either confused or obvious.

On the basis of McLellan's review, I won't be reading Charles Taylor's book *A Secular Age* anytime soon. Unoriginal, safe, idealistic—conventional wisdom dressed in the robes of neo-philosophy. But those robes are so threadbare that, to all intents and purposes, the emperor has no clothes. 'Secularism is an impoverished creed, humans "ache" for transcendence and "fullness," religion can never die out, belief and unbelief are simply alternative ways of living, etc. etc. etc.' Go tell it on the mountain, ass.

Who knows, there may be a "transcendent" layer of reality. There surely is, in fact. (What that means is another question entirely.) But if you're going to write a book you should say something worth saying. Don't just rehash all the same old shit in post-philosophical, post-critical, post-eloquent language.

V. Y. Mudimbe's "Reading and Teaching Pierre Bourdieu" (1993). "The habitus is an accretion of internalized lessons that the agent has learned over the course of his socialization… It is 'a durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations; it produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle.'" That sort of makes sense if you think about it. "Each agent," writes Bourdieu, "wittingly or unwittingly, willy nilly, is a producer and reproducer of objective meaning. Because his actions and works are the product of a *modus operandi* of which he is not the producer and has no conscious mastery, they contain an 'objective intention,' as the Scholastics put it, which always outruns his conscious intentions." Another suggestive idea is that *culture is a game*. There are rules, strategies, the forbidden possibility of breaking the rules, 'competitors,' and so forth. "'In the game you cannot do just anything and get away with it. And the feel for the game, which contributes to this necessity and this logic, is a way of knowing this necessity and this logic.' In any case, the orthodoxy and regularity of modes of practice in the game express the habitus, a disposition referring back to the language of rules inculcated in the agent." *Play…game…culture*. In children, play and games are ways of accommodating the child to the slow inculcation of cultural norms. Ways of 'easing the transition' from an earlier lawless state to the rule-boundedness of the social order. Ways of internalizing, or facilitating the internalization of, societal norms. *Culture is a game*. Not literally, but it's a good metaphor.

The fall of man, the rise of religion, the upsetting of an eons-long equilibrium—this coincided with the slowly progressing depersonalization of nature, i.e. the slow decline of belief in the 'intentionality' of natural phenomena, the ability to influence them as one influences humans, to interact with the natural world as with the social world. No longer was nature an other, or infused with others, somewhat comparable to the human other. This natural, *immanent* other was instead projected into the beyond, with the result that one oriented one's life toward the beyond.

Incidentally, from what I've read of Weber, he wasn't quite right about magic. It satisfied *both* the practical and the 'religious' desires in people, the desire to bring about one's ends and the desire for 'existential meaning.' In satisfying the first, it satisfied the second, for the second is essentially the desire to belong in the universe, to be a respected, integral part of it like all other parts. This desire didn't even become an object of awareness until the world was separated into "nature" and "society," which coincided with the division of the cosmos into *this* realm of reality and the *other* realm. These divisions existed to an extent even in China and India, although it wasn't until the rise of the West that they became really extreme. The Hellenistic era had a relatively advanced conception of them.

It would seem as though science is, after all, part of the problem, since science teaches us that the universe is mechanistic, that the chasm of *free will and consciousness* separates humans from the rest of nature, thus alienating us from it. But this is a capitalist science; it isn't necessarily the *correct* science. It *can't* be, at least not until it can account for paranormal phenomena of the sort that Mayer describes. Those suggest that consciousness is most definitely a part of the deepest layer of reality immanent—*immanent*, not "transcendent"—in the world.

Instead of saying "consciousness transcends itself," which sounds idealistic, it might be better to say "I transcend myself. A human being transcends himself, in his thoughts and his behavior."

The word "significance." Sign-ificance. "Life has no sign-ificance." Same with "meaning." "Life has no mean-ing." It's extremely revealing that these two words both involve the concept of "sign." To say that life isn't significant literally means that it isn't a sign of something else, of another layer of reality. Events in our world don't *mean* something else, don't *refer* to something, don't *sign*-ify something. You can see in the very structure of these words that the concept of existential meaning or significance arose under the influence of a transcendental religion like Christianity, which interpreted, especially in the Middle Ages, worldly events as signs of heaven or God's will. Everything was a mere sign (or *symbol*); everything referred to heaven and derived its sign-ificance from that. The physical structure of cathedrals, the hierarchical structure of the Church, etc. If Riencourt can be trusted, the Chinese traditionally had a similar understanding of worldly events as being signs of "heavenly" events, or rather the "flip-side" of such events. But they didn't emphasize the transcendental aspect as much as Christians did, and I bet that in the Chinese

language the modern characters for "existential meaning," if they exist at all, have no relation to the character(s) for "sign."

Thomas Luckmann's "Shrinking Transcendence, Expanding Religion?" (1990). Good article. Usefully distinguishes between kinds of transcendence.

The Protestant ethic has partly withered away, and is still withering, to be replaced by the ideology of personal fulfillment. That's a positive development, an important advance in the dialectic. "There seems to be a powerful 'elective affinity' between the structural privatization of individual life [in modern society] and the 'sacralization' of subjectivity that is celebrated in much of modern consciousness." Good point. What exactly are the reasons for the mass-acceptance of this ideology? My speculations on March 24th left a lot to be desired. I didn't even understand its importance, as shown by the last sentence of the relevant paragraph: "An attenuated ideology of Romanticism clings desperately to life despite its obvious inadequacy to contemporary conditions." No, Chris, you've got it all wrong! It isn't clinging desperately to life; it's ascendant! Its greatest triumphs are ahead. Hence it can't be only a despairing reaction to dehumanization or whatnot. It has also to do with the individual's great freedom, his unprecedented leisure-time, as well as the forces of commercialism, which trumpet the gospel of "self-fulfillment" because it's incredibly profitable.

Luckmann notes that the New Age movement represents a somewhat "magical" worldview. Think of astrological advice columns too. Remnants of magic have by no means entirely left the modern consciousness. Nor is magic entirely "untranscendental," as Weber implies.

September 15, 16

Hans Mol's "Time and Transcendence in a Dialectical Sociology of Religion" (1981). Dialectic between integration and differentiation… Present throughout nature and society. Everywhere. One's methodology should be premised on this fact.

Don't forget the purely cognitive benefits of religion, the 'ordering' functions it performs. But those aren't purely cognitive. Providing a means of orientation, like all ideologies do. The need to order your world and act on that basis, for without some kind of order, action is difficult or impossible. You act in light of ends, you pursue ends on the basis of your knowledge of means. The more systematic your 'knowledge' is, the better you can orient yourself and the more intelligently and effectively (ceteris paribus) you can act. Archimedes' points, transcendental ideas like God or democracy or private enterprise or the nation.

"For the Australian Aborigine, time was not a horizontal line extending back horizontally through a series of pasts but rather a vertical line in which the past underlies and is within the present… Time as an abstract concept does not exist in Aboriginal language… The Aboriginal religion did not look back to a golden age or forward to an afterlife."

Ramakant Sinari's "The Phenomenological Attitude in the Samkara Vedanta" (1972). John Searle's "How to Study Consciousness Scientifically" (1998). He writes, "Consciousness and indeed all mental phenomena are *caused by lower level neurobiological processes in the brain*; and…consciousness and other mental phenomena are *higher level features of the brain*." Both those statements are ambiguous, but on one reading they're right. In the rest of his paper he addresses common philosophical objections to the possibility of understanding consciousness, one of which is this: "There is no way that we could ever give an intelligible causal account of how anything subjective and qualitative could be caused by anything objective and quantitative, such as neurobiological phenomena. There is no way to make an intelligible connection between objective third-person phenomena, such as neuron firings, and qualitative, subjective states of sentience and awareness." This objection, I've said many times, is insurmountable. For no matter how sophisticated is our knowledge of biochemistry, no matter how great our understanding of the physical processes that go on in the cell and between cells, it will always be an intuitive mystery how something private and seemingly non-physical can arise from something public and physical. This is the mystery of a specific kind of *emergence*. Human beings lack the necessary cognitive apparatus to understand it, just as

we apparently lack the cognitive apparatus to understand—or rather to do away with—the dichotomy between causal necessity in the brain and freedom in consciousness and behavior.

Stated in Nagel's terms, "the problem is that we have no idea how objective phenomena, such as neuron firings, could necessitate, could make it unavoidable, that there be subjective states of awareness. Our standard scientific explanations have a kind of necessity, and this seems to be absent from any imaginable account of subjectivity in terms of neuron firings. What fact about neuron firings in the thalamus could make it necessary that anybody who has those firings must feel a pain, for example?" The answer is that, to our limited human understanding, *no* fact can make it necessary. Whatever complex of biochemical processes we ultimately decide produces consciousness, the emergence of consciousness from it will inevitably seem arbitrary and mysterious to us, because of the leap between public and private.

Searle disagrees:

> I accept the unstated assumption behind the objection: given our present scientific paradigms it is not clear how consciousness could be caused by brain processes. But I see this as analogous to the following: within the explanatory apparatus of Newtonian mechanics, it was not clear how there could exist a phenomenon such as electromagnetism; within the explanatory apparatus of 19th century chemistry, it was not clear how there could be a non-vitalistic, chemical explanation of life. That is, I see the problem as analogous to earlier apparently unsolvable problems in the history of science. The challenge is to forget about how we think the world ought to work, and instead figure out how it works in fact.
>
> My own guess—and at this stage in the history of knowledge it is only a speculation—is that when we have a general theory of how brain processes cause consciousness, our sense that it is somehow arbitrary or mysterious will disappear. In the case of the heart, for example, it is clear how the heart pumps the blood. Our understanding of the heart is such that we see the necessity. Given the contractions, it causes blood to flow through the arteries. What we so far lack for the brain is an analogous account of how the brain causes consciousness. But if we had such an account—a general causal account—then it seems to me that our sense of mystery and arbitrariness would disappear.
>
> It is worth pointing out that our sense of mystery has already changed since the 17th century. To Descartes and the Cartesians, it seemed mysterious that a physical impact on our bodies should cause a sensation in our souls. But we have no trouble in sensing the necessity of pain given certain sorts of impacts on our bodies. We do not think it at all mysterious that the man whose foot is caught in the punch press is suffering terrible pain. We have moved the sense of mystery inside. It now seems mysterious to us that neuron firings in the thalamus should cause sensations of pain. And I am suggesting that a thorough neurobiological account of exactly how and why it happens would remove this sense of mystery.

Needless to say, Searle doesn't know what he's talking about. The problem isn't analogous to earlier questions about Newtonian mechanics. Nor is it analogous to the question about how the heart pumps blood. Nor has our sense of mystery really changed since Descartes; the only difference is that we formulate the Cartesian question in sophisticated scientific language. The question remains, how can something physical and public give rise to something strangely (or 'partly') non-physical and private?

It's astounding that no one before me kept a lifelong daily record of his solutions to theoretical problems—a document in which he proceeded from problem to problem, trying to solve them. Hammering out his worldview. Billions of people, and, as far as we know, not *one*, at least not in anything like the thoroughness, or even the *form*, of my journal. Nietzsche came the closest.

Erik Olin Wright's "The Shadow of Exploitation in Weber's Class Analysis" (2002). Interesting: "The analysis in Weber's 1896 study of the causes of decline of ancient civilizations has a particularly Marxian flavor to it. His central argument is that the contradictions of slavery as a way of organizing production were the fundamental cause of the ultimate collapse of the Roman Empire."

Class, status, party: (1) economic, (2) communal, (3) political: (1) no necessary subjective identity or collective action; (2) some subjective identity, "positive or negative social estimation of *honor*," consciousness of belonging to a group; (3) collective action. "In these terms, members of a class become a status group when they become conscious of sharing a common identity, and they become a party when they organize on the basis of that identity." Definition of class in terms of the economic opportunities people face in the market (their "life-chances"), and also in terms of *rationalized* economic interactions. "For Marx, expropriation of the workers from the means of production is crucial because it enables capitalists to exploit workers; for Weber this expropriation is crucial because it allows for the full realization of economic rationality within production."

Relationship between rationalization and alienation…

Weber agrees with Marx that class is the primary axis of stratification in capitalism. Furthermore, both of their class concepts are relational rather than gradational ("lower, middle, upper"); both see property-ownership as the fundamental source of class division, and Weber recognizes that propertylessness is a coercive, unfree condition; and "for both Weber and Marx, the material interests structured by class locations have a strong tendency to shape the actual behavior of people within those locations." Duh.

(I should keep in mind that "fragmentation" or "atomization" in itself is not a sufficiently specific diagnosis of capitalist social life, for there was a kind of fragmentation amongst peasant communities in pre-capitalist societies—which is precisely why peasant class-consciousness rarely developed.)

Weber: "We may speak of a 'class' when (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life-chances, insofar as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labor markets. This is 'class situation.' …The kind of chance in the *market* is the decisive moment which presents a common condition for the individual's fate. Class situation is, in this sense, ultimately market situation." Marx's view is more complicated:

> In Marx's class analysis, the effect of exchange on life chances is only half the story. Of equal significance is how property relations shape the process of exploitation. Both "exploitation" and "life chances" identify inequalities in material well-being that are generated by inequalities in access to resources of various sorts. Thus, both of these concepts point to conflicts of interest over the distribution of the assets. What exploitation adds to this is a claim that conflicts of interest between classes are generated not simply by conflicts over the distribution and value of resources people bring to exchanges in the market, but also by the nature of the interactions and interdependencies generated by the use of those resources in productive activity.
>
> Exploitation, for Marx, identified the process by which labor effort performed by one group of economic actors is extracted and appropriated by another group. That appropriated labor is referred to as "surplus labor," meaning laboring activity above and beyond what is required to reproduce the laborers themselves. In capitalism, for Marx, this appropriation occurs because employers are able to force workers to work longer hours and perform more labor than is embodied in the products that they consume with their wages. Expressed in the classical language of the labor theory of value, the labor value of what they produce is greater than the labor value of what they consume. The difference—surplus value—is appropriated by the capitalist. This appropriation is exploitation.
>
> The concept of exploitation, defined in this way, is used by Marx in two general explanatory contexts. First, Marx sees exploitation as the source of profits in capitalism: Capitalists appropriate surplus value from workers that, when capitalists sell the commodities embodying that surplus value, is turned into money profits. Profits, in turn, are essential for investment and capital accumulation. In this way, exploitation figures centrally in Marx's account of the dynamics of capitalism. Second, Marx sees exploitation as central to explaining the particular character of conflict between workers and capitalists. Exploitation constitutes a social relation that simultaneously pits the interests of one class

> against another, binds the two classes together in ongoing interactions, and confers upon the disadvantaged group a real form of power with which to challenge the interests of exploiters…

The labor theory of value operates on an extraordinarily high plane of abstraction. That explains the difficulty in understanding it.

For Weber, classes are premised on the existence of a market, which means that slaves and serfs don't belong to a class. They're a status group.

At the end of his paper, Wright lays out the ramifications of the two different approaches to class analysis.

How funny is it that some woman named Sarah Palin, who thinks dinosaurs existed six thousand years ago, could with a little luck become president! All that's necessary is that McCain get elected and then die. If it weren't so funny it would be terrifying. But…no, it's just freaking hilarious. The political system doesn't anger me anymore—to be "angry" at it is like saying, "Auschwitz was a bad thing": it's not even in the ballpark of doing justice to the fact—and so I have to sit back and laugh heartily, and then shoot myself in the head.

I can't watch Sarah Palin talk: she's a cartoon. She makes Bush look like a personification of integrity and intelligence.

September 17

Years ago I mentioned an episode of a sitcom in which a fat man chose to gluttonize himself precisely because women were rejecting him. I asked the question, what does it mean when someone chooses to be a buffoon, in the manner of Marmeladov in *Crime and Punishment*? What exactly is going on? If people want to be validated, why would someone choose to debase himself so that he is explicitly contemptible to others? You have to realize, first of all, that no one does this unless he thinks that people *already* consider him a buffoon. On the basis of that impression he chooses to make himself an even greater buffoon, thus confirming and accepting his other-determined identity (his identity in the eyes of the other). It's easier for him to do this than to try to rise above and prove wrong the other's opinion of him. But why is it easier? Because to make himself *respected* by the other, which is naturally what he desires in spite of himself, would entail directly confronting the pain of having his sense of self not be validated—the pain of knowing he's an object of contempt. On some level, of course, he's already aware of this, but he doesn't have to confront it head-on if he adjusts his behavior and his sense of self so as to incorporate the other's impression of him. By accepting that impression and choosing to see himself in the same way, he makes it possible for his sense of self—which is now his *new* sense of self, his self-contemptuous sense of self—to be validated. That's what we want: to be seen as what we see ourselves to be. Normally we try to bring the other's perception of us in line with our self-perception, but in those cases when the other's perception is too set in its contemptuous ways and refuses to be changed, we may settle for bringing our self-perception in line with the other's perception, thus restoring some degree of harmony between how we see ourselves and how we're seen. *Recognition of ourselves as who we want to be*: that's what we desire. By *choosing* to be a buffoon, Marmeladov makes it possible for himself to be recognized (by others) as who he wants to be, namely a buffoon—for he knows that's how he is already seen by others.

There are risks, though, in the Marmeladovian strategy. One risks splitting oneself into two pieces, a lower and a higher, an inferior and a superior. The superior is essentially the "internalized" other looking at and judging you; the inferior is the concrete you, the you of your behavior and your "contemptible" personality. You may come to see yourself as loathsome, despicable, and thus succumb to various neuroses or psychoses premised on your harmful self-division. I should reread Laing's book.

Now that I have access to a real library—at UMass—I intend to get back on track with my reading. For light reading I'm perusing an anthology called *Feminism In Our Time: The Essential Writings, World War II to the Present* (1994). A decent article by Naomi Weisstein called "Kinder, Küche, Kirche as Scientific Law." She laments that "it has been a central assumption for most psychologists of human personality that human behavior rests primarily on an individual and inner dynamic, perhaps fixed in infancy, perhaps fixed by genitalia, perhaps simply arranged in a rather immovable cognitive framework." She argues, by contrast, that "what a person does and who he believes himself to be, is in general a function of what people around him expect him to be, and what the overall situation in which he is acting implies that he is. Compared to the influence of the social context within which a person lives, his or her history and 'traits,' as well as biological makeup, may simply be random variations, 'noise' superimposed on the true signal which can predict behavior." I think she goes too far there. Biological makeup and "traits" are enormously important in conditioning a person's actions and reactions in a given situation. Still, she's right to condemn personality theory for looking "for inner traits when it should have been looking [*also*] at social context."

"An ingenious experiment…showed that subjects injected with adrenaline, which produces a state of physiological arousal in all but minor respects identical to that which occurs when subjects are extremely afraid, became euphoric when they were in a room with a stooge who was acting euphoric, and became extremely angry when they were placed in a room with a stooge who was acting extremely angry." Social context, not biology or inner traits.

Similarly, a relatively high level of testosterone in a man does not necessarily mean that he will be aggressive, dominating, competitive. These modes of behavior are, in large part, socially determined: they depend on the social context in which the man finds himself, as well as on his past experiences, etc. On the other hand, it's a little silly to extend this argument to the hypothesis that biological differences are minimally relevant to the fact that men have almost always been the hunters and women the gatherers and/or agriculturalists. It's also silly to say that hormones and so on are not an important cause of men's generally greater aggressiveness and dominance than women. Social conditions do determine how psycho-physiological 'energy' will manifest itself behaviorally—as in the adrenaline experiment—but the fact remains that a person's behavior will be *somehow* affected by the presence or absence of certain hormones and endorphins and protein-levels and whatnot. Person X will tend to be more physically active than person Y, who will tend to be more nurturing and emotional than person Z. Not *solely* because of biology, but *partly*.

Feminists often construct strawman arguments that they have no difficulty tearing down.

"How are women characterized in our culture, and in psychology? They are inconsistent, emotionally unstable, lacking a strong conscience or superego, weaker, 'nurturant' rather than productive, 'intuitive' rather than intelligent, and, if they are at all 'normal,' suited to the home and the family." Yes, they are still characterized that way, though not *explicitly* so because people are forced to be hypocrites in these politically correct times. [They *act* on those beliefs but can't *state* them.] In any case, there is no denying that, on average, and in comparison with men, that characterization is pretty accurate (though a caricature). Modern women *are* all those things. And women *have been* all those things, more or less, since…I don't know…let's say the Early Bronze Age at least. You can draw whatever conclusions you want from that fact.

On the level of caricatures, however, men don't fare much better.

Women and men will always define themselves in relation to each other, behave in complementary ways. That doesn't mean, though, that the oppression or devaluation of women is unavoidable. But what about *mild* "devaluation" relative to men?—the vague impression of relative passiveness and weakness that has obtained not only in the most "civilized" cultures throughout history (from China and India to the Incas and Aztecs) but also in Native American society, early Germanic society, New Guinean tribes, the entirety of Polynesia, etc. etc.? Is *that* unavoidable? Yes.

Incidentally, what I wrote above about Marmeladov can, if revised, be applied to the case of millions upon millions of women. Women find that society expects them to act in less-than-fully-dignified ways, so they act in such ways for the sake of the other's approval (or recognition, validation).

September 18

It doesn't look like those hospital bills are going away. So I need more money. So I'm teaching English again, part-time, starting next week. I could use more human contact anyway: don't have much of a social life at the moment.

Laurel Ulrich's book *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785–1812*. Schnabel and Rocca's *The Next Superpower?: The Rise of Europe and Its Challenge to the United States*.

Sent Chomsky a query about his opinions on the mind-body problem and the free will issue. "…Similarly," I continued, "the free will vs. determinism debate is unresolvable due to the cognitive limits of the mind. Our conscious perception of freedom is as necessary and inevitable as is the scientific framework of physical causation in the brain.[1] The two ways of looking at the same phenomenon (namely consciousness) cannot be reconciled. Would you agree, or am I off my rocker?"

He agreed, though not with my opinions on the mind-body issue. "My feeling is somewhat different," he wrote. "I've been arguing for many years that the mind-body problem disappeared after Newton's discoveries were absorbed. I'll attach a recent paper about it.

"I suspect you're right about the free will problem. I've also suggested for many years that it may be beyond our cognitive limits. Which wouldn't be too surprising, since so are many other phenomena of nature, so it appears. Again, discussed a bit in the same paper." It's an excellent, borderline brilliant, paper he wrote some months ago. Very long, very erudite, and very historically grounded.

By the way, unlike most people, who, moreover, don't receive hundreds of emails a day, Chomsky replied within twenty-four hours, as he always does. You see, he has common courtesy, which is anything but "common" anymore. (Maybe it never was, except among the minority of humanly decent people in every age.)

His paper has made it clear to me that I've been using the word 'mechanistic' improperly, as when I say that the modern scientific worldview is mechanistic whereas Hegel's was teleological. Strictly speaking, 'mechanistic' (mechanism, mechanical, machine) has to do with matter colliding against matter—pieces of matter coming into contact with each other. Newton's notion of "action at a distance" is not mechanistic, which is why he wasn't satisfied with it. Action at a distance is inexplicable, mystical, occult, absurd, unscientific. He and his contemporaries thought that to understand something means to understand the *mechanism* through which it operates, which necessarily involves direct physical contact. And maybe they were right: due to the nature of our innate cognitive equipment—see Piaget—we intuitively understand the physical causation, the physical motion of the everyday world; we understand objects to be *substances* of some sort, *solids*, mutually separated *atoms* that come into contact with each other, and to us this is the only way motion can originate. Except—what about *willed* actions! When I move my limbs, the movement is somehow physically undetermined! My "will" determines it. But what does that mean and how is that possible? Well, that's just the mystery of will, of "free will." In any case, I've been using the word 'mechanistic' as though its opposite is some version of the concept 'willed,' which isn't the right usage. For neither quantum mechanics nor general relativity nor "field theory" (electromagnetism, etc.) is properly mechanistic. Not even Newtonian physics is mechanistic.

Chomsky is right that ever since Newton, the concept of matter has been essentially incoherent, ill-defined. My knowledge of this fact was precisely why in my paper on emergentism I shied away from formulating the issue in terms of "mind vs. matter," choosing instead "private vs. public." In the light of modern physics—even in the light of Newton, with his "action at a distance"—our intuitive understanding of matter is not valid, and no such criteria as extension or mass or divisibility or any other traditional ideas can be used to delineate what is material from what is not material. *Except*, perhaps, to say that matter is not private or first-personal. Maybe this criterion is inadequate too, but it's useful for expressing our

[1] Neither of which 'frameworks,' by the way, we understand even on their own terms.

intuition of the mind-body problem. The sensation I have when pinching my skin is a very different kind of thing from the skin itself. It's private and—yes, as Descartes said, it isn't divisible or extended in the way that skin is! I have to admit, though, that when I think hard about this problem I get the feeling that there may be something specious about it. It seems less substantive and less easily graspable than the problem of free will. Anyway, there's no good reason to believe that matter can't think or feel. I am *conscious matter*, whatever "matter" is. That's obvious.

"…Joseph Priestley made it clear that his conclusions about thinking matter followed directly from the collapse of any serious notion of *body*, or *matter*, or *physical*. He wrote that 'The principles of the Newtonian philosophy were no sooner known than it was seen how few in comparison of the phenomena of Nature were owing to solid matter, and how much to powers which were only supposed to accompany and surround the solid parts of matter… Now when solidity had apparently so very little to do in the system, it is really a wonder that it did not occur to philosophers sooner…that there might be no such thing in Nature.'

"There is, then, no longer any reason to suppose that 'the principle of thought or sensation [is] incompatible with matter,' Priestley concluded. Accordingly, 'the whole argument for an immaterial thinking principle in man, on this supposition, falls to the ground; matter, destitute of what has hitherto been called solidity, being no more incompatible with sensation and thought than that substance which without knowing anything farther about it, we have been used to call immaterial.' The powers of sensation, perception and thought reside in 'a certain organized system of matter, [and] necessarily exist in, and depend upon, such a system.' It is true that 'we have a very imperfect idea of what the power of perception is,' and that we may never attain a 'clear idea,' but 'this very ignorance ought to make us cautious in asserting with what other properties it may, or may not, exist.' Only a 'precise and definite knowledge of the nature of perception and thought can authorize any person to affirm whether they may not belong to an extended substance which also has the properties of attraction and repulsion.' Our ignorance provides no warrant for supposing that sensation and thought are incompatible with post-Newtonian matter…"

However true this all is, the intuitive difficulties remain. Maybe the *conceptual* difficulties don't…but yes, they do, given the difficulties involved in the idea of "radical emergence."

September 19

My greatest worry in life is that my journal will never be published. The world values values like mine less and less. I keep telling myself that eventually, maybe after a hundred or two hundred years, things will get back to normal, nihilism will have run its course and the ideal of "greatness" will make a comeback, but it's possible that the human species has entered its terminal phase. Besides, don't advanced technology and science by their nature rule out authentic humanism and cultural idealism? We need myths, we *need* them. At least for us higher men, life is unbearable unless there are myths to chase. But how can there be myths in a world of economic abundance?

[…]

Just as the S&L crisis of the 1980s was a fitting commentary on Reagan's economic leadership (or lack of it), so the current financial crisis, which could potentially cause the downfall of financial institutions across the world, is the perfect end to the Bush years. Deregulation, lack of government oversight—something economists have been warning against for decades—is causing an economic cataclysm. And then there's *environmental* deregulation, lack of government oversight, and the predictable result is global chaos decades from now.

Don't forget Enron and such debacles earlier in the decade. Republicans should be lined up against a wall and shot, having ruined millions of lives. Don't forget Iraq and Afghanistan.

And McCain was a zealot in defense of deregulation, and now he's saying that the crisis was caused by too much deregulation! If that man and his half-wit sidekick are elected, I'm fucking emigrating. How fucking stupid do people have to be to support him? What the fuck is wrong with this country?

Christ, when I watch that man talk I can see right to the back of his nasty little hypocrisy-soaked brain. He is despicable, repugnant. Everything he stands for, his pseudo-patriotism, his unprincipled politics, everything he is is *nasty*. I saw him yelling at a woman for five minutes until she cried, a woman who was speaking before a committee on behalf of American families who had been hurt by Vietnam, and he ranted about his patriotism and how he wouldn't let anyone "like *you*!" criticize him and his fellow senators. He was offended, his temper flared up, he yelled at this woman fighting for families until she cried. I was so disgusted I almost threw up. This blot, this stain, this *thing* can't be elected, that's impossible.

Without hyperbole, it truly is *beyond belief* that so many Americans are still undecided. "I'm not sure, I'm just not sure! Isn't Obama a Muslim? I don't know enough about him. I was told he's a Muslim! I don't like McCain's ideas, but at least I know him." This is the *stupidest* country in the world. Commercialism, pop culture has made people *stupid*. Eight years of Bush and they're still undecided?!! What fucking planet are you people from?!! The economy is going to hell and you're still undecided?! *Fucking morons*. You want health care but you're thinking of voting for McCain. You want us out of Iraq but you're thinking of voting for McCain. You want economic reform but you might vote for McCain. You want a better education system, you want more rights for women, but—McCain. You're worried about the environment, but "at least I *know* McCain!" You're worried about national security so you want to vote for the warmonger. Fucking brilliant.

September 20

People in olden times had wonderful euphemisms for sex. You can see them in the Bible. Another one is in the book I'm reading: a young woman accusing a man of rape said that "he ask'd me to lay down," and when she refused "pushed me down…& tried to be concerned with me." What a beautiful way of putting it!

In *Self and Others*, Laing quotes Buber: "In human society, at all its levels, persons confirm one another in a practical way, to some extent or other, in their personal qualities and capacities, and a society may be termed human in the measure to which its members confirm one another.

"The basis of man's life with man is twofold, and it is one—the wish of every man to be confirmed as what he is, even as what he can become, by men; and the innate capacity in man to confirm his fellow-men in this way. That this capacity lies so immeasurably fallow constitutes the real weakness and questionableness of the human race: actual humanity exists only where this capacity unfolds. On the other hand, of course, an empty claim for confirmation, without devotion for being and becoming, again and again mars the truth of the life between man and man.

"Men need, and it is granted to them, to confirm one another in their individual being by means of genuine meetings: but beyond this they need, and it is granted to them, to see the truth, which the soul gains by its struggle, light up to the others, the brothers, in a different way, and even so be confirmed."

Laing elaborates:

> Total confirmation of one man by another is an ideal possibility seldom realized. For practical purposes, as Buber states, confirmation is always "to some extent or other." Any human interaction implies some measure of confirmation, at any rate of the physical bodies of the participants, even when one person is shooting another. The slightest sign of recognition from another at least confirms one's presence in *his* world. "No more fiendish punishment could be devised," William James once wrote, "even were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof."
>
> Thus, we can think of confirmation as partial and varying in manner, as well as global and absolute. One can think of actions and interaction sequences as more or less, and in different ways, *confirmatory* or *disconfirmatory*. Confirmation can vary in intensity

> and extensity, quality and quantity. By reacting "lukewarmly," imperviously, tangentially, and so on, one fails to endorse some aspects of the other, while endorsing other aspects.
>
> Modes of confirmation or disconfirmation vary. Confirmation could be through a responsive smile (visual), a handshake (tactile), an expression of sympathy (auditory). A confirmatory response is *relevant* to the evocative action, it accords recognition to the evocatory act, and accepts its significance for the evoker, if not for the respondent. A confirmatory reaction is a direct response, it is "to the point," or "on the same wavelength" as the initiatory or evocatory action. A partially confirmatory response need not be in agreement, or gratifying, or satisfying. Rejection can be confirmatory if it is direct, not tangential, and recognizes the evoking action and grants it significance and validity.

Chapter 9 is good. A couple of insights: "The intensification of the being of the agent through self-disclosure, through making patent the latent self, is the meaning of Nietzsche's 'will to power.' It is the 'weak' man who, in lieu of potentiating himself genuinely, counterfeits his impotence by dominating and controlling others, by idealizing physical strength or sexual potency, in the restricted sense of the capacity to have erections and to ejaculate."

"Every human being, whether child or adult, seems to require *significance*, that is, *place in another person's world*. Adults and children seek 'position' in the eyes of others, a position that offers them room to move… Perhaps the greatest solace in religion is the sense that one lives in the Presence of an Other."

September 21

The Nietzschean, Heideggerian worry that everything will become unbearably light in the modern or postmodern world is only partly right. I used to agree with it, but I see now that was one-sided. In a sense, yes, things are "lighter" now than they were four hundred years ago, which is to say that nihilism has crept up on us behind our backs. Moreover, this is an essential component in the unhappiness of the modern man. But this sort of thing doesn't last; mankind rebounds, it always has. In the long run, people find a new project to throw themselves into.

Besides, "great men," the people Nietzsche was concerned with, have always sensed the shadow of nihilism looming over them; they've spent their lives trying to escape it. In that respect nothing has changed.

Actually, there is a way to ward off the shadow: simply devote oneself to the betterment of the species. Ultimately what makes people act and feel as if life has no meaning is atomization, or certain kinds of atomization. In an atomized world, then, working against atomization can give you the self-satisfaction you crave. Nihilism is a problem only for people who dwell on it. Just stop thinking about life's meaninglessness and *do* something! Then it won't be meaningless anymore. (Well, that's not strictly true. If you live in a nihilistic society, it's hard to overcome nihilism in your own life. On one level it's impossible. On another level, though, it isn't.)

The world's "objective truth," from one perspective, may be meaninglessness, but humans weren't destined for obsessive intellectualizing. We were destined, we were designed, to *act*—not to worry about individual greatness, i.e. immortality.

I'm tempted to think that there is no "choice," after all, between socialism and barbarism; rather, there is a single inevitable path, towards socialism. Consider the two options: either global disaster occurs, or it doesn't. If it doesn't—if, that is, a nuclear war doesn't happen and global warming isn't as catastrophic as everyone fears—then economic and political evolution will lead to relative decentralization combined with international governance. If disaster does occur, the species will undoubtedly survive, along with some forms of advanced technology and scientific knowledge. (Global memory can't be *wiped out*, after all; much of it will survive.) But capitalist social relations will be in tatters. On their ashes will rise up little socialistic communities because nothing else will be possible: cooperative social structures will be the

foundation of communal subsistence, of efficient allocation of resources—far more efficient than under capitalism. These communities will grow and spread, to what end no one will know. That's my prediction.

Was supposed to meet Wanni tonight but her friend died. Had a heart attack at the gym. She called me in tears, could barely talk through her tears. Is meeting his parents tonight. So now here I am in front of my computer listening to "Graceland," thinking about the vicissitudes of fate.

Just as I judge, broadly speaking, the degree of worthlessness of a pop song by the degree to which I can hear "Money!" whispering or screaming through the music, so I consider the spiritual worth of a piece of classical music to be inversely proportional to the music's expression of boredom and aimlessness. There is no boredom in Beethoven; impressionism, by contrast, is saturated with it. The whole-tone scale is musical boredom, the lack of a *goal* toward which one strives. Anomie, ennui, a musical yawn. Satie's "Gymnopédie No. 1" is the listlessness of a Sunday afternoon in the middle of summer. In most Debussy you can hear the lassitude of *fin-de-siècle* France. Same with a lot of polytonality, and, in different ways, serialism, neoclassicism, indeterminism *definitely*, and some Mahler and Strauss, and Wagner and even some Brahms and Liszt. The spirit of a society is expressed in its music.

Leslie Paul Thiele's "Postmodernity and the Routinization of Novelty: Heidegger on Boredom and Technology" (1997). Quite good. Achieves the impossible: makes Heidegger interesting.

> Postmodernism is modernism stripped of teleology. It is chiefly characterized by the routinization of novelty…
>
> Deep boredom is not the inevitable by-product of leisure. Hunter-gatherer societies, such as the !Kung San of the Kalahari, devote only a fraction of their time to work, usually less than twenty hours a week. In comparison to agricultural and industrial societies, these hunter-gatherers enjoy all but a few hours each day untouched by the hard labor of making ends meet. Yet boredom among such peoples is seldom demonstrated. Their free time is filled with storytelling and ritual. Deep boredom, it appears, is not the product of idleness per se but of a certain form of idleness. Deep boredom is the product of idleness that has lost its meaning, or rather idleness that has lost its capacity to generate meaning.
>
> …Hamlet is bored, we are led to believe, because he dreads the meaning of a dead father and villainy too close to home. Unable to confront his fears—and the anxieties they harbor—the young Prince becomes psychically and physically immobilized. This is indeed the etiology of deep boredom. It is an emotional and spiritual paralysis that arises from the repression of anxiety or fear. Such boredom remains unalleviated by opportunities for the activity or companionship which may remedy more superficial forms of boredom. The desolation of deep boredom is characterized not simply by unfulfilled desire, but by the unfulfilled desire for desire. Boredom might be described as "psychic anorexia." Spiritual or emotional nourishment is needed, but the victims of boredom cannot bring themselves to the table. All appetite for life is lost.
>
> Psychic bulimia might be a more apt description of the problem; the bored typically oscillate between psychic torpor and psychic bingeing. Despite its paralyzing power, boredom does not always produce enervated resignation and passivity. As often as not, it produces a fast-paced, systematic exercise of power. Reinhard Kuhn observes that "violent and indiscriminate action is as natural a consequence of ennui as is total inaction." The profoundly bored often marshal a vast array of forces into service in revenge of their condition. They may craft devious designs to make another pay dearly for their own existential plight. Out of boredom, Fyodor Dostoevsky remarks in his *Notes from Underground*, people are brought to take delight in sticking pins in other people simply to observe the reaction. "Boredom," he wryly observes, "leads to every possible kind of

ingenuity." As Baudelaire suggests, boredom may turn the earth into a shambles and swallow the world with a yawn.

Soren Kierkegaard insisted that "Boredom is the root of all evil."

The problem is not simply that modern peoples are, owing to increased leisure, highly susceptible to bouts of boredom. The problem is that the resources of ages past that were traditionally employed to combat boredom are no longer readily available. Nietzsche wrote that for the "*majority* of mortals" ascetic practices and ideals have been the "chief weapon" in the struggle against boredom. Indeed, the suppression of boredom was one of the primary reasons for the development of morality and religion. Today, these means of suppression have been drained of much of their power.

Anxiety is the disposition in which thrownness is made self-conscious and experienced most profoundly. Anxiety disallows our everyday turning away from thrownness, maintaining the relation of Being-in as problematic. …a dread of confronting one's finitude, one's ungroundedness… The worldly stage is nervously sensed as not of one's making or choosing. One finds oneself cast in a role beyond one's power fully to direct or control. Anxiety is perhaps best described as the state of unease in which one's "there" is revealed to be not fully one's own. One feels displaced. The world is disclosed as foreign. Anxiety is the foreboding of homelessness.

…Boredom is, in itself, an anesthetizing mood. It inhibits thought and reduces feeling to torpor. To psychologize its genesis, one might say that the fear of facing one's ontological condition, the fear of anxiety itself, lures one into the insensibility of boredom. Heidegger describes this repression as a form of cowardice. He writes that "An experience of Being as something 'other' than everything that 'is' comes to us in anxiety [*Angst*], provided that we do not, from anxiety of anxiety, i.e. in sheer timidity, shut our ears to the soundless voice which attunes us to the horrors of the abyss." Anxiety and boredom both confront us with the abyss of Being as nothingness. Both anxiety and boredom bring us face to face with the threatening insignificance of the finite self. In anxiety, however, one experiences a profound concern for this terrifying mystery, a concern that may transform itself into wonder if courageously digested. In boredom, the mystery is avoided by a listless or frenzied turning away.

…Rather than confronting and overcoming deep boredom, we choose to ignore, resent, or suppress it. This marks the true victory of nihilism. …Busy-ness is the chief means by which everyday life evades ontological questioning. The everyday achieves its escape from anxious thought in heightened worldly activity. The "tranquillity" of inauthentic Being "drives one into uninhibited 'hustle.'" Boredom does not preclude such activity. Indeed, a continuous flurry of activity often becomes boredom's chief defense against thoughtful anxiety. The engines of convention and coping that propel our everyday busy-ness find a particularly powerful fuel in modem technology. Technology, for Heidegger, does not refer to the development of machines, tools, or skills but to the "enframing" (*Gestell*) of the world under the imperial mandate of efficient exploitation. Deep boredom evidences itself today not so much in Hamlet-like brooding as in this fast-paced enframing of the world.

Thus, the bustle of modern life is mainly an attempted escape from anxiety and boredom. That's a typically idealist thought, not true but perceptive anyway. The extension of boredom from denoting a feeling to characterizing a way of life, an entire society, is probably valid. Every society does have a Zeitgeist, an "objective spirit" evidenced in its social relations, its institutions, the activity of its citizens.

I *feel* bored only sometimes. But my whole life itself is infused with boredom—because I long for transcendence, perfection, but am trapped in a world of which I am the center yet *in* which I am insignificant. That's the dissonance: I'm the center of *my* world but I mean nothing to *the* world. The knowledge of this is what I'm escaping when I watch TV or go to bars. In the past, by contrast, people were both the center of their world and central to the world. (The sun revolves around the earth, etc.)

We shouldn't try to *master* boredom, though (says Heidegger); moods cannot be willed away. They exist on a different level than will and intellect:

> The attempt to master any mood, in the sense of conquering it, is largely destructive. Moods are not mastered by will and suppression. Instead of suppressing boredom and other moods, Heidegger stipulates, we need to "awaken" to them. We must learn to acknowledge and "wait" through boredom. Boredom is truly overcome only when it is courageously and patiently explored and endured.

Heidegger meets Buddhism. Insight meditation.

> The benefit of boredom is the opportunity it allows us to awaken to its nature and understand its threat. What Heidegger said of technology, employing Hölderlin's words, might well be said of boredom: "Where danger is, grows the saving power also." If we awaken to the mood of boredom, if we learn how to wait through it, we may rediscover and reaffirm a philosophic path. ["The philosophic mood is a *waitful* disposition."] Waiting is not a passive state of being. It is an active endeavor, a questioning of our being in time. Waiting is grounded in an opening to this mystery. By waiting through boredom, we rediscover the nature of our temporal worldliness.

The philosopher's typical overestimation of philosophy. Of all famous philosophers, only Marx avoided that danger. *No one else* did.

"The former Age of Anxiety has given way to the Age of Boredom… Even the death of God has become all too familiar. It can no longer move us."

Another way of expressing the dissonance that disturbs me is to note the discrepancy between grandeur and smallness. Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger thought in grand terms, as did Plato, Spinoza, Kant, and dozens of others. Some of them were more deluded than others (read: Heidegger), but they all strove for epic heroism. "God is dead!"—"I have destroyed metaphysics!"—"I am Spirit's knowledge of itself!"—"I will be the Philosopher-King, the Divine!"—"Two things fill me with awe: the stars above and the moral law within!" And people have idolized these men. But on the other side…humans are ants. Minuscule, microscopic insects proclaiming their immensity, their immortality. It's a damned laughable farce. "Few people have dared to climb the mountain of Nietzsche's thought!" Give me a break. Nietzsche was a man. These people leap unthinkingly into the delusion of transcendence, they live in transcendent denial of the mundane world, Nietzsche most of all. It's comical.

I guess I've harped on this theme before, haven't I?

Death. Dreadful, horrifying death. "Everything I do, I do it for you." Death. The ultimate imbalance between man and his world. The reason death is so disturbing is that it signifies a great and necessary lack of confirmation of the self, a lack of recognition of the self's desires and self-image. Death is the ultimate insult, the ultimate disconfirmation of one's being. It is the original cause and symptom of man's not-being-at-home in the world, man's alienation. Are chimpanzees obscurely aware of death? Then they too are to that extent alienated from their world. There's no way around it: even the most primitive religions are symptoms of alienation, in large part direct or indirect reactions to the knowledge of death. Think of the Iroquois's animism, forests in the night being the home of dead spirits that hunt prey and disappear in the day. No society has ever considered death to be wholly unproblematic, perfectly acceptable. It is so disconfirmatory that comfort has always been sought and will always be sought. The unbelievable

conclusion is that nature has implanted in humans *unavoidable alienation*. It can be assuaged through religion, but it exists underneath the lies and gives rise to them.

Death symbolizes the foreignness of the world—the world that created man, this world is nonetheless *foreign* to him! How is that possible?! He is *part of* nature, yet he is not at home in it!

On the other hand, I may be making a big deal out of nothing. People rarely think about death, after all. The pleasure, the immediacy, of being alive shuts out thoughts of death. As I wrote a long time ago, the problem isn't death itself; the problem is *dwelling on* death, a morbid preoccupation that exists only in certain societies. –Yes, that's the answer. Marxism once again.

September 22

If I truly wanted to be happy in every moment of my life, I'd never stop drinking. I'm never happier than when I've been drinking my beloved vodka.

I've been reading about DFW. It's strange to me, but not really, that a genius like him could be stuck permanently in a state of regressive or "recursive" fixation on the objective-spirit-of-the-age's self-conscious self-consciousness, like, I don't know, a dog running frantic self-circles to catch its tail round and round and round a blank space, while an ordinary person like me could have no trouble getting past all that to fix his spirit on what matters in life and history—could, that is, be a serious person and a serious thinker, far more serious than the self-revolving genius stuck in the mud of the culture's narcissism so that he is so muddily self-conscious of his self-conscious self-consciousness that in the end he lets out a cry and places his head in a noose. Wallace's outlook, despite its freewheeling expressions, was parochial, narrow, smothered under the slag-heap of postmodern literature and literary theory, a ton of dross that would crush even the most robust idealist. If Lord Byron suffered, as his wife said, from a classical education, Wallace suffered from a postmodern education, and finally it claimed him. We didn't suffer a great loss with his death.

Self-consciousness:

> …Please believe me. The whole reason I'm having us talk about my record and what I get afraid might happen is that I don't *want* it to happen, see? that I don't want suddenly to reverse thrust and begin trying to extricate myself after you've given up so much and moved out here and now I've—now that we're so involved. I'm praying you'll be able to see that my telling you what always happens is a kind of proof that with you I don't *want* it to happen. That I don't *want* to get all testy or hypercritical or pull away and not be around for days at a time or be blatantly unfaithful in a way you're guaranteed to find out about or any of the shitty cowardly ways I've used before to get out of something I'd just spent months of intensive pursuit and effort trying to get the other person to plunge into with me. Does this make any sense? Can you believe that I'm honestly trying to *respect* you by warning you about me, in a way? That I'm trying to be honest instead of dishonest? That I've decided the best way to head off this pattern where you get hurt and feel abandoned and I feel like shit is to try to be honest for once? Even if I should have done it sooner? Even when I admit it's maybe possible that you might even interpret what I'm saying *now* as dishonest, as trying somehow to maybe freak you out enough so that you'll move back out and I can get out of this? Which I don't *think* is what I'm doing, but to be totally honest I can't be a hundred percent sure?…

Or, self-consciousness:

> …As mentioned before—and if this were a piece of metafiction, which it's NOT, the exact number of typeset lines between this reference and the prenominate referent would very probably be mentioned, which would be a princely pain in the ass, not to mention cocky,

> since it would assume that a straightforward and anti-embellished account of a slow and hot and sleep-deprived and basically clotted and frustrating day in the lives of three kids, none of whom are all that sympathetic, could actually get published, which these days good luck, but in metafiction it would, nay *needs* be mentioned, a required postmodern convention aimed at drawing the poor old reader's emotional attention to the fact that the narrative bought and paid for and now under time-consuming scrutiny is *not* in fact a barely-there window onto a different and truly diverting world, but rather in fact an "artifact," an object, a plain old this-worldly thing, composed of emulsified wood pulp and horizontal chorus-lines of dye, and *conventions*, and is thus in a "deep" sense just an opaque forgery of a transfiguring window, not a real window, a gag, and thus in a deep (but *intentional*, now) sense artificial, which is to say fabricated, false, a fiction, a pretender-to-status, a straw-haired King of Spain—this self-conscious explicitness and deconstructed disclosure supposedly making said metafiction "realer" than a piece of pre-postmodern "Realism" that depends on certain antiquated techniques to create an "illusion" of a windowed access to a "reality" isomorphic with ours but possessed of and yielding up higher truths to which all authentically human persons stand in the relation of applicand—all of which the Resurrection of Realism, the pained product of inglorious minimalist labor in countless obscure graduate writing workshops across the U.S. of A., and called by Field Marshal Lish (who ought to know) the *New* Realism, promises to show to be utter baloney, this metafictional shit…

A colorful regurgitation of the same old postmodernist tripe through the "barely-there window" of a sort of scorn that manages to legitimize the very thing it is scorning by adopting the language and analytical framework of the very thing it is scorning, making the attempt to transcend this hated metafictional shit a failure.

September 23

A note to feminist crazies like Adrienne Rich: having him put himself inside you means that you, so to speak, are *being done to*, that he is *doing to you*. That's it. That's the archetype of the male-female (sexual) relationship. In itself it has nothing to do with oppression and does not legitimize oppression or economic inequality or anything like that. But one of the reasons why male homosexuality strikes people as strange is that the idea of a man *being done to* seems peculiar, unnatural. […]

Anyway, I've said my piece.

[…]

The desire and expectation of *being done to* is, in indefinitely many forms and 'intensities' throughout history and across societies, common to most women, at least on some deep unconscious level. And yet, being humans, they also want to *do*. They want to be active, not just (relatively) passive. But in the psyche there is no sharp division between active and passive, and neither category ever applies in any sort of purity. Passive and active go together, they're fused in every act and feeling in both men and women, if only because the dialectical influence of the Other entails the interpenetration of passive and active. It's preposterous to say that one sex is active and the other passive, for everything in consciousness and behavior is relative. Nothing is pure or absolute or unmediated. In fact it's extremely difficult to say exactly what 'passive' and 'active' *mean*, although intuitively the matter is somewhat clearer. But "being done to" vs. "doing" is mostly a sexual distinction, and in the larger arena of life both sexes are almost (*almost*) equally active and passive—or so nature intended. I.e., so they *could* be, and so they *should* be, *have* to be, in order for people of both sexes to be happy. But to the extent that sexuality permeates the psyche and animates activities, there is inequality (this low-level "phenomenological" inequality, revealed in behavior) between men and women. Only in so-called civilized societies does such inequality become pathologically extreme and extend to 'other' spheres of life too, so that women may end up being little more than slaves.

The 'domain' of sexuality varies among societies. In some, it's emphasized less than in others (and thus the former usually treat their women more respectfully than the latter). Its importance in the society is reflected in the degree of its conscious psychological importance to the individual. Since in America it dominates culture—due to the possibility of exploiting it for the sake of economic gain—women are seen by their culture as mere sex-objects, i.e. as passive beings. The nature of the capitalist economy is primarily responsible for the way women are treated now.

September 24

Reading a good book called *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy* (1996), written by Eric Matthews. Places it all in perspective, in the broader perspective of the Cartesian tradition. Bergson to the French feminists, e.g. Irigaray and Kristeva. I've only just begun the book, but even the Introduction has deepened my understanding of philosophical history.

My distinction between private and public is basically synonymous with Bergson's distinction between inside and outside, or intuitive and analytical/conceptual. Like Schopenhauer, Bergson views intuition as providing epistemologically privileged access to the interior of things (in particular the self). This division between the self's "interior" and its "exterior," however mistakenly Bergson interprets it and whatever false conclusions he deduces from it, is a necessary condition of our existence and cannot be analyzed away, as functionalists and behaviorists believe. The untranscendable division between the mental and the material can be reduced to it.

Marx and Nietzsche contra Cartesianism and Kantianism, the latters' emphasis on reason's autonomy from society and psychology, a doctrine that is also implicit in the Cartesian divorce between mind and body. "Transcendental subjectivity," thus freedom from mechanical determinism in the world. Descartes: Galilean advocate of modern physical science and Augustinian philosopher of subjectivity (cf. Augustine's remark, "Return to yourself; truth resides in the inner man"). Hence dualism between (the physical) world and self, mechanistic science and freedom. One trend leads to positivism, Comte, Mill, eventually logical empiricism; the other trend leads to Bergson and thence Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, *et al*.—who considered themselves *anti*-Cartesian mainly because, under the influence of Bergson and Heidegger, they rejected the strict dualism between consciousness and body/world. (Also because, unlike Descartes, they weren't interested in physical science and didn't have a mechanistic view of the world.) The self is embodied, they insisted. "Being-in-the-world!" Some French thinkers also rejected the Cartesian doctrine of consciousness's *transparency*, again influenced by Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, structuralism, anthropology. Reason and consciousness are relative to society and culture. Post-structuralism, a thoroughgoing relativism, emerged at the end of this reaction against Cartesian rationalism. –I, like Chomsky, consider facets of this rationalism to be sound, in particular the belief in universal, *a priori* capacities and rules of cognition, rules innate in human biology. Also, universal and partly unconscious *desires*.

Bergson and Schopenhauer: "Intuition is supposed to be the basis of metaphysics because it grasps things from the inside, and therefore *absolutely* (in some sense), rather than from some merely relative point of view." A view derivable from Cartesianism. Writes Bergson: "Intuition is the kind of *intellectual sympathy* by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible." A silly but influential position. Analytical knowledge consists in classification, in relating objects to other objects, categorizing them, treating them as instances of general kinds. We can have both intuitive and analytical knowledge of the self, but only the latter is expressible in words.

Abstract, "spatialized" time, measurable (like space)—in minutes, seconds, etc.—is different from inner, experienced time, or *durée*. In general, Bergson's views on time remind me of my own ideas from seven years ago. He even agrees with my former self that the self (consciousness) essentially *is durée* (duration). "Bergson makes no distinction between our inner experience and the duration 'in' which that experience occurs: our self *is* duration." I called duration "the moment," the immediate moment in which past, present and future blend together.

(For most people, everything they do and think is basically derivative, even if they happen to alight on a thought that no one has had before. The situation is reversed with me: everything I do and think is basically original, even those of my thoughts that happen to have been thought before.)

Multiple layers of personality, of the self, from the most superficial, least personal, purely practical and social, where our thoughts etc. are "closest to being merely general and so communicable to others," to the deepest (unconscious?), where "thoughts, feelings, perceptions, desires and so on flow into each other in such a way that it is impossible to separate 'cause' from 'effect' in the way that scientific precision requires." In fact, within consciousness there is, strictly speaking, no causal determination at all, because, as Hume taught, cause and effect must be distinct existences, and there is no such distinctness or mutual isolation in consciousness. Only matter, it seems, or public events, can be separated in the necessary way, and even matter (post-Newton) is apparently not discrete or particulate in the way that common sense assumes. Public events aren't either, for that matter, at least not until they're arbitrarily divided up by thought. There seems to be no strict *causation* in the social world or the individual psyche, nor even on the deepest level of the physical world! Maybe (the framework of) causation is, after all, some sort of mind-produced illusion that doesn't apply to things in themselves. (Kant didn't use the word 'illusion,' but you know what I mean.)

My actions are not "*caused*" by my thoughts or feelings or character-traits; rather, they "*belong with them* in the total flow of my life-history." The concept of cause is impersonal, subjectivity-denying.

Interaction between mind and body. Physical perception is at the same time mental interpretation, "impregnated with memory-images." My perception of a rose is different from your perception of it, even though in some "superficial" sense it's also the same.

One of the divergences between Schopenhauer and Bergson: the former's metaphysics conceives reality as Being, in Parmenidean-Platonic-Western fashion; the latter conceives it as Becoming, as Change. Biological evolution analogous to the creative evolution of the individual, with his continuous change, a continuity secured by "memory," or "the preservation of the past in us." (Not necessarily conscious recollection.) "The whole universe, to the extent that it is living anyway, can be seen as having 'duration,' in Bergson's sense, rather than existing in objective, reversible, physical time. What it is now incorporates what it has been, but goes beyond it: just as an individual human personality at any stage in its life incorporates but transcends the past… Biological evolution…can be seen as genuinely creative of novelty, new forms which go beyond what has existed in the past and are not simply determined by that past: nature itself is not mechanistically determined but is *free* in much the same sense that humans beings are." Vitalistic metaphysics: reality is alive, life is inherently purposive, a striving towards some yet-to-be-defined goal. The *élan vital*, the driving force of all living activity. That's an exciting but unscientifically speculative metaphysics.

Zeno's paradox of motion!!

Sent Chomsky a follow-up email in which I also asked about his opinions on structuralism. He wrote back:

> The distinction you make [between one's skin and the sensation of pinching one's skin] is real, but it is not clear why it has anything to do with anything like a "mind-body" problem, since exactly the same problem holds for your skin and any concept we have of body, matter, etc.[1] That's the impact of Newton's discoveries. The public-private distinction can

[1] That doesn't seem right. What if we define matter as "that which has mass and takes up space"? Then skin is matter. Or what if matter is simply "the substance of which physical objects are composed"? Then skin is matter. Or what if matter is "anything that is composed of elementary fermions"? Then skin is matter. Unlike sensations. Besides, Chomsky argues that we *don't have* a coherent concept of matter, and I agreed with him while saying that the *intuitive* problem remains. Maybe Chomsky would say that Newtonian matter can "act at a distance," which is contrary to our understanding of the nature of skin. But it's also contrary to our commonsense understanding of the nature of *matter*.

> also be made, but it seems to have no relation to the mind-body problem in any of its formulations. Merely to take an extreme case, the late John Wheeler, one of the great 20th century physicists, argued in a book published by the American Physical Society that the world consists of bits of information, answers to questions we pose. If so, is the world public or private? [Public, obviously. What's your point? Wheeler's theory is bizarre anyway. "Bits of information" are abstract, timeless and spaceless, qualities that appear to have little in common with the world.] The discussion in the paper of Russell bears directly on this.
>
> I wrote about Saussure and structuralism in my monograph *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory*, in 1964 (actually came out in several versions, but these discussions are the same). The signifier-signified distinction is Saussure's version of the standard theory of reference. The problem is the obscurity of the notion "signified"—also discussed a bit in the paper I sent you, and more extensively elsewhere. His (standard) assumption is that there is a word-thing relation, where things are mind-independent entities. That seems false.
>
> The langue-parole distinction is also extremely obscure, and whatever it is supposed to mean, it can hardly be appropriate for the study of language. For example, as he points out, it has no place for the concept "sentence," surely a key notion of the study of language.

Met a 31-year-old Indian, post-doc student doing cancer research, for the second time. She likes me and I like her—as a friend. There's no chemistry. I'm not very attracted to her, that is. Don't know why. She ain't bad-looking—not *great*-looking, but okay. But if she were prettier I would definitely have made a move by now. Am I devaluing her, then? Maybe as a woman, as a sexual being. But not as a person, at least I don't think so. Well, in a way, yes I am, because I don't really desire her desire (i.e., that she desire me). But in a way I'm not, because I like being with her and consider her more intelligent than most people.

I suspect it's better to say that the public-private distinction doesn't refer to two different kinds of things, but to two ways of experiencing the same thing, namely one's body. Whether any of the classic formulations of the mind-body problem invoked 'my' distinction is beside the point; I'm saying that the Cartesian intuition just *is* the intuition of public vs. private. That's damned plausible, considering how Descartes described the bodily and the mental.

Emmanuel Mounier: "The person could be defined as a movement towards a transpersonal condition which reveals itself in the experience of community and of the attainment of values at the same time."

September 25

Despite what John Searle thinks, it's indisputable that consciousness will never be fully understood. We're too *close* to it, as I've always insisted. A clear, distanced perspective is impossible. Is consciousness a "nothingness," as Sartre argued? In a way, yes; in a way, no. Is it free? In a way, yes: every conscious state has the phenomenology of being chosen, i.e. of being *me*, an expression and manifestation of me. But in a way, no: I don't literally choose my conscious states or my feelings; even my actions are not chosen in a vacuum of freedom, for I'm somehow not really capable of acting in certain ways, while other ways are easy and natural for me. The very idea of freedom, of the "will," is incoherent, and certainly impossible to understand. Is the world inside consciousness or outside it? Both. How is consciousness produced by neural

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But if skin is matter, then action at a distance applies to it like all other matter. So what's the big deal? (I won't raise the objections in another email because I can tell that Chomsky is one of those guys who will never admit he's wrong, and who probably gets irritated if you keep raising objections.)

processes? Emergence, whatever that means. Am I "responsible" for myself, e.g. for forgetting to do something I was supposed to do? Yes and no. See? We'll never understand this stuff.

"'Value in its original upsurge is not *posited* by the for-itself; it is consubstantial with it—to such a degree that there is no consciousness which is not haunted by *its* value and that human reality in the broad sense includes both the for-itself and value.' …Conscious human beings exist in the world as a 'lack,' as a negation [or, better: a transcendence] of the situation in which they find themselves. The lack consists in an 'internal relation' between the negation and what it negates: that is, a relation which constitutes both the related terms in their being. Thus consciousness is constituted in its being by what it is not.

"What we lack, and so what we are, is precisely *value*: 'Value is the self insofar as the self haunts the heart of the for-itself as that for which the for-itself *is*.' We might translate this by saying that, for conscious human beings, what we are is defined not by our factual state but what we 'are-to-be,' that is, by what values our lives are directed towards. But these values, Sartre appears to be saying here, are inseparable from what our factual situation happens to be, since they express our negation or transcendence of that particular factual situation. The self which we 'have to be' is defined by what is lacking in what we factually are, and vice versa." This ties into what I've been saying in recent entries about one's "desired self," which I also touched on in the last chapter ("On life") of the so-called book I wrote. Your desired self, which includes (your relationship to) the *world* as you desire it, is not completely separate from your self (and the world) as it is. It affects everything you do, the way you act-in-the-world, the way you react to people. You aren't fully aware of it, but you're constantly accommodating yourself to the world as it is (with its social norms and so on) in light of the way you unconsciously/half-consciously want it to be.

What do I think of Sartre's "bad faith"? I have yet to settle accounts with the idea. I sympathize with Sartre's intuition, but I dislike the moralism from which it is inseparable. To refresh your memory: bad faith consists in a "refusal to come to terms with the ambiguity of the human situation," or "an illusion by which we seek to conceal from ourselves the uncomfortable ambiguity of our position." For instance, a woman knows that the man she's on a date with wants to seduce her, but she wants neither to be regarded as a mere sex-object nor to be respected in a purely, asexually "respectful" way. She deceives herself, therefore, by refusing to acknowledge the sexual character of the man's behavior and by distinguishing herself from her body: "her hand rests inert between the warm hands of her companion—neither consenting nor resisting—a thing." She is in bad faith because she's refusing to make a decision that she can't avoid making. She must either accept the man's advances or reject them. Another example: Roquentin's keeping a diary, by which he "seeks to impose a narrative structure on the random sequence of real events," is an instance of bad faith, of self-delusion.

But then clearly bad faith is inseparable from the human condition, and in a sense everyone is always guilty of it. For everyone structures his life, narrates it to himself, considers it to have meaning. But how futile and empty is the idea of "good faith" if everyone is always, necessarily, to some degree guilty of bad faith! Besides, we don't have total control over ourselves, over our consciousness—we don't have total freedom—because such a notion is meaningless. And we shouldn't be condemned for something we don't have control over. On the other hand, we do have *some* control, *some* freedom. There's the rub: *how much* freedom? How is it possible to have only *some* free will? In certain situations one can rightly be criticized for deluding oneself; in others, one can't. Where's the dividing-line? Should the woman be criticized? From one perspective, yes: she's "leading the man on," she's being a little cowardly, weak-willed, vain. (Likes the attention.) From another perspective, no: what's so bad about postponing her decision? Why is it wrong for her to enjoy the moment? The concept of bad faith is oversimplifying and not very useful.

Existence is far more "ambiguous" than Sartre thought: value-judgments are not so easily justifiable.

"Is it possible to show that values are in some sense subjective without drawing the conclusion that they are therefore entirely arbitrary?" Matthews thinks not, at least not in the framework of *Being and Nothingness*. I showed in my morality paper that the answer is yes. I showed that there is a third way between objectivity and arbitrariness, that it's possible to *rationally argue* with someone about values even though there is no objective truth vis-à-vis values. Where Sartre failed, I succeeded.

All things considered, the philosophy of *Being and Nothingness* is confused. It's a strange combination of behaviorism and introspective phenomenology. And there's a host of other problems with it. Like, self-consciousness is supposedly the self, and yet Sartre also argues, contradictorily, that the self is an object (for consciousness) in the world like other objects. (Silly doctrine!)[1] Moreover, if that latter claim is true, consciousness is impersonal—there is no self *in* consciousness—which means that all these analyses of consciousness are analyses not of the self but of a selfless consciousness, so why should we care about them? It isn't *I* who am free; it's *consciousness*.[2] Another problem: how is it possible to glean a whole existential system from a *nothingness*? Another problem: if the self is nothing(ness), then I am nothing(ness), which means I don't exist. Etc.

Merleau-Ponty. The body-subject. "Body on the subject-side of experience rather than the object-side." Rejects the Cartesian-Sartrean dualism between consciousness ("nothingness") and body. Bodies can have a purposive relationship to objects without the self's explicit consciousness of it. (E.g., reflexive actions.) Freudian repression is not the problem it was for Sartre, since M-P doesn't equate subjectivity with consciousness. "Repression is for him a kind of imprisonment in our own past thoughts and desires, made possible by the fact that we are embodied beings, so that those past thoughts and desires can continue to exist in the purposive behavior in which our bodies engage without the participation of our conscious minds." I like that way of conceptualizing it.

M-P: "Man taken as a concrete being is not a psyche joined to an organism, but the movement to and fro of an existence which at one time allows itself to take corporeal form and at others moves towards personal acts." Excellent formulation. Non-dualism.

September 26

Structuralism, Saussurean linguistics—language a system of differences that determines and structures our world for us rather than being a transparent reflection of reality (duh), which implies that societies with different languages might then have different realities, so to speak—and already here you can see latent postmodernism. Conscious thought intelligible only against the background of structures of which we are not conscious. "The subject is not something given and transparent [*pace* Descartes] but something constructed in language." Unconscious linguistic, anthropological, societal structures. Neo-Kantianism in some respects. Matthews considers structuralism a philosophic revolution, but obviously he's wrong: it's only a mildly original continuation and alteration of Kantian rationalism, historical materialism, Nietzsche (the self is not a metaphysical absolute but a construction of language), Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty ("being-in-the-world," embodied and partially unconscious subjectivity), even Freud (unconscious structures, empirical instead of *a priori* analysis of the self and reason). Merely another step in the "decentering" of the subject from its central position in Descartes. Kant was already decentering it, at least the *empirical* self (as opposed to the transcendental).

One of the reasons I can't help having contempt for relativists like Foucault and Rorty, who in this respect seem no more intelligent than the average politically correct American, is that anti-relativist objections to their theories are brain-numbingly obvious. So either these thinkers are, like the average American adult, stupider than an intelligent eight-year-old, or they have some sort of weird hidden agenda.

> If Foucault is giving a generalized critique of general theories [i.e., of theories that purport to be "objectively true," or true even outside the discursive practices in which they're embedded], then he may be open to a familiar objection to all such attempts, namely, that they are self-defeating. If all attributions of truth and falsity are relative to discursive

[1] Sartre is failing to distinguish between my *idea* of myself and my *active* self, the *acting* I of self-consciousness in every instant. The former is indeed an object in the world…*somewhat* like other objects.

[2] I seem to recall I made this criticism during my Madison summer.

> practices [and so are not valid outside a particular discursive practice], the objection would go, then the truth-claims of Foucault's own thesis will be equally relative to a particular discursive practice. That is, he will not be able to claim that his own thesis is objectively true, or such that it ought to be accepted by any rational being. Foucault could, however, defend himself against such objections by, for example, presenting his enterprise as not so much a general theoretical critique of theories as a piecemeal liberation of his readers from the harmful influence of the belief in the need for general theories to be accepted by any rational being.

But what is meant by "general theory" here? *Every* hypothesis is general, inasmuch as it is put forward as being *true*—not true "relative" to anything, but simply true. Therefore, by writing his painstakingly dense books, Foucault is trying to free his readers from the temptation to take seriously theories such as his. It puts a new twist on Nietzsche's maxim that the best disciple is he who rebels against his master.

Certainly broad, unscientific worldviews like "Enlightenment-humanism" or "Marxism-Leninism" deserve to be dismantled or at least dissected and aren't "objectively true" (partly because they incorporate a system of values). But either the Foucauldian position is obvious in this way or it's unrigorous and ultimately self-refuting.

Freud's famous saying: "Where id (it) was, there Ego (I) shall be." Lacan translates it: "*Here, in the field of dream, you are at home*." That's actually a thought-stimulating translation. Since reading (most of) *The Interpretation of Dreams* I've had sympathy with the hypothesis that dreams are disguised wish-fulfillments—despite my inability to *believe* that theory—because there is something inexplicably comfortable, home-like, about dreaming, even when dreaming nightmares. As I fall asleep every night I reflect with delight that I'll soon be dreaming. That state of free imaginings is restful, peaceful, an ideal home for the self because it's so unreal. But how is that fact to be understood? It's extremely significant.

Emmanuel Lévinas: "Metaphysics is enacted where the social relation is enacted—in our relations with men. There can be no 'knowledge' of God separated from the relationship with men. The Other is the very locus of metaphysical truth, and is indispensable for my relation with God."

First debate tonight. Obama was brilliant. McCain was awkward and amusing in that uniquely despicable way of his, but he didn't do as badly as I was hoping. By any reasonable standards, Obama "won"—but politics isn't reasonable, and politically it will probably be considered a draw. Even though Obama was far more presidential, sure of himself, knowledgeable, articulate, honest, and came across as a more decent, honorable and open-minded person than that sack of shit McCain, who acted at times like he was still on the campaign trail. Made a hilariously awkward joke at the beginning about his age because that's what he's been monkey-trained to do—and an instant later he remembered where he was (the absence of sycophantic laughter flustered him), coughed and frowned and got serious again.

My main criticism of Obama is that he wasn't aggressive enough. Didn't attack McCain enough. Why didn't he draw attention to McCain's inconsistencies?!

September 27

Alison Assiter's "Althusser and Structuralism" (1984). The whole dominates its elements: the latter are interconnected in the system; their position is determined by the system. Structuralism opposed to atomism. Every system has a structure which is hidden behind phenomena; the latter are merely outward expressions of the former. The task of science is to uncover the hidden structures. This is all very Marxist, of course. Holistic. Structuralism diverges from Marxism in its tendency to have a static approach to facts: synchronic, not diachronic, analysis. But it considers the two approaches to be complementary. Saussure: meaning emerges from the differences between all the words in a language. Holistic theory of meaning. The system predominant over its elements. Levi-Strauss: ceremonies, rites, methods of cooking not discrete entities; get their meaning from the contrastive relations they bear towards each other. "Like phonemes,

kinship terms are elements of meaning; like phonemes, they acquire meaning only if they are integrated into systems." They are "*of the same type* as linguistic phenomena." Barthes: food is not just food but also a system of signs which signify. Norms governing cuisine reveal culture. Same with traffic light systems, furniture systems, etc. They all have meaning and structure in a way similar to language. (Semiology: extending the idea of a sign system outside the realm of language. Problematic. Indeed, obviously false in some ways. *Structures* comparable to linguistic structures?!)

Althusser: Spinoza was the first thinker to pose the question of how the elements of a whole can be determined by the structure of the whole. The "whole" he equated with God or nature. It is a substance, which he defines as "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself: in other words, that the conception of which does not need the conception of another thing from which it must be formed." The paradox, which is unavoidable, of a self-determining, a self-caused, thing. Althusser: "the structure is immanent in its effects, a cause immanent in its effects in the Spinozist sense of the term; *the whole existence of the structure consists in its effects*." Cf. my paper on the emergence of consciousness, where I discussed all this with more rigor than Althusser did. (Not *enough* rigor, but *more*.)

Structural causation in society—what I've insisted on since my paper on methodological individualism—according to which a given society causes itself, so to speak, i.e. determines the nature of particular social relations. (The whole determines the parts, though in an "efficient causation" sense any given part, for instance a political event or the nature of power-relations in a particular firm, comes into existence as a result of a variety of temporally prior events, etc.) This holistic causation isn't incompatible with Althusser's "economic determination 'in the last instance,'" though many commentators have thought it is. The problem, which is insuperable, is in clarifying the interrelations of (1) types of causation and (2) "tokens" of causation, or concrete instances.

The phenomenon of structural causation, or downward causation, whether in the biological cell or in society, tests the limits of human cognition. No wonder atomists accuse holists of "mysticism"!

I asked above about the relations between the various concepts of "the other." The two most fundamental are self vs. not-self (primary) and male vs. female (secondary). European vs. Asian, or white vs. black, or Christian vs. Muslim, etc., are not nearly as basic to the psyche. They exist only in relatively advanced societies, where different ideologies and cultures meet. Every manifestation of "the other," though, serves the function of allowing or facilitating some degree of self-definition, self-identity, potentially even self-confirmation (which is at the same time confirmation by the other), which is what the self desires.[1] Self-confirmation requires neither that one *invent* an other, such as Asian or black or Muslim,[2] nor, if an other has been invented, that one *denigrate* the other. The mere presence of this ("tertiary") other, once it has been invented, facilitates the task of self-definition in an ambiguous world and thus a kind of self-contentment—although undoubtedly the *denigration* of the other provides *greater* self-esteem, in that it confirms the (relative) worth of the self. In an archaic and simple society, to invent and denigrate an other may be superfluous because the social conflicts don't exist that give rise to the self's desire to be *better* than other selves, i.e. to confirm its value not through *community* and *solidarity* but through *competition*, through proving itself better than the other (be it primary (everyone), secondary (e.g. women), or tertiary (e.g. blacks)). But in a complex and divisive society, inventing and denigrating a tertiary other may be of great psychological value for the individual, not to mention its benefit for the *society* (especially the *elite*) by helping to unite its citizens against a perceived enemy for whom they have contempt or hatred.

The invention of a tertiary other satisfies the self in other ways too. In particular, the very 'coming-together' of members of the same society that it may lead to signifies a palpable confirmation of the self's value by the primary other (viz., in effect, all the men and women who are 'like' it).

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[1] Laing's word 'confirmation' may be better than Hegel's 'recognition,' in that it has a clearer meaning. It clearly implies activity in the world and the participation of the other in the self.

[2] Cro-Magnon man recognized himself, his world, probably more fully than we do ourselves, even though presumably the only others for his consciousness were self vs. not-self and male vs. female. There was no 'tertiary' other, as it were, no 'cultural' other. Presumably.

What could be more boring than reading my own writings? I revisit entries or papers only if compelled to for some reason. Why do I find it boring? It's hard to say for sure. I'd rather be reading things by someone else. It's more intellectually interesting because it introduces me to new ideas. And it allows me to indulge in my anal love of accumulating ideas, hoarding them in my journal. I have this perverted obsession with reading and writing, writing about my reading, writing down the titles of most of the books I read, like if I don't write them down it won't count and I won't have accomplished anything, won't have hoarded experiences by crystallizing them in words. Rereading myself doesn't give me an excuse to note that I've read something new, nor an opportunity to hoard my impressions of new ideas. Another strange thing: when I read a paper or a book I want to read the *whole thing*, a desire that can be hard to overcome (though I often do succeed in overcoming it). It isn't rational, it's stronger than that. Sometimes, if it's a bad book, I'll skim through a lot of pages just so I can say (to myself) that I read it from first page to last. And then I write down the title in my journal and proceed to the next book. Sometimes I'll even feel uncomfortable reading something unless I first write it down.

The connection between money and feces. "Filthy rich; stinking rich; filthy lucre; rolling in it; he has money up the ass; a shitpot full of money; looking for a 'pot' of gold; putting money in the pot (in poker); shooting craps; the investor was cleaned out…" Association between feces and the devil. Sulphurous smell, etc. I should reread *Life Against Death*. Feces is precious for the small child, a treasure because it's mysteriously made by his own bodily functions and defecation is pleasurable. Sometimes the child thinks he or she is giving birth, like his mother. During toilet-training, his parents' contradictory attitude toward his feces—praising him ecstatically when he defecates into his little pot but insisting that poop is bad, foul-smelling, dirty—can confuse him. He may want to hoard it, hide it from his parents so they can't take it away because it's *his*. Depending on his experiences during this phase of life he may retain his acquisitive attitude but transfer it to money. The leap isn't great, after all: the child can see that money is precious to people, that they treasure it and store it away like feces. So he may end up becoming a miser, and in general having a miserly attitude with respect to many things in his life (for example, his possessions, his lovers—maybe he'll be jealous, he'll treat them like *acquisitions* that are *his alone*—his friends, even his feelings).

September 28

In a little over one month, Sarah Palin is going to do a greater service for this country than John McCain ever has: she's going to get Obama elected. I love you, Sarah!

Eugene Victor Wolfenstein's "Mr. Moneybags Meets the Rat Man: Marx and Freud on the Meaning of Money" (1993). Here's the tension: "I am a discrete, self-contained individual, who finds in any other individual a limitation upon and negation of selfhood and freedom; [but] I am a self in the same sense and only insofar as the Other is also a self, only insofar as we partake and recognize ourselves as partaking of the 'universal essence common to all men.'" That sentence sums it up.

Clark Butler's "Hegel and Freud: A Comparison" (1976). Fascinating paper. What I (think I) am for you, I am for myself. Because you are in me, you are part of me. You instantiate the ("generalized") other in me, to a greater or a lesser degree. To say it differently: "As G. H. Mead has insisted, one necessarily identifies with whomever one communicates [with], and in so identifying one reverts to identification with oneself because the other with whom one identifies is conscious of oneself."

Dreaming is reverting to the prenatal state. Sort of. No subject-object, no true self-consciousness. That explains its pleasure, the pleasure of sleep and dreaming.

I've never been happier, my friend. I feel like I'm at the peak of my intellectual and interpersonal powers! No self-mutilating desire to write poetry, barely any desire to write fiction! And I'm so *free*!

The "self-confident" person is he who doesn't automatically identify with whomever he happens to be talking to. He is more independent than that. In the past, no doubt, he has been prone to identifying

with others, since during childhood and adolescence everyone is relatively "sensitive" or "insecure" in this way, relatively prone to identifying with people. At that stage of life one's sense of self is still undeveloped, still in need of confirmation. But the self-confident adult has, in the past, been fortunate enough to live in the company of people who value him, who confirm his value, such that he has internalized the other's confirmation of him and no longer has such a need to be concretely "confirmed" or recognized.

This universal need to be valued—I still don't have a clear understanding of its unconscious origins. Its essential relation to self-consciousness. The latter and the former must not be two separate principles, they must be internally related, in fact merely analytically distinguishable expressions of the same desire or tendency. Hegel and his commentators interpret self-consciousness as precisely the desire for desire, the desire to be valued, but that doesn't seem right. Surely a being is conceivable that is aware of itself but has no ("insecure") desire for approval from the other. On the other hand, I can't escape the feeling that in having these doubts I'm overlooking something obvious.

Example of the many, *many* parallels between Freud and Hegel: "They both hold that the crucial drama of human history is one of unsuccessful rebellion against social authority, followed by confessions of guilt and freely consented introjection of the once rejected authority. They both take the 'dialectic of revolution and restoration' to be the essential key to an understanding of history and the human society."

Useful:

> One thing which the dialectical method never sufficiently explains is why a dialectic gets started in the first place… Why is there a dialectic at all? *A dialectic begins,* we know, *with acts of abstraction and reification*. [My italics.] But why does an individual abstract, and why does he abstract one aspect of reality rather than another? As to the first question, Hegel can only reply that man is essentially a thinker, and that thinking essentially entails abstraction. And as for the second question, Hegel indicates that the initial aspect which is abstracted at the dialectic's onset is chosen because of its simple, unmediated character. But although this answer may explain why a particular abstractive act is dialectically first, it does not always answer the question as to why such an act is temporally or empirically first. We know that the temporal, empirical order does not always follow the dialectical logical order. For example, nature religion, the worship of natural things and forces, seems to precede in time the religion of indeterminate Parmenidean being (e.g., Brahmanism, Sankara), although the category of being dialectically precedes that of the thing of perception… [What follows is a discussion of Freud's potential for illuminating Hegel's dialectic.]

I would say that on the level of ideology and consciousness, dialectical development is a response to—and on the level of being or behavior, it *is*—the conflict-ridden, "dialectical" development of productive forces and relations of production, which antagonistically fragments and progressively reifies communities. It has this effect because (1) individuals are committed to their material interests—they do what they have to do to survive and prosper—and (2) as technologies and economic techniques evolve, an economic surplus and a division of labor develop, which (3) gives rise to a divergence in material interests between people and therefore, in light of (1), causes conflict between people. The further the economy develops, the more economic and social antagonisms arise. But I don't know how to explain the dialectical form of the development (viz., affirmation, negation, negation of the negation). It's worth noting that, in its strict triadic structure, the dialectic is a simplification and is by no means always present.

September 29

Suspense, suspense with this election. I'm *suspended*. America is *suspended* with this election and this financial crisis going on. It's a movie, a simple-minded Hollywood drama of good against evil, against cartoonishly evil villains. It's gotten to the point that the main reason I am *passionate* for the Democrats is

not my compassion for mankind but my *hate* for Republican operatives. It's a corrosive hate; I turn away from the news even as I scour the internet for it because if McCain is elected with his sidekick Palin my brain will rust from the corrosive hate. George Bush is at least only a moron, a self-parody who means well; McCain is…deranged. He's a black hole of soullessness. I'm reading about John Brown—David Reynolds' *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights*—an excellent, massive book that rehabilitates Brown from the propaganda that he was insane, a fanatic—and there's no question in my mind that violence can be justified, nor that McCain must be killed if the race becomes close.[1] [Hm, I'm not so sure about that… I guess I was in a certain mood when I wrote this.] To raise moral quibbles about something like that is so preposterous as to be virtually a "category mistake." It doesn't even make sense! In this case, the logical positivists are right that moral judgments are senseless: there is only the human imperative to do what must be done. No more arguments, no more debates, no more back-and-forth accusations of blame, finger-pointing, finessing the masses, cock-teasing democracy; direct action is what's called for. Brownian motion is called for in times like this.

Oh the hypocrisy of condemning people like John Brown and accepting "righteous wars" or praising them! The nonsense morality! Disinterestedness, inaction, is infinitely more morally repugnant in extreme cases than violence is. The disinterested reasoning and distant action of a McNamara or a George Bush or every State in history offends the moral sense infinitely more than immediate and violent insurrection against oppression does. The latter is *human*, the former is not. (Bureaucratized violence—impersonal violence—totalitarianism, superfluity of the individual.) The Terror of the French Revolution? What about the thousand-fold terror of the *ancien régime*, the million-fold terror of the American government? But no, *John Brown* was a *fanatic* and a *terrorist!*

The $700 billion bailout didn't pass the House. Bummer.

Nothing could fill me with more glee than the existential crises of Wall Street tycoons. For decades deregulation has been ruining the common man; now that it's boomeranged on the elite, everyone suddenly cares. You know that famous image of jolly old Saint Nick "Ho-ho-ho!"-ing with his jolly fat hands on his big belly shaking with glee? That's me.

John Brown, hero. R. W. Emerson: "John Brown will make the gallows as glorious as the cross." Did you know he had wild support amongst Northern intellectuals and Northern soldiers during the war? Alfred Kazin said the war wouldn't have happened without him. (Probably false. But he definitely hastened the war.) Brown knew that only violence could end slavery.

In asking myself how it's possible that so many people used to support slavery even on *moral* grounds, as having a "civilizing" influence on blacks, I'm led to the conclusion that nothing is easier for humans than to invent and believe in ideologies which justify activities that bring material benefit and social recognition to the people who believe in these ideologies. Arguments can always be thought of for both sides of an issue, even moral arguments. Most of the time you're going to subscribe to philosophies and values that permit you to confirm yourself in the way you're accustomed to, because your most *fundamental* values are material comfort and social recognition. Whatever values are consistent with these deepest values are probably the ones you'll subscribe to. It's not just intellectual laziness, either. It's also the fact that the way you live structures your perception of the world, even determines the *data* that enter your consciousness. Living amidst a certain class of people in certain physical and economic conditions, not being exposed to other conditions, will naturally lead to your adoption of the views of this social group. You'll see certain things happening and not other things; you'll encounter certain types of behavior and not others, which may well cause you to make unsound generalizations about human behavior or the behavior of particular ethnicities. Your "social being" may end up distorting or suppressing your *innate human* commitment to kindness, fairness, compassion, solidarity. Other people, due largely to their different social conditions, may more nearly approach a realization of these human values than you; they may have a clearer

[1] At this point, a McCain election seems almost impossible. But it's dangerous to underestimate the stupidity of Americans. They change their minds every week, depending on the images in the media.

understanding of the nature of society's present configuration and of its (in)compatibility with human values. Some types of social being are relatively conducive to prejudice; other types are relatively conducive to rationality (practical and theoretical).

(Founding morality on rationality, the ancient philosophical project. It can be done. I have done it. Moral rationalism need not entail moral realism. *Consistency*, consistency with fundamental values. Consistency itself is more consistent than inconsistency is with the universal desire for truth and understanding; that's why it, or rationality, is valuable, "*rationally*" valuable.[1] Other values, such as not enslaving black people, can be rationally, i.e. non-arbitrarily, argued for by deducing them from values to which one's 'opponent' is, perhaps unconsciously, committed. On some level, as I said, everyone unconsciously values compassion, love, brotherhood, recognition—because such things are what make humans most happy—and so to the extent that one's behavior conflicts with these values, one is being inconsistent or irrational, and is blocking one's own happiness.

(There's often an element of ambiguity, though, and no one even approaches complete rationality, whatever that would look like.)

Primary, secondary, tertiary other not clearly separated in the psyche. Mere analytical distinctions. Each is involved in the others.

Parents in America not a true other. Being with them not so fun because no need to impress them. Their opinion doesn't matter much; they're part of you—no real *otherness* in your relationship with them—so the possibility of their 'devaluing' or 'disconfirming' you is almost as unlikely and unreal as the possibility of your devaluing yourself. In order to confirm your self you don't try to impress only yourself and no one else; you orient your efforts toward the other. You're witty and confident for the benefit of the other; you *perform* for the benefit of the other. Not for yourself, and not for your parents. –To be sure, there's *some* otherness in your relationship with them. Only not very much. Especially if they support you and esteem you as you esteem yourself—and especially if they respect you more than you respect them, or if they're not intellectually stimulating or very impressive, etc. The more impressive you consider them, the more you'll seek their approval. So the pleasure you get from their company depends on more than one factor, not surprisingly. And yet the factors are connected. The "level" or "degree" of a person's otherness depends in large part on the extent to which he instantiates certain values you've internalized, in particular self-confidence, intellectual ability, "charisma," perhaps physical beauty. It depends, that is, on how "impressive" he is. But, ceteris paribus, if your parents are as impressive, or have as compelling a presence, as a friend of yours does, you'll prefer spending time with your friend to spending it with your parents, because, as I said, in a way they're not as "phenomenologically" separated from you as your friend is.

Incidentally, animals act on the foundation of otherness too. They are in some obscure, unconscious way aware of it. Even cats, dogs, even reptiles—but in that case it's entirely physiological. Reptiles have only the most rudimentary, *physiological* kind of consciousness, which is just to say that they have essentially *no* awareness of an other.

September 30

In my thoughts yesterday on morality I forgot to mention *intelligence*. Intelligence—interpersonal and logical—cooperates with rationality to provide a so-called objective foundation for particular values and particular courses of action in given situations. *Open-mindedness* is virtually synonymous with intelligence. "A closed-minded but intelligent person" is practically, though not *quite*, an oxymoron.

[1] Yes: though it sounds odd, it's rational to value rationality, because you *necessarily* value it even if you think you don't. In other words, by *explicitly* valuing it and adhering to it, you're being consistent with yourself, i.e. (practically) rational. I've said before that rational norms are the only self-justifying norms; I should note that rationality is the only self-justifying *value*, too. The only non-arbitrary way to justify other values is to show that they are deducible from values to which you are particularly committed—that is, to justify them through *reason, logic*.

(Antonin Scalia is as closed-minded as they come but he's certainly intelligent in some ways. I'd say he's theoretically irrational—draws fallacious conclusions—and "abstractly-empathically" unintelligent. If you want, you can call the former a kind of unintelligence too.)

I have to make a presentation on John Brown, so I'll take notes on the book here.

Reynolds' book is "cultural history." The cultural biographer asks three questions: how does his subject reflect his era, how does he transcend it, and how did he impact it. Brown was not insane; he was an amalgam of social currents. Sheds light on the legacy of Puritanism, the social impact of Transcendentalism, the significance of slave revolts, the popular culture of the time (its reactions to him), the causes of the Civil War. Reynolds wants to show *how* and *why* Brown was unique among Abolitionists in his espousal of violence—how, that is, he "transcended" his time. Regarding his *impact*: first of all, Brown didn't *end* slavery but he *killed* it. After Harpers Ferry (in 1859) it was doomed. Likewise, didn't cause the Civil War but sparked it. Contributed to Lincoln's election because after Harpers Ferry the Republicans had to choose a moderate candidate over controversial ones. Had a *cultural* impact, though, mainly because the Transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau took up his cause. Union soldiers sang a song called "John Brown's Body," to the tune of which Julia Ward Howe wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"—a song that aptly fuses the two themes that sum up Brown, namely antislavery and religious devotion. Was a Calvinist, a fervid Puritan in the old Cromwellian way. "The last Puritan." But fused his Puritanism with democratic egalitarianism, a concern for social rights. Anticipated civil rights goals of the mid-20th century.

(Illuminating political cartoon on p. 15.)

In the South, "New England Puritanism" was considered a major cause of the war because it was linked with reform. Why? Because of its heritage of antinomianism—the breaking of human law in the name of God. Militant Abolitionism, Transcendentalist self-reliance (cf. Thoreau's civil disobedience), the "individual sovereignty" of anarchists and free-love activists. "Northern Calvinistic *insubordinatism* vs. Southern Episcopal *subordinatism*." Brown was descended from Puritans and his father was an Abolitionist. "I believe in the Golden Rule," he said, "and the Declaration of Independence. I think that both mean the same thing." Uniquely combined Calvinism and a republican belief in human rights. Believed in predestination, of course: thought he was predestined from all eternity to free the slaves.

William Lloyd Garrison (pacifist) vs. John Brown. Slave revolts horrified the former, inspired the latter. Five or six major slave revolts before Harpers Ferry. Brown admired Nat Turner and Cinque above all. (*Amistad*, 1837.) Why did he accept insurrectionary violence when other whites didn't? Because he was thoroughly open to the black experience. Least racist white American. Lived with blacks in rough conditions on the frontier, played with them as a child, tried to educate them, fought with them against whites, studied the history of guerilla uprisings, hid fugitive slaves. Once went into a church and was stunned to see black people sitting at the back, out of sight of the minister and choir. Furious, he escorted them to his own preferred pew—while reminding the congregation that God "was no respecter of persons"—and then he and his family sat in the seats vacated by the blacks. In the mid-1830s, proslavery forces turned violent; this brought out the militancy in Brown. Particularly when Elijah Lovejoy, an antislavery editor, was killed in 1837. This event pushed other Abolitionists away from violence; it pushed Brown towards it. He asked his sons to make common cause with him against slavery.

In the '50s there were other violent white Abolitionists sympathetic to violence, for instance the anarchist Lysander Spooner, but Brown was the most determined and ambitious. Discussed his plans with Frederick Douglass to invade the South with 25 men, free slaves and establish a colony in the Appalachian mountains which would be their home-base for successive mini-invasions, each one freeing more slaves. The South would be terrorized as during slave revolts in the past; the whites' control over blacks would become insecure. "Twenty men in the Alleghenies could break slavery to pieces in two years." His plan wasn't as unrealistic as you might think: it had many precedents in the New World. (Toussaint L'Ouverture, the Second Seminole War of the late '30s, etc.) He set his sights on Harpers Ferry in the early '50s because it was a symbol of government and had an arsenal that produced most of the weapons of the armed services.

John Brown, beloved by Malcolm X, was an exemplary man. Supported feminism (suffrage), even split the household duties between males and females; was tolerant, respectful, friendly towards people of

all religions (or no religion), classes and races; gave to the poor even when he was in dire financial straits (i.e., most of his life); and he started a little community in North Elba, New York where blacks and whites lived and worked together on equal terms. It was also a stop on the Underground Railroad. But in the mid-1850s he went to Kansas with his sons because proslavery forces were gathering there and he worried that it would become a slave state, which might have a domino effect on Nebraska and other territories. It was in Kansas that Pottawatomie happened.

There was a lot of proslavery violence in Kansas, "border ruffians" stuffing ballot boxes with proslavery votes and assaulting Free State men (who were not Abolitionists but wanted Kansas to be free of slaves, indeed all blacks). Anarchy. In 1855, 1200 proslavery men gathered to attack Lawrence, a Free State town, thus starting the "Wakarusa War." John Brown and his sons arrived to defend the town, but the tension was defused at the last instant and the battle was called off. But the next year they did attack Lawrence, burned it, destroyed it. Brown decided it was time to retaliate, especially since Senator Charles Sumner had just been brutally beaten in the halls of Congress by a Southerner, and President Franklin Pierce had a proslavery attitude, and Kansas was steeped in proslavery terror, etc. etc. So Brown gathered some men and went to Pottawatomie in the middle of the night. Their weapons were swords rather than guns because Brown wanted to kill in the way that Indians or blacks would have. Wanted the attack to be symbolic of race. The men went to houses of known proslavery men, knocked on the door, then escorted the man or men who answered to the forest, where they were killed. There were five victims that night. The murders had a minimal impact on the political situation in Kansas, but around the nation their impact was huge. They initiated the Southerners' misreading of the North as aggressively Abolitionist, thus aggravating tensions between the North and the South and, in the long run, pushing the nation towards civil war. Whereas slavery's defenders had previously considered Abolitionists to be laughable cowards, now they were *afraid* of these "ferocious criminals." Many Northerners came to see Brown as a hero, a legend, especially since he resisted capture in the months after Pottawatomie. It was in those months, too, that he won the battle of Black Jack and fought the battle of Osawatomie, where he was heavily outnumbered but inflicted heavy losses.

"Take more care to end life well than to live long." Brown's characteristic pithiness.

Went east to raise funds and buy weapons—met major intellectuals, antislavery businessmen—then went back west to plan the attack on Harpers Ferry and recruit men. Stayed at F. Douglass's house for three weeks and wrote a Provisional Constitution for post-slavery America, in which there would be complete social equality for all races and sexes. Then he went to Canada and organized a convention attended by thirty-four blacks and twelve whites; he told them his plans and tried to recruit men, and they discussed and voted on his constitution.

In the following months, more action and heroism. Freed eleven slaves and took them 1000 miles to Canada, won small battles, eluded capture, raised funds for Harpers Ferry.

October 1, 3

Women are like a magic lamp in which a genie sleeps: you rub them and all of a sudden the spirit of their sexuality awakens to grant your every wish.

Reading an 18th-century American novel called *The Coquette*, by Hannah Foster. Epistolary novel like so many of the time; it's a true story about a woman who was seduced by "a libertine of vicious character," a "rake," like so many women of the time, only *this* one died giving birth to his still-born, illegitimate child.

The problem with modern society is that it gives women every opportunity to indulge their romantic whims. That's unhealthy for everyone. Alexander Pope was not off the mark when he opined, "Every woman is, at heart, a rake," a thought that has been modernized in the song "Girls Just Want to Have Fun." Giving women free rein to pursue their crushes, their lusts, their momentary desires, their fetish of the wealthy or the charming libertine, has led to the ruin of millions of them. Freedom is a dangerous thing;

some people apparently can't handle it. A culture of arranged marriage (at least if the two future spouses have *some* say in the matter) is in some ways preferable to a culture of love. Love is moody, after all; feelings are fleeting, and they lead many women astray. *Respect* is a surer foundation for marriage than love. Unfortunately, among all the suitors of a pretty woman, it is often the least respectable with whom she falls in love.

Transcendentalism was essentially a manly, a virile form of Romanticism. It infused Romanticism with the air of autumn in Concord, when every breath you take of the brisk air is a draft of strong color from the leaves. Romanticism was the decadence of the Old World, the stupor of the senses and feeling; Transcendentalism was the self-confidence of a New World flexing its mind.

October 6, 7

Reading papers on John Brown and the pre-Civil War era in preparation for an essay I have to write.

Transcendentalism and Puritanism. Connection? Transcendence. Thoreau: Brown was "a Transcendentalist above all—a man of ideas and principles." Puritanism. Secular Puritanism. Puritanism and Hannah Arendt's "revolutionary tradition," with its "lost treasure" of spontaneous, grassroots democratic upsurges. Connection? Maybe not direct. Two manifestations of modern individualism; not-incompatible reactions to the emerging capitalist order. In fact, mutually reinforcing: anti-authoritarian. Freedom—though Calvinism may be a more individualistic kind of freedom than radical democracy is.

Paper topic: locate Brown in the tradition of revolution, from the English Civil War to the 20th-century Hungarian Revolution. (Hannah Arendt. Chatham etc. = grassroots democracy.) Not a fringe figure, not a freak; his Provisional Constitution, antislavery convention, interracial community of North Elba, League of Gileadites and so on were central expressions of the revolutionary spirit that hung over three centuries and more (ending in 1968). Came close to espousing communist ideals. Tie him, with his *thoroughgoing Puritanism*, to the Levellers… "The last Puritan."

Popularity of "John Brown's Body" among soldiers. "The song was largely a framework for improvisation of lyrics by soldiers on long marches. These 'verbal riffs,' [Reynolds] suggests, appropriately paralleled the centrality of improvisation in such African-American music forms as slave spirituals, blues, and jazz (p. 468). The song thus unites Reynolds's dual focus on Brown as an embodiment of Transcendentalism and a representative of white receptiveness to black culture. The shared value of improvisation, moreover, is particularly significant in the typical performance context of the song, the Union army arrayed in rank and file… The troops did not show quite the same affection for 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic,' a far more conventionally Christian anthem that, as Franny Nudelman has recently noted, turned away from the immortal individualism that John Brown symbolized. Like the supporters of slavery, Union ideology found it impossible to keep Brown's name and fame out of the war." Individualism and, perhaps, proto-democracy in the military, sort of like in Cromwell's military of the 1640s. Sort of. White receptiveness to black culture: revolutionary. Yet another expression of the revolutionary spirit. Popular culture of the time, some of it black-inspired, radically democratic. Walt Whitman. John Brown a product of this, not a fanatic or a freak. In some ways the epitome of his age, in some ways a remarkable throwback—because *a man*, endued with courageous convictions and the courage of those convictions.

Intelligent confident Lucy in my History class, kissable, debatable, spendmylifewithable. I could love her and respect her more than myself. But she has a boyfriend. Curses, she makes my heart ache which is why I have to write about her, I have to talk to someone—you—about her.

October 9, 10

Even movies that are supposed to be "real," "cool," "realistic," like *High Fidelity*, have little in common with reality. It's something about the nature of movies, even unglamorous ones: they glamorize life. They make it seem better and more exciting than it is, even if they explicitly set out to show its gloomy, grimy side. They make you think you're missing out on life. After watching *High Fidelity* right now I feel depleted and estranged from everything, because life just isn't that *special*. That glossy film with the cinematic sheen on it that Hollywood uses, that special kind of film or those special kinds of cameras that make everything look so much more glamorous than homemade videos—it estranges the viewer from his own decidedly unglossy life. And women and men….women and men aren't the way they are in movies, nor is sex movie-sex (even if the moves are the same). And seeing how irrational real life is makes you hate it; the idiocy and randomness of who gets whom or who's attracted to whom, based as it is on moods, circumstances, lighting, clothing, timing, drinking… And especially not having anything in common with people, not liking their kinds of music or fashion or TV shows or sports or dancing. Being full of love but empty of affection—yes—it's hard to bear.

All in all, the worst people in the world are in show business and politics. And business, of course. The three areas that are central to the modern world are magnets for the worst people, who have metallic, magnet-pulled souls. Souls of *nickel*, but with no resistance to corrosion.[1]

Two kinds of happiness: abstract and concrete. Intellectual, mediated, vs. 'immediately' interpersonal. The latter more powerful because more immediate. The latter also more of a force for good, more compassion-based, love-based. Concretely I'm made happy by being with happy people or by helping people; I never get pleasure from the suffering of a person who is directly present. But the suffering of a person who is *not* directly present—or, rather, my *knowledge* of such suffering—can give me pleasure, *abstract* pleasure. I get less pleasure from the *knowledge* that others are happy than from the knowledge that they're in pain (of some sort—not physical). Thus, my abstract, intellectual side is more cruel than my concrete, 'emotional' or 'directly interpersonal' side. (Cf. Montaigne's observation that his reason is more depraved than his instincts. Profoundly true, a *human* truth.) The knowledge, for example, that Edmund Ruffin, the rabid proslavery fire-eater who fanned the flames of Southern secession, killed himself right after Lee surrendered at Appomatox delights me. The thought of that nasty old man living to see all his dreams of a slave-holding nation shattered warms my intellectual heart. But to think of the happiness and success of certain Wesleyan alumnae has quite the opposite effect on me; and even the knowledge of my friends' happiness, or even of happiness that *I have caused*, pleases me but little. The "pleasure" it gives me, in fact, is so thin that to call it "pleasure" is well-nigh misleading. This explains how it's possible that even the greatest benefactors of the human race have often been miserably unhappy, despite their knowledge of having benefited millions of people. Such people are commonly fueled more by their desire to *overcome the (hostile) other* than to *help the ("meek") other*—because their fuel is, in large part, necessarily *intellectual* or *abstract*, and intellectual pleasure is more often malicious than sympathetic. [That's very debatable.] It comes from the assertion of oneself over the oppositional other in one's mind, the internalized enemy which, because it has been internalized, engenders a conflict in the self, a kind of intellectual displeasure. When you vanquish this enemy you restore a degree of self-unity, of self-confirmation, of self-recognition (which entails recognition in the world, i.e. the vanquishing of your enemy in the world. Your enemy in the world is the meaning of the internalized enemy in your mind which is causing your unrest; it *is* the enemy in your mind, at least as far as *you're* concerned). The enemy, the "hostile other," in question can be something like fundamentalist Christians, proslavery Southerners, a particular person, Wall Street, etc. The Other can take indefinitely many forms, some hostile (i.e., set in opposition to your sense of self), some friendly, some neutral.

When I read that Obama is surging ahead in the polls, what explains my happiness at the news? Does it arise from pure "sympathy" with him and his supporters, or from the impression that my ideals and

[1] [I remember that when I wrote that sentence I was pleased with the play on the word 'nickel,' which is both an anti-corrosive metal and an almost-worthless unit of money.]

desires (for the world and for myself) are being realized at the expense of those belonging to the hostile other (the Republicans, etc.)? Obviously the second. My happiness at his success is inseparable from my happiness at the downfall of my "enemy" (or enemies). It is at the same time sympathetic and malicious; but without the maliciousness, the sympathetic wouldn't exist. This is true of intellectual, abstract pleasure in general: it is highly mediated, highly ambiguous and ambivalent. Directly, concretely interpersonal pleasure is less mediated, less ambiguous, more "pure" and "good" and "compassionate" or "sympathetic." (Sadists and such, to the degree that they're sadistic, are exceptions, which is to say that they're unnatural. They can be common only in unnatural societies.)

This is all tied in with reification, in obvious ways. Indeed, in its abstract or intellectual forms, the Other itself is a reification and is made possible by a correspondingly reified social structure.

I just heard that a legislative panel found that Palin had abused her authority in firing a state official. More fantastic news. The pleasure it gave me was identical to my pleasure at having read recently that Obama is 11 points ahead in the polls, and that Connecticut's Supreme Court overturned a ban on same-sex marriage.

H. D. Thoreau, who idolized John Brown, said that people who regarded Brown as a criminal or who didn't recognize his wisdom and nobleness "either have much flesh, or much office, or much coarseness of some kind. They are not ethereal natures in any sense. The dark qualities predominate in them." Metaphorical language but insightful. He's right. On such matters one can't help speaking metaphorically because literal concepts like 'reasonable' or 'moral' or 'intelligent' are not full-blooded enough. They're thin, undescriptive. Such people, anti-Brownians, are, on the whole, indeed coarse and unethereal, unspiritual, un-lucid, with dark flesh-imprisoned minds fixated (be)nightedly on themselves, closed to new impressions of whatever sort, locked in the past. Thoreau even called these people "decidedly pachydermatous." After Brown's hanging, Thoreau wrote that "he has not laid aside the sword of the spirit, for he is pure spirit himself, and his sword is pure spirit also." Those aren't empty phrases; Hegel would have agreed with them while interpreting them in an emphatically un-Thoreauvian way. John Brown was mainly spirit, Spirit, a step forward in world history. He may have been "wrong" in his methods—though I don't really think so—but Hegel would have said that accusation is irrelevant, as irrelevant as it was in the case of Napoleon. (Napoleon, of course, was despicable; there's no gainsaying that.) Spirit, History, was working through John Brown, who knew that slavery would not be abolished except through violence.

You have to read this book. It'll change your views on the slavery era. "No one in American history—not even Washington or Lincoln—was recognized as much in drama, verse, and song as was Brown. Most of this expression was eulogistic." John Brown *truly was* one of the most important people of the 19th century. [Um, that seems wrong.]

October 11, 12

Again, I have to remind myself not to oversimplify when phenomenologizing. There is no clear dichotomy between "abstract" and "concrete": each is involved in the other. Nevertheless, what I wrote yesterday has some value.

10 + 8 = 18. 8 + 10 = 18. Two different ways of mentally constructing the same object. Two different syntheses.

Reading parts of *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky*. Mediation, explicit and implicit. Thought and word: "thought is an inchoate, fused, unpartitioned, nonsequential whole that comes into contact with words, which involve generalization and discrete, sequential representation." Suggestive way of formulating the opposition. Tension. Thought and speech interpenetrate and transform one another; they are not independent and isolated elements. "The relationship of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a movement from thought to word and from word to thought." Dialectic.

"Explicit mediation involves the intentional introduction of signs into an ongoing flow of activity. In this case, the signs tend to be designed and introduced by an external agent, such as a tutor, who can help reorganize an activity in some way. In contrast, implicit mediation typically involves signs in the form of natural language that have evolved in the service of communication and are then harnessed in other forms of activity. Because the integration of signs into thinking, remembering, and other forms of mental functioning occurs as part of the naturally occurring dialectic outlined by Shpet and Vygotsky, they do not readily become the object of consciousness or reflection."

Vygotsky's developmental method.

Vygotsky and Mead, similar concerns. But the former has a more "cognitive" approach than the latter.

From a Wikipedia article:

> Through play the child develops abstract meaning separate from the objects in the world, which is a critical feature in the development of higher mental functions.
>
> The famous example Vygotsky gives is of a child who wants to ride a horse but cannot. As a child under three, he would perhaps cry and be angry, but around the age of three the child's relationship with the world changes. "Henceforth play is such that the explanation for it must always be that it is the imaginary, illusory realization of unrealizable desires. Imagination is a new formation that is not present in the consciousness of the very raw young child, is totally absent in animals, and represents a specifically human form of conscious activity. Like all functions of consciousness, it originally arises from action."
>
> He wishes to ride a horse but cannot, so he picks up a stick and stands astride it, thus pretending he is riding a horse. The stick is a *pivot*. "Action according to rules begins to be determined by ideas, not by objects… It is terribly difficult for a child to sever thought (the meaning of a word) from object. Play is a transitional stage in this direction. At that critical moment when a stick – i.e., an object – becomes a pivot for severing the meaning of horse from a real horse, one of the basic psychological structures determining the child's relationship to reality is radically altered."
>
> As children get older, their reliance on pivots such as sticks, dolls and other toys diminishes. They have *internalized* these pivots as imagination and abstract concepts through which they can understand the world. "The old adage that children's play is imagination in action can be reversed: we can say that imagination in adolescents and schoolchildren is play without action."
>
> Another aspect of play that Vygotsky referred to was the development of social rules that develop, for example, when children play house and adopt the roles of different family members. Vygotsky cites an example of two sisters playing at being sisters. The rules of behavior between them that go unnoticed in daily life are consciously acquired through play. As well as social rules, the child acquires what we now refer to as self-regulation. For example, as a child stands at the starting line of a running race, she may well desire to run immediately so as to reach the finish line first, but her knowledge of the social rules surrounding the game and her desire to enjoy the game enable her to regulate her initial impulse and wait for the start signal.

Can be supplemented with Mead.

"The major theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Vygotsky (1978) states: 'Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. [No, that statement is much too empiricist.]'" Compare Vygotsky with Piaget. The former places more emphasis on culture, social factors, and language.

Identity-construction. Moderate Republican, radical environmentalist, stylish dresser, etc. Indefinitely many possible identities in the social, behavioral, mental space of the Other in which you exist, i.e. of Society as a reification or abstraction; you pick out certain identities, valorize them by choosing them for yourself. The person with a robust, spontaneous, dynamic sense of self, a strong sense of his active "I" as opposed to his passive "me" (in Mead's terminology), doesn't have a great need to label himself in these static ways; only someone with a weak or tenuous sense of his active self, his I, relies on labels (or discrete identities) to sustain his self-esteem and self-stability, i.e. to make possible the continuous confirmation of his self in the world. One person confirms himself relatively directly in his activities, without the *overt* mediation of discrete, static identities; his *acting* gives him the sense of being alive, of having a self (a self that is stable and confirmed), and this allows him to be flexible in his beliefs, his ideologies, even his modes of acting. He doesn't identify himself by a particular *type* of acting or believing which forecloses other possibilities, but rather by throwing himself entirely into his actions (whatever they be at that moment). The other person doesn't have such a vivid sense of being alive, of being immediately and actively alive, but must invoke his (memory of his) past reactions to the other and the other's past reactions to him—i.e., those things from which the "me" is constructed—in order to have a secure and recognizable sense of himself. This may lead to ideological inflexibility, close-mindedness, an unwillingness to think through new situations or philosophies, and inhumane bureaucratic behavior.

I'm more attached to my identity as a Marxist than as a writer, but I'm not so attached to it that I can't consider anti-Marxian arguments. Actually I'm not very attached to either label, but if someone attacks Marxism I'll vehemently defend it because on a less superficial level than "labels" it's an important part of myself, and since I want my self to be confirmed, I'll argue that Marxism is valuable. Still, I have a strong enough sense of myself (my I) to be able and willing to consider changing my mind on any given issue addressed by Marxism. Unlike many people, I won't suffer a debilitating loss of self-confidence if I'm confronted with proof of my error.

[Those two paragraphs show confusion about the I and the me.]

Eriksonian identities vs. Meadian identities. Two definitions of "identity": (1) "…a sense, felt by individuals within themselves, and as an experience of continuity, oriented toward a self-chosen and positively anticipated future…"; (2) "a self-understanding to which one is emotionally attached and that informs one's behavior and interpretations." The task of an Eriksonian individual is to construct an integrated, enduring, consistent identity; a Meadian individual has many identities, which are in relation to roles and cultural personae.

"Vygotsky's key to human existence was the capacity to escape enslavement to whatever stimuli humans happened to encounter, whether from within or without. The way that they accomplished this was (broadly) linguistic, that is, through the active construction and use of symbols. Just as humans can modify the environment physically—thanks to their production of, and facility with, tools and symbols—humans can also modify the environment's stimulus value for their own mental states." Transcendence belongs to the human condition. It is through mediation, or transcendence of the immediate, that man modifies himself. Hegel.

"I am a social relation of me to myself," says Vygotsky, echoing Mead. Kierkegaard would have added, "…and a social relating of me to myself." Most of this is not original with Vygotsky or Mead or even Kierkegaard or Marx; it started with German idealism. And before that it had been intuitively grasped hundreds of times by thinkers in a dozen cultures.

"…definite link between play worlds and institutional life. Fantasy and games serve as precursors to participation in institutional life, where individuals are treated as 'scholars,' 'bosses,' or 'at-risk' children—whatever the institutional role—and events such as the granting of tenure, a corporate raid, or the 'self esteem' of at-risk children are taken in all seriousness." All this, be it juvenile play or games or institutionalized culture, takes place through symbolic mediation. New meanings are assigned to ordinary objects; people locate themselves in a nexus of "imaginary" relations and alter their behavior accordingly.

Identities, symbolically mediated, allow us to sort through and structure environmental stimuli, to determine which are worth reacting to in what ways and so on. "An identity is a key means of escape from the tyranny of environmental stimuli." Each of us has an assortment of identities that he may not be

discursively aware of. These identities are necessary, and your actions are always mediated through them. The me is, it seems, present in the I, and the I animates the me. Still, I'd emphasize that certain people's identities are more static and closed, lifeless and rigid, more 'important' to them (rigidly dominant in them), than other people's are. In being more creative, the latter people show that social roles matter comparatively little to them. Their me is less determining, their I more so, than in others, which is to say that they have a more expansive and strong sense of their active, acting self. (Unlike the other people, they may be hard-pressed to say who they are, to pin themselves down as, e.g., a Republican, a banker, an extrovert, a Roman Catholic. But the presence of such discursive, passive senses of self is not the foundation of psychic health, and may indeed signify a weak sense of one's active, this-moment, real self, as I suggested above.[1]) It's also likely that these "expansive" people are relatively intelligent.

Practical mediation vs. symbolic mediation.

October 14

The *Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*. The whole Cambridge collection is online. I'm in heaven.

Shaved off my mustache. I look better this way. And mustaches aren't popular these days: people think they look creepy, like a pedophile. Don't ask me why. On a Seinfeld episode George grew a mustache—I forget why—then complained about it, saying "I feel like an out-of-work porn star."

Dialectic of Enlightenment. Alienation versus the *hic et nunc*, the here and now. It is this from which we are estranged. "It is the inability to see or feel what is here, now, in front of us that characterizes our inability to come to terms with our existence." Projecting ourselves into the future, we prevent ourselves from enjoying the moment. (Buddhism. The evils of the self's continuous self-transcendence.) "The character of this genuine reality, in the view of Horkheimer and Adorno, is intensely somatic. We 'are' most adequately in the unmediated richness of sense." Unoriginal but largely true. We are not only intellects, but if we define ourselves as such, perpetually *striving, scheming*, we'll be condemned to unhappiness and the risk of self-destruction. Duh. But they've forgotten Marx.

A. and H. argue that "genuine morality is ultimately primitive and individual, not schematic." In a sense, they're right.

Two kinds of knowledge: mimesis (good) and "enlightenment" (bad).

> Mimesis is the assimilation of consciousness to reality, [the merging of self with object]. It does not involve reproduction or apprehension; it is, rather, a matter of unmediated organic intuition. Mimesis is "physical imitation of external nature." As such, it is not an intellectual process. Indeed, it is not even restricted to human beings. Mimesis is the expressive response of created things to their environment, and it acquires its origins with the capacity to *suffer*, which is something proper to all living beings… [Art is a *human* expression of mimesis.] "Enlightenment" knowledge is characterized by its attempt to thrust all known and knowable objects into the corset of systematic "science." It thus renders itself unable to accommodate the *hic et nunc*. [Kierkegaard.] But as the authors argue, the world, and everything in it, is essentially unique. No one thing is the same as another. Individuals truly are individuals, and not exemplars of a species. Classification is no more than a *preparation* for knowledge, never its fulfillment.

[1] What does it mean to have a weak sense of your "active" or "spontaneous" self? Simply that you don't (*relatively*) un-mediatedly valorize yourself, your self. Your immediate self-esteem is low, so you valorize particular *roles* or *ideologies* and place yourself in them as a way of indirectly valorizing and validating yourself. So when people criticize a role or ideology you identify with, such as social conservatism or white supremacy, you may lash out with extraordinary violence, since as far as you're concerned these people are attacking your value as a self. Another person wouldn't react violently because he values his "spontaneous self" sufficiently not to take the attacks personally.

> The source of this compulsion to "know everything in advance" is, according to the authors, partly psychopathic and partly the result of fear. The fear is the primitive fear of nature, the hostile other which brings death… [With enlightenment,] the substantive intuitions of true knowledge are replaced by the ghostly compulsions of deduction and all the "logical" hierarchies of systematic knowledge.

Anti-intellectualism. In the bad sense. And straw-man opponents.

Interesting observation: "Sacrificial practices [in archaic cultures] derive from a central principal of mythical thinking, namely, the law of equivalence, which for Horkheimer and Adorno represents the magical origin of rational exchange. Every piece of good fortune, every advance, which the gods bestow on human beings, must be paid for with something of comparable value. Following this principle, early humankind attempted to influence the course of human and natural events by offering sacrifices to the gods in the hope that the deities would intervene on their behalf." What does the so-called law of equivalence say about the human mind? It's a primitive, relatively spontaneous expression of the unintellectual self. If you receive something, you must give something; if you give something, you must receive something. Anthropologists have observed this law in hundreds of societies, and it is surely evidenced in young children too. What explains it??

Winnicott: "It is creative apperception more than anything that makes the individual feel that life is worth living." One of those simple truths that is worth remembering.

A. and H.'s central assumption: the ego as such is autocratic. The integration, the formation, of the self is inherently violent and repressive. (Cf. Freud.) The ego's phylogenetic and ontogenetic emergence—which they equate with the emergence of "Enlightenment"—brought (brings) benefits, but it cannot emancipate humankind from fear and immaturity. Man's fulfillment does not take place through the development of reason and the mastery of nature. Fascism proves that. The only hope for humankind is a utopian rupture of some sort, a break from the dialectic of Enlightenment.

To repeat: the ego's emergence was paid for with the sacrifice of inner nature (i.e., of unconscious-instinctual life) and the loss of a mimetic, 'sympathetic' relation to nature. The ego *excludes*, *represses*. This is a Freudian vision, but, contrary to Adorno, Freud also suggests that the healthy ego is *inclusive* as well, in that it channels and organizes energy from the id. Enlightenment, therefore, need not be wholly repressive and violent; it can be inclusionary, perhaps even mimetic. But Adorno rejects this possibility.

Relationship between the id (the non-ego within the body/psyche) and the other… Self-consciousness a hindrance to unfettered self-expression and self-confirmation. Acute self-consciousness = excessive ego, weak but strongly defensive ego that erects walls against both the other's critical look and the id's instinctual libidinal energies. (This explains why, for instance, shy and insecure people sometimes have bursts of energy, especially in solitude: because, namely, their self-consciousness entails a suppression of psychic energy, which finally has to be released—usually in solitude, when there is little or no pathological self-consciousness. Reification of the self and the other—internalization of an "abstract other" which tends to have a negative attitude toward the self—such as occurs in shy or schizoid people blocks the self's access to reserves of psychic energy, places obstructions in the path of self-objectification and -confirmation,[1] and amounts to a self-fulfilling prophecy, a vicious circle of unrecognition. It's no accident that our society, the most reified in history, is also the most plagued by alcoholism, by weekly orgies of drunkenness, of "letting loose" in nightclubs, etc.—opportunities for purging the body/psyche of energy that has been suppressed during the weekdays of self-consciousness and atomization.) The greater the focus on the other, the greater the focus on the self, and the greater the suppression of unconscious libidinal

[1] Consider the many times I've observed that in particular moments I become unusually witty and energetic, for no apparent reason—moments that coincide with a lack of self-consciousness, a strange feeling of 'freedom,' 'looseness,' 'spontaneity.' The jokes well up out of nowhere, unpredictably. Cf. Freud's thoughts on the close relation between jokes and the unconscious: the former, I'd suggest, are an expression of the latter('s 'energy') and come straight out of it.

energy. The healthy self *acts*, *opens* itself to its (*socialized*)[1] instincts; it doesn't maintain rigid boundaries between itself, the other, and its intuitive, spontaneous, instinctual impulses.

Useful concept from Marcuse: the "repressive desublimation" of sexuality carried out by the advertising industry.

Suppression vs. repression (censorship…). The latter more historically specific, specific to certain societies. Maybe didn't exist in archaic ones. A degree of *sup*pression is necessary in every society, but suppression needn't mean unhappiness or a lack of self-integration.

October 16, 18

'Nothing matters. There is too much of everything for anything to matter.' As matters stand, that's true.

Reading Howard Gardner's *The Quest for Mind*, an exposition of the structuralism of Levi-Strauss, Piaget and other thinkers. In the beginning of the book he notes that Levi-Strauss asks the following question: Why are pet birds given human names (Pierre, Donald, Jacqueline) and dogs given un-human names (Fido, Spot, Pluto)? He doesn't say what Levi-Strauss's answer is; presumably the reader will learn later on in the book. Anyway, I want to offer my own answer and see (later) how it measures up to L-S's. I'd suggest that dogs are too 'close' to people for us to give them human names. We walk them, pet them, play with them, clean up their shit: their "world is too much with us." To call such an animal *John* or *Peter* or *Joseph* would sound odd, to say the least: dogs are too different from us to have human names. They don't have our *dignity*, so to speak; the name 'John' is far too dignified, too human, to be given to an animal that rolls around in the mud and smells bad and acts slavishly. Birds, on the other hand, are relatively diffident, distant from our everyday life. They live in their cages, hop and fly from branch to branch, and generally mind their own business as we mind ours. Their life is fairly separate from ours, unlike a dog's life. They don't act slavishly with people; they have dignity and diffidence, even more than cats do. — That's my answer. I'll tell you what L-S's is when I get to that part of the book.

Piaget argues that "all mental states involve a form of implicit activity on the world." Profoundly true. [Um, no.] "All thinking involves, for Piaget, a series of mental operations, and these operations are simply internalized actions and sequences of actions. [Nope, not true at all. Way too reminiscent of empiricism.] The child who appreciates that one ball has the same amount of clay as another that has been altered in shape is demonstrating the capacity to perform an operation of reversibility."

Met Nadine & Company last night. She gave me the greatest compliment I've ever received by saying, half-jokingly, that I'm a womanizer. I *wish* I were. But when I drink I'm capable of approaching that ideal—heck, sometimes even when I'm sober—and I'm fun to be with. I always kiss her at the end of the night and she doesn't object, but we're just friends.

Piaget. (1) Young child is incapable of thinking about himself. Doesn't differentiate between himself and the rest of the world. (Primitive man.) (2) Children initially think they think with the mouth. Can't think with the mouth shut. Also opine that the mind is *air*, "because you can't touch it." (Anaximenes.) (3) "For the youngest child, the dream is an image or voice coming from outside and manifesting itself in front of your eyes." Sometimes sent by birds, pigeons, or the air. Gradually children understand that the dream is internally caused. (4) In general, the child's ideas about thoughts, words and dreams are characterized by "realism, the attribution of an independent, quasi-physical reality to mental states and constructs." A name, for instance, is confused with the object itself: "to touch the name of the sun would be to touch the sun itself, to curse the sun is to threaten its existence. This realism gives rise to feelings of 'participation' in which the name passes to and fro between the object (the sun) and ourselves." (Primitive man. Magical power of naming.) Also confusion between internal and external, and between thought and matter. (Thought is a whisper or a voice or smoke, etc.) (5) All objects are perceived as being

[1] Contra Freud.

made for a given purpose. No such thing as chance or mechanical necessity; everything in nature is purposeful. No distinction between physical and moral causes. (The sun exists because it has to keep us warm.) Hegel was right that the early history of man repeats itself in the first few years of a child's life. Why? Because, as Piaget argues, the child comes to learn about itself and the world through *action*, through acting on its environment. The modern child grows up in a technological world, where man is separated from nature and from his fellow men. Early humans, on the other hand, grew up in a natural world. The separation between nature and man, between man and man, between internal and external, between name and object, between thought and matter, didn't exist yet because technology was primitive, the productive forces were primitive, and so were, necessarily, production relations. So in acting on the world, primitive man was acting on a rather undifferentiated world. His actions did not spur him to make distinctions between facets of reality that today we distinguish.

His cognitive and emotional capacities probably didn't mature at the same rate at which a modern child's mature, and his self-understanding (which includes his understanding of the world) *definitely* didn't, because it's explicitly mediated by material conditions—and if material conditions don't necessitate that the actor distinguish between things then he won't distinguish between them. Thought is an internalization of action. "Mental operations are simply internalized actions." [Again, no! Some are, but some aren't.] Social being—*active* being—first, consciousness second. Piaget supports Marxism.

Levi-Strauss. Cultural phenomena should be considered in terms of signs. These phenomena can, for analytic purposes, be treated as arbitrary, like linguistic signs; the point is that their interrelations tell us something about the structure of the human mind. The content of myths may vary between cultures, but the structure does not.

Taboo on incest: a rule found in all societies, therefore *the* rule of Society. How to explain this rule? I've always wondered that. The horror with which I look upon the idea of having sex with my mom is not rational; its very strength proves that. How was this horror inculcated in me? Is it somehow instinctual? At what age did I find the idea of incest unthinkable? Probably as soon as I reached a vague understanding of sex. What age was that? Five or six at the latest, probably earlier. Surely the incest taboo has to do with the nature of the inherently "idealizing" relationship between child and parents, which I've mentioned before. But what about brother and sister?

L-S argues that that phenomenon can be explained only by considering the nature and function of kinship systems. "The fatal flaw of incest is that it prevents the formation of larger units: if one marries one's sister, the possibility of exchanging women and so of establishing alliances is precluded. Inasmuch as society and survival are thought to depend upon the building up of such alliances, incest cannot be tolerated, and strong sanctions are devised against it.

"The prohibition is seen as a manifestation of giving or self-sacrifice, as the group's way of saying that, in sexual matters, a person cannot do as he pleases. Among primitive peoples, incest is regarded as socially absurd rather than as morally repugnant, reflecting a sort of Cartesian principle that one cannot marry oneself, or a part of oneself." L-S tells of a primitive man who rejects incest because it prevents one from having a brother-in-law. "With whom will you hunt?" he says. "With whom will you garden? Whom will you go to visit?" It's not *wrong*, it's just absurd.

Obligation of reciprocity. Exchanging women—gift-giving. Women are "objects" even in [some] primitive societies.

Basic mental structures (says L-S): the universality of rules, the principle of reciprocity, the socially solidifying nature of the gift, the tendency to think in oppositions. (Why oppositions? Because *omnis determinatio est negatio*. Concepts are meaningful only in opposition to other concepts. Saussure et al.)

L-S's answer to the question about pet names is a little different from mine, and probably more satisfying. But I think they're complementary. Quite similar, in fact. He argues that, while both birds and dogs are part of human society in that we keep them around the house, birds are thought to have among themselves their own society with its own relationships. "We can afford to give them human names because they have a parallel existence and will not be confused with our society. Domesticated dogs, however, are a part of the family and do not have their own society. Thus…[we give them] names which are parallel to the kinds of names humans have, but do not come from the same set." Yes. But there's no need for this

explanation to be framed in terms of structuralism. I think that questions about "methodology," in fact, are not as important as scholars think. I don't worry about methodology; I just give whatever explanation seems best. There's no reason to limit yourself *a priori* to a specific "method."

October 20

Article in *Rolling Stone* about Wallace. I see that his whole life was essentially my life between 18 and 25. In other words, it sucked. Right up to his death he had the same insecurities, the same thoughts, I had. Consider what he wrote in a letter: "I go through a loop in which I notice all the ways I am self-centered and careerist and not true to standards and values that transcend my own petty interests, and feel like I'm not one of the good ones. But then I countenance the fact that at least here I am worrying about it, noticing all the ways I fall short of integrity, and I imagine that maybe people without any integrity at all don't notice or worry about it; so then I feel better about myself. It's all very confusing. I think I'm very honest and candid, but I'm also proud of how honest and candid I am—so where does that put me?" These sorts of paradoxes, the paradoxes of self-consciousness, I was writing about eight years ago and finally stopped caring about one or two years ago. Being self-conscious on a second level, then being conscious of *that* level, then being conscious of this *fourth* level, until you lose all sense of yourself and conclude that self-determinations determine a vacuum and hence are vacuous. But then what? Then you stop thinking and go outside and play and know who you are again, unconsciously. Wallace's curse was that he couldn't stop thinking.

Just think: he craved the label 'genius' but couldn't accept it when it was conferred on him. He knew it didn't mean anything. His friend Mark Costello called him once: "He was talking," says Costello, "about how hard the writing was. And I said, lightheartedly, 'Dave, you're a genius.' Meaning, people aren't going to forget about you. You're not going to wind up in a Wendy's. He said, 'All that makes me think is that I've fooled you, too.'" An honest person in this age can't accept that he's a genius and then go on with his life in the certainty that he's a genius, comforted eternally by that thought. He knows it's false, even if it's true: he's not an object, not a *brilliant rock* or something like that; he's a person who changes from moment to moment, of whom it's meaningless to predicate the stable, static, *lustrous* quality *genius*. Wallace couldn't believe he instantiated a concept, since his mind had motion (self-consciousness)—and he knew, anyway, that if he *did*, the concept was basically meaningless. He craved self-confirmation but couldn't achieve it because the greater one's self-consciousness, the more quickly and completely one transcends one's objectifications. In the end, therefore, once he stopped taking his medication he couldn't bear the unfulfillment of his desire to be *thickly valued*, to be *value itself*, and he killed himself.

The reason *I'm* able to tolerate my lack of recognition—to say it yet again—(or, to speak more accurately, the *story I tell myself*[1] (in order, namely, to salve the wound, and stanch the bleeding, of insulted self-love))—is that I know being published wouldn't satisfy me because nothing matters, published authors are no better off than I am because fame means nothing and proves nothing, and besides, writers are irrelevant now even to *culture* because culture is dead and everything is irrelevant. For myself I'm an unusually valuable person and for now that's enough, it's enough if *I* know my value. No one has a better chance than I of living posthumously. (And yes, I know that's a pointless desire, like the desire for recognition itself, but you can't reason these desires out of existence. They're there, driving you, driving even your act of communicating that these desires are pointless.)

Wallace's self-absorption ultimately made his writing less interesting than it could have been.

Good joke from him, funny because it's true: "What does a writer say after sex? '*Was it as good for me as it was for you?*'" (The not-knowing-yourself. The knowing-the-other-better-than-yourself.)

[1] The *real* reasons, of course, are deeper than the following rational justifications. They have to do with neurochemicals and hormones.

"For Levi-Strauss, the major facet of cognition is the perception of opposites or contrasts in the world."

Piaget's constructivist view of knowledge—according to which the child slowly constructs, through action, his spatial, linguistic, mathematical, logical knowledge—doesn't necessarily contradict the theory that these kinds of knowledge are, in a way, innate, nor that they are justified *a priori*. He thinks it does, but he's wrong. Through interaction with his environment the child educates himself into a form or 'structure' of knowledge that is genetically predetermined, in much the same way that his future pubertal growth-in-knowledge (sexual, emotional, intellectual) is genetically predetermined but also influenced by his interactions with the environment. Both growth-spurts in knowledge are simultaneously innate and constructed. *[No, they're **triggered** by environmental factors but not **constructed** by them. Piaget was right that his constructivism was incompatible with innatism, and he was wrong about his constructivism.]* […]

Likewise, L-S's emphasis on perception and Piaget's emphasis on action are complementary, not contradictory.

October 23

Alan Greenspan: "I'm sorry, I was wrong after all." (Not in so many words.) Failure of an economist, failure of a thinker, failure of a man. With a face that says "Why, in God's name, am I still alive?" The so-called free market doesn't work after all. Big surprise, that.

Critical Theory. "Actualization of reason," the ideal bequeathed from Hegel. "The Hegelian idea of a rational universal." The *deficient rationality* of contemporary capitalism. Marx: the rationality immanent in the forces of production is prevented actualization by relations of production and ideological distortion. (Also from Marx: *structures* will evolve of themselves, *individuals* can do little but accept the necessity of this evolution and perhaps contribute to it in a small way. Marxian structuralism. True. Leninist voluntarism false. History of USSR, China, Cuba, Vietnam corroborates Marx's structuralism. On the other hand, Lenin and Sartre weren't *entirely* wrong, nor was Levi-Strauss entirely right (in his methods and assumptions[1]). The history of the USSR etc. corroborates this point too, since individuals did, after all, have a huge impact in the short term.)

Honneth:

> In contrast to the approaches that have achieved dominance today, Critical Theory must couple the critique of social injustice with an explanation of the processes that obscure that injustice, for only when one can convince the addressees by means of such an explanatory analysis that they can be deceived about the real character of their social conditions, can the wrongfulness of those conditions be publicly demonstrated with some prospect of acceptance. Because a relationship of cause and effect is assumed to obtain between social injustice and the absence of any negative reaction to it, normative criticism in Critical Theory has to be complemented by an element of historical explanation…
>
> …For Lukács, who was by his own admission significantly influenced by Weber and Georg Simmel, the characteristic feature of this [modern capitalist] form of rationality consists in the fact that its subjects are forced into a type of practice that makes them "spectators without influence," divorced from their needs and intentions. The mechanized production of parts and the exchange of goods demand a form of perception in which all other human beings appear to be thinglike, unfeeling entities, such that social interaction is bereft of any attention to those qualities that are valuable in themselves. If we were to describe the result of Lukács's analysis in a terminology closer to contemporary ideas, we might say that a certain form of praxis which is dominant in capitalism compels indifference towards those aspects of other human beings that are valuable. Instead of

[1] His specific positions, of course, were sometimes wrong, but that's not what I'm talking about here.

> relating to one another with mutual recognition, subjects perceive themselves as objects that are identified only according to the interests of each… The organizational form of social relations in capitalism prevents the application to practical life of those rational principles which, as far as our cognitive potential is concerned, are already at hand.

This passage reminds me…what role can I have if my ideas have already been expressed by others? The main contours of my ideas have been drawn by prior thinkers, although, admittedly, I have added a personal touch to them and hit on new insights. But this is more or less the situation of all thinkers, isn't it? Originality is always incremental. Still, I get the feeling that all that's left, in this age, for one to do is to record the process of his grappling with ideas and making them his own—to record the personalization of thought and the philosophization of personality, of a personality (mine). If structures predominate—more than ever before[1]—and the individual thinker is, more than ever before, irrelevant, perhaps the best thing to do, the only honest thing, is to revolt Sisypheanly against structures, proclaim proudly that individuality is superfluous and then defiantly draw your personality on the canvas of philosophical tradition, for no other purpose than to sublimate yourself. Not to influence people or change society, but only to be who you are, to express yourself and then die. Schematically, time might look like this:

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In the coming centuries, maybe writers and artists will embrace this attitude of "superfluity." But no, that's impossible, everyone will always want to be influential. The two attitudes can exist together, though. You can be influential and superfluous at the same time. ("Superfluous in relation to what?" you ask. You ought to know the answer to that…)

October 24

Winnicott's *Playing and Reality*. Skimmed it long ago but I wasn't mature enough to appreciate it.

Three parts of a person's life: inner reality, external life, and *experiencing* (between the two). "[The latter is] an area that is not challenged…a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated." "The substance of *illusion*, that which is allowed to the infant, and which in adult life is inherent in art and religion, and yet becomes the hallmark of madness when an adult…forces others to acknowledge a sharing of illusion that is not their own [i.e., to accept "the objectivity of his subjective phenomena"]." Natural root of grouping among humans: coming together on the basis of the similarity of our illusory experiences, which are "the intermediate area between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived." This intermediate area is originally manifested as "an intermediate state between a baby's inability and his growing ability to recognize and accept reality." A *transitional* state, characterized by, e.g., thumb-sucking, cloth-sucking (the corner of a blanket), babbling. *Transitional phenomena*. Sometimes the infant needs a particular object, like the corner of a particular blanket or a word or a tune, when going to sleep, as a defense against anxiety. *Transitional object*. Gradually, as the baby gets older, teddies and dolls and hard toys become the transitional object(s). Finally, after years, the object ceases to have meaning, "and this is because the transitional phenomena have become diffused, have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between 'inner psychic reality' and 'the external world as perceived by two persons in common,' that is to say, over the whole cultural field. At this point my subject widens out into that of play, and of artistic creativity and appreciation, and of

[1] Indeed, it's possible that the evolution of capitalism can be viewed as an increasing 'structuration' of society, an increasing domination or determination of life by structural dynamics. (Habermas's notion of the lifeworld's increasing colonization by the system?) This ties into reification.

religious feeling, and of dreaming, and also of fetishism, lying and stealing, the origin and loss of affectionate feeling, drug addiction, the talisman of obsessional rituals, etc." Fascinating, thought-provoking.

Transitional object symbolic of some part-object, such as the breast. But its *not being* the breast is as important as its symbolic value because it shows that the baby "is already distinguishing between fantasy and fact, between inner objects and external objects, between primary creativity and perception."

More accurately, the transitional object stands for an external object (like the breast) *by standing for an internal object* (see Klein), which is a mental concept or representation of the external object.

In the beginning the infant has the illusion that his mother's breast is part of him: when he's hungry the breast appears, as if created by him at just the right moment (i.e., when he desires it). The mother eventually has to dis-illusion her baby, and then wean him. "The transitional phenomena represent the early stages of the use of illusion, *without which there is no meaning for the human being in the idea of a relationship with an object that is perceived by others as external to that being*." (My italics.) This ties into what I've said about other people being instantiations of the other in oneself. There's an element of illusion here.

"The task of reality-acceptance is never completed, no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience. This intermediate area is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is 'lost' in play."

Winnicott says parenthetically that, in an adult, the pathological "true- and false-self organization" (see Laing) signifies an inability to accept the "paradox" of illusion, of mediating between inner and outer. Acute observation. Illusion, part inner and part outer, is healthy, indeed necessary.

When I'm reading a good book I experience periodic surges of intense excitement, maybe ten seconds long, in which I half-intentionally clench my fists, my jaw, my throat, squinch up my face and possibly make a high-pitched squealing noise. Quite pleasurable. A feeling of extreme freedom, satisfaction with the world, love of myself. Can be caused by other things too, for instance by looking forward to an evening with female friends or by reflecting that I have liquor in my freezer that I can drink whenever I want (I never drink it alone, by the way). The consciousness of being free, of being able to do what I want. Making the world *mine*. In other words: close connection to "illusion"—"*experiencing*," living in a space between the inner and the outer worlds. That's the task of the human being, to create this half-imaginary world for himself.

Said more succinctly: becoming aware of my *playing* fills me with joy. When I'm playing is when I'm most happy, and when the world is most mine.

For Winnicott, psychotherapy = playing, the overlapping of two areas of playing (patient and therapist). If playing isn't possible, the therapist's job is to bring the patient into a state of being able to play.

"Play is exciting…[because of] the precariousness of the interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects. This is the precariousness of magic itself, magic that arises in intimacy, in a relationship that is being found [by the baby] to be reliable [viz., the relationship between baby and mother]." In other words, "the precariousness of play belongs to the fact that it is always on the theoretical line between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived."

The near-withdrawal state of children at play (being "lost in play") is akin to the *concentration* of older children or adults.

Development from transitional phenomena to playing, from playing to shared playing, from shared playing to cultural experiences.

October 25

(I think I've mentioned this before.) It's revealing that it makes little sense to speak of a "genius" in the realm of popular music. Not even Bob Dylan or Freddie Mercury can be called a genius in the fullest sense. The type of music is too mediocre, even if certain songs are very good. With classical music, on the

other hand, there are most definitely geniuses. This is because the music is, ironically, more individualized than pop. It *expresses the individual* more. It's more 'interior,' more soulful, more creative.

Had an Ethiopian dinner with a student of mine, Polish, 35-year-old divorcée, then took her to my apartment, listened to Schubert and Chopin (she plays the piano), kissed and cuddled. Aniela. DJ on the radio and station manager. I didn't want sex, I'm a woman and prefer cuddling. She didn't seem to want sex either.

Said I'm unlike anyone she's ever met. I laughed it off, but it pleased me.

A little something I wrote for class, probably not at all what the prof wanted:

The Phenomenology of Thoreau's Spirit

One of the tasks of a historian is to reconstruct what it was like to live in a given society. Social and cultural history, in particular, consist in this attempt to represent a society's "spirit," its "objective spirit," as manifested in the daily routines of an ordinary worker, in the social movements that dominated the age, in popular music and literature, in the political practices of the elite, and so on. Everything that happens in a society, everything that is true of it, is an expression of that society, or rather of its "being," its "spirit," of *what it is like to live* in it. It is all an indissoluble unity, an expression of the whole—from the quotidian acts of the midwife to the exalted statesmanship of the king or Parliament or the President—although for the purposes of analysis this societal unity has to be broken up, abstracted from, in order to be synthesized again, painstakingly, in thought. This re-presentation of reality in words is necessarily incomplete, inadequate, because being cannot be reproduced in thought except in a wildly distorted form. (As experienced by people, being is immediate and concrete; as described in words, it is mediate and abstract.) Nevertheless, such an attempt to reproduce the being of an earlier society can shed light on the human condition, for example by showing which aspects of human behavior are variable and which are constant across cultures.

In this paper I would like to undertake such a "phenomenology of spirit," an imaginative reconstruction of an earlier time. Specifically, I want to use Henry David Thoreau's "Plea for Captain John Brown" as a window into American culture on the eve of the Civil War.

"A Plea for Captain John Brown" is a speech that Thoreau gave in Concord on October 30, 1859, weeks before John Brown was hanged for his raid on Harpers Ferry. It is a stirring document, full of righteous fury and eloquence. Brown's trial was still going on; the country was reeling from the implications of his October 16th raid. The national consensus was that Brown was a fanatic, a criminal, a madman, a murderer; the South, however, differed from the North in seeing him as representative of the Republican party, of abolitionists all across the North. Perhaps (thought the South) he was more courageous than they, but he was symbolic of the North's dangerous individualism, its Puritanism, its evil abolitionism, its determination to attack the South and suppress slavery once and for all. Most Northerners, on the other hand, disowned Brown, viewing him as a freak, an anomaly; and the Republican party certainly had no connection to the Harpers Ferry raid. Even Abolitionists were reluctant to praise him—or at least they tempered their praise with criticism of his methods—for the majority of them were pacifists. William Lloyd Garrison, a founder of Abolitionism, declared the raid to be "a misguided, wild, and apparently insane, though disinterested and well-intended effort"; Horace Greeley called it a "deplorable affair…the work of a madman."[1]

Meanwhile, however, Brown was giving interviews and writing letters in which he appeared decidedly clear-headed, in fact honorable, principled, full of integrity and intelligence. As his words were published in newspapers everywhere, the nation came to see him, paradoxically, as both an admirable man and a murderer, both humane and treasonous. Governor Wise of Virginia, who talked to Brown in the hours after the raid, said he was "firm, truthful, and intelligent…cool, collected, and indomitable…a man of

[1] David Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), p. 340.

fortitude and simple ingenuousness"[1]—yet at the same time he called him a criminal and a traitor. The nation was torn between these positive and negative interpretations of the man, with the negative, however, predominating everywhere.

The 1850s were a culturally frenzied time. In his book *Beneath the American Renaissance*, David Reynolds emphasizes the ferment and confusion of antebellum America—the cultural experimentation, the impulse for reform of every variety, the coexistence of every conceivable cultural extreme. It was the age, after all, of Transcendentalism and evangelical reform, of sensationalist literature and Poe's irrationalist fiction, of *Moby Dick* and *Leaves of Grass*, of resurgent Puritanism and atheism and free-love movements, of Emily Dickinson and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and, in general, of battles between conservative ideologies and an emerging radical democracy in both culture and politics. Slavery was arguably the dominant issue, though, especially after the passage in 1850 of the Fugitive Slave Act and in 1854 of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which led to widespread proslavery and antislavery violence in Kansas. (The name "Bleeding Kansas" designated this time.) By the end of the 1850s, Emerson was writing that the country had to be purged through war.

It was in this environment that Thoreau wrote "A Plea for Captain John Brown." Like many other writings that have been admired through the ages, this document provokes a paradoxical reaction in the reader: he enjoys its style, its imagery, its vigor, but only because he knows that it was written a long time ago. Something written in the same style *now* would be ridiculed as over-ornate, over-eloquent, absurdly grandiose and magniloquent, stylistically naïve, hopelessly out of touch with the zeitgeist. It would be considered *badly* written. But because it is not a product of our time, we are able to look upon it with unadulterated admiration, even to lament that such writing has gone out of style.

I will quote a few sentences to give the reader a sense of what I mean. Referring to Brown's interviews with proslavery men, Thoreau says, "Read his admirable answers to Mason and others. How they are dwarfed and defeated by the contrast! On the one side, half-brutish, half-timid questioning; on the other, truth, clear as lightning, crashing into their obscene temples. They are made to stand with Pilate, and Gessler, and the Inquisition. How ineffectual their speech and action! and what a void their silence!" "[John Brown] was not our representative in any sense. He was too fair a specimen of a man to represent the like of us. Who, then, were his constituents? If you read his words understandingly you will find out. In his case there is no idle eloquence, no made, nor maiden speech, no compliments to the oppressor. Truth is his inspirer, and earnestness the polisher of his sentences…" "Treason! Where does such treason take its rise? I cannot help thinking of you as you deserve, ye governments. Can you dry up the fountains of thought? High treason, when it is resistance to tyranny here below, has its origin in, and is first committed by, the power that makes and forever recreates man. When you have caught and hung all these human rebels, you have accomplished nothing but your own guilt, for you have not struck at the fountain-head…"

The question is, what would it be like to take such writing seriously if it belonged to the present rather than the past? Thoreau's speech electrified its listeners, it spread far and wide, helped inspire Emerson to take up Brown's cause, and in the end it went far towards rehabilitating Brown's reputation.[2] *One speech* had such influence. *What would it be like* to live in a society where the opinions of a solitary writer-philosopher in Massachusetts mattered?

Ultimately what we find foreign in Thoreau's speech is not merely its archaic and romantic language; it is its *authenticity*. It contains almost no hint of a divided consciousness such as characterizes postmodernity; it is pervaded by a spirit of certainty and righteousness, an almost religious devotion to *principles*. The pithy, forceful language expresses a *certainty of self*, a naïve authenticity that is alien to our own collective consciousness. Thoreau's culture, while riven by internecine conflicts and full of collective doubt, was yet more authentic, less self-conscious, than ours, a fact that made possible the appreciative reception of Thoreau's speech.

Emerson and Thoreau, two of the most famous writers of the time, preached self-reliance, individualism, devotion to principles, integrity, moral reform, civil disobedience. This is indeed why they

[1] Ibid., p. 332.
[2] See chapter 14 of ibid.

defended John Brown, going so far as to compare him with Christ. For Brown was far more authentic, self-certain, than even the Transcendentalists, who, on the whole, merely *wrote* about self-reliance and dedication to principles. But these Transcendentalist ideas, which were so celebrated a hundred and fifty years ago, now seem a little hollow, backward, insufficiently nuanced to be truly compelling any longer. We have become too *cynical* for them to grip our minds. Our society is too fragmented, too fast-paced, too solipsistic and technology-obsessed, for Thoreauvian idealism to inspire millions.

The same spirit that animates Thoreau's speech is evident in the popular Civil War song "John Brown's Body," and also in the song inspired by the latter, "Battle Hymn of the Republic."[1] The univocal, fervidly self-righteous consciousness that speaks through these cultural artifacts doesn't strike us as primitive only because in our encounters with them (the artifacts) we automatically adjust our impressions to take account of the fact that they were produced long ago, in a more heroic and idealistic time. It's impossible to imagine contemporary soldiers singing something like the Battle Hymn of the Republic while waging war. That's the stuff of comedy, of parody. This fact alone shows how distant our world is from John Brown's.

On the other hand, if you place "A Plea for Captain John Brown" beside, for example, the Book of Job or the *Odyssey*, you can see that the latter texts are, in a sense, much more "authentic" or "naïve" than the former, in that they evince less self-reflection, less self-consciousness. That is, they contain no hint of a *pose*, such as appears even in Thoreau's speech—with its calculated eloquence and intentionally lofty imagery—and appears far more so in our own postmodern literature. Thus, there are many possible degrees of cultural self-consciousness, any one of which can apply to a particular society.

This brief paper has raised certain questions and left certain conceptual problems unaddressed; in a longer essay one would have to look more closely at the meanings of "authenticity," "self-consciousness," and "objective spirit," concepts that are invaluable to any cultural analysis that aims to be at all penetrating. For the present, though, we'll have to be content with the tentative suggestions that have been put forward here.

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Discarded thoughts, which I'll expand on in the longer paper I have to write for that class:

"It must be kept in mind, though, when doing this sort of phenomenological investigation that the 'self-consciousness' in question is not really a tangible *state of mind*, a real conscious state in the mind of every person in a given culture; it is manifest rather in people's behavior, in the functioning of institutions, and can be 'read into' cultural artifacts like music, literature, painting, political documents. This is why Hegel called the phenomenon *objective*, not *subjective*, spirit. It is an objective fact about the society, not a state of mind in people's heads…"

"Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground* is more self-conscious, which is to say (implicitly) self-questioning, than *Walden*; and, insofar as the two works were popular in their respective societies, the latter differed in the same way as the works themselves…"

October 28

"In playing, and perhaps only in playing, is the child or adult free to be creative. This consideration arises in my mind as a development of the concept of transitional phenomena and it takes into account the difficult part of the theory of the transitional object, which is that a paradox is involved which needs to be accepted, tolerated, and not resolved." "It is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self [and uses the whole personality]. (Bound up with this is the fact that only in playing is communication possible; except direct communication, which belongs to psychopathology or to an extreme of immaturity.)" Wonderfully suggestive.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 469, 470.

Music: for me, soothing. Consoling. Reduction in anxiety. Interpersonal, yes. (Thank you Sacks and Chris of April 14th! You've helped me understand music!) My perpetual desire: overcome anxiety. Not conscious, mostly unconscious. Anxiety, tension. The defining characteristic of modernity. *Flowing* the ideal. *Flowing*. No defenses, no obstructions, no self-consciousness. Musical flowing, self-flowing, self-flowering. Playing, playing-in-oneself, playing *between* oneself and the other. (Winnicott: neither external nor internal; in-between.) *Some* tension is good, necessary for playing—a different kind of tension, different kind of anxiety—tonality exploits that good tension, tonality is *playing*, atonality isn't. Atonality is like *science*, *math*, a *task*, a logical puzzle.[1] And logic is not playful. Real music is playful, tense not only on an intellectual but on an affective level. Play: affective. Cognitive too, but not *only* cognitive. The impression of *flowingness* essential—a quality perceivable not through cognition but through affective intuition. No flowingness in atonality. What is flowingness? Going somewhere with relative ease [i.e., spontaneity], coming from somewhere, a *direction* necessary, therefore an element of tension, but essentially not mere *cognitive* tension. (Different kinds of tension or anxiety. How to differentiate them? Some good, some bad. Some, indeed, necessary to biological and psychological functioning, others necessary to play.)

My old question of why self-confidence or charisma is attractive to everyone. What *is* it, in fact? What *is* this quality? If I can answer that then the question of why it's attractive will answer itself. I suspect the answer is: "flowingness." No obstructions, no obstructive self-consciousness. No anxious division between self and other. Play. Charisma is playful. Free. Attractive because playing is the human ideal, it is happiness. Creating. (Self-confirming.) Charisma is creative, self-expressing, self-certain, playful, artistic. Winnicott: connection between transitional phenomena and playing. So, connection between transitional phenomena and charisma or (creative) self-confidence. Creating a middle space between self and other, as with transitional objects. Of the same type as sharing interests—a middle space, exciting, something to *connect* over, to "come together over"—charisma produces the impression of having something in common, or rather has an interpersonal effect *qualitatively similar* to the exciting, 'playful,' 'self/other-division'-dissolving impression of having something in common. This is the source of its power.

I've noted before that being "recognized" by a charismatic person is very self-confirmatory. But this is true also of playing intently, or of conversing about shared interests, or of creating an artwork you're proud of. These phenomena are all similar. If the interpersonal effect of a charismatic person is *uniquely* powerful, it's because such a person is, after all, an other, a concrete other, whose recognition therefore *directly* confirms you—while in the case of the artwork you're merely being *implicitly* recognized, i.e. the other recognizing you is abstract, not concrete. It therefore may, possibly, be less (directly) satisfying than having a conversation with someone like Bill Clinton in which (conversation) he laughs with you, likes you, shakes your hand, etc.

Wow, I may have just put to rest the basic lostness I had been experiencing for years with respect to questions about charisma and so on.

Real self-confirmation has nothing to do with correspondence (between, e.g., self and its objectification); it is simply *overflowing*. It is an existential condition, not an 'epistemological' condition. Overflowing into the world, submerging the other in your self and your self in the other, so that the concept of "objectification" does not apply. Cf. the paradox of the transitional object. Neither outside nor inside the self. No inner–outer or self–other dualism. That's self-confirmation, that's happiness, that's what we desire and strive for in (virtually?) everything we do.

In cerebral art there is no overflowing. There is careful measurement, analytical separation, a poverty of *creativeness* in the true sense, the sense of "spontaneity." Evidently the capacity to intuit "overflowingness" is within everyone, an unconscious capacity, judging by the universality of people's reactions to particular artworks, particular charismatic ("demonic") people, particular activities. An elemental capacity of enormous human importance—as important as the capacity actually to overflow, in play and so on. Closely related to spontaneity.

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[1] [That's stupid. Doing math can be playful; it is for mathematicians. But atonality perhaps doesn't *communicate* "play" in the way that tonality does. On the other hand, I'm sure this is all crap.]

Destructive kinds of tension versus productive kinds of tension. Blocking versus stimulating.

"…*the resting-state out of which a creative reaching-out can take place*. Free association [in psychotherapy] that reveals a coherent theme is already affected by anxiety, and the cohesion of ideas is a defense organization." Brilliant, far-reaching observation. The cohesion of ideas is a defense organization.

Trust. The necessity of trust. There's a lack of trust in modern society, hence anxiety—a play-vitiating anxiety. […]

Hmm… It occurs to me that playing does entail a self–other division. This is what makes possible its tension. In its strictest sense, then, playing is not simply continuous with "overflowing" or spontaneity, which don't imply a self–other division. And this is why true play is not compatible with a state of intoxication. But is it possible, after all, to define play with any exactness? I should look at Huizinga again. Play is compatible with quite-high anxiety. But this anxiety is not the destructive kind, the "insecure" kind related to shyness.

Solitary playing vs. shared playing (the *game*). They seem quite different. The painter vs. the two people flirting. The solitary child with his doll vs. the group of children playing cops and robbers. Surely the second kind adds a whole new element of tension, of interpersonal tension and pleasing anxiety. Can one really be considered an extension of the other? Games have *rules*—but, in a way, all play does, doesn't it? Art has rules. But games have rules in a different sense than art does or dollhouse-playing does.

Joking is playful. Wit is playful. And it evinces a kind of "flowing" (from the unconscious). The tension that characterizes it is not inhibiting; it permits flowingness. All play does. It has spontaneity, comes from the unconscious. I should drop the term "*over*flowing"; it's misleading, it connotes a threatening of the play-element (viz., a kind of tension).

But is there any so-called tension in transitional phenomena? If not, how can the latter be continuous with playing, as W. argues? Transitional objects are purely comforting, right? But playing, as W. admits, is "inherently exciting and precarious." Or maybe there's an element of this with transitional phenomena too. I suspect that's true, judging by what I've read.

"Creative impulses are the stuff of playing. And on the basis of playing is built the whole of man's experiential existence. No longer are we either introvert or extrovert. We experience life in the area of transitional phenomena, in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation, and in an area that is intermediate between the inner reality of the individual and the shared reality of the world that is external to individuals." My journal, my transitional object. My "blankey."

Playing is not synonymous with "doing anything that's enjoyable," though it's tempting to think it is. But how much do these questions of definition even matter? More than you'd think. We're trying to get clear on psychological capacities, on the differences between types of activity, on the origin and meaning of certain activities. It isn't a mere matter of *stipulating* the definition of "play."

No, I was wrong about having gotten past my "basic lostness."

October 29

The Republican party is literally trying to disenfranchise new voters in Ohio. (It hasn't been successful yet.) The McCain campaign has said, in an optimistic tone, that many newly registered voters typically don't vote on election day. (Most of such voters favor Obama; hence the optimism.)[1] McCain himself has called Rashid Khalidi, the director of Middle East Studies at Columbia University, a neo-Nazi, and has accused Obama of being friends with him. –This is the slime I try to ignore in my reading and writing. McSlime.

There is no *playing* in what Noam Chomsky does, namely list the ways in which the U.S. government is terrible. There is no real *creativity* in it. [Um, not really true.] In that respect he isn't truly

[1] In other words, the best hope for Republicans lies in a failure of democracy, and they explicitly acknowledge this by *hoping* many people won't vote.

fulfilling his humanity (which consists in playing, creating). *Morally* he is, though, since, arguably, he has a moral obligation to do what he does or something like it.

Winnicott.— Male and female elements in all men and women. Can be dissociated (pathological). Male: instinct, drive, impulse, object-relating that presupposes separateness. Id satisfactions in the baby "that include anger relative to frustration. Drive satisfaction enhances the separation of the object from the baby, and leads to objectification of the object… Object-relating backed by instinct drive belongs to the male element in the personality uncontaminated by the female element." Oral erotism, oral sadism, anal stages, etc., arise out of the male element. The *female* is simply *being*. Insofar as the infant *is* the breast, *identifies* with it, the female element is at work. "The male element *does* while the female element (in males and females) *is*." *The pure female aspect has nothing to do with drive or instinct*. It is the basis, though, for self-discovery, a sense of existing. (It seems like it has to do with *receptivity*, while the male has to do with *assertiveness*. But in a particular man, the female element may predominate, while the male element may predominate in a particular woman.)

W. distinguishes between *frustration*, which belongs to satisfaction-seeking, and *maiming*, which belongs to the experience of being. The notion of "maiming" takes into account the frequent viciousness of women's lashing-out. Their violent attacks don't come from *frustration*, from the frustration of not having certain urges satisfied, but from a deficiency in their sense of being. (To say it again: particular women, for example nymphomaniacs, may crave the satisfaction of impulses, but this craving originates in the uncommon strength of their *male* element.) None of this is falsifiable, but it has some plausibility.

The reason, then, why "creative" people are said to be both female and male is that they have both a heightened capacity for receptivity and the ability/desire to *assert*. Both are necessary for, e.g., artistic creation.

Kohut's Tragic Man vs. Guilty Man. The latter in the terrain of instinct or drive, the former in the terrain of…being? Former "feminine," latter "masculine"?

Internet-date with beautiful Indian from Canada who's getting a Ph.D. in Management. Why is it always the beautiful ones who are boring? It's like clockwork. I broached every subject from business, traveling, politics, Boston, Halloween, speed-dating, music, her family, to philosophy, literature, history, Korea, India… Nothing stuck. She's one of those pathetic snobbish girls who only dates narcissists. The West corrupted her. If she had grown up in India, she'd probably be easygoing and pleasant.

You have no idea how tired I am of females. It may be Tragic Man, but it's Pitiful Woman.

(Like God-knows-how-many artists, philosophers and scientists in history: 28 years old and still no deeply satisfying relationship with a woman. It must be the female element in our personalities that they dislike.)

October 30, 31

Sexual foreplay is aptly named. It constitutes play, surely. But intercourse, often, is not play. It's very serious, albeit enjoyable. And yet it seems natural to call oral sex a kind of play. Teasing, titillating, tongue-flicking and licking—that's playful. I'd even say that intercourse *can* be playful, depending on how it's done. The spirit of play can be absent or present. It can be absent in one moment and present the next. In and out of play. We live our lives in and out of play from moment to moment. Is it only "family resemblances," then, given the immense variety of activities that constitute play? How does one define *playing*? The spirit of play is not the spirit of seriousness, but play can be serious and serious activities can be playful. I don't have access to *Homo Ludens*, but luckily the internet exists. "Huizinga's book describes play as a free and meaningful activity, carried out for its own sake, spatially and temporally segregated from the requirements of practical life, and bound by a self-contained system of rules that holds absolutely." That's a plausible-enough definition. Appropriately vague.

Saw Aniela again last night, the Polish woman. Dinner, then spent the night at her place. It's too bad she's leaving next week; we like each other. Her attitude towards me is so rational it's stunning: she likes being with me, thinks I'm "the ideal man," so she…*likes* me. Finds it beyond belief that I don't have a girlfriend. Indeed it is surreal, and always has been.

It isn't an exaggeration to say that "civilization" breeds irrationality. For it makes people (and their world) more complicated than they are in natural conditions, which means that they sometimes act against their interests. It's always a good idea to ask yourself, "What would a Sapa villager be inclined to do in this situation?" The villager has fewer prejudices than the modern person, so his instincts are more sound.

Taking a break from extracurricular reading because I have to write two long papers and do a lot of grading for the Classics class. In one of the papers I want to look at the immigrant situation in Europe to see if there is even a shred of support for the prediction of a "clash of civilizations" made by many Westerners—like Bruce Bawer, in his asinine book *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam is Destroying the West from Within*—which necessitates a lot of reading. E.g., Samuel Huntington's original article, his book, commentaries, detailed empirical analyses of contemporary Europe and Turkey, etc. Huntington's article is not impressive. Shallow and idealistic.

[…] J. S. Mill: representative democracy is not possible in multiethnic societies. Not always true (Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia). But look at Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, the USSR, Macedonia, Iraq, even India! (India may be in-between.) Obviously Mill's formula oversimplifies.

November 3

"On This Day I Complete My Twenty-Eighth Year." Getting older doesn't bother me as much as it did when I was younger. Life isn't life and death isn't death: truly, the twain do meet.

[…]

Spent last night with Aniela. Concert then her room—cuddling, caressing, feelings of love, sleeping entwined in arms and legs. She gave me two good novels for my birthday. In the morning said she'd had the best dream of her life and couldn't wait for me to wake up so she could tell me. A long time ago—(this part isn't the dream)—she swore to herself she would never fly in a hot-air balloon until she'd found someone who loved her. Well, last night she dreamt for the first time that she was flying in a hot-air balloon, with some guy whose face she couldn't see. Presumably it was me, because, you see, I "love" her. Or, at least, that's what her subconscious thinks. And, who knows, maybe I *could* love her. Anyway I'm very glad I met her.

November 5, 8

Happiness. Obama probably wouldn't have won if the economy had been better, but what matters is that he won. His campaign strategy of taking the high road was not helping him until the Wall Street crash happened; McCain's scurrility paid high dividends (for McCain), even until the end. After all, the popular vote was 52 to 46 in a year when you'd think a Democratic victory would be *totally inevitable* if most Americans were sane.

Thank God! Reagan's atrocious legacy may finally be ending! [Wow. Naïve much?] It's a strange feeling to be able to *hope* again. Obama can't change the world, but let's enjoy the honeymoon while it lasts.

Watched the results last night with Aniela. Then nakedness and sex and happy sleep.

Putin's Russia: Life in a Failing Democracy. Anna Politkovskaya, a courageous investigative journalist who was later murdered for being courageous. Putin's Russia ain't a nice place, judging by this book. "I looked into his eyes," McCain said, "and saw three letters: K…G…B." For once John was right. This book makes me appreciate my country.

President Barack Obama. President Barack Obama. I like saying that. Makes me feel like this country really is mine, or can become so.

Four years ago Obama was an Illinois State Senator. Now he's president of the United States. His race, ironically, was of huge importance in this meteoric rise. (If he weren't black, he wouldn't be president! Now *that's* progress!)

Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*. Old Comedy, "Dionysian" and fairly unself-conscious, overtly sexual, more sexual than New Comedy and modern comedy. Think of children's humor. "The childhood of mankind." And yet it's also mixed with sophisticated satire and some irony. (Compare Old Comedy and Aeschylean tragedy, and New Comedy and Euripidean tragedy.)

Piano concert at Longy last night—Schumann, Schubert (Moments Musicaux), Brahms, Chopin 3rd sonata—Aniela and I together sitting hand in hand her head on my shoulder. Then Bacchic debauchery at a party with ESL students. Back to Aniela's apartment, where, for some reason, I cried in her arms drunkenly, and she actually said while looking into my eyes, "I love you." In the morning our usual cuddling and quiet talking, then a delightful bout of lovemaking—taking her from behind, "glorying in the very stink and sweat that rose from her arse," her belly flat on the bed and legs stretched out together straight behind as I dug my fingers and prick into the fleshy pink cleft that clenched around me like my teeth biting her buttock and my hand grabbing her tit, then raising her to be a dog and pummeling away at her inflamed moaning flesh. A fine body she has, very fine. (Fine face too, somewhere between Franka Potente and Sting. Short hair dyed dark-purple, boyish and cute.) Went to the airport this evening, said our goodbyes; she plans to return to the States in the spring.

[…]

Regrets

I feel as though I gave too little
and kept too much;
and so too much was lost
and little will last.

November 10

Predictions: Obama will be a centrist, not a "transformational figure." Bush and Cheney will not be prosecuted for their crimes. Osama bin Laden will not be caught, but terrorism will slowly start to decline. American education will not significantly improve. Obama will not address global warming aggressively enough, nor will he establish universal health insurance, but his efforts with respect to the latter issue will be more satisfactory than with respect to the former. He will fail almost entirely at cleaning up the corrupt lobbying culture.

It's too bad Howard Dean never became president; he's more progressive than Obama. I hope he joins Obama's Cabinet. Remember in 2004 when everyone thought it was a dreadful mistake to choose Dean as DNC Chairman? I never understood the reasoning behind all the pessimism; personally, I was optimistic. I thought he'd be excellent at his job. And I was right. Look at where the Dems are now.

Obama, please don't be another Clinton! Don't choose Larry Summers as Treasury Secretary. Summers, Rubin and Greenspan are mainly responsible for our economic problems; it makes no sense to appoint Summers to a Cabinet post. He's a neoliberal ideologue, not as bad as Greenspan or Henry Paulson but not much better. Transformational change will not happen with Summers at the helm. Besides, the guy is a total asshole. He's a terrible person, not because of his "political incorrectness" but because of his personality and his opinions on economic and social priorities.

What's going to happen to the Republicans? Four years after Karl Rove and his ilk were talking about a permanent Republican majority, the party is in tatters. It's no longer possible to be an intelligent, open-minded, un-bigoted person and believe in the Republican ideology of social and economic conservatism. […]

November 14, 15

Why are modern women obsessed with shoes? They often buy dozens of pairs, and they carefully take note of the shoes that a man is wearing at a bar or on a date. If they aren't impressed with your shoes, you may have already lost your chance. Maybe a partial answer is that shoes are an eloquent and powerful expression of masculinity and femininity. Masculine shoes exude simple self-confidence: they're one color, a dark color, they're comfortable, ideally they're polished and have an attractive, confident shine. Feminine shoes, on the other hand, definitely don't exude self-confidence: often they're garish (they're supposed to be), they have heels—high heels to give the illusion of height—they wobble perilously every time she takes a step, they're petite, they're uncomfortable. So the woman wants to be sure she looks feminine, and she wants her man to look masculine.

There are other explanations, but I'm bored.

Culturally, what has America contributed to the world? Quite a lot. A number of artistic and intellectual movements have originated in America. But let's look at music. What do we have? Ragtime, blues, jazz, rock, rap, and their offshoots. Do you notice a common thread? It's stunning: all these movements grew out of the African-American experience. It was blacks, not whites, who gave us this music. And all of it has an essential *freedom*, an improvisatory element. Originally it didn't even have to be written down.[1] How much less "American" would America be without (the descendants of) its black forced-immigrants!

November 22 to December 10

Saw Chomsky give a talk at a church downtown. His creaking, cracking, croaking voice. Brief and not satisfying but insightful as ever.

Lonely hours.— "Preserve your memories," says Paul Simon; "they're all that's left you." Well, what if you don't have any memories? Then you have nothing.

Being a station-manager, Aniela sometimes has to go to high-class parties with Polish celebrities and businessmen and the like. Went to one tonight; came back and wrote me this email about how much men suck:

> It was very short party for me! I'm very angry! Why men look at me like a sexual object? Why men see in my eyes only their penises and what if I need something different? What about my personality? Why I often meet a lot of idiots, imbeciles, cretins? I'm sick of stupid people! My party was disgusted! Too many idiots! I want to tell you something. Could you imagine it? It's a typical situation, when you are at the party. One of men was starting to talk with me "Hi honey! (?) I'm Peter! You look fantastic and very sexy! You know, I'm a business partner for your company, very rich person and my comfortable car is on the street now near the restaurant. Do you want to go with me to the hotel? Do you want to fuck with me?" Wow! Such a interesting conversation! I told him "Sorry, I don't interested in you.

[1] On the other hand, classical music too, in its origins, was quite improvisatory.

> Please, go away and leave me alone! I don't care about that!". When he was walking away he called me BITCH! Wow! That's going too far! It was my fantastic "glamour" party. So, I always have this same problem! Often animals are more intelligent than people! I need somebody who can use brain, not only penis!!! It isn't high standard, I think. My life style is different! Sometimes I don't understand men! You're a man! Could you explain me why men are often so stupid? Is it normal? What about my feeling? I'm sorry Chris, I don't disturb you. I know you are very busy now, but I'm only in a bad mood. I know tomorrow is new day, new chance to be happy…
>
> Could you hug me when you will go to sleep?
>
> Miss you.

Speaking of men being animals, the first day I saw Aniela I was carried away by the sexiness of her tight jeans hugging her buttocks.

Paper below that I wrote for a class, though that was only the pretext. It's more than twice as long as the prof wanted it so I'll have to cut it down, but my purpose was to write something publishable. The prof is a dipshit—one of the worst classes I've ever taken.

Three weeks ago I knew next to nothing about the Islamic world; but *now*…I still know next to nothing. But at least I disguised that well. I'm not satisfied with the paper, though: it wasn't ambitious or theoretical enough. [And it's badly written.]

"Eastern Muslims" and "Western Liberals": Ne'er the Twain Shall Meet?

Among the many competing visions of Europe's future, two in particular have a strong hold on the academic and the "policy-analytical"[1] mind. The reason for the appeal of these two visions, both of which I shall describe momentarily, is that they have the characteristics of overarching narratives, indeed of "metanarratives," to quote Jean-François Lyotard.[2] John Stephens defines a metanarrative as "a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience."[3] The great monotheistic religions are metanarratives; Marxism-Leninism is a metanarrative; Francis Fukuyama's famous thesis about the end of history is a metanarrative. Postmodernists like Lyotard argue that metanarratives as such are unsound, oversimplifying, intellectually dishonest. It seems more circumspect, however, to say that, while one should always be suspicious of a belief-system that claims to be the definitive interpretation of a diverse set of social phenomena, such theories should not be forbidden *a priori*. They should simply be evaluated on their merits, tested in the crucible of empirical reality; they should be treated like any other hypothesis. It may, after all, be the case that there *are* broad historical tendencies and trends, and accordingly that a so-called metanarrative (which picks out these tendencies) may be true, i.e. may be a satisfactory scientific interpretation of the world.

Let us, therefore, consider the two abovementioned theories and not scorn them because of their ambitiousness. The first is defended in Mark Leonard's (unacademic) book *Why Europe Will Run the Twenty-First Century*.[4] Leonard's vision of the future—which in some respects is a version of revisionist

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[1] By that term I'm referring to the so-called policy analysts who so eagerly and prolifically offer their interpretations of politics to the educated public.

[2] See Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979).

[3] Stephens, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1998), 6.

[4] (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005)

Marxism[1]—is actually three (related) visions. First of all, he argues, the EU-model of governance and regional economic integration represents the future: more and more areas of the world will find it necessary to do as Europe has done and "form a common market with coordinated macroeconomic policies in different sectors, [for example] foreign trade, agricultural, industrial, and fiscal."[2] Europe has paved the way: the successes of the EU have inspired such institutions as NAFTA in North America, MERCOSUR in South America, ASEAN in Southeast Asia, SAARC in South Asia, APEC in the Pacific region, and so on. Globalization has proceeded to such a point, in fact, that regional organizations like the EU have, arguably, become *structurally* necessary for global stability, so much so that they may gradually eclipse the nation-state in importance. This narrative of the decline of the nation-state and the rise of regional and interregional organizations is sometimes conflated with the second "vision" I just mentioned, namely that Europe, being the most successful of these regional units, will succeed the United States as the world's superpower, or at least will have no trouble holding its own against China and America in the twenty-first century. And the new age of Europe will approximate Kant's ideal of "perpetual peace," precisely because of the nation-state's decline and regionalism's rise.

The third aspect of this first narrative is the spread of liberal democracy and social equality around the world. Global integration in capitalist conditions arguably requires moves toward political liberalism insofar as it necessitates the rule of law, social and political stability—since entrepreneurs are averse to investing in unstable regions—significant freedom in the market, and, partly as an outgrowth of these factors, measures to ensure some individual liberty. Arbitrary, repressive governance hinders capitalist development; therefore, arbitrary and repressive governments tend to be undermined as capitalist development intensifies. Democracy, on the other hand, is promoted, partly because social and political stability are difficult to achieve if the majority of the population is denied a political voice. Later in the paper I'll speculate further on why capitalism—in the long run—seems to give birth to democracy—to *liberal* democracy, given the "liberal" requirements I mentioned a moment ago.

The foregoing, then, constitutes one popular narrative. Its predictions of the future are optimistic.

Contrasted with these encouraging prophecies are the apocalyptic ones that take their cue from Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis, which is the framework for the second theory I want to examine. In the age of Al Qaeda and Bush's "war on terrorism," the most popular narrative in the Huntingtonian vein is the one that emphasizes the clash between Islam and the West. Bruce Bawer's hyperbolic book *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam Is Destroying the West from Within*[3] is symptomatic of this thinking, which sees Europe's problems with Muslim immigrants as, first, a sign of the threat that radical Islam poses to liberal democracy and Western civilization, and, more specifically, a threat to the very existence of Europe as we know it. That the West will prevail in this epic struggle is, according to these observers, by no means a foregone conclusion. Liberal democracy and global integration are perceived as "delicate flowers," the flowers of the West, which must be protected at all costs from the gathering tempest of Islamism.

As I have summarized these two grand narratives, they might not strike one as very scientific or plausible. Nor might it appear that they are necessarily opposed to each other, given that, by and large, they apply to two different realms of social reality: the first presumes to locate inherent tendencies in the global economy and politics toward regionalism, toward international, cooperative management of economic and political affairs, toward liberal democracy, toward a reduction in the sort of conflicts (territorial, economic, armed) that have historically been engendered by the nation-state system; the second largely ignores the economic tendencies of global capitalism and focuses on the conflicts between cultures that result from globalization. If formulated in a certain "scientific" way, I believe these two positions *can* be compatible with each other—can, indeed, reinforce each other. Nevertheless, they come into conflict if the encounter

[1] I'll elaborate on that claim below.

[2] Ibid., 136.

[3] (New York: Doubleday, 2006) See also Robert Spencer's *Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2003), a book as laughable as Bawer's.

between the "West" and "Islam" is exaggerated, as it often is, to the point of being called *the* fundamental issue of our time, *the* major consequence of globalization, *the* tendency that overrides all others.

I'll argue in this paper that the so-called threat posed by Islam (to Europe and to Western society as a whole) is not as dire as Huntington and others suggest. Indeed, there is virtually no "threat" at all. The first narrative I described above is far more cogent and explanatorily powerful than the second. I will establish this claim initially on the basis of a few theoretical considerations but in particular by looking at recent developments in the Islamic world that are more consistent with our "optimistic" than our "pessimistic" narrative. In the paper's second section I'll explain why I believe that Europe, which is often portrayed as a cauldron of cultural conflict, is not particularly endangered by its Muslim population. This fact will, again, militate against any Huntingtonian theory.

The major lacuna in this paper will be the lack of attention devoted to the decline of the nation-state. I hope, however, that my analysis will at least "obliquely" support the hypothesis of the nation-state's relative decline.

The Islamic World

Samuel Huntington's book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* has been devastatingly criticized since its publication in 1996, and I won't rehash all its faults here. The only reason I mention it is that it is the classic statement of a mode of thinking that has become wildly popular in the years since September 11, 2001, to the extent that the book's thesis is now a part of the collective consciousness of the West, indeed of much of the world. (I'm not saying that everyone agrees with it.) Huntington expressed it in his original *Foreign Affairs* article in 1993 as follows:

> It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.[1]

The main "clash" that people pay attention to now is between the Muslim and the Western "civilizations," but Huntington also distinguishes between the Confucian, the Hindu, the Latin American, the Japanese, the Buddhist, the Slavic-Orthodox, and the African civilizations.

Huntington's analysis is enormously oversimplified and crude; he basically ignores the messy concreteness of socioeconomic reality in favor of making sweeping generalizations about religions, cultures and "civilizations"—concepts so abstract as to be nearly empty.[2] And yet the framework he defended has millions of adherents in, especially, Europe, America, and certain Muslim countries. The question "Why?" is not hard to answer: oversimplified metanarratives are attractive in that they reinforce the believer's self-identity and allow him to classify and thus "understand" a huge variety of phenomena.[3] They simplify the world. This in itself is not a vice; every theory is something of a simplification, and humans could not function without simplifying their world to make it intellectually manageable. The very act of

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[1] Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993).

[2] For succinct criticisms of Huntington, see the following: Edward Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," *The Nation* (Oct. 4, 2001); Sandra Buckley, "Remaking the World Order: Reflections on Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*," *Theory & Event* 2, No. 4 (1998); Carl Gershman, "The Clash within Civilizations," *Journal of Democracy* 8, No. 4 (October 1997).

[3] [This explanation, of course, is inadequate, in that it says nothing about the utility of Huntingtonian propaganda to political and economic power-structures in Europe and the United States.]

conceptualizing involves an element of "simplifying." But there are good simplifications and there are bad simplifications, "true" simplifications and "false" ones.

The minuscule kernel of truth in Huntington's theory is that people from different societies can potentially, under certain conditions, develop hatred for each other, for the "Other," and become violent in their hatred. This is what has happened in the case of some radical Muslims in the Middle East, Europe, and several other regions; it is also what happened to many Americans after September 11th, when the country rose up in fury against the Other and advocated annihilation of the Middle Eastern "enemy." This fact of *potential* hostility towards people not from one's own society or "civilization"[1] has been true throughout history; it is not new to the post-Cold War world. But such hostility is by no means always a reality: usually, in fact, it is not. Most Americans are not *hostile* but rather *indifferent* towards Latin American society (or "civilization," in Huntington's terminology); they are not hostile towards traditional Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Japanese culture. But they *are* towards Muslim society, or at least certain aspects of it; and some Muslims are hostile towards the so-called West. The interesting question, then, is, "*Under what conditions* does a 'clash' break out between people of different backgrounds, ideologies, or cultures?" Huntington and his followers essentially ignore this question.

It is useful to recall here the wisdom of Marxism as filtered through Barrington Moore, the famous sociologist. In his classic *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, he chastises sociologists and historians who use "cultural," as opposed to socioeconomic, explanations—people like Huntington and everyone else who blames Muslim "culture" for the problems of terrorism, immigrant-assimilation (or lack of it) in Europe, etc. The problem with cultural explanations, argues Moore, is that they imply a conception of "social inertia" which is unsound:

> There is a widespread assumption in modern social science that social continuity requires no explanation. Supposedly it is not problematical. Change is what requires explanation. This assumption blinds the investigator to certain crucial aspects of social reality. Culture, or tradition…is not something that exists outside of or independently of individual human beings living together in society. Cultural values do not descend from heaven to influence the course of history. They are abstractions by an observer, based on the observation of certain similarities in the way groups of people behave, either in different situations or over time, or both… To explain in terms of cultural values is to engage in circular reasoning. If we notice that a landed aristocracy resists commercial enterprise, we do not *explain* this fact by stating that the aristocracy has done so in the past or even that it is the carrier of certain traditions that make it hostile to such activities: the problem is to determine out of what past and present experiences such an outlook arises and maintains itself…
>
> The assumption of inertia, that cultural and social continuity do not require explanation, obliterates the fact that both have to be re-created anew in each generation, often with great pain and suffering. To maintain and transmit a value system, human beings are punched, bullied, sent to jail, thrown into concentration camps, cajoled, bribed, made into heroes, encouraged to read newspapers, stood up against a wall and shot, sometimes even taught sociology. To speak of cultural inertia is to overlook the concrete interests and privileges that are served by indoctrination, education, and the entire complicated process of transmitting culture from one generation to the next…[2]

Just as "cultural values" are transmitted from generation to generation only if very specific socioeconomic and political conditions obtain—and hence it is these *material conditions* that do much of the explanatory work vis-à-vis any given social phenomenon—so masses of people see it as a "cultural value" to destroy

[1] It's worth noting that this fact is totally vacuous, because hostility is "potential" everywhere, not only between cultures. Indeed, it is *actual* everywhere: intraculturally, interpersonally, intrapersonally, etc.

[2] *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 485, 486.

the "Other" largely because the concrete, material conditions in which they live have somehow encouraged them to desire the Other's destruction—or, rather, have encouraged them to *invent* an Other that has to be destroyed.

Therefore, let's set aside the hypothesis of a clash of cultures: it has no explanatory value, it is question-begging. It isn't even really a true hypothesis: it simply states the problem that has to be explained, namely why it is that so many Muslims have become hostile to the West, and how this conflict is likely to unfold.

But what narrative can take its place? We all crave a narrative (in every facet of our life), but we also want it to be *true*, i.e. an explanation of the world. Can we replace Huntington's sterile question-statement with something like a true narrative of the modern world?

One venerable narrative, dating from 1848, suits our purposes. The world has in recent years sloughed it off and let it molder by the wayside, but too many of its prophecies have been vindicated for persistence in this neglect to be reasonable. I am referring, of course, to Marxism—or, to speak more prudently, a revised and updated version of Marxism. To mount a defense of this system would require a long book; here I will present only a skeletal sketch of one aspect of its account of capitalist development, an account that supports the ideas I attributed to Mark Leonard above.[1] This sketch, supplemented with a little history, should enable us to put in perspective the challenge posed by radical Muslims to Western society.

Karl Marx was the first to predict what everyone by now recognizes as a truism: capitalism will eventually spread across the entire world, for it is inherently expansionist.[2] What the economic reasons are for its tendency toward explosive growth need not concern us. What matters is that, from its humble beginnings in feudal England and the Netherlands, the capitalist mode of production established itself first in Western Europe, then in North America, and then slowly, brutally, in Russia, Japan, Latin America, Africa, India, and so on, and it is still expanding (or consolidating its prior advances) to this day—into China and South Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, remoter parts of Africa and South America, and it has a long way to go in Russia and India. What is important for us to notice is that its evolution has not been peaceful: at every step of the way it has faced violent resistance, and it has used violence itself without compunction.

Consider Russia during the last decades of the Tsarist regime. Industrial capitalism was just beginning to force itself on a society that was still semi-feudal, in which the immense majority of the population consisted of peasants who had recently been freed from serfdom. (Serfdom was abolished in 1861.) One has but to read Maxim Gorky's autobiography to get a sense of how miserable life was then for the destitute masses. In 1917, the sufferings of the peasants, the factory workers and the soldiers were at a peak and the country was descending into chaos. The Tsar abdicated, a Provisional Government was formed, and the party that ended up gaining power was the one supported by many of the peasants, the soldiers and the workers, namely the Bolsheviks. The masses hated what they had seen of capitalism, so, naturally, they supported a party that promised to rid the country of capitalism.

Every region of the world has had to come to terms, in its own way, with capitalist encroachment and the inevitable undermining of traditional social structures it entails. The "clash of civilizations," in this sense, has been going on at least since the 1300s, when nascent capitalism started emerging in the interstices of feudal society. Centuries later it came into contact with other areas of the world, such as China and India, initiating an era of world-convulsions. China in particular has had a turbulent history for the last century

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[1] In fact, on one construal, the ideas *constitute* an aspect of ("revisionist") Marxism.

[2] See the *Communist Manifesto*: "The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere… The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization… It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image." Marx's main mistake was that he got the timeline wrong.

and a half. For instance, in reaction to the empire's economic problems, social unrest and political humiliation at the hands of the Western powers, the Taiping Rebellion broke out in the 1850s. Its inspiration and unifying ideology was not Confucian or Buddhist; it was Christian. The rebellion failed, so the imperial regime staggered on until 1911, when a revolution toppled it and Sun Yat-Sen declared China a republic. But the country remained unstable; the majority of the population continued to live in poverty and misery, and after decades of ideological and military conflicts the Communists came to power. Mao Tse-Tung went a long way toward erasing China's traditional social structure with his Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, but by the late 1970s China's leaders understood that they had to adopt capitalist reforms if their country was to survive. So now, like Russia and India, the nation is finally integrating itself into the capitalist world order.

In whatever area of the world you investigate, you find that people cope with social change by using the tools they have at hand. Ideologically, for example, people adhere to whatever belief-system provides the narrative they find most persuasive and most comforting in light of their social conditions. A peasant in Latin America might cope with poverty by appealing to Christianity; an intellectual in the same society might subscribe to Marxism because it provides a counter-narrative to the hegemonic "neoliberalism" and because of its fruitfulness for activism. Millions of Russians after the Revolution repudiated their former Christianity in favor of Marxism because the Bolsheviks were doing the most to remedy Russia's ills and restore national pride. In the Middle East, on the other hand, Marxism didn't have much success partly because there already existed a powerful ideological consolation and a counter-narrative to the West's, namely Islam. And the reason there has been both widespread opposition to the West and a revival of religion is not that there is any supposed necessity of inter-"civilizational" conflict or the presence of a Middle Eastern cultural "essence" or of massive cultural inertia or "the weight of tradition," but simply that—as with Russia, China, India, and other countries—specific socioeconomic and political events and conditions have fostered discontent.

Before looking at these conditions, it may be helpful to state once more the argument of this paper. In brief: the resurgence of Islam in the past decades is due ultimately to societal upheavals inevitable during the extended transition from feudalism and tribalism to capitalism. *[No! That's ridiculously oversimplified! Idiot!]* This broad claim should be uncontroversial. Since the 1400s, every society progressing towards mature capitalism has experienced ideological and political revolutions/reactions. […] And the Islamic world has had its flirtations with Arab nationalism, with socialism, with constitutional monarchies, and, perhaps more lastingly, with Islamism. Upon surveying all the wreckage, one sees that most societies that have achieved relative stability and a genuinely "mature" capitalism, such as the United States, Western Europe, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, are liberal democracies. Perhaps one could find counter-examples, but the evidence is compelling: liberal democracy seems to be uniquely suited to mature, stable capitalism. I'll speculate later on the reasons for this, but, in any case, the fact supports the hypothesis that inherent in capitalism is a long-term "tendency" toward liberal democracy. What I will argue, therefore, is that as capitalism continues its penetration of the Islamic world we will see moves toward democracy and liberalism and away from theocracy and, eventually, Islamism. In the end, the entire world is marching (very slowly!) toward, on the one hand, liberal democracy and social equality for all groups of people, and on the other hand, a partial decline of the nation-state and the rise of regionalism and globalism. My discussion of Europe in the second section will bear out this thesis by showing that Muslims are not the danger there that they are sometimes thought to be.

[Stupid amateurish idiot.]

To resume the thread: what have been the specific causes of the worldwide strengthening of Islam? (Identifying the causes will allow us to make a prognosis.) First we have to distinguish between four aspects of the phenomenon: (1) political regimes that, to varying degrees, are associated with Islam, for instance Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan; (2) mainstream Islamists, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, who are more extreme than the majority of believers but less extreme than the bin Ladens and al-Zawahiris; (3) the fringe fanatics in every Muslim society, the jihadists; (4) the masses of ordinary believers, comparable in most respects to ordinary Christians in the United States. To some extent these effects do not all have the same causes, and their fates correspondingly will diverge.

Many works have been published explaining the nature and causes of each of these four phenomena;[1] here I will only touch upon the circumstances associated with the latter two. In his excellent book *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Fawaz A. Gerges gives a detailed history of the rise of recent anti-American jihad, as distinguished from jihad against local Muslim rulers (in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, etc.) who are viewed as corrupt and beholden to the West. What is important for our purposes is, first, that no form of jihad has been "structurally inevitable" in the way that, e.g., the expansion of capitalism and the consequent spread of liberal-democratic ideologies are. On the most basic level, Islamic extremism has been a reaction to "the failure of secular governments to promote good governance and economic advancement in most Muslim countries."[2] More specifically, the jihadist movement is

> nourished on a diet of political persecution and suffering… The bloody history of official torture and persecution perpetuates a culture of victimhood and a desire for revenge and enables the movement to mobilize young recruits and constantly renew itself. Arab/Muslim prisons, particularly their torture chambers, have served as incubators for generations of jihadis… As long as Muslim governments violate the human rights of their citizens and sanction abuse, they will continue to breed radicalism and militancy.[3]

In large part, therefore, it is governments' *policies*—including the United States', which supports many autocratic regimes[4]—that are responsible for jihad. If different policies are followed, it is likely that the support for jihad among young Muslims will diminish.

Secondly, the common perception that Islamic extremism is a well-organized, semi-monolithic movement is completely false. Even such groups as Al Qaeda (during its heyday before the Iraq war) are poorly organized, "amateurish" in fact.[5] "Personalities in jihadist circles are more important than organization…"[6] For instance, the picture that emerges from the 9/11 Commission Report is that before 2001, Al Qaeda was practically synonymous with Osama bin Laden.[7] Gerges agrees: "Al Qaeda was—and still to a lesser extent is—synonymous with bin Laden and his close confidants, with no independent institutional anchor… It is unlikely to survive [bin Laden's] demise…"[8] The salient feature of the global jihadist movement is its reliance on *personalities*, on charismatic individuals like bin Laden and al-Zawahiri. This fact has obvious implications with respect to the long-term institutional durability of jihadist groups.

The fragmented and amateurish nature of jihadist networks unfortunately does not prevent them from occasionally inflicting high casualties in their attacks. The world was reminded of this by the Mumbai tragedy of November 2008, in which over 170 people were killed. It appears to have been an unusually well-coordinated series of attacks. "An attack of this nature," writes Bill Roggio, a military blogger, "cannot be thrown together overnight. It requires planning, scouting, financing, training, and a support network to

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[1] See, for example, Reinhard Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2000); Henry Munson, *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East* (Binghamton, New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 1988); Michael Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). The origins of the contemporary Islamic revival can be traced to the late 1960s, with the humiliating Arab defeat in the Six Day War and the popular hatred of inept, brutal U.S.-backed dictators like the Shah of Iran.

[2] 2002 report on the "Causes of Islamic Extremism" from the U.S. Institute of Peace, at http://www.usip.org/peacewatch/2002/6/extremism.html.

[3] Gerges, op. cit., 9.

[4] For elaboration of that claim, see Robert Dreyfuss's *Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 2006).

[5] Gerges, op. cit., 41.

[6] Ibid., 37.

[7] The Report is available at http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf.

[8] Gerges, op. cit., 39, 40.

aid the fighters."[1] Speculations abound that the Pakistani government or Pakistani militant groups were involved.[2] As of this writing, the truth has not been uncovered.

Days after the Mumbai attacks, a report was released by the Congressional Commission on the Prevention of WMD-Proliferation and Terrorism that gave a dire prediction: "Without greater urgency and decisive action by the world community, it is more likely than not that a weapon of mass destruction will be used in a terrorist attack somewhere in the world by the end of 2013."[3] "Nuclear terrorism is still a preventable catastrophe," but to prevent it would require a dramatic toughening of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, among other provisions.[4]

In short, despite their usual incompetence, terrorist groups remain capable of wreaking destruction and undermining social progress. However, there is nothing *inevitable* about Islamic terrorism. It is loathed, not supported, by the immense majority of Muslims (see below). Despite decades of violence it has failed to obtain access to weapons of mass destruction, and it may be forever stymied in that objective if governments can coordinate effective policies. Moreover, recruits for terrorism will be ever harder to find if the counterproductive policies of past and current governments are remedied. "The volume of Saudi volunteers for *jihad* in such places as Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon appears to have markedly shrunk…[primarily because] the fading of Iraq as a terrorist paradise and the increasing effectiveness of policing elsewhere have produced a more hostile global environment for jihadist radicals."[5]

Now, given the social conditions in many Muslim countries, it would be understandable if a high proportion of Muslims were attracted to fundamentalism, indeed to violent extremism. Consider these conditions:

> For more than five decades, the peoples of the Middle East and the Islamic worlds have lived in a vortex of social change. Once rural if not tribal, they now seek a better life in megalopolises so polluted that the very act of breathing is dangerous to their health. Except for the wealthy minority, there is little but squalor. The extended families, that massive network…that once provided the foundation of Middle Eastern society, are beginning to crumble… Social despair is paralleled by economic despair. Middle Eastern universities are bursting at the seams, but there are few jobs for graduates… A narrow class of merchants, speculators, and industrialists has become inordinately wealthy under the new economic order, but the masses have not. Things have become worse, not better…[6]

"With governments as oppressive and ineffective as they are corrupt, it is only natural that many Muslims have sought salvation in their religion."

And yet, as has been documented repeatedly, the vast majority of Muslims in the Middle East are not Islamists and certainly not jihadists. Monte Palmer and Princess Palmer estimate, based on surveys, that 75% of Muslims are quite moderate, 20% (in Egypt and Lebanon, at least) would feel comfortable living in an Islamic theocracy, and the remaining 5% is split between non-believers and "fanatics."[7] The Pew Research Center reported in 2005 (at the nadir of the war in Iraq, when anti-Americanism was at its peak) that Muslim attitudes toward terrorism and jihad had become increasingly *negative*: "in Turkey, Morocco and Indonesia, 15% or fewer now say [suicide attacks] are justifiable; in Pakistan, only one-in-four now take that view (25%), a sharp drop from 41% in March 2004; in Lebanon, 39% now regard acts of terrorism

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[1] "Mumbai attack differs from past terror strikes," *The Long War Journal*, November 28, 2008.
[2] Cf., e.g., the Associated Press article "Police: Pakistani group behind Mumbai attacks," November 30, 2008, available at http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/27940231/.
[3] Joby Warrick, "Nuclear or Biological Attack Called Likely," *Washington Post*, December 2, 2008.
[4] Ibid.
[5] "The Struggle Against al-Qaeda," *The Economist*, October 23, 2008.
[6] Monte Palmer and Princess Palmer, *Islamic Extremism: Causes, Diversity, and Challenges* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 18, 19.
[7] Ibid., 25.

as often or sometimes justified, again a sharp drop from the 73% who shared that view in 2002."[1] Gerges concludes that "bin Laden and his transnationalist cohorts have lost the war of ideas—the struggle for Muslim minds."[2] Again, this is particularly significant in light of the public relations disaster that was the Iraq war.

It appears likely, moreover, that with the election of Barack Hussein Obama, anti-Americanism will decrease throughout the Islamic world, even fewer recruits will be available for jihad, and American foreign policy will be less counterproductive than it was under George W. Bush. For example, Obama has vowed to end the Iraq war, a promise that Muslims overwhelmingly support and a policy that could end up indirectly defusing sectarian tensions in Iraq. Similarly, a more conciliatory stance than Bush's toward Iran might strengthen moderates and reformists in that country.[3]

Indeed, frustration with Islamic regimes is palpable. According to recent polls in Iran, 84% of university students are dissatisfied with the clerical state and only 6% of students watch or read religious materials.[4] One analyst argues that Islamism has already failed in Iran.[5] The younger generations—i.e., people under the age of 30, who constitute over 60% of Iran's population[6]—have been utterly disillusioned by the reactionary government. "Power has corrupted religious institutions and discredited the idea of Islamic values in government."[7] Economic problems have contributed to the frustration: most urban men and women have at least a high school education, but "data from 2005 show that while 90% of men have left school by age 23, it is not until age 29 that a corresponding percentage of men have found employment. The situation for young women appears bleaker: while their levels of educational attainment do not differ greatly from those of their male counterparts, the same data set shows that even by their late 20s, only 20% of them are employed."[8] The popularity of Western culture—be it fashion, music, movies, even ideologies—stokes the ferment for change.

The Saudi Arabian government, too, is facing popular pressure. As in Iran, there are demographic problems: population growth averages about 3.5% annually, which means that the country must create between 260,000 and 500,000 new jobs every year, which is not happening.[9] Since the number of foreign workers continues to rise, the number of unemployed among locals does as well. Widespread political corruption is another source of discontent among the populace.[10] Many women, too—who cannot vote or drive cars—are demanding change: while they constitute more than half of all university graduates, they represent about 5% of the kingdom's workforce.[11] Progress is being made, though: King Abdullah, who is supportive of reform, proclaimed in 2008 that he would issue a royal decree giving women the right to drive.[12] And in 2005 Saudi Arabia had its first-ever municipal elections across the kingdom. Officials say that in the 2009 elections, women will be allowed to vote.[13]

Like Saudi Arabia and Iran, Pakistan has a population whose majority does not support its government's traditional friendly relations with Islamists.[14] Historically, despite the state's manipulations

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[1] Pew Global Attitudes Project, http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=248.
[2] Gerges, op. cit., 270.
[3] See, e.g., Bahram Rajaee, "The Political Evolution of the Islamic Republic and U.S. Foreign Policy After September 11," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, No. 1 (2004).
[4] Ibid.
[5] Graham E. Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 105.
[6] Reported by CBS, at http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/01/25/eveningnews/main669223.shtml.
[7] Fuller, loc. cit.
[8] Reported by the Brookings Institution, at http://www.brookings.edu/events/2008/0710_iran.aspx.
[9] Jean-François Seznec, "Stirrings in Saudi Arabia," *Journal of Democracy* 13, No. 4 (2002).
[10] Ibid.
[11] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4397615.stm.
[12] Faiza Saleh Ambah, "Saudi Women See a Brighter Road on Rights," *Washington Post*, January 31, 2008.
[13] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4252305.stm.
[14] Husain Haqqani, "The Role of Islam in Pakistan's Future," *The Washington Quarterly* 28, No. 1 (2004-05).

on behalf of Islamic parties, they have usually captured less than 8% of the vote in elections,[1] a trend that continued in the elections of February 2008.[2] Ideology seems less important to most Pakistanis than quality of life. And the latter is poor: one-third of the population lives in poverty; only 35% is literate; health care and other social services are in decline while the annual population growth rate is 2.7%.[3] The majority will support whichever political party can improve their social and economic position. And politicians recognize this, which is why they are increasingly pragmatic rather than ideological. Vali Nasr compares political trends in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey and other countries to European Christian Democracy in the twentieth century: "Muslim Democracy" takes whatever it can use from Islam and from liberal and secular ideologies, whatever it needs in order to gain power and get things done.[4] The tremendous success of anti-Taliban, anti-Islamist parties in Pakistan's recent elections shows that the populace supports this strategy.

One could list for pages and pages, hundreds of pages, such reasons as the foregoing to think that liberalization and democratization represent the future of the Islamic world. One could also, of course, list recent events that might suggest the opposite. But this exercise would have little value. Social development is a complex process, full of setbacks and incremental advances. What I am concerned with is the long-term direction of historical evolution, not the daily record of protest movements and political reactions.

The issue of gender equality, for example, can be analyzed from a variety of perspectives, some of them more relevant to this paper than others. What is relevant, first of all, is that Islam itself, as laid out in the Koran, does not require political, economic or social subordination of women. Indeed, when it was founded in the 600s, Islam had a very progressive influence on gender roles. In pre-Islamic Arabia women were treated as little more than chattel, or inheritable property;[5] the Prophet tried to establish greater equality for them in his writings and in reality. Thus, feminists have pointed out that, while the Koran does distinguish between men and women, it does not argue that men are more *valuable* than women.[6] Nor does it "strictly delineate the roles of woman and the roles of man to such an extent as to propose only a single possibility for each gender."[7] The Koran is not a rigid, dogmatic, legalistic document; it is rich, full of poetic ambiguity and inconsistency. Yet it is infused throughout with a spirit of openmindedness and generosity.

More important, though, is the fact that any ideology can and will be reinterpreted continually in the light of social conditions. A group of people that is committed to a particular ideology or religion but finds some of its provisions unpalatable given material circumstances will either ignore those provisions or explain them away. Young Catholics in Europe and Latin America ignore the Church's dictates on birth control and abortion but consider themselves good Catholics anyway. Why do they ignore the Church in these matters? Because they want the freedom that others have, they want to be in control of their own lives, they want opportunities and independence—just like Muslims growing up in modernizing, globalizing, democratizing societies. The mere popularity or "resurgence" of Islam in itself says almost nothing about the concrete directions of social evolution, because Islam is a living creed, as mutable as Christianity, a creed that reacts and changes in response to such developments as high unemployment, political oppression, the spread of information technology, the decline or the rise in private investment. Even if there were some sort of "objective" incompatibility between Islam and gender equality, that fact would foreclose neither the equalizing of gender relations in Muslim countries nor the possibility of millions of Muslims' favoring women's empowerment.

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[1] Frédéric Gare, "Pakistan: The Myth of an Islamist Peril," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (February 2006), at http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/45.grare.final.pdf.

[2] Cf. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/02/musharraf_protaliban.php.

[3] Haqqani, op. cit.

[4] Vali Nasr, "The Rise of 'Muslim Democracy,'" *Journal of Democracy* 16, No. 2 (2005).

[5] Mohammed Ali Syed, *The Position of Women in Islam: A Progressive View* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 1.

[6] Karin Ask and Marit Tjomsland, eds., *Women and Islamization: Contemporary Dimensions of Discourse on Gender Relations* (New York: Berg, 1998), 30.

[7] Ibid., 35.

Thirdly, we can look at the empirical data. With respect to gender relations, what is happening in places like Egypt, Morocco, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Algeria?[1] Again, the differences between nations are vast; generalizations are risky. For instance, women's participation in the labor-force is high in predominantly Muslim Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, while it is low in the Middle East.[2] However, we can at least outline trajectories of change.

Consider, first of all, a phenomenon that has upset many secularists: women's return to veiling in certain Muslim countries over recent decades. It is argued that veiling symbolizes the control of men over women's sexuality—since its purpose, ostensibly, is to safeguard women's "honor"—that it is incompatible with women's rights, and therefore that its continued popularity in some areas of North Africa and the Middle East (as well as in Europe and North America) bodes ill for the prospects of social equality in those regions. This stereotypical Western perspective, however, overlooks the phenomenon's complexity.

In some areas, it is of course common that girls and women are forced by their male family members to wear the veil. Iran and Saudi Arabia require that women veil themselves. These facts are regressive, and they hark to the forms of oppression that have plagued women for thousands of years in the Arab world. However, the veil itself—which, by the way, is not an Islamic tradition inasmuch as it (1) pre-dates that religion and (2) is not explicitly prescribed in the Koran[3]—is not regressive, because it has different meanings depending on the socioeconomic and cultural context. It may symbolize oppression in Western eyes, but many women who wear it do so precisely because they find it liberating. It frees them, for example, from male stares, from the objectifying gaze of males in the street. "Being totally covered," says one Egyptian woman, "[lets me] feel more free, purer, and more respectable."[4] "It is a personal statement: My dress tells you that I am a Muslim and that I expect to be treated respectfully, much as a Wall Street banker would say that a business suit defines him as an executive to be taken seriously."[5] From one perspective, in fact, the veil is a tool of radical feminism. "Some young Muslim feminists consider the hijab and the nikab [two forms of the veil] political symbols, too, a way of rejecting Western excesses such as binge drinking, casual sex and drug use. What is more liberating: being judged on the length of your skirt and the size of your surgically enhanced breasts, or being judged on your character and intelligence?"[6]

The veil is not a purely religious symbol. It also has significance for class relations, in that it "allies modest middle-class women" and differentiates them from the lower class.[7] In some countries, such as Egypt, it serves to voice protest against an unpopular "secular" government.

Moreover, many women wear the veil partly because it helps legitimize their presence outside the home, their presence in universities and professional occupations. It makes it harder for them to be condemned by a still-conservative society for doing things that are not conservative. By adopting Islamic dress, that is, women "are carving out legitimate public space for themselves."[8] They are embracing their autonomy, not negating it. This 'religiously expressed' trend towards female empowerment is evident also in the fact that Islamist women are now invading the mosques, previously a male sphere: they defiantly

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[1] Throughout this paper I am disregarding Iraq and Afghanistan, simply because the social and political situations there are volatile and new developments may emerge in response to the new regimes. I am also not considering the Central Asian countries, partly because to do so would unduly lengthen the paper and also because the legacy of the Soviet Union complicates matters.

[2] *Women in Islamic Societies: A Selected Review of Social Scientific Literature* (2005), 3. This is a report prepared by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress; it is available at http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/Women_Islamic_Societies.pdf. Cf. also Shireen Hunter and Huma Malik, eds., *Modernization, Democracy, and Islam* (Washington, D.C.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005), 102 ff.

[3] See Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies: Sharazad Tells Her Story* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003), 20, 21.

[4] Quoted in Ask and Tjomsland, op. cit., 63.

[5] Yvonne Ridley, "How I Came to Love the Veil," *Washington Post*, October 22, 2006.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ask and Tjomsland, op. cit., 64.

[8] Ibid., 61.

enter the main part of the mosque, the men's part, and the men are "defenseless [because] the process is taking place within the legitimate dominant culture."[1]

Women are fighting for their rights all across the Islamic world. It should neither surprise us nor disconcert us that they sometimes do so through religious channels, for instance by becoming aggressive Islamists or by choosing to wear the veil even when their governments and their husbands disapprove of it. We may not like it that through the veil they often express their opposition to "Western culture"—but let's not forget that hundreds of millions of bona fide "Westerners" dislike the very things disliked by millions of Muslims, namely the objectification of women, sexual liberalization, a popular culture that promotes violence, a perceived vacuum in spiritual life, and such "unethical" practices as homosexuality and abortion. People in the Islamic world can articulate their opposition in their dress, unlike Westerners, and this practice can make them seem alien to us, as if they are the Other, the Enemy; but many, perhaps most, Americans and Europeans have the same qualms about modern society as most Muslims do.

Consider the issues of homosexuality and abortion. Political propagandists like to point out that large majorities of Muslims in nearly all countries think that both practices are immoral, an observation that is supposed to demonstrate the undemocratic, regressive nature of Islam. They fail to point out that most Christians agree with Muslims on these points.[2]

As for gender equality, studies have actually shown that highly religious Muslims in Southeast Asia are *more* likely to support equality than less religious Muslims.[3] The opposite is true in France and Spain (as well as, but less so, in several other Catholic countries): the more Christian one is, the more likely one is to oppose gender equality. Education, though, is a significant variable in both Islamic and Christian countries, insofar as it encourages egalitarian attitudes.[4]

Sexual freedom is another issue that supposedly separates the "Islamic" from the "Western" world. The reality, however, is far different from what American newspapers would lead you to think. Aside from the fact that one cannot generalize over countries as different as Morocco and Malaysia, Algeria and Syria, it is worth noting that even Iran is undergoing a "sexual revolution."[5] Premarital sex, sexual experimentation, promiscuity, adultery are rampant in cities like Tehran. The Iranian-American anthropologist Pardis Mahdavi has collected some telling data (as described in *The Nation*):

> Adultery, for women, is punishable by stoning in Iran, but fully half of Mahdavi's married, female research subjects are unfaithful to their husbands; for many of them, picking up lovers is a regular form of recreation. And despite the legal requirement that women in Iran cover their hair and hide the curves of their bodies, fashion obsesses the women in Mahdavi's study. They apply layer after layer of makeup, and they find ways to make the hijab as sexy as the skimpy summer attire of Western women… Iranian doctors, parents, educators and even institutions are bending to the forces of change…[6]

Mahdavi's study, published as *Passionate Uprisings: Iran's Sexual Revolution*, concentrates on upper-middle-class Tehrani youth, but that makes its findings no less significant. The punishments for partying, dating, having premarital sex and adopting Western fashion are usually not very severe, ranging from one or two nights in jail to a whipping. More encouragingly, the government now requires young couples to attend classes on family planning, where they are supposed to learn about disease transmission, contraception, mental health, even female sexual pleasure.[7]

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[1] Ibid., 62.
[2] See, e.g., Edward Bomhoff and Mary Gu, "Malaysia's Muslims: The First World Values Survey" (2008), available at http://ssrn.com/abstract=1206558.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Laura Secor, "Stolen Kisses: Iran's Sexual Revolutions," *The Nation*, November 25, 2008.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

In Saudi Arabia, the capital city of Sangeethadh has become a mecca for homosexuals. It is a "gay heaven," according to one man who has lived there since 2000.[1] Sodomy is officially punishable by death, but "the kingdom leaves considerable space for homosexual behavior" as long as it isn't shamelessly public. The same is true of lesbianism: "there's an overwhelming number of people who turn to lesbianism," says one Saudi woman.[2] The reason is that sex-segregation makes heterosexual dating difficult. Frustrated men and women turn to their own sex for satisfaction. This leads to some confusion about their religious identity, but not as much as one would think, for the Koran is surprisingly reticent on the subject of homosexuality. It considers sodomy a sin but neither devotes much space to the subject nor prescribes punishments. Gay Muslims often rationalize their behavior by telling themselves that God is merciful. Presumably, then, God would also forgive other transgressions:

> Private misbehavior is fine, as long as public decorum is observed. Cinemas are forbidden, but people watch pirated DVDs. Drinking is illegal, but alcohol flows at parties. Women wrap their bodies and faces in layers of black, but pornography flourishes.[3]

Last, what do Muslims think about democracy and human rights? The answer should be evident from the foregoing, but it is instructive anyway to look at polls. A Gallup poll published in 2008 that surveyed over 50,000 Muslims in 35 nations and claimed to represent the views of 90% of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims indicated that what Muslims (including many radicals) most admire about the West is its democracy and its technology. The majority want guarantees of freedom of speech, and they don't want religious leaders to have a role in drafting constitutions. John Esposito, one of the authors of the book in which the poll was published, has said, "Muslims want self-determination, but not an American-imposed and -defined democracy. They don't want secularism or theocracy." (Again, many Christians share this hostility toward secularism.) Ninety-three percent of those polled, incidentally, called themselves "moderate" Muslims.[4]

In December of 2008, WorldPublicOpinion.org published the results of a survey it had conducted in seven Muslim nations, viz. Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Iran, Indonesia, the Palestinian Territories, and Azerbaijan. The topic was the role of the United Nations. On average, 63% of respondents thought that the UN should have the authority to enter countries to investigate human rights violations; 76% thought the UN should have the right to authorize military force to stop a country from supporting terrorist groups; 70% of Iranians (and smaller majorities in Indonesia, Azerbaijan and Turkey) thought the UN should be "significantly more powerful" than it is.[5]

In another survey, a majority of Middle Eastern Muslims (64% on average) thought that globalization and international trade are good for themselves and their countries, although they were concerned about the effects of trade on the environment and job security.[6]

Such statistics indicate that the social values of people in the Middle East do not differ widely from those of Westerners. It is worth remembering, too, that the "Islamic" world is as diverse as the "Western" world. Some people reject liberal values; many embrace them wholeheartedly. Many women wear the veil; many dress like ordinary American girls, in shorts or tight jeans. If you walk down a street in Damascus or some other Syrian city, you'll see women dressed completely in black as well as women who have donned "the latest fashions freshly arrived from French and Italian boutiques."[7]

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[1] Nadya Labi, "The Kingdom in the Closet," *The Atlantic*, May 2007.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] The information in this paragraph comes from the BBC article "Most Muslims 'desire democracy'" (February 27, 2008), available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7267100.stm.
[5] The report can be found at http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brmiddleeastnafricara/index.php?nid=&id=&lb=brme.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Herbert L. Bodman, Nayereh Tohidi, eds., *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity Within Unity* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1998), 102.

Trends toward female empowerment are observable not only in the 'cultural' sphere of public opinion and fashion but in the economic sphere as well. Let us note, first of all, that a generation ago the average woman in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) raised more than six children, while today she can expect to raise half as many. (The number is even smaller for women in their early twenties.)[1] Partly as a result of this, women's participation in the labor force in MENA has grown by 50% since 1960. The growth rate was a high 5.3% during the 1990s.[2] In Saudi Arabia, one of the more conservative countries, women's labor-force participation went from 16.5% in 1990 to 24% in 2000; in Iran it went from 22% to 30% during the same years.[3]

With active encouragement from their governments, women have been spending more years in school (which has helped to lower fertility-rates and increase work-force participation).

> Among the total population in MENA over the age of 15, the average years of schooling rose from less than a year in 1960 to 5.3 years in 1999—the largest gain of any region in the world. For women, the increase was more dramatic: from 0.5 to 4.5 years… In 1970, women made up only 16.4 percent of literate adults. By the year 2000, they accounted for more than 50 percent… [University] enrollment rates rose from around 9 percent in 1990 to almost 14 percent in 1997… And by 2000, women outnumbered men entering local colleges and universities in many MENA countries, including Lebanon, Oman, and Qatar.[4]

Without going into details, the trends are clear.

As a middle class is born and pressures toward political reform mount, a nascent civil society is developing in the Middle East. In countries like Syria and Iran it might not be much to speak of, but dissident groups, both liberal and conservative, are gaining support everywhere. Women are agitating for rights, students are rejecting the ways of their parents—a generation-gap is noticeable all over the region.[5] Indeed, it's noticeable from Morocco to the United Arab Emirates, and beyond to Iran and Pakistan. Change is accelerating.

What are we to conclude from this brief discussion? It looks as if the Islamic world's experience parallels Russia's, China's, India's, sub-Saharan Africa's and Latin America's. All these regions have been "colonized" by capitalism and are continuing to be colonized by it, albeit no longer explicitly under the mantle of Western colonialism. And they have all reacted to it in their unique but broadly similar ways, corresponding to their unique social conditions and the specific forms that their colonization has taken. Each region has had to respond somehow to the massive destruction of traditional social relations, be they tribal, feudal, familial, and so on, as well as the poverty, famine, class inequality and ethnic tensions that have directly or indirectly followed the supplanting of pre-modern social relations by capitalist exploitative ones. In retrospect, this process of reaction and adjustment was bound to be agonizing and agonizingly protracted. One hundred and fifty years after the abolition of serfdom, Russia is still struggling to develop a coherent and stable institutional framework for capitalism; 150 years after the Taiping Rebellion, China is finally starting to achieve the same goal; African and Latin American nations have had their own horrific legacy of colonization to overcome, and in the absence of a unifying, ancient, plausibly anti-Western ideology like Islam they have floundered from democracy to proto-fascism to proto-Communism to military dictatorship to democracy. Regarding the Middle East, the presence of Israel has exacerbated enormously

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[1] *Gender and Development in the Middle East and North Africa: Women in the Public Sphere* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2004), 58.
[2] Ibid., 59.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 29, 30, 32.
[5] See, e.g., Laura Secor, op. cit.; Jim Alterman, "Libya's Generation Gap," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, February 2006; and "Middle East Youth: A Generation in Flux," available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4726173.stm.

the already formidable problems of modernization and democratization, contributing to the region's authoritarianism as well as its anti-Americanism and the Islamic revival after the Six Day War in 1967.[1] Like nearly all other parts of the world, therefore, the Middle East (and the Islamic world in general) has passed through a phase of rejection of the West, rejection of its ideologies and social arrangements—a rejection actively encouraged by many Islamic governments, for political purposes. But, again like most parts of the world, Arab and Muslim countries are now being swept up ineluctably by the forces of liberalization and democratization, and of course globalization. In the coming years we will surely continue to see radical or moderate Islamists maintain power and win elections in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and other countries, but, as has happened with Iran's clerical state and Saudi Arabia's monarchy, the Islamists will lose the support of the population in the face of economic stagnation, political oppression, enforced gender inequality, and rampant corruption. Democratization—*liberal* democratization—will gradually, if painfully, spread.

One wonders why liberal democracy follows capitalism in this way. In the short term, of course, it does not: centuries of struggle were necessary for stable democracy to be established in the West, and in the meantime we had fascism, Nazism, and other unsavory forms of government. "Illiberal," "totalitarian" democracy has existed too,[2] for instance in Iran after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. But this sort of "democracy" is unstable, insofar as it tends to become authoritarian very quickly and eventually 'manufactures discontent,' which finally results in societal upheavals. Be that as it may, it is obvious that capitalism, especially in its early stages, need not correlate with democracy.

In the long run, however, there is indeed a correlation, an 'emerging' of liberal democracy out of capitalism. Is this connection merely a historical accident, or does democracy somehow grow out of the intrinsic tendencies of capitalism? I cannot consider this question in detail here, but I would suggest, with Göran Therborn, that democracy emerges not directly from capitalism's tendencies but from its *contradictions* (in Marxian terminology). This was true, at least, with respect to the original struggles for democracy in the West. In brief, the most important factor was probably the creation of a working class that had a vested interest in extending the franchise to all people, in achieving social equality as far as it was able:

> Legal emancipation of labour and the creation of a free labour market, industrialization, concentration of capital are all intrinsic tendencies [of capitalism] which simultaneously lay the basis for a working-class movement of a strength and stability inachievable by the exploited classes of pre-capitalist modes of production. In accordance with Marx's analysis of the growing contradictions of capitalism, the working class is, *ceteris paribus*, strengthened by the advance and development of capitalism…[3]

The scholarly literature testifies to the role of the working class and its labor movement in, for example, extending the franchise to women, and generally in bringing about democratic change in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe and America.[4] And to a great extent this is still true, for example in Latin America. Evo Morales was elected president of Bolivia in 2005 after popular protests and movements against the neoliberal regime. He was himself once a poor farmer; the poor farmers brought him to power; after elected, he led an effort to revise the Bolivian constitution so that it would be friendly to the indigenous poor. Venezuela too has made notable moves toward democracy in recent years, again on the basis of mass

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[1] See Palmer and Palmer, loc. cit.
[2] See Hunter and Malik, op. cit., 90.
[3] Göran Therborn, "The Rule of Capital and the Rise of Democracy," *New Left Review* I, No. 103 (1977).
[4] See, for example, ibid. Cf. also Therborn, "The Travail of Latin American Democracy," *New Left Review* I, No. 113–114 (1979); Mary Nolan, *Social Democracy and Society: Working Class Radicalism in Düsseldorf, 1890–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Ruth Berins Collier, *Paths Toward Democracy: The Working Class and Elites in Western Europe and South America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

demonstrations and exceptional activism by the indigenous poor in support of Hugo Chavez. Such examples of the continued importance of working-class activism to democratization could be multiplied.

New elements, however, have been added in this age of globalization. New pressures toward democracy and liberalism. They are almost too obvious to point out: (1) the masses' easy access to information about comparatively prosperous and "free" societies such as the U.S. Television, the internet, radio, movies, and popular culture in general broadcast seductive images of a vibrant society—and raise political issues of equality and liberty—to people all over the world, who become progressively discontented and finally demand egalitarian reforms. Their governments can resist for a while, but not forever. (2) The intensifying of private and public investment in the economy, which leads to a higher demand for skilled and unskilled workers, which leads to a higher supply of them, which is made possible and is followed by an increase in education—and all this empowers the populace vis-à-vis its repressive government. (3) International political pressure on authoritarian regimes to reform themselves, to end their violations of human rights. (4) The rising need to coordinate economic and financial regulations, enter trade agreements, etc., with liberal democracies like the U.S. and European countries—and, in general, to integrate the national economy with the economies of "free-market democracies."

Summing up, one could say that, while the recent revival of Islam is not going to die out any time soon, the influence of religious fundamentalism is waning relative to the dynamic of capitalist integration and democratization. The former is reactionary and without hope; the latter is the future, as it has been for centuries.[1]

Europe and Muslims

The purpose of this paper is to deflate Western paranoia about the Islamic world. To that end, I have argued against the idea of a clash of civilizations, except insofar as the spread of capitalism has indeed been undermining pre-modern social structures (in the West, too) ever since its inception. I have argued that the Islamic world is not some sort of monolithic threat to modernity, that Islam is not "essentially" reactionary or repressive merely because it has been used to legitimize such regimes. Virtually any ideology can be manipulated in this way, for example Christianity. No ideology is ever the primary "cause" of a social structure; Islam, therefore, should not be blamed for the social and economic conditions that obtain in the Middle East. In fact, the blame lies far more with the imperialist policies of the United States during the Cold War, when authoritarian governments (in Saudi Arabia, Iran prior to 1979, Iraq during the 1980s, etc.) were propped up as bulwarks against Communism and other American "enemies." Underdevelopment, political oppression, poverty, widespread anti-Americanism and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and jihad were the results. I have also argued that Muslim terrorism, which (according to polls) is as hated in Muslim societies as in the West, is not the apocalyptic threat it is sometimes thought to be. Unless governments fail to take it seriously and let it flourish—which is unlikely—it will probably not destabilize the world much more than it already has by instigating Bush's misadventure in Iraq. It is disorganized, amateurish, fragmented, reliant on a few charismatic personalities because it lacks a coherent set of institutions. Its history is a record of blunders, accidents, miscalculations, and the occasional fortuitous success.

Furthermore, I have argued that, under the pressure of globalization, the Islamic world is starting to experience a wave of democratization and liberalization. […]

In short, the long-term future looks fairly bright. To corroborate this vision I will consider the situation of Muslim immigrants in Europe, which is often cited as proof that the West is "under attack" by a dangerous, reactionary thing called "Islam." Less hyperbolically, it is thought that the Muslim presence "could be a huge long-term threat to Europe,"[2] i.e. to Europe's social unity, and could thus lead indirectly

[1] Incidentally, this applies to Christian fundamentalism too. Like the Islamic variant, it is basically a doomed attempt to dam the flood of global integration and stop the erosion of traditional social structures.

[2] "Forget Asylum-Seekers: It's the People Inside Who Count," *Economist*, May 8, 2003.

to a decline of Europe on the international stage, which in turn could endanger a liberal-democratic world order. As we will see, these predictions are overstated.

First of all, what exactly is the problem under consideration? It has been stated a thousand times in the mainstream media and the scholarly literature: Muslim communities in Europe are not integrating themselves into the dominant secular, liberal-democratic order, a fact that is both cause and effect of social tensions. That is, Muslims increasingly identify not with Europe or their country of residence but with Islam—a phenomenon that is especially pronounced in the younger generation.[1] "Many Muslim communities are turning inward and rejecting European institutions and traditions."[2] Large proportions of non-Muslim Europeans, for their part, are hostile towards Muslims. The Pew Research Center reported in September of 2008 that, among the respondents to its polls (1000 people in each country), 52% in Spain, 50% in Germany, 46% in Poland, 38% in France, and 23% in Great Britain had negative views of Muslims.[3] More concretely, a 2003 Ipsos poll in France indicated that 25% of French Muslims—but 75% of those under the age of 25—thought the values of Islam were incompatible with those of France, while 62% of the general French population shared that view.[4] The European values in question seem to be those of "gender equality; sexual liberalization; and the principles of compromise, egalitarianism, and identification with the state."[5]

The usefulness of polls, however, is limited, partly because the public's views are subject to change from year to year. (For example, the Pew Research Center's findings in 2006 were more encouraging than those in 2008. Among Muslims, in fact, the findings were striking: in France, Germany, Spain and Great Britain, Muslims were more positive than the general public about the way things were going in their countries. Also, in general they were far more concerned about unemployment than about cultural or religious issues such as women's roles and the decline of religion.[6]) Demographic data are more reliable. According to the U.S. Department of State's *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom 2003*, there are more than 23 million Muslims in Europe, almost 5% of Europe's population. Timothy Savage summarizes other statistics:

> The Muslim birth rate in Europe is currently more than three times that of non-Muslims… By 2015, Europe's Muslim population is expected to double,[7] whereas Europe's non-Muslim population is projected to fall by at least 3.5 percent. Looking further ahead, conservative projections estimate that, compared to today's 5 percent, Muslims will comprise at least 20 percent of Europe's population by 2050. Some even predict that one-fourth of France's population could be Muslim by 2025 and that, if trends continue, Muslims could outnumber non-Muslims in France and perhaps in all of western Europe by mid-century… [A]s important as the dramatic increase in the Muslim population is the dramatic decline of the general European population, which, according to UN projections, will drop by more than 100 million from 728 million in 2000 to approximately 600 million, and possibly as low as 565 million, by 2050.[8]

It must be kept in mind that these numbers, which might seem frightening to some people, will probably have little effect on European stability unless there are coordinated social movements amongs millions of Muslims to fight liberal democracy, gender equality, egalitarianism, European integration. Or, alternatively,

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[1] Timothy Savage, "Europe and Islam: Crescent Waxing, Cultures Clashing," *Washington Quarterly* 27, No. 3 (2004).
[2] Barbara Franz, "Europe's Muslim Youth: An Inquiry into the Politics of Discrimination, Relative Deprivation, and Identity Formation," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 18, No. 1 (2007).
[3] The report is available at http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=262.
[4] Timothy Savage, op. cit.
[5] Ibid.
[6] http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=254.
[7] The U.S. National Intelligence Council, however, projects that it will double by 2025. The report can be viewed at http://www.dni.gov/nic/PDF_2025/2025_Global_Trends_Final_Report.pdf.
[8] Savage, op. cit.

there could be, for instance, increasingly widespread and destructive riots in response to discrimination, which could conceivably lead to the election of far-right governments that would only exacerbate the problem.

Probably the most immediate cause of concern for Europeans is the perceived spread of radical Islam among young Muslims, which has resulted in such violent episodes as the terrorist attacks in London on July 7, 2005, the murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004, the rage ignited by Danish cartoons of Mohammed in 2006, and the terrorist plot of 2006 involving planes leaving London's Heathrow airport. Counterterrorism officials estimate that 1 to 2 percent of European Muslims are involved in some type of extremist activity (which isn't necessarily violent).[1] Given the public's fear of terrorism and suspicion of Muslims, it is not surprising that headscarves, which have become increasingly popular among young Muslim women, have provoked controversy in France and Germany, nor that many people support greater restrictions on immigration.

But let's look more closely at what is happening. Why do many Muslim communities segregate themselves from the larger population to an even greater extent than other immigrant communities do? Why do they cling to traditional Islamic values? Why has terrorism increased? Barbara Franz gives a succinct, and I think correct, answer: "Europe's current Islamic alienation…is more about Marx than Mohammad or bin Laden."[2] It is more about political and socioeconomic alienation than religion per se.

Indeed, the "Marxist," "materialistic" approach is merely common sense. The facts speak for themselves: in Britain, for instance, Muslim communities are concentrated in the most deprived urban areas.[3] The current unemployment rate for Muslim men is nearing 40 percent, with economic inactivity at 50 percent. One-third of British Muslim children live in households where none of the adults is employed, households where depressive attitudes prevail, where the social circles are narrow and conservative. In France, Muslim enclaves have a 30% unemployment rate amongst 21- to 29-year-olds; incomes are 75% below the average. The Turkish community in Germany has an unemployment rate of 24%, while 50% in urban centers live in "financially precarious circumstances." All these Muslim communities derive originally from guest-worker programs established after World War II, when Europe needed foreign labor to fill factory jobs. Like Mexican communities in the United States, they began in poverty and have not yet, after two or three generations, transcended their poverty.[4] In conditions of overcrowded housing, poor health and low educational qualifications, despondency and identity crises are common.

The problem of poverty is reinforced by the problem of discrimination. The riots in France of October, 2005 had nothing to do with Islam, as shown by the inability of Muslim organizations to stop the violence and by the fact that churches and synagogues were not intended targets. They took place in working-class suburbs populated by North Africans; they were triggered by the deaths of two boys being chased by the police; and they were a response to racism. Discrimination against Arabs and Muslims in the employment, housing and education sectors is extremely common throughout Western Europe.[5] The youths who perpetrated the riots in France were frustrated not with a secular society but with socioeconomic structures.

> The immigrant children should go to school in the *banlieues* and should think about their future. Many do just that. Only, this does them no good. Whether they drop out of school

[1] Ibid.

[2] Barbara Franz, op. cit.

[3] Most of the information in this paragraph and the next is taken from Javaid Rehman, "Islam, 'War on Terror' and the Future of Muslim Minorities in the United Kingdom: Dilemmas of Multiculturalism in the Aftermath of the London Bombings," *Human Rights Quarterly* 29, No. 4 (2007), and from Barbara Franz, op. cit.

[4] Robert Leiken, "Europe's Immigration Problem, and Ours," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 15, No. 4 (2004). For a good overview of the history of Muslims in Europe, see Jørgen S. Nielsen's *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

[5] See the 2006 report on 'general' racism published by the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia, at http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/ar06/AR06-P2-EN.pdf. There is also a report on Muslims alone, at http://eumc.europa.eu/eumc/material/pub/muslim/Manifestations_EN.pdf.

> at 15 or graduate high school with honors—they will remain jobless either way. And if one nevertheless makes a career, say as a graphic designer or revenue officer, he will still remain a second-class French citizen. The bouncer will not let him into the disco in Saint Germain on Friday nights.[1]

For people who do not daily encounter hostile looks and discriminatory practices, who are not forced to be apologetic simply because they choose to wear clothing that is deemed un-Western, and who are not bombarded by propaganda constantly reminding them that they are the Other—the potentially dangerous Other—it is difficult to imagine what such a life must be like. Especially if such discrimination coexists with poverty, with a lack of opportunities, with no prospect for social advancement.

Add to all this the disastrous foreign policy of the United States and Britain, which has infuriated Muslims across the world. There is no question that the Iraq war has been a recruiting tool for terrorists in Europe, nor that it has inflamed the resentment of many European Muslims toward the West.

It is a social-psychological fact that when one is rejected by a community for some reason, e.g. because one is perceived as belonging to a different religion or ethnicity than the community, one may well react to this rejection by choosing to identify more strongly than before with the religion or ethnicity in question. It is a defense mechanism, a way of maintaining self-esteem in the face of rejection. To protect your sense of self, you spit contempt right back at the people who have contempt for you. If there is another despised community into whose fold you can retreat for comfort, you are all the more likely to use the defense in question, i.e. to consciously *choose* the identity that the Other has thrust upon you without your consent. And anyway, there is little else left for you: your identity has been decided in your enforced ostracism. This is partly what has happened with Arabs and Muslims in Europe. For decades they have been trampled under, discriminated against, even as they tried to minimize their otherness by adopting the ways of their host countries. But now, in this age of information technology, of globalization, of constant media-generated reminders of the chasm between the prosperity of the few and the indigence of the many—the chasm between the *promise* and the *reality*—and an age when anomie afflicts nearly everyone, the prosperous no less than the persecuted, and *cosmic lostness* seems stitched into the very fabric of society, some members of the younger generation of European Muslims have decided to accept the roles that Europe's social structure has pigeon-holed them into. They have decided to wear the headscarf, to sneer at the decadence and inhumanity of Western culture. Some of them have, indeed, gone too far in their rejection of those who have rejected them, becoming terrorists, extremists, bigots, homophobes, haters of equality. But noxious attitudes like these have grown out of specific socioeconomic conditions, conditions resulting partly from specific political policies. What is needed is not a renewal of intolerance toward immigrants, a "cracking down" on immigration, a "zero-tolerance" policy toward "urban violence," but a concerted and coordinated effort across Europe to fight discrimination, to renovate desolate housing projects, to revitalize urban economies, to create new jobs through public works programs, to integrate Muslims into politics.

That is the only possible solution: integration. *Assimilation*, or a mass repudiation of Islamic identity, is surely not necessary, but integration is. The alternative is continued segregation, and segregation has never fostered social stability. On the contrary, we have seen that various forms of segregation are the main cause of the problem—or, rather, are the problem itself.

Perhaps the reader will object that the prospects for a decline in discrimination against Muslims are not good, given that Muslims have suffered from discrimination ever since their arrival in Europe decades ago. (Actually, centuries ago.) How could discrimination ever end? Well, this question was asked by Malcolm X in the 1960s with respect to relations between blacks and whites in the United States—and now the U.S. has a black president. How did the miracle come to pass? How has discrimination against blacks been so undermined that Barack Obama can be president? Again, Marx is of use. Racism is not a spontaneous, natural reaction to the encounter between one race and another; it typically grows out of a particular socioeconomic condition, namely the correlation between class-stratification and race. Simple inductive reasoning corroborates that claim. For example, in the United States today there is a great deal of

[1] Alex Capus, quoted in Franz, op. cit.

racism towards Mexicans, most of whom are in "lower" classes; there is less racism towards people from India, who tend to have a more visible presence in the middle class than Mexicans. Likewise, when the French began to colonize North America in the 1600s, they displayed little or no racism per se towards Indians but were in fact relatively diplomatic and respectful in their relations with them.[1] By the 1800s, however, when Indians had been decimated by war and disease and were subordinate economically, politically and militarily, racism among Americans was rampant. It was rampant regarding blacks too as long as they were economically and politically subordinate to whites (and as long as this subordination was enforced); as their class position has risen following the Civil Rights era, mainstream racism has diminished.

The evidence leads one to believe that some discrimination against Arabs and Muslims will persist in Europe until the majority of Muslims have become part of the middle class. However, since discrimination is a major reason why Muslims have trouble improving their economic circumstances, it appears that we face a "catch-22." The best way out of the problem is the path followed by the United States from the 1960s to the present day: a civil rights movement and a forceful intrusion by European governments into civil society on behalf of the underprivileged. "Affirmative action" programs are necessary.[2] European leaders would be well-advised to examine in detail the measures enacted by the U.S. government to overcome racism—as well as the successes and failures of these measures. The current situation in Europe, though, is not strictly parallel to the past situation in America, partly because the segregated groups supposedly disagree about *values*.

But is this problem so intractable after all? I mentioned above that the socially conservative views of many Muslims around the world do not differ much from the views of conservative Christians. It is true that European Muslims are more conservative than the general public. A Gallup poll in 2007 found that Muslims in London, Paris and Berlin are conservative on the issues of homosexuality and abortion:

> At least two-thirds of the general public in France (81%), Germany (68%), and the United Kingdom (66%) say homosexual acts are morally acceptable; among Muslims in the countries' capitals, the corresponding figures are just 18%, 26%, and 4%, respectively… Among the general public in each country, majorities say abortion is morally acceptable (though just barely in Germany). Muslims in London are least likely to agree at just 10%…[3]

Upon seeing these data, however, one's inclination is to say, "So what?" Comparable divisions exist in America between "secularists" and "Christians," but the disagreements have yet to tear the country apart. In fact, diversity of opinion, and the freedom to express it, is the very essence of a healthy civil society. To call it a "culture war," as it has been called in America, is sheer hyperbole.

In general, the difference in values between European Muslims and the greater public has been exaggerated. […]

In fact, Europe quite obviously needs its immigrants in order to survive. And it needs *more* immigrants. Its population is declining, as we saw above, and a decline in population does not bode well for economic vitality. If the EU continues to take seriously the imperative to integrate immigrants into society, *increased* migration could well be called for. This bears on the question of Turkey's membership in the EU. Turkey currently has a population of about seventy million; its population is expected to stabilize

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[1] See Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[2] According to the Congressional Research Service's report on "Muslims in Europe: Integration Policies in Selected Countries" (2005), affirmative action programs have not been instituted but are starting to be considered. The European Commission recognizes the need for aggressive policies to integrate Muslims into society and is finally making a concerted effort to coordinate such policies across Europe. The report is available at http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33166.pdf.

[3] http://www.gallup.com/poll/27397/Values-Questions-Set-European-Muslims-Apart.aspx.

in 2030 at eighty-five million.[1] With negative demographic trends across Europe, the induction of Turkey into the EU would probably result in an enlarged supply of labor, which could be of great benefit to the economy. Burak Akçapar in fact argues that if Turkey becomes a member, "the problem for the EU could be not that there would be too many but too few Turks to migrate to the EU markets, where youthful and skilled Turkish labor will be increasingly needed…"[2] As for the so-called Muslim threat, Turkey is one of the most secular, modernized states in the Islamic world.

However, I won't delve into the thicket of arguments for and against Turkey's EU membership. My point is only that the decline of Europe's non-Muslim population need not entail a decline of Europe itself. Far from being the agent of Europe's demise, immigration could be its savior.

Islam and the West are not enemies. They are not even entities: they are abstractions with virtually no explanatory value. "Islam" has far more in common with "Christianity" than "Christianity" has with the "West." Analysts should talk less about "values" and "cultures," or "cultural values," and more about the real conditions on the ground that drive people to behave as they do. Huntingtonian thinking is jihadist thinking, it is "us" versus "them" thinking, "right" versus "wrong," and it obscures all the real issues. Barrington Moore said it best: to rely primarily on cultural themes in one's explanations—as Osama bin Laden does, as George W. Bush does, as Samuel Huntington does—is to create "a strong conservative bias under the color of scientific neutrality and objectivity"[3] (if, that is, it's done in a relatively sophisticated way). On the other hand, both truth and compassion are to be found in the Marxian narrative.

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December 11, 12

Watched a video of Valentina Igoshina (beautiful 30-year-old Russian pianist) playing a Chopin Prelude and sent her this email: "I just heard your version of Chopin's famous A major Prelude. What a lovely, unusual interpretation! But it shouldn't be unusual, because it's lovely. ☺ Full of languor, a sort of soulful repining… I can imagine Chopin playing it that way as he sits alone in George Sand's estate at Nohant… It's a summer afternoon, he's looking out through the window at the heavy air and thinking of the coming dusk—the dusk of his life (even though he's in his thirties)—Sand and her children have gone out for a walk, Chopin is in an autumnal mood.

"The piece as you play it is like the coda to a human life. A person is born, lives tumultuously, subsides into old age, dies peacefully….and this Prelude is time's final caress of its child. […]"

She made my day. Enriched my life.

December 13

A silly little paper for my other class:

On the Meaning of John Brown

Defenders and detractors of John Brown may disagree about many things, but few will deny that he was, at the very least, a fascinating character. In his lifetime he was even more famous—more loved and more loathed—than he is now. From the Transcendentalists to the governor who hanged him, from the

[1] Timothy Savage, op. cit.
[2] Burak Akçapar, *Turkey's New European Era: Foreign Policy on the Road to EU Membership* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 22.
[3] Moore, op cit., 485.

Union soldiers to Ku Klux Klan members, people have been fascinated by him. Why is this? It isn't only because of his daring raid on Harpers Ferry, for other men have done daring things without becoming objects of fascination. Rather, the cult of John Brown seems to derive from his singlemindedness, his unshakeable conviction of righteousness, his willingness to commit violence in pursuit of a noble end (a *holy* end, for him), combined with his intelligence, his eloquence, his courage. In short, what intrigues people, at least implicitly, is the contrast between him and his age. *He* had integrity, he was an old Puritan, an anachronistic Puritan from the days of Oliver Cromwell, he was "*authentic*"; his age was hypocritical, confused, self-estranged (as evidenced by its Civil War). This is the impression one gets from the outraged literature of the time,[1] and from the testaments of Brown's character given by Thoreau, Emerson, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Henry A. Wise (governor of Virginia), and others.[2] In this paper I will investigate such claims. That is, I will explore the relation between Brown and his age, between Brown and the Transcendentalists in particular, in the hope that doing so will yield insights not only into the phenomena I'm 'directly' discussing (namely the Transcendentalists, Brown, and their society) but also into the meaning and nature of "authenticity" itself, this concept which is central to Brown's mystique.

First I will examine pieces of Thoreau's writing and compare them to Brown's, in order to shed light on the former's relative "inauthenticity." Then I'll clarify what I mean by "authenticity," drawing on Hegel and Dostoyevsky. Lastly, I'll speculate on the causes of the character-differences between Brown, on the one hand, and Emerson and Thoreau on the other.

A reasonable place to start is Thoreau's speech "A Plea for Captain John Brown," delivered first in Concord on October 30, 1859 and then in other New England towns in the weeks before Brown's execution. The speech was also published in newspapers. It is a stirring document, full of righteous fury, and it roused Emerson to join the ranks of Brown's defenders. Brown's trial was still going on; the country was reeling from the implications of his October 16th raid. The national consensus was that Brown was a fanatic, a criminal, a madman, a murderer; the South, however, differed from the North in seeing him as representative of the Republican party, of abolitionists all across the North. Perhaps, thought the South, he was uniquely courageous, but he was symbolic of the North's dangerous individualism, its Puritanism, its evil abolitionism, its determination to attack the South and suppress slavery once and for all. Most Northerners, on the other hand, disowned Brown, viewing him as a freak, an anomaly; and the Republican party certainly had no connection to the Harpers Ferry raid. Even Abolitionists were reluctant to praise him—or at least they tempered their praise with criticism of his methods—for the majority of them were pacifists. William Lloyd Garrison, a founder of Abolitionism, declared the raid to be "a misguided, wild, and apparently insane, though disinterested and well-intended effort"; Horace Greeley called it a "deplorable affair…the work of a madman."[3]

Meanwhile, however, Brown was giving interviews and writing letters in which he appeared decidedly clear-headed, in fact honorable, principled, full of integrity and intelligence. As his words were published in newspapers everywhere, the nation came to see him, paradoxically, as both an admirable man and a murderer, both humane and treasonous. Governor Wise of Virginia, who talked to Brown in the hours after the raid, said he was "firm, truthful, and intelligent…cool, collected, and indomitable…a man of fortitude and simple ingenuousness"[4]—yet at the same time he called him a criminal and a traitor. The nation was torn between these positive and negative interpretations of the man, with the negative, however, predominating everywhere.

The 1850s were a culturally frenzied time. In his book *Beneath the American Renaissance*, David Reynolds emphasizes the ferment and confusion of antebellum America—the cultural experimentation, the impulse for reform of every variety, the coexistence of every conceivable cultural extreme. It was the age,

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[1] See, e.g., Emerson's essays and Thoreau's "A Plea for Captain John Brown."

[2] See David Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), chapters 2, 13, 14, etc.

[3] Ibid., 340.

[4] Ibid., 332.

after all, of Transcendentalism and evangelical reform, of sensationalist literature and Poe's irrationalist fiction, of *Moby Dick* and *Leaves of Grass*, of resurgent Puritanism and atheism and free-love movements, of Emily Dickinson and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and, in general, of battles between conservative ideologies and an emerging radical democracy in both culture and politics. Slavery, though, was arguably the dominant issue, especially after the passage in 1850 of the Fugitive Slave Act and in 1854 of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which led to widespread proslavery and antislavery violence in Kansas. (The name "Bleeding Kansas" designated this time.) By the end of the 1850s, Emerson was writing that the country had to be purged through war.

It was in this environment that Thoreau wrote "A Plea for Captain John Brown," hoping it would help raise Brown's name from infamy. I will quote a few passages to give the reader a sense of its style (which will be important to my argument). Referring to Brown's interviews with proslavery men after Harpers Ferry, Thoreau says,

> Read his admirable answers to Mason and others. How they are dwarfed and defeated by the contrast! On the one side, half-brutish, half-timid questioning; on the other, truth, clear as lightning, crashing into their obscene temples. They are made to stand with Pilate, and Gessler, and the Inquisition. How ineffectual their speech and action! and what a void their silence!
>
> …[John Brown] was not our representative in any sense. He was too fair a specimen of a man to represent the like of us. Who, then, were his constituents? If you read his words understandingly you will find out. In his case there is no idle eloquence, no made, nor maiden speech, no compliments to the oppressor. Truth is his inspirer, and earnestness the polisher of his sentences. He could afford to lose his Sharpe's rifles, while he retained his faculty of speech,—a Sharpe's rifle of infinitely surer and longer range…
>
> …Treason! Where does such treason take its rise? I cannot help thinking of you as you deserve, ye governments. Can you dry up the fountains of thought? High treason, when it is resistance to tyranny here below, has its origin in, and is first committed by, the power that makes and forever recreates man. When you have caught and hung all these human rebels, you have accomplished nothing but your own guilt, for you have not struck at the fountain-head…

The contemporary reader tends to enjoy this Thoreauvian heroic style. One enjoys the imagery, the vigor, the pithiness—but only because one knows that it was written a long time ago. A speech written in the same style *now* would be ridiculed as over-ornate, over-eloquent, absurdly grandiose and magniloquent, stylistically naïve, hopelessly out of touch with the zeitgeist. It would be considered *badly* written. But because it is not a product of our time, we are able to look upon it with unadulterated admiration, even to lament that such writing has gone out of fashion.

In other words, our reaction is inseparable from *nostalgia*. But what is nostalgia? It is a longing for, or fondness of, an idealized past. Usually the idealization involves the perception that the past was simple, certain, "whole," full of an authenticity that has been lost. The appeal of Thoreau's writing for us is not purely literary, since it contains literary flaws (such as exaggeration and romantic metaphors). The appeal consists also in its perceived *authenticity*,[1] its being an upsurge from a more authentic, naïve time than our self-conscious present. It contains almost no hint of a divided consciousness such as characterizes postmodernity; it is pervaded by a spirit of relative certainty, an almost religious devotion to *principles*. The pithy, forceful language expresses a sort of *certainty of self*. Thus, Thoreau's culture, while riven by internecine conflicts and full of collective doubt, was yet more authentic, less "self-conscious," than ours, a fact which made possible the appreciative reception of Thoreau's speech.

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[1] Throughout this paper I am using the word "authenticity" in a non-moral sense. I don't mean to imply that "inauthentic" people or cultures are thereby inferior or somehow immoral; the term is purely descriptive, not evaluative.

Emerson's language is equally revelatory: he refers to Brown as "that new saint, than whom none purer or more brave was ever led by love of men into conflict and death,—the new saint awaiting his martyrdom, and who, if he shall suffer, will make the gallows glorious like the cross."[1]

The Transcendentalists' enthusiasm for John Brown parallels our appreciation of the Transcendentalists' writings and our nostalgia for a culture that could produce such writing. The Northern intellectuals who supported Brown, such as Thomas Higginson, Wendell Phillips, Frank Sanborn, Emerson, Thoreau, and others, seem to have viewed him as an evolutionary throwback, a reincarnation of Oliver Cromwell. The degree of his religiousness is well-known: like every good Puritan from the 1600s, he "possessed a most unusual memory of [the Bible's] entire contents" and considered himself an instrument of God.[2] He was certain that slavery was "the mother of all abominations";[3] he therefore devoted his life (especially his last ten years) to its abolition. So little does he appear to have doubted himself or his cause that he never even *considered* compromise with "evil"; compromise would have been a betrayal of God and of Brown's mission on Earth. This complete integrity and self-certainty is evident in the final speech he gave to the court that sentenced him to death:

> …This court acknowledges, as I suppose, the validity of the law of God. I see a book kissed, which I suppose to be the Bible, or at least the New Testament, which teaches me that all things whatsoever I would that men should do to me, I should do even so to them. It teaches me, further, to remember them that are in bonds as bound with them. I endeavored to act up to that instruction. I say I am yet too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done, as I have always freely admitted I have done, in behalf of His despised poor, I did no wrong, but right. Now, if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I say, let it be done.[4]

Upon comparing this speech with Thoreau's, one begins to see what it is that the Transcendentalists found so magnetic about Brown. Thoreau speaks, writes and thinks in literary terms, which is to say in terms of the effect he wants to have on his audience. He is a self-conscious intellectual, a man perfectly familiar with self-doubt and the feeling of inadequacy, who is "aware of himself as an object of someone else's observation"[5] and is thus *critically* aware of himself, a fact that comes across in his carefully constructed, inflated sentences. Brown, on the other hand, simply states his convictions clearly and without ulterior motive. Without literary embellishments. He is too self-certain for inessential embellishments, for artificial devices that come from the writer's desire for applause. As Thoreau says, "Truth is [Brown's] inspirer, and earnestness the polisher of his sentences." Moreover, this observation is expressly intended to contrast with Thoreau himself, for in the prior sentence he has stated with a hint of self-disapproval, "In [Brown's] case there is no idle eloquence, no made, nor maiden speech"—which is precisely what Thoreau is giving, namely a "made speech" characterized by "idle eloquence."

Thoreau has already made the point explicitly when he says, "[Brown] was too fair a specimen of a man to represent the like of us." And earlier in the speech he has gone so far as to say, "No man in America has ever stood up so persistently and effectively for the dignity of human nature, knowing himself for a man, and the equal of any and all governments. In that sense he was the most American of us all."

For Thoreau and Emerson, therefore, as for most of the Transcendentalists, Brown is the ideal man not only because he guides his actions by his conscience and devotes himself to fighting for a higher

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[1] From Emerson's lecture "Courage," delivered on November 8, 1859.
[2] Benjamin Quarles, *Allies for Freedom* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2001), 12. Quotation from Brown, ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Quoted in Reynolds, op. cit., 354.
[5] R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 113.

principle (which, in his case, is the eradication of slavery), but also because he does so in the most "manly" of ways, viz. by *knowing himself for a man*. In the eyes of his admirers he suffers from no "divided consciousness," and in this sense differs both from New England intellectuals and from American culture as a whole in the 1850s. He symbolizes the ideal of authenticity. He is Emerson's "hero," the man whose essence is "self-trust," who "speaks the truth and is just, generous, hospitable, temperate, scornful of petty calculations and scornful of being scorned."[1]

In short, Brown "knew himself for a man" more fully than Thoreau and Emerson knew themselves as such: they were well aware that, while Brown *acted*, they merely *wrote*. However, what does the word "authentic" really mean? And what causes a person or a culture to be inauthentic? In thus contrasting the Transcendentalists with Brown, what exactly are we doing?

In a sense, the first question is not hard to answer. Inauthenticity can mean various things: self-delusion; "playing a role" or "wearing a mask"; being compulsively self-conscious to the extent that you don't have a clear sense of who you are; failing, for whatever reason, to "realize" (or *real*-ize) yourself (i.e., your potential), for example by watching TV all day every day; immersing yourself in superficial, commonplace pastimes that don't touch your "inner self," for instance by living like a New Yorker who rushes from place to place day after day, shopping, eating, drinking, watching movies, meeting friends, without ever pausing and self-reflecting for the sake of "staying in touch with" himself. What these modes of inauthenticity have in common is that they are ways of *not being oneself*. They imply a dichotomy between the "real self" and the "false self," between reality and appearance. The truly authentic person lives in a "fullness of being"; he suffers from no self-suppression or self-stuntedness or insecurity.

There are other ways to express the meaning of inauthenticity. For instance, one could use Hegelian language and say that inauthenticity at its most extreme is characterized by a "disintegrated consciousness." The example that Hegel chooses to illustrate what he means by this term is the Nephew in Diderot's dialogue *Rameau's Nephew*, the character who is so confused about his identity that he can be anyone and everyone, he can adopt whatever mask it pleases him to adopt in a given moment.[2] This character effectively has no self: his "self" is merely a series of masks floating in air, masks on top of masks all the way down to the "core"—but there is no core. There is only an infinite floating in a vacuum-of-identity. Dostoyevsky provides an even more extreme example of the disintegrated consciousness in *Notes from the Underground*, which comprises a series of self-reflections by the "Underground Man." The Underground Man's paradox is that he knows nothing about himself precisely because he knows everything. He is compulsively self-conscious, which means he never stops questioning himself, never stops wondering who he "truly" is, to the point that he considers himself to lack an identity:

> …I did not know how to become anything; neither spiteful nor kind, neither a rascal nor an honest man, neither a hero nor an insect… [A] man in the nineteenth century must and morally ought to be pre-eminently a characterless creature; a man of character, an active man is pre-eminently a limited creature…[3]

In other words, the disintegrated consciousness, which is the most alienated, least "authentic," of all consciousnesses, is obsessed, tortured, by its consciousness of freedom in relation to itself. According to R. D. Laing, the famous psychoanalyst, schizophrenia is the (patho)logical conclusion of this disintegration of consciousness.

What does all this have to do with John Brown and the Transcendentalists? First of all, it clarifies what we mean by saying that Brown is comparatively "authentic": we mean that his consciousness and behavior are farther away from the extreme of "dis-integration" than Emerson's and Thoreau's are. In other words, his actions are simple extensions of his sense of self to a relatively high degree. Emerson and

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[1] From Emerson's essay "Heroism."

[2] See Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the chapter entitled "Self-alienated Spirit." See also Lionel Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity*, which is an illuminating discussion of all these themes.

[3] *Notes from the Underground*, chapter 1.

Thoreau (I'll call them "ET" for short, and treat them as instantiations of a single mode of consciousness) are characterized by a greater division between their "inner," "true," "ideal" self and the self they present to the world, the self that determines much of their behavior. The division is reflected also in their writing, for as they write they are continuously, of necessity, making compromises between what they believe and would like to say and what they think will be acceptable and most effective in light of their audience.[1] That is, they are adjusting their behavior in light of social norms and people's expectations, which presupposes and reinforces a separation in their consciousness between what is "false" (in their behavior and writing) and what is "true." Their sense of self, therefore, suffers from a partial lack of integration with itself, a lack of un-mediated "wholeness" and self-certainty, corresponding to the split between their inner self/behavior and the self/behavior they present to others.

Freud believed that the pathological is a clue to the "ordinary," the "healthy." They exist on a continuum; there is no radical separation between mental health and mental ill-health. This Freudian belief supports my claim that John Brown and ET represent different places in a continuum from complete authenticity or self-certainty—as manifested, for instance, in an infant's consciousness, in which there is no self-awareness, no self–other division—to, perhaps, schizophrenia, if R. D. Laing's interpretation of schizophrenia is right. One could also say that ET is more authentic, less mediated by critical self-consciousness, less intensely "aware of [itself] as an object of someone else's observation," than many postmodern intellectuals, whose writings are saturated with compulsive self-consciousness. The writer David Foster Wallace is a good example of such an intellectual; so is Samuel Beckett, even Sylvia Plath—writers whose works testify to the cultural and personal insecurity that exists in this age.

The question arises, then, as to the *causes* of these various degrees of self-insecurity and inauthenticity. What factors caused Brown to be more self-certain than the Transcendentalists, and why were they more self-certain than many contemporary intellectuals are? To answer this question we have to look at the social environments in which these people grew up, the environments that formed them.

John Brown matured in the wilderness, on the frontier. Much of his youth was spent in Ohio, working at his father's tannery, living in the log cabin his father had built. These were rough conditions; his family never—throughout his life, in fact—transcended its poverty. Moreover, Brown's parents were severe with him, readily punishing and whipping him for his wild behavior.[2] He did not feel unloved, though. Quite the contrary. His mother died when he was eight, but he cherished her memory. His parents were also extremely devout Calvinists, a characteristic that they would pass on to their son. He grew up to be a stern, self-confident, commanding figure who disliked "'vain and frivolous' conversation and people."[3] Almost the entirety of his life would be lived in outposts in the wilderness, be they in Kansas, Ohio, or upstate New York.

Emerson and Thoreau, by contrast, spent most of their lives in or around Boston, Massachusetts. They both studied at Harvard and taught school briefly afterwards. Their continuous contact with civilization is reflected in their writings, which preach a return to nature, a rejection of laws and institutions that conflict with one's conscience, a reliance on *intuition* rather than established religion or anything predominantly social in character. The individual should, in a sense, have priority over society. In short, they were firmly convinced that society was corrupting, that it was false, sometimes evil, and that if the individual was not careful, *its* falsity could become *his* falsity.

The main reasons they had such an adverse reaction to "society" are also the main causes of their inauthenticity relative to Brown. Quite simply, modern society structurally imposes *roles* on people, modes of behavior they have to adopt if they are to survive the hustle and bustle and not become social outcasts. Social structures constrain one's freedom. Moreover, they fragment the populace, atomize people, make

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[1] Comparisons between Thoreau's journal and his "Plea for Captain John Brown" support that point. In the journal his wording was often stronger than in his speech, evidently because he thought his audience wouldn't appreciate his more strongly worded sentiments. The apposite portion of the journal is available at http://www.library.ucsb.edu/thoreau/writings_journals_pdfs/J15f4-f6.pdf.

[2] Reynolds, op. cit., 32.

[3] Ibid., 36.

them strangers to one another, which ultimately makes them mutually suspicious.[1] The end-result is mass insecurity and self-consciousness. The necessity to spend most of one's time playing various roles, worrying about people's reactions to one's behavior, worrying if one is fulfilling the designated roles properly, and so on, can have destructive implications with respect to one's sense of self. An individual may even *lose* his sense of himself, which is to say he no longer knows who he is. Emerson and Thoreau probably did not suffer from this pathology, but their emphasis on the individual's need to "trust himself" shows at least that they were not strangers to the modern problem of a loss of identity.

Brown, however, *was* a stranger to this problem because he was not formed by the social structures of American city-life. His identity was forged on the frontier, where it was unnecessary to adopt a plethora of identity-confusing "roles." He was raised by strict Calvinists and he became a single-minded Calvinist. His world was not ambiguous.

To be sure, his innate psychological endowment obviously had a lot to do with his character. But so did his background. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the differences between his background and Emerson's (and Thoreau's) partly determined the differences between their characters.

The foregoing reflections have a number of implications that might stimulate further thought. For instance, it would seem that societies, at least as "ideal-types," necessarily evolve in the direction of encouraging greater and greater inauthenticity amongst their denizens, inasmuch as they tend to proceed from a relatively primitive, "natural" state of little social differentiation or "role-playing" to an increasingly "civilized" state of economic and social coercion in the form of interwoven norms and roles—roles that emerge from the evolving state of technology, of the division of labor, of urban centers, of social structures. It would make sense, then, to call a society "self-conscious" or "inauthentic" to the degree that its institutions and social relations were such as to promote these traits in its inhabitants, i.e. to encourage the latter to adjust their behavior in light of how they see themselves and think they are seen by others (which is just to put on an *act*[2]).

Alternatively, one might approach the Transcendentalists' writings in terms of what they reveal about, e.g., the self-consciousness of certain sectors of American culture at certain times, and how that self-consciousness evolved towards greater self-doubt and despair—as well as the social causes that might have led to such an evolution in the 1840s, '50s, and '60s. Similarly, one might examine John Brown's writings as clues to how a relatively "authentic" person thinks and acts in given social conditions. They are clues to the mental structure of a certain kind of person.

Such investigations, however, lie beyond the purview of this paper. My purpose has been only to sketch a few telling differences between the characters of John Brown and his Transcendentalist admirers, and to speculate on why they so admired him. It appears, in the end, that their admiration was evoked by one thing above all: their sense that he was a more "genuine man" than they. —The cult of masculinity and the cult of authenticity overlap.

*

Here are victims of redaction, redacted because I would've spent tens of pages precisifying them:

I will argue that societies, at least as "ideal-types," progress from a primitive sort of authenticity to greater and greater degrees of inauthenticity, or alienation and anxious self-consciousness, and then transcend these conflicts to reach a higher level of "authenticity," which again succumbs to enervating self-consciousness and disintegration, and so on. Yet this conflict-ridden evolution is a story of continuous progress, of *development*; there is never a simple return to an earlier stage. Individuals—at least, those

[1] See Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979) for an insightful discussion of all these themes.

[2] The act may deceive the actor himself, but it nevertheless retains some of its 'act-ive' character as long as the actor adjusts his behavior—perhaps involuntarily—in response to a discrepancy between how he perceives himself and how he wants to be perceived (by himself and others).

individuals who are intelligent and sensitive enough to have the capacity for continuous development—experience a similar evolution throughout their lives, evolving from a state of wholeness to partial disintegration to a higher-level (i.e., more self-conscious and multifaceted) wholeness to a higher-level disintegration, etc. Later on I'll discuss Brown and his nineteenth-century admirers from the perspective of this Hegelian theory I've laid out.

If the theory, incidentally, seems confused or meaningless, it might seem less so if one considers the history of American culture. In the 1820s and '30s, for example, popular literature included James Fenimore Cooper's tales of the frontier, Washington Irving's short stories, Edgar Allan Poe's stories, and some of Emerson's essays; in the 1850s there were such works as *The Scarlet Letter*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Leaves of Grass*, *Walden*, and Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener." In three or four decades, then, we can see that the society had become more self-conscious and self-critical, as reflected in its literature. With Cooper it was lost in romantic adventures involving Indians on the frontier; with *Walden* it was critiquing itself, turning away from itself in weariness, and with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* it was condemning its own institution of slavery. *Leaves of Grass*, too, represented a growing national self-consciousness, which however had not yet reached a mature "anxiety." In "Song of Myself," for example, Whitman experimented with different voices, different identities—"I am large, I contain multitudes"—thereby celebrating both America's diversity and its self-conscious unity. This cultural self-consciousness was still, on the whole, strong and healthy, like Whitman's poetry—susceptible, indeed, to self-doubt and self-weariness, but not nearly as much as it would be a century later. After the Civil War and Reconstruction there was a rich, vibrant period of literary realism, naturalism and satire: this was the age of Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and then Henry James, Stephen Crane, Kate Chopin, etc. The country was increasingly self-conscious and self-critical but still basically integrated with itself in all its multifaceted permutations, not yet "disintegrated."

But if we jump ahead half-a-century and more—broadening our scope to Western culture as a whole—we find, e.g., Jean-Paul Sartre, Bertolt Brecht, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, Arthur Miller, Allen Ginsberg, Sylvia Plath, and so on. Avant-garde everywhere. By now, the culture (especially the "avant-garde" of culture) was plagued by anxiety, debilitating self-consciousness and self-doubt, fragmentedness, disintegration, alienation. To quote Susan Sontag, it "had entered, really entered, the age of nihilism."[1]

Strictly speaking, of course, it is not legitimate to ascribe properties like "self-conscious," "anxious" and so forth to an entire *society* or *culture*; by definition, only an individual can have such properties. Nevertheless, in a metaphorical sense it is not absurd to say that a society is full of anxiety and inauthenticity. What one is saying is that the majority of the population has these traits—or perhaps a better translation would be that the institutions and social relations of the society encourage these traits in individuals. The *roles* that are structurally imposed on people impel them into pathologies of behavior and consciousness, pathologies manifested in "culture."

December 14, 15

Reading Max Scheler's *Ressentiment*, his commentary on Nietzsche's theory. The editor paraphrases Scheler's definition:

> *Ressentiment* denotes an attitude which arises from a cumulative repression of feelings of hatred, revenge, envy and the like. When such feelings can be acted out, no *ressentiment* results. But when a person is unable to release these feelings against the persons or groups evoking them, thus developing a sense of impotence, and when these feelings are continuously re-experienced over time, then *ressentiment* arises. *Ressentiment* leads to a tendency to degrade, to "reduce" genuine values as well as their bearers. As distinct from

[1] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1966), 311.

> rebellion, *ressentiment* does not lead to an affirmation of counter-values since *ressentiment*-imbued persons secretly crave the values they publicly denounce.

Scheler also argues that "particular places in the social structure are peculiarly apt to produce *ressentiment*. *Ressentiment* emerges not from native impulses but from specific positions in the social structure in which men are variously placed." The feminine role, for instance, insofar as it is supposed to be passive and accepting, has a greater affinity for *ressentiment* than the masculine role. "When women reject certain masculine values which they secretly crave they may be said to be engaging in *ressentiment* behavior."

It seems like we're talking merely about *bitterness*, *rancor*, or a long-term version of these feelings. But even if that's true, Nietzsche's analysis counts as an important discovery.

Bernard Madoff: Wall Street dude arrested yesterday who swindled people out of $50 billion. It doesn't please me that a lot of ordinary middle-class people were victims, but it *does* please me that a bunch of wealthy New York socialites are in the doghouse now. Is that because of *ressentiment*? In a much-diluted way, perhaps yes. A slight underlying bitterness, dissatisfaction, rancor directed against Life or Society or People. Remember, though, that the label "*ressentiment*" isn't the point; the point is to understand the psychological dynamics suggested by the label.

Schadenfreude isn't always a product of *ressentiment*. (Am I understanding the term right?)

"Relative deprivation" (a sociological term): "privation is felt to be painful only in reference to others who are seen as possessing the prized values." (Desire is mediated by consciousness of the other.) When you're unhappy you want others to be unhappy. If equality of unhappiness is established, you're not so unhappy anymore. And you have little or no *ressentiment* anymore. You want to be equal to or better than others because self-esteem is mediated by consciousness of the other's attitude (implicit or explicit) towards you. If the other doesn't respect you, you can't respect yourself—because you are the other (or the other is *part* of you[1]).

The word in French: "First of all, *ressentiment* is the repeated experiencing and reliving of a particular emotional response reaction against someone else. The continual reliving of the emotion sinks it more deeply into the center of the personality, but concomitantly removes it from the person's zone of action and expression. It is not a mere intellectual recollection of the emotion and of the events to which it 'responded'—it is a re-experiencing of the emotion itself, a renewal of the original feeling. Secondly, the word implies that the quality of this emotion is negative. …suppressed wrath, independent of the ego's activity, which moves obscurely through the mind. It finally takes shape through the repeated reliving of intentionalities of hatred or other hostile emotions…"

"…Thirst for revenge is the most important source of *ressentiment*. As we have seen, the very term '*ressentiment*' indicates that we have to do with reactions which presuppose the previous apprehension of another person's state of mind. The desire for revenge—in contrast with all active and aggressive impulses, be they friendly or hostile—is also such a reactive impulse." Cf. what I wrote above.

The thirst for revenge, envy, the impulse to detract, spite, schadenfreude, malice, and finally *ressentiment* are all unnatural impulses/feelings. Impulses that are not spontaneous—that instead *poison*, that *rankle*—are unnatural, in that they arise from excessive, or "civilized," self-consciousness and individuation. They're perversions of natural feelings/impulses. Anger and violent rage are natural, being-annoyed is natural; prolonged hatred isn't. (What *is* hatred? Just an amalgam of such feelings as envy and the desire for revenge? Sometimes "repulsion"? What is repulsion specifically?) There are two main kinds of violence in nature: the violence of securing food, and the violence of spontaneous, 'immediate' impulses of ill-will. Civilization (in the loosest sense) has given us the violence of revenge, etc. Bottled up, simmering, rankling, then a violent act to release it. Same with malice.

Ressentiment: essentially *diffuse*? Partly or wholly unconscious.

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[1] I don't mean that *others*, that *other people*, are part of you. I mean the "Other" is. Other people are instantiations of the "Other" in you. But the Other is also outside you, realized in (or as) these people.

I can't think of anyone I hate. I would surely hate a lot of Washington politicians if I knew them. Repulsion. Disgust at their arrogance and hypocrisy. But what is disgust? There would also be a desire for revenge, or a sort of bitterness or *ressentiment*, at being ignored by strong personalities. This would in fact be the main reason for my hate, since hate is necessarily directed at someone you think (unconsciously, if need be) has done you wrong.

Important insight: With revenge and *ressentiment*, "the injured person always places himself on the same level as his injurer. A slave who has a slavish nature and accepts his status does not desire revenge when he is injured by his master…" There isn't much *ressentiment* in a society with sharply divided classes, like old India, because there is no equating of oneself with people in a higher class (or caste). But in modern society there is, because, according to Scheler, equality is a universally acknowledged right and yet inequality abounds.

The French Revolution and *ressentiment*. Killing off the nobility. Revenge. Insofar as social movements are propelled by these motives, they're propelled simply by the desire for recognition. And then "*ressentiment*" intersects with Axel Honneth's book.

December 16

My investment in vegetables is already paying off: I'm happier and more energetic. More "noble," as in "free of bitterness." Aside from eating oranges and bananas during the day, each night I cook myself a burger topped with cabbage, onions, carrots, tomato-slices and cheese—can barely get my mouth around it—and I eat celery with peanut butter. PB&J sandwiches every night too, as always. Soon I'll be adding more vegetables.

The elderly: *ressentiment* against youth. Tertullian: the sight of Roman governors burning in hell is one of the chief sources of heavenly beatitude. Christian *ressentiment*. (Scheler disagrees with Nietzsche's verdict on Christianity, but he agrees about Tertullian.) The romantic type of mind, romantic nostalgia for a past age: *ressentiment*, at least when the nostalgia is based on a wish to escape from the present rather than on a direct love of the values of the earlier period.

"The formal structure of *ressentiment* expression is always the same: *A* is affirmed, valued, and praised not for its own intrinsic quality, but with the unverbalized intention of denying, devaluating, and denigrating *B*." But then there's an element of *ressentiment* in everyone. For instance, I said above that when one is satisfied by a Democratic victory, a reason for the satisfaction is the Republican loss. Schadenfreude.

"To its very core, the mind of *ressentiment* man is filled with envy, the impulse to detract, malice, and secret vindictiveness. These affects have become fixed attitudes, detached from all determinate objects. Independently of his will, this man's attention will be instinctively drawn by all events which can set these affects in motion… Therefore such phenomena as joy, splendor, power, happiness, fortune, and strength magically attract the man of *ressentiment*. He can't pass by, he has to look at them, whether he 'wants' to or not. But at the same time he wants to avert his eyes, for he is tormented by the craving to possess them and knows that his desire is vain." Scheler says that this man devalues, denigrates what he really desires as a way to reduce the "tension between desire and impotence." "We have a tendency to overcome any strong tension between desire and impotence by depreciating or denying the positive value of the desired object. At times, indeed, we go so far as to extol another object which is somehow opposed to the first." The book is full of such acute observations.

It's "tension," yes. But another way to say it is in terms of recognition (self-confirmation). A "tense" state of mind is in a state of insufficient self-confirmation. To remedy that, you [i.e., as a man of *ressentiment*] make yourself value something different, something that you already have or that is easier to acquire or is opposed to whatever it is that's responsible for your lack of self-confirmation.

Anyway, the story continues. The man of *ressentiment* comes to hate the very essence, the existence, of the strong, happy, rich, beautiful person. The latter's existence is a reproach to this man. The last stage of *ressentiment*, the stage after this consuming hatred, is when the man turns values themselves

upside-down because he can't justify or even understand his own life in terms of such values as health and freedom. (E. A. Poe comes to mind.) So he comes to feel that "all this is vain anyway" and that salvation lies in poverty, suffering, illness and death. If this stage goes on long enough—in particular, if it spreads through a society—there is no longer a need for revenge against the strong, handsome, rich man because he is in fact pitiable, beset with "evils." "His sight now awakens feelings of gentleness, pity, and commiseration." And as the generations are taught this new morality, the strong people, the "masters," become infected, plagued with a "bad conscience" because they aren't, um, weak enough.

December 17

In Scheler, resentment and *ressentiment* bleed into one another. The former is properly more specific, the latter more general, and Scheler recognizes this; but some of his examples of *ressentiment* are merely examples of resentment. This is understandable, though: even in their strictest senses, the two concepts cannot be absolutely distinguished from one another.

Scheler's comparison of the ancient and the Christian conceptions of love is illuminating. I'll quote at length.

> [With the Greek and Roman philosophers and poets,] logical form, law, justice—in short, the element of measure and equality in the distribution of goods and evils—are superior to love. Even though Plato, in the *Symposium* for example, establishes great differences in value between the various kinds of love, in Greek eyes the whole phenomenon of "love" belongs to the domain of the senses. It is a form of "desire," of "need," etc., which is foreign to the most perfect kind of being. This view is the natural corollary of the extremely questionable ancient division of human nature into "reason" and "sensuality," into a part that is formative and one that is formed. In the sphere of Christian morality, on the other hand, love is explicitly placed above the rational domain—love "that makes more blessed than reason" (Augustine). This comes out quite clearly in the parable of the prodigal son. "*Agape*" and "*caritas*" are sharply and dualistically separated from "*eros*" and "*amor*," whereas the Greeks and Romans…rather see a continuity between these types of love… The most important difference between the ancient and Christian views of love lies in the *direction of its movement*. All ancient philosophers, poets, and moralists agree that love is a striving, an aspiration of the "lower" toward the "higher," the "unformed" toward the "formed," "appearance" towards "essence,"…a "mean between fullness and privation," as Plato says in the *Symposium*… [Expressions in metaphysics:] Already Plato says: "We would not love if we were Gods." For the most perfect form of being cannot know "aspiration" or "need." Here love is only a road to something else, a "*methodos*." And according to Aristotle, in all things there is rooted an upward urge towards the deity, the Nous, the self-sufficient thinker who "moves" the world as "prime mover."… The universe is a great chain of dynamic spiritual entities, of forms of being ranging from the "prima materia" up to man—a chain in which the lower strives for and is attracted by the higher, which never turns back but aspires upward in its turn. This process continues up to the deity, which itself does not love, but represents the eternally unmoving and unifying *goal* of all these aspirations of love. Too little attention has been given to the peculiar relation between this idea of love and the principle of the "agon," the ambitious contest for the goal, which dominated Greek life in all its aspects—from the Gymnasium and the games to dialectics and the political life of the Greek city-states. Even the objects try to surpass each other in a race for victory, in a cosmic "agon" for the deity. Here the prize that will crown the victor is extreme: it is a participation in the essence, knowledge, and abundance of "being." Love is only the dynamic principle, immanent in the universe, which sets in motion this great "agon" of all things for the deity.

> [In the Christian conception of love] there takes place what might be called a *reversal in the movement of love*. The Christian view boldly denies the Greek axiom that love is an aspiration of the lower towards the higher. On the contrary, now the criterion of love is that the nobler stoops to the vulgar, the healthy to the sick…the good and saintly to the bad and common, the Messiah to the sinners and publicans. The Christian is not afraid, like the ancient, that he might lose something by doing so, that he might impair his own nobility. He acts in the peculiarly pious conviction that through this "condescension," through this self-abasement and "self-renunciation," he gains the highest good and becomes equal to God… God is no longer the eternal unmoving goal for the love of all things… Now the very *essence* of God is to love and serve. [Scheler says that "the later theological thesis according to which God has created the world 'for his glorification' is foreign to the spirit of the Gospel. It is an element of ancient philosophy which has entered Christian theology."] An event that is monstrous for the man of antiquity, that is absolutely paradoxical according to his axioms, is supposed to have taken place in Galilee: God spontaneously "descended" to man, became a servant, and died the bad servant's death on the cross! Now the precept of loving good and hating evil, loving one's friend and hating one's enemy, becomes meaningless. There is no longer any "highest good" independent of and beyond the *act* and movement of love! Love itself is the highest of all goods!… Indeed, the achievements of love are only symbols and proofs of its *presence in the person*… But there is another great innovation: in the Christian view, love is a non-sensuous act of the *spirit* (not a mere state of feeling, as for the moderns), but it is nevertheless not a striving and desiring, and even less a need. These acts consume themselves in the realization of the desired goal. Love, however, *grows* in its action… Whenever I see badness in another, I must feel partly guilty, for I must say to myself: "Would that man be bad if you had loved him enough?" In the Christian view, *sensuous* sympathy—together with its root in our most powerful impulse—is not the source, but the partial *blockage* of love. Therefore not only positive wrongdoing, but even the failure to love is "guilt." Indeed, it is *the* guilt at the bottom of all guiltiness.
>
> Thus the picture has shifted immensely. There is no longer a band of men nd things that surpass each other in striving up to the deity. It is a band in which every member looks back toward those who are further removed from God and comes to resemble the deity by helping and serving them.

According to Scheler, *ressentiment* can indeed result in a Christian-like celebration of the weak. But true Christian love is "motivated by a feeling of security, strength, and inner salvation, of the invincible fullness of one's own life." One is *rich* enough to share one's being. A good example of this personality-type would be the Dalai Lama. Such a man "does not love sickness and poverty but what is *behind* them [i.e., the positive phenomena that are still there], and his help is directed *against* these evils." St. Francis kisses festering wounds and refuses to kill bugs that bite him not because he's perverted but because he has overcome his nausea through a feeling of life and vigor. The opposite of this attitude is that of "recent modern realism in art and literature," in which social misery is described, wallowed in—"a typical *ressentiment* phenomenon." Something bug-like is seen in everything that lives, whereas St. Francis sees something holy even in the bug.

All these ideas are valuable. You shouldn't be put off by the undercurrent of contempt that mars Scheler's discussion of *ressentiment*: the analysis needn't imply value-judgments. "Great" people can be partially motivated by a diffuse rancor and resentment. *Ressentiment* isn't *bad*, it's just something that exists—in almost everyone, to varying degrees.

I could go on quoting forever. With ancient love, says Scheler, there is a little anxiety, since the noble fears the descent to the less noble. The true Christian, though, is too certain of himself to have this fear.

Another thing: Christian love doesn't consist in the desire to help or even in "benevolence." Rather, it's "immersed in positive value," and helping is only a consequence of it. Altruism, socialism and such are very different from Christian love: they are means to an end, whereas in Christianity, love is the end. —It goes without saying that "true Christianity" is not the Christianity of the masses. It also goes without saying that Scheler's discussion isn't very *realistic*. All the falsely clear-cut distinctions he makes between personality-types, and the account of "spiritual love," and his psychologism.

A general question: what's the relation between love and desire? This is surprisingly difficult to answer. Does love merely *entail* desire, or *is* it a kind of desire? What does it say about these concepts and experiences that such a basic question is well-nigh unanswerable?

I had to revise my long paper, cut out the non-Europe parts. After writing the following I mostly cut-and-pasted the rest:

Evaluating the Muslim "Threat" in Europe

The problems of Muslim integration in Europe are often treated as proof of Samuel Huntington's thesis of a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West. Writers more sophisticated than Huntington[1] might not explicitly draw the Huntingtonian conclusion, but it hovers around the margins of their work all the same.[2] Western popular culture, on the other hand, is saturated with it, i.e. with the demonization of Muslims in Europe and around the world.[3] This is not surprising in the age of a "war on terror." It is, however, unfortunate, because the difficulties of Muslim integration into the "liberal world order" are less usefully thought of as exemplifying a clash of civilizations than as arising out of particular socioeconomic conditions faced by many Muslims. The focus of this paper will be on such conditions in Europe. Specifically, I will argue that Muslim immigrants are probably not the "huge long-term threat to Europe"[4] that they might appear to be.

That they *appear* to be so is true. European suspicion towards Muslims is understandable. First of all, Islamist terrorism has increased since 9/11. Terrorist attacks occurred in London on July 7, 2005; Theo van Gogh was murdered by a Muslim man in 2004; Danish cartoons of Mohammed ignited rage in 2006, though no terrorist attacks resulted; and in 2006 an ambitious terrorist plot was uncovered involving planes leaving London's Heathrow airport. The proportion of European Muslims involved in such activity is, of course, extremely low: counterterrorism officials estimate that 1 to 2 percent of European Muslims are involved in some type of extremist activity (which isn't necessarily violent).[5] This fact, however, is not necessarily comforting, since even a few dozen terrorists can inflict great damage.

Moreover, the above-mentioned incidents do not convey the full extent of terrorist activity in Europe. In 2008 alone, authorities broke up a terrorist cell in Barcelona, arresting ten men who were plotting an attack on Barcelona's subway; Spanish police arrested eight Algerian men who were members of "Al Qaeda in the Maghreb," a group that had recently claimed responsibility for bombings in Algeria; ten suspected terrorists were arrested in France, the Netherlands and Germany; German police foiled an attempt by two men to bomb a plane;[6] and 14 people with ties to Al Qaeda were arrested in Belgium.[7] In 2007,

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[1] For succinct criticisms of Huntington, see the following: Edward Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," *The Nation* (Oct. 4, 2001); Sandra Buckley, "Remaking the World Order: Reflections on Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*," *Theory & Event* 2, No. 4 (1998); Carl Gershman, "The Clash within Civilizations," *Journal of Democracy* 8, No. 4 (October 1997).

[2] See, for example, Robert Leiken, "Europe's Angry Muslims," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2005). More egregious is Bernard Lewis, "Islam and Europe" (Washington, D.C.: The AEI Press, 2007).

[3] See, e.g., Robert Spencer, *Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2003); and Bruce Bawer, *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam Is Destroying the West from Within* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).

[4] "Forget Asylum-Seekers: It's the People Inside Who Count," *Economist*, May 8, 2003.

[5] Timothy Savage, "Europe and Islam: Crescent Waxing, Cultures Clashing," *Washington Quarterly* 27, No. 3 (2004).

[6] http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/article.aspx?id=3007.

[7] "Belgium arrests 14 in anti-terrorism sweep," *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 2008.

"Europe saw four failed and attempted Islamist terrorist attacks. The UK experienced two failed attacks, while Denmark and Germany both reported one attempted attack each."[1] The EU member states reported that 201 terrorist suspects had been arrested in 2007; in 2006, the number was 257. Many more individuals, though, are under investigation: in 2007, for example, the United Kingdom reported that at least 2000 people posed a direct threat to its national security.[2]

Terrorism is not the only cause for concern. The European public has also been appalled by reports of women's ill-treatment in a minority of Muslim communities. Such practices as forced marriages, arranged marriages, "honor killings" (in which a woman is killed, usually by her family members, for having somehow sacrificed her "honor"), and genital mutilation have stolen newspaper headlines and given fuel to right-wing politicians who decry immigration. Reliable statistics on these phenomena are not available, but in Germany there were at least 47 honor killings of women from 2000 to 2006, while in the United Kingdom, 18 out of 22 domestic homicides in 2005 were classified as "murder in the name of so-called 'honor.'"[3] Tens of thousands of European-born Muslim women are annually forced into marriages in their family's home countries,[4] and approximately 500,000 girls and women in Europe are said to be at risk of genital mutilation.[5] These practices were not so common twenty years ago; they have resulted largely from the recent embrace of radical Islam by Muslim men, the causes of which we shall investigate shortly. But they have led people like Seyran Ates, a Turkish-German women's rights activist, to conclude that "two societies with two different value systems live side by side, but separate from one another."[6]

The human rights violations carried out in Islam's name have given many Europeans a negative view of Islam and its believers. The Pew Research Center reported in September of 2008 that, among the respondents to its polls (1000 people in each country), 52% in Spain, 50% in Germany, 46% in Poland, 38% in France, and 23% in Great Britain had negative views of Muslims.[7] More concretely, a 2003 Ipsos poll in France indicated that 62% of the French population thought the values of Islam were incompatible with those of France, while 25% of French Muslims—and *75%* of those under the age of 25—shared that view.[8] (The European values in question seem to be those of "gender equality; sexual liberalization; and the principles of compromise, egalitarianism, and identification with the state."[9])

Demographic data are even more striking than polling data. According to the U.S. Department of State's *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom 2003*, there are more than 23 million Muslims in Europe, almost 5% of Europe's population. Timothy Savage summarizes other statistics: […]

One would be forgiven for concluding on the basis of such data that Europe is indeed facing a "huge long-term threat."

In addition to the terrorism, the radicalization of disenchanted Muslim youth, the violations of women's rights, and the exponential rise of Europe's Muslim population, many non-Muslim Europeans are disturbed by the simple physical transformation brought about by Arabs and Muslims living in cities and suburban neighborhoods. As the Pew Forum states,

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[1] From the 2008 EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, at http://www.europol.europa.eu/publications/EU_Terrorism_Situation_and_Trend_Report_TE-SAT/TESAT2008.pdf.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Colin Nickerson, "For Muslim women, a deadly defiance: 'honor killings' on rise in Europe," *Boston Globe*, January 16, 2006.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Sophie Poldermans, "Combating Female Genital Mutilation in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of Legislative and Preventative Tools in the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom, and Austria" (2006), available at http://www.stopfgm.net/dox/ SPoldermansFGMinEurope.pdf.
[6] Quoted in a 2008 NPR article at http://www.npr.org/templates/story /story.php?storyId=18234876.
[7] The report is available at http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=262.
[8] Timothy Savage, op. cit.
[9] Ibid.

> it is not uncommon to see women wearing headscarves and men with skull caps and beards. On many European streets, shops now sport signs in Arabic and other Near Eastern languages and sell an array of exotic-looking products from the Middle East and other parts of the Islamic world. Indeed, in the space of a few decades, whole neighborhoods in cities like Birmingham, Rotterdam and Paris have been transformed.[1]

In such circumstances, a rise in xenophobia is virtually inevitable. And in response to xenophobia and discrimination, increased radicalization and self-segregation of Muslim populations occurs—which leads to more xenophobia. The situation is certainly not innocuous.

Let's look more closely, though, at what is happening in Europe. Why do many Muslim communities segregate themselves from the larger population to an even greater extent than other immigrant communities do? Why do they cling to traditional Islamic values? Why has terrorism increased? Barbara Franz gives a succinct, and I think correct, answer: "Europe's current Islamic alienation…is more about Marx than Mohammad or bin Laden."[2] It is more about political and socioeconomic alienation than religion per se.

In fact, if one attributes immigrants' lack of societal integration mainly to their *religion*, or to their "*culture*," as conservative commentators like Huntington do, then pessimism is a natural attitude. For "culture" is conceptualized as "tradition," "the weight of tradition," the traditions that have descended through century after century down to the present day, by which time they are so hoary as to be virtually embedded (supposedly) in the people, indeed in the "race." Culturalism is not far from racialism, which is not far from racism. As the story goes, people in a particular region of the world—in this case, North Africa and the Middle East—acquired a long time ago, in some primeval past, something called "a culture," which has stayed with them nearly unchanged for centuries and millennia just because cultures are the sorts of things that are very hard to change. The longer they exist, the harder it is to change them. By virtue of mere "cultural inertia,"[3] traditions pass from generation to generation passively, like the ebb and flow of time itself. There is little room for human agency in this history: one grows up in a cultural atmosphere, soaks it up like a sponge, and passes it on to one's descendants. So now, in the twenty-first century, an Arab or Middle Easterner necessarily has this tremendous cultural burden simply because he comes from North Africa or the Middle East. He cannot be other than he is; it is virtually in his blood. Therefore, if he emigrates to Europe or some Western region he will necessarily come into conflict with it: a "clash of cultures," a "clash of civilizations," will result, and Armageddon will come to pass.

The reality, of course, is not so simple. A "culture," insofar as it makes sense to speak of such a thing, is not some sort of *fog* that hangs over a piece of land or a group of people, something that one *breathes in*, so to speak, "automatically." Nor is it a *monolithic thing*. "Cultural values" are not unchanging Platonic Forms (*pace* Huntington and Bernard Lewis); they are essentially mere extrapolations from how a given group of people behave in specific material conditions. There is no such thing as "cultural inertia" in the strict sense; and the passing of a way of life from one generation to the next is not so unproblematic or automatic as one might think. To maintain "cultural traditions"—i.e., particular ways of living—amongst a populace even for a few years requires active indoctrination, violent suppression of dissent, the promulgation of laws and their enforcement, manipulation of information reaching the masses, censorship, constant repetition of particular images and sound-bites, the establishment and maintenance of a specific curriculum in schools, the self-monitoring of the individual, and so on. It is by no means an inevitable or passive process. It is especially not inevitable if people have emigrated from the society whose social structures helped sustain the "cultural values" in question and now live in a completely different society, where there is enormous pressure to adopt new social roles, new value-systems, new ways of interacting

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[1] "An Uncertain Road: Muslims and the Future of Europe." http://pewforum.org/ publications/reports/ muslims-europe-2005.pdf.

[2] Barbara Franz, "Europe's Muslim Youth: An Inquiry into the Politics of Discrimination, Relative Deprivation, and Identity Formation," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 18, No. 1 (2007).

[3] Barrington Moore, *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 486.

with others. If, nevertheless, after two or three generations of living in the new society, many people aggressively hold on to the traditions of their old culture, one cannot simply say, "Oh, it's just because they're Muslims, it's part of their *culture* to have honor killings, to wear the veil, to embrace jihad, to suppress women's rights." This is not an explanation. There are *specific reasons* why many Muslims in Europe—but only a minority—have decided to make a supreme effort to maintain their old ways of life and fight Western practices.

To understand these reasons it is necessary, first of all, to understand the social conditions of certain Muslim communities in Europe. Consider the United Kingdom. It has about 1.6 million Muslims (out of a population of nearly 60 million),[1] most of whom live in segregated communities in deprived urban areas. Nearly half live in and around London. On the whole, these communities are plagued by poverty, overcrowded housing, poor health, low educational qualifications, and high unemployment. The current unemployment rate for Muslim men is nearing 40 percent, with economic inactivity at 50 percent. One-third of British Muslim children live in households where none of the adults is employed, households where depressive attitudes prevail, where the social circles are narrow and conservative.

France has about 6 million Muslims, who constitute 10% of its population.[2] Muslim enclaves in the country have a 30% unemployment rate amongst 21- to 29-year-olds, while incomes are 75% below the average. French prisons hold nine times more young men with North African fathers than ones with French fathers. Germany has almost 3.5 million Muslims, most of whom are Turkish. The Turkish community has an unemployment rate of 24%—almost two and a half times the national average—while 50% in urban centers live in "financially precarious circumstances." Immigrants' educational qualifications also tend to be substantially lower than those of the general population.[3]

In short, Muslim immigrant communities are usually poorer and less educated than the rest of the population. This isn't surprising. Most of the communities derive originally from guest-worker programs established after World War II, when Europe needed foreign labor to help rebuild the continent. Like Mexican enclaves in the United States, they began in poverty and have not yet, after two or three generations, transcended their poverty.[4] This is not due to laziness. To a large extent, it results from discrimination. A 2005 study in Belgium that monitored job-seekers of foreign origin for three months found that 50% of them experienced discrimination during their applications.[5] In the United Kingdom, several studies have found that "the presence of educational qualifications for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis does not reduce the probability of unemployment to as great an extent as it does for other groups."[6]

[…]

December 18

Scheler distinguishes between Christian love and modern "humanitarianism" or "love of mankind." He agrees with Nietzsche that these modern phenomena arise out of *ressentiment*. The Christian "love of one's neighbor" is not love of mankind; it is directed not at the sum total of humans but at *individuals*, the "'nearest' visible beings who are alone capable of that deeper penetration into the layer of spiritual personality which is the highest form of love."

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[1] The information in this paragraph comes from Javaid Rehman, "Islam, 'War on Terror' and the Future of Muslim Minorities in the United Kingdom: Dilemmas of Multiculturalism in the Aftermath of the London Bombings," *Human Rights Quarterly* 29, No. 4 (2007).

[2] I've taken the following information from Barbara Franz, op. cit.

[3] The EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program's report on Muslims in Germany can be viewed at http://www.eumap.org/topics/minority/reports/eumuslims/background_reports/download/germany/germany.pdf.

[4] Robert Leiken, "Europe's Immigration Problem, and Ours," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 15, No. 4 (2004).

[5] See the 2006 report published by the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia, at http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/ar06/AR06-P2-EN.pdf.

[6] From The Open Society Institute's 2007 report on the United Kingdom: http://www.eumap.org/topics/minority/reports/eumuslims/background_reports/download/uk/uk.pdf.

Christianity is on a different level, so to speak, than democracy or egalitarianism. It doesn't advocate a social revolution: give to Caesar what is Caesar's, etc. Scheler thinks that modern political and social ideologies have almost nothing in common with Christianity, though superficially they seem similar. He has a point. But he takes it too far.

Though I disagree with Nietzsche about a lot, I sympathize with his suspicion toward belief-systems that emphasize transcendence, that deprecate this world in favor of a higher one. That attitude evinces a self-consciousness about man's place in the universe; it demonstrates an awareness of *divisions*, such as between man and nature, man and society, man and himself, low and high. It isn't *naïve*. It's "inauthentic." Nietzsche wanted authenticity and naïveté.

Incidentally, to the extent that it makes sense to talk about "declining life," "decadence" and so forth, a good criterion for applying those concepts is the relative presence or absence of inauthenticity, self-consciousness, anxiety, disintegration, etc. But what the analyst really needs is intuitive powers.

Glenn Gould was probably right that Bachian polyphony and contrapuntalism is on a higher spiritual (and intellectual) plane than later homophony, be it in Mozart, Beethoven, or whomever. It's more pure, less emotional—less tainted by association with the earthly. Interweaving of melodic lines enjoyed for its own sake. "God's thinking before he created the world." (Goethe) Ethereal, *transparent* in some indefinable way, *diaphanous*, it exercises your intellect and raises you above yourself. Beethoven is comparatively human. With his music you're more uplifted, but you're less *lifted up*.

Here's an email I sent Dad's friend Rich Pollak.

> I certainly share your enthusiasm for Perahia's Goldberg Variations. It's remarkable. I love his frequent Baroque ornamentations; they add buoyancy and an improvisatory quality. And authenticity. Most of the time I like his tempo, not too slow and not too fast. So, no, you're not "wrong." :)
>
> On the other hand, there's still a "special place in my heart" for Gould's version. Maybe just because I've listened to it dozens of times. But Gould has a unique forcefulness and vigor, arguably even more vigor than Perahia. It's true he lacks Perahia's spontaneity and sparkle. But his recording has an unmatched clarity and brightness. Also, I like his approach of emphasizing the piece's wholeness rather than the discontinuities between each of the variations: in an interview on the CD he says that he carefully maintained a basic "rhythmic pulse" throughout the piece in order to emphasize the harmonic unity that all the variations share. As for "authenticity," he adds his own sort of Baroque ornamentations—trills and appoggiatura that aren't as "light" or "sparkly" as Perahia's but have a more solid, weighty character—and, in addition, he doesn't use the pedal as much as Perahia. This contributes to the recording's clarity. I also love his interpretation of the aria. It's amazingly slow, but that sets it apart nicely from the saturnalia that follows. And then when you hear it again at the end, after the melee that has preceded it, at that slow pace and so quiet, so *diaphanous*, tears come to your eyes. It's a spiritual experience. It's like ecstasy.
>
> The Fritz Reiner CD case doesn't have a CD in it.
>
> Anyway, thanks for the CD. I love Perahia no matter what kind of music he plays. His Schubert, Mendelssohn and Chopin are great too. […]

"Little children and slavish natures have the habit of excusing their acts by asking, 'Have the others not done what I did?' According to *genuine* morality, companionship in badness makes it *worse*, for the badness of imitation and slavishness is added to the badness of the desired *content*." An obvious but little-recognized truth.

Scheler's psychologism goes so far as to blame the emergence of capitalism on *ressentiment!* Still, every chapter in the book contains thought-inspiring passages. And at least they all have the merit of *esprit*, of being philosophically adventuresome. In the last chapter he digresses into vitalism, biology, competing theories of evolution, value theory, metaphysics, a critique of industrialism and consumerism, and more.

It's all very confused and slapdash, but, unlike modern professorial micro-scholarship, it has the merit of being "vital."

Trying to tease apart the causal factors in the rise of any ideology is hopeless. Every ideology spreads due to social structures, environmental factors, and a whole array of psychological influences—negative ones like "*ressentiment*" and positive ones like benevolence and the magnetism of charisma.

Paul Tillich: "The tension between liberalism and democracy explains many traits of American democratic conformism." Suggestive. If you're wondering what this tension is, Tillich states it tersely: "Liberalism and democracy could clash in two ways: liberalism could undermine the democratic control of society or democracy could become tyrannical and a transition to totalitarian collectivism." (From *The Courage To Be*.)

In medieval times: realism vs. nominalism. Universal prior to the individual, or individual prior to the universal? Philosophical reflection of social change: the individual gradually becoming not just an instance of the "universal" but someone in his own right, a thing more real than the universal. Nominalism won.

Winnicott: transitional objects, play, art, culture, the creative life of people, is located in the "potential space" between self and other, or self and reality. My journal is my potential space. The space of my potential. My potential recreation of *space* (the universe). My potential spaceyness. The spatialization of potentiality. The potency of——well, forget it.

A Tillichian observation: In Plato, the soul's spirited element could potentially bridge the cleavage between reason and desire. (Platonically, what's the relation between the *sensual* and the *sensuous*?) But actually Platonism tends to be dualistic.

Two meanings of courage (says Tillich): ethical and ontological. A matter of valuation vs. the universal and essential self-affirmation of one's being. "The courage to be is the ethical act in which man affirms his own being in spite of those elements of his existence which conflict with his essential self-affirmation." Two conceptions of courage: heroic-aristocratic and rational-democratic.

> The aristocratic element in the doctrine of courage was preserved as well as restricted by Aristotle. The motive for withstanding pain and death courageously is, according to him, that it is noble to do so and base not to do so. The courageous man acts "for the sake of what is noble, for that is the aim of virtue." "Noble"…is the translation of *kalós* and "base" is the translation of *aischró*, words which usually are rendered by "beautiful" and "ugly." A beautiful or noble deed is a deed to be praised. Courage does what is to be praised and rejects what is to be despised. One praises that in which a being fulfills its potentialities or actualizes its perfections. Courage is the affirmation of one's essential nature, one's inner aim or *entelechy*, but it is an affirmation which has in itself the character of "in spite of." It includes the possible and, in some cases, the unavoidable sacrifice of elements which also belong to one's being but which, if not sacrificed, would prevent us from reaching our actual fulfillment. This sacrifice may include pleasure, happiness, even one's own existence. In any case it is praiseworthy, because in the act of courage the most essential part of our being prevails against the less essential. [Yes: the desire for recognition prevails against the animal desire for comfort.]… Since the greatest test of courage is the readiness to sacrifice one's life, the soldier's courage was the outstanding example… As long as the aristocracy was the group which carried arms, the aristocratic and the military connotations of courage merged. When the aristocratic tradition disintegrated and courage could be defined as the universal knowledge of what is good and evil, wisdom and courage converged and true courage became distinguished from the soldier's courage. The courage of the dying Socrates was rational-democratic, not heroic-aristocratic. …But the aristocratic line was revived in the early Middle Ages. Courage became again characteristic of nobility… [Cf. Nietzsche's love of the barbarian spirit.]

Is it true that "rational-democratic ethics are a heritage of the Christian-humanistic tradition"? Is it even wholly justified to associate Christianity with humanism? Is it at all meaningful to say that humanism grew out of Christianity? In an obvious sense it is: humanism was reborn in a Christian society. But was that *despite* Christian traditions or (partly) *because* of them? Both, of course. And what's the relation between late-medieval humanism and modern democratic ideologies?

"The spiritual substance of Renaissance humanism was Christian as the spiritual substance of ancient humanism was pagan, in spite of the criticism of the pagan religions by Greek humanism and of Christianity by modern humanism." Good way of expressing it.

December 19

"These are the times that try men's souls." More literally true now than when Thomas Paine said it. Fortunately the human spirit can never die. And so neither can this journal. –Increasingly, its entries are inspired by my pedagogical impulse. I want to spark thought in the minds of future generations (since current generations are beyond redemption).

Stoicism and neo-Stoicism are not just philosophical schools; they are ways that people have "answered the problem of existence and conquered the anxieties of fate and death. Stoicism in this sense is a basic religious attitude, whether it appears in theistic, atheistic, or trans-theistic forms. Therefore it is the only real alternative to Christianity in the Western world." It's true that the Stoic doctrines of the Logos and the natural moral law influenced Christian dogmatics and ethics. "But this large reception of Stoic ideas could not bridge the gap between the acceptance of cosmic resignation in Stoicism and the faith in cosmic salvation in Christianity." I'm a Stoic by temperament but have the Christian's yearning for salvation.

> Stoic courage is not an invention of the Stoic philosophers. They gave it classical expression in rational terms; but its roots go back to mythological stories, legends of heroic deeds, words of early wisdom, poetry and tragedy, and to centuries of philosophy preceding the rise of Stoicism. One event especially gave the Stoics' courage lasting power—the death of Socrates. That became for the whole ancient world both a fact and a symbol. It showed the human situation in the face of fate and death. It showed a courage which could affirm life because it could affirm death. And it brought a profound change in the traditional meaning of courage. In Socrates the heroic courage of the past was made rational and universal. A democratic idea of courage was created as against the aristocratic idea of it. Soldierly fortitude was transcended by the courage of wisdom. In this form it gave "philosophical consolation" [see Boethius] to many people in all sections of the ancient world throughout a period of catastrophes and transformations.
>
> The description of Stoic courage by a man life Seneca shows the interdependence of the fear of death and the fear of life, as well as the interdependence of the courage to die and the courage to live. He points to those who "do not want to live and do not know how to die." He speaks of a *libido moriendi*, the exact Latin term for Freud's "death instinct." He tells of people who feel life as meaningless and superfluous and who, as in the book of Ecclesiastes, say: I cannot do anything new, I cannot see anything new! This, according to Seneca, is a consequence of the acceptance of the pleasure principle or, as he calls it, anticipating a recent American phrase, the "good-time" attitude, which he finds especially in the younger generation. As, in Freud, the death instinct is the negative side of the ever-unsatisfied drives of the libido, so, according to Seneca, the acceptance of the pleasure principle necessarily leads to disgust and despair about life. [Tillich may be misunderstanding Freud.] But Seneca knew (as Freud did) that the inability to affirm life does not imply the ability to affirm death. The anxiety of fate and death controls the lives even of those who have lost the will to live. This shows that the Stoic recommendation of

> suicide is not directed to those who are conquered by life but to those who have conquered life, are able both to live and to die, and can choose freely between them. Suicide as an escape, dictated by fear, contradicts the Stoic courage to be.

Stoic courage is based on the control of reason, i.e. the internalization of the Logos. In their effort to conquer desires and fears, "the Stoics developed a profound doctrine of anxiety which also reminds us of recent analysis. They discovered that the object of fear is fear itself. 'Nothing,' says Seneca, 'is terrible in things except fear itself.' And Epictetus says, 'For it is not death or hardship that is a fearful thing, but the fear of death and hardship.' Our anxiety puts frightening masks over all men and things. If we strip them of these masks their own countenance appears and the fear they produce disappears…" I'm not convinced.

Ancient humanism: Stoicism, renunciation, tragedy of existence, the ambiguity of being (creative *form*, inhibiting *matter*), circular repetition of history (a doctrine resulting from societal stagnation), asceticism, the individual valuable not in himself but as a representative of something universal, e.g. a virtue. Modern humanism (Renaissance, Erasmus, Spinoza, etc.): "being as being is good," not asceticism but active shaping of the material world, belief in progress and creativity, hope, the individual valuable as a unique expression of the universe and irreplaceable. Rejects both Stoic renunciation and Christian salvation. Replaces renunciation by "a kind of self-affirmation which transcends that of the Stoics because it includes the material, historical, and individual existence." Nevertheless, it can be called neo-Stoicism. Spinoza is its representative. For him, everything shares the "courage to be," which is to say that it essentially endeavors to affirm or preserve itself. This is its essence and its particular virtue. That is, "virtue is the power of acting exclusively according to one's true nature. And the degree of virtue is the degree to which somebody is striving for and able to affirm his own being… Self-affirmation is, so to speak, virtue altogether. But self-affirmation is affirmation of one's essential being, and the knowledge of one's essential being is mediated through reason, the power of the soul to have adequate ideas. Therefore to act unconditionally out of virtue is the same as to act under the guidance of reason." Tillich and Spinoza are right that an ideal-typical person, whose mind hasn't been damaged by civilization, will, in acting to confirm his being (which action is the essence of the self), act virtuously and lovingly with others.

"The Self has itself, but at the same time it tries to reach itself." It wants to coincide with itself.

"Insofar as courage is the affirmation of one's self it is virtue altogether."

Anxiety: the state in which a being is aware of its possible non-being. The awareness that non-being is a part of one's own being. The awareness of one's finitude as finitude. Hmm… I guess that's acceptable, though a little simplifying. Cf. what I wrote about "tension" on the 16th.

> …Fear, as opposed to anxiety, has a definite object which can be faced, analysed, attacked, endured. One can act upon it and in acting upon it participate in it—even if in the form of struggle. In this way one can take it into one's self-affirmation [or -confirmation]… But this is not so with anxiety, because anxiety has no object, or rather, in a paradoxical phrase, its object is the negation of every object. Therefore participation, struggle and love with respect to it are impossible… [The *helplessness* of anxiety] expresses itself in loss of direction, inadequate reactions, lack of "intentionality." The reason for this sometimes striking behavior is the lack of an object on which the subject can concentrate… Fear and anxiety are distinguished but not separated. They are immanent within each other: The sting of fear is anxiety, and anxiety strives toward fear…
>
> The fear of death determines the element of anxiety in every fear. Anxiety, if not modified by the fear of an object, anxiety in its nakedness, is always the anxiety of ultimate non-being. Immediately seen, anxiety is the painful feeling of not being able to deal with the threat of a special situation. But a more exact analysis shows that in the anxiety about any special situation, anxiety about the human situation as such is implied. It is the anxiety of not being able to preserve one's own being which underlies every fear and is the frightening element in it. In the moment, therefore, in which "naked anxiety" lays hold of the mind, the previous objects of fear cease to be definite objects. They appear as what they

> always were in part, symptoms of man's basic anxiety… This situation drives the anxious subject to establish objects of fear. Anxiety strives to become fear, because fear can be met by courage. It is impossible for a finite being to stand naked anxiety for more than a flash of time… But ultimately the attempts to transform anxiety into fear are vain. The basic anxiety, the anxiety of a finite being about the threat of non-being, cannot be eliminated. It belongs to existence itself.

This sort of Existentialist thinking is so foreign to the spirit of Marxism that I never know what to make of it. Is it postulating as an absolute truth something that is characteristic only of certain societies, or is there indeed a trans-historical validity to all this? Did Cro-Magnon man experience "anxiety"? In forty thousand years, will existential anxiety still be around? It does seem ineluctable, this anxiety. How could it ever be overcome? Surely it's inherent in the human condition.

The source of my infinite wonder has always been: *why is there something rather than nothing?* And how can there be something without its having some kind of transcendent meaning?

Three types of anxiety according to the three ways in which non-being threatens being: the anxiety of fate/death, of emptiness/meaninglessness, and of guilt/condemnation. They correspond, respectively, to ontic self-affirmation, spiritual self-affirmation, and moral self-affirmation. —I don't object to most of Tillich's ideas, but I object to his framing human life in terms of ontology, of "being." It's unnecessarily metaphysical and theological.

1. Anxiety over death is the most universal. Inescapable. Can be mitigated depending on the form of society, but even in collectivist and primitive societies people are afraid of death. As regards "fate," Tillich has in mind, ironically, the contingency of life. Its irrationality, its lack of necessity. Fate and death are associated because life's contingency and unpredictability wouldn't produce anxiety unless death waited quietly in the background. "And death stands behind fate and its contingencies not only in the last moment when one is thrown out of existence but in every moment within existence. Non-being…stands behind the experience that we are driven from the past toward the future without a moment of time which does not vanish immediately. It stands behind the insecurity and homelessness of our social and individual existence. It stands behind the attacks on our power of being in body and soul by weakness, disease and accidents… We try to transform the anxiety into fear and to meet courageously the objects in which the threat is embodied. We succeed partly, but somehow we are aware of the fact that it is not these objects with which we struggle that produce the anxiety but the human situation as such."

2. Man's spiritual self-affirmation is his living creatively, his taking "culture" seriously, as a matter of ultimate concern for him. Emptiness and, more despairingly, meaninglessness manifest themselves when a person loses his concern for creative living. Their threat is *implied* in man's finitude but *actualized* by man's estrangement. Tillich notes that ontic and spiritual anxiety can't really be separated, since the onset of one tends to provoke the onset of the other.

3. Man is responsible for making something of himself, for doing something good with his life. He sits in judgment on himself, a situation that can produce the anxiety of guilt, or even the anxiety of self-rejection or condemnation. "Even in what he considers his best deed, non-being is present and prevents it from being perfect. A profound ambiguity between good and evil permeates everything he does, because it permeates his personal being as such… The awareness of this ambiguity is the feeling of guilt. The judge who is oneself and who stands against oneself, he who 'knows with' (conscience) everything we do and are, gives a negative judgment, experienced by us as guilt. …This anxiety can drive us to the feeling of being condemned—not to an external punishment but to the despair of having lost our destiny." Again, this moral anxiety can't be entirely separated from the other anxieties.

These anxieties are existential in that they're implied in the existence of man as man, his finitude, and his estrangement. They're fulfilled in the situation of despair.

To support his distinctions, Tillich suggests that at the end of ancient civilization ontic anxiety predominated; at the end of the Middle Ages moral anxiety was widespread; and at the end of the modern period spiritual anxiety is common. But in each period, needless to say, the other anxieties have been present, have been "embraced" by the predominating form of anxiety. Incidentally, "if one period deserves

the name of the 'age of anxiety' it is the pre-Reformation and Reformation." Tillich repeatedly makes statements that seem dubious but prove to be well-founded in his arguments.

"It is significant that the three main periods of anxiety each appear at the end of an era. The anxiety which, in its different forms, is potentially present in every individual becomes general if the accustomed structures of meaning, power, belief and order disintegrate…" On the other hand, you could say that the individual experiences anxiety *only if* accustomed structures of meaning etc. disintegrate. The presence of structures of meaning is, in a way, more "natural" than anxiety.

Watched a show about Truman Capote. Makes me wonder how people were able to take him seriously. He was an overgrown baby, as Sylvia Plath wrote in her journal.

December 20

What's the relation between existential anxiety and pathological anxiety, as in neurosis and psychosis?

> There is one common denominator in all the theories of neurotic anxiety: anxiety is the awareness of unsolved conflicts between structural elements of the personality, as for instance conflicts between unconscious drives and repressive norms, between different drives trying to dominate the center of the personality, between imaginary worlds and the experience of the real world, between trends toward greatness and perfection and the experience of one's smallness and imperfection, between the desire to be accepted by other people or society or the universe and the experience of being rejected, between the will to be and the seemingly intolerable burden of being which evokes the open or hidden desire not to be…
>
> …[In all these theories] there is the lack of a clear distinction between existential and pathological anxiety, and between the main forms of existential anxiety. This cannot be made by depth-psychological analysis alone; it is a matter of ontology…
>
> Pathological anxiety is a state of existential anxiety under special conditions. The general character of these conditions depends on the relation of anxiety to self-affirmation and courage… He who acts courageously takes, in his self-affirmation, the anxiety of non-being [or, rather, of the world's not being the self] upon himself. The preposition "upon" is metaphorical and points to anxiety as an element within the total structure of self-affirmation, the element which gives self-affirmation the quality of "in spite of" and transforms it into courage. Anxiety turns us toward courage, because the other alternative is despair. Courage resists despair by taking anxiety into itself.
>
> This analysis gives us the key to understanding pathological anxiety. He who does not succeed in taking his anxiety courageously upon himself can succeed in avoiding the extreme situation of despair by escaping into neurosis. He still affirms himself but on a limited scale. *Neurosis is the way of avoiding non-being by avoiding being*. In the neurotic state self-affirmation is not lacking; it can indeed be very strong and emphasized. But the self which is affirmed is a reduced one. Some or many of its potentialities are not admitted to actualization, because actualization of being implies the acceptance of non-being and its anxiety. He who is not capable of a powerful self-affirmation in spite of the anxiety of non-being is forced into a weak, reduced self-affirmation… He surrenders a part of his potentialities in order to save what is left. This structure explains the ambiguities of the neurotic character. The neurotic is more sensitive than the average man to the threat of non-being. And since non-being opens up the mystery of being, he can be more creative than the average. This limited extensiveness of self-affirmation can be balanced by greater

> intensity, but by an intensity which is narrowed to a special point accompanied by a distorted relation to reality as a whole…

Tillich proceeds to discuss in more depth the difference between the neurotic and the healthy personality. The former is more intense but limited, the latter more extensive but "lacking in the intensity which can make the neurotic creative. His anxiety does not drive him to the construction of imaginary worlds." The neurotic settles down to a fixed self-affirmation which involves his retiring to a "castle which he defends with all means of psychological resistance," because if he didn't defend it he'd succumb to despair. However,

> There is a moment in which the self-affirmation of the average man becomes neurotic: when changes of the reality to which he is adjusted threaten the fragmentary courage with which he has mastered the accustomed objects of fear. If this happens—and it often happens in critical periods of history—the self-affirmation becomes pathological. The dangers connected with the change, the unknown character of the things to come, the darkness of the future, make the average man a fanatical defender of the established order. He defends it as compulsively as the neurotic defends the castle of his imaginary world. He loses his comparative openness to reality, he experiences an unknown depth of anxiety… This is the explanation of the mass neuroses which usually appear at the end of an era. In such periods existential anxiety is mixed with neurotic anxiety to such a degree that historians and analysts are unable to draw the boundary lines sharply. When, for example, does the anxiety of condemnation which underlies asceticism become pathological?… To what degree are present-day Existentialist descriptions of man's predicament caused by neurotic anxiety?

Again: "neurotic anxiety is the inability to take one's existential anxiety upon oneself." Good formulation. But I'm still suspicious about his whole approach. On the other hand, it's hard to deny, for example, that "Large sections of man's civilization serve the purpose of giving him safety against the attacks of fate and death. He realizes that no absolute and final security is possible; he also realizes that life demands again and again the courage to surrender some or even all security for the sake of full self-affirmation."

December 21

Just a reminder for you philosophy students: Plato "teaches the separation of the human soul from its 'home' in the realm of pure essences. Man is estranged from what he essentially is. His existence in a transitory world contradicts his essential participation in the eternal world of ideas… Wherever Plato uses a myth he describes the transition from one's essential being to one's existential estrangement, and the return from the latter to the former. The Platonic distinction between the essential and the existential realms is fundamental for all later developments. It lies in the background even of present-day Existentialism." Platonism, alienation, disenchantment.

…"Courage is the self-affirmation of being in spite of the fact of non-being. It is the act of the individual self in taking the anxiety of non-being upon itself by affirming itself either as part of an embracing whole or in its individual selfhood." That's one of Tillich's main ideas: the dichotomy between participation and individualization. Two ways of affirming the self. Mysticism, collectivism, semi-collectivism, conformism, as against individualism and "Existentialism" in their manifold manifestations. He has a point. But I've discussed this alleged dichotomy before.

"The courage to die is the test of the courage to be." Why? Because being includes non-being: death is a part of life. An inability to accept death is an inability to accept life. The essential component of true

self-affirmation is unqualified acceptance of the relation between oneself and the world, a relation that includes one's final negation by the world (which is also one's re-absorption into the cosmos).

A show called "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition." A crew of designers redesign the house of an underprivileged family. The old house is demolished and hundreds of volunteers build the new one in a week as the deprived family is sent on their way to a week-long vacation somewhere; they come back to a new home and a better life. Watched this show tonight with my roommate's two granddaughters who are here for Christmas, 13-year-olds one of whom I'd adopt if she didn't already have a family because of her intelligence and cuteness (goes without saying) and last night the three of us confabbed in my room and watched Youtube videos; Rachel, the cuter one, got upset whenever I left the room momentarily—"Don't go, Chris! Here, sit next to me, there's room on this chair." On the show it was a family of five, a son with an intestinal disorder and two daughters, 4 and 8, who have Spinal Muscular Atrophy which means they're wheelchair-bound and have to be carried up and down steps and around tight corners etc. by their poor mother who has a bad back (the father is at work most of the day). The daughters might die young and there's no cure. But they have a bright spirit that puts to shame, I don't know, the sunlight irradiating Vermeer's "Girl With a Pearl Earring." Especially Brooke, the 8-year-old. What an angel on Earth. Worries about her mother's back, her sister's frustration, her brother's stomach cramps, but gives nary a thought to her own semi-immobility. Wanted a new stairless house just so her mother wouldn't have to carry her. I watched her talking to the interviewer and loved that bright face. Left the room, hid myself in the bathroom and, surprisingly, cried. Love of that girl worrying about her mother, pain for the mother learning one day that her daughter had SMA, wonder at the fact of people's helping each other when nature turns inhuman. Little miracles.

December 28

I read Kobo Abe's *The Woman in the Dunes*, one of the books Aniela gave me. Then email:

[…]

Pretty Aniela, I finished Abe's book. Yowzers, it's a weird one. Reminded me of Japanese horror films, how bizarre, Kafkaesque they are. Nightmarish images, disjointed plots, discordant reflections on (and *of*) the human situation. (I like that word 'discordant.') Japanese society is, um, very confused about itself, and has been so ever since modernization came to it with the Meiji restoration in the 1860s. It has the highest suicide-rate in the world. I liked the book, but I didn't *love* it. It made me feel like an insect. So I guess it was an artistic success. A man trapped in a sand-hole, forced to shovel out every night the mounds of sand closing in on him, the ceaselessly moving sand that will inevitably smother life, the million grains of sand clinging to his skin constantly no matter how he tries to clean himself -- in his hair, in his mouth, his ears, his eyes -- and the dunes up above with ten billion grains of sand that *never stop moving*, like water, blown in wavelets ceaselessly undulating to no end or purpose.....the villagers imprisoning this man and his woman in their hole just so they can shovel out sand every night and sleep during the day, the man trying to escape but failing always.....it's an inspired premise for a novel. Very moving. *Horribly* moving. Can you imagine such a fate as that man's?? And the symbolism, the allegorical significance is terrifying. On the plus side, reading the book made me appreciate not living in a sand-hole. Seriously! Such a thing is possible, after all, but here we are living comfortably, taking showers every day, eating great food (especially because I'm home with my parents), living in freedom, enjoying life more or less. How lucky we are! All in all, the book is a peculiar mixture of life-negation and life-affirmation, negation and affirmation of the human spirit. You have good taste, pretty Aniela.

> Tell your family I said "Happy New Year!" I miss you my dear lovely Abe-loving Aniela! I miss you and I kiss you ceaselessly, eternally like the sand rippling over dunes or the stars flickering behind the moon! I hope 2009 will be the happiest year of your life! If you stop smoking maybe it will be! Hugs, kisses, nakedness, passionate leg-entwined embraces -- breast-kissing, nipple-licking closeness!
>
> Love,
> Chris

January 1, 2009

Reading Lionel Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination*. Also James Fenton's *An Introduction to English Poetry*.

Music and poetry used to be expressions of essentially the same mental faculty, the same Dionysian tendency. Rhythm, meter, harmony, dance, performance, tragedy…magical invocations, participation in being, tribal participation, contests of artistic expression, drumming and dancing, self-abandon. Then writing happened, and they slowly started to go their separate ways. And now they're divorced, at least among self-respecting intellectual poets. Most poetry is now anything but musical. No meter, no true rhythm, no rhyme, no performance, mostly just looking at a page and reading words in your head. Poets write for the page, that's all. In popular culture things haven't come to such a pass. (Look at rap, etc.) They never will, fortunately.

Serious *music*, too, "intellectual" music, is no longer very musical. It's animated—or inanimated—by the academic spirit, the spirit of Apollo; Dionysus exists only in pop culture. But it isn't Dionysus in his original pure and life-affirming sense; it's a "repressively desublimated" Dionysus, a puerilized Dionysus, commercialized and reified, *lucrified*, atomized, *defanged* so to speak. Nor is Apollo what he once was.

I read André Gide's *The Immoralist*. Written in 1902. Byronism, Romanticism, anomie, aimlessness, *rot*—the rot of the French aristocracy—decadence. Not very satisfying literature.

No denying it: the modern desire to succeed is inseparable from malice. Inseparable from wanting to get the last laugh, to prove everyone wrong. The most successful are often the most malicious, the most insecure and narcissistic. Norman Mailer comes to mind. (Most of his writing I can't read: "The ego is too much with us." Repellent.) Maybe a writer, like an actor, shouldn't thrust himself into the spotlight, since his public persona then obtrudes into his works.

January 14, 23, 27

Back in Boston.

The joy of listening to Murray Perahia play Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*.

I had the flu, lay in bed for a day retching wretchedly. And I read a lot of my journal, reread my life. The two experiences have made me feel like separate from my self of last semester. And not being with my peers for weeks. Peaceful, calm, unreal. Separate from the rat race. Sitting here in my room submitting writings to academic and literary journals online, my Boston acquaintances not showing much desire to see me but I not caring. And anyway I have Aniela and Sofia and Emily and Precious Angel (her real name), a girl I met at the writers conference who emailed me. People I've made a connection with. Don't need much in life, only a few connections to help me weather the Silliness.

Aniela is apparently a superlative pianist, once wanted to pursue it as a career. Has played many of Chopin's etudes; sent me the sheet music as a Christmas present.

The nightmare is over. The Moron and the Devil are gone. America is entering the 21st century.

I might as well give up whatever ambitions I've had to write fiction, maybe even a screenplay. From now on, focus on politics and other areas of nonfiction. Periodically return to creative writing if the spirit moves me, but the spirit rarely moves me. What's the point of agonizing over fiction-writing if I can't contribute something momentous? I love neither reading nor writing fiction; only nonfiction grips me. You can't "learn" much from fiction anyway.

Schade that my imagination is limited. But nobody can do everything. I have to accept my limitations and embrace what I'm good at. The only good "fictional" thing I've ever written is the Book of Joe, and even that leaves a lot to be desired.

Watching Chomsky—inspired to learn about Israel-Palestine once and for all. This time I'm going all the way. Understand the whole history so I can write about the present situation and maybe get something published. Still waiting to hear from journals about my Muslim essay and my John Brown paper. (I shaved many pages off the bloated Muslim essay.)

Gideon Biger, "The Boundaries of Israel" (2008). Osamah Khalil, "Pax Americana: The United States, the Palestinians, and the Peace Process, 1948–2008." Wikipedia and other websites. Jasmin Habib, "Both Sides Now: Reflections on the Israel/Palestine Conflict" (2007). Most of Charles Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents* (2004). Etc.

The Israeli state is reminiscent in many ways of the Nazi state. The emphasis on racial purity, on the need to cleanse the country of "foreigners," on racial entitlement to the land; the treatment of people from a different race as second-class citizens, the outrageous violations of their rights; the militarism, expansionism, rejection of peace treaties, willingness to sacrifice civilians. Israel's history is horrifying. "Irony is the iron law of history."

(Another obvious parallel is the American persecution of Indians. Coming to a land and pushing aside the natives to make room for new settlements. Stealing their land, killing them, intentionally making life miserable so that they'll leave.)

February

Putting together another book, which I'm going to self-publish. The *Times* had an article about it: apparently self-publishing is popular and cheap, a way to get exposure, etc. The only problem for me is that I can't put substantive analyses in this book because people wouldn't understand them. Also, my journal is so *rich* that it's hard to choose what to include in the book. And arranging all the selections in a proper order, that's a real challenge.

Taking three courses: a history of American social movements since the late 19th century, a course on fascism, and a history of American politics since World War II. A lot of reading. Good book on fascism: Daniel Guerin's *Fascism and Big Business* (1934). Marxist analysis.

This damned economic crisis is interfering with my plans. Nobody wants to read a book on humanism, culture, Christianity, etc. when the news is flooded with reports of—600,000 jobs lost in January! 500,000 in December! It's getting worse and worse! Anyway, I've almost finished putting the book together.

Alger Hiss's Looking-Glass Wars (G. Edward White). *The Story of American Freedom* (Eric Foner). *Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights* (Ellen Carol Dubois). *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement and the Bombing that Divided Gilded Age America* (James Green). *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Stanley Payne). *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958–1964* (Fursenko and Naftali). *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (Lawrence Goodwyn). *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (George Mosse). *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870–1920* (Michael McGerr).

March

Very great excitement about Obama's budget proposal. If Newt Gingrich is terrified of it, you know it's an enormous step in the right direction. The stimulus bill was a disappointment—too many useless compromises that took the teeth out of it!—but it looks like the budget will pass in its essentials, at least it can if the Dems in Congress grow testicles and reject compromise with Limbaughian evil.

Conflict between my libertarian-utopian ideals and my quasi-Nietzschean aesthetic of struggle, the strong personality, and triumph. Each conception is attractive and yet infantile in its own way.

Published my book, *Notes of an Underground Humanist*. (Title from Dad.) Now marketing. I wish I'd put more in the book—more thoughts on Christianity, for example. (Pointing out that it has far more in common with socialism than capitalism or liberalism.) I've become averse to writing in my journal—no longer want to write short reflections à la Nietzsche that I can put later in a second book, because I'm past that stage of life. Everything is *obvious* to me, all my thoughts, any thoughts I can come up with. I've seen it all, been through it all; being "original" or "controversial" (as in my journal) seems boring now. But I should keep writing in my spare time so I can put out another book in a year or two.

Also publishing poems in *The Chaffey Review*. Still waiting to hear from academic journals about my essay.

Dereliction of Duty (H. R. McMaster). *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Zeev Sternhell). *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Robert Self). *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Paul Avrich). *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution* (David Carter). *The Doctrine of Fascism* (Mussolini).

I'm going to a $200 Grub Street conference in April to connect with authors, agents and publishers. I'm determined to be a success, if only to stick it to the assholes I've known.

Again I've lost direction. Have to write all the time but don't know what to write. Strangely intense this moment, not so much the same automatic behaving that is most of my behavior and writing, alone and melancholy after finishing the Sacco and Vanzetti book. Just returned from being with my family—parents liked my book but mother was conventionally critical of sections on women. Aniela coming in a few days, staying hopefully for a few weeks in my room, I miss her and she's coming just in time.

The best way to conceptualize the failure of Marx's main predictions is to say that capitalist society contains a variety of *tendencies*, many of which are in direct opposition to each other. Marx picked out certain tendencies, such as that towards the increasing antagonism of classes and immiserization of the workers, while underestimating the significance of others, such as the incorporation of the non-capitalist classes into the democratic process and thus the advance of reformism, welfarism, etc. The tendencies that Marx picked out were the closest to being exclusively economic—history shows that class polarization is an essential economic tendency of capitalism, which is however mitigated by extra-economic, political forces. His error was in thinking that purely economic trends were all-important. If they were, then a revolution might have happened. –Of course, even certain *economic* tendencies oppose certain others, and so even in the economic sphere a revolution was not necessarily the logical outcome. Perhaps the slow 'incorporation' of workers into the capitalist economy was also an economic tendency and not only a political or social one. Nevertheless, class polarization has been a uniquely powerful and recurring economic trend.

April

The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century (Michael Denning). *America in the Seventies* (edited by Beth Bailey and David Farber). *Phyllis Schlafly and*

Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade (Donald Critchlow). *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* (Paul Lettow). *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Movement* (Charles Payne).

If Marx was a "breakdown theorist," he may have been right. Capitalism broke down almost completely during the Great Depression. [Not really true.] If the government hadn't intervened, it couldn't have survived. Strictly speaking, "laissez-faire capitalism" isn't possible for long, even in 19th-century capitalism: business crises will eventually run the system into the ground, or workers will rise up and destroy it. But *why* does capitalism break down (or have a tendency to do so)? Why exactly? Is it because of the reasons Marx gave?

Marx's notion of capitalism was excessively "pure," excessively "liberal" or "Manchesterian." He didn't sufficiently understand that government could become an economically integral aspect of the system, that it could be a major economic force in its own right. This fact is why capitalism was not utterly destroyed in the 1930s or before.

Short paper for one of my classes:

Conceptualizing the Rise and Fall of Social Movements

The task of conceptualizing the inner dynamics of mass movements is not an exact science: pinpointing the properties that cause some movements to succeed and others to fail is a subtle art at best. The attempt itself to find commonalities between movements that take place in different settings and different contexts—at different times, in different places, amongst different classes of people—is fraught with philosophical peril. To what extent can one legitimately extrapolate transhistorical tendencies or features from concrete, specific events that will never occur again in their specificity? What methodological rules should one follow in undertaking such a project? How does one determine the project's success? – Philosophical questions like these should always be kept in the back of one's mind, but they should not interfere with the task of finding real answers to real historical questions, which is the purpose of this paper. Specifically, I will compare and contrast social movements that occurred in America between the 1870s and the 1920s in order to shed light on the qualities that made some movements more successful than others. In this endeavor I'll draw upon the interpretations of movement-formation and -consolidation presented in Lawrence Goodwyn's *The Populist Moment* and Hugh Davis Graham's article "The Role of Ideas in the African-American Civil Rights Movement." I will also examine several historians' accounts of the rise and fall of particular movements.

The movements I will consider are the radical workers' movement in Chicago from the late 1860s to 1886, the Populist movement in the South and West in the late 1880s and 1890s, and Progressivism. Among these, the first ended in catastrophic failure; the second was very successful for a while but petered out before achieving any of its major goals; and the third was quite successful, though it met its demise during the Great War. The question, then, is what factors explain these successes and failures.

Before analyzing the movements in depth, it would be wise to set out a framework for understanding and interpreting them. As mentioned above, the first framework I'll use is Goodwyn's.[1] It comprises a fairly intuitive and obvious set of parameters, but that is exactly why it's useful. Goodwyn's claim is that any process of democratic movement-building involves four stages, which can be stated briefly as (1) movement-forming, (2) movement-recruiting, (3) movement-educating, and (4) the movement's politicization. Stage (1) involves "the creation of an autonomous institution" that allows for new interpretations which challenge those of the established authority; (2) involves tactics, i.e. ways to attract the masses; (3) involves the effective education of people who have been recruited; and (4) requires the creation of a political institution that can effectively harness the ideas and energies of the mass movement. A given social movement can fail at any of these stages. (Goodwyn suggests that these stages are *sequential*, so that one literally follows the other, but we'll see that he's wrong about this. A movement can fail or succeed at all of these "stages" more or less simultaneously.)

[1] He discusses it in *The Populist Moment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), xvii – xix.

The second framework we'll use to illuminate the social movements under consideration is set out in Hugh Davis Graham's aforementioned essay.[1] Graham's account is perhaps even more useful than Goodwyn's, at least for the purposes of this paper, since it is more specific. Graham identifies five attributes of successful mass movements: (1) group consciousness (group resentment); (2) a spontaneous insurgency; (3) charismatic leadership; (4) a structure or organization that gives the movement "institutional continuity"; and (5) an ideology that offers group members "a vision of a just future."

In the light of these two interpretations let's consider, first, the Populist movement at the end of the nineteenth century. According to Goodwyn, the first stirrings of the Populist movement occurred on the frontier of the South, in reaction to the brutal and degrading crop lien system that structured the lives of millions of farmers. The "movement-forming" stage, which lasted several years, presupposed and began with the resentment of thousands of poor farmers towards the merchants and capitalists who supplied them with credit and materials. This group consciousness was a sort of incipient class-consciousness amongst farmers. It led to what Graham would call a spontaneous insurgency: in the late 1870s and early 1880s, farmers came together to establish cooperatives that would function as "rural organizations of self-help,"[2] through which they could buy and sell to one another while bypassing the hated merchants. These early cooperatives were already Goodwyn's "autonomous institutions" in which a new ideology or ideologies could arise and flourish. The ideology in question was that of *cooperation*, as opposed to the dominant ideology of competition. Of course, in the beginning the new ideology was only implicit; it had not yet been fully articulated. But with the arrival of "charismatic leadership," its articulation began in earnest. In the mid-1880s, leaders such as S. O. Daws and William Lamb molded the many cooperatives into a more coherent and effective organization (called the Farmers Alliance) and traveled around Texas as "lecturers" who would spread the new ideology and help organize new cooperatives and suballiances. This process constituted "movement-recruiting" and "movement-educating," stages that operated simultaneously.

By 1886, in fact, the soon-to-be "Populist" movement had, according to Graham's schema, become a fully successful and mature mass movement. It had effective leadership, institutional continuity, and a compelling ideology of cooperation. It was allying itself with the Knights of Labor; its leaders were calling for boycotts and sympathetic strikes with railroad workers. The main thing it still lacked was a political outlet. (This final step of "politicization" is disregarded by Graham in his general interpretation of social movements.) But the politicization of farmers was increasing rapidly, to the point that major political demands were being voiced by the organization as a whole.

There is no need to rehash the entire history of Populism. Suffice it to say that the movement developed astonishing sophistication: recruiting spread to Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas and various Southern states; the ideology became more coherent and focused, being centered on Charles Macune's notion of the sub-treasury system; tactics of educating the masses—and keeping them actively in the fold of the movement's democratic culture—became more effective (so that, for example, sophisticated use was made of the press, and traveling lecturers grew skillful at explaining the Alliance's economic theories); its leadership was bold, visionary and had clear goals in mind; and finally—a result of the foregoing—the decision was made to start a third political party, to break off from the Democratic Party (which didn't support the sub-treasury system) and found the People's Party. Ultimately Goodwyn is right that all these successes were due to the simple fact that the Alliance instilled in its members profound *self-respect*, *energy*, a spirit of hope and optimism, and that it thoroughly integrated them in a dynamic community oriented toward definite ends.

Unfortunately the People's Party did not last long once it was created, largely because it "sold out" to the political establishment by fusing with the Democratic party. (Also, it didn't have sufficient electoral support on the national scale.) Nevertheless, Populism was a remarkably successful movement, especially considering that its goals were revolutionary and its ideology completely opposed to that of American industrial capitalism.

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[1] See Peter A. Coclanis, ed., *Ideas, Ideologies, and Social Movements: the United States' Experience Since 1800* (University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

[2] Goodwyn, op. cit., 26.

The radical workers' movement in Chicago after the Civil War achieved successes as well. It was part of the broader labor movement that swept the nation through the 1870s and 1880s (and afterwards); this vast labor movement was far too multifaceted, though, for us to analyze here, so we'll focus only on Chicago.

Like agrarian populism in the South, this workers' movement began with spontaneous insurgency. For example, in 1873, during a depression, workers organized mass meetings and protests in which they demanded "bread or work."[1] One can quibble about whether such events can be called truly "spontaneous"—for, after all, they required *some* organization, *some* planning—but the point is that there was not yet an overarching movement with institutional continuity, long-term strategies, means of education and recruitment, and so on. Instead, there were isolated moments of protest and an emerging class consciousness.

Actually, by 1873 the movement was already growing in sophistication. In early 1874 socialist leaders founded the Workingmen's Party of Illinois and started a German weekly newspaper; socialist candidates challenged Republicans during the spring election.[2] The city was full of socialist and anarchist agitators and would remain so for many years—and soon outstanding leaders would appear, among them Albert Parsons and August Spies, who would attempt to channel working-class anger into constructive political goals through speeches and the publication of radical newspapers. This period of Chicago's history was so full of popular ferment that Goodwyn's and Graham's frameworks start to break down: all the "stages" of movement-formation occurred together in a whirlwind of social agitation. Movement-educating, movement-recruiting and movement-politicization took place simultaneously (in the late '70s and '80s) as German immigrants gave well-attended speeches on Marxism and anarchism, newspapers agitated for the eight-hour-day, political parties were formed, and strikes were coordinated across the city. Competing radical ideologies flourished, such that there was not much coherence to the goings-on. Indeed, to call this ferment a "movement" may be inappropriate: it was rather seething discontent expressing itself in myriad ways than a single, coordinated, coherently strategized movement. Its goals varied: many workers wanted only the eight-hour-day, others wanted a revolution—but what sort of revolution? Anarchist, socialist, or communist? All of these.

The conditions that fostered all this activity were similar to those responsible for the Farmers Alliance: abject poverty, class resentment, a lack of respect from capitalists. It is in such conditions that revolutionary movements are always born. Likewise, on a general level the tactics used by revolutionary movements to recruit and educate followers are almost always the same: speeches and newspapers primarily. In order to achieve their ends, though, the Chicago workers made far greater use of strikes than Southern farmers did—for obvious reasons. These strikes had mixed results, sometimes leading to the brutal suppression of the workers and sometimes resulting in employers' accession to workers' demands. (For instance, in the summer of 1877 thousands of workers went on strike to protest layoffs and wage-cuts; their uprising was suppressed by the police at the cost of many deaths.[3] On the other hand, the strike in response to Cyrus McCormick's wage-cut in 1885 ultimately led to a pay-raise for the strikers.[4]) On the whole, strikers in Chicago during the '70s and '80s were not notably successful in achieving their demands, but strikes were immensely useful for the "movement" insofar as they generated enthusiasm, hope, collective self-respect amongst the laborers, and proved to the latter that they were not, after all, as powerless as they sometimes felt.

On the other hand, the relative militancy of Chicago workers as compared with Texan farmers was arguably counterproductive in both the short-run and the long-run. For strikers provoked violence from the police and repression from city authorities. Similarly, Spies's militant language in his newspapers may in the end have done more harm than good, since it gave ammunition to pro-business leaders like Joseph Medill (the editor of the *Chicago Tribune*) and also may have encouraged the anonymous bomb-thrower to

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[1] James Green, *Death in the Haymarket* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 48.
[2] Ibid., 49.
[3] Ibid., 76 – 80.
[4] Ibid., 114 – 117.

hurl his stick of dynamite into a pack of policemen in the Haymarket in May of 1886—an act that indirectly led to the bloody suppression of the entire workers' movement in Chicago. Before this catastrophe, the decades-long agitation had finally developed into a genuine *movement* worthy of the name, with its acknowledged goal being the eight-hour-day and massive strikes being its tactic of choice.[1] And these strikes might finally have achieved major gains in May 1886 were it not that violence once again ruined everything: a group of strikers attacked strikebreakers, thus provoking policemen to fire on the attackers, which led indirectly to the Haymarket's bomb-throwing incident and the subsequent destruction of the movement.[2]

We see, therefore, that tactics of violence and incendiary language tend to be counterproductive (if, that is, the economic and political elite is fairly entrenched), even if they do generate enthusiasm among insurgents. They give the authorities an excuse to engage in brutal repression. The Populist movement tended to avoid these tactics, choosing such "legitimate" avenues as politics and economic alliances; as a result, it was able to spread all through the South and West. Chicago's labor movement, on the other hand, was unduly provocative at times, attacking strikebreakers and policemen and encouraging violence in its newspapers; this led to its downfall. –We must admit, though, that it's far easier to avoid violent confrontations in the Texan countryside than in Chicago's inner city. Different tactics, too, are appropriate to different conditions. City workers are forced to take a more aggressive stance than poor farmers, since the latter are thinly dispersed through the countryside. Had labor leaders in Chicago not been as militant as they were, the masses might not have followed them—or different leaders, more aggressive ones, might have taken their place, simply because the masses were angry and demanded action.

Another way of comparing the Populist and the Chicago workers' movements is to say that the former failed at the "top," so to speak—at the level of its political leadership, which lacked skill at navigating politics—whereas the latter failed at the "bottom," on the ground, in violent confrontations between workers and police. But this is a function of the differing natures of the movements: the workers' main weapon was necessarily direct action and strikes, while the farmers' main tactic had to be the establishment of cooperatives (because this was how they asserted their independence vis-à-vis capitalists), which ultimately required coordination not only on the state level but on an inter-state level. And this required skilled political maneuvering.

Populism and the labor movement, however, were both very different from Progressivism. They were revolutionary—they questioned the structures of American society; Progressivism was merely reformist. It was *fashionable*, so to speak, *respectable*: it was popular among the middle classes, among politicians (such as Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson), occasionally even among the upper classes. This "respectability" is partly what allowed it to have more successes than the other two movements we've looked at. In fact, Progressivism was a single "movement" only in a tenuous sense: different groups had different goals, sometimes contradictory ones; different impulses inspired its participants, from conservative religious moralism to the desire for social justice to the business manager's need for a more smoothly functioning corporation or factory. What these impulses had in common was that they were oriented towards "progress," towards a more harmonious and well-functioning society, the mitigation of social conflict and social ills.

Partly because of its nebulousness, Progressivism had a broader following than Populism and the labor movement. Any activist around the turn of the century who favored social reform but not economic revolution was part of the movement. Populism appealed specifically to poor farmers, the labor movement to workers; Progressivism appealed to anyone who disliked upper-class individualism or class conflict or alcohol or divorce or the disenfranchisement of women or racial conflict or inefficiency in factories, etc. Moreover, it was *safe* to be a progressive: since one was not challenging the structure of society, society did not set itself in absolute opposition to one. This is indeed an important, though obvious, lesson of Progressivism's success as against the failure of the earlier labor and Populist movements: generally speaking, a movement that doesn't challenge the foundations of society (and more specifically the

[1] See ibid., chapters 8 – 10.
[2] See ibid., chapters 11 and 12.

foundations of the economy) will have far more success than a movement that does, simply because in the latter case, economic and political authorities will do their best to stomp it out. What is necessary is to secure the cooperation, or at least the benign neglect, of the authorities—and progressives were able to do so, to the point of capturing the American presidency.

One should not think that progressives' *tactics* were more effective than those of socialists or Populists; in fact, the temporary popularity of the latter movements in a fundamentally hostile society proves that their tactics were remarkably effective. Instead, progressive *goals* were (comparatively) *acceptable to the authorities*. The latter had no reason to suppress a movement which, far from challenging economic and political power-structures, actually wanted to *strengthen* them (for the sake of forcing reforms on society). Progressive tactics, after all, were not much different from those of Populism: publishing newspapers, giving speeches around the country, trying to influence businessmen and politicians, protesting in the streets, establishing organizations to coordinate activism, sponsoring their own politicians, and so on. What differed were the goals, and the sorts of people who were attracted to them.

Still, questions remain: why did Progressivism emerge at the time it did (at the end of the nineteenth century) and not before, and why did it collapse after World War I? What were the "fundamental" reasons? Could it have been saved? Michael McGerr's *A Fierce Discontent* is informative and well-written, but it does not give satisfactory answers to these questions. Its purpose is arguably more descriptive than explanatory: McGerr aims to tell a story (about "parents and their children," about "private, intimate life" as well as public life[1]), not to give underlying, "structural" explanations. In the penultimate chapter of his book he essentially states that after the war, Americans were sick of Progressivism: Wilson's administration had become autocratic, it had taken Progressivism to its logical autocratic conclusion and thereby antagonized everyone, from workers to businessmen to consumers. People wanted a return to laissez-faire individualism; they wanted the government out of their lives. –This explanation may be true as far as it goes, but it isn't very profound.

Goodwyn's explanations of Populism are more adequate: they place the emphasis where it belongs, on economic factors, on the daily lives of the farmers and laborers who constituted the movement. The context and significance of Populism are described convincingly—especially in the final chapter ("The Irony of Populism"), which places the movement in a broad historical perspective. Goodwyn's study is, quite simply, more ambitious than McGerr's, more all-encompassing—and more ambitious than Green's as well. Green's purpose, like McGerr's, is to tell an engaging story, to appeal to a popular audience, and so his book focuses on characters, scenes, plot, *drama* rather than the broad structural and political tendencies that shaped the class conflicts of the day. It does, indeed, explain the short-term failures and successes of the Chicago workers' movement, as well as placing the movement in a historical and regional perspective: for instance, the book discusses the long-term ramifications of the Haymarket affair, going so far as to describe how, and to what extent, the tragedy still lives on in the public's memory. The book also gives an account of labor struggles taking place around the nation in the 1870s and '80s, thus placing the Chicago workers' movement in a national context. Nevertheless, Green's story lacks the breadth, the historical inclusiveness, and the explanatory power of Goodwyn's book (mainly because Green's subject-matter is more limited than Goodwyn's).

These criticisms notwithstanding, the three books mentioned in this paper—Goodwyn's, McGerr's, and Green's—are extremely useful for the light they shed on the successes and pitfalls of particular social movements. It is even possible to glean practical lessons from them, as we have done here—lessons that activists can use in their struggles against the status quo. It appears that the three most important lessons are as follows: (1) do not intentionally engage in violence if the power-structures one opposes are entrenched and have overwhelming force on their side; (2) if the movement succeeds in becoming politicized, be wary of compromises with, and within, the political system—for this is arguably what led to the downfall of Populism (namely when the Populists merged with the Democrats and accepted William Jennings Bryan as their candidate for president); (3) on the other hand, it is unwise to agitate for revolutionary economic change in a society of entrenched power-structures, since the latter can easily

[1] Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), xv.

suppress such agitation. More realistic is piecemeal social reform, such as many progressives advocated. (For example, the enfranchisement of women, the outlawing of alcohol, the reform of managerial practices, the mitigation of poverty.) History is littered with the corpses of revolutionary social movements.

Here's a shorter, less interesting paper for another class:

The Political Ramifications of the Cuban Missile Crisis

In their article "October Missiles and November Elections: The Cuban Missile Crisis and American Politics, 1962,"[1] Thomas Paterson and William Brophy ask, first, whether the Kennedy administration's actions during the crisis were influenced by domestic political considerations—given that a congressional election was about to be held—and, second, whether the results of the election on November 6 were significantly influenced by Kennedy's handling of the crisis. Did its successful outcome provide much benefit to the Democrats, who ended up doing unusually well on election day? The authors answer in the negative: the crisis's ramifications for politics were "indiscriminate." It helped some Democrats and hurt others; it helped some Republicans and hurt others. Similarly, Kennedy's actions between October 16 and October 28 were, on the whole, not politically opportunistic: they were sincere attempts to defuse the crisis by whatever means necessary. Domestic political thinking had little to do with the decision-making process.

These conclusions might seem obvious, but the background provided by Paterson and Brophy makes them seem less so. First of all, the Kennedy administration was determined to get more Democrats into Congress in the November elections so that its legislative program could succeed. For months, Republicans had been criticizing the administration for tolerating a Soviet military buildup in Cuba, for not doing enough to punish Castro, even for abandoning the Monroe Doctrine (by allowing a Soviet presence in Latin America). After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, the administration was particularly vulnerable to these sorts of criticisms. While the Democrats were still in a strong position in October, it would be reasonable to suppose that the Kennedy administration might have manipulated the Cuban missile crisis so as not to appear soft on Communism or Castro, and thereby to prove wrong Republicans' criticisms and succeed in the elections. Indeed, some people accused the administration of somehow *orchestrating* the crisis for these ends.

Because, moreover, the Democrats did well in the elections—losing very few seats in the House and gaining some in the Senate, which was extremely unusual for midterm elections[2]—it is reasonable to think that the national security crisis had benefited them. After all, it is well-known that the electorate prefers to keep incumbents in power during a security crisis—especially when the incumbents are doing a good job of resolving the problem.

Paterson and Brophy, however, argue fairly convincingly that such hypotheses are mistaken. They demonstrate, for instance, that even before October the Democrats were doing well in the polls, that support for Republicans was not increasing despite their constant attacks on the administration for its handling of Cuba. Most of the public seems to have cared more about domestic issues than Cuba, and it supported Kennedy's domestic initiatives (such as Medicare, civil rights legislation, and aid to the unemployed and college students). Even more tellingly, Gallup polls indicated that most people did not change their views about Democrats or the Kennedy administration between early October and October 30, suggesting that the missile crisis did not greatly help Democrats on election day. The party was already ahead of Republicans before the crisis, and it remained ahead of them.

Paterson and Brophy also argue that Kennedy's choice of a blockade to deal with the Cuban situation was not motivated by domestic political concerns. For, if such concerns had been in his mind, arguably he would have preferred a military strike over a possibly protracted blockade in order to silence the Republicans who had accused him so often of being indecisive. But the records of ExCom's meetings show remarkably few references to domestic politics: the decision-making, by and large, took into account

[1] This article was published in 1986 in *The Journal of American History*.
[2] In other words, the party of the president typically lost many seats in the midterm elections.

only what was in the best interests of the country and the world, and not what was in the best interests of the Democratic party. Indeed, the authors point out that it would be very odd for a man in Kennedy's position to spend much time thinking about the political fortunes of his party—not when the fate of the world rested on his shoulders! Politically speaking, he limited himself to forging a bipartisan consensus for his plan to blockade Cuba.

Certainly there was political pressure on Kennedy to act decisively against the Soviets. But the authors argue that this public pressure demanded only that Kennedy do *something*; it did not prescribe a specific course of action. However, it's possible they're mistaken about this. In his article "The Cuban Missile Crisis and Politics as Usual,"[1] Timothy McKeown argues that the choice of a blockade was attractive largely because of domestic politics. Certain Republicans would have preferred a more forceful course of action, but it was apparent from polls taken even before the crisis that the general public overwhelmingly favored a blockade over armed intervention in Cuba. And, since Kennedy's popularity in the autumn of 1962 was lower than it had ever been, he had good reason to heed the public's wishes in this matter. A blockade was neither too aggressive nor too "weak"; politically speaking, it was "just right."

If one retorted, again, that the records of ExCom's meetings show few references to political concerns, McKeown would answer that this is irrelevant. Recent scholarship has shown that ExCom was "probably not intended to play a primary role in the assessment of the domestic political consequences of decision-making" during the crisis; it was outside ExCom's meetings that domestic politics was considered in depth, especially in meetings between Bobby Kennedy and his brother. Written records were not kept of all these meetings. In any case, common sense should tell us that public opinion, interest group pressure, congressional politics and so on played an important role in Kennedy's decision-making: after all, the latter didn't exist in a vacuum. McKeown demonstrates this effectively.

However, even McKeown agrees with Paterson and Brophy that *partisan* political concerns probably played a relatively small role in Kennedy's mind during the missile crisis. There wasn't much *opportunism* involved; there was only a lot of responding-to-pressure—and, of course, attempts to shape public opinion (through television addresses and so on). While Paterson and Brophy probably underestimate the role of domestic politics, what they are really concerned with is the relationship between the missile crisis and the November elections—and so the fact that "domestic politics" *per se* played a very important role does not necessarily pertain to their thesis. They do a very good job of making the counterintuitive argument that the elections had relatively little bearing on Kennedy's decision-making, and that his decision-making did not have a huge effect on the outcome of the elections.

A particularly powerful argumentative tool of theirs is to examine the outcomes of individual races. Admittedly, after the resolution of the crisis partisan politics began again, with the Republicans arguing that Kennedy's policy had failed inasmuch as Cuba remained a Soviet military ally and Kennedy had been forced to promise that he would never again invade the island—while the Democrats argued that everything had been resolved satisfactorily. But detailed examinations of the races show that neither Republicans nor Democrats benefited overwhelmingly from the missile crisis. First of all, "the elections barely changed party alignment in the House." More tellingly, Paterson and Brophy show that such things as gerrymandering, domestic policy issues, and the Democratic party's strength in voter registration best explain the Republicans' failure to make major gains in the House and Senate. In several races, the missile crisis actually helped Republicans who had taken a strong stand against Cuba.

Paterson and Brophy admit that the crisis may have helped incumbents in general, be they Republican or Democrat, simply because, as stated above, the electorate tends to favor incumbents during national security crises. And 1962 was a good year for incumbents. Still, one should not overemphasize the importance of this fact, since a number of Washington veterans did lose to newcomers—usually not for reasons connected to the missile crisis.

Ultimately, despite the impressive array of data and the subtle arguments given in the article, the reader is not *wholeheartedly* convinced of Paterson and Brophy's thesis, simply because the Cuban missile crisis was such an important issue at the time that its lack of importance to the elections is surprising, almost

[1] *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (Feb., 2000).

unbelievable. On the other hand, politics is a messy business: for one issue to trump all others would be unusual, to say the least. And the mere fact that the Democrats were in power during the crisis should not be expected to count overwhelmingly in their favor, since there was a bipartisan consensus behind Kennedy's plans and, after all, Republicans had been insisting for a long time that something had to be done about Cuba. In a way, the events of October proved them right. –In short, both parties were helped and hurt by the missile crisis, which means that its effects on politics were, in the end, "indiscriminate."

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Why didn't America become fascist in the 1930s? When almost all Europe was heading towards fascism—Germany, Italy, France (sort of), Spain, Portugal, Eastern Europe—America had a decidedly leftist orientation. Why? For many reasons. An important one is that fascism is an extreme form of nationalism, and nationalism is usually strengthened by invoking an ethnicity it can be based on, a "pure" ethnicity, and America was not a nation of a single, pure ethnicity. It was literally a nation of recent immigrants, of every ethnicity in the world. Germany, of course, was not, nor was Italy, France, Spain or the others. They were comparatively "pure"—and insofar as aliens lived amongst them, ethnic minorities like Jews, the aliens could be attacked by the ethnic majority. Such minorities, therefore, *bolstered* fascism rather than undermining it, as in America. In America, what united millions of workers and agricultural laborers was a working-class lifestyle, poverty, oppression, hatred of the upper class. *Not* ethnicity, as in fascist countries. Proto-fascists like Father Coughlin, the 1930s version of Rush Limbaugh, failed to capture the hearts of most immigrants and workers. It was far easier for a left culture to emerge, a Popular Front, than a right one. –Also because Europe was going fascist and it's always tempting for Americans to define themselves in opposition to Europe and/or the rest of the world—even, or *especially*, if these Americans are first- or second-generation immigrants—and since ugly prejudices were surfacing in Germany and so on, it was exceptionally easy for leaders to organize opposition to European fascism and its prejudices.

On the other hand, a main reason why fascism instead of leftism happened in Europe is that business supported fascism as a bulwark against reform. The Marxist interpretation is basically right. It might be too simplistic to say that fascism was an "*agent*" of capitalism, as Marxists used to argue, since it had some anti-capitalist, and especially anti-bourgeois, elements. Fascists wanted a cultural revolution, and they hated "parasitic" finance capitalists. Fascists themselves, then, certainly weren't mere agents of the capitalist classes, mere fighters on behalf of the privileged. Nevertheless, as a social force fascism indisputably served the interests of the capitalist order by suppressing worker revolts, and this is why it was allowed to go as far as it did despite its unsavory, un-bourgeois elements.

The Bonapartist interpretation, inspired by Marx's analysis of Louis Napoleon, is also insightful.

Summary of Denning's argument I have to write for class.— Overarching argument: Corresponding to the Popular Front of the 1930s was a "cultural front," a broad alliance of radical artists and intellectuals that permeated the cultural industries and apparatuses. This front reshaped American culture. (He refers to a second American Renaissance, the first being in the 1840s and '50s.) "Just as the radical movements of abolition, utopian socialism, and women's rights sparked the antebellum American Renaissance, so the communisms of the depression triggered a deep and lasting transformation of American modernism and mass culture, what I will call the *laboring* of American culture." (Why "laboring"? (1) Pervasive use of the term "labor" and its synonyms; (2) proletarianization of culture, integration of the working class into culture and the arts, resulting from the huge expansion of secondary and higher education and also the industries of entertainment; (3) unionization of the new masses of cultural laborers, including screenwriters, actors, journalists, teachers, and so on; (4) the Popular Front was not simply New Deal liberalism and populism but a social democratic culture, "industrial democracy" and "industrial unionism.")

Why did the left have an unprecedented impact on culture in the 1930s? Most historians invoke the image of the "fellow traveler," the individual intellectual attracted to the Communist Party, but this is misleading and inadequate. It's a manifestation of the typical individualistic thinking of the bourgeois social scientist, the methodological individualism. The historian's focus in this case shouldn't be on the

momentary political commitments of individual writers and artists, or on the hackneyed narrative of their "seduction and betrayal" by the Communist Party. Rather, the cultural front resulted from social-structural forces, viz. "the encounter between a powerful democratic social movement—the Popular Front—and the modern cultural apparatuses of entertainment and education." The Popular Front wasn't just the Communist Party with its periphery of "fellow travelers"; it was a vast social-democratic movement "forged around anti-fascism, anti-lynching, and the industrial unionism of the CIO." It was a historical bloc, based in the CIO's industrial unions. And it wasn't merely a brief historical episode, an accidental detour which led nowhere, as historians have argued ever since the 1950s. Summing up its significance, Denning says that this unique constellation of social forces in the '30s informed the life-work of two generations of artists and intellectuals. "For the first time in the history of the United States, a working-class culture had made a significant imprint on the dominant cultural institutions. Both high culture and mass culture took on a distinctly plebeian accent. Black and ethnic writers, descendants of the proletarian avant-garde, dominated twentieth-century American literature. Vernacular musics like jazz, blues, and country resonated around the world. Gangster movies and *films noir* had founded the 'American' look in film. The cultural front had been a laboring of American culture."

Thus, Popular Front = *social movement*, not mere political alliance or "sentimental façade." It can also be seen as a "structure of feeling," in Raymond Williams's phrase, a concept that denotes "forms of practice and social and mental habits." (Each generation can be said to have its own structure of feeling.) In a way, then, the Popular Front was "a political and cultural charter for a generation"; and it didn't end with the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, as historians tend to think. It really lasted until after the war—even, in a vague way, until the early 1960s, when a new structure of feeling took over. It was coextensive with "the age of the CIO," which lasted from the '30s to the '50s.

"The cultural front is the terrain where the Popular Front social movement met the cultural apparatus [i.e., the whole apparatus of culture, from education to the media] during the age of the CIO. From that conflict and conjuncture came the Popular Front 'flavor' of American mass culture."

Denning admits, though, that in the end the laboring of American culture was a failure, "pummeled by the new postmodern forms of commodity fetishism." But, as Fredric Jameson has said, history progresses by failure rather than success. And it's better to think of a given historical figure as more of a failure than a success, "an actor or agent constrained by his own ideological limits and those of his moment in history." (Peter the Great, Napoleon, Marx, Lenin, John L. Lewis, etc.)

"The Literary Class War": Rethinking Proletarian Literature (Chapter 5)

Review of Denning's goal: to establish through a number of examples that conventional interpretations of the Popular Front (which started in 1935) are wrong. The Front's culture was neither a passing fad without long-term significance nor a selling-out of the more radical cultural and social movements between 1930 and 1934. Instead, proletarian literature left a "profound and lasting mark" on American literature/culture (making it more working-class) and, secondly, the Popular Front's literature was actually a continuation of the radical avant-garde of the early depression rather than a repudiation of it. It was, to a large extent, the avant-garde's institutionalization.

Denning starts by criticizing the common attempt to define "proletarian" literature. The problem with this attempt is that genres are not abstract and ahistorical ideal-types. They have "grown out of particular social formations and must be understood not as a class of objects but as the products of those formations." (His criticism of this ahistorical literary thinking therefore ties into his implicit criticism of methodological individualism.) A better question to ask is "What was the proletarian literary formation?" What kinds of writers and writing did it produce?

Definition of a "cultural formation": the combination of a cultural politics and an aesthetic ideology. (Useful distinction.) The former denotes cultural infrastructure (publishers, galleries, patrons, reviewers); the latter is the "conscious and unconscious ways of valuing that a cultural formation develops and inculcates, its 'aesthetic,' its sense of what is good, true, and beautiful." Denning proceeds to examine these two things in the context of proletarian literature, looking first at the variety of little magazines and literary circles it produced.

Hundreds of short-lived leftist literary magazines popped up around the country in the early 30s. Many clubs too, especially the John Reed clubs (for artists and intellectuals but also ordinary working-men). Important bohemian subculture. Engaged in cultural events and supported labor struggles. Denning describes in detail the lives of these clubs and of the intellectuals who took part in them, like Richard Wright, Michael Gold, Ralph Ellison, Malcolm Cowley, Jack Conroy, and Kenneth Burke, showing how their early experiences informed their later careers. He eschews abstract analysis of radical literature; concentrates on the concrete, especially "cultural politics" but also aesthetic ideologies, showing how they spread and colonized the broader culture. Examples of these ideologies or styles: the blues vernacular and racial romances of Langston Hughes; gangster melodrama; worker narratives and industrial lore; the surgical experimentalism of William Carlos Williams; lyric feminist regionalism; the migrant narrative; and the "ghetto or tenement pastoral," a new and lasting genre, like the migrant narrative. ("By the time of Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy, the story of the ghetto had become quintessentially American.") A common thread through all this is an emphasis on social and economic exploitation.

All in all, Denning's argument is fairly persuasive. A working-class perspective in much literature and culture persisted through the '40s and afterwards. His methodology is also sensible—focusing on social formations and ways of life rather than abstract analysis of texts. He does the latter, though, (sort of) in other chapters, and the two approaches are complementary. This is actually a criticism I have of his rejection of methodological individualism: holism and individualism are complementary, or *should* be. He prefers to think in terms of social forces, but the flip-side of these forces is their manipulation of the individual, in other words of his "political commitments." Thousands or millions of intellectuals were indeed attracted to working-class ideologies for a few years, and many of them subsequently moved to the right. The language of "seduction and betrayal" is tendentious, but the broader narrative it's used to describe obviously has some truth to it. Denning's main point is still sound, though: even if most individuals ended up repudiating the radical sins of their youth, it's undeniable that the social/cultural formations of the '30s and early '40s influenced culture into the '50s and '60s, and beyond. It's hard to "prove" that statement, but on some level it's surely a truism. (Is Denning's argument ultimately truistic? No, but it probably isn't as revolutionary as he thinks.)

The system of dating history by decades impedes understanding. Horribly. 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s… Each decade is supposed to have its own "character." But history doesn't work like this; social movements etc. don't begin at the beginning of a decade and end at the end. The "60s" really lasted until the early 70s; the 50s started around 1948; the 80s lasted, in some ways, up through W.'s presidency and are only now finally ending. (The conservative, even the neoliberal, hegemony is ending. [Ha! Wow were you wrong.]) Moreover, the dates themselves artificially break up history, disrupt its continuity. Thinking-in-decades sinks deep into the mind until it's virtually a structure of experience, a structure of knowledge. It *gets in the way*.

Noam Chomsky said in an interview once that "Conservatism has an honorable tradition, but this [viz., the radical nationalism of Cheney and friends] isn't it." He's right: conservatism does have an honorable intellectual tradition. But Phyllis Schlafly's confused amalgam of Christian fanaticism and bastardized classical liberalism isn't part of it. (Classical liberalism = Locke, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Adam Smith, Humboldt, Hume.) –The history of liberal and conservative ideologies is fascinating, as you can see from Wikipedia. "'[A]t the heart of classical liberalism,' wrote Nancy L. Rosenblum and Robert C. Post, 'is a prescription: "Nurture voluntary associations. Limit the size, and more importantly, the scope of government. So long as the state provides a basic rule of law that steers people away from destructive or parasitic ways of life and in the direction of productive ways of life, society runs itself. If you want people to flourish, let them run their own lives."'" That's classical liberalism: individual freedom, free markets, limited government. It emphasizes human rationality, individual property rights, natural rights, the protection of civil liberties. It's a combination of political liberalism (the rule of law, restrictions against the arbitrary use of power, consent of the governed, legal toleration of a plurality of religions and moral

codes) and economic liberalism (private property, limited state interference in the economy). As you can see, it's all united by a belief in individual freedom and the sovereignty of the individual.[1]

But in a modern society where corporations accrue immense power and are legally treated as persons, people who use the same language as the classical liberals are far from thinking the same thoughts as they. They're really apologists for capitalism and social inequality. Classical liberals wanted individual freedom above all; but in modern capitalism, real freedom is impossible for millions of people who are economically oppressed by the power of corporations and the ruthlessness of the market. People used to need protection from the absolutist state (hence classical liberalism); now they need protection from corporations and the market—hence *social* liberalism, the liberalism of social democracy and the New Deal.[2] This is the true successor to classical liberalism, in that it more nearly fulfills the intentions of the original liberals than does the ideology of such "liberals" as von Hayek, von Mises and Friedman. Government now has to interfere in society and the economy because, in a liberal-democratic regime, the greatest danger to freedom is not from government but from oligopolies and an unregulated market.

Properly speaking, of course, anarchism or communism is the real successor to classical liberalism, since it's the logical conclusion of the philosophy of individual freedom and rights.

What is called conservatism nowadays is really liberalism in the old sense of a minimal state and an unregulated market. Actually, conservatism just means a preference for tradition, and so 100 years ago a conservative might have been someone who advocated a return to the *ancien régime*. But now that free-market liberalism and the language of "individual rights" have become the tradition, a conservative is a liberal in that sense. And yet not entirely: the mass of American conservatives combine anti-government liberalism with a rejection of "cultural liberalism," or the belief that individuals have the right to choose their own lifestyle and beliefs. (As you can see, this is simply a component of political liberalism.) The combination of cultural conservatism (or "social conservatism") with anti-government liberalism in the ideology of American conservatism is no doubt a bit strange and potentially unstable—and, in fact, since this unholy alliance was born in post-World War II America, the two factions of conservatism have threatened to come apart repeatedly. (They're possibly coming apart again now, with the tension between the business wing and the religious wing of the Republican party.) Still, the alliance does make some sense insofar as both wings represent tradition. *[No: insofar as they represent a defense of hierarchy and power. That's really what "conservatism" has always been about.]*

And then you have "neoliberalism" and "neoconservatism." The former, at least in theory and rhetoric, exalts the principle of free markets and free trade. The contemporary world-system is largely neoliberal. Neoconservatism, on the other hand, "supports using U.S. power, including military force, to bring democracy and human rights to other countries, seeing this as virtuous or even morally obligatory. In addition, unlike traditional conservatives, neoconservatives are comfortable with a minimally bureaucratic welfare state; and, while generally supportive of free markets, they are willing to interfere for overriding social purposes." The rhetoric of neoconservatism can sound noble and inspiring, but from Reagan's terrorist wars and Cheney's misadventures you can see that the rhetoric masks less noble aims. Neoconservatives may pretend to be idealists—and some of them are ex-Marxists—but beneath the mask they're unscrupulous agents of business, imperialism, state power, and reactionary nationalism. They have little in common with true "conservatives" (in the Hayekian sense), except for their support of business. Reagan, by the way, was more of a neocon than a conservative, although his rhetoric celebrated the limited state and the unregulated economy. The rhetoric was a ruse. (Admittedly, Reagan did deregulate parts of the economy, with disastrous results.)

Actually, it's possible [but unlikely!] that what Chomsky was referring to when he said that conservatism has an honorable tradition is the conservatism of Edmund Burke and such thinkers. This is very different from American conservatism even in its half-honorable Hayekian form—although it has

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[1] That's one of several links to the idea of democracy, with its doctrine of popular sovereignty. Another (related) link is liberalism's emphasis on the consent of the governed.

[2] This is the kind of liberalism that American politicians have in mind when they say that an opponent is a "liberal," "a tax-and-spend liberal."

some similarity to certain sentiments in Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (such as its preference for piece-meal reform over revolutionary change).

Most American conservatives and neocons take from classical liberalism whatever can be used to justify their support of big business and ignore the rest.

Phyllis Schlafly's conservatism, which is that of Sarah Palin, would seem to have some things in common with John Brown's belief-system. Like Brown, Schlafly thinks that the Declaration of Independence is perfectly compatible with Christianity and that America is a nation favored by God. Our God-given rights are best protected by a liberal regime, by the reduction of government to a minimal size (because power corrupts, and because government interferes with "individual rights" and the sanctity of family and tradition). Brown hated government too. However, beneath these surface-similarities are huge contrasts. First of all, the most obvious: Brown took seriously the Declaration of Independence's guarantee of rights, so seriously that he condemned the Constitution for being tainted with slavery and devoted his life to freeing slaves. In other words, he took Christianity seriously. He hated government because it didn't protect the rights of black people—and his advocacy of a limited government was natural and sensible because government at that time was small to begin with. In Schlafly's day the government was immense, and necessarily so; and any idiot could see that it had to be immense in order to protect people's rights. Advocating a limited government in this day and age is beyond preposterous. Brown lived on the frontier where government was virtually nonexistent. And what little he saw of government convinced him it was an instrument of evil—as, more or less, it was, back then. (The blacks, the Indians, the workers.)

Fascism as arising from the mass desire for social order and harmony, an exhaustion with the turmoil of early capitalism and industrialization, an exhaustion with partisan bickering and the petty materialistic troubles of daily life, the rat race, the daily soul-numbing struggle, a longing for *escape*, a vestigial longing for a utopia or something higher than this life, a religious faith like Communism, the desire for *meaning* in life. To immerse oneself in a collective project!—and at the same time, of course, to be freed from the miseries of industrial poverty. Fascist idealism, the radical phase of the French Revolution, Communism, Islamism, wars of national independence and their aftermath—they have (at least superficially) some things in common.

I can't help thinking that "the socialization of the means of production" can come about in two ways: either capitalism is overthrown in an early stage of development and government takes control of industry, or capitalism is allowed to mature to a ripe old age, during which process socialization will come about organically and inevitably. Marx may have confused these two possibilities, or conflated them. He thought that the "old age" of capitalism would coincide with a proletarian revolution, but he was wrong. Such a revolution, as in Russia [sort of], can happen only before capitalism has become entrenched (by means of liberal democracy, bourgeois hegemony, etc.)—and if it does it will inevitably fail in the long run because a state-socialist country can neither survive in a capitalist world nor be truly *socialist* to begin with. The natural way for socialization to occur is to let capitalism evolve in its own way, for during this evolution government will become more and more involved in the economy—at the same time that the global economy becomes more and more integrated—until finally the world wakes up one day and finds that it has public control over its economic activities.

In other words, class polarization is, in the end, unrelated to the likelihood of socialization in the near future (except immature socialization, as with the Russian Revolution). Marx thought otherwise: he thought that the more polarization, the closer society was to the achievement of socialization. Perhaps this doctrine has a grain of truth with respect to the immature kind of socialization—though even then we're only talking about probabilities (that revolution will happen)—but it doesn't with respect to the *natural* kind, the kind that organically grows out of economic evolution.

Similarly, while there is an economic tendency towards class polarization and relative immiseration of the masses, there is a powerful tendency *against* such polarization (in the long run). These two

tendencies, of course, have very different economic (and social) causes. I don't know exactly what they are, but they exist.

Ed Hunt, dude in my History program, Chomsky-loving intellectual with a good sense of humor and a totally laid-back attitude, we get along famously. He's like a little Chomsky with his soft-spokenness and his command of data and fixation on the U.S. government. One of the very few guys I've ever truly liked talking to—about history, philosophy, politics, lotsa stuff. Good friend. At least I think he will be, when we have time to hang out together.

Watching Jacob Bronowski's series *The Ascent of Man* on YouTube. Magnificence.

If American conservatism is a bit paradoxical, though, so is American liberalism. Conservatism fuses old-style liberalism with religious conservatism—which negates aspects of old liberalism—while modern American liberalism fuses the desire for a strong social democratic government that can protect the underprivileged with an old-liberal (or "libertarian") desire that government not regulate social life, that it allow prostitution, gay marriage, "alternative lifestyles" of whatever kind. On the face of it, this fusion is as paradoxical as the conservative one. But it really isn't. As Eric Foner writes in *The Story of American Freedom*, modern liberalism is based on an extension of the idea of freedom that took place during the New Deal. Whereas before, freedom just meant liberty of contract, during the 1930s it came to mean civil liberties and economic freedom, or the abolition of economic and social insecurity. (Actually, these newer freedoms hailed from the Progressive era, but they were buried under the conservatism of the '20s. Rediscovered and fleshed out during the '30s.) So two notions of freedom competed: "freedom for private enterprise" vs. a "socialized liberty" based on an "equitably shared abundance." Thus, as I wrote above, modern liberalism, or (according to Wikipedia) "social liberalism"—whose opposite, confusingly, is *not* mere "social conservatism" but the *whole* conservative ideology[1]—is in fact a fully consistent extension of the original intentions of the classical liberals, i.e. an extension of freedom. It is freedom in every realm. *Positive* liberty as opposed to *negative* liberty. I.e., it's the "freedom" to have the power and resources to fulfill your potential as you see fit, which was the value that the classical liberals had in mind when they formulated the doctrine of negative liberty (freedom from restraint). They thought that negative liberty as translated into small government would be enough to secure that end, but, in this age, they're wrong.

Another way of saying it is that modern liberals want, above all, to protect the rights of all oppressed people, be they gays, women, blacks, workers, immigrants, radicals. [No, this is truer of *leftists* than liberals. But leftists are really just those who take classical liberal ideals of freedom and equality more seriously than anyone else.] They want to protect the freedom of everyone to the extent that his freedom doesn't impinge on anyone else's (in the second sense of 'freedom,' the New Deal sense, the "positive liberty" sense).

Modern American conservatism is not so consistent. It wants negative liberty, freedom from restraint, which means limited government—except that it wants to deny this freedom to gays, atheists, women who want abortions, and so on. In *this* sense it wants an active government.

Modern history proceeds, with temporary regressions, in the direction of social liberalism.

Actually, the thinking of conservatives like Schlafly does have a fundamental consistency. While they may invoke the language of limited-government liberalism and rail against interference in the economy, their real values are the socially conservative ones. They don't really care about limited government in the way that, say, Robert Nozick did; they want it to be limited only because they think it tends to undermine socially conservative values, like paternalism and the sacredness of the family. But they want it big to the extent that it can enforce their values. As for its interference in the economy…most of them don't care much, despite what they say. Or, at most, they fear that such interference will lead to interference with the family and religious values.

[1] Social conservatism = cultural and religious conservatism; social liberalism = cultural liberalism and "redistributive" liberalism, viz. giving more wealth and power to workers and the poor. These two liberalisms follow from the idea of positive liberty.

The 1930s obviously had a gargantuan influence on subsequent history. They were, in a sense, the origin of the "liberal consensus" that lasted into the 1970s. Before the Depression there was a conservative consensus; from the mid-'70s a conservative consensus began to emerge again; and with our current global recession, we're starting to return to a liberal politics. Whenever a major economic recession hits, the liberals come in and fix it. And it's always conservatism that has caused it. (Well, conservatism doesn't cause *every* recession.)

Mark Twain: "Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect."

May

The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11 (Lawrence Wright). *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Leon Fink).

I'm watching the world become more and more impersonal. Marx was wrong that capitalism is the only source of the problem: technology itself is partly to blame. At a certain point, the use of advanced technology necessarily alienates people from themselves, lessens their ability to recognize themselves in their acts and works. Reading books on the internet is less "human," more "alienating," than reading them in the old-fashioned way, with a book in your hand whose pages you turn. Humans desire *action, touch,* tactile sensations, the fashioning of tools and the interaction between *hands* and *world*. A huge portion of the brain is devoted to coordinating hand-motions, and it is through using one's hands that one feels most at home in the world. But a lot of technology eliminates the need for action and reduces the importance of hands. One starts to feel like a passive observer.

On the other hand, it's arguable that in a more advanced society people would be less chained to technology than they are now. They would choose to forego the temptations of the television, thus reducing atomization. Perhaps a more advanced society would use sophisticated technology in some areas, such as energy-production, but in daily life would indulge in the delights of a relatively primitive lifestyle. Some people might choose to hand-wash their clothes because that can be fun; many artists might retreat from computer-design to old-fashioned painting and drawing.

In his essay "The Role of the Individual in History," Plekhanov argues (among other things) that quietism is not a logical product of the consciousness that a given event is inevitable. The common criticism is that, if socialism is *inevitable*, what's the point of fighting for it? Plekhanov thinks this criticism is misguided. But he's wrong. He makes the Hegelian mistake of defining freedom as the consciousness of necessity, a definition that makes little sense. Maybe "freedom" is increased through *reason,* through understanding general tendencies (half-necessary) and social forces and thus being able to influence them (or society on the basis of one's understanding), but genuine *necessity*, over which one has no control whatsoever, is always opposed to freedom.

"Being conscious of the absolute inevitability of a given phenomenon can only increase the energy of a man who sympathises with it and who regards himself as one of the forces which will call it into being." Two criticisms. (1) The logical result of a consciousness-of-inevitability is passivity, because through acting a person aims to *change* something. Only if a man thinks that a given phenomenon is probable but not inevitable—or only possible, or nearly achieved already, or whatever—is he logically justified in doing everything he can to bring it about. (2) If the individual himself is one of the forces that will call it into being then the phenomenon can't be inevitable. Or at least it can't be seen as inevitable by the man, because his consciousness is necessarily of freedom. He can always act in more than one way; he can make a choice. If something depends on his actions it isn't inevitable, because his actions are free.

Luckily this is all academic, since, in fact, nothing in history is inevitable. At most, it is highly probable.

Here's a stupid pointless paper I had to write about a book:

Questions Raised by 9/11, and Their Answers

Lawrence Wright's book *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* is an illuminating account of Muslim terrorism prior to the attack on the Twin Towers. It describes the origins of such terrorism and specifically the rise of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. At the same time, it traces in great detail the history of the U.S. government's attempt to destroy terrorism, showing that it was partly because of bureaucratic incompetence and obstructionism in the FBI and CIA that 9/11 happened. The picture that emerges from the book is that bin Laden and his deputy al-Zawahiri have been the driving forces behind Muslim terrorism since the 1990s—that they have coordinated and financed, and/or inspired through their public announcements, a majority of the most destructive terrorist acts. Were it not for these two men, especially bin Laden, 9/11 would not have happened. Through its illustration of this fact, the book raises a philosophical question: exactly what impact can the individual have on history? For instance, if one or two strong people in the FBI or CIA, people like John O'Neill (an FBI specialist on terrorism), had succeeded in rising above the bureaucratic mess and discovered the 9/11 plot—which the book shows was by no means an impossibility—perhaps the Towers would not have been destroyed, which means that neither Afghanistan nor Iraq would have been attacked and the war on terror would not have been declared (at least not when it was)—and the ramifications of the war on terror have been immense and wide-ranging. In this paper I shall discuss the question raised by the book, this very interesting question about the individual's relation to history. What is more important: "great men" or social structures and impersonal dynamics? We'll see that structural forces are overwhelmingly more important.

The history of postwar America is replete with examples of individuals seeming to have an inordinate impact on historical evolution. The Cuban Missile Crisis is one such example. The book *One Hell of a Gamble* demonstrates that Khruschev and Kennedy essentially held the fate of the world in their hands during the relevant two weeks, and that at certain moments the world came remarkably close to nuclear war. In fact, any of the nuclear submarine commanders facing off in the waters around Cuba could have inadvertently set off a nuclear war had he let his nerves get the best of him. One particularly harrowing event is described in the National Security Archives:

> …Vadim Orlov recounted the tense and stressful situation on 27 October when U.S. destroyers lobbed PDCs [practice depth charges] at [submarine] B-59. According to Orlov, a "totally exhausted" Captain Valentin Savitsky, unable to establish communications with Moscow, "became furious" and ordered the nuclear torpedo to be assembled for battle readiness. Savitsky roared "We're going to blast them now! We will die, but we will sink them all." Deputy brigade commander Second Captain Vasili Archipov calmed Savitsky down and they made the decision to surface the submarine…[1]

Archipov may have saved civilization.

What these examples prove, however, is only the obvious point that in the nuclear age society can be virtually destroyed with the push of a button. A single individual cannot thereby *guide* historical evolution; he cannot have a major *creative* impact, only a destructive one. Moreover, the reason for this insane state of affairs, and the meaning of it, is that social relations within and between countries are structured in a certain way, a certain hostile, bureaucratic, capitalistic, nationalistic way, such that there is the potential for war. No single individual can be responsible for structuring society in this way; he can but actualize (through the bureaucracy) the destructive potential inherent in current social structures and dynamics.

Consider a different example. Lyndon Johnson is said to have had a huge influence on society in two ways: first, through his Great Society and civil rights programs, and second, through his escalation of

[1] http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB75/.

the war in Vietnam. The latter in particular had far-reaching consequences. For instance, it led indirectly to Johnson's withdrawal from the election of 1968 and thus set up the Democratic loss to Richard Nixon, whose presidency eventually led to Watergate, which is thought to have transformed the political landscape and the public's attitude toward politics. More broadly, Vietnam may have hastened or caused the split between students, or liberals in general, and the white working class, which did much of the fighting in Vietnam and was repelled by the liberals' hostility to the war and to Vietnam veterans. Combined with LBJ's civil rights programs on behalf of blacks (as well as the "godlessness" of cultural liberals), Vietnam thus pushed the white lower-classes into the arms of the Republican party, which made possible Reagan's election and hence the three-decades-long conservative hegemony—which itself arguably led to the current global recession (since conservatives advocated financial deregulation). In this picture, LBJ is a gigantically influential person, and it does begin to look as if the "great man theory of history" has some truth.

Appearances are deceiving, though. First of all, Johnson's liberal initiatives did not spring solely from his own personality, sheltered in some sort of social vacuum. They were the product of years—decades—of civil rights agitation, grassroots mobilization around the country, the tireless work of hundreds of thousands of people. It started in the 1930s, with the epic struggles of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union on behalf of sharecroppers, as well as the anti-lynching movement across the South. (Congress almost passed legislation in the late '30s making lynching a federal crime.) Black resistance to oppression continued after World War II, when veterans returning to the South insisted on their right to vote. At the same time, technological and economic changes (radio, television, the decline of the cotton economy, etc.) were ending the brutal isolation of segregated communities where blacks were terrorized, involving them in the social currents of the world and showing blacks that a different life was possible.[1] Change accelerated in the late '50s and early '60s, as civil rights workers traveled to the South to challenge Jim Crow. The national media became interested in racial injustice. Demonstrations were organized around the country. By 1964 millions of people were clamoring for change, and Congress finally responded with its Civil Rights Act and other bills. Lyndon Johnson was but a pawn in the hands of progress.

Nor was he alone responsible for Vietnam. H. R. McMaster's book *Dereliction of Duty* shows that Johnson felt trapped in Vietnam, pressured by Congress and the public neither to withdraw from the country nor to escalate the conflict too quickly, with the result that he built up troops very slowly and finally found himself bogged down in a quagmire. It was the political situation, the Cold War, that generated the pressure to do something about Vietnam; Johnson simply tried to respond to political pressure as best he could. He was the person *most* responsible for the war, but it was the social dynamics and resultant political considerations that led him to make the decisions he did.

We could discuss a whole range of examples, from Hitler to bin Laden, systematically showing that the importance of individuals has been overstated or at least stated simplistically, but that seems unnecessary. Logic is just as compelling in this case as empirical evidence. And logic agrees with the Russian Marxist Plekhanov when he states (in "The Role of the Individual in History") that "individuals often exercise considerable influence upon the fate of society, but this influence is determined by the internal structure of that society and by its relation to other societies." Or, expressed differently, "influential individuals can change the *individual features of events and some of their particular consequences*, but they cannot change their general *trend*, which is determined by other forces." The trends of society are in a certain direction; a person emerges who embodies or seizes upon these trends, pushing them along, and he becomes influential. But he has been *created by* these trends, these forces. He can merely serve them and guide them in relatively minor ways; he remains their slave. Compared to the structural forces of history, he is as a sailor navigating his skiff in the wind.

In short, while bin Laden may have provided the spark that set off the war on terror, it is because society was a tinderbox waiting for that spark that bin Laden has been influential. He did not "change history"; no one ever *changes* history, he merely plays into its hands.

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[1] See Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), chapter 1.

Here's a relatively interesting (but still inadequate) paper:

Reflections on Fascism: A Critique of Zeev Sternhell

Questions about the "meaning" or the "nature" or the "significance" of fascism have been debated since the early 1920s. Is it a revolutionary or a counterrevolutionary movement? Is it an agent of modernization or an opponent of it? Is it more socialist than capitalist or vice versa? What is the "meaning" of its celebration of cultural revolution? What is the relation between its ideology and its practice, or between fascism as a social movement and fascism as a regime? Some of these questions are easier to answer than others: for example, fascists opposed "modernization" if that term means liberalism, democracy, Marxism, individualism, and feminism, while they favored it if the term means technological and economic advancement, military superiority, efficiency, and the glorification of speed and machines. (It is well-known that one of fascism's ideological sources was Futurism, which shared all these traits.) The traditional Marxist interpretation of fascism has been that, despite its revolutionary rhetoric, in practice it was essentially conservative: it maintained the existing class structure and favored big business while brutally suppressing trade unions and workers' rights. It decisively foreclosed the possibility of revolutionary socialism, thus serving the interests of capitalism. Another interpretation, exemplified by Zeev Sternhell, maintains that fascism was more left than right, more revolutionary than counterrevolutionary: it was basically a revision of Marxism, violently opposed to capitalist society. Far from being a bulwark of the bourgeoisie, it loathed bourgeois decadence and advocated a form of socialism, "national socialism." These are arguably the two most widespread views, or at least the polar opposites around which debate orients itself. In this paper we shall weigh the respective merits of each and decide in favor of the Marxist one, with some qualifications.

In his books *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* and *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, Sternhell traces in great detail the origins of fascist ideology from before 1900 to the 1930s.[1] By following the careers of such intellectuals as Georges Sorel, Maurice Barrès, Georges Valois, Hubert Lagardelle, Arturo Labriola, Sergio Panunzio, Edouard Berth, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, and many others, Sternhell shows that fascist ideology originated—*in its most sophisticated forms*—among ex-Marxists and socialists. It arguably existed even before World War I, formulated by revolutionary syndicalists who had lost faith in the capacity of the proletariat to inaugurate a revolution on its own. These thinkers were disgusted with what they saw as the decadence, the selfishness, the pettiness, the materialism and immorality of bourgeois society; they despised democracy, liberalism, individualism, feminism, pacifism, all "un-heroic" ideologies. Like Marinetti and his Futurists, they longed for a revolution to make civilization *heroic* again. They longed for the triumph of ancient martial virtues over bourgeois egoism and cowardice, moral corruption. Many of them initially seized on Marxism as the means to achieve this aesthetic, moral revolution: they embraced the concept of a heroic struggle on the part of the working class to overthrow the bourgeoisie and therewith (as they saw it) the reign of moral relativism, with everything it entailed. When it became evident, however, that the proletariat was not up to the task, having been duped by its political leaders into settling for piecemeal social reform rather than revolution, intellectuals like Sorel decided that the revolution would have to be *national* rather than "social." It would have to be undertaken by the people as a whole, not just the working class. Sorel and his followers, therefore, turned to nationalism, the glorious idea of the "nation," as the myth that would inspire popular revolutions in France, Italy, Germany, and so on. Out of the ashes of the old corrupt regime would be born a nation of "corporations," a harmonious, hierarchical social order that would not pit worker against capitalist but would merge all interests in the unity of the state. The nation, as embodied in the State, would constitute a sublime collective affirmation

[1] In this paper I'll be concerned only with classical fascism. It seems to me that fascism can take many forms, more or less extreme, depending on the time and place. Classical fascism—particularly Nazism—was merely, in all likelihood, the most extreme, the most nationalistic form possible, because it grew out of a "perfect storm" of epochal social changes.

of the will to power, a spiritualized entity in a continuous state of martial tension and valor, a semi-realization of Hegel's idealistic philosophy.

In *The Fascist Revolution*, George Mosse gives an analysis that supports Sternhell's. True fascist movements set out to create a new man, a new nation, devoted to principles of beauty, war, hierarchy, self-sacrifice, youth, masculinity, virility, creativity, national unity and mobilization against outsiders or such "parasites" as Jews and financiers. The central principle in all this was nationalism, which often took the form of an obsession with racial purity. What was desired, in short, was a cultural revolution—but not a "social revolution," if that term denotes the overthrow of capitalism. Most fascists were not against capitalism *per se*; in fact, Sternhell shows that many supported it, or rather they supported "a capitalism of producers, hostile to the plutocracy and high finance, the stock exchange, the middlemen, and the money grubbers. [They were] strongly attached to the market economy, to competition, and to the nonintervention of the state in economic activity."[1] No doubt fascists hated materialism, money, speculation, and bourgeois values;[2] but they accepted the necessity of some form of a capitalist economy, be it "planned" or not.[3] Consistent with their qualified acceptance of capitalism was their ideological replacement of the Marxist opposition between workers and capitalists with the opposition between "producers" and "profiteers" or "financiers," i.e. parasites. Fascists wanted to do away with the parasites and keep the producers, a class that included both workers and "productive" capitalists, such as industrialists.

Already we begin to see that Sternhell is largely right about fascist ideology: it is neither conventionally right nor left. Actually, despite the title of his book cited above, he thinks it is more left than right. And this view, too, is, perhaps, not quite as absurd as it would have seemed to a free-thinking German in the 1930s. Consider Stanley Payne's excellent definition of fascism: it is "a form of revolutionary ultra-nationalism for national rebirth that is based on a primarily vitalist philosophy, is structured on extreme elitism, mass mobilization, and the *Führerprinzip,* positively values violence as end as well as means and tends to normalize war and/or the military virtues."[4] This definition has almost nothing in common with Marxism, but it certainly denotes a (quasi-)revolutionary ideology, an ideology directed at the destruction of the cultural and political status quo.

Sternhell is somewhat convincing, therefore, with respect to the "abstract" ideology that fascists believed in. However, that the movement as a whole was truly "leftist" is far less clear.

Before continuing, we must point out a confusion that can mar historical analyses: the term "fascism" does not denote a movement that was homogeneous across Europe. Fascist ideology is not like Communist or Socialist ideologies in their simple and specific social content, their easily definable program(s) for a revolution and a utopia. Rather, it is more like a "form" that can be filled in with virtually any social content. Communism preaches the overthrow of the capitalist class by the workers, their subsequent dictatorship, the socialization of the means of production for the purpose of expanding and rationally allocating output, and ultimately a society in which everyone works according to his abilities and is compensated according to his needs. This doctrine is extremely specific. Fascism, by contrast, preaches national revolution, the exaltation and rebirth of the *Volk* through a war against foreigners and liberals, militarism, an authoritarian state, a rejection of modern ideologies, and so forth. But *these* goals can be manifested in any number of ways. One fascist might desire the destruction of capitalism in favor of something like socialism, while another might hate socialists and desire that the business class remain in power. One fascist might want to protect certain minorities while another is perfectly happy to send them to concentration camps. One fascist might want to redistribute land to the peasants, while another wants to consolidate the power of landowners and keep peasants in virtual serfdom. The possibilities are endless. This is, indeed, the great strength of fascism: its flexibility, its mutability, depending on which social group

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[1] Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 91.
[2] See, e.g., chapter 7 of Sternhell's *Neither Right nor Left* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986).
[3] Some fascists favored a kind of laissez-faire capitalism; others wanted something along the lines of state capitalism. See ibid., chapter 6.
[4] Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 14.

or which region is being appealed to. What stays constant is only the *form*, so to speak, the form of mass mobilization and national rebirth, into which one puts whatever content one wants. To be sure, the idea of national rebirth is naturally compatible with ideas of beauty, youth, violence, self-sacrifice, hierarchy—and egalitarianism too!—elitism, a sort of radical democracy, mass spiritual identification with the *Führer* or the *Duce*—a whole array of dazzling and apparently contradictory ideas that are little more than means of fleshing out the abstract *form* of national mobilization for rebirth. What the social content of the regime will be is difficult to tell in advance.

Sternhell insists, against conventional wisdom, that fascist ideology is just as coherent and specific as Communist ideology, and in a sense he is right. Payne's definition quoted above is coherent and specific. But the conventional wisdom is right too: within the framework of this specific definition can be anything from laissez-faire capitalism to state capitalism, from rabid anti-Semitism to rabid anti-anti-Semitism. *This* is the solution to all the debates about the "coherence" of fascist ideology, this distinction between the "form" of "palingenetic ultra-nationalism"[1] and the "social content" that can be almost whatever one wants it to be. This is also how it is possible that some fascist parties were so pro-worker—at least in rhetoric—they almost qualified as Communist while others showed no consideration whatsoever for workers.

We can see now that Sternhell's claim that fascism is more left than right is misleading. In a sense it might be true, for fascism aims at a national revolution; but in a sense it is false, for this national revolution can theoretically veer toward the left or toward the right.

Another argument Sternhell adduces in favor of the leftist nature of fascism is that many of the founders of its ideology were once self-styled Marxists or revolutionary syndicalists. Supposedly, then, fascism is a "revision" of Marxism. But this too is wrong or misleading, for these intellectuals who despised bourgeois decadence and would go on to be fascists were much closer in intellectual orientation to Nietzsche than to Marx. It was Nietzsche who raged against "decadence," not Marx. Sternhell himself admits that Sorel, a progenitor of fascists, even in his Marxist days had incomparably more affinity to Nietzsche than to Marx. "Anti-rationalism and pessimism, the cult of heroic ages and values, and a horror of the Enlightenment were basic to [Sorel's] thinking"[2]—and totally opposed to Marx's. Anti-materialism, anti-determinism, intuitionism, idealism, moralism, the celebration of will and heroic myths, the glorification of violence for its own sake, the emphasis on psychology over economics—all this is (semi-)Nietzschean, not Marxist. The main reason that future fascists at one time called themselves Marxists is that they believed they "had found in Marxism the most extraordinary weapon of war against bourgeois society ever invented."[3] Marxism for them was a means to an end, not an "objectively true" theory, as Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and others thought it was. Proto-fascist intellectuals wanted to use its notion of class struggle to overthrow bourgeois culture and politics—but when they finally understood the proletariat's weakness they rejected the class struggle, embracing instead the myth of the nation and thereby showing themselves not to have been committed to a social or economic revolution but merely to a cultural and political one. Their hatred of bourgeois society was *aesthetic* in inspiration, not properly "social" or "economic" or even "moral" (for they rarely condemned its *injustice*, unlike Marxists).[4] To call them revisionist Marxists is therefore a half-truth at best. And to call fascism itself a revision of Marxism is downright false; it is rather a rejection of nearly everything that Marxism stands for.

Sternhell makes a more important mistake, though, in the very method he uses for analyzing fascism. He looks exclusively at the history of ideas, whereas he ought to have combined this approach with social history. It is indeed illuminating to examine the writings and rhetoric of fascist leaders—but only insofar as these factors influence the masses, for it is *movements* we are concerned with, not ideas for their own sake. Sternhell may be right that the "pure" idea of fascism, as expressed in the definitions above,

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[1] That's Roger Griffin's definition of fascism. See ibid., 5.
[2] *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 69.
[3] Ibid., 70.
[4] It can be argued, of course, that Marxists too had a deep loathing of bourgeois cultural decadence. What matters is that they combined this loathing with commitment to a thoroughgoing social revolution—i.e., to a revolution with a *social content* as opposed to a mere nationalistic "form."

is more compatible with a highly regimented state-socialist economy than with the chaotic, self-interested, materialistic world of "money-grubbing" capitalism. (In fact, he is probably wrong. See below.) But if we want to understand the dynamics of social movements, the real forces that swayed populations and nations during the 1920s and '30s, we have to look at the ways in which ordinary people interpreted fascist ideology.

The first point to make is one that has already been made: most fascist leaders and intellectuals themselves accepted capitalism, in some form (usually corporatist). They liked the Social Darwinism of the market, its dynamism, its productivity and efficiency, its competitive nature—all qualities that harmonized well with the fascist struggle of nation against nation, race against race, the will to power. They merely wanted to do away with the parasites, the financiers. But this loathing itself fit neatly into the fascist program, for it exemplified and justified the war against outsiders, against Jews or people who were not of the *Volk*.

Similarly, the fascists' struggle against Communism naturally inclined them to support capitalism. But why did they oppose Communism in the first place? Because they thought it would undermine the nation. First of all, it was internationalist in orientation—indeed, it was associated with Russia—and secondly, it fomented class conflict, which destroyed national unity. Most fascists (especially the more successful ones) preached a kind of class collaboration or corporatism, which effectively meant the continuation of capitalism.

In their actions, too, fascists proved themselves defenders of capitalism from the red menace. In the years after World War I, Mussolini's *squadristi* frequently attacked and killed socialists and workers on strike. Veterans hated socialists for their internationalism and for having opposed the war, so they joined the movement en masse and terrorized workers all over the country. The same anti-socialist attitudes and actions permeated fascism in Germany, in France, in England, even in Spain, where it was unusually sympathetic to workers.[1] It is not surprising, therefore, that the middle classes in many countries, who feared a socialist revolution in the wake of World War I or during the Great Depression, were attracted to fascism. Robert Paxton goes so far as to say that "Above all, it was by offering an effective remedy against socialist revolution that fascism turned out in practice to find a [political] space."[2] This quality of being a bulwark against Communism was fascism's main attraction to the middle and upper classes.

In much of their rhetoric, of course, fascists were vehemently anti-capitalist. This enabled them to attract millions of workers and peasants, for they promised to end their exploitation by big capitalists and even redistribute land from large landowners to the small peasants. (Needless to say, these promises were not kept when fascists attained power.)[3] Sternhell takes this rhetoric at face-value, or at least he thinks it represents the "true" fascism. We have already argued that "true" fascism is, by and large, not *inherently* committed either way—neither to the left nor to the right—on issues of social importance, such as the relative positions of the classes, the form of the economy, or gender-roles.[4] Its definition makes no reference to these issues. But insofar as fascism does lean toward one side or the other, it surely leans to the right—the *extreme* right—for a couple of reasons. First—with respect to the economy—the idea of a "national socialism," a fascist socialism, is nearly self-defeating. For fascists opposed the class struggle by definition: they thought, rightly, that a struggle of worker against capitalist would destroy the unity of the nation and thus defeat the very purpose of fascism. It would tear the nation apart. This implies, moreover, that it would necessarily not be motivated by nationalism but by a Marxist desire for social justice. In the 1920s and '30s, however, the only way that socialism or some sort of collectivism could be achieved was through the class

[1] See Payne, op. cit., chapter 8.
[2] Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 56.
[3] Ibid., chapter 5.
[4] Fascists tended to be very traditional with respect to gender-roles, but this was not theoretically necessary. It was not out of the question for fascist movements to have been progressive in this area—although it was unlikely, for reasons I'll discuss in a moment.

struggle, or through a peasant- and worker-supported rebellion against capitalist interests.[1] Hence, a fascist socialism would not have been fascist; it would have been Marxist. The very term "fascist socialism" is almost an oxymoron. ("Fascist state capitalism" makes more sense.) This, incidentally, is why it was wrong for some of their supporters to accuse Hitler and Mussolini of "selling out" when they crushed trade unions and labor rights after achieving power: they understood that to encourage or even allow such class conflict would violate fascist principles, in particular the principle of *nation above class (and everything else)*. They were being perfectly consistent.

The previous point generalizes to all social issues: people who believe in the nation above all cannot believe in social justice or freedom above all. Or, at best, they identify the cause of the nation with the cause of social justice—but this is merely a disingenuous rationalization for their emotional identification with the nation. Through this emotional identification, this profound desire for national unity and glory, they are implicitly devaluing the particularistic struggles of oppressed groups within the nation. They are effectively denying the legitimacy of claims for social equality on the part of, e.g., women, workers, homosexuals, and immigrants. After all, such groups within the nation that fight for social rights are said to be thereby undermining the nation itself, weakening it, fostering unnecessary conflict, and are thought to hate it, to be subversives. Insofar, therefore, as socialism and leftist ideologies in general are defined by their concern for social justice, equality and freedom, they are in principle opposed to fascism and nationalism.[2] In practice people might be confused about this fact, as evidenced by the millions of workers and peasants who claimed allegiance to fascism only to be crushed by the regime, but in principle there is no point of contact between the radical left and the radical right (of which fascism is one variety). In brief, 'left vs. right' generally means 'a concern for social and economic freedom vs. suppression of dissent and of (most people's) freedom (be it social, political or economic).'

Stated more simply, nationalists *qua* nationalists can brook no diversity; they are authoritarian. The nation must be a single homogeneous entity. If oppressed groups agitate for rights, they must be crushed. This belief-system is the very opposite of socialism and its fellow radical ideologies.

We are beginning to see that fascism is not what Sternhell seems to think it is: it is not leftist, not social-revolutionary, but largely reactionary, for which reason it can be potentially useful to the ruling class (but only during acute social crises, since the powerful are suspicious of its disruptive potential). This is consistent with the Marxian analysis. Actually, the traditional Marxian position is that fascism is merely an "agent" or a "tool" of capitalism, a means of propping up a decaying capitalist economy, but this view has been somewhat discredited. For it ignores "fascism's autonomous roots and authentic popular appeal."[3] Thus, Daniel Guerin is wrong that fascism "aims to restore endangered capitalist profits."[4] It cannot be so crudely reduced to the economic level. In fact, the very language that Guerin (as a Marxist) tends to use is questionable: what does it mean to say that a movement like fascism "aims" or "aspires" to do something, such as restore profits or protect big business? Social movements are not the sort of things that display intentionality; only people do. We ought to be more careful in how we formulate hypotheses.

Nevertheless, the Marxian approach has value: it provides us with the tools to understand how fascists came to power in two countries, and why it was fascists rather than Communists who did so. Quite simply, the answer comes down to financial and political support, which means support from those in power. We have seen that capitalists and conservatives had reason to appreciate fascism both on the level of its ideology—which replaced the class struggle with the struggle of the nation against outsiders—and on the level of its actions, which were anti-Communist. In the context of an economic and political crisis, during which both Italy and Germany showed "problems of economic dislocation…, a deadlock of

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[1] Some fascist intellectuals seem not to have fully understood this fact. They advocated national collectivism without understanding its fundamentally Communist nature. See Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1964), chapter 4.

[2] It makes sense, then, that fascists would be socially conservative (on gender-roles, for instance, or homosexuality), as in most cases they were.

[3] Paxton, op. cit., 207.

[4] Daniel Guerin, *Fascism and Big Business* (New York: Pathfinder, 1973), 8.

constitutional government…, a militant Left growing rapidly and threatening to be the chief beneficiary of the crisis, and conservative leaders who refuse[d] to work with even the reformist elements of the left,"[1] fascists could be quite useful to conservatives. Only two parties were substantially increasing their votes and membership during the respective crises of Italy (after World War I) and Germany (during the Great Depression): the Socialists/Communists, and the Fascists/Nazis. The liberal and conservative parties had lost support and become feckless. Naturally, then, the conservatives who ran the government appealed to the fascists to help get society under control and prevent a revolution.

What does this prove? It does not prove that fascism is an "agent of *capitalists*," as some Marxists have maintained, for big businessmen neither created the movement nor trusted it. It does show, though, that to call fascism—as a regime—an "agent of *capitalism*" is not off the mark. Moreover, not only were fascists granted their power by conservatives; once they had come to power, they stabilized capitalism by suppressing trade unions, workers' rights, and all oppositional movements.[2] Sternhell might argue that this was mere political expediency, but we have already seen that it follows directly from fascist ideology, from its nationalism, its authoritarianism and its class-collaborationism (all of which features fit well together, as we saw above).

One way that this analysis has been formulated by Marxists is by using the language of "Bonapartism." This term derives from Marx's analysis (in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*) of Louis Napoleon's government in France during the 1850s. Stanley Payne summarizes the theory as follows:

> [It explains] how in a situation of sociopolitical fragmentation ("equilibrium of social forces") a new force might create independent state power that did not rest solely on the interests of one social class, even though in the economic realm it might guarantee the "class interests of the bourgeoisie." …Fascism [can be seen] as the product of a political and social crisis in which traditional forms of class domination were no longer effective and in which competing forces canceled each other out, allowing a new form of dictatorship to free itself of class domination.[3]

This is a fairly accurate summary of what happened in Italy and Germany during the years of fascism's rise to power. Liberal government, to repeat, had become ineffective, essentially deadlocked between the right and the left and various smaller parties. The bourgeoisie had become incapable of running the country. Fortunately for the ruling class, a wildly popular ultra-nationalist party emerged that promised to restore order. Somewhat reluctantly it was given the reins of power, and it proceeded to rule independently of both labor and business, though with a very pro-business agenda.[4] (And, of course, it was much less independent of business than of labor.) –This account is simplified, but it is roughly accurate.

In short, fascism's great success in Germany and Italy is due ultimately to its dual character of being populist-nationalist and being a useful tool for the capitalist class during conditions of social crisis and political deadlock. Its lack of a specific social program tying it to a single class or group—i.e., its character as an "anti-ideological ideology," an ideology that aims merely for national mobilization and unity-against-outsiders as an end in itself—allows people to see in it whatever they want, be they peasants, urban workers, the middle classes or big businessmen.[5] This gives it a broader social base than Communism,

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[1] Paxton, op. cit., 105.
[2] Ibid., 10.
[3] Payne, op. cit., 446. Needless to say, however accurate the "Bonapartist" label may be, fascism also has many features not shared by mere Bonapartism, for example its advocacy of cultural revolution.
[4] Cf. Paxton, op. cit., chapter 5.
[5] It's worth noting that every type of nationalism as such is basically "anti-ideological," i.e. lacks a "social" content (beyond the proscriptions against immigrants, subversives, racial inferiors, etc.). Fascism is not alone in this respect. What makes it unique is its magnificent use of mass media, its modern propaganda-techniques, its uncompromising and radical nature, and the conditions of its emergence (in advanced European countries).

which appeals specifically to workers. Conversely, the authoritarianism inherent in any kind of ultra-nationalism, especially fascism, makes it a possible ally of conservatives and big capitalists, whose rule over society always has an authoritarian element, an element of force. The two qualities, therefore, are symbiotic: without the first (viz., amorphous populism), the ruling class would have had no reason to co-opt fascism, since the latter would not have had its widespread support among the populace; but without the second (viz., reactionary authoritarianism), fascism would not have been a potential ally of conservatives in the ruling class, which means they would not have offered it political power. Admittedly, the German conservatives, among them Franz von Papen and President Hindenburg, may have made a mistake in empowering Hitler, for he soon brushed them aside and consolidated power in his own hands. But the point is that fascism's dual nature—its populism and its usefulness to the authorities—explains its success, and that when fascism came to fruition it did indeed benefit the capitalist class and the forces of social reaction as a whole.

Perhaps it seems that this analysis contradicts George Mosse's widely accepted thesis that fascism aims for a cultural revolution. The impression is mistaken, though. Mosse is right. What must be emphasized, however, is that the revolution sought by fascists is basically in the service of counterrevolution. Fascists oppose all the progressive, *authentically* "revolutionary" tendencies of modernity, such as social equality, tolerance, inclusive democracy and international integration. In the sphere of culture and politics, these are the quintessentially progressive—revolutionary—trends of the modern world, the properties that distinguish it from the *ancien régime*. In seeking to replace these properties with hierarchy, authoritarianism, a closed national community, racial purity, militarism, in short *hatred of the impure Other*, fascists want to roll back history and recreate culture in the image of a mythical past. The myth of the *past*, of a primordial state of purity that has been lost, is implicit in all variations on the fascist theme, from Hitler's to Phyllis Schlafly's to the radical Muslim's. Indeed, the myth of the nation (or the race, or the religious community) itself is essentially regressive: the nation was born in the mists of early history, and those mists are more or less what the fascist wants to return to. Sorel invoked the heroic age of Greece; Mussolini invoked ancient Rome; all nationalists invoke an age prior to modern "corruption." Even if individual fascists did not always see themselves as inspired by reaction or the myth of the past, this is the logic of their movement. They oppose the direction in which they perceive that society is evolving (toward "decadence," etc.); progressives/revolutionaries, by contrast, want to *hasten* social evolution. The logic of their movement hates not only the past but even the myth of the past, preferring the myth of an open-ended, utopian future of universal freedom. –In short, while the fascist utopia can perhaps be called "revolutionary" inasmuch as it is very different from anything that has ever existed, its animating impulse is a counterrevolutionary hatred of the egalitarian and libertarian trends unleashed by the French Revolution.

Nor is this true only of classical fascism. Because it was, so to speak, an anti-ideology, an ideology (and a movement) devoted to national purity rather than any specific social-revolutionary content,[1] it has similarities with a variety of (conservative) movements. Movements or regimes that in many ways differ from classical fascism can be labeled proto-fascist insofar as they are exclusionary, devoted to such concepts as "purity," national or racial unity and supremacy, xenophobia, and an imposed uniformity on the population. Osama bin Laden's Islamism is an ideology of "Islamo-fascism," a kind of quasi-fascism with an Islamic content; the Ku Klux Klan has a fascist ideology, as does, to a lesser degree, Jerry Fallwell's Christian movement (Fallwell at least has *some* respect for democracy and the rule of law); even American Progressivism, from the 1890s to 1920 or thereabouts, had latently fascist elements, namely those that emphasized national purity and uniformity. (Some examples are its anti-divorce, anti-alcohol, anti-prostitution, pro-segregation, and Christian fundamentalist provisions—all provisions that emphasized

[1] To repeat: millions of people who called themselves fascists, for instance peasants and workers, did hope for a social revolution, which means that *their* "ideology" had a "social content." But to the extent that it did, it was not purely fascist. The logic of fascism is hostile to social revolution; it aims only for a "national" revolution. Peasants and workers were deceived: they did not fully understand the movement to which they belonged, as was shown by what happened to them when Hitler and Mussolini came to power.

"purity" or "morality.") Fascists and proto-fascists[1] are international-democratization's discontents: they dislike diversity and freedom/equality; many of them dread the erosion of their old ways of life. They want to recreate culture in a particular authoritarian and exclusionary image, to stem the tide of liberalization. The most fanatical among them, for example the Nazis and Mussolini's Fascists, want to create a "new man," a pure man, who is not so much a new man as an old one, an old un-liberalized one,[2] a man who will accept a social hierarchy in which fascists themselves are at the top. These discontents exist even during normal times, but it is only during social crises and times of political deadlock that they can start mass movements and potentially seize power (or be granted it by sympathetic elites).

We have criticized much of Sternhell's analysis, but before concluding this paper it is worth noting that, from a different perspective, fascism *can* have similarities to authentically revolutionary movements, movements for freedom and equality. The similarities are superficial, though. For instance, revolutionary movements can have semi-fascist means of organizing, can share the fascist emphasis on hierarchy, militarism, unity, virility, youth, violence, even race. An example is the Black Power movement in America during the 1960s. The Black Panthers were bona fide revolutionaries fighting for freedom and equality, but they exhibited many of the semi-fascist traits just mentioned. For instance, they all wore the same uniforms and thought of themselves as an egalitarian elite while obeying the cult of Huey Newton (the Leader). They staged mass meetings, roused their audiences into a black-nationalist frenzy through belligerent oratory pitting the white man against the black. And yet, despite these seemingly fascist tricks, the Black Panthers were ideologically at the opposite end of the spectrum from classical fascists, nor did they have the same cross-class appeal or even the same racial prejudices. They were not opposed to internationalism, either: in fact, their Maoism proclaimed the unity of oppressed peoples all over the world.

What are we to make of such phenomena, phenomena that seem to blur the lines between progressive-revolutionary movements and fascism? What do they tell us about our subject? In brief, they merely serve as warnings for us to be careful in how we classify and analyze social phenomena, since movements can have surface-similarities while being essentially different. It is absurd to say that Black Power, for example, has anything more than the most superficial resemblances to Fascism: it is the product of totally different social dynamics, different structural forces, different motivations and desires, different sorts of injustice and economic grievances. However, because it is an oppositional subculture trying to survive within a hostile dominant culture it can, and does, adopt some of the same techniques and rhetorical strategies as fascism did. It could have adopted more, too. It could have gone so far as to model itself, to an extent, on Mussolini's Fascist party—and yet even then it would have remained essentially different from the earlier movement. Its difference is manifested in the fact that its ideology is committed to specific *social* goals, in particular to economic and political equality for black people, while Mussolini's ideology is committed only to the *form* of national unity, hierarchy, militarization.

Given the fascist emphasis on national unity and an authoritarian state—an emphasis that leads, in practice, to a conservative regime, despite fascism's superficially revolutionary nature—it is not ridiculous to say that a number of ostensibly liberal-democratic regimes have fascist characteristics. It is not a mere misuse of language to say that the United States government under George W. Bush had vaguely fascist qualities. One has only to think of Guantanamo, the Patriot Act, the constant fear-mongering, the widespread surveillance, the common accusation of treason against political opponents, the circumventing of due process and constitutional rights, the propagating of enormous, appealing lies or "myths" (like the great fascist myths) to the point at which an entire alternate reality was constructed for the sake of securing

[1] That is, those who believe in the ideology of fascism, not those who misunderstand the movement and are swept up in it (such as urban workers who think fascism will improve their economic conditions). Nor am I referring here to those people, like hapless petty-bourgeois, who are drawn to fascism simply because it will protect their property from socialist expropriation. I'm talking about the true believers.

[2] More precisely, he is a new man inasmuch as he is a technologically savvy, militarily disciplined and selflessly devoted modern mass man; but he is an "old" man inasmuch as he has not been corrupted by modern culture. Culturally he is primitive, heroic, ancient, chivalrous, "moral," "pure," a "barbarian" (as Hitler was fond of saying); organizationally, so to speak, he is modern and efficient.

the population's submission, and the intense efforts to program the populace to think in terms of good and evil, of purity and impurity, of nation vs. outsiders. This is all semi-fascist. The analogy should not be carried too far, however, since Bush's administration had no Bonapartist quality—it was explicitly in the service of business, so that it was not "free of class domination"—and it did not grow out of any kind of semi-revolutionary mass movement or a crisis of liberal democracy or social chaos.

Nevertheless, the intuitive reasonableness of comparing Bush's presidency to a semi-fascist regime shows just how mistaken Sternhell is in equating fascism to the revolutionary left. The Marxist analysis—qualified and modified as it has been in this paper—is far more defensible, which is probably why it remains the conventional wisdom even after eighty years of revisionism.

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(There are a few easily fixable inconsistencies. I could have gone into more depth, used more examples, but there was a page limit on the assignment.)

It's insane how independent I am. Humans weren't meant to be this independent. But self-sufficiency has its rewards.

I like the word "rhythm." It's the most profound word in the English language. It explains everything, applies to everything. Every society has its own *rhythm*; a person's state of mind is determined by the *rhythm* of his life. Certain rhythms resonate with the biological basis of the psyche, others do not. A Mayan refugee said that "there's a different *rhythm* to life in the United States." The cosmos has its own rhythm, and it is not capitalism's. It's closer to the Mayan's. And music has a rhythm, and the infant lives life according to a rhythm—rhythmical processes—with no self-consciousness, and that's the happiest time of life.

Rhythm is like *Logos*. Pithy. If you look at the word long enough it starts to be something foreign, like Old English, like an upsurge from antiquity and nature itself. Mysterious, ineffable, like the innermost secret of the world, the word a work of philosophy in itself.

English is the only language in the world that writes "I" with a capital letter.

The idea of historical "progress" is indeed a myth. Progress toward equality, toward justice, is certainly not inevitable and, even on the level of millennia (i.e., the glacially slow level), in fact does not exist. There are, however, always certain pressures towards equality and freedom, and in the modern age these pressures are more powerful than ever before. (That isn't saying much.) There are also pressures *against* freedom and equality; these are the short-term, *explicitly* powerful pressures. They're the top-down pressures; progressive tendencies are always bottom-up.

Here's another paper. The prof just wanted us to compare a few social movements, but I wanted to do more than that. That's why parts of the paper are not strictly relevant to the paper's stated purpose (which wasn't relevant to the assignment).

The Conditions for Success of Social Movements

It is well-known among historians that hard times do not in themselves create social movements. Modern history is replete with instances of collective hardship that have not generated movements for social change. Often such hardship has the opposite effect: it weakens and demoralizes people, directing their energies into the struggle for survival rather than political reform. However, in exceptional circumstances oppression may indeed spark genuine and sustained movements for change. The question of what these circumstances are is the main subject of this paper. Specifically, I will look at, first, the civil rights movement in Mississippi during the early 1960s, and second, the labor struggles of the Mayans in

Morganton, North Carolina in the 1990s. I will compare these two progressive efforts and relate them to the Italian anarchist movement in the Northeast during the early 1900s. The result of this analysis will be a partial understanding of the conditions under which radical social movements form and thrive.

African-Americans in Mississippi had always lived in poverty and fear, from Reconstruction (and before) to the 1950s. They were overwhelmingly agricultural laborers, tenant farmers, and domestics,[1] and the threat of lynchings was always at best hidden, at worst explicit and omnipresent. Any black man who stepped out of line could quite possibly be lynched. Under such brutal repression and in such a backward and isolated region, it was essentially impossible for a civil rights movement to get underway. This circumstance already suggests two major factors that militate against grassroots mobilization for social change: first, violent and unrelenting suppression of freedom and instilling of fear, and second, isolation (usually imposed by geography and/or economic primitiveness) from broader social currents. Where these two factors are present, or even one of them, economic hardship and social injustice will probably not lead to a movement for change, simply because people lack economic, political and psychological resources and indeed tend to have difficulty even imagining a different social order. This is why the peasantry in most societies is naturally inclined towards conservatism and political passivity: it is, in most cases, brutally oppressed, atomized, and isolated from the rest of the world.[2]

Only when certain "liberating" economic and political developments occurred did the black struggle for civil rights begin. What these changes were need not overly concern us; suffice it to say that the decline of the cotton economy between the 1920s and the 1960s "led to less need to control blacks, either through the near-peonage of sharecropping or through violence."[3] Also, (1) the rise of radio and television, (2) industry's increasing investment in the South, and (3) the recruitment of blacks as soldiers in World War II lessened the South's isolation from the rest of the country. Lynchings became less frequent; the region started to open up. Activists in the 1950s established networks all across Mississippi, but it wasn't until the last few years of the decade and the early years of the '60s that the civil rights movement really began in earnest.

One of the most effective organizations in this struggle was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC, which functioned in Mississippi and other Southern states. SNCC, which consisted mostly of young blacks from within and outside the state, eschewed Martin Luther King's media- and publicity-oriented tactics as well as the reliance on centralized, charismatic leadership that his organization (the Southern Christian Leadership Conference) exhibited. Instead, SNCC heeded Ella Baker's advice to engage with *individuals*, with individuals of all colors and classes. Its focus was on long-term organization, not temporary mobilization for huge marches and protest rallies.[4] Thus, its members would enter a town, establish connections with any older activists (from the 1940s or '50s) who lived there, and proceed, month by month, to talk to as many African-Americans as they could find, be they sharecroppers or farmers or teachers or ministers. They would treat these people not as movement-fodder but as human beings worthy of respect, developing friendships with them, listening to them, slowly earning their trust. The official goal was usually to convince them to register to vote—which involved, for instance, educating them so that they could pass the registration test required by law, as well as simply building up their confidence to face the prejudice and hostility of the town's white registrar (and of the white population as a whole, which of course was none too kind toward blacks who wanted to vote). Unofficially, though, the most important goal was to help the local blacks realize that they themselves could change their lot in life, that they had the potential within themselves to organize their community and fight back against oppression. SNCC basically aspired

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[1] Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 16.

[2] Needless to say, under certain conditions—including a partial, often capitalism-imposed overcoming of its atomization and societal isolation—the peasantry does have revolutionary potential. See Harry E. Vanden, "Marxism and the Peasantry in Latin America: Marginalization or Mobilization?", *Latin American Perspectives*, 9.4 (1982): 74–98.

[3] Payne, 19.

[4] Elizabeth Gritter, "Interview with Julian Bond," *Southern Cultures*, 12.1 (2006): 76–91.

to be the midwife of an emerging participatory democracy; its members sought to instill a sense of "individual efficacy" in the locals because, as Ella Baker (SNCC's mentor) said, "strong people don't need strong leaders."[1]

> My basic sense of it [said Baker] has always been to get people to understand that in the long run they themselves are the only protection they have against violence or injustice… People have to be made to understand that they cannot look for salvation anywhere but to themselves.[2]

SNCC, in short, was the very opposite of a top-down organization, the opposite of an NAACP or an SCLC. It relied on the initiative of a few hundred young activists, but equally it relied on the willingness and ability of local people, having been exposed to SNCC's philosophy, to take advantage of their communal networks and organize resistance to racism. Voter registration schools were set up; boycotts were planned; mass meetings were organized. Gradually the old fear and passivity subsided, to be replaced by self-respect and determination.[3]

SNCC's drive to organize the South was highly successful. Indirectly it helped bring about political and legislative change, such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act, partly because the national media was sympathetic to the fight against racism and assisted the movement by documenting white brutality in Mississippi. Directly, though, it empowered people, gave them a new sense of themselves. Some discovered that they were natural leaders and effective public speakers; many discovered inner resources they hadn't known they possessed, reserves of physical courage and psychological endurance. The reason SNCC was successful is that it treated the process of individual growth among poor blacks as having an importance equal to short-term tactical goals[4]—and this, in fact, is precisely what allowed it to achieve these short-term tactical goals, for more and more people got involved as they saw their communities being infused with a new sense of purpose and a participatory democratic spirit.

The movement among Mayan laborers in Morganton, North Carolina had a similar, though less pronounced, effect on its participants. It was of a completely different scale and purpose than SNCC's organizing drive: it consisted of a few hundred Mayans and Mexicans rebelling against inhumane conditions in the Case Farms poultry plant where they worked. In 1995, after years of resentment and two mini-strikes (in 1991 and 1993), some of the Guatemalan (Mayan) workers abruptly stopped working when a request for a bathroom break was denied by a supervisor.[5] The personnel manager refused to discuss their grievances and even had three workers arrested; a few days later, as a gesture of solidarity with the workers in jail, hundreds of their compatriots went on strike (for four days). Union officials who had heard about the strike came to Morganton to unionize the workers, and within two months the workforce did indeed decide to unionize. For the next six years they would wage an ultimately unsuccessful campaign against Case Farms to win a contract, striking periodically, fighting protracted legal battles, and struggling mightily to retain broad worker support for the union.

Though the workers failed in their long-term objectives, the mere fact that the movement lasted as long as it did calls for an explanation. After all, these were immigrant workers many of whom did not speak English or even Spanish; they were living in a region and working for a company notoriously hostile to unions; and tensions not only between Mexicans and Mayans but even between the various groups of Mayans themselves (some more pro-union than others) surfaced continually. The North American workers

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[1] Ibid., 93.
[2] Ibid.
[3] See Daniel Perlstein, "Teaching Freedom: SNCC and the Creation of the Mississippi Freedom Schools," *History of Education Quarterly*, 30.1 (1990): 297–324.
[4] Payne, 331.
[5] Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 55.

at the plant, both black and white, were generally uninvolved in the strikes and did not show much support for union activity. So why and how did these Mayan (and Mexican) workers achieve what they did?

The answer lies in the similarities of their culture to that of SNCC and blacks in Mississippi during the 1960s. Both communities were partly separate from the mainstream American culture, possessing their own group-oriented, democratic traditions. Neither had absorbed the atomized, individualistic ethos of urban America; a philosophy of "mutualism," of "sticking together," reigned. Of course, saying so is only to hint at the answer we're seeking; what matter are the specific social forms and causes of this communal spirit. Even here, the two movements had some things in common: first of all, the dominant culture's hostility to them on account of their skin-color. In the case of the Mayans the hostility was merely implicit (most of the time), but it nonetheless forced them to "stick together" more than they might have otherwise, thus fostering the social and psychological conditions necessary to sustain a workers' movement.

A second similarity was the importance of the church to both movements. Religion itself served as a powerful bond between the people, but the local church too could be useful in several ways: first, as providing an integrated community through which propaganda could be disseminated and events could be planned; second, as providing a venue for mass meetings; and third, as providing authority-figures who actively helped the movement. (This was not always the case in Mississippi.) The Mayans were lucky enough to have Father Kenneth Whittington open his church to them and devote its resources to their movement.

Unique to the Mayans was their having emigrated from Guatemala, a country with a troubled history that had taught them "community surviving skills."[1] Years of civil war (in the 1980s) had taught them to defend themselves and their rights, and as guerillas or government soldiers they had learned how to organize themselves. The "regional tradition of cooperatives and other forms of community self-help"[2] also ensured that the idea of a union was not new to them, was indeed perfectly natural. Communal organizations had already sprung up in Morganton, including an all-Hispanic soccer league and two Hispanic evangelical churches (in addition to Whittington's St. Charles Catholic Church, which ministered to both whites and Mayans). Leon Fink also notes that "a sophisticated sign of communal organization emerged only weeks before the strike of 1995 with the formation of an Aguacatán burial society."[3] Many of the workers still had family in Guatemala to whom they sent money; when one of the Mayans in Morganton died, the burial society would send his body home to be buried. They would also raise money from Mayan communities all over the United States to send to his family for the purposes of burial and other expenses. –All these organizations, all these traditions, all this community self-help and togetherness—notwithstanding linguistic and ethnic divisions—militated in favor of mobilization on behalf of labor rights.

An additional reason why the Morganton labor movement lasted as long as it did is that, like the civil rights struggle in Mississippi, it had a decisive impact on people's sense of self-worth. All successful movements have this effect, and it is partly this that explains their success. Leaders emerged from the ranks of the workers; people invested themselves in a collective project and so expanded their sense of self. "The possibility of change—of tangible improvement and empowerment—in a central aspect of daily life…stirred a host of people to assert themselves in ways they had not done before. For the moment, at least, they [became] leaders."[4] It is true that, as they waited for a contract, year after year, they grew disillusioned with the union and with themselves. Case Farms simply refused to come to an agreement. However, that the movement lasted until 2002, even if in a divided and increasingly despondent state, testifies to the power of the promise of change in the context of a tightly knit and frustrated immigrant community.

` The Italian working-class immigrants in the Northeast at the turn of the century were such a community—or rather, they constituted many such communities scattered around cities like New York,

[1] Ibid., 72.
[2] Ibid., 71.
[3] Ibid., 73. Aguacatán is a Maya-populated area of Guatemala.
[4] Ibid., 103.

Boston, and Philadelphia, and all these communities had ties to each other. These Italians, too, often did not speak English and were discriminated against by the people of their host country. They relied of necessity on each other, and they kept their own neighborhood-wide cultures somewhat separate from the mainstream American culture. Like the Mayans, many of them had emigrated from rural areas. –All these features help explain the similarities that Italian anarchism exhibited to the other two movements we have looked at. There were differences too, but first we'll examine the similarities.

For one thing, anarchism was not a "top-down" movement; it existed wholly on the grassroots level, and it was vibrantly democratic. It amounted, in fact, to an entire culture in itself, a way of life—more so even than the civil rights movement in Mississippi. Italian anarchists had theater groups that performed radical plays and raised money for causes; they attended lectures in rented halls and clubhouses; they "churned out journals and leaflets on makeshift presses";[1] they had concerts, picnics, dances, and recitals, "imparting a new revolutionary content to [such] customary social activities";[2] they established anarchist schools "in which the children, educated in an atmosphere of freedom and spontaneity, would learn about working-class movements and revolutions, as well as how to think and live according to their lights and in harmony with their neighbors"[3]—schools that sound remarkably similar to SNCC's Freedom Schools for black children and teenagers;[4] anarchists even substituted their own holidays in place of religious and national ones, holidays commemorating such things as the 1886 Haymarket executions and the Paris Commune. So, while the Mayans of necessity had their own alternative culture in Morganton, a culture out of which grew their labor movement, and African-Americans had their own religious and communal traditions in Mississippi out of which grew their civil rights movement (once activists had taken the initial steps), anarchism *was* Italians' alternative culture. It was the guiding light of their cultural activities, the common thread through them, and it had been so since the 1890s.[5]

An even clearer parallel between anarchism and the other two movements is the transformative effect it had on people's self-esteem. An Italian laborer working twelve hours a day in a factory, being mocked and discriminated against by white Americans, living in poverty, might easily find himself succumbing to despair and self-contempt. His participation in anarchist culture, however, with its diverse opportunities for interaction with his compatriots, was an effective antidote to despair and alienation. It was an outlet for *active engagement* in something larger than himself, in a community driven by a purpose. In this respect anarchism may even have been more successful than the civil rights movement, since it was all-encompassing, totally absorbing the community's cultural energies. And it was undoubtedly more "successful" than the Mayans' labor movement, since this existed only among a tiny minority in a small town and never became the basis of their culture.

On the other hand, in many ways anarchism was decidedly less successful than the culture of SNCC, even than the Mayans' labor struggles. First of all, anarchists tended to be extremely doctrinaire, prone to narrow and petty ideological disputes. Followers of one sect were often condemned by another sect as traitors to the anarchist cause, perhaps even agents of the government or of capitalists. As Paul Avrich notes, such sectarianism is "the bane of every ultra-radical movement."[6] It hampers effective coordination of radical activities.

One result of the Italian anarchists' doctrinaire way of thinking was their refusal to engage in any sort of labor organizing or unionizing. They rejected the American labor movement, "disdain[ing] [its] conciliatory measures and [advocacy of] piecemeal economic and social change. Achieving limited improvements, they argued, would only blunt the revolutionary ardor of the workers…and delay the final

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[1] Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 54.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., 56.
[4] Payne, op. cit., 302 – 306.
[5] For descriptions of the anarchist life, see the interviews of Italian anarchists in Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 92–188.
[6] Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, 52.

overthrow of capitalism."[1] The Italians did not *organize*; they preferred to participate in strikes and demonstrations, since these showed the fundamental incompatibility between capital and labor. This philosophy is precisely the opposite of Ella Baker's: she disliked demonstrations because they did not produce long-term gains.[2] And the fate of anarchism shows that her attitude was not without justification: anarchism achieved essentially no long-term gains for the working class; only the labor movement, the tradition of the AFL and the CIO, did that. Even the Mayans of Morganton extracted concessions from Case Farms, such as small pay-raises, due to their willingness to organize and unionize. Anarchists merely got themselves persecuted by the government, deported, and killed.

The anarchist embrace of violence constitutes another difference from SNCC's philosophy. SNCC, like SCLC, was firmly committed to nonviolence, so much so that its members usually refused to fight back when attacked by whites. This certainly helped them sell their cause to the mainstream culture, for Americans saw on their televisions police brutality towards unarmed, peaceful demonstrators. It also harmonized well with the Christian backgrounds of SNCC's activists, and it gave them the motivating consciousness of being noble, Christ-like fighters on behalf of truth and justice. Anarchists, by contrast, skulked around in the shadows building bombs and mailing them to authority-figures or planning assassinations that resulted only in brutal government crackdowns on their activities.

To an extent, the differences between Italian anarchism and the Mississippi civil rights movement can be explained by the differing social environments, namely an urban versus a semi-rural one. The violent, militant, anti-"organized" nature of anarchism, and its aggressive atheism, grew partly out of the fast-paced, atomized, technologically sophisticated nature of urban life, the deadening, machine-like repetition of the working day in factories and the whole industrial environment, the violently *mechanizing* character of dehumanization in a vicious urban context. Also, it seems that most Italian immigrants simply lacked the religiosity of Mississippi blacks (and the Mayans)—or they had it beaten out of them in mines and factories—and this lack made room for their violent radical ideology. More generally, the problems that immigrants faced were different from those of blacks half a century later: it was not discrimination based on the color of their skin that was at issue; it was capitalist dehumanization, a dehumanization more extreme than that of the Mayan poultry-workers. The anarchists were social revolutionaries who sought the violent overthrow of the dominant class; SNCC merely wanted an improvement in race relations, a raising of the status of blacks. The difference in goals, therefore, partly determined the difference in methods.

On a broader scale, though, a telling similarity exists between all three movements we have looked at: none of the people who rebelled had been subject to prolonged indoctrination and atomization by the dominant power-structures. The Italians and Mayans were recent immigrants from rural countries; the African-Americans lived in a relatively isolated and rural region. Each group still had democratic and communal traditions; none had yet succumbed to resignation or apathy or a materialistic self-centeredness. This was not true of the North American blacks and whites who worked at the Morganton poultry plant: they had grown up in North Carolina and so had been successfully atomized and indoctrinated with anti-union thinking, with the result that the vast majority of them took no part in union activities. Similarly, around the turn of the 20th century it was usually immigrants who became anarchists and revolutionaries—Italians, Russians, Germans, and others. This is because, again, they had not yet been assimilated into the dominant society, had not been subjected from childhood to pervasive American indoctrination but instead retained their own languages, some of their own traditions, and "stuck together" in their immigrant communities separate from mainstream society.

The situation is different now. Corporate power has privatized much of civil society, banished broad swaths of participatory democracy (e.g., labor unions, to which about seven percent of the private-

[1] Ibid., 53.
[2] Payne, op. cit., 306.

sector workforce now belongs,[1] from a high of 35% in 1953[2]), and established society-wide structures and individual behavior-patterns of atomized capitalism, thus forcing individuals to rely on their own resources and effectively precluding coordinated mass-movements for foundational social change.[3] Civil society itself has been under attack for decades, since a privatized civil society is a contradiction in terms.

It seems from our analysis, then, that radical social movements tend to form and thrive where (1) there is some degree of intolerable oppression but not so much that any manifestation of resistance will meet with instant and savage reprisal; (2) there is some contact with social currents from progressive parts of the world (if, that is, the oppressed people in question live in a backward and isolated region like Mississippi in the 1950s); (3) people are not so atomized—i.e., capitalist power-structures are not so entrenched—that a truly democratic grassroots subculture cannot exist; (4) the oppressed population is either still in a semi-traditional ("communal") state of mind and behavior[4] or it comprises urban workers in societies undergoing the initial viciously exploitative stages of industrialization (such as the Italian anarchists and the German workers in Chicago during the 1880s); (5) ideally, (i) sectarianism does not splinter the movement—a phenomenon that occurs most often among social revolutionaries and results from an excessive emphasis on ideology—(ii) secretive, conspiratorial tactics do not become the norm (because such tactics are not effective, can be counterproductive, and foster a spirit of mutual suspicion and sectarianism), and (iii) long-term organizing is not shunned in favor of mass spectacles like demonstrations and speeches, which are arguably not as effective as organizing; and (6) the movement has a transformative effect on individuals' sense of self, empowering them through their identification with a community mobilized toward the goal of social justice. If it does not have this effect, it will not get very far.

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Handel, beloved Handel. The king of all music that is *stately*. The essence of the Baroque: *stately*. "*Pomposo*."

The second movement of Schubert's Sonata in A minor D. 845, the Variations on the Idea of Beauty. Aniela and I went to a concert where the sonata was played, and I fell in love with it. –Schubert's genius was inexhaustible. His melodic and semi-tonal genius will never be equaled, it boggles the mind of God.[5] And his spiritual profundity is almost the equal of Bach and Beethoven.

From an article called "Was Schopenhauer an Idealist?": "…two of the most cherished beliefs of the Enlightenment: faith and reason are or ultimately can be brought into harmony, and reason can justify all the essential truths of morality and religion." Both beliefs are false (except maybe, in part, the one involving morality). Faith is by definition opposed to reason.[6] If reason can justify religious beliefs, then they cease to be religious. They become scientific or philosophical. Insofar as they are religious, they are

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[1] Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Union Members Summary," http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm (accessed April, 2009).

[2] Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the U.S. Working Class* (London: Verso, 1986), 145.

[3] Mike Davis, ibid., provides a good history of the corporate offensive up to the 1980s. See Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979) for a thought-provoking analysis of the atomized, "narcissistic" personality that is the product of this entrenchment of corporate interests.

[4] This is Craig Calhoun's "radicalism of tradition" thesis (set forth in "The Radicalism of Tradition," *American Journal of Sociology*, 88.5 (1983)). Examples of it are the Morganton Mayas, the Mississippi blacks, the Farmers Alliance of the late 19th century, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union during the 1930s, the millions of peasant revolutionists in the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, and most recently the peasant-propelled democratic movements in Latin America that have brought leaders like Evo Morales to power.

[5] Take, say, the middle section of the A minor sonata's third movement. It's beyond divine. You always think it's impossible for Schubert to come up with yet *another* astonishing melody, but his mind was a gold-mine.

[6] The *act* of reasoning involves an act of faith at every step, i.e. an act of freedom, since *every* act has an element of freedom/faith/will. (A *leap* of freedom, a *leap* of faith, a *leap* of will. Using the word 'leap' brings out the essential sameness in all three ideas.) But the idea of reason is opposed to the idea of faith/freedom/will.

not scientific or "rational." Morality is not derived from reason either, at least not in the way we want it to be. In itself it isn't "unreasonable" to want to kill someone or even to do so; killing someone is unreasonable only in the context of other, conflicting values held by the killer.

Lessons from the Civil Rights Movement

The 1960s saw the rise of a number of organizations devoted to black liberation. Some of the most famous include Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Black Panther Party. The former three were born in the late 1950s or early '60s, and they operated in the largely rural South; the Black Panther Party was born in the late '60s, a product of the Black Power movement, and it originated in Oakland, California. Its social and cultural environment, therefore, was quite different from that of SCLC, SNCC and CORE, resulting in such differences as the Panthers' greater radicalism and espousal of violence (limited violence, only in self-defense). This paper will compare the Panthers to SNCC in the areas of ideology, tactics, structure, and general efficacy. Lastly, the respective causes of the demise of SNCC and the Black Panthers will be examined. The result of this analysis will be a series of lessons for activists.

To get a sense of the Black Panthers' radicalism, one might look at their Party Platform of 1966. Among the ten points listed are the following: "We want full employment for our people"; "We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our Black community"; "We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings"; "We want all black men to be exempt from military service"; "We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails" (because "they have not received a fair and impartial trial"); "As our major political objective, [we want] a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of black people as to their national destiny."[1] These six provisions already show the fusion of Marxism-Leninism, Maoism and black nationalism that characterized the Panthers' ideology.

Here is a typical statement from the party, a statement that could have been made by any Bolshevik or Marxist:

> As we live in a capitalist environment, the masses of the public are exploited at the hands of a few individuals that control and hold all of this nation's wealth. More people are waking up to the facts of capitalism's true nature, and as these people do so, they see that capitalism is the oppressor. Once this is realized these aware segments of our communities then move to further the destruction of this capitalist state. That puts them in opposition to the government, which perpetrates and tries to spread capitalism and imperialism throughout the world.[2]

The Panthers had a fairly sophisticated ideology according to which they were a vanguard party that would start the revolution to free African-Americans from oppression under the capitalist system. They were far beyond Malcolm X's crude early position that white people were the devil; the Panthers were willing to cooperate with radical whites, with anyone who would help them stand up for their constitutionally guaranteed rights. At the same time, they celebrated the black cultural heritage, preaching black pride—one means toward which, they thought (following Frantz Fanon), was revolutionary violence. "By fighting back, the black man would assert his dignity as a man," would achieve the rebirth of his personality.[3] This ideology amounted to an all-encompassing and internally consistent worldview.

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[1] *The Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Philip Foner (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 2, 3.
[2] Ibid., 35.
[3] Ibid., xxvi.

SNCC, at least in its early years, was far less ideologically driven—or rather, its ideology was much more "pragmatic" than dogmatic. The organization was formed in 1960 during the student sit-in movement, as a way to harness the energies and coordinate the efforts of the young activists. It was initially funded by SCLC and guided by Ella Baker, an experienced civil-rights activist (who had also been instrumental in founding SCLC). Partly because of Baker's influence and partly because it operated in the rural, Christian South—and most of its members were from the South—SNCC's approach to activism was both nonviolent and deeply *personal*, *flexible*, based on a willingness to engage sympathetically with every black and white person whom its members encountered. This is evident from its statement of purpose:

> We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our faith, and the manner of our action. Nonviolence as it grows from the Judeo-Christian tradition seeks a social order of justice permeated by love… Love is the central motif of nonviolence. Love is the force by which God binds man to himself and man to man. Such love goes to the extreme; it remains loving and forgiving even in the midst of hostility. It matches the capacity of evil to inflict suffering with an even more enduring capacity to absorb evil, all the while persisting in love.[1]

In its early years, SNCC's members saw nonviolence not just as a tactic but as a way of life, something that should permeate one's entire being. They approached their activism in the spirit of this nonviolence, being open to talk to even the most racist white man and try to convince him of the error of his ways. Medgar Evers, who worked for the NAACP in Mississippi (where SNCC operated) and was something of a hero to activists there, often received hate calls from whites who would curse at him and threaten his life. His wife remembers one call made by a drunken woman "full of talk about niggers and their low morals"; rather than hang up the phone, Evers began a long conversation with the woman and her husband about their racial attitudes, by the end of which "they were almost cordial."[2] This is a good illustration of SNCC's philosophy: "what underlies the nonviolent attitude is a confidence that your ugliest enemy can change."[3]

SNCC and the Panthers, therefore, had very different ideologies. The former's was Christian, the latter's Marxist. In fact, the differences between the groups are such as to make the task of comparing them seem almost futile. Nevertheless, it is enlightening, as we'll see. Corresponding to their different ideologies were different goals. The Panthers' revolutionary goals are stated above; SNCC initially had less explicitly ambitious aims, less "political" ones. It merely set out to organize people, to coordinate resistance against Mississippi's white power-structure. For the first half of the 1960s its main project was registering black people to vote, which required educating them so that they could pass the registration test required by law, as well as simply building up their confidence to face the prejudice and hostility of the town's white registrar (and of the white population as a whole, which, of course, was none too kind toward blacks who wanted to vote). Citizenship Schools were organized across the state, schools in which teachers from the same community as their students taught lessons "concentrating on literacy, the state constitution, and local and state government, [as well as] Negro history and community problem-solving, by which they meant boycotts, demonstrations, and the like."[4] One of the purposes of these schools was to train leaders, to discover and foster leadership capacities in ordinary agricultural laborers and domestic servants.

Organizers from SNCC would enter a new town and seek out informal leaders, such as an elderly woman who was well-respected. They would make connections with any older activists from the 1940s or '50s who had established networks of personal contacts across the town or region. They would canvass from door to door to encourage people to take the voting registration test—and also just to develop friendships, to listen and talk to people, to slowly earn their trust. "Canvassers were instructed not to worry

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[1] Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 99, 100.
[2] Ibid., 52.
[3] Ibid. See also Wesley Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC's Dream for a New America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), chapter 1.
[4] Payne, op. cit., 166.

about numbers; the idea was to reach individuals, and you did that by returning over and over to the same people."[1] Organizers also tried to gain the cooperation of local preachers, teachers, grocers and so on. They planned regular mass meetings at churches where local leaders would give speeches motivating the congregation and would lead everyone in song. Music and religion, in fact, were immensely important to the Southern movement. Mass singing worked against the fear that affected everyone, and it encouraged emotional investment in the movement. It also strengthened communal bonds and helped people "develop a sense of involvement and solidarity."[2] Religion did the same: it gave believers collective strength and a sense of ultimate vindication in the face of evil. Its influence was incalculable.

Originally SNCC was literally just a coordinating committee, "a group of leaders from decentralized movements," too amorphous even to be called an "organization" per se. In 1961, though, the committee named a permanent staff and developed a more strategic approach to its activities. An executive committee and an advisory board were established; a person was placed in charge of fundraising, another was in charge of voter registration activities, and a third was assigned to direct action.[3] Some of the new developments made SNCC a (*slightly*) less "democratic" organization than it had been; however, on the ground, so to speak, its original mission continued to inspire all its activities. The mission to which SNCC remained committed was not merely that of registering voters or promoting desegregation in schools and public facilities. On a more fundamental level, the goal was to promote radical democracy, to instill a sense of "individual efficacy"—by means of community-involvement—in poor, oppressed African-Americans. As Ella Baker said, "strong people don't need strong leaders."[4] Baker distrusted the tradition of mobilizing people for a demonstration, a march or a speech, and then letting them return to their daily lives. Such actions might garner media coverage, but they rarely led to long-term, lasting changes. More productive, she thought, was the tradition of slowly, patiently organizing towns and regions, gradually empowering individuals to make changes themselves rather than wait for leaders to do so for them. Her philosophy paid off: more and more people got involved with the movement as they saw their communities being infused with a new sense of purpose and a participatory democratic spirit. In place of the old fear and resignation was a new, slowly developing self-respect and determination.

The Black Panther Party had nominally similar aims to SNCC's—namely, black self-determination and empowerment, federal and state recognition of blacks' rights—but the substance of these aims was different. The Panthers arose "as a response to police brutality, the failures of Great Society liberalism, and the uneven economic development of the American metropolis."[5] They originated in Oakland's ghettos, where police brutality and poverty were not offset by such consoling forces as religious traditionalism, a strong communal support-system, an integration of music into daily life, or the many subtle comforts of slow-paced rural living in the South. Some of SNCC's tactics and goals (specifically the goals of desegregation and voting registration) were not sufficient in the context of Oakland's inner city, where discrimination and endemic black poverty were the real problems. The Panthers had to adopt a more militant stance.

For example, one of the party's early tactics was to "patrol the pigs," to follow police cars through the slums of Oakland and, with the help of guns and a lawbook, defend the rights of anyone who was stopped by the police. The police department was outraged, but soon the brutality and harassment declined, which duly impressed the local community.[6] The Panthers also held rallies, for instance after the killing of a black youth named Denzil Dowell by the police. Hundreds of people showed up for this rally, at which Huey Newton gave such an effective speech that many of the spectators signed up to work for the party that

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[1] Ibid., 253.
[2] Ibid., 263.
[3] Hogan, op. cit., 64–66.
[4] Payne, op. cit., 93.
[5] Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 219.
[6] Foner, op. cit., xxviii.

day.[1] Soon after, the party began printing its own newspaper, *The Black Panther*, thousands of copies of which were distributed to the community.

Huey Newton also knew how to exploit the media. In 1967 the California state legislature debated a gun-control bill that targeted the Panthers; Newton sent thirty members of the party (out of seventy-five or so) to protest the bill in front of the legislature as it was being debated. The press arrived to document these armed black men standing outside the building reading a statement, and the incident was broadcast all over the country. This national recognition eventually led to the establishment of party branches in New York, Detroit, Los Angeles, and other cities.[2]

Even as they continued defending themselves and their community against police harassment, which increased as the party became more well-known, the Panthers undertook such constructive projects as delivering social services to the poor and teaching classes in black history. 1968 saw the creation of a "free breakfast for schoolchildren program"; in 1969 the Intercommunal Youth Institute and the People's Free Medical Research Health Institute were founded, followed by a free clothing program and, in 1972, a free food program.[3] They also protested rent evictions, demanded school traffic lights (and won them), and informed welfare recipients of their rights. All these activities not only provided material benefits to the community but also brought about "spiritual and ideological transformations" among their participants and beneficiaries. Like SNCC, the Panthers adhered to an ideology of community self-help and education, although in this case the ultimate goals were the explicitly revolutionary ones that (1) the ghetto free itself from oppression by the white power-structure and achieve democratic, socialistic self-control, and that (2) this little revolution spread to all cities across the nation and finally across the world. Held to these standards, of course, the Panthers were bound to fail.

Nevertheless, in many ways they were remarkably successful. First of all, their longevity itself was a striking achievement, given the FBI's and the Oakland police department's determination to destroy them. Under the aegis of COINTELPRO, the FBI engaged in outright warfare against the party, using such tactics as surveillance, eavesdropping, infiltration, false testimony, and political assassination. The Oakland (and Chicago) police, for their part, "responded to the Panthers with nothing short of guerilla warfare."[4] The campaign decimated the party's leadership, with Bobby Hutton, Fred Hampton and others being killed, Huey Newton and others being sent to prison, and Eldridge Cleaver being forced into exile. Despite all this, the Panthers lasted in some form until the late 1970s—arguably because they changed their strategy and rhetoric from its earlier militant radicalism to a slightly more moderate, politically acceptable stance. After Newton's release from prison in 1970 they shifted from advocating an immediate national or international revolution to focusing solely on Oakland, bringing about socialistic reform that would make the city a model for others in the country. To do so, the party would not only have to cooperate with the city's liberal white power-structures but would have to come to power itself, which meant that it—or its candidates for public office—would have to become "respectable." Bobby Seale and Elaine Brown ran for office in 1973 on a pledge to reform the way the city did business and on the basis of a "massive voter registration and grassroots organizing drive."[5] Both were "startlingly" successful in their respective races, receiving endorsements from the liberal community and a hefty proportion of the total votes cast, but neither won. Brown ran again in 1975, and in 1977 a respected African-American liberal named Lionel Wilson ran for mayor with the energetic backing of the Panthers and won.

In short, the respective successes of SNCC and the Panthers were prodigious. They can be analyzed on two levels: the level of community-organizing and -uplifting, and the level of political change achieved through their efforts. Between 1960 and 1964, SNCC embodied what Charles Payne calls the "community-organizing" (or bottom-up) tradition, as opposed to the "community-mobilizing" (or top-down) one that the Black Panthers epitomized. Payne summarizes the characteristics of SNCC's tradition:

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[1] Ibid.
[2] Ibid., xxxi.
[3] Self, op. cit., 229–231.
[4] Ibid., 229.
[5] Ibid., 305.

> [a] developmental perspective, an emphasis on building relationships, respect for collective leadership, for bottom-up change, an expansive sense of how democracy ought to operate in everyday life, an emphasis on building for the long haul, an anti-bureaucratic ethos, a preference for addressing local issues…[1]

The advantage of this model is that it gives locals maximum input in decisions and actions that will affect them, thus directly empowering them and fulfilling the promise of a participatory democracy. The disadvantage is that the process of change is excruciatingly slow. *Individuals* are transformed, small local communities attain a measure of self-control, but statewide change takes years and years, and nationwide change is probably impossible. For the latter to occur, a significant element of top-down, undemocratic leadership is necessary.

In its early years, as we have seen, SNCC was extremely successful on the level of bottom-up community-organizing, but not until the federal government enacted and enforced its civil rights acts in 1964 and 1965 did the white power-structure and repression in the South really begin to erode on a massive scale. SNCC was indeed instrumental in getting the federal government involved, but that's largely because, from the sit-ins and Freedom Rides to Freedom Summer in 1964, the national media was there to document what was going on—and even then it was mainly because *whites* were being brutalized and killed that a nationwide culture of change came into being. In other words, local agitation in itself was not sufficient; the top-down, undemocratic, corporate media was an indispensable (albeit perhaps unwitting) "ally" of SNCC. It is always necessary to "get the word out"; and SNCC's organizing tradition in itself can probably not accomplish that effectively, if only because a sustained and well-coordinated large-scale effort requires a certain amount of centralized, bureaucratic leadership. The people doing the fieldwork in disparate regions of the country have to be directed and coordinated, and the directors have to fundraise and cooperate in manifold ways with the corporate media and the government, which inevitably involves making Faustian bargains—which alienates people in the movement—and so what ends up happening is that the intimate, trusting, cooperative, *local* style of SNCC's early years gets lost.

By the time the Black Panthers were founded, the freedom movement's early democratic and local forms had long since given way to a *mobilizing* tradition, a fact that partly explains the Panthers' adoption of a top-down model of leadership. Also, this model was appropriate to a chaotic, mass-populated urban environment where a movement needs to be disciplined if it is to survive. And so it achieved one of its functions: it revitalized Oakland's black community, gave it hope, gave it a mission. The Panthers were tremendously exciting and motivating to radicals all over the country, precisely because Newton, Seale and Cleaver were *not* "democratic" but semi-authoritarian, good at making speeches and organizing mass spectacles and laying down the law in the party newspaper. Nor was their only success a boost in morale; they also organized services for the poor, as was mentioned above. They spawned like-minded groups across the country; they had enough of an impact for J. Edgar Hoover to declare them the number one threat to the nation's internal security. Later on, the party played a big role in getting Lionel Wilson elected mayor of Oakland by registering thousands of voters and bussing them to the polls on election day.[2]

On the other hand, the party's masculine authoritarianism alienated many of the women involved, from Elaine Brown to low-level functionaries who were not respected by their sexist male superiors.[3] In fact, this is another way of contrasting the two models of leadership: the bottom-up one is more "feminine," given its emphasis on cooperation, trust, emotional nurturance, friendship, communal participation, *personality*—and all this was true of SNCC's movement, in which women played an unusually active role.[4] The top-down model can be called more masculine because of its impersonality, its authoritarianism, its

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[1] Payne, op. cit., 364.
[2] Self, op. cit., 314.
[3] See Robyn Ceanne Spencer, "Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle: Revolutionary Black Womanhood and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, California," *Journal of Women's History* Vol. 20, No. 1 (2008).
[4] Payne, op. cit., 266–276.

bureaucratism, its atomistic structure. Each model has its place. The former is more individually and communally empowering, more emotionally rewarding, while the latter is perhaps more efficient and "results-oriented," certainly more sustainable in an advanced capitalist society. This is probably one reason why the Panthers lasted in a relatively potent form for at least a decade, whereas SNCC petered out five years or so after its inception, once its democratic, bottom-up structure had begun bursting at the seams.

Consistent with SNCC's personalized structure was its ideology of empathic nonviolence. Both of these features were suited to the semi-rural, Christian social structures in which the organization worked, and both were essential to the movement's success. We have already discussed the empowering nature and trusting atmosphere of SNCC's democratic structure, but equally important was its nonviolence, both because of its effect on the inner life of the activist and because of its positive reflection on the movement in the eyes of the wider world. Media images of civil disobedience being met with violent reprisal were compelling, and they helped push American culture in the direction of liberalism.

The Panthers' advocacy of violence, on the other hand, was somewhat counterproductive in that it delegitimized their struggle in the eyes of mainstream America—although in the ghetto it had the effect of recruiting blacks to the cause (because they were impressed by the Panthers' willingness to stand up for themselves). What this contrast amounts to is that the party's violence had a largely positive effect on morale and recruitment in the ghetto—thereby enabling the party to survive and grow—but a largely negative effect on the effort to bring about substantive political reform, thereby vitiating the party's long-term goals. This is something of a catch-22, but the paradox necessarily grew out of the conflict between the Panthers' urban environment and its need to appeal to broad swaths of the nation's population in order to achieve meaningful change. –The conflict is revealed, for example, in the contrast between Bobby Seale's early radicalism and the later "respectable" political positions he took while running for mayor.

So, a crucial lesson for activists is that in a liberal-democratic society of entrenched capitalism, partaking in violence can only hurt one's cause in the long run. It turns society against the radical cause, and it also gives authorities an excuse to engage in violent repression. Because of the Panthers' espousal of violence, the FBI could claim that it was morally defensible, even necessary, to attack them. If the power-structure is weak or unstable enough that a violent rebellion might be able to overthrow it, then perhaps it is advisable to engage in such violence (as Lenin, Mao and Castro did). In the United States, however, it is not.

More generally, in a late-capitalist liberal democracy any group that advocates social revolution or radical change in socioeconomic structures is doomed to fail or to be brutally repressed, unless the society is experiencing an upheaval comparable in severity to, say, the Great Depression. Otherwise the authorities are simply too powerful, capitalist ideology is too hegemonic, the middle classes are too secure, the masses are too atomized. The early civil rights movement was able (and allowed) to gain the momentum it did because it did not challenge capitalism or liberal ideologies; its aim was merely the extension of liberal rights to a minority that had been denied them. There was nothing in the logic of broader economic and financial movements to oppose such an extension of liberalism: if anything, industry and finance heartily desired it, since in the long run it would lead to greater social stability and more opportunities for investment. Jim Crow had become economically obsolete with the demise of the cotton economy;[1] it was a hindrance now, and moreover tarnished the U.S's international image. The national media, therefore, cheered SNCC and SCLC from the sidelines, and Kennedy and Johnson offered at first passive and then active support. Only when Martin Luther King turned his attention to the Vietnam War and the plight of the poor working class did the media turn against him. For *these* were the truly revolutionary issues.

The Black Panthers, then, were too radical. Ultimately this is what doomed them. This is what caused the FBI virtually to destroy them. Activists should learn from their example that reformism is the only option in America today and has been so for a number of decades. Only through slow reform can a new society be born now.

It is strange, therefore, that the Panthers lasted in some form—admittedly a less radical form—until the late '70s, whereas SNCC was falling apart by 1965 or '66. What explains this? Arguably, the

[1] See ibid., chapter 1.

explanation is that from the beginning the Panthers had an organizational structure and a "style" (including media savvy) more suited to a modern society than SNCC's was. Once SNCC stood at the head of something like a mass movement—by the end of 1964—its decentralized structure broke down and became fragmented. As SNCC's membership rolls rapidly increased around the time of the Democratic National Convention and afterwards—becoming at the same time more white and middle-class, i.e. more diverse, more reflective of a mass movement—internal tensions started preventing constructive work from being done. Interracial tensions flared up because blacks thought that the new educated white staffers looked down on them or brought unconscious racial prejudices to the organization; an atmosphere of mistrust and envy was propagated as newcomers were given positions of authority and, in any case, the old intimacy was lost; certain movement veterans, like Stokely Carmichael, became celebrities as they traveled around the country giving speeches about black power, which further bruised the egos of their unrecognized coworkers; disappointments at the 1964 DNC in Atlantic City demoralized people, and politics continued thereafter to disillusion some, radicalize others, and generally wreck the *trust* that had once held the group together; debates about the future direction and organization of SNCC became more and more intense after 1964.[1] James Forman, SNCC's executive director, suggested that "the only way [SNCC] could maintain internal cohesion and unity was to establish a strong centralized executive structure," but his proposal was rejected.[2] Meanwhile the expanding organization became more fragmented, more individualistic, and after 1966 it "simply faded away." Its members moved on to other projects, such as feminism, Black Power, the anti-war movement, and the fight against poverty.

In retrospect it is clear that when a decentralized, locally semi-autonomous social movement or organization meets mass society, as SNCC did in 1964, the energies unleashed cannot be contained by the movement/organization, which therefore breaks apart. The result can be a fruitful cross-fertilization of movements, but the point is that the decentralized, democratic structure is not durable and does not seem to be the best way of accomplishing large-scale changes. If SNCC was indeed able to do so it was with the help of SCLC, CORE, the NAACP, the media, and the federal government, all of which organizations were relatively undemocratic. The Panthers, in contrast to SNCC, were able to mobilize people and organize social programs for more than ten years, and they maintained a relatively high level of discipline all this time because of their centralized leadership. Unfortunately their radicalism alienated them from the middle classes and provoked repression from the FBI, which reduced the impact they might have had. And as the '70s made way for the conservatism of the '80s and the Tax Revolt which adversely affected inner cities around the country,[3] the Panthers lost whatever influence they had still had in 1977.

It is also worth noting in this connection that the tradition of mobilizing thousands of people for marches, demonstrations and speeches is perhaps not as unproductive as Ella Baker thought. Especially in a society where *image* is incredibly important, where the media has tremendous influence through its propagation of images and sound-bites, mass spectacles can be powerful means of encouraging change and sending messages both to communities and to politicians. Barack Obama's successful campaign for the presidency testified to the power of image and spectacle, as well as the efficiency of top-down leadership. His campaign mobilized millions of supporters—they were called his "army" of supporters (and armies, of course, are not democratic)—giving them orders through email and text-messages, and thus won the election. It was the cult of personality, and it worked.

In the end, however, for large-scale change the ideal structure is the one that combines top-down with bottom-up leadership. First of all, this is the most *effective* model: it combines efficiency with semi-democratic and personal participation, which latter quality is necessary in order for movement-workers to feel as if they are valued members of a team and thus have a high morale. They have to feel like their participation matters, like they are not mere bureaucratic cogs. Secondly, this model retains some of the moral appeal of the bottom-up tradition. Fieldworkers should be able, through some mechanism or other, to voice concerns and suggest ideas to the top leadership, because ultimately what is happening "on the

[1] Cf. ibid., chapter 13 and Hogan, op. cit., chapters 10–12.
[2] Hogan, op. cit., 200.
[3] Self, op. cit., 316–327.

ground" is what matters most. If leaders lose touch with the grassroots they not only risk irrelevance; their organization also loses touch with democracy, which is precisely one of the values that progressive organizations are supposed to be committed to.

Luckily, it seems as though many political groups have learned these lessons. For instance, the Public Interest Research Groups, or PIRGs, which exist in many states and advocate for liberal causes, combine a somewhat bottom-up "feel" (for the grassroots workers) with a top-down structure. Doubtless no major organizations are democratic *enough*; all have become far more centralized than decentralized. But, again, for large-scale movements this structure seems inevitable in atomized, "privatized" late capitalist societies.

The tradition of decentralized, local initiative worked well for SNCC as long as the movement was largely isolated from mainstream society, politics and the media. Black communities were able to rely on their own traditional, religious, communal ethos to undertake social change together. In the isolated rural backwaters of modern America their communities were sufficiently small and homogeneous for the essential element of *trust* to hold activists together. But as soon as it became necessary to confront America's great heterogeneous civilization, the local tradition of activism came under attack and finally collapsed. Local activism still exists, however, all across America; "small-scale" activists would do well to study SNCC's achievements for the lessons they yield. For instance, Ella Baker's and Bob Moses's style of leadership will always be on some level the ideal one, namely the undogmatic, flexible, personal, dialogical, "Socratic," community-empowering (as opposed to community-dominating) style. This is the democratic style. Making personal connections is more important than maintaining ideological purity—that's another lesson from SNCC. Dogmatism only leads to sectarianism and infighting; the important thing is to maintain an expansive democracy. Even national organizations should do so to the extent that they're able. Similarly, extreme radicalism is not advisable since it antagonizes people: the fate of the Black Panthers teaches us that. Hence, violence should not be intentionally used except perhaps in conditions of exceptional social crisis, i.e. when the society is literally falling apart. Things should be open and aboveground, so to speak, not secretive and conspiratorial. (The Panthers understood that: they contrasted their own tactics with those of the Weather Underground.) In general, the attitude that should be fostered is openness and acceptance. But mass, "undemocratic" mobilization can potentially be useful too, if it is not the only or the main tactic.

However, the main lesson that SNCC's legacy—as well as, indirectly, the Panthers'—teaches us is that "democratic patience" is the greatest virtue. The loss of it caused SNCC's downfall, just as its presence made possible the early victories. "It was necessary for people to be persistent and patient with one another. Apparently, this was the single most important lesson that SNCC could not find a way to sustain."[1] Perhaps future activists will have more success.

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"Ernst Troeltsch's History of the Philosophy of History," by Robert Rubanowice.

I love love love reading intellectual histories, so now that summer is here I'm going to read some. First, *Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant*, by Etienne Gilson and Thomas Langan (1968). A 500-page tome. I still don't have the mastery of that era that I'd like.

The human mind, constantly classifying and ordering and associating things to one another. Ceaselessly, unconsciously and consciously, in the very structures of its physical perception as well as in the ways it interprets that perception, the stories it tells itself constantly, explicitly in philosophy and science and implicitly in common sense and ordinary language—just a never-ending *ordering, classifying, naming*, a *boxing-in* of all the data that come to it into thousands, millions of boxes, some large and some small, and then shunting some aside perhaps for later use while keeping others nearer the front of the mind because of their practicality. The compulsion to *associate*: think of Francis Bacon's tripartite division of the mind into

[1] Hogan, op. cit., 254.

memory, imagination, and reason, corresponding to his tripartite division of the sciences into history (natural and civil), poetry (narrative, representative, or allusive), and philosophy (divine, natural, or human). Memory = history; imagination = poetry; reason = philosophy. The child's urge to name, to associate, to make connections, to make everything *neat*, so as to gain power [over its experience, etc.]. The child's mind is the philosopher's.

Bacon was wrong that induction is the proper method of science—that one simply observes, classifies "without presuppositions," then extrapolates regularities and laws from these observations, then further reduces these to more general laws, and so on—but his mistake was virtually inevitable in one who was reacting against the scholastic tradition. Scholasticism placed far too much emphasis on sterile rationalism, deduction-spinning, concept-spinning without regard for experience; Bacon proselytized for an empiricist philosophy. It would have been contrary to the dialectical tendencies of historical and mental evolution for Bacon to have put forward a model akin to the modern deductive-nomological one, since this one is not as far removed from scholastic rationalism as his empiricism was. Affirmation, negation, negation of the negation. That's the natural trajectory of the mind and behavior, whether in an individual's or in society's history. Why? Because the mind operates through the positing of contrasts, through differentiation. The ubiquity of "binary oppositions" (e.g., light/dark, good/bad) is essentially related to the dialectic: the *oppositions* manifest the mind's nature in a static, conceptual, atemporal way, while the *dialectic* manifests the mind's nature in a dynamic, temporal way. And the reason why the negation of the negation often seems to take the form of a synthesis of the two earlier stages is that the mind remembers or retains them both and hence cannot just return to the initial stage but has to effect a reconciliation. Both stages are false in their own way; but since they are opposites, the only direction to go is toward the middle.

Posted an ad on Craigslist; some nutsos and illiterates replied to it, but then I heard from a 23-year-old female Harvard philosophy grad student who loves classical music, plays the harp and likes doing outdoorsy things (as do I).

If I'd been accepted [to Ph.D. programs in philosophy], I could have been studying philosophy at Harvard when I was 23, like this girl. Could have been taking courses on Continental philosophy, gotten a Masters, maybe a Ph.D., which would have led to who knows what. Korea never would have happened. Life is absurd.

Thomas Hobbes's crude reduction of life to mechanics, machinery, "the motion of limbs," has a contemporary parallel in Daniel Dennett's stupid reduction of the mind to a lot of software programs or whatever.

Descartes wanted "to provide science with a notion of matter in which nothing would resist a purely mechanical explanation. In this sense, the main object of the six *Meditations* is to establish that matter is nothing but geometrical extension, motion itself being a mere mode of extension." ("In science proper, this resulted in a mechanicism without dynamics.") Matter = extension. Interesting. As I wrote months ago, Newton rejected that, or anyway he rejected mechanicism and thus, according to Chomsky, made the idea of matter incoherent. (Action at a distance! That damned action-at-a-distance!)

> Descartes had left his followers a very grave problem to solve: If mind and body are really distinct, how can they unite to form the substantial unity of man? More generally, if no immaterial elements such as forms are included in the structure of physical beings, how can there be any communication between these two radically separated substances, extension and thought? To these two problems, a third one was soon to be added. According to Descartes, mind and body are really distinct because they can be conceived apart, but if the same principle is applied to any two substances, since they can be conceived apart, it will become difficult to imagine how one of them can communicate with any other one. This difficulty became known as the problem of the "communication of substances."

And so the adventure began, the centuries-long quest to come to terms with Cartesianism. Some philosophers would call it a misadventure, a sort of philosophical detour. I don't entirely agree: I think Descartes articulated dualisms that had been obscurely implicit in philosophy for millennia, and eventually

we were going to have to settle accounts with these dualisms. Every major culture obscurely recognizes dualisms between mind and body, inner and outer, spirit and matter, subjectivity and objectivity, etc. Descartes simply formulated them with unusual clarity.

He also did a philosophical service by clearing the way for skepticism, for instance through his first rule of method, that "one should accept in judgments nothing more than what is presented to the mind so clearly and distinctly that there is no occasion to doubt it." An "immediate consequence" of this is that "we must never attribute to any thing what is not clearly and distinctly included in its notion." It's easy to see how these rules could lead to Hume's skepticism.

For Cartesians, clear and distinct ideas are the most simple elements of thought, from which all knowledge can be derived *a priori* by way of deductive rules. One version of rationalism. We'll see this principle being followed by Spinoza and Leibniz.

"*All we know are our own representations*, and of these, only our ideas can be considered true and objective. Descartes has shown that only our clear and distinct ideas possess internal grounds for being held as representative of something; as for all the other affections in the soul, all the confused representations, be they sensations, dreams, imaginings…they surely exist in the soul, but what possible ground is there for affirming that they reveal something true about things lying outside consciousness?" Cartesian skepticism, ancient skepticism.

Said more concisely, the question—or one of them—is how we can know anything outside ourselves if we immediately know only ourselves. Descartes invokes God's perfect nature: he wouldn't *deceive* us, would he?! Malebranche relies on the Bible: it says there that things exist in an extended world, so, well, they must thus exist. The Bible doesn't lie, after all. In fact, we don't see bodies in themselves at all; when I see a book I am really just having the "idea" of extension presented to my spirit in a particular and sensory way by means of the "movement" of the impression (or "sentiment") of color. It is the universal and objective idea of extension which allows me to see something; only by participating in, or (as I would say) instantiating, the "idea"[1] of extension are things perceivable. And this idea, an aspect of universal Reason, has been given to us by God and is a part of him. Thus, the things we see in the world have a dual nature: they are particular (this is the bare sensory impression or "sentiment") but they also participate in the divine idea, as do we—without which participation they could not have the element of objectivity and universality, of *truth*, that allows other people to see them in the way I do. –All this is rather Kantian. It also paves the way for Spinoza's pantheism, especially when you add Malebranche's occasionalism (which is sort of implicit in this analysis; see the next paragraph).

Anyway, it's clear then that Malebranche's answer to the question above isn't as simplistic as Descartes's. It involves (1) God's being the cause of the "movements of knowledge and feeling in my soul" (part of which causation is precisely our possession of universal Reason, our participation in the divine idea), (2) the Bible's revelation that objects actually do exist, and (3) the conclusion that God must be arranging things in these objects in the ways that appear to me (through sensations, etc.), because, after all, he's causing movements in my soul, so it only makes sense that he would cause corresponding movements in the objects. This is the doctrine of occasionalism. One way to express it is: "My body and my spirit are distinct and cannot interact. But God, author of the movements of both, can, as part of the economy of creation, move my body and my spirit simultaneously so that the movements of the one will correspond perfectly with the affections of the other." In fact, substances in nature that seem to interact causally don't really do so: God coordinates them in such a way that the relation of cause and effect *appears* to hold between them.

Whatever. I'll pass over the confusions. From all this it's also easy to see Berkeley's idealism just around the corner. If we have no contact with objects in themselves, we might as well jettison the whole idea of them! We don't need them.

Here's a resolution of Zeno's famous paradox I hadn't considered: "The difficulty 'How can one cross an infinite number of points in a finite time?' results from an illusion. Since both time and space are

[1] The term "idea" is unfortunate, since what Malebranche really means is surely something like "structure," or "perceptual structure" (to psychologize it and put it in modern terminology).

divisible to infinity, we actually cross an infinite number of parts of space in an infinite number of parts of time, which is not absurd." Actually, this isn't quite the same thing as the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise.

Pascal, forerunner of Kierkegaard and existentialism. He was the first great modern philosopher to really understand Christianity; Kierkegaard was the second.

Spinoza resolves some of the Cartesian problems by declaring that there is only one substance. So there is no problem of communication between mind and matter, because thought and extension are simply two attributes of the same substance. And there is no problem of communication between substances in nature because everything is a mode of one universal substance. Here's a passage from the internet on Spinoza's notion of substance:

> For Spinoza, there is only one substance, the existence of which is demonstrated by a version of the ontological argument, which is thought of as being both God and Nature. It is an unending controversy whether Spinoza was a pantheist, or an atheist who called nature 'God' because it was the one true substance and existed necessarily. Everything else is a mode of this one substance. The view is analogous to a claim that the universe is space-time as a whole, with matter as distortions in it. If this were true, material objects would be modes of space-time. The analogy would be more exact if one also thought of the laws of nature as equivalent to the divine intellect immanent in nature. Spinoza's view [stresses the following two definitions of 'substance': (1) "being ontologically basic—substances are the things from which everything else is made or by which it is metaphysically sustained; (2) being, at least compared to other things, relatively independent and durable, and, perhaps, absolutely so."] Nothing but the universe as a whole meets these criteria fully.

Spinoza has always fascinated me, perhaps, on some level, more than any other thinker (except *possibly* Kant and Hegel). He challenges me: I barely understand him at all. But I always feel as though his philosophy is unfathomably deep, as though Truth is buried in it somewhere. He's like a European Buddha-Philosopher.

On the other hand, I often think he's the victim of conceptual confusions.

"Leibniz shared Descartes's idealist vocation and mathematicist prejudices: he set out in the search of Truth in the fair form of a philosophy that would proceed deductively from clear and distinct principles supposed somehow to enfold in their logical expression the very fountainhead of Being itself. …Leibniz's philosophy demands that everything be understood in terms of the 'first truths.'" And the most important first truth is the principle of identity, from which he constructs his entire philosophy. *A is A*. "Identity is that exact coincidence of subject with predicate which alone is absolutely necessary. Identity, necessity, the absolute—these are three ways of expressing the same reality; they are the properties of the clear and distinct truth." To know absolutely—"clearly and distinctly"—is to know what *has* to be, and what has to be is the principle of identity. It has to be because it is its own ground: a judgment of identity needs no more explanation.

"Leibniz made an important addition to Cartesian lore when he decided he had discovered why a truly clear and distinct idea is something divine, an absolute criterion by which the reality and intelligibility of all things are to be measured. This is because a clear and distinct idea has to be a judgment of identity, and a judgment of identity answers perfectly the question of 'sufficient reason': it is its own explanation because what it announces is simply one with itself. The judgment of identity manifests the ultimate, the divine reality, because it states with perfect simplicity that the subject is what it is. Ultimately, every true judgment then must be reducible to a judgment of identity, if it is true, if what it states is real, for that is just what it means to be *real, to be one with oneself perfectly*." Every true judgment has to be reducible to a tautology. The only reason there seem to be contingent truths for us is that we don't know enough, we aren't God. But if we were God we would see the *reason* for the connection between, for example, gold and its color yellow, which would make the judgment "gold is yellow" (or some such one) necessary, an expression of gold's identity with itself. –All this reminds me of Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*.

"To know something necessarily—i.e., absolutely—is to know its *reason* for existing; to know its reason for existing is to know the thing in its essence, so that the essential connection of all the predicates…is reducible to an essential expression of what the thing itself is."

> From this source [writes Leibniz] springs immediately the received axiom that nothing is without a reason, or that no effect is without a cause. Otherwise there might be a truth which could not be proved *a priori*, or which would not be resolved into identical truths; but that is contrary to the nature of truth, which is always, either expressly or implicitly, identical.

The authors comment: "No more dramatic reduction of the order of being to the order of logic can be imagined. The 'cause' of anything is its 'reason,' i.e., its essential intelligibility—the fact that its entire destiny can be reduced to a logical whole…" At any rate, if every truth can be proved *a priori*, everything is necessary. This was Spinoza's conclusion too, but his reasoning was different. Leibniz even agrees with him about the ultimate "sufficient reason" for everything, the reason "why there is something rather than nothing": it has to be a self-caused substance (otherwise there would be an infinite regress of external causes), a substance which causes itself and everything else. And what is this self-caused substance? Why, God, of course! God encompasses the world, and every thing in process that we see has its place in the unity of the totality, "the necessity and reality of which is evident *to any finite mind that has been led to discover within itself the ultimate sense of its own innate ideas*. We shall see that this is the key to Leibniz's conception of how we should live our lives." Let me take a wild guess: it has a lot in common with Spinoza's conception, i.e. with the conception of every philosopher in history (except Nietzsche and some Christians).

Time and space are not real, he argues. They are relations of "extrinsic denomination," whatever that means, due only to the limitations of our finite point of view.

As for the problem of the mind/body dualism—which generalizes to that of how *any* two particular substances can interact (which interaction would entail something passing over from one into the other, which is inconceivable because "it would violate the unity and integrity of each and leave them other than they are")—Leibniz introduces his famous doctrine of pre-established harmony. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as causation; what appears to be causation is in fact *concomitance*. God has arranged it from the beginning so that everything that happens in the mind corresponds to everything that happens in the body. –Um, I'm sorry dude, but Spinoza wins on this one. First of all, he anticipated my position, my emergentism, and secondly, his notion of a universal substance obviated the need to have recourse to any such absurd idea as occasionalism or pre-established harmony.

So, for Leibniz, every substance is a little world closed in upon itself. For it to open out onto other substances is both unnecessary (because of pre-established harmony) and impossible (because of the self-sufficient nature of substance). This Leibnizian atomism is different from the materialistic atomism of the ancients and others in that it rejects mechanistic efficient causation in favor of pre-established harmony: each monad reflects all the others in a sort of 'spiritual' way. Thus Leibniz also rejects Descartes's division of the world into the mechanical-material sphere and the spiritual, 'alive' sphere. –I've never understood the monads. The life of each one—(yes, monads have a "life," because among the substances they all reflect are macrocosmic living ones like humans and plants)—consists in some degree of *perception* and *appetition*. "The monad as representative of the whole universe is *perceptive*, while the monad considered as an individual realizing itself in a unified way is *appetitive*." Okay. That makes about as much sense as any of this.[1]

Leibniz discovered the unconscious. Yes. He understood that we are not conscious of the majority of representations in our mind. All monads, all substances—simple (atoms) and complex (e.g., plants)—have perceptions, according to Leibniz, but most are dim, unconscious; only a *fraction* of *human* perceptions are truly conscious. Remember Nietzsche's tribute to Leibniz in *The Gay Science*? "*…Leibniz's*

[1] Actually, it does make *some* sense. If you translate these old metaphysical philosophies into modern scientific language, they're sort of understandable.

incomparable insight that has been vindicated not only against Descartes but also against everyone who had philosophized before him—that consciousness is merely an *accidens* of the power of representation and *not* its necessary and essential attribute…"

Interesting observation: "The 'Copernican revolution' begins not with Kant, but with Descartes." In a way, that seems obviously true. Descartes's emphasis on consciousness, on the subject, on innate ideas, etc. Consciousness was no longer dependent on experience; experience depended on the structure of consciousness. Kant really just brought the "revolution" to its highest point. –But no, Kant's revolution consisted in "putting man in his place," by drawing the boundaries of reason. Man can't have absolute knowledge. This is fundamentally contrary to Descartes. Cartesian rationalism—which, in a way, is also Kant's—shouldn't really be called a Copernican revolution; it's more of a Ptolemaic counterrevolution, since it puts man at the center of the world, or at least of *his* world. Kant accepts this Cartesian innovation while adding his own properly Copernican element, his humbling of man.

Hitherto I hadn't known much about Christian Wolff besides the fact that Karl Marx had contempt for him, saying that he was basically Germany's Bentham. And so indeed he was. The same shallow, derivative, prolific tediousness.

The Cambridge Platonists. (Middle of the 1600s.) Anti-Puritans. Love, generosity, faith, humility, hope. The Neo-Platonic spirit (they'd all read Plotinus): "the emphasis on the unity of reality radiating downward from the highest principle; the suggestion that one should turn inward to find the presence in us of that highest principle;[1] the union of the practical and theoretical lives…" A Platonic opposition to Bacon's and Hobbes's materialism. They condemn the attempt to derive the higher from the lower—soul from matter, idea from material sensation, life from mechanism. Impossible! they say. Instead, they turn materialism upside down: there is spirit in everything, a world-soul that directs everything. (Cf. Leibniz's rejection of Descartes's mechanistic materialism. Spiritual, living monads.) Needless to say, they didn't have much influence.

With Locke begins the modern tradition of criticism, or critical epistemology (which eventually morphed into the philosophy of language and, on the continent, phenomenology), the tradition that opposes the construction of great metaphysical edifices towering above reality. Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, Husserl, the analytic philosophers, and on up to the present day. On the other side are Malebranche, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hegel, Schelling, Schopenhauer. (Descartes sort of straddles both.) But Locke, true to the spirit of jolly old England, rebels against the immense Baroque rationalistic deductions from first principles;[2] he wants simply to look at the human understanding clearly and unpretentiously, analyze it to see how it works, where its ideas come from, and what exactly we can know.

First, of course, he rejects the idealists' clear and distinct innate ideas. His arguments are easily refuted by Leibniz—with respect to the innate part, not the clear and distinct part. Anyway, you already know what empiricism is: the *tabula rasa*, the sensations, the complex ideas built up out of sensations, and so on. Locke says that all our ideas come from either sensation or inner reflection. He divides ideas into simple and complex. The simple ones include (1) atomistic sense-data (such as the feel of cold when you touch an ice-cube), (2) atomistic reflections on the mind's own operations, (3) "qualities discovered through the cooperation of several senses, and (4) ideas derived from a cooperation of sense and reflection." Examples of (3) are extension, figure, rest and motion, qualities called "primary." (The Cartesians claimed that these qualities are actually innate ideas in us; that's why they apply to all our experiences of objects.) Category (4) includes existence, unity, power, succession, pleasure and pain. These qualities are "suggested" by everything we perceive within us and outside us.

Then the mind *combines, compares,* and *separates* the simple ideas to form complex ones, which fall into the three categories of *substances, modes,* and *relations.* The idea of substance is invented by the imagination to give body to the accustomed "going constantly together" of a number of simple ideas. "Not imagining how these simple ideas can subsist by themselves, we accustom ourselves to suppose some

[1] Cf. the Hindu doctrine of Atman and Brahman. Also, of course, Augustine, Malebranche, et al.

[2] There's a notable similarity of spirit in Baroque architecture, painting, music, sculpture, and philosophy.

substratum wherein they do subsist, and from which they do result, which therefore we call *substance*." Hume essentially borrows his account from Locke.

Locke argues that we cannot know the real essences of things, because no complex idea fabricated out of the atoms of sensation, discrete and external, could ever actually be the thing itself.

As for causation, Locke argues that it is only through the inner experience of causing our own acts that we have a clear grasp of the principle and can apply it to the external world. "The simple ideas we have of bodies, derived from sensation, yield no experience of bodily motion actually beginning." All we can see from sensation is that bodies have the power to receive change, as when a billiard ball strikes another; we never actually see the beginning of a series of changes. Bodies have the passive power of being able to receive change, but do they have an active power? Well, in our inner life we encounter the active power of the will. We then apply the principle to external causation, attributing to bodies a comparable active power. You can see here the direction in which Hume will take this analysis: he'll "jump on the suggestion that cause is traceable to mental conditions and suggest that it is merely the imagination's way of structuring experience." You can also see the potential for a rationalist analysis, according to which the mind furnishes "objectively valid" ideas from which experience is constructed.

Descartes's explanation of personal identity is in terms of the spiritual substance. Locke rejects substance dualism—he even suggests that man *could* be nothing but matter endowed with the power of thinking, although he decides that *probably* thought is immaterial—so he has to come up with a different explanation of personal identity. He finds it in memory: identity extends as far as memory does.

The main purpose of Locke's *magnum opus* is to inquire into the nature of knowledge. It isn't to be found on the level of the ideas taken in isolation, but in the perception of connections between them. He anticipates the transcendental idealists in pointing to the assembling activity of the spirit as that which gives rise to knowledge. This is sort of ironic. "Locke's psychologism is father to the more fundamental transcendentalism of Kant." Locke even admits there is a lot which the human mind is incapable of understanding, for instance matter, motion, and mind itself. This, too, is distinctly un-empiricistic of him.

True knowledge, in the full sense of the word, begins only with the complex ideas, but the simple ideas are valid as far as they go, since they just represent what they represent. They can't be "wrong." Complex ideas Locke divides into mathematical and moral ones, and those relating to natural substances. Ideas in the first category (math/morals)—or, rather, propositions made from these ideas—don't refer to real objects but only to the ideas themselves, or to their mutual compatibility. So, in a way, mathematical and moral truths are true of concrete things too, simply because the latter, in not being denoted by the former, cannot contradict them. "It doesn't matter whether there really is any such thing as an equilateral triangle in the world; the principles concerning equilateral triangles will be true." Again, Locke is close to rationalism. The same applies to moral truths: if it's true in speculation that murder deserves death, then it's true with respect to a concrete act of murder. (Locke doesn't really explain how it's possible that complex ideas do manage to have an applicability to reality.)

Locke didn't like Descartes's deductive physics, preferring a physics of experimentation. "Science shouldn't try to meddle with the archetypes of material substances, [since they] lie without us and cannot be known in themselves." Our only contact with them is through the simple ideas, which may, after all, differ from them. Therefore, "sciences must of necessity be experimental and stop looking for absolute knowledge." In this respect, Locke is a skeptic.

> Locke's vision of the science of the future has proved in one essential respect far more exact than the Cartesian prediction: Science is to be a never-ending, by nature never-satisfied quest, its conclusions always tenuous, always subject to revision as experimentation advances and experimental tools improve. Yet science can be said to acquire some truths "once and for all." Only the realistic position, which admits the possibility of a grasp of certain truth short of a perfect knowledge of being, can explain the actual evolution of a science that is neither deductive nor absolutely uncertain.

Yup.

In some ways Locke is rather Cartesian, for instance in his "anchoring our knowledge of existence in an internal intuition of our own being, completely divorced from any embarrassing questions about the existence and nature of other things." He also deductively demonstrates that God must exist: something must have created being (which I know exists from my own internal intuition), and this something is God. Lastly, he even argues that sensation does, in the end, give us knowledge adequate to practical pursuits. It isn't certain enough to found an objectively valid science, but it serves practical purposes well.

As for political philosophy: there is a natural law grounded in the will of God. The best way to approximate this natural law in societies is for government to enforce the preservation of life and property and allow people to pursue happiness. Private property grows out of the natural right of self-determination with regard to life and happiness. "What man fundamentally possesses is his own person and his own labor. In the process of acquiring what he needs, he works on the things of the earth, transforming them, mixing his labor with them, and therefore making them in some way his own." Hence the right of private property. Locke also invokes the state of nature and the social contract in the predictable ways. The main difference from Hobbes is that the people remain the ultimate possessors of power: if the government abuses its power, going beyond the mere assurance of preservation of property (which is not for its own sake—contrary to modern-day "liberals"—but for the sake of liberty and happiness), its legitimacy is forfeit, power reverts to the people, and revolution becomes just.

Newton was tremendously influential not only in science but in philosophy. In achieving the perfect marriage between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*, he influenced everyone from the *philosophes* to David Hume to Kant. He proved that the proper scientific method is as follows:

> From empirical observation of phenomena one rises by induction to principles expressive of the general nature of the relationships involved. Then, through the medium of a mathematical formulation of these relationships, one deduces the results one should obtain when applying these formulae to the gross phenomena of the planetary system. Whereupon one returns to empirical observation to verify the conclusions, i.e. to see if the planets showed up where they should if everything really works as projected.

"Newton is [also] one of the fathers of the favorite eighteenth-century proof for the existence of a watchmaker to explain the wonderful clockwork of the universe."

"Out of the collisions of spiritualism and materialism, innatism and empiricism, was generated the need, if solutions to these problems were ever to be found, to plunge deeper into the workings of the human soul. And indeed the eighteenth century is the century of *psychology*."

Damn it, I really wish my professors had done more to mentor me in philosophy, at least guided me a little. They should have given me reading lists, advised that I read histories of philosophy first and then the classics. None of them put even the slightest thought into guiding me, despite their acknowledgement of my talent. There was at best benign neglect and at worst outright hostility to my pretensions to independent thought.

I could have sought assistance, yes, but I guess I didn't think I needed it. I did periodically ask for suggestions on what to read.

Almost a decade ago I took a few notes on Berkeley and Hume, but I was philosophically naïve (because untutored) back then. I won't spend much time on them now, though; I'm already well-acquainted with them. Berkeley: occasionalism. We mustn't mistake the connections in nature for causes. Ideas (which are the "objects" we perceive) can't be causes; they're inert. Only spirit, mind, has causative power. Berkeley's half-opposition to the atomism of the empiricist tradition was somewhat influential during the Enlightenment. (He stressed that the senses depend on each other, involve each other in their operations.)

Hume brings atomistic empiricism to its logical conclusions. Actually, the rationalists too, except Spinoza, were atomists, but "the inherently disintegrating nature of Hume's theory of sensation was kept in check and amply compensated in the Cartesians by the marvelous unification given the world by an

infinite God. Remember how Malebranche's God could coordinate a world the individual pieces of which never could touch one another. Or think of Leibniz's miraculously harmonized clocks, so carefully kept parallel by the divine Clockmaker, who can establish them to run simultaneously without any causal connection between them." It's the old problem of the communication of substances. Given the Cartesian assumptions about matter's being extension and extension's not implying motion but only mobility, etc.—so that things can't actively move each other—if God is taken out of the picture as the source of all motion, Hume's theory of causation, based on *impressions* and the role of the imagination, becomes inevitable. (?) "The whole problem is translated into a quest for principles governing the 'association of ideas.'" Hume identifies three principles: resemblance, contiguity in time and place, and cause and effect.

Hume's discussion of the imagination is rather complicated. I'll just try to summarize what he says about causation. Cause-and-effect is a relation between things that are *contiguous* and that are related *successively*, so that the cause always precedes the effect. Hume argues that if they weren't successive, that "if one cause were co-temporary with its effect, and this effect with *its* effect, and so on, 'tis plain there would be no such thing as succession, and all objects must be co-existent." So it would seem, but I'm not sure. If I push an object, the cause appears to be simultaneous with the effect. But that does seem illogical somehow. On the other hand, if a cause is temporally prior then there must be a temporal gap between it and its effect, which is patently illogical. Or is that statement mere sophistry? Maybe there doesn't have to be a temporal gap. So is the cause "infinitesimally" prior to the effect? That just seems silly. Besides, the cause will still have ceased to act before the effect occurs, which raises the question of why the effect occurred! –Reason is inadequate to analyze causation.

Contiguity, succession, what else? *Necessary connection*.

> Two objects may be contiguous and one may precede the other in time without their being considered related to one another as cause and effect. For this relationship to be in force, there must be some connection, considered in some way necessary, between the two impressions. What grounds this supposed necessity? We find a prime example of belief in causal necessity immortalized in the principle, presumed intuitively certain, that whatever begins to exist must have a cause. But is this principle really *necessary*; is it, as claimed, intuitively certain? Actually, the imagination can perfectly well separate the notion "beginning to exist" from the notion "having a cause." "The separation of the idea of a cause from that of a beginning in existence is plainly possible for the imagination; and consequently the actual separation of these objects is so far possible that it implies no contradiction nor absurdity; and is therefore incapable of being refuted by any reasoning from mere ideas; without which 'tis impossible to demonstrate the necessity of a cause."

After disposing of ideal necessary connections, Hume proposes that the basis for belief in causal connections is merely experience. But we can't be justified in drawing conclusions on the basis of past experience; there's no necessary reason to think that a given event will always follow another given event. "Reason can *never* show us the connexion of one object with another, tho' aided by past experience, and the observation of their constant conjunction in all past instances." Hence Hume's skepticism (or one aspect of it). And the problem of induction. "The conjunction of one impression with another…can never justify the least leap beyond experience and beyond time. Science is thus reduced by empiricism, and by all those who substitute a dust of sensory impressions for the living whole of our real experience, to a play of ideas devoid of existential significance the moment it strays beyond the limits of concrete sensible verification." The author is right to criticize empiricism in this way, but reason itself is a culprit too. Kant's point was that reason mustn't overstep its bounds: on the basis of pure *reason*, the necessity and the relation itself of cause and effect are inexplicable. Kant's solution is that our minds are structured as they are below the level of conceptual reasoning, which gets all muddled and twisted in knots when it questions its foundations (among which is the principle of cause and effect). But he has in common with Hume a skepticism about how things are in themselves.

In general, Hume wants to deflate the pretensions of reason, demolish traditional metaphysics, point to the importance of *habit* in how we think, emphasize the self's "embodiment," show that reason is not as strictly objective or absolute as the Cartesians thought. Like his predecessors and Kant, he argues that the *imagination*, which associates ideas and makes connections between them, is essentially what constructs the world for us. (Again, irony. The difference between the old empiricists and rationalists is that the former basically think it all has to do with learning from experience, through habit or whatever, while the latter think it's innate. But they both accept that the mind plays some role in structuring experience.[1]) So, for Hume, it's the imagination that makes us think objects exist externally to us, and which gives rise to our belief in personal identity or a spiritual substance, and which persuades us of the necessity of causation. His predecessors didn't emphasize imagination to this extent.

Hume is agnostic with respect to the debate between realism and idealism. Reason cannot adjudicate between them because there are valid arguments for both positions.

His ideas on morality were as perceptive as his ideas on everything else. You know by now that what he thinks about values is similar to what I think. An emphasis on subjectivism, etc. Following in the footsteps of Hutcheson.

Condillac, like Hume, wants to study human knowledge in order to know how it operates and thus avoid error. He argues that good philosophical systems are possible only if they start from observed facts. The bad ones are "abstract" or excessively deductive. He criticizes them on a number of general grounds, but one of his specific dislikes is the belief in innate ideas. Instead, he upholds sensation as the source of our ideas. Essentially his goal is to correct and complete Locke's philosophy. Locke had accepted that intellect was distinct from sense; it simply got all its material from sensation. But Condillac wants to get rid of intellect as a separate faculty altogether, claiming that it is merely *transformed sensation*. Sensations, he argues against the Cartesians, are in themselves clear and distinct, and they show unproblematically that an external world exists. Unconscious sensations (or perceptions) do not exist; Leibniz's notion of *petites perceptions* makes no sense, for unperceived perceptions are a contradiction in terms. (Cf. Sartre.) The mind, lacking reason and intellect, is wholly passive. Etc. The *Stanford Encyclopedia* summarizes: "Condillac was the chief exponent of a radically empiricist account of the workings of the mind that has since come to be referred to as 'sensationism.' Whereas John Locke's empiricism followed upon a rejection of innate principles and innate ideas, Condillac went further and rejected innate abilities as well. On his version of empiricism, experience not only provides us with 'ideas' or the raw materials for knowledge, it also teaches us how to focus attention, remember, imagine, abstract, judge, and reason. It forms our desires and teaches us what to will." Etc. Condillac was a precursor of associationism.

"The properly philosophical reaction to the movement represented by Locke, and partially at least caused by him, assumed a twofold form. First, there was what is now called the Scottish School of Common Sense. Its founder was Thomas Reid and he remains its greatest name. The other form of reaction borrowed its inspiration from the classics of modern Christian philosophy; it was initiated in Savoia by the now unjustly forgotten Cardinal Gerdil."

Reid was awoken from his dogmatic slumber by reading Hume's masterpiece: he decided that Hume's skepticism was the logical conclusion not only of Locke's philosophy but of Descartes's doctrine that *the immediate objects of man's knowledge are his ideas*. If you start from this premise, you're bound to get Berkeley and Hume, i.e. skepticism. The remedy, then, is to deny the premise. As he bluntly states, "No solid proof has ever been advanced of the existence of ideas." Wow! Talk about boldness! Actually, by 'ideas' he only means them as they are conceived by Cartesians and Lockeans. The authors' discussion of him isn't as clear as I'd like, but what is clear is that his doctrine anticipates Kant's in some respects: for example, he disagrees with the Cartesian and Lockean doctrine that the mind is confronted with simple apprehensions containing no conceptual content which it then compares and connects and makes judgments

[1] Actually, it seems as though empiricists suffer from a tension between believing the mind is passive and believing it's active. The rationalists accept its element of passiveness, but they can better account for the ways in which even the *empiricists* acknowledge it is active, i.e., they can do so without falling victim to a certain sloppiness of thinking.

about. Judgments cannot be separated from our immediate perceptions (or, according to the authors, sensations).[1] Sensations implicitly refer to objects in an external world; it isn't that we simply make an illegitimate *conclusion* that there are such objects, as Berkeley thinks. We cannot help judging, *in the very act of our perception*, that objects and substances and causes etc. exist. Reid anticipates both G. E. Moore and Wittgenstein, and he's more profound than the former:

> If I say that a sensation exists [as the authors paraphrase him], I understand myself; but if you want me to say that there is an agreement between my idea of any sensation and that of existence, I find myself confused… [Wittgenstein.] "It is no less a part of the human constitution to believe the present existence of our sensations, and to believe the past existence of what we remember, than it is to believe that twice two make four… To reason against any kind of these sorts of evidence is absurd; nay, to reason for them is absurd. [Wittgenstein.] They are first principles; and such fall not within the province of reason but of common sense."
>
> Such original judgments [argues Reid] are therefore a part of that furniture which nature has given to the human understanding… They are a part of our constitution, and all the discoveries of our reason are founded upon them. They make up what is called *the common sense of mankind*; and what is manifestly contrary to any of those first principles is what we call *absurd*… A remarkable deviation from them arising from a disorder is what we call *lunacy*; as when a man believes that he is made of glass. When a man suffers himself to be reasoned out of the principles of common sense by metaphysical arguments, we may call this *metaphysical lunacy*; which differs from the other species of the distemper in this, that it is not continued, but intermittent; it is apt to seize the patient in solitary and speculative moments; but when he enters into society common sense recovers her authority…

He wants to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle. He even refers to philosophers as patients! Awesome!

The obvious difference of all this from Kant is that Reid takes sensations at face-value: he accepts that the external world "really is" as it seems, whereas Kant considers this conclusion unwarranted. In fact, Reid would judge that not only Kant but all contemporary scientific realists suffer from "metaphysical lunacy." And he'd be right, in a sense. But that doesn't mean *we're wrong*.

Again, ironically, Reid does have something in common with Descartes: his rationalism.

Diderot: atheist and materialist. A self-organizing world of matter, governed by chance. He started from Condillac, who said that there is no autonomous reason or intellect in the soul, only sensations and their offshoots. But if the soul is essentially sensations and shadows of sensations, then why not get rid of the soul altogether in favor of the body? Sensations are simply modifications in the body. There is no reason or intellect, only bodily sensations which become "ideas" that are then associated in various ways, a process we call reasoning. Diderot's interlocutor objects that feeling is incompatible with matter, but Diderot rejoins, "How do you know that sensibility is incompatible with matter, since you know neither what matter is nor what sensibility is?" In fact, it may be that every piece of matter in the universe has sensations. (Leibniz.)

D'Holbach:

> He reduced all phenomena, physical and moral alike, to matter and motion, motion being held to be an essential property of matter. A strict determinism prevails everywhere. [But

[1] Reid distinguishes "*impression*, a change caused in a *passive* subject by the operation of an external cause; *sensation*, an *act* of the mind that can be distinguished from all others by this, 'that it has no object distinct from the act itself'; *perception* 'is most properly applied to the evidence which we have of external objects by our senses.'" I'd have to read his works to get a clear grasp of these distinctions.

> that statement is misleading: d'Holbach wasn't as deterministic as Hobbes, nor as "materialistic." He thought that humans are matter with certain peculiar properties not shared by most material things.] D'Holbach wrote a number of violently anti-religious works, directed against revealed religions in general but particularly against Christianity and priests. All religions are harmful; priests should everywhere be replaced by physicians. The doctrine aims at founding a new system of ethics which consists in identifying with pleasure the fundamental motive of human actions; societies should be organized in such a way that it be the interest of each and every individual to act for the greater benefit of the social body. [From the *Stanford Encyclopedia*: "Ethics on Holbach's account amounts to enlightened self-interest, vice to a failure to recognize the means to one's interest, and moral rules to hypothetical imperatives which dictate the means to happiness or self-preservation." Ayn Rand.] It is the business of the state to see to it that personal interest and morality coincide. The moral problem must therefore be solved by the political power; a non-religious education should train future citizens to act for the benefit of all… [He has a social contract theory of society, and he agrees with Locke about revolution etc.]

Sheer Bentham. Helvetius:

> [Similar to d'Holbach.] What is personal to him is, if not the notion itself, this being common to all the Encyclopedists, at least the all-importance he attaches to the idea of education. All men are made alike by nature, yet they are all different. What causes these differences? Education. On the part of the educated, the basis for education is attention; attention itself depends on interest and on passion, which are always bound with the quest of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. On the strength of these principles, it should be possible for education to mold men after a common pattern, abolishing the individual inequalities and training everyone to delight in actions beneficial to the common good of society. Virtuous actions are such as contribute to the welfare of the country; education will have achieved its end if it places children in surroundings that will determine in them the kind of passions from which virtuous actions inevitably flow… [The main thesis of his speculative philosophy is that] "*physical sensibility* and *memory* are the productive causes of all our *ideas*, and that all our *false judgments* are effects of either our *passions* or of our *ignorance*." At the psychological level, the doctrine is a rehash of Condillac: "all judgment is but sensation," "judging is feeling."

"In the field of philosophy, all the Encyclopedists inclined toward an associationist conception of the human mind, a materialist notion of the human soul, and, with notable hesitations, toward a materialistic interpretation of nature and societies." But of course most of them were deists, and some were far less hostile toward Christianity than others.

Vico impresses me. The *Stanford Encyclopedia* has a good article on him. He was a deeper thinker than most of the other Enlightenment figures.

Montesquieu. Environmental determinist: different laws are appropriate to different peoples, because they have different climates, different customs, etc. And differences between nations are explained by differences between their environments. Governments are either republican (democratic or aristocratic), monarchical, or despotic. A despotism = no other law but that of the tyrant, while a monarchy = a ruler following fixed and established laws. Montesquieu analyzes each of the governmental forms in great detail. He is "among the greatest philosophers of liberalism"; he's the one who expounded the doctrine of the separation of executive, legislative and judicial powers. From the *Stanford Encyclopedia*:

> Certain arrangements make it easier for the three powers to check one another. Montesquieu argues that the legislative power alone should have the power to tax, since it can then deprive the executive of funding if the latter attempts to impose its will arbitrarily.

> Likewise, the executive power should have the right to veto acts of the legislature, and the legislature should be composed of two houses, each of which can prevent acts of the other from becoming law. The judiciary should be independent of both the legislature and the executive, and should restrict itself to applying the laws to particular cases in a fixed and consistent manner, so that "the judicial power, so terrible to mankind, …becomes, as it were, invisible," and people "fear the office, but not the magistrate."

James Madison had read his Montesquieu.

Condorcet, the prophet of progress. In this respect, the logical conclusion of one of the trends of the Enlightenment.

Kant: metaphysics tries to go beyond experience—it tries to apply the "categories" beyond experience—which is illegitimate. It results in endless arguments that go nowhere because they can't be tested. Newtonian physics works: it can be tested. Metaphysics doesn't. Cf. the position of the logical positivists.

> Kant was confronted with this spectacle: on the one hand, Hume utterly undermining the possibility of forming from experience a valid principle of being; and on the other, Leibniz blandly assuring that all judgments can be reduced to a judgment of identity, that there exists a sufficient reason for everything (unknown to us, of course; but how reassuring merely to know that such a reason exists and that everything has to be just as it is, and, *as* it is, is perfectly *rational*!) Hume and Leibniz are violent extremes. Kant will seek to find a way between them.

He overcomes "the embarrassment of empiricism—its lack of a credible theory of abstraction [i.e., of abstracting from sensations essential and accidental forms] and consequently its failure to explain universality and necessity—…and subsumes Hume's theory of association into a 'transcendental' explanation: the strand of necessity is not mere habit but is rooted in the very nature of the sensibility (and the understanding) as such." Yep. Or, to speak in modern language, it's rooted in the biological structures of human cognition.

Descartes was wrong to substantialize the *cogito*, for "the notion of substance is not supposed to be itself the subject of an intuition but only to serve as a unifying function." One doesn't directly intuit a substance; one merely applies the concept to the sensory data one intuits. On the other hand, it may after all be the case that a soul, a spiritual substance, exists outside the realm of appearances. "Neither the materialist nor the spiritualist philosophies are right in asserting, respectively, that there is no soul or that there is a substantial soul, for neither has a legitimate basis for making such assertions. The soul remains an idea of which it is impossible to know whether it exists or not; in any event, reason is led to it necessarily, and there is nothing that suggests that it is impossible for it to exist." That's true—except I don't see how reason is led to it *necessarily*. Same with the idea of God.

A good summary:

> The sixteenth century had witnessed the end of a philosophical age—not just that of scholasticism—rather, it was really the end of the age of Greek philosophy. All the technical material used by the Christian philosophers and theologians, from Augustine to Marsilio Ficino, had been dug out of Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus. The earlier sixteenth-century philosophers had turned to Epicureanism, to Stoicism, and to Greek skepticism; that is, they were still living on the philosophical heritage bequeathed by antiquity…
>
> The birth of modern science was the decisive factor in the rise of modern philosophy. The scientific sterility of Aristotle's logical method contrasted unfavorably with the extraordinary fecundity of the new methods developed by Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler. In consequence, philosophy underwent a twofold change. First, it detached itself from theology because, under its scholastic form, it had become entangled with the

> now-abandoned Aristotelian physics; secondly, it asked from the newly founded or reformed sciences of nature new methods of philosophical investigation similar to their own.

"Owing to John Locke, Baconian empiricism was to become the driving force of the eighteenth century as visibly as the mathematicism of Descartes had been the dominant influence in the philosophy of the seventeenth."

I'm bored with being bored with being bored.

Reading A. J. Ayer's *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*. "The stumbling-block for [an empiricist] is the development of the 'pure' sciences of logic and mathematics, which seem to possess a security which sensory observation could not bestow on them. One way of dealing with it has been to deny them this security by making the difference between them and the propositions of the natural sciences at most a difference of degree, so that they too are open to revision in the light of further experience." This is what Quine tried in his famous paper on the "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," which I argued against in one of my papers. (The analytic/synthetic distinction has some validity. And the distinction between logical or mathematical propositions and synthetic [I think I meant *a posteriori*] ones is totally valid.[1])

The problem of free will amounts to the problem that there are two ways of describing people's actions: that which involves the self, its desires and reasons, and that which treats the person not as a self but as a sort of machine. From the inside, one *chooses* one's acts; the *self's desires* and *reasons* are what explain behavior. From the outside, scientifically as it were, it's theoretically possible to explain behavior without essential reference to the self. Or, if there is such a reference, as in sociology and psychoanalysis, the point is that it treats the self not as autonomous but as formed by hundreds of influences.[2] And with biology you don't even have to refer to the self at all; you just talk about stimulus and response, chemicals and electrical impulses. So, the problem is really that there are two levels of reality, the first-personal and, in the final analysis, the deterministic. There seems no way to reconcile these two levels: they're absolutely opposed. Each is the negation of the other. And yet each exists! *I am free*, that's indisputable. (I'm freely moving my fingers right now.) But *I am determined*, that's nearly indisputable too. (I'm an assemblage of cells interacting in such a way that these fingers are caused to move in the ways they're moving.)

So the free will problem is sort of a restatement of the mind-body problem. Two kinds of reality; the question is how they relate.

I'm autonomous, the master of myself and my acts. But beneath my apparent autonomy is its negation. This is an extreme case of the appearance/reality problem, the problem of how there can be an "essence" we don't have "access" to.

Why do I keep thinking, though, that the question of free will vs. determinism borders on being a pseudo-problem? Because it's hard to formulate clearly? Because it's hard to know what the stakes are? Or have I somehow misunderstood it?

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[1] Recall that in my paper I distinguished between analytic propositions, which rely on conventions of meaning, and logical or mathematical truths, which have to do with *form*, not conventions of meaning. Previous philosophers, I said, have been confused: many seem to have thought that logical truths themselves should be called analytic, but that's wrong. (Is it?) Actually (I said), it's self-evidently wrong: analytic propositions are *defined as* those that can be reduced to logical truths by virtue of their meanings. But then logical truths themselves are "primitive," not analytic. 'A is A' and '2 + 2 = 4' are neither analytic nor synthetic; they're simply…based on *identity*, not on relations of synonymy and so forth. (Actually, they're not quite the same: the second one includes an element of cognitive synthesis, unlike the first. But both involve the relation of identity and have nothing to do with conventions of meaning.) Synthetic *a priori* propositions, like those of "pure natural science," are another category.

[2] Or maybe these disciplines have no relation at all to the problem of free will and determinism. They treat of phenomena that are sort of 'between' the two extremes, implying neither freedom nor determinism. –How confusing all this is!

Incompatibilism has to be right on some level: there's an incompatibility between my radically indeterministic consciousness and the deterministic nature of those neural processes on which my consciousness supervenes. The fact that free will doesn't make much conceptual sense has little relevance, since *intuitively* it is self-evident.

Excerpted from an email I sent Aniela tonight:

> Hi! I wish you were here, I'm feeling strangely mellow and melancholy tonight. I'd like to hold you and just fall asleep in your arms. Tired… Want to write a poem but I've lost the talent. I'm too old, too dried-up. Listening to Zeppelin's "The Rain Song." Good song.
>
> How did the wedding go? […] I really have no idea why I feel so sad and alone now, I had a great day. But I'm just very very glad I know you and can think of you, it makes me feel like I finally sort of belong in this world or have a home. I don't think you know how important you are to me! You're definitely one of the best things that's ever happened to me. As Stevie Wonder said in "I Believe," "I'm so glad that I found someone to believe in again…"

And then I cried. A singular event.

The term 'synthetic *a priori*' is ambiguous. In philosophical jargon, 'synthetic' is opposed to 'analytic' and thus denotes propositions that are not true solely by virtue of their meanings but instead have empirical content. 'Every event must have a cause' is synthetic[1]—and, Kant would say, *a priori*, since it is justified independently of experience. [I.e., it *has* to be true.] In another sense, though, 'synthetic' can mean simply that which is synthesized by the mind, by our innate cognitive structures. In this sense, '2 + 2 = 4' can be called (misleadingly) synthetic *a priori*, since our assent to it depends on our cognitive faculty of mathematical synthesis. But philosophically speaking, the proposition should perhaps be called analytic in that it's true by virtue of its meaning. [*Not* by virtue of linguistic or social 'conventions,' though, as the definition of 'bachelor' is.]

Anyway, the philosophy conference on the early rationalists and empiricists was—the epitome of nerdiness. What a sheltered world philosophers live in! Any outsider hearing the lectures would have been like "Somebody please waterboard me or give me a gun, please." The rationalist lectures were the worst—the trafficking in the abstractest of abstract concepts like, apropos of Spinoza, "What is the nature of ideas of ideas? Are they conscious, does it make sense to attribute consciousness to ideas, or is it rather that *we* are conscious *through* ideas?"—and substance, form, souls as the forms of body, yada yada. Concepts piled on concepts, a shitheap of concepts, no one apparently having a clearer idea than I of their meanings since occasionally a question would be asked that cut through the infinite details and everyone would laugh, like "Yeah, what in God's name is all this Aristotelian crap about forms, what does he *mean*?!" When it comes to philosophy, you have to draw a line somewhere. It's fine to think about the idea of form or substance to see if it can be useful, but to discuss and discuss for hours—or years—on the basis of concepts you neither question nor understand because they're more abstract than even such notions as space and time is perverse. The lecture on British empiricism was a breath of fresh air after Leibniz and Spinoza—though that's not

[1] [Well, be careful. I suspect that all this talk about 'analytic vs. synthetic' is confused or imprecise. 'Having been caused' is surely implicitly part of our understanding of 'event,' and thus, perhaps, part of its meaning. (Or maybe that doesn't follow?) If so, the statement above is analytic. But the nature of its analyticity is different from 'A bachelor is an unmarried adult male,' in that it expresses an aspect of our innate cognitive structure, so to speak. Anything that happens -- i.e., an event -- *has to be* caused, we think. Its being caused is 'part of' its happening. Linguistic conventions have nothing to do with our understanding of this, which pertains to the framework of causality that we bring to experience. Anyway, 'Every event must have a cause' points to the substantive empirical fact that anything that happens (in our experience) is caused by something else. That's why I said it's synthetic.]

saying much. And yet the people were quite friendly and, of course, brilliant in their own hard-to-take-seriously ways.

I met Ashley today, another black girl from Craigslist, effervescent. Got along well. Will see her again soon. Several other Craigslist girls I'll meet this week or next (I sifted through the pile and found the intelligent ones).

No more of Ayer's book. Reading it isn't a productive activity. Instead, volume 2 of Scott Soames's *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*, a detailed discussion of analytic philosophy from the late Wittgenstein to Kripke.

June

"One of the themes of the *Investigations* is that terms like 'think' and 'understand,' which appear to refer to private mental events or processes, should really be understood as standing for complex behavioral and social dispositions, standardly including dispositions to use language." Stated like that, the thesis is wrong. It's not *either/or*. As I've noted in the past, it's *both*. And that's the paradox. Understanding and thinking consist partly in a private mental state and partly in behavior. My understanding of a math problem consists both in my conscious state—the 'click' of understanding—and in my successful completion of the problem. (Chomsky might disagree with that—or he'd add, probably rightly, that ultimately understanding in this case has to do with the correct application of unconscious computational rules. But this additional element surely doesn't apply to *all* cases of understanding.)

The older I get, the less I care about philosophy. And not only philosophy. If I belonged to a community of minds, that might not be true.

I'm worried about my future. Very worried.

Excruciating aimlessness.

Back in St. Louis I criticized some of Wittgenstein's conclusions—or those of his commentators—with respect to rule-following. I was reminded of what I wrote when reading Soames's summary a moment ago: "In [sections 82 to 85 of the *Investigations*], Wittgenstein is telling us that our use of words and other symbols is not always guided by rules; sometimes it is simply automatic." But this automatic quality (I wrote) is precisely how we know we're following a rule! We may not be able to say what the rule is—it may be something like an unconscious computation or whatever, à la Chomsky—but skepticism about rule-following certainly isn't justified by our so-called "blindness" when following the rules of language. And Soames is wrong to say that "sometimes" our use of words and symbols is automatic; rather, it is *always*, or at least *almost always*, more or less automatic. And that's because we're being guided by our unconscious cognitive structures and internalizations. We have no choice in the matter.[1] Soames continues: "Moreover, even when we do have a rule in mind that we are attempting to follow, the rule itself is something that, in principle, might be subject to different interpretations. As a matter of simple empirical fact, our interpretations are often instinctive and unthinking, in the way that our interpretation of a directional sign with a finger pointing in one direction is. But even if, in some cases, our interpretation of one rule requires another rule to guide us, at some point the appeal to rules to interpret symbols has to give out, and we will find ourselves using words without thinking. These are cases in which we use words without following rules at all." No! We don't have to be explicitly conscious of the exact rule in question in order to be following one. In fact, it's precisely in those moments when we're *not* conscious of what we're doing that our rule-following is most perfect and complete. As Nietzsche said, animals operate more perfectly, the less conscious they are.

It's obvious but it's often forgotten: when you feel bad about yourself or your situation or your not having accomplished everything you wanted to, remind yourself that it could be a lot worse. That helps. It

[1] It's astonishing to me that professional philosophers haven't understood this fact, or its implications.

seizes my mind sometimes that I could already have done much more with my life if my circumstances had been different or if I'd willed myself to, but then I tell myself: I could have done a lot *less* too.

Wittgenstein is arguing that the referentialist theory of meaning is wrong: a word's meaning cannot simply be some object to which it refers. (But he also opposes Russell's descriptivism.) The private language argument is a special case of his broader argument: the meaning of an expression cannot consist simply in the (kind of) private sensation it stands for. In order for the word to have meaning, there has to be a public or independent criterion for determining whether it is used correctly. But if its use is entirely private, then whatever *seems* right to the user *is* right, which means that there is no real criterion for its correct use. –But as I said a long time ago, all this was anticipated by Hegel. A language of "sensuous certainty" is not a genuine language, because in order for there to be communication there has to be conceptual mediation. An unmediated language would consist in brute sounds "referring" to the immediately present: even the expressions 'here,' 'now,' 'this' are not "brute" enough. So, strictly speaking, the meaning of any word in a natural language, even a name, cannot be *exhausted* in an object to which it refers, because then it is not implicitly being related to other concepts. Saussure said it too: linguistic meaning consists in *differentiation* between concepts. Such differentiation(s)—i.e., concepts themselves—are precisely the "rules" one is following when using language. Kant said it: a concept is essentially a rule. The rule of its use, and thus the criterion for its correct use, is implicit in the concept itself, which means that any speaker who fully understands the concept understands how to use it. It's superfluous to seek the criterion for correct use in the linguistic community's agreement with the speaker's use (and this is what Wittgenstein does; he insists that others be able to verify that the speaker has used the word correctly), because each language-user is *his own community*. He is his own other; he has internalized other people's reactions to him, and this is how he is able to use language. G. H. Mead said it. People take the role of the other when they speak, implicitly anticipating the other's reactions to their words; hence their ability to judge at every single moment whether they are using words correctly. Language presupposes both conceptual and interpersonal mediation (differentiation) in one consciousness.

Speaking loosely, we might say that the meaning of the name 'Saul Kripke' is its referent, the man, or that the meaning of 'pain' is a private sensation, but, strictly speaking, the intentional act of positing a reference-relation when using the word isn't that which solely gives it its meaning. It derives its meaningfulness from its place in the conceptual and interpersonal universe that exists in one's head and in one's society. (Kripke's "rigid designator" theory meets Frege's descriptivist theory, his sense–reference distinction. [?])

So, on one weak interpretation at least, Wittgenstein's private language argument is right, as are many of his ideas about linguistic meaning. To say that a word's or a sentence's meaning is just its reference is misleading if you don't also say that its meaning*fulness* comes from its relations to other expressions, from rules that govern its use, and so on.

—All this is probably meaningless to you if you haven't read Soames's book.

Soames effectively argues against Strawson's performative theory of truth, according to which "To say that a statement is true is not to describe it, to attribute a property to it, or to make any statement about it; instead it is to perform the speech act of endorsing, conceding, or confirming it." In his arguments, Soames also effectively "endorses" or "confirms" what I wrote in the long footnote about Austin in my paper on ontology. By the way, while I hate rereading anything I've written, I have to admit that it's refreshing to peruse my philosophical writings after reading those of an analytic philosopher. What breeziness and confidence there is in my writing! What wit, irreverence, ambitiousness, lack of regard for stale conventions! Some of my old papers are quite funny.

The millennia-long debate about radical skepticism about the external world can never be conclusively settled. There are two ways of thinking about consciousness: either consciousness is in the world, or the world exists only in [or for] consciousness. In the final analysis, there is no way of adjudicating definitively between these positions. Common sense and the 'Other-oriented' nature of experience tell us that consciousness is in the world, that there is an external, mind-independent world (and it's the one we

perceive); on the other hand, this external world is represented in [or to] consciousness and that is the only way we know of it. Everything we know is in consciousness. So why postulate an external world? Any number of reasons can be thought of, but ultimately none can do away with the fact that, from one perspective, everything we experience *by definition* exists, for us, only in [or 'as apprehended by'] our consciousness. So you have skepticism (Berkeleyan or a milder form) and you have realism, and you adopt one view or the other on the basis of a "Gestalt-switch." In one moment I'm a skeptic or an idealist; in the next I switch my perspective and I'm a realist. Neither perspective can be definitively established or refuted because consciousness cannot step outside itself to see whether there is in fact an external world (or whether the world-in-itself 'looks' like the world we see). So we're stuck with the Gestalt-switches.

Here's a clearer way of saying it: you can think of the objects in (or of) your perceptions as being either just sensory [or perceptual] appearances with no "depth" or full-fledged, independent objects. Ordinarily we think of them as the latter, but through a Gestalt-switch you can adopt the former perspective. And nothing can prove it wrong. In fact, science basically confirms it. But on the level of common sense, Wittgenstein and Austin are right that it's senseless to question ordinary objects or knowledge or to talk about "evidence" for the existence of objects; only when you step back into the skeptic's Gestalt can you start asking these questions.

Complete, Berkeleyan skepticism [i.e., idealism] is silly—though it can't be *proven* false—but other forms of skepticism are not.

It's remarkable how confused philosophers get when discussing this subject. Consider Moore's famous argument that skepticism can't be true because if it were then I wouldn't have hands—because hands are external objects—but I do have hands, so skepticism must be false. This is the sort of thing you'd expect from some homeless bum on the street. If you told him about skepticism he'd look at you blankly and say, "What do you mean?! I have hands, don't I?! So obviously there are external objects!" The famousness of Moore's argument in itself strips philosophers of whatever dignity they thought they had. The whole point is that hands are *in consciousness* [i.e., apprehended by it]—we're aware of them through consciousness, and so to that extent they're "in" it. They can be thought of as mere perceptual appearances, not independent physical objects. For all we know—however unlikely it is—these appearances might be posited by consciousness in such a way that it tricks itself into thinking they have independent existence. And if in some sense hands do exist even when they're not being perceived, who knows what they 'look like' in themselves! They could be [they are] colorless, they could be mostly empty space within and between atoms, who the hell knows! The nervous system creates its experience with the help of sensory data, and it manipulates the data in so many ways that there's little reason to think the world as we perceive it has much in common with the world in itself.

Nothing is more comical than a philosopher.

> Suppose a person both accepted a Malcolm-style linguistic account of *red* [according to which the word *red* has to apply to certain objects in order to be meaningful], and was willing to grant that he knew that his use of the word was meaningful. It is hard to see how such a person could then coherently deny that he knew that at one time his word correctly applied to certain things. Rather, such a person should be willing to say, *Since I know that my word 'red' is meaningful, and since I know that this could not be so unless there had been red things to which it correctly applied, I know that there have been red objects*.

Um, no one is denying that there are red objects. The skeptic's claim is only that these objects don't (or might not) have independent [mind-external] existence. *Of course* there are red objects, you moron! I can see them right now. But do they exist independently? I don't know. Surely not *as the red objects we perceive*. [The world-in-itself is what physics says it is, not what we perceive.]

> …One example of this general sort that was actually discussed during the ordinary language period we are studying involves a skeptical claim arising from the observation that what modern physics tells us about the ordinary objects around us is sometimes at

> variance with what we previously believed. For example, we have learned that familiar material objects, which appear solid, are made up of many tiny atoms at some distance from one another. This has led some to the modest skeptical conclusion that although we normally think that bricks, concrete blocks, and slabs of steel are solid, in fact they really are not solid, since most of the space they occupy is empty, owing to gaps between the atoms that make them up. The proper Malcolm-style response to such skeptics is that the word *solid* is defined by our intention that it is to apply to just such objects as bricks, steel, etc., and not by any abstract principle about how much empty space might exist at microscopic and submicroscopic levels. The putative linguistic fact here is that it is constitutive of the meaning of the word *solid* that it apply to such objects; it is not constitutive of its meaning that the things to which it applies must satisfy abstract descriptive principles that could be falsified by modern physics. Examples like this make it plausible to suppose that linguistic observations of the sort that Malcolm was trying to articulate may sometimes play a significant role in identifying the errors in certain skeptical views…

Huh? The skeptic's point is that our perception of objects is contradicted by what physics tells us about them. We see objects as clumps of congealed matter that definitely don't have a whole lot of empty space in them (in fact, according to physics, far more empty space than matter). Fuck linguistic analysis. It's irrelevant. The skeptic is right in this case: physics undermines commonsense realism.

I like being proven right:

> [From a newspaper article.] As my wife and I sat on the couch one night this past winter, reading and half-watching the inevitable HGTV, I started sweating hard and my face got so fevered and flushed that I felt as if I were peering into an oven.
> I turned to Deb and said, "Man, I'm having a wicked hot flash." And she said, "Me, too." Then we laughed. You laugh a lot — unless your hormones are making you cry — when you're having menopause with your wife.
> I was in the middle of treatment for an aggressive case of prostate cancer last winter, and it included a six-month course of hormone therapy. My Lupron shots suppressed testosterone, which is the fuel for prostate cancer.
> When your testosterone is being throttled, there are bound to be side effects. So, with the help of Lupron, I spent a few months aboard the Good Ship Menopause with all the physical baggage that entails. It's a trip that most men don't expect to take.
> The side effect that surprised me most were the hot flashes — not that I got them, I was expecting that, but by how intense they were. They often woke me in the middle of the night and made me sweat so much that I drenched the sheets. In midwinter I'd walk our miniature poodle, Bijou, wearing shorts and a T-shirt. I sometimes felt as if Deb could fry eggs on my chest. (It's also a bit disconcerting when your hot flashes are fiercer than your wife's.)
> When it comes to hot flashes, ladies, I salute you. After my brief dalliance with that hormonal phenomenon, it seems to me it's an under-reported condition. And it's certainly under-represented in the arts. Where are the great hot flash novels or movies? How come there's not a Web site or magazine called "Hot Flash Monthly"?
> Hand in hand with the hot flashes came the food cravings. I lusted after Cheetos and Peanut Butter M&M's, maple-walnut milkshakes, and spaghetti and meatballs buried in a blizzard of Parmesan. Isn't it funny how cravings very rarely involve tofu, bean curd or omega-3 oils?

> Then there was the weight issue. During the six months I was on Lupron I gained about 25 pounds. That was partly a byproduct of the cravings, but it also stemmed from the hormonal changes triggered in my body.
>
> And I hated it, hated it, hated it. I had never had to worry about my weight, and I began to understand why media aimed at women and girls obsess over weight so much. It was strange and unsettling not to be able to tell my body, "No," when it wanted to wolf down a fistful of Doritos slathered with scallion cream cheese.
>
> When I wasn't devouring a king-size Italian sub or smoldering from a hot flash, it seemed that I was crying. The tears would usually pour down when I got ambushed by some old tune: "Sweet Baby James" and "Fire and Rain" by James Taylor, "That's the Way I've Always Heard It Should Be" by Carly Simon and, yes, "It's My Party" by Lesley Gore. Not only was I temporarily menopausal, but it appeared that I was also turning into a teenage girl from the early 1970s.
>
> There were other side effects, too, like headaches and fatigue. But when I started drinking Diet Coke for the first time in my life, my son Owen couldn't take it anymore. He said, "Dad, are you turning into a chick?"
>
> So, what else did I learn during my six months of hormone therapy?
>
> Even though I only got to spend a brief time on the outer precincts of menopause, it did confirm my lifelong sense that the world of women is hormonal and mysterious, and that we men don't have the semblance of a clue.
>
> And, guys, when your significant female other bursts into tears at the drop of a dinner plate or turns on you like a rabid pit bull — whether she's pregnant, having her period or in the throes of menopause — believe her when she blames it on the hormones.

Biological semi-determinism. Nothing could be more obvious. It isn't easy being the second sex.

I asked Chomsky about skepticism. He wrote back:

"A skeptic could also argue that the person's 'memory' is just his immediate experience, referring to nothing that happened before, so he erroneously believes his word 'red' to be meaningful. That's accepting Malcolm's argument, which there's surely no reason to do, if only because of a variant of Hume's 'missing color' argument. I've never (consciously at least) seen anything that's periwinkle, but was told roughly where it lies in the spectrum, which is enough for it to be meaningful. In fact even if I know nothing beyond that it's a color word, which I can infer from usage, it's meaningful. The blind use color words meaningfully, as Barbara Landau and Lila Gleitman showed.

"I don't think Moore or his followers thought he was refuting the skeptic. Just illustrating why it's pointless to pay attention. Like Samuel Johnson's kicking a rock in response to Berkeley." Fair enough. It is indeed pointless to pay attention, at least to the kind of skepticism Moore was arguing against.

I've always had a positive view of H. P. Grice and the field of linguistics he founded called pragmatics. A systematic, logically rigorous attempt to develop a sophisticated understanding of how we use language. Conventional and conversational implicature: tremendously important notions. (And conversational *implicature* too.) Soames fills out the history a little. (I studied at an analytic department, so history was ignored.)

I must confess to a certain fascination with Quine's meaning-eliminativism etc. and Wittgenstein's thoughts on rule-following etc. I can't help thinking that certain truths have been hit upon. I've discussed Wittgenstein plenty and I think I've articulated in some mildly adequate form the substance behind his thoughts and the inadequacies in his own expressions of them. But I haven't discussed Quine much. Quine is, if anything, more radical than Wittgenstein, since he denies meaning and reference altogether. In fact, "the same considerations that lead to eliminativism about meaning and reference lead to eliminativism about propositional attitudes such as believing that P, asserting that P, and wondering whether P… Just as there is, in reality, no such thing as ordinary meaning and reference, so there is no such thing as ordinary belief and assertion. Hence, there is no place for these notions in a truly objective and scientific description of the world." Whatever Quine's flawed reasons were for adopting these paradoxical positions, I can't help

thinking that he was onto something. He merely took it too far. In my paper on him and Kant I tried to sort of articulate what I thought was defensible in his position, but of course more can be said. —By the way, Chomsky would disagree with all this, but I haven't read enough Chomsky to take him into consideration. Right now I'm concerned with the "phenomenological" level, so to speak, the level of consciousness and behavior.— Meaning, reference, and 'facts' about belief, assertion, etc., are not facts in the ordinary commonsense, physical or scientific ways. *Obama went to Egypt yesterday*. *I believe that Céline doesn't appreciate me*. These facts are of two very different kinds—and not just in the obvious ways. The second one actually isn't even a full-fledged *fact*: do I *truly* believe it? Maybe not. Maybe I just think I do, or maybe I'll change my mind in the next instant. Maybe I don't think I'm so great after all, maybe I'm deluding myself, maybe I have no idea what I believe about Céline's attitude towards me, maybe I have no belief whatsoever about her attitude. It seems to me I do, but maybe consciousness is just playing with itself or I'm just playing with words and on some deeper level there is no "belief" coming into play at all. What *is* belief, anyway? What is intention? What is meaning? A sort of 'directing' of consciousness towards some given thing, perhaps combined with a corresponding type of behavior. An 'investing' of consciousness in something, a momentary commitment to something. But it's all much more elusive and illusive than ordinary *facts* like the moon's revolving around the Earth.

It's because Quine thinks that physical facts are the only genuine facts that he rejects the idea that there is a fact of the matter about meaning, belief and so on in any given case. "Brentano's thesis [he writes] of the irreducibility of intentional idioms [to non-intentional notions] is of a piece with the thesis of indeterminacy of translation [and thus of meaning]." He goes on: "One may accept the Brentano thesis either as showing the indispensability of intentional idioms and the importance of an autonomous science of intention, or as showing the baselessness of intentional idioms and the emptiness of a science of intention. My attitude, unlike Brentano's, is the second." Mine is the first. After all, it's obvious that Quine's argument is self-undermining, since if belief, assertion, translation and ultimately meaning are indeterminate, then Quine's position itself is indeterminate, which means it has no content, which means it is meaningless. If it's right…then it's meaningless.[1] (There's an ironic parallel to Wittgenstein's conclusion in the *Tractatus* about that book's argument. Also, it's similar to what I wrote in the first chapter of my senior thesis, if I remember aright.) We can't do away with meaning and assertion and truth and all that. But we *can* confront their elusive, semi-behavioral character. All this stuff also reminds me of my paper on ontology, in which I argued that words, concepts and propositions are fictions, necessary fictions. My papers on art, knowledge and values fit nicely into this framework too. And my views on the self, definitely. (Fictional, etc.)

Epiphany. Before I leave my twenties I want to do one thing I've never done before: get *really* healthy, *really* in shape, so that I can finally, for once, actually feel *really* good about myself, unequivocally, absolutely *good* about myself. I never have. This summer I'm getting off my ass and being *active*—gonna play sports, work out, jog, meet people. […] There's something subliminal about being physically active, something that touches not only the dark female psyche but even the natural order itself, so that when you're active good things start happening to you, cosmic luck opens itself to you. I've sometimes wondered if I give off some sort of unconscious negative energy. In many situations that thought is preposterous, since I can be exuberant and funny. And even in my quieter moods people can like me, such as that girl Ashley who appreciated my intelligence and dry humor. (But see, it was sheer luck that I met her. Luck!) In any case, I desperately need a change.

Hallelujah! I'm still young and can look forward to tomorrow! (Barbecue, party outdoors later, and *gym!*)

It's painful how obvious these truths are. There's a certain intelligence in *instinct*, and an unintelligence in analysis.

Evidently I had a good understanding of Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* when I claimed that it's just a sophisticated defense of common sense. Russell and Quine didn't have common sense, and these are

[1] Quine adopts a complicated strategy to get out of this paradox, but it isn't convincing.

the people Kripke is arguing against. (Descriptivism about names?! A rejection of the intuitive distinction between essential and accidental properties?! Give it up, guys! You lose.) "If someone thinks [writes Kripke] that the notion of a necessary or contingent property…is a philosopher's notion with no intuitive content, he is wrong. Of course, some philosophers think that something's having intuitive content is very inconclusive evidence in favor of it. I think it is very heavy evidence in favor of anything, myself. *I really don't know, in a way, what more conclusive evidence one can have about anything, ultimately speaking…*" The sentence I've italicized effectively vindicates my, and Laurence BonJour's, claim that *intuition* is the ultimate court of appeal for logical truths, mathematical truths, analytic truths, and so on. 'Non-inferential' intuitions are in fact the final basis of every argument; and every step of every argument relies on the intuition of logical laws. Kripke is a universally acknowledged genius, so it's nice to have him on my side.

Kripke: there are necessary *a posteriori* truths, like 'Hesperus is Phosphorus,' and contingent *a priori* truths. ('Hesperus' was the ancient name for Venus as seen in the morning sky; 'Phosphorus' was the name for Venus as seen in the night. The ancients didn't know it was the same planet.) These are major Kripkean innovations.[1] So is his rejection of the belief that epistemic possibility is coextensive with metaphysical possibility; he argues instead that epistemic possibility is broader. Relative to our former knowledge, it was possible that Hesperus and Phosphorus were two different planets. But it wasn't metaphysically possible, because those two names in reality denote the same celestial body, and obviously it's never possible that a particular thing isn't identical to itself. Self-identity is an "essential," not an "accidental," quality. (Quine and previous analytic philosophers rejected the distinction between essential and accidental qualities, but Kripke reinstated it. An essential property of mine is that I'm a human being, or that my body is made of molecules; an accidental property is that I currently live in Boston.) So, because of the fact of *ignorance,* there are more epistemic possibilities than there are metaphysical possibilities.

But lo, trouble is afoot! There's a paradox to be dealt with! Kripke seems to have pretty well demolished both versions of the description theory of names: the first, that a name (like 'Aristotle') literally *means* a particular description (like 'Plato's greatest student'), and the second, that a name *fixes its referent* (e.g., the man named Aristotle) by means of a description associated with the name. The first (Russell's) version is stupid, the second (Frege's) far less so.[2] But Kripke has argued against even the second version, saying that a name is fixed to a particular referent not through a description—or, more broadly, a "sense," in Frege's terminology—but simply through an initial "linguistic baptism." The name is introduced by someone, for instance a child's parents, and then other people use the name to refer to its bearer, so that a chain is formed from one user to the next, the name's referent being determined by the historical chain stretching back to the original baptism. So this theory is committed to a certain "externalism" about meaning, in that a name's referent is determined not by anything in the speaker's mind but by something external to it, viz. a historical chain of uses that the speaker knows nothing about. Actually, this externalist theory of meaning constitutes one of Kripke's rare transgressions against common sense, and I'm skeptical of it. Besides, it almost seems irrelevant: the problem, surely, is to know how *I can know* that I'm referring to the correct individual when I use the name 'Aristotle,' to a specific individual who is referred to by everyone else when they use the name 'Aristotle.' Kripke's externalist theory is like, 'Whether you know it or not, you're referring to so-and-so. You may mistakenly think you're referring to *x*, but actually, in spite of yourself, you're referring to *y*. *Y* is the true referent of the name, not *x*.' Okay… That last claim may be true in some sense, but there's something fishy about all this.

I got off track there. I was going to discuss a paradox described by Scott Soames as arising out of Kripke's refutation of descriptivism, but while writing the paragraph I changed my mind about the

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[1] Recall my point in the ontology paper that, in fact, all necessary truths are reducible to *a priori* truths. It's only through empirical investigation that we learned that Hesperus is Phosphorus, but now that we know this, we can see that what is 'really' being claimed by that statement is that Venus is identical to Venus, which is an *a priori* truth. *That planet* is identical to *that planet*, i.e. to itself.

[2] By his own admission, the Theory of Descriptions was one of Russell's two most valuable contributions to philosophy. The second was his only-slightly-less-silly-and-ad-hoc Theory of Types.

effectiveness of Kripke's arguments against Frege. It's misleading, anyway, to call Frege a "*descriptivist*," as everyone does, because his notion of *sense* is more inclusive and subtle than that of *definite description*, à la Russell. The paradox that Soames describes is just a post-Kripkean variation of "Frege's Puzzle," which arose out of J. S. Mill's idea that the "meaning" of a proper name is simply its referent.[1] If Mill is right, then how can one explain the fact that the sentence 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' is informative, while 'Hesperus is Hesperus' is not? For 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' *in reality* refer to the same planet. Clearly the Millian view of proper names is not the whole story. Frege introduced his idea of "sense" to explain the difference between the sentences: the name 'Phosphorus' has a different *mode of presentation* and *description* associated with it than does 'Hesperus,' a different "cognitive value" so to speak. Etc. Frege's resolution of the puzzle is thoroughly intuitive and is thus, ultimately, correct in some precisified way (or so I think). But Kripke came along and discredited Fregean descriptivism in the eyes of many philosophers, which resulted in the rebirth of the puzzle. For the last few decades, philosophers of language have been trying to find ways around these paradoxical implications of Kripke's semi-return to Millian referentialism. But given my qualms with Kripke's externalism and my sympathy for Frege's sense/reference distinction, I'm fairly certain that Kripke's arguments against Fregean descriptivism are not as decisive as philosophers think. I was about to launch into an in-depth discussion, but it's late and I have to get up early tomorrow. Am working again at ELC, one class a day so far.

I'll say only this: the puzzle shows that the same sentence can express two different propositions, depending on how it's interpreted. There can be either an 'epistemic' proposition or a 'metaphysical' proposition, so to speak. Either a proposition that gets its content from the *sense* or a proposition that gets its content from the *reference*. Metaphysically, or 'referentially,' 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' is a tautologous identity-statement: it says that planet *x* is identical to planet *x*. But this isn't the way the sentence is usually interpreted. The 'natural' interpretation, oriented toward the sentence's *sense*, is something like 'The celestial body we see in a particular spot every morning is identical to the celestial body we see in a particular spot every evening.' Or, more exactly and less misleadingly,[2] 'The *image* we see in the morning sky is of the same celestial body as the *image* we see in the night sky.' The names don't literally *mean* these descriptions, but their sense includes them. Kripke's modal arguments objecting to this Fregean theory have force, but it's simply impossible for them to be true given the intuitive irresistibility (i.e., obvious truth) of Frege's position. In fact, I don't think his arguments against Frege are nearly as powerful as his arguments against Russell.

Freud and Merleau-Ponty are right: ours is a body-ego. Self-consciousness is the self-consciousness of the body. I am a *socialized body*. That's all. As Chomsky would say, we're organic beings. Pathological self-consciousness is the body's dissociation from itself. Intellectualism is the body's partial dissociation from itself. If you keep in mind our bodily essence, human behavior makes a lot more sense than it does otherwise.

After a certain point, the more comfortable life is, the less enjoyable it is.

What would it be for life to have (a) meaning? What would life look like if it had meaning? It would be *purposive* in character: its cosmic structure, so to speak, would be oriented towards a purpose. There would be a fundamental purpose or design behind everything that happened. At the very least, all the events in an individual's life could be related—*would* be related—to a cosmic teleology. *Chance* would have no

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[1] Russell would later agree with Mill vis-à-vis "*logically* proper names," the only two examples of which in English are 'this' and 'that,' as used to refer to one's current sense-data. Ordinary proper names, according to Russell, are actually disguised definite descriptions. Their grammatical form conceals their true logical form. But we've seen that he was wrong about this.

[2] It's misleading because the sentence 'The celestial body we see in a particular spot every morning is identical to the celestial body we see in a particular spot every evening' can itself be interpreted in the same 'metaphysical' or 'referential' way that we can interpret 'Hesperus is Phosphorus.' On the other hand, 'The *image* we see…' cannot.

dominion. A person would get his just rewards. In short, there would be an intelligible reason for everything, including the existence of mankind and the world itself. Natural selection through random genetic variation would not be the law of evolution; evolution would be teleological, or divinely ordained. The human way of behaving, which is based on *design* and *purpose*, would be the universe's way of behaving. They would go hand in hand.

But this desire for meaning became a felt need only with the Hellenistic age, or a few centuries before it, during the Axial Age. (Every society, though, has its own pace of evolution.) Internationalization, urbanization, the breakdown of rural traditionalism. Hence the proliferation of religions, philosophies, sects. Christianity, in the end, proved particularly adept at addressing the social malaise that expressed itself in spiritual yearnings; therefore it was functionally selected among all the competing belief-systems. Its worldview and its concrete humanitarianism and charity work cooperated to give it a mass following.

What explains the intuition that life in a utopia would be meaningless? The perception that it would have no purpose. Everything would be perfect and pleasant already, so there would be no need for *projects* to improve things or seek greater understanding. We would be animals sated and fat in idleness—and so at the same time there would be no outlet for the desire for recognition. Humans seek recognition through their projects; these two expressions of the human spirit (the desire for recognition and the desire for a purpose, a project, something to work toward) are closely linked. In fulfilling a project, one is implicitly recognizing oneself and can be explicitly recognized by others. That's why Lessing was right that it would be a terrible thing to completely understand the world—because then there'd be nothing left to do. (Ironically, it's also very annoying *not* to understand the world.)

Spontaneous, genetically determined expressions of the human spirit: curiosity, creativity (closely connected to purposiveness), and the drive for recognition (which includes erotic love). Each of these is essentially *affirmative*.

Reading *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* online. There are a number of ironic similarities between his thought and Marx's. For instance, the partial rejection of the entire philosophical tradition. The criticism of *theoria*, the "artificial" and derivative theoretical stance, in favor of *praxis*, or being-in-the-world. Man is essentially *involved*; his habits of thought and so on grow out of his situation. The rejection of "metaphysics" (though for different reasons). The emphasis on alienation and inauthenticity, concepts that are related. The holistic approach to their subject-matter. The historicism and quasi-social constructivism. The existentialist view of human nature: man's essence is his existence, he is his acts. The rejection of the language of consciousness in favor of that of "[social] being." The distinction between appearance and that which lies underneath, is "hidden" or "covered up." (Marx called it essence, a word Heidegger rejected.) The use of phenomenological analysis to uncover this hidden truth—a use that is, admittedly, only partial in Marx's case. (*Das Kapital* has more than a few "phenomenological" chapters, but its basic method is that of abstraction from appearance.) The conviction that Descartes was wrong: consciousness is not self-transparent but rather has its meaning and ground hidden from it.[1] But the differences between the two thinkers are just as striking, and are mostly to Marx's credit. Ultimately, Marx not only had a far greater understanding of himself—his project[2]—and society, but was more theoretically revolutionary. More innovative certainly, infinitely more lucid in his thought and writing, more insightful, *realistic*, more ambitious and original. (Marx had Hegel and Heidegger had Husserl, but one gets the impression that Marx set out on his own to a greater extent than Heidegger did.[3])

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[1] Needless to say, Marx and Heidegger interpreted all these doctrines in very different ways.

[2] The very questions that Heidegger spent his life trying unsuccessfully to answer, namely "What is the meaning of being?" and "Why is there something rather than nothing?", etc., are well-nigh meaningless. He was a confused man, in *so many* ways.

[3] Indeed, Heidegger claimed that *Being and Time* adhered to the "principle of phenomenology"—i.e., Husserl's method—more faithfully than Husserl himself did. And Heidegger's account of time borrows a lot from Husserl's. In any case, Husserl obviously attempted a "phenomenological ontology," a clarification of the being of entities in general, before Heidegger did.

The parallels betwixt Descartes and Husserl are astounding. Husserl was a 20th-century Germanic version of Descartes. (20th century: the logical precision, the sophisticated methodology, the pared-down theoretical program. Germanic: the besotted writing-style, the Kantian influence.)

Heidegger's nonrepresentational theory of truth. An assertion *directs* us to a state of affairs in the world. It doesn't "represent" anything; it orients us to the thing itself.

> An assertion corresponds simply by directing us to the state of affairs "so as to let it appear in the assertion as it is." And so, it becomes clear that the correspondence relationship is not a relationship in which a representation is appropriately like the thing it represents, but rather a relationship of pointing out or uncovering a fact—a thing in a particular condition. "To say that an assertion '*is true*,'" Heidegger concludes, "signifies that it uncovers what is as it is in itself. It asserts, it points out, it 'lets' what is 'be seen' (*apophansis*) in its uncoveredness. The *Being-true* (*truth*) of the assertion must be understood as *Being-uncovering*." Thus, on a nonrepresentational account of language, assertion is a way of orienting ourselves in an engagement with the world—an "assertative being toward what is asserted"—and correspondence amounts to uncovering.

But consider the example "The picture on the wall is hanging askew." This statement re-presents the state of affairs, the fact which is already presented in itself through perception. It presents it again, by directing our attention to the original perceptual presentation (if, that is, we're in the presence of the hanging picture). And it accomplishes this re-presentation by representing, or re-presenting, the fact in words, through words. The statement considered in itself is not the thing itself; it is a verbal representation of it. It isn't inaccurate, therefore, to say that the statement "mirrors" the fact. From one perspective, yes, it "uncovers" the fact, by directing one's attention to the state of affairs; from another perspective it "mirrors" the fact. And this conceptual mirroring is precisely how it accomplishes its uncovering, even though phenomenologically—in this example of the hanging picture—the mirroring isn't experienced, isn't an object of one's attention.

You have to admit that language itself agrees with Heidegger's theory. Re-presentation of truth, dis-covering truth. From a practical, everyday perspective, his phenomenological approach is right: there is no "mirroring," the representational theory is extraneous conceptual clutter. But 'logically' the element of mirroring is there, implicit in the relation between our statement and the world. Only at a late stage of history, when thinkers started reflecting on the nature of statements in themselves, could the representational theory acquire currency (and justifiably).

One of the connections between Heidegger and postmodernist relativism is in his second conception of truth—a more basic sort of truth than propositional—as the "unconcealment" or "disclosedness" of beings. Prior to our explicitly predicating properties of them in statements, things 'open themselves to us' in certain ways. We see them in certain ways, ways that, according to Heidegger, differ across cultures. And then we pick out their essential properties on the basis of this pre-linguistic, historically relative seeing.

> The claim that unconcealment is the essence of truth is the claim that the truth of beliefs and assertions depends on the world opening up for us in a particular way, prior to and independently of predicative language. The unconcealment of beings is the "anticipatory gathering," which lays out certain properties and relationships as salient. This means that the properties of a thing that we consider to be most important to it—the properties that determine its "essence"—are a function of the historical age. Inhabitants of different historical worlds will consider different features of objects to be essential, because their dispositions for the world are shaped in different ways. As a result, what things are, how they actually show up, differs according to the historical world to which a person belongs.

To an extent this is true. But to a very limited extent. Without doubt there's a basic human form of cognition (and affection and appetition) common to everyone, a cognition that ensures that the parallels between the

experiences of people in different cultures are astronomically more important than the differences. An old Samoan 'saw' the world in basically the same way I do; only around the most marginal of margins did his perceptions differ. Gold looked the same to him as it does to me: shiny and yellow. His priorities were basically the same as mine: eat, have shelter, find a woman, etc. The structure of his language was basically the same as mine: subject, verb, object, adjective, and the myriad syntactic rules that underlie sentences in all languages—there's a universal grammar. And modern science is objectively the best way of understanding the world, since it works the best. Gold's essence really is that its atomic number is 79 and so on, not that it is the kind of object whose beauty approximates God's or whatever. For science has taught us that the properties that every society uses to pick out a lump of gold are determined by its molecular structure, and that in fact gold itself *is* this molecular structure.

Anyway, Heidegger's more general influence on postmodernism is through his conception of hermeneutics. Hans-Georg Gadamer, who "developed Heidegger's account of interpretation into a general hermeneutics," defines hermeneutics as addressing the central question "How is understanding possible?" 'Understanding' here is Verstehen, the sort of intuitive, cultural, interpretive understanding of the humanities as opposed to the 'objective causal knowledge' of the natural sciences. From Schleiermacher to Dilthey, Verstehen, or understanding, was thought of as a special cognitive operation distinct from scientific explanation, which effectively tended to reduce hermeneutics and the humanities to an inferior status as compared to the sciences. But Heidegger essentially reversed this conception.

> A central part of Heidegger's legacy comes from his strikingly different conception of hermeneutics. Heidegger's analysis of Dasein as being-in-the-world changes our understanding of understanding from a derivative phenomenon to the central feature, the keystone, of human experience. As Gadamer remarks, "Heidegger's temporal analytics of Dasein has, I think, shown convincingly that understanding is not just one of the various possible behaviors of the subject but the mode of being of Dasein itself…and hence embraces the whole of its experience of the world." When understanding becomes the central phenomenon for philosophy, hermeneutics is no longer conceived of as simply one minor branch of philosophy. Instead, philosophy itself becomes hermeneutic. Or at least one can now speak of a distinctively hermeneutic approach to philosophy in contrast to the traditional approach running from Descartes through Kant to Husserl. This traditional approach conceived of the human being as a "subject," a knower disengaged from the world and from practical activity in the world.
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> Heidegger's hermeneutic turn is more radical than earlier philosophy, then, in that it avoids the traditional model of the subject as the knower standing over against what is to be known, the objective world. His hermeneutic turn shows both that the mentalistic vocabulary of the subject–object model is not the only possible starting point for philosophy and that this vocabulary is derivative from the more basic starting point where Dasein and world are coterminous in understanding. Heidegger conceives of Dasein and world as forming a circle, and he thus extends the traditional hermeneutic circle between a text and its reading down to the most primordial level of human existence. Traditionally, the paradigm for the hermeneutic circle is the reading of a text, where the parts cannot be interpreted without an understanding of the whole, but the whole cannot be grasped without an understanding of the parts. As I shall explain, in Heidegger's deeper conception of the hermeneutic circle as a feature of human existence in general, the relation of knowledge and understanding is one neither of antagonism nor of indifference, but one in which the legitimate task of achieving knowledge is a subspecies of the more general phenomenon of human understanding.

For Heidegger, there is a "primary understanding" or "interpretation" (with a lower-case 'i') which constantly characterizes our being-in-the-world. We're always interpreting situations and so on. Derivative of this is "Interpretation" (with a capital 'I'), which is reflective and theoretical. Philosophy, philology, etc.

It isn't of a different order than primary understanding, though: "it can be 'true to' the phenomenal activity of ordinary world interpretations because it is itself a form of the same phenomenon, although a more articulated or explicit form. So philosophical Interpretation is not simply arbitrary, and not threatened by the problem of relativism, because it is a case of the primary understanding that it is trying to capture." (The problem of relativism had plagued traditional hermeneutics, because the status of interpretations was unclear. What determines that one is better than another?) "Philosophical articulations of primary understanding are binding to the degree that they are adequate to phenomenal manifestations of understanding, which include philosophy itself." Okay… Explanation is simply one of the ratiocinative operations that constitute Interpretation, and it too derives from primary understanding.

Traditional philosophy started from disconnections, e.g. between physical and mental or object and subject, and tried to explain or reinstate connections, an enterprise that, not surprisingly, couldn't overcome skeptical challenges and ultimately ran into unresolvable antinomies. Heidegger, by contrast, starts from the primordial connection of Dasein and the world and then has to explain disconnections, such as the theoretical and practical errors that constantly occur in life.

So what exactly determines whether one Interpretation is better than another? Heidegger answers this question by distinguishing between two kinds of truth, which I discussed briefly above. There's the propositional, which "uncovers" a fact, and the more basic truth of primary understanding, which determines how things immediately disclose themselves to us. Since Dasein is being-in-the-world, understanding or disclosure of the world is simultaneously disclosure of Dasein itself. And the essence of this disclosure is (unreflective, implicit) disclosure of Dasein's possibilities. "Dasein exists as 'definite' or concrete possibilities"—not abstract or logical or explicit ones. Its knowledge of possibilities for itself in a given situation is often more like knowing-how than knowing-that. Usually it isn't spontaneously free choices or deliberate decisions that are involved, but implicit projection of possibilities—and Dasein itself, together with its understanding, is this continuous projection of possibilities in the context of a situation.

Distinction between factuality (nonhuman) and facticity (human).

To get back to the issue of how to determine the worth of an interpretation (and Interpretation): Heidegger thinks it's misguided to ask whether an interpretation is true or false. Better standards are authentic or inauthentic, genuine or not genuine, and transparent or opaque. Heidegger's paradigm cases of interpretation are everyday activities like opening a door and hammering a nail, not reading a text (contrary to contemporary tendencies). "Even Heidegger's philosophical Interpretation is an interpretation not of a text, but of Dasein. But these cases are analogues of texts insofar as Heidegger's point is that even the most obvious ordinary objects taken by themselves do not have their characteristics inscribed in them. Instead, the characteristics of the tools come into being in the concrete interpretation manifested in the activity of using them." He opposes the empiricist epistemology according to which we first "perceive" objects with their particular properties and secondarily use them or apply them.

> Seeing is not simply perceiving the properties of external objects with the bodily eyes. Instead of construing seeing as seeing that an object has such and such a property, Heidegger construes seeing as already interpreting something as something (e.g., seeing something as a hammer, as a door, or as a table). [Reid.] Another example of such "seeing-as" (not Heidegger's own) is found in the hermeneutic phenomenon of reading. When we read a text, we do not first perceive black marks on a white page and then construe their meaning. Instead, the meaning of the text, and indeed the text itself, comes to be only in the reading. Hence, for later hermeneutic theory the text and the reading form the paradigm case of the hermeneutic circle. While the early Heidegger does not emphasize textuality to the same degree, his account does underwrite the shift of philosophical attention from the epistemological model of perception to the hermeneutic model of reading.

Central to his account is the idea of meaning. He doesn't think of it as a private, internal mental state, nor as something one imposes on an object, nor as an intermediary between the subject and the object. The object is inseparable from its meaning, which is inseparable from the holistic web of meanings of everything

in the world. (Duhem, Quine, Wittgenstein.) Objects don't have meanings prior to or independent of their uses. Understanding consists in practices.

Hermeneutic circle: you have to already understand something in order to be able to interpret it. So, superficially, it seems like in order to understand it you have to understand it first—understanding presupposes understanding—which is paradoxical. But obviously this argument is sophistical. (Two kinds of understanding involved, a more primitive and a more explicit and articulated.) Still, in a way it's obviously true that you can never get outside the circle of your prior understandings. But you can criticize and reject some on the basis of other (implicit) understandings and (explicit) interpretations. In any case, Heidegger's point is that the world itself exists in a hermeneutic circle. There is nothing outside the web of meanings, no absolute reality "in itself." –The scourge of postmodernism looms.

Gadamer's hermeneutics attempts to reconstruct the meaning of a text. Deconstruction, by contrast, tries to pick apart this faith in the unity and coherence of the text "by finding in the rhetoric and style of the language of the text moments where the assumption of the unity of meaning fails." (Obvious objection to deconstruction: in the very act of formulating their position, of constructing arguments and so forth, deconstructionists ignore their own doctrine. For they presuppose a "unity of meaning" in their statements and arguments. And if they don't—if they try not to mean something at all—then they fail to communicate. One can't simultaneously intend multiple meanings.) In the end, though, both the positive and negative enterprises have something positive to offer—even if, in the case of deconstruction, it's merely the reminder to examine tensions and contradictions in a text.

From one perspective, Sartre was quite obviously a regression from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, a regression back toward Descartes and Husserl. His emphasis on disconnections, absolute dualities, and of course on the self-transparency of consciousness. (In a way, self-transparency is true, but in a way it's not.) Sartre was also confused: there's a tension in his philosophy between a public approach and a private approach to the self.

By the way, Heidegger's fundamental claim that the meaning of being in general is disclosed by Dasein (human being) is either truistic or meaningless. It's truistic inasmuch as "the meaning of being"—or the meaning of the world—for humans is obviously disclosed by human consciousness. It's meaningless inasmuch as it doesn't make sense.

More suggestive is his idea that the basic state of human consciousness is care (which doesn't mean love). I care. In everything I do, care is there. And so the statement "I don't care" implies a sort of negation of humanity. I don't care; in this moment care is absent from me. Global warming? I don't care: I am not invested in it, it doesn't affect me, I am separated from this source of affect-ion, my consciousness doesn't project itself into it, it is not a project for me, I am a passive observer, global warming is merely an external thing, a lifeless reification for me. I am not fully human, not "originarily" human, to the extent that I don't care, that I don't affirm—or negate something specific on the basis of a broad, deep and diffuse affirmative attitude toward life and myself. The child in his purity always cares; the adult in an archaic society always cares; the adult in current society often doesn't. He is bored, detached, withdrawn from the world into himself, which tends to make him care less about himself too. To the extent that he becomes a thing, losing vitality, he cares less, and vice versa.

[Noted later.] "Heidegger defines care as 'ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-(the world)-as Being-alongside-(entities encountered within the world).' This is a tripartite definition which says that Dasein has the following structures: (1) ahead of itself (understanding), (2) already in (disposition), and (3) alongside. Heidegger often refers to these three structures as existentiality, facticity, and fallenness… The three aspects of care correspond to the three dimensions of time: the future (ahead of itself), the past (facticity), and the present (fallenness)."

Useful summary:

> One common view of the history of twentieth-century Continental philosophy is as follows. At the beginning of the century, Edmund Husserl, disturbed by what he saw as

> the increasing relativism and historicism of Western culture, introduced the phenomenological method as a way to ensure that philosophy would arrive at final, incontrovertible truths… Because phenomenology "brackets," or suspends belief in, all metaphysical constructs in order to focus solely on what shows up as it presents itself in our experience, its findings are supposed to be apodictic, beyond all possible doubt.
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> According to the standard story, the early Heidegger came along and raised questions about the viability of Husserlian phenomenology by taking an "interpretive" turn. What is most important about Heidegger's hermeneutic ontology, so the story goes, is his recognition of the significance of the finitude, worldliness, and historicity of our human predicament—the recognition that our access to things is always colored and preshaped by the sense of things circulating in our historical culture. The story then concludes with poststructuralists and various postmodern thinkers detecting a nostalgia for metaphysics even in such Heideggerian concepts as worldliness, finitude, and history. Jacques Derrida especially points out that Heidegger still seems to be trapped in essentialism and totalization, twin sins of the very "metaphysics of presence" that his hermeneutic approach was supposed to displace.

It's worth pointing out that, even according to this half-true story of Heidegger's originality, he is original only in relation to the narrow philosophical trend epitomized by Husserl. "The significance of the finitude, worldliness, and historicity of our human predicament" had been appreciated by Marx and Nietzsche, not to mention multitudes of anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists.

Interestingly, Husserl thought (and Heidegger too?), unlike Kant, that we can know how things are in themselves. Peculiar opinion, especially in light of his method.

It occurs to me that Heidegger's notion of inauthenticity is basically defined as a turning away from care. Dasein is essentially care, so by being indifferent or living wholly in the present and ignoring the future or death, one is repressing or suppressing, or not accepting, one's essence, which is also what common sense means by 'inauthenticity.' One is not accepting oneself, which is to deceive oneself, to be dishonest (because one always thinks one is self-accepting and self-honest).

Heidegger vastly overemphasizes the historicity, as opposed to the naturalness, of man. And his positing of a fundamental difference between nature and man has overtones of Sartre and Descartes, which would not please him.

"In our ordinary agency, according to Heidegger's description, the self is not so much an object as an unfolding event or happening—the 'movement' of a life course 'stretched out between birth and death.' From this standpoint, it is wrong to think of oneself as a mind or a center of consciousness with its own Eigenwelt… Because we are generally outside our 'selves,' caught up in equipmental contexts in a shared world, Heidegger can say that being a 'self' is '"only"…a way of being of this entity.'" One-sided. The perspective of the "self" is implicit in everything I do. I am always at least half-conscious of the personal, private nature of my existence.

The contemporary understanding of the self as a narrative also has its origins, or at least its inspiration, in Heidegger, for obvious reasons.

"Inauthenticity is characterized by 'falling' and 'forgetting.'" Being immersed in the tumult of "average everydayness." In the hands of the right writer, Heidegger's philosophy can be quite inspiring:

> If we can take a stand on our being-toward-death [which is revealed in the experience of anxiety], our lives will be transformed. Facing death, one is pulled back from the dispersal, distraction, and forgetfulness of everydayness. The result is the ability to live with a clear-sighted grasp of the temporal continuity and future-directedness of one's own life-happening. This lucidity leads to a way of living we might call "self-focusing." The authentic Dasein, recognizing that not everything is possible, is "snatched back from the endless multiplicity of possibilities which offer themselves as closest to one" and focuses

> itself into a range of possibilities "which are determined by the end and so are understood as finite." Such directedness into a coherent range of possibilities brings about a change in the way we relate to our thrownness and our being as projections toward the future. We take over our situatedness with "resoluteness"—a decisive dedication to what we want to accomplish for our lives. And our stance toward the future is that of "anticipation" or "forward-directedness": a clear-sighted and unwavering commitment to those overriding aims taken as definitive of one's existence as a whole.
>
> Authentic self-focusing, understood as a resolute reaching forward into a finite range of possibilities, gives coherence, cohesiveness, and integrity to a life course. Authenticity is characterized by a distinctive temporal structure. Where inauthentic existence is lost in the dispersal of making-present, an authentic life is lived as a unified flow characterized by cumulativeness and direction. It involves taking over the possibilities made accessible by the past and acting in the present in order to accomplish something for the future…
>
> Heidegger's notion of "authentic temporality" might become clearer if we contrast two different ways of understanding the relation of actions to the whole of life. The first is found in the "instrumentalist" approach to living we saw in discussing Rollo May. This stance treats life as a matter of finding the means to achieving ends, where the ends are usually goods external to the activities themselves—such "positive reinforcements" as what "feels good" or satisfies a need. In this instrumentalist, means-ends living, actions are done in order to get something; for example, I run everyday in order to get healthy, or I help a friend in order to get him in my debt. In contrast to this means-ends approach, the second way of living might be called a "constituent-ends" way of living. Here actions are not just routes to achieving extrinsic ends, but instead are experienced as central to constituting a particular way of life, a way of life that is good because it consists of this and comparable sorts of activities. Action here is undertaken for the sake of being such and such: I run as a part of being a healthy person, or I help someone for the sake of being a good friend.
>
> It should be obvious that although the actions performed are the same in both cases, the quality of life will be quite different. In the means-ends case, life tends to be experienced as an episodic sequence of calculative strategies lacking any cumulative significance or overriding purpose… Where the means-ends attitude trivializes the present by keeping us preoccupied with the carrot at the end of the stick, the constituent-end approach, by making us realize that what we are doing at this moment just is realizing the goals of living, throws us intensely into the present moment as the arena in which our coming-to-fruition is fulfilled. Running and being a friend are not just impositions I could as well do without; they make me the person I am. What is important is building myself as this kind of person, not scoring points or getting rewards "down the road." When life is lived as an ongoing process of self-building or self-composing, it has the kind of cumulativeness and continuity that makes up authentic temporality.

Well said.

In their fetish of radical ("terrible") freedom and the essential meaninglessness of life, the French existentialists strayed very far from Heidegger. It's practically the opposite of his emphasis on our embeddedness. But that's the difference between old Germany and France: cultural embeddedness, national and racial pride, fascism, as opposed to atomism and individualism, the revolt against the past.

The essay on Buddhism and Heidegger is excellent. Let's review:

> Drawing on his study of Eckhart and other mystics, as well as on Kant, Heidegger maintained that the human being is not a thing but rather a peculiar kind of nothingness: the temporal linguistic clearing, the opening, the absencing in which things can present

> themselves and thus "be." If humans are not things, then we have to define "knowing" in a different way than before. Knowing is not a relation between two things, mind and object. Rather, knowing occurs because the openness constituting human existence is configured in terms of the three temporal dimensions: past, present, future. These dimensions hold open the horizons on which entities may manifest themselves in determinate ways—for example, as instruments, objects, or persons… Human understanding, then, does not take place inside a mind locked in the skull. Instead, understanding occurs because human temporality is receptive to particular ways in which things can present or manifest themselves… For Heidegger, thoughts are not radically other than allegedly external entities, such as trees, cars, and books. Thoughts and cars are both entities manifesting themselves within and thus being understood as entities within the temporal clearing of human existence.

For Heidegger, "to be" means to disclose or present oneself. Dasein, then, is what allows beings to be, since it is what allows them to disclose themselves. It is the place where they disclose themselves, the openness in which their presencing occurs. Time is, in a way, the opposite of being: it is absence, nothingness, while being means presence or disclosure. It is through time, therefore, that beings are. Each term implies the other. Hence the title of Heidegger's major work. It's in the mood of anxiety that we truly experience our own nothingness; and anxiety is perhaps the most basic human mood, albeit the rarest. –This all sounds very Sartrean. It's essentially a restatement of the traditional subject-object or mind-body dualism. Dasein is nothingness, everything else is being. Dualism. But if Dasein is time or nothingness, how can it be "embedded" in the world? How can any properties be predicated of it? And how exactly is it attached to a particular body? How do Dasein and its body communicate? We're back at the mind-body dualism. I wouldn't blame these problems only on this particular interpretation of Heidegger; they're implicit in *Being and Time*, from all I've read. Dasein is temporality, nothingness, that which allows beings to disclose themselves; and everything else follows from these premises. At least Sartre followed these thoughts to their logical conclusions, by embracing dualism and postulating the absolute freedom of consciousness (or nothingness). Obviously there are major tensions in Heidegger's philosophy. But similar tensions plague any reasonable philosophical worldview. Consciousness is a sort of nothingness; it is, in this sense, different from 'its' body. And yet, etc.

Like Heideggerian authenticity, Zen enlightenment involves insight into one's groundlessness and nothingness. One experiences the terrifying truth, and everything seems meaningless. But afterwards, one is able to return to everyday activities—as Heidegger thought—with a deeper understanding, however, of what they (don't) mean.

Environmentalists have seized on his statement that people are most free when they "let beings be" as they are, let them disclose themselves as what they are. (?)

Marx's superiority over Heidegger is revealed in the fact that the latter couldn't escape the paradigm of idealism. He insisted on man's being-in-the-world, on social practice, on our embeddedness in history and so forth, but he still failed to understand that material, historical conditions determine worldviews and social behavior. He reduced everything to metaphysics and idealism. For example, in his early work he thought that the reason why we moderns are so enamored of technology, science and instrumental reason is that we can't endure the experience of anxiety, of understanding our own nothingness! Sheer psychologism, flagrantly ahistorical. Later he got even worse: he thought that the pathologies of modernity result from the self-concealment of being! Ever since Plato, "being as such had increasingly withdrawn itself from human view." (What does that even mean?) The reason he initially loved the Nazis is that he thought they would bring humanity closer to being and nothingness, to authenticity. (And anxiety? They accomplished *that*, at least.) Unrealistic, ahistorical idiot!

> According to Buddhism, Gautama Buddha opposed the traditional doctrine of the Upanishads and Vedas, according to which eternal Atman, the unchanging Divine Self, permeates and sustains things by constituting their ultimate essence, their true "self." For

> the Vedantic tradition, suffering ends only when one overcomes dualism by ceasing to cling to the illusory ego and identifying instead with the Absolute Self; for Mahayana Buddhism, suffering ends only when one overcomes dualism by ceasing to cling to the illusory ego and recognizing that there is no Absolute Self either. The conception of Buddhism as a life-denying tradition may be attributed to those adherents of Hinayana Buddhism who conceived of nirvana, the cessation of suffering, as being possible only for those few individuals who followed the arduous process of deconstructing the ego, encountering its emptiness, and thereby transcending the illusions of the world of appearance. Mahayana Buddhism affirms the possibility of and the need for saving all beings, since all "beings" are internally related—hence, the increasingly active role played by Mahayana Buddhists in the movement to protect nature from human abuse.

"Surrendering one's constricted ego-identity, and thus moving beyond dualism, enables one to become the compassion (Buddhism) or care (Heidegger) that one always already is. 'Authenticity' (Heidegger) and 'enlightenment' (Buddhism), then, result from the insight into nondualism, the fact that there are 'not two,' neither an ego-mind here nor objects there." For both Heidegger and Mahayana Buddhism, everything is internally related. Oppositions, separations, are illusory. –But surely these ideas have a different meaning for Heidegger than for Buddhists.

In a sense, Heidegger was a phenomenalist. To be means to appear, to be perceived by Dasein. Berkeley formulated the position with a logical rigor foreign to Heidegger. But does Heidegger think that objects have an 'inside' not directly perceivable by us? If so, that contradicts aspects of his philosophy; if not, it contradicts science. But he didn't want to contradict science; he wanted to transcend it.

Mind and matter, he thinks, are only theoretical constructs that play no role in making sense of the everyday world. Conceptions of physical objects and their causal relations "are derivative from and parasitic on the world understood as a context of involvements directed toward accomplishing things." Scientific objects and explanations are not primary; our everyday use of the world is primary, and science is merely a "regional inquiry" not at all privileged as compared to ordinary understanding. –But what does all this mean? It's sheer confusion and emptiness. Obviously our ordinary experience is "primary" or "basic," just in the sense that it is experience. It isn't revolutionary to say that our experience of the world is how the world is experienced. Yes, epistemologically experience comes first: it is through experience that we acquire knowledge and, eventually, scientific knowledge. But anyone who would deny that experience has some kind of epistemological priority belongs in an insane asylum. Science is "derivative" and "parasitic" on experience: no shit, Sherlock. But its "derivativeness" says nothing whatever about its status as potentially giving us insights into the nature of the mind-independent world. Natural science is incomparably more powerful than our intuitive, unarticulated pre-understandings of things we encounter in the world. In other words, science is more powerful than—experience itself. For it explains experience.

Writes Heidegger: "Self and world belong together in the single entity Dasein. Self and world are not two beings, like subject and object;…[instead,] self and world are the basic determination of Dasein in the unity of the structure of being-in-the-world." Yes, "primordially" (Heidegger's word) there is no division between subject and object or self and world. That is to say, in immediate experience it doesn't cross one's mind that there are such dualisms. So what? That proves nothing. The dualism is implicit in every moment of our experience of the world, as is shown by the fact that in any particular instant it might occur to you (in the same way that your existence might occur to you). Denying the self–world opposition is like denying the self. Or the world. Denying the (intuition of the) mind-body dualism is like denying the body.

A note on deconstruction.— Heidegger can be used against thinkers like Derrida and Foucault insofar as he insists on the need for a background of meaning, a horizon of disclosure, a shared life-world with the "they," a meaningful canvas of "primary understanding" or "pre-understanding" against which life plays itself out. To deconstruct all regimes of meaning is, first of all, impossible even in principle because such deconstruction presupposes an undeconstructed background of meaning. Thus, deconstruction is partly self-refuting in that it presupposes its negation, an implicit naïve affirmation of coherent meaning in

the "background." (It's self-refuting in other ways too.) Secondly, radical deconstruction wouldn't be desirable even if it were possible, because it would mean the death of the self. Actually, this objection is essentially a reformulation of the first one.

"The fourfold," man's dwelling (in late Heidegger): earth, sky, gods, mortals. Earth and sky = nature; gods and mortals = culture or history. The idea isn't as silly or empty as you might think. (Gods = cultural and personal ideals, ideals embodied in past heroes. It's like one's heritage. Perhaps similar, in one aspect, to a broad understanding of the "conscience." Sort of eternal truths of morality or aesthetics that can guide behavior, norms that may conflict with current social mores.) Dwelling, belonging, a unity of the environment and culture, a fourfold unity in which each aspect is reflected in and implies the others, a rootedness in the soil and the ethnicity or nation which organically implies one's specific heritage. Modern mingling of populations destroys dwelling, belonging, destroys "the shaping boundaries of an ethnic or national world." Heidegger = nationalist fetish of the soil, the peasant, the race, the community's unity. Modern art is worthless because it doesn't arise from dwelling, isn't inspired by Hölderlin's observation that "poetically man dwells."

Translated into a human language, Heidegger's thoughts about value and nihilism are insightful. He agrees with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche that the modern world is nihilistic, but he disagrees with Nietzsche that the remedy is for the individual to create new values. Authority has deteriorated, the authority of religion and heroes and statesmen and great thinkers and shared commitments in the public world—none of this is authoritative anymore, so the individual is isolated and alienated. Kiekegaard thought that the answer to this nihilism was for the individual to make an absolute, unconditional commitment to something, for example love or God, a commitment that would determine one's whole sense of reality. For Heidegger, though, it isn't a failure of the individual that is at issue; it's a failure of the society. Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's individualistic answers to nihilism are inadequate, because the individual is formed by the shared world. In fact, Nietzsche's formulation of the problem in terms of a lack of values is precisely the problem. "Heidegger argues that to think of nihilism as a state in which we have forgotten or betrayed our values is part of the problem. Thinking that we once had values but that we do not have values now, and that we should regain our values or choose new ones, is just another symptom of the trouble. Heidegger claims that thinking about our deepest concerns as values is nihilism."

For Plato, we didn't choose our values; they shone on us and drew us toward them. The idea of the good drew us toward it. Only with the Enlightenment did values come to be seen as things we could choose to reject or accept, things that weren't binding on us until we accepted them. This is already the beginning of nihilism. Nietzsche took it further and said that we posit values, we create them. But if that's true, why should they have authority for us? "So, far from giving meaning to our lives, thinking of what is important to us in terms of values shows us that our lives have no intrinsic meaning. As long as we think in terms of value-positing rather than being gripped by shared concerns, we will not find anything that elicits our commitment. As Heidegger says, 'No one dies for mere values.'" The language of "values" is already implicitly relativistic, and thus nihilistic.

One of Heidegger's central ideas—and Wittgenstein's—is that it's impossible (and undesirable) to make explicit our everyday practices, concerns, skills, "values." As Wittgenstein said, they can only be shown. But they are what give our lives meaning, what allow us to make sense of the world. They constitute "a kind of knowing-how rather than a knowing-that. At the deepest level such knowing is embodied in our social skills rather than in our concepts, beliefs, and values. Heidegger argues that our cultural practices can direct our activities and make our lives meaningful only insofar as they are and stay unarticulated, that is, as long as they stay the soil out of which we live. If there is to be seriousness, it must draw on these unarticulated background practices. …What is most important and meaningful in our lives is not and should not be accessible to critical reflection." That's profound and profoundly true. In Nietzschean language, instinct, or the unconscious, is what guides a healthy life. To articulate is to belittle—and to transcend. In making something explicit, I transcend it. In bringing something to the level of consciousness, I deprive it of its power over me. Wasn't that the assumption behind Freud's method? If you bring a repressed fact to the light of day, you deprive it of its power over you. It's the same with the shared practices that determine what matters for us.

> The shared practices into which we are socialized provide a background understanding of what matters and what it makes sense to do, on the basis of which we can direct our actions. This understanding of being creates what Heidegger calls a clearing in which things and people can show up as mattering and meaningful for us. We do not produce the clearing. It produces us as the kind of human beings we are…
>
> Our cultural practices and the understanding of being they embody allow us to direct our activities and make sense of our lives only insofar as they are and stay unarticulated, that is, stay the atmosphere in which we live. These background practices are the concealed and unmastered that Heidegger tells us give seriousness to our decisions. Mattering lies not in what we choose, but in "that on the basis of which" we choose. [My italics.] The more our know-how is formulated and objectified as knowing-that, the more it is called up for critical questioning, the more it loses its grip on us. This is part of what Kierkegaard saw in his attack on modern critical reflection, and Heidegger in his attack on value-thinking.

But this isn't the whole story. After all, "there must always be a clearing—background practices containing an understanding of being—in order for things and people to be intelligible at all." Evidently the problem lies with our background practices, which are such that we are forced to choose personal values for ourselves. So the question is, what is it about these practices that makes them nihilistic? In order to answer this question we have to understand how it is that practices create shared meanings in the first place.

Enter: the work of art. In a broad sense. An artwork discloses an entire world, a way of viewing the world. Consider the Greek temple versus the medieval cathedral. The temple fostered a moral space defined in terms of gods, heroes, and slaves; the cathedral facilitated a moral space of sin and redemption, salvation and damnation. Each world was totally different from the other. "Heidegger would say that the understanding of what it is to be changes each time a culture gets a new artwork. Then different sorts of human beings and things show up." The temple and the cathedral represent different cultural paradigms. "A cultural paradigm collects the scattered practices of a group, unifies them into coherent possibilities for action, and holds them up to the people who can then act and relate to each other in terms of that exemplar. Works of art, when performing this function, are not merely representations or symbols, but actually produce a shared understanding." They create and maintain a sensibility.

Thomas Kuhn draws on these Heideggerian ideas with his notion of a "paradigm shift." The paradigm that guides scientists' practices cannot really be stated as a set of beliefs or values, or rules or criteria. It can only be shown. It can't be rationalized; it can only be imitated. And this is what explains its authority. Similarly, the artwork resists rationalization, because it isn't a symbol of a system of beliefs and values. It is rather an exemplar of shared practices.

The similarities between Heidegger and Wittgenstein are amazing. And Marx too, though in a different way. Less phenomenological and much less "cultural." Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, by contrast, are rather individualistic and psychologistic. (Heidegger can also be psychologistic, but in a more 'phenomenological' and 'metaphysical' way.)

Interesting terminological point: "Heidegger calls the way the artwork solicits the culture to make the artwork explicit, coherent, and encompassing the world aspect of the work. He calls the way the artwork and its associated practices resist such totalization the earth." In other words, the artwork has an explicable, articulable aspect, but it also has a mysterious, intuitive, ineffable aspect. This is true of cultural paradigms too. (Cf. what I wrote about the "objective spirit" of an era in the first paragraph of my first little paper on John Brown.) Since no interpretation is ever adequate to a work of art or a paradigm, a struggle between earth and world is set up. "This struggle is a necessary aspect of the way meaning inheres in human practices. It is a fruitful struggle in that the conflict of interpretations it sets up generates a culture's history." Hm. That's a rather simplistic, and "idealistic," way of putting it.

The problem with our modern technological paradigm is that it rejects earth in favor of world. It's on the basis of earth that our actions can matter to us, but modern culture celebrates clarity and control. It

denies the mystery of being, thereby denying Heideggerian seriousness and authenticity, and meaning. In trying to raise everything to consciousness it belittles being and makes it threadbare. Even the earthy margins of culture are under attack, such as friendship and "the mystical merging of the erotic," which has been turned into private sexual "experience." (The fetish of superficial, private "experiences," having as many experiences as you can because there is no publicly shared meaning in your life to fill up your existence. The meaning of your life becomes the accumulation of experiences, something quantifiable. An escape from meaninglessness, a distraction.) A technological, 'comfortable' utopia would be the worst possible thing for humans. The problem isn't technology itself but the technological understanding of being. Fortunately, according to Heidegger, it can be overcome. He thinks it should be possible for us to use technology without thinking of being in terms of values and calculation and means-end reasoning. We simply have to accomplish a gestalt switch, in which "the clearing belonging to the essence of being suddenly clears itself and lights up." As Dreyfus says,

> Once one recognizes the technological understanding of being for what it is—a historical understanding—one gains a free relation to it. We neither push forward technological efficiency as our sole goal nor always resist it. If we are free of the technological imperative we can, in each case, discuss the pros and cons. As Heidegger puts it: "We let technical devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave them outside…as things which are nothing absolute but remain dependent upon something higher. I would call this comportment toward technology which expresses 'yes' and at the same time 'no,' by an old word, *releasement towards things*."

Such releasement would eventually make possible a renewed understanding of our embeddedness in nature, our localness, and it would give rise to shared meaningful differences between us. We have to learn how to receive (being) again rather than control (it). In this new clearing, a more meaningful society could arise. "The issue," Heidegger writes, "is the saving of man's essential nature. Therefore, the issue is keeping meditative thinking alive." –Ha! There, he said it. Man's essence is meditative thinking. How surprising that a philosopher considers philosophy to be man's essence. Marx had advanced beyond this position.

It's significant that when a stand-up comic gets no laughs he says later, "I died. It was like *death* out there," while when the audience loves him he says, "I *killed!*" A semi-Hegelian struggle for recognition. (Absence of recognition = death of the self. Either the comic or the audience wins the struggle.)

What does it mean to *blame* [I meant *condemn* or *judge*] someone? Does that act make sense? What are its presuppositions? It presupposes that the person in question had control over his act, that he did it intentionally. So it couldn't have been an accident. Or maybe that's not right. Suppose someone accidentally crashes his car into mine; I'll "blame" [or condemn or *judge*] him. I'll get angry at him, which means I'll believe he did something *wrong*. What, though? That he behaved *negligently*. He should have been more careful; he was showing disregard for my welfare and that of my possessions. So, in a sense, it was intentional after all: while he didn't intend the crash, he was implicitly "intending" disrespect for me. But that isn't necessarily true, of course. Surely he wasn't thinking about me or my possessions at all. Maybe he got distracted and lost focus for an instant, with the result that he crashed into me. Is it rational to blame him for getting distracted? No, because by definition he doesn't have control over that. In order for him to have done something wrong, his free will has to have come into play. But here there is no question of free will: there is only an unintentional momentary lapse. But what if his behavior was *explicitly* negligent? What if he ran a red light? Then clearly he did do something wrong, something dangerous. But actually, strictly speaking, my anger at him isn't primarily on account of his ignoring a red light, as is shown by the fact that if he hadn't crashed into me I probably wouldn't have gotten angry. First and foremost, I'm angry that he crashed into me—and *this* anger, in itself, isn't rational, as we saw a moment ago. (Causing a car-accident is not in itself wrong (morally), since it can be accidental. Everything depends on the context.) In this example, whatever rational justification my anger has comes from his having ignored a red light and

thus put me in danger. He acted stupidly and morally recklessly. Right? But what if he didn't see my car coming from the other direction, he was terribly late for an appointment—or, to use an 'unselfish' example, he was rushing his pregnant wife to the hospital, or he had gotten a call from his daughter that an intruder was in the house, or some such thing. In 'emergency' cases like this, surely our intuition is that his behavior wasn't truly wrong. Maybe it was still somewhat reckless, but one can hardly blame him for that. So, morally speaking, it seems he's off the hook. In order for me not to "blame" him, then, he has to have had a good, unselfish reason for his behavior, a reason that trumps the claims of ordinary traffic-etiquette. Nevertheless, it isn't morally justifiable for him to put other lives in danger. It may be *understandable*, though. If it's understandable, is blaming him still reasonable? No, according to the common expression "I don't blame him. I would have done the same thing myself." That is, I might still have been morally culpable in doing the same thing myself, but I would have done it anyway, and so I can't "blame" him. "It was wrong, but I would have done it too." So I don't have the right to be angry at him. This is interesting: common sense distinguishes between giving someone the right to be angry, i.e. the right to *judge* the doer from a morally superior standpoint, and acting immorally. One can act immorally without thereby being "blameworthy" from someone else's perspective, because one's act might be *understandable*, i.e. could be done by any reasonable person. So there are two standards and two kinds of blame involved: an objective morality of some sort and the corresponding "objective" notion of blame (or condemnation), versus the *human* standard, so to speak, which is less stringent than the moral one in that any reasonable person would be capable of committing the "objectively" immoral act in question. And common sense is wise here, since it is not rationally justifiable to judge someone to be morally inferior (to oneself)—i.e., to *blame* him, to *shame* him, to get angry at him—on the basis of an act that one would commit oneself given similar circumstances. So let's bracket the question of "objective" morality. The main point I want to make is that in the majority of cases in which we get angry at someone, i.e. blame him, we are "capable" of acting the same way ourselves, which means our anger is unjustified (since the angry state of mind posits a moral *in*equality between oneself and the offender).

And yes, I think that the "moral" perspective is always implicit in such attitudes as anger, disgust, hatred and resentment (though not necessarily contempt). It may be a loose and imprecise understanding of morality, but insofar as the attitude incorporates the judgment that the offender has violated the "proper" way to act toward others (or toward animals, or toward the environment, or vis-à-vis the claims of integrity, as the case may be), it invokes morality.[1]

I sort of inadvertently answered my original question in the course of writing that long paragraph. The act of blaming someone does have a kernel of rational content…I think. It's the judgment that he hasn't acted the way a reasonable and/or high-minded person would act, i.e. the way the *judger* would act (or so the judger thinks). Whenever I'm angry etc. at someone, I "blame" or "condemn" him implicitly. –But, more often than not, the postulated inequality between him and me is an illusion in my mind. It may be true that he acted unreasonably or immorally in some way, but in looking down on him for it I'm probably being inconsistent because I *could* have done the same thing myself. (On the other hand, I didn't, and so at least in *that* moment there *is* a sort of inequality between us, I being the moral and he being the immoral one. And perhaps, after all, there *is* a real difference between the two of us, a "moral" difference in our characters.) –Obviously all this ignores the half-meaninglessness of the concept "moral," which meaninglessness further undermines the rational basis of my implicit self-righteousness in judging the other.

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[1] For instance, my resentment of Eric Schliesser for his comments on my senior thesis necessarily incorporates the judgment that he is a "bad" person (to the extent that I resent him), that he has acted badly toward me and vis-à-vis intellectual honesty, that he is arrogant and so on. I may also have contempt for him, which might mean only that I don't respect his intelligence—and *this* attitude does *not* seem to incorporate anything like a moral judgment or "blame" or "condemnation" in the full sense, because he doesn't have control over his lack of intelligence (whereas he does—this is the presumption, at least—over his arrogance, his lack of intellectual integrity, and so on, which is what allows these to count as (im)moral qualities).

Needless to say, there are other senses of 'blame' too. For example, "I blame him for the break-up of my marriage" simply means "I think he's the one who caused it."

Reading an anthology called *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century,* edited by William Barrett and Henry Aiken. Volume 4, the one I'm reading first, is on Marxism and the philosophy of history. It has a useful introduction. Review of facts I already knew:

Not until the French Revolution did mankind begin to have a full appreciation of *historical development*. With the Greeks, the Chinese and the Indians, history was cyclical. For the Greeks, "the eternal cycle of the heavens was imitated by the cycles of the seasons, and these in turn by the cycles of human history: the rise and fall of empires and men. Plato speaks of the cosmic Great Year (some 36,000 ordinary solar years) at the end of which all human things have decayed and go again through their old patterns. Aristotle remarks that the arts and the sciences have been discovered and have perished numberless times in the past." Christianity brought a new consciousness of history—time had a beginning and an end—but, nevertheless, "as far as the actual social life of man was concerned, the future was thought of as repeating the past, even though the future carried with it the possibility of the religious apocalypse. All of human history was spread out as a simultaneous whole before the gaze of an eternal, and therefore non-historical, eye." Then the Renaissance: a more secular consciousness began, but even in the 18th century "historians still performed their job essentially as moralists and humanists in the style of the great classical historians. Thus Gibbon takes Tacitus as his model." Even Vico, Herder and Condillac didn't undertake a "philosophical analysis of what historical phenomena and historical knowledge essentially are"; they simply described what the course of history had been.

"The French Revolution was the first event in human history that revealed that a revolution did not mean merely the exchange of rulers…but that the whole fabric of human life could be completely transformed from top to bottom. The future thus took on a new dimension of contingency: it could mean that the life of man in that future might be radically different from what it had been in the past… Kant described the Revolution as the most significant event in history up to that point, since it revealed for the first time that the conditions of human life could become totally different from what they were. However, none of this penetrated into Kant's philosophy proper: with him the forms and categories of the mind are necessary and *a priori,* fixed and eternal, not the creatures of historical evolution and change. It was Hegel who was to make the imaginative leap…to the new truth that all forms of the human spirit—including 'reason'—are the product of historical development." For Hegel, even logic is interpreted in quasi-historical terms!

"Yet…in the end Hegel remains faithful to the classical tradition in philosophy that goes back to Plato in its insistence that the philosopher must try to see all things in the universe with unhistorical eyes in the aspect of eternity. For the Absolute is beyond time, change, and history, which belong only to appearance. Thus Hegel's labor to expound the historical point of view in all fields is curiously at odds with itself because history itself has already been completed in the fullness of the Absolute… Real contingency disappears from history, for the end is already given." Marx banishes the Absolute, thus getting down to history itself, but he still adheres to the myth of inevitable progress (according to the editor). This editor's criticisms of past views of history are similar to Ernst Troeltsch's.

Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism,* from the selections I've read so far, is sensible. (That isn't the academic consensus, but what do you expect from academic philosophers? He's a Commie, after all.) Here's one of his briefer summaries of Berkeley's thought: "Let us regard the external world, nature, as a 'combination of sensations' evoked in our mind by a deity. Acknowledge this and give up searching for the 'ground' of these sensations outside the mind, outside men, and I will acknowledge within the framework of my idealist theory of knowledge *all* natural science and all the importance and authenticity of its deduction…" This view is essentially that of the logical positivists, of Carnap and Ayer and the rest. They were basically idealists, albeit of a special kind. Like them, Berkeley considered realism and materialism to be little more than nonsense—although the positivists' reasons for saying so were different, namely that metaphysical statements cannot be empirically verified. So they also considered Berkeleyan idealism, which makes metaphysical claims, nonsensical, while nonetheless implicitly adhering to it far more closely than to realism. For they rejected all talk of mind-independent matter. Within a certain

linguistic framework, argued Carnap, it makes sense to talk about independently existing objects, e.g. the frameworks of natural science and common sense; but it's meaningless to ask, from a position external to these frameworks, whether there "really" exist things in themselves. To do so is effectively to question the reality of the frameworks themselves, which doesn't make sense because frameworks aren't the sort of things that can be "real." In the framework of science it's *useful* to talk about the reality of electrons, and in the framework of ordinary language it's *useful* to talk about the reality of tables, and that's all that can be said. So the difference between the positivists and Berkeley is that the former consider the *question* of things in themselves meaningless, while the latter considers the realist/materialist *answer* meaningless. But then they both come out on the side of idealism, since all they recognize are sense-data and language. (The positivists consider objects and the world to be logical constructions out of sense-data. Again, Berkeley.) You see: metaphysics can't be avoided, even by those who think they're avoiding it. And Lenin is right that Ernst Mach and his disciples are derivative of Berkeley.

Ironically, (some of) the positivists were, in a way, even more idealistic than Berkeley. For Berkeley thought that the existence of "objects" even when we're not perceiving them is guaranteed by the existence of God, who perceives them at all times. But the positivists rejected the question entirely, which, given their other doctrines, effectively meant that reality consists only of sense-data and "logical constructions" and language. It's a very paradoxical, i.e. stupid, doctrine.[1] And it makes natural science a mystery, and (ironically!) a sort of delusion. For science *does* postulate things in themselves. –Fucking philosophers. The ones who most pride themselves on their clarity and precision are the most confused of all.

I simply fail to understand how a phenomenalist, someone like Ernst Mach or Ayer and Carnap in their early years, can accept scientific explanations literally. How can he accept that the nervous system constructs experience? The nervous system, like all external things, is mind-independent! If only sensations/perceptions, sense-data, and logical constructions out of them exist, then there *is no nervous system* (independent of our perceptions)! And so consciousness and sense-data, being effectively the only things that exist, become a permanent mystery, as does science itself. Is it possible for thinkers to be so confused?? Lenin shares my befuddlement. "…Sensation, then," he paraphrases, "exists without 'substance,' i.e., thought exists without brain! Are there really philosophers capable of defending this brainless philosophy? There are!"

I asked Chomsky about this. He answered: "Carnap wasn't a phenomenalist in the usual sense. In his *Logische Aufbau der Welt* he did take sense data as a basis for his constructions, but that is because it seemed to him to work, as opposed to taking physical objects. And he accepted scientific explanations. There's no inconsistency. We can believe, with Russell, that the most trustworthy evidence we have is our own immediate experience and that science is the organized effort to make sense out of it, and still regard the whole edifice of science, including postulation of the nervous system, as the best explanation, with no inconsistency." Obviously the last sentence is right. But if we don't countenance the existence of mind-independent matter, surely we can't accept scientific explanations. From everything I've read by and about them, the logical positivists—at least, most of them—rejected not only the existence of theoretical entities but even the meaningfulness of the statement that matter exists independently of its being perceived. (Thus, Ayer said that "The chair exists when I'm not looking at it" *means only* that I would have certain sense-perceptions if I looked in 'its' direction. (Reminds me a little of Berkeley.)) But science is committed to the mind-independence of matter. So it seems that Ayer and others, if my characterization of them is correct, can't consistently believe in the literal truth of scientific hypotheses.

I sent that to Chomsky. He wrote, "That's Ayer, a vulgarization of logical positivism. Carnap wouldn't have agreed. He was a physicist – as many of the Vienna Circle were – and a large part of his goal was to provide means for physics to carry out its work more clearly and successfully." Yes, I know, which is what confuses me. Carnap was obviously more sophisticated and subtle than Ayer, but I can't agree with him that *all* ontological questions are meaningless. Questions about numbers, classes, properties and

[1] One problem: solipsism. If there are no mind-independent things, then there are no people besides me. Berkeley at least had a theory to address this problem.

propositions are, but not questions about ordinary objects and theoretical entities like atoms, since these are supposed by most physicists themselves to have real existence in spacetime. More generally, there either *is* (mind-independent) matter or there *isn't*. That can't be a pseudo-question, because common sense and science are both committed to the position that there *is* matter. Period. (Nothing about "linguistic frameworks" here.) Which means it's a substantive position. Carnap wanted to navigate between realism and instrumentalism (anti-realism, a kind of idealism), but that's hard, maybe impossible, to do. Was he some sort of "structural realist"? Did he reject realism about theoretical entities but accept it vis-à-vis the *mathematical structures* of physical theories? Perhaps. But then, if so, he was an anti-realist in a sense—and a realist in another—which means he took a "metaphysical" position.

I'm always suspicious of philosophies that can't be stated in plain English. All this talk about "linguistic frameworks" and this refusal to be pinned down to one position, at times adopting the language of realism, at others the language of idealism, and at others saying that the whole issue is misguided—makes me suspicious.

The second Trio from Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 in F, the duet between the horns and the oboe near the end. Simply unique. Nothing like it. Indescribable.

Another irony.— In a nihilistic age, it's the nihilism-hating fanatics [such as fascists or terrorists] who finally become the greatest nihilists of all.

Chasing tail.— My chasing after women is as irrational, confused, frantic, self-vitiating, and *circular* as a dog's chasing its tail. (Panting, tongue hanging out, twisting around in circles, the object always just beyond my reach—and it's basically a *part of myself* that I'm chasing but can never coincide with.)

I met Meng this evening, a Chinese grad student I had previously met at a barbecue. What a great girl! A truly intelligent, friendly, considerate person, three qualities that are rarely found together. She suggested I take dancing lessons as a way to meet people, and go to a couple of churches she mentioned. My mom also recently suggested this humanistic church near Harvard; I think I'll try that one too. […]

I'm reading *American Pragmatism: Peirce, James, and Dewey*, by Edward Moore.

In pitying the human species one is pitying an abstract entity, which is senseless. To feel sorry for humanity…is to feel sorry for an idea. Mankind doesn't have a Hegelian Spirit; there are only individuals. Some people are happy, some are unhappy. It's the same fallacy as that involved in hating Jews or women, or in obsessively seeking fame: the collective entity that is one's intentional object doesn't exist. It is but a confused projection of the Other in oneself. –Of course, the drive for recognition (or confirmation) itself is based on a confused projection of this Other. It is the self's lifelong quest to reach itself and unite with itself.

—The socialized body (the self) wants to unsocialize itself, to transcend self-consciousness, the subject–object division in itself; it undertakes this unfulfillable project with the help of art, philosophy, music, love, friendship, sex—in fact, most activities. *Activity* is the self's projecting itself into the world, which also means into *itself* (because it has internalized the world).

Everything that makes us human grows out of our self-separation from the immediate, our mediating of experience, which is simultaneously our universalizing of it. (There is nothing between the particular and the universal. Through abstraction, one universalizes.) But there is an element of falsity in all abstraction, all reification, all mediation and universalization. There is a lack-of-union-with-reality. So, everything distinctively human is deluded. *Untrue* in some sense. The belief in words and concepts is a delusion; so is the (substantial) self; so is the self's desire for confirmation, in all its permutations—because they are not what they seem and cannot be consummated. All these beliefs and implicit self-conceptions

incorporate *abstraction*: concepts *are* abstractions (from experience), which means they don't exist *per se*;[1] the self-substance is an abstraction from the body's past experiences and interactions with other bodies, and it includes, or presupposes, the abstract Other, which is involved in the desire for recognition and ultimately vitiates it. The very nature of the human mind is abstractive—except in its lower realms, its appetitive and sexual realms. They're governed by concreteness, although of course they come into contact and tension with the higher abstract mental functions. (For instance, while the male sex drive gets 'taken up' by the desire for recognition in such a way that sex becomes, for men at least, another means toward recognition, the drive also *conflicts* with the desire for recognition. Were it not for this desire, after all—which is intimately connected with the inculcation of social norms—men would grab a pretty woman on the street and have their way with her. But because of the mind's internalization of other people's viewpoints and its desire for approval from people, the sex drive gets frustrated.)

I'm sick of Obama already. My skepticism was well-founded. I just want this world-system to end, a system that has made life miserable for the many and meaningless for the few—or the many.

It's misleading to say that concepts are "fictions." The unicorn is fictional; concepts aren't, at least not in the same way. "Consider the perceptual judgment, 'This stove is black.' On the basis of this judgment we make the abstraction of 'blackness'; that is, we consider blackness in itself. This blackness as considered in itself is not a fiction; it is not a product of my imagination. It is real. It has an external counterpart, namely the blackness that is in the stove. All that is meant by saying that blackness is real is that there is something which has blackness in it; that is, something that is black. Since this is so, blackness is not a fiction but a reality. 'It is perfectly true [writes Peirce] that all white things have whiteness in them, for that is only saying, in another form of words, that all white things are white; but since it is true that real things possess whiteness, whiteness is real.'" All this is obvious. If Quine would contest it, he's contesting common sense. But nominalism grasps a truth too: a concept itself is essentially *nothing*. It is not an existent, because everything that exists is a particular, it has a spatiotemporal location. There are no "general" or abstract *entities*. The notion doesn't even make sense. But it can be said to be presupposed by natural languages, by advanced communication, which predicates properties, or abstract objects, of things, and constantly uses abstract entities/objects like numbers and propositions. But when you look closely at these abstract objects you see that they're nothing, they're just…semantic rules that facilitate social behavior and thought. Kant's analysis of them is basically right. (Rules for uniting representations, or whatever he said.) *There is nothing there*. Whenever you analyze the foundations of consciousness and meaning, you find that it's all basically, and disturbingly, empty. It's all behavioral, or half-behavioral and half-'mental.' But we want something more than this emptiness—we think we *are* more than this emptiness—and so philosophers keep returning to the same questions about meaning and the self, hoping to find something beneath it all, something to ground it all. –All these thoughts are what I was trying to communicate in my papers on ontology and the analytic/synthetic distinction.

Sent Chomsky another email:

> Since I respect your opinion on everything, I'd like to pose an ethical question—which might seem rather academic and pointless. But I'm undecided between a 'natural rights' approach to morality and a sort of non-Benthamite utilitarianism, perhaps a utilitarianism tempered with a natural rights approach, if that makes sense. So, for example, killing a person in itself is immoral. But if that person himself is killing some arbitrary number of people—say, a Hitler or a Saddam Hussein or some such character—is it justifiable to kill

[1] "The concept 'shoe'" doesn't exist. There is not one such thing existing in a Fregean third realm, though we necessarily implicitly assume there is. We do have to use 'concepts' in order to communicate—which is why they're necessary fictions—but their *existence* has no place in a scientific account of the world. 'Where' would they exist? [See a few paragraphs below.]

> him, or him and his bureaucratic enablers? Surely Kant is right that that act 'in itself' is immoral—but, on the other hand, it seems 'justifiable.' It's both morally justifiable, at least prima facie, and yet 'absolutely' immoral (on the natural rights and Kantian conception) because one is taking a human life. So do you agree that the proper way of looking at morality is to 'combine' utilitarianism with 'natural rights' in this way? (The utilitarianism presumably comes into play with the justification given for killing Hitler, namely that it will increase the sum total of happiness and justice in the world.)
>
> I don't think the natural rights approach tells us much in this case. It tells us that it is immoral to take a human life, but it is also not to save lives when we can. I don't think utilitarianism gives answers either, for reasons that John Rawls discussed. Frankly, I don't think we can hope to find sound foundations for morals that will lead to conclusions in hard cases, any more than we can find sound principles for scientific inquiry that reach to difficult problems. We can do no more than use our critical faculties, evaluate the circumstances as best we can, and then arrive at necessarily uncertain judgments—in both domains.

His response is the reasonable answer, the one I've always subscribed to. If killing Hitler, as opposed to merely imprisoning him, is the only option and one can foresee that the result will be positive, it's morally justifiable—in fact, obligatory—to kill him. But it isn't easy to predict the future. For all you know, killing him might make the situation worse. [Um, in the case of Hitler, that's unlikely.]

No more of that book on pragmatism.

As a response to my criticism from a few days ago, Bertrand Russell might say that when he says he pities humanity he means only that he pities everyone, or he pities everyone insofar as they share in the pitiable human situation. That has some plausibility. Nevertheless, when he says "I have unbearable pity for mankind," he is implicitly making of the aggregate of humans a single collective object that suffers from the enormous collective pain of everyone combined. If such an object existed, yes, you're damn sure I'd pity it too. But it's an abstraction. Mankind *itself* does not deserve pity, or love or hate or anything else, because there is no such entity. If you don't want to be subject to the delusion of attributing existence and consciousness to a nonexistent object, you have to focus your emotions on specific people. You can pity Jane or every woman who has been raped. That's a rational act. But then why is it wrong to pity "mankind," since this arguably means only that you pity everyone (for having to deal with life's pain)? It's wrong because this "arguable" translation of the concept 'mankind' into 'every individual' is actually not valid, as is shown by the fact that you *magnify* your pity when you apply it to *mankind*. You think of your pity as "unbearable" or "overwhelming" because you attribute unbearable and overwhelming suffering to mankind, suffering six billion times as intense as that of a single person. If you weren't directing your pity at an abstract entity but instead at an individual, you wouldn't call it unbearable; but, after all, mankind is composed only of a collection of *individuals*. An individual's pain is the only pain that exists. The fact that millions or billions of individuals might be experiencing similar kinds of pain doesn't make the pain itself any more intense than that of a single person. So, if you wouldn't have "overwhelming" pity for *one* sufferer then you shouldn't have it for *mankind*, because there is exactly no difference in the level or intensity of real, concrete pain experienced.

(Also, Russell would surely deny that he pities *each specific individual* on the planet. He doesn't pity economic and political elites, etc. This means that 'mankind' isn't translatable into 'every person.' So is it translatable into '*most* people'? No. Mankind is mankind. Everyone. Hence, it has no adequate translation, and Russell is effectively pitying an abstract entity.)

This power of abstraction or generalization in the mind is what makes possible the love of a Mother Theresa and the hate of a Hitler. It's the generalized Other, the abstract Other instantiated in everyone and which can also be transformed into the idea of mankind or posterity or God or "Jews" or "infidels" or the

proletariat or whatever you want. (The idea of God is different from the others because it *explicitly* denotes a sort of collective being with consciousness, whereas the other ideas—depending on the context of their use—can only *function*, *unconsciously*, as denoting such a being, because they are intended to be purely abstract notions, not to denote a particular being like God. Whether they have such an unconscious function for a particular person is often revealed in his behavior. The idea of the Jews did for Hitler because he was obsessed with killing them all, i.e. with killing this noxious Other, this devilish *'Conscious-Principle' of Destruction* realized in every Jewish person. For normal people, the idea of 'Jews' is just an ordinary abstract concept like 'Christians' or 'men' or 'animals.' It isn't invested with emotional, Other-directed energy.) For unusual people, or ordinary people in unusual circumstances, one of these ideas may provide an outlet into which a great deal of emotional energy is directed, which means energy whose object in some sense is the Other. Typically the "Other" is none other than a real person, a lover or a friend or some significant other; sometimes it is an abstract entity like mankind. For Nietzsche and me, it is posterity/mankind. –Needless to say, this oversimplifies. In a particular mind there are *many* such objects of emotional energy—although there are only a few "significant" ones, which are what I'm talking about now. "Restless" people like me differ from ordinary people in that we orient a lot of our emotional and productive activity toward the *ideas* of mankind and suchlike concepts—a phenomenon which, as I said, is possible because the idea unconsciously functions as a kind of collective, conscious Other in itself. Someone who pities or loves mankind is falling victim to the same error. But it's an "error" that grows out of the human mind itself, so everyone shares in it to some degree.

Aaaaaah, this is all so difficult…

I want to reiterate the ironic truth that understanding life's absurdity can actually *ease* your pain if you have a lot of it. Knowing that everyone is in the same metaphysical position as I, and that time steals everything, helps me tolerate somehow the emotional pain in which my sense of self is grounded. (This pain is due mainly to my rejection by women, like the Harvard girl, whose interest in me isn't romantic.)

The problem with contemporary society is that at the same time as the shared lifeworld is shrinking, what remains of it is becoming less real. So the public space is both *small* and *false*.

People think of the loner, with his insecurities, as weak. In truth, he is extraordinarily strong: if *they* lived his life, it would kill them.

One of the advantages in being worn down by life is that you lose the vigor necessary to sustain thoughts of revenge. You come to accept everything; you reach a kind of negative equanimity. The only thought that still excites you is the thought of sleep, and nothingness.

What women are is a consolation. Every person should have the right to be consoled, the right to a woman.

When all is said and done, the thing I'll never be able to understand is how *thoughtless* and *duplicitous* people are. These two qualities go hand-in-hand. I literally cannot understand how it's *possible* to lack common courtesy in the way that most Americans do. I'm not talking about meaningless acts like opening doors for others; I'm talking about showing attention to your friends and acquaintances, showing that you appreciate them, sending spontaneous emails, *showing that you care*. People *seem* to *enjoy your company* (not *care*)—well, in fact, sometimes they do even *seem* to care—but, if they show interest in you, they never follow up later or help you out in any way; instead they completely ignore you until you meet again, when the duplicity returns. Actually, the female sex sometimes seems to be the more duplicitous one, but men are by no means innocent either. Even I'm not. But there's no question that I'm *more* innocent than most people: I *listen*, I'm *kind*, I'm *genuine* (usually). I follow up with people after meeting them once, and I don't cavalierly break appointments. Not even Meng, the Chinese girl, is genuine or thoughtful, as

I've discovered. You see, I project my own genuineness onto others and get excited initially, but then I'm disappointed.

After reading about Heidegger I can see the extent to which he influenced a whole variety of thinkers, not only the existentialists, phenomenologists and poststructuralists but even theologians like Tillich and eccentrics like Buber. All the talk about "being" and "presence" and "anxiety," and much more, it all comes from Heidegger. [No, not exclusively.] On the other hand, that doesn't mean he was wholly original. Far from it. He belongs to a large group of thinkers who were reacting against the Cartesian tradition, including Marx, Kierkegaard (sort of), James, Dewey—Heidegger took a lot from pragmatism—Nietzsche, even Hegel in some ways, Wittgenstein, and thinkers in other disciplines, e.g. psychoanalysis and anthropology. The humanities were inexorably heading away from Cartesianism, emphasizing man's embeddedness. At the same time, unsurprisingly, the individualistic perspective showed up in new ways, 'spiritual' and 'existential' ways, as social atomization intensified. (And in analytic philosophy, Cartesian-Lockean ideas inspired Russell, the logical empiricists, the early Wittgenstein, etc.) What resulted was a schizophrenic intellectual culture.

There's validity in all these approaches, from Descartes to his antipodes. Cartesianism has a lot of truth; so does the nearly opposite tradition of the 20th-century Continentals. It's all a matter of *emphasis*. You can emphasize our freedom or you can emphasize our embeddedness. You can emphasize the division between the mind and the body or you can emphasize their connection. Etc.

Reading *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*.

In his contribution, Charles Taylor follows Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in arguing against representationalism, or "a mediational epistemology." "I mean by that an understanding of the place of mind in a world such that our only knowledge of reality comes through the representations we have formed of it within ourselves." It's a picture that presupposes the inner/outer distinction. Heidegger, you'll recall, argues that we have knowledge of things themselves, not of mere "appearances." (Shades of Thomas Reid.) —To interject my own opinion here: from the perspective of ordinary common sense, this is true. It's even a truism. The book I see is the book itself, the thing itself. I see the thing I see, and the thing I see is a book. Moreover, one assumes unreflectively that the book as I see it is mind-independent: it 'looks' the same even when I'm not looking at it. But this is nonsensical: when no one is looking at it, it doesn't have any appearance at all. By definition. But then if it has no appearance in such conditions, its 'mind-independent' nature, or its nature 'in itself,' obviously differs from how it appears to us. Thus, there is a difference between the book as it is 'in itself' and the book as it appears to consciousness. Natural science supports this conclusion, by elucidating the mechanisms through which the brain constructs the appearance of the book. And so we're back to the representational picture, the mediational epistemology.[1] As Taylor puts it (without agreeing with it), "we grasp what is outside through something inner." How this picture can be doubted, I have no idea. Taylor's arguments are confused.

He argues against the idea that "we can understand our grasp of the world as something that is, in principle, separable from what it is a grasp of" (which he thinks is implied by any representationalism or mediational epistemology). Now, of course, the world as we experience it—which is the "world" he's talking about—is not separable from our "grasp" of it, our experience of it. But this is a tautology. The world as I experience it is not separable from how I experience it; it is not separable from the meanings I bring to it, the way I interpret it, the "bodily know-how" that allows me to get around in it, the nonconceptual ways of being in it, the shared practices that create the spaces in which people interact. But no reasonable "mediational epistemology" would deny any of this. In fact, such an epistemology welcomes it, since this

[1] [Was I confusing here causal mediation (the brain's construction of sense-perceptions) with epistemological mediation (which has to do with how to justify one's knowledge)? Most philosophers would probably say so. But it seems to me that the two are connected. There are "unconscious inferences" going on when the brain presents something to me as a tree or a house or whatever. The brain itself is engaging in 'epistemological activity' by synthesizing the abundance of sensory impulses it receives into the image of a tree—for it is *inferring*, so to speak, that what is present is in fact a tree.]

Heideggerian picture is perfectly consistent with the idea that the brain and the body construct the world as we live in it. The world as it is in itself, however, is separate from our grasp of it. Obviously. There is a certain way the world is independently of our experience of it. Before life existed, there was the world in itself. Now that life exists, there is still the world in itself. But we have no direct access to it. Only through scientific tools can we potentially gain some knowledge of it. –What is so difficult about this?

Taylor is both confused and unoriginal. The obvious existence in us of Heideggerian nonconceptual pre-understanding has no implications vis-à-vis any reasonable representationalism. (That term is misleading.) Taylor also seems to think, for some reason, that by attacking atomistic theories of experience, which postulate discrete sense-data, he's attacking "representationalism." "Our understanding of the world is holistic from the start… There is no such thing as the single, independent percept. Something has this status only within a wider context that is understood, taken for granted, but for the most part not focused on…" So what? This is nothing but a sound observation about how we experience the world. It has no interesting philosophical implications (although it does tell against Humean psychology). More generally, most of these Heidegger-inspired phenomenological analyses have no noteworthy philosophical ramifications. They just make explicit our prereflective experience of the world, which means that *psychologically* they're fruitful.

So, Taylor is right that ordinarily "our grasp [or understanding] of things is not something that is in us, over against the world; it lies in the way we are in contact with the world." (Of course, biologically it is in us, in our brains and nervous systems. But Taylor ignores biology.) He's right that in this sense there is not a complete disconnection or "dualism" between the subject and the object, since they interact in the same meaningful world (structured by the subject—a (neo-)Kantian point that Taylor doesn't want to admit). He's wrong that this has implications with respect to traditional issues like realism or skepticism. The Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian recognition that doubt presupposes a background of understanding, a world which is "the all-englobing locus of my involvements," doesn't make Berkeleian idealism incoherent, as Taylor thinks. Berkeley is perfectly aware of the existence of such a world. What he doubts is the existence of a different kind of world, a world of matter outside my immediate experience.

To repeat, natural science postulates a mediational epistemology. (External input makes contact with sensory nerves, which relay the information to the brain, which constructs the experience.) By denying such an epistemology, Taylor is denying science. But he's also denying to himself that he denies science. The result is an extremely confused man.

…Again, it all depends on how you approach the question. From one perspective, to talk about "representations" is superfluous: the things I see are the things I see, not "representations" of the things I see. I see the book itself, and it's silly or meaningless to say I see a representation of the book. On the other hand, it's truistic, from a different perspective, that everything I see is an appearance, i.e. a representation, in that it appears to me, I'm "being appeared to." But these are really two ways of saying the same thing. "The book itself" that I see is obviously something that appears in (or to) consciousness, which means it is an "appearance." Thus, I perceive appearances, by definition. But the word 'appearance,' which implies the subject-object distinction (the object appears to the subject), also implies, in a different way, that there is an essence, an object in itself. Outside the way things look to consciousness is the way things are in themselves. Science supports this distinction, which means it supports "representationalism."

How can Taylor even admit talk of perceptions, since 'the other side' of a perception is tautologously an appearance, a representation, that which is being perceived by the subject?

Davidon and Rorty oppose representationalism—or think they do. Actually, they oppose the correspondence theory of truth, favoring coherentism (about beliefs). But, as Taylor points out, beliefs are (one form of) representations. So, in a sense, D and R admit that truth has to do with representations; they simply deny that it's a matter of correspondence between representations and reality, arguing instead that it's a matter of coherence among the only kind of "representations" that exist, namely beliefs. Perceptions can't rationally ground beliefs, because "nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief." But then what is the relation between a perception and a belief? How does the first ground the second? According to Davidson, the grounding is causal, not rational. A given perception (e.g. of my roommate at the kitchen stove) causes me to have a belief (that she is cooking) but doesn't rationally justify

it, because the perception has no propositional content and only something with propositional content can justify something with propositional content (i.e., the belief). In Davidson's language, "the relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes." It can only be causal, then. This view generates absurdities, of course, and violates common sense, inasmuch as any idiot can see that my belief that my roommate is cooking is rationally justified by the sight of my roommate mixing things in a pot on the stove. But Davidson was a professional philosopher, i.e., handicapped, so don't be too hard on him.[1] The answer to the question (about how perception can rationally justify belief even though perceptions don't seem to have propositional content) is that perceptions do in fact have propositional content, "implicitly." This is shown by the fact that a proposition can unproblematically articulate the 'content' of a perception: for instance, my sight of a dog chasing a frisbee can be "re-presented" by saying that the dog is chasing the frisbee. The proposition "unpacks" the conceptual content of the perception (as I said in the first chapter of my senior thesis). Kant recognized all this. He knew that the brain synthesizes experience conceptually, so that experience has a propositional content and structure, in fact the same structure as language (which explains why, using language, we're able to do justice to perceptions).

John McDowell agrees with me.

How easy philosophy is. Professionals make it hard because otherwise they couldn't write the reams of articles that allow them to get tenure.

Went to a wine-tasting event. $60. Was supposed to meet a girl there, but she flaked out. Good wine on the roof of a building downtown with the sun shining, the park right beneath us. Boring, but it would have been fun with Aniela or some girl I liked.

....Why is it always the good person who has to justify himself? Gandhi had to justify his behavior, as did Bertrand Russell, as does Noam Chomsky, as does anyone who steps out of the mold. I guess my question answers itself.

Last night I invited to a bar a guy I barely know who's quite boring just because he had posted on Facebook that he was feeling lonely and depressed. He wrote a note on my profile afterwards: "Thanks for getting me out of the house. You might have saved a life tonight."

What is boredom? An unwilling acquiescence to a passive state of being. A desire to be active simultaneous with a desire to be passive, where the latter desire is stronger than the former. The trick is to strengthen the former desire to the point at which you force yourself to be active. The reason this can be hard is that a person doesn't have complete control over his desires. Far from it. The "body" can desire something even as the "mind" desires something else. The body may be inclined to persist in a state of passive inertia, while the mind—or rather, an aspect of one's consciousness—wants to get up and do something. (It's only an "aspect" because, after all, bodily inclinations exist in consciousness, however obscurely and implicitly.)

Attitudes and states of being can always be expressed in the language of desire. The most problematic and 'painful' are those states in which two or more desires are in conflict with each other.

Trying Match.com again because a friend, Olivia, suggested it. Very intelligent girl, by the way, articulate, self-confident, philosophy-minded, Chomsky-adoring, an avowed atheist. Pretty too. But no romantic spark between us.

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[1] He admits that "'I saw it with my own eyes' is a legitimate reason for believing there was an elephant in the supermarket. But [he thinks that] this reports no more than that something I saw *caused* me to believe there was an elephant in the supermarket." Clearly this view is false. Strictly speaking, the term 'reason' implies *logical*, not *causal*, justification. (We're not talking about the biological processes that *caused* me to have the belief. We're talking about my *justification* for having the belief.) But he has denied that sensations can logically justify beliefs, which means they cannot be *reasons* for beliefs. And that's stupid. See what I wrote during my time at UMSL on the issue of foundationalism vs. coherentism.

Merleau-Ponty wants to overcome Cartesian dualism by denying that there are only two ways of interpreting human existence, causally (physically) and rationally (mentally). Neither of these is adequate to understanding human being. Instead, we should think of humans in terms of the lived body and motives (not causes or reasons).

Our primary way of being in the world is neither mental/conceptual/rational/logical nor physical/causal. It involves a bodily intentionality, which is sort of between the "mental" and the "physical." The body is constantly comporting itself in relation to implicit expectations about objects or events in the world. When you're about to place your fingers on the keyboard, your body "anticipates" how it will feel and acts accordingly. The keys won't be soft or gooey; they'll be hard. Etc.

> The phenomenology of lived bodily experience shows that thoughts – "mental" states and events – and "physical" objects themselves actually bear on the body in ways that are meaningful but not rational. The phenomenon of motor significance makes this clear; there, we see that worldly objects speak to our body in myriad ways, drawing us into actions, while often remaining only tacitly present in our experience of things. The motivating object has "an ambiguous presence," Merleau-Ponty notes, "anterior to any express evocation… It must exist for us even though we may not be thinking of it." …As a result of the fact that motor significations speak to our bodies, rather than through the mediation of thoughts, we cannot ever get completely clear about what moved us to act in a particular case. This is true even when we are moved to perform an intentional act like asserting.

The term 'motivation' denotes that phenomenon whereby we are moved by things of which we are often only vaguely (if at all) aware. So a motive for Merleau-Ponty does not have to be intentional, like a desire or a reason, as in the normal understanding of the word. The normal understanding is just a special case of the broader meaning. An example of a (nonthetic) motive is discussed by Merleau-Ponty here:

> Only after centuries of painting did artists perceive that reflection on the eye without which the eye remains dull and sightless as in the paintings of the early masters. The reflection is not seen as such, since it was in fact able to remain unnoticed for so long, and yet it has its function in perception, since its mere absence deprives objects and faces of all life and expression. The reflection is seen only incidentally. It is not presented to our perception as an objective, but as an auxiliary or mediating element. It is not seen itself, but makes us see the rest.

The reflection on the eye is a nonthetic motive for action (or a particular judgment or experience) in ordinary life: we don't perceive it explicitly, but its presence disposes us to behave as toward a person rather than, say, a mannequin. It isn't a reason for action, but it isn't just a physical cause either. It is implicitly significant for the agent. In short, it has an ambiguous existence. Another example is that "our ability to see objects in the world is motivated by our bodily familiarity with space."

A motive moves us to have an experience or make a judgment or act in a certain way. In treating a motive as a reason, "I crystallize an indefinite collection of motives." There are always many "motives" for any given experience etc. And we're never explicitly aware of most of them. They operate through the body.

Met the Bulgarian ambassador through a Craigslist friend, a girl I see weekly to study for the GRE—interesting girl in her own right, a 22-year-old lesbian married to a gay man who has a child by him (which lives with her parents, Russian immigrants in Connecticut). Yelena, her husband John and her parents have started a nonprofit group to facilitate West–East cultural dialogue. They took me and an Albanian friend of hers named Albana to their exhibition in Conn. of children's drawings of "the ideal house"—children from Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Italy, America, etc. (Not surprisingly, the poorer the country, the more imaginative and colorful were the drawings. Conventional houses from the West,

incredibly imaginative ones from the East—flower-houses, rainbow-houses, fairytale-houses, nature-houses.) The ambassador, friendly, jolly guy, raconteur. Dinner with him in Yelena's parents' house, a unique place created by the father, an artist and poet—big gruff authentic peasant-like Russian who doesn't speak English. Nothing like this house, indescribable. The parents took quite a liking to me, saw me as an atypical American boy, a young philosopher and intellectual. (Conversation with the father translated through his daughter.) Invited me back this weekend. –So many great Russian customs I saw, like their giving me gifts (beer and wine) and the father downing a large shot of cognac with me before I left, probably a sign of respect or something.

July

The whole debate about such concepts as realism, representationalism, etc. is muddled. This is from the Blackwell Dictionary of Philosophy:

> There are two types of perceptual realism, direct and indirect realism [often called representationalism[1]]. Both claim that the physical world exists independently of perceivers and that the world is as science says it is. While direct realism believes that what we perceive is the physical world itself, indirect realism argues that what we immediately or directly perceive are sense-data, rather than the physical world itself, which can only be perceived indirectly. Thus, indirect realism sets up a field of sense-data between our perception and the physical world. But it contrasts with phenomenalism, for it denies that physical existents are composed out of sense-data. There are two main versions of indirect realism. One, called naive indirect realism, claims that sense data have all the types of properties that physical objects have. The other, called scientific indirect realism, suggests that physical objects have primary properties, while secondary properties, such as color, smell, and taste, belong only to sense-data. "The dispute between the direct realist and the indirect realist concerns the question of whether we are ever directly aware of the existence and nature of physical objects."

First of all, I should reiterate that the human mind is incapable of getting clear on this subject. The issue has been alive for millennia and will never be settled. Science has not brought us any closer to a philosophical understanding; it has, in fact, made the problems even more intractable. We know now that the brain constructs experience, constructs our experience of space and time and everything else. It's natural to conclude from this that a person's experience is somehow 'in' the brain, or 'in' consciousness, and not 'out there' as it seems to be. But let's be careful: what common sense decrees is, on the level of common sense, transparently true. We do perceive physical objects in space and time, and these objects have primary and secondary properties, and everything is more or less as it appears to be. Common sense even has room for certain scientific hypotheses, such as the hypothesis that there are microscopic particles in these objects that we can't normally see. But once you start to ask questions that can't be answered by direct appeal to sensory experience (including experiences made possible by microscopes and so on), the common sense account breaks down and you get philosophical headaches.

On the philosophical level, some such notion as sense-data [or rather *perceptual appearance*, as distinguished from actual mind-independent physical objects] is unavoidable. Two kinds of arguments establish it: purely 'conceptual' ones (like the argument from illusion and other arguments I've sketched above), which make no reference to scientific theories of perception, and arguments that do make such reference. The significance of the latter is easily graspable. An example of the former is the following: if there are external objects in the world, they are (perhaps by definition) 'public,' perceivable by more than

[1] This word has absurdly many different meanings. Some kinds of representationalism I don't have much sympathy for; others I do.

one mind. But one's *experience* of them, one's *perception*, is not public. I alone am aware of my perceptions as I experience them. So my consciousness of the objects in this room is, in a sense, private (first-personal), which is to say that the objects as they appear to me are private. Their appearances in my consciousness are private. But now we've surreptitiously snuck in so-called sense-data, i.e. the appearances of objects in consciousness (as distinct from the external objects themselves).[1] In short, it's necessary to distinguish between objects and their appearances or 'mental representations.'

But remember, for common sense there is no distinguishing between objects and their appearances. What I see is the object itself; to distinguish between it and its "appearance" is otiose. So, on this level, our "sense-data" [no; the 'structured' perceptual appearances] just *are* the external objects, and vice versa.[2] On a more sophisticated level, though, this isn't true. There's a difference between truly 'mind-external' matter and matter as we experience it. I.e., we have to distinguish between matter in itself and matter as it appears to a mind. The representation in consciousness (the appearance) is not a mere copy of some similar-looking thing in an external world that we don't perceive; it's radically different from matter as it is in itself. Matter is not colored in itself; it doesn't 'objectively' exist in those discrete forms we call "objects"; it's even possible that human time doesn't apply to it. On the other hand, this is peculiar, for our body itself is, after all, part of "matter in itself," and we can certainly say a lot of coherent things about how the body works "in itself," i.e. when the mind isn't directly perceiving its internal operations. But as I said when I was 20, it seems there are *levels* of the thing in itself (matter in itself), ontological levels distinguished by emergent causal powers. The levels that biology deals with have very different properties from the levels that quantum mechanics deals with. Somehow, space and time in some form comparable to our experience of them emerge as you proceed from the most micro of levels to progressively more macro levels. –The mysteries of philosophy merge with those of science.

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[1] [I was wrong to equate sense-data with the structured perceptual appearances we're aware of. Sense-data are a philosophical construct that's supposed to be more primitive than the perceptual manifold that appears to us as objects and so forth. Sense-data are, it seems, supposed to be things like spots of color we see *out of which* the mind constructs the image of a table. This distinction between "perceptual appearances (*as* mere appearances, not the physical objects that naïve common sense interprets them as)" and primitive "sense-data" is very subtle, and it may or may not be worth making. Sorry about the confusion. I should have said something like "perceptual appearances" rather than sense-data.]

[2] That's the element of truth in phenomenalism. [Written days later: Unreflective common sense, in not recognizing even the existence of mere sensory/perceptual appearance as contrasted with independent physical objects, doesn't recognize that the way objects appear to me is, in a sense, private. So the objects one perceives are ordinarily seen to be public, and one is supposed to see the same exact object that others see. Phenomenalism is more sophisticated than common sense, in that it admits sense-data. (The "public" objects are actually constructions out of sense-data.) And in doing so, it recognizes that, truistically, what consciousness has direct access to are private representations, not public objects. I.e., *mental* entities, not material ones. Where it goes wrong is in succumbing to idealism, in declaring that there *is no* matter-in-itself ("outside of experience"). There must be matter; science needs it. But consciousness doesn't have "direct" access to it, since experience is constructed by the brain. Consciousness has access only to itself and what is 'in' it, i.e. to mental representations. This is just to say that consciousness cannot experience matter in itself, which is a tautology.

[A major source of confusion in all this is that the ordinary material objects one perceives can be thought of from two different perspectives, the 'commonsensical' one according to which they are public ("material"), and the semi-Berkeleian one according to which they are private representations. The latter is more consistent with science, as long as you admit that matter exists in itself! But the former also has an element of truth, since, after all, the way that objects appear to me is, except in unusual or pathological circumstances, identical to the way they appear to you, which means that objects are in this sense "public," "out there," "independent of me."

[Anyway, the fact that objects can be analyzed in these two ways means that words like 'material' and 'mental' have two different meanings. There is scientific matter-in-itself, and there is matter as we experience it, i.e. as the ordinary objects we perceive all the time. Similarly, on the level of common sense there are thoughts as opposed to ordinary physical objects—this is the usual sense of 'mental'—but on the level of philosophy even these ordinary objects are 'mental' inasmuch as one's experience of them is private to oneself. The foregoing discussion has probably confused the reader because of the double meaning of each of these words ('matter' and 'mental').]

Been meeting interesting people lately. Yelena, Olivia, an Israeli woman last night while waiting for the fireworks on the Esplanade who is writing a book about her spiritual experiences ("epiphanies"), and today an Indian "recovering pharmacist" named Aishwarya at the park near my house when she sat down on the bench next to me and we had an hours-long conversation about, well, everything. Very articulate and self-confident woman in her thirties, whose views on society, politics, philosophy, Chomsky, etc. are the same as mine. Seriously wants to become a high-ranking Indian politician (the prime minister, in fact) to help clean up the mess; is moving back to India in January after fifteen years in Boston, going to volunteer with a group devoted to preserving wildlife and culture. Was quite taken with me, flattered me a number of times about my mind ("wildly intelligent," "the next Chomsky," which I laughed off). Said it was the most exhilarating conversation she'd ever had! We exchanged phone numbers.

The object is public, but my perception of the object is private. This is the source of so many confusions. You can look at basically the same thing in two different ways, as a material object or as an experience (of the object). It's like one of Husserl's reductions, I forget which. A wondrously subtle shift in mental attitude changes the thing from material to mental, from public to private! The common-sense attitude, and then the philosophical attitude (sense-perception, etc.).

First: the object. Second: the object *for me*. First: public, external, material, the same thing for everyone. Second: private, semi-'internal,' semi-mental (but still 'more' material than thoughts), mine alone. First: Thomas Reid. Second: Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Russell, Ayer. Each view is correct in its own sphere. (Ultimately, though, the Lockean view seems to be the deeper truth, the basic truth of the matter—as long as it doesn't become Berkeleian or Ayerian. We have to admit the existence of some kind of matter completely external to the mind.)

If you want to picture how crude is the scientific understanding of the brain, compare the most primitive human tool—say, a stone used by Paleolithic man for killing an animal—to modern nanotechnology. And then multiply that difference by 10,000.

Hey, look at this comment of Merleau-Ponty's: "How significance and intentionality could come to dwell in molecular edifices or masses of cells is something which can never be made comprehensible, and here Cartesianism is right." Yup. So Merleau-Ponty does accept a sort of mind-body dualism after all. But the dualism I accept is 'epistemological,' not 'ontological.' It's a reflection of our lack of understanding, not of a real division in the world between mind and matter.

Much of what Merleau-Ponty has to say about bodily intentionality and subjectivity bears on my thoughts from years ago about the inexplicableness of certain desires and modes of behavior. Why do I like looking at pretty women? Why do I desire to watch porn? How is it possible I can be ashamed in a situation without even knowing the meaning of my shame (in some sense)? How is it I'm able to just do things without thinking about them, without even representing to myself the goals of my behavior in that moment? I don't know. It's my body speaking—it's "bodily intentions" whose existence is "ambiguous," neither causal-physical nor rational-mental, somehow "implicit," possessing significance I'm not explicitly aware of (or perhaps not aware of at all). "Motives," as M-P says. I don't even have the faintest idea how it is that my hand moves when I want it to. It just does. It's all magical.

"The heart of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical inquiry is the movement by which a living being transcends its materiality and gives rise to meaningful existence and, conversely, the fact that every meaning, whatever its degree of abstraction, has its roots in corporeal life." The philosopher of the body.

Reading Gordon Wood's *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1991). Its argument is overstated—revisionists often go too far—but the book is exceptional anyway: a tour de force of scholarship.

> …In 1760 America was only a collection of disparate colonies huddled along a narrow strip of the Atlantic coast… The less than two million monarchical subjects who lived in these colonies still took for granted that society was and ought to be a hierarchy of ranks and degrees of dependency and that most people were bound together by personal ties of one sort or another. Yet scarcely fifty years later these insignificant borderland provinces had become a giant, almost continent-wide republic of nearly ten million egalitarian-minded bustling citizens who not only had thrust themselves into the vanguard of history but had fundamentally altered their society and their social relationships. Far from remaining monarchical, hierarchy-ridden subjects on the margin of civilization, Americans had become, almost overnight, the most liberal, the most democratic, the most commercially minded, and the most modern people in the world. …It was the Revolution that was crucial to this transformation.
>
> …The Revolution made possible the anti-slavery and women's rights movements of the 19th century and in fact all our current egalitarian thinking. The Revolution not only radically changed the personal and social relationships of people, including the position of women, but also destroyed aristocracy as it had been understood in the Western world for at least two millennia. The Revolution brought respectability and even dominance to ordinary people long held in contempt and gave dignity to their menial labor in a manner unprecedented in history and to a degree not equaled elsewhere in the world. The Revolution did not just eliminate monarchy and create republics; it actually reconstituted what Americans meant by public or state power and brought about an entirely new kind of popular politics and a new kind of democratic officeholder. The Revolution not only changed the culture of Americans—making over their art, architecture, and iconography—but even altered their understanding of history, knowledge, and truth. Most important, it made the interests and prosperity of ordinary people—their pursuits of happiness—the goal of society and government. The Revolution did not merely create a political and legal environment conducive to economic expansion; it also released powerful popular entrepreneurial and commercial energies that few realized existed and transformed the economic landscape of the country. In short, the Revolution was the most radical and far-reaching event in American history.

But much of what he writes in part two shows that all these transformations were more gradual than you'd think from his introduction, and were already underway in the 1750s. (For instance, the eroding of a politics of personal ties, of a monarchical ethos, and the spread of an egalitarian, 'impersonal' republican culture.) By the 1770s this "social revolution" was in full swing.

In asking what matter 'is' in itself, what its 'essence' is, we're basically, albeit implicitly, asking what its essential appearance is. We want to imagine it, imagine what it looks like—in itself. ('What does real, mind-independent, external matter look like?') But obviously that question contradicts itself: it tacitly presupposes a subject to which matter is appearing at the same time that it imagines away the subject, trying to get at the objective material world as it is in itself. "Essential appearance"? That's a contradiction in terms!—at least if 'essential' is understood in the way it is here. So the very question is misguided (at least as it is commonly, tacitly interpreted). This shows you how hopeless is the human attempt to truly understand the world, how hopelessly in the dark we are. We can't escape the subjective perspective. (Only formalistically, through mathematics, can we presumably escape it. Hence the truth of structural realism.)

The puzzle is that the ordinary objects we sense are both in consciousness and outside consciousness. Both mental and material. Unreflectively we think of them as wholly material and objective, but reflectively we have to think of them as at least partly mind-dependent, or mental. The word-markings on my computer screen are both *out there* and *in here*—as is shown clearly if I misread them when skimming too quickly and return an instant later to read a different word than the one I read a moment ago.

Evidently what I saw the first time existed only in my consciousness, even though it had an 'external' phenomenological character (like all 'external' objects). Generalizing, it's evident that everything I perceive exists as such only in [or *for*] consciousness, despite its seeming mind-externality. A philosopher can be classified on the basis of which aspect he emphasizes, the intuitive 'phenomenological' mind-independence or the logically evident mind-dependence.

Okay, I've been repeating myself for days now. I'll stop.

Except, one more thing: G. E. Moore was terribly vexed by all this stuff, torn between his commitment to the idea that what we directly perceive are sense-data and hence not physical surfaces (the surfaces of objects) and his commitment to the idea that we do perceive these surfaces. "I am completely puzzled about the matter," he said, "and only wish I could see any way of settling it." Well, the way of settling it is the one I've laid out. The seemingly incompatible positions are both correct—correct on two different "levels" or in different "gestalts." In the pre-philosophical common-sense gestalt, it's true that we perceive the surfaces of physical objects. In the more philosophical gestalt, this is wrong; we 'perceive' only mental representations. But these representations are understood by us to constitute physical objects—phenomenologically they have the character of being (or of constituting in their totality) external physical objects—so the element of truth in the naïve view is preserved. We perceive what appear to us to be physical objects. And in fact they are physical objects in the sense that they—i.e., these constructions out of mental representations—have the properties of being physical, including divisibility-into-parts, public availability to other consciousnesses, etc. (properties not possessed by mental phenomena as such).

You know society is fucked up when it's the intelligent people who are punished for the stupid ones' stupidity.

The basic point is that value-judgments are always relative to something, not absolutely true (not just "true, period"). A person is not stupid, period. He is stupid *relative to me*.[1] :) Hitler was not *bad*; he was bad relative to certain standards (and, in a slightly different sense of 'relative,' relative to certain people).[2] A value-judgment not made in relation to some set of standards is not really meaningful. The desire to help people is good…not "in itself" but given other values. The problem is that when we make value-judgments, the form of the assertion is categorical or "absolute" in the way I'm criticizing, which means that the assertion lacks meaning. "It's good to help people": that statement seems to have meaning when you first look at it, but the more you think about it, the more elusive its meaning becomes. Insofar as the meaning is unanalyzable, it doesn't exist. Only if you give reasons for the statement, i.e. justify it on the basis of other values, does it acquire a concrete meaning. So, why is it good to help people? Because, e.g., that reduces suffering (and I value a reduction in suffering). Thus, helping people is good inasmuch as it brings about the realization of some further end—and *this* statement is meaningful. It isn't a categorical claim ascribing "intrinsic value" to something, a notion that makes no sense.

There is no such thing as intrinsic value. Not even happiness is "intrinsically valuable," at least in the sense I'm discussing. Just consider the statement "Happiness is intrinsically good." What does that mean? Or "Beauty has intrinsic value." Huh? Every value is such in relation to a preference (i.e., an act of valuing). A masochistic person might deny that pleasure or happiness is valuable, and this is a perfectly coherent thing to do.[3] Why do I think happiness is good? Because I prefer it to unhappiness. It isn't good in itself; it's good because of (or "relative to") my set of preferences.

On another understanding, though, there are intrinsic goods. Virtue is intrinsically good: it's good by definition. Vice is intrinsically bad. But specific vices are not "intrinsically bad"—except insofar as

[1] Actually, 'stupid' may be more descriptive than evaluative. I'll leave aside such terms for now.

[2] Contrast 'This patch is yellow, period' with 'This painting is beautiful, period.' The former is wholly 'objective,' the latter not. And they have different logical forms.

[3] The only way it would be incoherent is if happiness is *defined* (emptily) as that which a person desires. But the common definition is that it's a pleasurable, conflict-free state of mind—and it's coherent for me to prefer pain and conflict.

they're classified as vices. For instance, lying is not intrinsically bad; it's just a way of behaving, like any other way. But insofar as it's a vice, it is bad, because vices are defined that way. Of course, this is really just saying that "insofar as it's (intrinsically) bad, it's (intrinsically) bad." Which begs the question.

If an intrinsic good is something that is desired or valued for its own sake, then there are intrinsic goods. Pleasure is desired for its own sake (though not always). So is happiness. So is recognition, or self-confirmation. So is—in a loose sense, perhaps—knowledge. ("I want knowledge solely for the pleasure of knowing.") These aren't goods in themselves; they're goods insofar as they're valued, and they're intrinsic goods insofar as they're valued for their own sake. But it's worth noting that specific instances of these general goods are not valued for themselves: for instance, a massage is valued not for its own sake (what would that even mean?) but for its pleasurable quality. So, a massage is extrinsically good, good on account of something else (conceptually distinct from it) which is realized through it.

Value characterizes a relation between a subject and an object. It's incoherent to say that an object is valuable in itself, i.e. with no reference to a subject (a subject's purposes, attitudes, etc.), because this contradicts the nature of value. But this is basically what one is doing when one makes a value-judgment. The statement "That painting is beautiful," by virtue of its form, ascribes value (a value-property[1]) to an object in itself—without reference to a subject—which is incoherent. The meaningful way of expressing the same sentiment is to say something like "That painting is such as to induce a feeling of aesthetic pleasure in me," or to list the criteria by which one judges aesthetic merit and then say that that painting fulfills the criteria.

But don't forget that all such philosophically problematic statements are unproblematic on the level of common sense. They serve their purpose in that context and are just as meaningful as they have to be given the functions of ordinary communication. (Cf. what I've written about the external world, the self, free will, linguistic meaning, the mind-body relationship, truth, etc. On the naïve level all this is unproblematic, but when you start to dig you see it all crumble beneath you until you're left with little more than illusions or contradictions or empty 'behavioral' phenomena.)

Met a Korean girl corrupted by Harvard. Match.com girl. Harvard sucks the vitality out of people, or at least it tends to. I want a girl who isn't as intellectual as I—because intellectualism is inversely proportional to spontaneity and vitality. (I can turn off my intellectual side when I want to.)

Must escape this country. The people, the food, the culture, the politics, the city-life—it's all noxious, soul-battering. "My soul is sort of calcifying, so to speak." (From an email to Olivia.) s-s-s-s-s.

It was a surreal night with the Indian girl. Started off fine: walked to a restaurant twenty minutes away, continued our lively conversation from the other day. […] During dinner she also gave me thoughtful advice on finding a woman. (My movements and voice should "flow" more than they do, should be slow and not "jerky" or "sharp," and I should speak in a deep and warm voice, etc. Again, it's all about exuding "strength.")

But as we talked I began to notice that, well, she can be annoying and isn't quite normal. Likes to hear herself talk, is highly theatrical, is a bit too pleased with herself…—certainly nothing unusual about that—…but then suddenly her spiritual side popped out. And that's when it got weird. This part of the conversation, which lasted an hour, was more of a monologue, since I didn't quite know how to react. For instance, in 2003 she died and was born again. It was a terrible experience, she dreamed that she was being

[1] This property (in the context of a statement) combines ordinary description with evaluation—a 'cognitive' stance with a 'noncognitive' one—which is incoherent. The statement posits its own truth, like any descriptive statement, but it can be neither true nor false because its real content is simply an expression of approval. So it contradicts itself. That is, its form suppresses the subjective perspective—denies its relevance, so to speak--in favor of positing an objective fact that has nothing to do with the subject's attitude—whereas its content is constituted by precisely this subjective perspective, the subject's reaction to what he is seeing.

roasted on a spit with her friends… Her death-and-rebirth was triggered one night while she was in the bathroom undressing. She was wearing two large triangle earrings, but as she pulled the sweater over her head one of them disappeared. She searched everywhere in the bathroom, but she'd had it on a moment ago and now it was gone, nowhere to be found. And then she had an epiphany: she realized that there was a triangle in her life—a love-triangle: her husband (whom she's divorcing now) was cheating on her. So she ran over to look at the phone bills and, sure enough, he had been repeatedly calling some woman. And then, I guess, Aishwarya died, at least spiritually, sometime in the next few days. But she was reborn, found peace; her personality reversed itself, from being like mine in some ways to being calm, contented, spiritual, at peace with itself. She attributes all this to God. (Professes to be a Hindu.) She also mentioned her theory that the recent Air France crash in the Atlantic Ocean was an act of God: evidently the souls in that plane had been impure. In fact, our civilization is more or less doomed: we're destroying the planet, etc., and God is getting fed up, so, for all we know, there's going to be another Flood to cleanse the world. I challenged her in the obvious ways. Like, how does all this fit with her belief that everything is predestined? Or, how could God allow all this to happen? "He trusted us with this planet but we betrayed him," etc.

So that went on for a while. Then the third act: she went to the bathroom, where a metamorphosis of some sort occurred because when she returned to the table she was virtually silent. Five minutes before, she'd been a geyser of spiritual self-analysis. We left, walked home in silence. I attempted vainly to engage her in conversation: aside from a few token sentences she would have none of it. "Why are you so quiet all of a sudden?" I asked. "I'm happy," she said. I pressed the question again later; "I'm thinking about my path," she replied. Evidently, though, she hadn't been pleased with my reactions to her spiritual revelations. "You're not in the know, are you?" she asked as we walked. "I don't know what you mean by 'in the know.'" "You haven't found your truth yet." "No, I certainly haven't," I answered; "maybe I don't have a truth."

Our parting was rather abrupt: shook hands and she said, "We'll talk later." […]

—The world is full to the brim with bizarre people. Most of what Aishwarya says is sensible, but then she behaves erratically and preaches a flaky spiritualism. Good luck in your future life, weirdo.

In its context, the most beautiful line in Western literature may be Jesus's saying "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." During dinner last night I related the story of the adulteress to Aishwarya, and as I did so I was so struck by its beauty that my eyes welled up. "Go, and sin no more." What a *world* of serene forgiveness and understanding is contained in those five words! (That sentence may actually be the most beautiful one.)

Merleau-Ponty on language: "The word has never been inspected, analyzed, known and constituted, but caught and taken up by a power of speech and, in the last analysis, by a motor power given to me along with the first experience I have of my body and its perceptual and practical fields. As for the meaning of a word, I learn it as I learn to use a tool, by seeing it used in the context of a certain situation." Wittgenstein. This view isn't incompatible with the sort of view I defended in college in my notes on Wittgenstein: "the meaning of a sentence [writes Merleau-Ponty, and college me] is its import or intention, which once more presupposes a departure and arrival point, an aim and a point of view."

Merleau-Ponty argues against both realism and social constructivism in science (perhaps not wholly coherently). Here's an interesting passage:

> For what precisely is meant by saying that the world existed before any human consciousness? An example of what is meant is that the earth originally issued from a primitive nebula from which the combination of conditions necessary to life was absent. But…[n]othing will ever bring home to my comprehension what a nebula that no one sees could possibly be. Laplace's nebula is not behind us, at our remote beginnings, but in front of us in the cultural world.

Hm. Postmodernism. The fact that I can't conceive of a nebula that no one sees, a nebula in itself, doesn't entail the nonexistence of such a nebula, or its existence only in the cultural world.

To make language new again: to make life new again. To escape the making-empty-ness of overuse. "It's refreshing to meet someone like you." It's re-freshing, makes me fresh, makes me new again and whole. It refreshes—it *freshes* me to talk to you. A new beginning.

'Realization.' Its duality of meaning supports a pragmatic theory of knowledge, something like Vico's. It's through real-izing (making, fabricating, achieving) an object that one comes to a realization about it, i.e. understands it, knows it. One realizes that something is the case—i.e., has knowledge—through an act of making-real.

The similar duality of 'object.' You can *achieve* an object (a goal) and you can *make* an object—or perceive it. Through perception, you're "achieving an object," both creating one (a physical one) and accomplishing one (a goal, an aim).

And then of course the duality of 'subject.' A subject that creates or is aware of an object, and a subject that—is 'created,' subjected to influences, processes of manipulation and transformation, of control. So on one of its meanings, 'subject' isn't much different from 'object.' Both somewhat passive objects. What's the significance of that?

The double meaning of 'fabricate.' Make and make up (lie).

Dissociation from one's past is not always a bad thing. In fact, it can be one of life's great mercies.

It's a cliché but it's true: modern loneliness comes from the attitude of treating people as means to an end, namely happiness/pleasure. If a person doesn't entertain me or stimulate me, I'll end my relationship with him. (Not I personally; this is just the philosophy.) Relationships have become conditional on stimulation and the achievement of satisfaction. But what's needed is commitment. You commit to someone as an end in himself, as you commit to an end. Commitment should be conditional, if at all, only on the other's respect for your humanity, on his treating you as an end. (No physical abuse, etc.)

Why does the modern attitude cause unhappiness? Because happiness comes from the interaction between oneself and a significant other. Happiness is relational: "happiness was born a twin" (Byron). The interaction between two equals, not between a lesser partner (a means) and a greater partner (an end). You necessarily desire recognition from someone you respect as you do yourself, because only someone fully human can fully affirm or confirm you. But we tend not to respect others as we do ourselves, i.e. as ends, which means we can't have a significant other in our lives. –And one of the reasons for our lack of respect for others is that this is a defense against rejection. If we don't let ourselves respect them, we won't care if they reject us. Perhaps we interact with them in a friendly, affectionate way, but we don't really allow them to become a part of our psyche—and for good reason. Unfortunately this is something of a self-fulfilling prophecy: if we withhold true respect for people out of an unconscious fear of rejection, our doing so will cause them to reject us precisely because they can probably unconsciously sense our lack of engagement with them. –Well, that's too simple. Many people show complete engagement when they're with their acquaintances but can't develop deeper relationships anyway. This isn't mainly their fault; it's because society as a whole has instilled an underlying emotional distance in people, a veritable *structure of feeling* that conditions how they relate to everyone (even the engaging ones).

Commitment is fundamentally not a hedonistic stance. It's a moral stance: it means commitment to the person, not to his function as satisfying you in some way. Hedonism even in a less crude sense than Benthamism or (in a different way) Freudianism has very little to do with the good life, with genuine happiness. The moral stance is not only the most *moral* one; it also makes possible your greater happiness than any other stance.

You must *care for*, not *use*. Things are meant to be used; people are meant to be cared for. It's the practical versus the affective mode of being: the first should characterize your relationship to things, the second your relationship to people (and 'aesthetic objects,' like nature). But modernity is the upside-down world: we care for things and use people (and nature). Is it any wonder we're unhappy? We're misdirecting or suppressing our emotional energies. Reification!

"In a lecture given in 1951, Merleau-Ponty rejected the notion of the unconscious. What psychoanalysts call the unconscious, he said, corresponds only to an 'unrecognized, unformulated knowledge, that we do not wish to assume.'" There may be something to that. Actually, it fits nicely with my idea of half-conscious thoughts and perceptions, or rather of a gradual transition from explicit knowledge to lower and lower degrees of consciousness. (Also a Leibnizian idea.) The "unconscious" is latently conscious, which is precisely why it's able to become conscious in special, 'revelatory' moments.

Obviously other aspects of the mind *are* truly unconscious, such as the computations it is constantly carrying out to orient the body in the world.

Reading *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*.

Why does the aesthetic seem inauthentic and frivolous now? Maybe it's because the world has become too serious and adult-like for intelligent people to try to lose themselves in fiction or poetry or music or whatever. Doing so seems somehow childish and immature. A too-obvious distraction from reality. Reality presses on us insistently. Politics, economics, the public world presses on us. There is no longer a place in life for imagination, no longer sufficient space for it, it has been crowded out. It's fine to read a novel now and then or go to concerts, but to seriously interest oneself in anything artistic—to take it truly *seriously*—seems almost deluded, almost comical. Solipsistic. Decidedly old-fashioned. There are more important things to do. There is no longer much of a separation between the private and the public (if there ever was); the public is the private and vice versa. The public world determines the private now—the fragmentation, the alienation, the distrust, the being-a-stranger-to-others has infected the private, so that it's quixotic to try to escape from the public into a world of art. The public is everything (which also means that the private is everything, since in the "public" world everyone is more or less atomized and alone now). Art used to be a way of connecting people, and as long as it served that purpose it was "authentic." But it can no longer serve that purpose. Culturally speaking, people are not really united any more by shared artistic values. Instead, art has become merely another way of escaping into a private universe, a way of evading reality, and so it is inauthentic. It's especially inauthentic because reality cannot be avoided any more. The world's problems are *closer* to us than ever before. By immersing oneself in art for extended periods of time one is simply, as it were, closing one's eyes to the world's situation, withdrawing into privacy.

Said differently, art has come to lack dignity. A Stephen King novel is explicitly frivolous, but even a Philip Roth novel is…an exercise in futility. In fact, a Roth novel is, ironically, somehow a more comical affair than a King novel, in that it suffers from a contradiction between its pretended seriousness or cultural dignity and the reality of its cultural irrelevance—its being a testament to a certain artistic solipsism.

Another way of saying it: art has always been essentially a celebration of humanity and the individual (even when it wasn't supposed to be, as during the Middle Ages). There was a kernel of humanism in it. This kernel started to die with postmodernism, which, at its best, was an honest attempt to artistically come to terms with the death of art. By now, humanism is effectively dead. The individual no longer has value, is no longer an end in himself. Hence, the artistic approach to life is passé.

What is still timely? Something like the 'Protestant ethic' approach (be it in business or politics or whatever), the hedonistic approach, and perhaps the ethical/humanitarian approach. The 'desire for fame' approach overlaps with all these, and I suppose the first overlaps with the third. (But there are plenty of people committed to one of the former approaches who don't desire fame.) And then, of course, there is the average Joe's approach, which basically consists in the lack of any distinctive approach. Being ordinary.

In the end, Hölderlin said it: "What are poets for in a barren age?" In an age of science, commodification and mass consumerism, art first adopts, perhaps, a defensive and defiant posture, then (or: along with) a despairing one, then (or: along with) an overly intellectual one, then perhaps a playful one—trying to make the best of the situation with a 'devil may care' attitude (postmodern irony, playfulness and frivolity)—and finally it becomes so contradictory to social reality that only a willful perverseness or stubbornness on the part of the individual can sustain a serious interest in high art. This stubbornness, I suppose, is the inauthenticity, in that it seems to signify a refusal to accept social reality. (It doesn't

necessarily signify that refusal, but, in any case, what I'm trying to explain is only the *partial appearance* of the inauthenticity of art in the contemporary period.)

So, yes, that's the answer. Art used to be a compelling way of engaging with the world, of connecting with people and being at the cutting-edge of culture—being in touch. Now it seems to be the opposite: a way of retreating, of being out-of-touch, a turning-away from the world—an attempt that's doomed to failure, because, as I said above, at this point there is no turning away from the world. You can pretend to, or try to, but then you're basically lying to yourself. Arguably.

From another perspective, of course, the aesthetic approach toward life is definitely not dead, nor will it ever die. Millions of people adhere to it, and not only artists. To an extent, I do. There's also the philosophical or scientific, truth-oriented approach, and I subscribe to this too. Finally, there's the religious approach. Like the aesthetic—but even more so—it is somewhat out of sync with the modern age, but that doesn't mean millions of people don't passionately subscribe to it.

I should also say that I still have far more respect for artists, writers, and musicians, as such, than for businessmen, politicians, and lawyers, as such. The former are individuals and rebels, the latter are conformists.

Above I focused on the activity of doing art, but what I should have discussed is art itself (in a broad sense). The contradiction is between art itself and the social world, a contradiction *embedded in* the art (in its social context).

From yet another perspective, serious art is no less and no more authentic than anything else nowadays. Everything is basically alienated, atomized. Art has become private, yes, but so has life itself. Art has become self-indulgent, but so has everything else (at least in its social framework). The zeitgeist is that everything is futile, merely a way to pass the time. Even politics and business, the most "real" of occupations, function in a framework of transience and privacy, self-indulgence, futility. The "system" is everything. What happens is all a show, a farcical drama or a dramatic farce. Since no one has value and there is no justice, it's just a bunch of idiots and pawns playing their games—be they in politics, academia, art, science, business, law, etc. It's all "privacy" (since nothing is *shared* anymore), all posturing and self-delusion, all acting. "A play acted by its spectators." —This is the phenomenology.

Again, though, all this is true only from a certain 'big picture' perspective. It seems implicit in social dynamics and the overall nature of social interactions, but it has little place in the immediacy of a happy life. Such a life can be perfectly "authentic" and deeply lived.

Kierkegaard as a classical moralist, concerned with integrity, character, intense virtue of an ethical or especially Christian sort. Inwardness, existence, subjectivity, selfhood, character, being an individual. Inwardness as contrasted with outwardness, like the inner-directed vs. other-directed personality. The modern age stresses an outwardly successful life and cares nothing about essential subjectivity.

> In *Two Ages*, "character" means something like "sustained dispositional ethical enthusiasm or interest" (we might also say "commitment," though this is not a typical word for Kierkegaard). Character contrasts with the personality formation typical of the present age, which is "*devoid of passion, flaring up in superficial, short-lived enthusiasm and prudentially relaxing in indolence*." Character is psychological continuity, stability in the face of changing circumstances. "Morality is character; character is something engraved; but the sea has no character, nor does the sand, nor abstract common sense, either, for character is inwardness." A person with character offers something "to dwell upon," something real, something stable, whereas a person without character is an "unstable emptiness" that stands only in "transitory relations" to other persons. Lacking "essential passion," he or she is "an uncomfortable lack of specific quality." These descriptions remind one of Judge William's descriptions of the personality (or rather, lack thereof) of the main aesthete of *Either/Or*, who from the judge's point of view is insubstantial,

> unconsolidated, lacking a definite personal identity because he never chooses himself in a decisive way, never becomes "finite" and "temporal" but drifts in realms of possibility.

Essential passion, that which consolidates the personality.

"The mature self is a proper synthesis of passion and reflection. Passion without reflection is immature, unformed, chaotic, and childish 'immediacy,' and reflection without passion is the kind of personal emptiness that is the chief target of *Two Ages* pages 68 through 112."

Parallels between Aristotle and Kierkegaard.

Marx and Kierkegaard, the first major thinkers to denigrate theory in favor of concrete living. But Kierkegaard much the more extreme of the two, the more extreme in rejecting theory. Implies that mere theorizing is even *morally* and *spiritually* wrong! Quite an original position. To merely "speculate" or "reflect" all the time is not to be a full self, not to have character or essential inwardness or subjectivity or passion. It is *dishonesty*, inauthenticity, an avoiding of the real issue (which is the question of *how* to live, not *what* is truth). The *what* doesn't matter, only the *how* matters, the how of subjectivity. Cf. Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, who take the question of "how?" in a different, un-moralistic direction. (How Dasein or the body orients itself in the world, not "what" is represented to it. Bodily know-how, etc.)

Also, Heidegger takes his preoccupation with anxiety from Kierkegaard.

Thomas Jefferson thought that the only thing from Christianity that should be retained is the Sermon on the Mount.

How pregnant with profound implications is the fact that the pleasure of creation is infinitely greater than the pleasure of consumption! (And why is the pleasure so much greater? Because through creation, through activity, one *confirms* one's self, projects it into the world, whereas consumption (buying things, etc.) is passive. Man's essence is activity, self-positing, "creation," not consumption: it is the former that distinguishes him from the animals.[1])

Aristotle doesn't think self-mastery is a virtue. It is never a virtue to dissociate yourself from aspects of yourself. (The Greek ideal of integrating the personality.) Even if the aspects you're rejecting are vicious instead of virtuous, it isn't a *virtue* to dissociate yourself from them and try to overcome them. Instead, it is merely *better* than being complacent about them. The Christian tradition differs from Aristotle: it is decidedly "virtuous" to dissociate yourself from vices, to try to achieve self-mastery. Kierkegaard agrees with the Christian tradition.

> The concept of an emotion is central to Kierkegaard's thinking about subjectivity, inwardness, existence, and character. I have argued that, as in the classical conception, character is for Kierkegaard constituted in large part of dispositions to emotion -good character (virtues) being dispositions to proper emotions, and bad character (vices) dispositions to improper ones. Human emotions incorporate thought as well as interest or concern for what the thought is about, thoughts that may be right or wrong. Thus to exist well is to incorporate right thinking into a pathos-filled life. As Plutarch comments, summarizing classical moral psychology, "Ethical virtue has the passions for its material, reason for its form." Kierkegaard differs from Aristotle, however, in two suspicions: He is more attentive than Aristotle is to the fact that reflection, when separated from passion, can undermine it further and become an enemy of the virtues; and he is aware that emotions, or their simulacra, can likewise be dissociated from selfhood in such a way that the self is

[1] Actually, consumption, in its cultural forms, can also be a means toward recognition. "Conspicuous consumption," for example. But it doesn't partake of the *intrinsic pleasure* of creation. Its pleasure is derivative, derivative of others' seeing one's consumption and expressing appreciation or envy.

> "volatilized." He also affirms, with the Christian tradition and against Aristotle, that it can be virtuous to dissociate oneself from aspects of one's character.

The phenomenon of dissociation wasn't something the Greeks were fully aware of, since their society was neither very individualistic nor moralistic.

Maybe the reason why people have an extra-strong desire for recognition from a charismatic person is that, in projecting greater self-certainty, he projects more of a *self*. A socially awkward little nerd doesn't have much of a self, or at least he doesn't project it; a Bill Clinton does. By 'self' here I mean 'sense of self,' i.e. self-esteem, self-confidence, self-certainty. To be insecure or self-doubting is to not fully coincide with yourself. And to not coincide with yourself is to not *be* a self, a self in the full sense. For what is a self? Fundamentally, it is self-consciousness. On the most primitive, immediate (but also 'abstract') level of self-consciousness, everyone is the same, pure self-consciousness. Empirically, though, some people are more 'self-conscious' than others—a statement that can mean different things; but here the relevant meaning is that they are more self-certain, more self-confirmed than others. Their *personality* is more certain of itself—self-recognized, self-confirmed, self-coinciding—which is to say that it is more *real*, has a higher degree of existence than another's personality. Hence, their self in its empirical fullness is more real. This is in fact essentially what it means to say that someone is charismatic or self-confident: his self has a "weighty presence," i.e. a *heavy*, *real* presence, unlike the wispy and weak presence of an extremely shy person.

Yay! I've answered the question that's bothered me for years ("*What is it* about charismatic people?")! The answer is deceptively simple, as usual. People always seek recognition from another self, so naturally they seek it most from the self that most exists. All the ordinary components of charisma, such as humor, intelligence, friendliness, "confidence," physical beauty and so on, combine to give the impression of an unusually *real*, self-certain self. Again, behold the wisdom of language: "He has a strong presence" = "His self has a high degree of presence or *existence*." This explains the unconscious judgment we make in the presence of a charismatic person that he is particularly *valuable* (which is why we bask in the glow of his attention: by being affirmed by a valuable person, we prove to ourselves that we're valuable too, i.e. that our sense of self *exists in the world*, has *reality*[1]).

Self-confidence means self-presence, which is the definition of self-consciousness, which is the self.

The reason it's better to be an asshole than a weakling is that an asshole at least *exists*—he has "presence"—whereas a weakling doesn't. Everyone's basic desire is to have his existence, his sense of self, be confirmed. So, being an asshole isn't a particularly *good* thing either because no one wants to be disliked—his (desired) sense of self doesn't include 'being disliked.' Ideally you want your sense of self to be confirmed in all its aspects; and this includes 'being a likable person, the sort of person people want to be around and be recognized by'—because in implicitly perceiving that others feel validated by your attention, you feel validated yourself (since the only entity that people want to be validated by is a *self*, a fully existing self). The interplay of mutual recognitions is a very subtle dialectic.

If I were really to launch into an in-depth analysis of all these ideas, you'd probably find it incomprehensible. The phenomena can be considered from a variety of angles. For example, while it's usually better (from your perspective) to be a slight asshole than a weakling, there's a point at which you can be so disliked that your existence is not really being even *somewhat* validated any more, simply because so much of your sense of self is denied by others.

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[1] In general, that's what explains why you like a particular person's company: it validates (confirms) your existence, "makes you feel valuable." People who reject me do so because I don't validate them sufficiently, for whatever reason. With one person it might be because I'm seen as not having a strong presence, while with another person it might be because I don't give her enough attention.

Youth…ending. Never the bloom of fresh love… The canker and the grief… Oh to turn back the clock and be different than I was!

To have hugged a dewdrop of a girl, who could have wet my cheek with joy… Maybe there was Sangeetha, maybe, for a short time… But now that's gone, and all that's left are forgotten memories.

"If thou regret'st thy youth, *why live*?"

Devoting yourself to abstract concepts like the state, the nation, the revolution, mankind, etc. is, quite obviously, a sign that you cannot achieve in ordinary life the self-confirmation you desire. Concrete others cannot satisfy you; you need an abstract other. As I said a long time ago, in "civilized" societies (organic solidarity) everyone orients himself toward an abstract other to some extent.[1] But certain individuals are unusual, etc. The question is, phenomenologically what exactly is going on with them?

"She is lovely. She is *love*-ly. She is beauty-full." My darling, you complete me. You *full-fill* me, fill me full with love and I love you, I love to paint you in my imagination. That's where you live, you live only in my imagination.

What explains the pleasure of buying things? Or the pleasure of getting presents?

Strictly speaking, humans are not "ends in themselves," i.e. intrinsically valuable, because nothing is. The notion doesn't make sense. But they are, or can be, valued *for their own sake* (so to speak): my valuing someone's self is effectively synonymous with my valuing my own self-confirmation, since it is through the mediation of another self (concrete or abstract) that I confirm myself. My valuing myself is my valuing you. If I don't respect *you* then to that extent I don't respect myself, since it is through being respected (or loved) by someone whom I respect (or love) that I respect (or love) myself. Thus, if I am to fulfill myself, to attain self-confirmation, I have to value you as I value myself. Arguably, that's impossible, perhaps even incoherent. But it can be approximated.

In any case, morally speaking you should *act* as if people are intrinsically valuable. That's what morality is.

If you think about it, the idea of karma is rather offensive. Or, since I'm not offended by anything, at least it's morally and logically problematic. It amounts to the claim that everyone gets his just deserts. The real is the rational, and the rational is the real. Or, this is the best of all possible worlds. "One truth is clear," as Pope writes in his *Essay on Man*; "whatever is, is right." But we all know that this Leibnizian, Hegelian—and Spinozistic—doctrine is not only ethically dubious but downright dangerous: it can be used to justify any sort of injustice. Stalinism? Hitlerism? Pol Pot? The oppression of minorities? The real is rational! Progress works in mysterious ways! Everything is determined, everything is necessary! Inevitable, like logic itself! Quietism, conservatism, is the logical conclusion of this attitude of *amor fati*. It's a quintessentially *religious* attitude: faith in the eternal, in the beyond, in historical logic or evolution, as if it's God, with the result that you accept the world as it is. Great faith = great equanimity, great love for the natural unfolding of fate. If you vigorously throw yourself into action it's because you don't have faith that everything is as it should be: the world could be different, the world as it is is flawed, which means that people *don't* get their just deserts, we're not all wholly responsible for our destinies, karma is at best only partly true, much of reality is irrational, and God is not perfectly good or worthy of blind faith. His work has to be corrected.

In other words, there is such a thing as chance and free will. This fact is what logically justifies social activism. (Is it any wonder that power-structures throughout the world and history have propagated

[1] Actually, in *all* societies there is an abstract element to the other, just to the extent that the other exists for people. Concrete and abstract are fused: a concrete other instantiates the abstract 'phenomenological structure' in your mind, while this abstract other is basically an internalization of the significant concrete others in your life.

the same deterministic, necessitarian, consoling dogmas about the justice of fate, everyone's essential place in the hierarchical social order—"duties," as in the *Bhagavad-Gita*—and eternal rewards, compensations for present hardship? Look at any metaphysically minded regime from ancient India to the Soviet Union. Secular regimes like America's have different versions of the same 'philosophy of consolation.')

On the other hand, there is something compelling about the idea of karma. To an extent each person does create his own reality. But only to an extent.

Among the profoundest concepts is that of *repetition*. It fascinates me, and many other great thinkers. Freud made productive use of it—it led to his theory of the death instinct; Nietzsche was dazzled by it; Aristotle and the ancient Stoics (and other cultures) believed in eternal repetition; Hegel recognized the importance to spiritual development of a sort of transformed repetition; an entire philosophy of history is premised on it; Kierkegaard wrote a book called *Repetition*. Throughout the cosmos, in fact, repetition is woven. Biologically it is of the utmost importance, from the infant's *rhythms* to the very workings of DNA and RNA. Music is based on repetition, not only rhythmically but melodically and harmonically. –The concept is both the most commonplace and the most profound of all concepts.

Think of this: "Be constant in thy love." (From my *Book of Joe*.) That means be faithful in your love. Con-stant: stand with, stand firm (*constare*). Stand firm in your love, stand *with* your loved one. But how does that manifest itself? Through repetition. You *constantly*, as it were, in every moment repeat the act of loving. (The connection between the two meanings of 'constant.')

Incidentally: how do you acquire the ability to stand firm (*constare*)? By standing with (*constare*). You get strength from your *with*-ness.

Interesting: the word 'complacent' seems to come from the Latin 'com placenta.' Not asserting your independence.

Went to a concert outside at the Esplanade (on the river). Very pleasant. Haydn's cello concerto in C—I prefer the one in D—and Brahms's first symphony. The problem with Brahms is that his melodies are usually not memorable, not nearly as memorable as Beethoven's. And his serious music usually lacks a sense of humor. Also, it lacks that sense of inevitability which characterizes Beethoven's pieces, with each measure inexorably emerging from the previous one. That is to say, Brahms doesn't have Beethoven's *vigor*, his life-affirming verve. What gives Beethoven's music this quality—this universality, this *necessity*—is basically a mystery, as Leonard Bernstein said. It can't be analyzed; it's intuitive.

[....]

Despair: de-*sperare* (*to hope*). As Kierkegaard says, to despair is to not believe in *possibility* any longer, to think that alternatives have become impossible. It is to lose faith in one's freedom (i.e., the reality of possibilities)—to treat oneself as belonging to the realm of necessity, the realm of thinghood, of remaining stationary in this state forever. "A possibility and the despairer breathes again," writes Kierkegaard, "he revives; for without possibility it is as though a person cannot draw a breath." In other words, "Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things…" Hope, or freedom, the consciousness of possibility.

The 'spiritual' meanings of a lot of words are merely metaphorical extensions of the original 'bodily' meanings. For example: depress, repress, suppress, impress. Im-press: *press in*. Sub-press: *press under*. De-press: *press down*. Re-press: *press back, press again*. (Something presses in one direction, you press back to keep it in check. From *reprimere*, to check.) This fact is philosophically and psychologically pithy.

Kierkegaardian repetition. More profound than Nietzsche's eternal return. I want to describe it, but I can't do it justice. (Kierkegaard may be the profoundest thinker of the 19th century after Hegel. He was certainly not its most *realistic* or *correct*, though, nor its most *socially* profound. Those distinctions are reserved for Marx.) It doesn't seem very metaphysical. It has more to do with self-fulfillment, with the desire to recapture a lost world of innocence, wholeness, meaning, value. Is this sort of repetition even possible? Not if you set out intentionally to achieve it. Such an attempt would probably backfire, sending

you into greater despair than you were in before. Instead, repetition is *bestowed*; it just comes, it is a *gift*. Your task is simply to be open to receiving this gift.

> Sometimes value lost is reacquired precisely when we stop trying to regain it. We may need a stance of receptivity, willingness, rather than the narrow focus of willed achievement. We are told in Kierkegaard's papers that at its highest, repetition gives up the idea of self-sufficiency. Realizing that the outcome of our search for roots or love or world is not under our control may be a necessary condition of openness toward emerging roots or love or world, and hence the satisfaction of the need. Giving up on repetition as an explicit task is preparation for repetition as world-bestowal…

Remind you of someone? Yes, Heidegger. Heidegger insisted that the antidote to nihilism is decidedly not in the creation of new values, because meaning has to come from the *background*. You can't consciously invent existential meaning, for it is precisely that relative to which we act, that fundamental "horizon of significance" which is implicit or presupposed. The very attempt to *choose* values is a symptom of the malaise. It implies relativism, after all. Instead, you need an attitude of *receptivity* to nature or "being" in order for the world to become meaningful again. You have to be open to the possibility of an "epiphany." (My addition.) Kierkegaard says similar things about repetition—and his framing the issue in terms of that concept is illuminating, suggesting as it does an Eden-like past. Union with the mother, perhaps, or some such moment of immediacy. I'll return to this in a second. Here's a passage from Kierkegaard:

> [We should know]…that repetition is a task for freedom, that it signifies freedom itself, consciousness raised to the second power, that it is the *interest* of metaphysics and also the interest upon which metaphysics comes to grief, the watchword in every ethical view, the *conditio sine qua non* for every issue of dogmatics, that true repetition is eternity, that repetition (by being pursued so far that it vanishes for psychology as transcendent, as a religious movement by virtue of the absurd, which commences when a person has come to the border of the wondrous) will come to mean atonement.

The book has a good discussion of these enigmatic claims.

I was going to write more, but forget it. I should read more instead.

The contrast between Platonic recollection (of the Good, True, Beautiful) and true repetition. Pagan vs. Christian—conscious vs. unconscious, reason vs. faith, active vs. passive, a self-guided act of recollecting vs. a gift from the other.

Two kinds of self-fulfillment? Active, as in Marxian philosophical anthropology, and passive, as in mystical oneness or Kierkegaardian repetition? The creative faculties as opposed to the affective faculty? "Self-fulfillment" is ultimately not a meaningful term. It's either a truism misleadingly expressed (from one perspective) or nonsensical (from another).

The danger of religious faith is that it's supposed to be above morality. Witness the story of Abraham. Faith justifies anything: "I have faith that it's all for the best. I have faith in God and eternity." The road to hell…

The teleological suspension of the ethical. "Faith is the paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal." According to *Fear and Trembling,* the ethical has to do with the common good; faith has to do with the individual's salvation, which is so little related to ethics that it can prescribe absolutely unethical courses of action. But if this is faith, then Osama bin Laden is an exemplar of faith, like Abraham. He is the logical conclusion of Abraham's philosophy of faith. (Or, if not bin Laden, since there are differences between his situation and Abraham's, then someone who murders his family and all his friends for the sake of God and his own eternal salvation.) —Contrary to *Fear and Trembling*, I think that true faith, the good kind, does not involve a suspension of the ethical. On the contrary, it is little else but a transcendentally motivated consummation of the ethical. Abraham's faith is not Jesus's (as *Fear and*

Trembling seems to imply); it is a degrading, submissive, slavish faith. A philosophy not of love but of submission.

The connection between sex and death, or sex and violence. One of the reasons for it: in sex, violence, and death, humans are largely reduced to their body. An objectification takes place, an identifying of the self with the body. The self in fact recedes from explicit view: blood, bodily fluids, flesh, even bacterial smells (in the case of sex and death) come to the fore and mediate our experience of the other's self. Another way of saying it is that our ordinary ethical way of acting is suspended in the experiences of sex, death and violence. Ethics, "human dignity," respect for the other as an autonomous being or an end in himself, a spiritualized entity, more or less disappear. In short, *culture* recedes from view. After all, culture is just a mesh of norms or roles that exist for the purpose of mediating the other's perception of you in order that he confirms your sense of self in the desired way. But in the three experiences I'm talking about, in their body-centered immediacy, mediative roles are in large part cast aside. Hence our fascination. It's significant that the degrees of our respective fascinations with sex, violence and death (and surgery) are almost equal. (If the fascination is greater in the case of death, that just supports my argument. Death is the complete absence of any vestige of culture, which amounts to the complete absence of the self.)

Said differently, with these experiences there is an unusual *closeness* to people, to the real, the physical, nature of people. The mask comes off. The thick mesh of behavioral norms is cut through, so that the body, the *biological*, appears. In primitive societies of paltry "socialization," nudity and sex are not such objects of fascination as they are for us—because there is not such a contrast between the 'naked' human being and his everyday roles. It's the *contrast* that grips us.

Liszt's transcription of Schubert's song "Am Meer."[1] And "Ständchen." And "Der Müller und der Bach." And "Lebe Wohl." Pieces that have moved me. Also the song "Am Bach im Frühling," among others.

Reading the novel *The Alchemist* because everyone has recommended it.

Mark Twain: "…Reader, suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself."

What's the significance of the fact that words like illusion, elude, allude and delude are variations on the Latin word for 'play'? Huizinga discusses this in *Homo Ludens*, but I forget what he says.

To understand: to stand under. That's the etymology in a nutshell. 'Finally, after years of studying it, I stand under (e.g.) Marxism!' It's also interesting that "the 'understander,' in circus slang, is the one whose shoulders carry the full weight of the acrobatic team." To understand: to bear the weight of… I used to stand outside Marxism; now I stand under it. I'm holding it up; it presses down on me. (?)[2] The original concept of understanding makes reference to one's *location*, to a virtually physical (or at least behavioral) fact rather than a mental one. Think also of German: *verstehen* = stand before. (Heidegger wasn't just being a stupid cultural nationalist when he said that German is the most philosophical of languages.)

But 'That joke was *above* me' = 'I *didn't* understand it.' Maybe 'above' here means far above, so that I am not in direct contact with it, not directly under it or directly before it, not in its presence. 'General relativity is beyond me. I don't stand under it; it's beyond me.'

Perceive: *percipere: per-capere*, to take thoroughly. So, to perceive is to thoroughly take something in, which has philosophical implications. ('Take' is active. So perception is active, not passive. And the 'thoroughly' part suggests that there is a difference between perception and sensation, in that the latter is less thoroughly conscious than the former.)

Conceive: *com-capere*, to take with, to take in and hold (be together with). The pregnancy meaning was the original one; the word was extended to mean 'to take into the mind' around 1340.

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[1] Another of Schubert's shockingly simple and moving melodies, in the beginning.

[2] Contrary to these suggestions, one website states that the Old English sense of 'under' was closer to 'between, among' than 'beneath.' Thus, to understand is to stand in the midst of, or to be close to.

Behave: be-have. Have being. To behave in a certain way is to have being in a certain way, to have (or hold) oneself in a certain way. "Behave!" Have being! Have a determinate being! Stop acting crazily, 'pull your self together,' give being to your self!

Comport: *com-portare*. Carry together, carry with.

Endure: *indurare* (harden against), *in-durare* (harden in [oneself, one's heart]). To endure something, you have to become *hard* in your self.

Enthusiasm: *entheos*, be inspired: *en-theos*, i.e. *a god in*. A god is breathing into you, so to speak.

Conspire: to breathe together.

Adjective: *ad-jacere*, to throw to. You 'throw' an adjective to its object. Again, this reinforces the model of humans as essentially active beings, not passive recipients of external data.

Object: *obicere*, "to present, oppose, cast in the way of," from *ob-jacere*, to throw against.

Subject: *subicere*, to place under, from *sub-jacere*. The original meaning is the "person under the control of another" one. The "person or thing that may be acted upon" meaning is from 1592. The connection between the meanings is obvious.

The Alchemist, the novel that has sold tens of millions of copies. "To realize one's destiny is a person's only real obligation." "When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it." "God has prepared a path for everyone to follow. You just have to read the omens that he left for you." "There is a force that wants you to realize your Personal Legend." "Whoever you are, or whatever it is that you do, when you really want something, it's because that desire originated in the soul of the universe. It's your mission on earth." In short, try to achieve your dreams. Where there's a will, there's a way. Life has meaning, and God cares about you. Every person has a destiny. The only thing to fear is fear itself. If you love yourself you can accomplish anything. —Cheap New Age "wisdom." There are no coincidences, everything is meaningful, everyone is special, the universe is teleological, we are all part of the One, each person is the center of the universe, blah blah. No wonder the book is so popular: it's self-help in the form of a novel. I'm reading a fucking self-help book. I won't deny that the writing is good—no characterization, of course; it's a simple allegory—but I will deny that the book deserves its fame. The author, Paulo Coelho, isn't a profound thinker; his philosophy is the superficial religious one. It's the sort of ideological, individualistic thinking that reconciles people to the social order. Requires no penetration beneath appearances—is in fact the *appearance* itself. 'Life is a matter of *will*. If you don't realize your dreams, it's your own damn fault. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps.' It's the fucking American capitalist ideology spiritualized. If people find these ideas remotely plausible, it's because they're ignorant of the millions, billions, of people who yearn passionately for their dreams but have no chance of achieving them.[1] The world is more or less just? What a fucking joke. This book implies that the world is just. No wonder the establishment loves it.

"Unfortunately, very few follow the path laid out for them—the path to their Personal Legends, and to happiness. Most people see the world as a threatening place, and, because they do, the world turns out, indeed, to be a threatening place." Wow. The world wouldn't be threatening if I didn't see it as threatening? That's one of those thoughts—the book is full of them—that sound profound but are actually asinine. In a few privileged areas of the world, for a few privileged people, it may be partly true that *esse est percipi*. Coelho's idealist philosophy may be not completely absurd. But in most of the world, it is. And sometimes your dreams are not objectively within the realm of possibility. No one *creates* his world; he is in large part created by it. Humans are not perfectly free: Sartre's existentialism is ultimately simple-minded, despite its profound appearance.

…Finished the book. I have to admit, it's a wonderful story. It left me high. And I see now that the falsity of its New Age propositions is beside the point: myths are what sustain people in their quests, in life itself, and to that extent are good and necessary. By refusing to let the world's injustice stifle you, the world indeed becomes a less threatening place (for you). Attitude is not everything, but it is a lot.

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[1] I don't include myself in this group of unfortunates. Fundamentally it's all the same to me: my happiness isn't conditional on the achievement of certain "dreams." I don't even think I have real dreams anymore.

Near the end, the book's implicit position is revealed: animism. The boy talks to the wind, the desert, the sun.

I should also remember that Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer's book proves that "miracles" do happen.

The eighteenth-century mania for republicanism. Think of the term "republic of letters," coined then. Republicanism was everything that was good, the opposite of corruption, self-interest, greed, and a virtual synonym for virtue.

The breathtaking utopianism of America's revolutionary leaders. Remaking society in accordance with republican principles. Inspired by Lockean empiricism: virtue could be *learned* if education and the political system were reformed. Republicanism would create leaders animated by a spirit of "disinterestedness," not the drive for personal gain that had operated in monarchical times. Nepotism had been almost rampant; now a republic of virtue would be created. A meritocracy. It was all about *enlightenment*. Enlightenment was fated to spread around the world, according to John Adams and others; and America was at the forefront of the movement. –Anticipations of the French Revolution.

One example of their progressivism: the reform of punishment. No more cruel and unusual punishment, fewer executions and no torture, punishments based not on public shame (which was becoming less meaningful because society was larger and less intimate than in the past) but on private penitence, solitary confinement where criminals could contemplate their wrongs. Hence the "penitentiary."

"We shall never understand the unique character of the revolutionary leaders until we appreciate the seriousness with which they took the new republican ideas of what it was to be a gentleman. [*Not* the monarchical ideas of family connections, wealth, estates, haughty behavior. America didn't have a conventional aristocracy.] No generation in American history has ever been so self-conscious about the moral and social values necessary for public leadership." They were nearly obsessed with rolling back parochialism, fanaticism, and barbarism. This explains their antagonism toward religion.

In all things they took their cue from the Roman republic. Classical ideals. They wanted to be modern-day Romans, modern Ciceros. (That was John Adams's dream.) Washington made himself a Cincinnatus by resigning as commander in chief of the American forces. He returned to his farm, wanting nothing more to do with public life. And, as he expected, the Western world sat in awe of him, this classical disinterested patriot. –Actually, Washington was supremely vain, truly obsessed with his reputation. Everything he did was for the sake of his reputation. He fervently wanted to embody classical ideals.

But there were differences between the moderns and the ancients. An important one was the changed conception of republican virtue. It wasn't as severe, stoical, self-sacrificing as during Roman times; it was softer, based more on the ideals of benevolence, affection, love, *politeness* between men. The willingness to get along with others for the sake of peace and prosperity. "Virtue became identified with decency." Ancient virtue was martial and masculine; modern republican virtue was soft and feminized. Since monarchical ties, such as patronage and personal loyalty, were being dissolved, it was hoped that this sort of benevolent virtue would replace them as the chief social adhesive. (As with Rousseau, political associations at a level lower than government were frowned upon, as promoting self-interest, corruption, conspiracies, the concentration of wealth, a lack of disinterestedness. Society was supposed to be a collection of (friendly, mutually attracting) atoms—the opposite of monarchical society, with its numerous dependencies, personal ties, rankings, hierarchies. Rousseau's atomized conception of man was a reaction to the completely un-atomized nature of the monarchical society he loathed.)

Another soaring summary of the revolutionaries:

> The republican revolution was the greatest utopian movement in American history. [Debatable. What about Populism, which swept up millions of farmers and laborers?] The revolutionaries aimed at nothing less than a reconstitution of American society. They hoped to destroy the bonds holding together the older monarchical society—kinship, patriarchy, and patronage—and to put in their place new social bonds of love, respect, and consent. They sought to construct a society and governments based on virtue and disinterested

> public leadership and to set in motion a moral movement that would eventually be felt around the globe.

It wasn't long before disillusionment set in. "By the early nineteenth century, America had already emerged as the most egalitarian, most materialistic, most individualistic—and most evangelical Christian—society in Western history. In many respects this new democratic society was the very opposite of the one the revolutionary leaders had envisaged." The idea of equality, which had been let loose in the Revolution, spread like wildfire. But really the biggest problem, from the perspective of most of the revolutionaries, was that society was becoming organized into *interests*. Interest-group politics emerged in the 1780s and 1790s, and it was here to stay.

Madison, Hamilton and the other Federalists had the republican belief that politics should be the sphere of disinterested, virtuous, educated gentlemen, men not involved in market activities which could give them private motives for advocating specific policies. It was all about *disinterestedness*, pursuing the *public* good over the private goals of interest-groups (like agriculture, commerce, manufacturing, etc.). This is pure Rousseau: only a few exceptional men had the breadth of perspective to be "legislators," to understand the general will and enact it. The Anti-Federalists, on the other hand, denied that anyone could be truly disinterested, and that the elite could understand or care about the needs and wants of the people. The elite was an interest-group like any other in society. In fact, the Anti-Federalists argued that there isn't any such thing as "the public interest"; there is only an aggregate of private interests each fighting for itself. And that's what politics should be: the arena in which interest-groups fight it out. "The consequences of such thinking were immense and indeed devastating for republican government," in the sense understood by the Federalists.

The Anti-Federalist conception of politics was the more powerful, the more realistic, and in the end it carried the day. Such developments ensued as "the increased electioneering and competitive politics, the open promotion of private interests in legislation, the emergence of parties, the extension of the actual and direct representation of particular groups in government, and the eventual weakening, if not the repudiation, of the classical republic ideal that legislators were supposed to be disinterested umpires standing above the play of private interests." But the Federalists were right in the long term, and Jefferson's Republicans were wrong, about the size of government. Jefferson wanted a small government, the Federalists wanted a big one.

Even now we still have a version of the old Federalist ideology that only a small group of men can be trusted with the task of governance. Walter Lippman and such liberal intellectuals—as well as many conservatives and neoconservatives—argue that only the educated elite should be concerned with politics; the rest of the population should be left out of it most of the time, because the people are stupid and ignorant. And, of course, they are, to an extent, but so is the educated elite. The elite is definitely not disinterested and virtuous!

By the way, have you ever noticed that George Washington didn't really have a face? That is, his face had no character, no distinctive features. It was bland and ugly, soft and flabby, with dull eyes. It's like…a generic face, if that's possible.

Kierkegaard and I share intuitions about knowledge and truth:

> …Kierkegaard thus seems to combine an epistemology that rejects classical foundationalism with a traditional "realistic" account of the aim of knowing. He seems "postmodern" in his account of knowledge, yet "modern" or really "premodern" in his understanding of truth. Such a combination is puzzling to many. How can one believe in an objective, mind-independent reality and at the same time deny that human beings have final knowledge of such a reality? [Huh? On the contrary, how can one find this combination of beliefs puzzling?] Can we view our beliefs as "approximations" of an ideal truth if we never possess that truth? [Sure. Why not?] How can one say there is a thing in itself and then deny that we humans ever finally know what that is? [Easily. There is

> nothing incoherent about that.] At this point the antirealist argues that the thing in itself is a meaningless or perhaps useless ideal. Richard Rorty, for example, argues that realism only makes sense if one asserts that humans have some kind of direct access to reality, some mode of "givenness" such that we can compare our ideas with a reality that is known independently of those ideas. But since we have no such access to reality, Rorty asserts we must give up the ideal of truth as "contact with reality" in favor of truth as "what it is good for us to believe."
>
> It is just at this point that Kierkegaard's view is most illuminating. For he rejects an often unnoticed premise that is common both to the classical foundationalist and the antirealist postmodernist. Both agree that *if* there is to be knowledge of objective reality, there must be some method of obtaining certain knowledge about that reality. [I don't see why Kierkegaard should be seen as rejecting this premise.] The classical foundationalist, from Descartes through Husserl, concludes that since there is objective knowledge there must be such a method. The antirealist concludes that since there is no such method there is no knowledge of objective reality. We can see lurking behind Rorty's antirealism the dashed hopes and disappointments of the classical foundationalist.
>
> On Kierkegaard's view, though there is no "absolute given" and no "method" that can be relied upon to produce certain, objective knowledge, empirical knowledge necessarily aims at such knowledge. He never doubts that this ideal of objective knowledge is valid as an ideal or that there is a reality independent of us that we are attempting to know…

This has been my position ever since my senior thesis, or before. Even if there isn't such a reality, we necessarily assume there is.

August

I'm in love with Helene Grimaud. (Her performance of Bach-Busoni's Chaconne in D minor. A few interpretive flaws, but excellent overall.) She is everything I want in a woman. If I'd met her when she was ten or fifteen years younger, I would have been infatuated.

The great mystery of my life, the single insoluble mystery, is that I am not God. I want to *stand under*[1] myself, but I can't because I am not God. Instead, I stand under the absurd. [Obvious references to existentialism.]

Busoni's transcriptions of Bach are magnificent, but Gould may have been right that they also represent corruptions of the original pristine structures, the musical-logical structures. They romanticize the music, sentimentalize it, aggrandize it, *exaggerate* it, thus depriving it of its pristine classical quality. I love Grimaud's version of the Chaconne, but I almost feel as if I shouldn't love it. For what exactly do I love about it? The epicness, the emotionalness, the sublime besottedness—*intoxicating*. And the *loudness*. The dynamic contrasts; it's all about the dynamics. But that ain't Bach. Bach wasn't all about the dynamics, or thick, lush sound. The Chaconne is for solo violin! It's melodic, contrapuntal; but with Busoni, everything's harmonic. It's 'Wagner meets Bach.' Insofar as there is anguish in Bach's Chaconne, it is subtle and dignified. It's infinite anguish, which is to say it doesn't enjoy itself. (No self-reflection, no self-consciousness.) And then there's infinite forgiveness and hope, which doesn't congratulate itself on its beauty. It simply expresses pure, elevated, melodic joy. There is no need for filling out its bare-boned structure with lush sound, with chords and arpeggios and huge crescendos and diminuendos to make

[1] [Understand…]

everything *pretty* and *embellished*—and *obvious*. Nor is there any virtuosity for its own sake. It's just a clear voice from heaven.

In his most serious compositions, Bach always wants to transcend sonority. Gould was right: Bach doesn't care about sonority, he cares about structure. He is reaching beyond, trying to communicate with God, literally. His works are about *transcendence*, transcendence of the immediate (emotions, matter, even sound-for-its-own-sake). Not so with Busoni and much romantic music. Busoni is "pianistic," as Gould would say. He is completely immersed in the piano, doesn't try to reach beyond it. Ultimately this attitude is a sort of musical *temptation* (in the sense of sin), like the temptation to wallow in sorrow of which Dante and Oscar Wilde speak. Wallow in the immediate—aestheticism, which is a kind of hedonism, which is weakness.

It's possible I'm being slightly unfair to Busoni. There are indeed otherworldly passages in his transcription(s). He was a true genius, of course. But I still get the sense that he vulgarizes Bach a little by going for the *effect*. I don't get this sense, for example, with Rachmaninoff's transcription of the third partita or with Liszt's transcriptions. But it's true that, from a Bachian or Gouldian perspective, the piano is an inherently risky instrument, since it's so easy to lose oneself in its beautiful, lush, textured sound.

…After hearing Alexander Gavrylyuk and Claudius Tanski play Busoni's version of the Toccata and Fugue in D minor, I have to say that no one could have transcribed it better. Besides, I need hardly note that the performer has a huge part of the responsibility to keep it clean and Bachian.

The assault on the American aristocracy by the laboring masses and emerging businessmen, from the 1770s to the early 1800s. Gordon Wood calls this the true American revolution, this new form of egalitarianism that swamped the North's aristocracy and put it on the defensive. Idleness became a vice, labor a virtue—an epochal change. Vicious attacks on the idle rich (mostly Federalists) by Jeffersonian Republicans—speeches, pamphlets, etc. "The rich are no better than us!" Parson Weems celebrates Franklin and Washington as industrious, as great because of their industriousness. Idleness is "the worst of crimes." This is the opposite of the old republican ideal of wealthy leisure which makes possible disinterestedness and virtue. Successful entrepreneurs are being celebrated as only great politicians were in the past. To keep up with the times, even aristocrats start insisting that man is essentially a working being, that real happiness consists not in leisure but in industriousness (even if it involves making money). Some aristocratic writers collapse the distinction between mental and manual work, arguing that lawyers and professionals have no more leisure than mechanics and are not essentially different from them.

These developments were occurring all over the Western world, but they were proceeding much more quickly in America. Foreign observers concluded that only in America was "industry an honor, and idleness a disgrace." Tocqueville was astonished that working for money was seen as honorable. And he remarked that this promoted the perception of equality: for if even government leaders had salaries, as they didn't in Europe (or only nominal ones), then no one need feel degraded by working for money.

"Perhaps nothing separated early-nineteenth-century Americans more from Europeans than their attitude toward labor and their egalitarian sense that everyone must participate in it… With everyone claiming to work and no exclusive working class, it is not surprising that the development of a socialist movement in the United States was inhibited." Good point. In Europe, the working class was clearly set off from the rest of the population. Obviously a socialist movement will more easily develop where the class structure is relatively rigid.

But why was America exceptional in these ways? One reason: it didn't have much of an aristocracy to begin with. In almost all cases, "aristocrats" didn't have anything approaching the financial security that their counterparts had in England. So they had to work on the side, practicing law or whatnot. This is also why the new American government was the first in Western history to give salaries to its leaders (in Congress and the executive branch): most men simply couldn't afford to work without pay. The establishment of salaries was another nail in the coffin of the Ciceronian ideal of disinterested public service.

So, classical republicanism was ending and liberal democracy was beginning: Jefferson apparently said that "the public good is best promoted by the exertion of each individual seeking his own good in his

own way." I.e., liberalism. Adam Smith. Everything was reducible to the competition of private interests. "By 1823 *Niles' Weekly Register* already defined modern politicians as 'persons who have little, if any, regard for the welfare of the republic unless immediately connected with…their own private pursuits.'" A far cry from Cicero! And also from the early ideals of the Founders.

These changes prepared the way for modern political parties. "The Democratic-Republican parties…in some northern states…were the first modern parties in American history and perhaps in Western history. These parties were impersonal and permanent organizations of professional salaried politicians that were designed solely to recruit leaders, mobilize voters, win elections, and compete regularly and legitimately with other opposition parties. As such, they were unlike the earlier Federalist and Republican parties and indeed were unlike any party that had ever existed before."

Martin Van Buren, the first modern professional politician to win the presidency. He built the best-organized political party in the country.

As for the increasing atomization and 'equalization' of society, much of it was due to the simple fact of westward expansion. "It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of this westward movement of people. It was a 'stupendous work of human advancement…of which the history of mankind certainly affords no other example.'" That may be true. The whole country "breaking up and moving westward" in two or three generations, population-movements and constant commercial activities undermining traditional social structures (or making impossible their establishment). No wonder individualism, freedom and equality became American traits! Frederick Jackson Turner was largely, though not entirely, right. But the Revolution itself was also integral to the growth of equality and democracy. "It was 'the general operation of the new political order of things on the mind and character of the country' that explained the growth of democracy." The Jacksonian revolution was responsible not so much for the democratization of America as for the legitimizing and bureaucratizing of democracy. It restrained it, controlled it, reconciled Americans to it. With Jackson came a lot of centralization and consolidation, which has been obscured to historians because of the Jacksonians' radical democratic rhetoric. It's true that far more ordinary people became involved in the government during those years than before. But Jacksonianism also signified the triumph of party politics and party-discipline—only Democrats were appointed to government positions, and party loyalty became the be-all and end-all—which means the relative centralization of power. (The president was called "King Andrew" by his opponents, who consequently called themselves Whigs.) And bureaucratic rationalization, regulation, impersonality increased.

…To return to commerce: it's important to understand that America did not become materialistic and money-obsessed only with the late nineteenth or twentieth century. Since soon after the Revolution, its latent materialism and commercialism had become explicit. "The American," foreigners said, "is always bargaining; he always has one bargain afoot, another just finished, and two or three he's thinking of. All that he has, all that he sees, is merchandise in his eyes." The anguished laments of American intellectuals before the War of 1812 about the crassness of their society remind one of the laments of Western intellectuals in the 1950s. In both cases, a new world, in a sense, was beginning, a new economic and political order. –And at the same time, at least in America, there was a revival of religion! Significant. (The Second Great Awakening was far more noteworthy than what happened in the 1950s.)

Saw a psychic tonight. First time in my life. Wasn't very impressed. It was at ELC: I went back there this afternoon to chaperone an activity with the students, but the incompetence of Boston's public transportation system made me late. I got there at 4:45; apologized to the receptionist, a Brit named Emily, and then asked her how late she usually stays at work. She said she was staying later than usual tonight because a psychic was coming to service the staff! (Or the few who were still there. Most of the staff leaves at 3:30.) I decided to stay, to have my future read to me. Most so-called psychics are frauds, but the director told me some astonishing stories about this woman. She had given her very specific information about, for example, her future marriage, and the nationality of her husband, and her future pregnancy—she was going to get pregnant within two months of her sister-in-law, and it turned out to be true—and so on. The psychic arrived. Started seeing each of us, fifteen minutes apiece. The people before me emerged from their sessions with impressive stories of her supernatural powers, such as her knowledge of the names of their significant

others. (“Is there a William in your life?” “Yes, he’s my husband.” Also, "I'm sensing something about dolphins...." "Well, I'm going to a Miami Dolphins game next week.") In fact, I was amazed at their detailed descriptions of her abilities.

But then I went in. One of the first things she said was “Is there a John or a Jay in your life? I’m seeing a J, a name starting with J…” I: “Yes, my brother’s name is Jay.” “Okay, have you been estranged from him recently? Has there been some coldness in the relationship, some distance…?” I didn’t want to be rude: “Well, I don’t know, I guess so… We were never very close as children…” “It looks like the relationship is warming up, you’re getting closer, things are improving.” “Uh, yeah, I guess we’re getting closer…” I was a bit confused; didn’t think we’d be talking about him. “And it looks like he’s been sick but is recovering now or has recovered. Or, someone has been sick. Has Jay been sick?” No. “I don’t know, maybe,” I said. Didn’t want to discourage her. Then she laid out some cards and started interpreting them. Said she saw a lot of men in my life and hesitantly offered some names and letters—‘Bill’ is the only one I remember. I told her that Bill is my mom’s brother—or rather, she asked hesitantly if that was so and I said yes—and then she made a few suggestions about Bill that didn’t seem very plausible to me. “Are you gay?” she asked. Apparently all these men in my life made her think I’m gay. (Who are these men? I have very, very few men in my life.)

All in all, she gave almost no specific information. Told me to take ten cards from the pile, then she interpreted them. Mentioned the letters J and L in connection with women in my life, but that meant nothing to me. Said I was choosing or was going to choose between two women. Later I asked her if I was going to get married, and she said in two years. Then said within two to four years. And I’d have a child in two to four years. Also, she remarked multiple times that I’m good at healing people, and that I’ll probably do something with my life that involves helping or healing people. Gropingly she mentioned law too, said I might do something with law. –All in all it was vague and unconvincing, though I repeatedly encouraged her so as not to be rude.

And yet the girls who met with her, and the only other guy (gay), emerged with incredible stories about the specific and accurate information she’d given them (along with inaccurate guesses). If she has psychic powers, they seem to wax and wane depending on who she’s talking to. Much of what she said to me was pure guesswork; maybe there’s some sort of resistance in my mind that blocks extra-sensory perception. Evidently what happens is that ideas and images flash before her mind: sometimes they’re ESP-caused, other times they’re random flickers from her subconscious or preconscious.

My natural inclination is to laugh at ESP stuff as being ridiculous, but I’m trying to be open-minded.

[…]

I woke up early in the morning with a splitting in my head because of the alcohol. So I drank a glass of water. Within minutes the headache eased; I could feel it easing as the water traveled through my bloodstream into my brain. And I was struck by the weirdness of it all. Water was at that very moment spreading through my head, with the direct result that my headache was being alleviated. *Water—in my head*. The flip-side: a pleasant effect on my consciousness. The objective and the subjective: the same phenomenon from two different perspectives.

The 1954 movie *Salt of the Earth*, about a strike by Mexican miners, is very good, especially for its low budget. It was banned at the time and condemned by the U.S. House of Representatives. I’ve decided to resume my education: reading books about American labor history. First Daniel Guerin’s *100 Years of Labor in the USA* (1976). Also articles. Jennifer Klein: “The Politics of Economic Security: Employee Benefits and the Privatization of New Deal Liberalism” (2004).

Chomsky is my intellectual conscience. I think about him every day, multiple times a day. Dozens, hundreds of times a day. It’s as if he’s always in my preconscious. He guides my thinking, at least on social and political questions. He has a genius for stating clear principles, premises or conclusions, which are nearly truistic but are surprisingly easy to ignore. Such as his insistence that the most elementary moral principle is that you must apply to yourself the standards you apply to others. People have a very hard time doing this, which is why nearly everyone is a hypocrite in many ways. (They condemn snobbery but are

snobs themselves,[1] condemn inconsiderate behavior but are inconsiderate themselves, and so on. I'm not immune to these lapses.) Especially in politics. When *they* do it, it's a crime, whereas when *we* do it, it's justifiable or even noble. This tendency to think hypocritically is a species of unintelligence, of "abstractly-interpersonal" unintelligence, as I called it once. An inability to put oneself in the other's shoes, or to think of oneself from the position of the other. The very foundation of morality is the ability to imaginatively adopt the viewpoint, or occupy the situation, of the other—which is why morality in its explicit form is limited to the human species. (Humans are the animal most capable of internalizing the perspective of the other, i.e. of being self-conscious.) But most "civilized" people—or perhaps most people in all of history—do not have this capacity in spades. Only the ones who do ought to be in positions of authority.

Chomsky's great virtue, in other words, is simple clarity of thought. He can make explicit thoughts that are usually only implicit. For example, I've read a lot about capitalism but have never explicitly drawn the obvious conclusion that *corporations are systems of private totalitarianism*. That thought has been implicit in my mind, but Chomsky makes it explicit, thus permitting clarity of thought. You can talk about "contracts" and unions and all that, but, in the end, a corporation remains a private tyranny because one side has vastly more power than the other and issues dictates to the relatively powerless, the workers. Since this is so, and if you accept that tyrannies are unjust, you're rationally bound to oppose capitalism, or at least American capitalism. You may like that it has created great wealth and improved standards of living, but *morally* it is indefensible, since it deprives people of their autonomy.

The advantage of living in contemporary America is that I'll never be disillusioned, because I've been dis-illusioned from the very beginning.

[…]

Long weekend in Maine with family friends. Bernstein daughters: Rachel, Lindsay, Ruth. 30, 25, 22. Snob, snob, not a snob. The first two have charisma because of their looks and wit, their "positive energy," the third is similarly intelligent but a little less charismatic and pretty. Without going into details, the weekend was quite fun except for my being shoved back into memories from my youth of being ignored by the 'popular kids' even when I had things to say, memories of having nearly to shout and gesticulate in order to get people's attention momentarily focused on me during a debate or conversation or, of course, a party. I lacked the presence or the "energy" (unconscious) of certain others. But it doesn't always have to be energy in the common sense of the word. For example, after Tim arrived this weekend he was instinctively paid more attention to than I (by Rachel and Lindsay, and one or two others—at least, those were the ones who made it obvious) even though he isn't a particularly "energetic" person and typically has less to contribute to a conversation than I do, unless it's about pop music. But his body-size and something intangible about him apparently combine to draw people's attention, and Rachel even has a crush on him.

Another example of the phenomenon: the girls' cousins are Matt and Steve, college students, brothers. Matt, while short, is quite good-looking, somewhat witty, and has a relatively confident aura. Steve got the short end of the genetic stick: he's prematurely balding, not very attractive, and doesn't have that confident aura. He's merely friendly, kind, self-effacing, intelligent, quiet but interested in people. So Rachel and Lindsay, the snobs, tend to ignore him in comparison to Matt. They don't *overtly* ignore him (usually), and I can see that they like him in a condescending sort of way, but if I were him I'd be insulted. While the six of us (including Tim and Ruth, not including Matt) were playing Yahtzee, a stupid game that involves throwing five dice and competing for attention, I was appalled at the girls' lack of interest in Steve, especially as compared with their overt interest in the goings-on in Tim's corner of the room. When Steve threw his dice and counted them up, then threw them again, etc., and added the total and so forth, everybody ignored him, pursuing their little side-conversations. But when Tim threw his dice the two snobs were

[1] Snobbery: not deigning to associate with certain people, considering oneself too good for them, because they're "nobodies." Usually it operates on an almost unconscious level.

riveted, especially Rachel. Every inane little comment Tim made—"Fuck! I didn't want a six! Dammit, I just lost the game!"—elicited appreciative remarks or at least signs of sympathy; on the other hand, I was left being the only one showing interest in Steve, which I did just because I didn't want him to feel ignored. (Amazingly, he seems impervious to people's reactions to him. Doesn't give a shit if he's ignored—an amazingly noble and rare attitude.)

[…] Someone who has the 'presence' doesn't really have to work hard, doesn't have to try to be funny etc.; he or she is like a magnet—tends to attract just by virtue of the presence. Someone without the presence is at a significant disadvantage and has to work harder, especially if in the presence of someone with the presence.

This stuff is difficult to analyze, especially since most elements of human interaction depend on the specific context, on the people with whom one is interacting, even on one's clothes, the lighting, the atmosphere, etc. Nevertheless, there are "tendencies" in each person.

By the way, another way to express all this is to say, as I wrote a few weeks ago, that certain people have more of a "self" than others, or at least they project more of a self; hence their popularity. Again, consider what's being said when you say "He has a strong presence": the opposite of presence is absence, so in effect you're saying that he is more *present* than others, who are more *absent*. His self is relatively present; another's self is relatively absent. This is the meaning of charisma.

Listening on Youtube to Bach's cello suites arranged for guitar. The Prelude of the first one, played by Li Jie: so beautiful I cried at the end. Somehow the piece is more moving on the guitar, or rather it's moving in a different way than on the cello. The guitar is more intimate, private, peaceful. The cello is obviously richer, warmer, more sonorous, but with the guitar I think that the ecstasy of that piece's final lines is more poignant and *piercing* than with the cello, crystal-clear ecstasy. And I thought of Helene Grimaud's saying that art is the only worthy thing man has ever done, and looking at Li Jie effortlessly playing those final bars which are really the most eloquent thing in all music,[1] I felt pretty overwhelmed.

Reading Thomas Brooks's *Toil and Trouble: A History of American Labor* (1971).

What does it mean to treat someone as an end? Literally it means to adopt that person as a goal, as something you want to bring about. That is to say, you want to (help) bring about his sense of self, his desires, his "objective interests"—all of which, in the end, amount to his *freedom*, or his *self-confirmation* (as a free being). A person essentially is the urge or the movement toward self-confirmation, and self-confirmation is, by definition, a matter of freedom, because it's *self*-confirmation (the self's achievement of itself). So, Kant's formulations of morality in terms of both autonomy/freedom and treating others as ends do, in a sense, entail each other, as he thought. And they both entail specific and concrete commitments with respect to the organization of society.

How strange it is that religious/cultural conservatism and business conservatism fused into one party! I've always been struck by the strangeness of the alliance. But it makes sense if you reflect on its origins. It came into being after World War II, when both the business elite and religious conservatives waged their war against Communism—for different reasons. (Imperialism and the manufacture of domestic consent in one case. In the other, Communism symbolized the perceived erosion of tradition and authority, e.g. with the civil rights movement.) Their alliance was one of convenience, always precarious because the goals of the two factions are not identical. The Sarah Palin rednecks hate business elites, and business elites have contempt for the rednecks. Had the Cold War not happened, the alliance might not have happened. Now that the Cold War is over, the alliance seems to be falling apart. (But old habits die hard.)

Actually, it wasn't until the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War, and afterwards, that the bizarre alliance between certain sectors of business and culturally conservative sectors of the working class really came into being. (Nixon worked hard to bring it about.) But even earlier, the Democrats were starting to lose parts of the working class and the culturally conservative sections of the middle class because the

[1] After all, they consist of mere *arpeggios* that have been invested with miraculous meaning.

Democrats, by virtue of their connection with labor, could not be as convincingly anti-Communist as the Republicans—and also because the Democrats were the party that (comparatively) supported rights for blacks, immigrants and minorities of all kinds, i.e. the threatening "Other" who would steal jobs from white workers and undermine their traditional lifestyle. When the Dems became associated with high taxes, it was over: the poor whites went Republican, thinking it was in both their economic and their cultural interest. What a spectacular coup on the part of business! Tricking workers into voting pro-business! Maybe the first time in history that had happened. And this wasn't a benign Republicanism: Reagan was among the most aggressively anti-union presidents ever.

[Later:] During the 1970s there was a migration of certain industries from the Northeast, where unions were relatively prominent, to the Sunbelt, where they were not. These industries were rabidly anti-New Deal and anti-union. Hence their (important) support of conservative politicians like Reagan. The defense industry also supported him, since he was a hawk. Needless to say, these industries didn't share the grassroots' concern with religion and traditional values; but they did share the opposition to taxes, to liberal government activism and to the New Deal, and they shared the desire to vigorously prosecute the war on Communism (because, for some of them, it meant revenues, and for all it was a bludgeon to use against their opponents, "radicals"). The parts of the working class that went conservative were hoodwinked, as they had been by the fascists in Germany and Italy; this isn't as true of the middle-class conservatives.

Why has America always been such a *fearful* country? So afraid of the Other! Far more so than other countries. Whether it's been the Indians, the British, the blacks, the Chinese, the Germans, the Communists, the Japanese, the atheists, the Mexicans, the terrorists, or whoever, Americans have always been terribly afraid of some group. It must have something to do with the unstructuredness of the social fabric, the atomization that has characterized American society from the very beginning (after the Revolution), which was so different from Europe. Paranoia is fostered in such conditions. Think of the paranoia of the 9/11 Truthers, and the conspiracy theories that have always been popular in this country. Distrust has always pervaded the society, especially distrust of authority (hence conspiracy theories) and of any 'new' group that is seen as unusually cohesive and thus threatening. Paranoia, mass distrust and fear, insecurity, xenophobia, are natural attitudes in an atomized society of few 'civil-societal' institutions or modes of association and a relatively fluid class structure, not to mention weak safeguards against unemployment and poverty (and a high crime-rate). "They'll steal our jobs!"

Obviously an equally important factor is the intentional propagation of such attitudes by the media and other power-structures. Sometimes the xenophobia is consciously whipped up, as during wars. But the fact is that this sort of indoctrination, whether conscious or not, is very useful to the ruling class for more than one reason.

What's the explanation for the unique American hatred of taxes? Whatever it is, it's essentially related to the distinctive American preoccupation with freedom (from government, from class; freedom to make money, to be an entrepreneur or adventurer, etc.). And both are a product of the social structure, privatized and atomized. Think of the Western frontier: people resented government intrusion into their lives, preferring to work their farms privately and do as they liked. The social meaning of the fragmentation varies between regions and times, from the frontier to the Eastern city and so forth, but the basic fact of fragmentation or "individualism" or "freedom" remains. It's a society without close ties, without a tangible class-structure along old European lines, with few social institutions except churches; the predictable result is that people want to be left to themselves (making a virtue of necessity, so to speak, or of the traditions in which they've been raised) and don't want to have to pay for others' health care or education or Social Security. An atomized society fosters the desire to be atomized ("free"); a tradition of solidarity fosters a love of solidarity. Traditions in general tend to propagate themselves through the generations, because people, having been raised in them, naturally continue to behave in accordance with them and in fact valorize them, as they valorize their sense of self.

But of course the hatred of taxes also has *a lot* to do with the power of business in America, with indoctrination, with propaganda. A broadly anti-union culture, created largely through relentless violent suppression of unions and workers' rights, specific *policies* pursued by business and government. A very

disciplined propaganda-system exalting the free market, individual initiative, distrust of the government and anything hinting of semi-collectivism.

"Why should I help that old widow across the street? Why should I help pay for her meals? Why should I help fund public education if I have no children in school?" You can see from these questions—which exemplify the anti-tax attitude—that it all comes down to the fragmentation of the social structure. "These people are strangers to me! Why should I care about them?" In a more solidaristic social structure, questions about why you should help widows and children would seem totally absurd, symptomatic of a dysfunctional mind. Selfishness might even be considered not *immoral* but *senseless*.

…Moreover, Americans have always been uniquely obsessed with *making money*. (In the 20th century, the rest of the world started catching up to us.) Saving and spending money, that's been the purpose of life. Read Gordon Wood's book. It's understandable, then, why Americans would have a unique hatred of taxes. You're *losing money!*

Robert Paul Wolff says that the fundamental problem of political philosophy is "how the moral autonomy of the individual can be made compatible with the legitimate authority of the state." And he writes a book (*In Defense of Anarchism*) arguing that the problem is insoluble. Individual autonomy cannot be reconciled with the state's authority. It seems to me that this conclusion is common sense. States, or governments, are violent, repressive institutions. There has never been a state that hasn't *compelled* its citizens in some way and hasn't used the threat of force to command obedience. And this is, transparently, to deny the individual his autonomy. The only "state" that could, perhaps, be morally legitimate is a small, decentralized direct democracy that legislated and enforced its decisions through discussion and persuasion, not violence and the threat of violence. Even with murderers, the moment you lock them up in a prison, you're depriving them of their autonomy and are thus committing an immoral act, strictly speaking. You can justify your act through utilitarian considerations of the greater good, and realistically it's advisable to shield the population from murderers, but it is never *morally right* to deprive someone of his freedom. It can only be *socially good*. Maybe you could call it *indirectly* moral, in that you hope to prevent the murderer from depriving someone else of his freedom (indeed, his life), but *directly* it isn't moral, in the same way that it's always *directly* immoral to lie, even if by doing so you hope to save a person's life. (See Kant's essay.) –Morality is, admittedly, an extension of humanitarianism (respect and compassion for others), but it's different from humanitarianism in that it's *absolute*, it permits of no exceptions. It isn't a feeling, it's a law. So, yes, the dictates of morality in a particular situation can conceivably violate the dictates of humanitarianism—and in this case we should ignore morality and go with humanitarianism, since the latter is, after all, the "cash value" of morality.

If you want, you can say that there are two kinds of morality: the absolute, deontological one, and the relative, humanitarian or "utilitarian" one. The former is morality in its strictest sense, as consisting of semi-divine laws by which we must regulate our behavior, but the latter is the only "morality" that isn't a delusion (the flip-side of the delusion that humans have absolute value). If we're assuming morality in its strict sense, then coercion or deception is always immoral. But if we're taking the more realistic position of "humanitarianism," then it is indeed sometimes justifiable to coerce or deceive people. –Still, even on this level, governments as they have always existed cannot be wholly justified because they have never been exclusively, solely humanitarian, concerned literally with nothing but the welfare and freedom of their citizens. The world is too messy for that; power-structures are too committed to consolidating their power.

Actually, even in theory all this stuff is messy. For example, in real situations you constantly have to adjudicate between the claims of deontological morality and humanitarianism/utilitarianism. Deontologically, so to speak, it's immoral to abort a fetus (because a fetus is a budding human and hence has absolute value), but humanitarianly it may be justified. 'Deontologically' it would have been wrong to kill Hitler in 1938, but humanitarianly, or "indirectly-morally," it wouldn't have. You have to ask which consideration is more important to you.

I wonder what Kant would say: is it moral to shove a person out of the way of an oncoming bus? You're coercing him. Considered solely in itself, your act is a violation of his autonomy. But the "maxim" of your act, I suppose, isn't, since by violating his freedom you're trying to prevent a worse destruction of

his freedom, in fact of his life. This example just shows how problematic even deontological morality is (quite apart from its having to be tempered by utilitarian considerations)—which itself supports my belief that morality is imaginary, unreal.

To return to the question about the state and bureaucracy in general. Wolff expresses it well when he says, "Men are no better than children if they not only accept the rule of others from force of necessity, but embrace it willingly and forfeit their duty unceasingly to weigh the merits of the actions which they perform. When I place myself in the hands of another, and permit him to determine the principles by which I shall guide my behavior, I repudiate the freedom and reason which give me dignity." Bureaucrats who follow orders unquestioningly are immoral not only in relation to others but in relation to themselves, since they're willfully violating their own autonomy.

[There are confusions in that discussion.]

When you have no energy to do anything, it's hard to muster the energy to do anything.

Historically, a major hindrance to the success of the U.S. labor movement has been "the ethnicization of the unions." More broadly: too many separate groups of immigrants, too many languages not spoken by other groups, too much ethnic pride and prejudice, too much discrimination by the skilled workers against the masses of newly arrived unskilled immigrants who threatened to steal the jobs of the established workers. "To protect their jobs, their craft and skills, skilled workmen frequently formed unions based on exclusion of recent immigrants, or of other ethnic groups." For decades, craft unionism won out over industrial unionism; i.e., exclusion won out over inclusion. But strength has always been in numbers—"one for all and all for one." This is how the CIO achieved its spectacular successes. But in the time of the AFL, businesses would pit groups of workers against each other and the media would propagate xenophobic attitudes. "Divide and conquer" is the motto of every savvy power-system, because it knows that if the oppressed come together they can accomplish anything.

Another problem, obviously, has been the 'blacks vs. whites' thing. Again, it's the lack of unity. European labor movements were lucky enough not to have this problem to such a degree as the American movement did. –In short, the failures of the labor movement (in any country) can, necessarily, always be attributed largely to that one overarching cause, a lack of solidarity. (It is this which, in large part, makes possible the excessive concentration of power in the business class—but this concentration of power, of course, also leads through various means to the fragmentation of labor.) This consideration should be the guiding light of any explanation of labor's weakness in America.

As Harry Bridges said, "The most important word in the language of the working class is 'solidarity.'"

I may be the only intellectual alive who's content to skip over the next fifty or a hundred years and speak directly to his third-generation descendants. I see that the current world order is doomed, that global warming and population growth will smash it into smithereens. So what is there to do for one who wants immortality? Only to leap over the rubble and talk to people on the other side, and tell them "Don't give up hope! Read what I've written; remember the past, remember that there are good things in life […]." As I've said before, I am a concentrated reflection of many the tendencies of my age; and so in remembering me, you are paying homage to an entire era. The era constitutes a tragedy, but I represent the element of life-affirmation in that tragedy. So, in a sense, I'm trying to redeem my age, to rescue it from the unmitigated contempt in which its descendants will be tempted to hold it.

—Observe, reader, the lengths to which we go to give ourselves a purpose and convince ourselves of our worth!

Met a sort of friend today, Raj, who convinced me to take up sailing. He just started it himself; sails at a club on the Esplanade. So I went there directly after talking to him, paid the $240 for the year, and had my first class (on rigging). Tomorrow I'll go back and practice, then I'll take the test. I should have done this years ago.

Later I met a new Italian friend, Elena, beautiful 30-year-old full of intellect and personality. And her Brazilian friend. I could probably fall in love with Elena if I let myself, but she's married, so there goes

that idea. If she were a little younger she'd be everything I want in a girl. The first time we met we spent an hour talking about David Foster Wallace! And what a sense of humor she has! Playful, self-deprecating, open and friendly. And her genuineness, it's the kind of genuineness that seems so rare in American girls but relatively common among the Latins.

She re-freshes me.

Oh my Lord…Beethoven's Choral Fantasy. I discovered that piece earlier this year. I thought it was a little strange at first, unstructured and meandering, but…you know, it's quintessential Beethoven, the affirmation of everything in spite of everything, the redemption of the universe. I always get tears in my eyes when watching great music performed by…*people*, people who have devoted their lives to art and you can see it when they're singing, the hours and years of practice and passion as they belt out their notes, their devotion to music. That beautiful soprano with the blond hair coiffed perfectly and the makeup and earrings on—the most beautiful thing about her is that she's a woman, just an ordinary woman who wants to look pretty like all women and has a family and sees her friends every day and has to do maintenance on her house every year—and yet here she is standing between an orchestra and a chorus, belting out Beethoven, *singing*—humans can *sing!* (how superfluous!)—singing about how "graceful, charming and sweet is the sound of life's harmonies!" The three men and the three women singing about God's grace being bestowed on humanity when love and strength are united, and peace and joy advancing in perfect concord, and then the chorus trumpeting that we must "accept the gifts of high art!", and the orchestra and piano and the conductor swinging his arms wildly singing along with the chorus (you can only see his lips moving but you know he's shouting as loud as the singers)—can you picture these men and women sitting and standing beside each other in front of a rapt audience, not fighting or arguing or talking of money or politics or responsibilities but *singing about art?* "Within these hallowed halls…" It's a miracle, the only real miracle in life.

A community, timeless and universal because they're performing music scribbled two hundred years ago by a deaf man who lived alone in his cluttered and filthy apartment—scratched-in ideas transported from one man's brain to a concert hall where worshipers pay homage to the only thing worth paying homage to, art. It'll all be over soon (two hours), but its very transience augments its beauty.

"The developments [throughout the world] of the past twenty years have proven wrong the assumption that economic liberalization leads to political liberalization." True. The one doesn't necessarily follow the other, at least not in the short term (several decades). But the former does create *pressures* toward the latter, *tendencies* that have to be suppressed by the state. The Chinese government, for example, is particularly enormous and powerful, so it has successfully suppressed them. But the point is that there is a contradiction between the relative freedom of its economy and the unfreedom of its politics, and in the long run this contradiction will tend to be resolved so as to increase political freedom. The economy conditions politics more than vice versa.

Apologists for capitalism, like Milton Friedman, have always argued that capitalism leads to freedom and democracy, but, again, this is bullshit. All you can talk about is *tendencies*, not *necessary outcomes*. Besides, insofar as capitalism does create tendencies toward democracy, it isn't because of the "democratic" nature of capitalism! Look at history: democracy and civil liberties have resulted from decades-long struggles of workers and radicals *against* capitalist *exploitation* and *suppression* of their rights. So, if anything, the positive tendencies of capitalism are flagrantly undemocratic.

Played soccer for the first time in I-don't-know-how-many-years. The pleasures of physical exertion (exhaustion).

The curious thing about major wars is that they have simultaneously a democratizing and a repressive influence. War is the health of the State, but it can also lead to greater rights for workers and oppressed minorities—partly because the State wants to head off domestic disputes and so is temporarily inclined to give workers (in particular) some of what they've been asking for. During both world wars, the American government forced employers to recognize unions and even gave labor a voice on governmental committees and such. Of course, labor was a junior partner. And, in general, repression is the order of the day (repression of strikes, of boycotts, of protests, of free speech, etc.), more than usual. But then after the

war, the masses who have been mobilized and relatively empowered through full employment and 'national participation' demand democratic reforms. Thus, e.g., the 19th Amendment in 1920, and the emerging civil rights movement and feminism after World War II. All in all, war usually leads to terrible repression but has democratizing potential at the same time.

Sent an email to Chomsky after a conversation I had with Rich Pollak:

> Professor Chomsky,
>
> I recently had a conversation about you with a fellow activist, and he said something I hadn't considered: he suggested that your talks and many of your writings are altogether too pessimistic. Apparently his mother had recently gone to one of your talks and had left feeling very discouraged and depressed. I defended you in the predictable ways (you're just stating facts; you're informing the public; it's hard not to be pessimistic if one is acquainted with history; and in some ways you aren't cynical at all), but he argued that, even so, a person in your position should give very specific advice to activists rather than simply advising them to make connections with each other and prepare for the long-haul and so on. For example, you must be in touch with or be aware of many liberal organizations and politicians; perhaps in your talks you could make your listeners aware of such resources, discuss the work that particular organizations have done and their past achievements, and even give your listeners strategic and 'tactical' advice for their battles against political conservatism. Maybe you could more often talk about recent examples of successful activism from various countries and the ways in which certain goals were achieved, instead of focusing so much on the crimes of the establishment.
>
> In the end, I came to agree with this friend of mine (more or less). I think it would be advisable for you to adopt a more positive tone. Maybe talk more about Porto Alegre in the 90s, for example -- but, in general, focus on spreading knowledge about activist efforts around the globe (especially in "Western" countries), making people aware of good things that organizers are doing in Europe, etc. Perhaps try not to come across as quite so cynical. -I realize you'd disagree with that characterization, but, justified or not, it seems to be a widespread interpretation of you. I suspect that a lot of people would like you to change your tone from predominantly negative to inspirational.
>
> With great respect,
> Chris

> Thanks for your thoughts. It's certainly wrong to leave people depressed, and if that's the effect of my talks, it's my fault. I'm aware of the problem, and try to deal with it, in talks and in writing, by emphasizing the achievements that have been won by dedicated persistent educational and organizational efforts, and appropriate actions, often direct action, including in recent years. But it's true that I don't give specific advice, and strategic and tactical advice. A lifetime of activism keeps reinforcing my feeling that it can't be done. Too much depends on specific circumstances, goals, interests. And that aside, it sends the wrong message. It's easy to say "join Move-on and do what they tell about how to support 'brand Obama,'" or some other specific goal. Or some other specific suggestion. Maybe that's sometimes right, but the principle is wrong. One shouldn't be a cog in anyone's machine: rather, one should be thinking for oneself and deciding which of the myriad of choices should be made. It may be easier to follow instructions, but those are the tendencies that should be combatted, I think.

> Insofar as I have any talent to be inspirational, I suppress it. Fortunately, that's quite easy. I cringe when I hear inspirational oratory. And for good reason, I think. The goal should be to help and encourage people to think for themselves, not to lead or instruct them, and not to mislead them -- as inspirational oratory almost invariably does.
>
> Others feel differently, I know, and maybe they're right, but I can only do what I think is right.

S. H. Rigby's article "Historical Materialism, Social Structure, and Social Change in the Middle Ages" (2004). It seems to me—I said this a long time ago—that the concept of a mode of production has two applications, on the micro- and the macro-level. (1) A productive unit in society, and (2) the predominant form of production in society. A modern factory is capitalist in that the property is owned by people who extract surplus-value from the workers, who don't own any property. But this *society* is capitalist in that the capitalist form of production predominates. (There are other forms of "production" in modern society. See Wright's book *Classes*.) Medieval society was feudal in that the lord–serf relation was its fundamental basis, the most important social relation. Every society after prehistory is organized in this way around two opposing classes, two fundamental classes opposed in the production-relation (and whose opposition makes possible and defines the specific production-relation). There are all sorts of social categories and occupations and even other "classes" in the strict Marxian sense, but one class-relation in particular props up the society (creates most of the wealth, etc.). This sort of statement is hard to verify but seems plausible.

The theory of surplus-value seems plausible too. It's obviously true, first of all, that ultimately the laborer's wages are paid out of the value of the commodities he produces, since these commodities are what give the capitalist the revenue out of which he pays his workers. But his *profit* comes from the sale of these commodities too. So the workers produce the equivalent of their wages plus the capitalist's profit. This profit is surplus-value, value they've created but which doesn't go to support them and their families (which is why it's called "surplus"). –Stated in this simple way, the theory seems almost truistic.

Rigby claims that "Of all of Marx and Engels's claims, the least acceptable aspect of their social theory now is probably their 'Primacy Thesis,' in which society's relations of production correspond to the level of development of its productive forces, and so are cast aside as they become fetters on the growth of the productive forces." One reason this claim is problematic is that "a given level of the productive forces can be compatible with a variety of different relations of production." I'm inclined to agree with Rigby. The same level of productive forces could surely give you either slavery or serfdom, or some Asian version of serfdom. *Some* technologies do rule out certain production relations; for example, with computers and so on it's going to be extremely difficult to sustain a mode of production based on slavery, for a number of reasons. In any case, it seems that the Primacy Thesis is either truistic (on a weak interpretation) or false (on a strong one). But there's also a middle interpretation according to which the productive forces are *constraints* on the production relations—or some such hypothesis—and this seems both plausible and rather substantive. The nature of the productive forces has *some* value in explaining why a particular set of production relations has been 'selected' by society.

Many recent Marxists reject G. A. Cohen's "technologistic" interpretation according to which the productive forces have an "autonomous" tendency to develop throughout history and instead argue that it's actually the specific production relations of capitalism which cause modern productive forces to develop at such a rapid pace. But these two claims aren't mutually exclusive. I think Cohen's word "autonomous" is unnecessary and misleading; the point is that there is a slight pressure (as E. O. Wright says) on the productive forces to develop through history, from the simplest tools of Paleolithic man to the machines of the Romans, and as this development occurs there will periodically take place social revolutions—most of them have been very slow—adjusting social and production relations to the new conditions of production. One revolution accompanied the emergence of a social surplus product: classes were born, masters and slaves came into existence because the hunter-gatherer relations weren't appropriate anymore (being suited to subsistence conditions in which there was no surplus to sustain an unproductive class). Actually, to speak

more realistically, there were, for example, the Mycenaean production relations, then the Classical Greek relations (appropriate to a higher stage of production than Mycenae), then the Roman—and then there was a regression in Europe, etc. But perhaps all these modes of production were more similar to each other than different, involving slavery and/or serfdom. With capitalism came a true revolution: for the first time, the production relations were not *conservative* (as they had been in the past) but inherently progressive, so that now it isn't a matter of waiting eons for the productive forces to develop to such a point that they change the relations; instead, the relations constantly revolutionize the forces. –In short, the Primacy Thesis is not incompatible with Cohen's critics' position, if the two are understood correctly.

Valid criticisms:

> If, as Marx and Engels claimed, society's relations of production correspond to and change with the level of development of its productive forces, then we would expect that, as they themselves concluded, "serfdom cannot be abolished without improved agriculture." Yet, in his specific historical analysis of the transition to capitalism, Marx actually claims the opposite: at first, "agriculture remains the same although the day labourer has replaced the serf." For Marx, England underwent an "agricultural revolution" from the "last third of the fifteenth century" until the final decade of the sixteenth century. Yet, while this revolution in the productive forces took place in the sixteenth century, serfdom had, in fact, "practically disappeared" in England as early as the "last part of the fourteenth century" so that the "immense majority of the population consisted then, and to a still larger extent in the fifteenth century, of free peasant proprietors." Again, Marx's own historical analysis concentrates on change in society's social relations as the prelude to change in its productive forces, the opposite approach to that set out in his and Engels's general theory.

On the other hand, the social relations can't change until the productive forces have reached a certain level of development. Serfdom in England couldn't have been abolished in the 1000s (as it supposedly was in the 1300s) because the material conditions weren't ripe for the abolition of serfdom then. But once it was abolished, the new social relations facilitated a revolution in productive forces. So you see that a very complicated dialectic characterizes the interaction between the social relations and the productive forces, each pushing the other towards change. Once the material conditions of production had evolved to a certain point, it was possible to abolish serfdom; once serfdom was abolished, the new social relations propelled a revolution in the material conditions of production.

Still, insofar as the Primacy Thesis suggests that "dynamic productive forces call forth new social relations," it's false. Productive forces are never "dynamic" or "revolutionary" or "inherently progressive" in and of themselves. Only social relations are.

In fact, it's better to say that insofar as productive forces ever advance, it's because social relations have caused them to. So maybe it's better to reject Wright's abovementioned suggestion altogether (even though it may be true). What causes the forces to develop isn't their "autonomous tendency"; it's the social framework in which they find themselves. But then once they have advanced to a certain point, the old social framework becomes obsolete and new relations are born. So in this sense, the productive forces and material conditions are primary.

Recall, though, the revision I made to historical materialism years ago: it isn't that *relations* become fetters on the *forces' development* (as Marx said); instead, the *obsolete* relations become fetters on the *new, emerging relations that propel the forces' development*. Marx's original statement is misleading. Two sets of social relations are involved, not one.

More criticisms:

> While historical materialism provides an extremely useful analysis of society's class divisions, it tends to neglect other, nonclass social inequalities and conflicts, such as those based on racial or religious divisions (as in the case of the position of the Jews within medieval society) or on other forms of personal status. A classic example of such a nonclass

> social inequality which is central to the stratification of all societies is that of gender. While Engels rightly emphasized that the nature and extent of the inequality between the sexes is socially specific and historically changing rather than being biological and inevitable in nature, his explanation of patriarchy in terms of its links with the transhistorical category of "private property" meant that, like Marx, he provided no real account of how gender inequalities were related to specific forms of class relation. Modern Marxists' attempts to fill this gap in Marx and Engels's analysis have tended to result either in reductionism, as when medieval gender inequalities are (rather unconvincingly) explained in terms of their functional benefits for feudal relations of production, or, alternatively, in an attractive but seemingly non-Marxist sociological pluralism in which society is seen in terms of a multiplicity of separate axes of social inequality.

Surely there is some truth to the functional explanations. And don't forget that functional explanations can, at least theoretically, be reduced to causal explanations.

Or consider this objection: "Many critics of historical materialism have focused on the problem that while Marx presents society's "economic foundation" as determining the nature of its political and ideological "superstructure," in reality it is impossible to distinguish or separate social and economic relations from political, legal, and ideological factors, since the latter are actually constitutive elements in the former. But if base and superstructure interpenetrate, and so cannot be separated, it would be illegitimate to derive one from the other or to claim a primacy of one over the other, a conclusion which would undermine the whole thrust of Marx and Engels's social theory." This objection is one of those superficially plausible ones that dissolves if you take a *historical* approach to the subject-matter. Theoretically it's possible (though empirically difficult) to 'observe' new relations of production emerging in the interstices of the old society. At first, these new relations have no legal expression, no ideological justification, etc. But as they gradually colonize the society there comes a point at which they're finally explicitly recognized in law and ideology, and they start to influence politics and science, etc. Then you can see that our current ideologies, laws and political practices have evolved on their basis. Thus, from a historical or 'developmental' perspective it *is* possible to distinguish the relations of production from political, legal and ideological factors.

Rigby asks if it's possible for one causal factor to be "more important" than another in historical matters. He answers in the negative. Economic factors aren't more important than others; instead, a whole jumble of factors come together to create an event or a situation, and each factor is as "important" as the others (because they're all necessary in order for the situation to come about). I disagree, or I think there's a confusion involved here. It's usually possible to rank things roughly in order of their importance. DNA can be called more important than RNA even though both are essential, because RNA is created from DNA. The heart is more important than the spleen because you can live without the latter but not without the former—and yet both play significant roles in biological processes. Similarly, you can say that, in general, economic factors are more important than ideological ones, for many reasons (one of which I sketched above).

Reading Mike Davis's *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the U.S. Working Class* (1986).

Why is the U.S. working class different? Why has it failed where European workers have succeeded (at least relatively)? Many reasons. Originally, for example, there was the "safety valve" of the frontier. And what I wrote above about ethnic and religious divisions. "Stratifications rooted in differential positions in the social labor process have been reinforced by deep-seated ethnic, religious, racial and sexual antagonisms within the working class… The political power of the working class has always been greatly diluted by the effective disenfranchisement of large sectors of labor: blacks, immigrants, women, migrant workers, among others." The European labor movement didn't have to deal with quite the same ethnic, religious, racial, or 'immigrant' problems. This doesn't explain everything, though. Part of the problem, surely, is that once the capitalist class had been allowed to 'get ahead' of the workers through all these

divisions, its dominance 'snowballed,' fed off itself, and thus it was able to keep down the workers even after they had finally achieved some measure of national and industrial unity.

Nor should you forget the incompetence and timidity of labor's leadership, with the likes of Samuel Gompers, William Green, John L. Lewis in his early days (or, rather, his whole life), Philip Murray, Sidney Hillman, George Meany, and all the corrupt bureaucrats.

Also, ironically, the very size of the country and of the laboring classes surely hindered the formation of a labor party. Too many regional divisions, too many linguistic divisions, too much diversity, too many industries, too many interests—millions of workers and hundreds of sectors with their own interests and jealousies—just *too much* for a unified labor party to come into being, to pull all these factors together. By contrast, the size of the country and wealth of its resources has only helped the capitalist class, by making possible giant conglomerates and vast accumulations of wealth and power. And capital has exploited and exacerbated the already atomized, fragmented nature of the social structure (which itself has been due to the country's size, the relative paucity of its population, the presence of the frontier, the absence of old feudal social ties and class solidarity, the constant flood of new immigrants—"strangers in a strange land," alienation, fragmentation between ethnic-groups—etc.). In fact, these circumstances help explain why throughout most of America's history there has been far more craft-solidarity than class-solidarity (which has been tremendously detrimental to the labor movement).

Between 1892 and 1896 a Farmer-Labor alliance started to develop which, for a time, looked like it might create a viable third party, comparable to the labor parties then being created in Australia, England and other European countries. But it was sabotaged by the forces of reaction (including Gompers and the AFL). Davis has a good discussion of it. On a broad scale, he attributes the radicals' failure to two factors:

> First, the united rebellion of the Southern yeoman and farm tenants—the cutting edge of agrarian radicalism—was broken up by a violent counter-attack of the regional ruling class which counterposed "Jim Crow" and redneck demagogism to the Farmers' Alliance and interracial cooperation. A vicious panoply of Black disfranchisement, racial segregation, and lynch terror was installed in the nineties to suppress Black tenants, to keep them tied to the land, and to prevent their future collaboration with poor whites…
>
> Secondly, this Southern counterrevolution was paralleled north of the Mason-Dixon line by a resurgence of nativism and ethno-religious conflict within the industrial working class. In the bleak depression days of the mid-nineties, many native as well as 'old' immigrant workers came to believe that burgeoning immigration was creating a grave competitive threat… Fatally for the hopes of labor radicals, anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic prejudice rent the unity of even those industrial unions, the miners and the railway workers, which were ostensibly the bedrock of Labor-Populism…
>
> …Although the Republicans [in 1896] temporarily captured an important segment of the alienated Catholic working-class vote, an even larger part retreated from electoral participation altogether. The election of 1896 thus marks a profound mutation in American political culture. At a time when the European proletariat was becoming more politically engaged than ever before, the American working class was undergoing a striking electoral *demobilization* as a result of the nativist backlash (particularly the agrarian capture of the Democratic Party) and of new restrictions on the popular suffrage (Black disfranchisement, poll taxes, and residency requirements). This combined process of exclusion/abstention dispersed the working-class vote…

September

Here's a simple way to think about the spectrum between conservative and anarchist: on the far right, you have people who support authority. It's the "authoritarian personality." ("A personality pattern reflecting a desire for security, order, power, and status, with a desire for structured lines of authority, a

conventional set of values or outlook, a demand for unquestioning obedience, and a tendency to be hostile toward or use as scapegoats individuals of minority or nontraditional groups." Conventionalism, authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, destructiveness, cynicism, excessive concern with sexuality, and so forth. I'll have to read Adorno's book.) These people tend not to value freedom, human rights, democracy, intellectual curiosity, etc.; they want *sameness,* universal agreement (with them), a rigid social order where they clearly belong and can see their place, can see themselves reflected in the uniformity of society. They can't tolerate dissent.

In the center you have "liberals" (e.g., Kennedy liberals), who value freedom and human rights but not enough. They still have an attachment to "order," to "legitimate authority"; they're frightened of radical democracy. The 1960s made them nervous. They accept capitalism, usually think it's "natural," don't adopt a very critical stance toward their society, accept a lot of conventional pieties about progress and their country's goodness; in short, they have the typical educated/indoctrinated middle-class outlook. Basically they want things to be "normal" so they can feel comfortable and secure. They're relatively open-minded but also a little small-minded.

The far left is reserved for those who are truly committed to freedom, democracy, diversity, a multiform equality. They always question authority: in fact, their basic assumption is that power over others is automatically illegitimate unless it can prove itself justified (which it rarely can). As Chomsky says, the burden of proof is on power, not on those who oppose it. Liberals and conservatives accept authority, to varying degrees; anarchists and left-Marxists don't.

…Another way to conceptualize the spectrum is to look at the *de*scriptions, not the *pre*scriptions, offered. Conservatives sometimes accept the class struggle in a qualified form, or at least they accept that society is composed of irreconcilable interests. Fascists, for example, are not committed to rejecting the reality of struggle. William Buckley or Phyllis Schlafly has no reason to deny that society is locked in a war between the lovers of authority and the haters of authority. But it's true that conservatives do tend to reject the Marxist interpretation of struggle as essentially economic; they often even deny that capitalists and workers are necessarily opposed. Regardless, they believe, at least implicitly, that justice is usually on the side of power, not the oppressed. (This shows that bureaucracies are essentially "conservative," since they consist in (the belief that) the exercise of power (is justified and is not to be resisted by the relatively powerless). They're also conservative in that they're resistant to change.)

Liberals, again, have been successfully indoctrinated: they accept the hegemonic ideology that society is composed, more or less, of a harmony of interests, with a few radicals and nay-sayers at the margins. There is no class struggle, there are no essential struggles at all. It's only necessary to smooth out the rough edges, to get rid of the troublemakers in the corporate ranks and the radical ranks, to rewrite a few governmental rules and regulations, etc.

The left, properly so-called, agrees with conservatives that society is locked in struggle, but it diagnoses the struggle differently: rather than mainly cultural, the struggle is economic. It revolves around the nature of economic power in capitalism, which affects everything from the environment to women's rights. And justice—and the future—is on the side of the oppressed.

…I should be clearer about conservatism. Thinkers like Hayek, Friedman and Henry C. Simons have very different allegiances than fascists or authoritarian-types. They genuinely want small government and individual freedom. They can be considered liberals, or even anarchists, by inclination—*absolute freedom, no bureaucratic authority trampling on rights!*—but they're anarchists who have been confused by neoclassical economics and ideology. They can't see the truth, as plain as day, that corporations rather than government bureaucracies have become the real threat to individual liberty, nor that an unregulated, unsubsidized economy wouldn't last a week. (It would either collapse immediately or a tiny minority would soon collect most of the economic power and proceed to govern the country according to their own interests. Adam Smith's ideal economy of small producers is inherently unstable.) In short, these "honorable," intellectually consistent conservatives end up, in spite of themselves, as mere ideologues and propagandists on behalf of business—although, admittedly, they do sometimes express dismay at the degree of cartelism, cronyism and corporate welfarism that permeates the economy.

Strictly speaking, then, I should distinguish between the mindless mass "conservatism" that led to fascism and is usually behind people's opposition to civil rights—i.e., the so-called conservatism of Rush Limbaugh and Pat Robertson—and the more 'intellectual' conservatism of Hayek, which is much closer to old liberalism than to fascism. *[Um, except for Hayek's love of Pinochet and other authoritarians!]* Chomsky considers it absurd to call the former current "conservative," but insofar as it is traditionalist (religious, patriarchal, authoritarian, law-and-order-ish) the label does make some sense. Is it right to call Dick Cheney a conservative? Not if you mean Hayekian; *somewhat* if you mean the other kind. But really he is neither. What he believes in is strong state power, strong executive power, and strong American power around the world. He isn't very committed to quasi-religious social conservatism, except insofar as it's useful in maintaining "law and order." He cares for one thing only, and that's *power*. He's a fascist without the principles (the fanaticism). A truly authoritarian personality. Which he has in common with Limbaughian conservatives.

Why didn't the CIO's alliance with the Democratic party before, during and after World War II result in something more satisfactory to the labor movement than FDR's lack of sympathy, a Republican Congress, the Taft-Hartley Act, Truman's broken promises, etc.? What went wrong? Many things.

"As we have seen, the 'civil wars' between the AFL and CIO, and later within the CIO itself [over the issue of Communism], undermined every attempt to establish a liberal bloc in American politics or to develop the basis for independent political action by labor. Without minimizing the purely political or inter-bureaucratic aspects of the schism between the AFL and CIO, the underlying determinant was still the persistence of those divisions between the craft and mass-production workforces that had polarized the American proletariat since the turn of the century. As we have seen, the surprising resurgence of the AFL in the late thirties behind the banners of labor-patriotism and anti-communism exploited the residual prejudices of the native and old-immigrant stock workers against the second-generation ethnic laborers in the mines and factories. Working-class disunity was further augmented by the pervasive white racism which all too frequently subverted wartime industrial militancy into 'hate strikes' against Black newcomers. Finally, the Cold War dramatically strengthened the hegemony of Catholicism and right-wing ethnic nationalism in broad sectors of the industrial working class.

"…[Additionally,] the anti-communist inquisition within the CIO produced a staggering series of losses: the 'deunionization' of the electrical and textile industries, the destruction of promising beachheads in the tertiary, professional and agricultural sectors, and the collapse of 'Operation Dixie.'…" Davis's analysis is long and insightful. In fact, the book is a masterpiece.

It occurs to me that the U.S. must be among the most violent countries or empires in history. First of all, it's one of the few countries founded on genocide—possibly the most effective genocide ever. It has fought dozens of wars in only two hundred years. Its military is the most lethal killing-machine ever devised. Apparently during Nixon's campaign in Cambodia, more firepower was involved than the sum of all the conventional bombs used in World War II. It's the only country ever to have used nuclear weapons. In general, the government pursues an unusually militaristic foreign policy and has few scruples about throwing its military might around the world (if only as a threat sometimes). It's complicit, moreover, in the crimes of the regimes it has supported, including Suharto's, Saddam Hussein's, Saudi Arabia's, Israel's, Egypt's, Turkey's, a number of Latin American states, etc. *Domestically*, the history of labor has been uniquely repressive and violent (on the part of the ruling class). Don't forget slavery and the subsequent century of black repression. In fact, the rule of business is founded on a constant, daily reign of unreported violence, the suppression of rights in the workplace, the persecution of anyone who steps a little out of line, the segregation of tens of millions in ghettos, slums, etc. The U.S. crime-rate is unusually high, and people have remarkable freedom to own guns. Images of violence pervade pop culture. Immigration and detention policies are appallingly arbitrary, despotic, bureaucratic. The prisonnsystem, partly privatized, is a monument to inefficiency, bloatedness and discrimination. The "war on drugs" is absurdly unjust and violent (though ineffective), little more than a continuation of imperialism by other means, especially in Colombia. Since the 19th century there have been seething undercurrents in the South and Midwest (and

everywhere else) of semi-fascist discontent, violence, prejudice. Nativism and xenophobia have always been unusually strong. The list goes on.

The Roman Empire was *nothing* compared to us. Its coercive forces were less intensive and less extensive than ours. Ours spread around the globe and penetrate to the level of every individual, forcing on us a degree of atomization unprecedented in history.

To maintain, despite all this, the prevailing ideology of liberalism, peace, democracy, moral superiority, broad-based consent—"Americanism"—is an impressive feat of ideological distortion. So is, incidentally, the widespread perception that America is not a class-polarized society, and the general acceptance of free-market myths.

What rational people often forget is that most people are not rational. Last night I attended a Bible study with my friend Ivy, an intelligent girl who wants to study at Stanford; at one point in the evening she denied that the Earth revolves around the Sun. She said it depends on your "frame of reference": if you're on the Earth, the Sun revolves around the Earth, while the reverse is true from the perspective of the Sun. I couldn't dislodge her from her opinion. –Postmodernism, you see. It all depends on "frames of reference."

In the same way, it's hard for me to take 'businesspeople' seriously: when I have a discussion with them, I hear indoctrination being regurgitated. Today I had a mini-debate with that intellectual abortion Raj, a business analyst.

But let's get back to stupidity. I just watched an interview with Chomsky in which the interviewer asked if he agreed that the terrorist attack on 9/11 was "*impolite*" and "*bad manners*"! The guy actually compared it to Ali G's irreverent interview of Chomsky! Poor Chomsky had to sit through a whole interview with this dipshit. He was like, "I don't see any analogy between 9/11 and Ali G's interview of me. 'Bad manners' is the wrong category. Would you say that the Holocaust was 'bad manners'?" And the interviewer went off on an incoherent spiel about language. How is this sort of stupidity possible?

It's the same with many people who oppose healthcare reform. Watch the videos of the town hall debates. The people cannot be reasoned with. That's scary. Comparing Obama to Hitler because he wants to extend health coverage. What planet do these people live on? All you can do is what Barney Frank did: refuse to have a conversation with them. "Talking to you, ma'am," he said, "would be like trying to have a conversation with a dining room table. I have no interest in doing it."

In the 1960s, the AFL-CIO apparently devoted *two to three percent* of its total income to recruitment campaigns, while 25% was devoted to "international affairs," i.e. to supporting the government's imperialist adventures. Moreover, "as the 1980s would again show with a new eruption of inter-union rivalries, it was often more 'profitable' for large established unions to raid other unions for new members rather than invest in costly organizing campaigns whose fruits might accrue to other unions."

In the 1950s, about a third of private-sector workers were unionized. Now, 7% are. Hopefully Richard Trumka, the new president of the AFL-CIO, will help turn things around. He seems to have fire in his belly.

Ralph Nader, quoting his father, referring to the government's repeated rescues of the economy and large corporations: "Why will capitalism always survive? Because it'll always make socialism save it." Or, as Chomsky says, "*really existing* free market theory," as opposed to the fantasies espoused by economists, is: "free markets are fine for *you* but not for *me*." Market discipline for you, but subsidies and bailouts for me.

Things started getting worse for the labor movement in the late '70s. Deindustrialization, deregulation, and the opening of the economy to foreign imports were some of the causes. But also, "in retrospect it can be seen that the postwar defeat of Southern labor organization (and, correlatively, the failure of the labor movement to become a civil rights movement) was the Achilles heel of American unionism. The right-to-work states have allowed American capital a unique internal mobility, leaving a vast economic space for the evolution of 'Southern strategies' and the crystallization of new non-union sectors." A whole region of the country was and is mostly non-union, more so even than the rest of the country.

I'm going to start regularly reading articles on the web about labor developments, from *The Nation*'s and *Monthly Review*'s archived articles (and *Z Magazine*'s, etc.) to those in daily newspapers. The unfortunate thing about immersing myself in current events is that I can't engage with the information as I do with philosophy and psychology (in my journal); I can only stuff my head with data. I can't be creative. But it's important data nonetheless, and it's true I'm learning how the world works.

Not only labor. Also Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, etc. Online magazines are full of information I should take advantage of.

John Bellamy Foster has a good article on dependency theory ("the development of underdevelopment"). He notes that classical Marxism tended to assume that the rest of the world would follow, more or less, the capitalist path traversed by Western Europe, but then he observes that "Marx himself in other historical contexts was to point to divergent paths of development. In *Capital* he wrote that 'a new and international division of labor springs up [under industrial capitalism], and it converts one part of the globe into a chiefly agricultural field of production for supplying the other part, which remains a pre-eminently industrial field.' In his writings of the 1860s and after he discussed what we would now call conditions of dependency imposed on nations such as Ireland and India."

According to the Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch, writing in the 1950s, "Underdeveloped countries were bound to an international division of labor where they exported low-value primary commodities and imported high-value manufactured goods, placing them at a structural disadvantage. Underdevelopment, it was argued, was not the same as original undevelopment, i.e., the mere absence of development." Prebisch's view is substantially the same as Marx's, according to which India, for example, exported the raw material of cotton to England, thus stimulating the latter's industrial revolution, and then imported the finished goods at prices so cheap that Indian producers couldn't compete.

Paul Baran was one of the founders of dependency theory. Contrary to bourgeois ideology, which explained underdevelopment as due to a lack of capital and know-how and an excess of population, Baran invoked the concept of economic surplus, i.e. the difference between output and consumption in a given economy. He distinguished between actual and potential economic surplus. "The actual economic surplus was 'the difference between society's actual current output and its actual current consumption.' This was the surplus or savings as usually treated in economic theory. In underdeveloped countries the actual realized surplus in this sense was typically quite small, leading to notions of a shortage of capital, or a chronic lack of surplus (or savings) for investment."

In contrast, potential economic surplus is "the difference between the output that *could* be produced in a given natural and technological environment with the help of employable productive resources and what might be regarded as essential consumption." The potential surplus in underdeveloped economies is much higher than the actual surplus.

> The entire distorted class structure that emerged [in underdeveloped societies] was prone to waste: luxury consumption by the wealthy coupled with loss of output and misallocation of surplus due to the irrational and wasteful organization of production and chronic unemployment. The state apparatus was often distorted by these developments, reflecting the parasitical class relations. "What results," Baran stated, "is a political and social coalition of wealthy compradors, powerful monopolists and large landowners dedicated to the defense of the existing feudal-mercantile order." The ruling elements in the underdeveloped countries tended to invest large parts of the surplus at their disposal abroad "as hedges against the depreciation of the domestic currency or as nest eggs assuring their owners of suitable retreats in the case of social and political upheavals at home." The mobilization of the surplus for new investment was thus typically blocked at every turn, leading to dismal economic performance and the expansion of poverty in a vicious circle. "Just as investment," Baran wrote, "tends to become self-propelling, so lack of investment tends to become self-perpetuating."

But even when foreign capitalists reinvested profits in the country, the investments were usually not very helpful, being organized around the export of primary commodities. This "tended to weaken rather than strengthen the internal development linkages of the underdeveloped country, thus impeding any possible 'investment snowball effect.'" These countries, therefore, had very undeveloped internal markets.

Sometimes the oppressed people tried to take matters into their own hands, by elevating governments that endeavored to divert the potential surplus to social and economic development. But in these cases, the U.S. covertly or overtly intervened to restore a regime friendly to the needs of foreign capital. Moreover, U.S.-supported regimes wasted huge surpluses on military expenditure.

Foster claims, plausibly, that the gap between the center and the periphery has actually increased since Baran's day (with some notable exceptions, a few countries that haven't followed the neoliberal model of development).

Women's greatest strength is their weak-ness. It naturally gives them power over men.

Reading James Joll's *The Origins of the First World War* for a class. Also, Carl Kaestle's *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860*.

A. J. Muste, "revolutionary pacifist" from World War I to Vietnam. I read this on Wikipedia: "At the end of his life, Muste took a leadership role in the movement against the Vietnam War. Fellow peace activist Andrea Ayvazian tells of Muste standing outside the White House every night during the Viet Nam War, holding a candle, regardless of whether it was raining or not. One evening, a reporter approached him and asked if he really thought that by standing outside the White House holding a candle night after night, he would change the policies of the country, to which Muste replied: 'Oh, you've got it all wrong. I'm not doing this to change the country. I do it so the country won't change me.'" Now *that's* a human being. [Well, maybe Chomsky's perspective is better: Muste's action there was entirely self-serving and not especially admirable. "The Vietnamese didn't give a damn if he saved his soul," as Chomsky later said in an email to me.]

What I wrote weeks ago was right: people identify with or sympathize with or hate or 'invest emotional energy in' fictive concepts like nations or races or religious groups, and this makes possible the noblest and the basest behavior. A nation is an imaginary entity. So is a race. It's a kind of infantilism to treat these things as real existents (as patriots do, anti-Semites do, etc.). It's misleading to say, "The United States went to war against Vietnam." This is an unscientific way of talking. Neither entity exists. What happened was that certain elites in one part of the world sent a mass of men to kill other men who were blocking the elite's goals…and so on. Less unreal than talk about countries is talk about classes, since at least the people in one class share material conditions and interests opposed to those in another class. The citizens of a "country," by contrast, have little in common besides their language (and not always even that)—and other such meaningless similarities as having to follow the same set of laws, etc. Merely a series of *formal* similarities, as opposed to real commonalities of interests.

But because humans have the capacity to intellectually subsume themselves under a concept which is supposed to denote a community—thus treating themselves as part of this (usually very 'forced' or abstract and unreal) community which functions as confirming an aspect of their sense of self—they treat the community as a real thing with real interests, sort of an extension of themselves. What often results is behavior that would look totally irrational to an observer from another planet.

Speaking of which:

> In 1906 there occurred a famous episode that seemed to demonstrate in farcical terms the position of the military in German society. An elderly ex-convict dressed up in a uniform of a captain of the 1st Foot Guards, ordered some soldiers coming out of the military swimming baths "by command of the All-highest" to follow him and arrested the mayor and the treasurer of a small town on the outskirts of Berlin, making off with the petty cash and leaving the bewildered soldiers in occupation of the town hall for several hours.

Classic. He was wearing a uniform.

As for World War I, if you want to sum up its origins in one word it's *nationalism*. European culture was thick with it, a virulent nationalism. Germany, Austria-Hungary, Serbia, Russia, France, even Britain suffered from this neurosis, this obsession with national honor and greatness and destiny. The leaders didn't all want a war, certainly not a general European war, and *definitely* not the war they got. But they were influenced by the cultural atmosphere: they felt that to renege on their treaty obligations would sully their country's honor in the eyes of the world, and in any case they had known for years that a war of some sort was inevitable. Too many clashing national "destinies," too many imperialistic schemes of world-domination. Too many arms races, too much militarism, too many imperialistic quarrels that could erupt any day into a full-scale war, and *would* erupt eventually. Everyone knew it. It was only a matter of when and where. It didn't have to happen when it did, but the odds were overwhelming that it would happen sometime soon. Culture and politics were just so *tense* back then, with politicians worried about socialists, worried about revolution, worried about the designs of neighboring countries, doing everything they could to foster national unity. Why? So that the elites could remain in power and increase their power. The continent was saturated with nationalistic propaganda, most of it from the initiative of the ruling classes. Anything to draw people's attention away from *class!* It's all about manufacturing consent: patriotic or nationalistic indoctrination is an excellent means toward that end. The same tricks are still being used today, and have always been used. It's true that Marxism in itself doesn't account for the emotional power of the appeal to the nation, but it does explain why power-structures constantly propagate national myths, and why patriotic wars etc. are enormously useful to the elite.

In addition, though, there was the organic nationalism among the oppressed ethnicities, in particular the South Slavs in Austria-Hungary (Serbs, Croats, etc.), who were creating unrest. It was they who assassinated Franz Ferdinand. The Austrians thought this was a good opportunity to suppress the Serbian troubles once and for all, which were threatening the stability of the empire, so they declared war on Serbia (whose government they accused of aiding the assassins). If they could crush Serbia, hopefully they could put an end to the agitation of the Serbs, Croats and others in the south of Hungary. So you see that nationalism wasn't only a tool of the Great Powers; it was also one of the immediate 'problems' that led to the war. It was in fact Serbian nationalism that was the direct cause of the war (through the killing of the Archduke). In short, nationalism created the culture that led to war, was itself the direct cause of war, and was propagandistically used by the Great Powers as a means of settling the imperial conflicts that had made inevitable a general European war. And so it was reflected in the anti-German provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. But this is precisely why the Treaty was bound to fail: far from addressing the main problem, viz. the prevalence of nationalist sentiment, it presupposed it and indeed intensified it. Hence the need for a second war to eradicate the disease once and for all—as was achieved in the late 1940s, when Europe finally set aside its past prejudices and worked together to rebuild itself on a peaceful, cosmopolitan, liberal-democratic basis. Not until nationalism had led to a truly apocalyptic catastrophe could it be transcended, i.e. understood as suicidal. Evidently World War I wasn't apocalyptic enough; another war was needed to drive home the point. In the '20s and '30s capitalism was still immature, too tied to the nation-state, not yet sufficiently (intensively and extensively) globalized. Now that countries' economies are much more interlinked, such a huge nationalistic war is almost inconceivable.

[…]

Nevertheless, it is capitalism that led to imperialism and nationalism. Industry and finance exerted considerable pressure on their governments to expand the country's sphere of influence in the world, so as to realize greater profits. Imperialism grew directly out of the expansionist tendencies of capitalism; and nationalism was a corollary of imperialism. For the latter was 'justified' to the population through nationalist propaganda, and besides, the idea of world empire and national greatness was very exciting to broad sectors of the population. Conversely, the imperialism of the Great Powers gave birth to organic nationalist movements among exploited and oppressed ethnicities, like the Slavs in the Balkans, who thus fought back against imperialism, creating extra conflicts. So, in some ways, imperialism had causal and logical priority over nationalism—and imperialism was a capitalist phenomenon. Thus, despite

appearances, capitalism gave birth to nationalism. But, again, it was a somewhat immature capitalism, in which capital was not as globalized or integrated as it would become much later. It still relied on national boundaries; it relied on governments to conquer foreign territories for it and administer them to its advantage.

So I guess I was wrong, or it was superficial, to attribute the war to nationalism. Rather, it should be attributed to imperialism, hence capitalism. Lenin was right. Marxism can explain nationalism after all.

No doubt this is all very complicated, and economic considerations were not necessarily the primary motives for the leaders' decision to go to war. But the dynamism and expansionism of capitalism in combination with the partial, or more than partial, reliance of capital on the patronage of its government led to an expansionist nationalism, i.e. imperialism,[1] which colored the whole cultural atmosphere and made it seem an end in itself to colonize foreign territories and acquire spheres of influence—or, to be precise, not an end in itself but something to be pursued for the sake of national prestige (and of course wealth)—which in turn, directly and indirectly, made a confrontation between the Great Powers inevitable. In a continent as dense with countries as Europe, the ideology and practice of political and economic expansionism was going to cause a collision sooner or later. A collective collision.

"The Marxist theorists who insisted that war was inherent in the nature of capitalism and that the growing crisis of capitalism would lead to war envisaged that this war would result from the imperial rivalries caused by the capitalists' need to maintain their profits by constantly finding new fields for investment, new sources of raw materials and cheap labor and new markets." Non-Marxist historians often deny that the politicians had economic motives in mind when they declared war. But what their conscious motives were is an uninteresting and perhaps unanswerable question. Maybe Nicholas II had personal insecurities of some sort, or he wanted to erase the terrible memory of the Russo-Japanese war… Who cares? Maybe some policymakers thought they were defending democracy. The important point is that the aforementioned political-economic structures and imperatives led to the situation that made war possible, in fact inevitable (given the political conditions of fin-de-siècle Europe—which were themselves, of course, influenced by the economic conditions).

Most European politicians in 1914 thought the war would last a few months at most, or a few weeks. Here's Friedrich Engels in 1887, referring to the future war:

> Eight to ten million soldiers will swallow each other up and in so doing eat all Europe more bare than any swarm of locusts. The devastation of the Thirty Years War compressed into the space of three or four years and extending over the whole continent; famine, sickness, want, brutalizing the army and the mass of the population; irrevocable confusion of our artificial structure of trade, industry and credit, ending in general bankruptcy; collapse of the old states and their traditional statecraft, so that crowns will roll by dozens in the gutter and no one will be found to pick them up; it is absolutely impossible to predict where it will all end and who will emerge from the struggle as victor. Only one result is absolutely certain: general exhaustion and the establishment of the conditions for the final victory of the working class.

He may have been right: the conditions were established. Unfortunately the workers failed to take advantage of them.

By the way, Engels was even right about the number of deaths: 9.7 million soldiers were killed.

The funny thing about time-travel is that even if, for the sake of argument, it's possible, or even if it *happens* some time in the future, so that someone goes back to change the past, what has happened has already happened and isn't going to be changed. It's not as if we can hope that a future time-traveler will

[1] Actually, those two factors don't entirely explain the brutal nationalistic form that imperialism took back then, since the two factors exist even now whereas virulent nationalism doesn't (in the West). But a kind of imperialism remains, in a somewhat different form than before.

return to the 1930s and kill Hitler, because the past is finished. It's logically impossible for the past to change. By definition, and not only by definition, it can't be altered. Can it be *observed*, or *returned to* in some way? Logical considerations would seem to make this, too, impossible. On the other hand, I've heard that some physicists think they're on the verge of time-travel on a subatomic level (to an instant immediately prior to the present). But they're probably kidding themselves.

Actually, in a way it's almost a truism to say that the war was ultimately due to capitalist imperialism and colonialism, because such imperialism is simply the specific form that economic and political expansionism took at that moment in history—and expansionism, or the desire to maintain and augment economic/geopolitical power, is essentially the cause of nearly all wars, at least indirectly. The conquests of the Hittites, the Persian wars against Greece, the Peloponnesian wars, the Chinese wars in the age before the Han dynasty, all the wars in the aftermath of Alexander's conquests, the innumerable Roman wars against Asia and the barbarians, most of the wars of medieval Europe, the Spanish conquests of Latin America, the American wars against the Indians, most of the imperial conflicts of early modern Europe, the American Civil War (especially from the perspective of the Confederacy), etc.—all these conflicts had to do with the pressure to increase or at least maintain economic power, the control over resources and "national interests." The main relevant difference between capitalism and prior modes of production is the *increased* expansionism, dynamism, competitiveness, imperialism, i.e. the greater opportunities and pressures and incentives toward war (be it in "colonies" or wherever). Mature, liberal-democratic capitalism has evolved means of maintaining a degree of stability and at least nominal peace—but you have only to look at the two Iraq wars, indeed the foreign policy of the U.S. all through the 20th century, to see that powerful imperialistic pressures (toward the control of resources and markets) remain. Capital is still tied to the nation-state: governments are still agents of the capital that has its home in their country, as they were a hundred years ago, and so they're still prone to violence and war.

I read the UN Charter. Among the noblest documents in history. Also perused the Geneva Conventions, thus confirming to myself that the U.S. has committed innumerable war crimes over the years.

When people argue that the interests of capital are essentially peaceful (so that it can continue its quest for profit unhindered by war), and draw un-Marxist conclusions from this supposed fact, they misunderstand the nature of capital. Yes, it has an interest in peace, but it also has an interest in violence, because violence is useful for extracting surplus-value and profit, for suppressing dissent, for spreading the dominion of capital around the world. And while in an ideal world capital would operate in peace on the basis of the total suppression of workers' rights, in practice violence is necessary to sustain the rule of capital. So the usefulness of violence trumps the usefulness of peace.

What happened after World War II was in fact the reorganization and reconsolidation of the forces of violence into a more effective and efficient system, a system of *multinational military integration* (as Mike Davis says)—through NATO, etc.—which would ensure that military violence was never again suicidally directed at "enemy" imperialist governments but instead at recalcitrant Third World nations or rebellions against imperialism, including countries that looked like they might succumb to Communism. After World War I, Western capitalism was not yet 'bourgeoisified' enough to permit the eradication of ultra-nationalism in the West; after World War II it was, or was in a condition to become so.[1] Reactionary nationalism had been utterly discredited, along with the aristocracy and everything remotely pre-capitalist. The evolution of capitalism, therefore, had finally reached the point at which the most important issue was seen to be the purely economic one of *the maintenance of capitalism*—not extra-economic goals like national glory or racial domination—a goal which, it was finally understood, could be achieved only in a liberal-democratic order [in the advanced capitalist core].

So, as I wrote years ago, the two world wars can be interpreted as stages, or symptoms, of Europe's laborious transition from pre-capitalism to capitalism. They resulted from the 'fusion' of an emerging

[1] That is to say, around the time of World War I Europe still had plenty of pre-capitalist elements, including a backward peasantry, a militaristic and race-besotted aristocracy, and, in places, a monarchical-absolutist ethos. After World War II these had been effectively destroyed. What remained was capital and labor.

capitalism and imperialism with a declining absolutist and aristocratic order, one of the effects of which fusion was the making of nationalism into a *reactionary* force,[1] which was intermingled with the counter-revolutionary obsession with race.

Thus, the orthodox Marxist explanation of World War I is only partly right. Ironically, it commits the quintessentially 'bourgeois' sin of abstracting from social structures, namely the structures of pre-capitalism that still existed in 1914—the structures that helped engender the (from the perspective of capital) highly irresponsible sin of engaging fellow capitalist elites in a massive suicidal war. Capital itself is most interested in waging violence only against exploitable workers or revolutionary movements, etc., less so against other capitalist nations—because what advantage can thereby accrue to capital?[2]

Davis makes a good point (unrelated to the foregoing):

> [After World War II], the Yankee legions on the Elbe and along the DMZ, together with the nuclear umbrellas that protect them, made it possible for the European and Japanese economies to provide, respectively, high social-welfare overheads to integrate labor, and vast trade and agricultural subsidies to preserve international competitiveness… In other words, the major allies, with the signal exception of Britain and its high per capita military outlays, have reaped the social-conformist fruits of militarism without having to pay the real market price.

When the government doesn't have to spend exorbitant sums of money on the military, workers and the underprivileged are, not surprisingly, much better off than they would be otherwise.

Interesting: "The old Gordian knot of capitalism and democracy in continental Europe was finally cut [after World War II] by the creation of a new, U.S.-sponsored political current: Christian Democracy. The contribution of Christian Democracy to the consolidation of an Atlantic capitalist order cannot be exaggerated." Equally important, though, was the U.S.-led campaign against not only Communists but "all really broad and inclusive forms of working-class unity." In Germany, Communists and left-Social Democrats were purged from elected positions and strikes were forbidden. The AFL and later the CIO assisted the U.S. government in its subversion of European trade union solidarity.

Another part of the postwar equation is that American institutions guided Europe's economic development away from cartelism and colonialism to a Fordist, consumerist, Americanized capitalism within an integrated European domestic market. The old protectionism- and heavy-industry-centered European order was cast aside, along with traditional 'Closed Door' colonialism. (And nationalism!)

The old problem of underconsumption (and overproduction), i.e. of insufficient aggregate demand (due to meager wages), which played a role in bringing on the Great Depression, was solved by the successes of the labor movements in the 1930s and subsequently, in particular, the successes of postwar collective bargaining, which ensured a relatively high level of real wages, in fact a more or less continuous increase in wages until the 1970s. Wrote one author in 1978, "The growth of the real wage has for more than a decade ceased to be the principal motor of private consumption, which has instead come to depend upon demographic growth and, for each family, on indirect and secondary sources of income, including part-time work and the black market." Suggestive observation.

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[1] In itself, nationalism is neither revolutionary nor counter-revolutionary. During the French Revolution and the events of 1848 it was revolutionary; in the 1920s and '30s it was counter-revolutionary, an obstacle to progress.

[2] [The obvious rejoinder is that particular sectors of capital gain from investing in technologies of destruction, whatever countries they end up being used against. Also, I was forgetting or unaware of Bukharin's point that *intrinsic to capitalism is the nationalization of capital*, not only the internationalization of capital. Nationalizing and centralizing dynamics engender tendencies of inter-imperialist conflict, which can either break out into war or can be contained by contrary "internationalizing" tendencies, as in the last 80 years. The world wars were products of both the essential tendencies of capitalism and "the persistence of the old regime" in that era—as Arno Mayer argued.]

Reading Gar Alperovitz's *America Beyond Capitalism: Reclaiming Our Wealth, Our Liberty, and Our Democracy* (2005). I heard Chomsky mention it in an interview. It's given me an idea for my Masters thesis: researching workers' ownership of firms.

I want to clarify the nature of American conservatism once and for all. All the different kinds. There's the libertarian version: the Chicago school of economics, Robert Nozick, etc. In its purest form, this is the opposite of fascism; in fact, it's but an [incoherent] capitalistic form of anarchism or left-Marxist utopianism. No state (or a minimal one), no interference with the individual, no coercion at all. It emphasizes the supposed economic and moral virtues of private enterprise. Secondly, there's traditionalism. Family values, patriarchy, religion, "morality," law and order. It intersects with a bastardized kind of libertarianism (as I wrote months ago), because many Americans have come to associate government with an undermining of tradition, an intrusion into the family, an activist liberalism, taxation and a redistribution of income to blacks, immigrants and the poor—i.e., the heathens, the enemies of patriarchal and religious authority, the destroyers of social order, the corrupting Other. These conservatives, despite their supposed semi-libertarianism, are not far removed from fascism: they would welcome a state that imposed their values on the population, that rolled back progress.

Thirdly, there are the neocons. These people are neither libertarians nor traditionalists, although they share the latters' nationalism, obsession with Americanism. They are in fact merely latter-day nationalists, statists and imperialists, advocating imperialism in the name of "democracy." They're not implacably opposed to government interference in the economy, especially when it benefits big business. Nor are they committed to small government. Cheney is the perfect example.

And then there are the shallow, selfish people who just want low taxes, who don't care about helping others, who don't really have an ideology but just want to be left alone. They're pale reflections of both the traditionalists and the libertarians. There are also the businessmen whose only ideology is that government shouldn't be involved in the economy except when it benefits them, and who agree with the apologists for private enterprise that social welfare is bad because it encourages laziness and is un-capitalistic. Government itself is a necessary evil—an evil because it's inefficient, bureaucratic, un-capitalistic. These people are intellectually diluted versions of the first category above. They believe that anything capitalist is more or less an end in itself.

Despite all these variations, I was right to put conservatism on the side of authority, since in practice, all these ideologies support and defend authority in one way or another. While they claim to be opposed to governmental authority, their opposition is actually in the name (or to the advantage) of a more insidious and destructive sort of authority: either *capital* or *"tradition"* (or, confusedly, both). But it's wrong to equate the "authoritarian personality" with the whole spectrum of American conservatism. It mainly applies to the semi-fascist traditionalists and some neocons. Doubtless some people on the left exemplify it also, but to the extent that they do, they're betraying leftist ideals.

In yet another sense, I am actually one of the truest conservatives around. I am an arch-traditionalist: I love old classical music, old literature, old art, old Enlightenment ideals of truth, rationality, freedom, community, all-encompassing knowledge. The ideal of the well-rounded person, the universal genius, but most importantly old values like compassion, simple morality, human dignity, humanism, philosophical wonder. I resent modern technology for its anti-humanist implications. Chomsky, by the way, has said the same thing about himself: he's exceptionally traditional.

Reading a lot of journal articles on workers' ownership and cooperatives. (And economics in general.) For example, Karen Ann Faulk's "*If They Touch One of Us, They Touch All of Us*: Cooperativism as a Counterlogic to Neoliberal Capitalism" (2008), about the experience of some hotel-workers in Argentina. Hoyt N. Wheeler's "Producers of the World Unite! A Return of Reformist Unionism?" (2004). Cecile G. Betit's "Carris Companies' Practice of Employee Governance" (2002). Rousseu and Shperling's "Pieces of the Action: Ownership and the Changing Employment Relationship" (2003). Elizabeth A. Hoffmann's "Confrontations and Compromise: Dispute Resolution at a Worker Cooperative Coal Mine" (2001). Takis Fotopoulos's "The myths about the economic crisis, the reformist Left and economic democracy" (2008).

From Shperling's article, a respectable non-Marxist formulation of the idea of surplus-value: "The traditional source of entrepreneurial wealth is the premium employees willingly pay for a guaranteed wage. This wealth premium is the difference between the worker's actual economic contribution to the firm and the compensation he or she receives." But later we have this statement: "To successfully start new firms or enhance growth in existing ones, workers must generate value greater than their current compensation." The emphasis here on *starting* and *growth* suggests that Shperling doesn't understand the general applicability of the theory of surplus-value.

Associative Democracy: New Forms of Economic and Social Governance (1994), by Paul Hirst. Much of *Making Mondragon: The Growth and Dynamics of the Worker Cooperative Complex* (1988), by William Foote Whyte. Most of *Governing the Firm: Workers' Control in Theory and Practice* (2003), by Gregory K. Dow. *The Cooperative Movement: Globalization from Below* (2007), by Richard C. Williams. Parts of *Fundamentals of the Stock Market* (2000), by B. O'Neill Wyss. Also reading internet articles on finance. I'm tired of ignorance. The subject-matter is dry, but learning about it is exciting.

This sentence (from the *Monthly Review*) basically sums it up: "When economic stagnation struck most of the world's advanced capitalist economies, beginning in the mid-1970s, capital went on the offensive, quickly understanding that the best way to maintain and increase profit margins in a period of slow and sporadic economic growth was to cut labor costs." As a result, "governments and global lending agencies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund began to implement policies that made workers increasingly insecure." That's the last thirty years right there. And the culmination was the Great Recession we're experiencing. *Finally* neoliberalism is on its way out.[1]

Simplifying somewhat, true statements about humans are (directly or indirectly) a function either of their biology or of the social structures, conventions, ideologies and so on that have molded individuals. But so-called moral truths can be justified by neither. Consider biology: no researcher has ever learned by studying DNA that it's wrong to murder. Likewise, it's ridiculous to say that given our biological constitution, or our patterns of behavior, humans have an inalienable right to freedom. So moral truths are not biological or "natural." But they can't be conventional either—their truth can't result from the fact that society is organized in a particular way. Why? Because that's as absurd as arguing for them on the basis of biology. Moreover, it actually contradicts the essence of moral truths: it means they can't be "absolute" or anything like natural laws, but are relative, changeable, like society itself. –Thus, to talk about moral truths is to not know what one is talking about, since they can be neither 'biological' nor (by definition) merely conventional—but these are the only two options.

In another sense, though, a non-normative sense, moral truths are a function of *both* biology and social organization: our genetic endowment predisposes us to (valorize) compassion, cooperation, respect for others, and the organization of our society results in our belief that particular rules are moral absolutes.

So the proper way to conceptualize ethics is to think of its practitioners as simply trying to find the best way to frame the normative dimension of human relations. Not as trying to find the "truth."

I should say, however, as I've said repeatedly, that, given certain basic values and assumptions, there *are* moral absolutes. If you reject the former, or somehow qualify your commitment to them, it's perfectly rational to reject the latter.

I'm studying for the GRE again; taking the test at the end of October.

John Aubrey Douglass's *The California Idea and American Higher Education: 1850 to the 1960 Master Plan* (2000). Parts of Fritz Fischer's massive *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (1966), which gives the very strong impression that Germany was mainly responsible for the war.

Irony #973.— It's perverse that selling yourself as a killing-machine to certain capitalist power-structures that send you across the world to slaughter people you don't know for the sake of the profits of

[1] [Wow. Naïveté.]

people you don't know—whose minions indoctrinate you into complete ignorance of what exactly it is you're doing—is considered praiseworthy, in fact heroic.

What do [some] women want? Vicarious confidence. They want a man in whose confidence they can bask.

Karl Marx once said, "After all, we can forgive Christianity much because it taught us to love children." Almost unbelievably, the factual part of that statement is right. Christianity did have such an effect on the Western world. Throughout antiquity, children had had little or no value. In Rome, fathers had absolute authority over their children: they were legally permitted to kill them for any reason, even on a whim. Infanticides, as you know, were rife all over the Mediterranean (and, I suspect, all over the world). Children were regularly sold into slavery. I can't think of any references in classical literature to the value of children. That's far from true, though, of Buddhist literature. And of Christian literature. From the Gospels on, Christians held children up as an earthly ideal. This attitude has been revealed in Christians' charitable endeavors throughout the centuries.

If all we knew about antiquity was that it didn't respect children, we'd know that it was a horrible, inhuman era. Aside from art and nature, the world contains nothing more valuable than children.

Concentration of power and resources has, from the very beginning, been the overwhelming source of the world's ills. (Not religion, as Dawkins et al. would have you believe.) Abolishing it is the sine qua non for establishing a humane society. –Yes, it *is* that simple. All the sophisticated analyses of scholars and economists and philosophers boil down to the fact that it's imperative to abolish the concentration of wealth, and therewith the centralization of power.

Jackson, good ol' Jackson, asked me on Facebook what I thought about Habermas and his "cognitive interests." I haven't addressed Habermas much in this journal, so I'll put my answer here: "I don't know much about Habermas, but I've always found him to be a more challenging and sophisticated thinker than his postmodernist competitors, like Foucault. The Marxist romantic in me likes his 'systematic' ambitions. But regarding his tripartite division of cognitive interests, it strikes me as a little simplistic, artificial. Any such classification of mental activity is bound to fail, I think, just because it's 'forced' and 'false' to draw boundaries between different kinds of activities of the intellect. You know, I'm always suspicious of tidy little schemas like Kant's twelve categories or Habermas's "technical, practical and emancipatory." They can be useful and illuminating and may lead to fruitful research, but ultimately they gloss over inconvenient details, they make everything too tidy—they're merely symptoms of the human desire to systematize everything (and to systematize usually means to simplify)."

Durkheim's conception of democracy as communication. (Similar to Habermas', by the way.) De-emphasizing the 'representation' aspect, emphasizing the 'communication between state and society' aspect. Coordination, constant communication. "The state is an organ for social coordination, not a mere medium for registration of the wills of social majorities." Closer to corporatism than to the atomism of classical representative democracy. Associative democracy rejects the elitist corporatism but accepts the centrality of *communication* (and also the necessity of political representatives).

Some obvious points from Hirst's book:

> The idea of a market society is a virtual impossibility. Social relations cannot be sustained by buying and selling alone, even if we assume an elementary non-commercial solidarity in the natural affinity between the members of the family. …The morality can only work in a context of social institutions that supply it with a distinctive morality for its participants. Even if we assume near-perfect competition and reasonably available market information, we find that the market requires, even with public regulation, strongly moral and self-denying individuals if it is to be equitable. Honesty, fair-dealing and a respect for law are essential to an efficient and impersonal market, but they are not supplied by it and

> cannot be bought at any price. They are a gift from society and its moral order… The market relies on the non-market motivations, beliefs and behaviors of individuals.
>
> …A market economy can function well if it is embedded in a society that is complementary to the market principle, but, in being complementary, uses non-market calculations and forms of resource allocation. In particular, such a society is cohesive enough and collaborative enough to judge market performance substantively, that is, the market system will be expected to produce acceptable levels of employment, investment and a suitable composition of output. If it does not, social actors will intervene to correct it, and provide the appropriate means of regulation and inputs to achieve the substantive outcome desired. The market system is thus a viable economic mechanism in the right kind of social context.

Fotopoulos notes that the market is efficient *given a particular distribution of income*. That's what economists always say: given a distribution of income (and perfect competition), the market allocates resources Pareto-efficiently. But the whole point is that income is never distributed equally. So a few people get everything they want and much, much more, while the majority can't even get what they need because their incomes aren't high enough. Therefore, resources aren't distributed rationally, if by 'rationally' you mean that everyone gets what he needs first and only then starts to acquire luxuries.

Market failures in fact occur constantly. They're *everywhere*, from pollution to the existence of widespread poverty to a lack of choice in various aspects of life. As Chomsky says, the market can give you the option to buy a Ford or a Toyota, but it can't provide you with a subway or any kind of public transportation system—which people overwhelmingly desire. Only a government can provide you with that. Democratic governments are more efficient, more responsive to the public's desires, than markets, because (ideally) they aren't attuned to the accident of income.

October

Part of an email from my beloved Aniela:

> So, shortly about my last trip. It was my first time when I was in Israel and I have to admit that it's amazing place but a little scary at the same time. When I was entering Israel I felt like I'm in Europe. Ok, almost like in Europe because the first what I saw was guns! A lot of guns and a lot of soldiers (very young people) everywhere! Do you know than the army is obligatory to everyone (boys and girls) who is 16 years old? It's frightening! In a crowded restaurant I had to ask a man to move his gun and after it I could sit in the seat beside him.
>
> I visited Jerusalem during the Jewish New Year. Of course I was impressed by the Wailing Wall. It must be very interesting when you see small groups of Jewish men with long braids and black yarmulkes read prayers in a rapid, muttering rhythm. The crevices were stuffed with bits of folded paper, all prayers, some possibly decades old. But I was given no peace. When I was watching Jewish people walking into Arab quarter I felt something like high tension. They are observe each others like boxers before boxing match. First time in my life I saw the destructive power of religion! Any form of dialogue will be never possible! People need bombs because of religious! Such a strange world!
>
> I visited Bethlehem and Jericho too. The situation here is far more tense and dramatic than I expected! The Israeli - Palestinian conflict will be forever! No doubt! And the word 'conflict' it's not strong enough to describe this situation. Fear and hate sit on every corner! They live in a climate of unrelenting fear, ever-increasing anti-Semitism and mutual

> suspicion. But on the other hand I'm attracted to some kind of apocalyptic culture. I want to go back to Israel this year!
>
> I went to Jordan to visit Petra. Absolutely amazing place! Petra itself is gorgeous, awe-inspiring, and well worth the visit. Unfortunately I didn't make any pictures because I left the camera in my apartment in Egypt but I want to see it again!
>
> […]

When the world has ten billion people, what is economic activity going to look like?? This is the question that drives me. I sit in my room trying to imagine what the global economy will look like. Much of the world, no doubt, will be in utter chaos, with famines, starvation, refugee-movements, depleted resources. Other parts of the world will be relatively prosperous, though overpopulated. Will capitalism still be hegemonic, or will cooperativism, or some other form of socialism, predominate? There will surely be a number of little wars going on in impoverished areas (e.g. much of Africa), which will kill off a significant proportion of the population.

Richard Williams's book is informative. The enormous success of cooperatives is the world's best-kept secret. I had no idea of their extent and influence until reading this book.

Prima facie, the arguments of economic liberals make sense. For example, liberalizing trade, eliminating tariffs, sounds like a good idea because of comparative advantage. Initially the liberalization of trade might result in hardship for many people, but eventually the capital of the two countries will shift to those sectors in which it is most profitable—i.e., in which production is most efficient—thus resulting in benefits for both countries, and for everyone in them. Prices will decrease through competition, real incomes will rise. Labor will shift to those sectors in which it is most in demand. Et cetera. You can finesse the argument however you want.

Unfortunately, the real world is messy. Such assumptions as perfect competition, perfect access to information, perfect flexibility in labor-markets, a fairly equal distribution of capital, equal access to political power (so that no one can cheat)—are invalid. In practice, the mega-corporations undersell the small local enterprises and drive them out of business. Local industry has no chance. (This is why virtually every industrialized country started off with high tariffs and a degree of state sponsorship, to protect its infant industries.) American corporations, moreover, have inordinate political power, so that they can retain government subsidies while forcing their competitors not to have them. This is what happened with NAFTA: corporate corn farms continued to be subsidized by the U.S. government, while Mexico wasn't allowed to subsidize its own corn growers, who consequently went out of business and had to become unskilled laborers, often emigrating to the U.S. Additionally, whatever income gains do occur for Mexicans go disproportionately to wealthy investors (who tend to siphon their profits off to the already-developed economies), unless a strong labor movement exists. Instead of the nation's becoming wealthier as a whole, it might well become immiserized. Hence the increased disparity between rich and poor countries over the last two decades.

Besides, the very concept of comparative advantage has lost most of its applicability in today's world. It's outdated (with the exception of a few sectors).

When adjudicating between models of the economy, for example the neoclassical vs. the Marxist, the final test has to be how closely they mirror the real world. How well can they explain things that are really happening? The neoclassical model has great logical force, it is mathematically elegant, but ultimately it is less adequate than the Marxist because it does a worse job of explaining reality. Its very starting-point is wrong: it starts from the market, from an abstractly idealized market, when it should start from what happens in the sphere of production, which is the real heart of capitalism. Even its *definition* of capitalism differs from Marx's, emphasizing the "free market" etc. rather than "wage-labor vs. ownership of capital." Which assumption seems more realistic to you?

Reading John Keegan's *The First World War*, a detailed military history. Other books too.

To sum up.— The problem with people is that we tend to judge someone's worth on the basis of his intelligence and confidence, not on the basis of his thoughtfulness and how he treats people. That makes sense from an evolutionary perspective but not an ethical one.

Upside-down.— People love the servants of power, the policemen and soldiers, for supposedly giving us our freedoms and protecting them, while they hate the radicals, the socialists, the workers, the feminists, who are the real reason we have any freedom at all. What confusion! Worshiping authority for ensuring *freedom*, the one thing it violently opposes! The confusion is predictable, though: indoctrination works wonders, reason-defying miracles.

Faith, not evidence.— The fact that I'm well-disposed towards people has nothing to do with people. It has to do with me.

A little thing I had to write:

Socialization in American Schools

The selections we read from *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools*, by Jonathan Zimmerman, and *Learning from the Past: What History Teaches Us about School Reform*, edited by Diane Ravitch and Maris Vinovskis, were stimulating and well-written. Taken together, they provide a coherent narrative of how the socializing functions of the public school system have evolved from the beginning of the twentieth century to its end. A picture emerges of a society preoccupied initially (around the turn of the century and afterwards) with instilling its diverse population with patriotic and nationalistic sentiments, to "Americanize" the many immigrant-groups and tie the country together. In this era, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, textbooks deemed "unpatriotic" for whatever reason—whether because, influenced by Charles Beard and other "new historians," they impugned the ostensibly noble, selfless motives of the Founding Fathers, or because they suggested that, in light of the Great Depression, laissez-faire capitalism is a flawed system—were attacked by groups ranging from the American Legion and Ku Klux Klan to immigrant organizations committed to the sacredness of the American Revolution (partly as a standard by which to criticize contemporary racist and anti-immigrant currents). This focus on assimilation was complemented by an emphasis on successful adjustment to the modern world, in which men could meet the demands of a complex economic order and women could be effective homemakers. According to Patricia Albjerg Graham, academic achievement in itself was not the primary concern of educators during the first half of the century;[1] assimilation and adjustment were.

During and after the civil rights era, educators concentrated on giving minorities and the poor increased access to education. "Equal educational opportunity" was the mantra during this period. In a sense, then, it constituted an extension of the prior concern with unifying the country, with ensuring that it truly become a "melting pot." From the 1970s on, however, multiculturalism has become the dominant and somewhat paradoxical means through which children are to be socialized—"paradoxical" because, as Reed Ueda notes, it apparently serves to fragment the populace rather than unify it. People are encouraged to identify with their ethnic group, their specific "cultural heritage," rather than simply with their country. Prima facie, this policy appears to be the opposite of that favored during the initial decades of the century.

Needless to say, this brief outline of the readings does not do them justice. A particular strength of Zimmerman's book is his appreciation and illustration of the complexity of the politics of education. It is not a simple matter of 'minorities and progressives vs. conservative nationalists'; instead, the agenda of the latter has periodically overlapped with that of immigrants, while progressives have been opposed by both. For example, during the first two or three decades of the twentieth century, conservatives and immigrants were both eager to promote patriotism and the worship of national heroes, in particular the Founding

[1] In fact, it only became so during the 1980s and '90s, when people started to think that American educational achievement was lagging behind that of other countries.

Fathers. They campaigned against so-called liberal textbooks that emphasized socioeconomic forces and class-based analyses, claiming that these ideas would dilute the patriotic fervor of impressionable children, who should instead be taught that the Revolution, for instance, was indeed a cut-and-dried matter of 'heroic Americans vs. evil British oppressors.' In this case, the main difference between immigrant groups and white Protestant conservatives was that the former tried to insert their own ethnic heroes into the historical narrative of America: the Irish claimed that they had been instrumental in the nation's founding, the Germans that *they* had been so, the Poles that *they* had been so, etc. But they all embraced the national mythology.

It is intriguing in this connection to note that, in a sense, the history of education has come full circle: whereas a hundred years ago ethnic groups insisted on including their own special contributions to America in schools' textbooks for the sake of basking in the nation's glory (thus derivatively illustrating the glory of their own cultural heritage), now multiculturalism pursues the same end—of appreciation for every culture and ethnicity—but effectively at the *expense* of an emphasis on national unity and glory, the "melting pot" ideology. That is to say, a century ago immigrants' pride in their heritage (as manifested in their education campaigns) was mediated by the idea of America; now, an insistence on the primacy of the nation is no longer necessary to achieve the same result of 'pride in one's heritage,' presumably because the idea and ideology of the nation-state is past its prime.

In fact, upon reading Ueda's article on multiculturalism, I was initially surprised that such an apparently divisive ideology was embraced so enthusiastically by educators across the country. Of course I had already been aware of the phenomenon of multiculturalism, but Ueda's focus on its cultural divisiveness brought home the point that it is in obvious tension with the ideology of the nation-state. From the time of Horace Mann (or earlier), however, a major concern of educators, as stated above, has been to foster a cohesive national society, to socialize children into love-of-country, to minimize differences between class, culture, and ethnicity (with the exception—until the 1960s—of blacks and occasionally Asians). So what is the significance of the recent apparent reversal in their practice?

Actually, it is easy to overstate the significance of multiculturalism in schools, and Ueda does so. Even in multiculturalism's heyday, most textbooks and educators did not denigrate the ideology of Americanism, or even necessarily discard the "melting pot" metaphor. (I remember its being repeatedly invoked in my Social Studies classes.) Perhaps from an ideal, abstract perspective, Ueda is right that "multicultural schooling intensifie[s] ethnic divisions by stressing group pride and exclusive identities" (p. 128). Nevertheless, realistically, one or two hours a day in a class that teaches one to take pride in one's race or ethnicity is probably not going to have a huge effect—and certainly not a very negative effect (as Ueda argues)—on one's way of viewing the world. Academic learning is not what usually determines a young person's behavior and worldview; rather, it is determined by the way he interacts with his family, his peers, his society inside and outside school. Besides, multicultural schooling is but a reflection of broader societal trends. These trends are the really important things—trends toward increased immigration from Latin America, toward the fragmentation of the country into ethnic, racial and working-class communities, toward regionalism, toward greater rights for minorities, toward an expanding population with a greater proportion of minorities. Ueda does not address these trends, instead treating multicultural schooling virtually as an independent variable, or at least as an extremely important conditioning factor in people's behavior, which it probably is not. It is more an effect than a cause.

Nevertheless, the readings were thoughtful and thought-provoking. They constituted an informative survey of policymakers' thinking (since 1900) on the purposes of American education.

Similar paper:

Timothy Hacsi's book *Children as Pawns: The Politics of Educational Reform* is a well-researched, illuminating discussion of five questions that get to the heart of proposals for educational reform. (Briefly, the questions are the following: "How successful is the program 'Head Start'?", "Is bilingual education a good idea?", "Does class size matter?", "How big a problem is social promotion?", and "Does more money make schools better?") It systematically examines the research that bears on each issue, eschewing the bias

and partisanship that characterizes most discussions in favor of an evenhandedness that reflects the true complexity of the issues. This is in fact its main strength, this scholarly rigor (combined with a readability that comes from its attempt to appeal to a popular readership).

A reader with liberal sympathies might take it for granted, e.g., that Head Start has been proven to be an extremely successful program, bilingual education is obviously advisable in the case of children who do not speak English, small class-sizes are virtually a prerequisite for effective learning, and so on. Hacsi's book will disabuse him of these illusions, at least to an extent: research undertaken on each issue since the 1960s has often led to ambiguous results. It has been shown, for instance, that while total submersion in English-speaking classes has a negative impact on the education of children who cannot understand English—a conclusion that is not too surprising—nevertheless, the relative advantages of different implementations of bilingual education are unclear. There is, for example, "structured immersion," in which classes are taught in English but the teacher can (in theory) speak the students' native language and does so in moments when it is considered necessary. There is the model in which certain classes, such as art and music, are taught in English, while others, such as math and science, are taught in the native language. Then there are the "two-way bilingual" classes in which, say, Hispanic immigrants and native English-speakers are taught in *both* languages, so that ideally they become fluent in two languages. (These programs appear to have been particularly successful.) And of course there is also the option of having regular ESL classes taught alongside English-submersion classes. –The list goes on. The point is that the most difficult part of the issue is not the broad question of "Bilingual education?" but the matter of *implementation*. Pundits and politicians tend to take a stance on the question of principle and leave it at that, but the ambiguous and difficult part of the debate is how to implement any given principle. Even to discover the strengths of one model over another is enormously difficult, given methodological problems and the messiness of the real world.

Head Start is almost as problematic as bilingual education. In principle, of course, it is an excellent idea. Preschool for disadvantaged urban children, combined with health care and various kinds of family assistance—what could be more commonsensical than that?! Hacsi shows, however, that when you start to dig a little the subject gets murky. First of all, as the *New York Times* pointed out in 1990, a "one-year program with little follow-up 'cannot combat the ills of poverty'" (p. 47). In many cases, merely attending Head Start for one year and then returning to the 'status quo ante,' which involves broken families, broken schools and broken neighborhoods, is not going to have a long-term impact on a child's life. Moreover, it has been shown that standardized test scores, especially several years down the line, tend not to be improved by one's having participated in Head Start. Many local programs are of very low quality (partly because Head Start as a whole is underfunded). On the other hand, certain studies have indicated that children who attend the program are less likely to need special education classes later on, less likely to be held back a grade, and less likely to drop out of high school (p. 35). So it is far from true that Head Start is totally ineffective. (And its health-care benefits, including immunizations and dental work, are obvious.)

In fact, if competently run, preschool education can be astonishingly beneficial. I was impressed to learn that a particular evaluation, of unimpeachable methodology, demonstrated that even *decades* after having graduated from a uniquely well-run program called Perry Preschool, former students were reaping the benefits of their early education. As nineteen-year-olds they had relatively high grades (compared to the control group), better-paying jobs, a greater sense of social responsibility—fewer had been arrested or gone to juvenile court—and a higher proportion had entered college. By the age of twenty-seven, they were earning significantly more than the control group, were more likely to own their own home, and had fewer arrests (p. 52). These data prove, in short, that a couple years of preschool education can potentially have a huge influence on one's entire life. Perhaps this is not so surprising, given that early childhood is one of the decisive stages of life. At any rate, it shows that Head Start, if administered competently and funded sufficiently, has significant promise.

If Hacsi's book has a weakness, it may be that he does not do enough to explicate the statistical techniques he employs, or rather which were employed by the evaluations he discusses. The entire purpose of his book is to evaluate and develop the implications of scores of studies undertaken since the 1950s, so this lack of attention to clarifying such techniques as meta-analysis can be considered a flaw. He does

discuss meta-analysis briefly in the introduction, but not in any detail. In light of the fact that meta-analytic techniques have led to diametrically opposed conclusions to those based on more 'primitive' techniques, I was left wondering exactly how such differences are possible. What *is* meta-analysis, ultimately? How is it done? A detailed example or two would have been illuminating. In Hacsi's defense, his book is not targeted specifically to scholars but to educated laymen.

The impression with which the reader is left is negative in a twofold sense: solving the problems of American public education is most likely impossible, due to their complexity and controversial political implications, and politicians do not have the will to solve them anyway. They don't even have the will to let evidence determine the policies they will promote. Other factors are more important, such as what is politically popular, what will get the politician reelected, what will please his donors, and so on. A massive infusion of money—tens of billions of dollars—into the education system would have a positive effect if the money were allocated wisely, but the pressures of interest-group politics make such allocation unlikely. If most of the money were used to reduce the average class size by eight to ten students and to hire better teachers, education might be significantly improved. But, again, even if the political will for these changes existed, the difficulties of *specific* allocation, administration and oversight would probably ensure that the results would be less magnificent than anticipated. Still, Hacsi's book makes the convincing case that it would be worth trying.

Much of Robert Oakeshott's *The Case for Workers' Co-ops* (1978), Johnston Birchall's *The International Co-operative Movement* (1997), and Reed and McMurtry's (eds.) *Co-operatives in a Global Economy: The Challenges of Co-operation Across Borders* (2009). Online resources may be even more useful than books and academic articles. Certain websites also have online books available for free, including the excellent *Cooperatives: Principles and Practices in the 21st Century*.

Every public school, public transportation system, publicly funded highway, cooperative, non-profit firm, state-funded social program, public park, and everything else the government does is evidence of a market failure. Rather than conceptualizing our society as basically market-run, we should describe it as basically 'cooperative' and state-run with a significant role for markets.

Christopher Read's *From Tsar to Soviets: The Russian People and Their Revolution, 1917–21* (1996). Want to write a paper on the Revolution.

Kissed someone for the first time since Aniela: Natalie, a girl I worked with at GEOS. Went to a bar with her and friends, walked her home, then "made out." Seems to like me. Nice girl, intelligent and fairly pretty. Has an unpleasant laugh. "Huhhuhhuhhuhhuh."

The tragedy of the 19th- and early 20th-century evolution of capitalism, or rather of Marxist and socialist movements, is that consciousness outran objective conditions. When capitalist industrialization was just starting, workers and intellectuals were already fighting for a post-capitalist society. Industrialization was so brutal and so conducive to working-class organization and radicalization that visions of, and struggles for, a socialist or cooperative society were inevitable everywhere. And, in retrospect, they were inevitably going to be defeated, either in the short run or the long run, because economic conditions were not ripe for a cooperative, democratic society. An economic framework of competition was still more efficient and productive than a framework of cooperation, because scarcity was still too prevalent. (Cooperation may be more efficient than competition in individual units like firms, but the competitive macroeconomic framework, which creates the necessity to produce cheaply, is what compels firms to be efficient.)

The absurdity of it is that, *necessarily*, socialist utopianism would be most widespread at the earliest, the most brutal, stages (because of their absolute brutality: one extreme tends to foster the opposite extreme)—precisely when true socialism was *least* possible. But as it slowly becomes more and more possible (because of the gradual overcoming of scarcity and emergence of a cooperative economy), revolutionary desires and hopes fade, because the masses' lot in life has become relatively tolerable. On the other hand, the fading of revolutionary dreams itself facilitates the slow emergence of socialism (worker cooperativism) because it means that there will be no more Leninist, Maoist misadventures, no more attempts to establish socialism *consciously*, by decree, which was never going to work. It has to be an

unconscious, organic evolution out of capitalist conditions, as Marx understood in his less voluntaristic moments. What he didn't understand was that this condition was incompatible with an upsurge of the masses, a rupture, a clean break from the past, a "dictatorship of the proletariat." In (almost) the same unconscious way that capitalism originally emerged from feudalism, socialism will emerge from capitalism. [It'll be in pockets at first, decentralized.]

It's an absurd tragedy. Think of it: millions of people laboring to establish a social order that they were fated from the very beginning not to establish, just because it wasn't yet time! "Communism" in Russia and China didn't have to happen; it depended largely on specific, contingent conjunctures. It could have happened in Germany but didn't because the authorities were strong and social structures relatively stable; it happened in Russia and China because the authorities were weak and society unstable. Everywhere, it was power-structures against workers and poor farmers/peasants—and the power-structures were historically, more or less, in the right (as shown by the failures of "Communism")! How absurd is that! The oppressed were getting ahead of themselves. That was history's horribly inadequate answer to them. [Of course this is simplistic and overly deterministic, but there's *some* truth to it, at least as regards the utopian goals of the revolutionaries.]

On the other hand, it's probably true that decades-long revolutions and civil wars were inevitable in such countries as Russia and China, simply because the aristocracy and the peasantry had to be destroyed in order for capitalism and modernization to happen. What wasn't inevitable was the form that these revolutions would take. The *outcome* was more-or-less predetermined, namely the destruction of feudal classes. But the path to this result didn't have to be "Communist"—although perhaps some such thing was probable after all, given the numerical force of the peasantry. I.e., it was likely that the peasantry would start out as the base for the new political elite, the elite that would crush the *ancien regime*, even if this very peasantry would necessarily itself be crushed sooner or later because it too was pre-capitalist (uncompetitive, unindustrial, unprofitable, conservative, all qualities that would have to be overcome if their society was to survive in a capitalist world—which, again, is why the feudal classes were doomed). Still, what strikes the historical observer is that most of the participants in these struggles completely misinterpreted the significance of their actions. Including Lenin, Trotsky, Mao, Stalin, all the leaders. They thought they were clearing the way for socialism, when, of necessity, they could do little more than clear the way (however circuitously) for modernization, i.e., in the final analysis, capitalism. That was their historical task—which, in fact, they failed at in the short term, since they misunderstood their task.

Sad irony! Marxists falling victim to Marx's insight that historical actors are usually mistaken about the significance of their actions. Ah, Reason, you cunning thing.

In any case, Marx was right that the "contradictions" of capitalism are what make inevitable, eventually, a more cooperative society (and what necessitate cooperative, democratic elements in current society). Many of these contradictions are what we call, in contemporary jargon, market failures or market inefficiencies.[1] What they all amount to is that the functioning of capitalism necessitates non-capitalist institutions and forces, which will someday overwhelm it.

By the way, you may wonder how "consciousness getting ahead of what is economically feasible" squares with Marxian epistemology (social being first, then consciousness). The truth is that it doesn't literally contradict Marxism, since this aspect of Marxism cannot in fact *be* contradicted. It isn't a scientific hypothesis that can be tested; it's more like a premise for psychology and sociology, a premise based on semi-philosophical, semi-psychological or -physiological considerations. It isn't empty, but its content isn't on the level of science. This is partly because consciousness, while molded by physical and social conditions, is not bounded by them. Humans have imagination: they can see beyond what is immediately

[1] These are "contradictions" because they are direct results of capitalist activity and yet tend to undermine it. Bourgeois economists are wrong, therefore, in implying that market failures are mere "accidents." They are intrinsic to capitalist production and the laws of supply and demand. For example, why are agricultural co-ops so common? Because capitalist firms didn't think that potential profits justified the expense of getting involved in these sectors. Whenever all relevant firms make such a calculation, these is a market failure, a "contradiction of capitalism." There's demand but no supply. (Other contradictions involve an excess of supply over demand.)

given. They can plan and hope and imagine. In fact, if you take the Marxian dictum in its strictest possible sense, human agency is inexplicable. But anyway, in an ideal science it would be possible to translate the dictum into a contentful hypothesis that could be tested (because the dictum is, after all, empirical); only in our messy world is that extremely difficult to do.

As for Marx's statement that mankind only sets itself such tasks as it can achieve—which is partly based on the idea that consciousness is derivative of social being—this is problematic. First of all, it would seem to have been disproven by the failure of all mass efforts to achieve socialism. On the other hand, it almost seems meaningless. And if it's not meaningless, why would it be true? Intuitively, for some reason, it strikes me as vaguely compelling, but I can find no logical justification for that.

To return to the thing above. Tsarism, for example, was doomed eventually. Why? Because capitalism and industrialization give rise everywhere to the "awakening of the masses," i.e. movements for equality and freedom. It happened in the West, it's happening in Latin America, it's happening in the Middle East and China. When millions of people are thrown together in cities, they're bound sooner or later to get some power, and more power as the decades pass. The question is, how was Tsarism going to fall? The process could have been gradual, if the rulers had been less hidebound. Liberal reforms could have proceeded step by step, the bourgeoisie could have been progressively brought into the institutions of governance, the workers and peasants could have been permitted a political party, as happened in Germany. In fact, for a while Germany and Russia *could* have traveled parallel paths. Nevertheless, some sort of violent revolution was likely sooner or later in both countries, since it's highly improbable that the aristocracy would have relinquished power peacefully. But the revolution could have been more like a liberal, bourgeois one than that of October 1917. There could have been a more successful "Provisional Government" than the one of 1917, and then a liberal constitutional convention, etc. Communism (in whatever form) was not inevitable. That is to say, the specific circumstances of World War I were not inevitable, partly because Russia *could* have liberalized to a greater degree than it had by then. But it didn't: it didn't ameliorate the conditions of the proletariat or the peasantry, it didn't moderate its imperialism, it chose to fight the war, and its generals didn't do so well. (Had Russia won, the revolution in whatever form would have been postponed a decade or two. It might have happened during the Great Depression.) So the Bolsheviks came and conquered because they told the masses, especially the soldiers, what they wanted to hear—"All power to the Soviets!" and "Peace, land, bread!" Unfortunately, democracy was impossible in the conditions that obtained then. The party was determined to maintain power, determined to establish socialism by whatever means necessary, and a civil war had to be fought for two years. And so it went. By 1921, Bolshevism had already served the historical purpose of destroying all reactionary aristocratic remnants of Tsarism; now it had to resume the industrialization that had begun under the Tsar but was now in tatters. In retrospect, though, we can see that industrialization, or modernization, in un-capitalistic conditions cannot be genuine, thorough modernization, i.e. cannot really compete with capitalist modernization. The case of China confirms that. Hence the ultimate necessity of introducing some kind of capitalism.

In short, the revolution in Russia, the event that would catapult it into the modern era, *should* have been something like the French—should have merely cleared away the detritus of feudalism and absolutism. [Actually, from this perspective the French Revolution was really decades long, still not finished by 1848.] That would have been the shortest, most efficient and effective way to get to the predetermined endpoint, viz. political and economic modernization. But World War I got in the way—millions of soldiers, and peasants, radicalized by years of misery—and the Provisional Government was inept, and Lenin was brilliant, and everything got fucked up.

Still, I shouldn't forget what I wrote yesterday: Russia and China were unique in the sheer numbers of their peasantry. Sooner or later some adventurer or party was, perhaps, bound to ride the peasants' wave into power, be it Mao or Lenin or whoever. (Actually, Napoleon III did the same thing, if you believe Marx's account in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. And he too, if I remember right, was none too loyal towards them, like Mao and Lenin. None of them *could* be loyal, in light of the imperative to modernize.) But his

inevitable betrayal of them didn't have to take the form of collectivization; it could have consisted in enforced 'capitalization,' as happened in other, smaller countries around the world. Including France.

The GRE has gotten harder since I last took it. John Nash would have had difficulty with some of those math problems. I got a 1320. Yup. Think I did fairly well on the writing section, though.

It's wonderful to be able to kiss and caress a woman again. The beauty of women… […] I need women; they're all I need. And *touch*, how I've missed touch! –Natalie and I are officially dating, though I have two or three other prospects also. A girl I met last weekend at a party (Dana) seems to have been smitten by my having discussed Russian literature and labor history with her: she sent me an email days later, having sought and found my address.

…Saw Dana tonight at a party she'd invited me to. She was nice enough to drive me home. We kissed for a while in her car until a cop interrupted us. I'll see her tomorrow night. She's a wonderful girl, intelligent and beautiful.

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29 years old. "You're an old man," Natalie said tonight as we lay naked in her bed after sex, or something like it. (She's 25.) The alcohol and the condom somewhat reduced Mr. Johnson's enthusiasm for the task to which he has devoted his life. Useless little fucker. He's demanding, but when he gets what he wants he doesn't want it. Anyway, Natalie cooked dinner for me, a delicious Italian pasta. As I was in bed with her, Dana called me: wants to meet this weekend.

Peter Irons' *Jim Crow's Children: The Broken Promise of the* Brown *Decision* (2002).

In the library today I happened to pass Harry Truman's memoirs. Picked the book up and flipped to the pages on the atomic bomb. "…General Bloodlust [or whatever his name was] wanted to drop the bomb on Kyoto, but Secretary Stimson argued that Kyoto was an important cultural and religious shrine." Stimson had spent his honeymoon there and had fond memories of it; hence, it was saved. Because of a honeymoon. A treasure-trove of history and culture saved because one guy said "No" because of his honeymoon. And then you tell me there's a God! Idiots.

Upon receiving the telegram reporting that the bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, Truman "was deeply moved. I turned to the sailors I was having lunch with [on some battleship somewhere] and said, 'This is the greatest thing in history. We're going home.'" Yes, he said it was the greatest thing in history. And–the next page is on a different subject. No reflections on the meaning of Hiroshima or the decision to use the bomb; just…it was the greatest thing ever, and then on to his negotiations with Stalin. The man was amoral. An arch-bureaucrat, an amoral machine, like Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, and most heads of state in history.

How that level of unreflectiveness is possible, I don't know. Years afterwards, as he's writing his memoirs, he doesn't stop to reflect on his decision to kill more than 200,000 (with the after-effects) civilians. He takes it for granted that American lives are more valuable than Japanese lives, and that it's better to kill hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians (women, children) than to let *much fewer* American soldiers die. Had the Japanese not surrendered, he and his generals would have gone on dropping as many bombs as necessary. They would have been happy to obliterate every city. A million deaths, two million deaths, priceless cultural artifacts destroyed…it would have been okay, because it would have ensured that they won the war.

Being a "man of action" is not a positive thing. It means that you're *not* a man of reflection. It signifies only the relative absence of reflection.

Irony #1048: cooperativism and quasi-"state socialism," which help rectify the myriad market failures of capitalism, are what sustain the capitalist world-system (by stabilizing it).

By the way, what China is doing in Chongqing and other areas is amazing. State socialism administered intelligently, if amorally.

Ronald Formisano's *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*.

Hegel: "History teaches us only that people have never learned from history."

From an article on the Russian Revolution: "…In the highly competitive world of nation states, none could hope to survive without the employment of all its human resources. As World War I showed, these would not be forthcoming if large segments of the population felt excluded from the benefits of full citizenship and if economic hardship intensified the sense of exclusion which led in some cases to open rebellion. In the half century after 1914, almost every European regime, whatever its political coloration—socialist, fascist or liberal—tried in some way to assure itself of the loyalty of its citizens, tried by means honest or specious to create for them a sense of belonging and participation. Corporatism, communism or welfare state were the different names given to what was fundamentally the same search for national solidarity, national power and national survival, for ways of reconciling deeply divided societies and of concentrating national energies. At the opposite pole from the Bolsheviks, Italian nationalists and fascists indicted their ruling clique (they shunned the word class) for ineptness and greed and preached national solidarity as a necessary prerequisite for the struggle between Italy, a nation of proletarians (or a proletarian nation), and the plutocracies. 'Workers of all classes unite!' was the slogan of Belgian fascism, and the choice of name for Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' Party was not accidental.

"Here then is another meaning of the Russian Revolution and of Bolshevism that shows them to be anything but provincial, local or peculiar and reveals them as partaking of certain central features of recent history. Here too, the one-party state, first developed in Soviet Russia and widely copied elsewhere, was but one tool for overcoming the atomization and disintegration of society caused by liberalism, war or economic crisis, just as communism, like fascism, was but one of the challenges to the selfishness of individuals and of interests that opposed themselves to the general will. Fascism is often seen as a reaction to communism, or as one of its distorting mirrors. It is equally true to say that while both were nourished in the matrix of modern history, they were separate and distinct (yet in some ways similar) responses to problems posed by that history. Both aspired to be total creeds; both proclaimed their hostility to the bourgeoisie, to individualism, to liberalism; both were collectivistic, messianic and authoritarian. They were alike in promising a new world and in invoking the general will, in their activism and their appeals to youth, in their opportunism and their combination of populist tendencies and elitist practices."

Welfarism, corporatism, communism, fascism, nationalism—these 20th-century phenomena all amounted to ways by which power-structures sought and/or were enabled to shore up the unity of their society and overcome the divisive tendencies of capitalism (especially liberal capitalism), thus maintaining power. Or, to speak more accurately, if these movements attained power it was because of their usefulness to power-structures in controlling the population. Each of them exploited a different tendency growing out of capitalist dynamics, which was almost *logically implicit* in them. Communism exploited workers' opposition to capital; fascism and some kinds of nationalism exploited capital's (or private property's) fear of working-class revolution; welfarism was an expression of capital's desire for societal stability and labor's "reformist" or "trade-union" desire for material well-being and the ownership of property (a desire in tension with its sometimes-revolutionary tendencies);[1] corporatism reflected a similar 'desire' or 'demand' for compromise between labor and capital. (I put those words in scare-quotes because I don't want to personalize fundamentally impersonal dynamics.) Liberalism, too, and individualism, human rights, etc., grow out of capitalist dynamics, for example the necessity of economic competition, of separation between owners of capital, of individual initiative, and so on, which leads to the bourgeois demand for a level playing-field, a doctrine of political liberty and equality as well as a framework of laws to adjudicate frequent disputes of an economic character. (But the working-class demand for rights and recognition is

[1] The two working-class tendencies, of a trade union consciousness and of a revolutionary consciousness, are logical outgrowths of two different aspects of the labor–capital relation. (Roughly, (1) the antagonists' 'desire' for harmony, stability or a modus vivendi, vs. (2) their 'desire' to *crush* the other, to attain complete power. Depending on social conditions, one or the other tendency will come to the fore.) The first is exploited by welfarism, the second by Communism.

also a tremendous impetus towards human rights and democracy.) Anyway, every mode of production has a dynamic that can be considered from various aspects, each of which expresses itself in a particular form of social and political activity.[1]

—I just thought of that. Cool! Though it's largely an extrapolation from Marxism, I can't remember reading any author who articulated it.

I've forgotten most of Barrington Moore's book. But it seems to me that the way it works is this:[2] the rise of the bourgeoisie and birth of the proletariat puts pressure on the state in a number of ways, which responds by placing more burdens on the peasantry (for example, increased taxation, greater exploitation, more pressure to produce a food surplus), which seethes in discontent for decades and finally boils over in revolutionary energy when an outside shock of some sort occurs, e.g. a war or political crisis. The inchoate bourgeoisie, petty-bourgeoisie and urban workers play perhaps the leadership role in the revolution but derive much of their power from the peasantry's opposition to the aristocracy. The urban leaders of the revolution will retain the support of the peasants if they denounce the landowners. So, the peasants rise up against the landowners as the bourgeoisie seizes political power, helped also, "objectively" if not subjectively, by the urban underclass. But the peasantry is not a progressive force: it wants only to own the land it works on, not to advance to a higher, more efficient mode of production. The bourgeoisie, however, wants (eventually) efficiency and profit, and wage-laborers to boot (drawn from the ranks of the peasants), so in the end its 'alliance' with the peasantry is doomed. The latter is the tool of progress, an essential tool in toppling the old regime but doomed to disappear after it has served its final historical function (of rising up against the autocrats and landowners in effective support of their bourgeois successors). –Or such is the most logical and 'direct' way for the transition to happen. In reality, in Russia and China it ended up being not the bourgeoisie but the Communists who successfully manipulated peasant discontent, largely because this discontent was directed in part against new capitalist policies (or the capitalists were somewhat in league with the landowners). But the Communists, being a group that aimed at power in a competitive international arena, had ultimately the same goal as the capitalists, namely economic efficiency and modernization, which meant that they too would inevitably scorn the conservative desires of the peasant. And the end-result is the same: downfall of the old regime by riding the wave of peasant resentment, only to turn on the peasants later (in an economic evolution lasting decades, during which the peasants cannot rebel successfully because their new masters have more power than their old ones did). Poor Mr. Peasant: the dupe of history.

…You should remember that the peasantry in a given society revolts periodically throughout the centuries. It isn't only with the onset of capitalism that things become unbearable for the peasant. But it *is* only with the onset of capitalism that the peasant revolt can finally lead to bigger and better things. The peasant wants to smash the state machinery that is exploiting him ruthlessly, so that he can return to the legendary days when he was in charge of his land. But *this* time there is also another class that shares his desire to smash the ancien régime, an emerging class centered in the cities, which can therefore take charge of the revolution and guide it by harnessing the power of the peasantry for its own ends. In countries, however, that have capitalism thrust on them instead of growing organically out of the society, capitalists make alliances with the landowners and the authoritarian regime, which means that only a group that sets itself in opposition to both "feudalism" and capitalism will gain the support of the peasantry. Relative to the latter, the capitalists are still a very small group that can be overwhelmed in a rebellion. So, given that (1) the fledgling bourgeoisie have allied themselves with a permutation of the ancien régime, which has itself begun adopting capitalist policies, and (2) the peasants hate this regime, a titanic struggle is inevitable, and it will take the character of a rebellion against feudalism and capitalism *at the same time*.[3] Socialists or

[1] I'm not saying that *all* social and political activity is an expression of tendencies implicit in the dominant mode of production.

[2] I'm thinking mostly of France and Russia. And I'm simplifying egregiously, for instance by using such terms as "bourgeoisie." But a term like that does have some meaning, a cultural and an economic meaning.

[3] What isn't inevitable is the outcome of the struggle. In China for a long time the Communists were losing. It was only after an imperialist war had weakened the national power-structures that the Communists finally triumphed. The

Communists are the group that leads the rebellion because of their education and urbanism. So the peasant uprising occurs, with the assistance of the nascent urban proletariat and the Communist intellectuals. The latter interpret the whole affair as heralding post-capitalism, but what they do once they've achieved power belies their Marxist faith: they smash *feudalism* (or 'capitalist feudalism'), just what the bourgeoisie did (slowly) in the original capitalist countries, but they do so, of necessity, by other than bourgeois means. By allying themselves, if uneasily/temporarily, with reactionary exploitative landowners, the bourgeoisie in these countries (such as China and Russia) had ensured that the path to modernization would be anti-bourgeois, once the peasantry revolted en masse against 'capitalist feudalism.' Only decades later, after the power of the peasantry had been broken by Communist violence, would it be possible for capitalism to emerge again, in a new form, and finish the process of modernization (as is happening now in China).[1]

I haven't yet lost the ability to feel. There's a certain pleasure even in my fundamental aloneness. A pleasure in myself, an enjoyment of myself fused with Schubert—holding myself aloof from the (pre)occupations of society. On a deep Schopenhauerian level not being concerned even with questions about the future of humanity or culture. The short article in the newspaper today written by a classical composer wondering if music has died, speculating on the future of music and culture. It's all external to me. I am the noble, un-absurd element in existence.

Chomsky makes a good point: the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was *far* more justified from a "preemptive war" perspective than our attack of Iraq was, since the Japanese had clear evidence we were planning to roll back their imperialistic advances, while we had no evidence of anything Saddam was planning. Even if we'd had such evidence, the legality and morality of an invasion would have been questionable at best.

Paper on the Russian revolution:

The Causes of the Russian Revolution

The Russian Revolution is the sphinx of the twentieth century. Its historical meaning is unclear. Lenin and Trotsky interpreted the events of October 1917 and subsequent weeks as constituting an authentic proletarian revolution, a socialist revolution. The main source of confusion for them was why this socialist revolution had occurred in so backward a country as Russia, when Marxist theory predicted that it would occur first in an advanced capitalist society like England. In retrospect, though, it seems that they were wrong: the October revolution was not socialist in the proper sense, because it did not lead to a post-capitalist order. Rather, in the (very) long run the society it made possible succumbed to capitalism, in the 1990s. Moreover, it did not even lead to workers' control over production (which is one way of defining socialism): the Communist party, particularly under Stalin, controlled production, not the workers who slaved in the factories. Even under Lenin, workers' experiments in controlling their factories were discouraged in favor of centralized, bureaucratic control.[2] But if the October revolution was not socialist or Marxist in the classic sense of "workers' democracy," what was it? Was it simply an "accident," as some historians have argued? Was its success truly a "miracle," so that it had no real historical significance but depended only on luck and Lenin's political skills?

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same thing happened in Russia, during World War I. So, in the sense that massive imperialist wars were inevitable, and these weak autocratic industrializing states were bound to falter and lose the ability to control their population, perhaps it was incredibly likely after all that the peasantry and workers would in the long run triumph over the landowners and capitalists—even if their victory was to be a hollow one.

[1] [The empirical statements in that account are not all correct. See my Russia paper below.]

[2] See Christopher Read, *From Tsar to Soviets: The Russian People and Their Revolution, 1917–21* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 247–255.

Scholars who argue along these lines have to account for the awkward fact that Communism has had an authentic popular appeal among numerous peoples on every inhabited continent. Nor was Russia the only country that—in the conventional understanding—had a successful "Communist" revolution. China and Cuba did too, among others, which suggests that Russian Communism was not totally improbable after all but resulted from causes that to some extent functioned internationally. Thus, I'll argue in this paper that the Bolshevik revolution was not exactly an accident or a miracle, nor even *nothing but* a "coup," but rather had genuine popular support and could not have succeeded without it. Most importantly, the industrial workers and many soldiers supported Bolshevism; but the peasants did as well, to an extent, since the Bolsheviks promised to expropriate land from the rich landowners and distribute it among the peasantry. World War I in particular is what laid the foundations for the Bolshevik victory—as World War II (specifically the struggle against the Japanese invaders) laid the foundations for Mao's victory in China. Nor can it be argued that these wars themselves were "accidental" (with the implication that the revolutions they made possible were based on a very lucky, historically improbable conjuncture); quite obviously, they grew out of the imperialist dynamics of the international capitalist order.[1]

But what are the broader implications of my argument? I haven't answered the question of the "meaning" of the Bolshevik revolution. Why did "bourgeois" revolutions occur in England and France, while so-called Communist revolutions occurred in Russia and China? In brief, it is because in England and France during the seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries respectively, the oppressors were not industrial capitalists but mainly the autocracy and the feudal lords (especially in France); hence, the peasants, the urban underclass and the nascent bourgeoisie fought together against the autocratic state and many of the large landowners, effectively paving the way for a bourgeois democratic order. On the other hand, in those countries where capitalism does not emerge indigenously and organically, so to speak, but is consciously imposed by the state and/or by colonial powers' imperialist policies, industrial capitalists *are* among the major oppressors, who also include the still-existing landowning aristocracy and the autocratic state. Russia in the early twentieth century was one of these countries. As in all modernizing "late-feudal" countries, the Russian peasants were more concerned to throw off the yoke of the landowners (and high taxation) than of the bourgeoisie; the urban proletariat, however, understood that its enemy was capital and the repressive state. So, what effectively tends to happen in "peripheral" countries that have capitalism imperialistically foisted on them (instead of growing organically and very slowly over centuries, as in England and France) is that the peasantry's anti-feudal, anti-landowners' rebellion partly allies with the proletariat's anti-capitalist rebellion, in a hybrid anti-feudal *and* anti-capitalist revolution.[2] But since the urban areas are the power-centers, dynamic and conflict-ridden, pulsating with historical initiative, the revolution typically starts there and uses a primarily anti-capitalist instead of an anti-feudal ideology. Indeed, initially it may not really know what to make of the peasantry, treating it as sort of an afterthought. Soon, however, it becomes clear that peasant support is essential if the landowners and capitalists (who together control the state) are to be defeated.

Its leaders invariably interpret the revolution as socialist or post-capitalist. In reality, it functions as a way of smashing relics of pre-modernity, including feudal property-relations and undemocratic ideologies. It signifies the country's entrance onto the modern stage, its embrace of mass politics (with

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[1] The First World War, for example, which acute observers had foreseen for years, was a product largely of the armaments race and the political and economic pressures for world-domination. After all, when numerous states are packed together in an area as small as Europe, each industrializing at a frenetic pace, expanding economically, seeking new markets abroad and new opportunities for capital investment at each other's expense, building up their militaries out of mutual suspicion and the political influence of the armaments industry, pursuing secret diplomatic alliances, actively fostering nationalist sentiments in their populations, a conflagration is inevitable.

[2] Needless to say, the rebellions don't always succeed. More often than not, capitalists and landowners, who form an uneasy alliance, remain in power for a long time, frequently with the help of a military dictatorship. Latin America provides many examples of this outcome. Christopher Read remarks that Russia itself, in the years before the First World War, "was moving towards military dictatorship based on authoritarianism and Russian nationalism," much like what would happen later in innumerable colonized countries whose states wanted to maintain the power of both capital and the (semi-capitalist) landowning aristocracy. Read, op. cit., p. 34.

democratic ideologies), nationalism, and the "patriotically inclusive" drive for national power,[1] to be achieved through economic modernization. It's significant that the Communist regime that seizes power soon fuses Marxist propaganda with nationalist propaganda—thereby revealing its true, nationalist nature.[2] In order to maintain power the new government pursues the same goal that was being pursued by the *ancien régime* in the final years before its collapse, namely of playing catch-up with the advanced capitalist countries by industrializing and modernizing its economy. It turns out, however, that "Communism," i.e., a hybrid state-capitalist state-socialism, is not up to the task, being less dynamic and more inefficiently authoritarian than liberal-democratic capitalism, and so in the end it in turn succumbs to a kind of capitalism, as has happened in China and Russia.

No stage in this long process is "accidental," per se. Neither is it inevitable. It is, rather, a product of deep economic and social tendencies, for example the tendency of capitalism in societies where it doesn't emerge indigenously to become associated—before having the chance to become entrenched (a chance it *does* have in such countries as England and France[3])—with the autocratic state and the pre-modern social structures that stifle the peasantry. Because of this association, the potential arises for capitalism to be overthrown—in its infancy—with the state and the landowners. But it is still only a *potential*. Even though the peasantry and the newly born proletariat constitute the vast majority of the population, the power-structures, having a virtual monopoly on violence, can usually maintain their hold on power. Only in the context of a war that is going badly for the state does the state's overthrow become likely, because in this case the *soldiers* turn against the government as well. Such is what happened in Russia in 1917. And, given this fact of soldiers' opposition—to be established below—a radical-left, people's or "Communist" revolution against the Russian government became likely. Had there been no Lenin, such a revolution might have been delayed, or conceivably might not have happened, but the pressures towards it would have remained.

The foregoing constitutes the theoretical framework within which this paper will argue that there was popular support for Bolshevism, that the masses were clamoring for a revolution, and that the war was what allowed the revolution to come to pass. In fact, the war played a central role at every stage of the sequence of events from February to October 1917.

Conditions in Russia prior to the First World War

The last few tsars pursued a policy that combined the blinkered absolutism of the French kings Louis XV and Louis XVI with Bismarck's promotion of industrialization from above. They understood that economic modernization was both desirable and inevitable, but they wanted it undertaken in such a way that they would retain absolute power. Hence their (suicidal) rejection of the German path of political

[1] I use the enigmatic term "patriotically inclusive" to contrast the new state's drive for national power with that of the old, the *ancien régime*. In a sense, the protracted transition from the old order to the new coincides with the creation of the nation-state, the "imagined political community" whose members identify with each other on that account. This nationalistic ideology is fundamentally democratic and inclusive, which is why it (1) can't properly exist in a feudal autocratic state and (2) is compatible, ironically, with the egalitarian, collectivistic Communist ideology. The spread of Communism can almost be regarded as the spread of a type of nationalism: it signifies the expulsion of the outsiders, the exploiters, the parasitic capitalists, so that only *the people*, *the nation*, remains. This creed is revealingly similar to Fascism. Indeed, as it functions ideologically, Communism is little more than an intellectually rigorous Fascism for the proletariat, just as Fascism is a more philosophically malleable and *explicitly* nationalist "Communism" for a capitalist society. (Expulsion of the outsiders, who are defined this time racially or ethnically, not fundamentally by reference to class. This ethnic, rather than economic, definition is what makes Fascism compatible with capitalism and thus a possible tool in the hands of business.)

[2] In other words, the Communist regime uses its embrace of Marxist ideology as a way of differentiating itself from other nation-states, of proclaiming the country's uniqueness and justice—a source of national pride, and thus a means of shoring up the regime's own power (by motivating its populace to serve the state, in manifold capacities). All this is precisely the opposite of Marxism, which is an internationalist creed.

[3] The reason, again, is that in these countries it is born very slowly, from the ground up, consolidating its power at every step.

compromise with representative democracy, which would have stabilized the regime and given it more popular support. Equally importantly, their incompetence extended into matters of economic policy: they bungled both emancipation of the serfs and industrialization.

First of all, emancipation, in the 1860s and subsequent decades, occurred on terms injurious to the peasants, spreading political and economic discontent throughout the country. Emancipation meant that peasants would be given a plot of land and be freed of their legal obligations to the landowner. But before they were granted ownership of the land, they were required to pay, over a period of decades, exorbitant sums of money to the government and landowners. In many cases the land they were given was barely sufficient to live on, since private landowners often retained huge expanses of their former holdings. The extreme inequality that resulted fueled resentment. In addition, the population was rising tremendously, to crisis-levels. In the Black Earth zone of Russia, between 1880 and 1917 the population rose from 100 million to 182 million, causing famines because agricultural techniques remained primitive and inefficient.[1] The expanding population had to be fed, but the size of the peasants' plots was too small to achieve that purpose, especially since the population growth meant that already-meager strips of land had to divided up further and distributed to millions of new households. Peasant land-hunger was potentially explosive by 1905, when the first revolutionary upsurge occurred.[2]

All this time, millions of peasants were trying to escape horrendous conditions by seeking industrial employment in the cities, where conditions were even worse. "Wages were low, hours long, factories dangerous, living conditions squalid, discipline brutal, employment insecure and insurance non-existent."[3] Many of the industrial companies in St. Petersburg were state-owned, but the state showed no interest in alleviating discontent by treating its workers humanely. The main reason that worker protest was limited before 1900 is that government repression was effective and organization was impossible.

The Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 set the stage for a revolution that the autocracy barely managed to survive. In January of 1905 industrial workers held a peaceful demonstration to publicize their economic grievances, to which the government responded with brutal repression. Strikes, terrorist attacks, and demonstrations resulted; across the country, too, peasant uprisings against landowners occurred. Finally in October 1905 the tsar reluctantly made liberal concessions, e.g., by granting a parliament.[4] Worker and peasant unrest continued, however, and after the Russo-Japanese war had ended, military repression spread through the country. What in fact was happening between 1905 and 1907 was a minor civil war: thousands of government officials were killed and thousands of summary executions of peasants and workers took place. At length the repression accomplished its purpose: the tsar felt confident enough to reimpose arbitrary authority, and the liberal concessions he had made were hollowed out.

Astoundingly, the autocracy learned no lessons from the 1905–1907 revolts. It remained mired in its old political traditions, while paying lip-service to a few new liberal ideas. An explosion, therefore, was inevitable sooner or later. There would be no step-by-step liberalization of politics. Even the liberalization of the agrarian economy undertaken by Stolypin after 1905, intended to mitigate the problems that had led to peasant insurrections, proved not wholly successful.[5] The society and state had not overcome the legacy of serfdom, including, with regard to the peasants, the centrality of the inefficient and primitive village commune and communal norms, and with regard to the state, a reliance on brute force to keep the population

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[1] Christopher Read, op. cit., p. 13.

[2] Most of the information in this paragraph comes from Graeme Gill, *Peasants and Government in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), pp. 1–17.

[3] Read, op. cit., p. 21.

[4] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 32–34.

[5] Gill, op. cit., pp. 11–15. Stolypin's legislation was meant to weaken the power of the peasant commune by making it easier for individual peasants to consolidate their land-holdings, i.e., separate them from the jurisdiction of the community. However, by the time of the tsar's fall, it seems that less than 20% of households had separated from the commune in this manner. Furthermore, the commune was actually strengthened insofar as peasants resentful of the rearrangement of their plots "fell back on the commune as their chief support," their main protection against the enclosure movement. Nevertheless, Stolypin's reforms did have some effect, and, given time, might have led to substantial liberalization.

in check (which reliance had evolved under conditions of serfdom). "The Russian state," writes Christopher Read, "remained, until 1917, essentially a serfowners' state with corresponding powers and attitudes."[1]

Nevertheless, the events of 1905 show that a kind of bourgeois revolution, similar to that which had occurred in England and France, was not out of the question in Russia. For months liberals were at the head of the opposition movement; Nicholas then issued his October Manifesto, granting civil liberties, a parliament, universal male suffrage, and the principle of a constitution; in 1906 a quasi-liberal constitution was adopted, the first Russian constitution ever, and the Duma (parliament) was elected (although subsequently dissolved by the tsar due to its radical politics). As had been the case earlier in other European countries, for example during the liberal revolutions of 1848, the bourgeoisie and the socialist workers resisted the government together, pressuring it to liberalize. Nicholas's concessions to liberalism were half-hearted, but, even so, an independent legal system was beginning in these years, an active civil society was emerging, political parties and trade unions were legalized (though still partly suppressed), censorship was becoming less draconian, and "commercial and professional organizations began to give Russia's main cities a more Westernized and liberal flavor."[2] Moreover, in the years before the Great War the government enacted a program of educational expansion: "enrollments in institutions of higher learning more than tripled and those in secondary schools more than quadrupled… The official goal…was the achievement of universal, compulsory primary school education."[3] George Kennan estimates that, had war not intervened, the goal might have been achieved by the mid-1920s.

It seems, therefore, that a Communist, or proletarian- and peasant-based, revolution was not inevitable in the long run or even overwhelmingly probable. In the absence of a disastrous war, other historical trajectories were possible, even given the government's hidebound conservatism. And yet the prospects for liberal revolution in Russia suffered from a tragic paradox: given the autocracy's hold on power, revolution was most likely to happen in wartime conditions (if, that is, the war was going badly), as during the Russo-Japanese War and World War I—while, on the other hand, the myriad instabilities of such wartime conditions meant that a liberal government would have difficulty maintaining the support of the peasants, workers and, most importantly, the soldiers, all of whom would be tempted to join the camp of the leftist radicals and overthrow the new liberal government. Such is what happened in 1917.

After 1910, prospects for liberal reform grew ever more remote, as the proletariat became increasingly radicalized in response to the old state repression and atrocious living conditions. Large-scale strikes became more frequent. In 1912, for example, government troops massacred 200 striking miners,[4] an event that belatedly symbolized the state's abandonment of its flirtations with liberalism. Since 1905, workers and peasants had been joining the radical Socialist Revolutionaries and Social Democrats[5] (who split into the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks); they had little interest in liberalism. The stage was being set for their strong suspicion of, and swift disillusionment with, the liberal Provisional Government in 1917.

World War I and the Russian Revolution

The Great War is what finally led to the collapse of tsardom. By 1916, virtually every sector of Russian society was disgusted with the government's handling of the war, from its incompetent military endeavors to its clumsy handling of proletarian discontent. With the growth of the army from a pre-war size of 1,400,000 to 16 million by 1917, the peasantry lost 40–50% of its able-bodied male population, which led to a severe shortage of labor.[6] Certain circumstances ensured that the peasantry's situation in the early parts of the war was not dire, including high grain prices and a prohibition of liquor (which traditionally

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[1] Read, p. 28.
[2] Ibid., p. 33.
[3] George Kennan, "Autocracy's Many Shortcomings," in *The Russian Revolution and Bolshevik Victory: Causes and Processes*, Arthur Adams, ed. (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Company, 1972), p. 8.
[4] Ibid., p. 34.
[5] Maureen Perrie and I. Ritina, "The Russian Peasantry in 1907–1908: A Survey by the Socialist Revolutionary Party," *History Workshop*, No. 4 (1977): pp. 171–191.
[6] Gill, op. cit., p. 14.

had consumed a large amount of the peasant's budget). But by 1917, rapid inflation and "increased exactions for the war effort"[1] had renewed and intensified the old desire to expropriate land owned by non-peasants. With the collapse of the autocracy, the peasants set about achieving their goal through initially peaceful and subsequently violent means.

Christopher Hill reports that nominal wages in industry trebled between 1913 and 1917; however, price-inflation was such that these wages bought less than 45% of the goods they would have bought in 1913.[2] Tsarist inefficiency was stupendous, denounced vituperatively even by conservative politicians in the Duma. By 1916, strikes and street-demonstrations were frequent. Finally, in February of 1917 thousands of people flooded the streets of Petrograd to protest the food shortages. A general strike began. At first, soldiers and police tried to suppress the demonstrations, occasionally with violence. After several days, though, a number of soldiers switched sides: they joined the crowds and mutinied against their officers. Many of the officers had in fact already fled the city; military discipline was collapsing everywhere. On March 2 the tsar abdicated, pressured to do so even by his closest advisors. A "Provisional Government" took over and a republic was proclaimed.[3]

It is evident that the soldiers' mutiny was decisive for the success of the revolution. This was only the first example of the essential role that the soldiers' radicalism would play in the unfolding of events over the next year. Industrial workers had started the rebellion—infuriated by low wages, a lack of food, the poor progress of the war, brutal conditions in the factories, and tsarist repression—but soldiers had completed it. Of course, workers and ordinary soldiers saw themselves as belonging to the same class and having the same interests. They were both victims of exploitation.

The new republic began governing with a surge of goodwill from the populace, but already the seeds of future conflict had been sowed: an ambiguous situation existed of dual power between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet. The soviets were novel institutions of grassroots democracy that had sprung up during the 1905 revolution and reappeared in 1917. They consisted mainly of delegates from factories and working-class organizations, though the army and navy would also apply the soviet principle. Petrograd's soviet was the most powerful in the country, but Moscow and many provincial towns developed soviets in the months to come. In some ways they were analogous to the village communes and the workers' factory committees that would be established later, since their function was to legislate and even to administer laws by direct and indirect democracy. While the Provisional Government was predominantly liberal and bourgeois, consisting of professionals and politicians, the Petrograd Soviet was susceptible to revolutionary ideas of class struggle, workers' control over industry, distribution of land to the peasants, and military democracy as opposed to hierarchy. Its first order in 1917, which was obeyed all over the country, "authorized all military units to elect committees with rights almost equal to those of the officers" and even stated that no governmental order to the army was valid without the signature of the Soviet.[4] In fact, the Petrograd Soviet commanded more allegiance among the masses than the Provisional Government did, and it had more power. As the War Minister Guchkov complained,

> The Provisional Government does not possess any real power; and its directives are carried out only to the extent that it is permitted by the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which enjoys all the essential elements of real power, since the troops, the railroads, the post and telegraph are all in its hands. One can say flatly that the Provisional Government exists only so long as it is permitted by the Soviet.[5]

[Incidentally, the duality between the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government points up the tension in every anti-'*ancien régime*' revolution between, on the one hand, the impoverished and semi-

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[1] Ibid., p. 16.
[2] Christopher Hill, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 33.
[3] William Chamberlin, "The March Revolution Was Spontaneous," in Adams ed., op. cit., pp. 46–52.
[4] Hill, op. cit., p. 89.
[5] Fitzpatrick, op. cit., p. 47.

impoverished masses, including (certain sections of) the peasantry, the petty-bourgeoisie and the workers, and, on the other hand, the bourgeoisie or the 'respectable classes' who are striving for representation in the autocratic government. The latter groups tend to desire only political and legal reforms in the mold of liberalism, while the former desire something like a social revolution, including universal suffrage, radical democratization, and social equality. For example, in *The World Turned Upside Down* (1984), Christopher Hill notes with regard to the English civil wars of the mid-seventeenth century that *two* revolutions occurred: 'The one which succeeded established the sacred rights of property (abolition of feudal tenures, no arbitrary taxation), gave political power to the propertied (sovereignty of Parliament and common law, abolition of prerogative courts), and removed all impediments to the triumph of the ideology of the men of property—the protestant ethic. There was, however, another revolution which never happened, though from time to time it threatened. This might have established communal property, a far wider democracy in political and legal institutions, might have disestablished the state church and rejected the protestant ethic.' The Levellers, the Seekers, the Ranters, the Diggers, and other such radical groups represented the revolution that might have happened. Similarly, in revolutionary France a tension continually displayed itself between radical democracy and 'responsible' representative government. The same conflict flared up in 1848, when the French workers and bourgeoisie fought together against the monarchy—although, more accurately, it's always the workers (and petty-bourgeois) who do the actual fighting—only to part months later, when the bourgeoisie allied itself with the aristocracy in crushing a threatened popular revolution. A similar phenomenon was evident in Russia in 1905, with the workers fighting alongside the bourgeoisie though each distrusted the other. And in 1917, first the bourgeois revolution—exemplified by the establishment of the Provisional Government—triumphed, and then the popular revolution did, exemplified by the events of Red October, which were supposed by millions to have finally established the principle of soviet democracy. Generalizing, it's evident that in some cases the popular revolution fails, which may result in a narrow parliamentary government, limited suffrage, and a liberal social order conducive to the development of capitalism, while in other cases (e.g., Russia in October 1917, China in 1949, and perhaps certain Latin American countries for a few years before the return of capital-based authoritarianism), the popular revolution 'succeeds'—at least it appears to, temporarily—resulting in the suppression of landowners and capitalists. In 1917, the masses had the resources, the numbers, the circumstances, and the leaders to succeed, whereas in France in the 1790s they didn't (because industrialization had not yet begun, modern urbanization was in its infancy, etc.).**]**

For a while the masses of workers and soldiers who had been radicalized into semi-Marxist revolutionaries by years of misery and struggle did not overtly resist the "bourgeois" Provisional Government. They accepted that the socialist revolution would occur later; for now, they were content to let the liberals govern. The Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, less radical than its rank and file, actively cooperated with the government. Some members of the Committee—Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries—even entered the government in May, which turned it into a coalition of liberals and socialists. However, continued economic grievances and dissatisfaction with the war effort led to open revolts against the government in June and July.

Lenin had returned to Russia from exile in April 1917. The Bolshevik party so far had been willing to cooperate with the government, at least for the time being, but Lenin's arrival changed that. He published his "April Theses," proclaiming that the government had to be resolutely opposed, that power should pass into the hands of the soviets, that the bourgeois revolution was already over and it was time for the proletarian revolution to begin, that landed estates should be confiscated and distributed to the peasants, and that the war should be ended unless it could be turned into a truly *revolutionary* war against the foreign imperialist powers.[1] These statements shocked even Lenin's Bolshevik followers, but in time he was able to bring the party around to his position. From then on, the Bolsheviks, alone among all parties, represented revolutionary opposition to the government and refusal to participate in it. In April this seemed like a dangerous gamble, and indeed it periodically threatened the political and personal safety of Bolshevik

[1] The History Guide, "Lenin's *April Theses*," http://www.historyguide.org/europe/april.html.

leaders, but in the long run it paid off. For it was only a matter of time before the masses would lose patience with their government, and when that happened they would turn to the Bolsheviks.

During April and May, militancy on all fronts increased. The factory committees in Petrograd and Moscow, which had been established by workers in order to supervise foremen and managers, actually began to take over managerial functions. Slowly they were wresting control of factories away from the owners and managers. In the Petrograd committees, Bolsheviks quickly became the dominant influence. In the countryside, similarly, land-seizures by the peasantry were becoming more frequent. This was not due to Bolshevik propaganda; in fact, most of the peasants hadn't even heard of the Bolsheviks. Their party of choice was the Socialist-Revolutionary. But that mattered little: the Provisional Government was procrastinating on the issue of land reform, and this in itself bred frustration and impatience.[1]

However, more immediately significant than these developments was the soldiers' war-weariness, which led to an uprising in early July. The government had initiated a major offensive in June, which began promisingly but soon fell apart. Two hundred thousand casualties were sustained, even as hundreds of thousands of soldiers were deserting the army in the months between February and August. Insubordination and lack of discipline were rampant, encouraged by the democratic mentality that revolutionary leaders were propagating everywhere. On July 2, sailors from Kronstadt, a particularly radical area, stormed into Petrograd with the intention of overthrowing the government, having been galvanized by rumors that they were to be transferred to the front.[2] Workers and other soldiers joined them, to the point at which the armed demonstration was said to have reached half a million people. They proceeded to the Bolshevik party's headquarters, where Lenin refused to lead them in an assault and advised them to disperse. It seems that he and other leaders were taken off guard by the attempted uprising. Soviet leaders, too, who were far less militant than Lenin, dissuaded the demonstrators from violent action. So the group broke up in confusion and disappointment.

The significance of this event is that it shows how far revolutionary sentiments had permeated the populace. The demonstration had not been organized by Bolsheviks, who indeed were utterly surprised by it. The Provisional Government had lost its legitimacy in the eyes of many soldiers and sailors, a sizable proportion of the army and navy. The economic crisis, the intractable problems of the war, the land question, and constant revolutionary agitation had produced the first popular rebellion against the government, which probably could have succeeded had it had effective leadership. The second would be in October—triggered, ironically, by a failed *conservative* rebellion in August.

The attempted conservative coup was centered around General Kornilov, the commander of the Petrograd military district. Officers and "men of property" had been wary of the Provisional Government all along: it was too leftist for them, and too tolerant of continual insubordination in the army. They were concerned above all with winning the war and ensuring that the rights of property were not eroded. Finally at the end of August they acted: Kornilov sent some of his troops to Petrograd on the pretext of suppressing disorders. Apparently he wanted to establish himself as military dictator. The coup failed due to the efforts of the Petrograd workers, who diverted and obstructed troop-trains, shut down newspapers that supported Kornilov, and in general pressured the troops to abandon their mission, assuring them that there were no disorders in Petrograd that had to be put down. Kornilov was arrested. The significance of his failed coup is that it pushed the radicalization of workers and soldiers to its logical conclusion: within weeks, the Bolshevik party had a majority in the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets and was acquiring greater influence in soldiers' committees all along the front, many of which passed resolutions that all power ought to be transferred to the soviets. The Provisional Government lost much of whatever legitimacy it had still had in the eyes of the masses, largely because its prime minister, Alexander Kerensky, was thought to have tacitly supported Kornilov's move so as to neutralize the troublesome Petrograd Soviet. The Bolsheviks, by contrast, gained new prestige, since they had been warning of a counterrevolutionary attempt from the very beginning. Their main advantage, though, was that "they were the only party uncompromised by association

[1] Fitzpatrick, op. cit., pp. 54–56.
[2] Read, op. cit., p. 50.

with the bourgeoisie and the February regime, and the party most firmly identified with ideas of workers' power and armed uprising."[1]

The immediate result of Kornilov's coup was a power-vacuum at the political center: the army officers and the right now hated Kerensky because they thought he had betrayed them by first supporting Kornilov and then withdrawing his support at the critical moment; the left didn't trust him for the analogous reason mentioned above. For months Kerensky had struggled mightily to maintain the coalition between socialists, liberals and conservatives; it had finally unraveled due to the coup (although it had been falling apart prior to that). The Provisional Government was polarized and ineffective, having lost every semblance of unity as well as the confidence of the masses. The latter were clamoring for the same thing that Lenin had advocated in his April Theses: "All power to the soviets!" Being the only party that expressed unreserved commitment to that idea, the Bolsheviks had the loyalty of the soldiers and workers, at least temporarily and conditionally.

In the final analysis, though, it is true that what happened at the end of October was more like a coup than a revolution. It was not a "spontaneous" upsurge of the masses, even if many sectors of the latter did embrace it afterwards and would have supported it beforehand. (And certainly in the aftermath, during the civil war between the Whites and the Reds, the majority of people supported the Reds at least passively.)[2] It was a coup secretly planned by Lenin, Trotsky and the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet. In fact, had Lenin not been vehemently insisting on the need for a coup since September to his skeptical colleagues, it surely would not have happened. In the end he convinced them, however, and so on October 24, soldiers loyal to the Military Revolutionary Committee occupied the telegraph offices, the railway stations, nearby bridges, etc. A couple days later forces occupied the Winter Palace, where the Provisional Government was meeting. Very little fighting actually took place. The government didn't put up much resistance, because it couldn't: the Petrograd garrison was no longer loyal to it. Many soldiers were convinced that the government favored reestablishing the power of the officers and rolling back the army's democratization. The soldiers who were sent out by Kerensky to defend particular locations were simply "talked out of" their loyalty to the government by their comrades loyal to the Soviet who showed up at the same locations later. The busy life of the city continued more or less as normal despite the political crisis occurring.

Again, it is evident that the essential factor was the behavior of the soldiers. Had they supported the government, the coup would have failed. Any coup or revolution, in fact, can be thought of on one level simply as a struggle for who will control the means of violence: will control-over-violence remain in the hands of the current power-elite, or will it pass to a new elite? If a hopeful elite can gain the hearts and minds of the soldiers—or at least the soldiers closest to the power-centers—then all that is necessary to initiate a successful coup is a few clever tactical maneuvers. By October the Bolsheviks had accomplished the first task; they then accomplished the second, through the determination of Trotsky and Lenin. It was the war, however, that had created the conditions for revolution—because the war is ultimately what caused first the tsarist autocracy and then the Provisional Government to lose the support of the "enforcers," i.e., the soldiers. The Bolsheviks, too, once they had had power for a number of months, began to lose the people's support,[3] but by then—and especially in the thick of the civil war—only two serious options presented themselves: either a Red government that claimed to speak for the workers, the poorest peasants, the soldiers, and democracy, or a White government that (it was commonly known) would have acted, and

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[1] Fitzpatrick, p. 61.

[2] Read, p. 198. The author remarks that the Whites' main weakness was their inability to gain a popular base of support. Of course, the situation varied between regions: in some regions, such as Siberia, the majority of peasants did oppose the Bolsheviks.

[3] See Roy Medvedev, *The October Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), chapters 12 and 13. In the spring of 1918 much of the petty-bourgeoisie, traditionally the most patriotic class, began to turn away from the Bolsheviks because of the humiliating Brest-Litovsk treaty. But the relatively well-off of the peasantry did so too because of forced grain requisitions in response to starvation in the cities. Even industrial workers in some regions started to prefer the Mensheviks and left-SRs to the Bolsheviks.

did act in the regions where it seized power, terroristically on behalf of capitalists, landowners, and the forces of reaction. For most people, especially the workers and the majority of peasants, it was not a difficult decision to make.

I have argued that most industrial workers and many soldiers had joined the Bolshevik camp by October 1917 because it was the Bolsheviks who had been agitating vociferously since April for soviet control, workers' democracy, "Peace, bread, land," the democratization of the military, and opposition to the government. N. N. Sukhanov, a Menshevik, later wrote that after the Kornilov revolt, "the mass lived and breathed together with the Bolsheviks. It was in the hands of the party of Lenin and Trotsky."[1] Christopher Read goes so far as to suggest that something like the October revolution might have happened even without the Bolsheviks, given the universal desire for soviet power and the ineffectual character of the government.[2] Immediately after the October coup, an All-Russian Congress of Soviets, which had been scheduled months before, convened in Petrograd. Three hundred of the 670 delegates were Bolsheviks. A group of Mensheviks and SRs violently criticized the coup and quit the Congress in protest, but even so, soviet power was triumphantly proclaimed at the first session of the Congress, suggesting that a great majority of the populace did favor the outcome of the coup, if not, perhaps, the illegal means.[3]

The peasantry, however, was not as supportive of the Bolshevik party as the workers and many soldiers were. On the other hand, there was really no reason for it not to be, given that Lenin and his party had since the spring supported the principle of parceling out the landowners' land to the peasants. Most peasants favored the Socialist Revolutionaries simply because they had been around longer than the Bolsheviks, had made more inroads into the countryside, and people were more familiar with them. In any case, politics was not a major concern of the peasantry, which in 1917 only wanted to have control over the land and be left alone by government agents. Throughout the summer it had been confiscating land in non-peasant hands and revolting against government authority, which had not only failed to address the peasants' traditional grievances but was frantically using every means at its disposal, including grain requisition, to alleviate the chronic food shortage in Petrograd and other cities. Graeme Gill observes that the link between the villages and cities was breaking down. This breakdown had revolutionary potential for the simple reason that without an effective administrative apparatus to transport food from the villages to the cities, mass starvation would result, and starvation would fuel revolutionary sentiment. "Combined with the war-weariness of the soldiers, the disillusionment of rural and urban dwellers left the government defenseless."[4] So the behavior of the peasantry played a role in preparing the ground for the Bolsheviks' success.

Immediately after the coup, however, the Bolshevik party moved towards a dictatorial form of government. Lenin had never been completely comfortable with the democratic idea of soviet power; he supported it only if the soviets could be used as organs of the party. His success was due to the fact that people took the Bolsheviks at their word when they advocated democracy. But during the Congress of Soviets in October, the true nature of the new regime was hinted at. It was announced that instead of the government's being headed by the Central Executive Committee of the soviets, elected by the Congress and including representatives from several political parties, it would be headed by a new Council of People's Commissars whose members would be exclusively Bolshevik. Later, party members argued that a broader socialist coalition should govern, but Lenin refused.[5]

The story of the regime's consolidation lies outside the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that, despite the erosion of popular support in the spring and summer of 1918 in the face of continued economic deterioration and the terrorization of certain parts of the peasantry, during the civil war much of the population fought alongside the Bolsheviks against what they saw as a threat incomparably greater than Lenin's dictatorship, namely the restoration of conservative rule. After the war, and even during it, the Red

[1] Quoted in Read, p. 161.
[2] Ibid., p. 175.
[3] Fitzpatrick, p. 65.
[4] Ibid., p. 187.
[5] Fitzpatrick, pp. 65 and 66.

Army brutally suppressed a number of anarchist uprisings against the Bolsheviks, for example Nestor Makhno's peasant insurrection in the Ukraine and the Kronstadt sailors' revolt in 1920.[1] But even before the civil war, the evils of bureaucratization, centralization, terror, and dogmatic thinking on the part of the government had shown themselves. For the remainder of its existence, Communism would rely largely on brute force to maintain its rule, just as the tsarist autocracy had.

However, the differences between tsarism and Communism reveal the meaning of the revolution. Tsarism was analogous to French absolutism before the Great Revolution: exclusion of the masses from politics, blatant suppression of civil liberties without attempting to justify it by reference to principles of "long-term" democracy and so forth (as Communism did), and generally an *ideological* (rather than only political and social) hierarchization of society, an explicit foundation in feudal hierarchies. The point is that capitalism and industrialization made inevitable, sooner or later, the masses' eruption into politics, in France, England, Russia, China, Germany, and every other country. The question was only how this would come about. Would it occur through a step-by-step liberalization, as in England and the United States? Or would it involve a sudden, violent social revolution, as in France? In Russia it took the path of the latter because of, first, the tsars' blind allegiance to reactionary dogmas, and second, the catastrophic nature of World War I. In retrospect, what seems most incredible is not that Red October happened but that the regime survived until 1991. After all, Chinese Communism felt compelled to liberalize after only about thirty years in power (1949–1979)—and even thirty years is impressive, thirty years of a monolithic, terrorizing, inefficient, blundering state structure. The lesson is that power is tenacious.

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Discarded paragraph from the first draft of my paper, before I'd decided to change the angle:

"…In this paper I'll argue that the real historical meaning of the revolutionary events from February to October 1917 *should* have been simply the overthrow of Tsarism, the casting-off of feudal and autocratic structures inappropriate to a country entering the modern age. That is to say, by rights the revolution should have been comparable to the French Revolution of 1789 and the English civil wars of the 1640s followed by the Glorious Revolution of 1688, all of which events served largely to clear away the political and bureaucratic detritus of feudalism and absolutism in what amounted to preparation for the rule of the bourgeoisie, and ultimately for the age of mass politics and democracy. They partially accomplished the modernization of the political order, which itself facilitated the continued modernization of the economy (which had already begun by the time of these revolutions). According to the logic of history, the revolutionary events of 1917 in Russia should have served essentially the same purpose (of partial political and social modernization in the framework of an emerging capitalism). The reason these events *didn't*, I'll argue, and instead went beyond their historical mandate and established something like a hybrid, monstrous state socialism—or a state-capitalist state socialism—which falsely claimed to act in the name of the workers, is that World War I got in the way. World War I is what made possible the derailing of the *legitimate* revolution, the revolution that would not have fallen victim seventy years later to the encroachment of capitalism because it would have been fully consistent with capitalism. It is Russia's tragedy that its inevitable anti-autocratic revolution happened to coincide with a world war that had already decimated Russia's social fabric."

Same goes for China, more or less. In war, things become possible that would have been nearly impossible in peacetime. The army can turn against the regime, and a new regime can take advantage of the chaos of things to build up a new state system based on a military mentality and structure, a repressive apparatus that can last decades. It necessarily originates in a popular revolution [or, at least, revolutionary impulses]—that's how it comes to power—but then…well, the rest is history. One long record of folly and brutality.

…Nationalism and Socialism/Communism are the two powerful ideologies that can seize a people awakening from centuries of torpor. (Fascism is a variant of nationalism.) Both incorporate profound

[1] Read, chapter 11.

democratic yearnings. And both were born in the French Revolution. At times the people leaned towards nationalism, at times they leaned towards (nascent) socialism—and there are many historical examples of a people leaning towards both. The two are theoretically compatible, after all, though what I wrote in my fascism paper is true: in practice, the emphasis tends to be on one or the other. Typically nationalism gets the best of socialism during a revolution (e.g. a colonial uprising) and afterwards, because nationalism is far less dangerous to power-structures.[1] But not always: not during major wars, for instance, as happened in Russia and China. *After* the revolution, though, even in these cases nationalism comes to supersede socialism or "industrial democracy" because the myth of the nation is enormously useful for the regime's consolidation of power.

Liberalism is a bourgeois ideology, not an ideology with mass power, that can *inspire masses to revolt*. The peasantry, petty-bourgeoisie and proletariat never rise up as one to institute—liberalism. What tends to happen is that some version of liberalism is the compromise reached between the bourgeoisie and the old monarchy, a sop thrown to the people but a gift to the bourgeoisie. During times with revolutionary potential, what the masses follow is always either nationalism or socialism—or some sort of economic egalitarianism[2]—or, confusedly, both (with the emphasis, in these cases, probably on nationalism, the expulsion of the imperialists). The late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries were the age of nationalism and "socialism" precisely because they were revolutionary: whole peoples were exploding into politics for the first time ever. Their inspiration, naturally, would be democratic egalitarianism in its two major manifestations, nationalism[3] and socialism.

It's true that a third mass ideology is possible: religious fundamentalism. Historically this has been less potent than the other two, and even now it usually isn't whole populations who support it but only fringe groups. […] Religious fundamentalism properly so-called also can have a quasi-nationalist dynamic (in its Muslim and Hindu manifestations), which is however fused with a distinctively fascist rejection of modern values, a desire to return to the good old days of strong authority, unity, hierarchy, simplicity, certainty. The reason why fascism can become a mass ideology is that, despite the hierarchical and authoritarian nature of its 'reality,' the *ideology*, and the movement itself, is strangely democratic and egalitarian, in that it's supposed to express the general will and signifies the submersion of the individual in the mass, so that everyone is equal and essential. Everyone has his special function; he belongs.

Nationalism and socialism get their power from their positing of an oppressor or parasite or 'evil Other' of some sort, from which the people have to assert their independence (by coming together and rebelling). Each ideology expresses the popular urge to be *free* and *whole, united*. Each exists most powerfully in opposition to oppression or as a reaction to genuine hardship. The difference between them is that nationalism tends to disregard material conditions, focusing on "culture" or "spirit" or "race" or "blood" or "heritage," while socialism takes material conditions to be of primary importance. Socialism is liberalism taken to its extreme of *economic freedom, economic rights*, while nationalism is (as an ideal-type) a negation of liberalism, being holistic and cultural. But both movements are realized by people coming together and battling a perceived menace.

When I refer to "socialism" I mean the ideology. The *reality*—which is cooperativism—has not yet had its day.

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[1] In fact, the socialist ideology has often been used as a mere tool by revolutionary leaders who fundamentally wanted only to get the imperialists out of their country so they could rule it themselves. Castro, for example, while he did want to improve the social condition of his people, had no *a priori* commitment to socialism or Marxism. He was partly *forced* into the lap of the Soviet Union.

[2] I insert that clause because the peasantry isn't always socialist or Communist. Sometimes they just want land for themselves, that's all. But the party that promises to institute this program is either nationalist or socialist, or both.

[3] Of course nationalism often leads to the opposite of democracy. But as a social movement, even in its fascist versions, its dynamic is somewhat democratic and egalitarian.

Social life. I don't care for Dana; she has no personality. Won't see her again. I've been seeing Natalie once or twice a week, sex etc. She spent the night here recently. Seems to like me quite a lot, but, as I think I said before, she isn't vivacious or talkative enough for me. So it's only a matter of time.

Reading David Fromkin's magisterial *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914–1922* (1989). Brilliantly researched and a ripping good yarn.

December

Eponine still hasn't lost her power over me. 'Eponine, a girl of the streets.' The most beautiful, the most affecting, the sweetest character in all literature. Or, at least, there can be no character *more* beautiful than her. Listening to the song "On my own," with the tears—such innocence and love suppressed by fate. "The rose that grows from concrete."

To repeat: we have to separate the dogmatic in Marxism from the scientific. The dogmatic is what's directly connected to the so-called Marxist revolutions, for example the theory that the proletariat is the necessary agent of capitalism's downfall, and most of the other ideas on the socialist revolution. The scientific is what can be established on the basis of evidence, not revolutionary prophecy. Capitalism does tend to undermine itself; that can be demonstrated through both logic and evidence. The working class does in many ways represent a challenge to capitalism and may periodically stage mass revolts against it. But in the light of the past century, only inverted Hegelian idealism—cheap philosophy, not social science—can lead one to the conclusion that these revolts will necessarily or even probably someday lead to the overthrow of the system. Far more likely is the possibility that gradual, decentralized experiments in cooperativism, as well as large-scale economic coordination undertaken by governments, etc., will lead to a largely post-capitalist society. (Remember, every society will surely retain elements of capitalism.) Perhaps at a late stage of this evolution, things like political revolutions will occur in many countries, discrete, violent or non-violent events that will transfer political power to—not a particular *class* but the majority of the population as a whole. A combination of classes and occupations. […]

The popular uprisings that have occurred during depressions or crises of various kinds have never signified something like 'a potential transition to post-capitalism.' It's easy to think so because of one's revolutionary hopes, but no *evidence* establishes it. What they signify, rather, is the simple truth that capitalism does undermine itself, does contain contradictions, and that one of these contradictions is the tendency for impoverished masses to revolt against their oppressors so as to gain more rights or institute new leadership. This is a tendency that has existed since the ancient world, and in that sense every form of society has been contradictory in a sense. People involved in the struggles certainly become convinced that the new world is at hand and develop impressive theories to prove so, but ultimately it's all just an expression of discontent and the desire to improve one's lot in life. Insofar as an overcoming of capitalism is inevitable, arising from profound social dynamics, it will take place very gradually and doesn't have to coincide with a violent political revolution. *[Um, at one or many stages, insurrections and political violence will be inevitable. But I was right about the* ***gradual*** *nature of any far-reaching change in economic systems.]*

It's easy to be bewitched by the vast logical constructions of Leninism and Maoism and so on, many of which have a seductive theoretical aesthetic and seem to follow from the scientific aspects of Marxism, but in most cases the revolutionary prescriptions and theories are logically separate from Marxism's defensible constructs. The best parts of Marxism are the diagnoses of how class societies, in particular capitalist ones, function, not the prognoses that are supposed to be logically based on them.

It's easy to invent plausible-sounding theories or excuses meant to justify one's values and desires.

…Marxism has to be shorn of its teleological aspects. Social-scientific thinking itself does. Every hint of teleology has to be rejected. *[No! I was wrong about rejecting even* ***hints*** *of teleology. When we look back at history, it's not hard to discern a loose kind of 'developmental' logic.]* Thinking of sectors of society in terms of their "*historical* function." What exist are systems, structures, tendencies conflicting with each

other, leading in all sorts of possible directions depending on how they interact and an infinite number of contingencies. […] There is nothing like a map to socialism. Some such society can be achieved in more than one way; nor, probably, is it inevitable, even in the very long run. No class has a "historic task."

Another problem is that classical Marxism doesn't recognize the extensive array of powerful countervailing tendencies in modern society, the many structures of consciousness and institutions. It's not all economics, nor is the economics all polarizing. Society really is of an astounding complexity. The conflicts and structures that Marx pointed to are indeed of exceptional importance, but things get messy when you have as many variables as we've had for several centuries.

It's my childlikeness that keeps me healthy—though it's also my childlikeness that keeps me alone.

Fascism and Communism. Both are founded on hatred of an oppressor or outsider. In Communism, it's the capitalist class and state; in fascism, it's the parasitic financial and political elites and parts of the broader population deemed parasitic, foreign, untraditional, subversive, divisive. In both cases, the "workers," the productive ones, are the good class; the "parasites," e.g. intellectuals and financiers, or (with fascism) immigrants and racial outsiders, are the bad class. This mass celebration of productive work already shows how new these two ideologies are, how distinctively modern. In its essence, Communism is economic; fascism comprises a fusion of economic and cultural concerns. The focus on the *economic structure* is what makes Communism revolutionary; the disregarding of the economic structure and the tendency, as it gets closer to power, to downplay economic problems in general and focus on culture is what makes fascism compatible with capitalism. Communism appeals primarily to industrial workers and the peasantry; fascism appeals primarily to the petty-bourgeoisie, the lower middle class, certain parts of the peasantry, some patriotic, culturally conservative workers, and the upper class insofar as it thinks it has to rely on extremism in order to prevent a social revolution. The existence of the two ideologies shows that two kinds of threats can (be perceived to) face the masses: either *economic*/political or *cultural*/political, or a confused blend of both (as in classical fascism). With Communism, it's the large majority of the population against the ruling elites, whereas with fascism, it's a huge part of the population against, probably, a somewhat smaller part as well as certain sectors of the ruling elite (although, ironically, it's the political elite that finally allows the fascist leaders to take power, since they're the lesser evil). In both cases, the regime that comes to power violently suppresses certain groups, reflecting both its ideological origins and political expediency.

Japan in the 1930s had something like a fascist society, but it was top-down and thus quite different from the European variety. Still, the militaristic etc. outcome was similar. Fascist *movements* are what I was talking about above; fascist *regimes* don't have to originate in a popular fascist movement, though usually they do.

Reading various chapters of Chomsky's *For Reasons of State*. Also Michael Albert's *What Is To Be Undone: A Modern Revolutionary Discussion of Classical Left Ideologies* (1974).

Sometimes a sentence or two can light up reality, even if what it says is obvious: "European emigrants to the New World left behind most of the old-world trappings of crown, state, aristocracy, and established church. In their place they constructed a political language that glorified individualism, hard work, economic self-sufficiency, self-reliance, localism, and minimalist government." American liberalism. Still exists, though now it's sustained by different factors than in the beginning. There was no real bourgeois revolution in America [except for the Civil War] because there didn't have to be: there was nothing to revolt against. No oppressive state or church or feudal aristocracy. The thin institutional atmosphere was naturally conducive to liberalism.

…Liberalism in the deepest sense isn't about minimal government, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, as people think. It's about the individual's freedom from coercive institutions. At times or in certain respects the government may be one of these institutions, but at other times or in other respects it may be a means to *protect* people from such institutions, in particular from private corporations. Similarly, true liberalism isn't opposed to labor unions or community groups of various sorts, nor is it absolutely committed to "self-

reliance." It's committed to whatever enhances freedom and autonomy. Insofar as labor unions protect their members from a threat to their autonomy, they are "liberal" institutions. It's private corporations that are illiberal and undemocratic, in fact totalitarian.

In certain social conditions, private property can be a force for good, for liberalism. In other conditions it can be authoritarian or the basis of something approaching totalitarianism. That is, it can constitute either a defense against authoritarianism or a tool of it.

Short paper:

The selections we read this week in *Learning from the Past* address a variety of contemporary educational problems. Gary Nash continues in Reed Ueda's footsteps of emphasizing the dangers inherent in multicultural education, specifically when it takes the form of "Afrocentrism," which he criticizes partly because he sees it as black chauvinism and partly because its focus on the grand cultural heritage of blacks does not solve, or even address, the real problems that inner-city black students confront in their daily lives. Diane Ravitch provides a history of attempts to erect "standards" for American education; the context of her article is the political effort in the early 1990s to impose sweeping national standards by the year 2000. David Tyack provides a similar history, in a similar political context, of attempts to "reinvent schooling" by, e.g., using new technologies for instruction, by contracting out education to private corporations, by "emulating management and budgeting techniques in business or government" (p. 193), and by reforming the teaching profession on the basis of an "ideology of competition and hierarchy and a practice of unequal rewards borrowed from other organizations" (p. 194). His history demonstrates that most of these ambitious endeavors have ended in ignominious failure, largely because they ignored the complex institutional realities of American education. Paul Peterson's article is an intriguing discussion of the dialectic between liberalism and statism that has characterized the history of American schooling, with statism predominant especially before the 1960s (Horace Mann, John Dewey and others promoting ideologies quite compatible with Hegelianism), and liberalism, or a "politics of choice" in the form of magnet schools, alternative schools, and vouchers, making inroads since then. Lastly, Joseph Kett considers the issue of "school leaving," i.e. dropping out of school, from a historical perspective, describing how educators from 1900 on have responded to the problem.

The best article—best-organized, best-written, and most informative—is probably David Tyack's. He shows how utopian, uninformed, and, not surprisingly, *capitalistic* most "break-the-mold" reform attempts in the 20th century have been. Looking at the history of it all, one sees how right Hegel was that what we learn from history is that people never learn from history. Also, one is struck by the truth of Ed Hunt's remark in class last week that teachers in America are treated with overt or subtle contempt because they are *workers*, i.e., part of the problem and not the solution, being intrinsically prone to laziness, inertia, a lack of creativity, benighted self-interest, bureaucratic routinism. Like the working class as a whole, they are merely raw material to be shaped at will; and if the resultant shapes do not prove as fine as the artist had hoped, it's because the clay is not pliable enough. The possibility of the design's being flawed in its essence is discounted. Innovators have been enamored of models from business and technology, despite the consistent failure of these models. In the early 20th century, Ellwood Cubberley, who thought of schools as "factories in which the raw materials (children) are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life" (p. 195), proposed that school administrators act more like business managers in order to make schools more efficient and cost-effective. Following in the tracks of this failed idea, "the cult of efficiency in education during the 1960s and 1970s" engendered the technocratic, McNamaran fads of "management by objectives," "zero-based budgeting," and other such educational applications of corporate concepts, which usually only increased inefficiency by adding new bureaucracies and new excuses to waste reams of paper.

The myriad attempts since the birth of radio and television to use newfangled technology in the service of learning (and thus, incidentally, make profits for the businesses selling these technologies) have met a fate similar to that of technocratic models, having been rejected by teachers who thought the technologies were of poor quality or didn't fit the curriculum or were simply not worth the trouble of setting

up and maintaining. Most of these outside entrepreneurial innovators have never requested the input of teachers; they have often even advertised their technologies as promising someday the elimination of teachers as necessary ingredients in education—which has hardly endeared them to the people whose jobs were to be lost. Similarly, the many schemes of merit pay and teacher-hierarchy proposed over the decades have not been successful, largely because teachers prefer an egalitarian culture in which they have incentives to share ideas and help each other over a competitive culture that incentivizes selfishness and is in any case irrelevant to the main reward that teachers crave, which is seeing their students grow.

Another strength of Tyack's article is that he draws concrete lessons from the failures of the past, for example to "enlist and honor teachers as the key people in reforming schooling." Too often, innovators have shown contempt for educators, which is a peculiar attitude to have on the part of one who wants to improve education. It's encouraging that Barack Obama seems to have more respect for teachers than his predecessors did.

I liked Peterson's article too. Its first half, at least, was intellectually stimulating in that it made surprising connections between institutions and ideas. It seems fruitful to conceptualize American educational history, as he does, in the framework of a tension between liberalism and statism, or Kantianism and Hegelianism. Initially, with Benjamin Rush, Thomas Paine and others, it was thought that government should stay out of education as much as possible, except to provide subsidies to parents so that they could educate their children however they wanted. Kant's liberalism may have inspired these thinkers, since Kant argued that governments "are simply interested in such training as will make their subjects better tools for their own intentions" (p. 221). Education should be freed from the "artificial restraints of church and state." Later, however, Horace Mann, and especially John Dewey, argued that state education did not necessarily have to be "restricted, constrained, and corrupted" by the interests of the state, since ideally they were synonymous with the interests of society and of the individual.[1] "Following Hegel, Dewey portrayed the school as the transmitter of the knowledge and culture that historical processes had created" (ibid.)—and the state, like society and the individual, had an interest in transmitting such knowledge and culture. He thus discarded the liberal distinction between the three entities (society, state, and individual). He should have known better: writing in the midst of World War I, he ought to have recognized that the state is not always a benign institution.

I won't summarize the rest of the article. Peterson goes on to argue that the courts, not the educators or policy-makers, have effectively been the carriers of the liberal tradition, typically asserting the rights of the individual against the encroachments of state-controlled education. He also has a multifaceted discussion of the ways in which statism and liberalism have influenced and intersected with Republican and Democratic policies and the civil rights movement. The history is complicated, but Peterson's conceptual "binary opposition" proves to be an illuminating prism through which to view it.

All the articles we read, in fact, were informative. One of the few weaknesses I can think of is in Gary Nash's: it seems to me that the position he is arguing against, the danger he is warning us of, does not merit all the attention he gives it. In this respect my criticism echoes the one I made of Reed Ueda's article: Ueda is overly worried about multiculturalism, while Nash is overly concerned about Afrocentrism. Each points to a number of logical flaws in his opponent's position, a number of ways in which the "progressive" strategy can theoretically go awry, but the fact remains that multiculturalism in education is probably incapable of leading to the sort of mass divisiveness and extremism the prospect of which Ueda and Nash bemoan. If anything will have this effect, it is economic and social conditions in society as a whole, not the curricula in a few classes at some public schools.

That isn't to say, however, that education is unimportant. The book *Learning from the Past* makes the case persuasively that it is not only important but interesting to study on a scholarly level.

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[1] Mann's arguments, at least implicitly, had much to do with his opposition to "papist superstition" and his desire to inculcate sound Protestant morals. The means to do so, he thought, was free public schooling, state-administered education, which won him the charge that he wanted to "Prussianize" American education. This was in the days before it had become possible to bandy about accusations of socialism or communism, a tactic that might have worked better.

*

The Marxist and existentialist claim that *you are what you do*, that there is *nothing else* to you, isn't true, or is meaningless. It's like behaviorism: it denies the interior, denies *potentiality*, and certainly denies the existence of a human nature in some deep sense. It says that there is no 'unconscious' structure of the mind; the only component of me is self-expression. Inasmuch as the self is consciousness (which is self-expression), that's true; but consciousness, even in its latently conscious or unconscious forms, is merely the surface. There's a deep structure of biology underneath it.

Anyway, I've always thought that Marxism isn't particularly committed to these existentialist ideas. In fact, they're not readily compatible with theories of alienation, since the latter implies that there is something that is alienated. But if *all there is* to me is how I express myself, surely I can't experience alienation, i.e. the suppression of my *potential*. –There may be ways around this criticism, but no matter. There's no point in making categorical, misleading statements like "You are how you act." Only in a limited, perhaps truistic sense is that true. (And what about *thoughts*? Do they count as acts?) There are possibilities in my character that haven't been realized and will never be realized. I have the potential to kill someone, but I probably never will. The inner is not the outer; it is broader than the outer. It encompasses an infinite range of 'outers,' an infinite set of possibilities. The outer does reveal the inner, but not the *whole* inner.

It's true that we are changed by our actions and environment, that even as we change our environment we are changed by it. But *human nature* stays the same, in the sense that humans have a different nature than birds. Only on a more superficial level can the environment change us. It can (to an extent) change how we act or are inclined to act, what sort of thoughts and emotions we have, but it doesn't change the broad human potential within us, nor the specific genetic potential in each individual.

I heard Chomsky say in an interview that "If you're a CEO you have to be an immoral monster. [The system forces you to be.]" In a way that's obviously true: your priorities necessarily have so little to do with human well-being that it would actually be better for you (your investors) if you could lower the pay of your employees as much as possible, give them as few benefits as possible, and in general focus all your attention solely on the pursue of profit, with whatever human or environmental costs that might have. If you fail in your duty to be nothing but a money-making machine, you'll be fired. It's the reverse categorical imperative: treat humans only as means to an end or you're dead.

Michael Albert's book is pretty good, though very repetitive. Useful little summary of dialectics (which Marx called "the science of the general laws of motion, both of the external world and of human thought"):

> The science of dialectics is essentially the assertion that significant historical changes are not matters of straight-line, progressive alteration but of rupture, not matters of evolution but of revolution, not matters of continuations of flows but of resolutions of spiraling contradictions.
>
> It is the assertion that real changes are due not to factors outside reality and imposed upon it, but to factors within reality from the start and only slightly affected by conditions imposing from without. It is the assertion that history does not change by the effects of some absolute, or in pursuit of some absolute, but rather in accord with its own internal contradictions and their continuously evolving resolutions.
>
> At least in its Classical pre-Maoist formulations, the science of dialectics is a very general, loose *methodological* assertion. That is, to understand historical situations one must understand those contradictions whose eventual resolutions entail overthrow of the original situation's defining characteristics. That is, one must understand situations insofar as they, by their very natures, toss up against themselves the forces of their own *dissolutions*.
>
> For Classical Marxists, systems necessarily undergo fundamental changes whenever they embody the contradiction of trying to *perpetuate* themselves while at the

> same time *undermining* themselves. Thus Classical Marxists interested in understanding and affecting historical situations have a clear methodological imperative: they must constantly uncover how systems simultaneously foster their own continuations and their own demises; *they must study motions of conflicting tendencies and forces precisely in regard to those critical contradictions and precisely so as to find ways to most beneficially help along the factors favoring their revolutionary resolutions*.

Actually, these ideas seem somewhat illuminating and useful. I was wrong when I wrote long ago that dialectics is an empty theory. It's both a methodology and a grand, general conception of society. It might even have some applicability in the realm of nature and psychology. In fact, it surely does. Systems perpetuating and undermining themselves at the same time. That all these ideas are imprecise and hard to conceptualize is not a decisive argument against them: remember that the concept of downward causation suffers from the same weaknesses but obviously applies to reality. Human cognition is deficient.

Needless to say, the theory of dialectics has weaknesses, for example (as Albert notes) its emphasis on forces that cause change over those that reinforce stability, and its overly 'general' character. [Also, insofar as it has content, it's kind of obvious. It's a fancy word for something that amounts to common sense.]

Rudolf Rocker:

> Power operates only destructively, bent on forcing every manifestation of life into the straitjacket of its laws. Its intellectual form of expression is dead dogma, its physical form brute force. And this unintelligence of its objectives sets its stamp on its supporters also and renders them stupid and brutal, even when they were originally endowed with the best of talents. One who is constantly striving to force everything into a mechanical order at last becomes a machine himself and loses all human feeling.

In a more general sense, though, Foucault is right that relations of power saturate society at every level. Psychological power (over others), bureaucratic power, institutional power, etc., subtle or overt. The broader the scale, the cruder, more brutal are the forms that power takes. Also, in politics and the economy power tends to be expressed more crudely than in love-relationships, etc. (With regard to the latter, see my thoughts on self-confidence, self-consciousness, charisma, the desire for approval, and so on.)

Joy Behar: "Monogamy is monotonous." True.

It became clear to me a moment ago, while reading pages from the novel *Snow*, that perhaps the main reason I don't like to read fiction is that it brings me painfully close to myself. I become one with my longings, my regrets, my loneliness. My heart starts aching with the old fantasies I daily repress, because I'm being carried along in someone else's fantasies. And I'm brought face to face with my past, repressed. It's much less painful to read nonfiction relating to impersonal entities than to read fiction or biographical nonfiction. For most people, reading such stories is an escape; for me, reading the non-biographical nonfiction is the escape. From my self-preoccupation.

The really great social revolutions occur when new, expansive production relations and forces come into conflict with old, conservative ones. I don't mean the actual violent events that we call a "revolution"; I mean the prolonged, sometimes centuries-long evolution that involves periodic political upheavals. In this context, such political upheavals are indeed pregnant with historical significance and constitute a phase in the classic Marxist type of a revolution. But historically, in most cases of a social group's rising up against the elite, it has had nothing to do with this sort of revolution. Not the slave revolts of the ancient world, not the peasant revolts of the Middle Ages. These were just reactions against oppression, pure and simple. There was no "cunning of reason" working through them, no tremendous historical potential. In all of history, probably the only revolutions in the classic Marxist sense occurred during the transition from

feudalism or some other type of agrarian economy to capitalism, revolutions that have occurred (and are still occurring) all over the world. The Communist revolutions that did away with private property, such as the one in Russia from 1917 to 1934 and afterwards, were not of the type that Marx described in his famous Preface—although from another perspective the events of 1917 *could* have signified one phase in such a revolution, but the one from feudalism to capitalism, not from capitalism to socialism. Actually those events *did* have that significance, but then the (ongoing) feudalism-to-capitalism revolution was hijacked and gave birth to a monstrous historical abortion [Stalinism] that ended up, in retrospect, signifying yet one more phase in the *very* prolonged transition from feudalism to mass capitalism. I.e., the "Communist revolutions" were essentially mere phases in the transition from feudalism to 'mass,' 'consumerist,' 'relatively stabilized' or 'mature' capitalism in the countries where they occurred. (Such capitalism hasn't yet been realized in Russia or China, but it's the logical end-point of the process.[1] Whether it will ever be achieved is another question.)

The[2] conflict between new and old production relations is manifested in the 'lower' classes' (including the bourgeoisie's) struggle for greater freedoms. The bourgeoisie's struggle is explicitly on behalf of the new economic relations, since it wants laws that favor capitalist property and capitalist trade. It wants more opportunities for, and fewer feudal obstructions to, making profit—and the capitalist thirst for profit is what drives the new production relations. Thus, in the case of the bourgeoisie, the 'mechanism' by which the 'impersonal' struggle between new and old production relations becomes translated into people's desire for more freedom is unproblematic. They want freedom to make profit, i.e. to intensify and extend the new economic relations. The peasantry's role in bourgeois political revolutions is not similarly on behalf of capitalist relations; it rises up simply under the burdens of increased taxation etc. and is used by the bourgeoisie in the latter's fight against the autocracy. But the peasantry's uprising is indirectly related to the conflict between new production relations (and forces) against the old, in that this conflict in the towns and cities has repercussions in the countryside which exacerbate the peasantry's grievances against landowners.

The industrial workers' revolts against the autocracy, which are in uneasy alliance with the bourgeoisie's and sometimes break out into full revolt against capitalism, are, like the peasantry's, not explicitly on behalf of capitalist property-relations. The workers only want more humane conditions and more freedoms. But again, their struggles are made possible by the new production relations—not insofar as they conflict with the old feudal ones, but insofar as they conflict with *themselves*. In this sense, the proletariat's struggle is in advance of the peasantry's and bourgeoisie's, because the latter struggles have to do with the conflict between old and new production relations, not conflicts engendered by capitalist relations in themselves. Marx was therefore right that the proletariat's battles were historically more progressive than the bourgeoisie's. They had to do with capitalism's undermining of itself, not with the struggle between capitalism and feudalism. He was even partly right that they had something to do with capitalism's fettering of productive possibilities, for instance as manifested in the business cycles and crises that happened repeatedly during the nineteenth century, crises that (1) interrupted and slowed production and (2) thereby encouraged working-class revolts, since employment dropped and workers were thrown out of work. However, he was wrong that working-class revolts had some connection to "new productive forces (or relations) slumbering in the lap of social labor," since back then labor wasn't yet "socialized" enough for such possibilities *genuinely* to exist. It's doubtful that, had the working class gained political power in the late 1800s, economic activity would have become greatly more efficient and more productive. Nowadays, though, cooperative production *is* often more efficient and productive than capitalism. In other words, it's doubtful that those old working-class revolts were full of historical potential in the sense that the bourgeoisie's revolt against the aristocracy was. In the latter case, new property-relations were

[1] I don't mean the final stage of history. I mean only that the myriad tendencies operative in capitalism seem to lead, in the long run, to this relatively stable, liberal democratic, consumerist capitalism, after which it's hard to say what historical stage will come (next).

[2] (Note for the reader: one of the purposes of this discussion is to reduce the functional explanation in Marx's theory of revolution to a causal explanation.)

steamrolling old ones, and capitalism's victory was virtually inevitable; in the former case, it wasn't as if socialist property-relations (almost nonexistent) were steamrolling capitalist ones, and certainly the victory of socialism was not remotely inevitable back then.

However, it's true that in conflicts between more productive and less productive economic relations, there's a certain pressure for the new relations to win—although there's also a pressure for the old relations to hold out against change. It's also true that the older capitalism gets, the more significant becomes the conflict between emerging cooperative relations, relatively efficient, and old capitalist ones.

Spent the night with Natalie. When it comes to women and sex, it all depends on your attitude. I wrote above that I tend to be a little disconcerted by the realities of the female body. But that's not entirely true—at all. […] My point is that you can choose to love the smells, sights, tastes and sounds of the female body. It's a whole other side of life, a whole world of earthy pleasure.

Later in the morning she got all in control of the situation with making breakfast, then confidently talking to her friend on the phone, not acting lovey-dovey with me at all; and this afternoon she went to a cookie-swap with her friends. The sensual and the practical sides of the female personality.

Final paper of the semester:

The Functions of Education in the United States

A question that tends to be ignored in policy debates about education, answers to which question are nonetheless implicit in many political proposals, is what purpose(s) education serves or should serve in a modern society. On one level, the proper answers are virtually truisms: education should increase students' knowledge, facilitate their cognitive growth and self-knowledge, prepare them for an economically productive adulthood, socialize them in such a way that they become citizens "mindful of the common weal," and in general make both the individual's and the community's life richer, more enlightened and moral, than it would be otherwise. These are humanistic answers that come naturally to us, since we live in a liberal society. In illiberal societies the emphasis might be less individualistic and more explicitly nationalistic: for example, in Stalin's Russia people might have thought that whether education contributed to an individual's "growth" was far less relevant than whether it prepared people to subordinate themselves to the interests of the state, to fulfill their economic roles faithfully and productively for the sake of realizing socialism. The commonly accepted functions of education vary between social contexts. So do, in fact—to a limited extent—the morally proper goals (as opposed to the goals that people in fact think education should accomplish, or the functions it actually serves). In a society in crisis, the ideal role of education surely differs from its role during normal times.

I'll take it for granted in this paper that, apart from times of extraordinary crisis, the correct functions of education are humanistic and liberal. Illiberal goals are always wrong, since they violate principles of the freedom, dignity and equal worth of all human beings. However, this still leaves open more specific questions, including "Should we try to use education to heal societal problems, such as class divisions and racism?" and "Should schools focus on inculcating patriotism, or should respect for the sordid truth guide the curriculum in history and civics classes?" Questions about higher education are pertinent also, for example whether it is more properly characterized as a "community of scholarship" or as a democratizing force that should serve societal needs. In the following, I will first summarize the history of American attempts to define the functions and missions of education; in the second section, I will set forth my own conception of what education ought to accomplish.

The Past

The republican sentiments that prevailed during and after the American Revolution influenced political theorists and policymakers in their advocacy of education as playing "an important role in

reconciling freedom and order."[1] Proper education would civilize the unwashed masses, train them to be good republican citizens who would elect wise leaders. It was through education that a descent into anarchy was to be avoided and that the enormous country would be tied together into one entity. Thus, the moral or civic aspect of education was considered at least as important as the intellectual aspect. And since education was supposed to train men from nearly all classes to be intelligent citizens, many political leaders argued that schools should be organized and financed by state governments. Education should be free, or nearly so. In 1779, for example, Thomas Jefferson put forth a plan (subsequently defeated) for free schools in Virginia. In 1786, Benjamin Rush introduced a plan for Pennsylvania that called for a state-supported university, several colleges around the state, and a free school in every town.[2] These proposals, being ahead of their time, had little impact. State legislatures were unwilling to institute taxes for education.

During the early decades of the republic, most rural children, who greatly outnumbered urban children, attended local schools a couple months in the winter and a couple in the summer to learn reading, writing and arithmetic. For these children and their parents, the primary purpose of education was simply to acquire enough rudimentary cognitive skills to function in the countryside. Urban education was more complex: there were "independent pay schools," which were somewhat like inexpensive private schools; there were apprenticeship opportunities for boys, which required the masters to furnish a rudimentary education; and there were church charity schools for orphans and the poor. As social problems increased through the decades, charity schooling became more widespread and secular (although the traditional denominational schools persisted). Reformers argued that increased schooling would mitigate problems of poverty and crime. "Both English and American advocates emphasized collective goals—such as the reduction of crime and disruption—rather than individualistic goals—such as intellectual growth or personal advancement. …One central goal…was to rescue children from an allegedly harmful family environment."[3] Charity schools were funded by philanthropists and voluntary associations.

During the mid-nineteenth century, as capitalism and industrialization tore up the old society and left relative chaos in its wake, the emphasis on education as a facilitator of social stability increased. "In cities the prevention of crime and poverty became the leading moral mission of public schools."[4] It was during these decades before the Civil War that the common-school movement began. Carl Kaestle defines a common school as "an elementary school intended to serve all the children in an area."[5] Such schools were not quite an extension of charity schools, since they were not solely for the poor and sometimes cost families a small amount of money. They were usually state-supported and state-regulated, though minimally. Reformers like Horace Mann and Henry Barnard advocated common schooling as a way to foster social harmony by bringing (white) children from all classes together, and by indoctrinating the youth with republican, Protestant and capitalist ideas. The socializing functions of education were emphasized more than ever before: these schools were to be a force for egalitarianism. The Whig Party, but many Democrats as well, came to think that government intervention was essential to instill morals and mold the diverse population into a cohesive whole, a project that intimately involved education.

"Generally speaking," said John Pierce, Michigan's first superintendent of public schools, "the child uneducated in knowledge and virtue is educated in the school of depravity. And what is true of the individual is true of communities." The reverend Elia Cornelius echoed that opinion: "the moral and religious improvement of the poor is the surest and best means of relieving their wants."[6] As Kaestle summarizes, "Intellectual education did not receive as high a priority as moral education in discussions of the purposes of common schools. Far more emphasis was placed on character, discipline, virtue, [Americanization,] and good habits than on literacy, arithmetic skills, analytical ability, or knowledge of

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[1] Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 5.
[2] Ibid., 9.
[3] Ibid., 33, 47.
[4] Ibid., 70.
[5] Ibid., xi.
[6] Ibid., 81.

the world."[1] Throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth century, epic debates took place over tuition-free schooling, centralization, government involvement in education, taxation for schools, and other issues, but eventually the "progressive" viewpoint emerged victorious. It became accepted that a major goal of education—and an important reason why government should be involved in it—was to alleviate social problems and to play some role, limited or otherwise, in integrating immigrants into the broader society.

Paul Peterson characterizes the view that was emerging as Hegelian; he takes John Dewey to have been its most influential exponent.[2] The ideology was more nationalistic or collectivistic than liberal: the emphasis (to repeat) was on transmission of the country's culture and mores, assimilation of immigrants into the society, and use of public schooling to remake society in a more harmonious, homogeneous image. Liberal values were considered compatible with this vision, but they were subordinate to the value of social harmony. After all, the turn of the twentieth century was the age of Progressivism, which sought to rectify social ills by governmental means—government intervention, centralization, but also the deepening of democracy.

Consistent with these circumstances is the unabashed triumphalism that was taught in social studies courses, the narrative of America's glorious and noble history. The American Revolution, for example, in the early twentieth century was often portrayed as something approximating good against evil, revolutionary "demi-gods" against the "deep-dyed scoundrels" who constituted Britain's leadership.[3] Likewise, the evils of slavery received short shrift in textbooks, due to the influence of the South on publishers. W. E. B. Du Bois complained that "our histories tend to discuss American slavery so impartially that in the end nobody seems to have done wrong and everybody was right."[4] This "impartiality" fit nicely into the narrative of America as a country unparalleled in history for its magnificence.

Inculcation of a patriotic ideology seemed especially important in the United States, as opposed to other countries, because hordes of immigrants had to assimilate into the culture. This was an enormous problem, and schools had an essential role to play with respect to it. Indeed, Patricia Albjerg Graham argues that it was probably education's most important function during the first quarter of the twentieth century.[5] The need to Americanize immigrants and their children "pushed the country to develop comprehensive schools through high school before they were common elsewhere."[6] Instilling enthusiasm for learning in children was at best an incidental goal, if that; the real goal was to create a "melting pot" of ethnicities, races and religions. How little academic learning was valued is shown by the *Report of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education of the National Educational Association*, published in 1918, which declared that the principal aims of education were as follows: health; command of fundamental processes; worthy home membership; vocation; civic education; worthy use of leisure time; and ethical character.[7] Of these seven aims, only "command of fundamental processes" hints at academic learning; the rest have to do with socialization, in particular with immigrant assimilation and an easing of citizens' painful process of adjustment to a vast industrial economy.

"Americans," according to Graham, "have traditionally considered their schools mechanisms for social improvement."[8] We have already seen examples of this. Around the beginning of the last third of the twentieth century, the mission was expanded yet again to include giving minorities and the poor increased access to education and thus to social advancement. This is not surprising, considering that schools and universities were at the forefront of the civil rights movement and many of its battles were fought on their turf. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, passed in 1965, "established the principle that children

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[1] Ibid., 100.
[2] Paul Peterson, "The New Politics of Choice," eds. Diane Ravitch and Maris Vinovskis, *Learning from the Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).
[3] Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 25.
[4] Ibid., 42.
[5] Patricia Graham, "Assimilation, Adjustment, and Access," *Learning from the Past*, 10.
[6] Ibid., 11.
[7] Ibid., 13.
[8] Ibid., 3.

from low-income homes required more educational services than children from affluent homes did."[1] Francis Keppel, commissioner of the U.S. Office of Education during these crucial years, was ambitious: he not only wanted to expand access but to emphasize socialization less and academic learning more. To this end he arranged for the federal government to give additional funds to schools to help them educate impoverished children, and he established the first national testing program.

Keppel's concern with the academic curriculum was ahead of its time. It wasn't until the 1980s that the nation became fixated on the "learning" aspect of education, with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. This report warned of "a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very existence as a Nation and a people."[2] Low educational achievement was rampant. The report recommended that state and local high school graduation requirements be strengthened so that they included, at a minimum, four years of English and three years of mathematics, science and social studies each. America was galvanized by this report into establishing commissions and task forces to study ways of improving learning. States rewrote curriculum frameworks, which resulted in the rewriting of textbooks. State testing was revised; many governors became converts to outcome-based education, which led to the unending search for better tests and assessments to measure student achievement. When George H. W. Bush became president he initiated the America 2000 plan to reach a wildly ambitious set of goals by the year 2000, including that the high school graduation rate would rise to 90 percent, U.S. students would be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement, every adult American would be literate, and every school would be free of drugs and violence.[3] Bill Clinton continued Bush's crusade to improve educational standards (at least according to these politicians' rhetoric), as did the second Bush.

At the same time, with the rise of multiculturalism the emphasis on America's unique moral greatness, as well as on the "melting pot" ideology, declined. In the early 1960s it was still possible to see in fourth-grade textbooks such passages as the following, which describes the massacre of the Pequots by Captain John Mason:

> His little army attacked in the morning before it was light and took the Pequots by surprise. The soldiers broke down the stockade with their axes, rushed inside, and set fire to the wigwams. They killed nearly all the braves, squaws, and children, and burned their corn and other food. There were no Pequots left to make more trouble. When the other Indian tribes saw what good fighters white men were, they kept the peace for many years.
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> "I wish I were a man and had been there," thought Robert.[4]

The socializing functions of such a textbook are transparent. But by the 1980s and '90s, textbooks had become more sophisticated. The narrative tended to be more ambiguous, less insistent of America's righteousness. The socialization purposes of school were no less important, but they had become oriented toward instilling respect for all people and cultures rather than focusing solely on how magnificent America and Western civilization were. This seems to be the stage we're at now.

In the foregoing brief survey I haven't discussed colleges and universities. Until the late nineteenth century and especially the advent of mass higher education in the early twentieth century, the institutions that existed were mostly private and catered to future lawyers, professors, diplomats and so on. There were also teachers' colleges, so-called "normal schools" (from the French, *écoles normales*). In the middle and late nineteenth century, however, public state universities began to be created in a number of states as a result of the passage of the Morrill Act in 1862, which gave federal land grants to states for this purpose. The growth of mass higher education was slow, but it came to maturity in the Progressive era, largely through the efforts of California and Wisconsin Progressives. The result was what John Aubrey Douglass

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[1] Ibid., 18.
[2] Diane Ravitch, "Standards in American Education," ibid., 180.
[3] Ibid., 184.
[4] Quoted in Noam Chomsky, "The Function of the University in a Time of Crisis," in *For Reasons of State* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 307.

has called the California Idea: "a cohesive and popular vision of public higher education as an ameliorative and pro-active agent of state and local government, which would set the stage for a modern and scientifically advanced society."[1] The industrial economy was expanding rapidly in California and all around the country, which necessitated "better-trained labor, a new class of professionals, and greater access to education." Public universities, in other words, were to become an essential agent of social and economic change, in particular the democratization of science and the economy. The first states in which they realized this purpose were California and Wisconsin.

The California system became a model for other states. Junior colleges emerged to supplement teachers' colleges and the prestigious University of California as a way to democratize higher education. The University of California itself grew from an original campus at Berkeley to a campus at Los Angeles, and from there on to other cities around the state as the demand for education kept pace with the rising population. The Berkeley campus symbolized the fusion of the old humanist, elitist conception of higher education with the new utilitarian, democratizing conception, in that it excelled both in the humanities and in scientific research for the benefit of agriculture, engineering, physics, etc.[2] The role of California's higher education system as a facilitator of economic and social progress became evident to the entire world, which for many decades would look to California as a symbol of the potential of democratic higher education if empowered to serve the needs of the state.

Later in the century, the university's mission became less clear. The institution experienced a kind of identity-crisis, which, if anything, has become more acute in recent years as government funding has dried up even as student populations have increased. Arguably the ambiguity in the university's mission was implicit even in the Progressive age; it became explicit, however, in the 1960s, with the disruptions caused by the Vietnam War, the anti-war movement, and the student movements. For many decades there have been three major functions that the university has fulfilled: the first is expressed in Willhelm von Humboldt's humanistic definition of the university as "nothing other than the spiritual life of those human beings who are moved by external leisure or internal pressures toward learning and research";[3] the second is to facilitate the democratizing and 'civilizing' of society and the economy; the third is to be an enabler of power-structures in business and the government, for instance to be a branch of the defense industry and a manifold source of profit for corporations and investors. The first two purposes are each partly realized in the 1960s-ish understanding of the university as ideally a locus of subversion, of the questioning of authority, of the radical democratization and de-bureaucratization of society, a place where shibboleths are attacked and discredited. But the third purpose is directly opposed to this noble ideal of intellectual freedom, and is even in tension with the university's role as advancing the democratization of professional, economic and scientific life. In recent years, the third purpose has been gaining at the expense of the other two.

The Future

Having considered the history of American education, we'll consider now the question of what purposes education *should* serve. I stipulated in the beginning that, whatever they are, they have to be at least *compatible* with humanism and liberalism, i.e., respect for the individual's freedom and creativity. We can expect that "schooling" and "higher education" will not have exactly the same functions.

The first question to ask is whether education should be devoted solely to (1) disinterested learning, unconcerned with social implications, and (2) realization of the individual student's creative personality, or whether it should also aim to fulfill certain socializing functions, such as indoctrinating children with patriotism or egalitarian ideas. Surely the answer is that it is neither possible nor desirable for the socialization aspect to be eradicated. Every generation of reformers has correctly assumed that socialization is not only an incidental but an integral function of schooling. Children have to learn how to relate to others,

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[1] John Aubrey Douglass, *The California Idea and American Higher Education* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 82.
[2] Ibid., 104, 105.
[3] Quoted in Chomsky, op. cit., 299.

and one cannot simply assume that they will learn proper behavior from their parents. But the behavior and beliefs they are taught at school should consist in an elaboration of liberal humanism—that is, respect for others, the belief in human equality and freedom, a broad humanitarianism, a commitment to reason and truth, etc., all of which components preclude aggressive patriotism or nationalism, exclusivist theology, racialism, and the like. In fact, children should not even be taught that the United States is a better country than others, and certainly not that it has a "great" history, since the first idea can lead to an emotional kind of patriotism singularly compatible with both willful ignorance and an irrational respect for one's compatriots over other people, while the second idea is contradicted by the facts. If patriotism is to be inculcated at all, it should be of the tepid sort that encourages you to help your fellow citizens in such a way that citizens of other countries are not hurt.

It's true that in social studies classes, a narrative of American history has to be presupposed by the textbooks one uses and the teacher's approach to them. But the narrative should not consist in the triumphalism that has been taught for much of American history. Rather, it should be organized around the simple but fundamental truth that *through popular struggle, people(s) have won freedom—and freedom has never been won without popular struggle*. Students ought to be taught that American history is "great" only insofar as it has been shaped by progressive popular struggles. The government's history should not be celebrated. The major crimes of political and economic power-structures ought to be discussed, but not at the expense of stories of progress.

The objection that the foregoing revisions in educational indoctrination would lead to a disintegration of America's social fabric due to a lack of commitment to the nation is unconvincing. What keeps the social fabric intact is not having been taught a narrative of American greatness in one's childhood and youth, but instead "the dull compulsion of economic relations," to quote Karl Marx. I.e., the daily subordination to economic and social relations that are difficult to revolt against. Whether the hegemony of any ideology at all is important in sustaining the structure of American society is in fact an open question.

On the other hand, the objection that my ideas are unrealistic, that they could never be actualized given the interest of the elite in maintaining the status quo, may have some truth but is irrelevant. I am proposing only an ideal we should try to approximate, because it would benefit both society and individuals and, moreover, is a consistent elaboration of our deepest shared values.

With regard to "indoctrination," then, students should be taught to think for themselves, to accept nothing on the basis of authority, to value truth and evidence above everything except freedom and compassion, and to develop themselves creatively in all directions as long as their creativity does not interfere with others'. The seven "principle aims of education" listed above (from 1918) are a good starting-point, but more emphasis should be placed on academic learning and spontaneous creativity. All academic learning should be consistent with the best scholarship (though simplified for children).

Horace Mann was right that we should use education, from the lowest to the highest, partly as a way to remedy social inequalities and divisions. Thus, it is advisable to mix children from different races and from the lower and upper classes together. Through busing, (some) suburban children should be sent to inner-city schools and inner-city children should be sent to suburban schools. If implemented—which it wouldn't be—this idea would have the added advantage of focusing attention on the inadequacies of city schools and causing suburban money and power to be used for their improvement (since middle- and upper-class parents would presumably insist on better city schools for their children). Similarly, affirmative action programs should be widely implemented in higher education. However, education should not be considered the primary means of rectifying social problems like crime and poverty. Far more effective would be massive, government-funded reconstruction of urban areas (with the participation, and in the interest, of the communities involved).

The new concern in recent decades with the quality of academic learning in schools is a positive development. However, the way to approach the issue is not through financial rewards based on standardized testing but through the infusion of massive aid into urban schools for the sake of reducing class sizes and hiring better teachers, i.e., raising teachers' salaries to attract the most qualified candidates. New schools ought to be built, and old schools renovated. Curricula in all states ought to be redesigned

along the lines I outlined above. Such measures would have a perceptible impact on both academic learning and socialization. They would simultaneously help the individual and the community.

Reforms in higher education should be as radical as those in primary and secondary education. To repeat, the major purposes of higher education are to give the masses access to the 'higher' spheres of economic, scientific and professional life, and in so doing to stimulate the country's economy while encouraging upward mobility amongst the populace. Wilhelm von Humboldt's humanistic conception of the university is valuable too but arguably secondary to the "democratization" conception. Given the university's tremendous potential to benefit society, as evidenced in its contribution to California's development during the twentieth century, federal and state governments should pour tens of billions of dollars into public universities and colleges across the country. High tuitions are a barrier to fulfillment of the university's democratizing potential; indeed, education should be free.

The least valuable purpose of the university is its being a handmaiden of corporate profits and the Department of Defense's high-tech research. Insofar as such research may be of use to society—as the development of the computer and subsequently the internet was—it is to be encouraged; but research on "weapons of mass destruction" such as napalm or missile systems (during the Vietnam War) contradicts the university's humanistic, democratic mission and is thus wrong. Likewise, for obvious reasons it is dangerous to think of universities as businesses whose funds should be invested in stocks and so forth, as is increasingly done.

Broadly speaking, there seems to be no contradiction between the humanistic and the democratic missions of education. Each is compatible with an ideological foundation in liberalism and an emphasis on the worth of the individual personality. These values should be the standards by which we judge how well any given aspect of education is fulfilling its goals.

We can learn a lot from the history of education, as an extended essay would demonstrate. The purpose of this paper has been merely to sketch the history of how reformers in the United States have conceptualized the functions of education and to propose on the basis of this knowledge a bare outline of an ideal educational system in the future. The chances of its being realized are slim, but nothing great has ever been accomplished without an unrealistic ideal in mind.

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Reading Takis Fotopoulos's *Towards an Inclusive Democracy: The Crisis of the Growth Economy and the Need for a New Liberatory Project* (1997). Very thought-provoking. Takes a market-oriented rather than capitalism-oriented approach. A whole different way of conceptualizing things. But I suspect it isn't as different as it seems at first: capitalism and the market are very closely related, the first presupposing the second and the second not *systemically* existing except in capitalism.

Thoughts on World War I, half-opposed to Lenin's:

"Protectionism [beginning in the 1870s]…undermined the market economy that had been established in the 19th century and, in fact, led to its near collapse in the 20th… It undermined…the world market economy by leading to colonial rivalry and competition for markets still unprotected. As a result of protectionist policies, the world economy, on which the 19th century balance-of-power system had rested, started disintegrating. This inevitably led to the near collapse of the system itself because…the '100 years peace' (1815–1914) crucially depended on two freedoms: the freedom of trade and the freedom of capital. Therefore, once colonial rivalry started having its effect on both freedoms, World War I became inevitable."

TF loves Karl Polanyi.

> To my mind, Polanyi's significant contribution was that he expressed the fundamental contradiction of the market economy system not in terms of an *economic* conflict between productive relations and productive forces, as Marx assumed, but in terms of a broader social conflict between the requirements of the market economy and those of society; in particular, in terms of the conflict created by the fact that in a market economy land and

> labor have to be treated as genuine commodities, with their free and fully developed markets, whereas in fact they are only fictitious commodities.
>
> Thus, as soon as a market economy was established, a ceaseless social struggle started. Schematically, this is the struggle between those controlling the market economy, i.e. the capitalist elite controlling production and distribution, and the rest of society. Those controlling the market economy aimed at marketizing land and labor as much as possible, that is, at minimizing—at best eliminating—all social controls on them [such as social security and trade union activity], so that their free flow, at a minimum cost, could be secured. On the other hand, those at the other end, particularly the growing working class, aimed at maximizing social controls on labor and land, that is, at maximizing society's self-protection against the perils of the market economy, especially unemployment and poverty.
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> At the theoretical and political level, this conflict was expressed by the clash between *economic liberalism* and *socialism* (in a broad sense)… [Liberalism: self-regulating market. Socialism: conserving humans and productive organization.] This struggle constituted the central element of European history, from the Industrial Revolution to date.

The economic conflict [between forces and relations] Marx discusses is so hard to evaluate empirically that it may not be worth keeping. But I can't help thinking there's some truth to it. Still, even if there is, it's less explanatorily useful with regard to social dynamics in capitalism than is Polanyi's hypothesis above (which is really just common sense). [See '*' below.]

The self-confidence of revolutionaries has been wrong from the beginning. Genuine socialist revolution has never been more than a distant possibility growing out of the contradiction between the demands of the capitalist elite and the demands of the broader society. Even in the 21st century, cooperativism will not usurp capitalism, though it will continue making inroads. Things are just going to become a big mess around the middle of the century, with the relative decline of the nation-state, the rise of semi-localism and semi-globalism, the interpenetration of various modes of production, and everything else.

The temptation to see things teleologically—and over-simplifiedly—is almost irresistible. Hence revolutionaries' confidence. Even now, for example, leftists are excitedly proclaiming that Latin America's moves toward independence have some deep world-historical significance, on the level of the rise of socialism. But nothing like that can be said. These developments are just stages in the aforementioned conflict. At times, one side gets the upper hand; at other times the population gets the upper hand. But it's mainly wishful thinking to argue that any given stage represents the beginning of the end. These struggles will go on forever.

I like the "sweep" of TF's interpretation of capitalism's history. In the 19th century there was the initial attempt at international marketization, liberalization, which failed (succumbing to protectionism, colonialism, imperialism, world wars) because "the objective [economic, technological] conditions for completion of this process [of the marketization of society] had not as yet been created." Then there was the interlude of statism, from the 1930s to the 1970s, during which marketization was rolled back, social controls instituted to protect society from the market, and the national domestic market rather than the international market drove economic growth. The statist or "social-democratic" phase fell victim in the 1970s to internationalization, liberalization, and the globalizing potential of information technology. The neoliberal phase is essentially a continuation of the liberal phase: "a historic opportunity has been created for the marketization process to be completed." Needless to say, the price of marketization is a drastic increase in inequality.

"In concluding, it is obvious that the rise of neoliberalism is not a conjunctural phenomenon, as social democrats present it, but that it represents the completion of the marketization process that was interrupted by the rise of statism." Radical *structural* changes have been brought about by the internationalized market economy, changes that can't simply be legislated out of existence by neo-

Keynesian economic policies or a mild improvement of the social safety net. In the light of the global recession, neoliberalism will be tightened up a bit and monitored more effectively, but it won't go away.

I think TF underestimates the extent of the "social controls" that still exist in the neoliberal age, such as social security, health insurance and unemployment insurance, and overestimates the extent of social controls during the "statist" or "social democratic" phase. I.e., he exaggerates the differences between that era and this one. But that's a relatively minor criticism.

*It occurs to me that Polanyi's hypothesis above, as elaborated by TF, is basically a reformulation of Marx's hypothesis that the story of capitalism is the story of class struggle. The struggle between the interests of capital (although TF would say the market economy—but "in the last instance" that resolves into primarily the interests of capital, i.e. profit and expansion) and the human interests of the rest of society, which Marx mistakenly thought would come to be dominated by the impoverished working class.[1] He also formulated this theory in terms of the conflict between productive forces and production relations, probably because he wanted his system to be "scientific" and "economistic." He was right, by the way, that the interest of the working class lay in the expansion of the productive forces, whereas the interest of the capitalist class was not in their expansion *simpliciter* but only in their expansion to the extent that it results in profit. Actually, on this level, the capitalist class as a whole has no collective interest at all; each capitalist merely wants to develop productive forces *faster than his competitors*, an interest which, in the aggregate, is perfectly compatible with recessions, depressions, the colossal waste of resources, etc. By contrast, the working class *does* have collective interests because the latter are *human* interests, e.g. the need for food, shelter, self-realization, and solidarity. And these interests can be realized in part by unimpeded development (and efficient, environmentally kind use) of the productive forces.

TF in fact regresses from Marx in that the class struggle (though not the conflict between forces and relations, which exclusively characterizes capitalism and the transition from feudalism to capitalism) has been a major causal factor throughout history, providing huge pressures on the political elite, even determining people's perceptions of the world (depending on their location in the class structure), etc., whereas TF expresses it as though social struggle didn't fully exist before the "market economy."

Anyway, this is all silly. The point is that *obviously* power-structures, and not only economic ones, conflict with the demands of the majority of the population. They always have and always will.

Incidentally, we shouldn't be too quick to say that the working class is no longer "relevant" or is merely a small minority of the population. The opposite is the case, especially on the global scale.

Likewise, the conflict between productive forces and production/exchange relations is still relevant. Perhaps more so than ever, on a global scale. In Latin America, Africa and much of Asia—as well as, for that matter, Europe and North America—capitalist relations prevent the unfolding of the productive potential of modern industry and agriculture. In many cases, cooperativism has become necessary in order to give people a livelihood, indeed to allow them to survive, and certainly to make full use of productive potentialities that exist (such as abandoned factories in Argentina). From the beginning of industrial capitalism, cooperatives have sprung up as a result of market failures, which generally can be expressed as emerging from a contradiction between productive (or consumption) potential and capitalist economic relations.

The reason that full-scale revolutions require changes in production relations is that the latter are the foundation of a society. And what's the logical reason that a revolution would cause a change in such relations? Because the old relations are hindering the development of productive potential—the realization of which is linked both to the satisfaction of human wants and the fulfillment of economic freedom—requiring the institution of new relations (which have in fact already been developing in the womb of the old society; the political revolution simply sweeps aside restrictions on their development). By the way, capitalism's ecological destruction, which results from the dynamic of its production and exchange relations, is yet another manifestation of its fettering of productive potential (since the environment is closely linked to production and the satisfaction of human needs). TF implies that Marxism's fetish of

[1] Actually, it theoretically *could* have been. But he was wrong that that was inevitable. It was merely one of the tendencies operative in a capitalist society.

productive growth *logically* leads to ecological destruction, but that's stupid, since such destruction hinders productive growth. TF's opposition to Marxism in general is extremely stupid.

Dialectics: *structures*, self-propagating and self-undermining. The original version of 'structuralism.' Not fully conceptualizable or explicable, but that's an indictment of human cognition rather than dialectics. –Actually, it's inexact to say that social structures undermine themselves. You should remember, first of all, that the dialectical and structural way of talking is just an approximation, or rather a kind of metaphorical abstraction. What exist are only human beings, each adhering to a variety of roles governed by rules. The roles and rules that are defined in terms of each other constitute a "structure." But the structure doesn't undermine *itself*. Rather, it is undermined (1) by clashing with other sets of roles and rules, or structures, and (2) by conflicting in various ways with the nature(s) of the people who together instantiate it. The human needs and desires of these people are separate from the rule-governed roles adopted, which are in constant tension both with other roles and with the *vivified* nature of their bearers. Rules can conflict with human needs. Speaking in the broadest way, urges of freedom and self-assertion will constantly undermine social structures (founded on power-relations, mutually interlocking duties, etc.). Sometimes these urges in one person will take a similar form to those in another, because the two people have the same location in a structure and thus have similar grievances—and if enough people come together, a social movement may start that aims at changing the repressive structure. This movement in turn will generate structures, i.e. relations of power, which might themselves come into tension with the vivified (i.e. free) character of the role-bearers, and so another movement might break away from the original. The process can be endless. In any case, what result from all these structures and counter-structures and structures within structures realized in a temporal world of freedom (and the unceasing urge for freedom, from repressive rules) and functioning in a matrix of *material conditions* are societal tendencies, counter-tendencies, contradictory tendencies, an impossibly intricate web of mutually complementary and mutually contradictory activities, with the 'unstructured' fact of *freedom* there at every instant and every point to provide continuous *rupture* (in tension with structural continuity). This stuff can't possibly be conceptualized in detail; only schematically and metaphorically can you inject some conceptual order into it.

January, 2010

Spent New Year's Eve watching the documentary *Ghosts of Rwanda*. Rwanda, the naked essence of power. Power vs. humanity, the struggle. Acts of heroism by an individual Rwandan soldier or a Belgian doctor juxtaposed with the evasions of Washington and New York bureaucrats, laughable if they weren't so despicable. Anthony Lake, Madeleine Albright, Warren Christopher, Bill Clinton, UN deputies and secretaries of state. Even trying to justify themselves after the fact. The moral cowardice is stupefying. And the tortured debates over the legal meaning of "genocide," because if the government admits it's genocide then it's bound to take action. The whole world withdrew from Rwanda. Left it to its fate. The UN, despite its mission never to let another Holocaust-similar event happen. White faces were evacuated, black faces left on the ground.

The fettering of productive potential by the Soviet system played a huge role in the demise of the system and its replacement by a capitalist economy. To an extent, this fettering even played a role in the revolutionary events of 1917, since it was *capitalist* (imperialist) forces that had resulted in World War I and thus indirectly in mass unnecessary starvation, which caused the workers to overthrow capitalism. In this sense, though, Marx's hypothesis says only that when economic relations result in massive poverty and "relative deprivation,"[1] (given certain other conditions) the oppressed will revolt against the economic relations. From this perspective, the hypothesis isn't terribly interesting.

[1] The connection between this concept and Marx's analysis is that relative deprivation shows the underprivileged what *could* be theirs given a more socially efficient use of society's productive capacity.

It is further emptied of content and made obviously true when you take into account that "fettering of productive forces" refers not only to their *development* but to their rational and efficient use, which obviously doesn't exist in capitalism. This fact has of course fueled many revolutionary social movements, a circumstance that both confirms and makes less interesting Marx's hypothesis. But the hypothesis is false insofar as it states that in any revolutionary conjuncture, the progressive movement will inevitably or very probably win. Only in the very long term is that *possibly* true.

Skimming Gar Alperovitz's *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb, and the Architecture of an American Myth*. Truman calling the bomb "merely another powerful weapon in the arsenal of righteousness." Absolutely jubilant upon hearing news of Hiroshima. As for Nagasaki, even G. A.'s scholarly excavations unearth no rational reason for its bombing so soon after Hiroshima, before giving the Japanese significant time to respond. It seems to have been only a result of the determination to end the war before the Russians, who had just declared war, had a chance to enter Manchuria. (Obviously the Americans wanted to keep them out of the east.) The decision to use the bomb at all was militarily unnecessary, as high-level generals and advisers stated years later and argued in private at the time. In fact, the war could have ended weeks earlier if the Americans had simply assured the Japanese, who were desperate for peace, that the emperor could remain on the throne (a request that was later granted). But Truman and Byrnes, the secretary of state, wouldn't make this concession. Why? Probably because their knowledge of the bomb gave them an "ace in the hole" at Potsdam, and they wanted a chance to demonstrate it to the Russians. So, from this perspective, far from shortening the war, the bomb may have lengthened it by a few weeks, by motivating Truman to reject Japan's overtures for peace. (Yes, he rejected them, in July!) But of course once the Russians declared war on Japan, the Americans wanted peace immediately. At any rate, the evidence is conclusive that the bomb didn't save American lives, since alternatives to invasion of Japan existed.[1] It was a maneuver undertaken for the sake of the Great Game with Russia that America had inherited from England. And Truman, along with Byrnes, Groves, LeMay and the rest, is among the great villains of history. (Actually, much like G. W. Bush, he lacks the grandeur to be a "villain." But objectively he is.)

By the way, neither Hiroshima nor Nagasaki was a military target, despite Truman's self-justifying lies to the contrary.

A journalist close to military thinking expressed it well:

> We were twice guilty. We dropped the bomb at a time when Japan already was negotiating for an end of the war but before those negotiations could come to fruition. We demanded unconditional surrender, then dropped the bomb and accepted conditional surrender, a sequence which indicates pretty clearly that the Japanese would have surrendered, even if the bomb had not been dropped, had the Potsdam Declaration [in July] included our promise to permit the Emperor to remain on his imperial throne.

What if Stalin had been the one to drop the bomb and had justified it by saying it probably saved Russian lives? Would we be defending the decision? No. We'd be saying, rightly, that the use of the bomb was horrifying, that in itself it enshrined Stalin as one of the arch-villains of history.

…Another note on Marx's theory of revolution: included in the "productive forces" is labor itself, productive activity, not to mention economic employment. And obviously insofar as these things are prevented from being realized, as they generally are to a greater or lesser degree in capitalism, tendencies toward revolt against the mode of production will build up. Whether they'll come to fruition is another question entirely, which Marx was wrong to gloss over. (I.e., he was wrong to take it for granted that the proletariat's revolutionary tendencies—and it has other tendencies too—would triumph.)

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[1] For instance, given that Japan was on the verge of collapse anyway, a weeks-long wait, combined with the shattering blow of Russia's declaration of war, might have resulted in victory.

After skimming through G. A.'s dispiriting book, it's a liberation to read Chomsky's "Notes on Anarchism" and "Language and Freedom."

Power-relations are inevitable in any society. Between family-members, friends, and lovers; in institutions of all sorts. They can be informal or formal, implicit or explicit. In a particular situation the social dynamic may vary from moment to moment, with one person and then another, or no one, or several, having a relative monopoly (or 'duopoly,' etc.) of power. Nature has even placed tendencies in humans regarding who will have relative power, e.g. male over female, large over small, strong over weak, adult over child. Certain power-relations, therefore, are natural; others are unnatural, or societally manufactured. The best that can be hoped for is to moderate the natural ones—since they foster emotional and physical conflict—and get rid of the artificial ones, which are the greatest source of social misery.

The wonderfulness of sex with "no strings attached." Seeing Natalie just to make out, have sex, lounge languidly afterwards, and…that's all. We talk, cuddle, all that stuff, but there are no romantic complications. I'm her boy-toy, her screamingly fun boy-toy, and she's my—exercise mat. But I want more girls, and most of all I want love.

Happiness means more to those who lack it than to those who have it; unhappiness means more to those in pain than to others.

Pleasures appear magnified the farther away one is from them.

On David Foster Wallace's prose.— Genius is rare, but rarer is genius that is not sickly.

It requires a special kind of cruelty, albeit a common one, to ignore a person.

He whose mind is purely disinterested is going to have a hard time in life.

Given the nature of modern society, failure is a point in one's favor.

A typically effective cure for boredom is to step outside.

The anarchist morality of not accepting subordination to power is essentially masculine. The feminine categorical imperative, in fact, is precisely the opposite.

On the other hand, the anarchist morality of democracy, community, cooperation, resolution of conflict through *talk*, is stereotypically feminine.

I suspect that every kind of behavior can be considered either "masculine" or "feminine" in this way, depending on how it's described. It can also be considered either "adult" or "childlike," and "bad" or "good," and "free" or "unfree," and so on. It all depends on how you choose to describe it. –This is like perspectivism, relativism, the lack of "objective truth." And yet it doesn't mean there aren't *better* descriptions, *truer* descriptions than others. So in some way there has to be a "truth of the matter" after all. Only with regard to these so-called binary oppositions, or at least some of them some of the time, is there perhaps not. (For instance, often the label "masculine" or "feminine" is virtually meaningless, as in the example above.)

Ressentiment, or resentment of a person for his perceived superiority, is a quintessentially feminine illness, and a modern one. Self-consciousness, self-criticism, a distant cousin of "compulsive awareness of oneself as an object of someone else's observation," to quote Laing's definition of self-consciousness. Indeed, schizophrenia is probably at least sometimes related to *ressentiment*, an extreme version of it. Perhaps generalized so as to be directed at all people. Acute insecurity, acute lack of self-confidence and self-identity, resentment towards reality as a whole (precisely because it is 'whole'). Like schizophrenia,

ressentiment is caused by a lack of (self-)confirmation from the other, from the world, from oneself. It can be analyzed in terms of recognition. And there are many ways to deal with it, for example the Christian way that Nietzsche talks about, or Sarah Palinian conservatism: "We rednecks are the true America, not those liberal elites in New York, and we're damned proud of our simplicity, our traditions, our guns." There's *ressentiment* involved in that: turning one's perceived inferiority (how the Other views one) into a strength, one's greatest source of pride. "You think I'm ignorant? Well, fine, I'm *proud* of my ignorance!" Defining oneself in relation to the dominant other: *he is bad, so I, being different, am good*, rather than *I am good (obviously), so he, being different, is bad*.

Kropotkin's essay "The State: Its Historic Role." *L'état, c'est la guerre*. One of its historic roles, of course, has been to transplant the peasantry from the countryside to the cities so as to facilitate industrialization (Marx's "reserve army of labor") and make possible the exploitation of land for profit. This is one of the ways in which the nation-state and capitalist industrialization go hand-in-hand. China is doing it now, moving hundreds of millions of peasants to cities—the greatest urban-planning project in history. European states did it from the 1500s to the 1900s, in England with the enclosure acts, in France with the laborious destruction of the village communes, in Russia with Stolypin's legislation and then Stalin's Five-Year Plans, etc. There are other ways too. Chomsky discusses in one of his articles the historic function of the Vietnam War in destroying on a colossal scale the peasant villages and sending former inhabitants to the cities, where they'd become cheap labor for capital to exploit. This massive removal of the peasantry from the countryside is a prerequisite for capitalist development, indeed for industrialization of whatever kind. And it isn't "automatic," proceeding from purely market-driven causes, as bourgeois ideologists proclaim. It's intentional, political, brutal, the forced uprooting of hundreds of millions.

Kropotkin was always right that the regeneration of society, the social revolution, couldn't be carried out by the state but only by grassroots movements. The state is an institution for domination, destruction, and "law and order"; it is not *socially creative*, except in marginal ways. (Funding initiatives like the Peace Corps, etc.) Anarcho-syndicalism was right that present economic structures will inevitably leave their mark on institutions built after the political revolution—and therefore that the *social* (economic) revolution must substantially take place *before* the conquest of political power, not after it. In the latter case it will fail, since capitalist holdovers of domination will influence the "new society." But this truth is also implicit in Marx's dictum that politics follows in the wake of economics. A revolution can't be politically imposed, because in that case economic relations are not ripe for it. The new relations have to have already "matured," at least somewhat, under the old political regime, as happened during the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Rightly understood, then, Marx was an anarcho-syndicalist with qualifications.[1] (Or at least he should have been, logically speaking.) From his premises, the proletarian dictatorship's task

[1] Anarcho-syndicalists believed that workers had to create in the womb of the old society the institutions of the new. Socialism, they thought, would be structured around workers' councils and unions that had developed in capitalism. They also rejected the idea of a "workers' state," proclaiming it to be impossible, and believed that the general strike was the most effective tool of revolution—two respects in which Marx would have disagreed with them. But he shouldn't have. From his perspective there's no good reason to disavow the use of the general strike. Even his support for the idea of a workers' political party, which anarcho-syndicalists rejected (because they rejected all politics), is not particularly "Marxist," since political parties are forced to work within the confines of the parliamentary system and thus make compromises that blur the antagonism between labor and capital, in the end leading to the co-optation of the labor movement as a prop for the stability of the system. This was a danger that Marx and Engels were aware of, but they didn't take it seriously enough. Marx also should have made more explicit his support of direct action, which anarcho-syndicalists of course advocated. Nothing is more "Marxist" than direct action (which, like Marxist theory, privileges economics over politics). [On the other hand, I have to admit that Marx's advocacy of political action was in some ways more realistic and less 'utopian' than the anarcho-syndicalist position. But it was either Scylla or Charybdis for him, and for the working class: either the syndicalist route, which didn't work so well in any country for a variety of reasons, or a workers' party that would attempt to seize control of the state but in the process would inevitably make compromises and finally succumb to a moderate reformism and bureaucratism, as happened everywhere.]

could only be to *finish* the job, not to *start* it, as Lenin tried. Workers' groups had to do much of the societal restructuring beforehand; their subsequent political decrees would formalize and 'organize' the institutions that the workers had already created. Otherwise, given the foundation of the political in the economic, the new government's acts would inevitably have the taint of capitalist, bureaucratic structures that still survived. More than the "taint," in fact. Despite himself, Marx knew that the attempt to politically will new liberatory institutions into existence wouldn't succeed (as Lenin, Stalin and Mao tried). They have to emerge slowly, through popular struggle; otherwise they're artificial, 'inorganic,' bureaucratic and coercive, since economic conditions aren't ripe for them.

Polanyi's *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. One of the salient differences, I think, between the era that led to the world wars and the era that followed them is that politics was more independent of the interests of capital in the first than in the second. The great wars were, by and large, not in the interest of European financial or industrial capital. **[Wrong! In many respects they were.]** As I said earlier, then, the wars were symptomatic of capital's immaturity, of its not yet having definitively conquered the summits of political power. **[It's true that the bourgeoisie wasn't in *unequivocal* control of the European state system by the time of World War I. But national capitalist classes were firmly behind their respective states in both wars. Would the wars have occurred had Germany's aristocratic Junker class not existed or had so much power? I don't know. Possibly not.]** Again, the great influence of nationalist and racist ideologies all through the 19th century and well into the 20th testifies to that—but only to an extent, since capital itself orchestrated innumerable colonial wars and fanned the flames of nationalism. (And such ideological forces also simply emerged 'naturally' from the social-dislocating dynamics of the international economic regime.) Racism and nationalism are perfectly compatible with capitalism up to a point; but they're dangerous in that they can breed social conflicts destructive to capital, and also in that as motivating forces they can interfere with the profit incentive. So, mature capitalism tends to discard them, or rather breeds (directly and indirectly) popular and elite efforts to discredit them for the sake of social stability, etc. **[But reactionary sectors of capital continue to propagate and subsidize them.]**

[…]

Mitt Romney is coming out with a book called *No Apology: The Case for American Greatness*. Since we're accustomed to politicians talking obsessively about "American greatness," the title of his book doesn't strike anyone as laughable. But think of it in a different way. What if a French politician came out with a book called *No Apology: The Case for French Greatness*? Or a Chinese with *No Apology: The Case for Chinese Greatness*? It would be a joke. Like, why the hell are they even worrying about stupid stuff like that? Reassuring themselves that they're great? It's worse than childish, since even children don't have to reassure themselves about the greatness of their country; it's infantile. But in America it's politically savvy.

A good way to conceptualize the failure of Marx's predictions is to say that he assumed incorrectly, like market liberals, that the only two alternatives are free market capitalism and socialism. This is just another way of formulating the common criticism that Marx underestimated the actual (in his day) and the potential role of the state in regulating the capitalist economy. Polanyi is right that without continuous massive state intervention, the free market would quickly lead to complete social disintegration, in which case something like a revolution might happen. And actually, the horrors of the first half of the twentieth century were largely a result of insufficient social controls on economic activity, or rather of the liberal framework around which the global economy was structured and to which nations tried to adapt in various ways (some fascist). The gold standard itself was a product of the liberal vision of a governmentally unregulated, self-adjusting global economy, and (according to Polanyi) it led to the opposite of what liberals predicted, namely enormous social dislocation, imperialism, protectionism to offset the social dislocation, depressions, and wars.

Fred Block's introduction to the book is very good. Excerpts:

> The gold standard was intended to create an integrated global marketplace that reduced the role of national units and national governments, but its consequences were

exactly the opposite. Polanyi shows that when it was widely adopted in the 1870s, it had the ironic effect of intensifying the importance of the nation as a unified entity…

The reality is that the simple rules of the gold standard imposed on people economic costs that were literally unbearable. When a nation's internal price structure diverged from international price levels, the *only* legitimate means for that country to adjust to the drain of gold reserves was by deflation. This meant allowing its economy to contract until declining wages reduced consumption enough to restore external balance. This implied dramatic declines in wages and farm income, increases in unemployment, and a sharp rise in business and bank failures.

…Hence, almost as soon as the gold standard mechanism was in place, entire societies began to collude in trying to offset its impact. A first recourse was for countries to increase their use of protective tariffs for both agricultural and manufactured goods. By making trade flows less sensitive to price changes, countries could gain some degree of greater predictability in their international transactions and be less vulnerable to sudden and unanticipated gold outflows.

A further expedient was the rush by the major European powers, the United States, and Japan to establish formal colonies in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The logic of free trade had been strongly anticolonial, because the costs of empire would not be offset by corresponding benefits if all traders had access to the same markets and investment opportunities. But with the rise of protectionism in international trade [which itself grew out of the exigencies of free trade, and the necessity to reduce its social impact!], this calculation was reversed. Newly acquired colonies would be protected by the imperial powers' tariffs, and the colonizers' traders would have privileged access to the colonies' markets and raw materials. The "rush to empire" of this period intensified the political, military, and economic rivalry between England and Germany that culminated in the First World War.

For Polanyi the imperialist impulse…materializes as nations struggle to find some way to protect themselves from the relentless pressures of the gold standard system. The flow of resources from a lucrative colony might save the nation from a wrenching crisis caused by a sudden outflow of gold, and the exploitation of the overseas populations might help keep domestic class relations from becoming even more explosive.

Polanyi argues that the utopianism of the market liberals led them to invent the gold standard as a mechanism that would bring a borderless world of growing prosperity. Instead, the relentless shocks of the gold standard forced nations to consolidate themselves around heightened national and then imperial boundaries. The gold standard continued to exert disciplinary pressure on nations, but its functioning was effectively undermined by the rise of various forms of protectionism, from tariff barriers to empires. And yet even when this entire system came crashing down with the First World War, the gold standard was so taken for granted that statesmen mobilized to restore it. The whole drama was tragically played out again in the 1920s and 1930s, as nations were forced to choose between protecting the exchange rate and protecting their citizens. It was out of this stalemate that fascism emerged. In Polanyi's view the fascist impulse—to protect society from the market by sacrificing human freedom—was universal, but local contingencies determined where fascist regimes were successful in taking power.

…Polanyi's arguments are so important for contemporary debates about globalization because neoliberals embrace the same utopian vision that inspired the gold standard… The neoliberal utopia of a borderless and peaceful globe requires that millions of ordinary people throughout the world have the flexibility to tolerate—perhaps as often as every five or ten years—a prolonged spell in which they must survive on half or less of what they previously earned.

Polanyi: "When the significance of poverty was realized [around 1780], the stage was set for the nineteenth century." Truer words were never spoken. If the eighteenth century was the age of the political revolution (republicanism and so on), the nineteenth was the age of the social revolution, at least the attempted one. In the 1700s it was republicanism, in the 1800s it was socialism.

Above I said that social structures don't undermine themselves, properly speaking. And in many cases that's true. The patriarchal family doesn't undermine *itself*; it is undermined by conflicting with human desires and with other social structures, and the desires/values that they propagate. However, at least one structure does undermine itself: the capitalist free-market economy, taken as a single vast structure. Or you can abstract out the essential elements from the empirical reality and take those as the structure. Either way, as a whole it conflicts with itself—the functioning of its rules and roles generates problems with their functioning—and, given enough time, will run itself into the ground. The difficult thing is to understand in detail the ways in which it accomplishes this feat. Marx spent a lifetime trying to do so.

Had Europe in the nineteenth century not taken measures to "protect society from the functioning of the economic (market) system," society and the economy would have collapsed. But, ironically, the measures it took—protectionism, imperialism—led to much the same outcome. Actually, it's too early for me to say whether I accept Polanyi's arguments about the gold standard and about imperialism being, in effect, a way of sheltering a nation from the ravages of the free market. I'm not even sure I like his way of conceptualizing things in terms of the conflict between the pressures towards a free market and the pressures towards society's "self-protection" against it. Why not interpret the world along strictly Marxian lines, according to which the various sectors of capital try to do whatever is in their interest, which usually amounts to "free market discipline for *you*, but subsidies, bailouts and protectionism (and imperialism, colonial wars, etc.) for *me*," while workers and all other groups disadvantaged by the rule of capital—which incorporates not only the free market but also state-sanctioned violence, union-busting, private armies and other non-market means of discipline—fight for their own interests? Isn't Polanyi's conceptual framework somewhat superfluous, i.e. not as explanatorily powerful as Marx's? Prima facie, in Polanyi's scheme *agency* is an after-thought, whereas it is essential to Marx's (even if its structural location is what matters most). On the other hand, Polanyi's perspective provides insights, is at least a half-useful way of viewing things, and can probably be seen as supplementary to Marx's if formulated in the right way. In fact, the reason for capital's insistence on subsidies and protections for its benefit is precisely that it recognizes the hazards of the free market and wants to be shielded from them. You can follow Polanyi in calling this an element in the "self-protection of society," but that seems explanatorily counterproductive. Ideological even, in that it suggests that capital's acts are socially necessary and beneficial, which is usually far from true.

…What I was trying to say above is that it may be better to talk only about the capitalist mode of production (wage-labor, capital, surplus-value, profit) rather than about the movement towards a free market vs. the "countermovement" towards "social controls." Doesn't Polanyi introduce illusory distinctions, artificial ways of picking out social tendencies? Doesn't he fixate too exclusively on the mode of distribution at the expense of the mode of production? He says that "Robert Owen's was a true insight: market economy if left to evolve according to its own laws would create great and permanent evils." Isn't it more fruitful to talk about the opposition between capital and labor than the opposition—derivative of more basic forces—between the free market and "societal self-protection" from the market? I guess the best way to answer such a question is by deciding which scheme bears greater theoretical fruit. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Maybe this is all sort of a red herring. Polanyi's basic point is that nature, humans, and businesses have to be protected from the "devastating effects of a self-regulating market," because land, labor-power, and money are "fictitious" commodities that obey different laws than ordinary commodities. His point is valid. In fact, it makes up for the deficiency in Marxism that led Marx to concentrate on purely economic laws at the expense of their possible, or necessary, alteration and softening by the state. Polanyi helps explain the state's interference in the economy, which helps explain, among other things, why a Western socialist revolution never happened.

On the other hand, if Marx succeeds in demonstrating the contradictions of capitalism, which are of course intimately connected even in his system with the functioning of the market, then surely he too inadvertently explains why the state is forced to intervene in the economy.

But what exactly is the relationship between capitalist production and distribution? Doesn't each imply the other? Isn't each *involved in* the other? And yet at the same time production is more fundamental? What does that mean? Analytically, how do you separate production from distribution? In a sense, the whole process is "production."

Maybe a better way of expressing Polanyi's criticism of the unregulated market is to criticize unregulated *capitalism*, i.e. capital's unregulated pursuit of profits. It is this that is the real danger, since capital also uses other means than the free market to squeeze profit from workers. Moreover, surely this criticism is more historically specific than Polanyi's. It's conceivable, after all, that unregulated markets need not always be socially catastrophic, for instance if they're on a small scale. The danger isn't markets per se but capital's use of them. Especially because (Polanyi points out in the beginning of his book that) markets in themselves don't have a tendency to expand or to destroy everything in their path; only the capitalist market does.

But I'm forgetting that Polanyi's criticisms are directed at the market *economy*, which he defines as the complete extension of markets so that they comprise even the organization of labor, land and money. In this sense, capitalism means the market principle taken to its extreme. "Market economy" is, for Polanyi—(obviously)—synonymous with "capitalism," more or less; it is this he is criticizing, not markets per se. But, again, his reluctance to frame the issue in terms of capital, class, surplus-value, the drive for profit, the sphere of *production*, and the opposition between capital and labor, reduces the explanatory power of his ideas. Marx's framework allows us to understand why there is constantly pressure for an expansion of the free market (though rarely at the expense of big business), namely because it is in the interests of capital in its war against wage-labor. Polanyi, remarkably, doesn't really try to explain why markets in a "market economy" are prone to global expansion; he mainly invokes "economic liberals" and mistaken liberal thinking as responsible for the extension and prolongation of the free market (during the 1920s, for example)—a wildly inadequate explanation, but virtually the only possible one within the confines of a theory that tries to minimize structural agency, class, and class conflict.[1]

(To repeat, the notion of surplus-value, which I invoked a minute ago, is, on the most basic level, merely common sense. It's practically a synonym for 'profit.' If the employee didn't create extra value (on top of the value of his wages) for the employer, there would be no point in employing him.)

Polanyi, the bourgeois socialist.

He dislikes the theoretical framework that sees society as composed of a number of competing interests, preferring to think in terms of "societal self-protection" (from the market economy) as a whole. He constantly talks about vague "*social* interests" as if everyone can agree on what these are, and refers deprecatingly to the typically Marxist "obsession that only sectional [e.g. class], never general, interests can become effective," i.e. can force themselves on society in such a way that reforms are made. But what are these general interests that become effective? There aren't many. Most pieces of social legislation have to be fought for by specific interest groups, which are usually directly or indirectly related to class locations and class-determined experiences.

The Andante from Schubert's Piano Trio in B-flat, D. 898. (I'm trusting the YouTube title.) The two components that make Schubert Schubert: the melodic hauntingness and the experimentation with key-changes.[2] Listening to each measure wondering where he's going to go next. The inventiveness. Brendel remarks in an essay that, whereas Haydn's excursions into foreign keys seem consciously planned and controlled, Schubert's seem to take him by a surprise comparable to the listener's. They're spontaneous. In

[1] Takis Fotopoulos, Polanyi's disciple, doesn't do much better: if I remember, he periodically alludes to the competitive advantage of expanding one's economic operations and doesn't probe further, perhaps because he's unconsciously afraid of the Marxian conclusions he might be led to. (The relative importance of the sphere of production, the role of structural conflict in capitalism, etc.)

[2] On a more general level, of course, the third Schubertian trait is a unique fusion of classicism and romanticism.

his late music, if he isn't actually changing the key he's inserting a note or two to *hint* at a key-change, only to draw back from the edge. The effect in this piece is an impression of *suspension*, levitation. But that also has to do with the classical restraint, simplicity and quietness of the melody. Unusually exquisite, even for Schubert.

How do you create a labor market where there isn't one, for example in traditional societies? You destroy the prevailing social structures and means of subsistence so that people are forced into the factories and the mines to make a living. Particularly effective is the expedient of starving them; they're bound to obey you then.

Polanyi's functionalism isn't necessarily mistaken. He's right that interests that serve a useful function for society tend to have some influence. For example, his explanation of the continued influence of the Continental landed aristocracy through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seems plausible: namely, that "feudalism and landed conservatism retained their strength as long as they served a purpose that happened to be that of restricting the disastrous effects of the mobilization [i.e., marketization] of land." In other words, the survival of feudal forms of life in Central and Eastern Europe was due to their function in "retarding the marketization of land," which had the potential to be socially catastrophic if undertaken too hastily. In general, Polanyi likes to explain the influence of a particular class by how well it serves the interests of society as a whole (presumably as stabilizing it and allowing it to compete with other societies). This reminds me of Darwin's functionalism: those adaptations that improve a species' chances of survival tend to be the ones that live on; the rest die out. But just as a *mechanism* is necessary in the case of Darwinism, so it is in the case of Polanyism. Real explanations are causal, not functional.

> Under the circumstances, a group able to represent the endangered rural interests could gain an influence out of proportion to their numbers. The protectionist countermovement actually succeeded in stabilizing the European countryside and in weakening that drift toward the towns which was the scourge of the time. Reaction was the beneficiary of a socially useful function which it happened to perform. The identical function which allowed reactionary classes in Europe to make play with traditional sentiments in their fight for agrarian tariffs was responsible in America about a half-century later for the success of the TVA and other progressive social techniques. The same needs of society which benefited democracy in the New World strengthened the influence of the aristocracy in the Old.

Very interesting thoughts. One way around the functionalism is to suggest that at first liberal policies were tried (in Germany, for example), and they led to social problems, such as the Great Depression of 1873–86; then protectionist, aristocratic, feudal interests were allowed to have a say, and the policies that resulted stabilized the society. (Legislation was enacted in the 1880s and later to protect labor also, and other interests.) So groups opposing them lost political influence, and the protectionist policies prevailed. In the meantime, by the way, the aristocracy's appeal to the soil, the race, the nation, and old martial, chivalric values—all of which struck a chord in the peasantry and petty-bourgeoisie, who were resistant to capitalist change[1]—played a great role in exacerbating national antagonisms and imperial rivalries, thereby contributing to the onset of World War I. Only when these conservative rural interests were destroyed in the Second World War was a European peace made possible.

In the broadest of strokes, here's a way to explain the world wars [and later developments]: Free trade in the nineteenth century, if unchecked, would have resulted in society's transformation into a "heap of ruins"; so protectionism, with its corollary imperialism, made great strides after the 1870s. National and imperial rivalries emerged, and in the long run the outcome was the Great War. Then in the 1920s there

[1] "The nation" etc. signified for them their old secure way of life, their self-respect, their traditional culture, and their property, as Daniel Guerin notes in his book *Fascism and Big Business*.

was a return to an orgy of economic liberalism. The consequence was the Great Depression. Once again, "protectionism" [of many types] on a huge scale resulted, with the New Deal in America and fascist policies in Europe. There were even pressures towards autarky, since international trade plummeted and nations decided it was more prudent to rely on themselves and avoid the risks of having to import essential resources from other countries. (Think of Hitler's *Lebensraum*, his policy of expanding Germany to such an extent that it could rely entirely on its own economy.) Combined with cultural resentments felt all across Europe, World War II was the product of this retreat into national self-sufficiency and elimination of free trade. Afterwards, international regulatory institutions were put in place to prevent a third war. Regulated free trade resumed, but in a framework of strong statist welfare measures and societal self-protection from the vagaries of the market. Decades of relative prosperity resulted, until the 1970s when deindustrialization began in the West as corporations outsourced aspects of the production process to countries where labor was cheaper. Protectionism, welfare, and regulation were partially dismantled for the sake of corporate profits; the consequence was great hardship for the mass of people everywhere. Similar to the 1920s, but worse and spread all over the world. Then in 2008 there was a semi-repeat of 1929, caused again by liberalization and the financialization of the economy. With the resulting mass hardship, protectionist and semi-fascist pressures are again making themselves felt (Sarah Palin, Glenn Beck), although this time the dangers are less real than they were in the 1930s because of our irreversible global economic integration and a somewhat more sophisticated approach to recessions, as well as the far more entrenched nature now than in the '30s of the non-fascist elite. What does the future hold? Probably a continuation of the status quo for a long time, with greater regulation of the global economy and relative loss-of-power of the nation-state. Trends toward global cooperation and regional decentralization will continue, as people learn that they can no longer rely on the national government and the broader economy to protect them. Developments like those that Gar Alperovitz describes in *America Beyond Capitalism*.

Polanyi is right: "The degenerative character of the fascist solution was evident. It offered an escape from an institutional deadlock which was essentially alike in a large number of countries, and yet, if the remedy were tried, it would everywhere produce sickness unto death. That is the manner in which civilizations perish." And in a manner of speaking, a civilization did perish in World War II. The degenerative character of fascism bears resemblance to the less extreme degeneration signified by Louis Bonaparte's rise to power in the late 1840s and early '50s. There was institutional deadlock: as Marx said, the bourgeoisie had become incapable of ruling society and the proletariat was not yet capable. (In fact, it never would be capable, or at least it would never have the opportunity to prove itself.) But the deadlock was much greater in the early 1930s. There wasn't a real risk of a communist revolution in Central Europe, but even so, capital wanted to stop labor's frightening agitation for social reform. Labor, for its part, was not strong enough to push through its policies, just as capital was not strong enough to push through its own. So a band of thugs was, in effect, called in to end the stalemate. This sort of scenario, this institutional breakdown, is a permanent possibility (though rarely a reality) in capitalism given the foundational antagonism between capital and labor.

My idea of happiness would be to play duets with a girl, like Schubert's Two Trios and Two Ländler, D. 618. Or those delightful duets by Mozart. Anything classical in spirit, since classicism is harmony and happiness.

Against Nietzsche.— More "strength" is required to overcome *ressentiment*, or any other attitude of mean-spiritedness, than to be immune to it from the beginning.

The amount of free time I have is really obscene. Almost sickening. That's in the nature of January, but it won't change because I'm not taking any classes this semester, only writing my thesis. So I'm getting involved in more activities. Book clubs and so on. Heard about a meeting tonight to address homelessness in Boston; the people there, twenty-somethings, were just the sort of *special* people you'd expect, special in the true sense. The girl directing the meeting—Emilia—was beautiful, charismatic, eloquent, friendly, brilliantly articulate. She's an opera singer too. Afterwards she walked over and thanked me for my

comments, which completely hadn't been "thank you"-worthy; we had a brief conversation. She probably has a boyfriend, though.

What a great documentary we saw. Short, but among the best. Produced in the '80s. It followed four homeless Bostonians around for weeks, four unique and very human characters who made me see homelessness in a different light. Marx remarks somewhere that the criminal classes tend to include the population's best elements, the intentional nonconformists.

Emilia and the movie and discussion had put me in a deliciously mellow mood, but now that I'm home in front of my computer and have just watched clips on YouTube, I again, as usual, feel nothing(ness). Doing nothing, feeling nothing.

All these new girls I meet through Craigslist and Meetup. Elena remarked in an email that my "untiring energy to go meeting new girls is remarkable." I suppose it is, isn't it? Hope springs eternal.

One problem with the average political "conservative" (or neoconservative; the distinction is evaporating in the broader culture) in the U.S. is that he has an emotional attachment to the idea of America, its greatness, so that if anything is said that might be interpreted as critical of the country he feels the need to disagree with it and defend America. He is more committed to his belief in the greatness of his country, a nonexistent abstract entity, than to action on behalf of people's well-being (action that he often thinks takes "anti-American" forms). He is vigilantly on the lookout for "anti-Americanism," his antennae hyper-attuned to the faintest whiff of it. He won't accept criticisms, for example, of American foreign policy unless they're premised on the belief that America is great, noble, a force for democracy and freedom in the world. His outlook, hyper-patriotic, is basically totalitarian. So he can't think clearly about the world: the fog of patriotism is always obscuring his vision and putting blinders on him, like on a horse. It's a mental pathology, not unlike the pathology of fundamentalist Christianity (which is probably why the two pathologies are often seen in the same person). A profound emotional commitment to an abstract entity is always pathological, which is to say unnatural, contrary to nature, arising out of societal alienation.

My little pseudo-debates with Ryan Williams on Facebook—Williams, the very exemplar of intellectual laziness and, yes, just plain stupidity—enlighten me as to how the conservative mind works. It revolves around an ideological core immune to argument. You could amass all the evidence in the world, but this douchebag is never going to change his opinion on issues like "big government" (bad) or "law and order" (good). The best thing you can do with such people is to push them aside and get on with productive work.

Here's a better way of saying it: once a person like the douchebag places you in a certain mental category that he considers beyond the pale, such as "radical" or "socialist" or "anti-American," his mind is more or less shut off to your arguments. You can say as much as you want, point to any number of facts or empirical studies or anything like that, but because you've been locked away in this box, none of it has to be taken seriously. The box is a defense-mechanism by which the douchebag prevents your arguments from undermining his own convictions too radically. The fact, then, that conservatives are very prone to name-calling is significant: by labeling their opponents "liberals" they give themselves permission to disregard their arguments, which is the best possible reaction because if they actually tried to engage with arguments on their merits they'd fail miserably. Liberals/leftists don't need the name-calling so much because they can beat their opponents through logic.

Reading John Curl's excellent book *For All The People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America* (2009). Very comprehensive.

Lincoln, just before his death: "I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country… Corporations have been enthroned, an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until the wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed." This crisis has been going on for about 150 years.

…The next time someone tells you that cooperativism doesn't work in practice, point out that in fact it works much better than capitalism, i.e. the system characterized by constant pressures toward war (two world wars), economic instability, high levels of unemployment, labor-capital conflicts, famine and

ecological destruction, disincentives toward adequate social welfare, oligarchic politics, and everyday alienation.

Herbert Gutman's "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815–1919." What a rich world we lost with the standardization and atomization of society. Such diversity and humanness, artisanal craftsmanship and pride, free-wheeling festivals of life outside the factory. Actually, already in the mid-1800s the dehumanization was apparent, according to Mike Walsh: "A 'gloomy, churlish, money-worshipping spirit' had 'swept nearly all the poetry out of the poor man's sphere,' said the editor-politician. 'Ballad-singing, street dancing, tumbling, public games, all are either prohibited or discountenanced, so that Fourth of July and election sports alone remain.'" Local and national power-structures pressing the masses into dull rectangular shapes. The nascent nation-state suppressing local variety, spontaneity being dangerous to centralized power.

At heart I remain a philosopher and a phenomenological psychologist. These are the subjects most congenial to the structure of my mind. Doing historical research is a very, very slow process, and painful. Every ten minutes I distract myself with music or YouTube or emailing.

I want to suck a slut's slick slit. Suck the slick slit of a slut. Slip the spit-soaked skin of my sucked stick into a slut's slobber-slick slit.

February

Reading *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* for a book club with a bunch of chicks. After a hundred pages and a little skipping around, one of my impressions is that this dude doesn't achieve the connoisseurship of suffering that I knew for too many years, although he thinks he does (or did) and prides himself on it (while mocking his pride, while mocking his mocking, while proud of his self-mocking self-mocking). Tragedy, yes; drama, no doubt; but extended, distended, intended, subtended pain tending toward suicide year after year after year, no. Parents dead within five weeks when he's 21—tragic, dramatic, the stuff of memoirs; but two older siblings and a girlfriend he sort of loves and close friends and a younger brother to whom he's passionately devoted and off to San Francisco (San Francisco!), and a fair amount of sex and dating. None of the cavernous loneliness and ambivalent self-esteem of mine for far too long, or the burning sexual frustration. (Maddening, the unconsummated love of women.) This insidious undramatic suffering is the worst kind. My having emerged cheerful as ever on the other side is—impressive.

On the other hand, Eggers did grow up with an alcoholic father. There's that too.

…The desire to meet a good woman is the motivation behind my socializing. ("A good woman is a hidden treasure: the finder is well advised not to boast about it.") The book clubs. The homelessness campaign, which I agreed to join the leadership committee of because it's a connection to good people. The MIT conference tonight and tomorrow on "Building an Ethical Economy" (utopian), subtitled "Theology and the Marketplace"—tonight a lecture by some Cambridge economist well-versed in the art of talking without saying anything. Grand words and sentences spoken with gravitas about why natural resources are underpriced in the market and so forth, and then the panel with a bishop, a theologian from UChicago, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and some other guy, followed by questions from the audience, and the same puffed-up lexical legerdemain with the big words and long sentences spoken in paragraphs that leave you wondering at the end "What was just said?" And if you figure it out, the next thought is "I could have said all that in two sentences." (And when it comes to intellectuals, the customer is indeed always right.) Afterwards the splitting into small groups to pore over the copious…doodles we had made. In the vacuum of power and intelligence that was my group, I emerged as the de facto leader, trying to steer the discussion towards something, *any*thing, concrete. These conferences, like most meetings of whatever sort, tend to be masturbatory—although really it's an insult to masturbation to call them masturbatory. But I met some girls and will go back tomorrow to meet others.

Second day: again with the verbal virtuosity but relative emptiness of thought, excessive abstractness. The focus of the conference is theory, not practice—and not even *productive* theory, but *moralizing*. Ways of moralizing about the economy and economics. You know, it's thinned-out theology, watered down into pseudo-humanism. Zippidy-doo, let's all go celebrate how good we feel now. But I liked most of the young people I met. Had a heated little debate during our "group discussion" with an elderly douchebag of a management consultant blindly loyal to capitalism; trounced him, of course. It's diverting to school a businessman in the ways of the world, talking calmly in my somewhat resonant voice, watching him get twisted in the coils of his illogic. These diluted humanist-religious people were allergic to what limited tension there was and tried to defuse it.

…Reading this book by an unconscious literary semi-Hegelian obsessed with self-obsession and fame and self-confirmation or the (imaginary) *real*-izing of one's self, the voice of a culture that has no higher goal than to overcome anonymity through whatever means necessary (*The Real World* or starting an ill-fated literary magazine or whatever)[1] because that's how you validate your existence even though it's quixotic for nearly everyone (and in a deeper sense, for *everyone*), brings home to me how ingenious is my own solution to the problem. You know what it is. The not caring about *present* fame, the being born posthumously. It's an illusion perfectly symmetrical to the illusion of imprinting oneself immortally on the world, which is what is sought by the author and his culture in the *present*, self-defeatingly (because the present is gone the next moment, but for other reasons too). My illusion is perfectly calibrated to achieve my goal, in fact makes its lack of achievement impossible—because if posthumously I'm not celebrated by millions it won't matter, since I'll be dead. So I go through life not being disturbed by my anonymity (at least on one level). Millions of others not so intensely aware of Absurdity as I are suicidal, suicides, while I "do my thing" quietly and patiently, guided by faith. In myself.

Twenty-nine years old.— Nothing impresses me anymore, least of all the fact that nothing impresses me anymore—so there's nothing to do but sit back and enjoy this good-humored life-weariness and listen to the song "Beast of Burden," with a cold beer in my hand.

Useless book club. Few people showed up, and only the stupid ones. Funny how two people can read a book and have totally opposite impressions—one person understanding it and the other completely missing the point. :-P Idiots moralizing about Eggers, his "selfishness," need for attention, manipulation of relationships for the sake of art. (Poor John, poor Beth, poor everyone being exploited by Eggers for his novel. So inconsiderate! So immoral! And oh his pathetic need to be in the spotlight!) Jesus God what morons. Personalizing it all. What the fuck is wrong with people. As usual, I played the philosopher to everyone else's–Tartuffe. The sympathizer with genius vs. the enforcers of convention. Seriously, what occurs in the mind of the average person? Condemning Eggers for "telling me how to interpret the book," and for being self-obsessed—as if that isn't the whole point. I went out of my way to antagonize these fools. "I loved the book, and as for his being self-obsessed, I have to agree with him that in general it's hard to be intelligent or interesting without being self-obsessed on some level. Anyway, it's the culture, not him. It's a narcissistic culture; that's his point. He recognizes the absurdities of his own stance, even the perhaps morally ambiguous implications, but you can't avoid his self-absorption nowadays if you're intelligent. [That sounded mean, so:] It's the environment." Stony stares, glares. And then the harsh moral criticisms for explicitly exploiting his relationships with friends. So I: "All artists exploit their relationships, their experience, especially all literary artists. At least he has the honesty to admit it, and to struggle with it. And that's the whole point, that self-consciousness. Besides, the only alternative is to not write at all. It's

[1] Irony: validating yourself, making yourself "real," by means of reality shows that are in fact less real than anything else in the world (although they are also *more* real insofar as they're at the center of culture, i.e. the public reality). And the public recognition that comes from them, or from any media-centered activity, is similarly unreal, meaningless. The only "real" things in life (i.e., the things that make you real) are your family, your friends, your lover, and so on, although these are also (perceived as) unreal in that they're not the center of the public world, which is seen as the only real world—though it is in fact, as I just said, the fakest.

supposed to be a memoir, portraying the inhumanity of modern America, the using each other for our own purposes, and the self-doubts, the moral doubts, that go along with that. He's full of angst, you know, and what more do you want?" Vacant stares, so I stop. Then my praising the scene near the end in the church thinking about his mother's death and the world's ingratitude for her sacrifices, my saying that was one of the best parts because it was totally authentic and not "corrupted" by self-consciousness, and somebody observing that in fact he thought Eggers was worrying in that scene about his *own* death, about people potentially not acknowledging *his* future achievements, and it required discipline for me not to say "That's fucking stupid." So I said, "No way. The point of that scene was to rise above any self-awareness or self-doubt, to just pour out his anguish, his genuine anger at the world for its treatment of his mother and for the absurdity of her death totally unsymmetrical with the value of her life—that's why the angels carried her up and the dome came off the church and the golden light. There was no self-referring. It would have corrupted it, like [earlier] when he was throwing her ashes into the water and wondering about his motives, about how he would look to an outsider and so on, which ruined the moment for him." But you can't change people's minds, so the other guy concluded that we simply had a disagreement. "Yeah, but I'm right and you're wrong," I wanted to say, as I'd said to the douchebag businessman at the other thing. (To be more exact, he had said that a certain group of people I was criticizing—mainstream media executives, etc.—would "make the same criticisms of you [i.e., me]," so I retorted, "Sure, but they're wrong and I'm right," which is the only sensible retort, aside from "So fucking what?" When he went on defending them, I shut him down.)

Yuja Li, 30-year-old attractive tall Chinese biologist-pianist with a new Yamaha in her beautiful apartment that I've been to twice to play for and with her (Mozart duet), a girl I met at a concert during a moment of taking-initiative on my part, and now it seems we're dating, very nice and intelligent though somewhat reserved girl. Mature.

Feminism ends in the bedroom. (Unless it's French feminism, in which case it begins in the bedroom.)

It's possible to be too good for your own good.

Interesting explanation: "Historically, 'fragmentation' has always been a problem for the political left because the left, unlike the right, cannot in principle coalesce around private property." The abstract leftist ideals of human dignity and freedom can be made concrete in more ways than the idea of a society organized around private property can.

March

Got high last night with Elena at her place. Drank and smoked A LOT. Higher than I've ever been. Exceedingly enjoyable; giggling maniacally at how surreal everything seemed. Disrupted, interrupted thought-processes; couldn't carry on a coherent conversation. Constantly forgetting what we were talking about. A bit of paranoia at how stupid I must have looked, since she hadn't smoked as much as I had. Was sorely tempted to kiss her as we sat on the couch but restrained myself.

…How is it possible to look so similar to people and yet be so different? The world's insipidness is suffocating, breath-taking. Imagine the inhumanity, the depth of the instinct to conform, required in order to ignore unrecognized value *because* it's unrecognized while heaping praise on disgustingly over-recognized semi-value *because* it's so celebrated. That's the human species right there. It's a good thing the "abstract Other" exists in my consciousness, because I certainly don't care if I'm recognized by these concrete imbeciles. –Only in the abstract can I find my equal.

This thesis is one of the most painful things I've ever had to do. It's torture. Horribly boring. I hate doing research and collecting data; I want to be doing something like examine the operations and implications of *ressentiment* and how it intersects with social structures, or whatever. There's no place for *originality* in this thesis. But the only time I feel like myself is when I'm being original. (Or, more accurately: the only time I *don't* feel like myself is when I'm being unoriginal.)

Got into UIC, thank God. Was quite happy to hear it. So the next four or more years will be in Chicago.

Yuja and I are dating. She seems to like me a lot, misses me when I'm away. Sleeping at her place a couple times a week. […] She's affectionate when we're in private, which I love. How lucky that I introduced myself to her that night! Otherwise I'd still be forlorn.

…Sex with Yuja. Then lying in bed and talking, mostly about me because she's very curious. Says I'm complicated, have "hidden depths" and all that. The first time we met she thought I was just a simple, happy guy. But now I'm an enigma, she wants to know what goes on "behind [my] face," is always looking at me cutely and intently without saying anything. Did so in bed for a few minutes until I asked her what she was thinking; she replied, "I didn't know it was possible to be so close to someone's body but so far from his heart." Wow. But I said she's much closer to my heart than most people are. Said I might even be able to fall in love with her. […]

…During a pause in a bout of sex, as I caught my breath while poised above her, she said, "I love your power…" "Uh, I'm actually not that powerful," I chuckled. "I like to be controlled," she responded, and "I like to be submissive." And yet she's not a particularly submissive person. (You see the implications.)

In *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*: for Marxists, "dialectic treats the world as a complex of processes rather than things, reveals everything to be shot through with tensions and contradictions demanding resolution and hence to be transitory, and involved in an inevitably progressive process of developments. This point sometimes carries in its train a number of other general ideas or philosophical theses. For example, it is often combined with the use of organic metaphors for societies and social change, usually implying a commitment to methodological holism and a willingness to employ functional or teleological forms of explanation. 'Dialectic' connotes reciprocity or mutual interaction between opposed or contrasting aspects of something…" The tension between thinking of it in terms of *structures* and in terms of *processes*. Both ways of conceptualizing it seem necessary. Social structures are in a state of continuous 'process' in relation to each other and on the basis of human freedom. Continuously evolving. Structures are always in flux, due to freedom and interstructural 'conflict,' even as they continue to exert enormous influence over our behavior.

Reading Nelson Lichtenstein's *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (2002). "By the onset of the depression decade, most reformers and radicals thought that a great contradiction lay at the heart of American capitalism. Outside the walls of the private enterprise, American political culture celebrated a Jeffersonian world of free speech, democratic participation, and masterless autonomy. But within the corporate world, and the nearby industrial municipalities, autocracy, obedience, and social deference were the order of the day…" Black holes of totalitarianism teeming in a society supposed to be structured around democracy. Lichtenstein points out, though, that many of the gains made by reformers over the last century which are now accepted as unquestionably valid, such as antidiscrimination law, are actually quite radical: they entail that employers can't do with their property as they wish. They're subject to laws restricting who they can fire and for what reasons, how they can treat the people who work on *their* premises, their property, and so on. The totalitarianism of these black holes has thus been moderated.

Important passage:

> Roosevelt's Court-packing plan of 1937 represented the decisive moment in the crystallization of an aggressive brand of anti-union, anti-New Deal sentiment. For more than half a century the Supreme Court had been the conservative defender of property against government regulation from above and labor upheaval from below. When FDR

> offered the nation his plan to expand, and thereby pack the Court with New Dealers, he opened the door to a world of anti-government invective. Indeed, FDR's Court-packing plan may be taken as the occasion at which modern conservatism achieves both a mass base and its ideological coherence. Until 1937 small producers, farmers, middle-class shop owners, as well as workers and consumers, saw the large, national business corporation as their enemy and nemesis. They hated the railroads, banks, mining companies, chain stores, and agricultural equipment makers. The government loomed far smaller in their social imagination, and when it did, it symbolized the agricultural extension service, internal improvements, and the maintenance of social order.
>
> But Roosevelt's Court-packing plan, proffered in the very midst of the sit-down strikes, worked a symbolic revolution, for it seemed to embody all that was threatening in the social and political upheavals of the New Deal. There was the assault on property, the overreach of executive power, the subversion of a hallowed institution of American government, and the New Deal alliance with a radical social movement that threatened the status and power of the old middle class.
>
> More trouble was to follow. Almost a third of a million small business firms folded during World War II, more than 10 percent of all those existing at the end of the 1930s. Manufacturing companies with fewer than one hundred workers saw their proportion of total output drop from more than a quarter to less than a fifth. The loss of autonomy particularly threatened small-town bankers, merchants, manufacturers, and others in the "old" middle class. For these citizens and others, an intrusive government symbolized the daily threat to individual and traditional values. Big business, on the other hand, emerged from the war with enormous sophistication and self-confidence…

It seems as though Obama's presidency is finally starting to kick into gear. He's been flailing around for a year, but now healthcare reform has passed, an arms-reduction deal with Russia is imminent, and financial regulatory reform is closer to reality. Of course, it's the same old shenanigans in Latin America and the Middle East, and the efforts to address unemployment have been pathetic, and environmental and energy legislation seems to be going nowhere, but at least the administration isn't as feckless as it was six months ago. The problem with Obama is that he's an idealist where he should be a realist and a realist where he should be an idealist. He's idealistic with regard to *process* but "realistic" regarding *substance*. Anyone with his head screwed on can see it's pointless to try to compromise with Republicans on issues like healthcare, as the Lawyer-in-Chief has been trying to do for over a year; it's also immoral, since it hurts society. The idiots in the administration think it's good politics, since the public likes the word "bipartisan," but what the public likes even more is getting things done. You think the healthcare law will *hurt* Dems in November? You agree with the pundits? Well then you've been debrained, like them. People want strong leaders, not timid compromisers—partly because compromise doesn't change anything, and what people want is change, epic change.

It amazes me that such an intelligent man as Obama can be so imbecilic sometimes. Why waste time and risk coming across as a weak leader by desperately trying to find common ground with people who you know have decided to obstruct every important thing you do? Just look at Boehner and McConnell, for God's sake. You think you're gonna get through to them?? Nancy Pelosi has balls; Barack is a pussy. I suspect it was Pelosi, in fact, who steeled him for the healthcare fight in January, who persuaded him not to follow Rahm's pusillanimous advice and gut the bill.

For such an ambitious idealist—"End the Age of Reagan!"—Obama sure loves to sell out.

Here's a paper I just discovered from my days at UMSL:

The Rigidity Thesis

In his paper "Rigidity and Content", Jason Stanley argues against what he calls the Rigidity Thesis, which is a principle that Saul Kripke uses in his arguments against the description theory of names in

Naming and Necessity. The thesis is that "if a term t is modally rigid, and another term t′ is not modally rigid, then t and t′ do not have the same content" (Stanley, 131). In other words, a rigid designator and a non-rigid designator cannot have the same content. Since names are rigid designators, as Kripke showed in his book—and if the Rigidity Thesis is true—the description theory of names must be false, for it states that a proper name has the same content as an appropriate definite description. For instance, the content of the name 'Aristotle' may be something like 'the last great philosopher of antiquity' (according to the description theory). But that description is modally non-rigid, and so, given the Rigidity Thesis, it must not specify the content of the rigid designator 'Aristotle'. Stanley contests RT, thereby defending the description theory from Kripkean criticisms. In this paper I shall argue that Stanley's objections against RT have little force.

First we should ask what it means to say that a rigid designator and a non-rigid designator do not have the same content. What is 'content'? Stanley notes that, given Frege's context principle, which states that the content of a term depends on the content of utterances in which it occurs, RT is basically a thesis about the content of assertions of sentences. So, restated accordingly, it is: "if one utters a sentence containing a rigid term, then one has *asserted something different* from what one would have asserted had one uttered, on that very same occasion, any sentence differing from the original one only in the substitution of a non-rigid term for the rigid one" (Stanley, 135). Stanley calls the content of an assertion the *assertoric content* (as opposed to semantic content, in a narrow sense).

He proceeds to offer two arguments against RT. The first is that there seem to be counterexamples. His example of a counterexample is as follows. Suppose Bill Clinton stops by my house for a visit. I can then say either "The President of the United States came by for a visit" or "The actual President of the United States came by for a visit". Now, these utterances don't seem to differ in assertoric content. They differ only in 'tone': by including the word 'actual' in the second one, I'm simply emphasizing my surprise at Clinton's visit. "The *actual U.S. President* came by for a visit! Imagine that!" The proposition being expressed by the two utterances, in other words, is the same. However, the second utterance contains the rigid term 'actual', unlike the first utterance. Therefore, if RT is true, the assertoric contents of the utterances should be different. Since they aren't, RT must be false.

Stanley's example, though, is not convincing. It seems to me to rest on an equivocation. The word 'actual' has two relevant meanings: it can be used either for emphasis—for 'stress' or 'tone'—or it can be used in a modal context. In the first case, its use is comparable to unphilosophical usage of the word 'absolute' in '*absolute truth*' (like, "It's the *absolute truth* that I saw him yesterday!"). It doesn't have a philosophical meaning in this case; including it in the quoted utterance is equivalent to saying "The *President of the United States* came by!" That is, the utterance has the same content whether or not the word 'actual' is used. On the other hand, the word can be used to differentiate between modalities: this world is actual for me, since I live in it, while other worlds are merely possible. On this understanding of the term, if I say "The actual President came by for a visit", I am really saying "The President in this world, as opposed to other possible worlds, came by for a visit". However, *this* assertion is clearly different from merely saying that the President came by for a visit. In short, Stanley has exploited the ambiguity of the word 'actual': the two utterances *do* differ in content if 'the actual President' is used as a rigid designator. So, in fact, Stanley's example *supports* the Rigidity Thesis.

Stanley's second argument fares no better. He imagines himself wanting to talk about a world in which the inventor of the zip, whoever he was, went into advertising instead of computer programming, with the result that the zip was not invented. He calls the man 'Julius'—a proper name, i.e., a rigid designator. The reference-fixing stipulation he uses is: "Let 'Julius' denote the inventor of the zip"—that is, the man who ended up inventing the zip in *this* world but *didn't* in another world. 'Julius' is rigid, while 'the inventor of the zip' is non-rigid. This causes problems for the Rigidity Theorist: suppose, for example, that one says "Julius was born in New York" and then "The inventor of the zip was born in New York". Since 'Julius' and 'the inventor of the zip' are not modally equivalent, the Rigidity Theorist is committed to thinking that the two utterances have different assertoric contents. This is counterintuitive, though: it seems as if, given that both terms denote the same individual, the utterances assert the same thing, namely

that this individual was born in New York. Therefore, unless one is willing to accept the counterintuitive conclusion, RT must be false.

Once again, however, Stanley is mistaken. While he is right that 'Julius' is a rigid designator, since it serves as a proper name, he is wrong that 'the inventor of the zip' is non-rigid in this context. For he is using it as synonymous with 'the inventor of the zip *in only this world*'. After all, he has said that 'Julius' will denote the man who invented the zip in this world but fails to invent the zip in another world. It looks as if 'the inventor of the zip' is non-rigid only because, when Stanley formulates his stipulation of the denotation of 'Julius' (on p. 138), he neglects to add the qualification 'in this world' after the description 'the inventor of the zip'—a fact that is easily passed over because in the preceding paragraph Stanley has already effectively added the qualification (so that it's now tacitly assumed by the reader). So, while 'the inventor of the zip' has the form of a non-rigid designator, it functions as a rigid designator in the context of the example. In short, it is *not* counterintuitive that the two assertions about the individual's being born in New York have the same content, for they both include rigid designators.

In section three, Stanley puts forward other arguments against the Rigidity Thesis. In one of these, he criticizes Kripke's use of intuition to establish the rigidity of names. "We have a direct intuition of the rigidity of names," writes Kripke, "exhibited in our understanding of the truth-conditions of particular sentences." The reason why this appeal to intuition is relevant to Stanley's paper is that, as Stanley says, "it would be difficult to account for this intuition unless we suppose that the rigidity of a term affects *what* we understand (i.e., the assertoric content)" (p. 150). In other words, we probably would not have the intuition unless RT is true. Therefore, Stanley has to argue against either the cogency or the relevance of the intuition.

He accepts that there is such an intuition, i.e., that people can intuitively see that rigidity characterizes at least *some* uses of proper names. He denies, though, that one of these uses involves the speech act of assertion. I disagree. Consider the following sentences:

(1) Aristotle was fond of dogs.

(2) The last great philosopher of antiquity was fond of dogs.

Kripke claims that we have a direct intuition that 'Aristotle' is modally rigid. Now, personally, I do have this intuition. It seems obvious to me that, even though I 'fix' the referent by means of some such description as "the last great philosopher of antiquity, who wrote the *Nicomachean Ethics* and tutored Alexander", (1) could be true even in a world in which Aristotle was not the greatest philosopher of antiquity. The name 'hooks onto' the *man*, not the *description*. What this means is that (1) and (2) have different truth-conditions. For Aristotle might have liked dogs even had he not been the last great philosopher of antiquity. The truth-conditions of (1) are simply that the man named 'Aristotle' liked dogs; the truth-conditions of (2) are that whoever turned out to be the last great philosopher of antiquity, whether Plato or Aristotle or Epicurus, was fond of dogs. So it's metaphysically possible that (1) is true while (2) is false, and vice versa. This means they have different assertoric contents, which upholds RT.

In general, I find Stanley's rejection of RT implausible. Why shouldn't modal rigidity affect the content of an utterance? If rigidity is irrelevant in this way, then so are all modal properties. None of them bears on the content of an utterance. But what does that mean? How could it be true? What notion of 'content' is this that bypasses modality altogether? Certainly a very strange one. For, as I just argued, the presence of a rigid designator in (1) affects its truth-conditions, and thus its content.

In any case, there would be momentous implications for the philosophy of language if modality were unrelated to assertoric content. In light of this fact, as well as the foregoing arguments, Stanley has his work cut out for him.

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Reading Steven Leikin's *The Practical Utopians: American Workers and the Cooperative Movement in the Gilded Age* (2005).

A note on the mass hysteria surrounding healthcare reform. As Frank Rich writes in his column today, it isn't really about healthcare per se. That issue is just an excuse. I'll quote some of Rich's article:

> …The real source of the over-the-top rage of 2010 is the same kind of national existential reordering that roiled America in 1964 [with the passage of the Civil Rights Act].
>
> In fact, the current surge of anger — and the accompanying rise in right-wing extremism — predates the entire health care debate. The first signs were the shrieks of "traitor" and "off with his head" at Palin rallies as Obama's election became more likely in October 2008. Those passions have spiraled ever since — from Gov. Rick Perry's kowtowing to secessionists at a Tea Party rally in Texas to the gratuitous brandishing of assault weapons at Obama health care rallies last summer to "You lie!" piercing the president's address to Congress last fall like an ominous shot.
>
> If Obama's first legislative priority had been immigration or financial reform or climate change, we would have seen the same trajectory. The conjunction of a black president and a female speaker of the House — topped off by a wise Latina on the Supreme Court and a powerful gay Congressional committee chairman — would sow fears of disenfranchisement among a dwindling and threatened minority in the country no matter what policies were in play. It's not happenstance that Frank, Lewis and Cleaver — none of them major Democratic players in the health care push — received a major share of last weekend's abuse. When you hear demonstrators chant the slogan "Take our country back!," these are the people they want to take the country back from.
>
> They can't. Demographics are avatars of a change bigger than any bill contemplated by Obama or Congress. The week before the health care vote, The Times reported that births to Asian, black and Hispanic women accounted for 48 percent of all births in America in the 12 months ending in July 2008. By 2012, the next presidential election year, non-Hispanic white births will be in the minority. The Tea Party movement is virtually all white. The Republicans haven't had a single African-American in the Senate or the House since 2003 and have had only three in total since 1935. Their anxieties about a rapidly changing America are well-grounded…

This is just a continuation of the fascist undercurrent that has ebbed and flowed in American society since the late nineteenth century. Since the progressive advances of the 1960s, it has been fighting a rearguard action against democracy and minority-rights. Nixon, Reagan and Bush Jr. rode the wave to power. These semi-fascist masses have always felt as if they were under siege, even when they were securely in the seat of power. But now that they really are in a state of terminal decline, for instance demographically, they're bound to lash out ferociously. I wonder how many thousands of Americans are plotting to assassinate Obama…

On the other hand, some of these Tea Party folk are simply well-intentioned people who want to fight big business and Wall Street but, due to their ignorance, are going about it in absolutely the wrong way, by attacking "big government," which is the only thing that can effectively fight against business. Poor dupes. Doing the bidding of corporate executives even as they burn them in effigy.

One of the problems is that, like classical fascists, they conflate the fight against Wall Street "parasites" with the fight against immigrant "parasites," minority-rights-obsessed "parasites," welfare "parasites," and so on. They feel like they're being persecuted not only by big business but also by ordinary *cultural* outsiders, and they think that government is in cahoots with business *and* immigrants, gays, blacks, welfare-recipients, not knowing that the interests of business are totally opposed to those of the latter group of people. The Tea-Partiers are torn, unknowingly, between their instinctive knowledge that corporate elites are bad and their 'business-propaganda'-fueled prejudice against government and minorities clamoring for rights. Again, this is the formula for classical fascism and the KKK.

Some of them could potentially be educated into the truth, but, as usual, the left is impotent.

Reading *A People's History of the United States* again. For real this time.

A fundamental truth from Zinn's book: essential to the stable domination of an upper class over society is this class's capturing the loyalty of the middle class. Sometimes this involves concessions to the

middle class, and always it involves the use of appealing rhetoric. The upper class has to foster divisions between the lower and middle classes—and ideally between sections of the lower class, as well as sections of the middle class. But it has truly done its job marvelously when, through a group of demagogues, it seduces and confuses not only the middle class but even much of the lower class. To the extent that this happens—i.e., that the mass of the people has been duped into effectively following the leadership of the upper class, thereby allowing it or even encouraging it (unknowingly) to pursue its own economic interests unhindered by the masses' noisy complaints (which, inasmuch as they continue to exist, are suppressed)—fascist tendencies have become predominant. Usually it's accomplished by appeals to the nation, the race, the "good old days," or religion. Insofar as all this is operative in a particular historical event, such as the American Revolution or the Civil War (which benefited Northern businessmen) or Reaganism, there are traces of fascism.

My existence. Here, now, at this moment in history. The *facticity* of it. Billions of years of my nonexistence…then *me*…then billions more years of my nonexistence… It's totally arbitrary that I was born when and where I was, yet at the same time it's absolutely necessary, because *I*, after all, could not have been anyone else but had to be myself, this self at this point in time. By 'definition,' so to speak. This body had to be this body; for it to be any other is…meaningless.

The problem is that it's "absurd" to accept that one is simply an object in the world like all others, an object in history no different from those that one reads about. One tends, necessarily, to assume a position outside of history, the endless flux of unfortunate creatures determined by larger forces of which they're unaware. I am a subject. I am the absolute *contemplating* history, not an object embedded in time, like any of those objects we read about from the 1800s or the 1500s or the 400s…

Historian Kim Voss: "American industrial relations and labor politics are exceptional [compared to Europe's] because in 1886 and 1887 employers won the class struggle." There's some truth to that.

Lesley Stahl (in 1996) on U.S. sanctions against Iraq: "We have heard that a half-million children have died. I mean, that's more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?" Secretary of State Madeleine Albright: "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price—we think the price is worth it." That statement in itself enshrines Albright as one of the villains of history.

Looked at a chapter from *The Cambridge Companion to Bertrand Russell*, got amused, wrote this email:

> Professor Chomsky,
>
> I've always been intrigued by the controversy that has reigned for centuries over the ontological status of such "abstract objects" as propositions, numbers, concepts, relations, and so on. It has seemed obvious to me that the myriad debates and the positions adopted, such as realism and nominalism, bespeak a great deal of confusion, in that they revolve around trivialities. For instance, is the concept 'whiteness' 'real'? Realists say it is, it exists, while nominalists deny that. Charles Peirce, the realist, says, "It is perfectly true that all white things have whiteness in them, for that is only saying, in another form of words, that all white things are white; but since it is true that real things possess whiteness, whiteness is real." Quine, on the other hand, denies the existence of whiteness. But is this debate not the height of triviality and confusion? Whiteness tautologically exists insofar as certain things are white; it tautologically doesn't exist insofar as, surely, for something to 'exist' it has to have a location in spacetime -- it has to be a "particular" -- and since abstract objects have no location in spacetime, they don't exist. Any notion of existence besides this 'concrete,' 'spatiotemporal' one seems obscure; and yet analytic philosophers, who pride themselves on their insistence on conceptual precision, endlessly debate about something as obscure, indeed as meaningless, as whether abstract objects "exist." What would it *mean* for them to exist?? What would their existence "look like"?

> Admittedly, my denial of abstract objects (as being a meaningless notion) might seem to pose certain paradoxes in the philosophy of mathematics and language, but surely the way to resolve these paradoxes isn't to introduce a virtually meaningless term that itself poses problems but to explain how they arise out of a mistaken use and understanding of language. The late Wittgenstein was on the right track, I think, when he tried to show that such debates -- i.e., debates that an ordinary non-philosopher would consider silly -- are based on semi-illusive confusions that philosophers get themselves into when thinking about how we use language.
>
> Like, Russell's position that propositions referring to external objects in the world somehow literally include within them those external objects.[1] Etc. The ontological question "What is a proposition?" itself seems misguided. All these confusions, I think, result from conceptual "reification" -- taking too seriously the 'representational' nature of language. Language is just a tool for survival, a way of behaving and, at the same time, a set of structures in the mind. We shouldn't introduce all these 'metaphysical' notions into it.
>
> What do you think? Do you agree that ontological questions of this sort are misguided and, ultimately, rather silly?
>
> Thanks.

Chomsky:

> It becomes non-trivial when you try to work out how you can paraphrase what we want to say about properties in terms of individuals. There's a considerable and often subtle literature on these topics.

Hm. I wish he'd said more.

Intellectually, one of Chomsky's inadequacies is that he's too firmly located in the analytic framework. I doubt he has much patience for phenomenology (loosely understood), which is an essential philosophical method and program. The analysis of consciousness, etc. His mind is too 'mathematical' and 'logical,' 'Russellian.' Nor, probably, does he have patience for philosophical experimentation à la Nietzsche or Wittgenstein.

When I read about these interminable ontological debates, I hear Bergson in the back of my head: "The essence of philosophy is the spirit of simplicity."

I mean, look at this passage below, about Russell. I choose it because it's comprehensible, unlike most of the others.

> Propositions were certainly problematic in their Principles [of Mathematics] form. They came in two varieties, true and false, and both alike were equally real. It is possible to make too much of the oddness of Russell's claim that the world is made up of propositions: propositions, after all, were just complex, unified terms. But, by the same token, on this account it is hard to make sense of the claim that there are both true and false ones and to give some appropriate account of the distinction between them. Yet false propositions, as well as true, were needed as the objects of belief. In particular, the theory makes it hard to understand why we should prefer to believe only the true ones. One might be tempted to

[1] In a sense, that doctrine is true. But in a sense it can't be, since a proposition is, necessarily, a (mythical) abstract thing.

> suggest that the actual world is made up of true ones, while the false ones occur in some non-actual (though, since necessary falsehoods may be believed, not always possible) world, but there is no hint of this account in Russell. Instead, he suggested at one point that we might have a fundamental moral obligation to believe only true ones, pointing out, with too much cleverness for his own good, that while we might hope that this principle was true, if it was not, there was no ground for thinking we did harm in believing it. Evidently, this state of affairs could not remain satisfying for long…

Non-actual worlds, possible worlds, non-actual but impossible worlds, "real" but false propositions vs. real and true ones, etc. etc. Something has gone terribly wrong. –But all this is nothing compared to what's common in contemporary literature.

And yet once you enter into the world of analytic philosophy, these discussions start to seem reasonable, even unavoidable, in some perverse way. This kind of analytic philosophy consists in analysis of myths, myths that are, in a way, necessary, or somehow presupposed in the way we talk and think.

Like the phenomenalists, Russell tried to demonstrate the existence of material objects by constructing them logically from sense-data, which were the only things he thought we had direct acquaintance with. But

> It is important to realize that, for Russell, sense-data were physical objects [?] (since they existed in physical space) but not material ones. [What the hell does that mean?] His construction of material objects was therefore not, as many have supposed, a form of phenomenalism. Nor was it, since physical objects were constructed from sense-data, a form of representational realism. Moreover, because sense-data were physical, there were more of them than were actually given in acquaintance. (In fact Russell used 'sensibile' as the inclusive term, and 'sense-data' for those sensibilia with which someone was acquainted.) Admitting unsensed sensibilia certainly proved useful in the construction of enduring material objects, for it supplied the resources needed for their existence when no one was looking…

Weirdness.

Are particulars "bundles of universals," as Russell thought at one time? Sure, in a sense. Obviously. They're bundles of properties. You list all the properties, and voilà, you have the particular. But in another sense, that's absurd. Properties are abstract; a particular is concrete. There has to be something the properties inhere in. Hence Locke's "substratum" or "substance in general." But that idea has problems too. (Substance is a "something I know not what.") In the end you're led to Kant's position, the categories and the inability to say anything very substantive about the world as it is in itself, because if you do you get tangled in paradoxes. Or rather, you have to leave investigation of the world-in-itself to science, or mathematics. On a "conceptual," rigorously philosophical level, using what Kant called "reason"—the level of metaphysics—we're never going to understand any of these things.

But as I said last summer, it seems there are three different kinds of things: consciousness (private); the matter in our world, the world we perceive (public); and matter as it is in itself, which is investigated by physics.[1] Matter "in itself" is surely very different from the matter we perceive. Even when you perceptually access a normally unperceived piece of matter, like a DNA molecule through a microscope, the image you see is partly constructed by the brain, is in fact the result of an indefinite number of 'invasive,' 'constructive' physical and biological processes. By definition it's impossible to view the world as it "really" is—i.e., to perceive it as it exists in an unperceived state!

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[1] That is, *for us* [i.e., from the perspective of the human mind informed by science and philosophy] there are three different kinds of things. The world in itself, though, is monistic. It's the difference between the epistemological and the metaphysical perspectives.

…It's true: by temperament, I'm an amateur. It's the restlessness of my mind. But amateurs, if they have discipline, can make great contributions. Just look at Nietzsche's psychological discoveries. I'd even go so far as to say that genius is inherently closer to the spirit of the amateur than the spirit of the specialist. It's the spirit of the child.

April

Asked Chomsky about metaphysics again. He wrote, "I don't really think the questions can be formulated properly this way. Take the concept 'intuitively understand.'[1] That disappeared with Newton, and was a major issue in the 18th century—never resolved, just forgotten. I've written on it, if you're interested." He's probably referring to the article of his I discussed a year or two ago. (We can't "intuitively understand" the notion of matter in the Newtonian system, involving as it does the idea of action-at-a-distance.) But I don't agree with him on this topic. In fact, surely his point about Newtonian matter only supports my own distinction between the "matter" we perceive and "matter" as it really is, this "occult" thing that supposedly acts at a distance. In any case, the real, "in-itself" essence of matter is energy, as Einstein showed, and that certainly contradicts our own experience or "intuitive understanding" of it. Hence, I'm right. We do have a vague intuitive understanding of what matter is, but our understanding, if supposed to apply to the essence of matter-in-itself, is wrong.

I attended my first Episcopalian service last night, at the church patronized by the Hope in Action campaigners. It was Maundy Thursday, so we did the whole foot-washing thing and then the Eucharist, etc. Endless singing and antiphonal rituals, responses, prayers. A certain pungent beauty in the foot-washing, beautiful symbolism. But how foreign it all is to the spirit of the times! A relic of antiquity, as Nietzsche said. The Greek chorus, for instance. Submersing ourselves in ritual, in self-forgetfulness and community. Love, the incredible and constantly repeated emphasis on love. Admirable. But it seems that in order so to escape ourselves in love we have to fall back on the expedient of inventing a God who loves us and enjoins us to love each other, and pray to him, direct our love first to him and thereby to each other. It is through the mediating idea of a God that people are best able to achieve love of mankind. Nor is this surprising. Mankind is just an abstraction, the most abstract of abstractions, and as such is not easy to love passionately. God is a kind of abstraction too, but, paradoxically, a concrete and self-conscious one. He is something like the "concrete universal." A sublimation of the idea of mankind, or rather of all its noble aspects (love, power, goodness, omniscient self-consciousness) as personified in a self, which is the sort of thing that can most readily be loved (as opposed to "mankind"). God is the bridge between the concrete self and the abstraction of humanity: he is a concrete abstraction, or an abstract concreteness. And the idea of him provides people with a half-conscious sense of being-respected or being-recognized/confirmed for loving everyone. It inspires them to make the effort to "love thy neighbor," since if they do, they know they'll in turn be loved by the Absolute Self, and thus be objectively confirmed as (objectively) valuable. Certainly this motivation isn't conscious, but it's there all the same.

As I've said repeatedly, God is something like the "objective correlative" of the abstract other in consciousness. By securing his recognition you're securing the recognition of the abstract other, and so, effectively, of your self. Putting to rest your self-doubt.

—If neuroscience ever catches up with me, it should be able to confirm the essentials of all my phenomenological analyses. (The meaning of self-consciousness, the element of otherness in consciousness, the phenomenological sources of self-dissatisfaction, the urge toward self-confirmation, etc.) Maybe "mirror neurons" will have something to do with it. Internalizing the perspective of the other. G. H. Mead and so on.

[1] I had written, "…Modern physics seems to confirm the Kantian viewpoint, given our inability to intuitively understand or 'conceptualize' the doctrines that quantum mechanics and general relativity lead to (about space, time, causation, gravity, etc.)."

One of the advantages of Marx's equation of progress with the expansion of productive capacity is that it provides a clear criterion for determining what is "progressive" (i.e., probably representative of the future, in light of powerful tendencies) and what is "reactionary."[1] Another criterion is the development of social and economic equality, but this one is probably less reliable than the first, partly because powerful interests always oppose equality whereas, in capitalism, they don't oppose the expansion of productive forces (and neither do most other interests). So in capitalism there is a very clear tendency for productive forces to develop and a somewhat less clear tendency for social equality to spread.

Consider "the Reformation peasants of Germany in the 1520s who rose up to defend their common lands and village autonomy in the name of an authentic folk version of Christianity." (From Murray Bookchin's essay "The Ghost of Anarcho-Syndicalism" (1992).) As Bookchin says, their movement manifested a kind of anarchism. But surely it wasn't progressive: although it was "egalitarian," it was opposed to the development of the productive forces, which by then was virtually inevitable. The future lay in capitalism, and hence the nation-state, the destruction of village autonomy. It's similar with the Knights of Labor. Insofar as they upheld the rights of the artisan against the encroachments of industry and mechanization, they weren't progressive. But insofar as they advocated egalitarian causes, unity of the black worker with the white, industrial unionism, etc., they were. (In the case of industrial unionism, which anticipated the IWW but especially the CIO, their project derived its 'Marxist' progressiveness from the fact that an expansion of nationwide industry would lead to its achievement fifty years later.) Economic cooperation, or reorganization of the economy along socialist lines, in the 1880s and 1890s probably wouldn't have resulted in an expansion of the productive forces competitive with that under capitalism, and so capitalists elsewhere—perhaps in Europe or England—would have continued to spread their operations around the world, and in the end socialism in America would have succumbed to capitalism, as it (or "state socialism") would do in China, Russia, and other places.

The real is definitely not "the rational," but, nevertheless, there is an overarching "rationality" or "probability" (perhaps a near-inevitability) in the real, if only in its most general structures.

…Bookchin takes issue with Marx's emphasis on the workers' economic interest as the probable motive-force of the revolution, preferring to emphasize the moral force of anarchism as a necessary motivator if people are to overcome present authoritarian arrangements. He quotes Malatesta approvingly:

> The real and immediate interests of organised workers, which is the Unions' role to defend, are very often in *conflict* with their [i.e., revolutionaries'] ideals and forward-looking objectives; and the Union can only act in a revolutionary way if permeated by a spirit of sacrifice and *to the extent that the ideal is given precedence over interest,* that is, only if, and to the extent that, it ceases to be an economic Union and becomes a political and idealistic group.

There may be some truth in those views. Think of Lenin's critique of "pure and simple trade-unionism." On the other hand, Marx was right that moral ideals will never be enough to motivate millions to overthrow fundamental power-relations. Only immediate and practical interest can impel the masses toward a revolutionary or quasi-revolutionary project. (Think of the oppression and starvation that led workers, peasants and soldiers to overthrow the state in Russia and China.) If, in the end, it seems that industrial workers usually did not identify their immediate and practical interests with the overthrow of capitalism, that fact simply shows that Marx's identification of the industrial proletariat as the agent of revolution was wrong—because, as Malatesta said, their economic interests turned out to be better satisfied by simple trade-unionism, reformism. But Malatesta and Bookchin are still wrong in appealing to the "morality" of anarchism, or rather it's pointless to make such an appeal, since the masses will never "give precedence to the ideal over interest." (If they do occasionally become frenzied in their support for a moral ideal, it's because they identify the ideal with their interest. Think of the black struggle for civil rights.) So we're back to Marx's claim: something like socialism will never happen unless people decide it's in their *practical*

[1] I use those words not in a moral sense but in a factual one.

interest. Numberless groups of people will have to decide, and act on the decision, that arranging production democratically is in their immediate interest.

When the state of the economy reaches such a point that, *finally*, most people's immediate practical interests will coincide with the (semi-gradual) supersession of capitalism—in such a way that cooperativism becomes not only an ideal but an apparently feasible goal—it'll happen. Marx's mistake was simply that he thought such "coinciding" would take place at an earlier stage of evolution (and amongst a more narrowly defined sector of the population) than it in fact will. Economic conditions are ripe for socialism only when the socialist project doesn't face overwhelming odds, with all of society's power-structures arrayed against it. Capitalist production relations, too, started to emerge from feudalism only when the feudal aristocracy was obviously in the throes of decline, with the legitimate means of violence already not always being used in its interest.

…Here Bookchin agrees with what I wrote a couple months ago about Marxist illusions, what he calls the illusion of "proletarian hegemony" (revolutionary hegemony, i.e. the proletariat as the agent of revolution):

> …The industrial working class, for all the oppression and exploitation to which it is subjected, may certainly engage in class struggles and exhibit considerable social militancy. But rarely does class struggle escalate into class *war* or social militancy explode into social *revolution*. The deadening tendency of Marxists and anarcho-syndicalists to mistake struggle for war and militancy for revolution has plagued radical theory and practice for over a century but most especially during the era of "proletarian socialism" par excellence, from 1848 to 1939, that gave rise to the myth of "proletarian hegemony." As Franz Borkenau contends, it is easier to arouse nationalist feeling in the working class than feelings of international class solidarity, especially in periods of warfare, as the two world wars of this century so vividly reveal. Given the steady diet of "betrayals" to which Marxists and anarcho-syndicalists attribute the failure of the proletariat to establish a new society, one may well ask if these "betrayals" are really evidence of a systemic factor that renders meaningless and obscure the *kind* of "proletariat" that Marxists and anarcho-syndicalists adduce as the basis for privileging the working class as a whole in the name of "proletarian hegemony."
>
> Often lacking in explications of the notion of "proletarian hegemony" is a historically nuanced account of the workers who did raise barricades in Paris in June 1848, in Petrograd in 1905 and 1917, and in Spain between 1870 and 1936. These "proletarians" were most often craftspeople for whom the factory system was a culturally new phenomenon. Many others had an immediate peasant background and were only a generation or two removed from a rural way of life. Among these "proletarians," industrial discipline as well as confinement in factory buildings produced very unsettling cultural and psychological tensions. They lived in a force-field between a preindustrial, seasonally determined, largely relaxed craft or agrarian way of life on the one hand, and the factory or workshop system that stressed the maximum, highly rationalized exploitation, the inhuman rhythms of machinery, the barracks-like world of congested cities, and exceptionally brutal working conditions, on the other. Hence it is not at all surprising that this kind of working class was extremely incendiary, and that its riots could easily explode into near-insurrections.
>
> …To the extent that wage-labor and capital do confront each other economically, their struggle—a very real one indeed—normally occurs within a thoroughly bourgeois framework, as Malatesta foresaw generations ago. The struggle of workers with capitalists is essentially a conflict between two interlocking interests that is nourished by the very capitalist nexus of contractual relationships in which both classes participate. It normally counterposes higher wages to higher profits, less exploitation to greater exploitation, and better working conditions to poorer working conditions. These patently negotiable

> conflicts turn around differences in degree, not in kind. They are fundamentally contractual differences, not social differences.
>
> Precisely because the industrial proletariat is "disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of capitalist production itself," as Marx put it, it is also more amenable to rationalized systems of control and hierarchical systems of organization than were the precapitalist strata that historically became the proletariat. Before this proletariat became integrated into the factory system, it mounted uprisings in France, Spain, Russia, Italy, and other relatively unindustrialized countries that are now so legendary in radical history books. Factory hierarchies, with their elaborate structures of managerial supervision, were often carried over into trade unions, even professedly anarcho-syndicalist ones, where workers were unusually vulnerable to "labor bosses" of all kinds—a problem that still plagues the labor movement of our own day…

"The radicalism of tradition."

Reading Leon Fink's *In Search of the Working Class: Essays in American Labor History and Political Culture* (1994). In one essay he criticizes the argument that a major reason why the Knights of Labor failed to transform society is that the bourgeoisie was culturally hegemonic, that the working class partially identified with the dominant culture and so undermined its own struggles against it. "T. J. Lears [his opponent] cites entrepreneurial ambition, evangelical religion, and electoral politics as a kind of devil's brew of individualism eroding the communal fiber of movement culture." The Knights had a "divided consciousness," partly accepting and partly rejecting the "symbolic universe" of the dominant culture. And so their struggles against the society were ineffective and incomplete because of this partial consent they gave to the culture.

Obviously this Gramscian explanation is inadequate, for many reasons. Just look at the concrete history of the Knights and you'll see how simplistic is the invoking of "cultural hegemony" as an explanation of their failures. More broadly, with regard to Gramscianism itself, I'm tempted to agree with Thomas Haskell: Gramscianism is to Marxism as Unitarianism is to Christianity—"a 'feather pillow' to catch those falling from the true faith." It's like the liberal notion of consensus as adapted for Marxists. It can lead one to put the blame on the oppressed for their oppression, for buying into the "general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group." Hence the conservative bias implicit in appeals to culture as an explanatory tool (in this context): the current social order can be seen as legitimate, since it's based on the consent of the masses. The elite's worldview is hegemonic because the masses let it be.

Needless to say, though, there is some truth to this aspect of Gramscianism. A great deal of societal consent is involved in the elite's economic and political domination. Sometimes the consent is active and overt, as with supposedly patriotic wars, while often it's passive, resigned, apathetic. (Patriotism is a particularly effective tool for manufacturing consent.) The mainstream media's job, after all, is essentially to manufacture consent. But cultural hegemony is probably not as potent a force (nor as substantive a notion) as Gramscians think. In any case, you have to temper, *greatly* temper, this doctrine with "vulgar Marxism" (economism, etc.). The reality of economic power-structures, brute economic power and control over the means of violence. In a middle-class society people simply act the way they have to in order to make money and not go to prison; what ideology they subscribe to, if they even have one, is of small importance for their behavior. In industrializing societies, on the other hand, continual coercion is necessary in order to suppress working-class subcultures and revolts. In general, "ideologies" are important only for the intellectuals who guide movements. The masses live as they do on the basis of what they perceive as their economic interests, their interest in associating with others (family, friends), and their interest in being entertained (whether by socializing, watching TV, reading novels, going to concerts, etc.). Social being—mundane realities of social life, the normal roles we adopt, the rules we're socialized into obeying—is far more important than cultural and political consciousness (insofar as ordinary people even *have* that consciousness).

It's true that ideas propagated by the media or whomever have tremendous power to motivate—but usually in times of social crisis, disruptions in the "social being," the matrix of economic structures,

patterns of behavior, the stability of habitual daily expectations. When these things are disrupted, identity-crises ensue, or the masses flare up in anger and seize on the nearest (and simplest) ideas, ideas that are typically in circulation precisely because they serve capitalist economic interests. (Think of the Tea-Partiers' Reaganism.) Or, in the case of progressives, it's usually when relations of absolute domination, like slavery or Jim Crow or patriarchy, start to break down that social movements—inspired by ideas, of course—have a chance to form. But the ideas that inspire them are simply an expression of the desire for new social relations, the desire for economic security, economic and political freedom, a stable and democratic communal life. Conservative movements incorporate ideas upholding old authoritarian rules and relations, and an economic security that is being threatened. (Certainly people's self-identity is being threatened too, but, again, that's because the social relations on which their self-identity was based are no longer stable.[1]) Whatever the kind of movement, then, its existence is almost entirely a function of how social relations are evolving, and the ideas that inspire it are merely more-or-less distorted ideological expressions of the desire for a particular set of social relations, which is to say a particular vision of how they want to interact with people and the world.

Writes Lears: "Like other labor historians in the [E. P.] Thompsonian mold, Fink sometimes still seems to assume that class consciousness provided the firmest basis for radical politics, even when his own evidence may suggest that local sources of solidarity [such as ethnicity, religious association, or craft unions] were more important than the abstract notion of class." Well, why is class supposedly such a firm basis to begin with? Many reasons. For instance, to paraphrase E. O. Wright, the best way to eliminate oppression and exploitation in capitalist societies is by systematically transforming class relations, given the fundamental origins of this oppression and exploitation in the relation between wage-labor and capital. In other words, to arrive at an effective solution, you have to solve the problem—the *main* problem for centuries. Secondly, essential to the success of radicalism of whatever kind is mass solidarity. Strength in numbers. And how better to amass numbers than to unite all industrial laborers and egregiously exploited people in what would effectively be a class struggle? Smaller, local groups have less chance of making a difference than millions united by their common economic grievances. And so on.

But of course class has disadvantages too. E.g. its abstractness, at least on a national or international scale. It's hard, though, for an analytical thinker not to assume that, due to the structures of the capitalist economy, class will inevitably be the fulcrum of a future successful revolution. That prediction is just too beautiful, too rational, too elegant, to be wrong. Unfortunately it is. (Probably.) Marx's method of abstraction is powerful and elegant but overlooks the complexity of society. Orthodox Marxists made a fetish of theoretical elegance—that's the final truth, the ultimate reason for their faith in the revolution.

I suspect the *potential* wasn't even there, realistically. Far from being inevitable, a cooperativist revolution wasn't possible. As Lears notes, "The discovery that radical protest has often had conservative sources is one of the major historiographical advances of the last two decades." The labor movement was most radical in its early stages—(a fact that directly contradicts orthodox Marxism)—when the "collective memory" of an agrarian and artisanal world destroyed was still fresh and poignant, and the situation of workers was most wretched. But a cooperative economy could surely never have evolved in those times of early industrial capitalism, even in the 1930s, for a dozen reasons. –If only Marxism didn't have such damned seductive elegance!

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[1] I admit that ideologies *can* be of great importance to self-identities. People can become extraordinarily attached to a particular ideology or religion. I suspect, though, that this isn't as common as it's thought to be. Or it may be common on the understanding that the ideologies in question are often merely implicit in behavior rather than explicitly objects of consciousness. But then this is in danger of becoming truistic. One can 'read into' any pattern of behavior a particular 'ideology' or set of beliefs and ideals that the behavior seems to presuppose. But almost always, people are just socialized into the behavior, on the basis of rules, roles, structural locations they've come to occupy, habitual accommodation to social expectations. The ideologies to which they may be consciously or unconsciously committed are, to a great extent, merely ("distorted") crystallizations-in-consciousness of the social relations—and, correspondingly, *interpersonal exchanges, reactions, internalizations*—that have molded them in their formative years.

…Or maybe that's being simplistic, not to mention fatalistic. While a socialist *society* was not and probably never will be anything remotely close to inevitable, maybe not even possible, *sections* of it in certain countries seem to have had the potential to become cooperatively organized and remain that way. Think of Catalonia during the Spanish civil war. The feats of cooperation there were astounding. But they were crushed once Franco seized power. Such semi-isolated regions have a greater chance of becoming cooperative than the mainstream does. (Mondragon.) But since they eventually have to face competition with capitalist sectors, with the wage pressures, business cycles and so on that market competition entails, true socialism or anarchism is not possible even there. A fully socialist or cooperative economy has to be self-sufficient, isolated from capitalist pressures.

In any case, my point is that strict economic determinism, as well as Marx's "all or nothing" perspective regarding socialism, is wrong. Degrees of cooperativism are possible between pure capitalism and pure socialism, just as *pockets* of cooperativism are possible in a broadly capitalist society. Similarly, while the state of productive forces and production relations may somehow determine what is objectively possible, human initiative determines whether certain possibilities, such as a cooperative transformation of production relations, are actualized. These truths provide the theoretical foundation for radical struggle, and restore to individuals their dignity as a potential force for structural economic change (of which dignity historical materialism threatened to deprive them).

An excellent observation from Lears: "I think we should try to distinguish between genuinely popular culture and the corporate-sponsored mass culture that is so often mistaken for it." Genuine popular culture is the kind of thing you saw amongst the farmers in the Populist movement, the Italian anarchists in the early 20th century, the working-class communities of the 19th century, etc. Popular culture is necessarily bottom-up, not top-down. Mass culture, by contrast, is founded on the co-optation and mutilation of a few popular impulses into means of making profit, tools of the upper class.

Reading Rudolf Rocker's *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice* (1938).

…To return to Gramsci: ideological hegemony is obviously of great importance even now, contrary to what critics of the "dominant ideology thesis" think. Many in the lower and lower-middle classes do subscribe to what's called Reaganism, and this influences their political allegiances. Reaganites are given power. Public-relations firms, private corporations, politicians, newspapers and magazines, think tanks, all spend billions of dollars propagating ideologies that serve to legitimate business interests. So evidently they think hegemony matters. And they're right. If the lower and middle classes could be indoctrinated with more progressive ideologies, changes might ensue. A counter-hegemony might accomplish great things. So yes, ideas do have power. That's so obvious it's not worth pointing out. But how does one mass-propagate ideas opposed to the dominant power-structures? The latter have almost all the resources. The nature of social relations almost entirely determines *which* ideas are kept in circulation. The only solution for the leftist is to keep working, keep trying to get through to people.

Chomsky observes that leftists are wrong to ridicule Tea-Partiers and such people. The right reaction isn't to criticize *them* but to criticize *oneself* for failing to educate them. If they're influenced by Rush Limbaugh it's because leftists aren't doing their job. –On the other hand, millions of these conservatives are absolutely immune to having their minds changed. I know that from personal experience. They were, so to speak, "socialized" into conservatism a long time ago, and nothing you can say will convince them to vote Democratic, much less Socialist. Even on local levels they often refuse to change their priorities or revise their understanding of, say, government and taxes. Maybe only on the level of direct action, such as taking over a factory, is there hope—contexts in which there is *no chance* of their mistaking what their interest is.

Reading Sharryn Kasmir's *The Myth of Mondragon: Cooperatives, Politics, and Working-Class Life in a Basque Town* (1996).

Arizmendiarrieta, the Catholic priest who started the Mondragon cooperatives in the 1950s, was, in some ways, a typical priest:

> The emancipation of a class or of a people [he said] must begin with the training of those who make it up. [So far, I agree with him.] We have said many times that we must struggle against social injustices, against the exploitation of the wage laborer, against the excessive accumulation of wealth, etc., but have we understood that the central servitude, that the first and greatest poverty is intellectual poverty? We consider that the saddest inheritance of the world is the lack of educational opportunities and not economic inequality.

Except that you'll never remedy the lack of educational opportunities for the masses unless you first remedy economic inequality. It's precisely in the poorest areas that people lack educational opportunities. Maybe some individuals are lucky enough or smart enough to get a good education and escape from poverty, but without a sustained assault on economic power-structures, you won't fix the general disparity in levels of education.

I'm starting to wonder if worker cooperatives are so great after all. I've had suspicions for months, but this book has brought them into focus with its observations on how co-ops sidestep the class struggle, on how cooperators tend not to identify with unionists, on how Franco and Mussolini liked cooperativism because of its similarities with corporativism ("nonconflictual relations between labor and management, the withering away of class identifications"). Cooperativism is collective entrepreneurship. Encourages workers to identify as small businessmen. ("Cooperativism [in Mondragon] was founded as an entrepreneurial alternative to working-class activism and socialism.") So it fits into the framework of capitalism—but not entirely. In principle it's also somewhat opposed, of course. It has an ambiguous position. I suppose I'm in favor of it if cooperators commit to establishing connections with each other, if they commit to building a social movement, a political movement, and don't foreswear the class struggle. Cooperativism can be one of the pillars of a counter-hegemony, which if it eventually claims the adherence of millions can be the foundation of a direct attack on capitalist power-structures.

By the way, "hegemony" doesn't have to signify something explicitly ideological or "cultural" in the narrow sense. Obviously. I was wrong to imply that earlier. Authors who criticize the "dominant ideology thesis" are partly missing the point: you can get the same effect with an "un-ideological," "unconscious" but consensual socialization into the dominant economic structures, which is surely all that "Gramscianism" requires. An acquiescence to a middle-class existence that isn't based on submission to explicit threats of violence is a form of consent, and it has substantially the same effects or "functions"—but in a more powerful way—as does indoctrinating people with a particular ideology. Even in such a socialized-bourgeois society, revolutionaries have the task of developing a counter-hegemony, whether through explicit ideological indoctrination or, preferably and more realistically, through struggle and the construction of new social relations that people "get used to," i.e. become socialized into.

As for cooperativism, its value in a capitalist society depends on its immediate institutional context and the ideological commitments of its participants. It can be a force for conservatism or a force for socialism. It can lead to working-class fragmentation and identification with the middle class, or it can help build an oppositional movement. Hence Mussolini's demand that the Italian cooperative movement purge its Communists and Socialists before he gave it legal protection.

…Parts of *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916–1935*, edited by David Forgacs.

Maybe the best way to think about it nowadays isn't to say we need a "counter-hegemony" (because there is no hegemony per se, no "dominant culture"); rather, we need to combat the fragmentedness of civil society.[1] We have to bring people together in a common project (or multiple projects on local/regional levels)—no small task in our atomized society. But effectively there's no huge difference between now and earlier times: always, the twin imperatives are *education* and *organization*. It's just that the system

[1] Or maybe you could say that the "hegemony" now is precisely this 'social fragmentedness of a consumerist, mass-cultural, corporate-capitalist character, incorporating a structurally determined apathy and sense of the individual's powerlessness in the face of omnipotent entrenched elites.' So the "counter-hegemony" wouldn't necessarily be a specific ideology but just the overcoming of structural fragmentation, the reinvigoration of civic commitment and of a movement or movements to build participatory democracy.

periodically finds new ways to perpetuate itself, which require new strategies from the opposition. Earlier, there was radical and overt violence; later, an increasing measure of hegemony, consent, the stabilization of capitalism (involving reformism, concessions from the ruling class); and now, even more corporate dominance, mass culture, fragmentation, consumerism on an unprecedented scale. But it goes without saying that "fragmentation" is possible largely on the basis of continued violence against unions, all kinds of political, economic and physical coercion against the poor, the dispossessed.

[…]

It's obvious that an enormous number of societal 'circumstances' are possible on the basis of the productive forces we have now. Tendencies toward one or the other set of circumstances are particularly powerful, but collective movements could accomplish a lot and potentially even overcome some such tendency as the continued massive political dominance of certain sectors of business. And on the basis of this success, other possibilities would present themselves. There's no reason to think that radical democratic movements can't emerge and have more success than any such movement in history—if only the right leaders and organizational arrangements come to the fore. The proletariat has lost the historical initiative, but cross-class alliances on behalf of economic aims are not out of the question. In a sense, of course, they're occurring everywhere even at this moment. We just have to build them up.

Still, there *are* major reasons—grounded in the dominant production relations—why things are as they are. Ultimately, to enact real change (for instance, to reduce the power of the banks, or to revitalize urban schooling) you have to make war on production- or property-relations, and that ain't easy. There were *some* advances in that direction in America in the late 1930s, with the Wagner Act, industrial unionism and so on, but they petered out. The civil rights movement accomplished less: minor changes in the political, 'educational' and cultural superstructure in certain regions (partial desegregation—less successful than the popular narrative tells us)—and cosmetic changes in economic relations—but even these minor reforms, which didn't prevent the horrifying current plight of minorities in cities, wouldn't have been possible without prior mini-revolutions (during the 1930s, '40s and '50s) in Southern economic relations or the active support of Northern economic elites during the '60s. So, in short, it isn't an accident that things are as bad as they are. It isn't just a failure of leftist leadership.

All the Sixties movements essentially failed, or had limited success, precisely because none of them amounted to a sustained and broad-based attack on economic power-relations. And the movement that tried to make such an attack, Black Power, was singled out and crushed by the FBI. –Every person in a position of economic or political power is unconsciously a vulgar Marxist with a loyalty to capitalism.

…Gramsci on the French Revolution: "In fact, it was only in 1870-71, with the attempt of the Commune, that all the germs of 1789 were finally historically exhausted. It was then that the new bourgeois class struggling for power defeated not only the representatives of the old society unwilling to admit it had been definitively superseded, but also the still newer groups [i.e., the workers] who maintained that the new structure created by the 1789 revolution was itself already outdated; by this victory the bourgeoisie demonstrated its vitality vis-à-vis both the old and the very new." (203)

"In studying a structure, it is necessary to distinguish organic movements (relatively permanent) from movements which may be termed 'conjunctural' (and which appear as occasional, immediate, almost accidental)." (201) The essential vs. the inessential. For instance, Franco's victory in the Spanish civil war was in large part accidental—it could have been otherwise—but the evolution of the welfare state in the West was basically inevitable, systemically determined. Likewise with neoliberalism (financialization, economic liberalization, etc.), and thus the contemporary decline of the welfare state.

Actually, Franco's victory was relatively "organic" compared to most political events, since it was closely related to such "systemic" international economic and political dynamics as the inevitable greater commitment of Germany and Italy to supplying the war-needs of a power-elite that would uphold conservative property-relations than of England, France and the U.S. to supplying the needs of a somewhat radical democracy (the Second Republic in 1936) that would redistribute economic resources to benefit the lower classes. The U.S. oil industry even supported Franco in the civil war, which was crucial to his victory.

The section "Americanism and Fordism." Gramsci is right that fascism partly amounted to an attempt to transplant Fordism to European conditions without substantially altering the old anachronistic

social structure (landowners, peasants, petty-bourgeois, the whole archaic structure of Europe even in the 1920s and '30s). Ford himself supported the fascists, who learned a lot from him, and the system he symbolized was simply industrial fascism. Creation of the new man, the new worker, the new order, etc. Taylorism, totalitarian company towns, regulation of the worker's private life, prohibition (of alcohol), and so forth. European fascism even had some success in combining the new with the old, modernizing society without modernizing it—"a revolution without a revolution," a "passive revolution," a "revolution-restoration." (Gramsci's incisive remark that fascism serves approximately the function for the 20th century that conservative liberalism served for the 19th—a revolution without a revolution, economic progress without social progressivism. In a diluted form, fascism would persist throughout the 20th century. Technocratic modernization and social conservatism, mass propaganda, the military-industrial complex, government planning, a degree of social welfare to limit discontent, diluted nationalism, colonial wars in defense of capitalism and to stimulate the domestic economy (including Cheney's Iraq war). True of the USSR too. Classical fascism was just an early and too-extreme-to-last manifestation of the statist (and monopoly-capitalist) phase of history.) The Second World War was in large part a result of fascism's success at reconciling the existence of the traditional conservative nationalistic strata (tied figuratively and 'literally' to the soil—"Blood and soil!", racialism) with modern methods of production that vastly increased the destructive power of technology. After the war had essentially destroyed all vestiges of the *ancien régime*, statism could continue without the threats to Western civilization it had posed in the first half of the 20th century. The boundary-dissolving tendencies of capitalism could operate less hindered by the traditional classes and social structure, which at the same time militated against nationalistic ideologies and conflicts.

Someday I want to buy posters of Marx, Chomsky, Nietzsche, Kant, and Sartre, and put them on the walls of my office. Each of these figures symbolizes one aspect or more of my personality and my mind. (With Sartre, it's the phenomenology and the "existential anguish.")

I'm reworking the thesis, since writing it was sheer torture. Now it has more emphasis on revolution and less on the day-to-day bullshit of running a co-op.

Sviatoslav Richter playing Bach's Fantasia and Fugue in A minor, BWV 944. Listening to it makes you feel like a tortured genius.

The rotten society.— "Average U.S. taxpayers subsidize excessive executive compensation—by more than $20 billion per year—via a variety of tax and accounting loopholes. That $20 billion for America's most powerful is more than double what the federal government spent last year on educating America's most vulnerable—children with disabilities."

Serious conversation with Yuja about our relationship. She said I don't care about her, in fact don't have an attachment to anyone; wants a long-term relationship, potentially marriage, but only if I change, etc. It'll never come to marriage, surely. But we talked and I tried to reassure her. I care about her, etc. Slowly I got a little sentimental, actually *wanting* to care about her and even thinking I did. –And there is, after all, truth to that. She is meaningful to me.– So finally, after she had cried a bit and I was feeling ordinary again, we hugged and suddenly I started crying. You know, that old thing, with the tears quietly streaming down as I lament the emptiness of life and my emotional scars. But then we were happy again, and the next time I saw her I brought flowers which she loved, and next week we'll go to the zoo, etc.

Last week of May

I read an article by Edward Herman, Chomsky's former collaborator, in the *Monthly Review* that argues, with extensive documentation, that the narrative we've been fed about the Rwandan genocide of 1994 is totally untrue. He claims that most of the victims weren't Tutsi but Hutu! Paul Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front supposedly killed hundreds of thousands of Hutus as it swept through the country to take power after the Hutu president's assassination in April—which, according to Herman, was itself an RPF

doing. His reasoning certainly makes sense. And there are a lot of holes in the official story. But I don't know… Herman says the U.S. wanted the RPF to control Rwanda for various reasons of its own, and *this* is why it didn't oppose the massacres going on—most of which were, apparently, against *Hutus*. The reason the U.S. pulled out most U.N. forces was to let the RPF take control of the country, which it wanted! But doesn't that seem too Machiavellian even for Bill Clinton?

I can accept that it was the RPF that killed the Hutu president and that it intended from the very beginning to seize power after his death—indicated by its incredibly efficient deployment of 50,000 troops against the Rwandan government two hours after the president's death—and perhaps even that Kagame anticipated the genocide of his own people as a result of the Hutu president's murder (and the RPF's subsequent movements) and that he was willing to use the genocide as a pretext to take power, but I'm still convinced that most of the killing was at the hands of Hutus, and that Tutsis were the most numerous victims. This has surely been sufficiently established by independent international observers. Nevertheless, Herman is probably right that the U.S. has been responsible for the lack of any serious investigation of Kagame and the RPF's doings during the genocide. Even the Hutu president's murder, which triggered the Tutsi genocide, hasn't been investigated! That's a sure sign that the U.S. government thinks or knows it was committed by the RPF, a U.S. client. Similarly, the U.S. has surely protected Kagame from being indicted for his role in the Second Congo War, which has caused the deaths of over 6 million people.

I'm reading Raymond Carr's *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective* (1977). I've always been curious about that war.

It's not even June yet and I'm writing the fourth and final chapter of the thesis. The first two chapters were much more tolerable to write after I'd changed the focus, and the third chapter, on revolution, was a joy.

…Joseph Marzah's testimony in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Charles Taylor of Liberia, Marzah a military guy. Describing matter-of-factly how at the orders of Taylor he and his colleagues slit open hundreds of pregnant women's bellies, smashed babies' heads against the wall to kill them, drowned old men, buried a pregnant woman alive, amputated thousands of limbs, burned people, pulled out intestines and stretched them across the road to scare passersby, stuck heads on spikes and car bumpers, carved out the heart of an enemy and ate it, cooked and ate many people (flavoring them with salt and pepper)—he was ordered to—raped thousands of women, etc. He denied having regrets. He had to do as he was told, otherwise he and his family (24 children) would have been executed. He saw a pregnant woman once, radioed his superiors to ask if he should cut out the fetus because "it's an enemy." In his testimony Marzah seems strangely like a child, totally naïve about moral issues—a partial result of his tribal upbringing, perhaps? Are most "primitive" men potentially like that, moral children? Certainly not individuated. He followed instructions more implicitly even than the Nazis. Did everything he had to, taking it all for granted. And yet I don't get the impression that he enjoyed it, although he may have. He's just an amoral machine.

[Stuff about Yuja.]

Reading Fred Magdoff and Michael D. Yates's *The ABCs of the Economic Crisis: What Working People Need to Know* (2009). Note to self:

> Under typical circumstances, a nation with a large trade deficit [which means that it is taking in more imports than selling exports] will find its currency depreciated, that is, exchanging for less and less foreign currency. As with anything else, when supply greatly exceeds demand, prices fall. In this case, the price is the exchange rate of the dollar with foreign monies… If the exchange value of the dollar were to fall dramatically, this would make imports to the United States more expensive (for example, more dollars would have to be paid for a certain number of yen than before), and by raising the price of consumer goods that would increase inflation in the United States. If the foreign goods and services did not have acceptable substitutes, U.S consumers might continue buying them at the

> higher prices and cut back on things produced here, leading to unemployment. A weaker dollar would also encourage foreigners to buy U.S. exports, but this might not be enough to stop the devaluation of the dollar. If the decline in the dollar's exchange value fell enough to whet the appetite of speculators who believed it might fall further, they would begin to speculate against the dollar and this would devalue it further. To stop the harmful consequences of this, the government, through the Federal Reserve, might have to push interest rates up to raise the demand for U.S. government bonds and thereby also raise the demand by foreigners for dollars. High interest rates would, however, reduce demand for houses, cars, and construction, causing more unemployment.

The U.S., however, isn't a typical country. The dollar is the leading global currency. So every nation's central bank has reserves of dollars with which, in the case of a depreciation in its own currency's value, it can buy that currency (for instance, Japan would use its reserves of dollars to buy yen) and keep the exchange rate stable, thereby preventing foreign goods from being more expensive and so preventing domestic inflation. As a result, the dollar has been in high demand around the world—also because U.S. government bonds are safe, so that foreign countries and businesses buy them in high volume. The result is that "the United States can run up large international deficits without causing its currency to depreciate in value as much as it should, which means that interest rates in the United States can be lower than they would otherwise be. Therefore, foreigners in effect helped subsidize the housing boom and all other spending that relied on borrowing." This has helped the U.S. economy, i.e. helped counteract trends toward stagnation.

Another note: supply-side economics tends to assume that by decreasing taxes on the rich, the rich will invest more in the real economy and thus create jobs for ordinary people. But the assumption is wrong. Because of the financialization of the economy, lower taxes simply cause the rich to invest more in stock-market gambling, which creates few jobs. –In his critiques of Reaganism, Paul Krugman never mentions this one (as far as I know).

"There was so much money in the hands of the wealthy that they had no productive way to use it. If a greater share had been in the hands of workers, this money would have been spent on commodities of all kinds, generating output and employment without such a massive accumulation of household debt" as we've seen in recent decades. This point harks to underconsumptionism and Keynesianism. But capitalism has powerful tendencies toward polarization of income—"underconsumption" for the masses, or "too much money being in the hands of the wealthy for it to be used productively"—and this contributes to its tendencies toward stagnation.

Moreover, given the existence of all this wealth without productive outlets, it was inevitable that financialization would occur, i.e. that the wealthy would find some way to use their wealth to make profits. But financialization, the massive system-wide accumulation of debt, in the long run was inevitably going to come untethered from the real economy, which means that people and institutions were someday going to lose their ability to service their enormous debt (because of their insufficient income), which means that a virtual collapse of the system was going to occur. And these tendencies will persist as long as there is a paucity of investment opportunities in the real economy, partly as a result of the relatively little wealth possessed by the multitudes.

Frankly, I'm not impressed by Obama's vaunted political skills. With opponents like Mitch McConnell, John Boehner, Eric Cantor and Newt Gingrich, not to mention Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh and the rest, it shouldn't be hard to seem like the voice of sanity. All he has to do is be honest, hammer home the point that Republican policies would benefit Wall Street. Tell the population that Wall Street hates him, which it does. Follow in the mold of FDR in 1936, as Paul Krugman suggests in his column today. Stop gingerly hinting at criticisms of corporate greed; be a fighter, at least in rhetoric (since it isn't in Obama's genes to fight in *action*). Treat the public like grownups; tell them, for instance, we need a certain amount of "big government" to fight big business. And repeat that until you're nauseated by it. And give concrete examples. These tactics are common sense. Say unorthodox things like, oh I don't know, the

truth. That'll impress people. Go to Tea Party country and give them a dose of common sense, which even they'll understand if you say it simply enough. Choose soundbites from Republican leaders and make mincemeat of them. Explain that you're raising taxes only on the wealthy. Etc. Go directly to the people, bypass their Fox News filter. –What on earth is wrong with this guy?? Corporations are already donating far more to Republicans than Democrats, so it isn't as though a change in his strategy would suddenly antagonize them and have disastrous consequences for the midterm elections. The opposite would happen. [Dude, be realistic. He's beholden to Wall Street and the corporate sector; he can't antagonize them.]

Speaking of Obama…it really is amazing, but predictable, how incompetent and/or inhuman his economic advisors are. I don't have to tell you about Lawrence Summers. But you probably didn't know this, although you could have guessed it: "The advice he gave as a highly paid consultant to Lithuania and Russia was that they should speed up their transition from socialism to capitalism by embracing neoliberalism as fast as possible. The results were catastrophic [as everyone knows by now]. Mass economic hardship caused the suicide rate in Lithuania to double, and Russia became the first advanced industrial nation in history to endure a sharp decline in life expectancies." The last two decades of Summers' career are a record of crimes, follies, and stories of what an obnoxious shithole he is.

Reading a few chapters of Chomsky's *Powers and Prospects: Reflections on Human Nature and the Social Order* (1996). I'm pleased to learn that Chomsky shares my contempt for the "Turing Test" beloved by a certain behavioristic breed of philosopher, which is supposed to provide a criterion for determining whether a given thing can think or understand or "manifests intelligence." I've always found it to be a pointless intellectual game played by thinkers uninterested in serious questions (or unable to tell a serious from a trivial question).[1] Apparently Turing himself thought as I do: "the question whether machines think 'may be too meaningless to deserve discussion.'" Yes. Or, even better: it depends what you mean by "think" or "understand" or "manifest intelligence." If you mean "think" in the sense that a human being consciously thinks, introspects, is self-conscious, I find it hard to believe that any possible machine could qualify. The Cartesian criterion was better than the Turing test: a being that can creatively use language as humans do has a mind. But I don't agree with this criterion either. I think cats have "minds" in some sense even though they can't use language.

Chomsky on the Turing test (and other such functionalist-inspired, behavioristic "criteria" for whether to apply a particular concept): "a confused attempt to answer a question that has no meaning."

Erik Olin Wright, "The Structuralist Marxist and Parsonsian Theories of the State" (1973). "Recent Developments in Marxist Theories of the Capitalist State" (1975). "The Continuing Relevance of Class Analysis" (1996). An encyclopedia article he wrote on class (2006).

I love the anger, the outrage, the impassioned sarcasm of Chomsky's writings on neoliberalism:

> What is being reported blandly on the front pages would elicit ridicule and horror in a society with a genuinely free and democratic intellectual culture. Take just one example. Consider the economic capital of the richest country in the world: New York City. Its mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, finally came clean about his fiscal policies, including the radically regressive shift in the tax burden: reduction in taxes on the rich ("all of the Mayor's tax cuts benefit business," the *New York Times* noted in the small print) and increase in taxes on the poor (concealed as rise in transit fares for school children and working people, higher tuition at city schools, etc.). Coupled with severe cutbacks in public funds that serve public needs, these policies should help the poor go somewhere else, the Mayor explained. These measures would "enable them to move freely around the country," the report in the *Times* elaborated, under the headline: "Giuliani Sees Welfare Cuts Providing a Chance to Move."
>
> In short, those who were bound by the welfare system and public services are at last liberated from their chains, much as the founders of the doctrines of classical liberalism

[1] The search for a "criterion" is probably not frivolous, but the way they go about it is. I obliquely addressed the issue in my paper on the analytic/synthetic distinction, as well as in this journal.

> advised in their rigorously demonstrated theorems. And it is all for their benefit, the newly reconstituted science proves. As we admire the imposing edifice of rationality incarnated, the compassion for the poor brings tears to the eyes.
>
> Where will the liberated masses go? Perhaps to *favelas* on the outskirts, so they can be "free" to find their way back somehow to do the dirty work for those who are entitled to enjoy the richest city in the world, with inequality greater than Guatemala and 40 per cent of children already below the poverty line before these new measures of "tough love" are instituted.

And on and on.

June

Yuja and I ended it last night. Tears on both sides. I completely broke down at one point, having drunk too much wine. Then to bed, maybe the last time I'll sleep in her bed. We're going to be friends, and we still plan to go strawberry-picking soon, etc. What pains me most is her pain—both her emotional attachment to me and her increasingly urgent quest for a husband. Hopefully she'll get over the former quickly.

I spend almost all my time alone, reading and writing.

Since reading that passage from Michael Albert's book, which I quote in my thesis, I've come around to the dialectic. I now finally appreciate its full significance. But it remains, after all this time, an under-emphasized and little-understood concept. Even I don't have a full grasp of it yet in all its permutations. I'd like to write an essay on it, the theory and the reality in particular historical events.

As Hegel and Marx said, a given period of history can't be well-understood until it has evolved into something else. One's understanding will become even more thorough after the succeeding period has in turn been superseded, and so on. Ordinary undialectical thinkers would say this is simply because one gains "perspective" on the period after it has passed, but that's a superficial explanation. The real reason is that the internal tendencies, the structural contradictions that constitute the real essence of a society and propel its development reveal themselves only in the new or modified structures engendered by their evolving and contradictory "resolutions." Until then, societal tendencies are extraordinarily difficult to detect or understand. Even the most acute thinker can be totally wrong about developments in his society, as Marx was wrong about the significance of working-class radicalism in his day. It certainly isn't *impossible* to make accurate predictions on the basis of thoughtful analyses, but the predictions are always provisional (unlike in the natural sciences, where there is no dialectic to worry about, because no consciousness or freedom).

Reading Chomsky's *Problems of Knowledge and Freedom* (1971). Part One is an able defense of common sense in the form of "rationalism." Part Two is a defense of common sense in the realm of politics and the economy.

Douglas Blackmon's *Slavery By Another Name: The Re-enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II* (2008). To quote Chomsky, "one of the most horrifying books I've ever read." But beautifully written, and a tour de force of investigative journalism. It enlightens you as to the human misery potentially embedded in the ground you walk on, the bricks in city buildings, stretches of de-forested land, seemingly placid rural hamlets. America truly was built on the backs of slaves, chattel-slaves and wage-slaves, convict-slaves, immigrant-slaves—centuries of persecution, torture, forced labor, debt-slavery, human trafficking, genocide, imperial conquests, every horror imaginable.

Here's an astonishing fact: according to Gallup polls, a majority of Americans has approved of labor unions in every single year from the 1930s to the present, except last year, when only 48% approved of them. This is despite *massive* business propaganda against unions. Even in the 1980s, most Americans consistently favored unions. It's miraculous. What a disinformation campaign we've been subjected to by the media!

On the other hand, for a long time people have feared big government more than big business. An example of propaganda stultifying rational faculties.

Erik Olin Wright's *Class, Crisis and the State* (1978).

Society, of course, isn't just "structures," unless that term is meant loosely. Children playing, adults foreplaying, friends hanging out together, ways of acting in the home, in fact interactions themselves are not "structures," although they presuppose some more or less defined structure(s). What you have are loose structures and norms associated with the roles in those structures. Some structures, particularly in the economy, are quite defined, relatively invariant, with strict and strictly enforced norms governing behavior, hierarchies, etc.; "cultural" structures and roles, on the other hand, as in the household and among friends, are more flexible, somewhat variable within a society, less "constraining" than economic roles, more like "norms" in the ordinary sense. It actually doesn't make a lot of sense even to call some of these cultural phenomena "structures," or defined by structures (role-differentiations), except in the most abstract, virtually empty way. They're just norms, common ways of behaving. Behavior among casual friends is the best example. No clear "structures" there.

The question is, why exactly are economic structures different in this way? Not too hard to answer. The reasons why they have to be strictly enforced are obvious. (Extraction of the surplus, survival of the society, etc.) Historically, hierarchies have gotten the job done—extracted the surplus—better than democratic cooperation. Or at least they get the job done, and the higher-ups don't want to change the structure. Coercion, strict enforcement, is necessary because nobody wants to be in the lower position.

Here's the thesis. Strange to say, I'm somewhat pleased with it, on the whole. (I could have done more with chapter 5, but by the end I just wanted to get it over with. The whole purpose of the essay, and the only reason I could tolerate writing it, is chapter 4.) *[I've substituted for the thesis the book that I turned it into a few years later. Or rather a nearly final draft of it. I had rewritten chapters 4, 5, and 6, and edited the first three chapters.]*

WORKER COOPERATIVES AND REVOLUTION: HISTORY AND POSSIBILITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The capitalist mode of production does not permit a socially efficient allocation of resources. Resource-allocation is determined by the twin structural imperatives of having purchasing power (on the demand side) and of chasing profit (on the supply side). If one has a need but lacks the money to back up that need, as for example the billion children worldwide living in poverty do, one's need will not be met by the market. Conversely, investors will pursue only those projects that have the potential to make a profit. For instance, many areas of rural America were still without electricity in the early 1930s because investors had judged that the meager profits to be made did not justify the costs of supplying electricity to these regions; hence the New Deal's Rural Electrification Administration and the cooperatives that sprang up to supply electricity.[1]

Broadly speaking, the dynamic between capital and wage-labor, as well as that between millions of atomized units of capital each seeking profit at the expense of every other, makes for a very unstable and crisis-prone economy. Capital's interests lie in paying the worker as little as possible and in preventing him from exercising control over the process of production, while the worker wants to be paid as much as possible and to exercise greater control over production. This simple structural antagonism is the basis for the whole history of the labor movement, the continual confrontations, the unions and union-busting, the private armies deployed to break up strikes, the government suppression of labor parties, the revolutionary

[1] Deward Clayton Brown, *Electricity for Rural America: The Fight for the REA* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980).

social movements, the constant and pervasive stream of business propaganda, and the periodic bursts of cooperative economic activity among the ranks of labor. At the same time, the vicissitudes of the capitalist economy leave many people unemployed at any given time, unable to find work because their skills and needs are not valued or because of insufficient investment in their geographical or professional area, or because of outsourcing to countries where labor is cheaper, or for other reasons. In recent decades, the liberalization and financialization of the international economy has entailed a tendency for corporations to seek profits not through investment in industry and infrastructure development but through financial speculation. This sort of investment, undertaken on the principle of "*Après moi le déluge*," is not only risky but essentially adds no jobs and no real wealth to the economy, which tends to stagnate—or to contract, after it finally becomes evident that all these financial transactions have been grounded in "the baseless fabric of a vision" (to quote Shakespeare). So, millions more people are thrown out of work as capital withdraws itself from further investments, and government initiatives are required to set the economy on track again—for more financial speculation and more stagnation, as opposed to contraction.[1]

However, even before the orgies of neoliberalism it was obvious that capitalism is not socially efficient. Market failures are everywhere, from environmental calamities to the necessity of the *state's* funding much socially useful science to the existence of public education and public transportation (not supplied through the market) to the outrageous incidence of poverty and famine in countries that have had capitalism foisted on them.[2] All this testifies to a "market failure," or rather a failure of the capitalist, competitive, profit-driven mode of production, which, far from satisfying social needs, multiplies and aggravates them. This should not be surprising. An economic system premised on two irreconcilable antagonisms—that between worker and supplier-of-capital and that between every supplier-of-capital and every other[3]—and which is propelled by the structural necessity of exploiting and undermining both one's employees and one's competitors in order that ever-greater profits may be squeezed out of the population, is not going to lead to socially harmonious outcomes. Only in the unreal world of standard neoclassical economics, which makes such assumptions as perfect knowledge, perfect capital and labor flexibility, the absence of firms with "market power," the absence of government, and in general the myth of *homo economicus*—the person susceptible of no other considerations than those of pure "economic rationality"—is societal harmony going to result.

From the very beginning of its history, the manifold social evils of capitalism have given rise to oppositional movements. The one I am concerned with in this work is cooperativism, specifically worker cooperativism. There are many other kinds of cooperatives, including those in the credit, agriculture, housing, insurance, health, and retail sectors of the economy. But worker cooperativism is potentially the most "oppositional" form, the most anti-capitalist, since it organizes *production* in anti-capitalist ways. Indeed, the relations of production that constitute worker cooperativism also define socialism in its most general sense: workers' democratic control over production and, in some varieties, ownership of the means of production (whether such ownership is organized individually, by owning shares of equity, or collectively). As one common formulation states, in the worker co-op, labor has power over capital, or "labor hires capital." In the conventional business, by contrast, capital has power over labor, i.e., "capital hires labor." None of the other kinds of cooperativism directly rejects these capitalist power-relations, although some may signify an implicit undermining of capitalism insofar as the co-op exists not primarily for the sake of maximizing profit but for satisfying some social need.

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[1] See John Bellamy Foster and Robert McChesney, "Monopoly-Finance Capital and the Paradox of Accumulation," *Monthly Review* 61, no. 5 (October, 2009): 1–20; and John Bellamy Foster and Robert McChesney, *The Endless Crisis: How Monopoly-Finance Capital Produces Stagnation and Upheaval from the U.S.A. to China* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012).

[2] Naomi Klein describes recent examples in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007).

[3] Capitalists may indeed reach a modus vivendi to alleviate the mutually harmful consequences of competition, for instance by fixing prices, but the potential always remains for the antagonism of interests to reassert itself.

It must be understood that a society's dominant mode of material production, i.e., the "hegemonic" method of organizing the relations of material production (such as manufacturing and food production), conditions the overall character of the society more than any other of its features does. This is because the society is erected on the basis of material production; the first task for a society is to reproduce itself in its specific form, which presupposes the reproduction of a set of production relations. Social relations will tend to evolve that make possible the reproducing of the relations of production. In the spheres of economic distribution, of politics, of sexual relations, of intellectual production, and so on, social structures and ideologies will tend to predominate that are beneficial, "functionally selected" with respect to the dominant mode of production.[1] Therefore, a movement that aims for fundamental transformations in society should not limit itself to the sphere of distribution, as do consumer co-ops, credit unions, and housing co-ops, nor the sphere of gender relations, as does the feminist movement, but should concentrate on changing the mode of production (with its correlative property-relations, the criteria for allocating resources), as does worker cooperativism.

Such cooperativism on a societal scale, involving "a federation of free communities which shall be bound to one another by their common economic and social interests and shall arrange their affairs by mutual agreement and free contract,"[2] is not only a more socially rational way of organizing production than capitalism but also a more intrinsically ethical way (even apart from its potential allocative efficiencies). First of all, the very premises of capitalism are absurd, as Michael Albert makes clear:

> Rewards for [owning] property are called profit…wherein individuals who own the means of production pocket profits based on the amount of those means of production. You own some machines. The machines have high output that can be sold for revenues that exceed the cost of maintaining them. You pocket the difference, or profit. You needn't do anything other than keep track of your deed to your property, while sipping mint juleps or dry martinis.[3]

More pertinent, however, is that capitalism tends to stultify the worker's creativity, his human urge for self-expression, freedom, mutually respectful interaction with others, recognition of his self-determined sense of self, recognition of himself *as* a self rather than an object, a means to an end. Karl Marx called it "alienation." Capitalism alienates the worker—and the capitalist—from his "fundamental human need" for "self-fulfilling and creative work," "the exercise of skill and craftsmanship,"[4] in addition to his fundamental desire to *determine himself* (whence comes the desire to dismantle oppressive power-relations and replace them with democracy). Alternative visions of social organization thus arise, including Robert Owen's communitarian socialism, Charles Fourier's associationist communalism, Proudhon's mutualism (a kind of anarchism), Marx's communism, Bakunin's collectivist anarchism, Kropotkin's anarchist communism, Anton Pannekoek's council communism, and more recently, Murray Bookchin's libertarian municipalism, Michael Albert's participatory economics, Takis Fotopoulos's inclusive democracy, Paul Hirst's

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[1] Philosophers have debated interminably the validity or invalidity of "functional explanation" and the notion of "functional selection," but in fact functional explanations are simply shorthand versions of causal explanations—as in Darwinism, whose talk of the "functions" of particular biological adaptations is a way of rephrasing the *causal* doctrine of natural selection by means of random variation. To say, as G. A. Cohen does in *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (1978), that Marxism (more specifically, historical materialism) is committed to functional explanation is misleading. It is "committed" only to causal explanations, but Marxists often use the idiom of functionalism because to tease apart all the causal mechanisms through which particular structures, patterns of behavior, and ideologies have developed and persisted is no easy task. I'll return to this issue in the final chapter.

[2] Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice* (Oakland: AK Press, 2004), 1.

[3] Michael Albert, *Moving Forward: Program for a Participatory Economy* (San Francisco: AK Press, 2000), 17. That many owners of capital do productive work (managerial, technical) is not essential to their ownership of capital considered in itself. It is this from whence they derive their profits.

[4] Noam Chomsky, *Language and Politics* (Oakland: AK Press, 2004), 364.

associationalism, and so on. Each of these schools of thought differs from the others in more or less defined ways, but they all have in common the privileging of economic and social cooperation and egalitarianism.

I take these visions to be essentially similar to "worker cooperativism," which in some form is at least an *element* in all of them. If it were generalized so as to be the dominant mode of production, a society approximating classical utopias would be achieved. In this book, however, my primary focus is not on cooperativism's value as the ideal we strive for, but on its value as a possible path towards that ideal. That is, I want first of all to evaluate the potential of worker co-ops for undermining capitalism and moving us towards something like "socialism." What should be their strategic role? What systemic effects have they had in the past? What mistakes have been made? How have co-ops fared as a form of business? Do they indeed tend to entail workplace disalienation and democracy, or is that just a theoretical construct that doesn't obtain in reality? Can their potentially revolutionary function be reconciled with their need to survive in a capitalist economy? What sort of political consciousness has their membership tended to possess? How have co-ops interacted with the labor movement? What challenges do they face as businesses? Why are they so rare?

Opponents of capitalism have by no means always looked favorably on worker co-ops as tools of revolution. We'll have to consider their arguments in the following chapters. Marx had an ambivalent attitude toward co-ops: he considered them to "represent within the old form [i.e., the capitalist economy] the first sprouts of the new" but thought that "they naturally reproduce, and must reproduce, everywhere in their actual organization all the shortcomings of the prevailing system."[1] Not until the working class had seized political power and imposed cooperative principles on the economy could co-ops be anything more than aberrations. Lenin and other Marxists agreed with this judgment. Nikolai Bukharin accused "pre-revolutionary" cooperators of being "purveyors of a 'miserable reformist utopia' because they imagined a socialist evolution of cooperatives within the capitalist system…cooperatives 'inescapably fall under the influence of capitalist economics'…and 'are transformed into capitalist enterprises.'"[2]

Edward Greenberg observes that members of worker cooperatives occupy what Erik Olin Wright has called "contradictory class locations."[3] "In producer cooperatives, democratic participation is joined to actual ownership of the enterprise so that shareholders are, at one and the same time, workers and capitalists."[4] Because of their contradictory structural locations they have contradictory interests and incentives, desiring both the maximization of profit and workplace democracy and equality. They might also, in their capacity as workers, identify with employees of conventional companies in their struggles against management, perhaps going so far as to join a union, to strike or boycott sympathetically in solidarity with their oppressed brethren, to participate in radical social movements—or they might foreswear unions and the class struggle altogether and act solely as entrepreneurs. We'll look at examples of this behavior later.

In chapters two and four I'll consider arguments for and against co-ops in depth. We'll see that the issues are not quite as simple as Marxist opponents and anarchist proponents have sometimes thought. Cooperatives can behave in different ways, and much depends on their institutional context. Some cooperators rhapsodize about their experiences while others profess disillusionment. What factors explain these differences? I also want to consider two additional questions: first, can co-ops have a viable role in alleviating on a broad scale, *within* the capitalist economy, the worst defects of capitalism? Secondly, is such a role in tension with the goal of eventually transcending capitalism, in that it tends to stabilize the economy and contain discontent, postponing the necessary *direct attack* on capitalist institutions? Or, on the contrary, can the propagation of co-ops in the interstices of capitalism be an element in the long-term formation of a counter-hegemony? That these questions are imperative is revealed by the fact that not only leftists but even conservatives and fascists have at times favored worker co-ops. Mussolini granted official

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[1] Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, Part V, Chapter 27.

[2] Quoted in Edward S. Greenberg, *Workplace Democracy: The Political Effects of Participation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 153.

[3] See Erik Olin Wright, *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985).

[4] Greenberg, *Workplace Democracy*, 153.

recognition to the Italian cooperative movement once it had purged Socialists and Communists, and he pointed to cooperatives as embodying "worker participation, nonconflictual relations between labor and management, and the withering away of class identifications."[1] In the famous Spanish town of Mondragon, worker cooperativism was founded (in the 1950s) "as an entrepreneurial alternative to working-class activism and socialism."[2] There is a danger, therefore, that cooperatives can become tools of reaction rather than progress.

In chapter two I'll discuss cooperatives from a non-revolutionary perspective, culling the scholarly literature for insights into organizational structure, methods of capitalization, labor productivity, worker satisfaction, wage levels, profitability, effects on employment, company survival-rates and longevity, challenges the movement faces, etc. Chapter three is devoted to the history of worker cooperativism in the United States. I will show, among other things, that in an overall framework of powerful institutional obstacles, worker cooperativism has periodically surged forward and then receded in a cyclical pattern. After its advances, conservative political and economic forces have pushed back to virtually eradicate it. For example, under the sponsorship of the Knights of Labor it made great headway in the 1870s and 1880s; in the late 1880s and the 1890s it succumbed to the attacks of big business on industrial unionism, which also decimated the Knights of Labor. Cooperativism made strides in the 1930s, partly with the help of New Deal legislation, but in the 1940s and '50s receded again. The 1960s and '70s saw further advances under the influence of such progressive movements as the civil rights, youth, anti-war, and feminist movements, while the 1980s saw massive counterattacks by conservative sectors of business. This whole history arises from the violent and cyclically prone conflict between capital and labor (in occasional conjunction with other progressive interests like the black struggle against segregation and poverty).

I'll apply the lessons from chapter three in the following chapter, where I discuss the question of what co-ops and the growing "alternative economy" can contribute to a long-term struggle against capitalism. This discussion will be more theoretical and speculative than that in the second chapter—inevitably so, since one can only speculate about the future, not analyze it. But since people study the past precisely to glean lessons for the future, a semi-theoretical, semi-empirical analysis of possibilities seems appropriate.

To anticipate briefly: I expound and revise the Marxist theory of revolution so as to provide a theoretical framework to interpret the alternative economy (of cooperatives, municipal enterprise, public banking, urban agriculture, the solidarity economy). Marxists and "cooperators" have tended to be mutually hostile, but, as I'll explain, the logic of Marxism is in fact committed to the sorts of "interstitial" movements that are emerging now, which represent a new society within the shell of the old. Marx himself misunderstood his own system when he adopted a statist perspective and predicted a dictatorship of the proletariat—two things that are very un-Marxian, as we'll see. His followers persisted in his mistakes, such that up to the present day virtually no one has understood the elementary truth that statism and Marxism are in conflict (in two ways, actually: morally and strategically). So, I purify Marxism, returning it to its logical essence. The reason for doing this isn't only to make some academic points about doctrine; instead, I think that if the theory of revolution is purified and updated it sheds light on the historical moment we're living in.

To illuminate that moment, I retrace the logic of the West's historical development in the last few centuries. The notion of a "logic of history" isn't fashionable nowadays, probably because it implies that capitalism is merely a temporary phase that, like all social systems, is bound to evolve into something different. Nevertheless, I resurrect the idea and use it to explain why *only now* are we finally entering the revolutionary era Marx and Engels looked forward to—and why it couldn't have been any other way. They got the timeline wrong; "socialism" on a broad scale was not possible earlier. But the coming revolution will not look like what they predicted, namely a seizing of the state and a unitary reconstruction of the economy. Rather, it will take place over generations and will sprout from the grassroots, locally, regionally,

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[1] Sharryn Kasmir, *The Myth of Mondragon: Cooperatives, Politics, and Working-Class Life in a Basque Town* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 75.
[2] Ibid., 195.

and transnationally—again, as Marxism (despite Marx) entails. Given a true revolutionary situation, cooperatives are by no means antithetical to the class struggle; they are an essential tool of it.

Chapter five returns to the narrow focus on worker cooperatives, this time looking at their formation. In particular, I recount the experience of a business that was recently formed and has frequently been in the press, the New Era Windows cooperative in Chicago. Its worker-owners are the same workforce that occupied the Republic Windows and Doors factory in 2008, just as it was closing, to demand the back pay, severance, and temporary healthcare benefits to which they were entitled. It was one of the very few factory occupations since the 1930s, and it became a national *cause célèbre* that even President-elect Obama spoke positively about.[1] A couple months after the workers' victory the factory was partially reopened under a new owner, Serious Materials—which three years later, in February 2012, announced that it was closing the factory again and consolidating operations elsewhere. So, once again, the workers staged a sit-in to protest the closing, which ended after the owners agreed to keep the factory open for ninety days. Fed up with capitalist caprice, the workers decided to buy the factory themselves and run it as a cooperative. Again they encountered resistance from the business class, but with determination and community support they overcame it. I tell their story in some detail in chapter five.

The point of this case-study isn't only to tell an inspiring story of David triumphing over Goliath. I'm also interested in how and why these workers have succeeded where others have failed or not even tried. Why were they apparently the only workforce in the U.S. to occupy their factory in the dismal months of late 2008 and early 2009, when the economy was imploding? What ingredients were present that were missing elsewhere? Why and how did they decide to start a cooperative? How did they force the owners, who were initially reluctant, to let them buy the factory? What steps were required to establish the cooperative? Has the experience been successful so far? What challenges have had to be overcome along the way? In general, I try to glean lessons that can be applied in similar cases, which I hope and expect will become more common in the coming decades.

In the final chapter I return to the topic of Marxism and revolution, to discuss some implications of the ideas in chapter four. I argue, for example, that the old mutual hostility of Marxism and anarchism is seen to be unfounded upon a deeper understanding of Marxism, and that leftists should therefore move beyond the sectarianism that has interfered with radical movements for at least 150 years. On the other hand, if my revision of Marxism succeeds in returning it to its "essence," it becomes even clearer than it was to Rosa Luxemburg that Leninism is a deviation from Marxism. According to the latter, and to any sensible revolutionary strategy, the transition to a new society will take place over many generations and will involve every conceivable tactic, including radical political parties, frequent mass demonstrations, violent confrontations with armed personifications of authority, transnational federations of peasant and worker solidarity, pressures from the environmental movement to end destructive capitalist practices, and, crucially, the construction of new cooperative modes of production and distribution in the womb of the old regime. Activists should have a clear understanding that this is what we're in for; this broad-based "movement of movements" is what we should expect and embrace.

Thus, an essential element in this movement of movements is the worldwide spread of co-ops (of every kind) that is happening now. Indeed, we are living in the most exciting time for cooperativism since capitalism began its conquest of the world. Cooperatives proliferate from Canada to Argentina, across Europe and Russia, to India and over to Indonesia, throughout Africa and the Middle East. Almost 800 million people are members of cooperatives, and three billion depend on them for their livelihood.[2] The developing world has made excellent use of the cooperative principle, in the form, for example, of microcredit, which is—or can be—a kind of cooperative banking. Neoliberal institutions like the IMF and World Bank, far from facilitating sustainable economic development, have typically amounted to imperialism and colonialism by other means, functioning so as to permit the transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich and from poor countries to rich countries. As a result, regions such as South Asia have, in

[1] Monica Davey, "In Factory Sit-In, an Anger Spread Wide," *New York Times*, December 7, 2008.
[2] International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), "Co-operative Facts and Figures," http://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-facts-figures (accessed December 13, 2013).

some respects, begun to reject the neoliberal model in favor of such strategies as establishing institutions that grant small loans with little or no interest to villagers, usually women—which, incidentally, empowers them vis-à-vis men—for the purpose of starting businesses or buying houses for their families. In Bangladesh, such institutions have helped well over 10 million people escape from dire poverty.[1] In recognition of the fact that cooperatives "are becoming a major factor of economic and social development"—as the General Assembly of the UN declared in 2002[2]—the UN named 2012 the International Year of the Cooperative.

Cooperatives have had success in the developed world too, as the following random statistics show. In France, farmers borrow up to 90 percent of their loans from credit cooperatives, cooperative banks handle 60 percent of the total deposits, and 28 percent of all retailers are cooperatives.[3] Ninety-one percent of Japanese farmers belong to agricultural co-ops. In the United States, a number of well-known corporations are technically cooperatives, including Land O'Lakes, Sunkist, Ocean Spray, Welch's, Sunmaid, REI, the Associated Press, and True Value Company. Credit unions in the U.S. had 95 million members in 2012, or 45 percent of the economically active population.[4] Electric utility co-ops provide electricity to more than 42 million rural Americans; 1.2 million families live in homes owned or operated by cooperative associations; and over 11,000 social and public service cooperatives exist—e.g., cooperative daycare centers, which serve more than 50,000 families.[5] Altogether there are about 30,000 cooperatives in the U.S., providing two million jobs and generating more than 600 billion dollars in revenue.[6]

Of all forms of cooperative economic activity, worker cooperativism has had the most troubled history. And yet it too has had notable successes. Consider Europe again. Confining our attention to recent times, the European Confederation of Worker Cooperatives reports that the 50,000 enterprises affiliated with it employ about 1.4 million people.[7] Italy has a particularly high proportion of worker co-ops—the highest per capita in the world—due in part to legal advantages.[8] The Mondragon cooperative complex in Spain has had well-publicized success since it was established in the 1950s, eventually diversifying its operations from industry to retail, agriculture, education, housing, and research and development. Currently it comprises about 250 companies that together employ 80,000 people and have annual sales of 13 billion euros, elevating Mondragon into the class of major multinational corporations.[9]

Worker cooperativism has recently been spreading in Latin America, as societies try to piece themselves together in the wake of neoliberal economic destruction. For example, factory takeovers by former employees were quite common in Argentina after the collapse of 2001; the new worker-owners have

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[1] Richard Williams, *The Cooperative Movement: Globalization from Below* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 84. Unfortunately, banks have discovered in microcredit a brave new world of exploitation-of-the-poor, and so are beginning to dominate the field even though they often charge interest rates of 100 percent or more. Neil MacFarquhar, "Big Banks Draw Big Profits From Microloans to Poor," *New York Times*, April 13, 2010.

[2] John Curl, *For All The People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 7.

[3] Lanyan Chen, *Gender and Chinese Development: Towards an Equitable Society* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 23; Coop FR, "Key Figures," http://www.entreprises.coop/decouvrir-les-cooperatives/chiffres-cles.html (accessed December 13, 2013).

[4] World Council of Credit Unions, "2012 Statistical Report," http://www.woccu.org/publications/statreport (accessed December 13, 2013).

[5] 2012 International Year of the Cooperative, "Quick Facts about U.S. Co-ops," http://usa2012.coop/co-ops-in-usa/quick-facts; University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives, "Research on the Economic Impact of Cooperatives," http://reic.uwcc.wisc.edu/services/ (accessed December 13, 2013).

[6] ICA, "Cooperative Facts and Figures"; 2012 International Year of the Cooperative, "Quick Facts about U.S. Co-ops."

[7] CECOP, "What is CECOP," http://www.cecop.coop/What-is-CECOP.html (accessed December 13, 2013).

[8] Gregory K. Dow, *Governing the Firm: Workers' Control in Theory and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 67–69; Erbin Crowell, "Cooperating Like We Mean It: The Co-operative Movement in Northern Italy," *Grassroots Economic Organizing*, http://www.geo.coop/node/357.

[9] Mondragon Corporation, http://www.mondragon-corporation.com/ENG.aspx (accessed December 13, 2013).

organized their companies on a cooperative basis.[1] Some of these firms have won important legal battles that have affirmed their right to expropriate the property of the old failed business.[2] After ten or more years—a long time even for conventional firms—many of these "recovered companies" are still in business. The same phenomenon has occurred in Brazil, perhaps on an even broader scale, as its solidarity economy has grown.[3]

The United States has often lagged with respect to progressive movements, and worker cooperativism is no exception. Currently there are only about 300 or 350 such co-ops in the country, and most of them are small to medium-sized.[4] (Employee stock-ownership plans (ESOPs), by contrast, are quite common, with 11,000 of them operating today.)[5] Nevertheless, the movement is growing. For example, the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives was founded in 2004; smaller such federations and support organizations proliferate across the country, for instance the Network of Bay Area Worker Cooperatives in the San Francisco area (founded in 1994), the Valley Alliance of Worker Cooperatives in Massachusetts (founded in 2005), the Eastern Conference for Workplace Democracy, the Federation of Workplace Democracies in Minnesota (formed in 2004), CooperationWorks!, the New York City Network of Worker Cooperatives, the Ohio Employee Ownership Center (from 1987), the ICA Group, the Cooperative Fund of New England, Green Worker Cooperatives (based in the Bronx), the California Center for Cooperative Development, the Working World, the Cooperative Development Institute, the National Cooperative Business Association (founded in 1916), and many more. Even the organizations not exclusively devoted to supporting worker co-ops have recently been getting more involved with them, as public awareness and interest have increased.

The worldwide growth of economic cooperation unreported by the corporate media suggests that we are witnessing the beginning of a social movement the likes of which have never been seen in history. It is quietly sweeping the earth, altering life for millions, but it has barely yet emerged from its infancy. For two centuries its scouts have forged ahead, so to speak, effectively building interstitial redoubts from which in part to wage the future war. And it *will* be waged, in the coming decades. Compared to this underlying economic evolution, the political headlines of today are little more than epiphenomena. Worker and consumer cooperativism, the social economy, the solidarity economy, local participatory democracy, public banking, regional economic coordination—all this represents the future. The following will establish this claim in broad outline, by taking worker cooperatives as emblematic of larger trends.

CHAPTER TWO
THE SOCIOLOGY AND ECONOMICS OF WORKER COOPERATIVES

The first question we have to answer is how to define a worker cooperative. Numerous definitions have been offered, all of which share the same intuitions about democratic ownership and control. Here is Derek Jones's definition:

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[1] The Lavaca Collective, *Sin Patrón: Stories from Argentina's Worker-Run Factories* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2007). See also Karen Ann Faulk, "*If They Touch One of Us, They Touch All of Us*: Cooperativism as a Counterlogic to Neoliberal Capitalism," *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2008): 579–614; and Peter Ranis, "Argentina's Worker-Occupied Factories and Enterprises," *Socialism and Democracy* 19, no. 3 (Nov. 2005): 1-23.

[2] See, for instance, Marie Trigona, "Argentine Factory Wins Legal Battle: FASINPAT Zanon Belongs to the People," *Upside Down World*, August 14, 2009, http://upsidedownworld.org/main/content/view/2052/32/ (accessed January 10, 2010).

[3] Mario Osava, "Solidarity Economy Combats Exclusion," *Inter Press Service*, January 11, 2008, http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=40760 (accessed May 10, 2010). See chapter four of this book.

[4] U. S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives, "What is a Worker Cooperative?" http://www.usworker.coop/about/what-is-a-worker-coop (accessed December 13, 2013).

[5] Gar Alperovitz, *America Beyond Capitalism* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005), 87.

> …an autonomous enterprise in which (a) many workers (or members) own stock, (b) ownership is widely distributed among the workers, who own much of the voting stock, (c) working-members participate in the enterprise's management and control, and (d) they share in the distribution of the surplus, usually on the basis of work [rather than stock ownership].[1]

Like most commentators, he distinguishes cooperatives from mere employee-owned firms, for instance those that have ESOPs, which do not require employee participation in their management.

As stated in the Introduction, the conceptual starting-point of the worker co-op is that labor has power over capital, whereas it is the reverse in a conventional business. That is, in a capitalist enterprise both ownership and control (and the right to a share in profits) ultimately belong to investors, and voting rights are proportionate to the number of shares of equity held. The more capital one owns, the more control one is supposed to have over the operations of the firm. In the co-op, control is not directly related to ownership: the principle is "one worker, one vote," not "one share, one vote." Moreover, all or the majority of shares—if stock exists at all—are owned by workers, not outsiders. Otherwise there would be the danger that investors could acquire all the power, which would lead to the business's degeneration into a capitalist firm.

In a traditional business, the only consideration that really matters is the accumulation of profit. All else is subordinated to this goal. In a co-op, the dominant consideration is whatever the workforce wants it to be, for example the maintenance of steady employment, service to the community, or the accumulation of profit (to be allocated as the members decide). We'll see below that, as a rule, workers prefer the continued employment of as much of the workforce as possible to the retention of high revenues, which in hard times means that they accept pay cuts in order to avoid layoffs.

The typical governance structure of a cooperative follows from what has been said. In large cooperatives, a board of directors, drawn from the ranks of the worker-members themselves, is elected by the workforce and managers are appointed by the directors (or sometimes elected directly by workers). Both directors and managers, therefore, have an incentive to treat "employees" well and respect at least some of their priorities, since if they don't, they might be voted out of their position. Small co-ops, on the other hand, have little "governance structure" at all: they tend to operate by (near-)consensus and have no need of managers or directors. Occasionally there is a nominal "board of directors" for minor decisions or for administrative matters with which other members do not want to concern themselves.

Already, a major reason for the rarity of worker co-ops is evident: investors have a greater incentive to invest in firms that give capital control over labor rather than vice versa. Hence, it will frequently be the case that people cannot raise enough capital to get a cooperative started or to keep it functioning. Investors' interest is in the extraction of maximum profit regardless of the will of the workers; indeed, the interest of the latter, as employees, is directly opposed to the interest of capital, since profit is inversely proportional to wages. Investors will therefore be reluctant to deposit their funds in a firm that gives control to its workers, who do not value the maximization of profit above all else.

At the same time, cooperatives are motivated, as I said, *not* to seek large amounts of outside investment, since then it might be difficult to prevent control from effectively falling into the hands of these investors, an eventuality that could lead to the erosion of the firm's commitment to democratic ideals. The usual practice among co-ops is to rely primarily on initial investments in the firm by its worker-members (who thereby gain a share in ownership),[2] in conjunction with loans from cooperative banks or other institutions ideologically committed to cooperativism. But it remains true, for the reasons mentioned and

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[1] Derek Jones, "American Producer Cooperatives and Employee-Owned Firms: A Historical Perspective," in *Worker Cooperatives in America*, eds. Robert Jackall and Henry M. Levin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 37.

[2] Actually, legal structures exist according to which worker-members do not "own" a "share" in equity but receive a portion of the profits anyway. See the final section of this chapter. For now, the differences between legal forms are unimportant.

others to be examined below, that raising sufficient capital is one of the biggest obstacles to the spread of worker cooperatives—and, as a corollary, that cooperatives have preponderated in non-capital-intensive industries.

However, let's consider these questions and others in more detail, drawing upon the scholarly literature. I will discuss small cooperatives, sometimes called "collectives," first, since they are the most numerous.

Collectives

Organizational structure

Collectives approach most closely the participatory democratic ideal of cooperation. Being of fewer than, say, 40 people, often as few as 15 or less, there is a minimum of bureaucracy and a maximum of collective decision-making. The values of decentralization, spontaneity rather than bureaucracy, freedom and self-initiative rather than external imposition of rules, are the guiding lights. In a sense, the structure of collectives can be seen as the ideal that larger cooperatives try to approximate insofar as they are committed to cooperativism.

As already noted, the collectivist form of governance is directly democratic and usually consensual. Major decisions, and often minor ones, are approved of in meetings attended by all the members; the goal is to hammer out a policy on which everyone agrees. What makes this consensual decision-making possible, of course, is the small size of the collective. As one author states, "The face-to-face relationships and directly democratic forms that characterize the collectivist organization *probably cannot be maintained if the organization grows beyond a certain size*."[1] There is no absolute optimal size of cooperatives, though, since the proper size varies with the nature of the work and the technology available. Perhaps Jean-Jacques Rousseau's criterion, suggested in *The Social Contract*, is best: "each citizen [must] with ease know all the rest." One writer states bluntly that "democracy is inversely proportional to the size of the cooperative," and he advises that co-ops not exceed a size compatible with a general meeting of the members.[2]

For example, in the 1980s the small size (around 25 members) of the Cheese Board, a collective in San Francisco that was and is the leading cheese store in the area, made possible a largely consensual approach to decision-making, with no formally acknowledged "leaders." Any leadership is informal, based on personality and perceived commitment to the co-op. As Robert Jackall noted in a 1983 case-study, when major matters have to be decided upon, "such as the long-term disposal of the growing surplus funds," a consensus is required at one of the monthly meetings. For minor matters, though, a simple majority vote sufficed—or decisions could be made by the shift at the time that an issue arises. Achieving consensus is difficult and time-consuming, sometimes requiring many meetings over many months, as when the business decided to post a sign publicly proclaiming its status as a collective.[3] This is one of the reasons why a constant practicing of direct democracy, especially of the consensual sort, is not feasible in large organizations; it would take too long to reach and implement decisions on even minor issues. Representative democracy and a degree of bureaucracy, i.e., of the centralization of power, become essential to getting things done in a timely manner.

(In fact, now that the Cheese Board has expanded to 50 members who also run a bakery and a pizza business, the old requirement of consensus has been partially abandoned. The new rule is that a kind of "modified consensus" is necessary for important decisions: members try to reach agreement, but if they can't, a near-consensus suffices.)

So, the first constraint on democracy is size—of the business and of its market. Equal Exchange, a workers' co-op in Massachusetts with over 100 members that did $51,046,000 worth of business in 2012,

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[1] Joyce Rothschild and J. Allen Whitt, *Potentials and Dilemmas of Organizational Democracy and Participation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 91. Italics in the original.
[2] Tadeusz Kowalak, quoted in ibid., 92.
[3] Jackall, "Paradoxes of Collective Work," in *Worker Cooperatives in America*, 122.

necessarily has more bureaucracy, more specialized jobs (including customer service, media outreach, etc.), and less democracy than Collective Copies, a copying center with 12 members in Western Massachusetts.[1] The second constraint, mentioned already, is time. "Quite simply, a boss can hand down a bureaucratic order in a fraction of the time it would take a group to decide the issue democratically."[2] On the other hand, in the latter case the policy might be implemented more effectively, since workers presumably would be more committed to it. Indeed, ironically, the much-maligned inefficiency of bureaucracies is due in large part to their *undemocratic* nature, their inflexible, impersonal, atomized, uncommunicative, unaccountable, uncreative, unresponsive-to-unforeseen-contingencies structure. As Michael Crozier says, "A bureaucratic organization is an organization that cannot correct its behavior by learning from its errors."[3] This is because in centralized organizations, change can come only from the top—but at the top are people who usually do not learn of "errors" at the bottom at all. Information does not flow efficiently: bureaucrats are isolated from the consequences of their actions and cannot see the broader picture, due to the atomized and diffuse nature of the organization, with each official performing a specialized function and no other, always waiting for dictates from on high in lieu of taking initiative.[4] These failures, and others, of bureaucracy do not apply to democracy.

A third constraint on democracy in worker co-ops is environmental: larger structures in the society have inculcated behavior patterns of submission to authority, competition in the workplace, conformism, and passive atomization rather than active participation in decision-making. One finds in the scholarship descriptions of cooperators who simply do not have the desire to participate in the governance of the firm, who want only to get their paycheck and not deal with the challenges of deciding policy. This is one origin of the old elitist accusation that "the masses" *want* to be subordinate, that they have neither the capacity nor the inclination to exercise democratic self-control. However, as one sociologist concludes, "We learn to participate by participating… The experience of a participatory authority structure might be effective in diminishing tendencies toward non-democratic attitudes in the individual."[5] To say it in a different way:

> If one accepts the assumption [that certain people "are not ripe for freedom"], freedom will never be achieved; for one cannot arrive at the maturity for freedom without having already acquired it; one must be free to learn how to make use of one's powers freely and usefully…[6]

As Kant goes on to say, the first gropings toward freedom and democracy by a people not used to it may be clumsy or ineffectual—especially if the experiments in freedom (such as worker cooperatives) are situated in a still-unfree society. Actually, a lack of involvement by some worker-owners in the affairs of governance is less a problem in collectives than in larger cooperatives. But the point holds: the cooperative's structure and the expectations or pressures that go along with it are in tension with those of the broader society, and this fact can undermine the co-op's smooth democratic functioning inasmuch, for example, as lazy and undemocratic attitudes have to be overcome, and individuals with competitive or authoritarian personalities have to be persuaded to soften their behavior.

One way to avoid these sorts of problems is to be selective in admitting new members. And collectives often are very selective indeed. The Arizmendi Bakery in Oakland, California is an example:

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[1] Equal Exchange, "Fast Facts," http://www.equalexchange.coop/fast-facts, and Collective Copies, http://collectivecopies.com/about/staff.htm (accessed November 20, 2013).
[2] Rothschild and Whitt, *Potentials and Dilemmas*, 64.
[3] Michael Crozier, *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1964), 187.
[4] To take a random example, Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Knopf, 2006) explains how the CIA's and FBI's bureaucratic overspecialization resulted in the 9/11 attacks.
[5] Carole Pateman, quoted in Rothschild and Whitt, *Potentials and Dilemmas*, 67.
[6] Immanuel Kant, quoted in Noam Chomsky, *For Reasons of State* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 393.

> We watch how [prospective members] work and how they take feedback. We bring people in for twelve hours over several weeks. They shadow someone and try out different tasks and we evaluate them. Then we bring them in for a group interview. If we really connect with them, then we bring them on for a six-month trial candidacy. We train them on specific shifts, and they go to meetings related to the history and other ideas that are important for understanding the collective.
>
> By the end of six months, there will have been three different evaluations, which are pretty intense. We give them constructive feedback, time for them to voice their concerns, feedback from their sponsor, who has been working alongside them. Then it goes to a full vote and the candidate has to get a 75 percent positive vote to be invited in.[1]

Joyce Rothschild and J. Whitt go so far as to say that "*consensus, an essential component of collectivist decision-making, may require from the outset substantial homogeneity among members*. Participants must bring to the process similar life experiences, outlooks and values if they are to arrive at agreements."[2] To an extent this is obviously true, and the rigorous screening process at Arizmendi testifies to it. But the criterion of homogeneity can surely be overemphasized. For example, Red Sun Press, a printing-and-design cooperative in south Boston with ten worker-owners, has had a very heterogeneous workforce since its founding in 1973: young and middle-aged, highly educated and less educated, countercultural and mainstream, middle-class and working-class, whites and Hispanics. This fact has not prevented the business from lasting forty years and being financially successful.

Another factor that can interfere with participatory structures is the sheer exhaustion and stress that can accompany the fusion of "employer" and "employee" roles. This is exacerbated by the fact that cooperators, especially collectivists, sometimes receive less pay than their counterparts in conventional businesses. "Burnout" can set in: "the experience of feeling constantly overworked, of having too much responsibility and not enough organizational support to carry it out, of never having enough free time for personal pursuits, of constantly being hassled, of, in one worker's phrase, 'losing your soul.'"[3] Similarly, in a directly democratic environment, where consensus may be required, interpersonal tensions are prone to flaring up. Disagreements can become personal, and general meetings can be quite stressful. Bureaucracy, therefore, is in some ways *easier* than democracy: the impersonal environment, the not-having-to-treat-people-as-people, can reduce the potential for emotional conflicts.

Again, though, qualifications are necessary. A member of Red Sun Press, in Boston, observed in an interview with the author that, contrary to what one reads in much of the scholarly literature, working in a co-op is not significantly more stressful than working at a traditional business. "In a conventional workplace," she says, "some of the stress comes from having little power over your working conditions and business decisions. In a co-op, some of the stress comes from *having* the power—then you *are* responsible for what happens! Ultimately, having the power is the option I would choose."[4] Most cooperators, and probably most people, would agree with her.

Studies in the 1980s and earlier emphasized another manifestation of the collectivist commitment to egalitarianism: "deprofessionalization," or the avoidance of professional specialization due to its bureaucratic, stratifying implications. "In the smaller worker cooperatives," writes one author, "work roles are holistic, specialized knowledge is demystified, and there is frequent task sharing and job rotation."[5] The practice of job rotation (or, in a less extreme form, simply having the option to change one's job) was in

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[1] Bernice Yeung, "Running a Business with 26 CEOS," *East Bay Express*, January 27, 2010 (an interview with Kamil Dawson, a member of the co-op).
[2] Rothschild and Whitt, *Potentials and Dilemmas*, 95. Italics in original.
[3] Jackall, "Paradoxes of Collective Work," in *Worker Cooperatives in America*, 129.
[4] Interview with Nancy Nichols, June 10, 2010.
[5] Robert Sommer et al., "Consumer Cooperatives and Worker Collectives: A Comparison," *Sociological Perspectives* 27, no. 2 (1984): 139–157.

part a legacy of the radical origins of the 1960s' and '70s' wave of collectives, but it also arose, and continues to arise, from the very nature of small-scale cooperative work. People working in a business often get bored with their routine and want to learn something new. This diversification of their skill-set, in fact, may be intimately connected to their sense of self-worth: the more routinized, bureaucratized, bored and detached from one's activities one is, the less self-esteem one has. Humans crave new challenges periodically, and a life or a job bereft of challenges or opportunities for growth is a terrible thing. In capitalist businesses, where most employees have far less input than management in the firm's operations, the desire for stimulating novelty is subordinated to the bottom-line. In collectives, by contrast, workers often give themselves the opportunity to change their roles, to learn new tasks.

For example, Robert Jackall notes that at the Cheese Board it was possible during the 1980s to switch jobs occasionally if one had enough initiative. Certain tasks were considered attractive, such as baking bread in the morning, and one could "win" these jobs at least temporarily if his coworkers respected his contributions to the store—in other words, if he "deserved" the job.[1] In fact, a similar tradition continues today.[2] It requires self-initiative, but the opportunity is there.

However, such deprofessionalization is not possible in all industries. Sometimes expertise is essential for efficiency, as in the printing-and-design and other high-tech industries. In these cases, job rotation is rare. What does happen, though, is that workers change their jobs if they so desire: e.g., at Red Sun Press, Nancy Nichols was the salesperson for seven years, then became the production manager, then did customer service, and now is the business manager. Still, to the extent that expertise in specialized tasks has become increasingly important in recent decades, deprofessionalization has declined. Similarly, the larger a cooperative is, the more difficult it is to organize job rotations, just as it is more difficult to institutionalize democracy.

Wages and employment

One of the ways in which cooperatives rectify the injustices of capitalism is by instituting a relatively equal compensation-scheme for their members. While in the U.S. the average ratio of CEO compensation in the Fortune 500 companies to the ordinary worker's has recently been reported as 344:1,[3] in co-ops the pay-differential between management and the average worker rarely exceeds 4:1. In collectives, like the Cheese Board, everyone is usually paid the same amount.

For example, a British study from the 1980s reports that all of the dozens of small co-ops it researched had lower pay-differentials than conventional businesses, and most had little or no differential at all.[4] At Arizmendi Bakery everyone currently receives about 20 dollars an hour plus a percentage of the year's profits. The worker-owners of Mondragon Bookstore and Coffeehouse in Canada earn the same rate of pay. At Equal Exchange, a relatively large co-op, there is a 4:1 pay ratio.

On the other hand, collectivists sometimes earn less than their counterparts in private enterprises. One study reports that at a cooperatively run newspaper called the *Community News*, which had a full-time staff of about 15 people, staffers made between 18 and 25 percent of what they could have made at comparable but "established" journalism jobs. Some workers in fact were paid nothing at certain times, while working a 40- to 60-hour week. At another co-op studied, a medical clinic, some staffers made about 50 percent of what they could have earned at other nursing or counseling jobs for which they were qualified. Volunteers also made up a significant portion of the staff. On the other hand, because of the substantial equality in salaries, such workers as secretaries often earned as much as their 'capitalist' counterparts.[5]

Against examples of low pay must be set small co-ops like Home Green Home Natural Cleaning in San Francisco, which was established in 2009 to give employment and decent wages to low-income

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[1] Jackall, "Paradoxes of Collective Work," 116.
[2] Personal communication with one of the members.
[3] Heather Landy, "Behind the Big Paydays," *The Washington Post*, November 15, 2008.
[4] Chris Cornforth et al., *Developing Successful Worker Co-operatives* (London: SAGE Publications, 1988), 123, 124.
[5] Rothschild and Whitt, *Potentials and Dilemmas*, 98, 99.

Latinas. In addition to the 50 to 100 percent higher earnings the women make at their new job than earlier, they have health insurance now and work in healthier environments, where the cleaning chemicals are not as toxic as in many conventional cleaning companies. A study reports that the worker-owners of another such co-op in California, called Natural Home Cleaning (started in 2003), have tripled their personal income and enjoyed an increase of 70 percent in their household income since they joined the cooperative.[1] In some cooperatives wages might be low but because workers are owners they receive a share of annual profits, which, combined with benefits, often raises their income to above the level at comparable private firms. **[more?]**

The reason for the sometimes-low pay-levels of collectives is not too obscure: it is due to undercapitalization, which means that small cooperatives "sometimes generate little surplus to distribute among their members."[2] Especially in the early days of a cooperative, the lack of external capital might mean that wage-levels have to be kept low in order to capitalize the business.[3] And in times of recession, cooperators usually choose to lower their wages if the alternative is to lay off members, which they are always extraordinarily reluctant to do. In conventional firms, by contrast, wages are "sticky," hard to change; management typically chooses to lay off employees and let the remaining ones keep an income that is perhaps higher than that of the cooperators who have voted to cut their own wages.[4] Thus, as one recent study sums up, cooperatives of whatever size tend to have more volatile wages than conventional businesses and less volatile employment.[5]

These facts, of course, merely confirm what common sense would suggest. First of all, members of cooperatives tend to see themselves as part of a community of worker-owners, and they respect each other as belonging to this community. It is reported universally in the literature that the prospect of laying off or firing fellow workers is extremely painful. This is especially so in collectives, where the communities are tightly knit and people develop bonds of friendship with each other. Even in situations where close friendships do not develop, there usually remains mutual respect and a sense of obligation to each other—a sense of "we're in this thing together." In fact, historically one of the most important goals and functions of cooperatives has been "to provide employment security or to expand the employment base for the local population." This was a key reason for the establishment of both the famous plywood co-ops discussed below and Mondragon,[6] as well as the green cleaning cooperatives in San Francisco and the Evergreen cooperatives in Ohio (see the next chapter). Therefore, to lay off workers, even the least productive ones, during hard times would flagrantly violate not only the democratic, humanistic spirit of cooperativism but also one of its main economic functions in a society of employment insecurity.

In short, there is no question that cooperatives, even collectives, have potential for alleviating unemployment, and that this function is typically seen to take precedence over that of securing high wages—although the two are by no means always mutually exclusive.

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[1] Hilary Abell, "Work and Pay Better at Green Cleaning Coops," *Owners at Work*, Ohio Employee Ownership Center, vol. 21, no. 1 (Summer, 2009): 6, 7.

[2] John McNamara, "Payment Solidarity: Looking Deeper at the Mondragon Principles," *SolidarityEconomy.net*, February 28, 2010.

[3] Cornforth, *Developing Successful Worker Co-operatives*, 123.

[4] In recent years, of course, it has become increasingly common during recessions for capitalist businesses not only to lay off employees but to hire new ones at a much lower rate of compensation. For instance, this is what the Hyatt Hotels and Resorts chain did in Boston in 2009: it laid off a hundred housekeepers who were earning $15 or more per hour and outsourced their jobs to others whom it paid $8 an hour (even though, because the staff had shrunk, these new housekeepers had to do far more work than the old ones had). Megan Woolhouse, "Firing Housekeepers Creates PR Mess for Hyatt," *The Boston Globe*, September 25, 2009. Incidentally, as is usually the case in such situations, the broader recession was simply an excuse that Hyatt used to justify its action; in fact, the company was by no means in desperate financial straits. See "Hyatt Hotels posts narrower Q4 new loss" in *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/feedarticle/8962714 (accessed March 15, 2010).

[5] John Pencavel et al., "Wages, Employment, and Capital in Capitalist and Worker-Owned Firms," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 60, no. 1 (Oct., 2006): 23–44.

[6] Jackall and Levin, *Worker Cooperatives in America*, 22.

Incentives, job satisfaction, productivity, and "the political effects of participation"

It should be obvious by now that a different set of incentives tends to operate in small cooperatives than in conventional businesses. Whereas the latter are typically structured primarily around the desire to make more money and get promotions faster than one's coworkers, the internal dynamics of the former have more to do with interpersonal relationships, the desire to feel good about one's work, the goal of maintaining a democratic workplace, and so on. Workers tend to have different expectations and want different kinds of rewards than they would hope for in a capitalist firm.

This is particularly true of collectives. As already stated, these are both the most numerous co-ops and, in general, the least remunerative: sometimes workers are egregiously underpaid compared to their counterparts in capitalist firms. But, as with all things cooperative, this is partly by choice. People *choose* to remain in a collective, they accept low pay in part because they value other things more than money. Study after study demonstrates that collectivists want most of all to be in control of their work, and that they find nothing more miserable than working in a bureaucratic setting with a boss who orders them around. The following statements are illustrative:

> "You get a different feeling, working for yourself…" "You're working more hours but you get more enjoyment…it's your own." "There must be many people who, like us, have been driven half-insane by the dehumanizing straitjacket of the orthodox working world and yearned to be part of something better, more fulfilling." "There's some scope for personal creativity." "Not having someone who does not know the job telling you what to do…" "I believe now in my capability of being something. I've always felt impotent before about getting things done in the world. I believe I could start a business of my own if I wanted to. I've gotten practical knowledge and a sense of self as well that I couldn't conceive of before." "Every year I become a little more confident of myself as someone who counts."[1]

Having control over work is not the only benefit. Closely related to it is the satisfaction of *believing* in one's work and lifestyle, being convinced of its moral worth. This is especially the case if the co-op exists in part to serve a broader social movement, whether it be through printing leftist literature, as Red Sun Press does, or through promoting knowledge of whole foods, as some food cooperatives do. Such 'moral' orientations may serve the same function of raising self-esteem as does the opportunity to control the actual work process.

Collectivists are usually, though not always, liberal, educated, young, middle-class, and white. There are many exceptions, but on the whole this seems, for now, to be the demographic most attracted to the collectivist experience. "The [potentially] low salaries and erratic uncertain career paths [of collectivists] exclude, by self-selection, most minorities and all but a handful of those from working-class origins."[2] Many of these young cooperators move on to more conventional jobs after a few years in a collective, desiring more money, new outlets for their ambition, and perhaps less labor-intensive, time-consuming work. But it is not uncommon to find middle-aged workers in collectives.

It is true that the sometimes-low pay can be considered a substantial cost, one of the most negative aspects of the collective experience. Tiredness due to long hours is also a common complaint, especially from workers who are very active in the business and feel that they are taking on an undue share of the burden. Resentment can arise toward less active members who are perceived as "free-riding." On the other hand, the more active one is, the more influence one has and respect one commands—as long as other workers do not perceive one as domineering or undemocratic. As mentioned above, collectives tend to be

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[1] Quoted in ibid., 124, and Cornforth, *Developing Successful Worker Cooperatives*, 100, 101.

[2] Robert Jackall and Joyce Crain, "The Shape of the Small Worker Cooperative Movement," in *Worker Cooperatives in America*, 94.

more susceptible to interpersonal conflict than conventional businesses are, due to their open, democratic, personalized structure.

None of these costs, however, is irremediable. Wages usually get higher, sometimes to union levels or above, after the co-op has been in business for a while and has accumulated experience and expertise; it is in the early stages or during difficult times that wages are lowest. The other problems can be mitigated simply by communicating with other members, airing grievances during meetings and strategizing about how to deal with them. Most cooperators report that meetings can be confrontational, stressful, sometimes traumatic, intensely personal, excessively long; but in principle it is through the mechanism of periodic general meetings that the pitfalls of cooperation can be overcome, or at least mitigated so that the benefits of cooperation decidedly outweigh the costs (as almost all cooperators report that they do). It must also be emphasized, again, that strong bonds frequently develop between cooperators, indeed partly because of the relatively intense and sometimes difficult nature of the work. Apologists for capitalism point to this existence of conflict as a flaw, but in fact it ought to be considered a strength. For one thing, it indicates that workers are personally committed to their work, unlike in many private enterprises. Overt conflict (when it exists) is also more psychologically healthy than suppressed conflict, and it is more ethical, in that it results from adults' treating each other as adults, with dignity. They confront their problems and try to solve them, which means they act as human beings rather than bureaucratic automatons who treat each other impersonally.

One source of "alienation" in conventional enterprises that cannot always be rectified in cooperatives is the intrinsically unpleasant nature of certain kinds of work. No matter what the social relations are, whether cooperative or competitive, sewing, for example, is not particularly fun. "It's hard work…you have to concentrate, you can't just gossip away and it can be boring," reports one worker. Printing may involve "toxic chemicals, noise, oil vapor, carcinogens."[1] The industrial work of the old plywood co-ops is inherently monotonous: "It's like being a zombie… You're doing something that's basically unpleasant. Most jobs are monotony and repetition. It can drive you nuts… I go through times when I get so depressed."[2] Even Karl Marx conceded that some kinds of work are inherently antithetical to freedom, the spontaneous creative expression of the human spirit:

> …In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production… [The realm of material production] remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite.[3]

Marx may even have exaggerated here the intrinsically alienating features of material work. But his broader point is correct: some activities will never, no matter how they're organized, be the sort of thing one chooses to do for their own sake. This is one of the reasons why some collectives practice job rotation.

A problem that may afflict collectives, and to an extent larger co-ops, but does not affect private enterprises is conflict over goals. Workers have to decide whether their main objective is to have high wages, to provide employment to as many people as possible, to provide a cheap service to political and community groups, to grow as a business and spawn new co-ops, or any other objective to which some members may be committed. The potential for strife here is great. Moreover, even if the members reach a consensus on how to prioritize objectives, there remain external constraints on cooperative goals and values, such as the need to be efficient and competitive against conventional businesses that may not have the same problems with capitalization as co-ops do. This necessity is less constraining the more "marginal" a

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[1] Cornforth, *Developing Successful Worker Cooperatives*, 104.
[2] Quoted in Greenberg, *Workplace Democracy*, 82.
[3] Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, Part VII, Ch. 48.

cooperative is—for example if it serves a niche market where there is not much competition from other firms—but co-ops will always have to act like a capitalist business to some extent, just to stay afloat.

Actually, labor productivity is usually higher in cooperatives than in conventional enterprises, for obvious reasons. I will return to this issue in the section on larger cooperatives; suffice it to say for now that cooperators have greater incentives to be productive than typical employees do. For one thing, worker-owners can directly appropriate, or do as they want with, profits, whereas in capitalist firms profits usually go to outside investors. Thus, the connection between the success of the capitalist business and the employee's personal gain is not as direct as it is in a co-op. Cooperators will also exert peer pressure on one another to perform well, and the relatively high camaraderie present in the work process will have a productivity-boosting effect. The work itself, as stated above, is more intrinsically rewarding and self-actualizing, especially in collectives, and the democratic environment, which allows access to information that would be withheld from conventional employees, is empowering. Cooperators are not always more productive than regular employees, but the *incentives* for high productivity are great.

Another argument sometimes made by leftists in favor of cooperativism is that it encourages class-consciousness, participation in politics and social movements, and in general fosters a "proactive" transformation of individual character. The hope is that cooperators will carry over their work practices (insofar as they involve participation and engagement) into the outside world, and that the co-op itself might join and support progressive movements. Unfortunately, the data are mixed. With regard to collectives, few generalizations can safely be made. It is true that most collectivists report that their experiences have raised their self-esteem—especially if they used to work at a traditional company—and they certainly enjoy work more than most employees do. It has not been conclusively established, however, that membership in a collective inherently raises political consciousness or encourages political activity. While it is likely that collectivists have had a higher rate of political participation than the population as a whole, that is partly because the sort of people who join small co-ops are more likely to have a liberal activist's temperament and values. Also, many such co-ops are explicitly political, such as radical printing presses and bookstores. Even food cooperatives are relatively political, since the distribution of food is a political issue. But cooperatives are also businesses, and as such might choose not to join a movement or even act contrary to progressive interests, for instance by negotiating deals with employers that are injurious to the latter's employees. American history is replete with examples of cooperatives alienating the local labor movement. Co-ops also might be loath to offend their customers by taking overt political stances.

So, individually and collectively cooperators as such *might* be prone to progressive activism (see below) but are not so in any stunning way. It seems as though they should be because their workplaces are relatively egalitarian and empowering, but one must remember the lesson of Marxism: social dynamics are holistic, such that individuals and institutions are molded by pressures emanating from *everywhere* in the society. The social structure as a whole conditions entities to behave in certain ways, and in a sense it reproduces itself.[1] Thus, the facts that co-ops have to survive in a capitalist context and that cooperators themselves have been shaped by broader patterns in the society tend to undermine whatever anti-capitalist and politically participatory implications there are in cooperative production relations. On the other hand, the latter's political potential becomes more potent the more cooperatives colonize a given area, building up their own culture, and the more they network with each other—the more they establish federations, etc. For then they might develop political agendas, lobby together for favorable legislation, link up with other

[1] Louis Althusser called this "structural causation," different from other kinds of causality. It is an obscure notion but a necessary one, which is operative not only in society but in nature (albeit in a different way, a more deterministic way). Althusser thought that Spinoza was the first Western thinker to grasp the importance of structural causation, the first to pose the question of how the elements of a whole can be conditioned or determined by the whole itself (which, in Spinoza's pantheistic system, was the entire universe, which he called God). See Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: New Left Books, 1970), especially 182–193, and Alison Assiter, "Althusser and Structuralism," *The British Journal of Sociology* 35, no. 2 (June, 1984): 272–296. Structural causation is closely related to the difficult ideas in contemporary philosophy of "downward causation" and "emergence."

movements in similar structural locations and with similar interests and ideals. Such networking is arguably the most important element in any attempt to make society a more humane place.

Medium-sized and larger cooperatives

Organizational structure

In general, the larger an organization is, the more complex and less directly-democratic its structure is. Indeed, it almost necessarily becomes more bureaucratic and hierarchical, because in order to function smoothly some specialization of roles is required. A business with a hundred employees has to have a more differentiated structure than a business with fifteen employees; for example, it has to process much more information, of different kinds. With specialization and bureaucratization, however limited it may be, comes an element of hierarchy. There has to be a central organ that collects all the information and uses it to make decisions about the organization's future and its relations with the outside world. Theoretically the entire body of workers could make these decisions collectively—perhaps everyone could receive a packet of information about the firm's operations, study it for a week or two, and then congregate in a general meeting—but certain constraints make this unrealistic. As stated above, the time constraints may be prohibitive. Even in a collective, weekly meetings can last for several hours and it may take weeks or months for a single issue to be resolved. Also, the information that has to be digested may be so technical that most workers are unable or unwilling to absorb it, preferring to leave it to specialists who have been trained in the particular topic. Or they may simply be apathetic and too exhausted at the end of the day to devote hours to administrative matters.[1]

For many reasons, therefore, some of which are not necessarily related to the nature of capitalist social structures, it may be necessary to have specialized professionals advising a board of directors. In a large cooperative, direct democracy will be the exception, representative democracy the rule. The board of directors will have to appoint managers—or they can be directly elected by the workforce, as the board of directors is—to ensure the smooth daily coordination of the business. Workers do monitor each other in many large co-ops, but it is not hard to imagine situations in which at least a few designated "superintendents" of some sort are necessary (and perhaps would be so even in a more egalitarian economy than the present).

The now-defunct plywood cooperatives of the Pacific Northwest, whose history will be discussed in the next chapter, illustrate these points. In the early 1980s there were eleven such co-ops in Washington and Oregon, each owned by between 100 and 300 workers. Christopher Gunn summarizes their governance structure as follows:

> Owner-members elect their board of directors, and the firm's general manager is appointed by that board. The board and the manager administer the routine operations of the co-op; policy decisions are made on a one-person, one-vote basis by all owner-members in semiannual or quarterly general meetings [where "there are discussions about everything from the manager's performance to capital-investment decisions"]. Major decisions are discussed extensively by owner-members, who have full access to information concerning the co-op's operation. The core of production workers in these co-ops essentially hires and fires its manager.[2]

There is an element of hierarchy in production and decision-making on the shop-floor, but much less so than in comparable capitalist firms. The word "hierarchy" in fact is a bit misleading: plywood worker-owners take their "supervisor" much less seriously than in conventional mills because his continued

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[1] See, e.g., Kasmir, *The Myth of Mondragon*, 136–138.

[2] Christopher Eaton Gunn, *Workers' Self-Management in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 100, 109.

employment depends on their goodwill, and it is very rare that he will try to fire one of them. (Sometimes he is an outsider who has been hired, sometimes a worker-owner himself.) There are also few supervisors in plywood co-ops, maybe one or two per shift, whereas in a private enterprise there have to be six or seven because the workers have less of an incentive to work efficiently. The co-op supervisor tends not to bother the workers but concentrates on "broader, plant-wide issues having to do with the flow of materials and machine-usage."[1]

Plywood cooperators, who often have semiskilled jobs that can easily be rotated, frequently organize informal job rotations to alleviate monotony or for some other reason. This is not done in conventional mills, where "jobs are assigned through precise and formal agreements made between management and the union."[2] Cooperators also initiate innovations in work procedures and have more flexibility in their tasks than at conventional mills.

Thus, while considerations of efficiency dictate that the consensual, spontaneous, "self-actualizing" form of collectives be limited in larger co-ops, it can still exist to a much greater degree than at private enterprises. One should not think, incidentally, that this presence of democracy constrains efficiency, that it signifies a compromise between freedom and productivity. Quite the contrary. The above description should already have helped dispel that impression; moreover, as I mentioned earlier, bureaucracy not tempered by democracy can be extremely inefficient, whether it's in a government or a business. Therefore, to compromise between participation and hierarchy in a large organization is in fact to establish the greatest possible efficiency. I'll return to this point below.

Companies in the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation, which have hundreds or thousands of workers, have a more complex governance structure than the plywood co-ops. The general assembly of all worker-members in each company meets at least annually to elect a governing council (similar to a board of directors) and to approve company plans and policies. Members of the governing council, who themselves are worker-members, have four-year terms; they are not paid for their council responsibilities but receive their regular salaries. The council appoints and can remove the CEO and must approve his choices for senior executives; it meets once or twice a month to monitor the management team's and the company's performance. There is also a "Social Council" that meets monthly, composed of representatives elected annually; its role is vaguely similar to that of a union, though it is supposed to be more cooperative than confrontational vis-à-vis the governing council and the management team. It serves as the voice of all the workers, communicating with management on such issues as working conditions, wages, and health and safety. This structure has worked for decades.[3]

Each cooperative in Mondragon has its own workplace structure, though there are similarities and tendencies that most of them share. The firm called Irizar, which manufactures products for transportation, from luxury coaches to city buses, exemplifies these tendencies. To encourage innovation and the diffusion of knowledge, there are no bosses or departments in Irizar. Rather, it has a flat organizational structure based on work teams with a high degree of autonomy. (One study remarks that they "set their own targets, establish their own work schedules, organize the work process as they see fit, and so on.") The teams also work with each other, so that knowledge is transmitted efficiently. Participation occurs also in the general assembly, which meets three times a year rather than the single annual meeting common in other Mondragon firms. Its subsidiaries in other countries have at least two general assemblies a year, where they

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[1] Edward Greenberg, "Producer Cooperatives and Democratic Theory: The Case of the Plywood Firms," in *Worker Cooperatives in America*, 196.

[2] Ibid., 191.

[3] William Foote Whyte and Kathleen King Whyte, *Making Mondragon: The Growth and Dynamics of the Worker Cooperative Complex* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1988), 35–41; and Fred Freundlich, "The Mondragon Cooperative Corporation: An Introduction," Ownership Associates, May 22, 1998, http://www.ownershipassociates.com/mcc-intro.shtm (accessed April 10, 2010).

approve the company's strategic plan, investments, etc. These participatory structures have enabled Irizar to surpass its competitors in profitability and market share.[1]

The cooperative in south India called Kerala Dinesh Beedi (KDB), which has had great success since its inception in the late 1960s, is worth describing because of its unusual characteristics. First of all, it is very large: at times having had over 35,000 worker-members, it currently has about 9000. It grew out of a conflict between the employees and owners of a private company, when the owners laid off 12,000 beedi workers in the state of Kerala.[2] A left government had come to power in Kerala in 1967 and was committed to implementing recent national legislation that would regulate and improve the deplorable conditions of the beedi industry. Beedi employers were not happy with these developments; they wanted to continue using child labor and also institute a domestic "putting-out" system to fragment the workers, whose unions had been active in radical social movements for decades and were troublesome to the employers. One of the latter essentially declared war on the unions and the new leftist government: not only did it threaten to relocate to a different state if the government enforced the law, but it laid off 12,000 employees.[3]

A months-long crisis ensued, until the government and the unions decided to create a new cooperative to employ the 12,000 laid-off workers. Cooperatives had been created before in Kerala, but not nearly on this scale. The workers could not afford to put up much capital, so the government lent them millions of rupees, in addition to helping the trade unions accomplish the monumental organizational tasks. Government officials even joined the board of directors. What is amazing is that despite all this political involvement, the government soon "withdrew from any active role in the running of the cooperative."[4] Even the endemic Indian problems of corruption did not arise, since the government was desperate for the cooperative to succeed.

One study summarizes the structure of KDB:

> KDB is a federation of twenty-two "primary cooperatives." Each of the primary cooperatives has six to fourteen shop floors. At each, there are generally between 75 and 125 beedi-rollers. Production takes place at the shop floor. Every worker directly participates, informally and continually, in the decisions about work arrangements at his or her shop floor. Each shop floor has a formal, general body meeting only about once every six months. At the general body meeting of each group of shop-floor workers (seventy-five to one hundred twenty-five people) everyone participates. These meetings are the fora for discussing complaints about conditions of work, disputes with supervisors, and problems with the behavior or productivity of individual workers. Every shop floor also has a "factory committee" that does the day-to-day supervision and management of the floor. This involves deciding on matters such as ventilation, entertainment, and break times.[5]

Each primary cooperative has a board of directors elected by the members, which supervises the purchase of raw materials from, and the sale of finished beedis to, the "central cooperative," which is the point of contact between KDB and the outside world. Its decisions are a function of market demand; it is in charge of quality control, pricing, marketing strategy, diversification, the overall structure of wages and benefits, etc. The central board of directors is elected by the primary cooperatives' boards of directors. Workers

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[1] Greg MacLeod and Darryl Reed, "Mondragon's Response to the Challenges of Globalization: A Multi-Localization Strategy," in *Co-operatives in a Global Economy: The Challenges of Co-operation Across Borders*, eds. Darryl Reed and J. J. McMurtry (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 127–132.

[2] Beedis are a kind of primitive, hand-rolled cigarette, very popular in India.

[3] T. M. Thomas Isaac, *Democracy at Work in an Indian Industrial Cooperative: The Story of Kerala Dinesh Beedi* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), chapters 2 and 3.

[4] G. Mitu Gulati et al., "When a Worker's Cooperative Works: The Case of Kerala Dinesh Beedi," *UCLA Law Review*, no. 5 (June, 2002): 22.

[5] Ibid., 25.

participate regularly in meetings with their unions, which then negotiate wages and benefits with the central cooperative. There are annual meetings of representatives of all the primary cooperatives.

Shop-floor supervisors cannot hire, fire, transfer, or fine their worker-bosses, but they have power nonetheless. They are usually senior workers themselves; they're promoted to their new position by the primary cooperative's board of directors. The supervisors are supervised, in turn, by foremen who have been hired by the central cooperative. The main function of a supervisor is to help train workers whose productivity is low or whose beedis are of low quality, but he is also responsible for enforcing workplace discipline and, of course, for monitoring individuals' productivity. Various positive incentives have been devised to encourage productivity, and as we'll see, they have been quite effective.

In short, every worker cooperative has its own distinctive structure, but the egalitarian and participatory tendencies I have described characterize all of them to some degree. These are the most important features distinguishing them from capitalist enterprises.

Wages and employment

The pay scales at large cooperatives are either identical to those at collectives or somewhat more unequal due to competitive pressures. The plywood co-ops paid all their members equally, the major exception being the general manager, who was usually a hired outsider and received a higher salary than members.[1] In the conventional plywood mills, by contrast, the wages of the highest-paid workers and the lowest-paid differed by a factor of about 2.5.[2]

At Mondragon, until the 1980s the differential between the highest- and lowest-paid workers was fixed at 3:1. In recent years, with the pressures of globalization and the need to attract skilled managers who could receive much more money in private enterprises, some positions have been raised to a 6:1 ratio, while the CEO of the entire Mondragon corporation earns nine times more than the lowest-paid worker.[3]

The fact that cooperative pay-scales are always relatively egalitarian is intuitive and uncontested. Less clear is whether ordinary workers in co-ops tend to be paid more or less than their counterparts in capitalist firms. It is known that, generally speaking, management is paid less than in capitalist businesses: this can be inferred from the smaller pay scale in co-ops. But the data on the wages of the average worker are less clear-cut. As we saw above, some collectives give their members higher pay and better benefits than in comparable private enterprises, while other collectives are unable to do so, especially if their capitalist competitors are unionized. Larger co-ops more regularly offer higher compensation, in many cases much higher than at comparable capitalist businesses—but, again, only for low-level or, sometimes, mid-level workers. David Herrera reports that "wages at Mondragon, as compared to similar jobs at local industries, are 30 percent or less at the management levels and equivalent at the middle management, technical and professional levels. As a result, Mondragon worker-owners at the lower wage-levels earn an average of 13 percent higher wages than workers in similar businesses."[4]

Kerala Dinesh Beedi is an even better example of high wages: workers earn over three times as much as those in other firms (including health benefits, maternity benefits, pensions, and paid holidays). While most beedi workers slave away in "small and dingy work sites that lack proper bathroom facilities and pose health hazards because of the way the tobacco is kept," KDB members have work sites that are spacious, clean, well-ventilated, and even "have entertainment in the form of someone who reads stories or news articles to the workers as they are rolling beedis." Managers, on the other hand, earn only about as much as the beedi workers themselves, whereas in a capitalist firm of comparable size they would probably

[1] Gunn, *Workers' Self-Management*, 115.
[2] Dow, *Governing the Firm*, 53.
[3] McNamara, "Payment Solidarity: Looking Deeper at the Mondragon Principles."
[4] David Herrera, "Mondragon: A For-Profit Organization that Embodies Catholic Social Thought" (2004), at http://www.scribd.com/doc/8786386/Mondragon-by-David-Herrera (accessed March 20, 2010).

make thirty or forty times that level, in addition to having luxurious perquisites not offered KDB's managers.[1]

Cooperative Care in Wisconsin, which provides care to the elderly, was able to give its 81 members in 2004 relatively high pay, workers' compensation, ten days' paid vacation, and 50 to 75 percent health insurance coverage, all only three years after beginning operations.[2] Cooperative Home Care Associates in the Bronx, New York, founded in 1985, offers its 1700 members "significantly better pay and working conditions than most home health aides."[3]

How are cooperatives able to maintain high wages while competing successfully against conventional enterprises? The answer lies partly in their high productivity, which we'll discuss below. Also, greater size leads to greater capital accumulation than in collectives, which leads to more revenue in a self-reinforcing cycle. Collectives often just don't have enough capital to get the cycle started in a meaningful way—although, to repeat, when the annual distribution of profits and benefits is taken into account (in addition to wages), many collectivists do have a higher income than their conventional competitors.

As regards the trade-off in hard times between wages and employment, medium-sized and large cooperatives have the same priorities as collectives: they adjust pay rather than employment. The plywood mills, again, illustrate the point. A 1992 study compares the responses of three types of firms in the plywood sector—unionized, non-unionized, and co-ops—to adverse economic circumstances in 1980, as contrasted with the expansionary year of 1972. It finds that

> employment in the union mills and in the classical [non-union] mills in 1980 averaged 83.6 percent and 51.3 percent of the 1972 values, respectively, whereas employment in the co-ops was 115.9 percent of the 1972 level; with respect to nominal average hourly earnings, earnings in the union mills more than doubled between 1972 and 1980, whereas earnings in the co-ops in 1980 were 183.8 percent of their 1972 levels.[4]

Thus, employment shrank significantly in the conventional firms but actually grew in the co-op, while the earnings of the cooperative workers did not grow as fast as those of the union workers. This supports my earlier contention that cooperatives have even more potential for alleviating unemployment than for providing high incomes.

Incentives, job satisfaction, productivity, and the political effects of participation

Because sizable co-ops are usually less economically marginal, more "mainstream," than collectives, and the people who work in them are more ordinary demographically and have more conventional expectations for their jobs, competitive success and high compensation are relatively important incentives. High profit-margins are valued so that members can earn more and (perhaps) the business can expand and invest in new technology. After all, most of these co-ops are founded solely to provide employment; the element of idealism or passion for a particular cause is rarely as significant as it is to many collectivists.

Owner-members of the plywood co-ops indicated in interviews that the reasons they joined the cooperatives were the potential for good income and job security. They have "individualistic, property-

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[1] G. Mitu Gulati et al., "When a Worker's Cooperative Works," 39, 40.

[2] Greg Lawless and Ann Reynolds, "Worker Cooperatives: Case Studies, Key Criteria and Best Practices," University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives, staff paper no. 3 (July, 2004), http://www.community-wealth.org/_pdfs/articles-publications/coops/paper-lawless.pdf (accessed May 5, 2010).

[3] Dan Bell, "Worker-Owners and Unions: Why Can't We Just Get Along?", *Dollars & Sense* (2006), http://www.dollarsandsense.org/archives/2006/0906bell.html (accessed May 5, 2010).

[4] Ben Craig and John Pencavel, "The Behavior of Worker Cooperatives: The Plywood Companies of the Pacific Northwest," *The American Economic Review* 82, no. 5 (December, 1992): 1085–1105.

holding motivations" that do not change as they experience the cooperative relations of production.[1] This is in marked contrast to most collectivists, who have precisely the opposite motivations—the inherently political desire to "escape the rat race" and do something they believe in. One obvious reason for the difference is that the plywood cooperators have a working-class origin and have known long periods of unemployment.[2] They think of their participation in a co-op as a financial investment: buy a share and get a secure job.

However, they quickly come to appreciate the control they have over their work. While they remain less idealistic and enthusiastic than the average collectivist, their attitude certainly differs from that of the workforce in a conventional plant, which tends to suffer from a relative "deadening of the spirit, a sense of defeat, hopelessness, and abjectness." The participatory environment of the cooperative "fosters an extremely strong sense of collective responsibility and mutuality," which is antithetical to the structure of work in a conventional factory. As mentioned above, this sense of mutuality is manifested, e.g., in collective and self-supervision and the rather low number of designated supervisors. "Everybody pitches in and helps," remarks one worker; "the people stick together, that's the reason we've gone so far and production is so high, 'cause everybody works together." Some workers even profess to enjoy their work, despite its repetitive and mechanical nature: "There is a certain feeling to know that you own part of what you're working for… I've always gone to all the stockholders' meetings and…I enjoy it. I've never had so much fun! Hell, we run this operation all by ourselves."[3]

One obvious supposed benefit of cooperatives is that there is less conflict between workers and managers than at conventional, hierarchical enterprises. Nearly all the data indicate that this is indeed the case. Consider, for example, a study published in 2001 that examines dispute resolution at a cooperative coal mine in Wales as compared to how it functioned when the mine was owned and operated by the British government, as it had been for years. In the early 1990s, with British Coal threatening to close it, 200 employees bought it and converted it into a worker cooperative. By law the company was required to have managers in charge of safety, finance, engineering and so on, but it hired only a third of the managers that had been employed by the government even though there was approximately the same number of miners. These managers retained significant power over the workers, but now their decisions could be overruled by the board of directors elected annually by the workforce.

When the mine was government-owned it was severely hierarchical and dispute resolution was confrontational: grievances, which cropped up continually, were resolved according to a rigid set of formal rules, and work stoppages instigated by either management or the union occurred frequently. Under cooperative ownership this all changed. Worker-owners were more flexible in upholding work rules, so that disputes were far less frequent. "Many current issues and conditions would have been formally contested under British Coal, warranting a grievance or other union action. Today, these potential disputes do not develop into grievances. Furthermore, these potential disputes are not…simply tolerated; instead, they are no longer seen as injurious experiences."[4] Miners were now not unwilling to work overtime without extra pay, or, for example, they would work at an undermanned site, whereas in the past that would have resulted in a grievance (because it entails extra work). In general, they were more willing to compromise, since their status as owners made them disinclined to stop work. Managers too were more easygoing and respectful, because power was more dispersed than in the past. One worker offers eloquent testimony:

> Today, the manager will come out and talk to you. He very rarely goes through the pit without saying, you know, stopping and talking to everyone. Whereas before, the manager used to come down and he wouldn't talk to you. He'd probably tell somebody

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[1] Gunn, *Workers' Self-Management*, 105.
[2] Greenberg, "Producer Cooperatives and Democratic Theory: The Case of the Plywood Firms," in *Worker Cooperatives in America*, 180.
[3] Ibid., 183.
[4] Elizabeth A. Hoffmann, "Confrontations and Compromise: Dispute Resolution at a Worker Cooperative Coal Mine," *Law & Social Inquiry* 26, no. 3 (Summer, 2001): 568.

> else who would tell you to do something. They felt they were some super-human! You know, we were down there and they were up at the top like. And it was all, "Do this!" They *tell* you rather than ask you.
>
> Today, now, the manager comes down and he'll ask you, "Any chance you could?" You know? "Can you do me a favor?" Before it was, "Oh you get and do that!" And obviously the respect had gone from the men for the management under British Coal.
>
> Now at the colliery the men have got a lot of respect for the manager, because, at the end of the day, he owns as much of the colliery as we do. We all have equal-share basis and he's in it for the same reason we are: to get the best out of the colliery.[1]

Admittedly, some research indicates worker discontent at some large cooperatives, including conflict between management and the workforce. Mondragon, considered an exemplar of large-scale worker cooperation, has not been immune to this. For instance, in 1989, at a typical co-op with 250 worker-owners, members reported to a researcher that they most definitely did not think the firm was democratic. They referred to themselves as "working stiffs" and called the managers "bosses." "We are not different," they said, "from other businesses in any way." "It doesn't matter how equal we are in theory, in practice we are not." "What good does it do me that they call me a collaborator when they treat me like a subordinate… At least in a regular firm you can call the boss a son of a bitch."[2] Managers at this company considered relations between themselves and the workforce to be cooperative, respectful, and democratic; the workers, however, disagreed.

A study in the mid-1980s reported that Mondragon's supervisory structures were virtually identical to those at nearby conventional firms, and observed that "the necessity to compete in national and international markets leaves insufficient space to implement alternative manners of work organization on a large scale."[3] Moreover, in recent years there have been major organizational changes considered necessary to maintain international competitiveness, so that now pay-scales are less flat, management councils have more power, and non-cooperative subsidiaries are being acquired in China, Brazil, and other countries.

There is no question that the need to compete in a capitalist world forces large co-ops to compromise with their principles. This has always been a criticism leveled at them by Marxists and other radicals. Nevertheless, it does not appear that they necessarily have to degenerate into semi-capitalist corporations, nor that they ever have the same adversarial relations between management and the workforce as conventional firms do. Even in the example mentioned above from Mondragon, the author of the study notes that relations are more harmonious in the co-op than in a comparable capitalist company. As long as most of the workers own the firm and participate in governance, and especially if efforts are made to instill a culture of cooperation at both the shop-floor level and the enterprise level, there will be meaningful differences between cooperative and conventional firms. These differences may even be strictly economic: the co-op will quite possibly be more productive than its capitalist counterparts, because of incentives and the diverting of resources away from unproductive supervision and the need to contain conflict (which is a constant imperative in the average capitalist business).

For example, I noted above that fewer supervisors were needed in the plywood cooperatives, and the worker-owners were unusually committed to the success of the enterprise. (The same was true of the cooperative mine just discussed.) This resulted in higher productivity-rates—measured by the physical volume of output per hour, the quality of the product, and economy of material input use—than in privately owned mills, as much as 50 percent higher. A relatively low amount of capital per worker was required, and the hourly return to workers was often 50 percent higher than union averages.[4]

The case of Kerala Dinesh Beedi is even more impressive. Despite its competitors' significantly lower labor costs, it has been able to compete successfully for decades. How is this possible? One area of

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[1] Ibid., 573.
[2] Kasmir, *The Myth of Mondragon*, 152.
[3] See Dow, *Governing the Firm*, 62.
[4] Gunn, *Workers' Self-Management*, 103.

advantage is its far fewer managers and their relatively low compensation. But KDB's labor costs remain high even so. Another advantage is that there have been no major labor disputes in its history—a fact that is stunning in itself, since disputes are common and costly in the region as a whole. Also, as noted earlier, shop-floor conditions are very efficient, with workers monitoring each other and sharing information willingly. A particularly decisive strength is the uniformly high quality of KDB's beedis, which customers appreciate. Workers at other companies have an incentive to be hasty and careless in their beedi-rolling because they are paid on a piecework basis, and monitoring is difficult. KDB workers, who are happier, healthier, and better-paid, are more careful.[1]

Examples of such productivity could be multiplied. But that would merely provide further illustrations of the intuitively reasonable point that labor will tend to be more productive in co-ops than in conventional businesses. One author concludes, on the basis of a meta-analysis of 43 previous studies, that (1) worker participation in decision-making in co-ops has a "small, positive, and statistically significant association with productivity, rejecting the traditional view that democratic management of the firm is associated with *reduced* efficiency"; (2) profit-sharing in cooperatives is very strongly associated with increased productivity, while the association is less pronounced in capitalist enterprises; (3) worker-*ownership* in co-ops has a small but statistically significant association with productivity, whereas in capitalist firms there is virtually no correlation (probably because employees typically own only a small proportion of assets).[2] A study in 1994 found that "employee involvement programs are invariably positively associated with desirable outcomes (such as greater work effort and higher productivity), whereas measures of performance pay are less robustly associated with these outcomes."[3] More recent studies have concluded that there is often a gain in productivity with employee stock-ownership plans—again, a result compatible with the hypothesis that worker cooperatives will tend to have high labor productivity.[4]

A number of reasons can be thought of to explain these results, most of which have already been mentioned. Cooperatives have lower absentee rates and less worker turnover than their conventional competitors. (For instance, the annual rate of turnover in the Mondragon cooperatives in 1974 was two percent, while in comparable capitalist firms it was 14 percent.)[5] Members show relatively high individual work effort, tending to act as their own supervisors, at least to a greater degree than employees do elsewhere. Job rotation, where it happens, enhances the attractiveness of the work. And there are greater incentives to help one another than in a competitive environment.

Does all this have implications for political consciousness and participation? It seems to, but less so than one might hope. I noted above that collectivists tend to be relatively politically conscious and active but that the reasons for this are not entirely clear. The situation is even more ambiguous with regard to larger cooperatives. Edward Greenberg's conclusions about the plywood industry are illustrative. He addresses four claims made by leftists: "workplace democracy encourages participation in other social institutions outside of the workplace; helps create citizens who are endowed with a sense of their own political efficacy; increases participation in normal political life; and creates a sense of community and cooperation as well as a commitment to the public interest."[6] Few of his findings are encouraging.

For example, worker-owners were actually a little *less* likely to participate in organizations outside the workplace than conventional employees. This could be due to the fact that many of the latter belong to unions, unlike the former, which may foster political consciousness and activism. On the other hand, Greenberg finds that over time the cooperators did increase their participation in social institutions, though not to above the level of ordinary employees. They also didn't have any greater sense of political efficacy

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[1] G. Mitu Gulati, "When a Worker's Cooperative Works," 40–44.
[2] Chris Doucouliagos, "Worker Participation and Productivity in Labor-Managed and Participatory Capitalist Firms: A Meta-Analysis," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 49, no. 1 (October, 1995): 58–77.
[3] John Pencavel, *Worker Participation: Lessons from the Worker Co-ops of the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), 80.
[4] See, e.g., ibid., 81, 82.
[5] Jackall and Levin, *Worker Cooperatives in America*, 26, 27.
[6] Greenberg, *Workplace Democracy*, 119.

than regular workers. More encouragingly, members were significantly more politically involved than conventional workers and were more likely to increase their participation over time—but at the same time they were more likely to think that "Society is best off when each individual looks out for his own well-being and not the well-being of others," and in fact to agree with this statement more the longer they worked in a co-op. So their political participation was not necessarily a sign of public-spiritedness. Nor were they class-conscious in a good way: they were relatively likely to call themselves middle-class rather than working-class, and a relatively high proportion identified themselves as Republican. (This was during the Reagan years.)[1] Greenberg concludes:

> Clearly…without powerful countervailing forces to the market mechanism, democratic, self-managed enterprises drift inexorably toward enterprise egoism and membership behavior as collective capitalists. Without a working-class party, a cooperative or egalitarian culture, a socialist ideology, a revolutionary movement, or a government committed to economic democracy, the logic of the market is determinative and blocks the larger promise of self-management…[2]

Especially in a large cooperative, whose members are typically more concerned with having money and a secure job than collectivists are, the market mentality can prove stronger than the democratic, egalitarian, workers' social-movement mentality.

As always, there are many counterexamples. Equal Exchange, with about a hundred members, is politically progressive, committed to such causes as Fair Trade (with Latin American coffee-growers). Inspired by Mondragon and the cooperatives of northern Italy, it has also begun donating a portion of its earnings to a fund for the development of new co-ops.[3] Rainbow Grocery in San Francisco, owned by about 150 workers, likewise functions as a center of progressivism, in the tradition of many natural-food stores. Kerala Dinesh Beedi has a long history of radical political activism going back to even before its formation. The region of Kerala has bred left social movements since early in the twentieth century; KDB's labor unions are militantly Marxist.

Such examples support Greenberg's point that progressive political activism, while not guaranteed by a cooperative workplace, is not only compatible with it but potentially encouraged by it as long as the business either maintains ties with cooperative institutions or is run by workers committed to radical ideologies. Unionization of employees in conventional companies likewise fosters political consciousness and action; there is no particular reason, therefore, why cooperatives cannot affiliate with unions and assist them politically, and vice versa. This has been common practice in Europe for a long time, was so in the United States for much of the nineteenth century, and, as we'll see later, is starting to become so again.

Other issues

I have yet to address a number of important matters in relation to cooperatives of all sizes. First, in what sectors is it most common to find them? All the research indicates that it is the labor-intensive, service areas of the economy. Food stores, bookstores, print shops, restaurants, repair services—all risky areas for small business. Historically, U.S. cooperatives have had "a strong craft orientation, with fields of activity including metal foundries, barrel-making, shingle-making, and plywood."[4] Many Western European

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[1] Ibid., 120–131, 137, 168.

[2] Ibid., 168. See also Edward Greenberg, "Spillovers from Cooperative and Democratic Workplaces: Have the Benefits Been Oversold?", http://www.colorado.edu/ibs/PEC/workplacechange/publications/democracy/SpilloversFromCooperativeDemocraticWorkplace.pdf (accessed November 27, 2013).

[3] Camille Jensen, "Equal Exchange creating capital for new co-ops," *Axiom News*, September 25, 2009, http://www.axiomnews.ca/NewsArchives/2009/September/September25.html (accessed May 25, 2010).

[4] Dow, *Governing the Firm*, 49.

cooperatives operate in construction and certain labor-intensive branches of manufacturing. Some Mondragon and Italian cooperatives, however, are very capital-intensive, which is possible because of the networks they have established with each other. Also, cooperatives are relatively common in the somewhat capital-intensive industry of transportation—a number of taxi companies have been cooperatives—which is probably because the physical assets needed (such as vehicles) can easily be resold at close to their purchase price if the business fails, so that there is relatively little risk in lending money to the co-op.[1]

The main problem, then, is that most cooperators or would-be cooperators have limited access to financial capital. Why is that? Sometimes they decide to seek capital only from their members; in this case, the reason for undercapitalization is self-evident. One reason they might shun bank loans is if banks charge high interest-rates. Sometimes banks will require that each member provide collateral to guarantee the loan, a risk that some workers might not be willing to undertake.[2] Two reasons why traditional lenders might be reluctant to lend to worker-run enterprises are

> because of heightened levels of (a) moral hazard and (b) transactions costs. The moral hazard argument is that lenders bear most of the risk of failure in situations in which workers can easily move to new jobs in the event of the firm's failure. As for the higher transactions costs, the argument is simply that it is easier and quicker to deal with a single borrower (or the borrower's delegate who has authority) than to deal with a group that has to use a democratic process to make decisions.[3]

Overseeing the activities of an enterprise with a small number of decision-makers is easier than if every worker is a director and owner. Even the initial loan is then relatively difficult to arrange: the bank has to deal with the elected board of directors, drawn from the ranks of the workers, who have often had no experience arranging bank loans. Sometimes "the bank must ultimately go to a shareholders' meeting and explain the terms of a loan to them, an unfamiliar experience for the lending officer and not always a pleasant one." Apart from this, "the bank's worst fears are that the co-op will distribute the loan among its workers and then declare bankruptcy." It is not surprising, therefore, that banks might attach onerous conditions to loans.[4]

An additional advantage, from the perspective of lenders, of undemocratic firms is that it is easier for the lender to influence the policies of such firms, for instance by preventing them from undertaking excessively risky or excessively conservative projects. One author remarks that with cooperatives "there is no guarantee of a single owner or officer who always represents the workers, given the democratic management. As a result, the financial community cannot obtain the leverage over cooperatives seeking to borrow that they can over capitalist firms."[5]

Equity financing, on the other hand, is unappealing to cooperators because it may mean relinquishing control to outside investors, which is a distinctly capitalist practice. Investors are not likely to buy non-voting shares; they will probably require representation on the board of directors because otherwise their money could potentially be expropriated. "For example, if the directors of the firm were workers, they might embezzle equity funds, refrain from paying dividends in order to raise wages, or dissipate resources on projects of dubious value."[6] In any case, the very idea of even partial outside ownership is contrary to the cooperative ethos.

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[1] Henry Hansmann, "When Does Worker Ownership Work? ESOPs, Law Firms, Codetermination, and Economic Democracy," *The Yale Law Journal* 99, no. 8 (June, 1990): 1771.
[2] John W. Lawrence, "Raising Capital for Worker Cooperatives," http://www.communitywealth.org/_pdfs/articles-publications/coops/article-lawrence.pdf (accessed May 18, 2010).
[3] G. Mitu Gulati, "When a Worker's Cooperative Works," 12.
[4] Pencavel, *Worker Participation*, 38.
[5] Dow, *Governing the Firm*, 187.
[6] Ibid., 188.

A general reason for traditional institutions' reluctance to lend to cooperatives, and indeed for the rarity of cooperatives whether related to the difficulty of securing capital or not, is simply that a society's history, culture and ideologies might be hostile to the "co-op" idea. Needless to say, this is the case in most industrialized countries, especially the United States. The very notion of a workers' cooperative might be viscerally unappealing and mysterious to bank officials, as it is to people of many walks of life. Stereotypes about inefficiency, unprofitability, inexperience, incompetence, idealism, and anti-capitalism might dispose officials to reject out of hand appeals for financial assistance from co-ops. Similarly, such cultural preconceptions may be an element in the widespread reluctance on the part of working people to try to start a cooperative. They simply have a "visceral aversion" to, and unfamiliarity with, the idea—which is also surely a function of the rarity of co-ops itself. Their rarity reinforces itself, in that it fosters a general ignorance of co-ops and the perception that they're risky endeavors. Additionally, insofar as an anti-democratic passivity, a civic fragmentedness, a half-conscious sense of collective disempowerment, a diffuse interpersonal alienation and mistrust saturate society, this militates against initiating cooperative projects. It is simply taken for granted among many people that such things cannot be done. And they are assumed to require sophisticated entrepreneurial instincts. In most places, arguably, the cooperative idea is not even in the public consciousness; it has barely been heard of.

Business propaganda has done its job well.[1] But propaganda can be fought with propaganda. In fact, this is one of the most important things that activists can do, this elevation of cooperativism into the public consciousness. The more that people hear about it, know about it, learn of its successes and potentials, the more they'll be open to it rather than instinctively thinking it's "foreign," "socialist," "idealistic," "hippyish." If successful cooperatives advertise their business form, that in itself performs a useful service for the movement. It cannot be overemphasized that the most important thing is to create a climate in which it is considered normal to *try* to form a co-op, in which that is seen as a perfectly legitimate and predictable option for a group of intelligent and capable unemployed workers. Lenders themselves will become less skeptical of the business form as it seeps into the culture's consciousness.

It's true that people sharing a common culture or ethnicity, especially if they have emigrated to or live together in a diverse society, are more likely to start cooperatives. It was the Basques of northern Spain who started Mondragon, at a time when they were fiercely antagonistic toward Spanish (Francoist) society. The plywood co-ops were organized by Scandinavians in a community that benefited from high levels of trust. This theme of "cultural homogeneity" supports the hypothesis mentioned earlier that heterogeneity is not conducive to the formation and success of worker cooperatives. A heterogeneous co-op may succeed, but insofar as its heterogeneity undermines levels of trust, it threatens the co-op's survival. Ultimately, though, the most important precondition, particularly in small cooperatives, seems to be that individuals have a democratic attitude, commitment to the project, and some degree of interpersonal skills.

One obstacle to forming a co-op is the challenge of gathering a group of interested, capable, and like-minded people, people interested in starting the same kind of business, who can work well together and have enough information and initiative to do the difficult preliminary work. A single entrepreneur is unlikely to want his business to be a cooperative, since that would reduce his revenue and control. Hopeful cooperators will probably be workers who place a high value on job-security or people committed to cooperation for ideological reasons. But such people are not likely to have a great deal of money to invest in a business, and they will be wary of putting thousands of dollars into one venture. Regular investors, of course, diversify their wealth for precisely this reason, this aversion to risk. It would seem, then, that risk-tolerant people would be most interested in forming a co-op—and such people are relatively rare.[2]

Employee buyouts of capitalist enterprises are not very common either. They usually happen, if at all, only when a company is in financial straits and workers want to save their jobs. One possible reason they are somewhat rare even in the case of failing firms is that they are more likely to occur if the employees are unionized, and unionization rates are low in the United States. Buyouts require a lot of work from a few

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[1] On the historical significance of business's crusade against the American left, see Patricia Cayo Sexton, *The War on Labor and the Left: Understanding America's Unique Conservatism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1991).
[2] Pencavel, *Worker Participation*, 44.

leaders. Also, workers might not be able to agree among themselves on the many decisions that have to be made, some preferring a cooperative and others control by outside investors. When takeovers do occur, often the company is in such bad shape that even in a restructured form it fails within a few years.[1]

All these considerations are reasons why the formation rate of worker cooperatives is low. And this is the biggest problem for cooperatives, this low rate of formation. But once they do form, other problems can arise. A commonly cited one is that cooperators may lack business experience and know-how. Many of the co-ops formed in the 1960s and 1970s failed because they were started by youthful idealists who cared little about the technical details of running a business.[2] They ignored accounting problems until it was too late. Even if the workers are competent, it might be difficult to attract managers or specialists if they are needed, since the pay is likely to be low. Another pitfall is that the stress and the personal intensity of work in cooperatives, especially collectives, might prove too much. People might find that they cannot work together or prefer an ordinary, less stressful job, and the collective may dissolve.

The severity of these problems is debatable—for example, Beatrice Webb was wrong to think that cooperatives will inevitably suffer from poor management because of an inability to attract skilled professionals[3]—but other commonly cited hazards are in practice even less problematic. It does not appear to be widely true that democratic decision-making leads to great inefficiencies; on the contrary, I have argued that it can promote high productivity and work-discipline, and in those cases when direct democracy is impracticable it is easy to substitute representative democracy. Nor is it true that worker-owners tend to shirk or that monitoring is difficult; more often, the opposite is the case.[4]

On the other hand, the possibility of degeneration into a capitalist enterprise is real. Ironically, this can result from the co-op's success. If the business wants to expand it might choose to *hire* labor rather than admit new members, because, under certain legal structures, if it adds new shares (each of which is to be bought by a new member) that reduces the value of the current members' shares. Ultimately, then, the co-op might end up having more wage-laborers than members. As we'll see in the next chapter, some of the plywood cooperatives degenerated in this way. Others, and many co-ops in the nineteenth century, degenerated by being sold to outside investors. That is, as "members approach[ed] retirement age and [became] more interested in wealth maximization than working conditions or other consumption benefits derived from firm membership,"[5] each member would sometimes sell his valuable share to an investor (because it was too expensive for less wealthy prospective workers to buy). Or, in some cases, the members collectively sold the whole business to investors.

The possibility of degeneration diminishes if the co-op uses the proper legal structure. The best structure is that of the Mondragon companies, which do not allow workers to own a tradable share of equity. Instead, in addition to their wages they each have an internal capital account the value of which depends on the business's performance and on the number of hours the member works. A new member has to pay a large entrance fee, most of which is credited to his internal account. He receives interest at the end of every fiscal year, but he cannot withdraw the annually accumulating principal from his account until retirement. Almost all profits are divided between these individual accounts and a collective account that helps ensure the company's survival. No buying or selling of shares takes place in this scheme, so that it is difficult for the firm to lose its worker-controlled status. Not until 1982, however, did the internal-capital-accounts legal structure exist in the United States (and then only in Massachusetts); prior to that, worker cooperatives had to make convoluted use of other categories, which sometimes made them vulnerable to degeneration.[6]

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[1] Dow, *Governing the Firm*, 218–221.

[2] Daniel Zwerdling, "The Uncertain Revival of Food Cooperatives," in *Co-ops, Communes & Collectives: Experiments in Social Change in the 1960s and 1970s*, eds. John Case and Rosemary Taylor (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 102, 103.

[3] Cornforth, *Developing Successful Worker Cooperatives*, 91.

[4] See, e.g., Will Bartlett et al., "Labor-Managed Cooperatives and Private Firms in North Central Italy: An Empirical Comparison," *ILR Review* 46, no. 1 (1992): 103–118.

[5] Dow, *Governing the Firm*, 225.

[6] David Ellerman, "Workers' Cooperatives: The Question of Legal Structure," in *Worker Cooperatives in America*, 268–273. Even now, most states do not have worker-cooperative statutes. From early in the twentieth century

In any case, the survival rates of contemporary cooperatives put the lie to traditional theories of cooperatives' unsustainability, for they appear to have *higher* rates of survival than conventional firms. During the 1970s and early 1980s, the death rate for co-ops in France (due either to dissolution or to conversion into a capitalist firm) was 6.9 percent; the comparable rate for capitalist competitors was 10 percent. A study in 1989 found much higher failure rates for capitalist companies than cooperatives in North America.[1] A study conducted by Quebec's Ministry of Industry and Commerce in 1999 concluded that "Co-op startups are twice as likely to celebrate their 10th birthday as conventionally owned private businesses."[2] A later study by the same organization found that "More than 6 out of 10 cooperatives survive more than five years, as compared to almost 4 businesses out of 10 for the private sector in Québec and in Canada in general. More than 4 out of 10 cooperatives survive more than 10 years, compared to 2 businesses out of 10 for the private sector."[3] These data sufficiently demonstrate the viability of cooperatives.

Indeed, their viability tends to be proportional to their cooperativeness:

> Broadly speaking, it is those clusters of producer cooperatives with the *most cooperative* features…that have the longest life, the best economic performance, and the best record of maintaining a cooperative structure over time… A great number of cooperatives succumb to the demands for efficiency by progressively negating their cooperative character. The historical record suggests that in the end these firms will end up with neither cooperation nor efficiency. The key to successful, long-lived cooperatives seems to be precisely greater cooperation and a concomitant responsiveness to the economic and labor conditions of the marketplace.[4]

The reasons for cooperatives' success should be obvious by now, but they are worth reiterating: "The major basis for cooperative success…has been superior labor productivity. Studies comparing square-foot output have repeatedly shown higher physical volume of output per hour, and others…show higher quality of product and also economy of material use."[5] Hendrik Thomas concludes from an analysis of Mondragon that "Productivity and profitability are higher for cooperatives than for capitalist firms. It makes little difference whether the Mondragon group is compared with the largest 500 companies, or with small- or medium-scale industries; in both comparisons the Mondragon group is more productive and more profitable."[6] As we have seen, recent research has arrived at the same conclusions. It is a truism by now that worker participation tends to increase productivity and profitability.

Research undertaken by Henk Thomas and Chris Logan corroborates these conclusions. "A frequent but unfounded criticism," they observe, "of self-managed firms is that workers prefer to enjoy a high take-home pay rather than to invest in their own enterprises. This has been proven invalid…in the Mondragon case… A comparison of gross investment figures shows that the cooperatives invest on average

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cooperative corporation statutes have existed, but these were usually designed for farmer cooperatives and are "poorly drafted and out-dated," so it was and is not particularly advantageous for worker co-ops to incorporate under them. David Ellerman, "What Is a Worker Cooperative?", in *Beyond the Market and the State: New Directions in Community Development,* eds. Severyn Bruyn and James Meehan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 240, 241.

[1] Dow, *Governing the Firm*, 226, 227.

[2] Luc Labelle, "Development of Cooperatives and Employee Ownership, Quebec-Style," *Owners at Work* (2001), http://dept.kent.edu/oeoc/PublicationsResearch/Winter2000-2001/CooperativesQuebecStyle.htm (accessed May 24, 2010).

[3] Quoted in Johnston Birchall and Lou Hammond Kettilson, "Resilience of the Cooperative Business Model in Times of Crisis" (Geneva: International Labor Office, 2009), 29, 30.

[4] Jones, "American Producer Cooperatives and Employee-Owned Firms," in *Worker Cooperatives in America*, 52.

[5] Katrina Berman, "A Cooperative Model for Worker Management," in *The Performance of Labour-Managed Firms*, ed. Frank Stephens (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 80.

[6] Hendrik Thomas, "The Performance of the Mondragon Cooperatives in Spain," in *Participatory and Self-Managed Firms: Evaluating Economic Performance,* eds. Derek Jones and Jan Svejnar (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1982), 149.

four times as much as private enterprises." After a detailed analysis they also conclude that "there can be no doubt that the [Mondragon] cooperatives have been more profitable than capitalist enterprises."[1] Recent data indicate the same thing.[2] One particularly successful company, Irizar, which was mentioned earlier, has been awarded prizes for being the most efficient company in its sector; in Spain it competes against ten private enterprises, but its market share is 40 percent. The same level of achievement is true of its subsidiaries, for instance in Mexico, where it had a 45 percent market share in 2005, six years after entering the market. An author comments that "the basis for this increased efficiency appears to be linked directly to the organization's unique participatory and democratic management structure."[3] A major reason for all these successes is Mondragon's federated structure: the group of cooperatives has its own supply of banking, education, and technical support services. The enormous funds of the central credit union, the Caja Laboral Popular, have likewise been crucial to Mondragon's expansion. It proves that if cooperatives have access to credit they are perfectly capable of being far more successful than private enterprises.

It is worth noting, incidentally, that most private corporations are fantastically inefficient, although their inefficiency is disguised by collusion with the government:

> Contrary to their claims of efficiency, most large corporations…spend an inordinate portion of society's resources on advertising, executive perks and salaries, transportation and communications to far-flung corporate empires, and lobbying expenses. Most depend for their profits and survival on a complex regime of public subsidies, exemptions, and externalized costs, including the indirect subsidies they gain when allowed to pay less than a living wage, maintain substandard working conditions, market hazardous products, dump untreated wastes into the environment, and extract natural resources from public lands at below-market prices. Ralph Estes…estimates that in 1994 corporations extracted more than $2.6 trillion a year in such subsidies in the United States alone—roughly five times their reported profits… It is one of the basic principles of efficient market function that the full costs of a product or service be borne by the seller and passed on to the buyer. Yet many corporations would be forced to close their doors or restructure if they had to bear the true full costs of their operations.[4]

Americans sometimes think of large size almost as an end in itself, or at least as necessary for economic efficiency. But this is not always the case. In some industries, economies of scale do exist. But large size tends to entail bureaucratic inefficiencies, environmental destruction, allocative inequalities, political corruption, in general significant negative externalities.[5] Consider, by contrast, the Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy, "widely recognized as one of the world's leading examples of a successful cooperative economy, with [40 percent] of the region's GDP deriving from cooperative

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[1] Henk Thomas and Chris Logan, *Mondragon: An Economic Analysis* (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 103, 104, 109.

[2] Will Bartlett, "Labor-Managed Cooperatives," finds little difference between levels of investment in capitalist and cooperative firms in Italy.

[3] Greg MacLeod and Darryl Reed, "Mondragon's Response to the Challenges of Globalization: A Multi-Localization Strategy," in *Cooperatives in a Global Economy*, 131.

[4] The International Forum on Globalization, *Alternatives to Economic Globalization: A Better World Is Possible* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2002), 142. See also Ralph Nader, *The Ralph Nader Reader* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2000), 147–194.

[5] William Greider points out also that "Above a certain size, getting bigger and bigger does not deliver new economies of scale; it simply walls off the threat of innovative competition. Companies use their size to guard their turf against intruders and, because they have greater financial resources and technological and marketing skills, they can literally smother the new guys who come along with a better idea." Therefore, the "success" of gigantic corporations like ExxonMobil and Microsoft does not necessarily indicate "efficiency." Greider, *The Soul of Capitalism: Opening Paths to a Moral Economy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 241.

enterprises."[1] The region of four million people, one of the richest and most developed areas in Europe despite its poverty only a few decades ago, has between 10,000 and 20,000 cooperatives (accounts vary) and 400,000 enterprises, making for a dense network of small and medium-sized firms. The major sectors are retail, manufacturing, and construction.[2] Emilia-Romagna's success is due to the unique structure of its economy, sometimes called the Emilian Model: cooperative principles govern "the joint production and distribution of goods and services by private firms," most of which are not themselves cooperatives. Highly specialized small firms cooperate to produce a given product; most of the firms are subcontractors for the one that produces the finished good.[3] At the same time, Mondragon's system of "secondary cooperatives," such as the Caja Laboral, that provide support to primary cooperatives has been replicated, so that small businesses share "service centers" for "research & development, education & training, marketing & distribution, financing, technology transfer, workplace safety, environmental regulation, and a host of other services that help small and medium-sized firms to compete in a global marketplace. …What all these centres have in common is that they replicate the advantages of large corporate structures for the collection and application of global knowledge for production, while maintaining the strengths which are unique to small enterprise."[4] Long-term support from the historically leftist regional government has been essential to the development of the Emilian Model.

In short, there are many ways in which cooperatives can be made to work. Even isolated co-ops can be successful if they have access to capital. As we have seen, cooperatives typically fare as well as or better than capitalist enterprises in relation to longevity, productivity, wages (sometimes), working conditions, democratic organizational structures, the potential for ensuring long-term employment, and even profitability (if they have enough capital). Their rarity is due to their low rate of formation, which is due in large part to difficulties in securing capital, but also to a lack of will or knowledge among the populace. People have to be educated on the possibilities open to them, shown where to look for resources, how to start a business together. Starting a business is hard work; it requires initiative, resourcefulness, and intelligence. But it is done all the time, though usually by capitalist-minded entrepreneurs; there is no reason to think that a small group of cooperators cannot do the same thing, especially if assisted by any of the dozens of organizations in the U.S. that exist for this purpose. Policy changes would help too—and have been forthcoming recently, as when the Small Business Administration started providing loans to worker cooperatives.[5] There is still a long way to go, though, especially considering that the hostility of the American government (on federal and state levels) as compared to the governments of Italy and France has historically been a major impediment to the formation of worker cooperatives in the U.S. Even today, the federally chartered National Cooperative Bank tends not to lend to worker co-ops. A priority of activists should be (and is) to change such policies. In fact, governments committed to the reduction of current high rates of unemployment would be well-advised to facilitate proactively the formation of cooperatives of all kinds.

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[1] John Restakis, "The Lessons of Emilia Romagna" (2005), http://www.geo.coop/files/BolognaVisits_Lessons_ER.pdf (accessed May 28, 2010). The bracketed figure comes from John Restakis, "The Emilian Model—Profile of a Cooperative Economy," http://auspace.athabascau.ca:8080/dspace/bitstream/2149/1111/1/Emilia_Romagna_Model.pdf.

[2] Eurostat, "Emilia-Romagna: Economy," http://circa.europa.eu/irc/dsis/regportraits/info/data/en/_itd5_eco.htm (accessed May 28, 2010).

[3] Alberto Rinaldi, "The Emilian Model Revisited: Twenty Years After," *Materiali di discussione del Dipartimento di Economia politica*, no. 417 (September, 2002): 3. Another author writes, "In Italy cooperatives in similar industrial sectors and regions have established consortia to enable them to engage in joint purchasing and bid for contracts jointly." Cornforth, 223.

[4] Restakis, "The Emilian Model—Profile of a Cooperative Economy," 3.

[5] Micha Josephy, "SBA Recognizes Worker Cooperatives as Small Businesses," *Grassroots Economic Organizing* (GEO) Newsletter, Vol. 2, Issue 12 (2012). See also Andrea Buffa, "Evergreen Cooperatives Forge an Innovative Path toward High-Quality Green Jobs," *CommonDreams.org*, April 17, 2010, http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2010/04/17-3 (accessed May 28, 2010).

I could go into more detail on certain matters, for instance the issues involved in employee buyouts of traditional companies, but the purpose of this chapter has been only to give an overview of the nature of the worker cooperative. Hopefully I have at least convinced skeptical readers that co-ops have great potential, and that if they are rare now it is not because of inherent flaws in the model. With education, technical support, policy changes, and capital—all of which, it is worth remembering, have been crucial to the global success of capitalist businesses—cooperativism could be the next great movement of American history, indeed of world history.

CHAPTER THREE
WORKER COOPERATIVES IN AMERICAN HISTORY

Despite its reputation for individualism and unbridled capitalism, the United States has a history rich in cooperation and communalism. From the colonial era to the present—and among the indigenous population for millennia—local communities have engaged in self-help, democracy, and cooperation. Indeed, the "individualistic" tradition might more accurately be called the "self-help" tradition, where "self" is defined not only in terms of the individual but in terms of the community (be it family, township, religious community, etc.). Americans are traditionally hostile to overarching authorities separate from the community with which they identify, a hostility expressed in the age-old resentment towards both government and big business. The stereotype, based on fact, is that Americans would rather solve problems on their own than rely on political and economic power-structures to do so. The following brief survey of the history substantiates this claim. While my focus is on worker cooperatives, I will not ignore the many and varied experiments in other forms of cooperation and communalism.

Certain themes and lessons can be gleaned from the history. The most obvious is that a profound tension has existed, constantly erupting into conflict, between the democratic, anti-authoritarian impulses of ordinary Americans and the tendency of economic and political power-structures to grow extensively and intensively, to concentrate themselves in ever-larger and more centralized units that reach as far down into society as possible. Power inherently seeks to control as much as it can: it has an intrinsic tendency toward totalitarianism, ideally letting nothing, even the most trivial social interactions, escape its oversight. Bentham's Panopticon is the perfect emblem of the logic of power. Other social forces, notably people's strivings for freedom and democracy, typically keep this totalitarian tendency in check.

In fact, the history of cooperation and communalism is a case-study in the profound truth that people are *instinctively* averse to the modes of cutthroat competition, crass greed, authoritarianism, hierarchy, and dehumanization that characterize modern capitalism. Far from capitalism's being a straightforward expression of human nature, as apologists often proclaim, it is more like the very antithesis of human nature, which is evidently drawn to such things as free self-expression, spontaneous "play,"[1] cooperation and friendly competition, compassion, love. The work of Marxist historians like E. P. Thompson shows how people have had to be *disciplined*, their desires repressed, in order for the capitalist system to seem even remotely natural: centuries of indoctrination, state violence, incarceration of "undesirables," the bureaucratization of everyday life, have been necessary to *partially* accustom people to the mechanical rhythms of industrial capitalism and the commodification of the human personality.[2] And of course resistance continues constantly, from the early nineteenth century to the present day. "Wage-slavery," as workers in the nineteenth century called it, is a monstrous assault on human dignity, which is why even today, after so much indoctrination, people still hate being subordinated to a "boss" and rebel against it whenever they can. The history of worker cooperatives in particular shows that commitment to

[1] See Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

[2] See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), as well as the enormous literature Thompson helped spawn on Victorian cultural repression, welfare capitalism, Fordism, the regulatory obsessions of Progressivism, and in general the history of labor movements everywhere in the world.

the ideals of workplace democracy, indeed worker ownership and control, is just below the surface of mass consciousness. A spark could light a fire.

From this history one can draw another lesson, more limited in scope: most cooperatives have been formed during economic contractions or waves of political and social movements. On the other hand, many cooperatives, like all kinds of businesses, have succumbed to economic contractions. The best way to prevent that is by building up a thick mesh of institutional networks, cooperative federations, and ideologically friendly banks. Fortunately, this is happening now. As it continues, moreover, society will no longer have to wait for recessions to stimulate the creation of new co-ops; they will be born continually around the world, as organizers spread the gospel and help provide the capital. Effectively there will be a continuous social movement.

This also suggests that another pitfall of earlier movements has finally been overcome: each generation of past cooperators often had to begin anew, relearning the lessons of their forebears, because most cooperative institutions did not extend sufficiently in time or in space. Even if knowledge and capital could be accumulated over many years—which they usually could not—the means of coordinating a continent-wide movement did not exist. Now they do, increasingly so every year.

More generally, a lesson of the history of radical social movements is that advances in freedom or against power-structures do not occur as quickly as activists would like or expect them to. Radicals in the 1880s, 1910s, 1930s, 1960s, and so on, thought that society was on the cusp of a social revolution. Strictly speaking, though, society is never on the "cusp" of a social revolution, because these things take an inordinate amount of time. I'll return to this subject in the next chapter; suffice it to say that the history of cooperativism is an excellent illustration of the *slowness* of systemic change, the necessity for revolutionists to be dedicated to decades of slow, patient organizing as opposed to sweeping assaults on the fortress of capitalism. To use Antonio Gramsci's terms, the "war of position" is more important than the "war of maneuver"[1]—precisely because, with regard to a *social* revolution, the war of maneuver should be seen not as separate from and subsequent to the war of position, as Gramsci saw it, but as a component in the latter. Radicals should always be testing the strength of reactionary power-structures, pushing against them directly through political "maneuvering" to enact reforms that erode their power and conservatism, while at the same time educating and organizing the multitudes partly as a basis for these political actions. This is the process through which most genuine, long-term progressive achievements have been won, as opposed to abortive "revolutions" like Lenin's in 1917 (which led to Stalinism). In the long run, Leninist impatience does not work.

Anti-capitalist movements were fitful and sporadic prior to the Civil War, although horror at the excesses of early industrialism was widespread even among the privileged, and the miseries of the lower classes in urban and rural areas fostered a seething discontent that exploded in events like the Flour Riot of 1837, Dorr's Rebellion in the 1840s, the Anti-Renter movement in the Hudson Valley around the same time, innumerable strikes by factory workers, and the formation of the world's first Workingmen's Parties in New York and other states.[2] The frequently wretched work conditions of the first half of the nineteenth century are well known.[3] Less well known are the early, tentative experiments in alternative social and economic arrangements. In the very early nineteenth century workers occasionally formed cooperatives while on strike, or after a strike had failed. In Baltimore, a cooperative shoemakers' manufactory was organized in 1794; in 1806, Philadelphia shoemakers organized another cooperative manufactory. Such actions became increasingly common in the early labor movement, especially among artisans and

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[1] See David Forgacs, ed., *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916–1935* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988).

[2] See, e.g., Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), chapter ten, and Joseph Rayback, *A History of American Labor* (New York: The Free Press, 1966), chapter six.

[3] See Peter Way, *Common Labor: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals, 1780-1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) and Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

craftsmen.[1] A less oppositional sort of cooperativism was practiced by immigrants from Europe, as it would be in later waves of immigration as well: they formed communities in cities on the east coast in which mutual-aid structures were essential to survival.

At the same time, communalism of both secular and religious varieties was trying to gain a foothold in the U.S. Communalism has been a recurring phenomenon in American history, from the early seventeenth century to the 1970s and beyond: a group of like-minded people get together and establish a community on the fringes of American society, away from the capitalist rat-race. Quakers, Shakers, Mormons, Rappites, Christian Socialists and other religious groups founded cooperative communities in the late eighteenth century and early to mid-nineteenth century, usually with at most a few hundred members. Some of them were quite successful, lasting decades; others ended after a few years because of personality clashes or organizational problems.[2]

Secular communalism was not wildly successful either. Robert Owen came to the U.S. in 1825 to spread his new socialist ideas and start experimental communities at New Harmony, Indiana and other locations. With 900 people, New Harmony did impressively well for a while—so well, in fact, that Owen prematurely changed its status and structure into that of a commune, with means of survival held in common and remuneration based on need rather than work. This enterprise failed miserably: the township was too diverse, consisting, as Owen's son said later, of "a heterogeneous collection of radicals, enthusiastic devotees to principle, honest latitudinarians, and lazy theorists, with a sprinkling of unprincipled sharpers thrown in," and infighting spelled its doom. The whole Owenite movement effectively collapsed in 1828.[3]

A second wave of communalism began in the 1840s, when Charles Fourier's ideas were put to the test. Horace Greeley, a disciple of Fourier, summarized these ideas eloquently:

> Not through hatred, collision, and depressing competition; not through war, whether of nation against nation, class against class, or capital against labor; but through union, harmony, and the reconciling of all interests, the giving scope to all noble sentiments and aspirations, is the renovation of the world, the elevation of the degraded and suffering masses of mankind, to be sought and effected.[4]

Associationists, as they were called, hoped that "phalanxes," Fourier's ideal communities, would eventually sprout all over the country and transform it from a competitive to a harmonious, cooperative society. Owen's followers had focused on cooperative agriculture, but Fourier's emphasized industry, since times had changed since the 1820s. Dozens of phalanxes with at least a hundred members each were founded in the eastern half of the country. But after a few years the old problems with Owen's movement returned: most poor people couldn't afford to found phalanxes, even after combining their resources, and the phalanxes they did form usually remained poor, "strangled by debts they had undertaken."[5] Participants expected the new communities to magically solve their economic problems; when they didn't, and in fact added such new stress to life that many people "burned out," the movement lost its vitality and collapsed (after ten years or so).

Concomitant with Associationism was a renewed union worker cooperative movement. After the case *Commonwealth v. Hunt*, decided by the Massachusetts Supreme Court in 1842, established that labor unions had the right to exist, unions grew quickly throughout the east. Strikes erupted in the late 1840s in

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[1] Curl, *For All The People*, 34.

[2] Ibid., chapter 18.

[3] Edwin Charles Rozwenc, *Cooperatives Come to America: The Protective Store Movement, 1845–1867* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1975), 7; Joseph Clayton, *Robert Owen: Pioneer of Social Reforms* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1908), 43. See also Mark Holloway, *Heavens on Earth: Utopian Communities in America, 1680-1880* (New York: Dover, 1966).

[4] Quoted in John Commons et al., *History of Labour in the United States*, Vol. 1 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918), 497.

[5] Curl, *For All The People*, 292.

response to wage cuts brought on by a depression, and cooperatives were formed in the wake of these strikes. For instance, the iron molders of Cincinnati struck in 1847, lost, and then organized a successful cooperative foundry: the 47 members collected $2100 with which to buy land, and philanthropists from Cincinnati erected buildings for the new business.[1] Unions established cooperatives in many states—often as a response to failed strikes—and among such diverse groups as glassblowers, cabinetmakers, barrel-makers, seamstresses, tailors, and hat-finishers.[2] Europeans who had emigrated after the failed revolutions of 1848 also started many cooperatives in eastern cities. On the whole, however, this wave of cooperativism was over by the mid-1850s, having succumbed to a lack of resources and fierce capitalist competition. The depression of the mid-1850s also wreaked havoc on cooperatives, and the Civil War eliminated most of the few that still remained.

But before that final catastrophe happened, consumer cooperatives made their first major appearance in the U.S., between 1845 and 1860. In a consumer cooperative, as opposed to a worker cooperative, "the customers are the voting members who band together to acquire consumer goods directly from producers and eliminate the profits of middlemen [i.e., retailers]. The workers in the cooperative may or may not be members."[3] Consumer co-ops are more capitalistic than worker co-ops in that, while the property is collectively owned by consumer-members, managers exist (appointed by a board of directors elected by the membership) who hire and fire workers as in a capitalist enterprise. Nevertheless, the co-op has definite advantages over the private enterprise, not the least of which is that it can sell goods more cheaply, at close to cost, by eliminating the middleman. This is what the Working Men's Protective Unions did, approximately 800 of which were established in New England and Canada between 1845 and 1860, servicing 30,000 to 40,000 members and tens of thousands of non-members.[4] The movement was stimulated by the harsh economic climate for working people of the 1840s, and also by the energy of radical European immigrants who carried the frustrated hopes of 1848 to America. The hundreds of stores provided cooperative employment, cheap goods, and devoted much of their financial surplus to insurance for the aged and the sick. And yet the movement lasted only a few years because of the aforementioned problems of debt, lack of resources, and economic depressions in the 1850s. It also fatally incurred the wrath of capitalists for selling goods too cheaply: private enterprises used the tactics of price-slashing and blacklisting to drive the co-ops out of business, after which prices were raised again.[5]

The Rochdale consumer-cooperative movement in England, which began around the same time as the Protective Unions in the United States, avoided some of the latter's mistakes, particularly the mistake of selling goods much more cheaply than conventional businesses did. Instead, the Rochdale cooperators pioneered a device that has been used to great effect ever since: rather than every customer's paying a low price, regular prices were charged but rebates periodically given to members (greater rebates going to those who purchased goods more frequently).[6] This mollified capitalist competitors. At the same time, the Rochdale group was better able to secure financing for its operations by relying not merely on small membership fees, as in the Protective Unions, but also on shares of equity sold to members, who thereby could earn a fixed dividend of no more than 5 percent.[7] Another important contribution of Rochdale was to formulate concrete principles of cooperation that have been embraced by cooperators for 150 years. Among them are the following: voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation, such that capital is equitably contributed to the business; autonomy and independence; education and training (of members and the general public, to spread the ideology of cooperation);

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[1] Commons, *History of Labour in the United States*, Vol. 1, 565.
[2] Curl, *For All The People*, 50.
[3] Ibid., 53.
[4] Rozwenc, *Cooperatives Come to America*, 116, 120.
[5] Curl, *For All The People*, 55.
[6] Edward Bemis, "Cooperation in New England," in Herbert B. Adams, ed., *History of Cooperation in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1888), 46.
[7] Steven Leikin, *The Practical Utopians: American Workers and the Cooperative Movement in the Gilded Age* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 4.

cooperation among cooperatives; and concern for community. Hundreds more cooperative stores opened in America after the Civil War, most of them modeled on the Rochdale system rather than the failed Protective Unions.

It is after the Civil War, during the "second industrial revolution," that the history of cooperativism becomes really exciting, full of promise and tragedy. Organizations like the National Labor Union, the Sovereigns of Industry, the Knights of St. Crispin, and the Knights of Labor enthusiastically supported cooperation and proselytized for it. Around the time of labor's Great Upheaval (the late 1870s and 1880s), thousands of cooperative stores and workshops were born around the country, especially in the east. Hundreds of thousands of laborers and artisans had faith in cooperation—at least in the long run—as an escape from industrial misery, low wages, and periodic unemployment, hoping to mold society anew in the image of a "republic of labor," which would be a continuation and fulfillment of the Founding Fathers' republican *political* vision. Labor reformers thought that in order for liberty, equal rights, and the pursuit of happiness to flourish, social conditions would have to be revolutionized: cooperation would have to supersede "wage-slavery," so that economic reality could be made consistent with America's democratic form of government. "The principles of Co-operation," wrote a reformer in the late 1860s, "are more in harmony with the principles of our form of government than our present social system."[1] The dream of this cooperative utopia inspired reformers for decades.

For example, in the late 1860s the newly formed National Labor Union, a loose federation that had over 300,000 members before it collapsed in 1873, endorsed cooperation and sponsored the creation of many cooperatives. William Sylvis, its president, declared that "Of all the questions now before us, not one is of so great importance, or should command so large a portion of our consideration, as co-operation… Co-operation is the only true remedy for low wages, strikes, lock-outs, and a thousand other impositions and annoyances to which workingmen are subjected."[2] The NLU even petitioned Congress to spend $25 million on establishing cooperatives. Many local unions in New England organized co-ops to support strikes or in the case of a lockout, but continued to operate them after the strike or lockout had ended. For instance, between 1866 and 1876, iron molders established at least 36 foundries and shoemakers at least 40 workshops, most of which were responses to failed strikes or lockouts. In fact, nearly all the important trades assayed cooperation in the years after the Civil War, including bakers, coach-makers, coal miners, shipwrights, machinists, blacksmiths, plumbers, tailors, printers, and many others.[3]

The Knights of St. Crispin, a shoemakers' union (excluding unskilled labor) that was founded in 1867, were equally zealous in their propagandizing for cooperative work. They were among the most powerful unions in the world: with over 50,000 members, by December, 1870 they had scores of lodges in Massachusetts, New York, New Hampshire, Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Wisconsin, New Jersey, even California. Like other national unions of the period they were decentralized, and so they mostly left it to the initiative of local branches to found co-ops. But it was recommended that every lodge consider starting a cooperative workshop and a store. In Massachusetts, by 1869 the Crispins had organized between 30 and 40 cooperative stores; in the following years they organized workshops in New England, New York, New Jersey, and other states.[4] The Crispins disappeared in the late 1870s, but the Knights of Labor would go on to form cooperative shoe shops in the 1880s.[5]

The methods of financing and organizing all these workshops and stores varied. Since the labor movement was highly decentralized at the time, the initiative usually lay with the local branches of unions. These comprised mostly skilled workers and craftsmen hostile to unskilled labor and the development of

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[1] John Samuel, quoted in Leikin, *The Practical Utopians*, 32. On the Knights of Labor, see, e.g., Gerald N. Grob, *Workers and Utopia: A Study of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement, 1865-1900* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1961) and Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983).

[2] Curl, *For All The People*, 66.

[3] Commons et al., *History of Labour in the United States*, Vol. 2, 111.

[4] Don D. Lescohier, *The Knights of St. Crispin* (New York: Arno, 1969), 50, 51, 52.

[5] Curl, *For All The People*, 75.

industry because it threatened to deprive them of their livelihood and the pride they took in their work. (Mass unionization of "unskilled" workers did not come into its own until the late 1930s, with the founding of the CIO. Craft unions, organized by occupation rather than industry, were the norm at the end of the nineteenth century.)

So how did these craftworkers start all their co-ops? The main obstacle was and is the need for capital. One common tactic was to require workers to purchase shares of stock, which would earn a small dividend. Perhaps after a failed strike at a capitalist business, a dozen carpenters in a union would get together and decide to form a co-op. Often they wrote letters for advice to labor leaders like William Sylvis, John Samuel, and Thomas Phillips, inquiring, for example, as to whether it was better to distribute profits on the basis of shares owned or of labor performed. They might start a retail store as a way to accumulate capital for production. In the 1880s, local and district assemblies of the Knights of Labor oversaw the creation of cooperative businesses, and it became common practice to open a store first. Victor Drury, a French immigrant influential in the labor movement, recommended that products be sold in the store at slightly above cost, only until

> we could sell at *cost* those commodities which we should produce ourselves as soon as we begin to manufacture. So soon as we could find sale for sufficient of the products of any of the industries we have mentioned to employ a few producers, we should establish a workshop or *centre of production*. For instance, if we sold sufficient bread and pastry to employ four or five bakers, we should immediately establish a bakery… We should then call upon the Trades' Unions to furnish us with the most skilled and capable men in their special industries to direct these *centres of production.*[1]

Drury was a member of the Knights of Labor's District Assembly 49 in New York, which organized many cooperatives that were managed by a designated committee. It sold shares in an organization called the Solidarity Co-operative Association, which invested over $6000 in various enterprises. No interest was paid to the shareholders, nor did they have any control over the management of the firms; instead, the association would buy back the shares later and reinvest 50 percent of its profits in cooperation. By 1887, the Solidarity Association was running eight businesses, one of which had capital of $67,000 and employed over 100 workers.[2]

Most of the cooperative businesses of the 1860s and 1870s—like many private enterprises—succumbed to one of the several depressions that rocked the nation in those decades, such as the severe slump of 1873. But the Knights of Labor picked up where the National Labor Union and the Sovereigns of Industry (among other groups) had left off, and it was in the 1880s that cooperativism had its greatest successes.

The Knights of Labor originated in the late 1860s and early 1870s in Philadelphia but slowly expanded into the rest of Pennsylvania and finally became a national organization with 750,000 members. It encompassed many trade unions and was organized geographically rather than by occupation. "The Knights attempted to organize all American productive workers into 'one big union' regardless of skill, trade, industry, race or sex and were divided into local, district and national assemblies, with a centralized structure"[3]—although substantial autonomy was granted to local assemblies, which took the initiative in establishing hundreds of cooperative stores and factories. The national leadership was less energetic on this score than local leadership. The overarching purpose of the organization was, as its longtime leader Terence Powderly said, "to associate our own labors; to establish co-operative institutions such as will tend to supersede the wage-system, by the introduction of a co-operative industrial system."[4] To this end, the Knights lobbied politically, engaged in numerous strikes, lent their support to other radical social

[1] Victor Drury, *The Polity of the Labor Movement* (Philadelphia: Frederick Turner, 1885), 61, 62.
[2] Leikin, *The Practical Utopians*, 83.
[3] Curl, *For All The People*, 88.
[4] Terence Powderly, *Thirty Years of Labor: 1859 to 1889* (Columbus, Ohio: Excelsior, 1889), 453.

movements, and, of course, organized co-ops. Masses of workers genuinely believed that they could rise from being "rented slaves" to become cooperators in control of their work and wages, living in revitalized and stabilized communities, no longer subject to periods of unemployment. Cooperation was a religion for some of them.

In 1880 the delegates to the General Assembly earmarked 60 percent of regular dues for cooperatives; in the following years they also levied a compulsory monthly tax on members and subsequently a voluntary one. But in 1884 the Cooperative Fund was still only $974.52.[1] On the other hand, the national leadership was willing to spend $20,000 over several years to support a coal mine that had been started by eight miners in 1883 after they leased a forty-acre plot. They ran into financial troubles and appealed to the Knights' Executive Board, with the result that this Indiana mine became the first major production cooperative to be run directly by the central organization. As John Curl states, "the Knights intended the mine to be the first link in the economic backbone of the new society they planned to build."[2] However, after buying the land, equipping the mine, and laying railroad tracks to it, the Knights discovered that the railroad company would not connect their switch to the main track for nine months. Later they found out that they would have to provide their own switch engine, which they could not afford. Such problems accumulated, and in the end the Knights leased the mine and finally sold it.

As already noted, more successful than these centralized efforts were the hundreds of projects initiated by local assemblies or unions. Minneapolis in the 1880s was a particularly exciting place for cooperators, who were running 35 or 40 businesses.[3] There were eight cooperative barrel factories, eight building-and-loan associations, two print shops, and one grocery store, shirt factory, house construction company, library, cigar factory, dry-goods store, laundry, and a 250-acre cooperative colony miles from the city. Most of these businesses were started between 1882 and 1886, when the Knights had a strong presence in the city, though some of the barrel-making factories dated from the '70s. These came to dominate the city's barrel industry; in 1887 they grossed over a million dollars' worth of business and employed 368 journeymen-owners out of 593 coopers in the city. Evidently their methods of capitalization served them well: each of the sixteen original members of the first factory (in 1874) bought a $15-share initially and paid $5 to the business every week thereafter, which eventually allowed them to buy a shop near the railroad. New members had to buy shares, which they could purchase from departing members (if there were any). Through these simple means, and the high demand for barrels among millers, the business was able to expand and spawn others, until a veritable cooperative community developed which maintained admirable cohesiveness despite the mixture of ethnicities—German, Swedish, Norwegian, Irish, Italian, and American.

Incidentally, it's worth quoting Albert Shaw, a nineteenth-century historian, on the salutary effects of cooperation among the Minneapolis coopers:

> Coöperation has developed business capacity in the men which they were not aware of possessing because they had never tested it. The conduct of the shops from the governmental point of view may well encourage one's belief in democracy. Sound judgment almost invariably prevails.... Dissension is almost unknown. Differences of opinion are not infrequent, but the will of the majority is acquiesced in without strain.... The coopers themselves are emphatic in saying that the moral effects of their coöperative movement constitute its highest success. It has unquestionably wrought a transformation in the character of these craftsmen. They are no longer a drunken, disreputable guild, figuring in the police courts and deserving the disfavor of the community. They have become a responsible and respectable class of citizens....[4]

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[1] Leikin, *The Practical Utopians*, 57.
[2] Curl, *For All The People*, 91.
[3] The information in this paragraph comes from ibid., 96–100, and Leikin, *The Practical Utopians*, chapter five.
[4] Albert Shaw, "Coöperation in the Northwest," in *History of Cooperation in the United States*, 236, 238.

The key to their economic success, of course, was institutional support. This is always essential to the success of any oppositional movement. A rich network of mutually supporting institutions is necessary, helping each other with finances, publicity, organizational and recruiting work, "moral support," etc. It is necessary to build a genuine community outside the mainstream. The Minneapolis coopers had this community, as testified by Shaw:

> In Minneapolis there are men who are earning their living in a cooperative cooper shop, paying for their home through a cooperative building and loan association, buying their groceries at a cooperative store, and having their washing done in a cooperative laundry. Some of them perchance enjoy the advantages of membership in a cooperative neighborhood improvement association, obtain books and magazines from a cooperative reading club or library association, and so on. Many of them belong to societies and orders which have as their most practical feature a system of cooperative life and accident insurance.[1]

However, the experience of the cooperative coopers is illuminating also with regard to the challenges they faced. For example, they had an ambivalent relationship with the labor movement and the Knights of Labor. On the one hand, the Knights provided institutional support and leadership. Indeed, the main reason cooperation failed in Minneapolis after 1887 was the organizational decline of the Knights.[2] On the other hand, the cooperators were running a business and so did not always have the same interests as the journeymen coopers, the wage-laborers, who were employed in conventional workshops with bosses. At times they acted in solidarity with their fellow workers, while at other times their business interests put them at odds with the labor movement. Some of the cooperators even hired journeymen and machine operators in their shops and so became employers themselves. The Knights actually expelled the members of one co-op from the local Assembly for acting too independently vis-à-vis ordinary workers. Such conflicts are, as we saw in the last chapter, always a possibility given the ambiguous nature of the worker cooperative.[3]

As the Knights expanded over the continent—especially after 1885, when they won a major nationwide strike against Jay Gould's railroad company—worker cooperatives followed in their wake, at least 334 of them between 1880 and 1888 (according to one study),[4] in 35 of the 38 states. Many were a response to the depression of 1883–85, when wages were cut on average 15 percent, causing workers to look to other sources for income.[5] The businesses they started were not "factories" as we understand the term, with its connotations of mass production and assembly-line workers, but rather workshops in which skilled craftsmen or semi-skilled workers supervised themselves and each other, sometimes with an almost obsessive concern for democratic procedures. The minutes of general meetings attest to this preoccupation with democracy, given the insistence on having formal votes on almost every conceivable matter.[6] Workers were always very reluctant to fire a fellow worker, and it seems to have happened in only the most exceptional cases.

Indeed, aside from their predictable sexism and racism, the attitudes and behavior of cooperators in the Gilded Age seem not to have differed substantially from those of cooperators eighty or a hundred years later, at least with respect to relationships in the workplace itself. There was the same emphasis on freedom and democracy, on realizing the inherent dignity of work, and the same struggle to reconcile cooperative ideals with the pressures of the market and hostility of conventional businesses. There was also a progressive desire to organize women, or for women to organize themselves: in Chicago, for example,

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[1] Quoted in Leikin, *The Practical Utopians*, 129.
[2] Ibid., 152.
[3] Ibid., 140–151.
[4] See Curl, *For All The People*, 92.
[5] Rayback, *A History of American Labor*, 160.
[6] See Leikin, *The Practical Utopians*, 99.

women in the Knights of Labor organized twenty cooperatives in the clothing industry. Forty women established one such co-op after being locked out by their employer; they bought shares of stock for $10 each, distributed the profits equally among the workforce, and worked only eight hours a day.[1]

There were, however, major differences between the respective upsurges of cooperativism in the 1880s and the 1960s, revolving around the fact that the earlier one was part of a broad-based *labor* movement, unlike the later. Thus, the skilled and semi-skilled cooperators during the 1870s and 1880s explicitly used cooperatives as a way to guarantee employment, and arguably they were more ambitious, with their revolutionary hopes for a cooperative commonwealth. Their ideology, of course, was not the educated middle-class countercultural and anti-authoritarian one of the 1960s' youth movements but "laborist," "producerist," devoted to the Jeffersonian ideal of a republic of free laborers, mostly artisans and craftsmen. Some scholars have argued that this fact proves the Knights of Labor were "backward-looking" rather than truly revolutionary—that the future lay in mass production, not skilled labor or artisanry[2]—but this criticism seems partly off the mark. It is true that the Knights were hostile to mechanization, just as workers were in the era of the AFL-CIO, because in both cases it threatened to put them out of a job or to result in the lowering of wages and the deskilling of work. If this aversion to the degradation and mechanization of work is reactionary, so be it. But it is also a source of such revolutionary demands as democratization of production-relations, cooperative organization of the economy, public ownership of industry, destruction of the capitalist class and its frequent tool the state, and other hopes cherished by hundreds of thousands of workers in the late nineteenth century.

In reality, the Knights of Labor were radical and conservative at the same time. They were genuinely progressive in their political positions, such as abolition of child labor, support for the eight-hour day, advocacy of public ownership of the railroads, water systems and utilities, support for the women's movement and "equal pay for equal work," attempt to organize *all* workers into "one big union," and so forth. They were conservative insofar as they still exalted the ethos of artisanry and rejected, in their prescriptions for a future economic system, nationwide socialist institution-building, something like the plan put forward by Henry Sharpe when he was president of the Knights of Labor's Cooperative Board in the mid-1880s. He saw that large-scale and long-term cooperativism could not work as long as co-ops remained isolated units in a market economy. Dependence on wages could not be superseded that way; competition would always remain a fact of life, as would, therefore, the downward pressures on wages, the necessity to mechanize and expand, the subjection to the business cycle, etc. Instead, the Knights of Labor had to create their own self-sufficient world of cooperation—"a great industrial union, self-employing, self-sustaining, self-governing." The members, he said,

> should be taught to look upon themselves as a "people," or, so to speak, as a nation, and the legislative, the executive, the judiciary, the industrial, the police, the insurance, the educational and the charities departments should all be well defined, properly officered and actively employed. It is high time that members be found whose special aptitudes incline them toward one or the other of the departments, and who, finding therein a field for their activities, develop their aptitudes still further and become specialists.

In effect, he was advocating state socialism. While his vision was impracticable and arguably morally objectionable, it had at least one virtue: as Steven Leikin says, it accepted "the organizational realities of the new industrial economy."[3] It anticipated the elaborate bureaucratic structures of the twentieth-century state, and hence was in no sense "conservative" or "reactionary." But the Knights refused to take cooperation to these limits. They would not consent even to compulsory taxes, much less to Sharpe's vision

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[1] James Green, *Death in the Haymarket* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 152.

[2] Needless to say, it is a caricature of the Knights' position to say they wanted an economy entirely of small artisanal workshops and small producers. Rather, they desired public control of transportation and communication systems and cooperative administration of mines and other massive industrial facilities.

[3] Leikin, *The Practical Utopians*, 65. See pages 60–66.

of centralized authority. Insofar, therefore, as they desired a cooperative society but would not make an all-out assault on capitalism or commit to building a network of alternative economic institutions, they can perhaps be called unrealistic and conservative. Similarly, inasmuch as bureaucracy, statism, and mass production represented "progress," the Knights, like anarchists and left-Marxists, were indeed ambivalent towards progress.

As it turned out, Sharpe was right. Cooperation succumbed to market forces, but even more to the war waged on it by the business classes. By 1887 the latter were determined to destroy the Knights, with their incessant boycotts, their strikes (sometimes involving hundreds of thousands), their revolutionary agitation, and their labor parties organized across the country. In the two years after the famous Haymarket bombing in Chicago and the Great Upheaval of 1886, in which 200,000 trade unionists across the country went on a four-day-long strike for the eight-hour day but in most cases failed—partly because Terence Powderly, the leader of the Knights, who had always disliked strikes, refused to endorse the action and encouraged the Knights not to participate—capitalist repression swept the nation. Joseph Rayback summarizes:

> The first of the Knights' ventures to feel the full effect of the post-Haymarket reaction were their cooperative enterprises. In part the very nature of such enterprises worked against them. The successful ventures became joint-stock corporations, the wage-earning shareholders and managers hiring labor like any other industrial unit. In part the cooperatives were destroyed by inefficient managers, squabbles among shareholders, lack of capital, and injudicious borrowing of money at high rates of interest. Just as important was the attitude of competitors. Railroads delayed the building of tracks, refused to furnish cars, or refused to haul them. Manufacturers of machinery and producers of raw materials, pressed by private business, refused to sell their products to the cooperative workshops and paralyzed operations. By 1888 none of the Order's cooperatives were in existence.[1]

Thus, by 1888 it had become evident that a national cooperative movement could not succeed in America, at least not in the absence of sustained, massive and violent attack on the wage-system, far more massive and well-organized than the Knights' movement had been. As Henry Sharpe said, what they were doing was not realistic. Small workshops with little capital and obsolete machinery in an age of rapid industrialization; insufficient institution-building to give financial and material support to co-ops; enslavement to the market at a time when competitors would stop at nothing to suppress working-class moves toward independence. Especially with the weak leadership of Terence Powderly and the mass desertion of former Knights after 1886, as they lost strike after strike, the great dream of building a national cooperative economy was effectively over.

Farmers in the South, West, and Midwest, however, were still building a major movement to escape from the control of banks and merchants lending them supplies at usurious rates; agricultural cooperatives—cooperative buying of supplies and machinery and marketing of produce—as well as cooperative stores, were the remedy to these conditions of virtual serfdom. While the movement was not dedicated to the formation of worker co-ops, it is worth mentioning anyway because of its vast historical importance. In the late 1880s and early 1890s it swept through southern and western states like a brushfire, even, in some places, bringing black and white farmers together in a unity of interest. Eventually this Farmers' Alliance decided it had to enter politics in order to break the power of the banks; it formed a third party, the People's Party, in 1892. The great depression of 1893 only spurred the movement on, and it won governorships in Kansas and Colorado. But in 1896 its leaders made an enormous strategic blunder in allying themselves with William Jennings Bryan of the Democratic party in his campaign for president. Bryan lost the election, and Populism lost its independent identity. The party fell apart; the Farmers'

[1] Rayback, *A History of American Labor*, 174.

Alliance collapsed; the movement died, and many of its cooperative associations disappeared. Thus, once again, the capitalists had managed to stomp out a threat to their rule.[1]

They were unable to get rid of all agricultural cooperatives, however, even with the help of the Sherman "Anti-Trust" Act of 1890.[2] Nor, in fact, did big business desire to combat many of them, for instance the independent co-ops that coordinated buying and selling. Small farmers needed cooperatives in order to survive, whether their co-ops were independent or were affiliated with a movement like the Farmers' Alliance or the Grange. The independent co-ops, moreover, were not necessarily opposed to the capitalist system, fitting into it quite well by cooperatively buying and selling, marketing, and reducing production costs. By 1921 there were 7374 agricultural co-ops, most of them in regional federations. According to the census of 1919, over 600,000 farmers were engaged in cooperative marketing or purchasing—and these figures did not include the many farmers who obtained insurance, irrigation, telephone, or other business services from cooperatives.[3]

From the 1890s to the 1920s, cooperation had its home mainly in the agricultural sector. The sheer number of regional and national organizations devoted to cooperation in agriculture testifies to this. There was the National Farmers Union, the American Society of Equity, the Non-Partisan League in North Dakota, the Farmer-Labor Exchange, the Farmers' Equity Union, the National Grange, Farm Bureaus all over the country—which in 1920 led to the American Farm Bureau Federation—to educate farmers on business methods and cooperation, many regional associations such as the California Fruit Growers Exchange (which became Sunkist), the California Associated Raisin Growers (now called Sunmaid), and the Missouri Farmers Association, and in the 1920s there emerged a variety of Communist farm organizations. Many of these associations had the financial and political support of the federal government, state governments, and business groups, who recognized that the atomistic, competitive model of classical capitalism was inappropriate to agriculture.[4] The passage of the Capper-Volstead Act in 1922 was of great importance for marketing co-ops, since it determined that they did not violate the Sherman Act's prohibition of organizations in restraint of trade. Because of this exemption, marketing co-ops no longer had to worry about the sort of legal harassment they had endured for years.[5]

Consumer cooperativism, however—not to mention worker cooperativism—was not having much success around the turn of the century. In 1896 the American Federation of Labor decided to support consumer co-ops, but they did not become a priority of the labor movement. Many immigrant groups ran co-ops in the East and Midwest, and in the West there were several thriving associations, such as the Pacific Cooperative League, the Pacific Coast Cooperative Union, and the California Rochdale Company; but aside from these Western movements, and some Midwestern federations, there was little coordination or communication between co-ops.[6] The Cooperative League of America was founded in 1916 with the mission of coordinating consumer cooperativism (although eventually it expanded its activities to apply to *all* co-ops). It joined the International Cooperative Alliance in 1917, and it exists today as the National Cooperative Business Association.

From the 1890s to the 1930s, worker cooperatives were almost entirely ignored by the labor movement. Neither the AFL nor the IWW had much interest in them; nor did the Socialist or the Communist Parties, nor even the Cooperative League. Labor activists seem to have learned their lesson from the fate of

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[1] See, e.g., Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1961/31); and Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[2] One of the innumerable ironies of history is that the Sherman Act was mostly used not against big business but against unions and cooperatives, even though its chief proponents had been workers, farmers, and small businessmen hoping to break the power of monopolies. Zinn, 260, and Curl, 118, 119.

[3] Joseph R. Knapp, *The Rise of American Cooperative Enterprise: 1620–1920* (Danville, IL: Interstate Printers and Publishers, 1969), 432.

[4] Ibid., chapters ten and eleven.

[5] Joseph Knapp, *The Advance of American Cooperative Enterprise: 1920–1945* (Danville: Interstate, 1973), 26.

[6] Curl, *For All The People*, 140.

the 1880s' co-ops. Not until the Great Depression and the self-help movement would there be a resurgence of a type of producer cooperativism, and this time the movement would be even more spontaneous and decentralized than it had been under the Knights of Labor. Consumer co-ops, too, would make a comeback; they had not fared well during the 1920s.

The self-help cooperative movement, which flourished between 1931 and 1935 but lasted in some form until 1938, originated not in production but barter. It involved the exchange of goods and services, with cooperators sometimes performing labor services on farms in exchange for meals. Productive associations, vaguely similar to worker co-ops, arose after 1934, oriented around such activities as butchering, plumbing, flour milling, logging and sawmilling, carpentry, dentistry, printing, furniture-making, coal mining, laundering, shoe-repairing, etc. Over the course of the movement, more than half a million families were affiliated with 600 self-help organizations in 37 states; about 250 of these were productive associations.[1] The cooperatives thrived particularly around Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Salt Lake City, Denver, and Minneapolis.[2]

The production cooperatives differed in at least one crucial respect from ordinary worker co-ops: they relied heavily on government funding and government assistance—$4,730,000 worth of funding. In 1933 a Division of Self-Help Cooperatives was set up in the Federal Emergency Relief Administration to administer the grants and set the rules that cooperatives receiving money would have to follow. One significant rule stated that no cooperatively produced goods could be sold on the open market. "In effect, a self-help economy was created which functioned separately from the open-market economy. These rules reflected the government's desire to allow the cooperative sector to operate as long as the free market was not disturbed."[3] Evidently the government was comfortable with cooperatives insofar as they had a stabilizing influence on society and would provide a safe outlet for discontent.

The economic performance of the co-ops was not quite stellar, but it was not shabby either. Many or most of the workers were in their fifties or older—people who had particular difficulty finding employment—and so were less productive than the average employee in a comparable capitalist business. The cooperatives tended to be relatively small too, and grew but slowly. They were, however, a very cost-effective way for the government to provide relief to the unemployed, because it seems that, had these co-ops not existed, the government would have spent far more on relief than it did. (Families who were eligible for relief did not apply for it, instead relying on their cooperative income.) In addition, they provided a useful service as "rehabilitation" for the unemployed, who derived psychological benefits from working when otherwise they would have been idle and discouraged. Therefore, whatever one thinks of the government's motives in supporting the co-ops, and their systemically stabilizing effects, it can hardly be denied that they performed a valuable function for the families affected.

In the end, the main lesson of the self-help co-ops may be that government assistance can be of great use to cooperators and societal innovators—as it was in Kerala, India—but they should be careful not to become too dependent on it. For then they are subject to the whims of bureaucrats, policymakers, and politicians, who may withdraw legislative and financial assistance if the political winds change. Government funding of self-help was not guaranteed and policies changed erratically, not always to the benefit of the co-ops. In any case, the movement lost much of its momentum after the Works Progress Administration was set up in 1935, providing employment for millions and thus obviating the need for the cooperatives.

The government also promoted cooperatives under the aegis of the Tennessee Valley Authority, in the mid- to late 1930s. As is well known, the TVA was conceived as a grand experiment in social reconstruction. It turned out to be quite successful, in no small part because of the fertilizer and electric

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[1] Derek Jones and Donald Schneider, "Self-Help Production Cooperatives: Government-Administered Cooperatives During the Depression," in *Worker Cooperatives in America*, 57.

[2] See Knapp, *The Advance of American Cooperative Enterprise*, 289–291. Clark Kerr's unpublished 1939 dissertation "Productive Self-Help Enterprises of the Unemployed" is the basic work on the self-help movement in the Great Depression.

[3] Jones and Schneider, "Self-Help Production Cooperatives," 59.

cooperatives that the government helped set up. Indeed, the TVA served as the "incubator of the federally promoted and financed rural electrification program" that began in 1935, when only ten percent of the country's farms were electrified. Dozens of electrical power cooperatives had already been set up in the Midwest between 1914 and 1930, but it was only with the Rural Electrification Administration that the problem was tackled on a large scale. In December 1935, 789,000 farms were being served by public and private utility systems; five years later, largely as a result of the REA, the number was 1,871,942. By 1940 more than half of rural America was still not electrified, but in the coming decades the job was completed.[1]

Agricultural cooperation thrived during the 1930s, again due to New Deal initiatives. In 1933 the Farm Credit Administration set up Banks for Cooperatives, a program that created a central bank and twelve district banks; it "became a member-controlled system of financing farmer cooperatives, as well as telephone and electric cooperatives."[2] For the rest of the century, Banks for Cooperatives would prove an invaluable resource. Already by 1939 its financial assistance made it possible for half the farmers in the United States to belong to cooperatives.

With World War II and the end of the New Deal, and especially in conservative postwar America, cooperation in all spheres but agriculture plummeted. The political left went off to fight Hitler as the right gained control of the government and many unions. After the war the CIO was purged of Communists, dealing a huge blow to the labor movement. Through reactionary legislation like the Taft-Hartley Act, military and police violence against unions, imperialist foreign policy, McCarthyite fear-mongering, and other such devices that created a center-right consensus in the 1950s, the labor and cooperative movements were severely damaged. It was essentially a war of big business and conservative Republicans against the social and political legacy of New Deal America, a war in which centrist politicians and even liberal Democrats were complicit, due in large part to the supposed exigencies of the Cold War.

Nevertheless, all was not quiet on the worker-cooperative front. In Washington and Oregon a number of large cooperatives had been and were still being organized; these were the plywood co-ops discussed in the last chapter. They would go on to become the longest-lived cluster of cooperatives in the United States, lasting from the 1920s to the early 2000s (although dwindling in later years). The first one was called Olympia Veneer, organized in 1921: a bank loan of $25,000 was secured, and 125 shares of equity were sold at $1000 each to loggers, carpenters, and mechanics, in order to finance construction. The business did well, and shares were sold at a high price to outsiders. Soon the worker-owners were earning one-and-a-half times the pay of employees in conventional enterprises, due to their higher labor-productivity. Over time the co-op degenerated into something like a capitalist corporation, since non-member employees were hired and non-workers could buy shares. By 1952, 1000 non-owners were employed and the original plant had been sold to a conventional lumber company; in 1954 Olympia was sold to U.S. Plywood Corporation.[3]

More plywood co-ops were formed just before World War II, and 21 were organized between 1949 and 1956. Over the course of their lifetime, the size of their workforces would be between 60 and 500. In the 1940s and '50s the cooperatives accounted for 20 to 25 percent of total production capacity in the industry; in later decades their relative share declined as many more conventional firms were created and almost no new co-ops. On the whole, though, they continued to perform very well, as well as or better than their conventional competitors even during severe slumps in the industry. Their decline in the 1990s did not reflect problems with their cooperative organization but rather the overall decline of the regional industry. Conventional mills succumbed too.[4]

Why were the plywood co-ops so successful? One reason is that they were formed in the growth period of a major new industry.[5] As stated above, the cultural origins of the cooperators surely played a role too: the Scandinavian people have traditionally sought cooperative solutions to problems. Also, the

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[1] Knapp, *The Advance of American Cooperative Enterprise*, 346, 347, 373.
[2] Curl, *For All The People*, 187.
[3] Dow, *Governing the Firm*, 50 ff.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Gunn, *Workers' Self-Management in the United States*, 104.

Northwest had had a lot of experience with consumers' and producers' co-ops. These last two reasons point to the importance of a "collective memory," a cultural memory, to the resilience of an oppositional culture.[1] Examples are legion: the Knights of Labor was defending an artisanal, pre-industrial, Jeffersonian-republican ethos; the Italian working-class anarchists in Northeast urban communities at the turn of the twentieth century had recently emigrated from rural areas in Italy with rich communal traditions they carried over to the New World, and which served as a foundation for radical opposition to industrial capitalism;[2] in the 1960s, SNCC had success organizing a civil rights movement in the South because it tapped into local traditions of participatory democracy, religion, empowerment through music and ritual, and small-town mutual respect and dialogue.[3] Even in the 1990s, Mayans in North Carolina who had recently emigrated from Guatemala waged a long battle against their employer Case Farms, nourished and encouraged by their collective memories of rural community, mutualism, agricultural cooperation, and immersion in the Catholic church.[4] All these dissidents derived their strength from the "radicalism of tradition" as it came into conflict with industrial society.[5]

That fact would seem to have a discouraging implication with respect to the viability of contemporary and future struggles against capitalism, namely that they will not be very "resilient" because, in many parts of the world, the possibility no longer exists of grounding them in "tradition," a "collective memory," "precipitates of past historical experience."[6] These precipitates, after all, have largely been erased by late capitalism. However, I think the conclusion is unwarranted. As will be evident from the following chapter, I think a good way to conceptualize radical movements is by dividing them into those that proceed in large part from the "radicalism of tradition" and those that do not obviously draw sustenance from past historical experience but instead grow out of mature capitalism itself. These two categories are of course merely ideal-types, and actual social movements might not always fall clearly under one or the other. But examples of the "non-traditional" kind of movement would be the anti-war, the feminist, the environmental, and the Black Power movements of the late 1960s. Currently, the vast global movement symbolized by the World Social Forum is, on the whole, a clear case of the "mature" sort of anti-capitalist radicalism, the unequivocally progressive sort (as opposed, for instance, to the Knights of Labor, which was in some respects reactionary). These latter-day movements have been quite resilient, some lasting decades and instigating major changes in culture and politics.

Karl Marx had little to say about the traditional, "primitive" sort of radicalism,[7] and in fact the utilitarian, Enlightenment-derived, "progress"-fixated, rationalistic and economistic bias of Marxism makes this theory not a wholly adequate framework for understanding them. Historical materialism as a sweeping theory, at least, tends to downplay the significance of "culture" and cultural residues, just as it has little interest in the psychological motivations that actually guide actors, emphasizing instead the latters' structural locations in the economy and the utilitarian *interests* that these locations dispose them to pursue.[8]

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[1] T. J. Jackson Lears, "Power, Culture, and Memory," in *In Search of the Working Class: Essays in American Labor History and Political Culture,* ed. Leon Fink (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 117.

[2] See Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[3] Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).

[4] Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

[5] Craig Calhoun, "The Radicalism of Tradition," *American Journal of Sociology* 88, no. 5 (1983): 886–914.

[6] Lears, "Power, Culture, and Memory," 117.

[7] Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester, England: The University Press, 1959).

[8] Cf. Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 145–151. On another level, though, Marxism as a set of research programs is perfectly compatible with—indeed, tends to encourage—an emphasis on the *concrete experiences* of collective actors, as evidenced by, e.g., E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, David Montgomery's *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), and Barrington Moore's *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making*

This framework has its deficiencies, but it is more appropriate to the analysis of "modern" radical movements than "archaic" ones. In particular, it is a powerful tool for interpreting, first, "modern" struggles between capital and labor, with regard to which considerations of culture and tradition are decidedly subordinate to the objective facts of structural location,[1] and secondly, the future evolutionary transition to a post-capitalist society. (See chapter four.) It is precisely the latter that Marx intended his theory to explain. Archaic cultural residues will be less relevant to this evolution, which, if it happens, will be propelled overwhelmingly by the economic conditions of late capitalism.

In another sense, however, "collective memory" has always been and will always be essential to every oppositional movement, inasmuch as the movement has to educate itself, remember its past experiences and learn from them, maintain and expand on its institutional innovations, build up economic, social, and cultural bases of resistance. The plywood cooperators came from a subculture that had already experimented with consumers' and producers' co-ops, which made their new venture that much easier. Another reason for their success is that the first few co-ops provided a "template" that later organizers could use. This, too, is an important lesson for contemporary cooperators.

Another lesson lies in the fate of many of these cooperatives: due in large part to their success, they degenerated into semi-capitalist corporations. Some of them were actually sold to conventional enterprises, but apparently all of them used hired, non-member labor much of the time. As stated in chapter two, they did not want to increase the number of worker-owners by creating new shares, because that would have entailed a loss of income for the current members. So the firms that wanted to expand simply hired employees who were not allowed to participate in decision-making and had vulnerable, often temporary jobs. They were effectively second-class citizens in the plants—and they sometimes constituted almost 50 percent of the workforce. This clearly interfered with a culture of cooperation. In fact, what sometimes happened was that when a member retired, his share was not sold to a new worker but instead bought back by the firm, so that each member would have a somewhat higher annual income. The result was that the membership, i.e., the class of owners, gradually shrank as the class of hired labor expanded. For example, during the first five years of Olympia's operation (1923 to 1928), 100 non-members were hired, as the number of worker-owners dropped from 118 to 92.[2]

This capitalist mentality was evidenced also in the fact that these co-ops did not participate in cooperative social movements and were founded purely for the sake of providing employment to members. They had no strong ideological commitment to cooperation; they rarely even linked up with one another for political, economic or ideological reasons. Each enterprise was simply "one big family" (with the exception of the hired labor) united against a hostile outside world.[3] As mentioned earlier, therefore, it is essential that co-ops maintain a connection with social movements if their cooperative identity is not to erode. No great social change will happen if cooperatives simply speckle the economic landscape atomistically, even if there are quite a few of them; they have to actively spread their ideology, spawn new co-ops, maintain ties with the labor movement, fundraise continually, agitate politically for grants and favorable legislation, look to progressive social experiments being undertaken in other parts of the world and learn from them or contribute to them. Besides, it is likely that the more connections they have with each other, the smaller is the possibility that they will fail economically.

The next great wave of cooperatives after the 1930s adhered to some of these principles, and was in any case the very antithesis of what the plywood mills represented. I'm referring to the movements of the 1960s and '70s. The perennial question arises: what caused these movements? At first glance they seem to have appeared out of nowhere. That is not true, of course; rumblings in the 1950s and earlier anticipated

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of the Modern World (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), not to mention Marx's own *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and *The Civil War in France*.

[1] We should not forget, though, as some revisionist historians are wont to do, that class structures have always been of central importance even to the old "tradition-derived" struggles. It is precisely the industrial capitalist class structure that artisans, petty bourgeoisie, peasants and others have fought against, while drawing on their cultural heritage.

[2] Dow, *Governing the Firm*, 51.

[3] Gunn, *Workers' Self-Management*, 106.

them. In the South, black activists in the 1940s and '50s were establishing connections with each other, testing the limits of repression, registering voters (voter registration increased fourfold, eightfold, tenfold even by the early 1950s);[1] the NAACP became increasingly active prior to and after *Brown v. Board of Education*, and its membership expanded. Conflicts escalated between whites and blacks as the latter grew in collective confidence. At the same time, urban centers in the North were incubating the counterculture, notably Greenwich Village and San Francisco, where artists, students, intellectuals, and dissidents of all sorts came together in loose communities. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, these movements reached a critical mass and exploded into the national spotlight.

Ultimately, the explanation for what was happening lies mainly in the advance of the productive forces and their bursting the shackles of certain conservative production relations.[2] In the South, for example, tractors appeared during the First World War; later, flame cultivators cleared land more cheaply than laborers did; a cotton harvester came into use during the 1940s, which did the work of forty cotton-pickers. In short, cotton production was being mechanized. At the same time, "competition from synthetics and cheap foreign cotton made cotton a less valuable crop." Plantations needed fewer and fewer laborers, and so there was less economic need to control blacks, "either through the near-peonage of sharecropping or through violence." Millions of them migrated to Northern cities, while the rest tended to become more socially assertive—not least because the rise of radio and television, as well as the mass mobilization for the Second World War, lessened their isolation from the rest of the world, encouraging activism to enact freedom and equality. Northern cities became more populous and diverse, which fostered creativity and dissent, as Southern cities became more overtly conflict-ridden.[3]

The movements that sprouted from this soil, including the civil rights, anti-war, women's, students', environmental, and anti-nuclear movements, translated their concern with freedom and democracy into organizational arrangements that revolved around the "collective." In a broad sense, a collective is just a small group that embodies participatory democracy; it is a form that can be adapted to many uses, from education and childcare to art or law. It was nearly ubiquitous in the 1960s—Freedom Schools, informal leadership committees, law collectives, communes, underground newspapers, cooperative housing, "food conspiracies," free medical clinics in Chicago and Oakland administered by the Black Panthers, the latter's Liberation Schools, free breakfast and clothing programs, free stores in San Francisco, music and art groups, "free universities" offering unorthodox courses, etc. And there were hundreds of worker collectives, and even more consumer co-ops.

John Curl summarizes the evolution of 1960s' worker collectives:

> The earliest collective businesses were mostly connected with radical communication media: presses, bookstores and film. This reflected the explicitly political movement from which they emerged. They were followed by food-related cooperatives in the late 1960s, and artisan/industrial collectives and cooperatives beginning around 1970 both in urban and rural areas. These differed from earlier American industrial cooperatives and co-op stores mainly in that they chose worker control through the collective consensus decision-making system, rather than the majority-rule managerial system predominant since the early 19th century.[4]

I cannot discuss the sixties and seventies in great detail here. Much of the history is common knowledge or is easily accessible. The rise and partial fall of food co-ops is illustrative and perhaps most worth looking at: "Of all the countercultural organizations, they became the most interconnected, the most

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[1] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 25, 26.
[2] See the following chapter.
[3] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 17, 19. See also Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), chapter seven.
[4] Curl, *For All The People*, 209, 210.

developed ideologically and…had the most far-reaching effects."[1] Between five and ten thousand of them were organized in the late sixties and seventies, at the end of which decade they had an annual volume of about $500 million.[2] Some were controlled by their workers, others by their workers and customer-members. Many began on college campuses but spread to working-class and middle-class neighborhoods as food prices skyrocketed in the 1970s, rising almost 50 percent between 1972 and 1976. The cooperatives' goal was, first, to provide healthier, less expensive food to their communities, and second, to create a radical alternative to the dominant system. The movement developed dozens of cooperative warehouses around the country to help supply the stores, since most co-ops could not buy in sufficient bulk for established wholesalers to do business with them. Trucking collectives helped connect the system of alternative wholesalers, co-ops, and regional federations on both coasts and in the Midwest.

When one considers the forces against them, it is remarkable how much the cooperatives accomplished. As always, the main obstacle was lack of money. Sometimes organizers had to knock on doors in their communities to fundraise before creating a store, or hold benefits such as dances. When the co-op got started it was often able to sell some food (not all) more cheaply than supermarkets because its members were not concerned with making a profit, and their business had little overhead. Some customers would be recruited for volunteer labor, but most importantly, workers paid themselves very low wages. Without this extreme "self-exploitation," most co-ops could not have lasted long or offered food at such low prices.

The food co-op movement, insofar as it can be called a movement, declined in the late 1970s. Co-ops could not compete with corporate supermarkets at selling processed foods or meat, or having a high volume of products. They became specialty stores that customers would patronize to buy natural and wholesome foods before skipping over to the local supermarket to buy everything else. Cooperators found that in order to remain in business they had to expand—which meant compromising their principles and led to bitter ideological fights. Even if they were able to expand, which they usually weren't, they were often still too small to remain financially viable for long, and with the low wages, workers "burned out" after a few years. There was also a chronic shortage of business experience. Financial problems were sometimes not taken seriously until it was too late. Some of these failures could have been mitigated had more cooperative networks been established across the country, but participants in the movement had too many different ideologies and goals to work together in a sustained way. Some had political agendas, others were committed only to running a store. "The co-ops in Minneapolis," said one participant, "are very isolationist." This was true almost everywhere.

Surveying the terrain of New Left movements in the sixties and seventies, one is led to several conclusions. Most of these movements seem to have gone wrong in similar ways, due to similar causes. State violence and repression were instrumental in some cases, especially regarding those few movements, such as Black Power, that explicitly challenged the class structure. More widespread in its counterproductiveness was ideological sectarianism. The bitter factional infighting that erupted in the late sixties and early seventies drained energy from networking and coordinating dissent. Often participants could not agree on their overall aims, or even their immediate aims. Even more importantly, the movements that attempted to create such alternative institutions as cooperatives and communes suffered from an inevitable lack of capital; in the end, the organizations that survived, whether in the media—like the *Village Voice* and *Rolling Stone*—or in the food industry, had to follow the rules of the dominant system. Idealism and inexperience lost out to pragmatism and business acumen.

On a deeper level, the fatal flaw in the New Left was that it did not set out to change the dominant mode of production in any comprehensive or competent way. One cannot have a true "social revolution" without radically transforming the class structure, which is the foundation of society's institutional structures in general. The sixties' movements, by and large, focused on culture and politics while neglecting the economy, thus vitiating their long-term goals. They were more interested in "sexy" things like culture,

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[1] Ibid., 212.

[2] Daniel Zwerdling, "The Uncertain Revival of Food Cooperatives," 90. The following information comes from Zwerdling's article and Curl, 212–218.

ideology, and politics than the hard work, the decades-long work, of building up a new economy. Of course, this could not have been done anyway; structurally it was impossible at that time, and even now it will be decades before the transition from capitalism to a more cooperative mode of production, if it takes place at all, will reach a very visible level. Nevertheless, the absence in the 1960s of an alliance between the labor movement and the New Left—indeed, the outright mutual hostility[1]—suggests the latter's "superstructural" nature, as it suggests the former's bureaucratic ossification and conservatism under George Meany and the old guard.

The fate of the New Left shows that the way to a new society does not lie with sectarian ideologizing. It lies with protracted economic evolution, coordination of sustained economic and political struggles, the slow accumulation of financial and human resources—nothing so culturally fixated and impatient as the movements of the 1960s. They were a product not of the impending demise or decrepit nature of capitalism, as many hoped, but of transformations in production relations and technologies (most obviously in the South), population movements, the complex of federal, state, and local housing and tax policies that fostered "white flight" to the suburbs and left inner cities to rot,[2] the spread of media that connected distant regions to an unprecedented degree, the partly resultant elevation of the problem of poverty into the national consciousness, the U.S.'s waging of an unpopular war in Vietnam, and many other circumstances.

All this time, mainstream cooperatives were making quiet progress. Credit unions, for example, which had been given legal foundations in the early decades of the century, spread after World War II. By 1969 there were nearly 24,000 credit unions, and a decade later they had 43 million members. Housing co-ops, which date to the beginning of the century, expanded in cities during the 1960s, many of them partly financed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Agricultural cooperatives (in marketing, buying and selling, etc.) continued to thrive and merge into ever-larger units, even as the number of farmers shrank. In 1955 there were 8100 farmer cooperatives with 7.6 million members; in 1979 there were 7500 cooperatives with fewer than 6 million members. Most rural inhabitants were no longer independent farmers but wage-earners for agribusinesses, part of the rural proletariat. As for worker co-ops, John Curl estimates that their U.S. membership reached its peak in 1979 with about 17,000 people. There were 750 to 1000 small co-ops and a number of larger ones, including 18 plywood co-ops and a reforestation cooperative called Hoedads with 300 members.[3]

The Reagan years were not kind to cooperatives, as they were unkind to the whole labor movement and in fact to oppressed people everywhere in the world. It was a terrible decade, the first full decade of neoliberal attacks on the global population. Still under the influence of conservative Meanyite traditions, the U.S. labor movement remained ambivalent to worker-ownership as manifested in employee buyouts, ESOPs, and cooperatives, opposing the blurring of the line between employees and management. Ever since the AFL had endorsed collective bargaining and rejected worker cooperatives in the late nineteenth century, this had been the standard line. It began to change in the late 1970s as union officials and local communities experimented with employee buyouts as ways of preventing plant shutdowns and saving jobs.[4] But in most cases the traditional adversarial relations between workers and bosses remained despite majority employee-ownership, and often buyouts could not prevent the failure of a plant anyway. Stock ownership plans have become increasingly popular since the 1980s, but usually they have little in common with worker cooperatives, since employees typically do not control the firm even if they own most of its stock. Arguably

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[1] See Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), chapters four and five.

[2] See, e.g., Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) and *Marxism and the Metropolis: New Perspectives in Urban Political Economy*, eds. William Tabb and Larry Sawers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[3] Curl, *For All The People*, 235–241.

[4] The most famous case is that of the 1977 steel mill closing in Youngstown, Ohio, which led to the employees' (failed—or foiled) attempt to buy the factory and turn it into a worker cooperative. See Staughton Lynd, *Fight Against Shutdowns: Youngstown's Steel Mill Closings* (San Pedro, California: Singlejack Press, 1982).

they are of more use to management than to ordinary workers, being ways of raising capital and of giving employees a direct stake in the company's success (which is supposed to motivate them to be productive).[1] Gar Alperovitz may be right, however, that in the long run ESOPs have great transformative potential, as employees demand more control over the companies they own.[2]

Recessions and a hostile political environment led to the relative decline of consumer and worker co-ops in the 1980s and, to a lesser extent, the 1990s, but in some areas in the latter decade co-ops began to come together in federations or sponsored the creation of supporting institutions. San Francisco's Network of Bay Area Worker Cooperatives, founded in 1994 to connect dozens of co-ops, is an exemplar of that trend, and it continues to spawn new businesses and affiliate with others. The National Cooperative Bank, chartered by Congress in 1978, provided assistance to cooperatives throughout these years; its total assets as of December 31, 2012 were $1.7 billion.[3] Unfortunately it does not often provide loans to worker cooperatives, focusing instead on consumer co-ops, housing, ESOPs, community development corporations, and sometimes even fast-food chains like Dunkin' Donuts (which qualifies as a business cooperative under NCB's definition).

Recently the prospects for cooperatives in all spheres, all over the world, have become brighter than ever. The United Nations and affiliated institutions have repeatedly proclaimed that cooperatives are a crucial component of the plan to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. From dairy cooperatives in Bangladesh, water cooperatives in Bolivia (to give people access to safe drinking water), and a revitalized consumer cooperative sector in Russia, to tenant takeovers of abandoned housing in New York City[4] and cooperative care of the elderly and disabled in Wisconsin and New York, the movement is making life livable for millions and spreading an anti-capitalist ethos. Indeed, as stated in this book's Introduction, we seem to be in the early stages of a renaissance unlike any in the history of cooperativism.

As will be clear from the following chapter, this renaissance is not some accidental or inexplicable thing. Forty years of savage neoliberal assaults on workers' rights have decimated civil society and discredited conventional approaches to fighting capitalist power. The old paradigm of bureaucratic business unionism, a narrow focus on wages and collective bargaining, and reluctance to fight for broader issues of social justice has failed catastrophically. New strategies are desperately needed and have begun to be pursued, even by such former strongholds of conservatism as the AFL-CIO. Unions that used to follow the motto "We'll get it done ourselves" are now allying with women's groups, immigrant organizations, environmental groups, and community groups of all kinds to fight for mutually beneficial goals like environmental protection, immigrant rights, a higher minimum wage, and improved public education.[5] The innovative strategy of "minority unionism" is spreading: rather than organizing a majority of workers at one business and then holding a vote for union recognition, a minority of workers at multiple businesses are organized to engage in militant, public actions that dramatize grievances, galvanize political action, and hopefully force employers to make concessions while attracting more workers to unionism.[6] Recent strikes at Walmart, in the fast-food industry, and for a 15-dollar federal minimum wage have followed this model. Progressive unions are reaching across national borders to create transnational alliances—a long-delayed necessity in this age of globalization. New models are emerging of "regional power-building," the construction of durable coalitions between unions, local labor councils, progressive business groups, and

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[1] William Foote Whyte et al., *Worker Participation and Ownership: Cooperative Strategies for Strengthening Local Economies* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1983), chapter five.

[2] Gar Alperovitz, *America Beyond Capitalism*, 81–89. Over three thousand ESOP companies are majority-owned by workers, and 40 to 50 percent of these have given voting rights to employees.

[3] National Consumer Cooperative Bank, "Financial Update from the CFO," http://www.ncb.coop/default.aspx?id=4074 (accessed April 30, 2013).

[4] Cooperative ownership is the most common form of apartment ownership in New York. Johnston Birchall and Lou Hammond Kettilson, "Resilience of the Cooperative Business Model in Times of Crisis," 7.

[5] Steven Greenhouse, "AFL-CIO Has Plan to Add Millions of Nonunion Members," *New York Times*, September 6, 2013.

[6] Josh Eidelson, "Walmart Workers Model 'Minority Unionism,'" *The Nation*, December 11, 2012.

other civil society organizations.[1] In this context of free-wheeling experimentation to address labor's woes, the spread of cooperativism and worker ownership is one of the most exciting developments. The sophistication of current projects is striking: in particular, institutions have learned the lesson that nothing is more important than to make connections with each other to birth new co-ops.[2]

For instance, the United Steelworkers union and Mondragon announced in October 2009 that they were collaborating to establish manufacturing cooperatives in the U.S. and Canada, an agreement that USW president Leo Gerard called "a historic first step towards making union co-ops a viable business model."[3] In March 2012, the USW, Mondragon, and the Ohio Employee Ownership Center jointly announced the publication of their detailed template for union co-ops, which sets out an organizational structure that can be replicated by other unions interested in starting co-ops as a way to save jobs and communities. The template is based on Mondragon's structure but with the key innovation that a Union Council (in place of Mondragon's Social Council) is empowered to collectively bargain with the management team on such matters as compensation and working conditions. That is, worker-owners elect a Board of Directors that appoints a management team to oversee the business's day-to-day operations and to engage with the Union Council on matters pertaining to employee rights and welfare. All the members of these bodies are required to be worker-owners themselves. The template, which also includes guidelines on ownership structures, financing, education, training, etc., is flexible enough to be appropriate for businesses of from ten workers to thousands of workers.[4]

The USW, along with SEIU and other unions, is already involved in a number of cooperative initiatives. For instance, it is helping to launch the Pittsburgh Clean and Green Laundry Cooperative, a new industrial laundry that will employ a hundred people. "Under the union-cooperative model," Amy Dean writes, "the laundry's employees would be able to join the union of their choice, and the jobs offered at the plant would provide a living wage, benefits, and a collective bargaining agreement. As worker-owners, the employees would also gain equity in the business."[5] Pennsylvania's Steel Valley Authority, which has been integral to the project, describes its ambitions as follows:

> It would be our intent to create worker ownership initiatives across the Pittsburgh region and examine the potential for expanding this initiative state and region-wide, and over time, explore opportunities for national replication. In order to accomplish this, the SVA is exploring the development of a dedicated center that provides technical assistance, a revolving loan fund that provides early stage capital for new co-op businesses, and a training program that provides specialized training for company leadership....[6]

All these ideas are taken, in part, from Mondragon, which is collaborating with the SVA.

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[1] Amy Dean and David Reynolds, *A New New Deal: How Regional Activism Will Reshape the American Labor Movement* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2009). There is a growing literature on the new progressivism of U.S. unions and the necessity for it. See, e.g., Tamara Kay, *NAFTA and the Politics of Labor Transnationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), which traces this progressivism to the shock of NAFTA. Bill Fletcher Jr. and Fernando Gapasin, *Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path Toward Social Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) is a thoughtful analysis of the crisis in the labor movement and possible solutions to it.

[2] For examples, see Luc Labelle, "Development of Cooperatives and Employee Ownership, Quebec-Style."

[3] Carl Davidson, "'One Worker, One Vote:' US Steelworkers to Experiment with Factory Ownership, Mondragon-Style," *SolidarityEconomy.net*, October 27, 2009, http://www.zcommunications.org/steelworkers-plan-job-creation-via-worker-coops-by-carl-davidson (accessed May 15, 2010).

[4] Rob Witherell, Chris Cooper, and Michael Peck, "Sustainable Jobs, Sustainable Communities: The Union Co-op Model," at http://assets.usw.org/our-union/coops/The-Union-Co-op-Model-March-26-2012.pdf (accessed May 15, 2013).

[5] Amy Dean, "Why Unions Are Going Into the Co-op Business," *Yes! Magazine*, March 5, 2013.

[6] Steel Valley Authority, "Pittsburgh Clean and Green Project," http://www.steelvalley.org/building-sustainable-communities/pittsburgh-cleangreen-project (accessed May 20, 2013).

Another example of the USW's activism is its support of the Cincinnati Union Cooperative Initiative, which is developing a railway manufacturing co-op, a co-op for retrofitting buildings for energy efficiency, and a "food hub" called Our Harvest that allows institutions "to buy produce that is grown, harvested, and packaged by worker-owners." Our Harvest, which is in partnership with the United Food and Commercial Workers union, is already in operation: food is grown on a 30-acre farm in an urban neighborhood, though plans are underway to get a thousand acres' worth of production going.[1]

As Rob Witherell of the USW notes, union-affiliated projects like these are springing up all over the country, from Seattle to New York. "One of the nice problems we have," he says, "is trying to keep track of it all."[2] This "problem" is a happy indication that the U.S. labor movement, in the footsteps of Latin America's, Canada's, and Europe's, is finally starting to take seriously the enormous potential that cooperatives have as both job-saving devices and means of pushing society in a progressive direction. Not since the 1880s, in fact, have mainstream American unions been so actively involved in either worker cooperativism or what has come to be called "social justice unionism" (or "social movement unionism").[3]

One of the success stories that has inspired this recent flurry of activism is the Evergreen Cooperative Initiative in Cleveland, Ohio. So successful has it been that in 2010 it was featured on NBC Nightly News, which glowingly reviewed its efforts to revitalize an impoverished community on the east side of the city; it has also been the subject of articles in the *Economist*, *Business Week*, the *Nation*, *Time*, and dozens of less prominent media outlets. The reason for all this hype is that it has provided a new and ambitious model for reversing economic decline in a blighted area of the Rust Belt. The project came to fruition in 2008 when several local institutions (including the Cleveland Foundation, University Hospitals, Case Western Reserve University, and the municipal government) teamed up with the Ohio Employee Ownership Center and the Democracy Collaborative at the University of Maryland to establish a network of worker-owned businesses modeled on Mondragon's federated structure. The goal was, and is, to create ten co-ops and five hundred living-wage jobs for local residents. With the help of millions of dollars in grants, three businesses had been created as of 2013: Evergreen Cooperative Laundry, Evergreen Energy Solutions, and Green City Growers Cooperative (supposedly the largest urban food-producing greenhouse in the country). Technologically these are cutting-edge enterprises, committed to being the greenest firms within their sectors. They are also very profitable, in part because they've attracted the business of hospitals and other local "anchor institutions" that are trying to reduce their carbon footprint (and keep their money within the community). To help start new co-ops, each of the businesses is required to pay ten percent of its pre-tax profits into a Cooperative Development Fund—a practice that is modeled, again, on Mondragon.[4]

Another striking fact about cooperatives in the twenty-first century is that they are faring comparatively well in our stagnant economy, on average better than capitalist businesses. An ILO report in 2009 concluded that "Financial cooperatives remain financially sound; consumer cooperatives are reporting increased turnover; worker cooperatives are seeing growth as people choose the cooperative form of enterprise to respond to new economic realities."[5] Cooperative banks, not being driven purely by the profit-motive, had little incentive to give risky loans; 2008 was in fact a record year in many respects for credit unions, some of which are among the largest banks in the world. Regarding other types of cooperatives,

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[1] Amy Dean, "Why Unions Are Going Into the Co-op Business."

[2] Steve Dubb, "Interview with Rob Witherell: Representative, United Steelworkers," *Truth-Out.org*, April 9, 2013, http://truth-out.org/news/item/15626-interview-with-rob-witherell-representative-united-steelworkers-usw (accessed May 20, 2013).

[3] For more illustrations of the rapprochement between cooperatives and unions, see Dan Bell, "Worker-Owners and Unions: Why Can't We Just Get Along?"

[4] The Evergreen website, at http://evergreencooperatives.com/, has links to many articles describing how the model works. See also Gar Alperovitz, Thad Williamson, and Ted Howard, "The Cleveland Model," *The Nation*, March 1, 2010.

[5] Birchall and Kettilson, "Resilience of the Cooperative Business Model in Times of Crisis," 2.

there has lately been an increase in their formation rates, and, as noted earlier, they have tended to last longer than conventional businesses.[1]

A 2012 study by the (cumbersomely named) European Confederation of Worker Cooperatives, Social Cooperatives and Social and Participative Enterprises reaches similar conclusions. The record has not been uniformly positive across Europe, but in general cooperatives have been more resilient than conventional enterprises. Their members mostly attribute this fact to the "participation of members in the management of the cooperative, the build-up of reserve funds, the connection with territorial needs and the participation of the community, the capacity to organise and follow-up business transfers to employees, mutual aid and horizontal groups and consortia among cooperatives. In particular, the establishment of horizontal groups and consortia is considered by members as being an important instrument to support innovation and competitiveness for small and medium sized worker and social cooperatives."[2] The number of worker cooperatives in the UK actually increased during the crisis, from 373 in 2007 to 541 in 2011. In March 2013 the *Financial Times* had an article titled "Economic crisis spawns co-op revival," which observed that the total number of cooperatives had risen by 23 percent since 2008, about the same rate as their growth of revenue.[3]

One of the lessons of such developments is that as oppressed people and their advocates find traditional avenues of reform closed to them, they will be forced to invent revolutionary new solutions such as worker cooperatives. This is what the Latina immigrants in Natural Home Cleaning and Home Green Home Natural Cleaning have done, as well as those involved in the emerging New York City Co-op Network,[4] and the Evergreen cooperators and many others. They have all been stymied in their attempts to seek help through conventional channels. Economic outcasts like these will continue for decades to network with each other outside the mainstream, accumulating resources on behalf of cooperativism, building up an alternative civil society alongside a decaying capitalist order. The system itself will drive them to these extremes; it will produce its own gravediggers as it collapses in old age. And the long, tragic history of cooperatives will finally be consummated: it will be rescued and celebrated as a glorious harbinger.

CHAPTER FOUR
MARXISM AND THE ALTERNATIVE ECONOMY

The death of Marxism has been announced so many times that it might seem anachronistic to reconsider Marx's ideas yet again. In the early twenty-first century haven't we moved beyond Marxism? The answer, it seems, is no. For one thing, in recent years even the mainstream media has suggested that the ghost of Marx is haunting the world. Articles are published with headlines like "Why Marx was Right"[5] and "Marx's Revenge: How Class Struggle Is Shaping the World,"[6] and mainstream economists like Paul Krugman and Nouriel Roubini invoke Marxism to explain capitalism's current crisis. Radical thinkers such as David Harvey and Richard Wolff have become academic celebrities, and magazines like *Monthly Review* and *Jacobin* are becoming more popular. In fact, the Pew Research Center reported in 2011 that among Americans aged 18 to 29, 49 percent have a positive view of socialism whereas 46 percent have a positive view of capitalism.[7] It seems, then, that reports of Marx's death have been greatly exaggerated.

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[1] Ibid., 29.

[2] Bruno Roelants et al., *The Resilience of the Cooperative Model* (CECOP-CICOPA Europe, 2012), 14, http://www.cecop.coop/IMG/pdf/report_cecop_2012_en_web.pdf (accessed November 30, 2013).

[3] Andrew Bounds, "Economic crisis spawns co-op revival," *Financial Times*, March 15, 2013.

[4] Michael Johnson, "A Network of Cooperatives Gets Organized in New York City: Low-income and immigrant workers well-represented," *Grassroots Economic Organizing* (GEO) Newsletter, vol. II, issue 5 (2010), http://www.geo.coop/node/435 (accessed May 18, 2010).

[5] Francis Wheen, *Financial Times*, March 27, 2011.

[6] Michael Schuman, *Time*, March 25, 2013.

[7] Alexander Eichler, "Young People More Likely To Favor Socialism Than Capitalism: Pew," *The Huffington Post*, December 29, 2011.

It is worth asking why Marxism is so resilient. On the most basic level, the answer is that class struggle is indeed of central and perennial importance to human life. Since the emergence of social classes thousands of years ago, individuals' and groups' access to resources has been determined primarily by their positions in particular relations of production (or a "mode of production")—and of course access to resources is of unique importance to life, since it essentially determines one's ability to survive and to influence what happens in society. The way that economic production has worked since class structures emerged is that certain classes of people have, through various methods of "hard" and "soft" power, forced others to work for them, or rather to produce a surplus that can be appropriated by the privileged or those with power. Whether people have been *aware* of "forcing" others to work—or of being forced to work—is irrelevant; the point is that the system has functioned in such a way that some people have had to be slaves, serfs, wage-laborers, etc., while others have been slaveowners, landed aristocrats, capitalists, etc.—i.e., have profited off others' labor (due to asymmetrical power relations). Exploiters and exploited have thus confronted each other in a perpetual struggle, sometimes implicit and sometimes explicit, to have more power and resources. The profound explanatory power of this analytic framework explains why academic Marxism has for decades been relatively prominent even in a capitalist society.

Incidentally, a corollary of this emphasis on class struggle and class interests is equally valid: at least if *explanation* is one's goal, it is more fruitful to analyze "social being" than "consciousness." The former is more fundamental than the latter, in part because consciousness tends to be a sublimation of social being. That is to say, ideologies, "discourses," subjective identities, thoughts and conceptions of all kinds are conditioned by such non-discursive things as economic realities, institutional imperatives (the need to follow the rules of given social structures), physical environments, and the basic necessities of biological survival to a far greater degree than the latter are conditioned by the former. This is true of both individuals and collectivities. For example, people in a particular social category will tend to have beliefs that legitimate their economic interests and institutional roles. Slaveowners may well believe that slavery is moral or divinely ordained; intellectuals will probably think that ideas or "discourses" are of tremendous importance;[1] capitalists will be prone to thinking that capitalism and greed are natural and good. But even if some people manage to be more mentally independent than the majority, that doesn't matter much, because there are still overwhelming pressures for their *behavior* to conform to social structures and institutional norms. And these are situated in a material and economic context that is, on a broad scale, structured around the power and interests of a "ruling class" (consisting of those who occupy the dominant positions in a society's dominant mode of production).

Thus, on the societal level too, consciousness and ideas are secondary to the configuration of production relations, the resultant distribution of resources, and institutional structures in general. Ideologies will tend to predominate that either legitimate or are compatible with the interests of those people who have the most control over the most resources, i.e., the ruling class. As Marx said, "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas."[2] True understanding of social dynamics, therefore, necessarily exists on a materialist foundation.[3]

Aside from these general considerations, the obvious reason why Marxism keeps reappearing in the broader culture is that Marx was basically right in his analysis of capitalism: the economy is prone to crisis, class polarization has a pronounced tendency to increase (unless held in check by other forces), the working class tends to be relatively or absolutely immiserated, people in general are commodified and dehumanized in capitalist society, commodities are "fetishized," and so forth. In fact, all it takes is an

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[1] For critiques of postmodern idealism, see my *Notes of an Underground Humanist* (Booklocker, 2013).

[2] Needless to say, this pat formula is of less use with regard to eras in which two or more classes are contending for supremacy, such as during the eighteenth century in Western Europe.

[3] For a study that shows the power of such a materialist analysis, see Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, *Right Turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986). Charles Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913) is a still-compelling classic. The political writings and interview collections of Noam Chomsky (*Understanding Power* is an easy-to-read example) likewise demonstrate the persuasiveness, indeed the commonsensicalness, of materialism.

unbiased mind to see that Marxian perspectives on all facets of capitalism are extraordinarily penetrating: the writings of E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, Paul Sweezy, Paul Baran, Ernest Mandel, Harry Braverman, David Montgomery, Robert Brenner, David Noble, Erik Olin Wright, Göran Therborn, Thomas Ferguson, David Harvey, John Bellamy Foster, and numerous other academic Marxists of the last sixty years are sufficient to prove this. And of course there are the writings of Marx and Engels themselves to consider, as well as of the second generation of Marxists (roughly Lenin's generation). In short, there is no question that Marxism is here to stay.

Given the unique power of this intellectual system, it is wholly justified to reconsider what is perhaps its weakest aspect, its theory of revolution. Marxists have traditionally been hostile to cooperatives as a tool of revolution, but as we'll see, a properly understood Marxism is in fact strategically *committed* to cooperatives. Even more importantly, a reconsideration and modification of Marx's theory of revolution will enable us to understand how a transition to socialism, or something like it, can happen, and what role cooperatives and other "alternative economy" institutions will play in that transition.

These are big topics, and the discussion in this chapter will necessarily be both wide-ranging and schematic. There isn't space to go into the detail I'd like. Still, lest the reader lose the thread of the argument in the thicket of ideas, I'll outline it here. The main point that ties it all together is that I reject Marx's statism, and I do so for reasons that I think are more faithful to Marxism than his own statist conception of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" is. I find it astonishing, in fact, that, as far as I know, no one has ever appreciated the radically *un-Marxian* character of that conception, the fact that it doesn't follow logically from the basic premises of Marxism. Quite the contrary: as I'll argue in chapter six—though it is also implicit in this chapter—the spirit of anarcho-syndicalism is much closer to the essence of Marx's thought than Leninism and statism are. This isn't just an academic debate, by the way. For one thing, Marxists should know what they are logically committed to, and in what respects Marx got his own ideas wrong. It's also important to cleanse and update the theoretical system in order to keep it a *living force*, to salvage its insights and put them to use in our own urgent struggles. It seems to me that intellectual integrity is a virtue, and ideas can have powerful practical repercussions.

My rejection of Marx's statism, i.e., his adherence (despite his internationalism) to the framework of the nation-state, leads to my argument that only in the twenty-first century are we finally entering the revolutionary period Marx and Engels looked forward to. That is, they got the timeline wrong: international socialist revolution never could have happened in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, for reasons I explain later. Their impatience got the best of them. Only now is the nation-state system *beginning* to deteriorate—and global revolution could never have happened before this deterioration started. In part to explain why this is the case, and what it is about our contemporary world that makes it so much more pregnant with transnational revolutionary potential than the world of, say, a hundred years ago was, I briefly review the "historical logic" of the evolution of capitalism and the nation-state into the neoliberal present. On the most abstract level, one can view the last 150 years or so in the West as consisting of, first, a relatively "pure" and "unregulated" capitalism that, through the conflicts it engendered between labor and capital (and the resultant economic crises of "underconsumption" and "overproduction"), necessitated the birth of the regulated Keynesian welfare state, in the heyday of the nation-state era between the 1930s and 1960s. This period was the interregnum, so to speak, between the first era of semi-"pure" capitalism and the second, which began in the mid-1970s and has continued to the present. As before, the relative lack of government economic regulation and the disempowerment of organized labor are leading to extreme social discontent and economic crisis/stagnation. This time, however, the old nationalist Keynesian "compromise" is not a possible solution, because the nation-state system is succumbing to the disintegrating effects of transnational capital.

So, the current decline of the nation is the world-historic development that, together with the emerging period of global economic stagnation, will make possible a (very protracted) social revolution—centered not around national states but around grassroots movements, municipal democratic experiments, regional networking, and transnational coordination of anti-capitalist resistance. It was always inevitable that *this* was how the revolution would happen, as opposed to un-Marxist fantasies of the working class

taking over national states and directing economic reconstruction from above. Such a proletarian dictatorship has never happened and never can happen, as follows from the premises of Marxism itself.

After setting out this theoretical framework, I consider its implications in practice. My focus this time isn't on worker cooperatives, since I discuss those in other chapters, but on things like municipal enterprise and participatory budgeting. I argue that these are the seeds of the new economy, the post-capitalist society that will germinate in the next century or two. After reviewing a few of these initiatives, I conclude the chapter by considering why states and ruling classes will allow—indeed, are allowing—the "revolution" to happen despite its anti-capitalist character. Throughout the discussion, I try to draw parallels with the earlier transition in Western Europe from feudalism to capitalism. I think that if we examine that earlier revolution carefully, we'll find clues as to how the future will unfold.

This chapter is necessarily dense; it could itself be expanded into a book or two. Its main purpose, again, is just to sketch a framework by which we can interpret the recent and future growth of alternative economic arrangements in the interstices of a decaying civilization. I'll leave it to a future book to fill in the details.

Theory

Marx has, in effect, two theories of revolution, one that applies only to the transition from capitalism to socialism and another that is more transhistorical, applying, for instance, also to the earlier transition between feudalism and capitalism. I will consider, and revise, each of these in turn. Both see the working class as the agent of transition to a post-capitalist economy. Whatever Marx meant by "working class," in the following discussion I will interpret the term broadly, as denoting the majority of wage-earners—except those whose high income, high managerial positions, ownership of stocks, and so on effectively align them with the capitalist rather than the working class. It has long been known that many people in modern society, especially those in the "middle class," have contradictory class locations, sharing some interests with capitalists and others with low-wage workers. This is what makes it possible for the middle class sometimes to act in radical ways and other times in reactionary ways.[1] Typically, in fact, the middle class has been the conservative bastion of social order; nevertheless, the wage-earning status of most of its members always holds out the possibility that someday they will act in radical opposition to those who own capital. If they lose their middle-class status, whether through economic crisis or some other cause, this possibility becomes more likely.

Among the people who will or can serve as the agents of transition to a new society are, for example, industrial workers, clerical workers, low-wage service workers, a majority of teachers, the unemployed, and in general those people who are relatively disempowered by corporate capitalism or have grievances that can be remedied by a dismantling of capitalism. This category of people in fact also includes others whom Marx would probably not consider working-class: most students, peasants, dispossessed indigenous peoples, even environmental activists (for such activism is really part of the class struggle, the struggle against the predatory capitalist class). All these people and more, the totality of whom amounts to the large majority of humanity, have interests opposed to the profit-making, environmentally destructive, humanly exploitative, universally commodifying, undemocratic imperatives of corporate capital, and therefore are effectively the "workers of the world" whom Marx called to "unite." This is how we should interpret his call in the twenty-first century.

Let's consider, then, the basics of his theory of how capitalism will gave way to socialism. The pivot of the theory is capital's unquenchable thirst for profit, for surplus-value. It seeks always to squeeze more surplus-value out of the worker, which is to say value for which the worker does not receive an

[1] See, e.g., Robert Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive-era Portland, Oregon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: Norton, 1991); and Lewis Corey, *The Crisis of the Middle Class* (New York: Covici Friede, 1935).

equivalent in wages.[1] This entails the reduction of wages to as low a level as possible (given societal conditions, workers' power, the skill-level of the job, etc.) and the intensification of work to as high a level as possible. Capital invests its earnings in labor-saving, money-saving schemes like mechanization, ever-increasing mechanization so as to employ fewer workers, especially fewer skilled ones, control them more effectively, and generate more profit. At the same time, it expands its operations and puts less profitable competitors out of business. These failed competitors—who historically have included artisans, craftsmen, much of the petty-bourgeoisie, and many capitalists themselves—are forced to become wage-earners as the relatively few surviving capitalists acquire more money and power. Most of the peasantry, too, is eventually forced off the land through myriad pressures of "push" and "pull," swelling the ranks of the working class. The "reserve army of the unemployed" also tends to grow, in part because periodic economic crises throw people out of work and shutter unprofitable businesses. Without delving into Marxian economics, we can say that these are typically crises of overproduction and/or underconsumption, the latter a product of the endemic drive to lower wages and employ as few workers as possible. That is, low effective demand leads to disincentives for business to invest and incentives to cut costs, which means laying off workers and paying them less, thus aggravating the macroeconomic problem.[2] The end-result of all these tendencies, at least according to Marx's ideal model, is that the working class and the unemployed population become larger and poorer, while the capitalist class gets smaller (at least relatively) and wealthier. Society becomes increasingly divided into two polarized classes. Workers' self-interest and collective grievances impel them to fight together for their power and dignity: they form unions and other associations, some of them political, that train them in struggle and radicalize them. Because their demands can ultimately not be met in the framework of capitalism, at length they seek to take over the state so as to remake the economy along democratic, i.e. socialist, lines. Marx thinks that eventually they are destined to succeed, if only because of their overwhelming numbers and their decades of organizing themselves.

To repeat, this is an ideal model and therefore, like all models, a simplification. The question is how closely it resembles reality. The answer appears to be: in some respects very much so, in others not. In particular, the analysis of how capitalism works seems clearly to be an accurate, if idealized, model of definite tendencies in the real world. On the other hand, the prediction of radicalization of the masses—their increasing class-consciousness—and eventual overthrow of the bourgeois state seems not to have been fulfilled. Before considering these matters in greater depth, however, I'll describe Marx's "second" theory of revolution, the transhistorical theory.

Its *locus classicus* is the last four sentences of the following paragraph from Marx's Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

> In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their

[1] This controversial theory of surplus-value is really nothing but common sense, like most of Marxism. If workers were compensated for all the value they produce (which then goes on the market), the capitalist couldn't make any profit. On Marxian economics, see, among innumerable others, Ernest Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory* (London: The Merlin Press, 1968); Paul Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development: Principles of Marxian Political Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1942); David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*

[2] See, e.g., David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Richard Du Boff, *Accumulation and Power: An Economic History of the United States* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1989). On the concept of overproduction, see Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (New York: Verso, 2006). He departs from orthodox Marxian economics, though.

> consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or—this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms—with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.

There are several problems with this theory as expressed here. First of all, it is clearly the barest of outlines, desperately in need of elaboration. Unfortunately, nowhere in Marx's writings does he elaborate it in a rigorous way. Second, it is stated in functionalist terms. Revolution happens supposedly because the productive forces—i.e., technology, scientific knowledge, the state of education, and so forth—have evolved to such a point that production relations are no longer compatible with their socially efficient use and development. But what are the *causal mechanisms* that connect this functionalist concept of "fettering of the productive forces" to social revolution? As far as I know, nowhere does Marx express his theory in causal, as opposed to functionalist, terms.

Perhaps the biggest problem is that, as it's stated above, the theory borders on meaninglessness. How does one determine when production relations have started to impede the use and development of productive forces? It would seem that to some extent they are *always* doing so. In capitalism, for example, one could point to the following facts: (1) recurring recessions and depressions periodically make useless much of society's productive capacity; (2) enormous amounts of resources are wasted on socially useless advertising and marketing campaigns; (3) there is a lack of incentives for capital to invest in public goods like mass transit, the provision of free education, and public parks; (4) the recent financialization of the Western economy has entailed investment not in the improvement of infrastructure but in glorified gambling that doesn't benefit society; (5) artificial obstacles such as intellectual copyright laws hinder the development and diffusion of knowledge and technology; (6) a colossal level of expenditures is devoted to war and destructive military technology; (7) in general, capitalism distributes resources in a profoundly irrational way, such that, for example, hundreds of millions of people starve while a few become multi-billionaires. Despite all this, however, no revolution has happened.

Indeed, in other respects capitalism continues to develop productive forces in a striking way, as shown by recent momentous advances in information technology. It's true that—contrary to the fantasies of "free market" fanatics—this technology was originally developed in the state sector; nevertheless, the broader economic and social context was and is that of capitalism. It is therefore clear that a mode of production can "fetter" and "develop" productive forces *at the same time*, a fact Marx didn't acknowledge.

In order to salvage his hypothesis quoted above, and in fact to make it quite useful, a subtle revision is necessary. We have to replace his idea of a conflict between productive forces and production relations with that of a conflict between two sets of production relations, one of which uses productive forces in a more rational and "un-fettering" way than the other. This change, slight as it might seem, has major consequences for the Marxist theory of revolution. It is no exaggeration to say that, in addition to making the theory logically and empirically cogent, it changes its entire orientation, from advocating a "dictatorship of the proletariat" that directs social and economic reconstruction to advocating a more grassroots-centered long-term evolution of social movements that remake the economy and society from the ground up. I will also argue that my revision makes the theory more compatible with the basic premises of Marxism itself, and that a statist version of Marxism, such as Leninism, is both un-Marxist and unrealistic.

My revision to the theory, then, is simply that at certain moments in history, new forces and relations of production evolve in an older economic and social framework, undermining it from within. For different reasons in different cases, the new production relations spread throughout the society, gradually overturning the traditional economic, social, political, and cultural relations, until a more or less new society has evolved. This happened, for example, with the Neolithic Revolution (or Agricultural Revolution), which started around 12,000 years ago. As knowledge and techniques of agriculture developed that made possible sedentary populations, the hunter-gatherer mode of production withered away, as did the ways of life appropriate to it.

Likewise, starting around the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in parts of Europe, an economy and society organized around manorialism and feudalism began to succumb to an economy centered around the accumulation of capital. Several factors contributed to this process, among them (1) the revival of long-distance trade (after centuries of Europe's relative isolation from the rest of the world), which stimulated the growth of merchant capitalism in the urban interstices of the feudal order; (2) mercantile support for the growth of the nation-state with a strong central authority that could dismantle feudal restrictions to trade and integrated markets; (3) the rise, particularly in England, of a class of agrarian capitalists who took advantage of new national and international markets (e.g., for wool) by investing in improved cultivation methods and enclosing formerly communal lands to use them for pasturage; (4) the partly resultant migration of masses of the peasantry to cities, where, during the centuries from the sixteenth to the nineteenth, they added greatly to the class of laborers who could be used in manufacturing; (5) the discovery of the Americas, which further stimulated commerce and the accumulation of wealth. In short, from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries, capitalist classes—agrarian, mercantile, financial, and industrial—emerged in Europe, aided by technological innovations such as the printing press and then, later on, by all the technologies that were made possible by the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century. All this is just to say that in the womb of the old society, new productive forces and production relations evolved that were more dynamic and wealth-generating than earlier ones. Moreover, on the foundation of these new technologies, economic relations, and scientific discourses arose new social, political, and cultural relations and ideologies that were propagated by the most dynamic groups with the most resources, i.e., the bourgeoisie and its intellectual hangers-on.[1]

It's true that numerous political clashes had to occur before the rising bourgeoisie could achieve hegemony over Europe. Both the feudal aristocracy and absolutist monarchies opposed the bourgeois doctrines of economic and political liberalism, such that a series of revolutions was necessary before the bourgeoisie could accede to political power. The point relevant to the following discussion is that once capitalist economic relations had reached a relatively mature and widespread level, the ultimate political victories of the capitalist class were nearly inevitable, if only because of this class's continuing growth and access to more resources than its opponents had. Furthermore, it was *only* when capitalist relations had already made significant progress that bourgeois political revolutions were possible.

We should apply the lessons of the transition from feudalism to capitalism to the future transition from capitalism to some other system. This, too, will have to happen in a very gradual way, as new production relations sprout in the "interstices" of a decaying order. Briefly stated, one can expect that capitalism's descent into long-term crisis (or stagnation) will generate—or rather, is generating—movements of resistance across the world, many of which will be devoted to establishing new cooperative modes of production and distribution that will assist millions of the unemployed and the cast-off in their tasks of survival. Explicitly political anti-capitalist resistance will spread too, but it cannot possibly attain the summits of political power without having command over tremendous resources, sufficient resources to compete against the ruling class. An important way of acquiring such resources is by accumulating capital through business activities, such as cooperatives and other "alternative economy" institutions do. Thus, just as the bourgeoisie could not achieve power before the capitalist economy had conquered much of Europe, so the working class cannot take over political power (on a broad scale) before its own economic institutions, its "socialist" institutions, have partially remade the world economy. Sooner or later, durable alliances will have to be made between the alternative economy and political movements if the latter are to

[1] Among many others, see Phyllis Deane, *The First Industrial Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Robert Brenner, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism," *New Left Review* I/104, July-August 1977, 25-92; Rodney Hilton, ed., *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1976); T. S. Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986); Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (New York: Verso, 1994); and Robert Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

succeed in their ultimate objectives. On a global level this process can be expected to take at least a century or two.

Before examining these ideas in more detail, it's worth reviewing the advantages of the revision I've made to Marx's theory of revolution. Again, my argument is just that social revolution happens when an old set of production relations fetters—or irrationally uses—productive forces *in relation to a new set of widely emerging production relations*. The "in relation to...." that I have added saves the theory from meaninglessness, for it indicates a definite point at which the "old" society really begins to yield to the "new" one, namely when an emergent economy has evolved to the point that it commands substantial resources and is clearly more "rational" in some sense than the old economy. Whether this hypothesis applies to *all* social revolutions is a question I won't consider here; the point is that it does apply to some, and it will surely apply to any transition between capitalism and cooperativism. (See below.)

Another advantage of my revision is that it supplies a causal mechanism by which a particular mode of production's "fettering of the productive forces" leads to revolution—indeed, to *successful* revolution. The mechanism is that the emergent mode of production, in being less dysfunctional and/or more "efficient" than the dominant mode, eventually (after reaching a certain visibility in the society) attracts vast numbers of adherents who participate in it and propagandize for it—especially if the social context is one of general economic stagnation and class polarization, due to the dominant mode of production's dysfunctionality. Moreover, this latter fact means that, after a long evolution, the emergent economic relations and their institutional partisans will have access to so many resources that they will be able to triumph economically and politically over the reactionary partisans of the old, deteriorating economy. Again, this is what ultimately ensured the political success of the bourgeoisie in its confrontations with the feudal aristocracy. Similarly, if capitalism continues to stagnate and experience manifold crises, this will ensure the global victory of a cooperative mode of production that will have developed over generations in the interstices of capitalist society.

So, in short, my revision provides a necessary condition for the success of an anti-capitalist revolution, and thus, as we'll see in a moment, helps explain why no anti-capitalist revolution so far has been successful in the long term (namely because the condition has been absent). Another way of seeing the implications and advantages of the revision is by contrasting it with the views of orthodox Marxists. A single sentence from Friedrich Engels sums up these views: "The proletariat seizes state power, and then transforms the means of production into state property."[1] This statement, approved by Lenin and apparently also by Marx, encapsulates the mistaken statist perspective of the orthodox Marxist conception of proletarian revolution. This perspective is briefly described in the *Communist Manifesto*, where Marx writes "The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class," and then lays out a ten-point plan of social reconstruction by means of state decrees. .... It's true that orthodox Marxists expect the state, "as a state," to wither away eventually, but they do have a statist point of view in relation to the early stages of revolution.

This statist vision emerges naturally from both of Marx's theories of revolution discussed above: from the first one, because Marx simply assumes that the main task of the working class is to take over the national state (i.e., all national states), and that in the long run its efforts will be devoted to this task; from the second, because the idea of a conflict between the rational use and development of productive forces and the fettering nature of current production relations suggests that at some point a social "explosion" will occur whereby the productive forces are finally liberated from the chains of the irrational mode of production. Pressure builds up, so to speak, over many years, as the mode of production keeps fettering the socially rational use of technology and scientific knowledge; through the agency of the working class, the productive forces struggle against the shackles of economic relations; at length they burst free, when the working class takes over the state and reorganizes the economy. These are the metaphors naturally conjured by the paragraph quoted above from the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

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[1] Quoted in Lenin, *State and Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1969), 15.

But there are logical and empirical problems with the statist view, the view according to which the substance of social revolution occurs *after* the seizure of state power. First of all, it is in tension with the Marxian conception of social dynamics. Briefly stated, Marx sees the economy—rightly, I think—as the relative foundation of the rest of society, including politics, which suggests that a post-capitalist social revolution cannot be politically willed and imposed. This would seem to reverse the order of "dominant causality," from politics to the economy rather than vice versa. Moreover, such extreme statism exalts *will* as determining human affairs, a notion that is quite incompatible with the dialectical spirit of Marxism. History really happens "behind the backs" of actors: it evolves "unconsciously," so to speak, as Hegel understood. Social and institutional conflicts work themselves out, slowly, through the actions of large numbers of people who generally have little idea of the true historical significance of their acts. As Marx said, we should never trust the self-interpretations of historical actors. And yet apparently he suspends this injunction, and his whole dialectical method, when it comes to the so-called proletarian revolution. *These* historical actors are somehow supposed to have perfect understanding of themselves and their place in history, and their historical designs are supposed to work out perfectly and straightforwardly—despite the massive complexity and "dialectical contradictions" of society.

The reality is that if "the working class" or its ostensible representatives seize control of the state in a predominantly capitalist society—and if, miraculously, they aren't crushed by the forces of reaction—they can expect to face overwhelming obstacles to the realization of their revolutionary plans. Some of these obstacles are straightforward: for example, divisions among the new ruling elite, divisions within the working class itself (which is not a unitary entity), popular resistance to plans to remake the economy, the necessity for brutal authoritarian methods of rule in order to force people to accept the new government's plans, the inevitable creation of a large bureaucracy to carry out so-called reconstruction, etc. Fundamental to all these obstacles is the fact that the revolutionaries have to contend with the institutional legacies of capitalism: relations of coercion and domination condition everything the government does, and there is no way to break free of them. They cannot be magically transcended through political will. In particular, it is impossible through top-down directives to transform production relations from authoritarian to democratic; Marxism itself suggests that the state is not socially creative in this way. The hope to reorganize exploitative relations of production into liberatory, democratic relations by means of bureaucracy and the exercise of a unitary political will is utterly utopian and un-Marxist.

The record of so-called Communist revolutions in the twentieth century is instructive. While one can expect some Marxists to deny that lessons should be drawn from these revolutions, since they happened in relatively primitive rather than advanced capitalist countries, the experiences are at least suggestive. For what they created in their respective societies was not socialism (workers' democratic control of production) or communism (a classless, stateless, moneyless society of anarchistic democracy) but a kind of ultra-statist state capitalism. To quote Richard Wolff, "the internal organization of the vast majority of industrial enterprises [in Communist countries] remained capitalist. The productive workers continued in all cases to produce surpluses: they added more in value by their labor than what they received in return for that labor. Their surpluses were in all cases appropriated and distributed by others."[1] Workers continued to be viciously exploited and oppressed, as in capitalism; the accumulation of capital continued to be the overriding systemic imperative, to which human needs were subordinated. While there are specific historical reasons for the way these economies developed, the general underlying condition was that it was and is impossible to transcend the capitalist framework if the political revolution takes place in a capitalist world, ultimately because the economy dominates politics more than political will can dominate the economy.

In any case, it was and is breathtakingly utopian to think that an attempted seizing of the state in an advanced and still overwhelmingly capitalist country, however crisis-ridden its economy, could ever succeed, because the ruling class has a virtual monopoly over the most sophisticated and destructive means of violence available in the world. Even rebellions in relatively primitive countries have almost always been crushed, first because the ruling classes *there* had disproportionate access to means of violence, and second

[1] Richard Wolff, *Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 109.

because the ruling classes in more advanced countries could send their even more sophisticated instruments of warfare to these countries in order to put down the revolution. But if a massive rebellion happened in one of the core capitalist nations, as opposed to a peripheral one, the reaction of ruling classes worldwide would be nearly apocalyptic. They would prefer the nuclear destruction of civilization to permitting the working class or some subsection of it to take over a central capitalist state.

My revision of Marx's theory of revolution avoids all these problems while still retaining key insights about the inevitable causes of revolution. It's obvious that any transition to a new society, if carried out largely through the agency of the oppressed masses (which it will have to be), will be a consequence of capitalism's socially irrational distribution of resources and fettering of the productive and democratic potential of current "forces of production." If used sensibly, there is no question that modern wealth, technology, and scientific know-how could make possible adequate shelter, sustenance, and security for billions more people than currently enjoy them. An anti-capitalist revolution will be motivated by the imperative to redress these (and other) inequalities and injustices, and it will necessarily take the form of instituting new, more democratic property and production relations. Whether such a revolution is "inevitable," as Marx and Engels arguably believed, is a question I will consider later. I will also consider the reasons why the state and the ruling class will allow a revolution of the "gradual" sort I have described to happen. The point is that the only possible way—and the only *Marxist* way—for a transition out of capitalism to occur is that it be grounded in, and organized on the basis of, the new, gradually and widely emerging production relations themselves. This is the condition that has been absent in all attempts at revolution so far, and it explains why, aside from a few isolated pockets of momentary socialism (such as Catalonia in 1936), they never managed to transcend a kind of state capitalism. They existed in a capitalist world, so they were constrained by the institutional limits of that world.

Ironically, Marx understood that this would be the case unless the revolution was international. He understood that "socialism in one country" is impossible. He knew that unless a revolution in Russia triggered or coincided with revolutions elsewhere, which on an international scale worked together, so to speak, to build a socialist mode of production, it was doomed to failure. What he didn't understand was that the only way a revolution can be international is that it happen in a similar way to the centuries-long "bourgeois revolution" in Europe and North America, namely by sprouting first on the local level, the municipal level, the regional level, and expanding on that "grassroots" basis. The hope that the states and ruling classes of many nations can fall at approximately the same time to a succession of national uprisings of workers—which is the only way that Marx's conception of revolution can come to pass—is wildly unrealistic, again because of the nature of capitalist power dynamics that Marxism itself clarifies.

Indeed, only recently has capitalism attained the truly globalized condition that Marx assumed was a necessary prerequisite for revolution. While there are good reasons to say that the USSR and Communist China before the 1980s or 1990s were in some respects state capitalist, their "capitalism" was very different from the competitive, market-driven system that is impelled by economic logic to expand and spread its dominion over the planet. *This* capitalism, which Wolff calls "private [as opposed to state] capitalism," has only in the last thirty-five years spread to huge areas of the world that had for a long time managed to hold it at bay. In addition to China, the USSR, and Eastern Europe, much of Latin America and Africa until the 1990s remained outside the domain of classical capitalist relations of production, defined by the presence of a mass of people who own nothing but their labor-power and are consequently forced to seek employment with those who own the means of production. The absence of these production relations was the result of many factors, for instance popular and elite reactions (such as, in some respects, the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920 and its aftermath) against the predatory liberal capitalism and imperialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[1] In other cases, such as parts of Central America, it was the result of international capitalism's *shoring up* domestic semi-serfdom, by means of the peculiar incentive

[1] See Alan Knight, "The Mexican Revolution: Bourgeois? Nationalist? Or just a 'Great Rebellion?'" *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 4 (1985): 1-37; Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and Leslie Bethell, ed., *Mexico Since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

structures created by "merchant capitalism" and the international division of labor (whereby some countries export raw materials, others export finished products).[1] Finally by the 1980s and 1990s, all this semi-capitalism, semi-feudalism, peasant resistance to proletarianization, state ownership of industries, and so on gave way to neoliberal offensives of privatization and marketization, such that the capitalist mode of production and its corresponding property relations have by now virtually conquered the world and are creating a truly global "proletariat" (or "precariat").[2] As they do so, resistance spreads and intensifies.

In order to understand what is likely to happen in the next fifty or a hundred years, it's useful to contextualize the historical moment we're living in. And to properly understand its context, it helps to resurrect an old, currently unfashionable idea, viz. that there is a kind of *logic* to history. That is, we should return to Marx's Hegelian notion that history, on the broadest scale, unfolds according to a certain "necessity," which is always evident in retrospect. This idea is commonly rejected nowadays, even by some Marxists, for two main reasons: first, it seems to deny that individuals have the power to shape history, that they are active agents in the historical process, instead treating them as mere tools of an impersonal historical "Reason"; second, it seems to valorize this Reason as being synonymous with "Progress" in some quasi-moral sense, implying (supposedly) that, e.g., the rise of Europe in modern times was both inevitable and good, and that people—artisans, workers, peasants—who resisted such things as industrial capitalism were benighted and backward, the enemies of progress. The result of these misinterpretations is that few writers now are interested in excavating the structural tendencies, the dialectical self-undermining, the logic of "the emergence of the new within the shell of the old" by which historical phases have yielded to their successors. Radical authors like Richard Wolff, David Schweickart, and Michael Albert have largely abandoned Marx's quasi-"scientific" conception of socialism, according to which socialism not only *should* but *will* happen (by means of class struggle); their approaches to the subject are not so much *historical* as *ethical*. We should resurrect Marx's historical approach—which follows Hegel's in seeing the "truth," the "meaning," of the past as revealed by the present and future—in the process correcting his mistakes.

Consider Marx's predictions that the impoverished working class would continue to expand until it constituted the majority of society, and that as it did so its class consciousness and radicalism would mature—internationally—to the point that world revolution would occur. In retrospect, we can see that he was wrong; he misunderstood capitalist society. While there are indeed tendencies toward class polarization, impoverishment of workers, international class solidarity, and economic crisis, there are also tendencies toward assimilation of the working class into the dominant order, toward "pure and simple trade-unionism," toward the state's stabilizing management of the economy, and toward workers' identification not only with the abstract notion of a social class that spans continents but also with the more concrete facts of ethnicity, race, trade, immediate community, and nation. These identifications make possible the working class's fragmentation, which diminishes the likelihood of socialist revolution in the classical sense. Similarly, the historical successes of trade unionism obviated the necessity (from the proletariat's perspective) of revolution; reform was sufficient, at least in the short run, to improve the life situations of a large proportion of workers. Thus was born twentieth-century social democracy, the welfare state, and collective bargaining.

Marx was right that the capitalist class is averse to progressive initiatives like these, and that it has inordinate influence over the state; what he didn't appreciate was the historic potential of divisions within the class. The research of Thomas Ferguson, for example, has shown that the "second New Deal" (in 1935) in the United States, which led to the welfare state and federal protection of collective bargaining, was made possible by divisions in capitalist ranks between labor-intensive, domestically oriented, protectionist businesses, such as those in the textile industry, and capital-intensive, internationally oriented businesses, such as Standard Oil and General Electric. The former were viciously opposed to labor-empowering measures like the 1935 Wagner Act, while the latter, who valued social stability more than savage

[1] Robert Brenner, "The Origins of Capitalist Development."

[2] "Guy Standing: 'Precariat' of Insecure Workers Is Stirring," *The Cap Times*, November 6, 2011, http://host.madison.com/ct/news/opinion/column/article_54c036b6-123e-5917-b45f-82947a3133c8.html (accessed November, 2011).

repression of workers, in fact helped *write* the Wagner and Social Security Acts.[1] Their support for Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal order made the U.S. welfare state possible (as did, in another sense, the struggles of millions of workers). The welfare state—and the institutionalization of collective bargaining—in turn contributed to postwar economic and political stability, which for a while seemed to invalidate Marx's pessimistic analysis of capitalism. Trade unions became part of the "establishment"; much of the white working class became increasingly conservative, alienated from movements for radical social change, and intellectuals decided that Marx had been totally wrong all along.

In reality, though, what he was wrong about was the *timeline*, as I said earlier. It was impossible for capitalism to succumb to socialism in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. Suppose, for instance, that by some unimaginable miracle Friedrich Engels' eager prophecies (in the 1880s) with regard to the Knights of Labor had been borne out. Aware of its experiments in cooperativism, its attempts at industrial unionism, and its radical rhetoric, Engels predicted that it would serve as midwife of a revolutionary class consciousness and class organization that would lead the workers to victory over capitalism. This couldn't have happened, of course, for obvious reasons. (The ruling class had a monopoly over the means of violence; divisions in the laboring classes, between black and white, skilled and unskilled, Catholic and Protestant, precluded the necessary continent-wide unity; most leaders of the labor movement were basically conservative, as they almost always have been.) But suppose capitalism had been overthrown in the United States in the late 1880s or 1890s and a semi-cooperative "republic of labor" had been founded, with artisans in their small workshops connected through cooperative networks, public control of industry, Rochdale-type consumer cooperatives proliferating around the nation. What would have happened then? Capitalists in Europe would have continued amassing profit, investing in mechanization, building up industry and technology, and the artisans, craftsmen, and self-governing industrial workers in the U.S. would have been, in the long run, unable to compete with them. In the end, the U.S.'s proto-socialism would have eroded due to competition from Europe, and a degeneration to capitalism would have taken place, much as it did later in the Soviet Union. What this would have proven is that America's proto-socialist adventure, like the USSR's so-called "state socialism," was a historical detour, a dead end, a kind of accident.[2]

Economic conditions—and productive forces—simply were not "ripe" then, or in the twentieth century, for socialism. It certainly is appalling to contemplate the irony of this fact. It's an absurd, senseless tragedy: millions of people in the Americas, in Russia and Asia, in Germany, in France, in Spain and Italy spending decades fighting and dying for a dream that would never have come to fruition anyway because, supposing they had achieved something like it in a particular region, such as Catalonia, and it had not been crushed by the forces of reaction, it would have slowly degenerated under market pressures from the broader capitalist society, pressures on wages—downward for the lower workers, upward for the higher—pressures to mechanize, and the business cycles that inevitably would have seeped in to these havens of cooperation and disturbed the order of things, and of course after the revolutionary fervor had subsided the usual daily problems of running factories would have cropped up, "alienation" would have returned because industrial work is inherently unpleasant, battles between management and the average worker would have spoiled the revolution. Mondragon's recent evolution confirms these counterfactual claims. So, the irony is shockingly cruel: it is when capitalist industrialization was *starting*, precisely when socialism was least possible, that workers, artisans, peasants, and intellectuals fought with greatest heroism and determination for socialism. Industrialization was so brutal and so conducive to the lower classes' radicalization that visions of, and struggles for, a cooperative society were inevitable everywhere. But they didn't have the significance their participants thought they did. They were, so to speak, symptoms of the birth-pangs of industrial capitalism, not of its death-throes. Or, to view the matter from a different perspective, they were—in the long run—symptoms of the maturation and consolidation of the nation-state, not of the imminent overcoming of

[1] Thomas Ferguson, *Golden Rule: The Investment Theory of Party Competition and the Logic of Money-Driven Political Systems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
[2] On Leninism and the Soviet Union, see chapter six.

capitalism. A global system structured around state-capitalist nation-states was always the inevitable outcome, despite the utopian hopes of millions of oppressed people.

This, indeed, is another way of expressing Marx's mistake: *political* conditions were not ripe for international socialist revolution. Marx didn't foresee the "mature nation-state" period of history, which is to say the twentieth century. He profoundly underestimated the power of the "nationality" principle, and of the state. In many ways he was right that the class principle is more important than the nation principle, but not in the way he wanted: *business* tended to be more loyal to class than to the nation, and it used the idea of nationality to divide the working class and maintain social control. (For example, big business subsidized and continues to subsidize fascist or semi-fascist movements because they distract from the class struggle and serve business's political agendas; and its frequent support for "patriotic" wars is a function not only of their profit-making potential but also of their usefulness in stifling domestic social discontent and progressive political movements.[1]) For other reasons too, though, the nation-state's central authority was *bound* to get stronger, more bureaucratic, more extensive, more "society-regulating," more effective at manufacturing consent, than it was in, say, the 1870s. In retrospect we can see this. From the Middle Ages on, capitalism and the nation-state have grown up together in a symbiotic relationship (at least until very recently); it was inevitable that as capitalism continued to grow in power and extent in the early and middle twentieth century, the nation-state would do so as well.[2]

There isn't space here to discuss all the reasons for the necessary failure of Marx's prophecies in the historical short term, or for the inevitability of the "high modernist" period of the nation-state.[3] I could, for instance, draw from the Marxian tradition itself and argue that an era of "monopoly capital" necessarily followed the nineteenth-century era of competitive capitalism, and that monopoly capitalism necessarily engendered certain varieties of state capitalism, corporatism, fascism, state welfarism, etc.[4] Instead I'll invoke Karl Polanyi's arguments in *The Great Transformation*, while adding my own perspective, which brings the story up to the neoliberalism of the present day. Permit me to quote from my *Notes of an Underground Humanist*:

> It's always dangerous to construct abstract schemas, but there appear to have been two, or rather one-and-a-half, "cycles" in capitalist history. Abstractly you can think of it in this way: first, a lot of ancient [feudal] communal practices and public goods [such as the peasant commons] were dismantled before, during, and after the Industrial Revolution. You can call this the first wave of privatization. (It has continued unceasingly all over the world, but let's just call it the first wave.) As it was going on, the victims of capitalism sought to maintain their old rights and/or acquire new, governmentally protected ones. At length they succeeded to some extent, and new public goods were consolidated under the 20th-century Keynesian welfare state. This was probably a nearly inevitable development, because, as Karl Polanyi said in *The Great Transformation*, marketization and privatization will, if unchecked, eventually cause the total destruction of society. So popular resistance, aided by sane elements of the upper classes, succeeded in regulating further depredations and temporarily saving society after the Great Depression. But technology kept progressing, capital mobility increased, global integration continued, populations kept growing, and the "public" and politicized nature of the Keynesian state started encroaching

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[1] See J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York: J. Pott & Co., 1902).

[2] See Peter Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historic Role* (London: Freedom Press, 1997), and Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

[3] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[4] See Rudolph Hilferding, *Finance Capital: A Study in the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981 (1910)); Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966); and Robert A. Brady, *Business as a System of Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943).

> too much on capitalist class power. Finally the masses got out of hand, got too politicized, too powerful—all those crazy ideas of democracy in the 1960s!—and there was a capitalist backlash, made possible by (and making possible) ever-more-globally-integrated markets, elite institutional networks, and extreme capital mobility worldwide. The inflationary consequences of relative popular empowerment in a context of economic stagnation (the 1970s) were tamed, namely by destroying popular empowerment. That is, the second wave of privatization occurred, after the 1970s: public goods were again dismantled and "capital accumulation by dispossession" began anew (though, in truth, it had never really stopped). This time, the old nationalist Keynesian solution to the horrors of privatization wasn't available, since the world had become too integrated and nations themselves were deteriorating, due to the post-1970s capitalist onslaught. So transnational social movements were necessary....[1]

Or, even more schematically:

> With respect to the very long run, Marx was always right that capitalism is not sustainable. There are many reasons for this, including the contradiction between a system that requires infinite growth and a natural environment that is finite, but the reason most relevant to Marxism is that ultimately capital can *never stop* accumulating power at the expense of every other force in society. It is insatiable; its [competition-driven] lust for ever more profit and power condemns it to a life of Faustian discontent. It can never rest. Any accommodations, therefore, between the wage-earning class and capital—such accommodations as the welfare state and the legitimization of collective bargaining—are bound to be temporary. Sooner or later capital's aggressiveness will overpower contrary trends and consume everything, like a societal black hole (to change the metaphor). Everything is sucked into the vortex, including social welfare, the nation-state, even nature itself. The logic is that nothing will remain but The Corporation [in the plural], and government protections of the people will be dismantled because such protections are not in the interest of capital. This absurd, totalitarian logic can never reach its theoretical culmination, but it will, it *must*, proceed far enough, eventually, that an apocalyptic struggle between the masses and capital ensues. A relatively mild version of this happened once before, in the 1930s and '40s, and a compromise [in the West]—the mature welfare state—was the result. But then, as I said, capital repudiated the compromise (or is doing so as I write these words), and the old trends Marx diagnosed returned with a vengeance, and so humanity could look forward, this time, to a final reckoning. A final settling of accounts will occur in the coming century or two.[2]

Those two paragraphs sum up my argument as to the context in which the "new economy" of cooperatives and other anti-capitalist institutions is arising. The rise of neoliberalism (from the mid-1970s on) was nearly inevitable, given the distribution of power in the West and the heightening of international economic competition after the 1960s.[3] In other words, a resurgence of global privatization and capitalist empowerment—after the consummation of the nation-state era between the 1930s and 1960s—was bound to happen, which means that social disintegration and atomization was bound to reach the pathological extremes of the present. This would inevitably, sooner or later, trigger massive resistance and creative efforts to reconstruct civil society and the economy on a new basis. These efforts are still in their infancy.

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[1] Wright, *Notes of an Underground Humanist*, 196, 197.
[2] Ibid., 173.
[3] See Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005* (New York: Verso, 2006).

To elaborate in a little more detail: As David Harvey and others have argued, the corporate capitalist class in the U.S. and Britain faced two major problems in the mid-1970s. First, it had to rein in the 1960s' "excess of democracy" that was threatening its political power;[1] second, it had to restore its profits that were eroding from the combination of intense international competition and "excessively generous" social welfare programs. Moreover, these programs, and in general all the pressures resulting from the population's relative political empowerment, were causing high inflation, which was bound to become intolerable to much of the ruling class sooner or later. In the end, the most effective way to curb inflation and to protect profits from the demands of organized labor was, first, to adopt a restrictive monetary policy (which Paul Volcker, chairman of the Federal Reserve, did in 1979) and, second, to dismantle the welfare, regulatory, and labor-accommodating regime that had been constructed between the 1930s and early 1970s.[2] The Reagan and Thatcher administrations proceeded to do this with gusto in the 1980s, and their successor administrations in the 1990s and 2000s continued their work. In the U.S., for example, union density in the private sector sank from 35 percent in 1954, and 20 percent in 1980, to less than 7 percent today. Various "free trade" acts, such as NAFTA, have been negotiated that have contributed to the decimation of organized labor in the affected countries. Daily newspaper headlines remind us of the devastation of the social safety net. Numerous studies have described how government regulation of the economy has been gutted since the 1970s, making possible the financial collapse and recession of 2008 and 2009. All this grows out of the dynamics of a corporate capitalism that is throwing off the shackles imposed on it by the nation-state-centric "compromise" (between labor and capital) of the postwar period.[3]

Moreover, by now the political economy of neoliberalism has spread from the U.S. and U.K. to the whole world. Libraries could be filled with the scholarship and popular writings on this subject. Naomi Klein provides a good popular overview in *The Shock Doctrine* (2007), which recounts the sordid tale of neoliberalism's conquest of Latin America, Eastern Europe and Russia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East (leaving out Europe, Africa, China, and India). Through IMF structural adjustment programs, trade agreements, collaboration with authoritarian governments, and other means, the U.S. has imposed its model of a liberalized economy on the entire globe. Recently even Europe, long known for its generous social welfare provisions and healthy trade-union presence, has been shredding its former social contract. This process was underway long before the 2008 recession, but since then ruling elites have adopted the motto "Never let a crisis go to waste" and dramatically accelerated their dismantling of unions and the welfare state. The pretext, as always, is the restoration of fiscal health and national economic competitiveness. The consequences are that far fewer workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements, workplace protections are being rolled back, income inequality is rising, healthcare and education are being partly privatized, poverty is increasing, and, in general, the social fabric is being re-cut to fit the pattern of the U.S.[4]

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[1] For the liberal wing of the ruling class's perspective on the 1960s, see Michel Crozier, Samuel Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York: New York University Press, 1975).

[2] A not incidental advantage of Volcker's tight money policies was that they facilitated the taming of organized labor, by raising unemployment to its highest levels since the Great Depression.

[3] On neoliberalism, see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (Toronto, Ontario: Seven Stories Press, 1999); Robert Pollin, *Contours of Descent: U.S. Economic Fractures and the Landscape of Global Austerity* (New York: Verso, 2003); Greta Krippner, C*apitalizing on Crisis: The Political Origins of the Rise of Finance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); David McNally, *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010); and Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, *Capital Resurgent: The Roots of the Neoliberal Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[4] Eduardo Porter, "Americanized Labor Policy Is Spreading in Europe," *New York Times*, December 3, 2013; Sotiria Theodoropoulou, "European Welfare States in the Era of Pervasive Austerity," European Trade Union Institute, Brussels (draft version, August 2012); International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, "Think Differently: Humanitarian Impacts of the Economic Crisis in Europe" (Geneva, 2013),

The most important points about this worldwide hegemony of neoliberalism (and its associated productive forces, in particular information technology[1]) are that it is causing a resurgence of economic crisis and stagnation, and it is hollowing out the nation-state as an entity. Let's consider each of these phenomena in turn, starting with the first (which contributes to the second).

Any thoughtful observer of the neoliberal political economy has to be struck by the parallels between it and the era that culminated in the Great Depression. There is similar class polarization and vicious subjection of labor to capital, similar 'thinness' of government economic regulation, similar extreme subordination of government to corporate capital, similar proneness to periodic economic crisis, similar empowerment of financial capital, and so on.[2] It's true that there are differences. For example, since the 1960s or 1970s, "deindustrialization" has occurred in the West, most notably in the United States. There, employment in the manufacturing sector declined as a share of total non-farm employment from 31 percent in 1950 to 20.7 percent in 1980, 13.1 percent in 2000, and 9.1 percent in 2009.[3] As Robert Brenner argues, this trend results in large part from heightened international competition since the late 1960s and consequent declines in the growth-rates of manufacturing profitability and investment.[4] That is, intense international (and intra-national) competition and the resultant diminished growth of profitability have necessitated firms' feverish cost-cutting, which has meant more automation, employee layoffs, wage cuts, and outsourcing of production. The former industrial infrastructure of the West has been dismantled as firms have downsized and relocated their operations to regions with cheaper labor. In the process, industrial unionism has been destroyed, the high wages and stable jobs of what was once the core of the economy have become low wages and unstable (or nonexistent) jobs—in part because automation is making human labor superfluous[5]—and a massive restructuring of the West's economy has happened.

The existence of deindustrialization only supports the broader point I want to make, that (to quote David Harvey) an "underlying problem [of] excessive capitalist empowerment vis-à-vis labour and consequent wage repression, leading to problems of effective demand,"[6] characterizes both the dynamics of neoliberalism and of the political economy that eventuated in the Great Depression, which is commonly interpreted along Keynesian lines, as a product of (among other things) low effective demand. Deindustrialization has recently been a major contributor to this dynamic, and thus to the stagnation that afflicts the West and with it the world. For the loss of jobs and high wages in the manufacturing sector has not been compensated by high wages or a sufficient quantity of stable jobs in the service sector; hence, in part, the higher income inequality in the West now than fifty years ago, and the resultant lowering of effective demand.[7]

Moreover, with deindustrialization, increased capital mobility since the 1960s, the demise of the Bretton Woods international regulatory framework in the 1970s, and in general the neoliberal restoration of capitalist class power has come a financialization of the U.S. economy even more striking than that of the 1920s. It isn't necessary to dwell on this point, since it has been thoroughly analyzed by scores of

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http://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/134339/1260300-Economic%20crisis%20Report_EN_LR.pdf (accessed December 10, 2013).

[1] David Harvey remarks that information technology is "the privileged technology of neoliberalism," largely because it is "far more useful for speculative activity and for maximizing the number of short-term market contracts than for improving production." *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 159.

[2] See Du Boff, *Accumulation and Power*.

[3] William Strauss, "Is U.S. Manufacturing Disappearing?", Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, August 19, 2010, http://midwest.chicagofedblogs.org/archives/2010/08/bill_strauss_mf.html (accessed November 20, 2011).

[4] Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence*.

[5] See Will Hutton, "Driverless cars, pilotless planes....will there be jobs left for a human being?," *The Observer*, May 18, 2013.

[6] David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital, and the Crises of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 118.

[7] The business press sometimes has good coverage of these "underconsumptionist" trends. See, for example, Steve Johnson, "Capital gobbles labour's share, but victory is empty," *Financial Times*, October 13, 2013.

commentators.[1] I will only note that the financial sector's share of corporate profits in the early 2000s was around *40 percent*, though since then it has declined to 30 percent.[2] Likewise, its share of GDP was 8.4 percent in 2011, compared to 2.8 percent in 1950.[3] As investment has shifted from the "real" economy to the more profitable financial sector since the 1970s—a sector that employs far fewer people than manufacturing once did—wealth and income inequality have skyrocketed, growth has stagnated, economic instability driven by speculative bubbles has increased, physical and social infrastructure has deteriorated, and unemployment has grown. Neoliberalism has meant, in short, a partial "de-development" of the United States (which in this respect is not alone among advanced industrial countries).

Processes that were in some ways similarly disempowering to the majority of wage-earners helped lead to the Great Depression, from which, as we know, ultimately emerged the Keynesian compromise between capital and labor. The national state stepped in to boost effective demand and empower labor, so keeping the system running. At the same time, nationalism, or rather the "imagined community" of the nation, continued its earlier function as a kind of ideological glue to cohere societies and ensure order: "we," both capitalists and workers, were "Americans" (or "British," or "French," or whatever) sharing a common language, a culture, a history, etc.[4] "We" were supposed to maintain allegiance to the nation and the state, i.e., to overarching power-structures, no matter how much we might disagree with one another or want a bigger slice of the economic pie than we had. To be "disloyal" was the supreme crime, and invoking that concept proved effective as a way to tar and feather "radicals." To call them Communists, for example, was to call them foreigners and subversives, which marginalized them and helped keep the capitalist order relatively stable. Thus the nation-statist compromise, which functioned ideologically as a kind of *distraction* (from immediate issues of economic, social, and political empowerment), reached its classical, high modernist phase.

Since the 1970s, however, the nation-state, after many centuries of growing in power, importance, and global extent, has finally begun its long, tortured descent into crisis and collapse. The elegant irony of history is again on display: while the evolution of capitalism hitherto had contributed to the consolidation of the nation-state, at this point capital outgrew and started to shake off its old friend and enabler, who clung to it in ever more servile fashion. The state now does whatever it has to to stay in the good graces of the most mobile and wealthy sector of capital, finance; but other sectors, too, have found that they have a freer hand than they once did.

Again, the essential condition of this shift in the balance of power has been the spectacular increase in capital mobility since the 1960s, made possible by the rise of new productive forces, in particular electronic technology. Actually, even apart from its enabling the ascendancy of transnational corporations and global finance, this technology is playing an important role in the downfall of the nation. Just as "print-capitalism" after the fifteenth century contributed to the rise of the nation-state (as Benedict Anderson argues), what one might call "electronic capitalism" is contributing to its fall. To be sure, the imagined community of the nation is declining faster than the national state itself. The community is fragmented by electronic media, which, at least in the context of capitalism, tend to substitute isolation and self-involvement for direct interaction with others, as well as to degrade communication into instantaneous visual and auditory stimuli whose effect is to undermine identities (be they personal, national, or whatever). To quote myself again:

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[1] In addition to works cited above, see Andrew Glyn, *Capitalism Unleashed: Finance, Globalization, and Welfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and, for the international context, Barry Eichengreen, *Globalizing Capital: A History of the International Monetary System* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[2] Jordan Weissmann, "How Wall Street Devoured Corporate America," *The Atlantic*, March 5, 2013.

[3] Justin Lahart, "Number of the Week: Finance's Share of Economy Continues to Grow," *Real Time Economics* (blog), *Wall Street Journal*, December 10, 2011, http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2011/12/10/number-of-the-week-finances-share-of-economy-continues-to-grow/ (accessed June 1, 2013).

[4] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

> These trends [of national disintegration] are evident when one considers the impact of television, video games, cell-phones, computers, the internet, and such "social media" outlets as Twitter and Facebook. A society in which most people spend an inordinate amount of their time sitting in front of TVs, playing video games, shopping online, searching for soulmates through internet dating, imbibing bits of information in short bursts from an endless variety of global news and entertainment sources, and electronically "chatting" with acquaintances or strangers located anywhere from the next room to the other side of the world—such a society does not have much of a tangible national culture, and its "imagined community" is indeed *imaginary*, a mere abstraction with little basis in concrete reality. In short, the individualistic, passive, and *consumerist* nature of a capitalist society saturated by electronic media[1] is interpersonally alienating and destructive of civil society, hence destructive of a shared national consciousness.[2]

Moreover, the fact that electronic technology makes possible nearly instantaneous communication across the world means that the kind of community it fosters is global rather than national. One may start to feel more affinity for people ten thousand miles away than for one's compatriots. Global social movements become easier to coordinate; things like the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street can emerge to break down national barriers and birth a *global* consciousness.

The worldwide hegemony of finance and the transnational corporation is similarly destructive of traditional civil society, and thus of the nation. For it has contributed to deindustrialization in advanced countries, the virtual destruction of organized labor, the rise of a "precariat" of insecure workers living on society's margins, the erosion of the welfare state, the privatization of such public resources as education and the natural environment, the decline of Keynesian stimulation of demand (largely because investors fear its inflationary consequences), the hollowing out of state regulation of the economy, the onset of economic crisis and stagnation, degradation of the natural environment, etc. All these circumstances tend to bring about a relative equality of conditions between countries, as a creeping Third-Worldization of the West occurs. The very idea of "America" or "Britain" or "France"—a substantive national community that differs from others—becomes threadbare, a transparent fig leaf for the naked pursuit of power by moneyed elites.

The state, too, is in decline, though perhaps less obviously than the idea of the national community. The reason is simply that the global community of capitalists will not let the Western state reverse its post-1970s policies of retrenchment, which is the only way for it to adequately address all the crises that are currently ripping society apart. If any state—unimaginably—made truly substantive moves to restore and expand programs of social welfare, or to vastly expand and improve public education, or to initiate programs like Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration or Tennessee Valley Authority (but on a necessarily broader scale than in the 1930s), or to restore organized labor to its power in the 1960s and thereby raise effective demand, or to promulgate any other such anti-capitalist measure, investors would flee it and its sources of funds would dry up. It couldn't carry out such policies anyway, given the massive resistance they would provoke among all sectors and levels of the business community. Fiscal austerity is, on the whole, good for profits (in the short term), since it squeezes the population and diverts money to the ruling class. In large part because of capital's high mobility and consequent wealth and power over both states and populations, the West's contemporary political paradigm of austerity and government retrenchment is effectively irreversible for the foreseeable future.

This raises an obvious question: how is the state to deal with social discontent? In the 1930s and 1940s, states adapted to discontent mainly by becoming more inclusive and increasing their control over

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[1] And by "print versions" of such media, for example magazines devoted to celebrity gossip and instant gratification of whatever sort.

[2] Wright, *Notes of an Underground Humanist*, 168.

capital.[1] But since that is no longer an option, what's the solution? Evidently the most immediate and urgent response is *repression*. This is the natural instinct of every power-structure when confronted by resistance: destroy it, stamp it out, for instance by imprisoning people, demonizing dissidents as "extremists" or "terrorists," and deploying police forces to smash popular movements. So far this has been, and will probably continue to be, the predominant political response to the contemporary crisis. A quasi-police state is taking the place of the welfare state, as can be seen from governments' investment in "national security," greater powers of surveillance, the expansion and privatization of the prison system, the militarizing of police forces,[2] the ever-more-frequent suspension of civil liberties, etc. These measures do not signify the health of the state; they are its desperate response to a terminal illness. National governments are being hamstrung and privatized by capital even as their subject populations are rising up in revolt. The only recourse, it seems, is to militarize society—i.e., to expand one of the few government powers capital doesn't object to, the power to suppress democratic resistance.

In short, durable "compromises" between labor and capital are no longer possible. Only the nation-state could be a framework for such a compromise, because only national governments (not local or regional) potentially have the power to stand up to corporate capital and regulate it. But they have lost this power (on the scale necessary) since the 1970s. So what will ensue in the coming years and decades is a global conflict between the capitalist hyper-elite—together with its political minions—and the majority of the species, a conflict that *this* time will not be resolved by the principle of nationality, because it is dying. Almost two hundred years after the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx's time has arrived. The time for *true* internationalism, which is to say *trans*nationalism, in anti-capitalist (and anti-statist) movements has arrived, at long last.[3] A hundred years ago there was no such internationalism in labor movements, as the two nationalist world wars—largely supported by organized labor—showed. Nor was there in the context of the Cold War, as the reactionary and imperialistic stances of the U.S.'s AFL-CIO showed. Only since NAFTA, and especially since the Seattle demonstrations against the WTO in 1999, have labor unions and social movements in general really begun to realize their internationalist potential.[4] I'll discuss this more in the next section.

A leader of Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement says it well: "It is very striking that it is only now that farmers are starting to achieve a degree of worldwide coordination, after five hundred years of capitalist development.... The new phase of capitalism has itself created the conditions for farmers to unite against the neoliberal model."[5] And the neoliberal model, to repeat, is not some drastic new departure but only the logical conclusion of tendencies that have operated in capitalism for many centuries, namely privatization, marketization, the commodification of everything, suppression of workers' power, class polarization, integration of the world under the aegis of capitalist relations of production, and ever-increasing capital mobility. These tendencies have finally reached the point that they are consuming nation-states and making both possible and necessary globally coordinated resistance in the form of transnational social movements. This *global* confrontation of capital, in fact, is really what Marxism was all about to begin with. The slogan "Workers of the World, Unite!", far from being outdated, has become more timely and necessary than ever before.

There is much more to be said about the decline of the nation-state, but I'll skip to the main point: what the retrenchment of government's public functions is making possible, for the first time ever, is the paradigm of revolution that I described above when critiquing Marx's theory. Given the state's growing

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[1] In many cases, of course, they tried the fascist route first, hoping to crush the left. After that led to near-armageddon they had to go the more democratic route, to some extent incorporating the left and the working class into the state.

[2] See, e.g., Arthur Rizer and Joseph Hartmann, "How the War on Terror Has Militarized the Police," *The Atlantic*, November 7, 2011.

[3] "Trans" means *through*; "inter" means *between*. We need social movements that operate through and around nation-states, not only between them or on the basis of them. We need movements organized globally.

[4] Tamara Kay, *NAFTA and the Politics of Labor Transnationalism.*

[5] Quoted in Annette Desmarais, "La Via Campesina," in *Rural Social Movements in Latin America: Organizing for Sustainable Livelihoods*, eds. Carmen Diana Deere and Frederick S. Royce (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2009), 37, 38.

incapacity to assuage discontent, movements of a decentralized, semi-interstitial, regional, democratic character are emerging to fill the vacuum. In the long run they, or the institutions they spawn, will probably take over many of the functions of the national state, such as the provision of social welfare. Even more importantly, they will enable the construction of new production relations in the shell of a corporate capitalist economy that cannot provide billions of people with a livelihood. These relations will spread all over the world, in an agonizingly slow process that will surely take over a hundred years—because social transitions on the scale of capitalism-to-"cooperativism" do not happen quickly.

But *how* will such a transition happen? I'll address this question empirically in the following section, but here I can at least outline the historical logic. Marxists and other radicals often object that the sorts of developments I'll describe shortly are merely interstitial and unpolitical, can be co-opted by the ruling class, can function as *stabilizing* forces for society, are compelled to compromise with capitalism, and therefore do not represent viable paths to a post-capitalist future. I'll argue that there is much truth to these objections when the social context is one of basic systemic stability, i.e., when society isn't in a "revolutionary situation" anyway. But when it is—when the social fabric is disintegrating, economic crisis is throwing millions out of work, class polarization is growing—these "interstitial" developments can have revolutionary significance. The logic is that as political resistance spreads and the ruling class grows ever more fearful, some of its more progressive members and institutions split off from the rest and throw their support to un-capitalist or semi-capitalist initiatives as a desperate way to keep the masses content and society under control. Again, this is how the New Deal state was born in the U.S. But since such a state is not an option anymore, the ruling class's hopes for stabilizing society will, by and large, lie in more localized and decentralized democratic experiments (in addition, as I said, to political repression). The combination of mass agitation and ruling-class support will ensure that these experiments spread, especially because in all likelihood there will be no foreseeable end to the economic crisis. In the long run, the result will be capitalism's self-undermining by means of its forced support for a proliferation of people-empowering measures. Their popularity and success, moreover, will generate a dynamic by which they spread of their own momentum, so to speak. The success of the new "bottom-up" economy will make the old top-down one increasingly obsolete, though of course innumerable political clashes will have to occur before it can be unseated from the summits of power.

In short, the state and ruling class will, whether consciously or not, adopt two overarching strategies to maintain their power: try to repress dissidents, and assist progressive initiatives that seem comparatively unthreatening. In "liberal" societies such a dual approach is always necessary, because repression alone is unsustainable and does not address the underlying causes of protest. On local, regional, and national scales, the ruling class will try to smash radical movements even as it (or a section of it) tentatively supports such things as public banking, municipal enterprise, cooperatives, and communal self-help institutions of various kinds. But political dissidence will, if anything, only spread, not go away. One can expect that, in a world of multiform crisis, alliances will naturally emerge between different movements on the left some of which are less explicitly challenging to the capitalist state than others. The progress of so-called "unpolitical" initiatives, therefore, will aid the progress of the more political movements, and vice versa, such that corporate capitalism will be slowly hollowed out even as it loses ideological hegemony. Its opponents will command more and more resources, which itself will make possible their command over even *more* resources, in a self-reinforcing cycle somewhat comparable to the early-modern bourgeoisie's gradual erosion of feudalism's (and later absolutism's) economic, political, and ideological hegemony. The more economic success one has, the more resources one has, which means the more propaganda one can churn out and so attract people to one's agenda.

As for the question whether alternative economic institutions can indeed be more "successful" than capitalist ones, that is to say more productive and socially equitable: one of the purposes of this book is to show that they can. Cooperatives, as we've seen, can be more effective than conventional businesses even by the narrow standards of capitalism. We shouldn't necessarily condemn co-ops for having to work within the confines of capitalism, for if they become common and network with each other and other progressive organizations they might prove to be of great use to left-wing political movements, by providing them with resources and spreading an anti-capitalist ethos. Furthermore, as greater numbers of co-ops mutually

support one another, each will be less shackled to the logic of capitalism. The economic success of these and other alternative-economy institutions—in part a result of their support for each other—will then serve as its own public-relations campaign, so to speak, attracting people to new models and thus contributing to the spread of alternative modes of production beside the old dysfunctional capitalist mode.

Another way to conceptualize the coming social transformations is to return to the idea that the main problem the economy is facing is low effective demand. The question, then, is how to raise demand. We know that the old Keynesian solution was high government spending and high wages for workers, but both those options are off the table in an era of austerity, government privatization, and neoliberal globalization. Keynesianism on the colossal and international scale necessary is simply out of the question. The only other solution, and the only appropriate one in an age of decaying nation-states, is to construct new, non-statist social relations that economically empower people, i.e., raise demand. To repeat, what many of these will ultimately amount to are new production relations, on the basis of which will, necessarily, arise new social and political structures. Thus, virtually by analytical necessity it is evident that profound social revolution offers the only way out of the contemporary economic crisis. The *slowness* of the revolution is what will allow members of the ruling class to support it, for it will appear that all they are doing is defusing mass unrest by means of piecemeal reforms. But these reforms will be of a very different character from those of the earlier welfare state. Rather than being essentially corporatist, i.e., giving greater power to a national state that is integrated into corporate capitalism, they will consist of a democratic transformation of social relations "from the ground up."

Practice

In the tradition of Marxism, we'll follow our theoretical discussion with a focus on practice, which is, if anything, even more important than theory. The point is to change the world, not just to interpret it. This whole book pertains mainly to practice, but in this section I'll disregard worker co-ops in the U.S. and describe other initiatives springing up around the world. Needless to say, there are many to choose from. People and governments everywhere are experimenting with alternative economic, social, and political arrangements. Some of these will not last long or will prove to be of limited importance; others may end up serving as models for a future society. In the following I'll focus on some initiatives that strike me as particularly promising and interesting.

A reasonable starting point is Quebec's social economy, which is a sophisticated set of interlocking institutions that has matured since the 1980s. The term "social economy" just refers to the third sector in economies, between the private and the public sector. It is composed of such things as housing associations, civic societies, nonprofits, charities, cooperatives, and credit unions—institutions that are at least in part run by community members and exist not to pay profits to shareholders but to benefit communities, the environment, and marginalized groups. The social economy has ethical aims, but, as we have seen with cooperatives, the seemingly opposed imperatives of ethics and "efficiency" are by no means mutually exclusive. Very often one finds that the more ethical an institution is, the more profitable, productive, and efficient it is. Likewise, bureaucracy, gigantic size, and slavishness to the interests of big capital not only are immoral (inhumane and undemocratic) but have costs even by the narrow standards of efficiency and effectiveness. Being run by people whose goals are ethical, the social economy contributes to job creation, the provision of services, the production of goods, community revitalization, and in general sustainable development.[1]

Quebec's social economy is famous, and has been intensively studied, because of its sophistication and effectiveness. I won't describe it in great detail here, but it comprises over 7000 organizations that provide an array of services to the population. A watershed moment for it occurred in 1996, when the state invited representatives of all these actors—among which are "citizen's committees, food banks, community centers, family economy cooperative associations, community health clinics, legal clinics, not-for-profit

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[1] Social Economy Lisburn, "What is Social Economy?" http://www.socialeconomylisburn.org/?tabid=696&tabindex=7 (accessed May 20, 2013).

childcare centers,"[1] housing co-ops, women's centers, workers' co-ops, community economic development corporations, labor unions, and environmental associations—to participate in a conference on the future of Quebec in light of its problems with unemployment and economic development. The result was the subsequent institutionalized collaboration between the state at all levels and these diverse organizations, a collaboration that "involve[s], among other things, making it much easier for non-profit associations engaged in social economy activities to acquire the necessary financial resources, through government grants, indirect subsidies, or access to credit; the creation of a social economy office within the provincial government; and the consolidation of an umbrella organization in civil society, the *Chantier de l'économie sociale*, to coordinate strategies for enlarging and deepening the role of the social economy."[2] Few social economies in the world have achieved this degree of institutional coherence and coordination, which explains why activists and policymakers have been so intrigued by the Quebec model.

In general, the global social economy can be expected to grow in the next fifty years, as national governments prove less capable of fulfilling their welfare and regulatory functions. Quebec's social economy, for example, continues to grow in extent and access to capital. A recent innovation was the creation in 2007 of the *Fiducie du Chantier de l'économie sociale*, "a $53.8 million patient capital or quasi-equity fund to enable collective enterprises to embark on long-term planning, invest in real estate, and move out of a vicious cycle of debt."[3] A couple years later, a financial network called CAP Finance was established to connect microcredit organizations, local development funds, large "labor solidarity" funds, and so on. The mainstream economy's recent travails have not hindered any of this activity; on the contrary, "amidst the debris of speculative financial markets" it has become easier to interest investors in the *Fiducie's* stable rates of return.[4]

Europe's social economy is just as vital as Quebec's. As reported in 2012 by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the social economy accounts for over 14.5 million jobs and about 6.5 percent of total paid employment in Europe.[5] Since the last quarter of the twentieth century the social economy has grown considerably, so that it is increasingly taking the place of the state in creating employment and correcting economic and social imbalances. It is also achieving greater recognition as an important actor in European affairs, as reports on it are published by the EESC, the UN declares the social economy to be crucial for global development, Europe-wide statutes for cooperatives are adopted, conferences on cooperatives and the social economy are organized, new legal forms are created to accommodate social enterprises, university courses on the social economy appear, and, in 2012, a social economy minister is appointed in France's government. As in Quebec, this sector of the economy is faring relatively well in conditions of economic stagnation; for instance, it has been able to deploy "its own alternative forms of solidarity funding, such as ethical banking, social currencies or the credit unions, which are not only providing credit but are also generating trust in its financial services."[6] Similarly, employment levels are proving more stable than those of the private sector. It's true that recent cutbacks in public spending have had a damaging effect, but they have been far from devastating.

A few random figures indicate the sector's vitality. In France, the social economy (which accounts for 10 percent of salaried employment) created 18 percent of all new jobs between 2006 and 2008. Its employment level increased by 2.9 percent (70,000 new jobs) between 2008 and 2009, while in the private

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[1] Marguerite Mendell, "The social economy in Quebec" (2003), http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/clad/clad0047506.pdf (accessed May 23, 2010).

[2] Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (New York: Verso, 2010), 204-205. See also Marguerite Mendell, "The Social Economy in Quebec: Lessons and Challenges for Internationalizing Cooperation," in *Co-operatives in a Global Economy*, 226–241.

[3] Marguerite Mendell, "Financing the Social Economy in Quebec" (2010), 48, http://communityrenewal.ca/sites/all/files/resource/MW200346.pdf (accessed May 21, 2013).

[4] Ibid., 50.

[5] José Luis Monzón Campos and Rafael Chaves Ávila, "The Social Economy in the European Union," 46, http://www.ciriec.ulg.ac.be/fr/telechargements/RESEARCH_REPORTS/EESC_-_CIRIEC_Report_2012__def__ENG.pdf (accessed May 21, 2013).

[6] Ibid., 87.

sector it sank by 1.6 percent and in the public sector by 4.2 percent. Similarly, in Italy, employment in cooperatives increased by 8 percent between 2007 and 2011, while in the conventional private sector it decreased by 2.3 percent. In Spain, too, employment in worker cooperatives grew by 4.7 percent in 2011, as it dropped in the rest of the private sector for the fourth consecutive year.[1]

Related to the social economy, and often considered a part of it, is the solidarity economy, which tends to be a little more political and anti-capitalist than the social economy as a whole. The values that inspire its participants are the opposite of capitalist: community, egalitarianism, and democracy. Like its more well-known cousin, the solidarity economy started growing exponentially in the last quarter of the twentieth century, as neoliberalism ravaged Latin America and other parts of the world. The solidarity economy's chief impetus came from social movements in Latin America, which has a long history of peasant- and indigenous-based resistance to Western imperialism. In the past, this resistance helped bring about things like the Mexican and Cuban revolutions, the "developmentalist" period of South American history between the 1930s and 1960s, Chile's dalliance with a kind of democratic socialism in the early 1970s (until it was crushed by the U.S. and Pinochet), and attempts at revolution in Central America in the 1980s. Since the 1990s, it has birthed Latin America's turn to the left (for example with the elections of Hugo Chavez, Lula da Silva, Evo Morales, Rafael Correa, and Daniel Ortega) and helped birth such global movements as fair trade, solidarity lending, the expansion of cooperativism and credit unions, the World Social Forum and its offshoots, and La Via Campesina. Among the practices that are often mentioned in the context of the solidarity economy are community-supported agriculture, urban gardening, alternative currencies, collective kitchens, and community land trusts, not to mention all the more familiar forms of cooperativism (producer, consumer, housing, agricultural, etc.).

Before going into more detail about some of these phenomena, it will be worthwhile to consider just how significant the solidarity economy and its conceptual relatives are becoming. In a sense, after all, the term is nothing but a name for the ideal that all "radicals" are fighting for: it is socialism, anti-capitalism, cooperativism, economic democracy, whatever your preferred name is. The post-capitalist economy will have to incorporate the "solidarity" structures that are emerging, and in fact it will be grounded in them. Especially if you broaden the concept of solidarity economy so that it encompasses public banking, municipal enterprise, benefit corporations, and participatory budgeting (all to be discussed below), its contemporary significance is undeniable. It is, in short, the terrain of the "movement of movements" against privatization and profit-mongering, aimed at the resurrection of *public space*, whether embodied in the World Social Forum, Occupy Wall Street, or any of the countless dissident movements rocking the globe.

A clear indication of the growing importance of the solidarity economy is its ever-greater institutionalization. A rather primitive gauge of this is the proliferation of relevant websites, such as yesmagazine.org, geo.coop, shareable.net, aloe.socioeco.org, ripess.org, community-wealth.org, en.solecopedia.org, uwcc.wisc.edu, and american.coop. More substantively, dozens of international networks have been formed recently to facilitate organizing and education, including Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and Solidarity Economy (ALOE), the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS), the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network (SEN), the Asian Alliance for Solidarity Economy, the European Institute for Solidarity Economy (INESS), and many organizations in Latin America. One must include all the social forums that exist even in the conservative U.S.: the U.S. Social Forum, the Midwest Social Forum, the Social Forum of the Americas, the European Social Forum, etc. Like their progenitor the World Social Forum, which began in 2001 and has met annually, these are essentially periodic conferences where activists and organizations involved in the alter-globalization movement can come together to share ideas, strategies, and experiences, attend workshops and lectures,

[1] European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, "Social Economy and Social Entrepreneurship" (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union), 53.

network and seed new institutions. The WSF regularly draws more than 60,000 participants from around the world.[1]

Perhaps even more striking than the proliferation of all these networks, organizations, and conferences is the recognition that the solidarity economy is receiving from governments. I already mentioned the creation of the new post of Minister for the Social Solidarity Economy in the French government. Compared to Latin America, though, France is behind the times. For example, in 2003 Brazil's president Lula established a National Secretariat of the Solidarity Economy, and cooperatives receive financial support from the ministries of Agricultural and Social Development. The Brazilian government also funds university programs that provide local groups with training and support to set up cooperatives or social enterprises, "similar to business incubators in the U.S."[2] (Cooperative business programs are starting to appear in North American universities too.) Ecuador went a step further in 2008: it adopted a constitution that draws from the social and solidarity economy (SSE) model for development, in that it formalizes commitments to food sovereignty, the use of land for social and environmental functions (forbidding large estate farming, land concentration, and the privatization of water), a "decentralized national system of participatory planning" for development, and numerous other progressive principles that are fleshed out in very concrete ways. Bolivia's 2009 constitution is similarly progressive. Public policy initiatives on the SSE have been flowering in Venezuela, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Peru, and elsewhere, under the pressure of growing social movements.

Governments in Africa and Asia are likewise facilitating the growth of the SSE, though I can't review all the relevant policies here. The South African government, for example, has passed legislation to boost cooperatives, and, as of 2012, further legislation to establish a cooperative council, academy, and development agency has been proposed.[3] Africa's tenth ministerial conference on the theme of cooperatives was held in Rwanda in 2012; 27 countries committed to passing laws to support the SSE, expanding education regarding the creation and sustainability of co-ops, increasing regional cooperation and trade among co-ops, and possibly creating integrated financial cooperatives at country and regional levels.[4] Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey launched in 2012 a national cooperative strategy and plan of action to fundamentally restructure the cooperative sector so as to make it more effective, competitive, and sustainable.[5] India and Indonesia have recently reformed their laws regarding co-ops. Since the early 2000s, the Russian government—at all levels—has actively supported the cooperative movement.[6] Indeed, on the whole it seems there are few governments in the world that do not provide notable support, and are not increasing their support year by year, for the social and solidarity economy.

The UN and its specialized agency the ILO have been taking action too; in fact, they have facilitated many of the policy initiatives just mentioned. I noted in the Introduction that the UN declared 2012 the Year of the Cooperative. What this designation concretely meant was a year of intense advocacy and organizational support for co-ops, so as to publicize their worldwide impact on poverty reduction, social integration, and socioeconomic development. (The website social.un.org/coopsyear showcases the UN's work in this area.) As the UN sponsors international summits, forums, ministerial conferences, film

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[1] See José Corrêa Leite, *The World Social Forum: Strategies of Resistance* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), and William Fisher and Thomas Ponniah, eds., *Another World Is Possible: Popular Alternatives to Globalization at the World Social Forum* (New York: Zed Books, 2003).

[2] Emily Kawano, "Report from the 1st Solidarity Economy Social Forum & World Fair, Santa Maria and Porto Alegre, Brazil—Jan 22-29, 2010," *SolidarityEconomy.net*, http://www.solidarityeconomy.net/2010/03/15/solidarity-economy-vision-blossoms-in-brazil/ (accessed May 25, 2010).

[3] Susan Steinman and Jerome von Rooij, "Developing Public Policies for the Social and Solidarity Economy in South Africa: The Need for a State - Civil Society Dialogue," *Universitas Forum*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2012).

[4] ICA, "African Ministers agree to support cooperatives," November 27, 2012, http://ica.coop/en/media/news/african-ministers-agree-support-co-operatives (accessed May 31, 2013).

[5] See "Turkish Cooperatives Strategy and Action Plan 2013-2016," a report from the Directorate General of Cooperatives in Turkey's Ministry of Customs and Trade, http://www.turkiye2012koop.org/images/haber61/tcsap.pdf (accessed May 30, 2013).

[6] ILO, *Cooperative Sector in Russia* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2009).

festivals, and other events to spread the ideology of cooperativism, the ILO publishes in-depth reports, sponsors cooperative projects, aids in the formation of policy, and helps organize conferences like the SSE Academy, which began in 2010. The SSE Academy is "an inter-regional training event bringing together more than 100 [in fact as many as 300] practitioners and policy-makers from around the world, to share their experiences and meet leading SSE specialists."[1] Among other achievements, the 2013 conference helped further the ILO's initiative to establish an Interagency Task Force in the United Nations that would bring "relevant UN agencies together for regular exchanges on their programming and policy making in the field of SSE."[2]

As for the actual practices of the solidarity economy "on the ground," I can at best hope merely to gesture at a few examples in the limited space here. The classic example is Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST), which began in 1984 and now has a membership of almost two million people. Its main political goal is to bring about national agrarian reform that eliminates the extreme inequality in ownership of land; much of its activity consists of occupying unused land and establishing encampments on it, which become permanent settlements if the occupiers gain legal ownership. The encampments and settlements can be organized on the basis either of family ownership or of collective ownership, depending on the decisions of local assemblies. Each settlement is structured as a mini-society (with extensive ties to other settlements and to state, regional, and national leaders), which collectively decides how the settlers' income is to be spent—how much will go to production, health care, schooling, and so forth. The MST as a whole has established hundreds of agricultural cooperatives that take in more than 50 million dollars a year, some of which goes to the 20 million dollar budget for social services and infrastructure, the rest of which goes directly to member families. The movement also has founded teacher-training programs in national universities, hundreds of daycare centers, an agricultural college, almost two thousand primary and secondary schools, several credit cooperatives, 96 food processing plants, a clothing factory, etc.—all of which is ancillary to its main achievements of organizing over 250,000 occupations and winning land for over 350,000 families in two thousand settlements (as of 2009), in addition to the 200,000 families that are currently occupying land but do not yet legally own it. As a result of all this success, the MST has won international recognition, receiving grants from UNESCO and UNICEF and awards from the UN.[3]

The MST clearly parallels the solidarity economy in general: it is both a model of a future democratic, socialist society and a means of bringing it about. More specifically, as activist Ethan Miller says, the means to the end is that "building relationships between solidarity-based enterprises and larger social movements builds increased support for the solidarity economy while allowing the movements to meet some of the basic needs of their participants, demonstrate viable alternatives, and thus increase the power and scope of their transformative work."[4] That's my argument in a nutshell. It's worth noting, incidentally, that the MST belongs to the Brazilian Solidarity Economy Forum, which "works on an even broader scale [than the MST], incorporating [as of 2006] twelve national networks and membership organizations with twenty-one regional Solidarity Forums and thousands of cooperative enterprises to build mutual support systems, facilitate exchanges, create cooperative incubator programs, and shape public policy."[5] This is the revolution in action.

A broad category, and a particularly well-known one, of the solidarity economy is the movement known as Fair Trade, which has expanded significantly in recent years. As defined by the World Fair Trade

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[1] ILO, "Partnerships for Decent Work Newsletter," http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—-dgreports/—-exrel/documents/publication/wcms_212742.pdf (accessed May 27, 2013).

[2] The Canadian CED Network, "UN Social and Solidarity Economy Conference Yields Rich Results," http://ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/node/11983.

[3] Laura Landertinger, "Brazil's Landless Workers Movement (MST)," 2009, http://www.yorku.ca/cerlac/documents/Landertinger.pdf (accessed May 31, 2013); Miguel Carter, "The Landless Rural Workers' Movement and the Struggle for Social Justice in Brazil," in *Rural Social Movements in Latin America*, 88.

[4] Ethan Miller, "Other Economies Are Possible!", *ZNet*, September 9, 2006, http://www.zcommunications.org/other-economies-are-possible-by-ethan-miller (accessed May 31, 2013).

[5] Ibid.

Organization (in association with Fairtrade International, the Network of European Worldshops, and the European Fair Trade Association), Fair Trade is a "trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers—especially in the South."[1] More specifically, it "promotes standards for production practices and delivery procedures, working conditions and labour remuneration, environmental care and social policies in supply chains of certified goods."[2] The Fair Trade Labeling Organization (FLO) was established in 1997 to set standards worldwide and certify that particular products embody these standards. Among the growing range of goods that the certification system can cover are coffee, bananas, sugar, oranges, tea, chocolate, wine, rice, honey, nuts, flowers, cosmetics, and clothing. As the Fair Trade movement has gone mainstream, with large retailers selling certified products, the worldwide volume of sales has increased; in 2011, for example, sales were up to 6.6 billion dollars, 12 percent higher than the previous year.[3]

The way Fair Trade works is quite complex, but the main point is that for a product to be Fairtrade-certified it has to have been produced and traded under conditions characterized by, for instance, the absence of child labor and forced labor, workers' freedom to unionize, compliance with ILO conventions on working conditions, respect for the environment, commitment to gender equity and poverty reduction, and the importer's payment to the producing organization (e.g., an agricultural cooperative) of both a specified minimum price and a premium. The minimum price helps shield farmers from the volatility of world markets, while the premium goes into a fund that farmers and workers can use for community purposes, as they see fit. Producers and traders who want to sell Fairtrade-labeled products have to pay a fee to FLO, which inspects them to certify that they adhere to the requisite standards.

Studies have shown that, so far, Fair Trade (FT) has had mixed results in terms of improving local conditions and empowering farmers and workers. On the one hand, "guaranteed Fair Trade market outlets and stable prices provide incentives to producers to realise on-farm investments, intensify input applications and enhance labour use."[4] FT associations and cooperatives can provide farmers with technical assistance and administer social and environmental projects made possible by the FT premium. Land and labor productivity are thereby raised above those of non-FT producers, which translates into higher household income and willingness to invest in long-term projects. According to some studies, FT producers report a greater sense of well-being and a more positive outlook for their future than non-FT producers do. Nutritional standards are higher and infant mortality rates lower than in households without access to Fair Trade organizations. Participation in Fair Trade has been found to reduce farmers' economic vulnerability, assist in poverty reduction, enhance family stability, improve children's education, strengthen the role of women in their community, and benefit the natural environment.[5]

On the other hand, these positive effects are not universally observed, in part because the certification process is not foolproof and FT standards are not consistently enforced. There are relatively few impact studies of Fair Trade, and the ones that exist do not always have sound methodologies. One thing known for sure is that few FT producers are able to sell most of their product to FT outlets, because of insufficient demand. Fair Trade is still a very small fraction of global trade even in such commodities as

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[1] World Fair Trade Organization, "What is Fair Trade?," http://www.wfto.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1&Itemid=13 (accessed June 17, 2013).

[2] Ruerd Ruben, "The development impact of Fair Trade: from discourse to data," in *The Impact of Fair Trade*, ed. Ruerd Ruben (The Netherlands: Wageningen Academic Publishers, 2008), 19.

[3] Natalie Huet, "Fairtrade sales to grow as consumers demand better labelling," *Reuters*, February 28, 2013, http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/02/28/uk-fairtrade-sales-interview-idUKBRE91R0XT20130228 (accessed June 17, 2013).

[4] Ruerd Ruben et al., "Fair Trade impact of banana production in El Guabo Association, Ecuador," in *The Impact of Fair Trade*, 155.

[5] Stephanie Geiger-Oneto and Eric J. Arnould, "Alternative Trade Organization and Subjective Quality of Life: The Case of Latin American Coffee Producers," *Journal of Macromarketing*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (September, 2011): 276-290. The WFTO-Europe provides links to many studies at http://www.wfto-europe.org/lang-en/documents.html (accessed June 21, 2013).

coffee and bananas; about 1.5 million farmers and workers around the world participate in it.[1] In 2011, FT producer revenues in the export of coffee, bananas, cocoa beans, and cane sugar were less than 1 percent of the global value of exports (although FT markets are growing at a brisk pace).[2] Some critics worry, too, that as FT becomes more mainstream, it is losing its commitment to the values that originally sustained it. Other common criticisms are that FT doesn't necessarily benefit migrant laborers, that its impact on non-FT producers is ambiguous at best, that the premiums consumers pay do not always directly benefit farmers, and that FT's consumer-driven model means it "cannot address the core problem of excessively concentrated markets in which a handful of over-powerful transnational corporations dictate terms of trade and suck profits up into their own coffers."[3]

Insofar as there is justice to these criticisms, the best answer to them is probably the one that applies to all initiatives in the solidarity economy: they cannot realize their transformative potential unless backed up by social movements. But if they are, and if the capitalist state feels existentially threatened so that it has to tolerate and support them, then they can indeed be components of systemic change. Fair Trade has already raised consciousness in the global North, making people more aware of conditions in the South and proving that consumers are willing to pay extra for products if doing so benefits farmers and workers. The task now is the admittedly difficult one of making the movement more mainstream while simultaneously shoring up its commitment to strict standards of producer empowerment. As producers improve their living standards, get access to more resources, and develop a greater sense of collective self-worth, they will have more success in pressing for political changes in their own countries. Fair Trade can also potentially assist in building solidarity movements in the North, and it can provide issues on which to pressure governments—and resources by which to do so. It's true, though, that ultimately the main component of systemic change is the transformation of the class structure, and here Fair Trade, in its current form, must play a subordinate role. The main strategic emphasis has to be on movements that directly attack the power of transnational corporations and aim to bypass them by organizing economic activity through different paths. What those paths will be is still not clear.

There are obvious possibilities, however—and even obvious necessities. As John Restakis argues, any future moral—and sustainable—regime of global trade will have to give a central place to agricultural cooperatives of the sorts that already exist across the South (and North). Only cooperatives, whether of separately producing farmers or of workers who collectively manage a single farm, can provide producers with the democratic agency and protections they need. One relevant model of a regional economy is the Emilian Model mentioned in chapter two. This system that permits small farmers organized in cooperatives to produce many of Italy's food products could be replicated in other parts of the world, with assistance from the global cooperative and Fair Trade movements. It's worth quoting some of Restakis's speculations on this score:

> The global co-operative movement contains within itself the material resources to do what the fair trade movement alone cannot do. Credit is one example. The credit unions of both rich and poor nations have the capital to establish a Fair Trade and Development Bank to do what the World bank and the IMF will never do—give direct support to farmer organizations, NGOs, business groups and local communities to build regional economies based on democratic control and ownership. An international co-operative development bank with members and progressive stakeholders from among consumers in the North and small producers in the South could provide the credit necessary to fuel the kind of value-added development that is now beginning to emerge in these areas. Among its top priorities

[1] Felicity Lawrence, "Fairtrade shouldn't all be down to the consumer," *The Guardian,* February 26, 2012.
[2] Kimberly Ann Elliott, "Is My Fair Trade Coffee Really Fair?," *Center for Global Development,* Policy Paper 017, December, 2012, http://www.cgdev.org/doc/full_text/policyPapers/1426831/Is-My-Fair-Trade-Coffee-Really-Fair.html (accessed June 21, 2013).
[3] Felicity Lawrence, "Fairtrade shouldn't all be down to the consumer"; Colleen Haight, "The Problem with Fair Trade Coffee," *Stanford Social Innovation Review,* Vol. 9, No. 3 (Summer 2011): 74-79;

> would be to build up local credit unions that can play a regional role in this development process. This has already begun. The World Council of Credit Unions (WCCU) and the national co-operative federations of many countries have been working to build the development infrastructure of Southern regions for many years....[1]

What the future holds for global trade is anyone's guess, but it isn't impossible to imagine a new regime that gives a much more prominent place to Fair Trade organizations, regulatory structures that protect small farmers, and regional coordination of development among cooperatives and local governments.

Turning to the North, in particular the U.S., recent research has illuminated potentially revolutionary developments of a different character than those we have been discussing. Gar Alperovitz is the scholar who has done the most work on this subject, and his books *America Beyond Capitalism* (2006) and *What Then Must We Do? Straight Talk about the Next American Revolution* (2013) are essential reading. Alperovitz is not alone, however: a veritable industry of reportage and scholarship is growing to document the systemic alternatives that are emerging throughout the North. As these alternatives become more widely known, one can expect them to continue spreading on an almost exponential scale, as people clamor for change.

One example that Alperovitz discusses is "municipal enterprise," effectively a kind of small-scale socialism whereby local government owns and operates properties and businesses. As the website Community-Wealth.org reports, "Increasingly, local governments have turned to municipal enterprise to both raise revenue and promote local jobs and economic stability by developing a more diversified base of locally controlled wealth."[2] For instance, there are over two thousand publicly owned electric utilities in the U.S., which, together with a number of co-ops, collectively supply 25 percent of U.S. electricity—more efficiently and at lower cost to the consumer than private utilities do. Hundreds of cities have built public internet networks too, and hundreds more are building them now.[3] Many other cities are involved in hotel construction and ownership, hospital ownership, transit development projects, ownership of land that is leased to companies for a profit, and environmentally friendly businesses like methane-recovery.

Important initiatives are in the works on the state level as well, most notably, perhaps, proposals to establish public state banks. North Dakota is the only state that has such a bank; it has been in operation since 1919. Its public bank is one reason why North Dakota is the only state to have been in continuous budget surplus since 2008. As Ellen Brown notes, "The bank has contributed over $300 million in revenues over the last decade to state coffers, a substantial sum for a state with a population less than one-tenth the size of Los Angeles County."[4] Public banks allow governments to invest in local communities, in ways that actually benefit the community rather than some distant corporate elite. Accordingly, a public banking movement is growing; as of 2013, at least twenty states were considering establishing a state-owned bank.[5] Counties and municipalities are likewise beginning to consider proposals for public banks.

Another type of institution with great potential is the benefit corporation (B Corp), which is a new legal form created in 2010. This kind of corporation differs from others in that "the goal is both to make profits and to use some part of them for social purposes."[6] Shareholders can't sue these businesses for failing to prioritize profits above all else, as they can in the case of a conventional corporation. The depth

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[1] John Restakis, *Humanizing the Economy: Co-operatives in the Age of Capital* (British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 2010), 186, 187.

[2] "Overview: Municipal Enterprise," http://www.community-wealth.org/strategies/panel/municipal/index.html (accessed June 24, 2013).

[3] Gar Alperovitz, *What Then Must We Do? Straight Talk about the Next American Revolution* (White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2013), 58, 60.

[4] Ellen Brown, "Banking for California's Future," *Yes! Magazine*, September 14, 2011.

[5] Public Banking Institute, "Banking in the Public Interest," http://publicbankinginstitute.org/ (accessed June 24, 2013).

[6] Alperovitz, *What Then Must We Do?*, 39. See Jamie Raskin, "The Rise of Benefit Corporations," *The Nation*, June 27, 2011.

of public support for B Corps, and in general for a new, more socially conscious way of conducting economic activity, is shown by the fact that as of 2013, sixteen states had passed laws for benefit corporations. The number in early 2010, again, was zero.

More common than B Corps—because older—are community development corporations (CDCs), community development financial institutions (CDFIs), and community land trusts. CDCs are

> nonprofit organizations dedicated to bringing about the revitalization of a clearly defined geographic area—often an urban neighborhood scarred by decades of disinvestment and concentrated poverty or an isolated and underdeveloped rural area. Governed by boards of directors composed primarily of local residents and other citizens with a strong stake in the community, most CDCs engage in some form of economic development within their service areas.[1]

They have been most successful at housing development, but in recent years have tried to return to the vision of their original founders (in the 1960s) and engage in "comprehensive economic, social, and political development activities," including community-owned and -controlled business development and economic revitalization. By 2005, 4600 CDCs had created over 1,252,000 units of affordable housing and generated 774,000 jobs.[2] They rely for funding on nonprofits, foundations, corporations, and all levels of government. CDFIs, similarly, are institutions that give credit to communities shunned by traditional lenders; they include community development banks, community development credit unions, microcredit programs, etc. Community land trusts, on the other hand, of which there are several hundred in the U.S., are nonprofit corporations that hold and lease land to keep it affordable for the community by removing it from the sphere of the market. The National Community Land Trust Network states that the purposes of these nonprofits are "to provide access to land and housing to people who are otherwise denied access; to increase long-term community control of neighborhood resources; to empower residents through involvement and participation in the organization; and to preserve the affordability of housing permanently."[3] What their long-term potential may be is still not clear, but if sufficient public pressure is broad to bear on government, they could easily become of more than marginal significance.

The same is true of the more experimental and radical movement to establish "Transition Towns" around the world, where initiatives exist to "rebuild local agriculture and food production, localiz[e] energy production, rethink healthcare, rediscover local building materials in the context of zero energy building, [and] rethink how we manage waste."[4] As Richard Heinberg characterizes it, "the 'transition' that's being referred to is away from our current growth-based, fossil-fueled economy and toward a future economy that is not only sustainable but also fulfilling and interesting for all concerned."[5] The movement began in 2005 in Totnes, England, and has spread to well over a thousand towns in at least 43 countries, all of which have initiatives inspired by the belief that "communities must become more resilient in the face of three catastrophic threats: peak oil, global warming and economic instability."[6] These initiatives include such projects as community gardens, community-owned energy production, community-owned bakeries and

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[1] Thad Williamson, David Imbroscio, and Gar Alperovitz, *Making a Place for Community: Local Democracy in a Global Era* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 213.

[2] Joyce Madell, "CDCs and the Myth of the Organizing-Development Dialectic," Madison, WI: COMM-ORG: The On-Line Conference on Community Organizing, Vol. 15, 2009.

[3] National Community Land Trust Network, "What Are Community Land Trusts?," http://www.cltnetwork.org/About-CLTs/What-Are-Community-Land-Trusts (accessed June 26, 2013). See also John Emmeus Davis, ed., *The Community Land Trust Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2010).

[4] Richard Heinberg, *The End of Growth: Adapting to Our New Economic Reality* (Canada: New Society Publishers, 2011), 271.

[5] Ibid., 270.

[6] Jessica Stites, "How the Transition Movement Is Spreading to Towns Across America," *AlterNet*, June 11, 2013, http://www.alternet.org/activism/how-transition-movement-could-be-happening-your-town?page=0%2C4&paging=off&current_page=1#bookmark (accessed October 13, 2013).

breweries, local currencies, and programs to incubate sustainable businesses. One celebrated initiative is called Transition Streets, which, in Totnes, "brought residents together, block by block, to support each other in decreasing their home energy use through improvements like insulation and solar panels. On average, each of the 550 participating households cut its annual carbon use by 1.3 tons and its annual energy bill by £570 (about $883)."[1] Such projects admittedly seem too tiny to make much of a difference, but this may change as they become more common and publicized. The vision of "localization" that is behind them is likely to be ever more appealing, indeed necessary for survival, as the capitalist status quo disintegrates in the next century.

Turning to politics, a radical reform called participatory budgeting is gaining momentum around the world. First developed in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1988, when the Workers' Party was elected, it has spread to over 1500 cities on all inhabited continents.[2] Erik Olin Wright describes its functioning in Porto Alegre as follows:

> Without going into details, the basic idea [of municipal participatory budgeting] is that citizens meet in popular assemblies throughout the city to deliberate about how the city budget should be spent. Most of these assemblies are organized around geographical regions of the city; a few are organized around themes with a city-wide scope—like public transportation or culture. At the beginning of the budget cycle each year these assemblies meet in plenary sessions. City executives, administrators, representatives of community entities such as neighborhood associations, youth and sports clubs, and any interested inhabitant of the city attends these assemblies, but only residents of the region can vote in the regional assembly. Any city resident participating in a thematic assembly can vote in those. These assemblies are jointly coordinated by members of municipal government and by community delegates.[3]

In Porto Alegre, participatory budgeting has consistently had high levels of participation and generated positive results. One resident observed in 2002 that before participatory budgeting, "there was no sewer, school, health clinic, or transportation. Now, a reservoir has been built with 6 million liters of water, the streets have been paved, and a school opened."[4] In fact, as reported by the World Bank, "Sewer and water connections in the city…went up from 75 percent of total households in 1988 to 98 percent in 1997. The number of schools has quadrupled since 1986. Porto Alegre's health and education budget increased from 13 percent in 1985 to almost 40 percent in 1996."[5] There has been a "massive shift in spending toward the poorest regions of the city," corruption has been dramatically reduced due to transparency, and a "thickening" of civil society has occurred, with civic groups of all kinds being stimulated by issues of democratic budgeting.[6] In the 2000s, participatory budgeting began to spread at an accelerated pace, finally reaching the United States in 2010 (in Chicago). The remarkable successes it has had here and elsewhere are showcased on the website Participatory Budgeting Project, at participatorybudgeting.org.

The point, again, is that democracy, cooperation, and transparency are not only ethically imperative but more socially efficacious than the top-down, corporatized, bureaucratic, secretive methods of the contemporary *ancien régime*. When ordinary people have a democratic say in budget allocation, the money goes where it's needed most, not where it will benefit only some politically connected corporate interests. Schools are built, streets repaired, libraries expanded, facilities improved. Poor neighborhoods see more

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Participatory Budgeting Project, "Where Has It Worked?," http://www.participatorybudgeting.org/about-participatory-budgeting/where-has-it-worked/ (accessed November 26, 2013).

[3] Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, 110.

[4] David Lewitt, "Porto Alegre's Budget Of, By, and For the People," *Yes! Magazine*, December 31, 2002.

[5] World Bank, "Participatory Budgeting in Brazil," http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPOWERMENT/Resources/14657_Partic-Budg-Brazil-web.pdf (accessed May 15, 2010).

[6] Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, 111.

money, and can expect greater accountability, than they would otherwise. At the same time, involvement in the political process creates a better informed and more active citizenry, empowering people to form associations and networks through which they demand ever greater expansions of democracy from political officials. Participatory democracy reinforces and expands itself, so to speak. It counteracts social atomization, builds community, militates against apathy, and captures resources for people who will use them to further improve democracy.

Measures of even greater democratic significance have been enacted in Kerala, India. When Kerala's Left Democratic Front coalition came to power in 1996 it began a program of administrative, fiscal, and political decentralization to 1214 local governments. This ambitious campaign took advantage of the 1993 Constitutional mandates to increase local government power as a response to India's developmental failures and crisis of democracy.[1] A brief summary gives some sense of the project's scale:

> The nested design of the Campaign's core institutions—Grama Sabhas (ward-level assemblies), development seminars, task forces, and local governments—represents a deliberate attempt to broaden avenues for citizen participation. In every year since 1997, local governments in Kerala have formulated and implemented their own development plans. These plans take shape through a multi-stage process of iterated deliberation between elected representatives, local and higher-level government officials, civil society experts and activists, and ordinary citizens. The process begins in open local assemblies, called grama sabhas, in which participants discuss and identify development priorities. Development seminars formed by the grama sabhas are then tasked with developing more elaborate assessments of local problems and needs. The development seminars give way to multi-stakeholder task forces that design specific projects for various development sectors. These projects are in turn submitted to local elected bodies (municipal councils called panchayats) that formulate and set budgets for local plans. Final plans are presented back to grama sabhas for discussion. These local plans are then integrated into higher-level plans (blocks and districts) during which all projects are vetted for technical and fiscal viability.[2]

The logistics are very complex, but the campaign seems to have been successful both at invigorating democracy—it is extremely popular—and at implementing development more effectively than before. This is partly because "popular involvement increases problem-solving efficiency through better and more rapid feedback and increases accountability by multiplying the points of scrutiny."[3] Much greater priority has been given to basic needs like sanitation, housing and drinking water than in the past, and there are now significant interregional differences as opposed to the "one-size-fits-all logic of the past." Just between 1997 and 1999, 98,494 houses were built, 240,307 sanitary latrines constructed, 50,162 wells dug, 8000 kilometers of roads built, and 2,800,179 people received support for seedlings and fertilizers—all of which far exceeds achievements from earlier comparable periods.[4] At the same time, corruption has declined significantly, as happened, too, when the cooperative KDB was formed.[5]

The innovations in Kerala demonstrate the possibility of a politics different from the anti-democratic paradigm of the present. As an alternative economy develops, a Kerala-style politics may follow in its wake.

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[1] T. M. Thomas Isaac and Patrick Heller, "Democracy and Development: Decentralized Planning in Kerala," in *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*, eds. Erik Olin Wright and Archon Fung (New York: Verso, 2003), 78.
[2] Ibid., 79.
[3] Ibid., 96.
[4] Ibid., 100.
[5] N. Ramakantan, "Democratic Decentralization and Empowerment of Local Government Associations in Kerala," *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance*, vol. 2 (January, 2009): 128–136.

All these quasi-experimental "radical reforms," involving millions of people and thousands of institutions across the world, cannot be a mere historical curiosity. They have epochal potential. One participant contrasts them with the dreams of the old anarchists and socialists who looked forward to a cooperative commonwealth: "The old cooperativism," he says, "was a utopia in search of its practice, and the new cooperativism is a practice in search of its utopia."[1] The contrast is apt. The tragedy of the old cooperativism, from a Marxist perspective, is that consciousness outran material conditions, material possibilities, and so it was doomed to failure; the new cooperativism has placed consciousness at the service of people's immediate economic interests, so that new modes of production and of governance are evolving step by step. Utopian dreams are being subordinated to economic realities—thus, perhaps, making possible the realization of "utopian dreams" in the distant future.

The obvious question, though, is the one that has been posed to radicals from time immemorial: *how* will the old world succumb to the new? How is that possible? What will the process look like? At this moment in history, characterized by a convergence of crises, it is easier to imagine catastrophe than a new and more stable civilization. We're traveling headlong into a perfect storm of crises. For example, the UN projects that the world population will be almost ten billion by 2050, which of course will put severe strain on human and natural resources.[2] At the same time, global warming is expected to have an incalculably destructive impact on civilization and the global ecosystem: ocean levels could rise three feet or more by the end of the century; temperatures will rise at least 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit, probably much more; extreme heat waves will contribute to difficulty growing food and to massive changes in plant and animal life.[3] In addition, the sword of Damocles hangs over humankind in the form of possible nuclear war, whether provoked by state or by non-state actors. And then there's the economic crisis I've already discussed. These circumstances in themselves are enough to show that there will be no smooth or peaceful transition to a more equitable and just society.

Some commentators, such as Chris Hedges and Richard Heinberg, insist that we are headed for a near-apocalyptic scenario. "The steady depletion of natural resources," Hedges writes, "especially fossil fuels, along with the accelerated pace of climate change, will combine with crippling levels of personal and national debt to thrust us into a global depression that will dwarf any in the history of capitalism." Heinberg speculates that soon our economic system will "implode":

> And when it does the financial system will seize up far more dramatically than in 2008. You will go to the bank or the ATM and there will be no money. Food will be scarce and expensive. Unemployment will be rampant. And government services will break down. Living standards will plummet. "Austerity" programs will become more draconian. Economic inequality will widen to create massive gaps between a tiny, oligarchic global elite and the masses. The collapse will also inevitably trigger the kind of instability and unrest, including riots, that we have seen in countries such as Greece....[4]

These dire prophecies may be accurate, or they may be wildly exaggerated. What should be uncontroversial is that multifaceted crisis is here to stay for a very long time. It's predictable what popular reactions to it will be: demonstrations, periodic rioting, looting (in the case of natural disasters, as after Hurricane

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[1] Quoted in Ethan Miller, "Other Economies Are Possible!"

[2] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2013), *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, Highlights and Advance Tables* (Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.228).

[3] Justin Gillis, "Climate Panel Cites Near Certainty on Warming," *New York Times*, August 19, 2013; Joan Vidal, "Millions face starvation as world warms, say scientists," *The Observer*, April 13, 2013; Dahr Jamail, "Are We Falling Off the Climate Precipice?," *TomDispatch.com*, http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175785/ (accessed December 17, 2013).

[4] Quoted in Chris Hedges, "Globalized Growth Is the Problem, Localism Is the Solution," *Truthout*, Monday, September 10, 2012, http://truth-out.org/news/item/11435-globalized-growth-is-the-problem-localism-is-the-solution (accessed November 15, 2013).

Katrina), perhaps a rise in crime, and grassroots organizing on both the political left and the right. What will determine how it all plays out is the reaction of the ruling class, which possesses most of society's resources and so has disproportionate power over the directions in which history proceeds.

Above I made some rather vague predictions regarding the behavior of governments and the ruling class, which I will qualify and elaborate on now. Of course it's impossible to predict the long-term future with any certainty. For all we know, nuclear war will destroy much of the species in the next century, or the collapse of our current world system will lead to two hundred years of wars over natural resources. Nevertheless, I think it can be useful and interesting to speculate on possible paths that the future will take—and not only because I consider apocalyptic scenarios to be implausible. Assuming that human society doesn't revert to some kind of Hobbesian state of nature, one can sketch plausible paths of historical development and use those sketches to help guide strategy.

As I said above, the point to keep in mind is that governments and ruling classes are not monolithic entities. This fact is what makes possible a paradigm of revolution different from the orthodox Marxist one: rather than the working class suddenly rising up as one in a titanic social explosion, bursting through the straitjacket of a unified ruling class that has refused to reform capitalism, what can and should happen—and has happened in the past—is that popular struggles exploit divisions in the ranks of the elite so as to achieve gradual progress. Many wealthy people and institutions are reactionary, but many are progressive. In order to accomplish lasting, democratic change, it is necessary for popular movements to get some of the progressive elite at least partly and provisionally on their side. Universities, nonprofits, philanthropic foundations, liberal millionaires and billionaires, progressive businesses, and politicians are just some of the entities whose wealth and influence can be critical to the success of a movement or a new idea. By any means necessary, one must get their support—because if it isn't forthcoming, the combined might of the reactionary and the liberal elite will squash the left.

Fortunately, the last 150 years of Western history have taught us that when crisis afflicts society, much of the liberal elite is willing to favor measures that benefit the populace and are not dictated solely by the short-term interest of the capitalist class (or some narrow section of it). There exist wealthy benefactors of environmentalism, public education, civil liberties, the labor movement, infrastructure development, and the social and solidarity economy. As the reign of neoliberalism deepens the crises that beset the world, more and more entities in the ruling class will divert more and more resources to assuaging popular discontent, in many cases by funding radical new initiatives such as have been surveyed in this chapter. The rot that runs through traditional government and civil society makes this "experimentalism" utterly predictable—because "bad times call for bold solutions," etc. It's highly doubtful that social crisis will abate, so radical reforms, insofar as they are demanded by the masses and seem to work, will spread from region to region and country to country, as they are already doing.

It's instructive to contrast, again, the present situation with that eighty or a hundred years ago. Aside from the comparatively serious and multifaceted nature of contemporary crises, there are crucial differences between the periods that should hearten present-day radicals. Certainly the national and international left does not appear to be in good shape. On the other hand, a closer look at things reveals glimmers of hope. First of all, popular movements potentially have far more resources available to them now than in the 1930s or before. Technology is infinitely more advanced than it was, making possible global resistance movements and more effective coordination between them. Electronic media make it easier to publicize, on a wider scale, projects in an alternative economy and politics. Society is awash in wealth and knowledge, which, although it's concentrated at the top now, could be harnessed and used for the benefit of "the 99 percent" and their dissent. Many of the people who will be in dire economic straits in the coming decades are highly educated, college graduates, articulate and aware, who were raised with high expectations and are likely to be radicalized relatively easily. Moreover, their education and former position in the middle class will probably ensure that their protest is less ineffectual than those of some more marginal group might be.

From one perspective, the fragmentation of the contemporary left isn't even a bad thing. For it arises, in part, from the fragmentation of society itself, the dissolution of an integral capitalist civil society and the nation-state. A decaying social fabric—and a decaying national state—signifies, in the long run, a

decaying corporate capitalism, a doomed civilization. It was different in the Great Depression, though: then, it was clear very quickly to far-seeing liberals that what was necessary to save capitalism was a stronger state, more state intervention in the economy, and stronger labor unions to bargain for high wages and so keep demand high and the economy running. With the strengthening of the state and unions would come a repairing of the social fabric and, in fact, the heyday of the nation-state system. Now, eighty years later, no one has a clear idea of how to save society (neoliberal globalization having made Keynesian nationalism impracticable)—which, in a sense, is a *good* thing for radicals, because it suggests that we really are nearing the end of the capitalist epoch. Systems and institutions are floundering; the left, for now, is floundering, as is the center, as is (in some cases) the right. But all this floundering opens up space for "decentralized" innovation, grassroots experimentation, localism and regionalism, under-the-radar moves toward cooperativism. This slow, semi-interstitial process is the natural way in which social (economic) systems yield to their successors.

Another respect in which the present has promise is that its transnational framework militates against fascism. Whatever revolutionary potential the 1930s had was vitiated by the (inevitable) consolidation of state capitalism, which in this early phase was easily susceptible to fascism, or "palingenetic ultra-nationalism."[1] Fascist movements marched all over Europe in the 1930s, and in some cases they achieved total or partial control of the state. After all, they were useful to certain sections of the ruling class in their struggle to beat back the labor movement, Socialists, and Communists. At the present, the same goal exists among similar reactionary entities of beating back the labor movement and progressivism of whatever form, and some of these entities are even willing to bankroll semi-fascist movements for this purpose. The Koch brothers' funding of the Tea Party is a well-known example. It's also true that as the middle class declines, one can expect many of the aggrieved to have sympathy with right-wing groups like Golden Dawn in Greece and the Tea Party in the U.S. This fact presents clear dangers for the left.

Nevertheless, the dangers are surely not what they were in the 1930s. The point, again, is that the world is simply too interconnected now, and transnational corporations have too much power, for a return to the era of sovereign and autonomous nations to occur. In the thirties it was much easier to assemble the political apparatus of reactionary ultra-nationalism than it is in an age of advanced globalization, unparalleled access to information from global sources, widespread higher education, and greater political sophistication among the elite than when they allowed fascist leaders to come to power in the early twentieth century. Nor should we discount the lessons that people and institutions have learned from the experiences with Italian Fascism and German Nazism. Historical memory is not always acute, but in this case its power is not insignificant. The main threat that semi-fascist movements might pose is just that they will slow down progress—or in some instances reverse it temporarily—and exacerbate social problems. The possibility is minimal that they will decisively take over national governments and start World War III. Worldwide, there is every reason to expect that far more people will join progressive movements than fascist ones.

As for the much lamented decline of the middle class, there are silver linings in this (insofar as it is happening). The "middle class"—by no means a monolithic entity—has tended to be the bastion of centrist conservatism, the ballast that has steadied the course of capitalism (or, at times, turned it to the right). No transition to post-capitalism could have occurred as long as the middle class was stable and intact, because few people whose material circumstances are satisfactory would ever give that up to fight for the mere hope, and the very risky prospect, of a completely different social system.[2] That is to say, as long as traditional labor unionism was strong, thus keeping the middle class strong, revolutionary hopes were doomed. Unions and collective bargaining had to decline—as did the welfare state—in order for radical possibilities to open up. This is an unpleasant and ironic truth that many leftists prefer to deny, but it *is* true. As I argued above, post-capitalism never could have happened within the corporatist framework of the nation-state; and industrial unionism and the welfare state were an essential component of the mature

[1] That's Roger Griffin's definition, quoted in Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 5.

[2] Erik Olin Wright makes this argument in *Envisioning Real Utopias.*

nation-state. So they had to go. (And they were bound to go sooner or later, given capital's aggressiveness and its increasing mobility on a global scale.) In any case, capitalism cannot end except in the context of economic crisis, as Marx sensibly argued. And crisis on the scale necessary is incompatible with the existence of a large and protected middle class. So the decline of this "class," while presenting dangers in the form of semi-fascism, is a necessary prerequisite to a transition out of capitalism.[1]

The old question remains: is such a transition "inevitable," as many Marxists have thought? Is corporate capitalism *necessarily* going to succumb to its own contradictions and to the crises, and resistance, it engenders? On this question, too, I'm an optimist, as I indicated above. For one thing, no social system is permanent; everything in history is transitory and in flux. More substantively, I agree with István Mészáros: "The fraudulence and domination of capital and the exploitation of the working class cannot go on forever. The producers cannot be kept constantly and forever under control."[2] Indeed, the inevitability of the current social order's demise seems so obvious to me that I can scarcely argue for it. The facts speak for themselves. No civilization can possibly weather the crises that are in their infancy now—the chaos of climate change, overpopulation, economic stagnation, class polarization, government retrenchment, privatization and exhaustion of resources, commodification of everything, and possible nuclear war. Radical reforms are inevitable.

One way the future may play out is that such reforms, eventually supported by much of the elite, continue to spread for many decades as social instability increases. They build up a constituency that acquires a vested interest in their maintenance and expansion. Since national governments and bureaucracies are simultaneously becoming ever more dysfunctional and inadequate to the task of ensuring social order, the "reforms" typically amount to a partial ceding of powers to the regional, local, and international scales. Military and police repression of far-left movements continues in many places, and such movements or parties are rarely permitted to capture national governments (because they're too important), but on less visible scales, such as the local and regional, "the people" do have more and more say in governance—because the elite finds it necessary to make some concessions, and it's less dangerous to do so on lower levels of governance than on higher levels. Nevertheless, even on the national level the left makes slow progress—simply because the right can't control things forever, otherwise society would completely collapse. The left's increasing success is partly a result, too, of the fact that the ranks of the hyper-elite are thinning due to the repeated bursting of economic bubbles, the protraction of economic crisis, and the consequent colossal destruction of wealth.

As the centers of global capitalism become more preoccupied with internal problems while having fewer resources to devote to policing world politics on behalf of corporate interests, leftist movements in the global South have greater success against their governments. Quite possibly, democratic initiatives such as have been pursued in Kerala, India become more common, as do participatory budgeting, public banking, and comparable experiments. This gives more resources to the left, which therefore grows. Social and physical infrastructure continues to decay in places where the right still has control and improves where the left does—but, because the left is growing, the long-term trends are largely positive. Environmental deterioration and economic stagnation counteract these trends, but in many regions governments are able to alleviate the effects of these negative forces by, for instance, sponsoring programs to establish worker cooperatives and coordinating the distribution of resources to where they're needed most. Regarding the environment, the severity of the crisis and the clamoring of the people finally force governments around

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[1] Marx had intellectual integrity, so he wasn't afraid to embrace unattractive but correct implications of his thought. During and after the 1850s he looked forward to economic crisis and was quite happy when it arrived, because he recognized that it fostered the conditions for revolutionary movements. (See Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life* (New York: Liveright, 2013).) Nowadays, many self-styled Marxists, such as the editors of *Jacobin*, who lack Marx's hard-headed realism and appreciation of history's "dialectical irony" think that twentieth-century social democracy could potentially have led straight into socialism if only things had gone differently, and that some sort of resurrection of the welfare state can still lead to such an outcome. See, e.g., Peter Frase and Bhaskar Sunkara, "The Welfare State of America," *In These Times*, October 22, 2013. I'll consider these fantasies in the final chapter.

[2] István Mészáros, *The Structural Crisis of Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010), 170.

the world to take substantive measures against global warming and other forms of pollution—although for centuries to come, environmental disasters are frequent. Indeed, probably billions of people in the next century are severely affected by climate change and other such calamities, so that innumerable inter- and intra-governmental organizations are established to address these problems (by reforestation, promotion of renewable energy, distribution of water and food to devastated populations, and so forth). On local levels, governments tolerate and even encourage the proliferation of nonprofits, communal "crisis centers," large communal housing cooperatives and other "self-help" institutions, and grassroots endeavors we can't presently foresee to mitigate the impact of extreme weather patterns. The reason for this political support, again, is that such organizations promote social stability and are demanded by both the public and a large part of the elite.

In general, the only adequate way to respond to crisis is by pursuing measures that are the opposite of privatization, marketization, and commodification. This fact alone should make a leftist optimistic with respect to the long run. As the world's corporate sector faces declining profit-rates from global overproduction and underconsumption,[1] and even the financial industry is suffering from replays of the 2008 collapse (and other sources of instability), its resistance to progressive movements becomes less effective than it once was. More and more corporations succumb to bankruptcy. One can't rule out the possibility that some businesses critical to societal well-being are nationalized. In any case, the point is that over many decades, the character of the economy, society, and politics changes such that the "public sphere" expands, albeit typically in less centralized and nationalistic ways than in the mid-twentieth century. After a long evolution, new modes of producing and distributing resources have spread around the world, modes that we can't clearly foresee at present. What national governments will look like at this point is impossible to predict, except that they will probably be attenuated relative to the growth of other political forms. Certainly the principle of nationality itself will be hollowed out, since it will hardly serve any economic purposes any longer.[2] The corporate capitalist class will have so thinned by this point that in many countries it will be possible for the "working class" (now in a different form, much of it consisting of members of cooperatives and other democratic organizations) to effectively take over national governments and continue to transform them into mere extensions and enablers of lower-level and higher-level administrative apparatuses. Throughout this long history there will have occurred innumerable bloody clashes between armed enforcers of the status quo and proponents of democracy, but repression cannot work forever. Maybe 150 years from now, things will have started to settle down and the contours of the post-capitalist global order will be clear.

—That's one possible scenario, a relatively optimistic one. It doesn't seem wildly implausible, though. The premise underlying it is the commonsense truth that corporate capitalism and privatization are unsustainable, i.e., a democratic reaction against them is inevitable. Given this fact, the above scenario is one plausible account of the future. It does leave out such eventualities as nuclear war or the destruction of most of the human species by climate change, neither of which is out of the question. Another unpredictable variable is the politics of white rage, i.e., semi-fascism, which may be manipulated and co-opted by interests with a stake in imperialist rivalries, for example between the U.S. and China.[3] Nonetheless, whatever

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[1] See Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence*.

[2] This statement doesn't imply the crude economic reductionism one might think. Raymond Williams was right that in cultural and political analysis one has to take into account the "residues" of previous systems; for example, Christianity is a residue of the Middle Ages, though in modern times it has assumed new political and social functions that have time and again reinvigorated it. Likewise, the idea of nationality will persist for a very long time, even as economic and political transnationalism and localism make it ever more obsolete. See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[3] Recently the U.S. has been engaged in a "Pacific Pivot," "a major initiative announced late in 2011 to counter a rising China. According to separate statements by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, 60 percent of US military resources are swiftly shifting from Europe and the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific region." Koohan Paik and Jerry Mander, "On the Front Lines of a New Pacific War," *The Nation*, December 14, 2012. New military bases are being added to the hundreds that the U.S. already has on foreign soil in the Asia-Pacific, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership "free trade" agreement excludes China. Nikolai Bukharin's *Imperialism and World*

scenario one concocts, it is surely inevitable that modes of economic, social, and political cooperation will evolve to partially or totally replace the privatized competition that has led humanity to the brink of catastrophe. If most of the species is destroyed, for instance, democratic cooperation will probably be essential to the survival of the remaining humans. Certainly corporate capitalism will no longer exist.

It is largely futile to speculate on the future of the market or whether new forms of sophisticated barter or economic planning will emerge. What is certain is that, for all the reasons I gave above, no other model of revolution than the "gradualist" one I've sketched is relevant to a transition from capitalism to a more just society. Worker cooperatives may well be an important element in the accumulation of resources by leftists and "the people" that is necessary for the latter ultimately to achieve political power. The recognition among unions that a social movement unionism has become necessary will cause more to promote and form cooperatives, even as more workers follow the example of Argentinians after 2001 by taking over businesses in the wake of economic collapse and turning them into co-ops.

Incidentally, these happenings provide an opportunity for us to observe history's fascinating, albeit inhuman, symmetry and logic: while the wave of worker cooperatives in the late nineteenth century succumbed to an ascendant corporate capitalism, the wave that is just beginning now—a product of comparable conditions of inequality, economic "chaos," and insufficient government intervention in the economy—will continue to build as its nemesis corporate capitalism dies. Thus, cooperative movements sprang up in the fractured dawn, or pre-dawn, of an era in the 1870s and 1880s, and they spring up at its fractured dusk—only to enjoy a success they could not earlier when their nemesis was in its childhood rather than its old age (and when they themselves didn't have the resources they do now). Neoliberalism has thereby been an unwitting tool of the "cunning" of historical reason, by precipitating the demise of the very order whose consummation it was and making possible the rise of a new one.

New Era Windows, which I'll discuss in the following chapter, is one of the cooperatives in the vanguard of the coming revolution. It is still a rather lonely outpost overlooking a vista of economic desolation, but its loneliness will surely be a temporary condition. After decades of concessionary bargaining and passive rearguard action, the labor movement is finally, by virtue of the enormity of its predicament, being forced to embrace revolutionary strategies such as worker ownership. Herein lies the hope for the future. If current trends continue, in our lifetimes we may even see a recrudescence, in a more sophisticated global form, of the old heroic battles on behalf of cooperation against the robber barons, as the beauty of Catalonian socialism in 1936—thousands of people joyously birthing a new world—emerges from behind the veil of memories into a world of possibility.

CHAPTER FIVE
NEW ERA WINDOWS

It may seem awkward to descend from the lofty heights of the previous chapter to the low terrain of a case-study, but it is precisely on the level of local institutions and their mutual self-help (with political assistance) that a new economy will have to develop. Its cooperative dimension will emerge in a variety of ways: people starting a co-op from scratch, buying out an employer, benefiting from liberal initiatives as in Cleveland, using their union to start a cooperative, etc. In the following I'll consider the second case, that of buying out an owner. In the U.S., since the late 1970s there have been countless attempts by workers to buy out employers that planned to shutter factories; few of these have been successful, typically because of capitalist resistance. For example, in 2010 a hundred employees at an aerospace plant in Taunton, Massachusetts that was about to be closed by their employer, Esterline Technologies, wanted to buy its equipment so as to run the plant themselves. After being rebuffed by the company, they and their union, United Electrical Workers (UE), convinced the city of Taunton to pursue the use of eminent domain to seize Esterline's machinery and buy the factory on behalf of the workers. This was unprecedented in recent labor

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Economy (1915) is worth reading in this context, being a classic analysis of the dynamics that still govern the world economy.

history, and the tactic holds great promise for the future. Unfortunately, it didn't work in this case, for complex reasons we need not dwell on here.[1]

Despite past failures, one can expect that such attempts will continue, indeed will probably become more numerous as unions and the progressive elite embrace the idea of employee buyouts and/or using eminent domain to save jobs. The more success stories are publicized, the more attractive these options will be (and the easier it will be for workers to find financial assistance). One such success story is that of New Era Windows, which bought its factory from the former owner in 2012. This case is particularly interesting and instructive given the workforce's history of militancy, including factory occupations, and success in confrontations with employers.

For people who want to start a co-op from scratch, there are dozens of books and manuals, some of them available at www.american.coop and www.usworker.coop. University courses are now being offered as well, at UMass Amherst, Rutgers, the University of Connecticut, Southern New Hampshire University, MIT, and other places.[2] It is probably more feasible, however, that large cooperatives are started by buyouts and takeovers than from scratch by entrepreneurs, so those scenarios are what I focus on in this chapter.

The New Era Windows cooperative is run by a workforce that, since 2008, has grown used to the glare of the media spotlight. In 2008 these workers symbolized the nation's disgust with the greedy and corrupt bankers who had run the economy into the ground and then gotten bailed out, and their defiance of the leviathan that is Bank of America was inspiring. Even Barack Obama, no leftist, felt compelled to express support for them: "I think they're absolutely right and understand that what's happening to them is reflective of what's happening across this economy."[3] Six years later, they symbolize not only defiant action for workers' rights but defiant construction of an alternative to corporate capitalism. Coverage of their actions by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *The Nation*, *Yes! Magazine*, the major television networks, *Democracy Now!*, *Al Jazeera*, and innumerable other media outlets around the world testifies to how deeply their story resonates with the public. The obvious questions, then, are: what *is* their story?; how have they accomplished all that they have?; and how can their victories be replicated?

Journalist Kari Lydersen published an excellent account in 2009 of the workers' struggle against Bank of America and Republic Windows and Doors, entitled *Revolt on Goose Island: The Chicago Factory Takeover, and What It Says about the Economic Crisis*. In the first part of what follows I'll draw disproportionately on her book, summarizing some of its main points in order to provide context for the discussion of the cooperative later.

Republic Windows and Doors was formed in 1965, and continued to grow until the end of the century. By the 1990s it was selling vinyl replacement windows and patio doors not only to small home-improvement contractors, as earlier, but to businesses, factories, and apartment complexes. It owned a large factory on Goose Island in Chicago where it employed hundreds of workers, primarily Latinos who had left Mexico and their families behind. This predominance of Latino workers is, of course, not an unusual thing in the postindustrial U.S. More than 50 million Latinos live in the United States, 23 million of whom are in the labor force (employed or unemployed).[4] Millions of these people are recent immigrants who regularly send money back to their relatives at home or try to earn enough for their families to join them someday in

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[1] Roger Bybee, "UE and Taunton, Mass. Chart Own Course in Fight Against Outsourcing," *In These Times*, December 14, 2010; Peter Ranis, "Occupy Wall Street: An Opening to Worker-Occupation of Factories and Enterprises in the U.S.," *MRZine*, November 9, 2011, http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2011/ranis091111.html.

[2] American Worker Cooperative, "Curricula," http://american.coop/category/tags/curricula (accessed December 15, 2013).

[3] Monica Davey, "In Factory Sit-In, an Anger Spread Wide," *New York Times*, December 7, 2008.

[4] United States Census Bureau, "Most Children Younger Than Age 1 are Minorities, Census Bureau Reports," May 17, 2012, http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-90.html (accessed December 16, 2013); Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, *Latino Workers in the United States, 2011* (Washington, D.C.: LCLAA, 2011).

the U.S.; for instance, three-quarters of the workers at Republic had emigrated from Mexico.[1] In part because of the rising proportion of Hispanic immigrants, low-wage workers in the U.S. are increasingly likely to be Hispanic.[2]

Given these trends, it is not much of an exaggeration to say that "the future of America's labor movement will be written in Spanish."[3] This fact should, perhaps, be encouraging to labor organizers, because, as the Republic occupation and other militant actions in recent decades suggest, there are clear tendencies for Latino and indigenous American workers to be more easily radicalized than white or African-American workers.[4] The latter groups have been socialized into the neoliberal American way of behaving and thinking, an unfortunate amalgam of atomism, loneliness, cynicism, interpersonal alienation, semi-passive resignation, disdain for unions, and so forth. Latino immigrants, by contrast, having come from a very different society with its own history and culture—in most cases a vibrantly leftist or "populist" one at the grassroots—have not typically internalized American atomism and ennui in the way that the mainstream has. This is evident simply from impressionistic observation. Moreover, the very fact of constituting a minority in another country, speaking another language, being more cruelly oppressed than most mainstream groups, and to some extent possessing a common culture different from the dominant one, pushes people towards solidarity, mutualism, and militancy in social and political struggles. These are good omens for the future labor movement in the United States, especially considering that Hispanics are the largest and fastest-growing minority group.

Richard Gillman, who became the owner of Republic in 2005, thus had the bad luck of inheriting an intractable workforce. This was particularly the case because the workers had voted in 2004 to end their association with a union called the Central States Joint Board (CSJB) and affiliate with the UE, one of the most militant and progressive unions in the country. Disenchantment with the conservative, undemocratic, and corrupt CSJB had become acute in 2001, when the union negotiated a dismal contract with Republic. As Lydersen recounts, workers were so disgusted that they organized a wildcat strike a couple months later, in January 2002. For more than two weeks, in the freezing cold, they held out against the opposition of the company, the union, and the police, who all encouraged workers to cross the picket line (as some did each day). "On a particularly frigid morning," for example, "some workers were lured across the picket line by the quintessentially Chicago bait of Krispy Kreme doughnuts and coffee."[5] Despite the support of Latino elected officials, including U.S. Congressman Luis Gutierrez, the strike failed and workers were forced to return to their jobs—while continuing to nourish the hope that someday they could get rid of their union.

Through informal contacts with labor-rights and immigrant-rights groups in Chicago, the workers eventually met with UE organizers, who convinced them that theirs was a much more effective union than the CSJB. In late 2003, about a year before the CJSB's contract was going to expire, "the UE launched its typical organizing drive, holding meetings to inform workers of their rights, providing stickers and flyers, and pointing out all the things the CSJB was not doing for them."[6] As is usually the case, a "militant minority" among the workers was crucial to the success of the organizing drive (and would prove crucial to the 2008 factory occupation). Armando Robles, for example, a maintenance worker in his late thirties who had started working at Republic in 2000, discussed with his coworkers week after week the merits of the UE, passing out flyers, holding meetings in community centers, and in general trying to counter the company's anti-union propaganda. When it came time for the election, the UE trounced the CSJB, 340 votes to 9. (About 100 workers voted for no union at all, having been disillusioned by their earlier one.)

Since the UE played a critical role in later years, it's worth saying a little about this unique union. It was formed in 1936, when independent local unions attended a conference in Buffalo, New York to create

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[1] Kari Lydersen, *Revolt on Goose Island* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2009), 17.
[2] George J. Borjas, "Wage Trends among Disadvantaged Minorities," National Poverty Center, August 2005.
[3] Tom Buffenbarger, President of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, quoted in *Latino Workers in the United States*, 6.
[4] See, for example, Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morganton.*
[5] Lydersen, *Revolt on Goose Island*, 39.
[6] Ibid., 41.

a national union that would organize the radio and electrical manufacturing industries. A few months later, it became the first union granted a charter by the newly formed CIO, which was a progressive alternative to the old, craft-union-based AFL. In the legendary years of the late 1930s when the United Autoworkers was organizing the automobile industry, the Steel Workers Organizing Committee was organizing the steel industry, and the Packinghouse Workers of America was organizing the meatpacking industry, the UE was making swift and fantastic gains at General Electric and other major corporations. Its victories continued through World War II, so that by 1945 it was the third largest CIO union, with over 500,000 members.

The organizational structure that made possible these early successes—as well as the union's later tenacious survival in difficult times—was unusual in the U.S. labor movement. The UE was and remains a much less centralized and bureaucratic union than others, with radical democracy enshrined in its constitution and by-laws. Union members not only elect, from among their ranks, local officers, stewards, negotiators, and delegates to national conventions; they also decide, themselves, when to strike and to end a strike, when to accept a contract and what terms to demand, and how to use local dues. The salaries of union staff and executives do not exceed the highest wage in the industry, a provision unique among American trade unions. On rights for women and African-Americans, the UE was far ahead of its time and most other unions, for example supporting "equal pay for equal work" during World War II and fighting to end workplace discrimination against blacks. It has also not been afraid to take controversial political stances such as opposing the Vietnam War (when the AFL-CIO resolutely supported it) and being actively involved in the civil rights movement. On the whole, it is hard to imagine a more progressive and militant union.[1]

In the context of the Cold War, however, progressivism was not unequivocally an asset. It led several unions, including the UE, to be branded as Communist and hounded out of the CIO. The 1950s were a dark time for the UE: under a barrage of attacks from business, the federal government, and mainstream unions, its membership plummeted to 60,000. It's a miracle that it survived at all; virtually no other left-wing union did. In the 1960s it began to rebuild its numbers, but the deindustrialization of the 1980s and 1990s wiped out many gains. At present the UE has about 35,000 members, and even this relatively low number has only been made possible by the union's trademark radicalism and flexibility. It has branched out from its traditional industrial jurisdictions to include teachers, nurses, and clerical workers, and it was one of the first unions to embrace undocumented immigrants. It has also been at the forefront of efforts to build transnational alliances, having formed a close alliance with the Mexican union *Frente Autentico del Trabajo* in the 1990s when they were both fighting NAFTA.[2]

In the light of this honorable history, it should come as no surprise that the contract the UE negotiated with Republic was excellent from the workers' point of view: "They obtained a nearly unheard-of average $3-an-hour raise over the course of three years, with $1.75 in the first year. They overhauled a subpar bonus system. And they won the right to have 19 union stewards on the shop floor, compared to five before. This meant more power for the union and more ability to file and win grievances."[3] A couple years later, Armando Robles was elected president of the local—Local 1110—and Ricky Maclin vice president, forming a partnership that would prove effective and long-lasting.

Being a democratic union, the UE gives leadership training to its members, particularly the stewards. This "consciousness-raising" and confidence-boosting is essential to giving members a sense of empowerment, efficacy, and self-respect vis-à-vis management. Leah Fried gives the example of training in grievance procedures. Stewards will learn about the different kinds of grievances, the steps involved in filing a grievance, and how to follow through in meetings with management. After reading through the contract and learning all the procedures, they then simulate a grievance meeting: one person plays the boss, another is the steward, a third the worker filing the grievance. Later, after a real grievance meeting, they

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[1] See Ronald Filippelli and Mark McColloch, *Cold War in the Working Class: The Rise and Decline of the United Electrical Workers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Lydersen, 46-53; and the UE website.
[2] Tamara Kay, *NAFTA and the Politics of Labor Transnationalism*, chapter five.
[3] Lydersen, *Revolt on Goose Island*, 42.

meet to go over what went well and what to do differently next time, and so the learning process continues over months and years. Gradually the workers become more effective at standing up for their rights.

For instance, one time a Republic worker was fired for taking out the garbage. Literally: as Fried recalls, "he took out the garbage and the supervisor fired him, saying 'You weren't supposed to take out the garbage!' So we got everybody to wear a picture of [the worker who had been fired], and they marched into the boss's office during their break…" Combined with the filing of a grievance, this collective action got the worker rehired.

Horizons, in short, weren't very sunny for Republic on the labor side of things; but the business side wasn't doing much better. The situation became especially dire in 2007, when the real estate boom collapsed. The loss of customers meant that Republic quickly used up its $5 million line of credit from Bank of America, which refused to grant more loans. By the summer of 2008 the company had lost $10 million in less than two years, and its factory was in the process of being downsized from 500 workers to 250. November 2008 is when the real drama started.

Robles and other workers noticed that factory equipment was being spirited away in the night, to an unknown destination. Managers assured them and UE officials that nothing was amiss, an obvious lie given the business's economic troubles (of which workers were well aware). It was revealed later that the equipment was intended for a factory in Iowa that Richard Gillman planned to be the base of operations for a new, un-unionized, company; at the moment, all that the workers knew was that they couldn't sit idly by while their factory was dismantled, an action sure to presage the elimination of their jobs. As Lydersen relates, the workers organized a surveillance team to keep an eye on the factory during nights and weekends. One Saturday, Robles and Sergio Revuelta, a union steward, were fulfilling their watchman duties in the parking lot when they saw boxes being loaded onto two trailer trucks at the factory's front entrance. They decided to follow them, curious where they were headed. Fifteen miles later they ended up at a truckyard, where the trailers were parked. Robles called UE representative Mark Meinster, who drove out to them to discuss what they should do. Angry at Republic's brazen contempt for its workforce, Robles suggested stealing the trailers to force the company to negotiate with them. Or at least deflating their tires. Meinster, likewise determined to get the truth about what was going on, hit upon another idea: occupy the factory. Robles liked the suggestion, and in the following days he and Meinster found others enthusiastic as well.

So that's how the idea was born. Factory occupations are more common in Mexico and other parts of Latin America than in the United States, so it isn't surprising that a mostly Latino workforce would be attracted to the idea. The local's executive board certainly was; its members saw no other option in the case of the plant's closure. Many other workers were similarly enthusiastic, and it was easy to find volunteers to occupy the plant. No action was taken for the moment, except to organize 24-hour surveillance over the long Thanksgiving weekend, each shift lasting two hours.

The workers' strange "limbo" situation lasted until December 2, when the plant operations manager called them to a meeting in the cafeteria and announced, predictably, that the plant would be closing on Friday, December 5. They wouldn't get severance pay or accrued vacation pay, and their health insurance would end on December 15 (in fact earlier, as it turned out). This sudden closing of the plant was in apparent violation of the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act, which requires that employees be given either sixty days' notice or sixty days of severance pay, a fact that would be exploited by workers and their allies in the following days, when they declared to the media that it was illegal to close the plant under these conditions. After bringing his grim tidings the manager hastily retreated, leaving everyone to contemplate the destruction of the lives they had known.

It's at this point that *connections* became especially important. Most things in the modern world depend on connections; luckily the Republic workers had them, through the UE. Union representatives got in touch with their contacts in the Chicago political world and such groups as Interfaith Worker Justice and Jobs with Justice; it was decided that the next day there would be a rally in front of Bank of America's headquarters downtown. This was the strategy they had decided on: it made more sense to publicly shame Bank of America than Republic, in part because the latter had insisted that everything was the bank's fault for having cut off credit, and in part because the bank had just received a $25 billion bailout from the government and was by no means popular with the public. This was, after all, the moment when Americans

were enraged by the financial sector's sabotage of the economy and disgusted by the TARP bailouts of the chief culprits. Attacking Bank of America for destroying jobs even after accepting public funds was a brilliant strategy—which the media, for its part, was happy to facilitate, given the public's mood.

As Leah Fried explained later, the union and workers crafted their image in a very conscious and knowing way. The issue couldn't be worker rights, because, as she said, "the media doesn't cover worker rights. It's very rare that they will. In fact, some of them right up front said we can't cover a union story." So instead, the union framed it as a story of the bailout. "This is what the taxpayer bailout is really doing. It goes to these financial institutions who then turn around and shut down factories. People are losing their jobs, and on top of that, they're not even being paid the money that they earned."[1] This so effectively tapped into the public's rage that, in the end, the workers had much more success than they expected.

The rally on Wednesday gained visibility for the coming struggle, but of course it was the occupation that captured international headlines. On Friday morning Robles, Fried, Meinster, and other union leaders met with the full workforce to ask once more if they wanted to go ahead with their plan: everyone did. "Si se puede!" they cheered. "Yes we can!" About thirty people said they would occupy the plant, while the others would support them outside on the picket line. (The action was illegal, after all, and some workers were worried about the repercussions for their families if they were arrested.) Later in the day, though, when a final vote was taken just before the action was to commence, *everyone* wanted to occupy, no doubt caught up in the thrill of what they were doing. They formed committees to organize it, deciding, for example, that only thirty or forty people would occupy the plant at any given time; only workers, union staff, and family members would be allowed inside (with exceptions for political figures); and the place would be kept tidy for the sake of public image. Soon after the occupation had begun at 5 p.m., managers called the police to implore that the workers be forcibly removed; the police, however, refused, having been told earlier by the city councilman representing Goose Island that this was a labor-management dispute in which they shouldn't intervene.

This points to the importance, again, of having connections with progressive members of the elite. From the very beginning, Congressman Luis Gutierrez was an articulate defender of the workers, an intermediary (along with union officials and others) between them and Bank of America, and an effective coordinator of resources such as food. Other political figures who showed support in the following days included the Illinois Attorney General, concerned whether Republic had broken laws in its treatment of workers; Governor Blagojevich, who visited the factory on Monday (three days after the occupation had begun) to declare his support for the workers; Obama, who on Sunday had done the same thing in a press conference; Jesse Jackson, who showed up at the factory to hand out turkeys and offer encouragement; U.S. Senator Dick Durbin, Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky, various city councilmen, and county commissioner Mike Quigley. All wanted to bask in the popularity of these workers who were seen as defying the monster that is Bank of America.

The press, including correspondents from national and foreign media, were already at the factory on Friday before workers emerged to announce that they were occupying it until their demands were met. UE's contacts with the media and activist groups around the city thus paid off from the start. Republic officials hadn't shown up to a meeting on Friday with Bank of America and union leaders, so the sit-in continued into the weekend. A support rally on Saturday drew several hundred people, and donations of food, sleeping bags, pillows, and other items flooded the plant. Jobs with Justice continued to organize solidarity rallies nationwide in the following days. Inside the factory the atmosphere was in fact somewhat festive, despite people's fear of arrest. Initially, indeed, they expected to be arrested, and yet were determined not to leave. When several policemen ventured inside the plant on Friday night some of the occupiers prepared to chain themselves to the equipment, but were relieved to see that the police were only checking for vandalism. The lengths to which workers were prepared to go to defend their jobs is a poignant illustration of their outrage and desperation, shared by millions of others that winter.

Another meeting with Bank of America and Republic was called for Monday, but this one didn't go very well either, at least at first. Gutierrez and a couple city councilmen joined Robles, Maclin, and

[1] Leah Fried, interview with Bob Bruno, *Illinois Labor Works*, Chicago Access Network TV, December 17, 2011.

union reps, all of whom faced a room of representatives from the bank, the Chamber of Commerce, the city treasurer's office, and other state agencies and interest groups. Maclin got angry when a Chamber of Commerce official asked the workers to tone down their statements to the media and stop making the bank look so bad; he slammed his fist down on the table, cursed loudly, and retorted that he'd tell the media whatever he wanted. Things went a little more smoothly later, but still no resolution was reached.

On Tuesday, after another day of the media "eating out of the workers' hands"[1]—even Fox TV, no friend of labor, praised them—talks resumed, this time more fruitfully. Richard Gillman angered the labor side when he asked, incredibly, that any new loan from Bank of America (to pay workers' wages) include severance pay for himself and funds to pay the leases on two luxury cars—"even his own attorney looked at him like he was crazy," said Maclin later—but after a huddle with the negotiators he withdrew his request and agreed to pitch in $117,000 of his own money to meet his ex-employees' final payroll. The bank then agreed to extend a "loan"—really a donation, since there was little chance it would be paid back—to cover the rest of the money owed the workers. The deal couldn't be finalized immediately, though, since UE officials, consistent with the union's democratic traditions, insisted that all the workers would have to vote on it later.

On Wednesday a final meeting occurred with Bank of America and JP Morgan Chase, which had 40 percent equity in Republic. Their proposal amounted to $1.35 million from the former and $400,000 from the latter to cover workers' severance and vacation pay, and two more months of health insurance. At the factory that evening the workers, thrilled at their victory, voted to accept the offer—and yet were disappointed that it appeared the plant wasn't going to be kept open. How would their families survive the next year? What kind of jobs could they get in this dismal economy? They decided right away to start a new trust fund, the "Window of Opportunity Fund," to raise money to buy the plant themselves or find another buyer. In the meantime, they accepted their partial victory and celebrated with their supporters, both in the immediate community and, in spirit, all over the world.

What had made their victory possible, then, was an unusual confluence of factors. First, they were lucky enough to be represented by a union as militant and democratic as the UE. Leah Fried says it well:

> Here's what made it possible for UE to do this [sit-in]. Number one, we had spent the time building the leadership in that local. The leadership had gained a lot of skill and knowledge. People had been through fights before.... We had built relationships with other unions, with community groups, with the immigrant-rights movement, with important coalitions in the city like Jobs with Justice and Interfaith Worker Justice.... We had built relationships over time, and we called on those relationships when the moment was right. And folks rallied, because they saw this as their fight, not just a UE fight. So, I think anybody could do it; you just gotta practice fighting, and you gotta build relationships with the rest of the movement. And start acting like a movement when the moment comes.[2]

If the labor movement as a whole acted more like the UE—or like the Chicago Teachers Union when it organized its internationally celebrated strike in September 2012—things might improve for workers. Unfortunately, the momentum and direction of entrenched bureaucracies, such as exist in mainstream trade unions, are not easily set on a new course. Timid, conservative, and establishment traditions cannot be reversed unless circumstances *force* them to be—that is, unless a context of prolonged crisis for the bureaucracies themselves finally necessitates their radical change. The labor movement seems to be undergoing this change now, at long last. It does have a ways to go before it catches up to the UE, though.

The very fact of having a union at all, or at least having a nearby worker center that can lend its support and resources, is virtually a prerequisite for the sort of action that Republic's employees undertook. Certainly if the action is to have some success, organizational resources—and the confidence that comes

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[1] Lydersen, 91.

[2] Leah Fried, interview with Bob Bruno.

with them—are a necessity. This may help explain why the Republic occupation didn't cause many similar acts around the country. The unionization rate in the U.S.'s private sector is less than seven percent, which doesn't translate into a lot of organizational resources for workers.

Similar incidents did happen, though. The most notable was after the Colibri Group in Rhode Island, a jewelry maker, laid off its 280 employees (mostly immigrants) without giving advance notice; some actually arrived at work the day the plant closed only to see a sign informing them of the fact. And that was it, even for those who had worked there twenty or thirty years. "I gave them so much, my whole life," one worker said later, "and then they just closed the doors on us like we were animals. I felt like my heart was on the floor."[1] Since no notice had been given, the employees were entitled (under the WARN Act) to sixty days of severance pay and health insurance. They had no union, but some of them got in touch with a local immigrant- and labor-rights group called Fuerza Laboral—which had just two staff members—and organized a protest rally a couple weeks later, on February 3, 2009. Three days later, coincidentally, Armando Robles and other Republic workers and UE officials came to Providence on a tour they were taking around the country—called the Resistance and Recovery Tour—to spread word of their story and raise money for their trust fund mentioned above. The fifty Colibri workers they met with were inspired by what they heard, all the details of how a couple hundred Latino workers had shamed Bank of America before the world. So they decided to enact a similar campaign to shame the majority owner of Colibri (Founders Equity) and two banks that were creditors. In the following months they and Fuerza Laboral took many actions, including marching on the state capitol, protesting in front of Founders' Manhattan headquarters, initiating a national letter-writing drive, and filing a lawsuit to get the money they were owed. But the act most reminiscent of the Republic sit-in happened at an auction of Colibri's assets on March 19: fourteen people, including ten workers, were arrested for sitting on the street to block traffic to the auction.[2]

While the campaign got attention from the media and sympathy from politicians, it didn't have the success of the Republic sit-in. The workers were never paid, because creditors got everything left over from the business. Why this failure? One obvious reason is that the factory had already been closed, so it couldn't be occupied. As Occupy Wall Street showed in 2011, occupying an area can be a uniquely effective tactic if it draws media attention and/or prevents members of the elite from using facilities valuable to them. It forces the authorities either to give in to protesters' demands or deploy the police to violently disperse them, which never makes the elite look good. Thus, none of the actions of the Colibri workers quite "packed the punch" of a factory sit-in. Nor did the workers have the resources of a battle-hardened union, powerful coalition partners, or extensive ties to power-brokers.

The Republic workers also benefited, of course, from perfect timing (although Colibri workers' timing wasn't much worse). It was soon after the TARP bailouts had been announced, jobs were hemorrhaging—awful employment numbers came out on the very day the sit-in began—and people worldwide were enraged at the corporate sector. Hopes for comparable or greater victories in the future should be raised by the knowledge that for a very long time to come, economic stagnation and crisis will be the norm. Crises will continue recurring, and as they do so the public will grow more angry at big business and more sympathetic toward factory occupations. While it won't always be possible for workers to invoke unpopular "bailouts," they will still be able to attack corporations for destroying jobs and not paying employees what they're owed—two compelling soundbites, as Bank of America learned to its cost. If unions and their allies have the will, the "way" will present itself.

I've spent so much time discussing the 2008 sit-in because I think this tactic is the most radical and effective of all, and I suspect it will grow more common in the next few decades. As seen in Argentina after the 2001 crash, it can even lead straight into the formation of a worker cooperative. In the case of the Republic workers, the route was a little more circuitous. Let's consider that route briefly now, after which I'll discuss the co-op itself.

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[1] Emilio Blanco, quoted in Lydersen, *Revolt on Goose Island*, 150.

[2] Lydersen, 148-154; "Police arrest protesters at E. Providence plant," *Associated Press*, March 19, 2009; Kelsey Abbruzzese, "RI workers suing jewelry maker for pay, benefits," *Associated Press*, May 21, 2009.

A company called Serious Materials (later Serious Energy), which manufactures energy-efficient building materials, bought Republic's factory and equipment in February 2009. With the help of Obama's 2009 stimulus package, it hoped to hire back all of Republic's former employees by the summer. Things didn't work out as planned, though: by September 2009, only twenty employees had been rehired, for reasons having to do with bureaucratic delays and insufficient stimulus funds.[1] Over the next couple years, in fact, only about 75 workers were hired back. Then, on February 23, 2012, UE was notified in a meeting with local executives that the plant would be closed that very day, because of "ongoing economic challenges in construction and building products, collapse in demand for window products, difficulty in obtaining favorable lease terms, high leasing and utility costs and taxes, and a range of other factors."[2] This time, at least, management said it would pay workers what they were owed under the WARN Act; union officers and staff, however, wanted time to find a buyer for the factory, so they could save the jobs. Management refused.

Because of a recent layoff, only 38 workers were employed at the moment. After the meeting with Serious, therefore, Robles and Fried called laid-off employees, asking them to come to the plant. Fifty workers met at 2 p.m., the end of the shift, to discuss the situation. Journalist Jane Slaughter describes what happened next:

> Robles presented [their options] soberly: Do nothing, or fight—stay and occupy the plant again. Without much hullabaloo, matter-of-factly, the members voted unanimously to occupy.
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> They had no food, no sleeping bags. Workers and leaders immediately started to phone fellow workers, allies, and the media. They called the local alderman and asked others to alert the mayor's office. Occupy Chicago came with tacos. Stand Up Chicago arrived.
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> Workers from other UE locals, including recently organized railroad van drivers, were there. Republic workers who'd never been called back to Serious but who still came to union meetings were there. The crowd inside grew to 65 and outside to 100.[3]

UE regional president Carl Rosen got in touch with Serious CEO Kevin Surace to tell him the workers were prepared to be dragged out and arrested, as they were in 2008. (Such an outcome, indeed, is what they had expected then, before the event became a media circus.) The police showed up after being summoned by management and warned the workers that in five minutes they would be arrested if they didn't leave the plant. And maybe they would have been, if not for the many supporters outside with cellphones and cameras, including local TV news cameras. So the police thought better of their threat and let the workers stay. By 5 p.m., Occupy Chicago was raising tents as workers inside played dominoes and ate donated food.

Soon, corporate headquarters in California took over negotiations, having decided they didn't want a big confrontation with the union. By 1 a.m. they had agreed to all their employees' demands: the plant would stay open for ninety days, giving time for the workers and their union either to find a new buyer or arrange to run the factory themselves. The latter is the course they chose, thanks largely to Robles' advocacy.

The co-op idea had been in the air for a while. In 2006 Robles had attended the World Social Forum in Venezuela and heard a group of electricians discuss the cooperative they had formed, but at the time he wasn't able to pursue the idea. During their "victory tour" around the U.S. in early 2009, however, he and his coworkers got a step closer to starting a co-op. In an interview on Democracy Now! in New York they met Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis, who had made the documentary The Take about factory occupations in

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[1] Kari Lydersen, "One Year Later: The Republic Windows Story," *War Resisters League*, Winter 2010, https://www.warresisters.org/content/one-year-later-republic-windows-story (accessed December, 20, 2013).

[2] Juan Conatz, "Workers occupy factory in Chicago," February 24, 2012, http://libcom.org/news/workers-occupy-factory-chicago-24022012.

[3] Jane Slaughter, "UE Occupies Chicago Window Plant Again, and Wins Reprieve," *Labor Notes*, February 24, 2012.

Argentina and, since then, have been deeply committed to the cause of worker cooperativism. They introduced Robles to Brendan Martin, founder (in 2004) of a nonprofit called The Working World, which would provide crucial assistance to the New Era Windows cooperative formed later. As stated on TWW's website, it helps design, fund, and carry out cooperative projects—hundreds of them in the last ten years, in Argentina, Nicaragua, and the U.S. While its business model might seem risky, in that it gives low-interest loans to relatively poor people who don't have to pay them back until their businesses make a profit, its loans have a 98 percent repayment rate.[1]

Martin pitched the idea of a co-op to Robles, but at the moment it was too late: Serious Materials had already stepped in. Robles was hopeful, though. As he recalls, "my answer [to Martin] was: you know what? Things happen. Owners are owners, they close. Sooner or later we could be in that spot, and then we'll give you a call." Almost exactly three years later, his prediction was borne out.

As he says,

> when [Serious] announced the close of the factory [in 2012], I keep mention [sic] all during the whole occupation— twelve hours—every single minute talk to the people, we should buy the factory, we could make a co-op. 'Cause I already have the idea. I see the movie *The Take* and it inspired me a lot. I have the opportunity from Brendan Martin who offered to us the financial support, and he has the dream to start the movement in the United States. So I see it as a big opportunity.[2]

At Robles' request, Leah Fried called Brendan Martin, who was in Argentina but flew to Chicago a couple days later. He met with Robles, Ricky Maclin, and a steward to start planning the co-op, for instance by choosing which workers they wanted to invite into the business. Initially it would have to be a small group of people who could be expected to get along well; later, the co-op could expand. They got in touch, therefore, with a few dozen former employees of Republic, not all of whom were interested. After all, the equipment hadn't even been purchased yet, and the whole idea of starting a co- op struck some people as crazy. Many saw themselves exclusively as workers, not bosses, and they couldn't break out of that mindset.

Nevertheless, progress was being made that spring of 2012. At an event showcasing the achievements of the Evergreen cooperatives in Ohio, the small group of planners fortuitously met Dennis Kelleher, executive director of the Center for Workplace Democracy. This institution assists cooperatives and community-based organizations in Chicago through advocacy, technical support, and financing. After hearing about the project that would soon come to fruition as New Era Windows, Kelleher organized classes in cooperative business administration for the workers who had agreed to join the co-op. In the spring and summer of 2012, therefore, when the status of the future business was still very uncertain, workers attended weekly classes run by Kelleher at the UE hall. The content of these classes was useful, but perhaps most important was the fact that—in these doubt-full early months—they brought people together every week and so fostered a group cohesion that, in retrospect, was "absolutely necessary," as Fried says.

One reason cohesion was so necessary is that there were still unforeseen battles ahead. Serious had agreed on February 24 to sell the factory—or rather, its equipment[3]—instead of liquidating it, thus giving workers the opportunity to buy it. Negotiations between the company and its ex-employees began soon after: the workers painstakingly selected which equipment they wanted to buy and negotiated the prices with Serious, Brendan Martin serving as an intermediary. Things were looking so positive that the 17 future worker-owners took steps to incorporate New Era Windows on May 30, 2012, though they didn't yet have equipment or a place of business. Negotiations continued for weeks until suddenly, at the beginning of July, Serious informed them it wasn't going to sell its equipment after all—thus reneging on the contract it had signed at the end of February.

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[1] Elie Winninghoff, "The Giving Generation," *Barron's*, December 3, 2012.
[2] Author's interview with Robles, January 8, 2014.
[3] Serious owned the equipment but not the building, which it leased.

Immediately the workers launched a petition on Change.org to pressure Serious to comply with its own prior agreement; within 24 hours, the petition had received 3000 signatures. (Seventy-five thousand more would follow in the next two weeks.) Meanwhile, the UE filed for arbitration over Serious's violation of the February 24th agreement. The next day, July 5, the union organized a rally in which workers and supporters, armed with stacks of their signed petition, marched on one of the chief financial backers and board members of Serious Energy, Mesirow Financial.[1] In less than thirty minutes, the march grew from twenty people to about eighty. Evidently this frightened Serious and its investors, for, in a conciliatory mood now, they promptly got in touch with the workers. "Stop," Robles paraphrases them, "don't go to the media, we're going to work with you guys."

This incident shows, once again, that Glenn Greenwald's characterization of bureaucrats in the National Security Agency applies to functionaries of power everywhere: they're like cockroaches, happy to operate in the dark but extraordinarily skittish once light is shined on them. In most cases they'd rather concede defeat in some battle than have their dark machinations be exposed. Doing so, or threatening to do so, is one of the most powerful weapons in the arsenal of democracy.

So negotiations resumed, continuing through the summer. Meanwhile the search for a new factory continued, since the old one on Goose Island was too expensive and much too large. Even Serious hadn't needed all the space or used all the equipment it had bought. The cooperative, in contrast, would start out small and without a large surplus of cash, a fact that encouraged its members to be much more efficient and sparing in their purchase and use of machinery and facilities than large corporations tend to be. They looked at over ten possible buildings, eventually deciding on one in southwest Chicago that was significantly cheaper than the property on Goose Island.

To pay for the equipment they were buying, each member contributed the $1000 that was his or her buy-in to the co-op, and The Working World provided the rest—in fact, more than the rest. It raised over $600,000, though in the end the equipment cost only about $400,000. The rest of the money it raised has served as a line of credit for New Era.

However, the whole cooperative venture almost fell apart again in September, when Serious dropped another bombshell. After months of negotiations over individual pieces of equipment, its executives changed their mind and declared that New Era had to buy everything or nothing. Since it didn't have the money to buy everything, the business could have ended just then, before it even began. Luckily Brendan Martin came to the rescue: he found a company that liquidates factories and arranged for it to buy 60 percent of the equipment while New Era bought 40 percent (which included much it didn't need, such as extra computers, tables, pallets, and lots of odds and ends the workers sold later). The deal was signed, and New Era had its equipment, finally.

The task now was to transport everything from the factory on Goose Island to the new one in south Chicago. Aside from four heavy machines that they hired someone else to transport, the workers moved all the equipment themselves—almost seventy trailers' worth. They hired a driver, but the loading and unloading they did themselves. Robles recalls with pride how effectively they organized this operation. They had bought four trailers from Serious; after filling them up they called the driver, who drove them one by one to the new factory, where another team of workers unloaded them. The efficiency with which they carried this out defied everyone's expectations, as Robles says:

> Against all the predictions from the Wrigley people, who's been the owner of the Goose Island building, and against the predictions of the liquidators—they assumed like how the workers gonna move, we don't have experience to do nothing like that. Well, with experienced people [who transported the equipment the liquidators had bought] they moved like four trailers, at most they moved four trailers a day. We reached, in three consecutive days, moving ten trailers a day. So we moved around seventy trailers to this facility.

[1] Laura Flanders, "Workers vs. Investors: Chicago Window Factory in Danger of Liquidation," *The Nation*, July 4, 2012; "New Era Windows Workers Continue Struggle With Serious Energy," *Chicagoist*, July 11, 2012.

That was in October 2012. In the following months they fixed up the plant, which was not in good shape. Old mattresses were piled high, the ceiling was an ugly brownish color, there were no lights and no heaters. With help from the building owners they cleaned it all out, painted the ceiling white, installed heaters and lights, ran pipes to each machine, and eventually built a break room and a large office on the factory floor. They didn't have fancy architectural drawings to guide them regarding the layout of the plant; instead, they just put the machines where they thought they should be, based on memory. "I was working here, I need this amount of space, this is the next machine, I could put this other one here... We make straight lines better than Republic or Serious," Robles says, "because we tried to do step by step."

Finally, late in the spring of 2013, they were almost ready to open—except for the required fire inspection, which they were worried about. Any little irregularity, whether with the sprinkler system, the fire extinguishers, the proximity of electrical panels to machines, or "all the chemical stuff," could pose a serious problem. It turned out they had no cause for concern, though: they passed the inspection without a hitch, and so were able to open their business on May 9.

Businesses rarely start making a profit very quickly; New Era has not differed much in this regard (though it has been successful more quickly than most businesses). The first summer was spent building up a base of customers, and not much production was done until the fall, which is in any case a more active season for the windows business than summer. In fact, the workers didn't give themselves their first paycheck until the fall. Their pay, which they calculate themselves, is based on a combination of sales and how many hours each person has worked, with everyone receiving the same rate. Nine months after opening, their individual earnings have fluctuated as the number of windows manufactured each week changes.

As the cooperative has expanded its business, the UE has been an invaluable resource. New Era's worker-owners are still unionized, but the role of the union has of course changed: it now serves to represent the co-op, giving it support with advertising, legal work, promotion among other unions and social justice groups, conflict mediation if that's necessary, and other issues that might arise. For example, if there's a protest or some kind of mass event, the union will get in touch with New Era to send people who can pass out flyers (while wearing their New Era t-shirts) and talk to the media. Also, the UE has connections that help it find customers who otherwise wouldn't even have heard of New Era. Suppose, for instance, that the city or state government wants to weatherize some buildings. If a small co-op offers to supply the windows, the government will just laugh at it. If, on the other hand, a union backed by 35,000 people pressures the government with petitions coming from all over the country and other such tactics, officials will listen. And there's also the influence that the UE can bring to bear on contractors as opposed to end users. All this can add up to the difference between a failed business and a successful one.

The union can perform other services too. At this writing, Leah Fried is arranging to get health insurance for the members of New Era. She's also facilitating the adoption of a "collective bargaining" agreement—not in the traditional sense, as between a boss and employees, but merely in the sense of a set of rules that the members commit themselves to obey. It isn't a particularly urgent issue at the moment, when the business is small and personal conflicts are infrequent, but if and when the cooperative brings in new members it could prove useful to have such a statement of principles and rules.

Brendan Martin has remained just as involved with the co-op as Fried. Amidst his continent-hopping he regularly comes to Chicago to work on behalf of New Era, primarily in sales, meeting with government representatives, construction companies, and other potential customers. Meanwhile, another member of The Working World, Steve Wong, works at New Era in sales, purchasing, technical support, and other areas. In addition, the worker-owners energetically advertise themselves, seeking out clients in person around the city.

As a result, business is steadily growing. Robles recalls that his first paycheck in the fall of 2013 was only $20—and yet even that was satisfying, because it was symbolic. "It was money from our own work, from our own factory, from our own product. That was a big thing, to make me successful, to make me feel comfortable and happy, 'cause in the end it was the fruit of all our work we put in this." In less than

ten weeks after their first check, everyone's biweekly pay had shot up to $580. Winter is an off season in the industry, but they expect sales to increase dramatically in the spring.

When talking to the members, it's striking how positive and optimistic they are about the cooperative. Joel Cruz, a middle-aged man with six children, thinks his future is much more secure now, just as the present is much more satisfying. "My life is different. Maybe next year, with more customers, I forgot everything, my problems [in 2008 and 2012]... You know, when you're in the company, you have a supervisor; the supervisor say, 'Why you come in late? Hey, what happen? You talk too much, you go to line! Back to line, back to work!' Now, nothing like that." As one would expect, he's motivated to work harder now that he partly owns his business; at the same time, he's able to relax occasionally without worrying he'll be punished. For some of the members, indeed, the co-op also serves as a kind of social club, and they enjoy coming to work to see their friends. The only complaint Cruz has—which is shared by the others—is that, for now, the pay is too little. To provide for his family he has to work a second job on the weekends, as a saxophonist with a Mexican band. Other members, such as Robles, have had to be supported by their spouses.

William Swanson is, if anything, even more enthusiastic than Cruz, about everything except the pay (so far). He worked at Republic for 26 years, then at Serious for two years, and now it seems that for the first time he actually enjoys his job. He views it as a kind of adventure, an adventure in freedom-from-a-boss. For him, that's by far the best part. But he also enjoys the learning process, learning how to do purchasing (which is his main responsibility now) and the other duties they all share. "It's fun! It's knowledge, we're learning. That's the good part about it. We're learning something, and we can always have this, you know? We'll always have this under our belt. And we ain't got no bosses standing over us telling '*C'mere, ya gotta do this!*,' 'cause we know what we gotta do. If we don't do it, we don't make money." Ricky Maclin has the same attitude as Swanson—something like exhilaration—and is absolutely confident about the future.

The co-op has five female members, whose attitudes toward their business do not differ much from their male coworkers'. Arizona Stingley worked at Republic for twenty years, then Serious, and now is loving her new role as a worker-owner. The small size of the business and its cooperative nature make it feel like a "family," very different from the impersonal environment of her two previous employers. Neither she nor Victoria Amaya, another long-term employee of Republic, has noticed any sexism at New Era; in fact, Victoria is one of the more dominant voices in the business and at their weekly meetings. These meetings, at which important business decisions are made (such as what materials to buy or how to address some problem that's arisen), are structured fairly informally, typically with a 75 percent supermajority being required on any given decision.

In short, things are going smoothly at New Era. The members hope to start a second shift and bring in new people in 2014, though they haven't yet decided on the specifics of that process. New members will probably have to pay a larger buy-in than the current members did, since the latter did all the hard, unpaid work of getting the business started. For now, though, they're just looking forward to enjoying the economic fruits of their intensive two-years-long labor.

Several lessons can be drawn from the history outlined in this chapter. First, militancy works. Or rather, it can work, if it has institutional support such as the UE and The Working World provided in this case. At each step of the way, it was by acting "impolitely," even illegally, that the workers were heard and got justice. The whole of labor history, of course, confirms this conclusion. For example, it was the sit-down strikes of 1936 and 1937 that led to the unionization of the automobile and other industries, whereas the concessionary bargaining of the 1980s and later did nothing to stop the decline of the union movement. It's time that mainstream American unions took the UE as their model.

The other obvious lesson is that media savvy is an invaluable tool for activists and workers. The slogan Leah Fried came up with in 2008, "Banks got bailed out, we got sold out," perfectly captured the public's mood and justified the workers' struggle. It was a catchy soundbite that simultaneously directed ire at banks and highlighted the injustice of what had happened to millions of people in the country. It's necessary to spin stories in such a way that the media will cover them, and then to conduct visible protest

actions. Especially if one has already built relationships among the liberal elite, it's quite possible that militant tactics will force authorities to come to the bargaining table, or even to concede all demands so that the issue goes away.

Regarding the cooperative itself, the history of New Era is vivid confirmation that starting a sizable co-op is extremely difficult and labor-intensive, and requires institutional guidance and support. Without Brendan Martin and The Working World, or the UE and its skilled organizers, New Era Windows never would have happened. If the U.S. had anything like a sensible industrial policy, government at all levels would provide much of the support needed to start co-ops and so give employment to some of the millions who desperately need it. For now, though, it seems that activists and visionaries will have to fill in the gap left by the government's inaction, while simultaneously pressing for policy changes.

A more encouraging lesson comes out of New Era's capital- intensiveness: it reminds us that worker co-ops need not be limited to labor-intensive industries. The record of Mondragon already demonstrates this, as does the cooperative sector in Emilia-Romagna and the success of other high-tech co-ops such as the long-running Isthmus Engineering & Manufacturing.[1] Still, to have a successful high-tech cooperative run by a working-class membership of Hispanics and African-Americans is yet another nail in the coffin of conservative conventional wisdom. Indeed, the diversity of the workforce demonstrates that, despite the scholarly stereotypes summarized in chapter two, homogeneity of cultural background is by no means a prerequisite of successful worker co-ops (however much it may conduce to success). What matter, rather, are commitment to the business and some degree of flexibility and amiability in relations with coworkers.

The broadest implication of the New Era Windows story is that one doesn't need a sophisticated formal education or a middle-class background or millions of dollars to stand up to corporate titans and win, or to start an ambitious manufacturing cooperative that is poised for indefinite expansion a few months after its inception. Such qualities as creativity, intelligence, ambition, and initiative are not limited to any one class of people but spread evenly throughout the population. It so happens that current social structures are designed to stultify these qualities in people who don't belong to the elite, but with determination, capitalist resistance can be overcome. If working people, with assistance from activists, tap into their enormous collective reserves of energy and defiance, there are no limits to what they can accomplish.

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON REVOLUTION

While worker cooperatives are the main subject of this book, I am much more interested in revolution than cooperatives for their own sake. The future of civilization is what concerns me, the future of cooperatives only derivatively. Given the unsustainable nature of corporate capitalism, society will necessarily undergo a transition to a different system sooner or later. The question is, how will that transition happen? And what will it lead to? In chapter four I tried to answer these questions, admittedly in sketchy ways. No certain or precise answer is possible. I used Marxism because no other relevant set of intellectual tools approaches it in explanatory power, theoretical fruitfulness, or historical resonance. The revision I made to Marxism, though, is important enough to warrant further consideration, not only for intellectual or academic reasons but because it bears on debates that activists have been having since the split between Marx and Bakunin in the nineteenth century. The most important implication of my revision is that the opposition between Marxists and anarchists virtually dissolves upon a deeper understanding of Marxism itself.

Now, there is a sense in which, say, Noam Chomsky's attitude toward such debates as these is right: they don't matter, they're elitist and intellectually masturbatory. We know what's necessary to bring about

[1] See Michael Billeaux et al., "Worker Cooperative Case Study: Isthmus Engineering & Manufacturing," University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives, staff paper no. 9 (October 2011).

social change: education and organization. Education about how the world works—namely through class war, exploitation of workers, big business's near-total control of national politics, etc.—and organization to take over factories, defend public resources, and so on. Chomsky's "anti-intellectualism" is refreshing and largely valid. On the other hand, insofar as millions of people do have a sectarian commitment to some particular ideology, it is not merely an intellectual exercise to argue that sectarianism is counterproductive and based on misunderstandings. Doing so can have positive practical consequences. The world needs an ecumenical left, a left that can countenance and integrate all kinds of radicalism, from cooperatives to political parties. Marxists, anarchists, feminists, environmentalists, unionists, anti-racism activists, and other such people ought to understand that they're basically on the same side and should work together.

I have to admit I'm also interested in theory for its own sake (and for the sake of interpreting history), and accordingly will elaborate on the discussion in chapter four in order to clarify what a twenty-first century Marxism entails. I'll return briefly to the topic of cooperatives later in the chapter.

Since the publication in 1978 of G.A. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, the academic school of Analytical Marxism has tried to reconstruct Marx's theory of history in the light of the Anglo-American philosophical pursuit of logical precision. Debates have erupted over the role that such questionable methods as functional explanation play in Marxism, and the discussions of Marx's "base/superstructure" metaphor could fill a small library. As is usual with academics, most of this labored intellection has been unnecessary and unproductive. Being an academic, I would, nonetheless, contribute to it myself were this an academic book; instead I'll make a few suggestions that eschew the obsession with logical precision in favor of old-fashioned commonsense reasoning. After making a couple observations on the base/superstructure metaphor, I'll confine myself to the theory of revolution.

The imagery of "economic base vs. political, ideological, and cultural superstructure" is woefully imprecise but intuitively reasonable, which is why it still commands attention even after generations of criticism. Its meaning and truth are revealed in the single consideration that the institutions and institutional actors with the greatest access to resources are going to have the greatest influence over society. Fewer resources, less influence. Institutions directly involved in the production and accumulation of resources—of money, capital, and technology—are naturally going to have the most direct access to these resources, i.e., the greatest control over them. The people who control these institutions, then, are going to have more power than other people, and they will seek to make other institutions (and ideas) throughout society "compatible" with their power or subservient to it. Which means making them compatible with the form of organizing relations of production in that society that has the most control over the most resources. In other words, the "dominant mode of production." In non-prehistoric societies, the class structure and implicit class struggle, which are defined by the relations between antagonistic positions in the mode of production, will therefore be central to social dynamics. The more exploitation of the producing class(es), the more power there will be in the hands of the exploiting class(es), i.e., those who occupy the dominant positions in the dominant mode of production. (Their dominant position is a function of their control over the resources necessary to force others to produce for them.) The exploiters will try to increase exploitation as the exploited try to diminish it. The vicissitudes of this struggle will go far towards explaining other political and cultural phenomena, because the struggle—which is integrally connected to the evolution of the relations of production, of the class structure, of economic institutions, as well as the closely related evolution of the forces of production—largely determines who has how many and what kinds of resources when, what sorts of institutions and values the people with resources will promote, etc.[1]

All this is sheer common sense, although its schematic nature demands the sort of elaboration for which I don't have space here. It leads directly into the theory of revolution, which I'll consider now. Analytical Marxists have spent decades wringing their hands over the supposed Marxist commitment to functional explanation, which is scientifically incomplete compared to causal explanation. For example, to say that birds have hollow bones because this allows them to fly—which is a functional explanation—is not to give a complete explanation, which requires invoking the causal mechanism Darwin identified of

[1] This paragraph is taken from my *Notes of an Underground Humanist*, 146, 147.

natural selection by random variation. Similarly, Marx's argument that revolution happens when production relations start to fetter the use and development of productive forces gives no causal mechanism to explain why this is the case. As I said earlier, my revision supplies the necessary mechanism, and thus renders all the hand-wringing over functional explanation superfluous. Such explanations are merely shorthand for causal accounts.

On the basis of my arguments, one can translate problematic statements by Marx into statements that are both substantive and possibly true. An example is his hypothesis that "No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society." Said in this way, the statement is objectionable. It's functionalist and isn't even entirely meaningful. One can translate it, though, as follows. "The overwhelming mass impetus necessary to effect a revolution in the dominant mode of production will not arise until the latter has nearly exhausted its resources, has reached a point of dysfunction such that it cannot efficiently use or develop productive forces any further; however, there also has to exist an alternative mode of production that has reached such a level of societal influence that it can withstand attempts by the old ruling class to destroy it." In some ways this is quite different from Marx's original statement, but it is both inspired by it and more cogent.

This translation also answers the question that no one has ever satisfactorily answered, namely, why hasn't a truly "post-capitalist" revolution occurred anywhere despite all the problems with capitalism? It isn't hard to think of various superficial reasons, such as that the capitalist class has had enough means of violence at its disposal to crush rebellions. What is needed, though, is a more comprehensive answer that acknowledges that the failure of past revolutions necessitates a substantial correction to orthodox Marxism, which predicted revolution long ago. But what, precisely, has to be corrected?

It turns out the answer is pretty simple: there is not only *one* condition for the success of revolution but *two*. First, capitalism has to be fettering the productive forces such that the majority of people live in poverty relative to the conditions they could be living in if society's productive potential were not so shackled. This is the condition Marx stated. The second condition, to repeat, is that a more rational or socially appropriate set of (*viable*) production relations has to already be spreading and attracting hundreds of millions of people worldwide who understand its superiority to capitalism. If this condition doesn't exist, then it doesn't matter how much "fettering" the old production relations are guilty of; they'll continue to predominate. The ruling class will still be able to maintain its hold on power, because it commands more resources than its relatively impoverished opponents do. In fact, radicals should be resigned to the fact that the capitalist class *will* retain substantial control over society for a long time to come, until capitalism has virtually *no* reserves of power left—as the European feudal aristocracy had virtually none left in the early twentieth century, when its remnants were still frantically trying to maintain their hold on the reins of power. (It took two world wars to destroy all vestiges of feudalism in the West.) Revolution is not a matter of swiftly overthrowing the state, shooting all your opponents, and then organizing a "new society" from the top down.

One might ask if the second condition I've identified will *ever* arrive, given that we're still waiting for it. The answer has to be yes, if only because the unsustainable nature of capitalism has become blindingly obvious. Unless the human species completely destroys itself, which likely isn't possible, a new mode of production will necessarily evolve as the old one succumbs to its contradictions and catastrophic environmental consequences. It's worth remembering, too, that the fact that radicals have been expecting an imminent socialist revolution since the 1840s means precisely nothing—except that they've been wildly over-optimistic and have wildly misunderstood history. Feudalism was around for many centuries; industrial capitalism has been around for barely two, and for less than fifty years in much of the world. It would be nice if history went faster, but, as it happens, it prefers to go very slowly.

Thus, as painful as it is for a Marx-lover to admit this, it's clear that Marx wildly misinterpreted mid-nineteenth century radicalism. It's time we revised our understanding of history and resurrected the idea of "historical necessity." All the popular discontent and rebellions from 1848 to 1871 to 1917 and afterwards were nothing like what Marx thought or would have thought—were not pregnant with historic

potential in the way he hoped: all these battles were fought by heterogeneous masses, some of them, like the craftsmen who felt themselves besieged by this terrifying new thing called industrial capitalism, "reactionary radicals,"[1] and others proletarians in the classic Marxist sense, but whose miseries could have been (and eventually were) effectively meliorated by mere reform. They were not proletarian armies "disciplined, united, and organized by the process of capitalist production"[2] but disparate masses of the lower classes with disparate interests—some progressive, some reactionary—temporarily thrown together by the sheer chaos of early industrialism. As capitalism matured in the twentieth century, the working class was "disciplined and united" into explicit reformism, and this was both good and inevitable. When reform is possible, revolution is not. Only when broad welfare-statist reform has become impossible is (gradual) revolution possible, because the dispossessed are forced to turn from obvious reformist solutions to less-obvious radical ones.

That is, there is no conflict between reform and revolution. People should always be fighting for reform. Only when it becomes impossible on a large scale does the question of revolution arise.

This idea that "necessity" plays some role in history begs the question: what about the twentieth-century revolutions in Russia, China, Cuba, and so on? What did they "mean"? Were they socialist revolutions, as their leaders claimed? Or merely some form of radical coup? Do they have any implications with regard to the ideas I've presented in this book? Such questions are made more important by the fact that these "revolutions"—the Russian in particular—still bewitch many radicals, who mistakenly look back to them for inspiration and strategic lessons. The reality is that they have very little to say to us who live in advanced capitalist societies, and they were certainly nothing like Marxist or socialist revolutions. I've discussed the Russian example briefly elsewhere, and I'll be even briefer here.[3]

Good scholarly accounts of the Russian Revolution, such as Christopher Read's *From Tsar to Soviets* (1996) and Orlando Figes' *A People's Tragedy* (1996), make several facts abundantly clear. First, the revolution was something of a historical accident. A thousand incidents leading up to the October coup had to go just right in order for Lenin's wild schemes (considered wild by his associates) to succeed, and if the prime minister Kerensky had shown a little backbone the Bolshevik leadership might have ended up ignominiously imprisoned months before the coup was attempted. And yes, the events of October *were* a coup and not a mass uprising, as any disinterested retrospective observer has to admit. Conspiratorially, secretively, Trotsky, Lenin, and the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) of the Petrograd Soviet planned out what would happen on October 24 and the following few days, namely that soldiers loyal to the MRC would occupy the city's telegraph offices, the railway station, nearby bridges, etc., and then take over the Provisional Government's headquarters at the Winter Palace. The coup was a swift, decisive series of acts that triggered hardly any fighting and barely disrupted the city's functioning. In the following weeks and months the Bolsheviks miraculously clung to power, perhaps in part because of Lenin's immediate moves to establish dictatorial control over the government.

The main reason, of course, that the party was able to stay in power in the subsequent weeks was that, for the moment, it had the support of most soldiers, industrial workers, and peasants. Why? Because Lenin was an astute politician. Since April 1917 he had distanced the Bolshevik party from the unpopular Provisional Government and used very popular slogans to propagandize for his party, in particular "All power to the soviets!"[4] and "Peace, bread, land!" The vast majority of the population wanted an immediate end to the European war that Russia was mired in; urban workers, many starving, wanted an end to the shortages of food; and peasants wanted carte blanche to seize aristocrats' land. So Lenin spent months

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[1] Craig Calhoun, "The Radicalism of Tradition."

[2] Marx, quoted in Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years, 1868–1936* (San Francisco: AK Press, 1998), 281.

[3] See *Notes of an Underground Humanist*, chapter two. My paper "Causes of the Russian Revolution" (on www.academia.edu) gives a more detailed summary of the events and commentary on them.

[4] The soviets were popular, relatively democratic institutions that had sprung up in many cities and towns after the February revolt against the tsar's rule.

telling them that the Bolsheviks would grant their wishes. Not surprisingly, he became exceedingly popular, such that when his coup occurred most soldiers in the vicinity of Petrograd accepted it.

In the following years, the Bolshevik dictatorship and bureaucracy grew so bloated and inefficient that even Lenin complained about it. Workers' earlier factory takeovers (before and right after the October coup) were reversed as a hierarchy of managers and bosses was reinstalled. Popular uprisings against the Red dictatorship were crushed in the context of civil war and afterwards, as even the Bolsheviks' former supporters grew terribly disillusioned with this "socialist" government that was in many ways more repressive than tsardom. Russia was so devastated by its civil war that in 1921 Lenin deemed it necessary to end forced grain requisitions and partially reverse some of the nationalizations of industry that had taken place since 1918. His New Economic Policy began, the most important achievement of which was to restore market relations to agriculture and thereby stimulate food production. This partial "retreat" to capitalism ended in the late 1920s, when Stalin ordered a return to full nationalization of the economy, organized the collectivization of agriculture, and began his Five-Year Plans to industrialize the Soviet Union. The Stalinist bureaucracy proceeded to liquidate millions of people and effectively enslave the rest for the sake of developing the USSR's industry and military. This situation lasted until the country's collapse in 1991 (though things did improve after Stalin's death).

Now, does any of this seem like workers' democratic control of the economy? That's what socialism means, after all. Does a secretly planned coup in a backward, semi-feudal country eighty percent full of peasants seem like a mass working-class revolution in an advanced capitalist country? The historical meaning of the so-called Russian Revolution is no mystery. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (before the Bolsheviks took over) Russia was undergoing the transition that some Western European states had already experienced, from being a late-feudal country with an absolutist monarchy to being a semi-industrial capitalist country with either a constitutional monarchy or some other form of representative government. Unfortunately, Nicholas II was a desperately incompetent ruler reminiscent of France's Louis XVI, not least in being utterly resistant to even minor democratic reforms that the population was clamoring for. Combined with the unstable state of Europe at the time, riven by imperialism, nationalism, racism, and an international arms race—all of which led to the height of "instability," World War I—this fact of the tsar's incompetence made it likely that Russia's decades-long "bourgeois revolution" would go off the rails sooner or later. It finally did, in the context of a world war that exacerbated the population's grievances. A new elite with good intentions took advantage of mass discontent to seize power—and used it to establish a much more vicious kind of state capitalism than existed in the West. Classic historical irony.

The point is that none of this was revolution, at least not in the Marxian sense. The same is true of the Chinese case and others. All these signified nothing but transitions to a mature capitalism that got waylaid for a few decades and ended up in an (inevitable) return to paradigmatic capitalism by the 1990s or 2000s. The only lessons they hold for us are in how *not* to do things.

The Russian case had another pernicious consequence: it cemented the idea in the minds of many Marxists that the way to make a revolution is to seize the national state and then remake society. This is exactly the opposite of the proper path, and the opposite of what Marxism (despite Marx) prescribes. In chapter four I explained the reasoning behind my revision, or rather purification, of Marxism, showing how it follows from a simple conceptual alteration and dramatically changes the thrust of the theory of revolution. I'll recapitulate that argument now before considering how it bears on the old, and rather tired, debate between Marxism and anarchism.[1]

To frame the conflict that leads to revolution as between two sets of production relations rather than between one set and the productive forces it shackles (as Marx does) has other advantages besides making the theory more meaningful, supplying causal mechanisms that answer academic complaints about functional explanation, and answering the question of why revolution hasn't happened yet. It also gives the

[1] A good introduction to anarchism is Daniel Guérin's *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970). His *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (San Francisco: AK Press, 1998) is a panorama of the original writings.

theory a grassroots, democratic emphasis, since the new set of production relations—which, in the context of the transition out of capitalism, are necessarily "cooperative" as opposed to antagonistic—cannot but emerge gradually from the energies of "ordinary people." In the case of the post-capitalist transition, they emerge from ordinary people's efforts to adapt to a world in crisis, efforts that take the form of creating cooperatives of all kinds, joining movements for public banking and municipal enterprise, pressing for nationalization of key industries, joining radical political parties with agendas to confiscate wealth, agitating for comprehensive participatory budgeting, taking over factories and making them worker cooperatives, demanding improved and cheaper public resources, and forcing expansion of the social and solidarity economy. Eventually, perhaps, one can talk about taking over the national state (in whatever form it may exist), but not until the corporate capitalist class has been enormously weakened by crisis and all the democratic initiatives that have accumulated over decades.

It's obvious how these arguments bear on the "Marxism vs. anarchism" issue: they bring Marxism closer to anarchism, by jettisoning the (implicit) statism of most orthodox Marxists and Leninists. In fact, I've argued that the essence of Marxism always was anarchist in this way, since the idea of a national state organizing a radically new economy—abolishing class structures, ending authoritarian hierarchies, eliminating the exploitation of workers and an elite's appropriation of the surplus they produce—is both a thoroughly "un-dialectical" notion and inexplicable in Marxian terms. Historical actors almost never understand the broad significance of their acts or succeed in their designs as they interpret them (a Marxian apothegm ironically borne out by the Bolsheviks' total misunderstanding of what they were doing, thinking they were establishing socialism or leading a working-class revolution when they were really, in effect, just opportunistic political adventurers who founded a regime that magnified some of the worst aspects of capitalism). History is always an agonizingly slow and unconscious process; one cannot sit in the driver's seat, so to speak, look at a map, and direct it where to go. If one tries, as Lenin did, one will find that History in fact is still in control and has another destination in mind.

Even the old Marxist strategy of forming workers' parties and entering the electoral arena—which is something that anarchists have traditionally been hostile to, since they regard politics and the state as an evil—is not especially "Marxist," though it is realistic and can produce gains for the working class. Its un-Marxist element is that such parties can, and historically have, become integrated into the dominant political and economic order, so that their radical edge is dulled and the essential antagonism between labor and capital is blurred. They can end up functioning as props for the stability of the system they were originally created to overthrow. This was the fate, for example, of the German Social-Democratic Party, which already by the time of World War I had shed much of its former radicalism. (It supported Germany in the war, a nationalist position anathema to many Marxists of the time.) Later, European Communist parties followed a similar trajectory.

On top of this, there is the tendency for party activity to degenerate into the "parliamentary cretinism" that Marx and Engels loathed, "a disorder which penetrates its unfortunate victims with the solemn conviction that the whole world, its history and future, are governed and determined by a majority of votes in that particular representative body which has the honor to count them among its members, and that all and everything going on outside the walls of their house....is nothing compared with the incommensurable events hinging upon the important question, whatever it may be, just at that moment occupying the attention of their honorable house."[1] In general, the real conditions and struggles of the working class can be forgotten or neglected by an insular party elite seduced by power or its illusion.

If there is nothing essentially Marxist about forming political parties, so there is nothing *un*-Marxist about the favored anarchist tactic of "direct action." Marx himself and most of his followers have consistently engaged in and supported direct action of all kinds, including strikes, sit-ins, armed insurrections, and every manifestation of civil disobedience. Indeed, insofar as direct action highlights antagonistic and asymmetric power relations, striking at the fulcrum of society in the economic sphere or demonstrating that the rule of the powerful rests on pure violence, it emerges straight from the logic of Marxism. Here too, then, anarchism and Marxism are one.

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[1] Friedrich Engels, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany* (1852), chapter 15.

If my revision of Marx's conception of revolution is justified, it follows that the ideas bearing his name have much more in common with anarcho-syndicalism than Leninist vanguardism, elitism, and statism. Anarcho-syndicalism is committed to the task of building the new society within the old, according to its understanding that "every new social structure makes organs for itself in the body of the old organism," as Rudolf Rocker writes. "Without this preliminary any social evolution is unthinkable. Even revolutions can only develop and mature the germs which already exist and have made their way into the consciousness of men; they cannot themselves create these germs or generate new worlds out of nothing."[1] This statement seems like common sense, but, judging by the writings and practice of a number of Marxists, it is either beyond them or they don't understand its implications. The institutions around which anarcho-syndicalists hope to construct a new society are trade unions and labor councils—organized in federations and possessing somewhat different functions than they have in capitalist society—but whatever one thinks of these specific institutions as germs of the future, one can agree with the basic premise of prefigurative politics (or economics). And it is this that is, or should be seen as, quintessentially Marxist. The new society will necessarily be erected on the basis of new production relations, and these will necessarily emerge through generations of popular struggle in the framework of a dying corporate capitalism.

In addition, the "economism" of anarcho-syndicalism that Gramsci so deplored is of course reminiscent of Marxism's materialism and economism. Both schools of thought privilege economics over politics and culture, focusing on economic struggles and such tools of working-class agency as trade unions and labor councils. For both, the class struggle is paramount. For both, workers' self-organization is the means to triumph over capitalism. James P. Cannon has a telling remark in the context of a discussion of the anarcho-syndicalist IWW: "The IWW borrowed something from Marxism; quite a bit, in fact. Its two principal weapons—the doctrine of the class struggle and the idea that the workers must accomplish their own emancipation through their own organized power—came from this mighty arsenal."[2] The very life and work of Marx evince an unshakeable commitment to the idea of working-class initiative, "self-activity" (*Selbsttätigkeit*), self-organization (with the assistance of dedicated organizers, a qualification accepted by every leftist worthy of the name). The word "self-activity" evolved into the even more anarchist concept of "spontaneity" under the pen of Marx's disciple Rosa Luxemburg, who devoted herself to elaborating and acting on the Marxist belief in workers' dignity, rationality, and creativity.

For instance, in her pamphlet "Marxism vs. Leninism" Luxemburg inveighs against the "military ultra-centralism" in party organization that Lenin advocates, counterposing it to the spontaneity and vitality of a living revolutionary movement organically connected to the working masses. Her concluding sentence even harkens to Kant, the philosopher *par excellence* of human freedom and dignity: "Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee."[3] (Compare the quotation from Kant in chapter two of this book.) "The working class," she declares, "demands the right to make its mistakes and learn in the dialectic of history." Left-Marxism, i.e., true Marxism, thus merges with anarchism, the only remaining task being to scrap the impurity of "a dictatorship of the proletariat"—which simultaneously updates Marxism for the twenty-first century and provides a theoretical framework to interpret the new and growing alternative economy, including worker cooperatives.

To give due credit to history, however, we should remember that the old statist formulations favored by a broad swath of radicals were a product of their time and appropriate to it. They were fantasies that never could have been realized, but, given their historical context, they were powerfully appealing and may even have seemed plausible. The nation-state was still in the ascendant—a fact that many Marxists would have denied, believing on the contrary that states had entered their terminal phase already in the early twentieth century. But Marxists' overwhelming commitment to state action—"everything for the sake of

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[1] Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 58.

[2] James P. Cannon, "The I.W.W." (1955), available at http://www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/1955/iww.htm (accessed December 5, 2013).

[3] Rosa Luxemburg, *"The Russian Revolution" and "Leninism or Marxism?"* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961/2000), 108.

taking over the state as soon as possible!"—itself belied their hopes, for it grew unconsciously out of the social environment of capitalist governments consolidating their rule, expanding their bureaucracies, regulating behavior ever more intensively, reaching ever further into society's nooks and crannies to take control, growing more aggressive in every respect. It was perfectly reasonable in this context to think that revolution necessitated seizure of the state apparatus and manipulation of it or "smashing" of it for one's own purposes. And the anarchist notion that political activity was unnecessary, that revolution could proceed automatically from a general strike or a succession of them that would bring the state to its knees, was utterly utopian. As if other states wouldn't immediately send in their armies to crush the workers if things got really serious!

While governments therefore had to be reckoned with—"seized"—because of their vitality, they were not yet the unimaginably hypertrophied entities they became later and are today. Today, it's just idiotic to think "the working class" can take over a national government; a hundred or more years ago, it wasn't quite so idiotic. Especially considering the vibrancy of labor movements then, the radical consciousness and militancy of a sizable proportion of the working class, the wide spectrum of political parties, and the tumult of a civilization experiencing transformations unique in history, it was surely easy to believe, if one wanted to, that successive conquests of national governments were possible. In retrospect we can see how *im*possible that was, and maybe intelligent people should have known better; but the combination of moral outrage and frenzied hope has ambiguous cognitive consequences. Certainly when reading radical tracts of the time, one gets swept up in the emotion and the compelling logic and is almost astounded that revolution *didn't* happen. But then in the cold light of reason one remembers that history is slow, and that ideologies and intellectual self-interpretations are never scientifically accurate.

Anarchists and Marxists had one conviction in common (aside from their shared moral critique of capitalism and vision of an ideal society): they both thought that a revolutionary *rupture* was possible and desirable. They had a millennial faith in the coming of a redemptive moment that would, so to speak, wash away humanity's sins. By concerted action, the working class would with one fell blow, or a series of blows, overturn capitalist relations and establish socialist ones. This is the basic utopian mistake that Marxism (if purified) can prove wrong but anarchism cannot, because it doesn't have the theoretical equipment to do so. Even anarcho-syndicalists, despite their verbal recognition that the seeds of the new society had to be planted in the old, shared the utopian belief in a possible historical rupture, not understanding that the only feasible way to realize their "prefigurative politics" was to build up a new mode or modes of production over generations in the womb of the old regime.

Since this was historically impossible eighty or a hundred years ago, when the capitalist nation-state was waxing in power, it would have struck revolutionaries as much more unreasonable and utopian than the hope for a sudden social upheaval. It made some sense then to adopt the Marxist attitude of contempt for worker cooperatives and other such "interstitial" endeavors as being distractions from real revolutionary work. As the capitalist state and civil society continue disintegrating in the coming decades, that attitude will no longer make historical sense. The arguments I've put forward in this book will seem merely truistic. The necessity for a wide range of revolutionary strategies, from interstitial to politically confrontational, will be obvious—for the interstitial will be the seeds that will have to be guarded and supported by the politically confrontational, which itself will be increasingly reliant on the interstitial for access to resources and a base of support.

–History is kind enough to offer its own, correct, solutions to old problems. Hegel was right about this. The truth appears when the moment is ripe.

In the end, doctrinal points about Marxism and anarchism are not as important as the single overriding imperative that anarchists, Marxists, and other radicals have too often violated: *work together*, don't consume oneself and each other in sectarian squabbles. Strict adherence to points of principle is sterile and counterproductive. David Graeber probably thinks he is espousing a magnanimous position when he says that anarchists ought to be "willing to work in broad coalitions as long as they work on horizontal principles," but even this seems inadmissibly sectarian.[1] Surely it's conceivable that coalitions not

[1] David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, A Crisis, A Movement* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013), 89.

organized on anarchist principles can do valuable work. Hierarchy, even in a moderate form, may be a violation of human dignity, but the world is in such a state that activists should be prepared to tolerate hierarchy for the sake of getting things done. Likewise, it's ridiculous for Leninists, or anyone, to refuse to work with anarchists, or to refuse to support worker cooperativism. It should be common sense that the transition to a new civilization will happen on multiple axes.

For the sake of clarity, though, I do think it would be useful for leftists to abandon their typically voluntaristic conceptualization of radical change. It's an attitude strikingly common among every group from centrist liberals to Leninists to anarchists. Given the balance of forces, it's natural for activists to interpret their task as that of battling overwhelming tendencies, of pushing back against reactionary entities with exponentially more power and resources than the left and its popular constituency have. One of the problems with such an attitude, at least in the context of hope for systemic change, is that it sets one up for disappointment: historical movements on the colossal scale of neoliberalism cannot be halted in their tracks or reversed by some counter-organizing among trade unions and their allies. That simply isn't how history works, nor does the democratic resistance have anything remotely comparable to the resources of the global corporate elite. In particular, it is hopelessly benighted to think (as, for example, the editors of *Jacobin* apparently do) that a revival of the centralized welfare state is possible.[1] That social formation was appropriate to a time of industrial unionism and limited international mobility of capital; it has been dying for forty years (starting in the U.S. and U.K.), and no such magical incantation as "We propose a new anti-austerity coalition" can call it back to life. Coalitions of that sort are desperately needed, and their targets should be at every level of government, but their outcome will not be a new manifestation of twentieth-century social democracy.

The proper way for a radical to conceive of his activism is in terms of the *speeding up* of current historical trends, not their interruption or reversal. Systemic trends have never been reversed, and cannot be. What radicals are doing now, and should be doing, is to contribute to the (self-)undermining of corporate capitalism and construction of an alternative. This self-undermining is the trend we are witnessing, which coincides with the trend to carry capitalism to its most pathological extremes. Just as the earlier liberal phase of capitalism's history eventuated in the Great Depression and *had* to come to such an end—this was its natural endpoint, even its *telos*, so to speak[2]—so the current neoliberal phase cannot but end in a virtual disintegration of the nation-state, its social fabric, and its political economy. That is the historical "meaning" and "mission" of neoliberalism, its essence, its "secret," as Marx might have said.[3] One should understand this and interpret one's activism accordingly.

Again, most leftists don't like to admit that things have to get worse before they get better, preferring the liberal's optimistic faith that if only we got our act together and *willed* a system-wide change for the better—perhaps a return to the welfare state—it could happen. No acute social crisis is necessary, only determination and competence. This elevation of will above objective social conditions and possibilities, aside from being the opposite of Marxism, is reminiscent of Lenin, who evidently thought a revolution could emanate from the will of one or two men (if they organized a coup and so on). One might even agree with what Orlando Figes says in the following comments:

> All the main components of Lenin's doctrine—the stress on the need for a disciplined revolutionary vanguard; the belief that action (the "subjective factor") could alter the objective course of history (and in particular that seizure of the state apparatus

[1] Peter Frase and Bhaskar Sunkara, "The Welfare State of America."

[2] See, e.g., Richard Du Boff, *Accumulation and Power*, 91: "What had really happened between 1929 and 1933 is that the institutions of nineteenth-century free market growth broke down, beyond repair. Had the chain of circumstances been 'right,' it could have occurred in 1920-21 or possibly 1907." Some academics like to mock Marx for his "teleological" conceptions, as if invoking that term constitutes an argument. This lazy mode of pseudo-argumentation, which simply assumes that anything hinting of teleology must therefore be wrong, is a legacy of the shallow positivism that has guided mainstream social science for too long.

[3] Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx*, 404-407.

> could bring about a social revolution); his defense of Jacobin methods of dictatorship; his contempt for liberals and democrats (and indeed for socialists who compromised with them)—all these stemmed not so much from Marx as from the Russian revolutionary tradition. Lenin used the ideas of Chernyshevsky, Nechaev, [etc.]....to inject a distinctly Russian dose of conspiratorial politics into a Marxist dialectic that would otherwise have remained passive—content to wait for the revolution to mature through the development of objective conditions rather than eager to bring it about through political action. It was not Marxism that made Lenin a revolutionary but Lenin who made Marxism revolutionary.[1]

While Marx himself, being a man of action, was occasionally susceptible to this "Leninist" way of thinking, the logic of his system does demand that one "wait" (though not passively) for conditions to mature rather than believe that skilled propagandizing, political maneuvering, and coalition-building alone can get the job done. Thus, just as the mature welfare state couldn't happen until things got worse—as they did with the Great Depression and World War II—so a transcending of capitalism can't happen until things get much worse than they are now. It is this that will force people to come together, as it did eighty years ago, to effectually demand systemic changes.

Given that the centralized welfare state is becoming structurally untenable,[2] what will necessarily evolve is an alternative economy. Exactly how this cooperative economy will interact with a decaying capitalism is impossible to predict—although it is already so interacting in places all over the world. Particularly in the early stages of the process, before they have established a myriad of supporting institutions, cooperatives and other anti-capitalist organizations will have to compromise some of their principles in order to compete successfully and survive in a hostile political and economic environment. But as the networks accumulate capital and experience, as well as grudging support from political and economic elites—as happened, too, during the transition from feudalism to capitalism (with regard to absolutism's support for capitalist industry)—they will acquire such power that they undermine the foundations of the current society. The world-order will come to consist of a mix of cooperative and competitive social relations such that it is no longer clear what is the "dominant" mode of production. Eventually this will change; cooperativism will continue "snowballing," propelled by its own momentum, as capitalism was in an earlier era. Just as worker co-ops' current rarity reinforces itself, so will their future growth reinforce itself. Throughout this history the nation-state will be declining, in part because many of its functions will be taken over by other institutions. Whatever counterattacks there are from the elite will not be able to stop these processes; capitalism will have lost any competitive advantages over cooperativism, because the latter's efficiencies, which were in some ways ill-suited to a competitive, atomistic, profit-driven society, will finally be irresistible. It seems likely that even at the end of this process there will remain a role for the market and the price-mechanism—and even, in a minor capacity, for wage-labor, which will probably never be completely abolished everywhere in the world[3]—but precisely what that role will be is, again, impossible to say.

Prophecies are not necessary, however. What is necessary is only to embrace and institutionalize the attitude of people like Armando Robles and his fellow workers, Brendan Martin, Leah Fried, and the whole grassroots vanguard of the revolution. Militant action is what will birth a new world; abstract intellection, such as this book contains, will not. We need only remember the old truth, "The people united will never be defeated!" That is the pith of the Left's accumulated wisdom, and the guide to action.

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[1] Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 145, 146.

[2] See Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards an Inclusive Democracy: The Crisis of the Growth Economy and the Need for a New Liberatory Project* (London: Cassell, 1997).

[3] The world is a complex place, and different modes of production will always coexist. The capital/wage-labor relation will probably constitute for centuries a more-or-less large part of the world economy. But will it still be the *dominant* mode of production, the one that determines the dynamics of the whole system? There are good reasons to think the answer is no.

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So many implications flow from a simple revision to the Marxist theory of revolution!

It's stunning that Marxists before me either didn't think of or didn't appreciate the importance of the revision I've made to the theory of revolution. For example, it renders moot all the arguments put forward by E. O. Wright and others—even in his latest book he's still rehashing the arguments (in his bland, bloodless academese)—about how the middle classes won't support a revolution because the mere *hope* for something better isn't enough to motivate them to risk everything. Okay, fine, maybe that's true. But it's irrelevant with regard to the scenario I've sketched.

Parts of *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, edited by Peter Hudis and Kevin Anderson. I'm ashamed to say I've never read Luxemburg.

The coming decades may well be the most cataclysmic in history.

Raymond Williams' *Marxism and Literature* (1977). Words like 'culture,' 'society' and 'economy': from original meanings of immediacy (centuries ago) to great abstractions now. Reification of language as society becomes more dynamic and interconnected. Reification of how one sees the world and talks about it.

Williams isn't a rigorous or lucid thinker, but his heart is in the right place: analyze the *material practices* that produce culture. He insists on the material production of ideology, entertainment, politics, art, culture. He's right that the base/superstructure opposition can be, ironically, a hindrance to a proper Marxist analysis of culture. *Material processes* rather than "abstract totalizations" or fixed generalities like "ideology" and "political superstructure" are what count. "It is the reduction of the social to fixed forms that remains the basic error" in analysis (129).

It's interesting to think of the media, as in the "mainstream media," as being the *media* of something, the medium through which something happens. Mediation. Mediation between the individual and society? Between the individual and the state? The media are the medium in which society becomes conscious of itself? In which ideologies are produced? In which people *live*? Through which a class maintains its hegemony? The media are a mediation of society.

The chapter on hegemony and the following ones are much better than the first half of the book. Make me think.

For a long time I've wondered why mass consciousness so often lags behind social being. Ideologies from an earlier era hang on until they're quite anachronistic. Williams has some good ideas on this. I like his concepts of the residual, the dominant, and the emergent. The dominant tends to be that on which the rule of the upper classes rests. The practices, habits, expectations, internalizations, "shaping perceptions of ourselves and the world," which, in being shaped primarily by the (practices embodied in and extending from the) dominant mode of production, serve to uphold the rule of the dominant class(es). In other words, it's basically the hegemonic. The residual has been formed in the past "but is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present."

> Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social and cultural institution or formation. It is crucial to distinguish this aspect of the residual, which may have an alternative or even oppositional relation to the dominant culture, from that active manifestation of the residual…which has been wholly or largely incorporated into the dominant culture.

For example, organized religion is mostly residual, but it has both "alternative and oppositional" elements and "a larger body of incorporated meanings and values," which in practice are compatible with and may even be used to legitimize the dominant order. Through "reinterpretation, dilution, projection,

discriminating inclusion and exclusion," much of the residual is made compatible with the dominant culture.

Anyway, Williams suggests that "those meanings and values which were created in actual societies and actual situations of the past…still seem to have significance because they represent areas of human experience, aspiration, and achievement which the dominant culture neglects, undervalues, opposes, represses, or even cannot recognize." This is obviously true. Examples are easy to think of. No dominant culture in itself is going to provide a palliative for every yearning, every doubt, every source of conflict to which humans are susceptible. Indeed, it necessarily "excludes the full range of human practice." What it excludes "may be seen as the personal or the private, or the natural or even the metaphysical." Hence, for certain purposes people will have to turn to either residual or "emergent" practices. The former, though, have an advantage over the latter (I think) in that they've already been consolidated for centuries. They already exist, whereas the emergent has to be birthed laboriously. And since it is oppositional or alternative vis-à-vis the dominant culture, it will often be actively suppressed. (Or it may be incorporated—and diluted in the process—as happened with the radical popular press in 19th-century England, as well as working-class lifestyles in general during the past couple of centuries, which have been incorporated into journalism, advertising and commercial entertainment. Or think of rap, which started out as oppositional and has been incorporated into the dominant order.)

It seems to me that with respect to *any* power-structure, the "emergent" (or pre-emergent) can come into play and be either suppressed or incorporated. For example, [a famous Marxist intellectual who read chapter 4 of my thesis and was skeptical] is part of an academic power-structure, so he has an interest in suppressing new ideas or in denying "originality" to people outside the power-structure who challenge his own ideas and his self-identity as an authoritative, original, *correct* thinker. People within the power-structure who challenge him are at least his "equals," so he has to take them seriously; and moreover, chances are that they approach issues in the same way he does, they share his assumptions about the proper way to do "scholarship," they shy away from "overreaching" or having the gall to seem excessively original, "tactlessly" original, *too* challenging, etc. But people outside the power-structure, or new to it, who pose challenges to it can be brushed aside as unimportant, with the effect that potentially "emergent" practices or ideas are stifled, and the power-structure reproduces itself in relatively unaltered form. The interests of the individual thus coincide with the interests of the structure.

Williams' concept of "structures of feeling"—in fact, the emphasis throughout his book on the phenomenology of culture—has a lot in common with what I meant by "objective spirit" in the first short paper I wrote on John Brown. "Structure of feeling" isn't a particularly original concept, though it has been treated as such by academics because it was formulated by one of their own.

I like his semi-reconceptualization of art. Not a spiritual, ideal, "higher" sort of thing, but ineluctably material practices, craftsmanship, manual work, techniques of production, saturated with materiality and implicit social relationships, power-relations, class structures. The romantic idealistic ideology of art was a reaction to the material monstrosities of the Industrial Revolution, the commodification of art, the degrading of culture. Think also of the ideology of genius, of inspiration, the divine expressing itself through the artist. It ties into the aristocracy's reaction against industrial capitalism, commercialism, the bourgeois order, seeing itself as the guardian of all that is beautiful in life, of aesthetic pursuits as against the lust for filthy lucre. In this sense the idealization of art is somewhat residual even though it didn't fully exist prior to the eighteenth century. It's a transformed residue of aristocratic ideologies, the celebration of leisure and autonomous self-expression. As the aristocracy melted away or blew itself up in the twentieth century, this romantic ideology became untenable. What you had then was modernism and postmodernism. The death of the author, all that. (Death of individuality, autonomy, an "aristocratic" haven from the herd.) The hegemony of mass culture and commercialism, and the despair of art. Hence Andy Warhol and the like.

The "productive process" of writing and of reading. Material production. "Notations [in writing] of order, arrangement, and the mutual relationship of parts; notations of pause, of break, of transition; notations of emphasis: all these can be said to control, but are better described as ways of realizing, the process of the specific productive relationship that is at once, in its character as notation, a way of writing

and a way of reading." The emphasis on writing and art as material production can be taken too far, but it's a corrective to idealism. Williams is surely right, though, that a work of art is in a sense a social relationship, between the creator and the perceiver. Each of its many elements involves a relationship between at least two parties, and the way these elements are understood and constructed depends on the social position of the parties. "Every communicative element is a social process which…becomes a social product."

"What is at issue in form is the activation of specific relations, between men and men and between men and things." Suggestive. Epic, drama, novel, lyric, romance…

On the whole, however, I think literary theory tends toward masturbation.

For the last couple of hours I watched videos on YouTube of Mailer, Buckley, Martin Amis, Hitchens and such characters. It was almost an unreal experience. These people and evidently their circles were/are not ordinary, in the worst possible way. I was watching degenerates, narcissists, poseurs, boors, and bores. No doubt brilliant in their own diseased way. But I couldn't help thinking I was in the electronic presence of personified decadence. Hitchens of course is the embodiment of sleaze, his whole being *icky*, *greasy*, *slimy*. Those are the adjectives that come immediately to mind when I look at him. The perfect emblem of this group of people, this whole literary cocktail-party subculture, would be a picture of Hitchens' face in the midst of an attempted smile. A grotesque, false image. Pop culture meets pretentious intellectualism meets Roman homosexual orgies.

…The essence is simple: with those people, as with most pop culture, I can feel myself being lowered—to the particular. With Chomsky, as with classical music, I can feel myself being elevated—to the universal. It is pollution versus cleanliness. Shiny pollution versus radiant cleanliness.

It seems to me that "structural" explanations partially break down in revolutionary situations. Individual leaders and the humanity of the masses then become decisive. Of course, invoking structures and systemic dynamics always provides only an approximate explanation anyway, since, as I said above, the world is not a closed theoretical system.

Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007). Fantastic book. Klein is now one of my "idols." A great human being. Milton Friedman, on the other hand, was…a criminally stupid man, a crackpot ideological fanatic who probably did more evil in the world than Chomsky has done good. (And that's very impressive indeed.) Of course not someone to be taken seriously, but nonetheless one of the most dangerous intellectuals of the second half of the twentieth century. It's almost hard for me to read Klein's book, I'm so disgusted by Friedman and his band of intellectual thugs at the University of Chicago. No less ideological and impervious to facts than Hitler or Sarah Palin. Fetishists of mathematical models, awesomely naïve about how the world works even as they "pal around with terrorists" like Pinochet, urging them to be even more ruthless than they are by nature and to eliminate (*eliminate*) social spending, impose a flat tax on the population, deregulate business, and privatize everything from education to social security to national parks—in fact, everything, with the exception of the army and the police. The horrors perpetrated by their protégés and friends—not believable. The evil of stupidity.

Friedman represents, among other things, the most vulgar of vulgar economics. He is worse than Frédéric Bastiat.

Paul Bairoch's *Economics and World History: Myths and Paradoxes* (1993) is an excellent corrective to the simple-minded fantasies of a Milton Friedman.

Ignorance may be blissful, but its consequences are quite the opposite.

On the one hand you have Gandhi: "The movement against war is sound. I pray for its success. But I cannot help the gnawing fear that the movement will fail if it does not touch the root of all evil—human greed." Ideas we *instinctively* recognize as good, noble, desirable, moral. On the other hand you have Friedman, Ayn Rand, Friedrich Hayek and all the other ideological hacks doing the bidding of big business by defending greed, saying it's inevitable and good, selfishness makes the world go round, everyone is necessarily greedy and should be. Reducing human life to a cost-benefit analysis, as vulgar and inhuman,

anti-humanist, as the behaviorist ideology of stimulus-and-response. It would be a horrible thing if these deniers of humanity and compassion, creativity, love, solidarity and cooperation, were right. Fortunately they're wrong. The world is not what their ideology implies it is, a dystopia of frenzied individualism. That sort of anti-paradise has been approximated only in Nazi concentration camps and such environments of sub-animal existence. Greed and selfishness—unless the concepts are broadened so much as to be meaningless—are in fact of marginal importance to human life. Ordinarily they're recognized as pathological. They have no place in family life or between friends or lovers. Generosity is infinitely more common on the level of personal relationships than greed and selfishness are. Cooperation and concern for others are universal, except in the perversely structured realms of the economy and politics in "civilized" societies (as opposed to tribal societies). The existence of greed has far more to do with warped social structures than human nature.

But at least Friedman, Hayek and their like were consistent: rather than recoil from repulsive personifications of their ideology like Pinochet and military juntas, they embraced them and facilitated their brutality, advising them, giving them the cover of intellectual respectability. Hayek was very impressed by Pinochet, and Margaret Thatcher became his firm friend. And when the ideology led to worldwide misery, Friedman maintained "the courage of his convictions," like George W. Bush, and never recanted or modified his position. Doggedly loyal to his vision of greed and selfishness.

…My Facebook status-update today: "The ideological spectrum of politics should be conceptualized not as 'left' to 'right,' which has a relativistic flavor, but as 'top' to 'bottom,' which is more in line with the fact that truth, freedom and compassion are fundamentally on the side of the 'left' while error, authoritarianism and bigotry belong to the 'right.' It's round-earthers vs. flat-earthers. Do you take the latter seriously?" Dave Melton, my former roommate, is one of my few acquaintances who seems to like my partisan status-updates.

An obvious truth that you'll never encounter in the mainstream media: "Chicago School economics [is] particularly conducive to corruption. Once you accept that profit and greed as practiced on a mass scale create the greatest possible benefits for any society, pretty much any act of personal enrichment can be justified as a contribution to the great creative cauldron of capitalism, generating wealth and spurring economic growth—even if it's only for yourself and your colleagues." Why else do you think neoliberalism is orthodoxy? Because of its truth or intellectual integrity? Ha. Even if it were true or had such integrity, that would have nothing to do with whether it would become "the Washington Consensus." It is simply the best system of ideas ever devised to justify an elite's orgiastic indulgence in greed and profit-mongering. 'The best thing for society is to let big capitalists do whatever they want.' It's so shameless and so contrary to common sense that you need the elaborate mathematical fantasies of neoclassical economics to make it remotely plausible, and you need to drum these fantasies into the heads of students in every major university in the world. The students really talented in the art of self-deception and theoretical perversity fused with verbal dexterity and confidence will go on to get jobs at the IMF, the World Bank, the U.S. Treasury, or top universities, so as to fulfill their function of providing a veneer of intellectual respectability for business's smashing of civil society and democracy all over the world.

When you read accounts in the mainstream media about how this or that measure favored by business will "create jobs," remember that what's really being said is it will generate profits. "Jobs" = "profits" in business-speak. Business has no interest in creating jobs, and usually the number of jobs created by its activities is paltry compared to the number that could be created through public spending, which would also direct funds to where they're needed most.

Chomsky has a nice way of taking us outside our subjective personal outlooks and considering matters from something like an objective viewpoint: he invokes hypothetical Martians surveying our planet from afar. For example, consider Martians encountering Earth for the first time. Think about what they'd see, the super-Gilded-Age inequality within countries and between countries. Millionaires and billionaires riding private jets over Somalian-type poverty and misery; "oligarchs racing around in black Mercedes convoys, guarded by top-of-the-line mercenary soldiers," as the homeless are curled up in blankets on the street; people in suits hurrying past hungry children in the street; politicians, lawyers, doctors, businessmen living in opulent suburbs as a billion people live in slums. Would these Martians not have the impression

that our world is, at least to a first approximation, divided up between a class of cartoonishly evil power-brokers and a much larger class of the cartoonishly unfortunate poor?

…The more you read, the more you realize that the last 44 U.S. presidents, more or less, have been geniuses at being alternately incompetent and indifferent to the point of "evil," at least from an "objective" perspective. A few of them, admittedly, have had brief spells of truly effectual moral engagement—aberrations. Off the top of my head I can't think of any examples in the last forty-five years. (Obama has been a failure. Clinton was an epic failure, from the moral point of view.)

Michael Wolfe: "Conservatives cannot govern well for the same reason that vegetarians cannot prepare a world-class boeuf bourguignon: If you believe that what you are called upon to do [e.g., work in the public sector] is wrong, you are unlikely to do it very well. As a way of governing, conservatism is another name for disaster."

July

The last few days I spent retyping the journal from my senior year of college and that summer, since I didn't have it saved anywhere except as a hard copy. Thank God I've finished! I've matured a lot since those years.

Reading Melvyn Dubofsky's *Hard Work: The Making of Labor History* (2000).

The amusing thing about many radical feminists is that by being close-minded, dogmatic, somewhat irrational, prone to logical fallacies (especially *ad hominem* and setting up 'straw man' opponents), quick to take offense, quick to take everything personally, they manifest stereotypes about women.

I got into a debate on Facebook with a radical postmodernist-feminist fanatic, and 'destroyed' her. But where does my satisfaction in 'winning' come from? The very words we use in such cases are illuminating: 'destroy,' 'crush,' 'demolish,' 'pulverize,' 'trounce,' 'thrash.' The psychoanalysts had great insights: it all has to do with internalizations, not with objects (subjects) themselves. What I found noxious wasn't the girl herself but the girl as I had temporarily 'internalized' her, the girl as she appeared to me. This 'image' in my mind so conflicted with notions integral to my selfhood about how the world is, what's true and what's false, the value and truth of my opinions, that I had to 'destroy' it, 'thrash' it.[1] Only then could I return to a conflict-free state of mind wherein no strong oppositional construct existed to upset my 'equilibrium.' –It does have to do with equilibrium too, as Freud might say. Confrontation with an opposed self somehow raises 'tension' in my mind, an unsettling energy-level, and I have an unconscious urge to return to the prior, 'settled' state. (You might (think you) enjoy vehement debates, but a deeper part of you has an urge to transcend the agitatedness they induce in you—as shown precisely by your vehement attempts to convince your opponent that you're right. If he acquiesces, then you have succeeded in extirpating the self-opposition in your mind and so return to the prior pleasant state of calmness.)

Been working out at the gym for a few weeks to get ready for Chicago. It's nice to be mildly beefed-up again, at least relative to what I was a month ago.

By the way, that crazy feminist I debated is not necessarily unintelligent; she studied philosophy at Wellesley and is a Harvard graduate student. But, being a postmodernist and a radical feminist, she hasn't absorbed philosophy's strictures against logical fallacies. When I suggested that capitalism was more of a problem for billions of people than the "patriarchy," she accused me of "mansplaining," as if that had anything to do with my argument. I observed that this was blatant *ad hominem*; she countered that no it wasn't because she hadn't called me an idiot. People always think 'ad hominem' means 'to insult a person,' when it needn't have anything to do with that at all. So I gave her a lesson in elementary logic, which she proceeded to ignore. Like all such feminists, virtually all her assertions were saturated with logical fallacies and gratuitous personal attacks. These so-called intellectuals, who think they're rebelling against

[1] I didn't destroy the girl herself, after all. So it must be that I destroyed my momentary 'construct' of her (as a person who challenged my conceptions).

stereotypes about women, are more stereotypically feminine than even ‘ordinary’ women are! The latter, after all, are not as petty, *ressentiment*-fueled, and downright irrational as people like Ana Trandafir (my esteemed interlocutor).

Ugh. The leftist who is worse than the conservative.

Now I’m reading *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky* (2002). The man is a force of nature. Possibly the greatest mind in history, all things considered. (Not necessarily the profoundest, though.) A whole website is required to showcase the book’s footnotes [which include long passages from the sources]. I’m trying to read most of them.

It’s incredible how few radicals have understood that Leninist elitism is essentially incompatible with the logic of Marxism, and how much more Marxist is Luxemburg’s faith in the multitudes. They’ll act when they act. When they’re ready—when social relations have made them ready. If they have to be *directed* by a centralized party that seizes power for them…first of all, that’s not much different from voluntarism—individual leaders having huge significance—which isn’t historical materialism. But secondly, the relations involved in an elite’s domination and direction of the masses have too much in common with capitalist relations (or relations in a capitalist society) to be revolutionary in any genuine sense. It’s basically state capitalism, or state-socialist state capitalism. The very fact that “revolutionary elitism” is necessary and possible at a given time proves that socialist revolution is impossible then. Whatever happens, workers’ control will not be instituted, because dispersed power cannot evolve in any direct way from concentrated power. To get workers’ control, workers first have to direct themselves in their revolutionary movements—network with each other, etc. This will of necessity be an enormously long process.

One of the reasons I’m hopeful about the future is that big business has been unequivocally in control for over three decades. From Reagan to Obama, or even from Ford to Obama, business has been having a field day. It has been the reign of business—with small steps in a different direction under Obama. Well, thirty-five years is a long time for one phase of a cycle. The reaction has to kick in eventually.

Email to Chomsky, with his responses in bold:

> Professor Chomsky,
>
> I share your aversion to pretentious highfalutin theorizing like much postmodernism, etc. But I wonder if your condemnation of certain areas of philosophy is not perhaps a bit too hasty. **[I’m happy to be shown.]** For example, while I don't know what your exact ideas are on the phenomenological method used by old existentialists and many psychoanalysts, I suspect you're dismissive of it because of the periodic obscurity of its results. Of course, much of what Sartre wrote is verbiage. But I think that sometimes "phenomenology" – this sort of 'intuitive,' 'introspective' analysis of consciousness and the 'self' – can lead to real explanations of human behavior – can help people understand why they act as they do. **[I quite agree. I’ve never hinted otherwise, as far as I can recall.]** R. D. Laing, for instance, used it in occasionally fruitful ways. You often say that in fact we understand very little about human psychology, and from the perspective of 'hard science' I think that's true; but it seems to me that there are significant insights in some of Nietzsche's reflections on *ressentiment*, some of Laing's thoughts in *The Divided Self*, some of what Sartre wrote, etc. It's a different mode of explanation than conventional 'hard science,' but perhaps not wholly illusory. (Indeed, the relation between these two 'modes' of explanation is itself an interesting, and puzzling, topic.) **[I’ve often pointed out that we learn more about people from serious fiction than from scientific psychology. The same is true of some nonfiction.**]
>
> Maybe a better example of the potential fruitfulness of initially obscure theorizing is Marxian so-called "dialectics." Your disdain for the pretentious word is surely justified,

> but, for example, I think Michael Albert has a useful (albeit sloppy and metaphorical) summary of the basic idea in a book from 1974: (a brief excerpt) –
>
> "It is the assertion that real changes are due not to factors outside reality [or a particular 'system'] and imposed upon it, but to factors within reality from the start and only slightly affected by conditions imposing from without. It is the assertion that history does not change by the effects of some absolute, or in pursuit of some absolute, but rather in accord with its own internal contradictions and their continuously evolving resolutions. **[A good illustration of why I don't see much point in this pontification. Sometimes factors outside a system have a huge impact on changes within it, e.g., military conquest, but much else as well. Sometimes they don't. Same with the rest. It's either misleading, or close to truism**.] […]"
>
> —It seems to me that, understood this way, "dialectics" can be useful as a way of orienting oneself in sociological investigations and even in revolutionary activism. It leads to a particular, not-empty interpretation of what exactly it is that one is doing. Moreover, I think it's possible to take these Marxian intuitions and flesh them out in more precise, literal ways than most Marxists have done, and thereby reach an abstract 'meta-level' understanding of what one is doing when investigating structures of capitalism or possible historical trajectories of capitalism, etc. For instance, this sort of methodological framework seems presupposed by Marxian political economy, which itself can be quite illuminating, far more so than the neoclassical stuff. **[It can be, and I read it with interest, discarding what seems to be a needless and mostly obscurantist framework**.]
>
> Sorry for the long email. Thanks for reading.

I still think it isn't totally useless to invoke 'dialectical contradictions' and so on, provided that one explain very clearly what that term means—as no one has ever really done—and give plenty of examples. Maybe it's otiose to use the word 'dialectic,' since all you mean is that there are structures etc. with tendencies etc. that conflict etc. and so lead to new tendencies and conflicts etc. But 'dialectic' sort of conveniently sums that up, indicates a 'dynamic-structuralist' approach to society, places the emphasis explicitly on ('holistic') structures, development, instability, conflict. Yes, it may be a virtual truism, but most bourgeois social science ignores it or downplays it, so it isn't a truism to everyone.

By the way, I've decided to change how I use quotation-marks. From now on I'll use inverted commas except when I have in mind a direct quotation. Quotation-marks are too clunky.

Just before MLK received the Nobel Prize in 1964, the FBI sent him an anonymous letter saying that they would release to the media a faked audio recording of him having orgies with prostitutes unless he committed suicide before receiving the Prize. –Not surprising, just illustrative.

Chomsky's remarks on economics and economic history are characteristically brilliant. I'll quote what he says about comparative advantage and "free trade":

> The basic assumption of the classical economists was that labor is highly mobile and capital is relatively immobile—that's required, that's crucial to proving all their nice theorems. That was the reason they could say, "If you can't get enough to survive on the labor market, go someplace else"—because you *could* go someplace else: after the native populations of places like the United States and Australia and Tasmania were exterminated or driven away, then yeah, poor Europeans could go someplace else. So in the early nineteenth century, labor was indeed mobile. And back then, capital was indeed *immobile*—first because "capital" primarily meant land, and also because the extent that there was investment, it was very local: like, you didn't have communications systems that allowed for easy transfers of money all around the world, like we do today.

> So in the early nineteenth century, the assumption that labor is mobile and capital is immobile was more or less realistic—and on the basis of that assumption, you could try to prove things about comparative advantage and all this stuff you learn in school about Portugal and wine and so on.
>
> Incidentally, if you want to know how well these theorems actually work, just compare Portugal and England after a hundred years of trying them out—growing wine versus industrializing as possible modes of development. But let's put that aside…
>
> Well, by now the assumptions underpinning these theories are not only *false*—they're the *opposite* of the truth. By now labor is *immobile*, through immigration restrictions and so on, and capital is highly *mobile*, primarily because of technological changes. So none of the results work anymore. But you're still taught them, you're still taught the theories exactly as before—even though the reality today is the exact opposite of what was assumed in the early nineteenth century. I mean, if you look at some of the fancier economists, Paul Krugman and so on, they've got all kinds of little tricks here and there to make the results not quite so grotesquely ridiculous as they'd otherwise be. But fundamentally, it all just is pretty ridiculous.
>
> I mean, if capital is mobile and labor is immobile, there's no reason why mobile capital shouldn't seek *absolute* advantage and play one national workforce against another, go wherever the labor is cheapest and thereby drive *everybody's* standard of living down. In fact, that's exactly what we're seeing in NAFTA and all these other international trade agreements which are being instituted right now. Nothing in these abstract economic models actually *works* in the real world. It doesn't matter how many footnotes they put in, or how many ways they tinker around the edges. The whole enterprise is totally rotten at the core: it has no relation to reality anymore—and furthermore, it never did.

He then discusses the real historical record—protectionism in every industrialized country (especially America), etc. Excerpt from an article in *Dollars and Sense*: "In the long run, there are no laissez-faire transitions to modern economic growth. The state has always intervened to create a capitalist class, and then it has to regulate the capitalist class, and then the state has to worry about being taken over by the capitalist class, but the state has always been there. That is what the N.I.C.s [Newly Industrializing Countries] show… Import substitution [through state intervention] is about the only way anybody's ever figured out to industrialize. Increasingly often, the industries that were created by import substitution turn out to be viable… What the extreme deregulators will tell you is that you don't have to go through this stage, but they don't have any cases [to support their claim]."

The *Monthly Review* rejected a shortened version of the fourth chapter of my thesis.

Reading Sweezy and Baran's *Monopoly Capitalism: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order* (1966).

I remember reading Milton Friedman's article on methodology: he argued that in science, the less realistic the model, the better. A typically simplistic argument. But for a neoclassicist it served the function of making a virtue of necessity, and thus allowing him to continue to believe his theories: since neoclassical economics is the most unrealistic, most idealized, most counterintuitive economic model of all, it's the best! This Friedmaniacal methodology therefore lets economists retort to criticisms regarding the inability of their models to explain what happens in the real world, "That's just because of the messiness and imperfections of reality! It doesn't prove that our *models* are wrong. You policy-makers simply have to make reality conform more closely to our logically beautiful models." Sure. Make *reality* conform to *models*, rather than making *models* conform to *reality*. To quote Herman Daly, former Senior Economist at the World Bank: "My major concern about my profession today is that our disciplinary preference for logically beautiful results over factually grounded policies has reached such fanatical proportions that we economists have become dangerous to the earth and its inhabitants."

When translated into policy, the fetish of a *pure idea* always leads to mass suffering. Nazism, Fascism, Communism, radical Islamism, and the Free Market ideology. Nothing is more inhuman than the urge to remake people and society in the image of an ideal model.

…Went to Bristol for two days with Yuja, stayed at my parents' house, went biking, had a grand time. They took quite a shine to her, and she reciprocated. Mom told me I'll probably never find any girl better than her. (Pretty, she said, and funny, personable, cute, talented, we have a lot in common. Just not enough.) It's true that she and Aniela are, on the whole, better people than most I've known—better conversationalists, more easygoing, more reasonable, less 'snobbish,' less fickle, more 'simple' in the best way—and everything *human* is simple. The worst people tend to be the really 'witty,' 'clever' ones—the artificial veneer of civilization—the ones who want to show themselves off, the un-serious ones who want to 'get ahead.' Serious people like Yuja and Aniela, who are fun-loving and good-humored, are sincere, honest and essentially simple (albeit complicated in another way, an *authentically human* way).[1]

Baran and Sweezy: monopoly capitalism "tends to generate ever more surplus, yet it fails to provide the consumption and investment outlets required for the absorption of a rising surplus and hence for the smooth working of the system. Since surplus which cannot be absorbed will not be produced, it follows that the *normal* state of the monopoly capitalist economy is stagnation." (108) The rising 'unrealized' surplus (surplus being defined as the difference between what a society produces and the cost of producing it) manifests itself as excess capacity, unemployment, underutilization of existing material and human resources, etc. (But how is an 'unproduced' surplus possible? Isn't that a contradiction in terms? It seems that what they're talking about is really the *potential* surplus, the surplus that *could* be produced and absorbed if existing resources were used to their full potential.) To the ordinary citizen, "the economic problem appears to be the very opposite of what the textbooks say it is: not how best to utilize scarce resources but how to dispose of the products of superabundant resources." Too much supply, not enough demand. Monopoly capitalism is even more contradictory than competitive capitalism, because in the latter the phenomenon of 'too much' "described a temporary derangement, not a normal condition… Only under monopoly capitalism does 'too much' appear as a pervasive problem affecting everyone at all times." The supply of labor is too high, the supply of products is too high, profits tend to be excessively high (not enough investment outlets for soaring profits), etc.

According to a Marxian analysis, 'supply-side economics' (giving money to businesses rather than consumers and workers), far from curing economic problems, risks *aggravating* stagnation in the real economy. But it became the law of the land anyway because it raises profits, which can be invested in finance rather than the real economy, which therefore stagnates more and more as profits are siphoned away from it. (The reason society hasn't fallen apart from declining demand is that consumer credit [and government debt] has assumed gigantic proportions.) Eventually the contradiction between the stagnating real economy and the booming financial economy becomes so profound that investors finally withdraw their funds even from financial outlets, and a Wall Street collapse occurs. The contradiction can't be ignored forever, after all. But soon the government puts the financial world back on its feet again while doing very little to stimulate the real economy…so the stage is set again for an ever-intensifying contradiction to develop, and then another financial collapse, etc.

…Example of my 'brilliance': in a freaking *footnote* in my thesis I reconceptualized the whole base-superstructure metaphor—in a non-metaphorical way—and so accomplished what no other Marxist, to my knowledge, has, despite thousands of pages and many decades devoted to the topic. I just said, "Oh and by the way, here's the answer, you fools. But let me get back to my argument…"

Short summary from J. B. Foster of part of *Monopoly Capital*'s argument:

> At the core of *Monopoly Capital* was the thesis that Marx's fundamental "law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall," associated with accumulation in the era of free competition, had been replaced, in the more restrictive competitive environment of

[1] [Actually, those compliments are truer of Aniela than of Yuja.]

monopoly capitalism (in which a handful of giant firms tended to control key industries and the economy as a whole), by a law of the tendency of the surplus to rise. The nature of the price mechanism under monopoly capitalism (an argument that went back to Sweezy's earlier theory of the kinked demand curve) meant that capital tended not to adjust to shortfalls in final demand by lowering prices, but generated instead chronic excess capacity, as plants were idled to protect profit margins.

As one analyst has cogently summarized the basic contradiction spelled out by Baran and Sweezy, in the technical language of professional economics:

"The potential surplus (which includes profit, interest, rent, surplus employee compensation, government spending and other wasteful expenditures) rises as productivity growth allows production costs to fall relative to prices. This potential fails to be fully realized, however, since investment spending stagnates when excess productive capacity is not eliminated by margin-squeezing price competition. Thus the existence of monopolistic conditions and so downwardly rigid mark-ups lead to inadequacy of effective demand by weakening the inducement to invest while maintaining the profit share and so restricting the growth of consumption."

[Deleted a description of my thesis defense.]

Another reason to love Chomsky: he stays far away from academic conferences.

Most intellectuals are little more than a set of defense-mechanisms, internalizations of roles, and multidimensional glibness.

[…] I had dinner last night with a good person, not a James Green [the labor historian]: Yuja. And stayed at her place for the night, slept together but without sex. After dinner we sat in her car in the parking lot and she let me know of her depression, her suicidal thoughts, the extreme pressure she's been feeling from her mom to get married and have kids. (Yuja just turned 31.) She's certain her parents are ashamed of her for still being single. Tears as she calmly told me with absolute conviction that she had decided to kill herself at 35 if she still isn't married. I went along with it for a while, figuring that was best; we discussed the best way to kill oneself. Life has become empty for her, she professes to care about nothing—"Nothing matters, we all die anyway, why not at 35 instead of 85?" Nothing gives her joy anymore, not because she's lonely (says she isn't, despite her lack of close friends in Boston) but because of the intolerable pressure to get married and the inability to find someone. The thought of having to go through it all over again now that I'm leaving for Chicago, the meeting people and acting in a charade and not being interested in the boring guys but having to feign interest and not knowing whether if she starts another relationship it'll lead to marriage or nowhere except months of wasted time, absolutely depletes her. The conversation was painful for me; to see her in that state was akin to torture. I gave her advice, did what I could to help, listened sympathetically. Mentioned that a better option at 35 than suicide was a sperm bank, etc. In Bristol I'd given her hours of advice about meeting men, which since then she's followed: has started going out with her coworkers, for example, which she's rarely done in the past. But it's going through the whole shit again that crushes her… Sleeping next to her with her breast in my hand was like nostalgia.

August

I want to get published, and it's easier to do so by writing about empirical stuff than theory. So I'm researching public banking in order to submit an article to *Z Magazine* and others.

If I excerpted from every informative passage in *Understanding Power* I'd rewrite the whole book, but here's something particularly interesting:

> …By now, about a trillion dollars a day moves around in international speculative markets—and that has a huge effect on national governments. In fact, by this point, what it means is that the international investing community has virtual veto-power over what any national government can do.
>
> [In America in the 1990s] real wages were going down, growth was very low, production was low—and even the slow growth that's been taking place has been halted at times because the bond market, as they put it, "signaled" that it didn't like the growth. See, financial speculators don't want growth: what they want is stable currencies, meaning *no* growth. In fact, the business press talks very openly now about "the threat of too much growth," "the threat of too much employment": they're perfectly open about all of this, to one another. And the reason for it is, people who speculate against currencies are afraid of inflation—because it decreases the value of their money, so therefore it's a big threat to them. And any kind of growth, any kind of stimulation of the economy, any decline of unemployment all threaten to increase inflation. Well, currency speculators don't like that, so if they see signs of stimulative economic policies or anything that may bring economic growth, they'll just take their capital out of that country's economy—and even a slight withdrawal of that sort can easily trigger a recession in those countries.
>
> So what's happened as a result of all of this is a big drift internationally towards low-growth, low-wage, high-profit economies—because national governments trying to make economic and social policy decisions just have very little leeway to do so by now, or else their economies will be wrecked by capital flight…
>
> [For example, the Wall Street Journal recently reassured its readers that if Clinton tried to initiate a program of social reform, it would immediately be cut off. The reasons are as follows.] The United States is deeply in debt—that was part of the Reagan/Bush program, in fact: to put the country so deeply in debt that there would be virtually no way for the government to pursue programs of social spending anymore. And what "being in debt" really means is that the Treasury Department has sold a ton of securities—bonds and notes and so on—to investors, who then trade them back and forth on the bond market. Well, according to the Wall Street Journal, by now about $150 billion a day worth of U.S. Treasury securities is traded this way. The article then explained what this means: it means that if the investing community which holds those securities doesn't like any U.S. government policies, it can very quickly sell off just a tiny signal amount of Treasury bonds, and that will have the automatic effect of raising the interest rate, which then will have the further automatic effect of increasing the deficit. Okay, this article calculated that if such a "signal" sufficed to raise the interest rate by 1 percent, it would add $20 billion to the deficit overnight—meaning if Clinton (say in someone's dream) proposed a $20 billion social spending program, the international investing community could effectively turn it into a $40 billion program instantly, just by a signal, and any further moves in that direction would be totally cut off…

Bought a subscription to the *New Left Review*. From an article on Darwinism that criticizes, among others, sociobiologists: “From Wilson onward, the argument is that biological evolution has not been able to keep up with the rate of cultural change. It is this gap that fosters the contradiction of ‘Stone Age minds in the 21st century.’ [An extremely stupid proposition, of course.] However, the evidence points to the speed with which culture has driven human biological change, from digestive physiology to brain structure. For example, originally, most human adults, like most other adult mammals, had difficulty digesting milk. The enzyme present in infants which makes it possible to digest the milk sugar, lactose, is deactivated as the child matures. However, over the past three thousand years, in societies that domesticated cattle, mutations that permitted lactose tolerance in adults spread. Today most adults in Western societies, as opposed to those in Asia, carry the mutation, and milk products are part of the normal adult diet.” Fascinating. I didn’t know humans had evolved at all in such a short period of time.

The authors marshal several arguments against sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, one of which is expressed in this sentence: "For Donna Haraway, as for Marx, the scientists' account of nature reflects and constitutes society and culture [rather than being 'universal' or 'objective' or just an uncovering of timeless biological truth, as many sociobiologists think]." This Marxian position is sound -- but its apparent logical culmination in the relativism of poststructuralism, postmodernism and the 'sociology of knowledge' is not. It's ironic that a doctrine implicit in Marxism would be explicitly embraced and carried further by postmodernists. But they're wrong to think that the Marxian insight into the social construction of knowledge implies that there is no such thing as truth. Marx understood, at least implicitly, that the point is to be self-conscious about one's methodologies, to use a rigorous scientific method, to try to be impartial and prevent the integrity of one's investigations from being undermined by institutional power-relations. By this means one can progressively formulate better and better doctrines, approach truth ever more closely.

I'm in Chicago. Already I much prefer this city to Boston. Happy years ahead! Right now looking for apartments.

Reading Robert Brenner's *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945–2005*. To quote Chomsky, the book is exceptional.

The reason that the philosophical question 'Why do I exist here and now rather than at some other place and time?' is meaningless is that humans, like all things, are nothing but matter. We are thinking matter. If we were a spiritual substance the question would not be meaningless: it would mean 'Why and how is this soul attached to this particular piece of matter?' But since we are matter, the question means only 'Why does this piece of matter exist now and here? -- i.e., why is it *this piece of matter?*', and that's just silly. It isn't a genuine question. And yet the question in the first sentence of this paragraph *seems* meaningful to us. What this fact shows is that *epistemological* dualism is true (although metaphysical dualism is false). We necessarily half-consciously think of ourselves as different from brute matter, in other words not completely reducible to 'our' body. (And the fact that we say '*our* body,' or rather '*my* body,' thereby distinguishing ourselves from our bodies, is another indication of our implicit adherence to dualism.)

Something I wrote with the aim of getting published:

Marx's Theory of Revolution in the Twenty-first Century

[A long essay distilling some of the arguments in the thesis.]

*

Noam Chomsky in a recent interview: "Journalist Chris Hedges is doing research on the New York Times, and a few weeks ago he came across a memo from the managing editor of the New York Times to the writers and columnists, saying that they were not allowed to mention my name. National Public Radio has said in print that I'm the one person who will never be allowed on their primetime news and discussion programme." Sometimes I wonder how people in the mainstream media manage not to be suicidal out of self-contempt. Obviously a lack of integrity has its advantages.

Among the things I'm reading this semester: John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*; Richard Evans, *In Defense of History*; Willie Thompson, *Postmodernism and History*; Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World*; Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds*; Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*; James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History*; Jon Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America*; Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History*; Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*; Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*; Richard Goodwin, *Remembering America: A Voice from the Sixties*; Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time: From World War II to Nixon -- What Happened and Why*;

Christian Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam*; Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Last Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam*; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*; Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America*; Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*; Jack Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture*; Colin Calloway, *New Worlds For All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America*; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*; T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*; Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*; Robert Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*; Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War.* There are also a number of articles and excerpts from books. I can't wait!

September

Living in Logan Square with two frat-boyish but likable guys my age, Mike and Mike.

In one class I have to write a short summary every week of the book we're reading. Here are some of the summaries:

In *Pursuits of Happiness* (1988), Jack Greene contrasts two interpretations of the colonial era of American history, the *declension* model and the *developmental* model. The former is the traditional one; the latter is Greene's own preferred interpretation of most colonial experience. Briefly, according to the declension model England's colonial settlements progressively 'declined' from an initial state of communal wholeness, order, tradition, primitive simplicity, to social complexity, fragmentation, individualism, modernity. In the developmental model, by contrast, settlements began as materialistic, individualistic, socially 'thin' or 'attenuated,' overtly profit-driven, secular, and over decades became more cohesive, coherent, socially 'thick,' metropolitan, complex, permanent. Greene admits that the declension model is partly applicable to New England's history, but he argues that New England, with its puritan origins, was exceptional; the Chesapeake, the mid-Atlantic colonies, the southern continental and Caribbean colonies, and Ireland followed the path of the developmental model. Most of the book is devoted to supporting this argument with empirical analysis.

Stated another way, Greene is trying to unseat New England from its privileged place in scholarship and the popular imagination as the main symbol and determinant of future American culture. Far from being 'normative,' New England's experience was unique. The colony was founded by people who had a millennial vision of establishing 'a city upon a hill,' of founding a true Christian commonwealth as a model for the rest of Christendom. They saw themselves as God's chosen people; they rejected contemporary English civilization in favor of a traditional, highly regulated social order, "with strong patriarchal families, elaborate kinship networks, and visible and authoritative leaders" (27). In a sense, they were self-conscious primitivists, and the society they created was not as similar to old England as has often been thought. But its original 'utopian' conditions gradually succumbed to centrifugal forces that, from the viewpoint of traditionalists, threatened to tear the social fabric apart. Most other colonies, on the other hand, developed in much the same direction that England developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, namely from a 'centrifugal' state of outright conflict, polarization, undisguised brutal exploitation, crude materialism and commercialism, individualism, toward the 'centripetal' state of a thickly articulated social structure, a 'civilized' organic unity between social classes. In the Chesapeake, for example, early super-profits realized through the cultivation of tobacco entailed extreme exploitation of white and black labor; as the profits declined, so did social polarization. Similarly, the decreasing incidence of disease and death over the course of the seventeenth century, as well as the equalization of the ratio between the sexes, led to

demographic growth, which made possible a more complex and cohesive social structure. In New England, such growth led to a *less* cohesive social structure because the original society had been astonishingly conflict-free, communal and closely regulated. The typical colonial pattern was the Chesapeake's, not New England's.

It is true that America's later celebration of itself as an exceptional nation destined for greatness has much in common with New England's original theological self-conception and might seem to be an outgrowth of it, but Greene notes that this later myth of American greatness was mainly secular, revolving around the notions of freedom, the pursuit of happiness, and Americans' high material well-being. It is really only in the nineteenth century, with industrialization and the discrediting of slavery, that New England's influence decisively increased in relation to the South's.

Colin Calloway's book *New Worlds For All* (1997) is a concise summary of the ways in which Native Americans and European settlers influenced each other in the colonial period of American history. Each chapter is devoted to a particular sort of cultural interaction, such as religion, medicine, trade, and war. While Calloway describes in great detail the profound impact that Europeans had on Indians, it is clear from his introduction and conclusion that he is most concerned to emphasize that Indians changed Europeans as well. The latter's process of Americanization was in many ways a process of 'Indianization.' Scholarship has tended to ignore this fact, indeed to treat Indians less as agents in their own right than as objects of European colonization. In recent decades, it is true, historians have done much to remedy their earlier neglect of Indians' agency and subjectivity, but, arguably, they still underestimate Indians' impact on Europeans, being more interested in how Indians coped with European imperialism. Thus, traces remain of the 'passive Indian vs. active European' paradigm, which Calloway wants to do away with. In general, though, his book is simply an overview of more than three centuries of intercultural adaptation. His observation in the preface is worth repeating: the Indian-European encounter was not a mere 'moment'; it lasted longer than the history of the United States itself has, and so provides a record rich with ambiguity and cultural cross-fertilizations.

Examples of Indian influence on Europeans are too numerous to list, but it is worth mentioning a few. An obvious example is Europe's introduction to new foods, such as potatoes, corn, tomatoes, squash, and beans, foods that would have tremendous economic, demographic, and even political importance in the Old World in the coming centuries. In addition to eating American foods, colonists, for instance among the Spanish, also sometimes adopted Indian clothing -- which even became an act of cultural self-assertion, a means of asserting their new 'American' identity vis-à-vis their European heritage. Calloway notes that the colonists in the Boston Tea Party who dressed up as Mohawk Indians were not disguising themselves; "they were proclaiming a new, American identity" (7). This new identity extended also into methods of waging war. To Indians, European warfare was a fearsome thing: it entailed mass destruction, guns, the burning of villages, slaughter of women and children, *total* war. But Europeans eventually found Indian tactics useful as well: guerrilla warfare, hit-and-run tactics, silent sneaking up behind an enemy, were lessons that colonists learned quickly and continued to rely on even when fighting other Europeans. George Washington used such tactics to good effect in the Revolutionary War.

According to some historians, the American Revolution itself might not have happened, or not when it did, had there been no Indians to help mold an independent, non-British identity among the English settlers. "Without the steady impress of Indian culture," argues James Axtell, "the colonists would probably not have been ready for revolution in 1776, because they would not have been or felt sufficiently Americanized to stand before the world as an independent nation. The Indian presence precipitated the formation of an American identity." Colin Calloway's book provides a thorough substantiation of that claim.

Ira Berlin's *Many Thousands Gone* (1998) is a social history of the first two centuries of slavery in the U.S. In the tradition of E. P. Thompson and Herbert Gutman, Berlin looks at the 'lived history' of black slaves through a Marxian lens, emphasizing the primacy of material conditions and economic change as determinants of black life. Slavery, he argues, was not something that remained constant and fixed in its

essence from the early seventeenth century to the early nineteenth; it was subject to change and continual 'renegotiation' on both a micro and a macro level. Specifically, on the one hand, slaves and masters, as living actors, engaged in a continuous process of mutual role-adjustment, implicitly negotiating and renegotiating their positions with respect to the other, testing boundaries, challenging the other's legitimacy and power. Of course the master had most of the power in this equation, but even so, the complex 'dialectic' of real life cannot be reduced to the simple opposition of power/powerlessness or activity/passivity. On the other hand, the institutions of slavery as a whole underwent great change up to the time of the American and French Revolutions: over two centuries they evolved through several distinct phases. With the "charter generations," i.e. the first black arrivals and their children, what existed were not full-fledged slave societies but merely societies with slaves. Slavery was not the dominant mode of production but one mode among others, and plantation workers included slaves, indentured servants, and wage-laborers. As the seventeenth century gave way to the eighteenth and the great landowners consolidated their power, these societies with slaves turned into slave societies, and the "plantation generations" of slaves succeeded the charter generations. The late eighteenth century saw the birth of the "revolutionary generations" as American society experienced the upheavals of war and political independence from Britain, as well as the ideological reverberations of revolutions in France and Haiti. Slaves' hopes soared during this period: in both the South and North they sought emancipation and greater rights. In the North, indeed, they made progress, as slavery was slowly eradicated, though only to be replaced by other methods of control and coercion. In the South, however, slavery actually expanded from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries as cotton production spread, and the ideology of white supremacy became formalized and institutionalized in vicious ways.

Throughout his discussion, Berlin's focus is on the transformations induced in the lives of African-Americans by changing material and economic circumstances. For example, blacks in the charter generations -- most of whom had already been semi-Europeanized, having come not straight from Africa but from the Caribbean -- lived in societies where racial prejudice was relatively limited and black slaves socialized with white servants. It is revealing, for instance, that "the respectable class in the northern colonies widely shared the perception that the social cleavage ran between free and unfree, not white and black" (60). As slavery became more important to production, especially in the South, both the position of slaves -- who were now imported directly from Africa -- and intermingling between the races declined. With the heightened severity of their condition, blacks became more receptive to Christianity than hitherto: from the Great Awakening to the antebellum period (but especially in the latter), black churches sprouted across the South. Such examples of slaves' coping with economic transformations in their lives could be multiplied, but in this limited space I cannot do justice to Berlin's analysis. *Many Thousands Gone* successfully restores agency to the downtrodden without simultaneously minimizing the horror of their plight.

In *The Marketplace of Revolution* (2004), T. H. Breen reinterprets the American Revolution within the framework of his answer to the question, "What made it possible for the American colonists to transcend their myriad divisions and disagreements and come together as a single people in opposition to England?" His answer is that their shared experience as consumers of British goods both gave rise to their grievances and provided them with a means to unite and prove their loyalty to the new "imagined community" of Americans. The first claim is familiar: Parliament stoked discontent in the colonies by imposing numerous regulations and taxes on commodities that Americans imported. The second claim is original to Breen: the "consumer revolution" of the mid-eighteenth century first went a long way toward culturally homogenizing America, and then later, in the late 1760s and early 1770s, it made possible the colonial boycott of British tea and other goods, which provided ordinary people with the means of proving their commitment to the revolution -- indeed, of getting involved with it at all -- and thus of coming to trust each other during the political fight with England. Thus, the *consumer boycott*, which Breen credits Americans with inventing, was a necessary condition of the Revolution. By participating in it -- that is, by sacrificing the private pleasures of drinking tea and buying British products for the sake of achieving a common political goal -- colonists effectively created and identified with the new community of 'Americans,' and so created the

revolution.

Breen devotes the first part of his book to an analysis of the consumer revolution itself. He shows how it came about and what its social ramifications were. Within three or four decades, people of almost all classes went from living the simple life to living the fashionable life, so to speak: even the lower classes insisted on buying new and colorful goods from England, including trendy clothes and, of course, tea. External distinctions between the upper and lower classes began to break down, and a democratic, liberal consciousness of consumer rights prevailed everywhere. Conservative moralists lamented that one could no longer tell who was a commoner and who a gentleman or lady: they all looked similar. In short, consumption-patterns that ordinary people would previously have considered luxurious became necessary, a necessary component of the good life. This fact is what made their voluntary boycotts of tea and other products during the constitutional crisis with Britain such a powerful statement.

The second part of the book explains in detail the role of massive boycotts in preparing the nascent nation for revolution. As Parliament was passing and repealing in succession the laws and taxes that its colonial subjects found so onerous and insulting (given their lack of political representation), Americans realized that their greatest source of power with respect to England was as consumers of its exports. Due to its size, the American market was extremely important to England. The colonists decided to leverage their economic power to influence Parliament's policies. Breen traces Americans' first tentative steps in the late 1760s toward organizing consumer boycotts and shows how the populace grew increasingly radicalized year by year -- up to 1775 -- as its boycotts became more ambitious. The politicization of consumer choice achieved through boycotts was essential to this process of radicalization in that it injected politics even into the domestic sphere; not only men but women were compelled to identify with America, to adopt its cause as their own, by foregoing the pleasures of British goods. By 1776, ordinary colonists had thus constructed a new political identity for themselves.

Joanne B. Freeman's *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (2001) is a study of the personal and political ties that held together, however tenuously, the new American government in the 1790s, when political parties did not yet exist in the modern sense. Freeman asks the question, 'What determined the dynamics of relationships between national politicians when government had virtually no infrastructure, no impersonal governing apparatus, no modern party system, and aristocracy was beginning to succumb to democracy?' Her answer is that national politics revolved around a code of honor to which all gentleman, and thus all politicians, were expected to adhere. This code, she says, "formed the very infrastructure of national politics, providing a governing logic and weapons of war" (p. xviii). Politics was essentially personal; everything depended on one's reputation as an honorable man. "Honor was the core of a man's identity, his sense of self, his manhood" (p. xvi). As a result, honor, or the concern for one's reputation, was seen as the force that would keep politicians' behavior within the bounds of respectability and integrity, and in so doing would lubricate the gears of political machinery. It would permit the functioning of the political arena, prevent its descent into a chaos of self-interest and greed. The code of honor was therefore the precondition for republican virtue and public-spiritedness.

Freeman divides her book into five chapters (or six, including the epilogue) each of which focuses on a particular politician and a document he wrote. William Maclay, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, and Aaron Burr are thus the principal characters of the book. In each chapter Freeman looks at one facet of the honor code through the refracted lens of her chosen document. For example, the papers that Jefferson collected from his tenure as secretary of state and assembled into three volumes show the centrality of gossip to politics. "Focused on attacking and defending reputations, [gossip] was the language of national politics" (p. 69). Gossip that impugned a man's honor could do such damage to his reputation that he might challenge the 'gossiper' to a duel as a last resort to prove his honor. The gossip, spoken or written (in newspapers, pamphlets, letters), that saturated political circles therefore ensured that beneath the polite veneer of this chivalrous society were fierce rivalries, suspicions, petty resentments and longstanding feuds, changing alliances, bonds of friendship that could mutate suddenly into implacable hatred. The book's culmination is a detailed account of the divisive election of 1800, which took the form of a war between Federalists and Republicans and ended in a tie between Burr and Jefferson. In Freeman's

interpretation, the election and its aftermath were the ultimate expression of the personal nature of politics and the political nature of politicians' private socializing in this era prior to impersonal party bureaucracies.

What changed with the institutionalization of parties was not the mudslinging or gossip or even the venomous nature of politicking but the decline of the aristocratic code of etiquette, the code of honor. In lieu of the honor code as the recognized means of regulating politicians' behavior arose the anonymous discipline of the party organization. Political enemies could now remain friends; as politicians they acted in an 'impersonal' capacity. In the republic's early years when there were no genuine parties, "political losses or public humiliations were no temporary setbacks; they struck at a man's core and threatened to rob him of his self-respect as a man and his identity as a leader" (p. 283). With political parties, by contrast, politicians had 'safety in numbers': they "were freed from personal responsibility for party directives" (p. 284). The culture of the honor code and the duel receded as politics and society became more impersonal.

In chapters 7 and 9 to 13 of *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815 - 1848* (2007), Daniel Walker Howe narrates and interprets the Jacksonian era in politics, from the end of the Era of Good Feelings, which coincided with John Quincy Adams's ineffectual presidency, to Martin Van Buren's presidency, which is sometimes called Andrew Jackson's third term. Howe portrays a country that is exploding with energy, expanding literally and figuratively even as it struggles to keep itself together. Among the momentous changes occurring at this time is the emergence of a relatively modern party-system under Jackson and Van Buren, as Jackson's half of the old Republican party splits off from Adams's half to become the Democratic party in opposition to the National Republicans and later the Whigs. Howe is more sympathetic toward Adams than Jackson and Van Buren, but his account is evenhanded -- as evenhanded as one can be toward violent white supremacists, Machiavellian politicians, and upholders of the law only when it suits their interests.

John Quincy Adams was almost the polar opposite of Andrew Jackson. Where Jackson was domineering, dictatorial, mercurial, a partisan dispenser of political patronage, an avowed racist and defender of slavery, a frontiersman obsessed with destroying Indian nations in order to make way for the white man, a state-rights advocate except when states contravened his own will, an old Jeffersonian Republican determined not to let the federal government accumulate too much power, Adams was a sophisticated, religiously devout, nonpartisan Northern intellectual who preferred to govern by consensus and had an expansive conception of the federal government's role: the government would actively facilitate economic and cultural development through transportation projects, public education, national universities, an astronomical observatory, the establishment of a Department of the Interior (which was finally created in 1849), the completion of the continent-wide postal network, and other such enterprises. Adams also tried to deal fairly with Native Americans, for instance by resisting Indian Removal and annulling a corrupt, exploitative treaty with the Creeks. Ultimately, however, Adams's nonpartisan approach was inadequate to his ambitious goals. America was becoming increasingly partisan, characterized by inter-regional, inter-class, and party strife. Martin Van Buren was an expert manipulator of partisanship and proved a formidable opponent to Adams; indeed, through his concern with organization and patronage he is often said to have created the modern American political party. He and Jackson handily defeated Adams in 1828.

The Age of Jackson was, in a sense, a democratic one, but as Howe notes, it was a democracy of white men in the service of white male supremacy. It was a violent, lawless age, when even presidents felt free to violate treaty obligations, ignore Supreme Court decisions, and break laws that were seen as undermining the political and economic sovereignty of the white man. It was an authoritarian, herrenvolkish version of popular democracy, for which Andrew Jackson was the perfect symbol. In the name of the common man he made war on the Bank of the United States as an unaccountable, undemocratic governmental tyranny, and he won; he purged government bureaucracies and installed men loyal to himself and the Democratic party (i.e., for him, Democracy), thus reducing the government's effectiveness and increasing its corruption; he forced Indians to move west of the Mississippi (thereby, however, "provok[ing] opposition from the strongest nationwide democratic protest movement the country had yet witnessed" (p. 357), a movement among evangelical Christians and other outraged whites); he supported the censorship of abolitionist publications in the mail so that they could not reach subscribers in the South; he killed

Adams's plan to use the federal government to build the nation's economic infrastructure, leaving it to the states to do so. Ironically, some of his 'anti-elitist' and anti-'big government' economic policies ended up hurting the common man by contributing to the financial panics and depressions that plagued Martin Van Buren's presidency.

In short, Howe provides a rich account of the political, economic, cultural, regional, and religious divisiveness that made the Age of Jackson the age of ferment that it was. In hindsight, one can see that the country was already heading down the path to civil war.

(Notes for a presentation on *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880* (1996), edited by Melvin Stokes and Stephen Conway.) In recent years historians have suggested that a market revolution occurred in early 19th century America. (The book goes to 1880 because during Reconstruction the market was still extending into the South and expanding around the country.) Reaction against 'consensus historians' in the mid-20th century, like Richard Hofstadter, who thought America had been born capitalist, so to speak. Puritan settlers had supposedly brought a capitalist mentality, Lockean liberalism was the American outlook, the farmer was committed to moneymaking objectives, etc. But this is oversimplified or wrong. More recent historians have emphasized early farmers' self-sufficiency, household production, the barter economy of small towns. Only with a growing population, a diminishing availability of land, better transportation facilities, and initiatives from merchant capitalists (the putting-out system, etc.) did the market extend into rural communities. Many social and political ramifications. Artisans fought the commodification of their labor, resented big capitalists, and workers and farmers opposed paper money and banks; hence one aspect of Jacksonian democracy. Also, reform movements and revivalistic religion were influenced by the social and cultural needs of an expanding market.

Charles Sellers's *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (1991) -- the book to which this anthology is a response -- synthesizes recent research. It "is constructed around the great divide between land and market." Eastern coastal areas market- and profit-oriented, interior lands largely self-sufficient. In the 18th century a population explosion, hence a flooding of the interior which isolated most Americans from the market. "What ultimately doomed the subsistence culture was a combination of rising land prices and expanding population." Families needed cheap land to provide for their numerous offspring; when it became less available in the Northeast, fathers supplemented their meager income (with which to pay higher taxes and buy land for their sons) through market activities while their wives became involved in putting-out systems. "In the struggle to maintain a traditional way of life, the farming families of southeastern New England were pioneering the changeover to capitalist methods of production." For Americans in the South and West, the boom following the war of 1812 led to the beginnings of capitalist transformation. Government involvement, especially on local levels, was important: pro-business policies and public-private partnerships to develop infrastructure. Also, sympathetic Supreme Court decisions. (Lawyers "the shock troops of capitalism" -- and, incidentally, the guardians of it ever since.) Cultural repercussions, such as pro-capitalist and anti-capitalist versions of religion -- what Sellers calls, unconventionally, arminianism vs. antinomianism. Many other not-terribly-original ideas about social consequences of the market's extension.

The anthology of essays critiques and elaborates on all these arguments in Sellers's book. For example, one essay evaluates Sellers's ideas on the religious expressions of the supposed *Kulturkampf* between "the traditional rural, democratic order of subsistence farmers, marked by communal cooperation, family obligation, patriarchal authority, honor, and independence" and the world of market production, characterized by specialization, division of labor, competitive individualism, etc. Sellers thinks the 'New Light' revivals over the period of a century, "from the mid-eighteenth-century Great Awakening through the turn-of-the-century Great Revival to the culminating Second Great Awakening of the 1820s and 1830s," were an antinomian reaction against capitalism and the market on behalf of egalitarianism, democracy, plainness, and communal love. Baptists and Methodists, "plebeian movements of subsistence farmers and working people," belonged to this category. On the other side was the market-friendly arminianism popular

amongst Yankee merchants and entrepreneurs that made salvation a function of one's work-ethic and worldly accomplishments. But there are problems with this scheme, aside from the unusual terminology.

It's true that Methodism was for a long time primarily a movement of the poor (rural laborers, subsistence farmers, mechanics, artisans), which "criticized worldly ostentation and the love of money and display." Methodists objected to market activities on the Sabbath and other occasions, and they opposed exploitation of the powerless, condemned excessive profits, etc. By the mid-nineteenth-century, Methodism had become more respectable and middle-class; some of its adherents looked back fondly on the old days of simplicity and communalism. But "why did the process of embourgeoisement provoke so little resistance in the church?" There were few schisms or major conflicts. The reason, according to Richard Cawardine, is that early Methodists were hostile not to enterprise and the capitalist ethic but to "genteel patriarchalism and aristocratic pretension, creating [their] own community against a world of deference and honor, and not against industrious effort and self-improvement." They bought and sold to each other, employed other Methodists in their businesses, tried to 'improve themselves' even through commercial undertakings, etc. Cawardine gives a lot of evidence that Methodism was not anti-'Protestant ethic.' Quite the contrary. It wasn't a communitarian creed. During the Jacksonian years, "Methodists' enthusiasm for the new economic order did not make them blind to the greed and exploitation of the capitalist market, but in general its Methodist critics sought to Christianize or sanitize the new order, not resist it."

Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination (1994), by Robert Abzug, is an account of the religious origins of New England's reform movements from the 1820s to 1840s. Abzug emphasizes the importance of 'cosmic' or 'cosmological' thinking to this age of reform. In fact, the term 'reform,' he argues, does not capture the full significance of what was happening: such movements as temperance, Sabbatarianism, abolitionism, manual labor reform (premised on the sacred value of physical labor), vegetarianism, and early feminism were intimately bound up with the Second Great Awakening. They embodied a sacralizing of ordinary life -- the reformer's vision of a fusion of the cosmic and the personal. Central to Abzug's history is Max Weber's conception of "religious virtuosos," people who are "tuned to heavenly rather than earthly matters, and who in most societies [have] lived as monks, holy men, mystics, and the like" (p. 4). It was these people who led America's so-called reform movements -- Lyman Beecher, Charles Finney, William Lloyd Garrison, Sylvester Graham, William Andrus Alcott, Catharine Beecher, and many others. They tended to see America as having a millennial mission, and were deeply disturbed by growing indications of its waywardness.

Abzug divides his book into three parts, titled respectively "Foundations of the Reform Cosmology," "Evangelical Reform," and "Radical Transformation." As is evident from its title, the first part is concerned less with the reform movements themselves than with the social and intellectual material from which they grew. Thus Abzug discusses Benjamin Rush, who anticipated the later movements in his passionate Christian republicanism and millennialism. "He imagined the [American] Revolution to be the first battle in a grand millennial fray. ....America must lead human efforts to prepare the world" either for Christ's literal return or for that glorious era when "Christ's spirit would inform every act and thought" (p. 19). Inevitably, Rush grew disillusioned, along with the thousands of Americans who shared his hopes. But these hopes were revived across the northeastern United States during the Second Great Awakening, which Abzug characterizes as a time of Manichean fanaticism and sectarian ferment, a radical revival that helped trigger radical reform in the 1820s. In the second part of his book he focuses on the three major issues that preoccupied evangelical reformers in the '20s, namely temperance, the holiness of manual labor, and Sabbatarianism (strict observance of the Sabbath). The frustrations that reformers encountered in proselytizing for these causes led them on to more radical ventures that even New England's evangelical establishment shunned -- movements such as Garrisonian abolitionism, feminism, communitarianism, and spiritualism. By the 1840s, for example, feminists were reinterpreting Genesis as not implying the subordination of women to men, a revision that threw into question the very structure of the patriarchal family. Spiritualists turned away from denominational churches, indeed from Christianity itself, toward Transcendentalism or various post-Christian faiths. Communitarians advocated communal ownership and personal renunciation. "Reform had thus moved from changing habits such as drinking to rethinking the

basic theological and social foundations of Western culture" (p. 228). By the mid-nineteenth century, as Abzug suggests, the evangelical Christian cosmos was crumbling.

The central argument of Walter Johnson's *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (1999) can be summarized in a single sentence: "The history of the antebellum South was made....in the slave pens" (p. 214). The slave pens, located in slave markets, were where African-Americans were stored and exhibited to buyers. The domestic slave trade was a significant portion of the South's economy from the early nineteenth century to the Civil War; a total of two million slaves were traded locally and between states. Johnson's book is a social history of the trade from the perspective of each of the four categories of participants: the seller, the buyer, the trader who served as middleman and brought slaves -- sometimes hundreds of miles -- to the market, and the slave himself (or herself). Johnson analyzes the experiences of everyone involved to understand the essence of the South's social system, to penetrate the cant of 'paternalist' rhetoric and slaveholders' self-understandings.

For example, slaveholders liked to think of their system as pre-capitalist: they saw themselves as having human relations with their slaves, as being benevolent protectors rather than callous buyers-and-sellers of labor-power as in the North. But this ideology depended on the slave-regime's supposed isolation from the market -- an isolation that did not in fact exist. Hence slaveowners' hatred and contempt for the "coarse, ill-bred" slave-trader (as they characterized him), "provincial in speech and manners....with cold hard-looking eyes and shabby dress" (p. 24). His existence belied their ideological self-justifications. "In the figure of the slave trader," Johnson writes, "were condensed the anxieties of slaveholding society in the age of capitalist transformation: paternalism overthrown by commodification, honor corrupted by interest, and dominance infected with disorder" (p. 25). Thus, when slaveholders did sell slaves, they invented elaborate excuses to justify their 'capitalist' act and deny a pecuniary motive for having cruelly separated slave families and friends.

Not surprisingly, blacks resisted this separation; that is, they resisted having what Johnson calls the 'chattel principle' forced brutally into their relationships and sense of self. Every slave, of course, was subject to the chattel principle: his identity "might be disrupted as easily as a price could be set and a piece of paper passed from one hand to another" (p. 19). Communities were destroyed, identities wrecked -- and paternalism was proven a slaveowner's fantasy. Or, more accurately, as a white man's self-conception it was something that could be bought in the slave market -- the very place, however, whose existence refuted the paternalist ideology.

Johnson describes in detail the operation of the market, the nature of the transactions occurring in the slave pens, the tactics of negotiation and evasion that slaves used so as to be bought together with their loved ones (if indeed they were being sold in the same market), the tricks that traders used to package their commodities -- slaves -- in appealing and deceptive ways that would fetch a high price. The book's most interesting discussions, however, are of the systemic implications of the slave market and its paradoxical importance to the slaveowner's identity. Everything definitive of Southern society could effectively be bought in the slave market: the white man's racist pride, his luxurious living, his potentially indolent lifestyle, his benevolent and chivalric self-conception, even the myth that the landed aristocracy lived in splendid isolation from the capitalist market. As Johnson states, slaveholders were "men made out of slaves," men who "lived through the stolen body of a slave" (p. 214). It is appropriate, therefore, that in the mid-nineteenth century the abolitionist movement came to see the slave market, not the plantation or paternalism or Southern political structures, as the essence of slavery. Southerners, tacitly ashamed of slave-trading, fought this abolitionist campaign, but they lost. "The crude spectacle that was daily on view in the slave pen -- a human being publicly stripped, examined, priced, and sold -- thus became an image that stood for the whole of slavery" (p. 219). There is poetic justice in the fact that the slave market, perhaps the central institution binding together a society of slaveholders, would, through abolitionism, end up contributing to the downfall of slavery.

In *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (1970), Eric Foner argues against Progressive historians who saw the Civil War as originating merely in a

clash of economic interests, or as furthering the interests of Northern economic elites. These historians downplayed the importance of ideologies, going so far as to claim that the issue of slavery was of little relevance to the war's outbreak. Foner argues, by contrast, not only that slavery was of major significance but that by 1860 the Republican party had put together a coherent and powerfully motivating ideology that exacerbated sectional tensions to the point of civil war. Foner's book consists of an elaboration of this ideology and a demonstration of its social power.

Central to the Republican ideology was the notion of free labor, which was opposed to that of wage labor and chattel slavery. The free laborer was a figure of inherent dignity, the necessary foundation of a dynamic and democratic society. Be he a farmer, a planter, a mechanic, a laborer, or a small businessman -- all occupations that did not profit by another's labor, such as the banker and the lawyer -- he was the rock of a society in which the best men rose to the top and, theoretically, no man had to remain poor who possessed talent and initiative. For the Republican, the North epitomized the 'free-labor civilization,' while the South was its antithesis. Rather than economic development, social mobility, and political democracy, the South had a stagnant economy, a fixed hierarchy, and an aristocracy of slaveholders (p. 40). It was a rotten civilization that could not be allowed to expand west, and according to many Republicans must eventually be destroyed even in the states where it already existed. Abolitionists shared these goals and values with Republicans, but there was one preeminent difference between the two ideologies: abolitionism based its opposition to slavery on the *moral* argument that slavery was inhuman and bad for black people, whereas Republicanism tended to base its opposition on the argument that slavery was bad for poor whites, in that it stifled social mobility and all the virtues associated with the Protestant ethic. This position was more popular with ordinary whites than the abolitionists' moralism.

Each chapter of *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* explores a different facet of the Republican ideology. For example, Foner discusses Salmon P. Chase's popular legal argument that in trying to extend slavery into the territories and new states, Southern slaveholders were acting unconstitutionally: after all, the Founders abhorred slavery, had refused to acknowledge it explicitly in the Constitution -- in the three-fifths clause they had referred to '*persons*,' not 'slaves' -- and had hoped that eventually it would wither away. In another chapter Foner addresses the role of Radical Republicans in ensuring that the party did not stray too far from its anti-slavery principles. On the other hand, the party also included conservatives, moderates like Lincoln, and ex-Democrats; Foner accordingly delves into the relationships between these factions and the circumstances through which they fused into a single party. In two of the final chapters, Foner considers the not-insignificant roles that nativism and racism played in Republican politics -- the latter, for instance, ensuring that Republicans' commitment to black social equality would be half-hearted during the Reconstruction era.

The book's greatest value, perhaps, is its sophisticated defense of the 'irrepressible conflict' thesis, that the North and South were inevitably headed toward a confrontation sooner or later. That Foner argues for the thesis by analyzing -- and attributing great power to -- ideologies rather than economic structures makes his book no less convincing.

Chandra Manning's book *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (2007) examines soldiers' letters and diaries, as well as camp newspapers, to discover "what ordinary soldiers thought about the relationship between slavery and the Civil War" (p. 4). She argues against the common view that soldiers did not think much about the issue at all, that they were non-ideological, or that, if they did interpret the war in 'ideological' terms, slavery was not important to their thinking. On the contrary, the historical evidence establishes that the large majority of soldiers on both sides believed that slavery was the fundamental cause of the conflict, and that it had to be either abolished (according to Union soldiers) or defended (according to Confederates). Manning organizes her book chronologically, so that the reader sees how soldiers' attitudes changed from year to year.

For example, as Union soldiers entered the war in 1861, most of them were not committed to emancipation of slaves. They shared the racist prejudices of their day, and in fact continued to do so throughout the war. However, as they encountered Southern society, they began to understand the horrors of slavery as well as its adverse consequences on the fabric of even white society. Most whites they saw

were poor and ignorant with no hope for social advancement; the whole civilization was backward, stagnant, with stretches of fertile land lying fallow. In the beginning, Union soldiers had volunteered to fight in the war because of their millennial faith in the greatness of the American republic, its universal significance as proving to the world that "republican self-government based on the principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence could work" (p. 40). If the Union collapsed, then so did America's divine mission. Later, though, this understanding broadened: "contact with slaves and southern society convinced many Union troops that the immoral and blighting institution of slavery was antithetical to republican government, and that any republican government that tried to accommodate slavery was doomed to eventual failure" (p. 50). This belief also explains the troops' reverence for President Lincoln: whereas their own loved ones in the North did not comprehend their conversion to abolitionism, Lincoln did (at least in the troops' eyes). He came to articulate and embody the true mission of the war, as redeeming the nation from the sin of slavery and making possible a new birth of freedom.

Confederate soldiers, on the other hand, saw themselves as defending slavery, their families, and the southern way of life. Most soldiers did not own slaves, but they fought for slavery anyway because it "buttressed the ideals of white liberty and equality," it "stabilized an otherwise precarious social structure," it provided a mechanism of race control, and its abolition would surely lead to anarchy (p. 32). It was the foundation of whites' manhood. Confederate troops underwent an evolution comparable to that of Union troops: just as the latter became more committed to emancipation as the war went on -- for only that could justify the deaths of so many of their comrades -- Confederates identified the war even more with the defense of slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation, for example, appalled southern troops.

What This Cruel War Was Over puts to rest any doubts about the ideological leanings of Union and Confederate troops. As they wrote in their letters home, the institution of slavery was the crux of the matter. For Northerners, the Union could not be preserved if slavery continued to exist; for Southerners, the preservation of the Union had no importance compared to the preservation of slavery. Luckily, the North won the war.

America In Our Time (1976), by Godfrey Hodgson, is a history of America's post-World War II 'liberal consensus.' In particular, Hodgson analyzes the origins and ultimate social consequences of an ideology that guided policymakers for thirty years. His concern is to explain how America fell from the heights of confidence it enjoyed in the wake of the war to the fractured despair of the mid-1970s. The book's subtitle says it all: *From World II to Nixon, What Happened and Why*. Hodgson's argument can be summarized in two sentences (p. 491):

> The point of departure for this book was the idea that, for a few years on either side of 1960, American politics and society had been ruled by a consensus, and that this consensus in turn rested on an ideology. What happened in the twelve years separating the beginning of Kennedy's and the end of Nixon's first terms in the White House, I have argued, can best be understood in terms of impact of events on that interlocking body of ideas and beliefs.

Hodgson's account is thus more 'idealistic' than materialistic -- it places more emphasis on ideas than on structural dynamics -- but it is not entirely one-sided, fortunately. Nevertheless, it is incomplete, and the frequent persuasiveness of particular arguments is marred by the shallowness of the book's overall perspective.

America's postwar liberal consensus, Hodgson rightly notes, was not leftist but centrist. It united almost all Democrats and Republicans, business elites, academic intellectuals, the foreign policy establishment, and most other mainstream institutions and figures. Some of the components of the ideology were as follows: (1) capitalism can not only function well but can operate democratically and justly, if managed properly; (2) economic growth is the be-all and end-all, since 'a rising tide lifts all boats'; (3) because growth benefits everyone, society is ultimately composed of a harmony of interests; (4) government

can solve all social ills if policymakers have sufficient expertise (or are advised by experts); (5) the United States has a duty to aid the cause of freedom, i.e. capitalism, all over the world, which means to fight Communism. Liberals' fetish of expertise, rational planning, governmental coordination of society, led to their love-affair with the presidency as opposed to Congress or democratic public debate: experts could be trusted to administer society. There were 'insiders' and 'outsiders,' and the latter were ignorant and meddlesome, lacking information and expertise. In the end, the liberal centrist creed paid lip-service to democracy but placed far more faith in *technocracy* as the means to societal harmony.

One consequence of this faith, according to Hodgson, was that the presidency in the 1960s became isolated from the broader world. The bureaucracy of the executive branch, especially the national-security bureaucracy, withdrew into its bubble of pseudo-rationality and pseudo-expertise, the expertise of numbers, charts, graphs, statistics, day-to-day targets, the 'domino theory' of the spread of Communism -- in short, instrumental rationality rather than substantive rationality. In the Pentagon there was virtually no debate over *ends*, only over *means*. Almost no one questioned that it was necessary for the sake of American prestige to fight Communism in Vietnam; the domino theory was not seen as the hollow, simplistic illusion it was, because the bureaucracy stultified independent thought. No real debate occurred over Vietnam. Lyndon Johnson heard the figures from McNamara, heard the arguments from the generals, heard no dissent, and launched the war while lying to Congress and America. Liberalism's celebration of technocracy thus led to Vietnam, which contributed to the collapse of liberalism.

Hodgson also places the blame for Vietnam on the liberal doctrine of foreign intervention in the service of freedom. Old conservatism, the conservatism of Robert Taft, had been isolationist; liberalism and the new conservatism (which accepted, with qualifications, the liberal consensus) were interventionist, fanatically anti-Communist. There was no Left in the mainstream anymore to challenge the Truman Doctrine; the Vietnam War was the result. Hodgson sums it up by saying that the liberal error was to believe that "the United States could use its military power to change the world in conformity with its wishes and not itself be changed in the process" (p. 497).

Another liberal error that led to the ideology's downfall was the belief in economic growth as a virtual panacea. More specifically, liberals were wrong to think that America's resources were limitless, that one did not have to take from one group of people in order to give to another. Johnson and his aides thought they could pay for the Great Society and Vietnam at the same time -- after having just passed a major tax cut! The tax cut may indeed have stimulated economic growth, but it reduced the revenues with which to pay for the government's huge expenditures, thereby giving rise to budget deficits, which caused inflation. Moreover, the spending for Vietnam eventually became so high that Johnson had to cut his beloved Great Society programs. Evidently society's interests were not all harmonious, America's resources were finite, and economic growth could not be the foundation of social justice. "You cannot abolish poverty if you won't pay higher taxes. Only if a real transfer of resources has taken place has relative inequality been diminished; it is the relative, not the absolute, situation of the poor that must be changed if poverty is to be abolished" (p. 497). By not taking from the rich to give to the poor -- and, in addition, by believing that massive foreign intervention could be undertaken without cost to domestic programs -- liberals ensured that their creed would founder on the shoals of social conflict.

The civil rights and black power movements further revealed the bankruptcy of liberalism. The coalition of blacks and Northern liberals was unstable, and it was bound to fall apart as liberals showed how shallow was their commitment to social reform. Their ideology did not countenance the possibility that racism and inequality were more than mere relics of the past, that they were of the very essence of American society and could not be eradicated without major economic redistribution. By the mid-1960s, most blacks understood that liberalism was part of the problem, not the solution. For them, radicalism was the answer -- but it failed too, and furthermore antagonized whites across the country, who punished Democrats for their coalition with blacks by electing conservatives.

Liberalism, says Hodgson, was not just the dogma of a faction or school; it was "the operational creed of a great nation at the height of its confidence and power" (p. 492). As this confidence and power waned, in large part as a result of policies and non-policies that grew out of liberalism and its illusions, the ideology necessarily waned as well. Conservatism rose in its stead: government would no longer position

itself in the center, no longer base its policies on the myth of unlimited economic expansion and a harmony of interests, but would unapologetically favor the privileged over the oppressed (at least in the *institutional realities* of conservatism, though not necessarily in its rhetoric). It would accept that certain interests are irreconcilable and so would do what liberalism had been unwilling to do: it would redistribute resources to benefit particular interests at the expense of others. That is, it would take from the poor to give to the rich.

America In Our Time offers a compelling interpretation of the postwar years in America, but in the end it does not fully explain why the liberal ideology was constrained in the ways it was -- why it was constrained to adopt silly illusions, to view the world in simplistic Manichean ways, to place such faith in technocracy and class harmony. Liberalism can be thoroughly understood only if one places it in the context of the social structures within which it became hegemonic, and in particular, the class structures. The fact is that it served the interests of certain sectors of business in a certain period of history, and this is why it was propagated and celebrated. The ideology itself was important, but more important were the structural mechanisms that propagated it, the institutional realities that were sublimated into a belief-system, and the social dynamics that favored or frustrated particular policies. Policymakers did not act simply in accordance with their *beliefs*; on a deeper level, they tended to act as they were driven to by institutional power-relations, institutional constraints. Had they not believed in this ideology called liberalism, they would not have risen to such positions of influence as they did. Thus, on the deepest level it was social structures, power-relations, class structures, that mattered, not mere beliefs. In other words, liberalism was not just an 'intellectual error'; it was an institutional necessity in postwar America, and it was inevitably going to wane as the institutions that it legitimated evolved in tension with other institutions and social movements to the point that they mutated, like much of society, in more 'conservative' directions.

Despite its flaws, the book is well worth reading. Its panoramic vista is a welcome corrective to the minutiae of scholarship, and by glancing over an immense array of issues it stimulates new insights and makes new connections. It is worthwhile, after all, for academics to read popular literature.

In recent decades American history has begun to be reinterpreted: historians have turned from the old paradigm of American exceptionalism and relative isolation from the world to the new paradigm of transnational history, placing the country in the context of world developments. As the nation-state has started to decline in importance and globalization has accelerated, nation-state-centric history has been eclipsed by an emphasis on global and regional interconnections. Without question, this has been a positive development. In the modern world especially, social dynamics in a particular country cannot be understood apart from their connections to tendencies in other societies; this is no less true of the United States than of France or England. The presence of two oceans and a relatively open expanse of land in the western half of the country does not exempt America from the necessity of interacting with the world. What happens within its borders, therefore, is determined by and determinative of what happens elsewhere. There is no U.S. "exceptionalism" except in the truistic sense that every nation's history is different from every other's.

The value of a transnational perspective on American history is demonstrated in *America on the World Stage: A Global Approach to U.S. History* (2008), which consists of short essays on a variety of topics by respected American historians. They show that while the new historiography rarely rejects established interpretations in their entirety, it supplements and qualifies them, adding subtlety and putting them into a broader context. By viewing events in America in the light of events elsewhere, new patterns are discovered, phenomena that were previously seen as uniquely American are seen as permutations of more general or multiply instantiated processes.

For example, in chapter eleven Patrick Wolfe compares the treatment of Indians by American settlers with that of Australian Aborigines by British settlers and finds that three phases characterized both: the initial phase of destruction of indigenous groups, whether by outright slaughter, starvation or introduced diseases; the second phase of removing surviving groups to reservations; and the third phase of assimilating them into white society, through miscegenation and other means. These practices contrast with the treatment of blacks in the American South after Reconstruction, when miscegenation was considered a terrible crime and racial segregation was viciously enforced. What accounts for the disparity in treatment?

The answer is that in Australia and the United States, settlers wanted the land, not the labor, of indigenous people; once they had seized it, the most effective and least conflictual way of dealing with indigenous survivors was to absorb them into the dominant society. Their demonization served no further purpose, so it continued to exist only in residual ways. Blacks, on the other hand, were useful not for their land but for their labor, their exploitability, and so their segregation from whites and confinement to work on plantations was maintained with utmost severity.

An even clearer example of the utility of taking a transnational perspective is provided by David Armitage's essay on the Declaration of Independence, that quintessential symbol of America. We have come to associate it with the celebration of individual rights -- "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" -- as well as a sort of affirmation or confirmation of America's unique status among nations, but it was conceived as something more mundane. As Armitage states, "the Declaration's primary meaning in 1776 was to affirm before world opinion the rights of a group of states to enter the international realm as equals with other such states" (p. 20). It was as much a declaration of interdependence as of independence. After its original goals had been won, Americans placed less emphasis on its first and last paragraphs and saw its liberalism as its most important aspect, but around the world revolutionaries have tended to invoke it more as a legitimating model for their own attempts to establish sovereign nation-states than as an affirmation of individual rights. Armitage's essay thus places the Declaration in its proper international context and shows that Americans themselves have partially misunderstood it.

In his essay "Returning the West to the World," Stephen Aron tackles that other revered symbol of American uniqueness, the narrative of the American West as a virgin wilderness that forged the national character by imbuing settlers with a democratic, freedom-loving, individualistic spirit. What is at issue here is not just a set of theses propounded by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893 but an American way of *seeing* the world, a sort of gestalt. Implicit in it are the half-formed ideas of Manifest Destiny, entitlement to a continent, a new world in the truest sense, a memory-erasing of prior colonizations by Spain and France -- a forgetting of the whole centuries-long history of colonial wars, conquistadores, Indians' defense of their homeland, mass migrations. Aron remarks rightly that the so-called 'West,'[1] "what Turner deemed 'really American,' was international before it became national" (p. 90). He continues:

> Not until the West ceased to be a zone of inter-imperial rivalry did it become manifestly American. Nor did this "effective Americanization" make the history of westward expansion particularly exceptional. To the contrary, the frontier processes that unfolded across North America readily -- and sometimes uncomfortably -- equate with numerous episodes of colonization and resistance around the globe.

For instance, German and Japanese expansionists took inspiration from America's genocidal expansion, and when one applies the term 'ethnic cleansing' to America's decimation of native populations, a host of more recent associations comes to mind (p. 91). Moreover, the idea that the West in the nineteenth century was somehow isolated from civilization is quite false. It was a land boiling with violence, a cauldron of cultural conflict and cross-fertilization, as millions of immigrants from China, Mexico and Europe clashed with Indians and Americans from the Mississippi to California. Turner's thesis is not wholly without foundation, but Aron's essay proves that it is an extreme oversimplification.

Other chapters in the book are less compelling than Aron's and Armitage's, but they too are insightful in their reconceptualization of American history. For example, Philip Morgan notes in his chapter on the "Origins of American Slavery" that 'the peculiar institution' was by no means peculiar to the United States, as we sometimes assume. "Almost every society in the history of the world has experienced slavery at one time or another" (p. 36). In fact, the Arab and Muslim slave trade between the seventh and twentieth centuries transported at least as many slaves -- most of them sub-Saharan black Africans -- to North Africa, the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf as Europe transported to the New World. Muslims did enslave

[1] The very name is mythical, since, as Aron states, the territory had to *become* 'West.' To different peoples it was north, south, east, and home.

Europeans too, but "medieval Arabs came to associate the most degrading forms of labor with black slaves" (p. 38). It is true, however, that the racism of American and Caribbean slavery was uniquely virulent.

Mark Noll places America's "Nineteenth-Century Religion in World Context" by showing how much it influenced and was influenced by religious movements elsewhere. Even between 1800 and 1870, when "religious connections, influences, and exchanges between the United States and the rest of the world were probably at their low point" (p. 56), the country was affected in numberless ways by international currents, largely as a result of the influx of Catholic and Protestant immigrants. In the final decades of the nineteenth century the U.S. also made significant contributions to religion in the international arena, for example through its thousands of missionaries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In 1903, one-fourth of the 16,000 Protestant missionaries around the world were from the U.S.

In short, *America on the World Stage* effectively demonstrates not only the usefulness but the necessity of abandoning the narrative of American exceptionalism in order to understand the country's history and its place in the world. The book's publication also testifies to the welcome fact that many historians have finally acknowledged this truth.

Marcus Rediker's *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (2007) is a beautifully written but horrifying account of Europe's slave trade in the eighteenth century. Its focus is on the slave ship and everything that transpired there, although Rediker also discusses how Africans ended up on the ship in the first place and what happened to them after they had reached the New World. Among scholarly books, *The Slave Ship* is surely one of the most gory and disturbing ever written. Rejecting an abstract analysis of institutional relations, Rediker describes in grim detail the actual experiences of slaves and sailors on the ship, this "floating dungeon" and torture-chamber. Anecdote after anecdote lends credence to the judgment of British abolitionist William Wilberforce: "So much misery condensed in so little room is more than the human imagination had ever before conceived" (p. 327). Reading the book is an awe-full experience.

Consider a few examples. One captain, facing a "rage for suicide" among his slaves, decided to teach them a lesson by tying a woman with a rope under her armpits and lowering her into the water. "When the poor creature was thus plunged in," remarked a witness, "and about half way down, she was heard to give a terrible shriek, which at first was ascribed to her fears of drowning; but soon after, the water appearing red all around her, she was drawn up, and it was found that a shark, which had followed the ship, had bit her off from the middle" (p. 40). Another captain punished slaves for an attempted insurrection by cutting them up with an axe as they were still alive: first their feet, then their legs below the knee, then their thighs, then their hands, and so on, all the while throwing their limbs and heads into a group of trembling slaves who were chained on the deck. But this torture was not enough (p. 219):

> [For the next group, the captain] tied round the upper parts of the heads of others a small platted rope, which the sailors call a point, so loosely as to admit a short lever: by continuing to turn the lever, he drew the point more and more tight, till at length he forced their eyes to stand out of their heads; and when he had satiated himself with their torments, he cut their heads off.

More common was the use of thumbscrews to crush thumbs over a period of hours or days, and of course rape and incessant floggings of disobedient Africans.

However, the book is not just a record of unremitting brutality, one nauseating anecdote after another. Its principal virtue is, admittedly, that it presents the Middle Passage in its human reality and consequences. But Rediker interprets the whole sordid story from a definite perspective, and that perspective is a Marxist one. He bookends his study in the introduction and conclusion with a condemnation of capitalism, the argument that the horrors he chronicles "have always been, and remain, central to the making of global capitalism" (p. 13). Distant merchants and capitalists were the ones who kept the system going; the slave captain was their representative, the representative of capital, who did their dirty work, but in a sense they were as bloodstained as he and equally or more guilty. The system had a hierarchy of power:

at the top was the tyranny of capital, which supported the tyranny of the ship's captain over his crew and, at the bottom, the slaves naked and dying belowdecks. The sailors functioned as proletarians, so to speak, who worked on the raw material of Africans to turn them into slaves, i.e. degraded, dehumanized, cowed beings whose will was their master's. (Needless to say, the transformation was rarely complete: resistance was common.) As proletarians, moreover, sailors were tyrannized and brutalized themselves -- by the captain. They channeled their frustrated wrath into cruelty toward blacks.

The sailor's situation was not much better than the slave's. Often he had been forcibly recruited while drunk; other times he was a prisoner or debtor the condition of whose freedom was to work on a slave-ship. After the ship had arrived on the coast of Africa it would sit for five to seven months as it filled up with human commodities; the subsequent voyage to the Americas took two or three months. During all this time it was the seamen's duty not only to sail the ship but also to guard the slaves and take care of them. For instance, during the daytime hours when the slaves were on deck, sailors went below to clean their 'apartments.' This entailed emptying the tubs of urine and excrement and scrubbing the deck to remove all the filth. Mortality among sailors was sometimes even higher than among slaves: they succumbed to African diseases, poor food, and harsh treatment by the captain and officers. Mutiny, desertion, and piracy were not rare. Upon reaching the West Indies, captains typically discarded sailors who had proved rebellious or were in a bad condition for some reason or other, with the result that Caribbean ports and coasts teemed with seamen scurvy-rotted, starving, and dying.

Sailors did fight back, on one occasion memorably: in Liverpool in 1775 thousands of them struck for higher wages. Together they went to the local prison to free their comrades, and then for two days they set about unrigging and immobilizing ships in the harbor. At the Mercantile Exchange the merchants rebuffed their wage-demands; again the next day the sailors met with no success but were ordered to disperse. Instead they began throwing bricks at windows, whereupon the besieged merchants fired on them, killing several. For the sailors, this meant war. The following day, therefore, the strikers broke into gunsmith shops and warehouses, and even commandeered horses to drag ships' cannon up a hill from which to fire on the wealthy slave-trading district. "As shot rained down on the center of business, privilege, and power, terror gripped the city" (p. 256). Men broke into the homes of the wealthiest merchants and destroyed their property. At last a regiment arrived from Manchester, which soon put down the rebellion.

Worse off than the sailors, however, were the slaves. The numbers involved are staggering. Over the nearly four hundred years of the slave trade, about 14 million people were captured, 1.8 million of whom died in Africa, another 1.8 million during the Middle Passage, and 1.5 million during their first year in the New World. The golden age of the slave trade, to which Rediker confines his analysis, was from 1700 to 1808, when the trade was abolished. During this period the slave ship was a world unto itself, a machine perfectly calibrated for transforming humans into commodities. Its very structure and dimensions, as well as the peculiar devices of torture and control with which it was outfitted, served the function of creating a terror regime that was meant to extirpate humanity. It never wholly succeeded. Rediker devotes much of the long chapter "From Captives to Shipmates" to slave resistance on the ships, which took a variety of forms. Chained to each other belowdecks, men separated from women, the slaves sometimes sang. "Song was an essential means of communication among people who were not meant to communicate" (p. 282). Through song they could communicate information and "forge a collective identity." Storytelling and drumming were other means of resistance, of asserting humanity. The Africans spoke different languages and were from different, sometimes hostile, cultures, but in the bowels of their floating prison they found ways to communicate and overcome mutual hostilities. It is not exaggeration to say that they constructed a collective identity in opposition to whites; they forged an identity as *Africans* or *blacks*, a single people oppressed by white demons. Miraculously, they were able to coordinate insurrections, hunger strikes, mass suicides (to return home in their afterlife), and they created new bonds of 'fictive kinship' that would carry over into the New World. "In a dialectic of stunning power," writes Rediker, "the community of mortal suffering aboard the slave ship gave birth to defiant, resilient, life-affirming African-American and Pan-African cultures" (p. 307). It is indeed a magnificent confirmation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic: the slaves went on to found cultures of Christian love and soulful living -- the Negro spiritual, gospel, ragtime, blues, jazz, arts of sublimated emancipation -- while the slave-masters' culture, based on

idle leisure and violent exploitation of a productive people, withered away.

Rediker also touches on the abolitionist movement at the end of the eighteenth century, showing how it made advances by invoking the reality of the slave ship. The famous *Brooks* image of hundreds of blacks crammed together on a ship was republished many times around the Atlantic; according to one abolitionist, it made "an instantaneous impression of horror upon all who saw it" (p. 309). In this way, the diabolical design of the ship, perfectly suited to its task, itself contributed to the eradication of the slave trade.

The Slave Ship is such a thorough, well-researched and well-written book that it is hard to find faults with it. Perhaps, ironically, it is *too* thorough: the stream of anecdotes surges on relentlessly, such that the book becomes repetitive and almost tiresome at times. It could have been fifty pages shorter without losing any of its power. Instead of hammering the reader with yet more instances of cruelty and barbarism, Rediker could have devoted some of those extra pages to a discussion of how French ships differed from British ones, or whether there were significant differences between the slave-trading practices of the Portuguese and the British. The author also could have spent more time describing the fate of Africans after they had disembarked in the West Indies or North America, and how their fates diverged from region to region.

Nevertheless, if a book is to be judged by how well it fulfills its author's intentions, *The Slave Ship* is an admirable success. It portrays in vivid detail the conditions of life on a 'slaver,' and it rescues from historical obscurity the heroism of all those Africans who resisted their enslavement. Appropriately, it ends on a note of affirmation: testimony from discarded sailors on the Caribbean shore, disease-ravaged wrecks of former men, relates that when the white world had turned away from them, blacks carried these living cadavers into their huts and tended to them, their former tormentors. And when the broken bodies finally died, it was blacks who buried them. In the darkness of a nightmare, a flicker of humanity.

It is well known that the New Left of the 1960s was not a classically revolutionary movement, nor did it emerge from classically revolutionary conditions. It was primarily a movement of middle- to upper-class white youth and was centered around universities in San Francisco, New York, Madison, Ann Arbor, Austin, and a few other places. Historians have long known that it was the product of a 'post-scarcity' culture and was fueled by students' alienation from mainstream society. It is surprising, therefore, that not until Doug Rossinow's *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America*, published in 1998, did an author argue that the New Left's origins lay in an existentialist yearning for personal and cultural authenticity rather than solely in outrage against social injustices. "More than a new existentialist departure in a continuous history of leftist agitation," Rossinow writes, "the new left was a newly insurgent departure in a continuous and multifaceted history of existentialist hopes for authenticity" (p. 164). Thus, the New Left should be located, first and foremost, in the existentialist tradition, not in the leftist tradition. It adopted a radical politics through its encounter with the civil rights movement in the South, which students interpreted as a rebellion against the inauthentic, rotten, artificial, alienated society they themselves abhorred. Rossinow analyzes students' existentialist rebellion by focusing on their experiences in Austin, Texas, although he also considers extensively the trajectories of the New Left movement as a whole.

The Politics of Authenticity is divided into two parts: the first considers 'existentialist' developments at the University of Texas in Austin during the late 1950s and early 1960s, while the second considers the later history of the New Left in Austin and around the country. Austin in the 1950s was a very conservative place, from which liberals of secular and Christian persuasions were decidedly alienated. Christian liberalism and existentialism, however, associated with the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Tillich, Gabriel Marcel and others, became influential at the university through the presence of two institutions: the Christian Faith-and-Life Community and the YMCA-YWCA. Here, the social gospel was preached and lived as "young people, influenced by existentialism, came to believe that activism was the path to authenticity" (p. 85). They studied existentialist authors like Tillich and Albert Camus, but more importantly, they manifested their commitment to spiritual 'wholeness,' anti-conformism, authenticity,

freedom, love and personal regeneration by taking up the cause of civil rights. White and black students mingled at the university Y, which desegregated itself in the 1950s, and the whites came to identify with the emerging Southern struggle for racial integration. Indeed, secular white students too yearned for a social life in which blacks and whites could be 'natural' around each other, in which the vision of a 'beloved community,' free of estrangement, could be realized. After the 1960 sit-ins in North Carolina, students in Austin therefore began their own interracial sit-ins and stand-ins at movie theaters and other venues, with some success. Activist organizations spread among Christian liberals. Rossinow suggests that the interracial contact of the civil rights movement in Austin and elsewhere affected white students more deeply than anything else, pushing them to the left. It was in fact "the annealing experience" in which the New Left was formed.

> All that came before [the civil rights experience] -- Christian liberalism, secular liberalism, libertarianism, existentialism -- might have come to very little, politically, had it not been for the moral challenge that the civil rights movement presented and the deeply personal meaning it held for young white activists. This experience told them that although they were implicated in a rotten society, they could be redeemed. It told them they could feel love and acceptance and that they could spread these things outward.... It also helped push the 1950s quest for authenticity out of the realm of the individual self. Instead, in the 1960s this quest became a search for a 'whole' and democratic society [p. 151].

In part two of his book, Rossinow discusses the many directions in which this search took the New Left. The antiwar movement, the counterculture, feminism, environmentalism, the co-op movement -- all were expressions of the urge to overcome forms of alienation that the affluent society had produced. New Left activists were endlessly asking themselves which group evinced the most authenticity and hence had the greatest revolutionary potential: was it the poor, young people, women, blacks, workers, or all of these? Participatory democracy was celebrated, for instance in the *Port Huron Statement*, as the most authentic kind of political experience, and it was practiced as well. One of the main differences, in fact, between the old and the new left was the latter's attempt to *live* the new world, the future authentic culture, rather than simply 'bring it about' politically. This is related to the New Left's emphasis on cultural revolution rather than 'mere' political and economic revolution. A change in *values*, in *lifestyles*, was the desideratum; the youth would embody the new culture in their daily life, and they would work to bring it about through political activism. Rossinow distinguishes between the counterculture and the New Left, but he argues that they both belonged to the larger youth existentialist movement and rejected mainstream society for the same reasons, as being a culture of death, dishonesty, and repression.

The New Left branched off into new movements in the late 1960s, but these too manifested the broadly existentialist orientation to social change that had been evident a decade earlier in Austin. Environmentalists, for example, sought an end to estrangement between humans and nature. As one participant stated, "Nature is not where the skin stops. We exist in nature, not with it" (p. 279). Insofar as both Communism and capitalism demonstrated a hubristic urge to control nature through technology, they were equally alienating. The proper goal was to live harmoniously, not to dominate fellow humans and nature.

A particularly successful movement that arose in the late 1960s was feminism. Women had come to see in the New Left an overt sexism that was supposed to be justified by the fact that mainstream society had emasculated men. Masculinity had been domesticated and attenuated by bureaucracy and 1950s social norms; young men were now determined to reclaim their authentic manhood. In practice, however, this led them to lord it over women in such organizations as SDS. Women rebelled against the equation of authenticity and masculinity; they sought their own authentic womanhood in response, launching thereby a powerful critique of sexism. Some activists focused on sexual liberation and a critique of monogamy, while others advocated for women's rights over their bodies in connection with abortion. The point is that the common goal uniting all their efforts was existential empowerment and cultural revolution, an end to the objectification and subordination of women.

Rossinow is very sympathetic to the New Left's attempt to forge a more meaningful politics and culture, but he argues that ultimately it was unsuccessful. "In the end, the new left achieved instead a holistic consumer society, naturalized sexual commodities, a less bureaucratic university education, and an authenticated capitalism: a softened social experience for themselves, not a transformed society" (p. 295). Moreover, he sees in contemporary society the same search for authenticity that took a political turn in the 1960s; now, however, it has become apolitical, more personal and 'therapeutic' in orientation. All these judgments are surely correct and not very controversial; few participants in the New Left, for example, would now claim that they succeeded in their overall goals. What is controversial is Rossinow's existentialist reinterpretation of the New Left, his placing it in the tradition of middle-class revolts against anxiety and cultural alienation rather than leftist revolts against oppression. How much truth is there in his analysis?

It would have been illuminating, first of all, if he had considered in more depth earlier instantiations of the existentialist tradition. There is certainly no dearth of examples to choose from. The 'Beat Generation' of the 1950s comes to mind, as do the existentialist and literary circles in France after World War I and up to the 1970s or later. European fascism in the 1920s and 1930s had the function, for many people, of alleviating anxiety and alienation in what was thought to be a corrupt, selfish, materialistic, individualistic bourgeois culture, uniting the masses in a more authentic and spiritual nationalist experience. Going back further, one could point to the Transcendentalist movement in New England and the Romantic movement in Europe, both of which were occupied with 'spiritual' questions of how the alienated or semi-alienated middle-class individual could live an authentic life. America's First and Second Great Awakenings, too, in the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were definitely existentialist in essence, addressing as they did anxieties generated by rapid social change and the perceived breakdown of old traditions and communal ties. The Protestant Reformation itself is plausibly interpreted in this existentialist vein. One can even take this tradition back to antiquity, with such philosophical sects as the Stoics, Cynics and Epicureans, as well as the proliferation of magical and mystery religions in the Hellenistic era, when the Mediterranean world was in flux. In China and India, Taoism and Buddhism arose to salve the anxious soul. Returning to more modern times, one might, ironically, locate the New Right at least partially in the same tradition as the New Left, to the extent that it was a middle-class response to what was perceived as an increasingly degenerate, meaningless, Godless, inauthentic modern culture.

Does it make sense, then, to place the New Left in such a tradition? The answer has to be yes. It is hard to define this 'tradition' with any precision -- certain movements might have an ambiguous character, and such disparate phenomena are classed together that one is inclined to doubt the meaningfulness of the so-called tradition -- but it surely has *some* meaning. And insofar as it does, the origins of the New Left, which Rossinow analyzes in relation to Austin, show that these white youth movements of the 1960s exemplified the existentialist tradition just as well as existentialism itself did. They turned left due to the broader social context of the time, particularly the civil rights movement.

The Politics of Authenticity is an unusually thought-provoking and original book. The controversy it has stirred is justified, but so are most of the conclusions Rossinow reaches about the character of the New Left. The paucity of institutional connections between the Old Left and the New Left is yet another indication that the 'essence,' the social origins and motivations, of the two broad movements differed. Rossinow's book may well stimulate further reconsideration of the continually reconsidered 1960s.

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In a sense, writing history is an *intrinsically moral* activity -- although different kinds of history embody different degrees of morality. Writing a 'sympathetic' history of oppressed and forgotten people is the most moral; writing such a history of states and power-structures is the least. But in both cases you're asserting human dignity in the face of the absurd, the absurd and appalling denial of man's dignity implicit in the facts of death and forgottenness. Whole civilizations forgotten, as if they never existed. A total absence of recognition, the cruelest denial of humanity. Historians are like heroic Don Quixotes engaged in a desperate and losing battle against time's inhumanity.

(But that's only from one perspective, like a lot of things in this journal.)

I'm reading articles on structuralism. What I wrote in the paper on Marx's theory of revolution was rather unfledged, intuitive and improvisatory, like everything I write. I want to be more sophisticated. So: "The Offspring of Functionalism: French and British Structuralism" (1991). "'Sociological Reductionism' from Parsons to Althusser: Linking Action and Structure in Social Theory" (1982). "Marx and Parsons in Soviet Sociology" (1974). "Parsons' *Structure* in American Sociology" (1988). "Social Theory and Talcott Parsons in the 1980s" (1985). "*Structure* After 50 Years: The Anatomy of a Charter" (1989). "On Social Structure" (1940), by Radcliffe-Brown. "What Is Structuralism?" (1969). Other articles just for the hell of it: "Psychoanalytic Psychology of the Self and Literature" (1980), on Heinz Kohut's self psychology. "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age" (1966), by Herbert Gutman. "Workers' Control of Machine Production in the Nineteenth Century" (1976), by David Montgomery. "Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Rhetoric vs. Practice in Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream*" (1990), by Thomas Haskell. "New People of the Newest South: Prospects for the Post-1980 Immigrants" (2009), by Leon Fink. "Reconciling the Old Labor History and the New" (1993), by David Brody. "Communism and the Great Steel Strike of 1919" (1951). (The epithet "Commie!" as an invaluable weapon with which to break the strike.) "The Task of Cultural History," "The Political and Military Significance of Chivalric Ideas in the Late Middle Ages," and "The Problem of the Renaissance," by Johan Huizinga.

One reason why I tend to have less respect for a person the more educated he is is that education often indoctrinates him out of common sense. Chomsky has made the point many times, but I've seen it borne out repeatedly in personal experience. It's true that if you go to certain areas of the country and talk to uneducated people, you can be sure to encounter some pretty ignorant and prejudiced views. But I suspect that common sense is right below the indoctrinated surface, and if you simply appeal to their experience and knowledge of the world, you'll find that in ten minutes they start agreeing with you about the evils of big business, the necessity of popular struggles against business, the virtues of direct action in the realms of the economy and politics, the value of labor unions, the importance of environmental issues and a host of other 'liberal' concerns, and probably even the fact that immigrants, gays, etc. are infinitely less a problem than Wall Street. Of course there are stupid people and ideological fanatics in every social class, but my hunch is that most people in the lower classes, especially minorities, have an ample reserve of common sense and sympathetic humanity. I hear it sometimes in conversations among African-Americans on the train -- rants against the 'big criminals downtown,' politically sophisticated explanations of inner-city poverty. With the average educated person, on the other hand, the 'indoctrinated surface' is very deep. These people have all kinds of intellectual defense-mechanisms, sophistical tricks of argumentation, tactics of evasion, excuses for the behavior of power-structures, and beneath it all is a fundamental lack of seriousness and *humanity*. They've been indoctrinated out of their humanity. It's a truly contemptible sight -- privileged people giving excuses for not caring about the multitudes.

Institutions tend to extirpate humanity. You talk to people outside institutions or who haven't internalized institutional norms and you encounter sensible, compassionate humanity; you get near institutions and you get farther away from both intelligence and morality.

I asked Chomsky his opinion of Habermas. Ten minutes later received this: "I don't know Habermas's work very well either. The reason is that when I've read some of it, I didn't find much that encouraged me to go on. I don't see much in the way of "theory," but that's no objection. Most of what he says sounds rather reasonable, but as far as I can tell not particularly novel or far-reaching. Others have tried to explain to me what they find important in his work, but I had the same impression. It could well be that I am missing something. I'm open-minded about the matter, and if instructed, will be glad to learn. But to be frank, it's just not a high priority for me."

Why are women often attracted to 'innocent' young men, 'pure,' 'sweet' boys? Yuja has a mini-crush on a 24-year-old Polish boy, although she doesn't want to date him because he's too young. "For some reason, I keep having feelings for the young Polish boy. He is so darling!!! I think the reason I like him is that he's always very innocent, simple, pure like a crystal." To say it's their 'mothering instinct' doesn't explain much. I want to know the phenomenological mechanisms. What exactly is going on in their

consciousness? They find 'sweet' young men irresistible....but what is this 'sweetness' and this 'irresistibility'? The former is a childlikeness, a vulnerability, a lack of 'hardness' or worldly 'cockiness,' a perceived sensitiveness and kindness, an almost feminine immersion in the immediate moment, a perceived lack of the sophistication necessary to dissimulate and manipulate, a simple *sincerity*. This kind of man has no mask (or such is the woman's impression); his self is *right there*, plain on his face -- he has an 'open' face, a soulful face of goodness and sincerity, an uncorrupted, childlike self. All this means that she can make a connection with him, she can directly connect with his self, so to speak, more intensely and closely than with a sophisticated and mature man's self, which is relatively hidden behind the worldly and somewhat cynical exterior. A woman tends to crave such close and immediate connectedness. In addition, she wants to be able to make an impression on her man; she wants to be needed, loved, valued -- wants to become a part of the man's sense of self, and thereby have her own self confirmed in the world. (The man has the same desire with respect to the woman.) Her feminine nurturing of the man is a way of being valued by him and thus of valuing herself (through him), 'realizing,' so to speak, her prior implicit self-valuing. (That's what people want, to *realize* their implicit but so far 'imaginary' self-love/self-valorization. They want to *validate* their self-love.) But with the sweet boy, she can not only nurture him but also *protect* him, protect him from the cruel world that threatens to destroy the beautiful openness and transparency of his self, his good-hearted and naive sincerity. Thus she is, or sees herself as, particularly important to him, and so is attracted to him for his being a powerful way of confirming her value. (Don't think this is implausibly 'underhanded' or selfish. People tend to like another person to the extent that he confirms their value to themselves, for example by liking them or relying on them or whatever.[1]) In fact, the sheer direct connection with another self that she craves, which I mentioned above, is itself desired on account of the confirmation ('recognition') of her self that it entails.

Of course, the fact that he's male is important too. His being male means that he is the archetypal other, whose recognition is most valuable. Many of his traits are quite feminine, but the fact of his masculinity hovers above them all and 'filters' them. Indeed, another way to explain his appeal to the woman may be to point out that his feminine character allows her to half-consciously identify with him or to feel closer to him than to stereotypically masculine men; she senses an affinity between the two of them. But since despite his femininity he remains a man, the affinity coexists with a romantic spark and sexual tension.

Incidentally, a male pedophile's attraction to innocent, sweet girls or boys differs strikingly from a woman's attraction to the sweet, innocent young man. It is really an extension of the masculine love of women (who are loved, at least implicitly, as being relatively innocent, sweet, pure, childlike, delicate, beautiful). The woman's attraction to the sweet boy, by contrast, is not an 'extension' of her attraction to men but exists almost in tension with it. She is attracted to men, after all, for virtually the opposite reasons (their strength, activeness, maturity, dominance).

And why are men attracted to feminine sweetness, beauty, passivity, childlikeness, etc.? Partly for one of the reasons that women themselves are, and everyone is (as a human being): these qualities signify a receptiveness to the other. This is in fact a very important element in the masculine love of women. Women 'receive' men openly, spontaneously, appreciatively, such that the man's self is validated/confirmed. Men love being with these receptive, laughing people: the man's sense of, and desire for, self-certainty (-confidence, -value) is being reinforced. But the element of physical beauty is important too. And that's harder to explain, not least because beauty is impossible to define. You know it only when you see it. And what does the pleasure of looking at it come from? It's just a brute fact, unexplainable, unanalyzable. Or maybe that's wrong. Maybe it's misleading to refer to the 'pleasure' of looking at a woman: the point is that implicit in the male's look is the half-conscious desire to *touch* the woman, and a sort of *anticipation* of touching her. The look is a sensual act, an implicit touching, or desire/anticipation/imagining of touching. And to touch a woman, to caress and squeeze her, is to assert oneself, to act, to confirm one's being in the world, the presence and reality and thus value of one's self. This also explains the frustration implicit in merely looking at a beautiful woman: the half-conscious

[1] La Rochefoucauld, as I've said before, was right, but he expressed the insight in an unnecessarily negative way.

desire/imagining of touching her is being thwarted. The same 'act,' therefore, is both pleasurable and unpleasurable.

The reason it isn't particularly pleasurable to look at a man is that the man's physical features don't convey *receptiveness* or *passivity*, as the woman's do (in a virtually unconscious way). Feminine features -- softness, plumpness, curviness, even the 'gentle' facial features -- express (to the man), on an intuitive, instinctual level, a *needing-to-be-touched*, *yearning-to-be-touched*. […] Action, after all, is pleasurable because it is self-confirmation, self-projection-into-the-world, and action on a woman's body is especially pleasurable because it means acting on another self -- being valued by this other self, this receptive self, giving it joy and pleasure, and thereby having one's own self be validated.

All this shows, incidentally, that Merleau-Ponty was right that there's such a thing as bodily intentionality, and that much of it is an extension of the *self's* intentions. (Actually, I don't know if he argued the latter claim, but it's true.) Whatever has to do with recognition, interpersonal interactions, etc., has to do with the self.

By the way, don't reject all these phenomenological analyses just because you think it doesn't make sense to say that thoughts or perceptions of which we're not explicitly aware are present in certain attitudes or states of mind. That happens all the time; *in every moment* things are happening in our consciousness that we're not 'reflectively' aware of, i.e. that our attention isn't focused on, but which can be brought to our attention in an instant. A second ago I wasn't fully 'aware of' the sensation of the chair pressing against my thigh, but now I am because my attention has been brought to it. *Intentions*, too, can be present in consciousness half-consciously (or 'unconsciously,' so to speak), from moment to moment.

After reading about Thomas Thistlewood and Jamaican slavery in the eighteenth century -- reading alone in a dark and empty apartment at night -- one has to clean oneself with the slow movement from the Archduke trio. Thistlewood the slave master who kept a diary of his practices but didn't comment on them, didn't reflect on his feelings or those of his slaves, just matter-of-factly recorded daily events without self-consciousness. Considered himself a man of the Enlightenment, was interested in botany and horticulture, read books. But the punishments he meted to his slaves -- no different from the punishments other plantation-owners visited upon their slaves in this probably most brutal of societies in history -- are not light reading. Of course the daily floggings and the sexual predations on his female slaves and all that. But also his invented tortures, like having a slave defecate into another's mouth and then wiring the mouth shut for hours. How do you reconcile these practices with Thistlewood's self-conception, his civilized Britishness, his intelligent ordinariness? The answer is obvious, but it says a lot about humanity. As I've said before, it's all about *categorizing* people. One feels sympathy, compassion, empathy to the extent that one *identifies* with another, categorizes him as an extension of one's self. Blacks were seen as not fully human, etc. The human capacity for *abstraction*, for *mediation* -- that most lethal and most magnificent capacity, which has led to man's villainies and glories -- allowed whites to mediate their experiences of blacks with the ideas of inferiority, filthiness, semi-subhumanity, *dirty otherness*. Hence, no self-identification of whites with blacks occurred, and so no pity or compassion. Blacks, while acknowledged to be human, became for whites effectively objects (of a nasty sort), like Jews in Nazi Germany. Whites could do whatever they wanted to them while still retaining in their own eyes a civilized humanity.

The postmodernist Lyotard speaking in 1987 on his famous little book that brought the term 'postmodernism' into general circulation: "I made up stories, I referred to a quantity of books I had never read, apparently it impressed people, it's all a bit of a parody.... It's the worst of my books, they're almost all bad but that one's the worst." This statement expresses the general attitude of postmodernism (with some exceptions). Making up stories, adopting an ironic and self-parodying stance, playing games with oneself and others, not taking things too seriously, not caring about intellectual rigor and honesty or science or the accumulation of knowledge. Playful solipsism. Culturalism, literary expression over communication, the 'play of signifiers' over genuine argument. It's more appropriate to the analysis of literary and artistic creations than to the sciences or social sciences, because art criticism usually has less to do with truth, seriousness, 'fixed meanings,' intellectual standards, than with playful interpretations of artworks,

experimental probings of possible meanings, nuanced investigation of forms, artistic and linguistic self-reference that has no contact with an external reality, streams of consciousness that don't reach definite conclusions, speculative masturbation. Hence, postmodernism had great influence on artistic and cultural analysis and less on the sciences and social sciences. The latter march on much as they did before, while postmodernism is dead -- or at least you rarely hear about it anymore.

By the way, one reason phenomenology was so attractive to a lot of postmodern thinkers is that it has tendencies to solipsism, it makes no reference to a world outside consciousness. Husserl enjoins thinkers to ignore the 'objective, external world' and analyze 'ideas' instead. So then later on you have European postmodernists, influenced by Husserl and Heidegger, saying that there *is* no external world, there is nothing outside language or discourse or whatever they choose to call it. It's just subjective idealism jargonized for the benefit of a more sophisticated and less honest intellectual class. Nothing but meta-stupidity. Questions about causes and explanations of phenomena cannot even be raised -- like, explanations of language, or digestion, or anything else -- because in the idealist scheme, it makes no sense to talk about causes the operations of which we're unaware of (because there is nothing outside consciousness). So natural science is thrown out the window -- as should have been obvious anyway because it refers to mind-independent *matter*, but Berkeley and Schopenhauer and Ernst Mach and the logical positivists somehow managed to overlook that fact.[1]

It's ironic, isn't it, that the logical positivists can from one perspective be lumped together with poststructuralists: they both effectively denied or ignored external reality, though in different ways and for different reasons. It isn't surprising, though. Even as science has made giant leaps forward by investigating a mind-independent physical world, the progress of modern society has made the individual ever more internal to himself, more skeptical of the world, set in opposition to the world, fixated on his consciousness (or his 'sense-data'), more *aware* of himself as an individual distinct from the world. Hence you get phenomenology, existentialism, logical positivism, postmodernism, personal and subjective worldviews of all sorts.

....Not all postmodernists were neo-'subjective idealists,' but nearly all were idealists of the more general anti-Marxist sort. Because they were obsessed with language and so-called discourses, most of them had little interest in sociology or social history, economics or economic history, analysis of material conditions, class-structures, the state, business, 'non-discursive' institutions. They basically ignored everything of real importance. In historiography, they had far more influence on cultural and intellectual history than anything else. In all his histories of madness, sexuality, the prison system and whatever else, Foucault somehow was able to disregard class, the economy, and the state, a fact which itself proves that he wasn't a serious thinker. He was essentially a rhetorician and an artist-historian, a historical artist who was prone to periodic flashes of insight. (He takes great liberties with the facts, his scholarship is one-sided and unreliable, but his writing can be beautiful and occasionally insightful.) But all this idealism and sloppy thinking was appropriate to a time (post-1960s) when Marxist hopes had died, intellectuals were disillusioned with the working-class and class analysis, business was on the offensive against progressive movements -- formerly radical intellectuals had become socially irrelevant, so they retreated into their little academic world and pretended to effect revolutions in *theory*, devoted themselves to playing around with language and discourses and texts, declaring that these were the only realities. They were making a virtue of necessity: they had been outcast from social reality, so they decided that social reality was an illusion; only discourses, only *their* world, existed. It was collective therapy, or rather collective self-justification.

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[1] For the philosopher-casuists: I know the logical positivists didn't self-identify as idealists. But they wanted to avoid the 'metaphysical' question of the existence of mind-independent matter, so they recognized only sensations, sense-data, logical constructions out of the latter, etc., which means effectively that they were idealists. (Bracketing the external world, admitting only consciousness, sense-data, language, logic, mathematics, and trying to construct a philosophical system around sense-data as if 'matter in itself' didn't exist. -But sense-data are private, internal to consciousness (by definition, since we're aware of them) -- don't try to get around that fact through some philosophical trick or other -- whereas science makes reference to events external to consciousness. Ergo, the logical positivists were morons. Q.e.d.)

Postmodernist arguments, such as they were, should not be read on their own terms; they should be read as symptoms, as clues of a social malaise and of the post-1960s relation between particular intellectual institutions and the broader world. (For example, what kind of inter-institutional relations would result in the production and popularity of postmodernist tracts?)

Moreover, postmodernism was *allowed* to be influential -- it made it through institutional filters, as Chomsky would say, media filters, economic and political filters, academic filters -- because it played into the hands of business and political power. It didn't challenge consumer capitalism but in a sense justified it, celebrated it, proclaiming that 'simulacra' were the only reality, that television was the new reality, that social class was just a 'construct' and not very important -- thus effectively encouraging people to accept the world as it was and not to fight economic power. Any potentially oppositional 'discourse' that reeks of solipsism or masturbation will be favored and propagated by powerful institutions, because it militates against social engagement.

....Me and Chomsky:

> I've been reading the logical positivists. I have one question for you. It seems as though their attempt to formulate or 'reconstruct' science in terms of sense-data was doomed from the start, because sense-data are surely internal to consciousness (by definition, since we're conscious of them), whereas science makes constant reference to 'mind-independent' external events in the physical world. On the one hand, then, you have 'private' sense-data, while on the other hand you have 'public' matter (physical processes 'out there' in the world). The logical positivist project therefore seems essentially contradictory. Do you agree?
>
> On a related topic, I find it peculiar, to say the least, that subjective idealists like Berkeley and Schopenhauer could deny that their philosophy makes natural science nonsensical. For it seems obvious that scientific explanations of, say, digestion, which are in terms of physical processes external to consciousness, contradict subjective idealism, which proclaims that there is no reality external to consciousness.
>
> I think the basic answer was given by Russell, in the 1920s. As he observed, we accord highest confidence to our own direct experience. We then try to construct a conception of the world that makes sense of it. The parts of that effort that are conscious and undertaken in a fairly controlled and considered way we call "science," and we accord less confidence to what it postulates. Among the entities sometimes postulated are sense data -- they are not "given." Others are taken to be mind-independent.[1] I don't think there's any contradiction.
>
> They would presumably respond that natural science may be exactly correct, except in its assumption that it reaches to a world beyond consciousness. It might be, say, that Newton's laws predict the conscious observations that we seek account for, but that we go too far in assuming that they exist independently of the mind.

Yes, that's what I don't understand -- how idealists can deny that science reaches to a world beyond consciousness. Science postulates that things like cells and atoms exist and have causal interactions when we're not aware of them. That claim, that 'realism,' is the essence of every scientific hypothesis; it is precisely how science is able to explain anything at all.

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[1] [But is that true? I thought logical positivism was committed to avoiding 'metaphysical' talk about a mind-independent external world and such.]

From another email Chomsky sent me: “In my view [existentialism] is only interesting as an illustration of cultural pathology, in France probably the result of their loss of perceived status as the world cultural center after WWII, and the suppressed guilt about collaboration. There’s nothing ‘absurd’ or ‘meaningless’ about our existence, as everyone knows who has a family, friends, interesting work, concern for other humans and their fate, etc.” He’s basically right, but still, this is another example of his closed-mindedness about philosophical positions with which he disagrees. It seems to me that existentialism has a kernel of intellectual honesty, that it expresses real doubts and confusions about life that humans have had for millennia.

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Death-ambition.-- My life-ambition is that I’ll still be read 500 years after I die.

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Mainstream laziness.-- Nothing is easier than to be agreeable. What one should strive for is to be ‘disagreeable’ -- to provoke out of shallow complacency.

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The acid test.-- You can tell how morally and intellectually serious an ‘intellectual’ is by how familiar he is with Chomsky’s works.

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Noam Chomsky.-- One would not have thought it humanly possible were there not a human who had proved it possible.

*

Silliness.-- I respect a man for collecting a lot of women as little as I respect a man for collecting a lot of money.

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Epiphenomena.-- Postmodernists rebelled against the idea of a social *reality*, against society itself -- withdrawing into their cocoon of literary theory and discourse-mongering -- even as, and because, they implicitly accepted and embraced the new social reality of consumerism, narcissism, fragmented selves, fragmented ideologies, and political disenchantment. Their contempt for social reality was an expression of social reality.

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The internal external.-- Men see women’s bodies as *intrinsically sexy*: the delicious sensuality is in their flesh, an essential part of it. It isn’t projected from us to them, a projection of our desire. It is *there*. But this is how the brain sees everything; all the world’s properties that we perceive are seen as external to us even though the brain constructs them.

*

Happiness and social norms.-- The best part of life is women. The worst part of life is not being

permitted to enjoy the best part.

*

Life.-- Listen to a festive Irish fiddle, think of peasants dancing outside in the spring, shouting, cheering, clapping, and you can't not love being alive.

*

Anatomy of human destructiveness.-- What makes possible cruelty and violence? Dis-identification with the other. This is the universal condition, the condition even for *self*-cruelty and -violence -- dis-identification with oneself (which is a kind of other). In fact, whether the violence is directed inward or outward, a lack of identification with oneself *and* with the other is occurring, because the other is a projected instantiation of one's self and one's self is an internalization of the other.

*

Wright vs. Chomsky.-- Chomsky's writings tend to lack 'human interest' and psychological depth; my writings lack immense command of facts and perfect clarity of logical vision.

*

Two thinkers.-- What makes them great is the fusion of creativity with an intellectual disinterestedness as close to pure objectivity as is possible for the human mind. Many people have one quality without the other; few have both.

*

The otherly other (the beautiful other).-- Why do men get so excited to see a woman naked? Why is there such desire to see the breasts underneath the t-shirt, the buttocks and vagina underneath the miniskirt? Because that is to see the *woman* in the woman. It is seen as the feminine self, the beautiful other's essence, which is maddeningly concealed. To see, and then to act upon -- and to act upon implicitly in seeing -- and so to assimilate.

*

On Nietzsche.-- One cannot overcome oneself, not literally. But figuratively one can, and to do so is noble both morally and intellectually. It is to achieve greater power over oneself, for one is detaching oneself from prior uncritical attitudes and predispositions and consciously trying to commit to new ones. Ironically, so to self-detach oneself is, in a sense, to affirm oneself on a higher level, for the part of the self doing the detaching is the crucial part, the *active* part. However, the psychological essence of the self-detaching can be, as Nietzsche says, either healthy (*deeply* self-affirming) or pathological (*deeply* self-rejecting, however superficially self-empowering it seems to be).

*

Self-unclarity.-- I wish somebody would interpret me, write a book on my ideas, so I could understand myself.

*

Self-enclosure, happiness.-- The times I feel most myself, most at home, are when I'm alone with my journal and my music.

(But 'self-enclosure' need not entail solitude. In fact, usually it entails self-reflection in a friendly other. I'm just unusual, that's all. I self-enclose myself by creating and listening to beauty.)

*

Sorry, Beethoven.-- The 'healthiest' music ever written, the 'purest,' is that of Bach, Handel, and Mozart.[1]

*

Life for its own sake.-- The universal fear of death shows that in life itself is a profound, though profoundly subtle, pleasure.

*

Wisdom in language.-- Politicians used to 'stand' for election; now they 'run' for election.

*

Old habits.-- Two hundred years ago, Southerners complained about the haughtiness and unfriendliness of New Englanders. Nowadays, Southerners complain about the haughtiness and unfriendliness of New Englanders.

*

Against politically correct stupidity.-- According to a scientific study, women with congenital adrenal hyperplasia "as a group have a lower interest in getting married and performing the traditional childcare/housewife role. As children, they show an unusually low interest in engaging in maternal play with baby dolls, and their interest in caring for infants, the frequency of daydreams or fantasies of pregnancy and motherhood, or the expressed wish of experiencing pregnancy and having children of their own appear to be relatively low in all age groups." In other words, shockingly, adrenal glands, sex steroids, and genetic mutations play some role in determining the sexually differentiated behavior of men and women, and 'socialization' isn't everything. Only someone highly educated, i.e. brainwashed, would have to be told this.

*

On Andrew Jackson.-- With him, for the first time, you see the baleful essence of the political appeal to the 'common man,' i.e. the common conservative white man (who might also happen to be a white woman). Later on the same phenomenon would underlie modern conservatism, as in Reagan and Bush 2 -- except that this time the rhetoric about simplicity and old-fashioned values would disguise a servility to big business, which is very anti-Jacksonian. In fact, the real meaning of the appeal to the common man would change: with Jackson it was relatively sincere, and there was a genuine aversion to big, undemocratic power-structures as symbolized by the Bank of the United States. Jackson and his Democrats were also ambivalent about capitalism; they were not disguised servants of capital. They were like Jeffersonian Republicans, not Hamiltonians. (In that respect, as in others, their ideology was reactionary and doomed. The future was in wage-labor.) Modern conservatism, however, is more

[1] (Insofar as Beethoven's music induces *joy*, however, it is arguably healthier in a different sense.)

ambiguous than Jacksonian democracy. Among the people, it taps into a real, albeit unconscious and confused, ambivalence about modern capitalism and a nostalgia for traditional security and hierarchy; among the powerful, it is a tool of big business and profit. But elements of Jacksonianism are nevertheless used in business propaganda (i.e. conservatism) because of the implicitly authoritarian, *pseudo*-democratic, demagogic, racist, obfuscatory, divisive, scapegoating, anti-government nature of the Jacksonian creed. Almost any ideology that favors the white man above all is useful to business.

*

The Jacksonian era.-- Despite Daniel Walker Howe's arguments, I think the Age of Jackson isn't entirely misnamed; after all, it was a rough-and-tumble time, a time of exceptional violence, white supremacy, the frontiersman, lawlessness, social transformations affecting everyone from the bottom to the top. 'Democratic' white supremacists were everywhere, though they called forth opposition in women's movements, abolitionism, and evangelical movements. A protracted market revolution was reaching into corners of the country and upending old traditions; the common man opposed it and celebrated it. America's was no longer a 'government of courts and parties'; it was becoming modern, with genuine party rivalries and popular politicking. Between the 1820s and 1840s the American masses took a decisive step onto the historical stage.

*

Stupid white men.-- Ironically, Jacksonian democracy was not wholly in the economic interests of ordinary white men. In this respect, as in others, it is similar to modern conservatism. Specifically, its destruction of the National Bank contributed to years of depression; also, its opposition to federally directed 'internal improvements' like transportation projects -- an opposition that slowed and undermined the market revolution -- was at best of ambiguous use to most farmers and small businessmen. But it did benefit Southern slaveowners, who feared the implications for their power of a highly interconnected national market and a powerful federal government. As usual, therefore, an ideology with emotional appeal to the lower-class white man yielded tangible economic benefits to the upper-class white man.

*

The throes of transition.-- A society in which a Glenn Beck can become a sensation is dying, and deserves to die.

*

The intellectual virtue of humility.-- The fact that intuitively we find it a *complete mystery* how our limbs move -- 'miraculously' -- when we 'will' them to proves the hopelessness of our trying to understand ourselves. Consciousness is sunlight glancing off the ocean's surface.

*

Glib but sort of true.-- Men are about as interesting as plants. Women are not much more interesting. But *people* are fascinating.

*

"Can't take my eyes off you."-- The life of a young man consists of continuous painful sexual frustration.

*

Thoughts on chemistry.-- Lovelorn people agonize over 'Why isn't he attracted to me?' or 'Why doesn't she like me?', but the answer is pretty straightforward. It's because she doesn't see him as sufficiently masculine, or he doesn't see her as sufficiently feminine. Attraction revolves around the dialectic of masculinity and femininity. Either a man is masculine enough (in the eyes of a particular woman) or he isn't. Either he makes her feel like a woman or he doesn't. The matter, it must be said, is simpler in the case of men: anything that's pretty and breathes is attractive to men. How he 'feels' matters little, except with regard to *love*. Of course, being 'attractive' is only one element of the equation; people may choose not to enter a relationship with someone they're attracted to, or they may not *like* someone they're nevertheless attracted to.

On a more substantive level than mere 'attraction' or 'chemistry,' an explanation in terms of masculinity and femininity is inadequate. A woman may hate an exceptionally masculine man, or a man may have contempt for a stereotypically feminine woman. Insofar as people are humans and not just animals, what's necessary is a compelling (to a given person) admixture of the masculine and the feminine in a single personality. Otherwise the romantic relationship will be dysfunctional, torn between the extremes of activeness (in the man) and passiveness (in the woman).

*

Inured to the barbaric.-- An essential skill for the labor historian is that he learn to suppress his gag reflex. He must overcome nausea in the face of everything that is horrible and despicable in man.

*

The inconvenience of having an intellectual conscience.-- I read labor history because I feel like I should. I read cultural history because I enjoy it.[1]

*

Two kinds of realism.-- Humans are innately realists, not nominalists, and realists, not idealists. However, anti-nominalist realism is false, and we can't know whether anti-idealist realism is true (though it almost certainly is).

*

The essence of man.-- The human spirit (the self) has three major manifestations, which are experientially united but can be analytically distinguished: to freely understand, to freely create, and to freely love. The frustration of one or more of these urges may result in psychological disorders.

*

Talent vs. genius.-- Emerson's and Thoreau's journals are repetitive, self-indulgent, boring, and poorly written compared to mine.

*

One of the best books ever written.-- Every so-called intellectual should read from Studs Terkel's *Working* before he goes to bed each night. It isn't 'how the other half lives'; it's 'how the 99 percent lives.'

[1] [Not *postmodern* cultural history, but Huizinga's and the like.]

*

Drink, fuck, make money.-- As you encounter more businessmen and politicians, you realize that the main problem with the world is that it's run by frat boys.

*

Life.-- Right now, in this moment, a dozen people are having their fingernails torn out, one by one. Hundreds are burning to death. Dozens are being butchered with machetes. Hundreds of women are being raped. Millions of children are starving to death. And yet I remain a fairly cheerful and happy person.

*

Pigs.-- The role of police officers is not so much to protect *people* as to protect *order*, i.e. power-structures. To ensure people's well-being is at most indirectly related to the cop's vocation, as shown by the regularity of police brutality, their implicitly or explicitly violent behavior not only in any kind of unusual situation but even on the daily beat (aptly named). In general, the police defend specific *social relations* between people more than people themselves.

Said differently, the police officer is the 'bouncer' for society, whose role is to keep out undesirables, those who do not conform.[1]

*

Human conservatism.-- People are not primarily reasonable creatures. Underlying their opposition to most things is the argument, 'I'm not used to it.' Once they get used to it, they're not opposed to it anymore.

*

On WikiLeaks.-- In general, if something is bad for power, it is probably good for people.

*

Gramsci's inadequacy.-- What is the relation between Gramsci's explanation for the failure or nonexistence of a workers' revolutionary uprising in the 1920s and 1930s and my own explanation? Gramsci invoked the idea of hegemony: most workers 'bought into' the bourgeois practices and ideologies of popular culture, politics, the economy, etc.; they didn't question the legitimacy of capitalism in any deep or sustained way. But to say so is really just to restate the original question in a more specific way: why didn't workers vigorously challenge hegemonic practices? Why didn't they coordinate massive resistance to bourgeois culture and norms? The reason, obviously, is that business had immensely more economic power and resources than workers, such that the latter could not marshal and coordinate resistance to a business-dominated culture. The terrain of social life was constructed in large part by business: the varieties of entertainment (movies, songs, radio programs) and sources of information that were propagated across societies (such as newspapers) were produced and/or filtered by business interests, in other words on the basis of their compatibility with capitalism. So workers were socialized into a semi-bourgeois state of mind and behavior. Here is where *my* 'explanation' comes in: the phenomenon of bourgeois hegemony was a sort of proof of the fact that capitalism, from a strictly economic point of view, was not decrepit enough to collapse into socialism. The economy itself was not 'ready' yet. Or, from another perspective that amounts

[1] (Yes, I know that's all simplistic and one-sided. I'm talking only about tendencies and ideal-types.)

to the same thing, no alternative mode of production had yet reached some degree of societal maturity or viability. The presence of an already-partially-built-up, 'interstitial' socialist mode of production is in fact necessary for a decisive mass overcoming of bourgeois hegemony, because people need *resources* to resist being socialized into a (semi-)hegemonic set of structures and ideologies. If in their work and play they're immersed in bourgeois structures and norms, they probably won't even *try* to rebel en masse. But if many people have begun to work in cooperative or semi-socialist relations of production around which they can organize their lives, it will be possible for them not to yield to the larger society's still-existing (though weakened) bourgeois norms -- and their resistance will be able to spread as their mode of production does. And *that* will spread as a result of capitalism's strictly economic dysfunctioning in its terminal phase. (More and more people will have to turn elsewhere to gain a livelihood.) Anyway, the point is that 'cultural hegemony' rests on other conditions, and so in itself it does not fully explain anything. Invoking it, while potentially illuminating, does not get to the heart of the matter.

*

'Meaning.'-- A purpose, a goal, a project, self-transcendence, community, recognition, self-confirmation in the world, the realization of self-ideals, purposive self-projection into the world, making a contribution, changing something, making *lasting* change, devoting oneself to something 'other,' love, commitment, faith, hope, spiritual 'ordering,' 'centering' oneself, awareness of *connection*, transcendence of atomizing self-consciousness, transcendence in various ways of the merely 'given,' immersion in the other, passion, truth, authenticity, spontaneity, affirmation.

*

Edmund Morgan: "The rise of liberty and equality in this country was accompanied by the rise of slavery. That two such contradictory developments were taking place simultaneously over a long period of our history, from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth, is the central paradox of American history. The challenge, for a colonial historian at least, is to explain how a people could have developed the dedication to human liberty and dignity exhibited by the leaders of the American Revolution and at the same time have developed and maintained a system of labor that denied human liberty and dignity every hour of the day." I'm not sure it's as paradoxical as he thinks, but it certainly is interesting.

Beautiful irony:

> American reliance on slave labor must be viewed in the context of the American struggle for a separate and equal station among the nations of the earth. At the time the colonists announced their claim to that station they had neither the arms nor the ships to make the claim good. They desperately needed the assistance of other countries, especially France, and their single most valuable product with which to purchase assistance was tobacco, produced mainly by slave labor. So largely did that crop figure in American foreign relations that one historian has referred to the activities of France in supporting the Americans as "King Tobacco Diplomacy," a reminder that the position of the United States in the world depended not only in 1776 but during the span of a long life time thereafter on slave labor. To a very large degree it may be said that Americans bought their independence with slave labor.

But not only their independence. Also, perhaps, at least in Virginia, the limited democracy that existed in the late eighteenth century. Morgan points out that almost up to the end of the seventeenth century in Virginia, social tensions between the 'rabble' and the large landowners continually threatened to break out into open conflict, as in Bacon's Rebellion. The problem was that as indentured servants (usually young men) kept being imported to work on plantations, rising numbers of poor ex-servants who lacked access to land swelled the colony. They lacked land because of pressure from Indians on the borders, competition

from other ex-servants, and the rich's monopoly over 'safe' land. The roving population of poor white bachelors, constantly increasing (partly because of longer lifespans), posed a threat to the social order. Gradually, therefore, a turn to black slavery occurred, as planters found that slaves were easier to control, cheaper in the long run, and solved the dangerous reliance on white indentured servitude. As Virginia imported fewer and fewer white laborers -- and at the same time the colony took ever more land from Indians -- it became easier for (the fewer) poor whites to acquire plots of land, which stabilized society. With the rising numbers of small landholders, representative government became deeply ingrained in the social fabric, and the ideology spread of the rights and powers of independent, property-holding yeoman farmers, the rights and liberties of Englishmen. Thus, "it was slavery that enabled Virginia to nourish representative government in a plantation society, slavery that transformed the [royalist] Virginia of Governor Berkeley to the [republican] Virginia of Jefferson, slavery that made the Virginians dare to speak a political language that magnified the rights of freemen, and slavery, therefore, that brought Virginians into the same commonwealth political tradition with New Englanders. The very institution that was to divide North and South after the Revolution may have made possible their union in a republican government."

Also, of course, the presence of blacks as a degraded race at the absolute bottom of the social structure raised the relative status of poor whites and thereby encouraged them to have a stake in the social order, to identify with other whites however wealthy they were. Racial differences confuse(d) and counteract(ed) class differences.

Lance Hill's *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement*. (Introduction and Conclusion.) Persuasive argument that, despite the revered narrative, nonviolence as a tactic wasn't particularly successful,[1] and violence and the threat of violence were absolutely essential to the changes that took place. SNCC's peaceful local organizing in the early '60s actually didn't bring about many real, tangible gains: months-long campaigns that succeeded in registering minuscule numbers of voters. Intractable white power-structures, racism, relentless Klan violence; King's "moral suasion," his hopes to shame Southern whites out of racism, failed utterly. In the end the activists had to turn to the coercive power of the federal government. But the government refused to act for years: nonviolence, numberless complaints submitted to the Justice Department, moral appeals, did not bring about legislative reform or enforcement of the laws. Finally in 1964 things were threatening to get out of hand, with black riots and some white deaths, so the government was able to pass the Civil Rights Act -- and enforced it only sporadically, usually when compelled to by violence or its threat. The Deacons, who didn't eschew violence, were in some respects far more effectual than SNCC. They also did more to restore dignity and pride to working-class black men (think of Frantz Fanon's theory), many of whom saw nonviolence as just a continuation of age-old submissiveness and an excuse for Southern whites to persist in their views of blacks as children and cowards. By fighting back, blacks forced local whites to take them seriously. Nonviolence was a useful tactic for getting white liberal support, but without the threat of black violence always lurking in the background it would have accomplished little. ("One of the great ironies of the civil rights movement was that black collective force did not simply *enhance* the bargaining power of the moderates; it was the very *source* of their power.") After all, states are not moral agents, as Chomsky says, that can be swayed by moral suasion; they are power-structures that respond to attacks on, or threats to, their power. In the end, even the reforms of the civil rights era did little to materially improve the situation of most blacks, blacks in ghettos, in rural poverty; they were very good, however, for middle-class blacks. (It's the old revolutionary pattern of poor people doing most of the real work and middle-class people getting most of the rewards.)

Pacifism is admirable but wrong, at least if you want change. For that you have to look at tactics, not adhere blindly to principles.

[1] Also, obviously, it was just a fringe movement -- with the support of the powerful.

Richard Goodwin, one of the best and the brightest, speechwriter and adviser to Kennedy. *Remembering America*, a flabby liberal whitewashing of history. Hero-worship of a young pretty personification of charismatic egomania whose assassination was in fact not all that tragic -- far less so than King's and X's. (Tragedy requires a contrast between promise and reality.) The intelligence of the 'good and bright' overwhelmed by an utter lack of *wisdom*. A McNamaran absence of moral imagination. The Vietnam War was an 'error,' the Bay of Pigs invasion a 'miscalculation,' the Reagan terrorism in Central America a 'terrible error,' and so forth; none of this was fundamentally *wrong*, because by definition everything we do is done with good intentions. And through it all, this litany of apologetics and qualified self-criticisms, is an abdication of responsibility (even when momentarily admitting that 'we liberals' were, despite ourselves, responsible for an error or two): the ultimate truth is that our good intentions were ineffectual in the face of reality, fate, bureaucracy, inertia, whatever abstraction comes to Goodwin's mind. It's a rotten book, disgusting.

And the platitudes, my God the pieties! Kennedy the symbol of the American idea, the great man who could have led the country to moral greatness, the "exemplar who led others to discover their own strength and resurgent energy," the man who "fueled the smoldering embers" of the 1960s (terrible writing), who could do no wrong even when he did wrong because at heart he was a hero for the ages, and of course don't forget the gloriousness of America as a symbol, an eternal beacon of light, the ideal of a restless, searching people who expanded to occupy a continent (let's not talk about those other people who had already occupied it for millennia).... But now, alas, we've become a nation of cynics! Ah, if only we had continued to follow the light of reason, the inner American in us all! Woe are we who have lost our faith! --This nostalgic liberal apotheosis of Kennedy and America and democracy and freedom evinces a mind-boggling moral and intellectual immaturity, a stunning childishness in thought and deed. It signifies little more than the liberal intellectual's celebration of himself, his defense of himself: 'Yes, some of the things we did were wrong: we were too idealistic! We didn't understand the evils of the world. We thought we could use reason to remake the world, but alas, the world is an unreasonable place.' Astonishing, despicable shallowness, being so self-blind as not to see that one's effusive praise of the so-called American idea is nothing but effusive praise of oneself. It's also totally stupid in its own right. Christianity is a far more rational religion than this liberal American one.

'The best and the brightest,' i.e. the worst and the stupidest.

....The book is enlightening, however, as a window into the mind of the Harvard liberal, revelatory of the sort of thoughts this kind of person has, his worldview. Liberalism from the inside. A prettified ideology, bland but appealing, with the reference to spiritual truths, reason, ideals of harmony and peace, a rising tide lifting all boats, the fundamental compatibility of all interests in society (except for those we don't like, of course), the nonexistence of class struggle, government's ability to solve all social ills, history as a progressive battle between knowledge and ignorance, light and darkness, reason and unreason, open-mindedness and bigotry, and any other set of binary abstractions you can think of. The whole ideology hovers above reality in the heavenly mists of Hope and Progress. It's all very pretty, hence its momentary resurgence -- succumbing even now to disillusionment -- with Barack Obama. And hence its ability to get through the filters of the class structure, to become an element in the hegemonic American discourse, floating above institutional realities like some imaginary golden idol one worships in lieu of common sense. It serves a very useful purpose for business, averting people's eyes from the essential incompatibility of class interests toward the idea of Gradual Progress by means of tinkering at the margins, making nice policies.

One is almost surprised at the contradiction in people like Richard Goodwin and Arthur Schlesinger, on up to Robert Reich and Paul Krugman, between native intelligence and blind liberal stupidity. But institutions mold people to fit into them -- or rather, they mold those people who are willing to be molded, i.e. who are ambitious and obedient. However intelligent you are, if you're ambitious you're going to have to let yourself be taught to believe what you have to believe in order to fit into your chosen institution. Thus arises the phenomenon of apparently brilliant people who you suddenly notice have this gigantic blind-spot in their mind that underpins their brilliant maneuverings.

....Lyndon Johnson after his presidency: "I knew from the start that I was bound to be crucified either way I moved. If I left the woman I really loved -- the Great Society -- in order to get involved with that bitch of a war on the other side of the world, then I would lose everything at home. All my programs. All my hopes to feed the hungry and shelter the homeless. All my dreams to provide education and medical care to the browns and the blacks and the lame and the poor. But if I left that war and let the communists take over....then I would be seen as a coward and my nation would be seen as an appeaser." Evidently it was more important to him that he not be seen as a coward than that he help millions of poor and oppressed. Just the sort of sociopathic megalomania that's necessary to become president.

[…]

Another question, unrelated: why is it that societies so often seem to return to earlier 'stages' but on a 'higher' level? It's a very Hegelian phenomenon. For example, in the first decades of the 20th century, American Progressives advocated a cultural pluralism that would discriminate against no ethnic groups but celebrate them all. A similar movement arose after the 1960s, called multiculturalism. Or consider the fight for black civil rights. In the 1930s and '40s it was integrated into labor's battles for economic justice; later, after unions and radicalism had been devastated by the conservative postwar backlash, the civil rights movement reemerged (in the late 1950s) in a different form, this time centered around the black church. Conservative movements too crop up again and again. Think of the Klan after Reconstruction, then again in the 1920s, then again in the 1960s, and then we had Reagan and now the Tea Party. But all these formulations are simplistic and misleading. There are not really sudden 'upsurges' like this. Instead, throughout history there is a continuous struggle between people in opposing institutions and conditions -- the relatively disadvantaged fighting for greater power, the relatively advantaged trying to retain their power. At times the conflict will be only implicit, as when slaves resigned themselves to their status or rebelled only in daily acts of trivial insubordination. But given the universal disparity in power-relations and the similarity of particular institutions across society, the potential is always present for a *movement* to develop on the side either of the advantaged or of the disadvantaged. Inevitably, whether it's a conservative or a progressive movement, it will not achieve its ultimate aims, because it will never be able to *eradicate* resistance (unless it destroys all its opponents and their institutions). Also, even if the movement makes substantial progress, things are always more or less in flux. Populations are growing or shrinking, new institutions are developing, people are migrating between societies, etc. Thus, whatever progress has been made is always being threatened by the facts of change and of resistance from people who sense that their power is being eroded. So, years or decades later, discontent among those people who had earlier made progress will again have reached the point of massive visibility, and a movement similar to the old one will (be said to have) emerge(d), though it will have to deal with new conditions somewhat different from the earlier ones. And intellectuals will judge that a 'new stage' of society has been reached, that the 'dialectic' has moved one step higher, that the negation of the negation is in the offing. But really on a smaller scale 'movements' are frequently or continuously happening against each other; the less powerful are fighting the more powerful and vice versa.

For example, Jacquelyn Hall is right to note in "The Long Civil Rights Movement" (2005) that it's potentially misleading to formulate the era in terms of (1) progress for workers and minorities in the 1930s and early 1940s, then (2) a conservative backlash in the late 1940s and 1950s, then (3) more progress for blacks and other minorities in the 1960s, and then (4) another backlash in the 1970s and 1980s.... In reality, the backlash and the progress were happening together from the very beginning. Even during World War II, poor middle-class whites in Detroit who had purchased homes with the help of the New Deal were jealous of their new property and wanted to keep blacks (migrating from South to North) out of their neighborhoods. So even though, as auto workers, these whites might have been expected to choose a New Deal mayor endorsed by the UAW, they chose the conservative who pandered to their fear and resentment of blacks, as Nixon and Reagan would do later. They also prevented adequate public housing from being built for blacks, adequate funds from going to their neighborhoods, etc. --Despite all this, though, there is truth in the more simplistic conception. Anyway, I've answered the question I set out to answer.

"Gilded Age business practices cannot be understood without realizing that for most entrepreneurs 'economic activity stood apart from the sphere of moral and personal considerations.'" Yes. Within the institution, people act in accordance with institutional norms; outside the institution they're free to act as their conscience dictates. Think of Stanley Milgram. People obey institutional necessities however horrifying they are, because momentarily they 'internalize' them (accept them, internalize the commands, accept the internalized authority-figures); once they step outside the bounds of the 'institution,' they return to their so-called normal selves. That is, they're free to act in accordance with a broader social morality. But there are different moralities for different institutions, and people accept them within the limits of the given institution.

It's funny that Christianity can be used to justify a lack of generosity toward the poor. Russell Conwell, from the 19th century: "The number of poor to be sympathized with is very small.... To sympathize with a man whom God has punished for his sins, thus to help him when God will still continue a just punishment, is to do wrong, no doubt about it." The real is the rational. We have to accept the world, do nothing about it. By trying to change it we're going against God's will. Religion to its logical conclusion (at least from one perspective).

From another perspective, obviously, religion can be a great stimulus for social change. Jesus himself was kind of a revolutionary, as was Martin Luther King. The 'social gospel.' Early Christianity, a movement of the poor. And liberation theology. It all depends on the social context, and on who is speaking. (One preacher will be reactionary, another revolutionary. But which way the masses go depends on politics and the social context.)

The credo of all oppressed people in history, formulated by Byron:

> Hereditary bondsmen! Know ye not
> Who would be free themselves must strike the blow?

The world is falling apart, but that statement is "all ye know, and all ye need to know."

....Bernard Bailyn on the American Revolution:

> The outbreak of the Revolution was not the result of social discontent, or of economic disturbances, or of rising misery, or of those mysterious social strains that seem to beguile the imaginations of historians straining to find peculiar predispositions to upheaval. Nor was there a transformation of mob behavior or of the lives of the "inarticulate" in the pre-Revolutionary years that accounts for the disruption of Anglo-American politics. The rebellion took place in a basically prosperous if temporarily disordered economy and in communities whose effective social distances....remained narrow enough and whose mobility, however marginally it may have slowed from earlier days, was still high enough to absorb most group discontents. Nor was it the consequence simply of the maturing of the economy and the desires of American businessmen for greater economic autonomy, or of the inevitable growth of infant institutions and communities to the point where challenges to the parental authority became inescapable: neither economies nor institutions nor communities are doomed to grow through phases of oedipal conflict. There was good sense in the expectation occasionally heard in the eighteenth century that American institutions in a century's time would gradually grow apart from England's as they matured, peacefully attenuating until the connection became mere friendly cooperation. American resistance in the 1760s and 1770s was a response to acts of power deemed arbitrary, degrading, and uncontrollable -- a response, in itself objectively reasonable, that was inflamed to the point of explosion by ideological currents generating fears everywhere in America that irresponsible and self-seeking adventurers -- what the twentieth century would call political gangsters -- had gained the power of the English government and were

> turning first, for reasons that were variously explained, to that Rhineland of their aggression, the colonies.

It seems to me that too much ink has been spilled on the 'meaning' of the American Revolution as opposed to the French. Its radicalism or conservatism, etc. Sure, it was less radical, in a way, than the French, just because the French revolutionaries had centuries of feudal traditions and institutions to sweep away, and millions of starving poor, and hordes of resisting aristocrats, and were surrounded by hostile European nations. A complete social upheaval was necessary for there to be a republican, 'democratic' revolution in such a country. Americans already had relatively free institutions and lived in a fairly modern, (pre-)bourgeois society (compared to France), so their reaction against arbitrary authority did not have to take an uncompromising, world-overturning form. It wasn't feudalism they were fighting against but a much milder form of oppressive power-structures. Nevertheless, the two revolutions were inspired by similar Enlightenment ideologies of liberty and republicanism, similar impulses against oppression and inequality, and they both signified early, 'bourgeois' stages of the masses' eruption into modern European history.[1] The English Civil War and Glorious Revolution had largely the same significance. Circumstances vary between countries and so social transformations take different paths, but on the broadest scale the meaning of all the classical revolutions even into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the events in Russia and China, was the struggle against feudal or, more generally, undemocratic power-structures, the middle and lower classes' reaction against economic and political oppression, and the spread of 'popular' ideologies (be they liberalism, republicanism, democracy, or socialism) and people's power. Fascism, by the way, and all its variants are different and paradoxical: popular movements *against* various kinds of people's power. Popular reactions to economic and political dislocation that look toward the past, toward order and hierarchy, rather than toward the future and increased freedom for all people. This is what makes them relatively acceptable to the ruling classes -- and that is why they have been so influential since the early twentieth century or before. Business would prefer not to have the masses involved at all, but since they have to be somehow or other (as they didn't for most of history), business propagates reactionary instead of progressive popular ideologies. It's a risk -- the masses can get out of hand -- but it's far preferable to the alternative of economic democracy.

If we understand the 'American Revolution' to be the long process of social change from about the 1760s to the early decades of the 1800s -- in which case one could even argue that the Civil War, a war against a pre-capitalist and 'undemocratic' society (or mode of production), was its final stage -- then we can place it even more clearly in the tradition of the English and French revolutions. It's true that the American struggle for independence in itself didn't have the same relation to society as the other revolutions, since it didn't constitute an effort to remake an essentially feudal politics and society but was instead a mere revolt against a mildly oppressive imperialist power, and thus was more 'accidental' than the chain of revolutionary events in Europe -- especially because, as Bailyn says, wise political leaders in England could probably have defused the crisis and prevented the war -- but Gordon Wood is right that it was symptomatic of underlying, long-term changes in economic and social relations, which in some form were happening in Europe too, albeit in more convulsive ways. And don't forget that there were, after all, traces of feudalism even in America, and these were going to be erased under various pressures. Economic and social relations were going to be progressively liberalized under the pressures of trade, manufacturing, population growth and migration, incipient industrialization, etc. At the same time, under the influence of early industrialists, protectionist laws and tariffs were almost inevitably going to be erected sooner or later in America, even if the Revolutionary War hadn't happened. The ties with England were inevitably going to be attenuated in either gradual or convulsive ways during the transition to early industrialism and greater commercialism. All this grew out of basically the same underlying processes of economic change occurring all over the West.

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[1] Certain stages of the French Revolution were far from bourgeois, but ultimately its bourgeois characteristics prevailed. Especially after Napoleon came to power.

Again, it's true that the power-structures that Americans revolted against were very different from the structures that the French revolted against a decade later. Starting in the 1760s, Americans became painfully aware -- through economic depression, England's imposition of 'intolerable' regulations and taxes, etc. -- of their humiliating status as colonial dependents. In some respects Americans were becoming increasingly prosperous, free, and sophisticated (theirs was a very literate culture, for example); commercialism and mass consumption were among the forces undermining old norms of subservience between the classes and between the mother country and the colonies. Ordinary people were becoming more conscious of their dignity as producers and consumers, the freedoms and rights they were entitled to; their degrading treatment by Parliament, their status as mere outposts on an empire whose metropolitan center didn't even recognize their right to political representation, contrasted outrageously with the vibrancy of their civilization, its economic importance to the empire, and the democratic, rights-conscious practices present throughout every colony. They were a people bursting with energy, but England treated them contemptuously. And its behavior only got worse, not better. So an explosion occurred, a 'democratic,' popular rebellion.

Conditions in France were so much worse that, in a sense, its revolution proceeded from nearly opposite causes: the peasantry and urban underclasses were miserable, not growing in self-confidence or increasingly aware of their substantive freedoms and rights as contrasted with their political disfranchisement. Nevertheless, with both revolutions it was a matter of the multitudes' and middle classes' clamoring against harsh treatment by power-structures. In both cases there were *ancien-régime*-ish straitjackets on the economic and political enfranchisement of the population even as inexorable economic pressures were tending to burst open these straitjackets and empower the disempowered. [And even in France, as in the American colonies, it was becoming clear to commoners and peasants that the aristocracy was losing its political legitimacy, its right to rule. Its 'hegemony' had long eroded. In France the nobility no longer had any important economic, political or juridical functions; it was becoming a class of useless parasites, and the peasantry knew this. Compounded with their economic misery, this led them to revolt.]

The two things I'm proudest of having written are my essay on values and my Job satire. I don't even remember the whole essay, but I remember the exhilaration of writing it and the certainty of saying something important. If it isn't the final word, it's the foundation of the final word.

So is my Master's thesis, especially the part on Marxism. That thesis is actually the most important thing I've written. It contains the most important revision of Marxism since....no, since never, since ever. I have purged Marxism of everything merely ideological, such as the prophecies of a socialist insurrection (which has never happened and never will, at least in its classical form) and a proletarian dictatorship. Everything utopian and 'unscientific' is gone now; the system is logically consistent, elegant, realistic, empirically adequate, more truly 'dialectical' than it was originally. There is no longer any tension between 'structural development'/'the initiative of the masses' and the role of individual leaders to guide the masses; I've elevated the significance of structures and 'the masses' at the expense of leaders and 'the revolutionary party.' In fulfilling Marxism[1] I've made it 'irrelevant' -- I've explained why ideologies will have little importance in a possible transition to socialism. What matter are mundane economic and social interests, grassroots networking, slow political advances, not revolutionary ideologies that infuse passion into millions so they can throw themselves against the state and be smashed. My thesis itself is a kind of manifesto for our time: it has approximately the same relation to contemporary society that the *Communist Manifesto* had to its society. That is, it's a little ahead of its time; it highlights developments that are now in their infancy but decades hence will (probably) be at the forefront of social change.

October, November

[1] [Actually, that statement is simplistic. Marxism is complicated, with several different tendencies. Nevertheless, an argument can be made that I've brought many of its basic premises to fruition.]

I'm going to be reading a bunch of books on 1968 for a historiographical paper I have to write. Some only skimming, some reading more thoroughly. Starting with Chris Harman's *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After* (1988). International context.

Fredrik Logevall argues convincingly in *Choosing War* that Johnson's escalation of war in Vietnam was completely unnecessary, avoidable, not at all 'overdetermined' by a lot of structural, political, economic, and ideological pressures. The evidence Logevall amasses is overwhelming. In a sense, it was four guys who made the decision: McNamara, Bundy, Rusk, and Johnson. But really it was Johnson. Vietnam happened because of Johnson's personal insecurities. He had resolved not to be the man who lost Vietnam, the only president in history to lose a war. He never seriously contemplated withdrawal even though ample opportunities existed, virtually all of America's allies favored it, most elite mainstream opinion in America thought escalation would be a mistake, and there were plenty of face-saving devices for the U.S. to get out of the war before 1965. Yes, there were pressures to escalate, but there were pressures (international and domestic) not to escalate too. But Johnson didn't want to be labeled a coward by his political opponents. Unlike Kennedy, he had never served in a war; he wanted to prove himself. Criticism of his foreign policy he interpreted as criticism of himself and/or encouragement to be a wimp, so he refused to give it consideration. Kennedy *might* have chosen the path Johnson did between December of 1964 and February of 1965, but it was by no means a foregone conclusion. For one thing, Kennedy had no insecurities and felt no need to prove his mettle in the foreign-policy arena, especially after the Cuban Missile Crisis. He had shown himself willing to listen to allies, all of whom except Australia were by 1964 against escalation. He had a more reflective and flexible mind than Johnson. The Bay of Pigs had predisposed him not to trust military advisors. Anyway, it doesn't matter; the usefulness of such speculation is just that it highlights the fact that it wasn't *structural necessities* but *personal decisions* that led to Vietnam. Ironically, Johnson's lack of moral courage was itself cowardly.

....If I stepped back and read my whole journal from beginning to end, I'd probably be surprised at my strength and resilience. And the contradiction between everything I've lived and the freshness I still feel most of the time. It's surprising that someone like I exists in America in 2010. Had I been born ten years later or ten years earlier, the fragile equilibrium that is Chris Wright would surely have been impossible.

Under one of the Youtube videos in which Chomsky refutes a reporter's objections to his analysis of the Israel-Palestine conflict, someone wrote a brilliant comment: "People who attack Chomsky are like balloons attacking a cactus."

David Brody's classic *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (1960).

The role of chivalry in the Middle Ages is fascinating. "The idea of chivalry constituted for these authors the sum total of general concepts with the aid of which they explained to themselves the realms of politics and history." "In spite of the confusion and the monotonous horror of their tales, they saw [the history of their times] bathed in an atmosphere of gallantry, fidelity, and duty.... All these authors are firmly convinced that the salvation of the world and the maintenance of justice alike depend on the virtues of the nobility." Self-sacrifice, honor, pride, the desire for justice, protection of the oppressed, solidarity with one's comrades, devotion to a leader and/or a cause -- these are the positive elements of chivalry. Huizinga sees the origin of patriotism in chivalry. And the honor code among America's Founding Fathers in the 1790s, which could lead to dueling -- that too is a legacy of chivalry, which in a few decades was about to die out under the influence of capitalism and party politics. Even the Founders' republicanism may be an afterimage of chivalry mingled with the Enlightenment's nostalgia for classical antiquity. --But what is the '*meaning*' of chivalry? What was its significance in the context of the Middle Ages, and of its revival in the late Middle Ages? What were its origins? Surely it arose out of traditions of the Germanic tribes. Actually, its significance isn't hard to fathom when you think about the economic system of feudalism -- its militarism, the phenomenon of vassalage, the need to protect serfs and peasants from marauders, etc.

Random thoughts on political conservatism.-- The liberal, individualist strain vs. the traditional, communal, hierarchical, 'religious fundamentalist' strain. Partially reconciled in shared anti-Communism and anti-socialism, but still in great tension. Perhaps also reconciled in implicit anti-

egalitarianism? (Conservatives wouldn't admit to that, but it's basically true. Equality (between races, classes, ethnic groups, etc.) is not an important value for conservatives, while it is for leftists.) But leftists valorize community just as much as traditionalist conservatives; they simply fuse that value with their love of freedom and equality. It's a different kind of community they have in mind, a free, equal, un-hierarchical community that permits the flourishing of the individual's unfettered personality. Another irony: leftists usually realize the libertarian conservative's emphasis on individual freedom better than the conservative himself. Think of the 1960s' flourishing of radical sects, the undisciplined, un-hierarchical, 'participatory democratic' approach to social change, as opposed to the fledgling conservative movements' organizational genius with its top-down structures and its slow, patient infiltration of existing institutions for the sake of achieving power sometime in the future. Quasi-Leninist organizations and means of organizing! An anti-individualism in the service of an ideology, or at least a rhetoric, that exalts individual freedom, limited government, free markets, etc. But essentially it was just an obsession with achieving power, an obsessive drive to achieve political power so that the white middle-class (and sectors of big business) could defend its perceived prerogatives against subaltern groups clamoring for power supposedly at the expense of the white middle-class. (I should acknowledge, too, that parts of the white working-class had similar anxieties to those of the middle-class, similar racist impulses, a similar desire to defend what few advances they had made in preceding decades against black barbarians at the gate.) For most conservatives -- not including those for whom conservatism is just a tool of business and power -- the whole ideology they've constructed is essentially a way to rationalize economic, cultural and psychological anxieties that impel them to lash out at subaltern groups who they think are rising in status at their (the conservatives') expense. Incidentally, for the sometimes-conservative white working class, the economic grievances are real; it's just that workers are "chanting at the wrong spook." But it's true, racism does still exist throughout the population. It's a hard thing to overcome, especially in a society of scarcity (we never lived in a "post-scarcity society," as liberals argued in the '60s) and economic insecurity. Just imagine, for example, that the impoverished people living in inner cities now were not blacks and Hispanics but whites; do you think their miserable conditions would have been allowed to persist as long as they have? Would their schools still be as dilapidated as they are if they were full of white children? No way. America is still fundamentally racist, but it's an almost-unconscious, structural racism.

I'm thirty years old. Starting a new decade. My twenties are over! My whole life -- I feel like my whole life, almost, has been lived in my twenties; before that was the Dark Ages, which I don't remember well. It was in my twenties that I became a full human being. A phenomenally productive time intellectually; less so socially and sexually, but that's not entirely my fault. It's partly due to the perversity of American society, where attractive women don't like good, easygoing and intellectual men. Hence my greater success with Europeans, Latinas and Asians.

In the beginning of January I'm going to talk to Noam Chomsky for half an hour in his Cambridge office.

....A few nights ago met a Polish-Norwegian-Native American (but fully American) girl from OkCupid.com at a bar, a beautiful 24-year-old artist. We talked for hours -- she's a great conversationalist, intelligent and articulate, confident, easygoing with a sense of humor. Named Ashleigh. The next night I met a beautiful 23-year-old actress-singer-playwright, overflowing with energy and charisma, who however is overfond of talking. Both girls enjoyed themselves (sent appreciative texts afterwards), but I preferred Ashleigh. Not so manic as the other, Kathleen, and easier to talk to. Met Ashleigh again tonight, coffee and then dinner. Again, gripping conversation. She's almost intimidating but seems to think I'm very intelligent and interesting, respects me for my thought-fullness or whatever. As we waited in the subway station I took advantage of a pause in the conversation to ask, "Would you terribly object to my kissing you?" She smiled -- "That was cute" -- so I leaned in and kissed her.

[A couple nights later.] Sex with Ashleigh. The best thing about sex, for men, is not really the physical pleasure but the acting on (in) another person. That says a lot about human nature and is contrary to the thrust (ha) of Freud's system.

December

Papers:

Factors Determining the Success of Labor Unionism: Lessons from 1919 and 1937

For the U.S. labor historian, the dates 1919 and 1937 have profound meaning. One signifies defeat, despair, a succeeding decade of acquiescence to the status quo; the other signifies triumph, hope, future years of progress. In the former -- 1919 -- a colossal wave of strikes across the country, which in some cases extended into the early 1920s, was mostly crushed; in the latter, a wave of strikes that had begun in 1936 and would continue into the early 1940s resulted in the achievement of that long-sought dream, unionism of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the nation's core industries. More than four million workers struck in 1919, including shipyard workers in Seattle, policemen in Boston, textile workers across the east coast, steelworkers in the East and Midwest, railroad workers around the country, coal miners from West Virginia to Oklahoma, and workers in scores of other occupations; in 1937 and the following four or five years, workers struck to unionize in the auto industry, steel, meatpacking, farm equipment manufacturing, electrical equipment, and other industries. The question is, what caused these respective strike waves and why did the first fail while the second succeeded?

A large scholarly literature has arisen around these questions, and I cannot consider all of it here. Certain contributions, however, have been particularly valuable, and in the following I will review the lessons they have taught us. Among these contributions are David Brody's *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (1960) and *Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919* (1965), Lizabeth Cohen's *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (1990), Sidney Fine's *Sit-down: The General Motors Strike of 1936-37* (1969), Irving Bernstein's *Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941* (1969), and Melvyn Dubofsky's *The State and Labor in Modern America* (1994). I will also review articles from the 1950s to the 1990s.

In a short paper I cannot address all the major strikes that occurred in the two periods under consideration; what I will do is look at certain emblematic labor struggles and the conditions that determined their outcomes. The efforts to unionize the steel industry have been studied most closely, so I will focus on them as well as the famous Flint sit-down strike among autoworkers in 1937. We will see that workers in 1937 were more favored in almost every respect than those in 1919.

1919

Steelworkers in America, by David Brody, is a classic of labor history. It is considered a transitional work between the old and the new labor history, in that it incorporates elements of the old institutional, trade-union-based history with the contemporary emphasis on social history, workers' experiences and 'agency.' However, it does not emphasize workers' agency or resistance to oppression as much as the work of Herbert Gutman and David Montgomery, who are considered the other two founders (along with Brody) of the new labor history. Brody is more interested in the sources of *stability* in the steel industry than in the sources and modes of worker resistance. He has been criticized, as a result, for implying that workers merely acquiesced to conditions created by management, that they did not forge their own culture.[1] There may be some justice to this criticism, but, nevertheless, political correctness does not always equal truth. Sometimes workers *are* more 'reactive' than 'active'; in certain periods, or maybe all periods, workers *have* been unequivocally 'victims,' though not completely passive ones. This is true of the era that Brody analyzes in *Steelworkers in America*, from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the 1920s (at which time the Great Depression led to major changes that made possible greater agency on the part of workers).

[1] See, e.g., Brian Greenberg, "What David Brody Wrought," in the appendix to Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

During this period, industrial unionism, or the inclusion in a single union of all workers in a particular industry, did not exist in steel or other core industries; there was only craft unionism, i.e. unionization by occupation, or skill, rather than industry. In steel, the most important craft union was the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers, which mostly represented skilled workers rather than laborers. The latter, in fact, belonged to no union at all. However, even the Amalgamated Association lost much of its power after its catastrophic defeat in the strike at Andrew Carnegie's Homestead plant in 1892. On the eve of World War I it was very weak. This did not prevent skilled workers, usually Americans, from being well off compared to unskilled laborers, most of whom were immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. These workers had low wages of from $1.50 to $2.00 a day (which, however, was more than they could earn in Europe), miserable living standards in the mill towns, and terrible working conditions with high accident rates. Immigrants regularly worked twelve-hour days, seven days a week -- when they could find work. In depressed periods of a few months at a time, they were lucky to have a job at all. The vast majority were single men who had come to America to make money for a few years, after which they hoped to return to their peasant families in Europe with a lot of money saved up. The hope of returning soon to the old country helped them tolerate the misery of the steel industry.

For many years, Brody states, two factors prevented the Amalgamated Association from trying to organize unskilled workers. First of all, nativist sentiment divided Americans from 'dirty,' 'ignorant,' 'slavish' Eastern Europeans with whom they could not even communicate, and who were willing to work for a pittance in degrading, dirty work. Skilled workers would not accept the unskilled in their union. Secondly, union leaders were worried that by attempting to organize laborers they might jeopardize existing contracts with the steel companies. Their own union members -- a small minority of all employees -- seemed relatively secure in their contracts with employers, so there was little incentive to organize the unskilled.

In the years before World War I, however, things began to change. In 1909 U.S. Steel, which set trends for the entire industry, declared that it would no longer recognize or negotiate with any union at all, even the Amalgamated. Collective bargaining, it had decided, interfered with the prerogatives of management. The philosophy of paternalism, which anticipated the welfare capitalism of the 1920s, would henceforth guide management's relationship with its employees. Given this 'open-shop' announcement, the Amalgamated Association no longer had anything to lose by organizing unskilled immigrants, and potentially much to gain. If it could recruit workers from all ranks of the industry it might be able to force U.S. Steel to negotiate with it. So after 1909 the AFL and the Amalgamated Association set about organizing the entire industry. They failed for a variety of reasons, but the experience at least prepared them for future efforts during and after the war, leading to the 1919 strike. At the same time, immigrants were becoming increasingly militant as more of them settled in America permanently, bringing their families over from Europe.

With World War I came the end of the status quo. The demand for labor skyrocketed with the demand for steel, and soon there was a labor shortage throughout the industry. Since the war halted the flow of new immigrants from Europe, steel companies recruited blacks from the South. They also raised wages for all workers and tried to improve living conditions in the mill towns. Most importantly, to offset the labor shortage the companies barraged employees with patriotic propaganda designed to raise output. Steelworkers were helping to 'make the world safe for democracy'; they were the linchpin of the war effort, they were proving their devotion to America and freedom, they were the pillars of democracy. This supercharged atmosphere of patriotism had its intended effect: immigrants threw themselves enthusiastically into their work, and profits surged (far more so than wages). At the same time, ordinary workers for the first time felt that their work was essential and highly valued by society. Immigrants embraced America, celebrated it in marches and flags draped from their windows, and felt that America embraced them for their contribution to the war effort. Consequently, as the war dragged on and conditions in the overpopulated mill towns deteriorated -- and laborers worked at a frenetic pace twelve hours every day, without being paid what they thought they deserved -- discontent built up. Employees' poor treatment was not commensurate with their value, reaffirmed daily in political and business propaganda. If immigrants were fighting for world democracy, why couldn't they have a modicum of democracy in their working lives? By the summer of 1918, the rank and file was ripe for unionization.

As the situation thus changed in the factories, so it changed in the lofty heights of national politics. To secure the wartime cooperation of workers and unions, President Wilson and the National War Labor Board he established in 1918 defended the right of workers to organize. Indeed, in adjudicating disputes between employers and employees, the NWLB usually sided with the employees. The whole changed political climate had several notable effects. First of all, it infused confidence into workers, courage to organize, since they knew that their efforts would be supported by the government. Steelworkers were doubly confident now that the labor shortage had eliminated the possibility of their being fired for trying to join a union. Secondly, the government's pro-labor position encouraged the AFL and the Amalgamated Association to resume their attempt to organize the steel industry. They took action in the summer of 1918.

However, the very structure of their organizations hindered them from the beginning, as Brody argues. Twenty-four craft unions claimed some jurisdiction in the steel industry, though most represented a very small number of workers. During the organizing drive of 1918 and 1919, this fragmented structure led to jurisdictional disputes, each union's petty guarding of its authority, and miserly financial support from each union for the semi-coordinated organizing effort. What was needed was industrial unionism, not conservative craft unionism. Moreover, the unions provided too few organizers for the national campaign. This precluded a 'lightning strike' across the whole country. Instead, organizers began in Chicago and eventually went to Pittsburgh, Youngstown, Cleveland, and elsewhere, thereby losing the element of surprise in their war against the employers.

Nevertheless, the campaign was quite successful. Everywhere the organizers went, workers were eager to unionize. In fact, the unskilled immigrant laborers were more eager than the Americans, who worked in better conditions and usually hoped to be promoted. Black workers, who constituted about 10 percent of the labor force, were the least susceptible to unionization, given their segregation and the outright prejudice they regularly encountered from whites. But the organizing drive continued apace, employers not knowing how to react to it in light of the government's pro-labor policies. Over a hundred thousand workers signed up.

Grievances accumulated in the months after the war's end, as laborers failed to be rewarded for their wartime sacrifices. The NWLB lost its power and then disbanded in the summer, leaving disillusioned workers at the mercy of their employers. Unemployment spread in early 1919 as demand for steel shrank; the desired eight-hour day did not go into effect; some men were fired for union activities. By late summer, national union leaders had decided that they could no longer contain the restlessness of the rank and file, who in Youngstown, Chicago and other places were threatening spontaneous strikes unless the unions called a national strike. So on September 22, finally, union leaders gave in, having been rebuffed in their attempts to negotiate with the head of U.S. Steel, Judge Gary. By September 30, between 250,000 and 300,000 men were on strike, about half the industry's workforce.[1]

Brody has a good account of the strike in his short book *Labor in Crisis*. From the beginning, the steelworkers were at a great disadvantage in light of the industry's tremendous wealth and power. Five years of unusually high revenues had placed the industry in a good position to withstand even a total strike; a partial strike such as the one that materialized therefore had little chance of success. Many mills around the country continued to operate, and as the weeks went by, thousands of strikebreakers (mostly African-Americans) were employed by the steel companies. In Pennsylvania and other centers of the industry, police repression was fierce. Picketing workers were arrested; indoor meetings among strikers were prohibited in some steel towns. "Local business and public men nearly everywhere....favored the management side from the start."[2] Even the federal government effectively supported management by refusing to intervene or mediate between the unions and the steel bosses. The Wilson administration had little incentive to act on behalf of labor, since an election was coming up and for months the administration had been publicly criticized for ceding too much ground to labor during the war.

In addition to waging a 'private war' against striking workers with the help of local law enforcement, steel companies waged a public war of propaganda to delegitimize the strike and undermine

[1] David Brody, *Labor in Crisis* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1965), 113.
[2] Ibid., 163.

workers' morale. The press cooperated in this venture. Crucial to its success was the national and international panic at the recent Bolshevik revolution and worry that Communism might conquer the world. The United States, after all, had already experienced by September of 1919 thousands of large and small strikes across the country since the war's end, an unprecedented explosion of labor militancy that terrified the ruling classes. For four days in February, Seattle had been convulsed by a general strike for higher wages. Several months later, the Boston police-force struck for union recognition and higher wages; it too was crushed by the city government -- all were fired from their jobs as volunteers and state guards temporarily took over police duties. In April, spontaneous strikes broke out amongst thousands of railroad workers who were protesting the recent rise in the cost of living and relative decline in wages; in this case, as in others, the national unions themselves helped business and government hire strikebreakers to destroy the movement, which they claimed (falsely) was led by Bolsheviks. Between April and June, Italian anarchists planted bombs in various American cities in an attempt to spark insurrection, though all they accomplished was their own deportation and savage government repression against presumed radicals. Later, in November, the United Mine Workers called a national strike, but the Wilson administration secured an injunction against it. (The mineworkers, however, at least were granted wage raises.)[1] In short, it was a time of extreme polarization and, correspondingly, extreme reaction by economic and political power-structures that had been strengthened by the recent war.

In "Communism and the Great Steel Strike of 1919" (1951), Robert K. Murray argues that the public fear of Bolshevism was a major factor in the defeat of most of these strikes, including that of the steelworkers. "Undoubtedly," he states, "the most spectacular phenomenon of this tempestuous year [1919] was the almost hysterical and paranoiac fear which the American public harbored for bolshevism.... No strike, no act of violence, no deviation from the norm failed to bring charges that the probable cause was domestic bolshevik activity."[2] In undermining public sympathy for labor activity, such charges did much to undermine labor itself. For example, one of the leaders of the steel strike, William Z. Foster, was a former syndicalist and member of the Industrial Workers of the World. He claimed to have renounced his earlier radical views, but this did nothing to quiet the press's persecution of him as an anarchist and a 'Red.' Papers everywhere proclaimed that the AFL was being infiltrated by radicals, that the strike was an attempt to start a revolution, that it was un-American, instigated by socialist immigrants. In reality, its goal was quite conservative, namely to force the steel industry to accept collective bargaining. But Foster's background was enough to fuel charges of treason and subversion, and he was compelled to testify at a Senate hearing that he no longer subscribed to syndicalism. Nevertheless, the Senate committee concluded -- falsely -- that "behind the strike was massed 'a considerable element of IWW's, anarchists, revolutionists, and Russian Soviets' who were using the conflict 'as a means of elevating themselves to power.'"[3] Murray may overstate his case when he declares that "the words 'revolution' and 'bolshevism' had killed all chance of the strikers' success," but he is undoubtedly right that the ubiquitous propaganda severely handicapped labor's cause.

It did so in another sense as well: business and the local press encouraged and exacerbated divisions between skilled American workers and unskilled immigrant laborers. It was the latter who were the backbone of the strike, since their conditions were the worst; many, or most, Americans were at best ambivalent, since they had more to lose if they were fired for union activity. Employers exploited Americans' ambivalence by appealing to their 'patriotism': the issue, stated one paper, was 'Americanism vs. Bolshevism.'[4] The patriotic American was exhorted to resist pressure by labor agitators and foreigners and instead to return to work, to serve Uncle Sam. And in many cases he did. At the same time, employers and the press would demoralize strikers by spreading false rumors that elsewhere in the country, in Youngstown or Bethlehem or Chicago, the laborers had gone back to work and the strike was collapsing. Insofar as this tactic was successful, it was partly due to the inadequate coordination, manpower and

[1] Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (Boston: South End Press, 1997), chapter 4.
[2] Robert K. Murray, "Communism and the Great Steel Strike of 1919," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Dec., 1951): 445, 446.
[3] Ibid., 463.
[4] Brody, *Labor in Crisis,* 158.

resource-distribution on the part of twenty-four separate unions each of which was jealous of its financial reserves and determined to protect its own interests. This craft-unionist fragmentation partially reflected and reinforced ethnic fragmentation.

Lizabeth Cohen argues in *Making a New Deal*, which is a study of Chicago in the interwar years, that ethnic divisions and community isolation were of crucial importance in vitiating the steelworkers' cause. "Fragmented into insular communities," she states, "the city's working-class population showed itself incapable of unifying across racial, ethnic, and territorial boundaries."[1] Aside from the linguistic, cultural and geographical barriers, there was also the simple fact of American prejudice against immigrants. As William Foster wrote in his account of the strike, "Everywhere American-born workingmen, unfortunately, are prone to look with some suspicion, if not contempt and hatred, upon foreigners, whom they have been taught to believe are injuring their standard of living."[2] Cohen notes, furthermore, that employers hired undercover spies and detectives to stir up bad feeling between, say, Serbs and Italians. "Spread data," spies were instructed, "among the Serbians that the Italians are going back to work. Call up every question you can in reference to racial hatred between the two nationalities."[3] Steel companies also imported Mexicans as strikebreakers in addition to blacks, fostering further tensions. Similar divisions helped scuttle the unionization drive amongst Chicago's meatpacking workers in the early 1920s.

In the end, steelworkers' morale could not withstand the industry's many and varied attacks, and after weeks of struggle the strikers began to return to work. By the eleventh week, their number was only 110,000; on January 8, 1920, the National Committee in charge of the strike officially ended it. Workers and unions had gained no concessions at all from the industry; their defeat was total. It heralded labor's weakness in the 1920s.

1937

Sidney Fine's *Sit-down: The General Motors Strike of 1936-37* is the classic account of the strike that was more responsible than any other for leading to mass unionism in the nation's core industries. Fine not only gives a detailed history of the strike itself, which lasted from late December, 1936 to the middle of February, 1937, but also discusses its background and consequences. Several lessons emerge from his treatment. Most obviously, key to the success of the strike was the new tactic of the 'sit-down.' Rather than following established precedent and picketing outside the factory, workers occupied the plant. This had several advantages. First, it prevented General Motors from bringing in strikebreakers. Second, it made difficult the use of police to break up the strike, partly because strikers could defend themselves more effectively than in a picket line and partly because the employer would not want to risk damaging his machinery. Third, for various reasons it was easier to maintain high morale in a sit-down than in a conventional strike conducted outdoors.[4] The new tactic became popular in labor struggles after the United Auto Workers' victory in Flint until it was outlawed by court rulings in the late 1930s.

Secondly, Fine emphasizes the importance of Michigan's Governor Frank Murphy in his refusal to crack down on the strikers either by denying them food and water or by forcibly evicting them from the factories they occupied. Instead, he served as a mediator between the union leaders and GM, proving himself fairly sympathetic to labor's cause. Franklin Roosevelt, too, had a benign influence in that he encouraged Murphy to facilitate negotiations rather than break up the strike. Thirdly, the Flint strike played a role in convincing the head of U.S. Steel (Myron Taylor) to negotiate with John L. Lewis, head of the new CIO, in March of 1937. Taylor decided that at a time when orders for steel were increasing from European countries preparing for possible war, it would be best to avoid a prolonged strike that would likely

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[1] Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 51.
[2] William Z. Foster, *The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, Inc., 1920), 198-199.
[3] Quoted in Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 41.
[4] Sidney Fine, *Sit-down: The General Motors Strike of 1936-37* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), 121.

end in concessions such as those that GM had made, including acceptance of collective bargaining.[1] As a result, he and Lewis signed a historic contract before any strike had broken out in steel. These two epoch-making contracts in the auto and steel industries generated a tremendous wave of enthusiasm among workers for the CIO, with its principle of industrial unionism, and led indirectly to further victories in the succeeding years. But how exactly had these two victories come about? What had made them possible, when only seventeen years earlier the labor movement had been rendered effectively moribund?

Perhaps the most obvious condition for labor's successes in the late 1930s was the New Deal's transformation of the state. In 1919 and during the 1920s the state was hostile towards organized labor; under Roosevelt the federal government defended workers' right to unionize and bargain collectively. In *The State and Labor in Modern America*, Melvyn Dubofsky gives a detailed account of just how important the state was in setting the terms for labor relations in the 1930s -- indeed, from the 1870s to the 1970s (where his book ends). In this respect, the book is in the tradition of the old institutional, 'labor-liberal' history, rather than the new bottom-up history. Dubofsky virtually ignores gender, race, and social history in general; his concern is to trace the extent to which the state has shaped conflicts between capital and labor. As he shows, that extent has been great indeed.

For example, in the 1930s all three branches of the federal government became more supportive of organized labor. Section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act, passed in 1933, "endorse[d] the right of workers to form unions free from employer interference and to bargain collectively with their employers,"[2] and later the president set up a National Labor Board to enforce the act. Workers across the country were emboldened by these developments to organize and strike en masse for union recognition, but, after a year of struggle between employers and workers, it became clear that the NLB lacked power to enforce workers' rights. As a result, a new law was passed in 1935: the National Labor Relations Act, or the Wagner Act. This act went further than the previous one in specifically outlawing various employer practices that interfered with labor's right to organize and in setting up a National Labor Relations Board, which was comparable to the NLB but with more power. Its job was to administer the new law and adjudicate disputes between business and labor. The NLRB proved to be very aggressive on behalf of workers' rights. At the same time, the executive branch, as we have seen, while not consistently pro-labor, was at least more genuinely neutral in labor relations disputes than it had been in the 1920s. At times Roosevelt supported the unions, at times he supported the employers. And in the Flint strike of 1937, his neutrality -- as well as Frank Murphy's -- worked to the advantage of labor in that it led to negotiations between GM and the UAW, and ultimately to collective bargaining in the auto industry.

Even the Supreme Court abandoned decades of precedent to favor organized labor over business. It upheld the constitutionality of the Wagner Act, the legitimacy of the NLRB, workers' right to picket while on strikes, and their right to bargain collectively. This was a real constitutional revolution, as Dubofsky states. Its sources, he argues, were the voters' progressive mandate in the elections of 1936, Roosevelt's plan to 'reform' the Court, and, most importantly, "the rise of the CIO, the growing assertiveness of militant workers, and the spread of industrial warfare."[3] Had the Court remained wedded to its old corporation-coddling ways, workers' advances between the late 1930s and early 1940s would have been much more difficult to institutionalize.

The basis for all these governmental changes, however, was change in the broader society. And here, Cohen's *Making a New Deal* is a definitive work. It "is devoted to explaining how it was possible and what it meant for industrial workers to become effective as national political participants in the mid-1930s";[4] to do so it examines the lives of workers in Chicago's ethnic and racial communities from the 1920s on. Cohen integrates racial, gender, labor, and cultural history to provide a comprehensive perspective on the changes unleashed by the Great Depression. She argues that, while changes in the larger

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[1] Ibid., 330.
[2] Melvyn Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 112.
[3] Ibid., 145.
[4] Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 5.

political environment were important, more important were gradual changes in workers' own 'orientation' during the twenties and thirties. After all, it was their mass militancy and solidarity more than anything else that allowed workers to consolidate major gains in the mid-thirties; the Wagner Act and other such measures were largely a response to this militancy and would have achieved little without it. It had not existed in the 1920s. So what happened to bring it about in the 1930s?

First of all, the working class grew relatively homogenized over the course of two decades. Whereas in 1919 Chicago had been fragmented into ethnic and racial communities, by the mid-thirties its workers had something like a collective consciousness and felt themselves integrally a part of the broader culture. This was due in large part to the explosion of mass culture in the 1920s. While Cohen insists that it did not have a single, simple 'homogenizing' impact on communities -- instead, workers grappled with it, adjusted to it, ethnic fraternities and benefit societies were forced to compete with it, blacks used it for their own culturally defiant purposes -- ultimately mass culture did foster assimilation of second-generation immigrants. (Immigration had effectively ended in the early 1920s with restrictive legislation passed by Congress. This, too, fostered homogenization.) "Although they did not always recognize it," Cohen says, "[by 1930] workers increasingly were shopping at the same chain stores, buying the same brand goods, going to the same chain theaters, and listening to the same radio programs on chain networks. Ethnic workers began to have more in common with their co-workers of different ethnicity and race and with their own children."[1] Not the least important effect of these developments is that more and more people spoke English.

The welfare capitalism of the 1920s, too, broke down the insularity of ethnicity and race, by forging ties between employees at their workplace. Employers offered services -- insurance, health, etc. -- that formerly had been provided only by ethnic organizations; this lessened the relevance of their communities for workers at the same time that it instilled a similarity of interests in workers of different backgrounds. When employers failed to deliver on the promises of welfare capitalism, employees identified with each other in their grievances. Moreover, welfare capitalism "legitimized standards workers would seek to institutionalize in the thirties. Job security, high wages, and benefits would never again be dismissed as the pipe dreams of industrial workers."[2] The latter, in short, would come together in the 1930s to demand a 'moral capitalism' such as they had been promised in the 1920s but had not experienced.

When the Great Depression savaged all these institutions -- ethnic benefit societies, building and loan associations, churches, welfare-capitalist employers -- workers had to search for new ones to fill the functions of the old. They turned to unions and the state. Since by the early 1930s unskilled workers identified more strongly with America than they had ten years earlier, they expected more from the federal government than they had earlier. Effectively they switched their allegiance from welfare capitalism to the welfare state -- especially as Roosevelt's weekly radio broadcasts brought the government into workers' homes, so that it became real to them. But they did not passively wait for the government to act on their behalf; they actively organized into unions, thinking that the state, personified in Roosevelt, would support them. On the basis of their common experiences, common grievances, and relative homogeneity (compared to 1919), steelworkers in the mid-1930s agitated in Chicago and elsewhere for higher wages, shorter hours, seniority rights, paid vacations, and union recognition. The conservative, craft-unionist AFL did not help them, but by 1936 the CIO had emerged to organize workers on an industrial basis.

Indeed, the birth of the CIO was as important an event as any other in the thirties. It made possible, at last, effective coordination of national organizing drives, an overcoming of the old craft-unionist inefficiency and organizational pettiness. This is clear from Irving Bernstein's *Turbulent Years*, which narrates the labor history of the 1930s through the top-down institutional stories of the New Deal, the AFL, the CIO, the NLRB, etc. John L. Lewis's CIO, which was born in 1935 when his union (the United Mine Workers) and several others split from the AFL, seized upon the seething discontent of industrial workers and channeled their organizational energies into coordinated national campaigns to unionize packinghouse workers, steelworkers, autoworkers, electrical workers, and others. Lewis poured unprecedented resources

[1] Ibid., 157.
[2] Ibid., 209.

into the organizing drive: the steel campaign alone cost $2.5 million of the UMW's funds in just its first year.[1] The CIO also benefited from America's well-organized and efficient Communist Party, full of talented, devoted organizers. For instance, a third of the CIO's organizers of the steel industry belonged to the Party.[2] -In short, through such continent-wide institutions as these, rank-and-file determination was finally matched, or almost matched, at the level of national leadership, and industrial unionism became a reality. However, the lesson of *Making a New Deal* should not be forgotten in our appreciation of the CIO: a key foundation of workers' achievements in the thirties was the 'common culture' they shared as a result of developments in the 1920s and early 1930s, a culture they had lacked in 1919.

Michael Torrigian nicely summarizes many of the reasons for workers' success in the late 1930s in his article "The Occupation of the Factories: Paris 1936, Flint 1937" (1999). He notes that months before the strike at GM's factories in Flint, Parisian metal workers occupied a number of factories in a massive wave of strikes that forced employers "to introduce one of the world's most progressive systems of industrial relations."[3] The use of the sit-down tactic, again, was essential, but this in itself would not have guaranteed victory for the workers without the state's at least passive support for labor. As in the United States, 1936 in France had seen a labor-sympathetic government come to power -- that of the Popular Front. In both countries, the tidal wave of electoral support for progressivism infused workers with confidence; in both countries, the progressive governments elected were unwilling to resort to force, or to let employers resort to force, against workers acting from their surge of confidence. This stands in marked contrast to the behavior of the U.S. government in 1919. The Great Depression (more severe in the U.S. than in France) had stirred labor's discontent for years, breeding a culture of radicalism. In some respects, of course, the depression and its prolonged unemployment weakened organized labor vis-à-vis employers, but in other respects it strengthened it. In particular, in France the "severe drop in employment closed off immigration..., discouraged rural migrants, limited the access of women and youth, curbed turnover, gave married men and skilled workers a preference in employment, and helped, for the first time in a generation, to homogenize the workforce." As in America, this homogenization ensured that workers were "better able to forge those ties necessary for collective struggle."[4] The economic upswing of 1936, therefore, which both France and America experienced -- and which contrasted with the downswing of 1919 -- led to vigorous and effective action against employers.

The years after 1937 in America would see periodic defeats for labor, as in the partial collapse of the CIO's organizing drive in the textile industry, but they would also see the consolidation of mass unionism in core industries. The state and business would finally view organized labor more as a partner than as an enemy to be defeated. As long as this state of affairs lasted -- until the mid-1970s -- it is not an overstatement to say that America's social structure was in large part a legacy of the Great Depression and the labor movement it spawned.

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The Agony and the Ecstasy: 1968 in the West

Sometimes in history a year appears as an explosion. Tensions and conflicts that have been simmering or forcibly suppressed finally erupt and society is thrown into crisis. 1789 was such a year; so were 1848, 1914, 1917, and 1936 in Europe. And then, three decades later, there was 1968. In this year, attempted mini-revolutions flared up in the capitalist and Communist worlds, in countries from Mexico to Poland; all were put down by the authorities. Students, workers, women, and minorities rose up -- and would continue to rise up in the succeeding years -- but in 1968 they met mostly defeat. The Establishment

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[1] Irving Bernstein, *Turbulent Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 453.
[2] Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 309.
[3] Michael Torrigian, "The Occupation of the Factories: Paris 1936, Flint 1937," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (April, 1999): 324.
[4] Ibid., 340.

would not yield power so easily. Ever since, historians and participants have studied the events of that year to determine what caused the upsurge, what went wrong, what its effects were, or just to reminisce and draw lessons for activists. In this paper I will review some of the literature on 1968 to explore how the scholarship has changed in the last twenty years and what its principal conclusions have been.

In the mid-1980s a number of works on 1968 appeared, among which were Chris Harman's *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After* (1988), David Caute's *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey Through 1968* (1988), and Todd Gitlin's *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (1987). Years later, in 2004, Mark Kurlansky's *1968: The Year That Rocked The World* appeared; then in 2007 Gerd-Rainer Horn published *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976*, and in 2009 the *American Historical Review* printed a forum on 1968. Many other relevant works have been published, of course, but I will use these few as a representative sample of the scholarship. When so much is written on a single year there are inevitably redundancies and common themes, such that a cross-section of the literature can reveal much about the tendencies of the whole.

A reasonable place to begin is with the recollections of a participant in the New Left, Todd Gitlin. His book is a particularly well-written and thoughtful exemplar of that genre, 'memoir-of-a-participant-in-the-Sixties.' It addresses not only 1968 but the decade as a whole from the perspective of an early member of Students for a Democratic Society. As a result, its analysis of the era is a bit one-sided: for example, Gitlin devotes relatively little attention to the later stages of the Black Power movement while recounting in great detail the demise of SDS. This is appropriate, however, in what is effectively a memoir, if an unusually analytical and historically conscious one -- the memoir of a movement more than an individual. Gitlin tells the story of the birth, rise and fall of the New Left, from the late 1950s to the early 1970s.

The principal virtue of his book, as of other such memoirs, is the *visceral* experience of reading it -- reading the testimony of one who lived the Sixties intensely, self-consciously, and is now remembering and critiquing the movements of which he was a part. To read the book, written in vivid, journalistic, partisan prose, is to encounter the Sixties from the inside. The existential commitments, the driving hopes and dreams, the violent disillusionments and fratricidal rage of 1968 and after -- this is the New Left in its lived immediacy, not the cadaverous abstraction dissected autopsy-like in most scholarship. Above all, it is *movement*. "A series of epiphanies," as Michael Rogin defined the New Left. A whirlwind of music, drugs, sex, self-discovery, cultural rebellion, revolutionary politics, bloody battles with the police, vicious internecine warfare among ultra-left factions each claiming the mantle of the Revolution -- ultimately 'the revolution devouring its own' after 1968 -- and through it all, the common thread of youthful middle-class alienation groping for authenticity against a violent bureaucratic world. That is the impression one gets from reading *The Sixties*: the New Left was full of very serious young people (and many not so serious), students and ex-students and young spirits of all sorts, who were disgusted with American culture and politics but would not have had any particular cause to rally around had the two issues of *civil rights* and *Vietnam* not appeared. Hundreds of thousands of restless middle-class young Americans, the product of a 'baby boom,' an expanding system of university education and a dynamic popular culture, were rebelling against old authority-structures, repressive cultural mores, political shibboleths like 'anti-Communism' that did not resonate with them, and all things that seemed opposed to freedom, love, life, self-expression, humanity, authenticity -- the values of the young. This 'existentialist' revolt took many different forms,[1] but politically it latched onto, first, the civil rights movement, with which it felt an instinctual sympathy, and second, the anti-war movement. Indeed, the war in Vietnam came to symbolize to these youth everything abhorrent about American society, and by 1968 the New Left was obsessed with it.

Gitlin's account of 1968, of all its hopeful and dreadful happenings, is as compelling and visceral as the rest of the book. He writes of the assassinations of King and Kennedy and their "enormous repercussions" -- "In two strokes, liberalism....was 'decapitated'";[2] he writes of the Democratic Convention in Chicago, the chaos, the thuggery of the police; he writes of the student movement's radicalization by the

[1] See Doug Rossinow's *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (1998).
[2] Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 305.

events of 1968 and its subsequent splintering into feminist movements and ever-more-radical revolutionary cliques like the Weathermen, which destroyed SDS from within. It becomes clear that, if there was a turning point, the turning point was 1968. By 1969 the New Left had "trapped itself in a seamless loop: growing militancy, growing isolation, growing commitment to The Revolution, sloppier and more frantic attempts to imagine a revolutionary class, growing hatred among the competing factions with their competing imaginations."[1] However, Gitlin argues that the movement's collapse in 1969 and afterwards, while probably accelerated by the traumatic events of 1968, was ultimately determined by a series of dilemmas or 'structural tensions' that had been present from the beginning. For example, as a student movement and a political movement at the same time, it "oscillated between narcissism (imagining itself to be the instrument of change) and self-disparagement (searching for the *real* instrument of change), eventually succumbing to the false solution of Leninism" with the elitism of the Weathermen, who hoped to ignite the revolutionary consciousness of the working class but ended up alienating the entire American public and legitimating political repression. Another dilemma is that, as an existentialist movement, the New Left "wanted to be both strategic and expressive, political and cultural": it wanted to change the world in the future but *live* the change immediately -- values that were not easy to reconcile. Many such 'structural' conflicts foredoomed the youth movement.[2]

The Sixties is limited, however, to events in America, and it does not focus on 1968. To get a broader picture of that year in its international context we must turn to David Caute's *The Year of the Barricades*, which surveys events throughout Europe and North America, and even Japan. As Caute narrates it, 1968 was the year that everything broke down. Anarchy was momentarily unleashed -- in the U.S., France, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Spain, England, Germany, Mexico, Japan, and other countries. Above all, power-structures could no longer contain the raging discontent of students. According to Caute, 1968 was truly the year of the students -- or, more generally, of the youth, since young workers in France and elsewhere played a role in instigating mass strikes. But student agitation seems to have lit the fuse everywhere, with the occasional help of intellectuals and academics, as in the coming of the Prague Spring. In Gramscian terms, the elite's hegemony (whichever elite was in question in varying circumstances) had collapsed, and students led the way in trying to construct a new order, first and foremost in their universities. Hence the student boycotts and occupations of universities throughout the West. Grievances differed depending on the country and the repressiveness of its institutions. For example, in Spain, Poland, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, where democracy was lacking, the complaints were not against technocracy, consumer capitalism or Vietnam but rather the "corruption, overcrowding, and administrative breakdown [that] dominated students' lives,"[3] as well as censorship of the press and political authoritarianism. Universities in France and Italy likewise suffered from overcrowding, as well as administrative inefficiency, poor housing conditions, segregation of the sexes, and general inattentiveness to the needs of students. One common student demand was for participation in administering their own education -- in hiring faculty, in the proceedings of administrative committees, etc. These demands were echoed in the U.S., where there was also outrage at elite universities' complicity in the Vietnam war.

Caute discusses the counterculture and its offshoots as well -- radical art, theater, film, the drug culture, sex, women's liberation -- and touches on the public's hostile reaction to the radicalism of the youth, but overall his book lacks sufficient context. It does not explain why things erupted when they did, nor does it delve into the broader economic and social conditions of the time. The reader is left wondering how it was that essentially uncoordinated youth revolts broke out at the same time all over the world, between 1967 and 1970. What were the international dynamics that led to the synchronicity of student rebellions? How had higher education evolved to reach the bursting point of 1968? In fact, Caute's emphasis on the young is surely misleading. Societies in their entirety were being torn apart, riven by economic, political and social 'contradictions' (in Marxian terminology). These contradictions, it seems, were expressed in a particularly dramatic way in the university-system, due to a confluence of factors: masses of

[1] Ibid., 380.
[2] Ibid., 6.
[3] David Caute, *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey Through 1968* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 83.

young people lived and studied together, had the time and youthful energy to think critically about their society and try to change it; universities were and are places of unusual ferment, where people of different races, classes, backgrounds and ideologies are thrust together -- a sort of elite semi-microcosm of society; a contradiction can, and did, develop between the great freedom and privilege of university life and students' (and professors') consciousness of being cogs in a bureaucratic machine; because of the elite status of universities, media coverage of them can be glaring and political. As for why student rebellions mostly failed, or at best resulted in minor reforms, Caute offers no satisfactory explanation.

Chris Harman does, however -- or at least he provides the framework for one, even though, or perhaps because, he is far more interested in classic economic and political conflicts than in student radicalism. Harman is a Marxist, and this shows in *The Fire Last Time*. He focuses on the class struggles and class structures that he thinks underlay the unrest of 1968 and succeeding years; he also attempts to place in their historical context the events of 1968, partly by carrying the story up to the mid-1970s, when the fount of radicalism in many countries finally dried up. The student revolts he treats as manifestations of deep-rooted contradictions in the evolving state-capitalist social order, contradictions that were even more forcefully and meaningfully expressed in years of workers' strikes and agitation throughout the West. In much of Europe, for example, huge portions of the peasantry were still migrating to the cities in the 1950s and 1960s; when industrial work proved low-paying and exhausting even as deskilling of the workforce was taking place (and consequent loss of workers' power), strikes began to break out frequently. At the same time, political repression was fierce in several fascist and semi-fascist countries, including De Gaulle's France, which were trying to modernize their economies -- make them internationally competitive -- without yielding to pressures for political democratization. Harman's book is valuable as a reminder that students were not the only ones advocating democratization or increased power for the 'people'; workers and other oppressed groups were doing the same. The war in Vietnam became a symbol for many students of society's essentially authoritarian nature, but workers too, as well as African-Americans in the United States and other groups, fought for greater power in their own spheres -- sometimes against political regimes, as in southern Europe.

As for why student rebellions dissipated or were easily crushed, Harman's answer is that

> the students did not have the power that workers have when they strike -- the ability to hit the source of their employers' profits. They could not build enduring organizations based on their ability to put permanent pressure on the authorities. The student upsurge could, by the very speed of its development, throw the authorities on to the defensive; it could force them to make concessions in a desperate attempt to reassert their ideological control over the mass of students. But it did not have the power to do real damage and that led the students rapidly to believe that little more could be achieved by direct action.[1]

Harman argues that workers might have been able to force significant changes in certain European countries, for instance France in May of 1968, when the largest general strike in history occurred, had not the leadership of their unions and political parties been essentially conservative. Worker unrest was corralled into 'respectable' channels of opposition, such as electoral action; leftist parties and unions effectively collaborated with governments to undermine their membership's militancy. Ironically, in the long run the victory of conservative 'reformism' over more radical tendencies led to the undoing of the organized left: their own parties being merely diluted versions of the political center and right, workers in many countries eventually lost faith in the left and turned to the right for solutions to their economic problems.

The three works discussed so far are quite different from each other, but they share a tendency not manifested in more recent scholarship: they take it for granted that the nation-state should be the basic unit, or should define the 'framework,' of analysis. This older scholarship is sometimes international in scope, but it is rarely or ever *transnational*. When one compares it to more recent works it seems relatively narrow

[1] Chris Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After* (Bookmarks: Chicago, 1988), 47.

and un-cosmopolitan. Timothy S. Brown expresses the perspective of the new scholarship when he writes, "[T]he nation-state cannot function as our primary frame of reference, not only because of the importance of transnational influences in shaping local events, but because of how intimately '1968' was linked to the creation of globalizing imagined communities that cut across national boundaries."[1] Even if most recent authors on 1968 do not explicitly argue for the latter claim (the creation of globalizing imagined communities), it is implicit in their work insofar as they downplay national boundaries and emphasize transnational connections and cross-fertilizations in social movements.

For example, Mark Kurlansky organizes his book *1968: The Year That Rocked The World* in a decidedly anti-nation-statist way, hopping around anecdotally from country to country, city to city, famous figure to famous figure, in a disjointed but engaging stream of narrative. His very style of writing is subversive of rigid boundaries and parochial fixations, being breezily popular in tone, ranging easily over stories from one side of the world to the other. One of the theses of his book is that 1968, or the eruption of liberatory social movements all over the world within several years of each other, was made possible by the relatively new phenomenon of television. "Television was coming of age but was still new enough not to have yet become controlled, distilled, and packaged the way it is today."[2] Without television, the three other factors that he thinks brought about a global '1968' could not have had the effect they did: America's civil rights movement would not have inspired people elsewhere in the world; "a war that was hated so universally around the world that it provided a cause for all the rebels seeking one"[3] would not have been broadcast to millions of homes; and "a generation that felt so different and so alienated that it rejected all forms of authority" would not have known that its alienation was global in scope, that people on every continent were rebelling against authority -- in imagined solidarity, as it were. By bringing visions of freedom to some homes and visions of savagery to others, television connected the world -- eroded national or regional traditions and authority-structures. In the end, Kurlansky's conclusion is that "1968 was the epicenter of a shift, of a fundamental change, the birth of our postmodern media-driven world."[4]

Richard Ivan Jobs writes in the same transnational spirit as Kurlansky but takes his analysis in a different direction: he argues for the importance of *travel* in breaking down national barriers. His argument focuses on European youth in 1968. "The events of that year marked a turning point in the emergence of a cohort of young people who had come, through travel, to conceive of themselves not merely as members of a particular nation, but as a continent-wide, transnational social group." Specifically, young people traveled between protest sites -- Berlin, Paris, London, Prague, and so on. Their experiences "helped to shape a politicized European identity."[5]

Jobs and Kurlansky illustrate another tendency of recent scholarship on 1968: rather than emphasizing the politics of that year, the political agendas of radical movements, it emphasizes the 'spirit' of 1968 -- "the transformed daily behaviors and interpersonal interactions that emerged during this period. Young people started to dress differently, they began to talk differently, and, yes, they had sex differently during the 1960s. The old ways never returned."[6] One author even titles his 2007 book *The Spirit of '68*. Actually, this book considers the political aspects of the movements in some detail, but it does so precisely to illustrate the spirit of 1968 -- the way of being, the zeitgeist that had emerged by the late Sixties. It was a cultural revolution. After considering the "medium- to long-term paradigm shifts in modes of interpersonal and institutional behavior and short-term material advances" that were achieved by young people and workers, the author concludes that

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[1] Timothy S. Brown, "'1968' East and West: Divided Germany as a Case Study in Transnational History," *American Historical Review,* Vol. 114, Issue 1 (Feb., 2009): 69.
[2] Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked The World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004), xviii.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 378.
[5] Richard Ivan Jobs, "Youth Movements: Travel, Protest, and Europe in 1968," *American Historical Review,* Vol. 114, Issue 2 (April, 2009): 376.
[6] Jeremi Suri, "The Rise and Fall of an International Counterculture, 1960-1975," *American Historical Review,* Vol. 114, Issue 1 (Feb., 2009): 48.

> the most important rearrangements occurred on yet another, rather elusive, constantly shifting, and ultimately vanishing terrain: the concrete experience of a qualitatively different way of life, the exposure to non-hierarchical modes of social interaction, the lived environment of solidarity, the heated atmosphere of open debate, the concrete strivings for a common and mutually beneficial system-transcending goal.[1]

For Gerd-Rainer Horn, the basic meaning of '1968' (the concept, not just the year) is *participatory democracy*. This is the meaning of the student occupations of universities, the popular revolts against dictatorships in Spain and Portugal, the experiments in workers' self-management in France, the strike committees and factory committees in Italy and France, the 'alternative' free schools and universities throughout the West during the 1960s, and many other manifestations of the mood of 1968. Of course, Horn's interpretation is not particularly original. To say that the spirit of 1968 was participatory democracy is just another way of saying that it was freedom, liberation, people's power, democracy, and so on. The point, however, is that his emphasis on the 'spirit' of the year exemplifies a recent trend in scholarship.

The subtitle of his book, which refers to the years 1956-1976, points to another trend: the placing of 1968 not only in a transnational context but in a broad historical context. This fits with the recent tendency to extend the 'Sixties' as a whole into the past and the future. For example, in her influential article "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past" (2005), Jacquelyn Hall argues that we should conceptualize the civil rights movement as having begun in the 1930s, with the culture of the CIO, left-led unions such as A. Philip Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the Popular Front against fascism and conservatism, the Communist Party's interracialism, and the various political advances made in the 1940s (such as FDR's Fair Employment Practices Commission and Truman's desegregation of the military). The Cold War put a temporary halt to progress, but in the late 1950s the movement resumed. In the same vein, Gerd-Rainer Horn finds that the 'spirit' of 1968 extends back to 1956 in some respects and forward to 1976 in certain European countries. Artistic and dissident circles in the late 1950s and early 1960s, such as Beatniks, Situationists and the Dutch Provos, anticipated the youth movements of the late Sixties, while the actions of, for instance, workers in Italy and collectivizing farmers in Portugal, as well as the multitude of popular far-left parties in the West after 1968, extended the rebellious spirit of that year into the Seventies.

The central element of all these innovations in contemporary scholarship is the 'problematizing' of established narratives. This is the case in all recent historical scholarship. The rise of various kinds of social history, cultural history, and postmodernism, as well as society's globalization, has made old narratives seem trite and narrow. The civil rights movement did not start with *Brown v. Board of Education* and end with the passage of the Voting Rights Act; 1968 was not *only* 'the year of the students,' nor was it some sort of inexplicable ultra-leftist aberration. As we have seen, earlier scholarship, such as Chris Harman's, made some of these same points; they have since become, however, the mainstream of academic literature, not the exception. The goal of writers now is to upset our preconceived notions, to 'layer' our understanding rather than letting it remain flat and complacent. Thus, in "Japan 1968: The Performance of Violence and the Theater of Protest" (2009), William Marotti gives a subtle analysis of the role of violence in Japan's student and anti-war movements, while also indicating the importance of "strikes, seizures, marches, and rallies [in] broaden[ing] the scope of political participation and [creating] new forms of political activism."[2] Sara Evans likewise unearths new meanings of 1968 by analyzing constructions of gender that prevailed in radical movements, against which women reacted in the resurgent feminism of the 1970s. Hippie culture was relatively androgynous, men dressing and behaving like women as women dressed and behaved like men, but in most leftist youth movements the men used their control of female sexuality -- their access to

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[1] Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 194.

[2] *AHR Forum*, "The International 1968, Part 1 - Introduction," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 114, Issue 1 (Feb., 2009): 44.

the bodies of young women in the movement -- as a way of flaunting their rebellion against the middle-class mores of their fathers and reaffirming their own hyper-masculinity. Eventually women in turn rebelled against their subordinate positions in these movements, and modern feminism was born.[1]

All these 'problematizing' features of recent scholarship are definite advances over older literature -- which, however, retains much value. The next step should be to fuse the best of the old with the best of the new. For instance, while Chris Harman's *The Fire Last Time* has flaws (e.g., a certain superficiality and a doctrinaire Marxism), its ambition of locating the origins of 1968 in the evolution of international economic structures is commendable. Too much of recent literature focuses on culture while ignoring the structural economic changes that underlay the ferment of the late Sixties, "the radical and youth movements of [which] time were harbingers of the globalizing dynamic that would characterize subsequent decades."[2] Economic dynamics are less 'sexy' than cultural ones but arguably more important. At the same time, the tendency of recent literature to study areas of the world that received scant attention in past scholarship on 1968, such as Latin America and Japan, is excellent and should be encouraged.

Even more ambitiously, it is perhaps time for some enterprising author to make an attempt at synthesis, at relating to each other all the best analyses and insights of the whole literature so that a comprehensive understanding is possible. Such a work would start with the 'foundations' of economic and technological change in the postwar decades and proceed to politics, systems of higher education, culture, and so on, illuminating how these spheres influenced one another and gave rise to the creative anarchy of the late Sixties. Part Two of this project would be to explain the dissolution of radicalism in the Seventies. Not the least benefit of such an enterprise is that it might provide lessons and encouragement to present and future radicals, whose task is no longer just to stop a particular war or help desegregate society but to ensure the very survival of our species in an age of world-upheaval.

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*A Review of **Yankee Leviathan***

The impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on subsequent American development has been incalculable, and historical scholarship as a result never ceases to consider the events from new perspectives. Richard Franklin Bensel undertakes an important such analysis in *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* (1990). As the title suggests, he argues that the Civil War caused an "explosive expansion" in central state authority -- not only in the Union but even more so in the Confederacy (a point overlooked in much of the literature). Reconstruction presented an opportunity for even greater state expansion as the North occupied the South in an attempt to rebuild its political economy, but by the early 1870s the attempt had effectively failed, and further growth of the state was halted until the turn of the century. The failure, Bensel argues, was due primarily to "internal contradictions within the [Republican] alliance," especially the existence of a Northern financial class that had an interest in ending Reconstruction (p. 2). Its failure had major implications for national politics in the subsequent century, and Bensel discusses these in the final chapter of his book. It is a rich and wide-ranging work; in the following I will summarize and critique its main conclusions and consider its place in the relevant historiography.

Bensel characterizes the antebellum state as "self-effacing": until the war, "the American state [was] little more than an arena in which contending forces and coalitions in the national political economy competed over decisions related to continental settlement and foreign policy" (p. 2). Indeed, the antebellum state was supposedly so minimal that Bensel treats the Civil War and Reconstruction periods as a case-study in state-formation. In this instance, it was revolutionary state-formation: the Republican party, which represented a "cohesive political-economic alliance," captured the state apparatus, which caused its major

[1] Sara Evans, "Sons, Daughters, and Patriarchy: Gender and the 1968 Generation," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 114, Issue 2 (April, 2009): 331-347.
[2] "The International 1968, Part 1 - Introduction," 42.

opponent, the Southern plantation elite, to withdraw from the state and found its own country. Thus, the government of the North was a party-state, as was that of the South. Both states became 'leviathans' during the war, but the Southern especially so -- ironically because of the South's underdeveloped, premodern economy. While the Union "relied on an unregulated capitalist market to supply resources and manpower," in the Confederacy "the central state regulated almost all forms of production and manpower, often assuming direct control of private factories, impressing their production, and even constructing state-owned plants where private capacity was insufficient for the needs of the war effort" (p. 233). In these respects the Confederacy was more modern than the Union. The latter was premodern also in a particular consequence of the virtual identity between its state and a single party: the government used political patronage to fill its bureaucracy, which compromised the quality of its operations. This fact actually contributed to the failure of Reconstruction, as described below.

Nevertheless, the Union was quite modern in many respects, including its emancipation of slaves, its sponsorship of economic development through such measures as high tariffs, and its reorganization of the nation's financial system. The latter is a central focus of Bensel's analysis. He argues that the Union government financed the war mobilization in three ways: it abandoned the gold standard and issued paper currency (greenbacks); it created a national banking system that "abolished locally chartered banks of issue and effectively nationalized the currency"; and it placed, through the national banking system, a large part of the national debt with finance capitalists (p. 14). These measures effectively created a new and powerful class of financiers whose interests aligned with the state's. They wanted it to win the war, and they wanted its fiscal policies to succeed. This alignment of interests, however, fell apart after the war had been won, for several reasons.

First, the financial class favored an early return to the gold standard, which had anti-statist implications. Its support for the gold standard rested on a number of considerations: (1) the resulting program of deflation would benefit many creditors; (2) the systemic stability fostered by the gold standard would benefit those financiers who operated in fast-paced, high-risk markets; (3) "the greenback system compelled the Treasury to conduct open-market operations" for which it was ill-equipped (as financiers knew), being staffed by incompetent "party hacks"; (4) the financial community probably sought power and influence through resumption of the gold standard, knowing that the Treasury would thereby lose influence over the money market (pp. 294-296). On the other hand, the gold standard was anti-statist for precisely that reason: the state would no longer control the amount of money in circulation, and it would lose economic autonomy within the world system. Moreover, resumption of the gold standard would make impossible the statist project of radical Reconstruction, since such Reconstruction would entail high government expenditures, therefore a huge national debt, and therefore a maintenance of the greenback system. The financial class wanted budget surpluses, not budget deficits.

Financiers opposed Reconstruction for other reasons as well. The massive redistribution of wealth from planters to blacks and poor whites that would have been necessary to ensure a large Republican presence in the South and to set the region on a new economic and social path entailed a great expansion in government, to which the financial class was opposed in part because of its experience with administrative incompetence and in part because it would lead to higher taxes. Also, a class-centered policy of wealth redistribution might well have extended to the North, as labor and the lower classes demanded a similar policy on a national scale. Thus, the financial elite used its influence in Congress to subvert the ambitious proposals of radical Republicans.

In fact, according to Bensel, the only faction of the Republican party that was strongly committed to radical Reconstruction was the Southern Republicans. "Iron districts," for example, "were more interested in the tariff, capital-rich districts in the operation of the financial system, and settlement districts in internal improvements" (p. 363). In short, "as the interests of the different factions diverged, the party lost the revolutionary zeal that had attended its role as the agent of Union survival and increasingly became a broker organization within which political allies narrowly construed their interests" (p. 303). Bensel concludes that the Civil War and Reconstruction era provides an example of how a particular pattern of state development can be self-limiting. In this case, the Union created a financial class (by floating a huge national debt) to help it win the war, but this class then turned against further state expansion in the form

primarily of Reconstruction. The (semi-)laissez-faire state of the Gilded Age was the result -- though it also resulted from the demise of the revolutionary party-state due to factional strife in the Republican party and the return of former Confederates to the government.

With the failure of Reconstruction came the retardation not only of modernization of the state but also of Southern political and economic development. A more interesting insight of Bensel's, however, is that the party-system of Republicans and Democrats that emerged militated against social democracy or the national rise of a coherent labor party. This is because a "cross-sectional inversion of class alignments" occurred: Republicans represented Northern industrial and financial capital and Southern blacks, while Democrats represented Southern plantation-owners and Northern immigrant-workers and subsistence farmers. That is, each party -- the 'Northern' Republican and the 'Southern' Democratic -- included in its constituency the economically discontented of the *other* section of the country. The lower classes therefore could not use the two-party system to assert coherent class claims across the entire nation: "an attack on economic privilege could only be made by sacrificing the elite interests of one of the two major parties" (p. 421). This is one of the reasons why Bensel thinks that the major problem facing late-nineteenth-century American state-builders was not the social dislocation of industrialization but the fact of Southern "separatism."

Having summarized the book, let us consider its place in the scholarship. Bensel sees himself as arguing against the relevance of modernization theory to America in the Civil War era. Louis S. Gerteis expresses it well in his review of *Yankee Leviathan*: "Union victory and the triumph of the northern state did not integrate a premodern South into a single modern national political economy. In the wake of the Civil War, Bensel argues, the South was not modernized but marginalized" (*Reviews in American History*, Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 190). Modernization of the state and the South would have proceeded had Reconstruction succeeded, but the hostility of the North's financial class prevented that from happening. More generally, however, *Yankee Leviathan* shows that modernization theorists are wrong to think that broad political participation at an early stage of state development necessarily hinders political modernization (by "abort[ing] the development of the specialized and politically insulated bureaucracies necessary to a strong central government" (Bensel, p. 5)). The American state was strong enough to attempt Reconstruction, even as "that strong state was synonymous with a robust political party (the Republicans) and rested on wide electoral participation (by southern freedmen and poor whites)." Far from being weaknesses, these were strengths (pp. 414, 415). -On the other hand, the modernization theorists are partly right: as Bensel's own evidence shows, the political patronage and corruption that resulted in part from the robustness of democracy did weaken the state and signify that it was not yet modernized.

Brooks D. Simpson points out in his review of the book that while "the impact of the Civil War upon American institutions has long interested historians, [until *Yankee Leviathan* there had been] no systematic exploration of this topic employing the concepts of state building and political economy" (*The Journal of American History*, Vol. 79, No. 1, p. 276). Bensel goes further than previous historians in treating the Civil War as an example of state-*formation*, rather than merely -expansion. Indeed, he probably goes too far. As Gerteis notes (op. cit., p. 192), *Yankee Leviathan* has no discussion of the statist implications of the creation of the Interior Department in 1849. Moreover, a state that could administer the massive, continental postal system is certainly not "self-effacing" -- or at least it is simplistic to label it so. Similarly, it is surely an exaggeration to claim that "the Civil War, even more than the end of British colonial rule, represents the true foundational moment in American political development" (Bensel, 10). Do the decades of state-development from the 1790s to the 1850s not count at all? Are they nothing but a 'prelude' to the 1860s? That seems a misleading way of interpreting the history.

Yankee Leviathan is a fusion of political science and history; it belongs to the 'new institutionalist' school, which Richard John characterizes as follows:

> [It] focuses not only on discrete governmental institutions, such as courts, legislatures, or administrative agencies, but also on the configuration of institutions that gave the polity its distinctive character. For [new institutionalists], governmental institutions are best conceived of as agents with wide-ranging social and cultural effects. Often they focus not

> only on the goal-oriented activities of policymakers, but also on the unintended and often unforeseen consequences of the organizational network in which specific institutions are found (Richard John, "Governmental Institutions as Agents of Change: Rethinking American Political Development in the Early Republic, 1787-1835," p. 367).

Bensel is thus concerned with institutions and their effects on society, not with social history or social movements or ideologies. This is perfectly legitimate, of course, but arguably it leads him to give an oversimplified interpretation of the failure of Reconstruction. He attributes its failure primarily to the opposition of the Northern financial class to an overweening statism; other factors, such as the resistance of Southerners, he downplays or ignores. No doubt he is right that factionalism in the Republican party was of major importance in causing the downfall of the Reconstruction regime, but by trying to interpret all the disparate phenomena he discusses through the lens of institutionalism, and more particularly through his focus on modernization and state-formation, he is forced to ignore features of reality that do not fit such a framework. For instance, he almost totally ignores the 'concrete reality' of Reconstruction, the ways in which Republican policies were carried out in the South and how that in turn influenced the policies. *Yankee Leviathan* exists on a very 'abstract' plane of analysis. The author has the right to choose what features of reality he wants to discuss or ignore in his book, but it is well to keep in mind the limitations of this study.

On the other hand, Clyde W. Barrow is right to point out that "Bensel's work breaks new ground by documenting the concept of a 'weak state' with an empirical analysis of the distribution of federal officials, troop deployments, arsenals, custom houses, lighthouses, etc." (*The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 2, p. 602). The book's empirical data can even be overwhelming at times, and tedious to read. Yet somehow, at the same time, *Yankee Leviathan* seems very 'theoretical' and 'divorced from society' -- perhaps because the data amassed relate mostly to the behavior of political parties, interest-groups, Congress, and other institutions.

Yankee Leviathan is an extremely rich book, but through all the data-analysis, theoretical discussions, and attempts at resolutions of secondary questions (such as why the South seceded in the first place and why the North did not simply let it secede) runs the thesis that during the 1860s and 1870s a modern American state was in the process of being created. While its continued creation was halted with the end of Reconstruction, the foundations had been laid for further modernization in the next century. The framework of a 'politically neutral' state apparatus and bureaucracy had finally been established -- a "sovereign central authority....which could at least initiate (if not [fully] administer) substantive social and economic policies" (Barrow, op. cit., p. 602). This is an important and interesting conclusion, and in itself it makes the book well worth reading.

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Does 'certainty' always indicate closed-mindedness?-- People should remember that there are two kinds of certainty: Sarah Palin's kind and Noam Chomsky's kind. The one is founded on unquestioning acceptance of the beliefs one has been trained to accept; the other is founded on continuous critical analysis of one's beliefs. It's the certainty of close-mindedness versus the 'certainty' of open-mindedness.[1]

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What is fascism?-- Populist conservatism.[2]

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[1] (I may have made that point a few years ago. Excuse the repetition.)

[2] That's the essential core, but classical fascism manifested it in quite specific ways -- relatively 'pure' and 'complete' ways. Note that, as a form of populist conservatism, American religious fundamentalism has the same essence as classical fascism. (Fundamentalism in other social contexts can be connected with a liberatory political agenda.) It has similar social and political functions, is 'reluctantly' supported by similar sectors of the economic elite, etc. Whether fascism takes a nationalist, a religious or some other form is secondary to the fact that it goes against the class struggle

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An incidentally true comparison.-- Like Mozart, I lack gravitas.

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Are women 'inferior'?-- The sexist question whether women are inferior to men (or, more exactly, whether femininity is inferior to masculinity) is half-meaningless. Nothing and no one is simply *inferior* to something or someone; inferiority is always relative to some set of values or standards. Stalin was not *bad*; he was bad in relation to a set of values like compassion, sympathy for others, not-killing-millions-of-people, etc. Noam Chomsky is 'bad' in relation to the values of cruelty and ignorance: he is bad at being a thug. Femininity is 'inferior' to masculinity in some respects, while in other respects masculinity is 'inferior' to femininity. It may be, however, that the respects in which masculinity is superior are those that are typically used to judge that a person 'has value' or has a strong presence, such as assertiveness, confidence, physical bulk, and physical strength.[1]

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Present philistines, future scholars.-- What does it say about people that the most celebrated thinkers and writers in their time are usually not the most celebrated ones centuries later? It says that, in general, the recipe for success in life isn't genuine merit judged on the basis of transhistorical standards of reason, creativity, originality, beauty, etc., but skillful, 'talented' obedience to the social and institutional norms of one's day. It says that most people, especially most people in positions of power, don't know how to judge real merit *if it exists among them* -- and maybe don't even care, since what matters is fitting into institutions. However, they are better able to judge *past* merit, because institutional norms constrict their thought in relation to the present more than the past. They are supposed to apply to the living more than the dead -- and so the dead are allowed to step outside the bounds of institutional respectability.[2] Also, the withering away of older institutional norms and the rise of new ones means that works that successfully embodied the former are no longer celebrated.

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Dionysian rape.-- Why do some women enjoy, or at least fantasize about, rape or semi-rape? It seems very paradoxical. I suspect that the secret enjoyment or fantasies are due to rape's being an extension of an aspect of sex that women find enjoyable: they like being genitally pounded by a man, half-violently treated like an object, being subjected to a frenzy of powerful masculine desire partly because it makes them feel desired (by a 'strong man') and partly because of its ecstatic release from self-consciousness, self-control, inhibitions. It's similar to the pleasure people get from being drunk, from going to raves, from indulging in any kind of orgiastic ritual. It's Dionysian pleasure, the joy of merging self with other.

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and so is in the interest of business and the status quo (or reaction). This is why it keeps appearing -- is *allowed* and *encouraged* to appear -- decade after decade.

[1] Socialization is not solely responsible for our valorization of those traits, as can be seen by the fact that all mammals and all human societies valorize them.

[2] That also has to do with the arrogance of the present: a person who reacted (creatively) against the 'quaint' or 'benighted' old traditions of his day is seen as anticipating the more sophisticated present. By appreciating the past rebel, the present is proving to itself its open-mindedness, generosity, capaciousness of thought, superiority over the past. Moreover, it flatters itself by appropriating (for itself) the brilliance of the rebel. 'It wasn't until *we* came along that Nietzsche could be appreciated.'

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J'accuse....moi!-- Your feminist vehemence in accusing me of misogyny possibly comes from your half-conscious sense that there might be *some* truth to ideas that aren't particularly flattering to women. (Just as there is truth to certain ideas that aren't flattering to men.) Sometimes, after all, they do seem, prima facie, plausible. As a result, you won't even *hear* these ideas: you'll shout them down, scream that their proponent is a misogynist, a sexist, a horrible person, not worth listening to, and if he starts to argue in a detached scientific manner, using logic and evidence to explain behavior, you'll accuse him ever more frantically of being disgusting and hateful, just to stop up the ears of your rational mind because you refuse to let it succumb to the temptations of a reasonable argument. Your frenzied value-judgments -- "Misogynist!" -- translate as "Shut up! I don't like what you're saying! I don't want to hear it! I'm afraid of it!" What it comes down to is fear, fear of ideas you don't like.

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Feminism and prejudice.-- Some feminists are so sensitive that whenever they hear an argument that takes seriously the possible existence of a particular so-called 'weakness' of their sex and tries to understand it instead of just denying or ignoring it, they hear nothing but an attempt to justify contempt for women, which makes it impossible for them even to consider the argument's logic. They become *incapable* of thinking in an unbiased way. Even if perchance they succeed in really hearing the argument, it means little or nothing to them because what they're fixated on is what they imagine its *tone* is, its contemptuous tone, which in turn means that the person putting it forward is contemptible, has a misogynistic agenda, and so can be ignored. But contempt for women, despite all these feminist fantasies, might have *nothing* to do with the argument or be totally absent from the arguer's mind. It's not *his* fault if most people, including feminists, make the leap from logic and facts to the value-judgment that women are 'weak' and therefore, supposedly, 'contemptible.'

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On the other hand.-- The person who is curious about the dark side of humanity is perfectly free to write down reflections that, while substantially true, might be seen (or misinterpreted)[1] as justifying misogyny. Given society as it is now, however, it would be irresponsible to publish such reflections in any form that might reach a mass audience. For you know what happens when the masses get hold of something. More important than communicating truth is protecting people from harm.

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Anarchism.-- 'Anarchism' is a fancy name for a simple thing, a commonsensical thing that has been around for thousands of years amongst billions of people. As Chomsky says, it is not so much a worked-out political theory as a deep impulse in human thought and behavior. People don't want to be subordinated to power-structures; they want to be free. Whenever they rebel against authorities, that's anarchism in action. Whenever they come together to organize a grassroots democratic life, that's anarchism in action. A *pure* anarchist society probably isn't possible because every society, no matter how egalitarian, must surely contain power-relations, but I suspect we can approach such a society relatively closely.

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[1] It might be a misinterpretation because the person suggesting the ideas might reject the conventional notions of what it is that would justify so-called 'misogyny.' He might not share society's values, so that, for example, what others see as weak he sees as human or even positively good.

Racism.-- Why does racism (in various forms) run like a blood-red thread through all of history? What explains the durability, the tenacity of this affront to reason and decency? It has nothing to do with a supposed human propensity to hate or distrust people who look different from one, because such a propensity would be meaningless and also because, insofar as it has any meaning at all, many or most people do not exhibit it. Many or most people are not racists. The real explanation is far more subtle. First of all, 'racism' as a full-fledged philosophy didn't even emerge until the middle of the 19th century or later, and it had a rather brief tenure in the public mind. As a more nebulous virulent prejudice it reaches farther back in time, but it's still largely a modern phenomenon, I think. Nonetheless, racial prejudice of some sort does extend far back into the mists of early history. It has existed more between *peoples* than *individuals* -- and that's the first clue to its character. 'Racism' appears where there are collective economic and/or political grievances that can be directed at a group or 'race' of people -- or where one people is economically exploiting another and so becomes contemptuous of it -- or where two peoples with different social structures and norms come in contact and, due to these differences or to the aggressive expansionistic institutions and ethos of one or both, develop mutual hostility -- or where there is some other such cause. The point is that racism is first and foremost a matter of economic and political conditions, not mere racial differences. And it's less a 'psychological' (or biological!) thing than a 'social' thing.

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Thoughts on socialism.-- In retrospect it's obvious that something like socialism couldn't have happened until the nation-state system had disintegrated (which it's starting to do now), because the nationality principle conflicts with the class principle. Marx thought the latter was more powerful and important than the former, and in a sense he was right. But not in the sense he wanted: *business* tended to be more loyal to class than to the nation, and it used nationality to divide the working class. In any case, since capitalism and the nation-state had been historically connected in their development, with the capitalist class eventually becoming intermixed with the ruling political elite, the working class would have had to triumph over, as it were, two elites fused into one. And that was a utopian hope. Only when capitalism and the nation-state began to decline together according to their internal dynamics and not due to some 'voluntaristic' push from the outside would the wage-earning classes have the chance to supersede capitalism and the nation-state (with its false principles of nationality and nationalism).

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The plight of progressives.-- The reason that advances in equality and freedom are so laborious in their birth is that, unfortunately, little gets done without help from allies in the business world. [See, e.g., the research of Thomas Ferguson.]

*

The last will be first.-- One of the ironies of history is that it's the poor and oppressed, the workers, the slaves, the marginalized -- and not the middle class or the privileged -- who carry on in their struggles the tradition of the Enlightenment, with its ideals of freedom, universal rights, humanity, and progress.

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The sublime.-- "Romance" from Shostakovich's *Gadfly*.[1]

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[1] (At least, the arrangement I'm listening to, a piano and violin duet.)

Against postmodernism.-- If you want a simple criterion for artistic greatness, here it is: the artist who manifests longevity in both popular and critical approbation is truly great. -That excludes most postmodernists, who don't appeal even to *educated* popular audiences, only to super-educated, or super-indoctrinated, 'critical' ones.

*

Postmodernism yet again.-- It irks me, that's all, when in class we're told that someone like Joan Wallach Scott has been hugely important to the historical profession, and is widely admired, because of her theoretical arguments that extend Derrida and Foucault and 'the linguistic turn' of the 1980s into the discipline of history. Arguments like "We [historians] need to scrutinize our methods of analysis, clarify our operative assumptions, and explain how we think change occurs. Instead of a search for single origins, we have to conceive of processes so interconnected that they cannot be disentangled. [Truism.] ...It is the *processes* that we must continually keep in mind. [Truism, idiocy.] ...To pursue meaning, we need to deal with the individual subject as well as social organization and to articulate the nature of their interrelationships, for both are crucial to understanding how gender works, how change occurs. [Truism, idiocy.] Finally, we need to replace the notion that social power is unified, coherent, and centralized [-Who is stupid enough to think that social power is unified, coherent, and centralized?-] with something like Michel Foucault's concept of power as dispersed constellations of unequal relationships [utter truism], discursively constituted [?] in social 'fields of force' [pretentious, unilluminating metaphor]." Etc. This is what happens when people trained in history try their hand at theory, seduced, probably, by how profound and philosophical it makes them feel. But 'the poverty of theory' is most evident when a Joan Scott wades into it.

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Parasitism in pre-capitalist and capitalist forms.-- I don't see much difference, in principle, between ownership of capital and ownership of land: in both cases one derives unearned income from the bare fact of owning property. Others do the work that makes the property productive in a real sense; the owner does nothing but supply some of the means by which the work is done (because he happens to have gained possession of these means, i.e. excluded others from possessing them; *not* because he has produced them). In principle he can lie on some beach and 'sip mint juleps' as he collects the profits of others' labor. And that is appalling. Unearned income, unless it is distributed equally amongst the people, is appalling.[1]

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Contrary to nature.-- Throughout history it has been the *parasites* who have had the most power and wealth.

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Academic indoctrination.-- 'Economics' is a term of propaganda, inferior as such to 'political economy.' It went mainstream due, first, to the discipline's pretensions to science -- whereas in fact it is as little scientific as sociology -- and, second, to the bourgeois façade of purging economic problems of their inherently political character so as to obscure the conflict between capital and labor. In fact the economy is

[1] That many owners of capital do various kinds of productive work -- managerial, technical -- is not essential to their ownership of capital considered in itself. It is from this whence they derive their profits.

the most 'political' sphere of all; hence it is proper to call the discipline 'political economy.'[1]

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A revaluation of values.-- The quality of being a 'natural leader' is not particularly admirable. For one thing, it probably means that one tends to be overbearing, to act inimically to the collective exercise of spontaneous democracy. For another, 'charisma' is not in itself a moral quality. It is neutral, neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy. Thirdly, a person who aspires to lead others aspires thereby to have power over them, which is an amoral goal at best. The kind of involuntary respect that leaders usually command is subhuman.

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Capitalism and 'patriarchy.'-- Women have indeed been subordinated to men throughout history, which means that patriarchal, sexist structures and norms exist that cannot be reduced to, and are not caused by, capitalist structures. Correspondingly, the supersession of capitalism does not entail the transcendence of every kind of sexist subordination. Certain kinds of such subordination may even be natural -- expressions of biological facts. The last sentence of the section above called 'Are women "inferior"?' provides plausible examples, as does my essay "On Women." Other, more culturally specific manifestations of subordination are a result of biological factors 'combined with' particular social conditions, and so can be abolished or mitigated by changing the social conditions. Some of these are capitalist in their origin, which means that, to this extent, modern class structures and forms of class oppression are 'prior to' modern sexist oppression -- i.e., that class has priority over gender. One author gives an example: capitalism, "with its concomitant free wage laborer, implies a separation, in some form, between the reproduction of workers and the production of goods and services. The separation [between private and public] seems also to imply a segregation, and denigration, of women," because due to the nature of childbirth and childrearing, women will probably be the ones to stay home and be in charge of 'reproducing' the labor-power that goes out into the world and secures the physical means of the family's survival. Women will end up being relatively confined to the domestic sphere and associated with the personal, the unpolitical, dependence on a man, and other demeaning things. Their subordination in these respects will not be overcome until the capitalist division between the private and the public has been overcome.[2]

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Class, race, and gender.-- The significance of each of these is multidimensional. Class, however, seems to have a unique sociological importance insofar as class structures, or economic structures, constitute society's essential 'infrastructure,' the skeleton that is fleshed out ('dialectically,' not reductively) in culture, politics, ideological trends, etc. Race and gender, by contrast, are primarily subjective identities, not *objective structures* rigorously defined and enforced in the ways that capitalist class-relations are. In imagination, one can picture rearrangements of the occupants of positions in class structures; black people could occupy capitalist positions and whites occupy wage-earning positions, or the current relative places of women and men could be reversed in the same way. And society would continue to have basically the same institutional configuration it does now, with lower wage-earners viciously exploited -- only these would be white men. In fact, blacks and women *have* made advances along these lines, even as the real sources of mass oppression have barely been touched due to the lack of *institutional* change. To change the institutional structures and so *really* change society, capitalist class-relations have

[1] [On the other hand, the discipline as it exists today and has existed for 150 years *shouldn't* be called 'political economy' because it ignores the social context, ignores power relations and social dynamics. The term 'economics' seems appropriately 'static,' abstract, mathematical, pseudo-scientific, sterile.]

[2] (Now that I think about it, I vaguely recall jotting down these same ideas years ago. Sorry.)

to be abolished.

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Two strains in populism.-- The dangerous thing about populism is that it does not seek only to improve the lot of the people; it seeks also to worsen the lot of their enemies. That can take benign, rational forms, as in social democracy (progressive taxation, welfare, government intervention in the economy), or it can take malign, irrational forms, as in fascism. Popular movements, even the 'good' ones, often have some of the bad populism in them, the blind resentment that lashes out instead of considering economic and social interests rationally. Authentic social-revolutionary movements always display some of this un-rationality (or even irrationality), but at least it tends to be more or less based on the rational foundation of insight into class-structures; more dangerous and irrational are the faux-populist movements like fascism and the Tea Party. [....]

*

The un-rational.-- Much as one wants to believe otherwise, there is little difference between Fred Phelps's flock of reason-proof homophobes and most people. The main difference is just the commitment the flock displays toward the single issue of anti-homosexuality. Their fanaticism is what distinguishes them, not necessarily their un-rationality and irrationality.[1] People constantly use reason, but their use tends to be half-hearted and ephemeral; it quickly succumbs to 'causation' (indoctrination, value-judgments, lack of interest). Consider my experiences in the class I'm taking on gender, in which everyone (it's all women) is a postmodernist but I. I argue against the famous historian Joan Scott, but it's quite impossible to change their minds on anything. They'll always be convinced, for example -- at least until they unconsciously evolve out of the belief -- that biology is totally irrelevant to history and gender-roles, that as historians we shouldn't even mention the word 'biology' unless we're studying the history of the science. -Needless to say, I never state directly that there are connections between biology and gender-roles. The women would burn me in effigy. I only suggested once that the association of women in the 19th century with the domestic sphere was due in large part to the biological facts of childbirth and nursing. One girl countered that not all women have children; I admitted that but said the point is that men can't give birth, that the female sex is the only sex that can. They stared at me uncomprehendingly; finally another girl said that's true *now* but might not always be true, due to science or whatnot. I let that pass, thinking it futile and irrelevant to argue the point; nevertheless (I said), in the 19th century it was true that only women could have babies. "There's such a thing as biology." But no, according to the professor biology is only an interpretation. Besides, as historians we have no business invoking biology. "But....we have bodies," I muttered despairingly. "So bodies are relevant to society. Which means biology is too." But I was forgetting that biology is just a social construction, and that arguing with these people was like smashing my head against a marble wall.[2]

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[1] Those two qualities signify two different ways of not being motivated by rational considerations. The first term denotes one's being outside the domain of reason, as in emotional states and value-judgments; the second term denotes one's *contradicting* oneself either in acts or in thoughts. (Value-judgments can indeed be 'rational' or 'irrational,' but only in their *relations* with each other, so that, for instance, it is unreasonable to be committed to mutually inconsistent values; the act of valuing itself is outside reason, i.e. neither rational nor irrational.)

[2] The biological sciences are indeed 'interpretations' and 'social constructions,' but that fact has no interesting implications. In particular, it doesn't imply that they have no truth, i.e. that they do not at least partly correspond to reality. More fundamentally, the non-thinkers in my class are confusing biology the real thing with biology the science, which studies the real thing. They're effectively denying the existence of biology the real thing, the actual processes that occur in the actual body. (*These* are what I was referring to by invoking 'biology,' but the professor turned my meaning around when she said that biology is only an interpretation.) They're idealists, postmodern idealists. Or they would be if they had the slightest knowledge of any of this stuff.

Consonance and dissonance.-- I like people, I have pleasant interactions with them all the time. Laughing, joking, small-talking or large-talking. But if I got to know them better, I'd consider most of them fools, conformists, and/or moral midgets.[1] It's an uncomfortable inconsistency, and has gnawed at me for years. But both reactions, I suppose, are justified. As my fellow living creatures, it's right for me to be well-disposed to, even to 'love,' all people, despite every individual's particular flaws; and I can also like each person for his good qualities. On the other hand, insofar as people fail to live up to important standards, it's right for me to consider them 'unworthy' in these respects, and it's natural that this cognitive judgment will be reinforced by some degree of emotional aversion. -Nonetheless, some cognitive dissonance remains, and necessarily so. Such dissonance is part of the enlightened life.

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Reading Jeremy Brecher's *Strike!*, a history of the U.S. labor movement from the perspective of the radical rank and file. 1877 to the end of the 20th century.

Barack Obama is turning out to be an even worse president than I thought he'd be. I was happy he was elected, but I didn't expect a whole lot from him. It's become clear by now that he's basically just another Bill Clinton. Except even more politically timid.[2] Evidently he wants to be a one-term president.

It's kind of fun to watch the world fall apart.

Gramsci's essay *The Southern Question*, a classic on the relationship between Italy's industrial north and agrarian south. I can't help thinking, though, that it's mainly of historical interest.

E. P. Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory*, his polemic against Althusser. A crushing demolition. I give Thompson credit for working through all the verbiage. He also draws some interesting parallels between Popperian positivism and Althusserian structuralism. -Let's talk about positivism for a minute, sometimes called empiricism. That word 'empiricism' has so many different meanings it can get confusing, but there are in fact connections between Popper's positivism and traditional British empiricism. At least, they fit together well. Positivism, in a nutshell, means a rejection of 'deep theories' meant to explain social phenomena, theories, like structuralist [or 'institutionalist'] ones, that get below 'appearances' or unproblematic 'facts' and posit tendencies or structural dynamics or other things that aren't experimentally 'verifiable' or falsifiable. Positivism wants only to record discrete facts with the help of statistics, computers, experiments, data-collection, etc. Minimal theorizing to explain it all. Social reality just is this collection of isolated facts; *relations* don't exist, only individuals. (See my paper from years ago.) You see how this shares the spirit of nominalism, which likewise acknowledges only 'individuals,' concrete particulars, and not universals (relations, etc.) -- because if those 'existed' then we would have to deal with a "prodigiously teeming Platonic heaven" of abstract objects floating around everywhere, and, you see, we're committed to Occam's razor, to postulating only those entities that are necessary to account for our best scientific theories. And so on and so forth. I need not point out how incredibly silly this all is: yes, it's true that only 'concrete particulars' in spacetime exist and not abstract objects -- because existence just *means* 'having a location in spacetime' -- but in another sense 'abstract objects' do exist, insofar as we use words, numbers, etc. Sure, they're a 'fiction' strictly speaking -- the number 2 doesn't *exist* in some place; the relation between worker and capitalist doesn't exist in the sense that you can point to it like a tree -- but we have to assume them in order to talk. Again, see my other paper, the one on ontology. Popper denies the existence of a 'class' such as 'army'; an army is just a collection of soldiers, he says. Okay, brilliant, way to go. But what is a soldier? Someone who belongs to an army. Oops. I guess armies exist after all. (See Alasdair MacIntyre, "Breaking the Chains of Reason.")

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[1] Those judgments, incidentally, aren't just symptomatic of my supposed cynicism. They're largely true. All you have to do is look at how people treat each other, how they spend their days, or read history or the newspapers or personal blogs. (Of course, some people might judge *me* similarly.)

[2] That accusation isn't entirely fair. Big banks and other sectors of business are one of his core constituencies, so much of his apparent 'timidity' is in fact service to his base.

You see how this is all very 'bourgeois,' by the way. Thompson says it well in the last sentence of this passage, in which he speaks in the voice of a positivist:

> The discrete facts are all that can be known. 'History' is an improper holistic concept to cover a sequence of discrete facts as in fact they succeeded upon each other. If we introduce concepts, we introduce these as 'models' which assist us to investigate and organize these facts; but we must be clear that these models exist in our heads and not 'in' the history. And we must develop ever more refined, value-free, and preferably quantitative empirical techniques to enable these facts to disclose themselves as in fact they took place. Whatever happens, I [the positivist] will make sure that no facts escape from their discrete prison cells, enter into relationships, or hold mass meetings.

By drawing attention away from social relations and structures, shared interests, etc., positivists reinforce the hegemony of an atomistic, individualistic way of life and ideology, thereby helping undermine social movements. They're doing the bidding of the powerful (not consciously, though). It's an "open society," yes: no connections between groups of people in similar structural locations, no solidarity, no mass fighting for a common cause. Incidentally, it's true that theories are 'models,' but they are supposed to be precisely models *of reality*. They're supposed to 'conceptually unpack' what is implicit in reality (as I wrote in my senior thesis), the relations-between-elements that are implicit in reality. This is what the natural sciences do, and it is what the social sciences are supposed to do. It's harder in the latter, though, or less precise, unmathematical, because of (the mystery of) free will, human's undetermined nature (different from the determined nature of physical processes).[1]

As for the affinity between traditional empiricism and positivism, it has to do with the fact that for empiricists humans bring nothing, or almost nothing, to experience; they just imbibe discrete events and inductively generalize from them, etc. Positivists try not to bring theories (a delusion), while empiricists deny that humans bring innate mental constructions. In both cases it's a matter of 'registering' discrete events.

What are the parallels between Althusser and Popper? First of all, they're both morons. More interestingly, Althusser's 'system' is like positivism in discouraging an "arduous interrogation" of appearances, a grappling with evidence and theories, struggling to explain why a particular thing has happened. Althusser has basically no interest in history *as history*; he has his little system with all its peculiar concepts that he applies mechanically, ahistorically, being interested in history only insofar as it exemplifies 'Theory.' Both Popper and Althusser refuse to learn anything from history, deny that history can teach us anything meaningful. As two of Althusser's disciples write, "Marxism, as a theoretical and a political practice, gains nothing from its association with historical writing and historical research. The study of history is not only scientifically but politically valueless." It's as stupid as postmodernism, and revealingly similar.[2] (What an intellectual freak, a postmodernist Marxism.)

Althusser's idol, remember, is Spinoza, in whose system history can (apparently) not be accounted for (or so Alex Kojeve says). Spinoza modeled his philosophy, or at least his *Ethics*, on mathematics, and Althusser likes math because it 'proves itself.' In the same way, says Althusser, historical materialism proves itself, and it doesn't need to be confirmed by analyzing history. -If Thompson's characterization is accurate....wow. Breathtaking. Althusser manages to overlook the fact that historical materialism is an *empirical* discipline while math is not.

An ironic thing about positivism, given its emphasis on empirical evidence, is that the theories, or 'models,' with which it's associated, such as neoclassical economics, are flagrantly contradicted by the evidence. That shows -- doubly -- the essential dishonesty and hypocrisy of bourgeois intellectual culture. (Not just bourgeois, though. Any intellectual culture subordinated to power-structures.)

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[1] As Thompson says, in history there are necessary causes but not sufficient causes.

[2] [I suppose I was referring there to its opposition to rigorous materialistic empirical investigation, its self-referentiality, its concern with language or 'Theory,' and other such things.]

Thompson points correctly to a tension in Marx's thought between his empirical open-mindedness, his realistic grappling with actual events, and his 'systematic,' 'idealistic' political economy which is almost Hegelian in its pretensions to tracing the 'immanent self-development' of capital from its most primitive forms to the final collapse of the society that has capital as its basis. This second side of Marxism arguably leads to the excesses of Althusser's Spinozistic, self-enclosed structuralism. But Thompson fails to see that this tension in Marxism is actually present to some degree in many theories: they try to explain the world, which means they have to be tested, but at the same time they have an internal logic that unfolds the theory out of itself, so to speak. They aspire to be 'transformed copies' of reality, but to the extent that they 'generate themselves' out of an internal logic they're stepping away, at least temporarily, from the world -- though not really, because they think that the world follows the same logic. Anyway, Thompson's injunction to stay close at all times to the evidence is well taken. Marx's semi-Hegelian method in the *Grundrisse* is dangerous: society isn't a closed theoretical system, and even if it were, the method of 'pure thought' might well get it wrong. The theorist could take a wrong turn somewhere, which he might have avoided had he paid closer attention to empirical data. On the other hand, I think Marx is right that there *is* an 'inner logic' of some sort to capitalist economic development. But to what extent? What's the relation between the 'inevitable' unfolding of inner dynamics and contingent external factors (which are *everywhere*)? How do these interact? We'll never fully know; reality is too complicated. But maybe we can approximate the truth. I don't know how, though. I guess it's a matter of examining the history of capitalism and seeing where it accords with and diverges from the most plausible 'pure' theories of capitalist development -- just using good sense to judge when there are extra-theoretical 'interventions from the real' and when, on the other hand, real events result from internal systemic dynamics. Actually, I suppose it'll always be a combination of both. Like with the Irish potato famine: no theory of capitalism could deduce from its own premises that there would be an Irish potato famine, but given certain natural conditions in Ireland in the mid-19th century (a potato blight or whatever), the internal dynamics of capitalism[1] exacerbated the famine and turned it into a catastrophe of Biblical proportions. There is always this interaction between the contingent (the external) and the systemically determined (the internal). -But I shouldn't forget that 'the economy' isn't the only 'system' in society; there are all sorts of institutions influencing each other, social structures with their own dynamics. The economy 'overlaps' with them, determines and is partly determined. And everything is a big goddamned mess.

....Thompson's book is a useful warning to me not to get *too* structuralist [or 'institutionalist']. But I think he takes his criticism of Althusser a bit too far (*occasionally*). Human behavior is conditioned to a *huge* extent by roles, institutional structures; somehow we just have to navigate between 'structuralism' and 'humanism' (individual agency, etc.). They're both necessary, and with a little good sense they can be reconciled in the practices of history and sociology. Thompson would surely agree with that. But my greater commitment to so-called structuralism (than his) is revealed in the fact that I'm not convinced that the 'stages' of a given process of social development -- the stages in a very broad sense, not in their specific, concrete, multitudinous manifestations -- are not in some way 'determined' from the very beginning. The process in question has to be very general, on a broad 'systemic' level, not some little concrete series of phenomena. I grappled with this subject a bit in the Conclusion of my M.A. thesis, and it's sort of what I was referring to above. Marx and Engels were too teleological at times, but Thompson is perhaps not 'teleological' enough. But it's hard to navigate in this way between teleology and complete non-teleology. It's hard to find a middle ground. But look, if you go through history from the onset of capitalism to the present day, looking only at the most significant 'systemic' 'outlines' -- and not even the Russian revolution qualifies as that; I'm talking about things like the development of the liberal state in the 19th century, the state-capitalist state in the 20th, the incorporation of the working classes into society (think 'hegemony,' etc.), major military clashes between advanced nation-states sometime around when they occurred (early

[1] As enforced by a British government unwilling to interfere with the 'free market,' which ensured that the Irish didn't get the food they needed. (I think I read somewhere that Ireland was actually exporting potatoes to England during the famine. Elsewhere in Europe that year, governments took anti-free-trade measures to prevent starvation -- and they largely succeeded -- but the British government was under the sway of free-market economists.)

to middle 20th century), neoliberalism in the late 20th century -- you'll see that it all seems pretty damned probable, almost inevitable. Each 'stage' emerges out of the previous according to what appear to be 'logical' systemic dynamics, not contingent concrete events. And so, proceeding into the future, it seems that even though we can't predict with any certainty what will happen, in retrospect it'll be seen to be nearly inevitable. 'Nearly.' What does that qualification mean? Well, in my thesis (in a footnote) I tried to explain that too.

I don't mean to imply that there's a rigid succession of stages. I use the word only in a metaphorical sense. But historians use it too -- like the 'stages' or 'phases' called the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, etc. It's a convenient term, that's all, and it has some relation to reality.

In any case, my point is that Thompson underestimates the importance of 'extra-human' structural dynamics. In historical evolution on a grand scale, they're overpowering.

The thing with Ashleigh didn't last long. We're going to be friends I hope, but romantically she isn't feminine enough for me. And I'm probably not masculine enough for her. We have good conversations and I already miss her a little, but a relationship wouldn't have worked well. Not enough chemistry, I guess.

I'm reading Thomas Nagel's *The View From Nowhere* (1986). Nagel seems more sensible than most contemporary philosophers. For example, "The reductionist program that dominates current work in the philosophy of mind [by which he means functionalism, behaviorism, physicalism, etc.] is completely misguided, because it is based on the groundless assumption that a particular conception of objective reality [namely the 'physical' conception] is exhaustive of what there is." In other words, unlike Dennett and other fools, he admits that sensations and other 'inner' states exist, and that humans aren't robots.

Nagel's thoughts remind me of how sensible my 'solution' was to the mind-body problem. The essence is that a single substance -- neural stuff -- has, in its *activity*, two different ways of being: 'physical' and 'mental' (our mental *experience*). The nervous system itself is physical, composed of physical things you can point to (neurons, etc.). But its electrical and chemical processes can be 'considered' in two ways: serially and 'holistically.' On the one hand, you can think of neural activity as involving millions of electrical bursts, chemical discharges, etc., all interacting in an instant to give rise to a sensation or a thought. It's a series of interrelated physical events. On the other hand, you can think of all these events not serially but holistically, from the perspective of the 'whole' that emerges from their nearly instantaneous interactions. This emergent whole is the mental experience. It isn't 'located' anywhere -- except maybe vaguely and somewhat metaphorically, like 'in the hand' or 'in the head' -- it isn't a physical thing you can point to or that has a precise spatiotemporal location (comparable to that of a neuron, say); because of its emergent nature, it's just the sort of thing of which you can't predicate an exact location. So the mental experience isn't really 'in' the brain (as a neuron is), although in a loose, metaphorical sense maybe you can say it is. -That's the basis of the solution to the mind-body problem. It doesn't cease to be a problem, because we still have this mysterious phenomenon of emergence that will never be fully understood, but at least now we understand what it is we don't understand. Before, it was just a big muddle. I've reduced the problem to a specific phenomenon of biology.

More broadly, of course, the 'mind,' including all its *unconscious* aspects and cognitive structures and mathematical computations and so forth, is 'emergent' from the brain.

Nagel's common sense has limits. In the context of a discussion of the self he suggests that possibly "I am my brain." He thinks that's a reasonable hypothesis. *I -- this consciousness -- I* am *my....brain! This consciousness* is the same thing as *its*....nervous system! Wow. It doesn't even occur to him that the self might be self-consciousness. (A hypothesis that has to be embellished, yes.)

Later on, though, he shows that, for an academic, he has a deep mind: he shares my fascination with the intuitive distinction between the 'essential' *me*, or *I*, and the particular person Chris Wright, who is just like all other people, not at all different except for the fact that it is through him that *I* exist. In thought I can separate myself from Chris, hover above the city and look at all the people walking around, one of whom is Chris -- who, as it happens, is *me!* In a sense, I could have been any of those other people, but I'm *this* guy, this particular body and personality and so on. Sometimes when I'm in the train surrounded by people I actually think about that: I look at everyone else, all their faces, and then look at the reflection in

the window and see another face -- and I realize it's mine! But it looks no different from anyone else's! It isn't particularly special, it isn't glowing -- but it should be, because it has a unique connection to *this self*. This (seemingly) *essential* self (essential to itself, that is). This essential self, which is sort of 'outside' the world, appears to have an accidental connection to the body and personality of Chris Wright, who is a being *in* the world no different from all others. Nagel even uses the same terminology I used in my senior thesis, but reverses it: whereas I called the particular body and mind I happen to 'occupy' the objective self, which is opposed to my 'true,' most intimate self, my (sort of) outside-the-world self that inhabits a particular body and mind, he calls this 'true' self the objective self (because it can consider the world more objectively, 'stepping outside' the particular perspective of Chris Wright or Thomas Nagel). His analysis doesn't go as far as mine, though.[1] I went on to argue that the 'true' self Nagel is talking about is self-consciousness (*not* the brain), and then I speculated about how self-consciousness (the I, the 'active' self, the 'subjective self') -- which, in its purity, is a sort of abstract thing, contentless, 'universal' -- manages to identify itself with the objective self (as I called it), i.e. the particular body and mind it 'occupies.' Of course this language is somewhat metaphorical: I shouldn't say *it*, as though self-consciousness is a single entity, but rather 'the continuously present thought of "consciousness of consciousness."' I also tried to describe the composition of the objective self: for example, self-consciousness 'immediately' identifies itself more closely with other thoughts than with the body, so it seems as though *all* these thoughts I'm having right now (and always) in my consciousness constitute the essential me, the self, whereas in fact the 'essential' me is only the abstracted thought 'consciousness of this consciousness.' (But that's also my least particular aspect, the aspect I share with everyone else.[2]) Needless to say, this phenomenological stuff is one of the most difficult areas of philosophy, so my account wasn't satisfactory.

By the way, it isn't just because I'm an intellectual and preoccupied with thoughts that I say the self identifies itself more closely with thoughts than with the body. This is true of everyone, as shown by the fact that people intuitively understand the mind/body distinction and that they often see their bodies as 'rebellious,' somewhat foreign things they have to control, take care of, etc.

Despite all this, however, it remains true 'on another level' that the mind-body dualism is specious. We are physical beings; consciousness is not a different substance but an emergent expression of neural activity.

....Throughout his book, Nagel keeps referring to the 'objective self,' that which can separate itself from the perspective of the body and mind to which it is 'attached,' can step outside particular perspectives, can advance in knowledge by reflecting on itself and its conditions of existence, can doubt the significance of life by considering the smallness of each individual, etc. But Nagel can't account for it; it's a mystery to him. It doesn't even occur to him that the so-called objective self is, more or less, just self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is what's responsible for the continuous tension that Nagel is obsessed with between the subjective and the objective -- being occupied in one's own perspective and looking at oneself externally, from the perspective of an other. Yes, this tension is essential to what it means to be human -- which is to say that self-consciousness is essential to humanity. Not a terribly original insight. But Nagel doesn't even rise to this insight, because the 'objective self' is a mystery to him.

On another subject, though, he reveals his common sense: he thinks that skepticism about the physical world is irrefutable. "The possibility of skepticism is built into our ordinary thoughts, in virtue of the realism that they automatically assume and their pretensions to go beyond experience." He's also right to think that the problem of free will is a hopeless muddle, for more than one reason. For example, the idea of freedom or autonomy is itself unintelligible. One reason, which he doesn't discuss, is that the self is largely an illusion. *We* don't even exist, at least not in the way we incoherently think we do. How can it be the case that I determine all my actions if I am nothing but self-consciousness (roughly speaking)? Consciousness of consciousness can't *will* anything; all it can do is be aware of itself (aware of everything

[1] (After reading more, I see that his ideas and mine are quite different.)
[2] Enter: mysticism, John Donne's 17th Meditation, etc.

going on in consciousness).[1] But let's ignore this reason and talk about ourselves as we ordinarily do. Years ago I said that, although we have reasons for doing any given act, at some point the reasons break off and we just make a 'leap' -- we just do the act. We could consider reasons for or against it forever, but sooner or later we have to give up the weighing of reasons and act. This fact seemed significant to me, but I didn't really know why. Nagel has helped me see one reason for its importance: it shows that intentional explanations (which presuppose the idea of freedom, as opposed to causal explanations, which are deterministic) can only go so far. You can ask somebody why he acted the way he did, and he'll list the reasons. But then you ask why he found those reasons more compelling than all the reasons *against* the act, and all he can say is, "I don't know, I just did." From his intentional perspective, there's no explanation for why those reasons motivated him. But obviously there has to be *some* explanation, because they did, after all, motivate him. Clearly, then, the answer will take us "outside the domain of subjective normative reasons and into the domain of formative causes of my character or personality" -- or, on another level, neural processes. Only *causes*, not reasons, can explain why I'm motivated by some set of reasons. In other words, my values are explained not by reasons I have for holding them but by causes of my holding them. (Admittedly, I can be led to value some particular thing on the basis of reasons, but my valuing those reasons is not itself explainable by further reasons. In fact, the valorization of logic itself is not explainable by reasons (which would be question-begging); it's only causally explainable.) Thus, no act can be explained solely on the assumption of autonomy or freedom.[2]

Unfortunately we can't escape our sense of freedom and self-initiative, so....there you go. We're at a dead end. Complete freedom doesn't make sense, but we can't help believing that we're totally free, so we just have to accept the dilemma and move on with our lives. Or maybe it's better to say that total freedom makes *some* sense but not *really*: "We feel that in acting we ought to be able to determine not only our choices but the inner conditions of those choices [such as our basic values, or our preferences in a given moment], provided we step far enough outside ourselves. ....Yet the logical goal of these ambitions is incoherent, for to be really free we would have to act from a standpoint completely outside ourselves, choosing everything about ourselves, including all our principles of choice -- creating ourselves from nothing, so to speak." This is exactly what I said in my senior thesis, that *complete* freedom is incoherent for these very reasons.

By the way, it's also a total mystery *how* my 'will' could cause a given act or thought or bodily movement. We don't know how these things happen, but postulating a magical 'will' doesn't seem particularly fruitful. The explanation will be biological, i.e. deterministic.

....Am I justified in condemning William Calley for the massacre at My Lai? Leaving aside questions about free will and responsibility and all that, it's true that he doesn't exemplify certain values we hold -- in his murders he was quite the opposite of them -- which means that from the standpoint of those values he is bad. That's a fact: he is not or was not good at living according to those values. But is (was) he *morally* bad? Well, insofar as we call those values 'moral' ones, yes, he was morally bad -- or at least, what he did was morally wrong. And in the moment of doing it, or at that time of his life, he was morally bad. He was not a good person from the perspective of values that we call 'morality' -- or, rather, if those values define what it is to be a good person, than he was a bad person. By definition.[3] None of this can be contested. What can be contested are more ambitious claims than that he simply didn't exemplify certain values, etc. Our inclination is to condemn him in a more 'absolute' way than all this; we want to get rid of the relativistic clause 'according to the values of such and such' and instead say that he was just *bad*. *A bad person, period.* Absolutely bad, bad in his 'essence,' so to speak, such that in describing him you

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[1] This self-awareness is in fact what explains our perception of free will, as I've said before. In being *of itself*, self-consciousness cannot escape the impression that it is self-causing, that it is responsible for all of 'its' (or 'my') acts and thoughts -- the acts and thoughts that are registered in consciousness.

[2] [More accurately, in a narrow sense, yes, acts can be explained on that assumption. But in order to explain why particular reasons had motivational force, you have to go beyond that assumption, to a deeper, causal level.]

[3] Again, free will isn't necessarily presupposed by any of this, just as it isn't presupposed when you say that your pet cat is a bad pet for whatever reasons.

could say, "He weighed 200 pounds, he was a lieutenant, six feet tall, and bad. Contemptible, repulsive." Stalin and Hitler are even better examples, since they expose our intuition with perfect clarity. But as I've argued sufficiently in the past, this *absolutist* value-judgment is not meaningful. Nevertheless, we want to condemn him in a stronger way than I outlined a moment ago. Such a condemnation would be based on the presupposition that he was free in his actions, that alternatives were available to him and he chose not to take them. He callously disregarded human life -- he freely and knowingly killed innocent old men, women and children -- which says a lot about his character. The 'mild' kind of condemnation above is somewhat 'external' in its nature, as when you judge that your cat is a bad pet. You're not condemning your cat's character; you're only saying that, as a matter of fact, probably for reasons out of its control, it isn't a good pet. But Calley is a human being and so presumably has free will. He is therefore immoral in a stronger sense: *he's responsible* for acting contrary to certain values, the *most important* values in life. The intensity of our condemnation is thus justified by two factors: the presumption that he's responsible, and the fact that the norms he flouted were more important than any others. A third factor is probably also relevant: we assume he *knew*, on some level, that what he was doing was the worst thing a person could do. Or maybe this presumption of his moral knowledge is included in, or is an extension of, the presumption that he's responsible for his actions, since *full* responsibility means he was perfectly aware of what he was doing.

But how meaningful is this stronger sort of condemnation? Insofar as it tends toward the 'absolute' condemnation I mentioned above, not very. But what other kind of condemnation is there, aside from the weak kind I discussed initially? There is, of course, the subjective aversion and disgust embodied in the judgment, but these *feelings* are not what I'm talking about. I'm searching for a *judgment* that has *cognitive content*. But there isn't another one. The only *strong* (i.e., adequate-to-our-disgust) meaning of our condemnation is that in some sense we banish Calley from the human community for his apparently complete lack of respect for our most important values, as shown by his willful violation of them.

But how willful is it? How much responsibility does (did) he have? Maybe he lacked a moral sense. Maybe his time in Vietnam had desensitized him to violence and horror, or had destroyed his respect for human life. He had had it drilled into him by his superiors and so on to think of Vietnamese peasants not as people but as the enemy -- a thing. Maybe he had also already encountered so many massacres that he had lost his moral bearings, had lost his sense of who he was, etc. For many men, Vietnam meant absolute existential disorientation. To an extent, all this would, perhaps, erode Calley's responsibility for his actions. Moreover, as we saw above, he couldn't really have had control over his not valuing human life, because he didn't *choose* not to value it. His attitudes were caused, not chosen. And his actions were at least strongly conditioned by his attitudes. If we keep going on in this way, he becomes less and less responsible for his acts, which means that our condemnation of him loses more and more of its justification, or its force. We can still deplore what he *did*, but we start to see him in a somewhat less condemnatory way.[1]

Or even in the case of somebody like Jeffrey Dahmer.... 'He is what he is.' Maybe he could have chosen not to kill and eat those men, but why would he have, given his values and desires? People act on the basis of their values, which in general are not subject to their control. Even if they were, why would somebody choose to change his values? He would have to do so on the basis of some other value, which in turn would not be something he had chosen.

And yet we can't help thinking, despite all this (and more -- for instance, the determinism of the brain), that people are basically free, responsible for everything they do. Calley chose to act as he did, he had alternatives, he didn't have to throw a baby into a ditch and shoot it. And that's true, in fact....but it's not the whole story....

There are a lot of similarities between Nagel's arguments and my old thoughts from college. Like his argument that prejudiced, narrow-minded and irrational people are less free than people without those traits, and that we can increase our freedom by cultivating reason, etc. Not terribly original ideas, but, as I

[1] But that doesn't have to stop us -- after reading in detail about what he did -- from being horrified at him, perhaps thinking of him as a cautionary tale about what can happen to people in war. And even if in some sense he wasn't completely 'free' in his choice to do what he did, we can still think of him as something dangerous that has to be locked up.

recall, I tried to deal with them relatively systematically in my thesis. That document has many problems -- so many that I don't even want to look at it again -- but my ideas themselves, or most of them, were defensible.

According to Nagel,

> Berkeley claimed that [the truth of the idea that to exist is to be perceived] became evident if we tried to form the idea of an unperceived object. It turns out to be impossible, he said, because as soon as we try to think, for example, of an unperceived tree, we find that all we can do is to call up a perceptual image of a tree, and that is not unperceived.
>
> It would be generally recognized now that this argument involves the mistake of confusing perceptual imagination as the vehicle of thought with a perceptual experience as part of the object of thought. Even if I employ a visual image to think about the tree, that does not mean I am thinking about a visual impression of the tree, any more than if I draw a tree, I am drawing a drawing of a tree.
>
> A similar mistake would be to argue that we cannot form the thought of something that no one is actually thinking about or the conception of something that no one is conceiving of. Clearly we can think and talk about the possible state of affairs in which no one is thinking or talking about Bishop Berkeley. The fact that we must talk about Berkeley to talk about the situation in which he is not being talked about doesn't make that situation either inexpressible or impossible.

Berkeley may indeed have made the mistake Nagel accuses him of, but the argument in the first paragraph above can be interpreted in another way: it can mean that when we try to think of a world independently of how it appears to us -- how it is 'in itself' -- all we can call to our minds is the world as it appears to us. We can't imagine what it 'looks like' independently of what it looks like to us. Obviously. I made the point a while ago: when we try to think of the world as it is in itself even on the most 'basic' level (underneath ordinary appearances), we find ourselves picturing cells or molecules or things like that, things that have *appeared* to us in photographs or artists' renditions or whatever. We can't escape the perspective of a subject viewing an object, even when we try to imagine an object as it is in itself without a subject looking at it. Where I disagree with Berkeley -- if *this* is what his argument was[1] -- is in thinking that this fact doesn't mean there is no external world. Our inability to imagine an external world 'in its contours' or 'in its details' -- i.e., as it *appears*! -- without adopting the perspective of 'being-appeared-to' doesn't entail that there are no things external to minds. It entails only itself, i.e. that we can't *imagine* (*visualize*) them (as they are 'when we're not looking at them').

Nagel's argument that objective values exist, values "independent of our beliefs and inclinations," is silly and confused. At one point he says that "to dispense with [objective values] is too radical a denial of appearances." He goes on: "If I have a severe headache, the headache seems to me to be not merely unpleasant, but a bad thing. Not only do I dislike it, but I think I have a reason to try to get rid of it. [Uh, yes you do, namely that you dislike it!] It is barely conceivable that this might be an illusion, but if the idea of a bad thing makes sense at all, it need not be an illusion, and the true explanation of my impression may be the simplest one, namely that headaches are bad, and not just unwelcome to the people who have them." What the hell? Headaches are bad, yes, insofar as they're painful: i.e., they're bad *to us*, because we value not being in pain. Their badness is relative to our desire not to experience pain. What would it even mean to say that headaches are 'objectively bad'?

Regarding moral values, the most that can be said is that they aren't mere subjective preferences with *no* independent basis at all; instead, there is a foundation for our common values in human biology. It is in our *biology* to (have a tendency to) think that the kinds of things that Stalin and Hitler did were bad or wrong; and other things being equal -- i.e., if social relations haven't warped a person's mind so much that he has lost touch with humans' natural morality -- we will so condemn Stalin and Hitler. Their acts were

[1] [After reading Berkeley's original argument I see that Nagel interpreted it correctly.]

literally *unnatural*. So in a sense, yes, there is an objective foundation of morality, viz. nature, in that nature predisposes us to act and value in certain ways.

Nagel is right, furthermore, that one can say that there are *degrees* of objectivity in value-judgments. One's morality can perhaps be called more 'objective' to the extent that one takes into consideration other people's viewpoints and values. But this doesn't mean that certain values *are objective*(ly justified), because there is no 'view from nowhere' in the ethical realm (or any other). There are only perspectives, desires -- desires and perspectives that determine what is seen as valuable. It's incredible that Nagel thinks there *is* a view from nowhere, a perspectiveless perspective, and that it is reached simply by stepping outside one's own 'subjective,' 'personal' viewpoint and considering things more 'objectively,' as an 'objective self.'

The more I read of the book, the more I see it's riddled with confusions.

But Nagel is right to reject Aristotle's and Plato's positions on morality. He distinguishes between the moral life and the good life: loosely speaking, in the first, one partially sacrifices one's own 'selfish' interests to those of others, while in the second, one's own interests take priority. (But it isn't ruled out that morality can be a component of the good life.) Aristotle more or less defined morality in terms of the good life -- which doesn't mean, however, that the two ideas are equivalent. "The test of moral principles is their contribution, either instrumental or constitutive, to the good life as a whole; but since we are social beings, this may entail some of the familiar moral virtues." Nagel rejects this because morality has its source in the claims of other people, which can't "be strictly limited by their capacity to be accommodated within a good individual life." For instance, it would be more moral for me to donate $100 to some charity that would use it to save children from starvation than to spend $100 on a meal in an expensive restaurant, even though fine dining might be considered a component of the good life. In a sense, living well (living the good life, which can be defined in various ways) is immoral when you know that other people are miserable, starving, etc. So Aristotle is wrong. Morality can't be substantially reduced to the good life.

Plato, on the other hand, defined the good life in terms of the moral life. That is, by far the most important thing in the former is the latter. But Nagel argues that "there is much more to us, and therefore much more to what is good and bad for us, than what is directly involved in morality." We have many different capacities and desires, and sacrificing most of them to the imperative to improve others' lives leads to the impoverishment of our own life. Thus, unlike Plato and Aristotle, Nagel thinks that the good life and the moral life [or at least the *most* moral life] can conflict. This is surely right.

Nietzsche thought that the good life overrides the moral life. I don't agree with Nagel that this position is simply *wrong* in the way that Plato's and Aristotle's are;[1] all you can say is that it's morally reprehensible. If you're happy living a life that has no concern for morality, then fine, that's your choice. Actually, if you accept that morality plays *some* role in the good life because it is in human nature to care for others -- and so to 'fulfill' yourself as a human, to live a good human life, you have to have some concern for others -- then a pure Nietzschean position that totally rejects morality in favor of the 'good life' isn't possible, since morality plays at least some part in the good (human) life. The opposite position is that the moral life overrides the good life. I think this, too, is neither right nor wrong; whether you accept it is a matter of choice, the values that you hold. My own position is that neither the moral life nor the good life should 'override' the other; we simply have to balance them as best we can. Try to be a full human being, which involves living morally but not *obsessively* morally (because then you'll neglect other sides of your personality, which will atrophy). But if you care far more about living 'right' than living 'well' and are willing to sacrifice your own interests to those of others, then do so; I'll respect you very much.

Interestingly, though, morality isn't only an other-oriented thing. In a broader sense, concepts like integrity, honesty and autonomy are relevant to it. This is more like a self-oriented morality; it implies that you can act immorally, at least in some loose way, with respect to yourself. And that makes sense, since you're a human being like all others. It seems as though this kind of morality has an even closer connection to the good life than other-oriented morality does (insofar as the two can be distinguished).

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[1] Of course, you can define morality and the good life however you want, and different people will have different understandings. I just mean that if you judge by common intuitions, Plato's and Aristotle's definitions are inadequate.

I'm reading my dad's dissertation again, since I didn't finish it when I read it eleven years ago. *Being Oneself: Its Meaning and Worth.* "When somebody tells me to be myself, what does he or she mean and why should I do it, and when somebody charges me with not being myself, what is it that I have been charged with and why does it matter? These are the questions which I try to answer in this book." After laborious phenomenological investigation of a variety of ordinary situations, he decides that not being oneself usually involves letting one's concern for the opinion or approval of others guide one's conduct, such that one puts on airs. The reason this is bad is that it jeopardizes or destroys one's integrity, "and as that slips away from us, so does the respect both of others and of myself, to which I am otherwise entitled by virtue of being myself." But, again, why is it so good to be oneself? Why does it deserve respect? He continues: "The source of this respect lies simply in the good of dealing openly with each other and the expectation that at least at certain times nothing less is acceptable." That's a reasonable answer. It's definitely part of the explanation, but I suspect that a more important part is the even more 'primitive' respect people have for a self that is certain of itself, that is full and confident. It is virtually a biological response. (Compare the obvious 'respect' that higher mammals have for the dominant male in their group.) People naturally respect and are drawn to a self that is whole and spontaneously self-projecting, i.e. a person who has 'more of a self' than others. Remember what I wrote about this being the essence of charisma. It's a strange, metaphorical idea/definition, but phenomenologically it's the crux of the matter.

Integrity is a moral ideal. To have a self in the fullest sense, to *be* a self, a self with an 'incorruptible' core, a self that has 'integrity' like a physical structure that won't collapse; to have authenticity, to be an authentic self. That's a *moral* ideal. Interesting. It seems less like an example of other-oriented morality (except on the margins, e.g. by making you honest and sincere in your dealings with people) than an example of self-oriented morality. By lacking integrity you're betraying yourself first and foremost. People don't really get *angry* at you for lacking integrity, as though you've done them some wrong; they have contempt for you. They see you, at least implicitly, as not a whole self, not a fully developed and mature person, an actor, someone with a deep emptiness at his core.

On the other hand, insofar as the statement 'He has no integrity' is thought to be almost synonymous with 'He has no (or *little*) morality,' the crime is not only a crime against oneself but against others. It means that the person doesn't evince moral respect for others, he uses them opportunistically as means to his ends. So I guess that to lack integrity is in equal measure a crime against oneself and against others. When we say that Bill Clinton has no integrity we're communicating contempt for him on the basis of his lack of morality, honesty, 'principles,' respect for others in his dealings with them, sufficient respect for himself to make a stand on anything.[1] We expect a person to guide his behavior by principles, rules, norms that he applies consistently, rules he identifies with, which constitute the 'boundaries' of his self. And since determination is negation, without these rules or (moral) 'limits' on one's behavior, one's selfhood is not fully realized. Which can be expressed by saying that one lacks respect for oneself. Clinton doesn't respect himself enough to *define* himself, just as he doesn't respect others enough to treat them as 'defined,' fully existing selves or moral beings (i.e., according to moral rules).

Wait, I forgot about courage. Mom informs me that she associates a lack of integrity with a lack of courage, 'moral' courage. Strength. Yes, maybe that makes more sense than the stuff above. To lack integrity is to be *weak*, as if you can't give a 'law' to yourself (Kant), have no moral self-discipline, succumb easily to temptations or take the easy way out. Kant might say -- partially backing up what I wrote above -- that such a person is not truly autonomous and hence not a fully realized self, but I don't know how much the ordinary person or our ordinary intuitions would agree with that. I suppose the essential thing is just the lack of strength and courage, the not-asserting-oneself with respect to values that one is seen as sharing with everyone -- because everyone acknowledges on some level the worth of the ideal of integrity, and so if you nonetheless ignore it you must be weak, unwilling to follow through on your own values because they're too hard.

....Dad also discusses Sartre's analysis of bad faith and all that. I've written about these subjects before. Does Sartre succeed in showing that a person can't 'be himself,' that sincerity is an illusory ideal?

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[1] Again, that isn't entirely fair. He took stands on measures that benefited business, such as NAFTA.

Mon père thinks not, and I agree. With qualifications. Supposedly humans cannot 'be what they are' because they are essentially consciousness, and consciousness is subject not only to facticity but to transcendence. It transcends itself, transcends its moods, its thoughts, its objects, its past, its facticity, etc. Humans are a fusion of facticity and transcendence -- the former is defined and unfree, the latter undefined and free. [Well, that may be simplistic; see below.] So if humans constantly transcend their facticity, their 'givenness,' the element of unfreedom in their being, they cannot *be themselves*, cannot be simply what they are, and so cannot be sincere or have integrity in any genuine sense. I think this is wrong on the level of ordinary daily life, common sense, interactions with people. Insofar as we can and do distinguish between, on the one hand, a person deceiving himself, deceiving others, dramatically adjusting his behavior to please others, acting with excessive concern for others' opinions, etc., and a person who is being sincere, honest, acting with integrity, and so on, there is clearly some difference at work. In general, the latter is 'being himself,' the former not (depending on the specific circumstances).

However, on a deeper, 'ontological' level Sartre is not off the mark. His observations are in the same spirit as much of Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche and others, so they are certainly not mere fantasies. First of all, incidentally, making a distinction between facticity and transcendence is one way of expressing the incoherence of free will. (That's ironic, since Sartre thought man is absolutely free. But he was confused.) Or, even more paradoxically, a being that is simultaneously facticity and transcendence -- and surely man is -- is a being shot through, at least for itself, with incoherence and paradox. 'In itself' it can't be, since nature is not incoherent, but for itself, yes, such a being is a mystery. Partially free and partially unfree? How are we to make sense of that? Freedom and unfreedom mixed together in the same consciousness? Huh? How is that possible and what does it mean? We have good answers to neither question.

The distinction between 'facticity' and 'transcendence' is obviously imprecise and unclear, like many of Sartre's ideas. It's also a bit artificial, as though there are two definite and clear-cut sides to man. Whatever we decide the concepts mean -- and they do have some meaning -- human consciousness swirls them around together, so that to some extent there is facticity *in* our ever-present 'transcendence' and vice versa. Maybe you can also think of them as denoting our nature viewed from two perspectives: from 'outside' with facticity, as others observe you and judge you as *such-and-such*, and from 'inside' with transcendence, as you implicitly sense that no criticism of you is wholly and forever true, since (as Sartre says) you're not a thing like an inkwell. You transcend yourself (cf. Nagel's distinction between the transcendent 'objective self' and the particular person he happens to be); you cannot be completely summarized in any judgment like 'He's a coward.' In reaction to such a judgment you can even consciously choose to act in the opposite way, thereby disproving the criticism, so to speak.[1] But there may nonetheless be some truth to it -- perhaps in terms of your 'dispositions,' or your desires, or the ways you usually act, or whatever. Compared to other people, it might be true that you tend to be less courageous and more fearful.

I could continue but I'm tired.

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[1] But this stuff about transcendence, I think, is not solely a function of (the 'universal,' 'equal' fact of) human self-consciousness. It's truer of intelligent people than of stupid people, who are more like a 'thing' than the former are. To a relatively large extent they are what they are. They don't 'transcend' themselves as much. -You might think that's silly, but it's not. After all, the psychological reason for and meaning of our self-transcendence (or self-consciousness), which Sartre doesn't really get into because he was obsessed with a confused 'ontology,' is that we internalize the other's perspective. And as I said years ago, the meaning of one kind of intelligence is the ability to internalize or 'imagine' the other's viewpoint (i.e., how the world looks to an other). Thus, greater intelligence means greater self-consciousness means greater 'self-transcendence.' So in a sense I was wrong a moment ago: transcendence *is* a function of self-consciousness, but different people have different degrees of self-consciousness and so of self-transcendence. And so of freedom. Stupid people are, in a way, less *free* than intelligent and rational people, as I said in my senior thesis. (They can't *choose* their acts and beliefs -- on the basis of rational considerations -- to the degree that intelligent, rational people do.) --But these are all mere hypotheses.

Reading Thomas Ferguson's Chomsky-recommended *Golden Rule: The Investment Theory of Party Competition and the Logic of Money-Driven Political Systems* (1995). In an interview on Youtube he repeats an excellent point made by Jesse Jackson in his 1988 campaign: the U.S. subsidizes and sells arms to authoritarian regimes in Third World countries that destroy labor unions (with the help of U.S. wealth and technology), which results in persistent low wages in those countries. This, in turn, causes American companies to relocate their operations to those countries or to use that prospect as a bludgeon against unions, which then leads to lower wages and the destruction of unions in America too. You see the implications. A global decline in wages and workers' power occurs, and "society increasingly takes on the appearance of two opposed classes," or whatever the quotation is from Marx. In the age of globalization, power-structures are able to transfer capital and military technology to wherever they have to in order to extract high profits and suppress labor movements. If you looked at the world from the standpoint of a Martian you would see a mass of wealth and armaments constantly circulating globally among a small group of elites, traveling to wherever it was needed at the moment, wherever discontent was threatening to get out of hand and/or money could be made quickly. Fortunately the situation is too volatile to last forever.

Anyway, the obvious implication that struck me is that if the U.S. government had a real interest in raising American workers' incomes, it would stop supporting the suppression of labor movements elsewhere in the world.

The investment theory of parties is opposed to the more conventional "critical realignment theory," which "understands political change primarily in terms of changing patterns of mass voting behavior."

> Most American elections, it considers, are contests within comparatively stable and coherent 'party systems.' While any number of short-term forces may momentarily alter the balance of power within a particular party system, and cumulative, long-run secular changes may also be at work, the identity of individual party systems rests on durable voting coalitions within the electorate. So long as these voting blocs (which in different party systems may be defined variously along ethnic, class, religious, racial, sexual, or a plurality of other lines) persist, only marginal changes are likely when administrations turn over. Characteristic patterns of voter turnout, party competition, political symbols, public policies, and other institutional expressions of the distribution of power survive from election to election.
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> 'Normal politics,'[1] of course, is not the only kind of politics that occurs in the United States. The 'critical realignments' of critical realignment theory refer to a handful of exceptional elections -- those associated with the New Deal and the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Populist insurrection of the 1890s, the Civil War, and the Jacksonian era are most frequently mentioned, though other dates have also been proposed -- in which extraordinary political pressures find expression. Associated with the rise of new political issues, intense social stress, sharp factional infighting within existing parties, and the rise of strong party movements, these 'critical' or 'realigning' elections sweep away the old party system. Triggering a burst of new legislation and setting off or facilitating other institutional changes that may take years to complete, such elections establish the framework of a new pattern of politics that characterizes the next party system.

This theory emphasizes popular control of public policy; sweeping changes are ascribed to voter sentiment. Unfortunately, a lot of evidence has recently been collected that suggests that "the durable voter coalitions which are supposed to underlie party systems never existed, and that so-called critical realignments are not only very difficult to define, but simply have not witnessed major, lasting shifts in voter sentiment." Three researchers sympathetic to the theory argue that, contrary to its predictions, "indications of substantial continuity of the alignment of electoral forces across virtually the whole sweep of American electoral

[1] That reminds me of Kuhnian 'normal science.' The whole theory is reminiscent of Kuhn's work on scientific revolutions.

history can be observed.... Electoral patterns do not, by themselves, clearly and unequivocally point to the occurrence of partisan realignment." In other words, partisan realignments, which have indisputably occurred periodically, can apparently not be explained by (massive changes in) electoral behavior. So we need another explanation. Ferguson provides one: in his theory, business elites, not voters, play the leading part. Parties are not what they have typically been conceived of, as machines to get out the vote. Instead, their real market consists of major 'investors.' (The word 'investor' is to be understood in a broader sense than the ordinary 'investor of capital.') "Blocs of major investors define the core of political parties and are responsible for most of the signals the party sends to the electorate."

> During realignments, I shall argue, basic changes take place in the core investment blocs which constitute parties. More specifically, realignments occur when cumulative long-run changes in industrial structures (commonly interacting with a variety of short-run factors, notably steep economic downturns) polarize the business community, thus bringing together a new and powerful bloc of investors with durable interests. As this process begins, party competition heats up and at least some differences between the parties emerge more clearly.... Assuming that the system crisis eventually eases....the fresh 'hegemonic bloc' that has come to power enjoys excellent prospects as long as it can hold itself together. Benefiting from incumbency advantage and the chance to implement its program, the new bloc's major problem is to manage the tensions among its various parts, while of course making certain that large groups of voters do not become highly mobilized against it -- either by making positive appeals to some or by minimizing voter turnout, or both.

Ordinarily most voters can have almost no influence on public policy because they don't sufficiently invest themselves in it. They have other priorities, e.g. living their lives. Hence, it will be major investors who set the political agenda. One predictive consequence of this theory is that "on all issues affecting the vital interests that major investors have in common, no party competition will take place." This is clearly borne out by the evidence. Certain issues, namely the most important ones to voters, rarely show up in campaigns; and when something like healthcare reform does, it's because one bloc of major investors no longer has an interest in ignoring it. If you look at polls you'll see that voters' attitudes on healthcare reform haven't changed much in decades -- they've wanted national health insurance. But major investors haven't, so it hasn't happened.

Ferguson's book is excellent.

Interesting point he makes in a footnote: "In regard to the progress of the movement for women's rights, it surely mattered a great deal that two of the biggest and fastest-growing sectors in the early stages of industrialization -- textiles, and the brewing and liquor sectors -- were dead set against women's suffrage. One was opposed because initially women's suffrage would likely have led to a stronger political position for its own workforce (which included many women and children); the other because of the leading roles women played in the Temperance campaign. Nor was it accidental that the final successful campaign for women's voting rights coincided with World War I, when public hysteria and official investigations had virtually immobilized the heavily German-oriented brewers."

Ferguson briefly analyzes the successive party systems of American history: Federalists vs. Jeffersonian Republicans, the Jacksonian system, the Civil War system, the system of 1896, and the New Deal system. I would add that the most recent system has been the one that began in the 1980s, as the New Deal system finally collapsed. (I wonder, though, if this notion of party systems is a bit artificial, contrived.) Even Ferguson's short sketch of that system in the first chapter is very interesting. He thinks that the most important segment of Roosevelt's political coalition was not workers, blacks and the poor but "a new 'historical bloc' of high-technology industries, investment banks, and internationally oriented commercial banks." Nonetheless, masses of ordinary voters did succeed for the first time in organizing themselves and "pooling resources to become major independent investors in a party system. Their success in this decade contrasts vividly with their failures during previous party systems, and vividly underscores the investment theory of political parties' strictures on the importance of distinguishing between simple rises in voter

turnout, such as characterized the Jacksonian Party System, [and which are emphasized by conventional electoral theories of politics] and the real growth in the political power of mass voters that came with their effective organization." Mere high levels of voting aren't enough; *organization* is necessary, because unless you *invest enormous resources* in politics you won't achieve anything.

Ferguson attributes the rise of right-wing nationalist sentiment in the Republican party during the 1950s and 1960s to the revival of world economic competition, which "sharpened protectionist tendencies in industries like steel, textiles, and shoes." These and other industries were probably more important to Goldwater's 1964 campaign than conservative grassroots movements, which, after all, would have gotten nowhere without funding.

Enlightening thoughts on business and politics in the early 20th century. Investment and commercial bankers had been in the Democratic party in the 1880s and part of the 1890s because it stood for free trade and I don't know why else (I suppose it was also a little more pro-labor than the Republicans, and banks had no particular reason to be rabidly anti-labor); the Republican was the party of industrialists -- high tariffs, anti-labor, etc. But banks went over to the Republican party in the late 1890s when Free Silver and Populist advocates briefly captured the Democrats. (Banks favored the gold standard, I suppose because it meant a lower money supply and thus lower inflation.) Financiers stayed with the Republicans because their massive investments in the late '90s and after in huge trusts that gave them a controlling stake in industry caused them to have largely the same interests as industry -- protectionism, etc. So Republicans, being, on the whole, the party of both finance and industry, dominated the era. World War I upset this situation. Many industrial firms became even more ardent economic nationalists because the worldwide industrial expansion had "left them face to face with vigorous foreign competitors." The labor-intensive ones also remained viciously anti-union. On the other hand, capital-intensive firms like Standard Oil and General Electric, which had grown disproportionately during the war, preferred to be more conciliatory with their workforce, and the really strong ones favored lower tariffs, "both to stimulate world commerce and to open up other countries to them." International banks shared these interests, because the war had turned the U.S. from a net debtor to a net creditor country, which meant that American banks wanted Europe to recover economically so as to pay off its debts. And in order to do that, European countries had to run export surpluses. "They needed to sell around the world, and they, or at least someone they traded with in a multilateral trading system, urgently needed to earn dollars by selling into the United States." American banks therefore opposed the high tariffs that protected much American industry. –The conflict between, on the one hand, banks and capital-intensive, internationally oriented firms and, on the other hand, labor-intensive, protectionist industries like steel, textiles and coal, "runs through all the major foreign policy disputes of the 1920s: the League of Nations, the World Court, the great battles over tariffs," and so on. Initially the protectionist forces had the upper hand: "they defeated the Leagues, kept the U.S. out of the World Court, and raised the tariff to ionospheric levels. But most trends in the world economy were against them. Throughout the 1920s the ranks of the largely Eastern internationalist bloc swelled." The largest firms of the multinational bloc "also dominated major American foundations, which were coming to exercise major influence not only on the climate of opinion but on the specific content of American public policy."

Incidentally, a number of businessmen in the capital-intensive, multinational bloc "played important roles in virtually all major developments in labor policy across the 1920s. These included the campaign that forced the steel industry to accept the eight-hour day; the milestone Railway Labor Act; and the increasing criticism of the use of injunctions in labor disputes....that eventually led to the Norris-La Guardia Act" of 1932.

"Under all these accumulating tensions the elite core of the Republican Party began to disintegrate." (Another interesting side-note is that the fact that a lot of leading bankers were Jewish fomented the era's anti-Semitism among industrialists like Henry Ford, who propagated the prejudice.) Many major businesses went over to the Democrats. But things got complicated in the late 1920s and especially with the onset of the Great Depression. Herbert Hoover was in thrall to big banks, which caused him to keep America on the gold standard (even after England had gone off it) and oppose expansionary monetary policies as well as deficit-financed government expenditures. Industrialists and farmers also wanted even higher tariffs, but Hoover wasn't sympathetic. "Hoover's commitment to gold began driving inflationist, usually protectionist

businessmen out of the GOP to the Democrats." Even some powerful bankers came to support Roosevelt -- and bank reform as eventually embodied in the Glass-Steagall Act, which completely separated investment from commercial banking -- as they saw that workers, farmers and many industrialists were "up in arms against finance in general." Under pressure from almost everyone but banks, Roosevelt took the country off the gold standard in 1933, which helped the economy. His NRA, too, was good for industrialists and farmers, was in fact a coalition built around them. Thus, by the miracles of political alchemy, the formerly free-trade (and even more formerly bank-representing) Democratic party had temporarily become the party of protectionists and industrialists. The capital-intensive, multinational bloc discussed above was still (I think) loyal to the Democratic party, but for the moment its interest in free trade, insofar as it still existed in the depths of the Great Depression, was subordinated to the country's need for the NRA-administered "national recovery."

But not for long. The NRA was only a modest success, and Roosevelt turned toward freer trade and away from proposals for more inflation. That is, he embraced the banks and the capital-intensive industries that had good long-term prospects in the world economy. And so was born, as Ferguson says, "the first successful capital-intensive-led political coalition in history," in 1935 or '36, with the Second New Deal. This is when the party system of 1896, which had been defined by the hegemonic unity of (labor-intensive, protectionist) industry and finance in the Republican party, finally passed away into a new hegemony of capital-intensive, internationally oriented industries and (most) banks. (Hence "multinational liberalism.") Unlike labor-intensive industries, they could afford to support, indeed to help write, the Wagner Act and the Social Security Act. In the election of 1936, when he was inveighing to the public against "economic royalists," Roosevelt was being supported and funded by a galaxy of bankers and executives from oil, GE, IBM, tobacco, ITT, Sears Roebuck, etc. etc.

Ferguson's investment theory of politics is so obvious, especially after you've read all his empirical substantiations of it, that you can't help but....be *unsurprised* it has been attacked by mainstream political scientists, including Theda Skocpol. Obviously it isn't the only way to understand political dynamics, as if no other approach has any value, but it's clearly central to a full understanding. Contrary to Skocpol's criticisms, I doubt that Ferguson significantly overestimates the role of business in American politics.

In another essay Ferguson starts out by noting that, despite all the propaganda, no 'right turn' occurred in the 1980s among the public. Polls prove this. As one author says, "the policy right turn of the Reagan years cannot be accounted for as a response to public demands."

Now I'm reading George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. As Chomsky said, it's outstanding.

Orwell discussing all the vicious hateful propaganda in the Spanish civil war coming from Communists, the bourgeois press and others: "One of the most horrible features of war is that all the war-propaganda, all the screaming and lies and hatred, comes invariably from people who are not fighting."

January, 2011

Reading Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958). One of my life-goals is to explain the first half of the 20th century in the context of the evolution of international capitalism. I want to understand all this imperialist and nationalist and totalitarian nonsense from the ground up -- from the economy up. And capitalism itself, or rather mature capitalism, is a semi-totalitarian system: corporations are totalitarian entities, and the state aims to enforce on the populace ideological uniformity and obedience (the hegemony of the bourgeoisie), etc. More broadly, I want to understand how and why the world-system has evolved as it has in the last three hundred years or so. Not just the empirical history, but the systemic dynamics behind it.

[This long description of Arendt's book is insufficiently critical. Her book is very definitely not Marxist enough, and a lot of its arguments are wrong or simplistic.]

Even in the first few pages Arendt already puts forward provocative and illuminating theses about antisemitism in the early 20th century. Parallels with the masses' reasons for hating the French aristocracy prior to the Revolution: not because of the aristocracy's power but because of its *dying* power, its status as

a class of mere wealthy parasites who had no real power anymore. Same with Jewry in Europe later -- its power waning but its wealth less so. No longer had even the moderate legitimacy of fifty years before.

Somehow I've never taken very seriously the role of Jews in the rise of modern Europe and the world wars, I suppose because antisemitism has never interested me even as an object of study. It has seemed so stupid and contemptible that I've seen it as only a manifestation of xenophobia and scapegoating. But Arendt's fascinating analysis of the recent history of European Jewry has convinced me, more or less, that Jews, in being a non-national anomaly in the European nation-state system and having a command of massive wealth and financial know-how, international connections by virtue of being the (non-national) indispensable servants of political power, etc., were for a long time practically the linchpin of the nation-state system with its 19th-century balance of power. They were the state bankers, the sources of political news, the representatives of diplomatic cross-channels, the financial advisers and assistants in peace treaties, etc. With the age of imperialism, however, they started to become less important, since other sectors of the bourgeoisie finally decided that it could after all be productive to invest in the state -- a militaristic, expansionist state -- with the result that the state ceased to be primarily reliant on Jews for its credit and so forth. At the same time, the onset of imperialism gradually led to the demise of the precarious balance of power between states, which meant that the role of Jews as the emissaries of peace, diplomacy and internationalism became less valued. "Just because the Jews had been used as a non-national element, they could be of value in war and peace only as long as during the war everybody tried consciously to keep the possibilities of peace intact, only as long as everybody's aim was a peace of compromise and the re-establishment of a *modus vivendi*. As soon as 'victory or death' became a determining policy, and war actually aimed at the complete annihilation of the enemy, the Jews could no longer be of any use." Thus, ironically, it's precisely because Jews were the only non-national European people and even became the symbol of internationalism and comity between nations that they were threatened more than anyone else by the "sudden collapse of the system of nation-states." It's easy to see how they would become the bête noire of all European nationalists and imperialists, especially since their former power had relatively disappeared.

For a long time Jews, being the impartial servants of every state, were uninterested in politics as such. It's another irony, therefore, that because of their intimate ties to states they were the one social group associated (by the populace) with the state (which had ceased to be tied to one particular class). They were seen by many as the puppeteers pulling the strings of international politics, when in reality they had little interest in politics. But the misperception had its nefarious impact: because "the only social group that seemed to represent the state were the Jews," for over a hundred years antisemitism built up among groups of people who came into conflict with the state. In fact, "the only class which proved almost immune from antisemitic propaganda were the workers who, absorbed in the class struggle and equipped with a Marxist explanation of history, never came into direct conflict with the state but only with another class of society, the bourgeoisie, which the Jews certainly did not represent, and of which they were never a significant part."

Arendt outlines the history of 19th-century antisemitism and then notes that it largely receded from open political view in the two decades or so before World War I, as Europe expanded economically and politics became a monotonous, theatrical affair. Jewish bankers declined in power and importance as big business increased its influence over the state; shifts in Jewish occupations occurred. More Jews left finance for independent business -- the garment industry, food commerce, etc. -- and, even more significantly, intellectual pursuits. The birth of a Jewish intelligentsia "proceeded at a fantastic pace. The crowding of Jewish sons of well-to-do parents into the cultural occupations was especially marked in Germany and Austria, where a great proportion of cultural institutions, like newspapers, publishing, music, and theater, became Jewish enterprises." Perhaps to compensate for their lack of a national home, many Jews pursued lives in "the aura of fame, becoming outstanding reviewers, critics, collectors, and organizers of what was famous. The 'radiant power' [of fame] was a very real social force by which the socially homeless were able to establish a home." They became the representatives of "a nebulous international society [of the arts, the intellect, fame, etc.] in which national prejudices no longer seemed valid." The Jewish question no longer bothered serious statesmen and publicists, but "Jews became the symbol of Society as such and the

objects of hatred for all those whom society did not accept. Antisemitism, having lost its ground in the special conditions that had influenced its development during the nineteenth century, could be freely elaborated by charlatans and crackpots into that weird mixture of half-truths and wild superstitions which emerged in Europe after 1914, the ideology of all frustrated and resentful elements." It was the ideology of *ressentiment* and envy, combined with contempt (for the Jew): a singularly confused and psychologically potent ideology. Social rejects like Hitler who hated society and the state -- both of which they identified with Jewry -- turned to antisemitism as their salvation, their means of revenge and victory over their nebulous enemies. In the end, "the Jewish question in its social aspect turned into a catalyst of social unrest, until finally a disintegrated society recrystallized ideologically around a possible massacre of Jews."

Remember, too, the importance of 'bourgeois decadence' for the early national syndicalists and Fascists. For many in Europe -- those among the social and political outcasts, the *déclassés*, the discontented of all sorts -- Jews, who had a huge cultural, intellectual, social, artistic, and economic presence, became synonymous with bourgeois decadence. It's hard now to imagine how integral Jewry was to the cultural and social life of Europe in the early 20th century, and how ambivalent everyone (including Jews) was toward this people -- fascinated with them, envious of them, contemptuous of them. Given the prior decades of near-universal European antisemitism, or something approaching antisemitism, it wasn't such a leap for Germans and others in the 1920s and 1930s to reach new peaks of antisemitic fervor. All that was necessary to set it off was a series of shocks like the aftermath of World War I and severe economic dislocation. In fact, considering the decades of business-funded patriotic, imperialist, nation-worshiping propaganda, together with the 'alien,' 'treasonous' presence of Jews in the body politic, in addition to the catastrophic defeats of several countries in World War I, it would be surprising if something like Nazism *hadn't* happened. Especially in light of its usefulness to certain sectors of business and the military. And of course the racial thinking of a decaying feudal ethos, with the aristocratic emphasis on 'blood' (and purity, caste, etc.) and the peasantry's connection to the land (hence the nation, the *Volk*), made for a potent ideological concoction.

In contemporary popular conservatism there is no longer the emphasis on blood or race or the *Volk*, since that was all discredited with Nazism and in any case lost its 'sponsoring' social classes with the demise of the aristocracy and the later demise of the peasantry -- i.e., the final definitive death of feudalism and its mindset -- but there is still the concern with the nation and its hallowed traditions threatened by invading outsiders (who, as earlier, are conceived as allied with the state and big banks, and who are degenerate, treasonous, international-oriented, etc.).

....Arendt doesn't really get into this, but European history is almost *beautiful* in the majestic sweep of its dialectical self-underminings. Let me experiment with some ideas. From the 1400s or so, the nation-state was born from the wreckage of feudalism through the agency of absolute monarchs, burgher-ish economic interest groups, mercantilist policies, aristocrats who 'enclosed' plots of land to destroy the village system of the peasantry and profit off the production of wool, etc. In other words, the nation-state was created in large part under the impetus of early capitalism, and capitalism could not have got off the ground without the creation and consolidation of nation-states (national markets, ex-peasant labor forces, centralized political and economic power-structures, and so forth). Also, the European power-balanced nation-state system seems to have required an international class of Jewish economic and political functionaries in both its birth and its persistence into the late 19th century. A network of unitary nation-states was thus created, along with the concepts of nationhood, people-unity, and various forms of nationalism. The old concepts of race and 'blood,' too, fit into this conceptual system, in fact were probably given new life by the modern phenomenon of nationhood.[1] The point is that all these un-capitalist concepts and things were originally created and continued to be propagated partially under the pressures of capitalism. And Jews, by helping to create and hold together the system of nation-states, were unwittingly instrumental in the spread of nationalist and racialist ideologies.

But capitalism kept expanding even as the nation-state increased its authority and power, until finally the former could no longer be kept within the bounds of the latter. "Imperialism was born [in the

[1] But they were especially reinvigorated by imperialism.

late 19th century] when the ruling class in capitalist production came up against national limitations to its economic expansion." Largely under the influence of the bourgeoisie, expansion became "the ultimate political goal of foreign policy." With imperialistic expansion came a new, more jingoistic nationalism and racism, which boded well neither for Jews nor for the nation-state system and its balance of power. A war-to-the-death among nations ensued (with alliances, yes, but only provisional); the tendency was for the bourgeoisie and political power-structures of each country to strive for continental and world dominance, i.e. world empire, which would destroy the very nature of the nation-state, namely the union of a single more-or-less homogeneous people.[1] In this process, for reasons discussed earlier, international Jewry would be bound to lose its influence with the state, which would happily sacrifice it -- this non-national people, this people of outsiders to every nation -- to the interests of imperialism. Some sort of catastrophe for the Jewish people would be highly likely in view of their no longer having allies among governments and living in the midst of rabidly nationalist, racist peoples. And when some of these nation-states failed in their imperialistic wars against others, their revengeful, bitter people would turn against outsiders in their midst. And more wars might well result, wars of revenge and further conquest, which, if the technology of destruction was highly advanced, might end in the final destruction of the European state system -- destroyed largely under the pressures of the very (economic) dynamics whose incipient expressions had given it birth centuries earlier. It would take the intervention of relative outsiders, such as the United States and Russia, to help reconstruct the old system in a less 'nationalist,' more integrated way. These outsiders (along with insiders) might even forbid the new old countries from investing in militaries and armaments; only the outsiders would be allowed to have powerful militaries to police the global order.

You see the dialectical logic to it all. I've barely even outlined it, though.

With the destruction of the old system, nationalism and imperialism would not be able to continue in the same forms as before. But new forms of exploitation of the rest of the world would be found, as they have been. Imperialism would take more 'regulated' and 'coordinated' forms as the connections between business and the state, and between various states and multinational businesses, etc., intensified such that a mature state-capitalism evolved. The nation-state would become more and more beholden to the bourgeoisie,[2] relatively less important and independent as supranational economic organizations and legal frameworks, etc., developed. Throughout all this, the nation-state would be slowly, imperceptibly deteriorating also because of the economic contradictions of capitalism, the repeated and prolonged social dislocations of millions of people, ever-recurring class polarization, explosive social and economic resentments, population growth, labor migrations, increasing capital mobility, and other divisive forces. That's where we are now. As I see it, this time -- in the next fifty or a hundred years -- there's no saving the nation-state. The system is decaying internally; its demise won't be 'external,' the result of countries trying to conquer the world and/or destroy each other (in which case there would be the possibility that countries could be reconstructed after destructive wars like WWII), but internal, in that the very 'structural integrity' of the nation-state is collapsing. The state as a principle of organization is being superseded and internally undermined.

Actually, according to Arendt's strict and literal understanding of it, the nation-state is probably already effectively dead. If indeed it ever existed.

...."The bourgeoisie, so long excluded from government by the nation-state and by their own lack of interest in public affairs, was politically emancipated by imperialism." A bit simplistic. "It is well known how little the owning classes had aspired to government, how well contented they had been with every type

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[1] In this strict sense, the U.S. obviously isn't a nation-state.

[2] This would be even more probable due to the aristocracy's destruction in the prior orgy of racist and nationalist wars. (To repeat: racism and nationalism are propagated through the intersection of old semi-feudal, aristocratic traditions/institutions with new capitalist economic dynamics. For instance, old habits of race-thinking are given new popular life by imperialism, becoming more virulent and dangerous in the process. (In general, 'residual' phenomena can be revived and exacerbated by modern tendencies -- as with fundamentalist religion.) And certain kinds of nationalism too are encouraged by imperialism, quite apart from the fact that nation-states themselves evolved with primitive capitalism.)

of state that could be trusted with protection of property rights. For them, indeed, the state had always been only a well-organized police force." That may be true, more or less. The early forms of 'state capitalism' began when the bourgeoisie took effective control of the state to guide it directly toward their ends, in the late 19th century. Which coincided with the era of imperialism. Businessmen became politicians, but they didn't even have to; they could control the state indirectly.

Arendt seems to think that one way to conceptualize totalitarianism, with its institutionalized terror and mammoth bureaucracy, is as the application of imperialist power-structures and -tactics -- which pursue the expansion of power for its own sake (and for the sake of profit), not for the more 'respectable' (liberal-democratic) sake of 'laws' or social order -- to the domestic population. That's a little simplistic but thought-provoking.

Interesting:

> When imperialism entered the scene of politics with the scramble for Africa in the eighties, it was promoted by businessmen, opposed fiercely by the governments in power, and welcomed by a surprisingly large section of the educated classes. To the last it seemed to be God-sent, a cure for all evils, an easy panacea for all conflicts. And it is true that imperialism in a sense did not disappoint these hopes. It gave a new lease on life to political and social structures which were quite obviously threatened by new social and political forces and which, under other circumstances, without the interference of imperialist developments, would hardly have needed two world wars to disappear.

In a footnote she quotes J. A. Hobson: "The [civil] Services offer the clearest and most natural support to an aggressive foreign policy; expansion of the empire appeals powerfully to the aristocracy and the professional classes by offering new and ever-growing fields for the honorable and profitable employment of their sons."

"The most radical and the only secure form of possession is destruction, for only what we have destroyed is safely and forever ours." Think of Oscar Wilde's apothegm that 'all men kill the thing they love.' Again, simplistic, but insightful. In wanting to possess something or someone, you don't want to let it live freely; you want to *freeze* it as *yours*. But there are different kinds of love, and in its active fullness love needn't be, and probably rarely is, morbid. The love that Wilde talks about is surely a caricature of love. -Or perhaps it's better to say that this urge to possess is only one side of any healthy love, because real love, in having respect for its object, also loves its object's aliveness and freedom. So it seems that a basic tension is at the heart of love. The friend or lover wants his friend or beloved to be *his* before others', but he also wants him or her to be a free, happy, living human being (which entails relationships with others, etc.). In any case, the more that love loves the freedom and aliveness of its object as opposed to its 'possession' of it, the more healthy and authentic it is.

Apparently Rosa Luxemburg thought that "the historical process of the accumulation of capital depends in all its aspects upon the existence of noncapitalist social strata," so that "imperialism is the political expression of the accumulation of capital in its competition for the possession of the remainders of the noncapitalistic world." But I don't understand the reasoning behind her first proposition. Presumably it has something to do with capital's needing investment opportunities for excess, 'overproduced' capital -- and for some reason these investment opportunities are supposed not to exist (at least in sufficient quantity) in a society that has become thoroughly capitalist. That may be true, but I don't know exactly why. I guess it's just because the 'market gets saturated.'

....Imperialism of course had many uses. One of them is that at a time when class struggle and other divisions were threatening to tear nations apart, it somewhat unified the country. It provided different groups of people with a common interest. It also fostered patriotism. And it gave the excess population a place to go, which helped stabilize society. -In its uniting of capital and the mob, imperialism contains the seeds of fascism.

It also prepared the world for totalitarianism in its awe-inspiring brutality. Due to Leopold II's policy in the Congo, the population was reduced from between 20 and 40 million to 8 million.

....According to Arendt, the difference between the old colonialism and the 'new' imperialism is (I think) that the first meant colonial *trade*, whereas the second meant direct investment in another territory and the extraction of profits by the investors.

In her interesting discussion of imperialism in South Africa (which would later influence the Nazi elites) -- in which 'superfluous' men from all classes in Europe, elements of the capitalism-spawned 'mob,' sought their fortunes in gold- and diamond-mining, financial speculation, exploitation of cheap black labor, etc. -- Arendt concludes that "South Africa's race society taught the mob the great lesson of which it had always had a confused premonition, that through sheer violence an underprivileged group could create a class lower than itself, that for this purpose it did not even need a revolution but could band together with groups of the ruling classes, and that foreign or backward peoples offered the best opportunities for such tactics." Important lessons for Nazism.

"Nazism and Bolshevism owe more to Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism (respectively) than to any other ideology or political movement. This is most evident in foreign policies, where the strategies of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia have followed so closely the well-known programs of conquest outlined by the pan-movements before and during the first World War that totalitarian aims have frequently been mistaken for the pursuance of some permanent German or Russian interests." An acute suggestion in the case of Bolshevism, though also debatable. But it's acute in recognizing that Bolshevism (as a mass movement and a set of political and economic structures) ultimately was more like a kind of nationalism and imperialism than Marxism or socialism. The initial Marxist and socialist impulses withered away; the end-result was just another imperialist 'nation-state' (loosely speaking).

Another way to look at totalitarianism isn't to ask why *did* it happen in Germany and Russia (and partly Italy) but why *didn't* it happen elsewhere. For the *potential* exists in state-capitalism everywhere, with its bureaucracy, imperialism, fusion of business and the state, suppression of opposition movements (like the labor movement), suppression of democracy, etc. The answer is that all these authority-structures are not enough to create a genuine totalitarian state; what is also needed is popular support, at least at the beginning. The people have to be so swept up in a movement that they willingly give up the elements of democracy that do exist, the popular institutions (representing specific interests) that exist. Then the state (and to an extent big business), no longer having to deal with 'countervailing forces,' will become all-powerful, and terror will probably be institutionalized to prevent popular opposition from arising in the future, etc. Fortunately the people don't voluntarily give up their power except in the most pathological of circumstances, when mass confusion and despair have caused them to be seduced by ideologies that implicitly benefit power while seeming to benefit the people.

Suggestive:

> While overseas imperialism, its anti-national tendencies notwithstanding, succeeded in giving a new lease on life to the antiquated institutions of the nation-state, continental imperialism [as embodied in the pan-movements, like the German] was and remained unequivocally hostile to all existing political bodies. Its general mood, therefore, was far more rebellious and its leaders far more adept at revolutionary rhetoric. While overseas imperialism had offered real enough panaceas for the residues of all classes, continental imperialism had nothing to offer except an ideology and a movement. Yet this was quite enough in a time which preferred a key to history to political action, when men in the midst of communal disintegration and social atomization wanted to belong at any price.

Just as continental imperialism "sprang from the frustrated ambitions of countries which did not get their share in the sudden [imperialist] expansion of the 1880s, so tribal nationalism appeared as the nationalism of those peoples who had not participated in national emancipation and had not achieved the sovereignty of a nation-state. Wherever the two frustrations were combined, as in multinational Austria-Hungary and Russia, the pan-movements naturally found their most fertile soil."

Aside from being multinational, Austria-Hungary and Russia were also distinguished by their despotic character -- their rule-by-decree and -bureaucracy. This inheritance of relative lawlessness influenced the pan-movements (German and Slav), which had contempt for constitutional government. -Another example of how totalitarianism resulted in part from residual pre-modern features of European society.

Even in Germany there was no tradition of liberal democracy. The Weimar Republic was erected on a rotten foundation.

....Arendt points out some differences between Italian Fascism and German and Soviet totalitarianism. For one thing, in the latter two the totalitarian movements didn't let themselves become identified with the state, as Fascism supposedly did. The totalitarian Party distinguished itself from the state, which was subordinated to the Party. Fascism remained basically a nationalism not opposed to the state as such, whereas Nazism and Bolshevism were a 'supranationalism' that (at least in their ideology) aimed to destroy the state. Everything was to be subordinated to the movement and its *movement*, its never becoming static (state-ic). But surely this was a tendency in Fascist ideology as well.

Interesting:

> Mussolini's Fascism up to 1938 was not totalitarian but just an ordinary nationalist dictatorship developed logically from a multiparty democracy. [Again, simplistic, because it at least *aspired* to be a movement and had some of a movement's features.] For there is indeed some truth in the old truism about the affinity between majority rule and dictatorship, but this affinity has nothing whatever to do with totalitarianism. It is obvious that, after many decades of inefficient and muddled multiparty rule [as in Italy], the seizure of the state for the advantage of one party can come as a great relief because it assures at least, though only for a limited time, some consistency, some permanence, and a little less contradiction.

I think she's mistaken in arguing that Fascism was *categorically* different from totalitarianism, separated from it by an abyss. It was indeed a 'movement' (and thus *potentially* totalitarian -- as after 1938) but simply much less of one than Nazism and Bolshevism. Also, surely Nazism got much of its support from the fact that ordinary Germans were fed up with the Weimar Republic's 'inefficient and muddled multiparty rule' -- and in this respect it was similar to Fascism.

The situation in Europe in the decades before and after the first World War was so unstable that the two great wars, as well as all the nationalist, 'supranationalist,' antisemitic, imperialist, racist, anti-capitalist, potentially totalitarian movements, seem nearly inevitable. So much nationalist, racist, feudal and capitalist oppression of hundreds of millions -- and the national strivings of so many peoples before and after the war -- and the simultaneous existence and intermingling of so many different social structures, some ancient and some ultra-modern: it was a volcano with a hundred possible erupting-points. In the 1920s there were all the artificial new countries in Southern and Eastern Europe with resentful minorities clamoring for 'national liberation' and states resentful of having to protect their minorities (or allow them to be protected by the League of Nations), and the stateless people in Central and Western Europe whose human rights were not recognized, and a diffuse attitude of cynicism and hatred of everything prevailed in the midst of general social disintegration. The plight of minorities and stateless people is particularly poignant. States without League of Nations-imposed 'minority obligations' were not, according to their political representatives, responsible for people of a different nationality who happened to live within their borders. Their laws didn't have to respect such people. The politicians who made these arguments "thereby admitted -- and were quickly given the opportunity to prove it practically with the rise of stateless people -- that the transformation of the state from an instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation [i.e. of 'nationals,' people belonging to the nation by blood] had been completed; the nation had conquered the state, national interest had priority over law long before Hitler could pronounce 'right is what is good for the German people.'"

As Arendt says, the danger of these developments, e.g. the rise of stateless people whose human rights were respected by no government, had been inherent in the nation-state from the beginning. "But insofar as the establishment of nation-states coincided with the establishment of constitutional government, they always had represented and been based upon the rule of law as against the rule of arbitrary administration and despotism. So that when the precarious balance between nation and state, between national interest and legal institutions broke down, the disintegration of this form of government and of organization of peoples came about with terrifying swiftness. Its disintegration, curiously enough, started at precisely the moment when the right to national self-determination was recognized for all of Europe and when its essential conviction, the supremacy of the will of the nation over all legal and 'abstract' institutions, was universally accepted."

When a person was de-nationalized by his government, as Jews were in Germany in the 1930s and millions of other people were elsewhere (such as Russians who had fled the Revolution), he became a 'legal freak.' He was a legal non-entity. No country wanted to import a flood of de-nationalized refugees, but their original country wouldn't take them back. So they were often sent to internment camps. They had lost all rights by virtue of being stateless.

It became the role of the police to deal with the stateless. The latter were *their* responsibility. "This was the first time the police in Western Europe had received authority to act on its own, to rule directly over people; in one sphere of public life it was no longer an instrument to carry out and enforce the law, but had become a ruling authority independent of government and ministries.... The greater the ratio of stateless and potentially stateless to the population at large -- in pre-war France it had reached 10 percent of the total -- the greater the danger of transformation into a police state." Once a state starts depriving people of citizenship on the basis of their race or nationality or political beliefs, etc., it becomes more and more difficult "to resist the temptation to deprive *all* citizens of legal status and rule them with an omnipotent police." The final stage of totalitarianism.

Arendt gives a plausible reason for the fact that full-fledged totalitarian regimes occurred only in Russia and Germany (and the latter became *fully* totalitarian only with the coming of the war, as the regime expanded into other countries): totalitarianism requires a huge surplus population in order to give free rein to its terrorizing and exterminating measures. Otherwise too large a percentage of the population will be sacrificed. Totalitarian movements occurred in many European countries and in some cases they came to power, but having done so they couldn't 'fulfill' themselves simply because "they did not control enough human material to allow for total domination and its inherent great losses in population."

She also makes an interesting distinction between the mob and the masses. The former is more characteristic of 19th century antisemitism, pan-nationalism, the 'butcher brigades' of the Dreyfus Affair, the Black Hundreds of the Russian pogroms, etc.; the latter is more characteristic of the 20th century and mass movements. The mob is still infected with a certain bourgeois individualism, and its members never reach "the point of complete loss of individual claims and ambition" such that their individual identity is extinguished permanently "and not just for the moment of collective heroic action." The mob is a byproduct of capitalist production; the masses, according to Arendt, emerge from the breakdown of class society. "The fall of protecting class walls transformed the slumbering majorities behind all political parties into one great unorganized, structureless mass of furious individuals who had nothing in common except their vague apprehension that the hopes of political-party members were doomed, that, consequently, the most respected, articulate and representative members of the community were fools and that all the powers that be were not so much evil as they were equally stupid and fraudulent."

The mass man is remarkably selfless. Arendt refers to "the radical loss of self-interest, the cynical or bored indifference in the face of death or other personal catastrophes, the passionate inclination to the most abstract notions as guides for life, and the general contempt for even the most obvious rules of common sense." Strangely enough, highly cultured people – intellectuals, artists, etc. -- can be particularly attracted to mass movements; their "highly differentiated individualism and sophistication" can actually *encourage* their self-abandonment in the mass.

"The truth is that the masses grew out of the fragments of a highly atomized society whose competitive structure and concomitant loneliness of the individual had been held in check only through

membership in a class. The chief characteristic of the mass man is not brutality and backwardness, but his isolation and lack of normal social relationships. Coming from the class-ridden structure of the nation-state, whose cracks had been cemented with nationalistic sentiment, it is only natural that these masses, in the first helplessness of their new experience, have tended toward an especially violent nationalism, to which mass leaders have yielded against their own instincts and purposes for purely demagogic reasons."

The totalitarian movement and subsequent regime is led by elements of the mob who had earlier withdrawn from society and then took advantage of the breakdown of the class system to lead the masses toward the mob's ends (such as pan-nationalism and destruction of the Jews). (One of the reasons for the mass man's selflessness, by the way, is that the class system's breakdown, or partial breakdown, goes a long way toward abolishing the particularity of interests that had defined political parties and had made possible the competitive play of self-interest in the earlier faction-ridden society. With the class structure in partial collapse, people from all classes can come together as one.)

The regime that results from the mobilization of the atomized but selfless masses is, at least in its logical conclusion, absolutely atomized and individualized. It has no room for human connections of any kind. Various devices are used to undermine family loyalty, friendship-loyalty and so on; all classes and social groups, including even the bureaucracy itself, are periodically liquidated in purges in order to keep the society atomized. (Presumably the Leader need not have all these intentions in his mind; he acts in paranoid, 'purge-happy' ways just because the structure of the regime itself fosters universal paranoia, suspicion and atomization.) In these respects it seems to me that the pure totalitarian regime is but the logic of bureaucracy taken to its horrifying and absurd conclusions.

(It's significant also that the goal of universal atomization is modern business's as well. America is extremely business-run and extremely atomized. But in fact all power-structures are opposed to human connections. Totalitarianism thus amounts to the ultimate realization of the logic implicit in every institution of power -- i.e., the extension of bureaucratic power-relations into every facet of life.)

Totalitarianism has no specific political program, and in the movement-stage its leaders always shun questions about the movement's program. All they preach is world-rule, some kind of solidarity (racial, class, nationalist), and hatred of some enemy or other.[1] "The practical goal of the movement is only to organize as many people as possible and to set and keep them in motion; a political goal that would constitute the end of the movement simply does not exist."

....As you read about the mentality of the mob elements in the 1920s from which Nazism and similar movements sprang, you realize how saturated those elements were in *ressentiment*. Hatred, envy, resentment, self-hatred, the passion to destroy, contempt for everything life-affirming -- and contempt for everything bourgeois, for liberal hypocrisy, for the whole admittedly wretched civilization whose dregs they were. "There was no escape from the daily routine of misery, meekness, frustration, and resentment embellished by a fake culture of educated talk." All this bred a yearning to lose oneself in a movement, a movement of cyclonic mass destruction.

Existentialism, too, was in part an expression of all this nausea. So was Dada, etc.

Both the intellectual elite and the mob were attracted to the "pronounced activism" of totalitarian movements. "What proved so attractive was that terrorism had become a kind of philosophy through which to express frustration, resentment, and blind hatred, a kind of political expressionism which used bombs to express oneself, which....was absolutely willing to pay the price of life for having succeeded in forcing the recognition of one's existence on the normal strata of society. It was still the same spirit and the same game which made Goebbels, long before the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany, announce with obvious delight that the Nazis, in case of defeat, would know how to slam the door behind them and not be forgotten for centuries."

It's fascinating how new ways of thinking can sometimes strengthen old ways of thinking. Darwinism, interpreted in a certain way, gave 'scientific' legitimacy to residual feudal prejudices about race and the natural superiority of the highest caste and the right of conquest and so forth. The partisans of

[1] Lenin wasn't totalitarian. Russia became such only with Stalin.

tradition or the 'residual' can always interpret science or modern ideas in ways that support tradition. Or, more exactly, they can fuse the two to create a bastardized but apparently 'modern' set of basically traditional ideas.

"Totalitarian propaganda perfects the techniques of mass propaganda, but it neither invents them nor originates their themes. These were prepared for them by fifty years of the rise of imperialism and disintegration of the nation-state, when the mob entered the scene of European politics. Like the earlier mob leaders, the spokesmen for totalitarian movements possessed an unerring instinct for anything that ordinary party propaganda or public opinion did not care or dare to touch. Everything hidden, everything passed over in silence, became of major significance, regardless of its own intrinsic importance. The mob really believed that truth was whatever respectable society had hypocritically passed over, or covered up with corruption." Think of Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck with his conspiracy theories, and other such demagogues. Their audience is the mob. The obsession with Sarah Palin's 'death panels,' Obama's supposed lack of U.S. citizenship, and conspiracy theories is like something out of the 1930s. What makes it all possible -- what creates the 'mob' -- is the lack of a functioning civil society, in particular a labor movement. (Actually, even if there were a labor movement there would still be a mob, but it would be smaller and not as influential. There are always going to be people whom the capitalist system ruins and fills with a destructive resentment and hatred. –What's interesting, though, is that much of the contemporary mob is middle-class and reasonably well-off. It shows that mass hatred and resentment are not created only by economic hardship. More generally, they result from a perceived loss or insufficiency of power and recognition.)

Arendt is obviously right that mass movements derive their power from giving people something to belong to, something that restores the self-respect of millions of people who have been atomized and forced to feel powerless, unrecognized, confused.

It's a masterful book, but I think she's wrong to argue that totalitarian regimes and movements differ *essentially* from one-party dictatorships, despotisms, various ultra-conservative movements, etc. Or at least that's misleading. There are totalitarian tendencies in a whole host of phenomena. Think of Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Mussolini's Italy, McCarthyism, a capitalist corporation, Reaganite conservatism, and so forth. It isn't hard to find totalitarian *tendencies* in such things. Luckily the tendencies have rarely come to complete fruition because of countervailing forces.

The genius of full totalitarianism is that it fuses bureaucracy with popular enthusiasm and participation. Bureaucracy grows to an unprecedented level, so that it ideally structures every aspect of life and there is no room for humanity anymore, but it's bureaucracy in the service of a movement, a popular ideology. In order for the movement and ideology to continue dominating everything and retain their momentum, the bureaucracy can't be allowed to become static and ossified; there has to be a constant 'shaking-up' of things, constant motion and continuous devotion to nothing but the Leader, who embodies the movement and ideology. (Think of Mao's Cultural Revolution after he felt that the movement was losing steam. It can't be allowed to become *only* a bureaucracy -- because then it slowly deteriorates and ceases to dominate everything including the individual's inner life.) The Leader's importance is solely a result of that function he serves, not of his particular personality -- which is probably why totalitarian leaders are never particularly concerned with finding a successor. Almost anyone would fit the bill.

The 'pointless' terror of totalitarianism, which intensifies precisely as opposition collapses, is due to the necessity of keeping the movement in motion and all-dominating. 'Objective enemies' have to be invented so that the terror has an excuse for its existence.

Totalitarianism fuses, as it were, the two phenomena that have come into their own in the modern age: bureaucracy and popular movements. And it takes each to its logical conclusion (from one perspective) -- the humanity-negating nature of bureaucracy and the 'massiveness,' the masses-ness, of popular movements. In this sense it can be seen as the perfect symbol of modernity. -Actually it's a good symbol of modernity in more than one way.

Totalitarianism is a form of government, or state, that is logically and historically based on an ideology, such that the structure of the particular state is supposed to be 'logically deducible' from its

ideology and, in addition, has historically emerged from a mass ideological movement. Many modern governments, I suppose, have been swept into power on the basis of a mass movement inspired in part by an ideology, but unless the ideology has then totally dominated society, such that there has been no civil society, no differentiation between the public and private spheres, etc., the regime hasn't been genuinely totalitarian. Of course, a *pure* or *absolutely* totalitarian society has never existed, insofar as even in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia the authorities couldn't completely extirpate freedom.

Arendt on solitude vs. loneliness:

> ....As Epictetus sees it, the lonely man finds himself surrounded by others with whom he cannot establish contact or to whose hostility he is exposed. The solitary man, on the contrary, is alone and therefore 'can be together with himself' since men have the capacity of 'talking with themselves.' In solitude, in other words, I am 'by myself,' together with my self, and therefore two-in-one, whereas in loneliness I am actually one, deserted by all others. All thinking, strictly speaking, is done in solitude and is a dialogue between me and myself; but this dialogue of the two-in-one does not lose contact with the world of my fellow-men because they are represented in the self with whom I lead the dialogue of thought. The problem of solitude is that this two-in-one needs the others in order to become one again: one unchangeable individual whose identity can never be mistaken for that of any other. For the confirmation of my identity I depend entirely upon other people; and it is the great saving grace of companionship for solitary men that it makes them 'whole' again, saves them from the dialogue of thought in which one remains always equivocal, restores the identity which makes them speak with the single voice of one unexchangeable person.
>
> Solitude can become loneliness; this happens when all by myself I am deserted by my own self. Solitary men have always been in danger of loneliness, when they can no longer find the redeeming grace of companionship to save them from duality and equivocality and doubt. Historically, it seems as though this danger became sufficiently great to be noticed by others and recorded by history only in the nineteenth century.... What makes loneliness so unbearable is the loss of one's own self which can be realized in solitude, but confirmed in its identity only by the trusting and trustworthy company of my equals. In this situation, man loses trust in himself as the partner of his thoughts and that elementary confidence in the world which is necessary to make experiences at all. Self and world, capacity for thought and experience are lost at the same time.

Interviewed Chomsky for half an hour. I was going to write a transcription of it here, but the recording device didn't work. Predictably. Asked him first about any current developments in the sciences that he thinks are particularly exciting, but didn't get much of an answer. Got more of one with the question on what explains the decadent intellectual culture of France after World War II: thinks it's due partly to France's long tradition of cultural insularity and arrogance (from the Enlightenment on) -- most biologists were pre-Darwinian until the late 20th century -- and also to France's loss of its preeminent international position after the war. Maybe the arrogance and insularity were even accentuated by that and became perverse. (That's me, not him.) Then asked whether he accepts that it's hard for a radical to avoid continual hypocrisy by participating in society. But the only alternative, of course, is to live in Montana somewhere and avoid everything -- which doesn't help anyone or change anything. But then what about 'active' participation like paying taxes? Doesn't that compromise one's integrity? He was a tax resister for a while, but not on principle; rather, he hoped that would influence others. "The government will get your taxes one way or another," so that isn't really the issue. *Principle* shouldn't be the issue; *tactics* should be the issue. Maybe if you're some religious activist who thinks that his relationship with God requires him to act in certain ways -- principle matters then; but ordinarily it shouldn't be the main point. Then I asked what he thinks about the worker cooperative movement, how much importance he attributes to it, and suggested that maybe the nation-state system is slowly collapsing and as it does so cooperativism is rising like a

phoenix from the ashes. He isn't sure what to think, but is skeptical. Certainly in the U.S. it has huge obstacles; the situation is brighter in Latin America. Recently a multinational corporation closed a factory in Rhode Island; its workers offered to buy it and run it as a cooperative, but the company rejected that offer. Why? Because executives' class loyalty matters more to them than some extra profit. They simply didn't want workers to take matters into their own hands. I also asked a random question about his musical tastes; as I suspected, he prefers the classics (Schubert, Bach, etc.). Up to the 1930s. (My tastes almost exactly.) Used to listen to folk music with his wife. I'd hoped he would get into more detail about Bach and music theory -- prompted him with some remarks on the 'structure' of Bach's music, etc. -- but no such luck.

Nice guy and brilliant, but once you know his worldview his thoughts about things aren't very surprising. When you meet him he comes across as a simple man, just a good, kind guy who doesn't have dark impulses or a contradictory or tormented character, is maybe even somewhat innocent almost like a child. "Absolute moral integrity," as Mailer said. Very simple and pure. He seemed to like me – I think we'd get along well.

We talked about Obama and politics briefly, and the Tea Party. He said that if you read the business press you'll see how worried business is right now about what it's unleashed, all the global warming-deniers and so forth. It ridicules these climate-deniers even as it continues to flood society with propaganda against global warming. But business is starting to get very worried about the long run. As for Obama, he was a "limp rag" coming into office and remains so, because his most important constituency is the rich. When the public was 2 to 1 against extending the Bush tax cuts but Obama caved to the Republicans, you've gotta wonder. If Obama had really been committed to ending them he could have marshaled his forces, rallied his popular support, and made the Republican opposition look terrible. He's a centrist; "he has no principles," as Chomsky said.

I would have liked to stay longer but didn't want to take up too much of his time. He gets a lot of visitors every day.

The main reason I saw him wasn't to ask questions. I didn't have any burning questions I wanted answered. It was just to have the experience -- to meet one of the greatest figures in history and see how I'd react, whether I'd be intimidated or could have a conversation with him or what. I was pleased with the result: I wasn't intimidated at all. We just had a pleasant conversation, which would have been even more pleasant had I not been aware of the time-limit. We're both easygoing people -- I suspect he appreciated my not treating him like a god. If we were closer in age I think we could be good friends.

I also saw Yuja, went to her apartment for a few hours. We had a good time. She's seeing a young Polish guy now whom she really likes, and who's leaving America for two years in one month. So, more heartache for Yuja. More tearful phone calls. It's quite upsetting; I wish she could be happy.

Me and Chomsky:

Professor Chomsky,

> I talked to you a few days ago - (I was the one with the 'bodyguard')[1] - I enjoyed the conversation, and thanks for taking the time. But I think I should have pressed you a little harder on one point. You often say that 'principles' shouldn't matter as much as 'tactics,' and so you reject questions about the possible hypocrisy of being an anti-capitalist so-called 'radical' (like me) while perhaps actively participating in the capitalist system (by, if nothing else, paying taxes - or think of Engels, with his factory in Manchester). But surely there comes a point at which the question of hypocrisy has to be raised. You yourself, after all, criticize officials in the U.S. government for being hypocritical in having supported Saddam Hussein and then condemning him later when it was useful for them to do so. Integrity is an important virtue, and obviously you have great integrity, which means you

[1] Some guy had asked me if he could sit in on our conversation. Chomsky made a joke about his being my bodyguard.

adhere to your principles; - so, living according to principles is, in the end, very important. But it isn't *everything*: the issue of tactics is perhaps equally important (certainly if one cares about social change). If the two values of having integrity and contributing to social change should ever conflict in some case, then probably social change (i.e., tactics as opposed to principles) should take precedence. But apart from that circumstance, one surely has to behave according to one's principles, right? - within reason, of course. But there's the rub: what does 'within reason' mean? One simply has to evaluate situations as they come, I suppose.

Still, what do you think of Engels' owning a factory? It was contrary to his principles insofar as he thought wage-labor was immoral, but it helped Marx get his work done by allowing Engels to send him money every week. Actually, forget about that fact; suppose there was no side-benefit, and Engels was just a socialist who owned a factory that exploited workers. Is that not hypocritical? Or should we not care about that?

Thanks for your thoughts.

I don't see any conflict between principles and tactics, at least if we have the right principles. One dominant principle should be organizing our lives and actions so that they can help poor and suffering people, ward off potential catastrophes, and in general have a positive impact on the world. Take Engels managing a factory, while doing his groundbreaking work on the condition of the working class in England. Suppose, instead, that he had given up factory management, gone off to live in a working class slum, probably dying of the social diseases that he pioneered in bringing to light. My feeling is that that would have been opposed to the decent principles he upheld, those just mentioned. I don't see even a touch of hypocrisy in his choice. [That's right. But I wanted to disregard 'side-benefits' (like allowing him to do research) of his managing a factory. If there were none it would be hypocritical for him to manage a factory, just as, perhaps, it is hypocritical for me to pay taxes to a government I don't believe in.]

Similarly, you could extricate yourself from capitalist society, get a plot of land in Vermont, grow your own food, and feel self-righteous. Who would you help by doing that? OK if you want to do it, but I at least would not regard it as a principled choice, because you can play a much more positive role than that.

It's true that every option has to be considered on its merits. We all have to make complicated choices. In 1965, for example, I tried to organize national tax resistance, and shortly after undertook other more far-reaching resistance activities for which I was coming up for trial in 1968 -- called off after the Tet offensive. I made a conscious choice to face a probable long jail term, which, of course, would have ended or at least delayed any positive work I could have done in the outside society (putting aside the effects for my family; my wife went back to college after 17 years because we had three children to support). Maybe the choice was right, maybe wrong. But I don't see any issue of principle vs. tactics -- which also should accord with principles.

Difficult judgments, and often hard to work out, but I don't think that the conflict you describe is a useful way to look at these dilemmas. [But as I said, I wanted to disregard cases in which there might perhaps be such a conflict. Or rather, contributing to social change should be one of the most important principles that guides action, such that a

> conflict between principles and tactics can't arise. But there are other principles one has, and in those cases when the question of contributing to social change doesn't come into play, one has to live by those other principles -- such as, it's wrong to support a government that wages imperialist wars, or whatever.]

I decided to send another email (and he wrote back, below):

> Thanks. One final thought: what I should have made clearer was that I was trying to disregard cases in which the question of tactics, i.e. contributing to social change, comes up. In all such cases, the principle of furthering change is the most important, and so of course one's principles then can't conflict with tactics. But, 'other things being equal,' it would be hypocritical for a socialist to manage a factory, just as it is perhaps hypocritical for me to pay taxes to a war-mongering government.
>
> I think A. J. Muste expressed it well when a reporter asked him, in response to his standing silently outside the White House every night with a candle in his hand (I think) during the Vietnam War, "Do you really think you're going to change the government's policies by standing here every night?", and he responded, "You've got it all wrong. I don't do this to change the government; I do it so the government won't change me." He just wanted to keep his integrity, quite apart from any considerations of tactics, and this principle required that he act in certain out-of-the-mainstream ways. As when Thoreau refused to pay taxes just for the sake of his integrity, not necessarily for the sake of changing society. These considerations about integrity are what give me a guilty conscience.

> I admired AJ Muste very much, and for that reason contributed to the memorial volume devoted to him, defending his "radical pacifism" in one of the hardest cases. But I didn't admire the action you mention, because it was completely self-serving. The Vietnamese didn't give a damn whether he saved his soul. Same with Thoreau. It's no trick to spend a night in a pleasant jail, probably more comfortable than his shack at Walden Pond. I've spent many nights in much worse ones. I was a tax resister for many years, but went far beyond that to organize tax resistance. Right or wrong, those were not efforts to be able to feel self-righteous about my "integrity," but to try to end a terrible war. And when tax resistance barely made a dent, I turned to other measures. Thoreau went back to contemplating nature in Walden. That's OK. I'm not criticizing him. It's just that I don't see much to admire in this behavior.
>
> Other things are never equal. If the hypothetical socialist gives up managing a factory and is replaced by some other manager, then what will change for the workers, the community, the outside society?
>
> Those seem to me the serious questions, and they arise all the time. As it happens, one of the leading activists in this area for many years, from resistance to the war in Vietnam to civil rights and innumerable other issues, happens to work as an investment banker -- which, incidentally, also allows him to be a major funder and to enlist others to do so as well. Is that hypocritical? The question is what the human consequences would be if he were to make some different choice.
>
> Anyway, that's the way I understand principled decisions.

Those are good points. But still, isn't there something to be said for integrity as a virtue in itself? Alleviating other people's suffering isn't *all* that matters, is it?

But Chomsky is right that you can fight the government in other and more productive ways than by not paying taxes. And if your main principle just *is* to further social change, then the way you have integrity is simply to work towards change. Or, even better: if you oppose the government or some business or whatever because its actions are harming people, then what you're bound to do on the basis of your principle is either to directly help the people or to try to stop the institution in question from hurting them. Which gets into questions of tactics. So yes, he's right: the basic principle in all this, or what *should* be the basic principle, is simply to improve people's lives and prevent business and government from hurting them. This principle, though, doesn't demand 'absolute' stances but rather considerations of tactics. You show integrity precisely by considering tactics carefully.

My refusal to pay taxes wouldn't change anything; it would serve only to get me arrested (maybe) and make me feel good about myself. What matters is *helping others*. Chomsky's right about that.

On the other hand, surely even a 'self-serving' act like Thoreau's or Muste's is better than doing nothing at all. But I guess it's only 'abstractly' better, 'morally' better but not in a *concrete* way, not in a way that actually helps people. Doing something only for the *principle* of it, only for the sake of 'having integrity' but not to help others, is somewhat masturbatory. It has no 'cash-value' (if it doesn't help others); it's academic, so to speak.

But then again, that might have odd implications. It implies that having integrity in itself isn't very important, is only an 'academic' consideration that serves no other purpose than to make you feel good about yourself. But that's bizarre, the notion that your desire to have integrity isn't moral but self-serving. In a sense, of course, it's true that such a desire is self-serving. But it's also 'moral,' surely: it evinces moral feeling, it indirectly bears on one's relations -- and relationships -- with others, it's grounded in a healthy desire for self-respect and indirectly shows respect for others (whom one is implicitly respecting by refusing to treat them as means to one's ends, by refusing to lie to them, etc.). Moreover, morality isn't *only* about helping (or not hurting) people. The principle that it's wrong to lie has at most an indirect relationship to the principle that it's wrong to hurt people.

Nevertheless, when it comes to acts that grow out of one's protest against real injustice in the world, like Thoreau's and Muste's acts, then yes, morality *is* only about helping people. *That's* the ultimate principle that brings forth Thoreau's tax-resistance: he doesn't want to participate in something that harms people ('unjustly'); i.e., he doesn't want to do evil to people but rather to do good. Which amounts to 'helping' them in some way. Which, as I said before, introduces questions of tactics and so takes us out of the realm of simple absolutist moral gestures like holding a candle outside the White House.

Sometimes being a moral person might involve following 'absolute' rules consistently, like (for the sake of argument) not to lie or not to steal or not to kill. –But no, even that isn't true. No such rule should be followed blindly. The basic moral principle is the Golden Rule, which requires that you treat each situation as the unique scenario it is. You have to evaluate each situation in the light of the question 'How can I best honor people's, or this person's, humanity here and now?' Then you'll see that Thoreau's and Muste's actions cited above are actually pretty poor stuff. Because, as Chomsky said, those acts don't matter a damn to the victims in question; if you take the perspective of a Martian you see that they're done more out of self-regard than regard for others.

And, to repeat, acting out of genuine regard for others is the *real, substantive* meaning of moral integrity. *Active compassion*, or *active* consideration for others' humanity,[1] is what it means to have moral integrity; compared to that, Thoreau's bare refusal to pay taxes seems formulaic, 'external,' passive, downright not-particularly-moral (because it's done largely out of self-love, not love of others).

Robyn Muncy, "Coal-Fired Reforms: Social Citizenship, Dissident Miners, and the Great Society" (2009). Ordinary workers didn't have only a negative, conservative role in the 1960s (opposing racial equality, etc.); in some cases they also stimulated progressive reform. "The behavior of coal miners in the

[1] You could extend that principle to the case of animals as well. It doesn't have to be only 'for humanity.'

eastern United States during the postwar period suggests that the relationship of rank-and-file workers to the Great Society was more complex [than the typical narrative suggests]. Many coal miners determinedly took part in protests, including violent ones, that galvanized officials in Washington to expand federal responsibilities. The actions of those miners help explain the emergence and shape of the Great Society. Most important, they demonstrate that at least some blue-collar workers participated in the active dissent that produced the third and final burst of progressive reform in twentieth-century America." These miners, whose (sometimes violent) protests were well-organized, were concerned about losing benefits from their union's health and pension plan. Actually, benefits had been fluctuating for years, and thousands of miners and their widows had been losing insurance since the 1950s. After a lot of agitation they won (in the early 1970s) increases in pensions, greater benefits to widows, etc.

> But miners did not restrict their protests to the union and the [benefit] fund. They simultaneously agitated for intervention by the federal government. Employing tactics that ranged from roving pickets and arson to alliances with other social movements to conventional lobbying, electoral politics, and lawsuits, indignant miners exerted pressures that expanded the federal state. Sometimes, the miners' efforts resulted in direct federal action in their behalf; at other times, the discontent roiling aggrieved miners contributed to a larger social unrest that included the civil rights struggle and the student movement. In fact, some miners reached out directly to those movements and imagined their struggles as akin. Rank-and-file workers thus contributed to the upheaval that opened opportunities for state expansion well beyond miners' specific grievances. Their protests helped create the Great Society.
>
> Miners' discontent eventually contributed to state expansion in three areas: antipoverty programs, including regional economic development and relief in Appalachia; federal protections for private old-age pensions; and health care/workplace safety. Brief narratives of the three suggest the historical significance of the sense of entitlement miners developed from their experience in a private health and retirement program....

Finally reading E. P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*, the whole thing. I read only a small portion in college. Query: why was England so impervious to social and political change in the early and middle 19th century? Answer: in part because in the 1790s "the French Revolution *consolidated* Old Corruption by uniting landowners and manufacturers in a common panic; and the popular societies were too weak and too inexperienced to effect either revolution or reform on their own." It's like 1919 in the United States, when the Russian revolution helped consolidate the power of business as against workers.

....Minor epiphany. (Sometimes something you've sort of known for a long time suddenly sinks in or you appreciate its implications with utmost clarity.) One of the most commonplace sociological facts about pre-industrial or transitioning-to-industrial or newly-industrial societies is that the labor force or even independent artisans do not have a 'Protestant work-ethic,' a disciplined work-ethic appropriate to industrial capitalism. Employers and the like complain about the laziness, indolence, indiscipline, etc. of the lower classes and obsess over how to get them to follow mechanically the rhythm of the clock and the overseer. So you get the sheer physical brutality of the Industrial Revolution, the constant cumulative struggle on the part of employers to increase their minute control of the work-process and deprive workers of every shred of autonomy, Frederick Taylor's scientific management, Ford's and others' attempts to 'socialize' workers into being good moral religious un-alcoholic dutiful citizens, and so forth. Wherever industrial capitalism is in its early stages, you see this Herculean effort -- this *war* -- to impose mechanical industrial rhythms on the workforce, through external coercion and more subtle 'internal' means. I say it's 'Herculean' because, as Thompson points out, it's like an attempt to refashion human nature. You have to stifle the desire for leisure, for social pursuits, for play and creativity -- in a being that is virtually defined by its love of play. No wonder there's so much resistance to it! Centuries-long resistance! And of course, luckily, the enterprise is never *wholly* successful. Human nature, contrary to Lenin's and Taylor's hopes, can't be erased

and redrawn. Even the nascent capitalist class, the one getting all the material benefits, needed psychological assistance to complete the transformation from semi-leisured medieval life to modern disciplined life; hence you had the spread of Calvinism and its notion of the 'calling' -- and individualism, self-discipline, acquisitive values, etc. (See Weber and Tawney.) But the working class too needed some such psychic mechanism to adjust itself to the new order, and so you had in England (and America? France?) during the Industrial Revolution the acceptance among this class of Methodism and other sects that preached the blessedness of poverty and hard labor, submission to authority, compensation in the hereafter, and the like. After quoting some emotionally overwrought Methodist literature (ecstatic convulsions of conversion, joyously self-abandoning abasement in God), Thompson says that

> we may see here in its lurid figurative expression the psychic ordeal in which the character-structure of the rebellious pre-industrial laborer or artisan was violently recast into that of the submissive industrial worker. Here, indeed, is Ure's 'transforming power.' It is a phenomenon, almost diabolic in its penetration into the very sources of human personality, directed towards the repression of emotional and spiritual energies. But 'repression' is a misleading word: these energies were not so much inhibited as displaced from expression in personal and in social life, and confiscated for the service of the Church. The box-like, blackening chapels stood in the industrial districts like great traps for the human psyche.... These Sabbath orgasms of feeling made more possible the single-minded weekday direction of these energies to the consummation of productive labor....

Thompson's whole discussion is brilliant. You really see how Victorian England and Europe became the repressive, neurotic, hysterical place Freud encountered. It was all this religion, all this 'methodical' morality to discipline the instincts and personality for the sake (indirectly, unconsciously) of accumulating profit. Religions of repression spread through the whole population. "Since joy was associated with sin and guilt, and pain (Christ's wounds) with goodness and love, so every impulse became twisted into the reverse, and it became natural to suppose that man or child only found grace in God's eyes when performing painful, laborious or self-denying tasks. To labor and to sorrow was to find pleasure, and masochism was 'Love.'" In some of its early manifestations Methodism came close to worshiping death. But apparently it had softened and humanized itself a bit by the mid-19th century.

Why did the working classes submit to all this? Partly because of continuous, intensive indoctrination. From an early age -- in the Sunday schools, etc. Also, there was the immersion in community that it offered. And in its social reality Methodism was by no means always as harsh as its intellectual expressions could be. Fourthly, Thompson suggests that Methodist recruitment and revivals between 1790 and 1830 were the 'psychic (and social) consequences of the counterrevolution' (by which he's referring to the suppression of labor movements, the inability of the exploited poor to raise themselves out of misery). Methodism among the poor at this time was, perhaps, the 'Chiliasm of despair.'

I need hardly point out that once Europe and America went from being industrializing to being mass-consuming, mature state-capitalist societies (with the 'establishment-bureaucratization' of labor unions and their 'self-policing' of workers, etc.), the character of mass indoctrination changed from emphasizing thrift, industry, morality, submission to authority, assimilation, and Americanization, to emphasizing relative leisure, consumerism, sexuality, and instant gratification. Then new psychic disorders arose. (Narcissism, schizoid patterns, 'meaninglessness.')

I'll have to read Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* someday. Surely it bears on all this stuff about Victorian 'inner discipline,' social monitoring, the construction of a new order. (But I suspect it neglects the economic aspect, which is the most important.)

Incidentally, I should remind you that the new disciplined modern 'character-structure' wasn't only *imposed* -- externally -- on the working classes; they also socialized themselves into it. With the Knights of Labor in America you still see prohibitions against drinking and other unsavory activities, self-directed attempts to discipline workers into a modern labor movement.

An eloquent passage from later on in the book:

> ....The conventional picture of Luddism as a blind opposition to machinery as such becomes less and less tenable. What was at issue was the 'freedom' of the capitalist to destroy the customs of the trade, whether by new machinery, by the factory-system, or by unrestricted competition, beating-down wages, undercutting his rivals, and undermining standards of craftsmanship. We are so accustomed to the notion that it was both inevitable and 'progressive' that trade should have been freed in the early 19th century from 'restrictive practices' that it required an effort of imagination to understand that the 'free' factory-owner or large hosier or cotton-manufacturer, who built his fortune by these means, was regarded not only with jealousy but as a man engaging in *immoral* and *illegal* practices. The tradition of the just price and the fair wage lived longer among 'the lower orders' than is sometimes supposed. They saw *laissez faire* not as freedom but as 'foul Imposition.' They could see no 'natural law' by which one man, or a few men, could engage in practices which brought manifest injury to their fellows.

That's what I love about E. P. Thompson. His impassioned partisanship of humanity.

Luddism (1811-1813, with later upsurges) was, in many of its manifestations, far from being the spontaneous, undisciplined outbreak of stupid rage-against-machines by riotous mobs that we've been taught to think it was. It was often highly methodical, sophisticated, well-planned and -executed by bands of masked men who went from village to village and destroyed only (specific) machines owned by men who were known to pay 'unfair' wages; the rest of the machines were left untouched. It was a widespread, 'quasi-insurrectionary' (according to Thompson), popularly supported movement. It also usually succeeded at least in its short-term objective of keeping wages up.

William Cobbett (in 1820) on 'the lower orders' before they had been corrupted by television, pop culture and business structures/ideologies:

> Give me leave to say that....these classes are, to my certain knowledge, at this time, more enlightened than the other classes of the community.... They see further into the future than the Parliament and the Ministers. -- There is this advantage attending the pursuit of their knowledge: they have no particular interest to answer; and, therefore, their judgement is unclouded by prejudice and selfishness. Besides which, their communication with each other is perfectly free. The thoughts of one man produce other thoughts in another man. Notions are canvassed without the restraint imposed upon suspicion, by false pride, or false delicacy. And hence the truth is speedily arrived at.

Much of that description remains true, though.

Books I'm reading or half-reading this semester: Rebecca Scott's *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (2005), Charles Postel's *The Populist Vision* (2007), Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore's *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (1996), Thomas Andrews' *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (2008), Margot Canaday's *The Straight State: Citizenship and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century America* (2009), Mae Ngai's *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (2004), Linda Gordon's *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits* (2009), Jennifer Klein's *For All These Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America's Public-Private Welfare State* (2003), Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (2003), Richard Hofstadter's *Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (1955), Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (1951), Bethany Moreton's *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (2009), Jesse Hoffnung-Garskoff's *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950* (2008), Piya Chaterjee's *A Time for Tea: Women, Labor, and Postcolonial Politics on an Indian Plantation* (2001), Kathleen Canning's *Languages of Gender and Labor: Female Factory Work in Germany, 1850-1914* (2002), Phyllis Palmer's *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants*

in the United States, 1920-1945 (1991), Londa Schiebinger's *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (1991), Thomas Klubock's *Contested Communities: Class, Gender, and Politics in Chile's El Teniente Copper Mine, 1904-1951* (1998), Wendy Goldman's *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia* (2002), *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (2004), Marla Miller's *Betsy Ross and the Making of America* (2010), Peter Way's *Common Labor: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals, 1780-1860* (1997), Paul Taillon's *Good, Reliable, White Men: Railroad Brotherhoods, 1877-1917* (2009), Larry Tye's *Rising from the Rails: Pullman Porters and the Making of the Black Middle Class* (2004), Kathleen Barry's *Femininity in Flight: A History of Flight Attendants* (2007), Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg's *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone: 1199/SEIU and the Politics of Healthcare Unionism* (2009), Shane Hamilton's *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (2008), David Montgomery's *Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (1987), Kevin Boyle's *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (2004), Le Ly Hayslip's *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace* (1989), Catriona Parratt's *"More Than Mere Amusement": Working-Class Women's Leisure in England, 1750-1914* (2001). Also lots of articles.

Charles Postel argues persuasively that Populism, the greatest popular movement in American history, should not be called (as it sometimes is) anti-modern, 'traditional,' anti-industrial, anti-progress, even anti-capitalist in a broad sense. What it opposed was not 'modernity' or industrial progress or technological efficiency or the market but a particular kind of corporate capitalism. It wanted to modernize the farmer's way of life in a manner that benefited him, that enabled him to get out from under the thumb of banks, merchants, railroads, etc. Populism was decidedly *in favor of* progress -- which meant public education for millions in the South and West, scientific agriculture, cooperation between farmers and the land-grant universities conducting agricultural research and training, the development of savvy business practices amongst millions of isolated farmers deep in debt, extensive government intervention in the economy, the beginnings of a state welfare system, an income tax, progress in women's rights (women were a large part of the movement), centralized bureaucracies at the service of monopolistic cooperative business, the exploitation of economies of scale through large-scale cooperative enterprise, etc. In many respects, Populists were far ahead of their time. In some ways, of course, they were conservative -- for instance in their racism. But on the whole it seems that they were even less conservative than the Knights of Labor.

Nor was Populism by any means a total failure, even in its immediate objectives. It was an oppositional moment in the history of the farmer's encounter with corporate capitalism, but in part this opposition manifested itself through the development of more sophisticated business structures that have lasted in some form to the present day. The semi-monopolistic agricultural cooperatives in California and other states are the best examples. Far from being ultimately opposed to capitalism, these structures were integrated into it and became indispensable. It's the old story of a capitalist society rejecting the rigidly oppositional elements of a radical movement but gradually incorporating other elements that allow for the partial 'defusing' of dangerous discontent, the achievement of greater 'flexibility' and responsiveness-to-the-people in economic and political spheres, in fact the greater efficiency and effectiveness of the economy. The same thing happened after the movements of the 1960s. Radical movements sometimes end up stabilizing -- by effectively 'modernizing' -- the old order.

Richard Hofstadter: "Populism was the first modern political movement of practical importance in the United States to insist that the federal government has some responsibility for the common weal; indeed, it was the first such movement to attack seriously the problems created by industrialism." In Europe at around the same time, such movements were having much success; in the U.S., it failed. Until the New Deal. The damn race question got in the way, as did ethnic divisions and the sheer size of the country.

More Hofstadter: "The Populist movement, despite its defeat, activated a stream of agrarian organization and protest that subsequently carried point after point.... Populism was the expression of a transitional stage in the development of our agrarian politics: while it reasserted for the last time some old ways of thought, it was also a harbinger of the new...." Hofstadter, being a liberal Consensus historian of

the 1950s who didn't like mass movements, emphasizes the dark, conservative side of Populism, but he's surprisingly evenhanded.

He doesn't remark on this, but some impulses of Progressivism were similar to future impulses of fascism. First of all, as you know, Progressivism was mostly a movement of the middle classes -- professionals like lawyers, doctors and academics, and the American version of the gentry. They were upset by their loss of status and power relative to the new plutocracy, and the modern bourgeois civilization that was arising around them they found appalling in its decadence, filth, corruption, selfishness, materialism, moral and aesthetic ugliness. It was becoming a very un-heroic, un-individualistic, vulgar, chaotic society; many of the educated therefore sought a partial return, by 'modern' means, to a purer past. Like future fascist leaders, most of them almost equally hated the plutocracy and the contemptible masses, and they sought a middle road between ultraconservatism and socialism. Unlike fascists, they tended to favor genuine democratic reforms and to be concerned with the well-being of workers and even immigrants. Progressivism was in part a phase in the beginnings of modern statism, with its increases in bureaucracy and the power of government. So, like fascism, it was basically a middle-class reaction to the confusions, polarities and uglinesses of modern industrial capitalism, a movement that necessarily took statist forms (because the state was the only structure strong enough to have an impact on the war between capital and labor, and on the behavioral tendencies of millions of people in all walks of life). And it even included a eugenics movement, and in general was interwoven with strong strands of racism, nationalism, nativism, and Social Darwinism -- which were related to its 'perception of social chaos'-induced preoccupation with mastery and self-mastery, manliness and virility, achieving a moral, ordered, 'healthy' society[1] that exhibited 'self-control' amongst the masses, even the ideal of spreading American civilization to inferior races around the world. (It was the age of imperialism, after all.) Nevertheless, the differences between the two movements -- such as Progressivism's amorphousness, its individualism, and its preeminently *moral* animus[2] ('Reform! Reform!') -- may well outweigh the similarities. It would have been very hard for a true and massive fascist movement to develop in the U.S., in light of the enormous immigrant population and the country's tremendous size and fragmented character.

Theodore Roosevelt represents the fascist side of Progressivism, Jane Addams the moral, compassionate side.

....The Imperial Wizard and Emperor of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s wrote a statement that, with a few alterations, could have been written by a contemporary Tea Partier:

> ....Nordic Americans for the last generation have found themselves increasingly uncomfortable and finally deeply distressed. There appeared first confusion in thought and opinion, a groping hesitancy about national affairs and private life alike, in sharp contrast to the clear, straightforward purposes of our earlier years. There was futility in religion, too, which was in many ways even more distressing.... Finally came the moral breakdown that has been going on for two decades. One by one all our traditional moral standards went by the boards, or were so disregarded that they ceased to be binding. The sacredness of our Sabbath, of our homes, of chastity, and finally even of our right to teach our own children in our own schools fundamental facts and truths were torn away from us. Those who maintained the old standards did so only in the face of constant ridicule.
>
> Along with this went economic distress. The assurance for the future of our children dwindled. We found our great cities and the control of much of our industry and commerce taken over by strangers, who stacked the cards of success and prosperity against us. Shortly they came to dominate our government....

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[1] Hence the popular schemes to prevent the 'feeble-minded,' the insane, criminals, epileptics, etc. from reproducing.

[2] It's true that this harks to fascism's moral absolutism and concern for moral regeneration, but in fascism's case it was a false morality, an 'aesthetic' morality (of glory, heroism, the unified nation, racial purity, order), whereas many Progressives genuinely wanted to help marginalized people -- even though these properly moral considerations were mixed with an aesthetic or racial or nationalist or '*order*-driven' morality of the Rooseveltian, semi-fascist type.

> We are a movement of the plain people, very weak in the matter of culture, intellectual support, and trained leadership. We are demanding....a return of power into the hands of the everyday, not highly cultured, not overly intellectualized, but entirely unspoiled and not de-Americanized, average citizen of the old stock. Our members and leaders are all of this class -- the opposition of the intellectuals and liberals who held the leadership, betrayed Americanism....is almost automatic....

Whether the movement is *irrational* is a complicated question, but it's certainly unintelligent. In many respects it's definitely un-rational, and if you talk to the average Tea Partier you'll find that he or she displays a great deal of irrationality too (self-contradictoriness).

Hofstadter argues, plausibly, that the New Deal was not so much a continuation of the Progressive impulse after the 'hiatus' of the 1920s as a new development in response to new conditions. Its brand of statist economic intervention was foreign to Progressivism (although the U.S. had experienced something like it during the First World War). The New Deal was not about *morality*, moral reformation, in the way Progressivism was; it was about economic justice and experimentation, *pragmatism*, not moral absolutism or residual Protestantism.[1] In these respects it differed from fascism too (aside from the 'Protestantism' thing). It may be too much to say that America had left its moderately semi-fascist stage behind by the 1930s and was on to practical things like making the economy work and building a labor movement; on the other hand, that statement isn't wholly without truth. The quasi-religious, crusading, 'morality'-regenerating, 'purifying,' 'morally-appalled-at-social-disintegration-and-adulteration' impulse common to Progressivism and fascism had largely spent itself in mainstream America by the 1930s[2] -- though it had yet to play out its final act in Europe.

"The key words of Progressivism were terms like *patriotism, citizen, democracy, law, character, conscience, soul, morals, service, duty, shame, disgrace, sin,* and *selfishness* -- terms redolent of the sturdy Protestant Anglo-Saxon moral and intellectual roots of the Progressive uprising. A search for the key words of Arnold's books [which are representative of New Deal thinking] yields: *needs, organization, humanitarian, results, technique, institution, realistic, discipline, morale, skill, expert, habits, practical, leadership* -- a vocabulary revealing a very different constellation of values arising from economic emergency and the imperatives of a bureaucracy." I think Hofstadter underestimates the role of racial, biological, imperialist, nationalist and 'aesthetic' thinking in Progressivism, which intersected with the old Protestant and republican thinking in complex ways. America's Protestant and republican heritage was one of the things that saved it from fascism.[3]

(Incidentally, it's obvious that 'Progressivism' had different social meanings depending on what groups you're talking about. Working-class agitation meant something different from middle-class reformist agitation. What Hofstadter and I are referring to by 'Progressivism' is only a particular dominant stream of the time.

(Also, I should note that even the less obviously semi-fascist side of middle-class Progressivism, such as Jane Addams, was basically conservative, serving potentially dangerous interests. (Remember that Addams was sympathetic to eugenics.) It wanted to uphold traditional Anglo values, order, stability; reformers like Addams simply used different methods to attain ends similar to the eugenicists'.)

....Hofstadter is right that so-called 'populism' is dangerous. The masses can get out of hand, and they might not understand who their real enemies are or how best to improve their situation. They might become obsessed with prejudice, be misled by demagogues, blame a scapegoat for their problems. But these possibilities become far more probable when the middle class or lower-middle class is part of the

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[1] I'm inclined to think that Hoftstadter underestimates the purely 'pragmatic' side of Progressivism (think of scientific management, for example), but broadly speaking his points are illuminating and defensible.

[2] It still existed in the 1920s, in fact even more so, but rarely took 'Progressive' forms then. Instead you had the KKK and other such overt manifestations of semi-fascism.

[3] Protestantism, of course, could be used in the service of something like fascism, as with the KKK. But its fostering of individualism militated against a movement in which the individual submerged himself in the mass.

movement. Movements of the working class (especially un-unionized workers) or the blatantly oppressed in any sphere -- and these are the most authentic 'people's' movements, not adulterated by business support and propaganda (public-relations campaigns, which can be very effective) -- tend to be relatively rational and potentially productive of real gains to society in the forms of democracy, freedom, and economic well-being. Middle-class mass movements are more ambiguous and can go either way, to the left or the right, because this class has 'contradictory locations' in the economic structure, sharing some interests with business/power and others with the working class. And to the extent that unionized workers (especially whites) approach the middle class and so have incentives to be conservative, i.e. to guard their privileges relative to other groups, they too can behave in apparently irrational, unintelligent or ambiguous ways in their political activity. For example, like the middle class, they might take up causes of 'cultural' repression. But these sorts of conservative movements are populist only in a degraded sense. They're in the interests of various kinds of power, not of people. And it's rare, in any case, that the majority of people supports them.

The truest kind of populism is popular revolution, the overthrow of authoritarian power-structures. This certainly can be a violent, wild affair, which means Hofstadter wouldn't like it, but it's a good thing anyway. It happens because reform wasn't working and no other options were available. [Think of Egypt's anti-Mubarak rebellion.]

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Short papers for classes:

Marla R. Miller's *Betsy Ross and the Making of America* (2010) complements in certain aspects T. H. Breen's *Marketplace of Revolution* (2004), in that where Breen considers the colonies and early American republic from the viewpoint of mass consumption-patterns, Miller considers it from the viewpoint of production-patterns. Admittedly, her focus is not as broad as Breen's: she is interested in narrating the life and times of Betsy Ross rather than tracing the development of a revolutionary consciousness among the colonists. Nevertheless, along the way she sheds light on the respects in which Americans' work-patterns contributed to their radicalization prior to and after the Revolutionary War, and so aided in the 'making of America.'

Because Betsy Ross worked as an upholsterer, i.e. an artisan or craftswoman, Miller discusses in great detail the culture and practices of American artisans during the latter half of the eighteenth century. What emerges from her treatment is, first of all, a sense of the centrality of artisanal life and work to the society she is investigating. Cities like Philadelphia, where Betsy Ross lived, teemed with craftsmen and -women producing all the accoutrements of a bustling proto-bourgeois society -- clothing, furniture, household implements, elegant finery, even houses and public buildings. It was a middle-class civilization, which at that time meant that urban society, especially in the northern colonies, was structured largely around independent artisans, storekeepers, small property-owners. This 'artisanal independence' entailed, in turn, a consciousness of and pride in liberty -- economic and political liberty -- a dignity and sense of self-worth engendered by economic independence. Historians know from the study of European revolutions and revolutionary movements that artisans have historically been in the forefront of radical social change. It was no different in the case of America. When the British Parliament began passing economically onerous laws like the Sugar Act, the Stamp Act and the Townshend Duties, raising taxes on various goods in which the colonies traded, artisans in Philadelphia, Boston and other cities rose en masse to organize (together with politicians, attorneys and some merchants) boycotts of British goods. They considered that their economic autonomy and political rights had been violated by a Parliament that raised their taxes without having offered them political representation first. Artisans in particular were affected by some of these taxes; for example, the Townshend Duties applied to such goods as plate glass, flint glass, green glass, red and white lead, painters' colors, and a wide range of papers (p. 88). Campaigns to 'Buy American' -- which would incidentally stimulate domestic industry -- spread throughout the colonies.

Thus, for many Americans it was through their work that the reality and immediacy of grievances against England were brought home to them. Consumer boycotts, too, as T. H. Breen argues, were essential to the process of popular radicalization. But once the populace had been sufficiently radicalized to conceive of American political independence from England, artisanal work became even more relevant to the birth of the new nation, and to popular identification with it. For now craftsmen and -women like Betsy Ross had to supply the new American military with uniforms, bedding, tents, military standards, flags, drums and fifes, guns, ammunition, coffins, etc. For Ross and others, the Revolution was not some distant, abstract affair; it was a guiding event in their professional and private lives. Conversely, by drawing ordinary men and women so closely into the political life of the nascent nation -- that is, by politically and economically 'empowering' them, thrusting on them a sense of their relevance to affairs of state -- the Revolutionary War further radicalized and democratized society.

Indeed, Miller notes in passing that "the seeds of Philadelphia's labor movement" were planted by the Revolution: "the forces unleashed by the Revolution were transforming social and labor relations in the capital city." She continues: "A world in which deference to one's superiors had been assumed....gave way to a world in which men asserted their equality as a matter of principle" (p. 270). Such changes were taking place, first and foremost, in the world of artisanal work, in relations between masters and journeymen. Investigation of this fact would be a fit subject for another study as ambitious as *Betsy Ross and the Making of America*.

In *Gender and Jim Crow* (1996), Glenda Gilmore analyzes the many intersections between race, gender and segregation in North Carolina in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Her focus is on black women and how they dealt with Jim Crow, but she also considers in detail the political behavior of black men, white men and white women -- how they negotiated and renegotiated the oppressive regime of Jim Crow in their politics, churches and civic organizations. In her account, after the effective disfranchisement of black men at the very end of the 19th century, it was their women who, in a "nonpolitical guise....became the black community's diplomats to the white community" (Gilmore, 148). In the darkest years of segregation, black women tried to keep hope alive by participating in community activism with their white 'sisters,' who were racists and white supremacists but were willing, in many cases, to cooperate with blacks for the improvement of the community. Through telling such stories of ordinary people, Gilmore humanizes Jim Crow, illustrating its concrete meanings for real people. It is not a happy tale, but in some of its lessons it is uplifting.

The story, however, of how North Carolina Democrats stripped black men of their political rights is not uplifting at all. It was after the Populist revolt of the mid-1890s, when the Populists and Republicans had cooperated to put the white-supremacist Democratic party in the minority. To regain their majority in the legislative elections of 1898, Democrats tried to prevail on poor whites to put race loyalty above class loyalty. And they succeeded, in large part by exploiting latent fears of black men's sexuality. These men were supposed to be sexual beasts, animals, rapists of white women -- hysterical stories of rape-outbreaks were manufactured and publicized around the state -- in short, such depraved creatures that white men had to protect their women in the streets and deprive blacks of political power. This theme of the black man as a sexual threat, an embodiment of raw animal sexuality, goes back centuries, although its origins are not entirely clear. Respectable society has never liked to dwell on it, since all things instinctual and insurgent are a threat to respectable power and must be repressed, but, for example, the sensation that Norman Mailer's essay "The White Negro" caused in 1957 suggests that the association of blackness with sexuality is always under the surface of the mainstream mind. Southern white supremacists manipulated it skillfully in 1898, and with the Republican and Populist parties thus out of power, it was finally possible to disfranchise North Carolina's black men and institutionalize Jim Crow.

One thing that Gilmore might have done more effectively is to draw general conclusions from her data about Jim Crow's impacts on gender relations and vice versa. She does note, for instance, that the campaign to protect white women from black men's sexuality served also to put women in their place, to enforce their dependency on men and thereby accentuate their femininity and supposed helplessness (Gilmore, 96). Conversely, depriving black men of political rights emasculated them, so resulting,

paradoxically, in the relative equalization of power between black women and men vis-à-vis the white world. Thus, the Jim Crow regime reinforced ordinary gender roles in white society (powerful men, powerless women) and undermined such gender roles in black society (powerless men, relatively powerful women). Later on, in the early decades of the 20th century, the greater relative power of black women resulted in their being the ones who most challenged Jim Crow norms, through their work with white women in social welfare, public health campaigns, charity groups, and women's suffrage groups. At the same time, all this was possible only due to their status as women, i.e. politically and sexually unthreatening people.

It is worth noting that the masculinity of poor white men was only partially served by Jim Crow. The contrast between their situation and that of black men affirmed their manhood and helped reconcile them to poverty, because at least they weren't the *lowest* group in society; on the other hand, the contrast between them and rich white men must have been humiliating and emasculating. One can't help thinking that an equally good strategy, or a better one, for affirming poor whites' manliness would have been to unite with blacks and seek power at the expense of rich whites -- as had been the strategy, to an extent, of the Republican and Populist parties of the 1890s. Evidently, though, blackness was seen as so contrary to proper manliness that such a strategy could not possibly be carried out in full. In other words, poor whites saw their race as a more powerful testament to their manhood than economic well-being would have been, so they chose race loyalty over class loyalty.

It is intriguing that these equations seem to have been reversed in the last few decades, since the 1960s. American culture now sees black men as quintessential males, as embodying athleticism, sexual prowess, masculine beauty (as testified by the recent series of Old Spice commercials acted by a black male model), and gritty inner-city toughness -- manifested in the very 'masculine' culture of rap and hip-hop. Similarly, there is a sense in which poverty and an inner-city life are considered more manly, because more difficult and 'real,' than wealth and an easy suburban life. A revaluation of values has taken place since the social movements of the 1960s and '70s.

In any case, from the foregoing it is clear that *Gender and Jim Crow* is a quite stimulating book. It would be interesting to study the evolution of gender roles and segregation up to the civil rights movement and beyond, to see exactly how the drastic changes of the last hundred years came about.[1]

The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925 (1987), by David Montgomery, has been compared with E. P. Thompson's masterpiece *The Making of the English Working Class*, in that, to paraphrase Thompson, it is essentially a biography -- an extraordinarily rich one -- of the U.S's working class in its formative years. It is, therefore, a work of synthesis. However, like Thompson's book, it goes beyond mere synthesis to provide a specific, and powerful, framework within which to interpret the fortunes of this class in its political and economic battles. In fact, Montgomery's account is arguably more focused than Thompson's: Montgomery sees struggles at the workplace over who will control work -- the employer or the employee -- as the crux of early industrial labor history, the most important source of conflict between workers and capitalists, and he emphasizes that the worker's worldview was formed above all at the point of production. Analytical continuities thus help to cohere what might otherwise have been an apparently arbitrary and bewildering discussion of a huge range of topics. Instead, the product is simply a monumental testament to scholarly rigor and capaciousness of thought.

The book is loosely divided into three parts of three chapters each. In the first part, Montgomery recreates in vivid detail the world and the work of three categories of workers in the late nineteenth century: skilled craftsmen (especially iron- and steelworkers), common laborers, and female factory operatives in the garment and textile industries. In the second part, he traces the rise of scientific management, which was a key component in employers' struggle to wrest control of the work process away from employees. The book's final three chapters are devoted to the explosive labor unrest that preceded, accompanied, and followed World War I -- and business and the state's reactions to this unrest -- as well as the creation of a

[1] (Gender is boring, as you can see.)

conservative welfare-capitalist regime after 1922 characterized by a quiescent labor movement. The capitalism of the 1920s was the apotheosis of that social order whose construction had begun with the decline of competitive capitalism at the end of the nineteenth century and the rise of corporate capitalism: it saw the final victory of management's attempts to control production and degrade the worker's conditions of work (while compensating him with 'welfare'). Only with the coming of the Great Depression would this form of capitalism, too, collapse -- at least in part -- thus providing America's labor movement with the opportunity for a new beginning.

Several noteworthy themes emerge in the course of Montgomery's analysis. As already stated, a particularly important one is the progressive degradation of work as management took over more and more productive functions and deprived workers of what autonomy they had once had. In the 1870s, many craftsmen had "exercised an impressive degree of collective control over the specific productive tasks in which they were engaged and the human relations involved in the performance of those tasks" (p. 13). They developed a group ethical code around their work relations, the most important component of which was the "stint," or "the collective definition of a reasonable day's work" (p. 17). That is, they restricted their output -- unilaterally, not in negotiations with their employer -- for the sake of maintaining regular employment, higher piece rates, and relative comfort in their work. Employers, understandably, could not abide such behavior that went on behind their backs; hence arose, eventually, Taylorism and scientific management, which entailed, for instance, "centralized planning and routing of the successive phases in fabrication [of a product]" (p. 217), as well as the standardization of work practices and the detailed supervision of workers. These developments, in addition to the rise of mechanization, contributed to an "epidemic of strikes" in the early twentieth century as workers rebelled against being reduced to machines.

An even broader theme, illustrated by the concept of the stint, is that an ideology of mutualism was fostered among workers by their relations with each other at the point of production -- an ideology quite opposed to the acquisitive individualism engendered by competitive relations between businesses. On the other hand, the racism and nativism that persecuted black and immigrant laborers tended to vitiate working-class mutualism. Montgomery paints the harassed lives of these laborers in poignant detail, illustrating in the process his point that "laborers' struggles bore the clear imprint of their rural origins and continuing ties to the land" (p. 87). Indeed, this is one of the great strengths of the book, namely that it places American labor history in the context of international capitalism and its devastating effects on the agricultural 'periphery' of the industrial 'core.' Developments in the former influenced tendencies in the latter. For example, the increasing mobility of rural people due to railroads and steamships allowed them to travel to industrialized countries by the tens of millions, among the effects of which in the West was the slowing-down of the improvement (due to high demand) in laborers' wages after 1878 (p. 70). By thus taking an international perspective, Montgomery avoids the parochialism of much labor history.

Being a social history, the book might have benefited from greater attention to the role of gender in conditioning behavior. Gender is by no means completely absent, however, for instance in Montgomery's account of the ethical code that governed machinists' behavior. "The moral imperative of a 'manly bearing,'" he notes, appeared often in machinists' discourse, as in that of other craftsmen. "The workers' code celebrated individual self-assertion, but for the collective good, rather than for self-advancement" (p. 204). Manliness was defined, therefore, not in relation to the individual but in relation to the group: if an individual upheld the code of the group and acted in solidarity against the common employer, he was prized as a man. Norms of femininity, on the other hand, appear even less often in the book than norms of masculinity, although Montgomery does devote many pages to the experiences of female factory operatives.

The Fall of the House of Labor is far too rich to be reproduced even in outline in a book review, but hopefully the foregoing has at least given the reader a small sense of its richness. The theoretically minded reader might appreciate the work for its substantial, though implicit, validation of Marxist historical methods and concepts, given Montgomery's constant return to the importance of production relations in shaping workers' experiences, hopes, and ideologies. In this respect, as in others, the work is very traditional. Whether that is a weakness is debatable; in fact, one might argue that the book itself proves the continuing value of traditional concepts and theoretical programs. For it remains a classic, almost twenty-five years after its publication.

One of the founding texts of contemporary social history, E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) remains unsurpassed in many respects almost fifty years after its publication. Most obviously, its author was one of the best literary stylists ever to write history. More substantively, Thompson's scholarship is unusual in its breadth and depth, incorporating newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, memoirs, private correspondence, and parliamentary commission testimony. And it is all in the service of a noble enterprise, "to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity" (p. 12). By letting these vanquished people speak in their own words, on their own terms, Thompson rehabilitates them and their experiences. In the end, his book is a deeply humane, deeply imaginative, and deeply partisan work -- partisan toward humanity, against complacency in all its forms.

Thompson's historical method follows from his moral purpose. His central analytical tool is the notion of class, but, as he explains in the Preface, by "class" he does not understand a structure, a thing, or a category, but a "historical phenomenon," "something which in fact happens....in human relationships." Or, as he says later, "class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition" (pp. 9, 11). He intends his humanistic understanding to contrast with the Marxist Louis Althusser's structuralist, anti-humanist understanding; the whole book is in effect an empirical substantiation of Thompson's polemic against anti-humanism in its Marxist and bourgeois forms. That is to say, the work is supposed to demonstrate the fruitfulness of a "historical," "relational," "developmental" understanding of class, as opposed to one that considers people to be mere occupants of structural locations in institutions, bearers of social roles. In large measure, the attempt succeeds.

Thompson's project is to reconstruct the formation of a working-class consciousness among England's lower orders between about 1790 and 1832. He divides his book into three parts. The first is devoted to political radicalism amongst artisans and other workers in the 1790s, a radicalism stimulated by the French Revolution and Thomas Paine's influential pamphlet *Rights of Man* (1791). This agitation, brutally suppressed by the government, did not yet evince a working-class consciousness. In the second part, Thompson considers the economic changes and some of their cultural manifestations in the forty-year period he is analyzing. The third part returns to the narrative of political radicalism after the 1790s to show how it finally developed an unequivocally working-class character, so that one can say "the working class" had been born.

Among the many thought-provoking aspects of Thompson's discussion is his brilliant analysis of Methodism as in large part a means by which the poor were reconciled to their miserable lot, as well as his defense of Luddites as not just a lot of wild mobs running around smashing machines but rather well-organized groups of men who traveled from village to village sabotaging particular kinds of machines that were known to displace workers and result in lower wages. The sections on Owenism, William Cobbett, Peterloo, the government spy system, the 1832 Reform Bill, the "standard-of-living controversy" (about whether the Industrial Revolution improved or harmed the lives of the poor), and many others, are equally valuable. Through it all, Thompson refuses to pretend to be neutral on questions of value, instead bringing to bear stern humanitarian value-judgments, as when he argues against apologists of capitalism that the Industrial Revolution was in fact a catastrophe for the poor, and that statistics and quantitative averages of supposedly rising standards of living are inadequate to the qualitative reality of epochal social change (which affects groups of people unevenly, so that "averages" conceal as much as they reveal). The book's moral passion helps to make it the compelling work it is.

One of the book's few semi-unsatisfactory features is its theoretical introduction and framework. No doubt Thompson is right to insist that historical actors' experiences be recaptured and reproduced, and that a rigid sociological or economic "structuralism" is not appropriate to the historian's craft. However, such formulations as "Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition" are inadequate, being nearly empty and truistic. People *do* occupy locations in social structures, and these locations do condition their consciousness. It is dangerous when a historian wades into theory, for he or she may oversimplify matters.

To make such criticisms, however, of a work like *The Making of the English Working Class* is but to cavil. Thompson's project is not so much theoretical as historical, and in this it succeeds magnificently.

As[1] the capitalist mode of production has colonized the world, it has required the development of new work patterns, new forms of community, new lifestyles and values. Pre-industrial, rural indiscipline has had to yield to industrial, clock-driven work processes. Stable working-class communities have had to evolve from the chaos and population-upheavals of peasants' mass eviction from the land.[2] In *Contested Communities: Class, Gender, and Politics in Chile's El Teniente Copper Mine, 1904-1951* (1998), Thomas Klubock picks apart the history of one example of such evolution, in a mining community in Chile from the early to middle twentieth century. In his words, he focuses on the process of class formation, "the transformation of a population of itinerant laborers into a settled and trained workforce in a modern capitalist enterprise" (p. 5). Working-class men and women created new sets of social relations, a new culture and politics, a new class-consciousness and gender-consciousness, "in response to initiatives by both North American capital and the state to establish a disciplined and stable labor force." Klubock's main interest is in gender: he argues that "the process of class formation in the copper mines must be understood as a 'gendered' process in which formal gender ideologies and informal norms, values, and practices surrounding sexuality shaped working-class structures of feeling and political consciousness. ....Proletarianization in the mine involved a reorganization of the gendered division of labor and redefinition of masculinity and femininity" (pp. 7, 8).

In 1904 an American company bought the El Teniente mine from Chileans; a few years later it passed to the Guggenheim family, and the Kennecott Copper Company was formed. Conditions at the mine were brutal, and labor turnover among the migrants was always high. Company executives were also constantly frustrated by workers' laziness, insolence, carelessness, gambling, drinking, absenteeism, and thieving. Women were not allowed to work in the mines, but many lived in the camps and worked as prostitutes, tailors, seamstresses, servers in bars, or owned small businesses. Small settlements in the environs of El Teniente also distracted miners from their work. In addition to all this, the workers were quite militant, staging major strikes -- "full-scale rebellions" -- in 1911, 1916, and 1919. To increase productivity and discipline, therefore, company executives decided they had to inculcate new habits and values in both the male and female workers, i.e. regulate their social lives.

In the spirit of welfare capitalism, the North American company took such measures as building better housing for married men in mining camps (to encourage workers to settle permanently), adding recreational facilities, schools, social organizations, sports clubs, libraries, cinemas, etc. The priority, however, was to restructure gender relations, because it was thought that stable households, middle-class family relations, were fundamental to a stable workforce. The company "sought to tie workers to their jobs by rendering women and children dependent on miners' wages" (p. 59). Thus, couples that cohabited were required to have legal marriage certificates. Miners were not allowed to live with extended family members. The company paper indoctrinated women with norms of respectable domesticity, middle-class consumption, and feminine beauty. Men, on the other hand, were expected to provide for their families, refrain from gambling and drinking, and train their sons to be disciplined and moral. The virtues of Chilean patriotism were also extolled, since patriotism and domestication were thought to belong together. Despite all these welfare policies, however, as well as the company's attempts to get the state involved in social regulation, traditional repression remained essential to the suppression of workers' movements in the 1920s.

The global economic crisis of the early 1930s restricted miners' mobility, due to the lack of available jobs elsewhere, so more people began to settle in El Teniente, "attracted by the company's corporate welfare system, high wages, and social benefits" (p. 81). A permanent, as opposed to migrant, workforce was thereby established by the late 1930s and 1940s. Industrial peace still didn't prevail, however, because work conditions remained horrible and people's freedom was limited. A union was

[1] [This was supposed to be just a short outline for a presentation I had to give. So excuse the roughness.]

[2] In recent decades, by the way, these working-class communities in advanced capitalist countries have in turn been breaking apart, leading to new forms of chaos and population-upheavals. What these processes will lead to is unclear.

organized with the help of Communist and Socialist party activists at the same time as the national government was becoming more responsive to leftist and labor influences, until finally in 1938 a Popular Front government was elected. The ideology and rhetoric of the Popular Front movement and government supplied, really for the first time, "a nationalist language of citizenship. ....Workers and peasants were now endowed with the universal dignity of citizenship and recognized as members of a new national category: Chileans" (pp. 112, 113). With the help of the labor-friendly government and the union, a fairly stable mining community was at last established in the 1940s.

Interestingly, the government, organized labor, and the North American company "shared common understandings of gender, social welfare, and cultural reform" (p. 118). The government wanted to build a new national culture of patriotism and moral citizenship, which entailed state and corporate welfare programs and social regulation along the gendered lines articulated by the company in the 1920s. Organized labor had similar goals but also thought that for an effective labor movement to come into being it was necessary for workers to overcome such vices as gambling and drinking and instead to educate and discipline themselves. On the other hand, in a challenge to conventional gender relations, the union argued that women should not merely embody domesticity; they should also fight on behalf of the working class, seize their potential political power. (And they did so, in the 1940s.)

Miners' work itself was understood in gendered ways. It was an intensely masculine work culture, miners defining their labor "as a source of masculine affirmation and pride" (p. 138). They competed to prove their strength in battles with the mine, which was seen as a stubborn, threatening, consuming female that had to be dominated and conquered. The masculine work ethic expressed itself also in miners' solidarity against foremen and supervisors, their willingness, for example, to physically assault their bosses "with enormous frequency." They also fought each other frequently; fights between strikers and strikebreakers were especially common, the latter being seen as contemptibly feminine and treacherous. (In one case, a strikebreaker was forced to dress up as a woman and then paraded around the camp as a form of public humiliation.) Many workers refused to submit to the prohibitions against alcohol, gambling, and illicit sex, taking pride in their rough "masculine" lifestyles. Others internalized the "respectable" norms promulgated by the company and confirmed their manliness through hard work, higher pay, and social mobility. All, however, resented their substandard living conditions, which contrasted cruelly with the luxury of the neighboring mining camp for North American workers and their families, separated from the Chilean camp by fences and guards. Both the socially "responsible" and the socially "irresponsible" miners fought the company's authority in their own individualistic ways, as well as in the collectivist ways made possible by the union and mutual aid societies.

Life was hard, then, for miners, but it was perhaps even harder for women. Single women had limited options for work due to company policies, and domestic service paid little. Many turned, therefore, to prostitution, which was dangerous; rape and physical abuse were common, and, due to regulation of female sexuality, the law usually sided with the accused man. Marriage was preferable to the single life because it promised relative economic security, but domestic violence abounded. Most husbands expected absolute obedience from their wife in return for the economic security they made possible; they resorted to violence when they did not receive this obedience. Women's only defenses, unfortunately, were the police and the courts, because, due to their substantial acceptance of domestic roles, women did not have many social organizations of their own.

The Popular Front government ended in 1948, and a years-long repression of the Left ensued. The 1960s saw a rejuvenation of miners' militancy, with strikes and protests focused on housing conditions, schools, services, wages, and work conditions. Women and children took part in these community movements, as they had in the 1940s. The 1960s was a decade of great advances in miners' standards of living -- made possible through collective bargaining and frequent strikes -- which "further reinforced the stability of the nuclear family in the camps, the masculinization of work, and the relegation of women to the domestic sphere" (p. 281). That is, the hegemony of middle-class gender relations was reinforced by miners' economic victories.

Roger Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!": A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930-1990* (1997)

Introduction:

Unlike most CIO unions after 1950, the UPWA "retained the insurgent spirit of the 1930s' workers' movement in the changed circumstances of postwar America. The union remained, by and large, democratic and accepted considerable internal political diversity throughout its existence. UPWA locals generally retained considerable influence over the work process through extensive shop-floor steward organizations...." (2, 3). Committed to social justice and anti-discrimination activity on behalf of black members, and contributed to the civil rights movement.

Three general factors: "the endemic conflict over work between labor and management in meatpacking, the interracial composition of the workforce, and the capacity of the union's founders to reproduce, in the 1940s and 1950s, a new generation of union militants" (3). These features explain the differences between the UPWA and other CIO unions after World War II. In many respects the union became *more* progressive after the war, not less. (However, it was less progressive on gender issues than racial issues -- even though women were about 20 percent of the workforce in every packinghouse.)

The book focuses on four meatpacking centers crucial to the UPWA and the industry: Chicago, Kansas City, Sioux City, and Austin, Minnesota. It takes its story up to the collapse of union power in the late 1980s.

The rest of the book:

Four histories of how unions were established in each of the four cities mentioned above. General themes: interracial unity, rank-and-file initiative. "Militant minorities" in the packinghouses. Chapter 6: the UPWA is born in 1943, succeeding the PWOC. CIO leaders want it to be structured like the USW, with top-down, centralized control, but the locals force it to have a relatively democratic, decentralized character. Their success in this struggle influences the UPWA's progressive nature during the 1950s and 1960s.

The labor movement's anticommunist hysteria between 1947 and 1950 had less effect on the UPWA than other CIO unions largely because of the great power that the locals wielded -- as opposed to the UAW's top-down structure, for example. The rank and file's influence ensured that the UPWA only paid lip-service to anticommunism; members knew how essential Communists had been to the union's past victories, and they saw no need to eject them. Nevertheless, the union was forced to comply with the Taft-Hartley Act after a failed strike in 1948.

In the 1950s the UPWA expanded its social unionism, especially with regard to anti-discrimination activities inside and outside the workplace. It actively supported the voter registration drives of Martin Luther King's SCLC, indeed was the only AFL-CIO union to send representatives to the formative meetings of the SCLC. Packinghouse workers also fought to end segregation in their own communities. On the other hand, the union's masculinist bias ensured that its efforts on behalf of gender equality were far less aggressive than on behalf of racial equality. Nevertheless, women activists succeeded in eliminating the pay-differentials between male and female workers.

After World War II, the big packing companies with which the UPWA had contracts started to lose market share to expanding companies like Hormel, IBP, ConAgra, and Excell, which prioritized low labor costs. Technological innovation made it possible for firms to exert greater control over the work process, and the development of highways in the 1950s made it more efficient to build plants in distant rural areas with little unionization. As a result, the Big Four companies that had formerly dominated the industry were forced to reduce costs in competition with the "new" firms, and they did so by closing plants in the Midwest. The UPWA lost so much of its membership in this way that in 1968 it was forced to merge, on unfavorable terms, with the AFL-affiliated Amalgamated Meat Cutters. The decline of unionism in the industry continued, however, because workers were forced to accept concessionary bargaining with the Big Four firms (Armour, Swift, Wilson, and Cudahy) due to IBP's significantly lower labor costs. (Some of IBP's plants were unionized, but the company simply closed these unionized plants and built others in Texas, etc.) Eventually pattern bargaining itself collapsed; wages varied from plant to plant. Companies recruited Mexican and Asian immigrants, further reducing levels of unionization. The pace of work sped up, in part

due to mechanization, and conditions in packinghouses continued to deteriorate. By 1990, the industry had returned to the "jungle" of sixty years before.

In a world that suffers from an ahistorical consciousness, in which the origins of social conflicts are forgotten or not understood, such a work as Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (2005) is valuable. Placing contemporary world affairs in the context of history, Westad argues that the Cold War was far from being merely a conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union played out on the stage of Europe, with a few incidental repercussions in the Third World. Instead, the war's most important aspects "were neither military nor strategic, nor Europe-centered, but connected to political and social development in the Third World" (p. 396). Westad concentrates on events in the 1970s and 1980s, showing how in Latin America, the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southern Asia, the U.S. and the USSR intervened in ways that would shape these regions -- mostly to their detriment -- for decades to come. The book's survey is useful and informative, as is its partial reconceptualization of the Cold War, but Westad's commendable project goes badly awry in his framing the events he discusses primarily in terms of two opposing ideologies. "This book argues," he writes, "that the United States and the Soviet Union were driven to intervene in the Third World by the ideologies inherent in their politics. Locked in conflict over the very concept of European modernity....Washington and Moscow needed to change the world in order to prove the universal applicability of their ideologies...." (p. 4). The reader is thus supposed to think that certain political elites believed *so strongly* in their ideologies, were so totally obsessed by them, that they would do almost anything to prove their rightness. Everything was subordinated to the obsession with proving that one's ideology was better than one's enemy's. Surely such an understanding of world affairs is impoverished. *Institutional relations* were far more important than ideologies in determining the course of the Cold War and its Third World interventions.

To set the tone of his book, Westad opens it with two chapters that respectively trace the careers of American and Soviet ideology. In these chapters and throughout the book, passages abound that quote the rhetoric of political leaders, their self-understandings, the ways they justified to themselves and the world their foreign interventions. At times this reaches the level of farce. For example, after quoting a State Department spokesman on George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq -- "I believe in freedom as a right, a responsibility, a destiny.... The United States stands for freedom, defends freedom, advances freedom, and enlarges the community of freedom because we think it is the right thing to do" -- Westad states with no hint of irony that the Iraq invasion is a perfect example of how "freedom and security have been, and remain today, the driving forces of U.S. foreign policy" (p. 405). He is, to be sure, critical of many U.S. (and Soviet) interventions, but on the whole he accepts politicians' interpretations of them. Almost totally lacking is any discussion of economic context, of economic interests that may have been served by particular interventions, of whether certain industries or companies were pressing for some foreign-policy action that came to pass, of what institutions benefited from which interventions, of policymakers' ties to various corporations. What was the significance of the Middle East's oil reserves to the superpowers' policies in that region? Did the existence of a "huge offshore oil field in Timor's territorial waters," which Western oil companies knew would be difficult to exploit if East Timor were allowed to become independent, have anything to do with the U.S.'s decisive military support (which Westad ignores) for Indonesia's invasion of the island and subsequent decades-long genocide there?[1] Maybe many of the superpowers' foreign interventions were motivated in part by the tremendous profits that could be made by selling arms to Third World regimes. Economically, *what was going on* with the U.S. and Soviet governments during the Cold War? Westad leaves us in the dark.

The very method of relying on leaders' public and private statements -- or rather, only those private statements made in the scattered conversations that have been recorded in the documentary record -- in order to understand the motives or the causes of specific policies is flawed. Such statements as the scholar can find should be taken into account, but they do not usually provide the most important information for

[1] Noam Chomsky, *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky* (New York: The New Press, 2002), p. 296.

an understanding of policies. First of all, the documentary record of conversations is necessarily fragmentary. Policymakers are not tape-recorded in every minute of the day. The statements that make it into the record may well reflect self-censoring or posturing in front of one's colleagues, or they may be rationalizations that disguise underlying unsavory motives. Public statements, on the other hand, are almost always nearly worthless except as indications of what plays well to the masses.

More broadly, self-deception is as rampant among policymakers as it is among "ordinary" people. Politicians and high-level bureaucrats are just as human as the rest of us, maybe more so (in the sense of being more self-deceiving). Nobody wants to think he is beholden to corporations or whatever interests have financed and coordinated his accession to power; he will convince himself that in his political behavior he is defending freedom, defending democracy, defending his country's security. Or, more likely, his having attained a high political position indicates that he has already been indoctrinated with the right ideologies, so that he genuinely believes what he is really doing is fighting some horrible evil called Communism rather than merely suppressing Nicaraguan or Guatemalan or Chilean independence from U.S. influence, or suppressing labor movements that might threaten the rule of business or set a bad example to neighboring countries by showing that popular democratic participation can improve people's lives. Or maybe he is clear-headed and knows exactly what he is doing. The point is that what he *believes* he is doing does not matter much; it should interest psychologists, not political scientists. The question is, what kinds of policies does the network of political and economic institutions *allow* to be pursued? What do these policies actually do? What effects do they have? If the policies continue for years and the people who promote them remain in power, one can assume they are having the right effects (as determined by certain powerful institutions). The essential irrelevance of lofty ideologies to the policies and machinations of political institutions is revealed in the fact that one can list off the top of one's head a dozen foreign interventions whose effects have totally contradicted the interventions' stated ideological purposes. If security and "defense" are so important to U.S. political institutions, why were the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan waged, wars that transparently were going to increase the U.S.'s insecurity by fomenting terrorist activity? If freedom and democracy are so important to policymakers and the institutions they represent, why were Reagan's wars in Latin America and Johnson's and Nixon's wars in Vietnam and Cambodia waged, which destroyed popular movements? Why has the U.S. government consistently flouted democracy by organizing coups to unseat popular leaders? Is it at all credible that policymakers are so disastrously incompetent that they cannot even understand their own ideologies, that whatever situation they stick their hands into they somehow manage to make infinitely worse than it was? Is it not more credible that they are merely paying lip-service to some nice ideology while acting so as to increase their own and their favored institutions' power?[1]

If the U.S.'s foreign interventions during the Cold War were really for the sake of fighting Communism, as Westad thinks, why didn't the end of the Cold War end such interventions? Westad does

[1] [In his comments on this paragraph, the professor wrote (in caps because the comments were embedded in the paper), "AN EXTREMELY POWERFUL STATEMENT. HOWEVER, YOUR ARGUMENT ALSO RUNS INTO A 'TRANSPARENT' PROBLEM. IF SUCH POWERFUL INSTITUTIONS ARE SO CLEARLY IN CHARGE, THEN WHY DOESN'T EVERYONE KNOW THAT, AND ACT ON IT?" I answered him with "I'd say that people *do* know that -- at least, ordinary, non-'intellectual' people do -- as shown by the cynicism of everyone you talk to on the street. Ordinary people take it for granted that big business is to a large degree 'in charge' and that politicians mostly want to remain in power, they'll do almost anything they have to to stay in power. Compromise whatever principles they have, etc. (Most intellectuals don't like such 'crude' ideas, such 'crude' cynicism, but to label something 'crude' or 'cynical' isn't, strictly speaking, an argument against its truth. No one ever said that truth has to be lofty and 'idealistic.') So why don't people do anything about it? Because of the incredible atomization of civil society. People feel powerless, since, as far as they're concerned, they lack effective institutions to fight back against 'The Man.' Hence most people's political apathy. In the 1930s, when there was a functioning labor movement and a vibrant civil society focused around working-class communities and so forth, people were far from being apathetic. They were hopeful, as you know. Now that business and its minions have, in the last thirty years, decimated civil society and the labor movement, people have few resources to fight back against power. So they do nothing. Sit at home and watch TV." It is telling that even an intellectual with some intelligence rejects such obvious truths.]

not even consider this question, despite its obviousness. The Cold War effectively ended in 1989, or 1991, but then the Gulf War happened, and later the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and U.S.-supported coups in Haiti (1991 and 2004) and Venezuela (2002), and meanwhile the U.S. continued supporting Suharto's aggression in East Timor, Turkey's massacres of Kurds, Israel's aggression in Palestine, etc., and it continued the Cuban embargo, instituted economic sanctions on Iraq, and so forth. All or most of these operations were explained not as defenses against Communism, because the Cold War was over, but as defenses against terrorism. The rhetoric had changed, but the interventions persisted. Is it likely, then, that "anti-Communism" was the real reason for identical interventions from the 1950s to 1980s, or was it not more probably an excuse, just as "anti-terrorism" was an excuse later?[1]

Even Westad's broader thesis, that the Cold War shaped developments in the Third World, is only partially true. If anti-Communism was indeed not the main reason for U.S. foreign interventions but only a convenient excuse (which some policymakers may well have believed in, though that's an academic question), it is probable that even had Russia or China never "fallen" to Communism, the United States would have intervened in the Third World on a large scale. Its purposes in doing so would have been the same ones it in fact had, namely to prevent countries from escaping its sphere of influence, from following independent, anti-"capitalist" paths, from establishing strong labor movements or building up the resources to resist pressure from American political and economic institutions. The suppression of such developments is the true "ideology" that American power-structures follow -- as is obvious from any honest consideration of the facts.

Notwithstanding all these criticisms, Westad's book has its uses. Primarily, it is an informative survey of Cold War foreign policy. On another level, it provides insight into the thought-processes of a typical liberal intellectual. It is illuminating to see how such a person interprets the world, how he convinces himself of the essential justness of a given political order, and of the good intentions of policymakers (as if "good intentions" mean anything at all). The book is also useful in demonstrating the explanatory poverty of a worldview that emphasizes "ideologies" above material factors and institutional relations.

After reading Mae Ngai's *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (2004), one may well be struck by what an *unnatural* form of social organization is the nation-state. This entity that sets arbitrary geographical boundaries between self and other, "us" and "them," and has the power to enforce these boundaries to the point of giving remarkable protection to "us" and acting to the positive detriment of "them," embodies the most vicious and dangerous kind of exclusionism. The citizen and the non-citizen -- the person and the non-person -- the full human and the half-human who can be stripped of rights he thought he possessed and imprisoned without due process, deported, moved around and manipulated with little legal recourse. In *Impossible Subjects*, Ngai tells the story of the most exclusionary and racist period in the history of American immigration law, between 1924 and 1965. Her title sums up the central and horrifying fact of restrictive immigration policies, namely that people can be present in a country illegally, that therefore they have few or no rights except at the pleasure of higher authorities (be they bureaucrats, judges, or legislators). Illegal aliens are *impossible subjects*, people who, according to the law, have no right to exist.

The danger of policies that limit citizenship was made clear by the Holocaust, which was perpetrated on people who had become stateless by having their citizenship revoked. As Earl Warren said, "Citizenship *is* man's basic right, for it is nothing less than the right to have rights. Remove this priceless possession and there remains a stateless person, disgraced and degraded in the eyes of his countrymen. He has no lawful claim to protection from any nation, and no nation may assert rights on his behalf" (p. 229).

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[1] The ideology of "containing Communism" becomes even more threadbare when one considers that the Soviet Union was not an expansionist power, certainly not nearly to the extent that the United States was. As Chomsky noted in 1989, the USSR was actually "conservative": "Whatever rotten things they [i.e., Russian Communists] have done, they've been inside the Soviet Union and right around its borders, in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan and so on.... They don't have troops stationed anywhere else. They don't have intervention forces positioned all over the world like we do. So what does it mean to say we're 'containing' them?" Ibid., p. 38.

Richard Rubenstein concludes that in fact no crimes were committed at Auschwitz, because the (stateless) victims had no rights.[1] According to domestic and international law they were non-entities.

Fortunately, most "illegal aliens" are not stateless but remain citizens of the country of their origin, a fact that presumably provides them with some minimal legal protection. Strangely, Ngai does not discuss this matter in any depth; she does not indicate what rights, if any, illegal aliens have by virtue of (in some cases) being citizens of another country. What powers does their government have to protect them? Not many, it seems, since she does not mention them. She does describe some of the ways in which aliens have been granted rights, or something *like* rights, since the early twentieth century. For example, in the 1930s "deportation policy became the object of legal reform to allow for *administrative discretion* in deportation cases," specifically cases in which deportation "separated families or exacted other hardships that were out of proportion to the offense committed" (p. 57). In later years this benevolent use of "administrative discretion" largely disappeared. More recently, in 1982 the Supreme Court ruled that undocumented children have the right to public education. Aliens have even been granted certain rights to due process in matters of deportation and detention (p. 268). In 1996, on the other hand, Congress passed laws that deprived legal and illegal aliens of many former rights, such as welfare benefits (for legal aliens) and judicial review in deportation cases. […]

A fruitful way of looking at the history of U.S. immigration law is as a prism through which to view broader trends in society. A country's treatment of the "other" illuminates its treatment of itself, or of the groups that constitute it. Obvious examples are the racially motivated laws from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth. Before the early 1920s immigration was relatively open, except for the exclusion of Chinese laborers due to an act passed in 1882 and a 1907 "Gentlemen's Agreement" with Japan that barred further Japanese emigration to the U.S. As Ngai states, "[O]n the United States Pacific Coast, Asian migrants collided with the racial imperatives of American manifest destiny, the ideology of continental expansion that had declared the West the domain of Anglo-Saxon civilization" (p. 18). Already in the 1880s, therefore, the U.S. had entered the West's climactic period of racism, imperialism, and nationalism, which would last until World War II.

After World War I Western nationalism became even more shrill, a shrillness reflected in immigration laws.

> [T]he international system that emerged with World War I gave primacy to the territorial integrity of the nation-state, which raised the borders between nations. For example, the introduction of passport controls in Europe and the United States, begun as emergency war measures, became, without exception, the norm in regulating international migration. In the United States, the Immigration Act of 1924 would require not only passports (documentary evidence of national identity) but also visas (documentary proof of permission to enter) for admission into the country [p. 19].

At the same time, the obsession with *race* reached new heights, such that the Immigration Act of 1924 fused racism and nationalism in a sort of uneasy truce. For instance, to limit immigration from southern and eastern Europe, Congress set up a complicated quota system based on national origins, according to which every country except those in the Western hemisphere had an annual quota of at least a hundred people, depending on the proportion of people inhabiting the U.S. in 1920 who were descended from it. Thus, the United Kingdom had a quota of 65,721, while India had a quota of 100. However, Congress also stipulated that Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Siamese people were ineligible to citizenship and hence excluded from immigration. So, while each of these countries had a quota of 100, the people who "racially" belonged to them were barred from immigration. These kinds of absurdities are what result when one tries to reconcile racist thinking with nationalist thinking. But in the 1920s, the U.S. was evidently steeped in these two kinds of prejudices to such an extent that politicians, academics, "race scientists" and others would agonize for

[1] Richard Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History: The Holocaust and the American Future* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 67.

months and years[1] over how to devise a system that accommodated racism and nationalism at the same time.

Less than twenty-five years later, however, by the late 1940s, the unholy trinity of imperialism, racism, and nationalism had lost legitimacy, with the consequence that reformers started a campaign to purge prejudice from the nation's immigration laws. As the 1950s passed into the 1960s, increasing liberalism, cultural pluralism, and rights-consciousness lent greater urgency to these efforts, until finally in 1965 Congress passed an Immigration Act that jettisoned the system of national origins quotas, "replacing it with a new system of quotas that were at once global (applying to all countries) and evenly distributed (20,000 per country)" (p. 227).

And yet the new law remained very restrictionist in some ways, causing a rise in illegal immigration from Mexico. Which brings us back to the dilemma cited earlier, of how to treat all people as humans in a world organized around nation-states. Probably it is impossible, given the necessary distinction between citizens and non-citizens. The logical conclusion, then, is that society will not be humane until nation-states have withered away.

*

February

After reading Christopher Lasch's *Plain Style: A Guide to Written English*, I'm going to be more careful with my punctuation. Returning to how I used quotation marks before reading Raymond Williams' book.

Dating a 30-year-old named Joy, a graduate student at the University of Chicago writing a dissertation on Buddhist philosophy (she's a Buddhist). […]

....Well, I spoke too soon, as usual. In an email she said she doesn't feel the "extra, mysterious 'thing'" between us that's necessary for a long-term relationship. Not terribly surprising. As usual, I'm too easygoing and "intellectual," or something, for there to be sexual tension. It's all about the masculinity. (Which, incidentally, is one reason for America's high divorce-rate. Women are attracted to their man but can't live with him.)

Life is merciful in finally desensitizing you to disappointment after two decades of it. -Well, *sort of* desensitizing you.

But how does one keep going? How does one continue to have the faith to keep going? In fact, how is it that I always return to optimism and buoyancy? It's decidedly unreasonable.

*

The irrational male.-- Relying on women for one's happiness is like relying on a known thief to guard one's property.

*

A false idol.-- The individualist is he whom everyone exalts in theory but condemns in practice.

*

For example, Tucker Max.-- One can take it as a rule of thumb that he who is beloved of women probably has little worth and should be avoided.

[1] The complicated quota system was not finalized until 1929, five years after the Immigration Act.

*

The mind-body problem.-- Watching people interact, the impression is inescapable that they truly are beings of *matter*. Earth-bound beings with muddy souls. And one returns to the realm of spirits with relief....

*

Hero-worship and other puzzles.-- It's easy to understand why I admire Noam Chomsky. But why do I *like* admiring him? Why is it emotionally gratifying? It isn't a mutual fondness; he barely even knows of my existence. For some reason, liking and, to an extent, admiring people is in itself pleasurable. That means that in some sense it's self-affirming, self-confirming. But that doesn't explain much. My admiration is a kind of self-activity, self-initiated activity, and so is satisfying. But again, that formulation is at best suggestive. Maybe it's actually misleading, in that liking someone is not so much an *act* as a *state*, the state of being impressed (half-consciously) by a person's "validation" of your own proclivities, your personal likes and dislikes, thoughts, beliefs, sense of humor, etc. You like someone insofar as you implicitly recognize yourself in him or her (even if "objectively" the two of you might appear to be quite different), whether because he values you and acts accordingly or because his behavior reflects what you value, such as your political beliefs or sense of humor. Similarly, you admire someone to the extent that he embodies your values (and thus, so to speak, *you*) perhaps better than you do. The "better than you do" is the part that can lead to envy and conflict; the "embodies your values" (thereby "validating," "confirming," "reinforcing" them) is what explains the subtle pleasure that exists in admiration.

*

American anti-intellectualism.-- The contempt in which intellectuals are held by most Americans is not necessarily contemptible. I'm inclined to think it is justified, though doubtless it takes crude and stupid forms. Intellectuals are parasites on the productive work that others do. They lead privileged, comfortable, isolated lives, and they unjustifiably consider themselves superior to others. Most of the work they do is basically irrelevant and masturbatory, and they usually don't do it very well anyway. They pride themselves on their independent-mindedness despite being arguably the most indoctrinated and least independent-minded class in society. If the average American gave these reasons for his contempt, I'd have to conclude that "American anti-intellectualism" is healthy and good. On the other hand, insofar as it arises from the emotional fascist ideas that "intellectuals aren't 'one of us,' they're unpatriotic, they're liberal," anti-intellectualism is stupid and potentially dangerous.

*

The natural divine.-- I believe in Bach, not God. Bach reveals a power beyond my understanding, and when I listen to his music I hear something too powerful to understand.

*

Pure liberalism, objectively valid.-- I used to "feel for" the plight of black cultural nationalists who thought that in order to exalt and be true to their race they had to return to their African origins and reject European civilization, even those aspects of which they approved. All their socialization of the last two centuries had been "inauthentic." But that's silly. The individual is the measure of all things; he is not bound to act or think in certain ways by virtue only of his family's or his "nation's" or his "race's" or any other group's past or present. A "heritage" is an imaginary construction, nonexistent outside a person's appropriation of it. There is nothing inauthentic about a black man identifying with European traditions, because collective identities are imaginary constructions that the individual is free to accept or reject. The

concept of authenticity understood in some sort of "objective" sense can apply only to the individual's relation to himself, because, in the final analysis, the individual is all that exists.

*

Joyous women.-- The source of young women's naïveté is no mystery. It is that the feminine, as such, is more personal than objective, more immediately immersed in itself -- in the gentleness, softness, giggliness and excited spontaneity of femininity -- than soberly comprehending of the other. This is why masculinity loves it, and why it loves masculinity.

*

Listen not to my words but to the Logos.-- Insofar as the reader resists some of the potentially "offensive" ideas I jot down, it is in part because he pays attention only to the *words* rather than to what they refer to. He doesn't use his imagination to go beyond the words and consider the phenomena they're describing. The words seem offensive and silly, so the reader rejects them without thought; but their point is to stimulate imaginative consideration of something *beyond* the mere words, namely, for example, the actual ways that men and women think and behave. Arthur Danto reflexively dismisses Nietzsche's judgment that women (he should have said "women insofar as they're feminine") are "more personal than objective," or less 'detached' than men; it is clear Danto hasn't taken the time to *imagine* the *concrete* meaning of the words. If you sit outside and watch people's behavior, or if you observe a woman in the throes of emotion, and if you haven't been totally indoctrinated into political correctness, you'll see there is some merit to Nietzsche's statement.

*

Fields of gold.-- While I have never walked in fields of barley with my love, nor lain in meadows as the west wind moved above us, I am comforted by the knowledge that others have. In a world of sorrow, that knowledge is a consolation. And so I listen to this song imagining others' happiness, and smile.

*

From a YouTube comment on Contrapunctus XI from Bach's "Art of the Fugue."-- "It's amazing that one man could write this, another perform it, and yet a third could design cluster bombs disguised as children's toys to be dropped by the USAF in Iraq."[1]

*

Three essences.-- The emotional logic of repressive conservatism is fear; the emotional logic of progressivism is hope. The middle and upper classes are prone to fear, since they do not want to lose what they have (including their "threatened" cultural values); the lower working classes are liable to hope, since they have little to lose. (The notable thing about fascism is that it combined fear with hope -- disguised repression as liberation. Hence its power, its appeal to both the powerful and the powerless.)

*

"Economic interests" vs. "status anxiety"?-- Hofstadter's and others' distinction (in political contexts) between "rational" economic concerns and "irrational" concerns over "status" or "culture" is not well-founded, and at any rate is unnecessary. Both concerns arise from the desire -- often institutionalized,

[1] (I had to rewrite the original sentence for literary purposes.)

thus becoming even more effectual -- to maintain or increase one's power relative to other groups. One might want greater economic power, greater political power, or greater power to have the kind of life and live in the kind of society one wants (for instance with respect to religion or traditions of authority -- or progressive environmental concerns, etc.). In all these cases the underlying desire is for *power* and *recognition*. Not necessarily recognition of *oneself*, but recognition of, or respect for, one's vision of how society should be. It is true, however, that particular forms of this desire may be more reasoned than others. Think of Jerry Falwell's homophobia as opposed to Egyptians' desire for democracy. Homophobia can be shown to be unreasonable (given other values and facts to which everyone implicitly subscribes), whereas democratic urges are eminently reasonable.

*

Fraudulent economics.-- According to the economist Robert Brenner, neoclassical economics, unlike the Marxian system, does not have a theory of capital accumulation. It cannot explain it. Since capital accumulation is the very essence of capitalism, the neoclassical system is....a joke. But its function, after all, is an apologetic one, so its explanatory thinness is not surprising.

*

How the public perceived a monster.-- Despite the campaign of disinformation to which we've been subjected in the last twenty years, Reagan was not a particularly popular president during his lifetime. In Gallup polls, his average approval rating was 53%, below Bush the First's, Clinton's, and Johnson's, and only four points above Bush the Second's. His highest was 68% and his lowest 35%. Carter's highest rating in the *Wall Street Journal*'s polls was higher than Reagan's.

*

Is it the Sixties again in Madison, Wisconsin?-- Eighty thousand protesters in solidarity with public-sector unions, defending their right to bargain collectively. It is inspiring and exciting. But whether they win or lose this fight, the hits against unions are going to keep coming. Business is going to keep using government deficits as an excuse to bust unions. The labor movement is not strong enough to fight back in any effective way. The only long-term hope for workers is outside the framework of collective bargaining, outside the framework of unions as traditionally understood. Cooperatives and such alternative entities are the only hope, I think. But it will take decades for them to establish a presence; in the meantime, we're going to see a lot of unemployment and a lot of misery.

*

Innate humanism.-- When you watch the young child dancing and singing along to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, or the child inquiring about the world's causes and life's purpose, or the child painting a picture vibrant with color, you realize that the higher things in life are not *taught to* people but taught *out of* them.

*

Healthy self-belittling.-- One of the reasons I respect Chomsky is that he takes himself profoundly seriously without taking himself seriously, indeed *by* not taking himself seriously. He takes humanity seriously, not himself. For example, while dissenters throughout history have celebrated themselves and their companions by arguing that to dissent -- from anything, even intellectual or artistic fads -- is a very "courageous" and "heroic" thing to do, Chomsky sensibly remarks that unless it entails real personal danger,

there is nothing especially courageous about it. Political dissidents in Turkey are courageous; dissidents in America are doing what should be expected of any reasonable and moral person.

*

A note on Populism.-- Despite my general appreciation of the Populist movement, I have to admit that insofar as its ideology was based on a *geographical* opposition to the East, to Wall Street and northeastern America, it was dangerous and bore the seeds of later semi-fascist conservatism. For geographical concerns cut across class lines and can easily become cultural or even racial. People can start hating not only big business but everything else associated with a particular region, such as civil rights, intellectual freedom, and "intrusive" government. Businessmen can be celebrated just by virtue of having originated in the "us" region (as opposed to the "them" region) and sharing some of its cultural values, such as Sam Walton. This sort of populism is easily manipulable by business and the public-relations industry, so that ordinary people wake up thirty years later to find that their working conditions at good ol' Sam's business are intolerable, they're paid little, and their communities are falling apart.

*

False consciousness.-- Leftists are sometimes criticized for being condescending toward the masses, for arguing that they are prone to displaying false consciousness in their political values and beliefs. But what *is* false consciousness? If you examine the notion rigorously, you'll see that, on at least some understandings, it can make perfect sense and is often applicable. All you have to do is assume that people have certain basic values and interests, such as being economically well-off, living in integrated communities, having political power, and having control over their work. Given such values, it is perfectly legitimate to criticize "secondary" values and strategies like opposing unions, civil rights, health-care reform, and government regulation of business. A different kind of false consciousness is exhibited in mistaken factual judgments, such as disbelief in anthropogenic global warming and belief in God. In general, insofar as someone is immune to rational considerations, he is exhibiting what can be called "false consciousness." (Truth, after all, is reached and tested through reason.)

People are free to have whatever values they want. If religion makes them happy, then fine. In that respect it is reasonable for them to be religious (for it makes them happy). But in other respects religious values and beliefs can be unreasonable, namely insofar as they contradict other values and beliefs the person holds. And they often, or always, do, implicitly if not explicitly.

Nevertheless, I find the notion of false consciousness to be not very useful. It is unnecessary; it has pejorative connotations and does not really clarify anything. In fact, it is such a broad, "multiply interpretable" concept that it obscures far more than it illuminates. For that reason I never use it. Still, it can have *some* substance, as I just showed.

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The mind is more attuned to selves than ideas.-- It is psychologically interesting that people tend to argue *ad hominem* -- to assume, for example, that by saying liberals are "condescending," one effectively refutes their positions. It shows that what people are really arguing against is not an argument but a self. What matter to them are not pure *ideas* or *arguments* but the fact that *a self is putting forward* certain challenging ideas. One wants to deal, first and foremost, with this self, not with the ideas it puts forward. The *opposed self* is what is offensive, its ideas only derivatively. As soon as one has come up with a reason to disregard the self in question, its obnoxious ideas no longer matter, being important not in themselves but only as symptoms of another's implicit devaluing of oneself (by disagreeing with one's ideas). Thus you have the amusing spectacle of adversaries screaming at each other, insulting each other, while completely ignoring each other's ideas. People who are able to detach ideas from their proponents and, furthermore, be more concerned with the ideas than with the fact that a person is putting them forward, are

rare. And even in such people, there is always a basic *ad hominem* consciousness that can be more or less transcended depending on moods, circumstances, etc.

Incidentally, I am not arguing that ideas don't reveal anything about the person who holds them. They often do. It is perfectly reasonable to dislike someone or make inferences about his character on the basis of his holding extremely obnoxious views. But this is separate from the issue I've been discussing.

*

Bareness

Looking at the snow, I know that I should go.
The moon is hidden by orange street-light, but I should go.
I am finished; my work is done, and things are dull.
Dusty books, dusty desks, dry reading
From dying books two years old, or dead-born.
I'm tired of things, and things are tiring too.
Outside the world, nature, nature is ever young,
Ever young-returning, turning old men into young.
There is a spot somewhere, snowy or summery, where
It is bare, life is spare, one can sit and be aware. And there
Is only silence or wind, no cares, trees standing quietly,
Things barely moving in the wind except for grass or falling snow.
-No, summer is where to be. Under the sun is where to be
When one no longer feels young, when feelings are done.
Warmth on the face upturned, eyes closed, all feelings
Focused in the skin, memories forgotten. Books
And desks and metal things and former hopes forgotten.
Only immediate sensations and enormous space.

*

"All hope abandon, ye who enter here."-- Undergraduate essays are like portals into the heads of ordinary people, into their thought-processes. Unfortunately, the world into which one steps through these portals is not well-lighted, has shadows everywhere, and is very, very frightening.

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Thoughts on Marxian common sense.-- An example of intellectuals' need to make everything more complicated and difficult than it has to be is the unending debate over the meaning and validity of the Marxian claim that the economy is the relative foundation of society, that production relations are ultimately the most important kind of social relations. One would have thought this claim to be commonsensical, but apparently it isn't. Its basic meaning and truth are revealed in the single consideration that people with economic power, who occupy high positions in institutions of economic production, generally have the resources to maintain or expand the societal role of their institutions, i.e. that other institutional actors, say in the realms of politics or the family or education, have less access to resources, and hence less power. That is to say, the institutions these latter actors represent have less social influence. As a result, for example, political and familial institutions in recent centuries have had to adjust to the capitalist mode of production far more than vice versa. Social revolutionary situations develop when powerful economic actors, along with the institutions they represent, start to lose their power, either in relation to a new set of economic institutions (as in the transition from feudal to capitalist society) or in relation to emerging social chaos, as in the Russian revolution. But, as I argued in my Master's thesis, in order for a new set of economic

structures really to transcend the institutional legacies of the old structures, as opposed to reproducing them in a disguised form or succumbing to them later (both of which apply to the Russian and Chinese experiences), the first scenario is what has to happen: new economic structures have to emerge in the old society, have to "compete with" the old structures and eventually prove their superiority by providing their partisans with greater access to resources than the "old" economic elite has.

Incidentally, insofar as a social revolution occurred in the American South between the 1950s and the 1980s, it was made possible in part by the substitution of certain new economic relations for older ones, itself made possible by advances in technology (mechanization, etc.) in the South and North (partially liberating blacks from their former servitude). And if you want to say that the New Left and similar movements in the 1960s and '70s inaugurated a "social revolution," this one too would not have been possible without prior changes in production relations and economic technologies. -The Marxian hypothesis, as you can see, is not really vulnerable to empirical refutation, being nearly axiomatic (or arrived at through something like pure reason), but it is not empty either. You might compare it in these respects to Darwinism, as I have before. Both theories can be refined and modified in numerous ways, but their central intuitions cannot be proven wrong.

*

"Queer theory."-- The problem with academic interest in the history of gender and sexuality is that it stinks of cultural decadence. It stinks of subjectivism, postmodernism, political correctness, withdrawal into the private self. Unfortunately, in a contemporary history department it is *everywhere*.

*

The dialectic of business's attacks on the public sphere.-- On a broad scale, business's privatization crusade is unstoppable, at least for the foreseeable future. It will not stop until it succeeds in tearing society apart. By that time, new public institutions, more decentralized than the welfare state, will have effectively taken over many necessary social functions -- and they will continue to become more powerful. It is impossible to say, however, when the tidal wave of privatization is going to crest and start to break against the ground of these new public institutions. Not for decades, probably.

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The farce of "progress."-- Aside from during World War II, there has probably never been more suffering amont the human species than there is now. And this statement will continue to be true for decades hence, each year seeing the aggregate level of suffering rise.

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La Rochefoucauld in the twenty-first century.-- The world is falling apart, pain and sorrow are everywhere, yet I remain a basically happy person due to my high opinion of myself.

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Male: external; female: internal.-- One way to express the differences between how men and women tend to experience sexual attraction is by saying that for men it is more "external" than "internal," while for women it is more internal than external. This corresponds to the fact that masculine minds are externally oriented -- observing the world, inquiring into it in an "external" ("intellectual") capacity, treating it (acting on it) as an object, not primarily feeling or empathizing or identifying-with or appropriating-into-the-self -- whereas feminine minds are less objective in this separation-between-self-and-other way. (Everyone's mind has feminine and masculine aspects, but the terms are still useful in

designating sexually differentiated tendencies.) Thus, masculinity wants to have sex with someone who looks beautiful, whereas femininity wants to have sex with someone who provokes certain feelings. External vs. internal, metaphorically speaking.

Moreover, to repeat what I've said before: insofar as, or *if*, there is a natural basis for the unevenness in scientific, mathematical, and philosophical achievement between the sexes, it is related to the contrast between the masculine orientation to the objective and the feminine orientation to the subjective. Femininity is surely just as cognitively capable as masculinity in the realms of natural science and mathematics, but it tends to have less *interest* in these subjects due to its affective cast of mind. Things having to do with *people* are more interesting to the feminine than things having to do with abstract logic and objective investigation of the non-subjective. Hence, in part, the higher incidence of female psychologists, social workers, teachers, lawyers, and businesspeople than scientists, mathematicians, and philosophers. (No rule without exceptions -- which are, however, probably a result of the relatively high "masculinity" of the minds of female scientists, philosophers, etc. For example, in my experience, many women who choose philosophy as a career are lesbians or simply un-feminine. (Not that there's anything wrong with that!) Maybe someday it will be possible to confirm all these ideas by studies of hormone-levels or brain-structures and such.)

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Essentialism, a revolt against postmodernist "cultural imperialism."[1]-- The difference between social-constructivists and me is that I think there must be some hidden truth in the eons-old essentialist thought of rich cultures, from India to China to Greece to Rome to Europe to Native American tribes and elsewhere. I have reverence for ancient wisdom. More generally, I respect the insights of non-contemporary-Western societies.

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Reading Christopher Lasch's masterpiece *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (1991). "This inquiry began," he writes, "with a deceptively simple question. How does it happen that serious people continue to believe in progress, in the face of massive evidence that might have been expected to refute the idea of progress once and for all?" As he understands it, the idea of progress is "the assumption that our standard of living (in the broadest meaning of that term) will undergo a steady improvement." In his book he tries to reconstruct the opposition to progressive, liberal ideology that runs through American history from the very beginning, as in republicanism (civic humanism, civic virtue), varieties of "radical Protestantism," Emerson, William James, populism (he thinks), Martin Luther King's nonviolent resistance, and, in Europe, Thomas Carlyle and Georges Sorel, among many others.

> A number of recurring themes informed the kind of opposition to progressive ideology that I have tried to recover and to distinguish from a more familiar lament for the decline of "community." The habits of responsibility associated with property ownership; the self-forgetfulness that comes with immersion in some all-absorbing piece of work; the danger that material comforts will extinguish a more demanding ideal of the good life; the dependence of happiness on the recognition that humans are not made for happiness -- these preoccupations, separately or in various combinations, reappeared in Sorel's version of syndicalism, in the guild socialism advocated by G. D. H. Cole and others, in Josiah Royce's "philosophy of loyalty," in Reinhold Niebuhr's account of the "spiritual discipline against resentment," and in Martin Luther King's practice of nonviolent resistance. What these thinkers shared with each other and with their predecessors was a sense of limits -- the unifying thread in the following narrative [i.e., this book]. An exploration of the idea of limits in various guises enables us to reconstruct not so much an intellectual tradition as

[1] Yes, "irony is the iron law of history."

> a sensibility, one that runs against the dominant currents in modern life but exerts considerable force, even today.
>
> It is most simply described, perhaps, as the sensibility of the petty bourgeoisie -- difficult to recognize as such, in major thinkers, only because we expect major thinkers to participate in the general revulsion against the petty-bourgeois way of life. These particular thinkers, I believe, embodied the conscience of the lower middle class, giving voice to its distinctive concerns and criticizing its characteristic vices of envy, resentment, and servility. Notwithstanding those vices, the moral conservatism of the petty bourgeoisie, its egalitarianism, its respect for workmanship, its understanding of the value of loyalty, and its struggle against the moral temptation of resentment are the materials on which critics of progress have always had to rely if they wanted to put together a coherent challenge to the reigning orthodoxy.

Lasch recognizes the unsavory aspects of lower-middle-class culture, such as nativism and racism, but wants to examine the positive aspects. His conservative vision, which is embodied as well in *The Culture of Narcissism*, is appealing, and I share it in many respects, but it's dangerous too. Or rather, it is dangerous if that side of it is emphasized that is little more than a sophisticated version of the "aesthetic morality" of the early intellectual fascists -- or national syndicalists -- in Italy and France. Lasch hates materialism, consumerism, spiritual shallowness, vulgar bourgeois selfishness, the breakdown of order and authority; he likes heroic cultures (such as ancient Greece), "spontaneity," moral consensus, the "legitimate authority" that has been corrupted by modernity, and dislikes "progress." He is concerned above all with the "devastated realm of the spirit." But look what happened when an intellectual ideology that shared these concerns was seized upon -- and embellished -- by the mob, by Hitler and his companions, Mussolini's minions, the French fascists. It is all too easy for this sort of conservatism or a similar kind to latch onto the nation or race as the agent of spiritual regeneration. Or to spawn something like the New Right. It is all too easy for an "anti-progress" ideology to be used to suppress democracy and human rights.

Here's something stupid: "The danger to democracy [today] comes less from totalitarian or collectivist movements abroad [because those effectively died in 1991] than from the erosion of its [i.e., democracy's] psychological, cultural, and spiritual foundations from within." Typical stupid idealism, which can lead to the bad sort of conservatism. Institutional facts -- the institutional configurations of corporate capitalism -- are what prevent democracy from happening, not the erosion of any cultural or psychological "foundations." That erosion is an effect of capitalism.

Lasch argues convincingly that the Judeo-Christian linear conception of time is not the origin of the modern notion of progress, and in fact is very different from it. For one thing, in the former conception, gradual *progress* isn't predicted to happen before the end of history. For another, the most common modern idea is that progress is open-ended and continuous, with no end to it. Things just keep getting better -- perhaps with periodic regressions -- as the productive forces expand, the standard of living improves, and freedom spreads. This is original. It derives not from Christianity but from the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment.

The Christian understanding of the temporal order is in fact not all that different from the ancient one. Both deprecate it, the ancient in the idea of endless cycles of birth and decline, the Christian in the idea of temporal corruption and transience, insubstantiality. Which is like Platonism. This has nothing in common with the modern secular ideology of indefinite progress, which valorizes the temporal order and deprecates, or denies, the spiritual and transcendent. Republicanism (civic virtue, etc.) is different from all this, but, to me, it seems closer to Christianity than to liberalism or "progressivism." It's inherently conservative and moralistic (in a sense), opposed to the endless accumulation of desires and needs on which modern progress rests. In some respects it's kind of like a secular version of Christianity, in that, for example, it encourages people "to find order and meaning in submission to a communal standard of conduct" and "associates the good life with a particular form of community and with the memories that constitute it." By contrast, classical political economy argued that "private vices," such as greed, become "public virtues" by stimulating industry and invention.

Actually, now that I think about it, the few similarities between republicanism and Christianity are entirely superficial and coincidental, since the two bodies of thought represent totally different traditions. Republicanism = a certain kind of aristocracy and urbanity, antiquity, this-worldliness, education and knowledge, a desire for glory and excellence; Christianity originally = the poor, the downtrodden and uneducated, the rejects from antiquity, other-worldliness, not reason but transcendent faith and love.

....It's funny that fascism has affinities with republicanism. Like the former, the latter celebrated (as I just said) masculine virility, honor, self-denying devotion to the common good for the sake of glory, and gazed wistfully on the noble and heroic, un-bourgeois civilizations of the past. It opposed the fracturing of society into independent interest groups, preferring to set up an educational system that would prepare citizens for disinterested public service. Fascism, at least in the mouths of its intellectual exponents, is sort of like the vulgarization, massification, industrialization, "nationalization," "heroicization," totalitarianization of republicanism.

Henry George. *Progress and Poverty*. Ideas on history: universal rules of growth and decay, etc. He argued that "specialization and the accumulation of wealth [always] steadily widened the gap between the rulers and the ruled; that advanced civilizations accordingly had to devote more and more of their resources to the maintenance of an idle ruling class; that they finally collapsed, top-heavy, under their own weight...." As true now as ever. Modern America is a perfect illustration of George's thesis, what with the ruling class's appropriation of more resources every year from the rest of society, which crumbles and starves.

Something surprising: I got positive feedback from a professor. Robert Johnston. He's quite good, one of the better teachers I've had. Sent me an email: "I'm writing to everyone now about their class participation. Yours has been excellent. You've had very challenging and insightful comments to make. Indeed, you are arguably the most challenging person in class, but you do your challenging in a quite collegial fashion. I appreciate how you wait to let other folks get on the table first and then come in (although you should feel free to be one of the early people to, if you wish). Overall, your comments are very well-considered, tied well to the texts, and always conducive to advancing the conversation. I'm very pleased." That was nice of him.

The economist John Hobson, a forerunner of Keynes, "challenged the orthodox consensus that savings and investment went hand in hand. Too much saving, according to Hobson, led to underconsumption and declining investment." Makes sense, surely. Excessive saving leads to low demand, which discourages investment. Keynes agreed with Hobson but wanted to find a more rigorous theoretical proof of his conclusions.

He decided that "The flaw [in orthodox economics], in effect, lay in the failure to reckon with the economic consequences of inequality, specifically with the 'psychological law that when income increases, the gap between income and consumption will increase.' Since the wealthy could spend only a small portion of their vast incomes, their disproportionate share of the national wealth meant that aggregate savings rose disproportionately as national income increased. A higher volume of savings did not generate a higher volume of investment. It led to a decline of aggregate demand, declining investment, and unemployment." Those ideas seem kind of obvious to me. Correlatively, the falsity of supply-side or "trickle-down" economics is obvious. (Even more so when you consider that nowadays the elite's investment is mostly in financial speculation rather than productive enterprise.)

....Lasch's thoughts on nostalgia vs. memory are of interest. It's falsity vs. truth. Escapism vs. reaching out to the world. Negation or rejection (of the *real* past but especially of the present) vs. affirmation (of the present and past). "Memory too may idealize the past, but not in order to condemn the present. It draws hope and comfort from the past in order to enrich the present and to face what comes with good cheer. It sees past, present, and future as continuous. It is less concerned with loss than with our continuing indebtedness to a past" that formed us. Active memory vs. passive nostalgia. Vitality vs. enervation. Engagement vs. alienation. Lasch contrasts the (healthy) Romantic and the (unhealthy) Victorian attitudes toward childhood. For the first, as Peter Coveney says, innocence is "valuable for what it might become."

I.e., the adult should retain a childlike spirit for the sake of maintaining his integrity in a corrupt world. For the later Victorians, however, innocence was seen not as a "resilient expression of man's potential integrity" but as something to be "statically juxtaposed to experience, and not so much static as actually in retreat." There was no place for innocence and integrity in the world, which is why Victorian novels so often had melodramatic childhood deathbed scenes. The pure child had to die, because life sucks. But it's telling that, in practice, the Victorian age treated children quite badly -- restricted their opportunities for development, restricted their freedom and play. This shows the falsity, dishonesty, shallowness, emotional self-indulgence of the Victorian adoration of children. If they were *really* adored, adults would try to learn from them, infuse experience with a spirit derivative of the child's, and treat children as they deserved to be treated rather than as prisoners or little wild things that had to be tamed. -The point is that the Victorian attitude exposes the essentially negative essence of nostalgia.

I used to wonder about the relation between socialism and republicanism, or between the "republicanism" of the Knights of Labor and that of the Founding Fathers. It isn't hard to puzzle out, though. We're basically talking about two different traditions, two different social essences, despite superficial similarities. As Lasch says, classical republicanism was aristocratic and agonistic, civic-humanist. "The republican ethic was nothing if not competitive. It was the ethic of the arena, the battlefield, and the forum -- strenuous, combative, agonistic. In urging men to pit themselves against the most demanding standards of achievement, it also pitted them against each other. In politics, it set a high value on eloquence, disputation, and verbal combat...." Its ethic was sort of a fusion of aesthetics and morality. Late-nineteenth century labor republicanism surely proceeded from very different social impulses and causes, however much it may have borrowed the language and some arguments of Thomas Jefferson. It was indeed conservative, like classical republicanism, but in a different way: its essential purpose was to protest against wage labor (and economic parasites like speculators and monopolists) and advocate for free labor. It was an early, not very self-conscious anti-capitalist movement. Classical republicanism shared its emphasis on economic independence -- because only propertied people could have the independence of mind to be proper republicans -- but it certainly was not an anti-capitalist movement. It was not a *protest* movement, except against monarchy, which it used as a foil to highlight its own inherently affirmative, antique, elitist ideals. Wage labor, insofar as classical republicans thought about it at all, was another foil. Labor republicanism was born amongst a different class of people -- artisans and so forth, not landowners and aristocrats. Just as socialism was an ideology for those who wanted to rise up out of wage labor (collectively), labor republicanism was an ideology for those who were worried about falling into (or remaining in) wage labor. It was a temporary, "reactionary" ideological stage in the transition from pre-industrial to industrial society; socialism has lasted much longer because it is not reactionary, it assumes industrialism but simply wants to organize it differently. In any case, classical republicanism, while not "reactionary" in the way that labor republicanism is, is the most conservative of these three ideologies, having been born in ancient Greece and Rome, revived in the Florentine Renaissance, and "picked up again by James Harrington and his followers in England and by Montesquieu and Rousseau in France."

It is true, though, that as classical republicanism died out in the early years of the nineteenth century, its exponents started to sound more and more like future labor republicans, lamenting the commercial spirit of the age, extremes of economic inequality, the spread of wage labor, etc. They went from the offensive (as in the American Revolution) to the defensive. It isn't a long way from this dying gasp of the old republicanism to the later slogans of the Republican Party and then the Knights of Labor.

....Lasch comments, rightly, that "the very essence of popular radicalism in the nineteenth century" was the distinction between the producing classes -- including artisans, shopkeepers, farmers, small business-owners, industrial workers, etc. -- and the parasites, mainly bankers, speculators, and lawyers. This reminds us that fascist ideology in some respects drew on nineteenth-century populist radicalism, since it too was (arguably) founded on the distinction between producers (including many types of capitalists) and parasites.

As I read Lasch, it occurs to me that liberalism and republicanism were often not sharply separated in the eighteenth century. The American Revolution, for example, drew on both. Thomas Paine borrowed

from both. So did Jefferson and many others. Classical liberalism, in fact, as Chomsky would say, was quite different from what was later understood as liberalism, which explains why so many people did not see it as incompatible with republicanism. Its basic tenet was individual freedom, which, in a different way, was a basic tenet of republicanism as well. I suspect the philosophies, insofar as they were clearly defined at all, were sometimes thought to be complementary. Liberalism meant rights, republicanism meant duties or "virtue." The former was negative -- "freedom from" -- the latter positive, in that it provided a positive moral vision absent in liberalism. People should be free *from* state intervention, etc., *to* (preferably) develop themselves in noble and public-spirited ways, etc.

As Lasch makes clear, liberals had republican sympathies and republicans had certain liberal sympathies, and many writers were not clearly one or the other. Classical liberals were very ambivalent about what glimmerings of capitalism they saw, though maybe less so than people who were attracted primarily to republicanism. Think of "Locke's argument that anyone forced by necessity to sell his labor lacked one of the essential attributes of freedom." Locke was a liberal, but republicans made exactly the same argument. For both traditions, freedom was essential. Which meant that both traditions were bound to oppose wage labor, i.e. capitalism.[1] Thus, future opponents of capitalism, whether in the 1820s or the 1880s, could take inspiration either from Tom Paine (who was quite liberal) or from William Cobbett (who was quite republican). And scholars who argue that republicanism was basically the only source of opposition to capitalism are very wrong. Especially since Christianity was also a source of opposition! And there were spontaneous popular sources too (which frequently quoted arguments from old liberals and republicans). And of course European socialist traditions became sources of opposition as well -- and they cannot always, or often, be thought of as continuations of the republican tradition.[2]

It can't be emphasized enough that most of the early opposition to industrial capitalism (or wage labor) falls under the category of "*producerism*." Jacksonian Democrats, many liberals and republicans, the early Workingmen political parties, the early Republican party, the Knights of Labor, the Populists, etc. People shouldn't have to rent themselves, they should be independent, productive property-owners, and bankers and speculators should be deprived of their power, etc. It wasn't for a *long* time that the sophisticated Marxist understanding (wage labor vs. capital) was widely accepted in the labor movement. Twentieth-century fascists were still seduced by the producerist way of thinking. And, now that I think about it, "populist" currents in American society are *still* basically producerist. The ideology's appeal is understandable: far-away parasites are leeching off the hard work of us ordinary folk. And "us ordinary folk" do, after all, want to make money and often own small businesses, etc., so a maturely anti-*capitalist* or socialist ideology is less attractive. Some variant of producerism is the alternative.

...."Nineteenth-century populism[3] meant something quite specific: producerism; a defense of endangered crafts (including the craft of farming); opposition to the new class of public creditors and to the whole machinery of modern finance; opposition to wage labor. Populists inherited from earlier political traditions, liberal as well as republican, the principle that property ownership and the personal independence it confers are absolutely essential preconditions of citizenship." But it's misleading to say that populism -- i.e., an ideology and movement of the "people," not just of a specific class -- is an inheritance of various intellectual traditions. It is just as much a "spontaneous" product of certain economic and social conditions, i.e. something that arises amongst people who have no exposure to traditions of European thought.

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[1] Well, the type of liberalism that Adam Smith embodied accepted wage labor, an intricate division of labor, etc. But even Smith had definite reservations about these things, and deplored phenomena that later became characteristic of industrial capitalism.

[2] Aside from all that, "ethical-aesthetic" and Romantic sources existed too (arguably having affinities with republicanism). But they usually manifested themselves in art and philosophy, not social struggle. At least not until fascist leaders and intellectuals came along later. (One shouldn't forget, either, the obvious conservative, semi-feudal sources of opposition to modernity. These were closer to the "ethical-aesthetic" opposition than anything else. Think of Edmund Burke.)

[3] He uses the term in a much broader sense than the agrarian kind of the 1890s.

Liberalism, republicanism, democracy and so on are *human.* People who have never heard the words will arrive at the same ideas, because the ideas are common sense. Expressions of the urge for freedom.

Lasch has a stimulating discussion of the eighteenth-century Calvinist Jonathan Edwards (in whose tradition he places Emerson). Query: what is original sin? Does it consist in specific crimes we commit, such as Adams's bite of the apple? No. It lies "not in specific transgressions so much as in a rebellious, disbelieving heart. Thus even infants have a 'malignant nature, though incapable of doing a malignant action.'" People want to be happy, they think they have a right to be happy; their lack of happiness, therefore, causes them to resent God.

> Rebellion against God, Edwards argued, was simply the normal condition of human existence. Men found it galling to be reminded of their dependence on a higher power. They found it difficult, moreover, to acknowledge the justice and goodness of this higher power when the world was so obviously full of evil. To put it another way, they found it impossible (unless their hearts were softened by grace) to reconcile their expectations of worldly success and happiness, so often undone by events, with the idea of a just, loving, and all-powerful creator. Unable to conceive of a God who did not regard human happiness as the be-all and end-all of creation, they could not accept the central paradox of Christian faith, as Edwards saw it: that the secret of happiness lay in renouncing the right to be happy.
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> Edwards's theology rested on careful observation of what happened to people -- himself first of all -- who renounced their claims on the universe.
>
> > The appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost every thing. God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in every thing; in the sun, moon, and stars; in the clouds, and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees, in the water, and all nature....
>
> In a "personal narrative" of his own conversion, Edwards recalled how he "used to uncommonly terrified with thunder, and to be struck with terror" at the approach of a storm. The acknowledgement of God's sovereignty transformed his terror into gratitude and wonderment. "I felt God, so to speak, at the first appearance of a thunder storm; and used to take the opportunity, at such times, to fix myself in order to view the clouds, and see the lightnings play, and hear the majestic and awful voice of God's thunder,....leading me to sweet contemplations of my great and glorious God."
>
> These words help to clarify what Edwards meant by "consent and good will to Being in general" -- the essence of "true virtue," as he called it in his treatise on that subject. "Consent" implied a love of God's creation in and for itself, without regard to the ways it thwarted or seemed to encourage human designs. ....Love of God, not love of mankind, was the "primary" meaning of faith, just as sin, the rebellious antithesis of "consent," was first of all an offense against God, not against humanity or particular persons.... "True virtue primarily consists, not in love of any particular Beings because of their virtue or beauty, nor in gratitude because they love us; but in a propensity and union of heart to Being simply considered; exciting absolute benevolence....to Being in general." Man has no claim to God's favor, and gratitude has to be conceived, accordingly, not as an appropriate acknowledgement of the answer to our prayers, so to speak, but as the acknowledgement of God's sovereign but life-giving power to order things as he pleased....
>
> ....Edwards stripped God of personal attributes.... God was simply "being in general." As such, he was "absolutely perfect, and infinitely wise, and the fountain of all wisdom," and it was therefore "meet that he should make himself his end, and that he should make nothing but his own wisdom his rule in pursuing that end, without asking

> leave or counsel of any." Virtue, then, lay in the joyous affirmation of the beauty and justice of such a God....

Wise thoughts, reminiscent in some respects of ancient Buddhism, Spinoza, and other profound traditions. As I wrote in my "satire" on the book of Job, happiness will come only when we stop grasping for happiness. ("Happiness is like an eel, slithering from our desperate grasp.") It will come when we embrace *wonder*, when we look on the world with awe and gratitude. In this sense, yes, love of "God" (Being) might mediate love of humanity and even, to an extent, of self.[1]

It's true that the most important thing in a world of suffering, the most moral thing, is to work to eradicate suffering. But this can be done on the basis of something like Edwards's ideas or Albert Schweitzer's Reverence for Life or, more broadly, the sort of capacious, wonder-full, universally affirming attitude that these philosophies are supposed to express. You can reason and write and preach and poeticize as long as you want, but the only real value of such meditative excursions is their expressing and fostering the very simple attitude of "joyous affirmation," "absolute benevolence," and profound *care*.

But of course you don't even need that, unless you personally need it. You might as well just try to help people.

....Edwards is right that self-love is the basis of "a mature conscience [and] the source of man-made morality." For one thing, we have a tendency to obey social (and institutional) norms because by doing so we get people's approval, which reinforces and expands our self-love. More interestingly, concern for others -- as well as the very ability to act according to norms, to take into account in your behavior people's expectations and reactions -- is based on the capacity to internalize in some degree people's self-love + experiences (i.e., their "perspectives"), or, what amounts to the same thing, to project one's own self-love (or loved self) onto others. How else could it be unpleasant to observe others' pain, or why would it give us pleasure to be in the company of happy people? Pleasure and pain work only on the self; you can't directly experience another's pleasure or pain. So, in order for another's experiences to have some seemingly immediate effect on you, it has to be by your internalizing them (more or less intensely). That's true by definition, in fact. Thus, humans have a natural urge to treat others well because of their self-projection/other-internalization combined with the fact of self-love on both sides (i.e. your self-love and your automatic understanding of their self-love -- which are components respectively of your self-projection and your other-internalization). This sort of interpersonal dialectic is possible by virtue of the fact that in your consciousness, in your self, is an "*abstract* other," a general diffuse otherness (the existence of which explains how you can be an other to yourself, i.e. self-conscious, namely by being implicitly aware of your particularity as contrasted with the universality of the other, or otherness, in your consciousness[2]). For when you encounter a concrete self, a person, your "perception" or "experience" of him -- or, rather, *he as perceived by you* -- partly occupies or "fills up" the space of the general otherness in your consciousness. Which is to say, you "internalize" him (to some small degree), or his selfhood "instantiates" a part of your consciousness. Your self-love is thus in some tiny degree projected onto him (such that you implicitly, to a very small degree, "identify with" him and his self-love) -- or, alternatively, his self-love is internalized by you. Same thing.

Sociopaths and the like are simply people who are deficient in the capacity to *affectively internalize* an other's perspective, i.e. to care about it (however cognitively or "intellectually" they might understand it).[3] Some people, on the other hand, have a higher-than-average capacity for affective internalization (such

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[1] From what I've read of Edwards's thought in general, it is *very* different from Buddhism and other noble philosophies. But some of the ideas above are similar.

[2] To say it more clearly: you couldn't be aware of yourself as a particular self unless you were also aware (on a half-conscious level) of some general otherness, some "abstract" general other. Particularity, as such, can exist, or can be known as particularity, only in contrast to universality. See my earlier thoughts on the subject.

[3] The existence of sociopaths etc. shows that we have to distinguish between types of internalization, for these people do internalize others in some way(s), only not in the relevant "empathetic" way. I'll have to think about this stuff in more depth later.

as empathy[1]), for instance, probably, my mom. Or, more extremely, the woman who reported that when observing a massage or some such thing she could *literally feel* the same kind of sensations experienced by the other. Such a person demonstrates the truth of all these ideas, for in her -- who embodies to an extreme the tendencies of ordinary people -- the extension of the (loved) self to incorporate others is obvious, not merely implicit or hidden as in the rest of us.

I need hardly point out, by the way, that self-love is integral to, or part of the essence of, all or nearly all human -- or even animal -- acts and experiences. Human tendencies are but extreme versions of animal, or at least mammalian, tendencies.

....Years ago when reading Emerson I came across Harold Bloom's opinion that Emerson is "America's philosopher" or something like that. It struck me as wrongheaded. The spirit of America and the spirit of Emerson had little in common, it seemed to me. "Progress," "democracy," "egalitarianism," American optimism, materialism, commercialism are opposed to the profundity and deep-loving spirituality of Emerson's writings. Lasch agrees with me.[2] Of course, I probably misunderstood Bloom's meaning. But with regard to scholars' common locating of Emerson in the tradition of progress and optimism -- Lasch calls these misinterpreters "professional Pollyannas" -- Nietzsche's love of Emerson is enough to prove the falseness or shallowness of that interpretation.

In a deeper sense, however, the fundamentally affirmative thrust of Emerson's thought suggests that it can be seen as a "heroic," spiritual, semi-religious sublimation of young America's vigor and expansiveness. Old-world Calvinism meets new-world dynamism.[3]

I have to disagree with Lasch's disagreement with Alfred Kazin. Lasch says that Kazin's "assertion that we can still share Emerson's 'thrill' in the 'primacy that he shared with Nature and America itself' does not strike me as terribly helpful [?], especially when it is accompanied by disparagement of Emerson as a 'sage-at-large'; a believer in 'self-actualization' and 'rapturous self-affirmation'; a closet elitist whose 'underlying contempt for those who could not live up to his revelation' offends us as deeply as his conviction that '"life"....was indeed nothing but what the "great man" is thinking of'; an apostle of 'perfect personal power' whose 'trust in the spiritual life' took no account of hard material realities; and, worst of all, an abstracted, 'unctuous' ex-preacher who gave the dominant classes their 'favorite image of the literary man as someone removed from "real" life while remaining an embodiment of the idealism professed as the essence of America.'" Nearly all these characterizations of Emerson strike me as accurate, or at least highly defensible. Lasch, being an arch-traditionalist and dogmatist, is excessively eager to attack (and to mischaracterize) others' opinions even when they have at least *some* obvious validity.

But, whatever. I won't cavil. The book is interesting. It's a nice diversion to think about all these idealistic philosophies, and it's a fine thing to do occasionally if you're a privileged intellectual who has too much free time on his hands, but it's also necessary -- and refreshing -- to return to the real world. The

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[1] It seems to me that not only are there different kinds of internalizations; there are even different kinds of affective internalizations. Insofar as sociopaths care about someone's opinion of them, they have "affectively internalized" him to some degree.

[2] But even Lasch "used to think of Emerson as a foolish optimist." A strange mistake to make. Even the essay "Compensation," which seems so Panglossian, does not express "optimism" properly so-called, or even a shallow belief in life's goodness and the world's justice. It expresses *amor fati*, a probing beneath appearances to affirm that things are essentially in measure. The good and the bad come with compensations. E.g., the rich and powerful are fearful, suspicious, harried, pressured, and eventually for them "pleasure is taken out of pleasant things, profit out of profitable things, power out of strong things," because these people "seek to separate them from the whole." -One may dislike such ideas because of their tendency to reconcile the oppressed to the world as it is -- and, after the twentieth century, *amor fati* or whatever you want to call it has become impossible -- but they aren't as shallow as you might think. Anyway, you should read the essay. Emerson's writings are too deep (whatever their flaws) to be typically "American" in the bad senses.

[3] As Lasch summarizes one scholar's views, "Emerson's rejection of a tragic view of life [read: the apparent implications of Calvinism] should be seen as a hard-won advance beyond tragedy, not as the product of a mind unacquainted with tragedy or unable to conceive it even as a hypothetical possibility." On the other hand, a case can be made that Emerson passed over tragedy and into affirmation too quickly.

age of Emerson and romantic idealism has passed. Reality has become too urgent for us to take seriously these games, variations on Solitaire.

Lasch aptly remarks that syndicalism and guild socialism were the last real challenges to the wages system. (Soviet Communism was basically a version of the wages system.) "They rested on a shared belief that 'slavery,' not poverty, was the overriding issue of modern times." In this respect they were different from social democracy and state socialism. Unfortunately, guild socialism in England was eventually absorbed by social democracy, while syndicalism in France "remained intransigent and unregenerate" until its collapse around 1910, after which time its former supporters gravitated toward either the extreme right or the extreme left. "For the French syndicalists, the servile mentality allegedly fostered by wage labor could be countered only by a movement that upheld discarded ideals of honor, glory, and 'pessimism.'" (E.g. Sorel.) The paradoxical aspects of French syndicalism, such as its being radical and proto-fascist at the same time, are due to the economic circumstances of its adherents. France was still economically backward in the early 1900s, craftsmen and artisans still being prevalent. It was they who spoke the "revolutionary and syndicalist phrases," even though in practice they were more conservative than the unskilled workers. "Their radicalism derived in part from their resistance to new machinery." But their "moral conservatism" was strong enough for many of them to join nationalist and fascist movements later.

American syndicalism, of course, was different from the French version. It was more progressive, appealing not to artisans and such but the enslaved masses. -Incidentally, William Z. Foster pointed out that the IWW was not syndicalist strictly speaking, since it aimed to organize all into "one big union," whereas syndicalists wanted decentralization and local autonomy. Syndicalists weren't necessarily industrial unionists; they saw decentralization as the issue, not any particular form of organization. -Nevertheless, the IWW in its practice and ideology did surely have a lot in common with syndicalism. Just look at its Wikipedia page.

....The mid-twentieth-century liberal-intellectual cult of the "expert," the technocrat, the social engineer (administrator), with its accompanying contempt for democracy and the irrational masses among whom consent had to be manufactured through propaganda and advertising, actually began in embryo in the early 1920s with Walter Lippmann and a small constellation of like-minded intellectuals who felt alienated from vulgar mass culture. Maybe one could trace it even farther back to the undemocratic, efficiency-fixated elements of Progressivism. It is embodied, for instance, in the founding of the Council on Foreign Relations in 1921 by Lippmann and others. Then later with the New Deal this liberal statist tradition became more institutionalized, and then much more so with the Second World War and afterwards with the "military-industrial complex" and the expansion of the welfare state. The whole tradition thus matured with the maturing of corporate/state capitalism and a stable consumer society, given the necessity of Keynesian policies and a capital-labor "accord." All these institutional necessities used Lippmann, Thurman Arnold, Robert Lynd and many other liberal anti-democrats as their mouthpieces, their ventriloquist dummies.

One of the things I like about Lasch is his defense of ordinary people against intellectuals' and professionals' contempt for them. He's basically a populist. For example, in opposition to the conventional liberal invoking of white working-class and lower-middle-class racism and their finally being (in the sixties) "prosperous enough to resent high taxes and welfare programs [for blacks and minorities] but still insecure in the middle-class status" as explanations for the conservative "backlash" against liberalism and the civil rights movement, Lasch points out that these classes have always had to "struggle to keep even," even in the late sixties and seventies, and in the eighties their economic situation got worse. Contrary to what both liberals and conservatives have thought, since the seventies the middle class has been shrinking, not growing. Thus, lower-middle-class whites were not only victims of "status anxiety" but had real economic grievances that they thought were not being met by the government. Moreover, anti-busing activists in Boston and other cities were not always out-and-out racists; they were concerned about the safety of their streets and the impact of desegregation on their schools. "In city neighborhoods where anxiety about these things has become a way of life, the attempt to achieve racial justice through busing and affirmative action presents itself as a contest between 'rich people in the suburbs,' as Louise Day Hicks put it at the height of

the Boston school wars, and the plain people of the city -- 'the workingman and woman, the rent payer, the home owner, the law-abiding,....hard-working, forgotten American.'" Imagine what the reaction of suburbanites would have been if black students had been bused not to inner-city white schools but to suburban white schools! *Then* who would have been the "racists"??

Nevertheless, one should be cautious in one's appreciation of the modern white working class and lower middle class. It remains true that these people are susceptible to divisive cultural and racial politics (but so is the more affluent middle class), that in their politics they often shoot themselves in the foot, and that in a different time and place most of them would have belonged to fascist parties. Still, they do have genuine economic grievances that propel their discontent, grievances more real than those of the Phyllis Schlaflys of the world.

"From the point of view of those [whites] who lived in deteriorating urban neighborhoods, liberals were not only indifferent to their needs but actively hostile, bent on destroying those neighborhoods if they stood in the way of racial integration." For the working class and lower middle class, their neighborhoods were and are their world. Historically these groups have actually been more interested in preserving their communities -- perhaps with a little more security and money -- than in seeking upward mobility. So it's understandable that they would revolt against a culture that seemed to threaten the things they held dearest, including their self-respect and their ethnic solidarity. As one worker said in the seventies, "The liberals and the press look down on hardhats like me, but we've invested everything we have in this house and neighborhood." Urban renewal programs, too, were destroying old ethnic communities in the sixties and seventies.

In light of liberalism's inability to solve the growing economic and other material problems of all these lower-class whites, it isn't at all surprising that many white workers would turn to political conservatives who at least seemed to share their social values, were not disrupting their communities with school busing, gun control, the banning of school prayer, etc., and did not share the "anti-Americanism" of "privileged" antiwar activists and those long-haired hippies. The rise of conservative populism was utterly predictable -- especially when it was backed by suburban wealth and political connections and the enormous power of conservative sectors of business.

Most of these socially conservative lower-class whites were fairly radical in their economic views, favoring a general redistribution of income. They did support California's tax revolt, but it was regressive property taxes they opposed, not the federal income tax.

Don't forget, too, that liberals in the eighties pressed for heavy taxes on tobacco, beer, and hard liquor, "the traditional consolations of the working class." Not surprising that this alienated much of the New Deal's constituency, as yet another sign of government interference in their lives. On the other hand, had a true populist political party existed, a party in the radical tradition of old Populism, most working-class Reagan-supporters might well have switched their allegiance. Instead they had to make to do with conservative pseudo-populism, which, in order to avoid stirring up the old populist hatred of big business, blamed society's ills on a "new class" of intellectuals, bureaucrats, and liberals, supposedly allied with black "welfare queens" and other parasites.

As an aside, Lasch makes the excellent point that the "private sector" is misnamed. Much or most of it isn't private but public, relying on money from the government, money taken from taxpayers. --Lasch is basically a confused thinker, but every so often he illuminates. (His whole book, by the way, consists, more or less, in his grinding his little ax against the ideas of liberal optimism and endless economic expansion. We have to celebrate *limits*! Human limits! Spiritual discipline! Republican *virtù*! Etc.! It's like, sure, I'm in favor of those things too, but *wow* does this guy have an ax to grind. And *wow* is he an idealist in the bad sense. And *wow* is his polemic against Marxism misguided and one-sided.)

March

Reading Roger Horowitz's *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!": A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930-90* (1997).

Sex with Amy. One of those passionate artists. It's incredible how much some women enjoy sex, and how frenzied they can get. […]

Anyway, Amy and I have nothing in common. So that's that.

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The politics of nostalgia.-- There is a nostalgia of the left and a nostalgia of the (populist) right. The former imagines a lost time of relative freedom and equality, or harmony between people(s), or environmental purity before industrialization, while the latter imagines a lost time of clear and harmonious social hierarchies and ideological certainty and uniformity. The right, however, seems to take far more interest in its nostalgic fantasies than the left. It constantly invokes religion and tradition, whereas the left rarely wastes time on backward-looking justifications but simply strives for change or to preserve threatened forms of popular power. This contrast is reflected in labels: the right is "*conserv*ative," the left "*progress*ive."

It's partly because nostalgia is such a powerful feeling that conservative populism -- the populism of the middle classes, from lower to upper -- has been a potent force for almost two centuries. Fear and resentment, however, are just as essential to conservative populism as "nostalgia."

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"Free at last, free at last! Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last!"-- When I step into the fresh air outside after enduring a three-hour-long class on gender and sexuality or the history of occupations or some other academic subject, I can almost literally feel myself breathing anew the air of intellectual freedom. I swell with love of the open world and of free thought. The academic dungeon, a dark and claustrophobic place, is forgotten. No more nodding appreciatively with a serious look on my face; […] no more institution-thinking. The moment you bring up anything *real* in these discussions or refer to general implications, people either lose interest or get offended. Implications are not what interest them; the question "Why should we care?" is not in their arsenal of interrogatives (which is otherwise so well-stocked). They just talk and talk about....what happened, when it happened, how it happened, how the author could have improved his or her analysis of it, what parallels there are between some little thing and some other little thing. And all this archival work that people do, all these monographs published all the time on every conceivable little subject....so much of this stuff is, as Chomsky says, little more than clerical work. Not much creativity going into it, a lot of the time. There's more creativity in being, say, an auto mechanic, figuring out how to make an engine work, using your hands and brain to find a solution to something. But intellectuals need something to do, so they get together in their glorified book clubs (seminars, conferences, etc.) and talk about the details of the details of something that happened in some place sometime, making sure not to stray beyond the norms of what is institutionally acceptable. –It's even worse, by the way, in Philosophy.

So, in short, I step outside and am refreshed.

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The tyranny of capital.-- The stripping of public-sector workers' collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin, while hardly surprising, bodes ill for America's labor movement. "As Wisconsin goes, so goes the nation" -- at least, historically.

To take one current example: In Michigan, "Governor Rick Snyder and the Republican-dominated state Senate passed, and sent back to the House, legislation today that allows Snyder to declare a local city to be in a financial emergency and appoint an emergency manager. That manager can, without anyone else's approval, cancel contracts, including collective bargaining agreements, force consolidation of schools, townships, cities and counties and, unbelievably, unilaterally remove local elected officials.... The

bill even allows Snyder to appoint a corporation as the emergency manager." So corporations will be able to own and control towns. The *reductio ad absurdum* of privatization.

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Ideas and social causation.-- In circumstances of a breakdown in public order or an exceptional state of fear and insecurity among a people, ideologies have a remarkable power to motivate. Ordinarily, however, it is not ideologies but simply institutional norms, as well as basic human desires and needs, that motivate and guide behavior. Actually, even in "ordinary" times it's true that social movements are motivated by ideologies -- but *whenever* ideological motivation comes into play, material and institutional facts remain the fundamental causal factors. They structure the situation; they determine that a particular ideology will be accepted by the masses, due, for example, to the unequal allocation of resources between competing institutions propagating competing ideologies (so that the institution with greater access to resources will tend to have more success in its propaganda). Or, on the other side, people who want to escape from political or economic oppression will gravitate towards an ideology that focuses their (material) grievances. One can almost infer from the proportional distribution of ideologies in a society which sets of institutions have what degrees of economic power.

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More on "idealism" versus "materialism."-- To talk about ideologies and discourses, "ideological foundations" and discourses of class, gender, race, and politics, focusing your analysis entirely on language and symbols, is to be supremely asocial and ahistorical. To take an analogy from a "discursive practice" dear to my heart: it is like drinking only the foam atop a mug of Guinness, leaving the beer inside. [Discursive practice because beer drinking usually involves talking as well.] Actually, in such analyses it is impossible not to presuppose institutional relations; otherwise you would be dealing with a social vacuum of ideas and individuals' psychology. Just a lot of ideas and symbols floating around, some of them being unaccountably "preferred" by certain people and others by others. The origins and meanings of discourses and self-understandings are explained by the complex of people's interrelationships, which are structured according to institutional relations. Working-class "discourses" of mutualism arise primarily out of production relations: workers in a factory are "structurally" tied together in ways that define them in opposition to their employer, that condition their outlook towards the community and themselves, etc. Assuming these production relations, you can make sense of workers' ideologies and discourses. It is true that in order to operate according to particular institutional relations (at work) workers have to communicate and so forth, but the ways they communicate are determined, or rather conditioned, precisely by the necessities of their institutional interrelations.

(Again, though, some institutions or social structures are more "necessity-governed" than others. Production relations are relatively inflexible; familial relations are relatively flexible, which means that subjectivity and freedom have a greater role to play, at least potentially.)

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A voice from Vietnam.-- "While we worked in the rice fields, my mother taught me everything I had to know about life. In the West, for example, people believe they must 'pursue happiness' as if it were some kind of flighty bird that is always out of reach. In the East, we believe we are born with happiness and one of life's important tasks, my mother told me, is to protect it. It seemed strange to me, then, when the Catholic teachers told us that little babies were 'born in sin' and must spend their lives struggling miserably to overcome it. How can one be happier than a little baby?"

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A lesson from an analytical genius.-- Marx almost never used the word "capitalism." He always used "the capitalist mode of production" (or *kapitalistische Produktionsform*). This is good analytical practice, given the vagueness and cultural connotations of "capitalism" as opposed to the precision and strictly economic connotations of "the capitalist mode of production."

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Slavery and capitalism.-- We look back now at slave societies in wonder and horror, wondering how it was possible that it was seen not only as necessary but as *good* that people were forced to sell themselves to other people just to survive. It doesn't occur to us that what we have now operates on the same principle: people are forced to rent themselves to others in order to survive. If it is morally wrong to (be forced to) sell oneself, it is morally wrong to (be forced to) rent oneself. The Lowell mill girls in the 1830s were wiser than our elite liberal intellectuals now; they understood that wage-labor is essentially wage-slavery. Whether a black slave was treated well or badly by his master did not affect the *principle* of the thing; similarly, whether an employee makes a lot of money or a little doesn't obviate the moral horror of having to rent oneself.

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Unavoidable immorality.-- I can't escape the impression that for me to be happy when others are unhappy is morally repugnant. If a friend of mine is depressed, what right do I have not to be depressed with him or her? What right do I have to forget his depression long enough to have fun with people? How can I be *happy* while he is *miserable*? The callousness is breathtaking. How can I walk past a hungry homeless person in the street and continue my conversation with my friend as though the hungry person does not exist? I must be a monster. We all must be monsters. In every minute of our lives we show how little other people mean to us.

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The joys of self-objectification.-- One who reads this journal might think that the writer has a powerful mind. I know myself, however. From the inside, my mind does not seem especially powerful; it seems quite weak, in fact. It is a totally inadequate mind. Hence my escape into writing.

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Science, religion, and arrogance.-- Postmodernists and other religious people -- for postmodernism is a kind of religion, a fundamentalism, like free-market ideology and strains of Islam -- are fond of accusing reason's partisans, such as scientists, of arrogance in relation to other ways of reaching "truth." It is ironic, therefore, that from one perspective scientists are actually the humble ones, Christians, Muslims and so forth the arrogant ones. For humility is the very essence of science. It is the *humility* of the scientific method that explains its power, and justifies its proponents' "faith" in it. Religious faith, on the other hand, is very arrogant, since, by definition, it isn't subject to continual testing and revision in the light of new evidence. It is a projection of the believer's desires and hopes into absolute truth. In other words, the believer takes himself -- his hopes, values, desires -- as the measure of truth, whereas the scientist's method is devoted precisely to suppressing his subjectivity.[1]

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[1] (Now that I think about it, I wrote down similar thoughts ten years ago. Sorry for the repetition.)

The meanings of voice-pitches.-- Mother Nature has designed humans in such a way that the pitch of their voice correlates with sexuality, i.e. with activeness or strength versus passiveness or weakness. Thus you have the deep male voice -- and the deeper, the manlier, the "stronger" -- and the high-pitched, "cute" female voice. And when a man talks in an artificially high voice, perhaps as a joke, he feels himself appearing more passive, weak, cute, feminine. Less sober, detached, in control; more in-the-moment, giggly, childlike. Children have the highest voices of all, which contributes to their incredible cuteness, the perception of their weakness and 'having-to-be-protected'-ness. So, partly as a result, the desire is instilled in women to protect their children -- so cute and lovable with their adorable high-pitched voices and all that -- just as the high female voice instills the desire in men to protect women, so cute and lovable with their adorable high-pitched voices and all that.

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Musical truisms.— Another obvious truth we've been indoctrinated out of is that musical rhythms, musical beats, tend to affect women and children more than men. (See St. Augustine, for example.) This is just common sense to any moderately intelligent observer of human behavior. For *all* people, though, to the extent that they are susceptible to music, they are not intellectually detached or emotionally detached. Other things being equal, they are more in touch with the primitive, the biologically and emotionally primitive, than music-unsusceptible people are. They have a greater potential for un-self-conscious interpersonal bonding, or loss of the self. Dionysian influences are more powerful than Apollonian. Just think of women's and children's crying, their need for catharsis, their immersion in the immediate moment, their emotional sensitiveness.

Dionysus is feminine, Apollo masculine. Insofar as I am emotionally or "rhythmically" or "primitively" receptive to music—which I very much am!—my mind is under feminine influences. (You see, incidentally, that "feminine" need not be a term of opprobrium.) One could spin out implications of these ideas, but I won't do that now. You can start by reading D. W. Winnicott.

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Speculations on love.— It's ironic that the aspect of the mind that allows men to feel tender or sentimental or affectionate towards women is precisely the feminine aspect, just as it's the feminine aspect of women that allows them to feel tender etc. towards men. The difference is that in men, the feminine aspect is mediating the expression of *masculine* sexual attraction, whereas in women it is mediating the expression of *feminine* attraction. Women can also express (and feel) their feminine attraction in masculine, aggressive ways, and men can of course express (and feel) their attraction in masculine, non-"tender" ways. But if love is synonymous with tender affection, it is the feminine aspect of minds (in men and women) that makes possible love.[1]

Might one even say that the "soft" or "receptive" emotions are feminine, and the "hard" or "aggressive" emotions are masculine? That is, does a man who has abnormally high levels of testosterone and other male hormones, chemicals, brain-structures, etc., have relatively little experience of soft emotions like misty tenderness, sadness, sweet nostalgia, friendship-love? I don't know. All these speculations could be wildly off the mark.

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American anti-intellectualism.— Sixty-five years ago, Anais Nin observed that Americans were less interesting than Europeans. Recalling this in 2011, one finds evidence of the great stability of cultures.

[1] These are not just matters of arbitrary cultural definition I'm talking about; they are substantive points about the chemical and physiological makeup of brains. Science is at far too primitive a stage to substantiate them, however.

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The closest thing to a saint.— One of the things I admire most about Chomsky is that a man of his moral and intellectual caliber, as close to personified purity as humans can get, has devoted most of his life to studying the sordid world of economic and political institutions -- and precisely the most sordid aspects of these institutions. He has surrounded himself with mountains of data on the crimes of power-structures, a nauseating record of infinite hypocrisy and crude economism. Crude technocratic calculations of power and profit. One of the noblest minds and personalities in history has willingly dived into this swamp and swum around in it for decades, without losing any of his nobility. His clarity of moral vision is as sharp today as it was sixty years ago.

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Women, on which to hone one's self-discipline.— I was about to tell you of one of my recent dozens of encounters with the frustratingly childish aspects of women's femininity, but I'll restrain myself. Why descend from the universal to the particular?

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Anti-Chomskys.— One of the most tiresome things in the world is the self-certainty, self-righteousness, and self-love of successful or powerful or beautiful or famous or "intelligent" people. It is despicably unoriginal and predictable, and almost never is it at all justified. Ultimately it's *boring*, like these people themselves.

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The genius of Marxism.— The power and appeal of Marx's thought are explained by his fusion of science, morality, and romanticism. Three modalities of humanity -- pursuing truth, justice, and the beautiful or self-affirming -- are brought together in one great system.

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The unrational self.-- In light of everything, nothing is more ridiculous than to think highly of oneself. In many people this self-love approaches the heights of absurdity, but even someone for whom it is measured, reasoned, tempered with self-knowledge, like me, cannot escape ridiculousness.

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The puzzle of self-abasement.— Though I considered this question long ago, it has thrust itself on me again: what explains "the voluptuous pleasure of cringing and self-contempt," as Marx says in the context of a discussion of Christianity? How can self-contempt be pleasurable? Well, at the risk of repeating myself, I think it has to do with bringing your self-conception in line with the other's, or the world's, supposed perception of you. What the self wants, after all, is harmony between the inner and the outer. It wants its sense of self to be confirmed by the "other" (the world, people, its environment, etc.). If there is a great difference between your sense of self and the other's reaction to you, something will have to give. Such cognitive, or affective, dissonance cannot last forever. Maybe you'll assert yourself, your sense of self-value, by going on a murderous rampage against this world that has contempt for you, to force it to notice you or recognize your power or just to eradicate the thing that causes you so much torment, or something like that. Or maybe you'll become schizophrenic; your self will split up to protect itself, with an inner part that the outer world can't touch. Or you'll join a fascist movement of some sort, to destroy the part of the world that sees itself as superior to you and keeps you in society's gutter. Or, to eliminate the

contradiction that torments you, you might accept the other's negative evaluation of you, though in a different way than the schizophrenic does. That is to say, you'll alleviate the tension in your mind by no longer resisting the other's contempt for you but internalizing it, though not in such a way that you overtly split yourself up. By having self-contempt, you can at least experience the pleasure of having your sense of self be confirmed by the other, even if it isn't the sense of self you'd like to have and originally had. But since the self *has to* value itself on some level, however implicitly, its "chosen" self-contempt is precisely a means to that end, a last desperate refuge of self-love. For by bringing the inner and outer into harmony, the self is asserting its claim to belong in the world. It is saying, "I am one of you, you despisers of me! I agree with you! In loathing myself, I am just like you, you valuable people (or valuable abstract Other(ness)) who despise me. So, *like* me, at least a little!" Thus a piece of the self is salvaged from the wreckage, viz. the piece that looks down on the self. *This* at least has some value.

Or, from another, simpler perspective, the descent into self-contempt can be a way of accepting yourself. No longer do you struggle to be someone you're not; you accept that you're weak and small, and such self-acceptance brings comfort. Maybe not *enough* comfort, since eventually you might end up killing yourself due to insufficient self-love, but it is at least more comforting than constantly having to tell yourself that all these people who ignore you or laugh at you are wrong, that actually you're strong and valuable. Struggling with yourself, tormenting yourself like that, being full of self-tension due to the contradiction between your desire to love yourself and people's contempt for you -- that can be horrible. It's much easier, like a relief, to accept yourself in your shameful little essence. And then you thereby are able to find new pleasures, new vindictive, revengeful pleasures, as by imagining bringing people down to your level, plotting petty tricks on them, thinking malicious thoughts like the Underground Man. Imaginary wish-fulfillments, putting you and your enemies on the same level or raising yourself above them, as by physically torturing them (in imagination at least) or provoking them to act in petty ways like you.

Religious self-abnegation or "self-contempt" can be very different from all this, though. It can entail raising yourself up to try to commune with God, to love him and be loved by him. You have scorn for your physical nature but love your higher self. But what about severe self-flagellation? I.e., outright masochism (emotional and physical). How do you explain that? I forget what I've said in the past. The starting point for an explanation is that masochism is an expression of self-love -- self-love perverted into self-violence. In at least some cases, physical self-flagellation is a way of confirming your reality to yourself, a kind of intense self-assertion. Extreme self-affirmation, paradoxically. It takes an extreme form because you feel extremely dead, empty, nonexistent. Its use in extreme religious sects is understandable, then, given that these people spend their lives obsessing over their nothingness and worthlessness as compared to God. When they flagellate themselves, the contrast between their ordinary sensory deprivation (and self-deprivation, mental deprivation) and sudden over-stimulation, extreme self-activity, might well launch them into some twisted ecstasy. Their sudden perception of self-reality, so real that it's *painful*, can probably approach mystical ecstasy.

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More masochistic puzzles and paradoxes.— Masochism surely is not always an expression of self-love. Authentic self-disgust or self-hatred can also motivate it, right? But what is the relation of these things to humans' underlying, sometimes repressed, self-love? It depends, because all such feelings have a different meaning depending on the context.

Ordinarily, of course, moments of self-contempt or self-hatred are unpleasant, something you struggle against. They happen through your temporary internalization of the perspective of an other who hates or has contempt for you. You momentarily understand that other's judgment of you, but probably you overcome it and convince yourself of your worth pretty quickly. In the case of someone like Dostoyevsky's Underground Man, however, his self-contempt is itself mixed up in his self-love, not necessarily opposed to it. In a way, yes, it is, since he probably still resists it in certain moods, etc. But in another way, he loves his self-contempt; it is comforting, it possibly allows him to feel superior to other people (because of his greater sophistication, self-knowledge, self-critical intelligence, etc.), it makes possible malicious pleasures

and the pleasures of brooding self-involvement, etc. Someone like Marmeladov, on the other hand, who is weaker, probably thinks on some level that his self-contempt sort of ingratiates him with people because he knows they have contempt for him. They'll like him (he thinks) at least a *little* if he doesn't resist their judgments of him. He's not resisting the world, he's accepting it. So to that extent it should accept him too, as part of it, or as a confirmation of it. To take a more concrete example: when a husband (e.g., Marmeladov) lets his wife beat him out of anger at his drunkenness or uselessness or infidelities or whatever, what is going on in his mind? He is thinking "I deserve it." But what does that really mean? It means he wants to be punished. It makes him feel better. By being beaten, he is atoning, washing away his sin. He is making things better with his wife, showing that he accepts ("confirms") her condemnation (hence her self-love, her desire to assert herself and be proven right) and thereby hoping she will forgive him and accept (confirm) him (his self-love) again. Or, to say it differently, if she can just let out her rage on him she'll feel better, and he'll feel better. There will no longer be the barrier between them of his shame and her resentment; he will no longer have to rebuke himself or feel bad about himself, at least to the same degree, because *she* will no longer hate him (for he has accepted and shown that he agrees with her anger, disgust, etc., which makes her feel better about *her*self). In short, his acceptance of her anger makes her feel better about herself (because, after all, his prior actions seemed to express contempt for her) and restores, to some extent, her fondness or love for him (maybe she "forgives" him), which makes him feel better about himself. Moreover, because he loves her and cares about her happiness, he simply felt guilty about causing her pain. By his showing contrition and letting her cause *him* pain, he is equalizing things again, so that she will not have to feel bad about herself (which she did implicitly, if not explicitly).

Anyway, to return to the idea that "masochism" is probably not always a mutated expression of self-love but sometimes arises from simple, unmediated self-hatred.... How do you clarify when it expresses self-love or at least helps restore it and when it doesn't? Maybe the latter, after all, is never the case. If someone simply *hates* himself (to the extent that his self-love has become totally repressed and unconscious), won't he just want to destroy himself instead of give himself pain?

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At the risk of repetition....-- Self-love is the foundation of the self. In wanting recognition or self-confirmation, which is the self's essential urge, what you want is objective confirmation of your self-love. This achievement has to be mediated by the other, first and foremost by the abstract otherness in your consciousness, which (otherness) is a part of you. Thus, you yourself, your (self-)consciousness, is the fundamental mediator of the fulfillment of your own urge to "prove" your self-love (to test it and confirm its truth). You undertake this self-imposed project through self-activity, in every moment of the day. If your self-activity is "successful" (as judged by you, hence by the otherness in your consciousness), your self-love continues or increases (at least momentarily) -- though quite possibly only on a half-conscious level, because ordinarily all this stuff is merely implicit. Generally speaking, your constant self-activity is more or less constantly effective to some degree; you achieve your purposes, you act on and in the world, you communicate with other selves, and your reality and effectiveness are proven. To the extent that all this is stable, your (implicit) self-love is stable.

When you're in the company of others, they partly instantiate the abstract otherness in your mind, which entails that their reactions to you condition your reactions to yourself (because, again, your mind's otherness (to itself) is part of you, part of the self). The more "significant" these particular others are to you, the more their reactions condition your self-reactions and so have the potential to reinforce or upset your self-love. A significant other -- in the relevant sense (different from Winnicott's) -- is in part a person who exemplifies more than other people the vague half-conscious "idea" you have formed in your mind of a "valuable" person (which idea is, to a rough initial approximation, precisely the implicit otherness that accompanies you at all times[1]), and in most cases someone you personally know and who probably cares

[1] In a sketch like this I don't have to be obsessively rigorous. But analytically speaking, the ill-defined, merely implicit, abstract "idea" in your mind of the sort of "valuable" person whose opinion matters to you is different from the diffuse

about you (but not necessarily), etc. Basically, I'm talking about someone you respect, whose opinion you value. The more "significant" a person is, the more complete is his or her instantiation of the "valuable" (and "abstract") other whose ill-defined "idea" implicitly accompanies you always. For example, if you deeply love and respect your girlfriend, when you're with her (or even not) your consciousness will tend to affectively "exhaust" itself or immerse itself in her, leaving little of a "remainder" (as there is when you're with people less important to you). Your consciousness will be less self-sufficient; she will take up much of the "space" in it devoted to the (valuable) abstract other(ness) (which ordinarily isn't taken up by, or associated with, any one person in particular). Which means that her opinion of you will matter to you very much.

Anyway, these are only notes. Were I to write an essay on the subject I'd try to clear things up, to the extent that it's possible. (The human mind is complicated, and phenomenology is hard.)

One final point. I have been talking about a "valuable" other (as judged by you), whether concrete or an "abstract" (general) unconscious conception in your mind, but I haven't said what *makes* an other valuable. The answer is: your unconscious or half-conscious impression that he or she exemplifies self-love, self-reality, self-effectiveness, self-certainty, self-coincidence, a sort of *solid, real, objective, deep,* **[*confirmed*]**[1] selfhood **[and *self-love* in particular]** (on the basis of such things as his or her self-confidence, intelligence, wit, good looks, popularity, and physical size and strength). As when I said years ago that "charisma" has to do with the (implicit) impression that a given person has "*more of a self*" or more "*depth of self*"[2] than most people. It's true that you might not really care what a particular charismatic person thinks of you, or you might not "internalize" him much -- a fact that might seem contrary to the ideas above -- but, after all, some given charismatic person (who, to that extent, tends to be implicitly seen as a "valuable" self) might not exemplify your own unconscious or half-conscious notions of a valuable self. For me, Noam Chomsky is infinitely more closely associated with the general other(ness) in my mind than, say, Bill Clinton. I've internalized Chomsky; I haven't internalized Clinton. This isn't because Chomsky "loves" himself more, as a crude interpretation of my ideas above would suggest; it's because I implicitly judge that "objective truth," or "objectivity," and his selfhood **[or self-love]** coincide relatively closely. His behavior and self-expressions project a kind of reality, certainty, "objectivity," "objective self-love" or "self-presence," "objectively self-loving (or self-certain/self-present) otherness." Since every self's project is to confirm itself (its *self-love*[3]) objectively, by being reflected in a real, objective other or others, and since Chomsky's self implicitly seems more real and objective or "otherly" to me than other selves **[or, more exactly, his *self-love* implicitly seems more "objectively true" or "justifiable," *real, confirmed*]**, I use his self more than others to confirm myself. That is, I internalize to a relatively high degree his self

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otherness that structures your consciousness, even though the two are very closely related, in fact extremely hard to distinguish phenomenologically (i.e. if you introspectively examine your own mind). The difficulty in distinguishing them may be due to the fact that your conception of the type of person that is valuable is not really an *idea* at all; it is essentially unconscious, and is revealed only in how you react to people. You ignore person *A* -- you don't "internalize" him much, you're not impressed by him -- while you're very impressed by person *B* and care what he thinks of you. He instantiates to a high degree your "idea" of the valuable person. Nevertheless, because the ways you tend to react to yourself, or the value-judgments you (implicitly) make of yourself -- which, to repeat, emerge from, or are possible due to, the ("abstract") otherness in your mind (because this is what makes possible *self-consciousness*) -- are conditioned partly by the unconscious "idea" you have formed of a valuable type of person whose opinion matters (i.e., by your implicit expectation of how such a person, a valuable other, would react to you in a given moment), it seems to me that "the diffuse otherness that structures your consciousness" is very closely related to your unconscious conception of the type of person that is valuable. Perhaps they merge into each other somehow.

[1] [That's a later addition.]

[2] One has to use metaphors, unfortunately. My point is that, intuitively or "phenomenologically," there is more *otherness* in such a person than in "ordinary" people [i.e., his self-love seems more "objectively true" or "real," *confirmed* so to speak].

[3] For example, insofar as I value myself for my ability to write, I want that to be objectively confirmed. Same with my valuing my masculinity, my philosophical talents, my political beliefs, etc. But I also just value myself period, and I want *that* to be confirmed too (e.g. through a woman's romantic love).

and its value-judgments. (Again, internalization is necessary because of the truism that the self's own consciousness is ultimately what has to judge the self's efficacy and value; but since it does so precisely through the *other's* reactions to the self, it has to *internalize* the other in order to get the job done. The self judges itself, or "recognizes" itself, through the other. And since Chomsky seems to me a particularly potent (objective, self-certain, un-self-divided, etc.) other -- although I have internalized *many*, to varying degrees, and *society's* judgments too, etc., until they have all merged into a vaguely indeterminate general other(ness) implicit in my self-consciousness -- I internalize him deeply, and he is a relatively important part of my mind's "general other(ness)" (to itself).)[1]

Note, by the way, the implication from the parenthesis that the self's essential project, taken to its logical conclusion of objective proof of the self's value, is unfulfillable. For the self can never get fully objective proof, because it itself mediates its awareness of the other's supposed recognition of the self's value. The self would have to coincide with the other, fuse with it, in order to get truly objective self-proof. But that's absurd. Hence, the self is always striving for more proof; it is restless, unsatisfied, undertaking self-expressive projects again and again. (Of course there are other reasons for that behavior too, psychological and biological reasons. Everything about the self can be interpreted in multiple ways.[2])

Suppose the relatively "valuable" others that you internalize (or whose attitudes you internalize), thus incorporating them into the otherness in your consciousness,[3] have implicit or explicit contempt for you. Suppose, for example, you're a black man sixty years ago who internalized whites' attitudes. Then you'll have some self-contempt, which you'll struggle against or try to reconcile with your self-love. [Didn't finish.]

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More on self-love.-- A peculiar thing about self-love is that it is not only "absolute," purely *love of self*. It can be, or maybe *is*, relative to others, relative to their value. Some people in fact always tend to measure their own worth *in relation to* that of others, wanting to be better than everyone else, but this is a pathology. A healthy, natural person wants simply to be as respected as other people; he (implicitly) wants to respect and be respected by them in equal measure. However, if he is overshadowed by someone in a given situation, even the healthiest, most natural person will tend to have at least a moment of self-doubt or self-disappointment due to his apparent inferiority to the other person. Thus, self-love is, after all, an essentially relative thing. This is not because everyone is "naturally" in a kind of psychological competition with everyone else, but simply because being "shown up" by another person implies a negative judgment by the other (whether concrete or abstract) on one's worth. Actually, *any* implicit or explicit such negative judgment (not only when someone else makes you look bad) is essentially relative, for if the other looks down on you, he[4] is thereby implicitly raising himself above you. If, say, people ignore you, or if you feel shame for some reason, or if you don't do as good a job as you'd hoped, or if you feel as though the world has rejected you, the implicit negative value-judgment puts you below the "normal" level of other people,

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[1] It's ironic I keep mentioning Chomsky, because he would surely consider this whole discussion impenetrable or meaningless. Like most people, he seems to lack a phenomenological imagination, i.e. the capacity for deep introspection or "intuitive self-projection" into a given scenario.

[2] There are also other reasons for the unfulfillable nature of the self's "project." For example, there is no such thing as "objective value" at all. To objectively confirm one's value or self-love is impossible because the idea of doing so is meaningless.

[3] In other entries I've used the word "internalize" in somewhat different ways. Maybe that's confusing. The problem is that, as I wrote above, there are different kinds of internalization. In a sense, just by being aware of someone or recognizing him as an other, you're at that moment "internalizing" him. In the stronger sense, though, you don't internalize everyone you meet. You don't "*permanently*" internalize everyone -- as a specific valuable individual, that is, whose opinion matters to you.

[4] Or "it," if you're negatively judging yourself. For that means that no particular individual is judging you but rather the other in your consciousness. (Of course, you could say that *you're* the particular individual judging yourself, but that's superficial. More accurately, you're judging yourself *through the other's implicit judgment of you*.)

the normal level of value and self-love. The self's natural desire is to be as real, as loved, as self-certain as the objective world (which includes, of course, other people[1]). It cannot literally achieve this, but being recognized as "one of us" by others, as a valued self whose recognition of others is itself valued by them, it realizes the ideal in a limited, non-literal way. For then it is at least as real and (self-)loved and self-certain as other people, though not as real and self-certain as reality itself. (God, or gods, then come into the picture. One appeals to them, these representatives of *objective reality*, for ultimate validation, the kind of validation one can't get from people. In other words, the self's inability in *our* world to confirm its self-love in a fully objective way tempts it to posit a *higher* world in which its self-love can be, and will be, objectively confirmed, when the self will finally coincide with itself by coinciding with reality (in Heaven, etc.).[2])

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"I miss you."-- What does it mean to "miss" someone? You want to be with him (or her), because then you enjoy yourself more. Why? Ultimately it's because he reflects, or confirms, your self-love to a high degree. That might be because he really likes you, or it might be because you see him as having a lot of value (due to his charisma or intelligence or good looks or whatever), such that his (implicit) recognition of your self-love (or self-value, etc.) means more to you than someone else's recognition. That is to say, you have internalized him to a relatively high degree. Thus, because he is a fairly important part of the other in your consciousness, his absence means that you feel relatively unrecognized, "empty" perhaps, as though a part of you is missing, and less loved or confirmed than when you are with him.

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Maturity.-- One sign of "emotional maturity" is that you no longer need a high degree of explicit approval from actual others in order to feel good about yourself. You're more or less satisfied with your own self-approval (as mediated by the implicit approval of the other in your consciousness). Similarly, disapproval from other people no longer upsets you very much, or at least does not regularly make you feel bad about yourself and doubt your self-worth. Your internalization of the outside world (the "other" in a broad sense) has, over decades, become stable enough, consistent enough (in its "attitude" towards you) from moment to moment, that you have attained relative emotional stability. You no longer have to compare yourself frequently to others in order to assure yourself of your value.

For example, while in some sense I have "internalized" Chomsky, I almost never feel the need to compare myself to him, and if somehow I discovered that he thought little of me it would not upset me as much as it might have five years ago. -On the other hand, I, like you and everyone, do depend on a sort of general positive reaction from people I meet -- a semi-positive recognition of my selfhood -- for if everyone shunned me I'd start to feel like a nobody. This general positive reaction from others is an important basis for my general positive self-reaction (or the reaction of the other in my consciousness). Still, my point is that with "emotional maturity" all this becomes less fickle, less moment-to-moment, less conditional.

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[1] Not that all other people, or even any, are necessarily seen by the self as "self-certain" or "objectively valuable" or "self-coinciding" in the desired way. But it is through their recognition that the self approaches this ideal.

[2] But, again, in not being *certain* of its value -- because it can't get truly objective, "ultimate" validation from people -- the self embraces the idea of Hell as a counterpoint to Heaven, as a realm where it will go if in fact, despite its present belief in its value, it actually "objectively" *lacks* value. All selves that lack value go to Hell, where they're separated from higher reality (God); the others go to Heaven, where finally they attain oneness with reality, thus having their value *truly* objectively confirmed. One's "objective confirmation" (in another self, etc.) in real life is always necessarily provisional, for reasons I laid out above and others too.

A riposte to an idealist.-- I can imagine that a contemporary "idealist" might defend the importance of ideologies by invoking the Tea Party and its Republican representatives, most of whom are definitely ideologically driven. I would respond that, yes, an ideology can be important in this way, but only because it serves the interests of some set of institutions. Sectors of business are funding and helping to organize these ideological movements because it is in their interest to do so. They are blasting society with billions of dollars' worth of propaganda and political-campaign money. The very idiocy of the Reaganite, Tea-Party ideology, together with its popularity, is evidence of the power of moneyed interests -- because unless people had been subjected for decades to well-funded public-relations campaigns, they would not have succumbed to such a stupid ideology. Business propaganda is so ubiquitous it has destroyed people's common sense. Thus arises an ideological movement like the Tea Party, which offers solutions to people's material grievances that promise to *aggravate* their grievances.

So, in short, the Tea Party movement, far from being proof of the power of ideas, is proof of the power of wealthy institutions.

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How to write history.-- When writing history, should you have in mind some particular theory, such as Marxism, or should you simply follow the "common sense" school of thought and not adhere to a specific explanatory model? I myself am very skeptical of writing history according to some theory or model. It should be enough to use your common sense to decide what things have caused a given event or situation. Unfortunately, "common sense" is contested. I find materialism commonsensical, while others are partial to idealism. Broadly speaking, of course, a historian should take account of all factors -- politics, culture, the economy, etc. He puts together a picture of a society at a moment in time; he invokes as many things as he finds relevant to that moment. The more things, the fuller the picture. -Well, that's simplistic. Historians often choose some "*theme*" to analyze, like the politics or the religion of, say, Philadelphia in the nineteenth century. In such cases the question of "explanation" does not necessarily arise; what is being done is description. Here, common sense is surely sufficient. Even Joan Wallach Scott forgets her silly "theories" (which really don't qualify as such in any interesting sense (as Chomsky would say)) and relies on common sense when discussing middle-class discourses about factory girls in the nineteenth century. When trying to explain something like the French Revolution, however, or any other thing that requires taking a "holistic" approach, you're implicitly guided by basic theoretical considerations even more than when you do "description." For you emphasize certain factors more than others. I'd emphasize the economy, others would emphasize culture. And both explanations would have value. But how do you decide which is "better"? Your criteria have to be based on a theory of some sort. I find Westad's book on the Cold War to be explanatorily superficial because it contradicts my theory that institutional relations, and ultimately imperatives of power and economic profit, are more "basic" than the ideologies that political actors claim to follow. In fact, though, this "theory" of mine doesn't seem like much of a theory at all; it seems like common sense! Since most scholars seem to lack common sense, it is necessary to give theoretical defenses of my approach (or my "method"). To that extent, theory has a place in the historical discipline -- namely as a justification for your prioritization of certain causal factors over others. But historians shouldn't go around writing screeds against some method of doing history or in favor of some other method as the only legitimate one. All kinds of history have their uses, even ideological history. Just use your common sense, that's all! ☺

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My hope.-- History is so full of treasures, cultural and intellectual treasures, jewels of humanism scattered all over the earth -- and I'm worried they will be buried in time! So much might be lost to future ages! Our traditions are so rich, there is simply too much to assimilate. So it will all be scattered, with some people admiring this jewel, others that jewel, and most forgetting most of them. What a tragedy! It cannot be. So I have made it one of my missions to collect all my favorite jewels -- suitably re-cut and re-polished

-- and store them in this journal, to salvage them and pass them along to posterity. I want there to be *one place* to which people can go, one index, as it were. They will read about this and that, this artifact and that idea, and they will seek them out for themselves. And our tradition will reach a few more people (as will, incidentally, *truth*, of which this journal is a repository).

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Contemporary conservatism.-- Republicans have, it is true, some things superficially in common with earlier conservatives, who espoused the positions, more or less, of classical liberals (while having forgotten the nuances, and to an extent the *spirit*, of liberalism). That is, Republicans want small government, like earlier conservatives -- but only in relation to taking care of the population, *unlike* earlier conservatives. They want the death of the people's welfare state but the growth of the corporate welfare state. *No* state for the *people*, *statism* for *corporations*. And that flatly contradicts turn-of-the-century conservatism. Or, to be even more precise, Republicans are not satisfied with a state in the service of corporations; they want corporations to *become* the state. They want the state and its functions to be privatized, so that democracy and public administration no longer exist. In a sense, this is the logical conclusion of twentieth-century corporate-statist trends. But it would horrify earlier conservatives, who detested the very existence of the corporation and especially the constitutional rights it had been granted by judicial activists.

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A result of sexual evolution.-- Nature has designed women (as women) in such a way that when particularly impressed by intense masculinity their defenses sort of shut down, their hormones step up activity, their rational ego partially collapses and they lose most of their self-control, becoming "limp" almost or "swooning," so that the man can take them and have his way with them. [Think of women's reactions to Elvis Presley, etc.]

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Aloofness.-- Aloofness is not only unpleasant; it is immoral. It means "I'm better than you; you're not valuable enough to pay attention to. So I'll ignore you." That isn't how you treat human beings.

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Hero-worshipers coping with an irreligious society.-- Was Nietzsche's animating spirit not merely a more profound and severe incarnation of Carlyle's and Emerson's?

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On late-nineteenth-century decadence and its sequel.-- What is the significance of the fact that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries certain sectors of the middle and upper classes in Western society started obsessing over heroism, manliness, strength, military virtues, and, conversely, society's increasing effeminacy, "neurasthenia," desiccation, decadence, etc.? It was indeed a near-obsession, and it helped make possible fascism. What brought it about? Obviously imperialism helped foster the glorification of manly struggle, racial vitality and so on, but people genuinely perceived a *decline* in the vigor or health of their culture. Why? Again, imperialism breeding racism intensifying nationalism led to a fixation on the supposed dilution of the nation's purity through immigration and the presence of Jews, a concern ostensibly borne out by increasing crime rates, urban chaos and filth, social dislocation, etc. But I think that to a great extent all the worries and fixations were also a product of the traumatic contradiction between collective memories (still embedded in culture) of relatively unrepressed, unregulated, un-atomized, semi-peasantly

"spontaneous," "carnival-esque," semi-uproarious (see Thompson's book), only *semi*-business-structured societies and, on the other hand, the new evolving repressive, atomized etc. social order. Western civilization was in the later throes of its transition from a post-medieval culture of full and only moderately regulated vitality (frequent festivals, carnivals, holidays, communal life, hard work, the majority of the population living according to the seasons) to a society of statist and business regulation and manifold means of instinctual repression (religion, welfare-capitalist programs of "Americanization" and such, patriotic mobilizations, regulation of holidays and pastimes of all sorts, increased policing of the streets, the beginnings of psychological therapy, mass advertising, mass education, Progressive reform movements such as temperance, etc.). Ex-rural immigrants and cities' lower orders still had some uproarious tendencies, but they were slowly being extirpated. The essentially passive cult of *consumption* was conquering society. Consumption and ease, not self-affirming self-activity. Life, in short, was becoming more passive, more institutionalized, more indoctrinated, more atomized, with more idle free time, and more "excessive" comfort, for more people. Hence you had *fin-de-siècle* ennui and its desiccate cultural expressions. But at the same time, inevitably, you had the reactions, most of them reactionary. Cults of heroism, war, action, "superabundant vitality," racial glory and conquest, etc. (which, again, were not only *reactions* but also served the purposes of various institutions and reinforced imperialist agendas). They had great appeal, promising remedies to boredom, resentment, and the frustration of people's urges for community (i.e. recognition) and self-activity. Thus, in the end, fascism arose, intended at once to be a return to a more liberated society and a culmination of modern regimentation. (In this paradoxical fusion you see how it could appeal to both the masses and the institutions that wanted to control the masses.) Not surprisingly, the latter aspect prevailed over the former. Since it was regimentation/mobilization in the service of heroism, war, national rebirth and so on, it had to end in a holocaust. After the holocaust, however, the old trends continued, this time less dangerously or problematically because the old collective memories of cultural vitality had worn thin and people had finally become accustomed to modern atomized life,[1] and anyway national power-structures had learned to integrate and coordinate with each other more effectively so as to prevent another conflagration. So the old progress of "privatization" and repression continued, until in the 1960s and 1970s another Western revolt against atomization and dehumanization occurred (coinciding with more elemental revolts in other parts of the world, including America's South). It was crushed, but its "instinct"-liberating grievances and tendencies were taken up by business for the sake of profits, with the indirect result that no such "liberatory" cultural uprisings would occur again because they had become less necessary.[2] The economic system had managed to make room within itself for some degree of (degraded) instinctual liberation, even as social atomization and regulation continued apace. So here we are now, with business more powerful than ever, society more atomized than ever, culture more desiccated than ever (although it has given people instinctual outlets, thus fostering social stability), and popular resistance to the ongoing destruction of civil society in as bad a shape as ever. What is to be done?

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The narrating self.-- It's fun to think about your life as if it is a novel in which you are the main character. What will happen to the hero in the next chapter? What adventures will he experience when he moves to a new city? Will he ever start a family or will he choose a life of restlessness and motion? How will he die? Narrating your life to yourself in this way makes it endlessly interesting. It also subtly encourages you to seek out "adventures," to start new hobbies and go to new places, because then the narrative becomes more suspenseful.

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[1] Television played a huge role in thus reconciling the middle classes to their generous allotment of free time, material comfort, boredom, communal fragmentation, cultural repression, and their patterns of passive consumption.

[2] After the 1970s, "identity-politics" movements continued but with far less disruptive potential than the earlier movements.

Freedom triumphant.-- It gives me joy to think that despite Franco's victory in the Spanish civil war and the succeeding decades of repression of the CNT and democracy, in the end fascism fell, public references to Franco's regime were banned, and the CNT blossomed again, with freedom.

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From a review of David Foster Wallace's last novel.-- "Perhaps, he writes, 'dullness is associated with psychic pain because something that's dull or opaque fails to provide enough stimulation to distract people from some other, deeper type of pain that is always there,' namely the existential knowledge 'that we are tiny and at the mercy of large forces and that time is always passing and that every day we've lost one more day that will never come back.'" Nope. That ain't it. Such thoughts may come in moments of dullness, but they are side-effects and not intrinsic to the pain. The pain is primitive, not mediated by some awareness of life's meaninglessness. For me, the pain of something like filling out tax forms is associated with an impression of *unfreedom*. A *visceral* impression, not necessarily conscious. I am being forced to engage in something that has only a negative relation to my sense of self and my spontaneous self-expressing; the tax form is impinging on my self-contained world. Not only does it not provide me with self-confirmation; it denies me, blocks my impulses and ignores them. It is impersonal and obnoxiously not-responsive-to-me. Thus it flouts and insults my underlying self-love, my urge toward self-activity. So I'm "bored," being prevented from asserting myself (from putting my self into the world and appropriating the world into my self).

"How can these hypotheses be tested?" you rebuke me, channeling Karl Popper. "How can one evaluate Wallace's hypothesis versus yours?" You simply have to reason through the arguments, judge them in the light of what you know about human experience, introspect to detect thoughts that are implicit in your mind during moments of boredom, etc. Do you think it's likely that humans' fundamental impulse is to constantly seek things to distract them from the painful knowledge that "we are tiny and at the mercy of large forces and that time is always passing and that every day we've lost one more day that will never come back"? I don't. That strikes me as wildly implausible, for many reasons. So then you're led to my hypothesis, and you have to evaluate that one too in similar ways. Anyway, the truth of my ideas is evident from the simple fact that "I don't *want to do* this!" is implicit in my mind when I do taxes (or talk to people at a boring party, or whatever). I "*want to do*" *something* -- I want to express myself in *some* way, real-ize my self-love somehow -- but not in *this* way, because this is a *denial* of my self-love. It makes a mockery of my self-love by mocking my desires, my impulses, my freedom.

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Violence as a tool of social change.-- Chomsky seems to argue that in general it is a mistake for dissidents to use violence in their resistance to an unjust state because the state has so much more force at its disposal that violence against it is effectively suicidal. I'm not sure I agree with him. Of course, it all depends on circumstances. In a relatively open and semi-liberal society, violent tactics might work in the long run. In the short run the state will forcibly suppress the revolts, or at least try to do so, but if they continue or get worse it might well have to accept reforms, as has been happening in the Middle East. Only in a closed and repressive society like Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, or the Jim Crow South in the early twentieth century is it always suicidal for a protest movement to use violence. But in such cases, protest itself is usually suicidal!

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L'enfer, c'est les autres?-- If hell exists, it is not other people. It is the absence of other people. An eternity of not being reflected in an other. After a while, in fact, the self would simply dissolve for lack of something to contrast itself with and define itself in relation to. The general other in its consciousness,

which is essentially a half-conscious or unconscious residue of the totality of its experiences with other selves (including their expressions in books, television, magazines, etc.), would eventually lose whatever determinateness it has, which means that the self would lose its opposition to itself (in losing its internalized other), thereby losing its self-consciousness. One would revert to an animal state.

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A riposte to a Social Darwinist.-- The person who likes people has a simple answer in response to those who justify poverty and inequality on Social Darwinist grounds (as resulting from the fact that the successful are more gifted and determined than the unsuccessful). There are many possible retorts to the Social Darwinist, but one is simply that, okay, for the sake of argument let's accept the wildly implausible assumption that luck and economic opportunities have nothing to do with it; nevertheless, everyone has gifts of some sort, whether as a mechanic, a plumber, a writer, a musician, a social worker, or whatever, and it is only a function of particular social structures that the gifts of being greedy and power-hungry and knowing how to get money and power are rewarded more than other gifts. There is certainly nothing "natural" in the idea that an aptitude for business indicates greater human worth than an aptitude for art or social work. Indeed, the contrary proposition is far more justified.

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The superfluity of being.-- How is one supposed to be "happy" in a world that is utterly senseless?

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A revaluation of people.-- I've always found it ironic that people sometimes accuse me of arrogance and closed-mindedness. It's even more absurd than accusing Noam Chomsky of that, partly because I'm more open-minded than he and partly because I'm even more unassuming and less cocky in my behavior. A sensible person would accuse other "ordinary" educated people of the sins that I'm supposedly guilty of, because these are the people who project arrogance and closed-mindedness. They're usually bad listeners, they love hearing themselves talk and talking about themselves, they rudely ignore people, they flippantly brush off opposing opinions rather than engaging with them meaningfully, and most of them revert instinctively to defensiveness instead of listening to the other's arguments. Ordinarily I'm unusually self-effacing and uniquely open to ideas, and yet I'm the one who is criticized. How do you explain that? -The answer, I suppose, is that I am seen as "different" and "challenging." I'm not "one of us." My ideas are different from most people's and I usually defend them competently and confidently; the combination of this "difference" and "confidence" makes me seem offensive (occasionally, to sensitive people). After all, other so-called intellectuals act similarly confidently, but since their views fit in more or less with everyone else's, they aren't criticized as arrogant or closed-minded. The most important virtue, as always, is conformism.

People get most offended when I argue in ways that are incompatible with postmodernism and relativism. When I insist that not everyone's opinion is equally justifiable, that some people are wrong and others right -- and that I'm in the "right" category. Then they always say, "What makes you so certain you're right? Lots of people in history have thought that, but they've been wrong." So I retort that *their* wrongness doesn't entail *my* wrongness. I also point out that everyone, not only I, thinks he is right and that people who disagree with him are wrong. (For example, Democrats think Republicans are wrong and vice versa.) I suppose the reason I'm attacked and they're not is that I take an almost wholly adversarial stance toward conventional wisdom; I question everyone and their postmodernist framework itself. It's true, too, that I can come across as dismissive of postmodernist positions I've heard espoused ten thousand times already.

Another factor is probably that I'm ordinarily seen as not identifying with other people, as being, perhaps, a little aloof. Really I'm just introverted, at least in group situations. I'm content to let others do most of the talking and clowning around.

*

Hyper-history.-- When I think about my past, it seems as though I used to live in a different world than I do now. Both internally and externally. The contemporary world enters a new era every five years or so. From 1994 to 2000: a new world. From 2000 to 2005: a new world (what with 9/11, Iraq, etc.). From 2005 to 2011: a new world. The changes in my own head have been even more dramatic....even though, paradoxically, I'm not all *that* different from how I was ten years ago.

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A strange change.-- The approaches of the Western working class and the middle class to raising children have undergone near-reversals over the last hundred years. It used to be that middle-class parents were overly strict and repressive with their children, especially in the Victorian era, while working-class parents were laid-back and permissive. Now, the latter tend to be cruel and strict with their children (think of black or lower-income white mothers loudly scolding and slapping their children on the bus), while the former spoil theirs. When and how did this change take place? To be fair, I should acknowledge that working-class parents seem to fluctuate between negligence -- perhaps somewhat like their forebears -- and authoritarianism. Was the middle class still relatively authoritarian in the 1930s? Probably the 1960s and 1970s caused the decisive change in that regard, from mild authoritarianism to permissiveness, "liberation," etc. But things had already changed drastically between the 1910s and the 1940s. Mass public education and the welfare state must have played a role in undermining paternal and parental authority. World War I probably also undermined strict Victorian norms and puritanism, middle-class propriety, repression of the instincts -- and then the Roaring Twenties, the Jazz Age, the advent of mass advertising, movies, the democratization of culture partially liberated middle-class children from the parochial authoritarianism of the Victorian household. The 1950s, with their Cold War emphasis on authority and tradition, saw a partial regression, but authority was exploded in the 1960s (for reasons I discuss in my paper above). With astonishing swiftness, the demise of authority was institutionalized in the economy, for example in the forms of rampant sexuality (exploiting sex for every conceivable marketing purpose) and the fetishizing of youth and beauty.

What about the working class? When did its ethos change from exuberance, boisterousness, spontaneity, communal conviviality, to resentment and mean-spiritedness? To an extent, these opposites are caricatures of reality. But there is some truth to them. Insofar as they're true, I would say that the change started to occur in the 1950s and progressed with deindustrialization in the succeeding decades. Ironically, it seems that it was with workers' economic victories through the institutionalization of collective bargaining, the welfare state, and the bureaucratization of work and benefits that their culture grew impoverished. It lost the *joie-de-vivre* character it had had even in the 1930s. More exactly, the change is probably a consequence of the destruction of a genuine, grassroots labor movement in the late 1940s and 1950s, the destruction of semi-autonomous enclaves of working-class culture due in part to the advent of television and the corporatization/privatization of society -- as embodied, e.g., in auto companies' and governments' destruction of public transportation (for instance in Los Angeles, starting in the 1940s) in favor of highways and private automobiles. With "privatization" inevitably comes alienation, boredom, frustration, resentment and envy of people who have wealth and power, political apathy, a feeling of impotence, perhaps hopelessness, the sense that one has to rely on oneself and others are untrustworthy, the sense that one has to "look out for Number 1" and not care about others, etc. All this breeds a poisonous culture and a destruction of communal spontaneity. When combined with the ongoing scourge of deindustrialization, increasing poverty, an inability to improve one's prospects in life, business propaganda that tells you everything is the fault of government and "liberal do-gooders," a popular culture that is violent, hedonistic, and degrading to women, the proliferation of drugs and gang violence, police brutality, etc., it isn't surprising that improper parenting is the result.

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"Spontaneous" women.-- A good way of putting it is to say that women tend to be more "*excitable*" than men. Naturally, not only due to socialization. Men are more "sober," women more excitable. To quote a book I'm reading, "'There is no doubt,' one member of the constabulary testified [in 1879 before a Select Committee on intemperance], that 'men may be said to carry their liquor more quietly than women.' Nor was there much doubt that it was 'the fact of the greater excitability of temperament upon the part of women' that accounted for the high proportion of arrests of women that had been recorded in cities such as Liverpool, Manchester, and London." Women's and children's excitability accounts in large part for their "cuteness" and attractiveness to men. (Actually, children are even more excitable than women; therefore, not only men but women find them adorable.) It also helps account for the universal half-conscious impression that they are somehow "subordinate" to men or tend to have "less of a self" than men, less self-certainty or "self-presence," less of a *presence*. -Again, these are only tendencies -- but easily observable ones. In groups, for example, or meetings, a man's contribution tends to have more weight than a woman's. I've noticed that a woman might make a suggestion and she'll be ignored, whereas a man who makes the same suggestion a minute later will be listened to.[1] He has a "weightier" presence.

Incidentally, these things are not always true. I, for example, pay more heed to less-noticed people than others do; I often ignore the charismatic person, who has enough attention on him or her already. But I'm unusual in this regard.

*

April

Email exchange:

Professor Chomsky,

I'm curious about your thoughts on a subject that has always puzzled me, as it has many philosophers and scientists. Modern science teaches us that "secondary qualities" do not inhere in external objects or "things in themselves," but that they are constructed by the brain through its manipulation of sensory data. The world we perceive is not the world in itself. I see a black table, but "really" what is out there are molecules, electromagnetic waves, etc., not the object I see. So, when I turn around, for example, and look somewhere else, the table is "gone"; what remain are the only elements that were always there, namely the colorless particles and waves that physics postulates. Thus, in a sense our brains are massively deceiving us, somewhat like Descartes's demon, in causing us to think that the objects we perceive have real, mind-independent existence. The world in itself has almost nothing in common with the world we perceive.

I don't see any other way of interpreting modern science, but I'm curious if you disagree. Thanks for your time.

[1] The same is true with regard to me. My input will quite possibly be ignored, evidently because I have a less "weighty" self(-love) than other men **[i.e. a less "naturally self-confirming" or "naturally *real-izing*" self-love]**; someone else's input will draw great appreciation even if it is essentially the same statement I just made. (This isn't *always* true.) One of the few categories of people I respect are those who -- like the law -- "do not respect persons" in this way, who show respect to everyone who deserves it and not only people with "weighty selves."

> Descartes would have pretty much agreed. His theory of perception was based on the idea that the internal structure of the perceptual system interacts with external data to determine what we perceive. Thus to pick one of his examples, if I look at an audience in a talk, I perceive people, but I'm constructing that visual interpretation from very scattered and limited data, ideas that were developed significantly in the 17th century and beyond. I don't see what alternative there is.
>
> Science is basically our way of trying to explain what we experience -- typically by careful experiment, other experience being far too complex.

I'm not really sure why I wrote that email, since it was pretty obvious what his answer would be. There's no alternative. (A lot of philosophers would disagree, but that's predictable.)

Sent another email afterwards:

> Thanks for your prompt reply. -Honestly, I don't know how you manage everything with your busy schedule. Not even my family members reply to emails that promptly! -But I suppose that after a lifetime of receiving compliments you're a little sick of them, n'est-ce pas?
>
> One other thought: while I agree with you about almost everything, I'm not sure you're right to dismiss the idea of "theories" in the realm of the social sciences. Certainly the theories don't have the level of rigor or substance that they have in the natural sciences, but theoretical ideas that pertain to society and aren't immediately commonsensical can be of use. For instance, Marxian materialism (i.e. emphasizing institutional relations more than ideologies, economic structures over intellectual culture, etc.) is quite a useful method, a useful way of guiding oneself, and it isn't common sense to most people. Maybe it should be. Or, to take another example, I found Erik Olin Wright's book *Classes*, which has a great deal of theory, to be very illuminating, largely because of its theoretical elements. In fact, the *Communist Manifesto* itself surely contains some powerful and not immediately obvious hypotheses. At least, they're extremely suggestive. And then of course there is economics. Robert Brenner's book *The Economics of Global Turbulence*, which you recommend in *Understanding Power*, has explanatory power because of the hypotheses it lays out at the beginning. Surely those count as "theories" even in a strict sense?
>
> Anyway, these objections are probably just academic nitpicking. And usually, yes, the so-called theories one encounters in the humanistic disciplines have little value.
>
> I'm glad you're still as active as ever. It'll be a blow to humanism when you're gone. (Sorry, another compliment.) Hopefully some of us can continue the tradition.

> I agree with your opinions about the work you cite, and find them very valuable. I don't frankly see much in the way of theory, however, at least if we mean by a theory a system of principles that can be used to derive conclusions about the world, where the theories go beyond plausible generalization.
>
> But it's a matter of taste, not substance.
>
> Not sure what you're referring to of mine. I have criticized the vacuous pretensions of "theory" in cultural studies, literary criticism, postmodern posturing, etc., and theories that

> are simply thin cover for ideology, like Efficient Market Hypothesis. But not work of the kind you mention.

Rereading Robert Brenner's *The Economics of Global Turbulence*, since I read only half last summer. This time I'm going to take notes. Brenner knows what he's talking about, and I don't want to forget his ideas.

Two periods in recent economic history: prosperity from the late 1940s to 1973, and slowed growth and economic turbulence from 1973 onwards. *Why?* Orthodox economics doesn't know, barely even acknowledges the trajectory. "The major existing alternative [to orthodox economics]....finds the source of the shift from long boom to long downturn in the increased power of and pressure from labour exerted against capital, itself the result in part of the long extension of the postwar economic upturn. But, with the benefit of hindsight, this thesis would seem to have been definitively undermined by the failure of the decisive weakening of labour vis-à-vis capital during the 1970s and 1980s to bring about the restoration of system-wide economic vitality."

Brenner sees *profitability* as key.

> The realized rate of profit is the direct measure of firms' ability to derive surpluses from their plant, equipment, and software. It is also the best available predictor of the rate of return that firms can expect on their new investment. As a result, the rate of profit is the fundamental determinant of the rate at which the economy's constituent firms will accumulate capital and expand employment, therefore of its output, productivity and wage growth, and, in turn, of the increase of its aggregate demand, both investment and consumer. From this point of departure, an initial account immediately follows. What made possible the inauguration and long perpetuation of the postwar boom in the US, Europe, and Japan was the achievement, over the period between the late 1930s and late 1940s, of elevated rates of profit and their maintenance during the following two decades. What brought the postwar boom to an end was a sharp fall in profitability for the advanced capitalist economies taken individually and together between 1965 and 1973, focused on the manufacturing sector but extending to the private economy as a whole, beginning in the US but soon encompassing Western Europe and Japan. The reason that, as of 2000, there had been no clear revival of the global economy is that there had been no decisive recovery of the profit rate system-wide, or in the US, Western Europe, or Japan considered separately. The challenge posed by these results is, of course, to account for the pattern of profitability itself -- both for the system as a whole and for its various regional and national components.... To respond to that challenge is, simply stated, the project of this book.

Why does the rate of profit have a tendency to fall? Because of the anarchy and competitiveness of capitalist production, which "require individual capitals to cut costs in order to survive by introducing fixed capital embodying ever more efficient technology, but to do so not only without reference to the reproductive requirements of other capitals, but by threatening their profits and indeed their very existence. The outcome in aggregate is, on the one hand, to bring about the unprecedented development of the productive forces. But it is, on the other hand, to prevent firms with higher-cost methods of production frozen in their already-existing plant, equipment, and software from realizing their fixed capital investments. This manifests itself in over-capacity and, in turn, reduced profitability."

Okay, so, a lot of theory. How do you connect it to reality? Through an intermediate conceptual link, which gives a reason for thinking that capitalist economic expansion will take the form of uneven development. Namely, Brenner argues that there will be an early-developing bloc of capital (the U.S. in this case) that is technologically and socio-economically more advanced, and later-developing blocs of capital (in Western Europe and Japan) that are at first backward but are "able to exploit the potential advantages of coming late and of cultivating new, hitherto less developed regions." Eventually, the later-developing blocs challenge the earlier-developing "by combining lower-cost inputs [such as labor] and

equal or more advanced technology, making for an intensification of inter-capitalist competition that undermines the ability of large masses of fixed capital investments to realize themselves, leading to the onset of over-capacity and declining rates of profit." This intensification of competition occurred between 1965 and 1973, and led to falling profitability system-wide.

But if that explains why the downturn started, why has it lasted so long? Especially given that firms, assisted by governments, have sought to restore their profit rates "by means both of the obsessive reduction of costs, above all direct and indirect labour costs, and the transformation of their ways of doing business." Hence attacks on the working class and the neoliberalizing of the global economy. E.g., firms "shifted capital out of high-cost, low-profit manufacturing lines, especially into financial services, and turned increasingly to speculation." All this was meant to cope with the problem of reduced profitability. But somehow it couldn't prevent the performance of the advanced capitalist economies from *worsening* as time went on.

So what is the explanation? Simply that private sector profitability didn't recover, due to the "paradoxical persistence of chronic over-capacity in international manufacturing." What happened is that, "on the one hand, in response to falling profit rates, firms had to slow the growth of investment and employment, while seeking to reduce the level of their costs, particularly labour costs, in the multifarious ways indicated above. The outcome, in the face of the persistent failure of profitability to recover, was a chronic and worsening problem of investment, consumer, government, and therefore aggregate demand. On the other hand, contrary to expectations, the great firms of the advanced capitalist world sought only tardily and with the greatest reluctance to respond to their profitability problems by withdrawing their capital stock from oversubscribed lines of production. Instead, they defended their positions in the world market as long as possible by improving their competitiveness by expanding investment as much as they were able, even in the face of reduced rates of return." At the same time, more regions in East Asia entered the world economy, as Western Europe and Japan had earlier. This led to more problems: increasingly sophisticated manufacturing products were poured into already over-supplied world markets, which increased still further the stress on world manufacturing profit rates.

> Nevertheless, the intensification of over-capacity in world manufacturing markets (which resulted from both the unexpected persistence of incumbents from the advanced capitalist world and the unprecedented ingress of entrants from the developing world, especially East Asia) in the face of a deepening problem of insufficient aggregate demand (which resulted from universal cost-cutting and the slowdown of investment and job-creation consequent upon the decline of profitability) did not lead, as might otherwise have been expected, to a large-scale shakeout of high-cost, low-profit means of production by making for serious recession or depression. [This "shakeout" is what used to happen in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.] This was because the governments of the advanced capitalist world, led to an ever-increasing extent by the US, made sure that titanic volumes of credit were made available, through ever more varied channels, direct and indirect, both public and private, to firms and households to soak up the surplus of supply over demand, especially in the wake of the serious cyclical downturns that periodically threatened stability. Rather than system-shaking crisis, we therefore witnessed the continuation, stretching over three decades, of persistently reduced rates of profit that made for ever-decreasing economic vitality on a global scale, along with ever more destructive asset price bubbles and financial implosions, and increasingly severe cyclical downturns. The upshot was the predicament facing the world economy as it entered the new millennium: namely, the still further continuation of the long downturn against a background of over-supplied lines of production, decelerating aggregate demand, and a mountain of over-priced paper assets, all made possible by the accumulation of private and public debt at unprecedented speed and at historic levels.

On one level, then, it amounts to too much supply, not enough demand. But it's not quite that simple, because if real wages had been allowed to rise in the decades after 1973, the rate of profit would have been even lower than it was. So, from one perspective, it was and is useful to business and economic growth to take more and more from labor, since that increases profitability. On the other hand, suppressing demand *too much* has disastrous consequences. So it's strange: a reduction in real wages (or in the growth of real wages) can be both bad and good for the economy. But ultimately, I guess, it's bad. For individual firms it's a good policy to reduce wages, but for the economy as a whole it's bad, at least in the long run, because then the masses won't have enough purchasing power to buy the goods that are being produced. So profit-rates will decline, which will cause investment to decline, which will result in laid-off workers and reduced wages, which will further decrease aggregate demand, etc.

"The contention, so dear to the hearts of business advocates and neoliberal politicians, as well as some neoclassical economists, that the turn to ever-freer markets and ever-deeper austerity must bring, and has brought, ever-greater economic vigour is in defiance of the evidence. The fact is that, for the advanced capitalist economies taken singly or together, economic performance has worsened, business cycle by business cycle, since the end of the postwar boom in terms of all of the main macroeconomic indicators: the growth of GDP, capital stock, labour productivity, and real compensation. Economic performance was less good during the 1990s than the 1980s, which lagged the 1970s, which was, of course, far worse than the economic performance of the 1950s and 1960s."

"Between 1970 and 1990, the manufacturing rate of profit for the G-7 economies taken together was, on average, about 40 percent lower than between 1950 and 1970.... As I shall try to demonstrate, the major decline in the profit rate throughout the advanced capitalist world has been the basic cause of the parallel, major decline in the rate of growth of investment, and with it the growth of output, especially in manufacturing, over the same period. The sharp decline in the rate of growth of investment -- along with that of output itself -- is, I shall argue, the primary source of the decline in the rate of growth of productivity, as well as a major determinant of the increase of unemployment. The declines in the rate of growth of employment and productivity are at the root of the sharp slowdown in the growth of real wages.

"To explain the origins and evolution of the long downturn through an analysis of the causes and effects of changes in profitability is thus the objective of this study."

"The fall in *aggregate* profitability that was responsible for the long downturn was the result of....the over-capacity and over-production that resulted from intensified, horizontal intercapitalist competition. The heightening of intercapitalist competition was itself brought about by the introduction of lower-cost, lower-price goods into the world market, especially in manufacturing, at the expense of already existing higher-cost, higher-price producers, their profitability and their productive capacity. The long downturn, from this standpoint, has persisted largely because the advanced capitalist economies have proved unable to accomplish profitably sufficient reductions and reallocations of productive power so as to overcome over-capacity and over-production in manufacturing lines, and thereby to restore profitability, especially given the growing presence of East Asia in world markets."

Brenner starts out by critiquing supply-side explanations of the downturn, which explain it in terms of declining labor productivity combined with a failure of real wage growth to adjust downward in tandem (due to workers' supposedly excessive political power, as well as to tight labor markets). Thus, rates of profit have declined because productivity growth has declined more than the growth in workers' wages has. There has been a squeeze on profits. Even Marxists and radicals subscribe to this theory. Brenner characterizes it as Malthusian because Malthus (and Ricardo) thought that in agriculture there is a long-term tendency to declining growth of labor productivity. Ultimately the upshot of this was supposed to be stagnation or crisis. Luckily Malthus was wrong: science came to the rescue by making possible various agricultural technologies that increased productivity. Nonetheless, many economists (on the left and right) are still attracted to the general "supply-side" idea that a secular decline in productivity growth can and does cause a fall in profitability. Even Marx himself embraced the idea (according to Brenner), despite his aversion to Malthus. His explanation for the tendency of the profit rate to fall was that as mechanization increases, more and more capital inputs and fewer labor inputs go into producing a commodity, which

means that less surplus-value is embodied in the commodity. (And profits arise from surplus-value.) As Brenner paraphrases Marx, labor productivity actually increases with mechanization, but *overall* productivity -- taking into account both capital and labor inputs -- declines.

Anyway, the point is that "Marxists and radicals have joined liberals and conservatives in explaining the long downturn as a 'supply-side' crisis, resulting from a squeeze on profits, reflecting pressure on capital from labour that is 'too strong.'[1] In so doing, they have characterized the current crisis in terms just the opposite of those that have often been used to characterize the long downturn of the interwar period, a crisis widely viewed as a 'demand-side' or 'under-consumption' crisis, resulting from an overly high profit rate, reflecting pressure from labour that was 'too weak.'" Interesting.

So why are the supply-siders wrong? First, while it's true that full employment tends to result in higher wages (which squeeze profits), it also leads to higher sales, hence more profits. The latter effect may offset the former. Second, the acceleration of real wage growth tends to cause firms to substitute labor-saving capital for labor, which increases overall productivity. Third, because of the high demand for labor, immigration from abroad will probably increase, thereby reducing the tightness of the labor market. At the same time, capital will be exported to regions of the world where labor is cheaper. Etc.

But let's suppose that full employment (and higher pay) does occasionally cause a significant fall in profitability. This still won't cause a *long-term* reduction in the profit rate, because firms will inevitably respond to their reduced profitability by reducing investment. "As a result, sooner rather than later, the labour market will loosen sufficiently" to allow for the restoration of profitability. In response to this argument, supply-siders maintain that the postwar political power of labor (through unions, unemployment insurance, etc.) was such that the labor market couldn't function properly. Profit-squeezing wages have therefore been able to persist alongside high levels of unemployment. Brenner counters that in *given* firms or industries for *given* periods of time, labor's entrenched power might skew the operation of the labor market. But it cannot so squeeze profits as to cause a *long-term, system-wide downturn*, simply because firms can always choose to invest in some area where workers have less institutionalized power. And if they don't so invest, they'll go out of business, because other firms *will* so invest.

In any case, the fact that supply-side theorists explain the long downturn in terms of the operation of institutions and impact of policies means that they have to explain it in historically and nationally specific ways. But how can such explanations account for a *universal, simultaneous* and *long-term* downturn? Clearly they can't.

After his demolition of the supply-side account, Brenner introduces his own approach in a very abstract and dense theoretical discussion. The main point is that, contrary to the received wisdom, when a new firm that uses cost-cutting technical advancements enters an industry -- or rather a "line" -- dominated by firms with relatively high costs of production and sells its products at a lower price than they do (because of its lower costs of production) so as to increase its market share, the old firms *cannot* be expected to take action immediately by either adopting the new techniques of the innovating firm or leaving the line as a result of their reduced profitability (which is due to competition with the innovating firm). The reason is that *if they have fixed capital* they will, first of all, not want to leave the line immediately as long as they can continue making profits that are at least above the costs of their circulating capital (viz., "the investment in labor power, raw materials, and semi-finished goods that is required to put their fixed capital into motion"). Their fixed capital is "sunk." They've already paid for it, so they might as well keep using it as long as they can get at least some profit. As for why they won't immediately adopt the new techniques of the innovating firm, that's because the technical interrelatedness of their plants makes it difficult to adopt specific new inventions without changing the whole structure of the plant, or scrapping it all. And the cost of doing that may be prohibitive, especially if the plant is still basically efficient. Furthermore, even *between* plants and other units in a given productive system it may be "difficult to innovate in one part without changing some or all of the others." Thus, productive systems are "inertial," which increases their vulnerability to new, lower-cost production based on new techniques.

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[1] Actually, that hypothesis is surely different from Marx's "rising organic composition of capital" hypothesis, which has little or nothing to do with the political strength of labor.

But I haven't said the most important thing yet: because the new, innovating firm lowers the price of its products to steal market share from other firms, it actually does not make a higher rate of profit than those firms did before it entered the market. And once it has entered, the older firms have a *lower* rate of profit than they did because their market share is lower. So what has happened is that the average rate of profit in the line has fallen. This lower rate of profit can be expected to adversely affect profits throughout the whole economy, for reasons I won't go into.

Brenner thinks of fixed-capital investment throughout the economy as taking place in "waves" or being "embodied in large, technically interrelated, developmental blocs." "This occurs because each investment tends to depend on others to provide the demand to its output and the inputs for its production process. Think of the interrelated rise of railroads and shipbuilding, coal mining, iron and steel production, and machine-tool production in the middle third of the nineteenth century, or the interrelated expansion of automobile, steel, iron, coal, and petroleum production, along with highway construction, in the US economy in the years following World War II." These developmental blocs are inertial, hence vulnerable to new, more productive, developmental blocs that may appear. But these large-scale processes of technical change and cost-cutting will not appear in some sort of continuous, unilineal way. Because of barriers to entry in markets, cost-cutting investors will tend to develop in new geographical regions (e.g., postwar Japan and Germany) where they don't face immediate and vicious competition with already-dominant firms. Moreover, production can be cheaper in such late-developing regions because "producers have the potential to emulate the advanced techniques of their rivals from the old bloc while availing themselves of less expensive labour and paying lower rents than in developed areas where living standards have increased in accord with the growth of labour productivity." Also, sometimes producers in these new regions have the advantage of trade protection, beneficial state intervention, etc.

In the long run, capitalists in these late-developing regions will improve and expand their productive capacity to the point that they can profitably enter already occupied markets. New blocs of capital will thereby come into competition with the old. And so the average rate of profit will decline, etc., in accord with the scheme outlined above. High-cost firms in the old bloc might well respond to the new situation by counterattacking, defending their markets by investing in new fixed capital. This strategy will tend to provoke the original cost-cutting innovators to accelerate technological change themselves, "further worsening the already existing over-capacity and over-production" (which is "over-" in relation to the previously and still prevailing rate of profit; -- i.e., it drives the profit-rate down). As rates of profit fall, the growth of investment, of employment, and of wages necessarily falls as well -- i.e., demand falls -- which makes it more difficult for firms to change to new lines. And productivity grows more slowly too, because of decreased investment. "It becomes harder to find alternative lines in which old levels of profitability can be maintained for the simple reason that such lines are emerging and expanding less rapidly."

To make things even worse, still lower-cost producers might enter the market.

> Just as the mere over-supply of a line of production cannot be counted on to force enough exit to restore its profitability, that same over-supply is insufficient to deter further entry that could bring down its profit rate further. On the contrary. The initial fall in profitability that results from processes of uneven development bringing about over-capacity and over-production can be expected to intensify the worldwide drive for even lower production costs for the same products through the combination of even cheaper labour with even higher levels of technique in still later-developing regions. To the extent this drive succeeds....it only intensifies the initial problem.

Firms will tend to respond to the hard times by taking out loans so as to increase investment or just to survive until things get better. This growth of borrowing facilitates the survival of low-profit firms and so exacerbates over-capacity and over-production, slows the restoration of profitability, etc.

Additionally, the fall in profitability *itself* generates further downward pressure on the profit rate by causing a reduced growth of productivity (due to the reduced growth of investment) -- and lower productivity, of course, means lower profits.

In the rest of the book, Brenner applies these ideas to the history of the international economy after World War II. Here's a short summary.-- From the early 1960s, due in part to the "dramatic reduction of trade barriers at the end of the 1950s," Germany and Japan took increasing shares of the international market at the expense of the U.S. and U.K. U.S. manufacturers found that their prices were under significant downward pressure, which meant that their rates of profit suffered. Partly because of the enormous size of the U.S. economy, aggregate profitability of the advanced capitalist economies fell in the years between 1965 and 1973. "Meanwhile, between 1969 and 1973, as part and parcel of the same processes of intensifying competition that brought down profitability in the US, the explosion of Japanese and German current account surpluses and US current account deficits -- catalyzed by the rise of record US federal deficits -- precipitated the collapse of the Bretton Woods system and with it a major devaluation of the dollar, leading to a dramatic restructuring of relative costs internationally in favor of US producers. The mark and the yen sustained major increases in value against the dollar, and, as a result, some of the burden of profitability decline was shifted away from the US economy and the international crisis was extended to both Germany and Japan."

"Rather than leave their lines, U.S. manufacturing corporations, aided by the even further devaluation of the dollar, sought to improve their profitability and competitiveness by launching a powerful wave of investment during the 1970s and radically reducing the growth of wage costs, direct and indirect." Given cheaper U.S. goods on the world market, German and Japanese manufacturers did the same thing as U.S. ones had, namely cut their costs, take out more loans, and *not* change production to different lines. Later, newly established producers in East Asia entered markets, perpetuating the downturn into the 1990s. Nonetheless, a series of major recessions did not lead to depression because of the massive growth of public and private debt, "made possible largely by the enormous expansion of government borrowing."

> From the end of the 1970s, the epoch-making turn from Keynesian debt-creation to monetarist credit restriction and intensified austerity did accelerate the destruction of redundant capital, especially in manufacturing, but it simultaneously made more difficult the necessary allocation of investment funds into new lines. Meanwhile, from the mid 1980s, on the basis of another round of massive dollar devaluation against the yen and the mark, there began a major new shift in the locus of the most competitive manufacturing production -- in favor of the US and against Germany and Japan. In the US, while growth remained slow, profitability did begin to rise, dramatically so towards the mid 1990s. This was in part because wage growth was so effectively held down and the dollar so heavily devalued against the currencies of Germany and Japan. But it was also in part because the US manufacturing sector achieved a certain rationalization and revitalization, largely through shedding redundant, ineffective capital and intensifying labour.

Nevertheless, largely because the growth of domestic demand in the advanced capitalist economies was curtailed by restrictive macroeconomic policies, etc., "there was no transcendence of the underlying problem of reduced system-wide manufacturing profitability." Advanced capitalist economies oriented themselves increasingly toward growth in manufacturing exports as domestic markets grew much more slowly. Thus, over-capacity and over-production continued.

[Met an interesting girl from Poland, etc. Blah blah.]

....I'm in Greensboro, North Carolina, waiting four hours for a bus because the Greyhound ran out of seats (last leg of the journey) even though I'd paid $260 for the trip from Chicago. -You've got to avoid institutions as much as you can, especially businesses and large bureaucracies, because they always find a way to fuck you. Anyway, I'm going to UNC-Chapel Hill to do archival research on the Textile Workers Union of America in the 1960s for a paper. Thrilling, I know, you envy me.

--Actually you should, at least today and tomorrow, because this university is a little utopia. The people I've met so far in the South themselves live up to their legend. What friendliness and openness! Smiling, greeting, helping, thanking. It strikes me as almost anachronistic, this supreme civility in a world

or at least a country where I've known mostly aloofness and suspiciousness. I'm on a different planet over here. A guy on the bus just overheard me asking the driver about the location of a particular hotel; he asked me its address and name to look it up on the internet and then, unbeknownst to me, actually called them up to ask where they were and how to get there. That sort of thing seems to be fairly routine here. -The feeling of *belonging* in a place is very strange to me.

And what a town and university! Perfectly charming. *Perfectly*. Beautiful young women in short shorts playing frisbee on the grass, students traversing the campus between classes, people sampling cafés in the town nearby. And oh Lord the girls here. Not only achingly beautiful but friendly and open. (Openness! How I love thee, you who make life worth living!) The kind of girls I wanted to know in college.

It's easy to be a little envious of these students […]. How different would my life have been...? Maybe not so many morbid journal entries. I could fall in love with half the girls I've seen here. But I'm not really that "envious"; I'm too capacious for real envy, I think. It's possible, you know, to identify with others' happiness, to make it in some distant sense your own. I don't dwell on the past; I try never to think about it. I don't want to know about it. But had it been spectacular it would have passed anyway, so what's the huge loss? The present and the future are what matter, until they too are in the past.[1] Anyway, Emerson is right that good things and bad things tend to have "compensations," as I wrote years ago in Korea when I desperately needed to be reminded of such compensations. I'll enjoy being here and then return to Chicago, where I'll enjoy being too.

As for the actual research I'm doing down here, the collection has virtually none of the stuff I was hoping for. And as it turns out, the main national collection of the TWUA is at the State Historical Society in Madison, Wisconsin. (Maybe I should have found that out beforehand.) So I came all the way down here for nothing, and I lost a weekend when the paper is due in a couple of weeks. -I haven't started writing; in fact, I don't even really know yet what I'm writing about.

Back to Brenner. Over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, "in one key industry after another" -- textiles, steel, automobiles, machine tools, consumer electronics -- Germany and Japan forged ahead of the U.S.

After the war, the U.S.'s labor movement, unlike Germany's and Japan's, was strong enough to push up wages rapidly, "especially when cyclical upturns pushed down unemployment, as at the time of the Korean War." Wages in Germany and Japan were much lower because of large industrial reserve armies and the labor movement's suppression with the advent of the Cold War. Hence, higher profit rates. Conservative trade unions in fact gave top priority to the needs of capital accumulation. Thus, "the postwar boom in both countries was predicated more on the defeat of labour than on its recognition, more on the explicit subordination of labour than the consolidation of any putative 'capital-labour accord.'" To say it differently, "it was the long postwar expansion itself which made possible labour's substantial material gains and its ulterior (partial) socio-political integration through the emergent trade-union bureaucracies -- not vice versa." German and Japanese workers hinged their fates to that of 'their own' firm. Through enterprise unions and works councils, they facilitated their firms' achievement of international competitiveness.

In the U.S., on the other hand, rapid economic growth from the late 1930s to the late 1940s "raised barriers to further improvement by leaving in its wake masses of fixed capital capable of deterring further entry and investment, by using up factor supplies, especially surplus labour, and by facilitating labour resistance." Also, the great manufacturing corporations and international bankers had an interest after World War II in helping other countries rebuild, because that's where many of the best opportunities for profit would be. So these forces got the U.S. government to support "a policy of free flow of goods and investment funds that would allow the multinationals and international bankers to make direct investments and loans abroad and allow imports to flow back into the country." Besides, U.S.-based exporters needed to allow their prospective customers abroad to sell goods to the U.S. in order to earn the currency they

[1] (I'm intentionally stating an "extremist" philosophy of life here, perhaps an impoverished one, which I'm not sure I agree with.)

would need to buy U.S. goods. For these and other reasons, the government opened up the U.S. market to exports from its economic rivals while accepting their own protectionism. "It thereby helped to create the conditions for the secular decline of competitiveness of U.S. domestic manufacturing." In other words, it made possible the export-driven economic growth of Germany and Japan, which eventually undercut the markets and profits of U.S. domestic manufacturers.

One of the morals of the story is that it *wasn't* "new arrangements for keeping domestic demand up with production" that were responsible for extraordinary growth rates of Germany and Japan. Their economic miracles were based on *supply-side* advantages, including various institutional and policy advantages, not on *demand-side* facts. Indeed, their governments held down the growth of domestic demand (by imposing balanced budgets and relatively tight credit) in order to achieve low inflation in the interest of overseas sales.

In the long run, Germany's and Japan's growth of exports was self-undermining, for several reasons. An important one is that its obverse side was the "tendential decline of U.S. manufacturing competitiveness, the tendential rise of U.S. external deficits, and the tendential decline of the U.S. currency. Implied was the declining capacity of the U.S. market to absorb its allies' and rivals' goods and thus to serve as the 'motor of last resort' of their economies. The very processes by which the German and Japanese economies achieved rapid growth during the postwar boom tended to destroy the foundations of their success."

Brenner briefly argues against Sweezy's theory of capitalist stagnation arising from the predominance of monopoly capital. It is true that the U.S. economy grew more slowly as the 1950s progressed. But Sweezy's main ideas were merely reifications of temporary and specific aspects of the U.S. economy in the 1950s. The *world* economy was not at all stagnant at this time, and the U.S. economy was only *relatively* stagnant compared to Germany and Japan. Moreover, its stagnation was simply a result of the fact that the U.S.'s "manufacturing sector offered relatively limited opportunities for profitable investment compared to those available in manufacturing outside the U.S." Firms thus invested abroad in order to generate profits, resulting in relative stagnation in the U.S. It's true, too, that in certain restricted senses "oligopolistic competition" fettered investment in the 1950s and 1960s. And as we've seen, high wage-rates decreased profitability as compared to the low wage-rates that permitted high profitability abroad.

"The slow growth of investment [in the U.S. in the 1950s] may well have been partly responsible for the reduction in the growth of labour productivity in manufacturing." I should note that Brenner backs up every statement with extensive empirical data.

"While the powerful surge of manufacturing productivity growth of the immediate postwar period petered out in the 1950s, wage growth failed to follow suit. The 1950s was the true golden age for the American worker.... *If there was a major squeeze on profits by the action of labour at any point during the postwar epoch, it took place in manufacturing in the course of the 1950s.*" (Brenner's italics.)

"With wages rising, with slow investment growth helping to push down both labour and capital productivity growth, and with capacity utilization declining, the 1950s understandably witnessed a very major decline in manufacturing profitability. Between 1950 and 1958, the manufacturing profit rate fell by 41 percent...." As if all this weren't enough, the American economy experienced inflation in the latter part of the decade as employers tried to pass on wage increases in the form of price increases; U.S. prices rose above those of its competitors.

Recessions occurred in the U.S. at the end of the 1950s. But the economy recovered in the first half of the 1960s. Manufacturing output grew fast, GNP grew fast, etc. Why? Because of a spectacular rise in the rate of profit. "Between 1958 and 1965, profitability in manufacturing rose by no less than 80 percent, in the private business economy by 45 percent. Increased profitability brought about increased growth by spurring a powerful boom in investment." Critical to the rise in profitability was an employer offensive against labor, made possible in part by the rise of unemployment due to recession that had itself been partially brought on by high wages' squeezing of profits. Employers defeated their workers in several large strikes, and they resisted extensions of unionization increasingly successfully, often by building new plants

in the un-unionized south and southwest. Unions won workplace elections less frequently, rates of unionization began to fall, there was a stepping up of supervision on the shop floor, etc. “All of these trends have continued to the present, and one cannot but conclude that the decade from the mid 1950s to the mid 1960s marked a turning point for the U.S. union movement, the beginning of a long and precipitous process of decline.” The upshot of the employer offensive was a significant lowering of the rate of wage growth. Investment therefore increased, productivity increased, and exports increased.

The recovery couldn’t continue forever, though, because the trends of reducing wage growth on which it was largely based could be carried only so far. And the German and Japanese economies were still growing, etc. In fact, even in the mid-1960s the U.S. saw its share of world manufacturing exports fall from 18.7 percent to 15.8 percent.

Let’s look at Germany. Its impressive growth after the war was due primarily to its export dynamism, made possible by the fact that “it could use its very cheap labour and historical endowment of very highly skilled labour to emulate, and in some cases surpass, U.S. production methods and, on that basis, seize markets formerly held by U.S. manufacturers.” Incidentally, the Korean War was important in jumpstarting, after a severe recession caused by a deflationary monetary policy, Germany’s export-driven boom (since American demand shot up). In general, the growth of demand in the American economy, “and particularly the stabilization of demand there by means of large-scale military spending,” contributed mightily to the expansion of Germany’s export-oriented economy (which was itself founded on anti-Keynesian policies -- i.e., budget surpluses, tight credit, high interest rates).

In causing high demand for labor and nearly full employment, why didn’t the boom lead to significant wage increases and corresponding pressure on profits? Because of the large reserves of labor in the countryside and abroad. Also, mass immigration of skilled labor from East to West Germany helped keep the labor market loose.

“During the late 1950s and early 1960s, while the U.S. economy temporarily broke from its long-term pattern of relatively slow growth, the German economy sustained an interruption of its momentum.” From the mid-1960s, the economy regained some of its former dynamism. But what caused the downturn between 1960 and 1965? Two things: “first, the rise of manufacturing producers across the advanced capitalist world prepared to challenge German producers for markets and, second, the self-limiting character of a German form of economic development that was structured to stimulate the growth of manufacturing exports at the expense of the domestic market.” From the late 1950s, the German economy’s costs of production rose in relation to those of its increasingly competitive rivals France, Italy, and Japan. In 1961 a revaluation of the mark exacerbated the problem by increasing relative labor costs. The growth of relative costs in turn sharply reduced Germany’s capacity to export.

As for the self-limiting character of export-led growth: such growth was “buttressed by macroeconomic policy aimed at restricting the growth of demand so as to keep down prices,” as I mentioned above. But the consequence of this was major current account surpluses, which in turn created strong pressures to revalue the mark (as was done in 1961). Mark revaluations, in turn, undermined competitiveness, for they tended to entail higher relative unit labor costs. “Germany’s competitiveness thus threatened to self-destruct by bringing about an increase in German relative prices,” either through inflation or through mark revaluation. -This is the side of economics I least understand, this international currency stuff. Exchange rates, all that crap.

Now Japan. In 1950 it had very low manufacturing productivity but even lower wage rates. Cheap skilled labor was key to the postwar economic boom. It’s true that the labor movement was very strong immediately after the war, as it was in Germany, Italy, France and elsewhere, but with the start of the Cold War it was crushed. Between 1950 and 1960, Japanese manufacturing output grew at an astonishing pace, on the basis of equally astonishing growth in investment and hence productivity. “What made it possible to sustain such rapid growth was, as in Germany, the Japanese economy’s ability to prevent the investment boom from bringing about the too rapid growth of costs.” Wage pressure was minimal throughout the whole period. As a result, the profit rate soared.

Market forces, however, were not in themselves responsible for all these successes. Crucial were horizontal networks in manufacturing, to plan, reduce risk, etc., and the effective merger of finance and

industry. Banks heavily involved themselves in the operations of their manufacturer-debtors, which enabled the latter to finance themselves to an unusual extent on the basis of debt rather than equity, which was good because stocks typically require higher rates of return than loans (due to their higher risk). “Firms were thereby [and for other reasons as well] relieved of the need to pay large dividends,” which meant that they could channel more of their profits into investment than American and other competitors could. “They were allowed, moreover, to orient their operations to long-run returns, subject only to their ability to satisfy their banker-financiers.”

The state, too, played an important role in economic growth. “Largely at the expense of workers and consumers, it provided desperately needed investment funds, either directly or through the banks, to Japan’s leading corporations and effectively guaranteed their continuing existence. By making financial advances contingent on how these funds would be used, the state was able to go far in determining the direction of the explosive process of growth that its patronage made possible.” The state also made sure that interest rates were kept low for the great manufacturing corporations. And it made huge investments in infrastructure, and gave huge tax breaks on capital investment, and established massive protectionism across almost the whole manufacturing sector, and so on and so forth. The successes of all these measures, incidentally, demonstrate the bankruptcy of neoclassical orthodoxy.

One of the reasons why wages didn’t increase so as to squeeze profits is that, as in Germany, a large part of the laboring population was still in agriculture. But also, the labor movement was oriented to the needs of capital accumulation. Japanese unions, “enterprise unions,” were organized on a firm-by-firm basis. After the suppressing of labor’s militancy at the start of the Cold War, “workers saw little choice but to hitch their fate to that of their firms, and to seek to improve their condition by improving their firms’ profitability.” This system of collaborative labor relations actually served workers well, since they accrued steady wage increases (in absolute, not relative, terms) and had excellent job security. -However, only the labor force employed by leading manufacturing corporations was unionized.

Brenner sums up his discussion of the “long boom” by criticizing Keynesian explanations of it.

> [He admits that] the increased steadiness in the growth of demand [from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s], resulting from the permanently increased size of the state sector in most of the advanced capitalist economies, must have helped endow these economies with greater stability than in the past. It may also have made for increased confidence on the part of capitalists, encouraging them to invest and innovate. But in Germany and Japan, where the most rapid growth took place, supply-side conditions were clearly responsible for economic dynamism. In the US, by contrast, the economy grew slowly during the 1950s, despite the subsidy of demand by public deficits and the growth of the wage share, and its brief takeoff during the first half of the 1960s was made possible largely by holding down the growth of wages and increasing productivity by means of intensifying labour.
>
> Where the autonomous growth of demand *did* operate powerfully to augment investment, growth and stability, it did so, paradoxically, less within national boundaries than across them. German and Japanese manufacturers derived much of their dynamism by means of appropriating large segments of the fast-growing world market from the US and UK, while beginning to invade the US domestic market....

“The origins of the long downturn in the advanced capitalist world are to be found in the US economy in the years after 1965. Between 1965 and 1973, the rates of profit in the manufacturing and private business sectors fell by 40.9 percent and 29.3 percent, respectively.” Obviously, then, the fall in profitability that set off the long downturn cannot have been caused by the oil crisis of the 1970s, as is commonly thought. So what caused it? The answer, again, is not high wages or lower labor productivity growth but increased downward pressure on prices reflecting intensified international competition. The data Brenner presents against the idea that increased workers’ power, especially as embodied in a decline in labor productivity growth, led to the decline in profitability are absolutely decisive. For example, in the manufacturing sector labor productivity growth actually increased between 1965 and 1973, when

profitability started declining. Nor did *capital* productivity fall in this period. It's true that labor costs increased a little in manufacturing in these years, but the main problem was that companies were not able to raise prices sufficiently to wholly offset the growth in costs. The decisive fact, then, which needs explaining, is that they were prevented from raising prices enough.

The foundation of the explanation is that from the mid-1960s, world trade dramatically increased. Manufacturing exports shot up. One consequence of this was especially rapid international economic growth, at least in Germany, France, Italy, Japan, and the U.K. Another consequence, however, was newer, lower-cost producers based in such regions as Germany and Japan taking ever larger portions of markets thitherto dominated by U.S. and U.K. producers. This was made possible, for example, by exceptionally rates of labor productivity growth in Japan. Also, high government deficits caused an outbreak of inflation in the U.S. after 1965. "The sharp relative increase in US costs of production [relative, that is, to those in Germany, Japan, etc.] stimulated a further acceleration of manufacturing investment overseas by US multinational corporations, accentuating the already established trend[s]." In short, U.S. manufacturers started to lose markets abroad and at home. But even in the markets they retained, they were prevented from raising prices to as great an extent in proportion to costs as they had been accustomed to doing, "with unavoidable consequences for profitability."

The eruption of labor militancy that took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s was not so much a cause of declining profitability as an indirect result of it. In response to pressure from abroad, employers stepped up their offensive against labor from the mid-1960s. Union bureaucracies initially didn't respond very vigorously, so the rank and file stepped into the breach with wildcat strikes and so on. Finally in the late 1960s union leaderships organized a major wave of strikes, with limited results, however.

As for Japan and the European G-7 economies, "the final stage of the postwar boom paralleled the onset of the profitability crisis in the US." They benefited, of course, from U.S. producers' problems, by taking increased shares of their markets. "The transition to international economic downturn can thus be said to have begun, somewhat paradoxically, at a point when most of the advanced capitalist world was in full expansion, at the height of its postwar dynamism." The U.S.'s diminished vitality was about to spill over into the other G-7 economies.

In the mid-1960s the U.S. government increased its already substantial spending in order to keep the economy moving. But it failed to stimulate a corresponding increase in domestic investment and supply because of firms' declining rates of profit, relatively high costs of production in international terms, and an overall deteriorating business climate. Instead, Keynesian stimulus measures -- and major tax cuts in 1964 and 1965 -- called forth more rapidly rising inflation and imports. This was bad for America's international position and the dollar. The Federal Reserve tried to stop inflation in 1965 by tightening up credit, but then it reversed that policy (until the end of 1967) when a recession threatened. In 1968 the Fed again raised interest rates, "but by this time a major crisis was maturing." America's trade balances with Germany and Japan were falling rapidly, and "in 1971 the US experienced its first trade deficit of the twentieth century."

As all this was happening, "the money market inevitably placed renewed downward pressure on the dollar and upward pressure on the mark and yen" in the late 1960s. As speculators attacked the dollar, the Bretton Woods system, based on the dollar's strength, threatened to collapse (and did so in the early 1970s). In the meantime, Germany's spectacular current account balance in 1968 led to huge speculative inflows, which swelled the money supply. Thus, Germany began to experience "imported inflation." Finally in 1969 the government succumbed to the inevitable and revalued the mark, which threatened the continued growth of German exports (due to the effective increase in their prices). Japan experienced the same inflationary pressures as Germany, but it tried to avoid revaluing its currency, "inviting a wave of inflation that would eventually dwarf that of Germany."

In 1968 and 1969 the U.S. government instituted a variety of deflationary measures that briefly stabilized the international monetary situation but caused the recession of 1970. Unwilling to accept the political and economic costs of a serious anti-inflationary policy, Nixon reversed it in 1970. America's exporting of inflation therefore resumed, as short-term speculators fled the dollar because of its low interest rates. Eventually "the pressures for a reordering of international rates of exchange became unbearable," and in 1971 the mark, yen, and other currencies were revalued against the dollar. But fixed exchange rates were

still used, and that couldn't last in light of the unstable monetary situation. Inflation continued to rise in the U.S. because of expansionary policies; finally in 1973 the advanced capitalist countries established floating exchange rates. The upshot was that between 1969 and 1973, the German and Japanese currencies appreciated against the dollar 50 percent and 28.2 percent respectively. This, of course, was good for American exports because it made them and their costs of production relatively cheaper. "The reductions in US relative costs made possible by the devaluation of the dollar, along with the gains in capacity utilization secured with the recovery from recession, had a galvanizing effect on the US economy." Profit rates increased a little, etc. Germany and Japan, on the other hand, "now began to shoulder the burden of the world crisis of profitability."

German manufacturers had to accept lower prices on their exports in order to retain market share, even as labor militancy led to rising labor costs and so even lower profit rates. Japan's story is complicated, but basically manufacturers ended up facing a similar situation to German ones. The growth of the world market had slowed, and producers faced intensified competition from abroad because of yen revaluation, etc. But ultimately it was the fact that so many manufacturers around the world were producing similar goods, leading to overproduction and "over-competition," that caused the downturn in the world economy.

Short summary of the long downturn:

The oil crisis of 1974-1975 exacerbated economic difficulties. The cost of oil rose everywhere, especially in Japan. "Since wages and technology did not immediately adjust to the rise in energy costs, rates of profit fell further, and inflation accelerated. At this point, many governments had little choice but to put on the brakes, raising interest rates and limiting the supply of credit. A sharp deflation thus followed immediately upon the inflationary crisis, bringing about another step down in profitability and the greatest recession since the Depression of the 1930s." With investment growth, hence the growth of capital stock, sharply reduced, the growth of labor productivity naturally declined as well. And, "given the reductions in productivity growth and profitability, real wage growth was bound to be constrained and fell far more rapidly than did output per person. With the growth of both investment demand, especially in manufacturing, and consumer demand so much reduced -- as an expression of the slowdown of the growth of the capital stock and of the growth of wages -- the growth of output had to fall too; as it did, the manufacturing sector shed much labour, and unemployment increased precipitously. Between 1973 and 1995, the unemployment rate in the G-7 economies averaged 6.5 percent, more than double the average of 3.1 percent for the years 1960-73." The growth of international trade decreased too.

From the start, of course, employers and their governments tried to offset the fall in profitability at the expense of workers. "To reduce indirect labour costs, as well as to soften up labour resistance, governments across the advanced capitalist world launched severe austerity drives -- tight credit to drive up unemployment and reduced social services to weaken workers' safety net." But this didn't restore profitability. Actually, for the economy outside manufacturing such measures did allow the maintenance of high profitability -- which corroborates Brenner's thesis, because the non-manufacturing sector deals with non-tradables, so that international over-capacity and over-production cannot have a direct effect on that sector, while they can on the manufacturing sector.

The main problem, to repeat, was that manufacturers across the advanced capitalist world stubbornly refused to leave product lines that had become less profitable. Historically this is how problems of overproduction have been solved -- by the collapse of unprofitable firms, the development of new lines, etc. That didn't happen here for many reasons I'll get into later. It's worth noting now, though, that in Germany, Japan, and other economies (but not the U.S.), "the problem of eliminating redundant productive forces from over-subscribed manufacturing lines was made all the more difficult to the degree that this entailed transferring means of production into the service sector." The reason is that levels and rates of productivity growth were much higher in manufacturing than in services, which means that if a transfer from the former sector to the latter were to take place without a loss of profitability, reductions in wage levels and wage growth would be necessary. But for various reasons it was hard for employers in many countries to reduce service-sector wages more than they had already been reduced. "One therefore witnesses [in Germany, Japan, and even the U.S.] a striking shift into finance, insurance, and real estate, where productivity and profitability were evidently on the rise, but difficulties of profitable entry into service-

sector lines where productivity was low, such as retail trade and hotel and restaurants." By contrast, in the U.S., where employers were able to reduce wages significantly, they had an easier time in recovering profitability and reducing unemployment than their competitors elsewhere.

As I stated above, too, the tremendous expansion of debt played a large role in stabilizing the world economy but prolonging the downturn (by preventing a decisive "shakeout" of unproductive and redundant capital). "Keynesianism," that is, "made the downturn both milder and longer." After its experiment with monetarism in the early 1980s, "the Reagan administration undertook the greatest programme of Keynesian pump priming that the world had ever seen. Through its record budget deficits, the US federal government massively raised demand so as to bail out yet again not just the US, but also the Japanese and German, economies from the recession of 1979-82 and to keep the whole system turning over during the 1980s."

Now for more detail. In the 1970s, "because profitability failed to recover, the [government] subsidy to demand [through high budget deficits and so on] that kept the system turning over could not but bring about the same succession of developments as in the late 1960s and early 1970s: the build-up of increasing numbers of high-cost, low-profit firms that in the absence of the subsidy would have gone under; a reduction in the growth of output that could be obtained by any given increase in demand due to firms' reduced access to surpluses and correspondingly reduced ability to invest; the corresponding acceleration of inflation, as any given increase in demand brought a smaller response in terms of supply than previously when profit rates were higher; rising interest rates and tight credit policies to combat inflation; and, ultimately, a new cyclical downturn. Another round of the same sort of stop-and-go cycle that had issued in the recessions of 1971 and 1974-75 thus culminated in the recession of 1979-82 and testified to the persistence of the economy's underlying problems."

In the 1970s Japan's export growth continued but at the cost of a spectacular collapse of manufacturing profitability. Because of international competition (from new East Asian firms too) and yen revaluation, firms had to keep their prices relatively low, which meant lower profits. Which meant lower investment growth, etc. But labor productivity actually increased at a respectable rate because of organized labor's self-discipline and various measures employers used to reduce labor's cost and increase its commitment to work.

At the same time, Japanese industry was restructuring itself. Because of the oil crises that hit it particularly hard, as well as all the other factors I've mentioned, the economy moved away from (or, alternatively, rationalized) heavy, energy-intensive, and labor-intensive lines and into high value-added industries like cars and "mechatronics" lines (industries that combined electronics and machinery). This process of economic restructuring was coordinated largely by the state and consortia of private companies, and was helped enormously by firms' close relationships with banks (which gave them much better access to finance than their overseas rivals).

Nevertheless, despite all these positive developments, "the Japanese economy could achieve only a limited recovery in the years after the oil crisis. This was because its expansion became even more reliant than previously on the growth of manufacturing exports, in a period in which international over-capacity and over-production were increasing as a consequence of the sharp deceleration of world trade and in which Japan's own overseas sales were proving increasingly self-undermining because inextricably bound up with the build-up of Japanese external surpluses."

Near the end of the decade Japan and Germany experimented with Keynesianism at the behest of the U.S., but, again, this was partly counterproductive in allowing high-cost, low-profit firms to remain in manufacturing and in making it more difficult to control wage costs. It tended to result in inflation more than sizable expansion of the economy. Eventually powerful interests like bankers and multinational corporations grew tired of the U.S.'s inflationary Keynesian policies that weren't even doing much to restore profitability but caused instability in currency markets, and a switch to the opposite policy occurred. The order of the day was now austerity, to rein in inflation.

An obvious implication of Brenner's argument is that when an economy starts to go bad, Keynesian policies are not what governments should enact. Either they should coordinate a transfer of capital from unprofitable to profitable lines, or they should allow, indeed encourage, the economy to collapse into

depression -- at least if their goal is long-term recovery. (And *then*, later, the government could go Keynesian.) Presumably these are the only two ways to get rid of redundant, unproductive capital. Or no, maybe there's a third option: instead of the U.S.'s "military Keynesianism" in the 1980s or an effectively half-hearted Keynesianism, the government could launch a *massive* spending program, a complete mobilization of society's resources to build up infrastructure, construct new industries, stimulate and *direct* a titanic level of investment. With the half-hearted Keynesianism of, say, the Vietnam War, the main result is a rise in prices rather than a large rise in productive investment because profit margins remain relatively low, not high enough to justify major new investment.

The course that the U.S. government chose in the 1980s was, first, effectively to encourage the destruction of unprofitable capital by restricting credit and government borrowing between 1979 and 1982, and then, second, to embark on a sustained program of military Keynesianism, which partially revived the economy. The problem with monetarism was the opposite one of Keynesianism: it indiscriminately reduced demand, such that, while it did encourage the elimination of unprofitable capital, it discouraged firms' entrance into new and more profitable lines. That is, it hit profitable and unprofitable capital equally. By reducing aggregate purchasing power, it set off a deflationary spiral that was hard to control. Thus, while helping to rationalize the U.S. economy through its setting in motion an extended process of "industrial shakeout," it triggered the worst recession since the 1930s, "pushing the U.S. economy in particular to the brink of collapse." The German and Japanese governments (and others) continued through the 1980s and beyond with tight credit and fiscal austerity (with a few major lapses) so as to reduce domestic costs and thereby increase exports, but the U.S. government went from monetarism to nearly the opposite extreme -- in *fiscal* policy at least. (The Federal Reserve moderated its monetarism.)

"The supply-side programme which accompanied monetarism in the US, highlighted by record tax cuts, did succeed in transferring enormous sums of money into the hands of capitalists and the rich from the pockets of almost everyone else. But it did not lead to the upsurge of investment and entrepreneurship expected by its advocates for the simple reason that, given the generally poor investment climate, tax reductions could not create the anticipated incentives. Yet, precisely because the tax cuts totally failed to vindicate their advocates' predictions that they would pay for themselves by bringing about higher growth and thus higher tax returns, they produced the highest federal deficits of all time. This was in a way fortunate, for major deficits were evidently necessary to bail out the US, and revive the rest of the world economy." But only partially, because the underlying problem of international over-capacity and over-production persisted, with the result that competition for (over-supplied) manufacturing markets continued to be a zero-sum game. The U.S. could gain only at the expense of its rivals and vice versa.

The combination of Reagan's (and others') Keynesianism with tax cuts and the Fed's monetarism actually exacerbated the underlying problem of reduced returns on investment by leading to record-high real interest rates. "This was because the rise in demand for credit coming from governments was very much amplified by that coming from corporations and workers, and was accompanied by the slowdown in the supply of credit that resulted from monetarist restrictiveness [in the Fed's supply of money, which continued to follow monetarist thinking], as well as the reduced rates of savings that were the unavoidable result of low profitability and low wage growth."

In the first half of the 1980s, high real interest rates and resultant dollar appreciation "spelled disaster for broad sections of US manufacturing." Exports fell, imports rocketed, etc. The service sector, on the other hand, "exploded" because of its low wages and so on. As did financial speculation.

But the competitive advantage that the high dollar gave the U.S.'s economic rivals was bound eventually to come to an end as it had in the early 1970s because, in undermining U.S. production, further driving up the U.S.'s external deficit, and pushing down the dollar, the relative value of currencies would eventually be reversed. And so in the mid-1980s the dollar's exchange rate plummeted, which caused export growth in America and decline in Germany and Japan. Moreover, dollar devaluation effectively implied a fall in international demand.

To sum up the 1980s in the U.S.: on the basis of federal deficits, the economy did achieve a long peacetime expansion from 1982 on. Nevertheless, investment growth was low, productivity growth in the private business economy was very low (partly as a result of the slowness of investment growth), and, in

general, despite talk of a "Reagan boom," the economy "showed less vitality than in the much-maligned 1970s, especially when one takes into account the two major waves of high oil prices that undermined growth in the 1970s and the collapse of oil prices that promoted growth in the later 1980s." This lack of vitality was also in spite of the unprecedented attack on labor, which of course helped business enormously.

By the way, I've often wondered in what sense high government deficits "crowd out" private investment (as economists like to say). The obvious answer is that they tend to cause higher interest rates (because they raise the demand for credit), which discourage investment. Also, government deficits mean that private investors are investing in government bonds instead of the economy. Of course these objections to deficits are stupid if the government itself is undertaking more productive investments than business is.

In the 1990s profitability in the American economy finally began to approach and then surpass its level in 1973, largely as a result of decades of slow or nonexistent real wage growth combined with high exports due to dollar devaluation. Investment and productivity didn't improve much at first, but the prospects were good. Meanwhile Clinton retreated from decades of Keynesianism by pursuing balanced budgets, as he had to in light of the political and economic environment. (This had the effect of exacerbating Germany and Japan's economic problems, since these -- and other -- countries had relied on U.S. deficits to sustain their anemic economic growth.) The Fed continued to stick with its austere monetarist policies because growth by the mid-1990s was thought to be gaining "excessive momentum," despite the 6-percent unemployment rate. The question, therefore, is why fiscal and monetary policy in these years was so austere even though the economy was growing (by 1996) at only a mild rate. The answer is that "a mild economic expansion was just what the political and economic establishment wanted." The U.S. economy that had emerged in the 1980s and 1990s was very different from in the 1970s and before:

> US capital had become profoundly dependent on close to zero real wage growth, as well as low inflation. Employers required the repression of real wage growth inside manufacturing to help counter intense competition from their leading international rivals; they required it outside of manufacturing so that they could increase their profit shares and profit rates, despite the snail-like pace of non-manufacturing productivity growth. US capitalists needed low price increases as well as low wage increases because they had profoundly increased their involvement in finance and in speculation on the stock market, and thereby had become exquisitely sensitive to rises in prices that would undercut their returns from lending or further push up their costs of borrowing for purposes of financial manipulation.

Brenner explains in detail how this new economy emerged, but much of what he says is an elaboration of what I've written above. "During the 1970s, it will be recalled, US manufacturing corporations, encouraged by a devalued dollar and sharply reduced wage growth, as well as declining real interest rates, had launched an impressive wave of investment aimed at restoring competitiveness and profitability. Their failure to bring about significant improvement in the rate of profit by the end of the 1970s must have done much to discourage the continuation of such a strategy. In any case, under the combined impact of the deep recession of 1979-82, the very high real interest rates which largely persisted throughout the decade and into the next, and a new, if temporary, rise of the dollar, US manufacturing corporations had little choice but to cut back and change their modus operandi if they wished to survive." Especially with the major increase in imports from the East Asian "tigers," manufacturing profitability in the U.S. fell (although profitability outside manufacturing didn't do so badly because of the non-manufacturing sector's relative isolation from international competition).

In addition to all this, stockholders in the 1980s secured radically increased dividend pay-outs (which had been cut back in the 1970s). And, encouraged by the deregulation of finance, labor's vulnerability, and tax breaks that ensured higher returns on unearned income and capital gains, "financial manipulators borrowed heavily to purchase controlling interest in companies in expectation of wringing increased returns from them -- especially by way of the stepped up exploitation of labour, the speeding up

of depreciation and refusal to invest, the shedding of manpower, and downsizing in all forms." As a result of all these factors, corporations deeply cut investment.

Manufacturing labor productivity did, however, improve significantly from 1979 on -- not because of investment, which was low, but because of the removal from operation of outdated and inefficient plant and equipment (along with the workers who had manned it), as well as from the intensification of work. *Downsizing*, therefore, led to higher labor productivity, but so did technical advance -- "secured, for example, by means of robotization and the application of computer-aided production and design." And so did American firms' adoption of Japanese methods of making labor input more intense, continuous, and effective. *Outsourcing* was important too, for it allowed employers to pay lower wages.

So, as I said above, all these things in combination with dollar devaluation after the mid-1980s *finally* led to a partial restoration of manufacturing profitability at the end of the 1980s and then even more in the middle and late 1990s. As a result, investment growth finally accelerated in the late 1990s, which "opened up the potential for a decisive US economic turnaround."

But remember, from 1979 the place of manufacturing employment in the economy shrank sharply, until in 1996 it was only 16 percent. At the same time, service employment rose. These trends weren't good for the economy because labor productivity growth was much steeper in manufacturing than in non-manufacturing. In fact, the latter's productivity growth was the lowest in U.S. history. Thus, "far from an expression of economic rejuvenation, the rapid net increase in the number of US jobs during the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, all of them outside manufacturing, was a manifestation of US economic decline." Why was productivity growth so low outside manufacturing? Because extremely low wages (and no pressure from foreign competition) ensured that employers had little incentive to adopt labor-saving technology. They continued to add jobs in low-productivity sectors like restaurant services and retail sales. Aggregate unemployment did, therefore, decrease, but this was not bad for business because of low rates of unionization and low wages. "The upshot has been a truly vicious circle, in which low wages have made for low labour productivity growth which has in turn rendered 'unrealistic' any significant growth of wages and thereby provided the basis for continued low productivity growth. So much for the Reagan-Bush-Clinton 'morning in America.'"

"The other side of capitalists' refusal to place much of their capital in production was their search for alternative ways to make money. With profitability down, interest rates up, and instability heightened, investors had increasing incentive to avoid the risks associated with longer-term placements of new plant and equipment. Still, to profit merely by buying cheap and selling dear is normally no simple task: for every gain there is an equivalent loss, for every winner a loser. Capitalists and the wealthy accumulated wealth with such success during the 1980s largely because the state intervened directly to place money in their hands -- enabling them to profit from their own business failure through lucrative bailouts, offering them giant tax breaks which played no small part in the recovery of corporate balance sheets, and providing them with an unprecedented array of other *politically constituted* opportunities to get rich faster through fiscal, monetary, and deregulation policies -- all at the expense of the great mass of the population." The pattern, he notes, was clearly established under the Carter administration.

The details of the wealthy's increasing wealth are pretty sordid. For example, major tax cuts in the 1980s benefited the rich directly, but in increasing the federal deficit they also benefited the rich indirectly, since those with great wealth did most of the lending to the federal government. Interest payments as a part of the federal budget almost doubled in the 1980s to 13.4 percent. These payments were covered by tax revenues largely from the working-class. Thus, despite their low income and standards of living, workers effectively gave their money to the government so that it could then be given to the rich -- in *many* different ways, of course, not only as interest payments.

Enough about America; let's look at Japan. I've already said a little about it. In the first half of the 1980s, Japanese money poured into the U.S. Treasury because of high interest rates; this meant that less money was available for domestic investment in Japan. Then the yen soared because of high current account surpluses (as stated above), exports fell, and a severe recession threatened. Luckily the Japanese government "launched a policy of extreme monetary ease," sharply reducing interest rates, which stimulated investment and "helped to force-feed a new boom, which lasted through 1990-91." What it was

trying to do was to wean Japan off its reliance on exports, since this reliance always proved self-undermining in the long run. (High growth of exports led to high external surpluses, which led to a high yen, which made exports relatively more expensive, which caused a decline in exports.) For a few years the policy was successful, causing a boom in domestic investment (partly because low interest rates also stimulated consumption, i.e. demand, by giving people an incentive not to save -- because of the low returns -- but to spend).

While the yen's revaluation was bad for exports, it was good for foreign direct investment. As a result, Japanese foreign investment skyrocketed in the later 1980s. In many cases firms relocated production to the U.S., both to get around import barriers and to take advantage of the U.S.'s cheap labor. They also invested in the East Asian NICs and even increased their exports to this region. Etc. Despite all these positive developments, however, the profitability of Japan's private business economy simply could not withstand "the increase in costs entailed by the massive revaluation of the yen." With the onset of the U.S.'s recession in 1990 and the Japanese government's raising of interest rates to gain control over the prior bubble, Japan entered its worst recession of the postwar epoch. This "recession that began at the end of 1991 and continued into the second half of 1995 was, in part, a reaction to the bubble itself. After engaging for almost half a decade in the most massive accumulation of capital stock, inventories, and labour without succeeding in raising their rate of profit, Japanese manufacturers could not but, sooner or later, cut back compensatorily on the growth of new plant and equipment, inventories, employment, and wages. The reductions had to be that much more severe because so much of the previous spurt of capital accumulation had been financed through the accumulation of debt." So, with the government's turn to higher interest rates, firms had to impose across-the-board cuts. "The resulting, extended collapse of both investment and consumer demand was at the root of the recession."

Actually, the ultimate basis of the recession was the underlying structural problem of the economy's dependence on manufacturing exports together with the secularly rising yen (which rose in the 1990s too) and the consequent inability to restore manufacturing profitability (given international competition -- i.e., overproduction "with respect to the prevailing rate of profit").

What about Germany? In the 1980s and 1990s it pursued "monetarism in the name of exports." Balanced budgets and relatively tight money -- i.e. holding back the growth of domestic demand -- "with the goal of keeping down costs and prices and intensifying competitive pressure on domestic producers so as to spur rationalization and improvement, in the interest of promoting the growth of exports and thereby investment." This policy did succeed in reducing costs of production, such as labor, partly through downsizing, getting rid of inefficient capital and its workforce. Also holding back the growth of wages, etc. The growth of exports did accelerate, but not enough to reduce high unemployment in the late 1980s or to revivify the economy, "for the simple reason that the expansion of exports could not stimulate the required major increase in the accumulation of capital." In the absence of such an increase, labor productivity growth continued to stagnate.

As usual, a major problem with Germany's export-based economic growth is that insofar as it worked, it undermined itself. German current account surpluses led to an appreciation of the mark in the late 1980s, which reduced the international competitiveness of exports. Manufacturing profitability therefore remained low. Firms dramatically increased their investments *outside* Germany because there were so few opportunities for profitable investment domestically. –Incidentally, *non*-manufacturing profitability stayed relatively high because of its insulation from international competition.

By the way, it seems that monetarist austerity tends to undermine the positive effects it can have on the profit rate (by reducing costs) in that it leads to higher real interest rates, which undercut gains in profitability. Also, again, monetarism is partly misguided in that, while encouraging the destruction of unproductive, unprofitable capital, it discourages the introduction of capital into new, potentially profitable lines. In Germany, monetarism led to an average of 8.5 percent unemployment between 1982 and 1990.

After a brief boom between 1988 and 1991 due to capitalist governments' expansionary policies in response to the stock market crash of October 1987, the German government cut spending, raised taxes, and "initiated an extended period of high interest rates to ensure long-term price stability." The result: an undercutting of growth in Europe, and an appreciation of the mark. These and other factors caused a severe

recession between 1991 and 1995. Even after the recession, the manufacturing sector continued to shed labor and have very low investment domestically. In 1997 unemployment in West Germany was close to 10 percent.

In the last chapter (before the Afterword written in 2005), Brenner considers and refutes mainstream arguments given in the late 1990s that the U.S. and maybe the world had finally entered a new and long-term boom. For example, cheerleaders for the American economy argued that low rates of price increase and low unemployment were clear indicators of economic vitality. Brenner points out, first, that "even contemporary economic orthodoxy has failed to establish that inflation rates of up to 8 percent have *any* negative impact on the economy's vitality." Inflation isn't that bad if it's kept below 8 percent. Indeed, "the grand crusade to control inflation" in the 1990s was very costly to most people, as monetarism always or almost always is, benefiting only the owners and lenders of capital.

Actually, the low rates of inflation and unemployment were simply the results of the extraordinarily slow growth of both demand and wage costs. "Nor is the slow growth of aggregate demand a mystery; it is the direct expression of the slow growth of investment demand, arising from low profit rates and secularly high real interest rates, the stagnation of consumer demand resulting from the long-term stagnation of wages, and the collapse of governmental demand stemming from the sharp turn to budget balancing under Clinton."

Another good point: "Most indicative of the real condition of the US economy has not been its ability to control prices, but its dependence on controlling the price of labour, its *incapacity* to accommodate virtually any real wage growth."

Despite all this, it's true that by 1997 the economy's profit rate had finally returned to its level in the late 1960s. Even the manufacturing sector's profitability was high. In the mid-'90s manufacturing investment growth accelerated, as did productivity growth and export growth. These trends, naturally, were based primarily on long-term wage repression, dollar devaluation, and "rationalization [of manufacturing] and technical change." But in 1997 real wages rose noticeably for the first time in five years, though not enough to put a squeeze on profits.

So the U.S. economy seemed to be doing pretty well. But in order for the long downturn to be transcended, a *system-wide* recovery of profitability would have to take place. It didn't. Japan and Germany were in almost as bad a condition as ever; U.S. gains in exports were made at their expense, because of their appreciated currencies. –Remember how important exports had become to all these countries by the 1990s. Domestic demand had contracted in the advanced capitalist countries (which means that the world market had contracted) because of semi-monetarist policies intended to slow direct and indirect wage growth and weed out unprofitable capital. Had monetarism worked the way it was supposed to, by eventually stimulating a surge of new investment by surviving firms, the market would not have contracted but expanded. But governments and corporations weren't willing to tolerate recessions severe enough to get the job done (i.e. to reduce wages sufficiently, kill enough redundant capital, etc.), instead relying on various forms of credit and Reagan's military Keynesianism to prop up the world market -- policies that, because of continued monetary restrictions, caused a sharp rise in real interest rates, discouraging investment. The upshot was that a system-wide investment boom never materialized; instead, there was declining growth of aggregate demand that exacerbated manufacturing over-capacity and over-production, and sharpened the tendency of international trade to take a "zero-sum" character. One country tended to gain at the expense of another.

Brenner sketches an optimistic scenario for the world economy, according to which the U.S. boom triggers export expansions in Europe and Japan (as it in fact did a little) such that the classic Smithian scenario is realized of "mutually self-reinforcing growth through [international] specialization and the gains from trade." Complementarity would override competition. Europe and Japan would export to the U.S., which would export other goods to them, etc. He finds this possibility unlikely, however. "The fundamental point is the obverse of the Smithian hypothesis just referred to -- that since virtually all of the world's leading economies are seeking to emerge from their difficulties through major, simultaneous increases in their reliance on the world market, based on still another and deeper phase of wage repression and

macroeconomic austerity, the inevitable flood of exports is more likely to issue in redundancy of output, intensified competition, and over-supplied markets than in the mutual gains from trade."

One piece of evidence for the latter scenario is that the 1995 currency accords that raised the value of the dollar in order to prevent Japan's economic collapse had by the late '90s caused an erosion of the U.S.'s decade-long export boom. But the resultant increase in exports from Germany and Japan did not catalyze economy-wide expansions. In Germany, the reason is that the cost-cutting and monetary austerity that made possible a new export boom shrank domestic demand. In Japan, the government for some reason raised indirect taxes even as the currency devaluation was failing to secure complete economic recovery, with the result that a new and severe recession arrived. It was temporarily alleviated in 1998 by major fiscal stimulus.

Meanwhile, the other economies of East Asia descended into crisis. They had benefited from the yen's high value by exporting to markets previously held by Japanese producers -- because the NICs' currencies were pegged to the dollar, so that the dollar's devaluation (in relation to the yen, etc.) from the mid-1980s until the mid-1990s helped them. Japanese multinationals were also investing in these countries because of their export boom. But then the yen was devalued in 1995, and things went downhill for the NICs. They "suffered sharp reductions in their export growth and/or profits, especially under the impact of intensified Japanese, as well as Chinese, competition...." When it became clear that their future wasn't bright, "Western and Japanese banks rushed to withdraw their mostly short-term capital, precipitating a run on the money markets." Foreign lenders withdrew their money in a panic, and eventually the affected currencies were devalued -- which worsened the crisis by making it harder for manufacturers to repay their huge loans.

"It was here that the IMF stepped in. The IMF might have attempted to get the international banks to agree formally to act together to keep their money flowing into Asia so as to counteract the panicky withdrawal of credit, for pouring in money is the normal remedy for a liquidity crisis. After all, the underlying problem facing many Asian firms was the insufficient international demand for their goods, not the inefficiency of their production, let alone their dependence upon (nonexistent) government deficit spending. Some firms would no doubt have had to be trimmed back; others would have had to go under. But the whole regional economy did not have to go down. As it was, the IMF, mainly concerned that European, US, and Japanese banks be repaid in full, demanded, in Hoover-like fashion, that credit be tightened and austerity imposed, radically exacerbating the debt crisis and ensuring a devastating depression." (The IMF also took the opportunity "to break down and open up the East Asian statist and organized capitalisms, notably in Korea." Naomi Klein discusses that in her book, as I recall.)

Brenner predicts (in 1998) that among the consequences will be cheaper exports from East Asia (because of the currency devaluation) and a shrinking of the world market because of the depression-induced shrinking of demand in the affected countries. In other words: the intensification of international competition and over-production.

At the same time, China was becoming a growing presence on the world market, even as its consumer demand was growing slowly (which is not good).

Japan, by the way, was itself severely damaged by the East Asian crisis because, among other reasons, East Asia was a huge market for its goods. An indirect consequence was that Japan's aggregate demand shrank.

The end result is that the growth of world exports is likely to increase while the growth of world markets is likely to contract, with obvious implications for international over-capacity and over-production. Prices will fall, profit rates will fall, investment will fall, productivity will fall.

Probably only a major world depression can get us out of this situation. Either that or an internationally coordinated campaign of epic Keynesianism and state-managed development, something approaching or embodying state socialism. And that ain't gonna happen.

Here's an email I wrote to my Thomas Friedman-loving fellow TA after a little debate we had, which I put here because it's how I think about this stuff:

> One last comment: while international trade is obviously necessary, it doesn't have to take "neoliberal" forms. That's all I'm saying. Friedman thinks it does, but he's forgetting that England, the U.S., France, Germany, Japan, the East Asian NICs, etc. developed initially through protectionism and (in the last century at least) intensive government involvement in the economy, funding and directing of infrastructure development, etc. Neoliberalism has, on the whole, not been great for the masses in any country. Just look at the devastation it (has) wreaked in Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Russia, much of Eastern Europe, India (although I know less about that), much of Africa, etc. On the other hand, the recent leftist regimes in Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia and so on, which have partly opted out of neoliberal so-called "free trade" (a huge misnomer of course, since there's nothing free about it; it's premised on massive subsidies to and protection of well-connected corporations and an almost total lack of protection for the politically unconnected masses), have succeeded in alleviating poverty, improving education and health care, etc. Plenty of scholarship documents that.
>
> Trade barriers should be lowered after countries have already developed their industries and raised living standards, as with Japan and the NICs. Then let international competition flower, when its effects on workers won't be as devastating as they have been in the last 35 years. --Anyway, that's how I look at it.

Charles is an example of that paradoxical but nearly ubiquitous phenomenon among the chattering classes, an intelligent (semi-)idiot. I like him pretty well anyway.

This is all academic of course, because the wealthier and more powerful corporations are more or less going to get their way. They're going to succeed in lowering trade barriers most of the time if it benefits them, especially if it also benefits the elites in the other country (as it usually does).

I admit, too, that these issues are too complicated to permit of such a simple prescription as I suggested in the email. International trade is inevitable. But it isn't a "yes or no" thing -- either yes to trade or no to trade -- as Friedman implies in his infantile manifestoes for neoliberalism. Trade agreements can be done in intelligent and subtle ways, with protections for the workers that might be hit hardest, programs for re-training, maybe long-term public-works projects if large numbers of workers are expected to be laid off as a consequence of "trade" (or corporate investment in lower-wage countries), provisions for paying workers in the cheaper country a specified minimum, provisions for the protection of labor unions (which can be good for the economy, in that their pressing for higher wages leads to higher demand, higher consumption), etc. These things aren't possible, however, unless global agencies like the WTO enforce them, which they won't because corporations won't let them.

From another email to Charles: "Actually, I suspect that insofar as China is doing well economically, it's due largely to the many ways that its government ignores neoliberal orthodoxy as formulated by Friedman, the IMF, etc. Same with Argentina, probably Chile and so forth -- because neoliberalism, as I understand it, means austerity, privatization, deregulation, destruction of the labor movement (and it was largely by virtue of the labor movement that the U.S.'s working class was able to rise to middle-class status), whereas modern development requires state intervention, industrial regulation, some fairly robust form of labor unionism, non-austerity, only semi-privatization, etc. As some economist said once (I forget who), these sorts of interventionist policies are the only way that anyone has ever figured out how to industrialize successfully. –How all this bears on Wal-Mart I'm not entirely sure. I suppose I think that if America was going to be deindustrialized, in an ideal world the government would have cushioned the blow by providing for massive re-training programs or public works projects (killing two birds with one stone) or whatever. Of course that was impossible, given our political economy. -I'm not sure you agree with the whole 'public works' idea, but the way I see it is, why not cut out the middleman and let a democratically elected government direct investment where it is most needed instead of where the most profit can be made by grinding workers down as much as possible?"

Later in that same email: “I guess ultimately my point is that, notwithstanding the conventional wisdom, the 'state sector' tends to be more efficient and effective -- and more potentially democratic -- than the corporate or private sector (except when the private sector interferes with the state's proper functioning -- as it more or less constantly does -- and introduces inefficiencies). And so state involvement should be encouraged at most levels. Look at how the internet was developed, and computers, and satellites, and containerization, and the atom bomb, and the space program, and so on: through the state sector. Look at how inefficient and ineffective America's private health insurance system is as compared to the relatively effective Canadian system (which has problems, yes, but far fewer than ours). Look at how popular Medicare and Social Security are. Look at how integral to Japan's postwar recovery an extremely active state was. (And the same in China now.) And think of the effectiveness -- (as I understand it, their effectiveness was almost universally acknowledged) -- of the WPA and the TVA.”

....Went to the Wisconsin Historical Society last weekend. As luck would have it, the TWUA’s collection is so large that it’s stored in an off-site location, which is open only on Wednesdays. So, I went back to Chicago empty-handed. Returned to Wisconsin this weekend because the archivists had brought a few boxes from the off-site location to the main site. *Finally*, therefore, I was able to do productive research. Archival research isn’t a very thrilling thing, but there’s something seductive about it, about sitting in a library room perusing folder after folder of old correspondence, memos, newspaper clippings, notes for speeches, minutes from meetings, etc. And looking at microfilm is strangely seductive as well. Page after page of voices from the past. Dramatic moments at conventions, inspirational speeches, delegates’ comments and complaints, moments of humor, an endearing rank-and-file respect for the procedural rules of laborite democracy. I can almost understand how scholars can let themselves devote years of their lives to uncovering the minutiae of some minute topic that only a minute sliver of the minute world that is academia cares about.

One needs a Nietzschean “instinct for self-defense.”

The 2005 Afterword of Brenner’s book reviews the history and updates it.

“The turn by the Federal Reserve to monetarist tight credit at the start of the 1980s was aimed, in the first instance, to force up unemployment so as to further reduce wage pressure and break the back of inflation. But it was also intended, with the help of big tax breaks for the corporations and a major dose of financial deregulation, to detonate a major restructuring of the US economy -- by eliminating the huge overhang of high-cost low-profit means of production that continued to hold down manufacturing profit rates, by dealing a death blow to unions so as to make increases in real earnings ever more difficult, and by opening the way for a reallocation of means of production out of industry into financial services. In fact, the cataclysms and shifts that were detonated by the Volker quake did set the US economy on a new course -- toward manufacturing revival, the expansion and consolidation of a low-wage economy outside of manufacturing, and the dramatic ascent of finance.” The “gargantuan shakeout” caused by the Volker recession “established the necessary condition for the revival of the manufacturing profit rate and thereby that of the private economy as a whole”; as a result, between 1985 and 1995, U.S. manufacturers were able to achieve a dramatic turnaround. Very important to this turnaround was the Plaza Accord of 1985, in which the G-5 powers, “acting in response to the devastation of US manufacturing capacity wreaked by record high real interest rates and the rocketing currency, detonated a decade-long plunge of the dollar.” I’ve reviewed all this above.

Between 1989 and 1993 the Fed brought “the real cost of short-term borrowing in the US close to zero”; “the real cost of long-term borrowing had, meanwhile, continued its long-term slide.” Under these conditions, the U.S. manufacturing sector “was finally ready to shake off its lethargy. Manufacturing investment, output, and exports all suddenly thrust forward, initiating an extended acceleration and providing a major stimulus to the rest of the economy.”

Unfortunately the U.S. had to deal with a world economy, which wasn’t doing very well. Here’s a nice summary:

> As a consequence of the continuous, precipitous fall in profit rates that resulted from the worsening of global over-capacity and intensifying international competition between the later 1960s and early 1980s, there emerged, in classical fashion, a dual problem of weakening aggregate demand and weakening productivity growth, which tended to be self-perpetuating. In order to restore profit rates, firms across the advanced capitalist economy moved immediately and decisively to reduce the growth of real wages, while government cut back sharply on the increase of social spending. Because, as an expression of reduced profitability, firms could secure only declining surpluses for any given increase in their capital stock, they were simultaneously obliged to reduce the growth of investment, as well as employment. As a result, the growth of consumption, investment, and government demand were all forced down, leading to the reduced growth of purchasing power economy-wide. Meanwhile, because firms, in the face of declining profits and prospects, neither wished to nor could expand their plant, equipment, and software as rapidly as before, a decline in the rate of growth of productivity naturally resulted. Of course, the slower growth of productivity further threatened profits, leading firms to exert further downward pressure on wages and, thereby, aggregate demand.... Slower growth of aggregate demand itself undermined profit rates further and firms responded by reducing capital accumulation and wage growth even more, leading to the further reduction of productivity and aggregate demand growth, and, in turn, profitability....a self-sustaining, indeed self-intensifying, process. Between the late 1960s and 1995, as profit rates fell and failed to recover on a system-wide basis, private investment (capital stock) for the US, Japan, Germany, the eleven members of the EU taken together, and the G-7 grew ever more slowly, business cycle by business cycle, as also did productivity, employment, and real wages, as well as private consumption and government demand, along with GDP.

Because of the ever-increasing downward pressure on the growth of productivity and aggregate demand, "the advanced capitalist economies were obliged to rely, as they had already begun to do in the middle to late 1960s, on ever larger government deficits to keep them expanding. From the mid-1970s, US federal deficits were responsible for pulling the world economy out of every cyclical downturn." Only with Clinton's "epoch-making" turn to budget-balancing and Europe's macroeconomic tightening in the run-up to the Maastricht treaty did the advanced capitalist countries "shift in earnest toward governance by way of the free market." Private-sector initiative became more important than ever. But in a situation of low aggregate demand, the way to restore profitability was not to increase investment and employment but to downsize and suppress wage growth. This "made for the weakening of purchasing power system-wide and deepening recession in much of the world economy between 1991 and 1995."

Etc.

In 1995 the "reverse Plaza Accord" happened, i.e. the revaluation of the dollar and devaluation of the yen and mark. This was a reversal of policy for the Clinton administration (though probably an inevitable one), because it meant a reduction of manufacturing competitiveness. The new economic trajectory was "based on cheap imports, rising asset prices, and the influx of foreign money to buy US Treasuries, corporate bonds, and corporate equities" (because they were worth more now, given the higher value of the dollar). In broad terms, what the Clinton administration was doing was embracing the political economy of the Reagan administration. "As in the first half of the 1980s, financiers would be favoured not just by low inflation enforced by inexpensive commodities from overseas, but by asset prices that would be driven up in international terms with the value of the dollar. Businesses that relied on imports, either for inputs into production or to sell directly, not least wholesalers and retailers, would also stand to benefit...."

"The reverse Plaza Accord of 1995 turned out to be the turning point for the US economic expansion of the 1990s and thereby the world economy, as it both set off the 'New Economy' boom and ensured that it would have feet of clay. The stepped-up purchases of US Treasury instruments by foreign governments drove down long-term interest rates, even as the Federal Reserve simultaneously reduced the short-term cost of borrowing (to stabilize the economy in the wake of the Mexican peso crisis). The stepped-

up purchases of dollars that these purchases required drove up the dollar's exchange rate against the yen and the mark. Taken together, these two trends -- toward cheap credit and an expensive dollar -- would persist through the end of the decade and shape the path of economic development on a global scale." As we saw, among the consequences was a decline in the U.S. manufacturing profit rate and a decline in East Asian manufacturing profit rates leading to financial crisis. Also, consequences included "the greatest stock market bubble in American history; an accelerating economic expansion driven by the wealth effect[1] of rocketing equity values; and a radical worsening of already existing manufacturing over-capacity, which resulted from a massive wave of mis-investment in high-tech industries set off by the bubble in New Economy equities."

After 1997 the manufacturing profit rate declined precipitously, "depriving the economic expansion of the 1990s of what had hitherto been its main objective foundation." The expansion actually speeded up because of the spectacular take-off of the stock market -- but this was a classic bubble, since corporate profits *declined* between 1997 and 2000. Again, a major reason for the rapid increase in equity prices -- an increase that wasn't justified by corporate profits -- was the easing of credit brought about by the reverse Plaza Accord.

Alan Greenspan's Federal Reserve did its part to encourage the stock market bubble. After the reverse Plaza Accord and Clinton's shrinking federal deficits -- both bad for investment (in the latter case because federal deficits had boosted aggregate demand) -- Greenspan evidently decided he had to do something to keep the U.S.'s expansion going. So he turned to the equity markets and their wealth effect to stimulate demand. "Indeed, the strategy that he evolved during the second half of the 1990s -- and has continued to implement ever since [up to 2005 at least] -- might usefully be called 'stock market, or asset-price, Keynesianism.' In traditional Keynesian policy, demand is 'subsidized' by means of the federal government's incurring of rising *public* deficits so as to spend more than it takes in taxes. By contrast, in Greenspan's version, demand is increased by means of corporations and wealthy households taking on rising *private* deficits so as to spend more than they make, encouraged to do so by the increased paper wealth that they effortlessly accrue by virtue of the appreciation of the value of their stocks, or other assets." Thus, Greenspan kept equities rising by means of ever-easier credit: between 1995 and the middle of 1999 he failed to raise interest rates except once in 1997. His purpose, again, was to keep the economic expansion going by compensating for insufficient demand in the "real" economy.

But surely -- this is me talking, not Brenner -- low interest rates are good not only for stock market investment but more substantive investment too, right? Greenspan kept interest rates low because he wasn't worried about inflation anymore, since the reverse Plaza Accord, the decimated labor movement, and low federal deficits had killed off inflation. His real concern, as Brenner says, was to keep the economy going; and obviously a good way to do that is to keep interest rates low. For all kinds of investment, not only for equity markets.

Someday I'll have to get clear on everything about interest rates, inflation, exchange rates, etc. It's all rather bewildering.

Between 1995 and 2000, "profits became increasingly hard to come by." Nevertheless, "corporations were able to fund stepped-up capital accumulation with consummate ease on the basis of runaway stock values that bloated market capitalization and thus apparent collateral beyond recognition." Borrowing increased too: "by the end of the decade, they were using borrowing to fund capital accumulation at the highest rates in history."

Households -- especially the top 20 percent of them in terms of income (which owned 95 percent of all financial assets) -- "also treated the rapid rise in equity prices as an opportunity for radically stepped-up borrowing and, on that basis, spending.... As the flip side of the coin, they felt free to sharply reduce their rate of savings as a proportion of consumption, so as to raise their rate of spending.... As one pundit put it, the boom of the later 1990s was the first in US history to be heavily driven by yuppie expenditures."

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[1] According to Wikipedia, a wealth effect is "an increase in spending that accompanies an increase in perceived wealth."

In the second half of the 1990s, "non-financial corporations allocated as much of the huge sum that they borrowed to buying shares as to accumulating capital.... Through share repurchases funded by borrowing, corporations avoided the tedious process of creating shareholder value through actually producing goods and services at a profit, and directly drove up the price of their own equities for the benefit of their stockholders, as well as their corporate executives who were heavily remunerated with stock options. Higher equity values made for still more collateral, further borrowing, greater stock purchases, and so forth. The same sort of process would soon be at work once again in the escalation of housing prices." The New Economy boom was underpinned in this way by the wealth effect of rising equity prices on both businesses and households.

Rising equity prices accounted for between one-quarter and one-third of the increase in GDP between 1995 and 2000. And one-third of the increase in consumption.

At the same time, retail trade and wholesale trade did very well due to the consumer spending spree and cheap imports (a consequence of dollar revaluation). So did the FIRE sector of the economy. The construction industry too, benefiting from an "astonishing, seemingly unending, increase in the demand for homes," enjoyed what would turn out to be a decade-long boom. And with the abolition of Glass-Steagall, huge conglomerates that combined commercial banking, investment banking, and insurance emerged, such as Citicorp and J.P. Morgan Chase. In 2000, the profits of the financial sector amounted to almost 40 percent of total corporate profits.

"The years between 1995 and 1997 constituted a brief era of overlap and transition, between the extended period of manufacturing-led profitability revival culminating in economy-wide revitalization between 1993 and 1997 and the period of stock-market-driven expansion leading to New Economy boom and profitability crisis between 1995 and 2000. Due to the lagged effect of the revaluation of the dollar, the recovery of manufacturing profitability had not yet ceased to impart its momentum to the economy. The wealth effect of the equity price boom was already, moreover, providing its own impetus. As a consequence, the economy displayed a vitality not seen in decades."

But then things went bad in East Asia, as we've seen. "As the rising dollar, accompanied by easy credit, enhanced US asset prices and thereby US economic growth from 1995, while shifting the weight of international over-capacity and reduced profitability from Japan and Germany to the US, similar forces brought about similar effects and a similar pattern in the economies of East Asia at the very same time, setting off a chain reaction of crisis that would ultimately engulf the US itself." Stock prices rose in East Asia (excluding Japan) while profit rates declined (because of revalued currencies and the consequent reduction in earnings from exports). "The growing divergence between falling profits and rising asset prices was unsustainable. As export remittances fell sharply, East Asian producers found it ever more difficult to repay loans." From the beginning of 1997, financial-industrial conglomerates in South Korea started to go bankrupt. "In expectation that loans would henceforth be more difficult to collect, funds began to quit the region, and with ever greater speed. As a consequence, asset prices began to crumble, which accelerated the outflow of funds and soon made for downward pressure on the local currencies. But devaluation only raised the dollar value of foreign debts in terms of the local currencies, making them that much more difficult to repay. Central banks raised short-term interest rates to stem the exodus of capital and prevent currencies from collapsing. But this caused financial institutions, which depended on borrowing from central banks, to go bankrupt, leading to the collapse of asset prices and the panicked flight of capital."

The crisis got worse in 1998. Currencies collapsed and the price of East Asian goods fell with them, "placing great pressure, direct and indirect, on the rest of the world economy" (presumably because of a decline in exports and/or a necessary reduction in their prices in order to compete with exports from East Asia, and a resultant loss in profits). "During the summer of 1998, the East Asian crisis spilled over into the less-developed countries. In August, the Russian government defaulted on its debt. The Brazilian economy started to melt down shortly thereafter...."

Page 302 nicely summarizes the reasons for Japan's stagnation and recession in the 1990s. I'll just say that the East Asian crisis hurt Japan too because that region was the main market for its exports. It collapsed into recession again, which further crippled East Asia and thereby boomeranged back onto Japan.

The annual increase in U.S. exports dropped virtually to zero in 1998. Other bad things happened too, so the Fed stepped in to bail out a hedge fund, lower interest rates, etc., with the result that markets were not only rescued but "sent into orbit." The new U.S. expansion "pulled the rest of the world from its recession and motivated a new global expansion, most especially in East Asia." U.S. demand was huge, and by 2000 even Western Europe had emerged from stagnation, "driven by its German dynamo." The U.S.'s exports could not remotely compete with its imports (partly because of the currency revaluation of 1995), so trade and current account deficits skyrocketed. "These external deficits brought with them enormous downward pressure on manufacturing profits, making a crisis for the manufacturing sector unavoidable."

"In the end, there was no escaping the fact that the explosion of investment and consumption that drove the last phase of the US expansion -- as well as the major uptick in productivity growth to which it gave rise -- was heavily dependent upon a historic increase in borrowing, which was itself made possible by a record equity price run-up that was powered by speculation in defiance of actual corporate returns." There was a titanic misallocation of funds into high-tech paper assets, and a consequent misdirection of new plant, equipment, and software into over-subscribed manufacturing and related lines, especially information technology. This was all largely a result of the deregulated financial sector's necessity of chasing short-term profits because that's what shareholders *et al* wanted. "As equity prices began to rise strongly from 1995-1996, fund managers were thus under heavy pressure to buy, even if, in light of the growing gap between stock prices and profits, they doubted the long-term viability of their purchases." Their competitors were doing the same thing, so if in the end the assets they'd purchased went sour (as they did), they wouldn't be held responsible. The Fed's behavior contributed to all this by reassuring investors.

Between 1997 and 2000, total corporate profits after taxes *fell* by 20 percent even as the index of the NYSE rose by 50 percent.

"From July 2000, ever-worsening earnings reported by corporations precipitated a stock-market collapse and, in turn, a sharp cyclical downturn, both by reversing the wealth effect and by revealing the mass of redundant productive capacity and the mountain of corporate indebtedness that constituted the dual legacy of the bubble-driven boom." Firms found it harder to get loans -- and in many cases they didn't even want to, being overburdened by debt already. With loans and profits harder to come by, the growth of jobs and new plant and equipment was cut back, undercutting both investment and consumer demand and triggering a self-sustaining downward spiral. "The crisis of profitability had, in classical fashion, brought about a crisis of aggregate demand."

> The rest of the world followed the US downward. Just as the stock market's last upward thrust had rescued not only the US but also the world economy as a whole from the international financial crisis of 1997-98, setting off a short-lived hyper-boom, the collapse of US equity prices and investment reversed the process. As the economy rapidly lost energy, US imports plunged, with the result that the economies of Japan, Europe and East Asia lost steam as fast as the US, while the developing world, notably Latin America, was, after a brief honeymoon, projected back into crisis. A mutually reinforcing international recessionary process was thus unleashed, rendered all the more problematic by the degree to which the rest of the world had, over the previous two decades, in the face of stagnating domestic demand, oriented their economies to exports -- and thus perforce to the US domestic market. As the rest of the world, deprived of its US motor, sank ever further into recession, the US could look only to itself to launch an economic recovery upon which most of the global economy depended.

The center of the storm was in the manufacturing sector, especially in high-technology lines. Because of their immense over-capacity, capacity utilization plummeted. In the year following July 2000, 4200 high-tech companies lost more money than *all* the profits they had realized during the five-year boom of 1995 to 2000. "As one economist wryly noted, 'What [this fact] means is that, with the benefit of hindsight, the later 1990s never happened.' So much for the New Economy boom."

Outside of manufacturing, the economy actually did pretty well during the recession, because the non-manufacturing sector wasn't plagued by systemic over-capacity or intensifying international competition. Critical in the long run was its ability to take advantage of the recession to reduce the growth of real wages. But it was also able to raise prices, unlike manufacturers, of course.

Nevertheless, because of the shock to manufacturing, the growth of GDP, investment, and exports declined faster than in any other twelve-month period since 1945. So the Fed intervened and lowered the cost of borrowing so much that the real Federal Funds rate was *below zero* for three full years. This didn't help much. "Vastly oversupplied with means of production and overburdened by debt, corporations had little incentive to increase hiring or step up the purchase of plant, equipment, and software....no matter how far interest rates came down." Instead, they eliminated millions of jobs.

Nor were households able to increase their borrowing and thereby consumption (and stimulate the economy that way), because jobs were disappearing and wage growth was falling. But the Fed was forced to rely on them anyway because its measures were having little influence on private businesses. So it turned again to "asset-price Keynesianism." This time, though, instead of pumping up corporate equities to spur corporate borrowing and investment as well as household borrowing and consumption, it had to do what it could to "force down mortgage rates and inflate the value of residential housing so as to facilitate stepped up household borrowing and, in that way, amplify personal consumption. Thanks in large part to the Fed's actions, long-term borrowing costs did fall significantly and housing prices did rise precipitously [in *real* terms].... These changes together laid the basis for the cyclical upturn."

At the same time, Bush substantially increased military spending, which did a little to help the economy stay afloat, and pushed through enormous tax cuts for the rich, which didn't help much because it only encouraged them to buy financial assets and not to raise their consumption. As a result, "the economy would have to continue to rely mainly, as it had been doing since the later 1990s, on asset-price Keynesianism."

"Households did assume the vanguard role assigned to them. Between 2000 and 2004, they took advantage of rocketing housing values and falling interest rates to raise their annual borrowing as a percentage of personal disposable income to an unheard-of 11.8 percent." Personal consumption expenditures thus accounted for *all* the growth of GDP from 2000 to 2004.

As the real economy outside manufacturing was doing pretty well because of households' consumption, the financial sector was doing great too. The housing market simply replaced the equity market. "....Like the stock-market bubble, the real-estate bubble fed upon itself, and increasingly so, with increased borrowing facilitated by rising paper wealth and easy credit making for greater housing demand and still higher real-estate values, which provided the collateral for still more borrowing making for more demand and higher housing prices, and so on." What set the whole process in motion apparently was the rise in asset values of houses (whatever that means), which allowed homeowners to borrow more and so spend more, etc.

"On the basis of the huge on-paper appreciation of the value of their residences, households were able to withdraw dramatically increased funds from the home equity -- by selling their houses at prices surpassing their mortgage debt, buying new ones, and still having cash left over; by refinancing and increasing the size of their existing mortgages, extracting cash in the process; and by taking out new home equity loans in the form either of second mortgages or lines of credit." Because of housing's contribution, the average annual growth of GDP between 2000 and 2005 was 2.4 percent instead of 1.7 percent.

In his wisdom, Brenner remarks that "nevertheless, it is hard to see how housing's huge subsidy to the economic expansion can long sustain itself." After 2008, we know he was right.

Between 2000 and 2005, U.S. external deficits kept the world economy going, as always. Its imports greatly exceeded its exports, and its share of the world market in manufactures shrank to its lowest level of the postwar epoch (9 percent). This happened despite the dollar's decline in value. In large part this was due to the annual growth of China's exports (over 25 percent). The turning point in the expansion of China's trade occurred in the first half of the 1990s, "when the government opened the way for banks to impose a major tightening of credit....while itself implementing a major devaluation of the renminbi."

Unlike Japan and the NICs in their periods of development, China did not "tightly control foreign direct investment in statist and mercantilist fashion." Instead, it welcomed a huge influx of foreign-owned companies and foreign investment. "By 2004-05, foreign firms had come to account for no less than one third of Chinese manufacturing output and 55-60 percent of its exports." Brenner goes on about China for a few pages, but it's mostly Greek to me. In the book's final pages he gives more reasons for pessimism about the world economy, such as the slow growth of investment and job creation resulting from not-high-enough profit rates.

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The Nineteenth-Century Campaign to Control Working Women's Leisure

Since antiquity, authorities and men have been alternately fascinated and horrified by women's supposed bacchanalian inner tendencies ever ready to unrepress themselves in riots of sexual abandon. In Greece there were the maenads, orgiastic followers of Dionysus; in nineteenth-century England there was something quite different but similarly appalling to middle- and upper-class sensibilities: working-class women uninhibitedly enjoying their off-hours. The ways they did so, and the ways that their social betters tried to prevent them from doing so, are the subjects of Catriona Parratt's stimulating book *"More Than Mere Amusement": Working-Class Women's Leisure in England, 1750-1914* (2001).

One way to read this work is as a study in what the pioneering social historian E. P. Thompson might call the disciplining of the "instincts," or of humans' essential ludic nature, for the sake (indirectly) of a smoothly functioning industrial capitalism. It is one part of the story of how English peasants' and ex-peasants' obstreperous life-celebrating culture was disciplined out of existence from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, helping make possible first a repressive Victorian society and later our own sexually unrepressed but communally fragmented society.

The world that is gone was indeed a "communal" one, as is evident from Parratt's first paragraph:

> Throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, women were visible and vital participants in popular recreational culture. In their cottages and workshops, in urban streets and on village greens, in alehouses and on farms, they worked and socialized alongside men. In the daily ebb and flow of labor and release from labor, and in the seasonal and annual round of celebrations, feasts, and holidays....they shared in an array of amusements that were gregarious and open. They gossiped and gambled....got drunk and got rowdy at private parties and public assemblies....and trekked out into open fields and onto moors to listen to ranting preachers....

It was a culture of hard physical labor and hard partying, alcohol flowing abundantly at popular festivals where fights broke out frequently (women participating), "lads and lasses [meeting] at the public-house" where they drank, smoked, and danced, and women battling one another in prizefights, sword fights, footraces, cricket, handball, and "folk" football.

As the eighteenth century progressed, such unrestrained merry-making became more offensive to many among the aristocracy and middle classes, who from the 1780s or so started trying to tame it or eliminate it. Before, the governing classes had treated the "almost Rabelaisian" popular recreational culture with good-humored tolerance, as befit the "benign paternalism" that they thought characterized their relations with the lower orders. But the long era of relative tolerance came to a convulsive end with the Industrial Revolution. The founding of the Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1802 marks this new stage of culture, although it was far from the only such organization. "Magistrates, justices of the peace, and the new police force vigorously licensed, prosecuted, and jailed in an attempt to promote the moral elevation of the nation.... Alehouses were closed, fairs were suppressed, wakes and other customary holidays were 'tamed.'" Employers, reformers, evangelicals, and politicians all had their own interests and goals in the transformation of popular culture they oversaw.

It is an old story that Parratt tells, but unlike other scholars she focuses on the mutations in women's, not men's, leisure during the nineteenth century. What fascinates her is the laborious, and only partly successful, domestication of working-class women. One of the catalysts of this domestication, not surprisingly, was religion, which has so often proved invaluable to "domesticators" of whatever sort. The evangelical movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did much to popularize conservative notions of femininity and masculinity, a patriarchal order of subservient females. Upper-class evangelicals such as Hannah More, author of *Cheap Repository for Moral and Religious Tracts* (published between 1795 and 1798), did moral missionary work amongst the benighted poor, particularly women, to prepare them "to be good wives and good mothers, as well as good Christians." These well-intentioned bringers of the truth were precursors, as Parratt remarks, of upper- and middle-class Victorian purveyors of "rational recreation" schemes to fill young women's idle hours.

We should always keep in mind, however, that people are not merely passive receptacles for indoctrination. "The working class made itself as much as it was made," E. P. Thompson said. Accordingly, Parratt devotes much space to analyses of working-class men's and women's self-education and self-disciplining. Chartism, for instance, a mid-nineteenth-century workers' movement, "played a major role in inscribing....restrictive gender ideologies deep within popular and working-class culture." Married women were expected not to work outside the home; working people's leisure was not to be consumed with drinking and dissipation; the working-class wife's purpose in life was to give comfort and happiness to her husband and raise his children to virtue and knowledge. Earlier, the Owenite movement had urged similar practices amongst the laboring classes in preparation for socialism, had similarly emphasized order, decency, sobriety, frugality, and familial responsibilities (although its understanding of the relations between the sexes was more egalitarian than that of Chartism). Later in the century, trade unionists continued this tradition of exalting women's domestic role, their function of providing men with a "haven in a heartless world," and often protested as much as middle-class reformers the existence of female wage-labor, which supposedly corrupted women and rendered them deficient in housewifely skills.

A working-class married woman's leisure was thus severely constrained, and was supposed to be, so that she could devote herself to satisfying her husband during *his* hours of leisure. But in addition to these cultural constraints, Parratt has a chapter on the material constraints that tended to deprive working-class women of their former leisured pastimes. She notes that as unionized male workers were getting the nine-hour- and then the eight-hour-day in the late nineteenth century, many women still had to work ten hours a day or more because their industries were not unionized. Female domestic servants often had it even worse: "In the 1890s, many could expect to have only two or three hours of free time a week, taken on a Sunday." Women's wages were of course far lower than men's, which further restricted their leisure activities. And wives and mothers had the unending housework to take care of.

All this adds up to a pretty bleak picture, perhaps misleadingly bleak. Throughout the nineteenth century, millions of working-class women found ways to spend their leisure time as they wanted. Even the ones who barely earned enough to live on somehow found the means to go on shopping sprees. "One week they have been on the verge of starvation," a contemporary said, "another they have shared in a 'blowout.'" They were inveterate hedonists who had "learnt to hate monotony, to love drink, to use bad language as their mother tongue." And the street culture in which they cavorted was a world of infinite stimulation. Chrisp Street in London, for example, was a universe of entertainment: "the barrel organ playing outside the public house, the man playing the violin with his eyes closed, the Indian man with his head and legs all bound round with cloth....the noise, the smell, the music and, oh, the life!" Upper-class observers noted that "people laughed easily, whistled, sang on high days and jigged in the street -- that great recreation room." Working-class women were thus not necessarily doomed to lives of uninterrupted drudgery and monotony. Quite the contrary.

Parratt devotes the last part of her book to the late-nineteenth-century phenomenon of "rational recreation" organized by middle- and upper-class women who wanted to guide their less privileged sisters into the light, to prepare them for the woman's proper roles in life. Working girls' clubs offered classes, lectures, space to indulge young women's love of dancing -- men were even allowed on such occasions (though subject to strict supervision) -- and simply opportunities to socialize with friends. Some employers

even organized classes and recreational programs at the workplace and offered such amenities as dining rooms, sports fields, and rose gardens to exert a "healthful" influence on the young female employees. The efforts that were taken to control or influence young women's leisured pursuits are astounding -- and yet despite everything they were only partially successful. Working-class women had a magnificent willfulness and pride.

That, indeed, may be the central theme of Parratt's book. Nineteenth-century English women among the lower orders would not let upper-class reformers destroy their independence or their raw passion for life. Their "bacchanalian" spirit remained subversive right up to the time of World War I and beyond.

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Laboring Against Racism: The TWUA in the South during the 1960s

The conventional understanding of labor unions and their membership in the 1960s is of a conservative and bureaucratic set of entrenched interests that played either a negligible or a reactionary role in the progressive upsurges of that decade. The AFL-CIO's support for the Vietnam War and the U.S.'s imperialist agenda can be seen as a symbol of organized labor's supposed integration into established power-structures. Among the rank and file, too, conservatism is said to have held sway, white unionized workers being a key component in the backlash against civil rights that elected Richard Nixon and would eventually sweep the Reagan regime into power. The popular image is of construction workers beating up "unpatriotic" students and hippies protesting the Vietnam War.

There is much truth to this caricature, but it oversimplifies. The labor movement in the 1960s was not some granite obstruction to progress or some monument to racial injustice. It is well known, first, that a number of progressive unions funded and participated in civil rights struggles, among them the UAW, the UPWA, and the Hospital Workers' Union, Local 1199.[1] Less known is that even rank-and-file Appalachian coal miners, for example, by violently protesting in the early 1960s against the potential loss of their health and pension benefits, pressed the U.S. government toward progressive solutions such as an expanded welfare state.[2] The majority of white workers and their unions were not unequivocally on the wrong side of history, even if they did tend to have certain racial prejudices.

Historians have intensively studied unions with a progressive membership in the 1960s, such as the UPWA, but have arguably paid less attention to unions that had to navigate that decade with a relatively conservative membership. That is, the ambivalent relationship of such unions to the civil rights movement, to African American rights in the workplace and society, has not been exhaustively studied. Many unions had a progressive national leadership but a socially conservative rank and file. Did these unions alienate their base by taking liberal stances on civil rights? Were they very successful in unionizing new black workers? How did white workers in the South react to the desegregation of their unions and workplaces? What were things like for newly unionized blacks?

In this paper I consider such questions in relation to a union with a relatively conservative white membership, the CIO-affiliated Textile Workers Union of America. When blacks in the 1960s, under the protection of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, started entering production jobs in the industry and then participating in the union, did the behavior of their white coworkers and the union hierarchy exemplify the narrative of organized labor's conservatism? As I will argue, the answer, unsurprisingly, is not a clear-cut "yes" or "no." On matters of civil rights there were indeed tensions between the TWUA's more progressive national leadership and its rank and file -- especially in the South

[1] See, e.g., Roger Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!" A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930-90* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997) and Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone: 1199/SEIU and the Politics of Health Care Unionism* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

[2] Robyn Muncy, "Coal-Fired Reforms: Social Citizenship, Dissident Miners, and the Great Society," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 96, Issue 1 (June 2009): 72-98.

-- just as there were tensions between blacks and whites in the workplace. However, white textile workers did not usually let their segregationist sympathies prevent them from joining blacks in struggles against employers (at least if they thought they had something to gain); in fact, many whites were radicalized by blacks' unionization, and they came to respect the latters' militancy. On the whole, the TWUA's record in the tumultuous 1960s does not reflect badly on organized labor.

Until the late 1960s the TWUA was overwhelmingly white, because most jobs in the textile industry, especially higher-paid "production jobs," were held by whites. Blacks did have a long tradition of working in the mills, but mainly as laborers. They "performed tasks which ranged from cleaning floors to installing electrical wiring to repairing looms to constructing mill buildings and mill housing."[1] Many of them, even in the South, were nevertheless unionized, but in separate locals from whites. Segregated locals stretched back even to before the TWUA was founded in 1939. For example, during the 1934 General Textile Strike black locals were organized in most major southern textile centers.[2]

It is worth noting that blacks themselves often considered segregated unionism preferable to integration, because it gave them a unified voice that whites could be forced to recognize. In Danville, Virginia, for instance, in the late 1940s, the TWUA had two large white locals and a black local, each of which elected representatives to a joint board. As a result, in cases of disagreement between whites, the black local had power disproportionate to its numbers. Danville also showed the potential of unionism to break down barriers of prejudice, in that blacks were elected to positions of responsibility based on their abilities, which were recognized by whites. As one worker testified, "in many cases, when the white workers within the shop steward area would find that the black shop steward was much more able than the white shop steward within the same area, they would take their grievances to the black shop steward."[3] Or, on interracial trips to national union conventions, white delegates would sometimes refuse to eat in diners that insisted blacks eat separately. "If we couldn't eat together," said one member recalling the TWUA's 1946 convention, "we didn't eat separate." Timothy Minchin says that these types of incidents were remarkable, "given the intense hostility that had marked black participation in the union during [a] 1944 strike." In the 1950s, too, union members would travel together only if buses were integrated. At one convention a white worker stated, in support of a resolution endorsing civil rights, "We have better relations with the colored people since we organized. They carry a lot of the responsibility."[4]

Despite the accomplishments of segregated unions in the South, conditions in the industry remained deplorable. Discrimination was rampant, blacks remained a tiny minority and were rarely promoted to higher-paying jobs, and divisions persisted, of course, between white and black employees. Only with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the creation of the EEOC did things really start to improve. "Within five years of the act's passage, a rash of major lawsuits had been brought against many of the South's largest textile companies."[5] Civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, the American Friends Service Committee, and TEAM (Textiles: Employment and Advancement for Minorities) played important roles in the racial integration of the industry, pushing recalcitrant employers to improve their hiring records by means either of legal action or of personal persuasion, in the latter case by visiting mills and talking to employers.[6]

Firms were in fact not always opposed to hiring blacks to production jobs, because a booming economy in the 1960s, as well as the departure of many white employees to more enticing positions in other

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[1] Mary Frederickson, "Four Decades of Change: Black Workers in Southern Textiles, 1941-1981," *Radical America*, Vol. 16., No. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1982): 27-43, at p. 29.
[2] Timothy Minchin, *What Do We Need a Union For? The TWUA in the South, 1945-1955* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 135.
[3] Quoted in ibid., p. 137.
[4] Ibid., p. 138.
[5] Timothy Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960-1980* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p. 42.
[6] Ibid., pp. 229-231.

industries, had led to a labor shortage. One newspaper reported in 1963 that "Negroes are quietly moving over to the heretofore all-white production line in Southern textile mills.... Throughout the South these days, they are talking labor shortage. Practically every textile plant -- cotton, synthetic, woolen, worsted, glass fiber -- is searching for willing and trainable help." The article goes on to suggest that "Within the individual mills, there has been peaceful integration. Whites and Negroes realize they must work in harmony."[1] We will see shortly that this was by no means always the case, but it does indicate that even in the early 1960s white employees were not so hopelessly bigoted they refused to work alongside blacks.

As the federal government and civil rights groups were forcing the integration of the textile industry, the TWUA was cautiously supporting desegregation and actively unionizing new black workers. Internal records make it clear that the union leadership strongly supported civil rights but was reluctant to proclaim its support too vociferously. At a staff meeting in 1966 to discuss the issue, the union decided to continue making public statements in support of integration but not to "spearhead the civil rights fight" because that would hurt it with its "present Southern membership."[2] The union had only a minority position in the industry, after all; successful organization was a higher priority than "the development of favorable membership attitudes on civil rights."[3]

Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that the national union did try to influence its white members on the matter of civil rights -- *cautiously* tried to educate them, nudge them towards liberal attitudes. This is evident from national conventions in the 1960s, which were attended by hundreds of delegates from locals around the country. These delegates in fact generally seem to have supported civil rights. For example, a resolution that was passed without vocal objections at the 1966 national convention recommended, among other things, "the passage of effective legislation making it a federal crime to commit acts of physical violence against and harassment of civil rights workers and organizers." It concluded with the declaration that "We pledge to continue our close cooperation with men, women and organizations of goodwill within the labor movement, as well as outside of it, to make our country a better place in which to work and live and to rid ourselves of prejudice, hate and discrimination whenever, wherever and against whomever we find it."[4]

Even more tellingly, the 1968 convention was visited by Alexander Barkan, former director of the TWUA's Political Action Committee and, in 1968, director of the AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education. He gave an impassioned speech on the necessity of not letting members get "sidetracked by phony issues," in particular racial prejudices, in the 1968 presidential election. "In 1966," he states, "we permitted our enemies to sidetrack us all over the country. We were sidetracked." He proceeds to give numerous examples of how white and black workers in Maryland, California, Illinois, New Jersey, and other states let politicians race-bait them into voting against their economic interests. For instance, the previous New Jersey legislature had given workers a higher minimum wage, improved workmen's compensation, and unemployment compensation for strikers. To unseat the Democratic majority and repeal unemployment compensation for strikers, "the Manufacturers Association got up a million-dollar slush fund" to spread the lie that "the Superintendent of Schools of New Jersey was going to push through a program of bussing ghetto school children into the white suburbs. There was not any such plan. The Governor denied it. The Superintendent of Schools denied it...." Nevertheless, such racial propaganda swayed many white workers in the suburbs, who helped elect a large Republican majority in 1966. The first act of this majority was to repeal unemployment compensation for strikers.[5]

Barkan also noted in his speech that the AFL-CIO's "Virginia organization" had taken a poll of its members in 1968 and found that, while Hubert Humphrey was the overwhelming choice, George Wallace got 21% of the vote. Barkan concludes with the fervent exhortation that delegates educate their members

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[1] "The New South: Negroes in the Textile Industry," *Daily News Record* (New York, NY), December 1, 1963.
[2] "Staff Meeting in President Pollock's Office," December 21, 1966, Box 90, TWUA Papers in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
[3] Quoted in Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker*, p. 235.
[4] Reel 58, Microfilm Collection, AFL-CIO Convention Archives, UIC Library, Chicago.
[5] Ibid.

on the issues. “Over and over and over again, you have to talk about these issues” -- “the real issues” -- “from now until next November 5.”

White textile workers tended to be among the more socially conservative members of the AFL-CIO, so Barkan’s speech, while testifying to the progressive character of the national TWUA and the AFL-CIO, also shows what the union was up against. Its conventions were very progressive affairs -- in 1970 Bayard Rustin spoke, to standing ovations and prolonged applause, on the importance of civil rights and racial integration, after which the union unanimously adopted a civil rights resolution “amid applause and cheers”[1] -- but the reality in the mills and their communities was not quite so uplifting. Timothy Minchin notes that the passage of a resolution condemning the White Citizens’ Council at the union’s 1956 convention “caused damaging fallout in local unions,” leading to the resignations of many members across the South.[2] Eleven years later, in 1967, TEAM observed that “A check of union plants indicates that the racial mix is no better” in unionized than un-unionized plants.[3] The priorities of southern locals during these years are reflected in the fact that the enormous archives of Scott Hoyman, Southern Regional Director for the TWUA in the 1960s and ’70s, contain very few references to African Americans or civil rights.[4]

In the 1950s and early 1960s, when the TWUA was taking tentative steps toward integrating plants and locals in the North and, to an extent, even the South, its organizers encountered predictable opposition among many whites. Integration nonetheless took place in a number of formerly segregated plants, even before the creation of the EEOC. Paul Swaity, an organizer in the 1950s and ’60s, remarks that integration was easier in the Midwest than the South partly because employers in the former region exploited not racial divisions but ethnic divisions amongst their employees. Even so, in order to integrate plants in St. Louis, for example, organizers had to do extensive preparatory work among white workers. They would ask shop stewards what they thought would happen if blacks were brought into the plant -- how whites would react, what the steward himself would do, and so forth. They would canvass ordinary workers too. Only after deciding whether any departments, and *which* departments, had a minimum of hostility to the idea of bringing in blacks would organizers coordinate with the employer the hiring of a few black workers.[5]

Even after passage of the Civil Rights Act and substantive or nominal integration of plants and local unions, combating discrimination was, for a long time, not a priority of most locals. In December 1966, only 2.6 percent of all southern TWUA contracts had a nondiscrimination clause, and very few had black stewards or officers. Locals also were reluctant to file grievances on behalf of black members.[6] The union did provide protection against unfair discharge and disciplinary issues, and its enforcement of seniority was invaluable to black workers, but in the 1960s and early ’70s locals often ignored blacks’ complaints about unequal pay. One worker, for instance, testified in a court case in 1972 that “the Union represents you for being fired or something like that, but as far as coming to get more money, they don’t do very much representing towards the blacks.” In many cases locals also tried to keep blacks out of leadership positions, even after the black membership had become a majority. Sometimes “whites resigned from the union en masse when the first African Americans were elected to positions of responsibility. ....The union found it very difficult to run mixed locals, finding its locals becoming either heavily black or staying all-white.” According to one black woman, racism in her local union was greater than in the plant as a whole. In fact, her union president was “a card-carrying member of the Ku Klux Klan.”[7]

Despite all this institutionalized racism, black workers understood that it was far better to have a union than not to have one. Indeed, they were among the most militant and organizable workers in the country, and they pushed their fellow employees toward greater militancy. This is evident from a memo

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[1] Ibid.
[2] Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker*, p. 238.
[3] Ibid., p. 240.
[4] Scott Hoyman’s archives are in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.
[5] Interview with Paul Swaity in 1979, Tape 725A in the TWUA Oral History Project interviews, Wisconsin Historical Society.
[6] “Summary of Southern TWUA Staff Survey,” December 12, 1966, Box 316, TWUA Papers.
[7] Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker*, pp. 243, 241.

that Paul Swaity filed in 1970 (when he was the director of southern organizing), in which he argued that "The climate for organizing textile workers in the south is better today than it's been since the early '40s. There is a general discontent that is growing in the textile mills of the south, particularly in the states of Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee." He continues with the following observations:

> A new generation of workers is entering the industry. They are much more independent.... Black workers, receptive to organizing efforts, are entering the industry in growing numbers. Most textile plants employ more than 15% black and in those textile mill areas where labor is extremely short, black employment is reaching the 50% mark. The black workers pride themselves on what they've achieved through unity and confrontation in the civil rights field. They know these same techniques are applicable to economic progress. Their attitude to a union is, therefore, generally favorable. ....Even among older textile workers, there is a pronounced change taking place. The confrontations and civil rights progress of the black people has had an impact on white textile workers. The entry of blacks into textile plants and the manner in which blacks stand up for their rights has made the docile textile workers sit up and take notice.[1]

Organizers therefore anticipated great gains from black unionization. Their optimism was largely justified, for many union elections were won because of black support. In Allendale, South Carolina, for example, organizers reported that a representation election in 1970 had been won because the "majority of workers were black and were self-organized and the company could not crack their solidarity."[2] In many campaigns, records show that the union had 100 percent support from black employees -- far more support than among whites. "Major victories at Oneita Knitting Mills in Andrews, South Carolina, in 1973 and at J. P. Stevens in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, in 1974 were due in large part to black militancy."[3]

David Griffin, white president of Local 250 in Erwin, North Carolina -- "the heart of Klan country," as a billboard on an interstate highway near the town announced -- believed in 1969 that black employment would be advantageous for his union. "I think within the next few years we'll have many more Negroes," he said in an interview. "Whites hate to organize. They want to 'get along' with management. But Negroes *know* it's not on *their* side. They've known that kind of thing all the way back to slavery times." Interestingly, in this deep Klan country white and black employees seem to have got along fairly well. As a spokesman for Burlington Industries, the textile employer in Erwin, said, "I think the greatest surprise some of our managers had at first [after integration] was the acceptance by whites of Negroes." The reporter who interviewed him concluded that the Klan's "violent spirit has not been evidenced in the attitudes of Erwin's mill workers as integration has proceeded. What is found among the 'hands' is a perhaps surprising amount of tolerance, with some genuine friendships across racial lines, but also a large measure of unsophisticated prejudice."[4]

It would be naive to think that "unsophisticated prejudice" could be overcome in just a few years in a society that had known it for centuries, but whites did soon learn to value the contributions of black unionists. A typical attitude was that expressed by a white worker in Roanoke Rapids in 1977: "I really admire the black folk. They stand up for their rights. I think the whites have a lot to learn about that."[5] Doubtless this particular worker was able to act in prejudiced ways toward blacks, due to decades of social conditioning, but he was also able to rise above his prejudice and join together with fellow workers to achieve a common good. Whites in an un-unionized plant were perfectly happy to follow blacks into a union, to let them take the lead in organizing it. In many cases they were even willing, at least after the

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[1] "Improved Southern Organizing Opportunities," June 29, 1970, Box 652, TWUA Papers.
[2] General President's Representation Election Questionnaire, September 17, 1970, ibid.
[3] Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker*, pp. 248, 249.
[4] Reese Cleghorn, "The Mill: A Giant Step for the Southern Negro," *New York Times Magazine*, November 9, 1969, p. 142.
[5] Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker*, p. 250.

initial shock of integration in the mid-1960s, to have a black president or vice-president of the local. In the 1970s it was common to have a white president and a black vice-president; in fact, whites would sometimes encourage black leaders to run as a way of strengthening the union.[1] In Fitzgerald, Georgia, a black woman who was elected president of her local union in 1970 apparently encountered no resentment among whites, who accepted her leadership even though she had recently been active in the local NAACP.[2]

In short, while examples can be multiplied indefinitely of local-union discrimination against blacks in the 1960s and 1970s, other examples can be multiplied indefinitely of successful cooperation between whites and blacks. The point is that the conventional narrative of labor's conservatism in this era is simplistic. Society is too complex to permit of such simple generalizations. The reality is that the TWUA's national union was at least as racially progressive as mainstream America -- a fact indicated by its progressive national conventions, the progressive attitudes of its leaders, and its progressive organizing efforts -- even if it did not try to influence its rank and file as strongly as it could have on the issue of civil rights. This was a strategic decision, a response to the perceived attitudes of most white members of the TWUA in the South.

And yet, to repeat, even these rank-and-file whites were not monolithically reactionary on civil rights. Especially by the early 1970s, many admired what African Americans had achieved in civil rights struggles; they admired the practice of "sticking together" to achieve collective gains, and were themselves willing to stick together with blacks if they thought it would help them economically. For their own part, blacks observed that the opening of production jobs to them in the 1960s and their subsequent participation in integrated unions often changed the way whites perceived them. As one African American said, "The atmosphere changed [after integration]. They [i.e. whites] changed and I changed. We got closer together in every way."[3]

Lest this paper end on too sanguine a note, we should acknowledge that employers in the South continued to exploit racial divisions amongst their workforce even into the 1990s. Bruce Raynor, former southern director of the ACTWU (successor to the TWUA), observed in 1995 that "to this day every campaign we run the company makes race an issue, every single one. The company will tell the whites, 'The union's going to force us to give the good jobs to blacks.'....It's still a big weapon against us."[4] Racial fears are extraordinarily tenacious, and the record of integration in the southern textile industry is by no means one long success. It is a story of victories and defeats, and it should be recognized as such -- a complicated human story, not the caricature of reactionary whites and bureaucracies vs. heroic individuals that we encounter in popular history. Reality, after all, is always more interesting than myth.

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A Critique of Current Historical Scholarship

If the history profession in the United States were to take stock of itself in 2011, it would have the right to be proud in many respects. It has come far in the last fifty years, become far more sophisticated in a number of ways. Social history has enormously enriched our understanding of the past, in particular the past of subaltern groups of people who tended to be ignored by academic historians up to the 1960s. Labor history is no longer mainly about trade unions and institutional politics; it also encompasses the *lives* of workers, as well as of their families and communities. The history of minorities is no longer excluded from the mainstream, and women are finally integrated into the historical profession -- both as scholars and as subjects of study. The history of gender and sexuality has explicated the formation of subjective identities and shed light on varieties of oppression that were hardly even recognized in the past. Historians have become methodologically more self-conscious and self-critical, and their scholarship has become incredibly

[1] Ibid., p. 252.
[2] Letter from Patricia Eames to William Pollock, August 18, 1970, Box 90, TWUA Papers.
[3] Quoted in Mary Frederickson, "Four Decades of Change," p. 38.
[4] Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker*, p. 257.

meticulous. Like culture itself, history-writing is incomparably more *inclusive* than it was fifty years ago -- inclusive of more people, more ideas, more methods, more agendas, more countries and societies (hence "transnationalism"). It is diverse, and it is huge. Nevertheless, the discipline has by no means perfected itself, nor should it be complacent about what it has achieved. In some ways it has not taken its recent democratic achievements far enough, while in others it has taken them too far, thereby losing sight of important issues and old insights. The discipline is also too fragmented and specialized, like most of the humanities and social sciences. One can accuse it, moreover, of being too "academic." Being humanistic, it should not isolate itself from society but should critically engage it, bring history to bear on the burning political questions of our time.

There is a myth among academics that "objectivity" entails "neutrality," that to take a partisan position in some controversy is by definition to be non-objective and unscholarly.[1] This belief goes back decades, and helps justify the political disengagement of scholars that is a function in part of the insularity of their institutions. According to conventional wisdom, the university system is not supposed to be the plaything of political agendas; it is supposed to be dedicated to politically innocuous research and the unpartisan education of students. Otherwise universities might not be able to get funding from a variety of sources, and they would not be able to maintain their supposed autonomy from the rough-and-tumble world of politics. Corresponding to these institutional facts is the academic conviction, which serves to justify an apolitical stance, that to take a politically controversial position in scholarship or popular writing is to depart from the "disinterested" pursuit of truth.

This is a fantasy, as is the idea that the university system is even moderately removed from political influence and agendas. By virtue of their particular locations in social structures, academics are already integrated into the political economy in ways they might not even know about or like. They are already serving certain economic and political interests in their research and teaching, both of which are inherently political. Whatever position one takes in teaching or writing, one cannot escape the implicit commitment to some set of political interests and institutions. By not challenging conventional interpretations, for example, one is upholding the hegemony of power-structures and the status quo, implicitly taking the "partisan" position that mainstream narratives, which like all interpretations exclude certain voices and include others, are substantially correct and that the powerful therefore are not only basically right but should remain powerful. By consciously avoiding political controversy in one's work, one is making a statement that to some other group of interests, an unrepresented group, is controversial.

There is no such thing as "disinterested" scholarship. In Nietzschean terms, one necessarily proceeds from a particular perspective. Jean-Paul Sartre said something similar in arguing that one is inescapably *committed*, whether one knows it or not. On the other hand, it is possible to be "committed" in a relatively "objective" and "rational" way, namely by encompassing more voices, more facts, and more arguments in one's position, and by being willing to assess it according to canons of logic rather than emotion or some other standard. An intellectual's work can serve the interests of freedom and democracy in more objective and rigorous or less objective and rigorous ways, just as it can serve the interests of the powerful in rigorous or unrigorous ways -- or, alternatively, in open and honest ways or implicit and unconscious ways (as it usually does). Every social scientist and humanist should decide which interests and values he intends to support in his work, and then do so as objectively as possible.

Historians, one might retort, often do serve democratic values and agendas in their work, as evidenced by the rise of social history in all its forms. This is true. However, there is still too much of a pretense of neutrality on issues of political moment, a neutrality that effectively supports the status quo. In many cases this neutrality takes the form of a specific *method*, viz. an "idealistic" method. In *The Global Cold War* (2005), for example, Odd Arne Westad argues that "the United States and the Soviet Union were driven to intervene in the Third World by the ideologies inherent in their politics."[2] He pays little attention

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[1] See Thomas L. Haskell, "Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Rhetoric vs. Practice in Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream*," *History and Theory*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (May, 1990): pp. 129-157.

[2] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 4.

to economic dynamics and institutional imperatives as explanations of the superpowers' foreign policy, instead relying to a great degree on policymakers' self-understandings and rhetoric. His idealistic method lends legitimacy to powerful actors, their institutions, and their policies, thus implicitly legitimizing the political status quo and undermining the popular democratic hopes and strivings that he ostensibly supports.

Social historians, on the other hand, sometimes adopt a kind of status quo-supporting idealism precisely by virtue of their "democratic" method of telling people's stories more or less as they lived them. Books like Bethany Moreton's *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (2009) and Lisa McGirr's *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (2002) embody the commendable project of taking ordinary people's experiences seriously and revealing such people as "active, articulate participants in a historical process."[1] However, these works can have an extreme emphasis on ideology and culture insofar as people interpret their own experiences that way. Political correctness frequently suffuses this sort of scholarship; everyone is given "agency," assumed to have control over his or her life because to deny that would be insulting or condescending. Institutional contexts and influences are frequently played down as the individual's motives and self-interpretations are elevated. The consequence is to divert the reader's attention from class structures and the overall distribution of power relations, which in turn often prevents this work from being politically very challenging or subversive.

Ironically, one can object to idealism not only morally but also by invoking the "disinterested" rational standards that scholars are so concerned with. For a materialism and "institutionalism" along Marxian lines is singularly *plausible* too, as contrasted with the various types of idealism manifested in much political history (e.g., *The Global Cold War*), postmodernist cultural history (e.g., Joan Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History* (1999)), and a fair amount of social history, the "humanism" of which tends to have factually incorrect implications. To quote the political scientist Thomas Ferguson: "That ordinary people are historical subjects [as social historians assume] is a vital truth; that they are the primary shapers of the American past seems to me either a triviality or a highly dubious theory about the control of both political and economic investment in American history."[2] The point is that one can overemphasize the historical importance of ordinary people's experiences and self-interpretations, and that many historians do this. The simple fact is that in the history of capitalist society, large business interests or corporations have vastly more sway over society than ordinary people do. They have incomparably more historical agency by virtue of their access to material resources -- surely a commonsense truth. Thus, if historians want to explain the dynamics and trajectories of societies, they would do well to emphasize economics, moneyed interests, and class structures far more than they do. Furthermore, as stated above, this would have the morally desirable effect of highlighting the injustice of current institutional arrangements, thereby bolstering popular struggles.

The intellectual's moral and scientific responsibilities, which arguably are not being adequately served by much contemporary historical scholarship, can be reduced to the responsibility to *challenge conventional wisdom*. Intellectuals are in a unique position to do this, having the necessary skills, leisure, and access to enormous amounts of information. Instead, they are usually the guardians of conventional wisdom, not its challengers. Most of their work reinforces the notion that class relations, which determine differences in groups' control over productive resources, are, far from being the most important determinant of social dynamics, not of especial significance, that, if anything, culture, ideology, gender, group psychology, and so forth are historically more important than the brute institutional realities of control over economic and material resources. The age of postmodernism has ushered in a scientifically dubious and morally objectionable (in its political implications) subjectivism, culturalism, and obsession with "discourse," as if cultural discourses were not shaped precisely by institutional, ultimately economic, conditions and the play of competing interests. (It requires access to resources, after all, to propagate discourses, and access to resources is primarily an economic fact, i.e. determined largely by the dynamics

[1] Thomas Ferguson, *Golden Rule: The Investment Theory of Party Competition and the Logic of Money-Driven Political Systems* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 96.
[2] Ibid.

of class relations, conflicts between groups of people with different economic interests by virtue of their occupying different locations in social structures.)[1] Analyses of discourses, ideologies, and gendered, sexual, and racial identities have their place in scholarship, but authors should keep in mind that to emphasize ideas and identities at the expense of structures of, and struggles over, economic production and distribution is already a political act, in that it tends to focus attention on politically peripheral issues and does little to develop a critique of the central power relations in society. This fact, of course, helps explain why it is so predominant in academia: institutional mechanisms tend to filter out materialistic critiques of economic and political relations, since such "leftist," "radical" arguments challenge society's most entrenched power-structures, the structures that fund universities and influence political policies toward them. From the perspective of these moneyed interests, it is far safer to write about the formation of sexual identities or ordinary people's "agency," their supposed power over their lives and influence over politics. To emphasize ideologies, too, is politically safe, since it suggests that ideas matter more than institutions and that it is more important to change the former than the latter.

History should stop being as "academic" as it is; scholarship should more often be motivated by current political struggles. Historians could do popular movements, not to mention *truth*, a service by placing in its historical context, for example, business's ongoing assaults on public-sector unionism, or by tracing corporations' influence on federal and state politics or their systematic, decades-long dismantling of civil society (unions, communities, public transportation, etc.), or the ways in which public-relations firms craft media campaigns and thereby propagate "discourses" favorable to business. There is no shortage of politically controversial subjects -- the controversial nature of which, incidentally, suggests their importance, their subversion of shallow conventional wisdom. That such scholarly projects are "partisan" is no argument against their essential truth, for there is no reason to think that truth should be benign toward or supportive of entrenched interests. Quite the contrary. It would be startling if social truths were unpartisan, i.e. acceptable to powerful interests, whose concern is not to propagate truth but to advance their own agendas.

Consistent with the foregoing critique is the criticism that historical scholarship is altogether too specialized, not "synthetic" enough. There is little cross-fertilization between economic history, political history, social history, cultural history, labor history, business history, and so on. To place everything in its proper social context, integration among fields is necessary. Historical materialist methods should in general be the foundation of most kinds of history, since they are common sense (notwithstanding their having been knocked out of people's heads due to their politically subversive implications). Economic theory, too -- at least the "realistic" kind of theory, e.g. Marxist economics,[2] not neoclassical fantasies about efficient markets, perfect competition, etc. -- is very relevant to history in that it helps explain social dynamics, and historians should study it. The consequence of *not* studying other fields or disciplines is the postmodern parochialism that pervades academia, the overemphasis on gender, sexuality, discourse, ideologies, subjective identities, in addition to the more general counterproductive fragmentation that itself does much to vitiate the political potential of scholarship.

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[1] This paper is not an appropriate place to set forward all the arguments for "materialism"; the best we can do is give examples of scholarship that shows its true power. Thomas Ferguson's above-cited book is one example. Others are Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (New York: Beacon Press, 2001); Noam Chomsky, *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky* (New York: The New Press, 2002); Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005* (New York: Verso, 2006); Erik Olin Wright, *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985); and Charles Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913).

[2] See, for example, Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence*; Fred Magdoff and Michael D. Yates, *The ABCs of the Economic Crisis: What Working People Need to Know* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009); John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff, *The Great Financial Crisis: Causes and Consequences* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009); and Robert Brenner, *The Boom and the Bubble: The US in the World Economy* (New York: Verso, 2002).

One can argue, in fact, that "intellectuals" have a moral obligation to serve progressive political struggles, being the beneficiaries of other people's "surplus labor," of an exploitive economic system that perpetuates poverty and disfranchisement among the large majority of the world population. Intellectuals have extraordinary privileges, which, because they are made possible by other people's *lack* of privileges, they are morally obligated to use for these other people's benefit. Such arguments, however, start to take us outside the realm of scholarship, so we will leave them here as suggestions.

The point is that political activism and scholarship need not be mutually exclusive, that politically partisan scholarship (or scholarship with partisan implications) can embody the highest standards of academic rigor, and that, far from being unrespectable, it is scientifically and morally imperative that humanist intellectuals use their work to undermine conventional narratives. To do so, as I have said, historians ought to broaden their scholarship, integrate social history with economic history with political history and so forth. We have a lot of monographs on every conceivable subject; it is time we did more to integrate the best scholarship in numerous fields and so make it more compelling to the general public. The public hungers for knowledge untainted by political dishonesty -- as evidenced by the popularity of such figures as Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein, Mike Davis, Holly Sklar, and others who bring knowledge to the masses. This is the next frontier in the history of the intellectual; historians should recognize that and celebrate it.

*

May

I witnessed my first shooting today. Or at least, I was there when it happened (didn't see it) -- across the street, in the exact spot I would have been thirty seconds later, in front of the train stop. Two shots that I thought were a car's backfiring until an instant later people yelled "Gunshots!", women screamed, and a nearby restaurant owner herded women and children around the corner to safety. So I followed him and them with some urgency because it was disconcerting to imagine a bullet entering the back of my head. (While running it occurred to me that these could be my last moments alive, if the shots continued and stray bullets hit me.) A police station was right there, so in a few minutes the scene was cleared up and everything continued as before. It didn't look like anyone was injured; just three black guys standing in front of the train station being arrested as I walked by.

It's moments like that when you're glad the police exist. I didn't want to walk over there until they had done their thing.

....Reading Charles Beard's *Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (1913). He quotes (p. 15) Seligman's formulation of "the economic interpretation of history" and calls it "as nearly axiomatic as any proposition in social science can be." As Seligman says, "The existence of man depends upon his ability to sustain himself; the economic life is therefore the fundamental condition of all life. Since human life, however, is the life of man in society, individual existence moves within the framework of the social structure and is modified by it. What the conditions of maintenance are to the individual, the similar relations of production and consumption are to the community. To economic causes, therefore, must be traced in the last instance those transformations in the structure of society which themselves condition the relations of social classes and the various manifestations of social life." Sheer common sense, which only the highly educated could dispute. (Seligman doesn't formulate it very precisely, but the intuition is compelling.)

Beard proposes to show that "substantially all of the merchants, money lenders, security holders, manufacturers, shippers, capitalists, and financiers and their professional associates" supported the Constitution, while most of the opposition came from non-slaveholding farmers and debtors. His economic interpretation of history is, therefore, corroborated by his study of the Constitution. "The direct, impelling motive [of support for the Constitution] was the economic advantages which the beneficiaries expected would accrue to themselves first...."

"Nationalism [among Americans in the late 18th century] was created by a welding of economic interests that cut through state boundaries." He mentions the identity of interest between creditors and the wealthy in many different states, as opposed to "their debt-burdened neighbors at the back door." For example, southern planters shared the interest of Massachusetts creditors in having a strong federal government that could put down insurrections, in the former case among slaves and in the latter among debtors (as in Shays' Rebellion).

Interesting: "[*The Federalist*] is in fact the finest study in the economic interpretation of politics which exists in any language; and whoever would understand the Constitution as an economic document need hardly go beyond it." I'll have to read those articles someday. It's worth noting that James Madison was basically a historical materialist in the broad sense, as is clear from Federalist No. 10. "....The most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property. Those who hold and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society. Those who are creditors, and those who are debtors, fall under a like discrimination. A landed interest, a manufacturing interest, a mercantile interest, a moneyed interest, with many lesser interests, grow up of necessity in civilized nations, and divide them into different classes actuated by different sentiments and views." Etc.

In general, "the live and persistent economic force which organized and carried through the ratification [of the Constitution] was the personalty interests [i.e. mercantile, securities, manufacturing, etc.] and particularly the public security interests. As has been pointed out, these had the most to gain immediately from the Constitution. Continental paper bought at two and three shillings in the pound was bound to rise rapidly with the establishment of the federal government...."

I need hardly add that the processes of writing and ratifying the Constitution were the opposite of democratic. For instance, probably not more than one-sixth of adult males voted to ratify the document. And no popular vote was involved in calling the Convention and selecting delegates. In fact, the whole process was frankly illegal, flouting as it did the provisions in the Articles of Confederation for amending that document. The Articles were simply ignored.

I also needn't add -- but will -- that the Constitution itself constitutes a "marvelously dexterous system of barriers to [democracy's] expression" (Robert Lynd).

Now I'm reading Robert A. Brady's *Business as a System of Power* (1943). These materialistic books are the sorts of things we don't read in courses, so I want to educate myself this summer. This particular book is all about the concentration or centralization of business, the similar state-capitalist forms it takes in fascist and liberal-democratic systems, and its having emerged organically from earlier trends.

After remarking that fascism is counterrevolutionary, Brady says this (p. 56):

> But why should such sweeping and vigorous counterrevolutionary action occur first in Italy, one of the least industrialized among the capitalistic states? There is an interesting historical analogy here with the contemporary situation in Russia, which helps to throw the Italian situation at the end of [World War I] into sharp relief. In Fascism capitalistic institutions were able to triumph; in Communism they faced defeat. Yet both Italy and Russia were among the "weakest links" in the chain of capitalist nations. In each case, at a critical point the pendulum seems barely to have swung the way it did. It is probably not too far from the truth to say that had Russia not turned Socialist in 1917 it would have adopted some form of "Fascism," and had Italy in 1922 not fallen unexpectedly to the Fascists it would have become a Socialist state....
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> Both countries were primarily agricultural. In both, rural life was characterized by deep contrasts between vast estates owned by politically powerful and immensely wealthy families on the one hand, and an overwhelming majority of more or less propertyless, poverty-stricken, ignorant, and repressed peasantry on the other. In both, important feudal carry-overs survived intact down to the outbreak of the [First] World War. In neither had Parliamentary institutions or the first grudging concessions to popular sovereignty seriously affected the vast proportion of the population. Both were political patchworks,

> and in neither had largely borrowed, nationalistic sentiments penetrated far beneath the thin upper layers of class-conscious jingoism.
>
> ....Industrialization came comparatively late, and in both cases, once begun, the pace of growth and development was unusually swift. At a time when industrial technique of its own momentum was becoming large-scale, and capitalism of its own native driving power was resorting everywhere to monopoly devices, this forced-draft growth tended at once to sharpen the social cleavages and to strengthen and unify the forces of antidemocratic reaction. By the "accidents of history," monopoly forms of capitalism, mercantilistic sentiments, and feudal social institutions were in both immediately juxtaposed.
>
> In Russia proletarian forces won the throw of the die; in Italy, property. For the spread of the Socialist-Communist state Russia lacked industrialism; for the dominance of capitalist institutions Italy lacked a widespread business system. Russia undertook to solve her problem by a backward step into NEP, in order to lead more easily into the industrialization program of the Socialist Five Year Plan. Italy devised the Corporate System. And the Corporate System is to be understood as that morganatic alliance between organized, Italian, patrimonial capitalism and the type of feudal controls long advocated by the Papacy, from which it was hoped to find at once an end to class war and full defense of the existing social-economic status quo.

He emphasizes the Catholic ideological origins of Fascist[1] corporatism. A recrudescence of the medieval guilds, etc.

After reading this chapter it occurs to me that one of the reasons why fascism and hence the Second World War were in large part the products of lingering feudal traditions is that the Church and other pre-capitalist (or pre-industrial capitalist) elements did much to push the class collaborationist ideology of fascism, the ideology of harmony between classes and cooperative coordination of economic activity. Industrial capital was less committed to such ideas than reactionary, "residual" (in Raymond Williams's sense) and (also) un-capitalist elements were. (Not all un-capitalist or un-bourgeois elements were wholly residual.) So when the struggle between capital and labor threatened to reach a political stalemate, or even to result in labor's triumph, in the 1920s and 1930s, big business, in order to remain securely on its throne, had to let residual and/or un-"bourgeois" forces seize political power and impose corporatism on society, which kept business on top in, perhaps, not entirely the way it would have liked. Business couldn't win the political class war on its own; it needed help from the reactionary, indebted-to-Catholic-corporatist-doctrine forces that coalesced around Mussolini, Hitler, and fascist figures in France.

It's true that even the U.S., which lacked a feudal past and so was not very influenced by Catholic or other elements that hoped to resurrect medieval guilds, adopted somewhat corporatist, "harmony between labor and capital"-promoting measures under Roosevelt. In Europe, however, probably because of its feudal residues, corporatist ideas seem to have carried more reactionary connotations and been tied up with anti-materialism, anti-socialism, anti-laborism, even anti-Semitism. (The Church was anti-Semitic, of course.)

Anyway, it's obvious that feudal residues -- class structures, ideologies, religious and political institutions -- had much to do with all the hierarchical, undemocratic, and anti-Semitic elements in Europe that helped lead the way to fascism.

Think of Japan too, with its even more obvious "feudal carry-overs" that made possible its version of fascism. (Some of the causes -- or rather necessary conditions -- of Japanese fascism were very different from those of the European kind, but some were similar. To that extent it had a similar essence.)

I'm in Warsaw with Aniela. Spending three weeks in Europe, also going to Italy with her, where we'll briefly meet up with my parents in a town called Lucca in Tuscany. It's great to be back on this continent, especially with Ania, who not only tolerates but seems to appreciate my quirks, my absent-mindedness and so on. Recently she has been pursued by a guy she calls Mr. Proper, who is rich, handsome,

[1] By 'Fascism' with a capital 'F' I mean the Italian variant.

intelligent, comes from a distinguished Polish family (his ancestor was the first president of independent Poland in the nineteenth century), and mingles with power-brokers and celebrities. The kind of guy most women dream of being with. But she isn't interested in him because....he's too perfect. Not "real." His glamorous world of parties is not real; it's boring. You see she's an unusually sensible and self-confident woman, who knows what she wants.

In the radio business she met and interviewed all kinds of famous people, including movie stars, musicians, artists, politicians -- the president of Poland -- and so on. And she herself has charisma. She oversaw hundreds of people as station manager, most of whom apparently found her intimidating. So I ask her what she sees in me, and she says I'm "real."

Reading Robin Hahnel's *ABCs of Political Economy: A Modern Approach* (2002). Chomsky recommended it. Nice overview of radical, i.e. commonsensical, political economy.

What he calls the macro law of supply and demand, postulated by Keynes, is that aggregate supply will follow aggregate demand if it can (if, that is, the economy isn't already producing at full capacity, in which case high demand will lead to inflation rather than an increase in production). This law explains the possibility of "downward spirals," or not-self-correcting recessions. "Keynes pointed out that weak demand for goods and services leading to downward pressure on wages and layoffs was likely to further weaken aggregate demand by reducing the buying power of the majority of consumers. He pointed out that this would in turn lead to more downward pressure on wages and more layoffs, which would reduce the demand for goods even further." Downward spiral.

The reason that few economists before Keynes acknowledged the possibility of such a downward spiral is that they had been seduced by Say's Law, which is basically the reverse of Keynes's macro law of supply and demand. It says that in the aggregate, supply creates its own demand. "Say's Law implies that there can never be insufficient demand for goods in general, and governments therefore need not concern themselves with recessions, which should cure themselves." As David Ricardo expressed it, the rationale between Say's Law is that every dollar of goods produced generates a dollar of income or purchasing power, either through wages or profits. And while it's true that people don't spend all their income on consumption but instead save some of it, which means that consumption demand falls short of the value of goods produced, the money they save goes into banks which then lend it to businesses -- *all* of it, at the equilibrium rate of interest -- because if they don't lend, they can't make profits. And businesses in turn use the money to invest. So the shortfall in consumption demand is made up for by investment demand, and as a whole, aggregate demand equals aggregate supply.

The flaw in this reasoning, which Keynes pointed out, is that, "while it is true that every dollar's worth of production generates exactly a dollar's worth of income or potential purchasing power, it is not necessarily true that a dollar's worth of income always generates a dollar's worth of demand for goods and services." Aggregate demand can be greater than income if, for example, actors use *previous* savings to spend more than their current income, or if they borrow against future income. Or aggregate demand can be *less* than income because the fact that at the equilibrium rate of interest the supply of loans is equal to the demand for loans does not mean that business demand for investment goods has to be equal to household savings. After all, businesses do not use all the loans they receive to buy investment goods (capital goods). Sometimes they buy government bonds or shares of stock in other businesses, which does not add a single dollar to demand.

"A given value of production *does* generate an equal value of income. But *when* that income gets used to demand goods and services can make a great deal of difference. If less income is used to demand goods and services in a year than were produced in that year, aggregate demand will fall short of aggregate supply and production will fall, as the macro law of supply and demand teaches. If the sum total of household, business, and government demand is greater than production during a year, production will rise (if it can), as Keynes's macro law teaches."

Hahnel's remarks on inflation and unemployment are illuminating. Cyclical unemployment, you know, results when "low aggregate demand for goods leads employers to provide fewer jobs than the number of people willing and able to work," while structural unemployment occurs when "the skills and training of people in the labor force do not match the requirements of the jobs available." Structural

unemployment can be caused by changes in the international division of labor, rapid technical changes in methods of production, and educational systems that are slow to adapt to new economic conditions. If structural unemployment is the problem, policies that increase aggregate demand won't help much but instead will cause inflation, as in the 1970s. What are necessary are programs to retrain and relocate the workforce.

There are different kinds of inflation too. Demand-pull inflation tends to occur when the economy is reaching its full potential of output but demand is still increasing. So prices rise. Cost-push inflation is when, say, employers raise prices because employees have negotiated a wage increase. So the rise in prices compensates for the wage increase.

"It is important to note that structural unemployment can exist in the presence of adequate aggregate demand for goods and services, and cost-push inflation can exist even when aggregate demand does not exceed aggregate supply." In other words, stagflation can happen. "Our Keynesian macro model does *not* help us understand how stagflation is possible." The point is that "demand-pull inflation can coexist with rising structural unemployment, and cyclical unemployment can coexist with increasing cost-push inflation. Often conflicts over distribution, changes in the international division of labor, and rapid technological changes generate significant amounts of structural unemployment and cost-push inflation to go along with the cyclical unemployment and demand-pull inflation the simple Keynesian macro model explains."

As for inflation, Hahnel debunks some myths. It is *not* bad for everyone. It means that prices are rising *on average*, at different speeds. "If the prices of the things you buy are rising faster than the prices of the things you sell" -- and everyone sells something, be it labor-power or goods or whatever -- "you will be 'hurt' by inflation. That is, your real buying power, or real income, will fall. But if the prices of the things you sell are rising faster than the prices of the things you buy, your real income will increase. So for the most part, what inflation does is rob Peters to pay Pauls. That is, inflation redistributes real income. ....Inflationary redistribution is essentially determined by changes in relative bargaining power between actors in the economy." So if corporations and the wealthy are becoming more powerful, inflation will make the distribution of income more inequitable, because prices will rise faster than wages.

Sometimes inflation can be so extreme or unpredictable that it makes businesses invest less and people work less, in which case it reduces output. But that's rare. "Most of us should think long and hard before joining corporations and the wealthy who put fighting inflation at the top of their list of problems they want the government to prioritize. The wealthy rationally fear that inflation can reduce the value of their assets. And employers have an interest in prioritizing the fight against inflation over the fight against unemployment because periodic bouts of unemployment reduce labor's bargaining power."

....Hahnel argues that "wage-led growth" is possible, that higher wage rates don't have to lead to lower long-run economic growth by means of lower capital accumulation (because of a wage squeeze on profits). The point is that higher wages mean higher aggregate demand, which stimulates greater capacity utilization. "Depressing wages and thereby consumption does leave more output available for capital accumulation, but by lowering the demand for goods and services it also decreases capacity utilization." It could lower the rate of growth of actual GDP even while increasing the rate of growth of potential GDP.

Such ideas, put forward by Michael Kalecki and Josef Steindl, provide a plausible explanation of the lower rates of economic growth in advanced economies over the past thirty years. "As corporations have increased their power vis-à-vis both their employees and their customers, they have been able to drive real wages down over the past thirty years. This has prevented aggregate demand from increasing as fast as potential production and led to falling rates of capacity utilization and lower rates of economic growth." Think of the fact that Scandinavian economies had higher rates of growth than most other advanced economies for fifty years despite higher tax rates and lower rates of technological innovation. "Could it be that strong unions, high real wages, and high taxes to finance high levels of public spending are not detrimental to long-run growth at all, but quite the opposite?"

Hahnel challenges the conventional wisdom regarding international trade, too. Sure, it *can* be efficient because of comparative advantage, but it can also be very inefficient. Adjustment costs, for example, can be significant -- moving people and resources out of one industry and into another -- and the social costs (environmental, etc.) of a country's specialization in some good are not reflected in prices, even

though these costs can be considerable. They might be such that the country *shouldn't* specialize in that good, i.e. that its comparative advantage has been misidentified because of the biases and inefficiencies of the market. He also notes that "the theory of comparative advantage is usually interpreted as implying that a country should specialize even more in its traditional export products, since those would presumably be the industries in which the country enjoys a comparative advantage. But underdeveloped economies are less developed precisely because they have lower levels of productivity than other economies enjoy. If less developed economies further specialize in the sectors they have always specialized in, it may well be *less* likely that they will find ways to increase their productivity." Japan and South Korea, for instance, were smart enough not to accept their old comparative advantages but instead to *create* new ones in industries where it would be easier to achieve large productivity increases. Industries like cars and steel and then, later, electronics and computers. Productivity increases were easier in these industries than in Japan's old comparative advantage of textile production.

International trade also tends to increase global inequality. The terms of trade between countries are usually such that countries that were better off in the first place get most of whatever efficiency gains there are in trade. The main reason for this is that productive capital is more scarce globally than labor, so that relatively poor labor-rich ("southern") countries have to compete among themselves for the scarce machines of the capital-rich ("northern") countries. This gives the latter power to dictate the terms of trade, which therefore end up being disadvantageous to labor-rich countries. Also, if capital-intensive industries are characterized by a faster pace of innovation than labor-intensive industries, the terms of trade will deteriorate for southern countries. Third, if markets are not all equally competitive but instead northern exporters have more market power than southern exporters, the terms of trade will be even worse for the latter than in competitive markets.

Trade also increases inequality *within* countries. Mainstream trade theory itself explains why, at least with regard to rich northern countries. "According to Heckscher-Ohlin theory, countries will have a comparative advantage in goods that use inputs, or factors of production, in which the country is relatively abundant. But this means trade increases the demand for relatively abundant factors of production and decreases the demand for factors that are relatively scarce within countries. In advanced economies where the capital-labor ratio is higher than elsewhere, and therefore capital is 'relatively abundant,' Heckscher-Ohlin theory predicts that increased trade will increase the demand for capital, increasing its return, and decrease the demand for labor, depressing wages. Of course this is exactly what has occurred in the U.S., making the AFL-CIO a consistent critic of trade liberalization. In advanced economies where the ratio of skilled to unskilled labor is higher than elsewhere, Heckscher-Ohlin theory also predicts that increased trade will increase the demand for skilled labor and decrease the demand for unskilled labor and thereby increase wage differentials."

However, Heckscher-Ohlin theory can't explain rising inequality in less developed economies. In fact, it predicts the opposite; unskilled labor should get higher returns from trade because that is what those countries are relatively abundant in. The problem is that H-O theory, like all theories, is *ceteris paribus*, ignoring dynamics that in this case overpower the theory. Specifically, decades ago large amounts of land in the third world had a sufficiently low value that billions of peasants could live on them without trouble from local economic and political elites who *now* want to use the land for valuable export crops. So peasant squatters are no longer tolerated. The "Green Revolution" -- which made much of the rural labor force redundant in third-world agriculture -- globalization, and export-oriented agriculture have increased the value of third-world land, so billions of peasants have been driven out of rural areas into megacities where they apply for new labor-intensive manufacturing jobs produced by trade liberalization and international investment. But there are far fewer jobs than ex-peasants who need them, so wage rates are falling, not rising.

International investment, like trade, can either increase or decrease global efficiency and inequality. But it usually comes with the bad, not the good. Direct foreign investment can be very profitable for investors, but, contrary to what mainstream economists think, that isn't necessarily because the plant and machinery are more productive in third-world countries than they would have been at home. It could be because the bargaining power of third-world workers is even less than that of their first-world counterparts.

Or because third-world governments are so desperate to woo foreign investors that they offer large tax breaks and lower environmental standards. Similarly, international *financial* investment can lead to huge efficiency losses, for example when investors panic and sell off their currency holdings, stocks, and bonds in an "emerging market economy," which can erase all the gains that had been made over many years.

International investment also usually increases global inequality. "Global efficiency rises when international loans from northern economies raise productivity more in southern economies than they would have raised productivity domestically. But when capital is scarce globally, competition among southern borrowers drives interest rates on international loans up to the point where lenders capture the greater part of the efficiency gain.... So even when international financial markets work smoothly and efficiently, they usually increase income inequality between countries." But when they don't work smoothly and efficiently, it's even worse. For instance, international financial crises give foreign investors the opportunity to buy up businesses at very cheap prices. Hahnel explains the "great global asset swindle" as follows: "International investors lose confidence in a third-world economy, dumping its currency, bonds, and stocks. At the insistence of the IMF, the central bank in the third-world country tightens the money supply to boost domestic interest rates to prevent further capital outflows in an unsuccessful attempt to protect the currency [i.e., to prevent it from depreciating more]. Even healthy domestic companies [as a result] can no longer obtain or afford loans, so they join the ranks of bankrupted domestic businesses available for purchase. As a precondition for receiving the IMF bailout, the government abolishes any remaining restrictions on foreign ownership of corporations, banks, and land. With a depreciated local currency and a long list of bankrupt local businesses, the economy is ready for the acquisition experts from Western multinational corporations and banks who come to the fire sale with a thick wad of almighty dollars in their pockets."

As for *efficiency*, empirical data prove that neoliberal policies have not accelerated world economic growth. Growth rates were much higher in the Bretton Woods era than they have been in the neoliberal era.

Hahnel's remarks on balance-of-payments accounts and exchange rates are illuminating. I won't summarize them all. A surplus on the account is when there is a net inflow of a country's currency into that country, due, in the case of the trade account, to greater exports than imports. (With U.S. exports, for instance, dollars flow into the country from the international currency market, because foreigners have to pay for U.S. goods with dollars. So they trade their own currency for dollars in foreign exchange markets and then send those dollars into the U.S.) A deficit is when there is a net outflow of the country's currency because of higher imports than exports. (There are also short-run and long-run capital accounts, which have to do with international investment.) "If the U.S. runs a $100 billion balance of payments deficit in a given year this means that there are 100 billion more dollars in the international currency market at the end of the year than there were at the beginning of the year -- and we would expect the value of the dollar to fall in foreign exchange markets, *ceteris paribus*." That is, the dollar will exchange for fewer yen, francs, pesos, etc., because there are more dollars in the currency market. I guess you could say there has been inflation with respect to the dollar in the currency market, so one dollar buys fewer "goods," i.e. currencies, than before. Conversely, I suppose a balance of payments deficit entails disinflationary pressures in the home market, because there are fewer dollars (for example) in the U.S. to pay for goods. [Is that right??] And because a dollar exchanges for fewer yen and so on, imports will be relatively more expensive. Which will tend to cause a decline in imports -- as exports increase because of the dollar's (and hence American products') relative cheapness -- which will lower the balance of payments deficit or even lead to a surplus. So you see that the market has equilibrating tendencies.

A balance of payments surplus, on the other hand, means there are fewer dollars (say) in the foreign exchange market and more in the U.S., which surely entails inflationary pressures (and/or pressures for the dollar to appreciate). And with inflation or dollar appreciation, U.S. goods and services become more expensive in international terms, which means that exports decline and imports increase -- because now international goods are relatively cheaper for U.S. consumers to buy -- which reduces the balance of payments surplus until, perhaps, it becomes a deficit and the dollar depreciates because the foreign exchange market is flooded with dollars. (Dollars flow out of the U.S. and into the currency market where they exchange for other currencies with which to buy imports.) This depreciation reduces the incentive for U.S. consumers to buy imports and increases the incentive for foreigners to buy U.S. goods. So dollars flow

back into the U.S., the domestic economy is stimulated, maybe the balance of payments account returns to a surplus, and inflationary pressures return. Etc.[1]

Another useful comment: "When domestic interest rates fall relative to interest rates in the world, fewer foreigners will invest their financial wealth in a country, and more domestic wealth-holders will invest abroad where interest rates are higher. Conversely, a rise in domestic interest rates relative to the rest of the world induces an inflow of foreign financial investment in response to the higher interest payments, and reduces the outflow of domestic financial investment."

Stuff about the IMF:

> In exchange for a "bailout loan" that allows the country to pay off international loans coming due that it would otherwise have to default on, IMF "conditionality agreements" typically demand that the recipient government reduce spending and increase taxes, and the central bank reduce the money supply -- in addition to demanding removal of restrictions on international trade and investment and foreign ownership. Since the economy is invariably already in recession, fiscal and monetary "austerity" further aggravate the recession. Reducing government spending and increasing taxes both decrease aggregate demand, and therefore decrease employment and production. Reducing the money supply raises interest rates, which reduces investment demand and further decreases aggregate demand, employment, and production....
>
> ....The IMF policies are designed to increase the probability that the country will be able to repay its international creditors, and make perfect sense once one realizes this is their goal. If the government is in danger of defaulting on its "sovereign" international debt, forcing it to turn budget deficits into surpluses provides funds for repaying its international creditors. If the private sector is in danger of default, anything that reduces imports and increases exports or increases the inflow of new international investment will provide foreign exchange needed for debt repayment. Deflationary fiscal and monetary policy reduces aggregate demand and therefore inflation, which tends to increase exports and decrease imports. By reducing aggregate demand, deflationary fiscal and monetary policy also reduces output and therefore income, which further reduces imports. Tight monetary policy raises domestic rates, which reduces the outflow of domestic financial investment and increases the inflow of new foreign financial investment, providing more foreign exchange to pay off the international creditors whose loans are coming due. Finally, since all in the country who owe foreign creditors receive their income in local currency, anything that keeps the local currency from depreciating will allow debtors to buy more dollars with their local currency, which is what they need to pay their international creditors. IMF austerity programs are well designed to turn stricken economies into more effective debt repayment machines as quickly as possible.

International economic considerations can help explain political behavior that might otherwise seem paradoxical or stupid. Hahnel gives the example of Jimmy Carter reneging on his campaign promise to prioritize the fight against unemployment over the fight against inflation. His betrayal of this promise was partly responsible for his loss to Ronald Reagan. So why did he do it? In part because of reasons having to do with the balance of payments. In 1977 the U.S.'s trade account deficit was increasing, which put downward pressure on the value of the dollar. "What made this particularly worrisome was that Saudi Arabia was Washington's ally inside OPEC and had prevented the OPEC oil price increases from being even greater by increasing its own production and sales. Since the oil price increases were widely believed to be responsible for a substantial part of the stagflation -- rising unemployment *and* rising inflation -- that rocked the European and U.S. economies in the 1970s, Carter deemed it critical to persuade the Saudis not to abandon their opposition to the majority of their Arab brethren in OPEC who wanted to cut world supplies

[1] [I don't trust my analysis. I'm an idiot at economics.]

and boost oil prices even further. But the Saudis were asking why they should continue to trade oil for dollars if the value of the dollar was going to continue to fall -- as it surely would if U.S. trade deficits continued to rise." If the dollar was going to continue to fall, it was better for the Saudis just to leave more oil in the ground where it could only increase in value. Now, if Carter had tried to aggressively combat unemployment this would have increased production and income but also imports (and inflation, I guess?), and thereby increased the trade deficit even more. So he adopted deflationary fiscal policies, which caused the trade deficit to disappear in the recession of 1980. Thus he defended the value of the dollar in order to prevent oil prices from rising even more. (The poor guy was caught in a double bind. Had he adopted expansionary policies, the Saudis would have let oil prices rise, which would have exacerbated inflation and maybe unemployment too, since high oil prices were probably partially responsible for high unemployment. (Right?) So he adopted deflationary policies, which led to higher unemployment. There was no way out for him, it seems.)

Carter also "betrayed" progressives by reappointing Paul Volcker as chairman of the Fed, which he did to show the Saudis he was serious about shoring up the dollar. "The only way to [raise the dollar's value] quickly was to raise U.S. interest rates significantly above world levels to induce a massive inflow of finance capital on the short-run capital account to counter the trade deficit until it could be reduced." Incidentally, the reason why Volcker's raising of interest rates apparently contributed to the 1980s debt crisis in third world countries is, I suppose, that in order to attract finance capital, these countries had to raise their interest rates too, which led to debilitating levels of debt.

In the penultimate chapter Hahnel demolishes Milton Friedman's apologetics for capitalism. He points out, for example, that the market isn't "free, voluntary, and non-coercive" if people come to it with different amounts of capital. In a sense, yes, employees have freely chosen to work for someone else. But they have been coerced into having to make that unpleasant decision by their relative lack of capital. It is either rent yourself out or starve.

It's usually wrong to say that powerful institutions don't work well or that powerful people and bureaucrats are incompetent. They're actually quite competent at fulfilling their real goals, which are rarely the ones they announce to the public. And their institutions do what they're supposed to; they serve the interests of those who control them. For example, a stagnant economy is in the interest of many of the most powerful institutions in society, for various reasons; hence the economy is allowed to remain stagnant, and institutions do not function to make it more dynamic. Before 9/11 the CIA didn't prioritize the fight against terrorism, as scholarship proves; the terrorist attack therefore didn't prove the CIA's "incompetence." What it proved was the agency's lack of concern for the population. Under Cheney, too, the hunt for bin Laden wasn't a top priority, as shown by the fact that he passed up good opportunities to get him. Bin Laden's existence was useful to Cheney as a tool for instilling fear in the public. Intelligence agencies weren't really incompetent with regard to the whole "weapons of mass destruction" fiasco; they understood that Hussein wasn't manufacturing WMDs. But Cheney and Bush wanted to go into Iraq for strategic reasons (to get control of oil reserves with which to influence global politics, etc.), so they manufactured whatever reasons they thought would work. First WMDs, then promoting democracy. It's true they didn't achieve their maximal goals, but that was because of unexpected massive popular resistance by Iraqis -- not the sectarian violence but peaceful protest movements unreported in the U.S.'s mainstream media.

Individuals in elite institutions can be stupid in many ways, but they do their jobs fairly well as determined by institutional priorities, which is why they have high positions to begin with.

Reading *The Tyranny of Oil: The World's Most Powerful Industry -- and What We Must Do To Stop It* (2008), by Antonia Juhasz. Eye-opening. It seems to me that most of the corporate mergers that have been going on for the last thirty years, especially in the oil industry, as well as all kinds of oligopolistic practices that go on constantly, patently violate the Sherman Antitrust Act (1890), the Clayton Antitrust Act (1914), the Robinson-Pattman Act (1936), and others. The fact that the FTC has been more or less in the pocket of big business doesn't mean that all these corporate executives aren't technically felons. Bill Gates included. The recent wave of mergers and concentration has probably been as bad as, or worse than, the one a hundred years ago.

Price-fixing, collusion, conspiracy, fraud of every kind.... The corporate world is a pure swamp of illegal activities. It's the jungle. Lawlessness on a scale that puts organized crime to shame. The laws are just not enforced -- because their enforcement would mean the end of American capitalism. Literally. Especially when you take into consideration all the illegal union-busting that goes on everywhere, the illegal intimidation of workers, illegal firings, illegal disregarding of safety and environmental regulations, and illegal or illegitimate forms of political funding and manipulation, and on and on. And all the stuff that Naomi Klein documents, all the egregious stuff that goes on with the IMF and the WTO and the CIA serving corporate agendas and paramilitary forces in Latin America and illegal wars started partly on behalf of the oil industry.... The upper echelons of America and the world are teeming with literal criminals. Capitalism simply will not be constrained by law. It is too explosive; it has to burst the law's straitjacket constantly. Something as quaint as *law* stands no chance against the most powerful forces in world history.

Reading this book makes one very angry. The history of the oil industry is unbelievable. What these institutions do. Destroying millions of lives, destroying communities and the environment, destroying economic independence and competition, destroying democracy. Under Bush the energy industry had one long orgy.

Aniela and I are in Forli for a day, whence we're going to Bologna, then Lucca in Tuscany to meet my parents, then Florence, then Assisi, then Spello, and then Pisa to catch a plane to Krakow. Forli is utterly charming, full of winding alleys like in Venice and wonderful architecture, a much more human place than any in America.

Lightly skimming two bestsellers because they're not theoretically interesting, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (2002), by Joseph Stiglitz, and *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster* (2009), by Rebecca Solnit. It's usually a mistake to buy bestsellers, but I needed something to read. The first book is about the criminal follies of people in power[1] -- in the IMF and the U.S. Treasury -- while the second is about the magnificent humanity of the un-powerful in the wake of natural and manmade disasters. Conventional wisdom, propagated by the media and power-structures, says that during disasters people revert to savagery and have to be controlled by governments and the police. This book puts forward the opposite view, the commonsense view that people tend to become remarkably altruistic in disasters and that it is the people in power who behave savagely. Disasters bring out the best in most of us -- because we're no longer constrained by barbaric institutions but in the absence of social order are able to act as human(e) nature dictates, compassionately and helpfully toward those most in need. In the coming decades, as natural disasters occur more frequently and with greater intensity, the lessons of this book will become ever more relevant.

Stiglitz, who, shockingly enough, has *some* (not much) intellectual integrity despite being mainstream, proves that Chomsky's view of the IMF as merely a branch of the U.S. Treasury is spot-on. And the Treasury is basically a branch of Wall Street. In recent decades the IMF has rivaled the oil industry in its destructive impact on humankind. Stiglitz also observes that the World Trade Organization is just as dominated by commercial interests as the IMF is by financial. "Just as the IMF gives short shrift to the concerns of the poor -- there are billions available to bail out banks, but not the paltry sums to provide food subsidies for those thrown out of work as a result of IMF programs -- the WTO puts trade over all else. Those who seek to prohibit the use of nets that harvest shrimp but also catch and endanger turtles are told by the WTO that such regulation would be an unwarranted intrusion on free trade."

The evolution of the IMF and the World Bank has been ironic. They were originally Keynesian institutions fully cognizant of market failures. The IMF's mission was to prevent another global depression, in part by lending to countries facing an economic downturn so that their level of aggregate demand could be maintained and a depression be averted. According to Stiglitz, the World Bank (or International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) for decades took seriously its mission of alleviating poverty by limiting itself to giving loans for projects like building roads and dams. In the late 1970s things changed.

[1] To be exact, their policies are "follies" if their goal is the IMF's stated purpose of helping to stabilize societies undergoing economic crises; if, on the other hand, their goal is the IMF's real function of protecting Western investors, opening up countries to Western investment, etc., they're not "follies" at all but perfectly rational.

"Founded on the belief that there is a need for international pressure on countries to have more expansionary economic policies -- such as increasing expenditures, reducing taxes, or lowering interest rates to stimulate the economy -- today the IMF typically provides loans only if countries engage in policies like cutting deficits, raising taxes, or raising interest rates that lead to a contraction of the economy." Ironic, eh? The World Bank has become more intertwined with the IMF than before, now giving "structural adjustment loans" to countries that accept IMF-imposed conditions. And after the fall of Communism, both institutions, though especially the IMF, guided the transition to capitalism. Badly. The point is that, far from facilitating global stability, they have evolved so as to create and exacerbate instability. Because that serves the interests of the institutions whose servants they are. (It used to be that these latter institutions, particularly financial sectors, had an interest in stability; in the 1970s and 1980s, as you know, that changed, when regulations were dismantled and instability became wildly profitable.)

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The phenomenology of greeting someone.-- Hand-shaking and hand-waving as greetings are amusing to think about. Two selves approach each other; they wave at each other, or they shake hands. What is happening there? What is the significance of these hand motions? Common sense says they signify recognition, and common sense is right. But the matter is deeper than some such glib statement. Two selves are together in the same room or the same elevator or the same area; until they show that they recognize each other as selves, a subtle tension is quite possibly in the air. Coming in contact with the other....but not acknowledging or being acknowledged by him or her (or them)....can produce a slight or mighty dissonance in the mind. The moment can be uncomfortable. So then someone breaks the silence and a mutual or collective sigh of relief is felt, and people joke together or engage in pleasant small-talk. The ice is broken. One has been confirmed as one has confirmed. One's self-love has been at least weakly validated by the recognition of one as a self worth greeting. Similarly, with a hand-wave to another self in the distance....one moves one's arm and hand from side to side, shakes them back and forth several times -- this seemingly comically arbitrary movement -- to indicate "I acknowledge you as a person, a self with enough value to be worth acknowledging, in the expectation or knowledge that you so acknowledge me." And with the hand-shake....two hands clasped together moving up and down two or three times....two selves are meeting in mental space on apparently equal footing.

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On Sam Harris's book "The Moral Landscape."-- "I will argue that morality can be considered an undeveloped branch of science." "[I will show] how science can determine human values." "The split between facts and values -- and, therefore, between science and morality -- is an illusion." Great, here we go, good old-fashioned vulgar scientism. Let's see what our esteemed New Atheist has to say. "Despite a widespread belief to the contrary, scientific validity is not the result of scientists abstaining from making value judgments; rather, scientific validity is the result of scientists making their best effort to *value* principles of reasoning that link their beliefs to reality." "The very idea of 'objective' knowledge (i.e., knowledge acquired through honest observation and reasoning) has values built into it, as every effort we make to discuss facts depends upon principles that we must first value (e.g., logical consistency, reliance on evidence, parsimony, etc.)." It is never a good idea for a pygmy like Harris to take on a giant like Hume. Yes, Mr. Harris, you are right that scientists value reason and that the pursuit of objective knowledge presupposes certain values. One cannot reason without implicitly valuing reason, just as one cannot drink water without implicitly valuing water or the drinking of water. Even so, to drink is not to value, as to reason is not to value. Said differently, value or valuing is an internal constituent neither of water nor of reason.[1] Every human act incorporates value, but the object of the act itself is distinguishable from the value

[1] By drinking water one interacts with water, just as by reasoning one can be said to interact with reason. For my purposes, the cases are analogous.

one assigns to it. The idea of objective knowledge does not have values built into it; it means awareness of truth, a definition that makes no reference to the concept 'value.' *Obviously* scientists value principles of reasoning; the point is that one cannot *prove* or *test* this value, the notion of doing which is either meaningless or question-begging.

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The sovereign of nature.-- A case can be made that the human brain, or certainly the human body, is the most complex structure in the universe.

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Chomsky speaks.-- "The main domestic function of the Pentagon has always been to transfer funds to high-tech industry. MIT is part of that funnel, part of the funnel by which the public unwittingly pays the costs of high-tech industry. The whole of the modern economy, if you look through it, is crucially based on this. So the Pentagon's budget [in the mid-1990s] has to not only stay [despite the federal government's balanced-budget obsession] but in fact go up [as it did]." The other part of the budget that went up in the mid-'90s, he remarks, was funding for prisons, in part as a tool of "social cleansing" and instilling fear (of crime) in the public[1] and in part because the prison system is a fairly significant Keynesian stimulus for the economy.

As for the obsession with the national debt, in the 1990s the debt actually wasn't massive compared to what it had been in the 1950s, parts of the 1800s, etc., when relative to GDP it was sometimes much higher than in the 1990s.

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On Slavoj Žižek.-- I've only read a little about his ideas and skimmed a chapter from one book, but skepticism of fashionable thinkers (especially postmodernist ones) is always in order. Their fame, after all, has no implications with respect to the value of their work -- except possibly negative implications. What makes a living thinker famous, aside from luck and "connections," is his appropriateness to existing institutions, his successful embodiment of fashionable norms. The norms may be valuable or they may be worthless; but there are innumerable examples of thinkers who were famous in their day who are now forgotten because their ideas had little value. One can almost say it is accidental if a fashionable thinker is also objectively worthy. Noam Chomsky is such a happy accident -- although even he has always had to fight an uphill battle. Kant was another such accident, famous in his day; so, eventually, was Hume (not truly recognized until later in life), and Leibniz and Descartes. -But even those guys are maybe not great examples, because my critique does not really apply to natural scientists and mathematicians, with regard to whom "fashion" is necessarily less fickle or "merely institutional." The point is that if I ever read Žižek it will not be because I expect much.

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Chomsky speaks.-- In a market system, your dollar is your vote. You have as many votes as you have dollars. If you have zero dollars, you have zero votes. Unborn generations have zero dollars, so what happens to them is of zero significance in a market system. What's done today, they have to live with. If

[1] Such functions need not be consciously in the minds of lawmakers when they design their policies -- although quite possibly they are, at least "in the back" of their minds. But the point is that the policies are thought to be having positive effects on social stability etc., and that certain interests are lobbying for their extension. (Maybe ordinary constituents who are afraid of all the black people they see everywhere, or businesses convinced of the economic and social value of prisons, or whatever.)

we destroy resources, they have to live with it. So to the extent -- the limited extent -- that market systems are allowed to function, they're just guaranteed to self-destruct. That's why if you take a look at modern history, in countries that were more or less organized and functioning they never allowed market systems to function. In Britain there was an experiment with laissez-faire around the 1860s and 1870s, but it was called off very quickly by the business world because they saw it was going to wipe out communities and the environment. What they instituted in its place was a kind of social democratic system. (See *The Great Transformation*.)

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Quotations from the footnotes to Chomsky's "Understanding Power."-- Chapter 6: "[Thomas] Jefferson did not support capitalism; he supported independent production.... The fundamental Jeffersonian proposition is that 'widespread poverty and concentrated wealth cannot exist side by side in a democracy.' This proposition is dismissed by liberals making peace with the rich and coming to terms with inequality, but Jefferson perceived the basic contradictions between democracy and capitalism.... In 1817 he complained that the banks' mania 'is raising up a monied aristocracy in our country which has already set the government at defiance....' A year earlier he said he hoped the United States would reject the British example and 'crush in its birth the aristocracy of our monied corporations which dare already to challenge our government to a trial of strength and bid defiance to the laws of our country....'" "Men divide naturally into two parties, 'aristocrats and democrats,' [Jefferson] wrote. On one side stood 'those who fear and distrust the people, and wish to draw all powers from them into the hands of the higher classes'; on the other stood 'those who identify with the people, have confidence in them, cherish and consider them as the honest & safe, altho' not the most wise depository of the public interests....'"

Chapter 7: "Shorn of almost two centuries of 4th-of-July oratory, [the American Revolutionary War] was a military operation fought by a very small armed minority -- at almost no time did Washington's forces exceed 8000 men in a country which had at least 300,000 able-bodied males -- and backed by a force of 31,897 French ground troops and 12,660 sailors and Marines manning sixty-one major vessels. The total cost of the campaign to the French (almost $2 billion) drove the French monarchy into bankruptcy and subsequent revolution. But politically, the French had achieved exactly what they had intended to do: they had temporarily shattered Britain's position of pre-eminence not only in America but in Europe as well."

Chapter 2: El Salvador under the U.S.-client regime in the 1980s: "Tonita is a peasant from Santa Lucia, a rural village near the volcano of San Vicente in El Salvador. One day, two years ago, at 11:00 A.M., Tonita left her one-room home to carry lunch to her husband, Chepe, and their two teenage sons who were cutting firewood on the volcano. She left her three smallest children -- an 18-month-old daughter, a 3-year-old son and a 5-year-old daughter -- in the care of her sister and mother.... Entering the house [on her return], Tonita was greeted by the grisly spectacle of a feast macabre. Seated around a small table in the middle of her house were her mother, sister and three children. The decapitated heads of all five had been placed in front of each torso, their hands arranged on top, as if each body was stroking its own head. This had proven to be difficult in the case of the youngest daughter. The difficulty had been overcome by nailing the hands onto the head. The hammer had been left on the table. The floor and table were awash with blood. In the very center of the table was a large plastic bowl filled with blood; the air hung heavy with its sweet, cloying smell. Tonita's neighbors had fled when the Salvadoran National Guard began their killing. The *Guardia* had not tried to stop the people from fleeing and, indeed, they encouraged it. One neighbor, Doña Laura, returned for Tonita and found her standing in the doorway, moaning and staring at her decapitated mother, sister and children.... This is only one tableau of many. Other *scènes macabres* have been created by the armed forces in their 10-year exhibition of horror and death. People are not just killed by death squads in El Salvador -- they are decapitated and then their heads are placed on pikes and used to dot the landscape. Men are not just disemboweled by the Salvadoran Treasury Police; their severed genitalia are stuffed into their mouths. Salvadoran women are not just raped by the National Guard; their wombs are cut from their bodies and used to cover their faces. It is not enough to kill children; they are dragged over barbed wire until the flesh falls from their bones while parents are forced to watch."

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More thoughts on materialist common sense.-- I've said this before, but to emphasize its importance I'll say it again. That the relations of production (which presuppose given levels of technology, scientific knowledge, etc.) are effectively the "base" of society should be a totally uncontroversial proposition. To think that intellectuals have debated it for decades is mind-boggling. All you have to do is reflect that the institutions and institutional actors with the greatest access to resources are going to have the greatest influence over society. Fewer resources, less influence. Institutions directly involved in the production and reproduction of resources -- of money, capital, technology, etc. -- are naturally going to have the most direct access to these resources, i.e. the greatest control over them. The actors who control these institutions, then, are going to have more power than other actors, and they will seek to make institutions in the rest of society "compatible" with their power or subservient to it. Which means making them compatible with the form of organizing relations of production in that society that has the most control over the most resources. In other words, the "dominant mode of production." In non-prehistoric societies, the class structure and implicit class struggle, which are defined by the relations between antagonistic positions in the mode of production, will therefore be central to social dynamics. The more exploitation of the producing class(es), the more power in the hands of the exploiting class(es), i.e. those who occupy the dominant positions in the dominant mode of production. (Their dominant position is a function of their control over the resources necessary to force others to produce for them.) The exploiters will try to increase exploitation as the exploited try to diminish it. The vicissitudes of this struggle will go far towards explaining other political and cultural phenomena, because the struggle -- which is integrally connected to the evolution of the relations of production, of the class structure, of economic institutions, as well as the closely related evolution of the forces of production -- largely determines who has how many and what kinds of resources when, what sorts of institutions and values the people with resources will promote, etc.

It is true that in other senses, the biological division between the sexes can be called the "foundation" of society. But not if you're talking about the specific forms that particular societies take. Biological facts do not explain that (do not explain differences between societies); economic institutions -- in addition to environmental circumstances and the nature of existing productive forces -- do, at least to a very rough approximation. (One also has to keep in mind Raymond Williams's concept of the "residual," the cultural, political, and economic residues of previous systems, as well as the sheer infinite complexity of a society's economic institutions, including the coexistence and even interpenetration of different modes of production.)

To take a non-capitalist example, in the Middle Ages the Church owned vast tracts of land and had immense wealth. As a consequence, it had enormous influence over the whole society. What could be more commonsensical? The Church's and the feudal aristocracy's ability to force others to work for them and to appropriate their surplus product allowed them to impose their institutions, norms, and values on the rest of society. Their control over the means of violence was necessary, of course, to their economic power -- and was in turn the result of prior economic facts, prior accumulation of resources by certain people and institutions, etc.

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It seems to me that to write about oneself nowadays, to write a memoir or some other such thing, is self-indulgent. Who cares anymore? A Christopher Hitchens (who just lost his voice, finally, due to cancer[1]) is a self-absorbed child, writing about all his glamorous experiences, the people he has known, his love of smoking and drinking, his exciting life. Humanity is at the edge; self-fixation is comical. Literature

[1] Unfortunately he can still write. Attacking Chomsky, for example, as a leader of the "paranoid anti-war left" and so on. (Is Malalai Joya, the young Afghan heroine of peace and human rights, who idolizes Chomsky, another leader of the paranoid anti-war left?)

itself, as I've said before, has come to seem a bit false or pointless or anachronistic. When everything is *urgent* and *serious*, is literary play not somehow inauthentic and "forced"? An author spending weeks, years creatively writing in solitude, agonizing over the right words, agonizing over characters and plots, all the while strongly suspecting that society does not care anymore, his work is "irrelevant" and will be forgotten. Writing fiction is no longer a culturally central activity but now feels self-indulgent, ego(t)istic rather than "altruistic" (see Susan Sontag's idea of "true culture"), part of the problem and not the solution. These sorts of feelings may well have been a factor in David Foster Wallace's suicide. Of course good literature and good memoirs are still worth writing....but things have changed, sadly.

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It should be clear from all I've said on the subject that the self and the internal(ized) abstract other are totally inseparable. Even analytically they cannot really be separated, because self-consciousness is self-otherness, and in order for such a thing to exist there has to be an "abstract" internalized other constantly present (implicitly) in consciousness. All this is fine, but it's disconcerting to think about deeply. When you react to something, for example, it isn't simply "*you*" reacting. It is also the other in you. You have spent your whole life internalizing people's behavior, such that when you act or react it is partly the internalization of all these people that is acting. You have learned what is appropriate in various situations, so you act in appropriate ways, in ways you think others will appreciate or as they would act themselves. Even in solitude your behavior is conditioned by others', and it is largely the other in you (which is a part of you) that is acting, or that is determining *how* you act.

And yet in all your acts there is also a "spontaneous" element, a primitively "authentic" or "purely you" element. There has to be, because you are a concrete being different from others. Maybe this element is what George Herbert Mead meant by the "I," as opposed to the "me." It is only implicit; you cannot be purely aware of it, because your awareness incorporates the other in you.

On another level, though, your whole self-expression in every moment -- every act, feeling, etc. -- is genuinely, authentically you. It is, after all, *your* self-expression. If you feel alienated or you feel as though you're always acting and not being yourself, *that* is authentically you, it is an expression of who you are at that time. It is impossible not to be yourself. -But in another sense -- or other senses -- it is definitely possible not to be yourself. I described one such sense above. In a way, we're never *just* ourselves; we're also others, having internalized other people's behavior. Sometimes in social situations you can be so self-conscious, so aware of others and concerned to please them, that you actually *feel* like you're not being yourself. You're not being "natural." This happens when the other in you, as *instantiated in* and *an internalization of* the people you're with, takes over your consciousness to such an extent that the "you" in you, or Mead's "I,"[1] the natural, spontaneous element, cannot express itself as it normally does but takes distorted, mutated, "nervous," "self-conscious" forms that might end up embarrassing you. The *other* blocks *you*, so to speak. I think that's a useful way to conceptualize it, maybe a psychologically or even biologically profound way. (These psychological divisions I'm talking about must after all have biological manifestations, which science will probably never understand.)

But of course all this is confusing, because your experiences with and internalizations of others have *formed* you. And you *are* an other to yourself, as shown by the fact that you can reflect on yourself and are at all times at least implicitly aware of yourself. So you are a self-other....but that formulation itself suggests that there is a "self" aspect in you and an "other" aspect and that they are somehow different -- even though in another sense they can't be, because you encompass both of them! Without the (internal) other there would be no you, only an animal consciousness. -Ugh, I'm tired of paradoxes.

After a certain point one loses interest in this sort of phenomenology because it is so difficult. Before giving up I'll just say that it's important to distinguish between senses of "other," even of the internal other. There is, first of all, the general abstract other that is always separating you from yourself, so making possible self-consciousness. Then there are the internalizations of specific people, which are really just your

[1] [I may have been conflating two different things.]

experiences of these people in addition to whatever unconscious significances they have for you. These people are for you instantiations of the general abstract other [that accompanies your consciousness], which is how it is possible for you to be aware of them as others at all. Then there is also your half-conscious or unconscious conception of what a "valuable" other is like, what traits he or she has that make him or her (or, more exactly, his or her self-regard) more real or confirmed (and so "significant" to you, hence worth getting recognition from) than other people. But this "conception" is not some definite idea but more like tendencies in you to react to certain kinds of people in certain ways. All your reactions are conditioned by this "tendential conception" of a valuable other; for instance, you might ignore some people because they don't fulfill it, maybe because they seem like fools or buffoons or whatever. The relation between this "tendential conception" and the general abstract other in your consciousness is not entirely clear, as I argued in the section above called "At the risk of repetition...." Another kind of internal other is the psychological and biological "legacy" of all your experiences with people, especially in your formative years, experiences that helped shape you into who you are, that helped form your psychological constitution. All these kinds of "others" probably merge into one another in your mind. They are part of you but not all of you.

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"The human harvest."-- Peter Marin: "Kant called the realm of [human] connection the kingdom of ends. Erich Gutkind's name for it was the absolute collective. My own term for the same thing is the human harvest -- by which I mean the webs of connection in which all human goods are clearly the results of a collective labor that morally binds us irrevocably to distant others. Even the words we use, the gestures we make, and the ideas we have, come to us already worn smooth by the labor of others, and they confer upon us an immense debt we do not fully acknowledge." When you talk or think, you are channeling the past and other people. When you put on your clothes or drive your car or use your computer, you are relating yourself to a network of other people. We are all indebted to each other.

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The cynic speaks.-- This life is not worth a potato, as Byron said (and Plato, Swift, Dante, Cervantes, Luther, Rochefoucauld, Wesley, Rousseau, Solomon, and countless others). Think of the professions, for example. To become (and then to *be*) a medical doctor or a lawyer you have to be not "intellectual" but an obedient drudge. To be a politician you have to be a liar, a panderer, and driven by power-hunger. To be a successful academic you cannot challenge institutional conventions -- as is true of every other job. To be a corporate executive you have to be obsessed with cost-cutting and money-making, and you have to be able to turn your back on humanity in a hundred different ways. To be a soldier you have to give up independent-mindedness and let yourself become a killing machine for hire. To be a scientist you have to be willing to spend your life immersed in unutterably tedious minutiae of theoretical or experimental research. To be a bus driver or janitor or fast-food employee or waiter or cleaning lady or secretary or receptionist or factory worker or clerk you have to tolerate exquisite boredom and subordination and the emptying of your mind (or maybe you don't have much of a mind to begin with). It's a wonderful world.

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In *The ABCs of Political Economy*, Robin Hahnel criticizes Marxism for postulating that the economic sphere is the dominant one in all societies. He thinks that the issue shouldn't be decided *a priori* but demands empirical investigation of particular societies. (He refers to a book co-written with Chomsky, who therefore probably agrees with him.) In one society, the "kinship sphere" might be dominant; in another, the political sphere. But this is confused. He is right to criticize Marxists for arguing that because every society needs to produce and distribute the material means of life, the economic sphere is "dominant" (whatever that means). That is not a valid argument. After all, biological reproduction is necessary too;

hence on this (flawed) reasoning, one could argue that kinship systems are dominant. But all this talk is riddled with confusions. First let's clarify the word "dominant." By using that word the Marxist means that relations of material production and distribution determine the form(s) of a society more than family relations do or political relations or some other set of cultural relations. This question of causal primacy, incidentally, is not the sort of thing that can be decided through empirical investigation. It is a matter of logic. It is inconceivable that merely by studying how a particular society was organized, an anthropologist could determine which sphere of social relations was primarily responsible for the society's total structure. How could such a conclusion be justified through an empirical description? The Marxist hypothesis is like Darwin's theory of natural selection, something we *bring to* the data to help interpret them. Actually, because this particular Marxist hypothesis has less cognitive content than the hypothesis of natural selection, it is even harder to imagine data disconfirming it than in the case of natural selection, which *can* be at least *modified* under the influence of data (as many Marxist hypotheses can, though not this one).

There are many reasons to think that the economy is causally primary; I gave one several days ago in the section above. Another is that social relations are mediated by, and constructed around, material things, which are produced and reproduced through economic relations. The specific form of the family will be strongly influenced by the sort of technology and physical structures that are available in a society, which are reproduced through a specific set of production relations. Thus the latter would seem to have more influence over how families are organized (*indirect* influence in *this* argument at least, influence mediated by the production of material things that are then used to express kinship relations) than vice versa.[1]

Of course in some societies production relations might be expressed in part *through* family relations, production being organized along kinship lines, but the logical priority of production, of the physical world and physical things and their reproduction, remains. To speak functionally, the kinship organization of production persists because it is functional for production; it is not true, on the other hand, that the specific way of organizing production relations persists because it is functional for family reproduction or sexual reproduction. That idea is just outlandish. Sexual reproduction can easily accommodate itself to whatever system of production relations exists (and is in part *constrained* to exist given the particular natural environment and the nature of productive forces).

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Anti-intellectual intellectuals.-- If intellectual curiosity means the desire to learn new things, encounter new ideas, explore and explain the world, then "intellectuals" have as little of it as other people do. They limit themselves to one field and do their job and earn their paycheck. In fact, most of them use their brain less than many "ordinary" people do.

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Academia is unusual among institutions in that it presents many opportunities to show one's humanity. Few academics, however, seem to take these opportunities. For instance, most professors and teacher assistants are rigid about grades, refusing to change them if a student complains, being wedded to their arbitrary little standards of what constitutes good work. I try not to be like that. If a student presents even a moderately persuasive case for my raising his grade, even if it has to do with his desire to graduate or get on the Dean's List or something like that, as long as he has shown effort throughout the semester and his grade is not far below what he wants it to be, I will do so. Why should I be a prick and stick to the subjective little value-judgment I made earlier? If a student has shown he cares, then I'm perfectly happy to make him happy. Institutions are bullshit; their standards mean virtually nothing. At this late stage of history there is no excuse for not knowing that. But most professors are glorified bureaucrats, so they're oblivious.

[1] That might be a bad argument.

Think about it: these stupid little games we play have no significance, these letters and numbers and pathetic attempts to be objective and standardized and fixedly ordered about arbitrary little papers and tests and quizzes when the world is an immense absurd place. As for students who are creative and intelligent and do assignments in their own way that maybe doesn't *perfectly* embody the formula that the professor was looking for, they definitely deserve not to be graded down. They usually are, though, as I know from personal experience. It is amusing and disgusting at the same time.

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A woman tells me that one reason women like the singer John Mayer is because his voice has something "dirty" about it. I suppose it is easy to imagine women masturbating while listening to him, fantasizing about sex with the person behind that dirty, rough voice. But what explains the appeal of such a voice? Why do women like to listen to it? Because its qualities exemplify one modality of masculine sexuality. Barry White's deep, sexy voice manifests another modality. Women want to be "*penetrated*" by such a voice and so by masculine sexuality; -- listening to these singers and others such as Bruce Springsteen and Elvis can be like simulated sex, dirty, rough, or smooth and gentle in the arms of a strong mellifluous voice like Josh Groban's. Of course the fundamental psychological fact of self-love is implicated in all this too: imaginatively or physically *joining* oneself with these singers and with a strong man more generally entails physical, emotional, and sexual self-confirmation, the proving and enactment of one's reality in the crucible of recognition by an other who is implicitly seen as stronger, realer, more dominating than oneself.[1] [Such ideas are arrived at through imaginative, 'empathic' contemplation of a woman's state of mind when listening to one of these singers. They aren't just arbitrary 'external' assertions.]

It is ironic that even though men are commonly thought to be obsessed with sex, it's closer to the truth to say that with women everything is connected to sex and sexuality. Their *being* is more sexual and sexually manipulable than men's. For men, sex is sort of an external thing, a drive to fuck as many women as possible and then get on with your day. For women it is more internal and seemingly (relatively) all-encompassing -- as during sex itself, for example. Men's sexual experience is almost entirely concentrated in the penis, an external organ; women's can be diffused through the whole body. The breasts, the neck, the legs, the butt, the feet (sucking on them, say), everything that can be grabbed and caressed and kissed. And a powerful female orgasm can apparently send ripples of ecstasy through the whole body, whereas a man's is like a contraction of the muscles in the pelvic area, a sort of long grunt of pleasure down there and then it's over. Women are sexually sensitive almost everywhere, from their feet to their scalp (massage), their fingertips to their neck. *Touch* is powerful for them, much more than for men. Precisely because it's more sexual for them. But their sexual sense generally has to be awoken from the outside, conjured under the touch of a man or the sound of his voice,[2] whereas men's "sexual sense," insofar as it exists at all, is more or less always present in the form of their underlying "external" *drive* to touch and penetrate the attractive women they see.

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For people with spirit, a sublime experience is less sublime if it is shared. The sublimity is concentrated in the solitude. The more people, the less profound. (Implications??)

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[1] It is only women, not men, who experience sex in this implicitly "self-subordinating" way. They almost necessarily do, in light of their relative passiveness, their *being penetrated, being held, being moved*, during sex. (Doubtless there are exceptions of half-masculinized women who want to be the active partner and half-feminized men who want to be the passive partner. But the rarity of these exceptions is significant. Anyway, remember I've always said there is a bit of the feminine in men and a bit of the masculine in women, to varying degrees depending on the person.)

[2] [Yes, I know lesbians exist too.]

In the Piazza of San Marco in Florence is a church in which lies the dried-out corpse of Saint Antonino from the fifteenth century, his hands folded on his chest in a well-lit glass tomb. The sight is macabre. Above and behind him and all over the church are models of Jesus's crucifixion, this man being tortured to death on a wooden cross with blood pouring from his hands and his pierced ribs. The church is cavernous and dark, with heavenly art and stained glass windows lulling the beholder into a state of awe intensified by the enforced silence, the whispering, the candles, the pews for praying on your knees with your head lowered and your hands clasped, and the "*mass-iveness*" of it all. And there are the rituals, the imbibing of wine (Christ's blood) and the wafer (Christ's flesh), and numerous such otherworldly, morbid rituals. And you realize that Catholicism is a religion of death. It is immersion in the past, preservation of the past and the dead, worship of the sphere of after-death, rejection of the worldly and the living. The five-hundred-year-old withered corpse of St. Antonino is a nice emblem of Catholicism. A religion so death-focused could not have triumphed in a dynamic civilization such as that before the late Roman Empire; and after a reemergence of dynamism, an epochal reformation was necessary. Dynamism, individuality, *life* had to be reintroduced into religion. And yet even Protestantism is in general a sort of compromise between life and death, this-worldly affirmation and negation. Some forms of Catholicism can even be more this-worldly than some kinds of Protestantism -- for example, liberation theology versus, perhaps, primitive Methodism. The forms that religion takes depend on the social context, but Catholicism has a definite tendency to oppress and *weigh down* the human spirit with death and its conceptual offshoots. The scent of decay, of a decaying antiquity, lingers about it.

It is ironic, then, that Catholicism would have inspired so much more great art (though not music) than Protestantism. Or perhaps not so ironic. An obsession with the transcendent, after all, has often characterized the artistic temperament, as has a peculiar morbidity. On the other side, the Church has always used art as a means to intoxicate and entrance the human spirit, to raise its vision from ordinary life to eternal life-in-death. And to direct it from the present to the past, which is also supposed to be the posthumous future.

One might defend Catholicism by arguing that it "affirms" one side of man, the "transcendent" side, the wonder-full side, the side that looks toward the universe and craves divinity and immortality, as well as the *communal* side, which goes together with the Catholic emphasis on tradition, ritual, memory, the past. In some sense, this may be true. Nonetheless, Catholicism remains, or tends to remain, a religion of anti-individuality, non-presence -- the non-present, the mythical past and post-deathly future -- death-in-life and life-in-death, which as such is opposed to a society immersed in a dynamic and forward-looking present.

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The primal urge.-- I have replaced Schopenhauer's will-to-live, Nietzsche's and Adler's will-to-power, and Freud's will-to-pleasure with the will to self-confirmation, which encompasses them all. It is the organism's will to "objectively confirm" its "self-love" in the world, whether by surviving, by conquering, by experiencing pleasure, by overcoming its own perceived inadequacies, or whatever.

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It is significant that children refer to themselves in the third person before they do so in the first person. It shows they do not yet have a clear or full conception of their own subjectivity, which means there is not a clear opposition in their mind between self and other. Only after years of conflict between self and other, i.e. confrontation between one's own perspective and others', does one deeply internalize the viewpoint of the other and so attain full self-awareness as a self distinct from all others in the world. Selfhood is attained through, and is synonymous with, mental conflict and contradiction. This conflict intensifies and gives new meaning to the urge for self-confirmation that is in some primitive form present

in all living things. (With regard to the vast majority, the concept of self-confirmation has very little meaning.)

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The nation-state made possible corporate capitalism, but then the son killed the father.

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Chomsky speaks.-- "Two years ago, a large majority of the U.S. opposed the threat of force against Iran. That is, they opposed the U.S. being a rogue, outlaw state which violates the UN Charter. The UN Charter, though nobody will mention it, bars the *threat* of force in international affairs, meaning everybody in the American political system is a criminal, because across the board it's 'all options have to be open.' Well, the population opposed that."

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A soldier speaks on Schubert.-- Under a Youtube video of the Andante from Schubert's Piano Trio D. 898 is this comment (from a Scandinavian): "i suffer from post traumatic stress disorder and the only thing that calmes me is schuberts music, no joke it's... yes it's the best. it's my medication... my friends would die laughing seeing this comment but God bless you and may you rest in 'piece' you chuppy little austrian fella!" I can well imagine that this piece, this piece of divinity, would soothe someone with PTSD. One of the most soothing pieces in music caressing away a soldier's pain.

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Listening, for example, to the 4th movement of Beethoven's 5th symphony, it occurs to you that what makes Beethoven Beethoven is the *naïveté* of his enthusiasm for life. The *childlike sincerity*, the *directness*, of his enthusiasm for life. It is this that speaks to billions of people. It is this that keeps the music perpetually fresh. Or, rather, the music's freshness is synonymous with its childlike sincerity; and Beethoven's whole art consists in the attempt never to let anything hackneyed or didactic or formulaic get in the way of the direct and spontaneous expression of emotion and thought. Most timeless art, in fact, has this "naïve" and "spontaneous" quality, but none more so than Beethoven's. How he managed to convey it through the manipulation of sounds is a mystery, because music itself is a mystery. But it is clear that even the music's "flaws," such as its occasional coarseness, vulgarity, and orchestral imbalances, contribute to its childlike vitality and hence its power.

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The Redeemer.-- Listening to the Pastorale Symphony, I can't help loving Beethoven as the greatest benefactor mankind has ever known. The deaf man torturing himself to create pure happiness for the rest of us. (Can you imagine how much less *rich* life would be if that man hadn't lived?) I had just returned from a party and was feeling impure, stained by young women's childishness, but all I had to do was turn on this symphony in order to elevate myself. Shedding the *particularity*, the *personal preoccupations*, of femininity and of humanity in general; embracing the universality of genius.

*

June

Reading *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (1933), by Carl Jung. Like so many early psychoanalysts, he has a rather naive scientific method. Assuming that all dreams are symbolic and then trying to discover what they symbolize. And yet he could be right. Some of his and Freud's analyses of particular dreams are convincing, though others are not. Personally, it is rare I have a dream that seems symbolic; more often they're totally nonsensical, even more nonsensical than the ones Jung and Freud discuss. And they're incredibly detailed; I remember almost nothing from them. They *could* be symbolic, but I have no reason to think they are (in any interesting sense). Last night, for example, I had a typically rich dream, much too rich to remember or summarize adequately, in which, among other things, Leonard Cohen went to Ground Zero sometime after 9/11, was moved by what he saw, and thereupon wrote a song about how consumerism was taking over America and depriving it of spiritual grandeur. (Maybe a reflection of my being impressed with Europe's culture.) The song was somehow thought to be very patriotic and so became wildly popular all over the country. A few years later, when the new Ground Zero site was almost completely constructed, the authorities had to decide what art to put in the four corners of the large plaza. They rejected their earlier plan of including a memorial of some sort to Britney Spears and decided instead to honor Leonard Cohen, because of his great song, in all four corners. I was very happy and thought that finally "great art" was being honored in America. -I suppose you could say this dream "symbolizes" my attitude to America, pop culture, etc., but that isn't symbolism in Jung's sense. Anyway, I'm willing to grant that all dreams are clues to the dreamer's unconscious -- and conscious -- life. And it is certainly a big mistake to write off psychoanalysis as "unfalsifiable" -- because it *is* falsifiable to some degree, indirectly. There are numerous ways to "falsify" or at least undermine a given hypothesis.

In the context of a discussion of the origins of psychoanalytic therapy and its relation to the confessional, Jung writes that

> As soon as man was capable of conceiving the idea of sin, he had recourse to psychic concealment -- or, to put it in analytical language, repressions arose. Anything that is concealed is a secret. The maintenance of secrets acts like a psychic poison which alienates their possessor from the community. In small doses, this poison may actually be a priceless remedy, even as essential preliminary to the differentiation of the individual. This is so much the case that, even on a primitive level, man has felt an irresistible need to invent secrets; their possession saves him from dissolving in the unconsciousness of mere community life, and thus from a fatal psychic injury. As is well known, the many ancient mystery cults with their secret rituals served this instinct for differentiation. Even the Christian sacraments were looked upon as mysteries in the early Church, and, as in the case of baptism, were celebrated in private apartments and only referred to under a veil of allegory.
>
> However beneficial a secret shared with several persons may be, a merely private secret has a destructive effect. It resembles a burden of guilt which cuts off the possessor from communion with his fellow-beings.

He proceeds to contrast the relative harmlessness of conscious secrets with the harmfulness of unconscious secrets (or repressions), which are concealed even from oneself. They split off from consciousness and lead an independent life in the unconscious as "complexes" with fantasy-lives and so on. It occurs to me that all this stuff about repressions -- and the confessional, therapy, etc. -- has an obvious relation to self-love. First of all, I should say that the self evidently has unconscious aspects, as Freud thought (in *The Ego and the Id*, as I recall). But I don't want to commit myself to his terminology or framework. For me, the self goes as far into the psyche as the sense of "self-possession" or "self-identity" does. (That formulation isn't necessarily question-begging, though it might seem to be.) That sense is explicit or nearly explicit on the level of consciousness and becomes more obscure as you go farther into the unconscious, until it vanishes

altogether when you get to the mind's innate cognitive architecture and suchlike. That stuff is not even in principle accessible to introspection or self-consciousness, and so is not even obscurely part of the self.[1]

You can see that a sense of self exists even unconsciously in the fact that it exists in dreams (very obscurely). In dreams you can differentiate yourself from others, and you can watch things happening to yourself. So there is even a kind of *self-consciousness* in dreams -- precisely to the extent that there is a self or a sense of self.

Incidentally, in the past I have defined the self as "consciousness of consciousness," but I should have said "consciousness of (a particular) consciousness as its own, i.e. as itself."[2] The former doesn't capture the sense of self-possession or self-identity implicit in the self.

So anyway, "self-love" is not only a conscious but also an unconscious phenomenon.

(I might also remark tangentially that my past equation of self-love and the self itself, while somewhat figurative, is also literally true. For the self is basically consciousness's sense of self-identity, and to identify with something, or make it part of your identity, is to "love" it or value it. (Thus, for consciousness to identify with itself is, so to speak, for it to "love" itself, and vice versa.) So insofar as you lack self-love, you lack self-identity, and hence you lack a self (to that extent). Conversely, to the extent that you lack a self you obviously lack self-love.)

What vitiates self-love is, naturally, self-division or self-disidentification. That is the opposite of self-identity or self-love. Pure self-love, if it were possible or a meaningful notion at all, would be complete self-identification, which, in Jung's language, means no secrets from yourself, no repressions, no lack of self-awareness or self-identification, hence no existence of unconscious aspects of the self at all. Total self-integration in consciousness.

When you have secrets from others (as we all do) or you think you're superior to them or hate them or have any sort of division from them, you're also divided from yourself insofar as they ("affectively") instantiate the other in you and hence are to some degree a part of you.[3] Division from your "significant other," with whom you identify strongly, is more painful, i.e. harmful to self-love (self-identification), than division from strangers, because it means greater division from your self (because your significant other instantiates the other in you -- and, conversely, is internalized in it -- to a greater degree than strangers do and are). In any case, division from "humanity" disturbs your self-love to the extent that, if for instance you have "guilty secrets," you might feel impelled to share them with someone. Maybe a priest, maybe a therapist. By unburdening yourself to him and implicitly securing his forgiveness, his understanding, his acceptance, his love, you are securing the "love" (acceptance) of the other in you, which formerly you imagined, in the form of "humanity," to be condemning you or devaluing you somehow. Hence the disturbance in your self-love. Therapy or the confessional has the power to restore your self-love. To say it differently, you can "confirm" (at least partially) your disrupted and disconfirmed self-love by seeking approval from the priest or the therapist.

Self-confirmation means self-identification, a lack of self-division. You achieve it by achieving love from others and the world, because others and the world are internalized in the other in you, which is what determines your attitude toward yourself (your self-love or self-rejection, self-repression, etc.). Complete self-confirmation, however, -- to repeat -- is impossible, indeed virtually meaningless.

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[1] *Derivatively* it can be, as I implied in my senior thesis eight years ago. By scientifically studying the structure of your mind, etc., you can realize that all that stuff is a part of you and so "derivatively" -- "conceptually," as opposed to "immediately" -- assimilate it to your self.

[2] The body is included in the self to the extent that the consciousness of which consciousness is conscious is also of the body.

[3] You care about the other in you, you value it and identify with it -- because it really isn't an "it" at all but rather suffuses your whole consciousness and is an essential aspect of your self(-awareness and -love). It is like a "structure" of human consciousness or self-consciousness. When you care about someone or people in general, you do so to the degree that they embody this aspect of yourself that you value. This kind of identification *has to be* the psychological meaning of caring for others, because to care about them is precisely to identify with them in some way. And for you to identify with them, they must (by definition) embody or realize some aspect of you.

....I should note, by the way, that the very notion of self-division, self-repression, self-disidentification, etc., is paradoxical, because....how are we to understand the self's separation from itself? There are then two (at least two) aspects of the self that apparently don't identify with each other. And yet in some sense they still presumably constitute one self, albeit a divided one. But how is a divided self possible? What does it mean? A self is that which identifies with itself. So how can a self not identify with itself? Maybe the solution to the paradox has to do with the fact that in many respects the self only *implicitly*, not explicitly, identifies with itself, i.e. that many aspects of the self are not explicitly or *fully self-consciously* identified by the self as part of itself. This is true of the self's unconscious aspects. In dreams, it is true, there may be some kind of obscure self-consciousness, and unconscious or repressed aspects of the self may be recognized as part of it, but the self-consciousness of dreams is not *full, explicit, conscious* self-consciousness.[1] The *fully realized* self is the conscious one, i.e. the part of the self that is aware of itself in consciousness. Its unconscious and repressed aspects are only implicitly included in it. What does "implicitly" really mean, though?

....Did Jung ever explain what it *means* to identify with another person? How it is *possible*? He doesn't seem to in this book. Probably most psychoanalysts haven't given enough attention to this problem. As you know, I've tried to give an answer in various sketches over the past few years, involving the "other" that is a part of self-consciousness. (The "internalized other," the "generalized other," the "abstract other," whatever.) There is also, of course, a biological explanation (to which science will probably never attain). And surely a non-phenomenological psychological explanation too.

By the way, "identifying" with someone in the relevant sense doesn't have to mean you think you're *similar* to him or her. That's a different sense of the word. What I and psychoanalysts mean (as when they say someone overly identifies with his parents) is that your relation to and valorization of a given person constitutes a relatively important part of your self. You partially transfer your self-love to him or her, thereby "identifying" with him or her.

Jung's book is quite good, at least so far. He sees the need for a plurality of approaches in psychotherapy, in light of the plurality of individual personalities and types of neurosis. Freud's fixation on pleasure, for example, is one-sided and has to be counterbalanced by Adler's emphasis on the "urge to power arising from a sense of inferiority" (especially in socially unsuccessful people). "[Adler's] interpretation is designed to show the patient that he 'arranges' his symptoms and exploits his neurosis to attain a fictitious importance; that even his transference and his other fixations serve his will to power, and thus represent a 'masculine protest' against a fancied subjection." But I think that to invoke a will to power is theoretically inelegant. Adler's ideas can be accounted for on the basis of the more meaningful hypothesis of a universal urge to "objectively confirm" one's implicit self-love, an urge that takes an indefinite number of forms. Broadly speaking, its forms fall under three categories: the urges to create, to love or value another and be loved or valued (through friendship, romance, family life, fame, having a pet, etc.), and to understand. Basically you want simply to act on and in the world and so prove or enact your reality and self-love. You want to *commit* yourself to the world, and you want the world to commit itself to you. The common modern perception of having an "empty" life comes from a deficiency of commitment from either one side or the other. I.e., you lack a sense of self-reality or "self-effectivity"; your implicit self-love is not being objectively confirmed **[or *stimulated* (through self-expression or recognition from others).[2]]** You feel separated and alienated from the world in that, for example, you don't care about anyone or you don't

[1] I know all this stuff sounds silly and paradoxical, but that has nothing to do with the supposed inadequacy of my ideas or my formulations. It is patently true that there is some sort of self-consciousness in dreams. But it is equally obvious that this self-consciousness is different from the self-consciousness with which we are ordinarily familiar. How do we express the difference between them? If you have a better idea than saying that our ordinary self-consciousness, as contrasted with the dreamlike version, is "full, explicit, and conscious," let me know.

[2] [Yes, self-expression or self-activity -- and being valued by others, too -- is not only about "confirming" self-love but also stimulating and intensifying it. [In fact, by being confirmed, surely it is also intensified. That's the whole point of self-confirmation, really.] In the past I've failed to make that point -- although it has been implicit, I think. Incidentally, I say "self-activity" rather than simply "activity" because not all activity counts as true self-expression. Just ask people who hate their jobs.]

have a purpose in life that can allow you to "act on/in the world" in such a way that your self-love is confirmed **[and stimulated]** (by being realized in your "effective" activities). Even if your acts are "effective," for example if you're a good receptionist or a good bureaucrat, if you don't *care* about them or haven't "committed" yourself to them -- which means to (implicitly) hang your sense of self-worth at least in part on them or their success -- their effectiveness won't make you feel as though you have a fulfilled life.

It may seem odd or counterintuitive that people value challenges they have to overcome or tasks they have to accomplish and prefer not to live a merely "easy" life -- so much so that if their life is too luxurious and easy they might commit suicide in order to end their "meaningless" life -- but actually this is perfectly understandable. For you confirm yourself by committing yourself to things and people and acting in the light of your commitments. This is just to say that it is human nature to *act* more than merely to *consume* or to be materially comfortable or have a leisured life. Your "commitments" are where your self-love meets the world and proves itself **[and augments itself (at least in the moment of your self-activity), by making itself *real*, so to speak]**. Without commitments, without caring deeply about things and people, you cannot truly meet the world and mold it, change it, make it recognize your value.

....Jung remarks offhandedly that without complexes, viz. "emotionally toned contents [in the unconscious] having a certain amount of autonomy," "psychic activity would come to a fatal standstill." A strong statement, maybe too strong. To have complexes, he says, means that "something incompatible, unassimilated, and conflicting exists -- perhaps as an obstacle, but also as a stimulus to greater effort, and so, perhaps, as an opening to new possibilities of achievement. Complexes are therefore, in this sense, focal or nodal points of psychic life which we would not wish to do without." What *are* they, though? First of all, they're the cause and/or the effect of a conflict. He says that in English we refer to them as "skeletons in the closet." They are "'vulnerable points' which we do not like to remember and still less to be reminded of by others, but which frequently come back to the mind unbidden and in the most unwelcome fashion. They always contain memories, wishes, fears, duties, needs, or views, with which we have never really come to terms, and for this reason they constantly interfere with our conscious life in a disturbing and usually a harmful way." In short, a complex originates in a clash between a requirement of adaptation and the person's "constitutional inability to meet the challenge."

...."Self-love" is a complicated thing. Even in a depressed or "self-hating" person it necessarily exists unconsciously and is implicit in all his acts. But his depression implies a low intensity of self-love, a relative lack of the sense of self-reality or self-certainty or self-efficacy (a notion that can perhaps be defined as "self-love that has been enacted in self-expression or confirmed through recognition from others and thereby intensified, changed from 'imaginary' to 'real'"). There are also, of course, different kinds and levels of self-love. For example, someone might be explicitly and obnoxiously "self-loving" or arrogant, but that might disguise a more fundamental deficiency in self-love, a deficiency in self-certainty (or the deep, implicit perception of self-efficacy that is synonymous with serene self-confidence).

Here's something interesting, by the way: I missed my flight from Budapest to New York (whence to Chicago), so now I have to pay $740 to change to another flight tomorrow. It was a silly mistake: I thought the flight was at 12:55 instead of 11:55, so I lost myself in reading and writing at the airport as I waited for the transfer plane. At 11:45 I realized what time it was, learned that the flight was leaving in ten minutes, ran to the gate, and wasn't allowed on. I suspect my parents won't be happy when I tell them, since they'll have to help bail me out. Stupid, stupid mistake. Now I'm at a cheap hostel in Budapest.

In the aftermath of defeat I half-decided not to stay at any place tonight and instead wander the city or sleep on a bench. I thought I deserved it. It was my way to atone. The prospect even pleased me a little, for some reason. I *wanted* to do it. But how do you explain that? I had no idea why I wanted to experience a sleepless and uncomfortable night; all I knew was that "part of me" had that desire. Its causes were unconscious, like the causes of Marmeladov's desire to be beaten by his wife. The starting-point of an explanation is that I obviously half-consciously expected such a night to make me feel better, to wash away my self-frustration. It would be my way of atoning. By so atoning I would restore things to normal, restore the equilibrium, compensate for and so effectively "erase" my past stupidity. "I made an incredibly stupid and expensive mistake; well, okay, I'll spend tonight on the streets. That will satisfy me." The point, I think,

is that by punishing myself I would be "acting out" (or "enacting"), so to speak, my self-love, my self-respect. By subjecting myself to a stern justice, or a *compensation*....well, but *how* does that realize my self-love? This is a difficult problem.

It reminds me of the fact that sometimes murderers who get away with their crime can't live with their having escaped punishment and finally turn themselves in. It is the Raskolnikov syndrome. (And maybe the Marmeladov syndrome too, come to think of it. He enjoyed being punished for his crime of being a pitiful alcoholic.) It isn't the murder itself they can't live with -- i.e., it isn't that they feel so horrible about having killed a person that they can no longer live with themselves. They want to be *punished*, not *dead*. If granted their wish for a punishment, it is quite possible they'll feel good about themselves again, indeed will be very happy, won't be bothered much anymore by their knowledge of having committed a murder. In my case too, it wasn't merely my *stupidity* that bothered me; it was the feeling that I had committed a *crime*. I really felt like a kind of petty moral criminal -- against my parents, I think, or rather against the "law" they have implanted in me that to disrespect money on such a scale is a crime. Even if they were dead or I did not expect them to lend me money or even to find out about what I'd done, I suspect I would have felt the same guilt. It was their *law*, not their actual selves, that weighed heavily on me. Or maybe you could say I was burdened by my internalization of their harsh perspective, which is equivalent to my unconscious or half-conscious desire that they, or my internalization of them, approve of me. I wanted to subject myself to their law, which meant I had to compensate for my transgression. Then I would have their implicit forgiveness; they, or my internalization of them, would be well-disposed toward me again, which would let me be well-disposed toward myself.

Normal people don't want to be wholly free; they want to be anchored in some kind of moral order, subject to a moral law that has punishments attached to its violation. In this way they can define themselves, can have standards by which to determine at any given time that they are worthy and self-defined beings. To be totally free, to live a morally unbounded life of whims and hedonism and unaccountable sinning, tends to be an intolerable psychic burden. That is to say, it tends to contradict the fundamental urge for active confirmation of one's value as a self. For one thing, it entails a denial of recognition of your value or self-love by authority-figures from your past or present whom you have internalized and whose judgment at least unconsciously matters to you. Consciously or unconsciously you know what their attitude is or would be towards you, and this tends to affect your mental health, either reinforcing/stimulating or undermining your self-certainty (self-harmony, etc.). --Actually, the case of the unhappy hedonist or "inveterate sinner" and that of the criminal who wants to be punished are psychologically different, although what I just said about authority-figures is true of both. So let's ignore the hedonist and focus on the criminal. Aside from the "authority-figures" thing, he is also troubled -- this is surely the crux of the matter, at least in many cases -- by always having to conceal from others a dreadful *secret* about himself. In such a case, Jung is literally right that the secret is "a burden of guilt which cuts off the possessor from communion with his fellow-beings." The burden of guilt, to repeat, is not necessarily due to the crime itself; it is due to the criminal's having to *conceal* the crime. He can never feel wholly at home in the company of others (unless they know his secret) because he always has to be careful not to reveal himself. He cannot know true companionship, true loving confirmation of his self-love, until he gives himself up. Through punishment, moreover -- compensation -- he feels as though he will be submitting himself again to the common moral law, which will signify his reentry into society (even as, perhaps, he physically leaves it, going to prison or Siberia like Raskolnikov). He will be reentering the human community. Realigning himself with his authority-figures, his significant others, etc.

[All kinds of guilt are, I think, implicitly about self-love in some way or other, like most things (or everything?) in the psyche. But in someone with an empathic disposition, guilt can also be about genuine concern for others. What is "genuine" concern, though? Is there a line to be drawn between "egoistic" guilt and "altruistic" guilt? Where do you draw it? I think you could call Raskolnikov's guilt egoistic,[1] but "empathic" guilt surely exists too.]

[1] [After all, he seemed to lose his burden of guilt after he was exiled to Siberia and had the love of pure devoted Sonia. What he wanted all along was that people and society forgive him, so he could (thereby) forgive himself. -On the

The Marmeladov syndrome is different from the Raskolnikov syndrome in that it doesn't involve a *terrible secret*, but it is similar in that it entails self-contempt due to the violation of the common moral law, i.e. due to the person's implicit knowledge of condemnation from society and his significant others in the form (at least) of condemnation from the other in his consciousness, or himself. Marmeladov compensates for his crimes by letting his wife beat him, which implies (as he sees it) that he accepts moral norms after all and so is not the outcast he seemed to be. He shows he agrees with his implicit accusers about himself, thus securing the validation of at least *some* of his injured self-love. (He has partially split himself into a "higher" and a "lower" part. A (self-)condemning part and a condemned part.)

My own feeling of guilt in the airport was identical neither with one case nor the other, but it was a milder form of both.

As for Budapest: ten years ago I wrote that the people here were unfriendly and unhelpful, "Budapests." But this time I've experienced exceptional kindness and helpfulness. I guess I was just unlucky the last time. The city itself is as *magnifique* as I remember. Thank God much of it wasn't destroyed in the Second World War.

Assisi is as holy a town as its reputation holds it to be. A mini utopia. Spello too.

Jung's book gets worse and worse as you read on. Confusions piled on confusions, empty poeticizing, unargued declarations *ex cathedra* in every paragraph, naïve reflections on history and "modern man," infantile excursions into philosophy. Stupid bile against philosophical materialism. Nonetheless, a few stimulating and sensible remarks here and there. Such as his critique of Freud's obsession with sexuality (to the point that almost everything in the psyche becomes, for Freud, a manifestation of sexuality, which concept thus starts to lose its meaning) and his overemphasis on the sickly:

> The sexuality which Freud describes is unmistakably that sexual obsession which shows itself whenever a patient has reached the point where he needs to be forced or tempted out of a wrong attitude or situation. It is an over-emphasized sexuality piled up behind a dam; and it shrinks at once to normal proportions as soon as the way to development is opened. It is being caught in the old resentments against parents and relations and in the boring emotional tangles of the family situation which most often brings about the damming-up of the energies of life. And it is this stoppage which shows itself unfailingly in that kind of sexuality which is called "infantile." It is really not sexuality proper, but an unnatural discharge of tensions that belong to quite another province of life. This being so, what is the use of paddling about in this flooded country [as Freudian therapy does]? Surely, straight thinking will grant that it is more important to open up drainage canals. We should try to find, in a change of attitude or in new ways of life, that difference of [energy-]potential which the pent-up energy requires....

Jung's goal to "put sexuality in its proper place" by showing that it is only *one* of the "life-instincts" is right, I think. Are we to make every aspect of interpersonal relations a manifestation of sexuality?? Are we to reduce even artistic and philosophical creation, and religion, and maybe science itself, to sublimations of sexuality?? The human brain and mind are complicated things; surely everything in them, or everything that humans do, does not revolve around the single function of sexuality. In the sexually repressed and puritanized but also sexually over-analyzed Victorian and Edwardian ages, which in addition were characterized (amongst the middle and upper classes) by stultifying family relations, dictatorial and distant father-figures, severely patriarchal structures throughout society, and insufficient outlets for *play*, it isn't surprising that Freud would encounter an extraordinary number of sexual neuroses (especially among women) in his therapeutic practice. But the West's experiences of later years have exposed the cultural specificity of all that Oedipal stuff, that "hysterical" stuff, that blocked-sexual-energy-being-sublimated-

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other hand, his compassion and pity for Lizaveta probably did entail an element of "altruism" in his guilt, genuine and profound regret for brutally killing this poor girl. Most guilt must comprise a mixture of egoistic and altruistic elements.]

and-causing-neuroses stuff. In reality, sexuality properly so-called is but one valence, so to speak, of other-directed energy, one mode of orientation to the other.

On the other hand, it seems likely that sexuality "blends into" other ways of relating to others. And Freud may have been right that all humans are to some degree bisexual, or at least have the potential to be -- that is, to enjoy homosexual play or sex -- given certain circumstances (such as being a sailor forced to live among men for years on end). Or, well, no. Maybe with regard to those unusual circumstances one could reverse the Freudian dictum and say that the psyche's platonic ways of relating to others can become "sublimated" into sexual ways, so that the supposed "bisexuality" is (in most people) not true bisexuality but just a "pathological" adaptation to those circumstances. I, for one, think it would be well-nigh impossible for me to get an erection at the thought of having sex with a man, no matter what circumstances I was in. Surely that is in large part a genetic thing, and thus I am not even latently bisexual in the real sense.

Are the infant and young child suffused with "sexuality" of some sort, given the probable existence of oral, anal, and genital stages? Again, probably not to the extent that Freud thought. I'm not even sure it's proper to call the oral and anal stages "sexual" at all. The child is curious about his world and his body and enjoys exploring them. Is that sexual?? Insofar as he derives physical pleasure from his oral and anal activity, *maybe* it can be called sexual in an extended sense. But in order for this not to become a mere quibble over terminology, the issue has to be about the relation between the child's activity and his or her still-latent sexual drive (or instinct).

Jung's un-mechanistic, "spiritual" way of interpreting the psyche is in some respects better than Freud's, especially in the therapeutic situation. The self, hence the psyche, needs meaning, not mere gratification. However, Jung is *too* idealistic, with all his claptrap about the spirit, God, and suchlike.

[…] It upsets me that Aniela is sad. –But why does that upset me? The obvious "explanation" is simply that I care about her, but that doesn't explain anything. What exactly is going on in my mind? Does it have to do with "self-love" on my part? I don't see how. Anyway, all this emphasis on self-love bothers me. I don't like emphasizing humans' egoism; I want to believe in their altruism. What about empathy, after all? What about sympathy, compassion, pity, etc.? Maybe I already addressed this issue earlier by saying that people to some extent "internalize," at least momentarily, everyone they meet, or even people they haven't met, thus subtly identifying with them. Compassion and empathy are about identifying with people, broadening one's self-love to include them. But then doesn't the concept of self-love lose its meaning? Besides, you can't erase the fact that by caring about another it is the *other* you care about, not yourself.

Aaaah, I'm tired after my long flight and sick of psychological analysis. I care about Aniela; that's enough. I wish I could make her happy.

....You can say whatever you want about self-love, self-confirmation, the need for self-validation, for assimilation of the other and externalization of the self, all that crap. It remains true that the self is not all that matters, that humans can care deeply for each other, that another's happiness can be more important to you than your own (however you want to explain that psychologically), and that the most important part of life is love in all its permutations. Indeed, it is precisely by caring about the other more than yourself and devoting yourself to people that you can best validate your self-love, can give your life meaning and so confirm your worth. This is why such devotion is so satisfying. Self-realization through self-denial, so to speak. That is, through community (or a lack of fixation on yourself). **[Remember, the abstract (or internalized, or "implicit") other is effectively seen as having absolute value, as shown by the fact that its recognition[1] is the standard by which the self judges its own value. The self wants to fuse with the other, and the only way to achieve or approximate such fusion is through recognition, whether it be (implicitly) through self-expression or (explicitly) through love of another person or emotional identification with a community. But the latter two methods are particularly effective, because they entail both self-expression and identification with a *concrete* other or others, hence a particularly**

[1] Or, recognition by *people* as mediated by the abstract other.

***emotional* fusion with the abstract other (as embodied in the concrete others one loves or identifies with[1]). This explains the ecstasy of religious conversion -- profound identification with a whole community, as well as with something like the abstract other itself, in the form of "God."**

[If all this talk about the abstract other is confusing, just think about it in terms of the "world." You seek the confirmation of your self-love, your (implicit) self-conception, in the world, by getting recognition (in various forms) from the world. The world is basically the "concrete" side of the abstract other, or rather the latter is the internalized side of the world and its responses to you.]

....One last thing. Maybe I've been wrong to use the word "abstract" when discussing the other in consciousness, because the other is implicitly associated with the privileging of certain values and norms, and with significant others you have internalized (by valuing them, identifying with them, taking their perspectives -- see Mead), and with moral tendencies in your society. All these are revealed in your behavior rather than directly in your consciousness -- although if you introspect you might be able to access them. You pursue recognition by others, which means by the "general" other in your consciousness, which means by your self, by acting to uphold and honor these values, norms, internalized significant others, etc. G. H. Mead might say that your "I" is constantly acting in the light of your "me." When you meet new people who impress you, too, your being impressed is largely a result of their embodying the values you have internalized throughout your life (many of which, however, seem to be naturally ingrained (i.e. naturally valorized) in humans, for example qualities of leadership, intelligence, strength, and kindness or compassion; only around the "margins," so to speak, are the forms that these values take socially determined). To repeat, the general other is just a part of your consciousness; but it is somehow "associated with" your half-conscious or unconscious standards of judging people's worth. The more highly you think of them, the more completely they instantiate the other in your mind (and vice versa), and potentially the more important they'll be to you (e.g. as people whose recognition you want).

Email:

> Professor Chomsky,
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> A few thoughts on your rejection of the mind-body problem. As I understand it, your position is that no clear distinction between the physical and the mental can be made because we have no coherent idea of the physical; therefore, the "problem" collapses, given our inability to understand what it is about or what it means. I would respond, first, that people do seem to find the relationship between the so-called mental and the so-called physical intuitively puzzling, and at the very least we have to try to understand what is the source of this puzzlement. And here, Descartes is surely on to something when he writes that the physical is extended and the mental not. No doubt modern science has undermined his distinction by concluding that "beyond our experience," on the level of quantum mechanics and so forth, the physical is in fact not extended; but within our experience, at least, it is, while the mental is not. (One cannot "divide" a sensation or a thought into parts as one can a banana or a piece of paper.) Insofar as we have experiential access to things that are called physical, such as tables, and things that are called mental, such as private sensations, we do seem to be struck by how different they are from each other. Another way of formulating the difference might be to say that the physical things of our experience

[1] A person can exemplify one's half-conscious notion of a "valuable" other -- which notion is intimately associated with the ("valuable") abstract other that is an implicit element in one's consciousness -- to a greater or lesser extent. The more closely he or she exemplifies it, the more satisfying will be one's recognition by him or her (or them). Incidentally, being recognized by (or identifying with) a community can be an especially powerful experience because the communal nature of the other in this case is sort of a realization of the abstract nature of the other in consciousness. A community is more like "humanity" or "everyone" or "the world" than a single person is -- and the notions of "humanity" etc. are projections of the abstract other whose recognition, as I have said, is the self's implicit standard of value.

> are publicly accessible, while mental things cannot be directly or immediately experienced except by a single self. They are "private." The question then arises how to relate these two kinds of things that we experience.
>
> Now, I see no reason to think that "matter" cannot be conscious -- except that *how* it is conscious is a mystery to me. I find it mysterious that electrical and chemical impulses traveling along neural networks can give rise to consciousness -- precisely because it seems to me that there are two different kinds of things involved, namely "non-extended" consciousness and "extended" configurations of matter. What the "ultimate" nature of matter is, whether it is extended or non-extended or outside our comprehension or whatever, is, I think, a separate question; what puzzles me is that I see no way to relate the matter I experience, which is extended, to consciousness, which, as Descartes said, is surely not extended (at least not in the same way). In other words, maybe it is not necessary for us to understand the true or "ultimate" nature of matter in order to have some grasp of the mind-body problem -- because the latter has to do only with the “ordinary” matter we experience, which, it seems to me, we *can* coherently characterize, in something like the ways Descartes did.
>
> And yes, the problem remains of how to relate the matter of our experience to the very mysterious stuff that physics postulates, but this question is separate from the mind-body problem.
>
> Thanks for your time.
>
> Can't really respond, because you've mistaken my argument and conclusion.
>
> It has nothing at all to do with quantum theory. Rather, in brief, Newton -- greatly to his dismay -- eliminated the only coherent notion of the "material" (physical, body, etc.). Nothing has replaced it since, apart from our best theory of the world, whatever it is, a constantly changing conception. In the 18th century it was widely understood that Newton's discoveries undermined the body-mind problem, and that it would be necessary to pursue what's known in the literature as "Locke's suggestion" -- that there is no real alternative to trying to understand how organized matter can think, just as it can attract, repel, etc., in ways so mysterious that Newton regarded the idea as "an absurdity." That continues at least until Darwin, and for those familiar with the history of science/philosophy, to the present.

Um, yeah. Not exactly an adequate response. I wrote back,

> I know about Newton’s elimination of the Cartesian conception. I was just using quantum mechanics as an example of the modern ‘reinforcement’ of the elimination. But my point was that the mind-body problem can be understood in a way that bypasses all these concerns about the ‘true’ nature of matter and focuses on the nature of the matter of our experience, which, I suggested, can be understood sufficiently for us to make some sense of the mind-body problem. I think it’s wrong to just ignore the common intuition that there is such a problem. Doesn’t it seem deeply mysterious to you that consciousness can arise from neural firings and so forth? I acknowledge that’s the way it has to be, but it still strikes me as mysterious. --But I guess we’re talking past each other. Sorry.

> I guess we are talking past each other. In writing about this matter for half a century I've repeatedly pointed out that Gilbert Ryle was wrong in concluding that the mind was exorcised: it was the body. Descartes' conception of the mind, such as it was, escaped unaffected.
>
> Sure, it's mysterious that consciousness can arise from neural firings. But as Newton, Locke, Hume, and many other leading figures of intellectual history recognized, it's also mysterious that attraction and repulsion, etc., can be properties of matter. Since Newton, we live in a world of mysteries. I'll attach one of many articles of mine about it, this one in the J. of Philosophy.

[After writing several of the paragraphs in my journal below -- hence the repetition (as you'll see soon enough) -- I replied with this:

> Thanks for the paper. I actually read it a couple years ago, I think, and found it very valuable. I'll re-read it.
>
> Regarding the admittedly impenetrable mysteries of attraction, repulsion, etc., I would just say that I think the "mind-body problem" is as much of a genuine problem as they are. My argument against you was based on what was perhaps the misunderstanding that you deny the substantive nature of the mind-body problem (on the grounds that we have no coherent concept of matter). **[His response: "If there's no coherent notion of matter (body), there's no coherent formulation of the mind-body problem, and we're left with 'Locke's suggestion.' For the same reasons there's no attraction/repulsion-matter problem."[1]]**
>
> Incidentally, I can't help thinking that the category of the mental, while certainly a "subcategory" of the "physical," is not strictly comparable to such categories as the optical, the electromagnetic, the organic, etc. (as you imply in another paper), given that the peculiarity of the mental surely consists in its being *matter's experience of itself*, and hence its introducing an element of reflexivity or "self-reference" absent from non-mental types of the physical. In being matter's experience of itself, mind seems quite "special" to me, unlike other categories of matter.
>
> But I don't want to keep taking up your time. Thanks again for the paper.]

Reading parts of *Chomsky and His Critics* (2003), a collection of essays and responses to them by Chomsky. Philosophy and linguistics, not politics.

Chomsky: "I see no reason to question the general conclusion reached long ago that thought is 'a little agitation of the brain' (Hume), or a 'secretion of the brain' that should be considered no 'more wonderful than gravity, a property of matter' (Darwin)." Right. Gravity is mysterious, and thought is mysterious. That is to say, matter itself is just as mysterious as the relationship between "mind" and "matter." But what I was saying above is that questions about the nature of matter and questions about the relationship between consciousness and the brain, while perhaps equally mysterious, are really two different sets of questions that both have to be answered (but probably never will be adequately). The fact that the nature of matter is mysterious doesn't entail that the mind-body problem is not a problem.

According to Chomsky, the category of the mental is not fundamentally different from any other physical category in nature, such as the electromagnetic, the optical, or the organic. These are all just

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[1] Okay, fine, but there's a mind-body *mystery*. He himself has distinguished in the past between "problems" and "mysteries."

distinctions among various aspects of the world. But it seems to me that the "mental" has a special status. Simply stated, it is matter's experience of itself. It therefore introduces an element of reflexivity or self-reference. This is what gives it its "private" character, which is unlike the electromagnetic or the organic as such. So Chomsky is right that mind is not a different substance than matter, but he is wrong that it is strictly comparable to such categories as the mechanical and the optical.

As I said, or implied, years ago when formulating my version of emergentism, the mental is physical but in a different way than the non-mental is. The latter is just unproblematically physical, and it mostly includes extended stuff like tables, neurons, molecules, atoms, protons, but also whatever non-extended entities and waves and forces and so on have been postulated by physicists. The mental, in being matter's self-experience and thus uniquely reflexive and emergent (from extended physical stuff), is not extended and not spatiotemporal in quite the way of ordinary matter. (A sensation does not have an exact spatial location in the way that a neuron does.) So it is physical, but it is also oddly non-physical, or at least different from ordinary physical stuff. Hence the centuries of confusion.

Galen Strawson, a materialist, is right to reject the usual terminology of "mental vs. physical," because, after all, the mental *is* physical (albeit in a peculiar sense, I think), like everything that exists. He substitutes for it "mental vs. non-mental," which are two broad categories of the physical.

In a sense, I don't understand what all the difficulty is with the mind-body problem, or why all these philosophical morons have to argue about it endlessly. Legions of them; they just don't have a clue. Strawson is better than most, but even he isn't perfect. He argues that consciousness is a form of matter, part of the physical being of the brain. Auditory experience, etc., is a *form of matter*. But that's wrong, and in any case it leaves you with all the old questions and perplexities. Neurons are a form of matter; atoms are a form of matter; consciousness is a form of the *activity* of matter, the "emergent" activity.[1] That formulation itself settles many of the doubts, since our perplexities arise from supposed differences between *physical stuff* and consciousness, not between the *activity* of physical stuff and consciousness. As I said years ago when discussing Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*, we have no intuitions about the nature of emergent electrochemical activity in the brain, as we do about the nature of the brain itself (e.g., its being divisible into parts, having a precise spatiotemporal location, etc.). It is our understanding of the *brain* that seems to contradict our understanding of consciousness; our non-understanding of emergent electrochemical processes cannot contradict our understanding of consciousness in the same way, precisely because we don't understand electrochemical emergence. It's true it is still perplexing to think that consciousness can arise from electrochemical activity, but if you stress the word *activity* you'll see that at least now we've done away with the problems about physical stuff being divisible into parts (unlike consciousness) and having a definite spatial location (unlike consciousness), because we *don't* intuitively think that any kind of "activity" is divisible into parts or has a spatial location in the way that physical stuff does.

As Bergson said, philosophical solutions are always simple in their essence.

Strawson goes on to argue that everything we know about the ultimate nature of matter is perfectly compatible with consciousness. He criticizes certain philosophers for finding it mysterious that "technicolor phenomenology can arise from soggy grey matter," because physics has taught us that "the volume of spacetime occupied by a brain" is "not a sludgy mass but an astonishingly (to us) insubstantial-seeming play of energy, an ethereally radiant vibrancy" of "all the sweeping sheets and scudding clouds and trains of intraneuronal and interneuronal electrochemical activity which physics (in conjunction with neurophysiology) apprehends as a further level of extraordinarily complex intensities of movement and....organization." We shouldn't find it particularly mysterious, therefore, that consciousness can be physical, if *this* is what the physical is. I agree with him. These reflections do go a long way towards dissolving the intuitive (and conceptual) puzzles. But, first of all, I think the puzzles can be largely dissolved simply by saying, as I did above, that consciousness is not matter itself but a kind of interaction between elements of matter, an interaction between, you could even say, spatially extended things like neurons and

[1] [Well, neurons and atoms are that as well, but that's irrelevant. The point is that they are also forms of matter itself, unlike consciousness.]

molecules and electrons and whatnot. But secondly, it seems to me -- and this is partly what I was arguing in the emails with Chomsky -- that whatever the intuitive and conceptual compatibility between consciousness and the "ultimate" nature of matter, what we naturally want to reconcile most of all is consciousness and the relatively "ordinary," non-subatomic matter of our experience and of "ordinary" science like biology (with its cells, molecules, and the like). Besides, matter on the deepest quantum-mechanical level interacts with itself to create larger, spatially located and extended structures such as molecules and cells. These things *exist*. They are there, just as on a "different level" there is also the ethereally radiant vibrancy of energy and so forth. So, since both of these kinds of things exist -- the relatively macroscopic stuff of cellular biology and the more microscopic stuff of quantum mechanics -- both have to be reconciled with the existence of consciousness. We shouldn't just *ignore*, so to speak, the existence of cells and "soggy grey matter," as Strawson effectively does above. That stuff exists too, and so we have to conceptually reconcile it with consciousness. As I've done.

Moreover, consciousness is a macro-level phenomenon (which corresponds in its "macro-ness" with the brain). So it is a different sort of thing than the infinitesimally small fields of force and energy postulated by modern physics. Which means that the apparent, somewhat metaphorical similarity between the latter and consciousness doesn't have much significance. We shouldn't think, "Hey, we've learned from physics that the ultimate nature of matter is after all not so totally different from consciousness!" and try to reconcile matter and consciousness in that way. First of all, it strikes me that even this quantum-mechanical stuff is very different from consciousness, however "spiritual" or "ethereal" our metaphorical pictures of it are. But even aside from that, consciousness and this stuff are on such vastly different "levels" of reality, the one so inconceivably microscopic and the other so enormously macroscopic, that I don't really see how quantum mechanics can bear on the mind-body problem.

In general, I don't think the mind-body problem is the sort of thing that science can have much bearing on. It's a conceptual and intuitive thing, not something we can make empirical discoveries about. It revolves around the profoundly mysterious division in our experience between public and private (or "outside" and "inside"), and between extended and non-extended. These divisions cannot be "discovered" or "theorized" out of existence; they are conditions of our experience. Even if it turns out that matter is essentially extended or has some other property inconsistent with consciousness, that doesn't matter because the point is that consciousness is *emergent* from *interactions between* components of matter. That consideration is enough to "reconcile" it with matter, at least insofar as no gross logical contradiction remains but only intuitive wonder that consciousness could emerge from physical stuff.

Emailed Chomsky again (with the heading "One final thought"):

> (I've been reading *Chomsky and His Critics*.) Galen Strawson argues that consciousness is "a form of matter," and he agrees with you that we know nothing about matter that should make us think it is incompatible with consciousness.[1] That idea strikes me as compelling in some respects, but also, in a sense, unnecessary. For even if matter did have properties that seemed incompatible with consciousness, one could still argue that consciousness was not (a form of) *matter itself* but rather "emergent" from *interactions between* components of matter. And it seems to me, in fact, that this is what consciousness is. It is therefore "physical," so to speak, but it is not, strictly speaking, "a form of matter," in the sense that, say, neurons and molecules are a form of matter (extended, spatially located, etc.).

[1] [This is all a little ambiguous, because it's possible for matter to be "incompatible" with consciousness in two ways. First, consciousness might be such that it can't be a *form of matter* -- and I think that's true. It isn't a form of matter. Consciousness and matter, at least the matter with which we're familiar, are two very different things. But matter could also be such that in its activity it couldn't *produce* consciousness. And there's really no reason to think that's true. To be sure, we can't *conceive* how matter would produce consciousness, but nature is full of conceptual mysteries. The point is that *this* mystery is at least not an example of a "gross logical contradiction," such as that consciousness (unextended, spatially un-located, etc.) *is* matter (extended, spatially located, etc.).]

> What I'm saying, in other words, is that whatever matter turns out to be has little bearing on the mind-body problem, because one can sidestep the supposed necessity of conceptually reconciling matter with consciousness just by saying that consciousness is an emergent phenomenon of *interactions between* components of matter (such as neurons and neurotransmitters). [In fact, that's the only thing it *could* be, on any naturalistic theory at all!]
>
> [....]

Repetitive because I wanted to make sure he understood what I was saying. No answer, unfortunately.

Instead of sensible views like mine, what you get in the philosophical literature are extraordinary denials of the reality of consciousness (as a private, qualitative thing) or senseless assertions that it just *is* a form of matter, or arguments like Thomas Nagel's (in "Conceiving the Impossible and the Mind-Body Problem") that "our inability to come up with an intelligible conception of the relation between mind and body is a sign of the inadequacy of our present concepts," in which "some development is needed." Yeah, right. Through the "development of concepts" we'll someday be able to bridge the gap between "*outside*" and "*inside* [consciousness]," *public* and *private, non-mental* (what is usually called "physical") and *mental*. "We do not at present possess the conceptual equipment to understand how subjective and physical features could both be essential aspects of a single entity or process." Good luck in your search for that conceptual equipment. There is simply no way around the conceptual chasm between mental and non-mental. You can't ascribe to mental states non-mental predicates such as color, size, and physical structure, nor can you ascribe to non-mental things mental predicates such as phenomenal experience and intentionality. You can't bridge the unbridgeable [which means you can't explain how they could possibly interact, how the mental could arise from the non-mental[1]]. The best you can say is that certain physical processes in the nervous system can be considered from two perspectives, the "serial" or "atomistic" -- a series of electrochemical events -- and the "holistic" or "emergent," which is the mental state. After that, it's all a damn mystery.

Reading *Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement* (2004), by Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss.

Now reading *NAFTA and the Politics of Labor Transnationalism* (2011), by Tamara Kay. It's interesting that although many people predicted an intensification of laborite racism, nationalism, and conflict between Mexican and American workers as a result of NAFTA, in many respects the opposite has happened. Since the early 1990s, the U.S. labor movement has, especially at the national level, done much to shed its age-old nationalist and anti-immigrant attitudes, joining hands with unions in Latin America and elsewhere, even taking "illegal" immigrants in the U.S. under its wing. For instance, it has been in the forefront of the fight against draconian immigration laws in Arizona. No longer is the AFL-CIO exclusionary; it is now among the most inclusionary forces in politics. What explains the change? To a great extent NAFTA, which necessitated the creation of coordinating and regulating institutions across North America. "The NAFTA story is about how political-institutional fields serve as new transnational political opportunity structures for emergent transnational social movements. Faced with a trade agreement that could potentially undermine labor rights and standards in North America, labor unions entered these new political-institutional arenas to mobilize. Through their interactions, they began to develop not only a collective strategy and agenda for changing the rules of regional economic integration but also a sense of their collective interests as North American workers." Lovely academic prose, but you don't read scholarship for its literary beauty.

Apart from NAFTA, however, don't forget that SEIU's and other unions' relatively recent organization of Hispanics in cities like Los Angeles and Las Vegas, as well as multiculturalism and the huge influx of Hispanic immigrants in the seventies, eighties, and nineties, have helped push the American

[1] [To clarify: science can demonstrate that phenomenal experiences, for example, arise from certain neural events, but it can't conceptually explain how that's possible.]

labor movement towards a more inclusive and internationalist stance. The end of the Cold War, too, has allowed union leaders to be more progressive without fearing demonization as Communists.

Sent an email to a leftist friend who had forwarded me an article he liked that criticized Chomsky's anti-Leninism and so on. It was one of those stupid fringe-left articles that are little more than idiotic propaganda.

> I don't agree with this article, which is simpleminded and inaccurate in places. For example, I haven't heard any praise from Chomsky for Obama, only criticism. (And the article doesn't cite any examples.) In 2004 he urged only that people in *swing* states vote for Kerry, because he understood that it would be concretely better for many of the oppressed around the world not to have Bush in power. Small differences in ideology and practices at the top can make big differences for those at the bottom. (I find it unlikely, for example, that the Iraq war would have happened had Gore been elected, since Gore is not as closely tied to the energy industry as Bush was.) So, because Chomsky cares about real people and not just an ideology, he advocated that, while in non-swing states people should vote for Nader or whomever, in swing states they should focus on getting Bush out of office -- and a vote for Nader would effectively mean a vote for Bush. (It's undeniable that the world would have been a better place if all those votes in Florida that went to Nader had gone to Gore and Gore had been elected. What matters is making the world concretely a better place, not furthering some pie-in-the-sky Leninism or other ideology.)
>
> Sure, it would be great if we had a revolutionary party. But until an immense amount of organizational footwork has been done, there is little point in an electoral strategy -- getting a few hundred votes here and there.
>
> As for Leninism, I did some research on that years ago when writing a paper on the Russian revolution. Turns out Chomsky is basically right, at least from what I discovered. As early as the very end of 1917 and throughout 1918, before the civil war had begun in earnest and the Party could use that as an excuse, Lenin and his comrades were already destroying experiments in workers' control over factories, and extensive repression had begun. Not on the scale of Stalinism, but in the suppression of democracy and dissent the seeds of Stalinism had already been sown. The best scholarship establishes this. It's revealing that the article cites no evidence whatsoever for its claims.
>
> I do wish that Chomsky would focus more on positive strategies than he does, but that's his choice. He thinks it is not his place to give advice, only to dredge up information to which people would otherwise have little access. He has, however, repeatedly advocated that the left organize workers to take over their factories, more generally that it "educate and organize" the discontented -- but he sees that as just common sense, to which there is little for him to add. People just have to make connections with each other, fundraise, spread their message to others....the way it has always been done. There is no point in talking about a "revolutionary party" without talking about how to get there. But in fact there *is* no magical way to get there -- only the old way of connecting with others, fundraising, etc.
>
> Of course Chomsky doesn't oppose a "revolutionary party." He simply opposes Lenin's methods and ideology, which, this article notwithstanding, were elitist and authoritarian. That was understood in Lenin's own day by Rosa Luxemburg and others on the Marxist left. (Even before the revolution, Lenin was seen by many as on the far right of Marxism.) His personality itself was very authoritarian, so it isn't surprising that his methods and ideology would be so as well.

Anyway, that's how I see the matter. Thanks for the article!

....Sometimes it's hard for "pessimism of the intellect" not to preclude "optimism of the will." *Al Jazeera* had an article today on climate change, which made it clear that humankind is on the precipice. A lover of life has to be in complete despair. How can you really care about anything when *it is certain* that twenty years from now the planet will be in chaos, and that things will keep getting worse until the end of the century and beyond? No scientist has any idea when the climate will finally stabilize. In the meantime, everything is in flux. Higher life might not even survive. According to one scientist, "The key issue is the large populations of plants and animals that make the planet inhabitable. We need oxygen to breathe and water to drink. A three-billion-year evolution of plants and animals has made the planet habitable, and we are systematically destroying this biodiversity by plowing, cutting, and burning areas." Human overpopulation makes it all much worse, of course. And carbon emissions continue to increase: "Unpublished estimates from the International Energy Agency (IEA) recently revealed that greenhouse gas emissions increased by a record amount last year to the highest carbon output in history, despite the most serious economic recession in 80 years."

Bought a bike -- I like biking -- so that'll be my main mode of transport until at least the end of the summer.

Watching videos on YouTube of Leonard Bernstein's Norton Lectures in 1973. Excursions into music theory, history, and appreciation. He makes a lot of good points in the first lecture -- for example, that the reason for *twelve* notes in the chromatic scale is that the circle of fifths, which arises out of the harmonic series (overtones -- you play C, there's a G overtone, etc.), gives you twelve tones. (C, F, B-flat, E-flat, A-flat, D-flat, G-flat, B, E, A, D, G.) [Um, you wrote that wrong!] It's fascinating that both the diachronic and the chromatic -- and of course the pentatonic -- scales have their source in the nature of the harmonic series. Bernstein is right that, just as humans have a Universal Grammar, so they have something like a Universal Musical Grammar, so to speak, which can be expressed in different "languages" (different types of music, types of scales, modes, harmonies). Obviously the parallel with language isn't perfect, but it's suggestive.

In the succeeding lectures, Bernstein takes the analogy with language too far. Goes into Chomskyan linguistics, tries to apply it to music, and things get a little silly. And it goes on with his incredibly extensive application of literary devices -- metaphor, alliteration, anaphora, repetition, etc. -- to music. Everywhere he sees "transformations," as in deletions, augmentations, inversions, and so on -- and those certainly exist, indeed are of the essence of good music, but to call them "Chomskyan" transformations is a stretch. He's right, though, to place *repetition* at the foundation of music.

He gives a fascinating and probably true explanation of why minor modes sound sad or disturbing. You know that when you play the tonic, implicit in the note are its overtones -- the fifth, the major third, etc. The *minor* third is also an overtone, but a distant one: the eighteenth. So when you explicitly play the minor third, thus changing the mode from major to minor, you're introducing an "interference" (of frequencies), or a sort of nearly imperceptible dissonance, since the major third, being one of the first overtones, is strongly (implicitly) present (in the tonic) as well. You're playing the major and minor thirds at the same time, as it were. The human brain hears this interference as expressing an unsettled, unsettling mood. Major modes sound "happy" because there is no interference of frequencies; there is relative harmony. The implicit first few overtones are also being *explicitly* played, pleasantly "reinforcing" the already present. (That last part is me, not Bernstein.)

Bernstein also makes much of the "delights and dangers of ambiguity." He sees *ambiguity* as key to *expressivity*. Syntactic, semantic, and phonological ambiguity. Reads from "The Leaden Echo" by Gerard Manley Hopkins, a poem with sublime ambiguities that delights in gorgeous sounds for their own sake. E.g.: "How to keep -- is there any any, is there none such, nowhere known some, bow or / brooch or braid or brace, lace, latch or catch or key to keep / Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty....from vanishing away?" Etc. Syntactically and *somewhat* semantically ambiguous. Hence extremely expressive (although that isn't the only reason). Music, too, he thinks can be "syntactically," "semantically," and

"phonologically" ambiguous -- and, to an extent, the more it is, the more expressive it is. Think of Chopin's ambiguous and wonderfully expressive chromaticism, his playing around with tonality so that sometimes you don't know what key you're in, you're "suspended." Or Schumann's rhythmic ambiguities, his syncopations and the like. Or the ambiguities of certain transitions in Beethoven, such as the transition between the third and fourth movements in the fifth symphony and that between the third and fourth movements in the Hammerklavier sonata. All intensely expressive. And the opening of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, even more ambiguous[1] and hence expressive. So ambiguous in its chromaticism as to stretch tonality to its limits -- thus making itself the "crisis work of the nineteenth century," pointing directly to the musical crisis of the early twentieth.

After his performance of the beginning and end of *Tristan*, Bernstein eloquently sums up the history: "And so music can never be the same again. The gates of chromaticism have been flung open, those golden gates of the golden age, which were the outer limits of ambiguity, standing firm in diatonic majesty. But now that they're open, now that Berlioz and Chopin and Schumann and Wagner have pushed them open, we're in new tonal fields that are apparently limitless. We're bounding and leaping from one ambiguity to the other -- from Berlioz to Wagner to Bruckner and Mahler to Debussy and Scriabin and Stravinsky. It's a dizzying adventure, this romantic romp, shedding one inhibition after another, indulging in newer and ever more illicit ambiguities, piling them on, stringing them out, daring them to take over for nearly a whole century. But how ambiguous can you get before the clarity of musical meaning is lost altogether? How far can music romp through these new chromatic fields without finding itself in uncharted terrain, in a wild forest of sharps and flats? Are there no further gates of containment? Perhaps not 'golden' ones, perhaps only dry stone walls or rude fences? Well of course there are, or rather *were*, until they began to crumble under the attack of the new century. These tonal fences, these walls of formality, somehow managed to contain the rampage of chromaticism even through the crises of *Tristan und Isolde* and of *Pelléas et Mélisande* and of *The Rite of Spring*. But ultimately a supreme crisis did arrive, a crisis that remains unresolved to this day and is over half a century old...." He leaves us guessing at this point, dallying instead in the dreamlike chromaticism of Debussy. Thoughtful analysis of *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*.

He's right about how *ambiguous* art became in the late nineteenth century, profoundly expressive in its profound ambiguity. Baudelaire, Mallarmé, the Impressionists in painting and music, Symbolism.... So much of it became *spiritual*, *dreamlike*, *extra-terrestrial*. *Abstract*. Things tend to get abstract, you know, when a culture is approaching its demise. Think of Plato's idealism and the even greater sophistication of Aristotle. In its youth, as in that of an individual, a culture is directed to the concrete and immediate, the naïve and spontaneous; as it proceeds into adulthood and old age, intellectualism sets in, symbolism sets in, the gaze turns toward the transcendent, irony and cynicism and boredom appear as the individual is made more aware of himself in opposition to others. Chromaticism can express all this wonderfully; hence its widespread use in the late nineteenth century.

Art became more ambiguous then because *life* was becoming more ambiguous. Culture, like society, was on the road to nihilism.[2] Finally in the one came Dadaism and the like (I'd say atonality too, which is supremely "ambiguous"), while in the other came World War I. And on into the 1920s, various literary, musical, and artistic expressions of decadence, of ennui, experimentation everywhere. *Then*, finally, a sort of rupture: the Great Depression, fascism, and World War II. Afterwards the mature, liberal democratic consolidation of corporate capitalism and mass consumerism, a more stable order -- but still despair and alienation in much high art and philosophy, such as Existentialism. New expressions of old alienated impulses, because, in effect, a semi-new society. Then a new eruption against middle-class alienation in the 1960s, a real social idealism throughout much of the world (in most countries, incidentally, not merely "middle-class" but more elemental)....but inevitable failure, and again a partial renewal of

[1] "Phonologically" -- 'What key are we in?' -- and "syntactically" -- 'What's the meter? Where's the first beat?' And "semantically" too, I guess. But I wouldn't take these linguistic terms too seriously.

[2] I hope you know I'm not using that term moralistically in my application of it to art. I suppose there is an aesthetic value-judgment implicit in it, but that's not mainly what I have in mind. I mean it more descriptively than evaluatively.

individualism, materialism, ennui (drug-taking, hedonism), and more "nihilistic" art in the 1970s and '80s. And so it goes.

To return. Bernstein observes that Debussy's whole-tone scale is in fact atonal, since it lacks a dominant and subdominant. No circle of fifths is possible, and no traditional modulations are possible. Thus, Debussy's invention was "the first organized atonal material ever to appear in musical history." It was also, perforce, the most "ambiguous." In the *Faun* he followed the old masters in containing his chromaticism and ambiguity with at least *some* diatonicism, but it was clear by that time that the diatonic containment of ambiguity (or of chromaticism and/or near-atonality) was about ready to burst.

It did so in 1908, with Schoenberg's Opus 11 -- and even more, later, with Opus 21 (or 23; I forget) -- the atonality of which was no longer at all contained by any vestiges of tonality. So a divide opened up in the succeeding years and decades between composers, led by Stravinsky, who still tried to remain in the framework of tonality and others, led by Schoenberg, who abandoned it. Both camps, however, had the same motivation: to increase expressive power. Schoenberg eventually invented his serial method because, having abandoned tonality, he needed a new framework by which to structure music. Otherwise atonal compositions would simply be too *free*, unconstrained by anything. Certain composers seized on his new method, and it (has) lasted for many decades. --It's revealing, however, that Schoenberg himself said he had continually been pulled back toward tonality, and late in life he even wrote a tonal work for orchestra. This shows the power of tonality, its greater *human* significance (and *physical*, *nature-al* significance) than something as formalistic, forced, "external," "intellectual," and "artificial" as serialism.

Bernstein observes tellingly that no matter what a composer does with music, as long as he is using the twelve notes of the chromatic scale he cannot *totally* escape tonality. Schoenberg himself said that -- he repudiated the word "atonality" because he thought it was impossible. Tonality is implicitly present in the notes, such that even serialist composers are *semi*-rooted in it, despite themselves. And of course they weren't the first to assay non-tonality; Bach sometimes did, Beethoven, even Mozart, and Liszt, and many others. They would play around the edges of tonality, bring rootlessness to bear on rootedness.

Of all the serialist composers, Alban Berg was the most successful at writing music that could appeal to people. He sometimes managed, unlike Schoenberg and the others, to reconcile or fuse the twelve-tone system with tonality (tonal intervals, regular rhythms, etc.) in such a way that his music could be emotionally compelling to at least a fraction of the public. It helped that he had a greater dramatic sense than other composers, as manifested in *Wozzeck* and his violin concerto.

Bernstein's thoughts on Mahler are typically illuminating. I'll quote only a few. "....I had hoped to reach the essence of the tonal crisis through examining [Mahler's] non-resolution of tensions [in the 9th symphony], his reluctant attempts to let go of tonality -- all of which does shed further light on the inevitable split that was to occur between Schoenberg and Stravinsky. And so I picked up the score again after some years away from it, filled with the sense of Mahler's torture at knowing he was the end of the line, the last point in the great symphonic arc that began with Haydn and Mozart and finished with him.... But while re-studying this work, especially the final movement, I found more answers than I'd expected, as we always do when we return to the study of a great work. And the most startling answer, the most important one because it illuminates our whole century from then to now, is this -- that ours is the century of death, and Mahler is its musical prophet...." Great eloquence on the tragedy of the 20th century follows. And Mahler, he thinks, hypersensitive Mahler, instinctively foresaw it all.

But to return to Schoenberg vs. Stravinsky. "While Schoenberg was dedicating himself to saving music by continuing that great subjective tradition, the chromatic, romantic tradition, Stravinsky was presiding over a wholly new movement heralding a brilliant new group of composers.... What the great Igor did over that forty-some-year period was to keep tonality fresh by one means or another." In particular, he reacted against the "almost morbid subjectivism" of German romantic music from Wagner to Schoenberg by embracing a sort of classical "objectivism," "a cleaner, cooler, slightly refrigerated kind of expression which was the result of placing the creative self at a respectful distance from the created object, taking a more removed perspective on music." This objective expressivity was already "in the air" when Stravinsky took up his pen, being a reaction, again, to German romanticism. Paris, not Vienna, was the central locus of this new music. For example, already in 1898 Erik Satie was "purposefully avoiding what was then

known as self-expression" in his simple, *detached* pieces. This sort of "anti-art" -- "anti-sincere," anti-subjective -- attitude was also emerging in painting (Picasso, etc.) and literature. Eventually it would culminate in Dada. But Stravinsky managed to use it to produce beautiful music. Instead of projecting his own feelings and inner conflicts into music, he imagined, for example, "the dreamworld of a pagan Russia" and recorded in *The Rite of Spring* what *it* expressed to *him*. This, incidentally, is why Adorno, whom Bernstein discusses briefly, detested Stravinsky -- because a sincere artist, a sincere composer, "should express his emotions directly, subjectively," like Schubert, Wagner, and Schoenberg. (Schoenberg? Atonality?? Expressing *emotions*?? Maybe in some sense -- but usually not effectively, since it only alienates audiences.) Stravinsky was the great artificer; hence Adorno's aversion. But, as Bernstein says, all art involves artifice to some degree, and it isn't necessarily insincere or inauthentic on that account. Adorno's perspective on modern music was as absolutist and half-simpleminded as his perspectives often were. And you know he was such a crazy elitist, hating popular music, hating film, hating almost anything most people liked.

What were these artifices that Stravinsky used? How did he succeed in reinvigorating tonality? Through such means as extending triads into sevenths, ninths, elevenths, and thirteenths, thus producing a new sort of dissonance, and through the new concepts of bitonality and polytonality (using two or more tonalities at once). Also, extreme *rhythmic* ambiguities, irregular meters, rhythmic "dissonances." He even used *polyrhythms*, two or more rhythms at once. And all sorts of musical vernaculars from ancient and modern cultures -- all to inject "fresh air" into a "stuffy post-Victorian room." All tools for revivifying tonality. And of course they all caught on, spreading like wildfire across the West.

But all this rampant modernist exuberance, all this vitality and humor and irony and folkloric borrowings that spread musically across continents to Milhaud and Kurt Weiss and Copland and innumerable others, was sort of chaotic. How could it be contained? How could it be structured so as not to degenerate into real musical chaos? Stravinsky's answer: neoclassicism. There had already been a revival of interest in such "classical" figures as Bach, Mozart, and Haydn, as manifested for instance in Busoni's transcriptions (which were really rather romantic) and in some Strauss and Prokofiev and others. But Stravinsky tied it all together. Bernstein compares him to T.S. Eliot, the master in whom preceding (and succeeding) developments in poetry, anti-romantic, anti-"sincere" and -"subjective" developments (E. E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, etc.), found their culmination. The 20th century *had* to turn away from direct emotional expression because it was so *insecure*. It had to hide itself, its true feelings, because it was embarrassed by too much sincerity. It was too self-conscious and self-doubting. The new century had to speak through a mask, "a more elegant and disguising mask than any previous age has ever used. And it's the *obliquity* of expression that is now semantically paramount. Aesthetic perceptions are registered at a remove; they are, so to speak, heard around a corner." *Objective expression*, in short, became necessary. Neoclassicism (as in Eliot) was a "security blanket for the whole literary [and musical] world to clutch at in its sudden death-ridden distress."

"Hiding behind the mask of *once* directly expressed emotion -- that is the beginning and essential meaning of neoclassicism." Emotion once directly expressed by John Donne or Mozart or Shakespeare; now we adopt their forms and make allusions to them, to their (comparatively) directly expressed emotions -- we hide ourselves behind them, and indirectly express ourselves through them. Example: "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." And Ezra Pound, and Auden, and *Ulysses*, and a whole galaxy of poets using classical forms. "They speak for all of us frightened children grasping for security in the past." "But doesn't it betoken an impoverishment of our resources that we must have recourse to the past? On the contrary, it reaffirms our links with the past, our traditions and roots; only we disguise that relationship by coating it in our tough, cool vernacular. But it's a thin veneer. And when the underlying emotion does shine through, then it hits us with *double* force, precisely because of our shy, frightened attempts to hide it. --Again we're faced with the ultimate ambiguity: living and partly living, rooted and partly rooted. Remember, just as we found in the last lecture with Schoenberg [i.e., his partial rootedness in tonality]? And so it is with Stravinsky too, in his utterly different way. The one, Schoenberg, tried to control the tonal chaos of modernism through his twelve-tone method; the other, Stravinsky, through the decorum of neoclassicism, exactly like Eliot." Decorum, yes; but also, like a lot of modern poets, incessant borrowings from the past.

In Stravinsky -- to simplify -- "the personal statement is made via quotes from the past, by alluding to the classics, by a limitless new *eclecticism*. This is the essence of Stravinsky's neoclassicism. He is now the great eclectic, the thieving magpie....unashamedly borrowing and stealing from every musical museum." Not always *direct quotes*, but at least stylistic references to past figures.

Throughout all this, of necessity, there is also *humor*. All this semi-plagiarism, it's all *funny* too. But humor, of course, can "bite deep" and doesn't have to be frivolous. All of Stravinsky's mis-matchings and incongruities are funny, but many of them are also intensely serious and poignant. "In the most serious sense, humor in one form or another is the lifeblood of his neoclassicism." *Irony* is frequently present in Stravinsky, in all his crazy incongruities.

It's true that eclecticism is usually considered a cardinal sin in artists. But Bernstein defends Stravinsky's use of it. Adorno "refused to acknowledge the extraordinary power of dramatic irony that could be generated by those egregiously ill-matched components [in Stravinsky, such as his setting a sublime Latin text to machine-like music].... We are *grabbed* by [Stravinsky's] music, there's no *escape* from it. As for Adorno, he simply failed to perceive it at all, seeing it only as cleverness, showbiz, theatrical know-how -- which was also true, in a way -- but not seeing the *real* meaning, which is the amazing proximity of comedy to tragedy in our time. He completely missed the joke!--the big existentialist joke which is at the center of most major 20th-century works of art, namely *the sense of the absurd*."

Having watched these lectures, I understand Schoenberg a little better than before. And Stravinsky too, and all modern music. I still maintain, however, that extreme elitism is a flaw in art. I don't need "prettiness," but I do ask for something that can *compel* me without requiring that I first devote years of study to it just to understand it and to *partially* reconcile myself to it. Music in particular should....among other things, should be the "quickening art," as Kant said, should quicken the heartbeat, quicken life, quicken the emotions and the self's loss of itself. It's fine for it to shock, but, after all, you have to draw the line somewhere. When does "ugliness" (etc.) in music become a flaw? Some people draw the line before aleatory music, others before serialism; I'm more of a traditionalist, attached to relatively traditional tonality, and so have more restrictive standards. It's fine to express "absurdity" in music, or to pursue one's personal path of self-expression at the expense of popular approbation, but that doesn't have to be done in *really ugly, boring, almost wholly intellectual* ways. When it isn't only "much of the public" but *almost everyone* who rejects one's art even fifty years after its introduction, something is wrong. (I'm referring first of all to Schoenberg and those inspired by him, but also to any artist to the extent that his work, fifty or a hundred years later, remains an object of general disdain or revulsion even among the intelligent, educated public.)[1]

Nor do I think it would have been terribly "inauthentic" or inexcusably plagiaristic or hopelessly naïve to write works in styles similar to those of Beethoven or Bach or Schubert or Chopin or Tchaikovsky or even the late Mozart in the 20th century. (Slightly modernized, of course.) Such art is timeless and can express whatever thoughts and feelings you want it to express.

Met a Polish girl from Craigslist tonight, a 36-year-old named Amelia Kowalski. We had emailed a bit beforehand, discussing poetry and the like. For example, she sent me some lovely poems by Adam Zagajewski, commenting that she loves his "gentle, understated luminosity, and a world-weary, but not jaded, sense of transience, and often a wry sense of humor. In person, he's wonderfully unassuming and sweet." You can see she's intelligent and a good writer. Used to be a journalist, in fact, on the "crime beat," going to crime scenes and morgues, interviewing police, hanging out in very sketchy neighborhoods -- which is why she quit eventually (not wanting to be killed or raped) to become a widely read columnist for

[1] Art should not be *alienating*. It should be, to a great extent, democratic -- as should everything in life, because "democratic" means "human." The elitism of most 20th-century classical composers was related to the elitism of modern bourgeois society, the economic, social, political, cultural, intellectual schisms and fragmentation. "Bubbles," such as the academic bubble, the political bubble, the Wall Street bubble....all sorts of elitist bubbles, including in cultural life. Whereas Beethoven tended to be democratic due to the relative *integration* of his society, modern artists have tended to be elitist due to their society's relative disintegration.

a Christian newspaper, until she had a "crisis of faith" (just as two Christian publishers were asking her to write her memoirs) and went into academia, first to get a Master's at the University of Chicago in International Relations -- she didn't like it much there because of the conformism and academic narrowness -- and then to get a Ph.D. at Northwestern, where she is now. Very interesting person; good conversationalist. And pretty. Tall, blonde, thin, feminine. We went to dinner and then up to her apartment so she could give me an umbrella because it was lightly raining; went out back to her deck on this misty romantic night, sexual tension pretty thick, so I stupidly asked if I might kiss her; she recoiled but then seemed to repent. Minutes later we walked to a bar where she'd been the previous night with her friend and had lost her credit card; after recovering it we went back to her place continuing our flirty conversations with the sexual tension thick again in the shadows under the trees in her urban-suburban neighborhood, so I remarked jokingly that "This time I'm *not* going to try to kiss you," but that did the trick because an instant later we were kissing. And then more kissing, etc. Quite satisfying. She seems to really like me, as I do her. Observed, as another girl had recently, that I act kind of like Woody Allen except not so neurotically. Apparently it's "cute and charming." I was indeed somewhat charming tonight, I think, as I usually am with easygoing women who have an ounce of brain in them. It was refreshing to have conversations about history, Marxism, religion, literature (*A Moveable Feast*, *Anna Karenina*), Leonard Bernstein, etc., and later it was all so delightfully playful and flirtatious. A good woman.

Tomorrow I'm meeting another one, from OkCupid. I doubt she'll compare with Amelia (partly because she's American, not Polish). And the next day I'm meeting a beautiful Korean girl from Craigslist. A few days later I'll meet Amelia again to see Woody Allen's new movie *Midnight in Paris*.

But Aniela, I love Aniela incorruptibly. Not passionately or truly erotically, but there is a special room in my heart reserved for her and her alone. The *gratitude*.

July

YouTube also has a recording of Bernstein's 30-minute analysis of Tchaikovsky's 6th symphony, an enlightening discussion of the many elements that unite the symphony into a cohesive whole. For example, the continual use of scale-y motives. A true genius, Bernstein; and broadminded, broad-spirited, in his appreciation of nearly every kind of music out there. Always defending great composers against their critics. And, needless to say, one of the supreme musical educators in history.

Neither the American nor the Korean was particularly interesting.

[The thing with Amelia didn't last, since she was still entangled with her ex-boyfriend.]

Random observation: A paradox about me is that my sensibilities are democratic and "elitist" at the same time. *Fundamentally* democratic and *fundamentally* "elitist," in that these sensibilities are *deeply ingrained* in me. For example, I take no notice of social status or stratification -- except negatively, in that, other things being equal, the higher you are, the less respect I have for you. I despise snobbery; I despise educated self-satisfaction; I despise the conformism of the elite; I despise technocratic, even "liberal" (welfare-statist) technocratic, management of society; I despise "expert wisdom." In short, I have contempt for everything artificial and inhumane. *Institutions* are my enemy, and the more top-down they are, the more horrible they are. I love authentic popular culture, its music, its folklore -- its spontaneity and humanity. I love the genuineness and kindness of ordinary people who haven't been corrupted by modern society. Etc., etc. […] But really what it all comes down to, I think, is that my sensibilities are *humane*: anything that speaks to me of *kind humanity* is what I love. Great classical music expresses "kindness" and/or "humanity" in a variety of ways (broadmindedness, universal fellow-feeling, a democracy of the spirit -- and human creativity, etc.); certain traditional cultures express these concepts in other ways. Insofar as I'm an "elitist," it's because that which I have scorn for is neither kind nor *human*, in the noblest sense.

Reading *Workers Across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History* (2011), edited by Leon Fink. In her contribution, Aviva Chomsky writes the following:

> Charles Bergquist has convincingly argued that the different forms of coerced and free labor that developed in different regions of the Americas during the colonial period played a key role in the emergence of the contrasting socioeconomic and political structures of, say, Haiti (or even Alabama) and New England. The colonies that produced the most wealth ended up the poorest. While Terry Karl looks at the impact of natural resources, primarily on states, Bergquist places labor systems at the center of the analysis: exploitable resources led to exploitative labor systems, which structured long-standing inequalities in the distribution of land, wealth, and power.

It's a striking and obvious fact: in places with rich, exploitable natural resources, there has been a tendency for those resources to (indirectly) bring poverty and misery to most of the population. Conversely, places like England, New England, much of Europe, and Japan, which aren't terribly well-endowed with natural resources, have become rich and powerful. New England, for example, developed *industry* because its agriculture couldn't compete with that of other areas. As it happens, industry can bring greater prosperity for more people than agriculture, probably because it is more conducive to workers' *coming together* and successfully making demands on their oppressors.

…Now reading *Shaping American Telecommunications: A History of Technology, Policy, and Economics* (2006), by Sterling, Bernt, and Weiss. Wondering if I should write my dissertation on telecommunications, since it's a transnational thing that will, moreover, be around for a long, long time. So if I write something good, it could be relevant for quite a while.

....That book is rather boring, so now I'm reading *Solidarity Transformed: Labor Responses to Globalization and Crisis in Latin America* (2011), by Mark S. Anner.

In the globalized world, he notes, "Even the simplest of items, such as a T-shirt, might be designed in San Francisco, use fabric made in Hong Kong, be sewn together in Honduras, shipped to Miami, and sold in a mall in New Jersey." That reminds me of Marx's concept of commodity fetishism. All that we consumers encounter is the finished product, which seems like it's some magical thing that has appeared fully formed out of nowhere. The social relations involved in its production and distribution are unknown to the consumer. All the vicious exploitation of workers, the capitalist networks of wealth and power, the human labor and sweat that creates the product, the incredibly complicated authoritarian hierarchies....they're all invisible to the consumer, who sees only a clean, shiny new product sitting on a shelf in a store. That's commodity fetishism. Being forced to be ignorant of *human connections*.

This international dispersal of production has destructive implications with regard to labor solidarity. Some of the reasons are obvious, but I'll quote this passage anyway:

> Labor in internationally restructured industry is now often dispersed and divided by language, culture, and distance. This undermines the ability of workers to communicate across borders while also increasing the social distance between workers and upper-level managers who are located in their home countries. In cases where corporations have numerous factories producing largely identical products across the globe, the ability of workers to leverage for higher wages through strike activity in one factory is greatly reduced....
>
> Cost structures are also transformed in ways that are detrimental to production workers. In the old, traditional, "full-production" systems, a firm purchases its production inputs, transforms the inputs into the final product, and then sells its product. Under internationally segmented regimes, MNCs [multinational corporations] purchase inputs in one location and ship them to *independent* firms in another location, companies under contract by MNCs that transform the inputs into a final product or into a component of the final product. The MNCs, which own the final product, distribute it to retailers, or sell it directly to consumers.
>
> In the traditional system, producers could negotiate the price of inputs or change suppliers to keep costs low. In the segmented system, this is not possible. Here the

> multinational firm, not the factory owner, purchases the inputs. This means that labor costs as a percentage of total costs for assembly plants are much higher in segmented systems, which, as economist Alfred Marshall observed long ago, reduces labor's bargaining power since there is less of a margin to increase wages without adversely affecting the viability of the enterprise. For example, workers demanding a wage increase where labor costs are 80 percent of production costs will face much stiffer employer resistance than workers demanding a wage increase where labor costs are only 10 percent of production costs.
>
> Secondly, in the traditional system, the producer sells the final product directly to the consumer or through retailers. When production costs increase, these traditional firms have the option of raising the sale price of the goods they make. In the segmented system, the multinational enterprise never relinquishes ownership of the final product and thus the supplier firm cannot benefit from an increase in the sale price. [If the supplier firm demands a higher price for the product it is making, the corporation can simply find another assembly plant that won't charge as much.] The result of both these processes -- high labor costs as a percentage of total costs and an inability to increase the sale price -- create pressures on firms to keep wages lower than in traditional manufacturing.

If Wal-Mart squeezes its suppliers, they're forced to squeeze their workers or go out of business. This "*buyer-driven*," "monopsonistic" dynamic applies especially to low-end industries like apparel. The situation is a little different in high-end industries like auto production, but with the new phenomenon of "modular production," in many countries the auto industry has become more difficult to unionize and characterized by lower pay. There are more female workers too (who are able to push the buttons that operate robots and such), not the middle-aged, high-paid male workers who predominated in the classic age of Fordism.

Remember when I've said in the past that one of my slight handicaps in attempts to impress women -- i.e., to *dominate* in some sense -- is my small head? You probably thought that was crazy or just some idiotic excuse. Needless to say, you were wrong: my idea, which is really quite obvious, has been indirectly confirmed by science. As reported in *The Independent* recently, a study conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee found that "Men's facial width-to-height ratio is generally a positive signal, evolutionarily speaking. Specifically, when men compete for resources with other men, relative facial width is a strong sign of aggressive, self-interested behaviour." (And thus female-attracting behavior.) Why? Probably because a wide face tends to impart a feeling of power. Like all forms of bulk (in men). More interestingly, men with wide faces are more likely to lie and cheat, because of their confidence. "The studies involved testing a group of 192 business students to see how readily they were prepared to either lie or cheat in order to gain an advantage over a competitor. Men with wider faces were about three times more likely to lie and about nine times more likely to cheat compared to narrow-faced men."

Reading Jesse Lemisch's little book *On Active Service in War and Peace: Politics and Ideology in the American Historical Profession*, presented as an essay at the lively 1969 convention of the American Historical Association but published later (by an obscure left press because it wasn't mainstream enough to make it into establishment journals). A professor recommended it to me after reading my paper for his class that criticized historical scholarship. In his introduction, Thomas Schofield explains that in 1969 Lemisch was "a historian who had been dismissed from the University of Chicago because 'his political concerns interfered with his scholarship.' In what may [have been] the most telling and fundamental critique presented before the AHA he proposed that the supposedly unpolitical stars of the profession (Allan Nevins, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Samuel Eliot Morison, Oscar Handlin, Daniel Boorstin and others) were implicit cold warriors who sought to use history as a vehicle in the fight against communism. Lemisch's paper....argued persuasively that what so many object to is not that a scholar should take a political position but that he should hold views contrary to establishment shibboleths." Duh. To argue that mainstream scholarship is "free from bias" is and was so wildly naïve as to be laughable. The guardians of every

mainstream institution in history have been certain they're right and "unbiased"; it's one of the most predictable things in human existence, and one of the most ridiculous. *Everything* -- or *nearly* everything -- is political and "biased"; there are political and social relations, and political and social value-judgments, implicit in every (or nearly every) act. When you ignore a homeless person on the street, that's implicitly a political act. When you write scholarship that is sympathetic toward the powerful and ignores the powerless, that's political. When you spend your evening drinking with your friends rather than volunteering at a shelter for battered women, that's political. The way a man treats his wife is political, as is the way she treats him. Society is saturated with power relations; there is no escaping them. And such relations are always at least indirectly political.

So it is impossible to be unbiased or unpolitical. But as I said in my paper, it is possible to be *less* "biased," *more* objective, namely by being more "radical." As long as you accept such broad values as individual self-determination, democracy, the non-killing of innocents, and so forth, a consideration of facts in the light of these values will lead you to what are called "radical left" positions.

Lemisch's writing is, at times, delightfully inflammatory. No compromising with complacent liberalism.

Discussing the anti-radical ideology of respectable "politically neutral" liberal historians and social scientists such as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Daniel Bell, Lemisch easily refutes Bell's "end of ideology" thesis by pointing out that, umm, the 1960s weren't very "un-ideological." In fact, Bell's little hypothesis, like Francis Fukuyama's little "end of history" hypothesis thirty years later, was nothing but the ideology of a few self-satisfied technocratic circles in the American elite at a specific point in time.

More interestingly, Lemisch puts short work to the Consensus idea that McCarthyism was the product of an earlier populist tradition (the implication of which claim is that populism, hence the "vulgar mass," is irrational, paranoid, undemocratic, etc.). In fact, so-called "McCarthyism" obviously began several years before the rise of McCarthy, in the late 1940s, with all the Truman-imposed loyalty oaths and the purging of the labor movement and all that rabid anti-radical bullshit. In other words, it was the *elite* that was paranoid, undemocratic, and irrational, not the people. But even regarding McCarthy himself, the smug liberal hypothesis is false:

> [In *The Intellectuals and McCarthy*, Paul Rogin] has tested the pluralists' contention that there was continuity between McCarthy and earlier agrarian radicalism [e.g., that of the 1890s] and found it invalid. Testing the contention in the Senator's home state, Wisconsin, Rogin finds entirely different social bases for McCarthy and [Progressive Senator Robert] LaFollette. McCarthy rose on a conservative constituency, the traditional source of Republican strength. Progressivism in Wisconsin "mobilized poor Scandinavian farmers against the richer areas of the state"; McCarthy "rose to power with the votes of the richer German inhabitants of the farms and small cities in southern and eastern Wisconsin...." Those counties which had been Progressive "tended to oppose McCarthy more than other counties in the state." ....McCarthy did not represent any "new" American right -- just the "old one with new enthusiasm and new power."
>
> In Rogin's analysis, McCarthy emerged from conservative rural politics -- which is far from mass politics, but rather the politics of local elites. Thus, for instance, Leslie Fiedler's contention that McCarthy's support by small-town newspapers was an indication that McCarthyism was another movement toward "direct democracy," continuous with Populism, is practically reversed when examined more carefully. Small-town newspapers in fact had an enduring record of opposition to agrarian radicalism; such newspapers are generally the voice of conservative local business interests, and it was these small-town business people who formed a part of McCarthy's base. Thus, Rogin notes, McCarthyism was a movement by a "conservative elite -- from precinct workers to national politicians...." It "flourished within the normal workings of American politics, not radically outside of them" and was "sustained not by a revolt of the masses so much as by the actions and inactions of various elites."

As I said months ago, then, McCarthyism was not so much populist as "faux populist" -- if even that. "McCarthy," says Lemisch, "is evidence for the evils of too little democracy, not too much." It's the same with the Tea Party movement nowadays. And even with the old racist George Wallace, to an extent. "Rogin has found the early support for George Wallace stronger among the middle and upper class than among the working class. 'Is "middle-class authoritarianism" a more fruitful concept than working-class authoritarianism?' he asks." Public attitudes on the Vietnam War were another example of how the masses are often less conservative than the elite.

In fact, Lemisch argues convincingly that postwar liberal pluralism ("legitimate" groups competing against each other in the political arena, "countervailing powers" balancing each other) was a kind of Burkean conservatism transplanted to modern conditions. Many Consensus historians and social scientists admired Edmund Burke and disdained Thomas Paine and the French Revolution, indeed all radicals and even the abolitionists, as having fallen victim to the naïve and dangerous faith that men could make their own history, could remake society in the light of reason and reject old traditions. Like Burke, these postwar liberals found "wisdom" in traditions and institutions, and insisted that the essential flaws of "human nature" would always vitiate radicalism. Their polemic, of course, which shaped their understanding of history, was against Communism, but they broadened it to apply to all radicals of the past and present, to everyone who was discontented with mere technocratic management of society. Schlesinger Jr. and his ilk were basically anti-democrats who, like Burke -- as well as nearly all of America's founding fathers, and nearly all intellectuals and elites in history -- radically distrusted the people. But because they lived in a society that exalted democracy, they had to pay lip-service to it while rejecting its substance. [What they really valued were "stability and equilibrium." For these people, says Lemisch, "stability and equilibrium were the goals of society,[1] and since the society called itself democratic, then stability and equilibrium must *be* democracy."[2]]

All these observations should be painfully obvious to anyone who has read anything, but they're worth repeating.

Lemisch savages all these smug, lazy liberals, exposing their ideas as establishmentarian tripe. It's fun reading.

In spite of themselves, they indirectly grasped a truth: national politics in the U.S. has, with rare exceptions, always been more or less a matter of "consensus." The U.S. has been basically a one-party state for a long time. Arguably since the beginning. As Chomsky says, variation and disagreement are permitted within fairly rigidly defined boundaries, which have always excluded the radical left. These facts result from many circumstances, including the electoral system and the elitist framework of the Constitution.

....Later in the essay he turns his attention from ideas to actions, specifically actions taken by all the liberal historians and social scientists in the heady days of 1968 and 1969. The revelations aren't surprising, but they expose these intellectuals as contemptible hypocrites. Celebrating democracy and freedom while justifying and participating in violent repression against students and radical professors, who were "threatening the foundations of democratic order." Hofstadter, Handlin, Boorstin, Bernard Bailyn, Schlesinger Jr., Seymour Martin Lipset, Bell, Leuchtenburg, Eric Hoffer, Nathan Glazer, Lewis Feuer, Bruno Bettelheim, and many others: conservative establishmentarians obsessed with relatively small disruptions of their ordered little worlds at the same time that bombs and napalm were killing and mutilating millions in Indochina. *That* was not wrong (at worst "imprudent"); *student dissent*, on the other hand, was morally horrifying, the very death-knell of civilization, a resurgence of something like Nazism.

One of the less egregious examples is Schlesinger writing in 1969 on police violence against Harvard students. While "invoking the police may on occasion be necessary to preserve academic freedom," at Harvard it was wrong. Or, to quote Lemisch's paraphrasing of Schlesinger, it was "not precisely wrong, but rather, imprudent; it was not the fact of 'cops clubbing Harvard and Radcliffe students'

[1] Cf. Talcott Parsons' sociology, which became all the rage in the 1950s.

[2] As a result, student dissenters in the 1960s were -- paradoxically -- "undemocratic," in that they upset stability and equilibrium.

that offended him [Schlesinger] but the '*spectacle*' of it, which 'obliged the S.D.S. and illustrated its favorite thesis of the hidden violence of American society.'" And we all know how absurd that thesis is. It would be ridiculous to deny that America is a fundamentally peaceful place. (Peaceful for Harvard professors, at least.)

--Excellent, impassioned essay. Well done, Jesse. *Écrasez l'infâme!*

Now reading Walter Rodney's classic *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972). Like Robin Hahnel, he postulates two main mechanisms: exploitation through trade and exploitation through investment (i.e., imperialism). The former has to do with the terms of trade. For example, the big capitalist countries effectively establish the prices of minerals and agricultural products and "subject these prices to frequent reductions," thus harming Africa's economy (depriving it of revenue). They also set the prices of the manufactured products *they* produce, which of course are higher than those of the former category. *Imperialism*, on the other hand, as manifested for instance in Europeans' ownership of land and mines (and banks, factories, etc.) in Africa, entails the outflow of revenue from Africa to the foreign owners, which forestalls African development. It also takes the form of loans to African governments, which have to be repaid with interest. Again, an outflow of wealth.

"The things which bring Africa into the capitalist market system are trade, colonial domination, and capitalist investment. Trade has existed for several centuries; colonial rule began in the late nineteenth century and has almost disappeared; and the investment in the African economy has been increasing steadily in the present century. Throughout the period that Africa has participated in the capitalist economy, two factors have brought about underdevelopment. In the first place, the wealth created by African labor and from African resources was grabbed by the capitalist countries of Europe [and the U.S.]; and in the second place, restrictions were placed upon African capacity to make the maximum use of its economic potential -- which is what development is all about."

In addition to all this, obviously you have to take into account the fact that many African political leaders have for a long time been tools of the West and so haven't acted in the best interests of their people. Corruption, etc. And the frequent military coups and constant political instability have had an adverse impact on African development (as they have in Latin America).

Rodney's survey of Africa before the colonial era is instructive. Some good ideas, too. E.g., regarding the debate whether there was an "African mode of production" as there was an "Asiatic mode of production," he simply states that his assumption will be that most African societies before 1500 were in a transitional state between communalism and feudalism -- "the practice of agriculture (plus fishing and herding) in family communities and the practice of the same activities within states and societies comparable to feudalism." They were slowly evolving, not on the basis of *class antagonisms* -- because in communalism there are no true class antagonisms -- but just on the basis of "the fundamental forces of production." All these myriad societies -- "pastoralists and cultivators, fishing societies and trading societies, raiders and nomads" -- were being "progressively drawn into a relationship with the land, with each other, and with the state, through the expansion of the productive forces and the network of distribution." In some cases, such as Ethiopia and Egypt, full feudal states emerged.

Before 1500 the techniques of agriculture in most of Africa were not quite as advanced as in Europe and other regions. Why? Because of the absence of classes. In Europe, for example, it was feudal landowners and, later, capitalist farmers who were responsible for the development of advanced techniques of production. "Where a few people owned the land and the majority were tenants [as in much of Europe], this injustice at a particular stage of history allowed the few to concentrate on improving their land. In contrast, under communalism every African was assured of sufficient land to meet his own needs by virtue of being a member of a family or community. For that reason, and because land was relatively abundant, there were few social pressures or incentives for technical changes to increase productivity."

In Asia, on the other hand, where much of the land was communally owned, it was the *state* that initiated tremendous advances in certain types of farming.

Rodney's discussion makes clear that manufactures and trade in Africa prior to European colonization were by no means as primitive as is commonly thought. The quality of many manufactured items was for a long time superior to that of Europe's manufactures (though in Europe manufacturing was

on a larger scale). Social stratification even in the more primitive parts of sub-Saharan Africa was also noticeable, families with the largest herds, for example, being socially and politically dominant, sometimes to the extent that a particular family became effectively the "ruling" one. Of course with military conquests, too, relations of domination and subordination developed.

Among the areas that were highly advanced in 1500 were the Maghreb, the Western Sudan (Senegal, Mali, Niger, and parts of Mauritania, Guinea, and Nigeria), Kongo, Benin, and even, to a lesser extent, Zimbabwe. All these regions and more were well on the way to sprouting full-fledged feudal kingdoms.

But then Europe got in the way. Rodney's argument is that over four and a half centuries, "Africa helped to develop Western Europe in the same proportion as Western Europe helped to underdevelop Africa." From the beginning, Europe determined that Africa's main export was to be human beings, who would be used to produce wealth in the Americas.

"The fact that Europe was the first part of the world to move from feudalism towards capitalism gave Europeans a headstart over humanity elsewhere in the scientific understanding of the universe, the making of tools, and the efficient organization of labor. *European technical superiority did not apply to all aspects of production, but the advantage which they possessed in a few key areas proved decisive*." (His italics.) Very true. Europeans had better killing-technology, and they were better at producing *practical* goods, as opposed to luxuries.

He gives many examples of how trade with Africa contributed to the economic development of Europe. For example, "gum from Africa played a part in the textile industry, which is acknowledged as having been one of the most powerful engines of growth within the European economy." And Africa's export of ivory was important. And don't forget that many of the products from the Americas would not have existed without the African slave trade. "It would have been impossible to open up the New World and to use it as a constant generator of wealth had it not been for African labor." Also, in England, "it was the county of Lancashire which was the first center of the Industrial Revolution, and the economic advance in Lancashire depended first of all on the growth of the port of Liverpool through slave trading." Several English banks, too, became large enterprises from the profits derived through slave trading. And James Watt, who invented the steam engine, was financed by slave owners. Etc., etc. Of course the U.S., too, benefited enormously from the slave trade and slavery itself.

As for the negative impact of the slave trade on Africa, it isn't necessary to observe that the theft of millions of healthy young people from the continent wasn't particularly good for economic development.

Aside from the slave trade, contact with Europe led to the stagnation of industry. "India is the classic example where the British used every means at their disposal to kill the cloth industry, so that British cloth could be marketed everywhere, including inside India itself." It wasn't as dramatic in Africa, but the effect was the same. "African and Indian trade strengthened British industry, which in turn [partly by investing profits in new technologies] crushed whatever industry existed in what is now called the 'underdeveloped' countries."

Trade with Europe ultimately remade the African economy so that it was dependent on Europe. Even to do business with each other, local economies tended to become reliant on Europeans as intermediaries (because of their command over the sea, which was an efficient way of trading). The former integration of African markets thus deteriorated. "It has now become common knowledge that one of the principal reasons why genuine industrialization cannot easily be realized in Africa today is that the market for manufactured goods in any single African country is too small, and there is no integration of the markets across large areas of Africa."

The main point is that *trade* with Africa stimulated *production* in Europe and America. Africa became oriented to mere trade, not production, exchanging raw materials for manufactured goods. But Africa's trade itself was of a destructive nature, not only because so much of it involved the selling of people but also because it was trade with *external* countries, not with other African markets (or only indirectly).

It should be emphasized, however, that until the 1880s, when Europe began to conquer Africa *militarily* and to dominate its politics, African countries and communities were by no means mere colonies

of Europe. Politico-military structures were, on the whole, still independent. Evolution towards mature feudalism continued in many regions, with social structures and ideologies remarkably similar to those of European and Japanese feudalism.

But in the late nineteenth century things changed, because European capitalism had become so dynamic that it had to invest in undertakings outside the home market. The domestic scope for expansion was too limited; higher profits could be realized by investing abroad, controlling raw material supplies, and finding new markets. "Africa's greatest value to Europe at the beginning of the imperialist era was as a source of raw materials such as palm products, groundnuts, cotton, and rubber. [Hitherto it had mostly been ivory, gold, and slaves.] The need for those materials arose out of Europe's expanded economic capacity, its new and larger machines, and its increasing wage-earning population in towns."

Consider Egypt under Mohammed Ali (who ruled from 1805 to 1849) and afterwards. He tried to develop industry by instituting protective tariff walls around Egypt's "infant industries," importing experts from Europe, etc. The development of Egypt, however, was "diametrically opposed to the needs of European capitalism. British and French industrialists wanted to see Egypt not as a textile manufacturer but as a producer of raw cotton for export, and an importer of European manufactures. European financiers wanted Egypt to be a source of investment, and in the second half of the eighteenth century they turned the sultan of Egypt into an international beggar, who mortgaged the whole of Egypt to international monopoly financiers. Finally, European statesmen wanted Egyptian soil to serve as a base for exploiting India and Arabia. Therefore, the Suez Canal was dug out of Egyptian soil by Egyptians, but it was owned by Britain and France, who then extended political domination over Egypt and Sudan."

In some areas of the world, such as Latin America and Eastern Europe, political sovereignty was left in the hands of the local population even during the imperialist era. Not in Africa, though.

> European capitalists came to the decision that Africa should be directly colonized. There is evidence to suggest that such a course of action was not entirely planned. Britain and France up to the 1850s and 1860s would have preferred to divide Africa into informal "spheres of influence." That means that there would have been a gentlemen's agreement that, say, Nigeria would be exploited by the British merchants while Senegal would be exploited by Frenchmen. At the same time, both Englishmen and Frenchmen would trade in a minor way in each other's informal empire. But, firstly, there was disagreement over who should suck which pieces of Africa (especially since Germany wanted to join the grabbing); and, secondly, the moment that one European power declared an area of Africa as a protectorate or a colony, it put up tariffs against European traders of other nationalities, and in turn forced their rivals to have colonies and discriminatory tariffs. One thing led to another, and soon six European capitalist nations were falling over each other to establish direct political rule over particular sections of Africa.

Rodney also points out that racism played a large role in motivating Europeans to seek political domination over Africa. The "inferior race" had to be "civilized" by force. (Economics, after all, is not the only causal factor in human affairs.)

To repeat, the main theme of colonialism was the expatriation of surplus produced by Africans out of Africa and into Europe. Europe was developed in the same proportion as Africa was underdeveloped. In addition to this, the exploitation of African workers was much worse than that of European workers, so much so that Africans had to supplement their wages with subsistence farming just to survive. Therefore, the profits that mining companies, for example, made from African labor were astronomical. "Superprofits."

The African working class under colonialism, however, was very small. By far most of the Africans involved with the colonial money economy were independent peasants growing produce such as cocoa, coffee, cotton, and palm oil to be sold to local businessmen (usually Arabs or Asians), who then sold it to Europeans. "The share of profits which went to middlemen was insignificant in comparison to those profits reaped by big European business interests and by the European governments themselves." European trading

companies "held the African farmer in a double squeeze, by controlling the price paid for the crop and by controlling the price of imported goods such as tools, clothing, and bicycles to which peasants aspired." In fact, the terms of trade for African exports of raw materials and imports of manufactured goods deteriorated throughout the colonial period, not because of any objective economic law but just because "unequal exchange was forced upon Africa by the political and military supremacy of the colonizers." The concept of the "protected market," or the colony that has to accept whatever terms of trade are imposed on it by its overlords, highlights this fact.

In addition to all this private exploitation and more (e.g., some European banks made even higher profits than mining companies, ultimately by appropriating surplus produced by laborers), the colonial governments exploited their subjects by taxing them -- to pay the costs of their own subjugation. "Public works" projects were also common, whereby Africans were forced to work for a certain number of days per year on castles for governors, barracks for troops, prisons for their own countrymen, and roads, railways, and ports "to provide the infrastructure for private capitalist investment and to facilitate the export of cash crops." It is well known, too, that forced labor was frequently used for the direct benefit of business interests.

"Men like Arthur Creech-Jones and Oliver Lyttleton, major figures in British colonial policy-making, admitted that in the early 1950s Britain was living on the dollar earnings of the colonies."

Aside from the sheer financial gains from imperialism and colonialism, the metropoles benefited from the fact that the international-division-of-labor system stimulated the development of technology, skills, and the organizational techniques of the capitalist firm. "Indeed, colonialism gave capitalism an added lease of life and prolonged its existence in Western Europe." A hard statement to prove, but probably true. As usual, Rodney gives many examples to support his argument. In a sense, however, one of the main points of his book is virtually a truism: without the metropoles' relations with Latin America, Africa, and Asia, the capitalist system could hardly have achieved anything remotely comparable to what it has, and Western societies could not have become remotely as wealthy as they have. If the world consisted only of North America, Europe, and Japan, then yes, things [in these places] would be very, very different. The interesting part of his argument (which is really all of it) is in the identification of *mechanisms* of development and underdevelopment.

Among his many excellent points is the observation that exploitation of the colonies "took the edge off" the contradictions of capitalism in Europe, especially the contradiction between capitalists and workers. "Surplus from Africa was partly used to offer a few more benefits to European workers and served as a bribe to make the latter less revolutionary. The bribe came in the form of increased wages, better working conditions, and expanded social services. The benefits of colonialism were diffused throughout European society in many ways...."

Another good observation (randomly selected) is that we shouldn't fetishize (in Marx's sense) "investment" or think of capitalists as doing some great service to humanity when they invest their money in projects that happen to have constructive uses. "It is necessary to reevaluate the much glorified notion of 'European capital' as having been invested in colonial Africa and Asia. *The money available for investment was itself the consequence of the previous robbery of workers and peasants in Europe and the world at large*. In Africa's case, the capital that was invested in nineteenth-century commerce was part of the capital that had been derived from the trade in slaves." (My italics.)

Apologists for colonialism sometimes argue that, despite all its evils, it was at least responsible for modernizing Africa. Not true. "The most convincing evidence as to the superficiality of the talk about colonialism having 'modernized' Africa is the fact that the vast majority of Africans went into colonialism with a hoe and came out with a hoe." Colonialism thus failed to change the technology of agricultural production. More generally, it failed to properly industrialize Africa. When indigenous industries did start to sprout, governments quickly blocked them on behalf of metropolitan industrialists. "Groundnut-oil mills were set up in Senegal in 1927 and began exports to France. They were soon placed under restrictions because of protests of oil-millers in France. Similarly in Nigeria, the oil mills set up by Lebanese were discouraged." Africa was useful to the metropoles only as a source of raw materials. Skilled labor was, by and large, not allowed to develop.

Another obvious example of colonialism's destructive impact on Africa was the phenomenon of "monoculture." "The term 'monoculture' is used to describe those colonial economies which were centered around a single crop. Liberia (in the agricultural sector) was a monoculture dependent on rubber, Gold Coast on cocoa, Dahomey and southeast Nigeria on palm produce, Sudan on cotton, Tanganyika on sisal, and Uganda on cotton. In Senegal and Gambia, groundnuts accounted for 85 to 90 percent of money earnings. In effect, two African colonies were told to grow nothing but peanuts!" The disadvantages of monoculture, which at times became lethal to millions of people, are self-evident. (Utter dependence on metropoles, the risk of disease spreading across a country's one crop, price fluctuations that left farmers helpless, a lack of agricultural diversification resulting in malnutrition and disease, etc.)

"The factor of dependency made its impact felt in every aspect of the life of the colonies, and it can be regarded as the crowning vice among the negative social, political, and economic consequences of colonialism in Africa, being primarily responsible for the *perpetuation* of the colonial relationship into the epoch that is called neo-colonialism."

....Now reading *Labor and Capital in the Age of Globalization: The Labor Process and the Changing Nature of Work in the Global Economy* (2002), edited by Berch Berberoglu. In his chapter, Harland Prechel discusses the Fordist and the "neo-Fordist" ways of organizing the workplace. Here's a brief summary:

> In response to the capital accumulation crisis that resulted in the Great Depression, Fordism gradually replaced Taylorism, but was only fully implemented in the post-World War II era. Fordism continued the trend of centralizing control by transferring workers' knowledge to managers, incorporating workers' 'know-how' into the production machinery, and creating taller managerial hierarchies. Fordism also continued to fragment tasks and specialize work activities. A primary characteristic of Fordism was the mechanization of the production process by reincorporating the various tasks into an assembly line. This reorganization of the labor process required several layers of management to supervise the various tasks and specialized work activities.
>
> This chapter analyzes neo-Fordism, the third mode of control based on principles of scientific management, in the age of globalization. I will demonstrate how neo-Fordism computerizes information flows to further centralize control, making it possible to eliminate several layers of management and reduce the decision-making authority of lower and middle managers....

It's not a great book, so instead I'm reading Richard Du Boff's *Accumulation and Power: An Economic History of the United States* (1989), recommended by Chomsky. It's good, since it takes a Marxian/Keynesian approach. Here's the first paragraph: "Just after the Second World War, economists of the Keynesian, Marxian, and institutionalist schools shared one vision -- that nothing in the workings of a capitalist economy assured compatibility between the demand side and the supply side requirements for steady growth with full employment. For several reasons this approach to economic history soon fell by the wayside (if in fact there were ever any attempts to make use of it). This book represents an effort to revive it."

The first chapter consists of a polemic against neoclassical economics and its version of economic history. Boff's analysis "focuses not on consumption and production choices in an allocative efficiency setting [as neoclassical analyses do] but on capitalist decision-making and its social consequences. That decision-making process is not seen as a series of adaptations to external market forces but rather as the major determinant of the pattern of economic growth and as the main element forcing change in the economy at large. In this view, the twin goals of capitalist enterprise are *accumulation* and *monopolization.*" Neoclassical theory likes to treat monopolies as a kind of pathology, an extreme departure from "perfect competition" or "equilibrium" or some other invented concept, but anyone with common sense understands that monopolies are "the natural end product of successful competition, arising out of accumulation and the drive for control over an economy never in 'equilibrium.'"

Okay, now for the history. "The earliest impetus to economic growth came from foreign trade, which boomed from 1793 to 1807. Revolutionary turmoil and the Napoleonic wars in Europe allowed American shippers to capture a major part of the international carrying trade and led to unprecedented volumes of exports and profits.... Exports probably constituted 15 percent of the national product...." America's export-led economic growth ended in 1807 with the Embargo Act, which was a catastrophe for shipping interests. But it had the beneficial effect of encouraging goods-production at home, since goods were not available from Europe. "The growing demand for cloth prompted the mechanization of weaving and the integration of spinning and weaving inside a single 'mill.'" Unfortunately, the end of Europe's war in 1814 reopened the U.S. to British imports, which drove many American competitors out of business and wiped out much of the newly expanded manufacturing base, "bringing a decade of near-stagnation." (If the IMF weren't the slave of Western investors, it might draw certain conclusions from such facts as these. Opening Third-World markets to floods of Western goods is precisely the worst thing to do, from the perspective of the Third World.)

Nevertheless, in some sectors manufacturing continued to expand, slowly. In textiles, for example, where a few large firms survived the British onslaught. Also, residential construction grew, stimulating the production of nails, bricks, shingles, etc., as well as the machines to make them. At the same time, the Northeast's "commercial revolution" was happening. Commercial banks, law firms, insurance companies, etc. Public works in transportation and communication were important too. The growing volume of trade bred a new generation of middlemen, who themselves contributed to economic development. And state governments provided crucial help by chartering corporations, giving companies monopoly-type privileges and attracting wealth from small investors whose calculations of risk were influenced by their "limited liability." On top of all this, agricultural productivity was rising in the West.

Real per capita incomes rose 30 percent between 1805 and 1840. The urbanized population was 11 percent by 1840. On the other hand, "by the 1830s the sense of social distance between rich and poor was growing," as a new class of wage-earners slowly developed. *Slowly*. By the 1840s, less than 10 percent of all workers were engaged in manufacturing. The structure of the economy remained pre-industrial.

"The modern accumulation process began in the 1840-1860 period, with the coming of the railroads." I won't go through all the ways that railroads stimulated economic development. The telegraph, too, proved to be of incalculable importance. Both accelerated the emergence of a national market, and of regional specialization.

"Agriculture's share of the labor force declined from 64 percent in 1840 to 53 percent in 1860; in the North the decrease was even greater, from 63 to 34 percent." At the same time, disparities in income and wealth (i.e. property) were increasing (although real wages for working people did rise). "By 1860 income disparities had risen to a 'high plateau of inequality' that persisted for the better part of a century." (And then, you know, a few decades of the welfare state, and then a resumption of extreme polarization.) Inequality in wealth was even worse.

One sign of strong capital accumulation in the 1840s and 1850s was "the revulsion against internal improvements," i.e. public works, which had been quite significant earlier.

> The defeat of national planning for internal improvements was no doubt related to the growing sectional conflicts, especially between the North and the South, and agitation for "states' rights." But the private business sector was also starting to oppose "government interference" in the economy. The ideological reaction apparently began with the great expansion of 1843-1857, when a generation of capitalists began to sense the burgeoning opportunities that lay in free-wheeling exploitation of new technologies and new markets. The telegraph provides evidence.... With the swift commercial success of telegraphy, a campaign for public ownership was undertaken by a number of congressmen and private citizens. Opposition was strong and effective from the outset. "Who should own the Magnetic Telegraph?" asked the New York *Mercantile Advertiser* in 1846. Surely not the Post Office was the reply, because of "its utter inefficiency, and its absolute inability to

> meet the wants of the public.... In comparison with *individual* enterprise it is perfectly contemptible....a bungling concern."

Actually, historians have shown that the postal system was an astonishingly effective institution for its day. But the "private enterprise" and "government inefficiency" propaganda had already begun by the 1850s.

After the interruption of the Civil War, things heated up. Investment shot up simultaneously with the growth of consumer demand. Per capita incomes rose at a brisk pace. "Real income per person increased at an annual average rate of about 1.1 percent from 1800 through the 1850s; after the Civil War the rate jumped to 1.6 to 1.7 percent per year through 1900." In the long run, growing demand has to come from improvements in productivity, "otherwise higher demand levels are not sustainable. Only increases in the productivity of labor and capital can give the economy the added capacity to generate or accommodate more 'demand.'" These necessary increases in productivity were happening at a great rate in the second half of the century, during the "second industrial revolution." These are the years when mass production began, and giant business firms sprang up.

And yet, as always, economic growth was wildly disrupted by depressions and downturns. Between 1867 and 1900, "the economy expanded during 199 months and contracted during 197 -- a disappointing if not ominous performance in view of the glowing images the new capitalists were fashioning of themselves and their economic system." Why such crisis-laden growth? I think you know the answer. It is "capitalism's endemic problem of maintaining levels of aggregate spending high enough to prevent productive capacity from outstripping demand.... [S]cience-based gains in efficiency....permitted huge expansions in productive capacity that tended to overshoot actual levels of private demand. The main problem lay in a system that encouraged efficiency gains but discouraged a distribution of income that could assure commensurate gains in worker purchasing power." In general, labor-saving and capital-saving innovation, cost-cutting, "tends to generate excess capacity, as a given amount of investment becomes more productive and capital-output ratios [and surely labor-output ratios too] undergo a long-term decline."

I won't summarize Boff's long discussion of the second industrial revolution and the great merger wave around the turn of the century. Let's continue with the theory. The point about the structural contradictions of capitalism is that in a regime of imperfect competition, "actions designed to promote profitable investment undermine economic stability -- and the investment that depends on it." For example, if events cause a corporation to cut back production and investment but *not* reduce prices, weakness in the economy will develop. Demand will grow more slowly, and the oligopolistic firm will cut its output levels. Excess capacity will then appear. "In a *competitive* regime, underutilization of plant and equipment brings on price cutting and the demise of marginal firms. But under oligopoly the excess capacity cannot be competed away like this; in recessions total profits may shrink but excess capacity remains in place." Investment will therefore continue to drop; consumers, being paid less and being employed less, will have less money to buy things and to service their debts, which could lead to defaults, which could interrupt cash flows and profits to banks and other lending institutions, which could precipitate a crisis in the financial system.

Labor-saving measures reduce production costs for a firm, but they also constrain consumption spending. Aggregate demand might therefore become insufficient to warrant further investment, which sets in motion the vicious circle. Also, because of all the cost-cutting, profits tend to grow....faster than good investment prospects. Which tends to lead to economic stagnation.

I wonder how this emphasis on the malign effects of "excess" profits squares with Brenner's emphasis on the malign effects of a low rate of profit. It's funny that both high and low profits can be macroeconomically injurious. (Well, it isn't the high profits themselves that are the problem; it's the low demand that might be their obverse side, because it augurs badly for economic growth and profits in the long run.)

There are various ways around these problems, such as strong labor unions that insist on high wages (although if production costs increase *too* much, profits can be squeezed, which will tend to lower investment), but "they do not automatically prevent a mismatch between the nation's productive capacity and the purchasing power to keep it utilized. There is, for example, no reason why the growth of demand

that results from a given rate of investment should be exactly equal to the growth of capacity that results from that investment."

It's true that "over the past century or more, expansionary forces have prevailed." There have been three great waves of economic expansion. But this wasn't so much the result of the free market as of powerful *external* stimuli. "Epoch-making innovations" such as the railroad and the automobile opened up vast new frontiers of investment -- as Paul Sweezy argues.

> But the basic problem never disappears. Sometimes capacity increases at very rapid rates, especially when the productivity of new capital goods is rising, at other times mass-purchasing power and final sales lag, and at still other times both phenomena occur. As a result, breakdowns of the investment-dependent system have been so severe that government has increasingly been called upon to guarantee stability not only through "regulation" but also by massive expenditures to prevent aggregate demand from collapsing as it did in the 1890s and the 1930s. The tension between forces making for expansion and contraction has not abated. Since 1929 it is easily discernible in the debate over the role of government in the economy, as well as in the business cycles that somehow keep happening.

Even after the depression of the 1890s had ended, when prosperity had returned, industrial spokesmen complained about excess capacity in the midst of prosperity. As one said, "We need to open our foreign markets in order to keep our machinery employed.... It can produce in six months all we can consume in a year." And that was at a time of vigorous economic growth, in 1900. From 1907 through 1915, "real GNP grew very slowly, at an annual average rate well below 2 percent per year." One important author later concluded (in his study of the pre-war downturn) that "increased industrial productivity [during those years] did not result in any substantial addition to the real income of employed workers in general." As Boff says, "This suggests a tendency to divert productive gains toward profits rather than wages, with an eventual dampening effect on economic activity."

You know about all the oligopolistic stuff that was happening in the early 1900s, so I won't go through that. All through the 1920s, trade associations and continual mergers and a permissive federal government ensured that competition was, "to a very considerable extent," controlled. That's the way things tend to be under corporate capitalism. Capital, as you know, did very well in the 1920s -- but "the increasingly promotional and financial basis of [the] merger movement indicates a surplus of funds seeking speculative profits, as opportunities for productive investment profitable enough for the corporate sector were waning." Remind you of anything? For example, our economy's financialization over the last thirty-five years, as "opportunities for productive investment profitable enough for the corporate sector" have waned? Yes, we're on the verge of another great depression. Or at least a very protracted slump.

Also, just like in recent decades, retail chains [characterized by low wages] did unprecedentedly well in the 1920s.

"What were the forces making for a sustained economic expansion [in the 1920s] that finally pulled the nation out of the doldrums of 1907-1915?" Boff's answer is simple: "The energy behind a vigorously growing market economy comes chiefly from a core of dynamic young industries. Between 1917 and 1929 electrification and automobiles provided the key investment outlets that came to fruition after World War I. They overrode the depressive tendencies of the oligopolistic investment mode, at least long enough to allow the economy to expand for several years without significant interruption." The statistics he gives for electrification prove the stunning importance of this new industry to economic activity in that era. The statistics for, and in general the importance of, automobile manufacturing, however, are simply mind-boggling. As before with steam power and railroads, "the accumulation possibilities opened up by automobiles invigorated the whole economic machine." Think of all the "forward and backward linkages," the many industries stimulated and created, the proliferation and expansion of roads and billboards and filling stations and garages and truck driving and building construction and suburban communities and

highway construction largely financed by state and federal governments that came to the aid of flagging private investment. Even in the 1930s it was already impossible to imagine the world without automobiles.

So why did this economic boom come to an end in 1929?

> As the 1920s stretched on, the prolonged investment boom was sowing the seeds of its own demise, through its contributions to increasing productivity and inadequate consumer purchasing power. The years following the First World War were ones of record-breaking increases in efficiency, in output per worker and per unit of capital stock. The reasons are clear -- electrification, automotive transport, and widespread mass-production innovations, with expanding markets and longer production runs bringing still greater economies of scale. The end of mass immigration in 1921 threatened to restrict the supply of labor and push up wage bills, leading employers to substitute machinery for labor at an even faster rate and to squeeze more production out of existing work forces through "human engineering" techniques.

So, while productive capacity was expanding quickly, "consumer demand could not seem to keep pace." This problem was quite troubling to industrialists and business economists; they did everything they could to raise demand for their products. But capacity utilization declined in the second half of the decade. The main problem was that, even though the real earnings of non-farm employees rose substantially in the 1920s, most of the increase went to people in upper-income brackets, who never spend as much of their earnings as less wealthy people do. (A similar problem today.)

Also, oligopolistic industries, as stated above, were (and always are) resistant to significantly lowering prices (as a way to pass on productivity increases to consumers). Instead, they tended to cut back production and employment, which hurt demand. "From 1929 through 1932, prices in competitive industries fell 60 percent compared to only 15 percent in 'the more concentrated industries.'"

As Boff says, however, all this might well have led not to a devastating depression but only to a characteristic recession. An important aggravating factor was, of course, the stock market plunge in late 1929. Earlier that year a downturn in business activity had already begun, but "the stock market debacle shattered business confidence, ruined countless thousands of private investors, and wiped out holding company and investment trust structures by the score. It effectively compounded factors making for output and employment drops that would not by themselves have produced a prolonged and desperate economic crisis."

Basically, the situation was that heavily indebted holding companies controlling much economic activity paid interest on their bonds out of the profits of the individual operating companies they owned. The decline in profits that began earlier in the year "led to defaults on a number of bonds and a series of spectacular bankruptcies. Meanwhile, the Wall Street collapse was drastically raising the cost of issuing new corporate equity and closing off this source of cheap finance as a way out.... Investment and consumption soon began to sink. As sales and prices fell, large corporations responded by reducing their outlays for inventory and capital goods and increasing their holdings of cash balances, withdrawing funds from the economy's spending stream...." The vicious circle had begun. Farmers and others faced shrinking markets for their goods, bank failures spread as loans could not be repaid, millions of Americans withdrew their bank deposits, etc. On top of all this, Hoover's misguided fiscal policies and the Fed's misguided monetary policies (it raised interest rates in late 1931 to protect the nation's gold reserve) made things worse.

"In Europe a similar crisis was swiftly developing, and as Europeans demanded gold, banks all over the world had to call in loans and shrink deposits. A new wave of liquidations, international in scope, followed. In the summer of 1931, the jerry-built house of international credit, debt, and war reparations finally gave way, crushing the last hopes for a 'normal' recovery."

"The anemic nature of the recovery during the 1930s was a direct result of inadequate increases in government support for the economy."

Boff's conclusion: "What had really happened between 1929 and 1933 is that the institutions of nineteenth-century free market growth broke down, beyond repair. Had the chain of circumstances been 'right,' it could have occurred in 1920-21 or possibly 1907. The tumultuous passage from the depression of the 1930s to the total economic mobilization of the 1940s was the watershed in twentieth-century U.S. capitalism...." State intervention blunted capitalism's crisis-prone tendencies even as it created "unanticipated additions to the full range of capitalist instability."

Okay, so during and after World War II things got better, etc. Except for a series of short recessions, like the one that started in late 1948, when excess capacity appeared and private investment started falling. Luckily the Korean War happened in 1950, temporarily saving American capitalism from itself. And the pattern continued for a long time thereafter. "There is little doubt that the major growth stimulus for the American economy from 1950 through the early 1970s came from the public sector, not private investment." In fact, Arthur Okun, who was chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers under Lyndon Johnson, said that this expansion of government should be judged "not in dollars of real GNP, but in the very survival of United States capitalism." It was government spending that prevented another Great Depression from happening. In the 1950s and 1960s, military spending accounted for more than four-fifths of all federal purchases. But "military spending" is not just for the military (as Chomsky often notes); it is really a sort of "backhanded planning" for various sectors of the economy.[1] "The record-breaking, 105-month-long economic expansion from February 1961 to November 1969 was largely a result of arms spending."

It's also worth noting that in the postwar era, government's taxation of profits and other non-wage earnings (for the sake of public spending, which increased aggregate demand) helped prevent excess productive capacity from developing to the extent that it might have. And excess capacity, to repeat, can trigger a recession by causing a decline in investment.

Let's not forget automobiles. While the industry was important before the war, it was probably even more important afterwards. As usual, government had to do much of the investing and assumption of risk, but automobiles and their economic offshoots were a monster stimulus to private investment too. (Think of suburbanization.) The "Los Angelizing" of the American economy occurred after World War II. But, as I learned from Chomsky, that name is misleading, since Los Angeles was not always the car-cluttered hellscape it is now. It used to deserve its moniker "City of Angels," being a paradise on earth. Beautiful scenery, very little pollution, quiet electric public transportation, no crisscrossing highways everywhere.... Unfortunately, "between 1936 and 1950, National City Lines, a holding company sponsored and funded by GM, Firestone, and Standard Oil of California, bought out more than 100 electric surface-traction systems in 45 cities (including New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Salt Lake City, Tulsa, and Los Angeles) to be dismantled and replaced with GM buses [and cars and highways]. It was understood that the sale of automobiles, gasoline, and tires would benefit too. The project was generally successful. In 1949 GM and its partners were convicted in U.S. district court in Chicago of criminal conspiracy in this matter and fined $5000."

Don't forget, too, that the federal government was mostly responsible for the development of electronics in the 1950s and afterwards. Also synthetics (plastics and fibers).

Okay, let's skip ahead to the downturn after 1972. From 1973 to 1987, unemployment averaged 7.2 percent. The growth of private investment slowed considerably, manufacturing declined as the commercial sector (retail, communications, real estate, insurance, services) rose, debt increased all around, etc. You know it all from Brenner's book. To keep aggregate demand from collapsing as it did after 1929, the government has relied on military spending. This form of public spending, as opposed to infrastructure programs, "has highly functional characteristics for American capitalism." "Military output does not interfere with or saturate private demand. Pentagon dollars jeopardize no business interests because they

[1] Economic and ideological opposition to government programs that "compete with private capital or encroach on its domain" prevents the federal government from directly funding sufficient public works on infrastructure and so forth, so it has to take the indirect route through the Pentagon, which is less efficient than the alternative (something like the WPA or the TVA of the 1930s). See Chomsky's *Understanding Power*.

go to private firms, providing support rather than competition. The same cannot be said for low-cost housing, Amtrak and mass transit, public recreational and wilderness projects, and many social services like legal aid for poor households. A sizable expansion in areas like these would have disrupting effects on private production and on free labor markets. It would also demonstrate that the public sector can provide certain goods and services more effectively than private profit-seeking companies -- a 'bad example' to be blocked at all cost."

Moreover, military spending has the advantage of reproducing the oligopolistic structure of the corporate economy, "as it consolidates the power of some of the largest firms in concentrated sectors of the economy."

In addition to military spending, transfer payments like Social Security, Medicare, and food stamps help stabilize the economy by helping to stabilize demand. But as you know, "welfare" spending has been slashed in the last 35 years. In fact, despite increases in military spending under Reagan and afterwards, since 1972 state, local, and federal government support for the economy has plunged. "The relentless attacks on 'big government' by a resurgent right wing, anchored in the Republican party but well represented among Democrats, have borne their bitter fruit -- a reduction of the amounts of public spending necessary to generate sufficient aggregate demand to keep the economy operating at a high level of employment and output. The laboratory test is the great postwar boom: in the absence of the rapid growth of government spending from 1947-48 to 1972-73, the economy would probably have exhibited the same stagnationist tendencies evident since 1973. With reduced growth of both investment and government spending, it is not surprising that the overall economy -- GNP -- has turned in such a poor performance since the early 1970s."

So what caused the downturn after 1972? Boff blames it on numerous things, including exogenous shocks like the OPEC happenings, worldwide shortages of commodities as a result of crop failures, and two devaluations of the dollar in 1971 and 1973....but he also mentions causes internal, or relatively internal, to the system. Like Brenner, he invokes heightened international competition, which depressed profitability and thus investment, productivity, etc. Lower productivity growth also resulted from the higher global prices of energy and other raw materials, which discouraged investment in energy-intensive plant and equipment. And "rising labor compensation" -- not in wages but from increases in the "social wage" (such as employers' contributions to Social Security, health and disability, and pensions) -- combined with lower productivity growth to squeeze profits. Apparently from 1965 through 1979, employers' "supplements to wages and salaries" increased much faster than money wages and profits. They went from 6 percent to 12 percent of national income.

Incidentally, if you're wondering what the relation is between Brenner's emphasis on lower profit rates (due to international competition) and Boff's emphasis on lower aggregate demand as explanations for the long downturn, I'd suggest that the lower aggregate demand was partly a result of the low profits.[1] Business had to cut costs to lower prices to compete with imported goods, which meant lower wages and less employment, which meant less effective demand. Which meant more excess capacity, which reinforced tendencies toward reduced growth of investment, which meant lower productivity growth, etc. A vicious circle. Heightened international competition wasn't the *only* trigger, but it was an important one. Boff might say that it ended up reinforcing -- ironically -- the stagnationist tendencies of America's oligopolistic economy (by encouraging greater cost-cutting....which *didn't* result in the "shakeout" of less-productive firms, as would have been the case in a more "purely competitive" economy, because of all the ways that oligopolistic firms in modern America have of staying in the game, including by relying on debt, on the government's military Keynesianism, on corporate tax cuts, on financial speculation, on investments in real estate and insurance, etc.).

So recessions got more severe. Boff notes, however, that recessions are functional for capitalism, and since the mid-1950s have always to some degree been policy-engineered. From the perspective of capital, they do "curative work" for the economy. They reduce inflation, assure adequate supplies of compliant labor, and "check speculative financings" that can imperil coordinated expansion of a market

[1] Of course in the long run it contributed to them, too.

economy. Recessions can restore conditions for profitability. Government's role is to "allow a recession but to stop it short of catastrophe."

Boff has a deprecatory attitude toward Reagan's supply-side economics. He doesn't even think it was particularly new. "Regressive tax legislation and assaults on labor were nothing new in U.S. history, but now they were reinforced by 'deregulation' -- the decontrol of regulated industries and the gutting of regulatory agencies that protect workers and consumers." Another new development of those years was that "as deficit spending encouraged consumption to race ahead of domestic output, imports filled the gap and foreign savings financed both the budget and trade deficits. That was the 'new' feature of supply-side economics -- foreigners supplied the goods and the funds."

Needless to say, one of the effects of all the deregulation of recent decades has been an acceleration of "the long march toward oligopoly," as an analyst for the Wall Street Journal wrote in 1985. The fourth merger movement began (the first being the one between 1890 and 1902).

Boff's final word on the long downturn is that "events since 1972 have done nothing to dispel the view that the chronic problem of capitalism is insufficient private-sector aggregate demand to keep production and employment growing." He quotes an author: "Throughout the entire industrial phase of U.S. economic history the system has operated below its potential, with full employment obtaining only in brief spans surrounding cyclical peaks.... The decade of the 1970s thus reveals the face of long-run stagnation, unleashed by the demise of the state and local stimulus together with the failure of the federal government to compensate for this demise." Brenner wouldn't agree with that diagnosis, but there's some truth to it. Boff immediately qualifies it, however, by repeating that one of the most significant factors was the change in the structure of the world economy beginning in the late 1960s.

> "Supply shocks" raised production costs and impaired existing industrial capacity in the United States (and elsewhere), so that Keynesian demand stimulation would have produced only a marginal output and employment increase, but probably a significant rise in inflation. [This, of course, is what happened.] But this constituted no reason to reject Keynesian economics, as conservatives (and many neoliberals) so quickly proclaimed it did. All economists agree that any decrease in productive capacity tends to cause a rise in prices and a fall in the quantity of output.[1] The *response* to the supply shocks of the 1970s actually validated Keynesian theory, as tight fiscal and monetary policies depressed economic activity, generated persistent unemployment, and further discouraged the investments needed to get out of the trap.[2] This period, moreover, was also marked by growing competition among capitalist nations, creating an oversupply of capital stock on a world scale in textiles, steel, motor vehicles, shipbuilding, and other industries. Even during the 1970s, the old excess capacity dilemma was at work -- and expanding to global dimensions, with companies in North America, Europe, and Asia fighting for the same markets.

It's possible that Boff puts too much emphasis on exogenous "supply shocks" and not enough on intensified international competition.

In the light of all these Keynesian ideas, it's even more clear to me than before that the government in 2011 is virtually digging the grave of American corporate capitalism by *dramatically* cutting spending, even military spending![3] The economy is going to get worse and worse for years. A full-fledged depression

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[1] (Um, but there continued to be *excess* capacity too, right? Not enough demand, right? *And* -- you're saying -- not enough supply? That's a little confusing.)

[2] But Brenner would argue that in order to *really* get out of the trap, an even more severe recession, or depression, would have been necessary first, in order to "shake out" all the unproductive capital in the economy. Indeed, Boff himself said as much a few pages earlier.

[3] (Actually, upon inquiring further I've learned that all the talk about cuts to defense spending is bullshit. Orwellian doublespeak. It only means reductions in the *projected future growth* of defense spending. Not actual *cuts*.)

might well break out. Will it be possible to reconstruct corporate capitalism in its aftermath? Doubtful. -- Capitalism's contradictions cause its downfall!

I won't summarize the last two chapters of the book, but I'll mention a couple convincing arguments Boff makes about the nature of corporations -- arguments I'd heard before, and which have always seemed obviously true to me. First, enormous size doesn't entail enormous efficiency. Corporate consolidation often happens at the expense of efficiency. (Market power, which doesn't seem to correlate with technical efficiency, is profitable.) Second, "giant companies are not the fountainhead of technological progress. The largest firms do not support R&D more intensively relative to their size. Small, independent inventors, unaffiliated with any industrial research facilities, supply a disproportionate number of inventions like air conditioning, the jet engine, [and] insulin. 'Radical new ideas,' *Business Week* concluded in a 1976 survey, 'tend to bog down in big-company bureaucracy. This is why major innovations -- from the diesel locomotive to Xerography and the Polaroid camera -- often come from outside an established industry.'"

Such facts suggest that Schumpeter's optimistic "creative destruction" theory "might be turned on its head. The revised sequence would be that, for big business, profitable growth strategies are linked to the attainment of market power, which often engenders bureaucratic management and conservative policies. Excess profits can accrue long enough to lull corporate giants into a false sense of security. Among the predictable results would be technological lag, periodic attempts to shore up profits and power through mergers, and administrative hypertrophy."

*

Sent Chomsky a couple of questions about Bertrand Russell's theory of descriptions and the law of the excluded middle. His response: "Strawson was right in recognizing [in his paper "On Referring"] that referring (in ordinary usage) is an action, and that the notion that there is a relation of reference between words and things in natural language is at best dubious (in my opinion completely false). But Russell's theory of descriptions was not designed to mirror ordinary usage. It was a tool for mathematics and mathematical logic. The question is what to make of mathematical statements like 'the first even prime larger than two is greater than 100.' --Same with the law of the excluded middle." Okay. But it does seem that Russell intended his theory to apply to ordinary sentences, such as "The present king of France is not bald." And no one will ever be able to convince me that that sentence is both true and false (on two different interpretations -- as Russell argued) rather than neither true nor false. So, insofar as the theory of descriptions and the law of the excluded middle are supposed to apply to propositions in natural language, they're surely wrong. They may be true, however, of mathematics and mathematical logic.

*

What will happen?-- The rich will keep getting richer, the poor poorer, the *public* state smaller and the *private* state bigger; the economy will continue deteriorating, public services disappearing, the national security state expanding (in part to keep in check an ever-more-restless citizenry), public education collapsing. My question is, what will be the *creative underside* of all this destruction? For there always is such creativity; the germs of the future are sown in the present. To survive, people will have to join together, will they not? They will not be able to rely on the state as they have, since welfare, social services, education, labor regulation, and other things formerly provided and administered by the state are being gutted. But *how* will they join together? And when? When will the creative "backlash" become visible? What forms will it take? Of course a "backlash" against business has been going on for years, but insofar as it is nationally visible it is largely doomed to defeat in the short run, as it has been on the ever-retreating defensive for decades. *This* is not the backlash I'm talking about, at least I don't think so. Society in its present form will collapse, destroyed by the depredations of the "market" (or capital) -- but what will arise in its stead??

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It's hard for me to take seriously people's responses to me, whether positive or negative, because in different circumstances they would have responded in the opposite way. It is never just *you* to whom people respond, but *you in such and such conditions*. An indefinite number of external factors enters into people's attitudes toward one another.

On the other hand, these attitudes are rarely *groundless*. They are merely not as grounded as they pretend to be.

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The hundreds of dates I've been on in my life, and the hundreds of parties I've attended, and the thousands of superficial acquaintances I've made, have diminished my enthusiasm. I'm heartsick, and I'm tired.

*

Like all great thinkers, Marx had some good ideas and some less-good ideas. Consider his ideas on revolution. He was right to see the crux of the matter as always being the relation between two polarized classes, because that is the pivot of (non-communal) societies. In antiquity the central structure was landowners vs. slaves; in feudalism it was landowners vs. serfs; in capitalism it is capital-owners vs. wage-workers. To speak in functionalist terms, these dichotomies are what make possible the production of the economic surplus that is necessary in order for the society to continue functioning, the surplus that is distributed in various ways amongst all sectors of the people. In causal terms, the people with greatest control over resources, which means over production relations, will exert their power to keep intact the relations that benefit them. The reason there is always only one central class structure instead of several is that the method of organizing production that extracts the most surplus with the least cost will tend to spread at the expense of other, less efficient or less powerful modes of production until it predominates. That is, the "representatives" of the most wealth-producing mode of production will accumulate power at the expense of representatives of less effective modes of production, until the whole society is structured around the interests of the former.[1]

Thus, a transition from one form of society to another occurs with the inauguration of a new dominant class structure, a new mode of production. And it comes about through the breakdown of the old class structure (possibly accelerated by the gradual emergence of a more dynamic mode of production, as in the transition in Europe from feudalism to capitalism). The Roman Empire succumbed to inefficiencies and problems in the slave-based organization of production; feudal Europe succumbed to problems and inefficiencies -- especially relative to emergent capitalism -- in the serf-based organization of production, as did the rest of the feudal world when it came into contact with capitalism. But it hasn't been just "productive inefficiencies" that have doomed all previous class-based modes of production; *class conflict*, whether implicit or explicit, has also been essential. For example, it was largely through the agency of the peasantry (in its conflict with landowners) that feudalism fell in France, Russia, and China. In the same way, if or when capitalism collapses it will be through the agency of wage-workers in a sort of alliance with worker-owners, the representatives of a higher mode of production. But before that happens, *implicit* class conflict[2] will start to cause the downfall of capitalism, as capitalists accrue more and more power, the economy becomes more and more polarized, and society becomes more and more dysfunctional.

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[1] Think, for example, of the North's destruction of the South's mode of production during and after the American Civil War. Barrington Moore was right to consider that war essentially a kind of capitalist revolution.

[2] Or rather, *explicit* on the part of capitalists. Think of their current attacks on public-sector unions, and their attacks on the welfare state.

Where Marx went wrong, as I've said many times before, was in *some* of his predictions of the *specific mechanisms* of capitalist downfall, as well as its timeline. His basic mistake was not to foresee the statist period of capitalism, or "state capitalism."[1] Fascist Europe, the Soviet Union, Communist China, the U.S. after the 1930s (or even before), and many other examples amounted to variations on the theme of state capitalism or monopoly capitalism or corporate capitalism.[2] (The Communist countries certainly were not socialist or communist; it is convenient, therefore, to call them ultra-statist, ultra-bureaucratic versions of capitalism, given that capital accumulation was the guiding principle of the system. Conversely, from even before the mid-20th century the U.S. was in many respects a planned economy.[3]) Had there been no state to intervene in the conflict between labor and capital so as to stabilize society, it is possible that some kind of post-capitalist social revolution would have happened in the early 20th century. But the nation-state matured with capitalism in such a way that they were inseparably united; the development of each reinforced the development of the other. So there had to be a statist "interlude." But it was also inevitable that capitalism would continue growing, continue internationalizing, continue exploiting labor in other, cheaper countries -- especially as international competition intensified -- and thus would continue eroding the boundaries and authority of nation-states, in part by virtue of its ability to play off one country against another. As capital became more and more gigantic, states would have to become more and more subservient to it and indebted to it (literally). Slowly, therefore, in losing what little autonomy it had had earlier (in the 1940s and '50s, for example), the state would cease to be as socially stabilizing as it once was. Class conflict and polarization would be allowed to resume; regulation of economic activity, being inconvenient to capital, would be dismantled; society would become more dysfunctional and crisis-ridden. Only at *this* point would advanced capitalist countries begin to enter a revolutionary era, an era of enormously *protracted* revolution. The nation-state had to erode before the era of (transnational) revolution could begin.

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There is something beautiful in the fact that musicians in Asia and Africa regularly play pieces by Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, and the others. Millions of Asians and Africans devote their lives to this music and make it their own. That is beautiful, that implicit and without-a-second-thought recognition that some things are the heritage of humanity and not of a specific culture. Beauty transcends its culture and becomes human.

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Mozart wrote his 36th symphony in four days.

*

Lèse majesté.-- Noam Chomsky has had an incredibly lucky life. His childhood was spent in an un-atomized, idealistic, intellectual culture with fascinating relatives whom he regularly visited (in New York). Until high school he went to a progressive experimental Deweyite school that he loved. From childhood he knew his future wife Carol, and they married at a young age, thus sparing him the infinite frustration of being an eccentric intellectual who has to spend years looking for the right woman, meeting hundreds of the wrong ones. Soon after entering college he met Zellig Harris, an inspirational, brilliant man who guided

[1] To say it differently, he didn't appreciate the power of the nation-state as a principle in human affairs.

[2] [Actually, in the light of the following, it's misleading to equate corporate and state capitalism. For, if I'm right, the nation-state is declining even as corporate capitalism is thriving as never before -- *because* corporate capitalism is thriving as never before (except maybe in the 1920s). The state-corporation nexus is still paramount, but the state is becoming weaker relative to capital (*transnational* capital) than it used to be.]

[3] To an extent, it has always been a partially planned economy, like every other country.

him and convinced him to study linguistics and not drop out of college. Through personal connections, having published little or nothing, he was given a professorship at MIT at a young age. (He was lucky enough to live in a time when it was easy to get an academic job.) Later he became an anti-war activist and would have gone to prison for a long time -- was about to go to trial -- if the Tet Offensive hadn't happened just then, saving him. (It convinced the U.S. government to start winding down the war[1] and to end its prosecutions of activists like Chomsky.) And so on. The man is charmed.[2]

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Artists, whether in literature, music, the plastic arts, theater, or anything else, are an interesting breed. The more you talk to them or watch them on talk shows or read about them, the more you realize that the majority are bores, buffoons, clownish narcissists, self-indulgent alcoholics, narrow-minded fools, etc. Watching videos of Jack Kerouac and others....you need a shower afterwards.

*

Chomsky likes to say that Americans are basically responsible for the crimes of their government, because they live in a relatively free society that allows them to influence politics. But there is only a small amount of truth to that. If you consider Americans as a group, all 300 million of us, then yes, in a sense you can say that this *group* is partly responsible for its government's acts. But *individuals* are not. It would be *impossible* for me to influence federal policies (or at least policies that mattered). I simply cannot stop the government from deporting undocumented immigrants, or from launching drone attacks in Pakistan that kill civilians, or from failing to enforce labor laws. In these respects I have *zero* power -- or, rather, approximately infinitesimal power. Which means I am not responsible, or my responsibility is approximately infinitesimal. That doesn't mean I shouldn't try to do what I can to influence government policies, since from an "absolutist" or "deontological" perspective you can argue that I have an obligation to do so, but realistically what I do either doesn't matter or, if I miraculously succeed in having influence *as an individual* on policies, it will take decades for my acts to lead to some *minor* concrete change. Chomsky himself can do virtually nothing to change policies (as he has admitted)....so what chance do I have? What chance does (almost) anyone have?

Is Chomsky responsible for policies he hates? Of course not. He has effectively no power, which means effectively no responsibility. (By paying taxes that fund bad policies, yes, there is a *tiny* element of responsibility. But one's refusal to pay taxes wouldn't have the slightest impact on policies, so, in the end, one doesn't really have any responsibility for them even if one pays taxes (because *not* doing so wouldn't matter).)

In a sense, Chomsky is right to publicly blame ordinary Americans: doing so can potentially shock them out of complacency. But that's a tactical consideration, separate from what I've been discussing.

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Requiescat in pace, capitalismus.-- A reasonable way to interpret the West's history in the last century is that the contradiction in capitalism between the tendencies towards increased supply (or surplus value) and decreased demand (or the *absorption* of surplus) finally reached a crisis point in the 1930s, and would have destroyed capitalism had the state not stepped in. The state had to artificially raise demand by using tax revenues and debt-financing to direct spending and income redistribution where it had to go in order to keep the system running. Eventually, however, the state's debt reached unsustainable levels even

[1] More accurately, it convinced a small group of former cabinet officers, generals, presidential aides, and ambassadors, sometimes called the Wise Men, to advise Lyndon Johnson to start de-escalating operations because the war was unwinnable and was hurting the country. Johnson obeyed dutifully.

[2] He himself has acknowledged the huge role of luck in his life.

as the capitalist class was pushing hard to cut taxes and end income redistribution (as well as economic regulation, which was essential to keeping the economy healthy), with the consequence that a return to relatively pure, less state-regulated capitalism took place. Not surprisingly, this coincided with a return to severe economic crises and an insufficiency of aggregate demand. The West approached a situation similar to the one at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s. Statism could not be the answer this time, given the already high government debt and the internationalized ("free-trade") conditions of the world economy. The [national] state was on its way out; hence, capitalism was (almost) on its own now. Which meant that, seemingly, it was doomed to protracted paroxysms of stagnation. Unless the developing world, particularly China and India, could save the system, there was no hope for it.

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Mumia Abu Jamal is right to refer to America's "prison-industrial complex." Prisons may be America's most dynamic growth industry. Communities want prisons to be built in them because they provide jobs. Prisoners are the raw material, so to speak, on which employees work; and corporations make fantastic profits off the construction of prisons and the exploitation of cheap prison labor. At the same time, sending millions of black and Hispanic males to prison for minor offenses rids society of an economically superfluous population that, as it grows, threatens to "destabilize" corporate capitalism. So capitalism has accomplished the impressive feat of making a *business* of getting rid of people whom capitalism has made economically redundant and politically dangerous. Finding a way to make profit off the redundant and unprofitable, *precisely by protecting capitalism from them* -- that's genius. Satanic genius. That it happens to destroy millions of lives is an unfortunate externality.

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A lot of mainstream people would criticize me for immersing myself in leftist scholarship and journalism, which they would say is a close-minded or partisan thing to do. They would say I should expose myself to *all* kinds of writing, not only the leftist variety. Actually, such a criticism is silly because I *do* read writings from a variety of viewpoints. In my courses, for example, I have to read mainstream scholarship, and every day when I peruse the internet or read my roommate's copy of *The Economist* I'm exposed to mainstream and conservative journalism.[1] Aside from this, however, the fact is that among leftist writing there is a greater proportion of *good* stuff, honest and critical stuff, than among mainstream and conservative writing. That judgment has nothing to do with my "ideology"; it is simply a fact. Nor is the explanation hard to think of. For one thing, journalists and commentators in the mainstream usually do not have to carefully give a lot of evidence to establish their claims, because it is relatively rare that anyone will challenge them (or their narrative framework, at least). If what you say is consistent with the dominant narratives propagated all over society by power-centers, most of your audience will simply take what you say for granted. If, on the other hand, you are challenging conventional narratives, people will demand evidence.[2] Thus, taking an oppositional stance to the mainstream, or to power-centers, itself tends to foster a mindset of intellectual integrity -- because that's the only way you can even get a word in.

Related to this is the fact that, because most people and institutions everywhere are constantly trafficking in mainstream ideologies and perspectives, it is relatively *easy* to do the same yourself. A scholar or journalist in the center or on the right usually does not have to dig deep, uncover hidden truths and think

[1] Some of which is pretty good. Much of the business press has good, factual reporting (the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Financial Times* -- though rarely the *Economist*, which is ideological pablum) -- but often such reporting, even in the business press, is precisely *leftist* in its implications and orientation. More leftist than anything you'll read in the *New York Times*. Some of it could appear in *ZMag* or *Dollars & Sense*.

[2] On the other hand, if you're Chomsky, your careful citing of masses of evidence will be ridiculed as intellectual bullying or as "his customary blizzard of citations" or something like that. Ultimately, the only way you can satisfy the guardians of mainstream orthodoxy is by espousing their own conventional ideologies.

critically about his intellectual framework. An author on the left, however, does. His whole project is to put forward views and uncover stories that are being ignored or no one knows about. All the better that these tend to be the *human* stories, the *concrete*, *factual* stories, stories about workers striking against corporations, people protesting wars, billions living in sprawling slums, public services breaking down everywhere, women being sold into sex slavery, governments colluding with corporations, arms being shipped from the U.S. to governments that use them to suppress labor movements, governments ignoring the popular will (demonstrable from polls), economic polarization reaching new heights every year, or democracy and the middle class historically being born from the efforts largely of the working class and the labor movement, etc. All this and much more is *true*; the writings of a Milton or Thomas Friedman, or an Arthur Schlesinger (in his Kennedy years), or a William Buckley, are transparently superficial and partisan, if not dishonest.

Ironic that it's the *leftists* who have always been accused of being ideological and biased! They're doing little but reporting facts and putting self-evident interpretations on them;[1] it's the centrists and conservatives who tend to be ideological and biased.

*

Liszt's transcription of Schubert's song "Frühlingsglaube." Listening to this at 1:00 a.m., what does one write to communicate the mood? What I told Aniela in my email to her with the link to the song is pitifully inadequate: "I love this magical midnight mood, serene and nostalgic, quiet as though nothing else exists in the world. Except you. :)" It is a piece that stops time. It is release.

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"Strength" is a false ideal. An artificial, a meaningless ideal. The only ideal that matters is *humanity*.

*

How did I attain the relative emotional maturity I've reached? In the most immature age in history, living in almost complete emotional and intellectual isolation, and loving the sweet melancholy of midnight and Chopin, how have I succeeded in transcending my past and finessing my originality so that it doesn't kill me? The innate genetic temperament of cheerfulness has been decisive: to look at this world not only with contempt but also amused condescension, understanding that the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune mean nothing because nothing, in a sense, means anything. My genes and my understanding have given me whatever contentment I have.

But also, the emotional maturity has come with a little help from my friend, Chomsky. He helped teach me that 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer fortune *quietly* than to moan about it. Not to fixate on the self, not to draw unseemly attention to the self, but to raise oneself above particularity and into universality. That is nobility, that averting one's gaze from oneself so that one becomes humanity. And if one's contemporaries almost to a man are disappointing, one simply withdraws into the universal. That is the cure.

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The stupidity of policymakers is striking. Assuming they do want to stimulate economic growth -- an assumption that is by no means unproblematic -- their prescription of fiscal austerity is self-evidently counterproductive. Look at how well it succeeded when Herbert Hoover tried it, and when Franklin Roosevelt returned to austerity in 1937-38, thus triggering another major recession. A schoolchild could

[1] I don't mean *all* leftists.

see that what's necessary is massive government spending, not cuts. But corporations hold the power, and corporations want cuts, so cuts it will be.

The silver lining is that spending cuts will intensify social and political conflict, class polarization, in the end hastening the demise of our overripe civilization.

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It's hard to imagine that in the next ten or twenty years there won't be a major uprising, or a series of major uprisings, in the U.S. What *is* hard to imagine is where these uprisings will lead. I have *no idea*.

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I can't help repeating the obvious: I'm thrilled that the age of "post-materialist" activism is coming to an end. Finally! All those elite postmodernist fools in the 1970s, '80s, '90s, and 2000s proclaiming smugly that the age of materialism, of class struggle, of economic activism was over....precisely when the ground was just beginning to cave in beneath the feet of the middle class and, much more so, the lower classes! In fact, the reason it was even possible to be fooled into the postmodernist, post-materialist creed was precisely the *intensification* of class war on the part of corporations! With the help of government they broke the precarious postwar "capital-labor accord" (not an "accord" at all, really), smashed the labor movement, and so deprived labor of an effective voice in the political arena. But the crumbling of effectual class struggle on the weaker side coincided with, and was made possible by, the triumph of class war on the stronger side. Any idiot could have seen this. And any idiot could have seen that such trends couldn't persist indefinitely, that a climax would eventually have to come to the "rich-getting-richer, poor-getting-poorer" dynamic. A day of reckoning would come sooner or later. Feminism, multiculturalism, and gay-rights activism -- *cultural* egalitarianism, in short -- could make headway because they didn't challenge the class structure (and because they had *money* behind them). As I've said before, then, the rise of postmodernism, far from invalidating materialism, Marxism, etc., was made possible by institutional facts that only a Marxian or "economistic" analysis can explain. Postmodernism was the quintessential symptom and proof of what it denied, thus refuting itself, so to speak. Its mere existence and popularity refuted it (because, institutionally speaking, *what was required* for it to become the hegemonic discourse?).

Post-materialist activism is important, but not nearly as important as economic activism. It's a matter of privileges versus survival.

*

I've discussed this topic a lot already, but here I go again: how do you explain the pleasure of thinking about unpleasant things? For ten minutes today I thought about that stupid incident in college when I went home after a date with the girl who was fumbling for her key and was probably about to let me in to have some fun with her. While reliving the moment I thought, 'Why am I thinking about this? It's painful. Stop thinking about it.' But I answered, 'No, I'm not finished yet,' and kept myself stewing in the relived sexual frustration. What's going on there? I think I answered the question a while ago, but here it is again: my purpose in continuing to think about it is to get myself to *accept* it, to experience the pain in order to rise above it and realize its unimportance. I want to "*assimilate*" the foreign, unassimilated experience, grasp it in its phenomenological essence and so deal with it, triumph over it, conquer its pain. And in fact, after a few minutes I attained a moment of clarity in which I (*intuitively*) understood the silliness and transience of the painful episode, at which point I thought, 'Okay, good. On to something else.'

These sorts of paradoxical things aren't true only of me; they're true of everyone. Due to my sensitive, introspective nature, though, I experience them more intensely than others.

*

On leadership, again.-- One of the reasons I don't respect "leaders" very much is that they're usually just as obedient and conformist as everyone else, in some respects maybe more so. For they rise to leadership positions by being good at following institutional norms and acting as people want and expect them to act. They accept the rules -- the *bullshit* -- of the game. In most cases they also necessarily have moral failings, such as dishonesty, hypocrisy, ruthlessness, selfishness, narcissism, a tendency to be rude and overbearing, and an unprincipled, authoritarian love of power. I might almost say they tend to exemplify the ethically dubious and inhumane.

Moreover, "leadership" is at best in uneasy tension with democracy. The *people* should lead, not an individual or individuals. "Communicative rationality," which is really what democracy is, is not readily compatible with the existence of dominating personalities who monopolize the conversation or guide it where they want it to go, using their emotional-charismatic powers of "*persuasion*"[1] -- not to mention other more underhanded tactics that political and economic leaders often use -- to manipulate outcomes. Reason is democratic (because quintessentially free, under one's control, and, in principle, universally accessible); charisma and all things un-rational are authoritarian, vis-à-vis either oneself or others. (They *compel*.)

Doubtless humans and societies are saturated with the un-rational, but to that extent democracy is imperfect. Both a person's "democratic" ("autonomous") control over himself and a society's purely democratic control over itself are impossible. But these ideals can be approached more or less closely. And with regard to a society, the more that the "leadership" principle predominates, the less democratic it is.

Incidentally, one might argue that it's largely or entirely the feminine element in people that makes them susceptible to being led. Women, especially the more feminine ones, tend to be more smitten by charisma than men, yielding to it readily, sometimes *fainting* from contact with it or its trappings (as, for instance, Elvis made young women faint). In this respect, femininity is in tension with true democracy, true communicative rationality. [I've deleted a long discussion I had here of democracy as it relates to femininity on the one hand and masculinity on the other.]

*

D. W. Winnicott notwithstanding -- and despite everything I wrote above -- I'm still not sure it makes a lot of sense to abstract out idealized feminine and masculine elements from each personality. Is it possible to assign different abstract traits to each? […]

*

From a recent Chomsky article on the global economy: "....The developing picture is aptly described in a brochure for investors produced by banking giant Citigroup. The bank's analysts describe a global society that is dividing into two blocs: the plutonomy and the rest. In such a world, growth is powered by the wealthy few, and largely consumed by them. Then there are the 'non-rich,' the vast majority, now sometimes called the global precariat, the workforce living a precarious existence...." Yup. The concept of the precariat is in some respects the successor to that of the proletariat. Every year the world gets closer to Marx's abstract ideal of polarization between the rich and the poor, with the middle class dissolving away like a memory. *Finally* the age of revolution is approaching!!

--The revolutions of the 19th and 20th centuries, from feudalism to capitalism (of various kinds[2]), will probably seem minor in comparison to the chaos that we're in for.

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[1] Some classical writers, such as Plato, made a distinction between reason and the coercion implicit in some kinds of speech (eloquent speech). It's the difference between being rationally convinced and being emotionally "persuaded." If I remember right, Rousseau also touches on this.

[2] Some kinds were not very "capitalist" at all if that denotes a market economy. The classic examples are the USSR and China. But, again, no societies had purely market economies; all were planned, *state*-planned, to some degree. It was a continuum, not a dichotomy, between market and non-market economies. The real source of conflict between, say, the USSR and the U.S. was simply, e.g., that the former wouldn't let the latter's investors have access to its

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August

I asked Chomsky about his thoughts on the synthetic a priori, and also on Quine's paper on the analytic-synthetic distinction. His response:

> I haven't written about it. I've written quite a lot on Quine, but not on that particular paper, which I think misinterpreted Carnap, and really doesn't bear on the questions of the synthetic a priori. [True.]
>
> In formal systems there is a stipulated analytic-synthetic distinction. For ordinary language it is not possible to pose the questions precisely because the concepts involved are not precisely enough defined.

Interesting viewpoint. But isn't it somewhat similar to what Quine argued?

[…] I'm reading Harry Braverman's classic *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (1974), which is "an attempt to inquire systematically into the consequences which the particular kinds of technological change characteristic of the monopoly capitalist period have had for the nature of work and the composition (and differentiation) of the working class." It's a thoroughly Marxist book.

Long discussion of Taylor and scientific management. Insistence that the latter, interpreted broadly, is of essential importance to labor processes in mature capitalism. (Management taking knowledge of technical processes away from skilled workers and forcing them (over decades) to be dumbed down, to be mere instruments that have little or no understanding of how all the work they do in factories "fits together." Management becomes the brain, whereas formerly the skilled workers were both the brains and the brawn. "Conception is separated from execution," which in the 1870s, '80s, and even afterwards was not the case. Hence the thickening of management, the addition of many layers of bureaucracy for the sake of planning and supervising.) The absurd extremes of the dehumanization of industrial labor under the impetus of the "scientific-technical" revolution in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

And machinery. Oh, the machinery! "The capacity of humans to control the labor process through machinery is seized upon by management from the beginning of capitalism as the *prime means whereby production may be controlled not by the direct producer but by the owners and representatives of capital.* Thus, in addition to its technical function of increasing the productivity of labor -- which would be a mark of machinery under any social system -- machinery also has in the capitalist system the function of divesting the mass of workers of their control over their own labor." (Italics in the original.) Braverman gives myriad examples.

"Machinery offers to management the opportunity to do by wholly mechanical means that which it had previously attempted to do by organizational and disciplinary means. The fact that many machines may be paced and controlled according to centralized decisions, and that these controls may thus be in the hands

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resources. It refused to be subservient to Western business interests. There was the ideological war, yes, and (more importantly) there was "the threat of a good example" -- the possibility of other countries following the lead of Russia into a more state-directed and unsubservient-to-the-West economy -- but fundamentally it was just a matter of "You're not letting us control you!" and "You're not letting us get rich off you!" The rhetoric of capitalism vs. socialism was a smokescreen. The real issue had to do with Russia's appalling principle of national independence, and also -- less so -- with the confrontation between two very different kinds of (basically) state-capitalist social relations, one of which was much more friendly to private investors than the other.

of management, removed from the site of production to the office -- these technical possibilities are of just as great interest to management as the fact that the machine multiplies the productivity of labor."

The capitalist drive to increase labor productivity can become socially irrational in its unstoppable frenzy. In the obsession with cutting labor costs, more and more people are eventually thrown out of work; more and more people lose their source of income and become economically redundant. Machines take the place of workers. As a result, aggregate demand falls, which causes a fall in capacity utilization, which causes a fall in investment, which further decreases aggregate demand, etc., until eventually a recession or depression hits. Since profitability is the goal, the only cure that units of capital know to all this is to keep cutting labor costs and in the long run keep increasing productivity -- which exacerbates the systemic problems and keeps the vicious cycle going. In the long run, governments, too, aid capital in cutting labor costs and financing improvements in productivity.

--"Each capitalist nation will further degrade its own working population and social life in an attempt to save a social system which, like the very planets in their orbits, will fall to its destruction if it slows in its velocity. Here we have the *reductio ad absurdum* of capitalist efficiency, and the expression in concrete terms of the insoluble contradiction that exists between the development of the means of production [or the productive forces] and the social relations of production that characterize capitalism." The development of the forces of production in the long run tends to undermine the social relations of production, by causing (indirectly) economic crises and long-term stagnation. (The latter, too, tends to obstruct further growth of the productive forces (by discouraging investment) -- though not to the point of stopping such growth altogether.)

Braverman's discussion of the modern corporation nicely demonstrates the insane complexity of corporate structures. For example,

> ....Thus marketing became the second major subdivision of the corporation, subdivided in its turn among sales, advertising, promotion, correspondence, orders, commissions, sales analysis, and other such sections. At the same time, other functions of management were separated out to form entire divisions. Finance, for example, although not as a rule large in size, became the brain center of the entire organism, because here was centralized the function of watching over capital, of checking and controlling the progress of its enlargement; for this purpose, the finance division has its own subdivisions for borrowing, extending credit, collections, supervising cash flow, stockholder relations, and overall supervision of the financial conditions of the corporation. And so on, throughout the various functions and activities of the corporation, including construction and real estate, legal, public relations, personnel and labor relations, etc.
>
> Each of these corporate subdivisions also requires, for its own smooth functioning, internal departments which reflect and imitate the subdivisions of the entire corporation. Each requires its own accounting section, ranging from the complex cost accounting of the manufacturing divisions to the simpler budgeting functions required of even the smallest divisions. Each often controls its own hiring through its own personnel department; many require separate maintenance and cleaning sections, as well as traffic and routing, office management, purchasing, planning correspondence, and so forth. Thus each corporate division takes on the characteristics of a separate enterprise, with its own management staff.
>
> The picture is rendered still more complex by the tendency of the modern corporation to integrate, vertically as well as horizontally. Thus, by growth and by combination, the manufacturing corporation acquires facilities for the production of raw materials, for transportation, semi-banking institutions for the raising of capital or extending of credit, etc....

And people deny that economic institutions (in their interrelations) are the central determinants of social dynamics!

The overall purpose of administrative controls is to reduce uncertainty and contingency with regard to the basic goal of making profit and accumulating capital. "Since markets must remain the prime area of uncertainty, the effort of the corporation is therefore to reduce the *autonomous character* of the demand for its products and to increase its *induced* character. For this purpose, the marketing organization becomes second in size only to the production organization in manufacturing corporations, and other types of corporations come into existence whose entire purpose and activity is marketing." All the mainstream fetishism of "free markets" is, therefore, sheer intellectual fraud. Corporations want to *control* markets, not to let them be "free."

Needless to say, just as production jobs have become more and more degraded in skill and intellectual stimulation as mechanization has proceeded and the division of labor has become more minute, so the whole world of management (not just "managers," and not the upper ranks) has become characterized by degraded, semi-skilled clerical work, increasing mechanization, and a minute division of labor. Antagonistic class relations are reproduced in the ranks of "management" itself.

Braverman's discussion of the nature and history of clerical work, how it has grown incalculably since the 19th century and lost status and pay in the process, is excellent. In the early 20th century it, too, was subject to the discipline of scientific management. And then mechanization, etc. For all intents and purposes, clerical work ceased to be "mental" and became "manual." A nearly unthinking repetition of simple operations. (Manual labor, too, had once been quite "mental," requiring great intelligence and understanding, but gradually was reduced in skill level.)

And then there are the service and retail occupations.

> The reasons for the rapid growth of service occupations in both the corporate and governmental sectors of the economy [are as follows]: the completion by capital of the conquest of goods-producing activities; the displacement of labor from those industries, corresponding to the accumulation of capital in them, and the juncture of these reserves of labor and capital on the ground of new industries; and the inexorable growth of service needs as the new shape of society destroys the older forms of social, community, and family cooperation and self-aid....

As labor is displaced from manufacturing, which is more easily unionized than clerical, service, and retail labor, and so tends to have (after unionization has happened) higher rates of pay, society's aggregate demand starts to decrease because of the lower pay rates in non-manufacturing sectors.[1] In order to keep the economy going strong, consumer credit becomes increasingly important. As it has been from the 1970s on.

"The paradox that the most rapidly growing mass occupations in an era of scientific-technical revolution [as from the late 19th century] are those which have least to do with science and technology [--such as service, retail, clerical, etc., areas that tend to be less mechanized than manufacturing --] need not surprise us. The purpose of machinery is not to increase but to decrease the number of workers attached to it. Thus it is by no means illogical that with the development of science and technology, the numbers of those cheaply available for dancing attendance upon capital in all of its *least* mechanized functional forms continue to increase at a rapid pace."

Based on extensive statistics and calculations, Braverman concludes persuasively that in the early 1970s, two-thirds to three-fourths of the total population (or working population?) appeared "readily to conform to the dispossessed condition of a proletariat." This category excludes, of course, "the engineering, technical, and scientific cadre, the lower ranks of supervision and management, the considerable numbers of specialized and 'professional' employees occupied in marketing, financial and organization administration, and the like, as well as, outside of capitalist industry proper, in hospitals, schools, government administration, and so forth." According to Braverman, these categories embrace (or

[1] Before mass industrial unionism, too, severe recessions and depressions were more frequent than in the era of unionism, probably in part because of insufficient aggregate demand.

embraced) “perhaps over 15 but less than 20 percent of total employment.” *Formally* they have the same proletarian condition as the others just mentioned....but increasingly these days, even *substantively* they have a similar position. More and more every year, as Marx predicted, the economy is being polarized into a tremendous majority of the dispossessed and a tiny minority of the possessors.

In the last chapter, Braverman demolishes the myth that most work tended to become *more* skilled during the 20th century by considering mainstream writers’ arguments on their merits (or lack of them). For example, most people in the West associated “white-collar” occupations with skill and “blue-collar” occupations with a lack of it, so that the rise of the former and decline of the latter was seen as proof that skill levels were rising. But we’ve already dispatched the myth that clerical, service, sales, and retail work is usually “skilled.” In fact it’s far less skilled than the work of the old craftsmen and even their semi-skilled assistants, and also the work of farmers and often their helpers (the number of (both of) whom declined sharply in the 20th century), who had to master “a great many skills involving a knowledge of land, fertilizer, animals, tools, farm machinery, construction skills, etc., and the traditional abilities and dexterities in the handling of farm tasks.” (Plowing, milking, caring for animals, harvesting, mending fences, etc.)

Interesting aside: “That self-evident, conventional wisdom can vary with time, place, and social circumstances was strikingly displayed by Jerome Davis in a study he made of the social attitudes of Soviet schoolchildren in the mid-twenties. In rating a list of occupations adapted from one of the common U.S. ‘prestige’ scales, these children reversed the order of rank found in the use of the scale in the United States, putting farmers first and bankers last.” A good case can be made that the children were right.

But what about the fact that the length of the average period a person spent in school before getting a job increased in the 20th century? Doesn’t this indicate that the skill levels of jobs increased? No. First of all, basic literacy and familiarity with mathematics has become more important just for getting around in society. Second, the provision of *socialization* has been increasingly taken over by schools (whereas it used to be done by farm, family, community, and church). So basic education has had to be prolonged. Third, in the late 1930s legislation was passed “restricting the labor-force participation of youths, the object of which was to reduce unemployment by eliminating a segment of the population from the job market. The anticipated consequence of this was the postponement of the school-leaving age.” Later, after the post-World War II surge of school- and college-enrollment (a result of government programs designed partly to reduce unemployment), there began to be an *over*-supply of educated people by the end of the 1960s. Millions of these people ended up being overqualified for their jobs.

At the same time, the expanded education sector furnishes jobs for millions of teachers, administrators, construction workers, etc., thus providing a huge boon to the economy.

Braverman gives many more compelling arguments, but that’s enough. In any case, by 2011 the main conclusions of his book have become common sense.

Reading the second half of Paul Krugman’s textbook on international economics. Notes.-- A rise in the interest rate causes the aggregate demand for money to fall, because people have more incentive to invest their money in illiquid, interest-bearing assets.

“The market always moves toward an interest rate at which the real money supply equals aggregate real money demand. If there is initially an excess supply of money, the interest rate falls, and if there is initially an excess demand, it rises.” So, if people want to get rid of some of their money because the interest rate is high (and they want to take advantage of that), they’ll try to buy interest-bearing assets. In other words, they’ll try to lend their money to others. But not everyone will succeed: more people want to lend than borrow. So the potential lenders will try to tempt borrowers by lowering the interest rate they charge. This process will tend to go on until the excess supply of money has disappeared, so that money supply equals money demand.

Thus, “an increase in the money supply lowers the interest rate, while a fall in the money supply raises the interest rate, given the price level and output.”

On the other hand, “an increase in real output raises the interest rate, while a fall in real output lowers the interest rate, given the price level and the money supply.” That’s pretty intuitive. If the

economy's output grows, the demand for money is going to increase. Assuming that the money supply is given, however, interest rates will be bid up by borrowers.

The relation between the interest rate and the exchange rate is fairly straightforward if you disregard considerations having to do with the *expected future* exchange rate. (More on that later.) *Ceteris paribus*, an increase in the interest paid on deposits of a currency causes that currency to appreciate against foreign currencies, because investors' demand for the currency increases. They want to get hold of that currency in order to lend it and thus realize relatively high returns.

I'm tired of that book, and the semester is starting anyway, so I have to read other stuff. Here are some of the books I'm reading or half-reading for courses this fall:[1] Margaret C. Jacob, *The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents* (2001); half of François Furet, *Revolutionary France, 1770-1880* (1995); Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848-1851* (2005); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (2010); Joan W. Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (1996); Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate* (2006); Cooper and Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (1997); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (2005); Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (1996); Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (1995); Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (2003); half of Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (2005). Also reading Jonathan Daly's large book *Revolutionary Civilization: Explaining Western Power in the Modern World* (2011) for the class I'm TAing (taught by Daly).

Margaret Jacob's selections from Locke's *Thoughts Concerning Education* make it clear that all the obsessive writing in the past century about how to raise children has been largely unnecessary. Locke's thoughts are, on the whole, sufficient. Raising a child is mostly a matter of common sense anyway; but since most people lack common sense, they should read Locke's advice. Almost all of it is fantastic. A truly humane and wise man, Locke was.

Let's try out a few ideas on the Enlightenment. What caused it? What was its meaning? This founding "event" of the modern world: how should we interpret it? I see it as sort of a continuation -- in some respects -- of the Renaissance and the Reformation: a reaction against hierarchy, authoritarianism, the dead weight of tradition, the submersion of the individual in the disfranchised mass -- a fundamentally anti-feudal phenomenon, as I think the other two events were. Society was becoming more individualized and, so to speak, atomized (a process that has continued to this day); self-consciousness was being progressively sharpened. Over centuries, people were becoming more aware of themselves as individuals (in opposition to institutional hierarchies), as well as of their society vis-à-vis others. Doubtless the Renaissance and Reformation were opposed in many respects, but they were both basically expressions of the "individuality" principle. As was the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on reason, republicanism, rights, democracy, opposition to illegitimate authority, etc. That's what the modern age, from the 1400s or so, is all about: the slow progress of self-consciousness, individuation, historical consciousness, differentiation between self and other (and ultimately, therefore, between the self and itself). [Of course our age is "about" other things too, but you know what I meant.]

As for what *caused* the Enlightenment, Jacob spells it out succinctly. Obviously England's scientific revolution of the 17th century did much to inspire thinkers on the Continent (and in England itself) -- Isaac Newton was worshiped by all enlightened thinkers, and the spirit of empiricism undermined Catholicism. But there were also political origins. "The political roots of the European Enlightenment grew out of a profound revulsion against new political abuses that arose in the 1680s on both sides of the English Channel. Two nearly simultaneous events precipitated the crisis: In 1685, the English Catholic James II came to the throne, and in France Louis XIV revoked the limited toleration that French Protestants, known as Huguenots, had enjoyed for nearly a hundred years." That is, he tore up the Edict of Nantes. As a result, many Protestants fled to Geneva, Berlin, the Dutch republic, England, and America, making connections

[1] There aren't many because I'm only taking two classes, and one is a research seminar for which I'll choose most of my own books.

with each other. Opposition movements to Catholic authoritarianism developed in both England and (more secretively) France. By means of printing presses, an international propaganda campaign amongst diverse Protestants and deists sprang up. James II was overthrown, a revolution that had positive repercussions for civil liberties in Britain and initiated a period of intellectual and cultural ferment. Intellectuals on the Continent were stimulated by developments in England, establishing, for example, secret Masonic lodges (which originated in England) where secular, oppositional ideas could be promulgated and discussed in safety. A "public sphere" began to emerge. Things took off from there.

I won't discuss economic factors, but you can imagine what they were.

Sent Chomsky another email:

> Professor Chomsky,
>
> You probably hear this sort of thing all the time, but I just wanted to let you know....you have helped me become, in a sense, my "better self." Intellectually speaking, at least. Helped clear my logical vision -- I've loved Marx since I was a teenager, but you helped modernize and 'rigorize' the philosophy for me -- and also morally speaking, you're a "hero of Homeric proportions," as someone once said.
>
> Possibly the only criticism I have is that I wish you would give more concrete advice to activists, even though I understand your reasons for not doing so. The sort of people you talk to, I think, already know that the world is in a lot of trouble, that the system is in crisis, and that corporations are responsible for most of the world's ills. You could, for example, slip into your talks suggestions on good sources of information (e.g., *ZMag*, *Dollars & Sense*, etc.; not everyone knows about these things), and spend more time talking about recent concrete advances that have been made (e.g., the manufacturing cooperatives being built by the USW and Mondragon in North America). You seem to focus on the negative. Why not spend more of your time talking about the positive?
>
> It's interesting: you're incredibly specific and concrete about the crimes of the elite that are always going on, but you become a little more vague and less detailed -- and more brief -- when talking about *good* things that are happening at this moment. I've watched a number of interviews and talks, and that's the impression I have. Maybe you could talk more about the sorts of things that are showcased on [various blogs].
>
> Incidentally, I've never fully understood your aversion to giving advice. As someone who has thought deeply about all the serious issues in the world, surely you have the right to give advice. And people have the right to reject it -- but the point is that at least they'd be hearing a different perspective that they could take into account when formulating their plans of action. Advice isn't necessarily presumptuous; it's just input. And input is always worthwhile, because it's *dialogue*.
>
> Anyway, as I once heard an interviewer say to you, "I love you!" You're a true hero -- intellectually, politically, and morally.

His response:

> Thanks for your thoughts. I've occasionally heard similar suggestions, but in fact, very rarely. They're overwhelmed by other requests: for facts, interpretation, analysis. It's true that plenty of people think that corporations cause endless problems, probably a large majority of the country. But in my experience at least, very few know how or why.

> I very rarely pick the topic of the myriad talks, discussions, interviews, etc. And bear in mind that these are not generally activist audiences, though the initiators quite often are engaged in particular issues. I try to do what I'm asked to do. Few seem to want to hear what you suggest, though if I were asked to talk about these topics, or even if they came up in Q&A, I'd be glad to do so. In fact, there isn't a great deal to say. It would be instructive to discuss carefully the successes and serious failings of Mondragon, but I'm never asked. When I'm asked (rarely) about cooperatives, the best I can think of doing is to refer to Alperovitz's useful reviews. Participatory budgeting is a good idea too. I've occasionally referred to it, but it doesn't seem to respond to audience interests.
>
> On giving advice, I'm not reluctant if people ask about a particular topic: what can we do about the alleged fiscal crisis? The Iraq war? Iran's nuclear weapons? Global warming?... etc. But what stymies me, frankly, is the great many requests for general advice: what should I do with my life? How can we bring about radical social change? Things like that. There are many young people who want simple formulas, but there aren't any. You don't find them in the traditional radical literature either.
>
> I have some reservations about citing sources too. If people ask me what to read about the economy, I do list specific journals and individuals, like Dollars & Sense. But I also think one should read widely, not just what reinforces our own beliefs. One can learn a great deal from the business press, for example.
>
> I appreciate your suggestions. It's not really clear to me how to respond to them.

Actually, that's a better response than I'd expected.

Here's a good article from *Al Jazeera* on the supposed possibility of capitalism's demise:

> The massive volatility and sharp equity-price correction now hitting global financial markets signal that most advanced economies are on the brink of a double-dip recession. A financial and economic crisis caused by too much private-sector debt and leverage led to a massive re-leveraging of the public sector in order to prevent Great Depression 2.0. But the subsequent recovery has been anaemic and sub-par in most advanced economies given painful deleveraging. […]
>
> So Karl Marx, it seems, was partly right in arguing that globalisation, financial intermediation run amok, and redistribution of income and wealth from labour to capital could lead capitalism to self-destruct (though his view that socialism would be better has proven wrong). Firms are cutting jobs because there is not enough final demand. But cutting jobs reduces labour income, increases inequality and reduces final demand.
>
> Recent popular demonstrations, from the Middle East to Israel to the UK, and rising popular anger in China - and soon enough in other advanced economies and emerging markets - are all driven by the same issues and tensions: growing inequality, poverty, unemployment, and hopelessness. Even the world's middle classes are feeling the squeeze of falling incomes and opportunities. […]

--It's beautiful. The beautiful Marxian logic. Only 130 years later than Marx thought.[1]

I had an interesting experience today. But I don't feel like going into detail about it. I'll just say that yesterday I met a pretty Chinese woman (34) at an event at an art gallery. Some of her art was on display: very impressive paintings. She came to Chicago a couple years ago to get an MBA (at Loyola) to

[1] In my Master's thesis I picked up where he left off, making the necessary revisions to his system.

help her in her social justice work, her fighting on behalf of migrant workers in China. Used to work for Oxfam. She invited me to accompany her today to the Art Institute; we had a good time critiquing paintings. I also learned that she's been married twice and has a nine-year-old daughter who went to a foster home a few days ago because Zhilan's current husband was recently arrested for beating her and her daughter in public. He has also threatened to kill them and invite Zhilan's father to come to Chicago to pick up her body. So, not an awesome guy. A few days ago he disappeared; Zhilan doesn't know where he is.

[…]

She's an intriguing woman. Emotional, eager for affection, relatively friendless, immature in some respects but intelligent, artistically talented, politically dedicated, ambitious, good-humored, and responsible enough to have raised a daughter. It probably isn't wise of me to get involved with her....but she likes me and could use a good man in her life. (I advised her to get a divorce from the vile husband.)

September

Is it possible that the West's current obsession with fiscal austerity will end in the next few years, as governments see what damage it's doing? Will there be a return to economic stimulus and an increase of social spending? Doesn't seem likely. It isn't in the interest of the financial sector and corporate power-structures in general. But depression isn't in their interest either. *Stagnation*, within reason, isn't so bad, but *depression* is. Is it possible that in the context of a global (proto-)depression there would be moves toward a sort of global New Deal? How could such a plan possibly be agreed upon by everyone? -- and then administered?! There are too many different power-structures with different interests. Too many countries, too many economic zones, too many ways for corporations to subvert the rules. If the global regime were going to be at all effective, it would have to change capitalism so much that corporations as we know them would effectively cease to exist. But they won't let that happen. Not until a *major, prolonged* depression occurs. And by then, a new system will be emerging from the ground up.

I don't see anything but systemic chaos in the future.

…Zhilan is a very passionate kisser. Also a very good person. She's had quite a life. She's been a reporter etc., and she visited garment factories when she was with Oxfam and couldn't handle seeing the terrible treatment of the workers and so doesn't want to go back to China, only wants to use her MBA to write articles for China's labor movement etc. Also has a Master's in Education and occasionally writes columns for Chinese business publications. Was the valedictorian of her high school class and the director of a large chorus (in college too) -- also the main soloist -- and the radio broadcaster for her school. Wants her daughter to be a lawyer so she can do effective work on behalf of the oppressed. For the next four months will be living with her daughter in a shelter for battered women, apparently a great place with lots of children and young mothers. --Women are certainly, in some respects, stronger than men. No question. They can stay positive and seemingly young at heart despite all their suffering.

…Went to Navy Pier with Zhilan and her daughter Suzy (Lulu), an intelligent, vivacious, adorable girl. And her mom is definitely a "milf." But also someone I'm emotionally attracted to. She sent me this message on Facebook: "By the way. You have been so elegently created, and being around of you is just a *joy*." I too am pretty happy around her.

Another nice email: "Hi your message is pretty much make the day *sunny*! Lulu began to like you, she likes you handsome, humble, and caring of her. Just let you know I am very happy. Oh! What a long week, what a sweet waiting!" Lovely girl.

[…]

Here are some excerpts from a review article of a book I'm about to read [for an academic paper I had to write] called *Slaughterhouse* (1997), by Gail Eisnitz.

> …The agony starts when the animals are hauled over long distances under extreme crowding and harsh temperatures. Here is an account from a worker assigned to unloading

pigs: "In the winter, some hogs come in all froze to the sides of the trucks. They tie a chain around them and jerk them off the walls of the truck, leave a chunk of hide and flesh behind. They might have a little bit of life left in them, but workers just throw them on the piles of dead ones. They'll die sooner or later."

Once at the slaughterhouse, some animals are too injured to walk and others simply refuse to go quietly to their deaths. This is how the workers deal with it: "The preferred method of handling a cripple is to beat him to death with a lead pipe before he gets into the chute... If you get a hog in a chute that's had the shit prodded out of him, and has a heart attack or refuses to move, you take a meat hook and hook it into his bunghole (anus)...and a lot of times the meat hook rips out of the bunghole. I've seen thighs completely ripped open. I've also seen intestines come out."

And here is what awaits the animals on the kill floor. First, the testimony of a horse slaughterhouse worker: "You move so fast you don't have time to wait till a horse bleeds out. You skin him as he bleeds. Sometimes a horse's nose is down in the blood, blowing bubbles, and he suffocates."

Then another worker, on cow slaughter: "A lot of times the skinner finds a cow is still conscious when he slices the side of its head and it starts kicking wildly. If that happens, ... the skinner shoves a knife into the back of its head to cut the spinal cord." (This paralyzes the animal, but doesn't stop the pain of being skinned alive.) And still another, on calf slaughter: "To get done with them faster, we'd put eight or nine of them in the knocking box at a time... You start shooting, the calves are jumping, they're all piling up on top of each other. You don't know which ones got shot and which didn't... They're hung anyway, and down the line they go, wriggling and yelling" (to be slaughtered while fully conscious).

And on pig slaughter: "If the hog is conscious, ... it takes a long time for him to bleed out. These hogs get up to the scalding tank, hit the water, and start kicking and screaming... There's a rotating arm that pushes them under. No chance for them to get out. I am not sure if they burn to death before they drown, but it takes them a couple of minutes to stop thrashing."

The work takes a major emotional toll on the workers. Here's one worker's account: "I've taken out my job pressure and frustration on the animals, on my wife, ... and on myself, with heavy drinking." Then it gets a lot worse: "... with an animal who pisses you off, you don't just kill it. You ... blow the windpipe, make it drown in its own blood, split its nose... I would cut its eye out... and this hog would just scream. One time I ... sliced off the end of a hog's nose. The hog went crazy, so I took a handful of salt brine and ground it into his nose. Now that hog really went nuts..."

Safety is a major problem for workers who operate sharp instruments standing on a floor slippery with blood and gore, surrounded by conscious animals kicking for their lives, and pressed by a speeding slaughter line. Indeed, 36 percent incur serious injuries, making their work the most hazardous in America. Workers who are disabled and those who complain about working conditions are fired and frequently replaced by undocumented aliens. A few years ago, 25 workers were burned to death in a chicken slaughterhouse fire in Hamlet, NC, because management had locked the safety doors to prevent theft.

Here is a worker's account: "The conditions are very dangerous, and workers aren't well trained for the machinery. One machine has a whirring blade that catches people in it. Workers lose fingers. One woman's breast got caught in it and was torn off. Another's shirt got caught and her face was dragged into it."…

The author of the review compares these plants to Auschwitz. Extermination camps for animals. (Actually, insofar as the “guards” are miserable too, they’re worse than Auschwitz.)

It's a very readable book, albeit disturbing. For example, "I glanced through the pile of complaints on my desk.... A guy in North Carolina strangled a hundred puppies for fun; a New Yorker collected two hundred homeless pets and then starved them to death. Just when I thought I'd seen it all, some new way to torture animals would land in my in-box...." But more disturbing than the random crazy people is the institutionalized craziness, the institutionalized sadism. (That's really what capitalism is, after all.) The way workers deal with killing and torturing thousands of beings a day is, not surprisingly, through drink. And taking out their frustrations on friends and family.

"....A live hog would be running around the pit. It would just be looking up at me and I'd be sticking [i.e., cutting throats], and I would just take my knife and cut its eye out while it was just sitting there. And this hog would just scream." This guy was known in the plant for sucking on eyeballs as a joke. Another guy drank a cup of blood. "You develop a bizarre sense of humor down there."

"....I've drug cows till their bones start breaking, while they were still alive. Bringing them around the corner and they get stuck up in the doorway, just pull them till their hide be ripped, till the blood just drip on the steel and concrete. Breaking their legs pulling them in. And the cow be crying with its tongue stuck out. They pull him till his neck just pop."

Aside from the corporations, the fault lies mainly with the USDA, which has abdicated its regulatory role. It simply doesn't enforce laws like the Humane Slaughter Act. Meat inspectors who try to enforce this particular law are *punished* by their superiors, for a variety of bureaucratic reasons. The systemic corruption that Eisnitz unearths is stunning.

It's ironic that the federal government is the Number 1 violator of its own laws (by not enforcing them).

I'm reading a bunch of other books too, of course. E.g., Donald Stull and Michael Broadway's *Slaughterhouse Blues: The Meat and Poultry Industry in North America* (2004). And too many others to list.

An email I sent to [a friend], my intellectual companion, which partially repeats stuff I've written before:

> No, obviously I don't think you're off base. Anyone with common sense -- in fact, the large majority of the population -- would agree that business interests are ultimately what propel most U.S. foreign and domestic policy. It's only in the hallowed groves of academe that people delude themselves into thinking that idealistic motives are the basic determinant of....everything. […]
>
> In general, I think my primary bête noire is institutions themselves. Outside of institutions, I like people. In their capacity as bearers of institutional roles, I tend to dislike them (for their lack of independent thought, their inhumanity, etc.). […] For these people, actually, it's the *physical location* that matters most. In an office building or an academic setting you have to *follow the rules* (understandably); outside, you can be a human being. This is the sort of thinking [or rather *acting*] that leads to Robert McNamaran inhumanity and ultimately Adolf Eichmannian "banal evil." Institutional thinking. That's been the main evil throughout history. […] These people, insofar as they're personifications of institutions, are not different *in kind* from Eichmann, only different in degree and in institutional setting.
>
> Anyway, I applaud your ongoing attempts to enlighten "the herd of independent minds" (to quote Chomsky quoting somebody, referring to intellectuals). And sorry for the vehemence of this email; I've been drinking.

And here's something I posted on Facebook in answer to a question a friend had posed.

> These are obviously important questions. An excellent book to start with is Erik Olin Wright's *Classes*, from 1985 or so. He's a rigorous thinker, a respected Marxist sociologist.

> As I see it, one's position in the "relations of production" is the main determinant of one's access to resources, hence of one's experiences, hence of one's consciousness. Even if in our postmodern times class is no longer one of the primary ways in which people identify themselves, it arguably remains the most important factor in explaining social dynamics and, ultimately, people's consciousness (belief-systems, behavior, etc.). In fact, on one level, "materialism" is just common sense. People and institutions need resources to get anything done, and economic position is ultimately what determines access to resources. Corporate power-structures, which occupy the capital-owning class-position in productive relations, have more resources than ordinary people, so their agenda dominates politics and the media -- so much so that they can manipulate people into voting against their own economic interests. I don't see how anyone can doubt that "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas" -- although that formulation has to be qualified, since the world is complicated. Nevertheless, it is broadly true, as a glance at the New York Times can establish. Why, for instance, was postmodernism, identity politics, etc. allowed to become relatively hegemonic in recent decades, at the expense of class issues? Because postmodernist grievances don't challenge society's central power-structures, viz. institutions devoted to the ownership and manipulation of capital. Feminism and gay rights, while important, don't pose fundamental challenges to the mode of property distribution; they are relatively un-threatening to the upper classes, which has made possible their success (compared to labor issues). -If you want to get analytically precise about class, you have to bring in Wright's notion of "contradictory class locations" and delve into tedious sociology. The point is that class is as relevant now as it always was, possibly even more so (given that class polarization is increasing, the labor movement is gaining steam in China and elsewhere, economic issues are becoming more explicitly important to people -- although of course they were always the most important thing, since people have to *survive* before they do anything else). But this post has gotten long enough.

Lovely Zhilan. The more I see her, the more I like her. It's unusual (in my experience) to find a woman who really cares about ideas.

*

On the French Revolution.-- One of the fascinating things about the Great Revolution is the essentially simultaneous ascendancy of two very different ideologies, liberalism and nationalism (between which, you might say, lies the concept of democracy). Individualism, atomism, "liberty," as opposed to the unitary general will, national community, popular sovereignty, the "direct" democracy of "*the people*." To speak simplistically, it's the Declaration of the Rights of Man versus the Terror, the "democratic," nationalistic Terror. Or, again, it's the Legislative Assembly versus the insurrectionist Paris Commune of 1792.[1] --As I just suggested, though, between these two extremes, connecting them, is the notion of democracy. For, while the ideology of popular sovereignty or the general will can be perverted into totalitarianism, it is also not wholly opposed to liberalism, since the safeguarding of individuals' rights is surely one manifestation of "Power to the people!"

The best concept of all these is socialism, since (in its classical form) it is an unambiguous fusion of liberalism with popular democracy. Economic democracy, workers' power over their work and lives, leaves no room for anything reeking of totalitarianism; nor is it merely a half-empty equality under the law, as liberalism can be thought of.

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[1] Of course, the big Terror and the little terror of the 1792 Paris Commune weren't "popular" in the sense of being supported by a majority of the country, but they were egalitarian, nationalistic, and democratic inasmuch as they were "formed under pressure from the *sansculotte* movement."

*

More reflections on the Revolution.-- An endlessly thought-provoking event. Parallels with both fascism and Communism. Think of the resentment, the desire for revenge, against aristocrats felt by the lower middle class of Paris, similar to the desire for revenge against Jews felt in Germany later. An old society dying, throwing up *enragés*, the "mob," with their "passion for punishment and terror, nourished by a deep desire for revenge and the overturning of society" (p. 131 of Furet's book but harking to Arendt's), a desire that led to the massacring of aristocratic Others, enemies to the Nation, outsiders corrupting the body politic -- "strangers in our very midst" (Sieyès) -- instantiations of nearly the same category that Jews instantiated in Germany in the 1920s and '30s. French nobles in the 1790s, German Jews in the 1930s -- classes of people who had already lost most of their power and so were socially/economically/politically expendable (as Arendt says), hence the perfect scapegoats. Symbols of the old regime that had smothered the "mob's" pride, spat at it, but now powerless and so contemptible. The chaos of an old semi-urban civilization in transition, everything in flux, wage-laborers joining with artisans joining with shopkeepers in burning resentment. And the necessity for Bonapartism (Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler) because of the government's inability to transcend and subdue political divisions.[1] And then the nationalistic expansionism.[2] And then the internationally orchestrated passage to a more stable order.

But of course also, in France, the lower classes' already-beginning hostility in the mid- and late 1790s to the bourgeoisie. "Before it had definitively vanquished the *ancien régime* and the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie was already standing alongside the accused [i.e. the nobility] in the court of revolutionary equality" (Furet). That could be said of the Russian bourgeoisie in the years before and after 1917. And Robespierre's Terror against "counterrevolutionaries" had perhaps a clearer class element than Hitler's persecution of the Jews; in any case, it reminds one of Lenin's and Stalin's terror against supposed counterrevolutionaries. In general, the French Revolution signified a vastly greater social revolution than fascism [for it was genuinely egalitarian!], and it happened in a country maybe comparably primitive to Russia in 1917. But it ended up going in a bourgeois direction, not an anti-bourgeois direction [unlike the Russian revolution]. Remember Robert Brady's comment that Italy could have gone either Fascist or Communist after World War I? These primitive riven-by-social-conflict countries in transition....they can go either way. But as I said in my paper on Russia (I think), France simply couldn't go [in the long run] pro-oppressed in the 1790s (aside from brief phases) because of its lack of industrialism and urbanism, the lack of identical social interests between sufficient numbers of the urban oppressed -- no massive factories, for example, which workers could take over -- etc. It had to go bourgeois eventually, just because the bourgeoisie, or capitalist economic structures, had far more power and more resources than its (or their) enemies. Unlike in Russia in 1917.

But remember what I wrote years ago, that Communism itself had affinities with fascism and vice versa. They were not "opposites in every respect" (whatever it would mean for historical events to be "opposites"). They couldn't be, if Brady is right that Italy could theoretically have gone in either one direction or the other. For one thing, *nationalism* was an important part of both.

I've said it before, but here it is again: all these national convulsions were primarily, from a long-term perspective, *capitalist* revolutions.[3] Stages in the transition to a society structured around capital. That was always the inevitable outcome, because of long-term global economic dynamics. In Russia and China

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[1] Admittedly, there are differences here between France and, on the other hand, Germany and Italy.

[2] [Furet states that "one of [France's] most powerful passions" in the 1790s was "national greatness inseparable from glory." Sound familiar?]

[3] At the same time, though, *popular* revolutions, since capital's undermining of the *ancien régime* gave the masses freedom (and causes (such as intensified exploitation and communal breakdown)) to rise up against their age-old oppressors. In some places, such as Russia and China, the popular revolution temporarily got the upper hand of the bourgeois revolution. But that was bound not to last in the long run. (In a sense, it didn't last at all: new "Communist" elites took control immediately.) [I should note that the popular-democratic and the liberal-bourgeois elements of a revolution have the same interests up to a point, for instance in abolishing serfdom. But they soon diverge. In Russia, the popular won out over the bourgeois -- but at the cost of being immediately suppressed by new elites.]

there was the detour through ultra-state-planned economic authoritarianism (and remember that capitalism itself is nothing but *fragmented*[1] economic authoritarianism), but in a world globalizing around the dynamic of capital, such an anti-market economy was slowly going to be hemmed in on all sides, challenged, eroded (black markets, etc.), until it either fell apart (Russia) or adapted itself (China).

--The problem with historians is that most of them lack historical perspective. They immerse themselves in the immediately empirical, people's actions and self-interpretations and power-plays, ignoring the "institutional significance" (especially "economic dynamics") of what emerges. Institutional structures are more explanatory than ideologies. After all, humans have a superhuman capacity for self-delusion. What somebody calls something is quite possibly the opposite of what it is.

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Ah, Hegel. Good old Hegel. *La dialectique*. "In your end is your beginning." Disintegration of civil society, disintegration of the nation-state, demise of national culture under the pressures of globalization, privatization, business-control over everything, commodification of everything, atomization....but at the same time, on the positive side: death of the nation-state! Hallelujah! No more "passions for national greatness inseparable from glory!" Too many divisions and too much cynicism for that sort of nationalistic infantilism! *Finally! How long have we waited* for this nightmare of the "nation-state" to end?! Centuries! And now it's here, at last! The "nation" is becoming....residual! Corporate capitalism is becoming *everything*, at the cost of the nation-state. The "*national security*" state indeed waxes, but the "imagined community" of the nation wanes. Only its bureaucracies, only its power-structures remain. Its culture is dying. The state now exists for the sake of business and, of course, its own power; all else is effectively dead. […] --First the nation dies, then....the state and corporate capital die together? One can't exist without the other. But that's a long way off, I fear. Many decades.[2] Anyway, the point is that in the *negative* phenomenon of contemporary atomization is the *positive* phenomenon of the nation's -- and eventually the [national] state's -- death.

(It was always a somewhat futile endeavor to try to reconcile the nation-state and all it entails with liberalism, i.e. morality. Nationalism and individual rights.... Huh? No. Doesn't work. The more *rights*, the less *nation*; the more *nation* (or *state*), the less *rights*.[3] At best, in conditions of the nation-state you can only have a modus vivendi. Liberalism needs socialism, anarchism, a stateless, nationless world, in order to be fulfilled.)

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It's interesting that the French Revolution's liberalism in some ways helped make possible its illiberalism, its nationalism and authoritarianism. For, by enforcing the vision of a society of atomized individuals and "destroying corporate society" (outlawing "orders" and corporate bodies), the Revolution made it easier for people to identify with the single overarching community of the nation, and harder for them to resist dictatorship and Terror.

It's also interesting that some kinds of atomization are, therefore, evidently compatible with nationalism, while others are not. Contemporary business-imposed atomism undermines nationalism, while the French Revolution's atomism intensified it. One of the reasons may be that the contemporary American

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[1] *Relatively* fragmented. (Remember, also, that in Communist countries workers rented themselves for wages, and a form of "profits" was the goal, as in ordinary capitalism.)

[2] The state is indeed losing its (relative) *independence*, and many of its social functions, but as yet it isn't itself dying. (Or, it's only in the very early stages of its death.) It is merely becoming more explicitly the handmaiden of capital.

[3] Well, that formula is simplistic regarding the relationship between the state and rights. In nation-state conditions you need a strong state to enforce rights; but if the state gets too strong in a certain direction, such as the "National Security" direction or the fascist direction, it starts to trample on rights. What you need is a state with oversight by the labor movement and minorities.

version is far more extreme than the "atomism" of 1789, since lately people have become *strangers* to each other, private worlds of solipsism, which wasn't true in 1789. People could still identify with things back then; that has become harder in the age of neoliberalism. Also, an essential difference is that modern atomism is not inimical to "corporate bodies," being indeed founded on the existence of such bodies in the business world. Corporate bodies in business have grown at the expense of substantive identification with the nation or the national community (as opposed to the *rhetoric* of nationalism, which is still prominent -- precisely due to its usefulness to certain business interests (in, e.g., the defense and energy industries)!). But of course there are "corporate bodies" all over American society, many of them existing at the expense of national identification. So maybe you could say that revolutionary France's atomism was, in a sense, the reverse of modern America's: while corporate bodies were supposed not to exist, the structure of society was *not* such that people were semi-aliens to each other. *Now* we have "interpersonal" atomism but a relative proliferation of so-called corporate bodies (intermediaries between the individual and the state).

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François Furet, who was a very important historian, apparently started out as a Marxist. But then all that stuff with the Soviet Union in the 1950s happened, and he lost his faith in Marxism and went to the other extreme, the idealist extreme. You know, it's the old story. Thousands of stupid intellectuals totally repudiating everything having to do with Marxism because of disappointment in the Soviet Union. Idiots. In the same category as the masses in their inability to separate the basic tenets of Marxism from political acts whose enactors claim they have something vaguely to do with Marxism. One of the good things about Chomsky is that he could see through these threadbare appearances and never lose his commitment to materialism, i.e. common sense, just because Stalin and Khrushchev did some bad things. --Even "idealists," or *especially* idealists, are not very good at ideas!

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Let's grant, for the sake of argument, that the French Revolution was precipitated more by the nobility's grievances than the bourgeoisie's. And let's grant that it had definitely un-bourgeois phases, such as Robespierre's Terror and his obsession with "civic virtue," republicanism, the general will, a phase that briefly approached totalitarianism. Let's also grant that people from the bourgeoisie were not the main actors in the Revolution. None of this implies that the Revolution was not ultimately in some sense, or several senses, a largely "bourgeois" event, or that the Marxist emphasis on class is inapplicable to it. First of all, class dynamics can be fundamental to an event even if its actors don't interpret their actions in class terms or don't *seem* to be motivated by material interests. The *sans-culottes* may have been consciously inspired by ideas of republicanism or resentment of the rich or status-envy, but mild self-deception isn't exactly an unknown thing. It's quite possible that an important motive -- even if they didn't like to admit it to themselves -- was their desire for greater material comfort, greater economic power, less living-on-the-social-and-economic-margins. What "republicanism" meant for them, in fact, was more *power*, more power over their political, economic, and social lives. Questions of motivation don't matter much, though. The point is that economic relations, economic conditions, are significant determinants of people's acts, especially *groups'* acts. What your position is in production relations conditions what kind of information you receive, the kind of people you spend time with, the sorts of places you live in or frequent, etc. Political and cultural solidarity, therefore, are structured largely around the occupation of similar locations in economic relations, due to the similar sorts of experiences that tend to correlate with that.

Besides, resentment or status-envy of the aristocracy, despite not seeming to be a "materialistic" motive, is basically a classist thing. And economically determined (beneath appearances).

As for the Revolution's significantly -- though not completely -- bourgeois character, at least two things establish that. First, among its long-term consequences were the facilitating of capitalist economic

activity and the spreading of bourgeois cultural norms.[1] The Code Napoléon was quite bourgeois, as was the political liberalism that prevailed off-and-on and then made several comebacks in the mid-1800s and then finally was permanently established (in France) in the 1870s. Economic liberalism, too, which capitalists favored, was in the air in the 1780s and 1790s -- and later -- even if under wartime exigencies and the influence of the *sans-culottes* and peasants it was periodically held in abeyance. The dismantling of feudal restrictions encouraged capitalist activity, as did the Le Chapelier law of 1791 effectively banning trade unions (as guilds), strikes, etc. Aside from *consequences*, you can also consider *origins*. The Enlightenment ideas that inspired the revolutionaries had partially originated in England, the most bourgeois country at the time, and were propagated by Protestants and deists, who mingled in bourgeois, liberal circles. It was through such things as trade, the opening up of markets, the international exchange of ideas, the development of manufacture and science, and the increasing popularity of travel -- all bourgeois things, at least in part -- that the ideological, political, and cultural currents that helped undermine the *ancien régime* and lead to the Revolution spread. Liberalism in all its forms is quintessentially bourgeois, and most of the Enlightenment ideas on which Furet likes to focus were nothing if not liberal. Even the idea of popular sovereignty is liberal in its milder manifestations. In the 1790s it was used to justify un-bourgeois things -- which were a product mainly of the *sans-culottes*' activism, counterrevolutionary upsurges in France, and the foreign wars -- but, yes, in revolutions the people and their representatives tend to get out of hand (from the perspective of the bourgeoisie and their hangers-on). The situation gets out of control, but in the end it subsides to normality. I.e., bourgeois stability.

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I predict that as an old man looking back on my life (--what a strange thing, to be an old man looking back on life!), what I will see first and foremost is an endless and never-fulfilled search for true love. I will sit in my rocking chair, alone in my living room, thinking about the past. Not regretting, just feeling peaceful and sad in my lack of comprehension. My *complete lack of comprehension.*

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You, nationalist, are an idiot.-- You can say whatever you want about the importance of nationalism and its challenge to Marxism; in the end, the fact remains that *class*, or economic and environmental situation, is more immediately important to people than "nation," which is an imaginary construction and took centuries of warfare and indoctrination just to be *recognized* by ordinary people. Peasants have always been more concerned with survival etc. than "nationality" -- even since the 19th century, when they were finally made aware of the principle of nationality. Serfs were always more invested in their struggles against the nobility than in some educated elite's preoccupation with "national identity" or whatnot. As for the thousands of years of tribal wars and barbarian invasions and imperial clashes and all that shitheap of history, that was mostly a function of the quest for economic power, material resources, material domination. In recent centuries, yes, a few other things have been added into the mix. But they're ultimately secondary to class domination and subordination, because without *resources* (and their specific distribution, determined by class structures) nothing is possible. Whatever social, cultural, and political institutions there are, and whatever goals they're directed towards, they need resources first, and those depend on modes of production and distribution, which entail specific power-structures with specific interests. "Nation"? Get real.

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[1] If you take a *really* long-term perspective, as Furet does -- all the way up to 1880, which is when he thinks the Revolution finally ended -- then its bourgeois nature is undeniable.

People usually think of religion as an example of the importance of ideas, and to an extent that's true. But not to the extent that is commonly thought. Religion is not only *ideas*, after all, but also *institutions*. Social roles. Modes of interaction. And simply an excuse to get together with people once or several times a week, to socialize and act out rituals that reaffirm community. These kinds of *behavior*, as opposed to mere thinking about various transcendental ideas, are quite possibly the most important aspect of religion for most people. And one reason why religion is so tenacious in the modern world is that *institutions* are tenacious, especially institutions with a lot of power and resources backing them up.[1] It isn't only "ideas"; it is generation after generation being socialized into institutions, to respect power-structures centered around priests and bishops and reverends and pastors and so on -- an especially easy thing to do because such respect gets people communal affection and allows them to participate in a significant part of social life. In the light of so many satisfying and self-affirming communal rituals molding one from one's childhood, it is easy to understand why millions would believe in God and try to act as he wants (because that means acting as the community wants). "Ideas" are in this case, as in most others, little more than reflections or residues of social behavior. By being influenced by the idea of God, one is being influenced by social structures that one has internalized.

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Capitalism was never going to be superseded until most of the world consisted of wage-earners, until the peasantry and the landed aristocracy were but a historical memory. The transition couldn't have happened earlier, for many reasons. (For example, the system could not approach terminal dysfunctionality until it had colonized all parts of the world, because, as Rosa Luxemburg said, capitalism has to be able to expand into non-capitalist places (i.e. conquer new markets) in order to survive[2] -- and as long as it can so expand, it will survive.) The peasantry still exists in parts of the world, but it is being rapidly destroyed. At the same time, capitalism is approaching crisis in its oldest, most advanced markets. [Didn't finish this section.]

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On Zhilan.-- Most members of the political, economic, and intellectual elites would feel superior to her on account of her occasional social immaturity and unorthodox behavior. But she has a sensitivity and humanity that would shame these people if they had any sensitivity or humanity. She feels, and she thinks, and she empathizes, and she expresses herself -- she has something to express, that is. She *lives*, and in her guileless sincerity illuminates the darkness of others.

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Intellectual impostures.-- That's the name of a book by Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont exposing the, well, intellectual impostures of postmodernists. I'll probably never read it, since postmodernism is generally a waste of time, but there are excerpts on the internet. For example in this review of the book by Richard Dawkins:

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[1] In the U.S., for instance, since the 1970s conservative business sectors have taken a great interest in religion, with Falwell's Moral Majority and all that.

[2] [She may have been wrong about that. Colonizing markets outside the capitalist world is an important way of counteracting low effective demand in capitalist society, but I doubt it's a *logical necessity* in order for the system to function at all. On the other hand, once the capitalist mode of production exists all over the world, it's probably only a matter of time before the chronically insufficient demand -- in addition to other factors -- causes the system's collapse.]

> The feminist 'philosopher' Luce Irigaray is another who gets whole-chapter treatment from Sokal and Bricmont. In a passage reminiscent of a notorious feminist description of Newton's *Principia* (a "rape manual"), Irigaray argues that $E=mc^2$ is a "sexed equation". Why? Because "it *privileges* the speed of light over other speeds that are vitally necessary to us" (my emphasis of what I am rapidly coming to learn is an 'in' word). Just as typical of this school of thought is Irigaray's thesis on fluid mechanics. Fluids, you see, have been unfairly neglected. "Masculine physics" *privileges* rigid, solid things. Her American expositor Katherine Hayles made the mistake of re-expressing Irigaray's thoughts in (comparatively) clear language. For once, we get a reasonably unobstructed look at the emperor and, yes, he has no clothes:
>
> "The privileging of solid over fluid mechanics, and indeed the inability of science to deal with turbulent flow at all, she attributes to the association of fluidity with femininity. Whereas men have sex organs that protrude and become rigid, women have openings that leak menstrual blood and vaginal fluids.... From this perspective it is no wonder that science has not been able to arrive at a successful model for turbulence. The problem of turbulent flow cannot be solved because the conceptions of fluids (and of women) have been formulated so as necessarily to leave unarticulated remainders."

As it turns out, the real reason for the scientific difficulty of turbulent flow is that the Navier-Stokes equations are hard to solve.

These sorts of writers love to use scientific jargon out of context, as in this relatively lucid but meaningless sentence from Jean Baudrillard: "Perhaps history itself has to be regarded as a chaotic formation, in which acceleration puts an end to linearity and the turbulence created by acceleration deflects history definitively from its end, just as such turbulence distances effects from their causes." And so on and so forth, from a galaxy of respected academics. Bruno Latour, for instance, arguing that a recent scientific discovery that a pharaoh from ancient Egypt had died of tuberculosis was nonsense because tuberculosis was invented (socially constructed) in the 19th century. What a topsy-turvy world, in which people like this are celebrated while *real* people who work two or three jobs to put food on the table for their families get no recognition!

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Giggling and jiggling.-- I was just watching a series of popular videos on YouTube in which three young guys record themselves getting women's phone numbers on the street. They make it look easy. (It helps that they're in Los Angeles, with the sun and tourists and hedonistic atmosphere.) But in fact it is easy -- in the right circumstances, and with the right confidence and humor. Confidence and humor are all that's necessary (obviously). Women like to giggle; if you can make them giggle a lot, they'll give you their number or, possibly, even go home with you. These three guys have an attractive attitude of *not caring*, of just having fun and not being serious, only flirting. "Girls just wanna have fun," so that's perfect. The problem is that, in men, a personality prone to flirting and charm and unseriousness isn't prone to having meaningful romantic relationships, so when the woman gets smitten by this charming guy she's likely to get her heart broken. It's sad. What initially attracts young women correlates negatively with what is conducive to a meaningful relationship. Thus, women reward men for bad, shallow behavior, while they themselves are discarded and he proceeds to the next woman, who rewards him for his shallow behavior and is in turn discarded.

Said differently, the problem is really that *men* [often] just want to have fun, while women both want to have fun and want to be serious with their man. So women end up hurt, and guys end up having fun. Ironically, though, these initial flirtatious encounters are most fun for the woman, not the man, who is occupied with trying to make *her* have fun (because that's how he validates himself as a man, and how he seduces her). Similarly, sex is often most fun for the woman -- along with most other things in life. She is

less detached from life than he is; she's more "excitable" than he. That's her undoing, because it entails her naïveté and emotional and intellectual receptiveness [compared to men].

[…]

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Emotional void. ***Emotional void.***

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Bloodlands, not surprisingly, is a dreary book. Here are examples from Stalin's genocidal artificial famine in Ukraine in 1932 and 1933: "In the face of starvation, some families divided, parents turning against children, and children against one another. As the state police, the OGPU, found itself obliged to record, in Soviet Ukraine, 'families kill their weakest members, usually children, and use the meat for eating.' Countless parents killed and ate their children and then died of starvation later anyway. One mother cooked her son for herself and her daughter.... One family killed their daughter-in-law, fed her head to the pigs, and roasted the rest of her body." In one place, a kind of orphanage, a woman reported that "The children had bulging stomachs; they were covered in wounds, in scabs; their bodies were bursting. We took them outside, we put them on sheets, and they moaned. One day the children suddenly fell silent, we turned around to see what was happening, and they were eating the smallest child, little Petrus. They were tearing strips from him and eating them. And Petrus was doing the same, he was tearing strips from himself and eating them, he ate as much as he could. The other children put their lips to his wounds and drank his blood...."

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It might seem wrong to maintain, as I have repeatedly, that the modern predominance of bureaucratic social structures and their ethos -- for which industrial capitalism (broadly defined, including the Soviet Union and even "Communist" China) has been largely responsible, in that it is an anti-personal social order in which people tend to be treated as instantiations of such categories as "wage-laborer" and "capital-owner," everyone being a means to an impersonal end, one's humanity necessarily being subordinated to the systemic imperative of accumulating capital, which, moreover, necessitates the proliferation of bureaucracies for the sake of keeping order, regulating workers and society, policing dissent, redistributing resources toward business interests and, occasionally, toward disadvantaged elements of the citizenry that might cause trouble if they aren't mollified, etc. -- bears, ultimately, the principal responsibility for the horrors of totalitarianism (or is at least among the most important *conditions* of it). It might seem that ideological fanaticism, as exemplified in both Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, has little in common with bureaucratic atomism and inhumanity. But in fact they are related. This kind of ideological commitment -- which is also displayed by the contemporary Tea Party and many mainstream economists and politicians, who have been perfectly happy to sacrifice millions of lives around the world in the service of their Free Market ideology -- is facilitated by atomistic and bureaucratic social structures, which foster the tendency to think and act in terms of "reifications," abstract categories, labels. In a society that functions by categorizing people and subordinating them to overwhelming institutional dynamics, the leap to mass ideological commitment (subordinating humanity to ideological considerations) is not terribly difficult. It is natural, being effectively a sort of extreme subjectivization of what is already the case in institutional functioning. The Free Market ideology is a good example, as is the anti-Semitism of the 1930s (which grew out of decades of institutionalized discrimination and institutional/social inequalities for which Jews were the scapegoat). Atomization and bureaucratization are among the conditions for mass ideological mobilization, which is a condition for totalitarianism. --But, in fact, it turns out that the masses' fanatical anti-Semitism wasn't as important to the success of Nazism as is commonly thought, precisely because this fanaticism didn't exist to the extent you'd think. After the war, Germans were able to move beyond the past

surprisingly easily, going about their ordinary lives and appearing not to be dedicated anti-Semites. Much or most of their earlier *behavioral* anti-Semitism (killing Jews, etc.) had been due simply to their following orders, fitting into the institutional (and social) environment, being good bureaucrats. So, you see, *that's* the horror, *that's* the origin, that institutionalized atomistic alienation, a much more fundamental thing than "ideological" alienation, fanaticism.

[In that paragraph I was confusing two issues, a bureaucratic etc. society as an essential condition for the emergence of totalitarianism, and extreme bureaucracy etc. as the most important and most destructive *manifestation* of totalitarianism. Both claims are true, I think. Mass ideological commitment is more important in the "movement" stage than in the "state" stage.]

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One of the ironies about Ayn Rand is that her philosophy of extreme selfishness and individualism would, if taken to its logical conclusion and realized in the world, result in a society that bore resemblances to the totalitarianism she fled when fleeing Russia. Let's leave aside her stupid love of laissez-faire capitalism, an impossible economic order that, to the extent it could be approximated, was responsible for the Great Depression and thereby the rise of Nazi collectivism. ....On second thought, no, let's look at this laissez-faire capitalism, since it is one manifestation of her vision. If a *pure* version of it were possible, it would be something like Murray Rothbard's "anarcho-capitalism," which, as Chomsky says, is "a world so full of hate that no human being would want to live in it."[1] As someone once said, maybe Hannah Arendt, the closest we've ever come to a society of pure selfishness and individualism was Auschwitz, which was the culmination of a kind of totalitarian collectivism. The parallels between Nazi (and Soviet) collectivism and Randian or Rothbardian individualism are significant: they're due to the profound atomization that each entails. In the latter, the individual is to treat everyone as a means to his end; in the former, the individual is to treat everyone as a means to the state's (or the movement's) ends. In both cases, no human connections are allowed, no treating the other as a being with his own value and his own claims on one's respect. Hate, mistrust, and misery are the inevitable consequences of both these dystopian visions.

Needless to say, people like Rand and Rothbard are not to be taken seriously, except as symptoms. But it's fun to glance at them sometimes because of all the little ironies you'll notice.

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Smoking.-- Now that I've taken up smoking (though barely; a cigarette every day or so), I understand the appeal. In a life from which you derive insufficient satisfaction, a life in which life is aimless,

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[1] The footnotes to *Understanding Power* have excerpts from one of Rothbard's "libertarian" books: "Abolition of the public sector means, of course, that *all* pieces of land, all land areas, including streets and roads, would be owned privately, by individuals, corporations, cooperatives, or any other voluntary groupings of individuals and capital.... Any maverick road owner who insisted on a left-hand drive or green for 'stop' instead of 'go' would soon find himself with numerous accidents, and the disappearance of customers and users.... [W]hat about *driving* on congested urban streets? How could this be priced? There are numerous possible ways. In the first place the downtown street owners might require anyone driving on their streets to buy a license.... Modern technology may make feasible the requirement that all cars equip themselves with a meter....

"[I]f police services were supplied on a free, competitive market....consumers would pay for whatever degree of protection they wish to purchase. The consumers who just want to see a policeman once in a while would pay less than those who want continuous patrolling, and far less than those who demand twenty-four-hour bodyguard service.... Any police firm that suffers from gross inefficiency would soon go bankrupt and disappear.... Free-market police would not only be efficient, they would have a strong incentive to be courteous and to refrain from brutality against either their clients or their clients' friends or customers. A private Central Park would be guarded efficiently in order to maximize park revenue.... Possibly, each individual would subscribe to a court service, paying a monthly premium.... If a private firm owned Lake Erie, for example, then anyone dumping garbage in the lake would be promptly sued in the courts."

it's a consolation. It's like saying "Fuck it." When I have a cigarette in my hand, I'm taking a break from the world. It's an escape from doing nothing, living nothing -- or rather an escape from false and empty somethingness.[1]

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From Simone de Beauvoir.-- "The advantage man enjoys....is that his vocation as a human being in no way runs counter to his destiny as a male.[2] Through the identification of phallus and transcendence, it turns out that his social and spiritual successes endow him with a virile presence. He is not divided. Whereas it is required of woman that in order to realize her femininity she must make herself object and prey, which is to say that she must renounce her claims as a sovereign subject." Well said, and true. It is conceivable that as applied to some society twenty thousand years from now, de Beauvoir's statement will need qualification, but as applied to history and people up till now, it is true. Why? Because to be a fully realized human being means to be active, to be free, to create and express oneself, to actively seek recognition by impressing oneself on the world and others. But this is also, in a slightly different way, what it means to be masculine, due to biological tendencies in the sexes. (The sexes naturally define themselves in opposition to each other, and because of biological facts about men and women, men end up being defined as more active than women.) Many men, of course, don't achieve the ideal, but to that extent they're not masculine. If women, however, fail to be active and self-creating and free, that doesn't count as a failure in their capacity as *women* but only as *humans* (and as *selves*, which have to be "self-certain," "confirmed," etc. in order to be fully realized). So, yes, full humanity, or "self-sovereignty," and full femininity are in tension.

If, however, you take the *moral* perspective on the nature of humanity, according to which the human ideal is to personify the Golden Rule, then there is no particular tension between femininity and humanity. (Nor, perhaps, between masculinity and humanity.) Unfortunately this is not the perspective that people instinctually seem to take. They unconsciously respect dominance and activeness more than kindness and compassion. The former traits are more interpersonally and instinctually *compelling* than the latter. Therefore, men are at an advantage.

Obviously the only thing that can be done to mitigate this situation is to socialize women in such a way that they don't feel the need to be exceptionally feminine. There is a time for accentuating femininity, namely in sexually charged interactions with the opposite sex, and there is a time for not accentuating it but just being *human*, namely in most other contexts. Women have to navigate the tensions between these roles.

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The history of nationalism is intriguing. Until about the middle of the 19th century, nationalism in Europe had progressive, egalitarian, and universalist connotations. It was liberatory, directed against the hierarchies, exclusions, and oppressions of the *ancien régime*. In Poland, for example, "to speak of national liberation was to imagine a chiliastic moment of emancipation for all humanity -- 'for our freedom and yours,' as the slogan of the day put it" (Brian Porter). This was true in France also, and Germany, and probably anywhere else nationalism reared its head. By the end of the century, however, nationalism had completely changed its character. It was now *ethnic*, exclusionary, reactionary, anti-Semitic in most cases, and authoritarian. Fifty years earlier, Polish nationalism had been perfectly compatible with the recognition of Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and even Jews as Poles (according to Porter). In 1900 or so....no way. The germs of fascism were apparent in most nationalisms by then. So what explains the change? It isn't that earlier nationalism was primarily an affair of elites while later nationalism was an affair of the masses -- i.e., that the masses defile everything they touch, etc. -- because around the turn of the century it was

[1] [I wrote that when I was in a bad mood. I guess I don't have to point out that smoking is also, well, just plain fun.]

[2] I quote this passage because the reader, being, probably, highly educated, won't take seriously any of my ideas unless he sees they have been said by a famous intellectual before me. And I've expressed the ideas in the quoted passage many times.

precisely, in many cases, elements of the elite that were most reactionary, anti-Semitic, and authoritarian. The explanation is more complicated. I haven't read Porter's book yet, but obviously the answer has to do with the whirlwind of industrialization and international migration that swept the continent. My hunch is that earlier in the century, nationalist intellectuals and the like had no reason to propagate authoritarianism, cultural exclusionism, and so on, because their main concern was to achieve political power, independence, and freedom vis-à-vis the old absolutist or foreign (in the case of, e.g., Poland) elites that ran the country in their own narrow interests. And because intellectuals identified their own interests with those of humanity -- as everyone tends to do -- their "nationalism" entailed the advocacy of freedom etc. for all peoples. Nationalists' task was to overthrow their political oppressors, dismantle feudal restrictions, and, in a sense, *create* the nation (and put themselves at the head of it); there was no point to authoritarianism when they were out of power, nor to cultural exclusionism when the principle of nationality still wasn't even acknowledged by most people. They had to bring people together first [partly in order to throw off the oppressors]; then, later, maybe it would be possible to exclude people.[1]

By the end of the century, political elites -- in Western Europe, at least (France, Germany, Italy, etc.) -- were propagating nationalism for its usefulness in keeping order and unifying the state in times of economic and social turmoil. So authoritarianism, exclusionism, and forms of social conservatism entered the house of nationalism through this door. Also, industrial interests were, I suspect, propagating a blend of anti-Semitism and nationalism partly as a way to divert the masses from class struggle -- blame the parasitic Jewish financiers, you know, not us "productive" capitalists -- and partly because many industrialists had a real hostility towards powerful financial interests. (Think of Ford's anti-Semitism, for example.) In addition to all this, Western European intellectual elites' problems had changed. The main threat to their power and to the existence of the nation-state was no longer the political regime but instead elements of adulteration and subversion. To the extent that intellectuals were now in the service of the state, they shared the state's interest in suppressing dangerous class conflict and democratic strivings and in manipulating popular rage and resentment so that it was directed towards Jews and foreigners. (It's quite possible that most of these intellectuals (such as those in the media, in academia, and in government bureaucracies) were convinced by their propaganda, that they believed Jews and foreigners really were behind all the social problems that kept cropping up.) Those nationalist intellectuals who *weren't* in the employ of the state or the media, who were oppositional and in some sense "revolutionary" (as they saw it), likewise had more to fear from social, cultural, and ethnic adulteration than from the state (except insofar as they thought it was in the service of "adulterating" elements of some sort), because a powerful state, being now [by the 1890s] truly national, was in itself not inimical to the realization of nationhood but potentially even its quintessence -- if, of course, it was delivered into the hands of these rebel intellectuals. What appalled and frightened them was the chaos, filth, decadence, materialism, waywardness, etc. of their society, all qualities that offended their intellectual craving for purity, order, meaning, beauty, heroism, and *power* -- the empowerment of their pure, beautiful, heroic, etc. vision (and thus of themselves). Hence their embrace of exclusionism, authority, and a kind of social conservatism.

Much of what I've said about Western Europe applies to Eastern Europe, except that the situation was made more complicated there by the fact that many "nations" had not yet achieved national independence. So it wasn't in the interest of Austria-Hungary, for example, to propagate nationalist ideologies; those were precisely what it wanted to suppress. Conversely, politically rebellious intellectuals were committed to the progressive cause of national independence, even as developments in Western Europe and their own societies had also raised the specter of cultural adulteration and chaos, thus committing many intellectuals to reactionary ideologies of exclusion and authority. What they had to fight against, in other words, was no longer only a foreign state but also the cultural and social disintegration of their nation (under the influence of industrialism, immigration, etc.).

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[1] [Porter has reminded me of *romanticism*'s contribution to the idealism and universalism of early 19th-century nationalism. Universal freedom, creativity, humanity, *action*, the *freedom-enacting act* as defining the nation. It's a spiritual thing, an ethical thing, *ideals*-defined, not an ethnic or "sociological" thing. Porter refers to "the 'abstraction' of romantic nationalism, with its transcendent spirit and its mystical vocabulary."]

I forgot to mention above the role of *imperialism* in giving nationalism in Western Europe a reactionary character. That was tremendously important. Nationalism, combined with racism, meant apologetics for imperialist brutality. (We're civilizing the savages, etc.) Moreover, such brutality abroad smoothed the road to brutality -- and certainly brutal ideas -- at home, justified in part by nationalist considerations. Also, imperialism heightened Europeans' racial consciousness (sense of racial distinctiveness and superiority), which exacerbated anti-Semitism and other kinds of interracial hostility -- which fit in nicely, though not *perfectly*, with nationalism. Of course ideas and practices that originated in Western Europe spread to the East.[1]

Anyway, those are my hypotheses. Let's see what Porter has to say now....

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Thoughts on the first half of the twentieth century.-- The catastrophe of the second "Thirty Years' War" had many causes, but right now let's consider the ideological ones. As I think I said years ago, nationalism, racism (as a systematic philosophy), and anti-Semitism were both reactions against and sublimations of the atomized, competitive, depersonalized capitalist society of Europe at the time, with its implicitly Social Darwinist structure. But even earlier in the nineteenth century, ideological reactions -- relatively benign ones -- existed. Romanticism and Transcendentalism, for example, escaping from the ugly, selfish, competitive world of early industrialism into quasi-mysticism, idealism, art, universalism, exalted morality....but also a transformed individualism (hence the "sublimation" aspect). At the same time, for the masses there was religious revivalism -- which, in its manifestations, sort of fused communalism and individualism, as all mass ideologies of the last two centuries have. So there were these early "reactions and sublimations," which didn't last. (There were also, of course, early workers' movements, but right now I'm considering "existential" movements and ideologies, not rational-interest things like fighting for higher pay and better working conditions. On the other hand, such movements can serve an existential purpose too, by allowing people to immerse themselves in a collective cause.) After the middle of the century, it seems that existential movements faded away for a while (except among pockets of intellectuals and students, and maybe in parts of Eastern Europe) -- only to reemerge with a vengeance in the 1880s and afterwards. This time the ideologies were more political, and some of them related not only to emotional and intellectual needs but also to "rational" social interests. So, socialism and Marxism spread, and Populism in Russia, and varieties of nationalism, some of them genuinely concerned with social justice (as well as, in Eastern Europe, political independence and freedom). But among nationalists it became difficult to serve two gods at once, the nation and social justice, so the camps split apart around the 1890s (in Poland, for example), one committed primarily to socialism -- although also the nation inasmuch as it identified the "real" nation with the proletariat and/or other oppressed classes -- and the other to national unity and greatness. This latter camp became increasingly attracted to an "aesthetic" morality rather than a "justice" morality, taking inspiration from Social Darwinism and vulgarizations of Nietzsche. Etc.

Anyway, I already made the point I wanted to make in the second sentence of this section. Fin-de-siècle nationalism and anti-Semitism were uniquely powerful ideologies, accepting as they did the realities of power and struggle in the modern world, exalting authority, hierarchy, Social Darwinistic struggle, even hatred (against the national enemy) -- thus proving useful to power-structures, effectively legitimizing them and their ever-greater accumulation of power -- but also promising the individual an escape from the horrors and petty daily miseries of all this struggle, these hate-producing hierarchies and social inequalities and structures of atomized competition, by holding out the *nation* as an arena of harmony and order and a kind of collective freedom, an arena in which one's material interests and emotional needs would be satisfied by one's immersion in the ordered mass. Nationalism in a sense accepted and legitimized all the dissonant and inequality-perpetuating aspects of modern life, by displacing them from an interpersonal to an international

[1] Obviously the East had its own indigenous anti-Semitism too.

and interracial realm.[1] So people could continue to feel as much resentment and hatred as they wanted without thereby feeling weak, unsuccessful, and confused, because now they knew how to make sense of their hatred, indeed that they were *supposed* to feel hate, that it made them good patriots. They could wallow in their diffuse resentment with a good conscience -- because at the same time they were rising above it and gaining power over it, channeling it into something meaningful and communal. And since nationalism was at bottom an emotional thing, not serving people's material interests, it was invaluable, as I said, to economic and political power-structures, which therefore fomented it, stoked it into a continent-wide conflagration. *Two* conflagrations.[2]

After World War II, finally, the powerful realized that vicious nationalism wasn't so useful to them after all, so they stopped subsidizing its propagation.[3] Instead, the welfare state and social regulation emerged to soften capitalism and keep the masses obedient. Now that postwar statism is dying, social polarization is returning to its old extremes and discontent is flaring up everywhere. Luckily *this* time nationalism won't be able to muck things up as much as it did a hundred years ago. It's the age of internationalism, or even "transnationalism."

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The "positive" point of view.-- When I interact with my roommates, or when I read the news, I remember that humans are apes; you shouldn't expect too much. Indeed, instead of being appalled by the savagery and stupidity of the species, we should be impressed that apes have achieved so much.

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Occupy Wall Street.-- This movement, which I assume you've read about in history books, will surely not bring about much or any change in the short term, because that would require a *massive* mass movement. But it is an early example of what I've predicted, the uprisings and disturbances that will become more frequent in the coming years. Unfortunately they won't be able to stop continued privatization. Maybe ten years from now there will finally have developed *massive* resistance to corporate power; it will take years more, however, for anything substantive to be done about it. --Notwithstanding all that, Occupy Wall Street is exciting, in part because networks are being formed for a global movement.

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Regarding Russia in the last years before its revolution, Orlando Figes remarks that "Frank and Berdyaev argued that the atheist and materialist attitudes of the intelligentsia had tempted it to subordinate

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[1] [I think what I meant here, or one of the things I meant, is that, according to nationalism, if these "dissonant" aspects of life continued to exist it was because of foreigners and members of other races. This doctrine effectively "accepted" and "legitimized" them, because of course they were due mainly to inter-*class* competition, not international or interracial. Power-structures therefore seized on nationalism as effectively allowing them to go on exploiting people, with the people's confused consent. --Another thing I meant is that nationalism saw conflict and struggle as an inherent and even valuable part of life, and in this sense legitimized them. This, too, made it useful to the powerful -- but also to the powerless, because, as I say in the text, it legitimized their diffuse hatred.]

[2] [When I wrote this I should have noted also that the extremely powerful business interests involved in *armaments*-production had good reasons to promote nationalism, and did so. So that's an example of nationalism's "modern" face. On the other hand, in many places the Catholic church embraced the nationalist movement and vice versa, so that's an example of its "anti-modern," "anti-capitalist" face. Indeed, its fusion with Catholicism was an important reason for the peasantry's embrace of nationalism all over the continent. --What a devilishly brilliant and hybrid ideological concoction these European intellectuals created! Had it not been for its *material* usefulness to the powerful and its *emotional* usefulness to the powerless (as well as their *belief* in its *material* usefulness to them), it surely would have been dismissed as the twisted fantasy of a bunch of kooks.]

[3] [That's an over-simplified statement, but it contains some truth.]

absolute truths and moral values to 'the good of the people.' On this utilitarian principle the revolutionaries would end by dividing society into victims and oppressors, and out of a great love for humanity would be born a great hatred for vengeance against particular men. [Recall what I've said about the dangers of *abstraction*. "Abstraction" (reification) as the origin of "evil."] B. A. Kistiakovsky condemned the tendency of the radical intelligentsia to dismiss the 'formality' of law as inferior to the inner justice of 'the people.' The law, argued Kistiakovsky, was an absolute value, the only real guarantee of freedom, and any attempt to subordinate it to the interests of the revolution was bound to end in despotism." It reminds me of Robespierre, and maybe other revolutionary tyrants from the twentieth century. There is wisdom in K.'s words. But it isn't *the people* who are the danger, and it isn't *the law* that is the savior. The savior is the *institutional apparatuses* of law, as the danger is the lack of these apparatuses. The problem with some sort of relatively pure democracy -- at the industrial capitalist stage of history[1] -- isn't the supposed bloodthirstiness of the people or some such thing but the corresponding[-to-"pure"-democracy] lack of institutional defenses against the rise of a tyrant. What you need are "corporate bodies" to prevent the atomization of society, as well as a state the bureaucracy of which functions according to the canons of liberalism. Together, these safeguards might very well prevent despotism. They were lacking in France and Russia (and China) in the relevant periods.

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As I suggested above, and as some scholars have suggested, it makes a lot of sense to think of the period between 1914 and 1945 in Europe as effectively one long but interrupted war. It was a state of periodically-active and periodically-suspended war. Thinking of it in this way is illuminating, since it highlights the fundamentally similar causes of both European wars, namely nationalism, racial thinking, industrial capitalist competition (in a nationalist framework), imperialist policies and cultures, social atomization making possible the rise of demagoguery, virulent class conflict and mass resentment being sublimated into racial and national hatreds, and the final clash between a dying society (landed aristocracy and peasantry) and a rising one (industrial capital and labor) -- a clash not manifest in any clear way but obviously, through mysterious chains of historical causation, integral to the war(s) anyway.

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Slavoj Žižek's great talent is self-promotion. I've read some of his writings and watched interviews, and my impressions are that what he says isn't profound but that the way he says it is colorful (and makes it *seem* profound). He has charisma and a big head and body, so he's noticed. But what he says is often either obvious or obscurantist. Or it's just rambling verbiage. He's one of those clownish postmodern self-promoters, loving to provoke and cause a sensation -- like when he said once that the problem with Hitler was that he wasn't violent enough. Predictably that caused a stir, because intellectuals and media-types care more about verbal appearances than substantive things. What he meant was that Hitler's violence didn't fundamentally challenge the system, and that in that sense Gandhi was more violent. Okay, fine, whatever. Great contribution. Let's play on the meaning of "violence" and twist it around to provoke our liberal friends. And to capture the headlines. If it obscures clear thinking, so be it. Being postmodernists, we're interested more in image than substance.

In truth, someone like Glenn Greenwald is a much more impressive thinker and scholar than a Žižek. *Reason*....simple *reason* is the rarest thing in the world. What you have instead are fashionable decadents like Žižek, who give intellectuals and the media something to do. (I'm always surprised when real merit achieves fame. Like Greenwald, Naomi Klein, Howard Zinn, Chomsky, and other such people. That shows there are cracks in the system -- more and more nowadays, in fact, even at the "intellectual" level.)

[1] Or at least the stage in which industrial capitalism is *emerging*.

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The clean air of the Baroque.-- Notwithstanding the uniquely life-affirming character of Beethoven's music, Bach has pieces that are more invigorating than anything except, perhaps, standing atop Mount Washington or some other peak close to the heavens.

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The book jacket of François Furet's *Revolutionary France 1770-1880* (1995) states that the work is "a testimony to the power both of ideas and of personality in the movements of the past." This is true. Furet offers a political history from the perspective of ideas and personalities, and his endeavor is quite successful. Its success is due partly to the undogmatic nature of Furet's "idealism" -- for he does not completely ignore social and economic conditions or administrative structures -- but, nevertheless, Furet demonstrates that ideas and powerful individuals do have great influence on history and cannot be wholly neglected in favor of "material" causes. The book's analyses of ideological currents and the consequences of ideas are fascinating. Ultimately Furet does devote too little attention to society and the economy, and he overestimates the causal power of ideas, but his book remains a great achievement.

One of its most fruitful themes is that the Revolution was guided and misguided by tensions between its animating ideas. In particular, two legacies from the Enlightenment met and battled for hegemony: first, liberal individualism, "according to which the constituent element of the social pact is the free activity of men in the pursuit of their interests and their happiness," and second, "a very unitarian conception of the sovereignty of the people, through the idea of the nation or 'general will'" (p. 87). The revolutionaries of 1789 "made a fragile synthesis of them," but the synthesis came apart under the impact of war and Terror. The liberal regime of law and individual rights was suspended in favor of a nationalist regime of the "general will" as embodied in the National Convention, particularly in the Committee of Public Safety. As Furet states, this regime "in effect constituted the application....of what was perhaps the French Revolution's supreme principle: the absolute and indivisible sovereignty of a single Assembly, deemed to represent the general will stemming from universal suffrage" (p. 136). Because "the people had appropriated the absolutist heritage and taken the place of the king," they had to be imagined as *one entity*, "independent of the private interests characterizing each of their individual members" (p. 140). The dictatorship of Robespierre was therefore implicit, so to speak, in the French Revolution's ideology. It was an inherent possibility from the beginning, and the ideology in a sense led to it. Or so Furet argues.

One might almost say that the central feature of *Revolutionary France* is its continual unearthing of new "tensions" that propelled French history forward. For instance, Furet argues that "it was the tension between the idea of democracy and the extent of inequality retained by the Constituent Assembly in the new body politic which formed the mainspring of the Revolution" (p. 99). Similarly, he refers to the "tension between philosophical abstractions and political realities" (p. 87), as manifested for example in the repeated resort to arbitrary power despite the Revolution's ambition to create a society of law, liberty, and equality. This was related to the tension between France's absolutist heritage and its modern Enlightenment fixation on republicanism, liberalism, and democracy.

Other tensions include that between the Revolution's nationalism and its universalism; the career of Napoleon is a perfect illustration of this, given, on one hand, the nationalist pride he evoked in the French and, on the other, his serving their desire to liberate all Europe from tyranny and spread democracy around the world. Even before the Revolution, however, tensions proliferated. A particularly pregnant one was that between the monarchy's modernizing tendencies -- its administrative centralism and reform, its "subvert[ing of] the traditional social fabric by levelling its ranks under general submission to a sole authority, and breaking up the hierarchies of birth and tradition" (p. 9), its progressive stripping of the power of the nobility and clergy -- and its deep "solidarity with aristocratic society" (p. 13). The result was that "royal action [throughout the eighteenth century] oscillated between despotism and capitulation" (ibid.), and the monarchy gradually lost the support of both the nobility and the broader society. This loss was manifest in the evolution of "public opinion," which became a "counterbalance to despotism, developed by

men of letters.... It constituted a public tribunal, in contrast with the secrecy of the king; it was universal, in contrast with the particularism of 'feudal' laws; and objective, in contrast with monarchic arbitrariness: in short, a court of appeal of reason, judging all matters of state, in the name of public interest alone" (p. 17). "Public opinion" became fixated on the revolutionary idea of establishing a "monarchy of reason" on the ruins of the feudal/absolutist monarchy. Furet returns again and again to this notion of public opinion and its solid opposition to arbitrary executive authority. The reader is left with the impression that public opinion is the one underlying constant in this era, the element of stability in a time of upheaval, the most consistent manifestation of reason and moderation, and the centripetal influence on wildly fluctuating political affairs, to which in the long run they inevitably tend.

In short, the book is extremely rich and cannot be summarized in two pages. A final critique, however, can be offered. Furet's analysis is intriguing in its discernment of a "logic of ideas," a dialectic of ideas and their interaction with social conditions, behind the seeming chaos of the French Revolution and its aftermath, but ultimately it is not ideas that primarily make history. An alternative analysis would focus on economic movements, on the people and institutions with the most resources and power, on the play of *interests* as opposed to the play of philosophical abstractions in their encounter with reality. Also, Furet's emphasis on personalities is in tension with his emphasis on the "dialectic of ideas and reality," since personalities introduce contingency into a discussion that tries to find necessity wherever it can. *Revolutionary France* would have been an even greater book had its author thought more carefully about his methods and assumptions.

One of the best qualities of *The European Revolutions, 1848-1851* (2005), by Jonathan Sperber, is that it shows common sense. Intellectuals throughout history, from ancient times to the present, have liked to interpret society in terms of ideas, philosophies, "discourses," etc., as if these were the most important elements of reality. Such an interpretation is understandable, since intellectuals, who traffic in ideas, want to think that what they do is important; therefore, they declare that ideas are the foundation of the world and the prime mover of history. Jonathan Sperber avoids such a naïve idealism; he interprets politics in the light of socioeconomic conditions and treats ideologies as what they are, sublimations of these conditions. Corresponding to his basically materialist approach is his emphasis on the experiences of ordinary people far from the centers of revolutionary activity, the capital cities and parliaments and barricade struggles. Whereas older historiography was seduced by the glamor and romance of national leaders and impassioned parliamentary debates, the newer tradition in which Sperber places himself is largely interested in the neglected uprisings and civil wars of 1849 and 1851, and in "the obscure local activists and the craftsmen, laborers, and peasants who made up a majority of the European population and of the participants in the revolutionary events" (pp. 2, 3). This new tradition also does not treat the revolutions with condescending scorn because of their failure; it takes them seriously, in part due to their lasting impact on the nature of popular political participation.

Sperber's materialist approach manifests itself in several ways. First of all, he places the revolutions in the context of ongoing social and economic conflicts, including the one "more prevalent than any other in mid-nineteenth-century Europe," viz., "conflict over the collective use of agricultural land" (p. 40). This particular clash of economic interests was a result of the slow spread of private property across the continent, which entailed the abolition of land held in common by peasants, landowners' acquisition of forests as their own private property (on which peasants continued to trespass in order to obtain necessary wood), and so forth. In most of central and eastern Europe, the conflict between lord and serf engendered "violent, murderous hatreds" (p. 43). In manufacturing and crafts, there were conflicts between masters and journeymen, "outworkers" and the merchants who employed them, and capitalists and laborers. Aside from emphasizing such ongoing struggles, Sperber argues that the economic crisis of 1845-47 was the "precursor to and precondition for" the 1848 revolutions, in that it escalated popular discontent.

Not only the revolutions' origins but also their conclusions get materialist treatment. Briefly stated, the final reason for the downfall of revolution is that it was crushed by military force. This is what happened, for example, in Paris in June, 1848, when thousands of workers who had set up barricades in the streets to overthrow the new bourgeois republican government were massacred by the National Guard. It is also what

happened in Germany, Italy, and throughout the Austrian empire, where a number of nationalist uprisings were brutally suppressed.

The attention that Sperber gives to nationalism is perhaps the least "materialist" aspect of the book (although it must be said that integral to the national movements were progressive social and economic programs). He argues, plausibly, that one of the main causes of revolutionary failure in central and eastern Europe was that "the different national movements fought each other, and cancelled each other out" such that they allowed the triumph of their common reactionary enemies in the government, the nobility, the army, and the Catholic Church (p. 147). In the French Revolution of 1789 and the following years, nationalism had strengthened and radicalized the revolution in a country beset by a hostile Europe; by 1848, many nationalisms had spread across the whole continent, clashing with each other and so weakening the revolution.

The most interesting parts of the book are its discussions of the long-term legacies of 1848. "By far the most significant and never altered consequence of the revolution," Sperber argues, "was the abolition of serfdom and other seigneurial institutions. These changes, won by rural uprising and decision of the revolutionary parliaments, were nowhere reversed, even by the most reactionary of the post-revolutionary governments" (p. 273). Aside from such concrete political and economic achievements, arguably the most significant legacy of the revolution was its introduction of the European masses to political mobilization. Political clubs were the most common means for this. Such clubs were associations whose members met regularly to debate political questions "and to organize petitions, election campaigns, [and] public mass meetings or demonstrations" (p. 167); they dated from the French Revolution of 1789, but in 1848 they introduced millions more to organized political activity. These initial mass political experiences helped shape European politics for the rest of the century.

As an overview of the 1848 revolutions, Sperber's book has few weaknesses. It is very rich, lucidly written, balanced, sensible, and a comprehensive introduction to recent historiography. Notwithstanding his materialism, Sperber may be a bit too dismissive of the Marxist emphasis on class conflict, for example with regard to the June, 1848 struggle in Paris between workers and the liberal government. On the other hand, someone of an idealist mindset might criticize him for not devoting enough attention to ideological analysis. An author can never please everyone; however, he can probably not come much closer to doing so than Sperber has.

[Insightful comments from Sperber that didn't make it into my paper: "Possibly the single best way to understand the revolutions of the mid-nineteenth-century [is by interpreting them as] a greatly expanded, partially revised, and, with 'success' narrowly defined as long-term change of regime, ultimately unsuccessful version of the French Revolution of 1789. Their outbreak and ultimate suppression both closed the cycle of revolution begun in 1789 and opened the way towards a different version of politics on the European continent."]

Once upon a time, in the early nineteenth century, European nationalism was progressive, democratic, idealistic, and universalist; later, it became reactionary, authoritarian, "realistic," and parochial. When and how did such a change happen? That's the question Brian Porter asks and partially answers in *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (2000). His method is to focus on a particular country, Poland, and to retrace the evolution there of "discursive frameworks" pertaining to the concept of nation from the early to the late nineteenth century. He "explores how writers, artists, political activists, philosophers, poets, journalists, military officers, and others in nineteenth-century Poland used the term 'nation'" (p. 5). Contrary to the assumptions of many scholars, he argues that it was not simply "inevitable" that nationalism would degenerate into a violent, exclusionary ideology by virtue only of its "logic"; nor did such degeneration happen only when the ideology finally became a mass movement, as is often thought. Rather, intellectuals had to "reconfigure the very concept of the nation" before nationalism could turn into a hate-saturated ideology -- and that transformation occurred *before* it became a mass movement. This argument, like most of the others in the book, is convincing. In the end, however, the book's narrow focus on rhetoric and intellectual debates limits its completeness as an account of the rise of Polish nationalism.

Porter begins by considering the "good" kind of nationalism that prevailed in the first half of the century. It was essentially a manifestation of romanticism, and so was mainly an affair of intellectual elites. In this ideology, the "nation" was scarcely a defined entity at all; it was not an ethnically and culturally homogeneous community with regard to which there were "outsiders" and "insiders." Instead, it was an ideal, "a principle that gave meaning to history.... Poland, which was said to exist in the hearts of all Poles, embodied an ethical principle and acted as a motive force in history" (p. 20). Specifically, Poland embodied the principle of *freedom*, as opposed to the tyranny and evil that Russia (which ruled over much of Poland) embodied. For the nationalist, "to speak of national liberation for Poland was to imagine a chiliastic moment of emancipation for all humanity -- 'for our freedom and yours,' as the slogan of the day put it" (p. 5). Ukrainians, Lithuanians, even Jews could be Poles if in their acts they embodied the patriotic and revolutionary principles of freedom and justice. Such an ideology made it difficult for one to be both a Polish nationalist and a political conservative.

This romantic nationalism, which celebrated the patriotic *deed* rather than a particular ethnolinguistic community, collapsed after the January Insurrection of 1863, a year that Porter compares to 1848 in Western Europe. It crushed the old illusions and idealism, and started the process that would culminate in reactionary Polish nationalism three or four decades later. What happened, in brief, is that after the defeat of high-minded romantic nationalism in 1863, intellectuals returned to earth. A group of them, called (misleadingly) the "positivists," embraced liberalism and science so as to define and hopefully elevate the nation, which now became an ethnolinguistic community rather than an ideal or spirit. This conceptual move set intellectuals on the path toward "solidifying cultural boundaries" and ultimately excluding categories of people from the nation, who became as a result the "enemy." The positivists themselves, however, did not go to this reactionary extreme; they remained historical optimists who looked forward to a future liberal utopia.

One of the most interesting arguments in Porter's book is the claim that what separated liberal and socialist optimists from authoritarian nationalist "pessimists" was a sense of "historical time." In the late 1880s a split occurred amongst leftist intellectuals in Warsaw: some of them drifted away from socialism and towards nationalism. Porter's argument is that the main reason for this split was that the future nationalists lost the Marxist faith in historical inevitability and teleology. They decided that if a revolution were going to happen it would have to be *willed*; one could not simply wait for the "laws of history" to bring it about (in part because "the people" did not have sufficient understanding of their own interests). In order to will a revolution, however, *social discipline* was necessary, *order, strong authority* to guide the masses in the right direction. The socialists could tolerate subversion and disorder in the present because of their faith in the future; the nationalists could not, which led them to eschew talk of class struggle in favor of "the 'duty' of workers and peasants to subordinate their own needs to a higher cause and to obey their betters" (who were supposedly acting, however, in the interest of workers and peasants) (p. 144). The abandonment of class struggle meant the embrace of national struggle. But the question then arose: if "the nation" or "the people" included the vast majority of the country -- even aristocrats and most of the bourgeoisie -- who was *not* a member of the nation? The answer had to be outside agitators, foreign exploiters, and Jews. Thus, through a few conceptual moves, former leftists and socialists arrived at a position that, despite their own self-understandings as revolutionaries and democrats, amounted to a version of the radical right.

Porter's reconstruction of nationalists' logic is convincing; the whole book, moreover, succeeds in showing how the liberatory nationalism of the 1830s, while not really *turning into* the authoritarian nationalism of the 1890s -- for the latter had different origins in a different social context (the 1880s) than that of the 1830s -- gave way to it. Ultimately, despite Porter's aversion to the label, the book is essentially an intellectual history, and a good one. As stated (or implied) earlier, however, to really explain the rise of modern Polish nationalism it would be necessary to pay much more attention to socioeconomic forces and the international social and cultural context than Porter does.

Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World (1997), edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, is a typical product of the postmodernist impulse as manifested in historical

scholarship. Like all postmodernism, it deals primarily with "discourses," with the play of contradictory subjectivities, identities, ideas, cultures, "vocabularies," "grammars," etc., in this case in the context of European colonialism. Specifically, the editors and contributing authors are interested in how "both colonies and metropoles shared in the dialectics of [cultural] inclusion and exclusion, and in what ways the colonial domain was distinct from the metropolitan one" (p. 3). The authors' purpose is to explore how in "the shared but differentiated space of empire....hierarchies of production, power, and knowledge" were shaped, paradoxically, against the backdrop of universalist ideologies such as liberalism, democracy, and human rights. A theme running through the book is the conventional postmodern polemic against "binary oppositions," including those between ruler and ruled, white and black, and "active" metropole and "passive" colony. Things were and are complicated, not "Manichaean." Another theme is the argument that universalist Enlightenment ideologies themselves bore much of the blame for the exclusions and violence perpetrated in the colonies. Also, of course, it is argued that the colonized had agency, resisted but participated in their own subjection, and that colonial cultures, instead of being purely passive, influenced metropolitan cultures to some degree. (The metropoles defined themselves in relation to the Other, etc.) In sum, the book is devoted to "deconstructing" supposed "meta-narratives." Its strengths and weaknesses are those of postmodernism in general.

The weaknesses are on full display in the introductory essay, which surveys postcolonial scholarship. The authors insist, rightly, on the complexity of the issues and the importance of subjectivity and particularity -- such insistence is the main strength of all postmodernism -- but aside from this, one is hard-pressed to find strengths. First of all, the chapter and the book, like most postmodernist "texts," fluctuate between hyper-particularity and hyper-abstractness, never finding a middle ground. Furthermore, the abstractions tend to be either truisms or oversimplifications. Consider some examples: "Colonial regimes were neither monolithic nor omnipotent. Closer investigation reveals competing agendas for using power, competing strategies for maintaining control, and doubts about the legitimacy of the venture" (p. 6). That's a truism, totally uncontroversial but presented as if it is an important insight. (When has power ever been monolithic or omnipotent? Who has ever thought it was?) "What is striking is how much the consolidation of bourgeois power at home and abroad drew on a polyvalent discourse of civility that emphasized different criteria for its measure and at different moments could move state policy in opposite directions" (p. 10). Truism. "Focus on the contingencies and contradictions of colonial rule emphasizes that political possibilities do not just lie in grand oppositions but in the interstices of power structures, in the intersection of particular agendas, in the political spaces opened by new and renewed discourses and by subtle shifts in ideological ground" (p. 18). Truism. Nothing interesting there. "As we have shown, the colonial situation was characterized by alternative projects and by the displacement and failure of such projects in colonial encounters: such processes did not begin or end with decolonization. Meanings of institutions, bureaucratic habits, and cultural styles set up in the colonial era were continually being reshaped" (p. 33). Truism.

The authors also tend to oversimplify or uncharitably characterize opposing positions. World systems theory, for example, argues that "colonization was one aspect of the development of a capitalist world system, through which the 'core' allocated itself the more complex and lucrative productive processes....and the 'periphery' was allocated the task of producing primary commodities through slavery or coerced cash crop production" (p. 19). The authors criticize the theory for ignoring "agency" -- but that's silly, because obviously when one is analyzing the entire world economy one cannot pay close attention to the agency of some village in Senegal or some protest movement in Ecuador. "The theory's assumption of passivity within colonial economies," they write, "has been amply refuted by research in different parts of the world." It is hardly a profound discovery that people in India were not, after all, rocks, passively letting colonizers do whatever they wanted to them. But unquestionably the colonized were *more* passive (victimized) than the colonizers; this is all that world systems theory is committed to. --And yes, it's true that by saying "colonized vs. colonizers" here I'm positing a "Manichaean" dichotomy, a "binary opposition," but, again, in order to *talk*, or to explain anything at all, one has to make simplifying assumptions that abstract from the infinite complexities of lived experience while grasping essential

features. This is how science proceeds, for example. If one brought postmodernist hyper-particularity and methodological qualms into the natural sciences, nothing would ever get done.

The second chapter, written by Uday Mehta, titled "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion," illustrates another typical fault of postmodernism: excessive idealism, i.e. the attribution of more "agency" to ideas (or discourses, etc.) than to institutions or people.[1] Mehta is puzzled by the historical contrast between "the inclusionary pretensions of liberal theory and the exclusionary effects of liberal practices" (p. 59). "One needs to account for how a set of ideas that professed, at a fundamental level, to include as their political referent a universal constituency nevertheless spawned practices that were either predicated on or directed at the political marginalization of various people. More specifically, one must consider if the exclusionary thrust of liberal history stems from the misapprehension of the generative basis of liberal universalism or if in contrast liberal history projects with greater focus and onto a larger canvas the theoretically veiled and qualified truth of liberal universalism." It is as if Marxism never happened.[2] Let's leave aside the bad writing and unnecessary jargon. The point is that Mehta blames *practices* on *ideas*: a set of ideas "spawned practices." We're back to Hegel, but without the profundity. In reality, of course, it is practices and institutional dynamics -- people's material interests, the interests of power-structures, etc. -- that spawn ideas, or at least determine what kind of rhetoric and ideologies predominate in a given society. If the liberalism of John Stuart Mill's day tolerated colonialism and various political exclusions, that isn't because liberalism itself is somehow "necessarily" exclusionary; it is because intellectuals and power-elites consciously or unconsciously accommodated themselves to the interests of powerful institutions. Indeed, a much stronger case can be made that "true" liberalism, uncompromised by acquiescence to the interests of power-structures, is committed to the freedom and rights of all people, their right to control their economic, social, and political lives. Certainly classical liberals like Wilhelm von Humboldt would find much more to like in a Noam Chomsky than in a Friedrich Hayek, or any other apologist for the powerful.

The rest of the essays in the book are uneven in their quality, although they do, at least, show careful scholarship. They analyze conditions in colonies from Southeast Asia to sub-Saharan Africa, subtly investigating the dilemmas and paradoxes of racial, class, and gender identities among Europeans, Creoles, and natives. One is uncertain, however, what conclusions to draw from them, except that....things were complicated. Identities and cultures, not surprisingly, are full of tensions and "contestations." The authors investigate in bewildering detail all the permutations of these contestations. After reading for several hours, one closes the book and thinks, "Wow, cultures sure have been contested." Aside from that, specialists and antiquarians would find much of interest in this anthology.

It is customary to think of the Great War as having caused a major rupture in European history, as having ended the nineteenth century and begun the twentieth. In culture, it brought about the triumph of modernism and the banishing of tradition, of romanticism, of all comforting myths, religious images and ideas, "sentimental" devices for reconciling oneself with life's tragedy and absurdity. Instead there was now Dada, abstraction, surrealism, James Joyce, Picasso, *The Waste Land*. A complete rupture. Jay Winter rejects this conventional understanding in *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (1995), arguing that "the rupture of 1914-18 was much less complete than previous scholars have suggested" (p. 3). The "modern" and the "traditional" overlapped and intermixed during the war and afterwards; artists in all media drew on traditional and popular ideas and forms in order to cope with the horrors of the war. Indeed, according to Winter it was the "universality of bereavement" that explained "the enduring appeal of many traditional motifs -- defined as an eclectic set of classical, romantic, and religious images and ideas" (p. 5). Pure modernism, with its paradoxes, ironies, abstractions, pre-postmodernisms, could express despair and anger, but it could not heal. "The strength of what may be termed 'traditional' forms in social and cultural life, in art, poetry, and ritual, lay in their power to mediate bereavement" (ibid.). Winter therefore structures his argument around analysis of how the dead of the Great

[1] This fault is ironic, because in other contexts postmodernists are obsessed with glorifying people's agency.
[2] Appropriately, Mehta begins his essay with an epigram from Hegel.

War were mourned, in art, poetry, and social practices. It is here that we see clearly the persistence of tradition.

For example, among mourners, between strangers, arose powerful bonds of "fictive kinship," of community and even surrogate family. Groups were organized to help widows and children; bonds were forged between the wounded and disabled; Catholic priests sponsored housing projects for poor families; the Red Cross gave information and support to local communities worried about their missing sons. There is nothing particularly "modern" about any of this. In fact, Winter goes so far as to say that the Great War "triggered an avalanche of the 'unmodern'" (p. 54). Spiritualism, for instance, surged during the war, carrying "much of the Victorian temperament" into the war period and beyond. Numberless people participated in séances to speak to fallen soldiers; belief in the paranormal was widespread even among the most educated, including modernist artists. Spiritualism was reflected also in artists' fascination with the satanic and the Biblical, and in millions of soldiers' beliefs in supernatural tales (understandable given the hellish, surreal nature of trench warfare). In these and other respects, the Great War actually had a conservative effect on European culture.

In the realm specifically of art, popular culture of course evinced strong connections to the art of earlier periods. In Germany, Hindenburg was immortalized in towering statues just as Marlborough and other military heroes had been in the past. Artists and sculptors of war memorials, too, drew on earlier traditions, in particular late-nineteenth-century funerary art. In religious art, for example, Michelango's Pietà frequently served as inspiration -- the dead soldier lying in his mother's arms. Films provide many examples of "the twentieth-century revival of popular romanticism" (p. 142). Regarding painting and literature, Winter gives dozens of examples of traditionalism, many involving the use of apocalyptic images, which have a long history in religious and artistic contexts. In fact, it can be argued that "the Great War was, in cultural terms, the last nineteenth-century war, in that it provoked an outpouring of literature touching on an ancient set of beliefs about revelation, divine justice, and the nature of catastrophe" (p. 178).

All this is fairly persuasive. The culture of the Great War clearly was not a "complete rupture" with the past, nor did modernism "neatly and surgically" leave behind conventions from religious, romantic, and classical traditions. But these statements, after all, should not be controversial. They're truisms. There are no clean breaks in history. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* is a good book, but after reading the introduction I was ready to concede the author his main points. The world is complicated, yes, and the "traditional/modern" divide, if taken too literally, can be misleading. One has to treat "binary opposites" with caution.

On the other hand, some of Winter's arguments fall flat. It's possible, in fact, that, while he has hit upon some truths, his thesis is fundamentally misguided in taking the persistence of classical, romantic, and religious forms and images as evidence of genuine "continuity." His artistic imagination has failed him. In the 1973 Norton Lectures at Harvard, Leonard Bernstein drew the exact opposite conclusion from Winter with regard to the obvious persistence of traditional artistic forms in the twentieth century: he concluded that it illustrated, ironically, our century's *separation* from tradition, its agonizing consciousness of being different from, and more anguished than, the past. Even the most modernist of artists, such as T. S. Eliot and Igor Stravinsky, used classical forms and images, not because there was any substantive "continuity" between them and the classical past but because, as modern men, they had become too self-conscious, too anxiety-ridden (reflecting their society), to express emotions *directly*, *unmediatedly*, *sincerely* and *subjectively*, as was once done. According to Bernstein, neoclassicism was a "security blanket for the whole literary world to clutch at in its sudden death-ridden distress" (Norton Lectures). "Hiding behind the mask of *once* directly expressed emotion -- that is the beginning and essential meaning of neoclassicism." But the general idea is not limited to neoclassicism: the point is that, while old images and ideas to some extent persisted, their social and psychological content had, arguably, changed. Even the most seemingly conservative reactions, such as the revivifying of spiritualism, can be understood as symptomatic precisely of modernity's *shock*, its being shocked out of the old Victorian complacency. There was cultural chaos going on with the Great War and afterwards, flailing around for meanings, for proper forms of artistic expression, for ways to cope with the horrors and uncertainties and anxieties of societal death and decades-protracted birth -- hence the desperate grasping at spiritualism, at apocalyptic imagery, Biblical, satanic,

romantic imagery. Only after World War II, as Winter notes, would all this turning-towards-the-past-to-cope-with-the-present be left behind, as the old society was finally annihilated -- World War I being the first act in the final drama.

Nonetheless, Winter is right that the drama played out slowly, not in a sudden triumphant explosion of modernism and destruction of tradition around the time of the Great War. History happens slowly. Not a very contentious thesis, but worth remembering anyway.

It is a curious thing that an event as consequential as the Russian Revolution, which ultimately determined the destinies of hundreds of millions, can depend in large part on a few personalities and a lot of luck. This is the inescapable conclusion of *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (1996), by Orlando Figes. There was no "iron necessity of history" or unstoppable Marxian dialectic leading to Lenin's revolution of October, 1917; there was contingency, free will, incompetence from some and reckless daring from others. It was anything but a true Marxist social revolution (of which there are no examples in history). Had Nicholas II not been so desperately stupid for twenty years, or Generals Evert and Kuropatkin not so incompetent in June, 1916, or Kerensky not so reluctant to take action against the Bolsheviks in the months before their coup d'état, or Lenin not so determined to seize power *exactly* when he did, or had V. N. Lvov's machinations not led to the misunderstandings that eventually got General Kornilov arrested in August, and had a thousand other such accidents not happened, it is quite possible that the course of the twentieth century would have been very different. That is probably the main lesson of Figes' book. But the book is so comprehensive, evenhanded, and engaging, being a narrative history that fuses social and political analysis with an abundance of vignettes and personal sketches, that much else can be gleaned from it than merely the historical importance of contingency.

For example, *irony* leaps from its pages: the reader is reminded that ubiquitous irony is perhaps the only "iron law" of history. For it is ironic that the Bolsheviks' total misinterpretations of the significance of their acts -- thinking they were establishing socialism or enacting a Marxist revolution when in fact what they were doing and creating was virtually the opposite of Marxism and socialism[1] -- in a sense *confirmed* a basic tenet of Marxism, that "consciousness" is of secondary importance compared to "social being." The intellectuals and politicians who rise to the top are those useful to the power-strivings of some group or groups in society, be they economic power-structures (business, the landed aristocracy) or some broad section of "the people." Whatever the subtle meanings of these intellectuals' elaborate doctrines or however they interpret their own actions, as long as they shout, for example, slogans like "All power to the Soviets!" or "Peace, land, bread!", and the circumstances are right, they will rise to the top. Naturally they'll interpret their success as proof of their theories, but really it could be, and probably is, nothing of the kind. Marx himself was a victim of this sort of self-delusion, in that the increasing popularity of his ideas late in life did not mean at all what he thought it did, that capitalism was approaching collapse. The ideas of his that became popular were merely fine expressions of the grievances of workers and gave them useful theoretical legitimation. That's all. If capitalism does eventually collapse, it certainly won't be in the way he predicted.[2]

Figes is right that Lenin was a product at least as much of the distinctive Russian revolutionary tradition (Chernyshevsky, etc.) as of Marxism -- and that he therefore departed from Marxism whenever he found it useful. The following passage is insightful:

> All the main components of Lenin's doctrine -- the stress on the need for a disciplined revolutionary vanguard; the belief that action (the "subjective factor") could alter the objective course of history (and in particular that seizure of the state apparatus could bring about a social revolution); his defense of Jacobin methods of dictatorship; his contempt for

[1] "Socialism" means workers' power, and that was exactly what Lenin, despite himself, was effectively fighting against by creating a bureaucratic, terroristic, authoritarian state. Similarly, a revolution that relies essentially on peasant support is not a Marxist, or "post-capitalist," revolution. It is more like an anti-feudal revolution.

[2] See Chris Wright, *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution: History and Possibilities in the United States* (2010), at http://scholarworks.umb.edu/masterstheses/19/.

> liberals and democrats (and indeed for socialists who compromised with them) -- all these stemmed not so much from Marx as from the Russian revolutionary tradition. Lenin used the ideas of Chernyshevsky, Nechaev, [etc.]....to inject a distinctly Russian dose of conspiratorial politics into a Marxist dialectic that would otherwise have remained passive -- content to wait for the revolution to mature through the development of objective conditions rather than eager to bring it about through political action. It was not Marxism that made Lenin a revolutionary but Lenin who made Marxism revolutionary (pp. 145, 146).

As I argue in the work cited above, an authentic, "*dialectical*" Marxism would be "evolutionary," not "revolutionary." It would also repudiate the idea that "a revolution could 'jump over' the contingencies of history" (p. 812). As Figes says, Bolshevism's embrace of this idea "placed it firmly in the Russian messianic tradition," not the Marxist tradition. In this respect, as in most others, the Mensheviks were more Marxist than the Bolsheviks.

What Russia's revolutionary period at the beginning of the twentieth century really was was a *bourgeois* revolution that went off the rails. Its doing so wasn't exactly "accidental," although the way in which it did so was (more or less). In a gigantic country composed almost entirely of peasants filled with hatred for landowners and the government, a relatively smooth transition to industrial capitalism -- i.e. a transition not disturbed for decades, say, by peasant uprisings and revolutionary demagoguery, or even by a "socialist" takeover of the state -- would have been extremely difficult under the best of circumstances. Given the unstable state of Europe at the time, with its imperialism, nationalism, racism, international arms race, and class conflict, it was almost impossible. Even had Russia's generals during World War I been competent enough to win the war, it is likely that in the following decade or two, perhaps during the Great Depression, massive peasant uprisings would have occurred, probably coinciding with strikes and demonstrations in the cities. The government might have been able to suppress them, or it might have succumbed to its own incompetence and let power slip to some future Lenin. One cannot say for sure. Maybe a future Stolypin would have managed the transition to capitalism with an iron hand. The point is that in primitive, predominantly rural countries like Russia, China, Italy and Spain in the early twentieth century, much of southern Asia around the same time, and so on, it is virtually a toss-up whether the transition to capitalism will bring to power a "leftist" government (Russia, China, Vietnam), a rightist government (Italy, Spain, China before Mao), or -- more rarely -- a centrist one (Italy and Spain before Mussolini and Franco). *That* is the meaning of the Russian revolution -- namely its lack of meaning.

Anyway, *A People's Tragedy* is an excellent book, both entertaining and very informative. Most of the analysis that Figes offers is not terribly profound, but it shows common sense. For example, Figes' conclusion is surely true: "It was the weakness of Russia's democratic culture which enabled Bolshevism to take root. This was the legacy of Russian history, of centuries of serfdom and autocratic rule, that had kept the common people powerless and passive" (p. 808). True, but not very interesting. Nevertheless, as a narrative history of Russia's revolutionary period, the book is probably unsurpassable.

Fascism is sometimes considered an enigma, due to its heterogeneity and mutability, but it is really rather simple. Its essence is just populist conservatism, or mass commitment to a cause that, whatever its followers might think of it, is "objectively" anti-egalitarian, anti-liberal, anti-democratic. If one wants to limit the concept to its classical European examples, one has to invoke ultra-nationalism, faith in a Leader, exaltation of violence, disgust with modern "decadence," and other features; the more general definition just given, however -- not a full definition but only a description of the core -- accounts for the intuition that, say, popular enthusiasm for Ronald Reagan was reminiscent of fascism, or that the Ku Klux Klan was somewhat fascist, or that even movements like the contemporary Tea Party or Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority are vaguely fascist. Whatever the rhetoric associated with them, these phenomena have been essentially anti-egalitarian. In his book *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2004), Robert Paxton, too, pays at least as much attention to classical fascists' *acts* as to their *words*. Specifically, he charts a middle path between the extreme "intellectualism" of Zeev Sternhell (who is interested mostly in the intellectual progenitors of

fascism) and the extreme Marxism of someone like Daniel Guérin, who considers fascism mostly from the perspective of its usefulness to big business. Paxton also sensibly rejects the Sternhellian contention that the "essence" of fascism is genuinely revolutionary and has as much intellectual content and coherence as liberalism and socialism. Rather, it is more like a "mood" -- popular anti-democracy -- than a fixed ideology with a set program. In short, *The Anatomy of Fascism* is a lucid, thought-provoking work.

For example, the survey from pages 77 to 81 of common explanations of fascism's "taking root" when and where it did is tantalizing (partly due to its brevity). The virus originated in the "crisis of the liberal order," and it grew most virulent in countries of weak or failed liberalism, such as Germany and Italy (as opposed to France and Britain). But what caused this crisis? It was most severe in countries that had industrialized late and so suffered from more social tensions than Britain, for example. "For one thing, the pace [of industrialization] was much faster for the latecomers; for another, labor was by then much more powerfully organized" (p. 79). Marxists have accordingly argued that in many nations the economic system could "no longer function without reinforced discipline of the working class and/or a forceful conquest of external resources and markets" (ibid.). Whether or not this is true, Paxton is surely right that fascism presented conservative elites in late-industrializing countries with new methods of social control, methods harnessing the power of public-relations techniques that had become essential in an age of mass politics.

According to another interpretation that similarly focuses on the pitfalls of transition to an industrial modern society, certain countries had a social structure that was too heterogeneous, "divided between pre-industrial groups that had not yet disappeared -- artisans, great landowners, rentiers [and peasants] -- alongside new industrial managerial and working classes. Where the pre-industrial middle class was particularly powerful, according to this reading of the crisis of the liberal state, it could block peaceful settlement of industrial issues, and could provide manpower to fascism in order to save the privileges and prestige of the old social order" (ibid.). In the context of this interpretation, one is reminded that support from the peasantry was key to fascists' success, since they reached out to peasants and farmers who often considered their economic interests opposed to those of industrial workers and felt ignored or even harmed by workers' parties (with their demand for cheap food, etc.). Societies that became fascist were thus stuck between the legacies of feudalism and a not-fully-realized industrial capitalism.

One might also consider fascism an early phase in the mature statist period of European history. There is a logic to the sequence: as big business and industry increased in size and power from the late nineteenth century on, the state had to grow in order to regulate and stabilize a society that was ever more plagued with social tensions. As the state's power grew, nationalist ideologies would naturally spread, especially because they legitimized power-structures and diverted attention from class conflict. They helped keep the masses under control. If in times of social or economic crisis certain states became deadlocked or ceased to function properly due to extreme polarization between radicals and conservatives (or between workers, peasants, landowners, petty bourgeois, big capitalists, and the "new" middle class), ultra-nationalism would probably conquer unprecedented political terrain, since it has the advantage of not being *a priori* committed to any particular set of social and economic doctrines but rather allowing anyone to fill it in with whatever social content he desires. It could mean one thing to landowners, another to peasants, another to big industrialists, and another to the petty bourgeois, such that it would attract more widespread support than, say, Communism, an ideology catering only to one class. Whether an ultra-nationalist party came to power in a given country would depend on circumstances and personalities, but there would be strong pressures for it to do so if the existing government was no longer functioning. In any case, the continent-wide environment of vicious nationalism would eventually impel many governments, especially the weaker or non-functioning ones, towards nationalist extremism, i.e., some version of fascism. Said differently, in order to solve the social crisis, a strong state would have to come about sooner or later.[1] And in an atmosphere of ultra-nationalism, such a state might very well have affinities with a fascist regime.

We can continue the thought-experiment: what would happen next? There are many possibilities, but the one certainty is that a continent could not remain forever boiling with nationalism and having a few

[1] Alternatively, the government would succumb to revolution -- but even then a strong state would probably emerge afterwards, as it did in Russia during the 1920s.

fascist or semi-fascist states. The situation would have to end eventually, either in a whimper, with the ultra-nationalism and fascism just dying out somehow, or, more probably, in a bang, with a cataclysmic war.[1] In either case, the result would be a more benign, *stable* form of statism. States would find, would *have* to find (in order to prevent societal destruction), a way to keep the extreme social and economic regulation while shedding the virulent nationalism. This, of course, is what happened after World War II. A new phase of European statism began, a more "technocratic," less "ideological" (nationalist) phase.

In any event, the fact that these speculations have been inspired by Paxton's book proves its fruitfulness. It is perhaps a bit too cursory in parts, such as in its survey of the many interpretations that have been offered of fascism's origins, but that is probably an unavoidable fault in a work that aims to be a brief and readable overview of an immensely rich subject.

The history of Europe after World War II is a big topic, but Tony Judt does an admirable job of relating it in *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (2005). Both the west and the east receive fairly comprehensive treatment, as Judt discusses politics, economics, society, popular culture, and intellectual life. The book is a narrative history and not an analytical one, but analysis is interspersed throughout -- as well as being stimulated in the reader's own mind by the narrative's sheer richness. The title itself contains implicit analysis, in that it claims that the legacies of the war fundamentally shaped Europe for sixty years (and are only now being transcended, as Judt suggests on page 10). This is the book's underlying theme, but there are other less grandiose ones. In the following I will consider a few of these themes, since they are of intrinsic interest and raise the book above the level of being a mere "description of what happened." *Postwar* indeed has flaws, such as its flippant and dismissive treatment of youth movements in the 1960s, but on the whole it is as thorough and evenhanded as can be hoped.

One of its themes is encapsulated in the observation that between 1914 and 1945, the old Europe of "overlapping languages, religions, communities and nations," with cities such as Trieste, Vienna, and Sarajevo that were "truly multicultural societies *avant le mot*, where Catholics, Orthodox, Muslims, Jews and others lived in familiar juxtaposition" -- Judt quotes a Polish writer who refers to "'the incredible, almost comical melting-pot of peoples and nationalities sizzling dangerously in the very heart of Europe'" -- all this was "smashed into the dust" (pp. 8, 9). The catastrophes that occurred between 1914 and 1945 destroyed a civilization, and the Europe that emerged "had fewer loose ends. Thanks to war, occupation, boundary adjustments, expulsions and genocide, almost everybody now lived in their own country, among their own people."[2] Europe after the Second World War and the decade of social reconstruction and economic development that followed was *cleaner*, so to speak, more coherent in its social structures and ethnic composition, than it had been earlier; most of the residues of feudalism, political absolutism, pre-modern petty-bourgeois production, and medieval "pre-nation-stateness" were gone. Evidently it was impossible for Europe to achieve stability without first achieving some kind of coherence in its civil society, a coherence that surely could not have been accomplished without upheavals similar to those that occurred in the decades following 1914. One can even interpret the unprecedentedly peaceful and integrated industrial-capitalist Western Europe of the 1950s -- or, by the 1990s, Europe in its totality -- as a culmination of five hundred years of transition from the economic, social, and political structures of the Middle Ages to those of full modernity, organized *stably* (or relatively so) around industrial capitalism.[3] In retrospect it isn't surprising that such an epic transformation, overturning class structures, social hierarchies, patterns of urbanization and agricultural organization, forms of religious worship, and establishing durable nation-states, would end in an orgy of violence, confusion, and group hatreds.

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[1] Had Hitler not existed, it is quite possible that a European war would have happened anyway, in the 1930s, '40s, or even, maybe, the '50s. Fascist movements marched all over the continent in the 1930s.

[2] [Judt notes incisively that "At the conclusion of the First World War it was borders that were invented and adjusted, while people were on the whole left in place. After 1945 what happened was rather the opposite: with one major exception [viz., Poland] boundaries stayed broadly intact and people were moved instead."]

[3] [The word "culmination" makes that not a very good interpretation. It suggests teleology and finality. In reality, of course, Europe kept evolving after the 1950s, albeit relatively peacefully and stably -- until now!]

Judt also argues that Europe is now returning to its multicultural past in a different way, due to the influx in recent decades of immigrants from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. This is probably true in a sense, but, fortunately, there are major differences between the past and the present. To whatever extent nationalism, racism, and xenophobia reappear nowadays, they cannot have the calamitous impact they had earlier, simply because the world is much more integrated than it was in the 1930s and before. Nation-states are on the decline, being slowly torn apart by international networks of capital accumulation and the social atomization and class polarization that neoliberal hegemony has engendered. Moreover, civil society remains far more coherent than it was a hundred years ago, such that in times of social crisis, simple class issues, transnational in scope, will be less easily eclipsed by ethnic, racial, religious, or nationalist confusions than they were in the past. All these things give one cause to hope.

Another theme of *Postwar* is that "a 180-year cycle of ideological politics in Europe" drew to a close in the postwar era, specifically after the revolts of the Sixties (p. 449). This is less obviously true than the themes already mentioned, but there is at least *some* truth to it. As Judt states, "In 1945 the radical Right had discredited itself as a legitimate vehicle for political expression. By 1970, the radical Left was set fair to emulate it." One can even argue that the relative "end of ideology" began in the 1950s, with the adoption by European and American elites of liberal-centrist technocratic management of society and the economy. Nonetheless, classical left ideologies did still have power to sway intellectuals and the masses, as the 1960s showed. Of course ideologies continued to exist even after the 1960s -- feminism, gay rights, environmentalism, a resurgent popular conservatism (much weaker than earlier nationalism), etc. -- but the old mass ideologies of the radical right and radical left seem to have exhausted themselves in Europe by the 1970s. "Single-issue voters" became common, as did a lack of political engagement by the masses (which began in the 1950s). It is true that radical left movements are on the rise again in 2011, but they have even less continuity with past traditions than the youth and workers' movements of the Sixties did. It would seem that Europe's older "180-year cycle of ideological politics" was a phenomenon of the transition from the *ancien régime* to a mature, "coherent" industrial capitalist society, while the contemporary upsurge of leftist movements all over the world is something new. Perhaps another transition to a different society, a post-capitalist one, is in the offing....

Such reflections would take us afield, however. One would like to comment on the book further, but space doesn't permit. Not all the "themes" are very interesting anyway; for example, it isn't terribly profound to argue that Europe has had a "complicated and frequently misunderstood relationship to the United States of America," wanting it to be involved in its (Europe's) affairs but resenting its involvement (p. 8). *Postwar* would have been even more interesting had Judt taken stands on historiographical issues -- or even mentioned any academic scholarship at all -- but, on the other hand, this would have made it less readable and layman-friendly. It is unquestionably a masterful book, despite whatever weaknesses scholars might find.

October, November, December

Reading Giovanni Arrighi's *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (1994) in my spare time. A wonderfully ambitious book, a study of "the two interdependent master processes of the [modern] era: the creation of a system of national states and the formation of a worldwide capitalist system." In the preface he explains that one of his guiding ideas, borrowed from Fernand Braudel, is that "finance capital [as in the beginning and the end of the twentieth century] is not a particular stage of world capitalism, let alone its latest and highest stage. Rather, it is a recurrent phenomenon which has marked the capitalist era from its earliest beginnings in late medieval and early modern Europe. Throughout the capitalist era, financial expansions have signalled the transition from one regime of accumulation on a world scale to another. They are integral aspects of the recurrent destruction of 'old' regimes and the simultaneous creation of 'new' ones."

He recognizes four successive "regimes of accumulation" or "systemic cycles of accumulation," which he names after their geographic centers: Genoa, Holland, Britain, and the U.S. Four "long centuries."

"What is compared in this book are the structures and processes of the capitalist world system as a whole at different stages of its development."

So, there are long periods of "discontinuous change," which end in "a reconstitution of the capitalist world-economy on new and enlarged foundations. Our investigation is aimed primarily at identifying the systemic conditions under which a new reconstitution of this kind may occur and, if it does occur, what it may look like."

As he sees it, the Genoese cycle was from the 1400s to the early 1600s, the Dutch cycle from the late 1500s through most of the 1700s, the British cycle from the second half of the 1700s to the early 1900s, and the U.S. cycle from the late 1800s to the present.

He follows Marx and Braudel in saying that "what makes an agency or social stratum capitalist is not its predisposition to invest in a particular commodity (e.g. labor-power) or sphere of activity (e.g. industry). An agency is capitalist in virtue of the fact that its money is endowed with the 'power of breeding' (Marx's expression) systematically and persistently, regardless of the nature of the particular commodities and activities that are incidentally the medium at any given time." When the returns are high enough, capitalists invest in industry or commerce or whatever. If the returns in those spheres get too low, they prefer to invest in finance. Capital thus reverts to its money form and accumulates more directly, "as in Marx's abridged formula MM′ [as opposed to MCM′]."

"Capitalism" is therefore not synonymous with markets, nor even with a world market economy—which has existed, at least in a primitive form, since the Middle Ages or maybe much earlier. (Trade between Europe, China, India, the Islamic world, etc.) Rather, "Braudel [and Arrighi] sees capitalism as being absolutely dependent for its emergence and expansion on state power and as constituting the antithesis of the market economy." The *antithesis*! Nice. (Maybe too strong a word, though.) More specifically, in Braudel's conception there are three layers of the economy. "The lowest and until very recently broadest layer is that of an extremely elementary and mostly self-sufficient economy." Peasants, I suppose, etc. Second is the market economy. Third is the zone of the "anti-market," which is the real home of capitalism. In this zone, a fusion occurs between capital and state. Braudel:

> Capitalism only triumphs when it becomes identified with the state, *when it is the state*. In its first great phase, that of the Italian city-states of Venice, Genoa, and Florence, power lay in the hands of the moneyed elite. In seventeenth-century Holland the aristocracy of the Regents governed for the benefit and even according to the directives of the businessmen, merchants, and money-lenders. Likewise, in England the Glorious Revolution of 1688 marked the accession of business similar to that in Holland.

Capitalists (merchants, etc.) have existed throughout the world for many centuries. Networks of trade, bankers, wholesalers, brokers. Only in Europe, though, did such elements coalesce into a truly capitalist system, in which capital essentially captured the state. So inter-state competition for mobile capital sprang up.

Let's skip ahead to the first chapter. Interesting comments on the differences between the medieval and the modern political system. In the one case, interpenetration of jurisdictions—"plural allegiances," "anomalous enclaves," etc.—and ruling elites that could travel across the continent and govern wherever. A system that had "none of the connotations of possessiveness and exclusiveness conveyed by the modern concept of sovereignty." Hence, quite different from the nation-state system.

One of the chapter's themes is the contradiction between a "territorialist" logic of power and a capitalist logic of power. He proposes to answer three questions: (1) why Europe's "unprecedented expansionism" began when it did, in the early modern period; (2) "why it proceeded unimpeded by the fall of one Western power after another, until almost the entire land surface of the earth had been conquered by peoples of European descent"; and (3) "whether and how the phenomenon has been related to the contemporaneous formation and equally explosive expansion of capitalism." To answer these questions he has to consider the origins and development of the modern inter-state system, the critical feature of which "has been the constant opposition of the capitalist and territorialist logics of power and the recurrent

resolution of their contradictions through the reorganization of world political-economic space by the leading capitalist state of the epoch."

The origins of the dialectic between capitalism and territorialism "lie in the formation within the medieval system of rule of a regional sub-system of capitalist city-states in northern Italy." So this is what Arrighi looks at. The balance of power between Venice, Florence, Genoa, and Milan "anticipated by two centuries or more many of the key features of the modern inter-state system." In fact, you could say that Europeans invented the modern state twice: first in the leading cities of the Italian Renaissance and second in the kingdoms north of the Alps.

In 15th-century Venice, for example, "the true prototype of the capitalist state," a merchant capitalist oligarchy had firm control of the state, and undertook territorial acquisitions only if they could increase the profitability of the oligarchy's operations. The four-city system prefigured the later nation-state system in the importance of the *balance of power* between the cities and also between the pope and the emperor. Indeed, capitalism couldn't have developed as a system of rule without a balance of power between polities. (Or at least, that's what history suggests.) Political fragmentation and power-balances. It's fairly easy to think of reasons for this. Anyway, "the accumulation of capital from long-distance trade and high finance, the management of the balance of power, the commercialization of war [as in mercenaries], and the development of residential diplomacy thus complemented one another and, for a century or more, promoted an extraordinary concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the oligarchies that ruled the northern Italian city-states." Early capitalism needed relative peace in order to thrive, etc.

Why did the medieval system of rule disintegrate? Many reasons. One of them: "the quantum leap in the European power struggle." For example, new war-making techniques: "the Spanish *tercios*, professional standing armies, mobile siege cannons, new fortification systems." New *productive forces*, that is. And of course the growth of international trade, urban areas, population, etc. From all this eventually you got the Reformation and then other democratic things, and the Thirty Years War, and the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, and so forth. Capitalism as a world-system began in the mid-17th century with the modern inter-state system as enshrined in the Treaty of Westphalia. (No authorities above states, and civilians weren't party to quarrels between sovereigns. Thus, international trade and capital accumulation could go on peacefully even when sovereigns were at war.) The Dutch were the main driving force behind the modern system, because they had taken Venice's place as the dominant capitalist oligarchy on the continent. So their interest was in the absence of destructive wars and trade barriers—an interest they shared with the emerging dynastic states. "In pursuing its own interest, the Dutch capitalist oligarchy thus came to be perceived as the champion not just of independence from the central authorities of the medieval system of rule [viz., pope and emperor] but also of a general interest in peace which the latter were no longer able to serve." That is, it became a *hegemonic* power. (Its particular interest was identified with the general interest.)

Dutch hegemony didn't last long. The new system principally benefited France and England. French and British mercantilism brought about a synthesis of capitalism and territorialism by means of three "closely interrelated" components: settler colonialism, capitalist slavery, and economic nationalism. Etc., etc. This book doesn't grab me, and anyway I have too much reading to do for my classes.

Reading J. A. Hobson's classic *Imperialism: A Study* (1905). He focuses on Britain, asking: Wherefore imperialism? (The *new* imperialism, since the 1870s.) Concludes that it isn't because of commercial benefits, giving a lot of statistics showing that trade with the colonies (imports and exports) is fairly marginal and hasn't grown much since the 1880s. In fact, foreign trade as a whole, even with other industrialized countries—which contribute *much* more to it than the colonies—has been diminishing relative to the growth of the domestic market since the 1880s. And colonial trade has been diminishing relative to that with foreign countries. And of all colonial trade, that with the new possessions (in tropical regions) has been "the smallest, least progressive, and most fluctuating in quantity, while it is lowest in the character [i.e. quality] of the goods which it embraces." So the new imperialism isn't explained by its

commercial benefits to the British economy as a whole. Nor is it explained by the supposed need for an outlet for Britain's (nonexistent) surplus population.

So, why imperialism? "Seeing that the Imperialism of the last six decades is clearly condemned as a business policy, in that at enormous expense it has procured a small, bad, unsafe increase of markets, and has jeopardised the entire wealth of the nation in rousing the strong resentment of other nations, we may ask, 'How is the British nation induced to embark upon such unsound business?' The only possible answer is that the business interests of the nation as a whole are subordinated to those of certain sectional interests that usurp control of the national resources and use them for their private gain." Which are these interests? The answer isn't hard to find. "What is the direct economic outcome of Imperialism? A great expenditure of public money upon ships, guns, military and naval equipment and stores, growing and productive of enormous profits when a war, or an alarm of war, occurs; new public loans and important fluctuations in the home and foreign Bourses; more posts for soldiers and sailors and in the diplomatic and consular services; improvement of foreign investments by the substitution of the British flag for a foreign flag; acquisition of markets for certain classes of exports, and some protection and assistance for British trades in these manufactures; employment for engineers, missionaries, speculative miners, ranchers and other emigrants." It's pretty similar nowadays, with the "splendid little wars" America likes to provoke. (Politically connected industries, foreign investment, greater power for certain government bureaucracies that therefore have an interest in wars, chauvinism in the domestic population that allows power-structures to seize more power, etc.)

"By far the most important economic factor" is foreign investment. Officially, between 1884 and 1903 the income from such investment (in securities, railroads, etc.) rose from about 34,000,000 pounds to 64,000,000 pounds, although the real amount was probably 100,000,000. The "capital value" of these investments was probably at least 2,000,000,000 pounds. It is evident that "the income derived as interest upon foreign investments enormously exceeded that derived as profits upon ordinary export and import trade."

"It is not too much to say that the modern foreign policy of Great Britain has been primarily a struggle for profitable markets of investment. To a larger extent every year Great Britain has been becoming a nation living upon tribute from abroad, and the classes who enjoy this tribute have had an ever-increasing incentive to employ the public policy, the public purse, and the public force to extend the field of their private investments, and to safeguard and improve their existing investments.... Aggressive Imperialism, which costs the taxpayer so dear, which is of so little value to the manufacturer and trader, which is fraught with such grave incalculable peril to the citizen, is a source of great gain to the investor who cannot find at home the profitable use he seeks for his capital, and insists that his Government should help him to profitable and secure investments abroad." Wow, this book couldn't be more timely.

Aside from the investors, there are also the financiers, "the general dealers in investments." The great financial houses "use stocks and shares not so much as investments to yield them interest, but as material for speculation in the money market." These financial dealers, who coordinate enormous transfers of money, are "the gravest single factor in the economics of Imperialism." "To create new public debts, to float new companies, and to cause constant considerable fluctuations of values are three conditions of their profitable business. Each condition carries them into politics, and throws them on the side of Imperialism." J. P. Morgan, for instance, made millions off the Philippine war.

One of the grounds on which Hobson argues against imperialism is that protectionism, on which imperialism supposedly rests, is not a sound economic doctrine. If France shuts Algeria off from trade with Britain, Britain will still indirectly benefit from France's increased trade with its colony, since that stimulates economic activity that eventually gets around to interacting with the British economy. Thus, there is little reason for Britain to fight other countries for their colonies, especially given the expense of maintaining them and so on. Britain will profit regardless. I'm not sure this argument is wholly successful, though. For one thing, having captive markets and sources of raw material can surely benefit particular domestic industries, since it means they don't have to engage in price-competition with foreign companies. For *consumers*, on the other hand, I doubt that imperialism is good.

Actually, in the next chapter Hobson qualifies his previous argument. This is where his famous "underconsumptionism" comes in. Too much capital and too many goods (i.e., too much productive capacity); not enough investment opportunities and effective demand in the home market. Hence the need to look to foreign markets. Business concentration is the culprit: it leads to reduced utilization of capital and higher profits. (See Sweezy's *Monopoly Capital* for details. I'm a little skeptical, or at least I'm reserving judgment.) "It was this sudden demand for foreign markets for manufactures and for investments which was avowedly responsible for the adoption [in the U.S.] of Imperialism as a political policy and practice by the Republican party to which the great industrial and financial chiefs belonged, and which belonged to them." The reason companies couldn't just use European markets for their surplus capital and goods is that tariffs against manufacturing imports prevented them.

Hobson's conclusion intuitively seems true: if you prevent the super-rich from having excessive income, which they don't spend as the less-rich would but unproductively *save* and/or invest abroad (or speculate with), and give all this income "to the workers in higher wages or to the community in taxes, so that it will be spent instead of being saved, serving in either of these ways to swell the tide of consumption—there will be no need to fight for foreign markets or foreign areas of investment." [I.e., low domestic demand and excessive "surplus capital" lead to imperialism.] I think that makes sense. It seems to me that with a more egalitarian distribution of income—a healthier economy at home, with sky-high demand—imperialism and foreign adventurism à la McKinley and Bush would diminish. Or at least business would have less interest in it. In fact, that's just a truism, isn't it? In general, business has a reason to venture abroad only if the domestic market and domestic investment opportunities are insufficiently profitable. One major way to remedy that is to increase home demand. (Of course foreign trade and foreign investment would continue, but not to the same extent.)

Surely another way to prevent all this "fighting over markets" (and colonies) would have been to forbid hostile, counterproductive kinds of protectionism. The race for colonies had a lot to do with pressures from politically connected companies/industries that wanted raw materials, investment opportunities, and markets for finished goods. If England, say, got some colony first, well then German businesses were shut out of it. Hence the *race*. And the arms race, etc. Considering the lack of supranational bodies to regulate world trade and investment at the time, the *hostile* protectionist behavior of European countries was understandable; but from the perspective of national economies (as opposed to special industrial interests) it was unnecessary [Are you sure about that, Chris?], as shown by the post-World War II global economy. After 1945 (or thereabouts) there were international regulatory bodies and, especially, a gigantic superpower (the U.S.) that forced Europe to abandon most of its colonies and eventually oversaw the construction of a global regime of relatively free trade (or at least of less *hostile* protectionism).[1] And things worked pretty well, until foreign competition got too stiff and neoliberalism began. But the problems of foreign competition *this* time manifested themselves differently than they had around the turn of the century, in part because there wasn't as much protectionism as before—and *no* protected colonies. This time there was no arms race [between countries whose industries competed against each other] and little vicious nationalism; instead, among other things, there was (is) greater suppression of workers' rights in Western Europe than there was in the early 20th century, a rollback of the welfare state, and a search abroad for cheap *manufacturing* labor (a search made possible by new technologies, global integration of managerial hierarchies, etc.). The rise of business concentration in both periods is the same, though, as is the growth of financial capital. (The causes of the latter might be a little different now than in the past.)

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[1] [There also emerged multinational corporations, many more than in the past, which militated against protectionism and colonization. As Anthony Brewer says, when there is an interpenetration of different national capitals (businesses or industries), "a struggle to enlarge one nation's territory at the expense of others becomes economically pointless. To give an example, there would be no point in Ford or General Motors seeking to extend their markets by sponsoring U.S. annexation of parts of the EEC, when they are securely established in the European industry already. In the same way, tariff barriers between different markets become a hindrance rather than a benefit once multinational firms are well established." (*Marxist Theories of Imperialism*, pp. 125, 126.) Actually, in an age of multinationals there can still be a lot of protectionism, though I suspect less than there was in, say, the first decade of the 20th century.]

[Regarding the U.S's forcing Europe to abandon its colonies after World War II, the economist Arthur MacEwan has this to say: "The current era of globalization was quite consciously planned by the U.S. government and U.S. business during and after World War II. They saw the United States replacing the British Empire as the dominant power among capitalist countries. But in place of 19th century-style colonial control, they looked to a 'free trade' regime to give U.S. firms access to resources and markets around the world. While U.S. business and the U.S. government did not achieve the 'free trade' goal immediately, this has been what they have promoted over the last 65 years." In other words, the free-trade version of imperialism, as opposed to the colonial version, could work only because it was in the interests of an overwhelming hegemon that could enforce it. There was no such hegemon between 1880 and 1945.]

....There are other interesting parallels between the past and the present. If I remember correctly, from the middle to the end of the 19th century Britain had a policy of free trade, opening its domestic markets to whomever. And from the middle to nearly the end of the 20th century, the U.S. basically had a policy of free trade. That changed with Reagan. In both cases, the intensification of foreign competition led to greater protectionism. And in both cases, *that* led to nationalism among much of the populace (through propaganda, etc.). But the U.S. couldn't help itself out by getting colonies this time because that era was over. Companies from around the world were forced to compete against each other, lowering prices and so on. (?) Which meant lower profits, more cost-cutting, lower demand, eventually the stagnant world economy of the present. Because (in part) no colonies! (Right?) I'm just "thinking aloud" here, so I don't know.... Did colonies in the past permit major industries not to cut costs as much as they have in recent decades, or as much as they would have otherwise, thus keeping demand relatively buoyant? Of course the Great Depression happened, but I don't know enough about that....

De jure colonies haven't been necessary, though, because manufacturing companies can get cheap labor now without having their governments politically control the country from which they're getting cheap labor.[1] In the past, Western governments had to wage war on places and install friendly governments and violently force the peasantry to work in mines or factories or wherever, because otherwise the "colonial" population would have just stayed in the countryside doing what it had been doing since time immemorial. Governments and companies had to *radically disrupt* things in order to profit off the land and the people. (And naturally the governments that went to the expense of disrupting wouldn't want to share the place with others; hence imperialist protectionism.) But that has been less necessary in the last thirty years, because the economic transformations have already more or less happened.[2] People in the global South need employment, so in order to get a labor force all that's necessary is to make sure a friendly government is there and go set up shop (through subsidiaries or subcontractors or whatever). Full-fledged colonialism is no longer a requirement for getting an obedient, cheap labor force or getting cheap access to raw materials. The South has been made pliantly capitalist, through the efforts of earlier Western savages.

Anyway, I don't know enough about the international economy of the past—or the present—to make detailed comparisons between the situation that led to the Great Depression and the situation that has led to the current proto-depression. But even in my ignorance I can see there are fascinating parallels and divergences. The most obvious is the presence for several decades of a hegemon whose free trade policies assist the rest of the "civilized" world in its industrialization—first in the second half of the 19th century, and then in the second half of the 20th century, when Europe and Japan had to reconstruct following World War II. The decline of stability has coincided with the relative decline of the hegemon. Earlier, as I said—after the 1870s—the consequences (of heightened foreign competition) were greater protectionism and the race for colonies, which were "surplus markets," sources of cheap raw materials and labor, and areas in which to invest excess capital. (Particular industries got their governments to act according to those industries' interests.) After the 1970s, the consequences, again, were greater protectionism—though less than in the past—and hunts all over the world for cheap labor [in *manufacturing* this time] and outlets for

[1] [But remember, Chris, that a hundred years ago such cheap labor was used mainly for *extraction of raw materials*, while now it is used also for *manufacturing*. That's the difference.]

[2] Actually, that's naïve. Western governments have officially operated at more of a remove than in the past, but essentially they've been almost as interventionist as always.

excess capital. It would seem, incidentally, that the search for foreign outlets for excess capital, both earlier and after the 1970s, is (unlike protectionism and the search for foreign cheap labor) a direct result not so much of foreign competition—which Hobson doesn't focus on—as of the phenomena Hobson discusses, low demand and few investment opportunities in the domestic economy. But low demand is itself in part a result of heightened foreign competition leading to cost-cutting. Probably business concentration plays a role too, as Hobson says, by diverting more money into the coffers of the rich, who spend less of it than the middle and lower classes would.

Economics is confusing.

Here are more timely ideas from Hobson:

> The creation of public debts is a normal and a most imposing feature of Imperialism. Like Protection, it also serves a double purpose, not only furnishing a second means of escaping taxation upon income and property otherwise inevitable [in order to pay for imperialism], but providing a most useful form of investment for idle savings waiting for more profitable employment. The creation of large growing public debts is thus not only a necessary consequence of an imperialist expenditure too great for its current revenue, or of some sudden forced extortion of a war indemnity or other public penalty. It is a direct object of imperialist finance to create further debts, just as it is an object of the private money-lender to goad his clients into pecuniary difficulties in order that they may have recourse to him. [Think of the shenanigans of Wall Street in recent years, financial companies doing things detrimental to their clients.] Analysis of foreign investment shows that public or State-guaranteed debts are largely held by investors and financiers of other nations; and history shows, in the cases of Egypt, Turkey, China, the hand of the bond-holder, and of the potential bond-holder, in politics. This method of finance is not only profitable in the case of foreign nations, where it is a chief instrument or pretext for encroachment. [Think of all the hand-wringing in America over China's enormous dollar reserves.] It is of service to the financial classes to have a large national debt of their own. The floating of and the dealing in such public loans are a profitable business, and are means of exercising important political influences at critical junctures....
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> Imperialism with its wars and its armaments is undeniably responsible for the growing debts of the continental nations, and while the unparalleled industrial prosperity of Great Britain and the isolation of the United States have enabled these great nations to escape this ruinous competition during recent decades, both, committed as they seem to an Imperialism without limit, will succumb more and more to the moneylending classes dressed as Imperialists and patriots.

Welcome to the 21st century.

The rest of the book is less interesting, though very sensible. His predictions are far-sighted. Here's a short summary of some of his arguments, which, stated in this way, are obviously true:

> The chief economic source of imperialism has been found in the inequality of industrial opportunities by which a favoured class accumulates superfluous elements of income which, in their search for profitable investments, press ever farther afield: the influence on State policy of these investors and their financial managers secures a national alliance of other vested interests which are threatened by movements of social reform: the adoption of Imperialism thus serves the double purpose of securing private material benefits for favoured classes of investors and traders at the public cost, while sustaining the general cause of conservatism by diverting public energy and interest from domestic agitation to external employment.

Reading Ernst Mayr's *This Is Biology: The Science of the Living World* (1997). I don't know enough about current issues in biology, and Mayr is a good source of information, being "one of the great figures of modern biology," as Chomsky has said. Early in the book, incidentally, he champions holism in biology, or emergence, or the philosophy of "organicism" as opposed to reductionism, which is a nice validation of my own proclivities as crudely expressed in my paper "Holism in the Sciences."[1]

Here are my two final papers:

Causes of the Industrial Revolution: An Overview

Eric Hobsbawm did not exaggerate when he opined that "the Industrial Revolution marks the most fundamental transformation of human life in the history of the world recorded in written documents."[2] If one wants to understand the origins of modern society, one has to understand the origins of Britain's Industrial Revolution. Teasing apart the causal factors is no easy task, considering that one has to determine the roles of colonialism, international trade, American slavery, the Scientific Revolution, the Glorious Revolution, environmental factors, population growth, enclosures of farmland, low interest rates, war, and many other things. Nonetheless, in the last hundred years historians have clarified matters immensely, such that it now seems possible to understand at least in broad outlines the causes of Britain's industrialization. In this paper I will survey explanations put forward in four books published between 1948 and 2009: *The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830* by T. S. Ashton (1948), *The First Industrial Revolution* by Phyllis Deane (1979), *Industry and Empire: From 1750 to the Present Day* by Eric Hobsbawm (1999), and *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* by Robert C. Allen (2009). Only the last is devoted solely to the question of what caused the Industrial Revolution and why it happened in Britain rather than elsewhere, but the others, written by important scholars, have much to say on the subject. Their explanations of Britain's great economic transformation are fascinating in their own right, but it is also of interest to observe the changes in scholarship over the last sixty years—the changes in emphases, in perspectives, and in scholarly sophistication.

One of the most obvious changes is embodied in Allen's use of the word "global" in his title. While earlier historians, such as Ashton, at least passingly mention events and conditions in non-European parts of the world, they do not emphasize them in the way that recent historians do. Indeed, this generalization applies across the historical discipline as a whole. Under the impetus of modern globalization, i.e. the worldwide impinging of economies, polities, and cultures upon each other, contemporary historians have inaugurated a "transnational" turn in scholarship, which rejects the parochialism of national histories in favor of histories that analyze cross-national social movements or anything else that doesn't respect national boundaries and sometimes tends even to undermine them. Allen's book does not quite reach this non-national level, being more like a comparative than a transnational history, but it is clearly influenced by these recent scholarly trends. Ashton's book, by contrast, is decidedly "un-international," i.e. Britain-focused.

It is also less sophisticated and conscientious in its scholarly trappings than Allen's, and recent historiography in general. In part this is because it is a brief overview of the entire Industrial Revolution. Even taking that into account, though, it is relatively "primitive," so to speak, lacking in citations and in the *cautiousness* when making judgments that recent scholarship evinces. It has a breezy confidence that is out

[1] In Mayr's most concise definition, organicism is "the belief that the unique characteristics of living organisms are due not to their [i.e. the organisms'] composition but rather to their organization." It originated in the first half of the 20th century as an alternative to both vitalism and "physicalism," two failed attempts at explicating the nature of life. For the organicist, emergence is an essential concept: "in a structured system [such as an organism], new properties emerge at higher levels of integration which could not have been predicted from a knowledge of the lower-level components.... By eventually incorporating the concepts of the genetic program [which is a distinguishing mark of all life] and of emergence, organicism became antireductionist [like vitalism but unlike physicalism] and yet remained mechanistic [like physicalism but unlike vitalism]." Organicism is widely accepted now.

[2] Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: From 1750 to the Present Day* (New York: The New Press, 1999), xi.

of fashion in contemporary history-writing. Current historians have so much literature to consider that they tend to narrow their focus, avoid generalizations, and discuss myriad authors to demonstrate their knowledge. This makes their scholarship more reliable but also, sometimes, less readable. Their works are more "polished," but there is a value in directness and "roughness" too.

For example, Ashton states flatly, "The outstanding feature of the social history of the period [between 1760 and 1830]—the thing that above all others distinguishes the age from its predecessors—is the rapid growth of population" in England and Wales (from six and half million in 1750 to fourteen million in 1831). What explains this growth? Not a rise in the birth rate; "it was a fall of mortality that led to the increase of numbers."[1] What explains the fall of mortality?

> The introduction of root crops made it possible to feed more cattle in the winter months, and so to supply fresh meat throughout the year. The substitution of wheat for inferior cereals, and an increased consumption of vegetables, strengthened resistance to disease. Higher standards of personal cleanliness, associated with more soap and cheaper cotton underwear, lessened the dangers of infection. The use of brick in place of timber in the walls, and of slate or stone instead of thatch in the roofs of cottages, reduced the number of pests.... The larger towns were paved, drained, and supplied with running water; knowledge of medicine and surgery developed; hospitals and dispensaries increased....[2]

This brevity and forcefulness contrast with Phyllis Deane's lengthy and cautious discussion of the same topic. Ashton displays similar "breezy confidence" when asking what relationship population growth had to the development of industry. Was it a cause or an effect of the simultaneous economic changes? The obvious answer is "Both," since a rising population made possible greater effective demand and was made possible by greater agricultural and industrial productivity. This is the answer Ashton seems to endorse when he quickly rejects both alternatives (cause or effect) in their one-sided opposition and concludes simply that alongside the population increase occurred an increase of productive land and capital, making possible a rise in the standard of living for most people.

So how does Ashton explain the Industrial Revolution? "If we seek—it would be wrong to do so—for a single reason why the pace of economic development quickened about the middle of the eighteenth century, it is to this [lowering of interest rates] we must look. The deep mines, solidly built factories, well-constructed canals, and substantial houses of the industrial revolution were the products of relatively cheap capital."[3] Low interest rates are not the only explanation he gives, but they have primacy. They resulted from the nationwide accumulation of savings, due largely to the fact that after the Glorious Revolution the ranks of the wealthy and middle class swelled and the rich got richer—and the rich have a higher propensity to save than spend. Thus, Britain's supply of capital increased throughout the eighteenth century—as did that of labor, due in part to population growth.

Ashton also emphasizes a factor of whose importance recent scholars have come to doubt: enclosures. He argues that the agricultural revolution that supposedly happened in the eighteenth century, which improved the land's productivity, was made possible in large part by "the creation of new units of administration in which the individual had more scope for experiment; and this meant the parcelling out and enclosure of the common fields, or the breaking up of the rough pasture and waste which had previously contributed little to the output of the village." Enclosures had been going on for centuries; their importance, Ashton thinks, consisted in that they made it easier to bring about changes of method in farming. For example, enterprising landowners introduced four-course crop rotation, the growing of turnips, the Rotherham plow, the production of grain and cattle rather than of sheep, and cultivation by tenants on large-

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[1] Hobsbawm contests this. See ibid., 22. It may well be that both factors played a role: the birth rate rose and the death rate fell, at least for people of certain ages (infants, for example).

[2] T. S. Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 4, 5. This is a reprint of the 1948 edition.

[3] Ibid., 9, 10.

scale holdings. Gradually, the horse was substituted for the ox, and wheat was grown instead of rye or oats. At the same time, Ashton thinks, enclosures drove many peasants off the land, "freeing" them to serve as industrial laborers. (He shares this belief with Karl Marx, although, being a conservative, he puts a positive spin on it.) All these processes facilitated the Industrial Revolution.[1]

Among the other factors Ashton highlights are the dismantling of feudal regulations on economic activity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the momentous improvements in means of transport that occurred between 1760 and 1830. He calls this the "canal era," but roads too were vastly improved—both by the government and by wealthy individuals—greatly reducing the cost of transporting coal, iron, timber, and other heavy commodities.[2] He acknowledges the Scientific Revolution as laying the foundation for the many brilliant inventions that swept the land, from Hargreaves' spinning jenny to Watt's steam engine, but he denies that trade with non-European countries played a significant role in precipitating England's economic transformations. The volume of such trade, he notes, was minor in comparison to the volume of trade with Europe. Ashton's conservative liberalism is revealed in his celebration of individual entrepreneurs over monopolistic organizations like the East India Company, and in his virtual ignoring of colonialism and slavery as possible contributors to the Industrial Revolution.

Phyllis Deane's *First Industrial Revolution*, being a synthesis of much scholarship, is less partisan on many points than Ashton's book. Deane also revises some of Ashton's emphases in the light of new empirical work. For example, while she agrees "there is no doubt that enclosure extended the area of productive land in England," she is careful not to exaggerate the movement's importance. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, enclosure of millions of acres of common pasture and waste helped make possible the land's ability to feed a rapidly growing population, but Deane refuses to take a stand on the question of enclosures' responsibility for the introduction of "new techniques of large-scale farming, mechanization, stockbreeding, land drainage and scientific experiment."[3] More precisely, she thinks enclosure was a necessary but not a sufficient condition for introducing these techniques. She also is skeptical that enclosing lands released an army of laborers into urban areas where they could work for industrialists, in part because some of the new agricultural techniques required more, not less, labor. Still, she concedes that *some* surplus labor was released for use in industry. The agricultural revolution was also important, she argues, in providing much of the capital that was needed to finance industrialization and to keep it going through a long period of wars. It is significant that many of the funds that financed the Industrial Revolution came from landowners.

Deane gives much more attention to colonialism, slavery, and trade with non-European countries than Ashton does. English plantations in the West Indies had extended the range of commodities English merchants could sell to Europeans in exchange for foreign timber, silk for the textile trade, pitch and hemp for ships and buildings, high-grade iron for the metal trade, etc. Thus, West Indian products such as sugar, tobacco, cotton, indigo, and dyewoods, produced by slaves on plantations (and exchanged in the West Indies for captured Africans), allowed Britain to expand its international trade and accumulate capital with which to fund industry. (Raw cotton, too, was *directly* involved in Britain's industrialization, as we'll see momentarily.) International trade was also important in that it provided poor, less-developed countries with the purchasing power to buy British goods, and in its causing the growth of large towns and industrial centers. "It was the growth of really big towns like London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and Glasgow that directly stimulated the large-scale investments in *transport* which were such an important feature of the early stages of the British industrial revolution."[4] All these towns, especially Liverpool and Glasgow, owed much of their growth to foreign trade.

Among other preconditions for industrialization were what Deane calls the "transport revolution" and the "demographic revolution," but, having mentioned these already, we will proceed to the industry that sparked the explosion, viz. the cotton industry. Ashton places little emphasis on it, but Deane

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[1] Ibid., 18-21, 45.
[2] Ibid., 59.
[3] Phyllis Deane, *The First Industrial Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 44.
[4] Ibid., 71.

appreciates its significance. (The other early industry she considers almost as important was iron production.) One reason for the decisive role of cotton is that it used factors of production with which Britain was amply supplied. It was labor-intensive, for example, and the skills it required, such as the weaver's skill, were abundant. It also used the labor of women and children, which made for an extra-abundant and cheap labor force. Moreover, the demand for cotton was highly elastic; i.e., small changes in price had large effects on the quantity demanded. In addition, it helped that there was already a high demand for cotton goods made in India, which were of better quality than those from Britain. For these and other reasons, mechanical inventions in the late eighteenth century that permitted greater output of cotton at a cheaper price and with a higher quality were quickly adopted by industrialists. An epochal consequence of these inventions was that they made feasible and desirable the concentration of workers in large factories. Deane quotes W. W. Rostow on the long-term implications of the growth of the cotton industry: "Industrial enterprise on this scale had secondary reactions on the development of urban areas, the demand for coal, iron and machinery, the demand for working capital and ultimately the demand for cheap transport, which powerfully stimulated industrial development in other directions."[1]

One can cull from Deane's book a list of miscellaneous other factors that led to the Industrial Revolution. The development of the steam-engine and the iron industry had major implications, both cost-saving and demand-increasing, for producers' goods industries in general. Abundant cheap labor "promoted new investment and so maintained technical progress which, by economizing in both capital and labour [and thus making possible higher profits even as prices fell], generated a cumulative self-reinforcing expansion in economic activity."[2] In the sphere of finance, Britain was lucky to have, by the mid-eighteenth century, the most sophisticated system of money and banking in Europe, which allowed capital to be efficiently directed to promising business ventures. It should be clear by now, in any case, that *The First Industrial Revolution* is, on the whole, a measured and fair overview of the main scholarly trends at the time of its writing. Its particular "slant," if it has one, is merely *synthesis*.

Eric Hobsbawm's *Industry and Empire* consists of synthesis as well, but it is not quite as "neutral" a book as Phyllis Deane's: Hobsbawm is a Marxist, so his interpretations tend to reflect that position. Nevertheless, so respectable and scholarly a historian is, naturally, broad-minded and not overly partisan. His book, being an economic and social history of Britain since 1750, has a much larger subject-matter than the question of what caused the Industrial Revolution, but his views on that topic are insightful and worth considering. Right away he states two things: first, that integral to British industrialization was the country's place in a world economy dominated by Europe; second—and here his Marxism is evident—that a satisfactory explanation cannot invoke only exogenous factors such as climate, geography, or biological change in the population, or only political conditions, or only historical accidents like the discovery of the Americas. All these explanations still leave open the question of why the revolution did not occur earlier, e.g. at the end of the seventeenth century, or in some other place in Europe that shared the particular property—such as large coal deposits—that supposedly gave Britain its advantage. Instead, we have to examine, first and foremost, the nature of Britain's economic conditions and institutions in the mid-eighteenth century.[3]

As it turns out, Britain in 1750 was well-prepared for industrialization. A landholding peasantry had already disappeared in much of England, as had subsistence agriculture. "The country was not merely a market economy—one in which the bulk of goods and services outside the family are bought and sold—but in many respects it formed a single national market. And it possessed an extensive and fairly highly developed manufacturing sector and an even more highly developed commercial apparatus."[4] The average income probably increased substantially in the first half of the century, so that effective demand rose. Britain's domestic market therefore was gradually and stably expanding—and this stability proved important in years when foreign demand fluctuated wildly or collapsed. However, it was foreign demand,

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[1] Ibid., 94.
[2] Ibid., 144.
[3] Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, 13-16.
[4] Ibid., 17.

Hobsbawm argues, that provided the real spark for the Industrial Revolution. If anything, he emphasizes its role even more than Phyllis Deane does.

What explains the explosive expansiveness of Britain's export industries in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? Two things: the capture of other countries' export markets, and the destruction of domestic competition in particular countries. That is, war and colonization led to Britain's industrial development. This brings us to the third major factor Hobsbawm discusses (after the domestic and foreign markets): *government*. Britain was lucky in that its government, unlike France's, subordinated foreign policy entirely to economic interests. Its eventual control of nearly all Europe's overseas colonies thus proved of enormous economic benefit. Incidentally, the wars in which it won all these colonies contributed *directly* to technological innovation and industrialization by virtue of the government's demand for guns, ships, cannon, and other such iron-built items. The figures on colonial trade that Hobsbawm quotes are striking: in 1700, Britain's colonial trade constituted 15 percent of its total commerce; in 1775 it was about a third.

In short, "our [i.e., Britain's] industrial economy grew out of our commerce, and especially our commerce with the underdeveloped world." But what exactly explains that statement? Phyllis Deane has already given much of the answer: the cotton industry was integrally connected to international, and especially to colonial, commerce. Until 1770, Hobsbawm notes, over 90 percent of British cotton exports went to colonial markets, mainly Africa.[1] (Later on, India assumed immense importance.) At times in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries cotton penetrated the markets of Europe and the U.S., but wars and native competition always ended that expansion of the industry, and it returned to some region of the undeveloped world. While in its day it was the best in the world, Hobsbawm is surely right that it was not competitive advantage that explained the preeminence of Britain's cotton industry but "a monopoly of the colonial and underdeveloped markets which the British Empire, the British Navy and British commercial supremacy gave it."[2]

On other matters, Hobsbawm dissents from the views of Ashton and Deane. For example, while they date the Industrial Revolution from about the 1760s, he dates it from the 1780s. One can argue, however, that the perennial debate among scholars over when exactly the revolution began and ended is not of much consequence. More substantive is the historians' disagreement over the importance of the iron industry during the first phase of industrialization. Deane and Ashton consider it to have been, even early on, of almost comparable importance to cotton, whereas Hobsbawm argues that, like coal, "it did not undergo its real industrial revolution until the middle decades of the nineteenth century, or about fifty years later than cotton; for while consumer goods industries possess a mass market even in pre-industrial economies, capital goods industries acquire such a market only in already industrializing or industrialized ones."[3] (He does not deny, however, that far-reaching technical innovations occurred in the iron industry during the eighteenth century, such as the smelting of iron with coke instead of charcoal and the inventions of puddling and rolling.) On the question of whether low interest rates triggered the Industrial Revolution—which Ashton effectively answered in the affirmative—Hobsbawm follows Deane in not even dignifying it with an answer. This is one issue on which recent empirical research has apparently refuted traditional historiography.

With each of these authors we have observed ever-greater rigor, sophistication in scholarship, and reliance on empirical data,[4] as well as greater emphasis on Britain's integration into the world economy. These trends are arguably taken further in Robert Allen's work *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective*. Not only does Allen focus on the global context; he also incorporates the relatively new field

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[1] Exports from Britain's somewhat backward cotton industry vastly expanded after 1750, giving the industry the impetus that culminated in its "industrialization" in the 1780s.

[2] Ibid., 32, 36. His next sentence is, "Its [i.e., Britain's cotton industry's] days were numbered after the First World War, when the Indians, Chinese and Japanese manufactured or even exported their own cotton goods and could no longer be prevented from doing so by British political interference."

[3] Ibid., 49.

[4] In a short paper we cannot convey the thoroughness with which Hobsbawm treats empirical records.

of environmental history. The main argument of his book is that the reason why industrialization happened in Britain rather than elsewhere was the unique combination of high wages (compared to other countries) and cheap energy. In China, for example, energy was expensive and labor was cheap, so it made no sense to use inventions like the steam engine and the coke blast furnace that substituted coal and capital for labor. That is, industrialization was *profitable* in Britain and unprofitable everywhere else; that is why it happened there. "The prices that governed these profitability considerations," Allen argues, "were the result of Britain's success in the global economy after 1500, so the Industrial Revolution can be seen as the sequel to that first phase of globalization."[1]

England's high wages of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a consequence of vigorous economic growth, were important also in that they ensured high levels of consumption and education, as manifested in literacy and numeracy. Likewise, they point to a pertinent difference between the England of 1750 and the England of 1450, which helps explain why the Industrial Revolution did not happen earlier despite the presence even then of relatively high wages: the Scientific Revolution had led to the "Industrial Enlightenment" of the eighteenth century (in addition to making possible new technology on the basis of insights relating to atmospheric pressure and time-keeping). As Joel Mokyr defines it, the Industrial Enlightenment was "that part of the Enlightenment that believed that material progress and economic growth could be achieved through increasing human knowledge of natural phenomena and making this knowledge accessible to those who could make use of it in production."[2] By analyzing the biographies of 79 inventors of the eighteenth century, Allen shows that social and economic links existed between intellectuals and producers, "the *savants* and the *fabricants*," indeed that the social circles of shopkeepers, proto-industrialists, artisans, and the wealthy were permeated by "scientific writers, tinkerers, engineers, lecturers, and experimental philosophers." He thereby demonstrates the soundness and significance of Mokyr's conception of the Industrial Enlightenment as contributing to the Industrial Revolution. More generally, the decline of superstition and rise of a scientific worldview seems to have been a precondition of Britain's industrialization.

As stated above, environmental history has a major role in Allen's book. He uses it to explain not only the course of the Industrial Revolution but also the success of England's early modern economy. To summarize his argument very briefly, the Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century slashed England's population. England's comparative advantage had already been the production of wool, but with the post-plague reversion of millions of acres of arable land to pasture, sheep had more nutritious diets, which made their wool grow to greater length. Long wool was better suited to making worsted cloth, which was the material of the "new draperies" whose export benefited from the commercial revolution of early modern Europe. The very important export of draperies and other woollen fabrics caused London, their export point, to grow in the seventeenth century, and it continued to grow as trade with the Americas, Africa, and Asia expanded. London's growth encouraged the rise of coal mining, and eventually the application of coal to more and more industrial technologies. "Metal refining and fabricating industries, among others, took off and provided a basis for economic development outside of London." Given the presence of cheap coal in northern Britain, wages could rise rapidly in that region—ultimately converging with London levels—without hurting the international competitiveness of industries there. High wages meant high demand, which further stimulated economic growth. Allen sums it all up in one sentence: "The success of the British economy was, thus, due to long-haired sheep, cheap coal and the imperial foreign policy that secured a rising volume of trade."[3]

Coal was important not only as a source of cheap energy but also for its "technological spin-offs," the steam engine and the railway. Without the coal industry, after all, there would have been no point in inventing the steam engine—which by the late eighteenth century was used in cotton mills—and so

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[1] Robert Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.
[2] Quoted in ibid., 239.
[3] Ibid., 111, 130.

"scientific discoveries would not have flowered into the technology of the Industrial Revolution."[1] The French invented technologies too, for example in paper production, but they were not as transformative as the steam engine and cheap iron. They did not lead to widespread mechanization and globalization. The difference between France and Britain, according to Allen's rather simplified account, is just that the latter was luckier in its geology. Only after British engineers in the mid-nineteenth century had made the steam engine more fuel-efficient, so that it consumed less coal, did it become profitable for other countries with less abundant supplies of coal to use it—and they did so.

Allen also has much to say about the agricultural revolution. In the standard narrative, to which the other authors we have considered (including Hobsbawm) essentially subscribe, "enclosure of open fields and the replacement of peasant cultivation by capitalist farming" were largely responsible for the agricultural revolution, i.e. the revolution in the land's productivity. "These changes," Allen continues in his description of the narrative, "increased output and (in Marxist accounts) reduced farm employment. The extra output made it possible to feed a larger urban or proto-industrial population and so fostered the growth of manufacturing. Institutional change in the countryside caused the growth of the city and propelled the economy forward."[2] Allen concedes there is some truth to this narrative, but he thinks causation ran more strongly in the opposite direction, from expansion of cities (resulting from international trade) to increased agricultural productivity. That is, the process involved more "pull" than "push." In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as the growth of international trade was precipitating the expansion of cities and improvements in the urban standard of living, farmers, whose incomes began to stagnate, felt left out of the economic boom. Many sold their land and moved to London, a process that facilitated the growth of large estates. Others invested in productivity improvements, whether by increasing crop and livestock yields or by farming with fewer people, which was done by "amalgamating small holdings into large farms and enclosing open field arable and converting it to pasture."[3] Both landlords and well-off farmers did this. — Notwithstanding these minor corrections to the standard narrative, it seems that the four authors we have reviewed agree on the fundamentals, that a revolution in agricultural productivity that coincided, at least in the long run, with depopulation of the countryside was an essential foundation of Britain's Industrial Revolution.

A peculiar thing about that world-historic event is that no matter how much one studies it, there remains something mysterious about it. There are so many factors to take into consideration that true understanding always seems out of reach. In this short paper we have barely been able to gesture at such understanding, but at least we have seen how some of the historiography has evolved. It is true that the four books discussed here focus, perhaps a bit too much, on economic history, saying little about the cultural and intellectual context. This charge is least justified, however, with regard to *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective*. As we have seen, Allen considers the Industrial Enlightenment to have been important in undermining a culture of superstition and exalting science instead; he is interested in the social and intellectual circles in which inventors moved. "Scientific lectures," he notes, "were popular in eighteenth-century England, as were books explaining the discoveries of Newton and other natural philosophers. The hoi polloi became familiar with the discoveries of science and with the scientific worldview.... This worldview was conducive to the improvement of technology."[4] More than any of the other authors, Allen appreciates the positive lesson of postmodernism, that the cultural and intellectual environment influences what happens in society and even the economy. In fact, Allen's book is an intriguing synthesis of technological history—he discusses in minute detail the functioning of the most significant inventions associated with the Industrial Revolution—economic history, environmental history, and cultural history. The latter is mostly ignored by the other three books, although Deane mentions "changes in entrepreneurial attitudes to innovation," quoting Samuel Johnson's sardonic comment that "The age is running mad after innovation. All the business of the world is to be done in a new way: men are to be

[1] Ibid., 157.
[2] Ibid., 78.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 241.

hanged in a new way; Tyburn itself is not safe from the fury of innovation."[1] Insofar as the three earlier authors (Ashton, Deane, and Hobsbawm) ignore the cultural and intellectual environment of Britain's industrialization, that is surely a flaw in their works.

All four authors rely largely on secondary sources, although, again, this is least true of Allen, who uses many contemporary drawings of eighteenth-century inventions and quotations from writers of the day. Ashton's and Deane's books are introductions to the subject, so they make no apologies for relying on secondary sources; Hobsbawm's is an introduction not only to the Industrial Revolution but to British economic history as a whole from 1750 to the present. The main difference between the four studies summarized here is probably their growing *comprehensiveness*, from Ashton's little 1948 book (111 pages) to Allen's incorporation of at least four different fields of study. In this sense, Allen's is probably the best work to emulate—although Hobsbawm's thorough familiarity with 250 years of history, as well as his writing style, are remarkable. In any event, after reading these four works and contemplating the path of historiography from the 1940s to the present, one is left with a sense of satisfaction at the state of historical scholarship today. It does not degenerate, as some things in human culture do; it ascends.

Deskilling on the Disassembly Line: Technological Change and Its Consequences in Beef-Packing Since the 1960s

One way to interpret the economic history of the West, and even of much of the "Rest," since the Second World War is in terms of the demise of the "proletariat" and rise of the "precariat."[2] The latter concept has been invoked in recent years to refer to the billions of people worldwide who, as the economist Guy Standing says, "must survive through insecure jobs and unemployment, with insecure homes, without an occupational identity, with volatile wages, without company benefits and with fragile access to state benefits." The precariat has been a product largely of the West's neoliberal policies: flexible labor markets, retrenchment of the welfare state, repression of labor unions, offshoring of production, the shifting of the economy's momentum into the service and financial sectors, in short the accumulation of ever-greater wealth and power in the hands of a tiny elite. In the age of the "Great Recession" and Occupy Wall Street—a movement occurring against the background of ballooning corporate profits—this diagnosis has become a truism. However, the state of affairs it describes presupposes and gives rise to something that is rarely explicitly mentioned: increasing automation and the systematic deskilling of work. By now we take these phenomena for granted, hardly even noticing them, but they condition modern life to such an extent that they deserve more attention from historians than they have received. In this paper I will outline the recent history of labor's deskilling and its implications for workers in a single industry, or rather a sub-sector of one: beef-packing, especially work on the kill floor. Even in such labor-intensive work as this, mechanization and deskilling by one means or another have proceeded since the early 1950s. An indirect consequence has been the creation in the last thirty years of a meatpacking precariat, whose conditions of work and life are frequently miserable.[3]

It used to be thought that automation *increased* the skill requirements of workers, due to the necessity of handling sophisticated machinery. Harry Braverman demolished this argument in his classic *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (1974). Probably one needed only common sense, not tremendous Marxian sociological intelligence, to recognize the falseness

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[1] Deane, *The First Industrial Revolution*, 123.

[2] [That is, first the proletariat gave way to the mass-unionized working class, which became, arguably, part of the middle class. Then this unionized workforce succumbed to neoliberalism, and the mass precariat emerged even in the West.]

[3] "Guy Standing: 'Precariat' of Insecure Workers Is Stirring," *The Cap Times*, November 6, 2011, http://host.madison.com/ct/news/opinion/column/article_54c036b6-123e-5917-b45f-82947a3133c8.html (accessed November, 2011); Yepoka Yeebo, "Corporate Profits At All-Time High As Recovery Stumbles," *Huffington Post*, March 25, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/25/corporate-profits-2011-all-time-high_n_840538.html.

of the argument; after all, an article in *LIFE Magazine* in 1963 reported an executive describing one of his machinists' jobs as follows: "All he has to do....is press the button to start the machine and then monitor it. All he has to know is what his machine looks like so he can find it when he comes to work." The machinist in question remarked that "the job gets boring. You spend most of your time loading it, rewinding the tape, and sometimes you spend 45 minutes just watching it." Nonetheless, Braverman performed a valuable service by placing automation in its historical context. As he interpreted it, it was essentially a continuation of Frederick Winslow Taylor's scientific management by other means, and so was but another stage in the capitalist's perennial project of wresting control of the labor process from the laborer. Moreover, Braverman saw automation as only one manifestation of the broader contemporary phenomenon of deskilling. He defined "deskilling" by reformulating several principles enunciated by Taylor.[1]

The first principle, he says, is "the dissociation of the labor process from the skills of the workers. The labor process is to be rendered independent of craft, tradition, and the workers' knowledge. Henceforth it is to depend not at all upon the abilities of the workers, but entirely upon the practices of management." The second principle is that of "the separation of conception from execution." The worker is the "hand," management the brain. Braverman distinguishes this idea from the more common one of the separation of mental and manual labor, because "mental" labor, too, such as clerical and even managerial, becomes subject to the same differentiation between conception, or knowledge and planning, and execution. The third principle, which is perhaps redundant, is "the use of [management's] monopoly over knowledge to control each step of the labor process and its mode of execution." Ultimately the point of these principles, and of management itself, "was to render conscious and systematic, the formerly unconscious tendency of capitalist production. It was to ensure that as craft declined, the worker would sink to the level of general and undifferentiated labor power, adaptable to a large range of simple tasks, while as science grew, it would be concentrated in the hands of management."[2]

From this Marxian perspective, the modern "precariat" is not a surprising or even a new thing but a logical outcome of certain basic tendencies of capitalist production. Indeed, the classical proletariat was little else but an *industrial* precariat, characterized by insecure employment, terrible working conditions, low pay, etc. Over time it was integrated into the dominant social order by the agency of labor unions and the state (through welfare programs, economic regulation, Keynesian boosting of demand, and adjudication of disputes between capital and labor), but after the 1950s the so-called "capital-labor accord" began to unravel under the impact of intensified international and domestic competition between units of capital. That is, in order to compete it became increasingly necessary for businesses to cut costs, which entailed a stepping-up of their campaign to reduce workers' pay and autonomy. A return to precarious conditions of life for the latter ensued, but since "deindustrialization" was happening in the West, the new precariat was not principally an industrial one but existed also in the service sector—and has lately been extending into other sectors, such as real estate. A new "reserve army of labor" is growing, a global army of cast-off or intermittently employed workers whose labor power is, more or less, at a "general and undifferentiated" level. They are available to do whatever unskilled or semiskilled work appears, but much of the time they are forced to sit around and wait.[3]

Even in the U.S., however, many of them work in industry. Among these are the meatpacking workers. I chose to write this paper about them not only because—perhaps paradoxically—beef-packing is still rather labor-intensive, but also because analysis of an industry as fundamental to society as *meat* can reveal much about the society in question. Unfortunately, what meatpacking tells us about ourselves is not

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[1] "The Point of No Return for Everybody," *LIFE*, July 19, 1963, 68B, UPWA Papers, box 286, folder 1, State Historical Society of Wisconsin. See David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, The State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) on the conflict between owners and workers over who was to control the labor process.

[2] Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 112-121.

[3] See Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (New York: Verso, 2006) for a magisterial overview and explanation of economic history since World War II.

pretty. The secrecy in which the industry is kept by its owners exists for a good reason: if consumers knew what goes on inside slaughterhouses, they might not want to eat meat.

While this paper draws on Braverman, I do not want to emphasize the negative aspects of technological change quite as much as he does. As a good Marxist, he would be the first to admit that technology itself is not the problem, or certainly not the main problem; it is the capitalist social relations, which use technology in a certain way, that are the "problem." Many of the technologies mentioned in this paper, far from being bad for workers and consumers, are more sensibly seen as beneficial. In a particular social context, however, work-related technological advance can be either empowering or disempowering vis-à-vis workers; and in a capitalist context, the tendency is for it to be disempowering, often by eliminating the need for certain skills and so eliminating a crucial source of employees' bargaining power. Accordingly, technological progress in recent decades has reinforced the policies of "neoliberalism" to produce a society that is hostile to labor and the labor movement.

The purpose of this paper is to survey the history of recent advances in mechanization on the beef kill floor and describe some of their repercussions for workers. I also try to give some context, so I do not ignore developments outside slaughtering—for instance, in processing the eviscerated and cooled carcass—or outside beef-packing. The scholarship suffers from a dearth of systematic discussions of technological advance in meatpacking. It is, admittedly, a dry subject, but it is surely an important one, considering the impact technology has had on workers and consumers.

Background

Aside from the railroad, the most important invention in the history of meatpacking was refrigeration. By the 1880s it was in widespread use; by the 1890s, mechanical refrigeration had, on the whole, superseded the use of natural ice. The epoch-making significance of refrigeration—in railroad cars, for example, which were used to transport meat—was not only that it made possible the rise of Chicago and the Midwest as centers of slaughtering and meat-distribution for the country and much of the world. It also led to a decline in demand for skilled butchers, since meat could now be cut up (at least partially) at central packing plants by mostly unskilled or semiskilled workers and distributed in refrigerated cars to distant markets. And because it made possible a year-round, as opposed to seasonal (wintertime), meatpacking industry, it heightened incentives for companies to invest in labor-saving and division-of-labor-increasing devices at slaughterhouses, thereby intensifying trends toward the deskilling of work.[1]

Meatpacking was harder to mechanize than other large industries due to the heterogeneity of size, weight, and quality among cattle, hogs, and sheep. As a result, it was and is relatively labor-intensive—which has entailed low profit-margins, which in turn has entailed that companies drive their employees hard and fast in order to produce more output. This is why meatpacking was the first industry to use assembly-line production, which originated in Cincinnati's pork packinghouses in the 1830s. The "assembly line" was quite primitive then: hogs were driven up to the top floor of the building, several stories high, where they were killed, after which their carcasses slid down an overhead wooden rail on hooks attached to rollers. Workers progressively disassembled them along the way. By the end of the nineteenth century, as historian James Barrett remarks, changes had come "in the extent of the division of labor, in the mechanical conveyance of the carcass, and in minor improvements like the substitution of steel for wood in the construction of the overhead rails."[2]

Things were more complicated with cattle than hogs. While rails were widely used in the late nineteenth century (as they have been ever since), it took a long time to discover an efficient and relatively

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[1] Arthur Cushman, "The Packing Plant and Its Equipment," in *The Packing Industry: A Series of Lectures* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1924), 99-102; Jimmy Skaggs, *Prime Cut: Livestock Raising and Meatpacking in the United States, 1607-1983* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press), 108, 109; Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 26-30.

[2] James R. Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers, 1894-1922* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 22-23.

humane way of killing and bleeding the large animals. A butcher who had worked in the Chicago Stock Yards in the 1870s and '80s later testified that in those early decades "There were various ways of dispatching the poor brutes. One was to spear them in the back of the neck, severing the spinal column and causing almost instant death. Another was to shoot them [with a rifle] from the top of the cattle pens. Still another way was to rope them and haul them down to a bull ring fastened in the floor, and then hit them with a sledgehammer in the forehead." None of these methods was ideal. "Roping and knocking them with a hammer," for example, "was too slow. It took up too much time....and when the cattle were 'onery' [sic] and wild often they would get out from the pen and cavort about the slaughterhouse, knocking down beef from the boxes and chasing the men hither and yon...." Eventually the system that is still in its essence used today spread widely, whereby, instead of killing and bleeding the animals on the floor, they were knocked unconscious with a hammer, hoisted up to the overhead rail, and bled by having their throats cut. By the turn of the century a "shackler" could hoist dozens of stunned cattle every minute by "simply clipping the shackle around the hind foot, while steam power does the rest" (according to an observer of the day).[1]

In all industrial-scale slaughtering the overhead rail is crucial, since it allows the animal to be carried easily from worker to worker (or from team to team, as the case may be). However, until the early twentieth century the rail was not automated; instead, workers had to push the carcass by hand at various stages of the process. Only in 1908 did this change, with the introduction of an automatic conveyor system that used a moving overhead chain. In ending the need for manual power, the moving chain ended most of workers' control over the pace of their work (although cattle carcasses still had to be removed from the rail in order to be skinned). The foreman used a lever to control the speed of the conveyor, hence the speed of work.[2]

These and other inventions, such as moving dressing tables (1908) and a machine to scrape off hogs' hair (1876), already illustrate the morally and socially ambiguous character of technological progress and the deskilling of labor. On one hand, as David Brody notes, the ever-more-minute division of labor in meatpacking greatly improved the quality of delicate tasks, such as skinning and splitting (i.e., cutting the carcass down the middle). Output per man increased enormously: "in 1884, five splitters had handled eight hundred cattle in the course of a ten-hour workday; by 1894 four of them were handling twelve hundred." Mechanization and the division of labor also made work easier inasmuch as they lowered skill requirements. On the other hand, by making possible inhuman work-paces, they made work more difficult and did little to improve its safety. They also, of course, deprived the worker of control over his labor and of the element of creativity and decision-making that had earlier given his tasks what charm they had.[3]

Between the 1910s and early 1950s, few important changes happened in the organization and technology of work. Especially in beef-packing, everything was done almost entirely by hand. Cattle climbed up a runway to the top floor of the packinghouse, where a "knocker" knocked them unconscious with a hammer. The shackler attached the overhead chain to the animal's foot, so that the steer hung upside-down from the conveyor that carried it to lower levels in the plant. A "sticker" cut the animal's throat, after which another worker beheaded it. The next step was to skin the carcass, which was done by lowering it onto the skinning bed and carefully cutting between the hide and the flesh. At the same time, butchers detached the legs at the knee joints. Midway through the hide-removal process the carcass was returned to the overhead chain, where the last stages of skinning took place. A series of butchers ("gut-snatchers," "gutters," etc.), helped by laborers, then proceeded to remove the viscera and drop them down a chute to the offal department below, after which splitters used long cleavers (later power saws) to split the backbone down the middle. Following a few more minor operations, laborers scrubbed the carcass with warm water, wiped it dry, and sent it to a government inspector. (By the 1910s there were often several inspectors at different stages of the line.) After being chilled for twenty-four to thirty-six hours in the cooler, the carcass

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[1] *National Provisioner*, Vol. 2, July 4, 1981, 32-35; Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, 24.

[2] Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, 24, 25, 27; Donald Stull and Michael Broadway, *Slaughterhouse Blues: The Meat and Poultry Industry in North America* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2004), 34.

[3] David Brody, *The Butcher Workmen: A Study of Unionization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 4; Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, 27.

was moved to the cutting and trimming departments, where its halves were cut in half before being shipped to butcher shops. Work continued in the offal rooms below the kill floor and in byproduct departments that processed everything from blood to brains to bones.[1]

Until the early 1950s, the most important technical innovation in cattle-slaughtering was the adoption in the 1920s of powered knives and saws in lieu of cleavers, which, as historian Ian MacLachlan notes, "improved the cut quality of the carcass....[and] greatly reduced both the skill and strength required of a butcher equipped with a cleaver." In addition to this, the method of stunning animals changed. By the 1940s, stunners no longer simply smashed a hammer onto the animal's head, trying not to kill it. (Death would stop the heart and so prevent the rapid draining of blood.) Instead they adopted the relatively reliable and humane method of firing captive-bolt pistols, which use compressed air to shoot a bolt either into or onto the skull (forehead). With modifications, these guns are still in use today.[2]

Finally, after decades of incremental advance, a truly revolutionary innovation appeared: continuous on-the-rail dressing. First applied in 1951 by a Canadian firm called Canada Packers, this system of slaughtering cattle eliminated the need to take carcasses off the overhead rail for skinning. To quote MacLachlan, it ended the "exhausting stooping over prone carcasses by floorsmen, time lost in walking around carcasses on blood-slick floors, the danger of falling overhead trolleys, and the time loss and expense of raising, lowering, and re-raising carcasses." With the help of raised benches, power saws, mechanical hide-pullers, hydraulic platforms that could be raised or lowered depending on the size of the carcass, and other new technologies, workers could disassemble an animal while the whole time it remained suspended from the rail. The result was faster line speeds, in some cases a doubling of production.[3]

Since the Can-Pak (for Canada Packers) system is still used today, let's consider a few of its innovations. The disassembly process was still labor-intensive, but now workers could remain stationary, positioned at heights appropriate to their tasks as the carcass moved past them. After stunning and sticking, as the carcass hung from the moving rail by its left hind leg, workers used knives, power saws, and power shears to skin the right hind leg and lop off the three unencumbered feet. The next step was to transfer the carcass from the "bleeding rail," where the animal was killed, to the "dressing rail," where most of the skinning, cutting, sawing, eviscerating, splitting, trimming, and cleaning took place. The rail-to-rail transferring was accomplished by inserting a hook through the right hind shank in order to power-hoist the carcass to a trolley attached to the dressing rail. As the weight shifted to the right hind leg, the left could be unshackled and the carcass detached from the bleeding rail. The left hind leg was then hooked up to the dressing rail (like the right), skinned, and had its hoof cut off. Meanwhile a circle was cut around the anus, "freeing the sphincter from the surrounding hide," as MacLachlan says. "A snug elastic o-ring, the size of a Cheerio, was used to cinch the rectum and avoid contamination of the carcass by intestinal contents."[4]

Now that the carcass was hanging from the dressing rail by both hind legs, skinning could proceed in earnest. Workers conducted its initial stages, skinning the chest, abdomen, belly, and parts of the legs while standing on a moving hydraulic platform. After that, a mechanical hide-puller—a crucial part of the Can-Pak system—pulled the hide all the way down from the rump to the nose, thus removing it from the body. The rest of the dressing remained labor-intensive, though workers now had sophisticated tools at their disposal. For example—again quoting MacLachlan—"the sawing of the brisket bone (formerly done on the floor with a hand saw or cleaver) was accomplished by a worker on a low platform using a reciprocating saw with guard to avoid piercing the paunch." Evisceration then required only a few knife strokes; the viscera "slumped out of the body cavity in one large intact mass," after which government inspectors

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[1] Roger Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!" A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930-1990* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 17-22; Victor Munnecke, "Operations: Beef, Lamb, and By-products," in *The Packing Industry*, 145, 146.

[2] Ian MacLachlan, *Kill and Chill: Restructuring Canada's Beef Commodity Chain* (Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto, 2001), 137-141; quotation from Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!"*, 18; Wilson Warren, *Tied to the Great Packing Machine: The Midwest and Meatpacking* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007), 131.

[3] MacLachlan, *Kill and Chill*, 172-174.

[4] Ibid.

examined them for signs of disease. Another worker used a band saw to split the carcass in half down the center of the spinal column. A final trimming to remove contaminated material and imperfections in appearance was followed by a hosing-down to remove blood and bone dust. Finally, the two sides of the carcass were pushed into the cooler for a twelve- to fifteen-hour period of chilling from about 100 degrees Fahrenheit to 34 degrees.[1]

The Can-Pak system so cheapened labor and improved productivity that it quickly spread to the United States. By 1954, for example, Hormel was using it in new plants. From the perspective of management, its advantages included its elimination of some of the highest-paid positions in the industry, such as skilled floorsmen and "cleaver-wielding splitters." In 1964 a trade association estimated that the Can-Pak system reduced labor costs by almost $2 per head. The old technology requiring interruptions of the continuous overhead chain was out of fashion in large beef plants by 1960.[2]

Even apart from the invention of continuous on-the-rail dressing, the postwar period was tumultuous for U.S. meatpacking, as many studies have documented. The modern highway system and the corresponding rise of the interstate trucking industry made practical the emergence in rural areas of large commercial feedlots holding tens of thousands of cattle in pens, where they were fed on special diets to fatten them up before slaughter. New packing firms in the 1950s and '60s took advantage of these developments to establish a presence in the industry, and eventually to destroy the monopoly power of the older Big Four meatpackers (Armour, Wilson, Cudahy, and Swift) and establish a new "Beef Trust." Their strategy was to build single-story plants near feedlots, a location that made possible direct buying from livestock producers (i.e., the elimination of middlemen), more efficient shipping of cattle to the plant for slaughter, and a cheaper workforce, since these rural regions in the Corn Belt, Great Plains, and South tended to have a weak union presence and therefore lower wage standards. Lower wages meant that meat could be sold for less, which meant that the big packers based in such cities as Chicago and Omaha, whose workforces had been unionized since the late 1930s, lost profits and market share to the cheaper, smaller upstarts. But the latters' success wouldn't have been possible had it not been for the invention of mechanically refrigerated trailers, which allowed the new packers to bypass the Big Four's railroad-based distribution system. All these factors combined to cause the decline of the Big Four, which entailed the decline of Chicago and other cities as meatpacking centers. Since they were the hubs of unionism, union power in the industry was in terminal decline by the 1980s.[3]

In this transformation of the industry, a company called Iowa Beef Packers, later IBP, played an important role. Founded in 1960, IBP's main contribution was its invention of "boxed beef" in the late 1960s. Prior to that, the firm had been instrumental in establishing viciously anti-union and low-wage policies among the new generation of "rural" meatpackers. It had also introduced technical innovations, such as refrigerating the entire slaughter and packaging process after the kill in order to reduce shrinkage from dehydration, as well as speeding up the whole process to such an extent that one worker complained he did not "have time to sweep sweat from [his] face." Boxed beef, however, was revolutionary. Hitherto, quarters of carcasses had been sent hanging in truck or rail cars to wholesalers and retailers; skilled butchers would then debone them and cut them up into smaller portions for consumers. What IBP did was to include deboning and cutting operations in its own plants, allowing it to pack meat in cardboard boxes and thus use trailer-space more efficiently, cutting costs. (Instead of irregularly shaped carcasses awkwardly hanging, there were now boxes stacked tightly from wall to wall and floor to ceiling.) Boxed beef also benefited retailers, in that it eliminated their need for skilled meat cutters and thereby reduced labor costs. The cutting that went on in IBP's plants was only "semiskilled": workers stood next to a conveyor belt, each making

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[1] Ibid., 174, 175.

[2] *National Provisioner*, June 19, 1954, 19; Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!"*, 250; MacLachlan, *Kill and Chill*, 175; Agricultural Research Service, USDA, *U.S. Inspected Meatpacking Plants: A Guide to Construction, Equipment, Layout*, Agriculture Handbook No. 191 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961), 18.

[3] Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 135-162; Jimmy Skaggs, *Prime Cut*, 190; Dale C. Tinstman and Robert L. Peterson, *Iowa Beef Processors, Inc.: An Entire Industry Revolutionized!* (New York: Newcomen Society, 1981), 8.

one or two swift cuts as animal parts passed by. Another advantage of boxed beef was that the vacuum-sealed bags in which meat was packed before being put into boxes extended the product's shelf life by nearly a month. For all these reasons, IBP's innovation conquered the industry in the next two decades, leaving failed businesses and a new "Big Three" in its wake. (The Big Three that emerged included IBP, ConAgra, and Excel, a subsidiary of Cargill.)[1]

The whole history that has just been summed up illustrates the central theme of this paper, that even in an industry as hard to mechanize as beef-packing, the deskilling of work in one form or another has been going on since the mid-nineteenth century. Under the simple imperative of cutting cost-per-unit so as to increase profit and lower prices, business has utterly transformed the nature of meatpacking. The work that people do and the ways consumers get their meat—and the kind of meat they get—have been determined largely by the evolution of productive forces, as Karl Marx would say, under the impetus of the dynamic of prevailing production relations. Workers have had to adapt as best they could to changes that have been foisted on them, to new technologies, new work-paces, and new intensifications of the division of labor. In the era of unionism, from the late 1930s to the 1980s, they had an unusual amount of power, but even then their interests were definitely subordinated to those of their employers.

Ironically, technological change and "deskilling" do not have to be to the detriment of workers. As we'll see below, the former can entail greater safety, greater comfort, and sometimes a more human environment; the latter can entail the elimination of onerous aspects of work. In the framework of capitalism, however, advances in technology and the division of labor sometimes have negative implications for workers.

Overview of beef-packing since the 1960s

Remarkable changes have taken place in meatpacking in the last sixty years. First of all, the industry has evolved from the relatively concentrated one of the Big Four to the decentralized one of the 1960s and 1970s, followed by the return to concentration in the 1980s and afterwards. In 1950 the four largest packers slaughtered 36.4 percent of commercially slaughtered cattle in the U.S. (down from 43.1 percent in 1940); in 1970 the figure was 21.3 percent. After the mid-1970s it rose again: 28 percent in 1980, 54 percent in 1987, 70 percent in 1997, and higher since then. Concentration in hog slaughter has been less extreme, the four largest firms accounting for 54 percent of it in 1997. Plant sizes, too, have increased in recent decades. In 1977, beef plants that slaughtered more than 500,000 cattle a year were responsible for 12 percent of industry production; in 1997 they were responsible for 65 percent. Correspondingly, the number of meatpacking plants has decreased: in 1977, for example, there were 2590, while in 1992 there were 1405. (For plants specializing in meat processing the respective figures were 1345 and 1260.) These bare figures suffice to show that concentration and consolidation have been on the rise since the late 1970s.[2]

What explains this fact? In a word, technology. More precisely (to quote a government study), "economies of scale in hog and cattle slaughter emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. The largest slaughter plants in 1992 held significant cost advantages over smaller plants." Especially in cattle slaughter, consolidation among large plants led to greater concentration (near-oligopoly) in the industry. An important reason that scale economies did not emerge in meatpacking until the 1980s is that large plants in the 1970s and earlier paid higher wages than smaller plants, sometimes 10 or 12 percent higher. Only in the 1980s

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[1] Tinstman and Peterson, *Iowa Beef Processors*, 8; Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 156, 157; Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!"*, 250.

[2] OECD Secretariat, "The Beef Chain in the United States of America," in *Towards a More Efficient Beef Chain: Documentation Assembled for the Symposium Organized by the OECD in Paris from 10th-13th January, 1977* (Paris: OECD, 1977), 142; James M. MacDonald et al., *Consolidation in U.S. Meatpacking*, USDA Agricultural Economic Report No. 785 (Washington, D.C.: USDA/Economic Research Service, 2000), 8, 9; Food & Water Watch, "Horizontal Consolidation and Buyer Power in the Beef Industry," July, 2010, at http://documents.foodandwaterwatch.org/BeefConcentration.pdf (accessed November, 2011); Michael Ollinger et al., *Structural Change in the Meat, Poultry, Dairy, and Grain Processing Industries*, USDA Economic Research Report No. 3 (Washington, D.C.: USDA/Economic Research Service, 2005), 11.

did large unionized firms succeed in reducing wages to the levels paid by non-unionized firms. In that decade, too, union membership in the meat-products industry (including poultry slaughter and processing) declined from about half to a fifth of all workers, and white employees—seeking better jobs—began to be replaced by Hispanics. The general theme of the period beginning in the 1980s, therefore, has been that of manufacturing as a whole: a consolidation of power among employers vis-à-vis employees and unions, and a consolidation of power among big businesses vis-à-vis smaller competitors. Through mergers this power has increased even further: Conagra, for example, purchased Swift in 1990, and Tyson purchased IBP in 2001.[1]

In this context of business concentration and union disintegration, it is no surprise that line speeds and output in meatpacking (and poultry) plants have dramatically increased in the last thirty years. "The old meatpacking plants in Chicago," Eric Schlosser observed in 2001, "slaughtered about 50 cattle an hour. Twenty years ago new plants in the High Plains slaughtered about 150 cattle an hour. Today some plants slaughter up to 400 cattle an hour—about half a dozen animals every minute...." At the same time, beef consumption in the U.S. has declined. As chicken consumption increased from 20.8 pounds per capita in 1950 to 83.9 pounds in 2008, beef consumption declined to 64.1 pounds in 2008 from a peak of 88.2 in 1975. Foreign demand has helped ensure that U.S. beef production continues to be a healthy industry.[2]

Technological change on the beef kill floor since the 1960s

In the years and decades after World War II, the age of automation began in many industries. In the meat-products industry, poultry slaughter and processing became more automated than that of hogs, which was more automated than that of cattle. A 1966 study listed some of the recent technical innovations: "rail dressing of cattle; moving-top inspection tables; antioxidants for lard; a continuous list of improvements in packaging materials and equipment; many new products such as skinless, boneless hams; electronic smoking; needle pumping of bellies [to inject brine, water that contains salt, curing substances, and additives]; electronic data processing; mechanical boning knives; low-temperature, centrifugal separation of fats; continuous frankfurter machines; and new beef-tenderizing methods." One can follow the introductions of these and other inventions by perusing the pages of the monthly (originally weekly) industry journal *The National Provisioner*, especially the frequent advertisements for every kind of meatpacking-related machine conceivable.[3]

Let's look at a few of these advertisements, specifically those pertaining to the beef kill floor. The common threads running through them are *speed* and *reduction of labor*, though improvements in cleanliness and safety are often emphasized as well. In 1962, for example, we encounter the "Seitz Eviscerating Drop," which "drops beef from high rail to low position and simultaneously spreads hind quarters. Enables fast, convenient eviscerating...." There is also the "Pneudraulic Head Splitter," described as follows: "This compact and rigidly built machine efficiently splits heads, leaving brains intact. Low installation, operating and maintenance costs make it a real profit maker on any Kill floor.... Each stroke is controlled by twin operating handles which require the placing of both hands well out of danger."[4] In 1964 we see an advertisement for a stun gun (made by Koch Supplies) that doesn't injure the animal's skull or brain:

This Cash knocker is *bulletless!*

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[1] MacDonald et al., *Consolidation in U.S. Meatpacking*, 6, 9; James MacDonald and Michael Ollinger, "Consolidation in Meatpacking: Causes & Concerns," *Agricultural Outlook*, June-July, 2000: 24, 25.

[2] Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 173; "Farm Animal Statistics: Meat Consumption," The Humane Society of the United States, August 26, 2011, http://www.humanesociety.org/news/resources/research/stats_meat_consumption.html.

[3] J. Russell Ives, *The Livestock and Meat Economy of the United States* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: American Meat Institute, 1966), 105.

[4] *National Provisioner*, April 14, 1962, 53; April 7, 1962, inside back cover.

> *There is no shooting gallery in this plant!* It is not possible for a stray bullet to drop a human target here, because *no bullets* are used.
>
> Special .25 caliber blank cartridges, made without wadding of any kind, activate a devastating, short piston-stroke that drops largest bulls. (Discharge seldom startles because a ventless chamber muffles most of the sound.) A long handle makes it easy to reach animals that duck into far corners.
>
> Bulletless Koch stunning makes it more practical to save brains (there are no bullets or fragments to pick) and brains may add thousands of extra income dollars every year.
>
> Safe—easy—no installation—saves brains! Practical for any size plant....[1]

One of the disassembly-related machines advertised in 1965 is the "'Boss' Hide Remover," which "handles up to sixty (60) cattle per hour when carcass properly prepared. It is complete, easy to install, and the 'heart' of more profitable Rail Cattle Dressing. Approved by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. Has a free turning roller that is hydraulically operated. Simple to operate. Increases production. Reduces cost. Almost no maintenance required. More sanitary...." Incidentally, one can see how much more automated is meat processing than the initial phase of cattle disassembly by considering an ad for "*Butcher Boy* Automatic Feed Grinders & Hydraulic Lift Mixers": "ONE MAN HANDLES THIS ENTIRE GRINDING OPERATION"; below that we're told to "*Speed up production!* To 6 tons per hour or more per machine." Even more impressive is the "Frank-O-Matic," which "PRODUCES 9600 FRANKS PER HOUR—COMPLETELY AUTOMATICALLY." The order of the day for the last sixty years or so has been automation, wherever, whenever, and however possible.[2]

An article in 1968 reports that a beef plant in Texas has achieved a production rate of 150 head per hour and is striving for 250 per hour, with the help of such innovations as clocks that record downtime on the lines in the dressing department—somewhat in the manner of F. W. Taylor, with his time-and-motion studies. In the late 1960s we also see illustrative advertisements for meat-processing machines, such as one that can produce 250,000 pounds of ground meat per week with only one man overseeing it. An ad titled "The automated hamburger" tells us, with some exaggeration, that "You put the meat in one end. Throw the switch. Then sit back and watch as the hamburger patties, sausage patties, chopped steak and other portioned products roll out the other end." The "Bettcher Power Cleaver," which has a capacity of 12,000 cuts per hour, "automatically cuts frozen steaks, chops....and other formed meat"—"no skill required. Operator training can be accomplished in a matter of minutes." On the beef kill floor, an on-the-rail breastbone opener—a small power saw—"reduces miscuts and eliminates [the] need for skilled labor. Handles up to 200 beef per hour...."[3]

The monthly magazine *Meat Industry* (later *Meat & Poultry*) is informative as well. An article in August, 1977, for example, gives advice to management on when and how to introduce greater mechanization into plants. In a session at a Food Marketing Institute convention, grocery-chain managers who had mechanized warehousing suggested that in order for employees to cooperate with labor-saving technological changes it was necessary only to treat them with respect and let them know what exactly was changing. (A reasonable suggestion.) Let the workers and their union know that they would not lose their jobs—or perhaps only a few would—but instead would be retrained. Most labor-savings would come later, when production volume increased but more workers did not have to be hired. Mechanization could have

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[1] Ibid., April 11, 1964, 39. "Non-penetrating" stun guns like this were invented earlier than 1964.
[2] *National Provisioner*, January 9, 1965, 23; April 3, 1965, 80; February 6, 1965, 38.
[3] "Beef Packer Eyes High Chain Rates," *National Provisioner*, July 27, 1968, 10 ff.; ibid., September 7, 1968, 47; October 5, 1968; February 15, 1969, 45; May 10, 1969, 2.

downsides too, however, such as a loss in product quality or in labor flexibility: "an automated or mechanized system tends to need the same amount of operators no matter what the volume is."[1]

One example of successful automation occurred in the electrical stimulation of carcasses, showcased in *Meat Industry* as long ago as 1979. Stimulating carcasses electrically as they hang from the overhead rail has many benefits, including improving the tenderness, palatability, and color of the meat. Before the automatic system was invented, workers on the kill floor had to insert a metal probe into each carcass and turn on the electrical control, and then sterilize the probe before inserting it into the next carcass. It was an inefficient and relatively unsafe system. Automation in 1979, at Sam Kane Beef Processors (in Texas), allowed producers to go from tenderizing about 25 carcasses per hour to 107. The way the system worked was that the rail passed through a large "cabinet" containing electrical equipment; as carcasses moved on the rail through the cabinet, they slid along bars through which electric current flowed. "These bars impart[ed] a pre-set number of electrical jolts, and their action [was] set off automatically by a switch which [was] tripped by the movement of carcasses on the rail." Since then, the system has been improved.[2]

Perusing the meat industry's articles and the bewildering array of advertisements for "all-new" technologies, one can be coaxed into the illusion that things have mostly gotten better, and easier, for workers in the last sixty years. Consider ads in the 1970s for a new "band-splitter," a saw to cut carcasses in half: "Faster.... Quieter.... Smoother with less down time.... Splits entire [beef] carcass in 12 to 14 seconds; reduces bone dust approximately 66%; vibration-free.... Less operator fatigue...." Or a new air-pressure captive-bolt stunner that was smaller, lighter (weighing nine pounds), and easier to handle than older stunners. Or the "Whizard glove," a safety glove ostensibly more comfortable, safe, and cheap than older "metal mesh" gloves.[3] ("Insulative properties provide warmth for working in cold areas. Helps keep fingers more limber. Reduces common occupational health ailments caused by cold metal and chafe. 85% lighter than metal mesh glove....") Or, after the onset of the "ergonomics" age from the 1980s to the present, the "carpal tunnel splint," an uncomfortable-looking thing that "restrains excessive wrist movement while permitting optimal hand function." Or the "ergonomic boot," which includes a "self-cleaning sole," a "pre-formed insole that is removable for hygienic cleaning," and an "ultragrip sole design that provides maximum slip resistance." Or the "safe rail system," an overhead rail that prevents hooks and rollers from falling onto workers below. And so on. A seemingly endless list of inventions nearly all of which are designed to make things cheaper and faster for employers and easier and safer for employees. It is ironic, then, that, for workers, the industry has effectively returned to "the jungle" of the early twentieth century, in terms of safety, stress, and general disempowerment.[4]

What should be clear, in any case, is that most of this constantly-introduced new technology has not *in itself* made conditions worse for workers, even if its general tendency has been towards the deskilling of labor. The "hardhats, safety glasses, earplugs, steel-toed and rubber-soled boots, and....amazing array of additional gear intended to protect them from injury" that employees were required to wear by the 1980s were certainly to their benefit. Likewise, Temple Grandin's invention in the mid-1980s of a new conveyor to carry animals from the entrance chute into the stunning area made the stunner's job easier and reduced stress for animals. In 1972 the "V-restrainer" system had been invented for restraining cattle during stunning and shackling. It was a decided improvement, according to safety and humane considerations, over the old-style knocking box, but it had flaws: stunners had to reach excessively and uncomfortably in order to place the gun on the animal's forehead, and sometimes cattle simply refused to enter. So Grandin invented a double-rail restrainer system that is still used today, whereby the animal walks down a ramp that maneuvers it into a comfortable straddling position atop a double rail conveyor, which carries it to the

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[1] "Will Automated Materials Handling Really Save on Labor?", *Meat Industry*, August, 1977, 20-21.

[2] "The Automatic Shocker," *Meat Industry*, February, 1979, 47.

[3] The name "Whizard" first referred to an air-powered circular knife invented by Lou Bettcher in the 1950s, which made meat trimming much easier and is still in widespread use today. See Bettcher Industries, Inc., "History & Mission," http://www.bettcher.com/about-us (accessed November, 2011).

[4] *Meat Industry*, August, 1977; January, 1978, 27; September, 1977, 33; *Meat & Poultry*, August, 1989, 136; August, 1990, 48.

stunning pen. The stunner does not have to lean far over, so his job is easier, and the shackler, standing below the elevated conveyor, can easily attach the shackle to the animal's hind leg.[1]

Proceeding to the 1990s, the heart of both the ergonomics and the automation era, new technologies entered the market at seemingly an even greater rate than before. As always, most of them pertained to the more-easily-mechanized processing and packaging, not the slaughtering, end of the production line. For example, fully automated vacuum-packaging machines were advertised, as were machines that processed sausage links at a rate of up to 122 a minute. In 1997 we see an ad for an "ergonomic worktable" for packing and unpacking cartons, and another for knife handles that are "ergonomically designed to fit the natural contour of the hand, providing a relaxed, comfortable grip"—and improving safety, for they are "heavily textured and slip-resistant." Regarding slaughtering technology, there are constant improvements to all the basic tools from decades ago, including hide pullers, head splitters, brisket saws, pneumatic stunners, hoof shears, bung droppers, dehorners, bleeding rail switches, moving platforms, steam vacuums that remove pathogens and spinal cords, and so forth.[2]

In the heady days of the "New Economy," with computers and high-tech equipment seemingly unstoppable in their conquest of the world, some meat-industry observers got a little carried away in their prognostications. "By the year 2035," one declared in 1995, "human line labor [in the meat and poultry industries] will have followed bank tellers into antiquity...." Another observer stated, "I think the human role in the manufacturing facilities of the future will be to supervise the machines." He continued, "In 40 years I think the industry will make the transition from fixed to intelligent forms of automation. With intelligent automation we're talking about systems that will sense what is coming in and use that information to make a decision and perform a particular function. Near-term examples already emerging on the market are the automatic portioning devices that use a vision system to scan the product and then use that information, as well as other pieces of information relative to product mixture, to cut it into nuggets or shape it into a perfect breast." Given Mother Nature's stubborn refusal to create her cattle and hogs in uniform shapes and sizes, it is hard to imagine that kill floors will ever be completely automated. And workers in 2011 would probably dispute that their obsolescence is on the horizon. Nevertheless, the presence of such attitudes among management since the 1990s shows how far mechanization has progressed in the last sixty years.[3]

It is true that robots have recently been introduced into the apparently uncongenial world of meatpacking. In 2008, a robot was invented that is capable of "picking, packing and palletizing" in food washdown environments. Six years earlier it was reported that a robotic unit had been invented at an IBP facility that could "lift-pivot-and-place 1-pound rolls of case-ready ground beef, nine at a time, into cradling sheets of plastic it lays into the box in alternating layers with the beef. The result is 36-unit boxes of beef ready to ship." Among other inventions credited to this IBP facility is the Intellijanitor, which lifts and cleans heavy conveyor belts every day, thereby saving morning cleaning crews from the "awkward, backbreaking task they used to do, manually lifting and holding the 3-foot-wide belts while they were washed with hoses." Another machine, perhaps the most impressive, can adapt to individual cuts of meat: it "identifies the small dimple at the end of the bone in a T-bone steak, then triggers a cutting blade to trim the meat at just the right spot" in order to make uniform steaks. So far, however, the robotic units used in the industry seem to be, if not exceptions, at least rather lonely pioneers. In any event, slaughtering cattle

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[1] Michael Broadway and Donald Stull, "'I'll do whatever you want, but it hurts': Worker Safety and Community Health in Modern Meatpacking," *Labor*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Summer 2008: 28; Temple Grandin, "More on the Super Restrainer," *Meat & Poultry*, February, 1987, 60, 62, 63; Temple Grandin, "Restraint of Livestock," at http://www.grandin.com/restrain/intro.rest.html (accessed November, 2011).

[2] *National Provisioner*, October, 1995; July, 1996; October, 1997; May, 1997; June, 1998; August, 1997.

[3] Keith Nunes, "Technology: 'We Haven't Seen Anything Yet,'" *Meat & Poultry*, January, 1995, 22; cf. Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table*.

is a less pleasant thing than packing and palletizing, or pivoting and placing, and robots would doubtless not find it to their liking.[1]

Since at least the 1990s, as consumers have become more alert to the dangers of tainted meat, a good deal of engineering ingenuity has been devoted to the problem of how to clean up the filth endemic in slaughterhouses and so reduce the incidence of food-borne illness among the population. In 1995, for instance, Cargill and a Swedish firm called Frigoscandia announced that they had developed a method to nearly eliminate bacteria in beef, pork, and poultry. The process used a blanket of steam to pasteurize the surface of carcasses. Because of its health benefits and the fact that it used less energy and water than the hot-water bath technology that was then used to clean carcasses before they were cooled, Excel, IBP, and other beef processors quickly integrated it into their slaughtering lines. The method has by no means eliminated bacteria or the need for periodic recalls of meat, but it is an improvement.[2]

Skimming issues of the *National Provisioner* and *Meat & Poultry* since the 1990s, one has the impression that, while automation in pork and poultry continues to advance steadily, technological change has slowed a bit in beef-packing, especially on the kill floor. There are fewer articles and advertisements that address it, *much* fewer than in the 1960s and '70s. This is probably because beef consumption has been experiencing a decades-long decline, as mentioned above. Instead what we encounter are more advertisements pertaining to poultry and pork, and sometimes beef processing. A recent ad shows how sophisticated machines have become:

New system stuffs 400 links per minute

> Handtmann has launched its new 400 links/minute Natural Casing Automation system with robotic orientation and loading. The system features high-speed, high-resolution photo scanning whose data drives the seamless integration of automated robotic orientation and loading functions with Handtmann's precise VF stuffer and high speed PVLS 125 revolving head/paired nozzle linker. The stuffing/linking system operates with patented digital servo-electronic controls.... [etc.].[3]

Four hundred links per minute is pretty miraculous. Such machines demonstrate that human labor in meatpacking continues to be superseded—day by day, month by month, with each new invention launched on the market.

What has all this technological progress from the 1960s to the present amounted to? From one perspective, the answer might be "Not much." A 1982 government report was prescient:

> Technological change will probably be limited in the meat products industry in the 1980's, with the possible exception of more sophisticated equipment for processing retail cuts of beef. Improvements to existing machinery are being made, but design concepts or functions are not expected to change. In meatpacking and poultry processing plants, new technologies were introduced in the 1960's that mechanized processing to some extent and reduced unit labor requirements. However, most cutting tasks must still be performed manually, and the industry remains relatively labor intensive.[4]

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[1] John Teresko, "A Meat-Packing Robot," *Industry Week*, September 1, 2008; Michele Linck, "IBP Engineers Create Automation for Meat-Packing Plants at New North Sioux City Facility," *Sioux City Journal*, October 6, 2002.

[2] "Companies Say End to E. Coli Is Found," *The New York Times*, April 12, 1995; Elise Golan et al., *Food Safety Innovation in the United States: Evidence from the Meat Industry*, USDA Agricultural Economic Report No. 831 (Washington, D.C.: USDA/Economic Research Service, 2004), 29. Businesses and scientists have also devoted much attention to the problem of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or mad-cow disease, but such biotechnological research is peripheral to the concerns of this paper.

[3] Email to author from Meatingplace.com, October 26, 2011.

[4] *Technology and Labor in Four Industries*, BLS Bulletin 2104 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), 1.

Mutatis mutandis, every sentence in that paragraph—at least as applied to meatpacking (not poultry), especially beef-packing—is still more or less true today. With regard to the beef kill floor, there have been no major changes in the basic concept of continuous on-the-rail bleeding and dressing of carcasses, only incremental improvements in its implementation. The Can-Pak system has been a serviceable one for management, since, as stated above, it takes most of the control over the pace of work away from employees. To a great extent, the obstacle to faster speeds is no longer employees' wills but simply nature, i.e. the limits of human endurance and the heterogeneous character of bovine bodies.

In another sense, however, technological change has had fairly impressive results. Combined with employers' speeds-ups and layoffs, which it has helped make possible, it has increased productivity substantially in certain periods over the last half-century. Between 1967 and 1972, output per hour in the red meats industry advanced at an annual rate of 2.2 percent; between 1975 and 1980, it rose at an annual rate of 4.2 percent, as output itself rose 3.4 percent and hours declined 0.7 percent. The corresponding annual figures for productivity gains were 2.9 percent (1967-72) and 3.7 percent (1975-80). These were higher than the gains in manufacturing as a whole. Similarly, from 1977 to 1986 productivity increased a bit more in meatpacking than in all manufacturing, at average annual rates of 3.4 and 3.0 percent, respectively. (For these ten years, however, meatpacking output rose only 0.7 percent a year, most of the productivity gains being accounted for by a 2.7 percent annual decline in employee hours.) According to one study, if we measure labor productivity by the index of output per employee hour and use 1987 as the base (100), in 1970 productivity was 57.7, while in 1998 it was 103.8. Thus, over this period labor productivity increased nearly 80 percent. (This study shows, though, that the growth of productivity has slowed of late, perhaps in part as a result of increasing concentration in the industry.)[1]

The consequences of technological change have been equally "impressive" with regard to employment levels and the conditions in which workers must labor. We turn now to the human side of automation.

Implications for workers

The comfortingly impersonal survey of technological advance provided above gives little hint—aside from the sanguinary names of instruments for slaughter—of the messy realities of workers' lives. One might think that all this progress would have largely positive ramifications for workers, but on the whole, the contrary has been the case. The consequences have been mostly negative—not because of the supposedly intrinsic "anti-human" nature of technology, but because of the embeddedness of technology in capitalist social relations.

First of all, automation has made it possible for more and more workers to become economically redundant, resulting in declining levels of employment—particularly in manufacturing. In other words, greater productivity has allowed employers, individually and in the aggregate, to hire fewer workers (especially relative to the growth in the country's population). Statistics tell the story. In absolute numbers, employment in U.S. manufacturing increased (with occasional drops) from 15,438,000 employees in 1960 to 19,426,000 in 1979, then declined (with occasional, temporary increases) to 17,695,000 in 1990, 16,441,000 in 2001, 13,879,000 in 2007, and 11,524,000 in 2010. In meatpacking, employment decreased from 274,000 in 1947 to 189,000 in 1972, about 120,000 in 2000, and 98,400 in 2008. These numbers are

[1] Richard B. Carnes, "Meatpacking and Prepared-Meats Industry: Above-Average Productivity Gains," *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. 107, No. 4 (April, 1984): 38; Martin Personick and Katherine Taylor-Shirley, "Profiles in Safety and Health: Occupational Hazards of Meatpacking," *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. 112, No. 1 (January, 1989): 7; *Choices: The Magazine of Food, Farm, and Resource Issues*, 4th quarter 2003, http://www.choicesmagazine.org/2003-4/2003-4-06.htm.

more striking when one recalls that U.S. population has more than doubled from 1950 to the present, going from 152,271,417 in 1950 to 312,000,000 in 2011.[1]

Compare these numbers for manufacturing to those for the service sector, which has lower labor productivity (due in large part to the greater difficulty of mechanizing): from 26,650,000 in 1960 to 89,582,000 in 2010. In fact, the greater productivity of manufacturing has made possible since 1950 an average annual increase in output of 3.4 percent, even as the sector has declined as a share of total non-farm employment from 31 percent in 1950 to 20.7 percent in 1980, 13.1 percent in 2000, and 9.1 percent in 2009. This latter trend has been called "deindustrialization." It is not directly caused by technological advance, but such advance has helped make it possible by permitting the gradual supersession of human labor. (The causes of deindustrialization are complex, involving heightened international competition and declines in the growth-rates of manufacturing profitability, investment, and demand. As suggested above, greater international competition and diminished growth of profitability have necessitated feverish cost-cutting, which has meant more automation, employee layoffs, wage-cuts, and offshoring of production—which in turn, by reducing purchasing power, or effective demand, in the domestic economy, have in the long run reinforced trends toward lower sales and profits, which have themselves reinforced the need to cut costs, thus creating a vicious circle of American "de-development.")[2]

Workers and unions in the 1950s and '60s clearly understood the destructive potential of automation, and they warned against it. Their attitude, however, was not one of unqualified and reactionary rejection. Instead, unions such as the United Packinghouse Workers of America presented intelligent analyses and constructive proposals for remedies to problems posed by technological advance. The pages of *The Packinghouse Worker*, the newspaper of the UPWA, are replete with articles weighing the perils and potentials of automation. For example, upon the establishment in 1961 of a subdivision of the U.S. Department of Labor devoted to the problems of automation, the newspaper's editor observed that more government action is required than "the retraining or the redirection of workers who have been displaced by automation." He continues:

> Technological advance should be a boon to humankind and not a curse. It is not enough to assume that technological advance should proceed undirected, unregulated and ruthlessly, while government limits its function to applying economic first aid to the injured workers. Government has the far broader responsibility of attempting to guide, plan and regulate the entire process in a manner which will be conducive to economic growth but which will, at the same time, avoid economic catastrophe before it occurs.[3]

The nature of such "economic catastrophe" is explained elsewhere in the same issue: automation could become "a suicidal device; for it makes possible increased efficiency and increased production, but it destroys the very market which that same increased efficiency and increased production make more necessary than ever before." That is, by destroying jobs it reduces purchasing power. This is a far-sighted and probably correct analysis, at least according to Keynesians and Marxists, for whom a major problem with capitalism is its chronic insufficiency of demand.

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[1] Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Data Retrieval: Employment, Hours, and Earnings," http://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtab1.htm (accessed November, 2011); Jimmy Skaggs, *Prime Cut*, 190; MyPlan.com, "Slaughterers and Meat Packers," http://www.myplan.com/careers/slaughterers-and-meat-packers/employment-51-3023.00.html; Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition: Food Processing Occupations," http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos219.htm; NPG, "Facts & Figures," http://www.npg.org/facts/us_historical_pops.htm; U.S. Census Bureau, "U.S. PopClock Projection," http://www.census.gov/population/www/popclockus.html.

[2] Bureau of Labor Statistics, http://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtab1.htm; William Strauss, "Is U.S. Manufacturing Disappearing?", Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, August 19, 2010, http://midwest.chicagofedblogs.org/archives/2010/08/bill_strauss_mf.html (accessed November, 2011); Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence.*

[3] *Packinghouse Worker*, June, 1961.

Ralph Helstein, president of the UPWA from 1946 to 1968, had made a similar call for government intervention a month earlier at the UPWA Food and Allied Conference. The problems of automation, he said, could not be solved within the framework of collective bargaining; instead, "tax policy is at the center of possible government techniques for making the transition from the mechanized economy we have known to the period of automated economy into which the nation is entering." Through changes in tax policy, government could shift the onus of paying for new buildings and machinery from the individual tax payer to corporations. Helstein also proposed that Congress set up minimum wage levels for each industry so that differences in wage rates could not serve "as a basis for competitive advantage between employers." The July, 1960 issue of *The Packinghouse Worker* summed it up: "Organized labor's position on automation, briefly, is this: Automation can't be stopped. But that does not make it desirable. For, on balance, automation does create large-scale unemployment. Any beneficial results from automation for all the people—and not just corporate stockholders—will have to be planned for. And, in all likelihood, fought for."[1]

Organized labor evidently understood the enormity of its problem. Indeed, by the early 1960s much of the country was apprehensive about the automated future. In 1963, a major article in *LIFE Magazine* (quoted above) captured the mood with its alarming headline: "The Point of No Return for Everybody"—subtitled "Automation: Its Impact Suddenly Shakes Up the Whole U.S." This exciting but frightening phenomenon, we learn, "displaces men. It has thrown hundreds of thousands of people out of work and will throw out many more. It is at the base of all the big recent labor trouble: the dock strike, the New York newspaper strike, the bitter railroad dispute...."[2] The UPWA, a particularly militant union, issued many reports on the dire possible consequences of increased mechanization. In 1957, for example, after surveying its members at some mechanized plants, it tabulated the data on their employment:[3]

Type of machine introduced	No. of workers employed	
	Before	After
Conveyors, tractors, lifts, etc.	339	83
Injecto-cure	80	23
Bacon slicing operations	69	31
Other wrapping-packing operations	124	44
Hair scraping [of hogs]	95	87
All other types of machinery	149	78

The report concludes that through mechanization, plant closures, and speed-up, meatpacking lost 36,000 jobs between 1952 and 1957—even as levels of output increased.

What was to be done? Collective bargaining provided palliatives, such as lower retirement ages, larger pensions, longer vacations, and transfers to new plants when old ones shut down. But these were not long-term solutions. Sometimes they were not even short-term solutions, as the UPWA and the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen's experience with Armour shows. In 1959, representatives from the company and the two unions formed, with great public fanfare, an Automation Committee to help retrain and transfer (to new plants) employees laid off by plant closings. A study it conducted of laid-off employees' experiences in four cities—Columbus, Fargo, East St. Louis, and Oklahoma City—found, for instance, that a year later in East St. Louis 56 percent were still unemployed, and that 61 percent of black workers, as opposed to 36 percent of whites, could not find jobs. Similarly, 52 percent of women, compared with 39 percent of men, remained unemployed. As for the transfer program, even when it was "successful" the employees typically lost their seniority and accumulated severance pay

[1] Ibid., May, 1961; Lyle Cooper, *Packinghouse Worker*, July, 1960, 8.
[2] "The Point of No Return for Everybody," *LIFE Magazine*, July 19, 1963.
[3] "How Mechanization and Plant Closures Are Holding Down Packinghouse Employment," UPWA Papers, box 382, folder 5.

and pensions. But in fact, Armour systematically undermined the program, in order, as the UPWA charged, "to rid itself of the 'nuisance' of [current employees'] accumulated rights with respect to such matters as vacations and other benefits, and to rid itself of union contract provisions of its employees." As a result, the UPWA withdrew from the committee in 1963, proclaiming that "Our continued silence on the failure of the Committee would only result in maintaining a facade of decency and humaneness that would conceal a ruthless program of mass termination of employees of long service and cynical manipulation of the natural fears of its employees to accomplish drastic cuts in wages and working conditions." The union went on strike, demanding that Armour accept transferred employees at six new plants; after six weeks the company acquiesced.[1]

Nevertheless, in the long run, as we know, unions lost the war. By the 1980s they were frequently compelled to engage in concession bargaining, acceding to employers' demands that, in particular, wages be lowered or else the company would close the plant or just go bankrupt. The result was that, while meatpackers' wages had for a long time been higher than the average manufacturing wage—15 percent higher in 1960, 19 percent higher in 1970, and 17 percent higher in 1980—the trend reversed: wages were 15 percent lower than the manufacturing average in 1985, 18 percent lower in 1990, and 24 percent lower in 2002. Between 1980 and 2007, real wages in the industry dropped by an incredible 45 percent. In May, 2010 the median hourly wage was $11.24, with at least ten percent of workers (probably more) making about $8.32 or less—less even in nominal terms than the base wage of $8.66 that Armour and Swift had paid in their Texas plants in the 1970s.[2]

Aside from its indirect impact on wages, reduced employment, and reduced union density, the use of more efficient machinery has influenced shopfloor dynamics, for instance gender relations. From the time when they entered the meatpacking industry, in the 1890s and early 1900s, women worked in processing departments, not in the production of fresh meat. They worked in sausage, bacon, offal, casings (for sausage), pork trim, and other such low-status, low-pay departments usually located one floor below the slaughter area. Men dropped leftover meat down chutes to the women below, who did the unpleasant work of "processing" it. Due to the physical separation between the sexes and women's unambiguously lower status, men did not show as much resistance as might have been expected to the presence of women at the workplace. Things started to change in the 1950s. First of all, the UPWA succeeded in eliminating the disparity between male and female starting pay, although jobs were still segregated and women had fewer opportunities for promotion. As technological change accelerated, though, eliminating many traditionally female jobs in processing departments, women began to protest against their exclusion from the less-easily-automated male jobs. At the same time, the new rural packers' construction of single-story plants in the 1950s and '60s brought women and men physically closer together, sharpening conflict (and encouraging sexual harassment). Roger Horowitz observes that the replacement of vertical chutes by horizontal conveyor belts as mechanisms of transferring meat to women's departments eliminated an old symbol of women's being "beneath" men. After the Civil Rights Act of 1964 gave women a means of legal redress, the old sexual division of labor finally collapsed.[3]

By the 1980s, women no longer had to work in their own subordinate departments. Even in the late 1960s, IBP was already recruiting them to work on its cut and boning floors, though that was only because it paid them less than men. Despite the advances women have made, however, they have yet to attain the

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[1] "Progress Report, Automation Committee," 3, 4, UPWA Papers, box 286, folder 1; "The UPWA Rejects the Armour Program for Employee Obsolescence," ibid.; Roger Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!"*, 256.

[2] Human Rights Watch, *Blood, Sweat, And Fear: Workers' Rights in U.S. Meat and Poultry Plants* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2004), 12, 13; Jerry Kammer, "Labor Market Effects of Immigration Enforcement at Meatpacking Plants in Seven States," Center for Immigration Studies, http://www.cis.org/node/1577 (accessed November, 2011); Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2010," http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes513023.htm; Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!"*, 260.

[3] Roger Horowitz, "'Where Men Will Not Work': Gender, Power, Space, and the Sexual Division of Labor in America's Meatpacking Industry, 1890-1990," *Technology and Culture*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (January, 1997): 187-213; Deborah Fink, *Cutting into the Meatpacking Line: Workers and Change in the Rural Midwest* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), chapter 3.

same status as many male employees in the industry. It is true that they moved into jobs that required the operation of machines—but, as Horowitz says, these were in processing departments that had always been open to them. It is true they could move into butchering jobs—but now, after the automation and boxed-beef revolutions, these were more unskilled than they had ever been. It seems that even today women rarely work on kill floors, except in menial positions. Ironically, their low-paying jobs in processing departments, despite being called "unskilled," are quite difficult, due to the necessity for precision cuts at high speeds. Some typically-male kill floor jobs, on the other hand, such as "bung dropper" in hog plants (a job that consists of placing a small machine into the body to cut out the anus), are comparatively easy and yet tend to pay well. Such are the injustices of gender roles.[1]

Automation has had major implications not only for gender relations but also for the ethnic composition of the industry's workforce. In the 1970s the workforce was still overwhelmingly European-American; as IBP and other companies automated, deskilled, and forced down wages, white people left in droves and Hispanics and Asians took over. By 2005, the United Food and Commercial Workers union claimed that immigrants constituted 50 percent of the industry's workforce; the Pew Research Center estimated in that year that about 27 percent of butchers and food processing workers were undocumented immigrants. Since the 1990s, the entrance of North Africans—Sudanese, Somalis, Muslims from various countries—has added to the ethnic mix and heightened the potential for conflict. For example, at a Swift plant in Grand Island, Nebraska that has 2500 hourly workers (66 percent of whom are Hispanic), ten languages or dialects are spoken daily. Among the inter-ethnic problems reported there is discrimination from the more established Hispanic immigrants against the newer Somali and Sudanese workers. Language problems add to the tension, although apparently most of the workers are bilingual. The main source of conflict is cultural division. For instance, in 2009, "about 500 Swift workers, all Muslim and most Somali, walked off the job and marched a mile to Grand Island City Hall to protest for religious freedom. They wanted prayer time during the holy month of Ramadan." When the plant moved to accommodate the requests, counter-protests were staged by whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Vietnamese. The company then created a human relations committee that meets weekly and is open to attendance by all employees.[2]

Judging by the reports of investigative journalists and anthropologists, plants are sometimes steeped in racial prejudice. Mutual animosity, aggravated by stress, can saturate the workplace. In 2000 a *New York Times* reporter investigated conditions in a Smithfield hog plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina. What he found was that the few whites tended to be mechanics or supervisors, American Indians were supervisors or had "clean menial jobs like warehouse work," and blacks and Mexicans had the dirty jobs—black women being assigned, for example, to the chitterlings room, "where they would scrape feces and worms from intestines," and black men working on the butchering floor. Mexicans were given the painful, dreary jobs of cutting pieces of meat every few seconds on the conveyor belt. What united the groups were ties of contempt and resentment. The other races had contempt for the Mexicans, and the blacks resented them for allegedly driving down wages; Mexicans considered blacks lazy and disliked them; both groups hated their white supervisors. Reports from other parts of the country tell similar stories.[3]

The predominance of immigrants in meatpacking plants, many of whom do not speak English (although that seems to be less common now than it was in the 1990s), has had mostly negative consequences on unionization rates. In part, this is because of the high proportion of undocumented immigrants: Latinos who are worried about deportation are not eager to complain about poor working conditions. In part it is because of language difficulties. In part it is because of the hostility and misunderstanding that prevail in an environment of many different races, ethnicities, cultures, and

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[1] Horowitz, "'Where Men Will Not Work," 211; Fink, *Cutting into the Meatpacking Line*, 93, 94; author's interview of Tom Alter, a former employee at IBP.

[2] Matt McKinney, "Meatpacking raids illustrate how much industry has changed—Automation and declining wages opened the door to immigrant workers," *Star Tribune: Newspaper of the Twin Cities*, December 26, 2006; Tracy Overstreet, "Cultural Balancing Act for Swift," *The North Platte Telegraph*, April 14, 2009.

[3] Charlie LeDuff, "At a Slaughterhouse, Some Things Never Die," *New York Times*, June 16, 2000. See Deborah Fink, *Cutting into the Meatpacking Line*, chapter 4.

languages. And in part it is because of "the frequent movement of immigrant workers." In fact, annual turnover rates in some plants are 100 percent, and in the 1980s and 1990s they occasionally went as high as 400 percent. Since the deskilling of work has made possible very quick training sessions for new employees, such high turnover rates do not overly inconvenience companies. They do, however, make it difficult to unionize—so companies have little incentive to reduce them.[1]

Why such high turnover? One factor above all is responsible, for it leads to most other complaints workers have about their jobs: *the speed of production*. Here, finally, we get to the heart of what automation has meant for the average worker in his or her job duties. Many studies have documented the appalling speeds of production and their consequences on workers' physical and emotional well-being, but they are worth considering again here. The terrible significance of *speed*, of companies' obsessive quest for faster and faster line speeds, cannot be overemphasized. It, too, has been a result, in part, of technological progress in the profit-driven framework of capitalist production relations. The main task for any would-be reformer of conditions in the meat industry is to find some way to force companies to slow down their pace of production.

The figures on meatpacking output quoted above (from Eric Schlosser) give some sense of the degree to which management has increased line speeds since the 1960s. More evocative, however, is the surge in repetitive motion disorders, such as carpal tunnel syndrome. Meatpacking has always been a dangerous industry, but the nature of its injuries and their frequency have changed over time. In 1943 a government report found that, while meatpacking accidents causing absence from work were twice the national average for manufacturing, "wrist and hand afflictions" (in which category most repetitive motion disorders would fall) constituted only 11 percent of injuries. Nearly all the others were cuts, bruises, fractures, and strains. In the 1940s and afterwards the UPWA succeeded in dramatically improving meatpacking's safety record, but by 1970, after years of intensive mechanization and the anti-union policies of firms like IBP, things had deteriorated again: the injury rate had climbed to three times the average for all manufacturing. This trend continued over the next twenty years. In 1985 the industry had an injury-and-illness rate of 30.4 per 100 full-time workers, whereas the rate for all manufacturing was 10.8. By 1991 the rate for meatpacking had increased 40 percent over 1981. "Much of the increase," Roger Horowitz remarks, "can be traced to a cascade of repetitive motion disorders classified under industrial 'illness.' The incidence of occupational illness—primarily carpal tunnel syndrome—grew an astonishing 442 percent between 1981 and 1991. Illnesses contributed less than 10 percent to the injury rate in 1981; ten years later they were more than one-third of the total injury rate." With some workers having to make as many as five precision cuts every 15 seconds, this appalling "illness" rate is no surprise.[2]

The horrors of meatpacking work are well-known, having been documented in such industry exposés as Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* (2001), Gail Eisnitz's *Slaughterhouse* (1997), a Human Rights Watch report entitled *Blood, Sweat, And Fear: Workers' Rights in U.S. Meat and Poultry Plants* (2004), and numerous newspaper and magazine articles from the 1980s to the present. An article in 1989, for example, notes that "meat and poultry workers, some of whom have testified before Congress, have complained about treacherously fast production lines, where meat flies off damaged conveyor belts and blood splatters in their faces. They have described cysts, infections and crippling hand and back pains that make it hard to lift their children, comb their hair or hold a glass." Such misery is to be expected when, according to the UFCW, meatpacking production climbed 20 percent between 1984 and 1989 even as production employees dropped by almost 10,000. Understaffing has continued in many plants, as revealed

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[1] Associated Press, "Meatpacking Injuries Spawn Union Drive," February 18, 2007; Tanya Golash-Boza and Douglas A. Parker, "Human Rights in a Globalizing World: Who Pays the Human Cost of Migration?", *The Journal of Latino-Latin American Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 4, Fall 2007: 40; Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, 160.

[2] Roger Horowitz, "'That Was a Dirty Job!' Technology and Workplace Hazards in Meatpacking over the Long Twentieth Century," *Labor*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Summer 2008: 13-25; "Here's the Beef: Underreporting of Injuries, OSHA's Policy of Exempting Companies from Programmed Inspections Based on Injury Records, and Unsafe Conditions in the Meatpacking Industry," Committee on Government Operations, U.S. House of Representatives, Report 100-542, 100th Congress, 2nd session (1988), 8, 22.

for instance by wildcat strikes in September, 2001 and February, 2002 at IBP and Excel plants over low pay and chronic staff shortages.[1]

The ergonomics wave of the 1990s, however, reduced injury rates, showing that technology, if used properly, can be a force for good in the workplace. As Roger Horowitz notes, "1991 marks the high-water mark of injury [as opposed to illness] rates; within ten years, aggregate levels dropped by 50 percent." Amputations and cuts were less common than they had been in the 1970s, due in part to the more extensive use of safety equipment, including not only hardhats, goggles, and earplugs, but also, as one expert states, "stainless-steel mesh gloves, plastic forearm guards, chain-mail aprons and chaps, leather weightlifting belts, even baseball catcher's shin guards and hockey masks." On the other hand, the incidence rate of repetitive motion disorders in 2001 was *thirty times* higher than the average for all private industry. In the same year, to quote Human Rights Watch, "the reported injury and illness rate for meatpacking was a staggering 20 per hundred full-time workers in 2001. This is two-and-a-half times greater than the average manufacturing rate of 8.1 and almost four times greater than the overall rate for private industry of 7.4." Government-reported injury rates in meatpacking have not been reliable since 2002, when the Bureau of Labor Statistics adopted new, business-friendly ways of recording data. Even with the new recording methods, though, occupational illness rates in meatpacking are almost twenty times higher than in manufacturing as a whole.[2]

The degree of government underreporting of injuries is highlighted by a 2009 study conducted by Nebraska Appleseed, a nonpartisan public-interest law organization. In its survey of 455 workers in Nebraska meatpacking plants, the organization found that *62 percent* of workers had been injured in the past year. Seventy-three percent of workers stated that line speeds had increased over the year, while, according to 94 percent, the number of staff had decreased or stayed the same. About half of the respondents claimed that there were ways in which their workplace had become less safe in the previous year, the vast majority blaming line speeds.[3]

The speed made possible by automation and deskilling is harmful not only for the injuries it causes and its tendency to make government inspection of carcasses more difficult, but also because its increase of pressure on supervisors to make employees work harder leads to considerable verbal and emotional abuse. A common form is the denial of bathroom breaks. Examples could be multiplied without end. According to one union official, when in 1997 he met with a large group of employees who worked at an IBP plant, "[p]eople were crying, talking about being covered in diarrhea the entire shift because the supervisor wouldn't let them go to the bathroom." The above-cited report by Nebraska Appleseed quotes comments such as the following: "The supervisors scream at you without having any reason." "I know of three people who urinated and pooped in their pants and afterwards they just laugh at you." "It would be good if they trained the supervisors how to manage personnel. There is a lot of screaming and that isn't good." "They treat you worse than animals...." Sexual harassment of women is also common.[4]

All these phenomena, as already stated, are manifestations and consequences of "deskilling," which is really just another word for worker disempowerment. It has been going on to some extent since the Industrial Revolution and will continue as long as industrial capitalism persists. The reason, as Harry Braverman said, is simply that it is in the interest of owners to control as much of the labor process as they can. Technological change does not have to entail deskilling, just as the latter does not have to entail the former—it can be accomplished through intensifications of the division of labor—but in the meatpacking industry since the 1950s, most advances in technology have, as we have seen, indeed had the effect of

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[1] Associated Press, "Pain with the Paycheck: More Productivity May Mean More Workplace Hazards," *The Press of Atlantic City*, November 12, 1989; Karen Olsson, "The Shame of Meatpacking," *The Nation*, September 16, 2002.
[2] Horowitz, "'That Was a Dirty Job!'", 21, 22, 25; Human Rights Watch, *Blood, Sweat, And Fear*, 30.
[3] Nebraska Appleseed, "'The Speed Kills You': The Voice of Nebraska's Meatpacking Workers" (October, 2009), 3, 29, at http://www.neappleseed.org/docs/the_speed_kills_you_ne_appleseed 100709.pdf.
[4] Karen Olsson, "The Shame of Meatpacking"; Nebraska Appleseed, "'The Speed Kills You,'" 34; Fink, *Cutting into the Meatpacking Line*, chapter 3; Elizabeth Cutter, "IBP Workers Note Vulgarity, Abuse," *The Gazette (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City)*, May 1, 2001.

depriving workers of ever more autonomy. From mechanical hide pullers to automatic feed grinders, power cleavers, electrical stimulators, and Intellijanitors, inventions have made possible faster speeds and reduced worker control over his or her job. At the same time, tasks have become easier (although the increase of line speeds has made them difficult again, and added new health and safety problems). Technological progress is neither "good" nor "bad"; what matter are the uses to which it is put, and the interests it serves.[1]

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The more I think about it, the less convinced I am that some sort of semi-fascist movement and/or regime probably won't achieve major power in the West during the next few decades. I'm sure nothing remotely on the scale of Nazism or even Italian Fascism will happen, but something less extreme.... As economies descend into crisis and governments lose legitimacy, who knows? Business and conservatives in power may want to foment or reach out to popular anti-democratic movements. They've already done that with the Tea Party, but the Tea Party isn't on a big enough scale to qualify even as semi-fascism. It's more like the first tentative gropings towards something that might eventually approach something like a fascist movement.

One thing to keep in mind is that the fear of Communism, which helped make possible classical fascism, is gone. Any kind of revolution except the evolutionary kind probably won't be in the cards; correspondingly, the fear of it won't be as profound as it was eighty to ninety years ago.

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It makes no sense to praise someone for something over which he has no control. Since people have very little control over who they are, it makes little sense to praise someone for his personality or his "noble mind" or his wit or his talent or his natural propensity to work hard or any such quality. And insofar as his acts express his propensities, it is senseless to praise or condemn him for them. In fact, similar reasoning probably leads to the conclusion that *any* act of condemnation or praise is, in a sense, misguided. (Other chains of reasoning also lead to that conclusion. For example, if the principle is that an act ought to be "praised" insofar as it is motivated by concern for others, then no act ought to be unreservedly praised, since all acts are motivated by at least as much self-regard as other-regard. Or, rather, they—at best—implicitly express both self-love and other-love. There is no "purely unselfish," or "purely unself-ish," act.) The paradigm for all these value-judgments, their "form" and real meaning, is revealed in something silly like the implicit approval that people project towards a good-looking person. It is a cognitively senseless[2] emotional reaction. Properly speaking, it has the form "I like" or "I am impressed," not "You deserve" (even though *for the admirer*—i.e., in the phenomenology of his mental state—the form is the latter, the objective statement, not the former, the subjective statement).[3] When we judge a person's worth we're trying to say something about *him*, but, ultimately, the more meaningful—and *sensible*—thing is what we're saying about ourselves (such as the implicit statement "I don't like him" or "I am in awe of him" or whatever).[4]

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[1] [I was so sick of the paper by the end that I was incapable of writing a proper conclusion. And yes, I know the paper is inadequate. Too ambitious and unfocused.]

[2] [That word is ambiguous. It could mean either meaningless or not sensible. Actually, this whole discussion is a little ambiguous. I know I meant at least "not sensible," and maybe "meaningless" too.]

[3] What is senseless, or empty, is the word "deserve." [I think the reason I chose the example of a good-looking person is that our appreciation is for something so obviously not under his control—similar in that respect to his intelligence, his talents, and ultimately most other things about him.]

[4] Insofar as our judgment, however, incorporates a *description* as opposed to an *evaluation*, it is meaningful. For example, the statement "He's an idiot" is meaningful insofar as it gives, or half-gives, a value-neutral description of his intelligence.

After reading a feminist blog.— Feminists often say that pornography, even the "clean" kind, is misogynistic. If you understand "misogyny" in a very broad sense, that's true. But really it's a silly, naïve judgment. Porn is just a reflection of male desire,[1] as a female columnist for Salon.com wrote today. There are pathological, violent and extra-degrading kinds of pornography, but those aren't what I'm talking about. Men naturally want to, and typically *do*, dominate women in the sex act, so porn usually involves male domination of women. Misogynistic? If so, then nature is misogynistic. And so are women, because most have always wanted to be dominated during sex. (Sometimes they are unaware of that desire or convince themselves it is absent. But self-deception is a ubiquitous human capacity.)[2]

*

In the past I've suggested that the difference between mind and body can be expressed in terms of the difference between "private" and "public." I'm still sympathetic toward that view, since it perfectly articulates the intuition behind the mind-body problem. (For example, scientists can conceivably observe the workings of my brain, the neural activity and so on, but they cannot conceivably observe my *thoughts*, at least not in the same first-personal way I do. My thoughts are private, my brain is not.) But I've also suggested, following Descartes, that the difference can be expressed by saying that matter is extended, i.e. space-occupying, while mind isn't. Disregarding the paradoxes of quantum mechanics, this Cartesian view seems eminently sensible to me. Why do contemporary philosophers ignore it? It seems somewhat senseless, after all, to say that thoughts and sensations literally take up space, while it is senseless to deny that one's body does. So, that's the difference.

....I asked Chomsky why we can't use the concept of extension to coherently distinguish mind from matter. He wrote back, "The problem is that Newton's demolition of the concept 'material' (etc.) postulated forces of attraction and repulsion, which do not fall within the concept of matter (body, etc.), then or since. And since then even more exotic entities have been postulated." I figured he'd say something like that. It remains the case that in our commonsense, non-Newtonian, non-quantum-mechanical world of experience, the idea of extension is one way to explain our intuition that mind and body are somehow different.

*

Returning to the thoughts on judging people's value.... While what I said above is true, I suppose it makes sense to judge the value of someone's whole "being," as opposed to his *self*, according to some standards or other. For instance, I might say that Chomsky is an amazing person, amazingly talented and kind and so on, yet at the same time I might deny *him* full credit for these qualities. He happened to be born with them, or whatever. But that fact doesn't have to prevent me from admiring and trying to emulate the "ensemble." In other words, it's possible to ignore the question of *responsibility* even while judging that somebody is good or bad or whatever.

Still, in most cases the attribution or denial of value to someone, e.g. for the way he habitually treats people, implicitly incorporates the idea that he is responsible for his behavior. And, after all, in a sense he is. He has a self, he is self-conscious, so he is the sovereign of himself. But, in other ways, he is *not* the "sovereign" of himself, of his talents and propensities and past experiences that have led him to feel and act in certain ways. He is free, but he is unfree. Oy vey!

*

[1] And female desire too. According to one study, a third of viewers of porn websites are women.

[2] Granted, *some* women are dominatrices. But in many of them that is probably explained by some unusual biological fact.

A strange thing about "freedom" is that it emerges in the animal kingdom *gradually*. Lower life-forms act in ways that are *caused* by their environments, that are *stimulated*—stimulus and response, etc. Dogs' behavior is not just *caused* but, to an extent, is "*encouraged*" by a given situation. Dogs, that is, have *some* freedom. Monkeys and apes have more, in that automatic stimulus-and-response is less true of them. Humans are the freest of all, for our behavior is *appropriate* to situations, not *caused* by them. Not coincidentally, the gradual emergence of freedom coincides with the gradual emergence of self-consciousness, or internalization of the other and so the ability to consider oneself and one's situation from the outside, to choose different paths, reason through consequences, etc. (The connection between self-consciousness and rationality, both manifestations of freedom.)

What's even stranger is that some kind of mysterious alchemy goes on in the human brain to bring freedom out of causation (neural, chemical, electrical). Similarly, the brain brings the private (consciousness) out of the public. And to the extent that an animal is free, it has private experience, or consciousness. The divorce between mental and physical (or non-mental) emerges along with freedom (self-causation). You could say that consciousness, or the mental, is how an organism experiences self-causation—freedom—and is what makes possible self-causation. For, in order for there to be such causation, there surely has to be a self (i.e., consciousness) that is doing the causing. [No, I'm not sure about that. What about "structural" causation, e.g. a cell's structure—the inter-location of different kinds of molecules, etc.—as in some sense causing what goes on in it? The cell's structure perpetuates itself, so to speak.] Anyway, that's the basic paradox of freedom: how is self-causation possible? What does it mean?

*

I don't see myself pursuing a career in academia. I see myself joining the global movement against corporate capitalism. Joining activist circles, maybe after I finish my Ph.D.

*

I have to agree with Ernst Mayr (e.g. in his paper "The Objects of Selection" (1997)) that what natural selection "acts on" are not genes or species but just individual organisms, and in some cases groups. These are the only things it *could* act on; phenotypes are what directly interact with the environment, so they have to be what are directly selected or eliminated. Certain kinds of group behavior can be selected too, such as "when a pride of lionesses splits up to block the escape route of an intended victim." That aids the survival of individuals, so it is selected. An individual's genotype, however, or some part of it, is *indirectly* selected by virtue of the phenotype's selection. Obviously![1] Individual genes can't be objects of selection, *pace* Dawkins, because "naked genes" don't exist. Not being "independent objects," genes are not "visible" to selection. They're embedded, so to speak, etc.

I'm not even sure anymore that organisms are usefully considered "survival machines" for their genes, or for their genotypes, as Dawkins argues. Mayr seems to make a good case that "*replication* of genes"—or "genes as replicators"—isn't the main point, and in any case is un-Darwinian. "What is important in selection is the abundant production of new phenotypes to permit the species to keep up with possible changes in the environment. This is made possible by meiosis and sexual reproduction. The replication of DNA has nothing to do with this.... Since the gene is not an object of selection (there are no naked genes), any emphasis on precise replication [of genes] is irrelevant...." On the other hand, maybe the word "precise" sets up a straw man. If the environment does indeed change over time, then minor changes in the genotype (to keep up with environmental changes) could be advantageous for its survival. And animals could reasonably be considered survival machines for (or "tools of") their genotypes-plus-minor-mutations. But I don't know. I forget most of *The Selfish Gene*.

*

[1] I suppose you could say that *species* too are indirectly selected by the success or failure of their individual members.

From the perspective of natural selection, it would be very surprising if men *weren't* more "objective" and "sober," less "personal" and "devoted" (not to mention "subordinate," etc.) than women. You already know about the necessity of males throughout the animal kingdom to dominate and so forth in order to spread their genes. Females choose (it's known in evolutionary biology as "female choice," aptly enough), males are chosen. And they're chosen on the basis of whether they dominate—although of course among humans things are more complicated than just "dominance or non-dominance." But also, the evolutionary advantages of a male's spreading his seed as widely as possible entail that most males will be interested not only in one female but in many, and so, at least among the highest mammals, will have a somewhat "detached" or "sober" attitude in relations with the opposite sex (and probably with the same sex as well, and thus with *themselves* too). They will be prone to mentally stepping back and considering things in a more distanced way, evaluating their options, looking at other females—other members of the species in general, just looking around and observing the world, looking for opportunities or interesting situations—thinking about things (and acting) more "abstractly."[1] Females, on the other hand, are naturally selected to be *less* object-ive than males, since utter female devotion is essential to her offspring's survival and, moreover, sexually her task is not to spread her seed but to choose a male and, ideally, keep him with her. Her devotion to him is a good evolutionary strategy to keep him interested. (In humans, if it goes too far it might have the opposite effect.) When talking about a species as advanced as humans, caveats have to be inserted with regard to all these statements, but they're broadly true.

As I've said before, men's object-iveness in the sphere of interpersonal relations will tend to spread into other spheres, such as their relative enjoyment of object-ive intellectual pursuits like philosophy, mathematics, and natural science. Plenty of women enjoy these things too, but there's a more pronounced tendency for them to enjoy psychology, anthropology, art, dance, etc.

*

Continued.— When women complain about men's being "emotionally unavailable," "closed," "unfeeling" and all that, they're referring to something that's a product of both modern socialization and the natural facts I just mentioned.

*

Ultimately, the things people do are done essentially, on some basic level, for themselves. Necessarily. In that half-empty sense, everyone is "selfish." The moral project is to incorporate others into oneself—as deeply as possible—and to incorporate as many others into oneself as possible, so that in acting for oneself one is also acting for others. *That* is morality, and that is how morality is possible.

*

One way of expressing the impossibility of achieving your goal as a human being is to say that you implicitly want to be surrounded by projections of your self, of your self-love—or *proofs* of it, reflections of it—but that these have to be, by necessity, "objective," or *through the other, in the world, through other people*. So basically what you want is to enact the world's dependence on you, its love for you, its need for you, not only through *independent* things—people, objects, the world in general—but through the *independence* of things. You use their independence to try to prove their "dependence," to make them part of you. And the more independent something or someone is—the more opposed to you, the more

[1] Cf. Jerry Seinfeld's comedic bit: he asks the audience, "Ladies, do you want to know what men really think about?" "Yeeeesss!" they all shout. "....Nothing," he answers. "We're just walking around, observing the world, taking it all in...." Profound truth. Men tend to be less *personally interested* or *personally involved* than women and children (hence less excitable); their stance is relatively objective, or object-ive. Separation between self and other.

challenging—the more you want to make it or him a part of you, so to speak, or attain power over it/him, get recognition from it (through it), confirm your self-love through it.[1] Reduce or conquer its otherness.

I'm not expressing this very well. There are actually several reasons why the fulfillment of the human project is impossible. First, the world and things in it will always be independent of you, whatever you do. They will never be mere reflections of your self-love; you will always be frustrated to some extent in your endeavors. But second, you don't even *want* them to be mere reflections of you, even though in another sense you do. You want them to be independent because the way you confirm yourself is by "testing" yourself against their otherness. If the world were not other than you, there would be nothing on which or through which you could enact your self-love, and you'd live in a nightmare of lack-of-confirmation. As I said in the footnote, people who do not project independence from you, who do not seem confident or rather "whole in themselves" or "self-certain" (which isn't synonymous with "self-confident" but incorporates that), tend to matter less to you regarding your desire for recognition than people who do and are, because the latter are truly *other*.[2] You desire this otherness but at the same time want to negate it. (You desire it in order to negate it, i.e. to use it to prove your worth. By at least partially negating it (by getting it to recognize or "value" you) you enact your selfhood.) Third, the otherness is in fact *in you*, in your consciousness; you are your own other. So, without "transcending yourself"—an absurdity—you will never be able to transcend otherness. You will never be able to confirm your self-love in the *complete* way you desire. There will always be "doubt," due to the nature of consciousness.

*

As capital has become more mobile internationally [since the 1970s], undermining national boundaries and cultures, and has accumulated in ever-larger concentrations, undermining the "relative autonomy" of the state, the world has approximated ever more closely the pure model of capitalism that Marx described in *Das Kapital*. The West slowly sinks to the level of the Rest, and the Rest slowly approaches the industrialized level of the West. The latter deindustrializes and eventually sees its infrastructure deteriorate, the former industrializes and sees its infrastructure build up, though not sufficiently. Class polarization in the West approaches levels in the Rest. Conditions everywhere tend to equalize, with a hyper-elite set against an enormous reserve army of labor. A revolutionary situation ripens as the world becomes more uniform and the middle class, that historical bastion of conservatism, disintegrates.

*

2011 has been the most globally revolutionary year since 1968. The Arab Spring, the Wisconsin demonstrations, protests in Greece, Italy, Spain, and England, Occupy Wall Street (around the world), and protests in Russia against Putin. And probably a lot of other stuff I don't know about. I'm looking forward to 2012.

*

[1] This explains, for example, the frequent success, or at least the popularity, of the romantic strategy called "playing hard-to-get." If you too quickly show someone that you're a little dependent on them, that you really want them or need them, they might lose interest in you because, in a sense, they've already achieved their goal. They don't feel the need to impress you anymore; they don't "emotionally care" much what you think of them; your lack of independence has made them lose a kind of "emotional respect" for you. They want someone who is truly an *other*, independent (confident, etc.), so that they can enact their self-love and make him or her dependent....but not *too* dependent! There's a perpetual tension, you see.

[2] For instance, Aniela is more of an other for me, more of a *weighty self*, than Zhilan because of her relative independence, her self-confidence, maturity, and sophistication. In other words, I desire her approval more than Zhilan's.

January, 2012

What would I do without the refuge of "universality," of music, books, art, my journal? A lot of similarly rejected people don't have such an asylum. They can't escape; they're imprisoned in a world of *stupid particularity*. I'm very lucky. Nonetheless, with universality on one side and the hyper-particularity of thoughtlessness on the other, is it any wonder my emotions have atrophied?

Reading Anthony Brewer's *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey* (1980). Sometimes my living in a postmodern culture makes me forget just how obvious the economic interpretation of history is. "The motives for imperial expansion," Brewer says, "were predominantly economic. Some historians now seek to deny this, but the men of the East India Company, the Spanish *Conquistadores*, the investors in South African mines and the slave traders knew very well what they wanted. They wanted to be rich. Colonial empires were exploited ruthlessly for economic gain as sources of cheap raw materials and cheap labour, and as monopolized markets." Of course, "economic interests are filtered through a political process, policies are implemented by a complex state apparatus, and the whole system generates its own momentum." So economic explanations alone do not suffice.

What Brewer says offhandedly about the two world wars is true, I think. Aside from everything I've said about the social causes, economic crises and so on, the wars were a consequence of the fact that "once the division of the world was complete, any further territorial expansion had to be at the expense of rival colonial empires. There was a sharp increase of tension between the main powers, especially between Germany (the rising power) and Britain (with the largest empire), which culminated in two world wars." Britain was the declining hegemon, Germany aspired to be the next one. Hence its being the main aggressor in both wars. To a large degree they resulted from economic dynamics built up over decades (from the 1870s) relating to which European country [or, rather, which national agglomeration of "finance capital"; see below] would be economically dominant. The explosive social conflicts culminating in fascism heightened Europe's inter-state instability and ultimately fed into the struggle between national power-structures over which nation would dominate. The "dialectics" of international competition and intra-national social conflict reinforced each other, since economic and political elites were able to channel social discontent into nationalist jingoism.

Another observation: in retrospect it isn't surprising that in the twentieth century the world capitalist system "contracted as a result of the subtraction first of Russia, then of China, then Cuba, much of southeast Asia and so on," nor is it surprising that later these subtracted areas would return, like repentant prodigal sons, to the fold of capitalism. The enormous social dislocation caused by capitalism led to revolutions and withdrawal from the capitalist world, hence to experiments with semi-capitalist, semi-statist modes of production, which inevitably failed in the long run because of their lack of dynamism compared to capitalism, so that in the end these countries had to reenter the world with their tails between their legs.

Thoughts on why capitalism tends to geographically expand:

> The [development] of capitalism constantly expands the demand for natural resources....and this is one motive behind the geographical expansion of capitalism. Even with a static demand, development of means of transport together with the search for cheaper sources of goods will tend to draw new areas into the capitalist orbit. Capital accumulation by itself tends to increase the demand for labour power as well, but the adoption of labour-saving methods tends to offset this. The search for cheap labour is another motive for geographical expansion.

Marx's comments on Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century pertain on a broad scale to the twentieth century too. Why couldn't Ireland develop industry? Why was it so poor? Because of English oppression and exploitation. As Brewer says, channeling Marx, "The expulsion of the peasantry [in Ireland] and the creation of capitalist farms under the aegis (and to the benefit) of the (English) landed aristocracy followed essentially the same course as in England (primitive accumulation), though it was carried out with even

greater brutality, but: 'every time Ireland was about to develop industrially, she was crushed and reconverted into a purely agricultural land. ....The people had now before them the choice between the occupation of land *at any rent*, or starvation.'" The main cause of industrial failure in Ireland "was the absence of protective tariffs; Irish industry could not survive English competition.... Just like workers from rural areas of England, the Irish were forced to migrate to seek work in the industrial cities of England." It was basically the same thing with the global South in the twentieth century (and to an extent it still is). The absence of protective tariffs. One difference is that nowadays the West directly invests in production in the global South, thus building up some kind of industry there. But infrastructure usually doesn't benefit much because foreign companies own the profits.

Interesting observations on England's trade patterns in the nineteenth century: "England had a trade surplus with India (as a result of cotton exports), which India financed from its surplus with China (the opium trade), while China in turn exported tea and other products both to England and to Australia and the USA, which had surpluses in trade with England, closing the circle. Marx analyses the way in which the opium trade was a lynchpin of this pattern of trade, and therefore had to be protected and expanded (by force), while at the same time the effects of the opium trade in China actually diminished China's capacity to import goods from the west."

Let's skip ahead to Hilferding. Finance capital. Not to be confused with financial capital. "Hilferding argues that the separation of industrial and financial capital, which was characteristic of the era of competitive capitalism, disappears in the epoch of monopoly capitalism. *Finance capital is the product of the fusion of industrial and financial capital.*" To quote Hilferding, "Finance capital marks the unification of capital. The previously distinct spheres of industrial capital, commercial capital and bank capital are henceforth under the control of high finance, in which the magnates of industry and the banks are closely associated." Brewer notes that multinationals, the head offices of which "perform many of the functions of financial capital in raising money from many sources (including small shareholders, by means of share issues), and also channel flows of capital from one subsidiary enterprise to another," can be considered a part of finance capital, whose epoch has therefore lasted over a hundred years.

Finance capital seeks the help of the state in its desire to gain the benefits of monopoly: specifically, it wants protective tariffs that shield it from international competition. The artificially high prices made possible by tariffs lead to super-profits, which can subsidize exports artificially cheap enough to undercut the prices of competitors in the importing country. (Think of WTO agreements or NAFTA provisions that allow Western corporations to be protected at home but force "free trade" on other countries, which undermines industry (and sometimes agriculture[1]) in those countries.) But also, the benefits of protection cause finance capital to agitate for national territorial expansion, so that it can have access to more protected markets and more super-profits. This requires a strong, militaristic state, very different from in the era of competitive capitalism (when liberal, laissez-faire ideologies were popular).[2] Quoting Hilferding:

> The demand for an expansionist policy overthrows the entire world view of the bourgeoisie. It ceases to be pacific and humanitarian. The old free-traders saw in free trade not only the most just economic policy, but also the basis for an era of peace. Finance capital gave up this belief long ago. It does not believe in the harmony of capitalist interests, but knows that the competitive struggle becomes more and more a political struggle. The ideal of peace fades, and the idea of humanity is replaced by the ideal of the grandeur and power of the state.... The ideal is to insure for one's own nation the domination of the

[1] That's what happened to Mexico after NAFTA, which allowed U.S. agribusinesses but not Mexican farmers to be subsidized. Hence the inability of Mexican agriculture to compete, an exodus from the countryside, increased crime and drug activities in cities (because of a lack of jobs), increased illegal emigration to the U.S., Clinton's heightening of border security, etc.

[2] In addition to protected markets, finance capital wants "exclusive fields for capital export." As Hobson said. Incidentally, all this stuff about monopoly capital and protected markets is "the classical Marxist theory of imperialism," of which Hilferding was the real founder.

> world.... Founded in economic needs, it finds its justification in this remarkable reversal of national consciousness.... Racial ideology is thus a rationalization, disguised as science, of the ambitions of finance capital.

Typically reductive but no less perceptive for that.

While finance capital continued to exist after World War II, it had learned that aggressive militaristic expansion—at the expense of great powers, that is—was not in its long-term interest. (The U.S. continued to be militaristic around the world, but not at the expense of major European powers—except for the Soviet Union. The latter's existence explains the cautiousness of America's war-making in that era.) In fact, in the U.S. its interest was in *helping* Europe, helping it rebuild, so tariffs were repealed. Once foreign competition got strong again, however, tariffs were re-instituted—though not militaristic expansion at the expense of great powers.

Moving on to Sweezy and Baran. I don't see how Sweezy's underconsumptionism can really be questioned. "With the development of capitalism, the share of wages, and hence of wage-earners' consumption, in total output falls [I would say has a *tendency* to fall], while the concentration of capital into fewer hands means that a falling share of total profit is consumed. Consumption therefore absorbs a falling share of total output. (This prefigures the 'law of rising surplus' set out in *Monopoly Capital*.)" Stated this way, the argument seems obvious. For one thing, it is clearly true as a description of the contemporary world. Less money in the hands of the masses, hence less consumption, i.e. effective demand, hence less incentive for business to invest (because of poor prospects for profit), hence stagnation. Brewer argues against Baran/Sweezy, but he's unconvincing. If income levels are extremely disproportionate between the elite and the masses—i.e. if there is an excessive and rising "surplus"—it's logical to expect economic dysfunction. What you'll get is not productive investment but elite gambling, speculation, money market bullshit, people and institutions in the elite playing the game of transferring wealth between each other in their financial bubble. Incidentally, all this is surely compatible with Brenner's emphasis on a fall in the growth-rates of profitability (especially in manufacturing). It has to be, because both Baran/Sweezy's and Brenner's arguments seem basically right.

You may recall, too, that another reason for Baran and Sweezy's indictment of monopoly capitalism—a reason derived from Hobson—is that "monopolies" tend to invest less than they might (for reasons I won't go into), so that there is a chronic lack of demand unless other factors take over.

Summary: "Baran argues that monopoly leads to a diversion of the surplus of output over necessary consumption away from productive investment towards wasteful uses. It is thus a cause of stagnation in both advanced and underdeveloped countries.... Underdeveloped countries are dominated by foreign capital with its local hangers-on, and by mercantile and [semi-feudal] landlord interests. All are hostile to development." All this is obviously true. Military Keynesianism, undertaken in the phase of monopoly capitalism (because it doesn't threaten powerful interests), is more wasteful than productive investment in infrastructure. In the 1950s and 1960s, largely external factors counteracted tendencies towards stagnation, factors such as Europe's and Japan's reconstruction, the high level of demand in the U.S. that was a legacy of World War II, the extension of New Deal programs, and the stimulus of the *automobile* to infrastructural development. As these factors wore off, stagnation began to set in. At the same time, the situation was made much worse by the intensification of foreign competition. (Brenner.) As I see it, this—ironically—sharpened certain tendencies of monopoly capitalism. Income polarization increased as businesses cut costs, which reduced aggregate demand, which reinforced monopoly capital's tendency towards meager investment (in the absence of offsetting external factors), etc. Wasteful uses of the constantly increasing surplus (increasing in part due to cost-cutting) became more common as capital finally got its way in dismantling New Deal regulations and programs; financial speculation and Reagan's military Keynesianism are examples.

....It's surprising that few of the "dependency theorists" and their kin seem to argue that the stifling of labor movements in the global South—made possible by support from the North for reactionary governments and corporations—has been one cause of underdevelopment. After all, low demand is one of the reasons for limited industrial development in these countries (i.e., there are limited incentives to invest),

and effective labor movements would raise demand, as they did in the West. Instead, income polarization is so extreme that tens of millions of people live in gigantic shantytowns while a tiny minority are multimillionaires.

It's true that higher wage-levels might eventually cause foreign companies to invest elsewhere, but insofar as demand increased, wouldn't domestic business step up investment [in *non-export* activities]? Without protective tariffs, of course, it wouldn't get very far. So what's really necessary, to repeat, is that the state and its economy not be subordinated to the interests of foreign capital.

As for labor unions, their effectiveness is surely vitiated by massive overpopulation. That must be another reason (though I don't know how important) for the South's underdevelopment. (Conversely, underdevelopment worsens overpopulation.)

Anyway, the South's subordination to foreign capital causes the survival, for a long time, of pre-capitalist modes of production, in part because (1) wages are so low that laborers have to supplement their income with peasant-work on the land (as in parts of Africa for a long time) and (2) cheap foreign goods prevent the development of domestic industry, ensuring a lack of economic opportunities in cities and thus the persistence for many decades of a huge agricultural sector. Much of this sector becomes capitalist, though, using hired labor.

Arghiri Emmanuel's theory: "unequal exchange." Inequalities between countries can arise not only as a result of monopolies etc. but also through free trade, as a result of inequities in the terms of trade. "Emmanuel's arguments mainly come down to asserting that high wages are the key to development." That's reductive, but it surely contains a lot of truth. Relatively high wages, as in England and the U.S. during their industrialization, entail both high demand and incentives to mechanize, i.e. to improve productivity, thus making possible higher wages in the future. It's a virtuous circle. In Latin America, Africa, Asia, and much of Europe for a long time, wages were a lot lower. (See Robert Allen.) It seems to me, though, that the "virtuous circle" of high wages is bound to end sooner or later: as mechanization gets sophisticated enough to become automation, more and more workers are thrown out of work, and the army of the unemployed or underemployed grows. This makes it harder for unions to maintain high wages, so wages start to fall. Etc. Tendencies towards stagnation are worsened if the economic context is one of increased foreign competition and thus pressures to cut costs. And since the cost-cutting reduces aggregate demand, firms are forced to rely, in large part, on more cost-cutting (instead of increased sales) in order to boost profits, aggravating the underlying problem. That's where we are now, for example with 2010's "greatest recovery of corporate profits on record," due to the corporate sector's capture of all the spoils of recent productivity advances (or cuts in costs). Without a labor movement, productivity improvements can actually be *counterproductive* regarding long-term growth and development, that is if they're due largely to massive layoffs or wage-cuts. That's how I see it anyway.

In any event, as Brewer presents it, Emmanuel's theory is quite complicated, so I won't discuss it. Same with Samir Amin's (which is partly just a synthesis of other theories).

If you set aside all the complicated academic debates and just think through things, they're often not terribly confusing. Consider the patterns of economic specialization between countries in the last two centuries. In the global South there has been a lot of specialization in agriculture and mineral extraction, while in the North there has been more emphasis on industry. Why? One reason is simply that the North became capitalist first and then industrialized first, and from there continued to invest in productivity improvements, thus getting farther and farther ahead of the South in industry. At the same time it forced "free trade" on the South, i.e. prevented it from instituting protective tariffs, thereby preventing infant industries from growing. The South was forced to specialize in agriculture and raw material exports. (Its agriculture wasn't very productive, due to technical backwardness and the persistence of pre-capitalist structures.)[1] Internationally capital wasn't very mobile in the nineteenth century, and productivity was high in the North, so the North's capital didn't migrate to the South and set up industrial production there. It had

[1] Apparently this ended with the Green Revolution of the 1960s and '70s, which caused the eviction of much of the peasantry from the countryside and the growth of enormous, sprawling slums all over the world.

few incentives to do that, and it was beyond its capabilities anyway. By the 1970s, though, capital was mobile internationally, and the rise of foreign competition gave it incentives to expand production in the South and reduce it in the North. (Labor's relative *lack* of international mobility—quite different from the situation in the nineteenth century—ensured that wage-levels differed widely between countries, making the South an attractive place to invest.) The North began to deindustrialize, and the South industrialized more. [Well, that statement is simplistic. Not entirely true.] Much of this industrialization was still confined to export activities because of the continued absence of protective tariffs,[1] but as the South has slowly become more politically independent of the North, the situation has begun to change. Not very fast, though. It doesn't help that foreign companies appropriate most of the profits from their activities in the South.

In recent decades the IMF's structural adjustment programs have been added to the West's bag of tricks for stealing surplus from the South. But instead of contributing to the West's further development, since the onset of neoliberalism the siphoning of the South's surplus into Western hands has accelerated the West's *de*-development, because that has been in the interests of the enriched institutions. Thus, less spending on infrastructure, less redistribution of wealth to people who would actually spend it, more attacks on labor unions, more deregulation of the economy, more worthless financial speculation, etc.

Reading David Harvey's *The Enigma of Capital* (2011). Harvey, being a Marxist, has the unusual merit of exhibiting common sense.

He has some things in common with Brenner. (And with Baran and Sweezy.) For instance, he makes it clear that in one sense financial institutions are right to say they're the linchpin of the economy: because incomes are so polarized between the elite and the masses, without absurdly high levels of lending to consumers the economy would grind to a halt. Even those with very low incomes eventually have to receive mountains of credit (as they did by the late 1990s), because confining it to the steadily employed population doesn't provide enough boost to demand. Hence the subprime loans for mortgages—in part the product of political pressure on financial institutions to loosen credit strings for everyone. (Not only the home buyers but even the property developers were debt-financed! In other words, "the financial institutions collectively controlled both the supply of, and demand for, housing!") Such loans were risky, but innovations in "securitization" supposedly spread the risk around "and even created the illusion that risk had disappeared."

So that was one way of solving the demand problem. Another way was "the export of capital and the cultivation of new markets around the world." We're back to the old imperialism, you see (dressed in modern clothes), and the old ideas of Hobson and the classical Marxists. Actually, even as early as England's forcing India to buy its cotton, "the cultivation of new markets around the world" to boost demand was going on. By the 1970s, one form of capital export—a response to the lack of profitable investment opportunities in the U.S.—was to lend massively to developing countries like Mexico and Brazil. (If they couldn't repay the loans, the IMF and its structural adjustment programs could come to the rescue of investors.) In order for capital export to become a really big industry, though, "a globally interlinked system of financial markets needed to be constructed." No more confining banks to their home country; no more "excessive" regulations; no more separating deposit from investment banking. (Repeal Glass-Steagall!) Liquid money capital had to roam the world freely, looking for locations with high rates of return. So much surplus capital to be absorbed!

Another way to absorb capital was to privatize state-run enterprises. Hence the global wave of privatization since the 1980s.

Considering all the things that can go wrong with capitalism, it's impressive the system works at all. For example, if organized labor becomes too powerful and wages are too high, the profit-squeeze might cause capitalists to reduce investment. (Alternatively, they might invest more in labor-saving technologies.) Lay off workers, etc. If this happens on a sufficiently broad scale, stagnation could set in. (But the resulting drop in wages and loosening of the labor market might lead to increased investment, ending the stagnation.)

[1] [Um, it wasn't really "continued." In the postwar era of developmentalism, import-substitution industrialization was the agenda in many countries. But then, apparently, a return to export promotion occurred from the 1970s on.]

On the other hand, if organized labor is very weak, such that wages are low and unemployment is high, effective demand might be insufficient to justify high levels of investment, and stagnation sets in. (What are the mechanisms that would lead to recovery? I guess Keynes' point was that there are only *external* mechanisms, such as government spending.) The Great Depression and the current stagnation fall, at least in part, under the latter category. (With the present stagnation there is also the problem of global overproduction-relative-to-prevailing-profit-rates, as Brenner says. This has been one cause of the insufficient demand, in that it has forced capitalists to cut costs.) The stagnation of the 1970s, on the other hand, was apparently in part the result of a profit-squeeze in the context of global overproduction. Hence business's and the government's attacks on organized labor—which, as I just said, led to the low demand of the present. This time, though, there probably isn't going to be a revival of labor unions and massive government spending, as there was in the 1930s and '40s. Instead there is going to be a slow collapse of capitalism, starting in the advanced countries. Will growth in developing countries come to the rescue? Doubtful.

....Harvey likes Baran and Sweezy. "If it takes competition to keep the permanent expansion of production going, then it follows that keeping capitalism competitive is also necessary to capitalism's survival." That's a sensible argument for Sweezy's interpretation of monopoly capitalism. The implication is that "any slackening of competition through, for example, excessive monopolisation will in itself likely produce a crisis in capitalist reproduction." The logic is pretty compelling. But it could be too simple. Harvey even attributes the stagflation of the 1970s to tendencies toward monopolization and the centralization of capital. Is that plausible? I suppose so, to an extent. But it doesn't seem *specific* enough—specific enough to the conditions of the '70s. On the basis of his Sweezyan interpretation, Harvey goes on to say that "The neoliberal counter-revolution that then occurred [after the 1970s] not only had to smash the power of labour; it had also to unleash the coercive laws of competition as 'executor' of the laws of endless capitalist accumulation." Neoliberalism unleashed competition? Hm. Maybe. But Brenner would prefer to say it was a response to competition—foreign competition.

Here's a possible compromise: heightened international competition in a global context of "monopoly capital" had the consequences that Brenner documents. (Incomplete "shakeout" of relatively unprofitable firms, enormously increased levels of government- and consumer-debt, lack of a genuine crisis (which would cleanse the economy of the least profitable companies) but instead prolonged stagnation, etc.)

Anyway, Harvey's formulations in general are illuminating. His whole explanation of economic activity revolves around capitalism's requirement that capital accumulation flow continuously. "The continuity of flow must be sustained at all times." He emphasizes this again and again. Accumulation is always looking to overcome barriers and limits. If it hits a limit of some sort, problems arise, sometimes leading to crisis. One essential role of the credit system is to stave off for a while "the problem of falling profits and devaluations [of capital] due to lack of effective demand"—but over the long term this tends to accumulate the system's contradictions and tensions, spreading the risks at the same time that it accumulates them. Credit has to grow at a compound rate (because capital accumulation occurs at a compound rate), "as indeed happened over the last twenty years. When the credit bubble bursts, which it inevitably must, then the whole economy plunges into a downward spiral of the sort that began in 2007. And it is at this point that capitalism has to create external power in order to save itself from its own internal contradictions." So it turns to the Federal Reserve, which has a power of infinite money creation.

Harvey opposes all attempts to look for one dominant explanation for the crisis-prone character of capitalism. "The three big traditional camps of thought are the profit squeeze (profits fall because real wages rise), the falling rate of profit (labour-saving technological changes backfire and 'ruinous' competition pulls prices down), [and] the underconsumptionist traditions (lack of effective demand and the tendency towards stagnation associated with excessive monopolisation)." Adherents of one school often insist that the others are simply wrong.

> There is, I think, a far better way to think about crisis formation. The analysis of capital circulation pinpoints several potential limits and barriers. Money capital scarcities, labour

> problems, disproportionalities between sectors, natural [environmental] limits, unbalanced technological and organisational changes (including competition versus monopoly), indiscipline in the labour process and lack of effective demand head up the list. Any one of these circumstances can slow down or disrupt the continuity flow and so produce a crisis that results in the devaluation or loss of capital. When one limit is overcome accumulation often hits up against another somewhere else. For instance, moves made to alleviate a crisis of labour supply and to curb the political power of organised labour in the 1970s diminished the effective demand for product, which created difficulties for realisation of the surplus in the market during the 1990s. Moves to alleviate this last problem by extensions of the credit system among the working classes ultimately led to working-class over-indebtedness relative to income that in turn led to a crisis of confidence in the quality of debt instruments (as began to happen in 2006). The crisis tendencies are not resolved but merely moved around.

One barrier to accumulation is repositioned at the expense of another. The crises that result are *necessary* ways of rationalizing (temporarily) an irrational, contradictory system. They are "as necessary to the evolution of capitalism as money, labour power, and capital itself."

"A synoptic view of the current crisis would say: while the epicentre lies in the technologies and organisational forms of the credit system and the state-finance nexus, the underlying problem is excessive capitalist empowerment vis-à-vis labour and consequent wage repression, leading to problems of effective demand papered over by a credit-fuelled consumerism of excess in one part of the world [the West] and a too-rapid expansion of production in new product lines in another [much of Asia?]." Similar to Brenner (and probably a galaxy of other Marxists). Seems obviously true.

Harvey has an interesting discussion of urbanization as one of the primary ways of absorbing capital surplus. As long ago as the 1850s, governments used massive infrastructural investment for this purpose, in other words to rescue society from its economic doldrums. The Europe-wide economic crisis of 1848, which contributed to the political upheavals of that year, was a crisis of "unemployed surplus capital and surplus labour existing side by side with no clear way to put them back together again." In France, the republican bourgeoisie failed to resolve the problem; only after Louis Napoleon became emperor was the solution hit upon, namely a huge Keynesian-style program of infrastructural investment at home and abroad, directed by Baron Haussmann. It entailed the reconfiguration of Paris's urban landscape, which helped stabilize society by employing vast quantities of labor and capital. Paris was transformed, becoming "the city of light"—and of consumption, tourism, and pleasures galore. New financial institutions and debt instruments were used to allocate capital, and apparently they worked well....until the whole speculative financial system and its credit structures collapsed in the crisis of 1868.

A later example is the U.S. in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. The war lifted America out of the depression, but what was going to happen after the war? In order to contain radical social movements, two things were necessary: repress them (as Napoleon III had in the 1850s), and solve some of the problems that had given rise to them. New ways had to be found to absorb surplus capital and so keep the economy going. Federal, state, and local governments effectively adopted Bonaparte's solution: invest in colossal projects of remaking metropolitan spaces. The "master builder" Robert Moses, a sort of Baron Haussmann of his day, is still the symbol of all this, all the resultant debt-financed highways and infrastructural transformations, the suburbanization, the urban renewal, and so on. "Where would the capital surplus have gone," Harvey asks, "had it not been for the making of the New York metropolitan region, Chicago, Los Angeles and other places of their ilk after 1945?" All this investment across the country, supplemented by tax subsidies for home ownership, the GI bill, "productivity agreements" between capital and labor, etc., was crucial to stabilizing not only the U.S. economy but U.S.-centered global capitalism. It also made possible the maturation of Fordist mass consumerism, thus changing people's lifestyles.

Of course there were costs, as you know. The dismantling of public transportation, the destruction of old urban neighborhoods and the hollowing-out of city centers, the U.S.'s dependence on the Middle East for much of its oil, the degradation of the natural environment, the urban crisis of the 1960s, etc. Hence,

in part, the radical backlash of the 1960s. Another consequence, Harvey argues, was the weakening of the dollar because of excessive U.S. borrowing, and thus ultimately the collapse of the Bretton Woods system.

"After the 1970s, urbanisation underwent yet another transformation of scale. It went global. The urbanisation of China over the last twenty years has been hugely important." China's urbanization has in fact been partially responsible for the stabilization of global capitalism. Think of all the demand it has generated! But China is really only the epicenter of the global phenomenon of debt-financed urbanization projects. I won't list the dozens of cities everywhere, many of them in America, that have been the sites of building booms. And this new wave of urbanization has depended, "as did all those before it, on financial innovation to organise the credit required to sustain it. The securitisation and packaging of local mortgages for sale to investors worldwide, and the setting up of new financial institutions to facilitate a secondary mortgage market, have played a crucial role." All these developments in the financial sector had the positive effects of bringing aggregate interest rates down and spreading risk. In the end, though, what happened in the financial crisis of 1868 in Paris and in New York City in 1975 (when it [almost] went bankrupt due to all its debt) and in many other places and times happened again in the subprime mortgage and housing asset value crisis.

What happened in Paris in the 1850s and across the U.S. in the postwar era has lately been happening all over the world: undesirable or economically redundant people are being brutally pushed out of the way by states and businesses seeking to create or "renew" urban areas. Earth is becoming a planet of slums. And social movements are taking up arms everywhere.

One other thing: landowners have taken an active role in pushing all this urban development, because it raises the value of their property and thus the rents they can charge. "The power of land and resource owners has been much underestimated, as has the role of land and resource asset values and rents in relation to the overall circulation and accumulation of capital. This arena of activity accounts for as much as 40 percent of economic activity in many of the advanced capitalist countries." Wow. That's a lot of parasites.

....What it comes down to is that compound economic growth forever is not possible. In a finite world, capital accumulation at a compound rate has to end eventually. Crises that restore growth by destroying or devaluing excess capital can only postpone the inevitable, not prevent it from happening.

Harvey notes that, broadly speaking, two different kinds of responses have evolved to the current economic downturn. On the one hand is the West, with its policies of deficit reduction through austerity. I.e., lower standards of living for most people, etc. On the other hand is the East and the emerging markets of the South, which are following an expansionary Keynesian strategy. In China there is massive investment in infrastructure combined with moderate empowerment of labor (higher wages, etc.), resulting in an increase of demand that gives a boost to the export economies of Latin America, Southeast Asia, Germany, and so on. —History's twists and turns are fascinating! The erstwhile victors rot from the internal contradictions of the economic system that made possible their global domination, while the erstwhile victims *rise* by virtue of the dynamics of this system that ground them under its boot for so long. Poetic justice! The formerly "independent" economies come to depend more and more on their former dependencies. But ultimately it's all unsustainable anyway.

Tonight I looked through a lot of photographs, letters, and notes from many years ago. All those memories.... People from my past, now only memories buried in scar-tissue. So I sat there, immobilized by emotions. (Appropriately but coincidentally, my family and I watched the movie *2046* later. No escaping the past, only pale attempts to recapture it or heal its wounds.) Wrote a short, sad email to Zhilan. […]

2046. All the women in the man's life—time measured by women, women flowing by like time—but no linear time at all, only a sort of swirling around endlessly a void in concentric circles, or a spiral, or rather a fog of avoided memories that prevents you from seeing clearly. (Yes, the void, the first and last image of *2046*.) Time measured by the ebb and flow of longing, and the compulsive repetition of loneliness. "All memories are traces of tears." You peer back through the fog of upwelled memories and see....human androids as in the film, secrets unshared, time-slices of attempts to share secrets, traces of kisses and stronger traces of loss. All the women in my life.... The imagined women....

Books I'm reading or half-reading for my two courses this semester (Latin America and World History): Alejandro de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century* (2008); Steve Stern, *Peru's Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest: Huamanga to 1640* (1993); Stuart Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society: Bahia, 1550-1835* (1985); Gregory Cushman, *Lords of Guano* (2012); Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (2008); Emilio Kouri, *A Pueblo Divided: Business, Property, and Community in Papantla, Mexico* (2004); Gillian McGillivray, *Blazing Cane: Sugar Communities, Class, and State Formation in Cuba, 1868-1959* (2009); Jeffery Paige, *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* (1997); John Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States* (2005); Greg Grandin, *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City* (2010); Myrna Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil: Environmental, Labor, and the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1938* (2009); Suzana Sawyer, *Crude Chronicles: Indigenous Politics, Multinational Oil, and Neoliberalism in Ecuador* (2004); Elizabeth Fitting, *The Struggle for Maize: Campesinos, Workers, and Transgenic Corn in the Mexican Countryside* (2010); Martin Lewis and Karen Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (1997); Jerry Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times* (1993); Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (2001); Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (1991); James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (1998); Geoff Eley and Ronald Suny, eds., *Becoming National: A Reader* (1996); Walden Bello, *The Food Wars* (2009). Also a lot of articles. And for the class I'm TAing: John M. Thompson, *Russia and the Soviet Union: An Historical Introduction from the Kievan State to the Present* (2009).

Most of the arguments in *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (1997), by Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen, are fairly convincing. It is undeniable that such concepts as "East and West," "Orient and Occident," and even the sevenfold continental system are cultural constructs that have no clear objective referents. They are mere conveniences, and their mutual delimitations are to some extent arbitrary. Over the last five hundred years the accepted meanings of these geographical schemes have changed many times, as the authors demonstrate. Moreover, thinking in these simplistic binary and continental terms can cloud one's understanding of the world—of its diversity and of the many parallels between "Eastern" and "Western" societies (as well as African, Asian, European, American, etc.)—and thereby perpetuate myths, stereotypes, and prejudices. Postmodernists can be just as guilty of these sorts of reifications as old-fashioned Eurocentrists. However, it's possible that the authors go a little too far in their third chapter, "The Cultural Constructs of Orient and Occident, East and West," in rejecting traditional notions of how Western Europe has differed from China, for example, and India. Doubtless it is absurd to identify "the West" simply with reason, progress, freedom, dynamism, individualism, and materialism, and "the East" with the opposites of those concepts. I will argue, though, that, if qualified, similarly sweeping contrasts are not wholly off the mark.

It is worth noting, first of all, that to reject out of hand ideas that attracted some of the greatest minds in Europe, America, and parts of Asia for over two hundred years seems intellectually lazy. Thinkers from Voltaire to Hegel to Marx to Weber and beyond have contrasted European societies with Asian societies. At the very least, one has to explain how it was possible for them *all* to have been so horribly wrong. One has to theorize the phenomena that misled them. But of course it is silly to say that they were all simply *wrong*; rather, they grasped certain truths in perhaps exaggerated ways. In recent decades, as countries in the so-called East and Middle East have become deeply capitalist, the old notions of Oriental stagnation, despotism, spiritualism, scientific non-rationality, and so forth, have lost whatever plausibility they once had. Nonetheless, from at least the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, Western Europe and North America were clearly more rapidly developing, more culturally individualistic, and more

scientifically progressive than the so-called Orient—because they were far more intensively capitalist.[1] Not even Lewis and Wigen deny this. Whether Europe and America in this period were also more *democratic* and *free* (politically and culturally liberal, etc.) than the "Orient" is a difficult question, but a strong case can be made that the answer is yes.

The natural question then is, "Why did Western Europe become dominated by capitalist production relations before other societies did?" The authors do not answer this question, but they treat several important elements of an answer in a rather dismissive way. "Carlo Cipolla," they note, "powerfully argues that the tradition of urban self-government, based essentially on merchant and craft-guild oligarchies, was uniquely European, and, more important, that its emergence in the High Middle Ages represented nothing less than 'the turning point of world history.' Cipolla also maintains that Europe was unique in the high social position it afforded members of the medical, legal, and notarial professions." After conceding the importance of these points, they state with no explanation, "Cipolla probably grants them more significance than they deserve."[2] It is quite possible, however, that these phenomena both were largely unique to Europe and contributed to the rise of capitalism.

Similarly, Lewis and Wigen deny that "parcelized sovereignty," which has often been thought to have played an important role in Europe's development, was truer of Europe than elsewhere. They argue that governments throughout Eurasia were not as centralized, despotic, or powerful as we are wont to think, that instead they were "segmentary" in structure and "had to come to terms with local power holders."[3] Even if this is true, though, the sort of parcelized sovereignty it indicates is different from the European proliferation of autonomous states in a relatively small area. It is this kind of political fragmentation that was surely most conducive to European development. It meant, for example, that Columbus could roam the continent in search of a political sponsor, trying Portugal, Genoa, Venice, England, and finally Spain. An adventurer in China had no such options. Competition between states also stimulated the advance of military technology in the late Middle Ages and early modern period. Even more importantly, the differences in political, economic, and environmental conditions between Britain and the rest of Europe caused feudalism to decline first in Britain and industrial capitalism to rise.[4] In addition, the growth of relatively autonomous cities in the Middle Ages, sometimes governed by merchant oligarchies (as in northern Italy), helped make possible the Renaissance, which provided the cultural context for the printing revolution, which was a precondition for the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and ultimately the Industrial Revolution. All these consequences flowed, in part, from Europe's unusual political fragmentation [and parcelized sovereignty].[5]

Lewis and Wigen also dismiss Marx's concept of the "Asiatic mode of production," an idea that has been, or used to be, taken seriously by generations of Marx-influenced thinkers and scholars. Were they all totally deluded? Was the Asiatic mode of production merely a figment of their imagination? Again, at the very least it is necessary to theorize the things that supposedly misled them, not just to say "They were

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[1] [Next to this word (and many others throughout the paper) the professor wrote, "Meaning what?" Hopefully the reader knows what I meant: relative predominance of the capitalist mode of production (viz., wage-labor vs. capital owners), competitive capital accumulation, a more deeply "marketized" economy, and so on.]

[2] Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1997), 93.

[3] Ibid., 99.

[4] See Robert C. Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[5] [Barrington Moore says the following (on p. 174 of his major book): "Imperial Chinese society never created an urban trading and manufacturing class comparable to that which grew out of the later stages of feudalism in Western Europe, though at times there were some starts in this direction. Imperial success in uniting the country may be advanced as one of the more obvious reasons for the difference. In Europe the conflict between Pope and Emperor, between kings and nobles, helped the merchants in the cities to break through the crust of the traditional agrarian society because they constituted a valuable source of power in this many-sided competition." In other words, kings, nobles, emperors, and popes had an incentive to let relatively autonomous cities thrive. Very different from China. Parcelized sovereignty, you see.]

wrong" and leave it at that. Moreover, it does not strike me as ridiculous to argue that private property in land gave modern European landowners—under particular economic conditions—an incentive to improve agricultural productivity and expel peasants from the land (contributing to the rise of a proletariat), whereas the absence of a legally protected system of private property in China and India, where land was often in effect possessed by the state, prevented such capitalist incentives from emerging. More generally, one would think that the absence, or at least the profoundly limited power (compared to that of the state bureaucracy), of a private landowning class would make for a very different society from that in which such a class had immense power, as it did in medieval and modern Europe. Even if, as Lewis and Wigen argue, the "Oriental" state was not as despotic as Marx thought, the concept of an Asiatic mode of production could still be suggestive, as could the thesis of a relatively cyclical Asiatic history (compared to Europe's). Indeed, prima facie this latter hypothesis seems obviously true. A cursory glance at the last 2200 years of Chinese history [except the last 150 years] reveals that, aside from invasions and dynastic struggles, China has had a more stable social order than Europe. Postmodernists like Lewis and Wigen appear not to notice this, so they don't try to explain it. But it does beg for an explanation.

Some arguments in chapter three of *The Myth of Continents* are very plausible. For instance, it is misleading to identify Western culture with reason or rationalism, because religion and various forms of irrationalism have been at least as prominent throughout its history. The authors quote William McNeill approvingly: "The striking transformation of the culture of the Roman world from the naturalism and rationalism of Hellenism to the transcendentalism and mysticism of the fifth and sixth centuries had no real parallels elsewhere in the [Afro-Eurasian] ecumene.... Unusual instability, arising out of a violent oscillation from one extreme to another, may in fact be the most distinctive and fateful characteristic of the European style of civilization."[1] Again, though, such instability has to be explained, and if it is distinctively European (as McNeill claims), the explanation is going to have to postulate significant differences between European and Asian societies. Moreover, environmental factors—which many historians prefer not to invoke because they supposedly justify "Eurocentrism"—will probably play a role in the explanation.

The point is that sometimes it is justifiable to make generalizations about "the West" and "the East," or at least parts of the East, and that there *are* major historical differences between societies that exemplify the West and the East. At the same time, *The Myth of Continents* serves as a useful reminder that we should be cautious in our generalizations.

Alejandro de la Fuente's *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century* (2008) is a close study of Havana during its formative period, in the latter half of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries. As the author notes, historians have given a lot of attention to the functioning of Atlantic trading networks in the eighteenth century, in particular those associated with the slave trade; less attention has been paid to the Spanish imperial system in the sixteenth century, and still less to the history of specific "imperial outposts" such as Havana. In light of the paucity of colonial sources, this is not surprising. De la Fuente, however, makes very profitable use of such sources as notarial records, town council records, and parish registries—so much so, in fact, that the resultant picture of Havana is at times tedious in its incredible detail. Underlying the author's intricate reconstruction of the town in its era of growth is a polemical purpose: he argues that historians have been mistaken to see Havana in this period as merely an imperial military outpost at the service of Spain's merchant fleets. While that was the function assigned it by Spain's imperial planners, the lived experience of the town was much richer and in constant tension with the one-dimensionality of its prescribed role.

Havana indeed was catapulted in size and vitality during the years de la Fuente studies. From a town of only 30 vecinos, or heads of household, in 1553, and only 60 in 1570, Havana grew to 1200 vecinos in 1620. At the same time, the city's service economy grew tremendously; massive new fortifications were built; African slaves and their descendants came to represent nearly half of Havana's population; and the city "created [an agricultural and mining] hinterland to serve its needs" (p. 118). All this resulted from the fact that Havana was the port at which merchant fleets gathered before and after their trips across the

[1] Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*, 86.

Atlantic. Because of its privileged location and function, the city was also granted numerous concessions from the crown, including tax exemptions, loans, subsidies, and the town council's unrestricted ability to distribute land. Some farms produced foodstuffs, such as cassava, for local demand; large ranches proliferated for raising pigs and cattle; lumber was produced for export, shipbuilding, and to meet local needs; copper mining occurred in eastern Cuba, and Havana became one of the most important shipbuilding centers in the Spanish Atlantic; and sugar was produced on plantations [and in mills] by African slaves, though not on anything like the scale of two centuries later. De la Fuente remarks that, while Havana was unique among port cities in having created a hinterland rather than being created by it, sugar pointed the way to a future in which the port would serve the needs of the hinterland, i.e. of plantation slavery and monoculture.

Appropriately, the book starts off with discussions of the port and the fleet system that determined Havana's rise, shaped its urban landscape, and created a service economy to provision the ships and cater to the needs of crews and passengers. The succeeding chapters fill out a progressively richer picture of the city and its place in the Atlantic economy. Havana's growth accelerated after the 1570s, in large part due to policies designed by the Crown to augment the population and bolster the city's defenses against pirates. The chapter on "Production" extends the analysis to the city's hinterland and its growing manufacturing sector, describing the rise of agriculture, shipbuilding, and sugar production. This leads seamlessly into the next chapter, "Slavery and the Making of a Racial Order," in which de la Fuente traces the processes through which race became a fundamental organizing principle of Cuban life. As is true throughout the book, the author makes a major contribution to scholarship here in the remarkable *detail* of his analyses. He looks closely at—among other things—the ways in which slaves were bought and sold, their prices, the diversity of occupations they engaged in (often working alongside poor whites), their culture and adaptation to life in Havana, the practices relating to manumission, and the many regulations local elites imposed in order to create a racially stratified society. In general, de la Fuente confirms what scholars have long known, that to be a slave in Cuba was not quite as horrible a fate in the sixteenth century as it later became.

The last chapter (aside from the Epilogue) consists of a typically rich and nuanced analysis of the changes that occurred in Havana's social structure as a whole between the 1550s and 1610s. Traditional social hierarchies based on the old medieval society of orders proved impossible for elites to fully re-create in the New World, especially in port cities like Havana. As the author notes, "Port cities experienced a constant demographic turnover and housed large transient populations, elements that did not contribute to the reproduction of traditional links of deference" (p. 187). Because of its centrality to the Caribbean and Atlantic economy, Havana in particular became a fluid and dynamic society. As throughout, an especially valuable aspect of de la Fuente's discussion is his illustration of the extent to which Havana was a creation of trade.

Broadly speaking, one of the author's main goals in *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century* is to transcend the traditional "Eurocentric, British-centered vision" of Atlantic colonialism, in other words to fulfill the potential of the relatively new field of Atlantic history by "transcend[ing] national and imperial boundaries" (p. 226). From this perspective, the decision to study Havana was an apt one, given that by 1610 the city "had become a collection of African and European 'nations' living by the sea" (p. 107). De la Fuente's masterful reconstruction of how this cosmopolitanism came about and what it looked like is the book's chief merit, and ensures that it will be a standard work for a long time to come.

The history of cocaine intersects with major topics in modern history, including, among others, Latin American and U.S. politics, American imperialism, indigenous peasant life in the Andean region, America's Progressive movement in the early twentieth century, the two world wars, the modern drug war, the history of medicine, and popular culture in the West. Remarkably, Paul Gootenberg delves into all these topics and many, many more in his ambitious book *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (2008). As he states, the book's main contribution "lies in its systematic effort to tie together the disparate global threads of cocaine's history, using the hitherto unknown story of Andean cocaine as the central strand" (p. 6). He takes a Peruvian perspective in part because he wants to emphasize Peruvians' agency in the construction of the cocaine industry. The fact, moreover, that Huánuco, Peru is the drug's "historical

homeland and haven" is in itself sufficient justification for framing a study around this region, as Gootenberg does. While Latin Americanists and specialists in "the new drug history" (as Gootenberg calls it) will be fascinated by this work, its recounting of cocaine's history from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries is of such interest that even non-specialists will surely find it engrossing.

Gootenberg divides the history of cocaine into three periods: first, the drug's birth as a successful medical commodity between 1850 and 1910; second, its decline from 1910 to 1945; and third, its reemergence as an *illicit* good between 1945 and 1975. Throughout, its story has been a decidedly transnational one. For example, it was a German doctoral student who, in 1860, isolated alkaloidal cocaine from the coca leaf that had been pivotal in Andean cultural history for millennia. Over the next few decades, but especially after the mid-1880s, German, French, British, and American scientists experimented with cocaine—and the coca leaf—to discover its practical applications, which included its use as a stimulant, an anesthetic, an antidote for stomach and respiratory ailments, and, in the case of coca, an antidote for the era's widespread "neurasthenia." Coca was also used in various beverages, including, after 1886, Coca-Cola. In these years, too, a Peruvian "nationalist science" emerged around coca and cocaine, based on the idea that these were national commodities—Peru's gifts to the world—"modernizing goods" that would help integrate the country into the Western world. The Franco-Peruvian pharmacist Alfredo Bignon contributed immensely to cocaine's later future by inventing a method for extracting so-called crude cocaine in the same places as coca cultivation, whereas previously coca leaves had had to be shipped abroad first, which created supply bottlenecks and other problems. Bignon's invention made possible the birth of a true Peruvian cocaine industry.

The industry's heyday did not last long, however. After about 1905, several factors combined to undermine it. First, more efficient coca production in Java, organized and controlled by the Dutch, cut into Peru's markets. Second, medical opinion turned against cocaine because of its dangerous side-effects and the discovery of alternative anesthetics. Third, the U.S. went from being cocaine's main consumer market to leading a global crusade against it. The reasons for America's dramatic shift in this respect are not entirely clear, as Gootenberg admits, but he gives a plausible explanation. Physicians and pharmacists sought to rein in use of the drug after becoming fully aware of its dangers and recreational possibilities, and local laws against it proliferated partly for this reason. At the same time, the popular demonization of the "cocaine fiend" spread, especially due to the drug's association with African Americans. In addition, the Progressive movement seized on cocaine as a symbol of the power and greed of pharmaceutical corporations—which, however, joined the anti-cocaine crusade in order to maintain their clean image. In any case, by the 1920s a uniquely harsh anti-drug regime had evolved in the U.S., which fought to extend that regime all over the world. Until after World War II its success was limited, the League of Nations more or less tolerating the legal international cocaine trade. Still, both the drug and its source the coca leaf suffered gradual delegitimization—even, to an extent, in Peru—in the interwar era.

Because of its absolute world dominance after the Second World War, the U.S. was finally able to consummate its anti-cocaine crusade, in part by using the UN as its tool. Gootenberg's discussion of the postwar period is masterful. The task he sets himself is forbidding: he aims to describe how the U.S. tried to extirpate the cocaine trade everywhere on the planet but how its efforts in Latin America backfired by the 1960s, leading to the explosion of an illegal commerce that would come to dwarf the earlier legal one. Along the way, he describes in some detail the roles that Peru, Brazil, Ecuador, Cuba, Argentina, Mexico, Panama, Bolivia, Chile, and finally Colombia played in the rise of illicit cocaine, as well as how the drug's destiny intersected with the Cold War, the "war on drugs" that Nixon inaugurated, and American popular culture in the 1970s and 1980s. With regard to the criminal actors themselves, Gootenberg focuses—wisely—not so much on the Pablo Escobars as on the earlier and lesser known trailblazers. One wishes he had devoted more attention in this final part of the book to the central question of why the cocaine industry has proven so resilient in the Andean region, but he does raise the issue and speculate plausibly on answers.

In his conclusion Gootenberg remarks, aptly, that "the subject of Andean cocaine has been viewed here through a dizzying array of lenses" (p. 323). This statement can be made the basis of a criticism, that the book is downright bewildering in its lack of focus. It touches on so many issues that the reader gropes for a central argument. There are, nonetheless, unifying threads, in particular Gootenberg's fusion of the

local and the global so as to create a sort of dialectic of Peruvian agency in the context of powerful transnational forces. Considering his emphasis on agency, Gootenberg could have gone into much more depth on the nature of production relations on coca plantations, and the lives of workers. This, however, would have been to add even greater length to a book that already threatened to get out of hand. Despite its flaws, *Andean Cocaine* is an excellent work—a good read and a product of admirable scholarship—which historians of all persuasions will appreciate.

The historian of Central America's civil wars in the 1980s faces an obvious question from the outset: what explains the divergent experiences of the countries in the region? Jeffery Paige frames his study *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* (1997) around this question; in particular, he wants to explain why the ideology and behavior of the respective elites differed so profoundly. He focuses on El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica (the only country that did not succumb to civil war), tracing the origins of their experiences in the 1980s back to the 1930s and even earlier. "The revolutionary crises of the 1980s," he argues, "were crises of the coffee elites and the societies they made at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries" (p. 5). While he is most concerned with elite ideology, such that the bulk of his empirical research consists of interviews with members of the coffee elite conducted while the civil wars were raging, he devotes much of his book to analyses of the economic and political structures of each country as crystallized in the 1930s and 1940s. It is all expressed in Marxian terms, as Paige both adopts and critiques the framework that Barrington Moore puts forward in *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.

Crucial to Paige's analysis of the civil wars is his distinction between two fractions of the coffee elite in each country: the agrarian fraction, i.e. the landowners who organize production, and the agro-industrial fraction, which controls processing and export. "The more land the elite control[s] or the more productive its system of growing coffee, the more powerful the agrarian fraction of the coffee elite.... The greater the technological and commercial development of processing and exports under elite control, the stronger the agro-industrial fraction" (p. 57). As implied by Moore's model, the agrarian fraction tends to be the more reactionary and authoritarian because of its reliance on "labor-repressive agriculture." According to Paige, the countries' different histories in the last century have been a consequence largely of the different degrees of power each fraction has had. Until at least the 1980s, he argues, the Guatemalan elite was overwhelmingly agrarian: "debt servitude, serfdom, and other forms of legal bondage created class relations similar to those of the European feudal manor: the Spanish and European immigrant landlord class ruled over an unfree Indian labor force" (p. 87). In El Salvador, the agrarian fraction benefited from an efficient production system, although the agro-industrial fraction was also quite strong. Costa Rica's elite was characterized by a weak agrarian fraction, due to the proliferation of small farmers. In Nicaragua, for a long time neither fraction was very highly developed because U.S. intervention in the early twentieth century and then the Somoza dictatorship interrupted economic development. Only in the postwar period, with the development of a mechanized cotton and sugar economy, did the agro-industrial class gain disproportionate power.

Applying Paige's ideas, Costa Rica's social democratic state was made possible by the presence of many small farmers and the dominance of agro-industrialists in the economy; El Salvador's ferocious civil war resulted from the great power of its agrarian elite, which tended to support the death squads and the hardliners in the military; and the Sandinistas were able to come to power in Nicaragua because a large portion of the agro-industrial fraction hated Somoza so much that it supported them (although later it turned against them). In the end, neoliberal democracy emerged in each country because agro-industrialists split from agrarians to support it—just as Moore's model predicts would have to happen. Paige argues, however, that in a sense Central America discovered a historically new route to democracy: through "socialist revolution from below," which is what finally forced the split between the hitherto-united agro-industrial and agrarian fractions.

The heart of the book is the discussion of the elite's ideology, specifically its evolution from a statist version of liberalism (which incorporated anti-communism after the 1930s) to—among agro-industrialists—neoliberalism in the late 1980s. Paige recounts the events of the 1930s and 1940s that

hardened each country's ideology around a central "myth" or "narrative": in the case of El Salvador's elite it was the idea of *progress*, in that of Nicaragua's it was the idea of *liberty* (the freedom to buy and sell without interference from the government), and for Costa Ricans it was *democracy*. In his examination of the narratives that emerged from his interviews, Paige fruitfully applies Fredric Jameson's theory of the political unconscious, the essence of which, "like Marx's theory of ideological mystification, is that resolutions in the narrative [or ideological] order depend on resolutions of real contradictions in the social order" (p. 359). For example, Paige argues that part of the unsayable "political unconscious" of the old order was the contradiction that two classes—agro-industrialists and authoritarian landowners—were fused into one unified elite; this contradiction was resolved when the revolutionaries of the 1980s effectively forced a split between the two, which eventuated in the triumph of the agro-industrialists' neoliberal vision in the 1990s.

On the whole, *Coffee and Power* is an excellent book. One might argue, however, that Paige's focus on ideology or "narratives" is misplaced, and that the most interesting parts of the book are the analyses of class relations and politics. Paige seems to sense this, for after his long discussion of the elite's self-perception he asks the important question whether narratives matter at all. "Is there anything that the narratives and their ideological distortions add to our understanding of the transformation of Central American society that is not equally well or better rendered by close attention to the underlying transformations in class relations and politics?" (p. 355). He concludes that there is, that political behavior is not solely an expression of economic interests. He is surely right about this; nevertheless, whether his long exposition of elite ideology is really worth it remains an open question. That aside, the book is fascinating, well worth reading and rereading. It is in the tradition of Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in terms of its materialism, its sophistication, and its profundity.

The Food Wars (2009), by Walden Bello, presents both a damning indictment of the neoliberal world food system and a vision of an alternative system based on small-scale agriculture, which Bello argues can be more efficient, socially responsible, and environmentally sustainable than capitalist industrial farming. Indeed, according to Via Campesina, such alternative agriculture (and hunting and gathering) is responsible for most of the world's food.[1] Not only is it an ideal, therefore; it is an incredibly important reality. However, Bello does not really *theorize* the hoped-for supplanting of corporate monoculture by what he calls "peasant" agriculture; he simply says, or implies, that Marxists have been wrong to predict the end of the peasantry, that instead this category of producers can represent the post-capitalist future. In this paper I will provide some of the theory that is lacking in *The Food Wars*.

In my Master's thesis, entitled *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution: History and Possibilities in the United States*,[2] I tried to update Marxism, specifically its outmoded theory of revolution, so as to explain how a transition to a post-capitalist civilization could occur. The essence of the revision is the replacement of Marx's statist vision—his prediction of a dictatorship of the proletariat that plans and directs social and economic reconstruction from above—by a more grassroots-oriented, quasi-anarcho-syndicalist vision, according to which decentralized [or *relatively* decentralized] networks of workers, farmers, consumers, and communities gradually build up the new society within the shell of the old. Ironically, this anarchist vision is, I think, more compatible with the fundamental tenets of Marxism than Marx's own statism is, for several reasons, of which I will mention two. First, the idea of a state organizing a new, egalitarian mode of production in a society that, after a merely *political* revolution, is still dominated by authoritarian capitalist relations of production, is inexplicable in Marxian terms. According to Marxism, after all, political relations are conditioned by economic relations; the state cannot simply organize a wholly new economy out of thin air, purely by an act of bureaucratic will. That would reverse the order of dominant causality. Given an already existing authoritarian economy (namely capitalism), the "new" economy organized by the post-revolutionary state will necessarily be authoritarian as well, in fact will reproduce many of the

[1] Via Campesina, "Sustainable Peasant and Family Farm Agriculture Can Feed the World" (Jakarta: September 2010), p. 5, at http://viacampesina.org/downloads/pdf/en/paper6-EN-FINAL.pdf.
[2] Available at http://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1020&context=masters_theses.

essential relations of the old economy. This is what happened in the Soviet Union, when the Stalinist bureaucracy organized an economy based on the exploitation of workers, the accumulation of capital, and other essential features of capitalism. Socialism means workers' control of their own economic activity, which is the exact opposite of both capitalism and the Soviet economy. What has to happen, in other words, according to a properly understood Marxism, is that the economy be substantially transformed—in a gradual process—*before* any political revolutions,[1] as was the case during Europe's transition from the feudal to the capitalist mode of production. (The French Revolution, for example, happened after capitalism had already made significant progress in France.) The same will have to be the case with regard to a transition from capitalism to a properly understood socialism.

Second, Marx theorizes social revolution in terms of the "fettering" of productive forces by an obsolete mode of production. As he says in the famous Preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859),

> At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure [of politics, culture, etc.].[2]

This hypothesis is basically true, but it is expressed in a sloppy way that tends to support Marx's invalid statism. It is virtually meaningless to say, as he does, that a specific set of production relations starts to fetter the productive forces at some point in its history, thus finally triggering a revolution that sweeps away the old society—by means of a dictatorship of the proletariat, as Marx says elsewhere. For most or all of its history, the capitalist mode of production has both promoted *and* obstructed the development and socially efficient use of productive forces, by encouraging technological innovation but wasting resources in periodic economic crises, wars, socially useless advertising and marketing campaigns, an inequitable and irrational distribution of wealth, and so on. "Fettering" and "development" can therefore happen simultaneously, in different respects. In order to make any real sense of the notion of fettering, it has to be considered as *relative to* an alternative mode of production emerging within the bowels of the old society, a new set of production relations that is *more* productive and socially rational than the older set. Feudalism fettered, in a sense, the development of productive forces for eons, but it collapsed only when this fettering was *in relation to* a new, more dynamic mode of production, namely capitalism. Similarly, capitalism has in some ways obstructed the development of productive forces for a long time; it will collapse, however, only when it can no longer effectively compete with a more advanced, cooperative mode of production. Then, and only then, can a post-capitalist *political* revolution occur—i.e., after the (gradual) *social* revolution has already reached a fairly mature level.

In short, the approach of Via Campesina, the World Social Forum, and other such organizations to fighting capitalism—their decentralized, federated, grassroots, un-Leninist and un-Maoist approach—is right. Moreover, it is a truly Marxist approach, if Marxism is cleansed of its quasi-Leninist and un-Marxian elements.[3] The notion of peasant activism as having a role to play in a transition from capitalism to socialism is not particularly un-Marxian, as long as it is understood that such activism has to work in tandem with

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[1] [I.e., before any final "seizing of the state."]

[2] Available at http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm.

[3] [I now think I was too hard on so-called "Leninism" in this paper and my thesis. A revolutionary political party can have a positive role to play if it doesn't try to remake the economy from the top down, by bureaucratic fiat as it were. If Leninism entails something like "voluntarism"—attributing immense historical importance to human agency and the leadership principle at a putative "moment of revolution"—that aspect of it is wrong. And I don't like its authoritarian overtones. But it can be understood in more innocuous ways too.]

urban, industrial activism in order really to lead to a new society. It is simplistic, however, to equate peasant agriculture with all small-scale farming, as Walden Bello seems to. A Marxist does not have to be committed to the idea that small-scale farming is doomed or has no role to play in an advanced capitalist or socialist society. All he is committed to is that the explosive growth of capitalism tends, in the very long run, to undermine or destroy feudal class structures and subsistence agriculture. These may persist for long periods of time, and subsistence farming in particular may last in some regions for all of history. It does tend to become less widespread, though, as industrial capitalism conquers the globe—a fact that Bello does not deny. Whether various forms of small-scale agriculture might be essential to the functioning of even late capitalism or socialism is a separate question, to which a Marxist can coherently answer "Yes."

Questions about Marxism aside, Bello is right that the way to a new society is represented by the economic and political activism of the downtrodden classes in all sectors of the economy, be they agriculture, industry, public education (under attack across the West), the service sector, or whatever. The Marxian injunction that "workers" all over the world unite should be understood as referring not only to the industrial proletariat but to the exploited and marginalized of all stripes, non-capitalists in whatever form. Whatever Marx's original intention was, this is the proper understanding of the revolutionary path. If peasants, industrial workers, students, small farmers, the unemployed, environmental activists, victims of discrimination, and dispossessed indigenous peoples all join hands to carve a new economy and politics out of the collapsing ruins of the old, it is possible that humanity will live to see another era.

Indigenous protest movements have in recent decades become regular features of Latin America's political landscape. In *Crude Chronicles: Indigenous Politics, Multinational Oil, and Neoliberalism in Ecuador* (2004), Suzana Sawyer provides a rich ethnography of such resistance in the Ecuadorian province of Pastaza during the 1990s. She focuses on the struggles of the Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Pastaza (OPIP) to defend ancestral lands and communities from the incursions of a neoliberal state in alliance with transnational oil corporations, particularly the Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO). In addition to the state's oil concessions that resulted in destructive outside interference in their social and natural environments, indigenous peoples had to contend with a 1994 revision to the country's agrarian laws that endangered communal holdings and deepened monoculture production. Throughout her account, Sawyer does not stray from her main themes: first, that globalization is not "equalizing, democratizing, and homogenizing" but quite the opposite; second, that it constantly produces oppositional movements that themselves help to shape its trajectories; third, that corporate capital and the state use abstract discourses of liberalism, democracy, and equality to erase history and to neutralize and depoliticize social inequalities; and fourth, that neoliberalism does not entail a reaction against state intervention in society (as is often claimed) but rather a reconfiguration of such intervention so that the state can "relinquish many responsibilities for overseeing the welfare of its citizens" (pp. 16, 116). All these points are both provocative and, in the light of *Crude Chronicles*, surely true.

For the uninitiated reader, Sawyer places the Pastaza Indians' struggles against oil companies and the neoliberal state in their historical context. Texaco exploited oil reserves in the northern provinces of Nabo and Sucumbia from the 1960s to the early 1990s, leaving behind a legacy of environmental destruction. Knowing that their own province would eventually be threatened by oil exploration, Pastaza Indians founded OPIP in 1978 to defend and gain legal title to their lands. This effort culminated in a 1992 march on Ecuador's capital, Quito, which Sawyer is able to describe in detail because she participated in it. Its outcome was that the state granted the Indians communal land title to 55 percent of the territory they claimed, arbitrarily dividing it up into nineteen zones whose boundaries ultimately served to fragment indigenous authority and create new divisions among indigenous peoples. Sawyer gives a nuanced Foucauldian analysis of how this map effectively erased history and culture and fostered new power dynamics through which to "discipline" native resistance.

Less than two years later, in January 1994, Indians again marched to Quito, this time largely in response to recent changes to the Hydrocarbon Law that made the regulatory regime much more friendly to multinational corporations. Just a few months after this, the national government also passed the epochal, business-friendly revision to Ecuador's agrarian laws mentioned above, which inflamed *indigenas* and

campesinos across the country. Thousands occupied transportation routes and set up roadblocks to protest the legislation; their nation-paralyzing action ended only after the president declared a state of emergency nine days later and dispatched the military to quell the protests.

Sawyer, who lived among Pastaza Indians for years and was a trusted companion of OPIP's leaders, relates all these events and many others in a decidedly "interested" way, making her book all the more engaging. Perhaps its most intriguing parts are the descriptions of meetings she attended between representatives of OPIP, ARCO, and the state; she is excellent at exposing the disingenuous tactics used by ARCO to counter OPIP's claims on behalf of native communities. For example, ARCO, which was given an oil concession in Pastaza in 1988, bribed (with school lunches, blankets, plane rides, etc.) a hundred or so natives who lived in the vicinity of its oil-drilling operations to support it against OPIP, which wanted to forge a united front of all *indigenas* against the company. ARCO then denied in meetings with OPIP that it was fomenting divisions between natives, arguing on the contrary that these divisions were merely "democracy at work" (p. 6). It pretended that DICIP—the artificially created group of a few dozen indigenous ARCO-supporters—had as much legitimacy as OPIP, an organization with a long history that represented many thousands of Indians. Sawyer therefore argues that ARCO used the language of democracy and liberalism to deny realities of history and culture.

The state is at least as much of a villain as ARCO in Sawyer's story. Not only does it enable the corporations that wreak havoc in Indians' lives; it uses the very tactics of these corporations to disingenuously claim it is being fair. That is, it uses "the purportedly neutral language of liberal law such that it reinscribe[s] difference and inequality" (p. 183). These tactics are on ample display in the two-week, televised commission that was formed to address Indian grievances against the new agrarian law. On one side (figuratively speaking) is the government and the landed oligarchy, with huge teams of legal advisors; on the other are Indians with a much smaller team of advisors, because many indigenous representatives are simply denied entrance. The government and oligarchy argue that everyone must respect laws equally, exceptions or special laws cannot be made for indigenous groups who want to preserve communal control of land; the *indigenas* argue that particularity, created by history, does exist, that social inequality has created an "uneven playing field" that demands recognition of historical specificities if justice is to be served (p. 194). Needless to say, the outcome of the commission is merely cosmetic change to the new agrarian law.

One of the reasons *Crude Chronicles* is such an enjoyable read is that it fuses analytical history with a compelling narrative. It is a story, told from the intimate perspective of someone who knows the central actors well, of an oppressed group fighting for its rights against sprawling institutions and faceless bureaucrats. Interweaving the narrative, though, is insightful analysis and a sophisticated understanding of the implications of neoliberalism. Sawyer is unquestionably partisan, but sometimes moral imperatives are so clear that partisanship is necessary. In short, *Crude Chronicles* is sure to be of both intellectual and human interest to specialists and non-specialists alike.

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However talented filmmakers are, film itself is inherently an inferior art form—like photography, though for mostly different reasons. Adorno remarked that "Every visit to the cinema, despite the utmost watchfulness, leaves me dumber and worse than before." In part that was directed against the shallowness of "sociability," but it applies to film itself too. In a word, the problem is that when one sits in the dark watching images and sounds flit by, one is forced to be relatively passive. And there is something "instantly gratifying" in a vulgar way about fleeting sounds and images. Even the best movies are....*unreal*, separated from the viewer—a flat screen of *stuff happening* as you sit there looking at it. There is something more interactive and more *real* about theater than film. Also, film is by necessity more *atomizing* than other art forms. People sitting in the dark, each in his own world, looking at electronic images and having noise blared at them, no performers present, no watching the art *enacted right in front of one*, an inorganic-ness....a "splicing together," an artificiality about the situation and the art itself. And then the experience is over and you rub your eyes and try to become active and whole again. It's different from watching plays.

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A New Year's resolution.— The child is father of the man, and the child is still in me. The enthusiasm and hope are still in me. Youth! Desiring change, turning my back on the past, having lived a thousand years but feeling newborn as the days get longer and First Night is here. Christmas presents, shiny new things, books and CDs and clothes, the tuned piano in the living room beckoning me when I walk past, Chicago with its gaiety beckoning me. New shiny clothes to show off, new people to meet. The clothes really do make the man. I'm going to start dressing well, not being as lackadaisical about my appearance as I've always been. Generally I look decent but not particularly classy. I just wear whatever. And that must have a subtle effect on my state of mind. I have good clothes; I'll wear them more often and buy more, and I'll start socializing again after the Zhilan-induced vacation from that. […] It's an easy resolution to maintain, and an intrinsically satisfying one. Looking good, feeling good, feeling young and healthy, reveling—it's wonderful.

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Above I compared 2011 to 1968. But in fact the former has been more revolutionary than the latter. 2011 is just the beginning of something very big; 1968 was, in many ways, basically the end. 2011 was a manifestation primarily of *elemental economic grievances*, even in the Arab world; 1968 was a manifestation largely of the youth's cultural discontent, European universities' dysfunctionality, anti-war sentiment, and, yes, young workers' dissatisfaction with conditions of production. 2011 targeted society's central power-structures, namely big business, especially financial institutions (and, outside the West, political dictators); 1968 was directed against....authority in general. Its diffuseness indicated its political immaturity. The main point is that 2011 was a symptom of a world order's descent into long-term crisis, whereas 1968 was produced by a variety of less systemically portentous developments. 2011 was the beginning of the real revolutionary period (a hundred years long?)[1] of capitalism's decline.

*

Philosophical thinking.— According to the Great Philosopher John Rawls, "…the causes of the wealth of a people and the forms it takes lie in their political culture and in the religious, philosophical, and moral traditions that support the basic structure of their political and social institutions, as well as in the industriousness and cooperative talents of its members, all supported by their political virtues." Jesus Christ. Really? Why do academics always insist on flaunting their naïveté? And why do they have to do it in such a ponderous, easy-to-mock way? Explaining the nature and causes of a people's wealth by....their religious, philosophical, and moral traditions, and their political virtues (all of which *underlie* their political and social institutions). Brilliant. Modes of production and distribution are irrelevant to the accumulation of wealth. –No one is more predictable than an academic.

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Some modern crises of political legitimacy: Western Europe in the mid-seventeenth century; France in the late eighteenth century; Europe in the 1840s; the West and parts of Asia in the 1930s; much of the West in the late 1960s (though to a more limited extent than in previous crises); and North America, Europe, Russia, and the Arab world now. All these periods have been transitions. None has been more important than the one we're embarking on.

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[1] [Are you kidding? It'll be much longer than that!]

Life is not totally "meaningless." People's commitment to their work, to relationships, and to life itself proves that. However, it is hard to deny that life is not as meaningful as we'd like. It is the evolutionary product of "meaningless" random variation and natural selection, not meaningful teleology or some kind of cosmic purpose. The course of an individual's life is molded to a great extent by accidents; his very existence is an utterly improbable accident. No one is as special or valuable as he thinks he is. Whether he is popular or unpopular does not mean what he tends to think it does, that he is (respectively) valuable or not valuable. There is little justice in the world. A person's basic existential project of objectively confirming his self-love—which is ultimately what the desire for "meaning" is all about—is unrealizable. He implicitly wants to be remembered by the world forever, or at least for a very long time, because he thinks that that kind of recognition would make his life more consequential, but he will not be. And even if he were it would not matter, because he'd be dead. His life is organized around illusions, such as that of the durable, permanent substantial self, and of the special value of loved ones, and of the "necessity" of his own existence. His place in the universe is not what he likes to think it is. In the long run and on a broad scale, his achievements are inconsequential. All this is not *meaninglessness*, but it is *insufficient meaningfulness*.

[Another way of saying it is that in wanting life to be "meaningful," people want the world to have value "in itself." Their desire for some kind of recognition from the world (i.e., for self-confirmation)—which is inseparable from their desire to have a meaningful life—is also inseparable from their implicit belief that the world has value. (We want recognition only from things or people to which/whom we attribute value.) But it doesn't. Nothing has value in itself; its value comes from the subject, in other words from us.[1] The world and life itself have *no* "intrinsic value," whatever that means, which is to say they are essentially meaningless. Thus, the human project, viz. the urge for self-confirmation, is, from at least one perspective (in fact several), fundamentally deluded. It presupposes that there is some *value* in "confirming" oneself, in objectifying one's self-love, in making it a part of reality (so to speak), which itself presupposes that reality or the world has some sort of "objective value," which it doesn't. In any case, the notion of objectifying one's self-love[2] is nonsensical, because *freedom* and *value* are necessarily *subjective* things.[3]]

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My repetition-compulsion.— Despite the conventional wisdom, Max Weber was susceptible to materialism. For example, he thought that "rational economic practices emerged in Europe precisely within the context of an epistemologically antirational religious tradition" (*The Myth of Continents*, pp. 83, 84). Rational intellectual traditions therefore followed in the wake of economic developments. It could not have been otherwise, in fact, since people and institutions (practices) with the most resources will tend to propagate throughout society their way of doing things. Economic practices, of course, have always been supported by the most resources (since they pertain directly to the accumulation of wealth), and so are effectively the foundation of society. How is it possible this can still be doubted?

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[1] I should clarify that we ourselves don't *have* value (whatever that would mean); we *give* things value. [On an unrelated topic: morality is based on the assumption that humans have value, which, from a strictly rational point of view, they don't and can't. Morality itself, therefore, is not "true" somehow but just a human invention, an "imaginary" thing, as I've said before. It's definitely a *good* thing (for us), though, and we should heed it despite its imaginary nature.]

[2] Which, to quote myself, "is ultimately what the desire for 'meaning' is all about."

[3] More exactly, from *one* perspective it's nonsensical to "objectify" or "confirm" your self-love. From another perspective, though, it isn't; we do it constantly. We project our self-love into, and through, our activities and interactions with others, thereby in some sense actualizing it or objectifying it. But the goal of putting your self-love into the world so that it stays there, so to speak, i.e. so that the world from then on reflects to everyone "Chris's value!" or something like that—something that can be *read into* the world—is nonsensical, though we all desire it (implicitly). What we desire, in other words, is to overcome the boundaries between self and world, self and other. That's what it all boils down to, the desire for meaning and everything else. But it's impossible, indeed meaningless.

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I've always suspected that people give too much credit to ancient Greeks. They couldn't have been as divinely original as we're taught. Lynda Schaffer's article "Southernization" (1994) and Martin Bernal's famous book *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (of which I'm reading only a few dozen pages) validate my suspicions. Their broader points—perhaps watered down a bit—are fairly obvious, though. Greece was hugely influenced by the Semitic, Indian, and Egyptian peoples, and by the Near East in general. This was acknowledged by the Greeks themselves, who actually thought their culture was the result of colonization by Egyptians and Phoenicians around 1500 B.C. But let's admit that the Greeks were indeed original in some respects; they're not the only ones. Far from it. Think of the Sumerians, the Indus Valley civilization, the ancient Egyptians, the so-called Semitic peoples, the Chinese, the Indians, the Romans in a few ways, the medieval Arabs somewhat, later Europeans, and Americans. And those are only the most obvious examples. Anyway, it's silly; all societies are original in their own way, though admittedly some make greater contributions than others (due largely to their integration in extensive economic networks, borrowing from other peoples, etc.). As for Europeans proudly seeing the Greeks as their ancestors, that is at best a half-truth. Even the Romans are not direct ancestors—or, insofar as they are, it is by the mediation of an un-Roman (and un-Hellenic) institution, the Church. [In fact, Christianity itself comes from the Near East!] In any case, Europeans who say that their civilization derives from the Greeks are also saying it derives from the Phoenicians, the Egyptians, Indians, the Orient in general. That happens to be true, by the way. Barbaric Europe had to be "southernized" and "easternized" (to an extent) before it could "westernize" the rest of the world. See Schaffer's article, and common sense.

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A long time ago I quoted an author on the Hellenistic origins of Christianity, how it was just one of many mystery religions proliferating in the time of Christ. Jerry Bentley, in *Old World Encounters*, adds some tidbits on how the Judaic tradition was influenced by Zoroastrianism. "Zoroastrian doctrine promised personal salvation and eternal life to individuals who observed the commandments to think good thoughts, speak good words, and perform good acts." "Zoroastrianism was more a national or ethnic faith than a missionary religion. Even without benefit of active proselytization, though, Zoroastrian beliefs and values exercised a remarkably wide influence. Post-exilic Jews adopted and adapted many elements of Zoroastrian belief—including notions that a savior would arrive and aid mortal humans in their struggle against evil; that individual souls would survive death, experience resurrection, and face judgment and assignment to heaven or hell; and that the end of time would bring a monumental struggle between the supreme creator god and the forces of evil, culminating in the establishment of the kingdom of god on earth and the entry of the righteous into paradise. Many of these elements appear clearly in the Book of Daniel, composed about the middle of the second century B.C.E., and they all influenced the thought of the Jewish Pharisees. Indeed, in its original usage, the term *Pharisee* very likely meant 'Persian'—that is, a Jew of the sect most open to Persian influence. It goes without saying that early Christians also reflected the influence of these same Zoroastrian beliefs. Some scholars hold that Zoroastrian appeal extended even into India, where the notion of personal salvation would have influenced the early development of the Mahayana school of Buddhism." Fascinating! Zoroastrianism lives on through Judaism, Mahayana Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam! The "Judeo-Christian tradition" is really, in some respects, the "Zoroastrian-Judeo-Christian tradition." The "West" derives largely from the "East"—although lately the East has been remade by its contact with the West.

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On Edward Said.— The gist of *Orientalism* is surely true. It's almost a truism, in fact, and has therefore been treated as revolutionary or highly controversial by postmodern intellectuals. (The book's

emphasis on high-cultural "discourses" also marks it as important in the eyes of intellectuals, who traffic in discourses.) Writers, artists, and policymakers in "the West," from ancient Greece to the twentieth century,[1] have tended to "essentialize" Arab and Islamic societies, oversimplify them, caricature them, present them as a feminized and inferior "Other." That has been one way in which Western elites, especially in modern times, have defined themselves (as exemplars of the West, the dynamic and active West) and have justified their economic and cultural imperialism. This should have been obvious to any thinking person by the 1970s—and therefore probably *wasn't* to most intellectuals, until Said came along. It is also true, however, that every major society in history has exhibited tendencies to essentialize, oversimplify, caricature, etc. other societies, just as individuals are often guilty of self-overestimating oversimplifications in their judgments of other people. It is a pronounced tendency of the human mind, this urge to simplify and to reduce the other to particular, often *negative* qualities instead of appreciating the human ambiguity and multiplicity of his or her character.

On the other hand, some abstractions and generalizations are grounded in fact, are objectively justifiable. Individuals and societies do exhibit tendencies—such as the one I just mentioned—and it's justifiable to characterize them on the basis of such patterns. It is also necessary, given that we have to *talk*, and that talking necessitates abstracting. Nietzsche and thinkers before him—probably all the way back to antiquity—already argued that language "lies" in this way, although to characterize it as lying is misleading. Postmodernism is certainly not original in its obscure recognition of this truth. Whether Arab and Islamic societies have exhibited some of the patterns that Orientalizing writers ascribe to them is another question, to which the answer in many cases (though not all) is probably no.

To return to Said: while I admire his devotion to the Palestinian cause, I'm not impressed by his thought. His rejection of Marxism, his (partial) adherence to postmodernism, his ambivalence toward the Enlightenment.... It's all confused and silly. From the criticisms I've read, *Orientalism* itself was ironically simplistic and essentializing (of the so-called West). While he made a few good theoretical points and had suggestive intuitions, Said just wasn't a rigorous thinker.[2]

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It’s funny that people often deprecate Marxian materialism as an explanation of society and human behavior, given that virtually no one cares much about ideas. People *think* they do, but basically they’re wrong. They insist that ideas, ideological motivations, and spiritual matters are very important to people....but then proceed to ignore them in their lives. Just listen to humans talk and you’ll see they’re essentially unfamiliar with ideas and don’t think about them very often. Their understanding of the world is utterly superficial; their ideological commitments exist mainly on the level of *words*; quotidian personal interests are what preoccupy them. Food, money, success, power, relationships, entertainment, etc. Every so often religion or politics will come up in conversation and people will get strangely animated for a few minutes, but that isn’t very significant. Anyway, most of the time a person’s commitments to certain ideas, such as they are, derive from their reflection of his interests, or their being a sublimation of his interests. *Some* selflessness might be involved—and with many people that’s a very important element—but even then, of course, the ideas are merely abstract reifications and “universalizations” of concrete interests or feelings or modes of interaction with others. But I’ve strayed from my original point.

I’d also note, incidentally, that often when people object to “ideas” they’re really objecting to changing their way of *doing* things. Religious conservatives oppose reformers in large part because they’re used to doing things (rituals) a certain way, and the thought of changing that makes them profoundly uncomfortable. The human mind/brain, after all, like that of other animals, is a pretty “conservative” thing: it finds comfort, so to speak, in patterns, habits, routines, rituals repeated again and again, such that encountering or doing new things can be very disturbing. Not always, especially not in the case of children (although observe how they react upon meeting strangers or when their parents force them, for whatever

[1] But probably less so between the end of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance.
[2] See, for example, Aijaz Ahmad’s *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (1992).

reason, to change some habit or discard some toy they're used to). Curiosity and *learning* can be a source of great pleasure. But changing one's behavior or attitudes is hard, sometimes impossible. Sartre notwithstanding, the self is not "free" in this way.

*

The evolution of European political absolutism, not surprisingly, was ironic. Initially it was useful to the rising bourgeoisie, as the latter was useful to it, in both the bourgeoisie's and the monarchy's struggle against the feudal aristocracy. The monarch could act in the interest of merchants and other capitalists in order to increase his tax base and wealth (through trade and budding industry), as well as to diminish the power of feudal interests relative to his own and that of a class (or classes) opposed to feudalism. In fact, you could probably say that absolutism depended on large-scale mercantile activities and the latter (on a large scale) depended on absolutism, or at least on a powerful sovereign. But then capitalists—of various kinds, including commercial, financial, and industrial—accumulated more and more wealth and became more central to the social order, and they wanted more political power, and their demands started to threaten absolutism. The population meanwhile was getting restless for reasons related to the rise of capitalism (commercial and proto-industrial) and the state's sponsorship of it. In the end, the absolutist state turned back towards the aristocracy as an ally in its struggles against the people and the bourgeoisie (and its "representatives," such as most intellectuals), but it was too late. Absolutism was doomed, and it collapsed. The bourgeoisie was ultimately the progressive force; absolutism was progressive only in relation to the feudal aristocracy, not to the bourgeoisie.

All this relates to the *logic* of the history, not necessarily to every act by all the major actors. I have to state that obvious caveat because postmodernists will inevitably try to "problematize" my summary, find counterexamples and use them to triumphantly declare me wrong. (The postmodern mind always tries to deny "general" truths.)

*

One of the innumerable examples of most "humanistic" academics' lack of intellectual seriousness is their readiness to cast the aspersion "Teleological!" at you if you suggest there might be some kind of reason in history. No one ever explains why even a soft variant of "teleology" is necessarily false. Actually, the charge doesn't have much content; it is basically a value-judgment. Postmodernists simply have a visceral aversion to statements like "Things were almost inevitably going to happen in such and such a way," maybe because that sort of statement seems to sneak in a notion of "progress" that supposedly justifies posterity's "enormous condescension" for historical losers, i.e. legitimizes the terrible fates of massive numbers of people all over the world and "naturalizes" Europe's rise, even makes it seem *morally* good. All this is nonsense, of course. It is as nonsensical as accusing someone who recognizes that biological facts make it highly, *highly* probable that any given society will valorize masculinity over femininity,[1] of claiming that masculinity *should* be valued more than femininity. "Is" doesn't imply "ought." Not every notion of historical "progress" has to understand progress in a *moral* sense. History is an absurd tragedy, and progress, i.e. history's movement, is in itself neither good nor bad. Or rather, it is both good and bad. Any moderately perceptive analyst of history will recognize that sometimes the future *is* "present," so to speak, in its past, in the sense that it is made inevitable or nearly inevitable by it. (See the last chapter of my M.A. thesis.) Actually, maybe that Hegelian claim—that the future is somehow implicit in the past and reveals its "truth" or "meaning" (for the past can be fully understood only in the light of the future)—doesn't presuppose inevitability.... I'm getting confused.... It's very difficult to parse the idea that

[1] Even in matriarchal and matrilineal societies, people effectively *treat* women (in daily life) as more "weak" than men. Ideologically women may be objects of reverence or some such thing....but that still makes them the second sex, the "other." And Maurice Godelier remarks that "in the last analysis" it is likely that men have always "occupied the summit of the power hierarchy."

historical processes have a logic, but they unquestionably do, as retrospective analyses show. (What sort of logic? How deterministic is the logic? On what level of historical "abstraction" or "generality" does the logic operate? What is the relation between the logic and the contingencies of daily events? Etc.)

By the way, the postmodernist's determination to see veiled value-judgments in claims that are strictly factual, and in particular to see attacks on himself or some group of people with which he identifies or sympathizes, is indicative of a somewhat totalitarian mindset. To quote Chomsky (from a different context): "The sign of a truly totalitarian culture is that important truths simply lack cognitive meaning and are interpretable only at the level of 'Fuck You,' so they can then elicit a perfectly predictable torrent of abuse in response." The totalitarianism of radical postmodernists is beautifully ironic, and beautifully predictable. —But these people, after all, are a product of their culture, their paranoid, hypersensitive, suspicious, atomized culture.

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One of the things that sets Chomsky apart is the degree to which he is not a decadent. He seems to float above his culture, as it were. Or, better: he is a rock. I'm much more of a decadent than he, though less so than most people.[1]

*

Marxism applied to South American "Indian" society.— On pre-Columbian social relations in the Andes, Steve Stern says, "Reciprocity among a community of producer-relatives constituted the central institution or relationship governing the production of material life in local society." He goes on to say this: "A society's fundamental relations of production tend to generate a particular kind of ethos, world view, and set of values. In Andean society, the mutual obligations of reciprocally related 'brothers' of the community pervaded local values and lifeways. As we have seen, Andean notions of justice or vengeance were closely related to a concept of 'balanced' exchange among those paired together for a purpose, whatever the latent conflicts between them. Andean peoples understood and judged their relationships with themselves, their chiefs, and their ancestor-gods in these terms. Andean ideas of morality and wrongdoing expressed judgments about the quality of reciprocal relationships of mutual obligation, rather than adherence to abstract rules of behavior."

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An exchange with Chomsky.— Though I'm ashamed to admit it, I haven't read many of the philosophical texts from the 17th and 18th centuries. I don't know how that's possible, but it's true. I'm appallingly ignorant. When I have time, I'll remedy that. Meanwhile, I sent Chomsky an email a few days ago:

> Professor Chomsky,
>
> I heard you say in a talk recently that empiricists such as Locke and Hume accepted the existence in human minds of "internal structures" (or something along those lines); they didn't think that *everything* comes from sensory experience. No doubt you're right. I'm just curious, then, how you would define classical empiricism. [....]

[1] In my defense, someone raised in leftist cultural milieux of the 1930s and '40s was much less likely to evince "decadent" traits [i.e., cultural pollution] than someone raised in the postmodern culture of recent decades. Look at David Foster Wallace, for example, who was almost a *complete* decadent.

Would you say that this paragraph from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy's* entry on the subject is a bit simplistic?—"The dispute between rationalism and empiricism concerns the extent to which we are dependent upon sense experience in our effort to gain knowledge. Rationalists claim that there are significant ways in which our concepts and knowledge are gained independently of sense experience. Empiricists claim that sense experience is the ultimate source of all our concepts and knowledge."

Thanks!

Don't know what you're quoting. I've written about the topic often. There's no doubt that Locke and Hume assumed internal structure to the mind – they were not lunatics, which is the only alternative. In Hume it's quite explicit. A core part of his philosophical psychology is that a good part of our knowledge comes to us "from the original hand of nature" – what we'd nowadays call "genetic endowment." In practice Locke made quite rich assumptions of this kind, e.g., in his careful analysis of the notion *person*, relying on notions of unity of consciousness and the like, which obviously don't derive from sensory experience. As Leibniz pointed out at once, Locke's *reflection* opened the door to rich innate structure.

It's difficult to distinguish empiricism from rationalism, because they overlapped so much. Take, say, Locke's famous refutation of innate ideas. It's OK in itself, but it doesn't even address the Cartesian notion of innate ideas (basically dispositional, like susceptibility to disease). And of course rationalists assumed reliance on sensory experience. That's why Descartes broke with custom and dissected sheep, etc. I think they should be regarded as different tendencies in the history of thought. In print, I've suggested abstracting leading ideas that contrast and calling them R and E, so as not to make factually false claims about a complex tradition.

I don't think the definition you cite is consistent with the texts, but it can be taken as a kind of idealization, of the R-E sort. Maybe useful, as long as what it is is recognized.

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With regard to the period between the 1530s and 1640s, Steve Stern divides the economic system that prevailed in the area around the city of Huamanga in Peru—and, by extension, the system in much of Spanish Latin America—into three stages. The first, lasting until the 1570s, was dominated by *encomenderos* and priests who pioneered relationships with local Andean societies. (An encomendero was a "Spanish colonizer in whose charge the Crown 'entrusted' Indians, from whom the encomendero could collect tribute and labor services in exchange, presumably, for tending to the natives' spiritual and material welfare." This system of encomiendas—a term that denotes the grant of Indians to an encomendero—was, as you see, quasi-feudal.) "Colonials [i.e., the Europeans] depended greatly upon uneasy alliances with ethnic societies and their chiefs to secure the labor and goods they needed: labor for construction, transport, mines, textile manufactures, artisanry, agriculture, and ranching, and goods ranging from precious metals to basic foodstuffs to an enormous variety of handicrafts." In the 1560s this system started to break down under Indian resistance to Europeans' demands for larger and more stable supplies of labor to work newly discovered mines. Also, radical Indian politico-religious movements threatened Spanish power. The colonial state was too weak to do much about these problems until the viceroy Toledo stepped in in the 1570s and reorganized the whole economic, political, and social system. He made the state much stronger, in fact instituted a "state form of extraction" defined by tributes and the *mita*, a "colonial forced-labor draft institution providing rotations of native laborers to selected beneficiaries of the state." "The mitas,

especially, made it possible to mine and refine large quantities of mercury and silver, to manufacture textiles in *obrajes* [i.e., workshops] employing the labors of a hundred or more Indians each, and to advance commercial agriculture and ranching." Again, though, Indian resistance—and population decline—eventually caused major problems. "Huamanga's native peoples adapted to the rise of state-sponsored extraction by engaging in aggressive, persistent, often shrewd use of Spanish juridical institutions to lower legal quotas [for tributes and mitas], delay delivery of specific corvées and tributes, disrupt production, and the like. Threatened with instability, legal entanglements, and a growing squeeze on their labor supply, elites had to resort to alternatives that might shield them from judicial politics, and assure more direct control over a clientele of laborers and dependents."

By 1630 or 1640, therefore, *private* forms of exploitation had grown more important. "*Yanaconaje* [i.e., "an institution of long-term personal bondage attaching [retainers or serfs] to masters"] and other forms of peonage, wage labor and work contracts, extralegal tributes and corvées arranged through [Spanish magistrates] or other functionaries—these, along with African slavery, represented the dynamic, growing forces of the early seventeenth century." All three of these forms of economic exploitation, even the "private" form (except when it involved wage-labor), bore distinct resemblances to feudalism and/or slavery.

"The labor system which matured in early seventeenth-century Huamanga thus differed sharply from the one with which the colonials began. Exploitation had evolved in three distinct stages, and in each case the transition from one phase to the next bore witness to the impact of native resistance on colonial policies and strategies. In the 1560s, Indian activity led to a crisis of the colonial system as a whole.... In the 1570s a powerful reformist state rescued the colonials and launched a new era of political control and economic prosperity. A half-century later, Indian resistance no longer threatened European hegemony or the social and economic structure as a whole. But conflict had continued, and native activity created a labor problem which, again, forced elites to modify social and economic strategies. Shortages, bottlenecks, and disruptions affecting specific enterprises, rather than a generalized crisis of colonial rule and extraction, rendered official Toledan institutions obsolete, and spurred a further evolution in Huamanga's history of labor."

Brilliant Marxism.

....Incidentally, the conventional narrative that Spaniards came in, destroyed Indian society wholesale, and built their own colonial structures on top of the ruins is simplistic. Traditional kinship structures and forms of social organization persisted for a long time; the colonials used them to organize the extraction of surplus labor. By the late sixteenth century, incipient class contradictions in Indian society—between chiefs and their kinfolk, for example, and between a small Indian elite and the peasant majority—were growing, such that some natives were in a "contradictory class location," sharing certain interests with the colonial system that gave them a degree of power and wealth and other interests with their peasant kinfolk who were harshly exploited. But it took a very long time for colonial expropriations and the burgeoning commercial economy to so undermine the self-sufficiency of local Indian societies that traditional structures disintegrated. (By the early seventeenth century their slow disintegration was very visible but by no means remotely complete.)

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Janet Abu-Lughod is probably right that industrial capitalism would not have arisen in Europe, certainly not when it did, had not the "discovery" of the Americas facilitated primitive capital accumulation and, later, the production of raw cotton to be worked up by English laborers. In general, exogenous factors obviously contributed to Europe's rise. On the other hand, I find it hard to believe that if the Chinese, Indians, or Arabs had discovered the Americas between, say, the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, industrial capitalism would have subsequently (within a few centuries) spread over their lands. For one thing, these peoples were not as savage as Europeans. Given the nature of their societies, it is unlikely that they would have barbarously slaughtered, plundered, and exploited Amerindians for the sake of extracting surplus, or transferred millions of Africans to the Americas and put them to work on plantations and in

mines. In the early modern period, Europe was a savage place continually at war with itself. Why? Largely because of its political fragmentation and parcelized sovereignty—together with the attempts of emerging states to triumph over this political fragmentation and parcelized sovereignty, to subordinate foreign and local powers to themselves. To do that, among other things they had to protect and encourage manufacturing and trading in cities and abroad, since this ultimately increased their own wealth and power. The accumulation of surplus (and use of it to increase power in a very competitive environment) was a driving, overriding political and economic imperative; unprecedented institutionalized brutality—soon enacted all over the world—was the means by which to carry it out.

In other words, the emergence of the nation-state [which wasn't fully accomplished even in Western Europe until the beginning of the twentieth century] was an essential cause of the rise of Europe (even before the Industrial Revolution, and to an extent even before the Americas had really started to show their potential). No such entity was emerging elsewhere, or at least not a cluster of such entities in a relatively small continental area that impelled them all to fight savagely for their survival and power. Like most old insights, this insight is still profound.

—I might almost say it would have been hard for the capitalist mode of production to become the dominant mode *anywhere* in the absence of political competition approximately analogous to that that existed in medieval and early modern Europe. Otherwise states and other powerful entities (e.g. feudal landowners and warlords) would have had little incentive, at least no *pressing* incentive, to not only tolerate but encourage the rise of relatively autonomous cities and manufacturing/trading/artisanal classes that could in the future potentially threaten the power of the entities that had initially supported them. This, of course, is what finally happened in Europe—proving that the Chinese state was, in a sense, wise never to have let urban areas and proto-capitalist classes gain substantial autonomy and accumulate enormous power vis-à-vis the state. In Europe, the bourgeoisie and its intellectual hangers-on (descendants of earlier burghers, etc.) had by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—even earlier, in some places—so gained the advantage over the *ancien régime* that they could, in conjunction with popular social movements, undermine and eventually topple the old order to remake society in ways more congenial to unfettered capital accumulation and bourgeois political power. See my M.A. thesis for more speculations along these lines.

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Read this, please.— It's unpleasant to know that a lot of people who read this journal will consider me a misogynist. *Me*, the guy who loves women like John Keats did! In truth, *context* is what matters. If I made all these observations about women in "appropriate" contexts, even most feminists wouldn't find me particularly offensive. For example, if you and I were observing women, especially young women, talking to each other or to men and I pointed out the significance of their mannerisms, modes of speaking, body language, etc.—i.e., if I invoked all those old stereotypes about women that, if qualified, contain a lot of truth—you would almost certainly "understand" my opinions or even agree with me. If you were an "educated" woman you might get a little defensive, but after I disarmed your defenses by insisting, truthfully, that I'm not "judging" women, that in many ways the stereotypes indirectly indicate *strengths*, that there's nothing wrong with acting "naturally" as long as it doesn't hurt other people, you would, I think, eventually concede my points. (Maybe you'd plead "Social constructions!", and to an extent you'd be right, but not entirely. Humans aren't *tabula rasas*.) Incidentally, I could play the same game with men—in which case I *would* be implicitly expressing mild contempt for them, justifiably or not. But *written down*, my opinions come across as offensive and untrue. Because all you see is the *words* and not the "dynamic reality" that animates them.

By the way, Chomsky argues in "The View Beyond: Prospects for the Study of Mind" that there is no legitimate scientific reason to be interested in differences between people arising out of their different races or sexes. Suppose it turns out, he says, that "a person of a particular race, on the average, is likely to have a slightly higher IQ than a person of another race. Notice first [he continues] that such a conclusion would have null scientific interest. It is of no interest to discover a correlation between two traits selected at random, and if someone happens to be interested in this odd and pointless question, it would make far

more sense to study properties that are much more clearly defined, say, length of fingernails and eye color. But here, it is clear that the discovery is of interest only to people who believe that each individual must be treated not as what he or she is but rather as an example of a certain category (racial, sexual, or whatever). To anyone not afflicted with these disorders, it is of zero interest whether the average value of IQ for some category of persons is such-and-such....” He is perfectly right with regard to race. Even if there are slight differences (say, in athletic ability) between “average” people of different races, that is of essentially no interest. Race shouldn’t even really *register* with you in your daily life. It does, unfortunately, with everyone, including Chomsky, but the less it does, the better. In any case, history has shown it to be such a dangerous area that science should stay far away from it. *Sex* is another matter, though. No one treats women and men exactly the same, as Chomsky implicitly demands in his argument; everyone is “afflicted with the disorder” of caring about sexual difference. In fact, it would be terrible and immoral *not* to treat women and men somewhat differently. If a man acted around women the way he acted around men—if that were *possible*!—he would probably end up hurting their feelings or making them hate him. Men have to be careful how they act around women, in order to be respectful. Moreover, sexual differences are so much more substantial and evolutionarily meaningful than racial differences that they *are* scientifically interesting—which is why so many scientists study them. Are they all “sexists”? Well, yes, insofar as everyone is.

Chomsky’s complete lack of decadence, the fact that he is an absolutely consistent classical liberal, helps account for whatever intellectual shallowness he exhibits. His liberal idealism is so extreme that he refuses to write or speak about the messiness of human psychology, the moral messiness and “illiberalism” of nature. A little decadence can lead to greater understanding.

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The proper way to think about Republicans and Democrats is as follows. The Republican party is just a *slave* to conservative sectors of big business. As Chomsky says, it isn’t any longer even a true party, a coalition of diverse interests; it is just a tool of the very wealthy (who are often religious conservatives—which is the “other” set of interests the party is commonly thought of as representing). The Democratic party is not quite a slave to big business; it is more like a serf, who on the day or two when he doesn’t have to slave for the lord can do some work on behalf of the other interests he is supposed to represent, such as women, the poor, minorities, immigrants, workers, consumers, the youth, future generations (hence environmentalism and nuclear disarmament), the rule of law, and the cause of internationalism. Most of the time these other interests get short shrift, but every so often the serf will throw them a bone, like he would to a dog.

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Part of an email I sent a girl: “Well, I'm not sure you're thinking about it in the right way. I don't think mankind has to rise above its "inherently selfish" desires. I don't agree with that whole "human nature is selfish, greedy, etc." argument. As Chomsky says, human nature is not any *one* thing like that; it "contains multitudes" (to quote Whitman). Human nature is such that people can be kind, compassionate, self-sacrificing, heroic, devoted to the common good—*as well as* selfish, greedy, and so on. There are all kinds of possibilities. Which possibilities are actualized depends, to a large degree, on the social context. In the context of capitalism, greed and selfishness are going to be rewarded because that's how you get ahead. In other social contexts, compassion and devotion to the common good could be rewarded, and so people would act in less selfish ways than they do nowadays. The task isn't for *individuals* to overcome their "inherently selfish" desires; it is for *social movements* to overturn the *institutional facilitators* of greed and selfishness. Your individualistic perspective is wrong. In order to defeat selfishness [at least to *some* extent], people first have to come together to destroy the economic institutions that reward selfishness. Such "coming together" isn't a terribly hard thing to imagine; it happens all the time. In the Arab Spring, for example.”

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What does it mean to say that some particular act is the *right* thing to do? Is there any determinate meaning to that statement? Yes, as I have implied before. What it has to mean is that such-and-such an act logically follows from certain values in conjunction with a description of the given situation. Implicit in the judgment—or rather in the act of expressing it to someone—is that you *should* hold such-and-such values, and that in fact you probably *do* hold those values. If I say to you, "The right thing to do would be to help that blind man cross the street," I mean that given your and my values (which I'm also saying are *good* values), we are committed to helping him cross the street on pain of being inconsistent with ourselves. You, however, are perfectly free to deny that you share my values or that my values are good. There is nothing "irrational" or "false" about such a denial,[1] except insofar as it might conflict with some other value(s) you hold, in which case one could argue it is irrational. But no question of falsity, or lack of correspondence with reality, can arise in discussions of values, because there is no "reality" to which value-judgments could possibly refer [or could represent or "express"]. They are nothing but manifestations of subjectivity.

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Sent Chomsky another email: "I'm curious what your thoughts are on the philosophical issue of causation. Have you ever written about it? Do you think (with Hume and Kant, I suppose) that reason is inadequate to fully understand it? Is it just one of those inexplicable mysteries, comparable in that respect to free will? -For instance, it would seem as though a cause would have to be either temporally prior to or coincident with its effect. But with regard to the latter possibility, one is inclined to ask, "How could something *cause* something else if they happen at the *same time—together*, so to speak?" And with regard to the former possibility, the question arises of what the time lapse is between the cause and effect. Even if it's infinitesimal, though, the question can be posed: how could the cause give rise to an effect *after* the cause has ceased to function? Shouldn't the effect be brought about while the cause is still functioning? But then we're led back to the first question. In short, the whole issue is paradoxical." He agreed that those were good questions but said he had nothing new or interesting to say about them.

It's possible there is something sophistical about the paradox, but I can't quite put my finger on it. One thing that seems necessary is to distinguish between different kinds of causality.

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In a book I'm reading, the author refers to the "classic sociological [phenomenon of] 'labeling' (the idea that as you call people criminals or deviants, they start to act that way)." In the past I've speculated on the psychological reasons for this interesting fact, and while I forget most of what I said, I'm sure it was unnecessarily abstruse. The real reasons aren't hard to think of. If somebody praises you, likes you, respects you, you tend to want to act in such a way that he'll keep liking and respecting you. Actually, two things are operative: you want to be *worthy* of his respect (to the extent that you value him), *and* you want him to keep respecting you. These desires are connected but not identical. What's happening is that the person who respects you is instantiating, to a degree, the abstract other in your consciousness; in turn, the abstract other is, to that extent, consisting of an internalization of that person. In other words, you have (at least temporarily) taken that person into yourself, to the degree that you value him and his opinion of you; therefore, to that degree, his respect for you entails or equates to your respect for yourself. You want to keep respecting yourself in that way, so you want to continue to be *worthy* of *his* respect—for the sake of the "abstract other," as it were. At the same time, of course, you want the *actual person* to keep respecting you. All these considerations, incidentally, help explain how it is that humans can be so easily socialized into new roles. They want people's approval, etc.

[1] [Unless, of course, you're lying about your values. But that's a different kind of falsity than I meant.]

Now the opposite case: if somebody *disrespects* you, claims you're a criminal or a deviant, you're going to try to shut him out of your mind, i.e. devalue him yourself. You'll try not to care what he thinks of you. In which case you might very well ignore or flout his values. "Fuck him," you implicitly say to yourself. "If he thinks I'm contemptible, fuck him, I don't care. I'll do what I want." If "he" is in fact *society*, or rather society's mainstream institutions and spokespeople, then a predictable result will be that you flout society's values. Your need to be (or to pretend to be) contemptuous of someone or something that is contemptuous of you will quite possibly manifest itself that way.

That isn't the only factor, though. There is also the element of "suggestion." Sometimes people act in disreputable or undignified ways because that's the easiest way for them to get *some* kind of "approval" from others, some kind of attention. If people think you're a buffoon, for example, you might try to make them laugh by *intentionally* acting like a buffoon. That might be the only way you can get at least a degraded kind of approval from them. Besides, it is simply *easier* to fulfill people's low expectations of you. It is extraordinarily difficult to change who you are, even minimally; if you try to do so you'll almost certainly be terribly disappointed with yourself, thereby damaging your self-esteem even more. People probably implicitly know this, so they rarely even *try* to change (i.e. in order to "prove them wrong"). They accept low self-esteem by accepting their other-imposed identity, rather than pushing themselves into even *lower* self-esteem by trying to *change*—infinitely hard work! (in part because it requires that you *directly confront* your self-dissatisfaction)—and *failing*.

Also, the more you're criticized by "respectable" people, the more tempted you'll be to seek out a different social circle, a circle that accepts you. If it includes "unrespectable" people, well then you'll start to *really* become that way yourself. This factor is surely important in the case of many rebellious teenagers. Alternatively, you might try to escape from a world that disrespects you by turning to drugs and alcohol, so "confirming" the world's opinion of you.

Aside from these psychological considerations, there is the fact that a society that devalues a group of people usually forces them into the margins, into marginal (or disrespected) occupations or physical spaces, where they have little choice but to act in "deviant" ways.

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As you know, I'm not a great fan of Foucault. I'll admit, though, that he can be useful as a symbol of certain intellectual tendencies, somewhat like Marx is. The latter was not totally original, but he is useful in having brought together a mass of important ideas, some of which were already in circulation before him. Foucault is like a pale version of that. His "image" draws attention to the modern state's regulation of the body, of sexuality, of discourses, of social deviants and their punishment. More generally, his image highlights the social construction of various features of life,[1] and the pervasion of power-relations throughout society. To an extent, all these ideas are truistic; moreover, they predate him. And his expositions of them are confused, obscure, and sloppy. Nonetheless, sure, it can be useful to associate them with a single thinker.

[In a sense, Foucault was lucky: his preoccupations coincided with those of emerging social movements in the 1960s and 1970s. The sexual revolution, feminism, gay rights, interest in prisons and prison reform, etc. More accurately, he was astute enough to see that materialist politics was on the wane and that a writer who wanted recognition should embrace "post-Marxism."]

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[1] Let's not forget to take this postmodernist logic to its self-defeating conclusion: the image of Foucault as enormously important, as very original, etc., is itself a social construction, in fact a myth. The academic discourse about him is indeed a much purer example of the tainted social construction of knowledge than contemporary science is! Beautiful, magnificent irony.

Irony no. 479,853.— The U.S.'s drug war, which really began in the Progressive era, used to be directed against drugs. The suppression of the drug trade was the goal. Its dramatic intensification in the 1970s and 1980s coincided with its catastrophic failure, which coincided with its unqualified success as determined by a new set of standards. Aside from being an excellent way for the powerful, especially conservatives, to frighten the public, increase their authoritarian control over society, and get more votes—which it had always been, to some extent—the drug war became a wonderful excuse to do two things: throw economically redundant people, potential troublemakers, into prison, which then allowed corporations to profit off their cheapened labor; and intervene in the affairs of Latin American countries so as to suppress rebellious political movements. This latter function also had the benefit of giving the government revenue, through arms-sales. While the prison-industrial complex is a horrific failure from the moral and social points of view, it is such a magnificent success from *power*'s point of view that it will continue growing for the foreseeable future.

*

The parallels between the English Revolution that began in 1640 and the French Revolution are striking. The two most obvious are the decapitation of the king and the declaration of a republic. But if you delve into the two events you'll see many more parallels.[1] That isn't surprising, after all, since the fifty years between 1640 and 1689 did for England largely what the sixty years between 1789 and 1848 did for France.[2] (Another obvious parallel is the Restoration of the monarchy in both countries. And, before that, the accession to power of a dictatorial military genius.)

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Here is a one-sentence summary of the origins, trajectory, and outcome of the American Revolution: it "ended in reaction as the Founding Fathers used race, nation, and citizenship to discipline, divide, and exclude the very sailors and slaves who had initiated and propelled the revolutionary movement." In general, that's how revolutions go.

*

February

Reading *From Descartes to Wittgenstein: A Short History of Modern Philosophy* (1981), by Roger Scruton. Early in the book he observes that William of Ockham subscribed to "the doctrine of empiricism, according to which reason, far from being the sole authority in determining how things are [as Plato had argued], is subordinate to and dependent upon the senses (upon empirical enquiry)." I guess that's a reasonable first approximation of a definition. "Such empiricism was by no means unusual in medieval thought; it is foreshadowed in Aristotle, and to some extent approved by Aquinas, who lent support to the scholastic tag '*nihil in intellectus quod nisi prius in sensu*' ('there is nothing in the understanding that is not first in the senses')...." Not surprisingly, a lot of later doctrines in Hume, Leibniz, and others were anticipated by Ockham and his fellow scholastics. —Eternal return (sort of).

...."Empiricism only began to come of age as a philosophy when it was able to align itself with a comprehensive theory of language [which Hobbes was more or less the first to attempt]. It was then, when

[1] For example, in England, "Cromwell and his propertied allies had to rely upon the radical voices of....the Levellers and the Diggers, the soldiers and sailors, the urban rioters and rural commoners, [who] proved to have an agenda of their own." These groups were comparable to the *sans-culottes* in France. In both countries, these radicals were eventually suppressed.

[2] Obviously the parallel isn't perfect. In some ways the French revolutionary era should be extended to the 1870s.

it felt able to determine what can and what cannot be *said*, that empiricism was able to challenge rationalism in what proved to be its weakest spot. Rationalism must assume that men possess ideas the significance of which outstrips the limit of any experience that might provide their content. Among such ideas were those of 'God,' 'substance,' 'cause,' and 'self,' upon which the rationalist worldview had raised its foundations. It is this assumption that the new philosophy of language was to deny.

"....Hobbes sought for a theory which would tell him how words acquire meaning, in order to demonstrate that certain metaphysical doctrines are, quite literally, meaningless. Like later empiricists [e.g. logical positivists], he was tempted to reject not just this or that metaphysical doctrine but the *whole* of metaphysics, as a science forced to use words in a manner that transcends the limitations which determine their sense...." Scruton continues:

> In common with many other empiricists, Hobbes gave a genetic account of the origins of meaning: words acquire meaning through representing "thoughts," and the origin of all thought is sense-experience, "for there is no conception in a man's mind, which hath not first, totally or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense." In order to discover the meaning of any utterance, we must trace it back to the observable circumstances that gave rise to it; these will suffice to determine the thought that the utterance contains. Hobbes went on to argue that, because sensory experience gives us knowledge [only] of particulars, then the words (names) which express our thoughts must ultimately have reference to particulars. Thus a general term (e.g. tree) could not denote a "universal"; rather it denotes indeterminately the particular members of a class. In this way Hobbes expressed a thought already familiar in the works of Ockham. He perceived a connection between empiricism and nominalism. One of the principal preoccupations of succeeding empiricist philosophy was to determine just what this obligatory nominalism amounts to, and how far it is tenable without the simultaneous denial of scientific thought.

Locke, too, began with a theory of meaning, which was essentially a fuller form of Hobbes'. Berkeley and Hume continued in this tradition.

Now that I think about it, it's striking the extent to which Russell and the logical positivists were following in the footsteps of Hume and the earlier British empiricists. None of these thinkers has to be committed to the *tabula rasa* conception of the mind, but they all do emphasize sense-data or sense experience over anything else, including the structuring and self-projecting capacities of the mind. (It's true Hume argues that the mind "spreads itself upon objects.") Their perspective also naturally lends itself to subjective idealism (or at least *skepticism* about an external world (among other things[1])) and solipsism, since the project of constructing the world out of sense impressions can easily render the notion of mind-independent entities otiose. Hence you have Russell (and his followers) "proposing to construe every entity in the world other than sense-data as a 'logical construction.' Whether or not we *do* mean, when referring to tables, to refer to logical constructions out of sense-data, it is, Russell thought, all that we ought to mean. As he put it, 'wherever possible, logical constructions are to be substituted for inferred entities.'" But it's impossible for us not to *constantly* rely on the assumption of "inferred" entities, as when we assume that a chair continues to exist when we aren't looking at it. Or when we give a causal explanation for something. It's true that the table's appearance exists only for the subject, and is in that sense "unreal" (mind-dependent), but we don't or can't *act* on that truth. Moreover, there *must be* mind-independent things of *some* sort, because otherwise the success of science (which invokes such theoretical entities) would be inexplicable.

[1] The "other things" include the concepts of causation, identity through time, the self, etc., because, at least according to Hume, we have no distinct "impressions" of these ideas. They are constructed by the imagination "from the fragmentary deliverances of sensation."

In some ways I'm sympathetic to empiricism—to its tendency toward skepticism, for example. I disagree with its emphases and with certain doctrines to which it can lead, such as Carnap's instrumentalism and Berkeley's idealism.

It's ironic that rationalism, too, like empiricism, has been prone to various kinds of idealism. Both traditions have at times tended to "abolish the distinction between thought and reality, thus displaying the principal characteristic of idealism."

A note on Kant: I suspect I'll always be baffled at most philosophers' aversion to the idea of the synthetic *a priori*. Leaving aside the question of whether this or that proposition falls under such a category, it can hardly be doubted that the human mind is continuously applying synthetic *a priori* "categories of the understanding" that shape experience. Substance, causality, identity through time, etc.: these "concepts" are in fact deep structures of experience and have the character of necessity, as shown by the fact that fundamentally it is impossible not to believe that this table is a self-identical object persisting through time, subject to the law of cause-and-effect. You can *say* "I don't believe in causation or this object's identity through time, etc.," but you'll continue to act as if you do—because you do. As you act in the world, you find these concepts self-evident. Similarly self-evident, perhaps, to 2+3=5.

By the way, sometimes I think Kant's philosophical importance is overestimated. Wasn't he basically just an idiosyncratic and particularly profound rationalist? And a skeptic about our pretensions to understand the world as it really is? Scruton thinks he was more "special" than that, but I don't see how. Indeed, considering Hume's half-appreciation of the fact that the mind structures experience, Kant's epistemology and metaphysics don't seem so vastly different from Hume's.

Scruton makes the very good point that Nietzsche's morality was largely a restatement of Aristotle's. Two "aesthetic" moralities. Human excellence is the goal. Don't suppress the passions but order them rightly. "Moral development requires the refining away of what is common, herd-like, 'all too human.' Hence this ideal lies, of its nature, outside the reach of the common man.... Aristotle called this ideal creature the 'great-souled man' (*megalopsuchos*); Nietzsche called it the '*Übermensch.*' In each case pride, self-confidence, disdain for the trivial and the ineffectual, together with a lofty cheerfulness of outlook and a desire always to dominate and never to be beholden, were regarded as essential attributes of the self-fulfilled man."

In his discussion of Frege, Scruton says the following. "Numbers [for Frege] at last fall from the Platonic heaven in which they had been enshrined. Frege moves closer to the view that numbers are, in Russell's phrase, 'logical fictions'; the science of mathematics was soon to be construed, not as the exploration of an independent realm of timeless entities, nor as a prime example of synthetic *a priori* knowledge, but as the projection into logical space of our own propensities towards coherent thought. What appears as an independent realm of mathematical entities or mathematical truth is simply a shadowy representation of our own intellectual powers. The number one is no more an entity than 'the average man'...." That's basically what I argued in my paper on ontology, not knowing that Russell had argued it too. I argued that *all* concepts, and all words, are essentially fictions. Actually, now that I think about it, I should have made a distinction between concepts like "the average man" or "the English nation" and concepts like "chair" or "house": the former are fictional in a second sense too, unlike the latter. But I don't care, this stuff doesn't interest me much.

A note on Wittgenstein. On the obligatory private-language argument, the most revolutionary thing since the invention of the wheel. My hat is off to you if you can make heads or tails of this:

> ....In outline, it seems to me, the argument is as follows: there is a peculiar "privilege" or "immediacy" involved in the knowledge of our own present experiences. In some sense it is nonsense to suggest that I have to find out about them, or that I could, in the normal run of things, be mistaken. [So far, so good.] As a result there has arisen what we might call the "first-person illusion." I can be more certain about my mental states than about yours. [Here we go. Get ready to abandon reason.] This can only be because I observe my mental states directly, yours indirectly. When I see you in pain, I see physical behavior, its causes, a certain complex state of an organism. But this is not the pain that you have, only some

> contingent accompaniment of it. The pain itself lies hidden behind its expression, directly observable to its sufferer alone. [Yes. Did you not, in effect, admit as much in the first two sentences above?]
>
> That is, in brief, the Cartesian theory of mind, presented as an explanation of the first-person case. Both the theory, Wittgenstein argues, and the thing that it is put forward to explain, are illusions. Suppose the theory were true. Then, Wittgenstein argues, we could not refer to our sensations by means of words intelligible in a public language. For words in a public language get their sense publicly, by being attached to publicly accessible conditions that warrant their application. These conditions will determine not only their sense, but also their reference. The assumption that this reference is private (in the sense of being observable, in principle, to one person alone) is, Wittgenstein argues, incompatible with the hypothesis that the sense is public. Hence, if mental events are as the Cartesian describes them to be, no word in our public language could actually refer to them. [Sophistical nonsense.]
>
> In effect, however, Cartesians and their empiricist progeny have always, wittingly or unwittingly, accepted that conclusion, and written as though we each describe our sensations and other present mental episodes in a language which, because its field of reference is inaccessible in principle to others, is intelligible to the speaker alone. Wittgenstein argues against the possibility of such a private language. He attempts to prove that there can be no difference made, by the speaker of that language, between how things seem to him and how things are. He would lose the distinction between being and seeming. But this means losing the idea of objective reference. The language is not aimed at reality at all; it becomes instead an arbitrary game. What seems right is what is right; hence one can no longer speak of right.
>
> The conclusion is this: we cannot refer to Cartesian mental events (private objects) in a public language; nor can we refer to them in a private language. Hence we cannot refer to them. But, someone might say, they may nevertheless *exist*! To which Wittgenstein replies, in a manner reminiscent of Kant's attack on the noumenon, that a nothing will do as well as a something about which nothing can be said. [The predictable fetishization of language. There is no reality outside language, etc.] Moreover, we *can* refer to sensations; so whatever they are, sensations are not Cartesian mental events.

Wow. Perversity.

After reading the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy's* article on the subject, I'll make a few comments (none of which comes from the article). First of all, let's get clear on what we can and can't do. We can refer to private mental experiences like pain in a public language; that's what I'm doing when I say, "I feel a stabbing pain in my leg." You can't feel it; only I can. But I just referred to it in a way that you understand. On the other hand, you don't "experience" my utterance in precisely the way I do, because for me the utterance is, so to speak, directed at a particular private sensation I feel in that moment. The "significance" of the utterance is different for me than for you, who only hear the words and abstractly understand that some sensation of mine "corresponds" to them. A better example is the statement, "This pain really hurts!" I have a particular feeling in mind when I say that, and the "combination" (so to speak) of that feeling and the sentence—the sentence denoting that feeling—is, for me, my utterance's meaning or significance. Its meaning/significance for you is simply the sentence's linguistic meaning together with your understanding that I'm experiencing something painful that has elicited the utterance.

Now, if a "private language" is such that (as Wittgenstein says) "The words of this language are to refer to what can be known only to the speaker; to his immediate, private, sensations," then when I refer to an "immediate, private" sensation of mine in words you understand, I'm speaking a private language.[1] The possibility of such a language, therefore, is self-evident, since people use it frequently. But Wittgenstein is

[1] [Well, if you think about the quotation carefully, it can be interpreted in such a way that that sentence is not true.]

mistaken when in the next sentence he says, "So another cannot understand the language." You understand the language I'm speaking perfectly well when I say, "This pain in my leg is intense." What you *don't* grasp in quite the same way I do is the reference of the words "this pain" (because you're not experiencing the sensation). Their sense is public, their reference is private. I don't see any logical inconsistency there.

If, on the other hand, a private language is something you create yourself, whose words—which refer to private sensations—you try to ostensively define by making some sound and at the same time directing your attention to a particular sensation,[1] then yes, it is impossible. As I noted many years ago, borrowing from Hegel (who, I suspect, basically anticipated all this silly private-language stuff), full linguistic meaning requires *mediation*. Conceptual mediation. The bringing of concepts and sentences into *necessitous* conceptual and logical relations with each other. Their implicit interrelations have to *force* themselves on you, so to speak, so that you have no choice in the matter. That's just the nature of meaning: in having a determinate content it has to be rule-governed, which means that your correct use of the word can't be up to you, your "free will." But in order for your free will to be removed from the equation, you can't teach the language to yourself; you have to learn it from others, who *give* you the determinate meanings of words and *correct* you when you make a mistake. Or, at the very least, a community of people have to develop the language together, correcting each other when necessary. Language presupposes the internalization of others, i.e. the existence of an abstract other in consciousness. Why? Because, again, it is the other who provides the element of resistance to your free will, and linguistic meaning depends on your internalization of such resistance. It can't be the case that whatever *seems* right to you *is* right.

The author of the encyclopedia article says the following when giving examples of philosophical notions and theories that ostensibly presuppose the possibility of the sort of private language I just declared impossible.

> For example, a still very common idea, often attributed to John Locke and openly embraced by Jerry Fodor in the 1970s, is that interpersonal spoken communication works by speakers' translation of their internal mental vocabularies into sounds followed by hearers' re-translation into their own internal vocabularies. Again, Descartes considered himself able to talk to himself about his experiences while claiming to be justified in saying that he does not know (or not until he has produced a reassuring philosophical argument) anything at all about an external world conceived as something independent of them. And he and others have thought: while I may make mistakes about the external world, I can infallibly avoid error if I confine my judgments to my immediate sensations.... Again, many philosophers, including John Stuart Mill, have supposed there to be a problem of other minds, according to which I may reasonably doubt the legitimacy of applying, say, sensation-words to beings other than myself.

It seems to me you can deny the possibility of a private language and yet consistently subscribe to all those positions. Fodor's idea just seems downright plausible, in fact utterly obvious, and I don't see how it requires private languages. Same with Mill's. (It might not be *reasonable* to doubt that others have sensations, but the possibility is at least vaguely conceivable, because you don't experience their sensations.) Same with Descartes'. Even if Descartes' ability to talk to himself entails that he learned language from others, those others could still, in principle, have been projections of his mind. We're dealing with a radical skeptic, after all. If he argues that *he*—his self, his free will—did not teach himself French but was taught by some unconscious projective capacity of his mind, or by God, it is perfectly consistent for him to both accept the impossibility of a private language and doubt that other people exist.

In short, Wittgenstein's argument isn't as important as has been thought, though I suppose it is of *some* interest.

Modern life is predictable but governed by chance. Amusing paradox.

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[1] "S means *this* feeling."

Reading *The Prison and the Factory: Origins of the Penitentiary System* (1977), a Marxist study by Dario Melossi and Massimo Pavarini. I'm thinking of doing something relating to prison labor for my dissertation.

"This book seeks to establish the connection between the rise of the capitalist mode of production and the origins of the modern prison." It deals with northern Europe and Italy between the mid-1500s and the mid-1800s, and with the U.S. from the colonial period to the late 1800s.

It's too pithy to summarize, but I'll jot down a few things. Forty pages in is this statement: "In the proposals advanced by Jeremy Bentham, a major representative of the ascendant English bourgeoisie [in the first half of the 1800s], prison has reached its intermediate stage: the productivist and rehabilitative aims of its earlier days—aims which were revived during the Enlightenment—began to be overtaken by pure control and deterrence." Think of the Panopticon, solitary confinement, etc. Presumably Bentham's "intermediacy" is reflected in the fact that he is still attached to the notion of using prisons largely for productive work.

On the frontispiece of the volume in which the Panopticon was originally described appears this:

> "PANOPTICON" or, the inspection-house: containing the idea of a new principle of construction applicable to any sort of establishment, in which persons of any description are to be kept under inspection [i.e., view]; and in particular to penitentiary-houses, prisons, houses of industry, work-houses, poor-houses, manufactories, mad-houses, lazarettos, hospitals and schools.

Dario Melossi elaborates: "One cannot sufficiently emphasize the interchangeability of the[se] various segregated institutions recently created by bourgeois society when Bentham wrote these pages. Over and above their specific functions, one overall aim united them: control over a rising proletariat. The bourgeois state assigns to all of them a directing role in the various moments of the formation, production and reproduction of the factory proletariat: for society they are essential elements of social control, the aim of which is to secure for capital a workforce which by virtue of its moral attitude, physical health, intellectual capacity, orderliness, discipline, obedience, etc., will readily adapt to the whole regime of factory life and produce the maximum possible amount of surplus labour." A few paragraphs later he provides a concise summary of Marx's theory of surplus-value, after reading which it is hard to understand how anyone could reject the doctrine.

An important theme running through the chapters on Europe is that the centuries-long expulsion of the peasantry from the land created at various times a large surplus population that couldn't find productive employment (and, in addition, often resisted the discipline of the wage-labor system). Vagabonds, beggars, thieves, prostitutes, starving families....society *teeming* with economically superfluous people.[1] A legal crackdown ensued to deal with all these unfortunates, and eventually workhouses, houses of correction, prisons, etc. popped up to help neutralize the threat they posed to "law and order" [and to take advantage of their labor power]. (Forced and encouraged emigration to the New World was another strategy.) A similar thing has been happening in the U.S. in recent decades—except that this time it's the *decline* of industry that has caused it.

....The two chapters on the U.S. briefly describe the different forms of prison labor in the nineteenth century. Here are the final two paragraphs of the first chapter:

> Protests and agitation in the labour movement against penitentiary production continued right up to 1930, even if the question of competition between the two could be considered as effectively resolved by the end of the century. The official figures around the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century are significant in this respect. In 1885, for example, 26 percent of all prisoners employed in productive work

[1] [Well, not always superfluous. Only in some parts of the continent, such as Italy.]

> were under the leasing system [by which they were leased out to a private contractor]; in 1895, 19 percent; in 1905, 9 percent; in 1914, 4 percent; by 1923, one could consider the system as having been completely done away with. We can see the same thing occurring in relation to the contract system: in 1885, 40 percent of prisoners worked for private contractors [*inside* the prison, not out]; in 1923, this was down to 12 percent. There were other, even more important changes: in 1885, 75 percent of prisoners were employed in productive labour, whilst in 1923, the so-called productive prison population amounted to 61 percent. This last factor must then be related to the following: the public account system together with the state-use and public-works systems [according to which private companies did *not* hire prisoners] employed just 26 percent of prison labour in 1885, whilst by 1923 the percentage had risen to 81 percent.
>
> Clearly the private exploitation of convict labour became obsolete as against the increasingly massive adoption of those systems of convict labour which did not compete with free labour. On the one hand, the basic reason can be traced back to the difficulties encountered by private capital when it came to industrializing the penitentiary productive process in forms that would still be competitive with technological innovations in the outside world. On the other hand, it was also located in the growing strength of the union organizations in the economic and political life of the United States. [Many businesses, too, opposed convict labor on the grounds that it gave their competitors an unfair advantage.] Thus at the beginning of the new century, the penitentiary ceased to be a "productive concern"; in fact budgets once again began to show growing deficits.

As unions got more powerful, the private exploitation of prison labor declined; as unions have gotten less powerful in the last thirty or forty years, prison labor has increased and prisons themselves have begun to be privatized.

March, April

Presented a much-shortened version of my meatpacking paper at a conference in Omaha, Nebraska. Only the second conference I've ever attended, the first being at UMSL. Nice people everywhere, some charming young ladies who unfortunately don't live in Chicago. Mostly very arcane and boring topics being presented, but that's to be expected. (How pious was King Edward II? Etc.) A classy event but, I don't know, I can't overcome my instinctive aversion to this sort of academic onanism.

Speaking of which: according to the website on which it's posted, my Master's thesis has been downloaded hundreds of times. Which already makes it more widely read than most academic publications. ☺

I suggested that Chomsky post some of his old syllabi online; he wrote back, "Afraid I was never organized enough to have syllabi. Courses just evolved, week after week, often in unexpected directions. I have lots of notes, which will presumably end up in the MIT archives, for what they're worth." I wish I had taken a class with him!

Reading *Punishment for Sale: Private Prisons, Big Business, and the Incarceration Binge* (2010), by Donna Selman and Paul Leighton. What's going on in the prison-industrial complex is almost literally unbelievable. Here's a one-sentence summary of the monumental injustice: "While the United States has a long history of the rich getting richer while the poor get prison, the current situation—private prisons listed on the stock exchange and an expanding number of businesses profiting from the expansion of the criminal justice system—means that rich whites get richer *from* poor minorities being sent to prison." In 1995 a Latino army veteran with three children was sentenced to a mandatory fifty years in prison for stealing some children's videos on two occasions. The sort of thing that happens all the time.

How do private companies make profits by managing prisons? By viciously cutting costs more than governments can or will. The government pays them a per diem rate per prisoner, and the company does everything it can to reduce costs so that as much of the per diem rate as possible is kept as profit. (One major strategy is to slash labor costs.) The more prisoners are incarcerated, the more money the company makes. So the industry has an incentive to lobby for harsh laws, as it has done effectively. It also favors crackdowns on undocumented immigrants, since they can be incarcerated.

In addition to the fees they charge governments, companies can make money from prison labor.

As for whether privatization saves taxpayers money, the research has been inconclusive. Some reports have found that it actually costs more money, while others have suggested that privatization yields savings of about 10 percent. But these reports haven't factored in all the extra costs associated with privatization, such as the time and money it takes to review proposals by various companies, negotiate contracts, review contract terms, deal with lawsuits resulting from the terrible conditions in some private prisons, renew contracts, etc. Companies have also been known to over-bill governments and not repay them.

Reading *At Hard Labor: Inmate Labor at the Colorado State Penitentiary, 1871-1940* (1993), by Elinor Myers McGinn.

Today I attended a talk by the famous mediocrity Nancy Fraser, in which she tried to explain capitalism's current crisis by expounding and critiquing Karl Polanyi's ideas. It was pretty poor stuff, ludicrously pretentious and totally unnecessary. Afterwards I asked a question: "Given all your criticisms of Polanyi, in particular your concern with relations of domination, why don't you just use Marx instead (who I think has a much more powerful theoretical framework)? But aside from that, I don't see the need for some grand theory in order to explain the connections between the three sets of crises you mentioned (the ecological, the economic, and the 'social-reproductive'). All you have to do is invoke the Marxian idea that capital, or big business in this case, exploits labor-power and accumulates capital, and in so doing harms the environment, wrecks the economy (or causes it to go from boom to bust—for the reasons Marx gave, or his disciples, like David Harvey), and disrupts social reproduction. That intuition seems like enough of a foundation for explaining these crises." She fumbled for a while as I nodded and grunted politely.

Later I went to an Occupy Chicago meeting, specifically of its Labor Outreach Committee. About 25 people. Here's part of an email I sent Ed Hunt: "It went on for several hours, and eventually I left. It was relatively well organized (especially compared to other committees, from what I've heard), but even so it reminded me of the retrospective accounts written by 1960s activists of how frustrating and interminable all their meetings could be. Why do people always feel the need to talk, even when they have nothing to say? They just go on and on—and they all have to put their two cents in! It's definitely true that democracy can be damned inefficient. –You know, I love the idea of democracy, but when it comes to procedural, political things like this I don't love participating. I'm kind of a hermit by nature (maybe we're similar in that regard); in fact, I'm temperamentally disinclined to activism, preferring to read and write and talk to people in intimate settings. So I don't know if I'll do this Occupy Chicago thing in a sustained, intensive way. I'll have to think about it."

Nancy Fraser and some of these volunteer activists are similar in that they both like to verbally jerk themselves off. But I'll say this about the activists: at least they're trying to change the world. They may be annoying, in love with the sound of their voice, socially clueless sometimes, other times cocky and prickish, but they're doing the right thing.

Reading *Discipline and Punish*. One of the reasons for Foucault's fame is the quality of his writing: there's a creativity, a forcefulness, a style that probably overawes a lot of feeble-minded academics who are willing to be impressed by that sort of thing when it's manifested by one of their own.

But there is also the fact that Foucault's obsession with power relations, his obsessive insistence that they permeate every facet of society and even the individual's mind, and that the *subject* is wholly a product of *subjection*, can be contagious. It really drives the point home. Even the dull-witted academic reader can start to think, "Hey, yeah, *power*! And discourses, and disciplines, and the fusion of power and knowledge—and hey, I'm an intellectual, so that's great for me—and all these cool terms like 'political

technologies' and 'political anatomy' and 'vectors of power' and 'micro-physics of power'! What a magnificent theoretical vision!" It helps that Foucault avoids talking about business and class relations, which means that society's central power-structures have no particular reason to be very hostile to him. It's striking how un-original it all is, though. E. P. Thompson's work shows how the modern subject has had to be disciplined—for the [direct or indirect] sake of capital accumulation, which Foucault tends to ignore; and then there's Gramsci (whose ideas themselves are pretty obvious), and Freud, and Nietzsche, and Marx, and a galaxy of lesser-known thinkers who have dissected the workings of power. But Foucault had a gift for self-promotion, so he became a celebrity.

And what's all this blather about "the body"? He goes on and on about how important the body is. Yes, I agree, bodies are important. And they're objects of power, etc. Again, the reason this jargon became so popular among academics is that feminism and the sexual revolution turned society's attention to the body—to women's (lack of) power over their bodies, to cultural interpretations of the body and sexuality, etc. Also, this kind of talk is conveniently un-Marxist, which is always good for having a smooth and successful career. It's basically a middle-class preoccupation—as most things "subjective" are—something that middle-class people have the luxury to think about, wondering what their attitude is toward their body, whether it's healthy or whatever, how society has influenced and perverted their relationship with their body. Actually, this intellectual turn toward subjectivity and the body is a symptom of the feminization of society since the 1960s, as decadence has set in (to quote Susan Sontag). With atomization has come a preoccupation with subjectivity, the self's insecurity; hence feminization.

....A nice thing about reading Foucault is that his prose is so prolix you can skim through a lot of it without missing anything substantial.

Another nice thing, though, is that he's more interesting and substantive than his fellow postmodernist "pioneers." He actually has things to say, although it takes a lot of intellectual digestion to see what they are. The problem, again, is that his writing is diffuse and abstract, consisting of a strange stream of reflections on, in this case, crime and punishment and their evolution. It isn't really philosophy, as it's sometimes called, but it isn't anything else either. It's uncategorizable. It's like a bunch of notes to himself on how to understand the "meaning," given particular social contexts, of various crimes and punishments. Some of it makes me think of a historical phenomenology, while at other times I simply have no idea what's going on. "What *is* this stuff?" It's so abstract and self-indulgent you can't really pin it down, and after pages of reading you remember absolutely nothing of what you just read. Meaningless words passing under your eyes. It's comparable to the feeling of "zoning out" for a few minutes. (Not all of it is this bad, I should say.)

Another obvious problem is Foucault's idealism. He fixates on the opinions of reformers, philosophers, politicians, scientists, only occasionally descending to earth to note how things actually were. He's pre-Marxist, like most postmodernists. Or, if not exactly pre-Marxist, unsophisticated in ways that Marx should have reminded him not to be.

Now for Rusche and Kirchheimer's Marxist classic *Punishment and Social Structure* (1939), a more informative, interesting, readable, scholarly, and reliable book than Foucault's. They note that epochs of "entirely different systems of punishment" can be distinguished. "Penance and fines were the preferred methods of punishment in the early Middle Ages. They were gradually replaced during the later Middle Ages by a harsh system of corporal and capital punishment which, in its turn, gave way to imprisonment about the seventeenth century."

Why were things less harsh in the early Middle Ages? In part because there just wasn't much need or possibility for a system of state punishment. The law of feud and penance essentially regulated relations between equals. Even in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, systems of punishment didn't change much. "The relations between the warrior-landlords and their serfs were of a traditional character, tantamount to a precisely determined legal relationship. These conditions tended to prevent social tension and to provide that cohesion which was characteristic of the period. Criminal law played an unimportant role as a means of preserving the social hierarchy. Tradition, a well-balanced system of social dependence, and the religious acknowledgement of the established order of things were sufficient and efficient safeguards." Moreover, the violation of property rights "did not count much in this society of landowners." It wasn't so much theft

as offenses against decency, religion, or accepted morality that could pose a problem. But if that happened, usually "a solemn gathering of free men would be held to pronounce judgment and make the culprit pay *Wergeld* or do penance so that the vengeance of the injured parties should not develop into blood feud and anarchy." It's reminiscent of customs in some tribal societies. The basic point is that there wasn't a strong central power, so private arbitration was necessary.

With the beginnings of the nation-state and early capitalism, things got more savage, as usual. Central authorities sought to strengthen their power by extending their judicial rights, which they also realized could be a fruitful source of income. Confiscations and fines brought in a lot of revenue.

Meanwhile, as you know, a surplus population was growing in various parts of Europe due to enclosures, the exhaustion of the soil, and other causes. Thus: pauperized masses, roving bands, etc. Corporal and capital punishment became very common (although wealthier criminals had the option of paying fines). All kinds of elaborate tortures were devised. "The whole system of punishment in the later Middle Ages makes it quite clear that there was no shortage of labor, at least in the towns. As the price paid for labor decreased, the value set on human life became smaller and smaller."

Things started to change around the seventeenth century, as wars of religion and other disturbances interrupted the growth of population. Labor grew scarcer and more expensive; corporal and capital punishment, therefore, was less frequently applied, since criminals could be used as labor power. They were often sent to the military, for instance. There were still plenty of beggars and vagabonds, people who either couldn't or wouldn't work, but now they were sent to houses of correction where the men often did hard labor and the women made textiles.

"The roots of the prison system lay in mercantilism [in its attitude toward labor], and its promotion and elaboration were the task of the Enlightenment."

By the second half of the eighteenth century and especially the first half of the nineteenth, the old conditions that had given rise, in the mercantilist period, to the "productivist" and "rehabilitative" system of punishment were disappearing. The population was growing dramatically and there was no longer a scarcity of labor power. "What the ruling classes had been seeking for over a century was now an accomplished fact—relative overpopulation." To make matters worse for the working class, machinery was introduced and the Industrial Revolution occurred, raising unemployment even more. Houses of correction, therefore, ceased to serve their former productivist, educative, rehabilitative purposes—because there was no economic need for those—and conditions inside them deteriorated. There was overcrowding and all manner of horrors. In the nineteenth century the ruling classes were tempted to return to the pre-mercantilist methods of punishment, favoring corporal and capital punishment again, but the upshot was simply that conditions in prisons were allowed and encouraged to become atrocious. In light of the fact that prisons, far from making profit (as houses of correction had in former days), didn't even pay for themselves anymore—since the advent of machinery had destroyed the value of work by hand, as in prisons (and in any case workers and employers fought vigorously against convict labor)—they became purely a means of deterrence and control. The idea was to make conditions so bad that the poor would refrain from stealing just so as not to be imprisoned.

In England and France, the problem of overcrowding was also addressed by deporting criminals to colonies.

The early U.S. had a scarcity of labor, so the Quaker system of solitary confinement didn't last long. It made more sense to use prisoners as cheap labor power; therefore the Auburn system became popular, whereby they worked together (in silence) during the day and were confined in solitary cells at night.

Conditions improved in most of Western Europe in the late nineteenth century, as overpopulation and unemployment diminished, prosperity spread, and reformers advocated for more humane policies. "The new policy favored by reformers was to keep as many delinquents as possible out of jail by a more extensive use of fines, by a probation policy, and, above all, by seeking to ameliorate the social conditions responsible for crime." Conditions in prisons improved too, and the length and severity of prison sentences declined. But then the World War happened, and then depression and fascism, and things went downhill.

"The Origins of Capitalism," a 2004 debate between Chris Harman and Robert Brenner, is pretty interesting. I don't agree with everything Brenner says, but he's right about important points. For example, it's true that commercialization (trade, involvement in markets), far from necessarily undermining feudal relations of production—as, supposedly, Adam Smith, Paul Sweezy, and Immanuel Wallerstein implicitly or explicitly contend—can strengthen or even create them, as in colonial Latin America.

> The reason that the appearance of opportunities to exchange has failed by itself to bring on capitalism and development is twofold. In the presence of pre-capitalist social-property relations, pre-capitalist economic agents do not, in fact, find it in their interest (or often their power) to seek the full gains from trade, or pursue all-out capital accumulation, or adopt the best available techniques. Nor, equally important, do they find it makes sense for them to try to introduce, on a micro, piecemeal basis, capitalist social-property relations. This is most clearly true of feudal lords. Because the peasants upon whom lords depended to work their demesnes possessed the means of subsistence, they not only had little incentive to work on the lords' estates but could not be disciplined with the threat of firing. As a result, lords found that to increase the surpluses they could sell on the market, their best route was to try to improve not the productivity of their peasants, but their ability to forcefully [he means forcibly] redistribute from them more of their product. This required tightening, not loosening, the feudal bond by building up their means to coercion through increasing the size, sophistication and equipment of their politico-military followers. The same tendency was imposed by the need to stand up to inter-lordly politico-military competition and the attractions of warfare as means of increasing wealth.

Thus, in some parts of Europe, expanding markets *reinforced* feudalism. Later on, too, in parts of the "global periphery," semi-feudal relations were intensified and extended in time all the way up to the late twentieth century by the elite's access to markets, which gave them an incentive to squeeze as much product as possible out of their forced laborers and effectively to obstruct the development of capitalist relations of production. This, of course, was one of the causes of those countries' underdevelopment. (Marx's idea that the dominance of merchant capital can interfere with the development of industrial capitalism is also apposite here.)

Brenner's emphasis, as in his long and important essay "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism" (1977), is on class struggle as opposed to the mere extension of the market. Market competition doesn't bring about self-sustaining economic growth and increasing labor productivity unless capitalist class structures already exist; and they are the result not of market competition—as though it could just automatically "bring them into being" somehow—but of historically specific conjunctures, political developments, class struggles. This is his argument against people like André Gunder Frank too—and Wallerstein—who attribute Third World underdevelopment to the overarching dynamics of the world division of labor. "They move too quickly from the proposition that capitalism is bound up with, and supportive of, continuing underdevelopment in large parts of the world [which it is], to the conclusion not only that the rise of underdevelopment is *inherent* in the extension of the world division of labour through capitalist expansion, but also that the 'development of underdevelopment' is an indispensable condition for capitalist development itself." I've always sympathized with Brenner's position. Underdevelopment in some place is surely not a necessary condition for development elsewhere (although it does contribute to it). And the reasons for underdevelopment in a given place have to do with politics and class struggles there—which fraction of the elite has the upper hand, etc.—and with the political-economic policies of the core capitalist countries in relation to that place.

In other words, dependency theory is inadequate. An economy oriented towards exports, even if it's dominated by foreign capital, *can* help lay the foundations for sustained industrial growth. According to Barbara Weinstein's article "Capital Penetration and Problems of Labor Control in the Amazon Rubber Trade" (1983), this is what happened with the coffee trade in Sao Paulo in the late nineteenth century. You have to take into account internal social relations and class conflicts in explaining such things.

Here's Brenner's interpretation of the English Revolution in a nutshell:

> The rise of capitalism in agriculture provided the social forces behind the English Revolution. Because capitalism in England developed within a landlord shell, what remained of the feudal landed class was very weak, and the capitalist aristocracy was very strong. On the other hand, the bulk of what remained of a feudal class became directly dependent for its reproduction on the absolutist state, the offices and privileges it provided. Conflict arose because the monarchy and those that lived off the politically-constituted private property that it created—churchmen, officeholders, government financiers, chartered company merchants, industrial monopolists, and so forth—sought to strengthen the embryonic absolutist state. This they tried to do by increasing unparliamentary taxation so as to undermine landed class control via parliament, by building a structure of offices dependent on the crown to replace national and local government dominated by the landed classes, by creating a standing army, and by pursuing alliances with financial support from the Catholic absolutisms of Spain and France. Landlord capitalists, who had in a sense already emerged as the ruling class on the basis of their control over the economy's surplus, but who still did not entirely dominate the state, were the ones most threatened by the absolutist offensive. So the capitalist aristocracy provided the fundamental social base for the anti-absolutist revolutions of 1640 and 1688, which definitively overthrew the old order. In so doing, they undoubtedly had help from colonial merchants, as well as newly emerging industrial capitalists and perhaps traders associated with them, not to mention the traditional revolutionary classes par excellence, the urban artisans and shopkeepers.

Brenner pretty much always knows what he's talking about.

Incidentally, it's obviously true that commercialization, the "commercial revolution" and so forth, played a role in the rise of the capitalist mode of production. It's just that politics and class struggles were an essential part as well. (Stated this way, Sweezy wouldn't disagree.)

Now I'm reading the 2006 edition of Benedict Anderson's 1983 classic *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. He's right to emphasize *print-capitalism* (after the 1400s) as having laid the basis for national consciousness. "Nothing served to 'assemble' related vernaculars more than capitalism, which, within the limits imposed by grammars and syntaxes, created mechanically reproduced print-languages capable of dissemination through the market." He goes on to say that these print-languages "created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars," so allowing speakers of one variety of French to communicate—through print—with those of a different variety. Thus is made possible, eventually, the birth of a national consciousness. Also, "print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language [which had hitherto been very changeable], which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation."

The importance of print-capitalism should be obvious, but seriously, take a moment to think about it. Without print....modernity is not modernity. You don't get the Reformation, science, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, the nation-state, modern culture, ideologies like republicanism, liberalism, socialism.... As for nationalism (of whatever variety), it's true that "everywhere, as literacy increased, it became easier to arouse popular support [for nationalism], with the masses discovering a new glory in the print elevation of languages they had humbly spoken all along." It's all made possible by *print-capitalism*!

Now I'm reading Andre Gunder Frank's important work *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (1969). He makes dependency theory seem like common sense—which, to a great extent, it is. Its main flaws are its excessive abstractness, its undertheorizedness, and in general the criticisms made by Brenner. But you can accept those criticisms while retaining or rephrasing certain key insights.

The Food Wars (2009) is very informative and full of insights, since the author, Walden Bello, has a quasi-Marxist view of the world. His concern is with the recent global food crisis—its causes and its 2095

possible revolutionary solutions. In the first chapter he places it in its historical context. It's the destruction-of-the-peasantry thing, etc. But I'll go into more detail.—

The first "international food regime" emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century; it "consisted of two food grids existing under the institutional canopy of a global free-trade system promoted by Great Britain." The first grid was the settler agriculture in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and Argentina that specialized in the production of wheat and livestock for the industrializing metropolitan economies, and which displaced much European agriculture. (Hence, in part, mass emigration out of Europe.) It was based mostly on family labor, not large, capital-intensive farms. The second grid was the system of capitalist plantation agriculture in what became the global South, which specialized in sugar, tea, coffee, tobacco, and cocoa for export, as well as raw materials like cotton, timber, rubber, indigo, and copper. The plantation economy often coexisted with a peasant economy that helped sustain the plantations' workers (who themselves went back and forth between the two economies).

After the interregnum of war, depression, and protectionism in the first half of the twentieth century, the Bretton Woods food regime emerged. Family farms continued to be important in the developed world, but now there was more corporate control of farm inputs, agricultural trade, and the food industry. Developed states protected their agricultural sectors, especially the bigger and richer farmers, by means of tariffs and subsidies. (Agriculture was exempted from the disciplines of GATT.) Some reasons for the persistence of the family farm are the limits to the advantages of greater scale in agriculture and "a distinct logic that aims not simply at profit maximization but long-term survival as a family enterprise." In the South they had developmentalism, a key feature of which was the advanced capitalist state's tolerance for import substitution policies that would help the growth of industry. Foreign investment tended to be strictly regulated, too, as in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. "In agriculture, there was strong protection from imports in the form of outright import bans, quotas, and high tariffs." Market relations continued to spread, however, and landlord exploitation intensified. Also, "food aid" programs (a consequence of the U.S.'s grain surpluses that it wanted to get rid of) undermined the barriers against cheap imports. To prevent peasant-backed radical movements, the U.S. sometimes went so far as to support land reform measures that stabilized the countryside and fostered industrialization, as in Korea and Taiwan in the 1950s. There were also attempts by the World Bank and other entities to improve agricultural productivity in the South through technical and financial support, which didn't succeed nearly as well as hoped.

So eventually came the neoliberal era, with its structural adjustment programs. In agriculture, these entailed "deregulation of land markets and the reversal of land reform policies originating in the national developmentalist era; drastic cuts in farm subsidies and price supports and the disengagement of both postcolonial states and the World Bank from irrigation support; the expanded use of agrarian biotechnologies and expanded commodification of seeds and seed reproduction; a marked and growing dependence on chemical, biological, and hydrocarbon farm inputs;....expanded cash crop production for export as animal feed; [the elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers;] and the export of niche luxury goods, fresh fruits, vegetables, and ornamental flowers for the global centers of overconsumption." The use of new synthetic compounds for tropical products like sugar also had an adverse effect on agriculture in the South. And then there was the emergence of the genetic engineering industry, which threatens to completely wrest control of production away from farmers and accelerate their conversion into rural workers (in part because corporations have monopolistic intellectual property rights that favor globally integrated production chains). And so on and so forth. Hundreds of millions of rural and urban poor have, as a result, been shunted off to gigantic slums. But there's hope, reader! Resistance movements have been spreading, and in the wake of the global recession, "deglobalization" has been occurring. Global production and supply chains are, according to Bello, threatening to wither away, and small-scale agriculture serving local and regional markets is starting to look more viable than capitalist industrial agriculture.

So what's causing the current (or recent?) food crises? I'll get to the reasons for the recent high prices of food later; more fundamental than such explanations, though, is the fact that structural adjustment in the developing world has led to massive food insecurity there. To explain how, Bello devotes much of the book to analyses of neoliberal restructuring in Mexico, the Philippines, Africa, and China. The first three were turned from net food exporters to net food importers by structural adjustment and trade

liberalization in the 1980s and after. The gutting of government budgets, "especially the drastic reduction or elimination of fertilizer subsidies," was the key factor. But unfair trade practices by the EU and the U.S. also contributed: low-priced, government-subsidized beef and cereals from the West displaced native producers. Export-oriented agriculture, such as cotton production, usually couldn't step into the breach successfully, again because of insufficient government investment [in the developing countries] and unfair trade practices by the West.[1] The upshot of IMF-imposed "depeasantization" (and deindustrialization) was that the regions became very vulnerable to price fluctuations: if international prices of food rose too high, millions of people would be left to starve unless their governments somehow intervened. This is what Malawi did in 2005, against the advice of the IMF and World Bank, thereby preventing a famine and turning the country once again into an exporter of food.

The basic and obvious problem with structural adjustment, according to the World Bank's own Independent Evaluation Group, was that in "most reforming countries the private sector did not step in to fill the vacuum when the public sector withdrew." Why not? For lots of reasons, among them poor infrastructure, an inadequately developed private sector to begin with, and, as Bello says, a lack of business confidence due to the terrible investment climate created by structural adjustment.

China, too, has been liberalizing its trade, which has devastated many farmers (sugarcane, soybean, cotton) and contributed to the recent slowdown in poverty reduction. More broadly, "the adoption [since 1984] of a strategy of urban-centered, export-oriented industrialization based on rapid integration into the global capitalist economy" has harmed the peasantry greatly, since the urban industrial economy has been built on the backs of peasants.[2] Heavy taxation of peasant surpluses and falling prices for agricultural products have transferred income from the countryside to the city. Health, education, and agricultural infrastructure haven't improved. Moves toward a regime of full private property rights in the countryside have been taken, which could cause a capitalist transformation of agriculture. (Big landlords, rural laborers, etc.) And of course millions of peasants have been forced off their land to make way for dams and urban environments. The result of all this is massive peasant unrest and China's loss in 2008 of its status as a net food exporter.

Getting to the more immediate causes of the crisis.... An important reason for the disastrously high and volatile prices of food between 2006 and 2008 (and probably later, I assume) was the higher global production, stimulated largely by U.S. and EU government demand, of *agrofuels*, mainly ethanol and biodiesel, and the corresponding rise in demand for corn, sugar, beets, and wheat, which are the raw material for these fuels. Midwestern America, for example, is "slowly being transformed into a giant agrofuels factory": in 2008, about 30 percent of corn was allocated for ethanol.[3] As usual, much of the incentive for corporations to invest in agrofuels (or biofuels) is due to government subsidies, begun (in the U.S.) under Bush. Biofuels are in fact not very good for the environment, but policymakers want "energy security," you see, so they subsidize the production of these fuels for transportation purposes. The agricultural systems in the U.S. and EU can't fill the targets set by policies, so agrofuel production is dramatically increasing in the South too, including Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa. (Some of this production is for the sake of the Southern countries themselves, which likewise desire energy independence.) Rainforests are being cut down and workers are being treated like slaves.

Agrofuels production also compromises development in poor countries, "where households typically spend about half their income on food." Ergo, with higher food prices, less money is spent on other items that can stimulate economic growth, and more people are forced into poverty.

To quote Via Campesina, "The contemporary food crisis is not really a crisis of our ability to produce. It is more due to factors like the food speculation and hoarding that transnational food corporations and investment funds engage in, the global injustices that mean some eat too much while many others don't

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[1] Export agriculture had made some progress in the era of developmentalism because of government assistance. But neoliberal dogma forbade this.

[2] Industrialization is almost always at the expense of peasants and farmers in some way or other. Think, for example, of Soviet and Chinese collectivization—squeezing surplus out of agriculture and transferring it to industry.

[3] I needn't point out that this also means less corn, wheat, etc. is used for *food*. So food prices go up.

have money to buy adequate food and/or lack land on which to grow it, and misguided policies like the promotion of agrofuels that devote farm land to feeding cars instead of feeding people."

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One of the confusing things about fascism is that the term denotes at least two different phenomena: a peculiar kind of social movement, and, more loosely speaking, the interlocking of government and big business.[1] I.e., state capitalism. Robert Brady discusses the latter in *Business as a System of Power*. According to this meaning of the term, at least the last 100 years or so have been the age of fascism—including, paradoxically, in Communist countries, where the state and "business" have been virtually the same thing. (So it's a different sort of fascism than in the West.)[2] In retrospect it's not surprising that the origins of the state capitalist kind of fascism coincided with the classic form of the social movement called "fascism," nor that over time—after World War II, in other words—states learned to navigate their fusion with big business in a less dangerous way, by trying to keep within limits the fascist nationalism that had reigned earlier (and that had been, at least before 1939, in the interest of state capitalism). The potential for such a movement remains, however, because of the continuation of "fascism" in Brady's technical sense.

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Gillian McGillivray has some useful comments on the Spanish-American War. "Between April 1898 and March 1899, President William McKinley sent some forty-five thousand American servicemen to occupy Cuba for an undefined period of time. This was the first of a series of twentieth-century U.S. interventions in Latin America supposedly to help flailing nations free themselves from tyranny and establish democracies. In fact, interventions occurred wherever revolutionaries threatened foreign interests and U.S. capitalists had enough investments at stake to force their government to buttress dependent elite regimes. U.S. forces intervened thirty-four times in nine Latin American countries between 1898 and 1934. Good Neighbor policies from the 1930s onward prompted instead non-recognition of radical governments and behind-the-scenes maneuvering for more U.S.-friendly regimes.

"The most common characteristic of these interventions (beginning with Cuba) was the U.S. administrations' need to portray them as motivated by humanitarian generosity when what really drove them was U.S. capitalists' desire for new markets. By the late nineteenth century, many U.S. industrialists were ready to export goods, to import and process primary resources, or to set up export industries abroad. These industrialists lobbied the U.S. government to lower import tariffs. In direct contrast, many U.S. agricultural producers continued to depend almost entirely on protectionist tariffs. Sugar had one group in each camp: U.S. sugar refiners and brokers wanted low tariffs for importing raw sugar from abroad, while most producers of beet sugar in the western United States and cane sugar in the southern United States wanted higher tariffs....

"Within this framework, one can understand the contradiction between what U.S. politicians said they were doing and what they actually did in Cuba and the rest of Latin America. The hypocrisy began with the myth that U.S. forces invaded Cuba to help the Cubans win freedom from Spain. The actual goal was to preclude a social and racial revolution ('another Haiti') and to create a new, dependent, and politically moderate Cuba safe for U.S. capital..."

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Coffee and Power (1997) is a very good book about Central America's second "revolutionary decade" (after the 1930s), the 1980s. It focuses on El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica (which didn't

[1] [I forgot the third meaning: a state that shares crucial features with classical fascist states.]

[2] It's surely more confusing than enlightening to call the USSR and others fascist, since their economic, social, and political dynamics were so different from the West's. Nonetheless, there are parallels.

experience the civil war that the other two and Guatemala did, because of its stable social democratic structure). "The revolutionary crises of the 1980s were crises of the coffee elites and the societies they made at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries." You know, the polarization between the old family-based oligarchies—centuries-old dynasties effectively running the countries—and the impoverished masses. The coffee elite and other dynastic families had immense power, but their political regimes had only barely survived the 1930s "by ceding direct rule to military dictatorships (even in Costa Rica [for a short time]....)." Later, "the long economic boom in Central America and the world economy after 1945 created new social and economic forces that could not be contained in the rickety oligarchic-dictatorial structures of the twentieth-century political order. The end of this boom after 1973 detonated the social explosion that had been gathering force throughout the long period of postwar economic expansion." Good ole Marxism, i.e. common sense: new productive forces and changes in social and/or technical relations of production slowly sweeping aside older production relations and property distribution, eventually—through the agency of the masses and of intra-"elite" competition—bursting their fetters and those of existing political relations, etc. This abstract schema is most appropriate for truly revolutionary transitions between forms of society, such as that between feudalism and capitalism, but it seems appropriate on smaller scales too. (On such scales, however, no "bursting of fetters" need go on; in general terms, it is safer to speak merely of *repercussions* in the realm of politics, culture, and so forth.[1])

The agro-export sector was primarily responsible for the new social forces. "The rapid expansion of sugar, beef, and, above all, cotton production in Central America after World War II began to challenge the coffee monoculture that was the basis of the old order. The coffee industry itself experienced a substantial expansion and technical transformation.... The expansion of the Central American common market in the 1960s, particularly in El Salvador, created a nascent industrial bourgeoisie."

All this was disastrous for the rest of the population, still heavily rural.

> The dramatic expansion of both cotton and cattle created massive displacements of the rural population of a magnitude not seen since the days of the Liberal land tenure revolutions of the nineteenth century. All of the new export crops, including the new coffee system, were more capital- and less labor-intensive than the systems they replaced. Unemployment increased dramatically as owners cleared unproductive serfs and squatters from their lands and replaced payment in subsistence rights and kind with cash wages and rents. The massive displacement of the rural population from the land created two new classes unseen before in Central America—a semi-proletariat of part-time wage laborers, renters, and subsistence farmers, and an urban informal sector of petty merchants, artisans, and day laborers. In many cases the two classes converged into a great mass of desperate people with no firm ties to the labor market, the institutions of property, or the societies of which they were a huge majority.

The precariat, created in part by the Green Revolution and associated developments. What happened in those decades reminds me of what happened in early modern Europe. Actually, in both cases the expulsion of the peasantry from the countryside took centuries; the Green Revolution and other things going on recently (in China, for example) have been simply the last stage of it in much of the world. Anyway, the parallels are striking. English landowners getting rid of peasants and the commons when sheep pasturage became very profitable; later, Third World landowners getting rid of remaining peasants, squatters, etc. when the land became profitable. An influx of people into insufficiently industrialized urban areas (not enough jobs) and shantytowns, as higher education simultaneously expands and radical intellectuals appear who help foster and guide discontent. New parts of the economic elite, too, that are less attached to the *ancien régime* than older economic groups are; in fact, the formers' interests often lie in the overthrow of

[1] [Obviously on such "smaller," non-transitional-between-different-modes-of-production scales, it is *technical*, not *social*, relations of production that are in question. I.e., the "forms of surplus-extraction" remain the same while the ways in which the productive process itself is organized change (as technology changes, etc.).]

the old order. So popular discontent can get support from them, and they can help guide it—and ultimately be its main beneficiaries. (This is what happened in Central America, where much of the economic elite in Nicaragua supported the Sandinistas against Somoza and eventually in El Salvador came to support a negotiated settlement with the rebels.)[1] So you get the English civil war and Glorious Revolution, the French Revolution, 1848, the 1917 Russian revolutions—of which the bourgeoisie lost control, succumbing to self-proclaimed representatives of the oppressed masses—Central America's civil wars of the 1980s, and the Arab Spring.[2] [Yes, there are important differences between these events. Obviously.]

"An increasing body of research indicates that it was these growing classes of unemployed and underemployed rural semi-proletarians and urban informal sector workers, joined, in the case of El Salvador, by a small but well organized formal proletariat in the Common Market manufacturing sector, that made the mass base of the revolutions." Like with the Arab Spring. (Students, too, were important in both cases.)

"The coffee export economy created the oligarchic political structures of Central America; cotton and cattle destroyed them."

On the nineteenth century: "The revolution from above instituted by the nineteenth-century Liberals was a disaster for most of the population. The most direct assaults on the people were the land and labor laws that abolished communal control over the land by indigenous communities, sold off the commons and public lands to large holders, and instituted systems of state control over labor with varying degrees of stringency. The subsidies, infrastructure improvements, and special concessions went entirely to benefit the elite. The pattern of concentrated land ownership in the agro-export sector and mass poverty and landlessness among much of the population in the 1980s was a heritage of the Liberal revolutions of the 1880s."

Paige, the author, goes into great detail on the class composition of the elites in the twentieth century, and on the economic differences between each country (including Guatemala). The basic point is that the elite in each country is or was composed of two fractions, which until the 1980s were fairly united: the agrarian (landowners, reactionary because of the need to control labor) and the agro-industrial (manufacturers, less reactionary, especially in the 1980s). In Costa Rica, the agro-industrial dominated; hence (in part) the country's relatively progressive politics since 1948. In Guatemala and El Salvador—especially the former—the agrarian was stronger; hence reactionary politics. In Nicaragua, neither fraction was highly developed....until late in the postwar era, when the technological developments mentioned above strengthened the agro-industrial elite (and to a lesser extent the agrarian), which then largely supported the Sandinistas.

"The rise of the agro-industrialists and the semi-proletariat created [in the 1970s] a revolutionary crisis not only between the popular classes and the elite but between the two fractions of the elite itself. During the 1980s, immense revolutionary pressure from below began to cause the two fractions of the elite, united in all previous crises, to split apart. By 1992 the agro-industrial elite had managed to separate itself from the agrarians everywhere except in Guatemala, and the agrarian order and the authoritarian regimes that had supported it were in ruins. The ultimate beneficiaries of the revolutionary crisis of the 1980s were the agro-industrialists. By 1992 they had emerged triumphant everywhere, again except for Guatemala. In the three cases that are the focus of this study, class relations in 1992 converged on a single pattern—a dominant agro-industrial elite divested from a now largely defunct agrarian fraction, and a large and ever increasing semi-proletariat. The three societies had also converged on the common political form of representative democracy, and the common economic program and ideology of neoliberalism."

The book follows in the tradition of Barrington Moore, while dissenting from some of his specifics. As Paige says,

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[1] Moreover, the ultimate outcome of the so-called revolutions was....neoliberalism, in the 1990s. Good for the elite, not so good for the masses.

[2] It's true that some of those examples, and others in history, involved a still-enormous peasantry. But the urban population, much of it having only recently left the land, was crucial too.

> In *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* Moore argues that democracy is a product of a "bourgeois revolution" against a backward landed aristocracy ("no bourgeoisie, no democracy"),[1] that authoritarian "fascist" regimes result from a coalition between a dominant landed aristocracy and a weak bourgeoisie, and that socialist revolution occurs when a massive revolt of cohesive peasant villages overwhelms landed and bourgeois classes weakened by a powerful agrarian bureaucracy.... Moore, like many other theorists, both Marxist and non-Marxist, traces the development of democracy to a "bourgeois revolution" in which a rising industrial bourgeoisie and its political allies defeat the entrenched political power of the landed aristocracy. The defeat of the Southern slave-holding aristocracy by the industrialists of the North in the U.S. Civil War is one of Moore's paradigmatic cases. The failure of bourgeois revolution can open the way to conservative authoritarianism (what Moore calls "fascism") through the continued dominance of the landlords, as in Moore's implicit comparative case of Germany. Given the close ties between the agrarian and agro-industrial fractions of the elite the prospects for a democratic resolution in the case of Central America are not [i.e., *were* not] promising. The inability of the agro-industrial fraction to separate itself from, much less defeat [at least until the late 1980s or 1990s], the agrarian fraction, as well as the heavy weight of agriculture in the economic base of the elite as a whole, suggest that conservative authoritarianism would be the expected outcome. To this extent the Central America past provides convincing confirmation of Moore's thesis.

He goes on to say, "The dependence of the landed elite on what Moore calls 'labor repressive agriculture' is the key element linking the landed elite with authoritarian anti-democratic politics. The use of extra-economic coercion in slavery, serfdom, or other forms of forced labor requires a powerful authoritarian state and precludes extension of citizenship or other legal rights to the working population." However, it's worth noting the obvious fact that an authoritarian state can be very useful to industry also, and that for such a state to exist there need not be a dominant landed elite. For instance, a foreign country such as the U.S. can prop it up through military aid.

Interesting comments:

> As James Dunkerly has pointed out, the transition to democracy takes on a very different form in Central America than in the Southern Cone of Latin America (Argentina, Uruguay, Chile) and other semi-peripheral regions that have become the model for theorizing about the current wave of "transitions to democracy." In the Southern Cone model of "democracy by default," the exhaustion of state-centered import-substitution industrialization, compounded by the debt crisis of the 1980s, led to a loss of foreign and domestic business support and subsequent voluntary withdrawal of the military from rule after it had disarticulated the left through political repression. In Central America, state-centered import-substitution industrialization was not the dominant pattern except in an attenuated form in Costa Rica.... The praetorian military dictatorships of Central America have little in common with the "bureaucratic authoritarianism" of the military regimes of the Southern Cone, and the Central American militaries, to put it mildly, did not leave voluntarily....
>
> As Gay Seidman has demonstrated in a comparative study of Brazil and South Africa, parallel processes [to Central America's] were at work in more developed societies. The success of import-substitution industrialization strategies in semi-peripheral authoritarian regimes such as Brazil and South Africa in the post-World War II era created new social movements that could not be contained within these regimes. The creation of a vastly expanded industrial working class on the one hand, and a vast impoverished urban

[1] One should note, however, that it won't be an *inclusive* democracy until the lower classes force it to be.

> informal sector on the other, both consequences of successful industrialization without redistribution, created the conditions for what she calls "social movement unionism."... Critical for the success of social movement unionism was a split between the industrial elite and the state as the world economy entered its downturn after 1973. Given a choice between strengthening the authoritarian state apparatus sufficiently to repress the workers' movements and making an accommodation with them, the new industrial bourgeoisie abandoned its allies in the military, opening the way for democratic regimes in both South Africa and Brazil.

This is sort of what happened in Central America. In both cases, "popular mobilization split the more progressive sector of the bourgeoisie off from its authoritarian allies." The class structures and the agents of the transition were somewhat different, but the outcomes were similar.

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Here's a simple way to think about the downfall of capitalism: for over a century, oppressed people all over the world have risen up again and again, year after year, decade after decade, to overthrow institutions either integral to or, if residual from the feudal past, temporarily strengthened or made harsher by capitalism. And people will continue to do so, each generation continuing the fight. Their prospects for revolutionary success, however, have been limited as long as the core of capitalism in the West has had a fairly stable social structure and intact civil society. As long as the richest states have not faced insurrections themselves but have been able to intervene (usually successfully) whenever such insurrections threatened elsewhere, global capitalism has been more or less safe. Only when, finally, insurrections elsewhere coincide with massive revolutionary movements in the core—resulting in part from the decline of an integral civil society—can capitalism fall. This condition wasn't really fulfilled even in the 1930s. Only now is it beginning to come to fruition.

Moreover, the necessity that civil society decay means that capitalism's fall has to coincide with that of the nation-state, which, historically speaking, matured symbiotically with civil society. The latter's decline entails the former's.

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In a sense, yes, nature was unjust in having made women subordinate to men[1]—in much the same ways as children are, though not to the same extent. Physical weakness, shorter and smaller bodies, the need and desire to be protected, a lower degree of assertiveness and self-certainty (on average), the tendency to have a more "receptive," impressionable, excitable nature, etc. All the old stereotypes. On the other hand, there are compensations, to quote Emerson. Women naturally derive many benefits from their so-called weaknesses, and those weaknesses certainly don't make them unhappy. If anything, women tend to be more joyful, life-loving, and innocently fun-loving than men. (Just as children do.) Only malcontented *ressentiment*-charged radical feminists are made unhappy by the *natural* side of their subordination to men,[2] and here the unhappiness is caused mostly by social factors, not genes. When it comes to the things that really matter, such as the capacity for happiness, moral behavior, intelligence, creativity and self-expression, *humanity*, women are far from inferior.

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[1] (Notice I didn't say inferior. That would be meaningless and stupid.)

[2] Obviously there are also "unnatural" kinds of subordination, unnecessary kinds, which should be abolished. I'm thinking, for example, of political and economic subordination.

There is something low and vulgar about picking up women, talking to them and flirting with them in order to get their phone numbers. Saying what you have to say, saying what you think will entertain them, trying to make them laugh, lying and flattering and teasing in order to elicit giggles, *descending* in that way. Women tend to like it, of course, but it's still low and vulgar. Frivolous, and undignified for both parties.[1]

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There's no question that the vast majority of pornography is degrading to women. What is disturbing is that the vast majority of people enjoy watching it.

*

The prehistoric understanding of words as possessing magical power, as being means of conjuring gods and controlling nature, has analogues all through history. For example, as Benedict Anderson notes, Church Latin, Koranic Arabic, and Examination Chinese were for a long time seen by their respective cultures as "truth-languages," direct emanations of the divine. Essentially untranslatable, each the only medium through which reality could be apprehended. So, instead of being a tool for controlling the world, language—a particular language—was now only an expression of it, of the world's innermost essence. One could no longer communicate with gods and influence them; one could only seek to understand them (or reality, the cosmos), by learning the divine language. This was a step towards the "disenchantment" of the world (as Weber would say), i.e. the self's separation from essential reality, its alienation, its understanding of reality as *transcendent* instead of immanent [which it had been in the age of animism]. With modernity came the final step, when the divorce between language and the world, thought and being, became absolute. Linguistic signs are now seen as arbitrary, in no way emanations of reality but rather "randomly fabricated representations of it."

With postmodernism, though, it would seem that there has been an ironic—and ironically unconscious—return to the more naïve attitude. The separation between thought and being, or "discourse" and the world-in-itself, has been repudiated, so that the world is now constructed by discourses, "signifiers," "significations," etc. Actually no return to an earlier stage has happened; instead, alienation has been taken to an extreme: reality itself has been sloughed off, discarded, denied. There is no reality; there is only the play of subjectivities and significations. Truth, God, whatever, is so "transcendent" it doesn't even exist! There is no anchor, only ethereal discourse. What can come after this stage? Presumably either the end of the world or some sort of negation of the negation.

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It's all illusion. All of it. And I don't have a stake in the outcome. –Let things fall apart, let chaos reign, let this ugly world fall to pieces.

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Believe it or not, I don't have very high standards for people. A woman who emails me after reading my profile on a dating website impresses me. An academic who expresses appreciation for Noam Chomsky really impresses me. Someone who regularly replies to emails impresses me. I'm impressed by people who love classical music. The problem is that almost everyone is predictable, so these things rarely happen.

[1] [That's only from one perspective, though. From another, a more good-humored perspective, it's perfectly fine and natural to hit on women and so forth. It's just good spontaneous fun. When I wrote the above I was thinking of those awkward situations in bars or elsewhere when you approach women with the intent of getting their phone numbers and are forced to make an ass of yourself.]

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On the "law" of comparative advantage.— According to Adam Smith, "were the Americans, either by combination or by any other sort of violence, to stop the importation of European manufactures, and, by thus giving a monopoly to such of their own countrymen as could manufacture the like goods, divert any considerable part of their capital into this employment, they would retard instead of accelerating the further increase in the value of their annual produce, and would obstruct instead of promoting the progress of their country towards real wealth and greatness. This would be still more the case were they to attempt, in the same manner, to monopolize to themselves their whole exportation trade." Chomsky comments: "Surely among the most spectacularly refuted predictions in economic history, but solidly based in the abstract theories that continue to be imposed on the weak." We're lucky that Alexander Hamilton ignored classical economics—as has every country that has ever industrialized.

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To reiterate ideas from months ago: as I see it, there have been two [or one-and-a-half] global "cycles" in the history of industrial capitalism. In the first, Britain industrialized, then adopted free trade because it really had no competitors to fear, and then imperialism happened (protected markets, etc.) when other countries caught up. International overproduction became problematic, and underconsumption in domestic economies persisted until finally it got severe in the U.S. (and elsewhere?) and helped cause the Great Depression. More protectionism, nationalism, and World War II. Afterwards the U.S. was in something like the hegemonic position of Britain in the mid-nineteenth century, so it adopted free trade because of relatively little danger from European competition. But by the 1970s international competition had reached the danger zone again and global overproduction returned. Hence lower profit-margins and more protectionism, especially, from what I remember, in the 1980s. (But less protectionism than early in the twentieth century—which probably has contributed to the even greater recent predominance of financial speculation than in the 1920s and earlier.[1]) A return to severe underconsumption, financial bubbles, and crises. The question is, what next? A global depression, but then what? Evolution towards socialism? Either that or the collapse of everything. (Or both.)

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The notion of "stupidity" seems purely polemical and without substance, but that's wrong. It is a necessary concept in order to explain things about people that would otherwise be inexplicable. Lack of critical intelligence, lack of talent for abstract thinking, lack of social awareness or understanding of people and situations—these are what is usually meant by "stupidity." Everyone exhibits stupidity sometimes, but in some people it is more common than others. A disproportionate number of political conservatives, for example, are more or less stupid, as you'll see if you talk to them. They have trouble understanding arguments; they're less open-minded than liberals tend to be, less able to understand opposing arguments or consider facts disinterestedly. Scientific research, by the way, confirms this. I suspect it has something to do with the old idea of the authoritarian personality (which exhibits more stupidity than a relatively "open" personality does). Another way to say it is that the average conservative is less objective, rational, open to logic, empathetic, etc. than the average liberal. That's a scientific fact, not just an insult.

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[1] In other words, with fewer protected markets than earlier—and no colonies to supply raw materials cheaply and serve as protected markets—manufacturing has become relatively less profitable than in the early twentieth century and finance correspondingly more so. (It's interesting that the interests of finance (speculation, etc.) and manufacturing are so often opposed. Manufacturers tend to profit from more protection but "financiers" from less, partly, I suppose, because financial capital is more mobile than manufacturing.) But I'm still too ignorant to talk about this stuff.

As for radical leftists, they often fall into one of two categories: the left version of arch-conservatives with whom you can't argue, and something that approximates the open-mindedness and intellectual disinterestedness of Chomsky or Zinn. Mainstream liberals tend to be more objective than the former but less objective than the latter.

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I dance, therefore I am.— A piece that's good for restoring the love of living after you've been corrupted by contact with authority is Beethoven's King Stephen Overture. It's joy in fun and fun in joy. Enjoy! :-)

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Men's attraction to women in their twenties is a kind of socially acceptable pedophilia.

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The movie *Der Untergang*, about Hitler's last days, dramatizes divine retribution. Nazism happened in Germany, and then Germany was destroyed. A grievous chastisement rained down from the sky. The most horrifying thing in history could not be without consequences for its perpetrators. Nazism in its essence was an implosion of everything true, good, and beautiful; its logical conclusion was World War II, and logically its conclusion had to boomerang back to its true believers. When you watch the scenes of bombs pulverizing Berlin and think of Dresden's destruction, you realize that that was all implicit in Nazism itself. The ideology was fulfilled. Nazism, as a negation of moral and intellectual culture, was *precisely* what happened to Germany [and all Europe]; in that sense, it ended as the most fully realized ideology in history.

This combination of perfect racism, perfect nationalism, perfect anti-intellectualism, perfect Social Darwinism, perfect authoritarianism, perfect bureaucratism, and perfect militarism amounted to perfect nihilism, and thus *was* what it both *deserved* and *received*: perfect negation. It was also the culmination of the dark side of Western history (which continues, however). Maybe, after all, it was inevitable that someday there would come to power a fusion of imperialism, nationalist and racist hatred, and ultra-bureaucratism—all on that most explosive and authoritarian of foundations, industrial capitalism. Maybe Europe just had to get it out of its system, at least temporarily purge itself. The transition from a feudal and absolutist social order to a mature capitalist and liberal democratic one was never going to be easy.[1] Is the stage of world-conquering nihilism going to happen again as we progress from capitalism to post-capitalism? Let's hope not.

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Classical and neoclassical economics are silly. Maybe at times they stumble into a good idea or two, but the foundation is unreal. Let's just use our common sense for a minute. If a country wants economic development, there has to be demand for goods. Without demand, producers will have no reason to supply goods. What's the most effective way to create demand? Let government use its enormous tax revenues to directly demand products and services (infrastructure development, etc.), to redistribute income to those who will use it to buy the most stuff, and to fund and direct public institutions that will contribute to

[1] [I hear a postmodern intellectual shouting at me, "Teleology! Determinism! Etc.!" But all I'm saying is that, in retrospect, it is liberal democracy that best (most stably and so on) reconciles the demands of capital with those of most of the populace. So it was highly probable that as capitalism grew older, liberal democratic tendencies would finally prevail—as they have recently done even in Latin America. Even where they haven't prevailed, though, there are long-term pressures in that direction. They might not be realized, but they exist.]

development. For these reasons alone, government has to be the foundation of modern economic progress. But it is also needed in the sphere of foreign trade, to establish import tariffs and quotas. After all, development is based on continual improvements in labor productivity. (With more productive labor, output can be greater and cheaper, which brings in more revenue that makes it possible to hire more workers and/or pay them more, which both raises effective demand and gives business incentives to raise productivity more, etc. It's a virtuous circle.) Government therefore should use its unequalled revenues and power to direct investment—or encourage it to be directed—where there is the greatest potential for improvements in labor productivity. This might well necessitate tariffs and quotas, to give domestic business a chance to catch up with international competitors.

The world is more complicated than all this, yes. Especially the world of late globalization. Nevertheless, the principles are accurate, as history proves. The problem is that in a capitalist world, contradictions inevitably creep in and muck up even successful instances of development. Nothing is sustainable in a capitalist world.

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In *Chomsky: Ideas and Ideals* (2004), Neil Smith says the following: "The part of his work for which [Chomsky] is most famous, infamous according to some, and the one for which he has been most vociferously criticized, is his argument that a substantial part of the faculty of language is genetically determined: it 'is some kind of expression of the genes.' [Horror of horrors!] The simplest formulation of this claim, which recalls the rationalism of Descartes, and explicitly juxtaposes this with the empiricism of Quine, is that 'Language is innate.' The claim is so radical [?], and so counterintuitive in the face of the existence of close on 10,000 different languages in the world, that it is necessary to summarize and evaluate the evidence.... [The evidence Chomsky cites includes] the speed and age-dependence of acquisition, convergence among grammars, analogies to vision and other modular abilities, species-specificity, the 'over-determination' of language acquisition in deaf or blind, or deaf-blind, children, but above all the existence of universals on the one hand and poverty-of-the-stimulus arguments on the other."

It's just astounding. Academics actually consider these ideas controversial, even "radical"! Why is there such aversion to the clearest common sense?? The average person on the street, who would surely agree with Chomsky, has a more sensible head on his shoulders than these professional intellectuals, these lunatics. Why the aversion to innateness?? Why the centuries-long commitment to empiricism?? Why the ridiculing of the idea that the human mind inherently has limited cognitive capacities?? Every other species does, so why not us? We're not angels, to quote Chomsky; we're defined, determined, organic beings, whose minds are not blank or infinite at birth. From my teenage years, or before, I've implicitly considered these rationalist ideas too obvious to discuss. But I guess humans don't like to believe there are limitations to their powers or freedom or ability to mold themselves and understand everything. Childish delusions, residues of infantile narcissism.

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Dissertation stuff.— Email to the labor historian Alex Lichtenstein: "Professor Lichtenstein— I'm a graduate student in History at UIC, […]. I found your article "A 'Labor History' of Mass Incarceration" quite useful as I plan my dissertation—but I'm still in the very early stages of the project, which is why I'm emailing you. I'm fascinated by the "prison-industrial complex" of recent decades, in particular by its surely great contribution to the "decline of America" that is occurring, this world-historic development. I'd like to study something to do with this, but I'm having trouble formulating a specific research program. I can't help thinking that the emergence of the "national-security state" is intimately tied to that of the "carceral state," that the two are but different facets of basically the same phenomenon—the same decline of civil society, privatization of public space, decline of the welfare state, all of which is clearly tied to deindustrialization, the rise of global finance, the war on drugs and on labor.... These developments all seem interrelated—though exactly *how* they're related is difficult to explain—and I suspect that they also are contributing to

the evolving global crisis of capitalism, for instance insofar as they stifle aggregate demand, which according to many economists is a fundamental reason for the explosion of consumer and government debt in recent decades. I'm fascinated by the ways in which all these symptoms of crisis seem indirectly to imply each other, to "holistically" bring each other about. And this carceral, national-security state that is being born—it strikes me as symptomatic of the crisis of the nation-state itself, as though perhaps, in the long run, it will prove to have been the final or penultimate stage of the (Western) state's 700-year-long evolution....

"So I guess I'm most interested in the big picture. Something having to do with the decay of the world center of capitalism—and thus, perhaps, the decay of capitalism itself—as viewed through the prism of the carceral state. Or of the rise of such a state as it has interacted with, and partially determined, the decline of the welfare state. But specifically how to approach the issue is stumping me. Do you have any ideas? This statement of yours intrigued me: "....In short, labor historians are positioned to ask how what Simon calls "governing through crime" has been linked to the emergence of a particular kind of political economy—one associated with the Sunbelt (California and Texas in particular), lack of regulation, the privatization of social space, antitax politics, erosion of state expenditures on public goods (education, services, etc.), yet (at least until very recently) apparently limitless public expenditure on corrections driven by fear, anxiety, and post–civil rights racial backlash. What does the new carceral state look like as a functioning political-economic system, and how did it evolve to its currently unsustainable point?" Excellent questions. I've been considering studying state governments' spending since the 1970s on carceral/security vs. "welfare" measures and how/why the proportions have changed. Or maybe it would be more interesting to study corporate lobbying pertaining to incarceration, surveillance, etc. A scholarly investigation of the American Legislative Exchange Council or some such organization might be fruitful. Or maybe I could study the evolution of a particular city (say, Chicago? or some other city in the Midwest?) from the perspective of the carceral/security state's rise. Do you think that might be worth doing?

"Anyway, I'd appreciate any suggestions, if you have time. I'd like to do something that's important but also manageable.... Having difficulty thinking of what that might be, as you can tell."

He sent a few suggestions, but I'm still struggling.

*

A romantic like me sometimes finds it hard to motivate himself to do things if he doesn't have a "soulmate" to inspire him. A beautiful woman he deeply loves and respects, a woman who challenges him to achieve his potential. He might lose interest in things or not take anything very seriously because unconsciously his mind is not at one with itself. He will possibly fixate on the pointlessness and unhappiness of everything, projecting his dissipated thoughts and energies into universal truths. If he has great inner strength he might survive and even accomplish many things, but it will all be rather hard and he'll feel deeply lonely. He'll talk to wonderful women like Marilyn Smith with a mild pain in his chest knowing that she's married and wouldn't be interested in him anyway, and he'll try to forget about her.

*

The state of our society and its trajectory since the 1930s are revealed in a simple juxtaposition: in the 1930s the government's message was "We have nothing to fear but fear itself"; nowadays the message is "We have nothing to fear but a lack of fear itself."

*

I don't like to sound negative, but I have to admit that you can *sort of* judge the "value" of a person by the quality of people with whom he or she chooses to interact. For example, I can't help thinking that there is something pathetic about a woman who wants to be my roommate's girlfriend. Even if she seems like a great person, you know there's *something* wrong with her. In general, you see these women fawning

over idiots and jerks, and it's hard not to judge them. A person chooses to be with people who reflect some aspect of him, who either complement him or share his qualities—i.e., who confirm his self-love, with whom he identifies in some way. So it's perfectly permissible to "judge" someone, at least a *little*, on the basis of his friends or lovers, since they are effectively reflections of him. They give clues to his character.

*

Here's an email exchange with Chomsky: "I'm curious what you think about vegetarianism/veganism. I'm not a vegetarian—I like meat too much—but maybe I should become one.... Do you think there's a moral imperative to justify one's decision to eat meat (considering the conditions of industrial production, etc.)? Or do you think that because choosing not to eat meat wouldn't do anything to improve conditions in the food industry, it isn't really a 'moral' decision at all? How do you justify not being a vegetarian?" "It's a moral issue, one of many. And there are conflicting values, as usual the case in life [sic]. Vegetarian or not, one should seek to improve conditions in the industry. On justifying actions, hard to imagine anyone who doesn't face that question. Take a vegan who doesn't grow his/her own food. How do they justify the waste of energy transporting it? The waste of time that could be used for helping people in need (it does take time, planning, etc.) and on and on."

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In my Master's thesis I argued that in the coming decades, the state and the ruling class, in order to partly contain popular discontent and so prop up their power, will probably have to evolve in ways that will undermine their position in the long run. I ought to have noted that neoliberalism itself—the state's configuration in the past thirty-five years—has evinced similar dynamics. It has been the means by which the ruling class has maintained and even augmented its power after the popular uprisings of the 1960s and 1970s, but ultimately it will prove—or is proving—to have made the long-term position of the ruling class untenable. It has so undermined social stability that I suspect power-structures all over the world are panicking now. In the last twenty years there has been a militarizing of police forces and an expansion of the national security state in order to control the population, and these trends are intensifying. But they're not going to prove sufficient. As the global economy falls apart and privatization continues, the ruling class will, I think, have to start tolerating and maybe even encouraging the kinds of decentralized grassroots initiatives I discussed in the thesis, because they'll seem less subversive towards power than mass political movements. Thus, the rich and their state will advance to another stage of the dialectic, another stage of their self-undermining, in which they participate more actively—out of necessity—in destroying the conditions of their rule. The "necessity" of this stage, if it occurs, will have organically emerged from the previous neoliberal phase, which itself grew out of the unsustainability of the earlier, more "populist" phase (the heyday of the welfare state), and so on back to the beginning.

*

May

A few weeks ago I joined the six-person bargaining committee of the Graduate Employee Organization. (New contract negotiations are coming up.) The stuff is tedious and I'm bad at it, but I might as well get involved in something. […]

End-of-the-semester papers:

The Tortured Demise of the Nation-State

In the age of advanced globalization, it is common for intellectuals to argue that the nation-state is in decline. David Held, for example, who distinguishes between a state's autonomy and its sovereignty, contends that international organizations such as the European Union, NATO, and the World Bank both limit states' autonomy and infringe upon their sovereignty.[1] Edward Said, on the other hand, observes that a "generalized condition of homelessness" characterizes contemporary life.[2] One could embellish this insight by pointing to the *social atomization* that seems to be ever more pronounced in much of the world, and that vitiates the *rootedness* of truly belonging to a national community. It appears, therefore, that the nation-state is under assault on more than one front. In this paper I will argue that that is indeed the case; I will also clarify some of the processes at work.

It is necessary, first of all, to define the nation-state. Anthony Smith gives a reasonable definition of the fully formed nation in saying that it is "a named community of history and culture, possessing a unified territory, economy, mass education system and common legal rights."[3] The term "nation-*state*," then, makes explicit the fusion of such a community with its own government that administers and regulates the social order. On this understanding, nation-states are a modern creation: history is full of empires, city-states, tribes, and nomadic groups, but before the late nineteenth century there were no full-fledged nations or nation-states. To say they are purely a modern "invention," however, or an elite construct with no basis in historical reality—as some scholars imply—is to go too far. Smith is right that the nation has historical antecedents. Both the ancient and medieval eras boasted "durable cultural communities," ethnic communities with common historical memories, homelands, languages, religions, and a sense of solidarity.[4] Some of these not-always-well-defined communities eventually formed the basis of particular nationalities.

Benedict Anderson is right to emphasize *print-capitalism* as having made national consciousness possible by creating "unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars."[5] In the centuries after Gutenberg's invention, print-capitalism spread across the continent, "assembling" related vernaculars by creating "mechanically reproduced print-languages capable of dissemination through the market."[6] Speakers of the many varieties of French, for example, could now understand one another through print. Literacy increased as writing became more accessible. Print-capitalism also gave a new "fixity" to language by encouraging the standardization of spelling and syntax. Third, Anderson notes that print-languages inevitably exalted certain dialects at the expense of others: High German and the King's English, for instance, eventually became languages of power, causing other dialects to atrophy and sometimes to die out. These processes fostered linguistic uniformity, which contributed to the rise of national consciousness.

In fact, without print-capitalism it is hard to imagine most of the things that are thought to have facilitated the emergence of the nation-state. The Reformation was made possible by print, as was the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, the spread of such ideologies as liberalism and republicanism, thereby the French Revolution, industrialism, the immense bureaucracy of the modern state, mass education, etc. Similarly, the large-scale state projects undertaken in the heyday of the nation-state would have been impossible without print. One might consider the history of the state to have climaxed in these projects that exemplify what James C. Scott calls the "high modernist" ambition for the "administrative ordering of nature and society," with which such figures as Le Corbusier, Stalin, Robert Moses, and Robert McNamara are associated.[7] Soviet collectivization is an example, as is the construction of Brasília between

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[1] David Held, "The Decline of the Nation State," in *Becoming National: A Reader*, eds. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 415.
[2] Quoted in Liisa Malkki, "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees," in *Becoming National*, 435.
[3] Anthony Smith, "The Origins of Nations," in *Becoming National*, 107.
[4] Ibid., 109, 110.
[5] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 44.
[6] Ibid.
[7] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 88.

1956 and 1960. Similar projects are still going on today—though not, it seems, in North America or Europe—as for example China's relocating of hundreds of millions of peasants into newly constructed cities such as Chongqing.[1]

Considering the importance of print-capitalism as a foundation for the rise of the nation-state, it is ironic that what one might call *electronic capitalism* is contributing to the *decline* of the nation.[2] Here, however, we must distinguish between the nation as an "imagined community" and the state, the government apparatus. The former is declining faster than the latter.[3] Already with the spread of television in the 1950s and 1960s, the atomizing potential of electronic media was becoming apparent. In a sense, television gave and continues to give people common cultural touchstones, shows they can watch and discuss, advertisements they can all relate to, news items, ubiquitous soundbites, etc. More fundamentally, however, television has fragmented communities and families, atomized the national culture, instilled mental and behavioral patterns of *passiveness*, and in the long run degraded civil society. Lauren Berlant is right that "television promotes the annihilation of memory and, in particular, of historical knowledge and political self-understanding."[4] Print media have a tendency to encourage dialogue and reify culture, to bring people together to participate in a broader community, ultimately a national one; electronic media—in the context of capitalism, at least—tend to substitute isolation and self-involvement for direct interaction with others, as well as to degrade communication into instantaneous visual and auditory stimuli whose effect is to undermine identities (be they personal, national, or whatever).

These trends are even more evident when one considers the impact of video games, cell-phones, computers, the internet, and such "social media" outlets as Twitter and Facebook. A society in which most people spend an inordinate amount of their time sitting in front of TVs, playing video games, shopping online, searching for soulmates through internet dating, imbibing bits of information in short bursts from an endless variety of global news and entertainment sources, and electronically "chatting" with acquaintances or strangers located anywhere from the next room to the other side of the world—such a society does not have much of a tangible national culture, and its "imagined community" is indeed *imaginary*, a mere abstraction with little basis in concrete reality. In short, the individualistic, passive, and *consumerist* nature of a capitalist society saturated by electronic media[5] is interpersonally alienating and destructive of civil society, hence destructive of a shared national consciousness.

At the same time, because electronic technology makes possible nearly instantaneous communication across the world, the kind of community it fosters is global rather than national. One may start to feel more affinity for people ten thousand miles away than for one's compatriots. Global social movements become easier to coordinate; things like the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street can emerge to break down national barriers and birth a *global* consciousness.

Electronic capitalism has also helped make possible the hegemony of transnational corporations, which have their own role to play in the destruction of the nation. First and foremost, their actions tend to bring about the equalization of conditions between countries. As corporations seek cheap labor abroad, impose ever-poorer working conditions on domestic employees, deindustrialize Western countries in part by obsessively pursuing productivity advances that make possible shrinking workforces, and fight to dismantle economic regulations and the welfare state, they cause a creeping Third-Worldization of the core capitalist countries—while facilitating a creeping industrialization of the former Third World. The point is not that the Global South will ever achieve anything like the once-prosperous level of the North; rather, it is that the world is heading towards a relative convergence of social conditions everywhere, in the form of

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[1] Robert Dreyfuss, "Chongqing: Socialism in One City," *The Nation*, November 18, 2009.

[2] [This and other ideas in the paper, as in most things I write, would be treated by academics as "provocative" and "fruitful" insights that suggest interesting research agendas if they were published in long, heavily footnoted and jargonized papers in some reputable journal or an anthology put out by a well-known university press. Absurdity.]

[3] [Another research agenda for scholarly mice.]

[4] Lauren Berlant, "The Theory of Infantile Citizenship," in *Becoming National*, 496.

[5] And by "print versions" of such media, for example magazines devoted to celebrity gossip and instant gratification of whatever sort.

extreme economic inequality, political disenfranchisement of the majority, environmental degradation, and so forth. In the West especially, class polarization is increasing and infrastructure deteriorating. National differences thereby become of less substance; the urgent task appears of *globally* confronting power-structures, since it is only on the global stage that transnational corporations can potentially be defeated. (After all, they can play off country against country in their quest for advantageous regulatory regimes.) The slogan "Workers [i.e. non-capitalists] of the World, Unite!" becomes more timely than ever before, since nation-states *really are*, this time, deteriorating from within and from without.

Like the national community, though less obviously, the state—particularly in the core capitalist countries—is under assault. As David Held says, it is slowly losing its autonomy and sovereignty to international organizations, and increasingly it has to coordinate its policies with other states. As it grows ever more debt-encumbered and beholden to corporate entities,[1] it begins to lose its ability to administer the social order, which itself is becoming less governable and more unstable as the population increases, class polarization intensifies, and infrastructure decays. The predictable consequence is that a quasi-police state will take the place of the welfare state—as is indeed happening, with heightened government investment in the "national security" state, in powers of surveillance, the expansion and privatization of prisons, the militarizing of police forces,[2] the ever-more-frequent suspension of civil liberties, etc. From one perspective, such developments *heighten* the power of the state; seen in their true light, however, they are symptoms of a social and political crisis. Far from indicating the health of the state, they show its sickness. In the long run they may prove to be its death-throes.

Said differently, the Western state is ceasing to be the *public* state it once was; it is becoming a government explicitly for the rich, a "private" state, a "security" state. More and more of its functions are privatized, including education, national security, law enforcement, and administration of prisons. The repressive functions of government—some of them taken over by outside contractors—become more important as the citizen-empowering, civil-society-enhancing functions start to wither away. Again, this is all in the interest[3] of "The Corporation," which can accumulate more capital and power as citizens lose their capacity to resist.

No doubt reactionary nationalist movements will appear, in fact are appearing, as these crises deepen. Their significance, however, is precisely the death of the nation-state, not its resurgence. David Held is right that the world is simply too interconnected now, and transnational corporations have too much power, for a return to the era of sovereign and autonomous nations to occur. Xenophobia and nationalism are vomited up with the drawn-out death-rattles of the Western state, as conservative sections of the public take up arms against the implications of corporate globalization.

The impact of all this on capitalism itself is another interesting question. Suffice it to say that, just as capitalism and the nation-state matured symbiotically together, so they will probably meet their demise in a fatal embrace. As capitalism evolved from its primitive commercial character in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to a more mature mercantilism and proto-industrialism, thence to full industrialization in the nineteenth century, finally from this phase of so-called "competitive capitalism" to "monopoly" or "state" capitalism in the twentieth century, the nation-state evolved from its primitive beginnings in the late feudal era to its apotheosis between the 1930s and 1960s in the "high modernist" schemes that James Scott discusses.[4] Capitalism's evolution made possible that of the nation-state, and the latter's evolution made possible the former's.[5] Capitalism's continued maturation, however, in the form of advanced globalization, has, as we have seen, begun to undermine the nation-state, a process that in the long run cannot but undermine capitalism itself. For the latter has, at least since the 1500s, required a state to maintain order

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[1] For the reasons behind these developments, see Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005* (New York: Verso, 2006).

[2] See, e.g., Arthur Rizer and Joseph Hartmann, "How the War on Terror Has Militarized the Police," *The Atlantic*, November 7, 2011.

[3] The short-term interest, that is. See the final paragraph below.

[4] Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1994).

[5] See Peter Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historic Role* (London: Freedom Press, 1997).

and facilitate the accumulation of capital. As the state loses its capacity to keep order, and as people across the world unite to resist the depredations of The Corporation, capital accumulation will face ever more obstacles.[1] In the end, one can expect the current world order to implode; some sort of post-capitalist, post-statist order will rise from its ashes. What it will look like, no one can foresee.

Dependency Theory Reconsidered

Forty-three years after its publication, Andre Gunder Frank's *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (1969) is still worth reading. It combines a compelling exposition of dependency theory with a wealth of factual information about Latin American history that even readers who disagree with Frank's theoretical premises will find of interest. Of course the most notable parts of the book, though, are its theoretical interpretations, which have aroused controversy since their publication. Frank is not the sole founder of the dependency school, which has a lot in common with Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory; nevertheless, he is a particularly important proponent of the model, and his arguments are at times very convincing. In this paper I will summarize some of his ideas, give a critique of them, and explore whether they are still relevant.

Frank states his overarching thesis and its presuppositions as follows:

> This essay contends that underdevelopment....is the necessary product of....capitalist development and of the internal contradictions of capitalism itself. These contradictions are the expropriation of economic surplus from the many and its appropriation by the few, the polarization of the capitalist system into metropolitan center and peripheral satellites, and the continuity of the fundamental structure of the capitalist system throughout the history of its expansion and transformation, due to the persistence or re-creation of these contradictions everywhere and at all times. My thesis is that these capitalist contradictions and the historical development of the capitalist system have generated underdevelopment in the peripheral satellites whose economic surplus was expropriated, while generating economic development in the metropolitan centers which appropriate that surplus—and, further, that this process still continues.[2]

The terms "metropolis" and "satellite" do not refer only to countries. According to Frank, their instantiations appear at all levels of the capitalist system, from the international to the intra-firm. For example, for most or all of its history Brazil could be considered a satellite of the world metropolis Britain (or London) or, later, the U.S. (or New York City); São Paulo, however, was and is the national metropolis that appropriates surplus from more underdeveloped regions of Brazil; within these regions are large towns that appropriate surplus from smaller ones and the countryside; on the level of the enterprise, too, the owner can be considered the "metropolis" who extracts surplus from, and thereby underdevelops, his "satellites" the workers, who are dependent on him as Brazil used to be utterly dependent on the U.S. The entire world is enmeshed in a billion webs of these metropolis-satellite dependency relations. The only difference between, say, a national metropolis like São Paulo and a world metropolis like New York is that the former is a satellite of the latter, and is therefore underdeveloped in relation to it.

Frank suggests that a metropolis has various mechanisms by which to keep its satellites in their dependent state and continue extracting their surplus, among them brute force (military or police), the enforcement of tariff policies (in the case of international relations) that benefit the metropole, the possible existence of powerful groups in the satellite whose interest lies in maintaining the status quo, and so forth. Underlying all these mechanisms, however, is the fact that the metropolis has so-called monopoly power

[1] David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) discusses these obstacles in detail.
[2] Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969), 3.

over the satellite, due to its already-established access to greater resources and possession of more economic surplus (which it then uses to extract even more). Once a country is already in a dependent relationship with another, Frank thinks it is impossible for it to break out of that underdevelopment-generating relationship unless it separates itself from the world capitalist system as a whole, in the manner of Communist Russia and China. The only possible solution, in other words, is a "socialist" revolution. The reason, it seems, is that, because the development of some places and the underdevelopment of others is an essential feature of capitalism, for a country to try to escape from a state of dependency by pursuing a "different kind" of capitalism than in the past—a more "independent" kind—is hopeless.

It is not difficult to criticize these ideas, however suggestive they may be. They are so abstract that their explanatory value is not clear. The metropolis/satellite opposition, while presented as a kind of explanation, is little more than a metaphorical description, albeit a suggestive and useful one. However, to compare the relationship between an employer and his employees with that between the global North and the South seems more confusing than helpful. In certain contexts, to invoke a metropolis/satellite relation can be useful as a way to guide one's analysis; ultimately, though, it is the details of the analysis that matter, the *mechanisms* by which surplus is transferred from one entity to another.

The notion of surplus itself is obscure. Frank takes much of his theoretical framework from Paul Baran, who, in *The Political Economy of Growth* (1957), distinguished between actual and potential economic surplus, both of which are different from Marx's concept of surplus-value. Given Frank's cavalier attitude toward theoretical underpinnings—his rather naïve use of the notion of surplus without investigating it rigorously—it is easy for the reader to be confused as to what exactly "surplus" means. Can it be measured? How is it determined? What is the relation between Marx's surplus-value and Frank's "surplus"? Is it even theoretically possible to determine how much surplus is extracted from a particular satellite? Despite all these problems, some kind of conception of surplus, of a difference between total output and the portion of it that is directly consumed, seems useful. Baran's and Frank's point is, first, that in addition to consumption there is savings or accumulation—the "actual" surplus—"which finds its embodiment in assets of various kinds added to society's wealth....[including] productive facilities, inventories, foreign balances, and gold hoards."[1] Second, much of the surplus from so-called satellite regions is siphoned to the metropolis, where it contributes to economic development; moreover, because consumption in satellites is often pushed down to subsistence levels, the surplus there, most of which goes to the metropolis, is large relative to total output.[2] Intuitively these ideas seem plausible. What they amount to, after all, is simply that global centers of industrial capitalism have historically extracted a great deal of wealth from more "backward" areas (thereby helping to keep the latter backward)—which is a fact that Frank amply documents in his book.

In other words, the central intuition of dependency theory, expressed in the previous sentence, is perfectly defensible, in fact almost certainly true. The problems with the theory, at least as Frank propounds it, are in its theoretical framework (or lack thereof) for that intuition. Baran, Frank, and others are right to emphasize tariff policies, foreign direct investment, foreign lending at high interest rates, and old-fashioned gunboat diplomacy as mechanisms to ensure the North's extraction of wealth from the South—mechanisms that have, perhaps, been made possible by the dominance in the South of landowning and merchant classes whose interests have tended to align with those of foreign capital—but Frank's hypotheses in particular are under-theorized and over-abstract. He effectively equates capitalism with the market, arguing that the fact that satellites are integrated into a world market in itself makes them completely capitalist. Their only possible salvation, therefore, is to withdraw from the international market and become "socialist." Robert Brenner counters by arguing that the necessary condition for modern cumulative development at a compound rate is that a country have a capitalist *class structure*, a structure relatively polarized between owners of capital and "free" wage laborers owning no means of production. Such a structure was largely absent in most of Latin America until recently; this fact, to which Frank apparently attributes little

[1] Quotation from Baran in Charles A. Barone, *Marxist Thought on Imperialism: Survey and Critique* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1985), 60.
[2] Ibid., 88.

importance, was a major determinant—and manifestation—of the continent's underdevelopment.[1] "Socialism," therefore, is not the only possible salvation; politically sponsored industrial capitalism, such as exists in South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and recently parts of Latin America, is equally a possibility. The point is that Frank's emphasis on the international market and his relative inattention to production relations and class structures limits the explanatory power of his ideas, makes his analysis excessively "abstract" and "fatalist" (in that any country that has at one point been underdeveloped is supposed to be incapable of developing without totally withdrawing from the capitalist market), and leads him to incorrect conclusions about policy and revolutionary strategy.

The central contention of dependency theory, however, remains relevant even today. The North continues to expropriate wealth, or surplus, from the South, thus contributing to the latter's underdevelopment. A particularly effective way of doing so, as Walden Bello argues in *The Food Wars* (2009), has been through structural adjustment programs imposed on developing states by the IMF and the World Bank. By conditioning loans on a country's privatization of its economy, dismantling of its public sector, suppressing of labor unions, and opening up of its economy to international competition—all of which are designed to enable the country to pay off its existing debt—the IMF has facilitated the plundering of states' wealth for the benefit of the global finance aristocracy. We can see these processes at work even now in Greece, which under the aegis of "austerity" is being forced to despoil its own citizens so as to transfer their wealth abroad. What will probably end up happening, as has happened in the past, is that foreign capital will come in to pick up the pieces of Greece's economy, investing in enterprises that will serve to transfer more wealth to the international financial elite.[2]

"Free trade" agreements are another means by which the North continues to exploit the South. NAFTA is the classic example. This agreement has resulted, for example, in the devastation of Mexican peasant agriculture due to the flooding of Mexico's market by the products of subsidized U.S.-based corporations. Income is transferred from ordinary people in Mexico to corporate coffers in the U.S., as peasants lose their livelihood and seek employment up north in America—where they can be exploited again, this time as labor-power. It is essentially the same kind of thing that Frank analyzed in *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, whereby tariff policies and foreign investment obstruct the satellite's development and benefit the metropolis (or at least its corporate sector).

Dependency theory is therefore still as relevant, or almost as relevant, as it was forty years ago. That is, its acknowledgement of the North's exploitation of the South is just as relevant; whether its theoretical premises remain compelling is another question, to which the answer might well be "No." With respect to much of Andre Gunder Frank's early work, the answer *is* no, although the notion of an economic surplus being transferred abroad seems worth keeping. Contrary to Frank's proposed solution, however, the remedy for this injustice is either governmentally [semi-]directed capitalist development, as in contemporary Brazil, or an *international* anti-capitalist movement—because it is on the global stage that true socialism will have to be born.

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[1] Brenner goes on to argue that not only does the existence of a market and its "profit motive" not in itself cause the transformation of a pre-capitalist class structure to a capitalist one (as Frank's position might lead one to expect); it can even *intensify* the former [i.e. entrench it, make it worse]. Thus, the slavery-based and/or semi-feudal regimes of labor control in most of Latin America were intensified by production for the market: unfree workers were squeezed more and made even less free so that they would produce more. Their low income, in turn, limited the development of a domestic market, "while there arose significant demand for luxuries [*produced abroad*] by the ruling class." Brenner continues: "Meanwhile, precisely the fact of forced labour in agriculture, either in pure form (slavery) or in correlation with peasant possession of subsistence plots, undermined the economies' ability to develop a free wage labour force for industry." Thus, the absence of a capitalist class structure was one cause of continued underdevelopment. Such a structure, moreover, can arise only through class struggle and political events, not "spontaneously" through market incentives. Robert Brenner, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism," *New Left Review* I/104, July-August 1977, 25-92.

[2] See Robin Hahnel, *The ABCs of Political Economy: A Modern Approach* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), chapter eight.

The Barbarous Legacy of Capitalism in Latin America

Since its colonization about five hundred years ago, Latin America has been ever more dominated by relations of commodity production for external markets, and secondarily for internal ones. With crucial collaboration by Latin America's merchant and landowning classes, Europe and, later, North America have ensured that the production (or extraction) and export of such commodities as silver, sugar, tobacco, coffee, rubber, fertilizers, bananas, indigo, oil, and cocaine have for centuries been foundations of societies south of the U.S. This fact has had deleterious implications for both the people and the environment of Latin America. Dependency theorists argue that it has entailed the continent's underdevelopment by means of the metropole's extraction of economic surplus—which has meant a corresponding depletion of wealth available for the continent's development—but in this paper I will focus on the brute facts of class conflict and environmental destruction. These have occurred all over the world as capital has deepened and broadened its dominion since the 1400s, but Latin America, like much of the global South, has suffered in ways somewhat different from the North, due both to the continued presence of indigenous peoples and to the subordination of internal development to the needs of foreign capital (and its effective "representatives" in the domestic economy). In the following, accordingly, I will consider several examples of how export-oriented commodity production has shaped Latin America's social landscape in conflict-ridden ways.

Steve Stern states the matter concisely in the first sentence of *Peru's Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest: Huamanga to 1640* (1982): "This book tells how conquest transformed vigorous native peoples of the Andean sierra into an inferior caste of 'Indians' subordinated to Spanish colonizers and Europe's creation of a world market."[1] For the sake of extracting economic surplus, from the mid-sixteenth century the colonizers began to impose on the native peoples of Peru such oppressive institutions as the encomienda, the mita, and, later, yanaconaje. The forced labor of the mita, for example, was for decades the principal means of exploiting mercury and silver mines, in addition to organizing work in such enterprises as textile workshops and sugar mills. Aside from the horrors of work and the low pay in a regime defined by mita labor, indigenous communities were gradually coerced into losing their ancient integrity, their self-sufficiency and internal vitality. Indian resistance was fierce, however, although it usually manifested itself in subtler and shrewder ways than collective uprisings, especially after the colonial state had been consolidated by Toledo's reforms in the 1570s. More commonly, Indians used Spanish juridical frameworks to defend their land and independence, often successfully. By the seventeenth century, their constant litigation "disrupted enterprise and incomes, shut down workshops, and pinched production with labor bottlenecks. Cheap mita labor grew scarce and unreliable."[2] The state form of extraction that consisted of mitas and tribute payments therefore deteriorated under the impact of pervasive and institutionalized Indian resistance.

In the long run, however, things did not improve for most natives; rather, new modes of controlling labor appeared that continued to undermine indigenous society and independence. Private forms of exploitation such as yanaconaje (long-term personal bondage to a master) and primitive wage labor became more integral to the social system than they had been earlier. As the market economy penetrated deeper into former enclaves of indigenous self-sufficiency, monetizing economic transactions and exacerbating divisions between rich and poor, and as entrepreneurs expropriated valuable resources such as irrigable lands and coca plantations, poorer Indians were compelled to rent themselves out in order to pay off debts or simply to survive. "Over time, then, colonial relationships gave rise to economic dependencies driving natives into the arms of colonials."[3] People abandoned village life in order to accumulate funds or start their lives anew, perhaps hoping to follow in the path of the minority of successful Indian entrepreneurs. The

[1] Steve J. Stern, *Peru's Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest: Huamanga to 1640* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), xv.
[2] Ibid., 128.
[3] Ibid., 153.

social structure continued to evolve in contradictory ways, but the ultimate result is clear: as Stern says, "The most dramatic creation—and legacy—of the first century of colonization was Indian poverty."[1]

Indian dispossession and poverty have continued up to the present; Emilio Kouri discusses an intervening period, the late nineteenth century, in *A Pueblo Divided: Business, Property, and Community in Papantla, Mexico* (2004). Unlike Stern, he focuses on a specific commodity, vanilla, showing how its growth in popularity overseas contributed to the demise of communal landholding in a particular region of Mexico between the 1870s and 1890s. Broadly speaking, Kouri recognizes three causes of the privatization of land in Veracruz: first, government officials had a fanatical commitment to the ideology of liberalism and private property; second, putting communal lands in private hands would augment property tax revenues and so assuage Veracruz's dire fiscal condition; third, the boom in the vanilla trade (among others), which resulted largely from improvements in communications and transport, heightened the value of land and made it worth controlling. The actual division of communal lands was a complicated, decades-long process full of interruptions, temporary compromises, legal machinations, government corruption, outbreaks of violence, two large rebellions, and state repression. By 1900 the transformation was complete: almost a third of Papantla's old communal territory belonged to townspeople, mostly big merchants, and a small Indian elite; the rest of the lands remained the property of native family farmers who had become landowners. More than a half of Indian households, however, were left propertyless by the triumph of privatization and parcelization, and inequalities in wealth and power were now guaranteed by differential access to land.[2] "Town merchants and Totonac [indigenous] bosses now reigned supreme," Kouri summarizes, "many Indian agriculturalists were now anything but independent, and the old bonds of community—whatever they once were—had long since frayed. This was the world that vanilla had made."[3]

Strictly speaking, of course, it is not a particular commodity that makes such a world but capital itself, the flow of ever-accumulating capital, which uses commodities as means to augment itself, a process that often entails privatization, dispossession, mass oppression, and environmental despoliation. A particularly effective way for capital to valorize itself is by extracting and refining oil; not surprisingly, such activities, being especially useful to capital, are also especially destructive to natural and social environments. This is clear from the two books *Crude Chronicles: Indigenous Politics, Multinational Oil, and Neoliberalism in Ecuador* (2004) and *The Ecology of Oil: Environment, Labor, and the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1938* (2006), by Suzana Sawyer and Myrna Santiago respectively. Although the books pertain to very different times, places, and categories of people, there are striking parallels between the stories they tell. In both cases, multinational oil companies invade a region and tear apart communities and natural habitats; the state is either unwilling or unable to assert itself against them sufficiently to protect the populations affected; the latter, whether Ecuadorian natives in the 1990s or Mexican workers in the 1920s, unite to defend themselves against corporate tyranny. A key difference between the cases is that the Mexican workers were citizens of a state that, during and after the Mexican Revolution, was ideologically and to some extent substantively on the side of "the people," which opened up opportunities for organized labor. As Santiago relates, the militancy of Mexican oil workers, while frustrated for many years by the power of multinationals and the weakness of the revolutionary state, finally, in 1938, provoked one of the decisive events of modern Mexican history: President Cárdenas's nationalization of the foreign oil industry. The details of this event need not concern us; suffice it to say that it grew out of a collective-bargaining dispute between labor and capital dramatized by the latter's flagrant violation of Mexican laws and the former's strike activity, which forced Cárdenas to act—on behalf of law and labor. This example serves as a welcome reminder that, while Latin America's history is a tragic one, not all the major victories have been won by the plunderers.

Ecuador in the 1990s conforms to the usual depressing pattern, however. Facing an alliance between the neoliberal state and multinational corporations, Indians fighting to protect their communities,

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[1] Ibid., 185.
[2] Emilio Kouri, *A Pueblo Divided: Business, Property, and Community in Papantla, Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 278-280.
[3] Ibid., 283.

their independence, and their habitat did not have much of a chance. Through popular mobilization they achieved some partial victories, and they succeeded in creating headaches for the state and its wealthy allies, but on a broad scale the neoliberal agenda was unstoppable. In 1994, for example, the government not only passed an important law that threatened communal lands but also revised the Hydrocarbon Law so that state intervention in the oil industry was diminished, the price of gasoline was deregulated, new oil fields were granted to private companies, and environmental protections were undermined.[1] The fatal potential of these developments is clear when one reflects that crude oil's most toxic components have been shown to lead to skin disease, nerve damage, reproductive abnormalities, and cancer in humans, and that the industrial processes associated with oil extraction themselves produce pollutants.[2] Since industrial accidents were rampant in the 1980s and 1990s, the indigenous peoples of Ecuador had cause for alarm. What happened in Mexico in the early twentieth century, however, was even worse, as the rainforest in the Huasteca was destroyed, oil conflagrations that lasted months killed workers and indigenes, "worker housing was showered with toxic chemicals routinely," and mundane accidents caused death-by-asphyxiation or oil-drowning.[3] All these tragedies make oil, as a commodity, the quintessential symbol of capital's violent nature.

Some commodities, by virtue of their production process, give workers more opportunities to exercise agency than others. According to Gillian McGillivray, sugar in Cuba was such a commodity, at least in the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries. In *Blazing Cane: Sugar Communities, Class, and State Formation in Cuba, 1868-1959* (2009), she recounts how sugarcane farmers and the workers they hired frequently burned cane fields as a way to assert their interests against sugarmill owners or in times of political upheaval. "It created jobs," McGillivray notes, "to burn cane that would otherwise be left standing until sugar brought a better price. The burned cane had to be cut and hauled to the mill, and the fields needed to be cleared and replanted during the dead season leading up to the next harvest."[4] (Burned cane had to be cut and milled within twenty-four hours lest it lose its sucrose.) Burning cane also made it easier to cut, and it improved working conditions in the fields. In certain contexts, such as times of political repression, burning fields could also be a revolutionary act, a means of protesting colonialism and elite rule. Undertaken on a sufficiently large scale, cane fires were an effective form of economic sabotage and a way to spread revolution. Their political importance was summed up by one of Fidel Castro's comrades: "Revolution in Cuba means burning sugarcane—it did in 1868, 1895, and 1930-33, and it did for us."[5] Through this sort of resistance at the point of production, i.e. at the fulcrum of society, workers turned their daily subordination and dependency on its head: they showed that in fact capital and its social order were dependent on *them*, that they had the power to shut society down. They could even install political leaders who promised to overthrow the rule of capital, as in the case of Castro.

Again, though, the balance of power under capitalism is such that it is usually capital, not labor, that wields violence and remakes the world in its image. The history of Latin America is one long confirmation of this. Consider the 1980s, for example. The violence of that decade in Central America was largely due to capital's attempts to suppress leftist insurrections by means of death squads and U.S.-backed paramilitary forces. Jeffery Paige makes it clear in *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* (1997) that a major impetus behind the reactionary savagery in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala was the coffee-growing landed elite, which had a greater interest than the "agro-industrial" class in controlling labor. "The revolutionary crises of the 1980s," he argues, "were crises of the coffee elites and the societies they made at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth

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[1] Suzana Sawyer, *Crude Chronicles: Indigenous Politics, Multinational Oil, and Neoliberalism in Ecuador* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 96, 97.
[2] Ibid., 102.
[3] Myrna Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil: Environment, Labor, and the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1938* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 195.
[4] Gillian McGillivray, *Blazing Cane: Sugar Communities, Class, and State Formation in Cuba, 1868-1959* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 3.
[5] Ibid., 264.

centuries."[1] As usual, therefore, the supremacy of a specific export commodity, or rather of capital as invested in the production of this commodity, brought hardship and even death for peasants and workers in Latin American countries. A similar thing happened in the 1930s, when uprisings against elites in El Salvador and Nicaragua were bloodily crushed by military force. The hubris and inhumanity of capital are on full display when tens of thousands of campesinos and laborers are slaughtered for the sake of maintaining complete capitalist control over society.

A bourgeois apologist might argue that capitalism as manifested in Latin America has had more positive than negative consequences for the environment and the majority of people, but that would be a hard argument to make. Examples can be multiplied almost without end of environmental and human agony as capital has steamrolled the continent. Given that commodity production is the foundation of the social structure, Indians and workers have had most success at softening their oppression when interfering with production itself. For instance, when Pastaza Indians in 1989 threatened seismic crews working for an oil company and confiscated their equipment, a presidential advisor flew in with company representatives to discuss indigenous grievances.[2] Interference with production could not simply be ignored. Nevertheless, even such minor victories as this have been rare compared to the number of defeats—the constant stream of defeats, from the sixteenth century to the twenty-first, from Mexico to Argentina. How long this sad history will continue is an open question, but one can expect it not to end until capitalism itself does.

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Reading *Contemporary Latin America* (2008) by Ronaldo Munck. It seems that you can divide the last hundred years of Latin America's history into four phases, more or less. First there was the agro-export, politically and economically oligarchic phase that was left over from the nineteenth century. Of course it included the beginnings of industrialization in some countries, early attempts at state-led development, etc. After the 1930s and until the 1970s there was the statist phase of import-substitution industrialization and populist mobilization of the masses in many parts of the region. (Less so in Central America.) To quote Munck, "Since the Second World War, the most significant change in the social structure of Latin America has been, undoubtedly, the effect of import-substitution industrialization. The simple overwhelming fact is that whereas agriculture employed over half the labour force in 1950, it provided work for less than a third of the total by 1980. The rise of industry is not quite so dramatic, although in most countries it accounted for a quarter or more of the working population by 1980." In this era the continent became urbanized. The developmentalist phase petered out by the 1970s for reasons I find a little obscure but that apparently have to do with excessive government debt, elite reaction against populism and democracy, the rise of global finance, the conservative ascendancy all over the hemisphere. So the era of neoliberalism began, the brutal military dictatorships, civil wars in Central America, the hollowing out of the state in favor of privatization, increasing social inequality, etc. The "fourth" phase is, I suppose, little but a kinder, gentler version of neoliberalism: a consolidation of democracy in recent years, a "left turn" that has tried to bring back some of the positive features of the so-called statist phase. (The 1990s fused quasi-democracy with continued harsh neoliberalism, but the latter has been softened in the last ten years.) Better economic performance than under the military dictatorships, but still widening social inequality. More social movements, but more and more chaos, it seems. Like everywhere else.

That rather crappy paper on Plato and Marx I wrote years ago is finally getting published in a philosophy journal, called *Philosophy Now*. I was surprised to get an email from someone at the magazine a few days ago, years after I'd submitted the paper.

Reading *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (2007), by Ruth Wilson Gilmore. Here's a summary of part of her argument:

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[1] Jeffery Paige, *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 5.

[2] Suzana Sawyer, *Crude Chronicles*, 64.

> California began to come apart during the world recession of 1973-75. After a false boom in the late 1970s, fueled by federal outlays that created jobs in both the military and aerospace industries and at the community level, California entered a new phase of political and economic restructuring in the early 1980s, during which time the bifurcation between rich and poor widened. While profits rose, capital's need for infusions of investment dollars was increasingly met out of retained earnings. Deep reductions in well-waged urban jobs that had employed modestly educated men of color—especially African Americans and Chicanos—overlapped with changes in rural industrial processes and a long drought. These forces produced surpluses of capital, labor, and land, which the state, suffering a prolonged period of delegitimation, manifested in the taxpayers' revolts, could not put back to work under its declining military Keynesian aegis. However, by renovating and making "critical already-existing activities," power blocs in Sacramento and elsewhere did recombine these surpluses—and mixed them with the state's aggressive capacity to act—by embarking on the biggest prison construction program in the history of the world.

The point is that as capital relocated in the 1970s, and automation made more and more workers redundant, and bad things happened to agriculture, and Pentagon funding shrank, etc., surpluses in land, labor, and capital developed. Since the Keynesian state that funded education and helped disadvantaged people was losing legitimacy (because of recessions, voters fed up with tax increases, conservative politics of "law and order," and so forth) even as surpluses in land, people, and capital accumulated, the state turned to prison construction as a way to "legitimately" put surpluses to work. Financial capital was happy to lend to the state for prison construction (as for anything else, as long as it paid); politicians found it convenient to blame societal woes on drugs and crime; many voters were in the mood to crack down on those hooligans in Los Angeles and elsewhere who were ruining America; rural areas going through hard times welcomed new prisons because they could potentially create jobs and raise the value of land. Prison construction surely had an added benefit in that it didn't necessitate the redistribution of wealth in a way that was unfavorable to elites, so it was politically "safe" in that regard. Just like military or "national security" spending. Criminal laws got tougher, in effect so that the expanding prison complex would have a *raison d'être*. For example, even though drug use declined in the 1980s, imprisonment of drug users increased. The "three strikes" law was also passed (in 1994), etc.

Now I'm reading the second edition of Barry Eichengreen's *Globalizing Capital: A History of the International Monetary System* (2008). You know about the gold standard in the late nineteenth century; I won't go over the history of how it came about. But I'll discuss how it worked. David Hume's price-specie flow model is still generally accepted, though it has to be modified in its particulars. Here are the essentials:

> ....Hume considered a world in which only gold coin circulated and the role of banks was negligible. Each time merchandise was exported, the exporter received payment in gold, which he took to the mint to have coined. Each time an importer purchased merchandise abroad, he made payment by exporting gold.
>
> For a country with a trade deficit, the second set of transactions exceeded the first. It experienced a gold outflow, which set in motion a self-correcting chain of events. With less money (gold coin) circulating internally, prices fell in the deficit country. With more money (gold coin) circulating abroad, prices rose in the surplus country. The specie flow thereby produced a change in relative prices.
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> Imported goods having become more expensive, domestic residents would reduce their purchases of them. Foreigners, for whom imported goods had become less expensive, would be inclined to purchase more. The deficit country's exports would rise, and its imports fall, until the trade imbalance was eliminated.

Modifying Hume's analysis to take into account the circulation of paper money rather than (or in addition to) gold within each country doesn't change its essentials.[1] The basic mechanism for adjusting relative prices and the balance of trade remains the same. (I guess it applies to any system of fixed exchange rates, right?) But it's necessary to mention the role of central banks.

> When a country ran a payments deficit and began losing gold, its central bank could intervene to speed up the adjustment of the money supply. By reducing the money supply, central bank intervention put downward pressure on prices and enhanced the competitiveness of domestic goods, eliminating the external deficit as effectively as a gold outflow. Extending [Hume's] model to include a central bank that intervened to reinforce the impact of incipient gold flows on the domestic money supply thus could explain how external adjustment took place in the absence of substantial gold movements.
>
> Typically, the instrument used was the discount rate. Banks and other financial intermediaries lent money to merchants for sixty or ninety days. The central bank could advance the bank that money immediately, in return for possession of the bill signed by the merchant and the payment of interest. Advancing the money was known as discounting the bill; the interest charged was the discount rate. Often, central banks offered to discount however many eligible bills were presented at the prevailing rate.... If the bank raised the rate and made discounting more expensive, fewer financial intermediaries would be inclined to present bills for discount and to obtain cash from the central bank. By manipulating its discount rate, the central bank could thereby affect the volume of domestic credit. It could increase or reduce the availability of credit to restore balance-of-payments equilibrium without requiring gold flows to take place. When a central bank anticipating gold losses raised its discount rate, reducing its holdings of domestic interest-bearing assets, cash was drained from the market. The money supply declined and external balance was restored without requiring actual gold outflows.

As it happens, central banks sometimes didn't follow these rules about where to set the discount rate. Other considerations were important, such as the fact that raising interest rates to stem gold outflows might depress the economy. Also, "central banks hesitated to raise interest rates because doing so increased the cost to the government of servicing its debt."

Let's take a break for a minute. I want to answer some questions I have about exchange rates. The basic principle, I guess, at least for floating exchange rates, is that a country's currency will rise in value if it is in demand—if there is excess demand relative to supply. It will decrease in value if there is excess supply relative to demand. A currency, therefore, is like any other commodity; it follows the laws of supply and demand. So, for example, if the U.S. Federal Reserve raises interest rates, foreign investors will exchange their own money for dollars in order to buy assets from the U.S. The international demand for dollars will thus increase, which will raise the value of dollars (just as the price of some product rises when demand for it does). Other currencies will lose value as investors exchange them for dollars. Conversely, lower interest rates tend to result in currency depreciation, because investors are less interested in assets denominated in that currency. So their demand for that currency declines, and its price falls.

Another factor that can influence exchange rates is the balance of payments. Let's just think about the current account. According to a fairly reliable website, "A deficit in the current account shows the country is spending more on foreign trade than it is earning, and that it is borrowing capital from foreign sources to make up the deficit. In other words, the country requires more foreign currency than it receives through sales of exports, and it supplies more of its own currency than foreigners demand for its products. The excess demand for foreign currency lowers the country's exchange rate until domestic goods and services are cheap enough for foreigners, [who then start buying more products from the country in

[1] Of course paper money can circulate in a country that's on the gold standard, as long as you can exchange a specified amount of paper money for a specified amount of gold.

question, which means that its currency is in greater demand, which raises its price, i.e. its exchange rate]." By the way, the balance of payments is related to the terms of trade. "If the price of a country's exports rises by a greater rate than that of its imports, its terms of trade have improved. An improvement in terms of trade shows greater demand for the country's exports," and thus indicates greater demand for its currency (with which to buy exports), which means that its currency will appreciate. Conversely, "if the price of exports rises by a smaller rate than that of its imports, the currency's value will decrease in relation to its trading partners."

Now consider inflation. "As a general rule, a country with a consistently lower inflation rate [than other countries] exhibits a rising currency value, as its purchasing power increases relative to other currencies.... Those countries with higher inflation typically see depreciation in their currency in relation to the currencies of their trading partners." In terms of demand and supply of currencies, I guess you could say that investors demand the low-inflation currency because when the assets they buy are paid off in the future, the real value of the money with which they're paid will be relatively high. A country that has high inflation will pay its debt with money whose value is diminishing quickly. So investors will tend to shun that country, and its currency will depreciate.

Large-scale government debt, too, tends to cause currency depreciation, because it tends to cause inflation. The reason for this, I suppose, is that government spending increases aggregate demand, which encourages inflation. Also, the government might end up printing more money to pay its debt, which is of course inflationary.

But wait, according to another source, inflation can cause *appreciation*, at least in the short run. This is largely because when investors expect inflation, they expect that country's central bank to raise interest rates in order to counteract the inflation.[1] [Similarly, high budget deficits can cause the cost of borrowing to rise--i.e., interest rates to rise--which means that the currency appreciates.] But even when investors don't think the central bank is strongly committed to minimizing inflation, the country's relatively low real interest rate "still creates some demand for its currency as global investors seek to do business there." That is, the "*other*" kind of investors might want to *borrow* the country's money (to do business there) because of low interest rates. In the *long* run, however, research shows that inflation does tend to reduce demand for the affected currency.

I also don't have a clear understanding of foreign exchange reserves. Here's a definition: they are "those external assets that are readily available to and controlled by monetary authorities for direct financing of payments imbalances, for indirectly regulating the magnitudes of imbalances through intervention in exchange markets to affect the currency exchange rate, and/or for other purposes." So, for example, if a country's currency is depreciating, its central bank might artificially create demand for the currency by using some of its foreign exchange reserves to buy it. (That is, it releases foreign currency into the marketplace in exchange for domestic currency, which it takes out of circulation.) Similarly, "a central bank can intervene on the foreign exchange markets to prevent currency *appreciation* by selling its own currency for foreign currency-denominated assets, thereby building up its foreign reserves as a happy side effect." This is what China has been doing, in order to boost its export economy.

Incidentally, it is called "sterilization" when a central bank mitigates the effects of foreign exchange interventions on its domestic money supply by buying or selling government bonds. For instance, taking some of its currency out of circulation (in order to defend its exchange rate) reduces the domestic money supply.[2] This will likely have a deflationary effect, slowing down economic activity. In order to prevent this outcome, the central bank will "sterilize" its foreign exchange intervention. "It can do this by engaging in open market operations that supply liquidity into the system, by buying financial assets such as local-

[1] The reason why higher interest rates reduce inflation is that they discourage borrowing and encourage consumers to save rather than spend. In other words, they reduce the money supply.

[2] One way it does so is by creating or worsening a current account deficit "due to the propped-up exchange rate being more favorable for importers than for exporters. This deficit sends currency out of the country, further decreasing liquidity [i.e., the amount of local currency held by individuals, banks, etc.]."

currency-denominated bonds, using local currency as payment." Thus it injects money into the domestic economy.

In the opposite case, when a country prevents its currency from appreciating by selling it for foreign assets, a similar sterilization can occur to prevent the domestic money supply from increasing. It's true that the money "spent buying foreign assets initially goes to other countries, but then it soon finds its way back into the domestic economy as payment for exports. The expansion of the money supply can cause inflation, which can erode a nation's export competitiveness just as much as currency appreciation would." So the central bank then sells bonds domestically, "thereby soaking up new cash that would otherwise circulate around the home economy." Alternatively, reserve requirements for banks can be raised, which has the effect of preventing monetary expansion (because it means that banks have less money to lend out).

Back to the book. Before 1913, central banks were firmly committed to defending their country's gold reserves and maintaining the currency's convertibility. That was the highest priority. (Later in the twentieth century governments were pressured to subordinate currency stability to other objectives, such as high employment, but before World War I this wasn't a problem. Labor parties were still in their formative years, the right to vote was mostly limited to men of property, and "the worker susceptible to unemployment when the central bank raised the discount rate had little opportunity to voice his objections....") Investors' knowledge of this caused them to act in ways that actually ended up stabilizing currencies—anticipating, as it were, central banks' reactions to things like currency depreciations. "Knowing that the authorities would ultimately take whatever steps were needed to defend convertibility, investors shifted capital toward weak-currency countries, financing their deficits even when their central banks temporarily violated 'the rules of the game.'"

The extent to which Europe's central banks cooperated in pre-war times to help each other maintain gold reserves and defend their currencies during crises is impressive. It helps account for the relative stability of the system.

Until the late 1890s the gold standard was associated with deflation, and with economic hardship for farmers and workers. The Populist explanation is probably right: output worldwide was growing faster than the global gold stock. Money supplies finally started to grow only when new gold discoveries were made in Australia, South Africa, and Alaska, and when the cyanide process was invented to extract gold from impure ore. "The association of the gold standard with deflation dissolved." The expansion of money supplies must have also played a role in the prosperity of the years before Word War I (or so it seems to me).

Here's a good summary of what happened after the resurrection of the gold standard in the 1920s:

> With the spread of unionism and the bureaucratization of labor markets, wages no longer responded to disturbances with their traditional speed. Negative disturbances gave rise to unemployment, intensifying the pressure on governments to react in ways that might jeopardize the monetary standard. Postwar governments were rendered more susceptible to this pressure by the extension of the franchise, the development of parliamentary labor parties, and the growth of social spending. None of the factors that had supported the prewar gold standard was to be taken for granted anymore.
>
> The interwar gold standard, resurrected in the second half of the 1920s, consequently shared few of the merits of its prewar predecessor. With labor and commodity markets lacking their traditional flexibility, the new system could not easily accommodate shocks. With governments lacking insulation from pressure to stimulate growth and employment, the new regime lacked credibility. When the system was disturbed, financial capital that had once flowed in stabilizing directions took flight, transforming a limited disturbance into an economic and political crisis. The 1929 downturn that became the Great Depression reflected just such a process. Ultimately, the casualties included the gold standard itself.

> A lesson drawn was the futility of attempting to turn the clock back. Bureaucratized labor relations, politicized monetary policymaking, and the other distinctive features of the twentieth-century environment were finally acknowledged as permanent. When the next effort was made, in the 1940s, to reconstruct the international monetary system, the new design featured greater exchange rate flexibility to accommodate shocks and restrictions on international capital flows to contain destabilizing speculation.

The first half of the 1920s was characterized mostly by floating exchange rates, which, given contentious political climates, were made unstable by volatile speculation. So Europe and much of the world returned to the gold standard, hoping greater stability would result. In the end, it didn't work out that way. I'll skip over the pre-Great Depression complexities—some countries having too much gold, others having too little, etc.—and focus on the 1930s. After the collapse of industrial production in 1929, governments "naturally wished to stimulate their moribund economies. But injecting credit and bringing down interest rates to encourage consumption and investment was inconsistent with maintenance of the gold standard. Additional credit meant additional demands for merchandise imports. Lower interest rates encouraged foreign investment. The reserve losses they produced raised fears of currency depreciation, prompting capital flight." In short, expansionary initiatives and gold convertibility were incompatible.

Governments' commitment to defending convertibility was no longer as credible as before World War I (because of the more politicized environment, workers and farmers having a greater capacity to influence the political process), so speculators were jittery. "As soon as speculators had reason to think that a government might expand domestic credit, even if doing so implied allowing the exchange rate to depreciate, they began selling its currency to avoid the capital losses that depreciation would entail." Thus, they brought about what they feared: depreciation. Nevertheless, because central banks' credibility was already in doubt, they "defended the gold parity to the bitter end" (so their credibility wouldn't suffer even more). "Hence, the gold standard posed a binding constraint on intervention in support of the banking system." International cooperation could have alleviated the problem, but it was prevented by the fact that governments had different interpretations of what the problem was. So, in the end, the gold standard collapsed.

First (in 1931) it was the Central European countries that abandoned the gold standard. Austrian and German banks had invested heavily in industry, so they were hit hard by the depression. Central banks couldn't bail them out without causing a depreciation of the currency that effectively destroyed the gold standard, so this is what happened. Actually, currency depreciation didn't go to hyperinflation extremes, because exchange controls (or capital controls) were implemented. (Capital controls are "regulations limiting the ability of firms or households to convert domestic currency into foreign exchange.") These ensured that not much capital or gold was transferred abroad. Britain and other countries left the gold standard later in 1931, then the U.S. in 1933, etc. Floating exchange rates returned, but this time central banks managed them so that there was less volatility than in the early 1920s.

"Having severed the link with the gold standard, governments and central banks had greater freedom to pursue independent economic policies." So they cut interest rates, initiated expansionary fiscal programs, etc. All this involved currency depreciation, which enhanced the competitiveness of goods produced domestically and stimulated exports (creating tensions with trading partners). "The timing of depreciation goes a long way toward explaining the timing of recovery. The early devaluation of the British pound helps to explain the fact that Britain's recovery commenced in 1931. U.S. recovery coincided with the dollar's devaluation in 1933. France's late recovery was clearly linked to its unwillingness to devalue until 1936. The mechanism connecting devaluation and recovery was straightforward. Countries that allowed their currencies to depreciate expanded their money supplies. Depreciation removed the imperative of cutting government spending and raising taxes in order to defend the exchange rate. It removed the restraints that prevented countries from stabilizing their banking systems."

Now for postwar events. The Bretton Woods system didn't come fully into effect until the late 1950s, because of problems associated with Europe's reconstruction. (Countries suffered from dollar shortages, they had to impose tariffs to encourage development, and so forth.) Some basic provisions of the

system were that controls limited international capital flows—though less effectively by the 1960s—and currencies were pegged to the dollar, which was convertible to gold at $35 per ounce. So it was basically a regime of fixed (though adjustable) exchange rates. The problem with it was that it was too dependent on the dollar (and its conversion into gold).[1] As governments accumulated immense dollar reserves (which financed the U.S.'s increasing balance-of-payments deficits), the dollar's convertibility into gold began to be called into question. A scenario became conceivable in which some foreign holders sought to convert all their dollar reserves into gold, thereby triggering the same behavior on the part of other holders worried about dollar devaluation. It would be like an old-fashioned run on the bank: everybody would want to get their gold out before the currency was devalued—thus forcing the currency to be devalued. Actually, for most or all of the 1960s it was recognized that the dollar was overvalued in terms of gold, but international cooperation and an array of ad hoc financial devices resorted to by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations postponed dollar devaluation (and/or an end to Bretton Woods). Again, the basic problem was that the U.S. refused to enact the policies needed to rectify persisting balance-of-payments deficits, for instance through devaluation or slashing government spending (in order to counteract inflation). *Vietnam*—and also the Great Society—was the problem, or a big part of it. The inevitable result was that investors transferred funds from the overvalued dollar to more reliable currencies like the deutsche mark. These trends became overwhelming in 1971, and in August it was reported that Great Britain and France planned to convert dollars into gold. So the Nixon administration abruptly ended the dollar's convertibility (for a few months, I guess?). Subsequently the dollar was devalued, and in 1973 it was devalued again, but this didn't reassure the market. (After all, it was perfectly conceivable that it would be devalued yet again.) So by 1973, most European countries had unpegged their currencies from the dollar and adopted floating exchange rates. This finally signalled the end of Bretton Woods.

The need for floating exchange rates was a consequence of the increasing mobility of capital. It got harder to maintain capital controls, which were necessary under Bretton Woods in light of the fact that governments tended to be unwilling to take the measures necessary to adjust balance-of-payments disequilibria (e.g. because there might be adverse implications for employment). Governments were even reluctant to devalue their currencies, because the merest hint that they were going to do so would provoke rampant speculation against their currencies. Actually, after Bretton Woods there were other alternatives to floating exchange rates: a region like Europe could move toward monetary union, which it eventually did. Or small, weak countries could make an absolute and uncompromising commitment to peg their currencies to those of a trading partner, thereby avoiding the destabilizing capital movements associated with floating exchange rates.

In terms of volatile exchange rates, the 1970s weren't too bad. More volatile than Bretton Woods, but not as bad as the 1980s. The reason is that in the 1970s there was "more concerted intervention [by governments], more extensive use of capital controls, and greater willingness to adapt policies to the imperatives of the foreign-exchange markets" than in the 1980s. The latter decade is complicated, so....screw it. There was dollar overvaluation and then undervaluation into the 1990s. Bush and Clinton didn't do much to counteract undervaluation. Why? Because "an overvalued currency, like the dollar in the mid-1980s, imposes high costs on concentrated interests (producers of traded goods who find it difficult to compete internationally) who powerfully voice their objections. In contrast, an undervalued currency, like the dollar in the mid-1990s, imposes only modest costs on diffuse interests (consumers who experience higher inflation and import prices) who have little incentive to mobilize in opposition."

I'll skip Europe. As for developing countries, here are a couple of informative paragraphs:

> Pegging [weak currencies to strong currencies] proved increasingly difficult to reconcile with the effort to liberalize financial markets. Developing countries had resorted to policies of import substitution and financial repression [i.e., anti-liberalization] in the wake of World War II. In Latin America, for example, where countries suffered

[1] Well, another problem was that mechanisms to adjust (or to force the adjusting of) balance-of-payments disequilibria were inadequate. These two problems cooperated to cause the downfall of the system.

> enormously from the depression of the 1930s, the lesson drawn was the need to insulate the economy from the vagaries of international markets. Tariffs and capital controls were employed to segregate domestic and international transactions. Price controls, marketing boards, and financial restrictions were used to guide domestic development. The model worked well enough in the immediate aftermath of the war, when neither international trade nor international lending had yet recovered and a backlog of technology afforded ample opportunity for extensive growth. With time, however, interventionist policy was increasingly captured by special-interest groups. Trade and lending picked up, and the exhaustion of easy growth opportunities placed a premium on the flexibility afforded by the price system. As early as the 1960s, developing countries began to shift from import substitution and financial repression to export promotion and market liberalization.
>
> The consequences were not unlike those experienced by the industrialized countries: as domestic markets were liberalized, international financial flows became more difficult to control. Maintaining capital controls became more onerous and disruptive. And with the increase in the number of commercial banks lending to developing countries, international capital movements grew in magnitude, making their management more troublesome. It became increasingly difficult to resist the pressure to allow the currency to appreciate when capital flowed in or to let the exchange rate depreciate to facilitate adjustment when capital flowed out.

As a consequence, more and more developing countries unpegged their exchange rates. The resultant volatility sometimes caused severe problems, though.

It seems to me that no option is very good: not ineluctable fixed rates, not fixed but adjustable rates, not completely floating rates, and not "managed floating" rates. And not monetary union, as the current crisis in Europe is showing. In the context of globalization, there are no good solutions. —But there were no "good" solutions under the pure gold standard either. Balance-of-payments adjustments were painful for the population. The problem, then, is capitalism itself, or maybe even the market system in whatever social context.

Last, I'll say something about recent "global imbalances." China and other countries in the South ("emerging markets") have been growing at high rates, earning more than they could or would invest at home—i.e., their national savings have exceeded their investment—such that they have run current account surpluses. The U.S., on the other hand, has for many years had large current account deficits and very low savings rates. The emerging markets have chosen to invest most of their excess savings in the U.S., because by stockpiling dollar reserves they can keep their economies stable and growing. (Presumably the reasons are, first, that all this global demand for dollars keeps the dollar fairly strong, which lets U.S. consumers buy imports from these export-driven economies. Second—relatedly—stockpiling dollar reserves gives these countries the ability to manipulate their own exchange rates.) So, with the U.S. "absorbing the vast majority of [emerging markets'] excess savings, the result was a peculiar situation where savings in poor countries were financing consumption in one of the richest." The poorer countries funnel money to the richer so that the latter can continue to buy products from the former. Strange.

Incidentally, I don't really understand why U.S. saving has been so low in recent decades. I guess it has to do with low interest rates, which are in part a result of the Fed's concern to keep the economy going. And this concern must exist because the corporate class war of recent decades has weakened aggregate demand, making the immense accumulation of debt a precondition for economic growth. To say it differently, households haven't been able to save much probably just because they haven't had enough income. And with all the financial bubbles, they've probably thought they didn't have to save a lot but

could borrow on the expectation of high future earnings.[1] As the last few years have shown, that plan didn't work out so well.

June, July

Reading *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (1975), by Samuel Huntington, Michel Crozier, and some Japanese guy. It's an important book, as Chomsky frequently tells his audiences.

Huntington: "*The vitality of democracy in the United States in the 1960s produced a substantial increase in governmental activity and a substantial decrease in governmental authority*." The decrease in authority is what concerns him, as a representative of the ruling elite. He bemoans the "excess of democracy" that the 1960s produced and calls for more "moderation." –Remember, the Trilateral Commission is the liberal end of the political spectrum. The turn towards neoliberalism after the early 1970s was, in large part, an attempt by political and economic elites to regain control of society after democratic excesses had undermined authority. All the nastiness of the war on drugs, the war on welfare, the so-called war on crime, the war on workers, the penal state, etc.—all this was the elite's furious reaction to the sixties and early seventies.

The Age of Diminished Expectations (1997), by Paul Krugman. A sort of primer on the U.S. economy. You have to take what Krugman says with a grain of salt, since he's a mainstream economist, but if you sift through his arguments he can be useful.

"The slowdown of American productivity growth since the early 1970s [is] the most important single fact about our economy.[2].... Had productivity over the last 25 years grown as fast as it did for the first 70 years of this century, our living standards would now be at least 25 percent higher than they are." Not exactly. Productivity growth has picked up in the last twenty years, but that hasn't helped most of the population much. Why not? Because there's no labor movement. [And because the government has abdicated its responsibility for popular well-being.] The corporate sector gets most of the gains from productivity growth—which gives it more resources with which to smash the labor movement, thereby making things even worse for the lower and middle classes.

(Just to be sure, I emailed those thoughts to the economist Robert Pollin, who agreed with me.)

Krugman has no idea why productivity growth slowed down. But mainstream economists have a solution: we should all consume less now so that more resources are available for investment. Yes. Save more, spend less. That's the answer. It's brilliant, isn't it? It doesn't occur to these people that if consumption declines, companies won't have much of an incentive to invest more. But that's economists for you.

Stuff on the U.S. trade deficit: One reason it's a bad thing is that it entails a loss of jobs in manufacturing (because more imports are coming in than exports are going out). But it's possible for that job loss to be made up elsewhere in the economy, for instance in the service sector. (What Krugman doesn't mention, of course, is that service jobs, being harder to unionize, tend to be lower-paying.) Another reason the trade deficit is bad is that it entails "a gradual mortgaging of future U.S. income to foreigners." The reason is that the deficit has to be covered by our selling assets to foreigners, such as stocks, bonds, real estate, and even corporations themselves. Thus, our net international investment position has deteriorated from the early 1980s, when trade deficits started accumulating. "From now on, the U.S. will be obliged to deliver a stream of interest payments to foreign bondholders, rents to foreign landowners, and dividends to foreign stockholders.... Our payments to foreigners are a direct drain on our resources, and the longer the

[1] Low interest rates come into play with these financial bubbles too. Eichengreen remarks, for example, that low rates fueled the housing boom. And "higher real estate prices made households feel wealthier," so they took out more debt and spent more.

[2] That's wrong. The most important fact is and was rising inequality.

trade deficits continue, the larger this drain will become."[1] Beautiful poetic justice: for almost two centuries the U.S. extracted surplus from other countries, but now, finally, those countries are starting to extract surplus from us. For now, it isn't a huge problem; it may well become one, though. Especially if someday in the future the confidence of foreign investors in the U.S. is shaken and they abruptly sell off dollars and stop lending to us. Then an economic crisis might ensue, as it did in Latin America in the early 1980s.

I wouldn't be terribly surprised if this is what happens eventually, decades from now. In that case, rapid inflation will occur (given the dollar's depreciation), and the IMF, if it still exists, might have to bail us out on the condition of structural adjustment programs. What magnificent irony that would be! By the time it happens, though, the world will surely be in the midst of its centuries-long evolution out of capitalism, and economic convulsions will be happening all over the place.

So why did trade deficits balloon in the 1980s? According to Krugman and other mainstream economists, it's partly because of the ballooning budget deficit. (Hence the idea of the "twin deficits.")

> The basic story runs as follows: Beginning in 1981, U.S. national saving began to fall sharply. Only part of that fall was a result of the budget deficits [which soaked up private saving]—hence the need to qualify the "twin deficit" view a bit—while part of it represented a change in the behavior of households. In any case, what happened was that U.S. national saving began falling well short of U.S. investment demand, which remained strong. If the U.S. economy had not had access to world capital markets, this saving shortfall would have produced a crunch that pushed interest rates sky-high. Instead, the United States was able to turn to foreigners to fill the gap. Much of U.S. investment was financed, not out of our own savings, but through the sale of assets to foreigners.
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> As a matter of straightforward accounting, the United States always buys exactly as much as it sells from the rest of the world. If it sells foreigners more assets than it buys, it must correspondingly buy more goods than it sells. So the emergent U.S. dependence on foreign capital to finance its investment had as an inevitable counterpart the emergence of a trade deficit. The ultimate cause of the trade deficit therefore lies in a decline in U.S. saving—partly, but not entirely, due to the budget deficit.

I asked Pollin about that; he replied: "Krugman is right strictly in terms of accounting. But in terms of causation, he is wrong. I doubt that he himself would still hold to this position today. In terms of causation, the trade deficit is due to the rise of globalization—with manufactured goods getting produced in developing countries to a hugely growing extent. That, along with the high level of oil imports, swung the U.S. into a net deficit trade position." It also must have to do with the decline in the competitiveness of American products in the 1970s and afterwards—their shoddy construction, etc.

I asked Dean Baker too; he wrote back, "My guess is that Krugman would no longer argue in the same way on the trade deficit. The proximate cause of the trade deficit is the over-valued dollar, that is what leads people to buy foreign goods rather than U.S. made goods. It is pretty hard to come up with a story whereby the dollar would be appreciably lower today if the deficit fell or private savings rose, especially when you have governments like China committed to sustaining an over-valued dollar. I hope this is helpful."

After discussing the crises in Mexico and Argentina in the 1990s, Krugman sums up a major problem with the world economy today: many countries are "vulnerable to what amounts to the whims of the capital markets. A country need not follow unsound policies to get in trouble; all that need happen is for investors to conclude, for whatever reason, that the country is at risk—and their loss of confidence will produce a crisis that justifies their fears." That is, when they stampede to sell off the currency, it will depreciate precipitously; in order to keep capital in the country and prevent hyperinflation, the government

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[1] [On the other hand, U.S.-owned assets abroad tend to be riskier and higher-yielding than foreign-owned assets in the U.S., so we still have a steady stream of income coming in to us from the outside. This is one of the perks of the dollar's being the global reserve currency.]

will have to impose very high interest rates, which will depress the economy....thereby confirming investors' fears about the economy's stability! It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. Behold the hazards of unregulated financial markets.

On the other hand, it is in part these deregulated markets that keep the world economy going, by means of bubbles that permit the extension of enormous credit to consumers and businesses.

Wolfgang Streeck remarks in his article "The Crises of Democratic Capitalism" (2011) that "democratic states [are] being turned into debt-collecting agencies on behalf of a global oligarchy of investors." It's the tyranny of the bondholder. For example, in Germany, "Populist rhetoric to the effect that perhaps creditors should also pay a share of the costs [of economic adjustment], as vented by [Angela Merkel] in early 2010, was quickly abandoned when 'the markets' expressed shock by slightly raising the rate of interest on new public debt." Governments are quite afraid of that possibility: "Given the amount of debt carried by most states today, even minor increases in the rate of interest on government bonds can cause fiscal disaster." Investors want austerity, so austerity is what they get. (Of course, the elite's *ideological* obsession with cutting public spending plays a role too.)

Reading *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), by David Harvey. The inflation of the 1970s, as you know, resulted from government attempts to keep the Keynesian, labor-accommodating state going in a poorer economic climate, an environment of slower economic growth than the two postwar decades. The high inflation manifested the crisis of the Keynesian state. Double-digit inflation couldn't go on forever; it had to end, surely, in more or less the way it did, with the turn to restrictive monetary policies that facilitated the destruction of unions and other conservative attacks on the population.

Harvey's observations on finance are interesting. The OPEC oil price hike placed vast amounts of money at the disposal of oil-producing states; the Saudis, under U.S. pressure, agreed to funnel all their petrodollars through New York investment banks. "The latter suddenly found themselves in command of massive funds for which they needed to find profitable outlets. The options within the U.S., given the depressed economic conditions and low rates of return in the mid-1970s, were not good." So the banks looked abroad, toward governments, which were the safest bet. In order to lend to them, though, international credit and financial markets had to be liberalized, a strategy that the U.S. actively pursued throughout the 1970s. Developing countries were hungry for credit, so they borrowed even at disadvantageous rates. What followed a few years later was the debt crisis of the 1980s. Here Harvey inserts a telling comment: "[Mexico's debt crisis demonstrated] a key difference between liberal and neoliberal practice: under the former, lenders take the losses that arise from bad investment decisions, while under the latter the borrowers are forced by state and international powers to take on board the cost of debt repayment no matter what the consequences for the livelihood and well-being of the local population." Good old-fashioned neoliberal hypocrisy.

Useful:

> [One general trend in neoliberalism] is for the privileges of ownership and management of capitalist enterprises—traditionally separated—to fuse by paying CEOs (managers) in stock options (ownership titles). Stock values rather than production then become the guiding light of economic activity and, as later became apparent with the collapse of companies such as Enron, the speculative temptations that resulted from this could become overwhelming. The second trend has been to dramatically reduce the historical gap between money capital earning dividends and interest, on the one hand, and production, manufacturing, or merchant capital looking to gain profits on the other. This separation had at various times in the past produced conflicts between financiers, producers, and merchants.... During the 1970s much of this conflict either disappeared or took new forms. The large corporations became more and more financial in their orientation, even when, as in the automobile sector, they were engaging in production. Since 1980 or so it has not been uncommon for corporations to report losses in production offset by gains from

financial operations (everything from credit and insurance operations to speculating in volatile currency and futures markets).

So how did elites manufacture popular consent in their efforts to restore their own class power after the 1960s and respond to the crisis of capital accumulation in the 1970s? Through propaganda, of course. The Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, the newly organized Business Roundtable, and other groups set about conquering the political and the popular mind. Think-tanks like the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Hoover Institute were formed. And neoliberal economics captured the research universities and business schools that churned out the technocrats who worked at the IMF, the World Bank, and other such institutions.

Harvey has a good discussion of New York City's fiscal crisis in 1975. "Capitalist restructuring and deindustrialization had for several years been eroding the economic base of the city, and rapid suburbanization had left much of the central city impoverished. The result was explosive social unrest on the part of marginalized populations during the 1960s, defining what came to be known as 'the urban crisis'.... The expansion of public employment and public provision—facilitated in part by generous federal funding—was seen as the solution. But, faced with fiscal difficulties, President Nixon simply declared the urban crisis over in the early 1970s." That was ridiculous, but it served as an excuse to diminish federal aid. As the recession of the mid-1970s got worse, New York's budget situation grew dire. Finally in 1975 a cabal of investment bankers refused to roll over the debt and pushed the city into bankruptcy. "The bailout that followed entailed the construction of new institutions that took over the management of the city budget." Draconian policies later associated with the IMF were imposed on the city, partly so that bondholders would get their money back and partly so that financial institutions could restructure the city in their interest. "Wealth was redistributed to the upper classes in the midst of a fiscal crisis," as would be the case in country after country for the next forty years. "The New York city crisis was 'symptomatic of an emerging strategy of disinflation coupled with a regressive redistribution of income, wealth, and power.'" After a few years of the austerity measures, "'many of the historic achievements of working-class New York were undone.' Much of the social infrastructure of the city was diminished and the physical infrastructure (for example the subway system) deteriorated markedly for lack of investment or even maintenance." Etc. In the meantime, investment bankers were remaking the city for the benefit of business (especially in finance, legal services, the media, and consumer-oriented areas), using public resources to build the appropriate infrastructure. "Working-class and ethnic-immigrant New York was thrust back into the shadows, to be ravaged by racism and a crack cocaine epidemic of epic proportions in the 1980s."

To sum up: "The management of the New York fiscal crisis pioneered the way for neoliberal practices both domestically under Reagan and internationally through the IMF in the 1980s. It established the principle that in the event of a conflict between the integrity of financial institutions and bondholders' returns, on the one hand, and the well-being of the citizens on the other, the former was to be privileged. It emphasized that the role of the government was to create a good business climate rather than look to the need and well-being of the population at large. The politics of the Reagan administration....became 'merely the New York scenario' of the 1970s 'writ large.'"

What happened to New York after the 1960s and 1970s reminds me a little of what happened to Paris after 1848, under the Second Empire. Striking parallels in terms of counterreaction to popular unrest and physical, social, and economic restructuring.

Meanwhile, businesses sought to capture the Republican Party as their own instrument, which was facilitated by recent campaign finance laws and pro-business decisions of the Supreme Court. To establish a solid electoral base, Republicans formed alliances with the Christian right.

Harvey is right that neoliberalism is riddled with contradictions, many of which fall under the category of hypocrisies. Both in theory and in practice there are contradictions. The result is that the neoliberal state is inherently unstable. Neoconservatism can be construed as a response to this instability. In some ways, neoconservatives and neoliberals work well together: they both favor corporate power, elite governance, private enterprise, the restoration of class power, and they're suspicious of democracy. But neoconservatives place a greater emphasis on "order" as an answer to the "chaos of individual interests"

(neoliberal atomization), and they're attracted to the ideas of nationalism, cultural traditions, and an overweening morality as "the necessary social glue to keep the body politic secure in the face of external and internal dangers." In theory, neoliberalism isn't concerned with the nation but rather with the state (and the market); neoconservatism is interested in both. Taken to their logical conclusions, its prescriptions imply a world of competing nationalisms, competing cultures and moralities, competing authoritarianisms. It is, in other words, a modern incarnation of fascism. Quite different from neoliberalism, though in practice there are clear "elective affinities."

So how did neoliberalism spread from the U.S. and U.K. to the rest of the world? You know about structural adjustment programs, Latin American dictatorships, and so on. Underlying all that was the increasing mobility of capital and the turn toward more open financialization, facilitated by the spread of the new economic orthodoxy to agenda-setting institutions. In addition, "the U.S. used the carrot of preferential access to its huge consumer market to persuade many countries to reform their economies along neoliberal lines." On the reasons for U.S. dynamism in the 1990s, Harvey remarks that "flexibility in labour markets and reductions in welfare provision....began to pay off for the U.S. and put competitive pressures on the more rigid labour markets that prevailed in most of Europe and Japan. The real secret of U.S. success, however, was that it was now able to pump high rates of return into the country from its financial and corporate operations (both direct and portfolio investments) in the rest of the world. It was this flow of tribute from the rest of the world that founded much of the affluence achieved in the U.S. in the 1990s."

Neoliberalism has had a dismal record at fostering global growth; its main substantive achievement "has been to redistribute, rather than to generate, wealth and income." The primary means by which it has done this is "accumulation by dispossession," or what Marx called primitive accumulation. That didn't end centuries ago; it has continued up to the present and even accelerated. Under neoliberalism there are innumerable techniques for robbing people of resources. Even—or especially—public goods previously won through generations of class struggle, such as social welfare provision, public education, and regulatory frameworks, have been pillaged and destroyed.

—That reminds me of the destruction of the commons and of medieval regulations in Europe during the transition from feudalism to capitalism. It's always dangerous to construct abstract typologies, but, to repeat what I've said before, there appear to have been two [or one-and-a-half] "cycles" in capitalist history. Abstractly you can think of it in this way: first, a lot of ancient communal practices and public goods were dismantled before, during, and after the Industrial Revolution. You could call this the first wave of privatization. (It has continued unceasingly all over the world, but let's just call it the first wave.) As it was going on, the victims of capitalism sought to maintain their old rights and/or acquire new, governmentally protected ones. At length they succeeded to some extent, and new public goods were consolidated under the Keynesian welfare state. This was probably a nearly inevitable development, because, as Polanyi said, marketization and privatization will, if unchecked, eventually cause the total destruction of society. So popular resistance, aided by sane elements of the upper classes, succeeded in regulating further depredations and temporarily saving society. But technology kept progressing, capital mobility increased, global integration continued, populations kept growing, and the "public" [and *politicized*] nature of the Keynesian state started encroaching too much on capitalist class power. Finally the masses got out of hand, got too politicized, too powerful—all those crazy ideas of democracy in the 1960s!—and there was a capitalist backlash, made possible by (and making possible) ever-more-globally-integrated markets and elite institutional networks [and extreme capital mobility worldwide]. The inflationary consequences of popular empowerment in a context of economic stagnation (the 1970s) were tamed, namely by destroying popular empowerment. That is, the second wave of privatization occurred: public goods were again dismantled and "accumulation by dispossession" began anew. This time, the old nationalist Keynesian solution to the horrors of privatization wasn't available, since the world had become too integrated and nations themselves were deteriorating. So transnational social movements were necessary. But would they prove strong enough to save society?? Stay tuned!

Anyway, you see there's a logic to it all. A "dialectical" logic.

I'm reading stuff on transnational labor history and activism, but I need frequent breaks. Most of it is tedious and superfluous. Labor history in general, at least as done by most academics, doesn't seem to present many opportunities for imagination and creativity. I have the soul of a poet, philosopher, and psychologist, but I want to understand society and I long for human liberation, so I read things that otherwise might not interest me. Only when I turn, say, to Lukács's reflections on Dostoyevsky in *Marxism and Human Liberation: Essays on History, Culture, and Revolution* do I feel really at home. I'm reminded of why Dostoyevsky struck me like a revelation—especially in *Notes from the Underground*—years ago. Like when Stavrogin, the hero of *The Possessed*, writes in a letter

> I tried my strength everywhere. You advised me to do this so as to learn "to know myself."... But what to apply my strength to – that's what I have never seen and don't see now.... I can still wish to do something good, as I always could, and that gives me a feeling of pleasure. At the same time I wish to do something evil and that gives me pleasure, too.... My desires are not strong enough, they cannot guide me. You can cross a river on a log but not on a chip of wood.

That's still sort of my problem, as it is the problem of millions of people everywhere. The solitude of life in the modern world.... "By this solitude, by this immersion of the subject in itself, the self becomes bottomless. There arises either the anarchy of Stavrogin, a loss of direction in all instincts, or the obsession of a Raskolnikov by an 'idea.'" I've experienced both, but a shallow version of the former is much more common. Aimlessness. It was already a widespread social disease in the second half of the nineteenth century, but in the twentieth century it reached epidemic proportions. Hence R. D. Laing and such theorists, who see people unconsciously obsessed with testing the reality of their existence. (A deficit of communal life = a deficit of self-confirmation = a deficit of the sense of self.) I don't see any prospect that this characteristic malady of modernity will be overcome within the next century.

Reading *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912) by Bertrand Russell. I'm inclined to agree with most of it. (In a lot of ways I'm basically a Cartesian. That's supposed to be incompatible or in tension with being a Marxist, but I've never understood why. Sure, Descartes tended to emphasize the individual and Marx the collective, but I see no logical inconsistencies between positions that are taken to define Cartesianism and those that define Marxism.)

Something I hadn't considered is that one way of expressing the denial that 'ought' can be derived from 'is' is by saying that judgments attributing or denying intrinsic value to something (such as "Happiness is good") are *a priori*. They can't be justified by, deduced from, experience; instead, we *bring them to* experience. On the other hand, it seems strange to call value-judgments *knowledge*, as Russell does. I'd prefer to reserve the term "*a priori* knowledge" for things like mathematics and logic. But, in a sense, this may be quibbling.

Russell sensibly rejects much of traditional empiricism, such as its denial that mathematics is *a priori*[1] and its nominalism. (Nominalism is at least in tension, if not incompatible, with the rationalist recognition that the mind imposes forms on experience, i.e. that we necessarily experience the world through the prism of our own mental "forms," universal "ideas" by means of which we interpret the particularities of sensory data.) In addition, he credits Kant for showing it's possible to have *a priori* knowledge that isn't analytic, "i.e. such that the opposite would be self-contradictory." Another topic on which I agree with Russell. Incidentally, I admit that some of my previous discussions of the so-called synthetic *a priori* have been confused, in part because the philosophical literature suffers from ambiguities and confusions. But my intuition that there's a kind of *a priority* that isn't merely analytic has been right, and Russell shares it.

A useful summary:

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[1] J. S. Mill, for instance, thought that arithmetic was based on inductive generalizations. ('So far, in my experience two objects added to two objects have always equaled four objects. But it's possible that sometime in the future I'll discover an instance where that isn't true.' Idiocy.)

> Hume (1711-76), who preceded Kant, accepting the usual view as to what makes knowledge *a priori*, discovered that, in many cases which had previously been supposed analytic, and notably in the case of cause and effect, the connexion was really synthetic. Before Hume, rationalists at least had supposed that the effect could be logically deduced from the cause, if only we had sufficient knowledge. Hume argued—correctly, as would now be generally admitted—that this could not be done. Hence he inferred the far more doubtful proposition that nothing could be known *a priori* about the connexion of cause and effect. Kant, who had been educated in the rationalist tradition, was much perturbed by Hume's scepticism, and endeavoured to find an answer to it. He perceived that not only the connexion of cause and effect, but all the propositions of arithmetic and geometry, are 'synthetic', i.e. not analytic: in all these propositions, no analysis of the subject will reveal the predicate. His stock instance was the proposition 7 + 5 = 12. He pointed out, quite truly, that 7 and 5 have to be put together to give 12: the idea of 12 is not contained in them, nor even in the idea of adding them together. Thus he was led to the conclusion that all pure mathematics, though *a priori*, is synthetic; and this conclusion raised a new problem of which he endeavoured to find the solution. [Namely, how is synthetic *a priori* knowledge possible?]

Russell has an interesting criticism of Kant's rationalist solution. "The thing to be accounted for [he reminds us] is our certainty that the facts must always conform to logic and arithmetic. To say that logic and arithmetic are contributed by us [as Kant says] does not account for this. Our nature is as much a fact of the existing world as anything, and there can be no certainty that it will remain constant. It might happen, if Kant is right, that to-morrow our nature would so change as to make two and two become five. This possibility seems never to have occurred to him, yet it is one which utterly destroys the certainty and universality which he is anxious to vindicate for arithmetical propositions...." However Kant would reply to Russell—invoking his idiosyncratic transcendental idealism—the objection seems powerful. Actually, on one interpretation it isn't: to explain our knowledge of synthetic *a priori* truths, *obviously* we have to invoke our human nature. We're so constituted....etc. On the other hand, what we "know" is that things *will always be* such that 2 and 2 are 4, etc. Such *a priori* propositions are not about our human nature but about things themselves. They aren't really, or merely, "laws of *thought*," as it would be natural to call them according to the Kantian position; they're (as far as we're concerned) laws of *things*, laws of reality. "When we judge that two and two are four, we are not making a judgement about our thoughts, but about all actual or possible couples. The fact that our minds are so constituted as to believe that two and two are four, though it is true, is emphatically not what we assert when we assert that two and two are four. And no fact about the constitution of our minds could make it *true* that two and two are four." Is this objection to Kant's position decisive? It seems so, but I'm not sure.

After disposing of Kant's answer, Russell offers his own. First, he argues that universals (viz., nearly all words) are neither mental nor physical. I argued the same in my paper on ontology, with the difference that I said all *concepts* are neither mental nor physical. No doubt my terminology was inexact, but my position amounted to much the same as Russell's and Frege's. As for Russell's answer to Kant's question, I don't entirely understand it. It has something to do with the claim, which is surely true, that "all *a priori* knowledge deals exclusively with the relations of universals [as opposed to particulars]." It also has to do with what Russell calls *intuitive knowledge*—immediate knowledge of truths, more precisely of self-evident truths. "Among such truths are included those which merely state what is given in sense, and also certain abstract logical and arithmetical principles.... Our *derivative* knowledge of truths consists of everything that we can deduce from self-evident truths by the use of self-evident principles of deduction." —Right. So I guess the answer is that our *a priori* knowledge is of self-evident truths. Um, yes, I agree. But Kant's purpose was precisely to explain why these truths are self-evident! It's not a very "deep" explanation just to say, "Well, '2 + 2 = 4' is self-evident, and that's that." I was hoping for something deeper—but I'm not surprised I didn't get it, because there *is* nothing deeper in the case of *a priori* truths.

There's only the Kantian, or semi-Kantian, invoking of human nature (the structure of the mind, etc.)—which itself is pretty obvious. With regard to *a priori* truths, you can't bring in further reasons aside from their self-evidence (and/or the relevant logical or mathematical laws, which are self-evident).

Not surprisingly, Russell is a "foundationalist," like me. He recognizes that there are truths that can't be inferred from some other truth; we just "intuitively" know they're true, as I said in my paper on the analytic/synthetic distinction [on Academia.edu]. "We must sooner or later, and probably before very long, be driven to a point where we cannot find any further reason, and where it becomes almost certain that no further reason is even theoretically discoverable. Starting with the common beliefs of daily life, we can be driven back from point to point, until we come to some general principle, or some instance of a general principle, which seems luminously evident, and is not itself capable of being deduced from anything more evident." Yes, *luminously evident*. Like Descartes said. Contemporary philosophers, being idiots, don't like to agree with Descartes, but there *are* propositions, probably an infinity of them, that are just *self-evident*.[1]

Is it true, as Russell says, that there are some ethical principles that are self-evident? Is "We ought to pursue what is good" self-evident? It seems so, insofar as it seems to be a matter of definition that we ought to do what is good, not what is bad. But how would you answer this question conclusively? Is that even possible? What are the implications of the fact that it isn't clear that the statement is absolutely, "luminously" self-evident? One of the implications is obviously that it isn't always self-evident whether the property of "self-evidence" applies to a given statement. Weird. And that raises questions about whether it's *ever* justifiable to invoke a "luminous" "intuition" of "self-evidence." And yet *sometimes* it obviously *is* justifiable!—as in the case of '2 + 2 = 4.' Ugh. Philosophy is maddening.

Russell has some reasonable suggestions relating to these doubts about self-evidence:

> One important point about self-evidence is made clear by the case of memory, and that is, that self-evidence has degrees: it is not a quality which is simply present or absent, but a quality which may be more or less present, in gradations ranging from absolute certainty down to an almost imperceptible faintness. Truths of perception [i.e., of what sense-data one is physically perceiving at that moment] and some of the principles of logic have the very highest degree of self-evidence; truths of immediate memory have an almost equally high degree. The inductive principle has less self-evidence than some of the other principles of logic, such as 'what follows from a true premiss must be true'. Memories have a diminishing self-evidence as they become remoter and fainter; the truths of logic and mathematics have (broadly speaking) less self-evidence as they become more complicated. Judgements of intrinsic ethical or aesthetic value are apt to have some self-evidence, but not much.
>
> Degrees of self-evidence are important in the theory of knowledge, since, if propositions may (as seems likely) have some degree of self-evidence without being true, it will not be necessary to abandon all connexion between self-evidence and truth, but merely to say that, where there is a conflict, the more self-evident proposition is to be retained and the less self-evident rejected.
>
> It seems, however, highly probable that two different notions are combined in 'self-evidence' as above explained; that one of them, which corresponds to the highest degree of self-evidence, is really an infallible guarantee of truth, while the other, which corresponds to all the other degrees, does not give an infallible guarantee, but only a greater or less

[1] There's *definitely* an infinity of them if you agree with Russell that "those [statements] which merely state what is given in sense" are self-evident. [But even if you don't want to give them that august label, you can still say that no further reason—aside from your having the sense-perception in question—is discoverable for saying that you're looking at a patch of blue or whatever. In other words, it seems to me you can be a foundationalist without having to say that the "foundational" truths are always *self-evident*, a concept that is difficult to get a handle on because of its vagueness or emptiness in a philosophical context.]

> presumption. This, however, is only a suggestion, which we cannot as yet develop further....

I find myself very sympathetic to most of Russell's arguments.[1]

Another example: he thinks truth consists in "*correspondence with fact*." He rejects the coherence theory of truth, as I did in my senior thesis, though he agrees with me that coherence can be an important *test* of truth (because reality is consistent with itself). These positions are utterly obvious, and it testifies to academics' incapacity for abstract thought that they can doubt them. (Coherence as the *meaning* of truth?? What planet do these people live on?![2])

Russell's summary of his discussion of knowledge: "Both as regards intuitive knowledge and as regards derivative knowledge, if we assume that intuitive knowledge is trustworthy in proportion to the degree of its self-evidence, there will be a gradation in trustworthiness, from the existence of noteworthy sense-data and the simpler truths of logic and arithmetic, which may be taken as quite certain, down to judgements which seem only just more probable than their opposites. What we firmly believe, if it is true, is called *knowledge*, provided it is either intuitive or inferred (logically or psychologically[3]) from intuitive knowledge from which it follows logically. What we firmly believe, if it is not true, is called *error*. What we firmly believe, if it is neither knowledge nor error, and also what we believe hesitatingly, because it is, or is derived from, something which has not the highest degree of self-evidence, may be called *probable opinion*. Thus the greater part of what would commonly pass as knowledge is more or less probable opinion." All that seems quite reasonable, though maybe it has to be refined.

Russell's explanation in the last chapter of the value of philosophy has a lot in common with what I've said in the past. Philosophy enlarges, or should enlarge, the mind. Its chief value is its very uncertainty. It militates against fanaticism and ignorance. It elevates.

Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, which he considered "incomparably the best" of all his writings, is a good example. It's a sheer joy to read. What a writer he was! A sort of Olympian elevation above vulgarity. I needn't add that the "empiricist," "sentiment-al" spirit that animates it is that which has animated most of my serious reflections on morality.

Insofar as its spirit is utilitarian, however, I'm more skeptical of it. I'm inclined to say to Hume, "For the sake of argument, I grant that most morals, customs, and laws have evolved on account of their social utility. Nevertheless, it is not their usefulness that makes moral things (or people) moral. Nor is it primarily because of their usefulness that we praise moral acts and virtuous people."[4] It's true that our knowledge that moral acts and virtuous people do good things for society, i.e. "useful" things, is psychologically relevant to our approbation; but it seems to me that on a more basic level what we value, what we consider morally worthy, is just the treating of people with respect, as ends, as beings to whom we ought to commit ourselves in much the same way as we're committed to ourselves. We value the caring about others; we attribute moral worth to people and acts to the extent that they're motivated by concern and respect for others [and by the application to oneself of standards that one applies to others]. The good consequences that ensue for others are morally relevant only insofar as they're signs of the character of the person and/or act that brought them about.

But I'm starting to have doubts. And Hume might not disagree with me in any case.

He's certainly right, however, to limit the role of self-love in the human mind. It isn't the source of every sentiment or act; the many examples he gives of unselfish sentiments suffice to prove that.

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[1] [But I'm not sure it makes sense to say that self-evidence has degrees. Surely something is either self-evident or not, right? How can it be "half" self-evident, so to speak? My dad suggests that Russell is confusing self-evidence with certainty: the former is objective, the latter subjective (and either *more* or *less*, unlike self-evidence). But on the other hand, a self-evident proposition is self-evident *to someone*; there is therefore some role for subjectivity. Right...?]

[2] The statement "The weather today was sunny" is true not because the weather was sunny but because that statement is coherent with some ill-defined "web of beliefs"? Jesus.

[3] "Psychological inference" is a technical concept of his.

[4] It's possible I'm misinterpreting Hume by attributing those positions to him.

"Sympathy," a kind of disinterested pleasure or pain from the consideration of others' happiness or suffering, is an affect of undeniable power. The admiration we feel for a person of great talents or virtue can scarcely be attributed to our self-love or self-regard. More generally, humans are susceptible to a sort of psychic contagion: cheerfulness tends to make cheerful, sullenness to make sullen, magnanimity to make magnanimous. Wit pleases; lack of confidence displeases. However such "natural sympathy" may be, in particular contexts, mixed up with self-regard, it is in principle distinguishable from it. And it is this sympathy or humanity from whence spring moral intuitions.

Against what he calls the "selfish hypothesis"—"that, whatever affection one may feel, or imagine he feels for others, no passion is, or can be disinterested; that the most generous friendship, however sincere, is a modification of self-love; and that, even unknown to ourselves, we seek only our own gratification, while we appear the most deeply engaged in schemes for the liberty and happiness of mankind"—Hume asks, "What interest can a fond mother have in view, who loses her health by assiduous attendance on her sick child, and afterwards languishes and dies of grief, when freed, by its death, from the slavery of that attendance?" It does indeed sound paradoxical to say that all her self-sacrifice on behalf of her child is done fundamentally for her *own* sake. I would say, though, that in fact it is a product of two causes: first, her "disinterested"[1] love for her child, the existence of which it is hard to deny; second, the fact that her devotion to her child gives her a sense of self-validation, self-reality (this other being, whom she loves, *depends on her*). It gives her a purpose and so makes her "happy," however anxious she is over the health of her child. When the child dies she loses, first, this supreme object of love, this person whose existence filled her with joy; second, she loses her purpose in life and feels useless, unreal, unvalidated. She loses much of her self-regard, because the outlet for her self-activity has vanished.

But how is "disinterested" love for another person psychologically possible? What does it "mean"? How is it possible that there can be any emotion that isn't merely a manifestation or modification or perversion of self-regard?

Turning from the idealism of the Enlightenment to the dark investigations of modern psychology, the third volume of Havelock Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1913) is fascinating and somewhat disturbing. A wealth of data documents the differences between the sexes—broadly speaking, male dominance and female submission. Every feminist should read this book. It's a magnificent refutation of naïve political correctness.

I'm teaching myself Spanish (and taking classes). It's kind of fun to be learning a new language again. And Spanish is fun to speak. But really, who cares? –In two hundred years global warming will probably have killed off humanity. So....unless we do anything about it, we're all just biding time.

But I'll continue acting, like everyone else, as if we're not on the precipice. […]

I went to the Chicago socialism conference this weekend, held annually. About 1500 people from around the country and world. Inspiring to see so many like-minded people, and most of the talks were excellent. I've decided to become a member of the International Socialist Organization, which has three branches in Chicago. I don't agree with all its positions—it's a little too Leninist for me—but, on the whole, it seems like a worthy organization.

Reading Bukharin's *Imperialism and World Economy*, the work that influenced Lenin. He's right to emphasize the two contradictory tendencies of capital: its internationalization and its nationalization. The latter isn't disappearing even in the age of globalization.

He argues, correctly, that monopoly capital pushes for high tariffs in order to raise prices in the home market, which allows it to sell products on the world market below the cost of production, i.e. to practice dumping. The dynamic that results on the world scale he describes as follows: "Cartel tariffs and the dumping system practiced by the foremost countries provoke resistance on the part of the backward countries which raise their defensive tariffs; on the other hand, the raising of tariffs by the backward countries serves as a further stimulus to raise the cartel duties that make dumping easier. Needless to say,

[1] That word is misleading.

the same action and counteraction take place both among the foremost countries in relation to each other and among backward countries in their mutual relations. This endless screw, perpetually applied by the growth of cartel organizations, has called forth the 'tariff mania'....that has grown even more pronounced in our days." The pressures toward this tariff insanity, which fans the flames of nationalist belligerence, help explain why after World War II international frameworks were developed to coordinate trade policy.

Bukharin continues:

> The important economic part now played by tariffs brings about also the aggressive character of the policy of "modern capitalism." Indeed, it is due to the tariffs that monopoly organizations gather additional profit, to be utilized also as export premiums in the struggle for markets (dumping). This additional profit may grow, generally speaking, in two ways: first, through more intensive selling inside the limits of the existing state territory; second, through the growth of the latter. As regards the former, there is an obstacle here in the shape of market capacity; one cannot imagine that the big bourgeoisie would begin to increase the share of the working class, in order to drag itself out of the mire by the hair. Cunning businessmen that they are, they prefer to follow the other way, the way of enlarging economic territory. The greater the economic territory, other conditions being equal, the greater will be the additional profit, the easier it will be to pay export premiums and to practice dumping, the larger consequently will be the foreign sales, and the higher the rate of profit.... [I]n our era the interests of finance capital [therefore] demand, first of all, an expansion of the home state territory, i.e., it dictates a policy of conquest, a pressure of military force, a line of "imperialist annexation."... There is nothing behind the discussions about the creation of a middle European tariff alliance but the wish to create a vast economic territory as a monopoly system allowing more successful competition on the external market. In reality this is a product of the interests and ideology of finance capitalism which, penetrating into all the pores of [the] world economy, creates at the same time an unusually strong tendency towards secluding the national organisms, towards economic autarchy as a means of strengthening the monopoly situation of the respective capitalist groups. Thus, together with the internationalization of the economy and the internationalization of capital, there is going on a process of "national" intertwining of capital, a process of "nationalizing" capital, fraught with the greatest consequences.

He was certainly right about that. It was one of the fundamental causes, or at least preconditions, of fascism, Nazism, and World War II.

Many of his arguments, like Lenin's, were stated earlier by Hobson. For example, the big capitalists seek foreign markets because wage repression ensures that domestic demand is insufficient. (This argument was stated by Marx himself.) Another motive for imperialist annexation/occupation is that with the growth of industry, more sources of raw materials are needed. "England's policy in Egypt, the transformation of all of Egypt into a gigantic cotton plantation furnishing raw material for the English textile industry, may serve as a striking illustration." Third, the export of capital increases enormously in the era of monopoly capitalism because of over-accumulation—a paucity of attractive investment opportunities—at home. Also because the incentive to export capital, to establish a base in foreign countries, is even greater when tariffs obstruct the export of commodities from the home country. Bukharin goes on to say that "capital export unusually sharpens the relations between the great powers. Already the struggle for opportunities to invest capital, i.e., the struggle for concessions, etc., is always reinforced by military pressure. A government or a 'country' subjected to the manipulations of the financiers of the great powers ordinarily yields to that party which appears to be the strongest militarily...." And once huge sums of money, particularly fixed capital like railroads, electric plants, large plantations, etc., are invested in a foreign country, the capitalists of the exporting country want their wealth guarded.

All this seems pretty obvious. The reason these dynamics don't lead to the same annexationist and militaristic-conflict-between-great-powers policies today as they did in the past must be, first of all, that

there are things like the WTO, the UN, the ICJ, and many, *many* other bodies that regulate global politics and the economy. Overt militaristic aggression would be frowned on, to say the least.[1] Second, after World War II Europe (and Japan) consciously abandoned, by and large, its former path of militarism. And in the nuclear age nobody wants wars between great powers. Third, after decolonization happened it was more politically difficult to use the heavy-handed tactics of the early twentieth century in dealing with ex-colonies. (This fact, however, has not stopped the U.S. from engaging in militaristic imperialism many times, indeed continually, over the last sixty years.) Fourth, after the decades-long task of transforming the economic structure of peripheral countries into a capitalist or quasi-capitalist one had finally been achieved—a task that necessitated sustained military intervention, political domination by the core countries, savage policies of (partial) destruction of the peasantry in order to create internal markets, especially labor markets—it was no longer necessary to be quite so interventionist in order to protect assets and make profits. The core countries could now, in general, rely on the power-structures, the class structures, the elite groups they had created in the peripheral countries to do most of the work for them, the work of keeping the masses in line and ensuring favorable conditions for capital accumulation.

And yet despite all these facts, military tensions grounded in economic and geopolitical competition persist. For example, lately the U.S. has been quietly establishing a military presence around China. An ominous development.

To resume: "We have laid bare three fundamental motives for the conquest policies of modern capitalist states: increased competition in the sales markets, in the markets of raw materials, and for the spheres of capital investment. This is what the modern development of capitalism and its transformation into finance capitalism has brought about. These three roots of the policy of finance capitalism, however, represent in substance only three facets of the same phenomenon, namely of the conflict between the growth of productive forces on the one hand, and the 'national' limits of the production organization on the other." Interesting. Such a conflict does exist. Only with the destruction of the nation-state will it be possible to use and develop the productive forces rationally, so that they and their socially beneficial use aren't obstructed by artificial barriers.

Quoting Hilferding: "The policy of finance capital pursues a threefold aim: first, the creation of the largest possible economic territory which, secondly, must be protected against foreign competition by tariff walls, and thus, thirdly, must become an area of exploitation for the national monopoly companies." Bukharin expounds on that: "The increase in the economic territory opens agrarian [peripheral] regions to the national cartels and, consequently, markets for raw materials, increasing the sales markets and the sphere of capital investment; the tariff policy makes it possible to suppress foreign competition, to obtain surplus profit, and to put into operation the battering ram of dumping; the 'system' as a whole facilitates the increase of the rate of profit for the monopoly organizations. This policy of finance capital is imperialism." That, in a nutshell, is the Leninist theory of imperialism. The difficult thing is to update it.

"[States] have become an exact expression of the interests of finance capital. [That may be exaggerated, but it's basically true. The state serves the big financiers and industrialists.] Every one of the capitalistically advanced 'national economies' has turned into some kind of a 'national' trust. This process of the organization of the economically advanced sections of world economy, on the other hand, has been accompanied by an extraordinary sharpening of their mutual competition.... A mighty state military power is the last trump in the struggle of the powers. The fighting force in the world market thus depends upon the power and consolidation of the 'nation,' upon its financial and military resources. A self-sufficient national state, and an economic unit limitlessly expending its great power until it becomes a world kingdom—a worldwide empire—such is the ideal built up by finance capital." He quotes Hilferding:

> With a steady and clear eye does it [finance capital] view the Babylonian confusion of peoples, and above all of them it sees its own nation. The latter is real; it lives in a powerful state, which keeps on increasing its power and grandeur, and which devotes all its forces to making them greater. In this way, the interests of the individual are subjugated to the

[1] As it was when Bush invaded Iraq. But America is the godfather, so it can sometimes get away with stuff like that.

> interests of the whole.... The class conflicts have disappeared; they have been annihilated, absorbed as they are in serving the interests of the whole. In place of the dangerous class struggle, fraught for the owners with unknown consequences, there appear the general actions of the nation which is united by one aim—the striving for national grandeur.

Bukharin remarks: "Thus the interests of finance capital acquire a grandiose ideological formulation; every effort is made to inculcate it into the mass of workers...." Mainstream academics might ridicule all this, but it seems pretty reasonable to me. Nationalism and fascism were able to happen because (at least for a while) they were expressions, albeit perverted ones, of the interests of "finance capital."

In short, through a variety of complex mechanisms, the conflict between units of capital is sublimated into the conflict between states. And it continues to be. The state is therefore not yet on its way out—although the "nation" is, in a sense. But as nationality declines, as civil society disintegrates, the state itself will enter a period of crisis. It already is, in fact, partly by virtue of other things like colossal government debt (which is indirectly connected to the disintegration of society and nationality).

How closely will history repeat itself? How severe will competition between states be in the next fifty years? Not as severe as it was in the epoch of fascism. There will be a lot of cooperation between states to put down uprisings and to try to salvage the global economy. But there will also continue to be economic competition, and it's impossible to predict how that will play out.

—It's irritating to know that all the information is out there in order to have a true and full understanding of the world economy and politics, but that such an understanding isn't humanly possible! I feel like I'm groping in the dark not for *bright* spots but for spots that are just a little less dark.

To resume: "Imperialism is nothing but the expression of competition between state capitalist trusts." The word "trusts" is an exaggeration, but that statement is more or less true. Liberals like Paul Krugman say or imply that nationalist economic competition doesn't exist or isn't very important—trade benefits everyone, global interconnection is good for all countries, a rising tide lifts all boats, etc.—but that's foolish. States do what they can to get the most resources for themselves, often at the expense of others. In the age of monopoly capitalism, this rapacity takes imperialistic forms. Surplus extraction through trade, investment, sometimes colonialism, and war—in partnership with corporations (effectively as their servant and enforcer, at least most of the time).

I got an email from AK Press, a publisher of Chomsky and other worthies of the far left, saying they'd like to publish a revised (*very* revised) version of my Master's thesis. It'll take a lot of work, but I'm pretty excited about it.

Reading a lot of books on cities, among them *Remaking Chicago: The Political Origins of Urban Industrial Change* (1999), *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe* (2002), *Chicago: Race, Class, and the Response to Urban Decline* (1987), and *Marxism and the Metropolis: New Perspectives in Urban Political Economy* (1984). And many, many others I'm reading in less depth. For my seminar paper this fall I want to explain how the political and economic elites of Chicago navigated the shoals of deindustrialization. Or, rather, I want to do something that pertains to that broad topic. I'm coming to appreciate that the future will be formed mainly in cities, and that the city will be the crucible, the proving-ground, of social movements. I have to become familiar with the literature.

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Could the neoliberal state have arisen in the U.S. if the country didn't have a lot of black people? What a terrible thing race has been all through history! The New Deal coalition was broken up because of the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left (which was inspired partly by the Civil Rights Movement). These are what made possible "Reagan Democrats," white working-class (and middle-class) voters whose support allowed conservatives to smash unions. [All this is naive, a consequence of reading too much mainstream historiography. The proper analysis is that of Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers. See my summary of it below, in 2014.] In other words, the elitist-populist cultural and racial backlash against the

1960s facilitated the economic and political restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s. The war on drugs, which has made possible the vast expansion of prisons, has been directed mostly at blacks, as has the "war on crime," which has led to the militarization of police forces and justified all kinds of political horrors. The war on welfare has succeeded in part because welfare is associated with black people. And so on. Nevertheless, while racism has been of inestimable value to the neoliberal agenda, I think economic and political evolution would have proceeded along similar, albeit less extreme, lines in recent decades even if it hadn't been possible to exploit racial stereotypes. For one thing, neoliberalism has been a nearly global phenomenon, not only a U.S. one. And class bigotry exists too, not only racial bigotry. Middle-class whites are perfectly capable of mobilizing politically against poor whites. And working-class whites are capable of mobilizing against the "liberal elite," not only for its perceived support of blacks but also for its supposed lack of patriotism, its support of foreigners, its Communism, its ties to Wall Street (!), etc. It's always possible to manufacture some scapegoat or other; racial differences simply provide an extra-convenient way of doing so.

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Apocalypse soon.— It seems to me that, at this point in history, environmental activism is more important than anything else, at least in the long run. In fifty years, the world won't look like it does now. Economic chaos will be overshadowed by climate chaos. What we need is a global movement to plant and protect forests in as many places as possible.

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People who argue that the "normal" state of capitalism is even growth, stability, "equilibrium," etc., are funny. From 1800 to 1945 there wasn't a whole lot of placid growth, stability, and equilibrium. From the late 1940s to the late 1960s, there was some of that, at least compared to the past. From the 1970s to the present, there hasn't been any. So there was a twenty-year interregnum of relative peace and prosperity on two continents (or three, including Australia). A Keynesian, labor-accommodating, protectionist (except for the U.S.) interregnum. *That* is what begs for an explanation, not the chaos and crises of the present or past. Those come with the capitalist territory.

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Here's a paradox: from one perspective, you could have been another person, or even another kind of animal. You didn't have to be the person you are; you could have been born someone else a hundred years later, or you could have been a lion or a chimpanzee or whatever. This is why it made sense for Plato to be thankful he was born a man and not an animal. From another perspective, though, you couldn't have been anyone else, because you just are who you are. One entity can't be another entity; it is itself, that's all. So how do you reconcile these contradictory intuitions? My senior thesis gives the foundation of an answer in its distinction between the so-called "subjective" and "objective" selves. Specifically, from one perspective you, like other animals, are simply consciousness;[1] from another, you are your "empirical totality," your whole physical and mental being. The basic thing I have in common with you is our consciousness (our being conscious), which is, ultimately, our selfhood. So, in a sense, we have our selfhood(s), our *selves*, our essences, in common. (This is an ancient and profound insight that has been rediscovered countless times over millennia.) But we are, after all, different people with different personalities, etc., and in that respect it makes no sense to say we could have been each other.

[1] [I.e., the self is consciousness. And insofar as other animals can be said to have a self (which they can to the degree that they're self-conscious), it, too, is their consciousness.]

It's true that things get more complicated when you bring other types of animals into consideration, since their "form" of consciousness is different from ours, in being less self-conscious. They have less of a self. Nevertheless, insofar as they are conscious, yes, Plato's statement has some sense.

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One of the many sources of instability in the world today is the immense surplus of labor. Hundreds of millions of people who don't have an integral economic role. There are two primary ways of dealing with this reserve army: either absorb it by giving it things to do, or repress it. Since the 1990s, China's main strategy has been to absorb it (through infrastructural projects and so forth);[1] the U.S.'s has been to repress it (and to give it meager welfare benefits). Neither of these strategies will prove sustainable for a long time, though. Keynesianism cannot last for many decades anymore, and repression will eventually face insurmountable resistance. Both strategies will start to meet their limits in the next ten years or so, though the repressive option will continue to be used for a very long time. Things are about to get interesting....

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Some varieties of "eliminativism" still intrigue me. Is there really a fact of the matter about whether I admire Occupy Wall Street activists? Even if I say I do, and even if in the moment I say it I believe it, do I? Maybe half-consciously I'm just saying it because I know the other person will appreciate my statement. What is it to "admire" someone anyway? Or to hate someone or have contempt for him or love him or respect him? In one moment you say you hate him; in the next you correct yourself and say you only dislike him; in the next, you say that, well, okay, he's not acting in malice and he means well, and maybe you just pity him. What the hell! There's no "reality" here! You're just talking. And yet there is *some* mental state, some vague sort of attitude toward the person in question, backing up your talk. But the mental state isn't "determinate" in any way. It's just a sort of nebulous disapproval coloring your thought of the person. Most of the intentional content is in your words, not in your mind itself. The role of your mind is just to assent to the words coming out of your mouth in the moment you say them. So to return to the question about whether there is an underlying "fact of the matter," I guess all that can be said is that my attitude toward OWS activists is such that I'm fairly comfortable *saying* I admire them. But then you retort, "Do you *really* admire them, though?" Um, yeah, I guess. But you know, these kinds of words themselves don't have very determinate meanings, and the more you dig into them, the less there is. I don't know what the broader lesson is.... It's possible, too, that I'm conflating several issues.

Maybe part of the puzzle I'm groping at is that universals like 'admire' seem as though they should have an "essence," a determinate, substantive meaning, whereas often they don't. There's an incongruity between the impressive-sounding universality and apparent determinacy of 'admire' and the lack of a comparable referent in my mind, as well as, once you investigate, the lack of real determinacy in the concept itself. It's not determinate in the way that 'bachelor' is.

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Some Marxists criticize Robert Brenner's book *The Economics of Global Turbulence* for its focus on inter-capitalist competition rather than the class struggle between workers and capitalists, as well as for seeming to deprive workers of agency. They argue that it portrays the class struggle as not very important in determining systemic trajectories. Since I'm sympathetic to Brenner's perspective, you might criticize me in the same ways. But of course both Brenner and I acknowledge that class struggle is absolutely essential to the dynamics of capitalism. Capital's need to exploit labor and labor's interest in resisting are foundational facts about society. Nevertheless, capital obviously has more power than labor, more influence, and to that extent a theorist who wants to explain historical trajectories should focus more on the

[1] Needless to say, repression hasn't been absent.

operations of capital than of labor. Whenever labor has made significant advances, after all, it is because it has had allies in the propertied classes. (Just consult history.) And in an era like that of neoliberalism, when labor is staggering under ferocious attacks, the agency of capital is especially decisive to social evolution. Labor has become even more "reactive" than it used to be. Brenner's emphasis, therefore, is not misplaced.

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Anti-ressentiment.— What I most resent people for is their *smallness*, because it makes me think that life itself is small.

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After seeing a talk by Glenn Greenwald, it occurs to me that Hannah Arendt's classic definition of totalitarianism is starting to apply, at least in a very approximate way, to the U.S. That's starting to be the *ideal*, the ideal of power-structures. It's the logic of their policies, though fortunately it will never be realized. The surveillance and "national security" state—the police state—is doing all it can to make impossible human interactions that aren't mediated or at least observed by power. Several billion hours of surveillance tape are produced *every day* around the country, and that amount is increasing. The NSA apparently has intercepted and stored about *twenty trillion* emails in recent years. Drones are being deployed to spy on the domestic population. (Historically, militaristic experiments abroad are often used on the domestic society after they have been perfected. Impoverished foreign countries are the laboratory.) Cyber-warfare is becoming more sophisticated, eventually to be used on leftist groups among the citizenry. The tactic of instilling *fear* among people, intimidating them through police brutality and so on, is being pursued all across the political spectrum, not only by the right. These are long-term trends that will intensify as the ruling classes sense that they're losing control over the world.

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In the past I've been hard on Leninism. But I have to admit that it's an easy thing to caricature. The fact is that Lenin was right about a lot. Theoretically, of course, he was right about *many* things, but even strategically he was right about a lot. It makes some sense to characterize revolutionary activists as the "vanguard," although if you take this conceptualization too seriously it can lead to a destructive and counterproductive elitism. Understood loosely, a kind of "democratic centralism" is just common sense. For a coordinated movement to work, there's no alternative. You have to have "executive committees" or whatever you want to call them, and there should be some semblance of unity-of-action. Representative democracy in the executive power. Revolutionary political parties can play a very important role [too]. On the other hand, they shouldn't be the only manifestations of the movement. Decentralized, "horizontal" networks of economic and political activism are essential as well, to help ensure that things happen from the ground up. Which is the only way to make a durable, successful *social* revolution. A socialist or quasi-socialist political party that takes over the national state before economic relations have made much progress towards socialism might bring about a revolutionary abortion, as happened in the Soviet Union, but less ambitious goals can be achieved or facilitated by the party, for example the popularization of anti-capitalist ideas and the taking of power on more local levels. In short, there is no one path to revolution; a variety of methods, some "Leninist" and some "anarchist," will have to evolve of their own accord.

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To understand the character of mainstream America, all you have to know is that it admires the repellent thing called Thomas Friedman. That fact in itself is a sufficient indictment of our entire civilization: it exposes the racist, imperialistic, jingoistic, dishonest, intellectually vacuous, hypocritical, elitist basis of Western society.

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Chomsky recently wrote an article describing how the rights enshrined in the Magna Carta have been shredded in the last five hundred years. Naturally, in the "Comments" section under the article online are observations to the effect that Chomsky, that horrible Commie, wants to take us back to the year 1215. Etc. An intelligent six-year-old would understand Chomsky's point(s), but these people can't. They've been indoctrinated into a pre-six-year-old level of intelligence and rationality. They can't interpret statements from "Commies" except through a fog of "Fuck you." Virulent hostility toward people who challenge them so colors their mind that they *can't understand what is being said*. It becomes impossible to consider arguments on their merits; all that really registers (implicitly) in these people's minds is that "This horrible guy is saying 'Fuck you!' to me—his very existence is a 'Fuck you!'—so I have to defend myself [i.e., my sense of self] by attacking him." It's a fascinating phenomenon, which gives clues as to how Nazism and concentration camps are possible. Hatred of the other, whether Commie or Jew or whatever, *consumes the mind*, so that any capacity for lucid reasoning is lost and the other's humanity is barely recognized. The kind of mind susceptible to this descent into semi-madness must be deeply paranoid, anxiously sensitive, insecure, prone to feeling as if it is beset by all kinds of demons that have to be destroyed. Commies, socialists, Muslims, terrorists, gays, big government, immigrants....the whole world is against me! All these evil forces have to be destroyed! Thus: far-right conservatives.

There's a continuum, of course; not everyone who hates Chomsky has a thoroughgoing fascist, authoritarian, paranoid mindset. But most have traveled some distance down that road. (Actually, everyone to some extent shares these traits—subtly categorizing certain people and hating them as instances of that category, etc.)

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On the "vice" of "generalizing."— My dad recently offered a friendly criticism of me: he said I "always go from the particular to the general" when making judgments about things. So I retorted in an ironical tone that Schopenhauer considered this trait to be the essence of genius. Which, if there's any truth to that, makes postmodernism the opposite of genius.[1]

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I was watching Conan O'Brien's late-night talk show; his guest was some beautiful actress. She was wearing a dress that exposed her ample bosom, and at one point she caught him looking down. "*Focus*, Conan [on my eyes, not my breasts]," she said with irritation. Then she laughed, as the audience did. While laughing, she brushed some strands of hair off her right breast, thereby giving Conan and the audience a better view of the two lovely things she'd demanded he ignore a second ago. And it occurred to me that this was a good example of why men, who tend to lack insight, sometimes call women irrational. After all, women tend to contradict themselves more than men do, in different kinds of ways. One of the reasons for that is that Simone de Beauvoir was right in the passage I quoted from her a long time ago: womanhood, as such, is in tension with one's vocation as a human being. Womanhood means (relative) passiveness, objecthood, a lack of autonomy. So women want to have those qualities even as they also, as human beings, want to be active subjects, strong, and autonomous. They're torn between the two desires, the two contradictory necessities. Therefore they act in contradictory ways, wanting to be treated like sex-objects but not.[2]

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[1] [Needless to say, there are intelligent and unintelligent ways of "generalizing." Most people do it unintelligently.]

[2] There's also the fact that women, because of hormones, are more innately fickle than men. See the article from the *New York Times* I quoted years ago, about the man who became somewhat like a woman because his testosterone was

This woman's action, incidentally, is also revelatory of the "unconscious intentionality" that infuses many of our actions. She wasn't *thinking* "I want people to have a better view of my breasts" when she adjusted her hair, but the intention was there all the same, unconsciously or half-consciously.

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One of the many tragedies of life is that everyone, or nearly everyone, has at least one thing at which they excel, one incredible talent. They can enrich themselves and the world by realizing their talents. And yet the *overwhelming* majority throughout human history, so overwhelming that the minority is practically infinitesimal, has not had the opportunity to realize talent, for many reasons. Some of these people were born before society had become sophisticated enough to invent the means for the pursuit of their talent(s); others lived in such a society but were denied opportunities; others were born, lived a few hours, and died. The entirety of what we have lost is the *universe* to the *atom* of what we have.

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I saw Woody Allen's movie *Midnight in Paris*. A soft haze hung in my mind afterwards. I feel as though that movie was made for me, and I see a lot of myself in the main character, the nostalgic writer. Stranger in a strange land (the present, not the 1920s). Shallowness and mundanity all around....but of course whatever historical era you live in is full of shallowness and mundanity. There was never a golden age. Still, nostalgia—for nothing in particular—stays with me, and with all "dreamers." Nostalgia for something never experienced. And never to be experienced. (True love, however, would be a step in the right direction.)

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As I get older, I find myself taking consolation in the thought that someday, perhaps, I'll be able to live in Europe. That always remains an option. To leave the desert and live in Italy, France, or Spain, […].

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Reading a book (published in 1987) that has the following passage: "....This [politically conservative, private-sector-fixated] perspective misdiagnoses the causes of current economic maladies, principally because of its uncritical devotion to market forces. High taxes, costly governmental regulations, excessive wage demands by unions, and an overly generous welfare state are viewed as the primary culprits. Yet this perspective is unable to explain why Sweden, Japan, and virtually all of the U.S. major trading partners in Western Europe have enjoyed greater levels of productivity growth than the United States despite higher taxes, greater government and union involvement in management, more generous welfare policies, and more equal distributions of income." The point is valid. *Planning*, as was done for a long time by Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry, is usually more effective than unregulated private competition. (In fact, to some extent it's absolutely necessary.) Intelligent government investment in the economy, funding long-term projects such as technological innovation, infrastructure development, and expanded public education, has for at least eighty years been a sine qua non of sustained economic growth. Many of the economic woes of the U.S. since the 1970s could have been avoided had the government pursued radically different, quasi-state-socialistic policies. But that couldn't have happened without, first, radical changes in the class structure.

In the absence of those changes, it was reasonable for the corporate sector to pursue Reaganite policies as means, in the long run, to speed up the growth of productivity and increase profits, as finally

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being suppressed. But really you don't have to "see" any article; just get a girlfriend, or be a woman, and you'll appreciate the truth of the stereotype. Unless you've been blinded by feminist propaganda.

began to happen in earnest—after decades of attacks on the Keynesian welfare state—during the 1990s. Of course this corporate class war has left millions of people in the ditches, but it has ensured that economic growth in some narrowly defined way has occurred. The choice was between the neoliberal strategy and a progressive statist one, and the latter was precluded by the balance of class forces.

But even if alternative, radically progressive policies had been enacted, in the long run the golden age couldn't have lasted. "Limits to capital accumulation" would have kept cropping up, and eventually the system would have descended into stagnation and crisis. A world economy structured around competition for profits is, in the end, doomed.

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It's ironic that the men who take women most seriously, the ones who try to understand them on the deepest level, are considered more "misogynistic" than the men who ignore them [i.e. their minds] and don't care about understanding them. Liberals and far-leftists don't go very deep with regard to female psychology; they simply assert that women should be equal to men in politics and the economy (as they should), and then move on to other topics. Or they rant about how men and women are the same. This behavior itself expresses misogyny, a total lack of interest in the differences between women and men, a lack of interest in women and what moves them. The moment you start to pay attention to women and investigate their desires, you're declared a misogynist or a sexist. If you don't believe that women are exactly the same as men—i.e., that maleness is the standard of all value—you're a sexist. If you respect human diversity, you're a sexist. Undoubtedly there are obnoxious, chauvinistic ways of paying attention to women, but the mere fact of being "chivalrous"—as all decent men are, often in imperceptible ways—or of being interested in women as women, is not objectionable. It is treated that way, though. The tyranny of political correctness will cast you out if you show a hint of intellectual honesty or interest in female psychology. That's the sad world we live in. The *truly misogynistic* world.

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Why is deindustrialization bad for the economy (or society)? This question should be taken seriously, though it rarely is. A lot of mainstream economists actually argue that there's nothing wrong with a decline of employment in manufacturing, that it's a sign of progress, in particular of the higher productivity in manufacturing than in the service sector. Manufacturing productivity in America has become so high that we need very few workers to produce an equivalent level of output to the 1960s. The employment lost in manufacturing can be compensated by higher employment in the services. Etc. There is some superficial plausibility to this view, but a bit of sensible thinking shows it to be false. The main problem with losing manufacturing employment, I suspect, is that it entails a loss of powerful unions, thus a loss of high wages in the core economy (the "standard-setting" economy), therefore a stagnation or decline in the standard of living and a shrinking of effective demand. With lower demand, the service sector can't grow sufficiently to stably employ the tens of millions who would have had manufacturing jobs if the industrial sector had continued to grow instead of shrink. Said differently, the basic problem seems to be that it's harder to unionize in services than in industry, because of the greater incidence of part-time and informal employment, the fragmentation [and "personalization"] of the sector, the lack of standardization in work processes, the transitory nature of employment, etc. Furthermore, since it is inherently more difficult to raise productivity in the services than in manufacturing, it's more difficult for wages to rise indefinitely—at least in "mass" jobs like retail and clerical work. There isn't a constant stream of inventions permitting greater output that raises the possibility of higher wages. Also, manufacturing jobs supposedly generate more secondary jobs than those in the service sector do. On top of all this, there is the obvious fact that problems of "transition to a new economy," the "temporary" problems of inadequate training for new well-paying jobs, are by no means insignificant, especially in a country that devotes few resources to properly training laid-off workers for new careers. Conceivably, deindustrialization in the U.S. did not have to be the agonizing process it has been, if tens of billions of dollars had been directed to programs of

"retraining," i.e. *education*. But that couldn't have happened in a country with the class structure of the U.S. It wasn't to the advantage of the financial sector—or real estate, insurance, retail, entertainment, or energy corporations.

[Another thing to keep in mind is that deindustrialization has coincided with a major increase of capital mobility, which has changed the power dynamics between capital and the population. Even apart from its contribution to deindustrialization, this greater mobility bears a lot of the blame for the dramatic rise of economic insecurity since the 1960s. It surely helps keep service-sector wages low, for one thing; and even if there were still a lot of manufacturing jobs in the U.S., high capital mobility would probably ensure that unions had little power and manufacturing wages were low. But of course deindustrialization itself can be attributed in part to high capital mobility (in a context of competitive pressures on a national and international scale).]

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August

The history of the American city is worth knowing. Marxists usually divide it into three stages: the commercial city, the industrial city, and the corporate city, corresponding to the successive phases of commercial capital, competitive industrial capital, and corporate or monopoly capital. The commercial city, which lasted until the middle of the nineteenth century, was a center for trade, craft manufacturing, and mercantilist government. Its residential structure was relatively heterogeneous and not as segregated as it would become later: "People of many different backgrounds and occupations were interspersed throughout the central city districts, with little obvious socioeconomic residential segregation. In the central port districts, the randomness and intensity of urban life produced jagged, unexpected, random physical patterns. Streets zigged and zagged every which way. Buildings were scattered at odd angles in unexpected combinations." The only group that didn't share in this central port-district life was the poor—beggars, casual seamen, propertyless laborers—who lived outside the cities in shantytowns and rooming houses, moving from town to town. As the commercial city grew, the only major change that took place in its organization was the rationalizing of land speculation, the birth of the "urban grid" characterized by straight lines, ninety-degree angles, etc.

Early factories were located in small towns, but after a few decades they had moved to large cities. Why? First of all, they provided easy access to markets, workers, transportation, and intermediate goods. In other words, cities provided "agglomeration economies," as conventional economics calls it. David Gordon also suggests that, at least until the 1880s, it was easier for employers to control their workers and suppress resistance in large cities than in small ones. The reasons, he says, are that, "first, the greater physical segregation and impersonality of the larger cities seem to have isolated the working class and exposed it to community indifference or ostracism [which was very different than in small cities, where the middle classes often supported workers' strikes]. Second, non-industrial classes in smaller cities seem to have exhibited more militantly preindustrial values [such as human decency and fair pay] than their larger-city cousins." In short, "the basis for industrial profits was best secured if and when a homogeneous industrial proletariat could be most effectively segregated from the rest of society," which was more feasible in large than in small cities.

Huge factories were concentrated in downtown industrial districts, near rail and water outlets; segregated working-class housing districts emerged, located near factories; the middle and upper classes began to escape from the unpleasant center city, eventually being "arrayed in concentric rings" around the center; shopping districts arose in the heart of the city to cater to the more prosperous classes. The differences from the earlier commercial city are clear. "The central city was [now] occupied by dependent wage-earners rather than independent property-owners. Producers no longer lived and worked in the same place; there was now a separation between job and residential location. There was no longer residential heterogeneity; instead, the cities had quickly acquired a sharp residential segregation by economic class. In

the Commercial City, the poor had lived outside the center while everyone else lived inside; now, suddenly, the poor and working classes lived inside while everyone else raced away from the center."

Problems—for capitalists—began to appear in the 1880s and later. The most important one was that as workers became more and more concentrated in large cities, labor unrest grew harder to suppress. Strikes bred demonstrations throughout the downtown districts. At the turn of the century, as the merger wave took off and monopoly capital entered the historical arena, manufacturing started moving out of the central city in search of more stable and secure environments (and lower taxes). Factory districts beyond the city limits cropped up, such as Gary, Indiana and East Chicago. Thus "the great twentieth-century reversal of factory location" began, because—at least in part—"corporations could no longer control their labor forces in the central city."

At around the same time, especially from the 1920s on, central business districts were created and expanded. "Downtown office space in the ten largest cities increased between 1920 and 1930 by 3000 percent. Tall skyscrapers suddenly sprouted...." Why did it take until the 1920s for central business districts to flower? Apparently because "large corporations were not yet ready for them before then. Huge corporations had not consolidated their monopoly control over their industries until after World War I. Once they gained stable market control, they could begin to organize that control. They were now large enough to separate administrative functions from the production process itself, leaving plant managers to oversee the factories while corporate managers supervised the far-flung empire." They chose downtown locations because of agglomeration economies (the advantages of being near other headquarters, banks and law offices, advertising agents). Incidentally, Daniel Burnham's 1909 *Plan of Chicago* proves that even at that early date, the commercial business community was preparing for a "post-industrial" future. It's a strikingly modern plan, prioritizing urban beautification, the development of highways, new parks, railroad terminal improvements, civic and cultural centers, a more systematic arrangement of streets, and the gradual eviction of industry from the central city by means of zoning regulations and the increase of land values. The plan was partially implemented in the following decades.

Another major change that began with the transition to corporate capitalism was the political fragmentation of urban areas, i.e. the rise of "political suburbanization." A sort of primitive suburbanization had already been going on for quite a long time, but until the end of the nineteenth century, central cities had continually annexed outlying residential districts. Suburban residents usually opposed this, preferring autonomy, but they couldn't do much about it. Until the turn of the century. The last urban annexations [in *old* cities at least, not newer ones like Los Angeles] happened between 1890 and 1910. The reason for this cessation of annexation activity, it seems, was that the power dynamics changed: as manufacturers themselves began to move out of central cities, legislatures and local governments were prevailed upon not to allow the annexation of suburban areas by cities. (What the manufacturers wanted was to avoid paying central-city taxes and to stay outside the purview of progressive city legislation.)

Gordon concludes his analysis:

> If a city had reached maturity as an Industrial City during the stage of industrial accumulation, its character changed rapidly during the corporate period although its physical structure remained embedded in concrete. Its downtown shopping districts were transformed into downtown central business districts, dominated by skyscrapers.... Surrounding the central business district were [eventually] emptying manufacturing areas, depressed from the desertion of large plants, barely surviving on the light and competitive industries left behind. Next to those districts were the old working-class districts, often transformed into "ghettos," locked into the cycle of central-city manufacturing decline. Outside the central city there were suburban belts of industrial development, linked together by circumferential highways. Scattered around those industrial developments were fragmented working-class and middle-class suburban communities. The wealthy lived farther out. Political fragmentation prevailed beyond the central-city boundaries.
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> Many other, newer cities—particularly those in the South, Southwest, and West—reached maturity during the stage of corporate accumulation. These became the exemplary

> Corporate Cities. They shared one thundering advantage over the older Industrial Cities: they had never acquired the fixed physical capital of an earlier era. They could be constructed from scratch to fit the needs of a new period of accumulation in which factory plant and equipment were themselves frequently predicated upon a decentralized model. (Orthodox historians explain the decentralization of manufacturing as a *result* of this new plant and equipment [which includes trucks, cars, and highways, presumably]; I have argued that an eruption of class struggle initially prompted the decentralization and, by implication, that the new plant and equipment developed as a result of that dispersal in order to permit corporations' taking advantage of the new locational facts.) There was consequently no identifiable downtown factory district; manufacturing was scattered throughout the city plane. There were no centralized working-class housing districts (for that was indeed what capitalists had learned to avoid); working-class housing was scattered all over the city around the factories. Automobiles and trucks provided the connecting links, threading together the separate pieces. The Corporate City became, in Robert Fogelson's term, the Fragmented Metropolis. No centers anywhere. [Los Angeles is the classic example.] Diffuse economic activity everywhere.

By the way, mass suburbanization and deindustrialization would have happened earlier if the Great Depression and World War II hadn't intervened.[1] –What an irony that the historic victories of the CIO happened only twenty or thirty years before deindustrialization truly got underway and started to destroy the power of unions! (Whereas earlier in the century, decentralization of production was impelled by the desire to escape labor unrest, in the postwar period it was impelled largely by the desire to escape the power of unions. In both cases, class struggle explains the shift.)[2]

The urban crisis between the 1960s and 1980s was a crisis of the "old cities," the old industrial centers like Chicago and New York, not the new cities in the South and West. The Great Depression and World War II saved the old cities for a time, but eventually they had to succumb to declining tax revenues (from white flight and deindustrialization)[3] and increasing expenditures due to social problems. So, some of them nearly went bankrupt, and all of them were economically restructured from the 1970s to the present. They were made more "corporate," more services-oriented, and recently more touristy, like cities all over the West [indeed, the whole world]. Even the "new" cities that initially avoided the urban crisis have recently been losing jobs, this time overseas (as capital mobility has increased). So they too have had recourse to things like tourism, entertainment, urban beautification, and the FIRE sector (finance, insurance, real estate). The so-called "neoliberal city" is really just the post-industrial city in a context of hyper-globalization. It is the latest, and probably the highest, form of the "corporate" city.[4]

It's also interesting that with the acceleration of gentrification, which is a very conscious *policy*, more middle- and upper-class people are returning to the city and lower-income people leaving it for the suburbs. Property values are rising, forcing many immigrants and minorities to move out to the suburbs where they can afford to live. City governments encourage this because higher property values mean higher taxes, in addition to a better "reputation" in the global competition to attract business. Needless to say, plenty of city neighborhoods remain in dilapidated, gang-ridden condition; their number is declining,

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[1] Patrick Ashton notes that in 1929 the population of suburbs was growing twice as fast as that of central cities. In 1900, about 10 percent of the U.S. population already lived in suburbs.

[2] It's true that other factors were operative too. Another author writes, "The growing scale of [industrial] operation discouraged central location where land was scarce. The wave of mergers around the turn of the century created giant bureaucratic empires which needed headquarters in which to coordinate their far-flung operations. Thus office activities began crowding out manufacturing from the central business districts...."

[3] Remember, too, that from the 1930s on, federal policies effectively subsidized the expansion of suburbs, because they were very good for capital.

[4] [Well, the term "neoliberal city" is half-meaningless. It conceals different forms, the evolution of the city from the 1980s to the present and beyond. Cities are going to become more militarized and privatized, for example.]

though. Logan Square, where I live, wasn't the safest of areas eight years ago, but it's gentrifying at a rapid pace. Soon some of the Hispanics who live on my block might have to move elsewhere.

Nancy Kleniewski has a good paper on postwar urban renewal in Philadelphia. But much of what she says applies to cities all around the country. For example, in Chicago too (under Richard J. Daley and later), "urban renewal stimulated investment in the central city, it bolstered the values of central city property, it spurred the transformation of central [Chicago] from an industrial city to a corporate city, and it initiated a change in the composition of the population living in and near the central city....from predominantly industrial working-class, unemployed poor, and racial minorities, to predominantly white, middle- to upper-middle-class and professional." The poor whose homes had been demolished were shunted off to public housing or to increasingly crime-plagued neighborhoods farther away from the central business district.

Reading *Capital Resurgent: Roots of the Neoliberal Revolution* (2004), by G. Duménil and D. Lévy, well-known Marxists. They follow the common Marxist line—which seems right—that neoliberalism was largely a response to the decline in the rate of profit in Europe and the U.S. between the late 1960s and the 1980s. There was a "structural crisis" that demanded that capital owners go on the offensive. The economic crisis coincided, more or less, with a political crisis, a "crisis of democracy"—too much democracy—which gave extra urgency to the capitalist offensive of the 1970s and 1980s.

Why did profitability decline? Supposedly because capital productivity declined, i.e. because "unfavorable conditions for technological change appeared in the 1960s or even earlier." Increasing masses of capital were required to improve labor productivity. I'm skeptical of this sort of technological determinism, especially because they simply declare that technological progress got harder somehow and don't explain it. I'm more sympathetic to Brenner.

They make a number of interesting observations, backed up by detailed data and graphs. For example, in the 1980s and 1990s, large proportions of the capital of nonfinancial corporations were paid out in interest and dividends, at the expense of "retained profits."[1] The state has come to the aid of corporate profitability, though, partly offsetting dividend and interest payments by reducing corporate taxation. Attacks on labor, too, have raised profits. Nevertheless, the profitability of financial companies has soared at the expense of nonfinancial companies.

The authors' "technological determinism" extends to their treatment of the past.

> The decades that we have just lived through and the trends that emerge recall the crisis that struck the main capitalist countries a century ago and the way in which it was overcome. The underlying circumstances for the emergence of these two structural crises are very similar. The last decades of the nineteenth century were marked by a development of technology and distribution à la Marx, with a decline in the profit rate similar to the one preceding the structural crisis of the 1970s. At the root of this movement are the rates and forms of technological change. Such change has a particular feature, linked to mechanization, which is central in Marx's analysis: the resorting to very large investments in big masses of fixed capital, buildings, and machines. In such a context, the savings on labor required by production, that is, the rise in labor productivity, demand ever-increasing masses of capital—far more machines, or more expensive machines, for less labor.

As capital productivity thus declined between the 1870s and 1890s, so did the profit rate, from 26 percent to 13 percent. At the same time there was a "crisis of competition." "Companies facing a lowering of their profitability sought salvation through reciprocal agreements, whose purpose was to protect them from the hardships of competition.... Some companies agreed to fix minimal prices with each other or to share markets and profits (as in pools)." Later, around the turn of the century, came the great wave of mergers.

[1] Interest rates decreased later in the 1990s, but dividend payments remained high.

Low capital productivity was, supposedly, finally overcome by the "tremendous technological and organizational revolution....known as the managerial revolution." Taylorism, the assembly line, huge staffs of executives and employees, etc. The assembly line, for example, led to greater gains of efficiency and productivity than previous innovations had. And so the profit rate gradually recovered.

One indication that there's something wrong about the authors' interpretation of "structural crises" is that, in 2004, they suggest that the post-1960s crisis may be nearing its end, because capital and labor productivity are recovering and overall profit rates are high. Events since 2004 have shown that high productivity is perfectly compatible with long-term, structural economic problems. The real essence of the latter (at least since the 1970s) must lie elsewhere, then—probably in system-wide overproduction and/or underconsumption.

Another obvious problem is that after the supposed end of the first crisis, the Great Depression happened. Productivity plunged. And yet Duménil and Lévy claim that the Depression was located right in the middle of a long upswing between the early twentieth century and the 1960s. Their way out of the paradox is interesting, but I don't think I find it convincing. What they say is that, yes, productivity began to improve with the managerial revolution and Taylorism, but these improvements didn't spread to all firms in the [American] economy. Initially only large, innovative corporations benefited from them. Many small, traditional companies "never acquired the size necessary to reform their management and to adopt more effective technologies; they were never chaperoned by finance," unlike the large companies that adopted progressive technologies and managerial structures. Automobile manufacturing provides an example of this "heterogeneity" of production in America: "numerous small production units, using obsolete methods, survived next to the giants (Ford and General Motors)." As long as business was prosperous, during the 1920s, the backward sector was able to survive, in part by going further into debt. But when the economy entered a significant recession in 1929 (which wasn't yet a depression), bankruptcies increased, debts remained unpaid, the banking system was shaken, and so on.

There was a second element of instability: the currency and financial system wasn't sufficiently regulated. In fact, it was "out of control." These two sources of instability combined to transform the 1929 recession into a depression.

This analysis suggests that, theoretically, the Depression could have been avoided.

> Action could have been taken on two levels. First, with regard to the underlying conditions for the crisis, two types of interventions were necessary. On the one hand, the backward sector should not have been allowed to benefit from passive protection [through antitrust legislation and other things], but should have been helped to transform itself; otherwise it had to disappear. On the other hand, the development of monetary and financial mechanisms should have been accompanied by the definition of a centralized, state framework of control of the stability of the macroeconomy, largely autonomous from private finance. This would mean the establishment of the institutions required by a true monetary policy, targeted to economic activity instead of to the narrow interests of finance. Second, in the crisis itself, business should have been strongly supported and on a lasting basis through credits as well as through public demand (deficits)....

In other words, the maturation of state capitalism should have happened sooner than it did (which was during World War II).

> What is most striking in the analysis of the Great Depression is that it is possible to see in it the crisis of the end to the structural crisis of the final years of the nineteenth century. The crisis at the end of the century had led to the development of a new configuration of the production system, that of big joint-stock companies, with unprecedented efficiency; it had prompted the rise of a financial system [the Federal Reserve, etc.] far different from the preceding one, and strongly tied to the production system. ....[B]ut these evolutions were not coupled with appropriate procedures of macroeconomic control. In spite of the

> pronounced heterogeneity of the production system, this period was characterized by the particularly favorable evolution of the major variables involved in the description of technological progress (labor and capital productivity), which extended to equally favorable movements concerning distribution [really?], wages [really?], and the profit rate. The Great Depression intervened in this context in disconcerting fashion—favorable development on the one hand, depression on the other. But this paradox is only apparent—that is what is expressed in the notion of crisis of the end of the crisis.

Interesting ideas that have some validity, but I think Richard Du Boff has a better interpretation in his insistence on *insufficient demand*, which Duménil and Lévy virtually ignore throughout their book. Surely *that*, together with overproduction (excessive competition, therefore cost-cutting, therefore low demand), has typically been the overwhelming problem with capitalism.[1]

Something I'm more inclined to agree with is the authors' argument that neoliberalism represented, in part, the restoration of owners' power over managers, the subordination of the latter to the interests of shareholders. In the postwar era managers had been relatively autonomous, able to pursue long-term growth at the expense of short-term profits. This was, in a way, the logical culmination of the earlier managerial revolution. But after the 1960s owners asserted their rights, and capitalism became quintessentially capitalist again. In other words, all the evils that had been mitigated after World War II returned.

Now I'm reading David Graeber's massive *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (2011). "This book is a history of debt, but it also uses that history as a way to ask fundamental questions about what human beings and human society are or could be like—what we actually do owe each other, what it even means to ask that question."

It really is striking to what extent human life revolves around debt, even in the narrow sense (as opposed to the general idea of owing something to someone or having obligations). "For most of human history—at least, the history of states and empires—most human beings have been told that they are debtors.... As the great classicist Moses Finley often liked to say, in the ancient world, all revolutionary movements had a single program: 'Cancel the debts and redistribute the land.' Our tendency to overlook this is all the more peculiar when you consider how much of our contemporary moral and religious language originally emerged directly from these very conflicts. Terms like 'reckoning' or 'redemption' are only the most obvious, since they're taken directly from the language of ancient finance. In a larger sense, the same can be said of 'guilt,' 'freedom,' 'forgiveness,' and even 'sin.' Arguments about who really owes what to whom have played a central role in shaping our basic vocabulary of right and wrong." Some of the most exalted spiritual ideas derive from lowly economic practices. (Cf. Nietzsche too.)

"Christ the Redeemer." As Graeber says later in the book, "The primary meaning of 'redemption' is to buy something back, or to recover something that had been given up in security for a loan; to acquire something by paying off a debt. It is rather striking to think that the very core of the Christian message, salvation itself, the sacrifice of God's own son to rescue humanity from eternal damnation, should be framed in the language of a financial transaction." He also remarks, in the context of discussing *The Genealogy of Morals*, that Nietzsche's "description of Christianity—of how a sense of debt [to God] is transformed into an abiding sense of guilt, and guilt to self-loathing, and self-loathing to self-torture—all of this does ring very true." I agree. The sense of debt is absolute, because God has redeemed us from our original debt (Adam's sin, I guess?) by sacrificing his own son—which surely, in a way, puts us in even *more* debt to

[1] Even in the "monopoly" stage of capitalism competition can be very sharp. Think of the history of the U.S. meatpacking industry in the 1950s and 1960s. Or the international economy since the 1970s. Or, in general, the decentralization (suburbanization, ruralization, off-shoring) of industrial production in the U.S. throughout the twentieth century, undertaken because of competitive pressures.

him![1] We're totally unworthy of God's love, but love us he does, thereby permitting us to be saved and go to heaven.

Maybe a better way to interpret it than in terms of debt is to say that Christ "redeems" us from the "other side," from sin and the devil—he buys us back for God by sacrificing himself. It isn't that we want to escape our debt to God; we're always in infinite, everlasting debt to him. But Christ's love for us convinces God to accept us into the kingdom of heaven. Or something like that. Christianity is incoherent, so it's hard to make sense of it.

Anyway, the first myth Graeber attacks is the conventional Smithian idea that societies evolved from barter to money (cash) to credit. The reverse is closer to the truth. For most of history, economic transactions have been organized by keeping an "account," i.e. on credit, which might be measured according to some unit of currency even though that currency (as cash) doesn't actually circulate or is very rare. In other words, money served as a unit of account rather than a means of payment or store of value.[2] Barter did happen, but usually between societies (tribes or whatever) that were enemies or strangers and came into brief contact. *Within* a society, no, it was rare. In comparatively recent times, cash has become a widespread means of payment; and barter has typically happened in societies where cash has been used but for some reason is not widely available at the moment. Russia in the 1990s and Argentina around 2002 are examples—both resulting from the failures of capitalism! Ironic.

"No example of a barter economy, pure and simple, has ever been described, let alone the emergence from it of money; all available ethnography suggests that there has never been such a thing."

Another myth coming from Adam Smith is that states and markets are radically opposed. This, too, is false. From ancient times, states have used tax policies to create markets. (By forcing people to pay taxes in cash, governments effectively force them to participate in the market (in order to get cash).) Conversely, "stateless societies tend also to be without markets." The reason governments imposed markets and coinage on their subjects—coinage was invented between 600 and 500 B.C. in China, India, and Greece—is mainly that that made it much easier to provision large standing armies, which arose around the same time.

Returning to Nietzsche for a moment....I have to agree with Graeber (and Georg Lukács and other Marxists) that in many respects his thought is little but a radicalization of the bourgeois tradition. As in much of *The Genealogy of Morals*, and more generally in his viewing life as an arena of competition, a struggle between the weak and the strong and between all individuals, a series of expressions of the will to power. His is an atomistic vision, a world stripped almost bare of human solidarity—although it's true he interprets society as a struggle between *races* too. A singularly bourgeois notion, perfectly compatible with capitalist structures. He's kind of like La Rochefoucauld, determined to strip human relations of all "sentimentality," as capitalism itself does. His psychologism and idealist tendencies are also bourgeois, "decadent." It's ironic but telling that postmodern thinkers consider him more radical than Marx. (Postmodernism as a movement is but a decadent expression of a certain stage of bourgeois society, of corporate capitalism in its age of greatest atomism.)

To say, as Nietzsche does, that the feeling of personal obligation "has its origin in the oldest and most primitive personal relationship there is, in the relationship between seller and buyer, creditor and debtor," is silly. "Here for the first time," he continues, "one person moved up against another person, here an individual *measured himself* against another individual.... Selling and buying, together with their psychological attributes, are even older than the beginnings of any form of social organizations and groupings..." It's the old bourgeois fantasy that the state of nature is atomistic, that commercial or contractual relationships precede any others.

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[1] How is God's sacrifice of his son supposed to redeem us? It makes no sense. If anything, it makes us even more puny and worthless compared to him. Or maybe the point is that God's love for us proves we must have *some* kind of value, at least in his eyes.

[2] Most gift economies apparently haven't used money even in this sense. They have simply established a system of ranked categories of things that were roughly equivalent to one another, such as pigs and shoes. One could give one in return for the other (though there was usually a time-differential, so it wasn't true barter).

It's true that commercial practices and institutions have done much to shape human behavior and thought, but there is a deeper substratum in the mind, in human nature, that has nothing to do with them. Love, compassion, empathy, creativity, curiosity, self-expression. (And other less noble things too.) Nietzsche was surely aware of this, but in his philosophical experimentation he tended to forget it or ignore it.

Anyway, Graeber makes the excellent observation that one of the moral foundations of ordinary life in any society is *communism*, which he defines by the slogan "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs." Basically, sharing, helping, and cooperation. "All of us act like communists a good deal of the time." He's trying to get away from the common interpretation of morality and social life in terms of strict reciprocity, "balanced exchange," "fairness," "symmetry," the repayment of debts, etc. According to this theory, which was enthusiastically defended by Levi-Strauss among others, "all human interaction can best be understood as a kind of exchange." (With language we exchange words, with kinship we exchange women, and so forth.) And if that's true, "then debt really is at the root of all morality, because debt is what happens when some balance has not yet been restored." But of course reciprocity (in the strictest sense) is inadequate as a universal foundation for ethics. For example, where is the "reciprocity" in the mother's relationship with her child? No child can ever repay his or her mother. And the law "an eye for an eye," while embodying reciprocity, doesn't seem particularly moral. So Graeber proposes instead, as one of the foundations for social life and morality, a kind of basic communism.

"Baseline communism [as he calls it] might be considered the raw material of sociality, a recognition of our ultimate interdependence that is the ultimate substance of social peace." A sensible view, which would be useful to invoke in polemics against apologists for capitalism.

Partially against Graeber, it seems to me that, in an extended sense, the logic of reciprocity is (and/or should be) at the root of most human interactions. It has to do with respecting others, treating them as you'd like them to treat you, applying to yourself the standards you apply to them, treating them as more-or-less equals. Nevertheless, it's true that *literal* reciprocity is often not applicable, is not even the ideal.

The origins of prostitution and patriarchy are intimately tied to debt. As Gerda Lerner says, "[One] source for commercial prostitution was the pauperization of farmers and their increasing dependence on loans in order to survive periods of famine, which led to debt slavery. Children of both sexes were given up for debt pledges or sold for 'adoption.' Out of such practices, the prostitution of female family members for the benefit of the head of the family could readily develop. Women might end up as prostitutes because their parents had to sell them into slavery or because their impoverished husbands might so use them.... By the middle of the second millennium B.C., prostitution was well established as a likely occupation for the daughters of the poor. As the sexual regulation of women of the propertied class became more firmly entrenched, the virginity of respectable daughters became a financial asset for the family." Various means were used to differentiate respectable from non-respectable women, including the practice of veiling respectable women, which first appeared in Assyria between 1400 and 1100 B.C.

"States seem to have played a complex dual role, simultaneously fostering commoditization and intervening to ameliorate its effects: enforcing the laws of debt and rights of fathers, and offering periodic amnesties. But the dynamic also led, over the course of millennia, to a systematic demotion of sexuality itself from a divine gift and embodiment of civilized refinement [as it had been in Sumer] to one of its more familiar associations: with degradation, corruption, and guilt." Because of its association with debt, poverty, the market, sexual slavery, prostitution.

"'Patriarchy' originated, first and foremost, in a rejection of the great urban civilizations in the name of a kind of purity, a reassertion of paternal control against great cities like Uruk, Lagash, and Babylon, seen as places of bureaucrats, traders, and whores. The pastoral fringes, the deserts and steppes away from the river valleys, were the places to which displaced, indebted farmers fled. [The Old Testament was a product of some of these pastoral rebels.] The extraordinary emphasis we find there [in the Old Testament] on the absolute authority of fathers, and the jealous protection of their fickle womenfolk, were made possible by, but at the same time a protest against, this very commoditization of people in the cities that they fled." Most of the world's Holy Books "echo this voice of rebellion, combining contempt for the corrupt urban life, suspicion of the merchant, and often, intense misogyny." Graeber quotes a denunciation

of Babylon, "the great whore," in the Book of Revelations, and then comments, "Such is the voice of patriarchal hatred of the city, and of the angry millennial voices of the fathers of the ancient poor." Fascinating. It's true that Judaism and Christianity originally represented these interests, although Christianity also represented the poor and oppressed of all kinds. It was a reaction against urban decadence, inequality, and injustice, though it was so broad that it contained conflicting impulses, some authoritarian and some egalitarian. Needless to say, in the long run the authoritarian tended to predominate.

These patriarchal trends ultimately triumphed in all major civilizations, from China and India to ancient Greece. "Between the push of commoditization, which fell disproportionally on daughters, and the pull of those trying to reassert patriarchal rights to 'protect' women from any suggestion that they might be commoditized, women's formal and practical freedoms appear to have been gradually but increasingly restricted and effaced. As a result, notions of honor changed too, becoming a kind of protest against the implications of the market, even as at the same time (like the world religions) they came to echo that market logic in endless subtle ways."

Let's skip ahead. To Rome, the decline of the empire. This too was largely a product of the accumulation of debt on the part of huge masses of people. "The works of the early Christian fathers resound with endless descriptions of the misery and desperation of those caught in rich lenders' webs. In the end, through this means, that small window of freedom that had been created by the plebs [over centuries of struggle] was completely undone, and the free peasantry largely eliminated. By the end of the empire, most people in the countryside who weren't outright slaves had become, effectively, debt peons to some rich landlord—a situation in the end legally formalized by imperial decrees binding peasants to the land. Without a free peasantry to form the basis for the army, the state was forced to rely more and more on arming and employing Germanic barbarians from across the imperial frontiers—with results I need hardly relate."

Remind you of anything? Like....the present? The working and middle classes staggering under the burden of debt and unfreedom.... The rights won by modern-day "plebs" through decades of struggle are being completely undone, and the civilization is collapsing under the weight of debt and income inequality.

I like Graeber's quasi-Weberian reflections on the relations between markets and the systems of thought and ways of life that arose in the Axial Age, when coinage, impersonal markets, philosophical systems, and world religions first appeared. It was also an unprecedented time of war, from Greece to China, and of slavery on an enormous scale.[1] "The growth of markets played a role [in the spread of intellectual movements], not only helping to free people from the proverbial shackles of status or community, but encouraging a certain habit of rational calculation, of measuring inputs and outputs, means and ends, all of which must inevitably have found some echoes in the new spirit of rational inquiry that begins to appear in all the same times and places. Even the word 'rational' is telling: it derives, of course, from 'ratio'—how many of X go into Y—a sort of mathematical calculation previously used mainly by architects and engineers, but which, with the rise of markets, everyone who didn't want to get cheated at the marketplace had to learn how to do.... [He refers to] impersonal markets, born of war, in which it was possible to treat even neighbors as if they were strangers." In archaic "human economies" (as opposed to commercial ones), motives are assumed to be complex, not aiming solely at private profit but relating to all sorts of social needs and desires. Not so with the impersonal market. The notion of "profit" became very common in the Axial Age, as self-interest came to be seen as fundamental. So in China you had Legalism, a kind of Machiavellianism, and in India the materialist school of Charvaka, as well as the inevitable reactions against them in the forms of Mohism, Confucianism, Buddhism, etc. But these were really reactions against all the materialist, selfish ways of life that had emerged with the rise of coinage and markets.

"Axial Age spirituality is built on a bedrock of materialism. This is its secret; one might almost say, the thing that has become invisible to us." This is evident even in metaphysics, with the materialist systems of Thales and many others. Drawing on scholarship, Graeber even suggests connections between coinage itself and philosophical materialism and dualism.

Here's his summary of all these ideas:

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[1] "Money was needed to pay armies to capture slaves to mine gold to produce money."

1) Markets appear to have first emerged, in the Near East at least, as a side effect of government administrative systems. Over time, however, the logic of the market became entangled in military affairs, where it became almost indistinguishable from the mercenary logic of Axial Age warfare, and then, finally, that logic came to conquer government itself; to define its very purpose.

2) As a result: everywhere we see the military-coinage-slavery complex emerge, we also see the birth of materialist philosophies. They are materialist, in fact, in both senses of the term: in that they envision a world made up of material forces, rather than divine powers, and in that they imagine the ultimate end of human existence to be the accumulation of material wealth, with ideals like morality and justice being reframed as tools designed to satisfy the masses.

3) Everywhere, too, we find philosophers who react to this by exploring ideas of humanity and the soul, attempting to find a new foundation for ethics and morality.

4) Everywhere some of these philosophers made common cause with social movements that inevitably formed in the face of these new and extraordinarily violent and cynical elites. The result was something new to human history: popular movements that were also intellectual movements, due to the assumption that those opposing existing power arrangements did so in the name of some kind of theory about the nature of reality....

6) [The impulse emerged] to imagine another world where debt—and with it, all other worldly connections—can be entirely annihilated, where social attachments are seen as forms of bondage; just as the body is a prison....

8) The ultimate effect was a kind of ideal division of spheres of human activity that endures to this day: on the one hand the market, on the other, religion. To put the matter crudely: if one relegates a certain social space simply to the selfish acquisition of material things, it is almost inevitable that soon someone else will come to set aside another domain in which to preach that, from the perspective of ultimate values, material things are unimportant; that selfishness—or even the self—are illusory, and that to give is better than to receive. If nothing else, it is surely significant that all the Axial Age religions emphasized the importance of charity, a concept that had barely existed before. Pure greed and pure generosity are complementary concepts; neither could really be imagined without the other; both could only arise in institutional contexts that insisted on such pure and single-minded behavior; and both seem to have appeared together wherever impersonal, physical, cash money also appeared on the scene.

The movements of protest, whether religious or not, that emerged in this era eventually helped achieve great things. "Wars became less brutal and less frequent. Slavery faded as an institution, to the point at which, by the Middle Ages, it had become insignificant or even nonexistent across most of Eurasia."

The Axial Age. The axis of history.

Given our tendency to glorify the ancient world, it's ironic that things got a lot better for most people in the Middle Ages. In Europe and India empires collapsed—and even in China, the Han empire fell apart (though it was succeeded by others)—but slavery largely disappeared and religious institutions began to regulate economic activity.[1] Coinage tended to disappear in Europe and India with the weakening of central governments; the use of money solely as a unit of account returned, and economic activity was organized mainly on credit.

"If the Axial Age was the age of materialism, the Middle Ages were above all else the age of transcendence.... Once-subversive popular religious movements were catapulted into the status of dominant institutions."

A new age began in the mid-1400s in Europe, "with a turn away from virtual currencies and credit economies and back to gold and silver. The subsequent flow of bullion from the Americas sped the process immensely, sparking a 'price revolution' [i.e., inflation] in Western Europe that turned traditional society upside-down. What's more, the return to bullion was accompanied by the return of a whole host of other

[1] Even in the Arab world, where slavery existed throughout the Middle Ages, its horrors rarely compared to those of the Axial Age and later New World slavery.

conditions that, during the Middle Ages, had been largely suppressed or kept at bay: vast empires and professional armies, massive predatory warfare, untrammeled usury and debt peonage, but also materialist philosophies, a new burst of scientific and philosophical creativity—even the return of chattel slavery." Between 1500 and 1650, prices in England increased 500 percent while wages rose much more slowly. In five generations they had fallen to about 40 percent of what they had once been. And the same thing happened everywhere in Europe. The consequent empowerment of bankers, large-scale merchants, and governments led to major changes in the fabric of European society.

September–December

Getting more involved with the ISO and its student representatives on campus. […] This Chicago Teachers Union strike is kind of exciting; I just got back from a big ISO meeting about it, and this week I'll go to a few picket lines depressingly early in the morning, around 7:00 or so. I'm still on the bargaining committee of the GEO too, so for the foreseeable future an unpleasantly large chunk of my time will be consumed in meetings.

Here's part of an informative article by Dean Baker on the U.S. economy:

> The mythology of Clintonomics is that Clinton took the hard steps to bring the deficit down. He cut spending and raised taxes. This supposedly shifted the budget from large deficits to large surpluses and led to a booming economy. In the late 90s we had the lowest unemployment in three decades, and we saw real wage growth up and down the income ladder for the first time since the early 70s. There was in fact much here to celebrate.
>
> However, the reality is quite different from the mythology. The reduction in the deficit was supposed to lead to an increase in investment and a fall in the trade deficit. These are the two components of GDP that increase our wealth for the long-term, the former by increasing our productive capacity and the latter by giving us ownership of more foreign assets.
>
> It turns out that the investment components of GDP actually did not increase in the Clinton boom. After we adjust for a technical issue associated with a surge in car leasing in the 90s (leased cars count as investment in the national accounts, purchased cars are treated as consumption), investment as a share of GDP increased by just 1.2 percentage points from their late 80s level.
>
> However, this was more than offset by a 2.2 percentage point increase in the size of the trade deficit. As a result, at the height of the Clinton boom in 2000 these wealth increasing components of GDP were 1.0 percentage point smaller as a share of GDP than in the high deficit 1980s.
>
> Instead, the component driving the economy in the late 1990s was consumption. The stock bubble led to a surge in consumption, which rose by 3.0 percentage points as a share of GDP as savings hit what was at the time a record low.
>
> The problem with this stock bubble boom was that it was destined to go bust. There are a limited number of fools with money. At some point there was no one left to pay billions of dollars for shares of Internet start-ups that didn't even know how they could make a profit.
>
> This reversed the irrational exuberance that had sent the market soaring. The market tanked and the economy and the budget surpluses went with it. The recession of 2001 was officially short and mild, ending just seven months after it started. However, the picture

> was much worse for most people in the country. The economy did not start to create jobs again until September of 2003, almost two years after the official end of the recession.
>
> The 2001 recession was hard to recover from because it was the result of the collapse of an asset bubble, just like the current recession. It is easier to recover from a normal recession, because a typical recession is brought on by the Federal Reserve Board raising interest rates to slow the economy.
>
> Higher interest rates lead people to delay buying homes and cars. This means that when the Fed wants to get the economy going again it can just lower interest rates and spark a surge in home and car buying. That sort of boost isn't possible when the downturn is caused by the collapse of an asset bubble.
>
> When the economy did finally start creating jobs again after the 2001 recession, it was on the back of the housing bubble, which drove growth in the last decade. In effect, we used the growth of one bubble to overcome the wreckage created by the collapse of another bubble, just as an alcoholic seeks to cure one hangover by starting on the next.
>
> There is another important part of the Clinton legacy that is impeding growth. When Robert Rubin became Treasury Secretary in 1995 he pushed a high dollar policy. He put muscle behind this policy with his control of the IMF in setting the ground rules for the bailout from the East Asian financial crisis.
>
> The harsh terms of the bailout led countries throughout the developing world to demand massive amounts of dollars. Their reserves of dollars were an insurance policy to keep them from ever being in the same position as the East Asian countries. This increased demand for dollars pushed up the value of the dollar and led to the massive trade deficits that we have seen in the last dozen years.
>
> We will not be able to get to a sustainable growth path until we reverse the high dollar policy. The dollar has to be pushed down to a level where U.S. goods are again competitive in international markets. This is a central part of the adjustment from the period of bubble driven growth.
>
> In short, the Clinton-era policies sent the U.S. economy on a seriously wrong path. They created an absurd obsession with budget deficits, a pattern of bubble-driven growth, an incredibly bloated financial sector and an unsustainable trade deficit.

That analysis seems too optimistic. The problem with Dean Baker is that he isn't a Marxist; he thinks a "sustainable growth path" is possible. Chris Hedges and Richard Heinberg are more realistic:

> The ceaseless expansion of economic exploitation [Hedges writes], the engine of global capitalism, has come to an end. [Um, not quite.] The futile and myopic effort to resurrect this expansion—a fallacy embraced by most economists—means that we respond to illusion rather than reality. We invest our efforts into bringing back what is gone forever. This strange twilight moment, in which our experts and systems managers squander resources in attempting to re-create an expanding economic system that is moribund, will inevitably lead to systems collapse. The steady depletion of natural resources, especially fossil fuels, along with the accelerated pace of climate change, will combine with crippling levels of personal and national debt to thrust us into a global depression that will dwarf any in the history of capitalism. And very few of us are prepared.

> "Our solution is our problem," Richard Heinberg, the author of *The End of Growth: Adapting to Our New Economic Reality*, told me when I reached him by phone in California. "Its name is growth. But growth has become uneconomic. We are worse off because of growth. To achieve growth now means mounting debt, more pollution, an accelerated loss of biodiversity and the continued destabilization of the climate. But we are addicted to growth. If there is no growth there are insufficient tax revenues and jobs. If there is no growth existing debt levels become unsustainable. The elites see the current economic crisis as a temporary impediment. They are desperately trying to fix it. But this crisis signals an irreversible change for civilization itself. We cannot prevent it. We can only decide whether we will adapt to it or not."

Heinberg goes on to make speculations similar to those in the fourth chapter of my Master's thesis.

This semester I'm taking an advanced undergraduate course in Irish history. Just for the hell of it. (Also taking the graduate seminar.)

....I've decided to rework the book I published a few years ago. Triple its length and take out a lot of embarrassing stuff. It seems to me that my "self-imposed tutelage" has ended, and I'm ready to make a name for myself. After publishing this book I'll focus on the AK Press one.

The problem is that I have schoolwork to do. Which I have no interest in. How am I going to get through this semester?

Well, I got through it somehow. Here's a rather pointless paper. I wrote it in a few weeks in November, having spent most of the semester working on my book. My God, the pain of those three weeks!

Neoliberalism on Trial: A History of Tax Increment Financing in Chicago

In a world of continually increasing economic inequality, the subject of "tax increment financing," or TIF, is of far greater importance than one might infer from its lack of public recognition. This tool of urban policy in the United States, used in 49 states and Washington, D.C., has contributed significantly to rising class polarization in cities and to the accumulation of municipal debt, which has begun to reach crisis proportions since the recession of 2009. As American municipalities grapple with the fiscal crisis of which pundits speak daily, and as social movements are birthed to defend populations against the depredations of fiscal austerity, activists and intellectuals will have to become more familiar with this thing called tax increment financing if they are to influence policy and comprehend The City's future.

In this paper, therefore, I will review the history of TIF in a single city, Chicago. Its use began under Harold Washington in the mid-1980s, escalated under Richard M. Daley in the early 1990s, and then exploded after 1998. By the early 2000s, Chicago was widely viewed by scholars and journalists as the poster child for what can go wrong with TIF, due to the inequitable, autocratic, and un-transparent ways in which Daley deployed it. As we'll see, TIF started out under Harold Washington as a relatively democratic and effective tool to encourage development in "blighted" neighborhoods; as its use became more common, however, it was appropriated for the neoliberal project of subsidizing big property developers and siphoning wealth from the lower and middle classes to the upper. This was manifested, for example, in the prosperity and the beautification of the central business district and its environs at the expense of poorer neighborhoods, and in the gentrification of areas near downtown. This history belongs not only to Chicago but to many cities around the country, indeed all over the world. What I describe in the paper can thus be considered emblematic of trends elsewhere and is usefully compared with them.

A great deal of scholarship and investigative journalism has been dedicated to tax increment financing, but I have been unable to find a comprehensive history of the program in Chicago. This paper is admittedly not comprehensive, being too brief, but it does adopt a broad historical perspective apparently absent in the literature. My purpose is to outline a story of neoliberal "declension," from the popular hopes and democratic stirrings of the Harold Washington years to the corporatizing, polarizing trends of the recent past.

This declensionist narrative is not new even in the "politically neutral" realm of academic writing, but its application to Chicago's history through the prism of tax increment financing is. A number of scholars of neoliberalism have described how this political-economic system has functioned to redistribute wealth upwards and exacerbate working-class insecurity. The celebrated geographer David Harvey, for example, argues that neoliberalism began in the U.S. in the mid-1970s, when New York City's fiscal crisis gave investment bankers and their political representatives an opportunity to undo many of the historic achievements of working-class New York by dismantling much of the city's social and physical infrastructure. Public resources were used to build new infrastructure for finance, legal services, the media, and consumerism, as "working-class and ethnic-immigrant New York was thrust back into the shadows, to be ravaged by racism and a crack cocaine epidemic of epic proportions in the 1980s."[1] New York City's investment bankers thus paved the way for a political economy of privatization, the privileging of financial institutions, and "urban entrepreneurialism,"[2] all of which proceeded in the 1980s and 1990s to conquer not only the U.S. but much of the world.

The contributors to the volume *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe* (2002) analyze some of the means by which neoliberalism has spread across the world. Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell argue that, given high capital mobility, cities are forced to compete against each other to attract business, by establishing "favorable business climates." What this entails is deregulation, the undermining of labor unions, and public subsidies to multinational companies. "The serial reproduction of cultural spectacles, enterprise zones, waterfront developments, and privatized forms of local governance" is the natural product of this worldwide inter-urban competition.[3] In her contribution to the volume, Rachel Weber argues that tax increment financing is an especially significant manifestation of urban entrepreneurialism, in fact that "by the 1990s, TIF had become the most popular means of financing redevelopment in the U.S."[4] That is to say, it was one of the most popular tools of urban neoliberalism.

Two other recent works take dim views of neoliberalism as it has unfolded specifically in Chicago: Paul Street's *Racial Oppression in the Global Metropolis: A Living Black Chicago History* (2007) and the collection *The New Chicago: A Social and Cultural Analysis* (2006), edited by John P. Koval, Larry Bennett, et al. We'll return to the latter work below; it consists of a series of essays on seemingly every aspect of "the new Chicago," including its economic restructuring, the culture and politics of its immigrant populations, the policies of school reform, public housing, the police force, urban beautification, etc. The essays on Chicago's political economy describe how the city has recently been trying to pursue both the "low-road" and the "high-road" strategy of competing in the world, the first by offering cheap labor, lower taxes, and direct public subsidies to business, and the second by emphasizing research, education, skilled workers, and high wages. As David Moberg says, it will ultimately prove impossible to pursue *both* roads, since the low undermines the potential for the high. But in the wake of deindustrialization—the closing of steel mills and the stockyards, and the decline of printing and publishing, electronics and electrical equipment, apparel, chemicals, fabricated metal products, etc.—the low road, the truly "neoliberal" road, has proven to be the "path of least resistance," the simplest strategy for attracting global business.[5]

Paul Street, on the other hand, focuses on the tragedies of Chicago's racial segregation, which has in some ways been exacerbated by the policies of Richard M. Daley. Even during the "booming" 1990s, regression occurred in Chicago's "overall racial distribution of income, the relative wealth of black and white neighborhoods, and the access of the black poor to public family cash assistance and to affordable housing." The percentage of blacks who experienced "deep poverty" also got worse. Just between 1999 and

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[1] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 57.
[2] David Harvey, "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism," *Geographiska Annaler*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (1989): 3-17.
[3] Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, "Neoliberalizing Space," in *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe*, eds. Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 46.
[4] Rachel Weber, "Extracting Value from the City," in *Spaces of Neoliberalism*, 187.
[5] David Moberg, "Economic Restructuring: Chicago's Precarious Balance," in *The New Chicago*, eds. John P. Koval et al. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 41.

2004, for example, black poverty rose from 28.5 percent to 33.9 percent, compared to a decrease in the white poverty rate by two percentage points. As Street says, "while white and Latino poverty declined in the city between 1999 and 2004, black poverty fell back to its 1989 level, at the nadir of the urban crisis."[1] As I'll argue, these levels of inequality are inseparable from the pro-downtown policies Daley has pursued, in particular his inequitable use of TIF.

It's time, though, that we considered the fundamentals of tax increment financing, before investigating its history in more depth. TIF was born in California in 1952, when the state legislature recognized that the existence of "blighted" areas—"characterized by unsafe buildings, incompatible adjacent land uses, and lack of necessary commercial facilities"—was hurting the quality of life in California neighborhoods.[2] However, TIF didn't spread to many states until the 1970s and later, in the midst of the "urban crisis" caused by deindustrialization and white flight from central cities. Federal aid to cities was decreasing around this time from its heights in the 1960s, and municipalities needed alternative means of encouraging development and raising revenue. So some states turned to tax increment financing; for instance, Illinois passed TIF-enabling legislation in 1977. The basic idea behind TIF is that a government subsidizes (re)development out of the higher tax revenue this development makes possible in the future (by raising property values). The way it works is that the assessed value of all the property in a particular TIF district is "frozen" at the time of the formation of the district; for the duration of the TIF, local taxing bodies such as schools and park districts may tax only this frozen property value. The tax revenue from growth (the "increment") accrues instead to the TIF fund, "to be spent on capital improvements, developer and rent subsidies, job training, and other expenditures meant to spur new development."[3] In Chicago, the mayor is effectively able to disburse these funds as he sees fit, with little accountability or transparency. A TIF district lasts for 23 years in Illinois (though the option exists of extending it to 35); upon its expiration, the taxing bodies again have access to all the property value of that former district.

One potential source of controversy with respect to TIF is already clear: it deprives government bodies of tax revenue from development. If no development would have occurred but for the existence of a particular TIF district, then of course this objection to tax increment financing is baseless. In fact, this "but for" requirement is usually a key criterion for determining whether a given TIF should be established. As we'll see, however, many TIFs have been created in areas of Chicago that were *already* developing, which means that taxing bodies have unfairly been deprived of a certain amount of revenue. In a time when municipalities and school districts are drowning in deficits, a lack of revenue is no trivial matter.

Later in the paper I'll return to criticisms that have been made of TIF, in particular by scholars, task forces, and journalists. Now, however, we'll review the background to Richard M. Daley's embrace of TIF in the 1990s, focusing on the relatively progressive years of Harold Washington's mayoralty.

Washington was elected in 1983 on the back of a popular insurgency, an electoral uprising against rule by the "Machine" that had been consolidated by Richard J. Daley and persisted into the 1980s, albeit in a weaker and less efficient form than in the 1960s. Since the 1950s, this political machine had functioned primarily in the interests of Daley's downtown-[4]oriented "pro-growth" coalition of real estate developers, financial companies, large retailers, and other commercial forces based in the central business district. It was this elite that determined the agenda of postwar urban renewal, which tended to sacrifice the interests of neighborhoods and communities for the sake of downtown revitalization and corporate profits. Popular

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[1] Paul Street, *Racial Oppression in the Global Metropolis: A Living Black Chicago History* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 220.

[2] Matthew Gray and Cecily Barclay, "California: TIF and Community Development Law," in *Tax Increment Financing*, eds. David Callies and W. Andrew Gowder Jr. (Chicago: ABA Publishing, 2012), 37.

[3] Mike Quigley, *A Tale of Two Cities: Reinventing Tax Increment Financing* (2007), 1.

[4] See, e.g., Gregory Squires et al., *Chicago: Race, Class, and the Response to Urban Decline* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), chapter 3.

resistance to the trampling of neighborhoods' and minorities' rights had been growing in Chicago since the 1960s, and in 1983 it succeeded in electing a black mayor for the first time.[1]

The approach to development that Washington adopted is indicated by the title of his administration's 1984 economic plan, *"Chicago Works Together."* On the first page are set out the goals, namely "to create and retain jobs, to rebuild neighborhoods, to renew housing and the City's physical assets, to aid businesses, and to inform and involve the public at every step of the way."[2] As the plan notes, most of these priorities are new: hitherto, job creation and neighborhood development had been decidedly secondary to growth in the central business district. "Balanced growth" thus became one of Washington's slogans. Equally novel was the emphasis on transparency and public participation, which Washington valued so highly that in the following years his staff grew frustrated with the necessity to get the public's input on decisions about projects. Such a focus on democracy was wont to cause delays.[3]

"Chicago Works Together," which is some sixty pages long, is an extremely detailed and ambitious plan that aims at nothing less than the renewal of Chicago's infrastructure and economy and the halting of deindustrialization. Its goals for 1985, for example, include the creation of over 10,000 permanent jobs (which could stimulate an additional 15,000 more jobs), job training for 12,000 people, the rehabilitation and construction of 6000 housing units, the provision of volunteer architect assistance to neighborhood revitalization projects, the development of a long-term economic strategic plan, the implementation of affirmative action programs, and the provision of technical assistance to 4000 businesses. In the long run, a major goal was to prevent the further erosion of industry in Chicago by establishing "planned manufacturing districts," in which zoning changes from manufacturing to commercial or residential designations would be prohibited. These districts, which continued to be established in the 1990s, turned out to be one of Washington's most important legacies.[4]

The job-creating, worker-empowering, industry-protecting approach of the Washington administration can be contrasted with that of Chicago's commercial business elite as represented by the Commercial Club. In December, 1984 this group published its own economic development plan, entitled *Make No Little Plans: Jobs for Metropolitan Chicago*. Job creation was clearly not its primary goal, but the plan was given its subtitle in recognition of the new political atmosphere fostered by Washington's mayoralty. The Commercial Club's report barely mentioned traditional manufacturing at all, focusing instead on financial services, retail, communications, high-tech industry, tourism, the marketing of Chicago for international business, and in general the creation of a "favorable business climate." What the last point entailed, as the report frankly admitted, were reductions in the costs of workers' compensation and unemployment insurance. Needless to say, this commercial agenda did not receive a very sympathetic hearing by the Washington administration—or, at least, not as sympathetic a hearing as it would later by the second Daley.

Tax increment financing did not figure centrally in Washington's plans. In fact, from 1983 to 1987 (the years when Washington was mayor), only three TIF districts were established. The mayor adhered strictly to the idea that TIF should be used only to help blighted communities, neighborhoods that had little hope of growth without assistance from the government. Accordingly, a TIF district (of six acres) was designated in West Ridge, a relatively impoverished community on the north side of Chicago; another, of ten acres, was designated in the low-income community of Washington Park on Chicago's south side; a

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[1] For the history of Chicago's political economy in the postwar era, see Gregory Squires et al., *Chicago: Race, Class, and the Response to Urban Decline*; Gregory Squires, ed., *Unequal Partnerships: The Political Economy of Urban Redevelopment in Postwar America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989); and Joel Rast, *Remaking Chicago: The Political Origins of Urban Industrial Change* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999).

[2] The Harold Washington administration, *"Chicago Works Together": Chicago Development Plan 1984* (Chicago, 1984), 1.

[3] Elizabeth Hollander, "The Department of Planning under Harold Washington," in *Harold Washington and the Neighborhoods: Progressive City Government in Chicago, 1983-1987*, eds. Pierre Clavel and Wim Wiewel (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 143.

[4] *"Chicago Works Together,"* 1, 5, 11, 12, 14; Rast, *Remaking Chicago*, 116.

third, of 27 acres, was in the North Loop, which was suffering from "decay and obsolescence."[1] The TIFs in West Ridge and Washington Park provided resources for such things as environmental remediation, demolition, a new retail center, and several other commercial structures for nearby residents; the funds went to "utility relocation, street and sidewalk improvements, security features, traffic signalization, and job training."[2] These two TIF districts proved to be quite successful, having generated by the time of their expiration a compound annual growth rate in total property values of 9% (in West Ridge) and 20% (in Washington Park).[3]

The North Loop TIF was a much bigger affair. The project to redevelop the North Loop already had a ten-year history of setbacks and failures when Washington came to power. A 1984 report by the Washington administration noted that the neighborhood "is not perceived as an attractive or safe area, particularly after office hours. State Street retail sales volumes and the quality of merchandise have fallen, and entertainment and cultural facilities and programming have severely deteriorated."[4] Washington was not very enthusiastic about the TIF, being more interested in redevelopment *outside* the central business district, but because of its momentum among the downtown commercial elite, he accepted its inevitability. His administration convinced the city council to approve a tax increment financing arrangement—the city's first—to raise the necessary funds, and in 1984 the project got underway.[5] As the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs reported, "the city [planned] to spend $283 million on public improvements and facilities in the district, including: purchase of a site for the relocation of the bus station, construction of a below-grade service tunnel linking parts of the areas with Lower Wacker Drive, adjustments to sewer and water lines, street improvements, pedestrian walkways and sewer bank improvements and new or rehabilitated transit stations along the 'Loop' elevated transit line."[6] As we'll see, in 1997, under Daley, the TIF was expanded enormously—a move that was of dubious legitimacy, in light of the fact that according to Illinois law TIFs can be established only in areas exhibiting urban blight, which the Loop in the 1990s definitely was not.

Harold Washington died in 1987, just when many of his reforms were starting to become institutionalized. It was a terrible blow to neighborhood and community movements, and to progressive politics in general.[7] His successor, Eugene Sawyer, was not as charismatic or effective as Washington, and his tenure lasted only until 1989, when Richard M. Daley was elected mayor. At that time there were only eight TIF districts in Chicago, though this would soon change.

From early on, it was clear to political observers that Daley's mayoralty would be quite different from Washington's. For one thing, he was the son of the Boss, the first Daley; many feared he would resurrect the Machine of the 1960s and '70s. More concretely, the sources of his campaign funding indicated what kinds of policies he would enact if elected. While the incumbent Eugene Sawyer got most of his money from individual donations of less than $1500, Daley received many donations of more than $10,000, which ensured that he had far more resources than Sawyer and his other opponents combined. Among Daley's biggest supporters were the city's top developers, lawyers, traders, and financiers—the downtown

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[1] Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, Office of Urban Assistance, *Tax Increment Financing: Case Studies* (1986), 5.

[2] City of Chicago, Housing and Economic Development, "Ryan/Garfield TIF" at http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/tif/ryan_garfield_tif.html and "West Ridge/Peterson TIF" at http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/tif/west_ridge_petersontif.html (accessed November 7, 2012).

[3] "An Analysis of Five Chicago TIF Districts," Polsky & Associates Ltd., at http://www.polskylaw.com/blog/?p=386 (accessed November 7, 2012).

[4] Harold Washington administration, *North Loop Tax Increment Redevelopment Area: Redevelopment Plan and Project* (January 1984), 2, 3.

[5] Gregory Squires et al., *Chicago*, 169-175.

[6] Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, *Tax Increment Financing*, 5.

[7] See John T. Betancur and Douglas C. Gills, "Community Development in Chicago: From Harold Washington to Richard M. Daley," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 594 (July, 2004): 92-108.

business community, in short. For instance, the law firms Bell, Boyd & Lloyd and Schiff & Hardin were quite generous to Daley, and the construction industry was especially munificent.[1] In the end, he managed to raise $7 million, vastly more than his competitors.[2]

Accordingly, after Daley's election in April 1989, newspapers reported that "Chicago's business community is breathing a collective sigh of relief," in fact that it "is beside itself with joy." The business leaders who had financed his campaign expected him to refocus development efforts downtown, make financing easier for city projects, enact policies that would increase real estate values, and in general foster a "cooperative relationship between city government and business."[3] Corresponding to business's optimism was the pessimism of constituencies that favored community empowerment. Members of the city's Economic Development Commission, for example, worried that neighborhood development, which had been emphasized by Washington, would wither. Their concerns proved to be well-founded.

Throughout his six terms, Daley's priorities would be largely consistent with those of three powerful business groups: the Commercial Club, the Civic Committee, and World Business Chicago, which was formed in 1999. The latter two were outgrowths of the first, which was founded over a century ago, in 1877. The Commercial Club currently consists of 350 active members, who are all business and civic leaders in the metropolitan area. The most powerful law firms are represented, as are consulting groups, financial institutions, medical centers, and Chicago's universities. Since the club's founding there has been a striking continuity in the interests it represents, as shown by its sponsorship of Daniel Burnham's famous 1909 report *The Plan of Chicago*, which laid out a very modern and post-industrial vision for the city. It prioritized urban beautification, the development of highways, new parks, railroad terminal improvements, civic and cultural centers, a more systematic arrangement of streets, and the gradual eviction of industry from the central city by means of zoning regulations and an increase of property values. This vision has been largely implemented from the 1920s to the present, the Commercial Club providing assistance and guidance at every step of the way. In the 1980s, in the midst of the urban crisis, it formed the Civic Committee—"a smaller group of member CEOs and senior executives from Chicago's leading businesses, professional firms and universities"—to help plan for the region's rejuvenation.[4] The first product of this new effort was the 1984 study mentioned above called *Make No Little Plans*, which set out a twenty-year (or more) agenda for economic development. After his election, Daley adhered to its services-oriented, post-manufacturing, anti-labor vision much more closely than Harold Washington had.

Given the power of these organizations—including World Business Chicago, which I'll discuss below—as well as the interests they represent, it isn't surprising that Daley essentially adopted their agenda. For example, in *Make No Little Plans*, the Civic Committee and Commercial Club had suggested that the city "renovate Navy Pier to house retail establishments and recreational facilities."[5] Daley promptly set about doing so, obtaining within a few months of his election $150 million from the state legislature to modernize the pier.[6] Soon afterwards he helped organize a $987 million expansion of the McCormick Place convention complex—another project long favored by the downtown business community, especially developers—and he also announced plans to build a third major airport in Chicago, which developers and other downtown interests had long been advocating.[7] (This project was never completed.) In addition, he pressed vigorously for a $775 million trolley system downtown and a $2 billion casino and entertainment complex, as well as engineering the construction of the $175 million United Center, a new basketball and

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[1] Dick Simpson, *Rogues, Rebels, and Rubber Stamps: The Politics of the Chicago City Council from 1863 to the Present* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview press, 2001), 280, 281.

[2] Mark Brown, "Small donors a big part of mayor's funding," *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 16, 1989; Ray Gibson, "Daley campaign raises $2 million," *Chicago Tribune*, February 7, 1989; Thomas Hardy, "1 million to decide mayor race," *Chicago Tribune*, April 4, 1989.

[3] Cindy Richards, "City's execs cheer Daley, look forward to stability," *Chicago Sun-Times*, April 6, 1989.

[4] "Purpose and History," The Commercial Club of Chicago, at http://www.commercialclubchicago.org (accessed October 31, 2012).

[5] The Commercial Club, *Make No Little Plans: Jobs for Metropolitan Chicago* (Chicago, 1984), 28.

[6] R. Bruce Dold, "Navy Pier remains in uncharted waters," *Chicago Tribune*, July 9, 1989.

[7] Henry J. Hyde, "Daley's proposed third airport: too little and too late," *Chicago Tribune*, March 2, 1990.

hockey stadium on the Near West Side.[1] Whatever merit these projects had, the point is that their chief advocates belonged to the downtown business elite.

It is true that in these early years, arguably more so than later, Daley was willing to contravene the wishes of property developers. After all, he had the progressive legacy of Harold Washington to deal with, the legacy of community mobilization. In particular, job creation had come to be recognized as a priority, one not always consistent with the prioritizing of high property values. Even developers often pitched their proposals on the politically popular basis of how many jobs they would create. However, political task forces and projections by the city's Departments of Planning and Economic Development sometimes concluded that industrial land-use would create more jobs than commercial land-use (and would contribute more to the Gross Regional Product), which put pressure on the mayor to approve the former rather than the latter. This was the case, for instance, with the Goose Island and Elston Corridor planned manufacturing districts, which had been proposed in the late 1980s. Their advocates, including unions and neighborhood groups, feared that Daley would cancel the projects, but he proved them wrong (due in large part to pressure from his planning commissioner, David Mosena[2]). Initially hesitant, in 1990 Daley announced that he was reversing his campaign position and would support the Goose Island and Elston Corridor PMDs. The real estate community and the editors of the *Chicago Tribune* were appalled, but with Daley's support the initiatives sailed through the city council.[3]

In the coming years, as we'll see, the Daley administration continued on occasion to flout the wishes of its core constituency, the downtown commercial sector. This became more difficult, however, as the West's agenda of property development, urban beautification, tourism, entertainment, gentrification in neighborhoods surrounding the downtown, and marketing of cities for global business came to predominate. Much scholarship has demonstrated that Daley grew enthusiastic, indeed passionate, about this kind of urban planning, that he came to see it as his mission to make Chicago a beautiful, global city. As early as 1989, he told an audience, "The city is changing. You're not going to see factories back.... I think you have to look at the financial markets—banking, service industry, the development of O'Hare Field, tourism, trade. This is going to be an international city."[4] Daley and his administration came to the conclusion that in order to reverse the city's economic decline they would have to transform and expand the Loop "through the support of high-density office development and retailing as well as the reintroduction of a substantial downtown population [i.e., 'gentrification']," and through Chicago's repositioning as a global city.[5]

In fact, Daley was not alone in his embrace of this new agenda. All over the U.S., mayors in the 1980s and 1990s pursued economic revitalization by means not of progressive social policies but of downtown gentrification, beautification, and remaking their cities as "tourist meccas."[6] Dennis Judd notes that "between 1976 and 1986, in the service of [this] new downtown development strategy, 250 convention centers, sports arenas, community centers, and performing arts facilities were constructed or started, at a cost of more than $10 billion, and over the next decade, the competition continued unabated."[7] Costas Spirou, too, observes that "waterfront districts, museum campuses, sport complexes, large outdoor festival venues and elaborate entertainment locales have come to be significant forms of urban development," because they can draw large numbers of visitors and generate considerable profits.[8] Spirou calls these trends the "disneyfication" of urban space.

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[1] John Kass, "Edgar trolley-funding switch angers Daley," *Chicago Tribune*, September 22, 1994; Joel Rast, *Remaking Chicago*, 136.
[2] Rast, *Remaking Chicago*, 142.
[3] Rast, *Remaking Chicago*, 138-142; "Don't Stop the Clock on Goose Island," *Chicago Tribune*, June 18, 1990.
[4] Quoted in Fassil Demissie, "Globalization and the Remaking of Chicago," in *The New Chicago*, 22.
[5] Ibid., 27.
[6] Dennis Judd and Susan Fainstein, "Global Forces, Local Strategies, and Urban Tourism," in *The Tourist City*, eds. Judd and Fainstein (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 12.
[7] Dennis Judd, "Constructing the Tourist Bubble," in *The Tourist City*, 36.
[8] Costas Spirou, "The Evolution of the Tourism Precinct," in *City Spaces—Tourist Places: Urban Tourism Precincts*, eds. Bruce Hayllar, Tony Griffin, and Deborah Edwards (Burlington, MA: Elsevier Ltd., 2008), 22, 23.

One of the keys to this urban agenda was tax increment financing. This is ironic, considering TIF's original purpose. Nevertheless, it is a fact that as the 1990s progressed, mayors all over the country—none more so than Daley—began to use TIF in a decidedly "neoliberal" way, i.e., as a means of raising property values around the central business district and transferring wealth from the lower and middle classes to the upper.[1] It took some time, however, for Daley to enthusiastically embrace this new agenda for TIF. From 1987 to 1997, there was an average of about four new TIF districts created each year in Chicago. In 1997 the city had a total of 41 TIFs. From 1998 to 2002, it created 86 new TIFs, more than twice as many as during the previous fourteen years and more than all of suburban Cook County during the same five-year period.[2] The number has continued to climb, so that in 2012 Chicago has 163 TIF districts, covering more than 30 percent of the city's land area.[3] As we'll see below, the majority of all this TIF money has gone to the wealthiest areas, in and around the central business district.

Since 1998, the city's total revenue from TIF has increased dramatically, as is clear from the following numbers:[4]

1987	$5.1 million
1990	$20.1 million
1996	$50.1 million
1998	$77.2 million
2000	$129.3 million
2002	$216.6 million
2005	$386.5 million
2007	$555.3 million
2010	$509.9 million
2011	$453.7 million

TIF revenue declined after the economic collapse of 2008, but this trend may be reversed as property values rise again.

To understand how tax increment financing has evolved over the last twenty years, it will be useful to consider some examples of TIF districts (commonly called "TIFs" for brevity). Many of them have been quite small, designed purely for the benefit of one or two businesses. In 1993, for instance, a district was created for Tru-Vue, an 80-employee company that had to expand its location on Goose Island in order to relocate its New York operations to Chicago. Similarly, Culinary Foods moved from West George Street to a TIF district in the Stockyards industrial park, thus providing this neighborhood with a few more jobs. Nabisco benefited from a 105-acre district, more than half of which included the company's enormous bakery employing 2400 people. Nabisco had suggested it might leave Chicago unless the city provided some funding for the facility's $500-million expansion and modernization, which Daley obligingly did.[5]

On the other hand, some TIFs created in the 1990s were very large—and very controversial. In 1997 the city council, which rubber-stamped virtually every Daley proposal, approved a major expansion of Harold Washington's original North Loop TIF, so that it now covered about a quarter of all buildings downtown and became known as the Central Loop TIF.[6] Community groups, such as the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, organized to prevent the expansion from taking place, but to no avail. Speaking for them, the president of ACORN declared at a rally in front of City Hall that "a [Central Loop] TIF is nothing more

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[1] See Craig L. Johnson and Joyce Y. Man, eds., *Tax Increment Financing and Economic Development: Uses, Structures, and Impact* (New York: State University of New York, 2001).

[2] Mike Quigley, *A Tale of Two Cities: Reinventing Tax Increment Financing*, 2007, 1-2.

[3] This figure of 30 percent is from 2008, so it is certainly higher by now. Adam Verwymeren, "Chicago, TIF by TIF," *Medill Reports,* June 5, 2008.

[4] "City of Chicago TIF Revenue Totals by Year," Cook County Clerk, http://www.cookcountyclerk.com/tsd/tifs/Pages/TIFReports.aspx (accessed November 4, 2012).

[5] Nancy Ryan, "City on a roll with deals to save jobs," *Chicago Tribune,* August 12, 1993.

[6] David Roeder, "Taxes to rebuild loop," *Chicago Sun-Times*, October 4, 1996

than another corporate welfare business raising its ugly head again. We would much rather see the money spent in the neighborhood than being spent with big corporations."[1] Even the *Chicago Tribune* criticized Daley's plans for the Central Loop TIF, saying that the mayor had been "maddeningly vague" about how the projected $300 million would be spent.[2] The *Tribune* also noted that nearly half of this future "tax increment" consisted of money that, in the absence of the TIF, would have gone to the Board of Education. "Now that the mayor is running the schools via appointees," the *Tribune*'s editors observed, "who's going to howl if and when the expanded TIF district starts squandering badly needed educational funds?"[3] This criticism of TIF—that it diverts taxes from schools (and the county, parks, libraries, etc.) to the real estate industry—was to become more and more common in the next fifteen years.

Another controversial TIF district was the one in the South Loop, in the neighborhood called Central Station (where Mayer Daley lived). The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless protested the TIF's passage in 1994, arguing that unless certain provisions were added to the proposal, the result of development would be to displace low-income and minority residents from the area. For instance, the coalition demanded that 20 percent of all new housing in the area be set aside for low-income families, and that 50 percent of the jobs created by development be filled by women, minorities, and the homeless.[4] These and other demands were not met, but aldermen did tack on an amendment stipulating that at least 300 units of housing be provided for low- and moderate-income residents.[5] This, unfortunately, was not enough to save the neighborhood from gentrification, as the fears of advocates for the homeless have largely come to pass.[6]

Neighborhood advocates had less cause to complain, however, with regard to the mayor's support for the city's industrial corridors. We have already seen that Daley prevailed on the city council to establish two planned manufacturing districts in 1990; since then, he had continued to juggle support for industry with his deeper commitment to commercial and residential development downtown and elsewhere. Among the TIFs he proposed in 1997, therefore, were six that were designed to preserve historic industrial areas by either encouraging revitalization or—in the districts that were close to the Loop, such as the Pilsen one—protecting them from an invasion of commercial and residential property, which would drive up land values to the point that manufacturers would be forced out. To this end, the Daley administration backed a zoning change, for example, in the Kinzie industrial corridor, which would keep residential development to a minimum. In addition, the administration promised to use the future TIF money for such industry-friendly purposes as constructing new sewers, improving viaducts, funding job-training programs for local employees, and modernizing buildings that were obsolete for modern manufacturing needs.[7] In subsequent years, most of these industrial TIFs proved to be fairly successful.[8]

Nevertheless, despite such moves to accommodate the interests of industry, workers, and even a few neighborhoods on the West and South sides of the city, it is undeniable that Daley's chief passion was to beautify, develop, and market Chicago for global business. The TIFs he was establishing downtown were facilitating the construction of new office buildings, the recycling of older buildings into condominiums, the creation of affluent new communities near the Loop, and a glittering array of initiatives to beautify the gentrifying portions of the city. Daley seemed particularly fond of wrought iron—"wrought-iron fencing erected by the mile," as one newspaper reported, "new bridges sporting wrought-iron trim and obelisks and

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[1] Paul David, "Community groups protest against city's misuse of TIF in Loop area," *Chicago Weekend*, December 15, 1996.

[2] In fact, from 1984 until its expiration in 2008, about a billion dollars was spent in TIF money in and around the Central Loop. Ben Joravsky, "A TIF Under the Microscope," *Chicago Reader*, July 15, 2010.

[3] "Daley's Loop TIF plan too vague," *Chicago Tribune*, November 12, 1996.

[4] Flynn McRoberts, "Protest right in Daley's backyard," *Chicago Tribune*, July 28, 1994.

[5] Fran Spielman, "Council blocks bid to void police sergeant promotions," *Chicago Tribune*, August 4, 1994.

[6] Martha Baybe, "The booming South Loop has a tortuous and tawdry tale to tell," *Chicago Reader*, March 13, 2008.

[7] David Roeder, "6 new TIF districts proposed," *Chicago Sun-Times*, October 3, 1997; Gary Washburn, "City officials seeking TIF designation for 6 industrial areas," *Chicago Tribune*, October 8, 1997.

[8] Greg Hinz, "A tough TIF trip," *Crain's Chicago Business*, July 29, 2002.

sculptures, wrought-iron lampposts with fanciful curlicues"[1]—but he also put up flowers all around the business district (hanging from lampposts and such), invested in rooftop gardens, planted hundreds of thousands of trees, and encouraged "nightly illumination of as many downtown facades as possible, to create a Midwestern 'City of Light.'" Many millions of dollars in TIF funds were spent on this sort of landscaping, for which Chicago was famous already by the late 1990s. The old gritty image of the industrial, and then the deindustrializing, city was making way for the new image of a sparkling, cosmopolitan, desirable place to live. The landscaping and beautifying rarely extended to lower-income neighborhoods on the West and South sides of the city, but around the business district Chicagoans could readily see their TIF money at work.

At the same time, such organizations as the Commercial Club, the Chamber of Commerce, and the World Trade Center Chicago were doing their part to improve the city's image in the eyes of global businesses. Specifically, in 1998 they founded World Business Chicago, a group that, according to its original managing partners, would be devoted to "telling Chicago's story" to international businesses in order to attract them to the area. In 2000 it merged with the Chicago Partnership for Economic Development, created by Daley in 1999, which enlarged the organization and gave it a more clearly defined corporate structure. The mayor was, and remains, the chairman; the board of directors consists of some of Chicagoland's leading corporate executives.[2] Major initiatives of the last twelve years, including the colossal "Millennium Park" project, have borne this organization's imprimatur.

The outlook and goals of World Business Chicago are those of the Commercial Club and the Civic Committee. They have not changed much since the 1980s, although the business elite has grown more savvy regarding public relations, so that, for example, none of the reports now published by these commercial organizations explicitly states that workers' compensation and unemployment insurance should be reduced (as *Make No Little Plans* stated in 1984). The public would probably not approve of such a frank admission. One can get a sense of the downtown business elite's current views by reading the Commercial Club's publication *Chicago Metropolis 2020: The Chicago Plan for the Twenty-First Century* (2001). Modeled on Daniel Burnham's 1909 *Plan of Chicago*, it lays out a comprehensive and ambitious vision for the region's social and economic future. The framework is what the author calls "regionalism," an insistence on the necessity of coordinating political and economic initiatives in the Chicagoland region, including the Cook, DuPage, Lake, McHenry, Kane, and Will counties. More pertinent to this paper, however, is the plan's casual dismissing of manufacturing in favor of services, such as entertainment, tourism, education, health services, financial services, and publishing. Tax increment financing is declared "indispensable," and the entire region is urged to make use of it.[3]

Not coincidentally, it was around the time of this report's publication that the Daley administration's use of TIF really started to become obsessive. It is true that some of the new TIF districts and programs faced little opposition from neighborhood groups. For example, to help small businesses, the city initiated a program called the Small Business Investment Fund, whereby businesses in a TIF district could apply for up to $50,000 of funding for capital improvements.[4] This program still exists and is very popular. In addition, a number of TIF districts continued to be created in underprivileged communities on the South and West Sides. To mention one or two at random: nearly 400 jobs were expected to be created and retained by means of the city's assistance with building a high-quality daycare center on the West Side,

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[1] Raad Cawthon, "Mayor's beautification of city has plenty of critics and copycats," *Houston Chronicle*, December 26, 1999. Another article notes that, once, "when Daley got tired of looking at a wooden barrier around an entire city block downtown, he had the wood ripped out and a wrought-iron fence put in, paying the $158,000 bill from TIF money." Ray Gibson and Rebecca Cohen, "King Richard's buried treasure," *Chicago Tribune*, November 2, 1997.

[2] Author's correspondence with World Business Chicago; Mike Comerford, "Selling Chicago abroad," *Daily Herald*, February 17, 1998.

[3] Elmer Johnson, *Chicago Metropolis 2020: The Chicago Plan for the Twenty-First Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 104-106.

[4] David Roeder, "New TIF targets small businesses," *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 12, 2000.

expanding a barrel recycling business, and expanding a North Side computer software development firm.[1] One could argue that these are exactly the kinds of projects for which TIF was originally intended.

However, as one peruses newspaper articles and editorials and critical studies of TIF, one realizes that the majority of TIF funding has, apparently, gone to politically connected businesses that are *not* located in the most "blighted" parts of the city. Jacqueline Leavy, executive director of the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group, said it well in 2000: she remarked that "the city has negotiated too many subsidies to private developers without adequate public oversight or a reliable accounting of the jobs supposedly created."[2] The *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, and other newspapers have scores of articles describing deals made with particular companies, subsidies given to them ostensibly for the purpose of convincing them to stay in Chicago. But there is little transparency or accountability with respect to TIF, so who is to say what really happened? When Quaker Oats Co. got $9.75 million in TIF funding to convince it to keep its headquarters in the city, who is to say what sort of negotiations went on between the company and the Daley administration?[3] Maybe Quaker would have stayed in the city anyway, and that $9.75 million could have gone to such taxing bodies as schools and parks instead of to the company.

In the early 2000s, political observers were growing more concerned not only over the lack of transparency or fairness of tax increment financing but also its fiscal costs. The nonprofit Neighborhood Capital Budget Group published a report in which it studied 36 TIF districts and found that in all of them, property values had already been growing prior to TIF designation. In other words, subsequent development was not solely or even primarily a result of the TIF, which meant that government bodies were being unfairly deprived of tax revenue from growth in property values. In fact, the NCBG calculated that over the lifetime of these 36 districts, the taxing bodies would lose $1.3 billion in revenues they would have collected had the areas not been designated as TIFs. The Chicago Public Schools, for example, was losing a total of $631.7 million from these 36 districts, and the City of Chicago $254.8 million. These numbers alone go a long way towards explaining the dire fiscal straits in which Chicago finds itself in 2012.[4]

It is not hard to find examples of the profligacy of the Daley administration. Millennium Park ended up costing about $500 million, $280 million of which were provided by the Central Loop TIF.[5] (Would any sane person argue that Millennium Park was built in order to counteract downtown blight?) In 2008, the city committed $75 million to Rush University Medical Center—a private hospital—an allocation that Cook County Commissioner Mike Quigley criticized as not "the proper use of TIF money."[6] On a smaller scale, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra has received $2.5 million.[7] The privately owned Willis Tower downtown was awarded at least $28 million for remodeling.[8] In 2005, $4 million went to Jewel Food Stores Inc. to build a store on the Near West Side, not a low-income area.[9] In fact, between 2000 and 2011, nearly half of TIF money designated for private sector projects went to some of the area's most profitable corporations, including CareerBuilder, UPS, Target, and Quaker Oats.[10] Amisha Patel, executive director of the Chicago-based Grassroots Collaborative, aptly summarized the inequitable history of TIF in the 2000s: "Of the $2.45 billion in TIF dollars spent from 2004 through 2008," she said, "the Loop, Near North, Near South, and Near West communities received $1.56 billion, or 63%."[11]

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[1] Anonymous, "Mayor Daley introduces ordinances to City Council to create and retain jobs," *Chicago Defender*, November 27, 1999.
[2] David Roeder and Fran Spielman, "9.75 million keeps Quaker in Chicago," *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 2, 2000.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Neighborhood Capital Budget Group, *Who Pays for the Only Game in Town?* (Chicago: Neighborhood Capital Budget Group, 2000).
[5] Ben Joravsky, "A TIF Under the Microscope," *Chicago Reader*, July 15, 2010.
[6] Dave Newbart, "$75 million windfall for Rush?," *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 8, 2008.
[7] Ellyn Fortino and Margaret Smith, "Corporate Giants Received TIF Money, Records Show," *New York Times*, February 26, 2011.
[8] Anonymous, "It's our money," *Chicago Tribune*, November 9, 2009.
[9] Tribune staff, "City to consider TIF for grocer," *Chicago Tribune*, March 8, 2005.
[10] Fortino and Smith, "Corporate Giants Received TIF Money, Records Show," *New York Times*.
[11] Jennifer Nunez, "TIF money is people's money, says Grassroots," *Gazette Chicago*, November 3, 2011.

The incredibly lucrative Central Loop TIF expired in 2008, but in 2006 the city had designated another TIF downtown that would prove to be almost as lucrative: the controversial LaSalle TIF around Chicago's financial district. As usual, the legal restriction of TIF to blighted neighborhoods did not pose a problem: city officials simply argued that some of the buildings in the area were "old" and "deteriorating," and that new infrastructure was needed.[1] This was apparently sufficient to cover the legal requirements for TIF designation. The Daley administration estimated that over its lifetime the TIF would capture at least $550 million in tax revenue, to be used for "high-quality retail development, improvements to the Chicago River seawall, new and improved open spaces, enhanced transit stations and public right-of-ways, and improvements to streets and alleys. Funds are also targeted for land assembly projects, public works improvements, job training, day care, and efforts that improve traffic and pedestrian circulation throughout the 49-block district and its environs."[2] These sound like worthy projects, but the fact is that in 2006 property values were already growing—tremendously—in the Loop, and TIF designation entailed that taxing bodies would collect less revenue from this property growth. Fed up with the city's shenanigans, Mike Quigley proposed in 2006 that the state study how TIFs were applied and whether the law was working as intended. His proposal, however, was rejected by the Cook County Finance Committee—which was chaired by John Daley, Richard Daley's brother.[3]

Even *Crain's Chicago Business*, no opponent of financial help to the business district, criticized the LaSalle TIF. Among other things, its editors observed that "roping off downtown tax revenues for 23 years would put hundreds of millions of dollars off-limits to county government for most purposes," at a time when the county was already experiencing a fiscal crisis. They were also concerned that Daley would have no accountability on how he spent the money.[4]

In part because of the LaSalle TIF, calls for TIF reform grew more frequent after 2006. Liberal journalists such as the *Reader*'s Ben Joravsky started popularizing the idea that tax increment financing was just a "slush fund" for the mayor; Cook County Commissioner Mike Quigley published a long primer on how TIF was being abused by the mayor and how it could be reformed; even aldermen, who hitherto had rubber-stamped every Daley TIF proposal, began to have second thoughts because the administration was routinely moving funds from ward to ward.[5] Some aldermen made proposals for reform, which went nowhere.[6] In 2006 the Cook County Clerk, David Orr, started publishing a four-part annual report on TIF, an online TIF primer to help the public understand what was at stake, and online TIF district maps. In 2007, for example, he observed that since 1986 Chicago's taxpayers had paid more than $3 billion in TIF money.[7] (Four years later, that number had risen to $4.6 billion.)[8] In 2009 he called for a "moratorium of new Chicago tax increment financing districts until new leadership is installed and a thorough review of existing TIFs can be conducted."[9] Needless to say, a moratorium did not happen.

Meanwhile, as taxpayers and the city were paying hundreds of millions of dollars to beautify the downtown area and its environs, hundreds of thousands of African-Americans were languishing on the city's South and West sides. The historian Paul Street observes that, as of 2005, a fourth of the Chicago metropolitan area's black households were officially poor, compared to 5.6 percent for white and 16 percent for Latin households. More than a third of black children lived in poverty. (Lately that has increased to

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[1] Yvette Shields, "Chicago Considering TIF for Financial District," *The Bond Buyer*, July 13, 2006.
[2] Ibid.; "LaSalle/Central TIF," City of Chicago, Housing and Economic Development, at [etc.] (accessed November 8, 2012).
[3] Steve Stanek, "LaSalle Street TIF Proposal Has Chicago Politician Calling for Moratorium," *Heartlander.org*, December 1, 2006, at [etc.] (accessed November 8, 2012).
[4] "LaSalle Street TIF proposal needs more work," *Crain's Chicago Business*, July 17, 2006.
[5] "Another form of TIF abuse," *Chicago Tribune*, April 30, 2007.
[6] See, e.g., anonymous, "Time for TIF sunshine," *Chicago Tribune*, April 21, 2009.
[7] David Orr, "2007 TIF report shows 11.5% jump in revenue," at [etc.] (accessed November 10, 2012).
[8] David Orr, "2010 TIF revenue down 4% countywide," at [etc.]
[9] Press release, Office of the Cook County Clerk, "Orr calls for moratorium on new Chicago TIFs," at [etc.] (accessed November 10, 2012.)

more than a half.)[1] According to the 2000 census, black median household income was 58 percent of white median income. Economic development was so lacking in some neighborhoods that one of them, Auburn Gresham on the South Side (a neighborhood that is 98 percent black), celebrated the opening of its *first sit-down restaurant* in 2004. It took "seven years, some arm-twisting, and a complex financial arrangement that included $55,000 in contributions from parishioners" for this restaurant to be built.[2] When one recalls that tax increment financing was intended precisely to remedy economic decay in neighborhoods like those on the South Side, facts like these are a terrible indictment of Chicago politics, indeed of contemporary American politics in general.

In fact, not only did the poorest neighborhoods in Chicago fail to develop under Daley; some of them actually de-developed. A 2006 study found that the poorest sections of the city lost nearly 600 businesses and more than 14,000 jobs between 1995 and 2004.[3] As Jesse Jackson said, "Right now, you go northwest, there's, like, three jobs for every one person. If you go south, there're six people for every one job. Here, taxes are up. Services are down. He [Daley] has not addressed structural inequalities."[4] More accurately, he has addressed them—by aggravating them. With the help of tax increment financing, Daley has presided over an era of unprecedented gentrification.[5]

Mindful of this, politicians, journalists, and academics continued to make proposals for TIF reform in the last few years of Daley's mayoralty; it wasn't until Rahm Emanuel was elected mayor in 2011, though, that something was done about them. Several months after his election he announced the creation of a task force to review the TIF system and recommend changes. In August, 2011 it published its report, which essentially confirmed the claims of long-time critics: the task force proposed ways for the city to increase its accountability, monitor its performance with regard to TIF goals, and increase transparency. For example, it recommended that "every five years TIF districts should be subject to strategic reviews which lead to continuation of the district, revision of the district strategy or more significant change."[6] Mike Quigley, David Orr, and other critics of Chicago's TIF program praised Emanuel's moves toward reform; on the other hand, Quigley noted that "nothing in the Emanuel report would change the way TIF districts operate."[7] The tax increment financing program would continue to be basically a slush fund at the mayor's disposal; the main difference is that, if the task force's recommendations were implemented, the mayor would be a little more accountable than before.

In fact, after Emanuel announced the implementation of some of the proposed reforms in January, 2012, it appeared that not much of real substance had changed. It's true that a comprehensive online TIF database would become available to the public and that monitoring of TIF performance would be moved to the Department of Revenue, which would hire independent auditors to perform random audits. None of this, however, has prevented taxpayers' money from continuing to go to some of the wealthiest people and corporations in the world, when Chicago Public Schools is facing a deficit of at least $700 million in 2013 and the city will have a deficit of $300 million.[8] For instance, $5.2 million are being diverted to the redevelopment of Harper Court in Hyde Park, whose main beneficiaries are the University of Chicago and Hyatt Hotels. That money could have gone instead to neighborhood schools and other public services. This is a particularly egregious case because Chicago's Pritzker family owns and controls Hyatt Corporation, and Penny Pritzker serves on the boards of both Hyatt and CPS. So, as she proposes a CPS budget that slashes $3.4 million from schools in the same TIF district that Harper Court is in, she personally benefits

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[1] Steve Bogira, "Chicago's growing racial gap in child poverty," *Chicago Reader*, October 4, 2012.
[2] Paul Street, *Racial Oppression in the Global Metropolis: A Living Black Chicago History*, 197, 202.
[3] David Bernstein, "Daley vs. Daley," in *Twenty-First Century Chicago*, eds. Dick Simpson and Constance A. Mixon (San Diego: Cognella, 2012), 105.
[4] Ibid.
[5] "Income Segregation in Chicago and the Gentrification of America," *Chicago Magazine*, August 2, 2012.
[6] "Tax Increment Financing Task Force Final Report," City of Chicago, August 29, 2011.
[7] "Daley versus Emanuel over TIF," *Chicago Examiner*, August 30, 2011.
[8] Noreen Ahmed-Ullah and Joel Hood, CPS budget for 2013 has huge shortfall," *Chicago Tribune*, March 28, 2012; "Chicago mayor's budget aims to shrink deficit," *Reuters*, October 20, 2012.

from a TIF grant of $5.2 million.[1] This is surely a conflict of interest, of the sort that TIF reform has evidently done nothing to prevent. The Chicago Teachers Union publicized this conflict of interest and abuse of TIF during its strike in September, 2012—marching teachers held up signs with messages such as, "Silly Rich Guy, TIFs Are for Kids"—but to little avail, as the Hyatt TIF has not been canceled.[2]

It is a serious question, however, whether things can continue as they are for much longer. As we have seen, the momentum behind TIF reform finally succeeded in accomplishing some of its goals in 2011 and 2012; it is unlikely that the movement for greater equity and democracy in tax increment financing will simply dissolve away, so soon after it has tasted partial success. California abolished TIF in February, 2012, thus giving the $6 billion a year that TIF was consuming back to the state, to be spent on schools, roads, public transit, debt-servicing, and other vital needs.[3] Colorado might soon follow California's example.[4] The Iowa legislature is considering changes to the state's TIF laws.[5] A nation-wide movement seems to be slowly developing for TIF reform, as states, counties, municipalities, and school districts sink under the burden of intolerable debt. More and more people are coming to realize that money locked away in "redevelopment" programs would be better spent on necessities such as education. One can only hope that these people will be able to convince the public of the wisdom of reform.

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Reading Greta Krippner's *Capitalizing on Crisis: The Political Origins of the Rise of Finance* (2011). One of her arguments is that the deregulation of finance—and the U.S. government's access to global capital markets from the late 1970s on—led to an explosion of credit in the U.S. economy, which alleviated the social tensions (over distribution of wealth) of the 1960s and 1970s. But credit can't keep expanding forever. As it contracts and becomes more expensive in the coming years, explosive conflicts will return. —More generally, her argument is that the turn to finance wasn't really planned by policymakers but emerged accidentally as they tried to solve the problems of inflation and social conflict. The financialization of the economy ended up being a way for policymakers to postpone the inevitable conflicts over "distributional" priorities.

January, 2013

My New Year's resolution is to lose my small beer belly. I might start working out again too.

I don't anticipate writing in my journal as much as I used to. I want to focus on publishing from now on, not taking notes.

Reading Jacob Bronowski's *The Ascent of Man.*

Over the next ten weeks I'll be reading or skimming many dozens of books for three exams I have to take in March (in Latin American history, U.S. labor history, and general U.S. history after 1763). Good times. In a lot of cases I'll just have to read book reviews, since I'm not a speed-reading machine. One particularly thorough overview of historiography, which I plan to make good use of, is *American History Now* (2011).

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[1] David Orlikoff, "How Hyatt profits from 53rd St. TIF," *Hyde Park Herald*, August 22, 2012.
[2] Brandon Campbell, "Day 4 of CTU Strike Targets Pritzker, Use of TIF Funds," *Progress Illinois*, September 14, 2012.
[3] Nanette Miranda, "California redevelopment funding coming to an end," *ABC News*, at [etc.]
[4] "As California's TIF goes, so might Colorado's," *Denver Business Journal*, January 13, 2012.
[5] Rod Boshart, "Working group hopeful of TIF reform," *The Gazette*, March 27, 2012.

Here's a paradox about the self.— The self needs otherness, an other, in order to exist and to define itself. Its reflection in an other is necessary to its existence and self-affirmation. But at the same time, the whole point of this reflection and self-affirmation is really to reduce or in some sense eliminate the otherness of the other! So the self needs the other and even posits it, but only so that it can affirm itself and thus transcend, so to speak, the other's otherness! It "posits" the other in order to (in some sense) transcend the other. That is, it posits the other in order to get recognition from the other in order to reduce the otherness of the other and so see itself confirmed (by the other).

The paradox, in other words, is that the self needs the other but wants to overcome its otherness. (In fact, it needs the other *in order to* overcome its otherness, i.e., to confirm and "define" itself). And the way to do that is premised precisely on the existence of otherness, for it is by having its self-love recognized and reflected by an other that the self to some extent overcomes the other's otherness.

Headache.

April - August

Finally done with exams.[1] Thank God. Now I can return to reading what I want to read. Starting with Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers' *Right Turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics* (1986). An exceptional book.

By the way, I'm still involved with the ISO—though I'm not really sure why. I don't like most of the people very much. They're not obnoxious, by and large; they're just typical group-thinking doctrinaire leftists, confused in a lot of ways, naive about the potential for "revolution," and intolerant of dissent. Also, annoying reflexive feminists. Obsessive, naive feminists. In fact, I've never liked most leftists very much. They tend to be almost as stupid and flaky as everyone else, only (sometimes) in different ways. Their smug, cliquey, postmodern, hipster vibe is the opposite of me.

I honestly find it baffling that I published the first version of *Notes of an Underground Humanist.* It's crap. How could I have done that? It really shames me, because some of the book is simply *frivolous.* The second edition is incomparably better and more serious. In the coming months I plan to buy all the copies of the first edition that are still out there and destroy them.

Ironically, despite my talents, it's taken me quite a long time to mature as a writer and thinker. That's probably in part a result of my having lived in a social vacuum much of my life—my having received very little feedback from anyone. But it's also just the fact that "deep down" I'm a child, a naïve and self-centered child who likes to be mischievous and so on. For some reason, this trait, this immaturity, seems to characterize a lot of artists and creative thinkers.

Dated a 28-year-old named Ellen for a few weeks, a rather abrasive person but cute, […] but we ended it because we're definitely not right for each other. Now dating a professional photographer named Lizz, 31.

Losing weight with my kale shake diet and going to the gym periodically, weightlifting and taking spin classes (once in a while).

One of the reasons I respect Chomsky is that I suspect he's one of the few intellectuals who would acknowledge the importance of my revisions to Marxism if I showed them to him. He wouldn't care much, since he isn't very interested in Marxism, but he would recognize the force of the logic. He might actually be intrigued by the possibilities my revisions present for reconciling Marxism and anarchism, in that I show extreme statism to be contradictory with the fundamentals of Marxism. "Thinkers" have been trying for over a hundred years to "reconcile" Marxism and anarchism—which in some respects isn't hard to do—but only with my revision to the theory of revolution has the reconciliation taken place. And yet if/when

[1] [Except that the profs who read my Latin American exam failed me because of a couple inadequacies in my answer to one question. So I have to redo it in the fall (with different questions).]

my book is published, no one will notice it or give a damn. Originality is shunned or not noticed, except by Chomsky. (Or, rather, all that matters in the world is connections, not ideas.)

But Chomsky is right that all these abstruse debates about Marxist theory and anarchism and Leninism and so on are basically pointless. Ultimately, who cares? We know what's necessary: organization. That and education about how the world works. That's all. I love Chomsky's "anti-intellectualism": he brushes off centuries of debate with a shrug, a mild gesture that in his case is wonderfully pithy.

In short, Chomsky "keeps it real." Try finding *that* quality among intellectuals! He's practically the only one.

I'm going to try to stop wasting my time on the internet. I write that here because it means I have to follow through. So many hours wasted! I'm done with that. From now on, work.

I sort of enjoy my role as the gadfly, the non-conformist, of any given group. For instance, the totalitarian political correctness of leftists irritates me so much that finally, after a year of tolerating it, I gave into my mischievous side. Wrote this in response to a comment thread on Facebook:

> Steven Pinker's defense of Colin McGinn [who sent sexually suggestive emails to a graduate student and was accused of harassment] is obviously wrong. Putting that aside, though, his attachment to the idea that "human nature" exists is right. In fact, it's just common sense. As Chomsky says, "human nature" is simply whatever it is that distinguishes humans from, say, pigeons. One aspect of human nature is that we have the capacity to form languages of a massively more complex character than those of other great apes. Another is that we have self-consciousness, unlike pigeons. Etc. So, human nature exists, and the mind is not a tabula rasa. (Philosophical empiricism, along the lines of Locke and Hume, is wrong; "rationalism" is right.) It's also an obvious fact - though a lot of postmodernists might disagree - that one's genetic endowment plays an enormous role in the development of one's character, one's "intelligence," etc. And it should surprise no one that hormones, sex steroids, adrenal glands, and so forth are in part determinative of behavior and mentality (although "social construction" plays a role too). For instance, according to a study by Heino Meyer-Bahlburg, women with congenital adrenal hyperplasia "as a group have a lower interest than controls in getting married and performing the traditional child-care/housewife role. As children, they show an unusually low interest in engaging in maternal play with baby dolls, and their interest in caring for infants, the frequency of daydreams or fantasies of pregnancy and motherhood, or the expressed wish of experiencing pregnancy and having children of their own appear to be relatively low in all age groups." The study may have drawn incorrect conclusions, but prima facie they aren't absurd, notwithstanding the dogmas of what Pinker calls "gender feminism." It's true that political conservatives may seize on such scientific conclusions as justifications or "naturalizations" of reactionary values (about "women's proper sphere"), but of course that's a logical leap. "Is" doesn't imply "ought." And yes, it's legitimate to argue that certain kinds of scientific research shouldn't even be conducted because it's possible that they would be used to justify reactionary politics. But the mode of argument that leftists often display when criticizing politically incorrect ideas about sex and gender is less legitimate: for instance, Owen Lloyd's piece (linked above) is full of logical fallacies, oversimplifications, an incredible and superfluous personal animus against Pinker, the attribution to him of horrible motives (which he may have, but it's irresponsible to say so given the lack of evidence), etc. There's a totalitarianism of the left, a hypersensitivity, a paranoia about the motives of anyone who disagrees with you, which is manifested in the reflex to instantly condemn and ridicule even those opponents who are (or seem to be) a cut above the crude racists, political hacks, and corporate lackeys. The political right

> certainly doesn't have a monopoly on dogmatism and narrow-mindedness; in fact, many "politically correct" ideas/attitudes are pure dogmatisms, usually revolving around the "socialization is (almost) everything" dogma (which, incidentally, Marx disagreed with). Maybe Pinker is a bad person, but in general - with some exceptions - I think it's good to evaluate ideas on their merits rather than on the basis of what it's conceivable some reactionary might use them to justify. (Again, I'm not referring to Pinker's defense of McGinn, which is absurd.)

Strangely, that didn't get much of a debate started.

I miss reading books that interest me. So, screw it. I'm reading Daniel Guerin's *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (1970).

—I truly am an anarchist in the root of my being. Viscerally. A radical democrat. It's the primordial structure of my character. The thing I dislike most in the world is power/authority, and I most love people with open minds, free and accepting personalities, easygoing and curious minds. I love spontaneity (freedom), which is the antithesis of authority.

(I should say, though, that in the context of political action I appreciate the need for structures of authority. Anarchy is the ideal we should always be trying to approximate, but only to an extent that is feasible, sane, and not counterproductive to our specific political goals.)

Reading Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward's *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (1971/1993)—in depth, unlike most of the other stuff I'm reading on unemployment. It's a brilliant and eye-opening book.

Also reading David Graeber's little book *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (2004).

In dark moments I'm still tormented by this thought: *If you can't be everything, why be anything?*

[…]

Hermann Hesse: "Whoever wants music instead of noise, joy instead of pleasure, soul instead of gold, creative work instead of business, passion instead of foolery, finds no home in this trivial world of ours."

Reading *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (1980), by Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner. It'll be relevant for my dissertation, especially the chapter on theory (where I'll criticize Gramscianism and so forth).

Just for the hell of it, here's a Facebook post of mine on some new bestselling book by Christopher Hayes called *Twilight of the Elites: America after Meritocracy*:

> ....Regarding Hayes's ideas, I'd say that in some sense they're just truistic, while in another sense they're simplistic. Social criticism isn't difficult, and at this late stage of history it's almost impossible to say anything theoretical that's both new and profound. Even C. Wright Mills's book, from what I read of it, didn't strike me as profound: the whole analysis is pretty obvious and has been more or less understood for centuries, though the nomenclature changes (power elites, power structures, dominant classes, the rich, elites, etc.). As Chomsky says, the "theories" we use to understand society are fairly trivial and, when shorn of needless jargon, can be understood by a twelve-year-old. Hayes's formulations, though, are objectionable. He's kind of like Robert Michels in separating his critique of institutions from a critique of capitalism, in fact in largely ignoring the latter as such (or so it seems). It isn't "meritocracy" that produces all these social ills; it's meritocracy, or rather bureaucracy, in the context of corporate capitalism. It's the latter that's the main problem, indeed the determinant of the forms that contemporary meritocracy takes. (But Hayes is mainstream and doesn't want to be politically

> marginalized, so he couches his "analysis" in terms of the less challenging notion of meritocracy. Also, he probably thinks that invoking that term, a less common one than capitalism, will give his book the appearance of originality.) As for the lack of empathy that meritocracy supposedly produces, that is in fact a function of bureaucracy itself—and, in slightly different ways, our competitive, atomistic, acquisitive economic system—and has been so for many centuries. It's not a new thing that bureaucrats and those in the elite lack empathy and knowledge. That's not some profound discovery of Hayes's. Nor are his solutions particularly interesting. "Reduce inequality." Okay, great. Wish I'd thought of that. But how is it going to be done? It can't happen anymore in the context of capitalism. So what we need are global social movements aimed at the very heart of our economic order (rather than at "meritocracy," whatever that means). We need an alternative political economy, one structured around cooperatives, municipal socialism, public banking, the "solidarity economy," regional (as opposed to national) governance, and so on. (See Gar Alperovitz's *What Then Must We Do?*) "Higher and redistributive taxes" [as a solution] are hopelessly inadequate—and, moreover, hopeless to achieve, at least in the absence of global upsurges of the working class. But, to have any success, such upsurges will have to radically change the existing configuration of power and capitalism itself—which gets us back to the need for a prolonged social revolution, not some technocratic tinkering with tax rates.

September - December

Mauritz Hallgren's *Seeds of Revolt: A Study of American Life and the Temper of the American People during the Great Depression* (1933) is quite good, a very thoughtful analysis.

Um, where did I come from? A person born in the 1980s in the U.S. and formed in the 1990s and 2000s....turned out *this* way. How did I acquire my values, my interests, my nineteenth-century humanism? How is such originality possible? Rejection of everything I was born into, every cultural, intellectual, technological thing of my time, my whole environment.... I just *instinctively* rejected it. Understood its decadence and mediocrity, and instinctively identified with the past. Old traditions, old humanism. Somehow, with no mentors or teachers, I more or less knew what was good in the world and what was ugly, and I resisted constant pressures to follow the ugly.

I'm something like an *egotistic universalism*. Most things "particular" or time-bound bore me—except insofar as they express the general—but the timeless fascinates me. It's my misfortune that I live in a time-bound world.

(—Drunk on Beethoven's *Fidelio* and *Egmont* overtures and *Leonore 2*.)

"In an amoral world, the amoral man is best qualified to succeed."

In a not very upbeat mood.— I have to admit that the United States isn't *all* bad. While it does tend to make you misanthropic, cynical, selfish, callous, apathetic, lonely, mean-spirited, and unhappy, it also tends to give you a kind of grit, strength (the strength born of war), imperviousness, self-reliance, and grim awareness of profound truths about life in our universe. The United States is the *reductio ad absurdum* of existential absurdity—the pure essence of the human condition according to existentialism, nihilism as the sole principle of life. The United States, while representing all that is horrible in the world, also represents all that is deeply true—because deep truth and horror are one and the same.

A part of the prospectus that I decided to get rid of:

....I intend the whole essay to be a kind of polemic against "Gramscianism," viz., an emphasis on the supposed cultural and ideological integration of the masses into the dominant order. Intellectuals and "ordinary people" alike commonly assume that such integration, involving "shared values," ideas, and identities, is an important precondition for the stability and coherence of a given society.[1] For instance, among the public there is widespread acceptance of the idea that particular countries have particular cultures, and that such cultures and value-systems are what partially "unify" the country and distinguish it from others. Among academics, on the other hand, the contemporary fixation on discourses, social constructions, subjective identities, and cultural phenomena of all sorts naturally implies that insofar as societies are relatively stable, it is because mainstream culture serves as a powerful glue. For the postmodernist, after all, social life is reducible to language, discourse, images, etc.; thus, if a society does not disintegrate, it must be because its denizens accept the predominant discourses. This conclusion is rarely articulated, since it entails the politically incorrect idea that ordinary people do not have much agency, but one is committed to it inasmuch as one accepts the idealistic postmodernist framework.

I reject all this Gramscian and postmodernist idealism (or semi-idealism, in Gramsci's case). I think "culture" is not of primary importance in explaining social dynamics, nor is mass "consent"—cultural, ideological, political—a very useful concept in explaining how a ruling class can maintain social control.[2] There are many ways of maintaining control, chief among them the use of force and, secondly, myriad political and economic—as opposed to cultural—strategies of combating workers' (or slaves', or peasants') power.[3] That culture follows economics and politics should in fact be axiomatic, an *a priori* principle, simply because it requires *resources* to propagate discourses and cultural values, and resource allocation is determined by economic dynamics, class relations, conflicts between groups of people with different economic interests by virtue of their occupying different locations in social structures.[4] Capitalists propagate ideas compatible with their interests while working-class organizations do the same as regards their own interests—but the latter are typically less successful, since they have fewer resources. Mainstream society therefore tends to reflect capitalist values; but whether and to what extent ordinary people accept such values, and whether such (partial) acceptance does much to ensure social stability, are at best open questions.

One of the premises of my dissertation will be that "the dull compulsion of economic relations" (to quote Marx) is, in addition to the ruling class's aforementioned use of force and political maneuvering, largely responsible for people's continued subordination to the rule of an elite. People simply have to conform to institutional structures and accept "the rules of the game" in order to survive; otherwise they'll be kicked out, killed, sent to prison, beaten by police, made homeless, institutionalized in some way or other, or shunned. This is how society should be conceptualized—not as a set of nebulous discourses or values but as an incredibly complicated set of interlocking and often conflicting institutional roles that have more or less severe sanctions attached to their violation, depending on how "dominant" and powerful the institution in question is. Whether someone actually believes in the ideologies and values propagated by dominant institutions is less important than the fact that ordinarily he has to act as if he does—he has

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[1] See Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980).

[2] If the Marxian term "ruling class" is objectionable, one can substitute for it C. Wright Mills's "power elite," or simply "the rich," or "the powerful," or whatever.

[3] See Patricia Cayo Sexton, *The War on Labor and the Left: Understanding America's Unique Conservatism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1991).

[4] Erik Olin Wright, *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985).

> to broadly conform to social expectations—because otherwise he'll risk shelter, sustenance, security, and self-esteem (given the psychological burden of social rejection).
>
> In light of the punishments attached to nonconformism, what is striking is not how stable and coherent society is but how *unstable* and *incoherent* it is. People are constantly rebelling in both small and significant ways, constantly defying authority and its supposed "hegemony," constantly withholding their consent from their "superiors." I don't think these facts are emphasized enough in most historiography. We should think of the world more in terms of conflict—usually at least implicit and muted, often explicit and riotous—than consent or consensus. Or, more accurately, whatever "consent" people give to existing societal arrangements is, first and foremost, provisional and self-interested, grounded in the perception that they have to play by the rules of the game in order to survive and prosper. The antagonism of interests between classes and other groups of people (authorities vs. subordinates, rich whites vs. poor blacks, financiers vs. industrialists, and so forth) always has the potential to become explicit and disruptive, namely if people conclude that making it so will benefit them—or, alternatively, if they're just desperate and fed up with injustice. Economic depressions and other such moments of crisis are interesting to study because they reveal so starkly the conflictual essence of society. Masses of people conclude that they have little to lose, and the veneer of consent is stripped away.
>
> I'll have an in-depth discussion of these theoretical points in chapter three, where, among other things, I'll argue against Melvyn Dubofsky's perspective in an essay published in 1986, the content of which is summed up by its title: "Not So 'Turbulent Years': A New Look at the 1930s."[1] The sections below on historiography and on the third chapter return to these matters in some detail.

I've had second thoughts about all that.

Chomsky and Zinn had the good fortune to meet a good female early on; I wonder whether they would have been so idealistic about the species if they'd had to date two hundred, three hundred people, and just keep trying, trying, searching everywhere for *someone*....

Sure, I can have a good time and go on dates and be playful and laugh and flirt with these girls, but....it almost never amounts to anything, because neither of us is particularly enamored of the other. The aggregate of all these disappointments—countless—would deflate the optimism of a fucking Dalai Lama.

The human spirit, or at least *my* spirit, is astonishing. How am I able to be so positive and happy most of the time?? It defies physics, the laws of nature. I'm a rupture in spacetime.

Life has gotten rather monotonous lately, so, fuck it: I'm changing things a bit. Gonna hire a personal trainer at the university gym; gonna start getting up earlier than 10:30; gonna be more productive in general; gonna keep trying harder than ever to find a good, interesting, attractive woman. (Yeah, good luck with that, Chris.)

....I also noticed today that drinking coffee has a quite noticeable effect on my mental health and energy. Years ago I didn't like it, but I have no idea why. Gonna try to drink it regularly from now on. — The whole rest of the day I was in a great mood! Didn't even nap for two hours in the library! :-)

[…]

Spent the night at Amelia's place (the Pole from a couple years ago) after going on an OkCupid date with an Australian girl. There wasn't much chemistry with the latter—she was intelligent and beautiful but too talkative and not a good listener, and anyway wasn't attracted to me—but sensual Amelia made up for that. (She recently broke up with her boyfriend.)

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[1] Published in Charles Stephenson and Robert Asher, eds., *Life and Labor: Dimensions of American Working-Class History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986).

....About a dozen more internet dates, none of them amounting to anything. (Except that with one girl, who wanted to be friends, I later went to a great performance of Wagner's *Parsifal*.) What fun the dating world is! Endless joy and an endless string of successes.

Louis CK is right that your body has antibodies against sadness. In one moment you're in despair, full of loneliness and sheer exhaustion from the search for a good woman, crying, while ten minutes later you're happy and rejuvenated. Fascinating!

[…]

....Seriously, this summer, at least, I plan to live in Paris. I have to try it out once to see what it's like, lest I spend the rest of my life regretting that I never lived in Europe (aside from when I was 20) and wondering what might have been. I'm a foreigner in my country, that's clear and not an exaggeration; maybe the converse is true, that I'd be (relatively) at home in a foreign country. It's unfortunate and makes me feel "petty" that at 33 I'm still concerned with personal, subjective issues like my happiness and my desire to settle down with a good woman—it makes me feel behind the times, and behind my age (for I *should* only be concerned with my career and with contributing to collective political struggles)—but I simply *need a woman*, and evidently I'm not going to find a good one in the U.S. Or maybe I will, if I keep trying.... It's possible. But no more internet dating; it doesn't work.

Finished the first draft of the prospectus. That took up most of this semester, although at least half the time I was doing effectively nothing, just worrying or wondering or watching YouTube. It didn't feel right for me to write the AK Press book, so I didn't touch it. But just now I returned to it—and was reminded of what it's like to be inspired. It's going to be a pretty great book. *This* is what I have to do with my life, this anti-institutional creative stuff. Writing academically is anti-creative and depressing, given all its constraints. That's the real reason for my depression this semester, namely that I wasn't letting myself write creatively. So screw it. Next semester I'll try to finish the book, and do the dissertation on the side.

I've wasted enough time in recent months, and years. Getting back to work on the book immediately. Tonight.

My students wrote their TA evaluations today. Once again, almost uniformly positive. "He's a very compassionate person," "He's the coolest teacher I've ever had," "He'll make a great educator or history professor someday," "He's approachable, not intimidating like other TAs" (although it'd be nice to be thought intimidating for once), "Very helpful in clarifying the lectures," etc. One girl apparently wrote the professor an email saying I was "phenomenal": "I have nothing but great things to say about his passion for the field." It doesn't mean much, but it's nice to read comments like that.

Here's the prospectus for my dissertation:

Proposal for a dissertation tentatively titled
THE UNEMPLOYED IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION:
A STUDY IN THE RADICALISM OF "ORDINARY PEOPLE"
By Chris Wright

INTRODUCTION

In a time of widespread unemployment and economic stagnation, it is an odd fact about American intellectual culture that the unemployed are not at the center of scholarly and journalistic study. Innumerable works do exist about subjects that pertain at least indirectly to unemployment, such as urban poverty, deindustrialization, anti-black racism, and the "informal economy," but the unemployed themselves, *as* unemployed, seem to receive comparatively little attention. Especially from a social history point of view, the condition of unemployment—its continuities and discontinuities over time—has been understudied. One searches in vain in contemporary scholarship for thorough studies of how Americans have coped with the loss of jobs, how or if they have organized "self-help" groups in times of economic hardship, what sort

of political consciousness the unemployed have had, whether they have organized political resistance and what forms it has taken. What has unemployment done to the family, the neighborhood, social ties of all kinds? What categories of workers were most likely to be unemployed at particular times? How pronounced were the tendencies toward "apathy" or acquiescence that conventional wisdom assigns to the jobless? These are the kinds of questions that aren't sufficiently addressed in recent scholarship, and that in my dissertation I'll try to answer in relation to a specific point in time: the Great Depression.

I've chosen the Depression for several reasons. The least interesting one is that an abundance of sources exists for the 1930s, so there will be little difficulty in finding information. Letters, memoirs, oral histories, newspapers from organizations of the unemployed, publications by leftist political parties, studies of the unemployed conducted at the time, government hearings on unemployment, and government-sponsored studies of relief efforts are just some of the sources available. The 1930s are a "historian's playground," so to speak, arguably to a degree unmatched by other periods. There is also a rich historiography on the Great Depression that I'll be able to draw from—although most of the scholarship is not focused on the jobless in particular.

Another reason for my choice is that I think the world is now entering a period that will prove to have more than superficial resemblance to the Depression. History never exactly repeats itself, but it does "rhyme" (as Mark Twain supposedly said). As global economic stagnation worsens, millions more people in the U.S. will be thrown out of work and left to fend for themselves, especially with the federal government shedding its former obligations to the citizenry under the pressure of "austerity" politics.[1] One can expect increasingly many people to become as desperate as millions were in the early 1930s, when the jobless participated daily in mass actions across the country. The issue of unemployment will thus be forced onto the public agenda, although what will come of this cannot be predicted with any certainty. The point is that analyses of previous depressions, and of popular responses to being rendered "economically redundant," will surely become more timely and urgent than ever in the last eighty years. To study the struggles of the earlier jobless might even prove to be of practical use to activists in the present.

A third reason—closely related to the second—for my interest in the Depression is precisely that it was a time of unprecedented activism by the unemployed. It's true that in previous depressions the jobless had mobilized, for example when "Coxey's Army" marched to Washington, D.C. in 1894, but the scale and the sustained nature of protest in the 1930s were more impressive than in the past. Reading such newspapers as the *Chicago Hunger Fighter*, the *New Frontier*, the *Unemployed Citizen*, the *Unemployed News*, the *Cry for Justice*, the *Vanguard*, the *Workers Alliance*, and countless others—all of them written for, and many by, the unemployed—one is struck both by the sophistication of political analysis and by the extent of reported activism: continual protest marches in every major city and region of the country; innovative self-help movements from the west coast to the east; frequent anti-eviction "riots"; a proliferation of Unemployed Councils, Workers' Committees, Unemployed Leagues, and so on. For the historian, in fact, it's an embarrassment of riches. One can imagine getting lost in such an overabundance of material.

To prevent that from happening I'll stick to a specific theme and line of argument. In brief, I want to explore some of the ways in which the jobless exhibited "agency" in opposition to mainstream society and politics. I don't think there's enough emphasis in most historiography on the degree to which society is held together (tenuously) by *coercion* rather than *consent*—or on the fact that most people are not politically, culturally, or ideologically very integrated into the dominant social order. Certainly in mainstream culture there is an overemphasis on the supposed coherence of society, on, e.g., the supposedly capitalist, politically centrist values and practices of ordinary people. But even in contemporary historical scholarship, the great interest in discourses, social constructions, subjective identities, and cultural phenomena of all sorts tends to entail an extreme, idealistic version of Gramscianism—viz., the idea that

[1] This prediction shouldn't be controversial. It is the common sense of critical economists like Robert Brenner, David Harvey, Richard Wolff, John Bellamy Foster, Dean Baker, Nouriel Roubini, even the impeccably mainstream Paul Krugman.

insofar as societies are relatively stable, it is because mainstream culture serves as a powerful glue.[1] For the postmodernist, after all, social life is reducible to language, discourse, images, etc.; thus, if a society does not disintegrate, it must be because its denizens accept the predominant discourses. This conclusion is rarely articulated, but one is committed to it inasmuch as one accepts the idealistic postmodernist framework.

It seems to me, instead, that such factors as brute force and fear, "the dull compulsion of economic relations" (to quote Marx), and the ruling class's use of economic and political strategies to combat popular power are primarily responsible for the fact that capitalist society stays somewhat intact.[2] "Discourses" are of less significance. If this is true, it leaves a lot of analytical room for popular initiative, resistance to power-structures, working-class solidarity, oppositional subcultures, and so forth—only these things are suppressed, again and again, by the ruling class, as they ultimately were in the 1930s. One of my purposes in the dissertation, therefore, is to illustrate this general point, that the rule of the powerful is founded on the suppression of anti-capitalist values and practices that continually reappear among the population, such as "mutualism," concern for others, an egalitarian and democratic ethos—in fact an anarchist ethos—and collective resistance to oppression. A number of labor historians have substantiated this point, at least implicitly, in their research over the last fifty years, but rarely in relation to the unemployed as such.

So, in part I intend the dissertation to have a polemical purpose. I want to put the focus back on old insights, on historical materialism and on resistance to capitalism (surely a timely subject). It's useful, sometimes, not just to "neutrally" describe society in all its complexity but to point out general tendencies and illustrate them by examples. And the struggle—always implicit, sometimes explicit—between the relatively powerful and the relatively powerless, first and foremost in the economic sphere, is one such tendency, perhaps the most important. One of the main tasks of the historian, for both ethical and "scientific" reasons, should be to highlight and illuminate this struggle. As I'll describe below, therefore, I'll devote part of chapter three (and maybe the introduction) to arguing against the common perception mentioned above, that most people in a given society do not have an oppositional consciousness vis-à-vis the dominant classes and ideologies. As applied to the 1930s, this view is given sophisticated expression in a 1986 essay by Melvyn Dubofsky called "Not So 'Turbulent Years': A New Look at the 1930s."[3] Thus, I'll contest Dubofsky's position in chapter three and implicitly throughout the dissertation, by demonstrating the agency, solidarity, and rebelliousness of many among the unemployed.

In a sense it won't be difficult to make such an argument, because for much of the thirties the country pullulated with protest actions and organizations. On the other hand, the number of militant jobless was always a minority of the total, far outnumbered by the people who simply did what they had to do to survive. It will be tricky to investigate their political consciousness; I'll have to use oral histories, clues from popular culture, memoirs, and letters (of which several collections have been published, in addition to the thousands of letters that exist in archives I'll visit). Doubtless much of the evidence will conflict with a romantic radical's idealization of the masses' social and political consciousness. Nevertheless, I expect to be able to strike a balance, perhaps even leaning toward the "romantic" side, between the conventional notion of the unemployed's "apathy" and an overestimation of the leftist character of their values and beliefs.

My focus will be on the unemployed in Chicago from the early to the late 1930s, but I'll make frequent, and in some cases sustained, reference to other regions of the country. Chicago was central to the unemployed movement in the Great Depression, in terms of sheer numbers (tens of thousands were organized), the militancy of the rank and file, and the many victories won there by the Unemployed Council and the Workers' Committee (each with dozens of locals in the city)—the first organized by the Communist

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[1] Gramsci himself was a subtle and complicated thinker; I use the term "Gramscianism" only as a convenient label to indicate a certain trend of thought.

[2] See Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), and Patricia Cayo Sexton, *The War on Labor and the Left: Understanding America's Unique Conservatism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1991).

[3] Published in Charles Stephenson and Robert Asher, eds., *Life and Labor: Dimensions of American Working-Class History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986).

Party and the second by the Socialist. More broadly, the Midwest seems like a reasonable place to concentrate on, in light of the high rates of unemployment in this center of industry.

[Deleted the rest.]

*

It's always a joy to come home for the holidays. […] This time I've been given the gift of labyrinthitis, or something like it. Constant dizziness and slight queasiness, and no energy. Confined to bed for six days so far (with a day-long exception in the middle). Some virus, probably. Apparently the symptoms can last for weeks or months, or sometimes even years. It's hard to imagine not losing one's sanity in that case.

…The torture is pretty much over, thank God! The dizziness is mostly gone. Probably just because I drank a crapload of water today and took some decongestants. A week of semi-hell really makes you appreciate not being in hell. It's sad that we so take for granted the simple pleasures of life, like being able to see and walk and think without obstruction. What a remarkable thing is the body, an exquisitely tuned instrument that goes out of whack if just a minuscule part of the inner ear loses its equilibrium. Your entire being is wrecked by a tiny tubule being inflamed. Astonishing, incomprehensible beauty, the body! How wonderful ordinary life is!

January–April, 2014

When I turn from Göran Therborn's book *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?* (2008) to the one I've almost finished writing, it's like going from a foggy to a sunny day. All confusion with no clear vision versus clarity and sure-footedness. There is much of value in Therborn's book, but on the whole it's time for the old academic Marxists to fade away. Most of them have no sweeping historical vision and little theoretic ambitiousness or originality; in some ways they're stuck in the past, and they have no imagination. Also their writings tend to be pretentious and elitist.

My book is ten times better than my Masters thesis.

Still haven't reacquired my old love of academic reading. For months and months I've been sick of it.

One of the books I'd like to write someday is a comprehensive investigation of stupidity. Particularly stupidity in the realm of thought. Want to demonstrate its ubiquity, from politics to philosophy and so forth, and then try to explain it in various ways, using biology, psychology, and commonsense reasoning. It's just astonishing how *bad* people are at nearly all kinds of thinking (including empathy, etc.), and I want to understand this. In part it's a result of contemporary social structures, but in part there must be biological and psychological causes.

I'm not talking about things that require real talents, such as quantum physics or hyper-abstract philosophical reasoning or even being good at reading maps. I'm talking about common sense. Very few celebrated philosophers have philosophical common sense (for instance, they ask idiotic questions like "Can computers think?" or "Can computers understand language?," etc.); radical feminists and postmodernists have utterly stupid ideas about biology's irrelevance to gender norms or the mind being a nearly blank slate; intellectuals have idiotic conceptions of how politics works, and they have no institutional self-understanding; Leninists think it's possible for "the working class" to take over the national state, while anarchists are convinced that if only the state were abolished things would be great. And then there's the political right wing, and ordinary people everywhere. Wherever I turn, I'm suffocated by this miasma of stupidity. Up to a point it doesn't bother me, but, sometimes, it does get annoying and alienating to feel like one of the few truly sane people on the planet. (Luckily there's Chomsky.)

I've been reading *No Gods, No Masters*, an anthology of anarchism edited by Daniel Guerin. But the writings aren't very interesting. They haven't aged nearly as well as Marx's major works (or some of Engels'). When they're not full of confusions and sloppy thinking (Stirner, Proudhon), most of them are

just repetitive elaborations of the intuition that centralized power is bad, and airy speculations on how to organize a good society. Doubtless these speculations and plans are of moral value; in 2014, though, they're a bit dated.

Part of the problem, too, is that I'm bored with reading. All reading. Can't seem to stay interested in any book.

As I do research for my dissertation, I need some side-project to sustain me. For a long time I've wanted to write a book on the psychological and sociological dimensions of the left-right political spectrum (discussing the "authoritarian personality" and so on), but that may be too ambitious for a side-project. But what other book could I write? Maybe I could try that idea of interviewing homeless people, since homelessness is becoming a major issue and apparently there are no Studs Terkel-esque books on it. But I want to do something *creative* too. How can I possibly immerse myself in mere dissertation research for however-long-it-takes??

Two pieces of good news. First, I did the prospectus defense and passed, so now I'm officially "ABD." […]

Also, I finished the co-ops book. (Completely rewrote the last three chapters of the thesis and edited the first three.) Did some interviews with the worker-owners of New Era Windows in Chicago, wrote that chapter, and sent the thing off to AK Press. I feel liberated!—at least for the moment. Can move on to other things now.

…Weirdly, I haven't yet read the very important book *Poor People's Movements* (1977), by Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, only skimmed a few parts. Reading it now. –I find that, if I have a positive attitude, good books are still, after all, a pleasure to read. Even the less good ones can still be a pleasure if I shed the "impatient" attitude I've had for over a year of only wanting to *write*.

Speaking of which, I'm going to resume my old habit of writing random thoughts and summaries of good books, to put together another book sort of like my first one, *Notes of an Underground Humanist*. I might have to end up self-publishing it again, since publishers are rarely interested in honest and original books, but if self-publishing was good enough for Nietzsche, then it's good enough for me.

Taking the Greyhound bus to New York City to do research for the dissertation. At the Tamiment Library at NYU.

It seems that the older I get, the more I'm in awe of myself as a lone voice of reason against every kind of idiocy and conformism. The new book I'm writing confirms that.

Predictably, I've been much happier this semester than last, since I've had creative projects to devote myself to. I recall being lonely and a little bitter last semester, but whenever I have something to do those moods vanish.

May

For a couple weeks I was close to abandoning the dissertation and starting a new phase of my life without getting the Ph.D. Was seriously thinking about it, because I just couldn't see myself writing this damn thing. Ed Hunt sent me a few good emails, though, and my parents strongly encouraged me to continue, and finally Zhilan and her daughter gave me a long pep talk practically demanding that I get a Ph.D.—and I took a short vacation with them at Starved Rock State Park—so when I returned I got back to it and have been making slow but steady progress. Once you fully immerse yourself in it, this chapter I'm writing (the fourth) is actually kind of fun, however difficult and slow this sort of writing is for me.

I'm also writing an in-depth timeline of U.S. labor history for the Hull House, which they're going to hire professionals to make an interactive thing on their website. It'll have two parts, one a series of events

and the other to provide social and economic context. Here's the first part, which I did with the help of the internet:

1866: Founding of the National Labor Union

The NLU is the first national labor federation in the United States, dedicated in large part to fighting for the eight-hour day. This goal is not achieved nationally, though in 1868 Congress does establish the eight-hour day for government employees (a law not consistently enforced). The organization falls apart during the depression of the 1870s.

1869: Founding of the Knights of Labor

This nationwide organization grows in the 1870s as the NLU fades; by 1886, in the wake of major victories in strikes against railroad companies, it has 800,000 members. Its long-term aim is to bring about a cooperative commonwealth of labor in the United States, in which the wages system would be abolished and workers would control their own work. More immediately, it fights for the eight-hour day, higher wages, women's economic rights, racial equality, laws against child labor, and industrial unionism (according to which all workers in the same industry are organized into one union rather than separated by skill-level and occupations, as in craft unionism). It also facilitates the establishment of hundreds of worker cooperatives around the country.

Summer, 1877: the Great Railroad Strike, a.k.a. the Great Upheaval

In response to wage cuts, depression, unemployment, and savage treatment by capitalists, spontaneous strikes spread along railway lines from West Virginia to cities in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Missouri, and other states. By the time the colossal strike is crushed by state militias, police forces, and federal troops—after 45 days of fierce resistance by workers—a hundred people have been killed and 100,000 workers have gone on strike. Despite its defeat in 1877 by the combined forces of private power and government, the labor movement continues to grow rapidly in the 1880s.

May 4, 1886: Haymarket bombing in Chicago

At a rally in support of the national movement for an eight-hour day—a movement that has inspired half a million workers to go on strike on May 1, 1886—an unidentified person throws a bomb into the crowd that kills seven policemen and several civilians. In a subsequent trial much criticized for its lack of objectivity, eight anarchists are convicted of conspiracy (though not of throwing the bomb), seven of whom are sentenced to death. The bombing triggers a nationwide crackdown on the militant labor movement, dealing a tremendous blow to the Knights of Labor and the revolutionary hopes it symbolized.

December, 1886: Formation of the American Federation of Labor

The AFL is founded as a craft-union-based alternative to the Knights of Labor, and accordingly takes a relatively conservative approach to labor activism. It eschews "social movement unionism" and opposition to capitalism as such, focusing instead on bread-and-butter issues like wages and other incremental demands that can be won through collective bargaining. As the Knights of Labor collapses, the AFL slowly grows to encompass millions of (mostly skilled) workers.

July 2, 1890: Passage of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act

This law is intended to prohibit business activities that interfere with free competition. In one of history's many ironies, though, it is frequently used to justify injunctions against union activities, such as strikes, that are said to interfere with competition.

Summer, 1892: Homestead strike

In an attempt to destroy the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (AA), the powerful union of skilled workers at the Carnegie steel plant in Homestead, Pennsylvania, Henry Clay Frick locks them out of the plant. Other workers in the plant and town then go on strike in solidarity with their

fellows. The conflict escalates as Frick tries to break the strike with the help of 300 Pinkerton "detectives"—effectively a private army—but a bloody battle ensues between them and the townspeople of Homestead. The strike is finally defeated after the governor dispatches a militia against the workers, with the further result that the AA's power in the industry is broken. For the next forty years, the steel industry will remain essentially non-union.

Summer, 1894: Pullman strike

Factory employees of the Pullman Company in Chicago go on strike to protest their low wages and abysmal treatment by George Pullman. In solidarity, Eugene Debs and his American Railway Union declare a boycott of all trains carrying Pullman cars; at its peak, the boycott involves 250,000 workers. President Grover Cleveland sends troops to Chicago to get the trains moving again, which infuriates the strikers, who react with violence. At length the army is able to subdue the workers (at the cost of many lives) and end the strike, which results in the dissolution of the American Railway Union and the arrest of its leaders for violating a federal injunction against the strike.

1905: the Industrial Workers of the World is formed

Despite its many defeats, the militant wing of the labor movement remains unbowed. It forms the IWW as a radical, anarcho-syndicalist alternative to the more conservative AFL, and organizes workers along class lines rather than occupational lines. It is the only union at the time to welcome *all* people into its ranks, including immigrants, women, and African-Americans. Before it loses influence during the waves of government repression that follow World War I, it plays a major role in campaigns for free speech and in some of the era's most important industrial conflicts.

1909: Shirtwaist strike in New York

Workers in the garment industry, which employs primarily young women, vote for a general strike against low pay, long hours, awful working conditions, and discrimination for union activity. Led mostly by rank-and-file women, the strike of almost thirty thousand lasts eleven weeks. Finally employers give in to most of the workers' demands, including a shorter week, no discrimination against union loyalists, and negotiation of wages with employees. The groundwork for industrial unionism is laid in the garment industry as the International Ladies Garment Workers Union gains thousands of members, proving to conservative AFL leaders that a multi-ethnic, immigrant, female workforce is worth organizing.

March 25, 1911: Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in New York City

Locked inside the factory by its owners, 146 garment workers (mostly young women) die during the fire, many by jumping to their deaths from the ninth and tenth floors. While the factory's owners are not convicted of any crime, the incident leads to new safety regulations and a modernization of New York's labor laws.

January–March, 1912: Textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts

More than twenty thousand workers, again primarily women and girls, walk out of the mills in response to a pay cut. The IWW takes over leadership of the strike and establishes several innovative practices, such as sending strikers' children to sympathizers in other states who will temporarily care for them. The police beat mothers, children, and pregnant women, which so inflames national sentiment that Congress holds investigative hearings that reveal the terrible conditions at the Lawrence mills. Eventually the company agrees to nearly all the workers' demands, thus furthering the unionization of the garment industry.

April 20, 1914: Ludlow massacre

This event is the climax of the deadliest strike in U.S. history, called by the United Mine Workers in 1913 to protest horrific conditions at John D. Rockefeller's mines in Colorado. For months, company-instigated violence failed to break the will of the strikers and their families. On April 20, the National Guard

and local militiamen attack the strikers' tent colony with machine guns (killing several people), then set fire to the tents as workers and their families flee. Eleven children and two women suffocate and burn to death under one of the tents. Ultimately the strike is lost, but the government commission that investigates the massacre provides support for many union demands, such as the eight-hour day and abolition of child labor.

1916: Congress passes the Adamson Act

This law establishes the eight-hour day for railroad workers, with additional pay for overtime work. It is the first federal law to regulate hours of work in private companies.

1919: Postwar strike wave

Following World War I, four million workers go on strike for higher wages and better working conditions. The response by business and government is the "Red Scare," or demonization of strikers as Communists. The violent repression of the strikes presages a decade of terrible setbacks for labor, which end only with the upsurge of popular protest in the Great Depression.

1932: Norris-La Guardia Act is passed

This law bans "yellow-dog contracts," which stipulate that an employee cannot join a union during the course of his employment, and forbids federal courts from issuing injunctions against nonviolent labor disputes such as strikes. It is a great victory for organized labor, anticipating the more comprehensive Wagner Act of 1935.

April–June, 1934: Toledo Auto-Lite strike

Led by the small American Workers Party, and with the decisive help of class-conscious unemployed workers, employees of an auto parts plant in Toledo, Ohio walk off the job to achieve union recognition, improved working conditions, and a wage increase. The strike lasts almost two months and survives a five-day battle between workers and thousands of police and National Guard troops (a battle in which hundreds are injured and several killed). Under the threat of a general strike, Auto-Lite finally agrees to nearly all the union's demands. This victory leads to the rapid unionization of other workplaces in Toledo.

May–August, 1934: Minneapolis Teamsters strike

Local 574 of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters strikes for union recognition and its right to speak for all of its members. The city's commerce virtually shuts down as trucking operations come to a halt. Serving, as usual, as the business community's enforcers, the police violently but fruitlessly attempt to break the strike. After weeks of virtual civil war, employers finally give in to the union's demands—a victory that sets the Teamsters up to eventually become a major national union.

May–July, 1934: West Coast waterfront strike

First longshoremen, then sailors and other maritime workers, in every port on the West Coast go on strike for union recognition, a coast-wide contract, and a union-controlled hiring hall. After a brutal police action a couple months into the strike, dozens of unions in San Francisco vote for a general strike, which lasts four days. The dispute finally goes to arbitration, which hands the maritime workers several victories: for example, the International Longshoremen's Association gains substantial control over hiring on the docks, employees' wages increase, and shift hours are reduced.

September, 1934: Textile workers strike

Under the leadership of the United Textile Workers, 400,000 workers from New England to the South go on strike for a thirty-hour week, a minimum wage, union recognition, and better working conditions. "Flying squadrons" travel from plant to plant, calling workers out. In response, employers call on local and state authorities, who send the police and National Guard to wage near-war on the strikers

(especially in the South). At length the UTW calls off the strike, which ends in total failure. For the rest of the century the South remains largely un-unionized, despite CIO efforts to organize it.

July, 1935: Franklin Roosevelt signs the National Labor Relations Act into law

One of the U.S. labor movement's greatest victories, the NLRA (otherwise known as the Wagner Act) guarantees the right of private-sector employees to organize into unions and bargain collectively, and to strike. It forbids discrimination against workers for engaging in union activity or filing charges against their employer. For purposes of enforcement it establishes the National Labor Relations Board, which oversees elections for union representation and investigates charges of unfair labor practices.

August, 1935: Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act

This law creates the foundation of the modern U.S. welfare state, by providing federal assistance for the elderly, unemployment insurance, and assistance to children whose families have low income. In later years, particularly the 1960s, the law's provisions are made more generous, though still not comparable to the generosity of many European welfare systems.

November, 1935: the Committee for Industrial Organization is formed

Later called the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), its purpose is to do what the AFL has failed to do: organize workers in the mass-production industries, such as automobile and steel production, into one big union each. In the following years, such iconic mass unions as the United Autoworkers, the United Electrical Workers, the United Steelworkers, and the United Packinghouse Workers achieve unprecedented successes in their respective industries, and the CIO, having left the AFL, grows to encompass millions of workers by the late 1940s. At long last, the "industrial unionism" dream of the Knights of Labor and the IWW has to some extent been realized.

Winter, 1936-37: Sit-down strike against General Motors in Flint, Michigan

One of the most celebrated events in U.S. labor history, this strike leads to the unionization of much of the automobile industry and thereby the first major victory of the newly formed CIO. The new tactic of occupying the factory—rather than forming a picket line outside—is used to prevent the company from using strikebreakers and to make it harder for police to break up the strike. Within six weeks GM realizes it has no choice but to negotiate with the UAW; the resultant contract gives the union such prestige that in one year it gains 500,000 members.

March 2, 1937: U.S. Steel concedes the unionization of its employees

Since the summer of 1936, the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) (of the CIO) has been signing up thousands of steel workers as members, in the first stage of its drive to organize the steel industry. Early in 1937 the head of U.S. Steel, Myron Taylor, secretly meets with John L. Lewis, head of the CIO, and agrees not only to recognize SWOC as a bargaining agent but also to an eight-hour day for employees, a wage increase, seniority protection, and a grievance procedure. These astonishing concessions are due to Taylor's desire to avoid a strike at a time when Europe is preparing for war and needs to import steel.

May 30, 1937: Memorial Day massacre in Chicago

Chicago police shoot and kill ten unarmed demonstrators (injuring many others) in a crowd of hundreds who have gathered to protest the refusal of small steel manufacturers to negotiate with SWOC. No policeman is prosecuted.

1938: Fair Labor Standards Act is passed

In a sense the culmination of decades of activism, this law mandates an eight-hour day and forty-hour week (with "time-and-a-half" for overtime), the abolition of child labor, and a national minimum wage. It applies to employees whose work relates to interstate commerce. In subsequent decades the law is

expanded and improved upon many times, for instance by raising the federal minimum wage and by expanding coverage to some farm workers (in 1966).

1945-46: Postwar strike wave

After the conclusion of World War II, six million workers in the railroad, coal, automobile, oil, steel, electrical, maritime, and telephone industries go on strike—the largest strike wave in U.S. history. The pent-up frustrations of the war years, primary among them wage grievances, erupt in this rank-and-file upsurge met by repression that is not nearly as serious as in 1919. The workers win many of their less-radical demands, but the settlements negotiated by unions, companies, and the federal government set the stage for the conservative "liberal consensus" of the 1950s.

June 23, 1947: Congress passes the Taft-Hartley Act

Perhaps the most significant event in the early backlash against the New Deal and its empowerment of unions, the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act rolls back many of the advances labor has gained by the Wagner Act. It prohibits secondary strikes and boycotts, wildcat strikes, strikes by federal employees, and the "closed shop," and allows states to pass "right-to-work" laws that ban the "union shop" (in which newly hired employees must become union members within a specified period of time). It also requires union leaders to sign affidavits saying they are not members of the Communist Party, a requirement that effectively purges many of the most militant activists from unions and contributes to the anti-Communist hysteria of the postwar years.

1955: Merger of the AFL and the CIO

In the context of the Cold War, the AFL-CIO is a conservative, bureaucratic organization that shows none of the social movement mentality of the CIO in the 1930s. Under George Meany, it supports U.S. imperialism in Vietnam and Latin America, and takes a generally conservative stance on the civil rights movement and feminism. Later, under Lane Kirkland in the 1980s, it is largely ineffectual in defending workers and unions from conservative attacks.

January 17, 1962: Federal employees win the right to collectively bargain

This landmark executive order signed by John F. Kennedy is a factor in the explosive growth of public-sector unionism in the 1960s and 1970s, as many states follow Kennedy's example and permit state employees to unionize. The number of public-sector strikes also dramatically increases, even in cases where they are illegal.

June 10, 1963: Kennedy signs the Equal Pay Act

An amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act, this law is intended to end wage disparities between the sexes. It prohibits sex discrimination in the payment of wages, thus allowing women's pay to rise dramatically in the next fifty years (though on average it remains lower than men's).

July 2, 1964: Lyndon Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act

Title VII of this Act outlaws workplace discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion, or national origin (age and disability being added later).

Late 1960s–1970s: United Farm Workers organizes workers in California

Under the leadership of César Chávez, the UFW does what Saul Alinsky thought impossible: it organizes tens of thousands of farm workers and forces growers to sign union contracts. This is achieved through such unconventional tactics as mass boycotts (by 1975, 17 million Americans are boycotting grapes), hunger strikes, marches, and community organizing. In 1975 the Agricultural Labor Relations Act passes in California, guaranteeing farm workers the right to organize, bargain with employers, and vote in state-supervised union elections.

December 29, 1970: Occupational Safety and Health Act becomes law

Before this law, government's attention to issues of workplace safety has been scattered and minimal. Thousands of workers were killed in the workplace each year, and millions were harmed or disabled. The OSH Act establishes an infrastructure (the OSH Administration, or OSHA) to enforce health and safety regulations.

August, 1981: Air Traffic Controllers strike

The Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) goes on strike for better working conditions and higher pay. President Reagan fires the 11,000 employees who have ignored his order to return to work, essentially destroying PATCO and signaling to employers that it's open season on unions. In the 1980s, the federal government stops enforcing many of the Wagner Act's provisions to protect workers and unions.

1985: Hormel Foods strike

In one of the longest strikes of the 1980s (lasting ten months), Hormel workers in Austin, Minnesota take a stand against the epidemic of wage cuts occurring in the U.S. manufacturing and food industries. The strike becomes a media sensation and leads to a national boycott of Hormel products, but in the end the workers cannot hold out against the opposition of their parent union (the United Food and Commercial Workers) and Hormel's determination to defeat them.

Late 1980s: SEIU's Justice for Janitors campaign begins

One of the most successful organizing campaigns in recent history, it has its first major victories in Los Angeles and spreads around the country in the succeeding decades. It uses many of the tactics of the United Farmworkers, which draw media attention. The campaign succeeds in raising wages for many thousands of janitors and improving their working conditions.

December 8, 1993: Bill Clinton signs NAFTA into law

The North American Free Trade Agreement between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico continues the neoliberal attack on workers and unions (under the guise of promoting "free markets"). By cutting back numerous regulations and social protections, in the next twenty years it contributes to record income inequality in North America, wage cuts, the loss of a million U.S. jobs, unions' catastrophic loss of power, the decimation of Mexico's peasantry and resultant influx of immigrants into the U.S., and the erosion of environmental protections. (See the Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch report "NAFTA's 20-Year Legacy," at www.citizen.org.)

November 30–December 1, 1999: Seattle protests occur against the World Trade Organization

Tens of thousands of protesters, including trade unionists, environmentalists, students, and representatives of many left-wing groups, demonstrate and march through the streets of Seattle as the WTO meets downtown. The first major U.S. protest against corporate globalization, it provokes a savage response by the Seattle police force and hostile treatment by the media. Nonetheless, it successfully disrupts WTO negotiations and forces the mainstream media to acknowledge the alter-globalization movement.

February–June, 2011: Protests in Madison, Wisconsin

Over a hundred thousand people demonstrate in and around the Capitol building in protest against Governor Scott Walker's bill to strip public employees (excluding police and firefighters) of the right to collectively bargain over pensions, health care, hours, safety, sick leave, and vacations, and to limit their pay raises, in addition to ending automatic union dues collection by the state. The bill passes and subsequently survives legal challenges. In the following years anti-union measures continue to pass in other states, as when Michigan and Indiana become "right-to-work" states in 2012.

Fall, 2011: Occupy Wall Street

While not strictly a labor action, this series of protests initiating in New York City and spreading around the world continues the post-NAFTA tradition of organized labor's allying itself with other progressive forces to achieve common ends. The immediate target of OWS is the growing income inequality in the U.S., but more fundamentally it is directed against the very political economy of neoliberalism. On November 15 the New York protesters are forcibly evicted from Zuccotti Park, and similar crackdowns are coordinated across the country. Nevertheless, OWS succeeds in putting the issue of economic inequality onto the public agenda.

September, 2012: Chicago Teachers Union strike

Rejecting the paradigm of narrow "business unionism" and concessionary bargaining that most unions have followed in recent decades, the CTU embraces a militant, social-movement strategy to fight back against the national assault on public schools and teachers' unions. Having painstakingly built up community support for teachers and students, the CTU is able to mobilize many thousands of people in picket lines and protest marches through the streets of Chicago to fight for improved public education. Drawing international attention, the strike makes possible what is widely considered a victory for the union in its contract negotiations with the Chicago Public School system.

*

Sent Chomsky an email: "Hi. I take it you don't think that "compatibilism" provides any solution to the mystery of free will, right? Have you written about compatibilism anywhere? It certainly seems to me that the ideas of free will and of deterministic neural processes that produce consciousness are in conflict, but many philosophers seem to disagree… (Which is weird. Do you understand how they can think that determinism and free will are perfectly compatible?? Surely there are two options: either you're free, or you're determined. Right?)" His answer: "Agreed."

Going to Paris for the summer on June 4. Thank God for that option. Some people are stuck in this country without any recourse! Presumably I'll come back in August—or maybe I'll take a semester off, or who knows… My plans for doing a home-stay with a French family fell through, so now I'm just going to Paris on a wing and a prayer. Which will probably be more fun anyway. Going to find an apartment to rent and take it from there. Studying French this month.

June, July

Another phase of life ending and a new one beginning… Moved out of my four-year apartment (will find a different one in the fall, if/when I come back to Chicago). Nine or ten weeks in Paris isn't much, but hopefully it'll rejuvenate me a little. I'm storing most of my things in Zhilan's apartment. I'll kind of miss her and her brilliant daughter Lulu this summer, by the way. For a long time I've spent pretty much every weekend in their apartment (helped them move to a new, better one closer to downtown in February), and sometimes weekdays too. I have a few decent friends in Chicago […], but on the whole my acquaintanceships are pretty shallow. So the only people who have been deeply in my life are Zhilan and Lulu.

…In Paris. Stayed at a hostel in Montmartre for a couple days; now I'm at the home of a girl I found through the Couchsurfing website, who offered to let me stay for six days, until I can move in to the apartment I found. It's in the fifteenth arrondissement and costs only 800 euros for the whole summer! Incredible. It's tiny, but it has all the necessities and is in a good location.

[…] It was probably stupid of me to come here. You don't truly appreciate things until you lose them for a while. I even miss Chicago a little, or its comforting familiarity. And Lulu and Zhilan. If nothing else, this trip has cured me, for a long time, of restlessness. All I really want now is "domestic bliss"—a wife, maybe children, a stable job. Three things I won't get.

Wise words from Lulu: “mmmmmhmmmmmmmm, i told you, it is absolutely retarded for your future to go to paris, first you need to do your dissertation, and then you need to be focusing on finding a TA job. And you cant do that in Paris. You also need to find a new apartment in Chicago, and you cant do that in another country, You dont think before doing. Paris sounds like PARIS to u, and you forgot what paris REALLY is and all your worries in Chicago. Tisk Tisk. Btw this is lulu, just saying, my mom wouldn't say this to you, im on her email.” But I was depressed and lonely in Chicago, desperate for a change.

…So, here’s an interesting development: the woman from whom I rented the apartment, to whom I gave 800 euros (for two months), scammed me, along with two other people. She rented it to three people at the same time. The two others showed up yesterday, and after talking to the landlord—whom she scammed too—he agreed to let them stay for a while. I showed up today, so it was too late; the place has already been given to them. (One woman has it for two weeks, the other for a month.) Maybe I acted stupidly, but I truly had no reason to suspect this woman’s intentions. She seemed totally legitimate: gave me the keys, wrote up a contract, was very friendly, etc. I guess I assumed she wasn’t capable of such depravity. So now I’m out 800 euros, and I have nowhere to stay. I’m tired of lugging my luggage around the city, going to a hostel here, a couchsurfer there, another hostel there…

On a brighter note, I went to a concert tonight in a theater on the Champs-Elysees, with a Parisienne from OkCupid. Rossini’s *La scala di seta*. Tomorrow I’m meeting another girl, then the next day going to a picnic, then the next two days two other girls.

Poor Zhilan. My heart aches for her, for her probably lonely future. It’s going to be very hard for her to accept that we’re just friends now. She sent me this email today:

> I am desperate right now. Just thinking three years close relationship with you, and you wanted me to be just a friend with you now.
>
> We met in a galley, We traveled 30 minutes to just kiss each other 15 minutes, you babysittered little lulu ...Just look at how happy we were in those subway pictures..my love for you is in my paintings, you were and will be my muse to my art…gosh, I don't think I will have all those beautiful memory with any other man in my later life. The best part of my life—full of youth, beauty and hope will be gone, when we say goodbye to each other. […]

The world is full of such pain. And getting older in itself can be such a painful process—thinking of past pleasures and present worries.

Exactly a month after going to Paris I returned to the U.S. Sitting in the LaGuardia airport now, waiting to fly to Chicago, where I’ll stay with Zhilan until I find an apartment. Visited Emily in Berlin, had some interesting experiences (e.g., almost got into a fight with a buffoonish drunk German xenophobe who was remarkably offended that I was American). But I was rather lonely in Paris, and it’s just not much fun to experience such a city alone (notwithstanding the friends I made). Missed Lulu and Zhilan, and I decided I should get back to the dissertation research, since the Paris vacation was going nowhere. I’m glad I went, though, for many reasons. And even though the U.S. disgusts me, it’s my home—mainly because I only speak English. I can’t very well live abroad.

August–November

Spent the night with a girl I met on OkCupid, Gloria, pretty, intelligent, 24 years old. Works as a consultant at Loews; regaled me with tales of the absurdity of the corporate world. First time meeting her; we had a great conversation at a wine bar and then proceeded to her apartment ten minutes away, where things heated up. A passionate young woman who clearly enjoys casual sex. I didn’t get a wink of sleep. But I don’t know if we’ll see each other again; it seemed like only a one-night stand.

To get periodic respite from the tedium of history writing, I've decided to start reading philosophy again. I really miss it; it can be much more stimulating than academic history. Starting with ethics: Alasdair MacIntyre's famous book *After Virtue* (1981)—which I'm finding to be deeply flawed, even ridiculous in places, but very thought-provoking. I'm also publishing my third book, called *Finding Our Compass: Reflections on a World in Crisis*. (First part of the title from Dad, again.) If anybody in my department reads it I'm doomed, because it's extremely critical of intellectuals and academia; but there are more than enough conforming cowards in the world, not enough people with the balls to tell the truth.

As for Zhilan and Lulu: the former, amazingly, found a new boyfriend a couple months ago, a young Jewish pianist who teaches at a college. Things seem to be going pretty well with them, so far; they tell each other they're in love and so on, and he just invited her to a wedding. I still spend a day or two at her place every weekend, mainly to talk to and 'mentor' Lulu. Brilliant, charismatic girl. She has a bright future ahead of her.

Now I'm reading G. E. M. de Ste. Croix's massive book *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World, from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (1982). Also Christine Korsgaard's *The Sources of Normativity* (1996). Taking notes on the former, to publish them in my next book. Once I've read enough books on ethics I'll write a paper or a couple chapters on it, drawing on the long paper I wrote years ago.

Also want to write a chapter or paper on the concept and reality of pretentiousness throughout history. It's much deeper and more socially interesting—and important—than people think. I included thoughts on it in my last book, but they were too condensed.

Random thought: I'd certainly be lonelier in Chicago—and I am lonely here—if it weren't for Lulu, who is much more interesting and fun than nearly all adults. Even if she can be rather unkind from time to time. She enjoys our intellectual conversations and, of course, being 12, isn't cursed with the pretentiousness that so many intellectuals are. There's a bond between us, of some sort. But maybe the most satisfying thing is to know that she'll get older and be a quite impressive person, and as a friend (probably) I'll be able to observe the process and influence it and make an impact on her life—as indeed I already have. In a world of artificiality and stupidity, one needs a few close bonds.

Here are my notes on Ste. Croix's book:

Thoughts on a Masterpiece

Some academic books are worth knowing about even if one doesn't have the time or inclination to read them. G. E. M. de Ste. Croix's *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World, from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (1981) is one of those, far too massive and dense for even most intelligent laypeople to read but too valuable for them not to know about. It is almost impossibly rich, and deserves to last as long as intellectually curious people exist. For it does what very few historians not only do but are even interested in: it *profoundly explains*—an enormous period of history—rather than simply describes or "plays with texts" to "uncover new meanings" and "reveal contestations" over "discourses" that must then be "problematized" and so forth. It gets straight to the point unpretentiously, determined to make 1400 years of history comprehensible on the basis of a few simple concepts. And what are those concepts? Marxist ones, of course. Class, class struggle, and exploitation. Even if one hadn't read a single other Marxist work, this book would have to convince one of the value of Marxian methods—as it did many mainstream classicists when it was published, who reviewed it rapturously even when they had criticisms.

Since the application of Marxism to antiquity was virtually unknown when the book was published, being considered anachronistic, as if classes hadn't really existed then—a transparently ideological fantasy, but an understandably popular one in a capitalist society characterized by institutional (academic) fragmentation and the subordination of intellectuals to bourgeois habits of thought[1]—Ste. Croix has to

[1] As Ste. Croix says, in criticism of historians who reject "all this theoretical stuff, about class structures and social relations and historical method," "it is a serious error to suppose that unconsciousness of ideology, or even a complete lack of interest in it, is the same thing as absence of ideology. In reality each of us has an ideological approach to

devote some of the book to analysis of his main concepts. They're fairly intuitive. An economic *surplus* is "that part of an individual's labor of which he does not directly enjoy the fruit himself, and the immediate benefits of which are reserved for others."

> *Class* (essentially a relationship) is the collective social expression of the fact of exploitation, the way in which exploitation is embodied in a social structure. By *exploitation* I mean the appropriation of part of the product of the labor of others [i.e., the surplus]: in a commodity-producing society this is the appropriation of what Marx called "surplus value."
>
> A *class* (a particular class) is a group of persons in a community identified by their position in the whole system of social production, defined above all by their relationship (primarily in terms of the degree of ownership or control) to the conditions of production (that is to say, the means and labor of production) and to other classes…
>
> It is of the essence of a *class society* that one or more of the smaller classes, in virtue of their control over the conditions of production (most commonly exercised through ownership of the means of production), will be able exploit—that is, to appropriate a surplus at the expense of—the larger classes, and thus constitute an economically and socially (and therefore probably also politically) superior class or classes. The exploitation may be direct and individual, as for example of wage-laborers, slaves, serfs, "coloni," tenant-farmers or debtors by particular employers, masters, landlords or moneylenders, or it may be indirect and collective, as when taxation, military conscription, forced labor or other services are exacted solely or disproportionately from a particular class or classes (small peasant freeholders, for instance) by a State dominated by a superior class.
>
> I use the expression *class struggle* for the fundamental relationship between classes (and their respective individual members), involving essentially exploitation, or resistance to it. It does not necessarily involve collective action by a class as such, and it may or may not include activity on a political plane, although such political activity becomes increasingly probable when the tension of class struggle becomes acute…
>
> *Imperialism*, involving some kind of economic and/or political subjection to a power outside the community, is a special case, in which the exploitation effected by the imperial power (in the form of tribute, for instance), or by its individual members, need not necessarily involve direct control of the conditions of production. In such a situation, however, the class struggle within the subject community is very likely to be affected, for example through support given by the imperial power or its agents to the exploiting class or classes within that community, if not by the acquisition by the imperial power or its individual members of control over the conditions of production in the subject community.[1]

Doubtless some academic would quibble with these definitions, but one could make them more precise and perfectly defensible. The most controversial one would be that of class struggle, since it doesn't refer to class consciousness or explicit *struggle*. The struggle can be, and usually is, only implicit. That seems reasonable to me, in part because people among the exploited classes are constantly resisting or objecting to their position in small or large ways—and so actually the struggle is continually explicit, on an individual level if not a collective one—but also because logically there *is* a struggle, a clash, of interests between the

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history, resulting in a particular historical methodology and set of general concepts, whether conscious or unconscious. To refuse—as so many do—to define or even to think about the basic concepts we employ simply results in our taking over without scrutiny, lock, stock and barrel, the prevailing ideology in which we happen to have been brought up…" (p. 34).

[1] The twentieth-century policies of the U.S. government with respect to Latin America are an excellent instance of both of these examples. When it (or members of its ruling class) didn't simply take control of property and the means of production, the U.S. regularly propped up the ruling classes.

exploiters and the exploited. The former's interest lies in extracting a greater surplus, the latter's in decreasing the size of the surplus extracted.[1]

On this understanding, Marx's frequently ridiculed apothegm is right: the history of all hitherto existing complex societies is the history of class struggles. In fact, this isn't only because class antagonism (struggle) is present in all of them; more importantly, it's because the class structure is the foundation of institutional structures in general, and thus of the framework within which people live and interact. Why can it be called the foundation? Simply because people in the dominant positions of the class structure directly appropriate—necessarily—a sufficient surplus to ensure their continued domination (i.e., to give them the resources with which to continue their domination), and this means they have the resources to ensure that most other institutions and practices are compatible with or subservient to their power. They are the people and groups with the most wealth and resources, and so, obviously, they are better able than others to dictate what forms society and culture will take. This truism is enough to establish the controversial but utterly obvious Marxian metaphor that the economic structure, or class structure, is society's foundation, the "superstructure" (in a loose sense) being politics, culture, and ideology. –In short, the institutions and people with the most resources have the most influence in determining the forms and content of social life.

Class struggle is central to history in still more ways; for instance, virtually by analytical necessity it has been, directly or indirectly, the main cause of most popular resistance and rebellions. Likewise, the ideologies and cultures of the lower classes have been in large measure sublimations of class interest and conflict. Most wars, too, have been undertaken so that rulers (effectively the ruling class) could gain control over resources, which is sort of the class struggle by other means. Wars grow out of class dynamics, and are intended to benefit the rich and powerful. In any case, the very tasks of *survival* in complex societies are structured by class antagonisms, which determine who gets what resources when and in what ways.

–Duh.

From such reflections as these one should already suspect that materialist class analysis will have to be the basis for any explanation of history. Certainly many other factors must come into play, but class is the fundamental one. It gives societies their overall dynamics and provides most of the context for what goes on in them. In fact, it "discloses the real secrets of history: the springs and causes of human behavior and social change." The best proof of its value as a historical and sociological concept is its fruitfulness; for it has made possible an immense amount of brilliant scholarship since the nineteenth century, which totally eclipses any other school of thought.

Ste. Croix argues that there are two fundamental differences between the ancient world and the modern: first, the former had infinitely more primitive technology. It didn't even have the wheelbarrow! Since it was, therefore, enormously less productive than our own world is, some means had to be found—unless everyone was to have to work practically all the time—to extract the largest possible surplus out of a considerable number of those at the bottom of society. So, in order to have cities and aristocratic leisure and so forth, the propertied classes in Greece and Rome had to derive their surplus not from wage-labor, as in capitalist society, but from unfree labor of various kinds. (Nor was wage-labor plentifully available anyway, or very skilled.) This is the second fundamental difference. The ancient world had debt bondage and a kind of serfdom, as we'll see, but the most important form of unfree labor was slavery—including in agriculture, which is (wrongly) denied by some classicists. It's true that a large part of production was done by small free producers, mainly peasants but also artisans and traders. Nevertheless, Ste. Croix goes so far as to call the Greek and Roman world a slave-owning society or a slave economy, because it was through slavery that the dominant propertied class—landowners—ensured the extraction of the surplus they needed

[1] Tellingly, throughout history dominant classes have had a high degree of class consciousness, usually being much more aware of, and prepared to act on, their unity of interest than exploited classes. Just read the publications of business groups in the U.S. during the last hundred years, and think of their highly coordinated public relations campaigns to secure the population's (passive) consent and extract its money. Something similar was the case over two thousand years ago: Xenophon writes of slaveowners being prepared to act "as unpaid bodyguards of each other against their slaves." Ironically, then, the "struggle" has typically been more full-fledged and conscious on the side of the oppressors than the oppressed.

for their own leisured existence. *This* is the key point, and it is why Marx said slavery was the foundation of the ancient world even though most production—until the later Roman empire—was done by relatively free peasants and some artisans. Incidentally, these classes too were exploited in various ways, as by taxation, military conscription, or forced services exacted by the state.

In support of his own class-based interpretation of antiquity, Ste. Croix points out that it was substantially shared by Aristotle. (He also inserts a few jabs at Plato, the anti-Aristotle. "The wildly exaggerated respect which has been paid down the ages to Plato's political thought is partly due to his remarkable *literary* genius and to the anti-democratic instincts of the majority of scholars. Plato was anti-democratic in the highest degree.") "Like so many other Greeks, Aristotle regarded a man's economic position as the decisive factor in influencing his behavior in politics, as in other fields." Evidently he had common sense. He understood that the rich property-owners (landowners) wanted pure oligarchy and the poor extreme democracy; he preferred the middle layers, who because of their moderate amount of property tended to be moderate in opinions and behavior. (Proto-Marxism.) Interestingly, he remarks that in some oligarchical city-states of his day, the oligarchically-minded take the oath, "I will bear ill-will towards the common people, and I will plan against them all the evil I can." A refreshingly honest oath. Other Greek thinkers, too, understood these categories. Euripides says in one play that there are three kinds of people: "the greedy and useless rich; the covetous poor, easily led astray by scurvy demagogues; and 'those in the middle,' who can be the salvation of the city." Essentially the reason why Aristotle and later thinkers favored a "mixed constitution" in which there is a balance between rich and poor is that this was a way of ensuring a balance in the political class struggle. –Much of what Aristotle says in the *Politics* clearly influenced James Madison and others of our "Founding Fathers," as shown by the proto-Marxism and Golden Mean-ism of passages in the *Federalist Papers*, as well as in correspondence they wrote to each other.

Not only does Aristotle tend to think in terms of class struggle; he even identifies groups defined according to their role in production, namely working farmers, independent artisans, traders, and wage-laborers. And he understands that city-states' constitutions will be of different types according to the relative strength of these different elements. No wonder Marx loved him! It's clear, in any event, that the notion of class is relevant to ancient society and was acknowledged to be so by many thinkers of the time (including even Plato).

Next is a long discussion about why class is not only relevant but more useful than alternative notions like status and "orders" (e.g., citizens, freedmen, the Roman senatorial order, equestrians, and resident foreigners. Orders were very important in the ancient world, as, indeed, in Europe's Middle Ages). Many criticisms can be given of Max Weber's emphasis on status as opposed to class—and of his notion of class itself, which is vague and has more to do with market relations and income than relations of production (which are surely what provide the main explanation for people's market position and income anyway; see Erik Olin Wright)—but Ste. Croix's main one is that Weberian "status groups" and even "classes" have no *organic relationship* with one another, "and consequently they are not dynamic in character but merely lie side by side, so to speak, like numbers in a row." Marxian classes are defined by their relations to other classes; the members of a Weberian class or status group have no necessary relationship to the members of another class or status group as such. It's hard to explain social change on the basis of this static, atomistic and inorganic conception, whereas it's much easier on the Marxian conception (of irreconcilable interests, antagonistic production relations, and so forth). Of course status groups can be very important to people's lives and the overall character of a society, and even to some political conflicts;[1] on the whole, though, they're more useful for *description* than *explanation*. This is one of the reasons for Ste. Croix's criticisms of the famous classicist Moses Finley, who had less interest in classes than status groups.

[1] But in many such conflicts class interests are very relevant, perhaps in complex ways, even if at first glance they don't seem to be. They frequently are disguised behind, and help determine, the overt issues. See Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and *The Class Struggles in France*.

Ste. Croix's discussion of women is much less satisfactory than the discussion of class vs. status, for he argues that women in antiquity constituted their own social class. Which is absurd. To broaden the concept of production so that it includes biological reproduction is to render it almost meaningless. Nor is an economic surplus necessarily appropriated by men, as such, from women, as such. Sure, the latter are dominated and subordinated, but that is quite different from exploitation in the technical sense. The realm of biology shouldn't be confused with the realm of economic production, to which sex is an external consideration, however much women may occupy particular positions in the relations of production (even sometimes *as women*—but then they're exploited as a result of their location in the economic structure, not directly as a result of having vaginas and ovaries).

Let's get to the non-methodological stuff. The leisured, propertied class (almost entirely landed property)—a tiny minority—of course was differentiated into the more or less wealthy, those who owned more or less property and therefore slaves. Some examples: "the owner of a large or even medium-sized farm, worked by slaves under a slave bailiff, or leased out at a rent; the proprietor of a workshop of, say, 20–50 slaves, supervised by a slave manager; the lessee of mines in the Laurium district of Attica, worked by slaves, and similarly supervised by a manager who would himself be a slave; the owner of a merchant ship or two which he hired out to traders or used for trading himself, manning them with slaves…" Lots of slaves. Though also other kinds of unfree labor, as Ste. Croix emphasizes. Greece was actually rather poor, though, as were its great landowners, compared to Persia and later Rome. The great Roman senators of the empire were astoundingly wealthy; next to them, Greece's aristocrats were petty stuff. The Roman empire, or rather its ruling class, swam in wealth.

As in many later societies, the landed aristocracy sneered at people who had gained their wealth from trade or manufactures. Leisure was the mark of the gentleman. And these value-judgments were to some degree shared by most of the population: "the ideas of a dominant class (at least if it is not a conquering, alien race) are always accepted in some measure by those it exploits, and most of all (as modern experience shows) by those who are near the top level of the exploited and see themselves as about to rise into the ruling class. And most of the words used in Greek to express social qualities and distinctions were heavily loaded with the moral overtones that had always been associated with them [e.g., that being a tradesman was demeaning], so that the poorer Greek would find it hard to avoid expressing himself in the very terms that proclaimed his unworthiness." The very vocabulary that societies use is inflected with class, partly determined by it.

Slavery and forced labor, serfdom, and debt bondage were widespread in the ancient world, the former three usually resulting from conquest (except in the later Roman empire, when serfdom emerged more organically). Athens was unusual in at least one respect: Solon abolished debt bondage in 594 B.C., a truly radical reform. The ancients themselves divided mankind into only two categories, slave and free, but there were in fact many intermediate statuses. Athens made especially intense use of slavery, despite—but also because of—its democracy. That's ironic, but it was because of democracy that the upper class couldn't exploit the humbler citizens to the degree it could in other places, so it had to rely exceptionally on rights-less slaves.[1] "This [class-based hypothesis] *explains* 'the advance, hand in hand, of freedom and slavery' in the Greek world, noted by Finley but left by him as a kind of paradox, entirely without explanation" (because Finley doesn't like to invoke class). Democracy can cause the intensification of slavery, and slavery can help make possible democracy—for some people. Fascinating!

Why weren't there more slave revolts, if there were so many slaves? Mainly because slaves in each city, and often even in single families and farms and workshops, were largely imported "barbarians" and very heterogeneous in character, coming from South Russia, Thrace, Lydia, parts of Asia Minor, Egypt, Sicily, Libya, etc. They didn't have a common language or culture. "The desirability of choosing slaves of different nationalities and languages was well recognized in antiquity, and it is stressed by several Greek and Roman writers as an indispensable means of preventing revolts." Yes, the old trick of divide-and-

[1] As Ste. Croix says, insofar as democracy gave the poor some power, it "played a vital part in the class struggle by mitigating the exploitation of poorer citizens by richer ones—a fact that seldom receives the emphasis it deserves."

conquer, used to fantastic effect by modern capitalists when trying to maintain control over their work force. Most techniques of power are timeless.

Serfdom was much less common than slavery in the Greek world: before the late Roman empire there were only isolated *local* forms of it, for instance the Helots of Sparta, and on temple estates in Hellenistic Asia Minor. (This serfdom on sacred land was probably a residue of forms of serfdom that had earlier been widespread in Asia.) "It is essential to realize, however, that these [west Asian] forms of serfdom tended to dissolve as a result of contact with the more advanced Greek and Roman economy (above all, no doubt, when the land came into the ownership or under the control of Greeks or hellenized natives or of Romans), and after a few generations virtually ceased to exist, except as part of very conservative complexes such as temple estates… Until the introduction of the Later Roman colonate, serfdom failed to maintain itself in the Greek world (or in the rest of the Roman empire), and when it disappeared in a particular area, there is no sign that it was re-established." But in various places, like Ptolemaic Egypt, even some non-serf peasants (who weren't tied to the land) were subject to very strict controls and supervision. In cases where serfdom disappeared after coming into contact with Greeks and Romans, some of the peasants sank even further, into slavery, whereas in other places they became freer, like if their territory was incorporated into a city.

"It was only at the end of the third century A.D. that legislation began to be introduced, subjecting to forms of legal serfdom the whole working agricultural population of the Graeco-Roman world. In outline, leasehold tenants (*coloni*) became serfs, bound either to their actual farms or plots or to their villages and almost as much subject to their landlords as were slaves to their masters, even though they remained technically *ingenui*, free men rather than slaves; working peasant freeholders too were tied, to their villages." Later in the book he'll give explanations for this and other changes from the Archaic Age to the late empire. For now, he's just describing the whole socioeconomic framework.

As for debt bondage, it is "virtually certain that forms of [it] existed at all times in the great majority of Greek cities." David Graeber demonstrates the profound significance of debt to the ancient world in his book *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (on which I've commented in *Finding Our Compass: Reflections on a World in Crisis*). The consequence of defaulting on a debt in Greek cities might be enslavement or the sale of one's children. "In Ptolemaic Egypt, there is clear evidence both for outright enslavement for debt and for debt bondage; but in the Roman period the latter seems to have replaced the former. [A rare instance of Roman humanity, perhaps?] It is difficult to generalize about Greek cities, but it does look as if debt bondage largely superseded outright enslavement for debt during the Hellenistic period." In early Roman law, the position of the defaulting debtor was even worse. "His creditors might keep him in chains; and ultimately…they might cut his body in pieces and divide the parts among themselves." Lovely. It was clearly a rosy time to live. "The wealthy Roman regarded a defaulting debtor who had been driven to borrow because of dire need, rather than for some speculative or luxurious purpose, almost as a kind of criminal." What a surprise, this class prejudice against the poor. In general, the Roman state and its law, like all states (to greater or lesser degrees), was "an instrument of the propertied classes; for the propertyless, the state 'couldn't care less.'"

Hired labor was less common than both slavery and, surely, debt bondage; its first major appearance in antiquity was in the form of mercenaries, though it was probably common at the peak periods of agricultural activity (harvesting, vintage, olive-picking) and may have been used for public works in Greek cities. Artisans, contractors, shopkeepers, and others must have occasionally hired workers too. The position of these wage-earners was considered contemptible. Plato and Aristotle placed them at the bottom of the social scale, and their attitude was shared by pretty much the whole propertied class. For Aristotle, "there could be no civilized existence for men who did not have leisure, which was a necessary condition (though not of course a sufficient condition) for becoming a good and competent citizen, and indeed was the goal (*telos*) of labor, as peace was of war… The overriding necessity for leisure excludes the citizens of Aristotle's ideal State from all forms of work, even farming, not to mention craftsmanship… The essential fact which, in Aristotle's eyes, makes the hired man a less worthy figure than the ordinary artisan is not so much his comparative poverty (for many independent artisans are likely to be poor too) but his 'slavish' dependence upon his employer." This attitude has been shared by many elites throughout history,

for instance eighteenth-century aristocrats like Thomas Jefferson and all his fellow republicans. The propertyless were supposed to be excluded from voting because of their lack of independence and consequent inability to act and think in a properly "disinterested," public-spirited republican way. They were essentially appendages of their employer. Interestingly, the "labor republicanism" exemplified by the Knights of Labor in the 1880s (in the U.S.) had a similar outlook, considering wage-labor ("wage-slavery") to be undignified, unmanly, a kind of degradation that interfered with the rights and duties of citizenship. The conclusion they drew, though, as did many other workers before them, was quite different from that of the classical republicans: wage-labor had to be abolished and a cooperative commonwealth established. "There is an inevitable conflict between the wage-system of labor and the republican system of government," as one of them said. It seems that only in the twentieth century, when the wage-system had finally unequivocally conquered the Western world, was wage-labor, for the first time ever, seen to be necessary and even good, not degrading. An idea that would have been utterly incomprehensible to all previous ruling classes and most of their subordinates.[1]

Even Kant, the philosopher who thought of humans as rational animals above all, had the inegalitarian attitude of his contemporaries. As Ste. Croix says, he "wished to confine the franchise to those who were their own masters and had some property to support them. A man who 'earned his living from others' could be allowed to qualify as a citizen, in Kant's eyes, only if he earned it 'by *selling* that which is his, and not by allowing others to make use of him.'… In a work published four years later Kant returned to this theme…giving four examples of excluded categories which 'do not possess civil independence,' such as apprentices, servants, minors and women, who may 'demand to be treated by all others in accordance with laws of natural freedom and equality' but should have no right to participate in making the laws." Such attitudes aren't *entirely* without merit in the context of the unequal, oppressive, and dependency-producing social structures of his day; but the proper conclusion to draw is that those social structures have to be eliminated, not that the majority of the people shouldn't participate in civic life.

As I said, public works may have, from time to time, been an important source of employment for unskilled wage-earners, but there isn't a lot of evidence for this. Contractors (probably hiring general laborers but also using slaves) did most of the work, and they don't qualify as wage-earners properly so-called. Even in Rome, which must have had the highest concentration of free men, including freedmen, in the whole Graeco-Roman world, there is no evidence for *regular* hired labor of any kind. "A certain proportion of the free poor lived to some extent on handouts provided by wealthy families whose clients they were—thus bringing themselves within 'the sound section of the populace, attached to the great houses,' whom Tacitus, in his patronizing way, contrasts favorably with the *plebs sordida,* frequenting (in his picture) the circus and theaters. But the great majority of the *plebs urbana* must have been shopkeepers or traders, skilled craftsmen (or at least semi-skilled artisans), or transport-workers using ox-carts, asses or mules [who weren't wage-laborers but worked for customers]."

Having discussed *direct individual* exploitation, Ste. Croix turns to *indirect collective* exploitation—as well as the exploitation (mostly of peasants) by landlords and mortgagees that took the form of rent or interest. He mentions that Marx anticipated his distinction between the two kinds of exploitation when he wrote, in *The Class Struggles in France*, of the French peasants of his day that "Their exploitation differs only in *form* from the exploitation of the industrial proletariat. The exploiter is the same: *capital*. The individual capitalists exploit the individual peasants through *mortgages* and *usury*; the capitalist class exploits the peasant class through the *State taxes*." It occurs to me that the exploitative function of taxes isn't true only of peasants and the poor in old times; to some extent it applies even to our own day. Insofar as the poor and middle classes don't get a useful return on their taxes, they're effectively being exploited. (Surplus is being taken from them without an equivalent being given back: hence, exploitation.) However much of the money they give to the government that goes to paying for wars, interest payments on debt to the rich, corporate welfare, etc. rather than to improvements in public education and

[1] On these topics, see, e.g., Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1992); and Alex Gourevitch, "Wage-Slavery and Republican Liberty," *Jacobin*, February 28, 2013.

transportation, roads, environmental protection (for their children at least), social insurance and so forth amounts to a kind of exploitation. It is indirect, publicly sanctioned, collective exploitation.

Taxation in Greek cities before the Hellenistic period may often have been quite light, "if only because the lack of anything resembling a modern civil service made it difficult if not impossible to collect small sums in taxes profitably from poor people (that is to say, from the great majority of the population), without the intervention of tax farmers, who seem to have been very unpopular with all classes… The total burden of taxation certainly increased in the Hellenistic and Roman periods," especially in the Later Roman empire, when it fell most heavily on the peasantry, who had least power to resist. As in our own day and throughout history, the rich had a much greater chance of escaping or minimizing payment than the poor.

So, what was the situation of the peasantry? Before delving into it Ste. Croix gives a beautiful tribute to these poor people, the vast majority of humanity in most periods of history, that I can't help quoting:

> To my mind, the most profound and moving representation in art of "the peasant" is Vincent Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters*… As Vincent himself said, in a letter to his brother Theo, written while the picture was still being painted, "I have tried to emphasize that those people, eating their potatoes in the lamplight, have dug the earth with those very hands they put in the dish, and so it speaks of *manual labor*, and how they have honestly earned their food. I have wanted to give the impression of a way of life quite different from that of us civilized people." …The quality that impresses one most about Van Gogh's peasants is their endurance, their solidity, like that of the earth from which they draw just sufficient sustenance to maintain life… The Potato Eaters are poor, but they are not evidently miserable: even if the artist shows infinite sympathy with them, he depicts in them no trace of self-pity. These are the voiceless toilers, the great majority—let us not forget it—of the population of the Greek and Roman world, upon whom was built a great civilization that despised them and did all it could to forget them.

The lot of the ancient peasant wasn't much more pleasant than it's been at any other time in history. I won't go into detail, but some indication is given by the fact that, similar to the case in medieval Europe (regarding the protection afforded by exploiting lords), being subject to a landlord could actually be *preferable* to owning land if the landlord could provide protection against the depredations of officials and soldiers—"always a terror to the peasantry in the Roman empire." Rents were paid in money or in kind, though sometimes in labor services, which were in addition to the irregular services occasionally demanded from tenants. If one wasn't a tenant but owned land, one may have had to deal with mortgages and foreclosures and so on. And then there were the famines, when it was often only in the *cities* that food was available. (This reminds me of the manufactured famine in the Ukraine in the early 1930s, when Stalin's Five-Year Plan extracted so much grain out of the countryside that millions of peasants starved. Timothy Snyder has some disturbing descriptions in *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (2012).) Landlords in cities sometimes hoarded grain to sell it at high prices, which contributed to starvation in the countryside. Again, there are modern parallels, with respect to European imperialism in India, Africa, and China, which Mike Davis recounts in *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (2002). Of course these modern semi-manufactured famines were far more horrifying than anything likely to have happened in antiquity.

"The characteristic unit in which peasant life was organized was the village… Many [villages] were situated inside the territory of some city; and some belonged to a handful of absentee landlords, or even entirely to a single proprietor, to whom the villagers paid rent. On the other hand, there were also villages of freehold peasant proprietors… Some villages, at least in Syria and Asia Minor, had what appears to have been a democratic form of organization, headed by a general meeting of the villagers; and—strange as it may seem—it looks as if this democratic form of organization may actually have survived in some villages, in parts of Syria at any rate, after all the genuinely democratic elements had perished from the constitutions of the cities throughout the [Roman] empire." In the Later Empire these villages were taxed very heavily,

paying their taxes to collectors appointed by the local city. –Peasants, in short, were largely at the mercy of the powerful, who could regularly act with virtual impunity.

At this point in the book Ste. Croix shifts to discussing the change in the *forms of exploitation* that happened slowly during the first three centuries A.D. A very important topic, which explains the eventual enserfment of most of the free working agricultural population of the Roman empire. The change happened all over the Graeco-Roman world but in varying degrees and at very different speeds in different areas. It has to do with the fate of slavery. In the late Roman Republic a series of foreign wars and civil wars had provided an abundant supply of cheap slaves for Mediterranean slave markets, but from the Augustan Principate (beginning in 30 B.C.) onwards there was a period of relative peace. As a result, "the number of slaves that were simply *appropriated from outside the Graeco-Roman economy, or brought within it by purchase*, soon begin to decline." (His italics.) To keep replenishing the slave population, therefore, it was necessary to encourage one's slaves to breed. This hadn't been done very much before because it tended to *lower the rate at which they could be exploited*, since the female slaves bearing children would of course be occupied, for a time, with things other than work, and would often even die in childbirth. As for the children, the many who didn't live to an age at which they could give a good day's work would be a dead loss to the master. For other reasons too, masters had preferred simply to buy new slaves coming in from foreign wars and discourage their breeding. But with fewer such imported slaves during the Principate (and the greater cost of those who were imported), slaveowners now resorted to breeding them, which had momentous consequences for the economy: in brief, it imposed a greater burden on the economy, because of the *lower rate of profit from slave labor*. This, in turn, would be likely to cause the propertied class to *increase the rate of exploitation of the humbler free population*—as the Roman ruling class now did, by degrees.

Hitherto slaves had frequently been housed in sex-segregated barracks, but now, to encourage them to breed, it was desirable to establish them in conditions conducive to the rearing of families (which itself made it harder to exploit them). It's not surprising, therefore, that as early as the last century B.C. we find evidence of slaves settled as virtual tenants of agricultural plots, with their own families. They were still technically slaves, but from the economic point of view they were tenants and could even own slaves of their own. Gradually slavery declined in such ways as these. Leasing lands as opposed to managing them oneself (overseeing one's slaves, etc.) became more common, in part because large landowners after the Republic were more likely to own widely diffused plots of land all of which they could hardly manage themselves. But even if they didn't own so many plots, it was still easier and less time-consuming simply to lease land to tenants (sometimes thousands of them) who would do the necessary productive work. These tenants were most often *coloni*, tied down by debts to their landlords, such as rent in arrear that gave an excuse for the landlord to make the conditions under which the tenant used his land more burdensome (which the tenant would still find preferable to being hauled off to debtor's prison). So, on the whole, the condition of slaves gradually improved somewhat and that of peasants throughout much of the Roman empire declined (at different rates). Finally towards the end of the third century A.D., "as part of the great reform of the system of regular taxation introduced by Diocletian," these agricultural workers became *legally* bound to the soil. In fact, not only leasehold tenants but virtually *the whole of the agricultural population* in the Roman empire was tied to the land on a hereditary basis and thus entered into serfdom (or quasi-serfdom in the case of peasant freeholders, who were tied not to a particular farm or plot but to their village). The reason for these legal changes was to facilitate the increased exploitation of the peasantry, primarily through taxation but also forced services and military conscription.

This legal reorganization "was of course seen by its authors as necessary, in the common interest of all, for the very preservation of the empire, imperiled as it was now, as never before, by 'barbarian' threats, by the increased power of Persia under the Sassanids, and by internally destructive rivalries for control of the imperial power. However, the propertied classes were determined to maintain, and were able to maintain, their dominance and their economically privileged situation… The great reorganization was therefore primarily for the benefit of the propertied classes as a whole; and for them, or at any rate their upper crust, it worked wonders for a time." He'll return to these topics later in the book, when he discusses the decline of the Empire.

As all this was going on, barbarians were settling the empire to an enormous extent, a fact that from a *cultural* point of view may have contributed to the decline of Rome but from an *economic* point of view must have helped preserve it for a while. Those who were brought in after capture by or surrender to Roman generals probably became mere tenants or *coloni* (often of imperial estates), whereas most who entered the empire by voluntary compact got to own their own land. The beneficial economic effect of these barbarian settlements "becomes immediately obvious when we realize that all those in which the settlers became mere tenants, and (if to a less extent) the majority of those involving freeholders, provided *both recruits for the army and an adult workforce, the cost of producing which had not fallen upon the Graeco-Roman economy*." The barbarian settlers therefore helped compensate for the lower profits from slavery.

Despite the decline of slavery, it's necessary to emphasize "the universal and unquestioning acceptance of slavery as part of the natural order of things, which during the Principate still pervaded the whole of Greek and Roman society—and of course continued in the Christian empire just as in earlier times. Slavery continued to play a central role in the psychology of the propertied class. [As Marx said, ideologies tend to linger long after the social conditions that birthed them have evolved to new ones.] And here I would refer again to what I said earlier about debt bondage: every humble free man must always have been haunted by fear of the coercion, amounting to slavery in all but name, to which he might be subjected if he ever defaulted on a debt to a rich man—including the payment of rent, of course."

Ste. Croix's comments on "the military factor" in the Roman empire are worth quoting, at least some of them. Needless to say, military considerations were highly relevant to Rome's downfall. Here are a few salient points:

1. From the second quarter of the third century onwards pressure on the frontiers of the Roman empire became much greater and tended to go on increasing, and the defense of the frontiers therefore became a matter on which the empire's survival rested.
2. In the circumstances of the time, the necessary standing army had to be raised largely from the peasantry.
3. In order to provide sufficient recruits of strong physique and potentially good morale, it was therefore essential to maintain a reasonably prosperous and vigorous peasantry.
4. On the contrary, as land, during the early centuries of the Christian era, became increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few owners (throughout most of the West and also, to a lesser extent, over a large part of the Greek East), the condition of a substantial proportion of the agricultural population became more and more depressed, until before the end of the third century most working peasants were subjected to forms of serfdom or quasi-serfdom…
5. *Socially* and *militarily*, this process was very harmful, since the peasants became increasingly indifferent towards the maintenance of the whole imperial system, most of the burden of which fell heavily upon them; and the morale (and probably the physique) of the army deteriorated, with the result that much of the empire disintegrated by stages between the early fifth century and the mid-seventh.
6. The maintenance of a relatively prosperous peasantry, sufficiently numerous to provide the large number of recruits needed for the army and willing to fight to the death in defense of their way of life (as the free Greeks and the early Romans had been), might have made all the difference and might have preserved the unity of the empire very much longer.

As he says, "the attitude of the peasantry in both Eastern and Western parts of the Roman world during the Later Empire was extraordinarily passive and indifferent." Sometimes peasants even joined the barbarian invaders. Karma, Rome.

We'll return to the fall of Rome later on, at the end of the book.

Now for Part 2, which is less descriptive and more explanatory. He begins with "the age of the tyrants" in Greece, between the mid-seventh century B.C. and the late sixth. Many Greek cities, which had been dominated until then by hereditary aristocracies, experienced a new form of personal dictatorial rule, by the so-called tyrants. "When the rule of the Greek tyrants ended, as it usually did after quite a short

period, of a generation or two, hereditary aristocratic dominance had disappeared, except in a few places, and had been succeeded by a much more 'open' society: political power no longer rested on descent, on blue blood, but was mainly dependent on the possession of property (this now became the standard form of Greek oligarchy), and in many cities, such as Athens, it was later extended in theory to all citizens, in a democracy." A fundamental change, which isn't hard to explain in terms of class struggle. The classes at issue were, on the one side, the hereditary ruling aristocrats, who were mainly the principal landowners and entirely monopolized political power; on the other side, at first, everyone else, the "demos." Some of the latter were quite prosperous, but more common were the well-to-do and middling peasants, who are often called "the hoplite class" because they provided the heavy-armed infantry of the Greek citizen armies. They owned a moderate amount of property. Below them were poor peasants, artisans, shopkeepers, petty traders, and wage-laborers.

What happened, then, is typically that the demos or some section of it revolted against oppression and exploitation. At some point a capable leader emerged who seized the semi-crisis for his own benefit, and after whom the old secure days of aristocracy were over. Solon and Peisistratus were *good* examples of tyrants, in Athens. A considerable proportion of the hoplite class must have given support to the tyrants, but they also came to power by means of mercenary forces or outside intervention (e.g., by Persia or some other Greek city-state). –Once again, Aristotle understands the significance of the class struggle. He contrasts traditional kingship with tyranny: the former "came into existence for the purpose of helping the better classes against the demos," whereas tyrants arose "from among the common people and the masses, in opposition to the notables, so that the demos should not suffer injustice at their hands… The great majority of the tyrants began as demagogues, so to speak, and won confidence by calumniating the notables." Good old-fashioned materialist common sense, depressingly opposed to the current postmodern obsession among historians with "complicating old narratives" etc., an obsession they're too obtuse to realize is nothing but an aid and comfort to the ruling class and is so widespread just because it can get through institutional filters by distracting from class struggle. If intellectuals are successful, it's because they don't challenge the powerful. (There are always a few exceptions, like Howard Zinn—people who bypass the approved channels and speak directly to the public.)

After the tyrants came the great age of Greek democracy in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. Ste. Croix actually says that so-called tyranny was a necessary phase in the development of many Greek states, because "institutions suited to maintaining in power even a non-hereditary ruling class, let alone a democracy, did not exist (they had never existed) and had to be created, painfully and by experience, over the years"—and so in this sense "tyranny" helped pave the way for democracy, a new phenomenon on the world stage (at least among thoroughly civilized societies). Democracy came to exist in scores of city-states, not only Athens; it involved majority vote of all male citizens, even the propertyless—an extraordinary fact. Recall that even in the U.S. it took until the mid-nineteenth century for such democracy to be well established. "The great aim of democrats was that their society should achieve as much freedom (*eleutheria*) as possible… Since public debate was an essential part of the democratic process, an important ingredient in democratic *eleutheria* was freedom of speech." Of course there was also equality before the law.

As in modern times, democracy was born through struggle on the part of the unpropertied or less propertied. For centuries, "economic distress often drove the impoverished to attempt revolution, with the aim both of capturing control of the state and of effecting some kind of reallocation of property—most frequently in the form of a redistribution of land or the cancellation of debts." The propertied, too, were wont to attempt revolution, on the side of oligarchy. These "revolutions" were most likely to be successful when an outside power was called in by the revolutionaries, such as Athens (to help install democracy) or Sparta (to install oligarchy).[1] It seems, incidentally, that Athens in the fifth century was possibly the only example in history of an imperial power that sought to create or strengthen *democracy* in the areas it dominated, and allied not with the upper class but the middle and lower. Athens suffered from less overt

[1] "In the early fourth century, Xenophon in particular always takes it for granted that when there is a division within a city on class lines, the rich will naturally turn to Sparta, the demos to Athens."

class warfare in this period than many other *poleis* did because of its stable and secure democracy; but you can see how bitterly the rich resented democracy and its leaders (whom they often called "demagogues") in the writings of Plato, Isocrates, Xenophon, and others.

"In the political sphere, democracy barely held its own in the fourth century [B.C.], and in many cities outside Athens the class warfare which had already become widespread in the last quarter of the fifth century became more acute… Oligarchic and democratic leaders had no hesitation in calling on outside powers to help them gain the upper hand over their adversaries." That's incredible: the fiercely independent Greeks were willing to subordinate their independence to class advantage! Violent civil strife sometimes broke out between the classes. Tyranny, which had become rare, began to occur again, suggesting an intensification of class strife. "Rich and poor would regard each other with bitter hatred, and when a revolution succeeded there would be wholesale executions and banishments, and confiscation of the property of at least the leaders of the opposite party." Many among the propertied classes wanted there to be a Greek crusade against Persia, since they thought this might provide land and a new hope for people who could no longer make a living at home. –This reminds me of what U.S. historians like Frederick Jackson Turner have argued: the vast, relatively empty Western lands in nineteenth-century America alleviated class tensions in the East, by drawing away millions of potentially discontented immigrants and giving them new opportunities. Apparently the same useful function of land was recognized in ancient Greece. (And think of the Nazi obsession with *Lebensraum*. Again, it could lessen class conflict: one shouldn't have oppressed and oppressors packed together too tightly.)

By the time of Philip II of Macedon, Alexander the Great's father, the oligarchically minded all over Greece gave (treasonous) support to his conquest of their cities, because they understood he would be much more sympathetic to oligarchy than democracy. And indeed, the League of Corinth that he and Alexander organized prohibited redistribution of land, the cancellation of debts, the confiscation of property, and the altering of city constitutions. (America's Founding Fathers, likewise, did what they could to prevent their elitist and rich-coddling Constitution from being altered, by making the process of amendment extremely cumbersome.)

So, the Hellenistic era. And then the suzerainty of Rome. In the early Hellenistic period the lower classes (especially among the city-dwellers, less so the peasants) may still have played an important part in the life of their *polis*, but very soon "there developed all over the Greek world a tendency for political power to become entirely concentrated in the hands of the propertied class. This development, or rather retrogression, was still by no means complete when the Romans took over, in the second century B.C. The Romans, whose governing class always detested democracy, intensified and accelerated the process; and by the third century of the Christian era the last remnants of the original democratic institutions of the Greek *poleis* had mostly ceased to exist for all practical purposes." Athenian democracy was effectively destroyed by the Macedonian Antipater in 322/1 B.C. after Athens had risen up against Macedon's rule and been defeated. The next fifty years were full of oligarchies, uprisings, blockades, and constitutional changes; after further vicissitudes the Roman general Sulla sacked Athens in 86 B.C., against "heroic and futile resistance" by the demos. In general, though, the Romans and the Hellenistic kings didn't treat the Greek cities they dominated in an overly oppressive manner. The kings, at least, rarely even formally limited political power to a small class, feeling obliged to support democracy because it was so well established by tradition.

Nevertheless, after the fourth century B.C. there were several common oligarchic methods of subverting democracy. The first entailed control of the city Assembly by royal officials, magistrates, and the like. Another, from a more long-term perspective, was the gradual abolition of the popular courts (like the one that convicted Socrates), on which in a full Greek democracy all citizens were entitled to serve. The Romans sometimes made constitutional changes to limit democracy, but more often simply supported the local rich and encouraged them to take control of political life. As they were only too happy to do. As usual, therefore, it was the rich who were most inclined to be traitors or semi-quislings, or to cooperate in the subordination of their land to an overlord, because that was a way to protect their property and power.

Ste. Croix anticipates a later discussion when he says, "The most significant result of the destruction of Greek democracy was the complete disappearance of the limited measure of political protection afforded

to the lower class against exploitation by the propertied, which became intensified in the early centuries of the Christian era and was one of the prime causes of the disintegration of a large part of the Roman empire between the fifth and seventh centuries." He also remarks that "modern historians [characteristically] have shown little concern with this aspect of the disappearance of democracy; and when they have noticed the disappearance at all, their interest in it has usually been submerged by attention to the supersession of 'city-state' or 'republican' forms of government (which of course may be either democratic or oligarchic) by the monarchy of the Hellenistic kingdoms or of the Roman Principate." *Political forms* matter more to most historians and other academics than *social content*. Doubtless it takes a little digging to unearth the class content behind political and social forms, but such content is, after all, the most important thing, which largely explains the rest.

Likewise, when reading primary sources, you should always keep in mind the class background, agenda, and prejudices of the author(s). When Cicero and other ancient thinkers praise republicanism and so forth, or exhort jurists in a court of law to heed "the welfare of the state, the safety of the community, and the immediate interests of the Republic," you should know that by "republic" they mean the propertied few. Class is the prism through which they, and all of us, view the world, because it (i.e., access to resources, and to particular types of resources) predominantly shapes our experiences and judgments and aspirations.

The lower classes resisted the slow crushing of democracy, though in the long run without success. Demonstrations were organized in hippodromes or amphitheaters, sometimes in the presence of the Roman emperor; as a consequence of such activities, the imperial government was very leery of allowing any sort of combination or association among the lower orders in the Greek East. Not even fire-brigades or mutual benefit societies were always accepted, because their activities might become political. There were also riots, involving the lynching of some detested official or the destruction of a local magnate's house for some cause like his refusing to distribute grain during a famine. –Thus does the ruling class reap what it sows.

The book isn't focused on Rome as such but only insofar as it participated in the Greek cultural and linguistic world. Even so, Ste. Croix devotes a chapter to Rome for its own sake, so to speak. It begins with an illuminating discussion of the much-vaunted Roman genius for law, which turns out only to have been for civil law, not criminal or constitutional law. It certainly wasn't a society "ruled by law"; even in the Principate (established by Augustus), not to mention the later Dominate, it was ruled much more by arbitrary power and discrimination on the grounds of social status and class. But its extraordinarily detailed civil law did hold property rights to be sacrosanct—which explains why Roman law was rediscovered and revived during Europe's late-medieval transition to capitalism. Human rights are meaningless to capital, indeed a positive hindrance, while property rights are the be-all and end-all. Another interesting (though predictable) relation to the present is that the Romans shared the penchant of the U.S.'s rulers—and the rulers of every other imperial power in history—to justify their war-making in terms of *defense.* According to Cicero—"in whom we often find the choicest expression of any kind of Roman hypocrisy"—it was only by "defending their allies" that the Romans became "masters of all lands." In fact, as one historian has said, "the peculiar Roman conception of defensive war…covered the prevention and elimination of any *potential* menace to Roman power." Hm, reminds me of the Bush II administration's doctrine of preventive war, to justify invading and destroying Iraq. –There are only a few ideological tricks in the bag of the oppressors, so they have to keep reusing the same ones from time immemorial. (Whatever one may say about Bush and his cronies, *original* they were not.)

The Roman Republic was just as riven by class conflict as the Empire and the Greek *poleis*. In part, it took the form of conflict between Patricians and Plebeians, dating from the Republic's very beginning in 508 B.C. These terms denoted orders, not classes, but, as always, there was a close relation between status and class. Truistically, "the Patricians were able to gain access to, and ultimately to monopolize, political power at Rome *because* they were by and large the *richest* families—in the mainly agrarian society of early Rome, the *largest landowners* above all." There are always exceptions here and there, but the generalization is broadly true. The Plebeians were more heterogeneous, some of them even rich, but their goals were typically to lessen both political oppression and economic exploitation (as we would call it today). In 494

they were able to create the institution of the *tribune* to advocate for them. I won't go into detail, since the history is easily accessible in popular books. The main point is that, in the long run, the "conflict of the orders" succeeded only in replacing the patrician oligarchy by a patricio-plebeian oligarchy that differed very little from the previous one in outlook and behavior. The governing class was thus broadened somewhat, as often happens in history—the social and economic discontent of the excluded masses gets suppressed while the richest among them are granted entry into the ruling elite[1]—and the influential position of its members came to be based even more on wealth rather than their status as patricians. It's clear, in any case, that Rome was never anything like a democracy.

As you know, the Republic succumbed to civil wars and Julius Caesar and finally the Empire. How can all this be explained? Ste. Croix starts by mentioning the *populares*, like the Gracchi, Catiline, Codius, and Caesar, who were opposed by the *optimates*, like Cicero. The latter, of course, favored oligarchy and didn't want concessions made to the "starving, contemptible rabble," the "dregs of the city," the "indigent and unwashed," the "dirt and filth" (as Cicero said). The former, while not really democrats, took a more populist stance, advocating debt relief, distribution of grain to the poor, agrarian reform, and defense of democratic elements in the constitution. "The *populares*, then, served as leaders of what was in a very real

[1] Think of the modern European "bourgeois revolutions." They didn't immediately do much to end the oppression of workers and peasants, but they did succeed in extending political representation to the hitherto excluded bourgeoisie. I recall a passage from a paper I wrote on the Russian Revolution: "The duality between the [worker-oriented] Petrograd Soviet and the [bourgeois-oriented] Provisional Government [between February and October 1917] points up the tension in every anti-'*ancien régime*' revolution between, on the one hand, the impoverished and semi-impoverished masses, including (certain sections of) the peasantry, the petty-bourgeoisie and the workers, and, on the other hand, the bourgeoisie or the 'respectable classes' who are striving for representation in the autocratic government. The latter groups tend to desire only political and legal reforms in the mold of liberalism, while the former desire something like a social revolution, including universal suffrage, radical democratization, and social equality. For example, in *The World Turned Upside Down* (1984), Christopher Hill notes with regard to the English civil wars of the mid-seventeenth century that *two* revolutions occurred: 'The one which succeeded established the sacred rights of property (abolition of feudal tenures, no arbitrary taxation), gave political power to the propertied (sovereignty of Parliament and common law, abolition of prerogative courts), and removed all impediments to the triumph of the ideology of the men of property—the protestant ethic. There was, however, another revolution which never happened, though from time to time it threatened. This might have established communal property, a far wider democracy in political and legal institutions, might have disestablished the state church and rejected the protestant ethic.' The Levellers, the Seekers, the Ranters, the Diggers, and other such radical groups represented the revolution that might have happened. Similarly, in revolutionary France a tension continually displayed itself between radical democracy and 'responsible' representative government. The same conflict flared up in 1848, when the French workers and bourgeoisie fought together against the monarchy—although, more accurately, it's always the workers (and petty-bourgeois) who do the actual fighting—only to part months later, when the bourgeoisie allied itself with the aristocracy in crushing a threatened popular revolution. A similar phenomenon was evident in Russia in 1905, with the workers fighting alongside the bourgeoisie though each distrusted the other. And in 1917, first the bourgeois revolution—exemplified by the establishment of the Provisional Government—triumphed, and then the popular revolution did, exemplified by the events of Red October, which were supposed by millions to have finally established the principle of soviet democracy. [They didn't; the Bolsheviks turned out to be just another elite that suppressed economic democracy, this time in the name of 'socialism.' Stalinism was the long-term consequence.] Generalizing, it's evident that in some cases the popular revolution fails, which may result in a narrow parliamentary government, limited suffrage, and a liberal social order conducive to the development of capitalism, while in other cases (e.g., Russia in late 1917, China in 1949, and perhaps certain Latin American countries for a few years before the return of capital-based authoritarianism), the popular revolution 'succeeds'—at least it appears to, temporarily—resulting in the suppression of landowners and capitalists. In 1917, the masses had the resources, the numbers, the circumstances, and the (ultimately traitorous) leaders to succeed, whereas in France in the 1790s they didn't (because industrialization had not yet begun, urbanization was in its infancy, etc.)." See, among many others, Christopher Read, *From Tsar to Soviets: The Russian People and Their Revolution, 1917–21* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1996); and Roy Medvedev, *The October Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

sense a political class struggle: a blind, spasmodic, uninformed, often misdirected and always easily confused movement, but a movement with deep roots, proceeding from men whose interests were fundamentally opposed to those of the ruling oligarchy…" Also relevant to the class struggle and civil wars was the fact that Rome was a great imperial power. Enormous wealth flowed to Rome's elite as a result of its rapacity and plundering abroad. As with modern imperialism,[1] the majority of the population received little direct benefit from the conquests, and in some cases was harmed. As one historian says, in the Late Republic the senators and equestrians—i.e., the nobility—who profited from the empire

> did not use their newly acquired wealth for any economically productive purpose; they spent it either on luxury goods or on the acquisition of land. Their demand for luxuries encouraged a one-way traffic of imports into Italy, which provided employment for provincial craftsmen and profits to merchants both provincial and Italian. Their acquisition of land led to the pauperization of many of the Italian peasantry. The Italian lower classes lost rather than gained by the empire. Many of them lost their land and were recompensed only by cheap corn if they migrated to Rome, or meager pay in the army.

Much of the Italian peasantry in this era was impoverished by military conscription, which took them away from their productive activities; at the same time, the rich were getting richer and dispossessing the poor from their land. Discharged veterans had little or no property to support them when they returned home. Being as short-sighted as the oligarchs of the twenty-first century—who are only destroying their power in the long run by increasing it in the short run—the senatorial government refused to give even the poorer legionaries land. "Consequently the loyalty of discharged veterans, and of soldiers who knew they would otherwise be left without means on discharge, was deeply engaged to commanders [like Marius and, later, Caesar] who could be relied upon, in the teeth of senatorial opposition, to make land grants available to their veterans… This gave the commanders irresistible strength." (It was Augustus who finally prepared the ground for a permanent standing army; and he and Tiberius ended conscription, though it returned later.) What happened, then, were the civil wars, between generals each with his own private army. Octavian—Augustus—was the final victor.

This is the kind of thing that happens when the rich get too rich and are given too much license to do as they want. They dismantle or ignore rules that aren't in their short-term interest, which inevitably causes a gradual disintegration of social bonds, of any kind of social compact, public-spiritedness, and the very fabric of society. Privatization destroys public goods, thus ultimately destroying society itself. Class polarization increases, and with it social discontent and instability, which creates opportunities (in certain historical contexts) for political and military adventurers. This is especially the case if savage imperialist practices have inured soldiers and commanders (and politicians, etc.) to war, such that they may visit war upon their own society. A gifted military commander or politician may emerge to break the stalemate, the polarization, between the classes and partially rescue society from its dysfunction; Gramsci's "Caesarism," as with Caesar himself or Augustus or Mussolini or Hitler, can step into the breach and cut the Gordian knot (to mix metaphors) by means of violence or terror and dictatorship. The propertied class remains on top, but concessions are given to the masses for the sake of preserving the social and economic order. What's amazing, with respect to Rome, is how durable Octavian's Caesarist intervention was, enabling Rome to last several centuries longer! The man was obviously a political genius.

Machiavelli describes an important aspect of the emperor's role well. As Ste. Croix says, "Augustus and many of his successors would have applauded the fascinating passage from the *Discourses on the First Decade of Livy*, in which Machiavelli recognizes the necessity, in a state containing over-powerful *gentiluomini* of the kind he so detested (bearing a striking resemblance to the Roman landed aristocracy), for a monarch with 'absolute and overwhelming power,' to restrain the excesses of 'the powerful.'" The essential role of the emperor, like that of modern presidents and prime ministers, was "the reinforcement of the whole social and political system and making it a stronger and more efficient instrument for the

[1] J. A. Hobson's *Imperialism* (1905) gives a good analysis, much of which applies to our own day.

exploitation of the great majority," a role that necessitated regulation and reining-in of the upper class's savage instincts. In the Later Empire, when barbarian incursions became more frequent, the emperor had to step up the exploitation and extract more taxes by making serfdom *de jure*, not only *de facto*. This also, combined with the regime's life-and-death situation, necessitated the emperor's assumption of even more autocratic power than before (though still to some extent disguised by the legal fictions and institutionalized tactfulness of which Augustus had set the precedent, to avoid offending the Senate).

Ste. Croix's chapter on "the class struggle on the ideological plane" has some interesting passages, although, because it deals with mere ideology, it's less fruitful than the other chapters. It starts out with a consideration of the very great importance of sheer terror and violence in keeping the propertied in power—tactics that the Romans perfected. The Greeks were more humane, doubtless in part because they didn't have a vast empire to control. More interesting are the intellectual and ideological tricks that the ancients—and all ruling classes—(have) used to justify oligarchy (usually without admitting to themselves that what they're justifying is oligarchy). Probably the most universal one, from antiquity up to the twentieth century and our own day, is the Platonic argument that only those people intellectually qualified and trained for ruling should have power; others, while doubtless performing essential social and economic functions, should stick to their (subordinate) calling, so to speak, and not irresponsibly interfere with governance. As Noam Chomsky likes to remind us, this ideology was shared by liberal intellectuals like Walter Lippmann and Edward Bernays, who helped found the public-relations industry (a euphemism for the propaganda industry, as it was more honestly called in the early twentieth century). "The bewildered herd" should stay out of the way and consent to being governed by "a specialized class whose interests reach beyond the locality" (Lippmann). These ideas aren't always articulated, because they don't sound very democratic, but of course nearly everyone who participates in governing believes them. Their plausibility is another question entirely, which at least partly has to be answered in the negative. Certainly some training is required to govern, in some cases some specialized knowledge, etc.; but when you reflect on how well and "disinterestedly" the powerful in history have carried out their "sacred obligations," you begin to doubt the soundness of the argument. If anything, the powerful have usually been more self-interested and short-sighted than their subjects, who, when they get the chance—as with the contemporary movement called "participatory budgeting"—regularly determine the proper priorities of government far more effectively than the rich and/or powerful do.

The Greek notion of *natural slavery* wouldn't be accepted by most of the elite now, at least not without modification, but it isn't far from the Social Darwinism that the rich love. It's hard to imagine many of the privileged not agreeing with Plato that "those who wallow in great ignorance and baseness" *belong* as slaves, or rather as the lower classes. (Ironic that the great ignorance and baseness has usually been on the side of those who call others ignorant and base.) "Some people are born weak," etc. Class privilege manufactures such ways of thinking, because people are born to rationalize. While the idea of natural slavery wasn't widely accepted for very long, slavery itself was rarely questioned in antiquity—at least according to surviving records. Even Christians didn't question it, with a few marginal exceptions. (As always, an ideology is adapted to material realities. It would have been odd if most Christians had questioned such fundamental institutions as slavery and serfdom.)

Nor were the ancients (at least the "respectable" ones whose writings survive) prone to questioning the rights of property. "It is property that confers rank," Ovid said. The Elder Seneca said, "It is property that raises to the rank of senator, property that differentiates the Roman *eques* from the plebs, property that brings promotion in the army, property that provides the qualification for judges in the forum." Cicero thought the primary function of a state was to protect private property rights. And there are other examples. The Jews were different, because of their different socioeconomic context (the provinces, the countryside)—and for Jesus it was a positive evil to have a lot of property, which could prevent someone from getting into heaven—but such radical ideas were partially cast off as Christianity migrated from the *chora*, the countryside, to the *polis*, the Graeco-Roman city. Later, it was only among the heretical Christian thinkers that private property was condemned. I'll copy here some thoughts Ste. Croix inserts after his long discussion of early Christians' obsessive persecution of each other, because the points he makes are good Marxist ones:

> I doubt if a better means could have been devised of distracting the victims of the class struggle from thinking about their own grievances and possible ways of remedying them than representing to them, as their ecclesiastical leaders, did, that religious issues were infinitely more important than social, economic or political ones, and that it was heretics and schismatics (not to mention pagans, Manichees, Jews, and other "lesser breeds without the Law") upon whom their resentment could most profitably be concentrated… [They were taught that] their real enemies were those enemies of God and his Church who, if they were not suppressed, would endanger men's immortal souls and bring them to perdition. "Heretics" and "schismatics," as well as "unbelievers," were an entirely new kind of internal enemy, invented by Christianity, upon whom the wrath of "right-thinking people" could be concentrated, for in paganism the phenomena of "heresy" and "schism," as well as "unbelief," were inconceivable: there was no "correct" dogma in which it was necessary to believe in order to avoid anathema in this world and damnation in the next, and to secure eternal life; and there was nothing remotely resembling a single, universal Church. We may reflect by contrast upon the good fortune of the mass of Greeks in the Classical period, who had no such beliefs instilled into them, to prevent them from recognizing who their real internal enemies were, and to persuade them that democracy was a useless if not an impious aim, since "the powers that be are ordained of God" [as St. Paul said].

You see here how this sort of dogmatic religion was, perhaps, the first ideology to fulfill a function like that of nationalism, fascism, and Nazism later: it distracted from real issues, fabricated pretend internal and external enemies, and was therefore ultimately embraced by power-structures. *Always* the masses must be divided in order to be conquered.

Okay, now for the final chapter in the history: the decline and fall of Rome. Ste. Croix begins with the gradual whittling away of the legal rights of the poorer classes, from the first century A.D. to the third. In 212 Roman citizenship was extended to nearly all the free inhabitants of the empire, but this meant very little; it was probably mainly an excuse to tax them more. Citizenship had come to mean less and less as a new set of social and juridical distinctions had arisen that were more important; and these distinctions were, on the whole, class distinctions. "For all practical purposes the constitutional rights to which an inhabitant of the Graeco-Roman world was entitled by at any rate the early third century depended hardly at all upon whether he was a Roman citizen, but, broadly speaking, on whether he was a member of what I shall call 'the privileged groups': namely, senatorial, equestrian and curial families,[1] veterans and their children, and (for some purposes) serving soldiers." The people below the privileged groups were the lower classes, who possessed little or no property; and, except for veterans and soldiers, who were of unique importance to the empire (its ruling class) and so were worth protecting, the privileged groups had by the third century become almost identical with the propertied class, i.e., those who could live in relative leisure off the proceeds of their property.

There were several differences between the two groups. For one thing, according to the "dual penalty system" the privileged received lighter punishments, for example decapitation instead of crucifixion, burning to death, or the beasts. They were exempt from flogging and from torture (which was frequently used in court), and it was easier for them to avoid imprisonment pending trial. Evidence given in court by members of the lower classes was accorded less weight than that of their social superiors. And so on. These kinds of inequalities are of course almost universal in history, and very much present in our own society. (Higher rates of incarceration of black males for nonviolent crimes than white males, etc.) More pertinently, the legal differences mentioned show it was becoming easier to exploit the humbler free people than it had been in the past—and, again, exploiting them was also more necessary, because the elite was becoming more directly dependent for its surplus on the free or quasi-free people than the (diminishing number of) slaves.

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[1] The curial order consisted of the members of the city Councils and their families, who eventually became a hereditary local governing class.

It was expedient to develop these new, largely class-determined distinctions because Roman citizenship, on which earlier privileges had been based, had, by its gradual extension, long ceased to be a class-specific thing.

The fiscal burdens of the Roman state began to get severe in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, between 161 and 180 A.D., because of ever more barbarian irruptions and the necessity to defend Rome. It was around this time that financial pressures on the curial order—to which belonged smaller landowners than senators—began to ruin some of its lower members. Public services of all kinds were demanded of them, which they couldn't afford. Their decline is shown by the fact that in the late fourth century the emperors even made it permissible to flog them mercilessly, sometimes to death. The richer ones might be able to finagle their way into the senatorial ranks—in part to avoid these dreaded floggings—but the situation of the poorer ones deteriorated. Exploitation and the class struggle thus worked its way up into the elite itself, and started to polarize it. Eventually the *curiales* "were reduced to little more than minor local officials responsible for tax-collection and the performance of other public duties," with very little real power.

"The whole process brings out admirably the complete control exercised over the whole Graeco-Roman world by the very highest class, of senators and equestrians—who had merged into a single order by at least the beginning of the fifth century. There were now more grades within the senatorial order… The utter lack of any kind of real power below the highest class left even men of some property and local distinction helpless subjects of the great… The screw, having already been tightened at the bottom of the social scale by landlords and tax-collectors about as far as it would safely go, and indeed further, had from the later second century onwards (as the situation of the empire became less favorable), and regularly during the third, to be put on the curial class, as the only alternative to the increased taxation of the really rich, which they would never have endured." More and more polarization as the top tenth of one percent gets ever richer. –Wait, that sounds familiar…[1]

Edward Gibbon called the process of disintegration of the Roman empire "the greatest, perhaps, and most awful scene in the history of mankind." He was wrong—that distinction surely belongs to the transport of millions of Africans to the Americas, as W. E. B. DuBois thought—but the opinion is understandable. (The collapse of Rome, however, will seem as nothing compared to the collapse of the present world-system in the coming century or two.) The tearing apart of first the Western Empire and then the Eastern, by the Arabs and many others, coincided with an intensification of horrors by the Roman overlords, including the much more frequent use of torture and mutilation, not to mention extortionate taxation of the lower classes. Corruption was rampant; poor men accused of crimes rotted in Roman prisons for months even before the trial happened. (Luckily that kind of thing never happens anymore!) [Sarcasm, of course.] Civil wars between rival claimants for the throne broke out at the time of the barbarian invasions, and plagues had disastrous consequences for the population. And the innumerable wars! Meanwhile, to quote an anonymous ancient author, "the houses of the powerful were crammed full and their splendor enhanced to the destruction of the poor, the poorer classes of course being held down by force. But the poor were driven by their afflictions into various criminal enterprises, and losing sight of all respect for the law, all feelings of loyalty, they entrusted their revenge to crime. For they inflicted the most severe injuries on the empire, laying waste the fields, breaking the peace with outbursts of brigandage, stirring up animosities; and passing from one crime to another they supported usurpers."

The huge army and civil service became a "fearful burden" on the Graeco-Roman economy, sucking up more and more surplus from the peasantry above all. In addition, from the second decade of the fourth century onwards the new economic burden of a large body of clerics, monks, and nuns appeared. Probably hundreds of thousands by the mid-fifth century. Most of these people had been withdrawn from production and so couldn't be exploited by the upper class or contribute financially to the maintenance of the state. The Church itself, which became fabulously wealthy, was given much money by the state and by offerings of the faithful—and the Church was economically unproductive, a giant parasite. The incomes of bishops were sometimes larger than that of any provincial governor. "The staffing of the Church absorbed far more manpower than did the secular administration [of the empire] and the Church's salary bill was far

[1] See Peter Coy, "The Richest Rich Are in a Class by Themselves," *Business Week*, April 3, 2014.

heavier than that of the empire." (On the other hand, the Church did give perhaps a quarter of the income of its endowment to charity. So that was useful.)

I'll quote the book's last paragraph:

> I hope it is now clear how I would explain, through a class analysis, the ultimate disintegration of a large part of the Roman empire—although of course a Greek core, centered above all in Asia Minor, did survive for centuries. I would keep firmly in view the process of exploitation which is what I mean primarily when I speak of a "class struggle." As I see it, the Roman political system (especially when Greek democracy had been wiped out) facilitated a most intense and ultimately destructive economic exploitation of the great mass of the people, whether slave or free, and it made radical reform impossible. The result was that the propertied class, the men of real wealth, who had deliberately created this system for their own benefit, drained the life-blood from their world and thus destroyed Graeco-Roman civilization over a large part of the empire[1]… That, I believe, was the principal reason for the decline of Classical civilization. I would suggest that the causes of the decline were above all economic and social. The very hierarchical political structure of the Roman empire, of course, played an important part; but it was precisely the propertied class which in the long run monopolized political power, with the definite purpose of maintaining and increasing its share of the comparatively small surplus that could be extracted from the primary producers. By non-Marxist historians this process has normally been described as if it were a more or less automatic one, something that "just happened." …[As Peter Brown says,] "Altogether, the prosperity of the Mediterranean world seems to have *drained to the top* (my italics)—Brown is speaking of the fourth century, and he has just mentioned that in the western part of the empire, in that century, the senatorial aristocracy was "five times richer, on the average, than the senators of the first century." …If I were in search of a metaphor to describe the great and growing concentration of wealth in the hands of the upper classes, I would not incline towards anything so innocent and so automatic as drainage: I should want to think in terms of something much more purposive and deliberate—perhaps the vampire bat. The burden of maintaining the imperial military and bureaucratic machine, and the Church, in addition to a leisured class consisting mainly of absentee landowners, fell primarily upon the peasantry, who formed the great bulk of the population; and, ironically enough (as I have already explained), the remarkable military and administrative reorganization effected by a series of very able emperors from the late third century to the end of the fourth (from Diocletian and Constantine to Theodosius I) succeeded in creating an even greater number of economically "idle mouths" and thus increased the burdens upon an already overburdened peasantry. The peasants were seldom able to revolt at all, and never successfully: the imperial military machine saw to that… But the merciless exploitation of the peasants made many of them receive, if not with enthusiasm at least with indifference, the barbarian invaders who might at least be expected—vainly, as it usually turned out—to shatter the oppressive imperial financial machine. Those who have been chastised with scorpions may hope for something better if they think they will be chastised only with whips. [A reference to a verse in the Old Testament.]

Such is the story of the Roman empire, and of human history.

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I read J. L. Mackie's classic *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (1977). It's an eminently sensible book, whose basic ideas I had arrived at in my early-to-mid twenties. It's incredible that nearly all moral

[1] Speaking of draining life-blood, see Steve Johnson, "Capital gobbles labour's share, but victory is empty," *Financial Times*, October 13, 2013. As the wealthy get richer and richer, aggregate demand shrinks, which leads to economic stagnation and crisis. Ultimately, perhaps, revolution.

philosophers reject this kind of moral skepticism, this "error theory," which is so intuitively obvious to me. *Obviously* value-judgments aim at, or presuppose, or express a belief in, objective values, and *obviously* there are no such things. Now I'm reading *A World Without Values: Essays on John Mackie's Moral Error Theory* (2010). Looking forward to defending a commonsense meta-ethics after I've read all this tedious literature. –It's annoying not to be able to *write* (for now), only *read*. Writing is what I enjoy, though it can be difficult and slow; reading is only an irksome prerequisite to writing.

I've radically revamped my website, *www.wrightswriting.com*, so that now it's a real website and even aesthetically pleasing. Posting lots of writings—book reviews, poems, essays, scattered thoughts, etc.

Here are more notes, this time on a book I first read a couple years ago:

The Rise of the Right

We all know that the world is absurd, in the deep existentialist sense. You want proof? Bill O'Reilly's books are bestsellers, while the phenomenal *Right Turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics* (1987), by the political scientists Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, languishes around #1,700,000 on the Amazon ranking. This fact actually points to one of the major reasons for the world's absurdity, which is also the focus of Ferguson and Rogers' book: the power of money and property, which promotes the Bill O'Reillys and sabotages the Thomas Fergusons.[1] It shouldn't surprise us that in a world run by big business, or more broadly power-structures—which necessarily aim at maintaining and increasing their own power—the popularity of a product or a person will tend to be inversely proportional to the intrinsic worth of that product or person. Thus, a book that largely explains how American politics began the trajectory to its present catastrophic state will be ignored, because no one knows about it.

How did neoliberal conservatism become the reigning ideology in the 1980s and afterwards? How did conservative Republicans conquer the political world, after their defeats (punctuated by periodic victories) from the 1940s to the early 1970s? How is it that the Republican Party has shifted to the lunatic, quasi-fascist right while the Democratic Party has become what moderate Republicans once were? Is it because the American public became more conservative in the 1980s, as one might naturally think? Were Samuel Huntington and his ilk right in arguing that the Democratic debacle of 1984, when Reagan won in a landslide against Walter Mondale, was the result of the party's having been taken over, in the 1960s and 1970s, by selfish and divisive "special interests" like labor unions, black groups, women's rights organizations, and Hispanic associations? Journalists, academics, and politicians confidently declared that American voters had repudiated the New Deal, and that, in order to survive, the Democratic Party "had to stop resisting the drift of the majority of the electorate toward conservative, entrepreneurially oriented social and economic policies, increased military spending, and more actively anti-Communist, interventionist foreign policies," as Ferguson and Rogers (or FR, as I'll call them) paraphrase. The famed New Deal coalition of minorities, women, blue-collar workers, and white Southerners had split apart amid the social turmoil of the 1960s and '70s, and—these pundits argued—it was necessary now for the Democrats to reach out again to the more conservative parts of their former base, notably those white Southerners who had defected to the Republicans in their disgust at anti-war hippies and pro-black federal policies. –Is this analysis right? Had the public, by reelecting Reagan in a landslide, indeed repudiated the New Deal, with its progressive income tax, business regulation, social-welfare programs, and protection of unions? No, say Ferguson and Rogers. The story is much more complicated than that, as they demonstrate in their book.

We should keep in mind that the conventional diagnosis, which FR argue against, has had staying power. It was the justification given for the Democrats' rebranding of themselves as "New Democrats" in the time of Bill Clinton, when the party embraced the ideology of limited government, the so-called free market, gutting of the welfare state, and other ideas that had traditionally been the domain of Republicans. It has been the constant refrain of pundits seeking to explain the latest Democratic defeat: "liberals are out of touch with the values of mainstream America," etc. The analysis has been trotted out so many times that

[1] For the story of how Ferguson was denied tenure at MIT, see Noam Chomsky, *Understanding Power* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 243.

it's become a cliché; it's considered so obvious as scarcely to require arguing for. Nevertheless, it's either flatly false or wildly misleading.

Despite the conventional wisdom of intellectuals, the public has *not* become more conservative. The Gallup, Pew Research Center, and World Public Opinion websites provide an abundance of evidence for the fact that the electorate has steadily continued to have social-democratic values for many decades, in fact at least since the 1930s. Certainly misinformation campaigns and barrages of propaganda—for instance to drum up support for wars—are sometimes temporarily reflected in polls, but the underlying values of support for unions, social welfare, national health insurance, environmental protection, progressive taxation, business regulation, cuts in military spending, infrastructure development, and so on remain quite stable. No great changes have happened since the 1960s—except, as FR show, that public opinion has become *more* liberal, not less! With regard to the 1980s, the authors give overwhelming evidence that the electorate largely rejected the Reagan administration's policies. For example, after studying polls, the *New York Times* concluded in 1986 that voter attitudes since the 1970s had shown "no consistent evidence of change, certainly not in a conservative direction." On religion, feminism, civil liberties, abortion, and race relations, a sharp increase in liberal attitudes had occurred since World War II. It's true that a majority of people in the late 1970s thought that the tax system had in recent decades become more unfair—because it had: it was much less progressive than in the early 1950s. Naturally, then, as taxes (especially payroll taxes) fell more and more heavily on ordinary people, they became more resistant to tax hikes and more receptive to politicians' promises to cut taxes, especially on the middle and lower classes—*not* on the rich, which is what happened under Reagan. Support for cuts in military spending as opposed to cuts in social spending substantially increased in the 1980s, though the Reagan administration was doing the opposite. Likewise, public aversion to nuclear weapons was strong and growing, and arms control met with widespread approval.

It's been claimed that Reagan was a uniquely popular president, but this is false. During his first term his approval rating averaged 50 percent, lower than Eisenhower's 69, Kennedy's 71, Johnson's 52, and Nixon's 56. As economic conditions improved in the mid-1980s, Reagan's popularity rose, though still remaining far below that of Eisenhower. But "if one controls for economic conditions, Reagan's popularity does not differ significantly from Jimmy Carter's." Ha! What a preposterous mythology has been constructed in the last thirty years.

Nor was there a major realignment of voter allegiances toward the Republicans. The 1980 election was more a negative referendum on Carter than an endorsement of Reagan. And in 1984, below the presidential level Republicans' gains were unimpressive. Reagan himself garnered only 32.3 percent of the potential electorate, given the numbers of people who abstained from voting. And, strikingly, several liberal Democratic senators (like Tom Harkin and Paul Simon) won against incumbents in states that Reagan decisively carried. So much for the idea that voters realigned towards Republicans in the 1980s—or afterwards, for that matter. (Power has continued to fluctuate between the two parties.) Reagan's electoral victories were mainly just a function of the country's positive economic performance in 1984, having little or nothing to do with support for his policies.

What about those "conservative" white males who had left the Democratic Party after the 1960s? Wasn't it—and isn't it—a good idea to try to get them back? Sure. But "the overwhelming importance of economic issues undermines revisionist arguments about the need to make conservative ideological appeals to parts of the old New Deal base. Even accepting the proposition that Southern white males need to be attracted back to the party, for example, the evidence suggests that the surest way to do that is not by abandoning Southern blacks but by running hard on economic issues that unite low-income groups across racial lines." Excellent point. There's no need to ape conservative Republicans; just address issues that blue-collar workers care about, like wages and the revitalization of decaying communities. The problem, of course, is that to do so means antagonizing big business. That's the Democrats' handicap: it's hard to be a party of big business and the popular majority at the same time. One set of class interests is inevitably sacrificed for the other; and usually it ends up being the people's interests that are sacrificed, because business has the money. (The Republicans' problem is different: how to attract votes when your *only* real

constituency is the rich? The only way to do so is to delude, by appealing to nationalistic emotions, cultural issues, religious fundamentalism, racism, and other such fascist things.)

Having said all this, the point of the rest of the book is clear. As the authors state,

> Before the United States wrecks its cities, shrinks its education system, abandons the regulation of business, turns the back the clock on rights for women, blacks, and Hispanic Americans, reverses the progressive income tax, heats up the arms race, invades another Third World country, or simply eliminates unions, we need to take a hard look at the recent history of the American political system. [A prophetic litany of horrors!] How and why did the New Deal political system decline? If, as the poll data suggest, public attitudes toward major policy questions have remained programmatically liberal, how does one account for America's right turn in the 1970s? Why did leaders of the major parties keep trying to jettison more and more of the New Deal's programs, including domestic programs that are popular with vast numbers of voters? Why did they repeatedly insist on pursuing sharply deflationary monetary policy, often at great electoral cost? [And why did Walter Mondale choose to stand for a paradoxical and self-destructive set of policies in his 1984 campaign, including unpopular tax increases?] …These are the questions we seek to answer in this book.

To do so, they start with a general consideration of what it is that produces massive policy changes of the sort that happened in the 1980s, when the New Deal system began to be dismantled. The conventional view among political scientists is the (seemingly) commonsense one: *voters* are the key factor. They're the ones with the power, who determine policy priorities. The broad theory is called "critical realignment theory"; in brief, it "understands political change primarily in terms of *changing patterns of mass voting behavior*." I'll quote from Ferguson's fantastic book *Golden Rule: The Investment Theory of Party Competition and the Logic of Money-Driven Political Systems* (1995):

> Most American elections [according to mainstream critical realignment theory] are contests within comparatively stable and coherent "party systems." While any number of short-term forces may momentarily alter the balance of power within a particular party system, and cumulative, long-run changes may also be at work, the identity of individual party systems rests on durable voting coalitions within the electorate. So long as these voting blocs (which in different party systems may be defined variously along ethnic, class, religious, racial, sexual, or a plurality of other lines) persist, only marginal changes are likely when administrations turn over. Characteristic patterns of voter turnout, party competition, political symbols, public policies, and other institutional expressions of the distribution of power survive from election to election.
>
> "Normal politics,"[1] of course, is not the only kind of politics that occurs in the United States. The "critical realignments" of critical realignment theory refer to a handful of exceptional elections—those associated with the New Deal and the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Populist insurrection of the 1890s, the Civil War, and the Jacksonian era are most frequently mentioned, though other dates have also been proposed—in which extraordinary political pressures find expression. Associated with the rise of new political issues, intense social stress, sharp factional infighting within existing parties, and the rise of strong party movements, these "critical" or "realigning" elections sweep away the old party system. Triggering a burst of new legislation and setting off or facilitating other institutional changes that may take years to complete, such elections establish the framework of a new pattern of politics that characterizes the next party system.

This theory emphasizes popular control of public policy; sweeping changes, as happened in the 1930s and 1980s, are ascribed to voter sentiment. Unfortunately, a lot of evidence has been collected that suggests that "the durable voter coalitions which are supposed to underlie party systems never existed, and that so-called

[1] Cf. Thomas Kuhn's "normal science," described in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Kuhn was a famous philosopher of science who radically changed scholars' understanding of how science makes progress.

critical realignments are not only very difficult to define, but simply have not witnessed major, lasting shifts in voter sentiment." Three researchers sympathetic to the theory argue that, contrary to its predictions, "indications of substantial continuity of the alignment of electoral forces across virtually the whole sweep of American electoral history can be observed… Electoral patterns do not, by themselves, clearly and unequivocally point to the occurrence of partisan realignment." In other words, partisan realignments, which have indisputably occurred periodically, can apparently not be explained by (massive changes in) electoral behavior. So we need another explanation.

Incidentally, the Marxist in me can't help remarking that, in a capitalist society, nothing is more predictable than mainstream intellectuals' adherence to this naïve *voting*-based analytical framework. As if ordinary voters are the ones who have real power! *Class* is invisible to most academics, because these people are not thinkers but careerists. "What, *wealth* as the determinant of power?! Absurd! Reductive! Vulgarly Marxist! Money and wealth have nothing to do with it! We live in a perfectly pluralist society in which all groups have approximately equal power!" I don't understand how such fantasies are possible.

Anyway, Ferguson and Rogers provide a more sensible explanation, in which *business elites*, not voters, play the leading part. Political parties are not what they have typically been conceived of, as machines to get out the vote. Instead, their real market consists of major "investors." (The word "investor" is to be understood in a broad sense, as people and institutions with the resources to invest a lot of time and money in trying to control the state.) "Blocs of major investors define the core of political parties and are responsible for most of the signals the party sends to the electorate." Voters, then, are a secondary, though necessary, factor.

> During realignments [Ferguson argues] basic changes take place in the core investment blocs which constitute parties. More specifically, realignments occur when cumulative long-run changes in industrial structures (commonly interacting with a variety of short-run factors, notably steep economic downturns) polarize the business community, thus bringing together a new and powerful bloc of investors with durable interests. As this process begins, party competition heats up and at least some differences between the parties emerge more clearly… Assuming that the system crisis eventually eases…the fresh "hegemonic bloc" that has come to power enjoys excellent prospects as long as it can hold itself together. Benefiting from incumbency advantage and the chance to implement its program, the new bloc's major problem is to manage the tensions among its various parts, while of course making certain that large groups of voters do not become highly mobilized against it—either by making positive appeals to some or by minimizing voter turnout, or both.

Ordinarily most voters can have almost no influence on policy because they're prevented from sufficiently investing themselves in it. They have other priorities, e.g., living their lives. Hence, it will be major investors who set the political agenda. One predictive consequence of this theory is that "on all issues affecting the vital interests that major investors have in common, no party competition will take place." This is clearly borne out by the evidence. Certain issues, namely the ones most important to voters, rarely show up in campaigns; and when something like healthcare reform does, it's because one bloc of major investors no longer has an interest in ignoring it. (If you look at polls you'll see that voters' attitudes on healthcare reform haven't changed much in decades: they've wanted national health insurance. But major investors haven't, so it hasn't happened.)

To understand how the New Deal system declined, it's necessary to understand what it was in the first place. And here we encounter another of FR's challenges to liberal orthodoxy. "At the center of [the New Deal coalition around Roosevelt] were not the millions of farmers, blacks, and poor that have preoccupied liberal commentators, nor even the masses of employed or striking workers who pressured the government from below (and later helped implement some of the New Deal's achievements), but something else—a new power bloc of capital-intensive industries, investment banks and internationally oriented commercial banks." Ferguson describes in *Golden Rule* how this bloc was forged in the 1930s, but I'll skip the very interesting history. The point is that, unlike labor-intensive industries such as textiles, firms in capital-intensive industries were not profoundly threatened by labor turbulence and organization. They

could thus afford to join a coalition with organized labor starting around 1935, thereby making possible the relatively left-wing "second New Deal" (exemplified by the Wagner and Social Security Acts—which businesses in the new Roosevelt bloc, far from opposing, helped write). "Because most large capital-intensive firms (with the important exception of the heavily protectionist chemical industry, which did not belong to the bloc) were world, as well as U.S., pace-setters, they stood to gain from global free trade. They therefore allied themselves with leading international financiers, whose own minuscule workforce presented few sources of tension, and who had supported a more broadly internationalist foreign policy and lower tariffs since the end of World War I. Together, members of this bloc provided the needed business support for the two broad policy commitments—liberalism at home, internationalism abroad—centrally identified with the New Deal."

This bloc was a small part of the business community in the 1930s, but it was immensely powerful. It included many of the largest and fastest-growing corporations in the country, including General Electric, IBM, Pan Am, oil companies like Shell, Standard Oil of New Jersey and Standard Oil of California, and banks like Chase National Bank, Bank of America, Goldman Sachs, and Lehman Brothers. The controlling interests in these businesses also dominated leading American foundations, and so could exercise major influence on political opinion and public policy. Once this bloc had come together and allied with Roosevelt, it dominated policy for a generation. "The administration embarked on a historic program of trade liberalization and efforts at currency stabilization," which after World War II took the form of the famous Bretton Woods system that lasted until the early 1970s. As you may know, "Bretton Woods established the dollar as the 'vehicle' currency to be used in the conduct and financing of international trade, and brought order to foreign-exchange markets by establishing a system of fixed exchange rates among the world's currencies, tied to the dollar; the dollar, in turn, was convertible to gold." The various institutional innovations of Bretton Woods helped make possible the incredible growth of the American and world economy in the postwar period.

Despite many successes, the Democratic coalition, both in its business and its electoral dimensions, wasn't particularly stable; in some respects it was already starting to disintegrate in the 1940s, as the labor movement ran into difficulties that included a catastrophic failure to organize workers in the South, and a failure to prevent the rabidly anti-union Taft-Hartley Act from being passed in 1947. Unions grew more conservative as radicals were purged, and in the context of the Cold War, no more great liberal or left-wing crusades were possible for a while. Moreover, racial conflicts between white and black workers were already breaking out in cities like Detroit in the mid-1940s; these presaged the conflicts that erupted in full force later, in the 1960s, and that ultimately doomed the New Deal's electoral coalition. Still, for a few decades the New Deal's basic program was solidly entrenched: social welfare, trade unionism, minority rights, expanded popular participation in government, the concept of a progressive income tax, and free trade. When in power, Republicans dared not stray far from it, even though their business constituency of labor-intensive firms surely wanted them to. (Such firms were opposed to both free trade—foreign competition—and protection for unions, but in the postwar era they didn't have enough power to push through their program.)

It was in the 1960s that things started to get tougher for the New Deal coalition. Kennedy was firmly in the multinational camp, so he promoted free trade and lowered taxes on corporations and the rich, which contributed to an economic takeoff after the recession of 1957–58. "With the growing boom, imports exploded, threatening many traditional, labor-intensive Republican manufacturers, as well as some primary producers and national oil concerns. Joined by many agricultural interests and smaller businesses who received little or no benefit from the investment-oriented tax cuts and who often feared the effects of rising social spending on their supplies of low-wage, unskilled labor; copper companies, whose prices were collapsing; some defense contractors; and many leftover opponents of the New Deal—these groups went on the offensive." These conservative forces increasingly took over the Republican Party, writing an import-restriction clause into the party platform, denouncing the UN and internationalism, and nominating Barry Goldwater for the presidency in 1964.

At the same time, as you know, the civil rights movement was attaining national prominence. Multinational elites, who were already losing what remained of their position in the GOP, decided they had

to secure the power of the Democratic Party for a generation. Solidifying the loyalties of black people, while permitting them the right to vote in the South, would help achieve that goal. So they supported and funded the civil rights movement. After Kennedy's death, these multinational, capital-intensive firms lined up behind LBJ and his Great Society (and staffed the upper tier of his administration), since in a context of vigorous economic growth they had no reason to fear increased social spending. More tax cuts and trade liberalization followed, and large U.S. military budgets made possible the repeated application of force abroad (e.g., in Latin America) to secure these businesses' overseas investments. But not only the elite was doing well: workers had more jobs and higher wages, and social welfare spending rose dramatically under LBJ. So, all in all, things looked pretty good for the Democratic coalition, especially since Goldwater had been thrashed in the 1964 election.

What went wrong? Historians often argue that the major Democratic catastrophe was Vietnam, but this likely isn't the case. It's true that the war divided business interests in the Johnson coalition. "The fabulous dollar outflow that the war entailed exacerbated the already shaky U.S. balance of payments. As pressure mounted on U.S. gold reserves, the [value of the] dollar itself increasingly came into question, threatening its key role in the Bretton Woods financial system." Unless this threat was checked, foreign deposits would leave U.S. banks, which would therefore see their position in the world economy decline. Other multinationals had their own reasons to question the war, and by 1968 were pressuring Democratic politicians to speak out against it. LBJ himself was finally persuaded to start drawing down troop commitments. All this embittered hawks in the party and strained the coalition's cohesiveness. But there were few long-term consequences: after the war ended, dovish and hawkish party elites reunited (in 1976).

More significant was the decline of organized labor. It remained very powerful in the 1960s, but its strength was waning. Democrats effectively ignored it on signature issues as sectors of the business community mobilized against unions; and ever freer trade was having a devastating impact on union jobs, such as in textiles, shoes, and steel. Kennedy and Johnson refused the import protections that both labor and some manufacturers wanted. At the same time, labor failed to broaden its power by organizing new workers—except for government workers, which wasn't enough to make up for losses in the private sector. Union density in the civilian work force decreased from 26 to 21 percent between 1970 and 1980 (and continued its decline thereafter). Nor did unions expand significantly in the South and West, which were the fastest-growing regions in the country. Thus, organized labor remained a basically regional phenomenon, concentrated in the East and Midwest. Also, its stance towards the women's movement, the black movement, and the environmental movement did it no favors: as is well known, the AFL-CIO was quite conservative, thereby abdicating its leadership role (and the benefits that could have come from it) with respect to social movements and large parts of the population. Conversely, these other groups were forced to turn to liberal corporate-dominated foundations and media for support, which left them vulnerable when these elites decided to pull back on their support for social action in the late 1970s. In short, "labor unions would continue to lose members, and millions of blacks, women, and Hispanics fail to get the unions they needed. Having abandoned most efforts to reach (increasingly Southern and Western) white male blue-collar workers who were not organized, as well as most blacks and women, the movement that could most sensibly claim to represent almost every ordinary American's general interest could hardly avoid looking more and more like the 'special interest' of a lucky few."

In addition to this is the sordid story of organized labor's support for imperialist foreign policy in Indochina and Latin America. Perversely, it helped subvert left-wing opposition movements around the world, which was destructive to its own membership in the United States. American aid used to prop up regimes that repress their own citizens and their wages "in effect subsidizes multinational expansion abroad by lowering the costs of that expansion—either by lowering wages or by reducing risks of popular (and investment-threatening) social upheaval in repressive regimes." Particularly with post-1950s advances in communications and transportation, outsourcing became more common: businesses could relocate to areas with cheaper labor (or use the threat to do so to force concessions from their workforces), and a tidal wave of low-cost imports contributed to America's deindustrialization—which also meant de-unionization.

As if all this weren't enough, the AFL-CIO's abandonment (in the 1960s) of the fight to expand the progressive income tax had disastrous consequences. It enabled Kennedy and Johnson to finance most

of their social programs by a rise in the social security tax, the most directly regressive of all American federal taxes. "Especially when combined with the cuts in corporate tax rates, and the proliferation of corporate credits, this step made the tax system significantly less progressive than it had been, while sharply increasing tax burdens on those who could least afford it." As I said earlier, it's therefore understandable why so many people would later embrace a political party (the Republican) that promised to lower taxes. Especially in light of another disastrous fact, namely that the multinational constituency that largely designed Johnson's Great Society urban and social programs crafted them in the interests of mortgage bankers, downtown merchants, big developers, and, in the case of medical programs, pharmaceutical companies, large foundations, the American Medical Association, big hospitals, and insurance companies. This meant that the programs would be costly and inefficient, difficult to reform (because of their powerful support from business), and prone to increasing the burden on the average taxpayer (as they grew more expensive). "It was a system that could hardly avoid inflaming tensions between different groups of middle- and lower-income Americans." In the end, the Republican Party proved to be the main beneficiary of these tensions.

Not immediately, though. The Nixon administration didn't represent the end of the New Deal system. It encapsulated a highly fragmented regime, and, as FR say, is best thought of as a typical transition product of a party system in disintegration. The old opposition to the New Deal, including protectionist interests like textiles and steel and independent oil companies, allied uneasily with an odd assortment of multinationally oriented figures like Henry Kissinger. As a result, the administration pursued rather schizophrenic policies. On some issues, like civil liberties and "law and order," it was definitely more conservative than Johnson; on others, like social spending and environmental protection, it was quite liberal. "The reason is straightforward. As Nixon himself clearly sensed, the part of his bloc that was tied to the 'Eastern liberal establishment' largely retained its commitment to the policy formulas of the New Deal." True, it was concerned about wage pressures and lagging productivity, but it didn't think these necessitated an all-out attack on the welfare state; instead, a short period of monetary austerity would probably be sufficient. As for Nixon's environmental regulation: this wasn't, as people are wont to think, merely a manifestation of "the public" winning a battle against "business." Rather, many among the upper classes, such as increasing numbers of bankers, brokers, insurers, and real-estate magnates, who enjoy the environment as much as anyone else, used their clout—while cooperating with popular movements—to push for regulation. Developers, fisheries, and tourist-oriented businesses rose up against oil spills off their coasts; Eastern coal producers tried to use "clean-air requirements" to cripple Western producers; and lawyers, "overjoyed to discover fertile new areas for expensive litigation," in the early 1970s rushed to file suits against polluters.

The one area in which the Nixon administration did depart from the New Deal framework was in its temporary New Economic Policy (in 1971), which instituted wage- and price-controls to curb continuing pressures to inflation, suspended the dollar's convertibility into gold (allowing it to float against other currencies and lose value, because it had been highly overvalued), and a ten-percent surcharge on many imports. All this broke with multilateralism and free trade, and led to protests from some business groups. FR have a detailed discussion of these issues, and of the epoch-making demise of the Bretton Woods system in 1971/73, but the upshot is that Nixon was able to placate the internationalists and prevent them from going over *en masse* to the free-trade Democrats. This was made easier by the fact that George McGovern was the Democrats' presidential nominee in 1972, a man so liberal that even much of the liberal Eastern establishment considered him beyond the pale. So they supported Nixon, who was reelected. What happened next, though, is more important: when the Federal Reserve tightened up the money supply after the 1972 election, the recession that was expected turned out not to be a mild one like 1969–70 but a more protracted and severe one. The American economy, and most of the developed world, entered its worst period since the Great Depression—which took the whole business community by surprise. Even after the recession had ended, U.S. wages, profits, productivity growth, and export shares kept dropping; only inflation and imports rose.

So, "the recession that began at the end of 1973, and stretched through the beginning of 1975, was a watershed event in American political economy. It marked the end of the long period of growth that had

been sustained since World War II, underscored the changed position of the United States in the world economy, and ushered in a sustained period of stagflation. It was then that American politics finally made its decisive turn to the right." The beginning of FR's chapter on "the dismal 1970s" states the main points clearly:

> Deteriorating U.S. economic performance in an increasingly competitive and integrated world economy is the analytic key to the Democrats' decline. In a variety of ways, sagging growth and profits at home, and increased competition abroad, made the business community much more cost-sensitive. This stiffened business opposition to the growth of social spending and forced the Democrats to work within tighter fiscal constraints on their domestic programs. Pressures on the social side of the budget increased as growing U.S. involvement in the international economy, and in particular in the Third World, widened demands within the business community for increased military spending. Moreover, these competing demands on the budget could not be easily reconciled by simply raising taxes, for as profit margins sagged and intensified competition from abroad made it more difficult for corporations to pass taxes through to consumers, much of the business community was mobilizing in support of further tax reductions. Over the course of the decade, the convergence of these different pressures and demands produced a growing budget crisis in the United States, in effect forcing a choice between social and military spending.
>
> For the Republicans, pressures to make this choice presented an enormous political opportunity. Unencumbered by a mass base…the Republicans were quite prepared to serve as a vehicle for tax and domestic-spending cuts and increased military outlays. For the Democrats, however, the growing tradeoff between guns and butter forced the party to walk a political tightrope between the demands of its elite constituency and the needs of its mass base. Even as the Democrats moved to the right over the course of the decade and the center of American party politics shifted, the tensions within the Democrats' ranks made them a less efficient vehicle for business aspirations than the Republicans. The GOP was thus the first beneficiary of America's right turn.

These ideas harmonize well with Robert Brenner's brilliant arguments in *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (2006), which I've summarized in *Finding Our Compass*. FR give a lot of useful background information on the economic context of the time, but here I'll just refer you to my discussion of Brenner's book. The point is that U.S. competitiveness was in decline, especially in manufacturing.

Businesses responded to economic deterioration in predictable ways: by relocating to the South or West, where labor was cheaper because unions were rare; by regularly violating national labor laws; and by trying to improve their bargaining position with workers in various ways. And as we've seen, most of organized labor was perfectly happy to be ineffectual and see its power decline. Still, we shouldn't overestimate the importance of these wage and unionization issues in causing America's right turn. The employer offensive, by hurting labor, did marginally hurt Democrats' capacities of voter-mobilization, and it weakened resistance within the party to the rise of conservatism. "But the decline in labor's power in the 1970s only continued a long downward slide evident since at least the mid-1950s. It was not a new development, unique to the later period, that can be looked to as precipitating a general policy realignment." In fact, because Democrat-supporting capital-intensive firms didn't have to worry so much about labor costs, "the labor question alone probably squeezed comparatively few traditionally Democratic firms out of the party."

So we have to look to other causes as well. One of them is the issue of *regulation*. "Reeling from intense foreign competition, many sectors of big business, *including* several of the most capital-intensive multinational ones, such as pharmaceuticals, paper, and petrochemicals, lashed back at what they claimed were 'unduly burdensome' government regulations—in particular 'social' regulations of the environment and worker safety that fell particularly hard on these sectors." As many studies have shown, for example David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), these regulated industries launched major efforts to influence public opinion and elite attitudes, e.g., by sponsoring studies that downplayed environmental risk, cultivating ties with university researchers, supporting "neoconservative" journals, funding broad

campaigns extolling the virtues of "free markets," and creating new conservative policy institutes like the Heritage Foundation. By the mid-1970s, U.S. businesses were spending more than $400 million a year on "advocacy advertising," much of it directed against government constraints on business. By the end of the decade it was up to $1 billion annually. This whole neoliberal corporate movement weakened the Democratic base in the business community and in the country as a whole.

–I can't resist inserting a polemical digression here. The authors mention in a footnote that John S. Saloma III gives a detailed survey of all these propagandizing activities in *Omnibus Politics: The New Conservative Labyrinth* (1984). "His study," they say, "is one of the very few to bring out the importance of the astronomical sums of money lavished on these activities, in contrast to the customary rhetoric about the importance of 'new ideas.'" They're right about the latter: intellectuals love to insist on the importance of "powerful new ideas" in explaining changes in society and politics. It's predictable—predictably bourgeois in deflecting attention from class and institutional structures—but it's stupid. John Maynard Keynes gave a classic exposition of this idealist philosophy in the very last paragraph of his *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936), which has stroked the egos of academics for generations:

> …[T]he ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas. Not, indeed, immediately, but after a certain interval; for in the field of economic and political philosophy there are not many who are influenced by new theories after they are twenty-five or thirty years of age, so that the ideas which civil servants and politicians and even agitators apply to current events are not likely to be the newest. But, soon or late, it is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil.

These are backward fantasies, which grow out of a poor sociological imagination. The point is that the ideas that come to be accepted as gospel are those useful to vested interests, which are the entities that have the resources to propagate them. (In the typically bourgeois language of impersonal 'automaticity,' Keynes refers to "the gradual encroachment of ideas." But ideas don't spread of themselves; they are propagated and subsidized by people and institutions whose interests they express. This is why "the ruling ideas of a society are the ideas of its ruling class," which has the resources to spread them.) Keynes' famous book itself contributed not at all to the so-called Keynesian policies of FDR and Hitler and others; in fact, such policies were already being pursued by Baron Haussmann in France in the 1850s, because they were useful in giving employment to thousands of workers and raising aggregate demand and thereby economic growth. Is it likely that had Keynes not published his book in 1936, the U.S. government during and after World War II would have pursued radically different, un-Keynesian economic policies? Hardly. Because they were useful to vested interests, those policies were bound to be adopted—and economists, tools of the ruling class, were bound to systematize their theoretical rationalizations sooner or later. Incidentally, in some form they had been around already in the late nineteenth century, long before Keynes, among liberals and socialists, "underconsumptionists" like John Hobson and many others. But they didn't become conventional wisdom until major parts of the ruling class had taken them up between the late 1930s and early 1970s. After their usefulness had ended, in the 1970s, they were abandoned, and a new, neoliberal, ideological crusade began, which was predictably successful because it was waged by the most powerful actors in society. The falseness and superficiality of the "supply-side" ideas of Reaganomics were no great hindrance to their political success, because *theory* doesn't matter in the real world—despite what self-apologists like Keynes and other liberals (Paul Krugman, etc.) might think.

–Let's return. Not only domestic but also international factors were relevant to the decline of the Democratic New Deal order. One of the most momentous was the huge rise in oil prices that OPEC orchestrated in 1973. Something that's forgotten now is that for a long time the oil industry—the biggest

and most powerful of America's capital-intensive industries—was disproportionately Democratic, because it could afford not to be intensely hostile to organized labor. In 1936, FDR raised more money from Texas than any other state; and Truman, but especially Kennedy and Johnson, had close ties with various oil companies. "In the twinkling of an eye, however, OPEC did what a generation of Republicans, anti-oil populist Democrats, and even the old Tidelands Oil controversy were never able to do. It built a virtual Chinese Wall between oil and the Democrats." This, of course, was quite bad for the Democrats.

The story is that, as oil and gas prices soared in 1973, the government tried to hold down the domestic prices by a complex system of price controls—much to the displeasure of oil and gas companies. A debate raged on whether the controls should be lifted, but the Democratic Party couldn't sponsor lifting them, because they were so important to labor, blacks, and the poor. "As a consequence, and particularly after the strongly Democratic 'Watergate Congress' of 1974 reduced the oil industry's depreciation allowance, virtually the entire oil industry began going over to the Republicans." This move was confirmed when, a few years later, Jimmy Carter pushed for a "windfall profits" tax on the oil industry. Thereafter, this powerful industry concentrated on electing Republicans, who were happy to let the "free market" set energy prices. In addition to this, though, were other subtler consequences of the boom in energy prices:

> For years, some very large fortunes in the South and West had strongly opposed the New Deal. Composed chiefly of growers and independent oilmen in Texas, Oklahoma, and California, this bloc had long patronized right-wing fundamentalist religious activities and spokespersons and other ultraconservative groups. As the boom in energy and commodity prices took off, the fortunes this bloc commanded received an automatic assist, with almost immediate political consequences. It stepped up support for various "New Right" spokespersons—including not only many political operatives associated with groups like NCPAC (National Conservative PAC) but also several leading evangelists [including Jerry Falwell]. …Increased boosting of religious fundamentalism coincided, of course, with a sharp downturn in the well-being of most working- and lower-middle-class Americans. Threatened by imports, rising unemployment, and declining wages, and jostled by the entrance of millions of new women workers (and illegal immigrants) into slack labor markets, many of the most vulnerable members of American society were understandably disenchanted with the profane world (and the "secular humanism" that was said to be its organizing principle). Among at least some of them, inevitably, these religious appeals found wide resonance [and have continued to ever since].

At the same time, elites in mineral-rich Western states stood to profit from price deregulation, and business communities that sought enhanced access to minerals on the huge tracts of Western land controlled by the federal government were bound to support Republicans, who didn't have environmentalists or a mass base to worry about (except for the semi-fascist, religious one they were trying to create). So an organized "Sagebrush Rebellion" began in the West, which laid (absurd) claims to the mantle of populism because its professed goal was recapture by locals of the resources that were controlled by out-of-state forces. –I should mention that this whole narrative and analytic account of the origins of the New Right is grossly simplified. The "movement" was already forming in the mid-1960s, and even, in some respects, the 1950s. A lot of mainstream scholarship describes its genesis from a social history perspective (i.e., why and how ordinary people, suburbanites like Phyllis Schlafly, were drawn to it). But the fact that it didn't really achieve much power until the middle or late 1970s suggests that FR's approach is the most fruitful one: examine why and how *business* funded and directed it. After all, there are always plenty of morons around who can be persuaded of some ideology if it has money and power backing it up. The key is to look at the money and power, not the morons.

Other things were changing too. As détente with the Soviet Union collapsed in the late 1970s, and for many other complex reasons, the business community began to favor an arms buildup, which came to fruition under Reagan. In an environment of slow economic growth, greater military investment would have to be offset by a decline in social spending. Moreover, the gigantic budget crisis of the seventies, a result of insufficient revenues to pay for expanded urban social services and welfare, was met by slashing these

services and some types of public investment. (In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* David Harvey describes how this was done in New York City in 1975, when the city nearly went bankrupt. The drastic measures taken in that case were to some extent adopted all over the country in the 1980s, to deal with the "urban crisis" and at the same time to create a new kind of city, the neoliberal city, designed for the benefit of the service-sector elite.)[1] In addition, the large cuts in corporate taxes in the 1960s and '70s, and proliferation of tax loopholes that benefited business, were not enough for the rich: they continued to press for more reductions in corporate and personal income taxes, thus squeezing social spending even more. Hard-pressed working Americans, who were shouldering much of the burden being shed by the rich, were attracted to these anti-tax campaigns, not knowing that the business leaders behind them wanted to replace the income tax with even more regressive sales or consumption taxes. Anyway, the squeeze on social spending "hurt the Democrats far more than the Republicans, since it constrained their ability to deliver the social benefits that had long secured them a mass base. In the new political economy of the late 1970s, the party of Roosevelt, which had long been able to build and maintain its popular base by dolloping out discrete social benefits, no longer had the resources to do so. Indeed, the very existence of that base posed an important barrier to the Democrats' capacity to realize business objectives. For virtually all sections of the business community, the GOP appeared as a more efficient vehicle for realizing their aspirations."

In short, what was happening is that even as business was embracing the Republican Party, many ordinary people decided to do so as well because at least it addressed their tax concerns (or seemed to) and wasn't tarnished by failed promises in the way the Democratic Party was. From a different perspective, you can interpret the situation as follows: a transition was taking place between two ways of organizing the nation-state. The way of (relative) *social integration*, of a somewhat cohesive nation that integrated different classes of people into the social contract, could not withstand intensified international economic competition and integration, because of the costs that maintaining a semi-cohesive nation imposed on business (in the form of social welfare programs, government investment in public resources, high taxes, the empowerment of organized labor, encroachment of populist ideologies, etc.). The Democratic Party was the preeminent political expression of this inclusive organization of the nation-state, which is why its policies and ideology dominated the period from Roosevelt to Nixon. But when that system started to seriously threaten the profits and power of the capitalist class, the latter necessarily, in large measure, abandoned the old policies and liberal ideology for a more harshly capitalist system that would allow it to compete and enrich itself in the new international context. Thus, the transition from liberal-Democrat to conservative-Republican—which has been replicated in other parts of the Western world—was really a transition between *two phases of the nation-state system itself* (and two phases of global capitalism). There's

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[1] To quote from a paper I wrote: "Many scholars of neoliberalism have described how this political-economic system has functioned to redistribute wealth upwards and exacerbate working-class insecurity. The celebrated geographer David Harvey, for example, argues that neoliberalism began in the U.S. in the mid-1970s, when New York City's fiscal crisis gave investment bankers and their political representatives an opportunity to undo many of the historic achievements of working-class New York by dismantling much of the city's social and physical infrastructure. Public resources were used to build new infrastructure for finance, legal services, the media, and consumerism, as 'working-class and ethnic-immigrant New York was thrust back into the shadows, to be ravaged by racism and a crack cocaine epidemic of epic proportions in the 1980s.' New York City's investment bankers thus paved the way for a political economy of privatization, the privileging of financial institutions, and 'urban entrepreneurialism,' all of which proceeded in the 1980s and 1990s to conquer not only the U.S. but much of the world.

"The contributors to *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe* (2002) analyze some of the means by which neoliberalism has spread across the world. Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell argue that, given high capital mobility, cities are forced to compete against each other to attract business, by establishing 'favorable business climates.' What this entails is deregulation, the undermining of labor unions, and public subsidies to multinational companies. 'The serial reproduction of cultural spectacles, enterprise zones, waterfront developments, and privatized forms of local governance' is the natural product of this worldwide inter-urban competition…" A semi-global program of urban beautification, gentrification, 'touristification,' property development, entertainment, etc. replaced the old paradigm of the industrial city, as a new, post-industrial economy emerged.

a historical logic and a kind of historical necessity to it. Chapter four of my *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution* fleshes out these ideas in more depth.

With everything that was happening—the aggressive public-opinion campaigns of the newly formed Business Roundtable, of the revitalized Chamber of Commerce and National Association of Manufacturers, the National Federation of Independent Business and scores of other trade associations, and the rightward shift of the media, etc.—it seems surprising that Carter was elected. But the trade issue—free trade (typically Democrats) vs. protectionism (often Republicans)—still divided business elites, and the economy briefly revived in 1975–76, so many pro-free trade multinational businessmen supported Carter in his presidential campaign. In the next few years, though, he was forced to move to the right on issue after issue—and even then he didn't sufficiently please large sectors of business, which therefore finally abandoned the Democrats. Meanwhile, the economy went from bad to worse just as the 1980 election was approaching, and for budgetary reasons Carter made massive cuts in funds for the poor, blacks, and cities, and the Federal Reserve dramatically raised interest rates to curb inflation—which, of course, pushed the economy deeper into recession and was very bad for the Democrats' mass base. Reagan was simultaneously moving from the far right to the center right, to be more electable. "Originally supported by ultraconservative entrepreneurs in California and elsewhere, some large fortunes inveterately hostile to the New Deal, parts of the armaments industry, many small businesses, and protectionist concerns in textiles and independent oil," Reagan was now modifying his policy views to appeal to the rest of the business community. Crucially, his campaign sought a compromise on the GOP's most divisive issue, international trade. The media, too, was largely behind him. All this added up to a solid victory for the Republicans in 1980.

Their victory, however, disguised the fact that their coalition was quite fragile. "Composed of both nationalists *and* several species of internationalists; advocates of tight money *and* monetary ease; free-traders *and* protectionists; sponsors of a variety of contradictory tax plans; and many clashing foreign-policy interests—the coalition that brought Reagan to power was a mile wide but only an inch deep." To keep it together, the administration resorted to a very reliable stratagem: satisfy the greed of the rich. Of virtually *all* the rich. The history of the major tax reductions passed early in Reagan's term doesn't reflect well on the human species, so I won't delve into it here. The point is that "in the golden glow of prospective tax reductions, and the drop in labor's bargaining position that the rise in interest rates was already inducing, the Administration had at least for a time found a way to square the circle. While withdrawing from traditional government obligations to working people and the poor, deflating the world economy, and introducing massively regressive revisions of the federal tax system, it could reward virtually all members of its highly diverse and rivalrous business coalition by simply giving them streams of cash."

Even as government revenues were being slashed by these tax cuts, an immense military buildup was being planned. Nearly the whole of American business was clamoring for it, largely to enhance the U.S.'s ability to project force abroad—"to press and defend American interests in an increasingly volatile world economy." It was great for defense contractors, too. The hundreds of billions of dollars invested in weapons procurement, warhead production, military construction, and so forth was incredibly wasteful and redundant, but when one's purpose is only to satisfy business and project power, considerations of efficiency are irrelevant. Billions of dollars were being cut in social spending at the same time, although many of the administrations' proposals—e.g., to drastically "reform" Social Security—were beaten back in Congress. (Republicans tried to gut Social Security again under George W. Bush, but again they failed. Incidentally, Bill Clinton was eager to privatize the program in the late 1990s, but then he was impeached in connection with the Monica Lewinsky scandal and abandoned the idea in order to shore up his liberal base. Few people know of this major contribution that Lewinsky made to the welfare of Americans.)[1]

[1] Michael D. Tanner, "Clinton Wanted Social Security Privatized," *Cato Institute*, July 13, 2001; Robin Blackburn, "How Monica Lewinsky Saved Social Security," *Counterpunch*, October 31, 2004. With the Lewinsky scandal unfolding and Clinton's popularity eroding, "in an instant Clinton spun on the dime and became Social Security's mighty champion, coining the slogan 'Save Social Security First.'" This, after eighteen months of secretly preparing to privatize it. The man is a piece of work.

Nevertheless, cuts to Social Security did occur, along with major cuts to low-income benefits and jobs and services programs. "To take only a few examples: the reductions in Food Stamp benefits for some 20 million Americans hit the poor hardest, with 70 percent of the savings coming from families living below the poverty line; some 440,000 low-income working families (almost all headed by women) lost AFDC benefits, while several hundred thousand more had benefits reduced; Medicaid benefits, linked to AFDC, were therefore also scaled back, with the result that nearly a third of all children now living in poverty [in 1986] receive no Medicaid coverage; and as a direct result of cuts in low-income housing programs, an estimated 300,000 more families were pushed into substandard housing." All these cuts did very little to reduce budget deficits, but at least they increased the misery of millions of people.[1]

"By 1984 some 33 million Americans—one in seven—lived below the [absurdly low] poverty line, 4.4 million more than in 1980, and 9 million more than in 1978. The plight of children was worse. In 1984, about one-quarter of all children under the age of six lived below the poverty line, and more than half of all black children under the age of six lived in poverty." Needless to say, the situation is worse now. With the poverty line at $23,492 for a family of four—which is ridiculous; annually that's barely enough money for two people, let alone four—about 50 million people were in poverty in 2013. Between 2009 and 2011, almost a third of the population was officially poor for at least two months.[2]

It's so well-known that the Reagan administration dramatically slashed enforcement of social and environmental regulations, and of labor laws, that I won't mention all the evidence. Unionization rates continued to plunge, too—to the point that private-sector unionization is now less than 7 percent. Overall, and all over the world, the 1980s were a horrifying decade. Unfortunately, the global spread of neoliberalism that began then has only accelerated.

What was the Democrats' reaction to all these attacks on the domestic—and global—population? Much or most of the time, they supported and enabled them, wanting to regain business support. The party's mass base, however, began to mobilize, despite having far too few resources to adequately counter the conservative offensive. Unions, community organizations, church groups, social-welfare workers, and state and municipal employees tried to unite in opposition to the cutbacks, and resistance grew to the administration's arms buildup and savage policies in Central America. Incredibly, "even the AFL-CIO showed [meager] signs of life," calling for rallies against the socially destructive policies. Reagan's approval rating dropped from 68 percent in May 1981 to 35 percent in January 1983.

No matter. Business is the constituency that counts. Leading Democrats got together to reorganize the party's finances and methods of fundraising, for example by creating the Democratic Business Council, which was successful at raising money from capital-intensive military contractors, investment bankers, real-estate magnates, high-tech executives, and corporate lawyers. The project to build a business-oriented alternative to Reaganomics quickly met with some success, given the discontent that Reagan's bellicose foreign policy was causing in the multinational business community. Arms control became a popular issue among multinationalists and foundations that represented their interests, like the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations. Urban real-estate companies were also being alienated by Reagan's policies, which were encouraging the flight of business from the Northeast and Midwest to the South and West, and tended to be destructive of the urban infrastructure necessary for the viability of many real-estate projects. These and other interests threatened by federal budget cuts—and favoring trade with the USSR, hence détente (which Reagan certainly didn't favor)—coalesced around particular issues, such as the huge "nuclear freeze" movement. Nor was the explosion of government debt appreciated by, e.g., investment bankers or insurance companies, whose prosperity "depends on investor confidence in long-term bonds. Permanently growing deficits erode such confidence, since investors know that governments and taxpayers will be almost

[1] Some of the most important programs cut, aside from the ones just mentioned, were those in child nutrition, Supplemental Security Income, Low Income Energy Assistance, financial aid for needy students, health block grants and other health services, compensatory education, community-services block grants, general job-training programs, and public-service employment. And this was just in Reagan's first term.

[2] Dave Boyer, *Washington Times*, January 7, 2014.

irresistibly tempted…to pay off the debt by printing money. Prominent members of both of these sectors [finance and insurance] thus became increasingly active in supporting the Democrats."

One big problem for the Democrats was the trade issue. Since the flood of imports was costing many thousands of jobs, unions desperately needed a Democratic commitment to some degree of trade protection. But free-traders in the party were strongly against this. So what was to be done? As it turned out, the severe recession of 1981–82 was proving so damaging to many businesses that, by late 1982, they were ready to make concessions to other Democratic interests for the sake of challenging Reagan. And as we just saw, many other groups had their own grievances. So all these diverse constituencies were finally able to reach a compromise "industrial policy" plan in early 1983, and thus to come together, at least briefly, behind a Democratic presidential candidate for 1984, who turned out to be Walter Mondale.

Mondale's campaign got support and funds from all the groups just mentioned, such as investment bankers, insurance executives, developers, and liberal internationalists. Before getting the party's nomination, though, he had to deal with challengers from both his left and right. George McGovern, for instance, ran again, though the media and most of the business community still considered him basically representative of the class enemy and shut him out. Candidates on Mondale's right, on the other hand, received a ton of money from business, much of which—given a more healthy economy than in late 1982—was now having second thoughts about the "industrial policy" compromise it had made earlier with organized labor. Since labor was obviously in decline, maybe it didn't have to be reckoned with at all. Leading Democrats, and then the media and business community, in fact started to publicly criticize Mondale's acceptance of the industrial policy as a capitulation to "special interests." Later on, as it was amplified, this charge would prove deadly to his campaign. For now, though, with some difficulty he was able to defeat the business-beloved conservative Democrat John Glenn and the more liberal Gary Hart, and Jesse Jackson's campaign—while generating a lot of excitement and publicity among the population because he was practically the only candidate addressing the concerns of the working class, the poor, and minorities—never had much of a chance, in light of elite hostility.

But Mondale made mistakes that cost him the general election. The worst was his suicidal pledge to raise taxes. "What on earth was he thinking?" you ask. Quite simply, he was thinking of his core constituency: those in the business community concerned about budget deficits. By supporting a tax rise he expressed his seriousness about getting the budget under control, and so could count on solid support from business. He also suicidally rejected the idea of broad tax reform, a popular issue that Reagan seized, probably because it made investment bankers and real estate interests nervous. But in taking these stances he ensured that the public would have little reason to vote for him. Certainly he didn't excite labor, the poor, or minorities, since he tended to ignore them. Nor, despite his great efforts to court business, did he excite most of the rich, who frequently continued to favor and fund Reagan. And of course on election day Democrats suffered from their usual problem: huge parts of their mass base, alienated from a political system that ignored them, simply didn't vote. Besides, as stated earlier, the upswing in the economy persuaded many among the middle class to stick with Reagan, who talked frequently about the attractive theme of economic growth. All these factors, and others I haven't mentioned (such as Democrats' ambivalence about spending millions of dollars to register new voters), combined to doom Mondale's campaign.

The last chapter of the book contains a slew of insightful predictions, the most significant of which is that America will continue its right turn, because the popular opposition has too few resources. As we know now, that prediction was correct. With Bill Clinton, the new conservatism of the Democrats became irreversible—absent a mass movement that, even if it happens, still isn't likely to turn things around anytime soon. The New Deal system and coalition is long dead and cannot be revived, in light of neoliberal globalization. My own prediction is that our current Gilded Age will continue to tear apart the social fabric until it calls forth a variety of popular movements and social upheavals that elites—globally—will have to reckon with somehow. We're already seeing the first glimmers of this, though so far elites have been able to use simple repression to fight them off. But this strategy isn't sustainable; constructive efforts to meet the resistance halfway are, sooner or later, inevitable, if only for the sake of preventing total social disintegration. Again, I refer you to my *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution* for more discussion of these

points. Briefly, I think we're in for a hundred-year-long chaotic transition to a new global system structured not around nation-states and corporate capitalism but some sort of more decentralized and fragmented political economy that can't be foreseen at present.

Anyway, the value of Ferguson and Rogers' book, and their way of analyzing politics, should be obvious. It's the Golden Rule: to find out who rules, follow the gold. In their last chapter they reiterate that it wasn't popular "special interests" that had caused the crisis the Democrats found themselves in; it was policies that elites had crafted in a context of sinking economic vitality. "These business interests [principally capital-intensive and multinationally oriented big business and its allies among developers, military contractors, and parts of the media]—and not workers, blacks, or the poor—were responsible for designing the fragmented, bureaucratized, litigation-prone regulatory programs and social-service delivery system whose costs ballooned in the 1970s. They promoted the vast urban-aid programs that were frequently little more than subsidies to developers, downtown merchants, and real-estate companies. Along with many Republican business groups, they pushed for the combination of regressive tax relief and a major military buildup that provoked [or rather helped provoke] the budget squeeze of the late 1970s and produced the even more disastrous one of the 1980s." It's the economic royalists of whom Roosevelt spoke who have transformed the country's politics since the 1970s—and who are digging the grave of capitalism by running society into the ground.

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January–May, 2015

Reading parts of another book on John Mackie's moral skepticism, a collection of essays.

…I'm gonna have to stop with the ethics reading, at least for now. Have to focus on the dissertation.

[…] Need intellectual stimulation, which I can't get with the dissertation. Don't know if there's any point to it, but it's fun, so I'm reading Friedrich Lange's 1875 classic *History of Materialism* (three volumes).

In a footnote early on, Lange makes the interesting, though perhaps obvious, observation that materialism can lead straight into subjective idealism. You have the notion that the basic constituents of the world are material; then you have the (Lockean) notion, congenial to materialists, that the only way we know of material "things in themselves" is through our sense-perceptions, so that we don't have direct access to matter in itself; and then you can easily get the (Berkeleyan) position that we might as well discard the material things-in-themselves as unknown and unknowable. All we know, and all there are, are sensations and ideas in our mind. Apparently the Greeks never took this idealistic step. It's understandable why Berkeley took it, but of course in doing so he contradicted science and was quite wrong—and also made it a mystery as to how we could have these sensations and ideas in the first place. (In principle, materialistic science has little difficulty in explaining the origins of sense-perceptions—although it's true that the conceptual leap from neurobiological processes to subjective experience is a mystery.)

The change from the materialism of Democritus and, sort of, Protagoras and the Sophists to the anti-materialism of Plato and, in a different way, Aristotle was probably related to the suspicion that materialism, with its "sensationalism" (Protagoras's and Aristippos's emphasis on the particularity of sensations, an anti-universalist or -objectivist position), was democratic, populist, vulgar, etc. Or so it seems to me. Materialism had led to the relativism of Protagoras, the valorization of the individual as the measure of all things, with the idea that there was no objective truth but that only appearances mattered, such that the lowest person had access to as much truth as the "highest." And anyway, the Sophists seem to have been a rather democratic phenomenon, frowned on by conservative and older aristocratic types. Their very *dialectical* method, and their questioning, their cynicism, etc., bespoke hostility towards authority and tradition. Actually, in some respects Socrates himself must have belonged in spirit to this school—Aristophanes was right about that—given his irreverence, his radical doubt, and so on. Nietzsche saw this. ("With dialectics, the masses always end up on top.") It's kind of puzzling, then, that Plato so admired

Socrates, in light of Plato's radically anti-democratic instincts. In any case, Plato hated all this democratic nonsense, all this emphasis on flux and relativism and sensations and pleasure (Aristippos) and matter, so he undertook to prove it was all illusion, that only the timeless, the divine, the anti-material, the idealistic Forms were reality. It was sort of an intellectual version of authoritarian reaction. He hated the vulgar masses and so tried to convince himself that their world, their conceptions, they themselves were illusions, or botched manifestations of the Forms; he alone, with his beauty and goodness and truth and aristocratic consciousness, was real. Aristotle didn't go to these extremes, didn't feel such a need to deny the world he lived in, but did, nonetheless, look askance on democracy and the hoi polloi. Thus, he theorized a sort of compromise between materialism and idealism.

As for Socrates, Lange reminds me, in a later chapter, that despite having points of contact with the Sophists he was also opposed to them. And hence to the spirit of theoretical and practical materialism. He was conservative, a dogmatic moralist, interested in the universal truths of reason that explain the world, even religious in a monotheistic sort of way. He was temperamentally and intellectually opposed to mechanistic materialism, less interested in efficient causes than in final causes, *reasons* for why the world is as it is. Unlike the materialists, he was prone to anthropomorphizing. "His entire conviction is that the reason which has created the world-structure proceeds after the manner of human reason; that we can follow its thoughts everywhere, although we must at the same time admit its infinite superiority. The world is explained from man, not man from the universal laws of nature. …Everywhere we have an anthropomorphic activity. A plan, a purpose must first be provided, and then the matter and the force to set it going. We see here how much of a Socratic Aristotle still was at bottom with his antithesis of form and matter, and the government of efficient causes by the final purpose." Socrates' was a basically theological conception. "The architect of the worlds must be a Person who can be conceived and imagined by man, though he may not be understood in all his actions." So, ironically, Socrates can be seen as inaugurating a (rationalistic) religious tendency that Plato carried forward and later the Neoplatonics and Christians filled out with different and more explicitly religious content.

—Paradoxical character, Socrates. Both democratic and anti-democratic, elitist and anti-elitist, conservative and radical, rationalistic and religious (fused together, as in fact has often been the case), etc. Seemingly skeptical of everything, but convinced that Truth existed and had only to be discovered (by means of dialectical criticism, rigorous criticism of one's conventional beliefs, the discovery of proper and timeless *definitions* of things).

Aristotle, of course, had no patience for the mechanistic materialism of Democritus and others. *Teleology* is kind of the opposite of mechanism. But it's an understandable and tempting extension of human intention to nature, which does, after all, at first glance seem to exhibit *design*. Ultimately Aristotle was led to "a pantheistic theory, which makes the divine thought everywhere permeate matter, and realize itself and become immanent in the growth and becoming of all things." Matter is passive, form is active; and the movement towards form animates all matter. But this movement is an expression of the unmoved mover, God. So God is everywhere, so to speak. –And yet he is also transcendental, so I wouldn't say it's a strict pantheism.

Anyway, decades after Aristotle, the pendulum swung again, back to materialism. This was especially so with Epicurus, but also with the Stoics and others. "The historical circumstances which prepared the way for the new influence were the destruction of Greek freedom [by the Macedonians] and the collapse of Hellenic life…" The Platonic state and Aristotle's politics had been opposed to individualism, but now, in the third century B.C., "individualism was of the essence of the time, and an entirely different stamp of men arose to take control of the thought of the age." Scientific research became more pronounced again, etc.

> The practical standpoint which Socrates had asserted in philosophy allied itself now with individualism, only to become the more one-sided in consequence. For the supports which religion and public life had previously offered to the consciousness of the individual now completely gave way, and the isolated soul sought its only support in philosophy. So it came about that even the materialism of this epoch, closely as it also, in the contemplation

> of nature, leaned upon Democritus, issued chiefly in an ethical aim—in the liberation of the spirit from doubt and anxiety, and the attaining of a calm and cheerful peacefulness of soul. [Epicureanism.]

Lange is worth quoting on Stoicism:

> At the first glance we might suppose that there is no more consistent materialism than that of the Stoics, who explain all reality to consist in bodies. God and the human soul, virtues and emotions, are *bodies*. There can be no flatter contradiction than that between Plato and the Stoics. He teaches that that man is just who participates in the idea of justice; while, according to the Stoics, he must have the substance of *justice* in his body.
>
> This sounds materialistic enough; and yet, at the same time, the distinctive feature of materialism is here wanting—the purely material nature of matter; the origination of all phenomena, including those of adaptation and spirit, through movements of matter according to universal laws of motion.
>
> The matter of the Stoics possesses the most various forces, and it is at bottom force that makes it what it is in each particular case. The force of all forces, however, is the deity which permeates and moves the whole universe with its influence. Thus deity and undetermined matter stand opposed to each other, as in the Aristotelian system the highest form, the highest energy, and the mere potentiality of becoming everything that form produces from it—that is, God and matter. The Stoics, indeed, have no transcendental God, and no soul absolutely independent of body; yet their matter is thoroughly pervaded, and not merely influenced, by soul; their God is identical with the world, and yet he is more than mere self-moving matter; he is the "fiery reason of the world," and this reason works that which is reasonable and purposeful, like the "reason-stuff" of Diogenes of Apollonia, according to laws which man gathers from his consciousness, and not from his observation of sensible objects. Anthropomorphism, therefore, teleology, and optimism profoundly dominate the Stoic system, and its true character must be described as "pantheistic."

Etc.

It was left to Epicurus to revive mechanistic materialism. I won't say anything about him, except that his whole system is subordinated to the goal to free people from suffering, from fear and anxiety. The point of studying nature is to free yourself from fear and anxiety, a goal that is attained as soon as you show how events can be explained from universal natural laws rather than supernatural causes (presumably because that shows their necessity and makes them comprehensible to human reason—and also frees us from our terror of the gods, and from the destructive irrationalities of religion). –Atheism is liberating! (Epicurus probably wasn't literally an atheist, but, given his conception of the gods, he was something like it).

Again, there are many points of contact between Epicureanism, Stoicism, and major tendencies of Indian thought.

The great age of Greek speculative philosophy came to an end with Epicurus. But advances continued in other fields, such as geometry, astronomy, anatomy, medicine, the study of grammar, history, and philology. We moderns tend to denigrate the achievements of the ancients in science, but the Hellenic and Hellenistic truly were astonishing eras. They saw the birth of the essential scientific notion that the world is a natural unity governed by universal laws. Doubtless that wasn't always clearly perceived, and few such laws were discovered then in comparison with the modern age, but it was at least a decisive advance. –Ironically, however, few of the great ancient "scientists" belonged to materialistic schools of philosophy. Not the mathematicians, for instance; and not Galen, Pliny, or Ptolemy, who inclined to pantheism. An odd fact.

So, on to the Romans. For a long time they weren't at all inclined to materialism, even in its practical aspect: they were a martial people, hard and cruel, not luxurious and wanton, nor given to scientific

and philosophical speculation. But this had to some extent changed by the end of the Republic, when decadence was setting in. Stoicism and Epicureanism, usually in vulgarized and diluted forms, colonized the Roman mind. The least vulgar or diluted expression of Epicureanism was in Lucretius's famous poem *De Rerum Natura*, which Lange discusses at length, and which was still delighting materialists in the eighteenth century. –In fact, Lange remarks that "it is only in our days [the 1860s, etc.] that, for the first time, materialism seems to have broken completely away from the old traditions." A striking observation. The eighteenth century, after all, was still steeped in the forms and content of the classical world; only in the nineteenth century was all that stuff *finally*, in large measure, left behind. And yet not entirely: the weight of antiquity was still felt—though less so than before—in some aspects of culture and education even into the first half of the twentieth century! It's amazing that it wasn't until my dad's generation that classical memories and identities were decisively discarded, except from a few dusty corners of academia. –Observe the remarkable continuities of history! "The past isn't dead; it isn't even past." Marxism: the incubus of history weighing on the brains of the living.

Materialism of course didn't have much of a chance in Christian Europe, which was more hostile to it than Islam and the Arab civilization. Even in philosophy, first Neoplatonism and then Aristotelianism reigned. Lange has a thoughtful critique of Aristotelianism, particularly of how its notions of form and matter, actuality and potentiality, substance and accident, etc. are merely subjective projections—mental constructs—and do not exist objectively in the things themselves, and therefore lead us astray when we take them to be objectively valid and do *not* help us comprehend the in-itself nature of the world, but I'll skip over that. It's worth pointing out, though, that Aristotle's depreciation of matter as passive and so forth contributed in its own way, even up to early modern times, to impeding any acceptance of materialism. For instance, how is a "dark, inert, rigid, and absolutely passive substance" to *think*, as it must on a truly materialist conception of the world? So these legacies of Aristotelianism had to be overcome.

It took hundreds of years, but they were. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, a galaxy of European thinkers and artists and (proto-)scientists slowly and usually unconsciously laid the groundwork for a transcendence of Aristotelianism and of the anti-materialist dogmas of the Church. The Humanists, the warriors of the Reformation, even some of the late Scholastics, and of course scores of sixteenth-century scientists and philosophers, all paved the way for the reappearance of materialism and with it modern science. Giordano Bruno, for example, under the influence of Copernicus, in the late sixteenth century undertook a "revaluation" of that much-maligned category *matter*, proclaiming it to be active and to contain everything within itself. "Matter is not without forms—nay, it contains them all, and since it unfolds what it carries concealed within itself, it is in truth all nature and the mother of all living things." But Bruno was still pantheistic. Francis Bacon was *almost* a complete materialist: e.g., "among all philosophical systems, Bacon places that of Democritus highest. He asserts in his praise that his school had penetrated deeper than any other into the nature of things. The study of matter in its manifold transformations carries us farther [Bacon argues] than Abstraction. Without the assumption of atoms nature cannot be well explained. Whether final causes operate in nature cannot be definitely decided; at all events, the inquirer must confine himself efficient causes only." But on important points he was equivocal, and he concentrated almost exclusively on method, so Lange refrains from calling him the true restorer of materialism. He was influenced by an environment saturated with alchemy and astrology, which, with their spirits and sympathies and antipathies and whatnot, were anything but mechanistically materialist.

Still, Bacon did help bring about modern science, by his emphasis on data collection and induction. As we know, he was the inductive empiricist, Descartes the deductive rationalist. Both contributed to science. But there's an irony here: while in its essential points materialism really starts from Bacon, its takes its *mechanistic*, or *mechanical*, character largely from Descartes, who—as I've learned from Chomsky—used the idea of mechanism (e.g., an old clock) to distinguish the material world from the human mind, the realm of freedom that isn't governed by the laws of mechanics. So, even though metaphysically and epistemologically Descartes started from his *cogito ergo sum*, doubting the existence of the external world, a position that can easily lead into idealism—and, furthermore, even though he believed in an immaterial substance, namely the soul—he gave the materialism of the eighteenth century

one of its defining characteristics (although really, perhaps, this definitive conception goes back to Democritus).

With his *ad hoc* "God wouldn't deceive me, so there must be a world," Descartes escaped idealism and was able to investigate nature. He wasn't strictly an atomist, though: he thought matter was infinitely divisible, since however small you get you can always imagine another division. And, unlike most or all true atomists, he denied that a vacuum could exist in nature. Still, he was extremely close to atomism: "he substitutes for the atoms small round corpuscles, which remain in fact quite as unchanged as the atoms, and are only divisible in thought, that is, potentially…" Hm. So, as opposed to atoms, there are corpuscles. That strikes me as hair-splitting. Anyway, he set aside all mystical explanations of nature by explaining every natural phenomenon by the laws of mechanical impact. Plants and animals and everything else—except, in part, humans, who have free will—are essentially *machines*. Again, I've learned from Chomsky where this story is headed: Newton demonstrated that the laws of mechanics are not enough to explain the world, for his system requires the incomprehensible *action-at-a-distance*; and with this move, strictly mechanistic/mechanical materialism, just a few decades after its rebirth, collapsed again forever. Now all kinds of "occult" things were admitted into science and the external world: forces, action at a distance, eventually magnetic fields and whatnot, then the paradoxes of general relativity and finally quantum mechanics. Pure clock-like contact physics is infinitely more primitive than all this…and yet, of course, all this remains materialism, and even, loosely speaking, "mechanistic" materialism, in that no Intelligence is behind it, no design. And the only thing that is now seen as existing is—*matter*. Matter/energy is everything in the universe. Thus, pure materialism has completely triumphed after a long history of being held back and despised, notwithstanding Democritus, Leucippus, and Epicurus, and, in ancient India, the Charvaka school of philosophy. –How fascinating and ironic history is!

To continue: Lange, perhaps eccentrically, gives credit for the revival of materialism to Pierre Gassendi first and foremost. Gassendi resurrected Epicurus, and so spread the doctrine of atomism, which later, in modified forms, had such success. But of course *Hobbes* is more famous as a self-conscious materialist, and ultimately was surely more important (or so it seems to me). He proposed an all-encompassing philosophy of materialism that was so influential I needn't discuss it. But apparently he wasn't an atomist, unlike Gassendi and most other materialists.

Needless to say, the progress of materialism was, in the final analysis, a product of the development of mercantile and then industrial capitalism. England and France were its main homes in the eighteenth century. As a philosophy, it was used mostly in a negative way in France, to criticize the Church and superstition and irrational traditions; it was more positive and, perhaps, sophisticated in England, especially as it flowered in the sciences. Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton are the two great early names there. Boyle was more important than is often thought, for instance in rejecting alchemy (unlike Newton) and all vestiges of Aristotelianism, and in introducing materialistic foundations into science. He was a rigorous experimenter and dedicated sharer of data and ideas with his colleagues, practices that were essential to advancing science. He and Newton were much influenced by Gassendi's Epicureanism, and so, like nearly all the moderns, were atomists, though they rejected (again, like most or all the moderns) the absolute indivisibility of the atoms. (If God created atoms he must be able to divide them.) Lange goes on to discuss Newton's inadvertent invalidation of traditional mechanical materialism. I'll just quote the following paragraph:

> From the triumph of Newton's purely mathematical achievement there was curiously developed a new physics. Let us carefully observe that a purely mathematical connection between two phenomena, such as the fall of bodies and the motion of the moon, could only lead to [Newton's] great generalization [as regards gravity] in so far as there was presupposed a common and everywhere operative material cause of the phenomena. The course of history has eliminated this unknown material cause, and has placed the mathematical law itself in the rank of physical causes. The collision of the atoms shifted into an idea of unity, which as such rules the world without any material mediation. What Newton held to be so great an absurdity that no philosophic thinker could light upon it, is

> prized by posterity as Newton's great discovery of the harmony of the universe! and, rightly understood, it is his discovery, for this harmony is one and the same, whether it is brought about by a subtle matter, penetrating everywhere and obeying the laws of collision, or whether the particles of matter regulate their movements in accordance with the mathematical law without any material intervention. If in this later case we wish to get rid of the absurdity, we must get rid of the idea that anything acts where it is not; that is, the whole conception of the mutual influence of the atoms falls away as an anthropomorphism, and even the conception of causality must assume an abstracter shape.

He surely goes too far in rejecting the idea of the mutual influence of atoms; for they do influence each other, only not in mechanical ways. Incidentally, instantaneous action at a distance is, indeed, absurd and physically impossible, since Einstein showed that nothing can travel faster than the speed of light. So Newton's doubts were right, though he was wrong to think—if he did—that the mere unintelligibility of some idea to the human mind is enough to refute that idea. Anyway, the point is that action at a distance, unmediated by anything, *doesn't*, after all, exist, for electromagnetic fields and the curvature of space-time (to explain gravity) have been postulated as "mediators." Insofar as Chomsky—and Lange—tends to imply that unmediated action at a distance is integral to modern physics, he's wrong.

After a short discussion of Locke's empiricism ("sensationalism"), Lange proceeds to the eighteenth century. Disjointed notes: David Hartley in 1749 "undertakes to refer the whole of human thought and sensation to vibrations in the brain." Not really original, but important even so, and despite Hartley's religious timidity. He's disturbed by the contradiction between the *causal necessity* of the brain's functions—material laws, etc.—and the apparent *freedom* of thought. (Yup, it's a paradox, an unresolvable one. You have the self, choice, intentionality, and reason versus the non-self, determinism, and "mechanistic" causation.) And there's Joseph Priestley, whom Chomsky likes to reference. I'll skip over the little that Lange says about Shaftesbury, Voltaire, Diderot, and Robinet. Germany for a long time was philosophically very backward compared to England and France, remaining "the ancestral home of pedantic Scholasticism." But near the end of the seventeenth century, Cartesianism and Spinozism became more influential there in the struggle against Scholasticism and theological orthodoxy. The English influence of Hobbes was felt around the same time as well, and so materialism slowly spread.

According to Lange, the true originator of materialism in France, and its most radical exponent—"scandalously" radical—was La Mettrie. He influenced all the other famous *philosophes*, though they disowned him as being too radical. His main point was that man is a machine, and—contrary to Descartes—not qualitatively different from other animals. In many ways, he is actually inferior to them. Matter has the capacity for sensation. All things soulful and spiritual and noble are grounded in the operations of base matter. (Compare Nietzsche.) Man is not special in his consciousness of good and evil; other animals have this also, as shown, e.g., by the downcast behavior of a pet dog after biting its master. An ape could probably be taught to speak. "The moral law is, in fact, still present even in those persons who, from a morbid impulse, steal, murder, or in fierce hunger devour their nearest relatives. These unhappy creatures, who are sufficiently punished by their remorse, should be handed over to the doctors, instead of being burned or buried alive, as has been the practice." Wow, what scandalous, horrible opinions! La Mettrie even anticipates Rousseau by arguing that humans are created to be *happy*, not to be *learned* (sophisticated), which amounts to a kind of misuse of our talents.

On religion: "The existence of a Supreme Being La Mettrie will not doubt [or so he says, in his book *L'Homme Machine*, published in 1748]; all probability speaks for it; but this Existence no more proves the necessity of worship than any other existence: it is a theoretical truth without any use in practice; and as it has been shown by innumerable examples that religion does not bring morality with it, so we may conclude that even Atheism does not exclude it.

"For our peace of mind it is indifferent to know whether there is a God or not, whether he created matter, or whether it is eternal. What folly to trouble ourselves about things the knowledge of which is impossible, and which, even if we knew them, would not make us a bit happier!" He rejects the argument-from-design for God's existence, because, after all, we know so little about nature that it's silly to make

dogmatic claims like that only God could create such a beautiful world. He thinks an atheistic world would be much happier than the current religious world, because there would be no theological wars, no soldiers of religion, and humans would be pure and innocent again. "Men would follow their own individual impulses, and these impulses alone can lead them to happiness along the pleasant path of virtue." Again, Rousseau. As for immortality, La Mettrie says it may be possible, given our ignorance of nature.

So, the whole thrust of his philosophy is that we should always rely on experience and observation, not religious authority or metaphysical speculation. *A posteriori*, not *a priori*. We should follow the practice of physicians, not philosophers. (Again, Nietzsche.) "One can and one even ought to admire all these fine geniuses in their most useless works, such men as Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz, Wolff and the rest, but what profit, I ask, has any one gained from their profound meditations, and from all their works?" *Body* is the key to life, bodily processes, bodily desires and appetites; all things intellectual and spiritual originate in things bodily. The soul is nothing but imagination, or "material consciousness," as Lange paraphrases. Or, to quote La Mettrie in another place, "The soul is nothing but an empty word, of which no one has any idea, and which an enlightened man should use only to signify the part in us that thinks. Given the least principle of motion, animated bodies will have all that is necessary for moving, feeling, thinking, repenting, or in a word for conducting themselves in the physical realm, and in the moral realm which depends upon it." *L'Homme Machine*, which I just read on the internet, is an incredibly modern work, and incredibly Nietzschean in many respects. Truly brilliant and revolutionary, even epoch-making.

Not surprisingly, it was read all over Europe. And it was reviled. Its author was even more reviled after, in another work, he praised sensuous pleasure. As Lange paraphrases, "Reflection may heighten pleasure, but cannot afford it. He who is happy through it has a higher happiness, but more frequently it destroys happiness. [True.] …The intoxication of opium produces by physical means a happier frame of mind than any philosophical treatise. How happy a man would be who all through his life could enjoy a frame of mind as this intoxication transiently procures him! …Intellect, knowledge, and reason…are a superfluous adornment with which the soul can dispense, and the great mass of mankind, who actually do dispense with them, are not thereby shut out from happiness." Actually, "reason is not in itself hostile to happiness, but only through the prejudices that attach themselves to thought." Again, true. In its proper and healthy activity, reason augments happiness. La Mettrie also praises education as a contributor to happiness. From this eudaemonistic foundation he erects a notion of virtue: "He agrees with Hobbes in holding that there is no such thing as virtue in an absolute sense, that anything can be called good or bad only relatively—in relation, in fact, to society. Instead of the absolute command by the will of 'Leviathan,' however, we have the free judgment of the individual as to the good and evil of society…" It seems that he arrives at a sort of early utilitarianism, which was later worked out by Helvetius. And then reproduced by Bentham in his dull way. "The whole distinction between the good and the bad," as Lange says, "consists in this, that with the former, public outweigh private interests, while the contrary is the case with the latter." La Mettrie also mentions the principle of *sympathy*, "the most important principle upon which [a materialist ethic] can depend." At the same time, he is akin to La Rochefoucauld (and other later writers) in recognizing the importance and value of self-love. At times he even goes out of his way to exalt sexual pleasure, apparently in order to scandalize society. –I love this guy! I'll have to read some of his other works too.

In France, the chief home of philosophical materialism in the second half of the eighteenth century, all these materialist currents culminated in d'Holbach's great *Système de la Nature*, published in 1770. "In the *System of Nature*," says Lange, "we feel already the cutting blast of the [French] Revolution." No wonder it so stirred up French society. It was atheistic, materialistic, deterministic, empiricist(ic), and radical in every respect. All is matter and motion. Religion is the chief source of human corruption. Etc. All or most of its ideas are basically implicit in La Mettrie. [I suppose Jonathan Israel would say they really come from Spinoza, who, allegedly, was the main progenitor of all these tendencies.]

A German reaction against materialism occurred with Leibniz and his successors, such as Wolff. The conception of the monads—which I've never understood, and which seems utterly bizarre—obviously bears the imprint of atomism, but its "atoms" are immaterial in some way or other. Each of them has consciousness to a greater or lesser degree, so that we no longer have to ask, with the materialists, "How are sensations and consciousness possible if material atoms are the basic stuff of the universe?" Leibniz's

monads are not material, or they're somehow a fusion of material and immaterial (I don't know), and they have consciousness. So, okay, no more mind-body problem! We've solved it; simple as that! Anyway, Leibniz's system didn't seem to have the radical consequences of materialism—especially since it was "optimistic," implying that this is the best of all possible worlds—so it became popular with conservatives and the like. Later, many Germans shared in the European reaction against La Mettrie and other militant materialists;—State and Church, of course, were no friends of materialism. In fact, despite empiricism and the progress of science and materialism, the eighteenth century was full of an idealist impulse—idealist in a broad sense. For example, interpretations of politics and social oppression were typically idealistic, focused on intellectual error and ignorance, religion, the conspiracies of priests, etc. A pronounced naiveté suffused the Enlightenment, which in addition was enamored of the ideals of beauty and justice. And in Germany, an idealistic, nationalistic, ultimately romantic movement—*Sturm und Drang*, etc.—rose up in (partial) reaction against materialistic dogmas and aridness.

And then, of course, appeared Kant and decades of German idealism. England and France had left the field of philosophy open to Germany, while they embarked on adventures in the economic and political spheres. So philosophical idealism reigned—as did romantic idealism in politics (together with conservatism, and eventually liberalism, among the rulers), especially on the continent, until 1848—even as economic and scientific materialism were advancing in England and France. It was a time of paradoxes, collisions between old and new, real and ideal, revolution and reaction, and very divided ideologies. Confusion and ferment. Lange doesn't discuss all this; instead he spends a lot of time on Kant, whom he considers exceptionally important for the history of materialism. Kant was neither a materialist nor an idealist with respect to the thing-in-itself; he thought that none of our conceptions or categories can apply to it. So, Lange says, insofar as materialistic science is supposed to describe the thing-in-itself, it's thrown out the window by Kant's system (which Lange substantially agrees with). –This is silliness, by the way. Maybe our ordinary notions/intuitions of matter, space, time, and, possibly, even causality don't apply to the most elemental level of nature or the "thing-in-itself" (or so you'd think from quantum mechanics and modern physics in general), but we can still postulate intelligible theories about it and invoke strange, unconceptualizable entities like electrons and quarks and photons to explain it. Besides, the old question remains: how can you explain the success of science except from the perspective of scientific realism? It's just stupid to deny that the world-in-itself is at least partly captured by modern science. Nor, in fact, does modern science contradict a sort of neo-Kantian viewpoint, as I've always insisted. It actually *confirms* a neo-Kantian rationalism—so much so that you have only to "naturalize" or "biologize" Kant (and other rationalists) in order to get modern science. (The nervous system constructs experience, etc.)

Lange spends a long time defending the idea of the synthetic *a priori*, but I won't get into that. It's obvious. Insofar as mathematics, for example, is not deducible from the principle of contradiction, it's "synthetic." In fact, we constantly rely on *intuition* in geometry and arithmetic, the intuition of spatial forms and so on. And a mental act of synthesis occurs when we construct a new number out of several other ones. On a deeper level, the brain "synthesizes" everything we experience, which causes us to unconsciously apply to experience—or rather, structure experience according to—a huge array of "*a priori*" categories, computations, constructions, fundamental spatial, temporal, logical, linguistic, emotional, aesthetic, etc. principles. I've never understood the *point* of the controversy, which is to say the point of empiricist objections to this confirmed-by-modern-science rationalism.

As for Kant's convoluted speculations on sense and the understanding, on the derivation of the categories (the "transcendental deduction"), etc.: while interesting, they can surely be discarded. They're superseded by cognitive psychology and other fields of science. Metaphysics itself has been substantially taken over by science. All the old metaphysical and psychological speculations of the philosophers might be worth reading and periodically might be suggestive, but on the whole they're of little value compared to science and modern empirical methods. (The psychological speculations are usually of greater value than the metaphysical, i.e., pseudo-scientific, speculations.)

If you know Marx, you know that it was with Feuerbach, in the 1830s and 1840s, that philosophical materialism was reborn after the era of German idealism. And yet even Feuerbach, despite his anti-religion and his anti-Hegelianism, could not escape idealism completely, for he tends to place man at the center of

things. There is also a sort of romanticism in him, with his elevation of love and recognition, the I–Thou relation, and his sometimes rhapsodic prose. “Isolation is finiteness and limitation, community is freedom and infinity. Man by himself is but man; man with man, the unity of I and Thou, is God.” And so forth. In fact, as you know, Hegel still continued to influence the youth in the early 1840s, particularly the Young Hegelians. But the temper of the time, even among some of the Young Hegelians, was moving towards materialism. Lange doesn’t mention this, but it’s most obvious with Marx. The beginnings of industry were coming to Germany, and chemistry, and physiology. Religion was criticized and attacked, as with David Strauss’s *Life of Jesus*. Then the explosion of 1848 happened—but here, still, idealism and romanticism were prominent. The *Communist Manifesto* was ahead of its time. Industry and science continued progressing in the 1850s and later, and a few forgotten German thinkers (like Karl Vogt, whom Marxists know of only because of Marx’s bitter contempt for him) defended materialism in philosophy, and the old idealistic romanticism finally died—although a new sort of reactionary-idealistic German nationalism was born. And we know what that ultimately led to: world wars and Nazism. It’s interesting how—all over Europe—an extreme practical and scientific materialism could, under the influence of imperialism, ally with a sort of ultra-idealistic, albeit horrendously reactionary, nationalism, of course in the service of industrial capitalism and each nation’s ruling class. Materialism (of various kinds) had at last attained total confidence and power, but it needed to subsidize and spread a type of fascist idealism in order to continue accumulating power and suppressing working-class dissent.

Anyway, my patience with Lange’s verbosity and repetitiveness is wearing thin, especially since for the rest of the book—hundreds of pages—he discusses dated nineteenth-century science and philosophical speculations, adding a good many of his own. I don’t feel like digesting and regurgitating all this verbiage. The book is too long anyway, especially as Lange now delves into “Darwinism and Teleology,” “Brain and Soul,” “Scientific Psychology,” “The Senses and the World,” “Political Economy and Egoism,” “Christianity and Enlightenment,” etc. Throughout much of this runs his unconvincing polemic against materialism. So, we’re done.

Except for one last thought. In the social and political sense, it’s true that modern society is more “materialistic” than earlier societies. But we shouldn’t forget the lesson of Marxism, that ultimately all societies are structured according to economic power dynamics, classes, methods of production and the unequal distribution of material resources, a distribution that largely determines what sorts of ideas will predominate in a given society (because one needs resources in order to propagate ideas—and so “the ideas of the ruling class [which has the most resources] will in every epoch be the ruling ideas”). One can understand history only on materialist premises. In this respect, the social sciences are indeed somewhat parallel to the natural sciences. Whether in philosophy, science, or social science, idealism is wrong.

Sent Chomsky another email about the old idealists, because I wanted to state my case as clearly as possible:

> For a long time I've been bothered by the idea that I have to choose between two options: either philosophical idealists have been radically confused, or I radically misunderstand them. Neither option I find particularly satisfying, but I've been a bit more attracted to the first. In brief: when Berkeley or Schopenhauer or whoever says that he accepts natural science, but at the same time that there is no mind-independent matter, that the world exists solely in consciousness, so to speak, it seems to me that he is blatantly contradicting himself. For science explains the phenomena that we experience in consciousness by postulating material processes that are supposed to be occurring external to consciousness, i.e., without consciousness's being aware of them as they're happening. Digestion is going on 'mind-independently.' And it's a material process. So: every scientific hypothesis is *transparently, obviously* premised on the notion that matter-external-to-consciousness exists. (And of course, in addition, the success of science is inexplicable except by presupposing scientific realism.) This seems to me so obvious, so necessarily clear to even

> an eight-year-old, that I'm bewildered as to how philosophers could fail to see it. Am I somehow misunderstanding them?
>
> I'd say something similar about the logical positivists, incidentally. They wanted to avoid metaphysical questions as being meaningless—questions like whether there is a 'world-in-itself,' a world of matter external to mind—somehow failing to see that when science describes, e.g., mechanisms internal to the brain, it is assuming that *there is a brain*, which is to say a piece of matter 'external' to mind. A piece of matter that, in fact, gives rise to mind. Lenin ridiculed Mach and others' "brainless philosophy" in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, and I have to admit I sympathized with his frustration when reading it. For it seemed clear to me that Mach and his logical positivist disciples were, despite themselves, effectively idealists (in their instrumentalism, etc.). In any case, thinkers like Carnap, who were in some respects very acute, should have seen that one cannot avoid "metaphysical" questions like whether matter exists (external to mind). It's either Yes or No, not "the question is meaningless." If Yes, science—the search for causes in the external world—is possible. If No, science is not possible. –But evidently it is possible, so the answer has to be Yes.
>
> Does this seem like approximately the right picture, or am I underestimating all these anti-realists?

He answered, "It's possible to hold, consistently, that we can be confident only of our immediate experience/impressions, that science is our effort to try to account for them, and that contemporary science is our best guess—but without going beyond that to claim that the entities postulated are more than explanatory fictions. –I'm not advocating that, but it's a consistent position."

Sent him another email after I'd asked if I could post the exchange on academia.edu. He said only if I kept it anonymous, because he doesn't like having personal correspondence posted publicly, to which I replied he must have found it annoying when the journalist George Monbiot posted a bunch of emails they'd sent each other. So he wrote, "True. I found it not only annoying but morally grotesque. Enough so that I'd never write anything to him again. It's a norm of civilized behavior that one asks permission to publicize personal correspondence." So, deciding to plunge into something I've always wanted to ask him, sent this:

> I won't take advantage of your generosity by continuing to email you, but just one last time. Given your acute sense of moral rectitude, it's often struck me that there's a sort of inconsistency, albeit an attractive and necessary one, in your behavior. But in fact we're all inconsistent in this way. Namely, we condemn people with whom we have no personal connection for their periodic violations of moral and intellectual standards, even as we're very forgiving of family members and friends who display the same or similar faults. (In fact, we ourselves frequently display the same faults we accuse others of—as you constantly remind your audiences.) That's part of what *loyalty* means, of course, but it remains a (to me) bothersome inconsistency regardless. Criticizing or 'condemning' others, as I sometimes do, while knowing that people close to me, and in some cases I myself, are or could be guilty of the same thing. That knowledge makes it hard for me to take any of my judgments of people seriously.
>
> To say it differently: you, who have higher intellectual and moral standards than most, must frequently be disappointed in your friends' behavior, because people one respects or is friends with sometimes do morally grotesque things—as when (to take a random example) Jesse Lemisch, whom I respect, tells a group of people (at a conference) of various unsavory opinions an academic expressed to him in private correspondence. Or when Howard Zinn—according to something I read, maybe untrue—cheats on his wife.

> Etc. You're very loyal, as Finkelstein said once in an interview, and you consistently express idealism about 'ordinary people' (which, needless to say, is the proper thing to do, just from the moral perspective), but I can only imagine it's been sort of a burden for you to be aware of the frailties of people close to you, and of people in general.
>
> Maybe the point is that one can condemn the acts without necessarily condemning the person who commits them. Certain acts are morally grotesque, but one can still respect and value people who occasionally have lapses. Because, after all, everyone has lapses from time to time. –Still, I remain bothered by the inconsistency of being infinitely more forgiving of people I'm close to than of others. But I guess this inconsistency is just a necessary, and even an important, part of life.
>
> —Anyway, that's something I've wanted to say for a while, because of the contrast between your severe moral consciousness (and expressed idealism about humans) and the morally/intellectually fuzzy behavior of most people.
>
> I don't know how one can respond to this email. So don't worry about it; you're too busy anyway.

He replied, “You’re probably right, but I think it’s an understandable flaw.”

Reading the book that was all over the media a few months ago, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism,* by Edward Baptist. It’s masterful.

Published an article in *CounterPunch*:

The Government's Intelligent Design

The public debate over government surveillance that was, if not inaugurated, at least intensified by the publication of documents provided by Edward Snowden has been, in some respects, surreal and deluded. One side claims that the NSA's mass surveillance is necessary to protect the public from terrorism, that in fact it has thwarted many "potential terrorist events." The other side claims, with much more justification, that bulk data collection does little or nothing to protect ordinary civilians. But few commentators draw another, more subversive conclusion: *government has no interest in protecting its citizens (as such) in the first place*. In fact, its interest is precisely the opposite: *to expose its citizens*--with privileged exceptions--*to harm*.

Sounds absurd, of course. But consider, first, the recent historical record, which certainly does not support the idea that the U.S. government cares about protecting Americans. Exhibit A is the attacks of 9/11. It became a commonplace long ago for leftists and liberals to cite the White House memo of August 6, 2001 that bore the heading "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in U.S.," which was apparently ignored at the time by the Bush administration. Perhaps more damning is Lawrence Wright's 2006 book *The Looming Tower*, which made it abundantly clear that the CIA and the FBI had not prioritized the fight against terrorism even after the 1993 Twin Tower bombing and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. If one were malicious enough, one might attribute competence to government institutions rather than mere criminal bungling: perhaps the ridiculously counterproductive--from the perspective of thwarting terrorism--organization and efforts of the CIA and FBI before 9/11 were, by some twisted institutional logic, *designed* to make possible precisely what happened, a major terrorist event.

Another commonplace is the observation that George W. Bush's Iraq war, far from mitigating terrorism, increased it substantially, perhaps sevenfold. This was predictable and predicted in 2003, a fact that, by elementary logic, means that the Bush administration at the very least was perfectly happy to expose American (and of course foreign) civilians to greater threats. The same logic applies to Obama's global drone war, which apparently has killed 50 civilians for every 1 terrorist.

Not surprisingly, it has fueled terrorism, and thus increased threats to Americans. (In fact, the drone campaign itself is terrorism, but here I am confining myself to the conventional American understanding of the word, as applying only to people that the U.S. government doesn't like.)

One could go on listing such facts indefinitely. For instance, the sordid lesson to draw from the Hurricane Katrina debacle in 2005 is that protecting Americans from a natural disaster was not a priority of government at any level, at least not of the governments involved. The deplorable actions of police in the hurricane's aftermath confirm this conclusion. The victims were treated as criminals, not people who needed and deserved protection.

In addition to ample historical evidence, one can also consider simple logic. Returning to the NSA's mass surveillance, it shouldn't be hard for government officials to comprehend that the more time and resources they devote to monitoring ordinary civilians, the less time and resources they are devoting to monitoring plausible terrorist threats. In fact, almost every major terrorist attack in the West during the past fifteen years has been committed by people who were already known to law enforcement. Such was the case, for instance, with regard to one of the brothers accused of the 2013 Boston marathon bombings. But the government, obligingly, was too busy spying on ordinary Americans to pay much attention to him, so he was able to carry out his attack unhindered.

But why, you ask, would it be in the interest of government to expose the public to harm? This question cannot be answered except in the context of specific historical circumstances, in this case the circumstances of neoliberal capitalism. In a society that is experiencing stratospheric income inequality, high unemployment and long-term economic stagnation, retrenchment of social welfare programs, the reality and threat of environmental collapse, and, in short, ever-greater social discontent and instability, institutional power-centers will want to increase their control over the population. As a proud plutocrat put it in a warning to his wealthy brethren, "the pitchforks are coming." And the plutocrats, together with their government representatives, want to be prepared for that.

The question is how to justify the expansion of government's surveillance and police powers that is necessary to keep the rabble in line. Clearly, pretexts are needed. And pretexts are provided whenever a terrorist attack occurs, especially if it occurs on American soil. This may be a virtual truism, but rarely is the implication articulated: in this respect, it is in the interest of government and the top "1%" in income/wealth for *civilians periodically to be victims of terrorism*. If the terrorist threat disappears, so does the useful pretext.

The "pretext" phenomenon has other dimensions. Naomi Klein discusses one of them in her famous book *The Shock Doctrine*, where she argues that in the last forty years, in the wake of catastrophes of whatever sort--natural, military, terrorist, economic--elites have taken advantage of popular disorientation and disorganization to force regimes of privatization upon the population. "Neoliberalism-by-blitzkrieg," one might call it. A prime example is what happened to New Orleans after Katrina: with the public's capacity to resist weakened, nearly all public schools were privatized. Under the pretext of education reform, "corporate profiteers and politicians have zeroed in on black communities, leaving behind devastation and destabilization," says a spokesperson of a New Orleans community group.

So, for the neoliberal state-corporate nexus, the devastation of a particular society, including a domestic region, can be eminently useful not only in smashing popular resistance to power but also in giving elites an opportunity to ram through programs they could not have otherwise. Convenient pretexts can always be thought of.

On a more general level, the relevant principle has been stated concisely by Noam Chomsky: the primary enemy of any government is (the majority of) its own population. For the population always wants more power and economic security than it has, and it is willing to fight for it (as the history of the labor movement shows)--which entails, however, the relative diminution of the power of the rich and their political minions. This corollary explains, of course, the U.S. government's continually savage treatment, through centuries, of workers, the lower classes, left-wing activists, African-Americans, protesters and dissidents and "ordinary people" of all kinds. They must be

humiliated, harmed, killed, beaten down, made examples of if they step out of line, kept in a state of constant fear and obedience (however impossible it may be to fulfill that goal). *Power exists but to maintain and expand itself*; that is its *raison d'être*, and that is the key to understanding its every move (at the institutional, not the personal, level).

For example, if government is not always blatantly aggressive in harming its own population, that is not because it's too moral to do so; it is because that might threaten its power, by stirring up more dissent. Concessions have to be made to the masses if in the long run they are to tolerate subordination. The appearance, and to some small extent even the reality, of protecting the population has to be maintained in order to appease the meddlesome outsiders.

None of this means that policymakers or bureaucrats or members of the "ruling class" necessarily have these intentions in mind when crafting policies or cracking down on dissent. Doubtless few are clear-headed enough. But the logic of the institutions in which they are embedded--the bureaucratic-expansionist, capitalistic, totalitarian, Panopticon-esque logic--manipulates their minds and, by some mysterious alchemy, is sublimated into rationalizations and pretexts that are usually sincerely believed in. It isn't hard to come up with pretexts to do what is in one's institutional self-interest. Humans are born to deceive themselves.

So, why not throw off all vestiges of sentimentalism about our rulers? Why not state the truth unequivocally: when a terrorist attack occurs, *this is not a failure of government*. It is a *success*; for now power-centers have another excuse to expand themselves, and to fear-monger, and to demonize the Other, and to make more profits from selling military and surveillance technology, and to clamp down ever more on the domestic population.

And when the police blindly brutalize innocent civilians or protesters, this is not a failure for government to correct. It is what the police are supposed to do, what they were designed to do and the main reason they exist in the first place. It is government acting intelligently, in its own interests and in the interests of its puppet-masters.

The population has to *protect itself* and stand up for itself, and fight for its freedom and power and security. Because the government certainly won't.

(The underlined words are links to websites.) Gonna write articles more frequently.

From now on I'm going to ask myself at various times throughout the day, whenever I remember or when some sort of intellectual or moral issue comes up, "*What would Noam do?*" Ha. Would Noam watch this YouTube video? No. Would Noam reply to this silly blog-posted criticism of something I published on academia.edu? Yes. Would Noam be *productive* in this moment, and this moment, and this moment…? Yes. –This will help keep me on the best moral and intellectual track.

[Drama with Zhilan and her daughter.]

Chicago is a desert, so I'm spending the summer in New York. Should have done this years ago. Desperately need to find some interesting, intelligent, and kind people, and especially a woman. Need a change from the treading-water existence.

Reading the excellent, and incredibly ambitious, book *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* (1995), by William Blum.

Published a few more articles, on the state of the Left, the Fight for $15, the ubiquity of kitsch and euphemisms in public discourse, the anarchist element in human nature (a short excerpt from my most recent book), and the value of Chomsky.

Reading David Noble's great little book *Progress Without People: In Defense of Luddism* (1993).

In case you're interested, here are the articles. [Plus one written in the summer.] The first one was butchered in many places by the editors.

The Future of the Left, and the Logic of History

The Left has always been prone to self-flagellation: what's wrong with us? Why can't we get our act together? Why can't we convince the masses to join us? Such self-criticisms are understandable and, to some extent, justified. The history of the Left and the labor movement in the United States is nauseatingly full of the leadership's cowardice, opportunism, bureaucratism, and cooptation by the corporatist state. There is much to criticize.

But many activists seem genuinely puzzled by the Left's relative impotence. Jeffrey St. Clair, editor of *CounterPunch*, laments that as one surveys the Left in America, "one looks in vain across this vast landscape of despair for even the dimmest flickers of real rebellion and popular mutiny, as if surveying a nation of somnambulists. We remain strangely impassive in the face of our own extinction."

All of this demands subtle and strategic answers. Clearly many past strategies and tactics have failed, and new ones are necessary. It's likely, for instance, that more confrontational, though nonviolent, tactics are called for, since they often seem to work better than top-down, bureaucratic, concessionary approaches.

More fundamentally, it has never been a mystery as to why the Left is not in great shape: it lacks financial and material resources. The organized Left has always been pitifully undercapitalized. This is completely predictable on the basis of materialist common sense, for, class power and wealth being distributed as they are in a capitalist society, it would be astonishing if the Left had substantial success more than a fraction of the time. One needs resources to get things done.

That is the 'historical logic' behind the Left's perennial underdog status.

Marxists, in particular, should have understood from the beginning, on the strength of their own ideas, that success in their ultimate revolutionary ends was historically unlikely. For 'the working class' to rise up as *one*, on an international scale, when the dominant classes had exponentially greater power to divide and mislead workers according to nation, race, ethnicity, sex, religion, occupation, and skill-level, was always a utopian hope at best.

Marx was right, therefore, that there is a logic, virtually a *teleo*-logic, to the development of particular societies. And this logic is essentially determined by economic dynamics, because institutions at the top of the class structure, which have the greatest access to resources, will obviously have the greatest power over the directions in which history proceeds. This 'economic determinist' core of Marxism ought to be seen as a mere truism, not a controversial theory requiring endless academic debate. But intellectuals need something to do, so maybe we shouldn't begrudge them their production of mountains of verbiage.

Given this 'logic' of history, what have we to look forward to and what lessons can we learn from the past? One lesson, I think, pertains to how activists should conceptualize their activism. There is a tendency, common among every group from centrist liberals through to Leninists and anarchists, to interpret activism in very un-Marxian and unsophisticated 'voluntaristic' terms. Supposedly radical social change is a matter mainly of will and competence, of forming strong political coalitions and pushing back against reactionary institutions so as, hopefully, to reverse systemic trends. But this hope is historically naive. Systemic tendencies cannot be stopped or reversed (though they can be mitigated), because the resources of the democratic resistance are not remotely comparable to those of the oligarchs.

For example, it is hopelessly benighted to think that an international revival of the centralized welfare state (even in an 'updated' form) and of twentieth-century social democracy is possible. Those social formations were appropriate to a time of industrial unionism and limited international mobility of capital, very different from the present. They have been dying for 40 years (starting in the US and UK), and no such magical incantation as "We propose a new anti-austerity coalition" can call them back to life. Coalitions of that sort are desperately needed, and their targets should be at every level of government, but their outcome will not be a new and improved manifestation of twentieth-century social democracy.

The proper way for radicals to conceive of their activism, on a broad scale, is in terms of the *speeding up* of current historical trends, not their interruption or reversal. This is one of the many useful lessons of Marxism. Radicals can mitigate destructive trends and hasten constructive ones, but that's the extent of the systemic 'agency' they can exhibit. Accordingly, they can have a lucid and correct

interpretation of their activism only by understanding the historical context of their society, and the significance of its dominant tendencies.

The question, then, is this: what are the main historical tendencies we are witnessing now, and how can they be finessed for the benefit of the global population? The answer is clear. We are in the early stages of the very protracted collapse of corporate capitalism and the nation-state system itself. We know that 'climate change' is going to constitute a global cataclysm; we know that, under the impact of neoliberal policies, the world's social fabric is being torn apart; and even the business press recognizes that economic trends of underconsumption and overproduction portend catastrophe.

Ironically enough—but 'dialectically' predictable—neoliberalism is, therefore, going to precipitate the demise of the very system whose consummation it is, namely the capitalist nation-state system of privatization, marketization, rapacious environmental exploitation, endless economic growth and savage imperialism. All of this is becoming unsustainable, and a titanic global backlash is inevitable.

What radicals are doing now, in short, and should be doing, is to contribute to the undermining—the self-undermining—of corporate capitalism and the construction of an alternative. These are the historically most significant tendencies of the present.

But they will not play out in the short run. As the failure of old Marxist and anarchist revolutionary dreams from the 1870s to the 1940s showed, history prefers to progress slowly, not by means of sudden, willed insurrections that overthrow the old order and sweepingly usher in a new one. We are in for a century or two of gradual change, partly 'interstitial', as a new society is slowly built up within the decaying shell of the old. Glimmers of the possible new world are already appearing, some of them in the work of Gar Alperovitz and the journalism of *Yes! Magazine*.

If allied with social and political movements, the solidarity economy in some form may represent the future. And it is humanity's best hope. The long-term alternative is something like a Hobbesian state of nature.

[There was a paragraph here that the editors idiotically deleted.]

Amidst the horrific tragedies we're in for, one may take comfort in the knowledge that at least they will not be permanent. In fact, myopic anti-social politics is undermining the ruling class and its economy, by destroying the conditions for its long-term survival. It may destroy most life on earth in the process, or it may not; but the Left should recognize, in any case, that the coming crises in every country of the world will not mean the extinguishing of hope. Nor will they signify the death, or even the shameful defeat, of the Left. For the phenomenon of leftists' continual setbacks is largely an inevitable result of the distribution of class power in our economic system.

More importantly, though, what happened in the Americas in the 1930s will happen globally this time: social semi-collapse will impel the downtrodden and the cast-off to fight together for their very survival, and to invent new forms of social and economic organization, and to build a new Left, a less centralized and bureaucratic one than in the heyday of the centralized and bureaucratic nation-state.

These facts follow straight from the logic of contemporary history, a 'dialectical' logic worth studying and excavating.

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The Historic Potential of the Fight for $15

[The many underlines indicating links to websites have been deleted.]

The demonstrations across the United States on April 15 revealed the significance of the Fight for $15, and have already been dubbed "the largest protest by low-wage workers in US history." Tens of thousands of people in 230 cities marching, chanting, broadcasting their voices over loudspeaker so that the "Masters of the Universe" could hear them—demanding fair pay for all.

Consider the scene at the University of Illinois in Chicago: thousands of black, white and brown faces cheering together—retail workers, graduate students, professionals, unions organizations for the homeless, interested individuals, schoolchildren, the middle-aged, the elderly: a panoply of humanity

shouting in unison against poverty wages, union-busting, racism, police brutality, corporate oligarchy—the status quo.

Even in its early stages, Fight for $15 already finds itself at the forefront of a new social justice movement. As it intersects with the Black Lives Matter and feminist movements, community organizing and workers' struggles the world over, Fight for $15 exemplifies an innovative new form of social movement unionism—the desperately needed successor to the old failed AFL-CIO strategies of narrow collective bargaining, ossified bureaucratism, and concessionary negotiations with union-busting employers.

It's time we took the fight to the streets, to resurrect and fuse the spirits of the 1930s and the 1960s. The Fight for $15 is rapidly emerging as a key node of this revolutionary 21st century fusion—what we can expect will become a massive international movement of movements for economic and social justice.

In less than three years, the Fight for $15 has grown from a single strike in New York City to what we saw on April 15, which included demonstrations in Italy and New Zealand. Seattle and San Francisco have passed $15 minimum wage laws, Chicago will have a $13 minimum wage by 2019, and other cities and states are considering similar laws.

More and more politicians are coming out in support of minimum wage hikes, which, on less dramatic scales, have been passed recently in several states and cities. Social movements take years to build, but this one is already picking up steam.

As it continues to gain visibility, moreover, the pressure it brings to bear on politicians will deepen and broaden. When issues like a higher minimum wage, anti-racism, workplace safety, immigrants' rights and social welfare are seen to overlap and are pressed forward, together, on multiple fronts—as happened, for instance, in the 1930s, when the wide range of social movements pushed American politics to the left on dozens of issues—real political change can result.

Ultimately, systemic alternatives can emerge, whether interstitially or squarely in the mainstream. As important as the Fight for $15 is, therefore, it may be only the beginning of something truly momentous.

We've already seen other glimmers of the possible, some of which flared up only briefly and then sputtered into semi-darkness after months or a couple years. Occupy Wall Street is the best example. It had enormous influence at the level of public discourse, thrusting the issue of income inequality into the spotlight, but after being savagely repressed by the political establishment and its police goons, it rapidly petered out.

The Fight for $15, by contrast, while lacking Occupy's creative anarchist spontaneity, is much more organizationally robust, oriented towards the long haul and towards specific legislative goals that can serve as stepping stones toward ever more ambitious goals. The movement is building networks and coalitions, politicizing working people, raising awareness, and pushing public opinion to the left. As the American mainstream becomes sensitized to the demand for higher wages and enforcement of workers' rights, it is more likely to support anti-racist policies, prison reform, action against police brutality, anti-war agendas, and other left-wing goals that all overlap.

These fights are not likely to suffer the fate of Occupy Wall Street, largely because they don't depend on a single specific tactic that is vulnerable to police action. They will build strength year by year, aided by the momentum of the Fight for $15.

It is significant, incidentally, that a large cross-section of American business—including two out of three small business owners—supports a higher minimum wage, because it makes good economic sense. When radical ideas like these start being adopted by large sections of the ruling class—even if only in a defensive move—it is clear that the momentum is on the side of change.

In short, there is cause for optimism on multiple fronts. Of course there is little doubt that society, in the long term, is in for catastrophic social and environmental disruptions—but in the midst of these tragedies, there will still be accumulating successes, thanks to the work of activists like those who have made possible the Fight for $15. The more of us join them, the more victories the left will be able to claim in the years and decades ahead.

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The Anarchist Element in Human Nature

[This is taken from a section in my third book, which accounts for its brevity and 'abruptness.']

The power of mainstream indoctrination is shown by the fact that most people don't consider themselves radical leftists, socialists, or anarchists. The way they act shows that basically they are, only they don't know it. They think that authority not only isn't self-justifying (to quote Chomsky's definition of anarchism) but is often or usually unjust, and merely has to be tolerated because it can't realistically be dismantled.

Democratic values spontaneously appear whenever people get together: they listen to each other, try to respect each other as equals, organize democratically to get things done, and resent people who act autocratically. This is anarchy in the positive sense, or anarchism in action. Grassroots organizing is 'anarchy,' in that top-down authority or bureaucracy is *not* the operative principle.

In fact, one can argue that 'democracy,' 'anarchy,' and 'morality' are but different terms for the same thing, or terms that emphasize different aspects of the same intuition about how humans ought to behave. Respect and compassion for others, openness to new ideas, the positive valuing of free communication, resistance to arbitrary authority—this whole complex of interrelated ideas, which together are mere common sense, is quintessentially anarchistic.

Nearly every valorized kind of behavior is anarchistic, while authoritarian behavior is maligned. If people deny that society as a whole ought to be governed from the grassroots up and not from the top down, they're contradicting their own more fundamental adherence to democratic, anarchist values.

Or consider the concept of socialism. Centuries of discipline and propaganda have not persuaded most people that having a boss is a good thing. Far from it. Bosses are frequently detested, and people hate the boss system itself. They hate having to follow the orders of a "superior," and would much rather be in control of their own economic life. This simple, obvious desire is the intuition behind socialism: workers controlling their own work, and people democratically deciding how to use resources. The practicability of such a system is shown by the success of worker cooperatives (typically more successful than capitalist businesses) and of various large-scale experiments in socialism, such as in Catalonia in 1936 (before being crushed by the forces of reaction).

In any case, whatever people explicitly think about the widely misunderstood concept 'socialism,' their basic acceptance of its values—when not slandered as 'socialist'—should be obvious from their preferences about how to organize the workplace, viz., democratically.

As for the "radical left" in general, people's understanding of social dynamics and consequent disgust show that at bottom they have a left-wing conception of the world. Judging by public opinion polls, the large majority of the population understands what intellectuals often don't, that government is largely run by and for the rich, and that the economy functions to benefit primarily the rich. And they hate this fact. Okay, they're leftists, at least on the inchoate level of emotion and barely-articulated understanding of society.

Moreover, their broadly left-wing, social democratic values are shown by hundreds of polls in the last fifty years. (See, e.g., Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, *Right Turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics* (1986).) Incredibly, according to Gallup polls a majority of Americans even supported labor unions in every single year from the 1930s to 2013, except in 2009, when only 48 percent approved of them. The average rate of approval has been 62 percent. This is despite *massive* business propaganda against unions, and a massive disinformation campaign by the media since the 1980s.

It's clear, in short, that the natural, quasi-instinctual, default way for people to think and behave with each other—and the morally valued way—is the freedom-loving, anti-authoritarian way. Only when authoritarian institutions muddle thinking and behaving do people get confused and start to malign the values they're implicitly most committed to.

The task of the Left is to explain these facts to people, to show them that basically they are already anarchists, and to convince them of the necessity to act courageously on their implicit anarchist values.

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The Value of Noam Chomsky

At 86, Noam Chomsky is getting old. He remains indefatigable, keeping up a schedule that would exhaust a man half his age, but, unless he is indeed a demi-god, we can assume the end is nigh. The tragic day cannot be more than a few years away.

This has set me to thinking: why, after all, does it strike me that his death will mark a day of global mourning, at least among the sane and the subaltern? What is it about him that is so magnetic? There are plenty of activists around the world more heroic than he, more selfless, many people who have devoted their lives more single-mindedly to rescuing humanity from its sinking ship, and who have, perhaps, done more concrete work to end suffering. These countless unknown people deserve at least as much reverence as Chomsky.

There are, of course, many reasons that Chomsky is such a cynosure, some of them not very interesting. The most obvious is the quality of his mind. All things considered, he has probably the greatest mind of the twentieth century, and one of the greatest in human history. Einstein didn't have anything approaching Chomsky's breadth of knowledge (about virtually everything, it seems) or razor-sharp logical vision or remarkable memory. It is hard to imagine that anyone has ever been a better debater than Chomsky, as one can judge from various YouTube videos. And, of course, he founded modern linguistics, and has made important contributions to philosophy and cognitive science, and so on.

But I'll let the eulogists celebrate his intellectual powers when the time comes. There are more important topics I'd like to consider here.

Another source of his mystique is his charisma, by now a sort of shy, grandfatherly, warm and self-effacing persona, combined with an absolute self-certainty. But charisma, as such, should not impress us much: it is a sub-rational phenomenon, a form of "dominance" similar to that recognized in other mammalian species, which in itself has little or nothing to do with morality or reason. The most charismatic people can be the most irrational and immoral.

Equally striking is the fact that since the 1960s he has been a nearly ubiquitous presence, more full of energy and stamina than any other intellectual. This is impressive and helps explain the adulation he receives, but it isn't mainly what intrigues me about him, or what I find most useful about him.

His astonishing command of facts and extensive documentation of U.S. crimes are extremely useful, but they're too obvious to require comment. His unusual kindness and solicitousness towards "ordinary people"—for instance, his spending many hours every day answering emails—is likewise very admirable.

But in addition to all these considerations are things I find especially noteworthy, which may be worth mentioning here because of the lessons they hold for us. For I think that he, or his public persona, can serve as a sort of moral and intellectual compass, keeping us on the road less traveled—less traveled because it requires some effort and willful independence. It is useful to have a guide on such a path, and there is no better guide than Chomsky. To speak plainly, he can serve as a symbol of certain intellectual and moral tendencies—much as Marx does, though in a somewhat different way—tendencies that in fact amount to little more than simple humanity and common sense, but that are surprisingly easy to forget in our indoctrinated and power-hungry world.

In short, we could do worse than to take Chomsky as our role model.

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For one thing, Chomsky is the last great Enlightenment thinker—perhaps the greatest of them. The most consistent, and maybe the most profound (unless that honor belongs to Kant). If this were an academic article I would write about his rationalist philosophy of mind; here I'll confine myself to the more "practical" side of his contributions, which is equally rooted in the Enlightenment.

One doesn't have to indulge in academic verbiage in order to express one of the central impulses of the Enlightenment: its recognition of the value of the individual. This is classical liberalism, as expressed by, say, Kant or Wilhelm von Humboldt (whom Chomsky likes to quote)—this essentially anti-authoritarian appreciation of the dignity and freedom of the individual. This is also, you may notice, morality. Respect and compassion for "the other," the other person, the other sex, the other race, the other nationality: this is the kernel of true liberalism and true morality, as encapsulated in the Golden Rule. Express yourself freely as long as you don't harm others, and express yourself so as to do good to others: liberalism and morality. These are the starting points and the endpoints of everything Chomsky has to say with regard to politics and society.

Certain Enlightenment thinkers of the eighteenth century subscribed to this moral liberalism, but, given the time in which they lived, they were periodically susceptible to illiberal sentiments, such as contempt for Africans or women or wage-laborers. Or they tried to justify imperialistic policies. Contrary to what postmodernists might think, this doesn't invalidate the Enlightenment itself; it merely shows that humans are human, products of their society, and sometimes unable to live up to the implicit conceptual content of their philosophies.

Chomsky, however, is perfectly aware of what his liberalism commits him to, and as far as I know he has never deviated from the classical liberal path in his public statements or actions. There are two things that generally deserve notice in our dealings with people and our estimation of them: first, to what extent do they recognize—fearlessly, if need be—claims of reason and logic? And second, to what extent do they act—again, with courage—on the basis of empathy and compassion (or respect for others)? These are the basic criteria we should use in judging someone's value as a human being. Chomsky evidently understands this, and so should we.

Our society, of course, sees things differently, in an illiberal and immoral way, which is precisely why it has to be dismantled and rebuilt. Society judges things in terms of power, authority, wealth, race, popularity, charisma, physical beauty, and other qualities that have either no relation or a negative relation to morality and rationality. Insofar as we, as individuals, periodically succumb to these illiberal tendencies, we must try to root them out of ourselves, even if that goal can never be completely fulfilled. We're only human, after all.

But one thing we do have control over is whether we acknowledge the force of logic and can follow chains of reasoning. If we admit that morality and rationality are, so to speak, no respecters of persons, that rank and wealth and power don't pertain to the inner worth of a person, then we're committed to fighting against society in its current form—its practices, its institutions, its cultural norms, and its authority figures. They are all apostles of illiberalism, of the coercion and injustice that radiate from what we might call *deadly snobbery*, the snobbery that happily disregards the claims to life and dignity of people without power or wealth or status (whether determined by white skin, physical beauty, wealth, or whatever).

It is the unreasoned respect for power/authority (in a broad sense) that gets you the world we have today. We unthinkingly look down on people who are "different" and respect those whom others respect, because of the human instinct to conform. So, since the amoral institutions that run society are naturally going to exalt amoral people who serve their interests—and since powerful institutions propagate the ideas and norms that influence our own ways of thinking and acting—we end up respecting amoral, irrational people, and behaving in amoral, socially irrational ways.

Thus, our anti-liberal snobbery goes hand-in-hand with our easy conformism, and both are contrary to reason and morality.

This is all implicit in Chomsky's work, and in his behavior he counters it more effectively than anyone else. He exudes contempt those with status—especially intellectuals and politicians—and respects and admires the forgotten, the millions of unknown activists, the nameless Colombian peasants who show incredible compassion in the midst of state-organized horrors, the "unpeople" everywhere who persevere in the face of savage collective torture.

The point isn't that Chomsky is a nice guy; the point is that we must all be vigilant against the anti-liberal tendencies in ourselves. We may be compelled to obey authoritarian norms in our work lives, but inwardly, and sometimes outwardly, we should rebel.

We should recognize that, other things being equal, the more mainstream success someone has, the less respect he deserves, for success only suggests obedience, uncritical acceptance of indoctrination, and the snobbery that notices only status, not morality or rationality (or *humanity*). In daily life such snobbery and institutional subservience are fairly innocent, if obnoxious and contemptible, but in the aggregate, on a large scale, they are what produce things like capitalist decimation of civil society and the natural environment, the U.S.'s ongoing global holocaust since World War II, and the Holocaust itself.

The "innocent" thus merges with the evil, making all of us obedient and snobbish people complicit in the horrors that characterize the modern world.

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Consider Chomsky's unique intellectual cleanliness. An example is his analysis of anarchism. He points out, following Rudolf Rocker and others, that the true successor to classical liberalism is anarchist socialism. This should be common sense, but since it has been buried in the manure of centuries of capitalist propaganda, few people recognize it.

If liberalism (like morality) means concern for people's freedom and dignity, then it means suspicion of power. It means that power is not self-justifying but has to be dismantled—unless it can give a convincing argument to justify itself, which it rarely can. This impulse to dismantle power-structures is the core of anarchism, and also the common sense of elementary morality, which most people implicitly agree with (whether they know it or not).

That is to say, most people are already anarchists, because the essence of anarchism is common sense. They might disagree on whether it's possible to create a large-scale society on the basis of diffused power, but, unless they're fascists or moral monsters, they agree with anarchist values, i.e., democratic values.

Chomsky is able to cut through all the nonsense of the dominant intellectual culture and state truths like these without sesquipedalian adornments, without having to indulge in elitist academic obscurantism. He recognizes, moreover, that we shouldn't worship "big names" like Lenin or Gramsci or Foucault (or Chomsky!) or any of the other more recent names that get thrown around in the media or in leftist subcultures, that to do so is elitist and pretentious—especially since most of what is valuable in the works of these "thinkers" is little more than an elaboration of common sense.

As for socialism, Chomsky is right that it means simply workers' control, economic democracy, and as such is but a component of "anarchy"—and of democracy. The Soviet Union, as a kind of state-capitalist society that allowed workers very few rights, was the precise opposite of socialism. Worker cooperatives, by contrast, exemplify socialism on a small scale.

There are countless other examples of Chomsky's lucid logical vision. He is right, for instance, that the "radical Left" is, in a sense, the only truly conservative force in politics, for it actually believes in such conservative values as community, freedom, justice, truth, and reason. It is struggling to *conserve* society against the disintegrating tendencies of capitalism. This is a point that, once made, is obvious—and that leftists should always bring up in debates with self-styled "conservative" opponents.

Radical change is needed in order to realize conservative values. One of those ironic facts with which history is replete.

Or consider these points—obvious once you hear them—that Chomsky makes about American imperialism in this video (at about the 8:15 mark). "Talking about American imperialism is a bit like talking about triangular triangles. The United States is the one country that exists, and ever has, that was *founded* as an empire, explicitly [according to the intentions of the Founding Fathers]... Modern-day American imperialism is just a later phase of a process that has continued from the first moment without a break." When you think about this statement and what it entails, you can start to see American history in a new light.

Of course, intellectuals typically think of American imperialism as starting with the invasion of Cuba in 1898. In reality, the 19th-century American expansion into the western part of the continent, which involved genocide of the indigenous population, was a particularly vicious form of imperialism. The

invasion of Mexico in the 1840s was another overtly imperialistic act. And so the record continues up to the present, the imperialism taking different forms at different times.

Especially since World War II, the United States has been the scourge of the earth, intervening constantly in any country where democratic hopes threatened to puncture authoritarianism, and actively supporting every dictator imaginable (Chiang Kai-shek, Batista, Diem, Somoza, Duvalier, Trujillo, Iran's Shah, Suharto, Mobutu, Papadopoulos, Pinochet, Mubarak, Marcos, Rios Montt, Saddam Hussein, and a hundred others) as long as he didn't pose a threat to U.S. power. Chomsky's work provides all the references you need.

Consider, also, his pithy analyses of what elementary morality requires. While other intellectuals and self-styled philosophers—often mere apologists for Western crimes—wade in the muck of "good intentions" (ours are good, theirs are bad) and subjectivism and idealized thought-experiments, Chomsky states flatly and clearly that, basically, two things are involved in acting morally: applying to yourself the standards you apply to others, and choosing how to act by considering the *predictable consequences* of your actions—*not* by having "good intentions."

With these two rules in mind, we have the tools to judge our own and others' morality. Unfortunately, neither we nor others typically come out smelling like roses if we're honest in our evaluations, because it is extremely difficult to rigorously apply to yourself (or people you identify with) the standards you apply to others. Humans are born to deceive themselves about the moral significance of their actions.

Some of us, however, can at least comfort ourselves that we're not the moral monsters who constitute the elite of powerful politicians, intellectuals, and corporate executives. We aren't directly responsible for invading and destroying countries, or for enacting policies that threaten to obliterate much life on earth, or for driving billions of people into desperate poverty and misery.

Chomsky usefully documents how Western leaders are constantly flouting the rule of international and domestic law—*their own* laws, laws that they themselves have enacted. In fact, no entity more consistently violates laws than a national government, and no one is literally more of a criminal than the leaders of a country. And their friends.

The U.S. government, for instance, simply doesn’t enforce many of its own labor laws, as codified especially in the Wagner Act of 1935. Employers are typically allowed to act with impunity against their employees. In a society governed by the rule of law, on the other hand, nearly all corporate executives would be behind bars, for continual minor and major infractions.

In foreign policy, the U.S. government regularly violates its own Leahy Law, by giving military assistance to countries with no regard for human rights. (Israel comes to mind.) Chomsky points out that, while it may be too much to expect the U.S. government to abide by international law, it should at least be *feasible* that it abide by *its own* laws. But, in fact, that isn't feasible.

Anyway, the point is that what a person with intellectual and moral integrity should do is to follow Chomsky's example: adumbrate a consistent set of moral and intellectual principles, and then rigorously apply them, as objectively as possible, to oneself and to others. Don't fall victim to the "self-love" fallacy, the tendency to make excuses for your own behavior and thereby contradict your principles and sacrifice your integrity. Evaluate yourself, and your country, as you imagine an honest outsider would.

That is, "step outside yourself" and try to nullify your subjective biases.

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Subjectivism and idealism are things I find particularly noxious, and things that Chomsky has counteracted in his work more effectively than anyone. He really is, at bottom, a Marxist, an anarchist Marxist (which is a perfectly coherent concept). He disagrees, rightly, with the orthodox Marxist theory of revolution (involving the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and so on), but his analyses are grounded in the ideas of class struggle, the imperialistic nature of capitalist power, a kind of economic determinism, and of course Marxian values of workers' dignity and creativity, and the evils of the capitalist state, and the evils of money and the market system.

He is probably the most consistent materialist alive, in his absolute rejection of the idealistic, subjectivist decadence that is postmodernism--i.e., his complete lack of interest in the discursive games that intellectuals like to play with themselves. He seems to have contempt for such self-preening verbiage machines as Slavoj Žižek, Lacan, Derrida, Baudrillard, Kristeva, and their thousands of (sometimes unwitting) acolytes scattered across the humanities and even the political Left.

But the postmodernists, fixated on language, "discourse," "society's imaginary," idealistic constructions of sexuality or gender or ethnicity, are only extreme manifestations of the more general idealism of the intellectual culture. Intellectuals are naturally inclined to think that words and ideas are of exceptional importance, because they themselves traffic in words and ideas, and they want to think that they themselves are important. So they proclaim that discourses are what create and structure the world, ideologies are of primary importance to social dynamics, etc. It's a type of self-glorification.

An added benefit of such thinking is that it has a conservative influence, for it focuses people's attention on ideas and subjective identities rather than institutional structures and class relations. It encourages people to think that what's important is to change ideas, rather than to change economic and political power relations.

Moreover, idealism, especially in its extreme postmodernist forms, is usefully solipsistic, individualistic, disengaging-from-social-reality. Everything is just a "construct," there is no such thing as objective social class or objective realities of power or objective truth in general; all depends on one's perspective or "frame of reference," etc. Such positions are calculated to turn one in on oneself, away from the outside world, and to undermine popular struggles.

No surprise, then, that corporate capitalism has been perfectly happy with idealism and postmodernism, and powerful institutions in the media and academia have propagated them. Chomsky is right to have refused even to dip a toe into the bog of subjectivism and "discourse analysis," or whatever one wants to call it.

Social "theory" in general he is suspicious of. He doesn't like its elitist overtones, its Ivory Tower nature, and he thinks that, by and large, it isn't necessary in the first place. It doesn't require overly subtle jargonistic analysis to understand, in broad outline, how society works. One has only to recognize, for example, that institutions will act so as to maintain and increase their power, and the institutions with the most resources at their command (in particular the corporate sector) will have the most political and ideological power, and class—as defined by one's location in economic institutions—is the central variable in determining what sorts of resources one has access to and what kinds of ideas one will accept and what one's general life-path will likely be, and the inner nature of economic institutions is class struggle (antagonistic interests), etc.

That is to say, all one needs is a basic Marxian materialism, because materialism is common sense. Access to resources is the key, the key to survival and to social influence and to education and to political power and to a high quality of life; and access to resources is typically determined by class position. –That sentence is the kernel of materialism.

As for bringing about social change, common sense, again, tells us what's necessary: education and organization. Join together with people whose interests lie in fighting progressively against the status quo and empowering the public; and listen to them, listen to their experiences, and offer your own experiences and ideas, and educate one another, and organize events to draw in more people, and gradually build up a movement. These are mere truisms of activism. We don't need fancy "theory" to understand society or change it.

Now, it's possible that Chomsky goes too far in his "anti-theoretical" stance, and that he underestimates the practical and scholarly value of, say, Marxian political economy as written by Robert Brenner, David Harvey, John Bellamy Foster, and others. I think that such scholarship can be extremely useful and enlightening. (Chomsky would likely agree, in fact.) But only because it's materialistic, and any correct understanding of society has to be based on a materialist foundation.

Fortunately, as class polarization increases and the global economy descends into stagnation and crisis, we can expect idealism to wane and materialism to rise. This is what happened in the 1930s, and structurally we are in a situation eerily similar to what precipitated the Great Depression.

In the coming years, as social crisis becomes the norm and the ruling class insistently professes its good intentions at every opportunity, we will do well to remember one of the lessons of Marxian and Chomskian materialism: the self-interpretations of institutional actors mean exactly nothing. The true significance of someone's acts is not given by what he thinks their significance is, because humans are born to deceive themselves (on the basis of their self-regard). Rather, it is given by analysis of his institutional functions.

People in positions of authority act as their institutions pressure them to; and if, by some miracle, they act with excessive independence, either they'll be taught a lesson and cut down to size or they'll be discarded by some means or other. So it is really the *institutions* that are the actors; the people with power are merely tools. (At high levels, people do have some freedom…but they always use this freedom only to increase their power, which is to say the power of their institution. So, again, it comes down to the objective nature of the institutional role they play.)

Thus, it is institutional analysis—grounded in materialist ideas—that matters most, not analysis of political rhetoric or self-interpretations or ideologies or "good intentions." It's fine for scholars to study such things, but they should have a clear understanding of their "superstructural" and self-deceived nature.

Incidentally, it is worth noting again that, in a totally different sense of the word, Chomsky is very idealistic. He has the idealism that is a component in classical liberalism and morality itself: the belief in human creativity, dignity, freedom, and the capacity for generosity and love. He is convinced, with good reason—and in the tradition of Rousseau—that these traits are innate in people…just as the capacities for pathological greed, violence, power-hunger, and slavish obedience are innate. The human mind is incredibly rich, with all kinds of potentialities, both for the insatiable greed of capitalism and for the loving generosity that is normal in intimate relationships.

What matters, as Rousseau thought and common sense confirms, is the nature of the social structures in which the individual is embedded. Pathological structures produce pathological imperatives; humane and democratic structures produce more humane imperatives.

Implicit in all this, however, is recognition of the essential "equality" of human beings, even in the midst of extreme social hierarchy. We are all to some extent moldable and to some extent genetically determined; we all have various strengths and weaknesses; we all can be manipulated to act in terrible ways depending on the circumstances; and in the lives of all of us, *luck* plays an enormous role.

Any form of elitism or status-consciousness is therefore based on ignorance and unreason. What should determine how we "rank" people, in general, are only their commitments to objective reason and to morality and human welfare, because such commitments are largely within the domain of free will. We have control over them: it is up to us whether we want to be honest, compassionate, and rational.

*

Despite this long encomium I've written—which I could easily double or triple in length—I have to admit that Chomsky isn't perfect. One can criticize him, for example, for not saying enough about *positive* things that are happening. He rarely gives specific advice to activists, though he surely has a rich history of experience to draw from. He seems to rarely tell audiences or readers about particular organizations that are doing good work, and that could use support.

One might also wish that he would more often discuss capitalism as the chief source of the world's ills, to get people thinking in explicitly anti-capitalist terms. His refusal to invoke the name of Marxism seems puzzling, but evidently he thinks one doesn't need to study Marx in order to understand how the world works. And, again, he is suspicious of theoretical systems in the context of the social sciences.

Personally, when I discovered Chomsky I found him useful as a validation of my ideas about politics and the intellectual community. He was a sort of distant mentor, who sharpened my thinking and encouraged me. In particular, his unparalleled precision of thought impressed me and guided me.

For example, I was struck by his statement that *corporations are systems of private totalitarianism*: orders come down from above, a common ideology is enforced on all the workers, disobedience can be punished severely, structurally speaking there isn't a particle of democracy. I found this to be an obvious

truth once I'd heard it—and on some obscure level I had always had a similar intuition about the nature of the corporation—but his articulation of the insight fostered clarity of thought.

And that may be his greatest contribution: his absolute clarity of thought, his ability to parse complex phenomena into simple, pithy statements that capture their essence. He bypasses all the ideological accretions and intellectual chicanery, and states the truth—backed up by facts—in unpretentious, anti-"snobbish" language.

In short, Chomsky is *sui generis*. It will be a sad day for the Left, and for humanity, when he departs…but at least his writings and talks will remain, to help guide us toward a better world.

In the meantime, "don't mourn, organize!"

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In Kitsch We Trust

In a popular video on YouTube, George Carlin aims his caustic wit at the dread political scourge of *euphemisms*. "I don't like words that hide the truth," he kicks off his rant. "I don't like words that conceal reality. I don't like euphemisms, or euphemistic language."

Our "public discourse" is, and to some extent always has been, polluted by an epidemic of euphemisms. This category overlaps with the category of *political correctness*, but it typically serves rightwing, not leftwing, ends. It also overlaps with kitsch, the category that Milan Kundera brilliantly analyzes in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Kitsch is "the absolute denial of shit, in both the literal and the figurative senses of the word; kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence."

The essence of this definition applies equally to euphemisms. Both kitsch and euphemisms serve to shield us from unpleasant truths—in other words to disguise reality.

Kitsch is everywhere where fake prettiness—or pretty fakeness—silences authenticity. It is at social gatherings, cocktail parties, academic conferences; it saturates interactions between salespeople and customers, and inspires the decor of every shop in the mall. It is the impulse that sustains the tourism industry. It is the regulating principle of institutional norms, whether in the intellectual, the political, the cultural, or the business world.

Kitsch is what coheres a consumer capitalist society, with its ubiquitous product-advertisements and self-advertisements (for the self has become but a product to be sold). In fact, power-centers in *any* advanced society will impose a regime of political and ideological kitsch on the population, for power has to lie in order to extract some semblance of consent from its subjects.

Kitsch, in short, while pretending to exalt all that is wonderful and pleasant in life, manifests the anti-human. Where social atomization happens, so does kitsch. Where power happens—and bureaucracy, and the state, and "the free market," and atomizing totalitarian tendencies of whatever sort—so does kitsch. And in the realm of political kitsch, the use of euphemisms is indispensable.

George Carlin mentions a few. Consider the evolution of the old, honest, direct World War I concept "shell shock". In World War II shell shock morphed into the more innocuous term battle fatigue, then during the Korean War it was called operational exhaustion, only to become post-traumatic stress disorder in the Vietnam era, or simply PTSD now. So, from *shell shock* to…an acronym.

This history exemplifies the role of power-structures in the ideological sphere, namely, to squeeze the life out of life—and out of language, and out of dissent, and out of anything that can potentially disrupt the smooth functioning of institutional relations. This is as true of academia as of politics. The imperative is to propagate appealing myths at all times; but if it proves necessary to acknowledge the existence of something negative, at the very least change its name so that it becomes inoffensive and boring. (Ideally, put a positive spin on it as well, so the bad thing magically becomes good.) *Eradicate every vestige of humanity*; that is the imperative.

We can all easily think of examples. Torture is enhanced interrogation; slaughtered children are collateral damage; a coup d'état is regime change; terrorism *we* carry out is counterterrorism; invasion of

another country is self-defense; destroying a country is stabilizing it; and imposing reactionary regimes on hapless populations is spreading democracy.

Job-destroyers are job-creators; the right-to-scrounge is called the right-to-work; the destruction of public education is "education reform"; destroying social programs and the welfare state is "austerity"; massive corporate welfare is the free market; workers' mutually destructive competition for jobs and wages is a flexible labor market; renting yourself to a corporation is finding employment; police terrorism is called unnecessary force. The list could go on for pages.

But it isn't only current political realities that are whitewashed. Rather, a country's entire history is effaced, replaced with a mess of kitsch and euphemisms. This may be a truism, and we may know it, but it remains very difficult to extricate ourselves from all the subtle wordplays and techniques of indoctrination that have been used to make us think well of our society and its history.

For instance, the recently published book *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, by Edward Baptist, at times may well strike the reader with the force of revelation, while simultaneously embarrassing him for having overlooked the truths it brings to light. Why do we use such bland terms as plantations and slaveholders? Because they're euphemisms—though we don't even know it.

Plantations were simply slave-labor camps, and we should follow Baptist in consistently calling them such. (The word "plantation" is actually appealing, quaint, pretty, conjuring images of a lovely countryside ruled benevolently by a paternalistic lord.) "Slaveholders" were *enslavers*, and we should call them such. Slaves were constantly *tortured*; that was part of their daily routine, to force them to work harder and submit to white supremacy. Half the country was a torture machine for slave labor, while the other half financed and profited from it.

The kitsch exists on a broader scale too. As Baptist makes clear—and as we all should have explicitly recognized long ago—slavery was not some marginal, economically backward thing; it was the very foundation of the modern American economy and the global industrial economy. It was an astonishingly efficient and effective way of producing cotton, such that from the perspective of economic logic it was *irrational* for slavery to be made illegal. Nothing is more modern than slavery and the economically productive dehumanization it entails.

The funny thing about kitsch, though, is that sometimes the truth is buried in it, peeking out ironically, only requiring a bit of excavation. Barack Obama, Marco Rubio and their ilk are right: America is an exceptional country. No other country was founded on, or owes its prosperity to, wholesale genocide of the native population together with centuries of enslavement of human beings. (It's exceptional in other ways too, though they probably aren't what Obama has in mind.)

It's hard to look at one's own country semi-objectively, because one is immersed in a miasma of kitsch and euphemisms. They are absolutely everywhere; they are the air we breathe as citizens, workers, and consumers. But if we can cut through the thick poisonous atmosphere of deceit and indoctrination, we may find that everything is upside down, and appearance is the opposite of reality.

We may find that in our society, as in a stagnant pond, the scum floats to the top. We'll realize, with the historian Albert Prago, that "in an amoral society, the amoral man is best qualified to succeed." Perhaps we'll learn to look with contempt on the leaders and the "successful"—the institutionally obedient, the non-questioners, and the greedy, the vulgarly ambitious, the rich—and admire the downtrodden for their struggles and their stoic survival.

So, whenever a person in a position of authority opens his mouth, we should ask: "What is the reality that is being kitschified here?"

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The Dismal and Hopeful Future

One doesn't have to be a brilliant social analyst to see that the contemporary world order is doomed, destined to start visibly crumbling within the next decade or two at the latest. The neoliberal system, in fact

the corporate capitalist system, is radically unsustainable. It is too unstable, too universally rapacious, too humanly exploitative and environmentally destructive, too demoniacally self-consuming—for capitalism can profit from its self-immolation!—to last much longer.

Is it even necessary anymore to argue for these claims?

Capitalism means self-sabotage. Its profit-making interest lies in paying wage-earners as little as possible, and ideally in mechanizing and automating them out of existence, for they're expensive and troublesome with their demands for "rights" and other such nonsense. On the other hand, capitalism needs markets; it needs entities to sell things to, for that's how it makes profit. Any sort of entity would serve its purposes—alien creatures, super-advanced machines, genetically enhanced chimpanzees, whatever—but, tragically, capitalism has so far been forced to do business with the very beings it exploits and wants to deny income to: humans!

Cruel irony! The mass of mankind, against which capitalism wars in the sphere of production, it has to make nice to in the sphere of consumption, to blandish and cajole into buying commodities. This fusion of consumer and producer in the same being is the tragic contradiction that torments capitalism and drives it to manic-depression—exuberance followed by depression followed by exuberance. The capitalist elite revels in Romanesque orgies as it squeezes money out of the sweat and blood of the workers, but the party ends once markets have, as a result, so shrunk—or the worm of doubt has so grown in the minds of investors—that investment is cut back to the point of ending growth. The spread of credit may keep the party going for a long time, postponing the full effect of long-term stagnating or declining wages (and ever-more-precarious employment), but the reckoning has to come sooner or later. An economy cannot be sustained forever on wishful thinking, namely the wish that aggregate demand will remain indefinitely high even as less and less of the nation's wealth and income are going to the bottom 99 percent.

All this is just Marxian common sense, which Keynes diluted and helped make mainstream during and after the Great Depression.

So, we're in a situation now quite similar to that which caused the Great Depression. There isn't any doubt that we're in for another such event, this time more global and protracted (though also uneven and possibly not as dramatic, at least initially). We're entering the epoch of stagnation and crisis—environmental crisis too, and population crisis, and political crisis, and every other crisis you can think of. We're embarking on the slow demise of a civilization.

Incidentally, the common comparisons between the current situation and the fall of the Roman Republic and the Empire are not altogether facile or superficial. In all three cases, the rise of "income inequality" is a determining factor, as the top one percent or fraction of one percent appropriates ever more wealth and increases its power. In the case of the Roman Republic, which succumbed to civil wars and Julius Caesar and then the Empire, republican forms were gradually corrupted by the enormous wealth that flowed to Rome's elite as a result of its imperial conquests and plundering. (Sound familiar?) The rich were able to dispossess many of the poor, including soldiers, from their land, and the senatorial government did little to address the impoverishment of the masses, since it represented and consisted of the (congenitally short-sighted) rich.

Soldiers therefore became intensely loyal to their generals, since it was only through a general's land grant that they would be guaranteed an income after being discharged. Ambitious generals were thus able to build up huge, loyal private armies that made them effectively autonomous of the Roman government. The Senate could only look on helplessly as civil wars between generals ensued, the ultimate victor of which was Octavian, or Augustus.

Such social calamities are always what happen when the rich get too rich and are given too much license to do as they want. They dismantle or ignore rules that aren't in their short-term private interest—rules, nowadays, like the welfare state, protection of public resources, and collective bargaining between employers and employees—which inevitably causes the slow disintegration of social bonds, of any kind of social compact, public-spiritedness, and the very fabric of society. Privatization (such as Rome's privatization of the army and much of the land, and the U.S.'s privatization of education, natural resources, etc.) destroys public goods, thus ultimately destroying society itself—for what is society if not one great public good, one great "commons"?

There is much we can learn from the fall of Rome, which happened twice and from similar underlying causes both times.

But as for the future, is there any hope? It might seem not, but, ironically, some hope is justified by virtue precisely of the catastrophes we're in for. At the same time as these corrode the foundations of a depraved civilization, they will create—or rather, are creating—the conditions for an upsurge of popular movements and democratic initiatives that will begin outside the mainstream and eventually become visible and widespread. As any Marxist—anyone with common sense—should understand, history progresses largely by means of silver linings in terrible circumstances. This is the essence of the so-called "dialectical" interpretation of history.

In this connection it's worth mentioning the three possible "plans" that left-wing activists in Greece have come up with for their country's future, since their conceptualization, if modified, applies to the future of the entire world. Plan A, favored by the Syriza government, was to remain in the eurozone but end austerity. That plan hasn't worked out so well, in light of Syriza's capitulation to the Troika. Plan B, favored by the left wing of Syriza, envisioned a Greek default and exit from the eurozone, followed by rapid statist reconstruction of the economy. This plan, too, is unrealistic, at least for now.

Plan C is what's left, and ultimately the one that is both most revolutionary and most realistic. Jerome Roos's formulation is clear and compelling:

> [Plan C calls for] a reinvigorated project of the commons and communal solidarity. In contrast to both Plan A and Plan B, Plan C would be a *bottom-up* project organized by local communities that would situate itself directly on the terrain of everyday life. Its main contributions would be threefold. First, through solidarity networks and communal support systems, it would enhance *popular resilience* by securing the means of social reproduction under conditions of extreme precarity.
>
> Second, by creating new and strengthening existing organs of popular power, the commons would collectively act as bases for continued *grassroots resistance* to further austerity and dispossession. History has shown that, without powerful grassroots movements exerting pressure from below, even left governments are easily led astray by the siren call of domestic and international capital. To prevent this, the still relatively small and dispersed movement of commoners will have to become an organized force of political opposition.
>
> Third, a project of the commons has *revolutionary potential* insofar as its protagonists manage to reclaim the means of production and reproduction; democratize workplaces, communities and existing political institutions; and contribute to a fundamental transformation of social relations from below. All of this is clearly still a far way off, but Plan C is precisely about cultivating this sense of perspective and direction — taking the struggle far beyond the stale dichotomies of state and market, euro and drachma.

These ideas are stated in the context of the crisis in Greece, but they generalize worldwide. Plan A, for us, is the path that the left wing of the Democratic party would pursue: remain basically in our current political economy, enact no sweeping reforms, merely tinker technocratically in a more proactive way than the Obama administration has, particularly with regard to issues of the economy and the environment. This plan would fall victim to the profound unsustainability of the corporate-capitalist political economy that it doesn't truly challenge.

Plan B would amount to a thoroughgoing shift in the state's policies, in fact a global shift (necessarily), incorporating something like Thomas Piketty's global wealth tax, but also much more. In order to set society on a new track, it would necessitate radical-left state intervention in the economy on a level that would make the postwar European welfare state seem puny.

Given the balance of power between big business and the democratic resistance, this option is totally impossible.

The only other option is the Plan C that Roos outlines—and that Gar Alperovitz and others have discussed in the context of the United States. Slowly build up a new society from below, a less atomized and more democratic society. Spread cooperatives of every kind, and public banking, participatory budgeting, perhaps community land trusts and community development corporations, "solidarity networks" and "communal support systems" of types that can't really be foreseen at present. All this has to be done in alliance with overt political resistance, social movements that force the state (at all levels) towards the left, but not in a sudden colossal coup that attempts to reconstruct society from the top down, an impossibility.

What's important to understand is that Plan C is not simply something that *should* be done, something that depends only on the will of activists (however important that is); rather, it almost certainly *will* be done. It is the direction in which history is proceeding, coincident with the deterioration of corporate capitalism. In the coming decades, as crisis savages civilization, people and communities across the West and across the world will be driven, for the sake of their survival and their political dignity, to invent creative solutions to their plight—to network with each other and to cooperate in the production and distribution of resources. The state will mutate—in ways we can't foresee—in response to these initiatives and this resistance, and slowly, laboriously, a very different society will mature in the interstices and finally in the mainstream of a dying *ancien régime*.

Plan C will mature far in the future, but the seeds of it are already being planted, even in the U.S. *Yes! Magazine* has showcased some of these, and the Democracy Collaborative is one of the organizations in the vanguard of the coming revolution.

Among the many glimmers of hope are the following. Several cities in the United States have begun investing in worker cooperatives, which are, in essence, examples of socialism—economic democracy—on a small scale. (The common leftist criticism that, for now, they are forced to operate in a capitalist context and engage with the market is irrelevant.) New York City's 2016 budget includes $2.1 million for developing worker co-ops, up from $1.2 million in 2015, which itself was up from $0 in 2014. Madison, Wisconsin is giving $1 million each year for the next five years to establish new worker co-ops.

The Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland, Ohio have had so much publicity since 2010 that it's hardly even necessary to mention them here. Similarly publicized has been the United Steelworkers' cooperation with Mondragon to establish manufacturing worker cooperatives, the first time since the 1880s that a mainstream labor union has been so closely involved in establishing co-ops. Nor is it the only one.

Participatory budgeting, having been tried first in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989, is now finally starting to spread across the West. It came to the United States—to Chicago—in 2009, and since then has been replicated in many other cities, though as yet only on a small scale. As its successes are publicized, it will continue to be replicated and expanded.

Public banking has had difficulty in expanding beyond North Dakota, the only state with its own bank, a remarkably profitable and socially efficacious one. Since 2009 a plethora of bills have been introduced in legislatures to establish state banks, but so far none has come to fruition. Entrenched interests have been able to stifle the growing advocacy for socially conscious banking. But one can expect that after the next financial crisis—an inevitability—and then the next and the next, the capacity of the elite to resist radical change will weaken substantially, largely because of massive popular movements.

Karl Marx was right, though, not to try to sketch what sorts of institutions would spring up during and after the "revolution." Even now, we don't know what new forms of social organization will appear in the next forty years and after. Society is too complex for us to predict these things.

The main point I'm making is just the old Marxist one that progress works in mysterious ways. The political economy of the twentieth-century capitalist nation-state is being dismantled—by capitalism. The nation-state is being progressively atomized, fragmented, polarized between rich and poor, parcelized and privatized, which in the long run will cause the demise of capitalism itself. For capitalism and the centralized nation-state have grown up together since the fourteenth century, and they will die together. It's possible they'll take humanity with them, or that a Hobbesian state of nature will ensue, but more likely is that "Plan C" will mature to the degree, and at the same pace, that capitalism succumbs to itself.

The way that historical progress happens, through crisis and the heightening of mass misery to the point that the elite can no longer resist popular movements, is indescribably cruel, but it does, at least, give us cause to hope for something good out of the horrors that await us.

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June–August

Found a great apartment near Brooklyn Heights, with a young Indian couple. Quiet people. Been on a few dates; the only promising one so far was with a Guyanese archaeology Ph.D. student. Also have started going to social events (Meetup, etc.) almost every night, when not on a date. Gave a talk on worker co-ops in Long Island last week to a small group of activists from Jobs with Justice, the Long Island Federation of Labor, and the Long Island Progressive Coalition. An old activist professor had read my book—a friend of a friend of Jay had given it to him—and liked it, so he invited me; hosted me at his house in Syosset. Impressive guy, full of energy and intelligence, sort of a visionary who has founded some great organizations and been involved with New York's Working Families Party. Meanwhile, I'll be meeting with some activists from the New York Network of Worker Cooperatives, and will try to get them in touch with groups on Long Island (if they aren't already). Writing the dissertation too, though it's very slow going.

New York, of course, is awesome. I should have spent last summer here; but, as I think I've said, at least that summer purged me of European fantasies—mostly because of the language problem!—and matured me a bit.

I met Lulu a couple times before leaving Chicago, and now am texting with her pretty regularly. (Finally entered the 21st century and got a smart phone, which for some reason has resulted in her texting me more frequently.)

…She sent me this text message, out of the blue:

> Can I make something clear? I'll probably never actually say this, because you know, ugh. But here's the thing: you were obviously incredibly important in the past two, three years. I don't even know how long it has been since you and my mom met. It was just after my first year in America and I was finally starting to reach the stage where I was no longer the kid version of a complete imbecile and became capable of actual thought. It was so important that you were there to help me realize a lot of things and see past the smokescreen that covers a majority of our tragically flawed society. You not only helped form my political views, but in other intellectual ways as well. I would not be the same way that I am now if you had not patiently helped me along. I consider myself intelligent and well versed in the world. Though of course I don't know everything, I like to think that I think beyond the shallowness that plagues most people my age, and beyond. I hardly ever, if at all, thanked you. I can't bring myself to do it. And if you ever bring this message up again I will likely punch you. Anyways, it was important that someone was there to shape my mind, especially someone who was able to deal with my screaming me and ranting and ridiculousness that hopefully I've managed to control slightly better now, though I'm sure I will feel the same way two years from now. So yes, this is me finally thanking you, though not in person, for everything you've done. I will never truly like classical music, but you have helped me appreciate at least its superiority and importance. Philosophy, science, writing would never have fascinated me as much as it still does now if you hadn't been there to talk to me about it. I will read those articles, I've promised. Sometime soon. Okay. But one more thing, I'm also at that stage where the only thing I am openly interested in is reading and my friends. We will email, and text, and I will no doubt incessantly bother you when something really bad happens because I sometimes need someone to talk to who

> is not my age. Someone who has always, mostly, been there before. […] I am going to regret sending this, but it needs to be and should be done. So thank you, once again, for everything.

I was surprised to get that, to say the least. I think I'll always treasure it.

[Deleted descriptions of dates and suchlike with incredibly flaky people.]

I'm leaving New York in a couple weeks, on August 22. This summer has, like the last, stimulated some personal growth, though only in the direction of more cynicism and ennui. For the last few weeks I haven't been writing the dissertation (partly because of a lack of sources here), haven't been doing much else either except go to some social events and go on more ultimately pointless dates.

…And yet, ironically, a week later it's clear that this summer has somewhat rejuvenated me at least with regard to living in Chicago. Somehow, maybe because my spirit is invincible, I'm ready to start looking for a good woman again over there. While I would still prefer to live in New York, I know now that Chicago isn't *awful* compared to it. Most people are pretty awful wherever you go in the world. I still think I would have—and I *did* have, this summer—more romantic and social success here than in Chicago (such as with the singer who invited me up to her apartment where I spent the night, only finger-fucking her etc. because I wasn't attracted to her), but it isn't like some sort of gigantic categorical difference between the cities.

Strange to say, I'm even looking forward to working again on the dissertation. After more than a month of idleness, I miss being productive.

September, October

One of the popular ideas in feminist circles now is that gender shouldn't be a binary system, masculine vs. feminine. It should be [or *is*] fluid, a spectrum, blah blah. One is tempted to say to these people, "Okay, change starts with the self, right? So why don't you try to be attracted to guys whom you perceive as less-masculine or non-masculine, and see how well that works out for you. Put your ideas into practice. Try, for once in your life, not to be a hypocrite. If you want gender to be fluid, then 'get with' a non-classically-masculine goofy and intellectual kind of guy!" (Har-har.) You can see how deeply committed these politically correct people are to their ideas by the fact that, in their actions and emotions (sexual or otherwise), they continue to valorize masculinity and to devalue extreme femininity.

The fact is that women will always value masculinity and men will value, or rather half-value, femininity. Duh. The "binary" thing, unfortunately, is unavoidable.

I wish it didn't bother me so much that 90 percent of people are shallow, moronic thinkers, self-blind hypocrites. I think about that fact often and it appalls me, especially in conjunction with people's persecution of anyone who exhibits intellectual courage and integrity. I abhor the mass man.

Reading George Huppert's very good book *After the Black Death: A Social History of Early Modern Europe* for a class I'm TAing. Also Hugh Trevor-Roper's *The Last Days of Hitler*.

Another of the things feminists will never acknowledge is that there are a lot of perks to being of a lower status than men. Yes, it's unfortunate that nature has apparently guaranteed that in every society women will be, at least implicitly and in subtle ways, the "second sex,"[1] but there are so many

[1] As usual, since we live in a culture of totalitarian stupidity, I have to "defend myself" by invoking common sense: even if there were no other reasons for women's subordinate status, it would basically be guaranteed by their relative physical smallness and weakness, just as relatively small and weak men are, *ceteris paribus*, treated as subordinate to large and strong men. (Cf. most other species of animal.) So please stop confusing your postmodern-feminist stupidity with ethical high-mindedness. We might as well be realistic instead of lying to ourselves.

compensations, as Emerson might say, that it's perfectly possible, even common, for women to be happier than men. For example, decent people frequently act more politely and kindly towards women than men. Also, young women often get free drinks and meals, and are showered with attention. The pleasures of primping and make-upping are, apparently, not to be laughed at. Women tend to have more spontaneous fun in any given activity—dancing, socializing, sex (sometimes)—than men. Motherhood is a deeply satisfying experience. Women don't know the pain of male sexual frustration. They can get away with an incredible amount of misbehavior (e.g., verbal and physical abuse), immaturity, and stupidity, a fraction of which would get a man ostracized or arrested. […] *Women get to choose their man*, more than vice versa. (Assuming they're attractive, if they really want a man, they can usually find one—unless they're too picky and keep rejecting men until they're dried-up old spinsters. As evolutionary biologists put it, the females choose while the males are chosen—although of course it isn't *quite* so clear-cut on the level of humans.) Etc.

Obviously it's necessary to challenge the social inequality of the sexes, because it sometimes takes terrible forms. But some degree of inequality is natural, and, to repeat, there are compensations for it.

Huppert's book is very rich, but the last chapter has a particularly pithy statement that struck me: "It is at the intersection of firepower and state power [in early modern Europe] that the secret of Europe's transformation is to be sought. It was warfare, a new kind of warfare, which brought the state into existence: its chief function was to find ways of paying for the ever increasing costs of war. Silver, gold, credit, technology, manpower—all were harnessed for this purpose. The world was scouted for new resources while fabulous profits were made by investors and contractors in the high-risk business of war." Reminds me a little of what David Graeber says about the ancient state, which was created in large part to make war. Except now, for the first time, war really became a *business*. And has remained so. It was and is something to be pursued because it produces *profits*. Shareholders get wealthy by funding mass killing.

I started reading John Mikhail's Chomsky-recommended *Elements of Moral Cognition: Rawls' Linguistic Analogy and the Cognitive Science of Moral and Legal Judgment* (2011), which looks quite interesting, but damn it, I think it's more responsible for me to get back to reading history. Especially labor history, since that'll help with the career and so on. So now I'm reading Elizabeth Fones-Wolf's *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945–60* (1994). Skimmed parts of it a couple years ago, and its central arguments are obvious to anyone who has read history, but what the hell, I might as well read it in depth. Chomsky is right that it's an important book.

Now reading *The War on Labor and the Left: Understanding America's Unique Conservatism* (1991), by Patricia Cayo Sexton.

Now *Struggle for the Soul of the Postwar South: White Evangelical Protestants and Operation Dixie* (2015), by Elizabeth Fones-Wolf and Ken Fones-Wolf. Among other things, useful background to the contemporary conservative-Christian insanity.

Interlude: Richard Lewontin's article "The Evolution of Cognition: Questions We Will Never Answer." An article that counsels skepticism about humans' ability to understand themselves and nature, in this case because of a lack of sufficient data (rather than a lack of cognitive capacity, as Chomsky and Colin McGinn argue—rightly, and obviously). All I can say is: are there actually idiots out there who think we'll ever fully understand human cognition, or the human mind?? The very idea is preposterous, not only in light of practical constraints but even in principle. It's even more ridiculous than the idea that someday we'll have a complete physics of the universe, including of the Big Bang. When I was 14—or younger—I understood that the human mind is limited, and that the *data* we have are limited. Because, after all, it's incredibly obvious, to any sane person who thinks about it for two minutes. Lewontin's impatience (in a letter to the book's editors) is justified:

> I must say that the best lesson our readers can learn is to give up the childish notion that everything that is interesting about nature can be understood. History, and evolution is a form of history, simply does not leave sufficient traces, especially when it is the forces that

> are at issue. Form and even behavior may leave fossil remains, but forces like natural selection do not. It might be interesting to know how cognition (whatever that is) arose and spread and changed, but we cannot know. Tough luck.

And: no shit. What a commentary on our silly intellectual culture that Lewontin actually has to devote an entire article—a controversial one, incidentally—to arguing this utterly trivial point! Just think how many gaps there are in the fossil record. Think how many data we'd need to reconstruct the rise and spread of cognition. Think how inconceivably complex—and almost entirely shrouded in silence—the history of hominids is. All we can do is "tell stories" about how evolution *may* have proceeded, and *why* it may have proceeded in certain ways. Eighty percent of nature, or rather of the aspects of nature we're interested in, will forever be a mystery to us.

Now reading *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below in the Long 1970s* (2010), a large collection of essays. Excellent and informative book.

I like Charles Tilly's 1985 essay "War-Making and State-Making as Organized Crime." To a good first approximation, government is just a gigantic protection racket (and extortion racket). As long as you pay me and obey me, I'll protect you; if you don't, I'll hurt you. It may be that the services government renders are worth the costs; but the "protection racket" model still applies. And certainly the ways that governments are formed (over centuries) constitute, in essence, organized crime. (And of course after being formed, much of what they do remains colossal organized crime, of a thousand different varieties.)

At the end of the essay he has some useful thoughts on why the states that were formed after decolonization in the mid-20th century tended to be quite different from European states:

> The extension of the Europe-based state-making process to the rest of the world, however, did not result in the creation of states in the strict European image. Broadly speaking, internal struggles such as the checking of great regional lords and the imposition of taxation on peasant villages produced important organizational features of European states: the relative subordination of military power to civilian control, the extensive bureaucracy of fiscal surveillance, the representation of wronged interests via petition and parliament. On the whole, states elsewhere developed differently. The most telling feature of that difference appears in military organization. European states built up their military apparatuses through sustained struggles with their subject populations and by means of selective extension of protection to different classes within those populations. The agreements on protection constrained the rulers themselves, making them vulnerable to courts, to assemblies, to withdrawals of credit, services, and expertise.
>
> To a larger degree, states that have come into being recently through decolonization or through reallocations of territory by dominant states have acquired their military organization from outside, without the same internal forging of mutual constraints between rulers and ruled. To the extent that outside states continue to supply military goods and expertise in return for commodities, military alliance or both, the new states harbor powerful, unconstrained organisations that easily overshadow all other organizations within their territories. To the extent that outside states guarantee their boundaries, the managers of those military organisations exercise extraordinary power within them. The advantages of military power become enormous, the incentives to seize power over the state as a whole by means of that advantage very strong. Despite the great place that war making occupied in the making of European states, the old national states of Europe almost never experienced the great disproportion between military organization and all other forms of organization that seems the fate of client states throughout the contemporary world. A century ago, Europeans might have congratulated themselves on the spread of civil government throughout the world. In our own time, the analogy between war making and state making, on the one hand, and organized crime, on the other, is becoming tragically apt.

Now the Chomsky-recommended *Political Economy and Laissez-Faire: Economics and Ideology in the Ricardian Era* (1986), by Rajani Kanth. Classical political economy as class war, against the aristocracy and the poor. (Kind of obvious, actually.)

A useful passage:

> [With the Speenhamland "amendment"—in 1795—to the Elizabethan Poor Laws, which, among other things, sanctioned the idea of outdoor relief to the able-bodied, legislators] acknowledged in practice what was imperfectly the latent principle of Poor Law legislation from earlier times: that society is an organic entity whose every segment, including the poor, has a right to the existence that it is the duty of the state and the superior orders to provide.[1] The noblesse, one might say, had to oblige. This was the idea that seemed an abomination to the classical economists and their stringent economic philosophy. And this was a principle that they inveighed against in their resolute opposition to this aspect of the Poor Laws which ultimately resulted in their "reform" in directions more suited to the achievement of classical ends… Their call to laissez-faire in this context meant the denial, in accordance with their vision of society, of the right of the laboring poor to maintenance outside the market-determined context of the social relation of wage labor. The recourse to laissez-faire as a general principle on this issue was intended to repeal the recognition of this right by a paternalistic state. The negative nature of the laissez-faire injunction was a means to achieve many things; but two of the most important issues it helped to undo were the Poor Laws and the Corn Laws. The class context of these two issues makes the meaning clear; if the first needed a rejection of state support to the laboring classes, the second required a denial of the rights of the landed aristocracy to state support. In so denying state action on behalf of two major socio-economic classes, semi-feudal and semi-proletarian, the doctrine of laissez-faire rationalized the ends of bourgeois society and the state—a modification and restructuring of the institutional behavior of these two classes vis-a-vis the capitalist mode of production.
>
> …So the agitation against the Poor Laws is the phase of laissez-faire against the poor, in favor of the capitalist mode of production which requires a free and mobile labor force devoid of access to means of livelihood other than through the wage-labor-capital relation. The agitation against the Corn Laws was laissez-faire against the landed oligarchy, again to favor the new economic system by lowering the rental and wage "deductions" from value. Once these two major objectives of the political economy of laissez-faire, i.e. the neutralization of the aristocracy and the orderly growth of the proletariat, were achieved, the sphere of laissez-faire was to be relaxed. Thus, John Stuart Mill, by 1848, was ready to allow for greater intervention. In fact, the trend is steadily noticeable after the Reform Bill of 1832, that early victory for the political power of capital. Intervention, henceforth, would be increasingly necessary to secure both the unity of capital and the acquiescence of all social orders in the new system.

Malthus did much to stir up educated opinion against the Poor Laws (especially public outdoor relief for the able-bodied). "The provision of sustenance to the poor, he argued, only increased the pressure of population on scarce food supplies by multiplying their numbers; hence, to help them was to hurt them." In thrall to an abstract and "scientific" ideology, he opposed all kinds of charitable and humane endeavors—and met with success in his proselytizing, since his beliefs accorded with manufacturers' interests. (In other

[1] The agrarian social order was rooted firmly in this conviction. As Hobsbawm writes, "The traditional view, which still survived in a distorted way in all classes of rural society and in the internal relations of working-class groups, was that a man had a right to earn a living, and if unable to do so, a right to be kept alive by his community."

words, wealthy and powerful people were on his side. He was a useful idiot, like all ideologues are, from one perspective or another.)

Ricardo, too, opposed the Poor Laws on the grounds of their interference with "liberty" and the sacred market, even wanted them totally abolished, a position deemed too extreme by politicians and many economists because of the threat it might pose to social order. But they liked his insistence that taxes and government expenditures should be kept to a minimum because they discouraged capital accumulation, which was the foundation of social progress. (Two hundred years later, economists and politicians are saying the same thing. Behold the barren and formulaic nature of capitalist propaganda.) Benthamite utilitarianism joined economic liberalism in opposition to the Poor Laws, since, given the painful character of labor and man's "natural" inclination to avoid it except under dire necessity or when tempted by generous rewards, they were supposedly lending support to humans' natural laziness. As the upper classes had been saying for a long time, poverty was *good* inasmuch as it stimulated the poor to work; and so it should not be relieved by governmental means. But even if one didn't accept that poverty was a positive good, it was agreed by all these liberal/capitalist types that relief interfered with incentives to work. (Again, an idea that remains characteristic of the ruling class.) Bentham, of course, was an ardent partisan of capitalism—and of surveillance, total control of workers, forced labor camps for the poor, etc. In many respects he anticipated totalitarianism (and also radical behaviorism, in some ways).

The new Poor Law of 1834, largely written by Nassau Senior, one of the classical economists, was a savage measure—even though Senior himself, and others, thought it didn't go far enough, for it didn't *unequivocally* end outdoor relief. To quote Hobsbawm, "there have been few more inhuman statutes than the Poor Law Act of 1834, which made all relief 'less eligible' than the lowest wage outside, confined it to the jail-like workhouse, forcibly separating husbands, wives, and children in order to punish the poor for their destitution, and discourage them from the dangerous temptation of procreating further paupers." Another historian observes that between 1834 and 1847 "the working class was reminded every day that the only choice for the poor man, when misfortune befell him, was the choice between starvation and disgrace." Needless to say, the Act was a great triumph for the market economy and the bourgeoisie, for it put the finishing touches on the decades-long creation of a disciplined proletariat.

John Stuart Mill, despite his relative humanity, supported the new Poor Law. On the other hand, by 1848 he took the position, against Ricardo, Senior, and the others, that the poor had a "right to live," a right to subsistence, and even speculated that "the state might guarantee employment at ample wages to all those who are born." A *very* different position from his economist predecessors. But by now it was safer to take such a view, for the Chartist and Owenist revolts had been defeated and a categorically subordinate proletariat had been formed. "Once converted into a proletariat…the working poor had a right to exist and make demands upon the public revenue; and the classical economists, within bounds, were solicitous of this right. They, the laboring poor and not the unproductive poor, were the true wards of society." Not incidentally, the support of the proletariat was needed now to prevent any rearguard action against industrial capitalism by the landed aristocracy.

Anyway, the broader point is that classical economics was formed, and then transformed, in relation to specific material and political issues of the time (a fact that is almost universally ignored in scholarship). Its main early task was to give ideological support to the construction of a market economy; once that had been achieved, its holy axioms and theorems could be tweaked or revised in support of new policy imperatives.

After the chapter on the repeal of the Corn Laws is a long discussion of the ways in which the classical economists were, and were not, committed to the ideology of laissez-faire. The most interesting part is what's said about Adam Smith. In recent decades he has been invoked as the great apostle of laissez-faire and a small state, as if he argued that government intervention is by nature wrong, such that almost everything should be left to the market; but this is a caricature of his real position. To understand him, you have to understand the social and political context in which he wrote. His target was the mercantilist state and its protection of monopolies, its overweening regulations, its obstructions to capital accumulation and the production of wealth. "His reservations about the nature of governments are to be seen as specific criticisms directed against the state machine of his own time," which he saw as corrupt and subservient to

the selfish ends of the monied and landed classes. But he was perfectly prepared to admit that regulation could sometimes be good, and he enthusiastically supported public works and government involvement in education, among other things. To quote one of his interpreters,

> Adam Smith was no doctrinaire advocate of laissez-faire. He saw a wide and elastic range of activity for government, and he was prepared to extend it even farther if government, by improving its standards of competence, honesty, and public spirit, showed itself entitled to wider responsibilities.

Indeed, one might turn the arguments of contemporary conservatives—in their appropriation of Smith—on their head: much of his suspicion of government was rooted in his knowledge that the class of merchant-manufacturers, which he hated (and which modern conservatives represent), was constantly trying to capture the state for its own "vile" purposes. And was having success in doing so.

Insofar as Smith's hostility toward government was general and not limited to the British state of his day, it was rather philosophical, derived from the French and Scottish Enlightenments and their notions of natural law, natural liberty, and so forth. This is quite different from the later classics, such as Ricardo, James Mill, Nassau Senior, and McCulloch. They were not Enlightenment philosophers far removed from politics but active participants in fierce political struggles on behalf of a rising industrial class, which Smith had had no inkling of. They invoked laissez-faire for their own partisan ends, as a tactic. As Kanth says, "for Smith, laissez-faire was a policy directed toward the elimination of mercantilist restrictions on capitalist accumulation, quite beyond the pale of a narrow class reference, whereas in the hands of the later classics it served as a deliberate class tactic in limiting the demands of the landed and laboring orders upon the state. What, for Smith, had been the antidote to the political economy of protectionism in the widest sense, became transmuted later into a mere instrument of class combat." Smith, in short, was more disinterested than his semi-disciples, and his understanding of "government non-interference" was correspondingly different. More elevated and abstract, so to speak, and not subordinate to particular class ends. But it's true that he and the later classics shared an appreciation for the market economy and advocated the dismantling of protectionism.

It seems to me that, while there are many differences between the post-Smith classical economists and today's neoliberal economists, they're similar in their use of the ideology of laissez-faire when it helps capitalists and repudiation of it when it hurts them. They call for governmental non-interference with the market in the cases when such interference benefits classes other than the capitalist, while calling for, or at least supporting, interference in the cases when it is to the advantage of capitalists. But there was probably more intellectual integrity among the "classics" than among today's economists, who willfully ignore a colossal body of evidence that contradicts their nostrums.

Now reading *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (2011), by Corey Robin. An elegant and erudite elaboration of an obvious thesis, that the essence of conservatism, in all its seemingly contradictory permutations, has always been the impulse to defend power and privilege against movements demanding freedom and equality. Conservatism is "a meditation on—and theoretical rendition of—the felt experience of having power, seeing it threatened, and trying to win it back." Yup. Nothing could be more obvious than that. It's a good book, though.

A point that Robin doesn't make—maybe because it might muck up his argument—is that insofar as conservatism "begins from a position of principle—that some are fit, and thus ought, to rule others," most intellectuals, politicians, and businessmen are, at least implicitly, conservatives. Even the ones who call themselves liberals. 'We superior people are *supposed* to run the world; the masses are "meddlesome outsiders" whom we have to distract and delude, for their own benefit.' The whole establishment is, loosely speaking, conservative, always trying to tame and often to destroy democratic movements. During times of upheaval, the conservative colors of nearly everyone with some power and privilege shine bright (for everyone wants to defend his power and privilege as soon as he sees it threatened). But it's true that not everyone in the establishment is *robustly* conservative.

Here are some interesting thoughts on what is common (among other things) to all conservatives from Burke to the present:

> Conservatism also offers a defense of rule, independent of its counterrevolutionary imperative, that is agonistic and dynamic and dispenses with the staid traditionalism and harmonic registers of hierarchies past. And here we come to the conservative's deepest intimations of the good life, of that reactionary utopia he hopes one day to bring into being. Unlike the feudal past, where power was presumed and privilege inherited, the conservative future envisions a world where power is demonstrated and privilege earned: not in the antiseptic and anodyne halls of the meritocracy, where admission is readily secured—"the road to eminence and power, from obscure condition, ought not to be made too easy, nor a thing too much of course"—but in the arduous struggle for supremacy. In that struggle, nothing matters, not inheritance, social connections, or economic resources, but one's native intelligence and innate strength.[1] Genuine excellence is revealed and rewarded, true nobility is secured. "'*Nitor in adversum*' [I strive against adversity] is the motto for a man like me," declared Burke, after dismissing a to-the-manor-born politician who was "swaddled, and rocked, and dandled into a legislator." Even the most biologically inclined and deterministic racist believes that the members of the superior race must personally wrest their entitlement to rule through the subjugation or elimination of the inferior races…
>
> The battlefield is the natural proving ground of superiority; there, it is only the soldier, with his wits and weapon, who determines his standing in the world. With time, however, the conservative will find another proving ground in the marketplace. Though most early conservatives were ambivalent about capitalism, their successors will come to believe that warriors of a different kind can prove their mettle in the manufacture and trade of commodities. Such men wrestle the earth's resources to and from the ground, taking for themselves what they want and thereby establishing their superiority over others…

In revolving around the worship and defense of *power*, conservatism naturally incorporates the attitude that has come to be called Social Darwinism. Actually, in a sense, the general agonistic ideal is appealing to me, the ideal of testing limits, testing oneself against others, triumphing over adversity and all that. Probably all people find it at least somewhat attractive. It's one of the pleasures of *games*, for example. (Contending against others and proving one's superiority, in a sense.) It becomes noxious only in certain forms, in collectivist contexts and when millions of lives are at stake. It's noxious—and wildly simplistic—when it's used as a legitimation for power.

Anyway, it's clear from what Robin says above that, even on the purely intellectual plane, the seed of fascism exists in all conservatism, including American libertarianism (which incorporates Social Darwinism).

While I always find it intriguing to trace and probe ideas and intellectual history, I'm too much of a Marxist to think there's anything of foundational value in a book like Robin's. When you get right down to it, conservatives and the powerful are little more than tools, indeed embodiments (metaphorically speaking), of particular institutional relations and pressures, of agglomerations of resources that are defined by certain interests, which conservatives serve. From the perspective of power-structures, these people are nothing but useful idiots, tools possessing the strange and inconvenient quality of consciousness (and *some* free will), which compels them to invent, for the sake of their own self-love and need to deceive themselves, all sorts of rationalizations and idealizations of power's impulse to defend itself and augment itself. Power sets its conscious robots in motion to do its bidding, obey its orders and rationalize them for public

[1] [Here we encounter one of the many points on which conservatism is utopian and utterly naive: its abstraction from real life, from social context.]

consumption and the robots' own self-justification. But what matters, ultimately, isn't what the robots say but what the institutional dynamics are that they serve and reflect.

It's hard to be productive when one is twisted by loneliness. Going to events, meeting people, going on dates…none of it helps. People have no character, no interest in others, no interest in staying in touch, no ability to keep commitments they've made, no thoughtfulness or empathy.

We live in the Hobbesian state of nature, although it's below the surface. Soon, in light of societal conditions, it may rise to open view.

While reading those books on ethics a while ago, I jotted down some thoughts to return to later. Here they are:

Christian and other cultures' horror of the body. Partly explainable by the body's resistance and self-will, its contradiction of our self-control and free will; we're prisoners of it, it's the master. It also smells bad and looks bad and so on. –Implicit dualism here, of course, between self and body.

Why do people always think (like Plato, the religious, etc.) that the inner essence of the world has to be *good*? That the world in itself must have value? Because of humans' innate affirmative stance towards the world? Desire for life's meaningfulness? Desire for recognition from something grand and good? (See the beginning of Korsgaard's book.)

Would you give away the Jew to the Nazi to save your own life? Why would that make you feel disgusted with yourself? Because of the Other's judgment of you. But is that judgment justified? Are you contemptible because of your act? Yes and no. Are such questions purely imaginary, fictional, social inventions? There is no right answer to them. In one mood you might act one way, in another a different way. You don't have a fixed, 'contemptible' (cowardly) identity. But there can be some truth to the judgment anyway, right? It's partly true and partly, maybe, false—and even partly meaningless.

Origin and meaning of the 'open question' argument.

Why do we have moral concepts? Where do they come from?

Contrary to Korsgaard, we do want moral *knowledge*. (p. 47) We think *it's true* that murder is wrong, just as we think it's true that the earth revolves around the sun. (Intuitionism?) Our moral beliefs aim for a kind of objectivity. We want there to be objective values—indeed, we want to have objective value ourselves. This is one of the reasons for believing in God, etc.

Hume, p. 50

Naturally having good impulses vs. forcing oneself to act in a good way. Which is better? Which is more praiseworthy or morally impressive? Should you have contempt for yourself if you have bad impulses? What does being a good person even mean? What are the criteria? Is it nothing but a baseless social construction?

What does normativity *mean*? What does 'ought' mean? (Derivations from other values. To act in accordance with particular values.)

Why should morality be binding on me? Why should I always follow it, even when it's inconvenient? From whence does normative force arise?

What is value?

pp. 102 ff.

People don't truly understand the significance of 'God is dead.' Objective value is dead; recognition from a transcendent other is dead; the world is topsy-turvy and meaningless. Institutional authority means nothing (which means conformism is based on a flawed premise, since it has faith in authority). All authority means nothing—except the authority of reason! That's the only anchor.

'Intrinsically normative' entities?? Misleading or meaningless. p. 112

The difference between right and good. Impossible to make a clear, compelling distinction?

Moral identity is necessary, unlike other identities, because it means valuing yourself as a human being, which underlies all other identities. Sound argument? (pp. 121–122.) Doesn't seem so.

(Different subject: *speaking to institutional relations* vs. *speaking to people*. It's the latter I'm interested in.)

Why do we have contempt for people who lack integrity? And what's the ethical significance of that contempt?

Why do we care so much about justice and injustice? Why are we outraged at injustice? (p. 112 of Mackie.)

What is the good life? ("Viable concept of happiness.") *Meaningfulness*. Should it involve universal benevolence? It can't, surely, but is that even a worthy ideal? (171) Some conflict is good, not to mention inevitable.

Mention [in a future essay] that I'm an error theorist about many things, such as colors, abstract objects, the self, life's 'meaningfulness,' values, and our conventional understanding of society.

If you can't convince the 'radically disaffected' why they should be moral, do moral obligations really exist at all? In fact, does this inability not show that it isn't necessarily irrational to be immoral? And hence: a kind of moral skepticism? (pp. 179 ff. of Korsgaard.)

Moral obligations are first and foremost obligations to myself, not others? [To maintain my identity, my self-respect, etc.] Seems weird. But there must be a particle of truth to that idea.

"*An obligation takes the form of a reaction against a threat of a loss of identity*." (181, 183) Maybe some important truth to that. It's "the experience or phenomenology of obligation." But the identity isn't necessarily a *moral* one, surely.

G. A. Cohen seems right, and Korsgaard wrong: I'm not necessarily committed to valuing my humanity, or the humanity of others. (Or the animality of animals and humans, etc.) In valuing myself, I'm not necessarily valuing my humanity. –But if my humanity is the source of my reasons and values, maybe I do implicitly value it after all. How does one decide this issue? In a sense maybe I do value it, but in another sense I certainly need not (explicitly).

(Write about why the Enlightenment's agenda isn't refuted by the 20th century. Humans have a dark side, yes, but the way to mitigate and counteract it is precisely by challenging power, by using reason, by fighting for freedom and democracy.)

Nagel's weird realism, p. 206, first complete paragraph.

Integrity = unity of the self. (Korsgaard, 229.)

Morality = respect and compassion for others, and for as many people as possible. That's the basic principle. It's imprecise, which helps account for the difficulty of fleshing out a consistent and intuitively compelling moral system that applies to all contexts.

Hare's definition of realism: 40, 41 of *Morality and Objectivity*. See also 43, second full paragraph. Values are not 'real' in either cows' sense or numbers'. (Value statements can be true or false only on the basis of other values, but ultimately it's all arbitrary. Different from numbers. People think moral statements can be true or false, but in the sense they implicitly mean, that's wrong. As Mackie argued, I guess.) But what exactly is the difference between 'there is a cow in the field' and 'Smith's act was wrong'? One is objective, in some sense, while the other isn't in that sense.

Doppelgänger problem.

Are moral judgments all false? Or are they neither true nor false? From one perspective, the first; from another, the second. (1) There are no moral properties to make them true, so they're false. But (2), there are no moral properties to make them false either. Something is neither wrong nor right; moral properties don't exist, so they don't apply to it. And yet, in another sense (3), we can invent moral properties and so make moral judgments true or false in a 'constructed' sense.

Mackie book, footnote on page 39.

How to explain the psychological power of following authority [i.e., the desire to follow it]? Authority is like the Other, full of self-certainty etc.—it's really the world, in a way—so you want to obey it, coincide with it. (By identifying with authority, you become an authority yourself.)

And ideas for articles to write:

An article on self-deception? Pretexts that people believe in, but they're still pretexts.

Conflicts between the sexes partly a result of capitalism [or the atomizing culture of late capitalism]. (Don't blame things on the opposite sex. Blame them on the system.)

Market and state, or market and bureaucracy, are not opposed, contrary to what conservatives think. They go together: market requires massive state. Market is actually created by state. (See David Graeber's Iron Law of Liberalism.)

We should state things as they are: corporate executives are *corporate bureaucrats*. Not really any different from government bureaucrats.

It's incredible how *rigid* most people's ideological commitments are. And how rigid their minds are. Goes along with a kind of stupidity. Being on the Left should mean open-mindedness.

> Social life rests on violence. Implicit violence is everywhere. Otherwise people would rebel and society would fall apart, or transform into something very different.

I mentioned an essay I wanted to write on pretentiousness. I started it last year but abandoned it, at least for now, since it would never get published. It would be too original and too critical of intellectuals to get published. Here was the beginning:

Thoughts on Pretentiousness

Excluding the sciences, the history of abstract thought can almost be called the history of reflections on interesting concepts. Whether truth, reality, God, knowledge, justice, goodness, freedom, love, or even "camp,"[1] dozens of pithy concepts have captured the attention of the reflective. Even people not prone to contemplation are on occasion, in receptive moods, seduced by the mysteries of such ideas as love or God or truth or "existential meaning." They debate them eagerly, show stubborn commitment to some particular conception, momentarily care about the musings of a Plato or a Kant or a Nietzsche. Evidently the human mind is drawn not only to abstract reflection but to thinking about *words*, or rather about the conceptual implications and limits of particular words. It can be fascinating to examine how we use words, and what meanings are hidden in their etymologies or conceptual overtones. It's odd, then, that in thousands of years of word-dissection, apparently no one has devoted much attention to one of the most pithy and revealing concepts of all: *pretense*, with its derivative *pretentious*. The derivative form is more common, as it aptly characterizes an enormous range of human behavior. The profundity of this concept has perhaps never been appreciated, nor has its potential to shed light on human psychology, institutions, social structures, the norms and roles—largely class-determined—that structure social life. The word's significance is suggested by the fact that it is closely related to such fruitful and enigmatic concepts as *authenticity*, *sincerity*, and even *the self* (and *self-deception*). More distant relations include, as we'll see, *authority*, *conformity*, *status*, *elitism*, and *classism*. In fact, it turns out that society itself, in its many dimensions, is refracted through this deceptively humble concept of 'pretentiousness.' An analysis of it is, therefore, overdue.

What we'll discover is that pretentious behavior is not only silly, comical, or parasitically elitist; it is, or can be, downright pernicious. Far more common than people realize, it has always served to uphold authority, hierarchy, the status quo, and class stratification. It is intrinsically, and in its social consequences, anti-democratic; it is anti-rational and antithetical to clear communication; it is deeply deceptive, dishonest, artificial, and obscurantist. In its social effects, it is indispensable for giving a patina of dignity to the collective conformism and submissiveness that cohere authoritarian institutions. To the same degree that freedom, reason, and democracy are values to be fought for, pretentiousness is something to be fought against. It will, however, remain widespread until exploitative class structures are themselves eradicated, for, indirectly, they produce it and always have.

To begin, let's consider some examples of pretentiousness. The Oxford English Dictionary tells us the word means "to attempt to impress by affecting greater importance or merit than is actually possessed." The buffoonery of intellectuals is an inexhaustible treasure house, a constantly expanding museum, of pretentiousness. From graduate students to senior scholars, from postmodernists to traditional conservatives, from art critics to mainstream "policy analysts," the glue that holds the intellectual world together is pretentiousness. Public intellectuals sometimes personify the quality. The famous conservative William F. Buckley is the example that comes immediately to mind, with his faux British accent, his semi-aristocratic demeanor, his speaking-through-his-nose, his cultivated self-assurance amounting to pomposity—a clownish smugness, snideness, *smarminess*—his exaggerated use of fancy words, his frivolous treatment of intellectual debate as a game of one-upmanship, and the very aura of decadence and literary-cultural rot he emanated like a fin-de-siècle fascist. He was the epitome of the elite culture Noam Chomsky encountered in his students days at Harvard:

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[1] See Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp" (1964).

> I remember [Chomsky says] there was a lot of anglophilia at Harvard [in the postwar years]—you were supposed to wear British clothes, and pretend you spoke with a British accent, that sort of stuff. In fact, there were actually guys there who I thought were British, who had never been outside of the United States. If any of you have studied literature or history or something, you might recognize some of this, those are the places you usually find it. Well, somehow I managed to survive that, I don't know how exactly—but most didn't. And what I discovered is that a large part of education at the really elite institutions is simply refinement, teaching the social graces: what kind of clothes you should wear, how to drink port the right way, how to have polite conversation without talking about serious topics, but of course indicating that you could talk about serious topics if you were so vulgar as to actually do it, all kinds of things which an intellectual is supposed to know how to do. And that was really the main point of the program, I think.[1]

Incidentally, the famous televised debate between Chomsky and Buckley in 1969 on the subject of the Vietnam War (which can be watched on the internet) is intriguing not for the drubbing Buckley received but for its dramatic presentation of the contrast between two archetypes of the intellectual: the perfectly unpretentious, facts-focused, plain-spoken, self-effacing Chomsky and the winking, smirking, joking, performing, prevaricating, *spectacle*-focused Buckley. These two people were inimitable exemplars of the types; most intellectuals fall somewhere in the middle, with at least *some* interest in facts and rationality but with a pronounced predilection for pretense as well. I'll return to this important contrast later.

Just as the political right wing has its pretentious intellectuals, so does the left. Slavoj Žižek exemplifies the latter. One might say that Buckley and Žižek represent two kinds of elite snobbery and decadence, which however overlap and have much in common because ultimately they're part of the same world: Buckley belongs to the crowd of explicit power-worshipers, sycophants, courtiers who hop back and forth between New York and Washington to attend the dinner parties and cocktail parties and lunches with senators—the crowd of "power-loving stablemate[s] of statesmen," as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. summarized Alfred Kazin's portrait of him (Schlesinger) in *New York Jew* (1978), as contrasted with Richard Hofstadter's type of "pure, dispassionate, incorruptible scholar."[2] (Schlesinger had enough self-insight to recognize the portrait as a faithful one.) Žižek, on the other hand, represents the herd of postmodernist intellectuals, some of whom, like the self-caricature Bernard-Henri Lévy, mingle with the rich and powerful—and most of whom, I suspect, would like to—but who as types are defined by their ostentatious intellectual posturing, their facility for saying something without saying anything, and their basically idealistic (in the anti-materialistic sense) and unrealistic interpretation of the world. Žižek is not as bad as it gets with these people, indeed is critical of some aspects of postmodernism; but his methods, his interests, his ideas and ways of presenting them, and his intellectual progenitors (notably Jacques Lacan) all define him as quintessentially postmodern. To throw together a miscellany of references to psychoanalysis, philosophy, history, religion, literature, pop culture, economics, Marxism, and vulgar *humor* (jokes and anecdotes), and to pretend that something incredibly profound is being said, is to create—to quote the title of one of Žižek's books—a truly "sublime object" of pretentiousness. Whether or not one tries to dignify the product with the term "*bricolage*," it's clear that what is going on is mere play, not serious or rigorous explanation. And yet thousands of people attend Žižek's talks[3] and earnestly take notes, treating with decorous academic seriousness this entertainer and professional provoker-of-liberals. The contrast between appearance and reality is stupefying—a splendid example indeed of "postmodern irony."…

*

[1] Peter Mitchell and John Schoeffel, eds., *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 238.

[2] Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *Journals, 1952–2000* (New York: Penguin, 2007), May 7, 1978 entry.

[3] Of which there is an abundant supply on YouTube.com.

One can get headaches from loneliness, and alcohol is the only refuge. –No, scratch that; alcohol and Netflix are the only two refuges.

[…]

Civilization is so tired of itself, it's just waiting to die.

–Yes, the world is going to burn. I only wish I had gasoline to pour into the fire.

I was doing research at the University of Chicago library and came across a short case-study of an 80-year-old man applying to something like a nursing home (in the 1930s). Here's an excerpt that moved me to tears (I had to suppress them in the reading room), and made me think of the sadness of life:

> When asked about his relatives, he replied, "I have none. They are all gone long ago. I never married. I had a sweetheart but she passed away before the day set for our wedding. No one can take her place."
>
> "Well, will you not be lonely in this home?" he was asked.
>
> "I don't think so. I will enjoy thinking about her while alone in my room, and while I wander about among the beautiful flowers and shrubbery on these grounds. I shall be contented and when I pass on I am requesting my body to be cremated and ashes to be strewn over the hills and valleys where my beloved and I passed many happy hours together."

The caseworker adds a comment: "Mr. Stanley can be found many hours of the day sitting in his easy chair looking out of the window—eastward—reminiscing."

Just think of that. Who knows how many years ago that was, that he was happy with his betrothed, until she died. And now, at the end of his life, his greatest pleasure is to remember her.

Oh, life is just too sad to take.

The year-long sexual dry spell is over, thanks to a 34-year-old Russian, Irene. Saw my profile on match.com and was intrigued that I'm in labor history, so looked me up on Google and found my website, which she liked, and then emailed me through it. I was impressed that a woman had taken such initiative—very few would, in my experience. In the last couple weeks I've stayed overnight at her place a few times, which has given me some blessed sexual relief. Unfortunately I'm not very attracted to her and have decided I don't like her much, so I'm going to end it the next time I see her.

Last weekend met a 30-year-old Indian cog in the corporatocracy (that's her job) who took me to her apartment on the first date, where we did most things except sex. But we have nothing in common—she's a weirdo, asking me how long and wide my penis is and how many women I've slept with, demanding half-jokingly that I drink more and more liquor to demonstrate my masculinity, and generally showing that she has mental issues of some sort—so I ended it today.

More dates coming up this week, probably with more mediocrities.

I'm constantly amazed that 90 percent of what I encounter in society is, from the perspective of both facts and reasonable values, totally backward. Almost hallucinatory. I see leaden feathers and floating rocks.

This whole journal is nothing but me talking to the Absolute. Trying to communicate, impossibly and meaninglessly, with the Objective, because the Subjective all around me is so trivial and unsatisfying.[1]

[1] In another sense, though, I *am* the Objective, or rather as close to it as a human being can get (with the exception of Chomsky, as usual). In Hegelian language, I am alienated Spirit struggling (hopelessly) to coincide with its universal self and overcome its alienation.

November, December

35 years old. Life is surreal. Someday I'll be 50? And then 70? That's terrifying.

I remember when I was 17 and tortured by all that adolescent self-examination. And now here I am, 17 years later. In a sense, it seems like not a lot has happened since then, even though everything has. Those distant years feel strikingly close to me still. –Life is both very short and very long, somehow.

I suppose I was destined never to be well-adjusted, even if my life had gone differently. I'd still be essentially who I am. It's true I've made mistakes—attending a small private university, going to Korea and not Europe or Latin America, spending too much time in the barren Midwest, not living in New York City during my twenties—but really, the open wound is time itself, or the very structure of my consciousness.

It's an incredible privilege to be alive at this moment in history. Hundreds of thousands of years, but it's *now* that I'm alive, just as everything has become perfectly clear and everything is about to collapse. Had I lived any time in the past, I likely would have been the victim of revolutionary illusions and idealism, and disappointments; it's only in the neoliberal era of capitalism that the trajectory and meaning of history, especially modern history, has truly revealed itself, and illusions are impossible (for me). Not only that, but I get to see civilization begin its ultimate implosion. I get to see the middle class of mediocrities disintegrate, and Western society begin to receive its comeuppance. The tragedy, of course, is that the global South will suffer more than the North. But hey, at least this time there will be some backlash onto the U.S. New York? Gone. Boston? Gone. It's awful, yes, but it's "sublime," in Burke's sense. Terrifying, awe-inspiring, God smiting the world for its evil. The Reckoning is upon us.

Why are there so many men in the U.S. filled with rage against women? Why so much hatred? It's all over the internet! What explains it? The misogynistic video game culture has something to do with it, but let's ignore that. It's not very interesting. The more general reason, I suspect, is rooted in sexual frustration and loneliness. To speak bluntly, it angers men that these "silly little creatures" (as they're seen), giggly and childish and weak, have the temerity to reject them, and are constantly getting their way. It's an insult to their manhood! What a farce, when women have so much more power than men! That's the thinking. Men watch porn, watch movies, watch TV shows, see women on the streets giggling with their girly friends, are inundated with the message that women are little more than pretty objects with consciousness, passive children who exist but for sex and to please men, and the gigantic contradiction is just too much to take. "How can *these* people have more power than *me*?!" many men think. "How can *they* be the ones who say Yes or No?! And then they have the audacity to complain about how *men* treat *them*! While we men are forced to gaze longingly from afar as they taunt us and tempt us and have to satisfy our needs by jerking off every night!" Etc. Those, I suspect, are the (very one-sided) feelings motivating a large proportion of internet misogyny.

Anyway, it's sad. The war between the sexes will never end.

Luckily it doesn't affect me much, for I have my Bach. My Absolute. My Bach is my rock.[1]

Thoughts on thinkers: Descartes had world-historical significance insofar as he was the most perfect manifestation of modernity's impulse to reject the past and begin anew, in a rational and scientific way. Kant was significant inasmuch as he was the highest expression of the Enlightenment, which itself was the highest cultural expression of the characteristic spirit of modernity in its *positive* aspects, namely its valorization of individual creativity, inquiry, freedom, reason, science, anti-traditionalism, and humanitarianism. (Hitler personified its *negative* aspects, which are the negations of its positive ones: bureaucracy, centralization of power, suppression of individuality in the mass, hostility to inquiry and

[1] I continue to think that the trio with the oboe and horns near the end of the last movement of the First Brandenburg Concerto is in the running for the title of Noblest, Most Virile Musical Fragment Ever Written. And certainly Bach's oeuvre is the noblest, most virile ever.

reason, cruelty and violence, and reaction against popular empowerment.) Hegel had world-historical significance inasmuch as he was the first, and alienated, expression of the characteristic *self-consciousness* of modernity, and of its historical sense. Marx had a dual significance insofar as he (1) un-alienated this self-consciousness and historical sense by turning it right-side-up (giving history a largely correct interpretation), and (2) gave highest expression to the movement for popular emancipation—most deeply, class emancipation—that has driven modernity upwards. Schopenhauer was a minor thinker who gave philosophical expression to the parochial and alienated self-consciousness—the Romantic self-justification—of one characteristic stratum of modern society, viz., its isolated, discontented, anti-mass-society, and self-intoxicated artists and intellectuals. Nietzsche and Freud were two expressions of mature modernity's alienated preoccupation with (1) the irrational and destructive forces of the human personality, (2) the relativism of values and essential meaninglessness of life, and (3) the individual self itself, especially in its unconscious self-determination. Kierkegaard and Sartre (both arguably minor thinkers but of some world-historical significance) were two opposed but, in a sense, complementary expressions—one religious, one atheistic—of the modern self's anxiety, its anguished anomie and freedom from external and internal controls. Chomsky is of universal significance in being the highest and most consistent personification of every Enlightenment value, and thus the ultimate model of how to live.

(As for me, I represent the perseverance of Spirit and the Individual in a time (soon) of world-despair and the decay of civilization, a time of mass anonymity, mediocrity, and futility. I am humanity's, or the self's, final tragic and defiant affirmation of itself despite its history (for I identify with history, and its weariness is mine). At the same time, I'm humanity's final self-reflection before it falls into the chasm that separates its past from…whatever lies in its future.)[1]

I could add a lot of other similarly "symbolic" figures, such as Rousseau, Bakunin, and Foucault (of semi-decadent significance), but you can imagine what I'd say.

According to the newspapers, Republican elites are starting to take seriously the possibility that Donald Trump will be the party's nominee for president. He doesn't seem stoppable, for the crazier are his statements, the more popular he is with the base. Many are expecting a debacle in the general election. All this I find pretty amusing, and reminiscent of the Hitler phenomenon. In the 1920s business and political elites in Germany not only tolerated but helped stoke the atmosphere of nationalism, racism, and imperialism, and to some extent subsidized the Nazis and other such groups. They created the possibility of Hitler, for his anti-Communist, anti-labor movement was useful to them. But then the Nazi Frankenstein to which they had helped give life conquered enormous power and had to be brought into the government, where eventually they lost control over it. In a similar way, the updated fascism that has been concocted in, and broadcasted from, the conservative public-relations industry over the last forty years has finally created a Frankenstein "movement" that is taking over the Republican party. The elites are losing control, and the whiff of totalitarianism (deporting 11 million immigrants, banning Muslims from entering the country, etc.) is in the air. What the upper class sowed, it is now reaping. Luckily the majority of Americans are still relatively sane, and progressive movements are picking up steam, so the general population probably won't reap the whirlwind.[2] [Whoops. Too optimistic there!]

Listening to Mozart, I realize that I should be grateful for most things that have happened to me, even the apparently bad things. For example, not having more long-term girlfriends in my twenties. Women can drag a creative person away from his creativity and away from himself. It was a blessing to be semi-

[1] Such megalomania is always half in jest. Incidentally, it's true that the first paragraph is kind of obvious, but it's interesting to adopt something like Hegel's perspective on himself and on other modern thinkers, and to use this to explain why they've resonated so much.

[2] Intellectuals live to make fine distinctions and so are insisting that Trump is nothing like a fascist, etc. Intellectuals also live to miss the underlying essence of a given phenomenon. There are obvious differences between the fascism of the 1920s and '30s and the Trumpian Tea Party phenomenon (and other such things in Europe), but there are also telling similarities.

ignored by females, an incredible stroke of luck. I wasn't burdened, I could listen to music when I wanted and write when I wanted and be free, and live beautiful moments without the pollution of another person sharing them. I've tended to think that not to share is not to live—and from one perspective there's truth to that, but not from all perspectives. In a sense I've lived more deeply because I haven't shared, or because I've shared only with myself. That's a kind of sharing too, maybe the most profound kind. I can look back on my youth with fondness mainly because I shared that time with myself and so truly experienced it in all its sadness and hope, and learned to love myself as I am and enjoy life on my own terms. I became myself with myself and no one else. [Well, that's an obvious exaggeration. I shared lots of wonderful moments with others.] The past *did* happen, it *is* worth remembering, it's worth loving for the countless moments of love I experienced, mostly love of myself and of music and life and solitude. I can actually look back fondly as lovers look back on their time spent together, for I was my own soulmate.

Chuck Mangione's great song "Bellavia." And "Feels So Good." Laid-back love of life. Two great dates recently, one with a professional actress and another with a soon-to-be nurse practitioner (Jane, intelligent Jew). Was more excited after each than I've been in a long time, and liked both girls much more than any other in a long time. The actress is away a lot of the time, but I should see her soon. Kissed the nurse at the end of the date tonight. Quite possibly nothing will happen with either of these women, since nothing ever does, but for now I'm just enjoying the mellow semi-hope.

Life goes on, and on. Incredible, time.

My whole life, I've wanted *one* thing: domestic bliss. Texting Jane and remembering the pleasure of our date, the artist in the back of my mind whom I try to lock away in the basement draws pictures, sneakily, of us sitting on a couch listening to music, my arm draped over her shoulders. And then she's in the kitchen fixing a snack as I…what am I doing?…I'm behind her hugging her, kissing the back of her neck.

–Sorry, it's the sentimental music I'm listening to.

Oy, want to see her again. Keep thinking about her, against my better instincts. These midnight moods ambush me most nights, but this time there's a specific person.

…Ugh, she's spending this whole week at Joshua Tree, so it'll be almost two weeks between our first date and our second. At least I can see her before going back to Rhode Island for Christmas. But I'm impatient! Haven't been this hopeful in a very long time.

Have started going back to the gym, partly because of her but also because it's satisfying (I'd forgotten), especially now that I have an iPhone and can listen to good music.

…Well, it seems that pessimism isn't always justified. The second date went well, and she came back to my place and spent the night. Wonderful girl, lover of laughing and intelligent talking and apparently even my quirky goofiness. Lovely face, body, and soul. Seems almost too good to be true. I hope I don't screw it up.

In my dissertation so far I've been rather tame, rather academic and conventional, not even mentioning Chomsky, for example, at all. Correspondingly, I've been somewhat bored with the whole enterprise. But just had an epiphany, in the context of interpreting the significance of gambling for men in homeless shelters (who very much enjoyed to gamble): fuck it, I realized, let's take the gloves off and let loose—to hell with propriety—and bring in some Chomsky on sports. I can apply his interpretation of spectator sports to gambling in the 1930s, as a way to revalue values and raise up the homeless and the poor (gamblers) to a position of dignity. That's basically the whole point of my dissertation, after all. And if I let myself stray from the academic script throughout the whole book a little more than I've been doing, and be even more partisan and Marxian and Chomskian than I've been, I'll be more interested in the thing.

If you're curious, here's what I just wrote:

> …Thus, even after the creation of the Special Activities Department, the principal forms of recreation remained extra-institutional and anti-institutional, the activities most conducive to

escape from collective anhedonia: drinking, gambling, and visiting prostitutes. In a viciously class-structured world, these were what was left those on the wrong side of the divide. Considered vices by mainstream society, their popularity among shelter inmates—especially the Hobohemians, who were more familiar than the others with gambling and prostitution—was emblematic of these men's extreme dis-integration from dominant ideologies and ways of life, bourgeois proprieties and hypocrisies. They chose their own path, adapting and resisting at the same time.

Gambling, for example, was far more than an act of desperation or despair: as with the African-American community on the South Side that was discussed in the last chapter, it was a positive source of excitement, hope, and intellectual stimulation, as well as an implicit rebellion against the deadening influence of the shelter bureaucracy. In interpreting the significance of gambling for these men—and thousands of them, Americans and immigrants, enjoyed it and actively sought it out—one recalls Noam Chomsky's remarks on spectator sports in contemporary society: one reason for the incredible popularity of sports, and the enormous amount of attention and analysis that people regularly devote to them, is that most other avenues for the exercise of collective intelligence are closed to the public. To quote Chomsky,

> In our society, we have things that you might use your intelligence on, like politics, but people really can't get involved in them in a very serious way—so what they do is they put their minds into other things, such as sports. You're trained to be obedient; you don't have an interesting job; there's no work around for you that's creative; in the cultural environment you're a passive observer of usually pretty tawdry stuff; political and social life are out of your range, they're in the hands of the rich folk. So what's left? Well, one thing that's left is sports—so you put a lot of the intelligence and the thought and the self-confidence into that.[1]

If this is true—and it rings true—of many people in contemporary society, it was much more true of shelter men in the 1930s, except that for them the outlet for creativity, intelligence, and thought was *gambling* even more than sports (although many retained their interest in spectator sports after entering the shelter, and every day read the sports section of the paper). They had been exiled from social, political, and cultural life, and had to endure the institutionalized suppression of their personalities every day, so they enthusiastically embraced gambling as one of the remaining means of expressing themselves and resisting the complete extinction of their identity. "The gambling habit has been accentuated since shelter entrance," a researcher writes in 1935. "The men are necessarily limited to small stakes, but they express as much enthusiasm and use as much energy in their gambling as do the patrons of expensive gambling houses." Card playing and, especially, betting on horse races were the most common activities, the latter being done either among the men themselves—betting with razor blades, cigarettes, and other small items—or at cheap gambling joints on West Madison Street. The researcher goes on to give testimony that supports the Chomskian interpretation:

> The men consume much time and energy in doping the races. They pour [sic] over racing literature and racing results in the newspapers and talk for hours on the relative merits of the various horses, the ability of certain jockeys, the condition of the track, the crookedness of the stables and jockeys, and the odds on the horses. On the basis of their reading, conversation, and knowledge of the races, even though they may have little or no money to bet, they have a great time doping out how one should place his bets.[2]

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[1] Peter Mitchell and John Schoeffel, eds., *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 99.

[2] Sutherland and Locke, *Twenty Thousand Homeless Men*, 122, 124, 125.

> Clearly this so-called "vicious," and illegal, activity was not engaged in solely for acquisitive purposes (as rational as those were), but also for "creative" purposes. As in the case of policy [a type of gambling] among African-Americans, elaborate systems were devised for placing the right bets. For some men, gambling became an obsession. "Such men eat horses, sleep horses, and talk horses all day long": in fact, the races gave them a reason to live. What is just as striking as the intellectual energy they, and others, devoted to gambling was the astonishing persistence of *hope* among men who usually lost, the invincible conviction that sooner or later they would have a string of successes and accumulate enough money, perhaps, to leave the shelter. After years of unconsummated job searches and the humiliations of shelter life we have described in this chapter, hope's last refuge lay in gambling. "If it wasn't for the fact that the pony players always hope and constantly look for a future change in luck," a shelter inmate observed, "many of them would commit suicide."[1]

Thanks, Noam!

By the way, I was pleased to come across today the following exchange in an old interview with Chomsky, which says basically the same thing I wrote in my review of the book *Tensions of Empire* years ago:

> *Question: But you're often accused of being too black-and-white in your analysis, of dividing the world into evil élites and subjugated or mystified masses. Does your approach ever get in the way of basic accuracy?*
>
> *Answer:* I do approach these questions a bit differently than historical scholarship generally does. But that's because humanistic scholarship tends to be irrational. I approach these questions pretty much as I would approach my scientific work. In that work - in any kind of rational inquiry - what you try to do is identify major factors, understand them, and see what you can explain in terms of them. Then you always find a periphery of unexplained phenomena, and you introduce minor factors and try to account for those phenomena. What you're always searching for is the guiding principles: the major effects, the dominant structures. In order to do that, you set aside a lot of tenth-order effects. Now, that's not the method of humanistic scholarship, which tends in a different direction. Humanistic scholarship - I'm caricaturing a bit for simplicity - says every fact is precious; you put it alongside every other fact. That's a sure way to guarantee you'll never understand anything. If you tried to do that in the sciences, you wouldn't even reach the level of Babylonian astronomy.
>
> I don't think the [social] field of inquiry is fundamentally different in this respect. Take what we were talking about before: institutional facts. Those are major factors. There are also minor factors, like individual differences, microbureaucratic interactions, or what the President's wife told him at breakfast. These are all tenth-order effects. I don't pay much attention to them, because I think they all operate within a fairly narrow range which is predictable by the major factors. I think you can isolate those major factors. You can document them quite well; you can illustrate them in historical practice; you can verify them. If you read the documentary record critically, you can find them very prominently displayed, and you can find that other things follow from them. There's also a range of nuances and minor effects, and I think these two categories should be very sharply separated.
>
> When you proceed in this fashion, it might give someone who's not used to such an approach the sense of black-and-white, of drawing lines too clearly. It purposely does that. That's what is involved when you try to identify major, dominant effects and put them in their proper place.

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[1] Ibid., 128.

Yup. Far from having deeper understanding than someone like Chomsky, as they think, humanistic (especially postmodernist) intellectuals have essentially *no* understanding, because they don't acknowledge the relative validity of generalities, which are the very stuff of understanding. You explain things on the basis of a necessarily simplifying set of principles; that's what understanding is. What you get with most mainstream scholarship, though, is little else but "Reality is complicated, and here are some things that happened." The moment you try to explain anything in terms of economic power or structures, you're attacked as being a simplifier or a polemicist, not a scholar.

I plan to use that interview excerpt in the introduction to my dissertation, where I'll argue for the overwhelming importance of class.

January–May, 2016

Reading parts of a collection of essays published in 1978 called *Anarchism*, edited by J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman. Pretty good philosophical essays, but I have to say that what I've seen of the literature on anarchism leaves much to be desired. Actually, the whole universe of anarchism, with all its different strains and movements and doctrines, is messy and full of confusions and oversimplifications. Basic concepts like domination, power, hierarchy, authority, freedom, and coercion are often left unclarified and essentially unanalyzed. We don't need Foucault to tell us that life is ineluctably infused with domination and authority, that constitutive of every situation, of the psyche itself, are elements of power and imperceptible forms of coercion. The self is formed through contact with authority, parental authority and peer pressure and hierarchies of power and status, and these remain embedded in the self throughout its existence. The social world itself becomes a dominant Other that confronts the self, and in relation to which the self is always defining itself. Its internalization is an authority that's *part* of the self, such that a relation of power and subordination is written into the very structure of the self. In every situation there are dynamics of power operating on the psyche and influencing, partly coercing (pressuring and determining), one's behavior, whether in the context of a romantic relationship or a social gathering or a meeting between anarchist activists. Even in tribal societies or the most egalitarian commune, inequalities of status entail inequalities of power, "unjust" forms of domination and restrictions on individual freedom. People are constantly competing, even unconsciously, for higher status and more power. Social structures of unequal power and freedom, hierarchies of subordination, define even worker cooperatives and relatively egalitarian municipal governments. There is both "top-down" and "bottom-up" authority in certain modern democratic institutions, and it seems inconceivable that this could ever change in any organization that consists of more than a few people. Someone with greater expertise will tend to have more power; elected representatives, even in a dramatically different political and economic environment than the present, will tend to have more influence and status, and thus more powers of domination and coercion (at least emotional coercion or rhetorical coercion or the coercion of "charisma" or whatever), than someone who is more unknown—or considered less intelligent or knowledgeable, etc. Even if society were organized according to decentralized workers' federations, dispersed "democratic" units of local economic and governmental power, the necessity of complex institutions to coordinate and distribute resources would inevitably breed elements of top-down power and domination, probably including implied threats—and in some cases the reality—of physical coercion if orders were not followed.

In intimate relationships, particularly in families and between lovers, not only are unequal power relations inevitable (although which side is favored by the inequality may vary between situations, from day to day, and between periods of life); they are, in some respects, good. As I've said, the greater authority and power of parents is integral to the formation of a child's healthy sense of self. But also, there are clear tendencies for women, especially younger women, to prefer that the man they're united with have greater power and dominance (physical strength, height, emotional strength (in a sense), intellectual strength, financial strength) than they themselves, because this is what attracts them to a man.

And of course it's easy to imagine innumerable situations in which even physical coercion is necessary and good, justified by appeal to some higher value.

In short, life is messy. "Autonomy" has a sort of intuitive meaning and validity as a moral ideal, but none of these abstract concepts that anarchism defends or attacks has a precisely definable denotation, since we all exist in an incredibly thick mesh of relations and relationships characterized by indefinitely many degrees of coercion, power, autonomy, hierarchy, status, etc.—emotional, physical, intellectual, political, economic. And many of these inequalities are inseparable from what it means to be a self, and are good and necessary. Nature, which is to say the human condition, cares little for the moral absolutes and oversimplified conceptions of classical liberalism (i.e., in its core, anarchism).

Nevertheless, as a general guide toward action and values, the basic intuitions of anarchism are essential. For they're little else but manifestations or corollaries of the basic intuitions of morality. We should always be skeptical of inequalities of power and status; and if they can't be justified, we should always do what we can to dismantle them, to the extent possible. We should always strive to respect the dignity and freedom of others, and to heed the twin authorities of reason and morality more than any other authority. To the degree that makes rational and moral sense, treat everyone, including children, as an equal.

Now reading Paulo Freire's famous little book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), which is apparently required reading for leftist intellectuals. It's overrated. Repetitive, derivative (of Hegel, the early Marx, Sartre, Erich Fromm, etc.), and full of verbiage, albeit inspiring and enlivening verbiage. It consists of little more than eloquent and verbose elaborations (and semi-philosophical justifications) of humanistic common sense about what is entailed in a good education. It's useful, though, in vividly driving home—through repetitiveness—humanistic conceptions of what it is to be a good teacher. The obsessive emphasis on the *participation* of students, on the need for dialogue, on the necessity to break down the hierarchy, or "contradiction," between teacher and student, on the importance of taking into account students' interests and backgrounds in designing (or *collaboratively* designing, with them) a course, on the constant imperative to facilitate students' creativity and critical thinking—all of this in the service of furthering the subversive, liberating thoughts and practices that can bring about a social revolution—helpfully focuses an educator's energies.

Along the way, Freire introduces pretentious technical concepts like "limit-situations, "limit-acts," "generative themes," and "decoding," concepts that give intellectuals something to play with and write articles about. (Ironically, in light of Freire's educative purposes, these concepts of his are quite elitist, in demanding a specialized vocabulary inaccessible to the ordinary people he wants to empower. Moreover, they're unnecessary and don't really aid understanding.) More useful is his (unoriginal) classification of educational styles into two categories: the usual *banking* model, involving the "depositing of files" and storing of static information in the student's passive mind, and the *problem-posing* model, which is more interactive, directed toward solving problems of life and understanding that confront the student. This latter model is reminiscent of the way I decided a while ago I'd like to organize history courses: namely, spend the first week or so discussing where society is in the present, how the political economy is structured (and relating this to the students' own experiences), and then spending the rest of the semester discussing how we got to this point—and, ideally, what lessons history tells us about how to move forward in a constructive way. If you want to get across to most people, you have to relate a course's subject-matter to their own interests and backgrounds. Very few teachers do this.

Much of what Freire says, especially in the penultimate chapter, relates to teaching illiterate peasants in Latin America and is of no direct relevance to educators in the U.S. But his methods of teaching peasants are interesting. I suppose his abstruse concepts could be helpful guides to interacting with these people, to deciphering their views and facilitating dialogue.

This whole participatory model of education, by the way, can easily degenerate into flaky political correctness—listening to and respecting all viewpoints in the classroom, insisting that every opinion has value, being ultra-careful not to offend anyone, letting students' subjective preferences and neurotic sensitivities guide the direction of the course. In small groups it could degenerate into a sort of group therapy. No one with his head screwed on could deny that in modern urban education the teacher should be the clear authority, should be the one to determine the content of the course (while soliciting students' input and considering their backgrounds, etc.). It isn't the *authority* principle—the teacher/student "contradiction"—that is the main thing to be remedied; it's the fact that most teachers are conventional

spouters of conventional doctrines who don't challenge students' conventional understandings. Presenting alternative, and *true*, left-wing perspectives in an engaging way, while simultaneously providing opportunities for students to participate and to create, is the formula for success.

As you know, I tend to be critical of intellectuals. I have to admit, though, that there's something moderately impressive about being able to engage in self-initiated intellectual work, especially if it's sustained over a long period. It's a solitary, laborious, and often tedious process for which very few people have the capacity. Even fewer, however, have the capacity to do it *well*, in a critical, challenging, and courageous way.

Reading Eduardo Galeano's magnificent *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (1973).

Good observation by Bertolt Brecht: "In democratic countries the violent character inherent in the economy doesn't show itself; in authoritarian countries the same holds true for the economic character of violence." (Quoted by Galeano in the context of Pinochet—the pro-capitalist character of his violence.)

Well, I was an idiot for thinking that pessimism sometimes isn't justified. If you're me, it's always justified. Jane doesn't feel the "spark," and, to be honest, I'm not sure I do either. It was there the first two dates, but the second two it wasn't. All in all, though, I'm sick of being alive. Don't know how much longer I can tolerate being alone. Something has to change.

…I feel as though I've reached a crossroads of some sort. I can't go on. I need a woman; I need love. I can't function. Should I use an expensive matchmaking service? But it's Chicago: I doubt I'll find someone worthy here. I should be in New York, or I should have lived in New York in my twenties. What a colossal mistake. I ruined my chances for happiness. What am I going to do? How can I find love? I'm 75 years old, I don't have much time left. But I was cursed to live on a different plane than others, already in an otherworldly state at the age of 75 when I'm still living. I observe the world and don't participate in it. I'm not of the world—I don't belong among people. So how can I find a human companion? What am I going to do? I can't be alone any longer.

…Spent a night with a girl, which was nice—large breasts and wet vaginas, all joys are due to you (to quote John Donne)—but she's already seeing someone and I'm not very interested in her anyway. Have a couple dates this weekend. Ugh.

…Dated a 28-year-old black girl named Merissa for a month, an intelligent and creative person, strong and self-assured, with many interests and ambitions. But not at all thin, and too self-preoccupied in her conversation. (Incidentally, I discovered that sex while high on pot is amazing.) Went to a therapist a couple weeks ago but it was silly, more like *his* therapy session than mine, and anyway I'm too intelligent for therapy and don't really need it. Had a session with someone else today, and she was better, but I'm still inclined not to keep it up. I can anticipate and see through everything these people say. Don't even need that kind of emotional reinforcement, since I'm already in awe of myself and basically have no problems with who I am.

Emailed Dad in response to a video he sent me of some famous academic idiot named Jerry Coyne talking about free will:

> Jerry Coyne does not impress me, although at least he seems less stupid and annoying than Dennett. Surely he's right to be an incompatibilist, since the idea of self-control (free will) manifestly contradicts the idea that one's acts are determined by factors outside one's control, such as environmental stimuli and neural impulses. That sentence, in fact, is almost all that's needed to dispel the entire controversy and the entire literature over compatibilism vs. incompatibilism. Some of his other points are less convincing, though. For example, as Chomsky has noted, the fact that, with the help of MRIs and whatnot, a person's next act can theoretically be predicted a second before he does it technically doesn't invalidate the notion of free will. All it entails is that decisions

are unconscious, and then bubble up into consciousness. But, in effect, we already knew this--we already knew that there's an unconscious and/or "pre-conscious" (in Freud's terminology) realm out of which a given conscious state emerges, frenetically churning with all sorts of mostly unactualized possibilities. It may be that if a decision is unconscious we shouldn't really say it's under our control and thus subject to free will, but that's a separate issue.

There's something naive about Coyne's whole presentation (which, incidentally, showed not a particle of originality). He doesn't seem to recognize all the logical and psychological problems involved in an abandonment, even if only an "intellectual" abandonment, of the belief in free will. But first, he's right on one obvious point: even if determinists succeeded in convincing everyone that free will is an illusion, this would have no very bad social consequences. Only a naive idealist/"intellectualist" about human behavior, like a Dennett, who ludicrously overestimates the social importance of abstract reflections, could think that people would suddenly start behaving differently, even immorally, if they decided that free will is an illusion. "Noble lies" like God or free will or whatever are not what regulate social behavior. Institutional norms and power-structures are, in addition to elementary psychological facts like the desire for approval from others.

But Coyne is blithely unaware of more serious problems. Do we really want no longer to *blame* people (in the "morally responsible" sense), or to think that no one is robustly responsible for his acts? He says, like a 15-year-old who has just started reading philosophy, "I was full of regret for the way the relationship with my ex-girlfriend ended, but then I remembered, oh hey, I don't have free will, so it couldn't have gone any other way! It had to end as it did, and so I lost my regret and felt better about myself." Simple as that, eh? Moron. You can't so blithely do away with the absolutely overwhelming, in fact *immediately certain*, impression of free will. I'm *choosing* to write right now instead of going outside to the grocery store. It seems inconceivable for this impression to be wrong. In a sense, *what would it mean* for it to be wrong? That possibility doesn't really make any sense. Now, given the truth of determinism, it seems that in some way it *must* be wrong--free will must be an illusion--but *how* it can be wrong is impossible to imagine. Both free will and determinism seem absolutely necessary. So Chomsky and McGinn and the "new mysterians" are right that our cognitive apparatus is inadequate to tackle the mystery of free will. The paradox is unresolvable.

But getting back to the problems with Coyne....our impression of free will is so fundamental to who we are, and so apparently certain, that it's much too easy and simplistic to comfort ourselves with the supposed fact that we have no control over what we do. As far as we know from our inner experience, we *do* have some large degree of self-control. A person's decision to behave a certain way with his girlfriend is very different from the case of the mentally deficient criminal who is acknowledged to have less control over his acts than normal people. (And yet Coyne compares the two situations, saying, in effect, that we're all like the criminal.) And after all, maybe, in some unfathomable sense, our impression of self-control is true.

In any event, as Kant said, it's impossible not to act without implicitly presupposing free will. We have to keep thinking of ourselves as free beings--subject to many constraints, of course--and evaluating ourselves and our acts on that basis. Coyne doesn't have the right to excuse his past behavior by invoking the supposed falsity of free will, partly because that is to abandon his whole identity as a human being, and partly because as far as he was concerned at the time he *did*, after all, make decisions, and--according to his own consciousness--he could have made different decisions. And also, again, it's possible that in some sense that humans are incapable of conceiving, some sort of determinism and some sort of free will may be compatible, such that we're right in believing ourselves to have free will.

> Nor does Coyne recognize that some of the objections to his view he mentioned are right. For instance, he says that people who don't believe in free will are not being inconsistent in trying to convince someone of a particular view, because, after all, environmental inputs are in part what determine how people act. So the inputs we give people through our arguments may somehow result in the rewiring of their neural pathways or whatnot, which will maybe lead them to change their mind. But the whole point of the objection, which he doesn't recognize, is that it's inconsistent for a non-believer in free will to appeal to a person's *reason* and try to change his mind thereby, because the essence of reasoning is that one (*freely*) considers alternatives, considers reasons, and (*freely*) decides between them. (The element of freedom is implicit in the very concepts of considering and deciding, which means it's implicit in the concept of using reason.) So, by presenting a logical argument, Coyne is implicitly presupposing that his audience has free will, i.e., can freely consider alternatives and decide for or against them. He may rationalize his behavior by saying, "No, I'm not actually trying to convince you on the basis of your use of reason but rather by manipulating you in a non-rational way to come around to my views"--which, in effect, is what he says--but that's a superficial rationalization that conflicts with the spirit of his activity, the *rational* spirit. In short, a non-believer in free will is constantly, in fact in every second of the day, faced with the contradicting of his determinist views by the premises, or the "spirit," of his actions. The contradiction is only extra pronounced in the case of the determinist who is engaged in reasoning, or in trying to convince someone else of a position by presenting him with reasons (as opposed to manipulating him in some way, emotionally or physically or whatever).
>
> Reason really is the realm of freedom. The old philosophers were right about that. That actually poses another problem, namely what the relation between reasoning and free will is. In a way we're less "free" when under the influence of a powerful emotion. But this apparently has to do with a different sense of free will than the one Coyne is discussing, according to which all our acts are free.
>
> Anyway, I guess that's enough for now. Gonna get back to the dissertation. Good luck with the talk! (if you give it)

Once again, I've become disgusted by my ignorance of intellectual matters. I don't see why I have to force myself to read only history if I get tired of it. I'm gonna read whatever I want to read. So, I'm starting with the history of cognitive psychology and cognitive science, which I know little about. *A History of Modern Experimental Psychology: From James and Wundt to Cognitive Science* (2007), by George Mandler. Also John Greenwood's 1999 paper "Understanding the 'Cognitive Revolution' in Psychology," and several other papers.

…Well, I guess I can't justify continuing this reading. So, back to history. Martin Comack's little book *Wild Socialism: Workers Councils in Revolutionary Berlin, 1918–21* (2012). Among others.

4:00 a.m. Insomnia, as usual. Schubertian *moments musicaux*. Thoughts of women—which never really leave my mind, to be honest. They're always there, in the back. A woman, a petite woman in her late twenties, lying next to me, naked…would be nice. A sweet and devoted, intelligent and kind, pretty young woman, who could restore a broken person to health, nurse him back to youth. Just someone to hold and love, and maybe make love to gently and slowly.

So many beautiful women in the world, and I'm stuck in Chicago.[1]

Women, marvelous creatures. Such perfect embodiments of a beautiful principle. The divine fusion of adult and child, of reason and feeling. Sweet devotion, sweet immersion in the moment. –I just like writing words, so I can savor the thought of women. A mood craves expression, a love craves expression.

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[1] When I compare women on Tinder in Chicago to those in New York, the difference in quality—in attractiveness and apparent intelligence—is astounding. It's fatties, uglies, and dull-eyed bimbos versus incredible hotties.

And yet this mood is not so bad, this melancholy—poetic, a dream of philosophic love. (Thank you Francis Bacon, and Franz Schubert.)

There's a sense in which activists who don't belong to the group on whose behalf they're fighting are on a higher moral level than those who do belong to that group and engage in resistance. For the latter's actions are *slightly* more self-interested than the former's. The former person wants to help others, the latter to help both himself and others. But of course this distinction is somewhat artificial and contrived.

The human abortion Antonin Scalia died today. Here's the last word on him, from my Facebook status-update: "Lest we forget what a troglodyte he was, here's a small sampling: [link to an article]. To use the lingo of Lenin, Scalia was little more than a useful idiot—from the perspective of the most reactionary sectors of the 'ruling class.' His sort of conservatism, while full of intellectual pretensions, is nothing but a tool of those whose interest is in fighting, or rolling back, the expansion of freedom and democracy to the historically disenfranchised. It's a useful 'intellectual' mask for the agenda of bigotry and repression." Then added a comment: "He was an atavism, more appropriate to medieval times than postmodernity. Would have made a better Grand Inquisitor than Supreme Court justice." Given his extreme Catholicism, his obvious fixation on sin and human weakness and the imperative of purity and so on, that's literally true.

It might not be totally absurd to say that I'm the first true Marxist ever, or at least the most Marxist Marxist. The person who has most absorbed its logic, for example in the revisions I've made to the system. And in my instinctive anti-intellectualism, anti-elitism, anti-subjectivism, and anti-voluntarism. But it's true that others come very close, such as Chomsky.

Sent Mom an email in a corny and half-drunk mood a few nights ago; here's the relevant part: [deleted]. She was happy about that ("Chris, these are the sweetest, most loving words I've ever received from you and I will always cherish them"), since I'm never corny like that with the parents. I was in a forlorn, anguished mood and was grateful to receive a sweet email she'd just sent.

Incidentally, for the last few days I've been strangely bothered by the knowledge that despite four years of closeness and mentoring, I apparently mean nothing to Lulu. Every so often I still text her, and she replies perfunctorily. Those two ice queens, she and her mom, live only a few blocks away, but I haven't gone over there because I don't want the mom to make a scene. It is hurtful, though, to be ignored after such a close and long relationship.

Wrote an article for an organization in Chicago that does work with the homeless and unemployed. They wanted me to draw on my research somehow. (For some reason the footnotes were deleted when I copied-and-pasted it here.)

Homeless in Chicago: Echoes of the Great Depression

It is a sadly obvious fact that our country is at a stage comparable in many respects to both the late 1920s and the 1930s, during the Great Depression. Economic stagnation, income inequality, high unemployment (as of February 2016, 10.1% or 14.7%, depending on the source), and increasing homelessness are only a few of the parallels between that earlier time of despair and our own.

The rise of demagoguery and bigotry in our mainstream political discourse is another clear analogy, reminiscent of demagoguery in Europe during the Depression.

So it may be of interest to recall conditions in that earlier time, since things are likely to get worse in the coming years. As a historian who has studied Chicago's public homeless shelters in the 1930s, I'd like to consider that topic here.

Some readers may, perhaps, recognize similarities between what I'll describe and what they have personally experienced.

In 2014, a "point-in-time" count of Chicago's homeless population found 5,329 people in shelters and another 965 unsheltered residents. But according to the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, there are in fact 64,000 homeless adults, 48,000 homeless children with parents, and 12,000 people younger than 21 without parents or guardians. (These numbers include people without a permanent residence who live with friends or relatives.)

Compare that with the 30,000 to 60,000 homeless residents who were in Chicago at any given time in the late 1920s, when the city had about 300,000 more people than it does now. Or, even more tellingly, compare the 5,329 in shelters on one night in 2014 to the 20,000 who coursed through shelters the entire *month* of February 1932, in the depths of the Depression.

These figures are ominous.

Even more ominous, though, is the fact that homeless shelters have been closing in recent years, as government funding has become less reliable. For example, the North Side Housing Shelter closed in November 2010; Catholic Charities closed two family shelters in the summer of 2015; and the New Life for Men shelter is currently closed because of funding cuts.

In our present political environment, such trends are likely to continue. And conditions in shelters are likely to worsen, as the few that remain open become overcrowded. Like they were in the Great Depression.

*

Conditions in most shelters (particularly for men) during those years were abysmal, and give us evidence of how harmful "austerity" politics is to the poor.

One man who had found it necessary to apply to a shelter in 1935 described it as follows:

> Here [in shelters] privacy is a forgotten word. On a cold or rainy day, or during the evenings, men are crowded into the basement or assembly room—German, colored, Pole, Greek, Mexican, American, Irish, Russian, and every nationality… Here also are degenerates, drunks, working men, bums, clerks, old men with all ambition gone, young men whose every ideal has been crushed, all herded together. One almost tastes the stench of unclean bodies, and the sulphur odor from fumigated clothes. For quite a while this lack of privacy nearly drove me nuts.

First of all, the physical facilities--warehouses, old factory buildings, schools commandeered for the purpose--were not exactly calculated to lift the spirits.

For instance, a "recreation" room with few amenities was typically overcrowded with men dozing on uncomfortable seats, standing silently or sitting on the floor because there were not enough chairs or benches, a few perhaps playing checkers or dominoes quietly in a corner.

Much worse, though, was the "bull pen," a dark, damp, dismal place located in the basement, where men could go to escape supervision. Often littered with cigarette butts, wads of chewing tobacco, crusts of bread, and discarded clothing, it had no furniture except some backless benches on which "clients"--or "inmates," as they were called--might sleep or have a drink.

The sleeping rooms were sometimes so densely packed with cots that it was necessary for the occupant to crawl in from the head or the foot of the bed, which violated state health regulations. Having been sent to bed at 8:00 or 9:00, the inmate spent the night trying to get to sleep while surrounded by 25 or even a hundred other men, until awoken at 5:30 or 6:00 a.m. The cacophony of "snoring, sneezing, moaning, sleep-talking, and coughing," to quote one account, would likely keep him awake for hours.

For most men there were no pillows or sheets. As for the blankets, they seemed to one reporter to be made of paper, which left the men shivering all night from drafts--drafts that did nothing to ameliorate the stench of perspiring bodies and disinfectants. Bedbugs and lice, fond of this environment, bit and crept all over their prey.

Meal service, too, was inadequate, especially in the years before 1935 when only two meals were served a day, at 6:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. (It was assumed that if the men got hungry in the interim, they could go out and beg for food or find odd jobs that might pay a few cents.)

The food itself was not infrequently rotten or bug-ridden, and most of the time was quite bland--cold beets, weak coffee, unbuttered bread, a tin bowl of beef stew, an old piece of fruit, etc.

In general, the central fact of shelter life in the 1930s was *regimentation*. One author summed it up well: "When the man enters the shelter he learns the meaning of the word 'line.' He is a 'linesman'; he lines up to see the caseworker; he lines up for his meals; he lines up to fumigate [every two weeks] and then to bathe; he lines up to wash, to shave, to use the toilet, and to go to bed. 'I spend,' said one man, 'half my waking hours either standing and waiting for something or sitting and waiting for someone.'" "Why in hell don't they line us up against the wall and shoot us and get it over with," grumbled one inmate.

Lines six blocks long to get food, serpentine lines that might take two hours to walk through.

"Watchmen" were always present to intimidate and challenge the men, especially if they were drunk, in which case they might be beaten--with clubs, sawed-off baseball bats, or lead pipes--and forced outside even in the cold night air.

A reporter summed up the whole wretched environment: "The place has approximately the same effect as a jail. It is the individual against the world. The monotony of the same old faces, ideas, arguments, line, nothing to do but sit, finally gets under the skin."

Through collective struggle and activism by the shelter men and social workers who represented them, conditions did improve a little, for example when lunch began to be served in late 1934. Likewise, after a winter of discontent in late 1931--protest demonstrations and individual acts of resistance occurring in shelters all over the city--a Special Activities Department was established to give the men more options for recreation.

In fact, Communist organizers had considerable success in some shelters as they advocated not only for better food and more humane treatment but, more broadly, interracial unity and a nationwide socialist movement.

Daily Communist-run meetings were held in a few shelters, in which the men discussed how best to improve conditions and which specific grievances should next be brought to the shelter supervisor. At the conclusion of these meetings, a researcher remarked, "the radical songs are sung--'Solidarity,' 'We'll Hang Hoover to a Sour Apple Tree,' and the 'Marseillaise.' Misguided as it perhaps all is," he continued, "it is rather a stirring sight to see men and boys stand erect at the end of the meetings and sing these songs with great emotional feeling."

However, despite all the efforts of activists and thousands of shelter men, it proved impossible to significantly improve conditions in Chicago's shelters. Pleading the necessity of "austerity" (to use contemporary language), political and economic authorities refused to divert substantially more resources to them.

And even when most of the shelters were shut down in 1935 and the men transferred to private quarters in rooming houses and tenements, the city's relief administration continued to be so poorly funded that it frequently could not pay the men's rent or provide them with adequate food or supplies. The second half of the 1930s saw crisis after crisis in the financing of relief, leaving thousands of people in dire want and misery.

The struggles of the unemployed to influence relief policy continued, but in the end it took World War II to finally solve their problems and raise their living standard.

Insofar as homeless shelters today are, in most cases, not as inhumane as those in the 1930s, we have decades of popular movements, popular pressure, and public-spirited advocacy to thank. Because of this, in fact, it is unlikely that most shelters will ever be allowed to sink to quite the level they were at in the Depression.

Instead, what will happen is that the loss of government funding will force more of them to close. Meanwhile, more people will require access to shelters because of long-term unemployment. The "shared sacrifices" and "tough decisions" that policymakers insist we must all accept because of government budget deficits will, as ever, disproportionately affect the poor, even as corporate profits remain at historic highs.

Whether we can distribute the economic sacrifices more equitably and so prevent history from repeating itself depends, ultimately, on whether we can build popular movements even greater than those that came to fruition during the Great Depression. At no time in our history has the task of "raising consciousness" been more urgent.

***

I've been doing better the last few weeks—quite well, actually—probably in part because of taking the Paxil more regularly. But, sometimes, damn the nights. Sometimes can't escape the loneliness, and "cry like a bitch."

I sometimes have the feeling that, as a man, going on a date is like a reverse job interview: the woman is interviewing candidates to be her boss. That's the emotional dynamic, at least.[1] If the conversational tone that the guy sets (for, in my experience, it's almost always the guy who has to, and is expected to, guide the conversation) is sufficiently jocular, friendly, suffused with sexual tension, and animated by his confidence, then maybe she'll approve of him and, ultimately, let him be her sort-of boss (though not explicitly). It's his job to make her *want* him to be a kind of semi-boss, in sex and in other contexts. Women like a man who leads.

As you know, I'm constantly struck by the obviousness of sexual inequality, and by the blindness that must be required not to see it. Such a degree of unreflectiveness scarcely seems possible to me. Even my highly intelligent Spanish roommate, Oriol (who unfortunately is moving out today to live with his girlfriend), seems oblivious to the *necessity* of sexual "inequality." We've gotten into two or three spirited arguments over it. He's incapable of seeing, or admitting, that something like contemporary gender norms—at least the relative positions of men and women—can practically be read off of biological facts, such as the facts I mention in two of my books.[2] When sometimes he seems close to admitting it, he simply asks, "What does it matter? Why care about this? It's not important." So I just tell him that I value intellectual clarity and sexual understanding, and it disturbs me that so many people are able to deny obvious truths and live in self-blindness. (It also irritates me that feminists can claim the moral high ground precisely by being idiots.)

Another source of my fascination/irritation is that I am, in fact, more committed to equality between the sexes than most women and feminists are. I value it more, and act on that value more consistently. For on dates and in social life generally, I'm perfectly happy to treat women as true equals, not necessarily trying to "charm" them or treat them like children (as most men do, implicitly) but rather like adults, being less sexist in my behavior than nearly everyone. The whole need to perform and charm and exude overt "bigger-than-you"-ness is something I'm not great at, being too egalitarian and laid-back.

When I try to imagine, or intuit, what most people's consciousness must be like, I can only come up with the idea that it's a primitive sort of unreflective glibness, a non-openness to intellectual impressions, a brute particularity that can't step back from itself or detach itself from considerations of *value* (like and dislike). This is the only "modality" of consciousness that would seem to account for most behavior. I imaginatively try to *inhabit* that consciousness.

Sometimes I think of Schopenhauer's distinction between the ordinary person and the so-called "genius." He was on to something in his descriptions of the differences.

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[1] The desire for a (semi-)"boss" explains, for instance, the female love of men in uniform. Uniforms express authority. "A woman's happiness is to serve," figuratively speaking. ("Serving" her husband, her children, her friends, or whatever.) This doesn't mean that women are "inferior" to men—whatever that's supposed to mean—but it is, indeed, a fact. It's less true, of course, of the masculine women, including many feminists.

[2] But you don't even need "biological facts." All you need is to think of women having sex, with their moaning "Ohhh, ohh, uhhh, yeah, I love your power! Spank me, pull my hair!" From *that,* almost everything can be deduced. But intellectuals specialize not in *un*covering but in *covering up* truth.

Got an email through my website that I saw tonight just in the right moment to rescue me from a mood of intellectual paralysis due to loneliness and longing:

> Hi Mr. Wright. I sincerely hope this finds you well. I came across your writings and books almost a year ago, and I have learned a lot reading your work! You are a great writer and easy to learn from with your conversational, unpretentious style. Anyways, I really hope I do not annoy with this email, but I was hoping to maybe glean your advice on which direction to go in my education. I am interested in studying history, philosophy, and the human condition. I am also interested in furthering humanity in its rational progression toward the dismantling of institutional structures of coercive power through knowledge and teaching in these various subjects (coupled with actual activism). My question is basically, what path do you recommend in getting an education in any of these subjects with these aims in mind? I have a bachelor's degree in Finance & Investments that I regret getting very much and may essentially be worthless in such pursuits, but I wanted to know if there were avenues of higher study that you would be able to recommend to someone who feels a bit lost. Are there any specific programs and/or any specific professors teaching today that you could possibly recommend looking into? What do you think is the prospect and even the advisability of trying to enter graduate-level or doctoral-level programs in any of these areas with a largely irrelevant undergraduate degree like mine? Any information, general or specific direction, or words of advice you could provide would be infinitely appreciated. I currently live in New York and am 28 years old, just for reference. And if you haven't the time to respond, as I'm sure you are inundated with your own work and life, then don't feel obligated in the least! Just thought an attempt at some insight wouldn't hurt. Many thanks for taking the time to read (and write, incidentally).

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Reading *The Interpreted World: An Introduction to Phenomenological Psychology* (2005), by Ernesto Spinelli.

Went to an absolutely absurd, self-indulgent, incomprehensible talk today by the famous postmodernist Ann Laura Stoler. Most of the audience seemed to share my amused befuddlement. Rehashings of Foucault, attempts to invent new concepts like “duress” with which to analyze colonial and postcolonial situations (and promiscuous use of a melange of old postmodern concepts like “genealogy” and “occlusion” and whatever else), altogether more an exercise in literary wordplay than anything else. But it reminded me of how this sort of postmodernism is essentially a *historical phenomenology*, or at least an attempt at such. Trying to uncover meanings somehow implicit in social experience, latent dimensions of experience—but of course in the service of questioning all our ordinary assumptions about the world, etc. And all done in a hyper-abstract way, throwing concepts around like continuity and rupture, and assonant or alliterative words like endurance, durability, duress, duration, to make the attempt at phenomenology flowery and poetic. The whole performance was a cautionary tale in how phenomenology, especially when done in a “theoretical” way, must always be the object of healthy skepticism. Its subjectivism should already make one suspicious of it. I still think it can, when done well (e.g., in Sartre’s *Anti-Semite and Jew*), be illuminating…but I have to admit, even then I tend to be suspicious of its “cash-value.” (See William James.) I’ve done it a lot myself, but it’s hard to know how to characterize the understanding that’s produced, since it isn’t testable or scientific. As an exercise in imagination (intuition) rather than rigorous *argumentation*, phenomenology seems closer to literature than science. And it’s often metaphorical. It can be fun, though, and it can have much more *human significance* (so to speak) than, say, cognitive science.

Another unfortunate thing is that phenomenological descriptions like Laing’s above [which I’ve deleted] exist on two levels, as it were. From an “external” perspective they can seem like mere words,

words, words, evocative but "easy," only literary and abstract. From an "internal" perspective, on the other hand, as *intuited* or *experienced* either directly or through an act of sympathetic imagination, they become deeper and more compelling, "concrete," such that a type of understanding (maybe you could call it "experiential understanding") seems to have been reached.

Anyway, here's a quotation from Spinelli's book: "On the one hand, we [as individuals] strive for a sense of our own uniqueness, wanting to be singled out for recognition, status, and love. On the other hand, however, our sense of distinctiveness may also give rise to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Thus, our self-awareness reveals opposing aspects that are often a major source of conflict as to our interrelations with others and the world in general." True. It's interesting, the desire to be special but at the same time the desire to fit in. How do you explain the presence of these two conflicting desires in the same mind, probably in every mind? Evidently they're just two different manifestations of the central desire that one's self-love be validated. You want others to recognize you as *superior* in some sense, but you also want them to see you as *equal*, such that you can "bond" with them (and have your self-worth be confirmed in that way too). Or maybe a better way to say it is that your desire for the *respect* of others is best fulfilled if they set you apart and above them, whereas your desire for their *affection* is best fulfilled if they treat you as part of their "community" and hence an equal. –Two different modalities of self-confirmation.

—Again, such phenomenologically inspired thoughts may be interesting sometimes, but the self can be interpreted in so many ways that it seems…what's the point? What's the point of soft psychological investigations like this, or like much of social psychology and so on? It's just a bunch of interpretations, a bunch of more or less different perspectives, with no apparent scientific payoff. Where does it get you?

As I read this book, I'm reminded that intellectually and "emotionally," so to speak, I've moved beyond all this psychologizing. Whether it's existential psychology, social psychology, humanistic psychology, cognitive-behavioral psychology, or (especially) psychoanalysis, it seems like one big quagmire. Endless reams of often interesting interpretations that in their aggregate amount to an Everest of verbiage. I simply don't trust intellectual endeavors that seem so navel-gazing, obsessively self-interpreting, even if I do on occasion still enjoy dipping my toe into the quagmire—but then quickly withdrawing it, lest I get sucked in. In part, it's an *aesthetic* preference of mine. I prefer the aesthetics of masculinity to that of femininity. Objectivity over subjectivity. Science over constant consciousness-probing. And yet sometimes the results of consciousness-probing do seem rather compelling and true, and the science…well, the science, for instance the cognitive science, somehow just seems like *collecting information*. I guess the problem is that it offers me fewer possibilities for creative engagement than the humanities and social sciences do. But given my dissatisfaction with the latter, I end up with no intellectual passions at all.

By the way, it's certainly true that various approaches to psychotherapy do sometimes work, or at least have positive consequences. But no one really understands *what it is* about the therapy that has worked. Why it works for someone and not for someone else. Etc. If the mind is an ocean, psychologists are oceanographers dipping below its surface in tiny submarines.

So let's just embrace history for now, intensively. I ought to have been reading more of it than I have in the last couple years. Have to catch up! *Internationalism in the Labour Movement, 1830–1940* (1988), edited by Fritz van Holthoon and Marcel van der Linden. Two volumes, but of course I'm only reading some of the essays that are in English.

—Wait, before leaving psychology, one more remark. Spinelli is right that a valuable contribution of phenomenology is to reinforce the lesson of all sophisticated psychology and biology that in experiencing the world, you're mainly experiencing your own mind. Ordinary experience teaches us much more about the structures in/of our minds—and, with regard to our interpretations of people, our own individual predispositions, biases, unconscious memories, personalities—than about an external world or other people "in themselves." This lesson is most obvious as regards our physical perceptions, which are constructed by the nervous system according to innate (and perhaps, to some extent, acquired) schemata. But it also applies to our judgments and impressions of others, which, in particular moments, largely depend on our mood, our expectations, the impressions we've already formed from previous encounters with the person, whether he or she reminds us of other people we've known, etc. There may be some validity to our judgments—for

example, insofar as others would agree with us—but, as I've said many times before, they rarely or never have the kind of validity we think they do. They reflect *us* as much as they reflect the other.

…Okay, back to history. Intellectual and cultural historians should always remember my dictum that the *lower* classes tend to be more ideologically and culturally creative than the upper classes. Usually it is among the lower or lower-middle classes that ideas (and forms of art) originate; they are then taken up and refined or even ennobled (sometimes) by progressive, creative members of the upper classes (or lower-born geniuses who secure the approval of the upper class, e.g. Beethoven). Think of how the Levellers during the English Civil War originated what later became political liberalism and modern democratic ideologies.[1] Locke wasn't really original, and the framers of the American Bill of Rights were doubly or triply unoriginal. (It's ironic that it was in a context created by the English state—namely, the New Model Army—that anti-statist and democratic ideas first caught fire.)

Reading Elizabeth Tandy Shermer's *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (2013). Excellent book, and very ambitious. Useful as, among other things, a reminder that the main reason the South and Southwest finally overcame their colonial status as little more than providers of raw materials to Northern industry was massive intervention by the federal government during the New Deal and World War II, and afterwards. Massive infusion of funds, building of infrastructure, planning of development—which was aided and continued by states, municipalities, and businessmen's associations. The "developmentalism" would have been even more successful had local and some national businessmen not opposed liberal policies of high wages, income redistribution, social welfare programs, racial equality, etc., or had they permitted the TVA to be replicated elsewhere.

The book is also a reminder that "neoliberalism" isn't new. For the Global South, of course, it's very old. But even for huge swathes of the U.S…well, as you know, the country as a whole was basically neoliberal before the New Deal, and conservatives and most business communities never renounced their commitment to neoliberalism (so-called free markets, anti-unionism, low taxes on business, corporate welfare but no social welfare), and in the postwar era the South and Southwest were semi-neoliberal. Neoliberalism is just…capitalism not tamed by organized labor (and the regulatory, social-welfare regime it buttresses). The "New Deal state" was extremely precarious and limited, under constant attack.

The more you read about politics and society, the more deeply you understand that, to a good first approximation, government exists but to make the world safe, lucrative, and pleasurable for the rich. That's its purpose. To the extent that it harms the rich or does not heed their interests, it is literally failing in its chief function. The task of popular movements is to change the calculus so that it is in the interest of the rich to help the poor (because if they don't, the poor will cause mayhem, or at least influence government in such a way that it harms the rich).

The nationwide "tax revolt" of the 1960s and 1970s is an interesting thing to study. It's usually thought of as having been basically conservative, a movement of white suburbanites against the high taxes imposed by liberal administrations. In fact it was at least as progressive as it was conservative, as much a reaction against business rule as against "tax-and-spend" liberals. In the postwar era of intense competition between states and municipalities to attract business investment, big business had secured incredible tax concessions and corporate-welfare public subsidies, which increased the tax burden on small property owners in both the suburbs and inner cities. So suburbanites and the working class to some extent shared an interest in reforming and democratizing local and state government. Many whites actually used the language of big-business-boosters to criticize business rule: it was contrary to individual rights, free enterprise, and democratic capitalism, it instituted high taxes, it was too in bed with the federal government, it amounted to creeping socialism, etc. (This conservative white "populism" also used the language of God and Christianity more than establishment conservatives did or were comfortable with.) At the same time, civil rights groups, black power groups, the Chicano movement, and other progressive forces were reacting in their own ways against business rule, sometimes overlapping with but frequently opposing the white

[1] Actually, it was surely not the Levellers who *originated* these things; earlier groups, such as radical peasants and artisans, were democrats and "liberals" as well. (We want a limited state, but a state that protects us from the predators! Etc.) The ideas must have already been in the air for many years. But the Levellers brought them to prominence.

populist mobilization. So politics at state and local levels, not to mention the national level, was very complicated and confusing/confused. But because of its ideological confusions, white populism and the tax revolt could be harnessed to business's old crusade against the liberal state, so that the potentially semi-progressive ire became ever more Reaganite-fascist by and during the 1980s. (That sentence is me, not Shermer, but it's surely true.) And yet the two main strains in conservatism, the populist-fascist and the establishment-conservative, never fused, making possible what we're seeing now: another rebellion by angry white populists against business rule (which is semi-confused, again, with "liberalism"), this time a more scary-to-the-establishment rebellion than that of the 1960s and '70s. For it has foisted Donald Trump onto the Republican party! The chickens are coming home to roost. Finally.

Read Marcella Bencivenni's *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture: The Idealism of the Sovversivi in the United States, 1890–1940* (2011). A friend recommended it. (The unjustly forgotten Arturo Giovannitti!) Now Walter LaFeber's classic *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898* (1963). Oh idiot me, so many great books I ought to have read by now! How I've wasted my time!

Useful comments on the late-nineteenth-century depressions: "As efficient machines produced more and more industrial and agricultural goods, consumption could not maintain the pace. The resulting deflation needed only the impetus derived from a few failures of large banks or Wall Street firms to push the economy into a full-scale depression. In the twenty-five years after 1873, half were years of depression: 1873–1878, 1882–1885, and 1893–1897. As each panic struck, Americans became convinced that the new one was worse than the last. Although they believed the 1893–1897 crisis to be most destructive, and although it did have the greatest impact on the formulation of foreign policy, economists have demonstrated that the depression of the 1870's was actually the worst… The break in the early eighties was especially sharp. Agricultural prices fell when good European crops combined with still greater American wheat production in 1881 and 1882. Industrial prices followed suit. Between 1880 and 1884 business failures tripled in number to almost 12,000 annually. The economy would not stand upright again until after 1897…

"In some respects, however, the mushrooming industrial economy fed upon these depressions. In discussing the 1873 panic Andrew Carnegie later acknowledged: 'So many of my friends needed money that they begged me to repay them. I did so and bought out five or six of them. That was what gave me my leading interest in this steel business.' [Thus, as Marxists theorize, strong capital survives, weak capital is weeded out. Concentration and centralization of capital is the result.] …Out of [the] expanded and productive plant [at Homestead] would come vast amounts of steel, much of which sought foreign markets in the 1890's because of insufficient demand at home. It was truly twenty years of boom hidden in twenty years of crisis."

At the same time, more and more American money (from huge profits) flowed into Europe, Latin America, Canada, and Asia. As the United States began exporting more than importing, it made up the difference by buying back American securities abroad, buying foreign stocks and bonds, and building American-owned transportation systems and industries abroad.

"The importance of this industrial power was just becoming apparent by the time of the Civil War, but agricultural surpluses had played a key role in the nation's foreign relations ever since Maryland and Virginia planters had tried to find markets outside the British Empire for the rich tobacco harvests in the seventeenth century. By 1870 the American economy depended so much upon foreign markets for the agricultural surplus that the economy's ups and downs for the next thirty years can be traced in large measure to the success or failure of marketing each year's wheat and cotton crops. No matter how many markets could be found, more always seemed to be needed. With the opening of vast new lands after 1865 and under the impact of farm mechanization, the production of wheat and cotton soared beyond all previous figures… Between 1869 and 1900 the home market bought between 75 per cent and 85 per cent of the total value of farm products, but the most important items of cotton, tobacco, and wheat depended much more on foreign markets… If foreign markets meant good instead of mediocre or poor profits for some industrialists, adequate markets abroad meant the difference between being solvent or bankrupt to many farmers."

For a while the great frontier of the American West provided new markets and sources of raw materials. But when in the 1880s many Americans feared that the frontier was closing, "they reacted in the classic manner of searching farther west for new frontiers, though primarily of a commercial, not landed, nature. This swept them into the Pacific and Asiatic area and hence into one of the maelstroms of world power politics." Another main thesis of the book is that as the internal frontier began to stagnate, an intensified threat to social order emerged in the form of "bankrupt farmers, unemployed laborers and miners, and bitter social critics including some of the foremost novelists of the day. Foreign policy formulators and many businessmen viewed expanding diplomatic [or imperialistic] interests as one way to ameliorate the causes of this discontent."

Already in the first chapter LaFeber gives a ton of evidence demonstrating industry's tremendous interest in foreign markets, and its increasing interest in enlisting the government in the service of this agenda. By the 1880s industry was also growing more favorable to the idea of free trade—low tariffs or no tariffs for the sake of cheaper raw materials, which, along with increasing mechanization, would soon enable American industrialists to undersell England anywhere in the world. For England still had overwhelming dominance of world trade, and industrialists wanted to end this.

"In the unfolding drama of the new empire William Henry Seward [Lincoln's Secretary of State] appears as the prince of players. Grant, Hamilton Fish, William M. Everts, James G. Blaine, Frederick T. Felinghuysen, and Thomas F. Bayard assume secondary roles. Although Seward left the stage in the first act of the drama, only a few of the other players could improve on his techniques, and none could approach his vision of American empire." In fact, his vision of empire (which was influenced by John Quincy Adams) dominated American policy for the next century—or longer. Imperial manifest destiny, world empires inexorably moving westward, Asia and the Pacific as America's destiny, etc. With Obama's "Pacific pivot," we can see that Seward was indeed far-seeing. His ambitiousness was breathtaking. Envisioned eventual annexation of Canada, Mexico, and Central America, bought Alaska in part as "a foothold for commercial and naval operations accessible from the Pacific States" (to quote Seward's son), wanted to hold islands in the Caribbean to protect an isthmian route to the Pacific and also prevent European powers from interfering with the Americas, prepared the way for the American embrace of Hawaii and the Midway islands, negotiated a treaty with China in 1868 that gave Chinese laborers almost unrestricted entry into the country so they could supply cheap labor to build railroads and the like, advocated high tariffs to protect small industries and attract foreign laborers (and also to give the federal government money for internal improvements, such as Quincy Adams had favored), etc. Seward is sort of the patron saint of modern American imperialism.

Grant and his Secretary of State Hamilton Fish continued the expansionist drive, into both the Pacific and especially Latin America. With regard to the latter, the U.S. "launched a four-pronged attack bearing all the characteristics of the new empire: attempted control of certain Caribbean islands, important for their strategic locations and raw materials; investment, notably in the new southwestern frontier of Mexico and Central America, by American capitalists; trade expansion…; and American control of an Isthmian canal. By 1904 the attack launched during the previous half century had won the field."

Secretary of State Evarts was important in his promotion of commercial empire and the expansion of trade. His 1880s successors Blaine and Frelinghuysen devoted much of their attention to finding Latin American markets for American goods, partly in the belief that the prosperity that could be secured by expanded foreign markets would mitigate internal social conflicts. For instance, Frelinghuysen negotiated bilateral reciprocity treaties with various Latin American countries to obtain lower tariffs on U.S. manufactures in return for lower tariffs on raw materials that the U.S. imported. He hoped thereby to draw these countries more closely into the U.S. sphere of influence and away from Europe. Wanted the benefits of annexation without the political burdens. Bayard, Cleveland's Secretary of State, "switched State Department attention from Latin America to the Pacific," such as Samoa and Korea.

The modern American navy began to take shape in the 1880s—which, incidentally, put an important vested interest behind the "New Navy," for it was decreed that all armor, steel, and ordnance for American ships had to be made in America. The construction of a great battleship fleet after 1890 "revealingly typifies the more ambitious qualities of American expansion in that decade" than in the

previous one. In fact, LaFeber concludes that "the years between 1850 and 1889 were a period of preparation for the 1890's."

Having considered the period of preparation, LaFeber turns first to the intellectual rationales for expansionism in the 1890s. One of them is associated with the name of Frederick Jackson Turner, though it was a common ideological current of the time. "An important part of the rationale for an expansive foreign policy in the 1890's was a fervent (though erroneous) belief held by many Americans that their unique and beneficent internal frontier no longer existed." The closing of the landed frontier supposedly necessitated the opening of a new commercial frontier. Other rationales were provided by influential vulgar ideologists like Josiah Strong and Brooks Adams, while Alfred Thayer Mahan, who was of more direct significance to policymakers, strategized about the importance of a navy and occupying strategic bases (though *not* actual colonies). Of course Social Darwinism and Anglo-Saxonism were of enormous importance as well.

On the beginnings of the modern battleship navy: "Commercial war could easily flash into a military conflict. This was the lesson Alfred Thayer Mahan taught in his influential writings published after 1890. Between 1889 and 1892 other new empire expansionists arrived at the same conclusion in a series of significant congressional debates. The result was the creation of the United States battleship fleet." Also submarines, heavy rapid-fire guns, smokeless powder, torpedoes, and heavy armor. The country's expanding foreign trade had to be protected, if necessary by raising blockades, attacking an enemy's coast, or even striking the first blow in a conflict. As Benjamin Harrison's Secretary of the Navy said in 1891, "the sea will be the future seat of empire. And we shall rule it as certainly as the sun doth rise." (Germans, of course, were starting to think along the same lines, building up their navy.)

Despite the general desire not to assume literal political control over territories, Harrison tried to annex Hawaii in early 1893. Americans already had a military base at Pearl Harbor (and another base in Samoa), but Harrison worried about the unpredictability of Hawaiian politics and the possibility that some other foreign power might become ascendant. He wanted Hawaii partly for its riches of sugar and rice, but especially because of "the islands' value as a naval base to protect the [planned] Isthmian route and as a coaling station on the avenues to Asia." To quote an administration spokesman (in all but name),

> …The necessity for new markets is now upon us, and with it the necessity for cultivating close commercial and political relations with the rapidly growing nations of South America and Australia and with the newly awakened empires of China and Japan. As a prime condition of this extending influence, the duty of controlling the Isthmian routes is clear to every intelligent mind… To render that control sufficient, the [American] sovereignty of Caribbean territory and of Hawaii is absolutely necessary.

In the end, Congress didn't want the problems of governing a multiracial Hawaiian population, particularly in the context of a depression, so annexation (as a territory, not yet a state) had to wait until 1898. The Harrison administration also tried to obtain strategic bases in Haiti and Santo Domingo but failed.

The most important prerequisite to achieving the empire that Harrison desired was "the formation of a consensus by important political and business leaders on the necessity of a more expansive foreign policy." This consensus resulted from the depression of 1893 to 1897. Economic analyses by the Cleveland administration, the business community, and leading congressional figures "led these three groups to conclude that foreign markets were necessary for the prosperity and tranquillity of the United States. These groups also drew the corollary that British commercial competition, especially in Latin America, endangered America's economic well-being." LaFeber continues:

> In their attempts to discover an antidote for the depression, the Cleveland administration and the business community could usefully draw on the facts of recent economic history. Crop failures and the collapse of the Baring Brothers banking house in England had sent western Europe spinning into a severe recession in 1890. Americans, however, had escape the crisis by exporting an abnormally large amount of their agricultural products… Again in 1892 European crops failed. American farm exports, finding excellent continental

> markets, once more reversed the gold flow [out of the U.S.]. Observers in business periodicals and in the Harrison administration…warned that only these exports shielded the United States from economic embarrassment.

A long and confusing discussion follows of the gold vs. silver currency controversy, tariffs, and the depression, but I'll skip that. Easier to understand is that business was investing ever more in Latin America, and industrialists were trying ever more vigorously to develop Latin American markets. The National Association of Manufacturers was founded in 1895 primarily with the goal in mind of expanding foreign markets; its constitution and opening convention looked to the government to improve market conditions and trade, through reciprocity agreements, a "judicious system of subsidies" to build a merchant fleet, a Nicaraguan canal, and the rebuilding of internal waterways. (Yes, what a shock, the organization that later was obsessively pro-"free market" when it came to governmental amelioration of labor conditions was absolutely anti-free market when it came to measures that would help business.) Foreign markets were all the more necessary at this time because the depression had shrunk the domestic market.

In early 1894, under pressure from business, the U.S. sent warships to Brazil to interfere with a rebellion occurring there. The result was that the rebels lost, and American trade benefited. Soon afterwards, the Cleveland administration intervened in Nicaraguan affairs and was able to maneuver England out of its strategic location in Nicaragua. In doing so, Cleveland's Secretary of State committed the U.S. to interfere in the country whenever American commercial or strategic interests were threatened. (American business had established banana plantations on an Indian reservation there, which now became a *de facto* American protectorate.)

In 1895–96 occurred the Venezuelan boundary crisis. "In the development of the new empire, only the economic effects of the 1893–1897 depression and the battle of Manila Bay in 1898 rank in importance with the Venezuela boundary crisis." This crisis had to do with a valuable stretch of Venezuelan territory next to British Guiana that both Venezuela and Britain laid claim to. The U.S., which even in its public opinion was growing increasingly angry at Britain's continual semi-violations of the Monroe Doctrine, was adamantly against the British claim. So Cleveland and his Secretary of State sent a couple of strongly worded letters to the British prime minister saying, in effect, "you can't have the territory because of the Monroe Doctrine!" Cleveland was even willing to risk war over the affair, and intimated so. In the end, a compromise was worked out according to which Britain got some of the disputed territory but not the most valuable parts. More importantly perhaps, Britain recognized America's dominance in the Western Hemisphere. Venezuela, incidentally, was consulted by neither the U.S. nor Britain in this whole affair.

As you know, it was during McKinley's administration that everything exploded. In 1897, German seizure of a key port in China menaced American trade and threatened the whole open-door policy that both Britain and the U.S. were determined to maintain. McKinley therefore began fortifying American naval power in the Pacific. His administration also paid close attention to the Philippine insurrection against Spanish rule that began in 1896, and decided that should war break out between Spain and the U.S. in Cuba it would attack the Philippines too. In 1897 McKinley submitted a treaty to annex Hawaii, which Congress approved in mid-1898. Influential sections of the business community, of course, supported annexation. "During the eighteen months before the United States went to war with Spain, American businessmen began their most intensive search for foreign markets." Trade journals were full of the drive for new markets, and celebrated the fact that American industry was continually pushing British industry out of some new area of the world. "When industrial employment began to rise in late 1897," LaFeber says, "observers quickly gave the enlarged foreign markets much of the credit."

The climax of all this semi-imperialism was the Spanish-American War. The Cuban revolution that had begun in 1895 was of grave concern to both Cleveland and McKinley because of the damage it was inflicting on American property, business, and interests, particularly the interest in economic prosperity. Neither administration was keen to get involved in the war or to annex Cuba, but by 1897 McKinley was demanding constructive action by Spain to end the war—or else. He pressured the Spanish government to enact reforms on the island that might mollify the rebels, and to some degree it did enact such reforms, but they didn't end the fighting. In early 1898 the *Maine* blew up and sank, but for a couple months McKinley

still resisted popular calls to go to war. By March, though, important sections of the business community wanted war (for various reasons—they thought it would mean full prosperity, it would head off a more radical social revolution, American annexation was the only way to have a stable government, it would end debilitating business uncertainty, etc.) and there were indications that the Republican party would do very badly in the 1898 elections if McKinley didn't go to war. Congress was also in a belligerent mood. So finally in April McKinley issued an ultimatum to Spain, which it didn't accept. As a result, war broke out.

The territories that the U.S. seized after the war were obtained "not to fulfill a colonial policy, but to use these holdings as a means to acquire markets for the glut of goods pouring out of highly mechanized factories and farms." For instance, Mark Hanna wanted "a strong foothold in the Philippine Islands [in order to] take a large slice of the commerce of Asia." Strategic bases were necessary in order to protect the nation's commerce.

Now reading the parts of *Poor People's Movements* that, for some reason, I haven't read yet. "Why did the Democratic party embrace the civil rights agenda in the late 1950s and 1960s, after so many decades of opposing it?" you ask. Good question. "Was it out of altruism or some sort of moral epiphany?" Stupid question. No. It was because of electoral conflicts and weakening party allegiances that resulted from the disruptive tactics of the civil rights movement. Southern whites were increasingly switching to the Republican party in the 1950s, in part because business and the rising white middle class were not very friendly to the party of the New Deal, and also because Democrats' large black constituency prevented the party from making bold statements against civil rights. But in the election of 1956 many blacks also defected from the Democratic party because of its tepid support for civil rights. So something had to be done. "Perhaps the party could afford southern defections, or black defections, but it could not afford both." Hoping to entice more blacks away from the Democrats, congressional Republicans submitted a civil rights bill in 1957 (breaking ranks with southern Democrats), which northern Democrats and Lyndon Johnson, Senate Majority Leader, supported. Thus was enacted the first civil rights bill since 1875, though it was largely symbolic. A second one, sponsored by the racist Eisenhower, was enacted in 1960, as Republicans continued to hope for black defections from Democrats.

As you know, Kennedy was quite passive on the civil rights issue as he tried to steer a path between liberal activists and racists. Some token advances, but little spontaneous enforcement of the law or encouragement to activists. The Freedom Rides forced the government to order the desegregation of all terminal facilities for both interstate and intrastate passengers, but the Kennedys encouraged activists to focus on voter registration rather than the highly polarizing issue of desegregation—in part because they realized that blacks in the South "represented a huge untapped pool of potential Democratic voters." But voter registration, too, elicited massive white violence and didn't have much success, so the administration effectively abandoned the activists it had said it would support. Still they pressed on, often with disruptive tactics, and eventually with mass marches that provoked widely publicized white violence. As the civil rights movement contributed to the rising tide of anger in northern ghettoes, and as northern whites increasingly supported the granting of political rights to southern blacks, "the balance of electoral considerations shifted decisively" in favor of protecting civil rights in the South. Local political leaders in the South, for their part, started to favor more moderate policies in order to attract northern business, which was repelled by racial turmoil and social instability. And so, etc. You know where the story is headed. Violence, marches, the deterioration of social order forced Congress to pass the civil rights acts of 1964 and 1965.

Somewhat less plausible is the authors' explanation of why the black movement ceased to be effective: it grew too "organized," so to speak. Activists and others were channeled into traditional electoral politics and other mainstream institutions. "Many other institutions [besides government] also began to admit blacks: business and industry responded to mass unrest by hiring blacks; institutions of higher education, themselves rocked by the struggles of the period, revised their admissions policies to admit more minority group members, some of whom had been in the front ranks of the civil rights struggle. Having gained entry to these institutions, blacks frequently formed 'caucuses' or developed other intra-institutional subgroups in order to exert 'black power.' In short, the society overtook the movement, depleting its strength by incorporating its cadres and by organizing blacks for bureaucratic and electoral politics." That

seems too pat. The co-optation and institutional diffusion of leaders and masses may have been part of the problem, but other factors were clearly at play too. (Such as violent repression.) Monocausal explanations of this sort of thing are insufficient.

But the book's main thesis is probably right: mass-based organizations of the poor to pressure political leaders tend to be less effective than mass mobilization for disruptive protests with the goal of creating a political or social "crisis." It was *disruption* that achieved the victories of the civil rights movement, the CIO, and the Depression's unemployed protests. Ella Baker criticized SCLC's philosophy of mobilizing thousands of people for big actions because it didn't cultivate local leadership or leave behind local organizations, but, well, it worked! It caused major disruptions in the South that necessitated federal action. If *confronting* power is better than *working with* (or lobbying) power, then surely widespread and large-scale confrontations are better than localized and small confrontations, such as Baker's philosophy might produce. –On the other hand, if you can create *many* nuclei of local activism, and if these nuclei all focus on disruptive actions that interfere with The Machine's functioning, then they, too, might be very effective.

Anyway, the chapter on the welfare rights movement of the 1960s is quite interesting, particularly in its description of the local welfare rights organizations that sprouted all over the country in the late 1960s. In many respects they were strikingly similar to the Unemployed Councils of the 1930s! For instance in their tactics: sit-ins, demonstrations, collective confrontations with welfare officials (which were notably successful). What an admirably turbulent decade the Sixties was! Thank god we're on the cusp of another such period.

Now Walter LaFeber's *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (1993). He interprets the history as consisting of several stages: *first*, the U.S.'s setting up of its Central American policy or "system" between the 1890s and World War II, a system that involved forcing a dependent status on Central America, limiting it to the production of food and raw materials, intervening militarily when necessary to keep it stable but then, by the 1930s, increasingly relying on dictators and indigenous militaries to do so (which was Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor" policy)[1] because blatant U.S. interventions caused too many problems; *second*, maintenance of the system under Truman and Eisenhower; *third*, updating of the system by means of the Alliance for Progress in the 1960s; *fourth*, collapse of the system in the late '60s and '70s, as the oppressed masses rose up; and I'll get to the later stages when I get to them.

One of the key means of "maintaining" the system, of course, was the innovation under Truman and Eisenhower of providing extensive military aid to Latin American countries—not for global or regional operations, but for "internal security." (Root out and destroy the Commies! And all leftists.) Latin American officers were to be trained at the School of the Americas in the Panama Canal Zone. "The Good Neighbor [policy] became less a policy of economic growth or reform than of military ties and leverage. And as the United States policy became militarized, it most directly appealed to, and necessarily counted on, Latin American dictators to protect North American interests." By the end of 1954, military dictators ruled thirteen of the twenty Latin American countries.

Side thought: one of the ironies of World War II is that most of the military, political, and economic leaders among the Allies were far more Nazi-like than democratic. They thought of themselves as defending democracy, but they were mostly rank authoritarians, racists, anti-Communists, imperialists, antisemites, and reactionaries. I recall that one of them said something like, "We're fighting the wrong enemy. We should be fighting the Communists—if it weren't for Hitler's megalomania." But actually, the leaders of the Soviet Union had almost the same authoritarian, imperialistic, racist, anti-democratic, anti-socialist values as the leaders of the U.S.

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[1] Another aspect of the Good Neighbor policy was that the government replaced American bankers as a source of funds. The Export-Import Bank was created in 1934 to provide credit to Central American governments so U.S. exporters could sell more goods overseas. (It gave loans for many infrastructural projects, to which strict political conditions were attached. E.g., U.S. materials had to be used in the projects, and the enterprises created had to fit into and couldn't compete with American businesses.)

Anyway, by the late 1950s the reactionary policies of the Eisenhower administration were contributing to political turmoil and economic decay in Latin America, which greatly worried Americans because a new upsurge of left-wing movements might take power. In 1958, Eisenhower—who for years had refused to give substantive economic aid to Latin America because of, you know, the free market and capitalism and his preference for military aid and killing people—finally agreed to the establishment of the Inter-American Development Bank, to give loans for infrastructure projects. This was a major departure in U.S. policy, which had favored ineffectual private investment. But Eisenhower refused to go farther than this, preferring to stick to his tried-and-false method of military support or intervention, as when he approved CIA plans to train Cubans for an invasion of Castro's domain. It was left to the Kennedy administration to try something bolder: the Alliance for Progress.

LaFeber introduces this program in a grand way: it stimulated high growth rates in a number of countries, including Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Costa Rica, at the same time that it inflamed severe political and social problems in the first three countries. "Ironically, it became the pivotal, perhaps even the essential, step on Central America's journey to the revolutions of the seventies and eighties." For the sake of heading off revolution, Kennedy wanted to pump $100 billion into Latin American development over ten years—$20 billion from the U.S., $80 billion from Latin Americans. With the support of indigenous social democratic groups, he hoped to weaken both dictators and the far left by building up stable middle classes. So, for instance, coffee stabilization agreements were worked out to raise prices (which had dropped rapidly) and rescue countries from balance-of-payments crises. "Security" was just as important as "development," so U.S. military aid increased 50 percent a year over the money granted under Eisenhower. "Military funds inundated small economies, transformed government budgets, and created a large military group trained by U.S. officers" in the School of the Americas and elsewhere. "The transformation of police forces was notable. Under the Agency for International Development, which operated the Alliance program in Washington, these forces learned to use gas guns, helicopters, and other anti-riot equipment. For this newly powerful elite, it proved to be only a short step to controlling dissent through sophisticated methods of torture." With the help of all this money and training, between 1961 and 1966 militaries overthrew nine Latin American governments. As for development, "Alliance funds in massive amounts went to U.S.-owned firms and to the Central American oligarchs that controlled banks and mercantile businesses, as well as the best tillable land." As always, the wealthy and politically connected benefited far more than the poor.

Lyndon Johnson was less enamored of the Alliance than Kennedy, so when he became president he reduced economic—though not military—aid. Relied, as had Eisenhower, on private capital and military regimes to accomplish development. So by the late sixties, "the Alliance's remnants consisted of its most dangerous parts: an emphasis on private investment that worsened the already glaring economic imbalance in Central America; a dependence on the military to maintain order in restless societies; and promises made repeatedly by Kennedy, Johnson, and other U.S. officials that raised hopes and aspirations. The first two were destroying the third. And as revolutionary conditions developed, the United States government stood aside, except for its support of the military." In many ways the Alliance actually accelerated and laid the basis for the coming revolutions, for example by mechanizing agriculture and forcing peasants into cities where they languished in unemployment. In Honduras (and elsewhere), "the post-1963 changes [in the Alliance's program] led to a stripping of the nation's wealth by foreign investors, the Hondurans' increased loss of control over their own banking and productive system, and major defeats for Honduran liberals… By 1968…the investment boom in commercial agriculture (especially in cattle and cotton) had led to an illegal expansion of large haciendas over peasant-tilled lands. The oligarchs' agents simply strung barbed wire around the area they wanted, then expelled any families found inside the barbed-wire compound. Peasants who tried to take wood from these areas were jailed on order of the new owner." Hmm… Remember the centuries of peasants' struggles in Europe against the privatization of forests? Funny how history is constantly rhyming with itself.

In Honduras, "unemployment rose 25 percent between 1961 and 1967, not counting the 150,000 coffee workers who earned wages only during the harvest." The situation wasn't helped by the fact that hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans were leaving their country to seek economic opportunities in

Honduras. With more competition from Salvadorans, it was even harder for Honduran peasants to find jobs in the cities. So—let's quote a great passage:

> …National campesino movements emerged to fight bared-wire and other incursions by the oligarchy. The new groups reoccupied land in force. The landowners promptly organized FENAGH (National Federation of Agriculturalists and Cattle Ranchers of Honduras) to discipline the peasants. FENAGH focused on attempts to turn poor Hondurans against the incoming poor Salvadorans. This tactic should have been effective since the latter took jobs and land from the former. But it failed. In a surprising turn, the campesinos banded together to protect each other. In one of many defiant gestures, the peasants moved back into the former lands in Choluteca, announcing that the enemy was not Salvadoran, but their own country's system…

But in 1969 the "soccer war" erupted:

> …When a soccer match between Salvador and Honduras ended in a bloody riot, Lopez's government [in Honduras] seized the opportunity to expel all Salvadorans. War broke out between the two nations. It ended after both sides suffered heavy casualties and the Central American Common Market began to break down. But FENAGH achieved its objectives. Ruthlessly expanding its export-crop operations into land long held by peasants, FENAGH finally succeeded in destroying united peasant opposition through the war against El Salvador.
>
> FENAGH, however, had to share the benefits with the already autonomous and virtually supreme Honduran army. The Alliance had set out to develop Honduran society, but ended by creating a highly efficient military force. The Alliance helped make such a force necessary, for the program's failure to diversify the Honduran economy led to an expansion of an export economy. That expansion in turn took lands from campesinos and set the class war in motion. The Alliance's post-1963 emphasis on private investment worsened the growing crisis, for it increased the nation's indebtedness, lessened Honduras's control over its own economy, paradoxically pulled wealth from the country while doubling U.S. investment, and—in all—helped create conditions that could lead to revolution.

In Guatemala, as elsewhere, no substantive land reform or tax reform occurred. Foreign capitalists were reluctant to invest because of political uncertainty, corruption, an unstable currency, and the small size of the internal market, but the little investment that did enter went into a few large firms that concentrated on exports, not on developing the domestic market. "Foreign-owned firms dominated the country's export trade. Taking control farther out of Guatemalan hands, they further skewed an already lopsided economy. Labor unions were impotent…" Insurgencies erupted in the 1960s, provoking brutal responses by the army that the U.S. had largely created since the mid-fifties. In fact, the military was ready to govern the country by 1963. "A military whose officers before 1954 had been attached to individual politicians became by the sixties an institutional force dedicated to its own preservation and prosperity. Its political tentacles reached down to the village level. From this point at least through the early eighties, Washington officials expressed severe reservations about the tactics and ambitions of the Guatemalan army, but they could do less and less about it. They were losing control of their own monster." On a less official level than the army the repression was even more brutal: private right-wing groups formed their own units to torture and murder students, Indians, and labor leaders suspected of sympathizing with the rebels. Military officers became major landholders themselves and formed close relationships with reactionary economic factions. To save himself, the civilian president gave the army total freedom to attack its enemies, which led to a bloodbath between 1967 and 1970.

In retrospect, the early 1970s were "the calm after the storms from the Alliance in the sixties, and before the terrors of revolution in the late seventies." Regimes seemed solidly in power. Nixon stepped up military aid to dictators (increasing their public debt). But the OPEC price shock proved devastating to Central American economies that were already at the breaking point because of rising military expenses and the enormous debts incurred to pay for the Alliance of Progress programs. "As money drained out of these small economies, they soon lacked the means to pay for U.S. food and industrial goods." With a growing urban proletariat, revolutionary pressures accumulated. Carter tried to punish Central American regimes for human rights abuses by cutting off military aid, but they responded by buying weapons from West European and Israeli suppliers and growing even more repressive at home. As the U.S. did little to change the terrible economic and political environment in Central America, Mexico and Venezuela, which had benefited from the rise in oil prices, emerged as relatively progressive counterweights to U.S. policy in the region.

But a more significant change was the rise of liberation theology. Consciousness-raising among the peasantry, base communities in the countryside to work with peasants, etc. "In Nicaragua, priests were instrumental in the revolution. At a critical moment they played the major role in transforming a narrow Marxist movement into a more moderate, broad-based, and powerful force. In Salvador, Archbishop Oscar Romero became increasingly critical of government-supported vigilante groups and the atrocities committed by the military. One group of Jesuits led the first strike in history in a large sugar mill and worked closely with a peasant union that supplied soldiers and supplies for a guerrilla unit." And so on. Of course all these priests were the target of violence.

I won't describe the course of the revolutions in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Will just note that Carter had a confused and ineffective policy towards them, at times denying military aid to the reactionary regimes and at times not. Supported Somoza until the end, then tried to get members of the barbarous National Guard into the Sandinista government. Gave military aid to the sadistic Salvadoran army in 1980. As for Guatemala, a huge earthquake in early 1976 played a role in the uprisings. Before 1976, the Indians who made up half the country's population had started to see their villages and traditions be destroyed "as the oligarch-military group seized Indian lands that seemed fertile or a likely spot to drill for oil. The army also brutally regimented villages in anti-guerrilla campaigns. In its rapacity, the government had thus not only opened up the Indian communities but also had made them enemies. The failure of the government to rebuild the villages after the 1976 earthquake only added to already great misery." LaFeber continues:

> But the Indians had begun to organize. International relief agencies appeared on the scene after the earthquake to do what the government refused to do, subjecting many villages to new political influences. Local priests provided leadership… For the first time in centuries, the Indians began to organize for a struggle. The country's political wars no longer involved merely one army faction against another. The revolutionary movement threatened to become a mass uprising.
>
> The economic crisis of the late seventies sharpened the conflict. Coffee and sugar earnings dropped more than 45 percent… But prices of such vital imports as food and energy soared. The poor not only became poorer, they also lost their land. Oil companies had started major exploration efforts in the early seventies… The oil discoveries set off a scramble for land in northern areas—precisely the region where revolutionaries grew in number. Mining of tungsten, nickel, and other minerals also focused on territory long held by Indians and other campesinos. Multinational corporations, in league with the Guatemalan military, forced people off land they had possessed for centuries…

Urban laborers trying to unionize were also subject to government violence. Rival factions of the elite even started killing each other as they competed for the country's land and mineral wealth in the context of an economic crisis.

As you know, American policy went downhill with Reagan. "Control of Central American policy was a payoff to militant conservatives for their support of Reagan. '[Alexander] Haig and [Thomas] Enders

realized they had to throw a bone to the right-wingers,' a conservative Senate staff member observed. 'They can't have the Soviet Union or the Middle East or Western Europe. All are too important. So they've given them Central America.'" The resulting history is too nauseating to relate, so I'll end here. The product of the 1980s was an utterly devastated region that has yet to escape from crisis and unimaginable misery.

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Was listening to Billy Joel's song "She's Always a Woman" on YouTube, with a beautiful accompanying video of black-and-white photos of exemplars of the sex. Angels. Saw a comment, sad but respectful, hiding a story behind it—poetry: "This song reminds me of the love of my life. She is an amazing, strong intelligent beautiful woman. As much as it hurts to never hear her voice again, I am so lucky to have known her. She carelessly cut me.[1] Out of her life. But she is the one for me. I could be with a million women, and I know it wouldn't be right. It was her. She was way too good for me. I miss her. Wish I could hear her amazing laugh again. She ruined women for me." The bittersweet poetry of life, of living.

Here are excerpts from a few random emails between an Italian friend and me: *[I deleted a couple of them]*

> *(She read the introduction to my dissertation and wrote some comments on it. Evidently its arguments went in one eye and out the other. Here are a couple excerpts from the emails.)*

(*Her*.) …Generally speaking, I had the impression that you should give readers further evidence. You'll probably have it, so you should just re-organize your arguments in a more convincing way. As you may have noticed, I tend to sympathize with Marxism and Marxists, meaning with class interpretation of historic phenomena. I believe, though, that historians should be very prudent in using Marxist categories, because I think that Marxism is not science. Although postmodernists seem to disagree with what I'm about to saying, history is a science, with its rules and (more or less conscious) limits. This means that there is a scientific method historian should follow in order to research and write about history. One of the rules that concern us is to avoid bias and prejudices as more as possible (completely is obviously impossible and counter-productive). I fear that to apply the Marxian scheme to a study can be both useful and dangerous. Useful because it helps us adopt a stimulating perspective. However, I also think that using this tool alone can reproduce bias. I don't think that class struggle is the only universal way to explain phenomena, and there've been lots of studies that show it. The world is a complex system of which we don't know all the variables. We can approximate and Marxism may be a good tool to do that, sure. But I don't know, I always fear I'm losing something when I adopt an exclusively-Marxist point of view. Variables such as religion, sex and others play also a role, a role that often is not secondary as Marxism suggests. So I'd be much more prudent than you in framing my research as "Marxist"…

(*Me*.) …Regarding Marxism, I agree it's not a science. It's a 'method,' a way of explaining society scientifically, or at least in as 'scientific' a way as can be done in the humanities and social sciences (which are much less 'scientific' than, say, physics). […] 'Marxism is biased, only one approach among many, etc.' But this is exactly what I was arguing against in the piece, this almost universal, relativistic, postmodern way of thinking among intellectuals (a way of thinking that effectively serves to uphold capitalism and its ideologies). And it's why I included the long Chomsky quotation that you didn't find convincing. -Here's one way to think about it: if, as you say, history is a science, then we ought to do history in a scientific way. So what is the scientific method? Basically, formulate an explanatory hypothesis and then argue for it by invoking evidence and logic. It so happens that historians rarely do this; instead, they just describe things that happened, interpret things that happened from a variety of different perspectives. 'This happened, then

[1] Reference to a lyric in the song.

this happened, and somebody thought about it in such-and-such a way, and it was gendered and also racialized, and a few other things happened...' Well, that isn't science in the strict sense. There is no hypothesis to be tested (except an intellectually insignificant one, e.g., such-and-such ideologies were important, or so-and-so was a significant figure in the history of such-and-such, etc.). There is no *explanatory* hypothesis, only, sometimes, a *descriptive* one (or more than one), and nearly always a vague and not-very-interesting one that serves merely as an excuse to amass and present a lot of data. This is what Chomsky has in mind when he says (in the quoted interview), "if you tried to do that in the sciences, you wouldn't even reach the level of Babylonian astronomy." You have to *explain* the data, which means applying certain hypotheses to it, such as historical materialism does.

In other words, what I was doing in the introduction was precisely to explain how history *can be* a sort of science. I set forth a couple of (Marxian) hypotheses, explained in an *a priori* way why they are of unique explanatory power, mentioned some scholarship that provides evidence to support my claim, and then said I'd provide further evidence in the dissertation. That is exactly how a scientific endeavor should proceed. The postmodernist 'epistemological relativism' of your statement that Marxism is only one way of interpreting society among many others is exactly *anti*-scientific, because, as Chomsky says in the quoted passage, the essence of science is to identify major principles, secondary principles, tertiary ones, and so on. In order to really understand something you can't do the politically correct thing of treating several interpretations as equally valuable; you have to rank their explanatory power, their relevance, etc. And what I'm arguing is that the Marxian schema is of greater power and relevance to my subject matter than considerations of gender, sexuality, and race are. That's an unfashionable argument to make, but I think that usually it's the unfashionable interpretation that is the best one.

Of course I do bring in considerations of race and gender, discussing them in some depth--class is obviously not *everything*!--but I treat them as what they are, secondary to class. (For example, as I mentioned, you can't understand why certain ideologies of race and gender prevail nowadays without invoking objective class structures, inequalities of wealth and power that have caused those particular ideologies to be propagated:

> ...Even ideologies of race, nation, and gender are largely a product of class—of slavery and its aftermath in the U.S., of European imperialism, of attempts by the Victorian upper class to control working-class women's lives and sexuality. In the case of religious fundamentalism in the U.S., for example, historians have shown that since early in the twentieth century, and especially since the 1970s, conservative sectors of the business community have subsidized right-wing evangelical Christianity in order to beat back unionism and liberalism, which have been tarred and feathered as communist, socialist, godless, etc. More generally, for centuries the ruling class (which is to say the aggregate of those who occupy the dominant positions in a society's dominant mode of production, and so have shared interests) has propagated divisive ideas of race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and gender in order, partly, to fragment the working class and so control it more easily and effectively...

You can say that Marxian ideas are mere 'biases' or 'prejudices,' but that's like saying any scientific hypothesis is nothing but a bias or prejudice. The theory of natural selection by random variation is just a 'bias.' --And that's what a lot of postmodernists, and Creationists, do say! Are you sure that's the kind of company you want to keep?)…[1]

[1] Of course the social and natural sciences aren't quite the same, since the latter have the advantage of dealing with a deterministic subject-matter, unlike the former. Questions of interpretation and judgment, "emphasis" and "bias"—"you should say more about race, etc."—therefore are more legitimate in the social than the natural sciences. Nevertheless, one has to be careful about using terms like "bias" to describe materialistic scholarship. For it isn't mere

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It can be hard to experience a moment of *intuitive understanding* that the self is a fiction, but maybe this will help. Just imagine a person undergoing brain surgery while conscious, the top of his skull removed and his brain showing while he talks so that doctors can make sure they aren't doing any damage. Or watch a video of that on Youtube. When I watch such a video, it strikes me with some force that the self and the mind are mere neurochemical processes, that there is *nothing there*, so to speak. Tongue moving, vocal cords vibrating, lips opening and closing, a billion mini-bursts of electricity in that soft slimy white matter…altogether a puppet with no puppeteer, the puppet somehow its own puppeteer.

And when I think about that, I find less frustrating and bewildering human mediocrity. The lack of free will, the stupidity, the animalistic assholishness, the moral and intellectual cowardice—people are *determined*, mere "secretions of the brain," brute matter, so it's all rather appropriate.

Here's an example of how things can be interpreted from more than one perspective, and how it can be hard to decide which perspective is better or truer. Writers in the early 1930s remarked that it was very rare to see women in breadlines. It was almost always only men. Why? Some writers attributed it to women's *pride*: women believed that "any public parade of poverty is degrading," so they tried to make do on their own. From this perspective you could say that women tended to be "prouder" than the men who displayed their poverty in breadlines. On the other hand, you could just as easily say that the explanation is women's *vanity*: they're more concerned about their appearance than men, how others view them, and so would be more likely to feel harsh self-contempt just because others looked at them with contempt as they stood in the line. From this perspective, it's the men who have a more "noble" attitude, not caring so much about how they look but just acting in a rational way (getting bread and soup to assuage their hunger). Especially when it comes to value-judgments like this, you can often (or always?) interpret behavior in two very different ways. So where does that leave us? It would seem that both interpretations have merit: the women *were* proud, after all, too proud to stand in those lines, but they *were* vain at the same time, such that their pride and vanity were inextricably united. They were both more and less "admirable" than the men. Which means…what? That—as sophisticated psychologists will tell you—our value-judgments say more about *us*, our perspectives and backgrounds and biases, than about the person we're judging. There *is* no "reality" in these cases. The very valorization of "pride" and denigration of "vanity" is nothing but a subjective response, a "social construction," that cannot correspond to reality in the way we think it can.

All of our "discourse" reaches out for objectivity, but an incredible amount of it is just imaginary. (On the other hand, a painstaking analysis might show that an incredible amount of it is indeed objectively true or false.)

Here's something we don't often think about but should: each of us is a universe. A walking, talking universe. Apparently about 37 trillion cells, together with trillions more bacteria, all functioning together in an impossibly perfect cosmic system that, incredibly, lasts not a mere few seconds before it collapses from the impossibility but rather up to a *hundred years or more*. This entity that is orders of magnitude more complex than should be possible. When one dies, an entire universe dies.

June, July

Various articles. Todd Moody, "Distinguishing Consciousness" (1986). Richard Rorty, "What Do You Do When They Call You a 'Relativist'?" (1997). (Silliness: "What should Brandom's strategy be when charged with a relativistic disbelief in the reality of intellectual progress? The obvious option is Kuhn's: 'to substitute evolution-from-what-we-do-know for evolution-toward-what-we-wish-to-know,' thereby

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bias that leads Marxists to prioritize class.

switching from progress toward a *focus imaginarius* to improvement on the historical past. This amounts to switching from pride in being closer to Reality to pride in being farther from the cavemen." As if pride in being farther from the cavemen isn't precisely a result of thinking that our beliefs are *truer, closer to reality*, than the cavemen's!) Don Ihde, "Postphenomenological Research" (2008). T. L. S. Sprigge, "Consciousness" (1994). C. Ram-Prasad, "Saving the Self? Classical Hindu Theories of Consciousness and Contemporary Physicalism" (2001). Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like To Be a Bat?" (1974). (Says some of the same things I said more succinctly in the first few pages of my paper on the mind-body problem. It's pretty incredible that Nagel's paper was extremely influential, since the gist of its argument is utterly obvious to anyone who can think straight. But, again, so-called philosophers are little more than institutional role-bearers, so an argument that doesn't conform to current institutional norms—groupthink—will seem bizarre or revelatory.)

Todd Moody, "Naturalism and the Problem of Consciousness" (2007). Wrongheadedness: "I agree with John Searle that '[W]e really have no notion of the mental apart from our notion of consciousness' (18). That is, what makes a state a mental state in the first place is that at least some states of that type are conscious states. They occur 'in consciousness,' as we say. We *experience* them." Years ago I sometimes wrote as if 'mental' and 'conscious' were effectively synonymous—because I thought, and think, that the so-called mind-body problem is really the consciousness-body problem (or "mystery," as Chomsky prefers)—but that was an unjustified restriction of the concept of mental or mind, which is broader than that of consciousness. Nearly all mental activity is not and can not be accessible to consciousness. I don't know why philosophers dogmatically like to identify mind with consciousness. (Leibniz was already beyond that.)

Martin Morris, "On the Logic of the Performative Contradiction: Habermas and the Radical Critique of Reason" (1996).[1] Like much of this Continental stuff it's almost unreadable. One is, as ever, tempted to say of all this "critique of reason" crap from Nietzsche through the Frankfurt School to poststructuralists and postmodernists—reason is domination, an expression of power-relations, exploitative, mythological, oversimplifying ("language lies"), irrational, full of gaps and silences and leaps of faith, riddled with all sorts of "dialectical" contradictions and negations and arbitrariness—including Habermas's attempt to rehabilitate reason or whatever his project was with the "theory of communicative action," that it's of little *intrinsic* worth but is significant only as an expression of certain social or institutional pathologies. And clearly one ought to be very skeptical of anything that is apparently so hard to communicate lucidly. But as a semi-Hegelian I'm convinced there must be *some* merit to every major philosophical movement, especially one that, in various forms, has lasted for so many decades. There's surely something worth salvaging in all this skeptical Continental stuff. Buried in it are important truths. It only needs someone with the ability to think and write clearly and unpretentiously to sort through it and extract the rational kernel. (Ha, irony; I'm so clever.) And I have to admit, when you're trying to think the limits of reason, the nature of reason, you're engaged in a rather difficult task.

Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (2012). Unconvincing. Somewhat like Moody's paper, it assumes that because *to us* the relation between consciousness and matter is utterly mysterious, scientific naturalism—materialism—is fatally flawed. In other words, because we can't understand how material processes give rise to consciousness (or intentionality or value), materialism must be false. So we have to turn to…something else. The obvious alternative isn't even considered, namely that the problem isn't with materialism but with the limitations of human cognition. The fact that we can't conceive how matter, through evolution, gives rise to mind doesn't entail that matter doesn't give rise to mind.

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[1] On the notion of performative contradiction, which is a common and obvious criticism of postmodernism and all its forebears, such as Adorno: "a radical critique of reason purporting to show that there exist no theoretical or philosophical 'foundations' that can secure the 'rationality' of reason beyond its historical, and therefore particular, embodiment, nevertheless performs a 'rational' critique by doing so and hence is said to involve a 'performative' contradiction of inconsistency."

Likewise, Moody—and apparently most or all other philosophers of mind—takes it as uncontroversial that there is no *necessary* connection between consciousness and its neural correlates. It's the old Kripkean argument. As Nagel says, "experience of taste seems to be something extra, contingently related to the brain state—something *produced* rather than constituted by the brain state. So it cannot be identical to the brain state in the way that water is identical to H_2O." Or, to quote Moody, "there is nothing about neural states that necessitates their being correlated with conscious states." This leads to the conclusion that, from the perspective of evolution (natural selection), consciousness is inessential. "In terms of detecting the environment and driving behavior, those neural states would be just as good—empirically indiscernible, in fact—even if they were not associated with consciousness, or even if consciousness did not exist at all." So there's no reason why it shouldn't have been zombies that evolved rather than conscious beings (since all that natural selection needs is the neural state; it doesn't need the conscious state contingently associated with it). Thus, "evolutionary theory offers [and can offer] no explanation of why consciousness exists at all."

To refute this argument, all you have to say is that the apparent non-identity of a conscious state with its neural correlate is a reflection of human ignorance. *To us*, yes, consciousness is nothing like a physical state of the brain. But there is no reason to say it *can't* be a particular type of emergent state of the brain. That the experience of taste *seems* different from a brain state doesn't mean it *is* different. Anyway, I answered the Kripkean objection to the identity theory ten years ago or so when discussing *Naming and Necessity*.

(As Nagel says, the Kripkean point is basically Descartes' argument for dualism. "Descartes said that since we can clearly conceive of the mind existing without the physical body, and vice versa, they can't be one thing." And that's true: consciousness is different from the body, from the brain—an extended, massive thing, unlike consciousness—from neurons, etc. But this doesn't mean it has to be different from the emergent state of billions of nearly instantaneous interactions between cells in the brain. It could very well *be* that, since we don't have such a clear intuition about the nature of that sort of emergent state as we do about the body in its massive physicality.)

On alternatives to some kind of teleological explanation of consciousness and cognition (which he favors), Nagel says this: "First, there is the hypothesis that the initial appearance of a code-governed [self-]replicating system [i.e., life] that started the evolutionary process was a cosmic accident, and that subsequent accidental mutations provided the set of successive candidates on which natural selection operated to generate the history of life. This hypothesis makes the outcome too accidental to count as a genuine explanation of the existence of conscious, thinking beings as such." Um, what? Why? How? Huh? Because an explanation incorporates an element of chance it isn't an explanation? I have to congratulate Nagel on his discovery of this odd new law of logic.

Published another article (links deleted below):

Liberal Faux-Outrage over Freedom of Speech

One cannot but be awestruck by the hypocrisy of intellectuals who pretend to adhere to points of principle--for transparently partisan ends.

A recent manifestation of the distinguished tradition of elite hypocrisy is Nicholas Kristof's two-columns-long exhortation to liberals and leftists (whom he characteristically conflates) that they be more tolerant of conservatives. Thus he joins a growing army of fellow intellectual luminaries--including Jonathan Chait, Catherine Rampell, Edward Luce, Damon Linker, Greg Lukianoff, Jonathan Haidt, and many others (Jerry Seinfeld, Donald Trump, etc.)--who bemoan the rise of an intolerant political correctness on social media and university campuses.

"On campuses at this point," Kristof laments, "illiberalism is led by liberals." Conservatives often feel discriminated against, are less likely to be hired in certain departments, and sometimes provoke student protests if they're scheduled to give a talk on campus. "[E]ven Democrats like Madeleine Albright, the first

female secretary of state, have been targeted [for protest]," Kristof writes, as if the absurdity and injustice of such targeting are too obvious to merit comment.

In a similar vein, other "liberals" denounce the far left for not respecting the free-speech rights of its opponents. The most obvious example is the wave of outrage that followed Chicago students' shutting down of Trump's rally on March 11. They were denying his right to free expression! "Shutting down Trump rallies is a dangerous, illiberal, self-defeating tactic," Jonathan Chait tweeted, as Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) admonished activists to take their grievances with Trump to the ballot box, not the barricade. "Confine protests to the marketplace of ideas!" the liberal elite shouted in chorus.

(Evidently this highly educated--indoctrinated--sector hasn't learned one of the clearest lessons of history, that progress happens not through ideas battling it out in some ethereal Platonic realm in the liberal imagination but through disruptive protest, popular struggles sustained over decades and centuries. The very democracy that the intellectual class pretends to cherish and to want to guard against "illiberal" activists was achieved by generations of activists throwing their bodies on the line in challenges to mainstream norms of propriety.)

The proper response to such liberal and conservative complaints about a rising left-wing generation is not to let oneself be dragged into a debate about activists' tactics or the excesses of political correctness; rather, it is simply to point out that rank hypocrisy scarcely deserves a response at all.

The Kristofs and Chaits are right that our society routinely violates the principle of free speech on a massive scale. What they seem not to recognize is that this is nothing new. It has always done so, since before the country's founding. Suppressing free speech is more American than apple pie. The aggrieved, however, have typically not been the Madeleine Albrights and Donald Trumps of the world, or the white male Republicans who don't feel welcome in an anthropology department; they have been the millions of dissenters from mainstream ideologies and institutions.

They have been the workers slaughtered for mobilizing against employers, and the IWW soapbox orators imprisoned for exercising their right to free speech on street corners. They have been the thousands of people locked up for opposing World War I, and the civil rights protesters of the 1960s violently attacked for marching against racism.

They have been the Fred Hamptons murdered by the state for organizing inner-city African-Americans.

More recent examples are not hard to come by. For truly massive and systematic suppression of viewpoints, Kristof need look no farther than his own newspaper. The perspectives of labor unions, for instance, are, as we know, virtually anathema to the corporate media, from the *New York Times* to the *Chicago Tribune*, from CNN to Fox. Were it not for marginal organizations like *Labor Notes*, *In These Times*, and *Nation of Change*, labor stories would suffer an almost complete media blackout. Which amounts to a blackout of the views and interests of tens of millions of people. This counts as rather severe censorship.

Or, if academia is what we're concerned about, consider the countless scholars who have been punished for expressing politically incorrect opinions--incorrect because they were too left-wing. How many of the elite public figures wringing their hands now over left-wing "intolerance" leapt to the defense of Steven Salaita when the University of Illinois fired him for angry tweets about Israel's Gaza massacre in 2014? How many defended Ward Churchill's right to free speech when he was fired for suggesting that some of the victims of 9/11 were complicit in American imperialism? Was Nicholas Kristof publicly outraged when Norman Finkelstein was denied tenure at DePaul for repeatedly criticizing Israel?

Who criticized MIT when its political science department denied Thomas Ferguson tenure explicitly because of his materialistic scholarship? (See *Understanding Power*, p. 243.) Which *New York Times* or *New Republic* intellectuals were scandalized by academic persecution of the brilliant materialist historian David F. Noble?

In general, it is hardly news that elite intellectual culture suppresses writers and ideas on the political left. How friendly, after all, has the mainstream media been to pillars of the left from Noam Chomsky to Glenn Greenwald (not to mention leftists without such name recognition)? The obviousness

of these points, however, doesn't mean we shouldn't call out the guardians of ideological orthodoxy on their hypocrisy and cowardice when they publish columns like Kristof's "The Liberal Blind Spot."

The proper course of action for people who genuinely care about free speech and healthy intellectual debate--i.e., who are not cynically exploiting the issue for ideological ends--is to defend, first and foremost, the free expression of the relatively powerless, not the powerful. It is sheer farce to complain about the occasional mild "censorship" (by a few university departments or students) of businessmen, politicians, conservative intellectuals, and racists if one does not first devote overwhelming attention to the systemic censorship of anti-establishment views.

So, to sum up, the appropriate left-wing response to the emerging fad of denouncing "political correctness" for its alleged shutting down of debate is to tell the whiners, "Yes, you have the right to speak, but until you defend free speech consistently and on *principle*, you don't have the right to be taken seriously."

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Reading Bruce Nelson's *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (1988). Harry Bridges was awesome, at least before World War II.

Here's something I've never seen addressed or even mentioned by any scientist or cognitive psychologist (except indirectly): how can one possibly connect the domain of cognitive structures, computations, and so on to the domain of neurobiology? There seems no way to do so, no way to explain how mental structures arise out of biological processes. How can you even go about studying that (the instantiation of these higher-level structures in neural processes)? I guess this is basically just the "explanatory gap," i.e., the mind-body problem, but it seems like a somewhat different angle on it. Where do you even begin in trying to find out how the brain makes computations? There's no starting-point! The only biological data we have are…neural structures, electrochemical impulses, and the like. How do you get from *that* to—computations? Or, for instance, where do you even begin in trying to explain why people are mentally different from each other—why one person is good at math, another at poetry, etc.? How are those sorts of things coded in cells (or in interactions between cells)? How can you go about *finding out* how they're coded in biology? Like, *what is going on* when certain cells specialize in one area, other cells in another area?

The only person I've seen come close to making some of these points is Chomsky. Not surprisingly. He also seems to be one of the few who appreciates how inconceivable it is that brain scientists will ever be able to explain *choice*. There's no apparent way even to address that problem. When you decide to do something…there's no way to investigate what's going on. (How the impulse originated, how it was 'decided upon,' etc.) Partly because, in fact, there's no way to investigate how a thought is manifested on the neural level. Or, rather, how neural impulses give rise to a specific thought. There's no way to show how biology produces *meaning*.

In other words, while to some extent we can discover neural correlates, we can't really *explain* anything having to do with higher mental processes.

Sophie Wahnich's *In Defence of the Terror: Liberty or Death in the French Revolution* (2003/2012). A thoughtful and imaginative historico-philosophical analysis, "defending" the Terror (and the September massacres, etc.) by contextualizing it in terms of its emotional logic, so to speak. But not just emotions, also certain aspects of the revolutionary value-system, as well as immediate political circumstances, of course. Wahnich makes it clear that any simple or reflexive condemnation of the Terror is ignorant and ridiculous. For instance, in part it was a way of *controlling* and *limiting* violence, by making it unnecessary for the people to engage in massacres like those of September 1792 in order to avenge wrongs that oppressors and counterrevolutionaries had committed against the *patrie*, against liberty and justice. Henceforth (as the revolutionaries saw it) it would be the revolutionary tribunal, not the people, that would carry out the terrible duty of avenging wrongs against humanity and protecting the *patrie*. And if there were no tribunal to do that, it was thought that the people might well take matters into their own hands again and be even more violent. –Anyway, aside from all this, it's rather easy to defend the Terror, except for the

Great Terror after 22 Prairial. France, and particularly the Republic, was in a moment of extraordinary crisis. Even just considering the enormous pressure from the *sans-culottes* for such a policy, the Terror was probably necessary for the survival of the regime. And it facilitated the victories in the foreign wars and civil wars.

(It seems to me that the common comparison of the Terror to Soviet totalitarianism or the Gulag is problematic. The social contexts, political contexts, and "symbolic universes" were quite different. Doubtless one can find resemblances, but how meaningful they are is another question.)

Random interesting quotation from René Girard: "The penal system has no principle of justice essentially different from the principle of vengeance. The same principle is at work in both cases, that of violent reciprocity or retribution. Either this principle is just, and justice is already present in vengeance, or else there is no justice in either case. The English expression for vengeance is that someone 'takes the law into his own hands.'" That seems rather true. The other obvious principle of the judicial system is rehabilitation, but mere rehabilitation without punishment is surely not justice. Some sort of reciprocity or retribution is necessary, so as to honor the outraged dignity of the victim.

Wahnich: "The revolutionary Terror, which is attacked for its revolutionary tribunal, its law of suspects and its guillotine, was a process welded to a regime of popular sovereignty in which the object was to conquer tyranny or die for liberty. This Terror was willed by those who, having won sovereign power by dint of insurrection, refused to let this be destroyed by counterrevolutionary enemies. The Terror took place in an uncertain struggle waged by people who tried everything to deflect the fear felt towards the counterrevolutionary enemy into a terror imposed on it. This enemy, for its part, tried everything to bring the Revolution to an end. The greatest danger was then that of a weakening of the revolutionary desire—a discouragement, a corruption of the founding desire. It was this danger that haunted those actors most committed to the revolutionary process.

"This is why the Terror was a deliberate self-constraint: it was not just a policy of arbitrary violence or extreme fear to intimidate its enemies. [In other words, the thinking was 'We have to terrorize, however inhumane it may be, in order to stay committed to the revolutionary ideals, to not soften or fail!'] It was the historic moment when the sovereign violence of 'making die' was that of a people driven to make use of it to maintain the extraordinary claim to have conquered sovereignty."

In the case of the Terror, as in the case of many other political contexts, a purely materialistic analysis won't do. One has to bring in symbolism, idealism, ideology. There was a definite class element, but that wasn't everything.

Karl Kautsky's *Foundations of Christianity: A Study in Christian Origins* (1908). Quite good. Despite his flaws and mistakes (both intellectual and political), Kautsky was a remarkable person and a serious scholar. –Of course there's a certain primitiveness, compared to present-day "sophistication," in his scholarship and writing, but there's also a directness, a bluntness, and a relative profundity and pithiness of thought. Intuitive insights, breadth of thinking, bold materialistic hypotheses suggested in passing. (But it's unfortunate he used the terminology of an ancient "proletariat" in his analysis of Christianity, since that made possible the willful misrepresentation of his work by later anti-Marxists. Not only was he perfectly aware that what he calls the Roman "proletariat" had very little in common with the modern industrial working class; he actually insisted on it. Nothing is more foreign to Marxism than a drawing of straightforward parallels between the present and the distant past.)

Interesting discussion of the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots. The Zealots! I'm a fan of the Zealots. Rebels, insurrectionists, against the incredible oppression of the Romans, though they were inevitably defeated in 70 A.D. when Jerusalem was destroyed. "Not the entire Jewish population of Jerusalem continued for three years, until September, 70 A.D., to fight the hopeless battle against the superior army in the bravest, most obstinate and most brilliant manner, covering every inch of ground with corpses, before it yielded, exhausted by famine and disease, and was consumed in the burning ruins. The priests, the scribes, the merchants, had for the most part found safety early in the siege. It was the petty artisans and shopkeepers as well as the proletarians of Jerusalem who became the heroes of their nation, together with the proletarianized peasants of Galilee who had cut their way through to Jerusalem."

Judea in and after the time of Jesus was a land of misery and rebellion, so it isn't surprising that the early Christians were inspired in part by class hatred. You can even see this in the Gospel of Luke and the Epistle of James. With some justice, Kautsky says, "Few are the occasions on which the class hatred of the modern proletariat has assumed such fanatical forms as that of the Christian proletariat." By the time of the Gospel of Matthew, which, according to Kautsky (and he might be wrong), was written decades after Luke's, the element of class hatred had to be minimized, since "wealthy and cultured persons had begun to seek contact with Christianity, and many a Christian propagandist began to feel the need of putting the Christian doctrine more amiably in order to attract these people." So whereas Luke says, e.g., "Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled; blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh…but woe unto you that are rich: for ye have received your consolation; woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep," the Sermon on the Mount takes a different form in Matthew. "Matthew has Jesus say: 'Blessed are the poor *in spirit*, for theirs is the Kingdom of *Heaven*… Blessed are they who are hungry and thirsty *for justice*, for they shall have their fill.'" Ha! They'll have their fill of justice. Ridiculous bowdlerization. Especially since "the Greek word translated by 'have their fill' was used mostly of animals, being applied to humans only in a contemptuous or ludicrous sense to designate a base mode of stuffing one's belly. The fact that the word occurs in the Sermon on the Mount also is a suggestion of the proletarian origin of Christianity, the expression having probably been current in the circles from which it was drawn, to indicate a full appeasement of bodily hunger. But it becomes ridiculous when applied to the satisfaction of a hunger for justice."

How likely is it that these points are made by any contemporary mainstream Biblical scholars?

There's also some fascinating detective work in Kautsky's rather persuasive argument that Jesus was actually a violent rebel, a Zealot or some such person. Arguments about the clumsy editing of the Gospels by later Christians who wanted to shape Jesus into a peaceful, politically submissive figure. The incredible contradictions of the New Testament are partly a result of this reshaping of Jesus.

Interesting analysis of the story of Christ's passion. Kautsky's dissection of it starts with the split between the original Jewish Christians and the pagan Christians. For many reasons there developed hostility between them, and the pagan Christians shed much of the Jewish background of Christianity. After the destruction of Jerusalem, the pagan (more "universalist") version triumphed and the nationalistic Jewish version died out. But since there was now no provincial center of resistance to Rome (as Judea had been), and since the particularly rebellious Jewish Christianity disappeared, Christianity became ever more submissive, even servile, towards the Romans. ("Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's," etc.) Jesus had been crucified probably because he had tried to foment violent rebellion against Rome; that is, the fault lay with the Romans, not the Jews. But the pagan Christians wanted to be on good terms with Roman authorities, so they had to twist the story around and blame the Jews for Christ's crucifixion, not the Romans. But why would the Jewish masses have any reason to want Jesus dead? He said he was the king of the Jews, which is to say their leader in the struggle for independence—which the masses desperately wanted, because they hated their Roman masters. Jesus was on their side (even if he was not in fact a very successful or famous leader). For Pilate, though, the case was clear. "As a representative of the Roman power, he was merely doing his duty in having the rebel Jesus executed."

The account in the Gospel, on the other hand, is absurd. It was unheard of that an official of the emperor would ask the masses of the people what was to be done with the accused. Pilate thought Jesus was innocent and yet had him killed just because a dirty rabble demanded it?! "Matthew assigns a most ridiculous role to Pilate: a Roman judge, a representative of the Emperor Tiberius, lord of life and death, begs a popular gathering in Jerusalem to permit him to acquit a prisoner, and on their deciding negatively, replies: 'Well, slay him, I am innocent of this blood!' But no quality could more violently contradict that of the historical Pilate than the clemency suggested in the Gospels. Agrippa I, in a letter to Philo, calls Pilate 'an inexorable and ruthlessly severe character,' and accuses him of 'corruption, bribery, violence, theft, manhandling, insults, *continuous executions without sentence*, endless and intolerable cruelties.'" The central government at Rome even had to recall him (in 36 A.D.) because of his ruthlessness! "And we are asked to believe that this man was exceptionally just and kind in the case of the proletarian seditionist Jesus,

besides showing a degree of consideration for the wishes of the people that was of fatal outcome for the accused!"

Kautsky continues to expose the absurdities of the story in masterly fashion. His points are almost numberless, but here are just a few more:

> The evangelists depict for us a mob that hates Jesus to such an extent that it would rather pardon a murder than him; the reader will please remember, a *murderer*—[apparently] no more worthy object of clemency was available—and is not satisfied until Jesus is led off to crucifixion.
>
> Remember that this is the same mob that only yesterday hailed him as a king with cries of hosanna, spread garments before his steps and greeted him jubilantly, without the slightest contradicting voice. And it was just this devotion on the part of the mob that constituted—according to the Gospels—the cause for the desire on the part of the aristocrats to take Jesus's life, also preventing them from attempting to arrest him by daylight, making them choose the night instead. And now this same mob appears to be just as unanimous in its wild, fanatical hatred against him, against the man who is accused of a crime that would make him worthy of the highest respect in the eyes of any Jewish patriot: the attempt to free the Jewish community from foreign rule.

And how did this astonishing mental transformation take place? Luke and John give no explanation, and Mark only says, "The high priests incited the multitude against Jesus." (That's basically what Matthew says too.) Somehow, with no motive at all, people were manipulated into violently hating the man they had practically worshiped the day before.

But, after these remarkable fictions invented by the evangelists to present the Jews as the most evil scum of humanity, the original, true story peeks through for a moment: "Jesus is derided and maltreated by the soldiers of the same Pilate who has just declared him innocent. Pilate now has his soldiers not only crucify Jesus, but first has him scourged and derided as King of the Jews; a crown of thorns is put on his head, a purple mantle folded about him, the soldiers bend the knee before him, and then they again beat him upon the head and spit on him. Finally they place upon his cross the inscription, 'Jesus, King of the Jews.'" *These* things probably really happened, and were too deeply rooted in the oral history to be deleted by the writers of the Gospels. Here the Romans again appear as Jesus's bitter enemies, "and the cause of their derision as well as of their hatred is his high treason, his claim to be King of the Jews, his effort to shake off the Roman yoke."

Since the story of Christ's passion has been of incalculable importance in causing Jew-hatred for two millennia, the original Christian writers who framed it in that way (during a time of universal hatred and persecution of the Jews—so their invention didn't come out of nowhere, and was widely accepted) have a lot to answer for. Including the Holocaust.

September–December

In Manhattan. [I moved to New York to escape Chicago.]

Staughton Lynd's classic *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism* (1968). Thoughtful philosophical analyses that set the Declaration of Independence in its Enlightenment context. It was a somewhat Lockean document, but not entirely. "In the mid-eighteenth century (as in the mid-twentieth) a sophisticated social science viewed with amused contempt any argument which failed to recognize that what is held good in one culture may be considered bad by another: that ethics are determined by environment. The 'best minds' of the Enlightenment came to believe that the state of nature, the social contract, and the rights of man—in short, the apparatus of John Locke's political philosophy—were human inventions. To grasp the significance of the Declaration as a source of revolutionary ideas one must first grasp equally firmly that from the standpoint of the ethical relativism of a Montesquieu, Voltaire, or Hume

it seemed a piece of provincial propaganda, charming perhaps, but founded on fiction and unworthy of serious intellectual attention. It is not untrue to say that the language of the Declaration is the language of Locke; but to say no more than that ignores the fact that by the third quarter of the eighteenth century the natural rights philosophy had been seriously called into question, and required to be restated in a way that incorporated the insights of its critics. The distinctive qualities of the Declaration are the product of that struggle."

Locke's old ideas were remodeled by Revolutionary radicals. "Locke, who blamed poverty on the poor, sought to protect all forms of property including chattel slavery, and took it for granted that government must be the business of educated gentlemen, would have been horrified to find his doctrine turned [by, e.g., Thomas Paine] toward the advocacy of common sense, government by common men, finally even common property." How did that transformation take place? The preparatory steps occurred mainly in England, "among a group of radical Englishmen associated with non-Anglican (Nonconformist or Dissenting) Protestant denominations such as the Quakers, to whom Paine's father belonged. These men transferred to secular political discourse that reliance on the individual conscience of uneducated men for which they had contended in religion. Above all they broke with the Lockean thesis that man is the passive product of circumstance, and affirmed what they liked to call 'the dignity of human nature.'" People like James Burgh, Richard Price, Joseph Priestley (whom Chomsky's fond of), John Wilkes, Granville Sharp, and Thomas Paine. After 1774, the Dissenters' pamphlets and other works—*Common Sense* was one of them—"appeared everywhere in the colonies."

The background is that "roughly halfway through the eighteenth century, there took place a pervasive intellectual crisis based on the perception that Locke's environmental psychology contradicted his political philosophy." That point actually seems plausible. How can there be a law of nature "writ in the hearts of mankind" making it self-evident that all people are equally possessed of inalienable natural rights—as Locke said in his *Second Treatise of Government*—if, according to Locke's psychology, people don't have innate or intuitively perceived moral or intellectual ideas? One of these propositions had to give way. It turned out to be the first one. "Stimulated by Locke's environmental psychology as by the economic determinism of James Harrington, English political philosophy in the eighteenth century turned away from natural rights toward a social science characterized by ethical relativism and pragmatic accommodation to existing reality." Hume's political conservatism is a good example. Sophisticated economic determinism and relativism pushed aside, to some extent, the whole realm of the ethical. In fact, even Locke's system was essentially based on property rather than conscience. So the Dissenting neo-Lockeans of the eighteenth century were obliged to reintroduce the ethical dimension. "They insisted on the reality of the good and on man's ability to recognize it, defended the intuitions of the heart against the paralyzing analyses of the head."

What this meant in practice was that they reached back beyond Locke to the religious republicans of the 1640s and 1650s, such as Gerrard Winstanley and Richard Overton. "The ascendancy of Dissenting radicalism represented a return to an essentially religious outlook," as opposed to the secular outlook of Locke, Harrington, and their popularizers. Locke's empiricist psychology was rejected. Discussing Richard Price, Lynd says, "confident intuition of a universal moral order made by nature's God was the preamble to the political faith of the Dissenter, as of the subsequent Declaration of Independence." It was a sort of rationalist intuitionism, so to speak, that inspired the Dissenters, which explains why they were fond of the earlier British Platonists. What was original to the Dissenters—or so Lynd says—was that they secularized the older defense of religious freedom of conscience, turning it into the Rights of Man. "Conscience, relegated by Locke to the periphery of a society based on property, became the critic of all social orders." It was the inner light that God had given men for guidance. –In some ways we're back to the Reformation, the turn from external authority (here, property) to inner faith (here, intuition of self-evident moral truths).

Lynd argues that in France, Rousseau played an analogous role to the Dissenters. I'd say he certainly did much to usher in a more libertarian sensibility. But in general, of course, the whole zeitgeist of Western Europe and America at this time was turning toward libertarianism, anti-authoritarianism. Various ideological rationales were found for this, depending on the particular cultural and intellectual heritage.

"As the American Revolution drew near, the Dissenters' faith in the capacity of the poor for knowledge grew together with their insistence that the poor should vote." As John Cartwright said in 1776, "*common sense*" was what enabled the "laboring mechanic and the peasant" to understand natural law and natural rights. To quote Lynd, "a belief in intuitively self-evident moral truth became associated with a belief in equality. All men came to be considered capable of perfection because every man was born predisposed to a correct intuitive knowledge of the essential truths. The words with which Rousseau began his *Émile*—'All is well when it leaves the hands of the Creator of things'—were echoed during the American Revolution by Price, who affirmed that equality was a right with which men came 'from the hands of their Maker,' as by Paine, who said that the revolutionary constitution of Pennsylvania considered men 'as they came from their maker's hands.'" And so we get the Declaration's declaration that, self-evidently, men are created equal.

And then comes the statement that they're endowed with certain inalienable rights that governments are created to secure. "What was striking about this formulation was its failure to mention rights given up in the process." That was the point, after all, of traditional formulations of the social contract: certain rights that individuals enjoy in the state of nature are given up so that governments can securely protect other, presumably more important rights. Effectively, then, the Declaration abandons the notion of the social contract. To explain how this result comes about, Lynd discusses Priestley's libertarian ideas on education, which were formulated in opposition to the moralistic authoritarianism that an Anglican minister named John Brown had articulated in the 1750s. "The essential difference between Brown and Priestley is that the tradition which passes from Priestley through Paine and Godwin to Garrison and Thoreau insists that men can and must *free themselves*, rather than *be freed* [or be indoctrinated with 'virtue'] by the external manipulation of educators and planners." Priestley then translates (in 1768) his ideas on education into political philosophy, concluding that government powers must be severely circumscribed for the sake of people's "civil liberties" (or their enjoyment of their natural rights). (On the other hand, he also was inclined toward utilitarianism: "the good and happiness of the…majority of the members of any state, is the great standard by which every thing relating to that state must finally be determined." Only through experiments can it be determined how far the power of the legislature should extend in order to promote the good of the whole. –Sensibly, Priestley believes that both liberalism and utilitarianism (to use anachronistic terms) are necessary.)

Richard Price went even farther than Priestley, arguing that people in society don't surrender any of their natural rights at all (whereas Priestley had still thought they had to gave up *some* of their "natural liberty"). It seems that these natural rights/liberties are primarily those "of thinking, speaking, forming and giving opinions," to quote Paine. (Things that have some relation to freedom of conscience, not surprisingly, in light of the religious background of many of these guys.) After his presidency, Jefferson was still saying that "the [common] idea is quite unfounded, that on entering into society we give up any natural right." The only purpose of government was to enforce our natural rights and duties (as he put it), "and to take none of them from us."

Early and later abolitionism drew on all this. "The idea of a natural law self-evident to the common man; the idea that liberty was man's inalienable right to self-determination [as opposed to his right to dispose of his property as he chose]: these were the axioms to which abolitionism added only corollaries. Down to Civil War and Reconstruction, abolitionists quoted the same natural law theoreticians cited by the Dissenters in contending, as the Dissenters had, 'that an immoral law cannot be valid.' Indeed the religious fervor of abolitionism was closer in spirit to Dissenting radicalism than was the cool deistic religiosity of the Founding Fathers…" That so much of this Enlightenment libertarianism and emphasis on human dignity was justified by appeal to the Bible is a bit ironic—but not very surprising, in light of Marx's insight that new phenomena in history typically feel the need (so to speak) to justify themselves by invoking supposed older traditions. Only after the new ideas and practices have become widely accepted is the ancient justification discarded or forgotten.

Like some other European intellectuals, in the second half of the eighteenth century the Dissenters gradually became more radical on questions of property and wealth. One common argument was that since God had given the earth to mankind in common, individuals did not have a right to unlimited accumulation

of land or wealth. Another was specifically about inheritance: the inheritance of private property should be just as subject to social regulation as the inheritance of political power. Jefferson was particularly fond of this argument. He didn't think that property was a natural right at all; it was only a social convention. Of course all this radicalism had definite limits, and these guys were nothing like socialists or communists. Still, they did "demythologize" private property, which may have helped lay the ideological groundwork for socialism and communism (which were already being proposed in the French Revolution).

–To be honest, I don't think these writers, or any writers, are as important as we might think. But in the aggregate of their dozens or hundreds, and in the context of social trends for which they serve as spokesmen, they can indeed have some influence.

"Both in England and America, eighteenth-century questioning of private property in the name of natural rights evolved continuously into early nineteenth-century questioning from the standpoint of a labor theory of value. Without exception the 'American forerunners of Marx' still spoke the language of natural rights." Cornelius Blatchly, for example, listed among man's inalienable rights "his perfect right to the full fruits of his own honest ingenuity and labor," and maintained that "no man by entering into civil government should be abridged of any equitable right to nature." With these writers, Jeffersonian language was used to argue for more-than-Jeffersonian ends (such as the abolition of slavery), as a few decades earlier Lockean language had been used to argue for more-than-Lockean ends. Later, the Radical Republicans pressed for confiscation and division of plantations, thus denying that property is sacred. Even more radical was Henry David Thoreau, who in a sense shared the early Marx's conception of alienated labor. "Men have become the tools of their tools," Thoreau wrote. "The laboring man has no time to be anything but a machine." Obviously both Thoreau and Marx were heavily influenced by writers like Wilhelm von Humboldt and other such liberals and romantics. In some respects the traditions to which Marx and Thoreau belonged overlapped. Similar tendencies of the Enlightenment, except that Marx also drew on Hegel, French socialism, and British political economy, while Thoreau, like all the Transcendentalists, was strongly influenced by (non-mainstream, Enlightenment-inflected) Protestant religion.

It really is striking to what extent *religion*, or at least doctrines with the tincture of religion, provided the ideological justification for dissent in these years, from the American revolution to anti-poverty activism to (especially) abolitionism. The Enlightenment was far from exclusively secular.

The Quakers are an example. "Just as the insistence of Dissenters on freedom of conscience proved the key to the thought-world of late eighteenth-century radicalism, so Quakerism [with its emphasis on an 'inner light,' which was 'that of God in every man'] most clearly exhibited the constellation of attitudes at the heart of radical abolitionism. Emerson and Bancroft ascribed to George Fox their belief in the common man's capacity to perceive the truth by unaided intuition. Garrison, charged by the churches with irreligion, discovered in Quakerism a religious tradition with which he could identify." Even Lincoln had a strong affinity for Quaker sensibility, which by the 1840s or earlier had been assimilated into mainstream American culture. For instance, a group of Friends in Ohio developed in the early 1820s "a synthesis of the Biblical and natural rights arguments" that held slavery not only wrong but unrepublican. William Penn's biographer and posthumous propagandist Thomas Clarkson also did a lot to bring Quaker beliefs into the mainstream. "By the 1830s what might be called philo-Quakerism pervaded the intellectual community of the North, especially in New England." (Of course Quakers were only one of many influences on abolitionism.)

Abolitionists—and Transcendentalists—turned away from Locke, with his empiricist psychology and insufficient emphasis on man's will and conscience, embracing more rationalist writers like Price. Theodore Parker remarked that he found much more help in the writings of Kant than in those of Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Reid, and the French materialists. "The Quaker concept of the inner light," Lynd writes, "facilitated the rejection of Locke by offering a homegrown equivalent to the doctrines of Price, Kant, and Coleridge." This aspect of "romanticism" can perhaps be called just as much an extension of the Enlightenment (insofar as the latter was rationalistic) as a reaction against it (insofar as it was empiricist or sensationalist).

What *was* anti-Enlightenment was the worldview of people who, following Jonathan Edwards, thought that man by nature was totally depraved. And there were others who, "with Machiavelli, believed

that in making a new government all men should be considered knaves. Persons holding [these sorts of] opinions were unlikely to believe that human beings should set their own consciences against law and government: were unlikely, in other words, to develop a theory of civil disobedience." That was left to people like Thoreau and such forerunners as Granville Sharp and William Godwin.

Godwin, basically an early anarchist, was an important link between eighteenth-century Anglo-American radicalism and the civil disobedience of the radical abolitionists. "The basis of Godwin's system consisted of beliefs 'common to many branches of Dissenting thought.' For him as for other radical Dissenters, liberty of conscience 'secularized and transferred to the civil sphere' was the theoretical point of departure. His questions were also the questions of Priestley and Price: 'How may the peculiar and independent operation of each individual in the social state most effectually be preserved? How may the security each man ought to possess, as to his life, and the employment of his faculties according to the dictates of his own understanding, be most certainly defended from invasion?'" He rejected the distinction between free thought and socially regulated action:

> It is commonly said, "that positive institutions ought to leave me free in matters of conscience, but may properly interfere with my conduct in civil concerns." But…what sort of moralist must he be, whose conscience is silent as to what passes in his intercourse with other men?

To quote Lynd, he concluded that "established authority has no more right to regulate an individual's actions than to regulate his behavior." Obedience is a question of expediency: decide whether to follow a law by considering the consequences likely to follow from possible courses of action. Ultimately he favored a society without government, in which, with respect to punishment of "criminals," "local juries would decide each case on its own merits without reference to general laws and without reliance on coercive sanctions." Government had no legitimate functions, since war was illegitimate and punishment (the other main function of government) usually did more harm than good.

Most abolitionists weren't quite so radical, but they defended civil disobedience. Some of them advised against paying taxes, others against voting or holding public office—forms of nonviolent resistance. But when the Civil War came, or even before it did, most changed their mind and embraced violent means in the service of a holy end.

The chapter on how these dissenters, both the early ones and the later ones, rejected nationalism and declared "my country is the world" isn't very interesting, so let's skip to the last chapter. It begins: "These chapters have described an American intellectual tradition which began with a concept of freedom shared with Rousseau, and culminated in a critique of alienated labor and nationalism shared with Marx. Like Rousseau and Marx, exponents of this American tradition believed that existing society oppressed its members by alienating human powers which nature intended men to reclaim. Like their European counterparts also, twice in the century 1760–1860 they concluded that deliberate lawbreaking and violent resistance to constituted authority were required to put an end to oppression. From all these points of view the ideas we have been considering are properly termed revolutionary."

Yes, the liberalism/libertarianism of the Enlightenment inspired radicals from Germany, or indeed Russia, to the Americas. And eventually all over the world. In different places and among different classes it took somewhat different forms, had different emphases—sometimes religious and idealistic, sometimes secular and materialistic—but everywhere the tradition shared a resistance to oppression and "alienation," in Marx's language. (Of course, these libertarian impulses were far from original to the Enlightenment.)

All these rebels also tended to value *decentralization*. "American radicals in the century preceding the Civil War adhered to an essentially unchanging vision of a decentralized good society… 'Society in every state is a blessing,' Paine wrote in the first paragraph of *Common Sense*, 'but government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil.' That government is best, Thoreau concurred at the outset of *Civil Disobedience*, which governs not at all. Like Marx, American revolutionaries sought a society in which the state would wither away." This seems similar to laissez-faire liberalism, but there's at least one key difference: these radicals valued *community*—a decentralized network of self-governing communities. A

"cooperative commonwealth," such as continued to attract workers (the Knights of Labor, etc.) in the late nineteenth century. Which is also to say that, unlike more mainstream liberals of the time, they were not enamored of the market. Their ideal was *democracy*, not the market.

The book ends on a refreshingly materialistic note: "The intellectual origins of the American radical tradition were rooted in men's effort to make a way of life at once free and communal. What held together these dissenters from the capitalist consensus was more than ideology: it was also the daily practice of libertarian and fraternal attitudes in institutions of their own making. The clubs, the unorthodox congregations, the fledgling trade-unions were the tangible means, in theological language the 'works,' by which revolutionaries kept alive their faith that men could live together in a radically different way. In times of crisis resistance turned into revolution; the underground congregation burst forth as a model for the Kingdom of God on earth, and an organ of secular 'dual power' [as Trotsky interpreted the soviets]…" During the Revolution, for instance, popular government sprang up in many of the colonies.

*

Amina visited me this week. [I've deleted descriptions of our relationship, which ended in marriage and then divorce.]

Well, the next four years are going to be interesting. It's hard for me not to feel a little schadenfreude at the colossal humiliation that was just inflicted on the Clintons and Obamas of the country, the political elite, the horrific mainstream media that is partly responsible for Trump's election, the whole rotten establishment that has brought this on itself through a generation of neoliberal policies—abandonment of the working class. First Brexit, now this.

But who knows what policies Trump will pursue. His foreign policy might be better in some respects than Clinton's would have been. Anyway, his election is going to galvanize a ton of left-wing activism, and the Sanders wing of the Democratic party will surely grow. There are silver linings. It's possible he won't be *quite* as evil as his campaign rhetoric would make you think.

Ha! From Obama to Trump! Way to go, Obama. Maybe if you'd actually brought some "change," you wretched mediocrity, this wouldn't have happened.

The pretty little illusions of the insular, incestuous liberal class—how noble our country is! how wonderful we ruling elite are!—have been exploded. (Doubtless they'll be reconstituted within weeks, though.)

Read Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, just for the heck of it. What a verbose and diffuse work! Now a few papers on Wittgenstein. Norman Malcolm, "Wittgenstein on Language and Rules" (1989). Paul K. Moser, "Malcolm on Wittgenstein on Rules" (1991). Paul Boghossian, "The Rule-Following Considerations" (1989). (Brilliant.) Crispin Wright, "What is Wittgenstein's point in the rule-following discussion?" (2002). And a few others. It seems to me that if there's any way out of all these conundrums about meaning and rule-following, it has to lie in the cognitivist approach: we *do* follow rules, but most of the rules are constituted unconsciously. Generally speaking, they're not accessible to consciousness.

Stanislas Dehaene, *Consciousness and the Brain: Deciphering How the Brain Codes Our Thoughts* (2014). Good book, sophisticated but readable. Explores how much of the brain's activity is unconscious. For instance, after reviewing a bunch of experiments, Dehaene states what should have been obvious all along (although of course it did need to be experimentally confirmed): "in some respects, consciousness is irrelevant to semantics—our brain sometimes performs the same exact operations, all the way up to the meaning level, whether or not we are aware of [the words we have been exposed to, e.g. because they were flashed on a computer screen too briefly for us to consciously notice them]." The brain can unconsciously process word meanings, just as it can unconsciously process the emotional valences of images, etc.

Dehaene also summarizes experiments that show that consciousness definitely isn't epiphenomenal. Which is to say, there are a hell of a lot of things we couldn't do if we weren't conscious. Duh. One of consciousness's evolutionary roles, for instance, is "learning over time, rather than simply

living in the instant." Subliminal perceptions and thoughts can't be retained for longer than a second or so, whereas conscious ones can. Another function may be to simplify and focus perception (since our brain is constantly receiving an enormous amount of sensory information). Also, we need consciousness in order to rationally think through a problem. The unconscious mind doesn't seem able, by itself, to carry out *steps* of reasoning; it can carry out single operations but not a cumulative series of them. And of course social information sharing is likely another essential function of consciousness.

Interesting discussion of "the signatures of a conscious thought." I'll just quote a particularly easy-to-read thing that I find pretty incredible, and also eerie: "With intracranial electrodes, the effects of stimulation can be very specific. Sparking off an electrode atop the face region of the ventral visual cortex can immediately induce the subjective perception of a face. Moving the stimulation forward into the anterior temporal lobe can awaken complex memories drawn from the patient's past experience. One patient smelled burnt toast. Another saw and heard a full orchestra playing, with all its instruments. [!] Others experienced even more complex and dramatically vivid dreamlike states: they saw themselves giving birth, lived through a horror movie, or were projected back into a Proustian episode of their childhood. [Apparently] our cortical microcircuits contain a dormant record of the major and minor events of our lives, ready to be awakened by brain stimulation." If you stimulate the subthalamic nucleus, the result is a state of depression, "complete with crying and sobbing, monotone voice, miserable body posture, and glum thoughts."

Astounding. Not surprising, but astounding nonetheless. It's obvious but incredible anyway that the Ninth Symphony is in my head, encoded in neurons, and theoretically can be elicited by the right stimulation.

In any case, "putting together all the evidence inescapably leads us to a reductionist conclusion. All our conscious experiences…result from a similar source: the activity of massive cerebral circuits that have reproducible neuronal signatures. During conscious perception, groups of neurons begin to fire in a coordinated manner, first in local specialized regions, then in the vast expanses of our cortex. Ultimately, they invade much of the prefrontal and parietal lobes, while remaining tightly synchronized with earlier sensory regions. It is at this point, where a coherent brain web suddenly ignites, that conscious awareness seems to be established."

But what *is* consciousness? Here's Dehaene's answer:

> When we say that we are aware of a certain piece of information, what we mean is just this: the information has entered into a specific storage area that makes it available to the rest of the brain. Among the millions of mental representations that constantly crisscross our brains in an unconscious manner, one is selected because of its relevance to our present goals. Consciousness makes it globally available to all our high-level decision systems. We possess a mental router, an evolved architecture for extracting relevant information and dispatching it. The psychologist Bernard Baars calls it a "global workspace": an internal system, detached from the outside world, that allows us to freely entertain our private mental images and to spread them across the mind's vast array of specialized processors [e.g., language, memory, the motor system, etc.].

So according to this theory, consciousness is just "brain-wide information sharing." He goes on to suggest that this was likely an evolutionary adaptation: in the harsh natural environment, it was necessary to have a mental map of space, a visual recognition of landmarks, a recall of past successes or failures at finding water or food, and so on. "Long-term decisions of such a vital nature, leading the animal through an exhausting journey under the African sun [for example], must make use of all existing sources of data. Consciousness may have evolved, eons ago, in order to flexibly tap into all the sources of knowledge that might be relevant to our current needs."

January–May, 2017

C. L. R. James' classic *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938/63). Should have read it long ago: it's beautifully written and analytically profound. If James' portrait is at all accurate, Toussaint L'Ouverture was an astonishing human being and one of the greatest revolutionary leaders in history. The black Spartacus, except he succeeded where Spartacus failed. Far greater than Lenin and Trotsky in his humanity and his commitment to authentically revolutionary values, his singleminded commitment to the noblest values of the Enlightenment. In a sense, the Haitian Revolution was the consummation of the Enlightenment, more so than the French. And it was largely Toussaint's doing. (Of course, it wouldn't have been possible without the French Revolution.)

–Except, as James says, his genius failed him at the end. And to some extent before the end. He ought to have proclaimed to the heavens his solidarity with the black masses, and made it even more visible in his policies, which were too favorable to whites.

And his submission at the very end…his two submissions…what the hell happened to him?? How such a brilliant leader suddenly could have become so misguided, even more misguided than when he shot Moïse, is a mystery. Such a stubborn will to maintain some connection with France, such a reluctance to cut all ties and destroy the French army on the island even when it was obvious that Napoleon was determined to restore slavery, such weakness as he displayed…it really is hard to understand, despite James' explanations.

My god, the savagery of the French. Or rather, of imperialists. They weren't and aren't human.

Now Charles Bergquist, *Labor and the Course of American Democracy: US History in Latin American Perspective* (1996). Argues, among other things, that U.S. labor historians should do more to examine the connections between imperialism and labor history since the late nineteenth century. For instance, U.S. imperialism has supposedly, to a great extent, been an elite response to domestic social unrest. (This may be true in some periods—perhaps the end of the nineteenth century, as Walter LaFeber argues—but it isn't true in others. George W. Bush's Iraq war, for example, didn't mollify social unrest but fostered it.)

Read J. S. Mill's essay "A Few Words on Non-Intervention." A hilariously naïve and embarrassingly tribalist exercise in British apologetics for imperialism. We Brits are almost impossibly magnificent, we never act from selfish motives, it's our duty to civilize the barbarians, etc. Typical liberal idealism. What a pygmy Mill was compared to Marx.

Back to common sense: Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (2007). An economic interpretation. From the dust jacket: "the primary purpose of the Constitution was, simply put, to make America more attractive to investors. And the linchpin to that endeavor was taking power away from the states and ultimately away from the people." The 1780s were chock full of economic turbulence and class conflict, especially between debtors and taxpayers on the one hand and creditors and bondholders on the other. An incredibly unstable time, thought of as far too democratic by the elite and not nearly democratic enough by the populace. Large and small popular rebellions all over the place; continual resistance to excessive taxes intended to pay off governments' huge war debts. "One reason the Founding Fathers favored the Constitution was that it would, for the first time, give the federal government the funds it needed to field an army capable of suppressing farmers' rebellions. That is what the Framers were talking about when they stated in the preamble to the Constitution that one of their goals was 'to ensure domestic tranquility.'"

"But the agrarian insurrections of the 1780s actually influenced the adoption of the Constitution even more powerfully in an indirect way. Insurgents extorted substantial tax and debt relief from reluctant state legislatures, and overturning this legislation became one of the principal reasons the Constitution was written…"

This book makes it clear that the Founders hated democracy with the white-hot intensity of a thousand suns. Even Jefferson was at best ambivalent towards it. To a first approximation, the Constitution can be considered just an elaborate instrument to limit democracy. The main reason it wasn't even more antidemocratic was that "it was necessary to consider what the people would approve," to quote one delegate to the Constitutional Convention. Ideally, the delegates would have loved to enact Hamilton's

proposal for a presidency-for-life and Senate-for-life, but they knew that was hopeless. The populace wouldn't have approved it.

"Modern descriptions of the Constitutional Convention generally focus upon the series of 'great compromises' that towered, like a chain of mountain peaks, over the members' day-to-day toil on more mundane matters. And yet twenty-first-century Americans are rarely exposed to what was arguably the greatest compromise of all: numerous explicitly elitist proposals, each of which would have obtained majority support if the delegates had had free rein, had to be abandoned—or at least replaced with more subtle devices—because they jeopardized ratification. These were compromises between the Framers and the American people. The convention nonetheless managed to construct a new national government that was considerably less democratic than even the most conservative of the state constitutions."

An unusual alignment of class interests occurred around federal taxation. The elite wanted to end the agrarian uprisings and relief legislation, and get creditors and bondholders paid; the masses wanted lower taxes. Well, giving the federal government power to impose tariffs on imported goods would accomplish all these goals, since, as a lucrative source of income, tariffs would eliminate the need for states to levy high direct taxes while simultaneously giving government enough money to pay its creditors. The prospect of lower taxes led many Americans to support the Constitution despite its antidemocratic and anti-debtor provisions. (Article 1, Section 10 was particularly anti-debtor, since it prohibited relief legislation.)

Another reason for the states' ratification of the Constitution was that the standing army it would establish would be invaluable against Indians, the British, and slave revolts.

But probably most important in convincing the skeptics was Federalists' promise that they would write a bill of rights after ratification. "It is a remarkable but rarely noted irony that Americans owe their most cherished rights—among them freedom of speech and religion, the right to trial by jury, and protection against self-incrimination and illegal search and seizure—not to the authors of the Constitution but to its inveterate enemies," who insisted on these amendments.

Now Terry Bouton, *Taming Democracy: "The People," the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution* (2007). Very good book. The famous financier Robert Morris emerges as one of the villains of American history, a wretched, greedy, merciless, bungling villain—different from nearly all the rich only in his power and even greater wealth than most.

One of the "advantages" of the Trump presidency is that it will only accelerate what was bound to happen eventually, the partial disintegration of society and the radicalization of millions. […]

For some reason I'm particularly upset by the environmental damage that Trump and the Republicans will cause. I'm not sure why. Maybe because that seems most permanent? And because it might have consequences for the entire species? I'm also worried that sometime in the future nuclear war will break out. When the world is run by lunatics and sociopaths, anything is possible.

On a personal level, it bothers me that *intellectually stimulating* things like philosophy will seem even more frivolous than they have for a generation. Writing about history and politics is kind of boring, and not very creative. I'd like to just retreat into a cave and write about intellectual problems—but I can't, because I'll feel like I'm being totally irrelevant and frivolous.

Had the dissertation defense today. It went okay. The committee members were both appreciative and critical (rightly so). Anyway, I passed, so in effect I'm now Dr. Wright. A nice little status-boost. I honestly wasn't sure I could pull off this dissertation thing, but those three magical letters are very motivating. 550 pages in all (not including the long bibliography).

So my graduate school experience is basically done. Eleven years. A new phase of life is about to start.

Reading Jean Jaurès's classic *A Socialist History of the French Revolution*—an abridged version.

Published a couple of articles on several left-wing websites:

The Founding Fathers: "Neoliberals" *Avant le Mot*

"Who is to blame for the election of Donald Trump?" It's a question that has been asked more than a few times since November 8. We're all familiar with the answers that have been given: James Comey, the electoral college, the DNC's *leaked*—not hacked—emails, the characteristically shameful performance of the mainstream media in its focus on personalities rather than substance, the stupefying incompetence of Hillary Clinton's campaign, the elitist insularity and corruption of the Democratic Party, etc. Longer-term causes (which are intertwined) include the decline of organized labor, which has always served as a bulwark against fascism or semi-fascism; deindustrialization, which has contributed to the economic insecurity that apparently motivated many of Trump's supporters; and the almost total capture of the Democratic Party by the corporate sector of the economy. But one group of people has tended to escape blame, even despite widespread disgust with the electoral college: the U.S.'s "Founding Fathers." While they are distant in time from the political obscenity that was November 8, they are far from innocent.

This is clear from two books that every American should read, published in 2008 and 2009 respectively: Woody Holton's *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* and Terry Bouton's *Taming Democracy: "The People," the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution*. These books reveal the extent to which nearly all the Founders loathed and feared democracy, at least between the 1780s and the first decade of the nineteenth century. (Their attitudes were more complex in the 1770s, and in their later years such (former) anti-democrats as James Madison and John Adams were repulsed by the excesses of the capitalist aristocracy.) The popular attitude of reverence for the Founders is a product of deep misunderstanding and ignorance, for it is the viciously antidemocratic structure of the political system the Founders created that has helped make possible our new Gilded Age, and thus the political success of someone like Donald Trump.

In fact, I think it's important to spread the idea that, far from being "liberators," the Founders were, in essence, the first in America's long line of usurpers and oppressors. This idea is a simplification, but it contains a large kernel of truth. The hackneyed narrative that history textbooks still teach about the greatness and nobility of Washington, Madison, Adams, Hamilton, and the others is nothing but nationalist propaganda that serves to obscure the *malignity* of these people's historical impact and legacy. One might even say that their most potent legacy was the precise opposite of what we've been trained to think (and what they thought): rather than having been great figures of anti-authoritarian revolution, heroic fighters against tyranny, in effect they did much to clear the ground for the most rapacious tyranny in history, the national and eventually global tyranny of capital.

The 1780s: the Founders vs. the People

These judgments might seem excessively harsh, but consider the facts. Across the American colonies, the revolutionary 1770s were a time of relative democracy. In the struggle against the British, the gentry and the lower classes to some extent united around the banner of white male popular empowerment. States adopted strikingly democratic constitutions, none more impressive than Pennsylvania's in 1776, which established a unicameral legislature, annual elections for every representative, a weak governorship that could not veto laws the legislature passed, the *election* rather than *appointment* of most offices in the state and county governments, and the enfranchisement of nearly all adult men, even those who owned no property.

But things changed in the 1780s. The gentry had "tired of an excess of democracy," to quote Alexander Hamilton—others were less restrained, decrying "democratical tyranny," a "republican frenzy," a "prevailing rage of excessive democracy"—and tried to take total control of state governments. Given the shortage of gold and silver, during the war with Britain governments had issued paper money, which soon led to high inflation. This was blamed, simplistically, on the democratic character of the governments, the "imbecility" of popularly elected politicians; and most of the elite "gentlemen" came to view all government-issued paper money as an evil to be done away with. They also disliked the social and cultural manifestations of democracy, the leveling spirit that raised commoners in their own eyes and lowered the

gentry. The ultra-rich financier Robert Morris represented his class when he resolved to strip power from all these "vulgar Souls whose narrow Optics can see but the little Circle of selfish Concerns."

The political and economic agenda that Morris and his associates championed bore a remarkable, if hardly surprising, resemblance to neoliberalism. "Morris wanted government to channel money to the wealthy," Terry Bouton writes, "either through direct payouts or by privatizing the most lucrative parts of the state and turning them over to new for-profit corporations owned and run by the gentry." One of the most powerful figures in American history, Morris founded in 1781 the first private bank in the United States—the Bank of North America—in part to remove finance from democratic control: not governments, but banks would issue paper money. Private corporations, unlike governments, would be immune to public pressure for a greater supply of money, and would therefore be able to prevent inflation. Actually, the acute shortage of money during the 1780s showed that Morris was too pessimistic: even in states where legislatures did on occasion print money, they certainly did not do so to the extent that "the people" desired.

The 1780s were a time of ferocious class conflict, with most of the eventual framers of the U.S. Constitution facing off, alongside Robert Morris and the majority of the gentry, against the middling and lower classes, overwhelmingly agrarian. On one side were the wealthy speculators in government IOUs, who had bought these bonds for pennies on the dollar from the farmers, artisans, and soldiers to whom they had been given during the war as payment for goods and services. Their original holders, expecting the bonds to depreciate and needing money right away, sold them for whatever they could get. Speculators, on the other hand, could afford to wait years for the government to redeem the bonds, and had the political clout to insist that they be paid at or near the certificates' full face value even though at the time of issuance the certificates' *market* value was far below this. The state and federal war debt most of which speculators thus bought up was enormous, about $27 million.

To pay interest on the war debt, many states tended to impose the same type of fiscal and monetary regime on the populace that more recently the IMF has favored: oppressive taxes, a tight money supply, and the curtailing of public services (such as government-run "loan offices" that gave cheap credit to farmers and artisans). Since both private creditors and bond speculators were averse to paper money, governments compelled debtors and taxpayers to pay with gold and silver. But the war years had drained the country of gold and silver, making it impossible for people to pay. The nationwide tragedy that resulted has been compared to the Great Depression of the 1930s: tsunamis of property foreclosures swept up hundreds of thousands of families, and economic activity plummeted. "Public Trade and Private transactions of Human Life," petitioners in Pennsylvania protested, "[are] nearly reduced to a total Stagnation."

On the other side of the economic divide, then, were masses of ordinary people who found that their troubles were much worse in the 1780s than they had been in the last years of British rule, when their hardships had driven them to rebellion and war. "Have we not expended our blood and our treasure to expel from the land a set of invaders who sought to rule over us as taskmasters," they exclaimed in the mid-1780s, "and shall we now become bondsmen to people of our own country?" The irony was appalling, and the victims fought back.

In fact, they were able to extract significant concessions and relief measures. In some states, by electing legislators sympathetic to their plight, farmers and artisans benefited from temporary suspensions of tax collection. Violent resistance, such as Shays' Rebellion in Massachusetts in 1786 and '87, frightened governments into being more lenient in their fiscal and monetary policies. Local and county officials often were sympathetic to the suffering of their neighbors and refused to enforce the law or carry out orders: for example, county tax officers would delay collection; some sheriffs obstructed or prevented property foreclosures; justices of the peace refused to prosecute people for nonpayment of taxes. Nor were state militias always of use in enforcing tax collection, for it was frequently militiamen who were leading the anti-tax protests. All this protest in the mid-1780s substantially mitigated the hardships of "the 99 percent" (so to speak)—which means that it was a tremendous irritant to the elite. For one thing, it prevented bondholders and creditors from being paid as much and as regularly as they wanted. For another, it fostered economic and political uncertainty, which made for a bad investment climate. European investors, in

particular, were leery of sending their capital to a land that was so riven by conflict. How could a country develop if it couldn't attract investment?

Various solutions were possible to the political and economic instabilities of the 1780s, and spokesmen of the aggrieved masses made reasonable proposals that were relatively fair to both sides of the class struggle. They called for a revaluation of war debt certificates, progressive taxation, limits on land speculation, bans on for-profit corporations, and other measures that would alleviate spiraling wealth inequality and strengthen democracy. Such proposals were consistent with the popular understanding of republicanism, an understanding that differed from that of aristocrats like Madison, Washington, Adams, Hamilton, and Edmund Randolph. As Gordon Wood describes in *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, these latter men considered it axiomatic that, because only an elite of disinterested, virtuous, propertied gentlemen was capable of pursuing the *public* good over selfish private ends, the success of a republic required that such men hold power. It was necessary to tame the wildness of democracy—i.e., to effectively disenfranchise the majority—in order for enlightened civic virtue to flourish.

"The people," on the other hand, tended to have a less naïve view of the world. As yeomen from Pennsylvania said in one of their many petitions to the state government, "No observation is better supported, than this that, a country cannot long preserve its liberty, where a great inequality of property takes place." Some of their legislators agreed: they declared that for-profit corporations were "totally destructive of that equality which ought to prevail in a republic." Farmers wrote that "We observe, with great anxiety, wealthy incorporated companies taking possession of public and private property," and condemned processes that made "a few men…sufficiently powerful by privileges and wealth, to purchase, or to destroy, the property and rights of their fellow citizens." Evidently these farmers had a more sophisticated political understanding than James Madison and his idealistic colleagues did, at least insofar as they understood that the real danger to republicanism was not democracy but rather a sharp inequality of property.

The Constitution: Triumph of Reaction

Needless to say, it was not the farmers' democratic vision that ultimately prevailed. Robert Morris and other anti-democrats across the states organized a new Constitutional Convention in 1787 to remedy the defects of the Articles of Confederation, which is to say to write a new Constitution that would more adequately insulate government from democratic control. The convention was not sold this way to the people, of course; its purpose, instead, was supposed to be to find ways to give government more power to protect shipping and to negotiate trade deals with foreign nations. Secretly, though, nearly all the delegates had one goal mainly in mind: to make America more attractive to investment, as Woody Holton argues. "And the linchpin to that endeavor," he says, "was taking power away from the states and away from the people."

In other words, the U.S. was founded from the motive, and on the principle, of *serving capital*. The very structure of its political system was chosen so as, chiefly, to attract investors, i.e., to be a tool of capital accumulation. It is probably the only country in history of which this is the case. But to those who are familiar with U.S. history, so full of subservience to capitalism, such a revelation should not be surprising.

Many of the devices that the Constitution's framers proposed to limit democracy were not adopted at the convention in Philadelphia. The delegates had to navigate between two contradictory imperatives: on one hand, they wanted to make it forever impossible for states to adopt the kinds of debtor-relief and taxpayer-relief legislation that the 1780s had seen; on the other hand, they could not make the Constitution *so* antidemocratic that the states and the people would not ratify it. Because of this second consideration, for example, Madison's proposal that the U.S. Senate be able to veto state legislation "*in all cases whatsoever*" was rejected. The same fate befell Hamilton's extreme proposal that the Senate and President be elected *for life*, as a way to provide the government with maximum protection against democracy. Nearly all the delegates strongly favored Hamilton's plan, but they knew it would prevent the Constitution from being ratified.

Nevertheless, in its finished form the Constitution was hardly a model of democracy. While senators' terms were not nine years long, as Madison wanted, six years was long enough to considerably insulate the Senate from the popular will. The Senate's very existence, of course—as a body explicitly reminiscent of Britain's House of Lords—was a significant "check and balance" against the people. As was the indirect election of its members, and of the president (by means of the electoral college). The Constitution's framers even managed to limit democracy in the House of Representatives, by making election districts so large that ordinary people would have a hard time getting elected. Men of wealth would be much more successful than others in making their names and views known in a large district. To say it differently, large districts would "divide the community," as Madison said, and make it difficult for the non-wealthy to "unite in the pursuit [of a] common interest."

Furthermore, members of the House and the Senate could not be recalled, and constituents were not given the right to instruct their representatives on how to vote on particular issues (a right that even as British colonists many of them had had).

As for the presidency, it would be a very powerful position that could veto any dangerously democratic law that somehow made it through the gauntlet of the deliberately cumbersome and convoluted machinery for passing legislation in Congress. The president would also be responsible for making most major appointments in the national government, a power that under the Articles of Confederation had resided in the legislative branch.

The Supreme Court—appointed, not directly elected—had its part to play in "check[ing] the imprudence of democracy" (to quote Hamilton): through judicial review it could overturn both federal and state legislation. In this way, Madison's proposal that the national government have some means of vetoing inconveniently democratic state laws was salvaged.

In case such protections were not enough, language was written into the Constitution that expressly forbade most of the pro-debtor, pro-taxpayer laws states had passed in the 1780s. Article I deprived states of control over the war debt, thus preventing them from paying war debt speculators the market worth rather than the much higher face value of the certificates they held. (As Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton, who had been mentored by the ultra-conservative Robert Morris, gave these speculators a tremendous windfall, to the outrage of farmers.) Congress was granted the power to directly tax citizens instead of relying on states to do so, and it could break mass resistance to tax policies by bringing in militias from surrounding states. Section 10 of Article I was especially momentous: it reads, in part, "No State shall…emit Bills of Credit; make any Thing but gold and silver Coin a Tender in Payment of Debts [nor] pass any…Law impairing the Obligation of Contracts." In one swoop, this established a political-economic regime that overwhelmingly favored creditors. It prohibited states from issuing their own paper currency—"effectively destroying state-run land banks [i.e., loan offices]," as Bouton notes, "and the system of public, long-term, low-cost credit" that had been very effective and enormously popular with farmers. Debt arbitration was outlawed. In general, states were prohibited from rescuing debtors.

(It is worth noting, parenthetically, that the recent fashions of "originalism," "original intent," "strict constructionism," and such tendencies in legal interpretation of the Constitution are predictable in a neoliberal context, given that the framers and their contemporaries thought of the now-revered document as thoroughly antidemocratic. Originalism can be a useful tool of hyper-capitalism.)

The majority of ordinary citizens were none too fond of this radically elitist Constitution. But they were so scattered and had so few resources compared to the "Federalists" who supported it that it was difficult for them to mount an effective opposition. Federalists, moreover, did not play nice. They were prepared to go to almost any length to get the Constitution ratified. In some states, such as Pennsylvania, they organized a ratification convention before the opposition had a chance to mobilize, and they gave districts that favored ratification a disproportionately large number of delegates. Their ownership of most newspapers allowed them to conduct a major propaganda campaign that suppressed the voices of Anti-Federalists. Violent threats were made against Anti-Federalist printers; offending pamphlets and newspapers were "stopped & destroyed"; Federalist postmasters intercepted and suppressed Anti-Federalist mail; writers resorted to lies about the provisions that the Constitution contained and the process that had brought it into being.

On the other hand, many people were reconciled to it on the basis of legitimate considerations. For one thing, since the national government would have the power to impose tariffs on imports, most people's taxes would likely be reduced. The government could rely primarily on tariffs for its revenue, not direct taxation of citizens (as had been the case in the 1780s). Even more importantly, Federalists committed to adding a Bill of Rights to the Constitution after it was ratified. This was something that middling citizens from across the country insisted on. Woody Holton makes an apt observation on this point: "It is a remarkable but rarely noted irony," he says, "that Americans owe their most cherished rights—among them freedom of speech and religion, the right to trial by jury, and protection against self-incrimination and illegal search and seizure—not to the authors of the Constitution but to its inveterate enemies." The Bill of Rights was a concession to the rabble.

If the farmers of the 1780s were alive today, however, they might feel vindicated. This isn't the place to review the entire history of the U.S.'s capitalism-on-steroids, but it should hardly be controversial to say that the antidemocratic, anti-"working class" political framework the Founders put in place has been perfectly adapted to the ambitions of a predatory economic system. It is almost as if capitalism had reached back from the future to move its pawns like chess pieces against capital's early opponents, who were finally checkmated when the Constitution was, through fair means and foul, ratified. After that, it could be smoother sailing for a developing American capitalism—although even then its development had to continually confront mass resistance. Eventually, and always with the decisive aid of the peculiar structure of the American polity, a point was reached where wealth could be so concentrated, the political system could be so captured by the corporate oligarchy, and ordinary people could be so desperate for change that they would elect a monstrosity like Donald Trump.

So here we are in 2017 still burdened with political leaders who, like the Constitution's framers, are concerned above all to protect creditors, financiers, and investors; who have the same "wisdom" as most of the Founders in their desire to undermine democracy, whether through gerrymandering, major propaganda campaigns, arcane Congressional tricks of obstructing popular legislation, or simply the appointment of wealthy friends to important government posts. The growing democratic resistance is in the tradition not of the "great men" who wrote the Constitution but of their enemies.

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Communism and Human Nature

In a world becoming more atomized and misanthropic by the day, where it seems sometimes that you have only to be a raving degenerate in order to achieve fame and power—witness Donald Trump and Steve Bannon, or, in a different way, Milo Yiannopoulos (whose degeneracy, though, has partly caught up with him)—it is useful to be reminded of the other side of human nature. The institutions of modern capitalism happen to reward depravity, first and foremost in the economic sphere, but since the maturation of mass society generations ago in the cultural sphere as well. One is constantly confronted, therefore, by moral and intellectual filth—the depths of human vulgarity on television and the internet, mad lusts for power and profit in politics and business, collective slavishness to mainstream norms in intellectual institutions, self-deception on a virtually heroic scale among the hordes of *objective* servants of power. One feels hemmed in by forces of delayed social implosion; one feels claustrophobic in a society whose categorical imperatives are but to privatize and marketize, to impersonalize, bureaucratize, and stupidize, all for the sake, ultimately, of accumulating capital.

Fortunately there are avenues of momentary escape from the decadence. One such avenue is to follow a particular train of thought that David Graeber pursues in his bestselling *Debt: The First 5000 Years*, as well as in this paper. It provides a conceptual antidote to the knowledge that Trumps and Bannons exist.

Namely, Graeber reminds us that fundamental to human nature, more fundamental than the debaucheries thrown up by late capitalism, is the tendency that he dubs *communism*. On a deep level, we are all (or nearly all), to some degree, communists. For if communism means "from each according to his

ability, to each according to his need," as Marx defined it, then it simply means sharing, helping, and cooperating—giving to others in need what you're able to give them, even if it is only advice, assistance at some task, sympathy or emotional support, or some money to tide them over. Friends, coworkers, relatives, lovers, even total strangers constantly act in this way. In this sense, Graeber says, "*communism is the foundation of all human sociability*"; it can be considered "the raw material of sociality, a recognition of our ultimate interdependence that is the ultimate substance of social peace."

From this perspective, incidentally, the early Marx's apotheosis of communism in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* acquires a somewhat different meaning. To quote his grandiose idealistic formulation: "This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man—the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species." If one understands "communism" in Graeber's sense, as, in effect, a fundamental tendency of human nature—and a "principle immanent in everyday life," to quote Graeber—these exalted theses are at least suggestive. For instance, humans' psychological communism does tend to resolve conflicts between man and nature and between man and man, for it springs from the reservoir of *sympathy* that Enlightenment thinkers such as Adam Smith understood to be shared by all non-pathological humans.

The communist morality, in fact, is nothing but a corollary of the Golden Rule, that you should treat people as you'd like to be treated, with respect and compassion. Morally speaking, communism is common sense. Indeed, polls show that, despite what we're taught to think about the political proclivities of Americans, large numbers agree with this "radical" statement. In 1987, for example, when Reaganism was ascendant, a national poll found that 45 percent of Americans considered Marx's famous slogan quoted above (from his *Critique of the Gotha Program*) to be so obvious that they thought it was enshrined in the U.S. Constitution! This is a point one might make in debates with political "conservatives" (i.e., reactionaries).

It would be amusing, too, to point out to some Breitbart writer or his legions of online followers that, in spite of himself, he is manifesting a communist morality every time he helps someone, every time he shares or cooperates; he is acting contrary to the capitalist imperative to "gain wealth, forgetting all but self." Or to point out to a conservative Christian that "Christian love" is essentially communistic, and that Jesus hated the wealthy. (See, e.g., Luke 6:24-25: "But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.") A communist *society* would just be a society in which the "baseline communism" of everyday life (and of original Christianity) was the guiding rule, the main principle of social organization.

As for our own society, the only reason it is able to function at all is that it's held together by this dense anti-capitalist fabric, into which the more superficial patterns of commercialism, the profit motive, and greed are woven. Capitalism is parasitic on everyday communism: everything would collapse if the latter even momentarily vanished. One might, therefore, reverse the typical judgment of apologists for the status quo: not only is capitalism not a straightforward expression of human nature (supposedly because we're all predominantly greedy, as an Ayn Rand or a Milton Friedman might say); it is more like a perversion of human nature, which evidently is drawn to such things as compassion, love, community, respect for others, and free self-expression unimpeded by authoritarian rules in the economic or political sphere.

—Such are the thoughts with which I try to comfort myself periodically, when feeling overwhelmed by the systemic misanthropy that daily bombards us all.

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I feel my creative powers waning. When was the last time I had enthusiasm? Perhaps when writing my third book. I no longer have a brilliant mind; I no longer get much pleasure from writing. I wanted to be great, but I grow ever more aware of my limitations. My feeble memory, my decaying talent for writing, my lack of interest in ideas, life, and the world. My doubts that I'll be a good teacher. Even designing a

syllabus is too hard for me. Now that my Ph.D. is done (except for the official graduation), I don't know what to do. I sit around and do virtually nothing creative. Don't know where to direct my energies, what few energies I still have.

Reading Jonathan Israel's *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (2010). Very useful.

Now Sven Beckert's *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (2014). Monumental.

Now E. H. Carr's *What Is History?* (1961).

Published another article, based on my cooperatives book. Also got my old *Book of Joe* satire published in a literary magazine and online.

Took some notes on George Novack's *Empiricism and Its Evolution: A Marxist View* (1968), to post them online:

…Starts out by noting that "empiricism" has a twofold meaning: empirical habits of thought and investigation (scientific investigation), and the empiricist philosophy of Locke and his successors. The latter wasn't totally original. "Some earlier philosophers had taught that human knowledge must be based on sense experience. Among the Greeks, thinkers who were otherwise so unlike as Democritus and Aristotle assigned the primary role in the process of knowledge to sense experience. Even such eminent schoolmen as Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great aspired to develop their science of nature through a rational interpretation of sense experience rather than on Christian revelation." Novack continues: "However, except for the Atomists, these ancient and medieval schools did not make the origin of knowledge in sense experience the governing principle which was central to their whole system of thought. That was the epoch-making innovation of Locke and his successors."

Both empiricism and the modern science on which it was based and from which it took inspiration were essentially progressive forces, intimately connected to and caused by "the bourgeois transformation of Western society." For instance, empiricism helped destroy the obsolete categories of scholastic thought (feudal thought, Catholic thought), thus helping to accomplish in the realm of theory and ideology what capitalism was accomplishing in the realm of the economy and politics, namely the overcoming of the old regime and liberating of the potential of human knowledge, technology, productivity, and sheer individuality. This whole *empirical* way of thought and behavior, which in its skeptical and inquisitive essence was intrinsically opposed to old authorities and shibboleths, became the spirit of the Enlightenment—which was the spirit of freedom, reason, criticism, science, universality, rebellion. In this sense empiricism, emerging organically out of the growing capitalist economy and its scientific and technological offshoots, was an absolutely essential world-historical force.

But I'd say that the anti-innatist, anti-rationalist doctrines of this tendency of thought—that the mind/brain doesn't bring very much to experience but is somewhat passive and easily moldable—(notions that are radically false) gradually became anti-progressive and useful to authoritarianism later on, in the twentieth century. As Chomsky says, "If in fact man is an indefinitely malleable, completely plastic being [as empiricism holds him to be], with no innate structures of mind and no intrinsic needs of a cultural or social character, then he is a fit subject for the 'shaping of behavior' by the state authority, the corporate manager, the technocrat, or the central committee." So, while empiricism originally became dominant as a tool of the struggle against reactionary old authorities such as the Church, it has persisted, in various forms (e.g., behaviorism), among intellectual and political circles perhaps in part because it became *useful* to *state-capitalist* authorities, whether in the Soviet Union or in the U.S.

In any case, Novack is right that "since the seventeenth century, empiricism, in one form or another, has been the major philosophy of the English-speaking peoples on both sides of the Atlantic." Evidently it is the preferred philosophy—or one aspect of the preferred philosophy—of capitalism. As Novack goes on to say, "From Bacon to Hume, it acted as a powerful stimulant to progress in Western thought. It challenged medieval ideas, shattered scholasticism, dislodged many props of feudal theology, and undercut established modes of idealism. It sought to devise a new logic and a more fruitful method of investigation of natural phenomena, of society, and of the reasoning processes to replace the formalized logic and sterile

speculations of the scholastics. It aided the revival of materialism and helped clear the ground for the growth of the natural and social sciences."

Francis Bacon "may be regarded as the father of British materialism and the grandfather of empiricism." For one thing, he severed natural philosophy from religion, by arguing that humans could know God's nature only through revelation, not reason or sensation. So science was allocated its own autonomous territory, "in which it could expand more freely." Ultimately this separation of science and philosophy from theology undermined the theological foundations of religious dogmas, "and so cleared a path for materialist and even directly atheist conclusions."

Bacon's experimentalism, inductivism (as opposed to scholastic deductivism), and materialism—matter was "indestructible, self-moving, ever active, and constantly changing," and not interfered with by God (who had created the universe but then left it to its own devices)—inspired later developments. He conceived the main function of philosophy not as providing arguments for religious dogmas but as serving the practical needs of mankind. As for empiricism:

> For Bacon, experience, based upon what we learn through the senses and aids to the senses like the telescope, was the sole valid source and sure road to useful knowledge. Unlike most of his empirical successors, he did not interpret sensuous experience as primarily passive. He was one of the first to emphasize that the acquisition of knowledge had its active side in the manipulating and shaping of objects as is done by a craftsman. It is through such practical activity that the senses disclose the essential features of nature to us.

Later on, "the materialism he pioneered acquired an aristocratic and monarchist form in the hands of his companion Thomas Hobbes and a plebeian and democratic expression in the Leveller leader, Richard Overton (1597–1663)."

Novack's discussion of Locke is inadequate, but he does make a few suggestive remarks. In particular, he traces Locke's general tendency to stake out a *middle* position to his role as an ideologist for the British bourgeoisie. For example, "the victorious bourgeoisie [after the Glorious Revolution] needed institutions of the Christian faith to uphold their regime, just as they had to foster natural science to promote their material interests. But they could not maintain the same sort of religion as the absolute monarchy. They sought a religion tailored to their special requirements, a utilitarian Protestantism which blessed the union of Church and State, tolerated a certain degree of nonconformism, and reconciled the new findings of physical science with the religious viewpoint." Locke was their spokesman. In *The Reasonableness of Christianity* he discarded some objectionable doctrines, such as the Trinity, and retained others. He argued for religious toleration—except for Catholics and atheists (threats to the bourgeoisie from opposing sides). Like Boyle and Newton, he defended the idea of God as the efficient cause of the universe—which proved an unstable compromise between religion and science, a compromise that opened up the possibility for later mechanists like Laplace to discard the idea of God entirely. ("Sire, I have no need for that hypothesis," Laplace answered when Napoleon asked him what place God had in his system.)

"Locke's positions that substance exists (even though it cannot be intimately known), that sensation is the basis of knowledge, and that matter might think, were closely akin to materialism. These elements in Locke's philosophy encouraged more thoroughgoing materialist conclusions. His influence in that direction can be most clearly seen in the writings of John Toland, of the deist Anthony Collins, and in the sensationalist and materialist schools of eighteenth-century France. [But the scholar Jonathan Israel argues, plausibly, that *Spinoza* had much more to do with this later materialism than Locke did.] But Locke himself did not take a stand firmly and fully upon materialist grounds."

A rather un-empiricist notion of the empiricists from Locke to Hume was that the highest type of knowledge came not from sense experience but from the direct intuition of the mind: most obviously in the case of mathematics. (But for Locke, moral truths too were as unassailable as mathematics.) Empirical ideas gave only probable knowledge. This argument, of course, is very Cartesian. As is Locke's idea that we have intuitive certainty only of our own existence: external existence "is not altogether so certain as our intuitive

knowledge, or the deductions of our own reason employed about the clear abstract ideas of our own minds." As Novack says, it isn't difficult to arrive at Berkeley's subjective idealism from this starting point.

Locke's general atomism obviously correlates with the atomism of capitalism:

> [Locke's "separatism" runs all though his mechanical empiricism.] In his view of nature only particular things exist; in society the isolated individual is the primary reality; in the human mind simple self-sufficient ideas are the basic units out of which knowledge is compounded.
>
> Since Locke starts with dissociated particles, individuals, and ideas, the problem then arises in all the domains of existence: how do these originally independent entities come together? The single principle of unification in his empiricism is mechanical aggregation by way of arithmetical addition. The atoms constitute material aggregates which have only external relations with one another; individuals combine into social groupings and set up governments by means of a contract; the simple ideas which are the elementary components of thought make up complex ideas by way of association.

Empiricism can take either materialist or idealist forms. The French sensationalists of the Enlightenment, including Diderot, Condillac, La Mettrie, Helvétius, and Holbach, developed its materialist side; Berkeley went in the other direction. Proceeding from Locke's argument that the mind "has no other *immediate* object but its own ideas," from which it follows that physical objects are not directly experienced but are only inferred from our impressions and ideas, Berkeley simply dropped the concept of external objects. This was especially easy to do since Locke had conceived of matter as essentially passive and inert (a conception with which John Toland disagreed, in 1704). "How could so passive a cause produce the diversity of perceptions that people experience, Berkeley asked."

Hume, of course, built on Locke and Berkeley to show how their empiricism leads inexorably to a thoroughgoing skepticism. Berkeley had denied that we have any abstract general ideas such as substance or triangle or whatever; we have only particular ideas, because everything we encounter in sense is particular. Hume essentially took over this argument. Whatever wasn't given in perception couldn't be an object of knowledge. We can't know if there's an external world independent of our senses; we can't know if a substantial self exists, since we don't encounter it in our inner perceptions; we can't know if God exists or the soul is immortal. Our idea of causation has no objective basis. "When we examine our sense perceptions," Novack paraphrases, "they do not provide any evidence that one event has any necessary or essential connections with one another or that one thing is instrumental in producing another. All that our experience enables us to say, or our reason to know, is that one thing follows another or accompanies another. But there is nothing given in our impressions to warrant the conclusion that one is the cause and the other the effect." We're not acquainted with *necessity* in our experience. We simply instinctually *imagine* that we are. (In modern language, we're genetically programmed to believe all these ideas, or to have all these cognitive structures, that Hume finds problematic.)

It seems to me that, even if one rejects much of empiricism, this skepticism is still unavoidable. I can't see that Hume is wrong when he says, "Let us fix our attention out of ourselves as much as possible; let us chase our imaginations to the heavens, or to the ultimate limits of the universe; we never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can we conceive of any kind of existence, but the perceptions which have appeared in that narrow compass. This is the universe of the imagination, nor have we any idea but what is here produced." One may disagree with the last sentence, since we surely *do* have "ideas" that don't arise from perception but that we *bring to* perception, but the general Cartesian and Lockean conception that in a sense we're imprisoned within ourselves seems obviously true, being confirmed by science. The brain constructs our experience; we're aware only of what the brain has produced. Thus you get skepticism about the external world and so on. Of course, there must *be* an external world, and we might as well imagine it to be as science describes it, but still, its existence can't be proven.

"Hume's skepticism laid the basis for phenomenalism, positivism, empirio-criticism, pragmatism, agnosticism and similar mutations of empirical doctrine which were developed in the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries." But I'd say it's certainly possible to admit the irrefutability of skepticism while yet rejecting all these positions.

"Hume also laid the basis for the subsequent pragmatic conception of knowledge by treating ideas as habits or rules of behavior adopted for the practical needs of getting along in the world. In place of the 'correspondence theory of truth,' that ideas are valid if they agree in content with their objects, he put forward what can aptly be characterized as the 'opportunist theory of truth.' Since our most cherished ideas cannot find a basis and backing in an independent reality then we must treat as true whatever enables us to get along best in everyday affairs. Truth, then, is determined not by the unity of the content of ideas with their references in the external world, but by purely practical considerations of expediency in conduct."

Positivism, too, was grounded in Humean considerations: for, if we doubt that underlying reality can be understood, it makes sense to focus just on collecting data and drawing superficial connections rather than looking for the fundamental causes behind appearances. In a sense, Hume's views on substance and causality swept away the foundation of natural and social science—which of course is why they so disturbed Kant. They also led to the idealism of later empiricists such as John Stuart Mill, Ernst Mach, and eventually the logical positivists.

Mill, for example, defined matter as "the permanent possibility of sensation." As Novack says, "This is a considerable retreat from Locke's views on the reality of objects in the external world. Mill made the existence of objects depend upon the *possibility* of their being perceived by us. This is a concession, not simply to Hume's skepticism, but to Berkeley's idealism which made the existence of objects depend upon their being *actually* perceived by us. Indeed, Mill did not hesitate to proclaim his agreement with Berkeley's school of subjective idealism." A. J. Ayer, among other logical positivists, later adopted Mill's definition of matter.

And yet at other times Mill seemed to accept that there is an external world in which we are implanted, and which science investigates. As the *Stanford Encyclopedia*'s article on Mill says, "Mill's claim that the process of science involves finding the structure *already present* in nature seems at least in tension with [his idealism]." Yes, very much so! The two positions are obviously contradictory. But Mill's contradictory stance was that of many empiricists—even though I don't see any reason why, from their Lockean premises, they were logically bound to adopt idealist positions.

"Mill's phenomenalism led on to the empirio-criticism and positivism of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These tendencies, starting from the premise that objects are nothing but combinations of sense data, cast doubt on our ability to know material reality and culminate in all kinds of quasi-idealistic conclusions." Again, I don't see why accepting the obvious premise that our experiences of objects are "nothing but combinations of sense data"—constructions out of the sensory input the brain is given—necessitates idealism. As for our ability to know material reality, it *is* limited and uncertain. Obviously. The paradoxes and incredible theories of modern physics, which are scarcely intelligible to the human brain, are enough to prove that. In this sense, Hume—and Locke (who was skeptical about humans' ability to understand everything)—was right. And Novack's scorn for the notion that human knowledge is necessarily limited is stupid.

Mach was another idealist. "Mach passes over from the proposition that *knowledge* consists of nothing but sensations to the quite different assertion that the *world* consists solely of our sensations. His non-materialist standpoint can be gauged by the following assertion regarding bodies on the natural world. 'To claim that there are in nature the objective counterparts of this conceptual apparatus is an unjustifiable piece of metaphysics; we may find the concept of a body, for example, useful, but we must not allow ourselves to think that there are bodies in the natural world; we experience only sensations.'" Idiocy.

Novack continues:

> Over the past three centuries, the empirical school has exhibited an ever stronger impulsion to break loose from the moorings in material reality already attenuated in Locke's philosophy and thrash about in a cloudland of self-enclosed sense-data divorced from the external world… The immense distance that latter-day empiricism has traveled from its pristine association with materialism can be measured by contrasting the view of Hobbes

> and Mach. Hobbes defined philosophy as reasoning about causes and effects generated by matter in motion and known through sensation and computation. Mach denied that causation was anything more than a conventional and convenient idea [Bertrand Russell, too, cast doubt on the notion of causation], and he was dubious about the capacity of sensations to reach beyond themselves and convey knowledge of an objective world.

In the latter respect, Mach's doubt was well-founded. Sensations in themselves don't necessarily convey accurate knowledge of an external reality (for they're constructed by the brain and aren't really *copies* of anything). For that, we need science.

I'll skip over Novack's uninteresting and confused discussions of Marxism, dialectical materialism, supposed negative effects of "empiricism" on the labor movement, etc. I'd concede to Novack only that empiricism and positivism are indeed suited in many ways to capitalism and opposed both to a radical social science and to advancing the cause of labor. (Superficial investigations of phenomena, atomistic conceptions of society, etc.) See my notes on E. P. Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory*. Novack isn't wrong that "empiricism instills and encourages many harmful habits of thought, [including] inconclusiveness, relativism, impressionism, eclecticism, subjectivism, and skepticism." (What does he mean by impressionism? "Impressionism relies upon personally enclosed or otherwise narrowed experiences as the practical standard for appraising and analyzing phenomena.") A rejection of positivism—liberalism—and its conservative preference for "piecemeal social engineering" can only be good for the cause of radical social change.

Novack's critique of pragmatism is mildly interesting. He argues that "pragmatism is essentially a belated and updated branch of the empirical tradition… Empiricism, pragmatism, and instrumentalism, or its variant, 'operationalism,' represent three consecutive phases in the evolution of the same trend of thought. Empiricism was the matrix, the rudimentary and general form from which pragmatism sprang, while Dewey's instrumentalism is the highest expression of pragmatism."

The pragmatists were unhappy with the state of empiricism in the late nineteenth century. They thought its account of the process of acquiring knowledge kept the body and its senses far too passive: they were pictured as inactive recipients or reflectors of whatever was pressed on them from outside. (The earlier German idealists, products of Kant and early Romanticism, had criticized empiricists along the same lines, as ignoring the active powers of sensibility and thought.) Second, pragmatists thought original empiricism was unhistorical and non-evolutionary. They embraced the idea of biological evolution and emphasized the biological origins and nature of mental phenomena. But "an even deeper defect of classical empiricism was its failure to explain the influence of the *social* environment and its changes upon the origin and evolution of man's knowledge." Unlike Bacon, Locke, and Hume, pragmatists interpreted human nature as plastic and variable, dependent in some respects on the forms of a given society. Dewey was the most profound here, but even he didn't grasp the essence of the materialist method. He did, at least, "make energetic efforts to overcome [the individualism of classical empiricism] by bringing into his structure of thought the social nature of the conditioning, thinking, and functioning of the separate personality."

The pragmatists took for granted some of the old premises of empiricism, such as the sensory origin of ideas and the nonexistence of innate principles in the mind, and occupied themselves with new questions. "They did not ask, Where do our ideas come from? That was for them a settled question. They inquired, Where do our ideas go to and what are they good for? Instead of asking, How did ideas originate and what are their roots? they asked, What functions do they perform and what effects do they have upon further experience?" William James characterized pragmatism as an attitude of mind, a mode of thought, a point of view, rather than a theory of reality or a system of the world.

Among their contributions was to reject the notion of the British empiricists that sense data are intrinsically isolated. James' psychology, for instance, was much more holistic and phenomenological—"stream of consciousness," etc.—than Hume's. And of course the pragmatic conception of truth was different from, say, Locke's. We separate truth from falsity "not by testing [ideas'] conformity with given realities," Novack paraphrases, "but by conceiving what their effects would be and noting the consequences when we act upon them. If an idea does help us get along in this stream of experience, fulfills our needs,

satisfies our desires and demands, then it is true, or rather it becomes true to that extent. 'An idea is 'true' so long as to believe it is profitable to our lives' [James writes]. And 'the true is only the expedient in the way of our thinking…in the long run and on the whole, of course.'" A distinctively American conception, you can see. "Whatever works!"

On one side, the pragmatists fought against idealism; on the other side, they fought against materialism. They tended to reject the objectivity of nature and society, instead trying to unite subject and object: both are formed in interaction. For James, nature depends on experience, not experience on nature. Again, a confused and unscientific notion, as well as inadmissibly idealistic.

James proclaimed himself a "radical empiricist": "To be radical," he said, "an empiricist must neither admit into his constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced." Reminiscent of Hume. And quite a naïve position.

His pragmatic understanding of truth and ideas (as nothing but "working hypotheses") led him to even greater naïveté in his justification of religion. "We cannot reject any hypothesis if consequences useful to life flow from it… If the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true." Wow. Okay. That it's true *for some people* doesn't mean it's *true*! Naïve relativism. (You can see here the seeds of Richard Rorty's even more explicitly relativist conception of pragmatism.)

Novack's conclusion is perceptive: "Despite their departures from classical empiricism in certain respects, the pragmatists did not break away from its prime postulate that what is presented here and now to the individual affords the best insight into the nature of reality. *Pragmatism remained attached to the phenomenology of experience*. [My italics.] The mandates of its method inhibited persistent search for the inner causal connections in the full scope of their evolution which generate the outward appearances of things." He goes on to say, "James and Dewey…remodeled [the] ideas [of traditional empiricism] to suit the requirements and outlook of the liberal middle-class intellectuals of their day. Indeed, the pragmatic philosophy had the same relation to empiricism as the political program of Progressivism had to capitalism and bourgeois democracy. It aspired to modernize the structure rather than change the foundations."

The last chapter of Novack's book, "Materialism and Empiricism Today," draws some useful conclusions. It reiterates that empiricism, as such, isn't or needn't be opposed to materialism—or idealism. It can take both forms, and has often had a heterogeneous and unstable character. Originally, though, especially in the cases of Bacon and Hobbes, it was allied with materialism. Both outlooks defended the new sciences against medieval authorities, feudal obscurantism, idealism and mysticism. With Locke, the potential grew for the two tendencies to come apart (in Berkeley, to some degree in Hume, and in later empiricists): for "his wobbling on the crucial question of the relation of ideas to the objective world [—e.g., primary qualities inhere in substance (which we're incapable of understanding) but secondary qualities don't—] dislodged the empirical theory of knowledge from a firm anchorage in reality and left it susceptible to agnostic and idealist uses." Materialist empiricism continued among French *philosophes* and in radical circles, but

> The ascendancy and conservatizing of the bourgeois regimes in the nineteenth century tended to brush aside the more materialist elements and exponents of empiricism and bring the skeptical conclusions of Hume to the fore. His reasonings against the reality of causation, the existence of substance, and the objectivity of scientific knowledge frayed the materialist ties of classical empiricism, made possible a reinstatement of religious belief through irrational faith, and steered many empiricists onto the paths of agnosticism and, in extreme cases, subjective idealism.

The successes of natural science continued to vindicate materialism, but most British thinkers of the Victorian era refused to be identified with anything so unrespectable.

> Since [the mid-nineteenth century], the more popular varieties of empiricism have accentuated their nonmaterialist features. The distance between the two philosophies has been widened by the persistent challenge offered by the systematic materialist teachings of

> Marxism to all forms of equivocation and confusion on the principal problems of philosophy prevalent among the empiricists. They in turn have defined their positions in more conscious repulsion against dialectical materialism. This antagonism has been most sharply manifested in the social and political arena, where the confrontations between liberalism and socialism, reformism and revolutionary action, have been tied up with adherence to the rival methods of empiricism and positivism or Marxism.
>
> Thus, starting out as intimate associates in the struggle against medievalism, the two schools of thought now stand arrayed against each other in fields extending from method in natural science to sociology and politics.

A classic example of the opposition of sociological empiricism—or positivism—to Marxism is Karl Popper. Again, see my notes on Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory*. Popper was a dogmatic anti-communist liberal idiot who denied that there are any regularities in history, in effect denying that history can teach us anything. "Non-repetitive events are the most striking aspects of historical development," he wrote. All events are unique, etc. Even the not-very-profound Novack has no trouble refuting such a facile and superficial positivism. ("Social relations themselves refute [the idea that history has no reliable regularities]; they are definite types of perennially repeated mutual interactions among men arising from continuous activities of a definite kind." Productive activities, continuously reproduced economic systems, etc.) Had Popper but read any good historical scholarship, he could hardly have maintained his liberal illusions.

On the other hand, there was some justice in his conviction that it's impossible to know where society is headed, impossible to predict the future in the way Marxism tries to. As Chomsky says, society is just too damn complex for us to know how things are going to turn out. In retrospect, it's possible to discern a logic to historical evolution (contrary to what Popper maintains), a logic grounded primarily in class conflicts; but that logic, and the direction of historical progress, cannot be discerned beforehand. In this sense, Popper's critique of Marxism is valid—though commonsensical. But it doesn't entail that revolutionary social movements are misguided or doomed to utterly fail, as he seems to think they are. (Again, evidently he isn't very familiar with history. The French Revolution, for example, didn't totally fail. Nor did the 1848 revolutions, or the English civil war and 1688 revolution, or the Cuban revolution of 1959, etc. Sometimes revolutionary attempts are *necessary* in order to achieve any progress at all.)

Anyway, on the whole Novack's book is somewhat useful, despite its naïve Marxist dogmatism. Draws interesting connections, has some useful historical discussions, and gives a few insightful critiques of empiricism.

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Well, I officially got the Ph.D. No idea what the future holds.

June–December

Reading Paul Mason's *Postcapitalism: A Guide to Our Future* (2015). Not a great book, but I figured it's the kind of thing I should know about. Maybe I can incorporate some of its ideas into articles.

Wrote a couple articles for *Truthout* and other outlets:

A 21st-Century Marxism: The Revolutionary Possibilities of the "New Economy"

It should hardly be controversial anymore to say we're embarking on the "end times" of…something. Maybe it's corporate capitalism, maybe it's civilization, maybe it's humanity. Whatever it is, the unsustainability of the contemporary *ancien régime*, on the global level, has become obvious.

Economically, socially, politically, and environmentally, the next fifty years will see major upheavals, which may end up dwarfing those even of the 1930s and 1940s—the Great Depression and World War II.

In this moment of crisis and uncertainty, as we wonder what might come next and if in the long run there is any hope for a *positive* resolution of the predicaments society finds itself in, we would do well to consider whether that old revolutionist Karl Marx has anything to say about our future. His intellectual fortunes, after all, have lately been on the upswing. As the greatest theorist ever of capitalism and revolution, it would be odd if his ideas couldn't illuminate the prospects for social transformation in a time of acute crisis.

Marx was mainly an analyst of capitalism, not a prophet or planner of socialism or communism. He did, however, predict socialist revolution, even arguing that it was inevitable and would inevitably take the form of a "dictatorship of the proletariat." This dictatorship, supposedly, would implement total economic and social reconstruction even in the face of massive opposition from the capitalist class, in effect drawing up blueprints to plan out a "new society" that would, somehow, on the basis of sheer political will, overcome the authoritarian and exploitative legacies of capitalism. Through necessarily coercive means, the government would somehow plan and establish economic democracy, in the long run creating the conditions for a "withering away of the state." How such a withering away would actually happen was left a mystery; and none of Marx's followers ever succeeded in clearing the matter up.

In my book *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution: History and Possibilities in the United States*, I have explained how this whole Marxian schema of revolution was always fundamentally flawed, and even, in some respects, blatantly anti-Marxist (i.e., contradictory with the basic premises of Marxism). No such revolutionary *rupture*—a sudden radical break with capitalism in the form of a politically planned, coercively administered flowering of workers' democracy—could ever happen, and ever has happened. Marx misunderstood his own system when he predicted it.

Even the greatest thinkers make mistakes. What is unfortunate is that their followers persist in these mistakes, to the point that even today it seems virtually no one has grasped the contradictions between basic Marxian conceptions of social dynamics and classic revolutionary prognostications that Marx and Engels made in the *Communist Manifesto* and other writings. Further discussion of these matters can be found here.

If we drop the ideological baggage of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," however, we will find that at a more fundamental level of Marxist theory there is a clue to how a transition out of corporate capitalism may occur—how, in fact, it will *have* to occur, if it is to happen at all. From a broad perspective, there is only one path to a post-capitalist society (leaving out the possibility of nuclear holocaust and total systemic collapse).

Transforming the "economic base"

The key to imagining a *positive* outcome of the decline of the contemporary order lies in the Marxian idea that *production relations* are the foundation of every society. That is, political, cultural, and ideological structures are grounded in class structures. The obvious corollary is that a post-capitalist society can evolve only on the basis of the evolution of new production relations, i.e., class (or rather, '*no-class*') relations. Just as new economic relations emerged over centuries during Europe's transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism—and it was on the ground of these structures that a new society developed—so new ways of organizing production will have to evolve in the coming generations in order for humanity to live to see a less crisis-ridden era than the present.

More precisely, inasmuch as the predatory regime of corporate capitalism is founded on the privatization of resources (of production, profit, the natural environment, etc.) and on authoritarian and antagonistic relations of production, a more just and stable society will have to be grounded in the *public* production and distribution of resources, and in relatively democratic and cooperative economic structures.

As such structures progressively emerge over the next fifty and a hundred years, a new kind of politics will, necessarily, evolve on their basis. The gradual, global "social revolution" will not, and cannot, be politically willed and imposed *after* a seizure of state power, as Lenin attempted and Friedrich Engels

predicted. ("The proletariat seizes state power, and then transforms the means of production into state property." What you have in this case is just state capitalism.) Rather, the long-drawn-out political revolutions will occur step-by-step as society, in particular the economy, gradually and organically evolves new, more democratic institutions, precisely to the degree that the old economy descends into crisis.

What will the new institutions look like? Marx was wisely reluctant to speculate in detail about the future. But we're in a more fortunate position than him, because we can already see the seeds of a new economy being planted. They have yet to sprout in a very visible way, but on the grassroots level there are, nonetheless, glimmers of hope.

The new economy

Activism around the "solidarity economy" has in the last decade been garnering more and more attention. Worker cooperatives and public banking, for example, are two concepts that are gaining traction even in the United States, as their growing coverage by journalists and scholars testifies. A recent *In These Times* feature article on public banks describes the remarkable potential of these institutions, as well as challenges the movement faces. But Shelley Brown, an activist from Santa Rosa, is far-sighted in her optimism: "All it'll take is the first domino to fall," she says. "Towns and cities will turn in this direction [toward public banking] because there's no other way to turn." She might have added that sooner or later, if economic stagnation and crisis persists (which it's bound to), states will do so as well, compelled by popular movements and widespread unrest to adopt institutional innovations like public banking.

Worker cooperatives have been more prominently featured in the media than public banking, in part because of their striking successes in both Europe and North America. In my abovementioned book I tell the story of how the cooperative New Era Windows was formed several years ago in Chicago, a few years after its worker-owners had, as employees of Republic Windows and Doors, made international headlines by occupying their factory. That was in the wake of the 2008 crash, when the factory was about to close and the workers were being denied severance pay and other benefits to which they were entitled. Five years later, with the help of their union (the United Electrical Workers) and a nonprofit called The Working World, they had turned the business into a co-op.

More such successes may emerge following the next economic collapse. Similarly, to bring back manufacturing jobs to the U.S., more unions may follow the lead of the United Steelworkers in building industrial cooperatives across the country. The cooperative movement is still in its early stages, so one cannot predict what its potential may be. What one can say with a fair amount of certainty is that public pressure will continue to build for measures like these to protect jobs and in so doing transform the economy.

It might seem that such "interstitial" institutions as public banks and worker cooperatives—or even the aggregate of all types of cooperatives, including in the housing, retail, agricultural, insurance, health, and credit sectors of the economy—have little or no revolutionary potential, being too marginal for that. And certainly, for now, this criticism has force. Whether it will still have force twenty years from now, after economic and environmental crises have savaged the dominant political economy and popular movements have had time to build substantial bases of power, is an open question. Given the unpredictability of history, it is myopic to arbitrarily declare that all "localized," decentralized, municipal or regional attempts to build oppositional institutions will forever be condemned to marginality and cannot serve as nodes of national and international anti-capitalist movements.

The inevitable reaction against neoliberalism

In any case, the necessity of creating *public* forms of economic interaction to save society, in the long run, from the total destruction that will ensue if the privatization and marketization of everything continues unchecked implies that some form(s) of public banking and producer cooperativism will, sooner or later, have to become hegemonic. The hegemony of such institutions is precisely what the revolutionary

goal has always been. "Cooperativism" is just another name for workers' democracy, which is the ideal that has always guided Marxists and other radicals.

It may be that (as Marxists have traditionally argued) the nationalization of key industries will eventually prove necessary and possible; but the idea of national industries *democratically* run is, in effect, just the idea of worker cooperativism writ large and transposed to the political sphere. The more the idea of democratic administration and ownership—as in municipal enterprise, community land trusts, cooperatives, participatory budgeting, etc.—permeates the public consciousness, the more likely it is that assaults on the commanding heights of corporate capitalism will become feasible.

If dire prophecies of another economic collapse, one even more serious than that of 2008–2009, are borne out, the chaos that follows will surely, in the end, empower "radical reformers" agitating for a more democratic and cooperative political economy—in addition to more conventional progressives demanding a reversal of the international austerity regime. For it is hard to see how in such a scenario popular movements can continue to be suppressed indefinitely, everywhere. And insofar as activists press for a transformation of *production* relations (at the local, regional, national, and international levels)—in the direction of abolishing the private appropriation of profits and the authoritarian, exploitative structures of business—they will be laying the groundwork for truly revolutionary changes. The sorts of changes that will someday, perhaps, make possible a move away from the capitalist "growth economy" that cannot but devour nature, people, democracy, and society itself.

In short, while it's necessary to abandon the old Marxian conception of proletarian revolution, the central insights of Marxism give us clues into how a gradualist revolution might proceed. We have to embrace the project of slowly building a new economy from the ground up, while continually agitating for changes in national policy that will facilitate such a project. This is what a twenty-first century Marxism looks like.

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Optimism in the Face of Crisis: How the Left Will Win

It's always fascinating to observe ruling classes seemingly willfully destroying the conditions for their own future rule. History is black with the ashes of self-immolated wealthy classes, grim reminders of the autosarcophagous nature of infinite greed. In eighteenth-century France there was the parasitic aristocracy that shunted all responsibility for the kingdom's finances onto the lower classes, thus setting the stage for the French Revolution. Today, there is the parasitic oligarchy that strips the lower and middle classes of everything but their labor-power and their debt, thus setting the stage for…revolution?

Let's consider some of the remarkable methods the U.S. ruling class, or at least dominant factions of it, are currently using to sabotage their own future rule. To a large extent these devices fall under the category "neoliberal," which is to say a fetishization of privatization and marketization, but that only obscures their real origin, the dominance of the capitalist mode of production itself. Neoliberalism is but a vicious manifestation and continuation of basic tendencies that have characterized capitalism for centuries, including the monomaniacal pursuit of profit, suppression of popular power, class polarization, increasing capital mobility, unfettered imperialism, the pillaging of the natural environment, etc. The salient difference between now and earlier is that on a global level these tendencies appear to be approaching their limits, reaching such a fever pitch that they're undermining the possibility of capitalism-in-the-future.

The short-sightedness of infinite greed

Daily headlines testify to the institutional myopia. Congressional Republicans seem to be trying as hard as they can to arouse the enmity of as many people as possible by passing the horrifying American Health Care Act—which is only serving to build support for a single-payer system. Trump's tax plan, which admittedly is pie in the sky, proposes "one of the biggest tax cuts in American history" (according to the director of Trump's National Economic Council)—to benefit the wealthy, who don't have enough money

yet. More fodder for populist rage on the Left. And, of course, yet another device to "starve the beast," i.e., hamstring the federal government's ability to administer society in such a way that…society continues to function.

Trump's budget, as we know, is a masterpiece of misanthropy. Among its shining provisions are $2 trillion of cuts to health programs, a 31 percent cut to the EPA, $472 billion slashed from income security programs, and $346 billion of cuts to education, training, and employment programs. It has no chance of becoming law, but since it's just an extreme version of Republican priorities, it doesn't bode well for the country's future. Which is to say, it doesn't bode well for the ruling class's untrammeled exercise of power—because of the civic collapse and consequent popular resistance it augurs.

Public education, for instance, has been an integral component of the mass middle-class nation-state, one of the guarantors of relative social order (in part by supporting the *hope*, at least, of social mobility). It isn't news to say that neither the Trump administration nor the billionaire class as a whole is enamored of public education. They loathe the idea of paying taxes to help people who are "beneath" them, and in fact dislike anything opposed to the gospel of privatization and atomization. And, of course, there's a lot of money to be made from privatizing education. Hence the ongoing nationwide crusade to destroy public education. State educational funding has been cut in the last decade; tuition at four-year public colleges has simultaneously increased 28 percent, exacerbating the student debt crisis; the spread of charter schools continues to chip away at the funding and the culture of robust public education; and the constant political, budgetary, and media attacks on teachers and their unions basically serve the function of attacking mass education itself.

With Trump and Betsy DeVos at the helm, the war on students, teachers, and public schools is only escalating. In DeVos's crosshairs are after-school programs, arts programs, childcare programs, money for teacher training and class-size reduction, financial aid for low-income college students, adult basic literacy instruction, etc. Voucher and market strategies, on the other hand, are given over $1 billion in Trump's budget.

The most obvious example of the ruling class's disregard for its own future power and well-being is the case of global warming. If civilization collapses, dragging down with it most life on earth, then, however much the wealthiest of the wealthy try to barricade themselves in Xanadus remote from climate chaos and the misery of the rabble, their quality of life is going to be affected. But as usual, short-term gain matters more than any other value, including long-term self-interest.

It's true that much of the oligarchy is worried about global warming, as shown by the outrage from even American business interests and politicians over Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement. But the efforts devoted to addressing climate change are pathetic. The corporate media scarcely even mentions it, at least by comparison with the coverage it would get from a genuinely free press. At a time when carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere is at an unbelievable 408 parts per million, it is Trump's probably nonexistent collusion with Russians that obsesses the political and media establishment. We're on track to hit 500 ppm by 2050. Antarctica's ice sheet is melting at an accelerating rate. Coastal areas are in danger of being wiped out by the end of the century or earlier. The Amazon rainforest could be a memory within our lifetimes. Meanwhile, even on the state level in the U.S., "the progress [in reducing carbon emissions] is slow," according to one expert, "and the near-term targets are low."

The longer the oligarchy abdicates responsibility for the well-being of future generations, the more ammunition it gives to radical popular movements whose aim is to completely transform the American political economy.

Last, I would mention the ruling class's apparent equanimity regarding the probability of another economic collapse in the near future, possibly a greater collapse than that of 2008–2009. The work of Marxist economists such as David Harvey, Robert Brenner, and the Monthly Review school illuminates the fundamental weaknesses of the American economy from a long-term perspective—weaknesses that have much to do with "excessive capitalist empowerment vis-à-vis labour and consequent wage repression," to quote Harvey. The only reason the economy functions at all is the existence of a colossal amount of debt, which temporarily solves the problem of low aggregate demand. But, as Reuters columnist James Saft

points out, consumer debt growth—which has lately been occurring at a far faster rate than incomes and the economy are growing—"can't outpace wages forever." Corrections, like that of 2008, are inevitable.

The Republican Party is doing what it can to ensure that the next crash is as catastrophic as possible by moving to gut the Dodd-Frank regulations, which would facilitate a resurgence of predatory lending and other practices that led to the 2008 crash.

Of course, the ultra-rich can expect to be bailed out again in the event of a crash. They don't have much to fear in this respect. What should cause them some concern are the "pitchforks" that will be brandished next time around: the surge of populist rage, largely left-wing (and therefore truly frightening), that will quite possibly signal the beginning of the end of neoliberal hegemony. We should, after all, recall an earlier parallel to our own time: in 1930 organized labor and the Left were in an abysmal state, having experienced a decade of repression so cataclysmic that historian David Montgomery famously referred to it as "the fall of the house of labor." The unionization rate was at 7 percent, barely above our current private-sector unionization rate. And yet within six years, after the emergence of continent-wide protest movements in the context of the Great Depression, the political economy had moved so dramatically to the left that the U.S. welfare state was born, the federal government was committed to protecting unions, and industrial unionism was making epochal advances that laid the basis for the sustained prosperity of the postwar era.

The case for optimism

The advantage of a Marxian, "dialectical" point of view is that it allows one to see silver linings in developments that look entirely and straightforwardly disastrous. The crises of the present, including the decline of the bureaucratic labor unionism that was integrated into the corporatist structures of the nation-state, present opportunities that leftists ought to embrace. Just as the mature welfare-state in the West didn't and couldn't emerge until the horrors of the Depression and World War II had paved the way for it (in part by mobilizing the Left on an epic scale), so the crises of the coming decades will, one can expect, prepare the ground for a reconstruction of society on a more just and democratic foundation.

Said differently, modern history is cyclical. The ferment of U.S. labor and the Left in the Progressive Era—with the IWW, the Socialist Party, the Western Federation of Miners, epidemics of strikes—was finally crushed by the reactionary backlash of the Red Scare and then the triumphalist New Era in the 1920s, when "the business of America [was] business," as Calvin Coolidge said. The decimation of labor, which suppressed aggregate demand (because of consequent low wages and insecure employment), helped cause the Depression, which saw a revitalization of the Left. During and after World War II, big business launched a remarkably successful counteroffensive (associated, misleadingly, with the name of Joe McCarthy, who was a bit player) that purged politics, culture, and organized labor of almost every hint of leftism.

But this phase of nearly unchecked Cold War corporatism succumbed to the turbulence of the 1960s and '70s. African-Americans, students, women, anti-war activists, environmentalists, and rank-and-file workers erupted against the repressive bureaucratic regime of centrist liberalism, permanently changing American culture and politics. In response, as we know, business and conservatives mobilized once again, determined this time to annihilate organized labor and the New Deal state itself, which they saw as a challenge to their power and profits. Thus came neoliberalism, another triumphalist "New Era" of savage repression and "end of history" propaganda (this time with a dash of postmodernism thrown in for good measure). By 2017, we're overdue for the next left-wing phase of the cycle.

But this time it's going to be different. It's not just another phase that will be followed by a reactionary backlash. As I've argued at length in *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution: History and Possibilities in the United States*, the unique historical role of neoliberalism has been to bring the long epoch of capitalism to its global consummation—which, in classic dialectical fashion, will end up precipitating its downfall. In fact, the nation-state system itself, which is integrally connected to capitalism, is in the early stages of its long decline. The political economy of privatization and social atomization on the one hand, and transnationalism on the other, that has emerged on the basis of information technology deployed in a neoliberal context is unraveling the social fabric of the nation-state—in part by facilitating

the emergence of a *global* consciousness and the undermining of a *national* one. This, in turn, is making possible the rise of global social movements (which, incidentally, are what Marxism was all about to begin with: "Workers of the world, unite!").

The decline of the middle class presents dangers in the form of semi-fascism, but, unfortunately, it is necessary if we're ever to transcend corporate capitalism. The middle class, after all, has historically been the conservative bastion of an inequitable social order. As it collapses, many of its members will be seduced by the political right, but others—together with the majority of the lower classes and minorities—will join progressives and radicals. Both Jeremy Corbyn's success in Britain's recent election and Bernie Sanders' enormous popularity demonstrate that the left-wing has but to broadcast its message effectively in order to build a mass popular movement.

The coming decades are going to see the apocalyptic struggle between labor/humanity and capital (particularly the most reactionary sectors of capital) that Marx prophesied but for which he got the timeline wrong (not foreseeing state capitalism and the welfare state). As the least progressive sectors of business struggle to push capitalism to its most misanthropic, world-destroying extremes, liberal and leftist institutions will acquire more support from the populace, more resources, and more power. They already are. The precise dynamics of this process can't be foreseen, but that it will happen can be predicted with near-certainty simply given the cyclical/dialectical logic of history. The only alternative is total repression of the population for an indefinite period of time—which, since we don't live in Nazi Germany, isn't an option.

It's unlikely we'll see a return to twentieth-century social democracy, because the nationalistic, heavily unionized political economy that produced that social formation is dead. It has succumbed to relative fragmentation and atomization. Instead, we'll see momentum grow behind more radical initiatives like the democratization of ownership—which is proposed in the Labor Party's manifesto and has been championed by Bernie Sanders and other senators. The very structures of government and the economy will be thrown into question as the idea spreads that humanity's current predicament is a direct product of these structures. Popular pressures to address global warming will reinforce and align with anti-capitalist movements, as it becomes clearer that only radical changes in the economy will be adequate to meet the ecological threat. The very inseparability of all the crises afflicting the country and the world—militarism, the privatization of resources, climate change, income inequality, economic stagnation, unemployment—will foment wholesale popular radicalization.

Moreover, the fact that the victims of the stagnant status quo include huge numbers of young people is extremely dangerous to the oligarchy. The youth will be the shock troops of the revolution.

One of the lessons of history is that the longer an elite prevents change from happening, the more it ensures that the change, when it comes, will be radical and all-encompassing. The French royalty learned this to its cost when it was swept aside by revolution in the 1790s. Tsar Nicholas II learned the lesson when his hidebound conservatism eventually empowered the Bolsheviks and got him and his family massacred. The Southern plantation aristocracy in the U.S. learned it when its viciously reactionary politics and unwillingness to compromise led to the Civil War and slavery's abolition. The U.S. ruling class learned it when its crushing of labor in the 1920s indirectly led to a flood of progressive legislation in the 1930s. And in the next couple of decades, our ruling class is going to learn the lesson once again.

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The Necessity of a Moral Revolution

We're embarking on a revolutionary era, an era that promises to be more radical even than the 1930s. No society of overwhelming decadence and moral rot, luxuriantly productive of Steve Bannons and Anthony Scaramuccis, is destined to last very long. No society that can throw up a bewigged slug as its leader has much of a future. As it parasitizes itself to death, new social forms are bound to sprout in abundance (through the energy of activists and organizers).

The core of the protracted revolution, of course, is to create new institutions, ultimately new relations of production. Every revolution is essentially a matter of changing social structures; the goal of transforming ideologies makes sense only as facilitating institutional change. Nevertheless, to spread new ways of thinking, new values, can indeed serve as an effective midwife of revolution, and thus is a task worth undertaking.

The fundamental moral transition that has to occur (in order, for example, to save humanity from collective suicide) is from a kind of nefarious egoism to a beneficent communism. This is the ideological core of the coming social changes, this shift from individualistic greed—"Gain wealth, forgetting all but self"—to collective solidarity. We have to stop seeing the world through the distorted lens of the private capitalist self, the self whose *raison d'être* is to accumulate private property, private experiences, private resentments, finally private neuroses, and instead see the world as what it is, a vast community stretching through time and space. Such a change of vision might facilitate the necessary institutional changes—which themselves, later, will naturally engender and instill this communist-type vision.

The very notion of "private property," of "this is mine, and I alone earned it," has to be recognized as a form of moral idiocy or insanity. Here, I would do better to quote the old anarchist Kropotkin than to offer my own formulations, which would pale beside his. In his classic *The Conquest of Bread*, Kropotkin explained just how *stupid* is the idea of entitlement to a private piece of property (as though "no one else deserves it"):

> Take a civilized country. The forests which once covered it have been cleared, the marshes drained, the climate improved. It has been made habitable. The soil, which bore formerly only a coarse vegetation, is covered today with rich harvests… Thousands of highways and railroads furrow the earth, and pierce the mountains. The rivers have been made navigable; the coasts, carefully surveyed, are easy of access; artificial harbors, laboriously dug out and protected against the fury of the sea, afford shelter to the ships…
>
> Millions of human beings have labored to create this civilization on which we pride ourselves today. Other millions, scattered through the globe, labor to maintain it. Without them nothing would be left in fifty years but ruins.
>
> There is not even a thought, or an invention, which is not common property, born of the past and the present. Thousands of inventors, known and unknown, who have died in poverty, have cooperated in the invention of each of these machines which embody the genius of man. Thousands of writers, of poets, of scholars, have labored to increase knowledge, to dissipate error, and to create that atmosphere of scientific thought without which the marvels of our century could never have appeared. And these thousands of philosophers, of scholars, of inventors…have been upheld and nourished through life, both physically and mentally, by legions of workers and craftsmen of all sorts…
>
> By what right then can anyone whatever appropriate the least morsel of this immense whole and say – This is mine, not yours?[1]

As he goes on to argue, the wage system itself, which is conceptually and institutionally a close relative of private property, is morally absurd. And not only because it's repugnant for people to be forced to rent themselves to others in order to survive. Or because wage-earners necessarily can't receive the full equivalent of the value they have produced (for then the capitalist couldn't make any profit). Perhaps equally ridiculous is the idea that it's possible to "measure" labor at all, to quantitatively compare workers' contributions, when there are so many qualitative differences between the work that each person does. How

[1] Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings*, ed. Marshall Shatz (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13–16. More concisely, "the means of production being the collective work of humanity, the product should be the collective property of the race. Individual appropriation is neither just nor serviceable. All belongs to all. All things are for all men, since all men have need of them…and since it is not possible to evaluate everyone's part in the production of the world's wealth."

can one say whose work is more valuable than another's? Why should a plumber's work be considered less valuable than an engineer's? Why a financial consultant's more valuable than a sanitation worker's? (If anything, the reverse makes far more sense.)

The only principle that makes logical and moral sense is "to put the *needs* above the *works*, and first of all to recognize *the right to live*, and later on *the right to well-being* for all those who take their share in production." Society has to be rid, once and for all, of the obsessive "*who deserves what?*" mentality, the *apportioning* mentality, the "*mine vs. yours*" pathology.

"If middle-class society is decaying," Kropotkin writes—thereby, incidentally, proving the timelessness of his thoughts—"if we have got into a blind alley from which we cannot emerge without attacking past institutions with torch and hatchet, it is precisely because we have given too much to counting. It is because we have let ourselves be influenced into *giving* only to *receive*. It is because we have aimed at turning society into a commercial company based on *debit* and *credit*."[1]

Actually, as I've written elsewhere (following David Graeber), even contemporary capitalist society, whose utopia is to make everyone an enemy of everyone else (that's what thoroughgoing privatization would mean), couldn't function without a substratum of implicit communism. Everything would instantly break down if people stopped giving what they could to those in need, whether money, time, free labor, gifts, advice, ideas, or encouragement. Social life itself is essentially communistic, based on community, generosity, and sympathy. The general systematization of private property is a perversion.

Kropotkin's arguments suffice to answer the misanthropic refrain of conservatives that "it's wrong to give something to people who have done nothing to earn it." But other answers are possible. One might point out that people born into the middle or upper class have done nothing to "earn" their privileged position. The wealthy haven't earned the inheritance they receive from their parents. White Americans didn't earn their skin-color or the fact that they weren't born in, say, a Haitian slum. People who benefit from charisma or physical beauty or intelligence did nothing to earn that; they were born with it. They deserve no credit for it. Somebody who happens to meet the right person at the right time and is launched on a successful career is the beneficiary of luck—as, in short, every "successful" person is, in innumerable ways.

Nor does any of this begin to address all the ways that the wealthy or corporations or Silicon Valley entrepreneurs benefit from state policy designed to give them what they want and to strip the poor of the right to live. Through the agency of the state (e.g., its corporate welfare programs, defense budget, patent and copyright protections, and, to some extent, interest payments on bonds), the population subsidizes the power and wealth of people whose ideology is to shame those who benefit from state programs. According to their own ideology, then, these "libertarians" in the business class ought to have their property confiscated, since, strictly speaking, they have "*earned*" none or little of it.

In fact, to the degree that our economy has become mainly a rentier economy, owned by parasites on the productive labor of others, it is sheer farce to talk about property-owners' *right* to their wealth—which is to say *their right to exclude others from ownership/use*. For where would this right come from, if there isn't even a *pretense* of their having earned all they own? How rich would Bill Gates be without the "rent" he receives from ridiculously stringent copyright protection for Windows and other Microsoft products? He is merely the lucky beneficiary of government policies that serve to hinder the diffusion of knowledge and wealth.

All this private property-exalting thinking, therefore, has to be cast aside onto the dung-heap of history. Rather than Reverence for Property, we ought to strive for something like the Reverence for Life that Albert Schweitzer famously wrote about and embodied. That is, we ought to explicitly embrace the moral communism ("From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs") to which we're already implicitly committed whenever we act as though guided by the Golden Rule, which is to say whenever we act morally at all. To be moral is, in essence, to act like a communist.

"Let us go then, you and I," and bring forth the moral revolution.

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[1] Ibid., 154, 155.

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Reading George Crowder's *Classical Anarchism: The Political Thought of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin* (1991).

[…]

Murray Bookchin's *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy* (2015), a collection of essays. Also parts of John Holloway's *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (2002). It's a flawed book, repetitive and verbose, which, absurdly, doesn't want to have anything to do with considerations of power. Even though, um, to change the world, by definition it's necessary to change relations of power. I.e., it's necessary for ordinary people to "*take power*" in some sense. Suggests some interesting conceptualizations, though, and gives a few of the same critiques I have of Marxist statism.

Bookchin's thinking is flawed too, quite superficial and silly on various points.

I'm adjunct teaching at a couple of colleges in New York City (and also doing private tutoring). Surveys of U.S. history. Here's part of one of the syllabi I wrote, a quite different sort of document than the syllabi of most history professors:

HIST 104: AMERICAN HISTORY SINCE THE CIVIL WAR

Course introduction

To study the second half of U.S. history is to study how the world arrived at the present moment. If you're interested in the present, then you should be interested in the past, which formed the present. If you're interested in the future, there is no better way of equipping yourself with the tools necessary for acting intelligently than by studying the past. Indeed, the novelist William Faulkner was right when he said, "The past is never dead; it's not even past." It lives on in cultural and political traditions, in economic practices, in the ways we think about the world. These are all, in large part, residues. *We inhabit a world of residues—we inhabit the past*—even as we're constantly trying to build a new world, to act *freely*, not dominated by the past. But the most effective way to even *partially* achieve this goal—this goal of free and intelligent action, free and intelligent thinking—is to understand where we came from, the social context into which we were born, rationally critique it, and thereby rise above it. The alternative is to remain mired in the dogmas, prejudices, and propaganda of the past.

Every teacher has a particular interpretation of his subject-matter, a particular intellectual background that determines what he emphasizes in his lectures and what he omits. In the first class I'll describe my own perspective on history, the ideas and interpretations that will guide the lectures. Here I'll just list some of the course's main themes:

1. The importance of *class*, and of conflict between classes, in shaping history. Examples include the conflicts between slave and master, sharecropper and landowner, wage-earner and capitalist, industrialist and banker, debtor and creditor, tenant and landlord, etc. But the major conflict is between worker and property owner, over both *control of production* and *remuneration of labor*.
2. The tortured progress of industrial capitalism in spreading its dominion to ever more spheres of life, as the country has evolved from predominantly agrarian to primarily urban and industrial (and finally post-industrial).
3. The concomitant growth of the federal government, which has been a key element in the relentlessly advancing bureaucratization of life and society. (But at the same time, massive government "intervention" in the economy and society has been absolutely necessary and frequently beneficial—a fact that contradicts popular ideologies exalting "small government" and the "free market.")

4. The ever-deepening tendency for the U.S. to project its economic, political, and military power abroad, until by the 1990s it was the world's sole superpower.
5. The cyclical nature of U.S. history.

In short, in this class we will not only learn *what happened* in U.S. history from 1865 to the early 21st century, what some of the most significant economic, political, and cultural developments were, from Reconstruction to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal to the social movements of the 1960s to the rise of information technology. We will also study *why* these things happened. I'll suggest certain perspectives and explanations that I find compelling, which you'll be free to accept or reject. At all times I'll not only tolerate but *encourage* disagreement with my suggestions, both in class and in the papers you'll write. The essence of exciting intellectual interactions is to encounter ideas with which you might disagree but that, at the same time, encourage you to formulate your own opinions in a sharper and more sophisticated way than before. [Deleted the rest of the syllabus.]

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I'll also copy my first two/three lectures here—the lecture notes—in case you're interested. The second/third one on the postbellum South was far more detailed than necessary, as became clear when I was giving it in class. (It was based mostly on Eric Foner's classic book on Reconstruction.) So I left out lots of the details I'd written down.

Why study history?

We live in an anti-historical time. A culture of instant gratification, material consumption, entertainment, instantaneous soundbites, video games, the internet—the present moment and the immediate future. The past isn't sexy; it's seen as boring and primitive. We want the quick fix. All this is the exact opposite of the spirit of historical inquiry, which demands patience, empathy, a capacity for sustained concentration.

So the study of history isn't fashionable. On the other hand, that makes it even more important. As Santayana said, "those who forget history are condemned to repeat it." And that's not a pleasant prospect: history is full of horrible catastrophes and injustices. By studying the past, it's possible we can mold the future in a more positive way

There's a lot to learn from history. (First paragraph of syllabus.) More specific lessons, from Paul Street:

> History properly and deeply understood is profoundly dangerous to authority. Consistent with Santayana's oft-quoted remark that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," it warns us about past mistakes. National leaders' remarkably recurrent faith in splendid little wars that will be concluded quickly with little human cost is one among many examples.
>
> It raises alarms and teaches lessons about the folly of imperial and environmental overreach and the related terrible consequences of the excessive concentration of wealth and power.
>
> It counsels us not to repeat past *crimes* (not merely mistakes) like slavery, colonialism, genocide, and fascism.
>
> It catalogues, frames, and explains horrors that should never be allowed to recur.

> It tells remarkable and inspiring stories of popular resistance, rebellion, and revolution – of people making history from the bottom up, with radical and egalitarian ideals and movements ruling classes and "power elites" natural want consigned to "the memory hole" (Orwell's phrase).
>
> It is full of lessons about how ruling classes and power elites rule and how ordinary people and activists have confounded masters.
>
> It tells us that humanity survived and often thrived for most of its experience without the hierarchical class structures of capitalism.
>
> It reminds us that the "modern" (and yet pre-historic) bourgeois mode of social and political relations is historically specific and transient, not the "end of history" or the logical destination or culmination of "human nature." (This helps us imagine and work for a different and much less stratified and destructive society in the present and future).
>
> It points to contingency and alternatives, reminding us that significant, even revolutionary historical change is possible and related to human agency, both individual and collective.
>
> It takes us to the developmental taproots of contemporary problems like sexism, classism, racism, imperialism, militarism, and ecocide, showing how and why all of these evolved over time out of decisions and paths taken by human beings, not the mysterious workings of some dark, all-powerful deity and/or "human nature" – or some other form of imposed destiny. (How understand contemporary racial inequality and oppression in the U.S. with no grasp of the origins, nature, and consequences of Black chattel slavery in British Colonial North America and the United States through the Civil War?)
>
> It helps us recognize and identify deadly developments in the present. It's useful to know what classic fascism was in Italy and Germany as a neofascist president holds power in the U.S. and as neofascists like Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders vie for power in Western Europe. Those who don't know what fascism was *and how and why it arose* in the 20th century may be condemned to live under a 21st century version of it today.

Aside from all the specific lessons that can be learned (which we'll discuss later), history is, of course, an indescribably vast and rich domain. It *should* be perhaps the most interesting of subjects, because in a sense it includes everything! Music, literature, the arts, philosophy, science, politics, war, religion—history is everything. Even the U.S.'s relatively short history is far too rich to be adequately summarized in a semester or two.

So it isn't easy to know what to focus on in a single course. Incidentally, if you have suggestions of topics you'd like me to cover, let me know…

I disagree with the way history courses are usually taught. (Boring, etc. Ask for students' thoughts on classes they've had?) Usually the past is only *described*—a bunch of things happened…—and it isn't made very relevant to the present or to students' lives. It doesn't have much intellectual content. But I think it's also important to try to *explain* things. Using general ideas that we can then apply to our own time (because, after all, it is the present and future that should be our most immediate concerns). As in the natural sciences, so in history the only way to make sense of enormous amounts of data is to use certain abstract ideas to place the data in comprehensible relations with each other.

So that's what I'll do in this course. A pretty different approach than is usually done—in part because if you bring in ideas and try to explain things, the discussion can get somewhat political. And teachers want to avoid politics. But I think that's a risk we have to take, because ideas are important.

So throughout the semester I'll put forward various perspectives that might be a little controversial…but I encourage dissent. (Refer to syllabus.)

#1: Class conflict. It sounds Marxist, but it's important. Can be conscious or unconscious, explicit or implicit. Every complex society is full of such conflicts, such institutional clashes, and they provide the economic infrastructure around which the society is organized. Culture, politics, and ideologies follow in the wake of class, for the simple reason that one needs *resources* in order to influence culture and politics; and it is class (roughly, occupation) that determines the distribution of resources. Therefore, in the final analysis it is class relations—which is to say the antagonisms, alliances, and differences in power between various classes—that broadly determine social phenomena and the trajectories of history.

Materialism vs. idealism. I'm a materialist; others can be idealists. Loosely speaking: ideas and culture are largely a reflection of society vs. society is basically a manifestation of, and guided by, ideas. (A long-running split between the two schools of thought; materialists are often more left-wing, idealists more conservative. Materialists think it's essential to change *institutions*; idealists care more about changing ideas. Care more about culture and so on than economic structures or class. People like Milton Friedman, for instance, like to talk about abstract ideas like "the free market"—or entrepreneurship, thrift, free labor, free enterprise, limited government, etc.—while materialists prefer to examine how institutions actually work. Abstract ideas can obscure how society really functions.) But ideas don't act by themselves; they need entities with resources (money) to propagate them. Besides, people generally act on the basis of their *interests*—they want money, shelter, security, power, recognition, status—and interests are defined economically. So the economy is most important.

We'll see how different groups of people, different classes, have different ideological agendas. (E.g., many slaveowners thought slavery was intrinsically moral and divinely ordained—because that was in their economic interest. Businessmen often think of humans as innately greedy and selfish—because that justifies their own activities.)

Of course, class isn't the only factor that determines history. You need a compromise between materialism and idealism. Other factors include sex (male/female), sexuality, race, and gender. But these are all influenced by class. Like race and racism: as we'll see, they've been propagated by rich and powerful people and institutions (big business) in order to divide the working class. Because working-class unity, organized labor, is a threat to the profits and power of the rich.

Given the significance of class, we'll find it's possible to make generalizations that give some sort of coherence to American history. One such generalization, for example, is expressed by the American linguist and activist Noam Chomsky as follows: "The history of the United States is a constant struggle between these two tendencies: pressure for more freedom and democracy coming from below, and efforts at elite control and domination coming from above." Throughout the semester we'll see abundant evidence for this statement. It isn't because the "elite" consists of bad or evil people; it is simply because it's in the nature of power to try to maintain and expand itself, to become more powerful. This is a fact one must understand in order to grasp history.

Most of it just comes down to *capital vs. labor*. Intrinsically opposed interests—and that gets you the history of the labor movement, of Communist and Socialist parties, etc.

Sounds political and partisan, yes, but I think we'll find it's also true. You're free to disagree if you want to, though, and can say so in papers and in class.

#2, etc.: refer to the syllabus…

Lecture Two/Three

The current resurgence of white supremacy—Charlottesville, Trump, the alt-right, neo-Nazis—shows that the legacy of slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction continues. Whites continue to scapegoat blacks and immigrants for their economic and political problems, as in the late nineteenth century. As we'll see, racial and ethnic divisions between workers in the U.S. have always hindered class-based movements against the rich, and have been one reason for America's relative conservatism.

Dismal history of blacks in the U.S. Slavery, a brief opening during Radical Reconstruction, then sharecropping, Jim Crow, and industrial re-enslavement until World War II (except for those who went up north during the Great Migration—although that wasn't a pretty story either), then some improvement in 1950s, '60s and '70s, then again the criminalization of black life. But for a different reason this time: after Reconstruction it was to control labor and secure cheap labor, while after the 1960s it was to control a population that, with deindustrialization, had become economically superfluous—and also dangerous, as the 60s had shown. Thus the drug war, the war on crime, and in general the war on the poor.

So on one hand the history of Reconstruction is the history of oppressed people (and their white allies) struggling for more power and freedom against former slaveowners and reactionary power-structures that want to keep them subordinate and in as close a condition to slavery as possible. Basically class struggle, but with a racial dynamic. On the other hand, the Civil War and Reconstruction are a story of expanding state power, expanding federal bureaucracies, which anticipates the later massive growth of government to administer a society full of class and racial conflicts. The end of Reconstruction signaled the end of this phase of remarkable state expansion; but expansion resumed at the turn of the century.

Because of the war's financial demands, Congress "adopted economic policies that promoted further industrial expansion and permanently altered the conditions of capital accumulation." Created a national paper currency, an enormous natnal debt, and a national banking system. To raise funds it increased the tariff and imposed new taxes. The Homestead Act offered free lands to settlers (to promote agricultural development). And there were enormous grants of land and government bonds for internal improvements like the transcontinental railroad, "which, when completed in 1869, expanded the national market, facilitated the penetration of capital into the West, and heralded the final doom of the Plains Indians." (Eric Foner)

All this shifted the balance of economic power in the North. A new and powerful class of financiers was created, wealthy people and institutions that benefited from high tariffs (which protected the growth of industry in the following decades), high inflation that raised prices and lowered real wages, and the payment in *gold* of interest on bonds. The new national banking system helped promote future investment in industry and commerce—and it was controlled by Wall Street. "As a result, the West and, after the war, the South found themselves starved of capital." This contributed to the South's later backwardness.

The birth of the modern American state. ("War is the health of the state.")

From a broad perspective, the Civil War and Reconstruction signified a second American revolution. And not only because slavery so contradicted the original ideology of liberty and democracy, thus making a mockery of the U.S.'s revolutionary heritage. Two very different labor systems, two economic systems, existing in the same country was an unsustainable situation. There was bound to be an epic clash sooner or

later. Since Northern industrial capitalism was far more dynamic and wealth-generating than Southern slavery, which in some ways was like feudalism, in the long run the South's system was doomed. It succumbed to capitalism and the market system. But it did take a long time for the process to be completed—until after World War II actually. Massive federal government intervention was necessary, as we'll see later. (Contradicts the ideology of the free market, limited government, etc.)

*

After the Emancipation Proclamation blacks flooded into the Union army—eventually 180,000. Were treated and paid badly (in segregated units) but nevertheless played a crucial role in winning the war and defining its consequences. Because of their service, blacks necessarily acquired a new *status* across the country. They began to be treated as equals under the law (military law). Large numbers learned to read and write. White Union soldiers, too, learned about the horrors of slavery as they served in the army.

History shows that military service sometimes has a politicizing and radicalizing effect. Guerrilla armies, American Revolution militias, and during and after World War II. Likewise with the Civil War. According to a Northern official: "No negro who has ever been a soldier can again be imposed upon: they have learnt what it is to be free and they will infuse their feelings into others." Blacks who had served became prouder and more militant; many later were political leaders of Reconstruction.

Military experience contributed to blacks' spirit of resistance during Reconstruction that foiled the most oppressive and reactionary plans of Southern whites.

What freedmen wanted was genuine freedom. Their own land, political equality, legal equality, etc. Something (at least land-wise) like what General William T. Sherman gave 40,000 of them in January 1865 with his Special Field Order No. 15, which confiscated a vast stretch of slaveowners' land along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia so each black family could have forty acres. In the months after the war ended, blacks organized endless mass meetings, parades, petitions, and political education clubs to demand civil equality and suffrage. They were far from passive: didn't just let whites decide their political and economic fate.

In fact, as the war approached its end, blacks started *living out* their emancipation by creating and expanding a whole civil society, a whole culture, of churches, schools, mutual benefit societies, clubs, and so on. It had already existed but now, in the postbellum years, was consolidated, thus laying the foundation of the modern black community. Burial societies, debating clubs, drama societies, trade associations, equal rights leagues. Ubiquitous processions and celebrations in Southern cities; a very vibrant culture.

Also a transformation of religion—the creation of an independent black religious life. Whites wouldn't let blacks have an equal place in white churches, and anyway ex-slaves wanted to be free of white control, so they formed their own separate churches (usually Baptist). Emotional services full of shouting, fainting, music, dancing. Later led to gospel music.

Almost as significant as the role of religion was freed slaves' passion for education. Practically an obsession. Wanted to read the Bible, but also wanted economic advancement, and more generally independence and self-improvement. Set up classes wherever they could—in abandoned warehouses, billiard rooms, churches, former slave markets, basements, private homes, and eventually in schoolhouses that were built through fundraising campaigns, donations, and money from the Freedmen's Bureau. All this institution-building that happened during Reconstruction fostered political awareness and the growth of a culture that united former free blacks and former slaves.

A key element in blacks' postwar project of self-empowerment was the Freedmen's Bureau. Created by Congress in March 1865, its purpose was to distribute clothing, food, and fuel to destitute freedmen, and to oversee "all subjects" relating to their condition in the South. So, very ambitious, even though it was planned to last for only one year! And Congress didn't even appropriate funds for it! It had to get its money and staff from the War Department.

Perhaps its most significant accomplishment was to help establish thousands of schools in the South (especially in towns and cities), and thereby to help lay the foundation for Southern public education. Also established the first black colleges in the South. The Bureau created an extensive network of courts, hospitals, charitable institutions, and labor regulations, but most were intended to be temporary. So weren't as effective as they could have been. Especially difficult to protect blacks from the rampant violence they were subject to. The Bureau soon phased out its own courts, but Southern courts were of course wildly racist.

The goal of Northerners—especially Radical Republicans—and Bureau leaders was to remake the South in the image of the North. The free market should structure social relations. Free labor, wages, capitalism. Many Northern businessmen wanted to lift up blacks materially and socially so there could be a vast new market for Northern goods. Even thought black suffrage was necessary to create the political conditions for Northern investment in the South. (This led much of the business community to support Radical Republicans. But other businessmen disagreed: didn't want to disrupt the cheap Southern labor force, and wanted cotton production to resume as fast as possible.)

These goals were utopian, though. In fact, immediately after the war the army was mainly concerned with compelling freedmen to return to plantation labor. Thought it could be regulated by a system of wages and free labor, but planters wanted to recreate their earlier absolute power as closely as possible. By 1866 the Bureau was forcing blacks to sign annual contracts to work on the plantations. Were often treated brutally and viciously exploited, and couldn't leave. Hardly "free labor," especially because landless freedmen had basically *no other option* and were fined or imprisoned if they went on strike.

Freedmen had hoped the government would give them land—and in 1865 the Bureau did try to settle many of them on the 850,000 acres of abandoned land it controlled. Wanted to create a class of black small farmers, an independent yeomanry. (Jeffersonian ideal, Radical Republican ideal.) This *could* have meant a major social revolution, a total reconstruction of the Southern class structure. But President Johnson overruled the Bureau and restored land that had been abandoned and confiscated to Southern planters, former Confederates he had pardoned. He also forced the tens of thousands of freedmen who had settled on Sherman's reservation off the land, which was restored to rich planters. There was massive resistance, but poor blacks didn't stand a chance against the army and the white power-structure. 1865 and 1866 were thus years of terrible betrayal, and were felt as such. As one freedman said, blacks had been left with "no land, no house, not so much as place to lay our head… Despised by the world, hated by the country that gives us birth, denied of all our rights as a people, we were friends on the march,…brothers on the battlefield, but in the peaceful pursuits of life it seems that we are strangers."

Planters tried to revive the antebellum gang-labor system, which was reminiscent of slavery. But in most cases blacks were able to resist this. Preferred more decentralized and less-closely-supervised forms of work. Sharecropping thus emerged (on cotton plantations)—a compromise—and gradually (over decades) became overwhelmingly dominant. Individual families signed contracts with the landowner and became responsible for a specified piece of land. Generally retained a third to a half of the year's crop. Far from an ideal system, but at least granted blacks some autonomy from white supervision.

A new class structure therefore slowly emerged. By 1900, 70 percent of farmers in the South (including whites) were tenants and/or sharecroppers. A rural proletariat. Reliance on a few cash crops—sugar, cotton,

rice—instead of a diversified agricultural system. (Bad because too many producers: prices were pushed down, and if the world market was glutted, farmers were screwed.) Endemic poverty and a largely stagnant society.

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Presidential Reconstruction. Lincoln had favored a lenient Reconstruction policy: general amnesty to white Southerners who would pledge an oath of loyalty to the government and accept the abolition of slavery. When 10 percent of a state's total number of voters took the oath, those loyal voters could set up a state government. He also wanted to extend suffrage to blacks who were educated, owned property, or had served in the army. The radicals thought this plan was far too mild.

Hoped Andrew Johnson would be more on their side, since he hated the planters and insisted that traitors must be punished. Initially seemed to crave revenge for mass treason. But it turned out he was a fanatical racist (former slaveowner) committed to white supremacy even more than punishing traitors, so he quickly adopted a policy even more lenient than Lincoln's. Appointed provisional governors who opposed black suffrage. When the Southern states in the fall of 1865 elected legislators, governors, and members of Congress—for they had fulfilled Johnson's conditions for readmission to the country[1]—they tended to elect white supremacists, former Confederates, and members of the old elite. Which antagonized the North and ultimately helped cause the rise of Radical Reconstruction.

So did the Black Codes that were being passed around this time, to return things to as close to slavery as possible. "Crimes" like being unemployed or using insulting gestures could be punished with severe fines; the criminals could then be hired out to private employers who would pay the fines. Basically debt peonage. Almost slavery. In some cases blacks were forbidden from taking jobs other than as plantation workers or domestic servants.

Also heavy poll taxes on freedmen, and very low taxes on landed property.

Many Northern capitalists supported Johnson's white supremacist policies because they were useful for controlling labor. (That's always what the capitalist wants. A docile labor force.) But luckily Radical Republicans came to blacks' rescue, for a time. (Irony about the Republican party—then and now.) The core of their ideology: use a powerful national state to guarantee blacks equal standing in the political system and equal opportunity in a free-labor economy.

So in the spring of 1866: another Freedmen's Bureau bill and the first Civil Rights Act. (Both vetoed but that was overridden.) CRA: everyone born in the U.S. (except Indians) was a national citizen and had certain rights: making contracts, bringing lawsuits, and enjoying "full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property." Nullified Black Codes. Gave the federal government some enforcement powers too, though not nearly enough. Very radical bill for its time, which also invalidated many discriminatory laws in the North. And was ahead of its time in its expansive conception of the national state. But said nothing about voting.

That summer Congress also approved the Fourteenth Amendment and sent it to the states for ratification. Its essence was a national guarantee of equality before the law. Sort of a Constitutional and therefore ironclad version of the Civil Rights Act, and so carried forward the state-building process born of the Civil War.

[1] Revoke the ordinance of secession, abolish slavery and ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, and repudiate Confederate debts.

By now there was an open break between Johnson and nearly the whole Republican party. In the 1866 congressional elections the Radicals won a majority of seats, so didn't have to worry much about Johnson's opposition. Actually the intransigence of Johnson and the Southern states helped their agenda. *Beginning of Radical Reconstruction.* They passed the Reconstruction Act of 1867: the eleven Confederate states (except Tennessee, which had ratified the Fourteenth Amendment) were divided into five military districts. A military commander governed each district and registered voters (adult black males and white males who hadn't participated in the rebellion). Voters would elect conventions to prepare new state constitutions, which had to include black suffrage. State governments could be elected once voters had ratified the new constitutions—and the state legislature had to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment. Then the state could be readmitted into the Union.

By 1870, all states had been readmitted.

Thus black suffrage arrived—though only in the South for now. The Fifteenth Amendment (1870) made it nationwide.

Quite radical—interracial democracy!—but not enough. Freedmen's economic conditions weren't changed, and no new agencies were created to protect black rights. (That came only in the 1960s.) Republicans never embraced the issue of land redistribution, since it was opposed by business.

Reconstruction Act triggered a new outburst of black political activity and resistance to segregation. More mass meetings, and a deluge of freedmen into the Union League for political education. It catapulted many ex-slaves into political leadership in their states, hundreds becoming state legislators in the following years. Throughout Reconstruction blacks remained infatuated with politics, running for elections and voting at rates of 90 percent. The Republican party became as central to the black community as the church and the school.

Carpetbaggers and scalawags (Southern-born white Republicans). The former got a major share of Reconstruction offices, but the latter (hated, often called "white negroes") were surprisingly abundant in some states. 25 percent or more. Some were poor white farmers who allied with blacks against the planter class, which they hated partly because it had been mainly responsible for wartime devastation. Often favored confiscation. So, the beginnings of real class struggle, revolutionary attitudes. But moderate white Republicans prevented these buds from blossoming into something bigger.

A remarkable time. Blacks served as mayors, aldermen, on city and town councils, on juries, as sheriffs, police chiefs, county supervisors, justices of the peace, etc. (Were always a minority, though. White Republicans had more power.) Vagrancy laws couldn't be used to force freedmen to sign labor contracts because Republican politicians owed their power to "the vagrant vote."

Expansion of the public sphere. Reconstruction governments were activist: established public schools, hospitals, asylums for orphans and the insane; expanded property rights for married women, widened grounds for divorce, and so on. Couldn't raise taxes enough to build a truly modern system of public education, but the achievements were significant. (4,000 schools by 1870, staffed by 9,000 teachers—half of them black. By 1876, more than half of all white children and 40 percent of black children were attending (segregated) schools in the South.)

In the early 1870s some states even outlawed segregation in certain private businesses, like railroads and hotels. But hard to enforce.

Impressive legislation to protect workers and poor white farmers. States outlawed corporal punishment, limited capital offenses, reduced penalties for theft, passed debtor relief laws, raised property taxes on the rich, abolished property qualifications for holding office.

Major priority was economic development. Development has always required extreme state intervention (tariffs, subsidies, tax incentives, eminent domain, appropriating money for infrastructure projects, government investment in science and technology, etc.). Conservative ideas of the pure free market are a myth. So Republicans used state policy to attract railroad and industrial companies, e.g. by exempting them from taxes. (Still going on today!)

But the program of state-sponsored capitalist development ultimately did much to bring down the Republican party and Reconstruction itself. Produced huge state debts, high taxes, and drained resources from schools and other programs. As state debts increased and the value of state bounds declined, credit collapsed. At the same time, all this aid to railroads created the conditions for widespread corruption, which undermined the political legitimacy of Republican governments. Bribery, fraud, plunder, conflicts of interest. U.S. was full of corruption at this time, but it got more attention in the South because of Reconstruction's enemies. Nor did it help that the promised economic revolution didn't happen: Northern and European investors were wary of sending their money to a region with so much political uncertainty.

No real modernization. But there were economic changes. Railroads made possible commercialization of the upcountry, where poor white farmers started growing cotton. Integrated into the market. Led to debt and dependency. Eric Foner: "Because of the region's chronic capital shortage and scarcity of banking institutions, local merchants generally represented the only source of available credit. With land values having plummeted, merchants would usually advance loans only in exchange for a lien [claim] on the year's cotton crop, rather than take a mortgage on real estate, as was conventional in the North. The emergence of the crop lien as the South's major form of agricultural credit forced indebted farmers to concentrate on cotton [which could be sold easily], further expanding production and depressing prices." Thousands of indebted white farmers had to become agricultural laborers and sharecroppers—especially because of the depression of the 1870s.

Bad not only for them but also Reconstruction itself: they blamed Republicans for bringing market relations into the upcountry (because of railroad promotion), and also hated the party for its high taxes. Gave political ammunition to the Democrats.

Freedmen fared a little better. Had more power than before, greater freedom to leave and seek better employment conditions, often higher wages (because planters wanted to entice them to work for them). Could work on railroads, for instance. Planters complained their workers were "unruly, insolent, and disobedient." Couldn't control them easily, partly because of the nature of sharecropping.

Nevertheless, like independent white farmers, black sharecroppers eventually grew more and more indebted, especially during the depression. Couldn't escape debt to the local merchant. Lost self-sufficiency in food because they had to produce cotton for the market in order to pay the merchant. (Progress of capitalism.) In the long run became like debt peons.

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Andrew Johnson did what he could to undermine Congressional Reconstruction, but he was basically a lame-duck president. The Radicals' attempt to oust him failed, but he had little power left anyway. Grant was elected in 1868.

Meanwhile, all this change provoked violent opposition. Had actually been going on since 1865. Mass murders, lynchings, and beatings by former masters on any pretext—although blacks counterattacked quite rarely. Got even worse later. Ku Klux Klan founded in 1866 as a Tennessee social club, but expanded to spread a "reign of terror" against Republican leaders black and white. Blocked blacks from voting. The KKK was basically a military force serving the interests of the Democratic party, the planter class, and white supremacy. Aimed to destroy the Republican party and restore control over the black labor force. Black churches and schools were burned; white and black politicians killed; economically successful blacks were killed, and laborers who weren't sufficiently obsequious toward their white employers. The Klan's leadership included planters, merchants, lawyers, and ministers. Respectable citizens, not just white trash. State governments in most cases couldn't or didn't want to suppress the violence.

By 1870, Northern Republicans were starting to lose interest in Reconstruction. Many thought the Fifteenth Amendment was the culmination and they should turn their attention to other matters. But as before, Southern violence and recalcitrance pushed them onwards to greater radicalism. The Ku Klux Klan Act of April 1871 for the first time designated certain crimes committed by individuals as punishable under *federal* law. "Conspiracies to deprive citizens of the right to vote, hold office, serve on juries, and enjoy the equal protection of the laws, could now, if states failed to act effectively against them, be prosecuted by federal district attorneys, and even lead to military intervention and the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus." A truly modern act, anticipating the Civil Rights Era. Major expansion of the central government—in principle.

Thousands of Klansmen were indicted, and many went to prison. Federal troops occupied parts of South Carolina. By 1872 the KKK was broken and violence had dramatically declined.

But Reconstruction was about to end anyway. Many reasons. Underlying condition was Republican factionalism: moderates, conservatives, fewer radicals by now. Moderates and conservatives connected to Northern finance wanted return to gold standard because deflation is good for creditors. But gold standard and Radical Reconstruction were incompatible. (Huge state, high government expenditures, budget deficits = greenback system, not gold.) Nor did they want high taxes. Also, any major empowerment of blacks in the South would mean empowerment of workers, which business was and is opposed to. And feared it might spread to the North.

Various different Republican constituencies across the country had their own interests and ideas. Conflicts over tariff, civil service reform (because of corruption), internal improvements in other regions (not the South), currency issues; the Southern Republicans were only one faction, and not very powerful.

But it was the 1870s depression that provided the context. Enormous class conflict. "Respectable" public opinion shifted right, to the necessity of protecting property and opposing democracy and activist government. For Republicans, "economic respectability" began to replace equality of rights for black citizens as the essence of their self-image. Beginning of the shift to conservatism.

Meanwhile, because of the depression, voters handed Democrats an electoral triumph in 1874. More Democrats came to power in the South. Downsized government partly because of states' devastated budgets and tax rolls (from the depression). The depression dramatically worsened the situation of black workers. And a resurgence of violence against blacks—not KKK, not masked and hooded, but open and savage. State and federal governments did little to oppose it. In 1877 Hayes took office in return for an end to Reconstruction. (Federal troops withdrew.)

The "Redeemers" had triumphed. As a black man said, "The whole South—every state in the South—has got into the hands of the very men that held us as slaves." For the rest of the century, Democratic governments reshaped the constitutional and legal system so as to control labor and subordinate blacks.

Taxes on the poor were increased, those on the rich decreased. State budgets were slashed: money for schools, public hospitals, "welfare" for the blind and disabled, etc. was drastically cut. Said one planter: "What I want here is Negroes who can make cotton, and they don't need education to help them make cotton."

The Republican party collapsed in the Deep South, because of racism, violence, and electoral fraud. Poll taxes and literary requirements for voting (especially starting in 1890s). The region became a bastion of the Democratic party—until the 1960s and '70s, when it became mostly Republican.

Rise of Jim Crow regime. Supreme Court's decisions in 1883: 14th Amendment prohibits states from discriminating, but not individuals or private organizations. Then *Plessy v. Ferguson*: "separate but equal." (Segregated seating on railroads.) Legitimized the system of racial hierarchy and segregation. Also dramatic increase of violence against blacks in the 1890s. Lynching events were sometimes like festivals, hundreds of white families watching, sending postcards about it, taking pieces of the dead bodies as souvenirs. In 1899, a plantation laborer who had killed his employer in self-defense was lynched before a crowd of 2,000 (including children). Executioners cut off his ears, fingers, and genitals and burned him alive, and then the crowd fought over pieces of his bones. No attempts to bring the perpetrators to justice.

All this was basically to control the black labor force: it was useful to the ruling class, useful for profits. Racist propaganda was also useful for dividing poor whites against blacks and so preventing a *class*-based political movement from challenging planters' and businessmen's power. (Populism had only minor success in building such a movement.)

Most "respectable" jobs were closed to blacks, though a small black middle class did emerge. Women were confined mainly to work as domestic servants, not secretaries or store clerks.

Moves toward a Southern industrial revolution. Textile manufacturing, iron industry, steel industry, mining, railroads. Northern capital came because of low wages and availability of convict labor. "Slavery by another name" (Douglas Blackmon book). Vagrants—the unemployed—could be arrested; so could black men who looked at a white woman the wrong way, or were "insolent," etc. Criminalization of black life. Similar to Black Codes, but worse. Some men were sent to prisons and then leased out to employers; others only had to pay fines, but because they couldn't afford them they were given to employers who paid the fine in return for using them as forced labor. Tens of thousands of convicts became industrial slaves. Were repeatedly bought and sold; stayed in the possession of companies for years. Company guards could chain them,[1] shoot them if they tried to flee, torture them, whip them almost without limit. Mortality rates as high as 50 percent or more. Miserable living conditions in labor camps and some company towns. Starvation, disease, very little medical treatment—and no legal accountability for vicious treatment of the slaves. (p. 218)

The industrialization of the South was in fact a product, in large part, of slave labor. Industrialists, bankers, politicians, planters all profited from slave labor (convict labor)—all the way up to World War II. (Today, similarly, corporations like Apple profit from sweatshops around the world. Capitalism and the modern world were/are made possible by forced labor, colonial conquests, genocides, and the cheapening of labor to the lowest possible point. (One of the purposes of this course is to learn about the dark side of capitalism.))

Incidentally, there's been a similar criminalization of black life since the 1970s. Possession by blacks of marijuana or crack cocaine (in the 1980s) or other drugs sent them to prison—even though it's a victimless

[1] But strictly speaking it wasn't chain gangs. Those emerged in the early 20th century, around tasks like road construction, ditch digging, and farming. Chain gangs were usually more humane than the older convict leasing, and by the 1920s or earlier they were more common.

crime. The opioid epidemic now is a largely white phenomenon, so it isn't seen as *criminal* but as a *health crisis*. Blatantly racist double standards.

Anyway… Partly because of workers' inability to unionize and raise their wages, the South remained a primitive, semi-colonial region that couldn't develop as the North did. A large middle class couldn't develop. But the South's impoverished agrarianism was also responsible for this. (Only the federal government's intervention later on finally brought the South to a "civilized" condition.)

In short, between the end of Reconstruction and World War II, Southern blacks were trapped in a framework of systematic terrorization and control. Couldn't escape it without outside help. So conservative philosophies arose like Booker T. Washington's: be a self-made man, get a vocational education, learn skills in the trades and agriculture, don't challenge the system or agitate for political or economic rights. Refine your speech, improve how you dress, adopt the standards of the white middle class. An *individualistic* philosophy. (Very different from W. E. B. DuBois'.)

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Reading *Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue: The Untold History of English* (2008), by John McWhorten. Good book. Also some random long essays. For instance "Getting Real with Rouse and Heidegger," by Jeff Kohan (2011), which is about my old Wesleyan professor Joe Rouse's philosophy of science and his interpretation of Heidegger, and "Bourdieu's Class Theory" and "The New Durkheim: Bourdieu and the State," both by Dylan Riley.

One reason I like to periodically return to contemporary philosophy is to remind myself I'm not missing much. Rouse, Kohan, and Heidegger are confused. For instance, according to Kohan,

> Rouse's claim that the world is constituted by practices, equipment, and social roles seems to pose a direct challenge to realism. For, if our practices play a fundamental role in the constitution of the world, then the realist's basic conviction that at least some entities must exist independently of our involvement with them appears hopeless. Indeed, Rouse's position would seem to have more in common with such antirealist doctrines as constructivism than it does with realism… Yet Rouse cautions that his own rejection of [empiricism] should not be mistaken for an endorsement of constructivism. According to him, the central claim of constructivism is that observation is theory laden. In other words, like Rouse, constructivists reject the [empiricist] notion of a pure [non-theory-laden] observation language, but, unlike Rouse, they do so because they believe that our only access to the world is through theory-laden observation. In fact, Rouse points out that the challenge posed by his practical hermeneutics to theoretical hermeneutics is equally effective against constructivism. With a nod towards Ian Hacking (1983), he argues that scientific research practices have "a life of their own" independent of theory and may thus yield interpretations of the world importantly different from ones laden by theory. Moreover, Rouse emphasises that, because practical hermeneutics puts the weight on practice rather than on theory, it does not point towards the "apparently idealist implications of constructivism."

Confusions. First of all, sure, our practices play a fundamental role in the constitution of the world—of *our* world, the world we experience. The world *as we experience it*. But that's just a truism, not some deep philosophically interesting insight. The world *as it is in itself*, prior to human experience of it, by definition *isn't* constituted by our practices and social roles and so on. It's constituted by whatever the independently existing essence of the world is. These Heideggerian types always think that somehow they're dissolving the realism/idealism debate—and the subject/object distinction, etc.—just by providing a phenomenological description of our experience (how we experience the world and what is implicit in our

experience). "Being-in-the-world" and so on. But that's stupid. Everything they say applies only to *our experience, our human world*. What *science* wants to get at, on the other hand—at least the hard sciences—is the essence of the world *prior to how we experience it*.

I don't understand how these simple confusions are possible.

At the end of the paragraph Rouse refers to the "apparently idealist implications of constructivism." But I see nothing idealist about the definition of constructivism given above. Whether observation is "theory-laden"—in a broad sense of theory, as having to do with values, presuppositions, cognitive interests, and the deep unconscious cognitive structuring of experience that the brain carries out—has nothing to do with idealism. We simply use our theory-laden observations to help construct and support hypotheses about how the world is in its essence.

Continuing his project of rejecting common sense, Rouse then tries to undermine realism by, first, criticizing the correspondence theory of truth. He prefers a deflationary account of truth:

> As Rouse writes, the deflationist insists that all we need to know about truth is contained in the Tarski sentence "'Snow is white' is true iff snow is white." In other words, anything that can be said using the predicate "is true" can be said just as well without using that predicate. Hence, to say that "'p' is true" is the same as saying more simply that "p." From this it follows that truth predicates do not introduce any new facts about the sentence in question. As a consequence, the deflationist claims that we can get along without a theory of truth, because, as Rouse puts is, "[t]ruth plays no explanatory role." In this way, the deflationary account undercuts the metaphysical doctrine of correspondence.

Um, yes, propositions posit their own truth. So, sure, it's somewhat redundant to say that "'p' is true." You might as well just say that "p." But I don't see how that invalidates the correspondence theory of truth. It remains the case that "Snow is white" is true if and only if *snow is white*. The proposition has to *correspond to* a reality in order to be true. As I wrote in my senior thesis, the fact that propositions *represent a state of affairs* already entails the correspondence theory of truth, because it's the *state of affairs* that is at issue, that determines whether the proposition is true or false.

More silliness:

> …Rouse moves still closer to realism in urging that the existence of electrons and positrons is genuinely theory-independent. Indeed, he firmly endorses Hacking's famous argument for realism. Responding to the successful manipulation of sub-atomic particles in the laboratory, Hacking writes: *"So far as I'm concerned, if you can spray them then they are real."* Spraying subatomic particles is not an act of theory; it is a practical act. Rouse argues that, insofar as practical action proves the existence of these entities, a proof has been given independently of theory. However, he also presses the point that such proof has *not* also been given independently of practice. Hence, citing the core realist doctrine that entities can exist independently of our theories and practices, Rouse insists that his practical hermeneutics can no more be counted a form of realism than it can a form of antirealism.
>
> …I have shown that Rouse's hermeneutical solution to the shared confusion of realism and antirealism includes an assimilation of existence to meaning. Following what he takes to be the pragmatism of *Being and Time*, Rouse construes entities *as such* in terms of equipment and argues that any specific item of equipment can only be what it is within an overall equipmental totality. Heidegger describes this equipmental totality as constituting the structure of the world. Only through their disclosure within the practical structure of an equipmental world do entities have meaning, which for Rouse means that only then can they exist. According to Rouse, we can never get at the real as something which exists independently of our interpretations.

Wow. First, it amuses me that Hacking's argument for realism given above (in the italicized sentence) is famous. As I wrote years ago when puzzling over how G. E. Moore's argument against idealism ("Look, I have hands!") could have become so famous, "that fact in itself strips philosophers of whatever dignity they thought they had." How stupid must people be to be impressed by Hacking's painfully obvious 'argument' for realism??

But after "firmly endorsing" Hacking's argument for realism, Rouse apparently…rejects realism. The proof of subatomic particles hasn't been given independently of practice, so…it doesn't provide an argument for realism. So Rouse doesn't endorse Hacking's argument after all. Instead, he thinks that what it is for something to exist is for it to be…disclosed in an equipmental world. Okay. Brilliant. So we're back to a kind of idealism (entities can't exist independently of us, of our practices or minds or theories or ideas or whatever version you like). Maybe Kohan is caricaturing his position, but *someone* here has to rethink things.

There's some truth in the last sentence, though: we'll never really "get at the real" as it is independent of human consciousness and experience (or practices, or however you want to frame it). By definition. That doesn't mean it doesn't exist, though.

Rouse: "[W]hat exists depends upon the field of meaningful interaction and interpretation within which things can be encountered." He forgot to insert the key words *'for us.'* What exists *for us* depends upon, etc. But that claim is an uninteresting truism.

Later, an amusing statement from Kohan: "As Rouse has so ably argued over so many years, the objects of science are meaningful because scientific research is a way of being-in-the-world. The world of science is configured by regimes of practice, and it is only within this practical context that the objects of science have meaning." Wow, remarkable insights. And so philosophically fecund. Scientific research is situated within practical contexts and has meaning within those contexts. Who would have thought. –Ugh, phenomenology. When it comes to the analysis of self and of relationships, I think phenomenology is of value; but it can easily become of virtually nugatory intellectual interest if indulged in for its own sake, so to speak, to analyze all our practices and claim that deep insights are achieved thereby.

Of more interest is something like Stephen Stich's article "Between Chomskian Rationalism and Popperian Empiricism" (1979). Tries to find a middle way between "rigid rationalism" and empiricism, but I think fails. How could there be such a middle way? Either the mind comes innately equipped with a rich cognitive structure that determines constraints on, for instance, the set of possible grammars a person can "learn," or it doesn't. All the dazzling and somewhat confusing legerdemain of a contemporary philosopher like Stich can't get around that basic intuition.

But getting back to the pragmatism of Rouse and kin, such as Robert Brandom and Richard Rorty (and the earlier classical thinkers), I'm not sure what to make of it. Sometimes, as in the case of Rorty, it's just hopeless. But in general I never feel as though I can do much with it or be very stimulated by it. Interpreting humans and ideas like truth, meaning, rationality, science, etc. in terms of practice, action, behavior, experience, intersubjectivity, "being-in-the-world," sociality, etc. To take an example from Robert Brandom (quoted in Steven Levine, "Brandom's Pragmatism" (2012)):

> For the pragmatists, experience is not an input to the learning process. It just *is* learning: the process of perception and performance, followed by perception and assessment of the results of the performance, and then further performance, exhibiting the iterative, adaptive, conditional-branching structure of a test-operate-test-exit loop. The result of experience is not best thought of as the possession of items of *knowledge*, but as a kind of practical *understanding*, a kind of adaptive attunement to the environment, the development of habits apt for successful coping with the contingencies.

It's like, sure, you can interpret it all in this way if you want. There's some truth to it, it can be reasonable enough, it can serve as a reminder that some sort of vulgar Cartesianism is one-sided. But in the end, I don't really see the point of it all. Reinterpreting everything in a certain way… Yeah, all this is one way to look at it. But it, too, of course is one-sided, and can be downright misleading and wrong insofar as it has

behaviorist and empiricist tendencies. It also seems shallow and not very *explanatory*, as cognitive science is.

"What Brandom thinks is most salient about pragmatism, in all of its guises, is a claim about the 'priority of the practical', the view that explicit beliefs and representations depend on and are somehow emergent from a background of implicit practical abilities. Here, pragmatism is seen as most opposed to an intellectualism [e.g., Chomsky's] in which our ability to think and act is underwritten by an ability to explicitly grasp and apply rules or principles." Okay, so pragmatism is opposed to cognitive science. [Unless "explicitly" here means *consciously*.] Good luck with that.

Anyway, I'm not particularly interested in alternative conceptualizations for their own sake (like pragmatism). I'm more interested in *learning* things, as through science, or in resolving deep philosophical puzzles—which I don't think pragmatism does, despite its pretensions to do so.

Reading/skimming a bunch of JSTOR articles in the philosophy of language, cognitive science, phenomenology, the philosophy of biology, etc. The papers by and about H. P. Grice aren't exactly easy to read. Nor are those by Wilfrid Sellars. But Laurence BonJour's 1969 Ph.D. dissertation on "Knowledge, Justification, and Truth: A Sellarsian Approach to Epistemology" is excellent. In the last chapter he summarizes some of the modern objections to the correspondence theory of truth:

> As is so often the case with pronouncements of (sophisticated) common sense, it is most difficult to see how the correspondence theory can fail to be correct. [Yes!] But, as is also so often the case, there are problems with such a view of truth which have proved to be extremely resistant to solution. These problems arise as soon as one tries to say anything very specific about either the relata of the supposed relation of correspondence, or about the nature of the relation itself. To take the latter first, there has always been a great temptation to regard the relation of correspondence as involving somehow a fitting together or congruence of belief and fact, where such a congruence is to be understood as involving more than a merely conventional correlation. This sort of inclination is, I think, one motive behind familiar image theories of thought, characteristic especially of the British Empiricists. But every attempt to go beyond the metaphor of congruence or fitting together and give a precise characterization of such a relation runs aground on the hard fact that, once the sorts of confusion present in the image theory have been eliminated, there simply does not seem to be any clear sense in which beliefs or the sentences which express them are non-conventionally related to the world which they describe. And thus we are apparently left with a purely conventional correlation as the only explication of what is meant by "correspondence," with the disheartening result that the correspondence theory seems to say nothing more than that a belief is true if it is conventionally correlated with the world in the right way, i.e. if it is true. And these already formidable difficulties with the correspondence theory are aggravated by problems about the nature of the relata of correspondence. E.g., is the first relatum a belief? A proposition? A statement? And what is the second relatum? A fact? But which fact? How many facts are there? I shall not pursue these issues, nor attempt here any further account of the modern tribulations of the correspondence theory, but shall simply assume that all attempts to state a traditional correspondence theory have failed. Such a view seems to represent the consensus of contemporary opinion, though there are doubtless still some who would demur.

Yes, I would demur! First of all, it's simply inadmissible to reject something so overwhelmingly intuitively obvious as the correspondence theory of truth. I realize contemporary philosophers care more about verbal disputes than intuitions, but still, there should be a limit to their rejection of intuitions. Secondly, the mere fact that it might be difficult to characterize the nature of the correspondence in question doesn't justify casting aside the whole "theory" itself (not really a *theory* but just a massively compelling intuition). There are all sorts of intuitions and 'understandings' we have that we don't have a great account of, but we don't simply abandon them because of that. (For instance, we don't really understand our sense of self or the

inner sense of free will, but we don't thereby reject the notion that we have a sense of self and a sense of free will). That we can't *clarify* something doesn't mean it's *false* or should be abandoned. It's hard to clarify the nature of causation, but we still believe that causes and effects exist. Nor is the correspondence theory empty in the way BonJour suggests when he says it states nothing more than that a belief is true if it's correlated with the world in…the right way. When you're talking about something as fundamental to the structure of human cognition as the relation between thought and world—more specifically, how sentences are able to represent states of affairs—you shouldn't be surprised if it's hard to say something that seems really informative or substantive or 'new.'

But BonJour, a rationalist, has great respect for intuitions, and so is a perspicacious thinker. He proceeds to reconstruct something like a (Sellarsian) correspondence theory of truth in the rest of the chapter. Here's another example of his perspicacity, on a subject I've addressed a number of times in the journal:

> One point at which the picturing aspect of empirical truth [which is his, and Sellars', version of the correspondence theory] becomes extremely critical is in connection with the familiar realist/instrumentalist dispute over the status of theoretical entities. The realist characteristically asserts that theoretical entities are real in whatever sense ordinary physical objects are real, and hence that true theoretical statements genuinely describe the "furniture of the world." The instrumentalist wants to deny this, and claims instead that talk about theoretical entities is only an "instrument" or a "calculational device" for making predictions about ordinary observable entities. There are, I think, serious confusions implicit in the instrumentalist notion of observation… But if no reference is made to the picturing dimension of empirical truth, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the basic issue upon which realists and instrumentalists appear to disagree is a *Scheinstreit*. Both camps agree that a true theory will be part of the most coherent total scientific account. Both agree that such a theory is true in the semantic [Tarskian] sense. Both can agree that such a theory is a useful instrument for making predictions about the sorts of phenomena which the instrumentalist wants to call observational. But in spite of these agreements, the realist still wants to say that such a theory genuinely describes the world in the strongest possible sense, while the instrumentalist wants to deny this. But does this difference really amount to anything? Can the point at issue even be clearly stated?
>
> It is most tempting at this point to conclude that the instrumentalist/realist issue really is a pseudo-issue, and many eminent philosophers have yielded to this temptation. It seems to me, however, that this move is intuitively so implausible that it should be resisted at almost any cost. Intuitively the difference between atoms and protons really existing "out there" in the same sense in which houses and apples do, on the one hand, and it merely being useful to talk of atoms and protons in order to make predictions about houses and apples and somewhat more esoteric objects of the same sort, on the other, is simply as enormous as can be imagined. It would seem that any philosophy which is forced to declare an intuitive difference of this magnitude to be illusory is in extreme danger of having implicitly declared itself to be illusory.

Yup. It has never ceased to amaze me that "many eminent philosophers" have been (for example in the days of logical positivism) able to believe that the debate between realism and this idealist instrumentalism isn't substantive!

More interesting than the typical philosophical rejection of utterly obvious common sense is the Sellarsian notion of the Myth of the Given. –I have to say, incidentally, that the more I read about and by him, the more Sellars impresses me. He's both provocative and, it seems, sensible (not in every particular but on the whole). And I can't but respect his systematic vision. He was someone who actually deserved the august title "philosopher." I like this quotation of his:

> The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term. Under "things in the broadest possible sense" I include such radically different items as not only "cabbages and kings," but numbers and duties, possibilities and finger snaps, aesthetic experience and death. To achieve success in Philosophy would be, to use a contemporary turn of phrase, to "know one's way around" with respect to all these things, not in that unreflective way in which the centipede of the story knew its way around before it faced the question, "how do I walk?", but in that reflective way which means that no intellectual holds are barred.

In light of his importance, it isn't surprising few or none of my philosophy professors ever mentioned him. I knew of him, but for some reason I didn't seek him out.

[Incidentally, Chomsky's definition of philosophy is, characteristically, pithier: philosophy seeks to answer the question "What are we up to?"]

I'm having a hard time getting clear on all the issues and implications involved in the (rejection of the) Myth of the Given. The subject gets quite complicated, and even somewhat elusive, as you delve further into it. But I suppose once you abstract away from all the abstrusities it's not so difficult. In one of its dimensions, at least, it's an epistemological issue, a question of "how the structure of propositional knowledge and belief relates to the world which it is about" (to quote BonJour). According to a certain philosophical tradition, the Given is supposed to infallibly ground our knowledge. It's what we're '*im-mediately*' (and thus non-conceptually) aware of, what is indubitably certain in, e.g., our sense-perceptions.[1] It's usually thought of as qualia or sense-data (but has also been thought of as certain self-evident principles, such as Descartes' causal principle in the Third *Meditations*).

This is from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article on pragmatism:

> The established view [from Cartesianism, both rationalist and empiricist] linked experience to what is sometimes called 'the given': we are the passive recipients of atomistic, determinate and singular sensory contents, the kinds of things that are sometimes called sense data. Experience provides the material for knowledge and conceptualization, but it does not itself have a content that is informed by concepts, practical needs, or anything else non-sensory. Our only contact with the external world is through receiving such experiences that, we suppose, are caused by external things; but since these sensory inputs are our only source of knowledge of the external world, we have no direct sensory awareness of external things…

Much of this, of course, is wrong, as Sellars argued. Our sense experience is already interpreted the instant we have it, unconsciously interpreted through the brain's synthesis of stimuli into a coherent manifold of enduring objects. (I'm not necessarily attributing this reasoning to Sellars.) This is both causal and epistemological mediation; there is no truly "immediate" sense-datum or quale. In a sense, yes, we are "noninferentially" aware that, e.g., there's a brown tree in front of me: *for consciousness,* the tree is just immediately given, we don't "infer" that it's there or it's brown. But the fact that the experience is propositionally structured or capable of being expressed in propositional form—if we have a language we can say, "The tree is brown" or "I see what appears to be a brown tree," and even if we don't have a language we're aware of the object with leaves on it and its color (an awareness that can in principle be expressed propositionally)—shows that on some level there have to have already been inferences from the non-propositionally-structured stimuli the brain/mind receives to the "interpretation" of a brown and green enduring object that's relevantly similar to other brown and green objects, etc. To say this sense experience is necessarily *conceptual,* as some opponents of the "Given" do, seems ambiguous insofar as the possession

[1] It doesn't seem that it *has* to be indubitable or incorrigible, but it was usually thought of that way.

of "concepts" (depending on what you mean by concepts) might seem to presuppose the possession of language, whereas surely people can be aware of trees and so on—not *calling* them trees but aware that trees as such differ from flowers, houses, and other categories of things—without having a language.[1] I'd rather say the sense experience is necessarily *cognitive*, located in "logical [or inferential] space," informed and structured by elements decidedly "non-sensory."

But no, on second thought, sure, you might as well say the sense experience is conceptual, even before or absent the acquisition of language. The person might not be able to *name* the conceptual objects he's confronted with, or have a fully-worked-out understanding of them, but they're essentially conceptual nonetheless. While I'm deplorably ignorant of cognitive developmental psychology, I'm fairly certain its findings (would have to) accord with my intuitions. I'll peruse some articles shortly.

As for the question posed by the last sentence of the quoted passage, whether we have direct awareness of external things, in a sense the answer is obviously no: our awareness is causally mediated, not "direct," whatever that would mean. But as for what the objects of our awareness are, they can be considered *either* external objects *or* 'internal' sense-perceptions. The latter alternative should be pretty uncontroversial: insofar as we have sensory experiences, the experiences are *for* (or *apprehended by*) *consciousness*, which means that in a sense they're 'in' consciousness, or are sense-*perceptions*. This desk, as I experience it, is a 'perception' present to my consciousness; and *as* a perception, it isn't an *external* thing. On the other hand, inasmuch as the scientific account of perception makes reference to such external things as photons and a myriad of other particles and waves, the 'image' (or auditory experience, etc.) the brain constructs is clearly of external phenomena that have impinged on the nervous system. So in this sense we *are* aware of external things. But only indirectly.

In their book *Knowledge, Mind, and the Given: Reading Wilfrid Sellars's "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind"* (2000), William deVries and Timm Triplett write, "What is crucial to Sellars's idea of the given…is that the given does epistemological work: What is given not only exists as some sort of element of a person's experience but also must serve the very specific epistemological role of being the epistemically independent basis that epistemically supports all other justified or known empirical propositions for a person. [Epistemic independence means that its positive epistemic status doesn't derive from some other proposition or epistemic state.] This idea explains why certainty is not an essential trait of the given. What is essential is its alleged capacity to justify without itself requiring justification."

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[1] Thus I'm skeptical of Sellars' "psychological nominalism," according to which "*all* awareness of *sorts*, *resemblances*, *facts*, etc., in short all awareness of abstract entities—indeed, all awareness even of particulars—is a linguistic affair." As John McDowell elaborates in "Sellars and the Space of Reasons," "We tend to picture a child, learning its first language, as already at home in 'a logical space of particulars, universals, facts, etc.' On this picture learning a language can be a matter of simply associating words and phrases with these already available objects of awareness. Against this, Sellars's psychological nominalism denies 'that there is any awareness of logical space prior to, or independent of, the acquisition of a language.' So knowledge, in a sense that implies awareness of 'logical space,' can be enjoyed only by subjects who are competent in a language." When I read such *a priori* armchair speculations on substantive issues of psychology I hear Chomsky's rebukes of philosophers for their "methodological dualism": respecting the scientific method only with regard to finding things out about the *body* (about how sight works, digestion, etc.), ignoring it when it comes to the *mind* (which of course is really just an affair of the body, specifically of the brain). You have to conduct a lot of subtle experiments before you can affirm or deny something like psychological nominalism. Intuitively, though, I'm inclined to be skeptical of it. I'm encouraged in my skepticism by Chomsky's remark in *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind* (and elsewhere) that "at peak periods of language acquisition, children are acquiring ('learning') many words a day, perhaps a dozen or more, meaning that they are acquiring words on very few exposures, even just one. This would appear to indicate that the concepts are already available, with much or all of their intricacy and structure predetermined, and that the child's task is to assign labels to concepts, as might be done with limited evidence given sufficiently rich innate structure" (p. 61). It's significant in this connection that the meaning of even simple concepts like house or book comprises a puzzling and paradoxical hodgepodge of abstract and concrete properties that no one is ever explicitly *taught*, if only because no one is even consciously aware of all these properties (all the hidden shades of meaning of a given concept). We must be born equipped in some unconscious way with a vast fund of conceptual knowledge, knowledge that is drawn out and filled out as experience proceeds.

"…One of Sellars's major points about the origin of the doctrine of the given is that it is precisely because classical empiricists have *confused* sensing with conceptual states that they have failed to see the incoherence in the doctrine of the given." For Sellars, sensing is not conceptual. A sensory experience is an object or event, like an apple or a thunderbolt, not a judgment. And so "sensory experiences cannot serve as premises or reasons in an argument, any more than an apple or a thunderbolt could. They are the wrong sorts of things." They can't transmit positive epistemic status (justification), so they can't play the role that givenists require them to. So the given is a myth. (His argument, though, can be generalized so it's not only limited to sensory experiences.)

To which I reply: first, it's certainly true that you can't get the conceptual framework of (or for) experience *from experience*. You have to bring it *to* experience, as rationalists understood. In this sense, mere sensing is not conceiving. Kant was right about that. So on this level, Sellars's argument tells against only empiricism, not rationalism. I'd argue, though, that after infants reach the age of, say, five months (or maybe less), their sensory experiences do start to be, in a sense, conceptually structured, in that they begin to perceive *kinds* of things. But anyway, Sellars's conclusion still follows: even conceptualized sensory experiences aren't just "given," since they aren't "epistemically independent." They belong (or slowly begin to belong) to a rich conceptual and epistemic framework, and in any case, in order for them to justify further propositions, one has to add the premise that they're *reliable*—a premise that can be argued about in a skeptical fashion, and that brings in other considerations. So a strict foundationalism is false. Thus, at least with regard to a theory of *justification*, it's necessary to bring in elements of coherentism—as Sellars said.

Well, I was going to go into more depth on Sellars, but this book and his classic essay both bore me and confuse me, so forget it. I think there's also a bit of confusion in both Sellars and his interpreters, and of course too much *a priori* philosophizing about things that are at least partially within the domain of cognitive psychology. (Sellars's "Myth of Jones" discussion isn't without interest, though.)

Reading a bunch of articles on cognitive development. A fascinating field.

Interesting: "Human infants who receive little touching grow more slowly [and] release less growth hormone… Throughout life, they show larger reactions to stress, are more prone to depression, and are vulnerable to deficits in cognitive functions commonly seen in depression or during stress. Touch plays a powerful role for human infants in promoting optimal development and in counteracting stressors. Massaging babies lowers their cortisol levels and helps them gain weight… Thus, besides 'simple touch' being able to calm our jitters and lift our spirits, the right kind of touch regularly enough early in life can improve cognitive development, brain development, bodily health throughout life, and gene expression." (From "Contributions of Neuroscience to Our Understanding of Cognitive Development" (2008).)

From Jean Mandler's article "A New Perspective on Cognitive Development in Infancy" (1990) it seems my guess about when concepts, in some primitive sense, *start* to develop in the infant (I said five months or so) was just about right. Piaget was wrong that there's a prolonged stage of exclusively sensorimotor processing, in which thinking, or conceptualizing, is absent. (In fact, he was wrong about the whole stage theory itself (except in the truistic sense that cognition progressively grows more sophisticated and abstract), as well as about the purported sensorimotor foundation of thought. This idea has *some* merit, but as a general explanation of all thought it's too empiricist (notwithstanding Piaget's criticism of empiricism).) Experiments have shown that the rudiments of conceptual thinking and perceiving exist by, at the latest, six months. (I'd say earlier, actually. In all likelihood.) One possible origin of concepts is that they develop out of the young infant's perceptual schemas,[1] perhaps from "a process by which one perception is actively compared to another and similarities or differences between them are noted." More specifically,

[1] As Jerome Kagan defines it in his paper "In Defense of Qualitative Changes in Development" (2008), a schema is "a representation of the patterned perceptual features of an event… The young infant's representation of a caretaker's face is an obvious example. The primary features of schemata for visual events are spatial extent, shape, color, contrast, motion, symmetry, angularity, circularity, and density of contour."

> image schemas—notions derived from spatial structure, such as trajectory, up-down, container, part-whole, end-of-path, and link—form the foundation of the conceptualizing capacity. [Lakoff and Johnson] suggest that image schemas are derived from preconceptual perceptual structures, forming the core of many of our concepts of objects and events and of their metaphorical extensions to abstract realms. They demonstrate in great detail how many of our most complex concepts are grounded in such primitive notions. I would characterize image schemas as simplified redescriptions of sensorimotor schemas, noting that they seem to be reasonably within the capacity of infant conceptualization.

Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence's article "In Defense of Nativism" (2013) makes you seriously wonder how anyone could be perverse enough to oppose nativism (i.e., a kind of rationalism, all the Chomskian stuff about innateness, poverty of the stimulus, the modularity of the mind, etc.). Here's an interesting piece of evidence:

> One especially vivid type of poverty of the stimulus argument draws upon the results of isolation experiments. These are empirical studies in which, by design, the experimental subjects are removed from all stimuli that are related to a normally acquired trait. For example, Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt showed that squirrels raised in isolation from other squirrels, and without any solid objects to handle, spontaneously engage in the stereotypical squirrel digging and burying behavior when eventually given nuts. Eibl-Eibesfeldt notes that, "the stereotypy of the movement becomes particularly obvious in captivity, where inexperienced animals will try to dig a hole in the solid floor of a room, where no hole can be dug. They perform all the movements already described, covering and patting the nut, even though there is no earth available." Since the squirrels were kept apart from their conspecifics, they had no exposure to this stereotypical behavior prior to exhibiting it themselves—the stimulus was about as impoverished as can be. Reliable acquisition of such a complex and idiosyncratic behavior under these circumstances provides extremely good evidence against [the empiricist hypothesis of] a general-purpose learning mechanism [that's supposed to explain the acquisition of all psychological traits, as opposed to the nativist hypothesis of specialized acquisition systems each operative in a different domain, whether that of language, numbers, music, object representation, facial recognition, etc.].

Are humans supposed to be *the only species* that isn't "programmed" to exhibit specific types of behavior and acquire specific types of knowledge??

Apparently the name of that argument is "the argument from animals": "The argument from animals is grounded in the firmly established fact that animals have a plethora of specialized learning systems… But *human beings are animals too*." What's true of other animals should be true of us. And, indeed, it is: just as other animals tend to be pretty stupid in many ways, human beings tend to be pretty stupid too, as shown by the fact that large numbers of them are empiricists.

Being sensible, the authors argue that some *concepts*, too, are, loosely speaking, innate. "Likely contenders include concepts associated with objects, causality, space, time, and number, concepts associated with goals, functions, agency, and meta-cognitive thinking, basic logical concepts, concepts associated with movement, direction, events, and manner of change, and concepts associated with predators, prey, food, danger, sex, kinship, status, dominance, norms, and morality." Yes! I love bold statements like this, especially when they're highly plausible.

From Alison Gopnik's "The Post-Piaget Era" (1996): "Piaget's thesis that there are broad-ranging, general stages of development seems increasingly implausible. Instead, cognitive development appears to be quite specific to particular domains of knowledge. Moreover, children consistently prove to have certain cognitive abilities at a much earlier age than Piaget proposed, at least in some domains. Also contra Piaget, even newborn infants have rich and abstract representations of some aspects of the world. Moreover, Piaget

underestimated the importance of social interaction and language in cognitive development. Finally, Piaget's account of assimilation and accommodation as the basic constructivist mechanisms now seems too vague." I'm skeptical of neo-Piagetian constructivism, such as "the theory theory," "the idea that cognitive development is the result of the same mechanisms that lead to theory change in science." Evidence, counterevidence, testing of the theory (or representation), the invention of auxiliary hypotheses, the construction of a new theory, etc. The child's brain is like a scientist revising theories in the light of evidence. In a sense, this must be true: children constantly ask questions, they interpret and try to understand the world, they learn to make inferences about what's going on in other people's heads, they revise their beliefs, and so on. In fact, humans continue to do this throughout life. Organized science is but a more sophisticated version of cognitive processes (of inquisitiveness, 'theory' formation, informal testing) we frequently engage in even without being reflectively aware of it. But there's at least one obvious difference between science, even folk science, and early cognitive maturation: the former is a highly conscious activity, while the latter takes place even before the young child is (self-)conscious at all or remotely capable of advanced conceptualizing. The infant's and toddler's brain *unconsciously* constructs representations of the world, not through conscious reflective processes but through utterly mysterious, natural, 'spontaneous' [to use a misleading word] perceptual-cognitive-neural processes that 'grow' unbelievably complex and ordered structures of vision, object perception, linguistic syntax and semantics, musical sensitivity, etc. Such processes of even *physical* brain-growth—neurons forming trillions of connections with one another so as eventually to build stable, coherent, and integrated representations of the world—appear to have virtually nothing in common with scientists' self-conscious construction of theories.[1]

More plausible than the theory theory is Fodor's (nativist) modularity conception of the mind, or Chomsky's principles and parameters approach.

And then in Nora S. Newcombe's paper "The Nativist-Empiricist Controversy in the Context of Recent Research on Spatial and Quantitative Development" (2002), you have the claim that "the key question in the nativist-interactionist controversy is whether environmental interactions are or are not required to produce mature competence. Nativists believe that adaptation was ensured by highly specific built-in programs, whereas interactionists suggest that inborn abilities do not need to be highly specific because, for central areas of functioning, the environmental input required for adaptive development is overwhelmingly likely. Evidence favors the latter solution to the adaptational problem." Of course. You need *some* sort of interactions with the environment in order for capacities to mature in the way they're 'programmed' to do! I don't see how that contradicts nativism.

Reading articles on David Marr's theories of vision. Not very easy. But stimulating and plausible. (Three levels: computation, algorithm, implementation. I don't see how the whole computational-representational conception of the mind, at least on *some* interpretation, can fail to be true. In order for the human being to interact with the environment, the brain has to deal with various levels and types of representations, and it has to carry out complex computations on the raw data it receives, so as to work up the data into something usable. Mathematics is the language of nature; calculations (computations) are how

[1] In another paper, Gopnik observes that "to many philosophers the very idea that children could be employing the same learning mechanisms as scientists generates a reaction of shocked, even indignant, incredulity." She continues: "For some reason, I've found this initial reaction to be stronger in philosophers than in psychologists or, especially, practicing scientists, who seem to find the idea appealing and even complimentary." Hm. Maybe philosophers do, after all, tend to be relatively perceptive thinkers? Personally, I find it hard to fathom how someone could be so wrongheaded as to think that infants—whose brains are *forming*!—and scientists are using the very same learning mechanisms. [It's true that toddlers constantly form "hypotheses" about the structure of the language they're learning, for example, and have their hypotheses repeatedly corrected and developed further by experience, but this is all unconscious.] Incidentally, here's another example of stupidity: some of Chomsky's critics have objected that language is socially constructed, part of a rich social context, not an individual psychological phenomenon. Half a moment's reflection should have suggested to them that even if language does depend crucially on social interactions, it "nevertheless ultimately depends on individual cognitive processes in individual human minds," to quote Gopnik. The idea that Chomsky's "Cartesianism" forbids recognition of the central importance of *interactions with others* is, well, stunningly dumb.

the brain processes and interprets the nature it 'receives' through the senses. (E.g., in order for us to walk, the brain has to constantly calculate where external objects are in relation to the body.) Maybe I'm just irredeemably stupid, but I don't see what real alternative there is to this picture. I have to admit I don't have the foggiest idea of how neural activities could carry out calculations, or even what it means to say they do, but clearly they must. Actually, the whole thing is one big goddamn mess, and scientists/philosophers haven't even got clear on the basics yet.)

Reading the Chomsky-recommended *Memory and the Computational Brain: Why Cognitive Science Will Transform Neuroscience* (2010), by C. R. Gallistel and Adam Philip King. A brilliant and illuminating book, though not light reading. "Our central claim…is that the function of the neurobiological memory mechanism is to carry information forward in time in a computationally accessible form." They argue against the non-representational, associative theories of learning that go back centuries, and claim that contemporary neuroscience is handicapped by its fidelity to this tradition, particularly in its position that the physical basis of memory is synaptic plasticity (the ability of synapses to strengthen or weaken over time, in response to increases or decreases in their activity).

Another central claim: "There must be an addressable read/write memory mechanism in brains that encodes information received by the brain into symbols (write), locates the information received by the brain (addresses), and transports it to computational machinery that makes productive use of the information (reads)." An academic review of the book elaborates: "In short, living organisms are made in the image of a digital computer of the sort described by John von Neumann and envisioned by Alan Turing." I've always been skeptical of the abundance of parallels that thinkers like to draw between brains and computers, but *some* of the parallels must be justified. (*Not*, however, the idea that computers are conscious. That's just stupid.)

Wow, Claude Shannon, "the father of information theory," was remarkably brilliant. In general, I've always been impressed by mathematicians, by the very idea of mathematicians; but Shannon was incredible. Finding a way to quantify *information*! It's almost miraculous.

From the book:

> This brings us to a brief consideration of how Shannon's analysis applies to the brain. The essential point is that the brain is a receiver of signals that, under the proper conditions, convey to it information about the state of the world. The signals the brain receives are trains of action potentials propagating down sensory axons. Neurophysiologists call these action potentials spikes, because they look like spikes when viewed on an oscilloscope at relatively low temporal resolution. Spikes are analogous to electrical pulses that carry information within electronic systems. Sensory organs (eyes, ears, noses, tongues, and so on) and the sensory receptors embedded in them convert information-rich stimulus energy to spike trains. The stimuli that act directly on sensory receptors are called proximal stimuli. Examples are the photons absorbed by the rods and cones in the retina, the traveling waves in the basilar membrane of the cochlea, which bend the underlying hair cells, the molecules absorbed by the nasal mucosa, and so on. Proximal stimuli carry information about distal stimuli, sources out there in the world. The brain extracts this information from spike trains by processing them. This is to say that much of the signal contains data from which useful information must be determined. [But the signal also contains 'noise' that the brain somehow has to filter out.]
>
> …The modern approach to a neurobiological understanding of sensory transduction and the streams of impulses thereby generated relies heavily on Shannon's insights and their mathematical elaboration. In a few cases, it has been possible to get evidence regarding the code used by sensory neurons to transmit information to the brains of flies and frogs. The use of methods developed from Shannon's foundations has made it possible to estimate how many bits are conveyed per spike and how many bits are conveyed by a single axon in one second. The answers have been truly revolutionary. A single spike

> can convey as much as 7 bits of information and 300 bits per second can be transmitted on a single axon. [This is *fascinating*. And how were they able to estimate it at all?!]
>
> Given our estimates above of how many bits on average are needed to convey English words when an efficient code is used (about 10 per word), a single axon could transmit 30 words per second to, for example, a speech center…

In short, "Understanding how the brain works requires an understanding of the rudiments of information theory, because what the brain deals with is information."

"For decades, neuroscientists have debated the question whether neural communication is analog or digital or both, and whether it matters… Our hunch is that information transmission and processing in the brain is likewise ultimately digital. A guiding conviction of ours – by no means generally shared in the neuroscience community – is that brains do close to the best possible job with the problems they routinely solve, given the physical constraints on their operation. Doing the best possible job suggests doing it digitally, because that is the best solution to the ubiquitous problems of noise, efficiency of transmission, and precision control." They make this observation because the modern theory of computation is cast entirely in digital terms (digital means information is carried by a set of discrete symbols, rather than something *continuously* variable), so in order for the theory to be relevant to the brain, the brain has to work digitally. Incidentally, the genetic coding of information is a digital, not an analog, system.

Sometimes I like to just sit in awe. The brain has to interpret the world in such a way that the organism can interact with its environment. So what it does, necessarily, is to give an *appearance* to something that in fact, in itself, has no appearance. What perceptual appearances are (of course) is just a vast amount of information about the world, information that enables us to survive. Information presented in the form of colors, sounds, tastes, smells, etc. There are structures in the world that correspond to what we perceive, while yet being so radically different as to lack the defining element of what we perceive, namely appearance. (Our complete incapacity to imagine something that (in itself) lacks an appearance only shows how inadequate our cognitive apparatus is to truly understand the world.) Anyway, I just find it mind-bending to contemplate that the brain, by carrying out computations on gigabytes of data it continuously receives, *gives an appearance* to the world. From billions of action potentials you get…a breathtaking sunset.

So far, most of the book I find mind-numbing and almost incomprehensible. All the details about information theory, functions, symbolization, all the mathematics…my brain doesn't 'function' in this way. Here's a refreshing and useful paragraph:

> The anti-representational behaviorism of an earlier era finds an echo in contemporary connectionist and dynamic-systems work. Roughly speaking, the more committed theorists are to building psychological theory on neurobiological foundations, the more skeptical they are about the hypothesis that there are symbols and symbol-processing operations in the brain. We will explore the reasons for this in subsequent chapters, but the basic reason is simple: the language and conceptual framework for symbolic processing is alien to contemporary neuroscience. Neuroscientists cannot clearly identify the material basis for symbols – that is, there is no consensus about what the basis might be – nor can they specify the machinery that implements any of the information-processing operations that would plausibly act on those symbols (operations such as vector addition). Thus, there is a conceptual chasm between mainline cognitive science and neuroscience. Our book is devoted to exploring that chasm and building the foundations for bridging it.

Useful paper: "Doing Cognitive Neuroscience: A Third Way" (2006), by Frances Egan and Robert J. Matthews. Defends the dynamic-systems approach Gallistel criticizes, but has information on two other dominant paradigms as well. The first is what most neuroscientists do: study what neurons are doing, what goes on biologically at the lowest levels. This is what Gallistel, David Marr, Chomsky, and other cognitive scientists criticize on the following grounds: "The persistent complaints of computational theorists such as

Marr seem borne out, that merely mucking around with low-level detail is unlikely to eventuate in any understanding of complex cognitive processes, for the simple reason that bottom-up theorists don't know what they are looking for and thus are quite unlikely to find anything. Sometimes the problem here is presented as a search problem: How likely it is that one can find what one is looking for, given the complexity of the brain, unless one already knows, or at least has some idea, what one is looking for. At other times the problem is presented less as an epistemological problem than as a metaphysical problem: cognitive processes, it is claimed, are genuinely emergent out of the low level processes, such that no amount of understanding of the low-level processes will lead to an understanding of the complex cognitive processes." That seems plausible to me.

As Marr said, "trying to understand perception by studying only neurons is like trying to understand bird flight by studying only feathers. It simply cannot be done." The neural level only *implements* higher-level cognitive principles and operations. So the other approach, of course, is Marr and Gallistel's, the top-down one. The authors of the article criticize these "cognitivists," on the other hand, for assuming that their account of mental processes will be found someday to "smoothly reduce to neuroscience"—or rather that neural mechanisms of implementation will be discovered—which Egan and Matthews think is false.

If both paradigms are mistaken, there must be a third one, 'between' the two. "The neural dynamic systems approach is based on the idea that complex systems can only be understood by finding a mathematical characterization of how their behavior emerges from the interaction of their parts over time." One possible manifestation of the dynamic systems approach is dynamic causal modeling. "DCM undertakes to construct a realistic model of neural function, by modeling the causal interaction among anatomically defined cortical regions (such as various Brodmann's areas, the inferior temporal fusiform gyrus, Broca's area, etc.), based largely on fMRI data. The idea is to develop a time-dependent dynamic model of the activation of the cortical regions implicated in specific cognitive tasks. In effect, DCM views the brain as a dynamic system, consisting of a set of structures that interact causally with each other in a spatially and temporally specific fashion. [But that's obvious!] These structures undergo certain time-dependent dynamic changes in activation and connectivity in response to perturbation by sensory stimuli, where the precise character of these changes is sensitive not only to these sensory perturbations but also to specific non-stimulus contextual inputs such as attention. DCM describes the dynamics of these changes by means of a set of dynamical equations, analogous to the dynamical equations that describe the dynamic behavior of other physical systems such as fluids in response to perturbations of these systems."

And so on, in the same vein. Eventually: "Let us summarize, briefly, some implications of the neural dynamics systems approach, as illustrated by DCM, for the problem of explaining cognition. Notice first, and most importantly, it explains cognition in the sense that it gives an account of the phenomena in neural terms, emphasizing a break with the 'cognitivist' assumption that to be an *explanation of cognition* is necessarily to be a *cognitive explanation*, where by the latter one means an explanation that traffics in the usual semantic and intentional internals [internal states] dear to cognitivists. Second, the account leaves open the question of whether there is any interesting mapping between cognitive explanations and neural explanations of cognitive phenomena—maybe there is, but then again maybe not…" But if supposedly you can explain cognition without mentioning representations, computations, and all that cognitivist stuff…well then is cognitive science misguided and unnecessary? That hardly seems possible, given its successes. If there isn't a way to bridge the divide between neuroscience and cognitivism, I don't see how we'll ever really understand the cognitive. But I guess this is just another manifestation of the mind-body problem, and as such might be insuperable.

Here's something interesting from Gallistel's book: apparently it's plausible that the brain is able to store a trillion gigabytes of memory, "the equivalent of well over 100 billion DVDs." Gives you some idea of only *one* of the differences between human brains and the most powerful modern computers.

Nice: "We suspect that part of the motivation for the reiterated claim that the brain is not a computer or that it does not 'really' compute is that it allows behavioral and cognitive neuroscientists to stay in their comfort zone; it allows them to avoid mastering…confusion [about all things computational], to avoid coming to terms with what we believe to be the ineluctable logic of physically realized computation." I'm sure that's right. Computer science is damn difficult, and people who have chosen to spend their careers on

something different don't want to have to get into it. (I doubt Gallistel is popular among neuroscientists. "He's challenging the way we do things! Criticizing us! Interloper!")

Summing up chapter 10: "A mechanism for carrying information forward in time is indispensable in the fabrication of an effective computing machine. Contemporary neurobiology has yet to glimpse a mechanism at all well suited to the physical realization of this function." So neurobiology is *very* far from understanding memory. It doesn't even have an inkling of the *mechanisms* yet (much less a fleshed-out understanding from a macro perspective).

Chapter 11 is about the nature of learning. Currently (in cognitive science and its related disciplines) there are two different conceptual frameworks for thinking about learning. "In the first story about the nature of learning, which is by far the more popular one, particularly in neurobiologically oriented circles, learning is the rewiring by experience of a plastic brain so as to make the operation of that brain better suited to the environment in which it finds itself. In the second story, learning is the extraction from experience of information about the world that is carried forward in memory to inform subsequent behavior. In the first story, the brain has the functional architecture of a neural network. In the second story, it has the functional architecture of a Turing machine." Needless to say, the authors favor the second story.

They have a nice little summary of the philosophical/psychological doctrine of associationism, and later behaviorism, that provides the historical and theoretical context for the first story about the nature of learning:

> [In Pavlov's classic experiments on dogs,] he was guided by the congruence between what he seemed to have observed and one of the oldest and most popular ideas in the philosophical literature on the theory of mind, the notion of an associative connection. In the seventeenth century, the English philosopher and political theorist John Locke argued that our thoughts were governed by learned associations between "ideas." Locke understood by "ideas" both what we might now call simple sense impressions, for example, the impression of red, and what we might now call concepts, such as the concept of motherhood. He called the first simple ideas and the second complex ideas. Whereas rationalists like Leibnitz believed that ideas were connected by some kind of preordained intrinsic logical system, Locke argued that the connections between our ideas were in essence accidents of experience. One idea followed the next in our mind because the stimulus (or environmental situation) that aroused the second idea had repeatedly been preceded by the stimulus (or situation) that aroused the preceding idea. The repeated occurrence of these two ideas in close temporal proximity had caused a connection to grow up between them. The connection conducted excitation from the one idea to the other. When the first idea was aroused, it aroused the second by way of the associative connection that experience had forged between the two ideas. Moreover, he argued, the associative process forged complex ideas out of simple ideas. Concepts like motherhood were clusters of simple ideas (sense impressions) that had become strongly associated with each other through repeated experience of their co-occurrence.
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> There is enormous intuitive appeal to this concept. It has endured for centuries. It is as popular today as it was in Locke's day, probably more popular…
>
> The influence on Pavlov of this well-known line of philosophical thought was straightforward. He translated the doctrine of learning by association into a physiological hypothesis. He assumed that it was the temporal proximity between the sound of food being prepared and the delivery of food that caused the rewiring of the reflex system, the formation of new connections between neurons. These new connections between neurons are the physiological embodiment of the psychological and philosophical concept of an association between ideas or, as we would now say, concepts. He set out to vary systematically the conditions of this temporal pairing – how close in time the neutral (sound) stimulus [like a bell ringing] and the innately active food stimulus had to be, how often they had to co-occur, the effects of other stimuli present, and so on. In so doing, he

> gave birth to the study of what is now called Pavlovian conditioning. The essence of this approach to learning is the arranging of a predictive relation between two or more stimuli and the study of the behavioral changes that follow the repeated experience of this relationship. These changes are imagined to be the consequence of some kind of rewiring…

The theory of rewiring isn't representational. There is no place for symbolic memory, which means no mechanism for carrying forward in time the information gleaned from past experience.

The authors argue, on the other hand, that "learning is the extraction from experience of symbolic representations, which are carried forward in time by a symbolic memory mechanism, until such time as they are needed in a behavior-determining computation." They argue for this by considering the phenomenon of dead reckoning, a simple computation that (from behavioral evidence) is almost certainly implemented in the brains of a wide variety of animals.

In a later chapter they also take issue with the popular, empiricist-inspired idea that there's a single basic learning mechanism—a "general-purpose learning process"—or at any rate a small number of such mechanisms. They prefer the modular hypothesis rooted in zoology and evolutionary biology, the hypothesis that there are *adaptive specializations*. "Each such mechanism constitutes a particular solution to a particular problem. The foliated structure of the lung reflects its role as the organ of gas exchange, and so does the specialized structure of the tissue that lines it. The structure of the hemoglobin molecule reflects its function as an oxygen carrier…" Adaptive specialization of mechanism is ubiquitous and obvious in biology, simply taken for granted. From this perspective, it's strange that most past and present theorizing about learning is opposed to the idea.

"A computational/representational approach to learning, which assumes that learning is the extraction and preservation of useful information from experience, leads to a more modular, hence more biological conception of learning. For computational reasons, learning mechanisms must have a problem-specific structure, because the structure of a learning mechanism must reflect the computational aspects of the problem of extracting a given kind of representation from a given kind of data. Learning mechanisms are problem-specific modules – organs of learning – because it takes different computations to extract different representations from different data."

Again, all this seems so obvious to me I'm puzzled (sort of) that it's a minority view. The details of the authors' reasoning are sometimes hard to follow, but intuitively their position seems extremely plausible.

Reading excerpts online from a book called *Biology at Work: Rethinking Sexual Equality* (2002), by Kingsley R. Browne. (Also articles.) Is yet another reminder of how ignorant—scientifically illiterate—most feminist "thinking" is on the subject of sex differences. (The typical level of feminist, and more generally politically-correct postmodernist, intellectual laziness is strikingly high. These people—in fact most people—reason on the level of *I like* and *I don't like*, not *The evidence suggests*. That's the cognitive original sin of humanity. To overcome such primitivism is to achieve cognitive maturity.)

Common sense: "Most studies of stereotype accuracy have shown them to be accurate generalizations… Indeed, stereotypes serve the essential function of allowing us to generalize from patterns of information."

Oh well, philosophy is more interesting than this sort of science. Tyler Burge's long essay "Philosophy of Language and Mind: 1950–1990" is very good.

David Montgomery's *Citizen Worker: The Experience of Workers in the United States with Democracy and the Free Market during the Nineteenth Century* (1993).

What Alexander Troup wrote in 1891 applies just as well to the present: "We prate religion… We indulge in morbid sentimentalism over 'happy homes,' we spread ourselves in eagle flights of oratory over our American institutions and the liberty and equality we enjoy under the law, while at the same time we are manufacturing paupers to an extent which places it among our leading industries."

Quite early in the nineteenth century, in fact, the courts were favoring the manufacture of paupers just as much as they do today. As far as they were concerned, Montgomery writes, "the basic principles of the republic required defense of individual initiative in economic life against both governmental and social interference." He gives an example: "In 1837 the Massachusetts Supreme Court made this clear while reasserting that a farm laborer hired for six months who had quit at the end of five was entitled to no pay. The judges declared, 'Laborers, and especially that most improvident part of them, sailors, may excite sympathy; but in a government of equal laws, they must be subject to the same rules and principles as the rest of the community; and a court of justice is almost the only place where sympathy should have no influence.'" Yes, that's one conception of justice, a conception exquisitely suited to a capitalist society. In justice there is no place for sympathy; only impersonal law—in particular a law that upholds class hierarchies, by being grounded in *private property* and *individualism*—ought to be recognized.

"During the next fifteen years [after 1877] state and federal courts vied with each other to underwrite the legal claims of property owners in a market economy against the collective initiatives of working people." Coal miners, being the most militant, were the most likely to face indictments and convictions for "conspiracy."

Montgomery sums up his first chapter:

> In conclusion, democracy hastened the destruction of onerous forms of personal subordination to masters, landlords, and creditors that American working people had historically faced. The voting rights extended to white male wage earners in the early nineteenth century [by significant portions of the gentry who "were prepared to advance their own political fortunes by soliciting the votes of humble farmers and artisans"[1]] provided them with both liberty of action and political influence, which helped them eliminate master-and-servant laws, imprisonment for debt, and seizure of personal property for nonpayment of rent. During Reconstruction the same developments were repeated for southern black workers, though under much more fiercely contested circumstances. [Black workers, of course, had far less success than white workers had earlier. Because of the differences in the labor regimes, or the modes of production, between North and South.]
>
> The new law that replaced the old, however, was defined not by the daily needs of wage earners, but by the emerging requirements of wage contracts for labor, rental of urban housing, expanded circulation of commodities, and the promotion of economic innovation. The legal status of employers and employees was basically defined through common law by the legal profession rather than by elected legislators. [That tradition has continued to the present. Extra-democratic means are necessary to fashion a legal framework for the accumulation of capital by the rich.] Court rulings translated the private initiatives celebrated by Jeffersonian Republicanism into the doctrine of the "free market." That doctrine, in its turn, enshrined rules established by employers in the legal definition of the wage contract. It also justified severe restriction of the use working people could make of their democratic rights and powers through their own collective initiatives or through governmental action…

In his chapter entitled "Policing People for the Free Market," Montgomery recounts a revealing incident in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1886. "The city's employers refused to reduce the hours of labor to conform to a new state law, which made eight hours a legal day's work. When thousands of workers paraded through the streets to demand obedience to the law, they found their city infested by almost two thousand guardsmen

[1] In other words, it wasn't out of the generosity of their hearts that members of the elite allowed wage-earners the right to vote. It was because, to quote the always perceptive Tocqueville, "as it was impossible to wring the power from the hands of a people which they [the upper classes] did not detest sufficiently to brave, their only aim was to secure its good will at any price." The consequence was that "the most democratic laws were…voted by the very men whose interests they impaired." Another of history's infinite ironies.

[National Guardsmen], eight Gatling guns, and a battery of heavy artillery—defending the manufacturers who defied the law!" A nice illustration of the real purpose of military and police authorities—not to defend the law but to defend the powerful.

As you know, late in the nineteenth century the courts had quite an array of tools to attack workers. Public exposure of working conditions by the labor press brought suits for libel; state laws that threatened to impinge on companies' control of their own business affairs were invalidated; but the injunction, of course, was the favorite method to disrupt labor actions. Citywide boycotts of firms, which could be quite effective, were usually judged illegal—for revealing reasons. "While workers defended their hundreds of local boycotts as the sort of private arrangements to promote the common welfare that were favored by America's Jeffersonian legacy, courts impugned them precisely because their motivation was not self-interested but 'sympathetic.' By introducing community moral standards into economic behavior, they charged, boycotts were 'combinations of irresponsible cabals or cliques' that threatened to bring 'an end of government.'" Ha! Morality and sympathy have no place in the capitalist economy, you irresponsible idealists! Whatever isn't inspired by greed is against the law!

Reading articles in history, to keep abreast of the discipline and have a stock of knowledge for courses I'll teach. E.g., because I'm teaching a 300-level course on the Gilded Age and Progressive Era next semester, articles on that subject. Rebecca Edwards, "Politics, Social Movements, and the Periodization of U.S. History" (2009). Richard Schneirov, "Thoughts on Periodizing the Gilded Age: Capital Accumulation, Society, and Politics, 1873–1898" (2006). Ballard Campbell, "Comparative Perspectives on the Gilded Age and Progressive Era" (2002). Worth Robert Miller, "The Lost World of Gilded Age Politics" (2002). Elisabeth Israels Perry, "Men Are from the Gilded Age, Women Are from the Progressive Era" (2002). Richard R. John, "Elaborations, Revisions, Dissent: Alfred D. Chandler, Jr.'s *The Visible Hand* after Twenty Years" (1997). James Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880–1930" (1992). Etc. Also Rebecca Edwards' *New Spirits: Americans in the "Gilded Age," 1865–1905* (2015), which I'm using as one of the course's textbooks.

Fruitful suggestion from Schneirov: "Much of national politics in American history has centered on accommodating the often-divergent interests generated from these modes of production [viz., household, chattel slave, crop-lien sharecropper, small producer or self-employed labor, capitalist, etc.] and stabilizing the succession of 'mixes'—usually under the hegemony of a dominant mode of production—that constituted the socio-economic matrix of the country in any one period." He's quite sympathetic to Marxism.

But then he says this: "Historical research has cast grave doubt on the classical Marxist notion that class conflict—however important—can serve as the central explanation of social change. Whether historians are dealing with the American Revolution, the Republican Party coalition of the 1850s, Progressivism, or the New Deal, it appears that cross-class coalitions consisting of segments of classes and in conflict with other cross-class coalitions transacted fundamental social and economic change." Duh. So? The idea that class conflict is the central explanation of social change doesn't imply that different classes have never worked together to achieve common aims.

Typical shallow thinking.

More sensible (thoughts on the Gilded Age):

> In the North…the Gilded Age can be defined at its start and conclusion by two important transitions: the first, from a self-employed or free labor mode of production to a capitalist one, and the second, a shift from a proprietary competitive capitalist order to a corporate administered one. While the completion of the first transition helps define the beginning of the Gilded Age, the beginning of the second helps define its close, that is, assuming that we keep the standard years for the Gilded Age, 1870s-1890s. Between these two transitions exists the dominant mode of production in the Gilded Age: competitive, proprietary capitalism, which itself was part of a larger mix including secondary or recessive strains of

> self-employed labor, household production, and in the South, large- and small-scale commercial agriculture.

What caused the depression of the 1870s? Not surprisingly—if you're a Marxist—it has to do with the too-great acceleration of capital accumulation after the Civil War, particularly too much investment in plant and equipment. "According to [Chicago banker Lyman] Gage, testifying before a House committee in 1879 as to the cause of the depression, it had been due to 'the immense transfer of capital into fixed forms, such as ships, railroads, mines, manufactories, &c' and was manifested in 'a large surplus of loanable funds in the banks.' In 1884, the economist Arthur Hadley directly challenged classical political economy's dictum that general overproduction was impossible. He traced the 1873 panic and subsequent depression to the much greater investment of capital in fixed forms, mainly in railroad building. '[T]he continued existence of such masses of undisposable [sic] surplus may be regarded as the leading difference between the long crisis of 1873 and the shorter one of 1857.'" Bourgeois (and not only Marxist) awareness of the dangers of overproduction thus goes back at least to the 1870s. Economic observers noted that the high fixed costs of many firms forced them to resort to cutthroat competition to cover those costs (which entailed mechanization and attempts to deskill work), causing a series of crises of generalized overproduction between the 1870s and 1890s.

With the Progressive Era, of course, a more managed and more corporate capitalism was born. This is why Rebecca Edwards is wrong that we should get rid of the term 'Gilded Age' and call the whole period the Long Progressive Era. She's right that there were important continuities—as always—but the differences are significant enough to warrant the two separate labels. (And yet, as always, we have to remember it *is* artificial and even obfuscatory to divide history into separate periods, especially if the periods are only a couple of decades long.)[1]

> Scholars date the decline of a state composed of "courts and parties" and the rise of the regulative state to the Progressive Era. It was then, at President Theodore Roosevelt's request, that Congress created the model for strong commission government by increasing the powers of the Interstate Commerce Commission, established in 1887. Only after the turn of the century were politicians able to muster enough public support for the sort of administrative mechanisms needed to enforce legislatively enacted regulations. It is nonetheless important to recognize for periodization purposes that it was in the Gilded Age that Americans experimented on all levels of government with major regulatory and redistributive solutions to the problems created by the rise of capitalism.

Change and continuity.

Gabriel Kolko's classic *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History 1900–1916* (1963). A far more profound book than the vast majority of scholarship on the Progressive Era.

Except in the beginning he does the typical historian thing of arguing that the triumph of conservatism "was the result not of any impersonal, mechanistic necessity but of the conscious needs and decisions of specific men and institutions." I.e., things could have turned out differently. But the mere fact that developments were the product of men and institutions doesn't mean there were no impersonal pressures that *strongly constrained* what would happen.

Anyway, "progressivism was initially a movement for the political rationalization[2] of business and industrial concerns, a movement that operated on the assumption that the general welfare of the community could be best served by satisfying the concrete needs of business. But the regulation itself was invariably

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[1] In any case, a better term would be the Long Gilded Age, not the Long Progressive Era. (But both 'Gilded' and 'Progressive' are flawed labels.) The Long Gilded Age could extend even into the late 1920s.

[2] By rationalization he means "the organization of the economy and the larger political and social spheres in a manner that will allow corporations to function in a predictable and secure environment permitting reasonable profits over the long run."

controlled by leaders of the regulated industry, and directed toward ends they deemed acceptable or desirable." Business control over politics (and not political regulation of the economy) is "the significant phenomenon of the Progressive Era"—and, he might have said, of every other era since before the Civil War.

So big business *desired* federal regulation, in large part to reduce destructive competition between firms. "Ironically, contrary to the consensus of historians, it was not the existence of monopoly that caused the federal government to intervene in the economy, but the lack of it." Business by its own voluntary measures, such as mergers, hadn't succeeded in rationalizing the economy. Its leaders realized that only the national government could accomplish that purpose.

Another reason for federal regulation was that, in its conservatism, it could be a "bulwark against state regulations that were either haphazard or, what is more important, far more responsible to more radical, genuinely progressive local communities. National progressivism, then, becomes the defense of business against the democratic ferment that was nascent in the states." An ironic and original thesis, in light of the conventional wisdom that federal legislation usually has a more progressive thrust than state legislation.

Despite the merger movement between 1897 and 1901, "the first decades of the century were years of intense and growing competition." Giant corporations often didn't even do very well, making mediocre profits. A financial journal observed in 1900 that "the most serious problem that confronts trust combinations today is competition from independent sources… In iron and steel, in paper and in constructive processes of large magnitude the sources of production are being multiplied, with a resultant decrease in profits…" Kolko proceeds to show in a series of "case studies" (of particular industries) that competition in the early years of the new century was growing: in iron and steel, oil, automobiles, agricultural machinery, copper, meatpacking, and the telephone industry. (Also paper, textiles, glass, chemicals, insurance, etc.) The public outcry over "monopolies" wasn't wholly without cause, but it was essentially confused.

Kolko's discussion of meat inspection is revealing. Decades after the publication of his book, we're still taught that Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* almost singlehandedly led to a great victory over the evil Beef Trust, when the Meat Inspection Act of 1906 was passed. It was the epitome of the Progressive struggle against big business, and a remarkable populist triumph. The reality is that the major meatpackers were the most ardent supporters of regulation, and had been agitating for better regulation for at least twenty years. "The most important catalyst in creating a demand for reform or innovation of meat inspection laws was the European export market [i.e., the business of exporting meat products to Europe] and not, as has usually been supposed, the moralistic urgings of reformers." Throughout the 1880s the major European countries banned American meat because of diseases, and the cost to the large American packers was enormous. Finally Congress passed a major meat inspection law in 1891, which opened up the European market. But then European packers who didn't appreciate the competition pressured their governments to impose new medical standards to keep excluding some of the meat. Another law in 1895 provided for even greater enforcement. But the government system still failed to reach smaller packers, and the big ones resented this competitive disadvantage. They wanted to deepen and extend regulation. So, in a sense, *The Jungle* only helped their cause. The American Meat Packers' Association supported the bill that was eventually passed, in fact lobbied successfully to get one of the only provisions they didn't like taken out of the original version, that the packers themselves would have to pay for the costs of inspection. Nor did the bill say anything about working conditions, which is what Sinclair had been most concerned with. So in every respect it represented a triumph for the meatpackers. (Actually, the American Meat Packers' Association continued in later years to agitate for *more* regulation, but it was unsuccessful.)

It was similar with the Pure Food and Drug Act, passed the same year. Major food interests had lobbied for regulation "in order to set their own houses in order and protect themselves from more unscrupulous associates," and they supported the bill.

As for Theodore Roosevelt, despite the myths, he wasn't much of a reformer. He was far more conservative than even his cousin Franklin Roosevelt. Didn't care much about the pure food and drug question, cared about regulating meatpacking largely because business supported it, cared less for the *conservation* of nature than for preserving it for utilitarian economic ends (at least according to Kolko),

and, despite his rhetoric, didn't even care deeply about the antitrust issue (except with regard to Standard Oil). "The antitrust activity of Roosevelt's administration was purely minimal, and substantially less, in terms of the number of cases initiated, than under Taft or Warren G. Harding." In addition, he had contempt for muckrakers, and was instinctively well-disposed toward nearly the whole of the business community. Kolko also gives convincing evidence that he was more anti-labor than such business groups as the National Civic Federation and the 'House of Morgan.'

Meanwhile, during Taft's presidency business continued to press for greater federal regulation of prices (to eliminate destructive price wars) and other matters, a stronger Interstate Commerce Commission, major banking reform, etc. The trade association movement heated up in order to facilitate price, market, and output agreements between businesses in competitive industries (agreements that were of questionable legality because of the Sherman Act, which most of the business community therefore wanted amended or repealed). Within a couple of decades the U.S. economy—like other Western economies—was riddled by many hundreds of trade associations.[1]

In short, what was desired was ever greater fusion of business with government, in the formally fascist fashion that was already becoming the norm across the Western world (and would eventuate in Fascism and Nazism, and more generally in numerous varieties of state capitalism).

The banking reform movement that culminated in passage of the Federal Reserve Act was, of course, organized by bankers and served their interests. As Kolko says, it "was initiated and sustained by big bankers seeking to offset, through political means, the diffusion and decentralization within banking"—the competition of innumerable state banks and smaller banks around the country, and the relative decline of New York as the center of finance. There was also growing financial instability, which culminated in the panic of 1907. The Federal Reserve System was the solution. "The trend in the national banking system until 1913 was toward a reduction in the bankers' balances and individual deposits in New York, and in favor of the relatively more rapid growth in the Midwest and West… The Federal Reserve System, for the most part, stabilized the financial power of New York within the economy, reversing the longer term trend toward decentralization by the utilization of political means of control over the central money market." Thus, another quintessentially "Progressive" achievement was quite conservative in its aims and consequences.

So were the Clayton Antitrust Act and the Federal Trade Commission Act, both passed in 1914. "Big business as a whole was very pleased, to put it mildly, with the new state of affairs. The provisions of the new laws attacking unfair competitors and price discrimination meant that the government would now make it possible for many trade associations to stabilize, for the first time, prices within their industries, and to make effective oligopoly a new phase of the economy. In part the new mood of confidence was a result of the President's repeated assurances that he favored a conservative approach to business…and a realization that a Federal Trade Commission was to serve as a stabilizing factor in the economy and a protector against public attacks. The unions were no better off, despite Gompers' effusive support of the Clayton Act, and the last stone in the foundation of a comprehensive political capitalism involving the banks, railroads, and industry had been laid."

All the public outcry against corporations and monopolies had eventuated in laws that in their essentials were exactly what big business desired. As usual, the rich were able to channel popular unrest to their own ends, while yet declaring that the public's aims had been realized. "In its larger outlines it was [politically oriented big businessmen] who gave progressivism its essential character. By the end of 1914 they had triumphed, and to the extent that the new laws were vague and subject to administrative definitions by boards and commissions, they were to totally dominate the extensive reign of political capitalism that had been created in the United States by 1915."

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[1] We see, once again, that, contrary to panegyrics penned by the public relations industry, what business really wants isn't a "free" market but a *controlled* market. That can be thought of as one of the central points of Kolko's book. The hatred of the market is so extreme that some businessmen, for instance Andrew Carnegie and Elbert H. Gary (head of U.S. Steel), actually advocated government price-fixing!

A useful statement in the concluding chapter: "National progressivism was able to short-circuit state progressivism, to hold nascent radicalism in check by feeding the illusions of its leaders—leaders who could not tell the difference between federal regulation *of* business and federal regulation *for* business."

Another useful statement:

> Historians have continually tried to explain the seemingly sudden collapse of progressivism after the First World War, and have offered reasons that varied from moral exhaustion to the repression of nonconformity. On the whole, all explanations suffer because they really fail to examine progressivism beyond the favorable conventional interpretation. Progressive goals, on the concrete, legislative level, were articulated by various business interests. These goals were, for the most part, achieved, and no one formulated others that big business was also interested in attaining. Yet a synthesis of business and politics on the federal level was created during the war, in various administrative and emergency agencies, that continued throughout following decade. Indeed, the war period represents the triumph of business in the most emphatic manner possible. With the exception of a brief interlude in the history of the Federal Trade Commission, big business gained total support from the various regulatory agencies and the Executive. It was during the war that effective, working oligopoly and price and market agreements became operational in the dominant sectors of the American economy. The rapid diffusion of power in the economy and relatively easy entry virtually ceased. Despite the cessation of important new legislative enactments, the unity of business and the federal government continued throughout the 1920's and thereafter, using the foundations laid in the Progressive Era to stabilize and consolidate conditions within various industries. And, on the same progressive foundations and exploiting the experience with the war agencies, Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt later formulated programs for saving American capitalism. The principle of utilizing the federal government to stabilize the economy, established in the context of modem industrialism during the Progressive Era, became the basis of political capitalism in its many later ramifications.
>
> In this sense progressivism did not die in the 1920's, but became a part of the basic fabric of American society…

I like Thorstein Veblen's remark that the U.S. Congress is little more than a "Soviet of Business Men's Delegates." Exactly!

Here's a random email about the Russian Revolution I sent in response to a few others, which I put here because it clarifies for you some of my attitudes:

> Yes, Kerensky stood firm on certain issues and at certain times, but he was indecisive at crucial moments, which ultimately allowed for the success of the Bolsheviks. He was indecisive, for instance, in the weeks and days leading up to the coup. Christopher Read's book gives a lot of evidence.
>
> Of course it's true that every event in history depends on contingencies. [I had said the Russian Revolution depended on a series of accidents, and my interlocutor had replied that's true of everything in history.] The point is that the transition from capitalism to socialism is supposed to happen virtually by necessity (as Marx argued in the Manifesto and other writings, and as the logic of his system entails), as developing productive forces burst the shackles (through the agency of the working class) of fettering production relations. This is why the transition was supposed to happen in an advanced capitalist state, not a backward semi-feudal one.

One can call the Russian Revolution a genuine revolution if one wants, but that's largely a terminological dispute. The point is that it wasn't and couldn't have been a revolution in any properly Marxist sense of the term, for a number of reasons. A Marxist "revolution"--which can take place over decades or generations, since it really just means a transition between different modes of production--would involve a transcending of the exploitative, authoritarian structures of capitalism and an unleashing of the productive potential shackled by capitalist property relations. Since most of Russia wasn't even capitalist or industrial in 1917, it's hard to see how the revolution could have been of this *post-capitalist* type. The Bolsheviks themselves puzzled over this, of course, concluding that the only way it could succeed would be if revolutions happened in more advanced states, so that the building of socialism in Russia could be coordinated with and assisted by the revolutions elsewhere. This hope faded after a few years.

More fundamentally, though, a transition to socialism--a necessarily *international* transition--could never have happened at that time. Conditions just weren't ripe. (They aren't even ripe yet, though some decades from now, in the era of capitalism's total decrepitude, they might be.) I've argued this point at length in the book. I have to say that in a sense I think I'm practically the only real Marxist around, since I share Marx's belief--which is very unpopular today--that there is a kind of logic and 'necessity' to historical evolution. A lot of leftists think "oh, if only things had gone a little differently, if we had had stronger leaders and so on, we could all be living in socialism or communism now!" That's not how history works. Events on the scale of a global transition between different modes of production don't depend on the will or abilities of a few leaders. They depend largely (though not exclusively) on the *'internal logic' of economic and political institutional change (given particular levels of technology, etc.)*. This is what "dialectics" is. This is why Marx thought it would be fruitful to investigate the logic of capitalist development, since he thought it would show why a transition to socialism would have to happen and *wouldn't* depend only on personalities, luck, etc. Of course the *way* it actually happened would; but *that it must happen* wouldn't. So the fact that a transition to socialism didn't happen a century ago itself shows it *couldn't* have; because if a transition ever does happen, it will be a result of something like historical *necessity*. The "necessity" of development through "dialectical contradictions" and so on. The only thing leaders can do is to speed up the process, make it more conscious and wholly *constructive*, reduce the amount of suffering during the long transition, etc.

This is why I critiqued Leninist "voluntarism" in the book. Voluntarism isn't Marxian. The principle of *individual will* (the will of a few leaders) and the principle of development through the systemic resolution of contradictions are opposed. The first is conscious and extra-systemic, the latter primarily unconscious and intra-systemic. I don't think Leninists really understand Marxism. In a sense even Marx didn't fully understand his theories, as I've argued in the book, since he had faith that a "proletarian dictatorship" would be able to *consciously direct* the long transition--despite his acute insight that historical actors never really understand the true significance of their acts! I think he suspends his whole dialectical method when it comes to his belief in a consciously willed, top-down, straightforward reconstruction of the economy from capitalist to socialist. Not only is such a belief unrealistic; it isn't even Marxian.

As I said in the excerpt, if a transition ever does occur, it won't involve only a few political parties that take over various states and direct everything from the commanding heights. It'll take place over many generations and will involve everything from national parties to local grassroots groups, from the proliferation of cooperatives to nationalization of major

> industries, from the laborious interstitial expansion of the solidarity economy to "consciously willed"--carefully thought-out and directed--plans akin to those of Jeremy Corbyn's Labor Party in its manifestos. It'll have very little in common with the Bolshevik seizure of power in a late-feudal country. As I said, I think the main lessons of that experience are in how *not* to do things.
>
> It's time we all stopped being dazzled and seduced by 1917. It was a historical accident that led to decades of horror. It wasn't and never could have been a truly socialist revolution. We should let the dead bury the dead and focus on the tasks at hand, in conditions radically different from those that confronted Lenin.

Nancy MacLean's bestseller *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (2017) deserves the attention it's gotten. It's an excellent and wonderfully pugilistic book. MacLean is a bare-knuckle boxer—and she's right: in 2017-18 it's time we took the gloves off.

January–March, 2018

This semester teaching courses at three colleges. An online class on the Gilded Age and Progressive Era in the U.S.; a class on U.S. history after the Civil War; and classes on World History to 1500 and Western Civilization to 1500.

Reading Ellen Meiksins Wood's brilliant *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (2002). A Marxist account highly sympathetic to Robert Brenner's interpretation. Gives commentary on the old debates and elaborates a rather persuasive 'new' perspective, according to which the question isn't how market *opportunities* arose in early modern times—for there have been market opportunities throughout history, despite the absence of a truly capitalist dynamic—but how market *imperatives* arose. For it is the *imperative* that producers are subject to the market that distinguishes the capitalist economy from all previous systems and makes its growth *self-sustaining* (at a compound rate, as David Harvey would add). Other theorists have tended to focus on how feudal *obstacles* to capitalism were overcome in Western Europe—for instance, how urban trade undermined feudalism—but this makes it seem as though producers simply had to be liberated from shackles in order finally to be free to become capitalists. The point, though, is that the rise of capitalism had less to do with "freedom" or "opportunities" than with *subjection to market imperatives* (or *coercion*)—of a kind that had never really existed before. For the first time, producers, on a wide scale, couldn't acquire the means of living except through ruthless economic (*not political*) competition. (The economy became its own separate sphere sundered from politics, subject to a strictly market-based logic.) So how did a system of market imperatives come into being?

I'd note here, by the way, that there's a lot of truth in the earlier interpretations too. As Wood indeed acknowledges. While the key transition may have happened in the English countryside, as Brenner and Wood argue, it was substantially dependent on earlier developments like the rise of trade, the existence of urban markets, the slow and partially interstitial erosion of feudal dominance across Western Europe. (So my comments in the book on cooperatives were basically valid.)

Throughout recorded history, of course, there has been commerce on a very wide scale. But insofar as it wasn't "subjected to the pressures of competitive production and profit-maximization, the compulsion to reinvest surpluses, and the relentless need to improve labor-productivity," it wasn't really capitalist *per se*. Capitalist competition necessitates the continual transformation of production, its continual "revolutionizing." The kind of trade that created great commercial powers tended to be "carrying" trade, with merchants buying goods in one location to be sold for a profit in another, or "commercial arbitrage between separate markets." "But even within a single, powerful, and relatively European kingdom like France, basically the same principle of non-capitalist commerce prevailed. There was no single and unified market, a market in which people made profit not by buying cheap and selling dear, not by carrying goods from one market to another, but by producing more cost-effectively in direct competition with others in the

same market." Nor was there a *mass market* for cheap everyday consumer products such as the market that would later drive industrial capitalism in Britain.

Even such advanced commercial societies as Florence during the Renaissance and the Dutch Republic during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries weren't "capitalist" in the strictest sense. The success of Florentine trade depended on extra-economic factors like monopoly privileges and other types of "politically constituted property." The Dutch were even more commercial than Florence, but they too were dependent on the (European) market in luxury goods and subject to its limitations. They also relied on "extra-economic superiority in negotiating separate markets, rather than on competitive production in a single market: on dominance in shipping and command of trade routes, on monopolies and trading privileges, on an elaborate network of far-flung trading posts and settlements, on the development of sophisticated financial practices and instruments."

Capitalism really began in the agrarian sector in early modern England. Wood doesn't go into as much detail as I'd like, but she sketches some of the conditions that made England unique. No other country was as effectively unified as England by the sixteenth century: it had a much more centralized state than even France and Spain, made possible by an impressive network of roads and water transport. London was becoming the hub of a national market, and agriculture was the foundation of this emerging national economy. The English ruling class was distinctive in two respects: first, it was demilitarized before any other aristocracy in Europe, and so did not possess "extra-economic" power or "politically constituted property" to the same degree as its continental counterparts.

> On the other hand [Wood continues] there was what might be called a trade-off between the centralization of state power and the aristocracy's control of land. Land in England had for a long time been unusually concentrated, with big landlords holding an unusually large proportion, in conditions that enabled them to use their property in new ways. What they lacked in "extra-economic" powers of surplus extraction they more than made up for with increasing economic powers.
>
> This distinctive combination had significant consequences. On the one hand, the concentration of English landholding meant that an unusually large proportion of land was worked not by peasant-proprietors but by tenants… On the other hand, the relatively weak extra-economic powers of landlords meant that they depended less on their ability to squeeze more rents out of their tenants by direct, coercive means than on their tenants' success in competitive production. Agrarian landlords in this arrangement had a strong incentive to encourage—and, wherever possible, to compel—their tenants to find ways of reducing costs by increasing labor-productivity.
>
> …As for the tenants, they were increasingly subject not only to direct pressures from landlords but also to market imperatives that compelled them to enhance their productivity. English tenancies took various forms, and there were many regional variations, but a growing number were subject to economic rents—rents fixed not by some legal or customary standard but by market conditions. There was, in effect, a market in leases. Tenants were obliged to compete not only in a market for consumers but also in a market for access to land.
>
> The effect of this system of property relations was that many agricultural producers (including prosperous "yeomen") became market-dependent in their access to land itself, to the means of production. Increasingly, as more land came under this economic regime, advantage in access to the land itself would go to those who could produce competitively and pay good rents by increasing their own productivity. This meant that success would breed success, and competitive farmers would have increasing access to even more land, while others lost access altogether…

In short, "it was unfixed, variable rents responsive to market imperatives that in England stimulated the development of commodity production, the improvement of productivity, and self-sustaining economic

development." Even tenants (or, in some cases, landowners working their own land) who enjoyed some sort of *customary* rent that gave them more security might have to sell their produce in the same markets as farmers who were responding more directly to the pressures of the market. So if they weren't productive enough to compete with other producers' low prices they wouldn't be able to sell their produce. Ultimately they might go under and join the poorer classes.

> So, as competitive market forces established themselves, less productive farmers lost their property. Market forces were, no doubt, assisted by direct coercive intervention to evict tenants or to extinguish their customary rights… The famous triad of landlord, capitalist tenant, and wage-laborers was the result, and with the growth of wage-labor the pressures to improve labor-productivity also increased. The same process created a highly productive agriculture capable of sustaining a large population not engaged in agricultural production, but also an increasing propertyless mass that would constitute both a large wage-labor force and a domestic market for cheap consumer goods—a type of market with no historical precedent. This is the background to the formation of English industrial capitalism.

Wood contrasts these developments with what happened in France around the same time, as the absolutist state, in the process of resolving the crisis of feudalism, *strengthened* old forms of peasant possession to preserve and expand the kingdom's tax-producing base while simultaneously reviving feudalism. (Because of this persistence of feudalism, moreover, France had to await the Napoleonic era to remove internal barriers to trade, whereas in England a competitive national market emerged much earlier.)

By the seventeenth and, especially, eighteenth centuries (the latter of which was the heyday of English agrarian capitalism), a practice and ideology of agricultural "improvement"—enhancing the land's productivity for profit—emerged on a broad scale across England. Scientists, landowners, tenants, eventually politicians, etc. grew intensely interested in new techniques of farming, technological innovations, and new forms and conceptions of property that would yield more productive agriculture. Thus arose the enclosure movement and the increasing privatization of land.

Wood's discussion of bourgeois revolution, and her distinction between bourgeois and capitalist, is of interest. Personally, I've always used the concept of "bourgeois revolution" in a somewhat ambiguous way, to designate both a country's long transition to capitalism and a particular moment of political revolution, such as the Glorious Revolution or (in some respects) the French Revolution. In the latter sense, capitalism has necessarily already made progress before the dramatic political clashes, which serve to sweep away some remaining obstacles to its further advance. Wood is semi-critical of the concept of bourgeois revolution, and I take her point that we should be more careful and analytical in how we use it. Anyway, the differences between the French Revolution and the English Revolution of the mid-seventeenth-century are indeed striking. The latter revolution consolidated the position of a capitalistic landed class that was already dominant both in society and in the state. "The revolution was not a class struggle that gave victory to a capitalist bourgeoisie against a ruling class thwarting its progress. The class struggle that certainly did take place within the Revolution was between that ruling class and subordinate popular forces, whose class interests had as much to do with opposing as promoting the progress of those capitalist landlords or their bourgeois collaborators."

The French Revolution of 1789, on the other hand, was (she says) much more of a "bourgeois revolution" than the English case, if that's supposed to mean it was a major struggle between bourgeoisie and aristocracy. But it wasn't very *capitalist*, inasmuch as the revolutionary bourgeoisie (city-dwellers, etc.) was, by and large, not capitalist even in its aspirations, being more concerned with civil equality between the Estates and the elimination of aristocratic privilege. But Wood does admit that in the long run the Revolution probably facilitated the development of capitalism by unifying the state and eliminating internal barriers to trade. –I'm inclined to think that Jean Jaurès' classic history of the Revolution partially refutes Wood's "problematizing" interpretation.

As agrarian capitalism progressed, an entirely new kind of commercial system was born, centered in England and especially London. For one thing, England developed its own distinctive banking system,

which wasn't just a more sophisticated version of ancient and medieval banking systems like in other European countries—specializing in money-changing operations, public banks dealing with state finances, and mechanisms for financing long-distance trade—but was organized around *domestic* trade. Specifically, it facilitated a network of distribution from London outwards throughout the country "by means of 'factors' or agents who operated on commissions and credits." This sort of banking made possible the integrated national market that sustained a growing non-agrarian population. And the national economy became the center of an international commercial system different from any other in history, which replaced "the infinite succession of arbitrage operations between separate, distinct, and discrete markets that had previously constituted foreign trade."

Another unusual thing about the new British economy was that the poverty of its mass of consumers, namely the propertyless wage-laborers who had become dependent on the market for their survival, *impelled* rather than *hindered* development of the forces of production. For it was necessary to produce cheaply in order for all these people to afford the basic necessities of life. So the masses' poverty reinforced the systemic compulsion to reduce costs of production in order to compete with other producers. (It's ironic that the *limitations* of the market stimulated development and reinforced the economy's dynamism.)

Agrarian capitalism made industrial capitalism—which is to say the maturation of the capitalist mode of production—both possible and probable (if not inevitable). The reasons should be obvious by now: it was agrarian capitalism that created a dispossessed mass forced to sell its labor-power for a wage, a mass that also constituted a consumer market for the cheap everyday goods (food, textiles) that drove industrialization in England. The outcome of the logic of agrarian capitalism was industrialization.

The chapter on the origins of capitalist imperialism is another enlightening one. Wood starts out by critiquing the view common among anti-Eurocentrists like J. M. Blaut that it was imperialist ventures in the New World, Africa, and Asia that made possible the "primitive accumulation" of wealth that led to Europe's capitalism. One obvious problem with this view is that while several European powers, such as Spain, Portugal, Holland, and France, were imperialistic/colonialist, only England made the leap to capitalism and then industrial capitalism. Moreover, England was a relative latecomer to the colonization game, and "its acquisition of colonial wealth lagged behind its own domestic capitalist development." Later, it wasn't only Britain that accumulated enormous wealth from slavery, but it *was* only in Britain that that wealth was converted into industrial capital (as Marxist historians like Eric Williams have argued). So why was colonialism associated with capitalism in one case but not in others? Evidently because the necessary transformations in property relations had already occurred in Britain but not elsewhere. "The wealth amassed from colonial exploitation may have contributed substantially to further development, [but] it was not a necessary precondition of the *origin* of capitalism."

"We can, nevertheless, identify a specifically capitalist form of imperialism, an imperialism that was more the result than the cause of capitalist development and stands in contrast to other European forms." Pre-capitalist imperialism is just the usual stuff: seizing territory and resources, capturing and enslaving people (thus the Spanish *encomienda* system and the slave plantation), using military power to squeeze taxes and tribute out of subject territories, etc. Or, in other cases, it was done in the interests of commerce, to secure trade routes, impose monopolies, gain exclusive rights to some precious commodity, and so on. The new capitalist imperialism, by contrast, amounted to the world's first "structural adjustment programs." England's conquest of Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was arguably the first case. For a long time England had tried to subdue Ireland by direct military means, but the Tudor state embarked on an aggressive new policy of colonization. "The effort to exert extra-economic control by a more effective military conquest was supplemented by an attempt to impose a kind of *economic* hegemony, using military force to implant a new economic system, as well as a new political and legal order." In 1585, for instance, a plan was enacted to grant expropriated lands in Munster to settlers who would introduce English agriculture to the region. The goal was to establish an English-style commercial order—not to turn Ireland into a commercial competitor but to make it an economic dependency of England. This aggressive colonialism "was the chief legacy of late Elizabethan Ireland to English colonization in the New World."

In the New World, of course, the establishment of property relations governed by market imperatives was even more brutal, involving genocide. It wasn't quite so brutal in other regions, such as India—but it was certainly brutal enough there too.

The book's last chapter, on "modernity and postmodernity," makes useful distinctions between various features of modernity. The tendency to equate *bourgeois* with *capitalist* and both with *modernity* is, Wood argues, analytically imprecise and misguided. If modernity is, in part, supposed to mean *rationalization* (as Weber said)—bureaucratic organization, the spread of education, industrial capitalism, the decline of superstition, and the progress of science and technology—capitalism isn't solely responsible for it. Neither in its sense of *market imperatives* nor as a *mode of production* is capitalism the only force that has propelled rationalization. Consider the Enlightenment, which is associated with science, rationalism (and empiricism), universalism, a belief in linear progress, the freedom of the individual, and other "modern" phenomena. In some respects it was produced by *non-capitalist* (not only *pre-capitalist*) social relations. The French Enlightenment in particular belonged to the absolutist state in France, which wasn't only a political form but also an economic resource for a substantial section of the ruling class. "In that sense, it represents not just the political but also the economic or material context of the Enlightenment." She continues: "The absolutist state was a centralized instrument of extra-economic surplus extraction, and office in the state was a form of property that gave its possessors access to peasant-produced surpluses." In an overwhelmingly rural society there were also other, feudal forms of extra-economic appropriation; and the internal market, which was limited and fragmented, operated on (strictly speaking) non-capitalist principles. The bourgeoisie wasn't really a capitalist class—and for the most part wasn't even a *commercial* class, since it consisted largely of professionals, office-holders, and intellectuals.

I'd reply that while all this may be true, it was nevertheless a mainly urban and commercial context, and a context integrally tied to England's emerging capitalism, that produced the characteristic achievements of the Enlightenment. Western Europe wasn't structured by a competitive system of market imperatives, but even so, market relations, internal and external trade, colonialism, etc. were pretty fundamental to the context of the Enlightenment. Insofar as people loosely understand "capitalism" to mean something like widespread commercialism, it certainly was part of the context of the Enlightenment.

But sure, one can agree that *capital*-ism, in the strict sense, had relatively little to do with the Enlightenment. In fact, of course, the inherent nature of capitalist exploitation, compulsion, and privatization is quite opposed to the liberatory, republican, democratic, humanistic values and achievements of the Enlightenment. In this sense, *modernity* and *capitalism* are by no means synonymous. Capitalism is merely one aspect of modernity, an aspect that isn't the source of all others but even contradicts and tends to crush some of them (e.g., democracy). (But, again, it is popular struggle in the context of capitalism that has given us liberal democracy.) Other aspects, such as "rationalization," progressed even under the absolutist state in France; and the later bourgeois revolution only completed the centralizing and bureaucratizing project of absolutism.

A comparison of France with England makes Wood's point forcefully. The characteristic cultural and ideological expressions of English capitalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries weren't Cartesian rationalism or rational planning (as under Richelieu and Colbert) but the "invisible hand" of classical political economy and the philosophy of British empiricism. (But this philosophy was taken up by French thinkers and used fruitfully in their battles against authority. In this sense, then, one aspect of the ideology of British capitalism was rather integral to the French Enlightenment, which undercuts Wood's argument.) "What set England apart from other European cultures was above all the ideology of 'improvement': not the Enlightenment idea of the improvement of *humanity* but the improvement of *property*, the ethic—and indeed the science—of profit, the commitment to increasing the productivity of labor, the production of exchange value, and the practice of enclosure and dispossession." Again, the point is that capitalism produced very specific ideologies and practices, only a limited subset of the rich panoply of the Enlightenment.

Anyway, the central lesson of Wood's book is well taken: we must appreciate the *specificity* of capitalism and not naturalize it as the inevitable result of—or even as *defined by*—increasing commerce or an urban society (or pre-capitalist imperialism, or a declining feudalism, or whatever). It was the product

of a unique set of circumstances in early modern England. And if it had such a definite and even implausible beginning, the possibility of its end suddenly becomes much more thinkable.

[However, I do think Brenner and Wood tend to overestimate the "radical," "qualitative" leap away from previous commercialism that supposedly happened with English agrarian capitalism. I'm skeptical that modern capitalism is as totally different from the early-modern growth of markets and trade as they argue. It just doesn't seem very plausible that a phenomenon wholly new in world history, *radically* different from anything that had ever come before, would suddenly appear in the English countryside around the sixteenth century.]

Happened to come across Chris Bambery's book *The Second World War: A Marxist History* (2014), so am reading it now. Should have taken notes on Mandel's book on the same subject; I'll rectify that mistake with this one. It seems pretty good. It agrees with Mandel, of course, that the war was largely "a continuation of the 1914–18 conflict—a struggle to re-divide the world between the world's great powers." It acknowledges, though, that for tens of millions of people the war was much more than that.

As you know, the Great Depression led to a harmful protectionism on the part of the great powers. "…The US and France followed Britain in attempting to create their own protected trade areas, together with a degree of state direction of the economy. Germany, Japan and Italy did not control overseas territories and looked to military expansion to secure markets and raw materials. For the German economy this global shift to protectionism was a catastrophe. Britain, France, the US and the USSR all had ample supplies of raw materials within their economic zones [including their colonies]. Germany did not. Nearly half of Britain's trade was with its dominions and colonies and a third of French exports went to its colonies; Germany had none. Germany's economic revival [after World War I] had been based on exports, but now they were excluded from key markets, and key raw materials had to be bought with dollars, sterling or francs… Before Hitler took power, sections of Germany's ruling circles began to argue that its export problems and lack of raw materials could only be solved by domination of Eastern and South Eastern Europe. They found ready allies in the military command."

Interesting: "The idea that the British state was fighting fascism during the Second World War ignores the warm relationship that existed between the fascist dictators and sections of the British ruling class, dating back to October 1922 when Benito Mussolini and his Blackshirts came to power in Italy." Newspapers, politicians (such as Churchill), aristocrats, and businessmen supported Mussolini—as did many in the U.S., including Roosevelt, who called him "that admirable Italian gentleman." Of course, in general the West's ruling class was at least very sympathetic towards fascism before World War II, if not during it. (And the *structure* of Western economies was formally fascist, characterized by deep and extensive ties between big business and the state.) The fascist Oswald Mosley was just a little more extreme and buffoonish than his peers.

Likewise, in the thirties "the dominant view in British ruling circles was that Germany should be encouraged to satisfy its expansionist ambitions to the east"—not least because this would threaten Russian Communism. Bambery gives some detail on how fond rich Brits were of Hitler, for instance some of the royals. Like the Duke of Windsor, formerly King Edward VIII. The dominant view in the ruling class was that Hitler ought to be appeased, although some went further and would have welcomed Britain's inclusion in the Third Reich. Material support was even given Germany. "The City of London continued to provide the German economy with a vital line of credit all the way up to the outbreak of the war. This policy of economic appeasement of Hitler matched Baldwin and Chamberlain's policy of political appeasement."

As for Churchill, "What Churchill grasped early on was that the Führer was aiming at German hegemony in Europe and that that was a direct threat to British imperialism, which had always manoeuvred between the various European powers to stop any one becoming too dominant. Unlike Chamberlain, Churchill was prepared to ally Britain with the US against Germany. The overwhelming message propagated by historians and politicians, on the right and the left, is that this was a war against fascism and for democracy. But fighting fascism was never the main concern of Churchill. He was opposed to Germany from the mid 1930s onwards because he recognised that it threatened Britain's position in Europe and the world. He had no problem with the Italian fascist dictator, Mussolini." (Had nothing against Mussolini's

invasion of Ethiopia.) This is true, of course, since it's well-known Churchill was a fanatical imperialist (and racist). He even supported Franco in Spain.

One reason Chamberlain and others wanted to appease Hitler is that they knew that if a war broke out, victory would be possible only if the U.S. and the Soviet Union entered it; and the price of that would be to further reduce Britain's position as a world power. Meanwhile Britain built up its armed forces in case of war, hoping it could impose an economic blockade on Germany (as in 1914–18) and France would be able to hold out. In the end, of course, things didn't go as planned, and in return for financial and material assistance from its two major allies it had to acquiesce to the dismantling of its empire, "the very thing Winston Churchill held so dear."

In France, fascism was a force to be reckoned with. But the Popular Front of Republicans, Socialists, and Communists triumphed in May 1936—to the horror of "the comfortable classes," many of whose members now looked to Hitler for salvation. By 1940, much of big business and the leadership of the French military had no heart for a war against Hitler, while the workers and peasants "were sullen in mood and unenthusiastic about a government that they saw as having betrayed the promises of the Popular Front." So the German victory wasn't long in coming.

The U.S., needless to say, "was dismayed by the Japanese invasion of China [in the 1930s]," and increasingly came to see Hitler as a major threat to U.S. power as well. Harry Truman, incidentally, may have been an exception, since as late as June 1941 he was quoted by the press as saying, "If we see that Germany is winning we ought to help Russia and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany and that way let them kill as many as possible." (The cold logic of the imperialist.)

In Germany, as industry collapsed it advocated protectionism less than it traditionally had and came to favor a policy of expanding control of markets and raw materials. Soon, the need for *Lebensraum* (e.g. in Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Romania) "became the rising demand among industrialists, financiers, and the generals." As one historian has said, "The expansionist Lebensraum ideology enunciated by Hitler in *Mein Kampf* must have been regarded as manna from heaven by the profit-strapped German business class. That Hitler meant *Lebensraum* in the USSR, i.e., the Ukraine, and not in South Eastern Europe, few noticed." So Hitler began to get more and more support from industrialists and bankers, especially as he wooed them.

> …The Nazis and big business shared common aims. Firstly, to use repression to smash working-class organisation and to reverse welfare measures in order to increase exploitation. Beyond that, both looked to expand production, to plunder, geographical expansion and war. Nazi political dominance sat comfortably with the continued economic dominance of big capital. A section of industrialists and bankers, whose mouthpiece was Hjalmar Schacht, moved towards accepting Hitler as chancellor. That month the steel magnate and Nazi Party member Fritz Thyssen, together with Schacht, organised a letter signed by business leaders urging Hindenburg to appoint Hitler as chancellor.
>
> …In the meantime von Papen played on Hindenburg's hatred of the Social Democrats to undermine the president's support for [Chancellor] Schleicher and to urge the old man to appoint a coalition government involving the right-wing parties and politicians. The president was a Prussian landowner and the agricultural lobby was also pressing for a coalition government of right-wing nationalists and the Nazis. Hitler's confidence was such that in this swirl of negotiations he held out for the chancellorship. Hindenburg dismissed Schleicher and on 30 January 1933 appointed Hitler as chancellor, heading a coalition government in which the Nazis initially took just two cabinet positions. The Nazi accession to power rested on a pact between the Nazis, leading sections of big business and the German high command. This bloc would remain in place until the end.

Unsurprising tidbits on the Spanish civil war: Texaco and Standard Oil supplied over three million tons of oil to Franco on credit, while Ford, Studebaker, and General Motors gave him 12,000 trucks, three times more than the Axis powers did. The chemical firm Dupont sent 40,000 bombs via Germany to avoid

contravening the U.S. Neutrality Act. Much of Britain's ruling class supported Franco, but the country confined itself to just giving no aid to the Republican forces and pressuring the French to do the same. A Tory member of Parliament remarked that "the propertied classes in this country [Britain] with their insane pro-Franco business have placed us in a very dangerous position." Indeed, for the Spanish war emboldened Hitler.

After Neville Chamberlain became prime minister he appointed the pro-fascist Sir Neville Henderson as ambassador to Germany. This guy's views—and the views of a large segment of the Western ruling class—are encapsulated in his statement, "I would view with dismay another defeat of Germany, which would merely serve the purposes of inferior races."

In 1938, France and, especially, Britain were not terribly keen to defend Czechoslovakia from Hitler, in part because that would put them in an alliance with Russia, which pledged military help to Czechoslovakia. Nor did it help that Czechoslovakia was alone in Eastern Europe in being a democratic state with a strong and vibrant left and labor movement. That did nothing to endear it to capitalist powers.

Even after Germany invaded Poland, Britain and France did effectively nothing for seven months, during the "Phony War." There weren't even air attacks against Germany, since the British air minister was loath to bomb armaments plants or other locations on the grounds that they were private property! Instead the RAF dropped propaganda leaflets. Bambery argues that much of the reluctance to fight Germany was due to the fear that an anti-fascist war might unleash left-wing popular unrest across Europe. After all, the ruling class was still haunted by the memory of the revolutionary wave that had broken out in Europe at the close of World War I. (And by more recent shocks, like the 1926 General Strike in Britain, the 1936 strike wave in France, and the 1936 revolution in Spain.)

Anyway, France fell—Bambery has fun describing the incompetence and lack-of-commitment-to-the-war-effort of the British and French early on—and the fascist regime of Vichy was founded. According to one historian, it was "largely a reaction against the revolution that the Popular Front had represented in the eyes of much of the French bourgeoisie." Pétain implemented anti-Semitic and fascist measures without orders from Berlin, and voluntarily collaborated with the Nazis.

Meanwhile, the British government was far from unified. Churchill, a few colleagues, and the Labor party were fully committed to fighting Hitler, but the Conservative appeasers (Lord Halifax, Chamberlain, and others) were working behind the scenes to negotiate with Hitler. Frankly, there was some treason going on. Most of the Conservative party was against Churchill. And its attitude had some rational basis, for the Battle of Britain was progressively radicalizing the populace. As Bambery says, "There was a radical spirit of resistance in that summer of 1940, but in the absence of any radical force to give conscious expression to it, that spirit would fuel the growing desire for a Labour government pledged to construct a welfare state"—which, of course, came to pass immediately after the war.

America, ever the selfless, noble nation, gave Britain no free help. An American journalist summed it up in December 1940:

> In heaven's high name, how have we aided England? When? Whose sacrifice produced the aid?... We have sold England an indeterminate number of military airplanes. She has paid cash. She has come and got them. We have sold England, I understand, some old rifles and various shipments of ammunition. She paid cash. She came and got them… Finally, in a moment of benign generosity, we traded England some rotting destroyers for some air and naval bases so valuable to our defence that even Mr Churchill had difficulty justifying the deal to his Parliament. We are going to sell her more and more planes, if our factories will just decide to produce them fast enough. We are going to sell England practically anything she wants—if we don't want it first… And Napoleon called England a nation of shopkeepers!

Britain soon went bankrupt, but even then we found a way to fleece it of more money: without notifying London, we sent a warship to South Africa in late 1940 to take 50 million pounds of gold, Britain's last tangible assets.

Lend-Lease was passed in early 1941, but we attached onerous conditions to that too: Britain was barred from exporting to new markets or existing markets such as Argentina. And a year later it had to pledge that the Sterling Bloc (a protective trade zone) would be dissolved after the war.

It can seem as though Hitler might have easily won the war but for a few mistakes he made, such as invading Russia before knocking out Britain. Bambery makes a good point, though: "In simple economic terms the outcome of the Second World War should not have been in doubt. In 1936–38 a third of the world's industrial production took place in the US. Add in the USSR's and Britain's shares and the figure was over half. Together the Axis powers' share was 17 per cent. In 1941 and 1942 the UK was out-producing Germany in military materiel. By 1942 the US alone was exceeding the combined output of all the Axis states. The Allies controlled 90 per cent of the world's oil output, with the US producing two-thirds of the world's oil in 1943; the Axis states controlled just 3 per cent." Had Hitler conquered Russia and Britain early on (which certainly wasn't out of the question), the calculus would have changed. But it's hard to believe he could have defeated the U.S., or, eventually, an alliance of the U.S. with most of the world. And he still would have had to pacify Russia, which wouldn't exactly have been easy.

On top of all this, there's no way Nazism could have kept control over all the territories it conquered. It was just too brutal. It wouldn't have had the resources to *constantly* be smashing resistance movements *everywhere*. –In short, the Third Reich was doomed, by its very nature, not to last long. It simply wasn't sustainable, especially on an international scale. Thank god!

One thing I didn't fully appreciate before was just how incredibly incompetent Stalin was. Practically the only thing he did right was to sometimes let his subordinates do what they wanted. His earlier purge of the military leadership was, of course, disastrous and monumentally stupid, but even during the war he repeatedly made costly and idiotic mistakes. Not the least of which was to *blindly trust that Hitler wouldn't invade* (Hitler wouldn't break his promise to me!), despite information from intelligence agencies. He did zilch to prepare for the invasion, except to ship huge amounts of resources to the Nazis as per their 1939 pact. In fact, from the late 1920s through the 1940s, Stalin's career is virtually a record of mistakes and disasters—mistaken foreign policy, mistaken military policies, mistaken paranoia, mistaken judgments of people, etc. What a guy.

The chapter on the popular Resistance in Europe is interesting. Predictably, the Allies were deeply ambivalent towards it, at times even hoping the Germans would defeat the partisans (and indirectly assisting them in doing so!). Why? Because the partisans were left-wing, and you can't have that sort of thing. But the successes—and the heroism—of the Resistance in certain countries were remarkable. For instance, one could say, perhaps, that Italy has had two eras of genuine glory: the Renaissance, and the Resistance. 1943–45. It was far more effective than the French Resistance, liberating large swathes of the country on its own. There is nothing comparably heroic in American history.

Here's a historian's comment on the political situation in France:

> Early in 1941, the prefect of the Lot [department] noted that collaboration [with the Nazis] was supported by the bourgeoisie, the peasants showed no open hostility, and the workers were against it. In December of the same year, the prefect of the Limoges region reported: 'Very striking hostility to the [Vichy] government from most workers, small farmers, small shopkeepers and artisans; unreserved support from big business and big shopkeepers, magistrates and notables.'

The usual story: patriotism and bravery from the lower classes, treason and cowardice from the upper.

"The United States had a number of aims in the Second World War. They included the dismantling of the British and French trade blocs, achieving a permanent military presence in Europe, and control of Middle East oil. But there was another—hegemony over China. Washington championed an 'open door' to China, meaning it wanted free trade which would benefit the sale of American goods and the purchase of raw materials from China. To that end Washington opposed the ceding of Chinese territory to the European powers (such as Britain's control of Hong Kong) and more importantly Japanese attempts to control the

country." In the end, of course, it wasn't the Japanese but the Communists who foiled America's hopes for an open door in China.

We're taught that one of the unspeakable crimes of the Soviet Union was its imposition of famines in the Ukraine and elsewhere during the 1930s. We're not taught that Churchill and Britain were guilty of the same thing. British-controlled India had seen many man-made famines; one of the worst was in Bengal in 1943:

> Between 3.5 and 5 million people died from starvation, malnutrition and related illnesses during the Bengal famine of 1943. The famine was not a natural catastrophe, it was man-made. The British were stockpiling food for the Indian army and rice was exported to the Middle East to feed British soldiers and to Sri Lanka where the British-run South East Asia Command was based. The loss of Burma cut rice supplies from there while a 'scorched earth' policy was implemented in the region nearest the Burmese border.
>
> Overall there was no fall in the rice harvest in 1943, but the rural labourers, peasants and fishing families of Bengal had seen their incomes fall by two thirds since 1940 while the price of rice had soared. Bengal had enough rice and other grains to feed its population, yet millions of people were too poor to buy it. The British authorities failed to implement normal peacetime famine relief measures and were more concerned with quelling the Quit India movement [a rebellion against British rule]. The Bengal government failed to prevent rice exports, and made little attempt to import surpluses from elsewhere in India, or to buy up stocks from speculators to redistribute to the hungry. Starving people flocked into Calcutta, many dying in a city with well-stocked markets. The British authorities removed (at times forcibly) tens of thousands of destitute, starving people from Calcutta and other urban areas in late 1943. These people were relocated to die in the countryside. Churchill repeatedly opposed food for India and specifically intervened to block provision of 10,000 tons of grain offered by Canada, because he saw that as weakening British rule. The US declined to provide food aid in deference to the British government. The British government rejected the Viceroy Lord Wavell's request for 1 million tons of grain in 1944 and also rejected his request that the US and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) be approached for assistance.

Churchill: what a guy.

So what was the overall meaning of the war? "Ernest Mandel argued that 'the Second World War was in reality a combination of five different wars'. He lists the wars as first, 'an inter-imperialist war' fought between the Axis and Allied powers; second, 'a just war of self-defence by the people of China, an oppressed semi-colonial country, against Japanese imperialism'; third, 'a just war of national defence of the Soviet Union, a workers' state, against an imperialist power'; fourthly, 'a just war of national liberation of the oppressed colonial peoples of Africa and Asia…launched by the masses against British and French imperialism, sometimes against Japanese imperialism, and sometimes against both in succession, one after the other'. Mandel's fifth and last war was 'a war of liberation by the oppressed workers, peasants, and urban petty bourgeoisie against the German Nazi imperialists and their stooges', which was fought 'more especially in two countries, Yugoslavia and Greece, to a great extent in Poland, and incipiently in France and Italy'." A perceptive interpretation. Different facets of the war had different meanings.

But "the imperialist nature of the war shaped everything. Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin succeeded in containing the forces of the anti-fascist resistance in Europe. In Asia they were only able to keep the lid on it for a brief time before it boiled over again [with the postwar decolonization movements]."

Reading Robert Wiebe's classic *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (1967), a book that heralded the "maturation" of Progressive Era historiography. Not Marxist, but insightful and a pleasure to read. Its thesis is contained in the title: whereas the Gilded Age meant chaos, fragmentation, innumerable pockets of parochialism and particularism (both rural and urban), wild competition, dislocation and bewilderment, a

scattered and disunited society that lacked a core, the Progressive Era meant a deepening search for order. The search for order began in the Gilded Age, of course (or even earlier), and took many different forms. Some were preoccupied with purity and unity, among them the temperance movement and prohibition, the hope for salvation in Protestantism, campaigns to instill patriotism (through worship of the Constitution, the flag, etc.) and cleanse school curricula and textbooks of alien influences, nativist drives to control, exclude, or Americanize immigrants, and patricians' and professionals' efforts to cleanse cities of vice and corrupt urban machines (through, respectively, repressive legislation and civil service reform). Collectively, it was a flailing around for social control. I suppose you could interpret some of the reactions in terms of Hofstadter's idea of "status anxiety" among a middle class (rural and urban), and even segments of the upper class, overwhelmed by a perceived loss of autonomy and security. But in the end, as usual, what matters most is which 'movements' or ideas could be used by big business to control society for its own ends, and which were useful to workers (and poor farmers) as they tried to control society for *their* ends.[1] The former movements tended to lead in the direction of fascism, while the latter led in the direction of social democracy (or, more ambitiously, socialism). Some movements, needless to say, were acceptable to both capitalist and worker, such as efforts to improve sewage and transportation systems and install indoor plumbing.

Well, on second thought, reading this book isn't the most productive use of my time. There are a million other things I can read that are more interesting. And maybe I should start writing again… The problem, as I've said before, is that I seem to have lost whatever talent I once had. It would be nice to know inspiration again.

Oh well, if I'm no longer capable of creating, I might as well keep reading. Georg Lukács' classic *The Destruction of Reason* (1952). A brilliant history of "irrationalism" from Schelling to Hitler—which, as a Marxist work, doesn't make the mistake of arguing that earlier intellectual trends inevitably culminated in Nazism but instead only argues that no philosophy is "innocent." "Reason itself [or a rejection of reason] can never be something politically neutral, suspended above social developments." Not strictly true—I don't see how there are any social implications in a debate between Chomskian linguistics and structural linguistics—but in general it's a reasonable statement.

"Thus the subject-matter which now presents itself to us is Germany's path to Hitler in the sphere of philosophy. That is to say, we mean to show how this concrete path is reflected in philosophy, and how philosophical formulations, as an intellectual mirroring of Germany's concrete development towards Hitler, helped to speed up the process. That we are therefore confining ourselves to portraying the most abstract part of this development by no means implies an over-estimation of philosophy's importance in the turbulent totality of concrete developments. But we believe it is not superfluous to add that to underestimate the philosophical driving forces would be at least as dangerous and as little in accordance with reality." Yep, philosophies and ideologies do matter.

"…Sorel's myth was so exclusively emotional, so empty of meaning that it could pass without difficulty into the demagogically exploited myth of fascism. Mussolini wrote: 'We have created a myth for ourselves. Myth is a faith, a passion. It does not have to be a reality. It is real by virtue of the fact that it is a spur and a faith, and signifies valour.' This is pure Sorel, and in it the epistemology of Pragmatism and Bergsonian intuition has become the vehicle of fascist ideology." Perceptive. Regarding pragmatism: it's "whatever works." We all need our faiths or myths, whether religious myths or scientific myths or whatever. The will to believe. We all have our own truths, beliefs that stimulate us or inspire us. Decadent relativism.[2] And with Bergson you get the vitalism, intuition (a sort of irrationalist intuition), *durée*, hostility to the

[1] This simplified polarized perspective is only an abstract model that facilitates clarity. I don't mean that businessmen necessarily cunningly manipulated certain social agendas for ulterior purposes.

[2] Later in the book (pp. 778–779) he remarks, "pragmatism is an ideology of capitalist agents consciously anchored in capitalist immediacy, a Babbit philosophy." Basically true. Like liberal capitalist apologetics, it remains on the surface of phenomena and doesn't try to penetrate to their deeper essence. Because that would contradict its relativistic spirit, its rejection of the effort to find an objective essence that differs from appearance.

objective character of natural science, hostility to objective reason. All these cultural expressions, and many more of a less 'disinterestedly philosophical' character, belong to a particular zeitgeist. To understand their significance, the Marxist method is necessary.

And Lukács is a master of that method. I'll just quote some passages of his long preliminary analysis of the German social, political, and economic experience that was sublimated into an infinitely variegated ideological irrationalism.

> We have located one of the most important weak points of the 1848 revolution in the lack of democratic experience and tradition, in the want of a democratic training of the masses and their ideological spokesmen through major internal class struggles. It is understandable that events after 1848, the conditions [in Prussia] of 'Bonapartist monarchy,' the creation of German unity 'from the top' through Prussian bayonets, again failed to provide any conditions favourable to the origin of revolutionary democratic traditions or a revolutionary democratic training of the masses. As a result of its impotence, the German Parliament was automatically condemned to sterility. And since every single bourgeois party had its basis in a compromise with 'Bonapartist monarchy,' the extra-parliamentary struggles of the masses, as far as they could spring up in the first place, were similarly doomed to sterility…
>
> An important ideological obstacle to the origin of democratic traditions in Germany was the ever-increasing, large-scale falsification of German history. It was—to summarize very briefly—a matter of idealizing and 'Germanizing' the retarded sides of the German development, i.e., of a version of history which extolled precisely the retarded character of Germany's development as particularly glorious and in accord with 'Germany's essence.' It criticized and repudiated all the principles and products of Western bourgeois democratic and revolutionary developments as un-German and contrary to the character of the German 'national spirit'…
>
> The most important factor of all is the average German's underdog mentality, a mentality by no means affected by the 1848 revolution, and also that of the intellectual however highly placed. We have noted that the major upheavals at the start of the modern era, which laid the foundations for democratic developments in the West, ended in Germany with the establishment, for centuries to come, of petty tyrants, and that the German Reformation founded an ideology of submission to them [in the form of Lutheranism, Pietism, etc.]. Neither the struggles for liberation from the Napoleonic yoke nor the year 1848 could alter this intrinsically. And since the German nation's unity was created not by way of revolution but from 'the top' and, according to historical legend, through 'blood and iron,' the 'mission' of the Hohenzollerns and the 'genius' of Bismarck, this side of the Germans' mentality and morals remained virtually unchanged. There sprang up large cities in place of often semi-medieval small towns; the big capitalist with his agents replaced the shopkeeper, artisan and small entrepreneur; world politics superseded parish-pump politics—but during this process the German people's subservience to its 'authorities' underwent only the slightest of changes… [He then quotes the following passage written by a German in 1919:]
>
> > The most easily governed nation in the world is the German…meaning a lively and active nation of average proficiency and intelligence with a developed critical bent for argument; a nation, however, which in public affairs is neither accustomed nor willing to act spontaneously without or against the will of authority; a nation which thus is excellently ordered and acts under official guidance almost as though it were only performing its own common will. This readiness to be organized, along with its efficiency, does indeed provide incomparably fine material for an organization, the purest form of which is of course the military type.

Here we have the immediate, subjective source of pre-imperialist German irrationalism. Whereas the Western Democracies—by and large—considered the State, State policies and so on to be largely their own work, expected rationality from them and saw their own rationality reflected

> therein, the German attitude—again, by and large—was the complete opposite… [It is] 'authority' alone which acts, and does so on the basis of an intuitive reading of inherently irrational facts… [Think of the celebration of Bismarck's 'genius,' etc.] …Certainly there was already arising—in the [early-19th-century] Romantic movement and its offshoots—an idealization of German backwardness which, in order to defend this position, was forced to interpret the course of events in a radically irrationalist way and to contest the idea of progress as an allegedly shallow, dim and misleading conception. Schopenhauer went farthest in this respect, and that accounts for both his total lack of influence before 1848 and his world-wide effect after the revolution was defeated.
>
> …The German development [as opposed to France's, England's, and so on] was rated the higher one precisely because, as a result of the conservation of older (non-rational) forms of governance, it could solve various problems (ethical, cultural, etc.) for which the society and social thinking of the rationally oriented West could never find a solution. It goes without saying that here, the effective combating of socialism played a decisive role.
>
> Irrationalism and a hostility to progress therefore go together. In this very togetherness they formed an effective ideological defence of the social and political backwardness of a Germany rapidly developing in the capitalist sphere…

Later, Lukács mentions that "Schopenhauer's Buddhist quietism matched petty-bourgeois apathy after the 1848 revolution," and that "the transformation requested by Nietzsche of the relationship between capitalists and workers into one between officers and soldiers corresponds to specific capitalist-militaristic wishes in the imperialist age." Neither of these thinkers could have achieved the influence they did if their philosophies hadn't served useful apologetic purposes. (The fact that they personally had no such intentions is irrelevant.)

On "irrationalism":

> Irrationalism is merely a form of reaction (reaction in the double sense of the secondary and the retrograde) to the dialectical development of human thought. Its history therefore hinges on that development of science and philosophy, and it reacts to the new questions they pose by designating the mere problem as an answer and declaring the allegedly fundamental insolubility of the problem to be a higher form of comprehension. This styling of the declared insolubility as an answer, along with the claim that this evasion and side-stepping of the answer, this flight from it, contains a positive solution and 'true' achievement of reality is irrationalism's decisive hallmark… Now what constitutes the specific quality of modern irrationalism? It is chiefly the fact that it arose on the basis of capitalist production and its specific class struggles—first the progressive battle for power against feudalism and absolute monarchy waged by the bourgeois class, and later the bourgeoisie's reactionary defensive struggles against the proletariat. Throughout this book we will show in concrete terms the decisive changes which the various stages of those class struggles wrought in the development of irrationalism in both form and content, determining equally the propositions and the solutions, and we will show how they altered its physiognomy.

Interesting: "Pascal in relation to Cartesianism and F. H. Jacobi in relation to the Enlightenment and classical German philosophy may be regarded as precursors of modern irrationalism. In both, we can clearly see the flinching from social and scientific progress as dictated by their period's pace of development and against which the pair, Pascal especially, formed a kind of romantic opposition, criticizing its results from a Rightist angle." Pascal, of course, anticipated existentialism in his emphasis on the "hopeless and irremediable isolation and loneliness experienced by the human being left to his own devices in a God-forsaken world." He even anticipated Schopenhauer in some respects, as in his analysis of deadly boredom as "the chronic malady of the ruling classes" (Lukács).

The discussion of Schopenhauer is very good. After 1848 a climate of reaction set in across most of Europe, which set the stage for the international reception of Schopenhauer (though he was especially popular in Germany). "It is with Schopenhauer that German philosophy starts to play its fateful role as the

ideological leader of reactionary extremism," which became more pronounced later with Nietzsche and others. Actually, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche were somewhat ahead of their time, anticipating (so Lukács says) decadent trends that later became universal.

> If we have called Schopenhauer the first irrationalist standing on a purely bourgeois foundation, it is not too difficult to perceive the associated personal traits in his social being. His biography distinguishes him quite sharply from all his German predecessors and contemporaries. He was a '*grand bourgeois*' in contrast to the others' petty-bourgeois status, which in Fichte's case was even semi-proletarian. Accordingly Schopenhauer did not experience the normal straits of petty-bourgeois German intellectuals (private tutoring, etc.) but spent a large part of his youth on journeys all over Europe. After a brief transitional period as a business trainee he lived a peaceful existence on private means, an existence in which even his university link—the teaching post in Berlin—played a merely episodic role.
>
> Thus he was the first major instance in Germany of a writer with private means, a breed which had become important to the bourgeois literature of capitalistically advanced countries long before. (It is significant that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche also enjoyed an independence stemming from a private income which much resembled Schopenhauer's.)…
>
> …Schopenhauer's high-minded withdrawal from all politics was only how he behaved in normal times, when State machinery automatically safeguarded the fortunes and incomes of private investors against any possible attack. But there were times—and Schopenhauer experienced them in 1848—when this automatic protection of fortunes was thrown in question or at least—as then, in Germany—appeared to be. At such moments Schopenhauer's aloof 'independence' vanished, and our philosopher made haste to hand his opera-glasses to a Prussian officer for a better view of the rioters at whom he was shooting…
>
> Schopenhauer's originality lies in the fact that at a time when the ordinary form of [capitalist] apologetics had not yet even developed fully, let alone become the leading trend in bourgeois thinking, he had already found the later, higher form of capitalist apologetics: *indirect apologetics*.

And so on. I could quote the whole discussion. By 'indirect apologetics' Lukács means that the bad sides of capitalism are acknowledged but explained as attributes of all human existence. "From this it necessarily follows that a struggle against these atrocities not only appears doomed from the start but signifies an absurdity, viz., a self-dissolution of the essentially human." One might object here that capitalism was still hardly hegemonic when Schopenhauer was writing, and that the philosopher certainly didn't have it in mind when penning his rhapsodies of pessimism, but this is irrelevant. The question is why his philosophy became so popular in the second half of the nineteenth century. The answer, or part of it, is that his pessimism suited the needs and the mood of bourgeois society at that time. Non-Marxists will object that this explanation is absurdly reductive, but in so doing they only betray their intellectual shallowness. No philosophy can become accepted by the mainstream, can be internationally celebrated, unless entities with resources propagate it and find it useful. Schopenhauer's ideas were entirely acceptable, in fact useful, to bourgeois culture in the 1850s and later.

> It was directly through his pessimism that Schopenhauer became the leading thinker of the second half of the nineteenth century. Through it he founded the new type of apologetics. To be sure, he did no more than lay the foundations. Later, and particularly when dealing with Nietzsche, we shall see that the Schopenhauerian form of indirect apologetics represents only the initial stage of this philosophical genre. The chief reason for this was that its conclusion—the abstention from all social activity (seen as senseless) and certainly from any effort to change society—sufficed only to answer the needs of the pre-imperialist bourgeoisie; it sufficed only during a period when, because of the universal economic boom, this rejection of political activity matched the position of the class struggles and the needs of the ruling class. The social task which reactionary philosophy was set in the imperialist period went further, although this trend was far from dying out altogether:

> now the task was to mobilize active support for imperialism. In this direction Nietzsche surpassed Schopenhauer, although, as an indirect apologist at a riper stage, he remained his pupil and continuation in the methodological sense.
>
> So pessimism means primarily a philosophical rationale of the absurdity of all political activity. That was the social function of this stage in indirect apologetics. In order to reach this conclusion, the chief necessity is to devalue society and history philosophically [as Schopenhauer did]…

Going along with his pessimism was his egotistic philosophy of man, and of everything in nature. In his ethics he does condemn this egotism—but he still says it's inevitable and cosmically universal (or nearly so). (His moral condemnation of it, incidentally, served the cause of popularizing his philosophy, since it amounted to a secularizing of the dominant Christian morality—dominant only in the sense that people paid lip-service to it, not that it genuinely governed people's conduct.) Moreover, he also defends a 'higher' sort of egotism than the universal vulgar one when he praises aesthetic enjoyment, saintly asceticism, and so on. He ends up celebrating the individual's self-sufficiency, which is a decidedly bourgeois conception.

> This contrast which Schopenhauer draws between two types of egotism is one of the subtlest features of his indirect apologetics. Firstly, he bestows on this attitude the sanction of aristocratic perspicacity as opposed to the plebeian's blind attachment to the world of phenomena. Secondly, this elevation above ordinary egotism entails no obligations on account of its 'sublime,' mystico-cosmic generality: it discredits social obligations and replaces them with empty emotional promptings, sentimentalities which may on occasion be reconciled with the greatest crimes against society. In the excellent Soviet film *Tchapayev*, the bestially cruel counter-revolutionary General keeps a canary, feels cosmically united with it—in the true spirit of Schopenhauer—and plays Beethoven sonatas in his leisure time, thus fulfilling all the 'sublime' commandments of Schopenhauerian morality.

Schopenhauer does himself another favor as regards the mainstream world's attitude towards him when he exempts himself, and thereby others, from following his own morality. "In general," he says, "it is a strange thing to ask of a moralist that he should commend no virtue unless he possesses it himself." Lukács elaborates: "This guarantees the decadent bourgeois intelligentsia the maximum of spiritual and moral ease: it has at its disposal a morality liberating it from all social duties and elevating it to a sublime height above the blind, uncomprehending riffraff, but a morality whose very founder exempts the intelligentsia from obeying it (where it becomes difficult or even just inconvenient)."

Lukács is perceptive also in his discussion of Schopenhauer's atheism. It was quite unlike the atheism of, say, the French materialists—for Schopenhauer was the exact opposite of a materialist. Rather, it was meant to serve as a substitute for religion, "to create a new—atheistic—religion for those who had lost their old religious faith as a result of social evolution and progress in the knowledge of nature." Schopenhauer is quite Christian in many respects, as in his defense of the dogma of original sin. (He's also semi-Buddhist, of course.) "Again serving as a model for decadent developments later, there came into being that religious atheism which assumed, for a large section of the bourgeois intelligentsia, the function of the religion which had become intellectually untenable among this class." Lukács goes on:

> [But here again] Schopenhauer did not round something off but only paved the way. His social starting-point in the restoration period [after Napoleon] dictated the fact that his atheism—like the religion of this era—inculcated a social passivity, a mere turning aside from social action, whereas his later successors, above all Nietzsche and the subsequent fascists, expanded these points of departure morally in the direction of an active, militant underpinning of imperialist reaction, which again ran parallel to the course taken by the Churches in the imperialist world wars and civil wars. (The complex stratification of capitalist society and the harsh changes in the course of the imperialist period's class struggles necessarily meant that religious atheism during this age could—

without needing to hark back directly to Schopenhauer—have quietist variations as well, e.g., Heidegger's existentialism.)

It hardly needs pointing out that idealism in all its forms is always a useful tool of reaction. So in a reactionary age it will be popular. (Again, this is why postmodernism has been dominant since the 1970s.) Schopenhauer's idealism went as far as one can go in denying the reality of the world of "phenomena," which certainly militates against social engagement. To care passionately about this illusory world and to struggle mightily to improve it is idiotic from Schopenhauer's perspective. (Here is another point of contact between him and religion.) There is no such thing as progress or development; time and causality don't apply to the thing-in-itself. "For Schopenhauer, history does not exist… Hence for him there exists no difference in history between important and trivial, major and minor; only the individual is real, whereas the human race is an empty abstraction." I'll quote the end of Lukács' discussion:

> Thus only the individual, isolated in a world without meaning, is left over as the fateful product of the individuation principle (space, time, causality). An individual, certainly, that is identical with the world-essence by virtue of the aforestated identity between microcosm and macrocosm in the world of things-in-themselves. This essence, however, located as it is beyond the validity of space, time and causality, is consequently—nothingness. Hence Schopenhauer's *magnum opus* logically ends with the words: 'Rather we freely acknowledge that what is left after the complete annulment of the will is, for all those who are still full of will, assuredly nothingness. But conversely also, for those in whom will has turned round and denied itself, this very real world of ours with all its suns and Milky Ways is—nothingness.'
>
> And at this point, with our survey of the most important problems in Schopenhauer's philosophy completed, we ask once again: what is the social task it fulfils? Or, to put this question from another angle: what is behind its widespread and lasting influence? Here pessimism is not by itself an adequate answer, for first pessimism requires a further concretization in addition to that we provided earlier. Schopenhauer's philosophy rejects life in every form and confronts it with nothingness as a philosophical perspective. But is it possible to live such a life?... If we consider Schopenhauer's philosophy as a whole, the answer is undoubtedly yes. For the futility of life means above all the individual's release from all social obligations and all responsibility towards men's forward development, which does not even exist in Schopenhauer's eyes. And nothingness as the pessimist outlook, as life's horizon is quite unable, according to Schopenhauer's ethics as already expounded, to prevent or even merely to discourage the individual from leading an enjoyable contemplative life. On the contrary: the abyss of nothingness, the gloomy background of the futility of existence only lends this enjoyment an extra piquancy. Further heightening it is the fact that the strongly accented aristocratism of Schopenhauer's philosophy lifts its adherents (in imagination) way above the wretched mob that is shortsighted enough to fight and to suffer for a betterment of social conditions. So Schopenhauer's system, well laid out and architecturally ingenious in form, rises up like a modern luxury hotel on the brink of the abyss, nothingness and futility. And the daily sight of the abyss, between the leisurely enjoyment of meals or works of art, can only enhance one's pleasure in this elegant comfort.
>
> This, then, fulfils the task of Schopenhauer's irrationalism: the task of preventing an otherwise dissatisfied sector of the intelligentsia from concretely turning its discontent with the 'established order,' i.e., the existing social order, against the capitalist system in force at any given time. This irrationalism thereby reaches its central objective—no matter how far Schopenhauer himself was aware of it: that of providing an indirect apologetic of the capitalist social order.

Masterful analysis.

The analysis of Kierkegaard, on the other hand, as of Schelling earlier, is…well, rather mystifying. Whenever Lukács gets going on "dialectics" and whatnot, an impenetrable fog descends over my brain. I

still don't really know what he means by dialectics, since he never defines the term. There's more than a little brilliance in these dissections of Kierkegaard, but it isn't worth it to try to digest it all.

"In Kierkegaard we encounter the mode of feeling, spontaneously expressed, of an intellectual bourgeois stratum which had become deracinated and parasitical. How little this was to do with a personal problem, or with a narrowly Danish one, is evident not only from Kierkegaard's later international influence but also from the fact that, wholly independently of him, similar versions of religious atheism were starting to spring up and to take effect all around him."

The chapter on Nietzsche is very good. In a sense, Lukács' task is too easy: there's an abundance of material in Nietzsche's writings that is eminently serviceable to imperialists and fascists, including plenty of passages on noble races and a race of masters, slave morality, the glory of war, the will to power, the Übermensch, the evils of socialism and democracy and "equal rights," slavery's desirability, and on and on. Politically, Nietzsche was obviously a reactionary. (His struggle between masters and the rabble was just a decadent-reactionary culturalist version of the class struggle.) Lukács is largely right that the appreciation both he and Schopenhauer showed for the Enlightenment, or at least certain Enlightenment thinkers, was superficial and based on distortions or confusions, since the Enlightenment was nothing if not enamored of the *moral progress* (and the *struggle* for progress) for which the two Germans had contempt. Of course there are innumerable contradictions in Nietzsche, and innumerable statements of his that are totally incompatible with the fascist or Nazi way of thinking; but one consistent thread running through his work is his utter hatred of socialism. Anyway, he bears a lot of the blame for the nefarious uses to which his writings were later put. He *did* contribute to the "destruction of reason" by being so elitist, anti-democratic, anti-socialist, individualistic and frequently racialist, enamored of the "will to power" (a term he should have known would be interpreted in the most vulgar way possible) and an amoral master morality, enamored of war and strength and aristocratic egotism and "barbarians" or "beasts." If there was ever a non-"innocent" philosopher, it's Nietzsche.

> …It was just at the time of Nietzsche's activity that the class decline, the decadent tendencies reached such a pitch that their subjective evaluation within the bourgeois class also underwent a significant change. For a long while, only the progressive opposition critics had been exposing and condemning the symptoms of decadence, whereas the vast majority of the bourgeois intelligentsia clung to the illusion of living in the 'best of all worlds,' defending what they supposed to be the 'healthy condition' and the progressive nature of their ideology. Now, however, an insight into their own decadence was becoming more and more the hub of these intellectuals' self-knowledge. This change manifested itself above all in a complacent, narcissistic, playful relativism, pessimism, nihilism, etc… [Think, again, of postmodernism.]
>
> …Nietzsche's philosophy performed the 'social task' of 'rescuing' and 'redeeming' this type of bourgeois mind. It offered a road which avoided the need for any break, or indeed any serious conflict, with the bourgeoisie. It was a road whereby the pleasant moral feeling of being a rebel could be sustained and even intensified, whilst a 'more thorough,' 'cosmic biological' revolution was enticingly projected in contrast to the 'superficial,' 'external' social revolution. A 'revolution,' that is, which would fully preserve the bourgeoisie's privileges, and would passionately defend the privileged existence of the parasitical and imperialist intelligentsia first and foremost. A 'revolution' directed against the masses and lending an expression compounded of pathos and aggressiveness to the veiled egotistic fears of the economically and culturally privileged…

One of the problems with Nietzsche is that he lived and thought mainly in the realm of myth. He was addicted to mythicizing, and his critiques, analyses, and ideals were not *sober* but *poetic*. Figurative, mythical, lyrical. He lived and thought at a fever pitch, and so couldn't see that if he ever had the misfortune of encountering, say, one of his beloved blond beasts—"the kind of exuberant monsters," he wrote, "that might quit a horrible scene of murder, arson, rape and torture with the high humour and equanimity appropriate to a student prank"—he would be horrified and revolted. There was no down-to-earth *realism* in his thinking; instead, there was only *aesthetics*. There were frequent flashes of intuitive genius, but in

the end even his most fascinating psychologizing (for instance about Socrates or Christians or Wagner) was merely suggestive, and more often than not aesthetical. As Lukács says, all this myth-making was extremely useful to imperialists and fascists, who as ideologists were even more addicted than Nietzsche to glorious-sounding myths. Pretty disguises of reality have always been useful to reactionaries.

More insights: "Nietzsche turned the whole problem of decadence firmly on its head when he defined as its most important sign the view that 'we are fed up with egotism.' For patently the predominance of individualist-egotistic propensities over social ones was among the movement's [or the era's] most significant features. But it was possible for Nietzsche to 'salve' the decadents, i.e., to induce in them absolute self-confidence and give them a clear conscience without fundamentally altering their psychological-moral structure. And he did so precisely by suggesting that they were not over-egotistic but rather lacking in egotism, and that they must—with a good conscience—become more egotistic still."

There's also a thoughtful analysis of Nietzsche's atheism. His war against Christianity, of course, was very opposed in spirit to Voltaire's war against the Church. The Enlightenment opposed the Church as an enemy of progress, reason, freedom, science, the individual; Nietzsche opposed Christianity primarily as having birthed (supposedly) the modern democratic, egalitarian, socialist nonsense. His attitude was practically the opposite of the Enlightenment's. Voltaire hated the Church's authoritarianism; Nietzsche hated Christianity's egalitarianism. After quoting a passage from Nietzsche, Lukács summarizes: "The basic thinking is patent: out of Christianity came the French Revolution, out of this came democracy, and out of this came socialism. When, therefore, Nietzsche takes his stand as an atheist, the truth is that he is out to destroy socialism [and all slave moralities]." As with Schopenhauer, his atheism is different in spirit and motivation from that of materialists and socialists.

Next, Lukács discusses vitalism (*Lebensphilosophie*), "the dominant ideology of the whole imperialist period in Germany." Not so much a sharply distinguished philosophy as a general trend pervading or influencing nearly all schools of thought (including the social sciences and the history of literature and art). Especially after World War I. For instance, "both neo-Hegelianism and the Husserl school in its advanced stage became entirely guided by vitalism." That term may be unfortunate, since in English 'vitalism' has a technical meaning. But evidently there's an affinity between vitalism in its technical sense and *Lebensphilosophie*—which, Lukács says, was present not only in Germany but also with Bergson in France, the pragmatists in the U.S., etc. Nietzsche was very influential as regards this whole emerging tendency.

Some more lengthy quotations:

> The struggle against materialism also governed the philosophical development of imperialism. Thus it was unable to detach itself from the epistemology of subjective idealism. It made no difference whether it was chiefly oriented towards Kant, as in Germany, or towards Hume and Berkeley: the unknowability, indeed the nonexistence, the unthinkable nature of an objective reality independent of consciousness was the implicit axiom of every philosophy of this age.
>
> …The key to all these difficulties, it was thought, could be located in the concept of 'life,' especially if this was identified, as always in vitalism, with 'experience.' Experience, with intuition as its organon and the irrational as its 'natural' object, could conjure up all the necessary elements of *Weltanschauung* without renouncing, *de facto* and publicly, the agnosticism of subjective idealist philosophy and without revoking that denial of a reality independent of consciousness which had become crucial to anti-materialism. Outwardly, to be sure, this struggle now acquired other forms. On the one hand, the appeal to the richness of life and experience, as opposed to the barren poverty of the understanding, permitted philosophy to counter the materialist inferences from social and scientific developments in the name of a natural science, biology… On the other hand, the appeal to experience gave rise to a pseudo-objectivism, an apparent self-elevation above the antithesis of idealism and materialism.
>
> The tendency to be raised above the allegedly false dilemma of idealism and materialism was a universal endeavour of philosophy in the imperialist age. To the bourgeois conscience, both 'isms' seemed compromised in various ways: idealism because of the sterile academicism of its

> advocates (with, as its background, the collapse of the great idealist systems); and materialism chiefly because of its association with the worker movement… Thus on the eve of the imperialist period, a philosophical 'third road' came into being with Mach, Avenarius and Nietzsche almost simultaneously. In fact, however, this amounted only to a revival of idealism. For whenever the mutual inseparability of being and consciousness is posited, there necessarily arises an epistemological dependence of the first on the second—which is idealism. As long, therefore, as the philosophical 'third road' remained purely epistemological, it differed not at all or barely from the old subjective idealism (Mach-Avenarius in relation to Berkeley)…

Right. I've made that point many times with regard to logical positivism, which was far more idealist than materialist.

To continue:

> In the intelligentsia, one can sense a constant growth of anti-capitalist attitudes. During the final Bismarck crisis, the time of the repeal of the anti-socialist laws, when the Naturalist ferment was taking place in German literature, the vast majority of the young and gifted intellectuals, for instance, was to be found in the social democrat camp. Therefore these tendencies had to be assimilated in the philosophical world outlook so as to combat the intelligentsia's socialist tendencies more effectively than was possible for ordinary reactionary ideology. With its contrast between the living and the dead, petrified and mechanical, vitalist philosophy took over the task of 'deepening' all concrete problems to such an extent that they created a major diversion from these imminent social consequences.
>
> …There is the additional point that the central position of experienced life in vitalistic epistemology necessarily nurtured an aristocratic feeling. An experiential philosophy can only be intuitive—and purportedly it is only an elect, the members of an aristocracy, who possess a capacity for intuition. In later times, when the social contrasts emerged more strongly still, it was overtly stated that the categories of understanding and reason belonged to the democratic crowd, whereas the truly eminent appropriated the world only on the basis of intuition. Vitalism had in principle an aristocratic epistemology.
>
> …We intend, in these studies, to trace in its main phases the development beginning at this point and ultimately leading, in its consequences, to 'National-Socialist philosophy.' Of course the line we are tracing does not mean that German fascism drew its ideas from this source exclusively; quite the contrary. The so-called philosophy of fascism based itself primarily on racial theory, above all in the form developed by Houston Chamberlain, although in so doing, to be sure, it made some use of vitalism's findings. But for a 'philosophy' [the fascist] with so little foundation or coherence, so profoundly unscientific and coarsely dilettantish to become prevalent, what were needed were a specific philosophical mood, a disintegration of confidence in understanding and reason, the destruction of human faith in progress, and credulity towards irrationalism, myth and mysticism. And vitalism created just this philosophical mood.

The "founder and most important forerunner" of *Lebensphilosophie* was Dilthey. (Although Nietzsche played at least as important a role.) His philosophy ran parallel to phenomenology, "whose vitalistic advances Dilthey anticipated and influenced more than anybody," and also Bergson and pragmatism. And it promoted the rebirth of neo-Romanticism and neo-Hegelianism. I won't summarize Lukács' whole discussion of Dilthey, but here's a passage that gives the flavor of Dilthey's thinking:

> Dilthey's epistemological rationale of vitalism proceeds from the thesis that experiencing the world is the ultimate basis of knowledge. "Life itself, liveliness, behind which I cannot penetrate, contains structural connections from which all experiencing and thinking is explained. *And this is the decisive factor for the whole possibility of knowing*. There is a knowledge of reality only because the full structural coherence which emerges in the forms, principles and categories of thinking is

> contained in life and experience, and because this coherence can be shown analytically in life and experience."

Anyway, you're probably familiar with Dilthey's "idealism" and "subjectivism," his division between explanation and understanding and his focus on the latter—intuition, hermeneutics, 'description,' etc. Closely related to phenomenology. Brought forth a psychological and historical typology of philosophical outlooks that amounted to a sort of historical relativism. *Gestalts*, mutually incommensurable. "Dilthey as a historian of philosophy could substantiate only a complete relativism—an unceasing battle of rival philosophies in which a specific selection is made, but there is no single choice: '[Philosophy's] major types stand beside one another, autonomous, unprovable and indestructible.'" A decadent relativism that leads, by way of Heidegger, to the even more decadent relativisms of twentieth-century Continental philosophy and postmodernism.

Next: Simmel. More idealistic and relativistic than Dilthey.

> Simmel no longer acknowledged any actual object-world, but only various forms of the vitalistic attitude to reality (knowledge, art, religion, eroticism, etc.), each of which produced its own world of objects: 'The coming into effect of certain fundamental spiritual forces and impulses means that they create an object for themselves. The meaning of the object of this function of love, art or religious feeling is only the meaning of the functions themselves. Each of these enlists its object for its own world by thereby creating it as its own…'
>
> The consequence of this position was a relativism still more radical than Dilthey's had been… And it is characteristic of vitalism, as the chief philosophical bias in the imperialist era, that the central content of the relativistic thought process was always a depreciation of the scientific method, a creating of space for faith and a subjective religious feeling without a definite object, using just this relativistic scepticism as a weapon…

Lukács proceeds to quote a passage from Simmel that amply makes his case:

> Despite the stress on the ever-advancing and immeasurable progress of our knowledge, it should not be overlooked that at the other end, so to speak, much that we formerly possessed as 'sure' knowledge is sinking into doubt and recognized error. How much mediaeval man 'knew', and the enlightened thinker of the eighteenth century or the materialistic scientific researcher of the nineteenth, which for us is either completely obsolete or at least completely dubious. How much of that which is now undoubted 'knowledge' will suffer the same fate sooner or later! The effect of man's whole spiritual and practical disposition is that—*cum grano salis* and speaking of the broad basis—he apprehends only that which matches his convictions and simply overlooks the counter-examples however startling: a fact totally inexplicable to later eras. Proofs no less 'factual' and 'convincing' were adduced for astrology and miracle cures, for witchcraft and the direct efficacy of prayer as are now adduced for the validity of universal laws of nature. And I by no means exclude the possibility that later centuries or millennia, perceiving as the core and essence of each individual phenomenon its indissoluble, unified individuality, not ascribable to 'universal laws', will declare such generalities to be as much of a superstition as the aforesaid articles of faith. Once we have abandoned the idea of the 'absolutely true', which is likewise only a historical construction, we might arrive at the paradoxical idea that in the continuous process of perception, the standard of the truths newly adopted differs only in degree from the standard of the errors we have abolished; that, as in a never-halting procession, just as many 'true' perceptions mount the front steps as 'illusions' are cast down the back steps.

Pretty egregious. But pretty useful for the purposes of reaction. "Modern relativistic scepticism was directly undermining objective scientific knowledge and, no matter whether its begetters intended this or not,

providing scope for the wildest reactionary obscurantism, for the nihilistic mysticism of imperialistic decadence."

A long discussion of Simmel's subjectivism and anti-Marxism follows. For example his reducing the problems of contemporary society to a "tragedy of culture in general," which rested on the antithesis of soul and mind (*Geist*), "the antithesis of the soul and its own products and objectifications." Such ideas were useful in diverting intellectuals' discontent and alienation from capitalism into less dangerous channels.

Vitalism developed in new ways with the outbreak of World War I. "The old basic antithesis of 'life' versus 'rigidity' and 'the moribund' was naturally preserved, but it acquired a new and seasonable content. The 'German character' (*das deutsche Wesen*) which was to 'restore the world's health' now constituted the 'life' conception, and the national character of other peoples (chiefly the Western democracies and especially England) was what was moribund and rigid. And in particular, there arose the new equations and antitheses of war as equalling life, and of peace as the rigid and moribund." Lots of pseudo-philosophical war pamphlets were put out. In one by Max Scheler, for instance, war was affirmed in a Nietzschean vitalistic way: "The true root of all war lies in the fact that a tendency towards ascent, growth and development is inherent in all life itself… Everything that is moribund and mechanical seeks only to 'maintain' itself…whereas life is growing or decaying." You can see glimmers of fascism here.

After the war—and after the Russian Revolution, which added a portentous new element into the cultural porridge that would produce fascism—came Spengler's *Decline of the West*, which was "a veritable, direct prelude to fascist philosophy." To quote Lukács: "Basically, vitalism's new phase [as exemplified by Spengler] was distinguished by the fact that the degrading of the scientific method, which was hitherto partly half-conscious, partly tactfully concealed and at first sought only to obtain room for vitalism's intuitive-irrationalist world-view alongside the established, materially unquestioned individual sciences, now went over to an open attack upon the scientific spirit in general, upon the competence of reason adequately to treat of important human questions." Intellectual standards sank. Spengler went farther along the path that Dilthey had pioneered, the path that elevated intuition, feeling, "perception through men of genius," a rejection of causal explanations in favor of description, analogizing, and the like. Lukács: "This shallow and arbitrary epistemology in which everything boiled down to experience, to intuition, was Spengler's way of asserting the undisputed mastery of historical relativism. Everything is historical: with Spengler that meant that everything was historically relative, purely relative." Including our knowledge of nature. And even mathematics.

> …Number, for instance, was for [Spengler] a purely historical category: '*A number in itself does not and cannot exist.* There are several worlds of numbers because there are several civilizations. We find an Indian, Arabic, ancient and occidental type of number each at bottom unique, each the expression of a different course of events… Accordingly there is more than one kind of mathematics.' This ridiculously consistent denial of all objectivity Spengler took to the point where he was capable of saying of causality that it was 'an occidental and more precisely a Baroque phenomenon.'
>
> For Spengler, history took precedence over nature as a general rule: 'Thus history is the original world-form and nature a late one which only men of a mature culture may fulfil, not the reverse as a prejudice in urban scientific understanding tends to assume.' And so the whole science of physics along with its object was a myth of the late occidental 'Faustian' culture. The atom, speed of light and gravitation were just as much the mythical categories of 'Faustian man' as poltergeists and household demons were categories of the period that believed in magic. (If we recall Simmel's statements on the historical relativity of knowledge we can see how Spengler was merely drawing all the conclusions of pre-war imperialist vitalism and popularizing them.) For those reasons, culture was for Spengler 'the primary phenomenon of all past and future world-histories.'

Reminds me of postmodernism. What a surprise. Decadent minds think alike.

Culture was a "primary phenomenon." Each culture had its own *Gestalt*, which was the basis for all of that culture's manifestations. "The automatic result was that these self-enclosed *Gestalts* were necessarily 'monads without windows': only within its unique essence could each be intuitively grasped and described." You see the fascistic origins of later postmodernist dogmas. Even the promiscuous use of the word 'culture' by contemporary academics has an essentially reactionary significance and origin. (You also see, incidentally, that Heidegger wasn't particularly original.)

One of the benefits of extreme historical relativism is that it denies there is any progress in history, thus denying a proposition that had become an article of faith for socialists and Marxists. It also presents science and materialism as mere provincial prejudices, thereby undermining an outlook that can serve as an immovable foundation for revolutionary politics.

Spengler regarded the various cultural *Gestalts*, such as the German and the Western democratic one, as basically 'solipsistic,' alien, hostile, impervious to communication with each other. (A sublimation of the solipsism of the imperialist age's parasitical classes.) This paralleled and reinforced the racial ideology that had already emerged with Gobineau and Chamberlain, that the different races were alien and hostile to one another. Thus "we notice in Spengler the fulfilment of Nietzsche's barbarizing tendencies, [and also] we see the deep-seated concurrent development of the various streams of reactionary imperialist philosophy, and their tendency to merge in theoretical preparation for the barbaric ideas and actions of Hitler and Rosenberg." The reactionary nature of vitalism is evident from its culmination in Spengler.

> Similarly, it is patent that the construction of this irrationalist, solipsistic myth of history had as its ultimate, crucial purpose another attempt to resist the socialist perspective on social evolution. Nietzsche, the first to take up this philosophical challenge, was still obliged to present the whole of world-history, which was unitary in his eyes, as a contest for leadership between masters and rabble. Therefore he had to lay stress on awakening the masters' 'will-to-power' with all the available means in order that their struggle might end in the future defeat of socialism. Spengler entertained hopes that were far weaker than Nietzsche's. His conception was a consoling melody rather than a battle-hymn, an opiate rather than a stimulus. The cyclical life of the cultural spheres, he thought, had repeatedly given rise to dangers similar to the contemporary one, namely the proletarian threat to capitalism. This danger, however, had been dismissed from every cycle, and each culture had died a 'natural' death of superannuation, of cultural paralysis. Why should a different fate befall the Faustian civilization of capitalism? There was, after all, intuitive-analogical morphology, the only sure knowledge of history, and this indicated that destiny was about to introduce the rule of the 'Caesars' (i.e., the monopoly capitalists). The fact that this rule signified the beginning of the end of the culture concerned did not interest any capitalist or parasitical intellectual. We shall manage to survive—*après nous le deluge*: that was Spengler's song of consolation, and very effective it was.

But in another work, *Prussianism and Socialism*, Spengler took a different approach to the problem of socialism, an approach that would later be adopted by Hitler. Lukács describes it as follows:

> Every civilization, according to Spengler, has its socialism (Zeno, Buddhism, etc.; present-day socialism is the Faustian form of these manifestations). But this generalization did not satisfy Spengler's analogy hunt. He had, in addition, to discover the 'real' socialism, namely Prussianism; the types of the military officer, civil servant and worker. The adversary of this 'socialism' was not capitalism but England. (Here Spengler was enlarging on the ideas in Scheler's war pamphlets and Sombart's *Dealers* [English] *and Heroes* [Germans].) Prussians and Englishmen represent two major types in the development of civilization. There are 'two moral imperatives of a contrasting kind, slowly evolved from the Viking spirit and the code of the Knights of the Teutonic Order. The one group carried the Germanic idea within them, the others felt it over them: *personal independence and supra-personal commonalty*. Today they are called individualism and socialism.' Karl Marx and working-class socialism have only complicated this question and are

> being thrust aside by the fateful logic of world-history. The victor will be 'Prussian socialism,' the 'socialism' founded by Friedrich Wilhelm I. The true Internationale will also be built on this basis: 'A genuine Internationale is possible only through the triumph of the idea of a single race above all others… *The genuine Internationale is imperialism*.' The worker, in this 'socialism,' becomes an economic officer, and the entrepreneur a responsible administrative official. The German working class will be bound to realize that only this 'socialism' has real possibilities. No ideology is needed, only 'a brave scepticism, a class of socialistic master-natures.'

Thus you get National Socialism.

Lukács next proceeds to a subtle critique of Max Scheler, Husserl, and phenomenology, but I'll pass over that. His section on Heidegger and Jaspers is even better—much better. Brilliantly diagnoses the illness that was existential philosophy, and critiques Heidegger's ideas. With this thinker, phenomenology "turned into the ideology of the agony of individualism in the imperialist period." I have to copy some passages again, since they're too pithy to summarize.

> The grim years of the First World War, which were full of abrupt changes of fortune, and the ensuing period brought a marked change of mood [in philosophy and culture]. The subjectivistic tendency remained, but its basic tenor, its atmosphere was completely altered. No longer was the world a great, multi-purpose stage upon which the I, in ever-changing costumes and continually transforming the scenery at will, could play out its own inner tragedies and comedies. It had now become a devastated area. Before the war, it had been possible to criticize that which was mechanical and rigid about capitalist culture from a lofty vitalistic angle. This was an innocuous and safe intellectual exercise, for the being of society appeared to stand undisturbed and to guarantee the safe existence of parasitical subjectivism. Since the downfall of the Wilhelmine regime the social world had started to constitute something alien to this subjectivism; the collapse of that world which subjectivism was continually criticizing, but which formed the indispensable basis of its existence, was lurking at every door. There was no longer any firm means of support. And in its abandoned condition, the solitary Ego stood in fear and anxiety.
>
> As a rule, relatively similar social situations produce relatively similar tendencies in thought and feeling. Before the outbreak of the 1848 revolution, which was an international, European event, Romantic individualism went to pieces for good. The most important thinker during its crisis and fall, the Dane Soren Kierkegaard, formulated in the most original way the philosophy of the then current Romantic-individualistic agony. No wonder that now, when this depressed mood was already starting to make itself felt—years ahead of the actual crisis [of the 1930s]—as a foreboding of future gloomy events, a renascence of Kierkegaard's philosophy was proclaimed by the new phase's leading minds, Husserl's pupil Heidegger and the former psychiatrist Karl Jaspers. Of course they did so with up-to-date modifications. Orthodox Protestant religiosity and Kierkegaard's strictly Lutheran faith in the Bible were of no use to present needs. But Kierkegaard's critique of Hegelian philosophy, as a critique of all striving for objectivity and universal validity by reasoned thought, and of all concepts of historical progress, acquired a very strong contemporary influence. So did Kierkegaard's argumentation of an 'existential philosophy' from the deepest despair of an extreme, self-mortifying subjectivism which sought to justify itself in the very pathos of this despair, in its professed exposure of all ideals of socio-historical life as mere vapid and vain ideas, in contrast to the subject, which alone existed. The altered historical situation did, of course, dictate far-reaching changes. Again, these lay chiefly in the fact that Kierkegaard's philosophy was aimed against the bourgeois idea of progress, against Hegel's idealist dialectics, whereas the renovators of existential philosophy were already principally at odds with Marxism, although this seldom found overt and direct expression in their writings; at times they attempted to exploit the reactionary aspects of Hegelian philosophy on behalf of this new campaign. That in Kierkegaard existential philosophy was already no more than the ideology of the saddest philistinism, of fear and trembling, of anxiety, did not stop it conquering wide intellectual circles in Germany on the eve of Hitler's

> seizure of power and the nihilistic period of so-called heroic realism. On the contrary: this pretentiously tragic philistinism was precisely the socio-psychological reason for the influence of Heidegger and Jaspers.

One indication of the change in mindset was that the catchword of earlier vitalism had been "life," whereas now the word was "existence." "The emphatic stress on 'life' signified the conquest of the world through subjectivity; hence the fascist activists of vitalism, who were about to succeed Heidegger and Jaspers, revived this catchword, although they gave it a new content once more. 'Existence' as a philosophical leitmotif implied the rejection of a great deal that vitalism had elsewhere approved as 'alive,' and this was now presented as inessential, non-existential." To talk about abstract *existence* instead of concrete *life* is to be more alienated from society and oneself, to be separate from or outside of life, to be acutely anxious.

As for Heidegger's philosophy itself, I'll say only that in essence it isn't much different from subjective idealism. It's dressed up in the garb of objectivity, "ontology," etc., but it's purely idealistic. How else can you describe a philosophy that claims "*Ontology is only possible as phenomenology*"? In reality, of course, ontology is only possible as natural science, since it is science that tells us (or tries to tell us) what the ultimate constituents of the world are.

More quotations:

> Bourgeois man's sense of becoming inessential, indeed a nonentity, was a universal experience among the intelligentsia of this period. Hence Heidegger's complicated trains of thought, his laborious phenomenological introspections struck upon the material of experiences widespread among this class and found an answering chord. Heidegger was here preaching a retreat from all social dealings just as much as Schopenhauer, in his time, had proclaimed a withdrawal from the bourgeois idea of progress, from the democratic revolution… [But] the human emotional emphasis in the withdrawing process was totally different, indeed opposed, in Schopenhauer and Heidegger. With the latter, the feeling of despair no longer left the individual free scope for a 'beatific' aesthetic and religious contemplation as in Schopenhauer. His sense of peril already encompassed the whole realm of individual existence. And although the solipsism of the phenomenological method may have distorted the depiction of it, it was still a social fact: the inner state of the bourgeois individual (especially the intellectual) within a crumbling monopoly capitalism, facing the prospect of his downfall. Thus Heidegger's despair had two facets: on the one hand, the remorseless baring of the individual's inner nothingness in the imperialistic crisis; on the other—and because the social grounds for this nothingness were being fetishistically transformed into something timeless and anti-social—the feeling to which it gave rise could very easily turn into a desperate revolutionary activity. It is certainly no accident that Hitler's propaganda continually appealed to despair…

There follows a long analysis of various facets of Heidegger's philosophy, including his philosophy of time and history, the upshot of which is basically that social action and so forth are "inauthentic." More authentic are the negative features of existence, such as anxiety, despair, etc. (You also see this negativity and individualism in Sartre, of course, with the emphasis on anguish, absolute freedom, bad faith, and the like.)

And then there's Jaspers. A neo-Kierkegaardian. "Every doctrine formulated of the whole," he writes, "becomes a shell devoid of the original experiencing of the ultimate situations, and it thwarts those energies which are actively seeking the meaning of future existence in self-willed experience. For this it substitutes the calm of a fully perceived and perfected, soul-appeasing world of eternally present meaning." For Kierkegaard the opponent was Hegel, for Jaspers it's Marx. "With the assertion of the one truth as universally valid for all men…*falsehood* immediately sets in." The main threat was in democratic rule by the masses. Lukács: "Only with the 'inwardly' turned, purely self-reliant individuum (in the intellectual philistine rejecting all public life) could, Jaspers believed, truth, integrity and humanity be found; and—in true German petty-bourgeois style—he represented all mass influence as falseness and barbarity." What a surprise: an intellectual who doesn't trust democracy.

As an aside, here's a paragraph from Jaspers that reminds us of how totally derivative Sartre was (but then so was Jaspers):

> Existential philosophy would be *lost* at once if it *believed it knew again what man is*. It would again provide the basic outlines for an investigation of human and animal life in its types, and would revert to being anthropology, psychology, sociology. It can have meaning only if it remains without a base in its concreteness. It awakens that which it does not know; it illuminates and activates, but it does not pin down… Because it remains without a concrete object, illumination of existence does not yield any results. The clarity of awareness contains the demand without fulfilling it. As observers we must be content with that. For I am not that which I perceive, and I do not perceive what I am. Instead of observing my existence I can only set in motion the process of clarified awareness.

Lukács' final judgment of Heidegger and Jaspers is suitably harsh (although it's possible he attributes too much importance to them):

> Heidegger and Jaspers carried the most extreme individualistic, petty-bourgeois-cum-aristocratic relativism and irrationalism to their farthest logical limits. They ended up with an ice age, a North Pole, a world become empty, a senseless chaos, a nought as man's environment, and a despair about oneself and one's inescapable loneliness as the inner content of their philosophy. They thus provided an accurate picture of what was widely going on within the German intelligentsia at the end of the twenties and the start of the thirties. But they did not stop at description. Their account was at the same time interpretation: an exposition of the meaninglessness of any action in this world. Their partisan attitude is manifest in the fact that they related the negative features of what they called the 'world' exclusively to democratic society. And that, on the eve of the crisis and during it, was tantamount to a decisive *parti pris*. For it deepened the general mood of despondency among broad sections of the German bourgeoisie, above all, its intellectuals, side-tracked potential rebellious tendencies and thus afforded significant assistance, in a negative way, to aggressive reaction. If fascism could inculcate a more than benevolent neutrality in broad sections of Germany's intelligentsia, this was due in no small measure to the philosophy of Heidegger and Jaspers.

Such is the danger of all relativistic and nihilistic philosophies.

The last section in the chapter on "Vitalism in Imperialist Germany" is the one on pre-fascist and fascist vitalism, which surveys the writers Klages, Jünger, Baeumler, Boehm, Krieck, and Rosenberg (although of course there were many others—also internationally). Again, a brilliant analysis. The creation of historical myths and mythical types; the explicit repudiation of intellect and reason as dead or moribund; the elevation of intuition, which finally became the infallibility of the *Führer*; the contempt for lifeless bourgeois culture, etc. (See my old paper on fascism, and the works of Zeev Sternhell.) Near the end, Lukács reminds us of the indirect guilt of Dilthey and Simmel (however much they would have despised the fascist so-called philosophers): "…the Baeumler-Krieck-Rosenberg philosophy would not have been possible without Spengler, and Spengler's would not have been possible without Dilthey and Simmel." And here's the chapter's last paragraph:

> This barbaric cul-de-sac [of "National-Socialist philosophy"] thereupon appears a necessary climax to the self-dissolution of German imperialistic ideology in vitalism (*Lebensphilosophie*), whose earliest philosophical forerunners we traced to the irrational reaction of German feudal absolutism to the French Revolution. And this climax was by no means fortuitous, but the merited fate of the immanent tendencies of vitalism itself. Hegel, who came to vitalism when it was not yet far advanced, when it was a doctrine of 'direct knowing,' prophetically wrote of it: 'From the thesis that *direct knowing* must be the criterion of truth it follows…that all superstition and idolatry are

> declared to be true, and that the most wrongful and indecent content of the will is justified… Natural desires and inclinations automatically deposit their interests in the consciousness, and the immoral purposes are directly located in the same.'

The next chapter, on neo-Hegelianism, is less interesting, so let's skip it. (It does, however, indicate yet again the astounding breadth of Lukács' learning.) Of far more interest is the chapter on German sociology, on how it contributed to a climate of "irrationalism." Consider Toennies, in the late nineteenth century. He did much to popularize the distinction between culture and civilization that later was very important to Spengler and others. "This antithesis arose spontaneously out of the bourgeois intelligentsia's feeling of discontent with capitalist, and especially imperialist, cultural development." Since the intelligentsia, tied in many ways to capitalism, couldn't become genuinely revolutionary, it expressed its discontent by elevating "culture" at the expense of "civilization." The latter, denoting techno-economic development, was constantly ascending, but at the expense of the former. Culture became increasingly impoverished, commercialized, vulgar, decadent. A "tragic, unbearable tension" would finally break out between the two. As Lukács comments, this conception was but the expression of an unrigorous Romantic anti-capitalism; but it had the advantage of militating against socialism. "For since socialism was developing further the material forces of production (mechanization, etc.), it too was unable to solve the conflict between culture and civilization. It was rather perpetuating the conflict—consequently, the argument ran, the intelligentsia afflicted by this dichotomy would be wasting its time by contesting capitalism for the sake of socialism." The odd and rather senseless distinction between culture and civilization was essentially backward-looking.

> The more strongly that *Lebensphilosophie* tendencies, especially Nietzsche's, took hold of sociology and social studies in general, the stronger the emphasis became on the contrast between culture and civilization, the more energetic the turning to the past, and the more unhistorical, antihistorical the propositions. And the internal dialectic of ideological developments after the war inevitably meant that the dismissive attitude was extended more and more to culture as well. Culture and civilization alike were rejected in the name of the 'soul' (Klages), of 'authentic existence' (Heidegger), and so on.

A more and more spiritualized-individualistic philosophy emerged, which, in rejecting the *social* sphere, collective action, economic and political progress, and so forth, necessarily aided the development of fascism and its ideologies.

With Toennies you also get a contrast between community and society, the latter equated, in effect, with capitalism. The "living" vs. the "mechanized." What resulted, again, was an effective diversion of intellectual discontent from anti-capitalism to…anti-modern-civilization in general.

And then there's Weber, the most sophisticated and ambitious of the German sociologists.

> For German sociology, the central problem in pre-war imperialism was to find a theory for the origin and nature of capitalism and to 'overcome' historical materialism in this sphere through a theoretical interpretation of its own. What constituted the real bone of contention was the original accumulation, the forcible separation of the employed from the means of production. (As adherents to the marginal utility theory, the majority of German sociologists regarded the doctrine of surplus value as settled scientifically.) New hypotheses and theories were set up by the dozen as a sociological substitute for original accumulation… With regard to later developments, however, Max Weber's conception became the most influential. Weber, as we have seen, started out from the interaction between the economic ethics of religions and economic formations, whereby he asserted the effective priority of the religious motive. His problem was to explain why capitalism had come about only in Europe. In contrast to the earlier view of capitalism as any accumulation of wealth, Weber was at pains to grasp the specific character of modern capitalism and to relate its European origin to the difference between ethico-religious development in the East and West. To achieve this

> his principal step was to de-economize and 'spiritualize' the nature of capitalism. This he presented as a rationalizing of socioeconomic life, the rational calculability of all phenomena. Weber now devised a universal history of religion in order to show that all oriental and ancient religions produced economic codes constituting inhibiting factors in the rationalization of everyday life. Only Protestantism (and within Protestantism, chiefly the dissident sects) possessed an ideology agreeable to this rationalization and encouraging it. Time and again Weber declined to see in the economic codes a consequence of the economic structures. Of China, for example, he wrote: 'But here this lack of an ethically rational religiosity is the primary factor and seems, for its own part, to have influenced the constantly striking limitation in the rationalism of her technology.' And in consequence of his identification of technology and economics—a vulgarizing simplification that acknowledged only mechanized capitalism as the authentic variety—Weber then arrived at the 'decisive' historical 'argument' that the Protestant economic ethos which speeded up and fostered capitalist development was already there '*before* the "capitalist development."' In this he saw a refutation of historical materialism.

In some respects Weber wasn't as conservative as many of his peers. Whereas they criticized Western democracy as dysfunctional and inferior and so on—in order to argue for the superiority of German conditions—Weber favored democracy…as "the form most suited to the imperialist expansion of a major modern power," to quote Lukács. "He saw the weakness of German imperialism as lying in its lack of internal democratic development." Lukács then quotes Weber: "'*Only a politically mature* people is a 'master race'… *Only master races are called upon to intervene in the course of global developments*… The will to [anti-democratic] powerlessness in home affairs that the writers preach is irreconcilable with the 'will to power' abroad which has been so noisily trumpeted." Weber was an imperialist like all the others, but a "democratic imperialist," so to speak.

Lukács also criticizes the formalism of Weberian sociology, which paralleled the formalism of contemporary philosophy. "As a result of its formalism, subjectivism and agnosticism, sociology, like contemporary philosophy, did no more than to construct specified types, set up typologies and arrange historical phenomena in this typology. (Here Dilthey's later philosophy had acquired a decisive influence on German sociology. Its real blossoming—after Spengler—we can witness in the post-war period.)" He continues:

> With Max Weber this problem of types became the central methodological question. The setting up of purely constructed 'ideal types' Weber regarded as a question central to the tasks of sociology. According to him a sociological analysis was only possible if it proceeded from these types. But this analysis did not produce a line of development, but only a juxtaposition of ideal types selected and arranged casuistically.

A rather just criticism, I think.

Lukács finishes his discussion of Weber with a nuanced analysis of how even this rigorous thinker inadvertently accepted and contributed to the climate of irrationalism in German intellectual culture. In brief, the point is that by striving for a value-free sociology, he left the field open to irrationalism, mysticism, and faith. He had to become a relativist, since supposedly science wasn't relevant to values or ends. (In a sense, this Humean argument is right. But Marxism shows that a sort of integration of values and "science" is nevertheless possible.) Values are arbitrary. So then it's sort of legitimate to have a separate, non-scientific sphere of irrationalism—much as Weber on some level would have contested that (and did contest the vulgar irrationalism of his day).

Later, in the midst of a long and compelling critique of Weber's younger brother Alfred (another sociologist of some importance), Lukács observes that the celebrated Weberian concept of "charisma" is in fact of little interest:

> As is well known, Max Weber in his sociology regarded the chosen state of the democratic leader in particular as 'charisma', a term already expressing the conceptually unfathomable and incomprehensible irrational character of leadership. For Max Weber this was not to be avoided. For if—following the Rickertian methodology of history, which only recognizes individual phenomena—we ask why it was that Pericles or Julius Caesar, Oliver Cromwell or Marat became leaders and try to find a sociological generalization covering the separate historical answers, there will arise the concept of 'charisma', which roughly pins down in a pseudo-concept our ignorant amazement, i.e., something irrational. When, on the other hand, Hegel spoke of the 'world-historical individual', he was proceeding not from the individual but from the historically allotted task of an age, a nation, and regarded as 'world-historical' that individual who could solve this task. Hegel well knew that the question of whether, among those with the potential awareness and capacity for action needed in this situation, it is the individual X or Y who does in fact become 'world-historical' conceals within it an element of irreducible chance. Max Weber posed the question precisely from the angle of this unavoidable chance element and sought an 'explanation' for it. Hence he was sure to land up with the partly abstract, partly mystical and irrational pseudo-concept of 'charisma'.

Characteristically acute insights. It's like…okay, sure, charisma is important. And one can, if one wants, elevate that concept into something more pithy than its ordinary humdrum meaning to express some sort of unrational mystical connection between the masses and a leader. But…so what? How far-reaching is the explanatory payoff of that concept? Not very. It's just more description and typologizing. More pseudo-explaining, superficial explaining.

Worse, the Weberian notion of charisma helped prepare the ground for the fascist theory of the *Führer*, and helped it gain credence among the intelligentsia. –For all these reasons and more, Weber, like the many other thinkers Lukács is discussing, has a bit of blood on his hands. In fact, any intellectual (or really any person—but the intellectuals and the elite first and foremost) who doesn't take a firm stand with the Left is complicit.

Okay; on to Karl Mannheim and his "sociology of knowledge" (which continues to find expression in postmodernist currents). Its logical conclusion, of course, is relativism, since all knowledge is supposed to be totally situation-bound, no more than an expression of a particular situation and the interests, desires, perceptions, perspectives, etc. embedded in that situation.

> Like all agnosticists and relativists of the imperial period, Mannheim protested against the accusation of relativism. He solved the question with a new term and called himself a relationist. The difference between relativism and relationism is about the same as that between the yellow and the green devil in Lenin's letter to Gorky. For Mannheim 'overcame' relativism by pronouncing obsolete and discarding the old epistemology, which at least put forward the demand for objective truth and termed the denial of it relativism. Modern epistemology, on the other hand, was to 'proceed from the thesis that there are areas of thought where uncommitted, unrelated cognition is quite unimaginable'. Or, more radically as regards the realm of social knowledge: 'But primarily, each of us gets to see that aspect of the social whole to which he is oriented in terms of the will.' Here Mannheim's source is obvious: it was historical materialism's theory of ideologies. But, like all the popularizers and popular opponents of this doctrine, he failed to observe that in it, the relative and absolute mesh in a dialectical reciprocal relationship, and that this gives rise to the approximative character of human knowledge, for which objective truth (the correct reflection of objective reality) is always an inherent element and criterion. Thus the theory involved a 'false consciousness' as a complementary pole to correct consciousness, whereas Mannheim conceived his relationism as the typification and systematizing of every possible kind of false consciousness.

'Historical materialism is itself an ideology just like all the others, and therefore a kind of false consciousness! Ha ha, I win!' But as I was writing as long ago as my senior thesis in college, you simply *have* to acknowledge the possibility of objective truth/knowledge and that not *everything* is only an

expression of a particular situation or perspective. For even in the moment of making such a relativistic claim, you're implicitly stating that *it*, at least, is an objective truth. It's the old "performative contradiction" of relativism: the very act of stating a thoroughgoing relativism contradicts the content of your statement.

Anyway, Lukács has some fun exposing the hollowness of Mannheimian sociology. For example: how does Mannheim get himself out of the performative contradiction? How does he get himself out of the total relativism he disavows? Well…

> To the *'floating' intelligentsia* [Lukács writes] was imputed the chance and the role of ascertaining the truth that met the present situation from the totality of standpoints and attitudes linked to these standpoints. This intelligentsia, according to Mannheim, stood outside social class: 'It forms a centre, *but not a centre in terms of class*.' Now why the thinking of the 'floating intelligentsia' was no longer 'situation-bound,' and why relationism did not now apply its own tenet to itself, as it was asking historical materialism to do, is known only to the sociology of knowledge. Mannheim asserted of this social group that it possessed a social sensibility enabling it to 'share the feelings of the dynamically conflicting forces,' but that was a hollow claim without proof. That this group had the delusion that it was standing above social class and the class struggles is a well-known fact. Historical materialism not only repeatedly described it, but also deduced it from the social Being of this group. Here it was Mannheim's duty to point out that the bond with social Being, with the 'situation' which, in his new epistemology, defined the thinking of every man living in society, was absent from this group or present in a modified way. But he did not even attempt to show this, and simply had recourse to the 'floating intelligentsia's' illusions about itself…

'We floating intellectuals, angelically hovering above society, are the exception to everything I've been arguing!' Ugh. Why must bourgeois thinkers invariably be such mediocrities? Well, I guess the question answers itself.

Enough about Mannheim and all these middling ideologists. Lukács sums up: "The sociological movement emanating from Max Weber was profoundly sterile." Intellectual and political sterility is what you get when you're committed to a middle position in a time of social crisis. These liberals couldn't countenance fascism but wouldn't commit themselves to a decisive democratic program to resist it—for they feared socialism even more than fascism—so they ended up vacillating pathetically, criticizing mass democracy while (sort of) defending it, fecklessly counseling moderation, thereby enabling ultra-reaction.

I'm reminded of recent U.S. history: the feckless, vacillating liberalism of Obama & Co. prepared the way for the semi-fascism of Trump & Co. Just as the feckless, vacillating liberalism of Jimmy Carter & Co. ushered in the reactionary age of Reagan & Co. Whether among intellectuals or politicians, centrist liberalism serves but to clear the ground for reaction.

I'll pass over the section on fascist and pre-fascist sociologists like Hans Freyer and Carl Schmitt. Moving on to the chapter on "Social Darwinism, Racial Theory, and Fascism": it was in the eighteenth century that racial theory sprouted, out of (e.g.) the French nobility's struggle to maintain its dominance against an ascendant bourgeoisie. "As early as the start of the eighteenth century, Count de Boulainvilliers wrote a book (1727) in which he tried to prove that in France, the nobility represented the descendants of the old Frankish ruling class, whereas the rest of the population were heirs of the subject Gauls. Therefore two qualitatively different races were confronting one another…" At the time of the French Revolution the polemicizing advanced to a new plane, as bourgeois ideologists like Volney and Sieyès ridiculed the nobility's claim to represent a superior and pure race.

"Thus racial theory—in its first rudimentary form—was already scientifically discredited at the time of the French Revolution. But the class forces behind it did not disappear in the revolution; the struggle against democracy continued and constantly took new forms. Thus racial theory was bound to flare up again in various forms. Its further vicissitudes were determined by the class struggles—partly by the varying amount of influence which feudal or semi-feudal reaction gained in the crisis-beset development of bourgeois democracy, and partly by the ideological needs of a reactionary bourgeoisie turned anti-democratic. For the latter looked to the remnants of the feudal age for political support, and in this

connection appropriated elements of its ideology…" Once the chief enemy had become the working class and not the feudal aristocracy, the bourgeoisie was willing and eager to ally with the latter against the former, including on the ideological plane.

For a long time, though, there was no particular need for racial theory in Germany. All the way up to the second half of the nineteenth century, under Bismarck, the Prussian Junkers were secure enough in their power not to have to invoke their racial superiority as a desperate defense of their privileges. It was instead in France that racialism was first reinvigorated, by Gobineau, whose book *The Inequality of the Human Races* gradually attained influence in the era after 1848. Gobineau wrote from a feudal-aristocratic perspective, but given that in France it had become utterly hopeless to return to the age of feudal dominance, it was through the interests and agency of the bourgeoisie that his ideas spread. For instance, American slaveholders loved them, and Gobineau was initially much more popular in the U.S. than France.

Gobineau's principal animus, of course, was against democracy and the "unnatural" idea of the equality of men. Equally predictably, he thought the white race, more specifically the Aryan, was the highest, and he was cast into despair by its modern mongrelization and bastardization. It was no longer a pure race, and so was doomed to decline, ossification, and ox-like stupefaction. Lukács comments:

> It is chiefly this fatalistic pessimism that distinguishes Gobineau from his important successors, Chamberlain, Hitler and Rosenberg. With these, racial theory was to a mounting degree the organ of an actively militant reactionary demagogy. And this demagogy, likewise, increasingly cast off the old feudal confines of reaction to become an obscurantist ideology of reactionary monopoly capitalism. Here, of course, we must not forget that Gobineau's successors preserved elements of his racialist pessimism in a specific sense, namely in the view that development always means deterioration (racial mixture is necessarily a corruption of the species). Thus the activism of later racial theory sprang from the same pessimistic, anti-evolutionary basis as with Gobineau. The only difference was that a desperate, ambitious activism supplanted fatalistic despair…

Later fascists considered Gobineau backward in some respects, as in his attempt to reconcile racial theory with Christianity (everyone is equal in the eyes of God), but they did draw a lot from him. "Above all, he was the first to produce a really effective pseudo-scientific pamphlet contesting democracy and equality, on a racialist basis. Moreover, his book marked the first large-scale attempt to reconstruct the whole of world-history with the aid of racial theory, and to do so by tracing back to racial questions all historical crises, social conflicts and differences."

Several decades passed before a new racial theory appropriate to the age of imperialism emerged, with Chamberlain. (But of course racial thinking was rampant everywhere in the second half of the nineteenth century, a fact that Lukács doesn't sufficiently acknowledge.) Social Darwinism played a decisive role in bridging the earlier and later stages of racism. I won't summarize Lukács' long discussion of its leading exponents, but a few points are worth making. Regarding the Social Darwinist Gumplowicz, for instance: "with his primitive biologist view of history, his mysticizing of the facts of class struggle into a racial struggle 'ordained by nature' and the anti-democratic attitude permeating this whole conception, he was paving the way for the fascist view of history."

I mostly won't summarize the long discussion of H. S. Chamberlain, since racism is of less than zero intellectual interest, but parenthetically Lukács makes an insightful critical remark on liberal intellectuals of that decadent age, a remark that applies to liberal intellectuals of our own decadent age: "Relativistically-minded modern liberal thinkers, while becoming very sharply opposed to the 'dogmatic' aspect of materialism, were extremely patient towards and indeed full of sympathetic understanding for the most obscurantist intellectual trends of the time [such as vitalism and strains of racialism]. Here again we see that objectively, this relativism of theirs was assisting the birth of fascist ideology." Today too: materialism is ridiculously dogmatic and reductivist! It's barely worth engaging with, it's so simplistic! It's much more sophisticated to focus on *culture*—race, gender, discourses, subjectivities—than the *economy!*

–Ugh. Oh well, I guess in some respects it's not as bad as it used to be, since contemporary political correctness, as silly as it is in many ways, is better than the racialism and reactionary obscurantism of the past.

I have to give Lukács credit for wading through all the racist dreck and devoting substantial intellectual energy to analysis of it. I couldn't do that. Here's one paragraph that I find of somewhat more intellectual interest than the others (which isn't Lukács' fault, given his subject-matter):

> Chamberlain expressed this philosophical allegiance to German imperialism with the most brutal cynicism: 'Nobody can prove that Germanic supremacy is a blessing for all the Earth's inhabitants; from the beginning right up to the present, we have seen the Germans slaughtering whole tribes and peoples…so as to procure room for themselves.' Here Chamberlain was perpetuating the Nietzschean line of indirect imperialist apologetics, the 'blond beast' line that so many of Nietzsche's liberal admirers would prefer to regard as nonexistent or inessential to him. But at this juncture it is plain how necessary and how central this particular line was to both of them, to Nietzsche as well as Chamberlain. In other respects they may have greatly differed, and a big difference in stature may have separated Nietzsche the literary stylist and psychologist of culture from Chamberlain. But both stood out from the other vitalists and racialists in that they strove to provide a historical perspective for the imperialist age on the basis of a pessimistic cultural critique. But what kind of perspective might that be, if not an imperialist one? And if it was an imperialist one, then what else could it contain—as its essential tenet—but the ['glorious'] myth of imperialist aggression and inhumanity? Where this perspective was lacking, all that could emerge was a scepticism bordering on nihilism, a state of despair or of resignation as the final wisdom,' as reflected in the history of vitalism from Dilthey and Simmel to Heidegger and Klages. [Think also of, say, the final line of Eliot's "The Waste Land": *Shantih shantih shantih*. Resignation, appropriate to Eliot's complicit conservatism. And that of a galaxy of like-minded intellectuals.] Objectively considered, the imperialist period could follow one of only two courses: it could either approve imperialism along with its world wars, its subjugation and exploitation of colonial peoples and its own masses, or else imperialism could be effectively repudiated, the masses could revolt and destroy monopoly capitalism. The thinking man had to side openly and firmly, either for or against. Otherwise his life, no matter whether he sympathized with imperialism as with fascism or disliked them, could only end without prospects, in despair. (We have already repeatedly illustrated the objectively positive service to fascism of the philosophy of despair.) [Many thinking men, however, refused to take a stand, in effect choosing passive compliance with the worst trends of the age. Complicit cowards, both morally and intellectually.] Nietzsche and Chamberlain, to be sure, differed not only in stature but also in their closeness to the concrete realization of imperialism. Nietzsche was merely its prophet; hence the general, abstract, 'poetic' form of his imperialist myth. Chamberlain was already more active, a direct participant in the ideological preliminaries to the First World War. Hence we can already clearly discern in him the outlines of bestial imperialism à la Rosenberg and Hitler.

Anyway, onward to the final section, on the National Socialist synthesis. "National Socialism was a major appeal to…those bad qualities [of the German people] formed in the course of centuries as a result of *failed revolutions* and *the lack of a democratic German development and ideology*." (My italics.) That's the reason in a nutshell. Most of the other Western countries benefited from a democratic tradition; Germany didn't. So you got a decades-long explosion of reactionary irrationalism, even more than in France, England, and the U.S. And in the end it achieved far more political power. Because of how useful it was to the ruling class, and how ineffectual the democratic resistance was. (Here, other factors played a role too. For instance, Stalin's catastrophic foreign policy.)

Let us also not forget the essential role of American capitalism: "Hitler's 'originality' lay in the fact that he was the first to apply techniques of American advertising to German politics and propaganda. His object was to stupefy and defraud the masses…" The U.S. was rather marginal in winning World War

II—that was done mostly by the Soviets—but it did provide invaluable assistance, on many levels, in causing it.

More on this topic:

> This fusion of German vitalism and American advertising was no accident either. Both are manifestations of the imperialist age. Both appealed to the desolation and disorientation of the people of this age, to their imprisonment in a fetishized category system belonging to monopoly capitalism. They played on men's numb suffering under the system and their inability to break free from it. But the American system of advertising was aimed at the man in the street, appealing to his most immediate daily needs, and in these the objective standardization through monopoly capitalism was mingled with a vague desire—within this framework—to stay 'personal.' Vitalism, on the other hand, reached out via extremely circuitous routes to the intellectual elite, where the inner resistance to standardization was much more fiery, albeit—objectively speaking—equally hopeless. Hence advertising techniques were cynically demagogic from the outset, an immediate expression of monopoly capitalism, whereas vitalism was for a long time pursued bona fide or at least with indirect, quasi-scientific and quasi-literary means. But for all their differences they were united—objectively considered—in distracting attention from all objectivity, in a one-sided appeal to feelings, experiences, etc., and in trying to eliminate and pour contempt on reason and independent, rational judgement. There was, therefore, a specific social necessity which explains why the products and the method of vitalism were conveyed to the streets with the tools of American advertising.
>
> Inasmuch as Hitler combined in his own person vitalism and monopoly capitalism, the latter's most advanced techniques, i.e., American techniques, were coupled with its most advanced imperialist reactionary ideology, i.e. , the German ideology. The very possibility of this parallel, this unity indicates that we can only understand and criticize all the barbarity, cynicism and so forth of the Hitler period by considering the economics, social structure and social trends of monopoly capitalism. Any attempt to interpret Hitlerism as a revival of some barbarism or other will miss the most crucial specific features of German fascism.
>
> It is only from the angle of these cynical, unscrupulous advertising techniques that we can accurately portray the Hitler fascists' so-called ideology. For all that they ever asked was: what use is this idea, what advantage does it have?—in total independence of objective truth which, indeed, they vehemently and scornfully rejected. (In this they were in complete agreement with modern philosophy from Nietzsche via pragmatism up to our own day.) Now, however, these coarse and muscular advertising techniques joined forces with the products of imperialist vitalism, the philosophy of the most 'refined' minds of this period. For that agnosticist irrationalism which had gone on developing in Germany from Nietzsche, Dilthey and Simmel to Klages, Heidegger and Jaspers had as its final outcome a repudiation of objective truth no less vehement than that which Hitler voiced from other motives and with other arguments. Thus vitalist irrationalism's relevance to fascist 'philosophy' did not hang on individual epistemological findings; these, difficult and subtle, were only meant for small intellectual circles. It had to do with a general spiritual mood of radical doubt concerning the possibility of objective knowledge and the value of reason and understanding, as also with a blind faith in intuitive, irrational 'prophecies' contradicting reason and understanding. In short, it had to do with an atmosphere of hysterical, superstitious credulity whereby the obscurantism of the campaign against objective truth, reason and understanding appeared to be the last word in modern science and the 'most advanced' epistemology.

This is one of the greatest books I've ever read. A work of near-genius. In a sense, despite its many flaws, it almost achieves the level of Chomsky in its reverence for pure reason, science, and the traditions of the Enlightenment.

I'm sorry, but I have to include another long quotation, this time on why all the fascist bestiality was able to happen in Germany:

> …As we know, Germany in the modern age developed on lines different to those taken by Western Europe as also Russia. Whereas everywhere else, the dissolution of feudalism gave rise to unified nation-states, in Germany it led to a political fragmentation. Hence Lenin was right in saying that the central issue of the bourgeois revolution in Germany was the creation of national unity. In the development of Germany, this situation produced various results which were peculiar to the country, but always unfavourable and connected with the reinforcement of reactionary ideas. Firstly, absolutism in Germany lacked those progressive features that were visible wherever it was the organ for establishing the political unity of a nation. Secondly, this line of development was connected with a belated and feeble development of the bourgeois class and with a long retention of relics of feudalism and the political predominance of the nobility. Thirdly, the bourgeois democratic revolution was weaker, less clear-cut and more susceptible to reactionary distractions than elsewhere, since its chief task was the setting up of a missing central power and not the progressive democratic transformation of one that already existed.

The ideas are sketchy—although earlier in the book he had elaborated on them in great detail—but they're suggestive and pithy. Later he adds, "Thus in other countries the ideology of absolutism, even if it turned the State into a 'leviathan,' distinctly reflected class struggles and class interests, as also the position and function of the State in these conflicts—albeit by no means fully or consciously. But in Germany, because of that backwardness we have outlined, there arose the theory of the State as the embodiment of the absolute idea, a theory which degenerated into a State mystique and idolatry. (This is also clearly visible in Hegel's law philosophy.)"

To read this book is a bracing, exhilarating experience. And its final pages—before the long epilogue—are characteristically magnificent, infused by a humanism that remains life-affirming and hopeful even in the aftermath of World War II. It begins with the following sentences and builds to a Goethe-quoting climax:

> One thing is certain: 1945 was not a repeat of 1918. The collapse of Hitler's Germany was no straightforward defeat, however crushing, no mere change of system, but the end of a whole line of development. It ended that falsely based German unity which started with the defeat of the 1848 revolution and was complete by 1870-1; it posed this central issue of the German nation entirely afresh once again. Indeed, one may say that the whole misguided history of Germany became due for revision. A hundred years before, Alexander von Humboldt—who was really not inordinately radical—had already seen that with the defeat of the Peasants' War, Germany had lost her way. She needed to retrace her steps to that date in order to find the right direction; what had happened since was the result of it…

And so Lukács issues a call to arms for humanism, democracy, and reason. His whole book, all 850 pages of it, is such a call, perhaps the most eloquent and urgent such call in history, considering the circumstances that brought it forth. It will never be surpassed.

In the very long epilogue he takes the story up to the early 1950s, focusing on the U.S., which was now the principal imperialist power. With the defeat of fascism and the discrediting of racism, irrationalism and capitalist apologetics now mainly (as, frequently, before) took the appearance of a disinterested rational investigation. "With regard to form, mode of presentation, and style we are here [in the case of mainstream American liberals and conservatives] dealing with purely conceptual, scientific deduction. But this is only so in appearance." In reality, such writers as Walter Lippmann—and innumerable others—are vulgar superficialists who refuse to analyze in any depth the workings of society because of the left-wing conclusions they'll come to. For instance, they say it's necessary to pass laws to break up the concentration of capital. But they don't ask how that can be achieved, what social forces must be mobilized to bring about such laws and make sure they're enforced. There is no real investigation of the relation between the economy and the politico-legal superstructure. There's just a shallow adherence to surface phenomena. (For

a contemporary analogue, see Paul Krugman's writings. He nearly always stops just before he gets to really substantive questions of political economy and the distribution of power, and of how actually to achieve the reforms he advocates. (Because that necessitates bringing in unions and building radical popular movements.)) This is a type of irrationalism, though a more subtle and, perhaps, effective type than the Hitlerian variety.

Some thoughts on analytic philosophy of the time:

> But in semantics and neo-Machism also—their dividing-lines are often blurred—there has arisen a vigorous further development of the earliest Machism in accordance with the ideological requirements of modern American imperialism. The early Machist show of 'strict scientific thinking' has been preserved unaltered, but at the same time the departure from objective reality has gone far beyond the earlier standards. Philosophy's task is now no longer an 'analysis of sensations' but only one of word-meanings and sentence-structures. And parallel with the formal-academic total loss of substance which this has entailed, overt direct apologetics have emerged far more prominently than ever before. Machism came about originally as a philosophical weapon against materialism, chiefly in the field of the epistemology of natural science. The modern agnostic forms which were elaborated in the process naturally constituted a good starting-point for many an irrationalist current, and Machism was always of philosophical assistance to irrationalism. Now, a general direct apologetic has plainly emerged. Semantics examine energetically and systematically the general concepts of social and economic life, only to find them trivial, empty word-formations. What follows? The English Marxist Maurice Cornforth tells us very clearly in a quotation from Barrows Dunham's *Man against Myth*: 'As we clearly see, there are no dogs in general, no human race, no profit system, no political parties, no fascism, no undernourished peoples, no shabby clothes, no truth, no social justice. With things standing thus there is no economic problem, no political problem, no fascist problem, no nutrition question and no social question… By simply breathing out,' he continues, 'they have spirited out of the world every important problem to have tormented the human race during its entire history.'
>
> And in addition, Cornforth showed most lucidly the social consequences of such a philosophy. He stated: 'To take a simple example, let us consider the kind of discussion that occurs very frequently between workers and employers. What is the semantic prescription for solving the dispute? It is expressed very clearly in the words of the boss who says: "Let's forget all this twaddle about labour and capital and profit and exploitation, which is only the meaningless invention of political agitators who are playing on your emotions. Let's speak man to man, as Adam to Adam, and let's try and understand each other." That is actually the way in which employers very often argue. They learnt to be semanticists before semantics was even invented.'

Recall my thoughts years ago on E. P. Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory*, where he discusses the great use of, e.g., Karl Popper's nominalistic positivism to maintenance of the political status quo. (It's no wonder the conservative W. V. O. Quine—who once told Chomsky that the Great Depression had never happened—was an empiricist, nominalist, behaviorist, etc.) While the conscious motivation of these people might not be to hinder leftist radicalism and organized labor—they may be too dull to see it has that effect—the point is that the reason their philosophies can become mainstream is that they're useful to power-structures (or at least benign towards them).

In general, I don't find the epilogue of much interest. But it has its moments. Such as when Lukács has this to say about the famous historian Arnold Toynbee: "Philosophically, his now famous *oeuvre* offers nothing new whatever. On all the main issues Toynbee is a straightforward epigone of the vitalist epigone Spengler, from whom he has borrowed all his important concepts, such as opposition to the unity of history, the equating of all civilizations, the denouncing of progress as illusory, and so on. His so-called originality is expressed in wholly trivial details; for however many such 'culture cycles' either one of them constructs—with equal arbitrariness—they result in as few concrete differences as exist between, to recall

Lenin's joke, a red devil and a blue one, i.e., none at all." Yep, that seems pretty accurate. I recall not being impressed by Toynbee when I read about him years ago.

The epilogue, too, ends on a note of hope: an invocation of the worldwide peace movement as a sign of things to come. "[The movement's] mere existence has a world-historical significance for human thought: the *protection of reason as taking the form of a mass movement*. After a century of the increasing dominance of irrationalism, the defence of reason and the restoration of subverted reason is starting on its triumphal march among the masses…" As we know, the Cold War continued and humanity survived only by the skin of its teeth. And now we're in a new age of even greater peril. But Lukács's hope is as 'rational' now as it was then, for the vast majority of humanity remains opposed to the most destructive trends of the time. Irrationalism is again on the ascendancy, but the democratic resistance is numerically greater and may yet triumph in the end.

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Reading Maurice Cornforth's *Marxism and the Linguistic Philosophy* (1965). A good book, not dogmatic or closed-minded in the old Marxist way. It starts off with a historical overview of philosophical empiricism (which eventually led into the "linguistic philosophy" of the mid-twentieth century). Summaries of Francis Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, and so on. The end of the first chapter makes a few useful points, starting with this statement: "In the contrast between the theories of Hobbes and Locke there appeared for the first time that dilemma which has troubled bourgeois philosophy ever since—how to follow the paths of science without abandoning bourgeois illusions." Cornforth sees Hobbes as having "carried things to their logical conclusions in a way that was unacceptable to the bourgeoisie of his own or any subsequent date. For this reason he was, and has remained, the odd man out of bourgeois philosophy." More specifically,

> He carried Bacon's conception of "man the interpreter of nature" to its logical conclusion in atheistical materialism. And he carried the refutation of the idea of the divine sanction of government to its logical conclusion in the doctrine that the authority of the state rests [solely] on its possessing the material means of coercion.

The bourgeoisie didn't and doesn't want to get rid of religion, for it's socially useful. Nor does it want the realities of power—the role of naked violence—to be laid bare in the Hobbesian way. The highly useful state should be thought to possess some moral and democratic legitimacy.

So Hobbes' intellectual integrity had only a negative use, not a positive one:

> The great intellectual and social impact of the writings of Hobbes did not consist in their founding any new school of thought, still less in their serving any political or class interests, revolutionary or counter-revolutionary. There have never been any Hobbists or Hobbesites. Hobbes' power lay in repulsion rather than attraction. His writings served as a warning, a red light signaling danger ahead.
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> The promotion of the sciences is part of the very life-blood of the bourgeois social order. The dilemma presented to all bourgeois thinkers consists of this—that either you take your stand by the sciences and sacrifice your illusions, or else you take your stand by your illusions and sacrifice the sciences. But they are prepared to do neither the one thing nor the other. And so some third way has to be found.
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> …The most fruitful, the most plausible, and at once the simplest and most flexible way was that discovered by Locke.
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> …The essence of Locke's approach was to find how understanding could be extended by first examining its limitations. And he laid it down that the human understanding is "fitted to deal" with no more than the ideas, impressions or appearances of things implanted in the mind. With these alone we are "conversant," and no science can ever make us conversant with anything else. The scientific approach, whether in the natural sciences or in matters of morality and government, must

always be content to argue about things only as they affect us, its object being not the things [in themselves] but the ideas of them in our minds.

Locke thus limited the sphere of possible scientific inquiry, and denied that it could penetrate to "the substance" of things. To try to do that meant pushing inquiry beyond our capacities, and could only result in difficulty and error. [An anticipation of Kant.]

This "way of ideas" has, as we shall see, been persistently explored from the time of Locke right up to the present day. Its virtue is that it enables the explorers at one and the same time to accept the empirical approach and the discoveries of the natural sciences, and to reject all materialism (such as that of Hobbes or, more to the point later, of Marx) and keep the discussion of social and moral problems on a plane where the real contradictions and motive forces operating in society, behind the façade of social consciousness, remain hidden and are never allowed to intrude.

But Locke was, in a sense, inconsistent. He said the "immediate objects" of our knowledge were not external objects but only our ideas—and yet that our ideas of *primary qualities* are genuine copies of the qualities of external objects. But if we don't have direct knowledge of external reality, how can we know which ideas resemble objects and which don't? This (purported) weakness permits of two opposed lines of criticism. On the one hand you can argue that if at least some of our ideas are accurate or semi-accurate reflections of reality, we're evidently able to make progress towards understanding things in themselves. This was the line of criticism followed by the revolutionary French materialists—Holbach, Helvetius, and Diderot. On the other hand, you can argue that if we're immediately aware only of our ideas, we have *no* knowledge of the external material world. This was the path followed by Berkeley.

But Berkeley, too, was inconsistent, when he inferred the existence of God as a spiritual being who produced in us the sensations and ideas we have. "For if it is illegitimate to infer the existence of the material world as the ground of our experience, it must be equally illegitimate to infer the existence of God. If all knowledge is derived from sense, how can knowledge of God and the soul be allowed? Or if we are allowed a 'notion' [as opposed to a more definite *idea*] of spirit, why is it absurd to have a 'notion' of matter? If the words 'material substance' are meaningless, surely the same must go for 'infinite spirit'?" Enter David Hume, who set about removing these inconsistencies. After his work of demolition was done, there were (supposedly) no longer philosophically respectable (or "demonstrable") reasons to believe in matter, spirit, soul, God, causality, or in fact anything besides "those perceptions which are immediately present to consciousness" (quoting Hume). Starting from Locke's doctrine of ideas we've arrived at solipsism. "I am at first affrighted and confounded," Hume said, "with that forlorn solitude in which I am placed in my philosophy." Even the existence of the past and future is thrown into doubt.

Be that as it may, just as all proofs of God and the like, and of matter, were now refuted, so were all proofs of their *nonexistence*. Hume was compelled to be agnostic about all this, since it's inadmissible to make inferences beyond sense-perceptions.

Though this was not his intention, Hume in fact continued and completed the work of Berkeley in the matter of the reconciliation of science and religion. He agreed that the object of scientific knowledge is nothing but our own sense-impressions. He corrected the extravagance of Berkeley, who had tried to make out that the observable order in our sense-impressions was proof of the existence of God. But equally, he reinforced Berkeley's own refutation of extravagant claims made on behalf of science. Men of science were deluded if they supposed that their investigations led to the discovery of material causes which were "the ultimate and operating principle as something which resides in the external object."

Science, therefore, can discover nothing that can possibly conflict with religion. A scientist can be religious or not, as he chooses—his researches simply throw no light at all on the truth or otherwise of religious faith. On the other hand, the religious man has no cause to fear or quarrel with science.

> In the first period of the development of modern natural science, it took up arms against religious obscurantism. The philosophy which Hume developed from Berkeley meant that science was now to be disarmed. It was to lay aside any claim to represent a true and expanding picture of the real nature of things, of natural history, the forces at work in the world, and the explanation of events.

Hume's spirit of skepticism and distrust of all certainty and "zeal" led to his being a Tory in politics. It's best to let well enough alone, only making occasional modest reforms. "Let us cherish and improve our ancient government as much as possible, without encouraging a passion for novelties." "An established government has an infinite advantage, by that very circumstance, of its being established… To tamper, therefore, in this affair merely upon the credit of supposed argument and philosophy, can never be the part of a wise magistrate…and though he may attempt some improvement for the public good, yet he will adjust his innovations as much as possible to the ancient fabric, and preserve entire the chief pillars and supports of the constitution." Cornforth comments: "This is exactly the same argument as Burke afterwards produced, with more prolixity, against the French Revolution, and as still serves today as the foundation-stone of British Conservatism."

Again, then, Humean empiricism and skepticism were useful to capitalism and the status quo.

Then came the nineteenth century and the revolutionary development of industry and science. After a short discussion of dialectical materialism—the world is a complex of dynamic processes, not things, and contradictory relationships leading to development, and quantitative changes resulting in qualitative changes—Cornforth remarks that, by contrast, the classical doctrine of empiricism (that sense-perceptions, not the external material world, are the objects of knowledge) continued to be maintained by bourgeois thinkers. Despite the incredible advances of science. For example, according to Mill, T. H. Huxley, and others, "what the sciences achieve is [simply] the methodical prediction of the ordering of sense-impressions. [These thinkers] explained that when science refers to material objects and material causes, what it actually does is predict what groupings and sequences of sensations to expect. A material object, as Mill put it, is a 'permanent possibility of sensation.'" You can see the long reach of these positivists in later arguments by Karl Popper and others that the point of science is to predict, and that any theory that can't make testable predictions is unscientific. Chomsky, by contrast—as a competent thinker—remarks that *explanation* is different from *prediction*. There's no contradiction in being able to explain past and present events while being unable to predict future ones.

And then there was Ernst Mach. "Bodies do not produce sensations," he declared, "but complexes of elements (complexes of sensations) make up bodies." "For us, the world does not consist of mysterious entities, which by their interaction with another, equally mysterious entity, the ego, produce sensations, which alone are accessible. For us, colors, sounds, spaces, times, are provisionally the ultimate elements, whose given condition it is our business to investigate. It is precisely in this that the exploration of reality consists." But he wasn't an idealist, he insisted! Reality isn't mental or spiritual. Rather, "the antithesis between ego and world, between sensation (appearance) and thing, vanishes, and we have simply to deal with the connection of the elements." The "elements" are neither mental nor material. They're "neutral." (Cf. Russell's neutral monism.) The science of psychology deals with one sort of "order" of the elements, and then we call them mental. The science of physics deals with another sort of "order," in which case we call them physical. But really they're neither.

After reading the *Stanford Encyclopedia* article on neutral monism I'm reminded of my own (obvious) thoughts from years ago about how a given 'object' or sensory appearance is physical from one point of view—an actual thing 'out there'—and mental from another—a perception 'in here.' So, sure, that's true. These "elements" can be called "neutral," since their ontological status depends on what stance you adopt towards them. But none of this entails there are no mind-independent physical entities or processes.

Cornforth has a nice critique of the deeply impoverished view of science that Hume's empiricism leads to. To argue, as the scientist Sir Arthur Eddington did, that "the whole subject-matter of science consists of pointer-readings and similar indications" is to misunderstand the essence and purpose of science,

which is far richer than that. I'm reminded of Chomsky's remark that to talk of "the behavioral sciences" (as opposed to the *cognitive* sciences or some such) is like interpreting physics as nothing but "meter-reading science," which every minimally rational person knows is an absurdly thin view, just laughable. But that's how positivists literally saw it!

The thinker should take it as a rule of thumb that insofar as something is mainstream or widely accepted, it's probably wrong. First because philosophies become *ideologies* the more popular they are—and the role of ideologies is but to serve the interests of the powerful and to intellectually sublimate institutional norms—and second because most people are not competent thinkers.

One advantage of idealistic empiricism, incidentally, was supposed to be that it adheres to Occam's Razor. As Russell said in one of his phases, "whenever possible, logical constructions are to be substituted for inferred entities." For then you're being more parsimonious in your ontology. But while Occam's Razor is a useful principle, it shouldn't be the be-all and end-all (or so it seems to me).

Anyway, while the positivist philosophy of science misunderstood science, "it fitted in far better with the methods and postulates which were at the same time being adopted for the investigation of society." While a genuinely "scientific" analysis of society has to proceed in the Marxian way, getting beneath appearances to uncover the processes of exploitation, the production of surplus-value, class conflict, etc., the imperatives of bourgeois social science forbade this method. Instead, it was argued that science should stick to the observed facts, and that the Marxian idea of real value and its objective measurement is a metaphysical invention. The point of bourgeois social science was, as Marx said, merely the task of "describing, cataloguing, expounding and bringing under classifying definitions the external phenomena of the process of everyday life in their outward manifestation and appearance." (Thus you get the obsession with typologizing that Lukács discusses, as manifested everywhere from philosophy to sociology.)

"Bourgeois economic theory studied to formulate laws connecting such observational variables as supply and demand, costs of production, wages, prices, rents, rates of interest, etc. This conception of 'law' [as having to do only with regularities and correlations between observed phenomena] was precisely that formulated in the positivist philosophy; and the task which bourgeois economic theory set itself was precisely the task allotted to science by the positivist philosophy."

> The positivist philosophy of science was, then, in its actual development the philosophy which enunciated the principles of the methodology of bourgeois social science… Most of the effort of positivist philosophers went into the interpretation of the natural sciences—and especially of physics. It was presented as a philosophy of natural rather than of social science. This meant, in effect, that what was being done was to misrepresent the methods and findings of the natural sciences in such a way as to represent the officially recognized social sciences as practicing the same scientific method, and to represent scientific socialism as unscientific.
>
> It does not seem likely that the misinterpretation of the natural sciences could have become so persistent, or gained so much social prestige, had it not been for this evident, but never stated, service which positivist philosophy performed for bourgeois social science.

At the same time, insofar as stress was laid on the limitations of scientific knowledge—"which, after all, revealed nothing but laws of combination and sequence of sense-impressions"—the effect was to leave scope for religious dogma and every other kind of obscurantist authority. Another useful service for capitalist society.

The chapter on the *Principia Mathematica* (and logicism, logical atomism, etc.) is a bit more dense and difficult than the others. The upshot is that the new methods of analytic philosophy, taken from the successes in analyzing mathematics and formal logic, gave positivism a new lease on life. Just as propositions in mathematics and logic had been analyzed into more primitive elements, so concepts like "external material things" and the like were supposed to be analyzed in terms of sense-data. As they already had been, by Mach and others. Russell's attempts, in *Our Knowledge of the External World*, *The Analysis of Matter*, and *The Analysis of Mind*, to work out a conception of the world by taking sense-data as his starting-point were not particularly original, aside from their "new terminology for setting forth the

conclusions of Mach's *Analysis of Sensations*." Nor, as Cornforth says, "did Russell even find new grounds for these conclusions. The grounds were the old [Humean] ones: all that we know with certainty to exist is our own sense-impressions, and all knowledge is therefore to be interpreted as referring to these sense-impressions."

More to the point is that Russell was wrong to say his analysis was "verifiable" and to compare it to Galileo's advance in physics. For how, e.g., is it to be "verified" that the same objects that constitute a body (sense-data) also constitute a mind? In fact, desite his protestations, his whole theory is a product of *a priori*, "unverifiable" reasoning.

Cornforth also exposits and critiques G. E. Moore's version of analytic philosophy, arriving at a similar conclusion: what Moore demonstrated (even more than Russell) was that "when an analytic philosopher sits down to do a philosophical analysis, all sorts of different analyses, each more complicated and far-fetched than the last, present themselves; but the method gives no means of deciding which of them, if any, is the right one, that is, the one which actually corresponds to the facts." And later he introduces his discussion of Wittgenstein and logical positivism this way:

> The chief difficulty in the method of logical analysis, as practiced originally by Russell and Moore, lay in the lack of any criterion or principle for deciding what was the right analysis. The conclusions, therefore, appeared arbitrary and speculative. It was this difficulty, above all, that led to the theorizings of the philosophers known as logical positivists and, in particular, to the first or original philosophy of Wittgenstein.

But before I get into that I just want to note down some points made about British absolute idealism in the late nineteenth century, since they're reminiscent of *The Destruction of Reason*. It was the age of imperialism, colonialism, the increasing incorporation of the working class into the state, in general the growth of the state and of a more interventionist policy domestically and internationally. Not surprisingly, then, mystical idealism sprang up even in Britain. "It was above all Bosanquet who translated into English the the Hegelian doctrine that the State is the manifestation in human life of the Moral Idea, that the individual exists only through the State and receives everything he needs through the State, that his good lies in obeying the State, and that the State itself is a spiritual entity, a spiritual unity more real than the fragmentary individual selves of its citizens. All this was put forward with a great show of moral fervor, of class reconciliation, and of contempt for mere science and empirical calculation." The analytic philosophers performed an important service in demolishing all this irrationalist, authoritarian nonsense, a victory that hindered the progress of fascism in Britain. In this respect, Germany could have used a few dozen Bertrand Russells and G. E. Moores.

Well, I was going to follow Cornforth into the tangles of Wittgenstein and logical positivism, and then "the linguistic philosophy," but I've read too much about these subjects in the past and by now they're dated anyway. On top of that, I always start to feel guilty when I spend too much time on philosophy. The world is falling apart, so I should focus on that.

Well, I will focus on it, I promise—and I am: I'm writing an article about spending 24 hours in jail back in February—but I'm also reading a book by Rom Harré called *Cognitive Science: A Philosophical Introduction* (2002). Early on he makes this useful statement:

> The positivist [idealist] philosophy of science was [originally, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries] often motivated by religious scepticism. By setting a very stringent standard for legitimate knowledge claims, it was felt that theology could be set aside as a source of knowledge superior to all others. In time this sceptical attitude modulated into an attack on all metaphysics, legitimate or speculative. Science was to be pruned of all claims to knowledge that went beyond those that could be verified by the use of the human senses alone.

The progressive, anti-medievalist philosophy of empiricism, which for Francis Bacon and others was the philosophy of science (that was precisely its progressive aspect), ended up, by the time of Berkeley and in later centuries, limiting the claims, ambitions, and power of science, by being anti-realist. Ironic! The progressive impulse to demolish obscurantist metaphysical systems in favor of science—by emphasizing sense-perception above all—led later to a critique of science's pretensions to explain the world beyond the senses…which, as we saw from Cornforth's book, in turn had the effect of reconciling religion with science and reinstating the validity of the former! For science didn't describe the world in itself! Profound "dialectical" irony in this ideological development. In fact, even as thinkers like Berkeley were using empiricism to *defend* religion, materialists in France were using it to *attack* religion! Ha! What a funny world.

For Hume, the real meaning of an idea was the sense-perceptions from which it was derived. So, for instance, the idea of causation, which supposedly comes from regular patterns of correlations between events, just means an experienced regularity. Thus you get the positivist notion that both causation and laws of nature are merely statements of the correlations between observable states of affairs—nothing 'deeper' than that. Since the content of ideas comes from experience, ideas can refer only to experiences (and relations between them). –That argument seems fallacious, so the logical positivists probably wouldn't have endorsed it, but surely something like it was a motivation for their idealist positions.

Harré seems like a sensible thinker:

> The positivist point of view has had an enormous and largely malign influence in psychology. If the domain of legitimate objects of knowledge is restricted to what can be publicly observed, psychology must be restricted to a science of public behavioral responses to stimuli imposed from the external environment. This was the ontological basis of the classical behaviorism advocated by Watson (1930). It followed that the only legitimate results of psychological research would be correlations between types of stimuli and types of responses. B.F. Skinner (1974) widened the ontology of psychology to include private, subjective experiences. Thoughts could be admitted as response correlates of stimuli. However, his radical behaviorism retained one of the main principles of positivism. Neither unobservable mental processes nor neural processes of any kind were to be introduced in an explanatory role into scientific psychology.

After a lot of preliminaries on the scientific method and so on he introduces a distinction between what he calls the First Cognitive Revolution of the 1950s and afterwards, and the more recent Second Cognitive Revolution (which "has turned to a more advanced computational model, connectionism, to link psychological phenomena with their neural groundings." Having read Gallistel and others, I'm skeptical of the value of connectionism).

> A useful way to introduce the deep differences between the First Cognitive Revolution and the Second is to contrast causal explanations with normative.
>
> *The causal picture: the First Cognitive Revolution.* Psychological phenomena are linked by cause–effect relations, presupposing the existence of (unobservable) causal mechanisms. A one-dimensional version of this picture, such as Hume's associationist psychology, has cognitive states, or ideas, causing subsequent cognitive states with which they have been associated. La Mettrie's proposal and its descendants presuppose a linear causal sequence of bodily states, each of which causes a correlative mental state, a two-dimensional version of the Causal Picture. In the first version, it is presupposed that thoughts can cause thoughts. In the second version, it is presupposed that neural states can cause other neural states and thoughts and feelings as well… In the Causal Picture, a person is just a place where causal processes occur, a site for one psychological event to cause another.
>
> *The agentive picture: the Second Cognitive Revolution*. Psychological phenomena are attributes of the flow of public and private actions by means of which persons are actively engaged, usually with real or imagined others, in carrying through various cognitive and practical projects.

> The flow of actions is orderly because actions are linked into sequences by the demands of meaning, and by the local standards of correctness to which people generally try to conform. In the agentive picture a person is the prime inaugurator of meaningful actions. Psychological phenomena are the products of human beings actively engaged in carrying through, or trying to carry through, their projects.

The proper way is to use both the causal and the agentive picture to construct a hybrid psychology.

In a historical chapter on psychology, Harré says, "I will discuss three variants of seventeenth and eighteenth-century mentalism, that of Descartes, that of Locke and that of Hume. As this program developed, a common thesis about the mechanism of cognition emerged, the association of ideas. Mentalism became increasingly positivistic. However, the principle of association was taken up by David Hartley, and used to sketch a realist psychology. In Hartley's scheme, unobservable brain processes explained observable associations of ideas, the association of material 'vibrations' exactly matching the associations of ideas."

Decided not to continue with that book, so have been reading other stuff. For instance, Wolfgang Streeck's *How Will Capitalism End?* (2016). (There's going to be a long "interregnum.") And Ha-Joon Chang's *Economics: The User's Guide* (2015).

Useful point against conservatives: "Adopting the Behaviouralist perspective, we begin to see our economy in a way that is very different from the dominant Neoclassical one. The Neoclassical economists usually describe the modern capitalist economy as the 'market economy'. The Behaviouralists emphasize that the market actually accounts for only a rather small part of it. Herbert Simon, writing in the mid-1990s, reckoned that something like 80 per cent of economic activities in the US happen inside organizations, such as the firm and the government, rather than through the market. He argued that it would be more appropriate to call it the *organization economy*." From this perspective, the term 'market economy' is just ideological.

Well, the book isn't as useful as I'd hoped, so forget it.

Reading *Literary Theory: A Complete Introduction* (2017), by Sara Upstone. Came across it in the bookstore. It's a pretty good book, systematically going through a remarkable number of schools of thought, including, e.g.: aestheticism, practical criticism, new criticism, formalism, reader response theory, Marxism and post-Marxism, structuralism, psychoanalytic criticism (Freudian, Jungian, Lacanian), existentialism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, Deleuze, postmodernism, feminism(s), queer theory, postcolonial criticism, cultural studies, cultural materialism, humanism, ethical criticism, genre theory, and ecocriticism. But I'm left with my old impression that, while literary theory and literary criticism can be very intriguing, insightful, and suggestive, in the end it's all just an infinity of *interpretations*, playful interpretations. Here's one way of interpreting a text, here's another way, here's another way, here's another way… You can choose this interpretation if you prefer, or that one, or that one, or this other one if you find it more interesting; and you can choose this approach (or 'method'), or that approach, or this approach. Some of the approaches/interpretations might have more value than others—a Marxian interpretation might be more fruitful or illuminating (or reasonable) than a Freudian interpretation—but they all might have something to say. But you're left thinking…so what?

I don't know, I'm conflicted between recognizing the potential value of literary/cultural theory—and criticism—and thinking it's quite masturbatory. (And sometimes just silly or nonsensical or totally self-indulgent.) Some ideas of Bourdieu, for instance, might give insight into the subtle workings of power and authority in culture, and might be construable as additions to or refinements of useful Marxian ideas. But I'm suspicious of the endless proposing of new conceptualizations seemingly for their own sake. Like, in Bourdieu, *habitus, doxa, disposition, field*—notice the characteristic borrowing of terminology from natural science, a practice that comes perilously close to pretentiousness (puffing up ideas as more substantive and necessary/useful than they are; and also trying to benefit from the intellectual prestige of science, by positioning oneself, more or less meretriciously, in its shadow). Inventing jargon that might, perhaps, be mildly thought-provoking but doesn't add much of substance to old, simple insights. Or the new vocabulary might even serve to distract from and dilute pithy, punchy intuitions that challenge the ruling

class's legitimacy; in this case, it will, naturally, become popular in institutions propped up by the ruling class.

It all seems so damn decadent.

Now reading Kautsky's *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation*. As with his history of the origins of Christianity, it's less "sophisticated" and "polished" than modern bourgeois scholarship but more profound and timeless.

December, 2023

Well, it's been an interesting few years. In large part because of my ex-wife, who is also mother of my child Aidan. Who turned 2 on December 18. Far too much insanity has happened since 2017 for me to relate here. But it's all turned out okay so far, since Aidan is an adorable little guy who has made my life more meaningful. I see him on the weekend every three weeks, when I go to Pennsylvania to visit him and his—very difficult—mother. His presence in this terrible world doesn't leave my conscience unaffected, though. To live is to be guilty, and to create life is to be even more guilty, but life isn't *only* suffering, thank God. With any luck, Aidan will have a good life.

Here are some articles I've published in the last few years, in various left-wing outlets and, in a few cases, on my website. The first sixteen are from 2018. I'm getting tired of writing and don't much see the point of it anymore.

(Also published a book version of my dissertation with Anthem Press: *Popular Radicalism and the Unemployed in Chicago during the Great Depression.* It's a pretty good book but not a great one.)

Privatization Is Killing Us: Dispatches from the War on Society

As the capitalist elite continues to pour ever more resources into its crusade to dismantle society, it's important to keep a tally of the damage done—if only to direct popular attention to where it's needed most, and to where the Left's own resources are needed most. High on the list of capitalist priorities, and thus of priorities for left-wing resistance, is the goal to privatize everything from education to nature to policing and soldiering. With that in mind, here's a list of some recent "negative externalities" of privatization that I've culled from news sources.

Children, teachers, and rat feces

Let's start with Rahm Emanuel's Chicago, jewel of neoliberalism. In February 2014, the Chicago Public Schools decided to outsource management of custodians to Aramark and SodexoMAGIC. The rationale for privatization is supposed to be that it cuts costs and improves "efficiency" or effectiveness. Left unsaid is the means by which costs are cut: primarily from the fact that private companies have a freer hand than government in treating employees viciously. It's easier for corporations to lay off employees, reduce wages and benefits, degrade working conditions, and destroy unions than it is for governments to do so, since corporations are totalitarian institutions. Whether the overall deal is a net financial gain for government is a difficult question, to which studies have given conflicting answers. Some have found that it actually ends up costing more money in the long run, while others have concluded privatization may in some cases yield savings of about 10 percent. But these reports don't factor in all the extra costs, such as the time and money it takes to review proposals by companies, negotiate contracts, review contract terms, deal with the inevitable lawsuits, etc.

And then there are the costs to the public, which, of course, don't count.

Tim Cawley, the chief administrative officer behind CPS's decision to outsource custodial management, claimed it would indirectly improve "family and community engagement"—which in a sense it did, since parents have felt compelled to volunteer to clean up bathrooms and classrooms. Because of

cutbacks in the number (and the pay) of janitors, it has been left to parents and teachers to clean up pools of urine in bathrooms, feces smeared on walls (in preschools), clogged toilet bowls, enormous amounts of trash, rat droppings, and the like. Toilet paper and soap supplies have repeatedly run out in many schools, forcing teachers to buy supplies themselves. (In some schools, students have been asked to bring in their own toilet paper, tissues, soap, and paper towels.) Leaky ceilings, cockroach infestations, rotting floors, outbreaks of bed bugs, exposed asbestos, the presence of dust and grime aggravating respiratory illnesses, and rotting garbage do not exactly "result in an enhanced learning environment," despite Cawley's assurances.

"It's gross and disgusting and my health is being affected," one teacher says. "I want to be outside the minute I'm in here. It smells. Everything smells and I can't focus. If I can't focus to teach, how can kids focus to learn?"

While these conditions have been known about for years, only a recent exposé by the *Chicago Sun-Times* has finally persuaded CPS to act—by hiring an extra 200 janitors this summer, of whom 100 will remain in the fall. The janitors' union had asked for 500 more permanent hires.

There is good news on the legislative front, though: on April 10, the Illinois House Labor and Commerce Committee voted favorably on a bill that would allow members of the Chicago Teachers Union to bargain over non-salary issues such as crowded classes and filthy schools. (This is a right denied only to Chicago teachers.) The bill now heads to the House.

Barbarism, Inc.

Few business models can be as morally putrid as private prisons. The government pays the company a per diem rate per prisoner, so shareholders make more money the more people are incarcerated. Which gives them an incentive to lobby for harsh laws, as they have done effectively in recent decades. The company also has an incentive to keep conditions as bad as possible for both prisoners and employees, since, of course, cost-cutting is good for profit-making. Study after study has revealed the obvious and outrageous moral hazards of the private prison industry.

But with a creature in the White House who supports the expansion of this sociopathic industry, it's useful to be reminded of just how horrible it is. A few weeks ago the *New York Times* published an article on the East Mississippi Correctional Facility, a privately run prison in which gang members have been allowed to beat other prisoners (for extended periods of time), a mentally ill man on suicide watch hanged himself, and inmates have to protect themselves with crudely made knives and other weapons because there aren't enough guards to maintain order. And the ones who are there aren't well-trained. One prisoner was charged by a man with a knife and a long section of pipe while he was being escorted to his jail cell; the two guards escorting him just ran away, and he was stabbed and hit for several minutes before other guards arrived. "They laughed and told [the assailant] not to do it again," the victim recalled. The medical staff did effectively nothing for his wounds.

Meanwhile, the recent "crackdown" on undocumented immigrants has meant a bonanza for the profits of certain corporations. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, a private prison company called CoreCivic, Inc. that runs the Steward Detention Center in Georgia has been making money off people detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The scheme is to force immigrants to work for as little as $1 a day cleaning, cooking, and maintaining the detention center, which would otherwise have to be maintained by actual employees. Those who refuse to work are "threatened with solitary confinement and the loss of access to basic necessities, like food, clothing, products for personal hygiene, and phone calls to loved ones, in violation of federal anti-trafficking laws." Lawsuits have been filed in several states to challenge these sorts of work practices.

For-profit Medic~~aid~~ hindrance

Under the perpetual pretext of cutting costs and increasing efficiency, a number of states, including (among others) Illinois, Iowa, North Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Kansas, have in recent

years partly or wholly privatized Medicaid. The "efficiency" pretext, incidentally, is ironic, given the likely truth of David Graeber's "Iron Law of Liberalism," that "any market reform, any government initiative intended to reduce red tape and promote market forces will have the ultimate effect of increasing the total number of regulations, the total amount of paperwork, and the total number of bureaucrats the government employs." The explosion of bureaucracy in the market-obsessed neoliberal era bears out this law.

What have been the consequences of these privatizations? Iowa is an illustrative case. According to a series of editorials for which Andie Dominick of the *Des Moines Register* won a 2018 Pulitzer Prize, the results have not been pretty. Since April 2016, three for-profit insurers have taken over management of health care for more than 500,000 Iowans, many of whom have, as a result, now lost access to services, equipment (such as wheelchairs), and even nutritional supplements. Against the advice of medical professionals, the insurers simply refuse to pay for needed care.

Healthcare providers have been underpaid or not paid at all. A nursing home was forced to borrow $150,000 while waiting for reimbursements; a mental health facility was owed $300,000; a family planning clinic had to close. To take only three examples. The state has had to bail out the insurers and assume financial risk—which is ironic, since the supposed point of privatization was to provide state budget predictability in Medicaid spending. Before the privatization debacle, Iowa's Medicaid had lower per-person spending than many other states and provided reliable reimbursements to providers and consistency in coverage for vulnerable people.

Because of problems similar to Iowa's, Connecticut in 2012 fired the insurance companies managing its Medicaid programs and transitioned back to the traditional "fee for service" model, according to which the state reimburses providers directly. The results were what you'd expect: the monthly cost of care per patient dropped $718 in 2012 to $670 in 2015; the number of doctors willing to accept Medicaid patients increased; and administrative costs dropped from 12 percent to 5 percent.

Turns out market forces aren't so "efficient" after all.

Nature for sale

Already in his short tenure in office, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has shown he can privatize with the best of them. There isn't space here to list all the creative ways he's trying to destroy the natural environment or restrict its enjoyment to a select few, but we can consider a few examples.

In December 2017, on Zinke's recommendation and at the behest of the fossil fuel industry, Trump announced he was going to reduce Bears Ears National Monument by 85 percent and Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument by 50 percent. Legal challenges to these orders are currently winding through the courts.

Zinke has ordered the Bureau of Land Management to hold oil and gas lease sales of public lands every 90 days, in addition to "eliminating burdensome regulations" related to oil and natural gas development. He has started the process of opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and natural gas drilling, and is pushing for an expedited timeline of leasing land by 2019. Meanwhile, he's trying to make drilling less safe by reversing safety regulations that were put in place after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster.

In January 2018 Zinke proposed an offshore drilling plan that would open 90 percent of the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf for oil and gas lease sales. By comparison, the current program puts 94 percent of the OCS off-limits. (Zinke said he'd exempt Florida from the plan, as a favor to his friend Governor Rick Scott, but it appears that this exemption wasn't a formal action and that Florida is in fact being considered for offshore drilling.) Zinke's draft plan also proposes the largest number of lease sales in U.S. history.

Selling land to corporations is one method of privatization; another is to restrict enjoyment of public parks to those who can afford to pay. Zinke is pursuing this second path as well. In 2016 the National Park Service offered 16 free-admission days at national parks; in 2017 the number was down to 10; this year it's down to four. The Interior Department had also planned to massively increase entrance fees at the country's most popular parks—from $25 to $70—but scrapped the plan due to public backlash. Instead, the department will enact a more limited increase at all parks that charge an entrance fee.

With the Trump administration's term less than half over, we can expect a slew of similar predatory plans in the coming years.

Business as usual

None of these trends is at all surprising, since they emerge from tendencies fundamental to capitalism for centuries. These tendencies have simply been unshackled from prior restraints in the neoliberal era. The destructive, antisocial essence of capitalism has been given free rein, like a raging bull that has broken free of its yoke, such that society is approaching the literal realization of capitalism's misanthropic *telos*.

In the long run, two outcomes seem possible. Either humanity will find itself in the Hobbesian state of nature—which is the inner logic and meaning of capitalism—or the crises into which we are fast plunging ourselves will call forth such massive global resistance that a revolutionary social transformation will, at length, come to pass. What it will look like can't be foreseen (though informed speculations can be useful). All that can be predicted with certainty is that unless the generations now living devote their very existence to the Resistance, humanity won't have much of a future.

Business as usual is no longer an option.

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Our Passive Society

Sitting alone in my room watching videos on YouTube, hearing sounds from across the hall of my roommate watching Netflix, the obvious point occurs to me that a key element of the demonic genius of late capitalism is to enforce a crushing *passiveness* on the populace. With social atomization comes collective passiveness—and with collective passiveness comes social atomization. The product (and cause) of this vicious circle is the dying society of the present, in which despair can seem to be the prevailing condition. With an opioid epidemic raging and, more generally, mental illness affecting 50 percent of Americans at some point in their lifetime, it's clear that the late-capitalist evisceration of civil society has also eviscerated, on a broad scale, the individual's sense of self-worth. We have become atoms, windowless monads buffeted by bureaucracies, desperately seeking entertainment as a tonic for our angst and ennui.

The old formula of the psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott is as relevant as it always will be: "*It is creative apperception more than anything that makes the individual feel that life is worth living*." If so many have come to feel alienated from life itself, that is largely because they don't feel creative, free, or active.

We don't often consider society from this perspective, but it may be of interest to adumbrate the ways in which modern capitalism tends to stifle human capacities of creativity and individuality. This stifling can seem ironic, given that so many apologists of capitalism, or "the free market," have celebrated its liberating dynamics, its unleashing of human potential, its apotheosis of freedom and competition. In his bestseller *The Reactionary Mind*, Corey Robin explains the logic of conservatives, from the nineteenth century to the present, who have seen the market as embodying the ancient agonistic ideal:

> [P]ower is demonstrated and privilege earned…in the arduous struggle for supremacy. In that struggle, nothing matters, not inheritance, social connections, or economic resources, but one's native intelligence and innate strength. Genuine excellence is revealed and rewarded, true nobility is secured… Though most early conservatives were ambivalent about capitalism, their successors [came] to believe that warriors of a different kind [than soldiers] can prove their mettle in the manufacture and trade of commodities. Such men wrestle the earth's resources to and from the ground, taking for themselves what they want and thereby establishing their superiority over others.

Aside from this quasi-Nietzschean aesthetic ideal, which has attracted capitalists and intellectuals of fascist persuasion, thinkers have defended capitalism on moral grounds: most (in)famously, Milton Friedman's writings exemplify the argument that the market is "free, voluntary, and non-coercive" and thus a highly liberal, indeed libertarian, and *moral* institution. For ideologists like this, it would sound paradoxical to condemn capitalism and its culture as dehumanizing or as turning people into passive atoms.

We know what to think of such conservative arguments, though. They are of little intellectual or moral interest. The economist Robin Hahnel, for example, has no trouble demolishing Friedman's apologetics by pointing out that the market is hardly voluntary or non-coercive if people come to it with different amounts of capital. In a sense, yes, employees have freely chosen to work for some corporation, perhaps even in a hideous sweatshop. But they have been coerced into making that decision by their relative lack of capital. It's either rent yourself out or starve.

In general, reactionary ideologies like Friedman's or those that Robin dissects function by substituting for gritty reality, forged in the crucible of conflict-ridden material institutions, an appealing, idealistic myth. In some cases the myth is heroical: free individuals, virtually bereft of socioeconomic context, battling for supremacy, bending the earth and the masses to their will; nations or races waging a similar but more apocalyptic war; or the Nietzschean notion of masters and the rabble locked in perpetual conflict, the fate of humanity and the collective will to power at stake. In other cases the myth is ethical: the United States spreads freedom and democracy abroad by invading countries; the philanthropy of the wealthy legitimates capitalism, in Andrew Carnegie's formulation; "a rising tide lifts all boats," as the typical American liberal declares, etc. All these ideologies are merely pretty disguises of political-economic realities, and can be dismissed. (For an acute analysis of the role of irrationalist myths in capitalist culture, see Georg Lukács's magnificent polemic *The Destruction of Reason*, summarized here.)

The truth, of course, is that after two centuries of the evolution of industrial capitalism, the individual is hemmed in by gigantic bureaucratic structures of social control and economic exploitation. Starting from puny embryos in England in the late eighteenth century, industrial capital has remade the world in its own image, as Marx foresaw: the image of universal commodification, social "reification" and depersonalization, mass regulation of labor, mass markets, mass privatization, mass administration of society for the benefit of capital.

The early stages of this process have been analyzed by social historians in the tradition of E. P. Thompson, who, before Foucault (and more acutely than him), showed how "the modern subject" is a product of *subjection*, how workers and citizens have had to be relentlessly *disciplined* for the sake of capital accumulation. In his classic *The Making of the English Working Class*, Thompson reveals the Herculean efforts of early British manufacturers and their state to impose mechanical industrial rhythms on a workforce that had from time immemorial lived by the pastoral rhythms of the countryside. These "lazy" ex-peasants just could not get it through their heads that it was their sacred duty to God, country, and employer to submit to the clock and the overseer in a cotton sweatshop every day from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Only if they were trained from the age of six and indoctrinated *en masse* with a submissive Methodism that preached the blessedness of poverty and hard labor and a compensation for their miseries in the hereafter was there any hope of widespread docility—although even then it was, as always, necessary to back up indoctrination with something a little more reliable, namely state-sanctioned killing. (The death penalty for Luddism, the occasional military massacre, etc.) And so it continued for many decades.

Women were subject to even more policing than men, in accordance with authorities' belief (since before ancient Greece) that female sexuality, maenadic and riotous, threatens social order. It has to be controlled. In her book *"More Than Mere Amusement": Working-Class Women's Leisure in England, 1750–1914*, Catriona Parratt gives a sense of just how much energy and how many resources authorities devoted to this effort through the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Their task was monumental, after all—they had to kill an "almost Rabelaisian" popular culture:

> Throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, women were visible and vital participants in popular recreational culture. In their cottages and workshops, in urban streets and on village greens, in alehouses and on farms, they worked and socialized

> alongside men. In the daily ebb and flow of labor and release from labor, and in the seasonal and annual round of celebrations, feasts, and holidays…they shared in an array of amusements that were gregarious and open. They gossiped and gambled…got drunk and got rowdy at private parties and public assemblies…and trekked out into open fields and onto moors to listen to ranting preachers…

Decade by decade, magistrates, justices of the peace, and new police forces got the upper hand: "Alehouses were closed, fairs were suppressed, wakes and other customary holidays were 'tamed.'" Later, middle- and upper-class women promoted the "moral elevation" of the nation in their own way, by organizing "rational recreation" schemes that channeled young working-class women's vitality into safe institutions like classes (in "domestic science"), lectures, and chaperoned dances. It was a steeply uphill battle for the forces of domestication, but by the twentieth century they had made immense progress.

In fact, they were already making significant progress by the mid-nineteenth century, and even in the less industrialized United States. In 1840s' New York, Democratic politician Mike Walsh lamented that "a gloomy, churlish, money-worshipping spirit has swept nearly all the poetry out of the poor man's sphere. Ballad-singing, street dancing, tumbling, public games, all are either prohibited or discountenanced, so that Fourth of July and election sports alone remain." By the turn of the century, the U.S. was becoming the world center of pacification of the working class, which is to say suppression of its freedoms and bacchanalian tendencies.

This campaign was carried out at least as vigorously inside the workplace as outside it. The historian David Montgomery has described the epic, decades-long struggle between skilled workers, who were proponents of workers' control within the factory (collective control over their specific productive tasks), and management, which sought to strip workers of all vestiges of control. The businessman's goal, of course, was to increase productivity, lower wages, and in general create a more compliant workforce. The explosive labor unrest from the 1870s until after World War I was in large part a response to this crusade to deskill work, to turn management into the brain and the worker into an appendage of the machine. The working-class ethic of "mutualism," too, had to be undermined, by hiring African-Americans as strikebreakers (to foment racism), giving higher wages to certain ethnicities (to foment resentment), destroying unions, planting spies in factories, etc. Frederick Winslow Taylor's ideology of scientific management was a quintessential, and very influential, expression of all these tendencies, for by breaking down work processes into their smallest components and transferring knowledge to the ranks of management it effectively dispossessed workers of the remnants of their autonomy. And in fact, from that time up to the present, the capitalist agenda to deskill, monitor/regulate, mechanize, and finally automate has continued almost without interruption.

The one time there was something like an interruption was when the mechanisms of the capitalist economy ground almost to a halt, during the Great Depression of the 1930s. This was a remarkable time, which we might look to for lessons about the future (about organizing the unemployed, building communal support systems, resurrecting *public space*, building a workers' political party, and so on). It was the only time in the twentieth century when the drive to marketize and privatize everything, including nature and the nation-state itself, met sufficient resistance to be not only halted but even, in some respects, reversed. Because of the economic collapse, people were no longer only consumers and employees, only nodes in a network of buyers and sellers; to some extent they became actual people, with the revitalization of community, generosity, and shared struggles. Historians of that time are well aware of the glowing reminiscences of many who experienced it. Rose Chernin, for example, who was a Communist organizer in the Bronx, observed that

> This struggle of people against their conditions, that is where you find the meaning in life. In the worst situations, you are together with people. If there were five apples, we cut them ten ways and everybody ate. If somebody had a quarter, he went down to the corner and bought some bread and brought it back into the council. Life changes when you are

> together in this way, when you are united. You lose the fear of being alone… In those years I was happy.

The labor movement saw a tremendous resurgence, and working-class culture, which was quite different from the ruling-class culture of individualism, acquisitiveness, and greed, experienced one last flowering before it was finally suppressed in the postwar and then neoliberal eras.

After World War II, mass bureaucratization and corporatization came of age. The corporate counteroffensive against the leftist legacies of the 1930s and the New Deal was remarkably successful and far-reaching, such that politics and culture as a whole became, arguably, more conservative and "regimented" than ever. The colossal industrial unions, such as the United Autoworkers and the United Steelworkers, that had been formed in the 1930s purged themselves of the radicalism that had so excited Rose Chernin and were integrated into the "corporate-liberal" political order, serving, ironically, as enforcers of properly subordinate behavior on the part of their members. The domestication of women reached new levels as working-class conditions became middle-class conditions and millions of housing-units sprouted on suburban lawns, manicured and garnished with little gardens, across the country. Meanwhile, that great instrument of atomization, pacification, and indoctrination began its conquest of the American mind: television.

Noam Chomsky, in the tradition of Marx, is fond of saying that technology is "neutral," neither beneficent nor baleful in itself but only in the context of particular social relations, but I'm inclined to think television is a partial exception to that dictum. I recall the *Calvin and Hobbes* strip in which, while sitting in front of a TV, Calvin says, "I try to make television-watching a complete forfeiture of experience. Notice how I keep my jaw slack, so my mouth hangs open. I try not to swallow either, so I drool, and I keep my eyes half-focused, so I don't use any muscles at all. I take a passive entertainment and extend the passivity to my entire being. I wallow in my lack of participation and response. I'm utterly inert." Where before one might have socialized outside, gone to a play, or discussed grievances with fellow workers and strategized over how to resolve them, now one could stay at home and watch a passively entertaining sitcom that imbued one with the proper values of consumerism, wealth accumulation, status-consciousness, objectification of women, subordination to authority, lack of interest in politics, and other "bourgeois virtues." The more one cultivated a relationship with the television, the less one cultivated relationships with people—or with one's creative capacities, which "more than anything else make the individual feel that life is worth living."

Television is the perfect technology for a mature capitalist society, and has surely been of inestimable value in keeping the population relatively passive and obedient—distracted, idle, incurious, separated yet conformist. Doubtless in a different kind of society it could have a somewhat more elevated potential—programming could be more edifying, devoted to issues of history, philosophy, art, culture, science—but in our own society, in which institutions monomaniacally fixated on accumulating profit and discouraging critical thought (because it's dangerous) have control of it, the outcome is predictable. The average American watches about five hours of TV a day, while 60 percent of Americans have subscription services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu. Sixty-five percent of homes have three or more TV sets.

Movie-watching, too, is an inherently passive pastime. Theodor Adorno remarked, "Every visit to the cinema, despite the utmost watchfulness, leaves me dumber and worse than before." To sit in a movie theater (or at home) with the lights out, watching electronic images flit by, hearing blaring noises from huge surround-sound speakers, is to experience a kind of sensory overload while being almost totally inactive. And then the experience is over and you rub your eyes and try to become active and whole again. It's different from watching a play, where the performers are present in front of you, the art is enacted right there organically and on a proper human scale, there is no sensory overload, no artificial splicing together of fleeting images, no glamorous cinematic alienation from your own mundane life.

Since the 1990s, of course, electronic media have exploded to the point of utterly dominating our lives. For example, 65 percent of U.S. households include someone who plays video games regularly. Over three-quarters of Americans own a smartphone, which, from anecdotal observation, we know tends to occupy an immense portion of their time. The same proportion has broadband internet service at home, and

70 percent of Americans use social media. As an arch-traditionalist, I look askance at all this newfangled electronic technology (even as I use it constantly). It seems to me that electronic mediation of human relationships, and of life itself, is inherently alienating and destructive, insofar as it atomizes or isolates. There's something anti-humanistic about having one's life be determined by algorithms (algorithms invented and deployed, in many cases, by private corporations). And the effects on mental functioning are by no means benign: studies have confirmed the obvious, that "the internet may give you an addict's brain," "you may feel more lonely and jealous," and "memory problems may be more likely" (apparently because of information overload). Such problems manifest a passive and isolated mode of experience.

But this is the mode of experience of neoliberalism, i.e., hyper-capitalism. After the upsurge of protest in the 1960s and early '70s against the corporatist regime of centrist liberalism, the most reactionary sectors of big business launched a massive counterattack to destroy organized labor and the whole New Deal system, which was eating into their profits and encouraging popular unrest. The counterattack continues in 2018, and, as we know, has been wildly successful. The union membership rate in the private sector is a mere 6.5 percent, a little less than it was on the eve of the Great Depression, and the U.S. spends much less on social welfare than comparable OECD countries. Such facts have had predictable effects on the cohesiveness of the social fabric.

Meanwhile, as government has become less concerned with popular well-being and business has had a freer hand in how badly it can treat employees, bureaucracy has—contrary to the predictions of conservatives—only expanded. We're told by free-marketeers that the penetration of market relations into ever more spheres of life is supposed to reduce bureaucracy and increase "efficiency." The opposite is the case (especially if "efficiency" is defined in terms of the actual well-being of people). In *The Utopia of Rules*, David Graeber states his "Iron Law of Liberalism" as follows: "any market reform, any government initiative intended to reduce red tape and promote market forces will have the ultimate effect of increasing the total number of regulations, the total amount of paperwork, and the total number of bureaucrats the government employs." He continues:

> English liberalism [in the nineteenth century], for instance, did not lead to a reduction of state bureaucracy, but the exact opposite: an endlessly ballooning array of legal clerks, registrars, inspectors, notaries, and police officials who made the liberal dream of a world of free contract between autonomous individuals possible. It turned out that maintaining a free market economy required a thousand times more paperwork than a Louis XIV-style absolutist monarchy.

With the spread of privatization and marketization over the last generation, public and private bureaucracies, intermeshing, have hypertrophied. Graeber calls this the age of "total bureaucratization" (or alternatively, "predatory bureaucratization"). We all know from our own lives, from (the necessity of) our continual interactions with corporate and government bureaucracies, how maddening this development has been. No wonder that when an irate 75-year-old woman went to a local Comcast office ten years ago and smashed it up with a hammer, she became something of a folk hero.

Speaking of Graeber, his notion of "bullshit jobs" is apropos here. The kinds of jobs that were first springing up in large numbers around the time of Taylorism in the early twentieth century, namely "administrative" jobs like human resources, public relations, and corporate law (but also, more recently, academic and health administration, financial services, telemarketing, and the like), have attained unprecedented numerical heights. Millions of people fill these positions, which seem to become more numerous every year. The tragedy is that untold numbers of these people see no point to their jobs. "How can one even begin to speak of dignity in labour," Graeber asks, "when one secretly feels one's job should not exist?" Such a response signifies a particularly acute condition of what Marx called "alienated labor." (One wonders how many people would identify with the central character in the movie *Office Space*, a classic expression of workplace alienation.)

In short, in less than two centuries we've gone from being free-spirited, unpolished, semi-rebellious plebeians and immigrants to being dutiful, docile, lonely bureaucrats administering fellow administrators

who are administering the people who, obediently, do the actual productive work and get paid a pittance for it. We've become a society of units, a society almost perfectly "legible" to both the state and the corporate sector. Even in our forms of entertainment, we tend to be isolated and *receptive* rather than creative.

The nightclub culture, for instance, plays an important function in permitting young people to let off steam from all their weekdays of repressive rule-following. So once or twice a week they stand in a line at one of various designated spots in the city where they can go inside and let loose. In the safe anonymity of darkness, pressed against hundreds of bodies, they can lose themselves in the sensory overload of drunken dance-humping to a heavy pulsing beat under booming hip-hop music interrupted only by screams in each other's ears. There may be little or nothing wrong with this sort of mass-produced, capitalist-friendly Dionysian recreation, but, whatever it is (and I find it mysterious), it's symptomatic.

And what of love and sex in this brave new world of ours? It turns out that the most common way to meet people is in the privacy of one's room, with the help of algorithms written by dating websites. In 2017, online dating became the most popular way for newlyweds to meet one another, 19 percent of brides saying they had met their spouse online. I don't mean to bash internet-searching-for-soulmates, but there is something pathological about a society in which people are "together" with others when they're physically alone and are alone when they're in the physical presence of others. Nor is the Tinder-originated phenomenon of swiping-right and swiping-left through an endless series of faces anything but the ultimate infiltration of the consumerist mentality into the ideally most *human* of spheres, that of romance and sex. Which is becoming practically the *least* human—with the help of an infinite supply of internet pornography, which encourages the attitude of treating people as but vulgar means to one's own pleasure. There is a disturbing tendency for us all to be sex-objects for one another. Ours is a society of objects, not subjects.

Perhaps the most poignant expression of this state of affairs, and of the desperate loneliness that results from it, is the latest "revolution" in artificial intelligence: sex robots that can get aroused, can have orgasms, and have customizable personalities. One of them, Solana, has an app for a phone or tablet with which you can "drag her face around to make her move her head, give her commands to make her smile at you, and type in sentences for her to say." Another one, Samantha, "is programmed to want romance first, then get comfortable before getting sexual." She has different "modes of interaction": romantic, family, and sexy. "The objective," her creator says, "the final objective of the sexual mode is to give her an orgasm." Sex-doll brothels already exist, which are proving more popular than brothels with actual women—even when the women are available for the same price. But not all the new dolls are only for sex, we're assured: some of them "can have conversations about anything, from history to science to politics." This capability "lends itself to bonding," another sex-doll-maker says, "and I think a simulated male that you can talk to and bond with will appeal to women too." Some customers have fallen in love with their dolls and married them.

Thus we reach the *reductio ad absurdum* of trends that began with, or perhaps long before, the British Industrial Revolution, as people have become objects and objects have become people.

In the meantime, and correlatively, humanity continues to do next to nothing (compared to what ought to be done) about climate change and the threat of nuclear holocaust, either of which may do us in sooner than we think.

What is to be done? Now that we're approaching the literal manifestation of the capitalist *telos*, is there any hope? Or has our collective passiveness already doomed us to moral and physical oblivion?

The only hope is that, collectively, we will act to *create* rather than to *let happen*. We have to create and expand "public spaces," for there is rationality in the public and irrationality in the private. As the activists of Occupy Wall Street understood, we have to bring back sit-ins on a mass scale, on a larger scale than in the 1930s and 1960s. We have to sit in at universities, and in public parks, and in legislative chambers; we have to sit down on highways and bridges and city streets. We have to flood the centers of power with wave after wave of popular rage. We have, in short, to *disrupt*, for that is how change happens. We should emulate the Luddites, pioneers of a sophisticated anti-capitalism, and totally resist our final reduction to the status of appendages to the Machine.

In a society of exquisite bureaucratic subservience, we become free and active by acting as, say, the teachers in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Arizona have. That's how we become people, as opposed to institutional automatons programmed to serve the powerful (who themselves are automatons programmed to accumulate profit). The necessity is to act directly contrary to every norm of privatization, which is always in the interest of reactionaries.

But protest isn't enough. Nor is it enough to force governments to pursue more progressive policies. In the long run, it's necessary to create a new system of social relations, starting with new economic relations. I've addressed this matter in *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution: History and Possibilities in the United States*, and can't go into any depth here. Suffice it to say that a new, sustainable world will have to be grounded in economic democracy, which is to say cooperatives of all types, public ownership and control of major industries, public banking, divestment from the military sector and massive investment in public works and public education, and in general a "socialistic" transformation of the nation-state system. The vision embodied in the British Labour Party's manifesto is an excellent place to start, for, with modifications, it can apply to every country that has had capitalism foisted on it.

In the coming years, the opportunity to seize our humanity again will present itself. The crisis of the old regime will lead to the birth of the new. Institutional breakdown will open up the space for radical experimentation in new modes of production and politics, modes responsive to the popular will. And it will become possible for the disenfranchised to take the initiative again.

There is indeed hope. We have only to reject despair in order to realize that hope.

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The Significance and Shortcomings of Karl Marx

I often have occasion to think that, as an "intellectual," I am very lucky to be alive at this time in history, at the end of the long evolution from Herodotus and the pre-Socratic philosophers to Chomsky and modern science. One reason for my gratitude is simply that, as I wrote years ago in a moment of youthful idealism, "the past is a kaleidoscope of cultural achievements, or rather a cornucopian buffet whose fruits I can sample, choosing which are my favorite delicacies—which healthiest, which savory and sweet—and invent my own diet tailored to my needs. History can be appropriated by each person as he chooses, selectively employed in the service of his self-creation!" But while this Goethean ideal of enlightened self-cultivation is important, perhaps an even greater advantage of living so late in history is that, if one has an open and critical mind, it is possible to have a much more sophisticated and correct understanding of the world than before. Intellectual history is littered with egregious errors, myths and lies that have beguiled billions of minds. Two centuries after the Enlightenment, however, the spirit of rationalism and science has achieved so many victories that countless millions have been freed from the ignorance and superstition of the past.

Few thinkers deserve more credit for the liberation of the human mind than Karl Marx. Aside from the heroes of the Scientific Revolution—Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Boyle, and others—and their philosophical 'translators'—Francis Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Voltaire, Diderot—hardly any come close. But not only did Marx contribute to our intellectual liberation; he also, of course, made immense contributions to the struggle for liberation from oppressive power-structures (a struggle that, indeed, is a key component of the effort to free our minds). These two major achievements amply justify the outpouring of articles on the bicentennial of his birth, and in fact, I think, call for yet another one, to consider in more depth both his significance and his shortcomings.

My focus in this article is going to be on his ideas, not on his life or his activism. He was certainly an inspiration in the latter respect, but it is his writings that are timeless. The fanatical and violent hatred they have always elicited from the enemies of human progress, the spokesmen of a power-loving, money-worshipping misanthropy, is the most eloquent proof of their value.

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The central reason for Marx's importance and fame is, of course, that he gave us the most sophisticated elaboration of the most fundamental concept in social analysis: class.

He was far from the only thinker to emphasize class. One might even say that the primacy of class verges on common sense. In his *Politics*, Aristotle already interpreted society according to the divergent interests of the poor and the rich. The semi-conservative James Madison, like other Enlightenment figures, agreed, as is clear from his famous *Federalist No. 10*:

> [T]he most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property. Those who hold and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society. Those who are creditors, and those who are debtors, fall under a like discrimination. A landed interest, a manufacturing interest, a mercantile interest, a moneyed interest, with many lesser interests, grow up of necessity in civilized nations, and divide them into different classes actuated by different sentiments and views.

Could anything be more obvious than this proto-historical materialism?

But Marx was unique in systematically expounding this materialism and grounding it in rigorous analysis of production relations—the concept of which he practically invented, or at least self-consciously elevated to a determining status and analyzed with exhaustive thoroughness. As everyone passingly familiar with Marxism knows, such notions as exploitation, surplus, surplus-value, and class struggle acquired a quasi-scientific—which is to say exact and precisely explanatory—character in the context of Marx's investigation of production relations, particularly those of capitalism.

Given that historical materialism is often ridiculed and rejected, it isn't out of place here to give a simplified account of its premises, an account that shows how uncontroversial these premises ought to be. This is especially desirable in a time when even self-styled Marxists feel compelled, due to the cultural sway held by feminism and identity politics, to deny that class has priority over other variables such as gender, sexuality, and race.[1]

The explanatory (and therefore *strategic*, for revolutionaries) primacy of class can be established on simple *a priori* grounds, quite apart from empirical sociological or historical analysis. One has only to reflect that access to resources—money, capital, technology—is of unique importance to life, being key to survival, to a high quality of life, to political power, to social and cultural influence; and access to (or control over) resources is determined ultimately by class position, one's position in the social relations of production. The owner of the means of production has control over more resources than the person who owns only his labor-power, which means he is better able to influence the political process and to propagate ideas and values that legitimate his dominant position and justify the subordination of others. These two broad categories of owners and workers have opposing interests, most obviously in the inverse relation between wages and profits. This antagonism of interests is the "class struggle," a struggle that need not always be explicit or conscious but is constantly present on an implicit level, indeed is constitutive of the relationship between capitalist and worker. The class struggle—that is, the structure and functioning of economic institutions—can be called the foundation of society, the dynamic around which society tends to revolve, because, again, it is through class that institutions and actors acquire the means to influence social life.

These simple, commonsense reflections suffice to establish the meaning and soundness of Marx's infamous, "simplistic," "reductionist" contrast between the economic "base" and the political, cultural, and ideological "superstructure." Maybe his language here was misleading and metaphorical. He was only sketching his historical materialism in a short preface, the famous Preface to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and could hardly have foreseen that generations of academics would later pore over his words, pick at them, cavil at them, fling casuistries at each other until a vast scholarly literature had been produced debating Marxian "economic determinism." As if the relative primacy of economic

[1] For example, see Peter Frase, "Stay Classy," *Jacobin*, June 26, 2014.

institutions that are, by definition, directly involved in the accumulation and distribution of material resources and thus power, isn't anything but a truism, and can be seen as such on the basis of such elementary reasoning as in the preceding paragraph.

The *Communist Manifesto's* epoch-making claim, therefore, that the history of all complex societies has been the history of class struggles is *not* ridiculous or oversimplifying, contrary to what has been claimed a thousand times in scholarship and the popular press. It is, broadly speaking, accurate, if "class struggle" is understood to mean not only explicit conflict between classes (and class-subgroups; see the above quotation from Madison) but also the implicit antagonism of interests between classes, which constitutes the structure of economic institutions. Particular class structures/dynamics, together with the level of development of productive forces they determine and are expressed through, provide the basic institutional context around which a given politics and culture are fleshed out.[1]

Thus, to argue, as feminists, queer theorists, and confused Marxists like Peter Frase are wont to, that class is of no special significance compared to group identities like gender and race is quite mistaken. Neither feminism nor anti-racist activism targets such institutional structures as the relation between capitalist and worker; or, to the extent that these movements do, they become class-oriented and lose their character as strictly feminist or anti-racist. If you want a society of economic democracy, in which economic exploitation, "income inequality," mass poverty, imperialism, militarism, ecological destruction, and privatization of resources are done away with, the goal of your activism must be to abolish capitalist institutions—the omnipotence of the profit motive, the dictatorial control of capitalist over worker—and not simply misogyny or terrible treatment of minorities. These issues are important, but only *anti-capitalism* is properly revolutionary, involving a total transformation of society (because a transformation of the *very structures* of institutions, not merely who is allowed into the privileged positions).

Moreover, as plenty of feminists and Black Lives Matter activists well know, you cannot possibly achieve the maximal goals that identity politics pursues while remaining in a capitalist society. Most or all of the oppression that minorities experience is precisely a result of capitalism's perverse incentives, and of the concentration of power in a tiny greedy elite. This ties into the fact that, since the time of Marx and Engels, a colossal amount of empirical scholarship has shown the power of the Marxian analytical framework. Even ideologies of race, nation, and gender are largely a product of class—of slavery and its aftermath in the U.S., of European imperialism, of attempts by the Victorian upper class to control working-class women's lives and sexuality.

In the case of religious fundamentalism in the U.S., for example, historians have shown that since early in the twentieth century, and especially since the 1970s, conservative sectors of the business community have subsidized right-wing evangelical Christianity in order to beat back unionism and liberalism, which have been tarred and feathered as communist, socialist, and godless.[2] More generally, for centuries the ruling class has propagated divisive ideas of race, religion, nationality, and gender in order, partly, to fragment the working class and so control it more easily and effectively. By now, leftists see such arguments, rightly, as truisms.

On the other hand, most intellectuals, including many academically trained leftists, also see Marxian "economistic" arguments as overly simplifying and reductive. Mainstream intellectuals, particularly, consider it a sign of unsophistication that Marxism tends to abstract from complicating factors and isolate the class variable. "Reality is complicated!" they shout in unison. "You also have to take into

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[1] In my summary (on Academia.edu) of G. E. M. de Ste. Croix's 1981 masterpiece *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World, from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests*, I added the following thoughts to the foregoing account: "Class struggle is central to history in still more ways; for instance, virtually by analytical necessity it has been, directly or indirectly, the main cause of popular resistance and rebellions. Likewise, the ideologies and cultures of the lower classes have been in large measure sublimations of class interest and conflict. Most wars, too, have been undertaken so that rulers (effectively the ruling class) could gain control over resources, which is sort of the class struggle by other means. Wars grow out of class dynamics, and are intended to benefit the rich and powerful."

[2] See, for example, Ken Fones-Wolf and Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Struggle for the Soul of the Postwar South: White Evangelical Protestants and Operation Dixie* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

account the play of cultural discourses, the diversity of subjective identities, etc. Class isn't everything!" Somehow it is considered an intellectual *vice*, and not a *virtue*, to *simplify* for the sake of *understanding*. It is true, after all, that the world is complex; and so in order to understand it one has to simplify it a bit, explain it in terms of general principles. As in the natural sciences, a single principle can never explain *everything*; but, if it is the right one, it can explain a great deal.

Noam Chomsky, with characteristic eloquence, defended this point in an interview in 1990.[1] I might as well quote him at length. Since he is in essence just an idiosyncratic and anarchistic Marxist—in fact one of the most consistent Marxists of all, despite his rejection of the label—his arguments are exactly those to which every thoughtful materialist is committed.

> *Question: But you're often accused of being too black-and-white in your analysis, of dividing the world into evil elites and subjugated or mystified masses. Does your approach ever get in the way of basic accuracy?*
>
> *Answer:* I do approach these questions a bit differently than historical scholarship generally does. But that's because humanistic scholarship tends to be irrational. I approach these questions pretty much as I would approach my scientific work. In that work—in any kind of rational inquiry—what you try to do is identify major factors, understand them, and see what you can explain in terms of them. Then you always find a periphery of unexplained phenomena, and you introduce minor factors and try to account for those phenomena. What you're always searching for is the guiding principles: the major effects, the dominant structures. In order to do that, you set aside a lot of tenth-order effects. Now, that's not the method of humanistic scholarship, which tends in a different direction. Humanistic scholarship—I'm caricaturing a bit for simplicity—says every fact is precious; you put it alongside every other fact. That's a sure way to guarantee you'll never understand anything. If you tried to do that in the sciences, you wouldn't even reach the level of Babylonian astronomy.
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> I don't think the [social] field of inquiry is fundamentally different in this respect. Take what we were talking about before: institutional facts. Those are major factors. There are also minor factors, like individual differences, microbureaucratic interactions, or what the President's wife told him at breakfast. These are all tenth-order effects. I don't pay much attention to them, because I think they all operate within a fairly narrow range which is predictable by the major factors. I think you can isolate those major factors. You can document them quite well; you can illustrate them in historical practice; you can verify them. If you read the documentary record critically, you can find them very prominently displayed, and you can find that other things follow from them. There's also a range of nuances and minor effects, and I think these two categories should be very sharply separated.
>
> When you proceed in this fashion, it might give someone who's not used to such an approach the sense of black-and-white, of drawing lines too clearly. It purposely does that. That's what is involved when you try to identify major, dominant effects and put them in their proper place.

But instead of trying to systematically explain society by starting from a general principle and evaluating its utility, then proceeding to secondary factors like race or sex and using them to elucidate phenomena not explained by the dominant principle, the approach that tends to prevail in the humanities and social sciences is a sort of methodological relativism. In social history, for example, you are generally expected just to describe things from different perspectives. You should discuss gender, and race, and class, and various relevant discourses, and how people identified themselves, how they reacted to given developments, and perhaps issues of sexuality and the body, etc. Some knowledge may be gained, but such work amounts to

[1] Adam Jones, "The Radical Vocation: An Interview with Noam Chomsky," February 20, 1990, at znetwork.org.

unanchored description seemingly for its own sake—description, often, from an *idealist* perspective, not a materialist one. The anti-Marxian idealism is a common quality of this mainstream writing.

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On the bicentennial of Marx's birth, it is intellectually shameful, though predictable, that idealism is still the primary tendency in scholarship and journalism.

What idealism means, of course, is an emphasis on ideas or consciousness over material factors, whether "social being"—economic conditions, institutional imperatives (the need to follow the rules of given social structures), *interests* as opposed to ideals or ideologies, and the necessities of biological survival—or, in the context of philosophical idealism such as that of Berkeley, Schopenhauer, and the logical positivists of the mid-twentieth century, the existence of mind-independent matter. Philosophical idealism, while no longer as respectable as it once was, persists in forms less honest and direct than that of Berkeley, especially in postmodernist circles and schools of thought influenced by the Continental tradition (e.g., phenomenology) and even American pragmatism. **[Give examples in a footnote.]** More important, though, is the type of idealism that disparages class and social being.

This idealism comes in different varieties. Its most common manifestation is the uncritical tendency to take seriously the rhetoric and self-interpretations of the powerful. As Marx understood and Chomsky likes to point out, humans are expert at deceiving themselves, at attributing noble motives to themselves when baser desires of power, money, recognition, and institutional pressures are what really motivate them. The powerful, especially, love to clothe themselves in the garb of moral grandeur. They insist that they are invading a country in order to protect human rights or spread democracy and freedom; that they are expanding prisons to keep communities safer, and deporting immigrants to keep the country safe; that by cutting social welfare programs they are trying honestly to reduce the budget deficit, and by cutting taxes on the rich they only want to stimulate the economy. When journalists and intellectuals take seriously such threadbare, predictable rhetoric, they are disregarding the lesson of Marxism that *individuals* aren't even the main actors here in the first place; *institutions* are. The individuals can tell themselves whatever stories they want about their own behavior, but the primary causes of the design and implementation of political policies are institutional dynamics, power dynamics. Political and economic actors represent certain interests, and they act in accordance with those interests. That's all.

An example of academics' idealism is Odd Arne Westad's celebrated book *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, which won the prestigious Bancroft Prize in 2006. Its thesis is that "the United States and the Soviet Union were driven to intervene in the Third World by the ideologies inherent in their politics. Locked in conflict over the very concept of European modernity…Washington and Moscow needed to change the world in order to prove the universal applicability of their ideologies…" It is a remarkably unsophisticated argument, which is backed up by remarkably unsophisticated invocations of policymakers' rhetoric. It rises to the level of farce. At one point, after quoting a State Department spokesman on George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq—"I believe in freedom as a right, a responsibility, a destiny… The United States stands for freedom, defends freedom, advances freedom, and enlarges the community of freedom because we think it is the right thing to do"—Westad states ingenuously that the Iraq invasion was a perfect example of how "freedom and security have been, and remain today, the driving forces of U.S. foreign policy." As if gigantic government bureaucracies are moved to act out of pure altruism![1]

Related to this idealism is the faith of liberal intellectuals that ideals truly matter in the rough-and-tumble of political and economic life. John Maynard Keynes gave a classic exposition of this faith in the last paragraph of his *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, which has stroked academic egos for generations:

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[1] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4, 405.

> …[T]he ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. [?!] Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas… [S]oon or late, it is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil.

These are backward fantasies, which grow out of a poor sociological imagination. The point is that the ideas that come to be accepted as gospel are *those useful to vested interests*, which are the entities that have the resources to propagate them. (In the typically bourgeois language of impersonal 'automaticity,' Keynes refers to "the gradual encroachment of ideas." But ideas do not spread of themselves; they are propagated and subsidized by people and institutions whose interests they express. This is why "the ruling ideas of a society are the ideas of its ruling class," which has the resources to spread them.)

Keynes' famous book itself contributed not at all to the so-called Keynesian policies of Franklin Roosevelt and Hitler and others; in fact, such policies were already being pursued by Baron Haussmann in France in the 1850s, because they were useful in giving employment to thousands of workers and raising aggregate demand and thereby economic growth. Is it likely that had Keynes not published his book in 1936, the U.S. government during and after World War II would have pursued radically different, un-Keynesian economic policies? Hardly. Because they were useful to vested interests, those policies were bound to be adopted—and economists, tools of the ruling class, were bound to systematize their theoretical rationalizations sooner or later.

But liberals continue to believe that if only they can convince politicians of their intellectual or moral errors, they can persuade them to change their policies. Paul Krugman's columns in the *New York Times* provide amusing examples of this sort of pleading. It is telling that he always ends his analysis right before getting to a realistic proposal: he scrupulously avoids saying that for his ideas to be enacted it is necessary to revive unions on a systemic scale, or to organize radical and disruptive social movements to alter the skewed class structure. Such an analytic move would require that he step into the realm of Marxism, abandoning his liberal idealism, and would thus bar him from being published in the *New York Times*.

If I may be permitted to give another example of liberal idealism: I recall reading Richard Goodwin's popular book *Remembering America: A Voice from the Sixties* (1988), a memoir of his time as speechwriter and adviser to John F. Kennedy. It's a flabby centrist whitewashing of history, a nostalgic apotheosis of Kennedy and America and democracy, not worth reading on its merits. However—to quote a review I wrote—

> The book is enlightening as a window into the mind of the Harvard liberal, revelatory of the sort of thoughts this person has, his worldview. Liberalism from the inside. A prettified ideology, bland but appealing, with the reference to spiritual truths, reason, ideals of harmony and peace, a rising tide lifting all boats, the fundamental compatibility of all interests in society (except for those we don't like, of course), the nonexistence of class struggle, government's ability to solve all social ills, history as a progressive battle between knowledge and ignorance, light and darkness, reason and unreason, open-mindedness and bigotry, and any other set of binary abstractions you can think of. The whole ideology hovers above reality in the heavenly mists of Hope and Progress. It's all very pretty, hence its momentary resurgence—which succumbed to disillusionment—with Barack Obama. And hence its ability to get through the filters of the class structure, to become an element in the hegemonic American discourse, floating above institutional realities like some imaginary golden idol one worships in lieu of common sense. It serves a very useful purpose for business, averting people's eyes from the essential incompatibility of class

> interests toward the idea of Gradual Progress by means of tinkering at the margins, making nice policies.

Such is the function of liberal idealism for the ruling class.

One other type of idealism that must be mentioned is the postmodernist variety (or rather varieties). It is ironic that postmodernist intellectuals, with their rejection of "metanarratives" and the idea of objective truth, consider themselves hyper-sophisticated, because in fact they're less sophisticated than even unreflective doctrinaire Marxists. They are not so much post-Marxist as pre-Marxist, in that they haven't assimilated the important intellectual lessons of the Marxist tradition.

In both its subjectivism and its focus on "discourses," "texts," "meanings," "vocabularies," "cultures," and the like, postmodernism is idealistic. Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, for example, is highly abstract and pseudo-philosophical, tending to ignore class and the concrete realities of both state institutions and socioeconomic contexts. (Far better—more instructive, lucid, and illuminating—is Georg Rusche and Otto Kirchheimer's Marxist classic *Punishment and Social Structure*, published in 1939.) Things didn't get better later, as is illustrated by, say, the heralded essay collection *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (1997), edited by Frederick Cooper and Anna Laura Stoler. Suffice it to say that this book, like much of postmodernism, consists essentially of playing around with ideas of cultural "contestations" and the tensions involved in people's "negotiations" of disparate identities. The analyses are so particularistic and so purely *descriptive*, focusing, say, on (the *cultural* dimensions of) some village in Senegal or some protest movement in Ecuador, that no interesting conclusions can be drawn. Instead there is a fluctuation between hyper-particularity and hyper-abstractness, as in the typical—and utterly truistic—"arguments" that the colonized had agency, that colonized cultures were not totally passive, that "colonial regimes were neither monolithic nor omnipotent" (who has ever said they were?), that "meanings" of institutions "were continually being reshaped," and so on. After all the analysis, one is left asking, "Okay, so what?" It's all just masturbatory play undertaken for the sake of itself. No wonder this sort of writing has been allowed to become culturally dominant.[1]

The postmodern, Foucauldian focus on the body, too, is, ironically, idealistic. Which is to say it is more politically safe than Marxism, since it eschews the language of class. Any intellectual who finds himself being accepted by mainstream institutions, as hordes of Foucault-loving postmodernists, feminists, and queer theorists have—contrary to the treatment of materialists like Gabriel Kolko, Thomas Ferguson, Jesse Lemisch, David F. Noble, Staughton Lynd, Rajani Kanth, Norman Finkelstein, Noam Chomsky, Glenn Greenwald, and many others—should immediately start to question whether his ideas get to the heart of the matter or do not, instead, distract from the workings of power.

Said differently, the problem with identity politics is that it doesn't completely reject Margaret Thatcher's infamous saying, "There is no such thing as society." It takes a semi-individualistic approach to analysis and activism. A revolutionary answers Thatcher with the statement, "There is no such thing as the individual"—in the sense that the focus must be on institutional structures, which mold us and dominate us. To the degree that the focus turns toward the individual, or his identity, his body, his subjectivity, the radicalism becomes more anodyne (while not necessarily ceasing to be oppositional or important).

There is a great deal more to be said about postmodernism. For instance, I could make the obvious point that its particularism and relativism, its elevation of fragmentary "narratives" and its Kuhnian emphasis on the supposed incommensurability of different "paradigms," is just as useful to the ruling class as its idealism, since it denies *general truths* about class struggle and capitalist dynamics. (See Georg Lukács' masterpiece *The Destruction of Reason* (1952) for a history of how such relativism and idealism contributed to the cultural climate that made Hitler possible.) Or I could argue that the rationalism and universalism of what Jonathan Israel calls the Radical Enlightenment, which found its fulfillment in

[1] See https://www.wrightswriting.com/tensions for a longer critique of the book.

Marxism, is, far from being dangerous or containing the seeds of its own destruction—as postmodernists and confused eclectic Marxists like Theodor Adorno have argued[1]—the only hope for humanity.

Instead, I'll only observe, in summary, that idealism is not new: it is as old as the hills, and Marx made an immortal contribution in repudiating it. Idealism has always afflicted mainstream intellectual culture, all the way back to antiquity, when Plato viewed the world as consisting of shadows of ideal Forms, Hindus and Buddhists interpreted it in spiritual terms and as being somehow illusory, and Stoics were "telling the slave in the mines that if he would only think aright he would be happy."[2] Idealism persisted through the Christian Middle Ages, Confucian China, and Hindu India. It dominated the Enlightenment, when *philosophes* were arguing that ignorance and superstition were responsible for mass suffering and a primordial conspiracy of priests had plunged society into darkness. Hegel, of course, was an arch-idealist. Finally, a thinker came along who renounced this whole tradition and systematized the common sense of the hitherto despised "rabble," the workers, the peasants, the women struggling to provide for their children—namely that *ideas* are of less significance than class and material conditions. The real heroes, the real actors in history are not the parasitic intellectuals or the marauding rulers but the people working day in and day out to maintain society, to preserve and improve the conditions of civilization for their descendants.

Had there been no Marx or Engels, revolutionaries and activists would still have targeted class structures, as they were doing before Marxism had achieved widespread influence. Unions would have organized workers, radicals would have established far-left organizations, insurrections would have occurred in countries around the world. Marx's role has been to provide clarity and guidance, to serve as a symbol of certain tendencies of thought and action. His uniquely forceful and acute analyses of history and capitalism have been a font of inspiration for both thinkers and activists, a spur, a stimulus to keep their eyes on the prize, as it were. His prediction of the collapse of capitalism from its internal contradictions has given hope and confidence to millions—perhaps *too much* confidence, in light of the traditional over-optimism of Marxists. But having such a brilliant authority on their side, such a teacher, has surely been of inestimable benefit to the oppressed.

As for the narrow task of "interpreting the world," the enormous body of work by Marxists from the founder to the present totally eclipses the contributions of every other school of thought. From history and economics to literary criticism, nothing else comes remotely close.

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Marx did, however, make mistakes. No one is infallible. It is worth considering some of those mistakes, in case we can learn from them.

The ones I'll discuss here, which are the most significant, have to do with his conception of socialist revolution. Both the timeline he predicted and his sketchy remarks on how the revolution would come to pass were wrong. I have addressed these matters in *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution: History and Possibilities in the United States*, but they deserve a more condensed treatment too.

Regarding the timeline: it has long been a commonplace that Marx failed to foresee Keynesianism and the welfare state. His biggest blind spot was nationalism, and in general the power of the capitalist nation-state as an organizing principle of social life. Ironically, Marxism is crucial to explaining both, since both are largely grounded in conditions of class conflict, the social pathologies and disorders that arise out of such conflict, and the development and needs of the maturing capitalist economy.[3]

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[1] See his (and Max Horkheimer's) book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), which, in effect, puts much of the blame for the violence, authoritarianism, and barbarism of modern society on rationality and science themselves. This argument is very idealistic and un-Marxian.

[2] W. W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilisation* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1952), 360.

[3] A large literature explores these themes. On Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, for instance, one might consult G. William Domhoff and Michael J. Webber, *Class and Power in the New Deal: Corporate Moderates, Southern Democrats, and the Liberal-Labor Coalition* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), and Thomas Ferguson,

In essence, while Marx was right to locate a capitalist tendency toward relative or, sometimes, absolute immiseration of the working class, he was wrong that this tendency could not be effectively counteracted, at least for a long time, by opposing pressures. That is, he underestimated the power of tendencies toward integration of the working class into the dominant order, toward "pure and simple trade-unionism," toward the state's stabilizing management of the economy, and toward workers' identification not only with the abstract notion of a social class that spans continents but also with the more concrete facts of ethnicity, race, trade, immediate community, and nation. These forces have historically militated against the revolutionary tendencies of class polarization and international working-class solidarity. They have both fragmented the working class and made possible the successes of reformism—the welfare state, social democracy, and the legitimization of mass collective bargaining in the wake of the Great Depression and World War II. Like other Enlightenment thinkers, Marx was too optimistic.

On the other hand, he was right that capitalism is not sustainable—because of its "contradictions," its dysfunctional social consequences, and also its effects on the natural environment. No compromises between capital and wage-labor, such as the postwar Keynesian compromise, can last. The market is simply too anarchic, and capital too voracious. Permanent stability is not possible. Sooner or later, with the continued development of the productive forces, capital mobility increases, markets—including labor markets—become more integrated worldwide, elite institutional networks thicken worldwide, and organized labor loses whatever power it had in the days of limited capital mobility. In retrospect, one can see that these tendencies were irresistible. Genuine socialism on an international or global scale never could have happened in the twentieth century, which was still the age of oligopolistic, imperialistic capitalism, even state capitalism. In fact, it was not until the twenty-first century that the capitalist mode of production was consolidated across the entire globe, a development Marx assumed was necessary as a prerequisite for socialism (or communism).

The irony, therefore—and history is chock-full of dialectical irony—is that authentic revolutionary possibilities of post-capitalism could not open up until the victories of the left in the twentieth century had been eroded and defeated by hyper-mobile capital. The corporatist formations of social democracy and industrial unionism, fully integrated into the capitalist nation-state, had to decline in order for class polarization in the core capitalist states to peak again, deep economic crisis to return, and radical anti-capitalist movements to reappear (as we may expect they'll do in the coming decades). Many Marxists don't like this type of thinking, according to which things have to get worse before they get better, but Marx himself looked forward to economic crisis because he understood it was only such conditions that could impel workers to join together *en masse* and fight for something as radical as a new social order.

The best evidence for the "things have to get worse before they get better" thesis is that the relatively non-barbarous society of the postwar era in the West was made possible only by the upheavals of the Great Depression and World War II, which mobilized the left on such an epic scale and so discredited fascism that the ruling class finally consented to a dramatic improvement of conditions for workers. Similarly, it is possible that generations from now people will think of neoliberalism, with its civilization-endangering horrors, as having been a tool of (in Hegel's words) the "cunning" of historical reason by precipitating the demise of the very society whose consummation it was and making possible the rise of something new.

But how will such a revolution occur? This is another point on which Marx tripped up. Despite his eulogy of the non-statist Paris Commune, Marx was no anarchist: he expected that the proletariat would have to seize control of the national state and then carry out the social revolution from the commanding

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Golden Rule: The Investment Theory of Party Competition and the Logic of Money-Driven Political Systems (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995). On fascism, relevant works include Robert A. Brady, *The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism* (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1937); Daniel Guérin, *Fascism and Big Business* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973); and Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship* (New York: Verso, 2018 [1974]). For a classic semi-Marxist analysis of various types of state formation, see Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993 [1966]).

heights of government. This is clear from the ten-point program laid out in the *Communist Manifesto*—the specifics of which he repudiated in later years, but apparently not the general conception of statist reconstruction of the economy. It is doubtful, for example, that he would have rejected his earlier statement that "The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class." Moreover, he seems to have endorsed Engels' statement in *Anti-Dühring* that "The proletariat seizes state power, and then transforms the means of production into state property." It appears, then, that both he and Engels were extreme statists, even though, like anarchists, they hoped and expected that the state would (somehow, inexplicably) disappear eventually.

In these beliefs they were mistaken. The social revolution cannot occur *after* a total seizure of state power by "the proletariat" (which isn't a unitary entity but contains divisions)—for several reasons. First, this conception of revolution contradicts the Marxian understanding of social dynamics, a point that few or no Marxists appear ever to have appreciated. It exalts a centralized *conscious will* as being able to plan social evolution in advance, a notion that is utterly undialectical. According to "dialectics," history happens behind the backs of historical actors, whose intentions never work out exactly as they're supposed to. Marx was wise in his admonition that we should never trust the self-interpretations of political actors. And yet he suspends this injunction when it comes to the dictatorship of the proletariat: *these* people's designs are supposed to work out perfectly and straightforwardly, despite the massive complexity and dialectical contradictions of society.

The statist idea of revolution is also wrong to privilege the political over the economic. In supposing that through sheer political will one can transform an authoritarian, exploitative economy into a liberatory, democratic one, Marx is, in effect, reversing the order of "dominant causality" such that politics determines the economy (whereas in fact the economy "determines"—loosely and broadly speaking—politics).[1] Marxism itself suggests that the state cannot be socially creative in this radical way. And when it tries to be, what results, ironically, is overwhelming bureaucracy and even *greater* authoritarianism than before. (While the twentieth century's experiences with so-called "Communism" or "state socialism" happened in relatively non-industrialized societies, not advanced capitalist ones as Marx anticipated, the dismal record is at least suggestive.)

Fundamental to these facts is that if the conquest of political power occurs in a still-capitalist economy, revolutionaries have to contend with the institutional legacies of capitalism: relations of coercion and domination condition everything the government does, and there is no way to break free of them. They cannot be magically transcended through political will; to think they can, or that the state can "wither away" even as it becomes more expansive and dominating, is to adopt a naïve idealism.

Corresponding to all these errors are the flaws in Marx's abstract conceptualization of revolution, according to which revolution happens when the production relations turn into fetters on the use and development of productive forces. One problem with this formulation is that it is meaningless: at what point exactly do production relations begin to fetter productive forces? How long does this fettering have to go on before the revolution begins in earnest? How does one determine the degree of fettering? It would seem that capitalism has fettered productive forces for a very long time, for example in its proneness to recessions and stagnation, in artificial obstacles to the diffusion of knowledge such as intellectual copyright laws, in underinvestment in public goods such as education and transportation, and so forth. On the other hand, science and technology continue to develop, as shown by recent momentous advances in information technology. So what is the utility of this idea of "fettering"?

In fact, it can be made useful if we slightly reconceptualize the theory of revolution. Rather than a conflict simply between production relations and the development of productive forces, there is a conflict between *two types of production relations—two modes of production—one of which uses productive forces in a more socially rational and "un-fettering" way than the other*. The more progressive mode slowly develops in the womb of the old society as it decays, i.e., as the old dominant mode of production succumbs

[1] In reality, of course, political and economic relations are interlinked. But analytically one can distinguish economic activities from narrowly political, governmental activities.

to crisis and stagnation. In being relatively dynamic and 'socially effective,' the emergent mode of production attracts adherents and resources, until it becomes ever more visible and powerful. The old regime cannot eradicate it; it spreads internationally and gradually transforms the economy, to such a point that the forms and content of politics change with it. Political entities become its partisans, and finally decisive seizures of power by representatives of the emergent mode of production become possible, because reactionary defenders of the old regime have lost their dominant command over resources. And so, over generations, a social revolution transpires.

This conceptual revision saves Marx's intuition by giving it more meaning: the "fettering" is not absolute but is *in relation to* a more effective mode of production that is, so to speak, competing with the old stagnant one. The most obvious concrete instance of this conception of revolution is the long transition from feudalism to capitalism, during which the feudal mode became so hopelessly outgunned by the capitalist that, in retrospect, the long-term outcome of the "bourgeois revolutions" from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries was never in doubt. Capitalism was bound to triumph after it had reached a certain level of development.

But the important point is that capitalist interests could never have decisively "seized the state" until the capitalist economy had already made extensive inroads against feudalism. Likewise, socialist or post-capitalist interests surely cannot take over national states until they have vast material resources on their side, such as can only be acquired through large-scale participation in productive activities. As the capitalist economy descends into global crisis and stagnation over the next twenty, fifty and a hundred years, one can predict that an "alternative economy," a "solidarity economy" of cooperative and socialized relations of production will emerge both in society's interstices and, sooner or later, in the mainstream. In many cases it will be sponsored and promoted by the state (on local, regional, and national levels), in an attempt to assuage social discontent; but its growth will only have the effect of hollowing out the hegemony of capitalism and ultimately facilitating its downfall. And thereby the downfall, or radical transformation, of the capitalist state.

I cannot go into the detail necessary to flesh out this gradualist notion of revolution, but in my abovementioned book I have argued that it not only radically revises the Marxian conception (on the basis of a single conceptual alteration), in effect updating it for the twenty-first century, but that it is thoroughly grounded in Marxian concepts—in fact, is truer to the fundamentals of historical materialism than Marx's own vision of proletarian revolution was. The new society has to be erected on the foundation of emerging production relations, which cannot but take a very long time to broadly colonize society. And class struggle, that key Marxian concept, will be essential to the transformation: decades of continuous conflict between the masters and the oppressed, including every variety of disruptive political activity, will attend the construction—from the grassroots up to the national government—of anti-capitalist modes of production.

I'll also refer the reader to the book for responses to the conventional Marxian objections that cooperatives, for instance, are forced to compromise their principles by operating in the market economy, and that interstitial developments are not revolutionary. At this point in history, it should be obvious that a socialist revolution cannot occur in one fell swoop, one great moment of historical rupture, as "the working class" or its Leninist leaders storm the State, shoot all their opponents, and impose sweeping diktats to totally restructure society. (What an incredibly idealistic and utopian conception that is!) The conquest of political power will occur piecemeal, gradually; it will suffer setbacks and then proceed to new victories, then suffer more defeats, etc., in a many-generations-long process that happens at different rates in different countries. It will be a time of world-agony, especially as climate change will be devastating civilization; but the sheer numbers of people whose interests will lie in a transcendence of corporate capitalism will constitute a formidable weapon on the side of progress.

As for the details of what this long process will look like, we must follow Marx, again, in shunning speculation. He is sometimes criticized for saying too little about what socialism or communism would look like, but this was in fact very democratic and sensible of him. It is for the people engaged in struggles to hammer out their own institutions, "to learn in the dialectic of history," as Rosa Luxemburg said. Nor is it possible, in any case, to foresee the future in detail. All we can do is try to advance the struggle and leave the rest to our descendants.

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Marx is practically inexhaustible, and one cannot begin to do him justice in a single essay. His work has something for both anarchists and Leninists, for existentialists and their critics, cultural theorists and economists, philosophers and even scientists.[1] Few thinkers have ever been subjected to such critical scrutiny and yet held up so well over centuries. To attack him, as usefully idiotic lackeys of the capitalist class do, for being responsible for twentieth-century totalitarianism is naïve idealism of the crudest sort. Ideas do not make history, though they can be useful tools in the hands of reactionaries or revolutionaries. They can be misunderstood, too, and used inappropriately or in ways directly contrary to their spirit—as the Christianity of Jesus has, for example, and, not rarely, the Marxism of Marx.

But in our time of despair and desperation, with the future of the species itself in doubt, there is one more valid criticism to be made of Marx: he was too sectarian, too eager to attack people on the left with whom he disagreed. In this case, Chomsky's attitude is more sensible: the left must unite and not exhaust its energy in internecine battles. Let's be done with all the recriminations between Marxists and anarchists and left-liberals, all the squabbling that has gone on since the mid-nineteenth century. It is time to unite against the threat of fascism and—not to speak over-grandiosely—save life on Earth.

Let's honor the memory of all the heroes and martyrs who have come before us by rising to the occasion, at this climactic moment of history.

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The Stupefying Mediocrity of Barack Obama

As a Marxist, I'm not very interested in the psychology of the powerful. I don't think it matters much, and it tends to be pretty uniform and predictable anyway: self-overestimation, self-justification, moral rationalizations for every horrendous decision made, brutal callousness to human suffering beneath (at best) a veneer of concern, energies directed to machinations for increased power, cowardly accommodation to the path of least political resistance, a collective insularity of the golden-boy culture gilded with sycophants, etc. On the other hand, as a despiser of the complacent powerful, I enjoy belittling their grandiose pretensions. So sometimes I do like to wade into the muck of their psychology.

A *New York Times* article on May 30 entitled "How Trump's Election Shook Obama: 'What if We Were Wrong?'" provided an opportunity to indulge in this sordid pastime. According to one of his aides, after the election Obama speculated that the cosmopolitan internationalism of enlightened intellectuals like him had been responsible for the stunning outcome. "Maybe we pushed too far," he said. "Maybe people just want to fall back into their tribe." In other words, we were too noble and forward-thinking for the benighted masses, who want nothing more than to remain submerged in their comforting provincial identities. We were too ambitious and idealistic for our flawed compatriots.

"Sometimes I wonder whether I was 10 or 20 years too early," Obama sighed. The country hadn't been ready for the first black president and his lofty post-racial vision.

These quotations are all the evidence one needs to understand what goes on in the mind of someone like Barack Obama.

In fact, the last quotation is revealing enough in itself: it alone suggests the incredible dimensions of Obama's megalomania. It is hardly news that Obama is a megalomaniac, but what is moderately more interesting is the contemptible and deluded nature of his megalomania. He clearly sees himself as the culmination of the Civil Rights Movement—he who participated in no sit-ins, no Freedom Rides, no boycotts or harrowing marches in the Deep South, who suffered no police brutality or nights in jail, who attended Harvard Law and has enjoyed an easy and privileged adulthood near or in the corridors of power. This man who has apparently never taken a courageous and unpopular moral stand in his life decided long

[1] See Richard Levins and Richard Lewontin, *The Dialectical Biologist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

ago that it was his historic role to bring the struggles of SNCC and the SCLC, of Ella Baker and Bob Moses, of A. Philip Randolph and Martin Luther King, Jr. to their fruition—by sailing into the Oval Office on the wave of millions of idealistic supporters, tireless and selfless organizers. With his accession to power, and that of such moral visionaries as Lawrence Summers, Hillary Clinton, Timothy Geithner, Eric Holder, Arne Duncan, Robert Gates, and Samantha Power, MLK's dream was at last realized.

Obama was continuing in the tradition of Abraham Lincoln and the abolitionists when his administration deported more than three million undocumented immigrants and broke up tens of thousands of immigrant families. He was being an inspiring idealist when he permitted arms shipments to Israel in July and August 2014 in the midst of the Gaza slaughter—because, as he said with characteristic eloquence and moral insight, "Israel has a right to defend itself" (against children and families consigned to desperate poverty in an open-air prison).

He was being far ahead of his time, a hero of civil rights, when he presided over "the greatest disintegration of black wealth in recent memory" by doing nothing to halt the foreclosure crisis or hold anyone accountable for the damage it caused. Surely it was only irrational traditions of tribalism that got Trump elected, and not, say, the fact that Obama's administration was far more friendly to the banking sector than George H. W. Bush's was, as shown for instance by the (blatantly corrupt) hiring of financial firms' representatives to top positions in the Justice Department.

And it's only because the masses are stupid and prejudiced that they couldn't see the glorious benefits they would have received from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, one of the few issues in which Obama seems genuinely to have been emotionally invested. What primitive tribalists they are to be worried about the loss of millions of manufacturing jobs, the increase of prices for medicines, inadequate protection of the environment, and in general massive empowerment of corporations.

Taken together, the two quotations above that constituted Obama's initial explanation of Trump's victory—'we pushed too far' and 'I was too ahead of my time'—also confirm the not very surprising fact that the moral issue of *class* doesn't exist for him, as (by definition) it doesn't exist for any centrist politician. Obama may have paid lip-service to it in his rhetoric, but what he cared about more was a threadbare type of identity politics, cultural inclusivity, symbols and spectacles of the post-racial, post-nationalist millennium, of which he saw himself as the great exemplar. If Trump was elected it can only be because people aren't ready for this millennium quite yet. But that doesn't affect Obama's own place in history: he is certain he'll be vindicated, indeed will be viewed as even more remarkable for having come too soon.

This perception probably also explains his general reluctance to publicly criticize Trump or other politicians. He simply doesn't *care* enough to do so—he has nothing like a deep outrage against the continuous injustices of Trumpian politics—because his task has already been accomplished: he has written himself into the history books by being the U.S.'s first black president. That achievement is what matters, that and his eight years of (supposed) attempts to "heal the country's divides." Again, it's too bad the country wasn't ready for him, but that isn't his fault.

Thus, rather than getting involved in any real resistance to neofascism—which might exacerbate cultural divisions, horror of horrors, and wouldn't be decorous or "presidential" (for the powerful shouldn't criticize each other)—the Obamas are now planning to produce shows on Netflix that will be unpolitical and "inspirational." This new project of theirs is symptomatic. Powerful people like to propagate "uplifting" stories, for anything else might prick their conscience, challenge the legitimacy of the social order from which they benefit, and inspire resistance movements. Better to focus on feel-good stories that reassure people about the essential justness of the world, or that inculcate the notion that anyone can improve their situation if they only try. This is the same reason that Bill Gates' new favorite book is Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now*, which argues that things are far better now than they've ever been, so we should all be grateful.

I happened to watch a video recently in which Norman Finkelstein psychoanalyzed Obama, and his interpretation stuck with me. Not because the pathetic person who was being analyzed is of any intrinsic interest, but because the *type he represents* is always with us—and will always be popular, and will always be morally and intellectually vacuous. Finkelstein had learned from reading David Garrow's biography

that, as president of the Harvard Law Review, Obama had a very conciliating style. Whenever arguments arose between the conservatives and the liberals he approached the problem in the same way: he took the interlocutors aside and said, "Don't get so excited, it's not such a big deal. Why are you getting so excited? There are bigger things in life." "Because for Obama," Finkelstein explains, "there was only one big deal in life: *me*. Everything else was just small change, except him."

That's the key. When your overriding value in life is self-glorification, what you tend to get is the moral cowardice and fecklessness of people like Obama, the Clintons, and, in truth, all centrist politicians. They'll do whatever they have to do to rise to power, so they can realize their "destiny"—of being powerful. They'll always try to please "both sides"—a binary notion that leaves out the genuine left, which is to say the interests of the large majority of people—because that is the safest and surest road to power.

Which brings us to Obama's real legacy, as opposed to the one he imagines. The moment he committed himself to a life of pale centrism in a time of escalating social crisis, he determined what his place in history would be. I'm reminded of Georg Lukács's analysis of Germany's waffling liberal intelligentsia during the 1920s in his book *The Destruction of Reason*. The elite liberals of the Weimar Republic couldn't countenance fascism but wouldn't commit themselves to a decisive democratic program to resist it—for they feared socialism even more than fascism—so they ended up vacillating pathetically, criticizing mass democracy while on occasion semi-defending it, fecklessly counseling moderation, thereby enabling ultra-reaction.

While the U.S. is certainly not Weimar Germany, and the risks of full-blown fascism are not as great now as they were then, one can see parallels. Just as the feckless, vacillating liberalism of Jimmy Carter ushered in the reactionary age of Reagan, so the vacillating liberalism of Obama prepared the way for the semi-fascism of Trump and the reinvigoration of white supremacy. (So much for Obama's supposed furtherance of the Civil Rights Movement. He is arguably one of the worst things to have happened to minorities since the end of Jim Crow.) You can't be neutral on a moving train. If you try, you're actually on the side of the reactionaries.

Congratulations, Barack. You've written yourself into the history books.

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Imprisoned for a Day: A Personal Reflection

In a world defined by social atomization, bureaucratization, and ant-like regimentation along institutionally sanctioned channels that exist but to uphold hierarchies of power, it is practically a moral obligation for anyone who wants to be fully human to seek empathic understanding of "the other." In particular, of those without a voice. If we privileged ones cannot literally shed our privilege, we ought at least to imaginatively inhabit other perspectives, say by reading primary sources or watching documentaries, or simply by talking to people from a different walk of life than our own. The result might be not only education but even, perhaps, inspiration.

A few months ago I had the opportunity to experience a bit of life from a perspective I'm not accustomed to: the inside of a jail cell. I was left with a kind of insight that an academic like me doesn't always achieve, an experiential insight. And I thought it would be worth communicating my impressions, if only to play some minuscule part in giving a voice to the "voiceless." For, as much abstract knowledge as we may have about the evils of the system bearing the Orwellian name "criminal justice," the matter appears in a different and darker light from within the dungeon cages underground.

The reason for my 24-hour incarceration is too trivial to mention, scarcely more than a petty misunderstanding. And the experience itself was, of course, a mere joke compared to what others experience, just a stroll in a sunlit park compared to what the 23 million or so imprisoned and released felons in this country—in addition to millions of those guilty of misdemeanors (not to mention millions of immigrants detained for weeks and months)—have gone through. But it was memorable enough, and perhaps worth relating.

I was struck, first of all, by the insidious psychological effect of having to place your hands behind your back so they can be handcuffed. This coerced action performed in the presence of onlookers instantly manipulates you into an unwonted self-categorization: you can't help but see yourself as others now see you, an *offender*, a *criminal*, a *bad 'other.'* Or rather, while rejecting the value-judgment, you're aware that that's the category into which you've been placed, by the officers, the onlookers, and especially the handcuffs. All of a sudden you don't unproblematically belong to society anymore; your personhood has been qualified and thrown into question. You're now half-person and half-ominous-question-mark. ("What did he do? What crime did he commit?")

I was careful to obey every command to the letter, since, as we know, there is nothing a police officer likes less than being contradicted, so my treatment was far better than it could have been. Still, I was puzzled by the length of time I had to sit in the car while the officers talked outside in what seemed a rather nonchalant way, given my shackled hands. That's another insidious technique of control for which you have a heightened appreciation when you're on its receiving end: the power to elongate time. It truly becomes impressive once you're behind bars.

After making it to the precinct, the trial-by-paperwork begins. More waiting, and more unscratchable itches on your back and face, as initial reports are filed. I came to have a better understanding of the social role of the police as I saw throughout the evening how much "paperwork," or electronic work, they have to file whenever an arrest is made. I had already understood that the police's true function isn't so much to protect *people* (as is claimed) as to protect "*order*," the given system of social relations, which is to say the power of the powerful. The police officer—in addition to being simply a personification of state violence—is the "bouncer" for society, whose job it is to keep out the undesirables, those who either refuse to conform or have committed the crime of being poor and dark-skinned.

But now I saw more clearly that, in effect, what the police are is just bureaucrats—with guns. Bureaucrats who dress up in blue and walk among us to make sure we're following the rules, and who take us in to be processed and labeled and categorized if we violate some rule or other (or even if we don't), and ideally to be frightened into never violating that rule again (if, that is, we're lucky enough to be released at all). None of this is to say there is no value in such a role; surely there can be, particularly with regard to addressing violent crime. But, given the amount of paperwork and the continuous human "processing" the job entails, to belong to the "force" is to be a fancy-dressed bureaucrat-in-the-trenches.

At length, after being divested of various items of clothing and whatever is in your pockets, the shackles are taken off and you're safely behind bars. Your company is your cellmates (if you have any), your worries, and time. Lots of time. I sat there for about eight hours, which seemed even longer, due to the human brain's self-flagellating tendency to dwell lugubriously on moments of nothingness (while speeding through moments of joy). I was fortunate soon to have a couple of talkative cellmates, both of whom were there for having thrown a punch or two; but even their presence was of limited use in accelerating the ticking of the clock.

We were waiting to be transferred to the Brooklyn Detention Complex, where we would wait till the next day to see the judge. If all went well, we'd be free, at least provisionally, by that evening.

So after a suitably punishing length of time, the handcuffs were snapped back on and we were transported to our luxury accommodations for the rest of the night. Actually, the precinct was a far more agreeable place, as you might expect, being less populated and less redolent of sweaty unwashed bodies crammed together in tiny spaces lacking ventilation and windows. The initial holding pens, in particular, were noisome: it would be cruel and inhumane to pack pigs into those enclosures, much less dozens of humans. At least one's nose grew numb to the smell.

Finally we were herded into the main area to be processed again (to have the mug shots taken and so on). Though it was around 1:00 in the morning there were serpentine lines, scores of shackled men and women shuffling along—nearly all of them African-American or Hispanic. A dreary semi-silence punctuated by commands from officers. Dull-looking bureaucrats from a Kafka novel sitting at desks, directing us where to go. It was a subterranean world we had entered.

At last the intake process was finished and we were taken down dark corridors to the cellblock area, in the bowels of the earth. You can imagine the conditions in each cell: a vomitous toilet in the corner, a

metal sink next to it, benches against the concrete wall…and that's all. So there we were, about thirteen of us in a cramped cell, as the bars shut behind us. I recalled Malcolm X's admonition:

> Any person who claims to have deep feeling for other human beings should think a long, long time before he votes to have other men kept behind bars—caged. I am not saying there shouldn't be prisons, but there shouldn't be bars. Behind bars, a man never reforms. He will never forget. He never will get completely over the memory of the bars.

To be sure, it's easy to get over the memory when you're confined for only a day. Still, the contrivance of the steel bars is an effective contribution to the psychological function of jails and prisons, viz. to dehumanize, to animalize, to infantilize.

Some of us claimed a bit of space on a bench; the rest sat or lay on the floor, settling in for a long night of sleeplessness. One guy made a pillow out of several inedible cheese sandwiches in little bags he had found strewn around the cell. (That's the food we're given, in addition to a small portion of cereal in the morning.) Those of us on the floor spent the night trying to avoid collisions between legs.

Sleep would likely have been impossible for me anyway, but it was made even more so by a few cellmates who had an impressive talent for remaining animated hour after hour, in a most vocal way. The guffaws were frequent. I listened to interesting conversations about, for example, the relative merits of an astonishing galaxy of hip-hop artists, quite intelligent music criticism being expounded at great length, even to the point of heated debate. Later, conversation extended to those in the cage across the hall, questions being shouted as to where they lived, what acquaintances they all had in common, what they had been talking about over there, etc. "What's your name, man? Oh, you live on Broadway? Me too! Monroe? I'm a couple blocks away, at Jefferson! You know Malik? He's on Madison—works at the Subway there." The irony wasn't lost on me that this institution, meant to segregate and isolate, could also bring people together.

In fact, through the night and the next day I observed how easy it was for a camaraderie to develop among the inmates, the first inklings of a solidarity against the cops. While profanity-laced tirades against guards occurred occasionally—due to ignoring requests for food or for the time, or for being granted a phone call—more often the attitude was informal respect and easygoing familiarity. But that didn't preclude a definite collective identity, an "us vs. them" mentality, based on a sense of shared injustice and oppression (or, more generally, shared interests). Everyone I talked to took it for granted that the criminal justice system is wildly racist—they were surprised that a "white boy" was in there with them. But the race factor, or any other divisive factor, didn't really matter: when requests or demands or complaints were made to the guards, it was far more common to hear the words "we" and "us" than "I" or "me."

Of course, this isn't to deny that vicious divisions between inmates or groups of inmates emerge in prisons. It was merely striking to observe the spontaneous appearance of a collective consciousness even despite, and because of, the radically anti-social environment we were trapped in.

What I found even more striking, and poignant, was the casual familiarity with jail that most of the men displayed. None of them seemed particularly discomfited by it, except the next day when the waiting, prolonged hour after endless hour despite previous assurances of speed and efficiency, grew intolerable. More than a few guys took me under their wing, as it were, and explained how the system worked and why legally I had nothing to fear. "What did you do? Oh, that's the lowest level of misdemeanor. You'll be fine—they'll release you and you'll be on probation, and then the case will be dismissed. You have nothing to worry about." Their expertise reminded me of Dave Chappelle's bit: "Every black dude in this room is a qualified paralegal. If one of us even started to do something wrong, an old black man would pop out of nowhere—'Nigga don't do that, that's five to ten!'"

It was clear that jail, and its ever-present possibility, was just a part of their lives, as, say, being paid very little is a part of the life of an adjunct professor. I tried to imagine what that would be like, how different all my frames of reference would be. I would literally perceive the world differently: my perceptions would incorporate and embody utterly different value-judgments than they do, different expectations from moment to moment, and I'd have to be cognizant of entire dimensions of experience—

fears, worries, possibilities, factors to be taken into consideration—that are currently beyond my horizons. The understanding sank in on a visceral level of my privilege.

But more than that: I could see my own views of the world changing somewhat. After all, to sit on a floor against steel bars for twelve hours, and then several hours more when I was moved up to the even more crowded holding pen we wait in until the court is ready to see us, is an experience that encourages introspection. The situation felt both surreal and much more real than ordinary life. I thought of my daily routines, the mindless reading of news in the morning and evening, the pleasantries exchanged with fellow professors and students, the YouTube-watching at night in between grading and perusals of academic journals. I thought of the throngs that flood the streets of Manhattan every day on their shopping missions or sightseeing missions, and the bar-socializing with acquaintances—the trivialities shouted across the table over the din. It all seemed more hollow than ever.

Millions of us chatting happily outside or going to movies, averting our gaze from every unpleasantness, while other millions rot in steel-enclosed windowless misery—for throwing a few punches or having marijuana on them, or not legally being an American, or being poor and black in a white society. At this point I could say that our usual complacent behavior is contemptible and unconscionable, but what hit me most forcefully was just how *false* and *empty* it is. We live in and through illusion; our entire quotidian existence is grounded in denial. We have a pathetically *partial* view of the world, a parochial little outlook conditioned by frivolity and routine, blind to the very foundation of society underground in these cages that police the "dangerous classes." I felt that *here* was the truth, the beating heart of America.

For, as we know, we live in an overwhelmingly bureaucratized society, a world increasingly shorn of human connections—sacrificed on the altar of marketization and privatization—which is precisely why it's hurtling towards doom. Humanity is simply a non-factor in the political-economic equation. In fact, for a long time I've thought that the Holocaust, the apotheosis of bureaucratic inhumanity, is the clue to the moral essence of capitalist modernity, the perfect symbol. But on a less murderous scale, mass confinement in cages is an equally apt emblem. The prisoners are almost totally helpless, totally at the mercy of bureaucratic diktats and the whims of guards and wardens. And we know how helpless we all tend to feel with regard to any bureaucracy—government bureaucracies, insurance bureaucracies, workplace bureaucracies, bank bureaucracies. We're completely subordinated to power, with hardly any recourses. The arbitrary power over life and death is only more pronounced in the case of the "criminal justice" bureaucracy.

The prison bureaucracy takes the alienating tendencies of capitalist institutions to their logical and literal conclusion, in the separation of people into their own concrete cells and the enforcement of this isolation by armed guards. Actually, in a sense, jail or even prison might, perversely, be less isolating than the broader capitalist civilization they reflect, given that the basic unit of society is no longer the community or the family but really the lone individual with his computer and his smartphone—and, for his social context, the bureaucracy in which he is embedded (as employee, consumer, and citizen). At least in jail a "collective consciousness" can emerge, together with real sympathy and empathy. And the human interactions tend to have a stripped-down quality, a directness and rawness, very different from the impersonal fakeness outside.

By around 11 a.m. the remaining conversations in the cellblock had died down. By 12:00, and then 1:00, and then 2:00, an absolute listlessness had settled on us, except for periodic ejaculations of disgust at whatever incompetence or malice was keeping us down there. Time had stopped. I began to wonder if I'd ever be released; the thought of freedom seemed too good to be true. Maybe I'd be stuck here another day, or longer. Would I have to miss work on Monday? Some of the guys had missed work that day, putting their jobs in jeopardy. I looked at the bodies sprawled on the floor and thought, *This is what matters in the world. The rest is a lie, as long as this exists.* The way I'd lived, immersed in thoughts of self, seemed absurd and shameful. All that mattered was to fight against *this*, and all suffering. I had to make changes, drastic changes in how I lived. That *this* could exist, or conditions far worse than this, was intolerable.

At long last the moment of deliverance arrived: my name was called. Full of hope, I left the cell…to be transferred to another cell. In which there were perhaps thirty people, though it was scarcely larger than the one I'd spent the night in. But at least I was closer—so I hoped—to freedom. I was also trepidatious,

not knowing what to expect when I faced the judge, for instance whether he would set bail, or whether the DA would prosecute despite the triviality of the incident that had landed me there. Soon after I was in the new cell, a man came in cursing the judge, whom he had just seen. "That motherfucker set bail even higher than they asked for! $2000. As soon as I saw him look down at the sheet, I knew it was over. They said I had an old warrant for littering, so they went after me."

To be sure, others had committed more serious crimes than littering. One middle-aged guy, a jovial fellow, had been caught shoplifting at Macy's (to sell the items later). "I know what I did wrong now," he said. "I gotta be more careful when there aren't crowds. In the holiday season it was different—I probably took $20,000 worth. Easy. There are so many people it's easy." I noticed that they all drew a distinction between stealing and taking. "You don't *steal*," one guy said. "You *take*. A woman steals, I take. You gotta take it, just take what you need, it's yours, and walk out of there." Earlier I had talked to a pregnant young woman, attractive, confident, and articulate, who said she regularly steals—no, *takes*—expensive items from Macy's (again, to sell them on the street). It isn't really theft because she thinks she's entitled to it, in light of how much the government takes from her and how cruelly the System treats people like her. She has a job, but the pay isn't enough for her to provide for her family. It was clear to me that this sort of theft is widespread.

The situation, then, is predictably absurd: people are denied the ability to earn a living, and, in addition, government steals money from them when they can find work—yes, *steals*, for the logic of government is, arguably, no different from that of a protection racket—so they have to turn to illicit means of surviving; but in that case, if discovered, they're sent to prison. So it's Scylla or Charybdis. Deprivation or—deprivation in prison.

Meanwhile, my own brief period of deprivation was about to come to an end. The last couple of hours weren't particularly eventful, aside from when one of the inmates had a seizure, complete with foaming at the mouth. I can't say if it was due to negligence by the authorities, but my guess is not, since they acted fairly promptly to get him medical assistance. At any rate, by this point I was more than ready for freedom. Not to mention food. The thought of both was sweeter than I had ever known.

In the early evening my name was called for the last time, and I made my way to the courtroom. Whence to freedom, a half-hour later. Having no criminal record, I was let off easy. What happened to the others, I don't know. What I do know is that as I walked outside into the drizzling rain, the taste of freedom in the air, people in handcuffs were being ushered into the back entrance of the building, out of the rain-scented air and into the sweat-stinking holding pens. Many of them would be repeat offenders, and this latest arrest might have dire effects on their lives. It would be harder to get a job, which would tempt them to *take* what they needed, which would raise the possibility of another arrest, and so the cycle would continue. The System would continue to be fed fresh meat, and it would grow bigger in scale, and ever more lives would be ground up in its gears. The System would continue to dominate a diabolically *regimented* society—unless its victims and their advocates could, somehow, throw a wrench into its gears and grind them to a halt.

I didn't know how that could be done, but, newly inspired, I knew I had to take part.

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The American Oligarchy: A Book Review

Consumers of left-wing media are well aware that America is an oligarchy, not a democracy. Everyone with a functioning cerebrum, in fact, should be aware of it by now: even mainstream political scientists recognize it, as shown by a famous 2014 study by Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page. Nevertheless, it is important to continue to publicize the oligarchical character of the United States, in order to delegitimize the institutions that have destroyed democracy (insofar as it ever existed) and inspire people to take action to restore it. Ron Formisano's book *American Oligarchy: The Permanent Political Class* (2017) is a valuable contribution to this collective project.

"*American Oligarchy* has been written," Formisano says, "not to propose a path out of the New Gilded Age, but to discredit the political class by raking its muck between covers in black and white." Formisano certainly achieves his goal: the "political class" comes out stinking of, yes, a swamp, a putrid moral bog. This "networked layer of high-income people and those striving for wealth including many politicians in and out of office, lobbyists, consultants, appointed bureaucrats, pollsters, television celebrity journalists (but not investigative reporters), and the politically connected in the nation's capital and in the states" calls to mind in its hedonism, corruption, money-worship, and giddy myopia the decadent Senate-attached aristocracy of the late Roman Republic, greedy beyond the dreams of avarice.

The term 'aristocracy' is apt, for Formisano argues convincingly that the U.S. is headed beyond oligarchy to an aristocracy of inherited wealth, complete with all the ideological and cultural trappings of aristocracy. Our exalted rentiers and their service-providers have the usual attitudes of aristocratic entitlement to all good things in this world (and exclusion of the non-rich), sputtering rage at the occasional prospect of losing a particle of their preferential tax treatment, and the valorization of nepotism as first among the virtues. "The rampant nepotism of the political class fuels the galloping socioeconomic inequality of the twenty-first century." The main differences between the American aristocracy of today and, say, the French aristocracy of the eighteenth century seem to be that the former has incomparably lower cultural (and architectural) tastes than the latter and is incomparably more destructive of society and the natural environment.

The circles in which the nation's political leaders and their thousands of well-heeled minions travel are indeed reminiscent of some enormous eighteenth-century court. Over half the members of Congress are millionaires, with a total worth in 2013 of $4.3 billion; but even the ones whose income is of a mere six figures are able to live like millionaires. The reason is that the gears of Washington are greased by a "gift economy," which, to quote ex-lobbyist Jack Abramoff, amounts to "a system of legalized bribery. All of it is bribery, every bit of it."

In 2007 Congress passed a law prohibiting lobbyists from giving gifts to representatives, but, as Abramoff says, in effect "they just reshuffled the deck… They're still playing the same game." Campaign committees and "Leadership PACs" pay for the many luxurious trips legislators take around the world, as do lobbyists and donors. Golf outings, lavish "conferences," fishing in the Florida Keys, skiing in Colorado, trips to Paris or Vienna or Hawaii, innumerable expensive parties and receptions and breakfasts with lobbyists and donors—all are paid for by either tax dollars or various committees, lobbying firms, corporate interests, etc. Aside from the obviously corrupting influence of all this legalized bribery, it matters a great deal that "politicians have no experience of poverty." In fact, from 1998 to 2008 only 13 members of Congress came from blue-collar backgrounds, and they had long ago left behind that experience. No wonder policy almost never favors the working class.

Meanwhile, while in 1970 only 3 percent of members leaving Congress moved into lobbying, now well over half do. As do thousands of congressional aides. In addition to reinforcing the insularity and chumminess of the Beltway culture, this "accelerating exodus of staffers to K Street…has had the effect of increasing the power of lobbyists by shortening the overall tenure of staffers." As the latter group becomes younger and less experienced, lobbyists take on an ever-greater role in crafting legislation—increasingly byzantine legislation that is difficult even for staffers to understand, which further enhances the power of lobbyists.

Formisano documents with admirable thoroughness the fact that the foremost concern of politicians and the politically connected in both the nation's capital and the states is to look out "for me and mine." The most obvious and common means of doing so is to monetize one's public service, but almost as common is the practice of nepotism. "[T]he political class practices nepotism routinely, brazenly, and shamelessly, giving their 'nephews' plum jobs, promotions, a place at the head of the line." Donald Trump may (unsurprisingly) be even more shameless than most, with his political use of his daughter, his son-in-law, and his sons—one of whom has remarked candidly that nepotism "is a beautiful thing." But the second Bush administration took nepotism to a high art, given, for example, the important roles of Liz Cheney, her husband, and her son-in-law; the Mehlman brothers, the McLellans, the Powells, and Ted Cruz and his wife; the Martins, the Ackerlys, and the Ullmans, etc. The Obama administration was hardly innocent

either, though it didn't go to quite the extremes of its predecessor. Children of governors and members of Congress fare well too, whether serving in politics, in law firms, in businesses that benefit from political connections, or as lobbyists.

The media are almost as riddled with nepotism as politics. When her mother was Secretary of State, Chelsea Clinton was hired by NBC as a television journalist, making $600,000 a year ($26,724 for every minute she was televised). CNN's Andrea Koppel, Anderson Cooper, Jeffrey Toobin, and Chris Cuomo are beneficiaries of nepotism, as are (at other channels and publications) Douglas Kennedy, Chris Wallace, Mark Halperin, Mika Brzezinski, Bill Kristol, Ronan Farrow, Luke Russert, Meghan McCain, Jenna Bush, Jackie Kucinich, and others. Formisano concludes, "Whether the field is literature, television, entertainment, or politics, the hallmark of this New Gilded Age of Inequality is 'naked, unabashed favoritism,' and the shameless effrontery of those who give and receive it."

American Oligarchy also contains long discussions of the nonprofit world, specifically of its contributions to rising income inequality. The nonprofit sector employs 10 percent of the U.S. workforce, and in 2010 corporations, government, and individuals donated $300 billion to charitable enterprises. At least $40 billion every year is lost to "fraud, theft, personal enrichment of executives, and misappropriation." In general, the culture of large nonprofits is approximately that of the permanent political class in Washington.

University presidents and hospital CEOs, for instance, can make millions of dollars a year, and that doesn't include such perks as bonuses, deferred compensation, auto allowances, and financial planning. In the same years as student debt has soared and state funding has declined, university foundations have been used as slush funds for big payouts and personal expenses for presidents and other administrators. Even more egregiously, nonprofit hospitals have initiated hundreds of lawsuits against patients who couldn't pay and have routinely had arrest warrants issued and jailed debtors. Conversely, lawsuits have been filed against hundreds of hospitals in seventeen states for gouging the poor.

In other cases, nonprofits have in effect become allies of the forces they're supposed to be challenging. A particularly outrageous instance is that of The Nature Conservancy, "by far the wealthiest green group with well over $6 billion in assets." On its governing board and advisory committees sit executives of oil and chemical companies, mining and logging businesses, auto manufacturers, and coal-burning electric utilities, who have influence over the group's policies. Even while preserving millions of acres, The Nature Conservancy has logged forests, drilled for natural gas under the last breeding ground of an endangered bird species, invested millions in energy companies, cultivated relationships with such polluters as ExxonMobil and BP, and sold its name and logo to companies that then claim undeserved credit for being green. Similarly, the World Wildlife Federation has close relationships with both Monsanto and the rainforest-destroying palm oil company Wilmer.

At any rate, the evidence Formisano amasses proves that the moral corruption of the American aristocracy has utterly polluted the ostensibly selfless and charitable world of nonprofits. From museums, public libraries, and human rights organizations to symphony orchestras, veterans' groups, and environmental organizations, excessive executive compensation, corporate ties, and outright corruption have perverted the public mission of nonprofits.

American Oligarchy is not an uplifting read. Its chapter on Kentucky, a case-study of political corruption in a poor state, is, despite the detached analytical tone, at times wrenching, in particular when you reflect on all the human suffering that is the corollary of the aristocracy's venality and greed. On the one hand are profits for Purdue Pharma in the billions of dollars, and power and money for a complicit political class; on the other hand are numberless opioid deaths and lives ruined by addiction.

But books such as this are indispensable in their bleakness, since we live in bleak times that call for unstinting exposés. Perhaps as the backlash against Donald Trump grows, *American Oligarchy* and books like it will acquire a wide readership and so contribute to the radicalization of a generation.

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Glimmers of Hope: The Death of the Old and Arrival of the Young

If there is a silver lining in Donald Trump's sadistic presidency, we saw it on vivid display on June 26. The victories of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ben Jealous against establishment candidates confirm what many have been saying since last year, that Trump is one of the greatest recruiting tools the left has ever had. He is, as it were, a personification and distillation of all the evils of neoliberal capitalism, all the decadence, the corruption, the awe-inspiring greed and misanthropy, the savage disregard for humanity and all things living in the cause of a debased and orgiastic self-glorification whose telos is the self-immolation of civilization itself. Combined with the success of Bernie Sanders' campaign, the barbarity of the Trump administration is inspiring a new generation of leftists.

Let's just take a moment to revel in and reflect on the victories of June 26. In themselves they might not seem like much, at least in light of the enormity of the crises we're facing, but it's clear, at any rate, that Nancy Pelosi is wrong: it isn't just one or a few districts we're talking about, it's a nationwide groundswell of activism against the kind of politics she symbolizes, namely obedient service to the corporate sector. She and her elderly colleagues at the summit of the centrist power-hierarchy are on their way out, both politically and even existentially.

The 'age' factor is of interest and importance. On one side there are the old representatives of business, corrupted from decades at the center of power: Pelosi, 78; Steny Hoyer, 79; Jim Clyburn, 77; Maxine Waters, 79; Diane Feinstein, 85; Chuck Schumer, an impressively young 67; Patrick Leahy, 78; Dick Durbin, 73; Bill Nelson, 75; Richard Blumenthal, 72. You get the point. The 115th Congress is among the oldest in history, with an average age in the House of 58 years and an average age in the Senate of 62. (The Republican House leadership is over two decades younger than the Democratic House leadership. Fascism is a youthful, virile creed.) Given the senescence of the Democrats, the stillborn quality of their leadership is hardly a surprise.

On the other side, with the notable exception of Bernie Sanders, is relative youth. Ocasio-Cortez is 28; Jealous is 45; Kshama Sawant in Seattle is 44; Keith Ellison is 54; Dana Balter, who defeated the DCCC-supported Juanita Perez Williams in a race in New York, is 42; Chokwe Antar Lumumba, left-wing mayor of Jackson, Mississippi, is 35; and in general, a tidal wave of millennials is poised to engulf local and state politics. National organizations have sprung up to help young progressives run and win, and groups like Indivisible and the Democratic Socialists of America are proving effective in their advocacy of candidates. Young women are running in record numbers.

However fatuous it sounds, I can't help remarking that leaders of past revolutions have tended to be quite young. Robespierre, Danton, Mirabeau, Desmoulins, Saint-Just, Brissot, and their colleagues were between their twenties and (in one case) early forties; so were Jefferson, Madison, the two Adamses, Hancock, Hamilton, and most of the other "Founding Fathers" during the American Revolution. Trotsky and most Bolsheviks were not yet 40 in 1917. Such has always been the pattern, from Thomas Müntzer in the German Peasants' War to Castro and Che Guevara in the Cuban Revolution. America, of course, is nowhere near a revolution—in fact, some such seizure of power is likely hopeless in conditions of advanced capitalism—but with the mass entrance onto the political stage of a younger generation not jaded from a lifetime of disappointment or brainwashed from old propaganda about socialism or the virtues of centrism, American politics may be at the beginning of a long march to the left. Or at least away from the center, to both the semi-fascist right and, on a broader scale among the sane majority, the left.

The Democratic Party's leadership for the last generation has served its heinous historic function of overseeing, in partnership with Republicans, the shredding of the postwar social contract, the decimation of organized labor, the global triumph of the capitalist mode of production, and the inauguration of a new Gilded Age. That was the service rendered by the likes of the Clintons, Obama, Biden, Pelosi, Schumer, Harry Reid, Tom Daschle, the whole rotten lot of them. It was an almost wholly negative service, except in that—as Marx might see it—the class struggle has been brought to a screaming pitch of intensity and the door to radical change has once again been opened. At the nadir of the neoliberal era, with a buffoonish man-child capitalist-poster-boy at the helm of the ship of state, popular movements are beginning—one hopes—to point the way to a new political economy. Leaders can, it seems, be elected even without funding from the corporate sector, which makes them beholden only to their popular constituency. The worse things

get under Trump and afterwards, the more people will be radicalized, and the better things may get in the long run.

Again, it's worth pausing at this moment of the changing of the guard—a moment that will, of course, last years, as we wait for the old guard to die off or lose elections—to consider just how *abject* the leadership of the Democratic Party is. Insofar as it was ever even nominally committed to helping the poor, the working class, and minorities, it has failed abysmally. It gave us Bush and it gave us Trump, and it gave us the Bush-lite and the Trump-lite administrations of Bill Clinton and Obama. Obama wanted to be a transformative figure, and in a sense he succeeded: he transformed millions of hopeful idealists into disillusioned cynics.

But in substance the Democrats were never committed to anything like genuine populism, so their "failures" are in reality a reflection of their priorities. By their fruits ye shall know them. (It's also true, though, that there is a remarkable amount of incompetence at the top of the Democratic Party. Hillary Clinton's campaign, for instance, was stunningly incompetent.)

Whether the party can, even on local or state levels, be transformed from an agent of reaction to one of democracy remains to be seen. The strategy of "boring from within" has, historically, yielded disappointment after disappointment, from the Populists of 1896 to countless attempts by organized labor to push the party left. On the other hand, one cannot simply extrapolate the future from the past. History is not a science; with changed circumstances can come changed outcomes. In all likelihood, left-wing leaders will emerge in the context both of third parties and of the Democratic Party, which in the long run will itself become more leftist—while at the same time full of internal conflict (much as the Labour Party of Jeremy Corbyn has been—and the Republican Party, for that matter).

But for now, I think we're entitled to some savoring of Joe Crowley's defeat and some cautious optimism about the future. God knows we could use a bit of hope, after decades of defeat.

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Thoughts on Overcoming Despair

As a leftist, I'm used to despair. How many hours have I, like so many others with an ounce of humanity in them, sat alone in my room miserably reading about global warming, horror-struck at the scorching hellscape we're leaving our descendants? How many times have I sat frozen in rage and disgust as I thought of the impunity of the "masters of war" sheltered behind piles of money, protected from the just comeuppance due them for their genocidal war-games—for it's all a bureaucratic game for them, a very serious game involving clever political maneuvers geared to the sole objective of conquering even greater power and wealth. On the one hand are the Henry Kissingers (who of course live forever) and Barack Obamas making the cocktail-party rounds, being fêted by a fetid power-worshiping culture of amoral sycophants and groupthinking herd-people, the social climbers never disturbed by a twinge of conscience despite the most unspeakable of crimes. On the other hand are their victims: the thousands of young people, mercenary instruments of the powerful, drawing their last agonized breath in muddy blood-puddles on the battlefield; the children clinging to their mother's mutilated corpse, looking around the street for her arms blown off her body when the bomb exploded; the father who comes home to find that his house and his family no longer exist. How can one not *grieve—forever*—from all this, and from the absurdity and meaninglessness of such a tragic, farcical world?

It's so easy to see no hope whatsoever. Or to recoil misanthropically into one's cocoon away from the stupidity and evil of late capitalism. It would seem that almost everywhere, the signs portend doom. There is no need to interpret them all, yet again. Others have done so with great eloquence, and one has but to read the daily news or contemplate mass obsessions with pop celebrities and the latest video games to come in danger of losing all vestiges of faith in humanity.

But then, after I turn away from the overwhelming bleakness, a contrary impulse enters my mind and I remember Goethe and Nietzsche: life-affirmation, despite everything, is a more profound truth than pessimism and despair. The latter are exactly what the bureaucrats-in-chief, the rulers of the world, want

you to feel, so that you'll do nothing and let them go on getting richer. Few states of mind are less revolutionary than the collapse of the will, than apathy or absolute hopelessness. It's more challenging, more productive, and, in a sense, more *beautiful*—even more moral—to affirm and not only to negate.

So I find it important to take breaks from the dreary reading and remind myself of simple joys and hope. It's essential to periodically rejuvenate the will, an imperative I personally can fulfill only by purging my mind of everything remotely bureaucratic, institutional, and authoritarian. For instance, it's very difficult for me to listen to, say, a festive Irish fiddle while thinking of peasants dancing outside in the spring air, shouting, cheering, and clapping, without at the same time feeling deep gratitude for being alive. Just imagining the scene, this bucolic antithesis of bureaucracy and authority, is enough to melt away the contempt and despair. Or I might listen to Beethoven, the greatest of all life-affirmers, whether in one of his exuberant moods or in a ravishingly lyrical one. Or Schubert, or Mozart. Good classical music is perhaps the most left-wing of all music, in its ennobling sublimity, its emotional accessibility, its democratic appeal to everyone from the age of 1 to 101, its rationalistic spirit, its humanism, its being the very opposite of everything commodified, artificial, machine-like, and money-produced. Nothing is less stained than Mozart.

This is the spirit that ought to, and tends to, animate the left, this freedom-loving anarchistic spirit of sheer creative individuality. Which of course goes along with the creative and democratic *collective*, since in a truly human society "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." We should leave everything that vitiates hope and vitality to the right-wing, since the right-wing is defined, in effect, by its commitment to the anti-human: hierarchy, capital accumulation, profits over people, privatization and atomization, ecological destruction, hatred of the Other, bigoted nationalism, imperialistic savagery, etc. Apathy and hopelessness are appropriate right-wing emotions; bureaucracy and institutional thinking are right-wing phenomena (notwithstanding the usual reactionary attacks on "government bureaucracy"). Joy and empathy are inherently left-wing, because deeply human, connecting, and empowering.

In the task of purging oneself of right-wing traits and maintaining a positive outlook, it's essential also to cultivate open-mindedness. One would expect those on the right to be closed-minded, not only because of the closed-off nature of the "authoritarian personality" but also because the essence of reactionary ideologies is commitment (explicit or implicit) to hierarchy and authority. The left-wing valorization of reason, dialogue, democracy, and empathy, however, should entail willingness to consider opposed perspectives on their merits rather than reflexively attacking them. It's unfortunate and ironic, then, that there's so much closed-mindedness on the left, so much sectarianism. Whether among Marxists, anarchists, Leninists, feminists, left-liberals, or any of the countless other schools and sub-schools of thought, the hostility to potentially challenging ideas is deplorably common. That Marx and Engels themselves were highly sectarian is no argument in favor of it. One has but to reflect on how much damage sectarianism inflicted on the New Left in the 1960s, not to mention the Old Left in the first half of the twentieth century, to realize that it's a pretty stupid way to behave. With greater openness to, and willingness to ally with, other non-reactionary perspectives comes greater political efficacy, a broader sense of solidarity and consequently "empowerment," a less narrow, crabbed, bitter, misanthropic individual character, and a more expansive and generous view of humanity and life itself. This is quite apart from the *principled* nature of such a stance, the fact that it is itself a realization of leftist morality.

Another way to overcome jaundice and despair is to appreciate the degree to which left-wing ideals are already manifest in ordinary life. For human nature has a solid anarchistic and communistic component. (See Kropotkin's classic *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*.) As David Graeber has argued, if communism means "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need," then it is the foundation of human sociability—"the raw material of sociality, a recognition of our ultimate interdependence that is the ultimate substance of social peace." The only reason society is able to function at all is that it's held together by a dense anti-capitalist fabric of sharing, helping, and cooperating, i.e., giving to others in need what you're able to give them, even simply advice, sympathy, assistance at some task, or a bit of money. In effect, to be a leftist means to want to elevate this "baseline communism" to a more determining principle of social organization, not only for its own sake but also because that would further the goals of popular freedom

and power. Rousseau may have been wrong that human beings are naturally "good" (though neither are they naturally bad; they're both), but at least we can appreciate and be grateful for the spontaneous communism and sympathetic happiness that continually well up from humans' psychic depths.

All these considerations and pleasures help me avoid a relentlessly dreary attitude, but in the age of Trump a new factor has come into play: genuine hope that a popular backlash against neoliberalism is developing. Finally! After forty years, it's about time. And since neoliberalism is just capitalism on steroids, capitalism itself is becoming a target for increasing numbers of people—to the horror of "moderate Democrats." The once-vital center is disintegrating, as a semi-fascist right and a semi-socialist left rise from its ashes. Such a historical moment certainly presents dangers, but it also presents opportunities not available during quiescent or "centrist" periods. In fact, history teaches us that progress can happen most rapidly in moments of crisis, when people are open to radicalization. The Great Depression in the U.S. is an obvious example, for it bred popular movements that birthed both the welfare state and mass industrial unionism. The inevitable next economic crash will have a similarly galvanizing effect on social movements, strengthening and radicalizing the "Resistance" that is currently in its infancy.

We are, indeed, embarking on an era second to none in historic importance. As I've argued in *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution: History and Possibilities in the United States*, it is only in the twenty-first century that a post-capitalist "revolution"—in whatever protracted, global form it will take—has finally been placed on the historical agenda. Marx, not foreseeing state capitalism and the welfare state, got the timeline wrong. But the basic idea of a final colossal confrontation between capital and the majority of humanity was accurate. Only, this 'final' confrontation will last generations. And it is beginning now, not a hundred years ago. With the stakes so large, this epoch really amounts to the climax of human history.

We can't know how the struggles will play out; we can only wage them, and analyze the historical tendencies that bear fruit in them. In the meantime, we have to ward off hopelessness—by remembering that bleak times are nothing new, that progress has been made even in darker times than the present, that life is full of joys and pleasures we too easily take for granted, that it's necessary to unite with all comrades on the left even when we disagree on particulars, and that even non-leftists or not-yet-leftists can be appealed to on the basis of their communal urges and sympathies. It's a tremendous responsibility we bear—we're responsible for the fate of the species, and of life itself—but it's a tremendously exciting era we're entering.

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Capitalism vs. Freedom

Being run by business, American culture suffers from an overwhelming preponderance of stupidity. When a set of institutions as reactionary as big business has a virtual monopoly over government and the media, the kinds of information, entertainment, commentary, ideologies, and educational policies on offer will not conduce to rationality or social understanding. What you'll end up with is, for instance, an electorate 25 percent of whose members are inclined to libertarianism. And the number is even higher among young people. That is to say, huge numbers of people will be exposed to and persuaded by the propaganda of the Cato Institute, the magazine *Reason*, Ayn Rand's novels, and Milton Friedman's ideological hackery to express their rebellious and anti-authoritarian impulses by becoming "extreme advocates of total tyranny," to quote Chomsky. They'll believe, as he translates, that "power ought to be given into the hands of private, unaccountable tyrannies," namely corporations. They'll think that if you just get government out of the picture and let capitalism operate freely, unencumbered by regulations or oversight or labor unionism, all will be for the best in this best of all possible worlds. And they'll genuinely believe they're being subversive and anarchistic by proposing such a program.

The spectacle of millions adhering to such a breathtakingly stupid ideology would be comical if it weren't so tragic. I'm an atheist, but Christianity strikes me as a more rational—and moral—religion than this "libertarian" (really totalitarian) one of absolute faith in universal privatization, marketization, corporatization, and commoditization. To be a so-called libertarian is to be deplorably ignorant of modern

history, economics, commonsense sociology, human psychology, and morality itself. (Regarding morality: if the Golden Rule is an essential maxim, then the communist slogan "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need," which is basically a derivative of the Golden Rule, is fundamental to any humane social organization. Greed and Social Darwinism—every man for himself—are hardly morally luminous principles.) Given this reactionary philosophy's intellectual sterility and the fact that it's been refuted countless times, it's tempting to simply ignore it. And most leftists do ignore it. But that's a mistake, as the frightening figure quoted a moment ago (25 percent of the electorate) indicates. It's necessary to challenge "free market" worship whenever and wherever it appears.

The economist Rob Larson has performed an important service, therefore, in publishing his new book *Capitalism vs. Freedom: The Toll Road to Serfdom*, the more so because the book's lucidity and brevity should win for it a wide readership. In five chapters, Larson systematically demolishes the glib nostrums of Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek (in the process also dispatching those other patron saints of the right wing, Ludwig von Mises, Ayn Rand, and Murray Rothbard). Even the book's title is highly effective: the message "*capitalism vs. freedom*" should be trumpeted from the hills, since it challenges one of the reigning dogmas of our society. Liberals and leftists themselves sometimes buy into the view that capitalism promotes freedom, arguing only that socialist equality and justice are more important than capitalist freedom. But this is a false framing of the issue. The fact is that socialism, which is to say workers' democratic control of the economy, not only means greater equality and justice than capitalism but also greater freedom, at least for the 99 percent. It is freedom, after all, that has inspired anarchists and even Marxists, including Marx himself.

Larson begins with a brief discussion of two concepts of freedom, negative and positive (a distinction that goes back, as he notes, at least to Isaiah Berlin). Crudely speaking, negative freedom means the absence of external constraint, of a power that can force you to act in particular ways. Positive freedom is the ability or opportunity actually to realize purposes and wishes, to "control your destiny," so to speak. It involves having the means to satisfy desires, as when you have the means to assuage hunger, be adequately clothed and sheltered, and have adequate sanitation. Positive freedom can be thought of as "freedom to," whereas negative freedom is "freedom from." Classical liberals like John Stuart Mill and modern conservatives like Friedman and Hayek are more concerned with negative freedom, which explains their desire for a minimal state; socialists are concerned also with positive freedom, sometimes believing that a stronger state (e.g., a social democracy) can help ensure such freedom for the majority of people.

Friedman and Hayek argued that free-market capitalism, with minimal intervention by the state, is the surest guarantee of negative liberty. Larson's book is devoted mainly to refuting this belief, which is widely held across the political spectrum; but it also defends the less controversial claim that capitalism is incompatible with widespread positive liberty too. "Capitalism," Larson writes, "withholds opportunities to enjoy freedom (required by the positive view of freedom) and also encourages the growth of economic power (the adversary of liberty in the negative view of freedom)." That concentrations of economic power in themselves threaten negative liberty might be challenged, but this is a weak argument, among other reasons because it's clear that centers of (economic) power will tend to dominate and manipulate the state in their own interest. They'll construct coercive apparatuses to subordinate others to their power, which will itself enable further accumulations of power, etc., until finally the society is ruled by an oligarchy. Thus, from "pure" capitalism you get an oligarchy with the power to coerce.

However obvious this point may seem to those possessed of common sense, it's far from obvious to libertarians and most conservatives. According to Friedman, "the kind of economic organization that provides economic freedom directly, namely, competitive capitalism, also promotes political freedom because it separates economic power from political power and in this way enables the one to offset the other." Here we encounter the typical naïve idealism of conservatives (and, indeed, of centrists and liberals), which I've discussed at length here. Rather than analyzing the real conditions of real social structures, conservatives traffic in airy abstractions about "freedom," "the separation of political and economic power," the lofty virtues of "competitive capitalism," and so on. Evidently it doesn't occur to Friedman that economic power will tend to confer political power, and therefore that, far from offsetting each other, the two will be approximately fused. The economically powerful might not directly hold political office, but

because of the resources they possess, they'll have inordinate power and influence over political leaders. This is intuitively obvious, but it's also borne out by empirical research.

It's worth pointing out, too, something that Larson doesn't really focus on: *within* corporations, freedom, even negative freedom, is severely curtailed. In the absence of a union, the employee has hardly any rights. There's no freedom of expression, for example, and the boss can threaten you, manipulate you however he wants, verbally abuse you, behave horrendously towards you with probably no repercussions for himself. Capitalism in fact is a kind of fragmented totalitarianism, as privately totalitarian corporate entities proliferate all over society and constitute its essential infrastructure, its foundation. The more oligopolistic they become, to some degree even fused with the state, the less "fragmented" and more dangerous the totalitarianism is. Eventually the "libertarian" millennium might be achieved in which all countervailing forces, such as unions, are eradicated and the population is left wholly at the mercy of corporations, reveling in its sublime freedom to be totally dominated.

Anyway, to resume the thread: Larson is right that "in portraying [the] concentration of money in society as a reasonable development"—e.g., as a reward for successfully competing against other capitalists—"the libertarian tradition completely dismisses the *power* of concentrated money." Hayek, for example, claims that in a "competitive society" (a meaningless abstraction: different kinds of societies can be "competitive") nobody possesses excessive power. "So long as property is divided among many owners, none of them acting independently has exclusive power to determine the income and position of particular people." Okay, fine, maybe not *exclusive* power, but to the degree that property is divided among fewer and fewer owners, these people can achieve *overwhelming* power to determine the income and position of others. Such as by acquiring greater "positive freedom" to dominate the state in their interests and against the interests of others, who thus proportionately lose positive freedom and possibly (again) even negative freedom, e.g. if the wealthy can get laws passed that restrict dissidents' right to free speech or free assembly.

More generally, it goes without saying that positive freedom is proportional to how much money you have. It apparently doesn't bother most libertarians that if you're poor and unable to find an employer to rent yourself to (in the gloriously "free, voluntary, and non-coercive" labor market), you won't be able to eat or have a minimally decent life. Hopefully private charities and compassionate individuals will come forward to help you; but if not, well, it's nothing that society as a whole should care about. Strictly speaking, there is no *right* to live (or to have shelter, food, health care, education, etc.); there is only a right not to be interfered with by others (except in the workplace). What a magnificent moral vision.

Libertarians admit that concentrations of wealth emerge in capitalism, but they deprecate the idea that capitalism leads to competition-defeating market concentration in such forms as oligopolies, monopolies, and monopsonies (like Wal-Mart). Usually these are created, supposedly, by government interference. But most businessmen and serious scholars disagree, pointing, for instance, to the significance of economies of scale. The famous business historian Alfred Chandler showed that many industries quickly became oligopolistic on the basis, in large part, of economies of scale. Historian Douglas Dowd observes that large-scale industrial technology has made it both necessary for firms to enlarge and possible for them to control their markets, while Australian economist Steve Keen argues that "increasing returns to scale mean that the perfectly competitive market is unstable: it will, in time, break down [into oligopoly or monopoly]."

Larson might have gone further in this line of argument by emphasizing just how much capitalists *hate* market discipline—i.e., the "free market"—and are constantly trying to overcome it. They're obsessed with *controlling* markets, whether through massive advertising campaigns, destruction or absorption of their competitors, price-fixing and other forms of collusion, or the formation of hundreds of trade associations. The historian Gabriel Kolko's classic study *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900–1916* revealed that the hatred of market anarchy is so extreme that Progressive-Era oligopolists were actually the main force behind government regulation of industry (to benefit business, not the public), as with the Meat Inspection Act of 1906, the Pure Food and Drug Act, the Federal Reserve Act, the Clayton Antitrust Act, and the Federal Trade Commission Act. Andrew Carnegie and Elbert H. Gary, head of U.S. Steel, even advocated government price-fixing! So much for the corporate propaganda about how wonderful free markets are.

If government regulation is primarily responsible for monopoly elements in industries, as Friedman and Hayek argue, then you'd think that the deregulation tsunami of the neoliberal era would have led to greater competition across the economy. Did it? Not exactly. Larson quotes a *Forbes* article:

> Since freight railroads were deregulated in 1980, the number of large, so-called Class I railroads has shrunk from 40 to seven. In truth, there are only four that matter… These four superpowers now take in more than 90% of the industry's revenue… An estimated one-third of shippers have access to only one railroad.

Quod erat demonstrandum. But there are many other examples. The deregulatory Telecommunications Act of 1996 was supposed to throw open the industry to competition; what it accomplished, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, was "a new phase in the hyper-consolidation of the cable industry… An industry that was once a hodgepodge of family-owned companies has become one of the nation's most visible and profitable oligopolies." These trends have occurred throughout the media, on a global scale.

The same consolidation is found in the airline industry, where deregulation "set off a flurry of mergers" (as the *Journal* notes), "creating a short roster of powerful giants. And consumers are, in many cases, paying the price." In fact, it's well known that deregulation has facilitated an enormous wave of mergers and acquisitions since the 1980s. (Similarly, the big businesses, and later the mergers, of the Gilded Age appeared in a time of little public regulation.) All this market-driven oligopolization has certainly not increased consumer freedom, or the freedom of anyone but the top fraction of one percent in wealth.

Speaking of communications and the media, another classic libertarian claim is hollow: far from encouraging a rich and competitive diversity of information and opinion, the free market tends to *narrow* the spectrum of opinion and information sources. When Hayek writes of totalitarian governments that "The word 'truth' ceases to have its old meaning. It describes no longer something to be found, with the individual conscience as the sole arbiter… it becomes laid down by authority," referring to the "spirit of complete cynicism as regards truth…the loss of the sense of even the meaning of truth," it is easy to think he's describing the mass media in the heavily capitalist United States. For one thing, because of scale economies and other market dynamics, over time fewer and fewer people or groups can afford to run, say, a successful and profitable newspaper. Across the West, in the twentieth century competition eventually weeded out working-class newspapers that had fewer resources than the capitalist mass media, and the spectrum of information consumed by the public drastically narrowed. "Market forces thus accomplished more than the most repressive measures of an aristocratic state," to quote the authors of an important study.

At the same time, the sources of information became less and less independent, due to the development of the advertising market. Advertisers "acquired a de facto licensing power because, without their support, newspapers ceased to be economically viable." As Edward Herman says, it wasn't the final consumer's but the *advertiser's* choices that determined media prosperity and survival, and hence the content (broadly speaking) of the news and opinion pieces. Moreover, the media increasingly consisted of giant corporations who had basically the same interests as advertisers anyway. The result corresponded less to Friedman's slogan Free to Choose than to Edward Bernays' slogan Free to Imagine That We Choose (because what we're choosing from is a narrow range of corporate and government propaganda).

Capitalism vs. Freedom also has a chapter on "political freedom," and another on the "freedom of future generations"—which is nonexistent in a strictly capitalist society because future generations have no money and therefore no power. They have to deal with whatever market externalities result from their ancestors' monomaniacal pursuit of profit. Including the possible destruction of civilization from global warming, a rather large externality. Even in the present, the IMF has estimated that the "external" costs of using fossil fuels, counting public health effects and environmental ramifications, are already $5 trillion a year. Again, this should suggest to anyone with a few neurons still functioning that markets aren't particularly "efficient." Especially considering the existence of major public goods that are undersupplied by the market, such as roads, bridges, sanitation systems, public parks, libraries, scientific research, public education, and social welfare programs. What do Friedman and Hayek think of these things? Well, Hayek was writing for a Western European audience, so he had to at least pretend to be reasonable. "[T]he

preservation of competition [is not] incompatible with an extensive system of social services," he wrote, which leaves "a wide and unquestioned field for state activity." Okay. But that's a significant concession. Apparently his "libertarianism" wasn't very consistent.

For Friedman, public goods should be paid for by those who use them and not by a wealthy minority that is being taxed against its wishes. "There is all the difference in the world," he insists, "between two kinds of assistance through government that seem superficially similar: first, 90 percent of us agreeing to impose taxes on ourselves in order to help the bottom 10 percent, and second, 80 percent voting to impose taxes on the top 10 percent to help the bottom 10 percent." Thus, the wealthy and powerful shouldn't have to pay taxes to maintain services from which they don't directly benefit. We shouldn't subtract any of the positive freedom from people who have an enormous amount of it (i.e., of *power*, the concentration of which libertarians are supposed to *oppose*) in order to give more positive freedom to people who have very little of it. That would be unforgivably compassionate.

Most of Larson's chapter on political freedom consists of salutary reminders of how politics actually works in the capitalist United States. Drawing on Thomas Ferguson's investment theory of party competition, Larson describes the political machinations of big business, the concerted and frequently successful efforts to erode the positive and negative freedoms of the populace, the permanent class war footing, the fanatical union-busting, the absurdly cruel austerity programs of the IMF (which, again, serve but to crush popular freedom and power), and the horrifying legacy of European and U.S. imperialism around the world. Readers who want to learn more about the dark side of humanity can consult William Blum's *Killing Hope*, Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* (which also describes Hayek and Friedman's love-affairs with neo-Nazi Latin American generals), Robert Fisk's *The Great War for Civilization*, and most of Noam Chomsky's books. In light of all these practices and policies that have emerged, directly or indirectly, out of the dynamics of the West's market economy, to argue that capitalism promotes human freedom is to be a hopeless intellectual fraud and amoral minion of power.

(If that judgment sounds harsh, consider this gem from Hayek, directed against measures to ensure worker security: "It is essential that we should relearn frankly to face the fact that freedom can be had only at a price and that as individuals we must be prepared to make severe material sacrifices to preserve our liberty." More exactly, working-class individuals have to make severe sacrifices to preserve the liberty of the capitalist class.)

In fact, to the extent that we have freedom and democracy at all, it has been achieved mainly through decades and centuries of popular struggle *against* capitalism, and against vicious modes of production and politics (including slavery and Latin American semi-feudalism) that have been essential to the functioning of the capitalist world-economy. Göran Therborn's classic article "The Rule of Capital and the Rise of Democracy" gives details, as does Howard Zinn's famous *People's History of the United States*.

Larson, unlike the charlatans whose work he reviews, actually does believe that "concentrated power is opposed to human freedom," so he dedicates his final chapter to briefly expositing a *genuinely* libertarian vision, that of socialism. Here I need only refer to the work of such writers as Anton Pannekoek, Rudolf Rocker, Peter Kropotkin, Errico Malatesta, Murray Bookchin, and others in the anarchist and/or left-Marxist tradition. There's a lot of talk of socialism these days, but few commentators (except on the left) know what they're talking about. For instance, like Hayek and Friedman, they tend to equate socialism with state control, authoritarianism, the Soviet Union, and other boogeymen. This ignores the fact that anarchism, which reviles the state, is committed to socialism. So virtually all mainstream commentary on socialism is garbage and immediately refuted from that one consideration alone. The basic point that conservatives, centrists, and liberals refuse to mention, because it sounds too appealing, is that socialism means nothing else but worker and community control. Economic, political, and social democracy. It is, in essence, a set of moral principles that can theoretically be fleshed out in a variety of ways, for instance some preserving a place for the market and others based only on democratic planning (at the level of the neighborhood, the community, the firm, the city, the nation, etc.). The core of socialism is *freedom*—the absence of concentrated power—not absolute equality.

Whether a truly socialist, libertarian society will ever exist is an open question, but certain societies have approached the ideal more closely than others. The Soviet Union was, and the U.S. is, very far from

socialism, while Scandinavian countries are a little closer (since the population generally has more freedom and power there than in the U.S. and the Soviet Union). The Bolivian Constitution of 2009 is vastly closer to socialism, which is to say morality and the ideal of human dignity, than the reactionary U.S. Constitution. On a smaller scale, worker cooperatives—see this book—tend to embody a microcosmic socialism.

Larson ends his book on the note sounded by Rosa Luxemburg a century ago: *socialism or barbarism*. Margaret Thatcher's infamous declaration "There is no alternative" can now be given a more enlightened meaning: there is no alternative to socialism, except the destruction of civilization and maybe the human species. Morality and pragmatic necessity, the necessities of survival, now coincide. Concentrated corporate power must be dismantled and democracy substituted for it—which is a global project that will take generations but is likely to develop momentum as society experiences ever-greater crises.

In the end, perhaps Friedman, Hayek, and their ilk will be seen to have contributed to the realization of a truly libertarian program after all, albeit indirectly. For by aiding in the growth of an increasingly authoritarian system, they may have hastened the birth of a democratic opposition that will finally tear up the foundations of tyranny and lay the groundwork for an emancipated world. Or at least a world in which Friedmans and Hayeks can't become intellectual celebrities. For now, I'd settle for that.

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On "Bullshit Jobs"

Referring to cultural Marxism, especially the Frankfurt School, Noam Chomsky once said, "I don't find that kind of work very illuminating… The ideas that seem useful also seem pretty simple, and I don't understand what all the verbiage is for." While I think there is much of value in the so-called Western Marxist tradition—for instance, I'm partial to Georg Lukács (more so than to Adorno and others in the Frankfurt School)—I have to admit I strongly sympathize with Chomsky. But his criticism generalizes, and is even truer in other areas: since well before the mid-twentieth century, a large amount of work in the humanities has been prone to unnecessary and sometimes incomprehensible verbiage. Later this tendency came to be associated with postmodernism, for it was most pronounced in the writings of such luminaries as Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, Deleuze, and Foucault, as well as their hordes of epigones. By the end of the twentieth century, a vast field of "Theory" had reached maturity, encompassing much of philosophy, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and literary, film, and cultural studies.

As an anthropologist, David Graeber works in this broadly conceived "interpretive" tradition (I call it that because it consists essentially of endless cultural and social "interpretations" or "theories," often playful and highly verbose conceptual exercises). He has an advantage over many of his peers in that, while not a particularly great writer, he can at least write clearly and informally enough to be widely read. Presumably this lucidity helps account for his fame—as do, more importantly, his heterodox ideas, his ability to capture a cultural mood even in the titles of his books (*Debt*, *The Utopia of Rules*, *Bullshit Jobs*), and his impressive productivity. Perhaps he's *too* productive: while reading his latest book, I couldn't help thinking it would have packed a greater punch if he had shortened it by a third. It meanders and meanders, repeats and repeats, and, well, I didn't understand what all the verbiage was for.

The full title of his book is *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*. I wasn't able to find the "theory," unless it be that bullshit jobs do in fact exist. And Graeber marshals abundant evidence to test and confirm that theory. The most entertaining, and probably the most valuable, parts of the book are the many testimonies he presents from poor souls who spend their lives in a bullshit job, which is to say a job they think shouldn't exist because it contributes nothing to the world. The numbers of people who believe this are incredibly high. One poll in the United Kingdom found that only 50 percent of people with full-time jobs were sure their job made a meaningful contribution to the world, while 37 percent were sure theirs didn't. A poll in Holland put the latter number at 40 percent. Even jobs that aren't bullshit, like nurses and professors, are being increasingly bullshitized, as paperwork, meetings, and other administrative duties crowd out more meaningful tasks like taking care of patients and teaching. (Nurses reported to Graeber that as much as 80

percent of their time is now taken up with meetings, filling out forms, and the like.) Considering these facts, as well as the existence of many second-order bullshit jobs (jobs done in support of those directly engaged in bullshit), Graeber estimates that well over half of all work being done in society could be eliminated without making any real difference.

What sorts of jobs are we talking about? Not most lower-tier jobs: not street cleaners, bus drivers, repairmen, restaurant workers, store clerks, gardeners, construction workers, etc. These people make a contribution to the world. Graeber suggests a rough five-fold classification of bullshit jobs. First are flunkies: jobs that exist "only or primarily to make someone else look or feel important." This includes doormen, many receptionists (those who have hardly anything to do and find the job oppressively dull), some HR assistants, and the like. Second are "goons," jobs that have an aggressive element but "exist only because other people employ them." For instance, most lobbyists, PR specialists, telemarketers, corporate lawyers ("I contribute nothing to the world and am utterly miserable all of the time," one said), and national armed forces, which exist only because other countries have armies. "If no one had an army, armies would not be needed." As for PR specialists, one of them probably spoke for many when he opined that every person who works in or for the entire advertising industry simply "manufactur[es] demand and then exaggerat[es] the usefulness of the products sold to fix it." He concluded, "If we're at the point where in order to sell products, you have to first of all trick people into thinking they need them, then I think you'd be hard-pressed to argue that these jobs aren't bullshit."

Third is the category of "duct tapers," people whose jobs exist only because of a glitch in the organization, "who are there to solve a problem that ought not to exist." Often this includes underlings who have to fix mistakes made by incompetent superiors. Or do nothing but deal with customers irate because something went wrong. Fourth are "box tickers," who allow an organization to be able to claim it's doing something it actually isn't doing. One testimony is from a guy who was Senior Quality and Performance Officer in a local council in the United Kingdom; most of what he did involved ticking boxes, "pretending things are great to senior managers, and generally 'feeding the beast' with meaningless numbers that give the illusion of control. None of which helps the citizens of that council in the slightest."

The fifth category is taskmasters, people who do nothing but assign work to others, create bullshit tasks for others to do, or supervise bullshit. Middle management frequently falls under this category, as when managers oversee workers who could perform just as well, or sometimes better, without oversight. "I just got promoted to this job," one manager says, "and I spend a lot of my time looking around and wondering what I'm supposed to be doing." That's a common complaint: being forced to supervise people who don't need supervision. (Readers of Harry Braverman's classic *Labor and Monopoly Capital* won't find this complaint surprising at all.) Frequently positions with the word 'strategic' in their names—Strategic Dean, Vice President of Strategic Development, Strategic Officer—are bullshit. "All I could do," one such person said, "was come up with a new strategy that was in effect a re-spin of already agreed-upon strategies." But these people are given their own staff, which they have to try to find work for.

Graeber's classification system is somewhat interesting, although, as he acknowledges, it leaves out a lot. One huge area of bullshit it leaves out he doesn't mention at all: bullshit academic research. Surely the large majority of academic research makes essentially no contribution to the world, except to pad CVs and advance careers. Endless conferences, "calls for papers" sent out for yet another conference, thousands upon thousands of scholarly articles published every year most of which are read by hardly anyone (more often simply glanced over). Much of the writing isn't only irrelevant and uninteresting, superficial and unchallenging, but even perverse: again, one thinks of postmodernist obscurantism, relativism, and idealism. In the case of postmodernism and, more generally, the idealism (and centrism) of bourgeois scholarship and journalism, the bullshit serves an obvious purpose for the establishment: it distracts from structures of class and power, obscures understanding of how society works, and does nothing to advance left-wing dissent.

Graeber devotes a couple of chapters to what it's like to work in a bullshit job and why people so often report themselves miserable. According to bourgeois psychological theories, after all, it might seem that some of these jobs are great. You hardly have to work, you have barely any real responsibilities, you can spend hours playing computer games or surfing the web. You can (in many cases) be almost as lazy as,

supposedly, you want to be just by virtue of being human. But of course humans are not, in fact, lazy by nature, creatures who have to be *driven* to work, as bourgeois ideologies proclaim. They *want* to work, but on creative and enjoyable tasks. Their fundamental desire is not to slack off but to have a ***meaningful life***, full of purpose, creativity, exploration, and love, a life of contributions to the world. To work in an utterly pointless job, therefore, day in and day out, month after month, can be maddening, soul-killing torture. It seems that the respect and prestige these people might be accorded can make it even worse, heightening their sense of being frauds or parasites.

Many of the testimonies Graeber has compiled are both sad and hilarious. Most are too long to quote here, but I'll quote one, from a security guard:

> I worked as a museum guard for a major global security company in a museum where one exhibition room was left unused more or less permanently. My job was to guard that empty room, ensuring no museum guests touched the…well, *nothing* in the room, and ensure nobody set any fires. To keep my mind sharp and attention undivided, I was forbidden any form of mental stimulation, like books, phones, etc.
>
> Since nobody was ever there, in practice I sat still and twiddled my thumbs for seven and a half hours, waiting for the fire alarm to sound. If it did, I was to calmly stand up and walk out. That was it.

One might think of this guard's job as a literal realization of the metaphorical meaning of thousands of positions filled by tens of millions of people. The colossal waste of human potential is beyond comprehension.

The natural question, aside from how to change this terrible collective situation, is how all these worthless jobs started proliferating in the first place. Why aren't we all working fifteen-hour weeks? If we got rid of the pointless jobs and the pointless aspects of the real jobs, the resulting work could easily be taken care of by our working fifteen- or twenty-hour weeks. In fact, back in 1930 John Maynard Keynes predicted that in a hundred years the problem of scarcity would have been solved, and the major problem of the age would be to find ways to prevent ourselves from going insane with boredom. So what happened?

This is a complicated historical question that gets to the heart of how capitalism has evolved over the last century, so it isn't to Graeber's discredit that he doesn't fully answer it. He first dispatches two answers conservatives give: that the world has become so complicated we need all these jobs, and they aren't really as pointless as they seem; and that even if there are bullshit jobs, it's only because government regulations have led to a growing number of useless bureaucrats. These answers are on the intellectual level of most conservatism, and Graeber refutes them with ease. With one piece of evidence. He points out that between 1985 and 2005 the proportion of administrators and their staff in American universities shot up even though the number of teachers per students remained largely constant. Teaching and writing certainly haven't become so complicated they suddenly need far more administrators and staffers—so why the bullshitization of universities? It isn't because of the big bad government either, since the number of administrators at private institutions has increased at *more than twice the rate* it did at public ones. So there goes the "libertarian" notion of government wastefulness. "In fact," Graeber comments, "the only reasonable interpretation of these numbers is precisely the opposite: public universities are ultimately answerable to the public, and hence, under constant political pressure to cut costs and not engage in wasteful expenditures."

Graeber's own answer is that capitalism has changed its character since the days when it somewhat approximated conditions of perfect competition. When capitalism was mainly about producing things competitively, the argument that free-market enthusiasts give against the notion that corporations would ever hire unnecessary workers to do bullshit jobs made sense: maximizing profits meant paying the least number of workers the least amount possible. To hire a large number of redundant workers would be absurd. But, as Graeber argues, the logic of the economy has changed in the last forty years, with the rise of financial capitalism and the FIRE sector (including insurance and real estate). The main object now is not to produce goods competitively but to distribute large sums of money, to distribute the proceeds from enormous

amounts of debt, to create money (by giving loans) and then move it around in very complex ways while extracting fees with every transaction. "The results often leave bank employees feeling that the entire enterprise is…pointless."

So, "when a profit-seeking enterprise is in the business of distributing a very large sum of money, the most profitable thing for it to do is to be as inefficient as possible." It can then find pretexts to take more cuts, even acting against the interests of its clients, and using its profits to hire more people and grow bigger. There seems, indeed, to be a tendency inherent in large bureaucracies, whether corporate or political, to expand, to suck up more resources as an end in itself. Graeber gives a name to the "new" dynamic that has emerged in capitalism: managerial feudalism. It's supposed to be analogous to the creation of hierarchies of nobles and officials in medieval Europe through a process of devolution called "sub-infeudation," in which a king would grant land to a duke, who would use the resources from that land to support a huge retinue of courtiers and vassals, many of whom would be granted their own plots of land that could support their own retinues, and so on down to local knights and lords of the manor.

"The rise of managerial feudalism has produced a similar infatuation with hierarchy for its own sake." Managers manage other managers, each with their own staff; various levels of managers market things to one another, especially in "creative industries" like publishing, the visual arts, and film and television. It's particularly bad in the latter industry, where there are untold numbers of producers, sub-producers, executive producers, consultants, etc., "all in constant search for something, anything, to actually do." But even in more traditional manufacturing industries, white-collar workers are hired seemingly for the sake of having more white-collar workers. Graeber uses the example of the Elephant Tea factory outside Marseilles, France. Years ago it was bought up by Unilever, which pretty much left its old organizational structure intact. Meanwhile the workers, on their own initiative, managed to speed up production by more than 50 percent, markedly increasing profits. So what did Unilever do? Rather than hiring more workers or buying new machinery to expand operations, it hired a bunch of white-collar bureaucrats to wander around trying to think of something to do. "They'd be walking up and down the catwalks every day," an older worker said, "staring at us, scribbling notes while we worked. Then they'd have meetings and discuss it and write reports. But they still couldn't figure out any real excuse for their existence." Finally they just suggested that the company shut down the whole plant and move operations to Poland—whereupon the workers took over the factory and kicked their employers out.

Even when corporate executives are presented with ways to automate tasks that white-collar employees are doing by hand, they often resist. One testimony was from a guy who was hired by a large bank to do risk management, which meant he was able to have a panoramic view of the bank's internal processes and suggest fixes for incoherencies, vulnerabilities, and redundancies. He concluded that, conservatively, 80 percent of the bank's 60,000 employees were unnecessary, because their jobs either could be performed by a program or were in support of "some bullshit process" to begin with. But when he presented executives with programs that would solve inefficiencies, he always faced severe hostility. Not a single one of his recommendations was ever adopted. "Because in every case," he said, "fixing these problems would have resulted in people losing their jobs, as those jobs served no purpose other than giving the executive they reported to a sense of power." In case after case that Graeber reports, it was clear that the higher-ups prided themselves on their bloated staffs.

The notion of managerial feudalism is evocative, and Graeber is clearly onto something with his suggestion that "there seems to be an intrinsic connection between the financialization of the economy, the blossoming of information industries, and the proliferation of bullshit jobs." What exactly that connection is, though, is hard to tease out. The precise *mechanisms* are hard to tease out. His "iron law of liberalism," formulated in *Utopia of Rules*, is also apropos: "any market reform, any government initiative intended to reduce red tape and promote market forces will have the ultimate effect of increasing the total number of regulations, the total amount of paperwork, and the total number of bureaucrats the government employs." Such reforms have been abundant in the neoliberal era, and they have certainly contributed to the explosion of bureaucracy, in both the private and public sectors.

But Graeber neglects to mention the more deep-rooted forces that have made bullshitization a steadily growing phenomenon since at least the time of Frederick Winslow Taylor. Ever since management

began to take control of production away from workers, to centralize knowledge in its own ranks and reduce the worker to mere appendage of the machine—but an appendage that has to be closely monitored and supervised—whole layers of unnecessary bureaucracy have existed. Much of the bureaucracy has existed only to control and monitor the direct producers, to strip power from them and keep it in the hands of capitalists or their agents. In other words, its purpose has been largely political, not directly economic or "efficiency"-related.

At the same time, it became ever more necessary to control markets and the public mind, through political and advertising propaganda. Hence the rise of the public relations industry from around the time of World War I. And hence whole new layers of massive bureaucracy, which have continued to expand for a hundred years. Meanwhile, government bureaucracies expanded exponentially in order to improve society's "legibility" to the state and administer it for the benefit of capital. Corporate capital and the state constantly strengthened their ties, effectively intertwining, collecting practically infinite amounts of data on the population for the usual purposes of surveillance, control, and profit-making; and the processing of such data inevitably was used to justify further growth of bureaucracies, even beyond what was strictly necessary. All this was happening long before the neoliberal era, though it attained new heights of wastefulness under the impact of "deregulation," privatization, financialization, globalization, and the information economy.

It's significant, too, that the proliferation of bullshit jobs is itself a form of population control, of keeping people subordinate in hierarchical structures, socialized into submission, atomized and alienated from one another. African American men are kept under control by being locked up in prisons, while whites are funneled into pointless jobs where they can be supervised and indoctrinated. The system hasn't been consciously designed for this purpose, but the reason it's able to expand is that it serves the interests of power-structures.

So is there any way out of our bullshit society? Can it be reformed so that half the work being done is no longer pointless? Graeber doesn't focus on this question, since his book is supposed to be about diagnosing the problem rather than proposing solutions, but he does suggest that Universal Basic Income would help. Unlike many reforms that social movements are proposing, UBI would likely reduce the size and intrusiveness of government, not increase it. If everyone automatically received, say, $25,000 or more a year, huge and intrusive sections of government could simply be shut down (even if social welfare programs continued or expanded). Millions of bureaucrats would lose their jobs, but they would also receive an annual income allowing them to pursue other projects that interested them.

"A full Basic Income would eliminate the compulsion to work, by offering a reasonable standard of living to all, and then either leaving it up to each individual to decide whether they wished to pursue further wealth, by doing a paying job or selling something, or whether they wished to do something else with their time." Bosses might start treating their employees better, since it would be a less frightening prospect for the latter to quit, and conditions in crappy low-paying jobs would have to improve in order to attract workers. Many pointless jobs would cease to exist, since few people would want them. The social changes would be so radical and far-reaching it's impossible to fully anticipate them.

Graeber doesn't delve into the technicalities of UBI, but he's right it's a proposal worth seriously thinking about. It could be a step on the road to even more radical changes.

All in all, *Bullshit Jobs* is a good book that's worth reading, despite its irritating prolixity and meandering structure. It usefully highlights and names a major social malady that afflicts tens of millions of people but that few talk about, except in informal conversations among their fellow sufferers. We should all be talking about the meaningless-jobs crisis and proposing solutions that will end the rampant spiritual misery it has caused. UBI, if designed well, could be a huge step in the right direction. But ultimately, I don't see any thoroughgoing cure except an end to capitalism itself, which is to say a (necessarily protracted) revolution that finally establishes the old socialist ideal of economic democracy. Democracy is the only real cure for all of humanity's current ailments.

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An Updated and Improved Marxism

It is the rare intellectual who can withstand the pressures of groupthink. This is a fundamental truth, or a truism, borne out not only by daily experiences in an academic or other "intellectual" context (e.g., the newsroom or editorial board of any establishment media outlet) but also by critical scholarship from the likes of Ed Herman and Noam Chomsky. Left-wing intellectuals tend to be vigilantly aware of irrational groupthink among mainstream, establishment types, or even among other leftist sects with which they don't identify; but, like all intellectual cliques—indeed, like nearly all individual intellectuals—they're reluctant to turn their critical gaze on themselves. They imbibe certain ideas and ideologies in their formative years and perhaps refine them as they mature, but on the whole their commitment to the ideology is apt to become rigid and uncritical.

This complacency has always most disturbed me with regard to Marxists, whose system of thought, if correctly formulated, is precisely the most critical, the most *self*-critical, the most democratic and revolutionary ideology ever devised. I expect intellectual laziness from most "postmodernists," from liberals and centrists, from all witting or unwitting servants of power. I'm disappointed, though, when I see it in Marxists and semi-Marxists. There's a pronounced dogmatism in most Marxist circles. Personally, I've tried to stimulate some critical rethinking of Marxism in various publications, including my book *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution: History and Possibilities in the United States* and this distillation of some of its arguments (though disregard the editor's oversimplified summary at the top of the page), but I haven't had much success. These writings appear to have been ignored.

Which is unfortunate, because I'm convinced it's necessary in the twenty-first century to revise the Marxian conception of revolution. Conditions have changed from what they were a hundred or a hundred and fifty years ago; Marx would likely be appalled by the lack of creative rethinking that has met these altered conditions. It's an unfortunate situation when millions of activists across the world are struggling to build new modes of production, new modes of politics, and Marxist scholars and thinkers still confine themselves, more or less, to quoting staid formulations from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (This fact, ironically, supports Marx's argument that old ideologies tend to hang on doggedly even as changing material conditions make them progressively irrelevant.) Writers and 'critical ideologists' can play an important role in the construction of a new society from the ground up, but instead they're usually content with elaborating on old slogans about seizing the state or smashing it, establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, creating a vanguard party, and so on.

An article that *Jacobin* recently published provides an example of this stubborn immersion in the past, as well as an opportunity to propose a more critical and up-to-date interpretation of revolution. The article in question is actually an essay by the famous British Marxist Ralph Miliband, entitled "Lenin's *The State and Revolution*," published in 1970. In itself it's a perfectly respectable and sophisticated meditation on Lenin's classic work, indeed counseling a proper critical attitude towards it. But the reposting of it on the website of a "cutting-edge" left-wing journal almost fifty years later highlights just how stagnant (in some respects) Marxist thinking continues to be, especially given the editorial comment with which *Jacobin* introduces the piece:

> Marx famously proclaimed the need to "smash" the bourgeois state. But what does that mean in practice? If our aim is a democratic, non-bureaucratic socialism, what kind of state should we be striving for?
>
> Those looking for answers have often turned to Lenin's *State and Revolution*, where the famed revolutionary confidently speaks of transforming "a state of bureaucrats" into "a state of armed workers."
>
> In the following essay, Ralph Miliband…offers a critical appraisal of Lenin's pamphlet and explains why "the exercise of socialist power remains the Achilles' heel of Marxism." …[T]he essay is still the sharpest reading of *State and Revolution* available.

The accuracy of this introduction is rather sad. In 2018 we're still looking for inspiration to a brief critical analysis written in 1970 of a short work written in 1917—in completely different conditions than prevail today—that itself was but a commentary on sketchy ideas put forward in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century. (One can argue, moreover, that *State and Revolution* was intended as little more than cynical propaganda for the Bolshevik party, in light of its deviation from Lenin's earlier party line and his later authoritarian practice.) Surely we can do better than this.

Miliband is still right, though, that "the exercise of socialist power remains the Achilles' heel of Marxism." This is true not only of practice but of theory—which is to say, as I've argued in my paper "The Significance and Shortcomings of Karl Marx," that the concept of proletarian revolution is Marxism's main weakness. In the rest of this article I'll again summarize, very briefly, some of the points from my book, in the hope of shedding a little light on an old problem.

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The conceptual revisions I proposed in the book offer two main advantages: first, they bring the strategic or prescriptive aspect of Marxism up to date, incorporating the increasingly popular idea and practice of the "solidarity economy" (while simultaneously providing a systematic theoretical framework to interpret the latter's potential); second, they correct certain inconsistencies and logical errors that Marx's sketchy proposals on revolution introduced into the theory of historical materialism. That is, with my "revisions," Marxism has been made more logically defensible and consistent with itself. And the road is cleared for even orthodox Marxists to engage creatively with the burgeoning alternative economy of cooperatives, public banks, and other experimental ideas/institutions.

We can start with Marx's formulation of revolution in the following four sentences from the famous Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

> At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or—this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms—with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.

One problem with this classic statement is that its notion of "fettering" is meaningless. And nowhere else in his writings does Marx flesh it out with sufficient content. Capitalist production relations, especially in the last hundred years, are in fact constantly fettering the use and development of productive forces—and yet no post-capitalist revolution has happened. Recessions and depressions certainly "fetter" the productive forces; so do legal obstacles to the dissemination of knowledge, such as intellectual copyright laws; so do ideologies and practices of privatization, which hinder the public sector's more socially rational and dynamic use of science and technology. On the other hand, even in decadent neoliberalism the productive forces continue to develop in various ways. So it seems wrong or meaningless to say that production relations fetter productive forces and then revolution breaks out.

A slight revision can remedy the problem, and at the same time changes the whole thrust of the Marxist theory of revolution. Rather than a conflict simply between production relations and the development of productive forces, there is a conflict between *two types of production relations—two modes of production—one of which uses productive forces in a more socially rational and "un-fettering" way than the other*. The more progressive mode slowly develops in the womb of the old society as it decays, i.e., as the old dominant mode of production succumbs to crisis and stagnation. In being relatively dynamic and democratic, the emergent mode of production attracts adherents and resources, until it becomes ever more visible and powerful. The old regime can't eradicate it; it spreads internationally and gradually transforms the economy, to such a point that the forms and content of politics change with it. Political entities become its partisans, and finally decisive seizures of power by representatives of the emergent mode

of production become possible, because reactionary defenders of the old regime have lost their dominant command over resources. And so, over generations, a social revolution transpires.

This conceptual revision saves Marx's intuition by giving it more meaning: the "fettering" is not absolute but is *in relation to* a more effective and democratic mode of production that is, so to speak, competing against the old stagnant one. The most obvious concrete instance of this notion of revolution is the long transition from feudalism to capitalism, during which the feudal mode became so hopelessly outgunned by the capitalist that—*after the emergent economy had already broadly colonized society*—bourgeois "seizures of the state" finally became possible.

You see that the simple conceptual revision I've proposed changes the Marxian theory from advocating a statist "dictatorship of the proletariat" to advocating a more grassroots, *gradual,* unambiguously democratic transformation of the economy that proceeds at the same time and to the degree that the old society deteriorates. This change of emphasis is itself an advantage, since the old overwhelmingly statist theory (notwithstanding Lenin's semi-anarchistic language in *State and Revolution*) was idealistic, un-dialectical, and utopian. Which is to say un-Marxist.

In the orthodox account of the *Communist Manifesto* and later writings, the social revolution occurs *after* a seizure of state power by "the proletariat" (which, incidentally, isn't a unitary entity but contains divisions). But this account of revolution contradicts the Marxian understanding of social dynamics—a point, oddly, that few or no Marxists appear ever to have appreciated. It exalts a relatively unitary *conscious will* as being able to plan social evolution more or less in advance, a notion that is utterly undialectical. According to "dialectics," history happens behind the backs of historical actors, whose intentions never work out exactly as they're supposed to. Marx was wise in his admonition that we should never trust the self-interpretations of political actors. And yet he suspends this injunction when it comes to the dictatorship of the proletariat: *these* people's designs are supposed to work out perfectly and straightforwardly, despite the massive complexity and dialectical contradictions of society.

The statist idea of revolution is also wrong to privilege the political over the economic. In supposing that through sheer political will one can transform an authoritarian, exploitative economy into an emancipatory, democratic one, Marx and Lenin are, in effect, reversing the order of "dominant causality" such that politics determines the economy (whereas in fact the economy "determines"—loosely and broadly speaking—politics).[1] Marxism itself suggests that the state can't be socially creative in this radical way. And when it tries to be, what results, ironically, is overwhelming bureaucracy and even *greater* authoritarianism than before. (While the twentieth century's experiences with so-called "Communism" or "state socialism" happened in relatively non-industrialized societies, not advanced capitalist ones as Marx anticipated, the dismal record is at least suggestive.)

Fundamental to these facts is that if the conquest of political power occurs in a still-capitalist economy, revolutionaries have to contend with the institutional legacies of capitalism: relations of coercion and domination condition everything the government does, and there is no way to break free of them. They can't be magically transcended through political will; to think they can, or that the state can somehow "wither away" even as it's forced to become more expansive and dominating (to suppress capitalist resistance), is to adopt a naïve idealism and utopianism.

In short, the interpretation of revolution that contemporary Marxists have inherited is backward. It is standing on its head; we have to turn it right-side up in order to comprehend our activism and our goals properly. Of course this isn't to deny the importance of engaging in political work, whether it takes the form of constructing a workers' party, electing socialists under the aegis of the Democratic Party, or lobbying for particular laws. As during the transition from feudalism to capitalism, it's essential to target the state at every step of the way. We simply have to recognize that a *paramount* strategy is to take advantage of openings and divisions in the capitalist state to politically facilitate the long-term construction of new relations of production, on the foundation of which the new society will gradually emerge. The revolution can't happen in any other way. Certainly not through a historical *rupture* in which "the working

[1] In reality, of course, political and economic relations are fused together. But analytically one can distinguish economic activities from narrowly political, governmental activities.

class" dramatically seizes power, suppresses (somehow) all its opponents, and organizes a new economy on the basis of utopian blueprints. In the twenty-first century, any such *ruptural* conception, even if moderated by realism on some point or other, is astoundingly naïve.

The truth is that revolutionaries have to dig in for the long haul: a global transition to a post-capitalist society will take a century or more. Cooperative and socialized relations of production (in forms that it's futile to predict at this point) will spread through generations of bitter struggle. Meanwhile, the conquest of political power will occur piecemeal—at different rates in different countries—suffering setbacks and then proceeding to new victories, then suffering more defeats, etc. It will be a time of world-agony, especially as climate change will be devastating civilization; but the sheer numbers of people whose interests will lie in a transcendence of capitalism will constitute a formidable weapon on the side of progress.

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As Chomsky has said on more than one occasion, the job of intellectuals, or one of their jobs, is to make simple things appear complicated. You're supposed to think that in order to understand anything about the world, you have to be able to read and write long articles or books full of citations and arcane terminology and long discussions of other writers, delving into the intricacies of their arguments, minutely dissecting the meanings of their favored terms, spinning out paeans to verbiage like a crafty spider trying to snare the unwary. This is how intellectuals protect their territory and ward off democratic challenges to their status. But the truth is that old-fashioned commonsense reasoning can get you pretty far. It only takes a bit of reading and a bit of critical thought to find approximate answers to classic questions about the nature of society, the nature of a *good* society, and the revolutionary path to the latter. And in fact, in the sociological domain, you're never going to do much better than approximate answers. With interactions between billions of people to take into consideration, too little will always be understood.

So, to get back to the old question that Lenin and Miliband tackled: what does it mean to "smash" the bourgeois state? What kind of democratic state should we be striving for? Well, the notion of "smashing" the state is just a pithy metaphor that provides no guide to action. We should stop being bewitched by old and unhelpful imagery. In conditions very different from those that confronted Marx and Lenin, we should simply focus on the matters at hand rather than endlessly poring over what the god Lenin said. Keeping in our mind the Marxist and anarchist ideal of a stateless, non-coercive, economically democratic society, we should just do what we can to make the state we're immediately confronted with more democratic and more just. We do what we can to expand democracy in the real world, and step by step we find ourselves approaching the distant moral ideal that guides us. It's hopeless to try to spell out the ideal in detail. Marx understood this, which is why he was so reluctant to get bogged down in these kinds of questions, confining himself to some vague suggestions that, not surprisingly, turned out to be largely mistaken.

The task of Marxists now, aside from continuing to critically analyze society, is to rethink the old prescriptions and abandon tired formulations. In so doing, they'll not only make themselves more relevant to the contemporary world, a world teeming with democratic and nonsectarian initiative; they'll also, in effect, finally rid Marxism of its lingering traces of irrational dogma, internal inconsistency, and parochial nineteenth-century ideology. The system will at last have realized the old ambition of being a genuine science of society.

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The Working Class Strikes Back

Reading the daily headlines, it's easy to forget that the corollary of a civilization in precipitous decline is a world of creative ferment, a new world struggling to be born. If you could have a God's-eye view of all the creative resistance rending the fabric of political oppression from the U.S. to Indonesia to

Colombia, you would surely be persuaded that all hope is not lost. This conclusion is borne out in detail by a book published earlier this year, *The Class Strikes Back: Self-Organised Workers' Struggles in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Dario Azzellini and Michael G. Kraft. The chapters, each dedicated to a different case-study, survey inspiring democratic activism in thirteen countries across five continents. The reader is left with the impression that the global working class, while facing an uphill battle in its fight against imperialism, business and state repression, and conservative union bureaucracy, may yet triumph in the end, if only because of its remarkable perseverance generation after generation. Its overwhelming numerical strength, too, bodes well.

In their introduction, the editors concisely state the book's purpose: "this volume aims to examine how new, anti-bureaucratic forms of syndicalist, neo-syndicalist and autonomous workers' organisation emerge in response to changing work and production relations in the twenty-first century." Traditional unions, which they observe have been "part of the institutional setting to *maintain* capitalism" (my italics), have deteriorated on a global scale. In their place have sprung up more radical and democratic forms of resistance, such as blockades, strikes, and workplace occupations and recuperations. Workers' actions have even made decisive contributions to the toppling of governments, as in Egypt in 2011.

In this article I'll summarize several of the most compelling case-studies. Unfortunately I'll have to pass over many interesting chapters, including ones on the workers' movement in Colombia, the solidarity economy and radical unionism in Indonesia, the sit-ins and ultimately the worker cooperative at a window factory in Chicago (about which I've written here), and the South African miners who were attacked by police and massacred in August 2012. The book is too rich to do justice to.

Greece

The crisis in Greece that followed the economic crash of 2008 and 2009 saw a savage regime of austerity imposed on the population, which resulted in a "diffuse precariousness" across the labor force. Conventional unionism and national collective bargaining have been among the victims of this neoliberal regime. And yet the general strikes that the trade union bureaucracy was compelled to declare early on, particularly between 2010 and 2012, were the most massive and combative of the past forty years. "Long battles with the police, crowds which refused to dissolve and regrouped again and again, the besieging for hours of the house of parliament, self-organisation and solidarity in order to cope with tear gas and take care of the wounded—all have become part of the normal image of demonstrations during strikes, replacing the nerveless parades of the past."

Outside the framework of conventional unionism there have arisen exciting new forms of struggle. Since early 2013, the Vio.Me factory has operated under worker self-management, after its initial owners abandoned the site. Aside from the lack of hierarchy, the job rotations, and the directly democratic structure of the business, one innovative practice has been to run the factory in cooperation with the local community and, indeed, the whole society. After taking over the factory the workers consulted their community about what they should produce; they were asked to stop making poisonous building chemicals and instead to manufacture biological, eco-friendly cleaning products. A "wide network of militants and local assemblies" around the country has supported the effort from the start, which has enabled even the distribution of the firm's products to be done in a completely new way, "through an informal network of social spaces, solidarity structures, markets without intermediaries and cooperative groceries."

In general, labor struggles in Greece have become more intertwined with social movements. Early in the crisis, structures of mutual aid sprang up everywhere:

> Throughout the country collectives have established community kitchens and peer-to-peer solidarity initiatives for the distribution of food, reconnected electricity that was cut down to low-income households, organised "without middlemen" the distribution of agricultural produce, established self-organised pharmacies, healthcare clinics and tutoring programmes and organised networks of direct action against house foreclosures.

Later on, grassroots initiatives became more political, in an effort to create institutions that would be long-lasting and relatively independent of capital and the government. The Greek squares movement of 2011 spread to almost every city and village in the country, leaving behind a legacy of local assemblies and social centers. It also "unleashed social forces which boosted the social and solidarity economy and the movements for the defence and the promotion of the commons."

All this flowering of alternative institutions has not occurred without significant problems and defeats. There has been little success in establishing solid organizations of the unemployed, and grassroots labor struggles have failed to form durable structures that can challenge institutionalized unionism. Certain victories, nevertheless, have been impressive. Social movements were able to prevent the government's privatization of public water corporations in 2014. Even more remarkably, after the government closed down the influential public broadcaster ERT in 2013, ERT employees, together with citizens and activists, took over the production of television and radio programs by occupying premises and infrastructure. For almost two years the self-managed ERT transmitted thousands of hours of broadcasting on the anti-austerity struggle, serving as an important resource for the resistance. When Syriza came to power in 2015, it reestablished the public broadcaster.

Worker and consumer cooperatives exist all over the country. Cooperative coffee shops and bookshops, for example, exist in most neighborhoods of Athens and Salonica, functioning "as the cells of the horizontal movements in urban space and the carriers of alternative values and culture." Broadly speaking, labor identities are becoming more socialized, "because more embedded in local communities and grassroots struggles."

The Greek experience is of particular interest in that other Western countries, including the U.S., are likely to replicate important features of it in the coming years and decades, as economic crisis intensifies. We ought to study how Greek workers and communities have adapted and resisted, to learn from their failures and successes.

Egypt

The mass movement that felled Mubarak's regime in 2011 received sympathetic coverage from the establishment media in the West, but the key role of workers' collective action was, predictably, effaced. Strike waves after 2006 not only destabilized the regime but also gave rise to the April 6th Movement in 2008, which would go on to catalyze the 2011 rebellions. Even after the fall of Mubarak, the flood of labor actions didn't let up.

As everywhere around the world, neoliberalism meant decades of pent-up grievances against working conditions, privatizations, low wages, and economic insecurity. Finally in December 2006, 24,000 textile workers went on strike at Misr Spinning. Within a few weeks, "similar strikes were spreading between public and private sector textile producers, and from there to civil servants, teachers, municipal refuse workers and transport workers." In the next couple of years, many more strikes occurred, frequently taking the form of mass occupations of workplaces.

Workers even managed to form the first independent unions in more than fifty years, beginning with the Real Estate Tax Authority Union (RETAU), established in December 2008. The conservative and bureaucratic Egyptian Trade Union Federation was unable to cope with all the sit-ins, strikes, and waves of democratic organizing, and saw its influence over the labor movement wane. RETAU's consolidation "accelerated the development of other independent unions and proto-union networks among teachers, public transport workers, postal workers and health technicians," raising their expectations of what could be achieved through collective action.

After the steadily rising wave of worker and popular resistance crested with the resignation of Mubarak in early February 2011, labor actions didn't cease. In fact, Mubarak's fall was followed by "a new tidal wave of strikes and workplace occupations, with nearly 500 separate episodes of collective action by workers recorded in the month of February 2011 alone." Strike waves ebbed and flowed over the following two years, and did much to undermine the military and Islamist governments that succeeded each other before the crisis of the summer of 2013, when, after Mohammed Morsi fell, a successful

counterrevolutionary offensive was launched by the Armed Forces, the Ministry of the Interior, the judiciary, and the media.

After the fall of Mubarak, a ferment of self-organization resulted in the founding of many new independent unions, which often engaged in intense battles for *tathir*, or the "cleansing" from management positions of the ruling party's cronies. This was especially the case in public institutions. Public hospitals in Cairo, for example, "were the scene of attempts to assert workers' control over management to a much greater degree than had been possible before the revolution." These experiments weren't always successful, but in a number of cases they did at least force the resignation of old directors and were able to establish, temporarily, democratic councils to oversee work.

In the end, the workers' movement was unable to impose its demands on the agenda of national politics. Its leaders "did not score victories at that level on the question of raising the national minimum wage, or forcing a lasting retreat from privatization, or even of securing full legal recognition for the independent unions themselves." Still, the authors comment that the nationwide revival of self-organization was an astonishing feat. "Factory and office workers created thousands of workplace organisations, despite conditions of acute repression and the lack of material resources. There have been few examples on this scale of a revival of popular organisation in the Arab world for decades." Memories of these uprisings will not be erased easily, and will inspire the next generation of activists.

Venezuela

Venezuela differs from the other cases in that its Bolivarian revolution has entailed a commitment to elevating the position and the power of workers. So how successful has this process been? In recent years, of course, Venezuela's severe economic crisis has undermined the Bolivarian process, with increases in poverty and less money going to social programs. But the achievements have not all been destroyed. The account in the book goes up to early 2016, well into the crisis years.

Until 2006, the Chavez government focused on promoting cooperatives (in addition to nationalizing the oil industry and expropriating large landowners). In nationalized medium-sized companies, for example, workers became co-owners with the state. Whereas Venezuela had had only 800 registered cooperatives in 1998, by mid-2010 it had 274,000, though only about a third were determined to be "operative." It had been hoped that these businesses would produce for the satisfaction of social needs rather than profit-maximization, but the mixed-ownership model, according to which the state and private entrepreneurs could be co-owners with workers, vitiated these hopes.

By 2006 a new model was spreading, which was more communally based. Its political context was that "communal councils" began to be recognized as a fundamental structure of local self-government: in urban areas they encompassed 150 to 400 families, while in rural areas they included a minimum of 20 families. "The councils constitute a non-representational structure of direct participation, which exists alongside the elected representative bodies of constituted power. Several communal councils can come together to form a commune. By the end of 2015, over 40,000 communal councils and more than 1,200 communes existed." Councils and communes can receive state funding for their projects, which now began to include community-controlled companies instead of cooperatives. "In these new communal companies, the workers come from the local communities; these communities are the ones who, through the structures of self-government…decide on what kind of companies are needed, what organisational form they will have and who should work in them."

In 2008 a new model for these companies emerged, the Communal Social Property Company (EPSC). "While different kinds of EPSCs can be found in the communities today, their principal areas of activity correspond with the most pressing needs of the *barrios* and rural communities: the production of food and construction materials, and the provision of transport services. Textile and agricultural production companies, bakeries and shoemakers, are also common." Under the initiative of workers, even some state enterprises are partly under community control, at least regarding their distribution networks.

Despite Chavez's commitment to workers' control, it has not been easy to shift the orientation of a state and a private sector deeply hostile to workers. Workers' councils and struggles for worker participation

can be found in almost all state enterprises and many private ones—and workers have taken over hundreds of private businesses, sometimes after the state's expropriation of the original owners—but even in the *chavista* state bureaucrats were apt to undermine the Bolivarian process. Whether through corruption, mismanagement, obstruction of financing to state companies with worker-presidents, or other means, ministerial bureaucracies and even corrupt unions impede workers' control. In many state enterprises the situation is ambiguous: workers don't control the company or even participate in management, but "they control parts of the production process, they decide on their own to whom they will give access to the plant, [and] they are in a full-scale conflict with the management."

Despite all the advances made under Chavez, the fact is that the economy's social relations of production have not really changed and capitalist exploitation remains the norm. Private interests are still too powerful and have too much influence over the government, promoting mismanagement and corruption. It is still a rentier economy. But a revolutionary process has begun and is being carried forward by communities and workers across the country. The transformation of a society from authoritarian to democratic does not happen overnight.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Like the rest of the post-Soviet world, Bosnia-Herzegovina has suffered terribly from the privatizations, asset-stripping, marketization, and rampant corruption that have attended its transition to capitalism since the mid-1990s. Unemployment and economic insecurity are at epidemic proportions. In 2014, workers in Tuzla, Bosnia's third largest city, organized a massive mobilization against their deteriorating conditions, the first since the 1992–95 conflict. While the movement didn't last, its legacy may inspire further mobilizations in the future.

The 2014 demonstrations were a response to the wretched situation of workers in a laundry detergent factory, DITA, which at one time had provided 1,400 jobs. After its privatization in 2005, things started to go downhill. The company paid them minimal wages, issued meal vouchers only in bonds rather than cash, and eventually stopped paying them pension funds and health insurance. In 2011 they began a long strike, but in December 2012 the firm closed, having ignored all their demands.

Picketing the factory and filing lawsuits didn't secure justice for the workers, so in February 2014 they teamed up with their counterparts from four other nearby factories to stage demonstrations in front of Tuzla's canton court. All five workforces had similar demands: investigation of the questionable privatization processes that had destroyed their livelihoods; compensation for unpaid wages, health insurance, and pensions; and the restarting of production. Their demands didn't get a very sympathetic hearing: during one of the demonstrations, riot police secured the entrance of the canton building and fired teargas and rubber bullets. This brutality only further inflamed the workers, who kept up their resistance the following couple of days. The number of demonstrators rose to 10,000 as students and other citizens joined the protests, finally setting the government buildings on fire.

Chiara Milan's summary of the ensuing events is worth quoting:

> The action [of burning government buildings] resonated throughout the country. Within days, rallies in solidarity with Tuzla's workers took place across Bosnia-Herzegovina. Increasing discontent among the social groups suffering under government policies led tens of thousands to join in the main cities of BiH [i.e., Bosnia-Herzegovina]. Like a domino effect, the rage spread and the revolt escalated. On 7 February the government buildings of the cities of Mostar, Sarajevo, and Zenica were set ablaze by seething protesters. While politicians tried to hide the plummeting economic conditions of the country by constantly playing the ethnic card, the workers of Tuzla triggered wider social protests, arguing that rage and hunger do not recognise ethnic differences. The protests spawned a mass movement of solidarity that overcame the ethno-national divisions inside the country, travelling across the post-Yugoslav space. Rallies in support of the workers were reported in nearby Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and Macedonia…

Soon, directly democratic assemblies called plenums were set up across the country. "The citizens gathered in leaderless, consensus-based assemblies where everybody had the right to one vote and nobody could speak on behalf of other people." Each plenum had working groups addressing such issues as media, education and culture, and social problems. "Demands that arose during the plenums were collected and delivered to [these] working groups, in charge of reformulating them in a coherent way. Once reformulated, the demands typically returned to the plenum for a final vote [after which they were submitted to the cantonal government]. All the plenums were coordinated through an organisational body called interplenum…"

A new labor union was also formed in the wake of the protests, called Solidarnost, which quickly reached 4,000 members from dozens of companies. It was intended as an alternative to the conventional unions that had so signally failed to protect the interests of their rank and file. While it didn't succeed in winning the battle for the workers, it did keep fighting for years afterwards, as by staging weekly protests in front of the canton court.

The moment of collective outrage slowly faded away, especially after the flood that hit the country in May 2014 turned into a national emergency. The workers at the DITA factory, however, still did not give up: in March 2015 they occupied the factory and restarted the production of cleaning products, publicly appealing for international support. Shops and retail chains decided to sell the "recuperated factory's" products, and groups of activists volunteered to help the workers optimize production.

In general, Milan comments, the uprisings left a legacy of solidarity and activist networks, which challenge "the dominant rhetoric of ethnic hatred" and may be drawn on in future struggles.

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The path forward for the working class in an age of neoliberal crisis is tortuous and uncertain. Given the near-collapse of mainstream trade unionism and many left-wing political parties, it's necessary for people the world over to forge their own institutions, their own networks, to fight back against the rampaging elite and construct a new, more equitable society. The stories collected in *The Class Strikes Back* are an encouraging sign that workers everywhere are already waging the war, that democratic institutions can germinate in even the most crisis-ridden of societies, and that the ruling class's hold on power is in fact, ultimately, rather tenuous. The next generation of activism is sure to bring major changes to a morally corrupt civilization.

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Two Cheers for the Decline of the Middle Class

I realize how callous the title of this article sounds. The decline of the middle class, which in recent years has been the subject of innumerable articles, books, and movies, entails a terrible increase in human suffering. The descent of millions of families into relative poverty is beyond appalling, not something to be celebrated. However, the perverse Marxist in me feels obliged to complicate the narrative of unmitigated catastrophe that dominates all journalism and scholarship on the subject. The fact is that "progress," like God, works in mysterious ways, paradoxical, inhuman, "dialectically contradictory" ways. And the contemporary decline of the West's middle class may end up advancing, indirectly, the banner of humanity that the Left has carried forward since the seventeenth century.

The point isn't a very deep one. Consider the gravest threat that life on Earth faces today: global warming. This threat cannot be adequately confronted in the framework of capitalism, which indeed is responsible for it; it demands a systemic socio-politico-economic revolution, a social transformation that systematically elevates human needs above capital's needs. The most realistic way to address the crisis is for governments to nationalize the fossil fuel industry and shift resources toward renewable energy, which should be produced and distributed through publicly owned utilities. And this is only the beginning. There

have to be international reforestation and afforestation programs, for instance, and massive deployment of carbon sequestration methods and technologies. The very dynamics of the political economy have to be altered.

How can society ever get to this point? Evidently only through upheavals so painful that it becomes clear there is no other option. Revolutionary change on such a scale happens only by means of unprecedented crisis, which is to say social discontent so extreme that half-measures are cast aside as pitifully inadequate. As long as a large middle class exists to serve as a bulwark of social stability and relatively conservative politics, the requisite crisis will not happen. Society has to polarize between a tiny minority of ultra-rich and a huge majority of unprotected, insecure, ecologically vulnerable, politically desperate people whose violent discontent propels the "revolution" forward. Systems have to be radically disrupted, on a scale greater than during even the Great Depression, which led to the welfare state. If history has taught us anything, it's that the middle class is an effective barricade against revolution.

We might also reflect that, climatically speaking, the best thing that can happen in the short term is a global economic depression. Carbon emissions in the U.S. dropped by 11% between 2007 and 2013, mostly because of the Great Recession. A deeper economic collapse would have an even more positive effect, quite apart from the contributions it would make to the sort of systemic breakdown that would facilitate radical change.

Karl Marx recognized that class polarization and economic crisis present unique opportunities for systemic disruption, opportunities that activists must seize. That's the imperative, after all: to disrupt the smooth functioning of powerful institutions, and to create new institutions in their place. The more polarization, the more opportunities there are for revolutionaries. There are also more dangers, as we're seeing by the rise of the far-right across Europe and the U.S. But these dangers aren't necessarily insurmountable, if only the Left can get its act together and organize the drifting masses.

Millions of people are out there waiting to be organized. We can only hope that by the time of the next economic crash, the Left will be ready to seize the initiative.

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On the Use and Abuse of Rage for Life

"These are the times that try men's souls." How much truer is that statement now than in 1776! We're poised on the precipice, peering over into the crocodile pit below, where fascists swarm and writhe in sanguinary anticipation. Humanity is on the verge of losing its footing and plunging headfirst into the open maw of reptilian sadism. Where you stand, in this climactic moment of history, determines whether you are reptile or hominid.

We know where the majority of the ruling class stands, in their contempt for the poor, for the future, for democracy, the working class, the natural environment, the impartial rule of law, social cooperation, community, and a rational public discourse: they're on the side of the reptiles. Whether it's the boorish, amoral mediocrity of a Brett Kavanaugh, the rank hypocrisy of a Lindsey Graham or a Susan Collins, the naked cupidity of a Jeff Bezos, the proud Israel-fascism of a Chuck Schumer, the unfettered evil of a Mitch McConnell, or the undisguised corporatism of a Nancy Pelosi, a Barack Obama, and virtually every other politician on the national stage, the ruling class despises morality and law as an insolent threat to its unchecked power. Almost as offensive as these people's lack of all principles besides unwavering loyalty to the rich is their aggressive *mediocrity*, their transparent conformism and cowardice. One is stunned at the gall of such insipid nonentities to believe themselves superior to the rest of us.

Even from the perspective of their intelligence, these elitists don't exactly distinguish themselves. Consider one of the more honored and allegedly intellectual specimens: Anthony Kennedy. In what I suppose constituted an attempt at self-criticism, he recently offered the following rueful analysis of the state of the nation: "Perhaps we didn't do too good a job teaching the importance of preserving democracy by an enlightened civic discourse. In the first part of this century we're seeing the death and decline of democracy." The lack of self-awareness takes your breath away. The man responsible for the supremely

anti-democratic decisions in *Bush v. Gore*, *Citizens United v. FEC*, *Shelby County v. Holder* (which gutted voting protections for minorities), and *Janus v. AFSCME* (which by harming unions harms democracy), and who vacated his seat during the term of a president who prides himself on his authoritarianism and disrespect for the rule of law, is chagrined and apparently puzzled that democracy is declining.

Evidently the man is an imbecile, devoid of the capacity for self-critical reflection and empathic understanding of opposing arguments. And yet he's an esteemed member of the ruling elite. (Precisely *because*, one might maliciously suggest, of his incapacity for critical thought.)

How maddening it is that such indoctrinated fools have power! It's the blind leading the sighted!

Anyway, it's for the rest of us to decide where *we* stand. Will we stand idly by, cynical and apathetic, while what's left of society is dismantled, piece by piece, as a sacrificial offering to the great god Mammon? Or will we, fueled by sheer rage, stand up as one to the orgiastic misanthropy of our "leaders" and smash their petty little self-aggrandizing ambitions into dust? Will we march in the streets, occupy offices, organize mass strikes, take over workplaces, and confront our political "representatives" wherever they turn and wherever they are at every moment of the day? Or will we remain the domesticated dogs we've become under the long-term impact of corporatization, bureaucratization, and privatization?

In a time of universal atomization and a zombified-consumerist public life, the redemptive power of collective rage shouldn't be scoffed at. It is in fact key to the recovery of our humanity, our de-robotization, and to the very survival of humanity itself. We should embrace our rage, cultivate it as though it were the tree of life, cherish it, for its power of both motivation and social transformation is prodigious.

The plaintive cries of establishmentarians to restore "civility" in the public sphere are laughably self-serving and shouldn't be taken seriously. "You don't call for incivility," Megyn Kelly says in response to Representative Maxine Waters' call for exactly that. Angry left-wing responses to Trumpism are "unacceptable," according to Nancy Pelosi. "We've got to get to a point in our country," says Cory Booker, "where we can talk to each other, where we are all seeking a more beloved community. And some of those tactics that people are advocating for, to me, don't reflect that spirit." And poor, long-suffering Sarah Sanders sent out a tweet of Solomonic wisdom after the owner of a restaurant had asked her to leave because of her noxious politics: "[The owner's] actions say far more about her than about me. I always do my best to treat people, including those I disagree with, respectfully and will continue to do so."

In short: let institutions operate as they're supposed to, and don't enforce accountability on public officials outside the electoral process. By all means vote us out of office if you don't like our policies, but don't make life uncomfortable for us.

The truth is that, from more than one perspective, the decline of civility or politeness in the "political dialogue" is a sign of *progress*, not retrogression. Politeness upholds the politics of "respectability," which is the politics of conservatism, hierarchy, and the status quo. It coddles the powerful, even as they're enacting *substantively* uncivil, which is to say destructive, policies aimed at everyone who lacks the money to buy influence. The essence of politics, which is but war by other means, has always been "incivility"—struggle over resources, competing agendas, bribery, corruption, the defense of privilege against the unprivileged and the latter's struggle to wrest power from the former. There is a "beloved community" only in the milquetoast liberal imagination of a Cory Booker. The task for actual democrats is to bring the war to the doorstep of the privileged, to make them viscerally aware of the stakes involved, even if it means directly acquainting them with the wrath of the dispossessed. They've been sheltered far too long.

Even from the other side, the side of the reptiles, there is something to be said for Trumpian insult-flinging and demagoguery. At least it serves to take the fig leaf of high principles and public-spiritedness off the reactionary policies of almost fifty years. When Obama deported millions of immigrants and separated tens of thousands of families, it seemed as if no one cared. Now that Trump is doing it (arguably in even more sadistic ways), even the establishment media expresses outrage. The vulgarity and blatant evil, in short, tend to radicalize everyone who still has a vestige of moral consciousness in him. That's useful.

Ultimately, though, it hardly needs arguing that Trumpian "incivility" is disastrous, for example, in its promotion of white rage and white supremacy. But this is exactly why the time has come for the

politics of *extreme disruption*, as expounded and defended in that classic of sociology *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*, by Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward.

The Usefulness of Violence

As Piven and Cloward show, mass social disruption and civil disobedience were essential to the victories of several major popular movements in the twentieth century: the 1930s' unemployed workers movement (which indirectly brought forth the modern welfare state), the industrial workers movement that unionized the core of the economy, the civil rights movement, and the welfare rights movement of the 1960s that forced huge expansions of welfare programs. Even the scores of urban riots between 1964 and 1968 had a partially constructive impact. In the violent summer of 1967, for example, the Pentagon established a Civil Disturbance Task Force and the president established a Riot Commission. Seven months later, the commission called for "a massive and sustained commitment to action" to end poverty and racial discrimination. "Only days before," the authors note, "in the State of the Union message, the president had announced legislative proposals for programs to train and hire the hardcore unemployed and to rebuild the cities."

Without going into further detail, the lesson is already clear: not only "disruption" but even rioting can, potentially, be constructive, given the right political environment. This doesn't mean riots ought to be encouraged or fomented, of course; they should be avoided at almost all costs. But when conditions become so desperate that waves of riots begin to break out, we shouldn't too quickly condemn them (or the rioters) as hopelessly irresponsible, self-defeating, primitive, immoral, etc. The state's immediate response might be repression, but its longer-term response might well be reform.

Other scholars go further than Piven and Cloward. Lance Hill, for instance, argues in *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* that the tactic of nonviolence wasn't particularly successful in the civil rights movement. SNCC's peaceful local organizing in the early 1960s didn't bring about many real, tangible gains: months-long campaigns succeeded in registering minuscule numbers of voters. White power-structures, racism, and Klan violence were just too formidable. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "moral suasion," his hope to shame Southern whites out of racism, failed utterly. So the strategy shifted to provoking white violence in the full view of television cameras—and, as with the Deacons for Defense in Louisiana, *inflicting* violence as well (mostly in self-defense). By 1964 things were threatening to get out of control, with riots and some white deaths, so the government was able to pass the Civil Rights Act—which it proceeded to enforce only sporadically, usually when compelled to by violence or its threat.

Nonviolence was a useful tactic for getting white liberal support, but without the threat of black violence always lurking in the background it would have accomplished little. "One of the great ironies of the civil rights movement," Hill says, "was that black collective force did not simply *enhance* the bargaining power of the moderates; it was the very *source* of their power."

In general, the point is that people have to act in such a way that authorities will feel compelled to give them concessions lest social hierarchies be threatened. In the long run, needless to say, the goal is to replace the authorities, to empower people who actually care about people. But in the meantime it's necessary to extract concessions—by putting the fear of God, or, far more frighteningly, of revolution, into the heads of the thugs at the top. The credible threat of violence can bring results, as history shows.

In 2018, after the consolidation of a reactionary regime on the Supreme Court, it is long past the time for organized collective violations of "law and order" and "property rights." It's time to badger elected officials at every moment of every day, and to foster political polarization so that the ground caves in beneath the feet of the "centrists." Conditions aren't yet desperate enough for collective looting and rioting—since, after all, the economy is booming! (right?)—but it's necessary at least, in the coming years, to stoke such fears in the minds of the rich. Monolithic, sustained, savage repression cannot work for long in a nominally democratic country like the U.S. Radical reforms are inevitable—if, that is, we rise up *en masse*.

A "Crisis of Legitimacy"

The one good thing about Kavanaugh's confirmation to the Supreme Court is that it completes the delegitimization of the most undemocratic and typically reactionary institution at the federal level. Having an obvious perjurer, sexual harasser, overgrown frat boy, and overtly partisan hack on the Court strips away whatever patina of honor and impartial dignity that farcical institution still had. It has now lost all pretense of representing not only the will of the people but even the rule of law. This fact, too, will facilitate radicalization.

The entire political economy, and the august institutions that protect it, are being thrown into question.

The whiff of revolution is in the air, just starting to float, here and there, on the breezes blown back from the future into the present. The scent is positively revivifying.

It's a good time to be angry. And to translate your anger into action.

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The Necessity of "Lesser-Evil" Voting

It's election season again, that joyous time of the biennium, and you know what that means: a renewal of the perennial left-wing debate over "lesser-evil voting." Is it wrong to vote for a Democrat, rather than someone on the genuine left, in order to keep a reactionary or a fascist out of power? Or, on the contrary, is it wrong to vote for a leftist who has apparently no chance of victory, thereby denying a vote to the Democrat and so increasing the odds that the reactionary candidate will win? The most famous advocate of "lesser-evil" voting is Noam Chomsky, who argues that the most immediate moral imperative is to prevent the worst possible electoral outcome from occurring. Critics of lesser-evil voting are legion, as a simple Google search indicates.

The writer Nick Pemberton recently contributed to this debate in a *Counterpunch* article entitled "Reflections on Chomsky's Voting Strategy: Why the Democratic Party Can't Be Saved." It's a long and rambling article most of which isn't worth responding to. Nevertheless, since Pemberton has resurrected the issue, I'd like to weigh in on the side of reason and morality. Maybe a miracle will happen and I'll reach one or two people.

It's to the credit of Pemberton and many of his allies in this debate—e.g., B. Sidney Smith and Andrew Smolski—that they acknowledge it's a risky proposition to disagree with Chomsky. The man has a preternatural ability to be rational and right about nearly everything. And on this issue too, I think, he's absolutely right, and his critics are wrong. Now, if Chomsky can't convince the critics then I certainly can't, but hopefully I can at least provide a bit of food for thought.

One way to approach the issue is to list policy differences between Democrats and Republicans that leftists should care about. The claim is often made that the two parties are effectively indistinguishable, but this is hardly the case. Consider net neutrality, an issue leftists care about. Where do the parties stand on it? Obama's FCC voted in favor of it on party lines, while Trump's FCC ended it. Not exactly indistinguishable.

On global warming: Obama was pathetically inadequate, but during his term the U.S. did at least join the Paris Agreement. Trump withdrew from it. Obama's EPA introduced rules to cut pollution from vehicle tailpipes, while Trump's is rolling those rules back. Trump is enamored of coal; Obama wasn't. Trump's EPA has proposed to dramatically weaken regulations concerning mercury, posing a threat to the nervous systems of children and fetuses. The differences go on and on.

On the Supreme Court: how likely is it that Hillary Clinton would have nominated judges as reactionary as Brett Kavanaugh and Neil Gorsuch? Clinton cares about *Roe v. Wade* and would certainly have nominated people likely to protect its legacy. This is a major issue, not a trivial difference between the parties. In general, the liberals on the Court are hardly "indistinguishable" from the conservatives, as

this list of some major decisions in 2018 shows. (The entire twentieth-century history of the Court indicates the same thing, most notably from the New Deal on.)

What about workers' rights? The Democratic Party has little loyalty to organized labor—as evidenced by NAFTA and the TPP, among innumerable other betrayals—but Obama did at least sign the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 (in addition to a number of pro-worker executive orders), to which McCain was opposed. And Obama's Labor Department and National Labor Relations Board were far friendlier to workers than Trump's administration has been.

The foreign policies of the parties are much more similar than their domestic policies, being in fact virtually identical on issue after issue. I'm not going to defend the Democratic Party's foreign policy. But it's worth noting that George W. Bush's Iraq War probably would not have occurred had Al Gore been president, since Gore had fewer ties to neoconservatives and the oil industry than Bush and Cheney did. That is, a world-historic catastrophe that resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths, millions of refugees, and the destruction of a country quite possibly could have been avoided had more people voted for Gore over Bush in swing states in 2000. Is such a cataclysmic war worth preventing? I think so. Apparently critics of "lesser-evil" voting disagree.

Speaking of the 2000 election, the frequent denials that Ralph Nader contributed to Bush's victory are nonsense. Bush defeated Gore in Florida by 537 votes. Nader received 97,421 votes in Florida. Had only 538 of the people who voted for Nader voted for Gore instead, there would have been no Bush administration and quite possibly no Iraq war. It's a matter of simple arithmetic and shouldn't be controversial. Of course there were thousands of additional reasons why Gore lost, including perhaps the Monica Lewinsky scandal, his blandly centrist political positions, decisions his campaign made, and so on. But it's mathematically provable that one of the reasons was Nader's campaign in Florida.

The reason-defying power of ideological thinking is such that people are able to deny not only elementary morality (that you should prevent the worst possible outcome) but even elementary arithmetic. It's remarkable.

I won't continue listing differences between the two main parties, though there are many more. Instead, let's consider some of the other arguments. A common formulation is that "the lesser evil is still evil." To which I'd reply: sure, you can phrase it that way if you want, and maybe you're right to do so. But the point is that there are degrees of evil. Indeed, that's all we're confronted with in politics: greater and lesser evils. You shouldn't look for moral and ideological purity in the messy realm of politics. Even far-left candidates will almost never be perfect reflections of your values: there will be political sins in their past, they'll take stands on issues that you won't agree with, and if elected they'll almost inevitably make compromises that will disappoint you. The designation "lesser-evil voting" is misleading, because *all* voting is lesser-evil voting. Even if you vote for the most radical Green Party candidate you're still choosing (what you think is) the "lesser evil," because no candidate is absolutely perfect. You vote for the one who will do the least damage, or will serve your moral values most effectively.

And, again, one of your values should be to prevent the worst possible outcome. You can pretend you're being "pure" somehow by voting against the Democrat (or not voting at all), but, depending on the political context, what your feel-good voting strategy is accomplishing might only be to empower the candidate who will, say, pull the U.S. out of the Paris Agreement, step up the war on immigrants, end net neutrality, ratchet up the capitalist war on humanity and the environment, and give white supremacy a prominent platform.

I'm not saying you should necessarily actively campaign for a Democrat just to prevent the Republican from winning. (Although that's quite a reasonable thing to do if you don't want the fascist to win.) But surely it isn't too much to ask that on one day every two years you cast a vote against fascism and on every other day get back to the task of building a socialist movement.

The claim is often made that lesser-evil voting has enabled the rightward drift of U.S. politics since the 1980s. This claim would have more merit if there had existed a third party with even a remote chance of electoral success. But the fact is that the rightward drift of politics has overwhelmingly resulted from the business community's multidimensional mobilization against democracy, not merely from people's voting for a Democrat every two or four years. Incomparably more important than voting, at least as long as viable

third parties don't exist, is, on the one hand, the work of challenging and pressuring Democrats once they're in power, and on the other hand, the work of building a radical social movement *outside* the voting booth. The latter task takes decades. Not until it has been accomplished does it make much sense to embrace the sort of electoral strategy Nader has followed.

One argument I haven't heard Chomsky make is that having Democrats in power is useful because it shows people the flaws of the Democratic Party, and thus the necessity of building a socialist movement. If only Republicans were ever in power, people might think all problems could be solved just by electing Democrats, any Democrat. And that's the goal they would focus on. When Democrats in power show how corrupt and oligarchical they, too, are, then anti-capitalist movements like Occupy Wall Street and the current widespread activism for "democratic socialism" can emerge to push for systemic changes in the political economy.

In this sense, Obama's presidency advanced the political education of millions of Americans, who realized that electing centrist Democrats wasn't enough.

In the end, one's opponents or interlocutors will always have some stock answer to every argument, no matter how logical the argument is. Leftists who loathe the Democratic Party with apparently every fiber of their being will always have some rationale, however specious, to justify *never voting for a Democrat*. Even for a Democrat like, say, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who is (or seems) manifestly better on most issues than nearly all Democrats. The very word "Democrat" is, for many leftists, little more than a term of abuse, a curse word, as it is for so many Republicans, a term so value-laden that the idea of voting for such a person is nauseating. But investing political labels with primarily emotional content is neither useful nor rational, and can lead to demonstrably stupid, even totalitarian thinking and acting. We should try to step back from our visceral hatreds and aversions and consider dispassionately what course of action is likely to ameliorate the most human suffering. And that's really all that should matter.

If you think letting the House or Senate remain in Republican hands is a price worth paying for voting for an ideologically "correct" candidate who has no chance of winning, so be it. But I'd bet a lot of immigrants who are finding it much harder to get a visa now than under Obama would disagree with you. As would, perhaps, quite a few environmental activists who are now desperately working overtime to prevent Ryan Zinke's Department of the Interior from stripping yet another national park or monument of federal protection.

When (semi-)fascism is appearing on the horizon or is already in power, the imperative is to build a united front against fascism. The Communist Party in the period of the Popular Front was right about this. It's time to apply the hard-won lessons of the past.

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An Ode to Chomsky

[I don't like this article because it's so meandering and personal. But here it is anyway.]

Ninety years old and still going strong. Almost twenty years after the age when that other great left-wing public intellectual Jean-Paul Sartre was already utterly frail, uncommunicative, pliable in the hands of his handlers, and prone to haplessly spilling egg and mayonnaise on his face while eating, Noam Chomsky is still constantly giving interviews, traveling to distant countries to give talks on the political issues of the day, and in general is just as lucid as he always has been. It's an unusual constitution that guy has.

A few years ago I wrote a long article about why I find Chomsky important, but that piece didn't succeed in communicating what he has meant to me, and to many others. So I thought that on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday I'd take another stab at it. A lot has been written about him, but little from the "personal" perspective I'll adopt. My hope is that some readers will identify with my own encounter with Chomsky.

I'm well aware of Chomsky's aversion to personalizing things, and to an extent I share his taste. There is something inegalitarian about singling people out and praising them to the sky, something anti-

democratic and anti-anarchistic about treating them as authorities (particularly if they're perceived as nearly infallible). Even aesthetically one might object to doing so, if one prefers the coolly rational and objective aesthetic of classicism, of Bach and Mozart, the purity of a vision elevated above the spots and blemishes of the concretely existing. I've always much preferred the realm of ideas and perfection to that of personality and politics. It's so much ***cleaner***, so much nobler and more sublime, timeless, transporting, this realm of philosophy, science, intellectual and art history, music from the Baroque and Classical eras, all things not merely time-bound or *particular*. The universal is what's healthy; the particular slides into decadence.

But this is exactly why I can't help but be fascinated by Chomsky. For he seems, at least from afar, to be a unique fusion of the particular and the universal, of personality and reason, a person who exists above the personal. I've never seen anyone so reluctant to say a word about himself or his private life, his personal grievances or feelings or experiences, so completely self-effacing that it's hard even to believe he has a family or a life at all. He seems to be the disembodied voice of reason, compassion, and morality. […]

I can think of no one else as intellectually, morally, and humanly *clean* as Chomsky (or as his persona, at least). And we should all, I think, strive for such "cleanliness," a concept, incidentally, that moral theorists might expound on for its pithiness and evocativeness.

In any case, while there are dangers in personalizing or in hero-worship, there can also be gains. And insofar as humans are oriented towards humans and not only abstract principles, personalizing can never be wholly escaped. From childhood onwards, we enjoy putting certain people on a pedestal and perhaps emulating them; and this can be a quite important means of self-development, of the youth's sculpting of his own identity—in the likeness of his hero. Chomsky is wrong to dismiss—if he does—the importance of role-models, and of his own status as a role-model, in his conviction that each person should follow his own inner light, realize his creativity in his own peculiar way unencumbered by subordination to an authority. On this point, at least, Nietzsche was nearer the mark, for Nietzsche saw that sometimes to revere an "authority" can serve precisely to liberate, not to enslave:

> Your true nature lies [he wrote], not concealed deep within you, but immeasurably high above you, or at least above that which you usually take yourself to be. Your true educators and formative teachers reveal to you what the true basic material of your being is, something in itself ineducable and in any case difficult of access, bound and paralyzed: your educators can be only your liberators.

By fixing your gaze on a star and struggling to raise yourself to its height, you unwittingly find your way to your true self and perhaps, in the end, even become your own star, shining confidently apart from the distant celestial body you once worshiped. For it's true you should never simply copy another; you should only use others to liberate yourself from the dreck and slime of your surroundings and finally, using what you have learned, "become who you are."

Even Chomsky shouldn't be followed everywhere. He may be the least decadent person in history, the least culturally polluted—"he's a pencil-and-paper theoretician who wouldn't know Jabba the Hutt from the Cookie Monster," Steven Pinker has said—but sometimes a little decadence can be a good thing, can add depth and richness to life. To be as perfectly masculine, as rock-like, as Chomsky, nothing but the Enlightenment, can be limiting; there is also a place for the feminine, for, say, existentialism, phenomenology, popular music, dancing, receptiveness. And even Chomsky is just plain wrong from time to time. (For instance, he's wrong to rarely mention particular left-wing organizations that could use donations or members.)

In the following, though, since it's his birthday, I'll focus on the positives. In particular, I'll argue that adopting Chomsky as a "role-model" can help us lead lives relatively free of misanthropy, groupthink, intellectual dishonesty, "decadence," and, in short, excessive selfishness and self-immersion.

*

In fact, to be blunt, with this article I'm in the myth-making business. Again as Nietzsche understood, human life has need of illusions and is even grounded in them. The necessary illusion of our own importance, of the great value of our own little contributions, of the very existence of oneself as a substantival self, some coherent and enduring entity called "Chris Wright" or whatever (an illusion Buddhists, and not only they, have recognized as such—but can nonetheless not fully escape)—these and other lies are in some sense ineluctable. Easier to escape is the lie of traditional religion, but we still need values despite the death of God. The death of the human species itself is now a glimmer on the horizon, and yet we still, somehow, have to ward off nihilism. In a time of monsters and "morbid symptoms" (to quote Gramsci), of triumphant relativism and mass degeneracy, we need an anchor. My thesis is that Chomsky can serve as that anchor.

"Some people say, 'What would Jesus do?'" remarks Lawrence Krauss. "I say, 'What would Noam do?'" Myths, by inspiring and vivifying, can help ward off the rot and decay that creeps underground and far above ground in the White House, to seize on the living and sap their will to resist.

Living in this society, many years ago I woke up to find myself hemmed in and threatened on all sides by mediocrity. And in myself too I was more than disconcerted to see layer upon layer of mediocrity. But it was mostly the external mediocrity that troubled me, because it seemed so over the top. Everywhere I looked I saw stupidity, irrationality, meanness, proud ignorance, thoughtless conformity, an impossible lack of empathy, self-deception, hypocrisy, status-worship, an unbelievable amount of flakiness—in general a world governed by assholishness and idiocy. And cowardice. […]

But I'm not finished with the mediocrity yet. A few days ago I was in a car that grazed the door-handle of another car as it pulled out of a parking spot. We stopped to make sure there was no damage to either, and were about to leave when out of the other vehicle, originally hidden by tinted windows, stepped a gorilla of a man livid with murder in his eyes. "You bumped my car!" We apologized profusely and pointed out there wasn't a scratch anywhere. No matter. He was inconsolable. So we left, lamenting that such creatures as this gorilla existed—by the millions.

"It's *mine*! You can't touch it!"

[…]

Wherever there is atomization, there is sickness. It might be the sickness of "Don't step on my lawn!" or it might be the sickness of "Don't blame me, I'm just following the rules." Or the sickness of hating the Other—the Jew, the Muslim, the immigrant, the liberal—or of pursuing profit at the expense of workers, communities, the natural environment, and life itself. The manifestations of alienated atomization are infinitely varied, from the pointless, stupid honking of car horns in cities to the bureaucratic mass murder of "the unpeople" by the U.S. and its client states. I ought to be numb to it by now, but somehow whenever I encounter the sickness again, every day, I still shake my head at the cruelty and predictability of humans.

In general, I've lived much of my life in a state of resentment at the *smallness* of our species, the moral and intellectual smallness. There's a cognitive and affective dissonance that arises when you spend a large amount of time immersed solitarily in "high culture," overawed by the mysteries of life and the universe, by the grandeur and inconceivable beauty of the human brain, of existence itself, and then look up from your reading to see a world in which, say, the most embarrassing fools can become intellectual celebrities—Ayn Rand, Thomas Friedman, William F. Buckley, Ann Coulter, Sam Harris, Jordan Peterson—or in which luck and subservience determine destiny, and rationality and courage are almost always punished. Not to mention the stupefying small-mindedness that, for example, sentences a teenager (black, of course) to 65 years in prison for having participated in a robbery when he was 15 that resulted in a police officer shooting his friend to death. Life comes to seem utterly picayune and pointless, the very opposite of majestic and beautiful, when it's lived in such a world as this. A world in which the fate of millions can be determined by the merest accident, like a 5-4 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court that installs the reactionary Bush rather than the centrist Gore in the presidency. How can anything really matter in such a farcical, *accidental* world?

And then one starts to sympathize with, e.g., George Carlin's nihilism and misanthropy. Late in his life, Carlin said the following in an interview:

> We're on a nice downward glide. I call it circling the drain. And the circles get smaller and smaller, faster and faster… And we'll be gone. And that's fine, I welcome it. I wish I could live a thousand years to watch it happen. From a distance, so I could see it all.
>
> *Interviewer*: Does it depress you?
>
> No, it lifts me up. It lifts me up because I gave up on this stuff. I gave up on my species and I gave up on my fellow Americans. Because I think we squandered great gifts… And that's why I'm divorced from it now. I see it from a distance… I said, "George, emotionally you have no stake in this, you don't care one way or another. So watch it! Have fun!"

It's all a farce, so just enjoy the spectacle!

That's the temptation, the "sinful" temptation. And it seems that many, many people have succumbed to it, have become wholly cynical and apathetic.

I might have succumbed to it too, feeling alone, embittered, if it weren't for my discovery of…yes, Chomsky. He helped prevent my "downward glide" into the depths of Carlinian cynicism. In finding someone who validated nearly all my instincts and intuitions, but who sharpened them and elevated them to a level of virtually complete objectivity, I felt both vindicated and somewhat forgiving of others' faults. For it was clear that Chomsky was far above me in most respects, and yet was well-disposed toward humanity and hadn't "lost faith"—so who was I to lose faith or wallow in disgust? I didn't have the right to. And since then, Chomsky has served as a moral and intellectual guide—not an infallible one, but a pretty reliable one.

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I suppose part of the explanation of my "hero-worship" is that I have a somewhat religious temperament, a mind oriented towards transcendence and desirous of objectivity, and I've never fully made my peace with the nonexistence of God. I've wanted objective confirmation of my worth—as we all do, only I was especially preoccupied with the ideal of objectivity or truth. Simply living in the world wasn't enough; I wanted to transcend it, to penetrate mere appearances and understand, or even coincide with, something timeless and absolute. Something like "God."

To say it in more mundane language, perhaps the only thing I find fundamentally interesting is objectivity or rationality. Or truth. Error and mere subjectivity are everywhere, predictable and boring. People are so certain of themselves, and they're so wrong, it becomes difficult to take them seriously. But a genuine commitment to rationality, and an ability to follow through, to be consistently logical, open-minded, reasonable, concerned only to know truth even at the expense of "fitting in"—this quality is rare and precious.

For these reasons, I found it more than refreshing to come across Chomsky. He was, as Lawrence Krauss said or implied, the closest approximation to something transcendent or to pure reason that humans could hope for. In a world of rampant and rampaging self-indulgence, here was someone totally disciplined, fanatical about evidence, virtually masochistic in his devotion to principle, embodying moral and intellectual integrity in apparently every act and every utterance, a warm and kind person, and on top of it all, a genius with few peers in history who was right about seemingly everything. I felt that, well, if *homo sapiens* is capable of Nazism, at least it's also capable of Chomsky.

[…]

The sparkling objectivity and impersonality of Chomsky's analyses leads to one of his greatest contributions, his making a *science*, so to speak, of leftist philosophy. Marx, in a sense, had already accomplished this, but Marx made mistakes in his predictions and was a bit analytically sloppy on key questions (as I explain here). Chomsky, in essence an anarchist Marxist, dropped the ideological baggage of Marxism but implicitly kept most of the theoretical framework—which, after all, is just common sense, insofar as class struggle, conflictual relations of production, the capitalist state, imperialism, and other basic

concepts can hardly be denied except by vulgar ideologists. The factually rigorous interpretations of politics that Chomsky gave, backed up by overwhelming detail and an apparent command of almost the entire scholarly and journalistic literature, were and are of immense utility in substantiating the claim that to be on the far left is not just to be ideological or biased; it is to be scientific and rational, if the values you hold include democracy, human freedom, and human welfare. I had sometimes wondered if I was too left-wing; Chomsky convinced me I wasn't nearly left-wing enough, nor consistent enough.

As I suggested earlier, there was something else I appreciated about Chomsky's Olympian objectivity, or his focus on institutions rather than individuals: I liked the aesthetics of it. For one thing, I liked the withering contempt it expressed for functionaries of power, media figures, and intellectuals. Occasionally Chomsky would directly state what he thought of most intellectuals, as when calling them "specialists in defamation," or the American intellectual community a "gang of frauds," or the liberals at *The American Prospect* "pathetic, frightened, cowardly little people"; but ordinarily it was just the tone of savage irony, and the refusal to treat most intellectuals as anything more than *expressions of institutional interests*—not people to be taken seriously in their own right—that made clear his attitude.

And he was exactly right, both morally and scientifically. It's an obvious point that goes back to Marx: social behavior is overwhelmingly constrained by institutional context. Nearly everyone internalizes the norms appropriate to his institutional location—intellectuals maybe even more so than most, since they're more educated and therefore more indoctrinated. So their self-expressions tend just to be sublimated expressions of power-structures and hierarchies, institutional jealousies and conflicts, often mere class interests or rationalizations of class interests. When interacting in academic contexts, I've frequently had the uncanny feeling that I'm not talking to a person so much as to a node in the network of institutional norms. An institutional automaton, so to speak. There were limits to what I could say: for instance, if I mentioned Chomsky or Norman Finkelstein, or if I said some critical words about Foucault or some other postmodernist hero, the atmosphere grew a little tense and uncomfortable. "Chomsky lacks academic bona fides," I would be told. Or (after asking why Chomsky is rarely mentioned among scholars of Latin America) "Chomsky just borrows from scholars without producing original research," or something along those lines. It was clear that these remarks were mere rationalizations of the desire to ignore him—since, after all, he draws on every conceivable source and puts forward compelling interpretations—and that what was really being said was "He's not one of us, so we don't mention him. But I'll forgive you this time because you're new." It was interesting, in any case, to realize that at that moment I was talking to an institution, not a person.

As for the morality of it, well, to the extent that one lets one's humanity be submerged underneath institutional norms, one is abdicating responsibility and ceasing to be a moral agent. It becomes perfectly legitimate, then, to treat such a person as "beneath contempt," to use a term Chomsky is fond of.

But there was another aspect of the aesthetics of objectivity that I liked: as I said above, I appreciated the absence of any hint of cultural decadence. This was not a minor consideration. For whatever reason, for a long time my antennae have been hyper-attuned to indications of decadence. I've always thought, for example, that the greatest and healthiest music ever written was during the era of Bach to Schubert: after Beethoven and Schubert, decline set in—enervation, emotionalism, romanticism, self-indulgence, excess, stupefaction, a lack of discipline, etc. This isn't to say I don't love an enormous amount of Romantic music, from Chopin to Rachmaninoff; but I know it isn't as spiritually healthy or creatively disciplined as Mozart and Beethoven. And with the twentieth century—impressionism, atonality, Mahler, Stravinsky, and then eventually the indeterminacy of John Cage, and minimalism, and all the academic noise-crap that gets written today by classical composers—things got truly, repulsively decadent. There was still some great music, but it was on a lower order of greatness than the Holy Trinity Bach-Mozart-Beethoven.

I could discuss whole swathes of culture, from philosophy to poetry, explaining how and why there was a decline from the vigor of the eighteenth century (and Marx, its disciple) to the lassitude and fragmentation of the twenty-first, but that would take me rather far afield. The point is that Chomsky, the last great Enlightenment thinker, was the most significant exception to this trend of ever-increasing

decadence. He struck me in fact as the most purely autonomous person ever, impervious to unhealthy influences or impulses.

Philosophically, for instance, I was pleased to see my contempt for behaviorism validated by two brilliant essays, the famous 1959 review of Skinner's *Verbal Behavior* and a lesser-known critique of Skinner that appeared in Chomsky's *For Reasons of State*. From the first moment I had come across behaviorism, the notion of interpreting humans and all animals in terms of stimulus and response, conditioning, reinforcement, and so on struck me as ludicrously impoverished. Empiricism in general, the tradition emanating from John Locke and David Hume, who deprecated the rich innate endowment of the human mind in favor of interpreting it as virtually a passive absorber of sense-perceptions and the like, I was never able to take seriously. It was just too contrary to common sense, and too scientifically primitive.

More clearly "decadent," though, was the whole "paradigm" of postmodernism that Chomsky has consistently rejected, and that actually has some connections to the empiricism he has fought against his whole life. This isn't the place for a systematic discussion of postmodernism—i.e., the cultural tradition emanating from Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Deleuze, Lyotard, and their acolytes—so hopefully I'll be forgiven if I just refer passingly to its general thrust of interpreting the world, in the vein of empiricism and idealism, as formed and structured by "discourses," "vocabularies," "epistemes," "imaginaries," social constructions, mutually incommensurable and incommunicable paradigms, and other such idealistic notions.

I've never been able to understand why intellectuals and activists who operate in this relativistic, *discourse*-obsessed tradition can consider themselves to be exemplary leftists, since the leftist tradition has for a long time been associated with materialism. Its goal has been to change the objective world that constrains us, the institutions that govern our behavior, and thus the class structures that allocate resources. What's so radical or transformative about withdrawing into the spheres of literary and cultural theory? What's so radical about relativism, the denial of objective truth, a focus on subjectivity, denial that natural science can give us access to the nature of the mind-independent world, denial that there even *is* a mind-independent world? Doesn't that tend to imply that power and oppression are only in the mind, that they aren't objectively real, and so that people can free themselves from oppression if they only change how they think and talk?

But that, of course, is the point. The idealism serves two purposes: it allows intellectuals to pretend they're important, since they're the ones who produce the ideas and discourses that supposedly constitute reality; and it takes attention away from things that matter in the real world, like wages, working conditions, the natural environment, and living conditions, thus serving the interests of business. So the whole postmodern paradigm is allowed and encouraged to become culturally dominant, and colossal sums of money are directed to fund "research" in these academic fields. It certainly is no coincidence that the era of the triumph of postmodernism was the era of the triumph of conservatism.

It's also worth noting that, as György Lukács describes in his masterpiece *The Destruction of Reason*, an idealism and relativism quite similar to the spirit of postmodernism pervaded German culture, and European culture generally, in the early twentieth century, and did much to prepare the ground for fascism—which itself was an idealistic and relativistic ideology and movement. So the postmodernists aren't in great company.

Wherein consists the decadence of postmodernism? In brief: (1) its frequently obscurantist and impenetrable prose, which serves to give the impression of incredible profundity and also protects writers from criticism (since "you're misunderstanding them!"); (2) its navel-gazing subjectivism and focus on language or terminology (or subjective identities, one's relationship with one's body, etc.), which discourages active, confident, productive engagement in/with the real world; (3) its agenda to deconstruct, tear down, "problematize," refute, fragment, rather than confidently create and synthesize; (4) its relativism, pessimism about the possibility of mutual understanding—or even the existence of meaning itself—and ultimately its nihilism; (5) its supposed hyper-sophistication, its cynicism, its weariness with all the great philosophies and achievements of the past, which is the opposite of a healthy, youthful, strong naïveté; (6) its fetish of the *particular* over the *general*; (7) its extreme pretentiousness, which dresses up simple ideas in over-inflated, turgid prose and presents truisms as if they're important discoveries; (8) its rejection of

commonsense realism and the very notion of objectivity or truth; (9) its intellectual sloppiness and many self-contradictions (e.g., "[it's objectively true that] there is no objective truth"); (10) its cloistered, elitist, hyper-academic nature; (11) its political cowardice, as in its refusal to confront class-structures; (12) its lack of seriousness and urge to just fecklessly *play* (with words, concepts, images, collages—*bricolage*); (13) its goal to provoke for the sake of provoking, to be outrageous for the sake of being outrageous, and in the end to just garner attention for oneself because nothing else matters in a world in which nothing matters. Etc. *ad nauseam*. Postmodernism is the very apotheosis of decadence, the kind of thing that happens just before the world ends.

So Chomsky has generally ignored it. And even this reaction is the healthiest and least decadent possible, because postmodernism is so *obviously* rotten, so clearly masturbatory, so vitiating, so polluted with intellectual, aesthetic, and moral vice, and in the end so unimportant compared to the crimes constantly being committed by the state and the business community, that one might as well focus on something else, something that truly matters. Just ignore these intellectuals as the self-promoting parasites and poseurs they are.

I've also appreciated Chomsky's tendency to ignore another symptom of decadence: postmodern feminism, queer theory, gender theory, all the discussion of sexuality and bodies and so on that proliferates among liberal and leftist academics and activists. Practically the only time he ever acknowledges feminism is when describing progress that has been made since the 1960s. And he's right, of course: the progress that has been made in women's rights and sexual equality, as in gay rights, in the last two generations is of immense importance, and has had a civilizing effect on the culture. Moreover, this sort of activism remains urgent, as states roll back abortion rights, a conservative majority exists on the Supreme Court, the Trump administration tries to make it more difficult for sexual assault survivors to speak out, etc. Feminism will always be of great moral significance, because there will always be room for improvement in relations between the sexes.

But the specifically postmodernist aspects of contemporary feminism are of far less moral importance than the general goal to empower women. In fact, there's an enormous amount of intellectual confusion and shallow thinking among feminists. I've discussed the matter here, and won't delve into it now. Suffice it to say that, for many feminists, the idealistic mantra "Social constructions!" substitutes for thought, and for open-minded perusal of the relevant scientific and psychological literature—not all of which (to say the least) supports favored politically correct dogmas. The radical empiricism of postmodern feminism, according to which the minds of males and females are a blank slate at birth onto which social expectations are written—such that genes, hormones, brain structures and such make no contribution to the differences in behavior and psychology between men and women—is scientifically very problematic.

But it's an example of a common and unfortunate, and quite anti-Chomskian, human tendency: the tendency to believe something not on the basis of evidence but simply because one *wants* to believe it. Most people evidently are prone to thinking on the level of "I like" and "I don't like," not "The evidence suggests…" They think according to value-judgments, not disinterested investigation of evidence. This explains how religious belief can be so widespread despite being irrational: people want to believe in God, so they do. This phenomenon is such a "fundamental dishonesty and fundamental treachery to intellectual integrity," to quote Bertrand Russell, that I find it hard to understand. But it's present everywhere, among feminists, conservatives, liberals ("Obama was a great and moral president!"—despite his drone terrorism campaign, aggressive deportation of immigrants, refusal to prosecute bankers, slavish support of Israel, refusal to bail out homeowners after the 2008 crash, support for the 2009 military coup in Honduras, relatively meager actions on climate change, catastrophic intervention in Libya, support for dictators all over the world, and generally his abject subservience to the oligarchy that runs the U.S.), free-market fundamentalists, Leninists, and so forth.

Regarding Leninism, for instance, Chomsky is right to criticize both the theory and the practice (before, during, and after the Russian Revolution). Recent scholarship, such as that of Christopher Read and Orlando Figes, validates the old criticisms of Lenin by anarchists, left-Marxists like Rosa Luxemburg, and Chomsky himself, in showing how Lenin ended the experiments with workers' control of factories in 1917 and established dictatorial control over the state and society. One can argue that he had to, given the

conditions that prevailed; but it's striking that his undemocratic, semi-Blanquist practice was wholly consistent with his earlier ideas, his vanguardism and elitism. But even apart from this, there is something at least prima facie odd in still worshiping and looking for profound lessons from a figure, or figures, who dealt with conditions that could hardly be more different from the U.S. in the twenty-first century. What does Russia in 1917 (and earlier, when Lenin was formulating his ideas) have in common with the U.S. in 2018? Why not stop obsessing over how Lenin seized power in a shattered late-feudal, early-capitalist country, or what his strategies were to seize power in such a country, and instead focus on conditions and problems that confront us now?

One other point about feminists, and many other young leftists today: conservatives' criticisms of their totalitarian tendencies are not wholly off the mark. Free speech is, after all, an important value, however much feminists and others might not want to hear things that hurt their feelings. To give a trivial personal example: I was once invited to give a talk on worker cooperatives at a university, but the invitation was rescinded after some students came across the page on feminism I linked to above. They were offended, you see, by what they had read. I found the incident more amusing than anything, but it was disconcerting to have it vividly confirmed that even the sorts of obvious truths and mild provocations they had read are considered beyond the pale, so much so that it's necessary to cancel a talk on a completely unrelated subject. Nothing less than absolute uniformity of thought is permitted.

Again, though, Chomsky's attitude is right: however stupid and immoral the totalitarian intolerance of young leftists might be—and also self-defeating, because it risks alienating people who basically share their values and want to fight for a better society—the threat to free speech posed by such people is so minuscule compared to the colossal suppression of truth and free speech by government and the corporate media that it makes no sense to focus on the silly young leftists.

Moreover, Chomsky's general reluctance to criticize the left, especially as compared with the fierce criticisms he levels against dominant groups, is precisely right. "The most important word in the language of the working class is 'solidarity,'" Harry Bridges said. Privately, yes, one should criticize the actions or beliefs of fellow leftists if that might have a constructive effect. But one should be wary of making severe public criticisms, since that might serve only to foment resentment and thereby fragment and undermine the left. No living leftist better exemplifies solidarity than Chomsky. (On this point, he is far superior to the sectarian Marx.)

To sum up, Chomsky has been able to avoid all the decadence that has afflicted intellectual and cultural life for well over a hundred years. I have yet to come across instances in his writings and talks of sloppy thinking, intellectual dishonesty, a lack of commitment to principle, or the groupthink and status-consciousness that condition how virtually all "intellectuals" (and, in fact, nearly all people) think, write, and act. How common it is for people to take something seriously just because it's taken seriously by others! Or to act in a certain way only because others do, and condemn those who act or think differently. Instead, one should step outside one's own little subjectivity, one's personal feelings and impulses, and evaluate every thought and act in the light of cold reason and warm compassion.

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Another unusual quality of this *Übermensch* I'm over-praising is that he doesn't waste words. His manner of speaking and writing is notably pithy and economical—which sounds odd, since he's famously long-winded. He talks and talks, and could probably talk for days, until he collapsed from inanition, just following a train of thought where it led him. In general, though, every word seems necessary, every sentence furthers the argument or usefully illustrates it with examples. This economy of expression is, to put it mildly, unusual among intellectuals, as among everyone else. People love to hear themselves talk, and they'll frequently talk for the sake of talking. It's a phenomenon readily observable during most kinds of "meetings" (of activists, for example), academic seminars, and question-and-answer sessions during talks (in which audience members asking their questions frequently expatiate unnecessarily, and often incoherently, on all manner of topics, until the moderator has to interrupt them).

Again, I'm led back to the theme of decadence, and of particularity vs. generality. People are immersed in themselves: when talking at great length unnecessarily, they're being self-indulgent, unempathetic, undisciplined, and just plain stupid. (Stupidity is utterly immersed in itself, whereas intelligence incorporates others. Particularity vs. generality.) In communicating, one should try to stick to the point. Even more importantly, one should *have* a point.

Chomsky's practice in this respect holds some lessons for academics. He doesn't describe for the sake of describing, recounting things that happened just because it's interesting to tell stories or to probe the experiences of people from certain analytical perspectives (the perspectives of gender, race, sexuality, or whatnot). While there is value in doing so, in the manner of social historians for example, he prefers to take a more scientific approach to the study of society. As he says in this interview (near the end), if your goal is to *explain*, rather than just to describe, you have to apply general principles to particular phenomena and try to explain the latter in terms of the former. You don't simply wade around in the particularity and remain on that level; and you certainly don't celebrate the particular for its own sake, as postmodern scholarship—which rejects general principles like class conflict as either oversimplifications or of no special priority—often does. The whole point of science is to simplify, to explain the chaotic mess of reality in terms of simple principles like Boyle's Law or Newton's laws of motion. You abstract from complicating factors and isolate dominant forces; then you try to account for unexplained factors by using secondary principles, and so on. Throughout, the point is to test the *general idea*, not to say, in effect, "Reality is incredibly complex, but here are various ways of describing it and interpreting it (using gender, race, sexuality, class, individual psychology, etc.)."

As I've explained in this essay, in the case of society, the dominant principle has to be class conflict. Or historical materialism more generally. Of course, society is different from nature: it's not deterministic. So the "science" is of a different character than physics, and the explanatory principles are of a different character than Newton's laws of motion. Still, the people who criticize Chomsky or Howard Zinn or Marx for being reductivist, oversimplifying, partisan, etc. are wide of the mark. The truth is that it's the establishment intellectuals who are being far less scientific than the "partisan" leftists, because the latter recognize how science, or understanding, works. It isn't "neutral." It is *grounded in "reductivist" principles*.

A new book by the respected liberal historian Jill Lepore serves to illustrate the point. *These Truths: A History of the United States* has received the usual acclaim that establishment writers get, and in many ways it is an impressive achievement. But not as providing a framework of explanation for U.S. history. Insofar as the narrative is guided by general ideas at all, they're the wrong ideas. "The United States rests on a dedication to equality, which is chiefly a moral idea, rooted in Christianity, but it rests, too, on a dedication to inquiry, fearless and unflinching." "The American experiment rests on three political ideas…political equality, natural rights, and the sovereignty of the people." It's the tiresomely conventional liberal idealism, which, incidentally, is grounded in value-judgments just as much as Zinn's *People's History of the United States* is. Lepore has given the usual criticisms of Zinn, that he simply reverses old value-judgments about the gloriousness of America, a reversal that, analytically, "isn't an advance; it's more of the same, only upside-down." She fails to see that her own history is just a more subtle return to the narrative about how great and unique "the American experiment" is. She acknowledges that lots of bad things have happened in U.S. history, but then immediately qualifies this admission by saying it's true of every other country too (which it is). And then the next sentence: "But there is also, in the American past, an extraordinary amount of decency and hope, of prosperity and ambition, and much, especially, of invention and beauty." This sentence isn't followed by acknowledgement that the same value-judgment is true of other countries, because Lepore, as a good patriotic liberal American, still implicitly subscribes to the old notion of American exceptionalism (which Zinn, being a deeper thinker, rejected—and this *was* an "analytical advance"). Her agenda is to celebrate the U.S.—to defend it against "critics" like Zinn—as a French historian might celebrate France, a British historian might celebrate Britain, etc. There isn't much explanatory value in this sort of patriotic narrative history.

[…]

One of the reasons for Zinn's sophistication is that he doesn't adopt a naïve idealism that tries to "explain" history using principles that aren't robust enough to really explain anything. He uses truly explanatory principles, which, like a scientist would, he tests by deeply exploring the past. These "principles" amount to the single, commonsense statement that Chomsky makes in the film *Requiem for the American Dream*: "The history of the United States is a constant struggle between these two tendencies: pressure for more freedom and democracy coming from below, and efforts at elite control and domination coming from above." It's a history of power struggles, which amounts to a history of class conflict (including racial and other forms of conflict, conditioned in myriad ways by class). This is a realistic and substantive hypothesis that provides a framework of understanding, and that is backed up by a colossal body of world historiography.[1]

Nathan Robinson of *Current Affairs* has devastatingly criticized Lepore's book, pointing out that it mostly ignores the history of working-class struggle, among other things that are central to the American story. But this is what happens when you don't have much of an overall point except to tell particular stories that you rather arbitrarily judge to be important. If you lack a weighty analytical anchor, you lose your way.

I've always found it ironic that the idealists, whether liberal, conservative, or postmodernist, are bad at ideas, far worse than the materialists.

The fact is that you don't need the endless verbiage of academics, the (usually hyper-specialized) books and articles *ad infinitum*, in order to understand the world. Essential truths can be expressed in a few words, as Chomsky shows. You state the hypotheses, and then you provide the factual documentation. Of course, we intellectuals have to get our paychecks, so it is necessary for us to constantly come up with new research proposals and new stories to tell for their own sake, and to discuss unendingly in conferences and so forth, repeating and slightly reformulating old insights or "problematizing" them for the sake of problematizing them, pompously "theorizing" and pontificating, but little of our activity has much of a 'scientific'—and certainly not a moral—payoff. It's just how the institutions work, and how the political economy keeps educated people occupied who might otherwise spend their time on dangerous pursuits like challenging power-structures.

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This article has gotten long enough, but there are a couple more points I want to make before putting an end to the "endless verbiage" to which I'm subjecting the reader.

[…]

In the end, it's this (relative) absence of ego that sets Chomsky (relatively) apart. He obsesses over politics not because he enjoys it—he surely finds it very dreary—but because, given his abilities, he has a duty to. I think we all could be a little more conscious of our duties to each other, insofar as we subscribe to the Golden Rule (as we should). Duties to be kind, to answer emails, to not be too quick to judge harshly, to imagine ourselves in the other person's shoes, to give people the benefit of the doubt while yet taking a clear stand when certain moral lines have been crossed, and in general to strive for relative selflessness (because that is intellectually, aesthetically, and morally elevated).

It's easy to be misanthropic and nihilistic, but there is something a little self-indulgent, even decadent, about that. A more "clean" and virile response is to recognize the horrendous evils and absurdities of the world, indeed to take them for granted, but to imagine oneself as an objectively detached being who is committed, no matter what, to realizing certain universal values. Nothing can make you stray from your path. However stupidly and disgustingly people act, you continue to act kindly and respectfully because it's

[1] But you really only need to read one book in order to get the rudiments of an education: *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky*. I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say that, together with its extraordinary footnotes, this may be the greatest book ever published in the fields of political philosophy and political science. I think it also suggests one of the reasons that intellectuals loathe Chomsky: he knows and understands so much more than they, despite lacking all professional credentials in these fields, that his existence is something of an embarrassment. Even worse, it's hopeless to argue against him. All you can do is smear him.

a principle you're committed to, your own categorical imperative. You keep working to improve the world in whatever small ways you can, because that's the law you've given yourself. You try not to emotionally dwell on the negative, since there's so much of the negative in the world that you'll end up in suicidal despair. You remember there is also plenty of the positive, and the only healthy thing is to increase the aggregate amount of the positive.

In a sense, don't take the world seriously. Don't take the farce, or the "freak show," as George Carlin called it, seriously. We're here for a few decades, can observe and try to mitigate the freak show for a few decades, and then vanish into the oblivion from whence we came. Nothing really makes sense, not our existence and, especially, not what we've collectively done with our existence. The brutal Chomskian irony/sarcasm is appropriate. But you still make of life what you can, do what you can to live in a healthy way, not being surprised or overly depressed by all the cruelty and absurdity but impressed by the many positive qualities you encounter.

Nietzsche's *amor fati* is perhaps unattainable, but Chomsky's stoicism and good humor are the next best thing.

In short: happy birthday, Noam, and may you have many more.

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Free Speech, Hassan Nasrallah, and Other Victims of Internet Censorship

The fact that we live in a world in which the distribution of information is largely under the control of private corporations (and of governments overwhelmingly influenced by corporations) is itself a sufficient indictment of our civilization. Even if, impossibly, no other crimes ever occurred anywhere and systems of power were by and large benevolent, private control and distribution of information would justify attempts to reconstruct society on a new foundation. Such control is simply too contrary to the principles of free expression and free access to information to be tolerated by a people who value democracy, truth, and rational, unimpeded communication. How much worse is it, though, when corporate control of information is an essential precondition for the non-stop commission of systematic crimes against humanity by these very corporations and governments. If the public knew everything that's going on, it is unlikely they would tolerate it for long.

As it is, we're living in a planetary practical joke, victims of some malevolent cosmic intelligence with a sick sense of humor: in order to organize political dissent, struggle for social progress, and spread knowledge of corporate and government crimes, we're dependent largely on networks that are run and policed by these criminals themselves. We function at the mercy of their good will. Internet service providers can, whenever they feel like it, deny service to some "dangerous" individual or group; media platforms like Facebook and YouTube can suspend a user as soon as they decide they don't like what he's saying, or if he runs afoul of some algorithm; Google can steer traffic away from particular websites, as it has lately been doing with regard to left-wing sites like the World Socialist Website, AlterNet, Democracy Now, and CounterPunch. And the victims of this censorship have, in effect, no recourse, except to appeal to the public to pressure the censors.

Facebook has censored countless users who didn't deserve it, as when disproportionately targeting activists of color, suspending livestreams of police shootings, temporarily deleting TeleSur's English page, and deleting VenezuelAnalysis's page (until the ensuing public outcry got that decision reversed). Its army of content reviewers is constantly censoring individual posts in accordance with a 27-page set of rules, resulting in the suppression of posts about, e.g., Indian atrocities in Kashmir, Geronimo and Zapata as heroes in the "500-year war against colonialism," and a left-wing counter-rally on the anniversary of the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia.

The political censorship (of both the left and, sometimes, the right) is out of control: this past year, hundreds of accounts and pages have been deleted on the pretext that they're fake or "inauthentic." Or, as always, "extremist." Not surprisingly, many have been quite legitimate, run by real people who were using pseudonyms for the sake of safety, or whose perspectives are just designated as unacceptable because

they're contrary to official narratives. After deleting dozens of "inauthentic" accounts and pages last summer, Facebook stated that the culprits had "sought to inflame social and political tensions in the United States, and said their activity was similar—and in some cases connected—to that of Russian accounts during the 2016 election." In other words, users are now forbidden to "inflame tensions" or to act "similarly" to Russian accounts.

At least we're still allowed to share cat memes and baby photos.

But the main victim of this creeping McCarthyism has been, of course, the cause of the Palestinians, and more generally anyone who objects to Israel's decades-long orgy of bloodlust. Whether on Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, or other platforms, entities resisting Israel are regularly denied a voice. Hamas's armed wing isn't permitted an account on Twitter, while the Israeli army is. Facebook blocks Palestinian groups so often—including Fatah and leading media outlets in the West Bank—that they have their own hashtag, #FBcensorsPalestine. Given that these media near-monopolies are an essential means of reaching followers and spreading a message, such censorship has a very destructive effect.

Recent outrages concern suppression of the voice of Hezbollah's Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah. A year ago YouTube suspended a popular channel that broadcast, and provided translations of, speeches of Hassan Nasrallah, among other "anti-American" leaders (Putin, Assad, etc.). The channel, which had over 400 videos, had 10,000 subscribers and had racked up more than six million views, and was growing in popularity. YouTube's pretext for its suspension was "violation of the rules concerning graphic or violent content." More specifically, three videos of Nasrallah's speeches were deemed offensive: one was titled "ISIS is Israel's ally and aims [at] Mecca and Medina," the second was titled "We are about to liberate Al-Quds (Jerusalem) and all of Palestine," and the third was called "The next war will change the face of the region." It would be hard to argue that anything in these speeches was particularly "graphic or violent," for they contain little but sensible political analysis and exhortations to resist a brutally violent neighboring state.

The owner of the channel then created a Facebook page to post similar content, called Resistance News Unfiltered. A year later, just a few weeks ago, it was deleted. With no explanation. It had over 6,000 subscribers and was providing an important service by translating the speeches of a highly perceptive political analyst. Norman Finkelstein recently released a statement on all this censorship of Nasrallah:

> It is a scandal that the speeches of Hassan Nasrallah are banned on youtube. Whatever one thinks of his politics, it cannot be doubted that Nasrallah is among the shrewdest and most serious political observers in the world today. Israeli leaders carefully scrutinize Nasrallah's every word. Why are the rest of us denied this right? One cannot help but wonder whether Nasrallah's speeches are censored because he doesn't fit the stereotype of the degenerate, ignorant, blowhard Arab leader. It appears that Western social media aren't yet ready for an Arab leader of dignified mind and person.

The *New York Times* has reported that "Israeli security agencies monitor Facebook and send the company posts they consider incitement. Facebook has responded by removing most of them." In fact, typically over 90 percent of them. Meanwhile, as Glenn Greenwald notes, "Israelis have virtually free rein to post whatever they want about Palestinians," including calls for genocide and the most grotesque celebrations of the torture and murder of Palestinian children.

All this is perfectly predictable, for the economically powerful will always cooperate with the politically powerful to suppress dissent. Companies like Facebook and Google (which owns YouTube) will always be inclined to do the bidding of the U.S. government and its allies. This fact nevertheless constitutes a terrible, proto-fascist danger to free speech that ought to be resisted as energetically as any crime against humanity concealed by such corporatist collaboration.

Only if we flood Google, Facebook, Twitter, and the others with complaints is there a chance for necessary voices like Hassan Nasrallah's to be heard. Our endgame should be to eliminate these corporations themselves and transfer the media infrastructure they own to the public, but on the way to that goal we have to keep poking holes in the corporate blackout to let in some sunlight.

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The Coming of American Fascism, 1920–1940

Fascism is usually thought of as a quintessentially and almost exclusively European phenomenon, as having begun with Mussolini, culminated with Hitler, and been eradicated in World War II. The U.S., in particular, is thought to have been largely immune to it, given the absence of mass movements similar to Nazism or Italian Fascism. But there exists a different narrative, or at least there did in the 1930s, before it was buried under an avalanche of patriotic American propaganda and liberal historiography. According to this alternative understanding, the U.S. was falling victim to fascism already in the 1920s—though a different sort of fascism than in Europe. Long-forgotten Marxist journals such as *The Communist*, *The New Masses*, and *Labor Notes* (unrelated to the current publication of the same name), and newspapers like the *Daily Worker* and the *Industrial Worker*, analyzed with great insight the nature of this distinctive American fascism, until the struggle against the Nazis shifted their priorities to supporting a more liberal and "patriotic" Popular Front.

In a new book entitled *The Coming of the American Behemoth: The Origins of Fascism in the United States, 1920–1940*, Michael Joseph Roberto has resurrected the old Marxian conception. Aside from its interest as a work of history, the book is also quite relevant to the present, as the old structures of American fascism have deepened in the last generation and colonized much of the world.

The essence of fascism

Roberto's project, in brief, is to reconstruct the arguments given in such pioneering, albeit now ignored, works as Lewis Corey's *The Decline of American Capitalism*, Mauritz Hallgren's *Seeds of Revolt*, Robert Brady's *The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism* and *Business as a System of Power*, Carmen Haider's *Do We Want Fascism?*, and A. B. Magil and Henry Stevens' *The Peril of Fascism*, all published in the 1930s or early '40s. These authors and others, whose insights were not taken up by generations of liberal scholarship, understood that fascism was not uniquely European, that it could easily happen in the United States. In fact, they understood it was happening: as Brady noted in 1938, "business is going political as it never has before, and it has learned to funnel its funds and pressures through highly centralized, interest-conscious, informed and exceedingly well-manned, united front organizations."

Evidently these writers had a different concept of fascism than most of us do today. As Paul Baran wrote in 1952, according to the liberal understanding, for a political system to qualify as fascist "it has to display the German or Italian characteristics of fascism. It must be based on a fascist mass movement anchored primarily in para-military formations of brown shirts or black shirts. It must be a one-party regime, with the party headed by a Führer or a Duce… It must be violently nationalist, racist, anti-Semitic…" While it's perfectly reasonable to consider such a phenomenon as one manifestation of fascism, the analysis tends toward superficiality insofar as it obscures the class roots and class functions of the regime. The Marxist approach, which looks beneath the surface, is more penetrating, resulting in a "dynamic definition of fascism," Roberto summarizes, "as an inherent function of monopoly-capitalist production and relations whose telos was and remains the totalitarian rule of capitalist dictatorship."

Incidentally, this wasn't only a Marxist notion. It was widespread in the 1930s, including in the very centers of power. "Many persons strategically placed in American business," Brady wrote, "confidentially argue that [fascism] is already here in both spirit and intent." Harold Ickes, Franklin Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior, gave a speech in 1937 arguing that "fascist-minded men" had "a common interest in seizing more power and greater riches for themselves, and ability and willingness to turn the concentrated wealth of America against the welfare of America. It is these men who, pretending that they would save us from dreadful communism, would superimpose upon America an equally dreadful fascism." Other Roosevelt advisors trumpeted the same message. And finally Roosevelt himself broadcast the "Marxist" idea, when he announced in a speech in 1938 that "I am greatly in favor of decentralization,

and yet the tendency is, every time we have [a recession] in private industry, to concentrate it all the more in New York. Now that is, ultimately, fascism."

It was widely understood, then, that the essence of fascism was, in Carmen Haider's pithy formulation, the "attempt to introduce a collective form of capitalism in the place of individualism." It was the fusion of big business with politics, the war on democracy by a public relations industry in the service of capital, the myth-making and "business evangelism" that is so integral to the propaganda industries of monopoly capitalism (and so reminiscent of the myth-making central to Fascism and Nazism). Whether the classic seizure of power through middle-class support was present was ancillary to the dictatorial rule of capital.

The New Deal's corporatism

Roberto tells the history of the American political economy in the 1920s and '30s through this lens, exploring how the fascist structures of our own day were forged between the two world wars. Much of his book, in particular the long expositions of Marxian economics, will be familiar to readers versed in left-wing literature. He devotes a chapter to the ideologists of fascism, or business rule, in the conservative 1920s, notably Thomas Nixon Carver, Harvard professor of economics, and Charles Norman Fay, vice-president of the National Association of Manufacturers and author of *Business in Politics*. Inevitably, we encounter Edward Bernays, father of public relations and believer in the necessity of "regimenting the public mind every bit as much as an army regiments the bodies of its soldiers." These were the prophets and soothsayers, the heralds of the New Era of untrammeled capitalism.

But by 1930, the fascist millennium had succumbed to its economic contradictions, with the Great Depression. It turns out that when all the money goes to the top, the people on the bottom don't have enough money to keep the economy growing. What was the way out of this dilemma? Well, according to the leaders of business and politics—more fascism. Many of them pined for a Mussolini, and even liberal newspapers like the *New York Times* advocated "some sort of Council of State" that could rule by decree. In the end, the oligopolists only partially got their way, with the establishment of Roosevelt's National Recovery Administration in 1933.

It may seem absurd now, but in the mid-1930s it was usual for Marxists and socialists to argue that the New Deal was simply a higher stage of fascism. In fact, they had a point. "Conceived as a means to create common ground between government and industry," Roberto writes, "the NRA marked a decisive move toward state monopoly capitalism in the United States." The real power was left in the hands of big business, which wrote hundreds of "codes" to regulate prices, wages, work hours, etc., all to restore profits and eliminate overproduction. It was a move towards a planned, state capitalist economy, of which big business was the sole beneficiary. Small businesses suffered, workers were not really empowered, income was not redistributed, and the economy remained sluggish. But the profits of big business recovered.

The early New Deal "bore strong resemblances," Roberto notes, "to the corporatist state established in Italy in its approach to reconciling the antagonism between capital and labor. Both Mussolini and Roosevelt had made clear their commitment to maintain and strengthen capitalism in their respective nations. Consequently, the fascist character of the New Deal could not be easily dismissed…" Roosevelt himself admired Mussolini: "I don't mind telling you in confidence," he wrote a friend, "that I am keeping in fairly close touch with the admirable Italian gentleman." It's ironic that a few years later Roosevelt was denouncing fascist tendencies in the U.S.

Huey Long and Charles Coughlin

Roberto is on shakier ground in his chapter on the "small-fry fascisti" who populated America's political landscape during the Depression, particularly in his argument that Huey Long and the "radio priest" Father Coughlin were reactionaries and fascists. Long was a famously progressive, albeit dictatorial, governor of Louisiana in the early 1930s who later became a U.S. senator, from which perch he criticized the New Deal for its conservatism and proposed his own wildly popular "Share Our Wealth" program. Had

he not been assassinated in 1935, he might have posed a serious challenge to Roosevelt's reelection. Coughlin, on the other hand, was never a political leader, though through his radio broadcasts he was a political force in his own right. He, too, became intensely critical of the New Deal for its conservatism—although, like Long, he denounced Marxism and communism as well.

My own research on the subject led me to conclude that, despite what some historians (including Roberto) have argued, they were more left-wing than right-wing, at least until Coughlin in later years turned decisively toward anti-Semitism. The two men certainly were politically ambiguous, and had Long become president, it is impossible to know how he would have governed. But it's inarguable that their massive following was due to the far-left character of their rhetoric—as may be judged by the Principles Coughlin laid out for the National Union of Social Justice, the political organization he founded. He went so far as to condemn the economic system itself: "Capitalism is doomed and not worth trying to save."

The reason I cavil with Roberto on this point isn't that I care much about defending Long or Coughlin. Rather, I disagree with his characterization of the millions of "petty bourgeois" who were attracted to the two figures:

> Angry at the ruling class for robbing it of livelihood and status, [the petty-bourgeoisie] also stood fast against the masses that they believed threatened them more. Amid the swirl of change, dislocation, and anxiety about the present and fears for the future, they made up the great wave of political reaction during the mid-1930s… Not understanding how and why those above them were responsible for the crisis that threatened them, they blamed most of it on the enemies lurking below, the Negroes, Jews, Catholics, Mexicans, anarchists, socialists, and, of course, the communists—all enemies of True Americanism.

This is a facile interpretation for which, in effect, no evidence is given. In its over-generalizing it reeks of the lazy old Marxist condescension towards the middle classes. I can't go into much detail here, but elsewhere I've argued that there was no "great wave of political reaction" in the mid-1930s except among big business, that the middle and lower classes were generally far to the left of Roosevelt—and pushed him to the left in 1935, with the so-called Second New Deal that partially repudiated the fascist tendencies of the first. Long and Coughlin themselves played an important part in this swing to the left, since Roosevelt's popularity was waning in 1934 under the barrage of left-populist criticism. As a result, in 1935 he supported the Wagner Act, the Social Security Act (which was, however, more conservative than most Americans wanted), and the establishment of the Works Progress Administration. And in 1936 he ensured his overwhelming reelection by taking a page from Long's book and denouncing "economic royalists" who were callous to the suffering of Americans.

The truth, then, is that Long and Coughlin, together with the influential Communist Party and other leftist organizations, helped save the New Deal from becoming genuinely fascist, from devolving into the dictatorial rule of big business. The pressures towards fascism remained, as they always will in the context of corporate capitalism, and reactionary sectors of business began to have significant victories against the Second New Deal starting in the late 1930s. But the genuine power that organized labor had achieved by then kept the U.S. from sliding into all-out fascism (in the Marxist sense) in the following decades, during the Cold War.

The struggle to come

The Coming of the American Behemoth is an interesting book with lessons for the present, as we confront a polarized and oligarchical political economy so redolent of that which precipitated the Depression. All the debate about whether Donald Trump is fascist, or whether society is in danger of succumbing to fascism, can be seen, from one perspective, as missing the point. Fascism in the materialist sense has been increasingly with us, especially (though not only) with Americans, for the last forty years, as the political economy has returned to something like its state in the 1920s. It is here now, already, and would be here even if Hillary Clinton had won the presidency.

The danger isn't so much that "paramilitary formations of brown shirts or black shirts" will take over society as that we will fail to overturn the *class* foundations of fascism that are at this moment racing to destroy life on Earth. Roberto is right to emphasize this deeper structural reality.

In short, while the American Behemoth was rising in the 1920s and '30s, in the 21st century "the beast is at full strength." It will take a revolutionary struggle of the working masses to destroy it.

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A Little Misanthropy Can Be a Healthy Thing

[A blog post]

This is from a letter Sigmund Freud wrote to his pastor friend Oskar Pfister:

> I do not break my head very much about good and evil, but I have found little that is 'good' about human beings on the whole. In my experience most of them are trash, no matter whether they publicly subscribe to this or that ethical doctrine or to none at all. That is something that you cannot say aloud, or perhaps even think, though your experiences of life can hardly have been different from mine. If we are to talk of ethics, I subscribe to a high ideal from which most of the human beings I have come across depart most lamentably.

He expressed the thought more concisely in another letter: "In the depths of my heart I can't help being convinced that my dear fellow-men, with a few exceptions, are worthless."

Misanthropy has tempted "great thinkers" from Heraclitus to Nietzsche and beyond, and I suspect it tempts most people in general, at least sometimes. All they have to do is look at how cruel, stupid, inconsiderate, selfish, greedy, vulgar, and so on their fellow humans are! The irony is that most people who periodically feel this revulsion are themselves more than capable of being cruel, stupid, inconsiderate, etc. Freud, for example, was very far from a model human being.

Personally, I'm not above the occasional misanthropic mood. There have been times I've identified so little with the nasty, stupid species called *Homo sapiens* that I've whimsically speculated I must come from another planet. I remember fantasizing at 12 or 13 that I was an alien who had been dropped on Earth to live among humans for a while, write a long report on what he saw, give it to the human species for its benefit (so it would have the opinion of a third party), and then return to Mars or wherever it was I was from. What has kept me from actually being a "misanthrope," I think, is that I was lucky enough to be born with a cheerful nature and a sense of humor. Observing how ridiculous people are, in the ironical mode of a George Carlin, can be a diverting pastime.

"When you're born, you get a ticket to the freak show," Carlin remarked. "When you're born in America, you get a front row seat."

In a post several years ago called "Subversive common sense" I gave a few examples of the absurdity of our usual ways of thinking and acting, but I'm in that impish mood again and think I'll continue the list here. Sorry if it offends or upsets anyone. It's mostly just meant in jest (I think). Life, after all, would be hard if we didn't have a sense of humor. We shouldn't take ourselves so seriously!

Where to begin? How about with that old Freudian chestnut, sex? Freud's fetishizing of sex was a little extreme, but the sex instinct certainly does take up a lot of space in the mind. And a good deal of behavior that seems more or less innocent is shot through with a not-very-high-minded significance. To take an obvious example: feminine clothing. Imagine what an outside observer, like a Martian, would think if he were to investigate our species. He would see the females dressing skimpily and seductively, baring their skin and breasts, as the males frequently stared or tried to avert their gaze; and he would likely be puzzled as to why the males didn't simply grab one of these tempting females whenever they wanted. "What's holding them back?" he'd wonder. "What a strange species! The males have an irrational amount

of self-restraint. From their behavior it's clear they're frustrated, and it seems the females like to taunt them. Perhaps in this species the females are dominant?"

He'd watch men and women sit in public settings and would see men spreading their legs and women closing theirs. "The males' pose is sexually inviting, but the females invariably either cross their legs or simply keep them closed, obviously to cover their vaginas. This custom, at least, makes sense from the standpoint of evolutionary psychology." (That's the *Martian's* point of view, not the *true* one.) Suppose he observed gymnastics, figure skating, or ballroom dancing. "It's all very beautiful and impressive, but certainly one of the meanings of these rituals must be sexual. Why else would the females wear such revealing clothing, showing even their buttocks and breasts, when the males don't? Why else would they keep spreading their legs wide open, twirling them around the males, who are touching them and grabbing them in the most private areas? The crowd seems mesmerized by these sexual displays." If he happened to see the Rockettes perform, the significance of the high kick routine would be evident: "The point, obviously, is that the females are giving everyone a series of momentary views of their genital area. It's a sexually suggestive, flirtatious performance."

What he probably wouldn't know, from his external perspective, is that a vast conspiracy of silence among humans systematically pushes such "naughty" interpretations as his off to the margins of consciousness. Or maybe after lengthy observation he'd have an epiphany: "My god, is it possible they're actually just living in denial? They keep sexuality repressed -- so repressed they might even be outraged if someone pointed out these obvious truths! Are they perhaps ashamed of sex?"

"In general," he would conclude, "this species shows dazzling ingenuity, really inexhaustible imaginativeness, in both its expressions and its concealments of the sexual impulse. Wherever humans go and whatever they do -- whether watching images on their electronic devices or walking in the streets or sitting on the underground trains -- they're viewing females flaunting their sexuality, or else trying to conceal it. In this sense, the male sex is clearly dominant and determines social behavior. And yet most males are terribly frustrated, it seems. Fascinating!"

Sometimes you get a truer perspective, or at least a more interesting one, if you imagine how a Martian would interpret humans. This is why Noam Chomsky likes to use this conceptual device. To paraphrase him: "A Martian would see us exacerbating global warming, i.e., racing to destroy ourselves, and would conclude humans are an evolutionary error. Self-destruction must be programmed into them somehow. That would be a rational [though not necessarily a *correct*] conclusion."

On the whole, people are much too prone to self-deception. They tell themselves pretty stories to think well of themselves and to hide the real significance of their behavior. Suppose a woman falls in love with a man. "He's so kind and smart, caring and funny. He's my soulmate." Okay, but what if he were three or four inches shorter? Or, God forbid, actually shorter than you? Would he still be your "soulmate"? Not likely. What if he had a lazy eye? Or an unsightly mole on his face? Would his kindness and intelligence mean so much to you then? Doubtful. You would have rejected him in favor of some taller or better-looking guy, just as men are apt to reject women for not being pretty or thin enough or subservient enough or giggly enough.

"Affairs of the heart" are largely accidental. Like most things in life. They're not so meaningful. If the guy had chosen a different bar for the first date, a noisier or seedier bar, the dynamics of the conversation would have been different and the girl might well have decided, for whatever reason, not to see him again -- and so their marriage, their children, their grandchildren, none of it would have happened. All because he took her to the wrong bar. Or to a place with bad lighting or a rude bartender or some other little thing that could muck up the "chemistry." Or if he had worn an outfit she didn't like; or maybe he wasn't muscular enough, or he had a bad haircut, whatever. It's all bullshit. Life is a series of stupidities and accidents.

All this is obvious, but people seem to forget it. Understandably, I suppose. But it's salutary to keep it in mind, so we don't take ourselves too seriously.

And we definitely shouldn't take seriously collective or institutional phenomena like culture or politics or individuals' status. The tendency is that high social, professional, economic, or cultural status indicates moral and intellectual mediocrity (though there are exceptions). "In an amoral world, the amoral man is best qualified to succeed," to quote the historian Albert Prago. But not only the amoral man: also

the obedient, cowardly, groupthinking, and incurious man. It always strikes me as pathetic and immoral that some people, such as celebrities, billionaires, and successful intellectuals, are treated as superior to everyone else. It's a farce: they're just *people*, after all. Except that in most cases they're more unpleasant and morally compromised than others.

Sometimes an article published in a mainstream newspaper or magazine will cause a big splash and the author will get a lot of attention, will be interviewed a lot, and will perhaps have changed how hundreds of people think about the world. It's a joke. Any number of articles published on left-wing sites like *Counterpunch*, *Current Affairs*, *In These Times*, *Jacobin*, *Consortium News*, and dozens of others would have had a much bigger impact if only the editors and publishers of liberal outlets weren't too cowardly to print anything really challenging. I can't help being disgusted by the whole show, in fact by many things that have a *collective* dimension. In the "collective" is not only stupidity but also fakeness, pretentiousness, amorality, and cowardice.

I sometimes even find it hard to reconcile the desire to be influential with the knowledge that most "influential" people are pretty contemptible. Or that influential books and articles are often *terrible*. Think of the writings of "libertarians" like Ayn Rand, op-ed columnists like Thomas Friedman, or intellectual hucksters like Ben Shapiro and Jordan Peterson. If *that* is what it means to be influential, well then screw it, who cares! Of what value is "recognition" if such pathetic people as this have so much of it? Why do I care about influencing or being "recognized" by the sorts of uncritical fools who are capable of worshiping low-caliber "public intellectuals"? I should care about that desire not much more than I care about influencing other apes in the human family tree -- chimps, bonobos, gorillas, orangutans. In the end, are most people really so far removed from *Homo neanderthalensis*? (Just think of most white supremacists, ICE agents, fascists, reactionaries, inhumane bureaucrats, politicians, "bro"-y corporate types, money-grubbers of all stripes, empathy-deficient egotists, uncritical dogmatists anywhere on the political spectrum, and so on.)[1]

I'm reminded, again, of what Chomsky said once. When his assistant asked him, "How do you keep from getting angry at all the nasty emails you get from enraged people?," he simply said, "Do you get angry with a hurricane? [No, she replied.] Well, people are hurricanes." I don't know what he meant by that, but, in less-than-sympathetic moods, I've assumed he meant people tend to have little control over themselves, they're guided more by emotions than reason, don't have a lot of free will in some respects, are scarcely even responsible for their actions. They're like forces of nature, not rational moral agents.

But this type of thinking is too one-sided and misanthropic to be the whole truth. And even if frauds, idiots, and assholes are frequently respected or even revered (in fact, it's safe to say that nearly all people who are widely respected -- including Mohandas Gandhi, by the way -- are profoundly flawed), that doesn't mean you shouldn't keep trying to make the world a better place and appreciate whatever recognition you get for doing so. And if you get none, so be it. In such an unjust world as ours, that's really what you should expect: either no recognition at all, or active punishment of various sorts. What matters is that you respect yourself. Take it as a badge of honor that you're not celebrated -- you're not low enough for that.

But however important it is to do all you can to help people, don't make the mistake of taking them (or 90% of them) seriously.[2] They're not Chomskys; they're wrong about most things, and deeply flawed. The most passionately believing people are liable to be the most wrong. Even well-intentioned liberals and leftists almost always have gaping blind spots they plug up with all manner of delusions. Take anti-nuclear environmental activists, people like Helen Caldicott. Since the 1970s, thousands of activists have devoted much of their lives to fighting against nuclear energy, which they consider polluting and dangerous. Some have achieved great fame, and are utterly convinced they've made the world a better place. Turns out they've

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[1] Needless to say, scientifically speaking, the comparison between humans and Neanderthals is surely unfair to both. Who's to say Neanderthals weren't gentle, peaceable creatures? And humans are, after all, more intelligent than Neanderthals, even if it often seems they aren't. At least humans have language, which Neanderthals probably didn't.

[2] More accurately, help them, improve them, listen to them, reason with them, but don't get frustrated by them. *Expect* them to disappoint you -- and then you won't really be disappointed. You might even be pleasantly surprised, if they defy your expectations.

not only wasted their lives but have actually made the world worse. I've written elsewhere about how the conventional wisdom on nuclear power is dead wrong. By advocating the closure of nuclear power plants and making it more costly to build new ones, these people have helped cause the deaths of thousands from coal plant emissions (which have replaced nuclear plants) and have exacerbated global warming. Future generations can thank environmentalists for helping to wreck the environment.

The same is true of most anti-GMO activists. While there are plenty of reasons to fight against Monsanto and other such corporations, the war against GMOs as such has only harmed people across the developing world. Many activists who pride themselves on their morality and humanitarianism are devoting their lives to keeping millions hungry and poor.

These are the ironies human life is full of, the ironies you can avoid only by educating yourself dispassionately, observing the world objectively, and thinking critically about everything you do and believe. Don't get too attached to particular beliefs; always be willing to rethink everything.

One significant irony is that intellectuals, or in general highly educated people, are usually more deluded about themselves and the world than the less educated are. They've been more indoctrinated, so their beliefs are less sensible. Certain aspects of feminism are a good example. Many feminists are certain that physical and biological facts about men and women have no causal relation to gender identities -- everything is socially constructed -- but in fact this belief, far from being correct, is hardly even coherent. After all, gender identity incorporates beliefs about and attitudes toward one's body, and toward the biological processes that occur in one's body. Processes like, in men, the pubescent growth of the penis and testes, ejaculation, increasing muscle mass, and greater size and height than women; and in women, processes like menstruation, the growth of breasts, pregnancy, and nursing. If norms of femininity include norms about nursing children, or even staying at home during pregnancy and motherhood as your partner provides for you, evidently this is (in part) because it's women, not men, who get pregnant, give birth, and nurse children. So, lo and behold, it appears that biological facts do partly determine gender, and "social construction" is only one piece of the puzzle.

Why is masculinity associated with physical activity, athletic prowess, and muscular strength? You don't have to be a genius to see it's because men tend to be faster, stronger, and have more endurance than women. (*This isn't a value-judgment!* It's just a fact!) And so, given that the sexes naturally define themselves in relation to each other, masculinity ends up being defined as more athletic than femininity. Whoops: it seems, again, that biology semi-determines gender norms. And the whole vast feminist literature arguing against this idea is refuted, by a couple of sentences.

It's easy to go on in this vein, refuting postmodern idealism about gender.

Feminist academic writings also provide illustrations of intellectuals' extreme *pretentiousness*. Even Wikipedia articles, hardly as pretentious as most "theoretical" writings, can verge on self-parody. Here's a random example:

> Gender, according to West and Zimmerman, is not simply what one is, but what one does -- it is actively produced within social interactions. Gender is an accomplishment: 'the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category.' People do not have to be in mixed gender groups or in groups at all for the performance of gender to occur; the production of gender occurs with others and is even performed alone, in the imagined presence of others. 'Doing' gender is not just about conforming to stereotypical gender roles -- it is the active engagement in any behavior that is gendered, or behavior that may be evaluated as gendered.
>
> The performance of gender varies given the context: time, space, social interaction, etc. The enactment of gender roles is context dependent -- roles are 'situated identities' instead of 'master identities.'

So one's actions are relevant to one's gender. "Gender isn't only what one is but what one does." What a profound insight. It never would have occurred to me that gender has to do with behavior. Or that gender

roles vary with context and are "situated" in given contexts or circumstances. I'm in awe of such intellectual acuity.

And then there's the great Judith Butler. Here she is on the distinction between performance and performativity:

> When we say gender is performed, we usually mean that we've taken on a role, we're acting in some way, and that our acting or our role-playing is crucial to the gender that we are and the gender that we present to the world. To say that gender is performative is a little different, because for something to be performative means that it produces a series of effects. We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman… We act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal reality or something that is simply true about us, a fact about us. Actually, it's a phenomenon that is being produced all the time and reproduced all the time. So to say gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start.

I have to admit I don't see what's so earth-shaking or original about these ideas. Of course, she dresses them up in much more jargonized prose in her writings, but here she explains them fairly lucidly. The point is that there is no "internal reality," that a person *is* not a gender but *acts out* a gender. Through repetition of acts, a gendered reality is created. You see it's the old idealism, the old denial of objectivity or truth or "essence," which I've written about elsewhere.[1] In the fragmented, alienated, hyper-commodified, nihilistic social conditions of postmodernity, it's been fashionable to deny the existence of the self, and of objective truths in general. (The spectacular successes of natural science constitute a rather embarrassing problem for this anti-realist, relativistic ideology.) But, well, I don't see why it's necessary to deny that there is a "masculine" or "feminine" *self*, an "*internal reality*" of some sort that may well be (in fact certainly is) influenced by the kinds of objective biological facts scientists study, having to do with hormonal and many other physiological differences between the sexes. Feminist theorists like to disregard or explain away this whole realm of natural science, since they're constrained to respect disciplinary boundaries -- their field is culture/literature, not biology, so they'll leave the biology to the biologists and pretend it has no bearing on their subject (or, alternatively, is irredeemably sexist, patriarchal, whatever) -- but that theoretical stance shows no intellectual integrity.

And sure, gender is "a phenomenon that's being produced and reproduced all the time," in part through one's acts (and internal thoughts, which Butler characteristically doesn't mention because internal = bad) and also one's "situatedness" in institutional, political, cultural, etc. contexts, and yes we're all heavily influenced by the social world and various "discourses" (or rather practices) we've been socialized into, and the *specific* expressions of gender obviously differ between societies (although certain cross-cultural commonalities are striking), etc. But Christ, what a mountain of pretentious ideological crap is produced by these hordes of self-serious academics!

Sorry to go on at such length. I only wanted to give an example that ties into my general theme of "Humans are ridiculous and take themselves too seriously." It would be easy to give other examples of pretentious and pointless intellectualizing, for instance among Marxists. Actually, it's too easy. So let's move on.

Incidentally, the really striking and ironic thing about most intellectualizing isn't its pretentiousness but the combination of its pretentiousness and its *stupidity*. I confess I've never been able to understand why most intellectuals are so stupid/irrational (though I've speculated about it here). They're frequently quite skilled at talking, writing, reading, footnoting, even teaching, but beneath all the fireworks I often perceive a lack of critical intelligence, of analytic sense, of a *sturdy realistic mind*.

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[1] Among postmodernist leftists it's considered very enlightened to reject "essentialism" about any given thing. In some contexts, maybe this rejection is progressive. But not always: the *essence* of capitalism, for example, is unjust in the ways Marxists have described. "Essences" are everywhere. *Homo sapiens* itself has a biological "essence," a "nature," like every other organism. Science deals with essences. So does philosophy.

E.g., in the context of politics, why do leftists have to be so damned sectarian? Every little school of thought fights against every other, with the result that everyone loses and the reactionaries win. It's stupid. Get over yourselves, people! Work together! Purity of doctrine matters less than changing the world. (Have you never heard the word "solidarity"?)

And why do leftists so often inveigh against "lesser evilism"? In some cases, it's very important to keep the worst candidate out of office! Again, doctrinal purity matters less than preventing the absolute worst things from happening! I agree with Chomsky that this principle is common sense.

How is it possible there are intellectuals who reject historical materialism? The materialist interpretation of society is so blindingly obvious it almost requires genius to be obtuse enough to reject it. Idealistic liberals like Paul Krugman, and to some extent even John Maynard Keynes, are not impressive critical thinkers.

In philosophy, why are confusion and superficiality so common? I recently read a book by Susan Blackmore called *Consciousness: A Very Short Introduction*. It's rife with confusions. I've written about the mind-body problem, but here I'll just say I find it odd that philosophers are so reluctant to accept the conclusion that the human mind isn't capable of understanding exactly how consciousness emerges from electrochemical processes in the brain. There is an unbridgeable gap between private subjectivity -- intentions, feelings, phenomenal qualities like colors, sounds, and tastes -- and objective physical processes like electrochemical impulses traveling across millions of neurons. The mystery is a *deep conceptual problem* that thinkers have agonized over for centuries. Why not simply accept the natural conclusion that the human mind is limited, just as the mind of every other animal is limited, and there are certain problems it will never be able to solve? This position seems very obvious to me.

Why have so many philosophers and linguists resisted Chomsky's idea of a Universal Grammar that is genetically hardwired into humans? As he says, UG means nothing but *the initial state of the language faculty*. Humans surely have a language faculty, meaning an aspect of the cognitive architecture of their brain that predisposes them to "grow" a language in the first few years of life as they encounter verbal sounds produced by adults in their environment. No other animal grows a language in this way; only humans have such a capacity. And this capacity is precisely UG, which therefore *must* exist, since humans have language! Yet the Chomskian position is controversial! I find it mystifying. Surely the burden of proof is on those who reject his perfectly natural, almost self-evident, theory.

I've already touched on the inadequacies of postmodernist thinking about sex and gender, and elsewhere on this website I've written about how postmodern thinkers are wrong (or superficial) about most other subjects as well. So I won't go into that here. The intellectual shallowness, in some respects even self-contradictoriness, of postmodernism is stunning.

Etc. In the humanities and social sciences, it isn't always easy to find sensible thinking. But these are ideological professions, after all, where the pressures of groupthink and subordination to power are extreme. So the lack of acuity and honesty isn't surprising.

Moreover, for academics the rule is "publish or perish." So they have to keep writing, keep publishing, keep thinking of new little arguments to make, however trivial or silly, in order to advance their careers. It's perfectly understandable. They have to "problematize" for the sake of problematizing, so to speak, since this is how you can keep having things to say (maybe not interesting things, but what matters is only that you say *something*). It's important to quibble and quarrel over every little point, because otherwise you'll be out of a job. Indeed, this is probably why philosophers are so reluctant to accept that the mind-body problem (among others) can't be resolved! If they were to accept this position, then there would be little else to say on the matter, and they wouldn't be able to publish anymore about a big subject that has advanced thousands of careers.

"Stupidity" is therefore -- actually in many ways -- built into the academic bureaucracy, and is inevitably and continuously produced by it. Not a surprise, because *all* bureaucracies, by their very nature, manufacture stupidity and inhumanity.

Speaking of Chomsky, I must say I even find it hard to understand that so many people who encounter his work, whether in philosophy and linguistics or in politics, think nothing of strenuously disagreeing with him. This strikes me as itself a form of stupidity (however understandable it might be in

the context of their career, which may *require* that they disagree with him). All you have to do is read his writings or watch videos of him to see he's a uniquely acute, informed, and serious thinker. If you're going to disagree with him about something, well, you'd better think long and hard before doing so.

If I were really going to be serious about arguing that human life consists largely of illusions and self-deceptions, I'd go deep, all the way down to what it means to be a self in the first place. While we certainly do have an internal sense of self, we do *not* exist in the way we think we do, as some sort of ego-substance named "Chris Wright" or "John Smith" or whatnot, a Person or a Soul or a Self with a Will and an Identity, etc. What "I" am, in effect, is just a body infused with consciousness, self-consciousness specifically, consciousness of being conscious. There is no Ego in the grand, substantival sense we like to think. Again, I've written about this subject elsewhere. We're just *conscious bodies* running around fighting and playing, mating and talking, bodies with advanced brains that can construct the sense of an integral self based on things that have happened and are happening to the body -- sensations, perceptions, memories, and responses to other bodies (or rather to *embodied selves*, for that's how each human body perceives itself and other bodies). There is no "John Smith": the entity denoted by a name is an illusory construct.

To get a better idea, an *intuitive* idea, of the magnitude of the illusion, I can only suggest you go to a mirror and look at the pupils in your eyes very closely. Ordinarily we "see" pupils as some kind of *substance*, like a direct expression of, or a gateway to, the self that we are. But of course the pupil is a hole -- an absence, not a presence. When I glance at the bathroom light in the mirror and then look back at my pupils, I find it pretty disconcerting to see them dilate. I can then vividly see they're merely deep black holes, vacant, nothing, and it's as if right at the center of my self is an emptiness, a soullessness. I see myself as just a biological robot or a zombie. But then when I back away from the mirror the impression dissipates and everything is back to normal, I'm back to being a substantive self/soul named "Chris Wright."

Anyway, the broader point is that we're not categorically different from other animals, as we like to think; we're merely stupid, self-deceiving, "soulless" animals genetically not far removed from Neanderthals, mammals like any dolphin or elephant, mammals among whom the females *lactate* -- *feeding their baby with their body!* -- and the males clumsily, gruntingly ejaculate fluids into the female or onto their own hand as they stare at moving images of naked females mating with other males. That's our essence -- grossly corporeal, instinctual, comical, in most cases not especially rational or intelligent.

But ultimately, if you scratch the surface a little, even the evident differences between individuals -- differences in intelligence, kindness, compassion, courage, honesty -- start to disappear and it becomes clear we're all pretty much the same. The same in that we perceive (our brains synthesize) the same physical world, we have the same kinds of bodies, the same desires and fears, we suffer and yearn, regret mistakes we made or things we said, we change and evolve between moments and years, we live on the same planet moving in a vast impersonal universe. It isn't hard to dislike or have contempt for each other, but at bottom we're all flawed, we're all mere variations on the same genetic code. We might as well try to overcome, to the extent we can, our frequent mutual antipathy.

Sure, indulge in "misanthropy" from time to time, but, as a good Stoic and Skeptic, don't take even *that* too seriously. Understand that the world is absurd, our very existence is absurd, and have a sense of humor about it all even as you do what you can to lighten the burden for others. But don't expect to be rewarded for that, or for anything good you do. Rewards are accidental and indicate nothing anyway: the most highly rewarded people have often done the most harm. Rewards aren't the point.

The point is to make the world a less insane place.

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The "Jacobin" Vision of Social Democracy Won't Save Us: A Review of "The Socialist Manifesto"

The title of Bhaskar Sunkara's new book is both bold and smart, from a marketing perspective at least. It's eye-catching in its reference to *The Communist Manifesto*. I'm actually a little surprised that apparently no previous book has had that title, since it seems so obvious. The reason may be that other

writers have been more humble than Sunkara, and less willing to elicit inevitable comparisons between their work and Marx's. For no writer will fare well under such a comparison.

But I don't want to be too harsh on the founder of *Jacobin*, whose magazine has (whatever one thinks of its particular political line) performed very useful services for the American left. Sunkara is not an original thinker, but he's an effective popularizer—and in an age of mass ignorance, there is much to be said for popularizations. The book is written for the uninitiated, and if it succeeds in piquing young readers' interest in socialism then it has served its purpose.

The title is a misnomer, however, for the book is no manifesto. It is essentially a critical history of socialism with a couple of chapters at the beginning and the end on the present and possible future of the left. The scope is ambitious: it ranges over the German Social Democratic Party up to World War I, the triumphs and tragedies of Leninism and Stalinism in Russia, Swedish social democracy, the record of "socialism" in China and the Third World, and the history of socialists in the U.S., in the process touching on the Labour Party in Britain, the Popular Front period in France, the impact of neoliberalism on the working class, and other subjects. It also has a chapter on fifteen lessons to be gleaned from the history, as well as a whimsical, speculative chapter (the first one) on what it might be like to live in a socialist society and what the transition from a social democratic to a socialist society might look like. Sunkara's interpretations and ideas come from respectable scholars such as Michael Harrington, Vivek Chibber, and David Schweickart, in addition to younger writers for *Jacobin*.

Through most of the book, the arguments are anchored in sturdy common sense, however much one might contest a point or emphasis here and there. On "Third World socialism," for example, whether in China or Africa or the Americas, Sunkara is right that it turned Marxism on its head, so to speak: "revolutionaries embraced socialism as a *path* to modernity and national liberation. Adapting a theory that was built around advanced capitalism and an industrial proletariat, they struggled to find 'substitute proletariats'—from peasants to junior military officers to deprived underclasses—to achieve these ends." None of it was socialism in the Marxist sense, as coming from the breakdown (literal or not) of capitalism and signifying the liberation of humanity from alienated and exploitative production. It was a "socialism" subordinated to nationalistic ends.

As for social democracy, Sunkara is clearly right that it always faces a "structural dilemma," in that it exists within capitalism and depends on capitalist profitability. Historically it was safe only as long as there was an expanding economy. "Expansion gave succor to both the working class and capital. When growth slowed [in the 1970s] and the demands of workers made deeper inroads into firm profits, business owners rebelled against the class compromise." The era of neoliberalism began.

Sunkara's conclusion to his survey of twentieth-century socialism is appropriate: "The best we can say about socialism in the twentieth century is that it was a false start." Personally, I would even argue (and have, in *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution*) that attempts to introduce socialism—which is to say workers' democratic control of production—exclusively through the bureaucratic initiative of the state, in an international economic environment still completely dominated by the dynamics and the hierarchies of corporate capitalism, were always misconceived. If a transition to genuine socialism ever happens, it will necessarily take generations, generations of struggle around the world directed at everything from the interstitial construction of solidarity economies to the mobilization of millions on behalf of radical political parties.

What Sunkara envisions is that a new kind of "class-struggle social democracy," of the sort that Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders advocate, may be achieved after years of popular struggle. But rather than being content with this achievement and possibly letting it be undermined by the capitalist class, as happened to classical social democracy, socialists have to keep pressing for more radical transformations, such as expansion of the cooperative or publicly owned sector of the economy.

> Democratic socialists must secure decisive majorities in legislatures while winning hegemony in the unions. Then our organizations must be willing to flex their social power in the form of mass mobilizations and political strikes to counter the structural power of capital and ensure that our leaders choose confrontation over accommodations with elites.

Eventually, this new social democracy will evolve into socialism, as the state and/or workers take over ownership and control of the remaining private firms.

Sunkara fleshes out these predictions a bit in his first chapter, but I think some skepticism is in order. Social democracy was appropriate to an era of industrial unionism and relatively limited mobility of capital. In a "globalized" age, it's hard to see how social democracy can simply be reconstructed—in a more radical form, even, than before. History doesn't work in this way, in which previous social formations are resurrected after they have succumbed to the universal solvent of capitalism. We can't just return to conditions that no longer exist. That is a key lesson of Marxism itself.

In the U.S., to enact Medicare for All, safe and secure housing for all, free child care, decent public education at all levels, and other reforms Sunkara mentions would require, as he says, that socialists have strong legislative majorities. Given the power of the capitalist class, I don't see this happening, at least not in the next twenty or so years. It took reactionaries decades of organization to achieve their current power—and they had enormous resources and existed in a broadly sympathetic political economy. It's hard to imagine that socialists will have better luck.

Predicting the future isn't exactly easy, especially not at this moment when humanity is poised on a precipice overlooking climate change, mass extinction of flora and fauna, economic crisis, complete political dysfunction, and general social breakdown. But my own prognosis would be more pessimistic than Sunkara's. Neoliberalism has brought to its consummation the fracturing and atomizing of civil society that capitalism has entailed. The nation-state system itself seems in danger of decaying from within, from social crisis. There is no return of vitality and integration on the horizon. There is only a long period of crisis, a period of political flailing and confrontation, of stagnation and polarization, a period that will see lots of little left-wing victories and lots of defeats but few epochal triumphs. (If Sanders or Corbyn achieve power, for example, they will face a business community determined to destroy them.)

Whatever will be happening at the level of the national state, on smaller scales initiatives in the solidarity economy will be spreading around the nation and around the world, from people's sheer necessity to survive. Activists will be pressing for changes in state policy to facilitate the growth of this non-capitalist economy, and states will be increasingly forthcoming if only because such local and decentralized projects are seen as relatively unthreatening to capitalist power. As left-wing parties acquire more influence, they will press for the expansion of this cooperative sector of the economy—along with other policies that are more directly and immediately threatening to capitalism. The reactionaries can't control everything forever (otherwise society would completely collapse), and the left will begin to have more political victories to approximately the degree that a cooperative sector invested in the left grows. As repeated economic crises will be destroying huge amounts of wealth and thinning the ranks of the capitalist hyper-elite, a new society and economy will gradually emerge in the womb of the old regime.

In my abovementioned book I argue that this scenario, which will unfold over many decades, is the only truly Marxist or materialist conception of socialist revolution, notwithstanding most Marxists' hostility to any conception hinting of "gradual change." The *Jacobin* social democratic scenario is naïve and ahistorical.

Nevertheless, Sunkara's book is of value. Little in it will be new to long-time leftists, but American political culture could certainly use more popularizations like *The Socialist Manifesto*. We have a long, long war ahead.

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It's Time to Embrace Nuclear Energy

It is a tragic irony of the contemporary environmentalist movement that in its opposition to nuclear energy, it is doing the bidding of the fossil fuel industry and increasing the likelihood of climate apocalypse. This is the inescapable implication of the new book *A Bright Future: How Some Countries Have Solved Climate Change and the Rest Can Follow*, by Joshua S. Goldstein and Staffan A. Qvist. The anti-nuclear

stance to which Green Parties, for example, are so fervently committed may seem enlightened, but in fact it is dangerous and destructive. What an informed environmentalist movement would demand above all is a rapid and globally coordinated acceleration of nuclear power plant construction, ideally at a rate of 500 or even 750 new reactors a year. This would set us on track to completely eliminate fossil fuels from the world's electricity generation within a couple of decades, as well as displacing coal as a heat source for buildings and industrial use. We would be well on the way to making the planet livable for our descendants.

A Bright Future is hardly the only recent book to make the case for nuclear power. Others include Gwyneth Cravens' *Power to Save the World: The Truth About Nuclear Energy*, Charles D. Ferguson's *Nuclear Energy: What Everyone Needs to Know*, and Scott L. Montgomery and Thomas Graham Jr.'s *Seeing the Light: The Case for Nuclear Power in the 21st Century*. What these and other books make clear is that the "green" shibboleths about nuclear energy's being dangerous, polluting, proliferation-prone, wasteful, vulnerable to terrorist attack, and excessively expensive are vastly overstated. The truth is closer to the opposite—although in the United States, because of the byzantine regulatory environment and the multiplicity (rather than standardization) of reactor designs built and operated by private companies, the economic costs of building a reactor are indeed very high.

The advantages of nuclear power

A Bright Future is framed by two contrasting stories: that of Sweden and that of Germany. From 1970 to 1990, due to its construction of nuclear power plants, Sweden was able to cut its carbon emissions by *half* even as its economy expanded and its electricity generation more than doubled. Germany has taken a different path, which has led to its emitting about twice as much carbon pollution per person as Sweden despite using one-third *less* energy per person and having approximately the same per capita GDP.

What Germany has done is to install large capacities of renewables, mostly wind and solar power, such that by 2016 they made up more than a quarter of electricity production and 15 percent of total energy production. At the same time, however, Germany cut nuclear power by roughly an equivalent amount, which means it only substituted one carbon-free source for another. CO_2 emissions have hardly decreased at all, in fact going up slightly in recent years. German energy remains dominated by coal, and greenhouse gas emissions remain around a billion tons a year.

Decades of anti-nuclear propaganda have colored public attitudes in the West, but, as Goldstein and Qvist explain, nuclear energy has many advantages. For one thing, like renewable sources, it produces no carbon emissions (although over its entire life-cycle, from mining materials to decommissioning the plants, there are some emissions—as with renewables). Unlike solar and wind but like coal, it provides baseload power, which is to say it reliably and cheaply generates energy around the clock to satisfy the average electricity demand. Renewable sources can be more flexibly deployed to match changes in demand, so they have an important role to play during periods of peak energy use, but they also tend to be intermittent and unreliable, unlike nuclear.

Goldstein and Qvist give abundant evidence for the latter claim. "As a rule of thumb," they note, "nuclear power produces at 80–90 percent of capacity on average over the year, coal at around 50–60 percent, and solar cells around 20 percent." In 2013, Europe saw an entire month in which solar produced at only 3 percent of capacity because of the lack of sunshine. Wind is somewhat more reliable than sunlight: at a massive 2,700-acre wind farm in Romania, for example, which has 240 wind turbines each as tall as a fifty-story skyscraper, production in 2013 was a little less than 25 percent of capacity. And the total capacity of this enormous wind farm was 600 megawatts, a fraction of a large nuclear power plant.

In fact, the amount of space and material needed for a solar or wind farm to produce as much energy as a large nuclear plant is mind-boggling. Take the example of Ringhals, a plant in Sweden. On just 150 acres it can produce up to 4 gigawatts of electricity, 24/7. A wind farm that was to produce as much energy would require three times the power capacity because wind is so variable. That is, it would require about 2,500 wind turbines 650 feet high, spread over 400 square miles. And its energy production would be intermittent, sometimes much higher than demand and sometimes much lower.

A solar farm equivalent to Ringhals would need a capacity of at least 20 gigawatts and would cover 40 to 100 square miles. “Imagine driving down a highway at 65 mph, with solar cells stretched out for a mile to the right of you and a mile to the left. It would take you about half an hour before you got to the end of the solar farm.”

Think of the environmental (and aesthetic) costs of building scores of such immense wind and solar farms to replace both coal and nuclear.

Waste and safety

Another advantage of nuclear energy is how little waste it produces. Public fears about radioactive waste are absurdly disproportionate to the reality. In the United States, “the entire volume of spent fuel from fifty years of nuclear power—a source that produces one-fifth of U.S. electricity—could be packed into a football stadium, piled twenty feet high.” Spent fuel rods can be safely stored in water for several years, becoming less radioactive, and then transferred to dry storage in concrete casks that contain the radiation. They can remain in these casks for over a hundred years. Longer-term storage, for hundreds of thousands of years, can involve burying material deep underground, as the U.S. military does for its waste from nuclear weapons.

To rebut the hysteria about radioactive waste, it surely suffices to point out that spent fuel has been stored around the world for almost 70 years with apparently no adverse health effects at all.

Other energy sources produce waste as well. When the life of solar cells is over after twenty-five years, their waste remains toxic for many decades and requires special handling for disposal. Coal waste, both solid and airborne, is not only orders of magnitude more voluminous than nuclear waste—as is true of solar waste, too—but is also toxic for centuries, and contains radioactive elements. Goldstein and Qvist observe, in fact, that if you live next to a coal plant you’ll get a higher dose of radiation than if you live next to a nuclear power plant. (Humans are continually exposed to small doses of radiation that have zero or negligible health effects.)

In general, nuclear power is incredibly safe. Three famous nuclear accidents have occurred: Three Mile Island in 1979, which had no health effects because of the containment structure that surrounded the partially melted core; Chernobyl in 1986, which caused a few dozen deaths in the short term (though possibly 4,000 in the long term, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency) and was the product of terrible reactor design, terrible on-site errors by operators, and terrible bureaucratic incompetence and secretiveness by the Soviet government; and Fukushima in 2011, which caused *no deaths* from radiation exposure. (The authors investigate this question in depth and conclude that, on the worst possible assumptions, several people *might* eventually get cancer because of the accident.)

How does this record stack up against other energy sources? Coal kills at least a million people every year from particulate emissions that lead to cancer and other diseases. It also has a terrible safety record, including toxic wastes that are usually located near poor communities and coal-mining accidents that still happen multiple times a year around the world.

Methane, or natural gas, not only emits about half as much carbon dioxide as coal but also is liable to explode from time to time, killing anywhere from several people to hundreds (as when 300 children were killed in an explosion at a Texas school in 1937). And fracking, to extract oil or gas, has negative impacts on public health and the environment.

Oil, too, is less safe than nuclear (leaving aside Soviet incompetence). It spills and it blows up, as with the *Deepwater Horizon* disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, and oil trains can derail and explode, as happened in Canada in 2013, when 47 people were killed.

Hydroelectric dams are not at all safe. If a dam fails, thousands of people downstream can die. In Banquiao, China in 1975, for example, 170,000 people died when a dam burst. Dam failures have killed thousands in the U.S.; just in 2017, crises in California and Puerto Rico forced the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of people.

Imagine if nuclear energy had a record remotely comparable to coal or hydropower! Worldwide, the whole industry probably would have been shut down long ago.

An uncertain future

A Bright Future is far too rich to do justice to in a single article, but Goldstein and Qvist also address the issues of possible terrorist attacks on power plants and, in more depth, nuclear proliferation. Regarding the latter, the record over the decades since nuclear technology was developed is reassuring, due in large part to the very effective IAEA and the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

But even if nuclear energy weren't as remarkably safe as it is, we should ask ourselves if it would still be worth including as a major part of a "diversified portfolio" of clean energy. Why are we willing to tolerate so many deaths and risks from coal, oil, hydropower, and natural gas while demanding *none* from nuclear? (And even then, nuclear has a bad reputation!) Even if a fatal accident occurred from nuclear power every year or every few years, might that not be an acceptable cost if the benefit were a massive mitigation of climate change? We accept risks in every other sphere of life, as when driving cars, living near seismic fault lines, riding airplanes, etc. It's odd that we rail against nuclear energy because it isn't 100 percent risk-free.

The simple fact is that we can't solve climate change without accelerating the construction of nuclear power plants. Since the energy in nuclear fuel is millions of times more concentrated than wind or solar power, nuclear power can "scale up" much faster than renewables. "What the world already knows how to do in ten to twenty years using nuclear power," the authors write, "would take more than a century using renewables alone."

And yet in the U.S., *reverse* action is being taken. Nuclear power plants are being shut down prematurely for political reasons, as in Vermont, California, and Massachusetts, and producers are often abandoning plans to build new plants after facing endless litigation, regulation, opposition from anti-nuclear groups, and competition from cheap and highly subsidized fossil fuels. When a plant is shut down, what that means, first, is that renewables that are introduced afterwards are not contributing to decarbonization but are simply replacing a clean (and far more powerful) energy source. Second, fossil fuels have to fill most of the gap, which causes a rise in carbon emissions.

For example, after the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant closed in 2014, carbon dioxide emission rates rose across New England, reversing a decade of declines. When Massachusetts' last remaining nuclear power plant, Pilgrim, closed last month, much more electricity generation was lost than the state generates with all its solar, wind, and hydropower combined. Several new fossil fuel plants will mainly take the place of Pilgrim.

Thus, Greenpeace and other anti-nuclear groups with money and political clout can congratulate themselves on exacerbating climate change.

Globally there are bright spots for nuclear energy, mostly in the developing world. Goldstein and Qvist discuss this topic in detail, placing some hope in Russia, China, and India, which are much friendlier to nuclear power than the U.S. They also devote a chapter to "next-generation technologies" that are being developed, such as thorium reactors, which have advantages over uranium, and fusion, which has advantages over fission.

But despite these (and other) bright spots, and despite the book's overall optimism, after I had finished reading I couldn't help feeling very, very worried about the future. We know how to address climate change. But the vast funds of the fossil fuel industry and the anti-nuclear movement, together with mass ignorance, may yet doom us in the long run. We have, it seems, a decade or two to wake up and demand government action.

Renewables, yes. But even more important: nuclear power.

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Renewable Energy Is Not the Answer; Nuclear Is

"It's always a good idea to start by asking about the facts." So advises Noam Chomsky. "Whenever you hear anything said very confidently, the first thing that should come to mind is, 'Wait a minute, is that true?'" *De omnibus dubitandum*—doubt everything—was Karl Marx's motto and should be the motto of every thinking person. Question even or especially what the tribe most takes for granted.

In the era of climate change, when fossil fuels are known to be driving civilization straight into the ocean, the idea that liberal and left-wing tribes take most for granted is "Renewable energy!" It is shouted confidently from every public perch. Renewable energy, scaled up to replace fossil fuels and even nuclear, is declared the only possible salvation for humanity. It has such obvious advantages over every other energy source that the world has to go 100% renewables ASAP.

Obviously!

But wait a minute—is that true?

Let's try to shed the religious thinking, look objectively at the facts, and come to a conclusion about this most important of subjects: how to power the future and hopefully save the world.

Renewable energy emits greenhouse gases

First, consider the claim that renewable energy has no carbon emissions. This is true, in a sense, for wind and solar farms (as it is for nuclear energy), which in themselves emit virtually no greenhouse gases. It isn't true for hydropower, however, which in 2016 produced 71% of all electricity generated by renewable sources. According to one study, hydroelectric dams worldwide emit as much methane (a potent greenhouse gas) as Canada, from decaying vegetation and nutrient runoff. Another study concluded they produce even more carbon dioxide than methane.

"These are massive emissions," one expert comments. "There are a massive number of dams that are currently proposed to be built. It would be a grave mistake to continue to finance those with the impression that they were part of the solution to the climate crisis."

And yet in every scenario projected by renewables advocates, hydropower is absolutely essential. For instance, Stanford Professor Mark Jacobson's famous—and deeply flawed—proposal to run the U.S. on 100% renewables by 2050 assumes the country's dams could add turbines and transformers to produce 1,300 gigawatts of electricity, over 16 times their current capacity of 80 gigawatts. (According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the maximum capacity that could be added is only 12 gigawatts, 1,288 gigawatts short of Jacobson's assumption.)

The International Energy Agency projects that by 2023, wind and solar together will satisfy a mere 10% of global electricity demand, while hydroelectric power will satisfy 16%. Nearly all the rest will be produced by fossil fuels and nuclear energy.

Burning biomass, too, which is a renewable energy source, releases large amounts of carbon into the atmosphere. "It does exactly the opposite of what we need to do: reduce emissions," says an expert in forest science and management.

Even leaving aside hydropower and biomass, the use of wind and solar dramatically increases greenhouse gas emissions compared to nuclear energy. This is because, given the intermittency and the diluted nature of solar and wind energy, a backup source of power is needed, and that source is natural gas. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., a guru of the renewables movement, himself acknowledges this fact:

> We need about 3,000 feet of altitude, we need flat land, we need 300 days of sunlight, and we need to be near a gas pipe. Because for all of these big utility-scale solar plants—whether it's wind or solar—everybody is looking at gas as the supplementary fuel. The plants that we're building, the wind plants and the solar plants, are gas plants.

The burning of natural gas, i.e. methane, emits about half as much carbon dioxide as the burning of coal. So natural gas is better than coal, but not nearly good enough if we want to solve climate change. Even worse, many millions of tons of unburned methane are leaked every year from the American oil and

gas industry—and methane is more than 80 times as potent a greenhouse gas as carbon dioxide. So these leaks cancel out much of the environmental good that wind and solar farms are supposedly doing.

In other words, the fact that wind and solar farms typically operate far below their capacity (because of seasonal changes and the unreliability of weather) necessitates that a more reliable power source "supplement" them. In fact, as researchers Mike Conley and Tim Maloney point out, strictly speaking it is the renewable source that acts as a supplement for the oil or natural gas plants linked to the renewables. A solar farm with a capacity of one gigawatt, for instance, will on average operate at only about 20% of its capacity, which means that if a gigawatt of energy is really to be produced, the majority will have to be provided by the "backup" fossil fuel plant(s).

The upshot is that an anti-nuclear and pro-renewables policy means an increase in greenhouse gas emissions.

California is a good example. Like other states in the U.S and countries in the Western world, it has been closing its nuclear power plants—despite their safety, reliability, effectiveness, and environmental friendliness. The carbon-free nuclear plants have been replaced with renewables + natural gas, which is to say, they've been replaced mostly with natural gas (prone to methane leaks). After it closed the San Onofre nuclear plant in 2013, California missed its CO_2 emissions targets as a result.

In New England, after the premature closing of the nuclear power plant Vermont Yankee in 2014, CO_2 emission rates rose across New England, reversing a decade of declines. When Massachusetts' last remaining nuclear plant, Pilgrim, closed last month, much more electricity generation was lost than the state generates with all its solar, wind, and hydropower combined. Several new fossil fuel plants and a couple of small solar and wind farms will take the place of Pilgrim, increasing carbon dioxide emissions.

In their new book *A Bright Future: How Some Countries Have Solved Climate Change and the Rest Can Follow*, Joshua Goldstein and Staffan Qvist give other examples. Between 1970 and 1990, due to its construction of nuclear power plants, Sweden was able to cut its carbon emissions by half even as its electricity consumption more than doubled. Germany, by contrast, emits about twice as much carbon pollution per person as Sweden despite using one-third *less* energy per person, because it has chosen to phase out its nuclear power while introducing renewables.

This means that Germany has simply substituted one (relatively) clean energy source for another, while doing virtually nothing to decarbonize. Its energy production remains dominated by coal, and greenhouse gas emissions are around a billion tons a year.

A more sensible policy would have been to build more nuclear plants and phase out coal. Or at least to let the existing nuclear plants continue to operate while adding renewables, which then would have displaced coal.

ExxonMobil likes renewable energy

The fact that renewable energy directly and indirectly causes far more greenhouse gas emissions than nuclear should already tell us it isn't a solution to climate change.

Indeed, the willingness of the oil and gas industry in recent years to promote and invest in renewables is itself significant. Over the last three years, the five largest publicly traded oil and gas companies have invested over a billion dollars in advertising and lobbying for renewables. "Natural gas is the perfect partner for renewables," ads say. "See why #natgas is a natural partner for renewable power sources," Shell tweets.

By pretending to care about the environment, these companies not only burnish their reputations but also are able to associate natural gas with clean energy, which it very much is not. The formula "renewables + natural gas" thus serves a dual purpose. In fact, it serves a triple purpose: it also distracts from nuclear power, which, unlike renewables, is an immediately viable alternative to oil and gas.

Nuclear power, not renewable energy, is what the fossil fuel industry really fears. The reason is simple: the energy in nuclear fuel is orders of magnitude more concentrated than the energy in oil, gas, coal, and every other source. (Which is why nuclear reactors produce vastly less waste than everything from coal to solar.) If governments invested in a global Nuclear New Deal, so to speak, they could make fossil fuels

largely obsolete within a couple of decades. Not even Mark Jacobson's wildly unrealistic $15-20 trillion 100% renewables plan envisions such a fast transition.

Because of the diffuse and intermittent nature of wind and solar energy, all the world's investment in renewables didn't prevent the share of low-carbon power in generating electricity from *declining* between 1995 and 2017. Western countries' shuttering of nuclear power plants in these decades was a disaster for the environment.

Another way to appreciate the disaster is to consider that global carbon emissions are actually *rising*, even as the world spent roughly $2 trillion on wind and solar between 2007 and 2016. (This is similar to the amount spent on nuclear in the past 55 years.) So much for the gospel of renewable energy!

Meanwhile, the fossil fuel industry has been smiling on the sidelines, giving millions of dollars to groups like the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Environmental Defense Fund, and many others that work to kill nuclear power and thus exacerbate climate change. (Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth are particularly active in the war on nuclear—and they refuse to disclose their donors. Could it be because they receive an unseemly amount from oil and gas companies?)

We have eleven years

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 2018 special report, we have eleven years left to avoid potentially irreversible climate disruption.

António Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, has called on global leaders to "demonstrate how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 45 per cent over the next decade and achieve net zero global emissions by 2050." They're supposed to meet in New York in September 2019 to answer this call.

The only conceivable way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on the scale called for is to aggressively embrace nuclear power. It is cost-competitive with all other forms of electricity generation except natural gas—although if you take into account the long-term environmental costs of using natural gas (or oil or even renewables), nuclear is probably the cheapest of all.

A worldwide rollout of nuclear power plants on the scale necessary to save civilization would certainly take longer than eleven years, but we can at least make substantial progress by then. If, that is, we pressure our governments to stop subsidizing oil, natural gas, and the renewables they go hand-in-hand with and instead massively invest in nuclear.

It's time to stop doing the bidding of fossil fuel interests and get serious about saving the world.

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"Critical and Informed Thinking Is Dangerous to the Powerful"
Interview of Chris Wright by Mohsen Abdelmoumen

***Mohsen Abdelmoumen*: You wrote "*Worker Cooperatives and Revolution*" where you talk about workers' cooperatives. In this fascinating book, we note your optimism about the coming of a new era where the human is at the center. You give the example of the cooperative New Era Windows, in Chicago. In your opinion, are we in a new era where the union of workers in the form of a cooperative will shape the future of the world?**

Dr. Chris Wright: I think I may have been a little too optimistic in that book about the potential of worker cooperatives. On the one hand, Marx was right that cooperatives "represent within the old form the first sprouts of the new." They're microcosmic socialism, since socialism is just workers' democratic control of economic activity, which is essentially what cooperatives are. Even in the large Mondragon firms that have seen some conflicts between workers and the elected management, there is still vastly more democracy (and more equal pay) than in a typical large capitalist enterprise.

Moreover, there's an expanding movement in the U.S and elsewhere to seed new cooperatives and promote the transformation of existing capitalist firms into co-ops (which, incidentally, are often more productive, profitable, and longer-lasting than conventional businesses). Countless activists are working to spread a cooperative ethos and build a wide range of democratic, anti-capitalist institutions, from businesses to housing to political forms like participatory budgeting. (Websites like Shareable.net and Community-Wealth.org provide information on this movement.) This whole emerging "solidarity economy" is really what interested me when I was writing the book, though I focused on worker co-ops. I was struck that the very idea of a socialist society is just the solidarity economy writ large, in that all or the majority of institutions according to both visions are supposed to be communal, cooperative, democratic, and non-exploitative.

It's true, though, that a new society can't emerge from grassroots initiative alone. Large-scale political action is necessary, since national governments have such immense power. Unless you can transform state policy so as to facilitate economic democratization, you're not going to get very far. Cooperatives alone can't get the job done. You need radical political parties, mass confrontations with capitalist authorities, every variety of disruptive "direct action," and it will all take a very, very long time. Social revolutions on the global scale we're talking about take generations, even centuries. It probably won't take as long as the European transition from feudalism to capitalism, but none of us will see "socialism" in our lifetime.

Marxists like to criticize cooperatives and the solidarity economy for being only interstitial, somewhat apolitical, and not sufficiently confrontational with capitalism, but, as I argue in the book, this criticism is misguided. A socialist transformation of the country and the world will take place on many levels, from the grassroots to the most ambitiously statist. And all the levels will reinforce and supplement each other. As the cooperative sector grows, more resources will be available for "statist" political action; and as national politics becomes more left-wing, state policy will promote worker takeovers of businesses. There's a role for every type of leftist activism.

Do you not think that the weakening of the trade union movement in the USA and elsewhere in the world further encourages the voracity of the capitalist oligarchy that dominates the world? Does not the working class throughout the world have a vital need for a great trade union movement?

The working class desperately needs reinvigorated unions. Without strong unions, you get the most rapacious and misanthropic form of capitalism imaginable, as we've seen in the last forty years. Unions, which can be the basis for political parties, have always been workers' most effective means of defense and even offense. In the U.S., it was only after the Congress of Industrial Organizations had been founded in the late 1930s that a mass middle class, supported by industrial unions with millions of members, could emerge in the postwar era. Unions were important funders and organizers of the American Civil Rights Movement, and they successfully pushed for expansion of the welfare state and workplace safety regulations. They can serve as powerful allies of environmentalists. It's hard to imagine a livable future if organized labor isn't resurrected and empowered.

But I don't think there can be a return of the great postwar paradigm of industry-wide collective bargaining and nationwide social democracy. Capital has become too mobile and globalized; durable class compromises like that aren't possible anymore. In the coming decades, the most far-reaching role of unions will be more revolutionary: to facilitate worker takeovers of businesses, the formation of left-wing political parties, popular control of industry, mass resistance to the global privatization and austerity agenda, expansion of the public sphere, construction of international workers' alliances, etc.

Actually, I think that, contrary to old Marxist expectations, it's only in the 21st century that humanity is finally entering the age of the great apocalyptic battles between labor and capital. Marx didn't foresee the welfare state and the Keynesian compromise of the postwar period. Now that those social forms are deteriorating, organized labor can finally take up its revolutionary calling. If it and its allies fail, there's only barbarism ahead.

Your book "*Finding Our Compass: Reflections on a World in Crisis*" asks a fundamental question, namely, do we live in a real democracy?

We certainly don't. None of us do. The U.S. has democratic forms, but substantively it's very undemocratic. Even mainstream political science recognizes this: studies have shown that the large majority of the population has essentially zero impact on policy, because they don't have enough money to influence politicians or hire lobbyists. Practically the only way for them to get their voices heard is to disrupt the smooth functioning of institutions, such as through strikes or civil disobedience. We've seen this with the *gilets jaunes* protests in France, and we saw it when air traffic controllers refused to work and thus ended Donald Trump's government shutdown in January 2019. We live in an oligarchy, a global oligarchy, which isn't constrained much by the normal "democratic" process of voting.

But voting *can* be an important tool of resistance, especially if there are genuine oppositional candidates (like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, for example). In that case, society can start to become a little more democratic. So it remains essential for the left to organize electorally, even if it will take a while for there to be a big policy payoff.

Do you not think a new crisis of capitalism is in progress? Does not the capitalist system generate crises?

I'm not an economist, but anyone can see that capitalism has a deep-rooted tendency to generate crises. There's a long tradition of Marxist scholarship explaining why crises of overproduction and underconsumption (among other causes) repeatedly savage capitalist economies; David Harvey, Robert Brenner, and John Bellamy Foster are some recent scholars who have done good work on the subject. A lot of it comes down to the fact that "excessive capitalist empowerment," to quote Harvey, leads to "wage repression" that limits aggregate demand, which constrains growth. For a while the problem doesn't really appear because people can borrow, and are forced to borrow more and more. But accumulation of debt can't go on forever if there's no growth of underlying income. Huge credit bubbles appear as borrowing gets out of control and capitalists invest their colossal wealth in financial speculation, and the bubbles inevitably collapse. Then things like the Great Depression and the Great Recession happen.

As horrible as economic crises are, leftists should recognize, as Marx did, that at least they present major opportunities for organizing. It's only in the context of long-term crisis and a decline of the middle class that there can be a transition to a new society, because crisis forces people to come together and press for radical solutions. It also destroys huge amounts of wealth, which can thin the ranks of the hyper-elite. And the enormous social discontent that results from crisis can weaken reactionary resistance to reform, as during the 1930s in the U.S. (On the other hand, fascism can also take power in such moments, unless leftists seize the initiative.)

There is no hope without crisis. That's the paradoxical, "dialectical" lesson of Marxism.

You wrote an article about Obama's mediocrity. Don't you think that the current US President Donald Trump is competing with Obama in mediocrity?

In the competition over who's most mediocre, few people hold a candle to Trump. He's just a pathetic non-entity, an almost impossibly stupid, ignorant, narcissistic, self-pitying, cruel, vulgar little embodiment of all that's wrong with the world. He's so far beneath contempt that even to talk about him is already to lower oneself. So in that sense, I suppose he's a suitable 'leader' of global capitalism. Obama at least is a good family man, and he's intelligent. But he's almost as lacking in moral principles as Trump, and he has no moral courage at all. I don't know what to say about someone who announced in 2014, as Israel was slaughtering hundreds of children in Gaza, that Israel has a right to defend itself, and went on to approve the shipment of arms to that criminal nation right in the midst of its Gaza massacre. He's a self-infatuated megalomaniac without morality.

You wrote in one of your articles that the US government considers its citizens as enemies by using generalized surveillance. Does not the real danger come from this system which spies on everyone?

I think Glenn Greenwald is right that few things are more pernicious than an expansive "national security" state. Surveillance is a key part of it, facilitating the persecution of protesters, dissenters, immigrants, and Muslims. The so-called "law and order" state is a lawless state of extreme disorder, in which power can operate with impunity. It begins to approach fascism.

One danger of the surveillance state is that it might operate like Jeremy Bentham's panopticon: because people don't know when they're being watched or targeted, they monitor and regulate themselves all the time. They avoid stepping out of line, being obedient drudges and consumers. Any misstep might sweep them up in the black hole of the police state's bureaucracy. So they internalize subservience. Of course, in our society there are many other ways of making people internalize subservience. Surveillance is only one, though a particularly vicious and dangerous one.

Another reason to be concerned is that internet companies' ability to "spy" on users allows them to censor content, whether on their own initiative or from political pressure. Google, Facebook, Twitter, and other such companies are constantly censoring leftists (and some on the right) and deleting their accounts. Critics of Israeli crimes are especially vulnerable, but they're hardly alone. The only real way to solve this problem would be to make internet companies publicly owned, because private entities can do virtually whatever they want with their own property. It's absurd that leftists can connect and coordinate and build movements only subject to the approval of Mark Zuckerberg and other corporate fascists. It's also terrifying that a surveillance alliance can develop between corporate behemoths and governments. That's another feature of fascism.

How do you see the inhuman treatment of Julian Assange and the persecution of him by the British and American administrations?

As left-wing commentators have said, the persecution of Assange is an assault on journalism itself, and on the very idea of challenging the powerful or holding them to account. In that sense, it's an assault on democracy. But that's pretty much always what power-structures are doing, trying to undermine democracy and expand their own power, so the vicious treatment of Assange is hardly a surprise. But I doubt that the U.S. and Britain will be able to win their war on journalism in the long run. There are just too many good journalists out there, too many activists, too many people of conscience.

This capitalist society is based on consumption but boasts of concepts such as "freedom of expression," "human rights," "democracy," etc. Don't we live rather in a fascist system?

I wouldn't say the West's political economy is truly fascist. It has fascist tendencies, and it certainly cares nothing for freedom of expression, human rights, or democracy. But civil society is too vibrant and gives too many opportunities for left-wing political organizing to say that we live under fascism. The classical fascism of Italy and Germany was far more extreme than anything we're experiencing now, especially in the U.S. or Western Europe. We don't have brownshirts marching in the streets, concentration camps for radicals, assassinations of political and union leaders, or total annihilation of organized labor. There's still freedom to publish dissenting views.

But major power-structures in the U.S. would love to see fascism of some sort and are working hard to get there. And they have armies of useful idiots to do their bidding. American "libertarians," for example, of whom there are untold millions, are essentially fascist without knowing it: they want to eliminate the welfare state and regulations of business activity so as to unfetter entrepreneurial genius and maximize "liberty." They somehow don't see that in this scenario, corporations, being opposed by no

countervailing forces, would *completely* take over the state and inaugurate the most barbarous and global tyranny in history. The natural environment would be utterly destroyed and most life on Earth would end.

In one sense of fascism, Marxists from the 1920s and 1930s would, as you suggest, say we do live in a rather fascist system. For them, the term denoted the age of big business, or, more precisely, the near-fusion of business with the state. Insofar as society approached a capitalist dictatorship, it was approaching fascism. We don't literally live under that kind of dictatorship, but without determined resistance it could well be our future.

Isn't there a need to reread Karl Marx? How do you explain the disappearance of critical thinking in Western society?

I actually think there's a lot of critical thinking in Western society. The rise of "democratic socialism" in the U.S. is evidence of this, as is the popularity of Jeremy Corbyn in Britain. The left is growing internationally -- although the right is too. But insofar as society suffers from a dearth of critical thinking, the reasons aren't very obscure. Critical and informed thinking is dangerous to the powerful, so they do all they can to discourage it. Lots of studies have probed the methods of corporate and state indoctrination of the public, and the enormous scale of it. Noam Chomsky is famous for his many investigations of how the powerful "manufacture consent"; one of the lessons of his work is that the primary function of the mass media is to keep people ignorant and distracted. If important information about state crimes is suppressed, as it constantly is, and instead the powerful are continually glorified, well then people will tend to be uninformed and perhaps too supportive of the elite. It's more fun, anyway, to play with phones and apps and video games and watch TV shows.

The mechanisms by which the business class promotes "stupidity" and ignorance are pretty transparent. Just look at any television commercial, or watch CNN or Fox News. It's pure propaganda and infantilization.

As for Karl Marx: there's always a need to read Marx, and to reread him. He and Chomsky are probably the two most incisive political analysts in history. But Marx was such an incredible writer too that he's a sheer joy to read, and endlessly stimulating and inspiring. He rejuvenates you. (His political pamphlets on France, for instance, are stylistic and analytic masterpieces.) Besides, you simply can't understand capitalism or history itself except through the lens of historical materialism, as I've argued elsewhere.

Of course, Marx wasn't right about everything. In particular, his conception and timeline of socialist revolution were wrong. The "revolution," if it happens, will, as I said earlier, be very protracted, since the worldwide replacing of one dominant mode of production by another doesn't happen in a couple of decades. Even just on a national scale, the fact that modern nations exist in an international economy means socialism can't evolve in one country without evolving in many others at the same time.

I can't go into detail on how Marx got revolution wrong (as in his vague but overly statist notion of the "dictatorship of the proletariat"), but in *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution* I devote a couple of chapters to it. It's unfortunate that most contemporary Marxists are so doctrinaire they consider it sacrilege if you try to update or rethink an aspect of historical materialism to make it more appropriate to conditions in the 21st century, which Marx could hardly have foreseen. They're certainly not honoring the Master by thinking in terms of rigid dogma, whether orthodox Marxist or Leninist or Trotskyist.

You are a humanist and the human condition is central in your work. Are you optimistic about the future of humanity?

Frankly, no, I'm not. The forces of darkness just have too much power. And global warming is too dire a threat, and humanity is doing too little to address it. It's worth reflecting that at the end of the Permian age, 250 million years ago, global warming killed off almost all life. If we don't do something about it very soon, by the end of the century there won't be any organized civilization left to protect.

And then there's the problem of billions of tons of plastic waste polluting the world, and of the extinction of insects "threatening the collapse of nature," and of dangerous imperialistic conflicts between great powers, and so on. I don't see much reason for optimism.

We know how to address global warming, for example. But the fossil fuel industry and, ironically, environmentalists are acting so as to increase the threat. According to good scientific research, as reported in the new book *A Bright Future* (among many others), it's impossible to solve global warming without expanding the use of nuclear power. (Contrary to popular opinion, nuclear power is generally very safe, reliable, effective, and environmentally friendly.) Renewable energy alone can't get the job done. The world has spent over $2 trillion on renewables in the last decade, but carbon emissions are still rising! That level of investment in nuclear energy, which is millions of times more concentrated and powerful than diffuse solar and wind energy, could have put us well on the way to solving global warming. Instead, the crisis is getting much worse. Renewables are so intermittent and insufficient that countries are still massively investing in fossil fuels, which are incomparably more destructive than nuclear.

But the left is adamant against nuclear power, and it's very hard even to publish an article favorable to it. It's usually biased and misinformed articles that are published, with some exceptions. So the left is, in a way, working to exacerbate global warming, just as the right is. Why? Ultimately for ideological reasons: most leftists like the idea of decentralization, dispersed power, community control of energy, and anti-capitalism, and these values seem more compatible with solar and wind energy than nuclear. The nuclear power industry isn't exactly a model of transparency, democracy, or political integrity.

But the *Guardian* environmental columnist George Monbiot is right: sometimes you have to go with a lesser evil in order to avoid a greater one, in this case the collapse of civilization and probably most life on Earth. Is that a price environmentalists are willing to pay so they can preen themselves on their political virtue? So far, it seems the answer is yes.

We humans have to break free of our tribal ways, our herd-thinking ways. We have to be more willing to think critically, *self*-critically, and stop being so complacent and conformist. The younger generation, actually, seems to be leading the way, for instance with the Extinction Rebellion and all the exciting forms of activism springing up everywhere. But we still have a terribly long way to go.

I haven't lost hope, but I'm not sanguine. The next twenty or thirty years will be the most decisive in human history.

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Political Correctness Is Getting Out of Hand

On June 28, the *New York Times* published an article by Bari Weiss that wasn't moronic.

Entitled "San Francisco Will Spend $600,000 to Erase History," it was about the school board's unanimous decision to destroy a New Deal-era mural by the famous Communist painter Victor Arnautoff that's painted on the walls of a local high school. Called "Life of Washington," the mural depicts Washington's slaves picking cotton at Mount Vernon as a group of colonizers walks past a dead Native American. The painting is clearly meant to oppose the sanitized versions of American history that are taught in most schools.

So you'd think "progressives" would support it. Instead, some of them, at least, find it so offensive they want it gone. "A grave mistake was made 80 years ago to paint a mural at a school without Native American or African-American input," the school board's vice president told Weiss. "For impressionable young people who attend school to have any representation that diminishes people, specifically students from communities that have already been diminished, it's an aggressive thing. It's hurtful and I don't think our students need to bear that burden."

It seems that most students object to the mural's removal, though a number of community members support the board's decision. "We know our history already," a recent high school graduate and member of the Tohono O'odham tribe said. "Our students don't need to see it every single time they walk into a public school."

Predictably, Weiss's article confines itself to admonishing liberals and leftists for being "un-American" snowflakes, failing to point out that conservatives are typically far more eager to censor than the left is. Bashing hyper-sensitive leftists seems to be Weiss's favorite activity, aside from hyper-sensitively complaining about supposed instances of anti-Semitism that are usually nothing more than criticisms of Israel's horrifying militarism and near-genocidal policies towards Palestinians. (I didn't see her write a column bewailing what a "snowflake" Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti was for advocating the destruction of an "anti-Semitic" mural in L.A. that depicts Israel as the Grim Reaper.)

But leaving aside Weiss, who's nothing but a vulgar propagandist, her column does raise an important issue. Censorship, the destruction of art, and the sanitizing of history are appropriate agendas for reactionaries and establishment-types like Weiss; progressives and radicals should certainly oppose them. And yet, in the age of "political correctness," there's a disturbing tendency for those on the left to adopt the repressive tactics of their enemies.

Whether on social media, on university campuses, or in cultural spaces of whatever sort, people are shunned, shamed, and silenced for not adhering wholeheartedly to a party line. A whiff of dissent brings down the wrath of the mob; a statement or an image that someone, somewhere, might find hurtful is enough to end your career or ruin your life. Magazine editors are fired for defending "cultural appropriation," as in 2017 when an editor in Canada lost his job for the crime of defending the right of white authors to create characters from other backgrounds. Safe spaces, trigger warnings, microaggression reporting systems, call-out culture, and other such devices become ever more ubiquitous, threatening to neuter culture and intimidate even fellow leftists into silence.

In the end, all this excess reaches truly farcical extremes: political correctness eats itself, as a wonderful old mural that tells a people's history of the United States is destroyed for being "degrading." A paradigm of identity politics that celebrates and weaponizes victimhood brings forth practitioners who claim they're being victimized by having to be reminded of their history as victims. In the name of "empowerment," they want to whitewash a mural whose existence is a blow against whitewashed history, which is the very thing to which identity politics indignantly objects. Political correctness chokes on itself and coughs up self-refuting paradoxes.

In this grotesque autosarcophagy we see the *reductio ad absurdum* of this whole mode of aggressive liberalism: it becomes a kind of void, a black hole of infinitely dense inhumanity, the postmodern left's version of cultural totalitarianism. It becomes kitsch, virtually without content except to prevent members of "vulnerable" groups from ever feeling the slightest pang of discomfort. That's the universal standard, the standard of acceptable art, acceptable speech, acceptable politics, and acceptable thought. And if you stray outside the bounds of acceptable thought, we'll "cancel" you, hopefully most aspects of your identity: career, social life, public life, especially internet life, since the beautiful anonymity and atomization of the internet are what allow us to besiege you and call out your transgressions against orthodoxy. Ultimately it isn't permitted—or at least it's testing our good will—even to state manifest truths, such as that men on average are taller and physically stronger than women, or that, e.g., women tend to be attracted to male dominance (e.g., men taller than they) and the dominant male. No such truths we consider insulting to "marginalized" people can be acknowledged.

Now, as I said, these totalitarian trends are only the *reductio ad absurdum* of political correctness, and do not invalidate the entire phenomenon known as PC culture. Historically, this multicultural politics that emerged from the radical movements of the 1960s and '70s has had very constructive effects on society. It has been integrally tied to the collective recognition of *real* history, the history of Native Americans, African-Americans, immigrants, women, and European colonialism. In educational curricula, it has effectively challenged the supremacy of the Western canon of white male writers, such that students now encounter voices from many different cultures and traditions.

Feminism has raised consciousness to a far more civilized level than in the 1960s, when Betty Friedan could write about "the feminine mystique" that dehumanized women. The MeToo moment is just the latest front in a long war to advance women's rights. Similarly, we have identity politics to thank for the historic victories of the gay rights movement, which have at long last made homophobia disreputable.

Even the much-derided concept of "microaggressions" denotes a real situation that minorities and women face. Nathan Robinson of *Current Affairs* gives examples. When a female physician wearing a stethoscope is repeatedly mistaken for a nurse, that surely gets irritating and can be seen as offensive. When a white woman clutches her purse as a black or Hispanic man approaches, that's a racist microaggression. A particularly egregious example is the time when a black student asked her academic advisor for information about majoring in biology and, "without being asked about her academic record (which was excellent), was casually directed to 'look up less-challenging courses in African American Studies instead.'" Whatever the Supreme Court thinks, the U.S. is still saturated with racism, and unconscious racism is constantly revealing itself in trivial interactions in every social context.

Identity politics and political correctness are far from being the unmitigated evils Donald Trump and Bill Maher apparently think they are. And it's true that in popular movements, excess is inevitable. From the French Revolution to the New Left—and now to the new New Left—popular enthusiasm has been apt to get out of control and become absurd and even violent (as with Antifa). But that doesn't mean the excess shouldn't be fought when it becomes truly damaging. When a mode of politics starts to ruin the lives of innocent people, discourage independent and honest thinking, and advocate the destruction of valuable works of art, it's time to rein it in.

One of the most striking features of the extreme fringe of political correctness—a fringe that seems to dominate culture more and more—is one of the least talked about: often, it is just a sublimation of the very conditions of neoliberal capitalism that leftists hate. Interpersonal atomization and alienation, gleeful cruelty, schadenfreude run amok, censorship and suppression of dissent, a universal leveling that valorizes groupthink as the highest virtue, and surveillance of daily life and every interaction: these tendencies of late capitalism are somehow refracted into left-wing forms and concerns. The mechanism, actually, of this ironic 'refraction' is probably quite simple: society has become so inhuman and depersonalized, so bureaucratized and anonymized, that people all across the political spectrum—not only leftists—are made pettier, more insecure, sensitive to perceived slights, and mean-spirited (especially online).

We see the "Other" as oppressing us—however each of us defines the Other—and we lash out to punish it or those who we think manifest it at any given moment. This punitive mentality at least gives us little malicious pleasures that partly compensate for the indignities we're constantly suffering.

But while it might be understandable, it's hardly appropriate for people on the left to be so corrupted by the anti-humanism of a fragmented and paranoid capitalist society. From Karl Marx to Eugene Debs, from A. J. Muste to Noam Chomsky, the left has devoted itself to far more elevated causes than vindictively shaming people for, e.g., using the word *fútbol* despite not being Hispanic, or quietly telling a "sexist" joke to a friend within earshot of a woman who doesn't like such jokes, or in general policing the world so that every space is "safe" and people are never uncomfortable. Some such policing, within reason, can be productive and important: people should be educated, to the extent possible, out of their unconscious biases and prejudices. But those who identify with the left should also identify with the tradition's compassion and self-critical inclinations. Perhaps a little less puritanism is called for, and a little more understanding that even good people are imperfect and have lapses. And that no one, including the most eager shamer, is perfect.

Indeed, I'm tempted to say that the hyper-moralistic mindset doesn't belong to the left at all. Its demand for purity is uncomfortably close to the puritan obsessions of the religious right, so vigilantly attuned to the merest indication of atheism, sex, homosexuality, coarse language, and humanism. At best, leftist puritanism represents an attenuated, enervated, decadent left, a strain of the left that has lost its love of people and become thin and narrow as a reed. Brittle, misanthropic, crabbed, ungenerous, ultra-judgmental, whiny, sickly—these are the words that come to mind to describe such a "left."

How different from the humanism, compassion, and spiritual capaciousness of a Debs or a Chomsky!

The destruction of a left-wing mural for being "hurtful" may seem like a pretty minor affair, and compared to the catastrophes occurring every day all over the world, it is. But if the cultural tendencies that have eventuated in this crime against art are not checked, we'll continue to see more such crimes, and not

only against art. Against people, too, people who don't deserve to be publicly shamed or ruined. The left should take care lest it lose its humanity and adopt the censorship-fetish of the fascist right.

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It's Important to Always Ignore Thomas Friedman

Whenever I read a column by the pustule called Thomas Friedman, I don't know whether to laugh or cry. To laugh at the hilarious attempts of an anthropoid carbuncle to sound vaguely human and Serious, or to cry at the fact that this abscess on the body politic is admired and deemed Serious by…all the polyps and tumors that run the media, the government, the corporate sector, the country, and the world. Even decent people who are influenced by the mass media are tricked into thinking that the incoherent ravings of an anti-human make sense! "I think Tom has made some excellent points here!" a friend of mine emails me, in reference to his recent column "Trump's Going to Get Re-elected, Isn't He?"

Ugh, where to begin? I know I'm a little slow on the uptake regarding this latest Friedmanite obscenity—it was published on July 16—but I had refrained from reading it. "For once, be stronger than your masochism!" But I finally read it and decided it provided an opportunity to refute the fascist fallacies of the Moderates who run the Democratic Party and virtually everything else.

Now, it goes without saying that most Moderates, at least the powerful ones, are not acting in good faith. Their commitment to Moderation is less a function of their desire to unseat Trump ("The average voter is a moderate!") than of their desire to maintain their power and avoid upsetting the status quo. When a Friedman says to Democrats, "please, spare me the revolution! It can wait. Win the presidency, hold the House and narrow the spread in the Senate, and a lot of good things still can be accomplished," it's clear that the bedrock of his Moderateness—which is just another word for conservatism, which is just another word for fascism—is his revulsion at the prospect of radical change. Not his pious hope to get rid of Trump.

"Dear Democrats," little Tommy writes, as if he's addressing his diary: "This is not complicated! Just nominate a decent, sane person [i.e., not a leftist], one committed to reunifying [?] the country and creating more good jobs [you mean like Bernie Sanders?], a person who can gain the support of the independents, moderate Republicans [who don't exist] and suburban women who abandoned Donald Trump in the midterms and thus swung the House of Representatives to the Democrats and could do the same for the presidency. *And that candidate can win!*"

Oh, like Hillary Clinton won? That was your model moderate, moron. Remember how well she did against the Orange Blob, who should have been the most easily defeated candidate in recent history?

It would be surprising how slow some people are, if we didn't already know it's hard to get someone to understand something when his salary depends on his not understanding it.

But while the Friedmans of the world don't make arguments in good faith and shouldn't be taken seriously, there doubtless are Moderates out there who should and can be convinced of the error of their ways. Both the strategic and the moral error. Strategically, for example, one might point out that, whatever this or that poll says on this or that issue, Americans tend to respect strong, committed, proud leadership with a clear vision for the future—even if they don't necessarily agree with every aspect of that vision. The projection of self-certainty, moral clarity, honesty, and genuine concern for ordinary people is telegenic and polls well, as attested by Bernie Sanders' greater popularity than Trump and Clinton in 2016. A hemming and hawing, "flip-flopping," vacillating, calculating Moderate like the Clintons and John Kerry in 2004 often evokes contempt. (Obama was an exception because of his charisma, his "symbolic" skin color, and his hopey-changey rhetoric that people were hoodwinked into believing.)

In 2016, both the Moderate Republicans (Jeb, Rubio, Christie, Kasich, etc.) and the Moderate Democrat were dismally defeated by a shouting blubbering giant orange infant racist sex abuser who knew nothing about anything. Why? Newsflash: people want change. Radical change. They're screaming for it. Trump was change (they hoped), like Obama was change (they hoped). In 2020, guess what: people will still want change, especially those who have been disappointed or disgusted by Trump.

This desire, by the way, is one reason that the horrifyingly "radical" Medicare for All polls well, and would likely poll even better if more people understood it (e.g., the fact that Sanders' version would eliminate premiums and deductibles and bring down overall costs).

In short, let's put to rest the notion that the Average Voter wants Moderation. A poll here and there might suggest that, just as other polls don't. Questions about the Average Voter's preferences cannot be answered in any precise or scientific way, and anyone who claims he knows how people will vote is a fraud. What we do know is that the (relative) left had significant victories in 2018 and came close to winning in other races (Stacey Abrams, Andrew Gillum, Beto O'Rourke), in several instances likely losing because of Republican foul play.

The pundits were wrong in 2016, and there's no reason to believe they're right this time around.

Even more important than electoral strategy is something that the Friedman anthropoid has little knowledge of: morality. "I was shocked," he writes, quivering in righteous indignation, "that so many [in the June Democratic presidential debates] were ready to decriminalize illegal entry into our country. I think people should have to ring the doorbell before they enter my house or my country." The usual nuanced analysis.

"I was shocked," he continues, bewailing the injustice of the world, "at all those hands raised in support of providing comprehensive health coverage to undocumented immigrants. I think promises we've made to our fellow Americans should take priority, like to veterans in need of better health care." How noble of you. Too bad you haven't explained why the two goals are mutually exclusive.

This lack of concern for the downtrodden exposes the hollowness of the characteristic appeal to radicals to "wait." "You're going too fast!" the Moderate says. "You're going to screw everything up if you don't learn to be patient. Be reasonable! Act like the 1960s' white liberals whom Martin Luther King Jr. excoriated in his Letter from a—oh, wait. Um… No. Yes. Act like them: he was wrong and they were right."

The Moderate is either unaware or doesn't care that every worthy political goal has been achieved only because "radicals" were clamoring for a revolution (or at least a mild Sanders-type "political revolution"). American independence? Those despised radicals Jefferson, Washington, Adams, and the rest—and even more so the ordinary farmers, artisans, sailors, laborers, and women—got fed up with "patience" and severed their ties with the imperial power, heedless of the sage counsel of conservatives.

White male suffrage? Agitators in the mode of Thomas Skidmore and Thomas Wilson Dorr *demanded* that it be granted. Patience and politeness would have got them nothing.

The end of slavery? Fiery abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and John Brown had the courage to ignore the Thomas Friedmans of their day and finally, after decades of struggle, stirred a nation to action.

Women's suffrage? The Elizabeth Cady Stantons and Susan B. Anthonys, the Emmeline Pankhursts and Carrie Chapman Catts, organized and organized until the powerful could no longer ignore them.

The birth of the U.S. welfare state? Millions of unemployed in the Great Depression marched in the streets, resisted evictions, terrified authorities, demanded action, until the ruling class consented to the Social Security Act as a necessary concession to forestall revolution.

The civil rights movement? You can imagine what would have happened if activists had agreed to "wait": Jim Crow would still exist today.

And so it goes, time and again, always and forever. Feudalism collapsed not "automatically" from the spread of capitalism but because millions of peasants and urban workers resisted it and fought against it, from the 14th to the 20th centuries, until it was gone.

Today, if activists and political figures don't talk ceaselessly and heedlessly about Medicare for All, a $15 national minimum wage, the abolition of ICE, abolition of student debt, free education for all, radical action to tackle global warming, demilitarization of the U.S. budget, and a dozen other urgent issues, *nothing good will happen*. The status quo will continue, and society will, in the end, collapse. Wild misery and injustice will only spread and consume the country and the world.

In order to "normalize" "radical" ideas, you have to talk about them. Wherever and whenever you can. The more you talk about them, the more likely it is that people will understand them, accept them, and eventually demand them. They'll *always* be "too radical" if you put them on the back burner and focus on more "immediate" goals that are supposedly—but not really—in conflict with them.

Both strategically and morally, it is imperative for Democrats to move to the left, much further than they have. The more of them adopt the policies of "the Squad" (or rather more left-wing policies than the Squad's), the more hope there is for the country. Ultimately, of course, the Democratic Party will likely remain "history's second-most enthusiastic capitalist party," but individual Democrats at least can try to break the mold and galvanize resistance.

As for little Tommy Friedman (he's still learning how to write) and his Moderate pundit playmates, I'd only say to them: your grotesque amorality is rivaled only by your intellectual immaturity. Had you been writing in the 1850s, you'd be shameful little "compromise"-obsessed historical footnotes. As, indeed, you will undoubtedly be seen decades from now.

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Don't Mourn, Organize

A Review of *Beaten Down, Worked Up,* by Steven Greenhouse

We live in a paradoxical time. On the one hand, workers and organized labor are in their worst state since the early 1930s. Only 6.4 percent of private-sector workers belong to unions; average hourly pay is below what it was in 1973; 40 percent of adults lack the savings to pay for a $400 emergency expense. On the other hand, there is more excitement and organizing potential on the left, and among many workers, than there has been in generations. The Fight for $15 has been remarkably successful; hundreds of thousands of teachers have gone on strike illegally and won; innovative new forms of organizing are reinvigorating both labor and the left.

Steven Greenhouse, longtime labor correspondent for the *New York Times*, surveys this extraordinary terrain in his new book *Beaten Down, Worked Up: The Past, Present, and Future of American Labor*. While he doesn't provide a detailed history of labor, he does cover some of its most dramatic moments and significant phases from the early twentieth century to the present, with a journalistic flair for personal stories often absent from academic accounts. Much of the narrative, particularly of the neoliberal attack on unions, is bleak, but in the end Greenhouse's argument is compelling: labor's present weakness is not engraved in stone. A renaissance is possible.

The most interesting parts of the book are those that lend support to this argument. Too few people are aware, for example, of the spectacular successes of Culinary Workers Union Local 226 of Las Vegas. "Its membership has more than tripled since the late 1980s," Greenhouse writes, "soaring from eighteen thousand to sixty thousand today, making it one of the most powerful and fastest-growing union locals in the nation." Dishwashers, waiters, and hotel housekeepers—immigrants, blacks, refugees—have been raised to the middle class.

The trick has been to reject the union's old "business unionism" model and make it a rank-and-file union, starting in the 1980s. With the help of large and long-lasting strikes at casino-hotels—one lasted over six years—the Culinary forced one hotel after another to accept "card check" neutrality (meaning it would recognize the union after a majority of workers signed cards supporting it). Even the very anti-union MGM finally changed its tune, after public demonstrations were held and the union distributed reports to MGM's investors warning them that a Culinary strike could damage the company's precarious finances.

Other unions could also learn from the Culinary's dedication to politically mobilizing its members. In 2016, it was decisive in switching Nevada from 'red' to 'blue': its members knocked on 350,000 doors, got thousands of people to register to vote, and brought tens of thousands of early voters to the polls. In 2018, similarly, the union was instrumental in flipping a U.S. Senate seat from red to blue, along with the governor's mansion and two House seats.

Greenhouse is especially interested in how activists and a "militant minority" of workers have adapted to the adverse conditions of neoliberalism. In chapters on app-based work (Uber, TaskRabbit, Mechanical Turk, etc.), the Fight for $15, viciously exploited farmworkers in Florida, the teacher strikes of 2018, and "how Los Angeles became pro-labor," he explores the novel strategies and tactics that have been used—in some cases outside the framework of any traditional union at all.

For tomato pickers in Immokalee, Florida, for instance, conditions have approximated slavery. In 1993, activists founded the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) to educate and entertain workers by means of leadership training sessions, a low-power radio station, weekly skits about farmwork and social justice (with the immigrants as actors), and other programs. By the mid-90s the Coalition was organizing strikes to press growers for higher pay and better working conditions. But the strategy wasn't working.

So they switched their focus: they began to pressure tomato-buying chains like Taco Bell and later McDonald's and Burger King. They had two demands: that these companies require their suppliers to adopt a code of conduct, and that they pay their suppliers a penny more per pound, money that would be passed on to the pickers. With the help of university and high school students, the National Council of Churches and other religious organizations, federal prosecutions of forced labor on Florida farms, and highly visible tactics like a hunger strike outside Taco Bell's headquarters, the CIW organized a boycott of Taco Bell until the corporation would agree to its demands. In 2005, it finally did. A few years later, other companies followed.

As a result, 35,000 farmworkers have had their wages and working conditions significantly improved. A workplace-monitoring program, which experts have called the best in the U.S., ensures that violations are investigated and punished. "[T]he tomato fields in Immokalee," one researcher says, "are [now] probably the best working environment in American agriculture."

Such stories as these make *Beaten Down, Worked Up* an inspiring read. The final chapter is particularly interesting, for Greenhouse gives concrete advice on "how workers can regain their power." Perhaps there could be a major national workers' group comparable to AARP, called something like the American Association of Working People, to which members would pay dues and which would advocate for their interests. Activists could champion a system of worker representation on company boards, similar to Germany's. Union leaders should be incentivized to do more organizing. If the federal government won't act, states could implement new laws Greenhouse outlines.

Readers familiar with labor history and the recent corporate attacks on unions might find the book's treatment of these subjects a little superficial, but Greenhouse's purpose, in any case, is to contribute practically to the struggle for workers' rights. And at this he will surely succeed admirably.

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Capitalism, Socialism, and Existential Despair

Decades ago, Edward Said remarked that contemporary life is characterized by a "generalized condition of homelessness." Decades earlier, Heidegger had written that "Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world." Around the same time, fascists were invoking the themes of blood and soil, nation, race, community, as intoxicating antidotes to the mass anonymity and depersonalization of modern life. Twenty or thirty years later, the New Left, in its Port Huron Statement, lamented the corruption and degradation of such values as love, freedom, creativity, and community:

> Loneliness, estrangement, isolation describe the vast distance between man and man today. These dominant tendencies cannot be overcome by better personnel management, nor by improved gadgets, but only when a love of man overcomes the idolatrous worship of things by man…

Over a hundred years earlier, Karl Marx had already understood it was capitalism that was responsible for all this collective anguish. "All fixed, fast-frozen relations…are swept away," he wrote in

the *Communist Manifesto*, "all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned…" Home, community, the family, one's very relation to oneself—all are mediated by money, the commodity function, "reification," exploitation of one form or another.

And now here we are in 2020, when the alienation and atomization have reached such a state that it seems as if the world is in danger of ending. The phenomenology, the "structure of feeling," of living in this society is that everything is transient and "up in the air," human survival itself is in question, a hectored, bureaucratized anonymity chases us from morning till night, nothing really matters, no one gets their just deserts. Young people are refraining from having children. There is certainly no collective sense of *belonging*—that's long gone. We're *les étrangers*, passively consuming distractions as we wait for the other shoe to drop.

Meanwhile, we read of little else but agonized suffering, from children in cages to rainforests burning, from opioid epidemics to rampaging neofascists.

As always, it's socialism or barbarism

The case for socialism is usually made, rightly, from the perspective of its justice. It would be just to have economic and social democracy, for one thing because it is intrinsically right that people not be forced to rent themselves to a business owner who exploits them for profit but instead that they collectively control economic activities and distribute rewards as they see fit. Moreover, economic democracy, whether in the form of worker cooperatives or democratic government control, would make impossible the extreme income inequality that corrodes political democracy and ultimately unravels the social fabric.

But it's also worth broadcasting the message that even from an existentialist point of view, our only hope is socialism. Certain types of conservatives (usually religious) like to complain about the demise of the family, the community, non-hedonistic interpersonal ties, and the sense of meaning in our lives, a demise for which they blame such nebulous or imaginary phenomena as secularism, "humanism," "communism," and liberalism. That is, they blame everything except what really matters: capitalism, the reduction of multifaceted life to the monomaniacal pursuit of profit, property, and power. So these conservatives end up in the realm of neofascism, which promises only to complete the destruction of family and community.

The truth is that only socialism, or an economically democratic society in which there is no capitalist class, could possibly usher in a world in which the existentialist howl of Camus and Sartre didn't have universal resonance. Mass loneliness, "homelessness," and the gnawing sense of meaninglessness are not timeless conditions; they're predictable expressions of a commoditized, privatized, bureaucratized civilization. Do away with the agent of enforced commoditization, privatization, and bureaucratization—i.e., the capitalist class—and you'll do away with the despair that arises from these things.

Optimism of the will

It's true that the current suicide epidemic in the U.S. and the mental illness epidemic around the world have more specific causes than simply "capitalism." They have to do with high unemployment, deindustrialization, underfunded hospitals and community outreach programs, job-related stress, social isolation, etc. In other words, they have to do with the particularly vicious and virulent forms that capitalism takes in the neoliberal period. But long before this period, widespread disaffection and mental illness characterized capitalist society.

And then, of course, there is the "material foundation" of the civilization that has sprouted such globalized despair. How much *more* unhappy would we privileged people be if we didn't live in our little spiritual cubicles walled by Netflix and Amazon, Youtube and Facebook, shopping and video games, but instead could see with a God's-eye view the inconceivable physical suffering and oppression, the *literal* homelessness, of billions! As Mike Davis wrote years ago, it's a planet of slums. The vast dimensions of the exploitation of humanity—for those who are "lucky" enough to be exploited, as opposed to simply being made economically redundant and cast aside to subsist on whatever leavings or charity or extra-legal opportunities they can find—are unfathomable. A social order in which even the richest nation in world

history leaves 40 percent of its adult citizens without the means to afford a $400 emergency expense cannot justify its existence, and is begging to be torn down and rebuilt.

Now, in light of global warming and ecological destruction, it's possible that humanity won't last much longer anyway, in which case capitalism will never be overcome and our collective existential anguish is perfectly appropriate. But nothing is certain at this point. Except that we have a moral imperative to do all we can to fight for socialism. "By any means necessary." It is what justice demands, and it offers the only hope that even we privileged people—not to mention the less privileged majority—can know what it is to truly have a home.

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The Life and Times of Jimmy Hoffa

Jimmy Hoffa used to say he'd be forgotten ten years after his death. This was an uncharacteristically unintelligent judgment. Forty-four years after his murder on July 30, 1975, Hoffa is still famous enough that one of the most celebrated movies of the year is about the man who claims to have killed him, Frank Sheeran. Called *The Irishman*, the film, directed by Martin Scorsese, stars Robert De Niro as Sheeran, Al Pacino as Hoffa, and Joe Pesci as Russell Bufalino, the Mob boss who approved the killing. For a labor leader, such a level of fame is not only extraordinary; it is unique.[1]

Of course, the reasons for Hoffa's fame are not entirely to his credit. He is seen as the dictatorial and corrupt union leader who was close friends with gangsters and allied his union, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), with the Mafia. Bobby Kennedy went after him for years, starting with the famous McClellan Committee hearings of 1957–59 (for which Kennedy was the chief counsel), and finally got him convicted in 1964 on charges of jury tampering and fraud, for improper use of the Teamsters' pension fund. His appeals having failed, Hoffa went to prison in 1967, but was released in 1971 when Richard Nixon commuted his sentence. As described in Charles Brandt's bestseller *I Heard You Paint Houses*, on which Scorsese's movie is based, Hoffa's subsequent campaign to regain the presidency of the Teamsters was sufficiently threatening to the Mafia that they had him killed.

The Irishman focuses on this seedier side of Hoffa's life, thus perpetuating the image of a wholly amoral and self-serving criminal with which the McClellan hearings made Hoffa's name synonymous. Most articles published in popular media, such as Steve Early's recent piece "The Ghost of Jimmy Hoffa Won't Go Away," express a similarly one-sided view. The truth is that Hoffa's Mob connections were hardly the defining feature of his life. Rather, he deserves to be known, in large part, as the preternaturally effective and hard-working—20-hour days six days a week—leader of what was then the largest union in American history, responsible for raising millions of truck drivers, warehousemen, laundry workers, retail clerks, and others into the middle class.

With the possible exception of John L. Lewis, no twentieth-century union leader was as beloved by the members as Hoffa. He made it a point to be approachable and endlessly responsive: in speeches, for example, he regularly gave out his office phone number and insisted that members call him at any hour of the day or night if they had problems. The contracts he secured were remarkably generous—and yet, ironically, even employers profoundly admired him, considering him a master negotiator, a "genius," more

[1] This article relies primarily on the following books: Thaddeus Russell, *Out of the Jungle: Jimmy Hoffa and the Remaking of the American Working Class* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001); Arthur A. Sloane, *Hoffa* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991); Ralph C. James and Estelle Dinerstein James, *Hoffa and the Teamsters: A Study of Union Power* (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1965); James R. Hoffa, *The Trials of Jimmy Hoffa: An Autobiography* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1970); Charles Brandt, *I Heard You Paint Houses: Frank "The Irishman" Sheeran and Closing the Case on Jimmy Hoffa* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Steerforth Press, 2004); Robert F. Kennedy, *The Enemy Within* (New York: Popular Library, 1960); and Dan La Botz, "The Tumultuous Teamsters of the 1970s," in *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below in the Long 1970s*, eds. Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Cal Winslow (New York: Verso, 2010), 199–226.

knowledgeable about the trucking industry than anyone, all in all "a great statesman" who was scrupulously honest and realistic in bargaining.

Indeed, the fundamental reason for the perennial fascination with Jimmy Hoffa may be not so much his ties to the Mafia as his sheer power and success. No other industry was more critical to the nation's economy than trucking, and Hoffa did more than anyone to rationalize and stabilize conditions in this chaotic, competitive industry (a service for which employers were grateful). Bobby Kennedy may have exaggerated when he said Hoffa was the second most powerful man in the country, but he certainly did have a degree of power unimaginable for a union official in the twenty-first century. And that's what's so interesting about him: Hoffa symbolizes a political economy long gone, an era when a union leader could strike fear and loathing in the hearts of senators and presidents, when the old industrial working class, millions strong and capable of bringing the economy to its knees if it so desired, was still the foundation of the social order. Certain sectors of the working class were even defiantly independent of the corporate-liberal "consensus" of the Cold War establishment, having carved out their own self-policed political economy with the help of organized crime, informal deals, and a willingness to meet violence with violence. The Teamsters epitomized this independent working class, and Hoffa epitomized the Teamsters.

It was the *aesthetic*, so to speak, of the Teamsters and their form of unionism to which Bobby Kennedy and other "corporate liberals" objected (together with "socially responsible" unionists like Walter Reuther of the United Autoworkers). As historian Thaddeus Russell argues, "the confrontation [between Kennedy and Hoffa] represented a cultural conflict between the rising, respectable professional class of the prosperous postwar years and the uncultured, unassimilated, and unruly industrial working class of the Depression." To have such an untamed and independent social force right at the heart of society—in the age of triumphant liberalism—was an embarrassment.

That working class is dead now. But in its heyday, it was one hell of a force to be reckoned with.

The Rise of Jimmy Hoffa

Years later, Hoffa formulated the moral philosophy he had imbibed from his early days in Indiana and Detroit:

> Every day of the average individual is a matter of survival. If by chance he should go from home to work and have an accident, lose an arm or an eye, he's just like an animal wounded in the jungle. He's out. Life isn't easy. Life is a jungle… Ethics is a matter of individualism. What may be ethical to you may be unethical to someone else… But my ethics are very simple. Live and let live, and those who try to destroy you, make it your business to see that they don't and that they have problems.

It was in Detroit in the Depression years that Hoffa learned the law of the jungle. As a dockloader at Kroger's warehouse, Hoffa led a strike against the sadistic foreman, which resulted in a temporary agreement with the company that improved conditions and pay. When he was fired a couple of years later, in 1935, for dropping a crate of vegetables on the loading dock, he was immediately hired by a Teamsters official to be an organizer (or "business agent") with Local 299. He was only 21, but with his boundless energy and intelligence he proved effective.

Across much of the country, the IBT was beginning a sustained offensive in these years. In 1934 its members played a decisive role in two successful general strikes: one in San Francisco, where they joined the longshoremen's union to shut down the city, and one in Minneapolis, where the Trotskyists in charge of Local 574 led a strike that elicited shocking violence from the police and thugs hired by employers. The Teamsters' almost total victory in this strike, leading to the unionization of thousands of "unskilled" workers, began its transformation from a small conservative craft organization to a national industrial union encompassing over two million members.

The more politically conservative Detroit Teamsters were, in their own way, just as militant as the Trotskyists in Minneapolis. To organize the increasingly numerous—and abysmally paid—intercity freight

drivers, Local 299's organizers favored a strategy much simpler than signing up workers and petitioning for elections that would be overseen by the newly established National Labor Relations Board. Instead, they approached an employer: "either enroll your workers with the union or we'll bomb your trucks." If he refused, they bombed his trucks. And sometimes his home. In a violent, lawless city, this strategy worked well. (They had likely learned it, in fact, from having their own cars bombed by "hired thugs.") Combined with frequent strikes and strike threats, such intimidation resulted in an influx of new members into the local and steadily rising wages.

Hoffa and his several union colleagues didn't limit themselves to organizing drivers; anyone who worked on a loading platform was fair game too. "We'd go out," Hoffa later recalled, "hit the docks, talk to drivers, put up picket lines, conduct strikes, hold meetings day and night, convince people to join the union." It was treacherous work: "My scalp was laid open sufficiently wide to require stitches no less than six times during the first year I was business agent of Local 299. I was beaten up by cops or strikebreakers at least two dozen times that year." During one strike he was jailed eighteen times within a 24-hour period, since he kept returning to the picket line after being released. In these years he also had a list of arrests "that's maybe as long as your arm" for fighting with strikebreakers, hired thugs, and members of rival unions who were trying to organize the same workers the Teamsters were.

In 1938 two developments occurred that would later facilitate Hoffa's centralized control over the entire union. First, Dave Beck, an organizer from Seattle (who went on to become president of the IBT in 1952), formed the Western Conference of Teamsters, an administrative body covering the eleven western states and British Columbia. Such a higher-level body was necessary for coordinating organizing and bargaining in a fragmented industry that had thousands of small employers and hundreds of local Teamster unions. That very year, two thousand employers in the eleven states signed an agreement to bring higher wages to intercity ("over-the-road") drivers.

Around the same time, Farrell Dobbs was achieving a similar ambition in the Midwest. One of the Trotskyists who had led the 1934 Minneapolis strike, Dobbs realized it was inefficient and mutually damaging for locals to separately negotiate different wage scales for their own over-the-road drivers. So he and his comrades, with the cooperation of the IBT leadership, created the Central States Drivers Council (CSDC) to bargain for all unionized over-the-road drivers in the twelve Midwestern states. To force reluctant—and widely scattered—employers to come to the bargaining table, Dobbs gave them the kind of ultimatum that Hoffa used to great effect in later years: all firms with lines ending or beginning in Chicago (which meant most firms in the Midwest) would have to negotiate an areawide contract or face a devastating strike. They quickly complied, and over two weeks they and the CSDC hammered out the most ambitious and important contract the IBT had ever negotiated. Establishing uniform minimum wages, maximum hours, seniority rights, safety guarantees, a grievance committee, and a closed shop (all drivers had to belong to the Teamsters), the contract covered 125,000 workers at 1,700 companies.

Hoffa worked with Dobbs in this historic campaign, specifically as a leader of Dobbs' effort to organize those long-distance Midwestern drivers who hadn't yet been recruited into the union. Whatever qualms he felt about Dobbs' Trotskyism, Hoffa was profoundly impressed by the man's strategic and organizational genius. "I was studying at the knee of a master," he reminisced later.

He also learned from Dobbs the usefulness of the secondary boycott. Some employers in Omaha and Sioux City had refused to accept the CSDC contract and locked out their unionized employees. Dobbs and other Teamster leaders studied the companies' routes and decided that the best way to force them to capitulate was to threaten a strike against employers in Kansas City, who made shipments for the Omaha and Sioux City operators, unless they suspended their dealings with the latter. This would cut off the holdouts in Nebraska and effectively force them to sign the contract. The plan worked—and Hoffa was made vividly aware of the power of the secondary boycott, a tactic he would never be afraid to use. (After the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 made such boycotts illegal, Hoffa found a legal loophole and defiantly continued to use them.)

This tactic also inspired a broader strategy that helped the Teamsters organize industries contiguous to trucking, thus increasing the IBT's membership considerably. Any company that depended on Teamsters for deliveries and pickups could be compelled to unionize its employees simply by being refused service

and thereby shut down. “Warehouses, canneries, laundries, retail stores, bakeries, and breweries fell to this tactic,” one historian writes, “which Hoffa used to make the Detroit Teamsters and ultimately the entire IBT into a boundless, multi-industry union.”

Hoffa’s triumphant future might have been quite different if not for a fateful decision Farrell Dobbs made in 1940: he resigned from the Teamsters to devote all his time to the Socialist Workers Party. Daniel Tobin, head of the IBT, pleaded with him to reconsider, to drop his Trotskyist politics and continue working with the union, even promising him the first available vice-presidency. Which could have been a stepping-stone to the presidency. But it was to no avail: Dobbs resigned his union positions, including negotiating chairman of the powerful CSDC. This is what made possible Hoffa’s rise to national prominence, as he wrote later in his autobiography:

> I was chosen to replace Dobbs as negotiating chairman. I didn’t realize, when I accepted the job, along with a vice-presidency [of the CSDC, not the IBT] the following year, that it was the post that would project me into the national limelight as far as the International Brotherhood was concerned, but that job really paved the way to the General Presidency. As a rung in the ladder of my career, it provided a giant step upward.

Hoffa’s star was rising on other fronts too. He had been de facto leader of Local 299 since 1936—overseeing its financial stabilization (after near-bankruptcy) and recruitment of several thousand new members—and was gradually becoming de facto leader of the Joint Council of all Detroit locals. In 1942 he was elected to the board of directors of the Wayne County Federation of Labor, but more importantly, he established the Michigan Conference of Teamsters to centralize in his hands bargaining for all locals in the state. Weaker locals regularly negotiated subpar contracts for their intracity members, which exerted downward pressure on wages across the state. With Hoffa negotiating a uniform statewide contract, the wages of thousands of workers were raised, and increasingly many members became familiar with him and intensely loyal to him.

But it was his achievements with the CSDC that ultimately made him wildly popular across the country. During World War II Hoffa’s ambitions were confined within the straitjacket imposed by the National War Labor Board, but starting in 1945 he was able to negotiate contracts that contained wage increases as high as 20 percent or even 50 percent. He brought tens of thousands more drivers into the Midwestern agreement and established a Central States health and welfare program funded entirely by employer contributions. And he did what the CIO failed to do with its postwar Operation Dixie: he organized the South. Using the secondary boycott, it wasn’t particularly challenging (at least in principle). He ordered warehousemen and dockworkers to boycott Southern trucking companies crossing into the Midwest unless they hired union members, which after a few years forced the large majority of Southern employers to sign with the union. And then, by the mid-1950s, he forced them to raise wages and improve working conditions to the level of the CSDC.

At the same time, the CSDC (renamed the Central States Conference) had undertaken two gargantuan projects: to negotiate uniform contracts for *local* workers—as opposed to over-the-road drivers—in the 22 states the Conference now covered, and to complete the unionization of all trucking companies in these states. By 1957, these goals were achieved.

Hoffa’s meteoric rise in the IBT was cemented at the 1952 convention, when he was unanimously elected a vice-president of the union, the youngest ever (at 39). He quite possibly could have been elected president, but he preferred to engineer Dave Beck’s election in return for Beck’s promise not to interfere in his activities. Aside from the president, Hoffa was the most powerful union officer at the time, controlling the Southern and Central Conferences, and by the middle of Beck’s brief reign (ending in 1957) he was certainly the dominant force in the entire IBT.

How did Hoffa rise so high so fast? Part of the answer, which will be explored below, is that he allied himself with a lot of useful people. But much of his success was due simply to his personality and intelligence. According to people who knew him, he had an “almost hypnotic” charisma, was a “master psychologist,” “the smartest guy I know,” “like an elephant with his memory—it’s beyond belief,” and

expert in the minutiae of labor law. In the 1960s he would often give talks at universities or business executive lunches, discoursing perceptively on the history of labor legislation or jousting with economists and lawyers, leaving initially hostile audiences so impressed they would give him a standing ovation (as on one occasion at the Harvard Law School Forum). He was supremely confident and supremely competent.

In addition to all this, of course, he was infinitely ambitious.

He wanted the union to be millions strong. It's almost as if he shared the old IWW dream of One Big Union for the entire working class—even as he rejected the concept of social-movement unionism associated with both the political left and, in a diluted way, liberals like Walter Reuther. Just before Hoffa was elected president in 1957, he wrote a "policy statement" that included earmarking at least 25 percent of the IBT's income to organizing. This was at a time when the AFL-CIO, to which the Teamsters belonged, was (myopically) devoting about 5 percent of its revenue to organizing. A year later, even as the McClellan hearings—broadcast on televisions around the country—were making his name synonymous with corruption and criminality, Hoffa announced a plan to bring every policeman in the U.S. into the IBT. "It is a piece of unmitigated gall," one political official responded, speaking for multitudes. Hoffa also planned to establish a "Conference on Transportation Unity," under his leadership, that would bring together the IBT, the International Longshoremen's Association, the National Maritime Union, railroad brotherhoods, airline unions, in total more than fifty organizations in the transportation sector. Both of these projects had to be scuttled because of public opposition. But they indicate the scope of Hoffa's dreams, which the union continued to pursue by organizing everyone from egg farmers to airline flight attendants.

The other ingredient of Hoffa's personality that was crucial to his success was the one that also led to his downfall: his contempt for bourgeois respectability, bourgeois hypocrisy, and liberal pieties.

Hoffa vs. Kennedy

Jimmy Hoffa was a contradictory man, but one quality, at least, was foundational to his character: brutal realism. He saw the world in terms of power relations; he rejected all ideological illusions and mystifications (as he saw them), from communism to liberalism to his wife Josephine's Christianity. This is how he could both support Republican politicians and frequently sound like a Marxist. It was all in the name of realism, whatever was necessary to get ahead and help certain others get ahead.

His attitude towards the legal system was characteristic. As a couple of academic observers who knew him well wrote, "To Hoffa law is not something to respect, but rather a set of principles designed to perpetuate those already in power, and something for others to 'get around.' Thus, Hoffa feels clear of conscience about his expertise in devising legal loopholes and practicing legal brinksmanship." In effect, he thought the state was a capitalist state; therefore, he had little respect for the idealistic liberal corporatism of a Reuther or the Kennedy brothers. While he recognized the value and necessity of having a welfare state, at bottom he thought the working class had to take care of itself, do whatever was necessary to survive, and constantly fight against a hostile world.

His public statements at the time of the McClellan Committee reflected this perspective. "The working man is being shortchanged every day in America." "Twenty years ago [i.e., in 1939] the employers had all the hoodlums working for them as strikebreakers. Now we've got a few, and everybody's screaming." Speaking to a television audience:

> Now, when you talk about the question of hoodlums and gangsters, the first people that hire hoodlums and gangsters are employers. If there are any illegal forces in the community, he'll use them, strong-arm and otherwise. And so if you're going to stay in the business of organizing the unorganized, maintaining the union you have, then you better have a resistance.

In short, Hoffa was working-class through-and-through, the very symbol (at least to the public) of anti-establishmentarian defiance in a relatively conformist age, closer to the rank and file than probably any other major labor leader. "As he walks down the street," one observer wrote in 1964, "he often halts passing

trucks for a moment's discussion with a couple of members. When away from Washington, D.C., he takes time out to tour the local trucking terminals, where he jokes, wrestles, and swears with the workers." Nothing was more apt to provoke his legendary temper than an aspersion cast on the dignity of the truck driver's occupation.

Hoffa's connections to the criminal world dated back to the 1930s and were, arguably, a natural product of operating in a violent, cutthroat environment. If Local 299 and others hadn't made alliances with unsavory people, they likely would have been gobbled up by employers and/or rival unions. In the late 1930s, for instance, a jurisdictional war erupted between the Detroit Teamsters and the United Brewery Workers, both of which unions claimed the right to represent the city's beer drivers. Vicious street battles broke out while higher-level administrative bodies and even federal courts tried to mediate the dispute. The Teamsters developed a network of allies from local saloons to the Michigan statehouse, including members of the East Side Sicilian Mob and other criminals. With their help, and by bribing or intimidating some bar owners into only accepting beer delivered by Teamsters, the latter managed to keep their foot in the brewery industry.

More broadly, David Witwer points out in *Corruption and Reform in the Teamsters Union* that the IBT had both been victimized by and benefited from criminal associations for decades, but especially starting in the 1930s. Chicago and New York were the great hubs of extra-legal activity. The sociologist Daniel Bell explained long ago why trucking was particularly susceptible to crime: "racketeers were able to enter only into small, unit-sized industries where chaotic competition prevailed," meaning that "the greatest potential for racketeering is in the Teamsters union."

It isn't known for sure when the Detroit Teamsters first made really durable and extensive connections with organized crime. Some writers, such as Dan Moldea, argue it was in the early 1940s, when Hoffa's union was facing an existential threat from well-funded CIO unions that were raiding the (AFL-affiliated) IBT's turf to steal its members. Supposedly Hoffa was compelled to turn to the Mob for manpower and political influence in his many battles against the CIO.

Thaddeus Russell, on the other hand, argues the decisive events weren't until later in that decade, in connection with Hoffa's attempts to control the local liquor industry (made up of breweries, bars, groceries, liquor stores, and the state Liquor Control Commission) and to defend it from CIO incursions. By 1946 the Teamsters had organized nearly all of the industry's workers, except for those in a group of businesses owned by the Mafia. The president of the largest Mob-owned company, Bilvin Distributing Company, was William Bufalino, who was a close associate of (among others) Russell Bufalino, underboss of one of the most powerful crime families in the northeast. To break the resistance of the Detroit Mob to unionization, Hoffa hired William as president of Local 985, which covered jukebox workers. This created the first *institutional* alliance between the Detroit Teamsters and the Mafia, who now accepted unionization and in fact engaged in a violent campaign against scores of bar owners who didn't sign with the gangster-owned, Teamster-organized firms.

William Bufalino went on to become one of Hoffa's most important attorneys in his later legal battles. And these new (or not-so-new) connections to organized crime in Detroit facilitated IBT connections to Mob figures all over the country. In 1951, for example, Hoffa placed the Central States health and welfare fund with the Union Casualty Life Insurance Agency of Chicago, which was owned by Allen Dorfman. Allen was the son of Paul Dorfman, who was a useful ally to have in Chicago: he was friends with the city's political bosses, President Truman, leaders of the Chicago Federation of Labor, and AFL president George Meany. He was also connected to organized crime in both New York and Chicago.

In general, one of the key reasons for Hoffa's alliances with gangsters is one of the reasons politicians' later attacks on him tended to be hypocritical: the Mafia was politically influential (in addition to being inextricably intertwined with the "legitimate" business community). "The mobsters have always been wedded to the political system," one criminologist observed decades ago. "That's how they survive. Without that wedding, they'd be terrorists—and we'd get rid of them."[1] As Thomas Reppetto has written, "in both politics and business [the Mafia] managed to link the underworld to the upper world," becoming

[1] Arthur Sloane uses this quotation in *Hoffa*, but he doesn't cite the source and I haven't been able to locate it.

immensely powerful in the process. In the 1940s and ’50s, if businessmen, politicians, and corrupt law enforcement were all linked to organized crime, it would have been odd for an ambitious union leader operating in a viciously competitive environment not to reach out for protection and advantage to those same powerful “underworld” figures.

In an ABC News interview in the early 1970s Hoffa justified his relationships with alleged criminals and ex-convicts in terms that were, while self-serving, not wholly implausible: “these [organized crime figures] are the people you should know if you’re going to avoid having anyone interfere with your strike. And that’s what we know them for… Know who your potential enemies are and neutralize ’em.” To another reporter he insisted, “I’m no different than the banks, no different than insurance companies, no different than the politicians. You’re a damned fool not to be informed what makes a city run when you’re tryin’ to do business in the city.” On the other hand, a majority of politicians could have justly pointed out they had no ties to the Mafia. Whether they had no ties to *any* corrupt individuals or businesses, or even themselves weren’t morally and legally compromised in numerous ways, is another question entirely.

Hoffa was certainly unusual, though, in his willingness to thumb his nose at propriety. Being convinced of the moral turpitude of the entire political-economic system, he saw no reason to take seriously the self-serving outrage—directed at unions, not corporations or politicians—of its guardians. So he dug himself deeper, as it were, even flaunting his relationships with notorious people. The Central and Southern States Pension Fund (CSPF), for example, which he browbeat employers into creating and funding in 1955, got him into trouble some years later. With millions of dollars flowing into it every month, retired union members received some of the most generous pensions in the country. (Teamsters were also, by now, receiving some of the most generous wages: there were stories of professors at elite universities quitting their jobs to become long-distance truck drivers because they could double their pay.) But all this money, hundreds of millions of dollars, had to be invested, and Hoffa was in charge of the investment decisions, as he was in charge of almost everything. The Fund gave out countless loans to a bewildering variety of people and institutions, but some were given to mobsters such as Russell Bufalino, Carlos Marcello, Santo Trafficante, Johnny Dioguardi, and Morris Dalitz, one of the Mafia figures who used CSPF money to build Las Vegas casinos. While these loans may have been legal, in the context of the McClellan hearings they were provocative.

Meanwhile, since at least the 1940s Hoffa had found it expedient to bribe public officials, including in law-enforcement and regulatory agencies, prosecutors’ offices, and state legislatures. “Every man has his price,” he was wont to say. No doubt he thought bribery, a well-established practice among businesses and (less so) unions through the entire industrial age (in a sense, even up to the present), was necessary to secure the cooperation of typically anti-labor governments. But its widespread practice by unions contributed to the stench of corruption that had, in the public mind, settled on organized labor by the early 1950s.

The history of the public revulsion against ostensibly corrupt “Big Labor,” crystallized in the award-winning 1954 film *On the Waterfront*, is too well known to need retelling here. Grand jury investigations, congressional hearings as early as Senator Estes Kefauver’s Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce in 1950–51, and negative media coverage hounded some of the nation’s largest unions for years. This was the era, after all, when big business was conducting a colossal political, legal, and public-relations campaign to beat back the left-liberalism spawned by the popular movements of the 1930s. As Elizabeth Fones-Wolf argues in *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945–60*, there was a “unity of purpose within much of the business community on…the necessity of halting the advance of the welfare state and of undermining the legitimacy and power of organized labor.” The more that unions could be tarred and feathered for connections to organized crime (as if business itself lacked such connections, or were selflessly devoted to the common weal and knew nothing of legal infractions!), the better it would be for the corporate offensive against labor.

Needless to say, the personal motive of self-designated crusaders against organized crime and union corruption was not necessarily to do the bidding of big business. Bobby Kennedy, for instance, who emerged as the most ferocious enemy of both the Mafia and Jimmy Hoffa, was a highly religious man who seems to have considered it his Catholic duty to cleanse organized labor of racketeers. Unions, he thought,

should be sacred institutions, a movement of the oppressed—hence his embrace of Cesar Chavez in the 1960s. According to Arthur Schlesinger, this millionaire son of a successful businessman, brother of a senator and president, "came to identify himself with workers who were expelled, beaten, murdered." The point, however, is that whatever Bobby's motives were, his long obsession with crushing Hoffa and other despised union officials fit neatly into the political agenda that had been set by business. This fact, doubtless, is why he was given all the resources he needed to pursue his obsession.

In retrospect, the Kennedy–Hoffa war from 1957 to 1964 has symbolic, sociological significance. It was a clash of two opposite types, two personifications of diametrically opposed philosophies and social strata. On one side was the liberal "do-gooder," the (anti-Marxian) idealist, the educated, elite professional who thinks society should be run by idealistic educated professionals who are noble and objective enough to have the public interest at heart. He may be inclined to think in terms of moral absolutes—"as Mr. Hoffa operates it," Bobby wrote, "[the Teamsters union] is a conspiracy of evil"—and is certain he is on the side of Good. This idealist is motivated by whatever lofty ideas he chooses, but his actual role in the political economy is typically to be a smooth-talking technocrat who enforces the rule of the capitalist class. Objectively, so to speak, he is on the side of business.

On the other side is the working-class materialist, the realist, the person whose training in the art of survival has taught him that what matters above all is the struggle for resources. He may share Hoffa's lack of interest in broad social reform, as well as his belief that a union is in essence just a business to sell its members' labor at the highest price. He may, therefore, somewhat accommodate himself to society as it is. But the reality of this person's existence is a kind of class struggle, a struggle to wrest what he can however he can. Doubtless the liberal professional finds him—and his class—vulgar, uneducated, crassly materialistic, and potentially threatening. As Kennedy found Hoffa. But the working-class realist doesn't have the luxury (nor the liberal hypocrisy) to sneer at "materialism."

These two types tend to loathe each other.

Incidentally, there is an irony here: in some respects Hoffa had a "purer" character than Kennedy. He never drank or smoked—didn't even want people to drink in his presence—and would never have dreamed of cheating on his beloved wife, contrary to the perennially philandering Kennedy brothers (whose sexual addictions, including White House orgies, revolted him). At a San Francisco nightclub once, he was so embarrassed by a stripper's performance he turned his chair away so as not to see her. While he cursed incessantly—except around his family, where he was a paragon of a doting, gentle father and husband—he hated off-color jokes. Far from using the union as a means to enrich himself, Hoffa lived modestly, rarely even upgrading his (somewhat shabby) wardrobe, and constantly gave away large sums of money to anyone who asked for it. "He was probably the most generous, open-handed guy I've ever met," an associate recalled, being a "sucker for any sad song or hard-luck guy."

As for the Kennedys, their aversion to the Mafia didn't prevent them from hiring its members to kill Fidel Castro, as part of the secret terrorist program called Operation Mongoose. Seymour Hersh even reports in *The Dark Side of Camelot* that the Mafia, rather stupidly, got John F. Kennedy elected president by manipulating the vote in Illinois. Their reward was that Attorney General Bobby Kennedy devoted unprecedented resources to destroying them.

In effect, what Kennedy and his fellow liberals who administered the Cold War corporatist state wanted was a fully assimilated, "civilized," obedient population that wouldn't have any shadowy groups opaque to the state. Communists were illegitimate and had to be persecuted, as they were from the late 1940s on; unions that forged their own way, not consenting to political assimilation, were also illegitimate. Hoffa's Teamsters, the most powerful union of all and the most "independent"—it even supported Republicans!—was first on the list of offenders.

Dave Beck, sybarite extraordinaire, was the first big fish to be caught in the net cast by Senator McClellan's Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor and Management Field. But right around the same time he was exposed as corrupt, in early 1957, Hoffa was caught allegedly bribing a lawyer involved with Bobby Kennedy's investigation. And then began Hoffa's streak of good luck: to Kennedy's shock, a jury found him not guilty. So later that year he went on to be overwhelmingly elected General President of the IBT. Kennedy was certain the election had been rigged, and publicly said so; it turned out

he was wrong. Hoffa was incredibly popular with the members, and grew more so the more he was vilified in the press. "When the government came after him," a union member said years later, "a lot of us wanted to take our trucks and run 'em over certain people… Everyone I knew thought Hoffa was a great man."

His election did result in the Teamsters being expelled from the AFL-CIO. But legally his troubles were overcome one after the other, infuriating Bobby, "the only member of our family who doesn't forgive," his father said. A trial on Hoffa's alleged wiretapping of union offices ended in acquittal. An indictment for perjury before the McClellan Committee had to be dropped when the Supreme Court ruled that wiretap evidence obtained by state officials couldn't be used in federal court. Over three years, the committee subpoenaed hundreds of Teamster officials and mobsters, filled fifty-odd volumes with witness testimony, interrogated Hoffa many times, charged him with more than eighty improper activities, but in the end, remarkably, proved nothing (as regards Hoffa, that is—other targets weren't so lucky). Organized labor's national reputation had been damaged, but legally, Hoffa had weathered the greatest congressional onslaught against a single individual in history.

The committee's activities did stimulate the passage, in 1959, of the Landrum-Griffin Act, officially known as the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act. Consistent with the committee's almost exclusive focus on union corruption and blithe disregard of management corruption, this act largely ignored management and instead regulated the internal affairs of unions. For instance, people convicted of robbery, bribery, extortion, aggravated assault, or embezzlement were barred from holding a union office for five years after conviction. The act also outlawed the principal means by which Hoffa had built the Teamsters since the 1930s: picketing to force employers to recognize a union; certain forms of secondary boycotting that the Taft-Hartley Act had left legal; and "hot cargo" arrangements whereby employers would agree not to deal with another employer involved in a labor dispute. This law thus revealed what, on the broadest scale, was really at stake in the McClellan hearings, namely the business class's desire to control, hobble, and discredit unions.[1]

The Teamsters membership seemed to understand this fact, judging by delegates' behavior at the IBT convention in 1961. Russell describes Hoffa's reception:

> On the day the convention opened, an airplane trailing a banner with the message "Re-Elect Hoffa" circled overhead as more than 2,000 delegates, nearly all wearing Hoffa hats and saucer-sized buttons, flooded into the Deauville Hotel in Miami Beach. After Hoffa was nominated by John English, who called the incumbent "the man with the most guts in America," the delegates responded with a fifteen-minute ovation and a continuous chant of "Hoffa, Hoffa, Hoffa."… The delegates then mocked the government's attempts to impose Spartan living on their leaders by passing with roaring unanimity a resolution raising Hoffa's salary to $75,000—the highest of any American union official at the time…

As for Bobby Kennedy, he "had long been the target of the members' insults as a 'pantywaist' and 'hatchet man' bent on taking away the comforts they had gained from the union." Except for some dissidents scattered around the country, Hoffa acquired nearly mythic status among members as he continued to grow the union and systematically raise wages in the 1960s, even as he was facing his greatest legal threats yet.

Bobby hadn't forgiven him for escaping his clutches earlier, so as soon as he became Attorney General in 1961 he formed the Get Hoffa Squad (as it was known), consisting of sixteen attorneys and thirty FBI agents. By any means necessary, including methods of questionable legality (such as wiretapping, bugging, and planting spies), they were going to destroy their target. They empaneled fifteen grand juries to investigate Hoffa. In 1962 he went on trial in Nashville, Tennessee for accepting payments from an

[1] During the hearings, for example, the National Association of Manufacturers and the United States Chamber of Commerce "initiated a ferocious anti-union drive," Thaddeus Russell writes, "and used as one of its selling points the issue of union corruption." See David Witwer, *Corruption and Reform in the Teamsters Union* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), chapter nine.

employer in violation of the Taft-Hartley Act. The government meticulously prepared its case, and yet, once again, Hoffa bested Kennedy: the trial ended in a hung jury.

Six months later, however, he was indicted yet again, this time for jury-tampering in the Nashville case. The Justice Department had uncovered evidence that he had attempted to buy some of the jurors' votes. The trial took place in early 1964, and this time, at last, Bobby got his revenge: Hoffa was found guilty and sentenced to eight years in prison. Just a few weeks later he went to trial once more, on charges of defrauding the CSPF in an alleged scheme that was so complex and technical it took him some time even to understand what he was being charged with. In this case, too, he was convicted, on one count of conspiracy and three counts of mail and wire fraud. His sentence was five years in prison, to run consecutively after the other eight years. Five days after the verdict, his great obsession finally consummated, Kennedy resigned as Attorney General to run for the Senate.

Thus, the Cold War state had won a major battle against a union that had stepped out of line and gotten too powerful for its own good. "The International Brotherhood of Teamsters," Senator McClellan had written in 1962 for the *Reader's Digest*, "is now powerful enough by itself to put a stranglehold on our nation's economy… If they called a nationwide strike, you could not get ambulances to take sick people to the hospital, nor hearses to carry the dead. Farmers could not get produce to urban areas; food manufacturers could not send in canned goods…" McClellan exaggerated Hoffa's power, but his fear was shared by many people and did reflect, however hyperbolically, the very real power of the IBT. Corruption and outright lawlessness existed all over society, not least within the federal government itself.[1] It is hardly a coincidence that officials empowered to hunt down corruption attacked, first and foremost, the largest union in the country.

Indeed, in the very year that Hoffa was convicted, the IBT was attaining new heights of power. In January of 1964, Hoffa achieved the dream both he and his mentor Farrell Dobbs had cherished since the 1930s: a National Master Freight Agreement that covered hundreds of thousands of intercity and local truck drivers. It wasn't entirely complete, not being wholly uniform and not covering all the trucking-relevant occupations of the IBT membership. But it was a magnificent achievement nonetheless, 25 years in the making.

In the years when Bobby Kennedy and his colleagues were almost single-mindedly focused on, in effect, disciplining and defaming organized labor (however they personally interpreted their actions), Hoffa was patiently laying the foundations for realizing his dream. Year by year he was consolidating his power over the two regions he didn't yet control, the East and West. Bargaining was highly fragmented in the East, wage diversity prevailing everywhere. Both employers and local union leaders, fearful, as Hoffa said, that "they would no longer be kings of their individual little isolated area," resisted standardization. But through threats and cajolery, strikes and other kinds of leverage, Hoffa gradually imposed uniformity on West Virginia and Pittsburgh, upper New York state and New England, then Philadelphia, Delaware, and southern New Jersey, finally the troublesome New York–New Jersey metropolitan area. All these places saw conditions begin to approximate the privileged Central States area for which Hoffa had long been bargaining.

It was a similar story in the West, although in a sense his task was easier there because bargaining was less fragmented. By 1961 he had achieved near-uniformity, in the process greatly raising wages in some areas, including Los Angeles.

Having engineered a common expiration for contracts from coast to coast in 1964, Hoffa was able to bargain with employers across the country at the same time. The 47-page contract, "the most complicated one ever worked out between a union and employers" (in Hoffa's opinion), covered 450,000 drivers. For most, the generous fringe benefits and across-the-board increases of 28 cents per hour over three years and three-quarters of a cent per mile were a significant improvement over their previous contracts. In just a few decades, then, the trucking industry had gone from being completely decentralized, low-paying, and

[1] For examples, see William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2004).

characterized by utterly inhumane working conditions to being highly centralized, high-paying, and relatively humane.

For the next couple of years Hoffa worked towards achieving the same goal of relative uniformity for other occupations in his union, such as warehousemen. But by early 1967 his appeals of his convictions had run out, and it was time for him to report to federal prison in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. "The last couple of weeks before he went to jail were hellish," said a staffer who was with him during this time. "He was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. He would lie on the floor and yell, 'I'm not gonna go!'" But in early March, he went.

The End

It's easy to imagine that for a man with the energy of Jimmy Hoffa, prison would not be easy. In fact, one of his favorite expressions became "Prison is hell on earth, only hell couldn't be this bad." When he was released, after 58 months in an overcrowded, rape-plagued, drug-infested, violent penitentiary, his description of the experience didn't mince words: "I can tell you this on a stack of Bibles: prisons are archaic, brutal, unregenerative, overcrowded hell holes where the inmates are treated like animals with absolutely not one humane thought given to what they are going to do once they are released. You're an animal in a cage and you're treated like one."

During his confinement he constantly suffered little indignities, such as having his anus inspected for drugs after returning from the visiting room, having to wear shoes and pants that didn't fit, and getting nosebleeds from his job assignment of unstuffing and restuffing old mattresses forty hours a week.

But even in prison, the labor leader found opportunities to organize. He became quite popular with the prisoners, for whom he formed and headed a committee that brought grievances to the attention of the warden. Since officially he remained president of the IBT until just before he was released, he was able to find jobs for many parolees, as well as sending money every year to his former Teamster assistants so they could buy Christmas cards for the families of his fellow prisoners. Guards and prisoners of all racial, religious, and educational backgrounds were, by all accounts, very fond of him.

Meanwhile, his power in the IBT was waning. He had appointed the rather dull but loyal Frank Fitzsimmons as acting president in the belief that he would willingly step aside when Hoffa was released (hopefully early, on parole). But Fitzsimmons gradually began to show signs of developing an independent identity and wanting to remain in power. Not that his leadership was beneficial for the union. He was too weak to impose his will on the vast bureaucracy, so he restored decentralization to local and regional officials. Since this allowed them to build their own structures of power—not always to the benefit of the rank and file—they found Fitzsimmons' presidency quite congenial to their taste. They also began to increase their involvement with the Mafia, which, in addition, was finding it easier to get loans from the pension fund than under Hoffa.

In contract negotiations Fitzsimmons had skills, but they weren't on the level of Hoffa's. The renewals of the National Master Freight Agreement (NMFA) in 1967 and 1970 disappointed thousands of workers, who went on strike in cities across the country. Considerable violence broke out as governors mobilized the National Guard, employers sent hired goons to attack pickets, and the union sent its own officials for the same purpose. Employers were finding it easier to coordinate resistance to employee demands, in part because the NMFA had, ironically, forced unity on them, but also because the IBT's leadership was increasingly ineffectual and corrupt. Wage growth slowed at the very moment when inflation was rising (as it continued to do through the 1970s). By the early '70s, rebel rank-and-file groups were springing up in almost every major city.

In fairness to the Fitzsimmons regime, in the long run even Hoffa could hardly have been up to the challenges. The political economy that had allowed a Hoffa to seize the reins and dominate an entire industry was already coming to an end. Facilitated by technological change, employers were embarking on a productivity push that threatened Teamsters' traditions of workplace control, as Dan La Botz argues. More companies were using pallets and forklifts; truck trailer lengths were growing longer; radio dispatch increasingly directed drivers; mechanized systems of conveyor belts distributed packages. The organization

of work was changing. Teamsters "worked harder and under worse conditions as new equipment and new management techniques eliminated jobs while forcing those still employed to pick up the slack."

Hoffa had foreseen the inevitability of technological change and done what he could to ease the transition for suffering workers, forcing employers, for example, to pay for new job training and the costs of workers' relocation. But just as he left the picture, change was accelerating. His departure from the scene, however adventitious, was symbolic.

As economic and political crisis gripped the country in the 1970s, the transition to a neoliberal economy began. Neither strike waves in industry after industry nor the formation of union reform movements such as the important Teamsters for a Democratic Union (founded in 1976) could prevent the economic transition, though they could, at least, discipline and even eliminate corrupt leadership that was often in league with employers. With profit-rates under attack from heightened international competition, the overriding business agenda to cut costs, no matter the consequences for workers and communities, soon became the national political agenda. Industries began to be deregulated, a trend that has continued, with interruptions, up to the present. Trucking was deregulated when Jimmy Carter signed the Motor Carrier Act in 1980. Dan La Botz summarizes the consequences:

> As intended, new non-union trucking firms swarmed into the industry, union firms went bankrupt en masse, and a series of buyouts and mergers pushed the industry toward oligopoly. Part and parcel of the same processes, the IBT lost tens and eventually hundreds of thousands of unionized truck drivers and dockworkers, and within a decade the Teamsters Union had been obliged to cede its long-standing position as the dominant force in American over-the-road truck operations. Since the freight industry had been the heart of the union and freight workers the most political and active union members, the cost to the union as a fighting organization went far beyond mere numbers…

The stage was set for the Reagan years, so disastrous to the labor movement.

Hoffa was released from prison late in 1971, but Nixon had imposed a restriction on his parole, probably at the request of Fitzsimmons: he couldn't engage in union activity until 1980. He hadn't known about the restriction when agreeing to be released, and was quite bitter when a reporter told him of it. "Jimmy, do you want to be president of the Teamsters again?" he was asked. "Jack, do you like to breathe?" Hoffa replied. But, not wanting to violate the terms of his parole, for a couple of years he laid low and gave the impression of accepting the terms of his freedom.

Instead, he pursued a new passion: prison reform. He went on television shows, talked to journalists, testified before Congress, gave speeches, and did whatever he could on behalf of a new organization called the National Association for Justice, dedicated to reforming prisons. Using his negotiating skills, he was instrumental in averting several prison riots and improving conditions in an Ohio penitentiary. Meanwhile, he was deluged with letters and physical greetings from well-wishers, thousands of drivers who treated him "like the Messiah," according to one observer. All this can only have whetted his appetite to return to power.

Which opens the curtain on the final act of his life: his legal battle to get Nixon's parole restriction overturned, together with his public campaign to take back the presidency into which Fitzsimmons had been elected at the 1971 IBT convention (while Hoffa was still in prison). Ever the fighter, reckless to a fault, in 1974 Hoffa began publicly attacking both Fitzsimmons and the Mafia. The terms in which he did so certainly opened him to the charge of hypocrisy: he accused Fitzsimmons of "selling out to mobsters and letting known racketeers into the Teamsters." "I charge him with permitting underworld establishment of a union insurance scheme," he declared. "There will be more and more developments as time goes on and I get my hands on additional information." Such statements could hardly have pleased his Mob associates.

Nor did these associates want a change of administration in any case. The union was more corrupt than ever, and they were perfectly happy with that. It was starting to look like Hoffa intended to kick them out of the union's affairs, to clean things up and get revenge on everyone he thought had betrayed him.

"I'm going to take care of the people who've been fucking me," he told Russell Bufalino, according to Frank Sheeran. "Everybody wants Hoffa to back down. They're all afraid of what I know."

And so, in the end, Hoffa was done in by one of the deepest traits of his character: reckless defiance. His union career had ended because of his defiance of the law—the law of a government he didn't respect—and now his life ended because of his defiance of the Mafia. On July 30, 1975 he stood waiting in a restaurant parking lot just outside Detroit. A car pulled up; inside were his foster son Charles O'Brien, his hitman friend Frank Sheeran, and Salvatore Briguglio, an associate of the vicious mobster Anthony Provenzano. The friendly faces of O'Brien and Sheeran reassured him, so he got into the car, which O'Brien—not knowing what was in store—drove to a small suburban house nearby. The meeting to "make peace" was, as far as Hoffa knew, to take place in this house. Hoffa and Sheeran got out and walked up to it as the car drove away. Once inside, Sheeran put two bullets in the back of Hoffa's head, after which two men waiting in the house brought the body to a local Mob-connected funeral parlor, where it was cremated.

At least, that's how Frank Sheeran tells the story. And a lot of knowledgeable people (Arthur Sloane, Joe Pistone, Bryan Burrough, William D'Elia, and others) find it credible.

So, in such an anticlimactic way did the remarkable life of a remarkable person come to an end, a life lived at the very center of the most dramatic events of the age.

Hoffa's disappearance did have one positive result: it jolted the federal government into systematic action against organized crime, action not just in the context of a battle against a single individual and his unacceptably powerful union but as the beginning of a decades-long war of attrition. In the following years, the FBI hunted down the men it knew were involved in the murder and imprisoned them all on one charge or another (except for those who were themselves killed). The Mafia continued to infest the Teamsters until the 1ate 1980s and even 1990s, but federal prosecution, assisted by Teamsters for a Democratic Union and a reformist president in the 1990s (Ron Carey), finally succeeded in almost completely ridding the IBT of its ancient ties to racketeers. Today, the Teamsters isn't the awe-inspiring force it used to be, but it is still one of the largest unions in the United States, with 1.4 million members.

As for its greatest leader, Jimmy Hoffa, he'll always be something of an enigma. On the one hand, he was no saint, nor was he a hero. He sometimes acted in amoral, brutal ways. While his biographer Arthur Sloane is right that the more lurid accusations (that he ordered murders, for instance, or even the assassination of JFK) have never been proven, and also that he was more independent of the Mafia than is generally supposed, Hoffa was not the kind of man or labor leader who should be copied in every particular. What he was was a concentrated, brilliant reflection of his environment, differing from other ruthless power players of his age and ours chiefly in that the side he chose was that of the working class, not the business class. He helped create the postwar middle class, in the process becoming arguably the most popular and the most reviled labor leader in U.S. history.

But perhaps his greatest legacy can be summed up in the inscription on a plaque he displayed on his desk: *Illegitimi non carborundum*. Don't let the bastards grind you down.

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Is Bernie Sanders Electable?

In his 2007 classic *Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War*—a book that, in the age of Donald Trump, is more relevant than ever—Joe Bageant makes an observation that cuts to the nub of the matter. America, he says, isn't composed of some great middle class; it is an overwhelmingly working-class country. "If we define 'working class' simply as not having a college degree, then fully three-quarters [or at least two-thirds] of all Americans are working-class." He continues:

> "Class," however, is defined not in terms of income or degrees but in terms of power. Especially regarding labor. If you define "working class" in terms of power—bosses who have it and workers who don't—at least 60 percent of America is working class, and the

> true middle class—the journalists, professionals and semiprofessionals, people in the management class, etc.—are not more than one-third at best.

In fact, professionals, such as journalists and teachers, live increasingly precarious, disenfranchised lives, as revealed by the upsurge of teacher strikes in the last couple of years. Many professionals belong right next to truck drivers, medical technicians, retail workers, and the chronically unemployed and underemployed in the exploited, low-paid working class.

Among the Democratic candidates for president, there is one person who speaks for this vast, long-suffering working class, this beating heart of America: Bernie Sanders. Whether or not all his legislative goals are achievable in the short term, he is the one fighting most aggressively for the interests of workers. It is hard to argue, after all, that his proposals for "workplace democracy," the cancellation of student debt, tuition-free higher education, a federal jobs guarantee, Medicare for All, and so on are against the interests of the large majority of Americans.

So what does it mean to say, as so many do, that he is unelectable?

One possible meaning is that most Americans are unaware of their true political interests. They might be swayed, say, by pundits' or Republicans' demonization of Sanders as a socialist—even though true socialism means popular control of the economy and abolition of the capitalist class, which Sanders hasn't advocated. Disinformation campaigns like this (and there are many other examples) are crucial to convincing working-class Americans to vote against a candidate who has spent most of his life fighting for the working class.

Another possibility is that Democrats who support Sanders will convince themselves that in the general election he would never win, so voters in the primaries will choose someone supposedly more "electable" like Elizabeth Warren or Joe Biden. On this understanding, the primaries may pose more of a challenge for Sanders than the general election, in that the prediction of his unelectability could become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

But primary voters shouldn't single out Sanders for their worry; the fact is that neither Warren nor Biden is obviously more electable than Sanders. Both have weaknesses Trump could exploit: for instance, Warren could be mocked for her "elitist" Harvard resumé, her claims to Native American ancestry, and (like Sanders) her "ultra-left" program. Biden, on the other hand, is prone to gaffes, is just as much an "establishment" candidate as Hillary Clinton was, and lacks "the vision thing" that Sanders and Warren have in spades.

As for Sanders, the argument that he's far to the left of the electorate is belied by polls. Nationally, he is consistently more popular than Trump, while among Democrats he is competitive with Warren and Biden. Support for the two left-wing candidates together trounces support for the centrist Biden.

On issues, the electorate—consistent with its largely working-class composition—tends to be left-wing. A majority favors Medicare for All, the Green New Deal, worker representation on corporate boards, a wealth tax, and other leftist goals. If Sanders were given the sort of universal media coverage Trump was in 2016—as opposed to being regularly ignored—it's likely that support for him would increase. After all, people tend to like politicians with a simple, consistent, populist message, the message that "I'll fight for you." No one delivers this message more forcefully than Sanders.

Attempts to predict election results are a fool's errand, but it should be clear, at least, that in a working-class country such as the U.S., a candidate whose essence is his appeal to the working class has a definite shot at winning. The question is whether he and his millions of supporters can neutralize the corporate chorus of disinformation.

In an age of working-class desperation, this question, too, may prove to have an affirmative answer.

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Rambling Reflections on Camille Paglia
[A blog post]

I've been reading Camille Paglia's collection of essays *Sex, Art, and American Culture* (1992). I disagree with a lot of Paglia's opinions, in this book and elsewhere, but, if it came to a choice between her and the establishment—including the "left-wing" side of the establishment, in academia and the postmodern-leftist circles that swirl around it—I wouldn't hesitate to stand by her side. Her battle against groupthink is necessary. In any case, her writing is so scintillating, spirited, witty, contemptuous of orthodoxies, and joyfully defiant that I can't help but be partial towards her—again, despite her absurdities and excesses.

In some respects I identify with her. (Though not with her dazzling writing talent or work-ethic.) I'm completely on the left, the far-left—more so than she—but my commitment to reason keeps me something of an outsider. To give some random examples: while I wholly agree with the left that even Sanders, not to mention Biden, is much too conservative, I agree with Chomsky that "lesser-evil voting" is, in some circumstances, a moral truism, so obviously right in many cases that it hardly even deserves discussion. (There are other ways to move the political system left than by voting for the most marginal far-left candidate, thus using your vote to help the reactionary candidate.) I find much academic feminism—which has increasingly become mainstream feminism—intellectually dishonest and uninteresting. I share Paglia's bewilderment with the academic left's worship of Foucault, Derrida, and the other French decadents, together with their decadent American disciples (the whole constellation of postmodern "theorists" in the humanities, from Judith Butler to, I don't know, Ann Laura Stoler). Like her, I dislike the snobbery and careerism of academia, along with the superficiality and emptiness of fashionable discourses.

But Paglia is too fond of pop culture for my taste. Her "worship" of television I find silly. While I appreciate her impulse to defend the cultural tastes of "the masses" against left or pseudo-left academic snobs, I think the "snobbish" (as she calls it) Marxist critique of mass culture pretty much hits the nail on the head. (But I still have to read Neil Postman's classic *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*.) I consider her love of astrology laughable and her admiration for Freud a little misguided, but I like her willingness to face dark truths about humanity—about sex, the aggressive side of male sexuality, ineradicable interpersonal conflict—and her rejection of bland left-wing utopianism. (Not least the utopianism of feminists. "Academic feminism is lost in a fog of social constructionism. It believes we are totally the product of our environment. This idea was invented by Rousseau. [Actually not; it was around before him.] He was wrong... Aggression and eroticism are deeply intertwined. Hunt, pursuit, and capture are biologically programmed [*to some extent*] into male sexuality. Generation after generation, men must be educated, refined, and ethically persuaded away from their tendency toward anarchy and brutishness.") We'll never have a world without conflict (fortunately?), though we should do all we can to try to achieve it, especially to try to abolish class.

On this subject of human "brutishness": while I agree with Rutger Bregman that most people are inclined towards decency, I'm more conscious than leftists like to be of contrary tendencies in human nature. I'm often struck by the innumerable little unkindnesses I observe in daily life, people's callousness toward each other. Much of this results from environmental influences, but I remain disturbed by the astounding cruelties and stupidities that leap out, by the millions, from every page in the annals of history. It's depressingly easy for unsympathetic, even brutal strains of human nature to manifest themselves, even just in everyday situations. The natural world itself is pretty unkind. I think Paglia overstates how "dark" human nature is—her anti-Rousseauism is too extreme—but at least she's unafraid to defy liberal and leftist groupthink.

It's easy to ridicule the statement that men have a biological "tendency toward anarchy and brutishness," but all it needs is some qualifications to be correct. Men aren't "naturally" brutish, naturally *Lord of the Flies* Hobbesians, but that is *one side* of them, a latent potentiality that it's important to "ethically persuade" them away from. When social order breaks down, one consequence may be an efflorescence of cooperation and community, but another may be an orgy of male bestiality. It is the never-ending task of civilization to limit expressions of violent masculinity and divert them into safe outlets, such as sports.

> Here are my conclusions, after a lifetime of observation and reflection. Maleness at its hormonal extreme is an angry, ruthless density of self, motivated by a principle of 'attack'

> (cf. 'roid rage,' produced in male bodybuilders by anabolic steroids). Femaleness at its hormonal extreme is first an acute sensitivity of response, literally thin-skinned (a hormonal effect in women), and secondly a stability, composure, and self-containment, a slowness approaching the sultry. [I'm not sure about that sentence. Women don't always strike me as stable, composed, and self-contained.] Biologically, the male is impelled toward restless movement; his moral danger is brutishness. Biologically, the female is impelled toward waiting, *expectancy*; her moral danger is stasis. Androgen agitates; estrogen tranquilizes—hence the drowsiness and 'glow' of pregnancy. Most of us inhabit not polar extremes but a constantly shifting great middle.

I think these reflections have some truth, however unpalatable they may be to liberals and leftists. More broadly, I agree with this paragraph, aside from the one-sidedness of the last sentence:

> …The feminist [and generally leftist] naïveté about life, history, and culture must end. We must eliminate social injustice where we can. But all 'human needs' will never be fully met, except in a totalitarian regime of bloated centralized authority. [Actually, they wouldn't be met even there.] Life will never be a utopian paradise of universal happiness, harmony, and good will. Life is combat, strife, limitations, obstacles met and overcome by self-discipline and self-criticism.

This philosophy of life grounds Paglia's criticisms of contemporary feminism. She thinks it encourages and manufactures weakness, infantilism, naïveté, mollycoddling, a fetishizing of victimhood. "Running to Mommy and Daddy on the campus grievance committee is unworthy of strong women."

> …The Italian philosophy of life espouses high-energy confrontation. A male student makes a vulgar remark about your breasts? Don't slink off to whimper and simper with the campus shrinking violets. Deal with it. On the spot. Say, 'Shut up, you jerk! And crawl back to the barnyard where you belong!' In general, women who project this take-charge attitude toward life get harassed less often. I see too many dopey, immature, self-pitying women walking around like melting sticks of butter. It's the Yvette Mimieux syndrome: make me happy. And listen to me weep when I'm not.

In another passage, making the point explicit, she says, "my kind of feminism stresses independence and personal responsibility for women." "Blaming the victim makes perfect sense if the victim has behaved stupidly. I doubt that [my critic] would leave her purse on the street or sleep with her doors wide open at night." "It is woman's personal responsibility to be aware of the dangers of the world. But these young feminists today are deluded. They come from a protected, white, middle-class world, and they expect everything to be safe. Notice it's not black or Hispanic women who are making a fuss about this [date rape]—they come from cultures that are fully sexual and they are fully realistic about sex." "If your car is stolen after you [leave your keys on the hood], yes, the police should pursue the thief and he should be punished. But at the same time, the police—and I—have the right to say to you, 'You stupid idiot, what the hell were you thinking?'"

I see her point in all this. It's pretty commonsensical: women, be smart. Be prudent. It isn't "victim-blaming" to say women should be aware of their surroundings and not trust that every man is good. On the other hand, I do think it's necessary to teach men the proper sexual norms. The perpetrator should be blamed a lot more than the victim. As feminists argue, we should do all we can to move society to a different place, a place where violence is seen *automatically* as unacceptable. (Women, too, who not infrequently have bad tempers and inflict physical and verbal violence on children, partners, store clerks, etc. (arguably more often than men), should be educated to control themselves.)

I agree with her that there's something to be said for "strength," "self-reliance," "independence," and the like. She has this quasi-aesthetic, quasi-ethical set of values that informs her ferocious criticisms of

contemporary feminism, academia, and liberalism. She hates the idea that people are being taught to see their own victimization everywhere and to *define* themselves as victims, whether because they're "objectified," harassed, discriminated against, date-raped (and she thinks date rape shouldn't be seen as the scourge that feminists see it as), or whatever. A strong person should rise above these things, learn from them and use them to mature. Identity is forged through conflict, as Freud said, not through coddling and weepy hand-holding or wallowing in victimhood. Besides (she says), there's an inherent *power* in female sexuality, in being "objectified," desired, admired as beautiful. For thousands of years, men and women have been objectified in art, not to mention in sex, courtship, and social life generally. Objectification isn't only passive; beauty exudes power, and cultivating one's physical beauty is a legitimate expression of personality. Nor has Paglia herself ever felt envious or insecure when looking at beautiful models in the fashion industry or wherever; she just admires and appreciates them.[1] Feminists should stop whining endlessly about the world, about men (and don't forget, she admonishes, all the technological conveniences and cultural satisfactions—and *good, protective men*—this male-created civilization has given you!), and take responsibility for themselves.

As usual, there's a lot of sense in these ideas, but I think they can be taken too far. And she probably takes them too far. Too much sexual objectification, or the wrong type of it, is limiting and dehumanizing. Strength of personality is good, but there have to be institutional sanctions on behavior. Young people can be fragile and, given the anxieties of modern life, should be encouraged to accept themselves, not pressured to achieve unattainable ideals—or, at least, only pressured in constructive ways. (Maybe in earlier times such pressure wasn't overly psychologically damaging, but society now is awash in innumerable anxieties that didn't exist a couple hundred years ago.) Pop culture is indeed toxic in many respects, however much Paglia might enjoy it.

But her ridicule of activists who want to censor everything they don't like is completely appropriate. The new left concepts of microaggressions, safe spaces, trigger warnings, etc. I don't have much of a problem with, inasmuch as they raise awareness and contribute to recognition of marginalized voices. But campus activists who want professors fired if they have mildly unacceptable opinions—that's just lunacy. The viciousness and maliciousness of which these "marginalized voices" are capable are astonishing. Frantically trying to destroy someone's life if they don't completely agree with you—it's incredibly nasty, low, totalitarian. Unsurprisingly, there's another irony here (besides the irony of leftists being totalitarian): the behavior of these zealots validates one of Paglia's broader criticisms of liberalism and academia today, that it lacks historical memory and awareness. The august, and leftist, tradition of *defending free speech* (isn't free speech an anti-authoritarian principle? And isn't the left supposed to be anti-authoritarian?) is being casually, vulgarly dismissed. Four hundred years of intellectual achievement! The Levellers, John Milton, Spinoza, Voltaire, John Stuart Mill, and many others—they're all cis white heterosexual men, fuck them! There's no point in reading them, in fact it can be positively injurious! You might get infected with their cis white heterosexual male ideas! History is bunk—except the history of "the marginalized." That's all that matters. Black, brown, female, gay, trans, queer—those are the only voices that have any moral or intellectual authority. Everything else: burn it all down.

To some extent I'm caricaturing, but that's the extreme to which these ideological currents tend. You can see how they emerge from postmodernism, which, again, Paglia loathes (ironically despite her love of much of contemporary, postmodern culture): the rejection of the past, anti-intellectualism, anti-science, the belief that all that really exist are contests of power, the immersion in the faddish present, the elevation of subjective feelings and identities and relative lack of attention to *class* oppression as such (for class oppression includes white men)—it has little in common with the traditional left. The traditional left was rationalistic, scientific, intellectually rigorous, committed to analysis of history, continuous with the Enlightenment, *objectivist*, materialist. It's true there was an authoritarian left, a censoring left, but this had much to do with the decidedly-not-leftist Stalinism and its effects on Communist parties around the world.

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[1] "We should not have to apologize for reveling in beauty. Beauty is an eternal human value. It was not a trick invented by nasty men in a room someplace on Madison Avenue." She is, of course, a connoisseur of the arts, and has the values of an artist.

The censorship and authoritarianism were largely an imposition from a deformed politics elsewhere that claimed to be left for its own political reasons. Again, I'll admit that Marxism even "organically," as it developed around the turn of the century, was susceptible to authoritarianism; but this was vigorously contested by other Marxists (anti-Leninists and such). It certainly didn't come from any desire to suppress dissenting views because of how bad they made some people feel or because they represented white male heteronormativity. *This* motivation is postmodernist, post-1960s, postindustrial, post-collapse-of-organized-labor.

And yet, as I said, there are authentic leftist impulses even in the postmodern left. The desire for equality, for freedom, respect, dignity, an end to oppression—this is continuous with the old left, if not institutionally then at least in terms of values (the values of the Enlightenment—notwithstanding some feminists' dislike of the Enlightenment). Meanwhile, a new materialist left is rising amid the ashes of neoliberalism and allying, even fusing, with the identity-politics left. Thus, a broader, all-encompassing left, which in Hegelian fashion is "synthesizing" previous different strains, is on the march. All told, its influence is very beneficial, despite the excesses of campus and Twitter fanatics.

Speaking of postmodernism, maybe I should get into that a little. Paglia is a virtuoso at "deconstructing" it, in particular the Holy Trinity of Lacan-Derrida-Foucault and their thousands of acolytes in American humanities departments. (Still today! This book came out thirty years ago and already she was fed up with the cult! And yet the cult has only grown since then, as has its political expression in subjectivist fanaticism! I've seen the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness.) Or rather, she's a virtuoso at mocking it in learned fashion, albeit without grounding her mockery in the sort of dispassionate analysis necessary to really destroy it. Her prose is luminous, hilarious, sparklingly witty and malicious. Her essay "Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders: Academe in the Hour of the Wolf" may be the most vicious and entertaining diatribe I've ever read, outside of Marx (*The Civil War in France*) and Nietzsche. How refreshing it is to read an academic so *exuberantly contemptuous* of the dominant intellectual culture!

The following passage isn't one of the most brilliant, but it's interesting in its characteristic Paglian respect for both science and noble forms of religion:

> …Robert Caserio recently said to me, 'The whole profession [various disciplines in the humanities] has become vast mimicry. There is only the Foucault monologue, the Lacan monologue, the Derrida monologue. There is no room for creative disagreement. No deviations from what is approved are tolerated.' These monologues are really one, the monotonous drone of the school of Saussure, which has cast its delusional inky cloud over modern academic thought. Never have so many been so wrong about so much. It is positively idiotic to imagine that there is no experience outside of language. [*Yes, thank you! That's one of the most moronic dogmas I've ever encountered.*] I am in love with language, but never for a moment did I dream that language encompasses and determines all knowledge. It has been a truism of basic science courses for decades in America that the brain has multiple areas of function and that language belongs only to specific areas, injured by trauma and restored only by surgery or speech therapy. For thousands of years, sages and mystics of both East and West have taught us about the limitations of language in seeking truth. When Dante must part from Virgil at the gates of Paradise, he is expressing the ancient insight that faith and vision occur in a realm beyond reason and language. My generation, inheriting the Beatniks' interest in Zen, made a spiritual passage to India, with its flaming avatars. We knew words, names, concepts had to be dissolved and transcended. Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault are termites compared to the art, culture, and archaic topography of India. One remedy for today's educational impasse: more India and less France. The followers of Derrida are pathetic, snuffling in French pockets for bits and pieces of a deconstructive method already massively and coherently presented—and with a mature sense of the sacred—in Buddhism and Hinduism.

Paglia has a vehement hatred of Foucault that itself already distinguishes her as a thinker and scholar from the gray multitudes of American "humanists." All this postmodern intellectual sloppiness-cum-arrogance she loathes, fulminating against it without mercy.

> …As a writer, Foucault was an arrogant bastard. He did not believe in truth and so never sought it. *[It is indeed a contradiction: if you don't believe in truth, what is it you're trying to achieve?]* His books, clumsily researched but overconfidently argued, show language-obsessed Parisian parochialism become paranoia, delusional and obsessive-compulsive... American humanists, untutored in sociology, are knocked out by Foucault's daring: analyze crime and punishment, prisons and penal codes! Gee, I wish I'd thought of that! Well, Foucault didn't think of it either. It's in Durkheim's *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893). Foucault extends Durkheim's argument one step further but covers up the influence. Look at Durkheim's *Primitive Classification* (1903), and you will see the shadow of Foucault's phrases about taxonomy. Durkheim is everywhere in Foucault. The intricate complexities of analysis of organizations and power groups in Max Weber make Foucault look like a tyro. It is only ignorance of the social sciences that has allowed Foucault to rise to cult status among pitifully unprepared American humanists... His big squishy pink-marshmallow [?] word is 'power,' which neither he nor his followers fully understand. It caroms around picking up lint and dog hair but is no substitute for political analysis. Foucault's ignorance of prehistory and ancient history, based in the development and articulation of cultures and legal codes, makes his discussions of power otiose. He never asks how power is gained or lost *[right, because that would require attention to **class**, which he likes to gloss over]*, justly administered or abused. He does not show how efficient procedures get overformalized, entrenched, calcified, then shattered and reformed. He has no familiarity with theories of social or biological hierarchies, such as the 'pecking order' universally observed in farmyards and schoolyards. Because, in the faddish French [structuralist, poststructuralist, social constructionist] way, he ridiculously denies personality exists, he cannot assess the impact of strong personalities on events, nor can he, like Weber, catalog different types of authority or prestige. He is inept in comparing different governmental structures. Because he cannot deal with flux or dynamic change *[again, this has to do with his disregard of class]*, he is hopeless with protracted power struggles...

The central point of her long essay on academia is that it's lost its way and has to be reformed. Political correctness has mutilated humanistic scholarship: presentist concerns, Foucauldian ideologies, and feminist dogmas have shunted aside the disinterested pursuit of truth. Meanwhile, the profession has been....*professionalized*, bureaucratized, insularized, commercialized (people obsessively selling themselves), overly specialized, and all that. It has to become a center of *learning* again, genuine and deep learning, authentic humanist achievement largely divorced from "presentist" agendas, etc.

To which I say: yes (with qualifications), but good luck with that. The university exists in society, and social tendencies are bound to shape it. The very society she apparently admires, the commercial mass culture of television, rock 'n' roll, overwhelming "presentism" and careerism, inevitably dominates academe, and you can't change the latter without revolutionizing the former. The common sense of Marxism suggests this, but she seems oddly immune to the common sense of Marxism.

> [From a speech at MIT:] I am the Sixties come back to haunt the present... The reform of education [in particular, her appealingly 'conservative' vision for what it ought to be] is *not* a neoconservative issue! It is an issue facing the entire nation. So what I'm trying to do is to mobilize and radicalize the liberals who have been silent and who have let academe be taken over by these opportunists, these sickening, disgusting, ass-kissing opportunists...

> I'm trying to bring back out of the woodwork all these Sixties people. Come out, come out, wherever you are! Come back. Take over the cultural center again!

An admirable call for change, but very politically naïve. Institutions are *economically and socially embedded*. To change the university system, you have to upset the whole class system. And that takes generations.

Intellectually speaking, the point that most stood out to me in the essay was her repeated criticism of Foucauldian, feminist social constructionism. This school of thought, as I've always insisted, is unserious. For one thing, how can doctrinaire social constructionists account for *individual personality*? If they deny or disregard the influence of biology and insist that every new individual is formed simply by passively internalizing what he encounters in society....why aren't we all approximately the same? How can there be the enormous differences in personality that we observe? Indeed, how can we be anything other than undifferentiated lumps of clay that bear impressions? Manifestly, a person is an active being, constantly responding to new situations in original ways, *spontaneously* acting and reacting—not in some sort of conditioned, repetitive, behaviorist, Pavlovian-dog way but in continuously *creative* and *novel* ways. Our behavior can't be only "constructed": it also constructs, as we impose ourselves on the world. Since each individual evidently has his or her own distinct, creative, spontaneously manifesting nature, "socialization" can be only part of the story. (This is a Chomskyan argument that I've charitably read into Paglia's writing. It can be supplemented with a poverty-of-the-stimulus argument, i.e. that in the first couple years of life the environmental input is too impoverished and degraded to be entirely responsible for the emergence of stereotypical gender roles, which *do* manifest by that time. The comedian Bill Burr has made some perceptive remarks on this score.)[1]

> Women's studies is institutionalized sexism. It too must go. Gender studies is no alternative: 'gender' is now a biased, prudish code word for social constructionism. Sexology is an old and distinguished field [which recent academic trends ignore, she thinks]. As sex studies, frankly admitting it is sex we are tirelessly interested in, it would take in the hundred-year history of international commentary on sex; it would make science its keystone; and it would allow both men and women as well as heterosexuals and homosexuals to work together in the fruitful dialogue of dislike, disagreement, and debate, the tension, confrontation, and dialectic that lead to truth. Women's studies is a comfy, chummy morass of unchallenged groupthink.

Yup. But not only Women's Studies. Some random guy's website can have more truth and intellectual integrity than a whole bookshelf of scholarly monographs.

It's clear from this book that Paglia is, or was, desperately nostalgic for the Sixties. Everywhere are scattered references to the glory, as well as the failure, of the Sixties. Its untamed, vital, explosive energy corresponded to Paglia's untamed vitality. (Just watch videos of her, especially in her younger years. She's wild and uninhibited, *manic*, a bull in the china shop of academia.) As I read her, it's everything lifeless, inert, oppressive, constraining, and pretentious that she hates. Rock 'n' roll, sex, art, psychoanalysis, television, drag culture, astrology, pornography, prostitution, free speech, personal responsibility, personal strength, spirited competition—to her, all these are elemental, creative, beautiful, "primordial," life-giving.

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[1] I've found that comedians sometimes are more honest and have more insight into human behavior than academics, who are prevented by the politics of institutions from expressing obvious truths. Bill Burr's explanation, or at least partial explanation, for gender identities in the linked video makes sense to me. Very young boys are (frequently) wild, violent, destructive; the girls observe them and think "well, I can't compete with that; that's not me," so they naturally pursue different modes of self-expression. More "nurturing" modes. It's a simple, unpretentious, sensible explanation, which as a result is unmentionable in academic writings. It's also appealing in that it attributes more creativity, rationality, and freedom to children than dogmas about "social constructions" do, as if children are merely passive imitators of others. There's more truth in Burr's statement than in entire scholarly books on the subject.

I happen to disagree with some of her value-judgments here, and altogether I think she isn't sufficiently Marxist or realistic (she has said flattering things about *Jordan Peterson*, of all people!), but her basic approach to life is one I find attractive. *Écrasez l'infâme!* The motto of the rebel.

So, despite her perversities, but in light of her healthy political values—she has supported Sanders and Jill Stein—and her anti-authoritarianism and aversion to institutionalists, who are the bane of the age ("Authentic leftism is populist, okay? It is based in working-class style, working-class language, working-class direct emotion, in an openness and brusqueness of speech—not this fancy, contorted jargon of the pseudo-leftists of academe, who are frauds. These people who manage to rise to the top at Berkeley, at Harvard, at Princeton, okay? How many of these people are radical? They are career people. They're corporate types, okay, who succeeded in—they *love* the institutional context. They know how to manipulate the bureaucracy, which has totally invaded and usurped academe everywhere, okay? These people are company-players."), she has my respect. We could use more of her barbaric energy today, her rebellious and *affirming* energy—albeit with the political clarity of Marxism.

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Capitalism and Colonialism

As I frequently and tiresomely reiterate, academic writing tends toward sophistry, superficiality, and obscurantism. Personally, my aesthetic tastes are offended by the endless rivers of overabundant verbiage one has to wade through in scholarly articles and books. But leave that aside. It sometimes seems as if many writers specialize in missing the point. Consider the typical arguments of liberal and conservative anti-colonialists (or so they characterize themselves) who want to defend capitalism against the charge that it necessitated or directly caused the brutal imperialism and colonialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There are various arguments you can expect to find in their writings. They will say that colonialism (e.g., the Scramble for Africa of the 1880s) was financially and economically senseless, since, supposedly, it led to the home country's net loss of income and resources as it built up infrastructure in the colonies. Some money and resources flowed home, but even more flowed abroad. Or they will say it was not primarily economic motives that led to colonialism but rather forces like popular nationalism, the vainglorious egos of politicians, irrational racial ideologies, and the political power of the military and diplomatic corps. Strictly speaking, all this colonialism was unnecessary, in fact a terrible and bloody mistake.

So don't blame capitalism for it! Blame those stupid irrational Europeans of a hundred years ago!

The historian Jonathan Daly, a great enthusiast of "free enterprise," is, like his more well-known but embarrassingly vulgar University of Illinois colleague Deirdre McCloskey, one of these writers.[1] Let's take a look at his textbook *The Rise of Western Power*:

> ...Economics, far from the main driving force, was often only an *ex post facto* argument for retaining colonies. Yet colonies almost never paid for themselves, enriching only some individuals or companies, and did not magically enable merchants to gain access to commodities they could not have otherwise acquired through open trading...
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> ...[T]he intense worldwide struggle for colonies was not even a boon to the competitors. Was there a deeper reason [than economics] for the New Imperialism [of the late 19th century]? The West's raw physical power, apparent scientific mastery of nature, efficient and dynamic economy, and myriad technological advantages provoked a broader moral crisis of Western civilization involving aggressive ideologies justifying and lauding violence and struggle as central to human existence. Sigmund Freud, shocked by the carnage of World War I, hypothesized about the "collective insanity" of Europe. It does

[1] For an illustration of McCloskey's vulgarity, see her article "Socialism for the Young at Heart," *National Review*, June 3, 2019.

> indeed seem as if some kind of psychosis drove the European peoples to imperialism and war at the turn of the century.[1]

Some kind of psychosis. What a profound explanation.

In response to such arguments, I would say, first, that whatever the economic benefits to Europe at the time were or were not, *in the long run* the colonization of Africa and Asia was enormously beneficial to industrial capitalism and world economic growth. Intervention in these regions on a colossal and brutal scale was necessary in order to thoroughly integrate them into a capitalist world-system. You have to create labor markets there, uproot traditional social structures, dispossess peasants of their lands, implant modern technologies and administrative controls, remake the whole society. Once you have accomplished that, after many decades, you can let the re-socialized natives take political control again and run the new system for the benefit of international capital, as has happened to a greater or lesser degree since the 1960s. That is, once you have created new structures of internal political and economic control, you can put your past and present victims in charge of those structures and rely, most of the time, on less direct means of external control ("neocolonialism") to make sure the newly "independent" societies stay in line.

Over centuries, imperialism and colonialism created the international division of labor that world-systems theorists such as Immanuel Wallerstein and dependency theorists such as André Gunder Frank and Walter Rodney spent decades exhaustively analyzing. The imperial "core" has specialized in high-value-added production, while "peripheral" countries have largely been consigned to exporting raw materials. This world division of labor has been so advantageous to the imperial core that diplomatic historians like Gabriel Kolko and Thomas McCormick have argued, plausibly, that its maintenance has been an overriding goal of American foreign policy up to the present.[2] The world system could hardly have been constructed without prolonged and invasive intervention in the economies of non-capitalist regions so as to ineluctably draw them into a Western-dominated capitalist system.[3]

Aside from the incredible benefits to future capital of the brutal restructuring of Africa, Asia, and South America, such restructuring was inevitable anyway. Not even liberals and conservatives can realistically deny that capitalism is an intrinsically expansionist, dynamic, *growing* system, a system that entails perpetual growth—the hunt for and cultivation of new markets, new raw materials, and new opportunities for investment. This process necessarily continues until the whole world has been transformed in the image of capitalist relations of production, as it finally has by the twenty-first century. As industry and investors extended their tentacles to peripheral regions of the world in the late nineteenth century, it wasn't exactly *accidental* or *mistaken* that governments were prevailed upon to protect investments and trade and to facilitate the whole process legally, financially, militarily, administratively, and technologically.

So, in effect, we have already dispatched the arguments of capitalist apologists. Imperialism and colonialism were a natural and inevitable product of capitalism, and in the long run (arguably also in the short run) they very much benefited the countries that undertook them, enabling further economic growth, world trade, international investment, and the accumulation of profits and resources. Societies had to be remade in the image of capitalism, and this process was never going to be peaceful or "free."

But more can be said. Did colonialism really, in most cases, not economically benefit the metropolitan country in the short term? Was it economically irrational? We can concede that it was to the greater advantage of investors, politically connected industrialists, and arms manufacturers, not to mention

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[1] Jonathan Daly, *The Rise of Western Power: A Comparative History of Western Civilization* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 338.

[2] Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy, 1945–1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988); Thomas J. McCormick, *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War and After* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

[3] Even in the absence of formal colonialism, military force was often necessary to compel countries to trade, on disadvantageous terms, with the West. The Opium Wars between Britain and China (1839–1842 and 1856–1860) are well-known examples.

the military and diplomatic establishment, than of the general population. It may, in fact, have somewhat harmed the latter, inasmuch as a portion of their taxes went to pay the costs of having colonies. But this argument is of no help to the defender of capitalism, because it is an inevitable result of the ongoing accumulation of capital that some people and businesses will become much wealthier than others, and that their wealth will confer political power, with which (frequently) to manipulate government towards an imperialistic, militaristic foreign policy.[1] So even if colonialism was not of much immediate benefit to the countries that embarked on it but primarily only to favored businessmen and the upper class, that does not get capitalism off the hook, for capitalism creates the circumstances in which these favored investors can help guide policy.

But I don't think colonialism helped only a tiny greedy elite. Even if huge sums of money did go into administering and developing a colony, it was not as if the metropolitan country got nothing for its investment. For one thing, it provided tens of thousands of men with employment abroad and at home. Government bureaucracies and militaries expanded and techniques of administration, repression, and social control were honed, frequently to later be used domestically.[2] The expansion of domestic and colonial bureaucracies increased aggregate demand (since bureaucrats have to eat too) and stimulated economic activity, thus growth.[3] Raw materials extracted from colonies fed the domestic industrial machine. One can, admittedly, indulge in counterfactual history and argue that colonialism was not necessary for the imperial power to have access to these raw materials. But at a time when Western countries were feverishly competing to industrialize—and there was no United Nations or other international legal bodies to regulate the anarchy of great-power competition—it was rational and highly probable for each to stake out large swathes of territory as *theirs* and keep others out. Leopold II and Belgium made quite a killing, so to speak, in the Congo after taking control of it.

In many cases, it is likely that the access to vital raw materials alone did much to justify the expense of maintaining colonies. (And, again, the mere fact that something is expensive does not mean it is harmful. Government spending, including high levels of deficit spending, can be extremely useful for generating economic growth, as America's participation in World War II proved.) Combined with the growth of colonial markets to absorb admittedly small "surplus" amounts of industrial products that could not be sold domestically—but relatively small amounts of sales abroad can mean the difference between high profits and low profits, a growing industry and a stagnating industry—these economic considerations begin to make it look quite rational to have colonies.

Besides, it is doubtful that countries would have maintained colonies for decades and sought new ones if they really had gained nothing from them or were harmed by them. Surely governments would have figured this out, sooner or later. Governments are self-interested; they act to increase their power. It would be anomalous for them to waste colossal resources on endeavors that, over many decades, yielded little or nothing. The sheer growth of state capacity and war-making attendant in colonization would have benefited national power and industry.[4]

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[1] The "revisionist" diplomatic historiography associated with the New Left is full of examples of such business influence on imperialistic policies. See, e.g., William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1972); Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967); and Thomas McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893–1901* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967). The Marxist tradition of scholarship, from Bukharin and Lenin on, is similarly persuasive.

[2] Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

[3] This is a point that conservative critics of government bureaucracy consistently fail to appreciate or even think of. Bureaucracies = jobs, and jobs = economic activity. If you massively downsized bureaucracies there would be more unemployment, less demand, and less growth.

[4] To take one example, Avner Offer argues that "the [British] empire extended considerably Britain's capacity to wage war, by adding to its military, demographic, and economic resources." Avner Offer, "The British empire, 1870–1914: a waste of money?" *Economic History Review*, vol. 46, no. 2 (May, 1993): 215–238.

When you look at good research, it seems that having a colony could be very beneficial indeed. According to one scholar's estimate, Britain drained around 45 trillion dollars from India between 1765 and 1938.[1] Moreover, it has long been a commonplace of historiography that Britain's industrial revolution was made possible in large part by using India and other colonies as captive markets for cotton textiles.[2] There has been no shortage of excellent scholarship, whether Marxist or dependency theorist or mainstream, arguing that Europe gained immeasurably from colonialism (as from slavery earlier, and from imperialism generally).

As for the argument that nationalist and racist ideologies were important motivators of colonialism, sure, that's true. But, again, it does not get big business or capitalism off the hook. This points to a fundamental error in the usual thinking of liberals and conservatives (and postmodernists): its characteristic idealism. It attributes too much importance to ideas, "culture," and the psychology of the masses and leaders. What matters is that particular ideologies are able to dominate *because they serve the interests of institutions with resources*, which propagate them or at the very least allow them to be propagated and do not feel the need to push back with some contrary ideology. The ruling ideas are, typically, the ideas of the ruling class. Nationalism and racism were, and are, favored by powerful sectors of business, for their own purposes—such as, in the late nineteenth century, imperialist expansionism.[3] The only reason such ideologies are allowed to become "hegemonic" at all is that they serve the interests of the institutions with the most resources, namely business; otherwise, they would be crushed by some other, more business-friendly set of ideas. –These *a priori* considerations, based on the most elementary reasoning about how entities act (i.e., to serve their interests), are so obvious you could easily explain them to an eight-year-old. And yet most intellectuals, including postmodern leftists (who usually fixate on "discourses" rather than class dynamics), appear to be blind to them, and therefore embark on misguided and misleading research projects. (Exhibit A, again, is Deirdre McCloskey, an especially egregious and vulgar example of an idealist, given her fixation on a few glorious "bourgeois ideas," rather than material forces, as having ushered in the modern world.)

In general, the excuses and apologetics of intellectuals, Milton Friedmanites and others, who want to absolve capitalism of the sin of colonialism are historically naïve and transparently partisan, motivated by a childish ideology. ("Capitalism = freedom.") These sorts of scholars are rarely to be taken seriously.

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On How to Live

[A blog post, like the previous piece]

When I was younger, I used to wonder: should I care what people think of me? I saw arguments on both sides of the question. And I still do (though I don't care as much anymore). It's one of those questions that follows us around our whole lives, because there are always going to be people who don't like us very much. But should that bother us? Or does it not matter at all? Should we follow the advice of those pop psychologists who say, "Don't care what people think of you! Just be you! You're amazing, you're fantastic, etc."? What a surprise it is that such self-help shallowness has so much commercial success: people like to be told they're amazing and beautiful and everyone who criticizes them is wrong. Taken literally, that self-

[1] See Jason Hickel, "How Britain stole $45 trillion from India," *Al Jazeera*, December 19, 2018. The scholar who published the research is Utsa Patnaik.

[2] For example, see Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: The Birth of the Industrial Revolution* (New York: The New Press, 1999).

[3] A classic expression of the utility of racism to the expansionist goals of business is Senator Albert Beveridge's speech on "the Philippine Question" on January 9, 1900. In support of annexing the Philippines, he first adduces "China's illimitable markets," thus beginning with the economic reason. But then he shifts to the racism: Filipinos "are not capable of self-government. How could they be? They are not of a self-governing race." So it is the white man's burden to civilize them. (What a happy coincidence that our moral duty coincides with our economic interests!)

help stuff is nonsense, though. It's a formula for the self-complacency of the bimbo celebrity who tweets out feel-good nuggets of flaky wisdom that get 100,000 retweets. It's meaningless. But then, to what extent, and when, should you care what people think of you?

First of all, it's important to always remember that most people are not very interpersonally, intrapersonally, or logically intelligent. That's just a fact, evident from daily observations, news articles, internet comments, the fact that the average IQ is 100, etc. As a leftist, I try to see the good in people; but I also try not to delude myself. I wish people were more intelligent, and maybe in a humanely organized society they would be. But, for now, I have to accept that most people, much of the time, aren't terribly insightful in their judgments about others and the world. So, the fact that someone reacts adversely to you is in itself not compelling evidence you've done anything wrong or are a "bad person" (a semi-meaningless judgment). They may have completely misunderstood you. They may have a terrible political ideology and hate you because you don't want to see refugees die of thirst in the desert. *They* may be the awful one; their criticism might be an indication of your moral and intellectual worth.

Personally, like everyone, I've been misjudged and misunderstood too many times to count. Someone might think I acted in a rude way, unaware that the reason I made a mildly rude comment was because a moment earlier *they* had said something insulting to me, which they weren't intelligent enough to recognize as insulting. I, and probably you, am/are constantly kind both overtly and in ways that are too subtle for most people to notice. And yet I've never been one of the "popular" guys. Why not? Doubtless because I'm an introvert (and also have different interests than most). Popular narcissists are everywhere, as are less-popular kind and intelligent types. It's true with regard to the opposite sex too: assholes and flakes (female or male) may be sought-after while kind and intelligent people might be considered less attractive, maybe sometimes because they're more difficult to identify with. So the “substantive” people can end up being relatively ignored while the lowest common denominator is beloved.

In all these cases and contexts, on a deep level you shouldn't care very much what most people think of you (or of others). Their opinion might have no implications with regard to your worth or the truth.

The burden of intelligence is that it's condemned to be misunderstood and rejected by a world of stupidity.

The tricky thing is that judgments of you often *do* have *some* legitimacy. Even if you were misunderstood, maybe you acted in a way conducive to misunderstanding. So you should try to avoid that in the future. Maybe you should refrain from acting rudely even in response to someone else's rudeness. Sometimes being an introvert can make you seem aloof or judgmental, so to counteract that you should make an extra effort to be friendly. On a non-moral level, to increase your popularity it's certainly a good idea to break out of your comfort zone and try to act as the people around you seem to value. Their overall judgments of you may be superficial or wrong, but it's advisable to make tweaks in your personality here and there.

In general, I suppose the only rule of thumb is the cliché that you should be open to others' impressions and judgments but not take them *too* seriously. Be smart about it. When it comes to your worth as a person, what matter most are *principles*, not others' judgments. The Golden Rule matters above all: be kind and compassionate, apply to yourself the standards you apply to others, be self-aware and self-critical. And other common intuitions: be courageous, tell the truth, be rational, etc. Value-judgments in and of themselves are virtually meaningless; they acquire legitimacy only insofar as they accord with principles that have cross-cultural resonance.

What this means is that there's some truth to the cheap self-help wisdom after all. From childhood, we're taught that we should try to make an impact on others, we should want approval, want to be loved, achieve recognition and success; but these in fact are not the deepest values that should guide us. Ben Shapiro, the toxic conservative, has "made an impact" and is beloved by millions, as are many other toxic people, conservative or not. The better goal is that of Socrates and Plato: live according to reason and morality. Don't focus on being loved or popular, except as a side-effect of living rationally, morally, and humanely. It can't be said often enough that popularity, or having loads of friends or lovers, or being "recognized," means nothing, despite the status-fixations of the world we live in. *Principles* are what matter, not people's opinions of you. Don't get down on yourself for what others think of you, unless you think

their (alleged) judgments might have some independent merit and are worth considering. Even then, treat them as an opportunity to grow rather than some sort of objective reflection of your worth.

We tend to think of people like, say, Martin Luther King Jr. as more "valuable" than the rest of us because of how many lives they influenced, how much change they helped inaugurate, and so on. But that's wrong. Even though you should want to make the world a better place and orient your efforts toward that goal, your success at doing so isn't what determines your "value." How many people have been as courageous and dedicated as MLK but have had less success and/or been forgotten? Millions. What should determine their value is what they did, not how much change they brought about or how many lives they influenced (or the presence or absence of fame). They deserve to be celebrated just as much as MLK. I dislike the kind of thinking that laments one's not having been as influential as others. "Mozart changed so many lives, gave the world so much, and what have *I* done??" I hear this sort of lament sometimes. Yes, Mozart had a particular, unusual talent—just as you might have a particular talent he or others lack(ed). Or you might be admirable in ways he wasn't. "Giving the world so much" isn't the be-all and end-all, in part because it depends to an extraordinary degree on luck. The real test, again, is living in accord with certain principles. That's what you should see when you look in the mirror, and that's what should determine your attitude to yourself. The rest of it, more or less, is secondary.

It does remain frustrating when your goodness or whatever goes unnoticed—as it usually does. It's easy to become contemptuous. That may even be a reasonable attitude, to some extent. How can you not be a little resentful if you're a good person who is treated badly? Still, we should keep those old *principles* in mind and keep regulating our behavior by self-imposed laws, to speak as a Kantian. No matter how ridiculous people are, act so you can look at yourself in the mirror with pride, knowing that all else is a show, a play "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

That's what I like about Chomsky, his personification of principle. No one in history, surely, has embodied adherence to reason and morality more than he has. As I've written elsewhere, he's a useful tool to keep yourself on the right path.

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Revolution in the Twenty-First Century: A Reconsideration of Marxism

In the age of COVID-19, it’s even more obvious than it’s been for at least a couple of decades that capitalism is entering a long, drawn-out period of unprecedented global crisis. The Great Depression and World War II will likely, in retrospect, seem less of an upheaval than the many decades of ecological, economic, social, and political crises humanity is embarking on now. In fact, it’s probable that we’re in the early stages of the protracted collapse of a civilization, which is to say of a particular set of economic relations underpinning certain social, political, and cultural relations. One can predict that the mass popular resistance, worldwide, engendered by cascading crises will gradually transform a decrepit *ancien régime*, although in what direction it is too early to tell. But left-wing resistance is already spreading and even gaining the glimmers of momentum in certain regions of the world, including—despite the ending of Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaign—the reactionary United States. Over decades, the international left will grow in strength, even as the right, in all likelihood, does as well.

Activism of various practical and ideological orientations is increasingly in a state of ferment—and yet, compared to the scale it will surely attain in a couple of decades, it is still in its infancy. In the U.S., for example, “democratic socialism” has many adherents, notably in the DSA and in the circles around *Jacobin* magazine. There are also organizations, and networks of organizations, that consciously repudiate the “reformism” of social democracy, such as the Marxist Center, which disavows the strategy of electing progressive Democratic politicians as abject “class collaboration.” Actually, many democratic socialists would agree that it is necessary, sooner or later, to construct a workers’ party, that the Democratic Party is ineluctably and permanently fused with the capitalist class. But the Marxist Center rejects the very idea of prioritizing electoral work, emphasizing instead “base-building” and other modes of non-electoral activism.

Meanwhile, there are activists in the solidarity economy, who are convinced it is necessary to plant the institutional seeds of the new world in the fertile soil of the old, as the old slowly decays and collapses. These activists take their inspiration from the recognition, as Rudolf Rocker put it in his classic *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, that "every new social structure makes organs for itself in the body of the old organism. Without this preliminary any social evolution is unthinkable. Even revolutions can only develop and mature the germs which already exist and have made their way into the consciousness of men; they cannot themselves create these germs or generate new worlds out of nothing."[1] The Libertarian Socialist Caucus of the DSA is one group that identifies with this type of thinking, but there are many others, including the Democracy Collaborative, the Democracy at Work Institute, Shareable, and more broadly the New Economy Coalition. Cooperation Jackson has had some success building a solidarity economy in Jackson, Mississippi.[2]

The numbers and varieties of activists struggling to build a new society are uncountable, from Leninists to anarchists to left-liberals and organizers not committed to ideological labels. Amidst all this ferment, however, one thing seems lacking: a compelling theoretical framework to explain how corporate capitalism can possibly give way to an economically democratic, ecologically sustainable society. How, precisely, is that supposed to happen? Which strategies are better and which worse for achieving this end—an end that may well, indeed, seem utopian, given the miserable state of the world? What role, for instance, does the venerable tradition of Marxism play in understanding how we might realize our goals? Marx, after all, had a conception of revolution, which he bequeathed to subsequent generations. Should it be embraced, rejected, or modified?

Where, in short, can we look for some strategic and theoretical guidance?

In this article I'll address these questions, drawing on some of the arguments in my book *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution: History and Possibilities in the United States* (specifically chapters 4 and 6).[3] Historical materialism is an essential tool to understand society and how a transition to some sort of post-capitalism may occur. Social relations are grounded in production relations, and so to make a revolution it is production relations that have to be transformed. But the way to do so isn't the way proposed by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*, or by Engels and Lenin and innumerable other Marxists later: that, to quote Engels' *Anti-Dühring*, "The proletariat seizes state power, and then transforms the means of production into state property." Or, as the *Manifesto* states, "The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class."

Instead, the revolution has to be a gradual and partially "unconscious" process, as social contradictions are tortuously resolved "dialectically," not through a unitary political will that seizes the state (*every* state!) and then consciously, semi-omnisciently reconstructs the economy from the top down, magically transforming authoritarian relations into democratic ones through the exercise of state bureaucracy. In retrospect, this idea that a "dictatorship of the proletariat" will plan and direct the social revolution, and that the latter will, in effect, happen *after* the political revolution, seems incredibly idealistic, unrealistic, and thus un-Marxist.

I can't rehearse here all the arguments in my book.[4] In the following I'll very briefly restate a few of the main points, after which I'll argue that on the basis of my revision of Marxism we can see there is value in the many different varieties of activism leftists are currently pursuing. No school of thought has a monopoly on the truth, and all have limitations. Leftists must tolerate disagreements and work together—

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[1] Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Its Theory and Practice* (Oakland: AK Press, 2004), 59.

[2] Cheree Franco, "Building a Solidarity Economy in Jackson, Mississippi," *The Indypendent*, October 2, 2019.

[3] *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution* (Bradenton, FL: Booklocker, 2014), available for free online. Being an outgrowth of my Master's thesis, the book over-emphasizes worker cooperatives. It does, however, answer the usual Marxist objections to cooperatives as a component of social revolution.

[4] For a more concise statement of some of the arguments see Chris Wright, "Rethinking the Concept of Revolution," at rs21.org.uk.

must even work with left-liberals—because a worldwide transition between modes of production takes an inordinately long time and takes place on many different levels.

I'll also offer some criticisms of each of the three broad "schools of thought" I mentioned above, namely the *Jacobin* social democratic one, the more self-consciously far-left one that rejects every hint of "reformism," and the anarchistic one that places its faith in things like cooperatives, community land trusts, mutual aid, "libertarian municipalism," all sorts of decentralized participatory democracy. At the end I'll briefly consider the overwhelming challenge of ecological collapse, which is so urgent it would seem to render absurd, or utterly defeatist, my insistence that "the revolution" will take at least a hundred years to wend its way across the globe and unseat all the old social relations.

Correcting Marx

Karl Marx was a great genius, but even geniuses are products of their environment and are fallible. We can hardly expect Marx to have gotten absolutely everything right. He couldn't foresee the welfare state or Keynesian stimulation of demand, which is to say he got the timeline for revolution wrong. One might even say he mistook the birth pangs of industrial capitalism for its death throes: a global transition to socialism never could have happened in the nineteenth century, nor even in the twentieth, which was the era of "monopoly capitalism," state capitalism, entrenched imperialism, the mature capitalist nation-state. It wasn't even until the neoliberal period that capitalist relations of production fully conquered vast swathes of the world, including the so-called Communist bloc and much of the Global South. And the logic of historical materialism suggests that capitalist globalization is a prerequisite to socialism (or communism).

All of which is to say that only now are we finally entering the era when socialist revolution is possible. The earlier victories, in 1917, 1949, 1959, and so on, did not achieve socialism—workers' democratic control of the economy—and, in the long run, could not have. They occurred in a predominantly capitalist world—capitalism was in the ascendancy—and were constrained by the limits of that world, the restricted range of possibilities. Which is doubtless why all those popular victories ended up in one or another form of oppressive statism (or else were soon crushed by imperialist powers).

If Marx was wrong about the timeline, he was also wrong about his abstract conceptualization of how the socialist revolution would transpire. As he put it in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, "At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production… From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution." The notion of fettering, despite its criticism by exponents of Analytical Marxism as being functionalist and not truly explanatory, is useful, but not in the form it's presented here. For to say that relations of production fetter productive forces (or, more precisely, fetter their socially rational use and development) is not to say very much. How much fettering is required for a revolution to happen? Surely capitalism has placed substantial fetters on productive forces for a long time—and yet here we all are, still stuck in this old, fettered world.

To salvage Marx's intuition, and in fact to make it quite useful, it is necessary to tweak his formulation in the famous Preface. Rather than some sort of "absolute" fettering of productive forces by capitalist relations, there is a *relative* fettering—relative to an emergent mode of production, a more democratic and socialized mode, that is producing and distributing resources more equitably and rationally than the capitalist.[1]

A parallel, albeit an imperfect one, is the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Feudal relations certainly obstructed economic growth, but it wasn't until a "competing" economy—of commercial, financial, agrarian, and finally industrial capitalism—had made great progress in Western Europe that the classical epoch of revolution between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries burst onto the scene.

[1] The state's official censorship may have required Marx to censor himself in the Preface, but I know of nowhere else that he expresses his theory in causal, as opposed to functionalist, terms. That is, he doesn't provide a *mechanism* by which fettering leads to successful revolution. My restatement of his conception in terms of *relative* fettering—relative to an emergent mode of production—is an attempt to provide such a mechanism.

Relative to capitalism, feudalism was hopelessly stagnant, and therefore, once capitalism had reached a certain level of development, doomed.

Crucially, the bourgeoisie's conquest of political power wasn't possible until capitalist economic relations had *already*, over centuries, spread across much of Europe. *There had to be a material foundation for the capitalist class's ultimate political victories: without economic power—the accumulation of material resources through institutions they controlled—capitalists could never have achieved political power*. That is to say, much of the enormously protracted social revolution occurred *before* the final "seizure of the state."

If historical materialism is right, as it surely is, the same paradigm must apply to the transition from capitalism to socialism. The working class can never complete its conquest of the state until it commands considerable economic power—not only the power to go on strike and shut down the economy but actual command over resources, resources sufficient to compete with the ruling class. The power to strike, while an important tool, is not enough. Nor are mere numbers, however many millions, enough, as history has shown. The working class needs its own institutional bases from which to wage a very prolonged struggle, and these institutions have to be directly involved in the production and accumulation of resources. Only after some such "alternative economy," or socialized economy, has emerged throughout much of the world alongside the rotting capitalist economy will the popular classes be in a position to finally *complete* their takeover of states. For they will have the resources to politically defeat the—by then—weak, attenuated remnants of the capitalist class.

Marx, in short, was wrong to think there would be a radical disanalogy between the transition to capitalism and the transition to socialism. Doubtless the latter process (if it happens) will take far less time than the earlier did, and will be significantly different in many other respects. But social revolutions on the scale we're discussing—between vastly different modes of production—are always very gradual, never a product of a single great moment (or several moments) of historical "rupture" but rather of *many decades* of *continual* ruptures.[1] Why? Simply because ruling classes are incredibly tenacious, they have incredible powers of repression, and it requires colossal material resources to defeat them—especially in the age of globalized capitalism.

Building a new mode of production

What we must do, then, is to laboriously construct new relations of production as the old capitalist relations fall victim to their contradictions. But how is this to be done? At this early date, it is, admittedly, hard to imagine how it can be accomplished. Famously, it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.

But two things are clear. First, a significant amount of grassroots initiative is necessary. The long transition will not take place only on one plane, the plane of the state; there will be a tumult of creative energy on sub-state levels, as there was during Europe's transition into capitalism. (Of course, in the latter case it was typically to establish predatory and exploitative relations, not democratic or communal ones, but the point holds.) The many forms of such energy can hardly be anticipated, but they will certainly involve practices that have come to be called the "solidarity economy," including the formation of cooperatives of all types, public banks, municipal enterprises, participatory budgeting, mutual aid networks, and so on. In a capitalist context it is inconceivable that states will respond to crisis by dramatically improving the circumstances of entire populations; as a result, large numbers of people will be compelled to build new institutions to survive and to share and accumulate resources. Again, this process, which will occur all over the world and to some degree will be organized and coordinated internationally, will play out over generations, not just two or three decades.

[1] If someone will counterpose here the example of Russia, which didn't require "many decades" to go from capitalism and late-feudalism to a "Stalinist mode of production," I'd reply that the latter was in fact like a kind of state capitalism (as Richard Wolff, for example, has argued), and therefore wasn't so very different in relevant respects from the authoritarian, exploitative, surplus-extracting, capital-accumulating economy that dominated in the West.

In the long run, moreover, this solidarity economy will not prove to be some sort of innocuous, apolitical, compatible-with-capitalism development; it will foster anti-capitalist ways of thinking and acting, anti-capitalist institutions, and anti-capitalist resistance. It will facilitate the accumulation of resources among organizations committed to cooperative, democratic, socialized production and distribution, a rebuilding of "the commons,"[1] a democratization of the state. It will amount to an entire sphere of what has been called "dual power"[2] opposed to a still-capitalist state, a working-class base of power to complement the power of workers and unions to strike.

The second point is that, contrary to anarchism, it will be necessary to use the state to help construct a new mode of production. Governments are instruments of massive social power and they cannot simply be ignored or overthrown in a general strike. However unpleasant or morally odious it may be to participate in hierarchical structures of political power, it has to be a part of any strategy to combat the ruling class.

Activists and organizations will pressure the state at all levels, from municipal to national, to increase funding for the solidarity economy. In fact, they already are, and have had success in many countries and municipalities, including in the U.S. The election of more socialists to office will encourage these trends and ensure greater successes. Pressure will also build to fund larger worker cooperatives, to convert corporations to worker-owned businesses, and to nationalize sectors of the economy. And sooner or later, many states will start to give in.

Why? One possible response to crisis, after all, is fascism. And fascism of some form or other is indeed being pursued by many countries right now, from Brazil to Hungary to India to the U.S. But there's a problem with fascism: by its murderous and ultra-nationalistic nature, it can be neither permanent nor continuously enforced worldwide. Even just in the United States, the governmental structure is too vast and federated, there are too many thousands of relatively independent political jurisdictions, for a fascist regime to be consolidated in every region of the country. Fascism is only a temporary and partial solution for the ruling class. It doesn't last.

The other solution, which doubtless will always be accompanied by repression, is to grant concessions to the masses. Here, it is necessary to observe that the state isn't monolithically an instrument of capital. While capital dominates it, it is a terrain of struggle, "contestations," "negotiations," of different groups—classes, class subgroups, interest groups, even individual entities—advocating for their interests. Marxists from Engels, Kautsky, and Lenin to Miliband and Poulantzas to more recent writers have felled forests writing about the nature of the capitalist state, but for the purposes of revolutionary strategy all you need is some critical common sense (as Noam Chomsky, dismissive of unnecessary "theoretical" verbiage, likes to point out). It is possible for popular movements to exert such pressure on the state that they slowly change its character, thereby helping to change the character of capitalist society.

In particular, popular organizations and activists can take advantage of splits within the ruling class to push agendas that benefit the populace. The political scientist Thomas Ferguson, among others, has shown how the New Deal, including the epoch-making Wagner Act and Social Security Act, was made possible by just such divisions in the ranks of business.[3] On a grander scale, Western Europe's long transition from feudalism to capitalism was accompanied by divisions within the ruling class, between more forward-thinking and more hidebound elements. (As is well known, a number of landed aristocrats and clergymen even supported the French Revolution, at least in its early phases.) Marx was therefore wrong to imply that it's *the working class vs. the capitalist class, monolithically*. This totally Manichean thinking suggested that the only way to make a revolution is for the proletariat to overthrow the ruling class in one blow, so to speak, to smash a united reactionary opposition that, moreover, is in complete control of the state (so the state has to be seized all at once).

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[1] See Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

[2] *ROAR Magazine*, for instance, titled its ninth issue, in August 2019, "Dual Power," and devoted it to the solidarity economy.

[3] Thomas Ferguson, *Golden Rule: The Investment Theory of Party Competition and the Logic of Money-driven Political Systems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

On the contrary, we can expect the past to repeat itself: as crises intensify and popular resistance escalates, liberal factions of the ruling class will split off from the more reactionary elements in order to grant concessions. In our epoch of growing social fragmentation, environmental crisis, and an increasingly dysfunctional nation-state, many of these concessions will have the character not of resurrecting the centralized welfare state but of encouraging phenomena that seem rather "interstitial" and less challenging to capitalist power than full-fledged social democracy is. But, however innocent it might seem to support new "decentralized" solutions to problems of unemployment, housing, consumption, and general economic dysfunction, in the long run, as I've said, these sorts of reforms will facilitate the rise of a more democratic and socialized political economy within the shell of the decadent capitalist one.

At the same time, to tackle the immense crises of ecological destruction and economic dysfunction, more dramatic and visible state interventions will be necessary. They may involve nationalizations of the fossil fuel industry, enforced changes to the polluting practices of many industries, partial reintroductions of social-democratic policies, pro-worker reforms of the sort that Bernie Sanders' campaign championed, etc. Pure, unending repression will simply not be sustainable. These more "centralized," "statist" reforms, just like the promotion of the solidarity economy, will in the long run only add to the momentum for continued change, because the political, economic, and ecological context will remain that of severe worldwide crisis.

Much of the ruling class will of course oppose and undermine progressive policies—especially of the more statist variety—every step of the way, thus deepening the crisis and doing its own part to accelerate the momentum for change. But by the time it becomes clear to even the liberal sectors of the business class that its reforms are undermining the long-term viability and hegemony of capitalism, it will be too late. They won't be able to turn back the clock: there will be too many worker-owned businesses, too many public banks, too many state-subsidized networks of mutual aid, altogether too many reforms to the old type of neoliberal capitalism (reforms that will have been granted, as always, for the sake of maintaining social order). The slow-moving revolution will feed on itself and will prove unstoppable, however much the more reactionary states try to clamp down, murder dissidents, prohibit protests, and bust unions. Besides, as Marx predicted, the revolutionary project will be facilitated by the thinning of the ranks of the capitalist elite due to repeated economic crises and the consequent destruction of wealth.

Just as the European absolutist state of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries was compelled to empower—for the sake of accumulating wealth—the capitalist classes that created the conditions of its demise, so the late-capitalist state will be compelled, for the purposes of internal order, to acquiesce in the construction of non-capitalist institutions that correct some of the "market failures" of the capitalist mode of production. The capitalist state will, of necessity, be a participant in its own demise. Its highly reluctant sponsorship of new practices of production, distribution, and social life as a whole—many of them "interstitial" at first—will be undertaken on the belief that it's the lesser of two evils, the greater evil being the complete dissolution of capitalist power resulting from the dissolution of society.

It is impossible to predict this long process in detail, or to say how and when the working class's gradual takeover of the state (through socialist representatives and the construction of new institutions on local and eventually national levels) will be consummated. Nor can we predict what the nation-state itself will look like then, what political forms it will have, how many of its powers will have devolved to municipal and regional levels and how many will have been lost to supra-national bodies of world governance. Needless to say, it is also hopeless to speculate on the future of the market, or whether various kinds of economic planning will, after generations, mostly take the place of the market.

As for "the dictatorship of the proletariat," this entity, like the previous "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie," won't exist until nearly the end of the long process of transformation. Marxists, victims of impatience as well as the statist precedents of twentieth-century "Communist" countries, have traditionally gotten the order wrong, forgetting the lesson of Marxism itself that the state is a function of existing social relations and can't simply be taken over by workers in the context of a still-wholly-capitalist economy. Nor is it at all "dialectical" to think that a group of workers' representatives can *will* a new economy into existence, overcoming the authoritarian, bureaucratic, inefficient, exploitative institutional legacies of

capitalism by a few acts of *statist will*. Historical materialism makes clear the state isn't so radically socially creative![1]

Instead, the contrast that will appear between the stagnant, "fettering" old forms of capitalism and the more rational and democratic forms of the emergent economy is what will guarantee, in the end, the victory of the latter.

An ecumenical activism

In a necessarily speculative and highly abstract and abbreviated way I've tried to sketch the logic of how a new economy might emerge from the wreckage of capitalism, and how activists with an eye toward the distant future might orient their thinking. It should be evident from what I've said that there isn't only one way to make a revolution; rather, in a time of world-historic crisis, simply fighting to *humanize* society will generate anti-capitalist momentum. And there are many ways to make society more humane.

Consider the social democratic path, the path of electing socialists and pressuring government to expand "welfare state" measures. Far-leftists often deride this approach as merely reformist; in the U.S., it is also common to dismiss the idea of electing progressive Democrats such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez because supposedly the Democratic Party is hopelessly capitalist and corrupt. It cannot be moved left, and it will certainly never be a socialist party.

According to Regeneration Magazine, for instance, a voice of the new Marxist Center network, "Reformism accepts as a given the necessity of class collaboration, and attempts to spin class compromise as a necessary good. One of the more popular strategic proposals of the reformist camp is the promotion of candidates for elected office running in a capitalist party; a clear instance of encouraging class collaboration."

There are a number of possible responses to such objections. One might observe that if the left insists on absolute purity and refuses to work with anyone who can be seen as somehow "compromised," it is doomed to irrelevance—or, worse, it ends up fracturing the forces of opposition and thus benefits the reactionaries. It is a commonplace of historiography on fascism that the refusal of Communist parties in the early 1930s to cooperate with socialists and social democrats only empowered the Nazis and other such elements—which is why the Stalinist line changed in 1934, when the period of the Popular Front began. Then, in the U.S., began Communist efforts to build the Democrat-supported CIO (among other instances of "collaboration" with Democrats), which was highly beneficial to the working class. Leftists, more than anyone else, should be willing and able to learn from history.

Or one might state the truism that social democracy helps people, and so if you care about helping people, you shouldn't be opposed to social democracy. It may be true that the Democratic Party is irredeemably corrupt and capitalist, but the more left-wing policymakers we have, the better. Democrats have moved to the left in the past, e.g. during the New Deal and the Great Society, and they may be able to move (somewhat) to the left in the future. One of the goals of socialists should be to fracture the ruling class, to provoke splits that provide opportunities for socialist organizing and policymaking.

At the same time, the strategy of electing left-wing Democrats or "reformists" should, of course, be supplemented by an effort to build a working-class party, not only for the sake of having such a party but also to put pressure on the mainstream "left." Anyway, the broader point is just that the state is an essential terrain of struggle, and all means of getting leftists elected have to be pursued.

Personally, I'm skeptical that full-fledged social democracy, including an *expansion* of it compared to its traditional form, is possible any longer, least of all on an international or global scale. Thus, I don't have much hope for a realization of the *Jacobin* vision, that societies can pass straight into socialism by resurrecting and continuously broadening and deepening social democracy (on the basis of popular

[1] This is why I claim in my book that my "revisions" of Marxism are really purifications of it, eliminations of mistakes that finally make the *properly understood* Marxist conception of revolution consistent with the premises of historical materialism.

mobilization to combat capitalist reaction).[1] Surely Marxism teaches us that we cannot resuscitate previous social formations after they have passed from the scene, particularly not institutional forms that have succumbed (or are in the process of succumbing) to the atomizing, disintegrating logic of capital. The expansive welfare state was appropriate to an age of industrial unionism and limited mobility of capital. Given the monumental crises that will afflict civilization in the near future, the social stability and coherence required to sustain genuine social democracy will not exist.

But that doesn't mean limited social democratic victories are not still possible. They surely are. And in the long run, they may facilitate the emergence of new democratic, cooperative, ecologically viable modes of production, insofar as they empower the left. Even something like a Green New Deal, or at least a partial realization of it, isn't out of the question.

On the other hand, while mass politics is necessary, that doesn't mean we should completely reject non-electoral "movementism," as Paul Heideman counsels.[2] As I've argued, the project of building a new society doesn't happen only on the level of the state; it also involves other types of popular organizing and mobilizing, including in the solidarity economy. The latter will likely, indeed, be a necessity for people's survival in the coming era of state incapacity to deal with catastrophe.

Not all types of anarchist activism are fruitful, but the anarchist intuition to organize at the grassroots and create horizontal networks of popular power is sound. Even in the ultra-left contempt for reformism there is the sound intuition that reforms are not enough, and we must always press forward towards greater radicalism and revolution.

Ecological apocalypse?

An obvious objection to the conception and timeframe of revolution I've proposed is that it disregards the distinct possibility that civilization will have disappeared a hundred years from now if we don't take decisive action immediately. For one thing, nuclear war remains a dire threat. But even more ominously, capitalism is turbocharged to destroy the natural bases of human life.

There is no need to run through the litany of crimes capitalism is committing against nature. Humanity is obviously teetering on the edge of a precipice, peering down into a black hole below. Our most urgent task is to, at the very least, take a few steps back from the precipice.

The unfortunate fact, however, is that global capitalism will not be overcome within the next few decades. It isn't "defeatist" to say this; it is realistic. The inveterate over-optimism of many leftists, even in the face of a dismal history, is quite remarkable. Transitions between modes of production are not accomplished in a couple of decades: they take generations, and involve many setbacks, then further victories, then more defeats, etc. The long march of reactionaries to their current power in the U.S. took fifty years, and they existed in a sympathetic political economy and had enormous resources. It's hard to believe socialists will be able to revolutionize the West and even the entire world in less time.

Fortunately, it is possible to combat ecological collapse even in the framework of capitalism, for example by accelerating the rollout of renewable energy. It is far from hopeless, also, to try to force governments to impose burdensome regulations and taxes on polluting industries, or even, ideally, to shut down the fossil fuel industry altogether. Capitalism itself is indeed, ultimately, the culprit, but reforms can have a major effect, at the very least buying us some time.

Climate change and other environmental disasters may, nevertheless, prove to be the undoing of civilization, in which case the social logic of a post-capitalist revolution that I've outlined here will not have time to unfold. Nothing certain can be said at this point—except that the left has to stop squabbling and get its act together. And it has to be prepared for things to get worse before they get better. As Marx understood, that's how systemic change tends to work: the worse things get—the more unstable the system

[1] See Bhaskar Sunkara, *The Socialist Manifesto: The Case for Radical Politics in an Era of Extreme Inequality* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).
[2] Paul Heideman, "Mass Politics, Not Movementism, Is the Future of the Left," *Jacobin,* April 12, 2020.

becomes—the more people organize to demand change, and in the end the likelier it is that such change will happen.

The old apothegm "socialism or barbarism" has to be updated: it is now socialism or apocalypse.

But the strategic lesson of the "purifications" I've suggested of Marxist theory remains: the path to socialism is not doctrinaire, not sectarian, not wedded to a single narrow ideological strain; it is catholic, inclusive, open-ended—both "reformist" and non-reformist, statist and non-statist, Marxist and anarchist, Democrat-cooperating and -non-cooperating. Loath as we might be to admit it, it is even important that, in certain circumstances, we support lesser-evil voting, for instance electing Biden rather than Trump. Not only does it change people's lives to have a centrist instead of a neofascist in power; it also gives the left more room to operate, to influence policy, to advocate "radical reforms" that help lay the groundwork for new economic relations.

It's time for creative and flexible thinking. The urgency of our situation demands it.

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Learning from the Great Depression

According to Mark Twain (supposedly), history doesn't repeat itself, but it frequently rhymes. He was right. Donald Trump, for example, rhymes with Mussolini. The decline of organized labor in recent decades rhymes with its decline in the 1920s. And the coming depression will rhyme, in many respects, with the Great Depression.

For decades, in fact, it has been clear that the political economy of neoliberalism "rhymes" with the political economy that caused the Depression. In addition to (and in part because of) the analogous collapses of organized labor, economic inequality skyrocketed in both eras: in 1929 the richest 0.1% of families in the U.S. owned 25% of all wealth, which is almost exactly the same amount as today. Real wages in the last forty years have stagnated or even declined, as in the 1920s. What these trends, coinciding with an explosion of debt, have indicated is a dangerous weakness in aggregate demand, which has heralded an eventual collapse of markets.

Now that markets are imploding (although from an unforeseen trigger, the coronavirus pandemic), we can observe history rhyming yet again: the fiscal policy responses today, especially by states, mimic those of the Great Depression.

It is of interest to consider government policies in that earlier period, for there may be lessons to heed as states and the federal government confront our own generation-defining economic cataclysm. While political officials don't always learn from the past, at least activists and the public can.

The most striking fact about the fiscal policy of states in the 1930s is that they consistently underfunded unemployment relief, even in the years when many of them, far from being strapped for cash, had budget surpluses. This is a paradoxical and frequently forgotten fact: U.S. states ended the Depression in a much stronger financial position than when it began.

The reason is simple: it was in these years that states discovered the sales tax, and came to rely on it (together with taxes on alcohol, tobacco, gasoline, and soft drinks) for the majority of their revenue. By 1940, they had doubled the amount they collected in 1930. And yet even the wealthiest states, such as Illinois, continued to plead poverty as an excuse not to adequately fund relief for the unemployed.

It is also noteworthy that states typically preferred to enact regressive forms of taxation such as the sales tax rather than raise taxes on property, individual and corporate incomes, estates, and the like.

The very agenda of austerity, which was a near-religion for states and municipalities in the 1930s (except insofar as Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal counteracted it), was not the "economic necessity" authorities claimed it was. It was hardly unavoidable that governments would—as they did—deeply cut spending on such services as public health, sanitation, education, libraries, and transportation. Instead, they could have collected more taxes from corporations and the wealthy, as liberals, labor unions, Communists, and various popular organizations advocated.

In retrospect, such progressive policies seem both just and economically wise, in that they would have increased purchasing power among lower-income groups and thus expanded markets, incentivizing businesses to invest. But the political power of business groups like Chambers of Commerce, Real Estate Boards, and the National Association of Manufacturers ensured that more regressive fiscal policies were enacted and large proportions of the unemployed were left to fend for themselves.

In short, governments made choices; they were not forced to act as they did. They chose to rely on sales taxes instead of something more progressive; they chose not to spend budget surpluses on relief programs for the unemployed; they chose to cut spending on institutions that disproportionately benefited the working and middle classes.

If any of this sounds familiar, it's because governments are making the same choices today (as they did following the Great Recession).

New York, for example, is cutting billions of dollars in aid to schools and Medicaid, and is sure to make further cuts in the coming months. Even as he pleads poverty, Governor Andrew Cuomo has rejected out of hand the idea of raising taxes on the ultra-rich, which could generate tens of billions of dollars in revenue for the state.

Other states are following the same playbook, making significant cuts without committing to raising taxes on the wealthy.

In the end, what the Great Depression and its solution in the colossal spending for World War II showed is that ultimate responsibility rests with the federal government. A mobilization of society's resources on the level of the 1940s—under the auspices, say, of a Green New Deal—would not only solve the coming economic crisis but lay the foundation for sustained prosperity.

Nevertheless, states are not without their own resources, which they have an obligation to tap in order to mitigate the burden on the most vulnerable.

Let us, for once, avoid making the present "rhyme" with the past and instead set foot on a more enlightened path.

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Reflections on Life at 40

…They accuse me -- *Me* -- the present writer of
The present poem -- of -- I know not what –
A tendency to under-rate and scoff
At human power and virtue, and all that;
And this they say in language rather rough.
Good God! I wonder what they would be at!
I say no more than hath been said in Danté's
Verse, and by Solomon and by Cervantes;

By Swift, by Machiavel, by Rochefoucault,
By Fénélon, by Luther, and by Plato;
By Tillotson, and Wesley, and Rousseau,
Who knew this life was not worth a potato.
'T is not their fault, nor mine, if this be so –
For my part, I pretend not to be Cato,
Nor even Diogenes. -- We live and die,
But which is best, *you* know no more than I.

Socrates said, our only knowledge was
"To know that nothing could be known;" a pleasant
Science enough, which levels to an ass

Each man of wisdom, future, past, or present.
Newton (that proverb of the mind), alas!
Declared, with all his grand discoveries recent,
That he himself felt only "like a youth
Picking up shells by the great ocean -- Truth."

Ecclesiastes said, "that all is vanity" –
Most modern preachers say the same, or show it
By their examples of true Christianity:
In short, all know, or very soon may know it;
And in this scene of all-confess'd inanity,
By saint, by sage, by preacher, and by poet,
Must I restrain me, through the fear of strife,
From holding up the nothingness of life?

Dogs, or men! -- for I flatter you in saying
That ye are dogs -- your betters far -- ye may
Read, or read not, what I am now essaying
To show ye what ye are in every way.
As little as the moon stops for the baying
Of wolves, will the bright muse withdraw one ray
From out her skies -- then howl your idle wrath!
While she still silvers o'er your gloomy path…

That's Byron in *Don Juan*, one of the greatest and wittiest poems in history. (Probably *the* wittiest.) I remember reading it for the first time in my early twenties and falling in love with it. As I wrote in my journal,

> Its sentiments are so in tune with mine—its Ecclesiastical sentiments—and its style—that its genius is but a secondary reason for my infatuation. But what genius! It's a poem unlike any in the English language—any in *any* language—far surpassing even Pope's *Dunciad*. Yes, its power is a negative one, unlike Shelley's or Keats', but I don't consider that a point against it. It's still as timely as it was when written, and it'll *always* be timely, because life, after all, *is* nothingness. And yet beneath the sophisticated cynicism is a heart-rending despair, and an idealism, and a passion for life, and a yearning for salvation.

At the age of 40, I still come back to Byron, as I did at 22. I can't escape him however much I'd like to, because he remains the spirit of modernity—the Faustian spirit of striving, struggle, yearning for beauty and truth and freedom, but hedonistic, nihilistic, disillusioned, self-hating even in his self-love, pathologically self-aware, existentialist (broadly speaking) yet enamored of reason—torn between existentialism and the Enlightenment—in the end *rebellious*. Byron had no home, as modernity, and ultimately humanity, has no home.

I've written elsewhere, and in my first book, about the torment of being too aware of life's ridiculousness. It's always in the back of my mind, that knowledge of meaninglessness, that detachment from life. I don't know what it is about me that makes me fixate on it—maybe the abstractness and self-consciousness of my mind, and the emotional semi-immaturity. I just can't get over how unreal life seems, how brief and questionable in all its aspects. It can be hard even to be ambitious, to *care* enough, when you find it so difficult to take things seriously. You start to feel like a spectator at a theatrical farce. Sometimes it seems that hardly anything except stupidity, shallowness, cruelty, and randomness (the randomness of being alive at all) confronts you—few experiences are truly, deeply satisfying, especially as you live longer and grow less excitable or impressionable. And all the while there remains the knowledge of death, the

constant passage of time bearing down on you. Your own death will mean as little to people as their deaths mean to you.

To relate a somewhat trivial grievance (of even many middle-aged people): in a world of flakes, *dating* can be frustrating. Relations with the opposite sex are rather important, after all, and if they're unsatisfying you'll find that your whole life tends to be unsatisfying. It's fashionable, even feministy, for women to publish articles inveighing against internet dating, but hardly anyone seems interested in how unpleasant dating can be for men—sending scores of cute little messages and getting few replies, going on innumerable first dates, regularly encountering the most incredible flakiness, all while grappling with the pain of sexual frustration. It's no wonder that young "incels," millions of them, are driven to despair, suffocated by loneliness and frustration, suicidally sick of mere masturbation. (And then self-righteous liberals and leftists ridicule them, laugh at them, which is a pretty sick reaction to the suffering of another human being—and drives them into the loving arms of right-wing frauds like Jordan Peterson.) It requires strength and native buoyancy not to will a renunciation of life in these atomized conditions, starved of love and, frequently, sex.

On the other hand, that's one of the perks of getting older: you start to care less, since you develop a more full-bodied, self-confident, even good-humored appreciation of the fact that everything is bullshit. (It helps that your hormones begin to take pity on you.) Deep down there remains a certain resentment toward the world for being such a senseless place, so senseless that it seems actually *unreal, illusory*—I sympathize with the Buddhist teaching that life is saturated with illusion—but, to paraphrase Nietzsche, you've grown so used to your diffuse disgust that you're almost fond of it now. "I've given a name to my pain," Nietzsche said, "and call it 'dog.' It is just as faithful, just as obtrusive and shameless, just as entertaining, just as clever as any other dog…"

Anyway, leaving aside post-pubescent hormonal urges that used to afflict me and returning to more pretentious matters of the "intellect"… As a young lad I wanted to get to the *bottom* of things—I wanted to answer all important philosophical and historical questions, I wanted to intellectually tie everything, all of history, up in a bow, even while helping to wage "the revolution" to establish socialism or communism. It was this that would give my life meaning, this quest for and achievement of near-perfection. Life itself was not enough: it was only a means to something greater, something timeless. Actually, I think I did make intellectual progress and answered many questions to my satisfaction, more or less. Still, my "achievements," such as they were, were far from approaching what I had dreamed of—something like *transcendence*—and coming face to face with the mundane reality of my limitations was depressing.

I'm finding it hard, though, to express the source of my restlessness, or even the *meaning* of my restlessness. Compared to most people in the world, I'm ludicrously privileged. But *internally* I can hardly imagine "happiness." I think it has to do with a peculiar contradiction: the contradiction between my knowledge of the *miraculousness* of being alive—the impossible majesty of the human brain, the wonders of the cosmos itself, the unfathomable mysteries, down to the quantum level, contained in a single eukaryotic cell, the astounding privilege of being *homo sapiens* (the "sovereign of nature," as Marx said)[1] and capable of listening to a Beethoven symphony or even of playing a Beethoven piano sonata (think of how the brain has to somehow coordinate the activity of ten fingers, exquisitely calibrating every movement according to a continuous flood of sensory input from the tactile, auditory, and visual systems that it first has to instantaneously process, sift through, analyze, compute, at the same time as it attends to innumerable other matters of internal bodily monitoring and regulation, all while processing *memories* of the music that has been practiced repeatedly and anticipating what the next notes are, what the next finger movements are—and remember that all this activity, unconscious and effortless, is on behalf of something totally luxurious and purely *aesthetic*, the creation of music, a capacity only humans have)—and the frequently dull, grim realities of actual life. Each of us is a practically divine miracle, and yet each of us is subject to extraordinary social, physical, and metaphysical indignities. It seems as though every moment of life ought

[1] In the words of Chomsky, another great humanist, "none of the other 50 billion species [that have existed on Earth] can even form a thought, at least any thought that can be formulated in a symbolic system." The gap between humans and all other animals is vast, and utterly mysterious.

to be transcendently and timelessly beautiful—for that is what nature is and what our existence is[1]—but in fact life is shot through with mediocrity, mundanity, disappointment, shattered hopes, and death. Indeed, strictly speaking, the only "meaning" of life, the reason we're here in the first place, is the exceedingly mediocre and animalistic one of procreating. Richard Dawkins is surely right that we're mere "survival machines" for our genes, tools of DNA propagation (for that is the basis of evolution, the self-replication of DNA). As reductive as it sounds, we're organisms that DNA constructs just so it can survive in a harsh environment and replicate itself. We're driven to do the bidding of this arrogant and selfish molecule without even knowing why—we just crave sex, it's out of our control, we're robots programmed to serve our master.

But what a strange master that has given its creation the capacity to rebel and refuse to procreate! Instead, we often devote ourselves to "higher" pursuits like philosophy, like observing life and contemplating its "meaning"—an absurd and comical activity that only serves to increase unhappiness, sometimes to the point that the robot—or, better, the puppet, the human being—kills itself and thereby the chances for its DNA puppeteer to replicate itself! *Homo sapiens* is indeed a paradox!

Be that as it may, the point is that, given my awe at existence itself, even my gratitude, I had a desire to achieve things commensurate with this awe and gratitude. I wanted to intellectually assimilate as much as possible, through intellectual creation that would have a universal significance and be read even after I died. These desires, in a sense, weren't much different from the dreams of a lot of young men, who boldly leap into life determined to conquer the world and by some means or other overcome their mortality and relative insignificance. Fame is a typical goal, for example. A young man glories in possibility and can tend to be rather self-enclosed—as manifested, for instance, in my naïvely self-publishing three books at least one of which I could and should have used a traditional publisher for. (It would have been a better book, dammit!)

As you approach middle age, the ambitions subside. Life starts to wear you down. The regrets pile up (although, truth be told, I had plenty of regrets already at 23); you go unnoticed for things you think deserve notice; you tire of your own mediocrity and the even greater mediocrity of so much that you encounter; you grow more aware of the brevity and *lack of gravity* of life.[2] The "fulfilling experiences" you longed for fail to materialize, and you realize you'll never overcome the hollowness, the "ontological emptiness," at your core. ("Nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being, like a worm," Sartre said.) At least, that's been my experience. You'll write, but people won't read. You'll read, but you'll wonder what's the point of it when all the reading and writing leaves the world more or less as it is. You'll still desire intellectual stimulation but you'll feel guilty when indulging in it because what matters in our era of catastrophe is activism; but you'll be bored when doing or writing something related to activism because you miss intellectual stimulation. And the years will go by, year after year, and before you know it you'll be on the verge of death, and your former thrill at the miraculousness of life will seem as if from a quaint, forgotten land.

In short, it's the *ordinariness* of it all, and the transience, that gradually dissolves the element of inspiration that had once made life interesting. The times I've felt most satisfied were when I was writing something I thought had merit, because it was as if I was ("permanently") putting truth and profundity into the world, as if I was "*beautifully objectifying*" myself—being validated by Reality itself. But that's only a pleasant conceit, and one that fades as you grow older.

Nor does it help, in my case, that I've always been susceptible to depression, and to doubt of my own reality (I'm sort of a detached observer). Still, I can't be the only one who sometimes thinks that, notwithstanding all one's experiences and world travels, not enough has really *happened* in life. Not enough moments of deep love; not enough meaningful connections with other people; not enough "adventures" of various sorts. Lately there's been a lot of "running on autopilot." I need a change, but what sort of change isn't entirely clear.

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[1] Well, strictly speaking, that isn't true. Nothing has positive or negative value *in itself*. But it certainly is easy to think of nature as being beautiful and magnificent in many ways.

[2] More specifically, *in retrospect* life may seem rather short, though while you're living it it can seem terribly long.

Well, whether I like it or not, a change is coming by the end of this year: I'm going to be a father. Thanks to a tryst with my ex-wife. I don't know how involved I'll be with raising the child, but conceivably fatherhood will make my life seem more meaningful. And yet, bringing a person into this world… By nature I'm actually quite cheerful, believe it or not, but I recall some hilariously dark thoughts I once wrote:

> When you bring someone into this world, you introduce them to suffering. A lifetime of suffering. I don't see how Buddhists are wrong about that. Or how Schopenhauer is wrong. You come into the world in pain and you leave the world in pain. In between, you experience more than your fair share of pain.
>
> At this point in history, there is no need to elaborate on these claims. Just read Schopenhauer or the Buddhists. Or use your common sense. Either you end up with the dull drumbeat of ordinary middle-class unhappiness or you suffer misery. It depends where you were born, in what circumstances, who your parents were, how lucky or unlucky you were in life. Indefinitely many horrible things might happen to you. Or maybe you'll get lucky and you'll merely have a boring career, a couple of annoying children, thousands of lonely hours, and get cancer at an old age and die painfully. That's not so bad compared to some of the alternatives.
>
> The supreme act of love is to refrain from conceiving a child. It is a beautiful, unselfish act of pure kindness.
>
> Think of what a contribution you've made to the world, how much suffering you've subtracted from it (ahead of time, as it were), by not having a child. It is virtually a holy thing, a saintly thing. To save one life is to save the world entire. You save a life by not creating it.
>
> Even if you have children, your not having had more of them is noble. Whenever a man doesn't ejaculate inside a woman, he can imagine the millions of little people in his semen thanking him that they will not exist. To masturbate, far from being immoral (as religious loons sometimes think), is a moral act! Or at least more so than impregnating a woman.
>
> To have an abortion is moral, humane, compassionate…

A one-sided point of view, to say the least, but not without a particle of merit. I hope my child's life doesn't provide more support for those grim thoughts!

Meanwhile, I'll be publishing (*not* self-publishing) a book next year—a version of my Ph.D. thesis—which I suppose will be satisfying.

I'm aware that, in a sense, everything I'm saying here is just a lot of unseemly complaining. I don't have much right to complain. That's one of the many things I like about Noam Chomsky, for example: he is without self-pity, he's a hyper-rational machine who cares only about what is true and what is right. He has remarked that existentialism—which in its concern with subjectivity, anguish, death, and the like is sort of a philosophical expression of human self-pity—doesn't resonate with him, which is exactly what you'd expect from someone who doesn't have an iota of cultural or psychological decadence. He's like a Bach fugue. He's a pure scientist: a scientist of language, of the mind, of society, and, most importantly, a scientist of morality, a rigorous and consistent paragon of morality. Life is what it is, often difficult and sometimes horrible but not in itself an evil, just a neutral thing that we experience and should make the best of. What's the use of whining about it?

Moreover, insofar as I'm unsatisfied, it has more than a little to do with my own issues and is, to some degree, my own fault. I'm not as good a writer as I'd like; I'm not as hard a worker as I should be; my original life goals were wildly unreasonable to begin with (as I knew), and in any case I'm still fairly young; if I find it hard to take pleasure in many things, that's *my* problem, not *yours*; whatever malfunctions there might be in my brain chemistry are, again, my own problem, not something general that should interest others. As a Marxist, I'm perfectly aware that each of us is *situated*: our experiences, perceptions, and thoughts emerge from *particular* conditions, particular economic, social, and psychological conditions that

largely determine our discontent. It isn't necessarily life itself that is the problem; it's the conditions that prevail in any given case.

Okay, fine. But the test is, do these sorts of existentialist thoughts resonate with others? If not, then I'm just a freak; if they do, then the particular conditions are to some extent general, perhaps resulting from the nature of capitalist society. They seem even more general than that, though, since similar grievances have motivated the lamentations of poets, philosophers, theologians, and others for millennia. I do have "my own issues," but it is plausible to suppose I'm just one of those people in whom the general grievances about the human condition are sharpened, because I had the misfortune to be born with a pathological sensitivity to the world's ridiculousness. As for the unbecoming nature of whining about "the human condition" (or "the modern condition"), well, can't we permit ourselves a little bit of whining now and then? I think we're entitled to it.

I'm 40, the age of the midlife crisis. I recall the comedian Jim Gaffigan's joke about being in your 40s:

> It's amazing how our attitude on alcohol changes. Even as a teenager, you know it's wrong. You're like, "You know, I don't like the taste of it, but I want to look cool." And then in your twenties, you're like, "You know what, this kind of gives me confidence to talk to the opposite sex." And then in your forties you're like, "You know what, this is the only thing I like about being alive." [Uproarious laughter from the audience.] It's only funny 'cause it's true.

You still have a lot of living left to do, but you're less excited and interested than you used to be, so you're in an awkward position. How are you going to spend the rest of your life? That's the question that occupies me now, especially considering I'll surely never get a tenure-track job—I don't even know if I want one—and I don't want to spend the rest of my life on year-long contracts or the like. But most non-academic options aren't very attractive either.

Aside from the career questions that plague young generations now, there are the more intimate, sad psychological facts of middle age hinted at by Gaffigan's joke. Once again, I think of Byron:

> But now at thirty years my hair is gray—
> (I wonder what it will be like at forty?
> I thought of a peruke the other day)
> My heart is not much greener; and, in short, I
> Have squander'd my whole summer while 'twas May,
> And feel no more the spirit to retort; I
> Have spent my life, both interest and principal,
> And deem not, what I deem'd, my soul invincible.
>
> No more—no more—Oh! Never more on me
> The freshness of the heart can fall like dew,
> Which out of all the lovely things we see
> Extracts emotions beautiful and new,
> Hived in our bosoms like the bag o' the bee:
> Think'st thou the honey with those objects grew?
> Alas! 'twas not in them, but in thy power
> To double even the sweetness of a flower.
>
> No more—no more—Oh! never more, my heart,
> Canst thou be my sole world, my universe!
> Once all in all, but now a thing apart,
> Thou canst not be my blessing or my curse:

> The illusion's gone forever, and thou art
> Insensible, I trust, but none the worse,
> And in thy stead I've got a deal of judgment,
> Though heaven knows how it ever found a lodgment.

The freshness of the heart, the freshness of life, is gone. But at least Byron had lived intensely, had had fame, wealth, innumerable love affairs, incredible highs and lows. It's probably more painful for people who feel as if they *haven't* lived enough and yet by their late 30s are weary and bedraggled anyway, the victims of epidemic social atomization, the petty bureaucratic hassles of contemporary life, colossal waste of nervous energy over decades, the weight of *postmodern unreality*—the unbearable lightness of postmodern being. (I just thought of Billy Joel's song "Running on Ice": not the greatest of songs, but expressive of this existential syndrome, particularly from the urban perspective that dominates life today.) I rarely knew the freshness of the heart, of youthful love, despite being a great romantic who pined for it. And now the time is long past when I could have felt it, so…the only thing is to just move on, cut your losses, keep looking ahead, fight the good fight—whatever cliché you like.

Meanwhile, as Gaffigan said, be grateful that alcohol exists.

The idea of getting older is, perhaps, especially uncomfortable for me because in my essence I'm somewhat of a child. That really is the key to my identity, I think. Not that anyone should be interested in me, but, hypothetically speaking, if they were, they would have to start with my childlikeness. There's a Jim Carrey-esque silliness in me, and it may be this trait, this ingrained humorous attitude, that leads me to see silliness everywhere in the adult world.[1] There's nothing wrong with that, I suppose, but, as I indicated earlier, it does make it hard for me to take seriously the pursuit of professional and worldly status, honors, "success." My youthfulness means that most things that matter to me are internal; whatever is "external," from quotidian responsibilities (e.g., grocery shopping, a dreaded imposition) to professional goals, seems false and unsatisfying. Doubtless this fact, incidentally, is yet another reason I can't help but think "life is a dream," to quote the title of Calderón's famous play.

Childlike interiority: I think that helps explain the difficulties of quite a few people in adjusting to modern life, and to aging. The world can seem external and alien, not only in the ways it does sometimes to everyone but in a deeper, "ontologically insecure" way. The psychoanalyst R. D. Laing used this concept of ontological insecurity to analyze schizoid and schizophrenic patients, whom he interpreted as being divided between a true, "inner" self and a false, "outer" self. But it isn't only in the extremes of schizophrenia that you find a sort of intense interiority that can interfere with the enjoyment of anything that doesn't emerge organically from one's inner life. A lot of "creative people" likely suffer from this condition—a condition that's largely responsible, by the way, for the popular association of creativity with madness. "No excellent soul is without a tincture of madness," Aristotle said; or in the words of John Dryden, "Great wits to madness sure are near allied / And thin partitions do their bounds divide." Being too much in your own head can take both constructive and destructive forms.

One "destructive" form, for example, is that the process of aging can seem surreal and paradoxical. You still feel rather young and immature (though tired) on the inside, but you're old and decrepit on the outside. Indeed, the continuity of life is disturbing: instead of there being some sort of break between youth and maturity, or some process whereby you wholly shed your immaturity and become a Fully Grown Adult, you really just feel kind of young—at least in my case—your whole life. It's like you're a 25-year-old who

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[1] I've given examples of such silliness in other blog posts, but here's (a non-political) one I was just reminded of after seeing a picture of the fat-headed gorilla Donald Trump: *ceteris paribus*, being a man with a large head confers great advantages with respect to social presence, confidence, people's impressions of you, "charisma," sexual success, etc. Think of how often "leaders," for instance American presidents—from FDR to Bill Clinton—have large heads. People tend (though it's only a *tendency*) to be more attracted to big-bodied and big-headed men, because size matters: it communicates dominance. Humans are, after all, mere animals, beastly primates, in some ways more pathetic than any other species because of their self-deceiving pretensions and indescribable idiocies (for which, unlike other animals, they don't have the excuse that they lack the capacity for abstract, symbolic thought).

gets older and older while staying approximately 25, never becoming a "different person." At 70 I'll feel like a very old young man, the same person as decades earlier but bizarrely wrinkled, weary, and weak. How different from what I used to imagine aging would be like!

Lest I seem overly negative, however, I should note that whatever disadvantages there are to having a juvenile and abstract cast of mind may be outweighed by the advantages. It can be pleasant to exist on a rarefied plane above daily cares, professional worries, material grievances, the phlegmatic character of the self-serious adult mind. My boyish curiosity gives me more insight into people than they have into themselves, these lumbering mental hippopotamuses who are far more *particular* than *universal*. (Stupidity is particular, utterly immersed in itself; intelligence incorporates others.)[1] It's also pleasant to have the sort of childlike aesthetic detachment that makes it possible to, say, experience inexpressible joy listening to Beethoven's Fourth Symphony, a pure love of life that makes you want to dance around the streets just to contain the frantic energy bubbling up from your heart. This aesthetic receptivity, thank God, is something that will never leave me—life would be very gray without my love of music.

Anyway, in the end, whatever advantages or disadvantages there are to my particular "situation"—my own situatedness—my only firm conclusion is that it's all a mystery to me. Like Socrates and Byron, I know only that I don't know. Why or how we're here in the first place, what this thing called "time" is, why people are so callous and cruel, how one is supposed to keep trudging on even into one's 80s or 90s, what the grim future will look like, what my child's life will look like…I don't have answers to any of these, not meaningful answers. I'm still almost as full of wonder and bewilderment as I was in my teenage years.

There are certain pat things I could say here, nuggets of pseudo-wisdom. For instance, it's clear that the very enterprise I'm engaged in with this blog post is unhealthy, this stance of stepping back from life and abstractly evaluating it: it's decadent and unnatural, in itself already symptomatic of alienation. You should just *live*, throw yourself into life without fixating too much on its underlying "conditions" (mortality, transience, chance, frequent loneliness, injustice, "absurdity"). As Nietzsche always insisted, the naïve and spontaneous attitude is healthier than the navel-gazing attitude. The latter indeed fosters the discontent that it thrives on! It's like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

But how a thinking person is supposed to avoid asking these sorts of questions, and sometimes fixating on them, is beyond me.

I don't know what the future holds for me. I've thought about dipping my toe into freelance journalism, likely in the labor sector. I could try to write articles of "commentary" that are more serious than most of what I've published. My mind, by its nature, will always be more comfortable with and interested in abstract philosophical questions than concrete political ones, but the latter are of more human significance and infinitely more urgent in the twenty-first century than the former, so I just have to adapt. I might even try to re-embrace academic historical research, although I find it more satisfying and socially relevant to write short pieces that aren't necessarily read by an academic audience. (An immense amount of work goes into a scholarly paper, but how many people read it?? Its primary use is to be another item on your CV.)

To get even more personal than I've already been: last year, feeling a bit discouraged, I tried taking the drug ketamine in the hope that it would jumpstart the rusty old engine in my head and reintroduce me to life. No such luck. The four doses I took over several weeks at least brought on some fascinating experiences. A recent article in the *New York Times* described the experience well: "the room dissolved around me in a transcendent swirl of lucid dreaming. I traveled backward in time, inhabiting memories in a pleasantly detached manner. I traveled forward, too, and visited places I'd never been. It felt as though I'd shed my corporeal form and was melding into the fabric of the universe." It was wonderfully trippy, especially as I was listening to a beautiful trippy soundtrack the treatment center had curated. The boundaries of my 'being' dissolved as I was suffused by an expansive love for everyone and everything, a longing to show people how sublime life is. Time dilated: ten minutes felt like an hour, or maybe two

[1] But most "intelligent" people are no less deluded, in their own way, than those who are judged unintelligent. The kind of intelligence that is wholly and ironically aware of itself, genuinely self-insightful, is rare.

hours—I really had no notion of time. I felt "enlightened," albeit disoriented and overwhelmed by the cacophony of thoughts and feelings that flowed together with the music.

Pleasant after-effects lingered for days, perhaps weeks, but no longer. So that was that. It wouldn't be so easy to jolt me out of my inertia.

But, as with most people, the satisfaction and the dissatisfaction come and go; the contentment and the sadness come and go. Most of us manage to muddle through. We find ways to occupy ourselves for eight or nine decades. At the end we look back and think, "Wow. That was a lot. But it went by rather quickly. And now, whatever it all was, it's over…" –*How terribly strange to be seventy*, to quote Simon and Garfunkel. I'll let those two old poets have the last words:

> Time it was, and what a time it was, it was
> A time of innocence, a time of confidences.
> Long ago it must be, I have a photograph—
> Preserve your memories: they're all that's left you.

Well, until we're on our deathbed, we have to push these kinds of thoughts out of our mind, just keep living, keep struggling ("life is struggle," Marx said), keep being honest with ourselves and others, and keep spreading compassion, of which the world has too little.

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Strikes, walkouts, and sickouts:
How working-class Americans are organizing in the time of Covid-19
(An interview with *Counterfire*)

Hi Chris, thanks so much for taking time to speak with Counterfire. You're based in New York City, please can you tell us about the rent strike there? What prompted this action and how has this been organised in the current circumstances?

Most states, including New York, have instituted a moratorium on evictions for a few months, but that's a pathetically insufficient response. What are tenants who can't pay supposed to do when the moratorium is over? (In the meantime, by the way, many are still being pressured and intimidated and threatened by landlords.) They'll have to pay the back rent they owe, without having the means to do so. As a result, tenants all over the country are organizing rent strikes largely as a way to pressure elected representatives to take their plight seriously. Of course, most of these tenants can't pay their rent anyway—and obviously millions of people who aren't consciously participating in a strike won't be able to pay. But organized collective action sends a message, in addition to de-atomizing and "empowering" people who would otherwise feel helpless and alone. It also pressures landlords to collectively bargain with tenants.

Rent strikes—not only in New York—are being organized in all kinds of ways. Some of them are very micro-scale, involving a few dozen tenants in one building or several buildings owned by the same landlord. For example, in one case in Brooklyn, a couple of tenants put up signs in the hallways of their building, which led to a group chat and recruiting people door-to-door. They wrote a letter to the landlord, a large company that was bullying and threatening tenants who couldn't pay rent. Initially they were ignored, but once the tenants' union had solidified, a clear set of demands emerged: forgiveness of rent and late fees, the completion of repairs, recognition of their union, etc. Meanwhile, they've been in touch with lawyers and politicians.

For a clearer example of a landlord's nauseating greed, we can turn to Columbia University, the largest private landowner in New York City. Columbia is both employer and landlord for its graduate students, so it has the power to cancel their rent and/or raise their salary. In its infinite wisdom—corresponding to its

nearly infinite endowment—it has declined to reduce or cancel the rent this summer for students who have lost access to various funding sources. This is despite its waiving of April and May rents for commercial (as opposed to residential) tenants. So hundreds of Columbia students have organized a rent strike, with the assistance of social media (e.g., Facebook groups).

On a larger scale, grassroots groups like New York Communities for Change and the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence have organized virtual meetings with tenants to coordinate rent strikes, the ultimate goal being to put such economic pressure on landlords that legislators will be forced to comprehensively address the crisis. In New York, the Upstate/Downstate Housing Alliance, along with many other groups, has organized tenants in scores of buildings statewide and launched a petition vowing to withhold rent until the state meets three demands: freeze rents, cancel rent for the duration of the public health crisis, and permanently house the homeless. In the aggregate, this appears to be the largest rent strike in nearly a century.

A national organization called Rent Strike 2020 has called for a suspension of rent, mortgage, and utility bill collection in all states. Tenant-rights organizations in cities from L.A. to Philadelphia to Chicago to D.C. are coordinating strikes; a campaign called We Strike Together is trying to keep track of all the action, which has involved hundreds of thousands of households across the country.

The power of social media—Facebook groups, Twitter hashtags, Zoom meetings—to facilitate resistance to the capitalist class that itself owns these media is impressive and encouraging. It's hard to see how governors and legislators will be able to ignore all this mounting pressure.

Here in Britain, it feels as though the pandemic is revealing a lot about society and how it's really organised. On the one hand, the relentless – deadly – drive for profit, but on the other who are the real key workers that keep everything running. As in the UK, it's BLAME people who are suffering disproportionately, which exposes a lot about racism and exploitation. Would you say that people's ideas are being changed by this crisis?

At this early date, it's hard to say for sure how people are responding or will respond. With regard to racism and xenophobia, in the U.S. there's been some of that. On one hand we have Trump's farcical attacks on China for having bred the pandemic or even (so it's said) creating the virus in a Wuhan lab—transparent attempts to shift the blame for his administration's catastrophic response. On the other hand, Asian-Americans have reported a rise in harassment and discrimination. That's a real concern, which could very well lead to a rash of hate crimes around the country. But, broadly speaking, I think only the lunatic-right fringe has promoted anything like racism. For all the problems with identity politics, that's one thing we can be grateful for: racism has become disreputable here, such that only the most vulgar and vicious of political figures will promote it.

On the positive side, it appears that people are indeed growing more aware of how society is organized, for example by seeing the contrast between the federal government's munificence towards the wealthy and miserliness towards everyone else. It's a lesson we learned in 2008–09, and we're learning it again now. Millions of the unemployed have had difficulties receiving the benefits they're entitled to; medical workers have been appalled by governments' inability to provide personal protective equipment, test kits, ventilators, and other supplies; companies have treated their employees with utter callousness, often refusing to grant hazard pay or paid sick leave. Popular discontent is certainly increasing, which tends to bode well for the left.

I don't think most people are "victim-blaming" or blaming Asians. I think they're blaming the Trump administration, the rich, and a dysfunctional political economy.

We've been hearing about strikes, walkouts and stay aways taking place in workplaces that have been notorious for appalling working conditions, from Amazon warehouses to meat processing

plants. Please could you tell us about this and whether this represents a renewed working-class confidence?

I don't know if it represents confidence; I'm inclined to say it represents intense frustration and anger. It will probably be years before confidence and optimism begin to motivate large numbers of workers in their confrontations with bosses. But it's true that the upsurge of strikes in the last couple of years—in 2018, more workers went on strike than in any year since 1986—in addition to Bernie Sanders' presidential campaigns, has begun to shift people's perceptions of what's possible. Five years ago, I doubt there would have been such an eruption of wildcat strikes. It also helps that people in these non-white-collar jobs are being told their work is essential, they're even heroes. And their bargaining power has increased, given that their employers (Amazon, Instacart, grocery stores) are in high demand right now.

The escalating strike wave is remarkable. In the last couple of months, hundreds of strikes, sickouts, and walkouts have occurred. Whole Foods, Target, McDonald's, Taco Bell, Walmart, FedEx, Ford, Uber, and many other big-name companies, in addition to meatpacking plants, agribusinesses, trucking companies, and smaller stores, have seen labor actions. The causes have been various: in many cases, workers haven't been adequately protected from the virus; in others, they have demanded hazard pay or have protested low wages; a common demand is for paid sick leave and compensation for unpaid time off. Unions, workers' rights groups, and organizers with the Fight for 15 campaign have helped coordinate many of these actions, but in other cases workers themselves have organized walkouts, with the help of social media. They've racked up some victories, and it's likely that more will come.

Crises like the pandemic present opportunities for both the exploiters and the exploited, the ruling class and the working class. The coming years will doubtless see a reinvigoration of the same old fiscal austerity and heavy-handed repression. But I'm optimistic that, even in the midst of all this, popular resistance will, at long last, start to shift the momentum to the workers.

One of the other things we've been hearing about, of course, is the staggering and rapidly mounting unemployment figure. How is the left responding to this challenge?

What the left *should* do is what the Communist Party did in the 1930s: organize the unemployed. We should have Unemployed Councils in urban neighborhoods organizing people to demonstrate, to block traffic, to picket outside power centers and politicians' homes, demanding public works projects, generous unemployment insurance, a universal basic income, rent control, etc. Especially once social distancing measures are relaxed, local organizations should devote resources to building tenants' unions that can negotiate with landlords and help lobby governments. And of course national organizations should pressure the government in all possible ways, including by direct action, to launch a Green New Deal or other programs that can employ millions.

The left everywhere is perennially cursed by inadequate resources—which is a major reason for its continual defeats—but I think much of the left has been doing a creditable job of advocating for the unemployed. Left media are doing what they can to highlight the suffering of those who have been laid off, publishing stories about the frequent impossibility of getting unemployment benefits and people's loss of their employer-based health insurance (at the worst of times, during a pandemic). Unions are fighting to limit layoffs and ensure their laid-off members receive the benefits they're due.

Everyone knows the U.S. lacks a visible left on the national stage—except for Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and a few other leaders. But these few national leaders, supported, as always, by an army of grassroots organizations, have resisted Republican sociopathy. Sanders and others were able to force Congress to include in the CARES Act some much-needed relief for those out of a job, such as four months of receiving $600 a week on top of whatever unemployment insurance their state gives them, as well as a one-time payment of $1,200 for people earning less than $75,000. They've tried to get much more than this, for example monthly $2,000 payments, but Republican opposition makes it impossible.

In general, the left seems to be doing what it can to support the sort of agenda Bernie Sanders has publicized. It's also lobbying state governments to raise taxes on the wealthy so as to avoid brutal austerity measures.

In both the US and the UK we have dangerous complacent political leaders who are endangering lives on a mass scale. In December we suffered the blow of the election result which saw probably the most progressive leader ever of the Labour Party ousted and replaced by a centrist who has already proved himself no ally of working people in this crisis. Then, just as the Coronavirus crisis began to explode, we watched as Bernie Sanders pulled out, leaving Joe Biden as the default Democratic candidate. But in the UK, the government's handling of the crisis has prompted widespread opposition and support for workers' rights. Would you say that something similar is happening in the US – that despite what's been happening at the top of politics, there's a real crisis in right-wing ideas and a growing popularity for socialist solutions?

I certainly think socialist solutions are becoming more popular, especially among the young. I see this in the students I teach at the City University of New York, most of whom seem to take it for granted that capitalism is in dire need of radical reforms, if not a systemic overhaul.

One of the ironies of history is that great leaps in moral progress often require that things first get radically worse. The Great Depression and (especially) World War II, which mobilized the left on an unprecedented scale, made possible postwar social democracy, which was a significant improvement compared to what had existed before. Likewise, I think that the coming years of global crisis will create the conditions for growth of the international left and delegitimation of the trite ideas of neoliberals. To speak as a Marxist, neoliberalism, through its contradictions and catastrophic consequences, has prepared the ground for its own "dialectical" transcendence, by means of the agency of working (and unemployed) people. Capitalism is showing its true nature, and fewer and fewer people will continue to be deceived by its apologists.

Fascist and nationalist ideas aren't in the same sort of crisis as center-right ideas, and the right will surely continue to grow internationally. Demonization of minorities, foreigners, "out-of-touch leftists," etc. never gets old. But, as I've argued elsewhere, the longer the right stays in power, the more popular the left will get. Virtually by definition, right-wing policies lead, sooner or later, to societal collapse. (It was nonsensical propaganda when Margaret Thatcher said, "there's no such thing as society," but unwittingly she was communicating a truth: the hidden meaning of the right, with its fetish of markets ("externalities" be damned), privatization, and commodification, is that in the end there will be "no such thing as society," because it will be destroyed.) So there's always a backlash eventually—what Karl Polanyi would call a movement by "society" to "protect itself" (against the market). Less misleadingly: as people get more and more miserable under reactionary regimes, the prestige of left-wing ideas increases.

We can be sure neoliberal ideas will continue to straggle on for years, because the ruling class won't stop propagating them except under the most extreme duress. But the tide is beginning to turn, finally. The legitimacy of the status quo is almost completely shattered at this point.

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Adjudicating the Chomsky-Greenwald Dispute on Lesser-Evil Voting

The rituals of the political left are as predictable as they are puzzling. It's an election year, so we leftists have a sworn duty to reignite, for the 10,000th time, the debate about "lesser-evil voting." Glenn Greenwald recently made some comments on the matter, as did Noam Chomsky, and Bruce Levine weighed in in a *Counterpunch* column on June 19th, and other corners of the facebooking, tweeting, youtubing, altogether self-flogging left have delved into the dull topic, so I can't resist inserting my two cents too. In accord with my self-identification as #1 Fan of the Great Man, I want to defend the Chomskian point of view.

I won't summarize everything Greenwald, Chomsky, and Levine (who links to the relevant videos) say. What I want to do is just to implore those on the left to heed the suffocating nausea in their gut when, say, watching some such performance as Trump's in Tulsa on June 20th, and vote against the Infant Beast on November 3. Please. For the sake of the climate that Trump is passionate about destroying, and the children he is passionate about torturing, the immigrants he is passionate about excluding (including "legal" immigrants whom Obama and Biden never persecuted), the working class he is passionate about punishing, the public lands he is passionate about privatizing, the *elementary decency* he is passionate about violating—for the sake of all that is still worth salvaging in this broken world of ours, please vote against him. Vote to oust him. Which, by inescapable logic, means vote for Biden.

Are the two political parties the same? No. Are they even approximately the same? No. They're growing farther and farther apart, thanks to, on the one hand, the neofascism of the right, and on the other hand, the "democratic socialist" insurgency that has already elected leftists to Congress. The political center cannot hold; the momentum is on the right and the left, and the left has begun to drag even the most debased corporatists (Pelosi, Schumer, et al.) at least symbolically in its direction. Hence the ludicrous sight of capitalist minions draped in kente cloth kneeling on the floor of the Capitol. Hence Biden's relatively progressive policy platform. Hence the progressive bills the House passed in 2019, even before the left-populist wave became as visible as it has been in 2020.

The Democratic Party belongs to business, but there are different sectors of business. Just read Thomas Ferguson. There is "liberal" business and there is fascist business. Liberal business funded Franklin Roosevelt even after he had signed the Wagner and Social Security Acts in 1935 (in fact, it helped write them)—two legislative achievements that leftists have celebrated ever since. Liberal business supported the Great Society. If you look at history, every law that has significantly benefited the population was—of necessity—supported by some segment of the business community. Otherwise it wouldn't have gotten anywhere. It would be nice if we didn't need assistance or at least acquiescence from the liberal side of the ruling class in order to enact desperately needed reforms, but we're not remotely close to that point yet.

Biden is an obscenity, but he isn't a neofascist. That consideration alone should be decisive. He's done terrible things (so has Sanders, by the way), but the political context is changing. The Democrats of the 2020s will not be the Democrats of the 1990s. They won't be socialists either (except in rare cases), but we have to live in the real world. We have to oust the aspiring fascists before we can make really constructive changes. At the absolute least, we have to prevent things from getting drastically worse—which they will if Trump is reelected, and if Republicans hold the Senate.

What about Greenwald's argument that regularly voting for Democrats causes you to lose any leverage you might have over them? It is a powerful argument, and it is a major reason the Democratic Party has been able to virtually ignore organized labor for decades. But, again, in a time of a newly energized left, there are other ways to pressure politicians than by not voting for them on election day. For one thing, you can try to remove them in the primaries. Or you can—here's an idea—protest in the streets. (I wonder if that might have some success…) Or you can mob their offices or picket their homes or vandalize their neighborhoods or strike workplaces or flood their offices with phone calls or air negative advertisements or hire more lobbyists, etc. In the coming era of social crisis, the left will not lack for means of pressuring elected representatives.

What about the argument one always hears that lesser-evil voting has enabled the rightward drift of the Democratic Party over the last generation? First of all, a few hundred thousand or more votes here and there for a third party wouldn't have changed that, wouldn't have accomplished anything except electing Republicans—as it sometimes did (I find it bewildering that Ralph Nader can sleep at night). Which itself contributed to the rightward drift of politics. So there goes that argument. The overwhelming cause of Democrats' "rightward drift" hasn't been lesser evilism but the business community's massive mobilization since the 1970s against liberal policies. Hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of propaganda, of institution-building and -dismantling, of investment in armies of lobbyists, has moved the whole political system to the right. You think a little non-lesser-evil voting (among the tiny minority of conscious leftists) would have changed all that?

Here are just a few of the almost certain consequences of a Trump re-election: the judiciary will become ultra-reactionary for at least a generation; global warming and ecological destruction will *accelerate*, and may pass a point of no return; nationalism will triumph and the immigration system will be remade such that its sole purpose is to destroy as many lives as possible; higher education will become even more expensive and people will remain debilitated by debt their entire lives; in general, every social policy will veer into the domain of hyper-misanthropy. If you live in a swing state and you don't vote for Biden, even if you don't *want* any of these things to happen, you are increasing their likelihood.

I know it's appalling to contemplate submitting a ballot on which you've indicated support for a sexist, racist, imperialistic, business-loving villain like Biden. But if you want to live in a world of moral purity, take a one-way trip on the SpaceX Starship.

Bruce Levine, using a common talking point on the left, decries "fear-based decision-making." Lesser-evil voting is fear-based decision-making. Horror of horrors. Personally, I think fear is rational when we're faced with aspiring neofascism and the end of civilization in three generations. I freely admit I'm afraid of what Trump and the Republicans might do in the next four years. But I also have hope: I hope a leftist insurgency can pressure the Biden administration to make things better for a lot of people, and even to lay the groundwork for substantive action on global warming. As Chomsky is fond of saying, one can't predict the specifics of what the future will bring. Institutions change and are susceptible to popular pressure.

Levine's praise of the "integrity" of Briahna Joy Gray, among others, for denouncing Biden after Sanders had endorsed him is misplaced. Nothing is easier than to denounce someone like Biden. Look how easy it is: I revile Joe Biden. See? That was easy. It requires more courage to buck the tide of popular opinion (on the left) and plead with people to vote for someone as unappealing as that corrupt old corporatist. There is no loss of "integrity" in doing so, if one of your principles is that you care about the predictable consequences of your actions.

Chomsky's position is vastly more reasonable than Greenwald's.

"Gene Debs, Ralph Nader, and Briahna Joy Gray," Levine writes, "weren't ready to grovel in the dust, and those of us who have any energy should consider expending it supporting courageous people like them, as well as maintaining our own integrity and helping one another from becoming too broken to fight." What on earth is he talking about? Is it "groveling in the dust" to spend a few minutes voting for Biden and other Democrats on November 3? Does doing so make one too broken to fight? Maybe that's not what he meant. But I don't see why it arouses so much cognitive dissonance in so many people when you say: fight like hell all the time but vote to keep out the neofascists. There is nothing remotely inconsistent in that imperative.

There are, at long last, so many newly awakened leftists in this country that in the aggregate they can have a tangible effect on the elections. I hope they're able to swallow their understandable revulsion for Biden—and other corporate Democrats—and vote to kick out the fascists, making possible progressive legislation in the future.

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The Revolutionary Beethoven

(Published in *Dissent*)

Two hundred and fifty years after Beethoven's birth, we're faced with something of a paradox: his music is known and beloved all over the world, probably more than that of any other composer, even as its real significance is hardly ever remarked on except in critical studies largely unread by the public. Familiarity, it seems, has bred, not contempt but ignorance. We hear the famous melodies for the thousandth time, whether in movies, commercials, or concerts, melodies from the third, fifth, sixth, ninth or other symphonies, or from piano concertos and sonatas or pieces of chamber music, but the *cutting edge* of this music has been dulled through overuse. That is, we have forgotten, and no longer seem to hear, the intensely

political nature of Beethoven's music—its subversive, revolutionary, passionately democratic and *freedom*-exalting nature.

In the year of the great composer's 250th birthday, it would be fitting to recapture the music's essence, retune our ears to pick up its political and philosophical message. This is especially appropriate in our own time of democratic struggles against a corrupt and decaying *ancien régime*, a time of parallels with the Beethovenian era of revolution, hidebound reaction, and soaring hopes to realize "the rights of man." Beethoven belongs, heart and soul, to the political left. Centuries after his death, his music, especially if properly understood, still retains the power to transform, transfigure, and revivify, no matter how many political defeats its partisans and spiritual comrades suffer.

We might start with the most famous of Beethovenian motifs, the opening notes of the Fifth Symphony (1808). We've all heard the legend that they represent "fate knocking at the door." The source of this idea is Anton Schindler, Beethoven's notoriously unreliable secretary. Sir John Eliot Gardiner, world-renowned conductor, has a different interpretation: he detects the influence of Cherubini's revolutionary *Hymne du Panthéon* of 1794 in the famous notes. "We swear, sword in hand, to die for the Republic and for the rights of man," the chorus sings, to the rhythm of *da-da-da-duuum*. Beethoven was a great admirer of Cherubini, not to mention a devoted republican, so Gardiner's theory is hardly far-fetched. In the stultifyingly conservative and repressive Vienna of 1808, Beethoven issued a clarion call to revolution in the very opening notes of one of his most revolutionary, Napoleonic symphonies. No wonder conservatives detested his music!

Some biographical details are in order. Beethoven was a child of the Enlightenment and remained so his whole life. Bonn in the late eighteenth century was steeped in the most progressive thought of the age: Kant, the philosopher of freedom, was a lively subject of discussion at the university, as was his follower Schiller, the poet of freedom, impassioned enemy of tyrants everywhere. The young Beethoven was heavily influenced by Eulogius Schneider, whose lectures he attended: one of the most important of German Jacobins, Schneider was so radical that in 1791 he was kicked out of the liberal university, whereupon he joined the Jacobin Club in Strasbourg. (There, he was appointed public prosecutor for the Revolutionary Tribunal, enthusiastically sending aristocrats to the guillotine—until he lost his own head a couple years later.) Schneider's republicanism stayed with Beethoven, but it was Schiller whom Beethoven worshiped.

Schiller's poem "An die Freude," of course, impressed Beethoven immensely, given that he planned early on to set it to music and finally did so in the Ninth Symphony. But he was just as enamored of Schiller's idealistic, heroic plays, such as *The Robbers*, *William Tell*, and *Don Carlos*. In marginal notations on the latter play, he jotted down his own thoughts as a young man: "To do good whenever one can, to love liberty above all else, never to deny the truth, even though it be before the throne." Decades later, we find him exclaiming in a letter, "Freedom!!!! What more does one want???" In a similar vein, he once wrote to a friend, "From my earliest childhood, my zeal to serve our poor suffering humanity in any way whatsoever by means of my art has made no compromise with any lower motive. I am thoroughly delighted," he continued, "to have found in you a friend of the oppressed." The historian Hugo Leichtentritt concludes, "Beethoven was a passionate democrat, even in his youth; he was, in fact, the first German musician who had strong political interests, ideals, and ambitions."

Indeed, his first significant composition was his *Cantata on the Death of Joseph II*, a heartfelt and moving tribute to the enlightened reformer who died in 1790. Beethoven, who always disliked hierarchy, was wholly in sympathy with Joseph's attacks on the power of the Catholic Church and the Austrian aristocracy. His contempt for aristocrats was such that, years later, he was able to write an insulting note to his most generous benefactor, Prince Lichnowsky: "Prince, what you are, you are by circumstance and birth; what I am, I am through myself. There are, and always will be, thousands of princes; but there is only one Beethoven." Even his fashion sense was democratic. A woman who knew him wrote a reminiscence of his behavior in aristocratic Viennese salons: "I still remember clearly Haydn and Salieri sitting on a sofa…both carefully dressed in the old-fashioned way with wig, shoes, and silk stockings, while Beethoven would come dressed in the informal fashion of the other side of the Rhine, almost badly dressed." Corresponding to this was the fact that he was "without manners in both gesture and demeanor. He was

very haughty. I myself saw the mother of Princess Lichnowsky…go down on her knees to him as he lolled on the sofa, begging him to play something. But Beethoven did not."

One reason for Beethoven's decades-long fascination with Napoleon was that the latter was not an aristocrat, that he was the "little corporal" who had conquered Europe by his own efforts. "He admired Napoleon's ascent from such a low beginning," remarked a French officer he befriended in 1809. "It suited his democratic ideas." On the other hand, Napoleon's crowning himself Emperor certainly did not suit Beethoven's ideas, as we know from the anecdote of how he furiously tore up the title page of the *Eroica* Symphony (1803), which he had originally intended—incredibly, given the political repression in Vienna—to title *Buonaparte*. "So he is nothing more than an ordinary man!" Beethoven raged. "Now he too will trample underfoot all the rights of man…and become a tyrant!" And yet twenty years later, in the thick of the Restoration, his views had softened: "earlier I couldn't have tolerated him [Napoleon]. Now I think completely differently." However bad Napoleon was, he wasn't the despised Emperor Francis II—or, even worse, Metternich.

The *Eroica* is arguably the most revolutionary of Beethoven's symphonies, which may be why it remained his favorite, at least until the Ninth. John Clubbe, author of *Beethoven: The Relentless Revolutionary* (2019), believes the famous first two chords, which crash like cannon shots, are indeed supposed to represent the cannon fired by Napoleon's armies as they marched across Europe carrying the banner of revolution. "The chords recall the world of the [French] Revolution: exuberant, over-the-top, colossal. They are wake-up calls to jolt [the] somnolent audiences" in Vienna and elsewhere—for Beethoven loathed the complacent, apolitical, frivolous Viennese of his day, intimidated by repression and censorship into sybaritic silence. The symphony is full of the techniques of disruption that have come to be considered quintessentially Beethovenian, including sudden dynamic contrasts, extreme dissonance, colossal noise, massive dimensions, density of ideas, bursting of forms and conventions, even an extra French horn to conjure the atmosphere of revolution. All of it together serves to communicate the abiding essence of Beethoven's music: *struggle*, ending in triumph. It is not mere personal struggle, such as his struggle against deafness; it is collective, universal, timeless struggle, a war against limits, so to speak—artistic, creative, moral, political, even spatial and temporal. Gardiner's characterization is apt: Beethoven represents the struggle to bring the divine down to Earth, a struggle he shares with revolutionaries everywhere. (Gardiner contrasts this with Bach and Mozart, the first representing the divine *on* Earth, the second giving us the music you would hear in heaven.)

Theodor Adorno was surely right when he said, "If we listen to Beethoven and do not hear anything of the revolutionary bourgeoisie—not the echo of its slogans, the need to realize them, the cry for that totality in which reason and freedom are to have their warrant—we understand Beethoven no better than does one who cannot follow the purely musical content of his pieces." The man was so political that, by the end of his life, some of his friends refused to dine with him: either they were bored of his constant politicizing or they feared police spies would overhear him. "You are a *revolutionary*, a *Carbonaro*," a friend of his wrote in his conversation book in 1823, referring to an Italian secret society that had played a role in various national uprisings. Well past the point that it had become (to his contemporaries) anachronistic, Beethoven kept the Enlightenment faith.

It is beyond the scope of this article to trace Beethoven's hortatory humanism through all its musical permutations, from the bucolic poetry of the Sixth Symphony (he had a nearly pantheistic love of nature) to the "peace that passeth understanding" of the final piano sonata, with the dazzling variety of forms and content in between. We can hardly ignore, however, the one opera he wrote, whether in its initial form (as *Leonore*) or its final form almost ten years later (1814) as *Fidelio* (which he wanted to dedicate, much like Lord Byron, to the Greek freedom fighters in their war against the Ottoman Empire). Here was a chance for the great democrat to express his convictions in words, not only music. And the words, music, and plot of the opera are unambiguous: in them "the Revolution is not depicted but reenacted as in a ritual," to quote Adorno.

Fidelio gives free rein to Beethoven's unalloyed idealism, as the choral movement of the Ninth Symphony would do a decade later. The plot is simple (and ostensibly based on actual events that occurred during the French Revolution). Leonore, disguised as a young man named Fidelio, gets a job at a prison

where she suspects her husband Florestan is being held for political reasons. He is, in fact, being slowly starved to death in the dungeon for having denounced the crimes of the prison's governor, Pizarro. The minister Don Fernando will arrive the next day to investigate accusations of cruelty in the prison, so Pizarro resolves to kill Florestan in order to keep his existence and unjust imprisonment a secret. Fidelio and a few others are sent to the dungeon to dig a grave; meanwhile, they set most of the prisoners free, at least temporarily, to gather in the courtyard and see the sun once again. At last the time is come for Pizarro to kill Florestan: he approaches with a dagger, but Fidelio leaps between him and Florestan and reveals herself, to everyone's shock, as Leonore. She threatens Pizarro with a pistol, but at that moment a distant bugle is heard, announcing the arrival of the benevolent minister. Pizarro ends up imprisoned himself, as Leonore frees Florestan from his chains and is celebrated for her heroism by the crowd of emancipated prisoners.

The symbolism and allegorical meanings of the opera are not hard to discern. Beethoven believed in the courage and heroism of women just as much as men, and was just as affected by its contemplation and depiction. He was, in fact, a lifelong child, as sincere and pure in his values—as well as in his "utterly untamed personality" (quoting Goethe)—as a naïve boy reading Schiller for the first time. Doubtless it is this quality that so moves audiences, that inspires flash mobs with millions of views on YouTube, and that has made his music immortal. The greatest art is always *affirmative* in spirit, and no one is more profoundly affirmative—or more entitled to affirmation, in light of his terrible suffering—than Beethoven.

The spirit of his music is as simple as the spirits of his models (he insisted) Socrates and Jesus: good will triumph over evil; cherish freedom but live with moral seriousness, always challenging authority; love your fellow human beings, not parochially, as in the mode of nationalism, but universally; never compromise your ideals or integrity; above all, *struggle for emancipation*. "Freedom remained the fundamental motif of Beethoven's thought and music," Clubbe writes.

Lest a political conservative misinterpret this last point, I must insist that "freedom" for Beethoven did not mean the freedom to try to start a business, to rent yourself to a corporation (on pain of starving), or to enjoy the wealth you have inherited. These are deeply impoverished "freedoms," however glorified they may be in the rhetoric of modern conservatism. Richer is the republican freedom to participate actively in politics, or the freedom to create and think and speak what you will, where you will. Politics "as the art of creating society, a society that will express a richer and fuller life," was Beethoven's favorite theme, according to his biographer W. J. Turner. Indeed, there is something incongruous about the attendance of the lavishly dressed moneyed elite at public concerts of Beethoven symphonies or concertos, given the music's expression of the revolutionary, democratic, humanitarian spirit the elite's existence is premised on crushing. But such are the ironies that result when the historical specificity of art is denied or forgotten and all that is left is a vague feeling of aesthetic enjoyment.

Still, even the pure aesthetic enjoyment is significant. The music is exquisitely beautiful in the mode of *invigoration*: no composer in history is more humanistic than Beethoven. As Leonard Bernstein once said,

> No composer has ever lived who speaks so directly to so many people, to young and old, educated and ignorant, amateur and professional, sophisticated and naïve. To all these people, of all classes, nationalities, and racial backgrounds, this music speaks a universality of thought, of human brotherhood, freedom, and love.

That even our modern aristocrats and reactionaries can love Beethoven, however perversely, suggests just how universal his music is.

Let us, then, turn again with fresh ears and open minds to "the first great democrat of music," in the words of Ferruccio Busoni. Let us draw inspiration from him in our own struggles to humanize and democratize the world. And let's be sure not to forget, in the cultural wasteland that is twenty-first-century America, the nobler aspects of our civilization's heritage.

Admirers of Richard Wagner's music have been known to call it the "Music of the Future." Let's hope that Beethoven's is the real Music of the Future, and that humanity one day will be free.

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Personal Reflections on Anarchism

Anarchism (anti-authoritarianism, love of freedom) is an essential thing, an essential guide for our thinking and action, but I have to admit I'm sometimes struck by what I see as the lack of acuity of a lot of anarchist thinkers. I've been reading the massive book *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, by Peter Marshall (second edition published in 2008)—a very good book—and came across this paragraph in the Epilogue:

> Post-modernist thinkers tend to be libertarians [*not* in the right-wing American sense] rather than anarchists. Michel Foucault for one maintains that power in the sense of "a mode of action upon the action of others" is everywhere and cannot be escaped, whether in the arena of society or in the realm of knowledge. While the relations of domination can be changed, the relations of power will always remain. Where anarchists seek to dissolve the structures of power, for Foucault it is senseless to try to create a world outside power: "there are no margins for those who break with the system to gambol in." Indeed, in his view power does not emanate from the State but the State from power: the State is thus a congealed assemblage of power relations.

Ugh. This is why Chomsky insists the social sciences have little intellectual content. These claims are merely truisms, and yet they're seen as controversial and even original. (Actually, the very idea of "originality" is yet another simplistic and artificial scholarly convention. No one is really original, and everyone is. All "thinkers" get ideas from a vast array of sources, and even profound writers like Kant or Marx or Chomsky are less original than we're inclined to think. Thinkers can be more or less *insightful. That's* a more meaningful designation than "original.")

As I've written elsewhere, it's sadly obvious that we can't achieve the anarchist goal of doing away with power. Even in the most egalitarian tribal societies, there have always been subtle relations of power and status based on force of personality, physical strength, intelligence, age (a child has less power than an adult, a younger adult often has less power than an older adult), and other non-institutional factors. That's part of the human condition. Women, for example, have always lived to some degree at the mercy of men, since men are typically much stronger and larger than they. That's a power relation. –Sorry if that's an "un-woke" thing to say, but it's true.

As for complex modern societies, no matter how decentralized or democratic or communistic we try to make them, there will always have to be institutions of *some* sort. And whenever you get an institution of some size, you're going to get roles that aren't all equal in status or power. Moreover, it's hard to imagine that in a complex, highly technological world civilization, even a future "democratic" or "socialist" one, there won't be institutional hierarchies anywhere. Surely, they'll be all over the place. Direct democracy, being sometimes impracticable, won't be able to govern *everything*; there will still have to be *representatives* in various contexts—political (or "administrative" if you prefer), economic, and so on. The principle of *delegation*. And you can't do away with an elaborate division of labor except in the simplest of societies. Large worker cooperatives will have to have elected directors of some sort, elected managers, "hierarchies" (albeit democratically grounded) of some form or other.

Various types of power, authority, and domination permeate every set of complex social circumstances. Why Foucault is respected and controversial for insisting on this trivial point, I have no idea.

But, characteristically, he had to fuse his "insight" with wrongheadedness: I see no reason to rule out the possibility that we can make society more libertarian (free), or that small groups of people can escape "the system" and live in more egalitarian circumstances than prevail all around us. We aren't all "prisoners" to the same degree. There are *different* systems of power in our civilization, some of them more egalitarian and libertarian than others. Foucault's pessimism, or at least his particular brand of pessimism,

is unwarranted. History offers countless examples of people freeing themselves from systems of oppression—even if it's true we can't free ourselves from power altogether.

Despite my skepticism that genuine anarchy on a large scale can ever be achieved, I'm a thorough and instinctual anarchist in my personality. Actually, I'm interested in probing this fact, so if I might indulge (self-indulgently) in some self-description for a moment.... I'm pretty much a lover of solitude, a hyper-individualist, largely set apart from society and all groups and organizations. To my frequent cost, I don't seem to really fit in anywhere. As a young leftist in the late 1990s I had no interest in the usual cultural tastes of young leftists, such as punk rock (awful!) or other "subversive" brands of popular music, or postmodern theory, etc. I was enamored of classical music, from Bach to, say, Tchaikovsky. (I had no use for twentieth-century classical music.) I was, and am, an arch-traditionalist, generally more appreciative of and interested in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than anything that came later. I adored Marx, having discovered his writings in my dad's office. I'd wager that no one in my town shared my adoration, and that at my high school graduation quite a few people in the audience were nonplussed or worse when I referenced Marx several times in a speech I gave. I was really a naïve boy who lived in his head.

I have a reflexive aversion to all things *institutional*. This aversion isn't entirely reasonable, but I've often felt vaguely suffocated in the academic environment, where freedom of thought isn't always encouraged. Academic events and writings are frequently celebrations of pretentiousness, groupthink, and intellectual perversity. (Leftists are as guilty of these things as everyone else, because most academic leftists have internalized the "proper" norms.) I'm usually quite polite and pleasant to authority figures, especially in academia, but something about the authority principle instinctively grates on me. Which is one reason I try to avoid all bureaucracies and bureaucrats like the plague.

But I also avoid aggregations of people, even, usually, small social groups, like at parties. I dislike the dynamics of domination that emerge in such situations, where you have to compete for attention lest you be ignored. Individuality isn't very respected in those circumstances; you become a group-creature who has to adhere to the (usually vulgar) interests and tastes of the group. People become remarkably stupid, insensitive, and cruel in groups. Power, domination, charisma, loudness—loutishness—and the like are too respected. I'm interested in people as individuals, not as members of a group.

Intellectually, I've never been able to respect disciplinary boundaries. I'm not a specialist by nature, and I find it terribly boring and limiting not to range widely over history, philosophy, psychology, and the natural sciences. (Unfortunately, in order to get anything done, it's necessary to specialize somewhat.) This is one reason I like Chomsky, whose polymathy totally flouts academic norms. I'm no genius, but you can see from this website that I enjoy writing/speculating about everything from the history of capitalism to the philosophy of mind to human psychology. And I don't think you need special credentials to write perceptively—more perceptively than many of those with credentials—on these matters.

So I'd say in most respects I'm by nature a nearly perfect anarchist. That is, a democrat, a "humanist" (as opposed, e.g., to an institutionalist), and a communist who would like to see the withering away of private property, to the extent possible. We should all be anarchists in the sense of "the anti-authoritarian personality." We should value creativity, freedom, individuality, self-expression, authentic community, non-hierarchy, democracy, free and honest communication, and rational inquiry and persuasion. As a set of values, anarchism is pure common sense! I'll even admit that, theoretically, it would be wonderful if we could do away with government or "the state." Governments are pretty monstrous, as history teaches us.

But I part ways with most anarchists not only in my belief that power/domination/authority, in various forms, has always been with us and will always be with us but also in my doubt that government, even centralized government, can be abolished (unless civilization collapses). It's just too hard to imagine systematic decentralization and "localization" of all administrative structures in an advanced technological global society. Nor does it seem possible to do away with *laws*, as Kropotkin, William Godwin, and others have dreamed of, relying instead on public opinion and custom to regulate social behavior. Look at how complex the world is! Can such an infinitely complex world operate purely through the force of public opinion and the fear of public censure, with no need of coercive or hierarchical institutions to enforce compliance? Can we do away with jails and prisons in even their *most humane forms*? Of course prison

systems could be massively downsized compared to their extent now, but it's hard to believe that even a "classless" society of billions of people wouldn't require *some* law enforcement.

The state is in many of its functions a horrifyingly destructive entity, but it also comprises constructive functions. You can consult Mariana Mazzucato's *The Entrepreneurial State* for an analysis of some of these functions. All the advanced technologies we enjoy today, such as plastics, electronics, the internet, nanotechnology, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, and green technologies, have relied overwhelmingly on state funding and state "direction" of research at most stages of their development. Without large and well-resourced governments, these technologies wouldn't have come into being. (The same is true of mass production, electric power, aviation and space technologies, and nuclear energy. See Vernon Ruttan's *Is War Necessary for Economic Growth?: Military Procurement and Technology Development*. The doctrines of free-market enthusiasts are mostly fantasies: government planning and funding are primarily what have ensured economic growth and relative societal well-being.)

Moreover, insofar as the state is a destructive entity, that is mostly because of the private sector's influence over it. Sociopathically structured corporations, voracious for profit, are the engine behind our civilization's self-immolation. If we could "socialize" the private sector or make it worker-run, thus making government more democratic and egalitarian, the state would become far less harmful than it is today. It still wouldn't be ideally democratic—it would still consist mostly of bureaucratic hierarchies—but its worst, most murderous and militaristic abuses would be significantly curtailed. It's true that the state has its own authoritarian interests, but it is also used as an instrument by outside forces. The more beneficent the outside forces are, the more beneficent the state will be.

There is something attractive about the "purity" and idealism of anarchist goals and sketches of a future society, but there is something naïve about them too. Leftists in general are often guilty of naïveté. The fact is that to be alive is to be in a "fallen" condition, which is to say a condition of suffering and struggle. It has always been this way, for every animal in the history of life. Nature is not an ethical or a just place, and there is little reason to think we can achieve a truly moral or just society (on a large, least of all a global, scale). For instance, there is no precedent for a large-scale, populous society that lacks a "government." Even in the urban Italian communes, or city-states, of the Middle Ages there were smallish bureaucracies and power-structures and every non-anarchist phenomenon you can imagine. Of course, there were classes too. Maybe a classless society wouldn't require a government? Well, as I've said, even if someday we manage to achieve "classlessness"—that is, abolition of differential ownership and control of the means of production, workers and communities democratically deciding how to plan economic activity and allocate resources—complex administrative structures analogous to "governments" will surely be necessary.

Anyway, I'm repeating myself, coming dangerously close to academics' characteristic sin of long-windedness. Let me just say I can't help having deep doubts about the future of a species capable of, say, Nazism, nor being deeply skeptical, therefore, of all idealism. I'm reading a book called *"The Good Old Days": The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders*, and once again it's been brought home to me how profoundly objectionable *homo sapiens* is, from a moral and intellectual point of view. What is one to think of such a species as ours, which finds it so easy to plumb the abyss of depravity? Sometimes I wonder if those people who are endowed with a high degree of empathy and outrage at injustice—among whom are many leftists—simply misjudge the moral character, the moral potential, of their fellow humans. I at least am continually appalled by what I see of humanity—not only by institutions, which are blatantly amoral, but by individuals themselves. The cruelty and lack of intelligence of individuals, billions of individuals.

Nevertheless, the optimism of anarchism will always be refreshing and inspiring. I see no end to the struggle to realize its ideals—I think the struggle will go on until the last members of our species have perished and the nightmare of history comes at last to a close. But at least the anarchist ideal of freedom and dignity gives us something to struggle for in the first place.

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Interview: If Unions Had Organized the South, Could Trump Have Been Avoided?
(published in *Labor Notes*)

At a time when activists and commentators are puzzling over the United States' enduring conservatism, Michael Goldfield's new book *The Southern Key: Class, Race, and Radicalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (Oxford University Press, 2020) provides some perspective. Goldfield argues that the old question "Why no socialism in the U.S.?" reduces to "Why no liberalism in the South?", which itself is answered, in large part, by unions' failure to organize the region in the early and middle twentieth century. The book consists of case-studies defending this thesis and exploring what went wrong and how things might have turned out differently. I interviewed Goldfield in early November about his arguments and his thoughts on the labor movement today.

CW: One of the major theses of your book is that the failure of the CIO in the 1930s and 1940s to organize certain key industries in the South, such as woodworkers and textile workers, has shaped U.S. politics and society up to the present. For example, the "liberal"—as opposed to laborite—character of the civil rights movement, Republicans' racist "Southern Strategy" (influenced by George Wallace's presidential campaigns in 1964 and 1968), businesses' relocation to the South in the postwar and neoliberal periods, and in general the conservative ascendancy of the last fifty years were all made possible by the CIO's earlier missteps. How did these failures to organize a few industries have such far-reaching effects?

MG: Underlying my argument is the unique ability of workers organized at the workplace to engage in what I call civil rights unionism, including demands inside the workplace for more hiring and upgrading of non-whites, especially women, desegregation of facilities, etc. Secondly, this involves broader struggles for desegregation, access, and other issues, in the community at large. Of special importance here is the ability of workers at the workplace to resist and successfully fight against right-wing, racist repression, something that was so successful in silencing and destroying individual white liberals in the South. I discuss a number of such examples in the book, including the Farm Equipment Workers (FE) at International Harvester in Louisville and Local 10 of the ILWU in San Francisco. These instances, though vitally important in their limited impact and providing clear templates for future struggles, were too isolated to affect the general course of events.

There is a clear contrast here with the UAW and the NAACP, the liberal civil rights organization. By 1945-46, the autoworkers union with Walter Reuther at the head had become very bureaucratic. They were on record as supporting civil rights, and Reuther was allied with the NAACP. But what did they actually do? In Detroit, for instance, there were restaurants and bars around auto plants that were segregated, not allowing Blacks in. Reuther and the NAACP sent letters to all the bars and restaurants saying that they should integrate—and of course nobody did anything. At left-wing locals, on the other hand, workers organized. Interracial picket lines went up around the restaurants and bars; the workers told the owners that if they didn't allow Blacks in, they would have no business from anybody in the union. Instantly, owners changed their policy—thus demonstrating the effectiveness of civil rights unionism.

I can give you an example from my own experience, when I worked at an International Harvester plant outside Chicago. We had a Black worker in our plant who bought a house in a racist all-white community; his house was firebombed twice. Our group controlled the Fair Practices Committee, and we got the union local to vote to support a round-the-clock picket line at the house. Immediately, all the violence stopped. Our plant was about a third African-American, and there were probably quite a few workers who were not sympathetic to what we were doing. But if any of us had been attacked, the whole local would have gone berserk. That type of strength that unions had when they were fighting for civil rights was different from most of what existed across the South.

The organizing, then, of over 300,000 woodworkers (an industry that existed across the deep South, 50% of whose workers were African-American) had the potential to make a tremendous difference. And if

the USWA and other unions had maintained their civil rights focus, the course of the civil rights struggle and of history might have been altered.

You're very critical of the leadership of both the CIO and the Communist Party in the 1930s–40s. Briefly, what mistakes did they make? Why did organizations that, for a time, showed such militancy and effectiveness in organizing particular industries (such as steel, automobiles, and meatpacking, among many others) fail so dismally to organize large swathes of the South?

This is discussed extensively in the book. I analyze in detail how the Stalinization of the Comintern and the U.S. Communist Party undermined many of their laudatory efforts. I also agree with Nick Fischer's argument in *Spider Web*, that liberal anti-communism, as practiced by the UAW under Reuther and the USWA under Philip Murray, aligned itself with racists and fascists. In order to defeat the CP leadership of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, Murray and the USWA allied themselves de facto with the KKK in Birmingham, destroying a progressive civil rights unionism (or at least weakening and limiting its influence) in Alabama. The CIO did the same in destroying the Winston-Salem Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers local. The United Packinghouse Workers did not do this and continued to be a civil rights union. Auto, steel, and meatpacking actually were organized in the South. As Matt Nichter's forthcoming article in *Labor* shows (entitled "Did Emmett Till Die in Vain? Organized Labor Says No!"), the UAW and USWA had no rank-and-file civil rights presence, while the UPWA sent an interracial male and female southern delegation to the Emmitt Till trial in Mississippi.

Broadly speaking, the failure of interracial unionism in the South is attributable to three primary causes. First, the right-wing leadership of the CIO—the forefathers of the leadership of the contemporary labor movement—refused to seriously confront white supremacy in the South, squandering golden opportunities to organize Black workers in a number of large southern industries. Second, the left-wing of the labor movement—which had been the major goad behind interracial class unity in the first place—liquidated itself at the behest of the Soviet Union, which demanded labor peace during WWII, then limited their civil rights activity during the Cold War. Third, the postwar red scare—including the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act—dealt a crippling blow.

You argue that in order for workforces to successfully organize, they generally need either "structural power" or "associative power" (or both). For instance, coal miners during the period you write about had immense structural power and therefore tended to serve as a "vanguard" of the labor movement. Textile workers, by contrast, lacked structural power, so they had to rely—or should have relied more than they did—on associative power, making alliances with other organizations and social forces. Today, do you see any industries that have notable structural power and should be a prime target for organizers? Or do you think most workers now are compelled to rely primarily on associative power, on making connections with other groups and social movements?

Miners had structural power in part because they were providing the main fuel to the economy, which they don't anymore. There are hardly any coal miners left in the United States, despite all the rhetoric. But other people have the power to bring the economy to a halt, like truck drivers and others in the transportation industry. Airline workers could potentially—they could have done it during the air traffic controllers' strike, but of course the unions wouldn't have considered that. It's interesting that workers in the food production industry and the warehouse and logistics industries are suddenly realizing how important they are, given the pandemic, and are mobilizing around their terrible treatment. There have been 44,000 cases of Covid-19 in the hundred-plus meat processing plants and over two hundred deaths. People are not happy about this. In Detroit, where I am, bus drivers have struck over the lack of safety. It seems to be a generalized phenomenon that's taking place, but I don't know how to gauge it. I read *Labor Notes* and I subscribe to it, but its reporters are always seeing a new upsurge taking place. The United States is a big country and there are always strikes happening somewhere, but it doesn't necessarily mean that a large movement is in the offing.

Still, we're seeing people in places that were historically difficult to organize getting more upset and taking action. Many of the logistics hubs, for instance, are in the South. One of the biggest in the country is in Memphis, there's a big one in Louisville, etc. These are urban, interracial workforces. The South, of course, is very different now than it was in the 1930s and 1940s: it has much more economic dynamism, including a significant percentage of the auto industry, particularly transplants (foreign plants that have their production facility in the U.S.). While Detroit still has more auto production and more parts, there are huge parts corridors in states across the South.

Public service workers, too, are getting screwed really badly. The reason we had so many teachers' strikes in so-called red states is that the budget cuts were much more severe there. When these people struck, they had broad associative power and huge amounts of public sympathy. The Chicago Teachers Union organized parents and others in the community to support them, which hadn't previously been done as much by teachers' unions. In West Virginia, a state that overwhelmingly voted both in 2016 and 2020 for Trump, schoolteachers were militant and had broad support throughout the state. The same was true in Oklahoma, and some of these same things happened in Mississippi. So I think that the possibilities for a Southern upsurge, as well as in the country as a whole, are real. On the other hand, there isn't the same insurgent, radical leadership that there was in the 1930s.

It's obviously hard to generalize over the labor movement, but are you concerned that unions today too often adhere to the same earlier, self-defeating trends of centrism and collaborationism? Or do you see cause for hope that the kinds of errors the CIO made in its Southern campaigns—and that the AFL-CIO continued to make for decades thereafter—are finally being overcome? Do you think organized labor is starting to turn the corner?

No. While there are insurgent parts of the organized labor movement, including those who had threatened a general strike if Trump tried to steal the election, the AFL-CIO and its major unions, short of insurgencies and new leadership, are too sclerotic to lead the next wave of struggle.

Racism and white supremacy are central to your analysis. The CIO's inability to organize the South made possible the extremes of white supremacy we saw in the postwar era and we're seeing today, which have catastrophically undermined class solidarity. What do you think of the current Black Lives Matter movement? Is it wise to place the dominant emphasis on police brutality and defunding the police, or are there more effective ways to challenge white supremacy? Should activists organize around shared class interests with allegedly racist whites rather than the divisive issue of abolition of the police?

The police were established to play the role of repressing labor and communities, as much recent literature documents. This is central to capitalist rule and its function should be abolished. As such, police unions are not unions and do not belong in the labor movement. On the other hand, the demand to abolish the police needs to be sharpened. As many have noted, lots of things the police do, including responding to disturbed people, should be delegated to others, and removed from policing. On the other hand, there are certain types of protective services for which there should be an organization that serves. What to do about rape and violence against women? Who do you go to when your car is stolen? This whole range of concerns and demands needs to be delineated clearly so that people can be sure that we get rid of the police in their anti-labor, racist functioning, but still have necessary services so that we do not merely exist in an anarchic state of chaos, which is the impression that opponents of our demands give.

Many left-wing unions and some others as well combined broad class issues, interracial solidarity, with racial egalitarian demands (I discuss these questions also in *The Color of Politics*). The examples I give of certain civil rights-oriented unions (such as FE and ILWU Local 10) were successful at doing this, too.

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The Rise of Right-wing Libertarianism Since the 1950s
(Notes on a dismal history)

Sometimes as I read books I like to simultaneously summarize them in my own words, to facilitate the intellectual digestion. And also to post my notes online later on, in the probably vain hope of diffusing knowledge to young people and non-academics. I've been reading a couple of books on the rise of political conservatism in the last several generations, and since nothing is more important to the future than combating conservatism, I'm going to jot down some notes here. As a historian, I'm familiar with the story and have read quite a few works on the subject. (E.g., this one.) Nevertheless, Kim Phillips-Fein's *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (2009) and Nancy MacLean's *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (2017) are interesting enough to warrant some summarizing.

One of the useful functions of the latter book, in particular, is that it brings force and clarity to one's prior knowledge of the dangers of right-wing libertarianism, or more generally anti-government and pro-"free market" thinking. In fact, this sort of thinking is an utter catastrophe that threatens to destroy everything beautiful in the world. I know that sounds like an absurd exaggeration, but it's not. What with society and nature teetering on the brink, it's the literal truth. I suppose the reason leftists don't always take right-wing libertarianism as seriously as it deserves—despite their deep awareness of the evils of capitalism—is simply that it's embarrassingly easy to refute. It's a childish, simplistic, vulgar hyper-capitalist ideology that, once you examine it a little, quickly reveals itself as its opposite: authoritarianism. Or even totalitarianism, albeit privatized totalitarianism. Noam Chomsky, as usual, makes the point eloquently:

> …Here [in the United States] the term 'libertarian' means the opposite of what it meant to everybody else all through history. What I was describing [earlier] was the *real* Adam Smith and the *real* Thomas Jefferson and so on, who were anti-capitalist and called for equality and thought that people shouldn't be subjected to wage-labor because that's destructive of their humanity… The U.S. sense [of 'libertarian'] is quite different. Here, every word has taken on the opposite of its meaning elsewhere. So, here 'libertarian' means *extreme advocate of total tyranny*. It means power ought to be given into the hands of private unaccountable tyrannies, even worse than *state* tyrannies because there the public has *some* kind of role. The corporate system, especially as it's evolved in the twentieth century, is *pure* tyranny. Completely unaccountable—you're inside one of these institutions, you take orders from above, you hand them down below…there's nothing you can say—tyrannies do what they feel like—they're global in scale. I mean, this is the extreme opposite of what's been called libertarian everywhere in the world since the Enlightenment…

"Libertarianism," in short, is a bad joke: morally hideous, theoretically flawed, and empirically without merit. (For instance, it's well known among economic historians, or should be, that the only way countries have ever industrially developed is through radical state intervention in the economy, which is also the reason that today we have technologies like electronics, the internet, aviation and space technologies, pharmaceuticals, nuclear energy, containerization in shipping, biotechnology, nanotechnology, green technologies, even mass production and electric power.) Still, the simplistic dogma has to be taken seriously and combated because of the incredible damage it has done worldwide, by, for example, justifying state withdrawal of support for vulnerable populations and deregulation of industries that are consequently destroying the natural environment.

Even people and policymakers who aren't actual libertarians (in the perverted right-wing American sense) have almost always been influenced by pro-market ideologies, because two centuries of global propaganda have made their mark. I don't want to say markets are necessarily and always, even on small

local scales, destructive; I'm only saying that the denigration of government relative to markets is horribly misguided. Besides, what does "the market" even mean? When people talk about "the free market," what are they talking about? Markets, at least national and international ones, have always been shaped and structured and created and manipulated by states. That's a truism of economic history. Just read Karl Polanyi's classic *The Great Transformation* (1944). "The market" is a meaningless abstraction, an idealization that distracts from the innumerable ways states create rules to govern market interactions, rules that favor certain actors and disadvantage others. No national or international market has ever been "free" of political constraints, structures, institutions, rules that are continually contested and shaped by interest groups in deadly conflict with each other.

Conservative ideologues such as most economists, especially so-called libertarians, always prefer to traffic in idealizations (for instance the neoclassical fetish of mathematical models or the "libertarian" fetish of "the market") and ignore history because, well, history is inconvenient. Reality mucks up their dogmas. Actual investigation of labor history, economic history, political history, social history leads to such subversive notions as that if workers had never organized, the mass middle class would never have existed. Or that capitalist states have consistently acted for the (short-term or long-term) benefit of the capitalist class or some section of it. Or that *classes* exist at all! It's much safer to follow the Milton Friedmans and Friedrich Hayeks and talk only about "freedom," "economic liberty," "the market," "the price mechanism," "labor flexibility," and other things that abstract from real-world conditions. It's also less intellectually and morally arduous. Materialism—historical materialism—leads to revolutionary conclusions, so let's stay on the level of abstract ideas!

What an obscenity that capitalism is considered synonymous with freedom! When ideologues prate about "economic liberty" or "the free society," the obvious question is: *whose* liberty? The liberty of a Jeff Bezos to pay a non-living wage is premised on the inability of millions of people to find a job that will pay more. And when, as a result, they're (effectively) *coerced* into taking that minimum-wage job—because the alternative is to starve—their low income vitiates their "liberty" to realize their dreams or have a decent standard of living. Charles Koch, say, has the freedom and ability to influence policymakers at the highest level; in a radically unequal society, most citizens do *not* have that freedom or ability. A billionaire (who likely inherited a great deal of money) has a heck of a lot more "economic freedom" than the rest of us. But he whines about his *lack* of freedom because of burdensome government regulations, taxes, and irritating labor unions. If only he could get rid of these obstacles he'd have *more* freedom—to pay his workers less, fire them for any reason, pollute the environment, and charge consumers more. The "freedom" of the right-wing libertarian is the freedom to dominate others. (More specifically, the freedom of the capitalist to dominate others.)

The truth is that socialism, or popular democratic control of the economy, entails not only more equality but also more widespread freedom. For example, in an economy of worker cooperatives, people would be free from coercion by a boss (because collectively the owners of a cooperative are their own boss). Even in a social democracy, people generally have the means to realize more of their desires than in a neoliberal economy where much of the population lives in poverty. Similarly, the more public resources there are, the more freedom people have to use these resources. Privatization of resources *excludes*, depriving either all or some people of their freedom to use them.

Needless to say, it took a *lot* of indoctrination, backed up by a *lot* of money, to convert untold numbers of people to right-wing libertarianism in the last sixty years. Phillips-Fein starts her story with the famous du Pont brothers who created the Liberty League in the 1930s to fight the New Deal. They didn't have much success: in the depths of the Depression, it was pretty easy for most people to see through vulgar business propaganda. It wasn't until after World War II that business was able to regroup and launch successful offensives against the liberal and leftist legacies of the 1930s. You should read Elizabeth Fones-Wolf's *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945–1960* for a broad account of this counterrevolution. Phillips-Fein's focus is more narrow, on the far-right organizations that sprang up to play the long game rather than just immediately beat back unions and Communists and left-liberalism.

One such organization was the Foundation for Economic Education, which "advocated a stringent, crystalline vision of the free market" and disseminated that vision through innumerable leaflets and pamphlets and LP recordings. It was funded by companies both small and large, including U.S. Steel, General Motors, and Chrysler. A couple of the businessmen associated with FEE helped bring Friedrich Hayek, already famous for *The Road to Serfdom*, to the University of Chicago (the libertarian Volker Fund paid his salary) and assisted with his project of building the international Mont Pelerin Society in the late 1940s. The ideas of Hayek and his mentor Ludwig von Mises (who was hired as a FEE staff member) would become gospel to the fledgling libertarian movement.

It's remarkable, and testament to the power not of *ideas* but of *money*, that a movement that started out with a few scattered malcontents in the business and academic worlds who were fighting a rearguard action against the internationally dominant Keynesian and social democratic paradigm of the 1940s has snowballed to become almost globally hegemonic by the 2010s.

"Over the course of the 1950s," Phillips-Fein writes, "dozens of new organizations devoted to the defense of free enterprise and the struggle against labor unions and the welfare state sprang into existence." Ayn Rand, amoralist extraordinaire, had already become "tremendously popular" among businessmen. But some in the business world didn't like her rejection of Christianity, and they dedicated themselves to shaping religion in a pro-capitalist direction. "We can never hope to stop this country's plunge toward totalitarianism," wrote one of them (J. Howard Pew, president of Sunoco and a devout Presbyterian), "until we have gotten the ministers' thinking straight." (The usual irony: to avoid "totalitarianism," we have to get everyone to think like us. Only when every individual is lockstep in agreement, marching behind us, will the danger of totalitarianism be overcome. These ideologues are pathetic, unreflective mediocrities who take it for granted that they have the right to rule—and anything else is totalitarianism.)[1] Pew worked to support an organization called Spiritual Mobilization to get "the ministers' thinking straight," and Christian Business Men's Committees spread in a decade that saw the increasing success of anti-Communist preachers like Billy Graham and the growth of fundamentalism.

One reason for the alliance between religion and capitalism in those years is obvious: they were both anti-Communist. But there are other affinities that are, I think, revealing. What they amount to, at bottom, is the common urge to dominate—an authoritarianism common to both religious and business hierarchies. Most religion by its nature tends to be a rather closed-minded affair (rejection of scientific evidence, doubt, skeptical reasoning), attached to tradition—traditional hierarchies like patriarchy, white supremacy, homophobia. The authoritarian and submissive mindset/behavior it encourages in the faithful can be useful to and coopted by business institutions that similarly demand submission and are authoritarian in structure. (Just as Christianity earlier on was coopted by the Roman authorities (after Constantine), and then by medieval authorities, and then by the early modern absolutist state.)

It's true that in most respects, market fundamentalism and conservative Christianity are very different ideologies. And their fusion in the modern Republican Party can seem odd. The socially conservative and the economically conservative wings of the party, basically anchored in different constituencies, have by no means always been comfortable with each other. (For instance, libertarian attempts to privatize and destroy Social Security and Medicare have been resisted by the socially conservative popular base.) It's even more ironic because the religious concern for community, family, and tradition is constantly undermined by capitalism, as has been understood at least since the *Communist Manifesto*. But the reactionary business elite needs an electoral base, so it's stuck with the rednecks it despises, because of the interests they have in common. And the "rednecks," or the social conservatives—but we should keep in mind that plenty of people in the business world are themselves socially conservative and religious—end up allying with business for the same reason. For both groups are *opposed to democracy and equality*. They want the federal government to *stay out of their business*, for the federal government has historically done a lot more than state governments to empower the oppressed and undermine

[1] Think of the famous Powell Memorandum in 1971: absolute panic at the fact that business didn't completely control the country—there was some dissent among the young and a minority of intellectuals—and fervid determination to (re)impose ideological uniformity on the population…for the sake of the "free" enterprise system.

reactionary hierarchies. Whether it's white supremacy, conservative Christian values, or the business desire to avoid taxes and regulation, the federal government has frequently been the enemy—as during the era of the Civil Rights Movement and the liberal Warren Supreme Court. "Small government!" can become the rallying cry for authoritarians if government starts to challenge authoritarianism.[1]

Thus you get the seemingly incongruous but immensely revealing cooperation, starting in the 1950s and continuing today, between white supremacists and "libertarians." Who thereby show their true colors. Nancy MacLean's *Democracy in Chains* is illuminating on this point. Her book describes the career of the influential Nobel laureate economist James M. Buchanan, one of the founders of public choice theory, which is devoted to the impeccably capitalist goal of exposing and explaining the systematic failures of government. MacLean argues that John C. Calhoun, the great nineteenth-century ideologue of slavery, states' rights, limited government, and "nullification" (the idea that states can refuse to follow federal laws they consider unconstitutional), is an important inspiration for right-wing libertarianism.

> Both Buchanan and Calhoun…were concerned with the "failure of democracy to protect liberty." In particular, Buchanan and Calhoun both alleged a kind of class conflict between "tax producers and tax consumers." Both depicted politics as a realm of exploitation and coercion, but the economy as a realm of free exchange… Both thinkers sought ways to restrict what voters could achieve together in a democracy to what the wealthiest among them would agree to.

Murray Rothbard, among other libertarians, spoke openly of the movement's debt to Calhoun. "Calhoun was quite right," he said, "in focusing on taxes and fiscal policy as the keystone" of democracy's threat to so-called economic liberty, or property rights. Property rights trump every other consideration, including the right of the majority to vote and determine policy. This is why Buchanan worked with Pinochet's government in Chile to write a radically undemocratic constitution, and why he worked with Charles Koch and others to find ways to limit democracy in the (already very undemocratic) U.S., and why, in general, prominent libertarians have been quite open about their distaste for democracy. The famous economist George Stigler, for example, once told a meeting of the Mont Pelerin Society that "one possible route" for achieving the desired libertarian future was "the restriction of the franchise to property owners, educated classes, employed persons, or some such group."

The young libertarian movement was energized by the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. Why? Not because they supported it (as *genuine* libertarians, people who authentically value human freedom and dignity, would have), but because, like segregationists, they found it an appalling instance of federal overreach. William F. Buckley and his magazine *National Review* (funded largely by Roger Milliken, a reactionary textile manufacturer)—not totally "libertarian" but very much in that camp[2]—published articles denouncing the Supreme Court's "tyranny." Others were excited by the prospect that the South's resistance offered to end public education itself. Buchanan, at the University of Virginia, wrote a proposal to sell off all public schools and substitute for them a system of tax-funded private schools that would admit or reject students as they saw fit. His plan never came to fruition, but in the following years, as the Civil Rights Movement gained steam, libertarians—such as Barry Goldwater—could always be found on the side of "states' rights." After all, the Civil Rights Act *did* interfere with property rights, by dictating to businesses what their policies had to be!

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[1] Notice, however, that reactionaries love big government as long as it supports their agenda. Fundamentalists and anti-abortion types want to use government to impose their values on the country—showing how little they value "freedom"—and big business certainly has no problem with corporate welfare or the national security state.

[2] The *National Review* is always mentioned in histories of the New Right. As Phillips-Fein says, it is "rightly known for pioneering what the historian George Nash has described as the 'fusion' of conservative ideas, joining the Hayekian faith in the market and critique of the New Deal to the larger moral and political concerns" of conservatives who lamented the decline of religion.

Goldwater's campaign for the presidency in 1964 was a precocious moment for the young conservative movement, and his landslide loss to Lyndon Johnson showed the country wasn't ready yet for the mainstreaming of far-right politics. Still, all the organizing during the 1950s, from the John Birch Society to the American Enterprise Association (which became the now-well-known American Enterprise Institute), had clearly made an impact. Goldwater's bestselling book *The Conscience of a Conservative* helped his cause, as did Milton Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom*. Financial support for his campaign came from conservative businessmen across the country, not only big names like the du Pont family and Walt Disney but also countless small businesses (which are often more conservative than larger ones). The Republican establishment, on the other hand, was hardly fond of Goldwater: Nelson Rockefeller, for example, issued a press release that said, "The extremism of the Communists, of the Ku Klux Klan, and of the John Birch Society—like that of most terrorists—has always been claimed by such groups to be in the defense of liberty."

To try to get white working-class support, the Goldwater campaign pioneered a strategy that Republicans have used to great effect ever since: capitalize on racial and cultural fears. As one official wrote in a memo, Goldwater should "utilize (and build) fully the one key issue which is working for us—the moral crisis (law and order vs. crime and violence)." Instead of talking about the usual libertarian themes of unions, Social Security, the welfare state, and taxes, he should focus on "crime, violence, riots, juvenile delinquency, the breakdown of law and order, immorality and corruption in high places, the lack of moral leadership in general, narcotics, pornography." Phillips-Fein comments: "The issues of race and culture, White [the author of the campaign memo] believed, could easily be joined to the politics of the free market. The welfare state, after all, was the product of just the same unrestrained collective yearnings that produced moral chaos." Exactly. This, then, is another point of contact between free-market ideologues and social conservatives. Both groups want "law and order" and nothing more. (No equality—and no freedom for "undesirables"—only authoritarian hierarchies, whether of class, race, gender, sexuality, or whatever).

As for Buchanan, in the late 1960s, as he was teaching at UCLA at the peak of the New Left, he found himself decidedly unsympathetic to the student protests. To quote MacLean: "Despite 'my long-held libertarian principles,' he said, looking back, 'I came down squarely on the "law-and-order" side' of things. He heaped praise upon one administrator who showed the 'simple courage' to smash the student rebellion on his campus with violent police action." –What a surprise. A "libertarian" who cheers violent police actions. (Buchanan also supported the Vietnam War, except that he thought it should have been fought more aggressively.)

Meanwhile, he co-wrote a book called *Academia in Anarchy* that used public choice theory to explain—abstractly, as usual, with no empirical substantiation—why campuses were in an uproar. It had to do, e.g., with students' lack of respect for the university setting because tuition was free or nearly so. Faculty tenure, too, was "one of the root causes of the chaos" because job security meant professors had no incentive to stand up to radical students. The solution was that students should pay full-cost prices, taxpayers and donors should monitor their investments "as other stockholders do," and "weak control" by governing boards must end. Such measures would facilitate social control. "In essence," MacLean comments, he and his co-author were arguing that "if you stop making college free and charge a hefty tuition…you ensure that students will have a strong economic incentive to focus on their studies and nothing else—certainly not on trying to alter the university or the wider society. But the authors were also arguing for something else: educating far fewer Americans, particularly lower-income Americans who could not afford full-cost tuition." As we now know, the ruling class eventually adopted Buchanan's agenda.

The tumult of the late '60s and early '70s, combined with inflation, recession, and intensifying international competition, is what finally shocked big business into taking action, much broader action than before. The Powell Memorandum, written for the Chamber of Commerce, is symbolic of this panic. Neoconservatives like Irving Kristol argued that, in order to be effective in the sphere of propaganda, businessmen should stop defending only such grubby, uninspiring things as selfishness and the pursuit of money and instead elevate more transcendent things like the family and the church, institutions that (to quote Phillips-Fein) "could preserve moral and social values and had the emotional weight to command true allegiance." (These neoconservatives also became militant advocates of American imperialism under

the slogans of fighting Communism, spreading freedom and democracy, etc.) Nonprofits like the American Enterprise Institute began to get a much more receptive hearing when they pressed businessmen to fund a free-market ideological counteroffensive. The Olin Foundation, among others, disbursed millions of dollars to a variety of conservative think tanks, such as the new Manhattan Institute. The Coors family were the main financers of the Heritage Foundation, created by Paul Weyrich (a conservative young congressional staffer) in 1973, which would take a more pugilistic and *culturally* conservative stance than the AEI. For instance, it attacked "secular humanism" and defended the "Judeo-Christian moral order" at the same time as it was attacking big government, unions, and the minimum wage.

Incidentally, if this fusion of cultural conservatism and defense of capitalism reminds you of European fascists in the 1920s and 1930s, it's because reactionaries always use the same ideological bag of tricks. Fascists and Nazis defended capitalism and even, sometimes, "Christianity" while attacking "decadent" bourgeois culture, democracy, effete intellectuals, socialists and Marxists, ethnic minorities (not Blacks, as in the case of American conservatives, but Jews and others), economic parasites—think of Buchanan's attacks on welfare "parasites." Most of these American conservatives would have been Nazis had they been German in the 1930s.[1]

Corporate Political Action Committees sprang up everywhere. Phillips-Fein:

> In 1970 most Fortune 500 companies did not have public affairs offices; ten years later 80 percent did. In 1971 only 175 companies had registered lobbyists, but by the decade's end 650 did, while by 1978 nearly 2,000 corporate trade associations had lobbyists in Washington, D.C. Thanks in part to…the educational seminars sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and other business organizations, the number of corporate PACs grew from 89 in 1974…to 821 in 1978. They became an increasingly important source of funding for political campaigns, while the number of union PACs stalled at 250.

Meanwhile, the Business Roundtable "was founded on the idea that celebrity executives could become a disciplined phalanx defending the interests of business as a class." Its membership was open only to the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. As its executive director said, "Senators say they won't talk to Washington reps [e.g., lobbyists], but they will see a chairman." The Roundtable took a less blatantly reactionary (anti-union, etc.) approach to lobbying than many other business organizations.

The Chamber of Commerce was less genteel: it changed its character in the 1970s, becoming much more activist and politicized than it had been. It "believed in mobilizing the masses of the business world—any company, no matter how large or small, could join the organization. The Chamber rejected the Roundtable's tendency to seek out politicians from the Democratic Party and try to make common ground. It backed the Kemp-Roth tax cuts [based on the new and controversial supply-side economics of Arthur Laffer] long before most other groups…" By 1981 the group had almost 3,000 Congressional Action Committees; at the same time, it was sponsoring all kinds of projects to indoctrinate students and the general public with conservative points of view on capitalism and such issues as civil rights, gay rights, feminism, and school prayer.

The right-wing counteroffensive was so vast it can scarcely be comprehended. New anti-union consulting companies were founded, and employers became more vicious toward unions. Legions of small businessmen, fed up with the costs of complying with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's rules, joined the veritable movement to "Stop OSHA" that was coordinated by the American Conservative Union. Colossal efforts were directed, too, at reshaping the nation's courts so that, as one crusader said, "the protection and enhancement of corporate profits and private wealth [would be] the cornerstones of our

[1] There are obvious differences between Nazis' statism and right-wing libertarianism, but in power the Nazis were highly supportive of business and profoundly hostile to unions. Since modern conservatives attack unions and social welfare far more than corporate welfare and the national security state (neoconservatives, of course, actively adore the latter), it's pretty clear that in practice they're not opposed to business-friendly statism. They would have been very happy with fascists—and at the time, their counterparts were.

legal system." Entities like the Liberty Fund, the Earhart Foundation, and many businesses funded Henry Manne's "law and economics" programs to train lawyers in corporation-friendly interpretations of the law. (By 1990, more than *40 percent* of federal judges had participated in Manne's program at George Mason University.) A few years later, in 1982, the Federalist Society was founded—"federalist" because the idea is to return power to the states, as good white supremacists and libertarians (business supremacists) would want. Within several decades it had completely transformed the nation's judiciary.

The 1970s was also the decade when "the upsurge of religious fervor that has sometimes been called the Third Great Awakening began to sweep the country" (Phillips-Fein), "shifting the balance of the country's Christian population toward evangelical and fundamentalist churches and away from the old mainline denominations." Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and other evangelical leaders preached not only the predictable homophobic, anti-pornography, anti-abortion stuff, but also libertarian ideology—anti-unions, anti-government-bureaucrats, anti-welfare-state stuff. As Falwell said when founding Moral Majority in 1979, part of its job would be "lobbying intensively in Congress to defeat left-wing, social-welfare bills that will further erode our precious freedoms." (*Roe v. Wade*, of course, had helped inflame social conservatives' hostility to the federal government, providing another reason for the affinity with economic conservatives.) Needless to say, the politicization of evangelicals has had some rather significant consequences on the nation's politics.

And then, as if all this weren't enough, there was…Charles Koch. Whom MacLean focuses on, together with Buchanan. He's become even more influential in the last couple of decades—though MacLean surely exaggerates when she says, "He is the sole reason why [the ultra-capitalist right] may yet alter the trajectory of the United States in ways that would be profoundly disturbing even to the somewhat undemocratic James Madison"—but he was already playing a very long game in the 1960s. The son of a cofounder of the John Birch Society, he's a true ideologue, a fanatical believer in "economic liberty" and Social Darwinism, fiercely opposed to government largesse dispensed to anyone, apparently including (at least in his early idealistic years) corporations.[1] From the early days to the present, one of his favored institutions to help carry out the revolution has been the ironically named Institute for Humane Studies, successor to the Volker Fund in the mid-1960s. But in the late 1970s he founded, with the assistance of the even more fanatical Murray Rothbard, the Cato Institute, to train a disciplined "Leninist" cadre that, unlike most conservatives, would never compromise, never forsake its anti-government principles in any area of policy. (Rothbard supplied the Leninism.) Abolish the welfare state and all government regulations! Abolish the postal service and public education! Legalize drugs, prostitution, and all consensual sex! Slash taxes across the board! End American military intervention in other countries! Much of this was a bit shocking to mainstream conservatives, but Koch wouldn't stray from his divine mission.

> With a permanent staff and a stable of rotating scholar visitors, Cato could generate nonstop propaganda… Buchanan played a crucial role in such propaganda, for Cato's arguments generally followed analyses provided by his team. Koch, meanwhile, provided new resources as the cadre brought in recruits with ideas for new ways to advance the cause. They would then be indoctrinated in the core ideas to assure their radical rigor, all of this held together with the gravy train opportunities Koch's money made available as they pushed their case into the media and public life…

Koch (and his brother David, who was less political) also supported the Reason Foundation (which still publishes the magazine *Reason*), a think tank that soon became "the nation's premier voice for privatization, not only of public education…but also for every conceivable public service, from sanitation to toll roads." And in 1984—to give just one more example of many—the Kochs founded Citizens for a Sound Economy, chaired by Ron Paul, to rally voters behind their agenda.

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[1] Koch Industries benefits from an array of federal subsidies, but Koch insists (somewhat comically) that he wishes this whole regime of corporate welfare didn't exist.

The conservative mobilization of the 1970s, combined with the country's economic woes and liberals' feckless policies, got Reagan elected—a pretty impressive achievement when the electorate had overwhelmingly rejected his views just sixteen years earlier, in the form of Barry Goldwater's campaign. But many libertarians were unhappy with his presidency, since he did so little to shrink government. (He did cut taxes, social spending, and regulations, but overall the government continued to expand and, very disappointingly, the welfare state wasn't destroyed.)

The Cato Institute's top priority became the privatization of Social Security. Buchanan helped supply a strategy to achieve this wildly unpopular goal. It would be political suicide to just come out and state it openly; instead, devious measures were necessary. First, a campaign of disinformation would have to convince the electorate that Social Security wasn't financially viable in the long term and had to be reformed. (You may remember this intensive propaganda campaign from the George W. Bush years.) Step two was to "divide and conquer" (in the words of MacLean): reassure those who were already receiving benefits or would soon receive them that they wouldn't be affected by the reforms. This would get them out of the fight to preserve the existing system. Meanwhile, foster resentment among younger workers by constantly reminding them their payroll deductions were providing a "tremendous welfare subsidy" to the aged. And foster resentment among the wealthy, and thus their opposition to Social Security, by proposing that they be taxed at higher rates than others to get their benefits. Etc. Eventually, popular resistance to "reform" would begin to break down. The financial sector could be enlisted in the fight too because of the windfall of money it would get by Social Security's privatization.

As always, the ultimate goal was to eliminate all "collectivism," all collective action and solidarity, which really means to get people to stop caring for each other. The world should consist of private atoms, because that means "freedom"—but more importantly because that means the elimination of resistance to capitalist power. (Ideologues may convince themselves that they're wonderfully idealistic, but from a Marxian point of view they're only useful idiots serving the objective interests or dynamics of capitalism to expand everywhere. As I wrote in a brief critique of Corey Robin's *The Reactionary Mind*, power-structures basically ventriloquize certain highly indoctrinated people, animating them to speak for them and rationalize them.) It reminds me of Hannah Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism, according to which the ideal is that everyone is an atom. To shamelessly quote myself:

> As someone once said, the closest we've ever come to a society of pure selfishness and individualism was Auschwitz, which was the culmination of a kind of totalitarian collectivism. The ironic parallels between Nazi (and Soviet) collectivism and Randian or Rothbardian individualism are significant: they're due to the profound atomization that each entails. In the latter, the individual is to treat everyone as a means to his end; in the former, the individual is to treat everyone as a means to the *state's* (or the movement's) ends. In both cases, no human connections are allowed, no treating the other as a being with his own value and his own claims on one's respect. Hate, mistrust, and misery are the inevitable consequences of both these dystopian visions.

Cf. Pinochet's regime, beloved by Hayek and Buchanan.

Anyway, the Cato Institute was hardly the only conservative institution fighting to privatize Social Security, but the war was never won. Democracy and "collectivism" proved too resilient. Unexpected outcome! In the 1990s, the Kochs and other funders, Buchanan, Congressman Dick Armey, Newt Gingrich, and the whole 1994 crop of Republicans at the vanguard of the "free market revolution" struggled mightily to shackle democracy by passing a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution (along with cutting Medicare, "reforming" welfare, and so on), but again, alas, they failed.

Buchanan was particularly incensed by the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (the so-called Motor Voter Act). "We are increasingly enfranchising the illiterate," he growled, "moving rapidly toward electoral reform that will not expect voters to be able to read or follow instructions." It bears noting, by the way, that it's really superfluous to argue that market fundamentalists hate democracy, because it hardly requires great insight to see that the accumulation of wealth by a minority is itself totally inimical to

democracy. And such wealth accumulation is not only an inevitable product of "unfettered" markets but openly celebrated by businessmen and ideologues.

In the meantime, George Mason University, conveniently located right next to Washington, D.C., had become a center of the "Kochtopus," as people took to calling the vast network of institutions the brothers funded. It was the home, for example, of the Institute for Humane Studies, the James Buchanan Center, Henry Manne's Law and Economics Center, and the important Mercatus Center. Buchanan himself, who had provided so many useful ideas and academic legitimacy, was effectively pushed out of the movement as Charles and his loyal lieutenants (Richard Fink, Tyler Cowen, and others) took control at the university. And now, at last, the long march of the zealots was about to come to fruition.

The last chapter of *Democracy in Chains* is chilling. In the words of the economist Tyler Cowen, the reality that is being fashioned for us will see "a rewriting of the social contract" according to which people will be "expected to fend for themselves much more than they do now." From public health and basic sanitation to the conditions that workers toil in, the goal is to dismantle government, which is to say democracy. As the most extreme market fundamentalists have preached for centuries, only the police and military functions of government, the authoritarian functions, are legitimate. (Adam Smith, by the way, did *not* advocate this position.)

As hard as it may be to believe, one individual—Charles Koch—really is behind a large part of the destruction that conservatives have wrought in the twenty-first century. He substantially funds Americans for Prosperity, the American Legislative Exchange Council, the State Policy Network, the Mackinac Center in Michigan (worth mentioning only because its lobbying played a significant role in Flint's water crisis), and, in fact, uncountable numbers of institutions from university programs to legal centers. His loyalists control the Stand Together Chamber of Commerce, a massive conservative fundraising machine, and American Encore, a secretive but powerful nonprofit that funnels money to right-wing causes and advocacy groups. He owns i360, a cutting-edge data analytics company that has precise personal information on over 250 million American adults. It's so sophisticated it has eclipsed the Republican Party's voter files, such that the party has had to buy access to it to more effectively bombard voters with personalized messages.

(See this *Intercept* article by Lee Fang on how Tennessee Rep. Marsha Blackburn used i360 to help "inundate voters with anti-immigrant messages" in her victorious 2018 Senate run. The technology shaped "3 million voter contact calls, 1.5 million doors knocked, $8.4 million spent on television ads, and 314,000 campaign text messages," all of which gave her a commanding lead over her Democratic opponent.)

In 2016, the "Koch network" of hundreds of wealthy right-wing donors he heavily influences spent almost $900 million on political campaigns, which in effect made it a third major political party—and little of that money was for the presidential election, since neither Clinton nor Trump interested the man at the center. Even officials with the Republican National Committee have grown uncomfortable with the power of Koch and his allies: journalist Jane Mayer reports one of them plaintively saying, "It's pretty clear that they don't want to work with the party but want to supplant it."

Ever since the brilliant journalism of Mayer and others brought the Koch underworld out into the open more than ten years ago, much of the politically conscious public has become vaguely aware of the role of this network in funding and coordinating attacks on everything from climate action to unions to public education. But to get a real sense of the radical evil and effectiveness of this "vast right-wing conspiracy," it's necessary to read Mayer's *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*.

For example, the hysteria in wealthy right-wing circles after Obama's election precipitated nearly instant mobilizations to create the Tea Party. Citizens for a Sound Economy had tried to create an anti-tax "Tea Party" movement as early as 1991, but these attempts had led nowhere. In 2004 CSE split up into the Kochs' Americans for Prosperity on the one hand and FreedomWorks on the other, the latter headed by Dick Armey and funded by, e.g., the Bradley Foundation, the Sarah Scaife Foundation, Philip Morris, and the American Petroleum Institute. In early 2009, operatives from these two groups and a couple of others formed what they called the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition to organize protests across the country, using talking points, press releases, and logistical support provided in part by the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute. To help get the word out, FreedomWorks made a deal with the Fox News host Glenn Beck:

for an annual payment of $1 million, he would read on air content that the think tank's staff had written. Pretty soon, the increasingly frequent anti-government rallies were filled with racist slogans ("Obama Bin Lyin'") and racist depictions of Obama—showing, once again, the deep affinity between pro-capitalist ideologies and racism. It's hard to argue with the Obama aide (Bill Burton) who opined, "you can't understand Obama's relationship with the right wing without taking into account his race… They treated him in a way they never would have if he'd been white."

From these noble beginnings, the Koch network stepped up its funding for and organizing of ever more vicious attacks on Obama's agenda, such as cap-and-trade legislation and even the conservative-centrist Affordable Care Act. With the help of the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision in 2010, they met with extraordinary, though not complete, success. And this was in addition to the highly successful efforts to take over state governments. In North Carolina, for instance, Americans for Prosperity (significantly aided by the John William Pope Foundation and other funders, as well as an array of private think tanks) played a large role in the Republican takeover of the state's government and passage of such measures as slashing taxes on corporations and the wealthy while cutting services for the poor and middle class, gutting environmental programs, limiting women's access to abortion, banning gay marriage, legalizing concealed guns in bars and school campuses, eviscerating public education, erecting barriers to voting, and gerrymandering legislative districts for partisan gain. State after state succumbed to such agendas. Just between 2010 and 2012, ALEC-backed legislators in 41 states introduced more than 180 bills to restrict who could vote and how.

Thus, a reactionary political infrastructure generations in the making has finally matured, even as its goal of completely shredding the social compact and leaving everyone to fend for themselves remains far in the future (in fact unrealizable). Economic and cultural polarization, consciously planned and financed since the 1950s, has reached untenable extremes. Daily newspaper articles relate the sordid story of Republican state legislatures' ongoing efforts to decimate the right to vote, as, meanwhile, Koch and his army of allies and operatives frantically work to defeat Democrats' For the People Act (described by the *New York Times* as "the most substantial expansion of voting rights in a half-century"). "The left is not stupid, they're evil," Grover Norquist intones on a conference call with Koch operatives and other conservatives. "They know what they're doing. They have correctly decided that this [voting rights act] is the way to defeat the freedom movement." The class struggle, in short, rages on, with the stakes growing ever higher.

A Marxian, "dialectical" perspective offers hope, however. Being nothing but capitalism's useful idiots, the vast horde of reactionaries whose handiwork I've surveyed is unable to see that history is cyclical. The business triumphalism of the 1920s led straight into the Great Depression, which led to left-populism and the welfare state, which led to the corporate backlash of the 1950s, which helped cause the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left, which bred the hyper-capitalist counterassault of the 1970s–2010s, which is now bringing forth a new generation of social movements. These are still in their infancy, but already they have been able to push even the execrable Joe Biden to mildly progressive positions (though not on foreign policy). To paraphrase Marx, what the radical right produces, above all—in the long term—are its own gravediggers. For Karl Polanyi was right that before society can ever be destroyed by thoroughgoing marketization and privatization, it will always bounce back and "protect itself" (in his words). At long last, we're starting to see the glimmers of this self-protection.

As for libertarianism—yes, in an *authentic* form, a philosophy of freedom must guide us. As Howard Zinn said, Marxism provides the theory and anarchism provides the moral vision. But in order to realize freedom, what we need is the exact opposite of the tyrannical Hayekian model of society. We need an expansive *public* sector, a society of communal and public spaces everywhere, cooperatives and democratic institutions of every variety—libraries and schools and parks and playgrounds in every neighborhood, public transportation and housing and hospitals, free higher education and healthcare, the transformation of corporations into worker cooperatives or democratically run government institutions (whether municipal or regional or national or international). Even in the neoliberal United States, society has (barely) functioned only through hidden economic planning—and corporations embody sprawling planned economies—and without constant local planning, urban planning, scientific planning, political and

industrial planning, everything would collapse. "The market" is nothing but a concept useful to bludgeon popular strivings for dignity and democracy. Its ideologues are the enemies of humanity.

What does it mean to be free? A robust freedom isn't centered around the property one owns; it's centered around the individual himself. Every individual should have the right to freely and creatively develop himself as he likes, provided he respects the same right in others. To respect others means to take on certain responsibilities to society—which is already a "collectivist" notion, in a sense. To respect others means to acknowledge their humanity, to treat them as you would like to be treated, to do no harm and in fact to do good—to cooperate, to work to advance and protect a society that allows everyone to live a decent life. Rights are bound up with responsibilities. And substantive, "positive" freedom isn't possible in an environment of significant material deprivation, especially when others have incomparably greater resources and will use them to consolidate power (further limiting the freedom of the less fortunate). So, to permit the flourishing of freedom and thereby respect others' rights, we all have a responsibility to advocate and work towards a relatively egalitarian, economically democratic, socialist world.

Reverence for "property" (a concept defined by the state and subject to political negotiation) has little or nothing to do with protecting individual liberty. It isn't impossible to imagine a world in which private property is marginal, the means of production, the land, perhaps even housing being held in common and managed through procedures of direct or representative democracy. That such a world would end up violating people's freedoms on a scale remotely comparable to that at which our own world does is far from clear, to say the least.

Nor does the radical right's objection to "discriminatory" taxes on the wealthy make sense. As Peter Kropotkin lucidly argued in his classic *The Conquest of Bread*, we all benefit from the collective labor of millennia, and of the present. "Millions of human beings have labored to create this civilization on which we pride ourselves today," he wrote. "Other millions, scattered throughout the globe, labor to maintain it… There is not even a thought, or an invention, which is not common property, born of the past and the present." Why should a few individuals capture exponentially greater gains from all this labor than everyone else? And if they do capture such gains, why shouldn't they be compelled to give back more than others to the society that permits them such extraordinary privilege? Right-wing objections are the more absurd in that economists such as Mariana Mazzucato (in *The Entrepreneurial State*) have shown it is overwhelmingly the taxpayer, not the wealthy investor, who drives innovation forward and has therefore, through the mechanism of government funding and coordinating of research and infrastructural development, built the prosperity of our civilization. Capitalist parasites on taxpayers and the collective labor of billions deserve to be driven out of existence through confiscatory taxation—which would give government more resources to invest in *publicly* beneficial research and development.

"Libertarian" arguments are bankrupt, but that hasn't prevented the movement from doing incalculable harm worldwide since the 1970s. We can only hope that popular movements defeat it before its environmental consequences, in particular, doom us all.

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Coda. Excerpt from ***The Great Transformation*** *(p. 76):*

> …To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment…would result in the demolition of society. For the alleged commodity "labor power" [which Polanyi argues is a *fictitious* commodity, like land, nature, and money—not real commodities in the way goods are] cannot be shoved about, used indiscriminately, or even left unused, without affecting also the human individual who happens to be the bearer of this peculiar commodity. In disposing of a man's labor power the system would, incidentally, dispose of the physical, psychological, and moral entity "man" attached to that tag. Robbed of the protective covering of cultural institutions, human beings would perish from the effects of social exposure; they would die as the victims of acute social dislocation through vice, perversion, crime, and starvation. Nature

> would be reduced to its elements, neighborhoods and landscapes defiled, rivers polluted, military safety jeopardized, the power to produce food and raw materials destroyed. Finally, the market administration of purchasing power would periodically liquidate business enterprise, for shortages and surfeits of money would prove as disastrous to business as floods and droughts in primitive society. Undoubtedly, labor, land, and money markets *are* essential to a market economy. But no society could stand the effects of such a system of crude fictions even for the shortest stretch of time unless its human and natural substance as well as its business organization was protected against the ravages of this satanic mill…

Few more horrifying visions of society have ever been put forward than the market fundamentalist vision. If you're curious why the world is in such bad shape as it is, you need look no further.

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Revolution in East Harlem: A Review of "The Young Lords: A Radical History"

Johanna Fernández's *The Young Lords: A Radical History* could hardly have been published at a more auspicious time. The fateful year 2020 saw not only the outbreak of a global pandemic but also, in the U.S., a rejuvenation of Black Lives Matter and renewed national attention to issues of racial and economic justice. The pandemic and its economic consequences have further skewed a lopsided distribution of income, with U.S. billionaires gaining over a trillion dollars in the last nine months of 2020 even as millions of people were thrown out of work and wages continued to stagnate. Popular resistance, in part inspired by Bernie Sanders' two presidential campaigns, seems to be gaining momentum, as the nation continues its headlong rush into an era of tumult likely reminiscent of both the 1930s and the 1960s-70s. The memory of the Young Lords resonates in our time of troubles.

Others have written about the Young Lords, including members Iris Morales (*Through the Eyes of Rebel Women: The Young Lords 1969–1976*) and Miguel Meléndez (*We Took the Streets: Fighting for Latino Rights with the Young Lords*), but Fernández's work, which focuses on the New York organization, is an exhaustive study grounded in archival research and extensive interviews with surviving Lords. It covers every aspect of the group's history, not least the social and political context that was able to radicalize so many young people of color from Chicago (where the group began) to New York (where it was strongest) to smaller cities around the country. Not only scholars and students but also activists would benefit from reading this book, for, aside from the fascinating history itself, one can glean lessons on how to organize from the failures and successes of the Young Lords. Indeed, Fernández concludes the book by drawing a helpful list of such lessons.

The Young Lords is, in short, the definitive history of "one of the most creative and productive expressions of the New Left" (p. 7), a group that, for its brief existence of several years, was a highly effective heir to the Black Power movement. It may have failed in its goal of sparking revolution among poor communities of color in the U.S. and in Puerto Rico, but its ambitious and militant campaigns won significant reforms that helped push New York's postwar liberalism to its outer limits before colliding with the conservative backlash of the late 1970s and subsequent decades.

The group's humble beginnings hardly foretold such future success. The Young Lords started out as a small Puerto Rican gang in Chicago in the early 1960s, no more "political" than any other local gang. But by early 1969 it was transforming, under the leadership of José "Cha Cha" Jiménez, into an activist organization addressing urban renewal, police brutality, and welfare rights. Very quickly they made connections with the Chicago Black Panthers, which led them to adopt the Panthers' model of organization and its Ten-Point Program, in addition to such practices as building a free health clinic, starting breakfast and dental programs, publishing a newspaper, and even occupying a church briefly in the summer of 1969. As Fernández says, this bold move to emulate the Panthers "was precisely the example that Puerto Ricans in New York needed to propel them into motion" (p. 48).

The New York group had very different origins than the Chicago group. Its founders were not gang members but young activists and college students, particularly from SUNY Old Westbury. Mickey Melendez, a student there, had in January 1969 formed the Sociedad Albizu Campos (named after the iconic leader of Puerto Rico's struggle for nationhood), a small organization devoted to bringing young Puerto Rican activists together. Members of the SAC traveled to Chicago in the summer of 1969 to meet Cha Cha Jiménez after reading an interview with him in the Black Panthers' newspaper. Inspired by what Jiménez had created in Chicago, they returned to New York and set up a Young Lords affiliate in East Harlem, complete with the same Panthers-influenced structure and even similar regalia of purple berets, black military fatigues, and combat boots. The core members of the group, including Felipe Luciano (chairman), Pablo Guzmán, Juan González, Denise Oliver, David Perez, and several others, had already been radicalized by the racism and segregation they encountered in the New York school system, and in some cases had gained valuable training by subsequent work with the Community Action Programs funded by Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. Fernández's discussion of these individual backgrounds serves to situate the Young Lords in the context of New York's explosive protests and riots of the late 1960s.

Once the Young Lords Organization (YLO)—later called the Young Lords Party—was formed in New York, it immediately launched its first campaign: the so-called Garbage Offensive, an attempt to draw public attention to the chronic crisis of poor sanitation and "epic garbage accumulation" in East Harlem (which was by far the most densely populated neighborhood in Manhattan). Conversations with local residents had revealed that they saw this problem, rather than police brutality or the independence of Puerto Rico or some other more "sensational" issue, as the most urgent matter to be dealt with. So in August 1969 the Young Lords organized a series of direct action protests: they and other residents piled huge heaps of garbage (in some cases setting them on fire) at busy intersections to block traffic, even overturning cars and casting old refrigerators and other large items into the heaps. Very soon they captured the attention of the city's elite press and political power-players, who realized they could no longer ignore the festering sore of inadequate sanitation in the city. At length, extensive reforms were introduced that did much to alleviate the crisis and make conditions in the city's poorer and darker neighborhoods more livable than before.

Fernández's account of the Garbage Offensive sets the pattern for her discussion of all the other campaigns the YLO embarked on in the following years. Rather than simply giving a factual narrative of what happened, she weaves into her analysis a discussion of the Young Lords' ideological self-understandings, as formed against the backdrop of the tumultuous global politics of that era. For instance, in accord with the group's Maoism (and Leninism), the very name "Garbage Offensive" recalled the Tet Offensive of 1968. The young activists saw themselves as applying to the urban context the tactics of guerrilla warfare, such as "flexibility, mobility, surprise and escape" (e.g., by discarding their uniforms and blending into the crowd as soon as police showed up). They were at war, fighting for the national liberation of an internally and externally colonized people—in fact for the liberation of Blacks, Asians, and Native Americans as well. But their war would not be fought through armed struggle; it was fought through community organizing, issue-based campaigns in the neighborhood, and an effort to build a cadre organization that soon attracted hundreds of young people as volunteers, members, and staff (for the Young Lords rented out an office where they printed a newspaper and other material, manned the phones, planned press conferences, etc.).

A whirlwind of activity ensued, for years, after the Garbage Offensive. The Young Lords were quick to join the welfare rights movement, for instance offering security at civil disobedience actions. Together with the Black Panthers, they collected clothing and distributed it to poor welfare mothers, in addition to establishing a free daily children's breakfast program. Regular political education classes, where classic revolutionary texts (by Mao, Lenin, Ho Chi Minh, Frantz Fanon, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and others) were read and discussed, "raised the consciousness" of members and residents. In the fall of 1969 the YLO got heavily involved in campaigns to reform the community's health infrastructure, from protesting impending cuts to staff and health services at Metropolitan Hospital to writing and publicizing (with the assistance of doctors) a Ten-Point Health Program that envisioned such radical changes as a publicly funded healthcare system, direct democratic governance of Metropolitan by staff and residents, and "the creation of small, neighborhood-based clinics" that would facilitate "a comprehensive, 'door-to-

door' project of medical care and social services that prioritized care for drug users, prenatal care, childcare, and care for the elderly" (p. 142). These proposals were inspired by the Cuban Revolution's mass expansion and democratization of healthcare delivery.

Out of this campaign emerged the Young Lords' "most enduring legacy," the militancy they brought to "a preexisting campaign against childhood lead poisoning that pressured city hall to take action on a silent public health crisis" (p. 135). Fernández notes that in the 1960s, 43,000 old housing tenements that had been deemed "unfit for human habitation" in 1901 continued to house Black, Puerto Rican, and Chinese tenants, whose children were consequently at grave risk of lead contamination. Various groups had brought attention to the issue, but it was the Young Lords' Lead Offensive in late 1969 that finally catalyzed change. They were able to secure 200 lead-testing kits, after which they conducted door-to-door screenings that revealed high rates of contamination. With the help of media publicity, the city government was thus shamed into action. Almost immediately, the Department of Health created the Bureau of Lead Poisoning Control, as well as launching the Emergency Repair Program to remove lead paint from tenement walls. In a campaign reminiscent of the Young Lords' community-based healthcare plan, the city even sent teams of doctors into neighborhoods to test for illnesses and give sickle cell, rubella, and measles immunizations.

Within a few months, in short, the Young Lords had made a name for themselves in New York City. They were about to gain much more notoriety, however. While searching for a new location for their children's breakfast program in the fall of 1969, they came across the First Spanish United Methodist Church. Since its facilities were unused every day of the week except Sunday, it seemed like an ideal candidate to host the program. Unfortunately, the Cuban pastor and the church board adamantly disagreed, and for weeks continued to reject the Young Lords' arguments that they only wanted to help the church fulfill its Christian calling of serving the poor. At last, after an attempt one Sunday to publicly appeal to the congregation resulted in a "police riot" *within the church*—"nightsticks flying all over the place," as one witness recalled, "blood all over the church" (p. 166)—the young activists decided they had no other recourse but to stage an occupation. So on a Sunday late in December they occupied the building, nailing shut all the doors but one and announcing they would leave only after they were granted space for a "liberation school," a daycare center, and the free breakfast program that had originally provoked the conflict.

Fernández's discussion, as usual, brilliantly contextualizes the YLO's Church Offensive, setting it against the backdrop of liberation theology, the teachings of the philosopher of education Paulo Freire, debates between liberal and leftist Americans over the causes of poverty, and the generational conflict between young Puerto Ricans (who tended to support the Lords' militancy) and their elders (who were more wary, though frequently sympathetic). At press conferences, leaders of the occupation calmly and persuasively explained their goals, in fact so compellingly that clergymen, elected officials, and pop stars were driven to express their support. Inside the church, for ten days the activists worked with professionals and community residents to feed children, provide free medical services, and run a liberation school that featured lessons on U.S. imperialism and Black resistance. In the evenings, things loosened up: the strict discipline of the daytime "surrendered to creative revelry" that was audible from a block away, in which participants would perform Puerto Rican folk music, spoken word poetry, and dance. The People's Church thereby "destabilized traditional conceptions of cultural production and one of its major assumptions: that people of color produce lower forms of art" (p. 183). This was the first public staging of the "Nuyorican" identity that was later institutionalized in sites on the Lower East Side, the Bronx, and elsewhere in the city.

The People's Church could hardly last forever; it was impressive, indeed, that it lasted as long as it did, almost two weeks. The Young Lords' attorneys could at best postpone the inevitable arrests. Eventually the church dropped charges and agreed to activists' demands for a daycare center and a drug rehabilitation clinic—though it never followed through on its promises. At least Governor Nelson Rockefeller, directly influenced by the Young Lords and the Black Panthers, started a breakfast program for 35,000 poor children in the city.

By 1970 the Young Lords were expanding significantly, opening branches in the South Bronx, the Lower East Side, Philadelphia, Boston, and other cities. With this expansion it became necessary to deal with issues around race and, especially, gender. Fernández's nuanced account shows that the latter was

much more problematic than the former. While racial prejudice and conflict was hardly unknown within the Young Lords—for many Puerto Ricans had absorbed dominant racist fears of Black men—the group was effective in promoting an inclusive and solidaristic understanding of race, as shown by the fact that 25 percent of its membership consisted of Black Americans. Non-Puerto Rican Latinos were also welcome, though they constituted a small minority of about 7 percent.

Relations between men and women were more fraught. The YLO was almost entirely led by men, even though by early 1970 approximately 40 percent of its members were female. It wasn't as if the men were oblivious to feminism: in the group's founding political document, Point 10 read "We Want Equality for Women. Machismo Must be Revolutionary…Not Oppressive." The problem, as Fernández notes, is that machismo by its nature entails male dominance. Sexism, both subtle and overt, was rife within the organization, as women frequently adopted female-typical ("background") roles and were inappropriately propositioned or disrespected by men. A women's caucus, inspired by white feminists' consciousness-raising circles, was formed in the spring of 1970 to embolden and empower female members, and it had some success. As one young participant said later, "Getting clarity helped me fight my own tendency to sit in the background and bite my tongue and be ashamed to speak because what do I know, you know, I'm just a woman" (p. 255). The Young Lords looked askance at the mainstream of the women's movement, which they viewed as too middle-class and inattentive to the oppression of Third World women, but it heavily influenced them nonetheless.

A men's caucus was formed later in 1970 to continue the process of "reeducating" members, specifically to teach men—in the words of one of the Young Lords' pamphlets—"to cook, to care for children, to be open to cry and show emotions because these are all good things—needed to build a new society" (p. 263). Point 10 of the Thirteen-Point Program was rewritten to state "Down with Machismo and Male Chauvinism." Around the same time, in May 1970, Denise Oliver was the first woman elected to the Central Committee. Soon thereafter, the organization adopted the policy that sexist behavior would be formally denounced and those engaging in it would be charged, tried, and disciplined. The YLO even published a lucid and sophisticated Position Paper on Women that demonstrated its commitment to the goal of raising women's status and challenging sexism, including the distinct forms of sexism in Puerto Rican culture. The Young Lords, therefore, were unusual in the growing Puerto Rican movement for their sincere attempts to address both anti-Black racism and oppression of women. As leader Iris Morales said years later, "Thinking on it now, the Lords made a real contribution. We kept saying if we're gonna change society, we have to change ourselves. I challenge you to study any of the movement pictures of that time in terms of the other organizations and especially the organizations in Puerto Rico, and you will see a total absence of women and Afro-Puerto Ricans in leadership" (p. 265).

The history of the Young Lords was, if anything, even more dense and eventful during and after 1970 than in the organization's first year. In addition to members' usual daily activities of selling the newspaper, leafleting, attending speaking engagements, assisting residents with advocacy at schools or welfare offices, testing door-to-door for tuberculosis, and so forth, they launched several major campaigns and suffered several tragedies that would contribute to the group's eventual downfall. In the summer of 1970, they began a months-long grassroots organizing effort at Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx to expose the deplorable conditions there, the climactic moment of this campaign being a highly public and effective day-long occupation of the hospital. One of the upshots of this long effort was a Patient Bill of Rights—including such demands as the right to refuse treatment, to know what medicine is being prescribed and what its side effects are, to choose your doctor, to have free daycare centers in hospitals, and to receive free healthcare—that has, in many respects, been replicated by hospitals across the country under the same name. Fernández's chapter on this ambitious campaign is one of the richest and most riveting of the book.

Around the same time there occurred a couple of events that ultimately weakened the Young Lords Party. First, beloved chairman Felipe Luciano was demoted to low-level cadre for having been on "unauthorized leave" for one day. When, as a result, he quit the YLP entirely, the organization lost the person best positioned to lead it through the crises it was about to face. One such crisis happened very soon afterwards: the Lords again occupied the First Spanish United Methodist Church—this time, however, *armed*, a highly provocative move Luciano would have vehemently opposed. The decision to brandish arms

was, at least, understandable: member Julio Roldán had just committed suicide (or, according to his comrades, been murdered) in the Manhattan House of Detention because of his barbarous treatment there. As Fernández relates, in these years young people of color across the city and the country were rising up, often explosively and violently, against epidemic brutality inside and outside prison walls. "We are armed," stated a YLP flyer, "because we must defend ourselves, and we advise all Puerto Ricans in New York to begin preparing for their defense. The U.S. government is killing us, and now we must defend ourselves or die as a nation" (p. 324).

The problem with the armed church occupation was that it increased government surveillance and repression, frequently conducted under the auspices of the FBI's COINTELPRO. The occupiers were able to escape immediate legal consequences by surreptitiously sneaking their weapons out of the church before police had had a chance to confiscate them. But in the meantime, they had intensified the state's hostility.

A more damaging move, however, was the YLP's decision in early 1971 to shift many of its resources to organizing in Puerto Rico for national independence. In the end, this campaign not only proved largely fruitless—organizers often didn't even speak Spanish, and they faced fierce repression and logistical challenges—but it also contributed to a climate of demoralization, internal party squabbling, and the loss of several crucial members who disagreed with the focus on Puerto Rico. Mass membership began to decline, the YLP offices in East Harlem and the Lower East Side closed (even as the party newspaper continued publication), and the Central Committee grew more authoritarian and intolerant of dissent. COINTELPRO's infiltration and disruption heightened trends of paranoia and factionalism, tendencies that in fact were common to groups on the left at this time. Fernández also faults the Young Lords' ever-strengthening Maoism, including its belief—which motivated, for example, the Puerto Rican misadventure—that "sheer will, dedication, and hard work among small groups rather than classes form the motor force of change" (p. 375), in addition to the Lords' hypercentralization and disconnection from the grassroots beginning in 1971. The YLP straggled on into 1974 (under a new name: the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers' Organization), but it had drastically shrunk in size and influence.

Such, then, was the ignominious demise of what had once been "a profoundly effective, beloved, and exciting socialist organization that fueled the power of the New Left and made a lasting impression on U.S. consciousness and history" (p. 377). *The Young Lords* does ample justice to this history, not least in its extremely sympathetic and even-handed treatment of the vicissitudes and failures the organization experienced. One might have wished the author had said more about the Young Lords' history in cities outside New York, but this would have increased the book's length to a truly mammoth size.

The book's useful Coda summarizes the Young Lords' achievements and contributions, from helping bring about the construction of a new building at Lincoln Hospital to "anchor[ing] a renaissance in Puerto Rican art and reclaim[ing] the Afro-Taino roots of their culture" (p. 383). As mentioned earlier, Fernández also summarizes some lessons for organizers: for example, "Bold direct action that stops the normal functioning of municipal life captures the attention of media and the public, shifts the terms of political debate, and broadens the public's understanding of social problems" (p. 384). The Lords were expert at direct action, and at communicating with the public. Activists today would do well to study their strategies, tactics, and messaging.

The U.S. is now entering an era of turbulence that in many respects parallels the 1960s. Struggles around class inequality, racism, police brutality, prison reform, urban housing, the healthcare industry, and U.S. imperialism promise to become as prominent in the years ahead as they were fifty years ago. *The Young Lords* will help to ensure that memory of that earlier time continues to inform the seemingly endless fight for human dignity.

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Eleven Theses on Socialist Revolution

How should we think about "socialist revolution" in the twenty-first century? I put the term in scare-quotes because it can be hard to believe anymore that a socialist, or economically democratic,

civilization is even possible—much less inevitable, as Marx and Engels seem to have believed. Far from being on the verge of achieving something like socialism, humanity appears to be on the verge of consuming itself in the dual conflagrations of environmental collapse and, someday perhaps, nuclear war. The collective task of *survival* seems challenging enough; the task of overcoming capitalist exploitation and instituting a politico-economic regime of cooperation, community, and democracy appears completely hopeless, given the overwhelming crises and bleak horizons of the present.

Some leftists might reply that it is precisely only by achieving socialism that civilization can save itself from multidimensional collapse. This belief may be true, but if so, the prospects for a decent future have not improved, because the timeline for abolishing capitalism and the timeline by which we must "solve" global warming and ecological collapse do not remotely correspond. There is no prospect for a national, international, or global transition to socialism within the next several decades, decades that are pivotal for addressing ecological crises. In the United States, for example, it took Republican reactionaries almost a century of organizing starting in the 1940s to achieve the power they have now, and this was in a political economy in which they already had considerable power. It isn't very likely that socialists, hardly a powerful group, will be able to overthrow capitalism on a shorter timeline. If anything, the international process of "revolution" will take much longer. Perhaps not as long as the transition from feudalism to capitalism, but certainly over a century.

It can seem, then, naïve and utopian even to consider the prospects for socialism when we're confronted with the more urgent and immediate task of sheer survival. However guilty capitalism is of imposing on humanity its current predicament, the fact is that we can make progress in addressing the environmental crisis even in the framework of capitalism, for example by accelerating the rollout of renewable and nuclear energy, dismantling the fossil fuel industry, regulating pesticides that are contributing to the decimation of insect populations, experimenting with geoengineering, and so on. These goals—and their corollaries, such as defeating centrist and conservative candidates for political office—should be the most urgent priority of left-wing activists for the foreseeable future. If organized human life comes to an end, nothing else matters much.

Nevertheless, we shouldn't just forget about socialism for now, because it remains a distant goal, a fundamental value, and organizing for it—e.g., "raising the consciousness" of the working class—can improve lives in the short term as well. So it is incumbent on us to think about how we might achieve the distant goal, what strategies promise to be effective, what has gone wrong in the past, and what revisions to Marxist theory are necessary to make sense of past failures. We shouldn't remain beholden to old slogans and formulations that were the product of very different circumstances than prevail today; we should be willing to rethink revolution from the ground up, so to speak.

I have addressed these matters in a book called *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution*, and more concisely in various articles and blog posts. Here, I'll simply present an abbreviated series of "theses" (eleven of them, in honor of Marx's Theses on Feuerbach) on the subject of revolution that strike me as commonsensical, however heterodox some of them may seem. Their cumulative point is to reorient the Marxian conception of socialist revolution from that of a completely ruptural seizure and overthrow of capitalist states—whether grounded in electoral or insurrectionary measures—followed by a planned and unitary reconstruction of society (the "dictatorship of the proletariat"), to that of a very gradual process of economic and political transformation over many generations, in which the character of the economy changes together with that of the state. The long transition is not peaceful or smooth or blandly "reformist." It is necessarily riven at all points by violent, quasi-insurrectionary clashes between the working class and the ruling class, between international popular movements seeking to carve out a new society and a capitalist elite seeking to prolong the current one. Given the accumulating popular pressure on a global scale, which among other things will succeed in electing ever more socialists to office, the capitalist state will, in spite of itself, participate to some extent in the construction of new economic relations that is the foundation of constructing a new society—even as the state in other respects continues to violently repress dissenting movements.

But the process of building a new economy will not be exclusively statist (despite the statism of mainstream Marxism going back to Marx himself). Transitions between modes of production take place on

more than one plane and are not only "top-down." In particular, as civilization descends deeper into crisis and government proves inadequate to the task of maintaining social order, the "solidarity economy," supported by the state, will grow in prominence and functionality. A world of multiform catastrophe will see alternative economic arrangements spring up at all levels, and the strategies of "statist Marxism" will complement, or be complemented by, the "mutual aid" (cooperative, frequently small-scale, semi-interstitial) strategies of anarchism. These two broad traditions of the left, so often at each other's throats, will finally, in effect, come together to build up a new society in the midst of a collapsing *ancien régime*. Crisis will, as always, provide opportunity.

1

Successful socialist revolution, meaning the creation of a society that eliminates differential ownership and control of economic resources and instead permits democratic popular control of the economy, has happened nowhere on a large scale or a "permanent" ("post-capitalist") basis. Whether in Russia, China, Cuba, or elsewhere, the dream of socialism—still less of communism—has never been realized. According to Marxism, indeed, the very fact that these were isolated islands under siege by a capitalist world indicates that they signified something other than socialism, which is, naturally enough, supposed to *follow* capitalism and exist first and foremost in the "advanced" countries. The fact that these "socialist" experiments ultimately succumbed to capitalism is enough to show that, whatever progress they entailed for their respective populations, they were in some sense, in the long term, revolutionary abortions.

2

Marx was right that there is a kind of "logic" to historical development. Notwithstanding the postmodernist and empiricist shibboleths of contemporary historiography, history isn't all contingency, particularity, individual agency, and alternative paths that were tragically not taken (because of poor leadership or whatever). Rather, institutional contexts determine that some things are possible or probable and others impossible. Revolutionary voluntarism, the elevation of political will above the painfully protracted, largely "unconscious" dialectical processes of resolution of structural contradictions and subsequent appearance of new, unforeseen conditions that are themselves "resolved" through the ordinary actions of millions of people, is a false (and un-Marxist) theory of social change. If the world didn't go socialist in the twentieth century, it's because it couldn't have: structurally, in the heyday of corporate capitalism (monopoly capitalism, state capitalism, imperialism, whatever one calls it), socialism was impossible.

In short, on the broadest of historical scales, the "hidden meaning" of the past—to use a phrase beloved by Marx—is revealed by the present and future, as probabilities with which the past was pregnant become realities.

3

Marx therefore got the timeline of revolution radically wrong. He did not (and could not) foresee the power of nationalism, the welfare state, Keynesian stimulation of demand, the state's stabilizing management of the crisis-prone economy, and the like. In fact, we might say that, falling victim to the characteristic over-optimism of Enlightenment thinkers, he mistook the birth pangs of industrial capitalism for its death throes. Only in the neoliberal era has the capitalist mode of production even finished its conquest of the world—which the "dialectical" logic of historical materialism suggests is a necessary precondition for socialism—displacing remaining peasantries from the land and privatizing "state-socialist" economies and state-owned resources. Given the distribution of power during and after the 1970s between the working class and the business class, together with the increasing mobility of capital (a function of the advancing productive forces, thus predictable from historical materialism), neoliberal assaults on postwar working-class gains were, in retrospect, entirely predictable.

4

Despite, or because of, its horrifying destructiveness, neoliberalism potentially can play the role of opening up long-term revolutionary possibilities (even as it presents fascist possibilities as well). Its function of exacerbating class polarization, immiserating the working class, eroding social democracy, ripping up the social fabric, degrading the natural environment, destabilizing the global economy, relatively homogenizing conditions between countries, hollowing out the corporatist nation-state and compromising the integrity of the very (anti-revolutionary) idea of "nationality," facilitating a *global* consciousness through electronic media—a consciousness, in the end, of suffering and oppression—and attenuating the middle class (historically a pretty reliable bastion of conservatism): all this in the aggregate serves to stimulate mass protest on a scale that, eventually, the state will find unmanageable.

Fascist repression, it's true, is very useful, but fascist regimes can hardly remain in power indefinitely in every country. Even just in the U.S., the governmental structure is too vast and federated, and civil society too thick and resilient, for genuine fascism ever to be fully consolidated everywhere, much less made permanent. Repression alone is not a viable solution for the ruling class.

5

Sooner or later, it will be found necessary to make substantive concessions to the masses (while never abandoning repression). Some writers argue that what these will amount to is a revitalization and expansion of social democracy, such a sustained expansion (under the pressure of popular movements) that eventually society will pass from social democracy straight into socialism. This argument, however, runs contrary to the spirit of Marxism, according to which society does not return to previous social formations after they have departed the stage of history. Fully fledged social democracy was appropriate to a time of industrial unionism and limited mobility of capital; it is hard to imagine that an era of unprecedented crisis and decaying nation-states will see humanity resuscitate, globally, a rather "stable" and nationalistic social form, even expanding it relative to its capacity when unions were incomparably stronger than today. While social democratic policies will surely persist and continue to be legislated, the intensifying dysfunction of the nation-state (a social form that is just as transient as others) will necessitate the granting of different kinds of concessions than centralized and expansive social democratic ones.

6

Here, we have to shift for a moment to considering the Marxist theory of revolution. Then we'll see the significance of the concessions that states will likely be compelled to grant. There is a glaring flaw in Marx's conceptualization (expressed, for example, in the famous Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*) according to which "an era of social revolution" begins when the dominant mode of production starts to fetter the use and development of the productive forces. The flaw is simply that the notion of "fettering" is semi-meaningless. Philosophers such as G. A. Cohen have grappled with this concept of fettering, but we don't have to delve into the niceties of analytic philosophy in order to understand that the capitalist mode of production has always both fettered and developed the productive forces—fettered them in the context, for instance, of devastating depressions, disincentives to invest in public goods, artificial obstacles to the diffusion of knowledge, and, in general, a socially irrational distribution of resources; even as in other respects it still *develops* the productive forces, as with advances in information technology, biotechnology, renewable energy, and so on. In order to be truly meaningful, therefore, this concept of fettering needs revision.

7

The necessary revision is simple: we have to adopt a *relative* notion of fettering. Rather than an absolute conflict, or a contradiction, between productive forces and production relations, there is a conflict between *two sets of production relations, one of which uses productive forces in a more socially rational and "un-fettering" way than the other*. This revision makes the idea of fettering meaningful, even concretely observable. Capitalism, for example, was, in the final analysis, able to triumph over feudalism because it was infinitely better at developing productive forces, such that its agents could accumulate far greater resources (economic, scientific, technological, intellectual, cultural) than the agents of feudalism. The epoch of social revolution, properly speaking, lasted half a millennium, though it was punctuated by dramatic moments of condensed social and political revolution such as the French Revolution.

If the idea of fettering is to apply to a transition between capitalism and socialism, it can be made sense of only through a similar "relative" understanding, according to which a cooperative and democratic mode of production emerges over a prolonged period of time (hopefully not half a millennium) both interstitially and more visibly in the mainstream. As the old anarchic economy succumbs to crisis and stagnation, the emergent "democratic" economy—which does not yet exist today—does a better job of rationally and equitably distributing resources, thereby attracting ever more people to its practices and ideologies. It accumulates greater resources as the old economy continues to demonstrate its appalling injustice and dysfunction.

8

This theoretical framework permits an answer to the old question that has bedeviled so many radicals: why have all attempts at socialist revolution failed? The answer is that they happened in conditions that guaranteed their eventual failure. There was a radical difference between, for example, October 1917 and the French Revolution: in the latter case, capitalist relations and ideologies had already spread over Western Europe and acquired enormous power and legitimacy. The French revolutionaries were beneficiaries of centuries of capitalist evolution—not, indeed, industrial capitalist, but mercantile, agrarian, financial, and petty-bourgeois. This long economic, social, cultural, and political evolution prepared the ground for the victories of 1789–1793. In 1917, on the other hand, there was no socialist economy whatsoever on which to erect a political superstructure (a superstructure that, in turn, would facilitate the further and more unobstructed development of the socialist economy). Even industrial capitalism was barely implanted in Russia, much less socialism. The meaning of 1917 was merely that a group of opportunistic political adventurers led by two near-geniuses (Lenin and Trotsky) took advantage of a desperate wartime situation and the desperation of the populace—much of which, as a result, supported these "adventurers"—to seize power and almost immediately suppress whatever limited democracy existed. The authoritarian, bureaucratic, and brutal regime that, partly in the context of civil war, resulted—and that ultimately led to Stalinism—was about as far from socialism as one can imagine.

It is one of the ironies of the twentieth century that the Bolsheviks both forgot and illustrate a central Marxian dictum: *never trust the self-interpretations of historical actors*. There is always an objective context and an objective, hidden historical meaning behind the actions of people like Robespierre, Napoleon, or Lenin, a meaning they have no access to because they are caught up in the whirl of events (and, to quote Hegel, the owl of Minerva flies only at dusk, *after* the events). The fact that Lenin and his comrades were convinced they were establishing socialism is of no more than psychological interest. It is unfortunate that many Marxists today continue to credulously believe them.

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Said differently, the twentieth-century strategy of "Marxist" revolutionaries to seize the state (whether electorally or in an insurrection) and *then* carry out a social revolution—by means of a sweeping, "totalizing" political will—is highly un-Marxist. It is idealistic, voluntaristic, and unrealistic: history moves forward slowly, dialectically, "behind the backs" of historical actors, not straightforwardly or transparently through the all-conquering will of a few leaders or a single political party. The basic problem is that if you

try to reconstruct society entirely from the top down, you have to contend with all the institutional legacies of capitalism. Relations of coercion and domination condition everything you do, and there is no way to break free of them by means of political or bureaucratic will. While the right state policies can be of enormous help in constructing an economically democratic society, in order for it to be genuinely democratic it cannot come into existence *solely through the state*. Marxism itself suggests that the state—largely a function of existing economic relations—cannot be socially creative in such a radical way. Instead, there has to be a ferment of creative energy at the grassroots (as there was during the long transition from feudalism to modern capitalism) that builds and builds over generations, laboriously inventing new kinds of institutions in a process that is both, or alternately, obstructed and facilitated by state policies (depending on whether reactionaries or liberals are in power, or, eventually, leftists).

Nearly all attempts at socialist revolution so far have been directed at a *statist rupture* with the past, and have therefore failed.[1] There is no such thing as a genuine "rupture" in history: if you attempt it, you'll find that you're merely reproducing the old authoritarianism, the old hierarchies, the old bureaucratic inefficiencies and injustices, though in new forms.[2] Rather, the final, culminating stage of the conquest of the state has to take place *after* a long period of economic gestation, so to speak (again, gestation that has been facilitated by incremental changes in state policies, as during the feudalism-to-capitalism transition), a gestation that serves as the material foundation for the final casting off of capitalist residues in the (by then) already-partially-transformed state.

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This brings us back to the question of how capitalist elites will deal with the popular discontent that is certain to accumulate globally in the coming decades. Since the political economy that produced social democracy is passing from the scene, other sorts of concessions (in addition to repression) will be necessary. In our time of political reaction it is, admittedly, not very easy to imagine what these might be. But we can guess that, as national governments prove increasingly unable to cope with environmental and social crises, they will permit or even encourage the creation of new institutional forms at local, regional, and eventually national levels. Many of these institutions, such as cooperatives of every type (producer, consumer, housing, banking, etc.), will fall under the category of the solidarity economy, which is committed to the kind of mutual aid that has already been rather prominent in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Capitalism's loss of legitimacy will foster the conditions in which people seek more power in their workplaces, in many cases likely taking them over, aided by changes in state policies (such as the active promotion of a cooperative sector to provide employment in a stagnant economy) due in part to the presence of more socialists in government. Other innovations may include a proliferation of public banks, municipal enterprises (again, in part, to provide jobs at a time of raging structural and cyclical unemployment), and even universal basic income.

The subject of what types of "non-reformist reforms"—i.e., reforms that have the potential to serve as stepping-stones to a new economy—governments will be compelled, on pain of complete social collapse, to grant is much too complex to be explored in a brief article. Two points suffice here. First, the usual Marxist critiques of (worker) cooperatives and other ostensibly apolitical, interstitial "anti-capitalist" institutions—such as "mutual aid"—can be answered simply by countering that these are only *one part* of

[1] Other reasons for their failure have been operative as well, notably imperialist interference with the revolutionary process. But the effectiveness of such interference has itself shown the inadequacy of an exclusively "ruptural" strategy—the attempt to create socialism by political fiat in a still-overwhelmingly-capitalist world—because core capitalist nations usually find it easy to squash the political revolution when it hasn't been preceded by generations of socialist institution-building across the globe, including in the heart of the most advanced countries.

[2] To repeat, this is the lesson of Marxism itself. We are embedded in the past even when trying to idealistically leap out of it and leave it behind. Insofar as Marx sometimes wrote as if a proletarian dictatorship could virtually "start anew," enacting whatever policies it wanted and planning a new society as though from a blueprint, he forgot the gist of his own thought.

a very long and multidimensional project that takes place on explicitly political planes too. It is puzzling that so many radicals seem unaware that the transition to a new civilization is an incredibly complex, drawn-out process: for instance, over many generations, emergent institutions like cooperatives network with each other, support each other, accumulate and share resources in an attempt to become ever freer of the competitive, sociopathic logic of the capitalist economy. At the same time, all this grassroots or semi-grassroots activity contributes to building up a counter-hegemony, an anti-capitalist ethos in much of the population. And the resources that are accumulated through cooperative economic activity can be used to help fund political movements whose goal is to further transform the capitalist state and democratize the economy.

Second, the question naturally arises as to why the ruling class will tolerate, or at times even encourage, all this grassroots and statist "experimentation" with non-capitalist institutions. On one level, the answer is just that the history will unfold rather slowly (as history always does—a lesson too often forgotten by revolutionaries), such that at any given time it won't appear as if some little policy here or there poses an existential threat to capitalism. It will seem that all that is being done is to try to stabilize society and defuse mass discontent by piecemeal reforms (often merely local or regional). Meanwhile, the severity of the worldwide crises—including, inevitably, economic depression, which destroys colossal amounts of wealth and thins the ranks of the obstinate elite—will weaken some of the resistance of the business class to even the more far-reaching policy changes. By the time it becomes clear that capitalism is really on the ropes, it will be too late: too many changes will already have occurred, across the world. Historical time cannot be rewound. The momentum of the global social revolution will, by that point, be unstoppable, not least because only non-capitalist (anti-privatizing, etc.) policies will have any success at addressing ecological and social disaster.

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The argument that has been sketched here has a couple of implications and a single major presupposition. The presupposition is that civilization will not destroy itself before the historical logic of this long social revolution has had time to unfold. There is no question that the world is in for an extraordinary era of climatic chaos, but—if for a moment we can indulge in optimism—it might transpire that the ecological changes serve to accelerate the necessary reforms by stimulating protest on an absolutely overwhelming scale. Maybe, then, humanity would save itself in the very nick of time. If not, well, we'll have a grim answer to the old question "Socialism or barbarism?"

One implication of the argument is that there is a kernel of truth in most ideological tendencies on the left, and radicals should therefore temper their squabbling. The old debates between, say, Marxists and anarchists are seen to be narrow, short-sighted, crabbed, doctrinaire, and premised on a false understanding of the timescales in question. If one expects revolution to happen over a couple of decades, then yes, the old sectarian disputes might acquire urgency and make some sense. But if one chooses to be a Marxist rather than a voluntarist, a realist rather than an idealist, one sees that global revolution will take a century or two, and there is temporal room for statist and non-statist strategies of all kinds.

A second implication, less practically important but of interest anyway, is that Marxists going back to the founder himself have misunderstood the prescriptions of historical materialism. There may well be something like a "dictatorship of the proletariat" someday, but, since idealism and voluntarism are false, it will (like the earlier "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie") happen near the end of the revolutionary epoch, not at the beginning. It is impossible to predict what form the state will take by then, or how the final removal of bourgeois remnants from government will further transform it. What can be known is only that in order to politically oust the ruling class, the working class needs not just numbers but *resources*, which hitherto it has lacked on the necessary scale. With the gradual—but, of course, contested and violent—spread of a semi-socialist economy alongside (and interacting with) the decadent capitalist one, workers will be able to accumulate the requisite resources to effectually compete against the shrinking business class, electing left-wing representatives and progressively changing the character of the capitalist state.

Meanwhile, in the streets, people will be figuratively manning the barricades, decade after decade, across a world tortured by the greed of the wealthy and the suffering of the masses. All their struggles, surely, will not be in vain.

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Resisting Fascism: A Review of Shane Burley's "Why We Fight"

The elevation of Donald Trump onto the national political stage in 2016 provoked a heated debate among centrist and left-wing commentators that has yet to be resolved (and likely never will be): do Trump and the Republican Party today represent a recrudescence of fascism, or is this a flawed historical analogy? Writers like Timothy Snyder and Jason Stanley insisted on the parallels between interwar fascism and the contemporary far-right, from demonization of ethnic "Others" to fomenting of violence against democratic institutions (as on January 6, 2021); writers such as Samuel Moyn and Corey Robin disagreed, arguing that Trump proved to be much too weak a figure—and his attacks on the political order were much too weak—to legitimately be called fascist. Scores of articles and books have been published litigating the term "fascism" and its applicability to various ugly phenomena across the American political scene.[1]

Wisely, journalist Shane Burley bypasses this debate in his new collection of essays *Why We Fight: Essays on Fascism, Resistance, and Surviving the Apocalypse*. It's clear there are both similarities and differences between classical fascism, on the one hand, and Trumpism and the modern far-right on the other. (For this reason, one might call the latter neofascism or proto-fascism, as an acknowledgement of the valid points made on both sides of the debate.) Instead, Burley takes it for granted, and illustrates throughout his book, that a vast constellation of groups and individuals on the right today have salient fascist characteristics and would happily tear down democracy if they could. *Why We Fight* consists mostly of articles Burley has published in recent years shedding light on these shadowy groups, this underworld of the Alt-Right and its relatives.

In seventeen chapters, Burley illuminates the methods and varieties of both fascist and anti-fascist organizing. Among the topics he covers are the rise and fall of the Alt-Right, from 2008 to the aftermath of the Charlottesville "Unite the Right" rally in 2017; the nature of the "Alt-Light," a less extreme version of the far-right that coalesced around figures like Milo Yiannopoulos, Alex Jones, and online "manosphere" leader Mike Cernovich; the toxic cult of masculinity that unites a wide range of far-right groups; the world of fascist publishing in Europe and the U.S., led by companies like Arktos Media and Counter-Currents that are dedicated to "creating the intellectual foundation for a new fascism" (p. 151); attempts by anti-fascists to colonize cultural spaces that have often attracted fascists, such as soccer, gun clubs, mixed martial arts, the paganism and heathenry subculture, and, in music, black metal and neofolk; the deep-rooted and continuing appeal of antisemitism to the far-right; and even the remarkable Kurdish experiment in an anarchist, anti-fascist society at Rojava. Altogether, the book gives a nuanced and compelling picture of the highly fragmented, internally divided, typically amateurish, but very frightening world of the contemporary far-right—from the Proud Boys to militia organizations, from journalist provocateurs like Andy Ngô to the neo-Confederate Council of Conservative Citizens (founded in 1985), from "lone wolf" mass shooters to student groups like Turning Point USA that seek to intimidate and silence left-wing voices at college campuses.

As an "advocacy journalist," Burley eschews a neutral or academic tone; he combines history, journalism, psychology, an editorial voice, and even memoir to stitch together a tapestry that, in its totality, serves to communicate the urgency of fighting and defeating all these noxious forces. In one of his pieces, for example, he argues that anti-fascist activists (often known collectively as antifa), rather than some diffuse "public opinion" or mainstream intellectual commentary, were responsible for the downfall of the

[1] For an overview of the debate, see Udi Greenberg, "What Was the Fascism Debate?," *Dissent* (Summer, 2021). Links to some sources can be found at Matthew Sitman and Sam Adler-Bell, "Did It Happen Here?," *Dissent*, January 19, 2021.

Alt-Right in the months after Charlottesville. Through constant interference with public talks by Alt-Right speakers, pressure on university administrations and other venues not to permit such talks, counter-protests, violent physical confrontations, and other aggressive measures, left-wing activists essentially shut down the Alt-Right phase of the white nationalist movement.

"Police barricades," Burley writes, "last-minute venue cancelations, and public brawls overshadowed the Alt Right's message, and as members were doxxed and fired from their jobs, it became harder and harder to make their movement attractive to recruits. In the wake of Charlottesville, they were forced off social media, web hosting, podcast platforms, and just about every outreach tool available, leaving them only to the back alleys of the internet" (p. 57). He clearly endorses such tactics, barely even acknowledging concerns about censorship and the right to free speech.

It would have been interesting, however, for him to delve into the ongoing debate over tactics and moral principles. Or, if this would have distracted from the book's journalistic focus, it is at least incumbent on the reader to think through these issues. On one side are, it appears, the majority of leftists who both deny that fascists have a right to be heard and, tactically, think the best way to defeat them is to prevent them from being heard. On the other side are principled civil libertarians such as Noam Chomsky and Glenn Greenwald who argue that everyone has the right to be heard, neither the state nor private entities like Twitter and Facebook should be allowed to police speech (for then what is to prevent them from policing left-wing speech, as they in fact constantly do?), and even tactically the best way to defeat fascists is to let them air their views so that others can expose their absurdity and immorality. Chomsky, for instance, argues that while fascists should never be invited to speak at college campuses, if they are, the best response is not to shut down the event—which allows the speaker to pose as a great defender of free speech under attack by leftist totalitarians—but to use it as an educational opportunity and organize a counter-event exposing the hideousness of far-right ideas.[1]

One might reply, on the other hand, that making life miserable for fascists does seem to help inhibit the growth of a movement. (But, again, is such harassment, including violence, wrong in principle?) As for "deplatforming" the far-right, someone in Burley's camp might concede that social media companies (for example) should not have the right to police speech and indeed should be publicly owned and operated, while maintaining at the same time that as long as private entities do have this right and are happy to wield it against the left, activists should pressure them to wield it also against racists. If doing so helps conservatives and centrists vilify leftists as authoritarian and opposed to free speech, so be it.

A chapter devoted to these questions of principle and tactics, thorough and fair-minded in its treatment of the conflicting arguments, might have been a valuable addition to Burley's book, especially given the book's activist purpose.

One theme that recurs in some of the essays is the useful reminder that fascism doesn't always wear its heart on its sleeve, and it is important to be able to see through euphemisms or non-fascist appearances to the political reality and poisonous potential underneath. Burley quotes reporter Tess Owen: "Far-right publishing companies like Arktos have sought to give white nationalism a veneer of pseudo-intellectual legitimacy by dressing up old, ugly, racist ideas in euphemisms. For example, their authors don't talk about whiteness, they talk about 'European identity.' This is part of a calculated strategy: move out of the fringes, and into the political mainstream" (p. 164). There are certainly "degrees" of fascism among groups and individuals on the right, but, in the words of Burley, to the extent that there is commitment to "human

[1] The journalist Natasha Lennard, who wrote a foreword to *Why We Fight*, contests Chomsky's position by making the remarkable claim that arguing against white supremacy is futile; only *force* (of various kinds) can work. "Anyone who has watched [Richard] Spencer and his ilk in public debates," she writes, "…should see how the belief that his violent white supremacy can be reasoned away is flawed. He sticks to his guns about the necessity of a white 'ethno-state'…" But the point, of course, is not to convince the fanatical racists themselves; the point is to educate and inoculate the public, including young men who might otherwise be susceptible to white supremacy. It is deeply defeatist and cynical to have no faith in the power of rational argument. See Natasha Lennard, "Is Antifa Counterproductive? White Nationalist Richard Spencer Would Beg to Differ," *The Intercept*, March 17, 2018.

inequality, social traditionalism, racial nationalism, and an authoritarian vision founded in the resurrection of heroic mythologies" (p. 65), there is an affinity for fascism.[1]

Even the mere cult of masculinity, widespread among large numbers of disaffected men in an age of social dissolution, can embody very dangerous ideological impulses, as Burley documents in his lengthy final chapter. The whole online "manosphere" of "men's rights" advocates, incels, pick-up artists, and the like, can be considered a sort of gateway drug to fascism—and it must be said that leftists ignore or ridicule these millions of lost male souls at their peril. When you leave the indoctrinating and organizing of men, as men, to the right-wing, what you get are weird perversions like the neopagan Wolves of Vinland, which Burley has investigated in depth. Founded in 2005 by the bodybuilder Paul Waggener, the Wolves of Vinland is a "male-tribalist organization" that assures men that "the promise of their patriarchal authority is built into the connective tissue of the natural world and that their feeling of anxiety is the proper reaction to the 'attack on men' that the modern world has devised" (p. 261). Until being recently discontinued, its online and in-person program Operation Werewolf—"equal parts pagan instruction, workout regimen, and self-help manual" (p. 261)—attracted men from all over the world who craved the "Total Life Reform" it promised. This involved, in part, being indoctrinated into a semi-Nietzschean ideology that glorified violence, physical strength and pain, an idealized masculinity, tribalism, hierarchy, and contempt for the effeminate weakness and decadence of modern society.

What is most frightening about Operation Werewolf, which Burley discusses in great detail while interweaving stories of his own personal experiences with unhealthily masculinist cultures, is that it is just one tiny node in a sprawling global network of similar proto-fascist subcultures. What the left's answer to this challenge should be is not entirely clear. Burley's proposed solutions to fascist organizing, scattered throughout the book, are, perhaps inevitably, vague; for instance, to counter groups like the Wolves of Vinland, he suggests we "build up communities that are strong," "rediscover spiritual traditions…that can connect us to where we are today," and "help people build a body cult to stay tied to their physicality and health, not to fit the prescriptions of a hierarchical and fat-phobic fitness culture, but to build themselves according to the vision they alone have" (p. 305). What is clear is that the task of defeating cultures of "toxic masculinity," which often overlap with white supremacy, will require meeting people on their own terms and dispensing with contemporary leftists' beloved "purity tests" for who they will or won't interact with.

Why We Fight is, in short, worth a read if one seeks information about cultures of the far-right. This isn't to say, however, that it is immune to criticism. Burley's style of writing, while at times eloquent, is often awkward, as well as needlessly prolix, rambling, and repetitive. The frequent typos and grammatically awkward constructions are distracting. More substantively, it would have been nice to see some information on the kinds of people who have been attracted to these fascist organizations, such as their class, occupational, and geographic backgrounds. Statistical studies of Trump's supporters have shown them to be disproportionately petty-bourgeois and moderately affluent, though frequently without a college degree: small business owners, real estate brokers, managers, and so on—not primarily "the white working class," despite the mythology. The same is presumably true of the groups Burley discusses, but he presents very little data on the matter.

Likewise, one would have appreciated more information on the funding sources of all these far-right groups, particularly to what extent some of them might be supported by reactionary big business. Doubtless such information is not readily available, though.

In the end, however imperative it is to fight against such organizations as the Wolves of Vinland, or the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers, the American Identity Movement, the Atomwaffen Division, etc., it is surely not these peons, the flotsam and jetsam of a tempestuous capitalist society, who present the gravest danger to the country and the world. It is the "respectable" people and institutions: the Charles Kochs of

[1] On this understanding, the intellectual celebrity Jordan Peterson, for example, who is enamored of hierarchies ("consider the lobster!"), archaic myths, cultural tradition, strong and heroic masculinity, and the conflict between Order and Chaos, has quite a few points of contact with fascism. See Pankaj Mishra, "Jordan Peterson and Fascist Mysticism," *New York Review of Books*, March 19, 2018.

the world, the ExxonMobils, the Citigroups and JPMorgan Chases, the Defense Departments and Supreme Courts—the ruling class. These are the agents of our coming immolation in the fires of ecological holocaust and, possibly, nuclear war. Relatively speaking, the likes of Paul Waggener and Andy Ngô are picayune. They're dangerous, but more dangerous are the well-funded think tanks and propaganda outlets like the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute—two of the forces behind the immensely damaging Tea Party—or the Manhattan Institute, one of whose "senior fellows" (Christopher Rufo) is almost entirely responsible for the current furor over "critical race theory."[1] Fox News, One America News, the Daily Caller, the Daily Wire—these are the entities that indoctrinate tens of millions.

How, or whether, the left can dethrone these truly demonic forces before they cause the demise of society is the burning question. As always, the answer can only be found through mass education and organization.

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The Radicalism of Working-Class Americans

In the United States there exists today, and has existed since at least the 1950s, a dominant political narrative according to which most Americans, indeed the very history of the country, exemplify a kind of ideological "moderateness." Democratic Party operatives and sympathizers constantly preach the virtues of occupying the political center, where most of the population supposedly resides. If the party caves in to its "extremist" left wing, it faces electoral annihilation. This narrative echoes, in a vulgar and opportunistic way, the postwar "liberal consensus" school of thought among social scientists and more generally the political culture, that the U.S. has historically been an exceptional country in its relatively middle-class and Lockean-liberal character, its individualism, its relative absence of dramatic ideological clashes, of class conflict and class consciousness. Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America*, for example, published in 1955, was a classic expression of this "centrist" interpretation of American history, an interpretation that tended to explain away and criticize what dissent there was—on the left and the right—as consisting of fringe movements of status anxieties, maladjusted psychologies, anti-intellectual impulses, hysterical moralism, and the like.

For the centrist establishments, then, of both the Cold War and today, left-wing (and right-wing) dissidence is simultaneously pathological and, in the broad sweep of American history, aberrational. The U.S. is *essentially* a middle-of-the-road, bourgeois country, which is why radical movements have usually failed and are doomed to failure in the present and future.

Since the 1960s, scholars have subjected this liberal creed in its various facets to devastating criticism, but it continues to hold sway, in some form, even among sophisticated academics who ought to know better. An early critique was given by Michael Paul Rogin in his brilliant *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* (1967), which systematically exposed the flaws in liberal analyses of "protest politics" (notably their assimilation of McCarthyism to an earlier tradition of agrarian radicalism, as if "irrational" left populism was to blame for McCarthy). Later scholars have shown that U.S. history contains just as much class conflict and class consciousness as the history of Western Europe; Sean Wilentz's 1984 article "Against Exceptionalism: Class Consciousness and the American Labor Movement, 1790–1920" is a compelling statement of this point of view.

Recently, my own book *Popular Radicalism and the Unemployed in Chicago during the Great Depression* (2022) has criticized liberal analyses of the 1930s, which tend to dismiss the idea that there was much radical potential—socialist yearnings or revolutionary sentiment—in popular collective action of the time. Supposedly even in the 1930s, the quintessential "collectivist" decade, the American masses remained

[1] Benjamin Wallace-Wells, "How a Conservative Activist Invented the Conflict over Critical Race Theory," *New Yorker*, June 18, 2021. On the origins of the Tea Party, see Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (New York: Anchor Books, 2017)—or, more briefly, my blog post "The rise of right-wing libertarianism since the 1950s."

broadly subject to the hegemony of bourgeois culture, loyal to the distinctive U.S. political economy, and uninterested in radical social change. After all, they adored Franklin Roosevelt and rushed into the open arms of the Democratic Party in 1936.

Given that the political economy of the U.S. today has ominous parallels with the economy that eventuated in the Great Depression—including extreme income and wealth inequality, limitless aggrandizement of big business, and weakness of organized labor—it might be of interest to challenge such interpretations of American history, borrowing from my book. There is in fact an enormous base of support for truly radical change today, and there certainly was in the 1930s.

Historians influenced by the liberal tradition, such as, for example, the late Alan Brinkley, Jill Lepore, and Jefferson Cowie, tend to adopt a somewhat "idealistic" (anti-materialistic) perspective on society, to some extent abstracting from class conditions and class conflict in favor of an emphasis on culture, ideas, ideologies, and discourses. "The United States is founded on a set of ideas," Lepore writes in her defiantly anti-leftist bestseller *These Truths: A History of the United States* (2018)—and of course the ideas in question are noble ideas: "a dedication to equality… [and] a dedication to inquiry, fearless and unflinching." This is the way of the liberal (and many a conservative as well): to ground society in abstract ideas, preferably lofty ones, prioritizing "consciousness" over "social being," as if Karl Marx hadn't already shown in *The German Ideology* (1846) that the former is largely a sublimation (often obfuscation) of the latter. The idealistic method typically implies an ahistorical essentialism: the U.S. is "essentially" committed to equality and democracy, however rarely it may live up to "its" ideals—or it is essentially individualistic or anti-statist or capitalist or whatever other idea is favored. In abstracting from class conditions, idealism usually has conservative implications, which is doubtless why it has always been preferred by ruling classes and the intellectuals who speak for them.

Jefferson Cowie is more sophisticated and less propagandistic than Lepore, but he too, like many other excellent historians, is not always sufficiently materialistic. For instance, in *The Great Exception: The New Deal and the Limits of American Politics* (2016) he insists that Americans remained very "individualistic" even in the depths of the Great Depression, and that traditions of so-called individualism have contributed significantly to vitiating collectivist radicalism in the United States. Like other liberal scholars, Cowie seems to prefer explaining the defeats of the American left in terms of the stubbornness of various popular ideologies and cultures, including divisions among the working class (between race, ethnicity, skill, gender, etc., as if such divisions haven't existed elsewhere), rather than the more basic and "material" fact that America's capitalist class has historically been unusually ruthless, class-conscious, repressive, resourceful, and dominant over the state. This fact, indeed, is the real American "exceptionalism," and it is the primary explanation for the failures of the left in the U.S.

As a case-study of popular consciousness, we might consider the remarkable nationwide support given to two famous left-wing "demagogues" of the 1930s, Huey Long and the "radio priest" Father Charles Coughlin. (Coughlin is sometimes called a fascist, but respected scholars have argued that this label isn't appropriate for him until after 1937, by which time his popularity was vastly diminished.) Historians commonly interpret the massive popularity of these two figures as, ironically, proof of the relative conservatism of Americans. Cowie, for example, in a vague and idealistic formulation (disregarding class) characteristic of liberal historiography, states that these men and their following were very individualistic: they merely hoped "to restore the republic to the little man, resurrect some version of traditional values, and deliver the individual from the crush of mass society." His interpretation echoes that of Alan Brinkley's *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (1983):

> The failure of more radical political movements to take root in the 1930s reflected, in part, the absence of a serious radical tradition in American political culture. The rhetoric of class conflict echoed only weakly among men and women steeped in the dominant themes of their nation's history; and leaders [such as Communists] relying upon that rhetoric faced grave, perhaps insuperable difficulties in attempting to create political coalitions. The Long and Coughlin movements, by contrast, flourished precisely because they evoked so clearly

> one of the oldest and most powerful of American political traditions [namely, "opposition to centralized authority and demands for the wide dispersion of power"].

But what did Long and Coughlin actually say? It is revealing to look at their words. While they both denounced Socialism and Communism, Coughlin thundered that "capitalism is doomed and not worth trying to save." A journalist wrote in 1935 that he "talk[s] about a living wage, about profits for the farmer, about government-protected labor unions. He insists that human rights be placed above property rights. He emphasizes the 'wickedness' of 'private financialism and production for profit.'" The principles of Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice, founded in 1934, included the following: a "just and living [i.e., not market-determined] annual wage which will enable [every citizen willing and able to work] to maintain and educate his family according to the standards of American decency"; nationalization of such "public necessities" as banking, credit and currency, power, light, oil and natural gas, and natural resources; private ownership of all other property, but control of it for the public good; abolition of the privately owned Federal Reserve and establishment of a government-owned central bank; "the lifting of crushing taxation from the slender revenues of the laboring class" and substituting for it taxation of the rich; and the guiding value that "the chief concern of government shall be for the poor."

Huey Long, similarly, made fairly radical proposals, as we can read in his whimsical retrospective account of his *First Days in the White House*, a book completed shortly before he was shot. A reviewer summarized Long's post-presidential self-description as follows:

> He was the man of action who in rapid succession launched a stupendous program of reclamation and conservation, who planned for scientific treatment of criminals, cheaper transportation and popular control of banking. Higher education for all became fact. Tell every parent, he said to his advisers, "I will send your boy and girl to college." There was much more, but all was overshadowed by legislation for the redistribution of wealth [by means of confiscatory taxation on the wealthy].

These are hardly ideas that shun class conflict. Nor are they obviously "individualistic." Insofar as Coughlin and Long's tens of millions of fans, in the working and middle classes, agreed with these political programs, they certainly can be said to have desired *fundamental* reforms in American capitalism, reforms that would have ushered in a much more collectivistic and socialistic society. It requires the impressive intellectual acrobatics of liberal historiography to differentiate these messages from a class-based populism and claim they can be largely reduced to an "opposition to centralized authority" or a "resurrection of traditional values."

There is more truth to the way Eric Leif Davin frames the matter in his article "Blue Collar Democracy: Class War and Political Revolution in Western Pennsylvania, 1932–1937" (2000): "Fundamentally, the political mobilization of the working class in the thirties was a class war for political and economic equality." It is suspicious, after all, that intellectuals are often so determined to deny that the ideal of socialism—workers' democratic control of their economic life—has much appeal to working Americans. Why wouldn't it, inasmuch as people obviously want control over their lives and livelihood? Indeed, Brinkley admits as much when he says that Long, Coughlin, and their followers called for "a society in which the individual retained control of his life and livelihood; in which power resided in visible, accessible institutions; in which wealth was equitably (if not necessarily equally) shared." The obvious reply to this characterization is that it is little but a watered-down definition of socialism!

If American workers don't always flock to the banner of socialism or communism, the most plausible explanation, prima facie, isn't that they are deeply attached to some traditional ideology or are the benighted victims of bourgeois hegemony but simply that they understand it is hopelessly unrealistic, for now, to try to achieve a democratic economy. As Vivek Chibber has recently argued, it is their *rationality*, not their *ideology*, that generally keeps working-class Americans from throwing themselves into the profoundly difficult (and frequently criminalized) project of building a nationwide class movement that can overthrow the structures of capitalism.

As historians, rather than endlessly investigating "ideology," we might do better to, say, follow Noam Chomsky's practice of foregrounding brute repression and censorship. These factors have overwhelming explanatory value. This is illustrated by a forgotten incident that occurred in the spring of 1936: CBS invited Earl Browder, head of the U.S. Communist Party, to speak for fifteen minutes (at 10:45 p.m.) on a national radio broadcast, with the understanding that he would be answered the following night by zealous anti-Communist Congressman Hamilton Fish. Browder seized the opportunity to reach a mass audience and expounded the Marxist analysis of capitalism and prescription for a better society.

Reactions to Browder's talk were revealing: according to both CBS and the *Daily Worker*, they were almost uniformly positive. CBS immediately received several hundred responses praising Browder's talk, and the *Daily Worker*, whose New York address Browder had mentioned on the air, received thousands of letters. The following are representative:

> *Bricelyn, Minnesota*: "Your speech came in fine and it was music to the ears of another unemployed for four years. Please send me full and complete data on your movement and send a few extra copies if you will, as I have some very interested friends—plenty of them eager to join up, as is yours truly."
>
> *Evanston, Illinois*: "Just listened to your speech tonight and I think it was the truest talk I ever heard on the radio. Mr. Browder, would it not be a good thing if you would have an opportunity to talk to the people of the U.S.A. at least once a week, for 30 to 60 minutes? Let's hear from you some more, Mr. Browder."
>
> *Springfield, Pennsylvania*: "I listened to your most interesting speech recently on the radio. I would be much pleased to receive your articles on Communism. Although I am an American Legion member I believe you are at least sincere in your teachings."
>
> *Harrold, South Dakota*: "Thank you for the fine talk over the air tonight. It was good common sense and we were glad you had a chance to talk over the air and glad to hear someone who had nerve enough to speak against capitalism."

The editors of the *Daily Worker* plaintively asked their readers, "Isn't it time we overhauled our old horse-and-buggy methods of recruiting? While we are recruiting by ones and twos, aren't we overlooking hundreds?" One can only imagine how many millions of people in far-flung regions would have flocked to the Communist banner had Browder and William Z. Foster been permitted the national radio audience that Coughlin was.

It is true that ruling-class propaganda, constantly flooding the visual, auditory, and print media, can have a major influence on popular attitudes, manipulating the public into "conservative" political positions. But this doesn't imply the typical Democratic argument that Americans are naturally moderate or centrist, nor does it mean that because they are somehow "steeped in the dominant themes of their nation's history" they tend to reject left-wing ideas. Indeed, the very fact that it is necessary to deluge the public with overwhelming amounts of propaganda, and to censor and marginalize views and information associated with the political left, is significant. Why would such a massive and everlasting public relations campaign be necessary if the populace didn't have subversive or "dangerous" values and beliefs in the first place? It is evidently imperative to *continuously police* people's behavior and thoughts lest popular resistance overwhelm structures of class and power.

When we consider the findings of polls, we can see why the ruling class devotes such colossal spending to "manufacturing consent." A few examples may suffice. In 1935, a *Fortune* magazine poll found that 41 percent of the upper-middle class, 49 percent of the lower-middle class, and 60 percent of the poor thought the government should not allow a man to keep investments worth over $1 million. As late as 1942, 64 percent of people thought it was a good idea to limit annual incomes to $25,000. That same year, another *Fortune* poll found that almost 30 percent of the nation's factory workers thought "some form of socialism would be a good thing for the country as a whole," while 34 percent had open minds about it—which means only 36 percent thought socialism would be "a bad thing." Given the resources and energy the business class had dedicated to vilifying socialism, these findings are striking.

They may bring to mind more recent findings. Gallup polls have found that 40 percent of Americans (and a majority of Democrats) have a positive view of socialism—which is a remarkable fact, considering that the mass media's coverage of "socialism" is almost uniformly negative. For a similar reason, the 68 percent approval rating of labor unions is also noteworthy. According to the Pew Research Center, 59 percent of Americans are bothered "a lot" by the feeling that corporations and the wealthy don't pay their fair share of taxes. Sixty-four percent of people think that protecting the environment should be a top policy priority. As usual, then, the populace is largely to the left of the two major political parties, even after being continually inundated by anti-left propaganda. In fact, a large number of people come very close to believing in communism: according to a poll in 1987, 45 percent of Americans thought the Marxist slogan "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" is so morally obvious it is enshrined in the Constitution!

But—to return to the 1930s—what about the fact of Roosevelt's great popularity? He was hardly a revolutionary figure. Given the enormity of the economic crisis, doesn't his popularity suggest that most Americans are indeed basically "liberal" at heart, congenitally averse to radical social change?

Well, the fact that he was popular doesn't mean he wouldn't have been more popular if he had pursued more transformative change. This is suggested, after all, by the stunning success of Coughlin and Long, who in 1934 and 1935 vehemently denounced Roosevelt and the New Deal for their conservatism. Historian Charles Beard observed a "staggering rapidity" in the "disintegration of President Roosevelt's prestige" in early 1935, while journalist Martha Gellhorn wrote, "it surprises me how radically attitudes can change within four or five months." Correspondents wrote to Roosevelt that he had "faded out on the masses of hungry, idle people," had served only the "very rich" and proven to be "no deferent [sic] from any other President." "Huey Long is the man we thought you were when we voted for you," a man wrote from Montana. The so-called Second New Deal, which signified a left turn, shored up Roosevelt's popular support, but it was not nearly as radical as many millions would have liked.

Communists, too, were more popular at the time than we might think in retrospect, despite their self-sabotage by speaking in an alien jargon and consistently praising the Soviet Union's tyrannical regime. Millions of people passed through the party and its many auxiliary organizations (Unemployed Councils, the Young Communist League, the John Reed Clubs, the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, etc.)—again, in spite of the savage police repression and media censorship to which Communists were subjected. The party even had great success agitating for its remarkable, socialistic Workers' Unemployment Insurance Bill between 1930 and 1936, which would have created a social democracy in some respects more expansive than that which any Western European country enacted after the Second World War. Historians have sadly neglected this bill and the nationwide wave of mass support that developed behind it, which led it to be the first federal unemployment insurance bill in U.S. history to be reported favorably out of a congressional committee (the House Labor Committee, in 1935).

In short, a case can be made that, for the sake of both advancing left-wing political goals and highlighting essential historical truths, historians ought to embrace a consciously materialistic method that emphasizes above all else the ubiquitously ramifying class struggle. Julie Greene has acutely remarked that even "struggles over environmental justice, human rights, anticolonialism, welfare rights, or women's reproductive rights" are forms of class struggle. Class is fundamental, as Marx saw, and working people even in the "conservative" U.S. are and have been in many respects very leftist underneath all the ruling-class indoctrination to which we have been subjected. Left intellectuals ought to constantly expose this popular radicalism in public forums and never stop repeating the "reductivist" refrain that the defeat of the left has been a product of ruling-class violence and repression more than anything else. Reductivism has its virtues.

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On stupidity and the excesses of wokeness

One of the first laws of human existence, or at least of existence in class societies (determined by anti-human institutions that mold human behavior), is that the world consists mostly of idiots. Or, more precisely, of people much more prone to idiocy than is desirable. (To say someone is "an idiot" or "unintelligent" or even "irrational" is inadmissibly reifying, since it treats the person as a static entity, an unchanging thing—*irrational, always and forever*; *just plain stupid, period*. The defensible content of the statement is that the person has *acted* irrationally or stupidly, or *in that moment* has been unintelligent. Even "stupid" or "irrational" people sometimes act intelligently and rationally.) The subject of unintelligence or irrationality—two concepts that, strictly speaking, should be distinguished from each other—doesn't get as much attention as it deserves, given the astonishing prevalence of stupidity and irrationality throughout history. How can it be explained? Why are so many people so dumb, in so many ways? What are the social, institutional, political, psychological, and biological causes? Years ago I jotted down some thoughts on the matter that I sometimes link to on this blog, but much more can be said.

Politically, for example, the right wing is virtually defined by stupidity, ignorance, bigotry, and, among the higher-ups, sheer lust for power for its own sake (even if it means destroying civilization in the process, tearing apart nature and everything pertaining to social welfare), but the left is lamentably moronic as well. A large proportion of the left's stupidity is, as usual, a result simply of indoctrination, groupthink, and conformism, tendencies that in fact go a long way toward explaining the ubiquity of stupidity/irrationality throughout history. People want to fit in—with whichever group is their preferred one—so they voluntarily and even enthusiastically submit to the ideologies or "discourses" that allow them to fit in, not sufficiently questioning them in the light of reason. The consequence is that you get billions of Christians, Muslims, Jews, etc. even in the modern world that should have left religion behind long ago. Or you get the formerly widespread belief in, say, the divine right of kings. People accept what they've been taught because they see others around them accepting it. Or you get the contemporary left's hyper-woke ideologies that serve, in large part, to marginalize leftists and alienate everyone else. These people have chosen to identify with certain groups, they've read the literature of these groups and imbibed the modes of interaction, and they've accepted it all simply on account of their self-identification (with these groups) and the values that sustain that identification.

I'll give you a trivial example, from my email inbox yesterday. I was amused to see a thread of messages on an academic listserv that were responding to this seemingly innocuous email from, let's say, Jennifer:

> *Good Morning,*
>
> *Hope all is well. [Redacted] is in need of a few good men to assist with loading food into the pantry today, Thursday, April 7th from 12noon – 2pm in room 235. Any assistance will be greatly appreciated.*
>
> *Thank you.*

Seems innocent to me. A light-hearted reference to a Tom Cruise movie, etc. But a few minutes later we get, from (say) Lindsay:

> *Hi Jennifer. Strength does not have a sex or gender. Thank you.*

Yes, the woke police were on the job. Thank God someone was there to correct the thoughtcrime! Later we read from a third person (let's say Anna):

> *Good afternoon All,*

> *I am happy that [redacted] needs assistance in stocking the pantry so that we can provide nourishment for as many students and their families as possible. If anyone is able and willing, please stop by 235 to help.*
>
> *Thank you Lindsay, for reminding us to be thoughtful in our interactions, both in word and deed. We must all work to un-, re- and learn interpersonal habits. If something is said or done that appears to perpetuate behavior or language we seek to change in efforts to build our inclusive and equitable community, we can be gracious and kind in pointing it out or asking for it to be addressed.*
>
> *For example, I've been addressing this language in smaller spaces as it occurs: we must all remember not to address large crowds as "ladies and gentlemen" or "you guys", as doing so excludes individuals who do not identify as either. Instead, use inclusive language, such as, "all, everyone, or folks", for example. [...]*

I was curious to see how far the wokeness would be taken, so I kept reading, from a fourth person:

> **able-bodied volunteers. There, I fixed it for you!*

Later we see another email:

> *Good afternoon Anna, I really admire how you jump right in to de-escalate a situation!*

Yes, the "situation" between Jennifer and Lindsay was…threatening to escalate? Luckily Anna was there to help. Moments later we get a mea culpa from Jennifer:

> *I sincerely apologize to anyone that took offense to the [redacted] department need for assistance. Thank you Anna for the reminder and it will be taken into consideration if the need should arise again. It was not my intention to exclude or suggest women are not strong and for that I sincerely apologize.*

Phew, HR situation averted. But the issue isn't settled yet, because an hour later we see this message from yet another staffer or professor:

> *Thank you everyone for your thoughtful contributions and your dedication to making [this college] an institution that welcomes everyone - including students, staff and faculty.*
>
> *We are all learning how to work with each other in thoughtful, compassionate ways. No one is perfect at this (speaking as a lifelong learner here).*
>
> *In this spirit of sharing and learning, I'd like to add to this important conversation. "Able-bodiedness" can be used as code for "normal" in a way that is potentially harmful, painful, and exclusionary of some people with disabilities.*
>
> *If the concern is that people have physical strength to volunteer, it probably makes more sense to say that the tasks will require lifting 25 (or however many pounds) rather than disqualifying people with disabilities who may be perfectly able to lift that amount or more.*
>
> *And, they might even be really fun to work with!*

It turns out that the term "able-bodied" is offensive too. Before long, we won't be able to talk anymore. The expression "how are you?" is offensive to people who think it's too nosy and prefer to just say "hello." And so on, and so on (to quote Slavoj Žižek).

By the way, men are, in fact, physically stronger on average than women, so it was perfectly reasonable for Jennifer to ask for male volunteers. Maybe heavy boxes had to be lifted. (I know I just committed a fascist thoughtcrime by saying men are usually stronger than women.)

This email exchange is merely amusing, but it's a microcosm of a veritable epidemic of woke stupidity among the left and liberal-left. I'm not saying everything "woke" is unnecessary or ridiculous; in many contexts, woke interventions are valuable. But the whole discourse just goes so far that it ultimately becomes its own form of "left-wing" "fascism." It would be nice if the highly woke could be relied on to use their common sense about when to intervene and when that would just be petty and alienating, but evidently a lot of them have been indoctrinated out of common sense and are happy to take wokeness to its *reductio ad absurdum*, again and again. Policing every single word people use, making a laughingstock of the left.

It reminds me of part of a *Dissent* interview with Barbara Ehrenreich in 2019:

> …Or making any kind of human connection to other people. I'll give you another anecdote—though this is not about DSA. In 2009, there was an event—part of an international series of socialist gatherings—in Detroit. There was a workshop at this conference, and I had invited a group of working-class people from Fort Wayne, Indiana, who I had become close to. About six or seven of them drove from Fort Wayne to Detroit, and they were mostly laid-off foundry workers: stereotypical white men—though, actually, not all of them were white. I was closest with one of them, Tom Lewandowski, who created a workers' organization and was the head of the Central Labor Council in the Fort Wayne area. [At the event], they talked about what they were facing in the recession. And then some woman in the room who was an adjunct professor suddenly says, "I'm tired of listening to white men talk."
>
> I was so aghast. Of course, it was a big setback for my friends from Fort Wayne, who were humiliated. I advised Tom not to get into settings where he would be subjected to that ever again. There has to be a way to say to such people, look, we know you probably aren't doing great as an adjunct, but have some respect for other people's work and their experience, and recognize that they are different from you in some way. I've just had too many encounters like that, which are kind of heartbreaking.

Such is the power of ideological thinking, which typically amounts, in some respects, to *stupid/irrational* thinking. Closed-minded, inflexible, unempathetic, inhumane thinking. The disturbing prevalence of such thinking suggests to me that most people simply lack a sufficiently *rational* (and intelligent) cast of mind, the capacity of intellectual self-defense against the pressures of socialization and indoctrination. It's an unfortunate fact about humanity, which is among the ingredients that have made possible fascism, Nazism, everyday bureaucratic inhumanity, and all manner of stupidities and cruelties. Very few people, actually, are significantly immune to such pressures—I can only think of one, the hyper-rational and hyper-individualistic Chomsky[1]—but most are *very, very far* from being immune.

As I've remarked elsewhere on this blog, stupidity/irrationality often amounts to little more than *value-laden thinking*, as opposed to logical, evidence-based, *skeptical* thinking. Lindsay didn't *like* the words "a few good men," with their implication that men are better at lifting things than women (which, on average, they are), so she had to send out a stupid, irrelevant email about how women are strong too. Feminists don't *like* jokes they consider "sexist," so in the middle of comedy shows they stupidly blurt out

[1] If you—like others—think my (frequently reiterated) admiration of Chomsky is excessive, just read his works in linguistics, philosophy, cognitive science, history, and of course politics. Go and read his voluminous output, to see what I'm talking about. There's no one like him.

heckling objections or tweet about how some comedian has made a joke that's, "like, so misogynistic, like it's so not okay!" Get over yourself. Religious people don't *like* the idea that there is no God, so they ignore the hundreds of reasons to be an atheist. A third of the country *likes* Donald Trump, so it stupidly and slavishly waves away all rational objections to that monstrous buffoon. *Values, values, values*—people can't see past their values, refuse to consider anything contrary to their values (or the ideas, objects, people, and ways of being they value). They can't *step outside themselves enough* to consider objections, contrary evidence, chains of reasoning, opposing perspectives that may well be more justifiable than their own. They're *heavily immersed in their own subjectivity*, a subjectivity that doesn't sufficiently incorporate others (for such incorporation is a quality of both intelligence and rationality). Thus you get a world that teems with ludicrous ideas and people, an awe-inspiring freak show of every conceivable form of stupidity, irrationality, and insanity—all because people are trapped in their own petty little subjectivities walled by rigid personal values, windowless monads, prison cells that let in, at most, mere cracks of light.

There's an extreme of *lucid, diaphanous* consciousness and an extreme of *opaque, self-immersed* consciousness. Most of us fall somewhere in the middle, closer to one end or the other. Non-human animals have an ultra-opaque consciousness, barely incorporating other beings at all (barely self-aware, self-critical); people like Chomsky, incorporating an incredible abundance of perspectives and facts, are at the other extreme. A huge proportion of people are, it seems, disturbingly close to the animal end of the spectrum.

Since I've referred to the excesses of wokeness, it makes sense to end this post on an anti-woke note, by briefly defending the terrible left-wing heresy called "*class reductionism*." (Cue the hisses, boos, and outraged shrieks.) What an atrocious heresy, which has had such ignominious exponents as....Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, for starters. Marxism, after all, is pretty much all about so-called class reductionism—class struggle, class solidarity, the principle of class conflict as being the most important factor in explaining social dynamics. It's a mystery to me how self-styled Marxists can inveigh against class reductionism—whatever that term means—but, again, stupidity pervades the left.

First of all, "class reductionists" like Adolph Reed Jr. are perfectly aware that issues of race, gender, sexuality, and so on are important and to some degree independent of class. They can't be wholly solved through an exclusively class-based politics. So all the rabid denouncers of class reductionism are, almost entirely, tilting at windmills. It's a classic straw-man fallacy. But there is indeed a disagreement between the camps: genuine Marxists are convinced that class solidarity offers the greatest hope and the largest social base for emancipatory and expansive social change, whereas their woke, postmodernist (identity-politics-obsessed) critics prefer, in effect, a fractured left in which each little group pursues its own agenda—Black people, immigrants, feminists, the LGBTQ community, etc.—perhaps trying to form alliances when they can. Such a politics can certainly produce gains for each group, but meanwhile, the society-wide problems of *working conditions, income distribution, housing, health care, education, unemployment, livable cities, environmental destruction, imperialism, militarism, and nonexistent democracy*—problems that affect huge proportions of people in these groups—remain largely unaddressed. Instead we get, say, campaigns around police brutality that have almost no success at eliminating police brutality—which, after all, is a somewhat minor issue (however horrendous it is) compared to the ones I just listed. All *those* problems have to be addressed through a *class* politics, an alliance of people of all colors in the (immense) working class against a predatory elite. When you build such a movement of overwhelming numbers, you have much more success at addressing *fundamental* issues than a fragmented race-based or gender-based or sexuality-based politics can have.

Marxist intellectuals have written sophisticated academic articles—like this one: [“The Class Path to Racial Liberation”]—in defense of a class-based politics over a race-based one—pointing out, for instance, that race-blind interventions in public policy, such as income redistribution, can substantially reduce racial inequality—but in truth you need only a little bit of intelligence and rationality to see the vast superiority of a strategy that targets class rather than race. "Class" = a much larger social base; solutions to fundamental social ills; potentially an egalitarian society; and plentiful opportunities to combat racial and other prejudices as all sorts of people work together in political and labor organizations. "Race" = divisiveness and fragmentation; frequent *deepening* of racial prejudice among whites who resent all this

focus on the problems of Blacks; political ineffectiveness (as seen by the failures of Black Lives Matter); relative disregard of universal and foundational social ills; and an agenda that, to a large degree, wants little more than for minorities to be treated like heterosexual whites—most of whom capitalism treats horribly. What a grand agenda! Identity politics, especially taken on its own in abstraction from a class strategy, is a retreat from the *revolutionary, universalist* visions of an older left. (And remember, the older left was far from insensitive to the grievances of minorities. The Communist Party in the 1930s really got the civil rights movement started, on the basis largely of class demands on behalf of Blacks. And unions in the AFL-CIO were important funders of the civil rights movement.)

Unfortunately, in order to see these truths, you have to be....somewhat intelligent. Which means—to return to the cynical theme that began this post—only a minority of the intellectual class is able to see them.

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Common Sense in the Form of Theory

A review of Vivek Chibber, *The Class Matrix: Social Theory after the Cultural Turn*. Harvard University Press, 2022. 224 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 9780674245136.

In the ideological disciplines—the humanities and social sciences—it is rare to come across a theoretical work that doesn't fetishize verbiage and jargonizing for their own sake. From the relatively lucid analytical Marxism of an Erik Olin Wright[1] to the turgid cultural theory of a Stuart Hall, pretentious prolixity is, apparently, seen as an end in itself. In such a context, one of the highest services an intellectual can perform is simply to return to the basics of theoretic common sense, stated clearly and concisely. Society is very complex, but, as Noam Chomsky likes to say, insofar as we understand it at all, our understanding can in principle be expressed rather simply and straightforwardly. Not only is such expression more democratic and accessible, thus permitting a broader diffusion of critical understanding of the world; it also has the merit of showing that, once you shed the paraphernalia of much academic writing, nothing particularly profound is being said. Vivek Chibber's *The Class Matrix* constitutes an exemplary demonstration of this fact, and of these virtues.

Chibber has been critiquing postmodern theory for some time now, ably defending Marxian common sense against generations of carping "culturalist" critics. His *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (2013) brilliantly showed that the Marxian "metanarrative" that has come under sustained attack by poststructuralists and postmodernists retains its value as an explanation of the modern world, and that many of the (often highly obscure) alternative conceptualizations of postcolonial theorists are deeply flawed. More recently, in an article published in 2020 in the journal *Catalyst* ("Orientalism and Its Afterlives"), Chibber has persuasively criticized Edward Said's classic *Orientalism* for its idealistic interpretation of modern imperialism as emanating in large part from an age-old European Orientalist discourse, rather than from a capitalist political economy that—as materialists argue—merely used such a discourse to rationalize its global expansion. In more popular venues too, notably *Jacobin*, Chibber has argued for the centrality of materialism to the projects of both interpreting and changing the world.

The Class Matrix continues his engagement with these issues, this time in the form of a systematic critique of cultural theory, specifically of its inability to explain the sources of stability and conflict in modern society. Materialism, in contrast—i.e., an emphasis on such concepts as class structures and objective economic interests rather than "discourses," "cultures," "identities," and "meanings" (however important these are in a *secondary* role)—is quite capable of explaining society, and can rather easily be defended against the criticisms of (some) culturalists. The book's admirable lucidity serves several functions: first, Chibber is able to present the arguments of a variety of "culturalisms," from Gramscians'

[1] See Russell Jacoby's savage review of Wright's *Envisioning Real Utopias* entitled "Real Men Find Real Utopias," *Dissent*, Winter 2011, for an exposure of the intellectual emptiness of a certain type of "theoretical" sociology.

to the Frankfurt School's to those of the post-1970s cultural turn, very clearly and in a way that illuminates the stakes of the debate; second, his eloquent reconstruction of (aspects of) cultural theory lays the ground for an equally eloquent, and much more thorough, exposition of structural class theory, which is shown to have no difficulty (contrary to the claims of culturalists) in explaining the longevity and stability of capitalism; third, the discarding of all unnecessary verbiage and jargon makes it clear just how intellectually trivial these long-running theoretical debates are in the first place. One can have a perfectly defensible and sophisticated understanding of the modern world on the basis of rational common sense and knowledge of history.

Chibber starts by presenting the culturalist case. Why didn't the West become socialist in the twentieth century, as Marxists predicted? Evidently Marx had gotten something wrong. In fact, it was argued (in the postwar era), he neglected the role of *culture* in forming the consciousness of the working class. Mass culture and the diffusion of dominant ideologies were able to reconcile the working class to capitalism, indeed to generate active popular consent for it. This analysis amounted to a demotion of the classical Marxist emphasis on the conflictual dynamics of the class structure—which supposedly would naturally lead to proletarian class consciousness and thereby revolution—in favor of the cohesive functions of mid-twentieth-century culture. Later culturalists took this argument a step further by rejecting the Marxian theory altogether, arguing that culture is actually *prior* to structure: what people are really presented with are not unmediated structures or objective material interests but "constellations of meaning" (p. 6), social identities, local cultures, contingent processes of socialization that shape how actors understand the many structures they are located in. One cannot (*pace* classical Marxism) predict behavior from people's structural locations and the interests they supposedly define, because people first have to *interpret* structures, a process that is highly contingent and variable. Subjectivity, therefore, is primary, and the objectivity of class structures tends to evaporate.

Chibber's response to this postmodernist argument, in effect, is that while it is perfectly true every structure is steeped in culture and agents' subjectivity, this hardly implies the causal inertness of class location. Capitalist institutions don't impose high interpretive requirements: everyone is capable of understanding "what it means" to be a worker or a capitalist. If you lack ownership of the means of production, you either submit to wage labor or you starve. The economic structures force themselves on you. "[T]he proletarian's *meaning orientation* is [therefore] the effect of his *structural location*" (p. 34). Similarly, the capitalist has to obey market imperatives (structures) in order to survive as a capitalist, so he, too, is compelled to subordinate his normative orientation to objectively existing capitalist institutions. In fact, it is the postmodern culturalists who are in the weaker position: how can they explain "the indubitable fact of capitalism's expansion across the globe and the obvious similarity in its macrodynamics across these regions" without accepting materialist assumptions (p. 45)?

Having dispatched this particular objection to materialism, Chibber moves on to other difficulties. Given the antagonistic relations between worker and capitalist (which Chibber elaborates on in detail), why hasn't collective resistance, and ultimately revolution, been more common? The obvious answer, contrary to cultural theory, is that the asymmetry of power between worker and capitalist is so great that workers find it quite difficult to fight successfully for their collective interests. The insecurity of the worker's position (for example, he can be fired for union activity) makes it easier and safer to pursue *individualized* modes of advancement or resistance. Moreover, the intrinsic problems of collective action—free rider problems, difficulty in securing agreement among large numbers of workers, etc.—militate against class consciousness and collective resistance. Classical Marxists were wrong to assume that the most rational path for workers would always be the "collective" path. In fact, contingent cultural considerations play an important role in the formation (in any given case) of class consciousness—although culture always remains constrained by material factors.

Having successfully and eloquently deployed common sense in his first two chapters, Chibber now turns, in the lengthy third chapter, to an explanation of how capitalism has endured. Here, too, he prefers common sense to the idealistic arguments of many Gramscians and New Left theorists, who pointed to bourgeois "cultural hegemony" and ideological indoctrination as having manufactured consent among the working class. One problem with this theory is its dim view of workers: "Culturalists are in the embarrassing

position of claiming implicitly that while *they* can discern the exploitative—and hence unjust—character of the employment relation, the actors who are, *in fact*, being exploited, who are experiencing its brute facts, are not capable of doing so" (p. 91). There are, admittedly, other possible understandings of the basis of mass consent, more materialistic understandings, but in the end Chibber rejects these as the primary explanation for capitalist stability. Instead, he argues that workers simply *resign* themselves to capitalism—they "accept their location in the class structure because they see no other viable option" (p. 106). What Marx called "the dull compulsion of economic relations" keeps the gears of capitalism grinding on, generation after generation, including in the absence of workers' "consent" to their subordination.[1] In short, the class structure itself—the enormous power asymmetry between employer and employee—underwrites its own stability, and there is no need to invoke "consent" at all (even if such consent does, perhaps, exist in certain periods).

There remain a couple of other issues Chibber has to address in order for his defense of materialism to be really systematic. First, what about the old charge from E. P. Thompson that "structural theories bury social agency" (p. 122)? Is this necessarily the case, this conflict between structure and agency? No, as long as one acknowledges the role of *reasons* in motivating people's actions. "The structure is not reproduced because it turns agents into automatons but because it generates good *reasons* for them to play by its rules" (p. 123). A structural process may be rather deterministic in its outcome, but it "is generated by the active intervention of social agency" (p. 126). Given the structures of capitalism, people rationally adapt to them, regulating their behavior in accord with them. Structure thus exerts its causal force precisely through agency.

Of course, agency also exists in tension with structure insofar as agents can flout institutional norms or even rebel against particular structures. This point brings us to another question Chibber considers, namely the relation between structural "determinism" and *contingency*, another favorite concept—along with agency—of the postmodern cultural turn. His argument here is quite rich and nuanced, much too subtle, in fact, to be summarized in a short book review. (It goes without saying that I have merely been outlining his arguments, hardly doing justice to their richness.) One might think that such an austere structuralism as Chibber defends would be unable to account for the contingency of social processes, but through a fairly ingenious analysis he is able to answer this objection, too. Even *prima facie*, however, the objection doesn't hold much water, because capitalist relations are evidently compatible with an immense variety of social structures, such that between nations and even within a nation there can be great heterogeneity of local cultures. In a world of infinitely many structures and cultures interacting and overlapping, all of them being activated and enlivened by countless individual free wills, there is clearly a place for contingency on both small and large scales. Materialism can therefore accommodate the "argument from contingency".

The Class Matrix, in short, is a quite thorough and impressive work, not only a compelling defense of materialism but also a fair-minded if highly critical engagement with cultural theory. It isn't clear how culturalists—especially the anti-Marxist ones—can effectively respond to this broadside, tightly and cogently argued as it is. They might, perhaps, be able to make the case that there is a greater role for culture than Chibber allows (although he does grant the importance of cultural considerations at many points in his arguments), but they certainly can no longer sustain the claim that materialism is deeply flawed.

In fact, that claim could never have been sustained anyway, because, in the end, materialism—the causal primacy of class structures (and the theoretical implications of this doctrine)—is little more than

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[1] This argument, indeed much of the book, is anticipated not only, as it were, by common sense (most workers could tell you they don't *embrace* their position but simply find it inescapable), but also by a brilliant book Chibber doesn't cite: *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, by Nicholas Abercrombie et al. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980). Incidentally, I myself have grappled with the question of why socialism hasn't happened yet and have offered a quite different, and perhaps more original, explanation than Chibber. See my paper "Marxism and the Solidarity Economy: Toward a New Theory of Revolution," *Class, Race and Corporate Power* 9, no. 1 (2021), as well as the shorter articles "Revolution in the Twenty-First Century: A Reconsideration of Marxism," *New Politics*, May 5, 2020, and "Eleven Theses on Socialist Revolution," *Socialist Forum* (Summer 2021).

common sense. The average member of the working class, more insightful (realistic) in many ways than most intellectuals, could tell you about the overwhelming importance of economic institutions. If classical Marxism got certain predictions wrong, that wasn't because of any inherent flaws in historical materialism. As Chibber shows, it was because the original theorists misunderstood the implications of their own theory. There was never a good reason to think socialist revolution would "naturally" happen as workers "naturally" achieved greater class consciousness. These predictions were but a projection of the hopes of Marxists, not logical entailments of materialism. In our own day, when the historic achievements of Western labor movements have been or are in the process of being destroyed, it is unclear what the way forward is—except, as ever, for working-class self-organization and critical materialist understanding of society. Toward the latter task, at least, *The Class Matrix* makes a valuable contribution.

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Classical music vs. mediocrity

On one side is the mediocrity of all functionaries. All bureaucrats. Let's take a glance, for instance, at the *intellectual* bureaucrats. Here is a randomly selected passage from a typical academic essay (entitled "The state as social relation: Poulantzas on materiality and political strategy"):

> …In this [essay], I discuss Poulantzas' work through this lens of the materiality of the capitalist state… I argue that by theorising the state as a social relation—more specifically, as a material condensation of a relationship of forces between classes and class fractions—Poulantzas was able to sidestep the theoretical dilemmas that confounded prior Marxist thinking about the state. Furthermore, Poulantzas' account of political strategy follows from his treatment of the state as a material condensation of political forces. In particular, his conception of the state as a contradictory and uneven terrain that is potentially open to the intervention of the 'popular classes' into a given conjuncture continues to provide a foundation for a distinctly Marxist theory of politics.

The author of this passage is no worse a writer than most academics. But my god, what a load of dreck. This is what the "intellectual bureaucracy" looks like, this dull and sterile academese that specializes in saying something without saying anything. Poor Marx is spinning in his grave at the thought of his revolutionary, world-overturning writings being domesticated, via twisted academic byways over the last hundred years, into this desiccated tripe. What is being said in this passage? "A material condensation of political forces." Okay, yes, the state is a sort of microcosm of conflicts between classes, class fractions, and other groups. Nicos Poulantzas was not the first to say this; nor even was Marx, though he said it in biting and striking ways. It's common sense. But that term "material condensation"—what a vivid metaphor! And it has the word "material" in it, so it's revolutionary! What about the last sentence, the thesis of the whole article? The state is "a contradictory and uneven terrain": congratulations on finding a pretentious way to say governments are complex. As for the rest of the sentence, yes, Poulantzas and the author are both right that ordinary people can potentially, in certain circumstances, have some influence on governments. What a profound thesis! If this is the "foundation" of the Marxist theory of politics, well then it's a grand and ambitious theory after all, isn't it?

This kind of stuff is why Noam Chomsky says the social sciences are intellectually trivial. Stating truisms in such an aesthetically offensive way serves no other purpose than to help the author fill out his CV and hopefully get tenure someday.

So, on one side is *this* verbiage, which constitutes perhaps 75 percent of academic output. On the other side is…what helps keep me going: Bach, Handel, Scarlatti, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and scattered composers from the century after that. Careerist obedience on the one hand, life-giving humanism on the other. The contrast could not be starker.

Leftists often have an inordinate fondness for such musical genres as punk, metal, hip hop, and the like. Much of this seems to me to be little more than creative sterility and puerility, scarcely worth any attention except as a temporary cathartic escape (or an intriguing sociological symptom to be studied). It's true these genres have some very good songs, but even those are, creatively and artistically speaking, on a lower level than the great music of the past. And that music was as far from "elitist" or "undemocratic" as you can imagine, being little but an elevation and ennobling of *folk* music, to quote the old socialist Oscar Ameringer.[1] People are free to like whatever they want, but leftists should know that nothing is more anti-capitalist than the music of the eighteenth and (most of) the nineteenth centuries. Pop culture, by contrast, is thoroughly integrated into commercial structures, thoroughly money-driven, business-conscious, and commodified.

However therapeutic and fun, sometimes beautiful, popular music can be, classical music *raises you above yourself*—if you really listen to it, study it, and choose good composers to listen to. Such music can have an uncanny power of washing away all the particularities, the grievances and regrets, of your selfhood so that you commune with the universal. You forget the barrenness of our bureaucratized culture, the obedience and the rank *pretense*; you have direct contact with the highest thoughts and feelings, miracles of creativity. These are the ultimate antidotes to the nihilism of life in the United States.

The magic of music is worth pondering. Consider Bach's epic Chaconne for solo violin, about which violinist Joshua Bell has this to say: "not just one of the greatest pieces of music ever written, but one of the greatest achievements of any man in history. It's a spiritually powerful piece, emotionally powerful, structurally perfect." Three hundred years ago, a man returned from a trip to find his wife, who had been healthy, dead from some sudden illness. He grieved, and in his grief he wrote the greatest piece for solo violin in history. He sat down with pen and paper, heard imaginary sounds in his head, imposed a structure on them, crafted them so that they would be a perfectly formed artistic whole, and through the miracle of musical notation transmitted them to paper. Other people then read this notation and used it to reproduce, with their instruments, what the man had conceived in his bitter solitude. His silent inner thoughts were externalized and made concrete so that they could be shared with the world. Generation after generation, century after century, musicians and audiences continued to reproduce and contemplate the thoughts of that old, long-dead man from the eighteenth century who was mourning his wife. Through the media of print and musical performance, the ideas of one person were implanted in the minds of millions of others. And a musical community stretching across centuries, a community of listeners and performers, was created whenever the piece was played. People listened and actually wept, from the sheer mysterious power of sounds arranged in a certain way.

In fact, they themselves, in a sense, *re-created* the music simply by hearing it: their brains processed the sounds, organized them as human brains do, structured them harmonically and melodically such that everyone heard the same harmonies and melodies and marveled at them. What one (unconscious) part of their brain was doing, creating the music by listening to it, another part contemplated in awe.

People even translated Bach's thoughts for different instruments. Ferrucio Busoni wrote a brilliant arrangement for piano, and a hundred years later Hélène Grimaud performed both Bach and Busoni's thoughts at a piano recital one can watch on the internet. Across spans of time, people collaborated in a collective artistic project. Viewers of Grimaud's concert heard the piece and in some cases were themselves inspired to play it on their own piano, having been influenced by Bach-Busoni-Grimaud. And so the chain extended, in a continually expanding display of collective intelligence and creativity. All of which was initiated by one man's imagination as he was shut in a room somewhere three centuries ago.

Grimaud's recital is worth watching on YouTube. In the middle, for instance, after a series of variations on grief, anger, and despair (universalized, not personalized), the music shifts to a softer and

[1] Oscar Ameringer, *If You Don't Weaken* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1940), 265, 266. He describes proselytizing for socialism among Oklahoma farmers in the 1890s, at big tent meetings where he and his sons also played pieces by Bach, Mendelssohn, Schubert, and others. "Those simple people took to good music like ducks to water. Their minds were not yet corrupted by the Tin Pan Alley trash that later was a music for profit. Besides, 'classical music' is folk music clarified, interpreted and ennobled by the great masters, and these were folk people."

more consoling register. It is quite moving. It sounds like acceptance, peaceful resignation, expressed in the rich and sonorous voice of some angelic being. And the music builds, as the sufferer is even able to find beauty in his sorrow. It builds and builds, at last reaching even joy and finally ecstasy. Eventually, however, it returns to its earlier register, and at length the piece ends on a note of cosmic darkness.

All this is the very essence of humanity's higher faculties. It is world-spanning, world-creating, world-communicating. We humans *live in each other's minds*. We *create* on the basis of each other's minds, each other's creativity. We interpenetrate, universally, such that a global community can spring from a single person's artistic imagination. What Beethoven wrote two hundred years ago unites billions. His body is long gone, but his mind, in a sense, lives on, in us all, as we live in each other's minds.

So, thank God for music, which can elevate our thoughts in this way and *transport* us out of ourselves. On the basis of music it is almost possible to achieve Nietzsche's goal of *amor fati*, love of fate, love of everything. Sorrow becomes joy. One forgets the mediocre, one sloughs it off effortlessly by being transported to a different realm. That is the highest function of *good* music, as it is the highest function of all art. (But music is the most profound and transporting of the arts, I find.)

Listen to high art when you're sick of modern living. Quite possibly, it will revitalize you.

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Organized Labor and the Crisis of Democracy

We live in a time when it's become a boring cliché to say that democracy is under attack. Whether it's an ultra-reactionary Supreme Court, a nationwide Republican assault on voting rights, a MAGA movement that hopes to put an amoral power addict back in the presidency in 2024, a gathering backlash against women's rights and LGBTQ rights, or the very structure of an oligarchical, billionaire-dominated political economy, circumstances in the U.S.—and abroad—are hardly encouraging for people who value democracy and human rights. It seems that things get bleaker every year, so much so that it can be difficult to have any hope at all.

There is, however, at least one glimmer of hope for democracy, and it comes from a source that might initially, to many people, seem rather unrelated: a renascent labor movement.

Given that the primary role of unions is to advocate for the interests of their members on the job, one might wonder how they could play an essential part in protecting and revitalizing the very different institution of political democracy. How can organizations with such a *particular* mission, a seemingly narrow economic one, serve as a buttress for the *universal* interest of democracy itself? Actually, according to polls, two thirds of Americans approve of labor unions, suggesting they understand what a constructive force unions are. If people knew the real history of organized labor, however, the number would probably be close to 90 percent.

So let's take a look at history to gain some insight into why labor organizations are so fundamental to democracy, and why it's so predictable that their decline in the last forty years has led to a political crisis and the rise of neofascism.

The origins of democracy

The very establishment of democracy in the first place—universal suffrage and equal voting "weight" across classes—was in large measure the achievement of unions, labor-based political parties (whether called Socialist, Social Democrat, Labor, or some other name), and mass working-class protest. To quote one scholar, throughout the long struggle across the West to broaden the franchise, from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, the labor movement "was the only consistent democratic force in the arena," playing a "vital role" at nearly all stages in most countries. In Britain, for example, decades of labor organizing and mass demonstrations, from the Chartists of the 1830s to the working-class Reform League of the 1860s and further union agitation up to the 1880s, were a crucial precondition for the enfranchisement

of all men. By the early twentieth century, the new Labor Party also supported the women's suffrage movement.

To take another example, that of Belgium, a comprehensive study observes that "working-class pressure and particularly the use of the political strike were constant features of the process of Belgian democratization from the 1880s on." As elsewhere, it took decades of struggle to overcome the hostility of the propertied classes—many urban capitalists, agrarian landowners, and the Catholic establishment—but, in alliance with Liberals, the Belgian Labor Party was finally able to establish full male democracy in 1919.

Waves of democratization occurred in the aftermath of the two world wars, and in all or nearly all cases, labor and its representatives were catalysts. Germany's Weimar Republic, which instituted universal suffrage, was a creation of the labor-based Social Democrats. In Sweden, years of strikes, worker demonstrations, and Social Democratic pressure in Parliament culminated in the passage of universal suffrage by 1920. The achievement of full parliamentary democracy after World War II in Italy, France, Austria, Canada, eventually Japan, and other countries was, of course, a result of the world-overturning mobilization of the working class and the Left against fascism, which was defeated primarily by Communists.

What about the United States? "Full" democracy in this supposedly freest of countries didn't exist until the late 1960s, after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. We're accustomed to thinking of these legislative accomplishments as the fruit of a *religiously* grounded movement organized around Black churches in the South, but in fact, "the long civil rights movement" of the 1930s–1960s critically depended on labor organizations such as the Communist Party (in the 1930s) and industrial unions. Historians have called it "civil rights unionism." Communists organized Black and white workers to challenge racial discrimination in employment and politics, not least in the savagely white supremacist South, and unions in the CIO, and later (after 1955) the AFL-CIO, continued this sort of work even in the repressive political climate of the Cold War. The AFL-CIO and most of its affiliated unions funded the Civil Rights Movement, actively supported its legal initiatives, and, in the case of the UAW, sent staff members into the Deep South to assist with voter registration drives. Indeed, some of the movement's major leaders, from A. Philip Randolph to E. D. Nixon (who organized the Montgomery bus boycott and chose Martin Luther King Jr. to lead it), came from a union background.

Conversely, it wasn't only *political* democracy that was at stake; the movement aimed to emulate labor movements elsewhere and establish *social* democracy. The 1963 March on Washington, for example, included in its demands decent housing, adequate education, a massive federal works program, a living wage for everyone, and a broadened Fair Labor Standards Act. King himself later became a socialist and helped organize a vast Poor People's Campaign, though he was assassinated before it came to fruition.

Even recent struggles against authoritarian governments have been largely driven by labor organizations and worker protests. From Spain in the late Franco years, Chile under Pinochet, and Argentina under neo-Nazi generals, to the Arab Spring of 2011, workers and unions have not only, through collective action, destabilized despotic regimes but have often led the resistance that overthrew them. This isn't surprising, since the working class is typically the group that suffers most from a lack of democracy.

In short, it is hardly an exaggeration when yet another scholarly study concludes that "the organized working class appeared as a key actor in the development of full democracy almost everywhere."

Organized labor means solidarity

Evidently, then, unions and other labor organizations aren't as "narrowly economic" as it might seem. They do exist to raise wages and expand benefits for their members, and to enhance job security and increase workers' control over their work, but their functions extend further for two reasons. First, the economic well-being of workers isn't determined only on the job or through collective bargaining; it is a profoundly political issue, intrinsically connected with government policies and the very structures of the political economy. So there are powerful incentives to get involved in politics, whether that takes the form of mass protests, creating political parties, lobbying, or whatever.

Second, unions are, in the end, little else but *their members*. They are themselves, or should be, democracies. What the membership desires, therefore, is (ideally) what the union pursues. The guiding principle of business is to make profit, at all costs; the guiding principle of organized labor is simply to empower people, who can themselves determine what their goals are. So if they decide that their goal is to democratize society—as they very well might and often have—then that's what they'll try to do.

For both reasons, most of the time and over a long period, the large-scale thrust of labor organizations is to increase democracy: political and social democracy, and ultimately, perhaps, economic democracy, in which workers oust the boss and run the workplace themselves. The sheer size of the membership and (frequently) the immense resources of organized labor mean that the efforts can have momentous effects.

In the absence of strong unions, on the other hand, "the general prey of the rich on the poor," as Thomas Jefferson described it, can take truly savage forms and go to lycanthropic extremes. Income and wealth inequality can skyrocket; billionaires can pay trivial tax rates of 3% or 4%, far lower than the rates that most wage-earners pay; agencies like the Occupational Safety and Health Administration that exist to protect workers' rights can be gutted and hamstrung; vast networks of far-right dark money, political organizations, and media infrastructure can spring up unopposed by comparable networks on the left; reactionaries find it easier to be elected and to appoint fellow reactionaries to the judiciary, which subsequently eviscerates voting rights, opens the floodgates to corporate political spending, makes it more difficult for workers to organize, and overturns *Roe v. Wade*. In general, the decline of unions means relatively untrammeled rule by big business, which itself means oligarchy.

Millions of working people who might have found a home in organized labor, as they did in the mid-twentieth century, become socially unmoored and fall prey to far-right media, lunatic ideologies, racist demagogues, and conservative Christianity. The human need for belonging, for interpreting one's misfortunes and finding meaning in something larger than oneself, can be fulfilled in either rational or irrational ways. It's rational for wage-earners to join economic and political organizations that fight for democracy in all its forms; but when such organizations have an anemic social presence, people who have been bombarded by well-funded right-wing propaganda may irrationally join movements that, in effect, seek to strip them of their rights and eliminate democracy itself.

In these circumstances, the priorities of liberals, from abortion rights to anti-racism to environmental legislation, will meet failure after failure because their mass base begins to shrink, to be less readily mobilized, and to feel ever more alienated from the political system. The "professional-managerial class" isn't enough of a mass base in itself, notwithstanding the apparent belief of two generations of Democratic leaders that it is. We're seeing the dismal collapse of this illusion play out right now, along with the collapse of the attendant ideology, an identity politics evacuated of class content (which means, more exactly, that it is in fact a class politics, "the politics of the left-wing of neoliberalism," to quote Adolph Reed). After all, a major reason twentieth-century liberalism ever had any success in the first place, from the 1930s to (in an increasingly attenuated form) the 1990s, was that it had organized labor on its side, and the financial, cultural, and human resources of organized labor. It turns out that when you not only take your popular constituency for granted but collude in its decimation, sooner or later your political fortunes—the fortunes of the Democratic Party and liberalism—decline.

Any liberal who actually cares about saving democracy should be cheering the resurgent labor movement and scrambling to support it in every way possible. In the long run, the only alternative to an authoritarian and neofascist politics is a labor politics. At some point you have to decide which side you're on.

Even the so-called "cultural" issues dear to liberals have for generations seen active support from labor. In addition to anti-racism and the Civil Rights Movement, labor has often marched beside feminists in the fight for women's rights, whether pay equality, the Equal Rights Amendment (by the early 1970s, that is), or reproductive rights. Few writers have expressed themselves on these subjects as eloquently as the socialist leader Eugene Debs in 1918: "Freedom, complete freedom, is the goal of woman's struggle in the modern world… She, the mother of man, shall be the sovereign ruler of the world. She shall have sole custody of her own body; she shall have perfect sex freedom as well as economic, intellectual and moral

freedom, and she alone who suffers the agony of birth shall have control of the creative functions with which she is endowed."

The natural tendency of organized labor is toward solidarity with all oppressed groups. No other social force is equally equipped to defend everyone and everything under attack today: women, minorities, immigrants, the welfare state, the rule of law, and democracy. No other social force is comparably universal or has a comparable interest in resisting the predations of the oligarchy. No other force offers as much hope for humanity as the cause of labor. For labor *is*, precisely, the cause of humanity.

It is the duty of all believers in freedom and democracy to take up the banner of labor.

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A Critique of Social Constructionist Feminism

On various pages of my website and blog I've criticized some of the dogmas of feminism, for instance the social constructionist dogmas about gender (as if sex hormones, for example, have nothing to do with gendered behavior!), the belief that *every form* of unequal power relations between men and women can someday, hopefully, be overcome, and the naïve idea that racism and sexism are equally morally problematic (the truth is that racism is just plain wrong, morally and intellectually, while sexism is part of human nature inasmuch as men and women are, on average, psychologically different and frequently get angry at each other, misunderstand each other, and generalize about each other[1]). But I sometimes return to these matters because I think the fashionable demonization of men as such goes a little too far,[2] and I'm annoyed by the lack of rational, evidence-based thinking and the deeply tribal tendencies among most leftists (no different in this respect from other categories of people, whether conservatives, academics, liberals, the wealthy, or whoever). I think it can be useful to have voices on the left who serve as occasional gadflies. (Not that I have a particle of influence.)

—I suppose I should stop subjecting myself to the feminist men-bashing, and the "gender is merely *constructed* and *performed!*" ideologizing, that's been rampant on social media and in the mass media for years. But I do, once again, want to embellish on points I've made elsewhere that poke holes in the dominant discourse of social constructionism. *Feminism is an essential and overwhelmingly constructive political movement, but, like any movement, it isn't immune to criticism*.

One might ask, "Why even criticize the logical and factual errors feminists make, if on the whole the movement is so constructive?" In part, it simply comes down to whether we care about understanding human behavior. If we don't care about that, then one key reason for making criticisms is gone. But if we do care, then we should be willing to sometimes think un-ideologically. The Judith Butler sort of "anti-essentialist" idealism, totally dismissive of all scientific research that shows the influence of physiology on gender and sexuality, is very primitive, and yet it's utterly hegemonic among liberals and leftists. Doubtless for political reasons. And while there might, sometimes, be political value in trumpeting the reductive message that humans are nothing but products of sexist socialization, I think we should be willing to explore the possibility that humans are *also* rational, creative, and reasonable, and that men and women, on average, are, in fact, slightly different—not only because of passive subjection to sexist discourses (which does occur, obviously) but also because of the *active* functioning of their brains and bodies.

In answering the above question, one might furthermore say that, if a liberal-left movement starts to alienate large numbers of people who broadly share its values and goals—as woke feminism sometimes does (alienating even such militant feminists as Camille Paglia)—then it's worth looking at *why* this is the case. For instance, is the movement mistaken in some of its social analyses? We shouldn't, out of the

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[1] Many expressions of sexism are awful and should be challenged through activism, but sexism as such—categorizing most people as either male or female and being strongly influenced in your thoughts and behavior by that categorization—is universal. For example, taking greater care not to hurt women's feelings than men's is both sexist and very, very common—and also the right thing to do, because women and men are different.

[2] The linked article has flaws, but it isn't worthless.

pressures of groupthink and cowardice, shrink from critical interrogation of any powerful ideology, including feminism. Constructive criticism might even advance the goals of the left, like by discouraging irrational divisive rhetoric against people who could be political allies.

My final apology for this blog post is that psychology interests me, and I find it unfortunate that, at least in recent decades, there have been so few honest "phenomenological" accounts of the nature and causes of gender relations, accounts that make explicit what is implicit. I don't see why such analyses have to be incompatible with left-wing values—or have to be academically pretentious and perverse in the way (sometimes) of gender studies. Reasoning on matters of social concern should be democratic and accessible.

So here are some foolhardy but hopefully accurate reflections on the sexes, which have the implication that we shouldn't blame men or "the patriarchy," or even "socialization," for *every* type of inequality between men and women. "Nature" plays a larger role than most feminists allow. Once we accept this fact, moreover, we might devote less time to spouting misandrist, *objectively reactionary* nonsense about the awfulness of men as such and more time to attacking real problems, from authoritarian political control over women's bodies to economic inequality between the sexes.

Some preliminary thoughts on "male dominance"

Consider the notion of "the patriarchy." We hear of this concept all the time. Is there such a thing as the patriarchy? Surely, in a sense, yes. It seems that all "complex" societies and a good many "less complex" ones have been at least partially patriarchal, both in the public and the private spheres. In their book *The Dawn of Everything*, David Graeber and David Wengrow argue that Minoan Crete during the Bronze Age was ruled by women, but even this is debatable, as they admit. The Marxist anthropologist Maurice Godelier argued in an article called "The Origins of Male Domination" (1981) that, while many "primitive" societies have been basically egalitarian, "in the last analysis" it is likely that men have always "occupied the summit of the power hierarchy." Why? One reason isn't hard to fathom: men are usually physically stronger, taller, and larger than women. In all animal species, these traits tend to correlate with (relative) dominance.[1]

So yes, it appears that men are, *on average* and with plenty of individual exceptions, in important respects the dominant sex, and one is free to lament this fact if one wants. (Personally, I find it extremely lamentable—lamentable even that there should be such a thing as "dominance" in nature at all.) One can also apply the word "patriarchy" to it if one wants. But it is indicative only of lazy and idealistic thinking to say the tendency of male dominance is *solely* a result of "socialization" or sexist "discourses" or some

[1] Notice, also, that even just among men, physical strength and size tend to correlate with relative dominance, other things being equal. A smaller and weaker man is usually less dominant than a large and strong one—and elicits less sexual interest from women (most of whom show greater preference for strong, tall, (semi-)dominant men). So it's hardly only women who are disadvantaged by the inequalities that are inscribed in nature.

Incidentally, feminist literature has addressed this question of physical strength and size. Let me comment on, for example, Kate Millett's overrated classic *Sexual Politics*, which denigrates biology in favor of culture: "*The heavier musculature of the male is biological in origin...but is also culturally encouraged through breeding, diet and exercise*" (p. 27). True. Culture is important. But the male's "heavier musculature" seems to be "culturally encouraged" in nearly all societies, for reasons of competition between males, hunting for prey, sexual prowess, etc. "*Yet it is hardly an adequate category on which to base political relations* ***within civilization***. *Male supremacy, like other political creeds*"—but it isn't only a political creed; it's a deeply rooted tendency in personal relations (as we'll see)—"*does not finally reside in physical strength but in the acceptance of a value system which is not biological*." Again, true: a value system, as such, isn't merely "biological"; it's also cultural. But there is no reason to think biology can't influence value systems. (For instance, the value placed on sex and procreation is clearly biological in origin.) "*Superior physical strength is not a factor in political relations—vide those of race and class*." Well, for one thing, I'm not making a vulgar reduction of political relations to superior male strength, so this criticism doesn't really apply to me. But, actually, superior physical strength *can be* a factor in political relations. Suppose one race were very physically weak: we would hardly be surprised to find that it was frequently enslaved by others. –Anyway, this gives you the gist of some of Millett's arguments against the importance of "nature." The others are similarly weak.

such. These things are relevant, but, in this case, social constructs and discourses emerge to some extent out of prior conditions of human physiology, anatomy, the biology of sex, and innate psychology. Unless we genetically reengineer the human species so that, for example, women are stronger and larger and men are physically weaker and smaller, we're never doing away with *some degree* of relative male dominance—though that doesn't mean we can't *reduce* the disparity in status between men and women.

(What does dominance mean here? It means the tendency to—often informally—be a leader, to be confident and assertive, respected, listened to, to have a "strong presence" and generally a higher status. Of course, other factors are important, such as intelligence and verbal fluency, and these are not even *relatively* monopolized by the male sex, which is why there have been so many female leaders in history.)

Another consideration related to men's relative strength, but also to their typically greater visual-spatial skills and facility with (or interest in) the mechanical problems of constructing tools and the built environment, is that men have been overwhelmingly responsible for creating the actual physical infrastructure of civilization. How often do you see women in construction crews? (Even if they can certainly do most of the tasks associated with construction work, it's more "natural," given sexual aptitudes, for men to do such work. Sexist discrimination is hardly irrelevant here, by the way; but even in the absence of such sexism, it is unlikely women ever would have constituted a *majority* of construction workers, carpenters, contractors, artisans, and the like.) One reason—in addition to workplace discrimination—there are fewer female engineers, architects, mathematicians, technologists, and other "systemizing" types is that women, partly because of sex hormones, are usually more interested in *people*-oriented occupations (education, social work, law, politics, art, dance, theater, music, history). Well, it doesn't require deep insight to see that constructing the material basis of civilization confers a lot of prestige and power.

To the extent that women increase their involvement in such activities of construction, engineering, and manipulation of the physical environment, their status and power will rise.

Here's another factor related to brute physicality: men's achievements in athletics and sports have always surpassed women's, for obvious reasons. Sports are a highly visible, culturally central activity, in relation to which women are treated as either *secondary* (in the case of female athletes) or *spectators*. The implications for female status are obvious.

This permanent fact of *some* male dominance, however, doesn't imply a permanent monopoly of *political and economic* power, for such power is a function of institutional arrangements and can be changed through activism. For many reasons these institutional circumstances are extremely stubborn and difficult to eradicate, but in principle, it may be possible someday in the future, in many (hopefully all!) countries, that men and women will hold equal or virtually equal economic and political power. The type of patriarchy this activism targets should and, perhaps, can indeed be abolished.

On psychological differences between the sexes

It's already an indictment of academic feminism and gender theory that you won't often encounter in such writing the perfectly obvious points I've made here—because these points are perceived as unflattering to women, politically pessimistic (I'm "naturalizing" gender, like a scientist), and hence unsayable. The humanities and social sciences, after all, are largely ideological, not strictly scientific or intellectually honest. (It's ironic that postmodernists have critiqued natural science as being ideological, socially constructed, and reflective of power relations, when those criticisms apply with far more force to postmodernism itself.)

But what I've said so far is only the tip of the iceberg. It's frequently considered rather enlightened or progressive for women to denounce men, in egregious (and "sexist") generalizations, as being, say, misogynistic, insensitive, selfish, narcissistic, and the like, but let's put aside the ideology and look honestly at male and female psychology and romantic relations.

I sometimes find puzzling the nearly universal conspiracy of silence about obvious average differences between the psychologies of men and women. Even without delving into the scientific research of the past century, some of the differences are apparent. There surely must be *some* implications regarding "male dominance" that most women, for example, cry more easily and often than men—behavior that

people don't see as exuding dominance—and are more excitable and intensely emotional than men. (See Julia Serano's *Whipping Girl* for an account of how her emotions became more intense after she transitioned to being a woman. Most stereotypes about the sexes contain a kernel of truth—which is why they're stereotypes to begin with.) A man who was as prone to laughter, tears, excitement, anger, anxiety, and so on as women are (*on average*) would be seen, doubtless, as weak, childish, and very unattractive to the opposite sex. Heterosexual men tend to be more emotionally *detached* than women, more "sober," to quote Kierkegaard from this offensive-sounding and overly generalizing passage in *The Sickness Unto Death*:

> Woman has neither the selfishly developed conception of the self nor the intellectuality of man, for all that she is his superior in tenderness and fineness of feeling. [Her] nature is devotion, submission, and it is unwomanly if it is not so... [A] woman who is happy without devotion, that is, without giving herself away (to whatever it may be she gives herself) is unwomanly. A man also devotes himself (gives himself away), and it is a poor sort of a man who does not do it; but his self is not devotion..., nor does he acquire himself by devotion, as in another sense a woman does, he has himself; he gives himself away, but his self still remains behind as a sober consciousness of devotion, whereas woman, with genuine womanliness, plunges her self into that to which she devotes herself…

His mode of expression here is certainly objectionable, but he shows insight into average differences between men and women. One reason people associate women and children, after all, as distinct from men, is that both are more likely to exist in a sort of *emotional immediacy*. They're (usually) more "in the moment," more excitable and receptive—which is one reason men enjoy their presence.[1]

Indeed, it's worth asking a question that is rarely asked in a serious way: why have such large proportions of men throughout history been attracted to teenage children? Ancient Greeks with their love of beautiful boys, kings and emperors with their harems of young women, countless "dirty old men" with their child brides, hordes of pedophiles today—what explains it? The answer isn't hard to think of: attraction to children is just a (pathological) extension of attraction to women. Women's tendency to emotional receptivity and excitability isn't *categorically* different from children's; it's only of a less extreme nature. Feminine "giggling," for instance—a rather *receptive* thing, not *assertive*—is sort of on a continuum with childlike giggling. Men find female giggling very attractive, and *some* men find *childlike* giggling attractive.

As unwoke as it may be to say this, implicit in male attraction to women is a kind of condescension, a *protective* urge. Young men, especially, are apt to see women as some sort of semi-angelic being, innocent, naïve, childlike, fragile, needing protection from the cruel world. John Keats gave expression to this feeling in the poem quoted near the bottom of this page, called "Woman! when I behold thee flippant, vain." Men feel similarly about their children: they need protection by the "adult," the one "in charge," the man. (Of course, women want to protect their child too, but, having a different affective cast of mind, they experience this impulse differently than men do.)

—None of this, again, should be controversial. It's just straightforward phenomenological description of human psychology, the kind of thing any intellectual would be happy to write if he or she

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[1] The feminist urge to say, in effect, "Sexism!" in response to such thoughts as Kierkegaard's, and thereby to dismiss them, isn't a serious response. Kierkegaard was no idiot, and he had far more psychological insight than the run-of-the-mill feminist. By the way, women's "permission" to be relatively emotional—and, to repeat, this stereotype of "emotionalism" is based on *truth*, not prejudice—is an example of a kind of *female privilege*: as I just said above, a man who acted exactly like most women do would be judged laughable and pathetic because of his lack of self-control. *(This is just a fact about how he'd be perceived; I'm not making any value-judgment, as if I endorse such a perception or—idiotically—think there's something shameful about female behavior. Lest one kill the messenger, one has to distinguish between* ***reporting*** *facts and '****endorsing****' facts.)*

I also might as well note here that there is much truth to the widespread idea that gender is on a spectrum, that the sexes aren't absolutely different, and that everyone has masculine and feminine traits. I'm only saying (or rather reporting the results of scientific research) that most women cluster near one end of this psychological spectrum while most men cluster near the other end.

were sufficiently courageous and interested in truth. But no, we're supposed to think that the age-old *yin/yang duality*—acknowledged in some form by countless cultures—is pure nonsense, a mere social artifact with no basis in human nature! So much for postmodernists' supposed respect for other cultures and their insights.

When someone has the urge—and is expected—to protect, and to be *gentle* (like during sex), to always refrain from exercising his full strength, to be careful what he says so as not to hurt feelings, to "be a shoulder to cry on," and to control himself at all times because of his responsibilities, he is the one who (implicitly or explicitly) has the higher status and the greater power. Adults therefore—and for other reasons—have a higher status than children, and the male sex, unfortunately, has, in general, an at least *slightly* higher status than the female. Women and children are typically permitted to sort of "lose control" in public, to get emotional and even violent (think of women who hit their children or get infuriated at store clerks or some other hapless employee), but if a man acts that way he'll quite possibly be arrested. In this and other respects, society holds men to a higher standard. Likewise, if a young man and woman are drunk together and she seems sexually receptive, some feminists argue that he should act in her best interest and refrain from sexual activity because she might regret it later. She hasn't *really* given her consent. That is, they hold him to a higher standard: he is expected to know what's good for her better than she is. He is supposed to compensate for her "weakness."

Men's higher status—and society's higher standards for them (in *some* respects)—are constantly indicated by trivial, and of course "socially constructed," daily incidents the significance of which most of us, including feminists, hardly even notice. When a wife adopts her husband's last name, that indicates his status. She is adopting him as an important element of her identity. When she holds his arm as they walk together, that's a *tiny* indication of the difference in status between them. When a man is the customary "leader" in a dance with a woman, that expresses his higher status. Women who write things in their online dating profiles like "Make me laugh!" or "Teach me something!" or "Take me to your favorite bar!" are unknowingly expressing their relative passivity—and their *desire* to be relatively passive, their enjoyment of it. (This isn't "oppression," by the way, and there's nothing wrong with it, or with any other female desire.) The universally valued, chivalrous injunction to "save the women and children first!" in the case of an emergency is an expression of the *somewhat* comparable status of women and children. The list goes on without end. Most types of female/male behavior, especially in, say, the first half of life (when, e.g., testosterone concentrations in men are highest), communicate relative passiveness vs. relative activeness—and the fact that this isn't *only* because of "socialization" is shown by the presence of these tendencies across *very different* societies, from, say, pre-Columbian Native American ones to modern China or the U.S.

Sex itself is, typically, characteristic of stereotypical gender relations. To enter a woman and ejaculate inside her is quite a manifestation of male potency. In most sexual positions, from missionary to doggy-style, women are the so-called "submissive" partner. And their verbalizations during sex, more often than not, express passiveness: "Do me!" "How do you want me?" "I love your power!" Even the ecstatic contortions of their bodies signify a kind of relative passiveness, *being-done-to* and losing control. On the whole, the man has taken charge. –Again, these tendencies are not *only* "socially constructed." They emerge organically out of the very nature of sexual intercourse (notwithstanding exceptions, such as sexually submissive men).

It's rarely explicitly acknowledged that women and men experience sex, love, and romance very differently, because (in part) of anatomy, physiology, and psychology. To penetrate someone, and to desire that, is different than to be penetrated and to desire that. The former is intrinsically self-assertive, "virile," semi-dominating; the latter is more akin to submission and to elevation of one's partner. No wonder, then, that men want to have sex with as many women as possible (because it's intrinsically self-affirming) whereas women more often want to pick one partner, get to know him, take the measure of him, and decide if he's actually a person they'd want *inside* them, who could possibly impregnate them. Likewise, men are intoxicated by the female body; they're *driven* to see it naked and touch it everywhere, ravenously grope it and squeeze it and kiss it and taste it—"objectify" it: "License my roving hands, and let them go / Before, behind, between, above, below," John Donne said, speaking for the male sex. And women, of course, frequently enjoy this: they enjoy being touched, fondled, kissed, "manhandled" to some extent, treated

almost as putty in a man's hands. The relations of power or relative dominance in this situation are pretty clear (and are comparable to those in most other "romantic" situations, whether the man is making the woman giggle, giving her flowers, paying for her dinner, buying her jewelry, or fulfilling some other wish of hers).

All of this is almost too obvious to point out,[1] but somehow people are still able to say, "Why do women have a lower status than men? It must be *only* because of male misogyny! It's the patriarchy!" The intellectual naïveté of this—or the willful blindness—is remarkable. The rage at men can even be somewhat galling, because, as I noted, the average heterosexual woman implicitly *wants* and *expects*, in certain contexts, to be of a slightly lower "status" than men, more receptive, protected, and so on. How many women are attracted to men of lower status than they—weaker men, shorter men, insecure men? A man thought to be of a *higher* status (whether in terms of his (perceived) confidence, his finances, his career, his physical strength, his older age, or whatever) is infinitely more attractive.

In fact, behavior that some feminists, such as Andrea Dworkin, have criticized as misogynistic and degrading to women is often *celebrated*—perhaps rightly—by "sex-positive" feminists, who plausibly argue that women should be allowed to explore their sexuality even if it takes "demeaning" forms that Dworkin wouldn't like. Wearing flagrantly self-objectifying clothing, for example, or enjoying and participating in degrading pornography, are sometimes considered "empowering" for women. (Similarly, one recalls the widespread celebration some years ago of Beyoncé's commodification of her sexuality as a bold feminist move.) Apparently the irony passes unnoticed that behavior that *reinforces* women's objectification and subordination should be considered "empowering." But this is yet another instance of the common and perfectly normal female desire—in part a social artifact, and not always consciously acknowledged, but nonetheless a deeply rooted desire—to be relatively "passive" in certain circumstances.

Again, though, to describe all these facts has no implications with regard to essential types of feminist activism. It should be self-evident that the activism focused on domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, the right to have abortions, and on material issues of childcare, economic security and status, etc., is of a wholly different moral character than the naïve intellectual discourses that pretend there is no natural basis at all for "sexist" gender relations. This is why I'm saying nothing about the fight against political misogyny: it's too obviously legitimate and necessary, and there's nothing interesting to be said about it because it's already universally embraced by leftists and liberals.

But what a disgrace, in the age of 21st-century science, that a semi-"blank slate" model of the mind is still taken seriously by vast numbers of educated people! Behold the influence of postmodern idealism/empiricism—Foucault, Bruno Latour, Judith Butler, and the like, but also the more general, scientifically illiterate *100% social constructionism* of much feminism since the 1960s.[2]

Not only women suffer

This post has taken on a rather polemical tone, so I should probably repeat the disclaimer I made in a footnote: *I'm not making value-judgments (as if men are "better," whatever that means).* We're free to deplore any fact about how people naturally behave and think. Personally, I do deplore the "immorality" of nature—the cross-species tendency to valorize "dominance" and devalue, for example, males who are weaker or smaller, or females, or, say, anyone who is physically unattractive. Or, even worse, the vicious

[1] It's also seen as *impolite*—or even misogynistic—to point it out. But, while it's quite proper that in polite company you shouldn't make elementary observations about human behavior that might make someone uncomfortable, if you're actually interested in *understanding*, you can hardly ignore the implications of any of this.

[2] Social constructionist feminists are in an unenviable position. For the sake of their ideology they're committed to denying that biology or natural human responses play any role *at all* in constructing gender or status relations between men and women—because as soon as you admit they play even a small role, you're naturalizing gender—but this forces them to ignore or try to explain away every piece of scientific evidence and every consideration of elementary rationality that suggests gender is grounded in biology. So they can't help but be dogmatic, irrational, and scientifically perverse.

struggle for survival itself: the carnivorous eating alive of luckless prey, the starving to death of endless numbers of animals, the very creation of an animal—*homo sapiens*—capable of the horrors history is full of. Nature cares nothing about our human values of equality and justice.[1]

If you want to play the value-judgment game, it isn't hard to find reasons to say men are the more "shameful" sex. The proliferation of pedophiles, sleazebags, sociopaths, psychopaths, sadists, narcissists, domineering buffoons, amoral power addicts, and every other horrific type of male personality (though not only male) is enough to establish this. A feminist friend of mine once said, "men are *actively* horrible, while women are horrible in their passiveness." The second half of that statement is a little harsh, but there's a lot of truth to the first half. Of course, it too is oversimplified. Men should be shamed to the extent that they act badly, and women should be shamed if they act badly too. Neither sex is "better" than the other, and it's incredibly immature to make such judgments. We're all individuals with our unique strengths and weaknesses.

Having said a little about the partially *natural* foundations of gender stereotypes—and by implication the inadequacy of feminists' blaming men for *every* type of sexual inequality (as though women have no agency and are nothing but victims)—I want to say something about the liberal and left tendency to ignore or dismiss the problems of men in favor of an exclusive focus on the concerns of what they call "the marginalized." (*As if millions of men—even white cisgendered men, believe it or not!—aren't effectively "marginalized" in our crushingly inhuman late-capitalist trainwreck of a civilization!*) It isn't exactly a brilliant political strategy to try to alienate an enormous popular constituency.

It must be said, first, that it certainly is hideous how much suffering men cause women (and each other). Not only institutionally, as with the blatantly misogynistic Supreme Court, but also personally. We shouldn't be surprised that the dominant sex is apt to treat "the second sex" appallingly, not least because the dominant sex (sometimes) treats everyone, including fellow males, appallingly. But that hardly excuses it.[2] Western society, fortunately, has become well aware of women's suffering due to the achievements of feminism since the 1960s, even if the U.S. is currently experiencing a regression. Unfortunately—on a personal level—male violence and abuse persist, and surely, to some degree, always will. The best we can do is to mitigate them, through education and a more enlightened politics.

With the progress of feminism, however, has, as I said, come a relative decline of interest in the problems of men. Attention to these is now often relegated to the dark corners of the internet—incel forums and the like—and reactionary media figures. The intellectual buffoon Jordan Peterson quite possibly never would have become a celebrity if liberalism and the left had not ignored the concerns of millions of left-behind young men, a huge sea of lost souls. Who are now, in many cases, ripe for fascism because of their rage and alienation.

Even if their despair couldn't have been solved, it's important at least to be *noticed*. Peterson notices them, and they love him for it.

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[1] This isn't to endorse Social Darwinism. Humans are a deeply social and communal species who can, do, and should take care of each other.

[2] It does, however, make somewhat less impressive the usual charge of "misogyny!" Men treat each other horrifically, just as badly, in a sense, as they treat women. And they often treat women much better, much more respectfully. As I said above, sexism or "double standards" can work to the advantage of women, as when women aren't ridiculed or ostracized for behavior that would get a man relentlessly mocked or even physically assaulted. In this respect, feminists, despite themselves, are very much in favor of a kind of positive sexism or an underlying chivalry—and they're right. It would be unbelievably offensive and gauche, or worse, to treat women just as one treats men. (For example: if a woman acts in a highly obnoxious way, a way that would get a man knocked out if he acted similarly, a man is forbidden from hitting her, because she's a "weak" and "defenseless" woman. It's telling that there *isn't* a similar stricture against hitting a comparably weak or physically frail man, which you'd think there would be if simple "weakness" or "defenselessness" were the issue. Instead, it seems that chivalry and sexism are the only motivations for this (morally right) "don't hit women" rule. This is even more clearly the case given that society is actually more forgiving of parents who hit their children than of men who hit women!—despite the greater disparity in strength between adults and children than between men and women!)

Much of the despair arises from their relations with women. Or their lack of relations with women. What they need are *left-wing* figures to talk to them, to acknowledge them and "recognize" them. Or, better, left-wing institutions and public spaces to discuss together and raise consciousness. There's no substitute for sex or a relationship with a woman—it is this that allows the man to feel like a *man*, to feel affirmed, listened to, cared for and loved—but the construction of public spaces could be precisely a means toward realizing these desires. Social privatization and atomization, driven by neoliberal capitalism, bear much of the blame for the loneliness epidemic that afflicts men and women, but these men, brainwashed by libertarianism and Ben Shapiro, end up as ideological foot-soldiers for exactly this capitalism that has been their downfall!

I have to admit I have some sympathy for the millions of young men who are sexually starved, anguished, frequently rejected by women after one date for no apparent reason except that she "didn't feel the chemistry." (And what determines chemistry? If he's funny enough, charming enough, good at flirting, or else very good-looking, etc. If he doesn't exude a confident and high-status masculinity, she'll quite possibly brush him aside and look for someone else.) It isn't fun to be lonely, as we all know. I think of that guy who tweeted some weeks ago that he's gone on countless dates, been consistently kind and friendly, and yet been rejected so often that it seems as if all women had a meeting wherein they decided not to date him. So he's just come to accept that he'll never have a girlfriend, and he's trying to adjust to that fact.

I don't really know what I'd say to them, but I wish I could talk to these men who feel *hardly human* because of their rejection by the opposite sex. They feel *ignored*, *invisible*, many of them. To be shunned by such *beautiful* people (it seems) as women is the most awful injury, cutting to the very core of one's manhood.

And so, in misery, a lot of these men become misogynistic. But what is misogyny? It can take structural forms, as when women are systematically excluded from some institution, and it can take subjective forms, as in the hostile attitudes that find expression online. Feminists have stretched the term so that almost anything can be misogynistic—acting chivalrously, looking at a woman's half-exposed breasts, "objectifying" her (as if her highly revealing clothing isn't self-objectifying), making some inadvertent generalization in a conversation—but this is just the usual excess that attends all popular movements. We shouldn't let it mislead us into thinking misogyny is only imagined and not a real problem. There is misogyny even in the womanizing behavior of charismatic, narcissistic, sociopathic men (see: the Tinder Swindler) who are wildly popular with women and end up breaking their hearts.

Unfortunately, there is no hope to eradicate misogyny. Resentment or even hatred of women will always be present in some men who have been frequently rejected—just as hatred of men will often be present in women who have been rejected. These are natural psychological reactions to acute unhappiness that is thought to be caused by some group of people. You can no more do away with them than you can do away with the human psyche. But it's true that in a less privatized, atomized, and frivolous society, a world without such an incredibly toxic dating culture, the sexes would doubtless have a healthier attitude toward each other.

Meanwhile, for the sake of reducing the threat of fascism, it would be advisable for leftists and liberals to stop ridiculing and demonizing all men and instead start taking them and their problems seriously. Otherwise you're driving them into the arms of the fascists. (Historically, liberalism has always been complicit in fascism—liberals fear socialism, or economic democracy, more than fascism—but it's sad that even leftists now are complicit in the rise of the far-right.[1]) After all, it isn't as if most women are saints either. Both sexes participate in and/or benefit from the exploitative, authoritarian relations of capitalism, and both sexes (or most members of both sexes) are harmed by them also. Both sexes act with astonishing cruelty toward other people. As individuals, men are no worse than women.

Many feminists—I see them on social media pretty often—will deny that men have distinctive problems at all, but to wildly dismiss the opposite sex like this is only to substitute a fascism-enabling war between the sexes for the revolutionary war between the classes.

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[1] Frankly, they were complicit even in the 1930s, given the suicidal sectarianism of both Communists and Social Democrats.

Rationality vs. ideology

Mainstream intellectual culture revolves around denying or ignoring uncomfortable truths. It is controlled and policed by ideologists who refuse to face—or to publish—obvious facts about a wide array of issues: the disastrous nature of capitalism, the catastrophic role of the U.S. in the world, the total amorality of power centers, the desperate need, for the sake of human survival, to build global anti-capitalist movements. And, far down the list, the irrationality and misandrist tendencies of feminist intellectual discourse.

It's perfectly predictable that most liberals or leftists who come across this blog post will have no response to it except "Misogyny!", but my hope is that some readers will have the cognitive capacity to separate the realm of value from the realm of fact. To look at *homo sapiens* honestly, warts and all, holding their value-judgments at bay.

To spread the message—implicitly or explicitly—that men are nothing but terrible oppressors, that their masculinity is "toxic," that they're alone responsible for all of history's evils and have contributed very little that's positive, that virtue is equivalent to femininity, that only women really suffer and that male perspectives are intrinsically prejudiced and unjust, is to turn people against both feminism and the left. Likewise, to reduce all of gender and sexuality to *socialization*, as if sex hormones don't exist and women and men aren't *naturally* psychologically different in some respects, is to turn people against feminism, because these dogmas are transparently ideological and stupid. It's as if Judith Butler and her acolytes, provincially postmodernist, have never read a scientific paper or are incapable of reflecting on the status implications of, say, physical size and strength or the tendency to cry easily and crave protection by men. However ridiculous these status implications are, they do exist.

It would be nice if feminism could be more realistic and less fanatically social constructionist/woke, but that won't happen. Mere reason is hopeless against hegemonic institutions and ideologies. It's up to more realistic people, or the more realistic side of the same people, to focus on the things that matter: class organizing, resistance to the dismantling of abortion rights, organizing for maternity leave and free childcare, the defeat of all Republican candidates for office, in general raising the security and status of women. *This* is what's rational and what's needed—not the contempt for men that often passes as feminist.

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"Race Reductionism" Threatens to Doom the Left

The reparations debate is getting old. But it shows little sign of abating. Academic papers continue to parse the idea of reparations for slavery; books continue to be written on the subject, adding to the mountain of material that already exists; celebrated journalists give speeches to the UN advocating reparations. Democratic candidates in 2020 prominently and sympathetically discussed the issue on the campaign trail. The debate is not going away anytime soon. It is the more unfortunate, then, that much of it is conducted in an unserious way.

The recent "national conversation" about reparations is usually traced to Ta-Nehisi Coates' 2014 essay in *The Atlantic* "The Case for Reparations," but this piece only gave a shot in the arm to a conversation that was already quite spirited and publicly visible. Talk of reparations entered the mainstream in the 1990s and early 2000s, having been confined largely to circles of Black nationalism starting in the 1960s. Lawsuits were filed, and dismissed, against the U.S. government and corporations that had profited from slavery; books such as *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* (2000), by Randall Robinson, were published to advocate for reparations; magazines and newspapers across the country, from *Harper's* to the *Los Angeles Times*, presented the case, as did numerous academic papers and conferences. "Reparations" was in the air: Japanese-American internees during World War II had been compensated in 1988; survivors of the Holocaust were being compensated; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa recommended reparations for apartheid, and such commissions in Chile, Guatemala, Colombia, Peru, Sierra

Leone, Canada, and many other countries made similar proposals. Year after year, the ideological momentum behind slavery reparations increased, and Coates' essay increased it even further.

The *New York Times'* 1619 Project gave yet another boost to the demand for redress, probably the most significant boost so far. As a systematic effort to interpret U.S. history entirely in terms of the oppression of Blacks, it was tailor-made to advance the reparations narrative. The immense resources of the *Times*, in collaboration with the corporate-endowed Pulitzer Center, went into designing and distributing a curriculum that schools could use to teach the 1619 Project. This massive nationwide campaign soon coincided, fortuitously, with the George Floyd protests in 2020 and the revival of Black Lives Matter. By then, Black identity politics was so deeply embedded in the nation's culture that conservatives discovered they could capitalize on it by inventing a "critical race theory" boogeyman to frighten whites into supporting reactionary politicians and reactionary policies. The discourse of anti-racism and reparations continued to spread even as the right-wing backlash against it grew in intensity and effectiveness.

In the last couple of years, books on reparations have not been lacking. Their titles indicate their content: *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century* (2020); *Who Will Pay Reparations on My Soul?* (2021); *Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair* (2021); *Reparations Now!* (2021); *Reparations Handbook: A Practical Approach to Reparations for Black Americans* (2021); *Reparations for Slavery* (2021); *Time for Reparations: A Global Perspective* (2021). Liberal America can't get enough of the reparations idea. Fewer books on the subject have been published in 2022, but *Reconsidering Reparations*, by Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, is an exception that has gotten some attention. It may be worth briefly reviewing here, because its shortcomings illustrate the shortcomings of the whole reparations discourse, indeed "identity politics" itself.

A debate rages on the left between the practitioners of identity politics and alleged "class reductionists," but the latter seem to be decidedly in the minority. This is unfortunate, because in order to defeat the threat of the far-right—whether it's called white nationalism, Christian nationalism, white supremacy, neofascism, or proto-fascism—we're going to have to build a movement on the basis of class struggle. This doesn't mean denying the legitimacy of the grievances of groups defined by race, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality, but it does mean incorporating them in a broader movement organized around the old Marxian dualism: the working class vs. the capitalist class.

Reconsidering reparations

From a Marxian point of view, the inadequacies of Táíwò's book start in its first paragraph:

> Injustice and oppression are global in scale. Why? Because Trans-Atlantic slavery and colonialism built the world we live in, and slavery and colonialism were unjust and oppressive. If we want reparations, we should be thinking more broadly about how to remake the world system.

Apparently the world is unjust not because capitalism is inherently unjust, but because it began, centuries ago, in slavery and colonialism. We're called to remake the world system, but the focus is on how horrible the past was, and, admittedly, how horrible the present is for non-white people because of their past. Capitalism as such isn't mentioned; instead, as in all of the reparations discourse, it is slavery, the slave trade, colonialism, and racism that are emphasized. This fact, of course, is why the liberal establishment is comfortable talking about reparations and even invests enormous resources in propagating the narrative. It understands that it poses no threats to its own power and serves as a useful distraction from class conflict as such.

The purpose of *Reconsidering Reparations* is to argue that "reparation is a construction project," the project of building a new world, a "just distribution." Táíwò approvingly quotes a historian: reparation is "less about the transfer of resources…as it is [sic] about the transformation of *all* social relations…re-envisioning and reconstructing a world-system." He borrows a concept from Adom Getachew that has become fashionable: "worldmaking." Just as the postwar decolonization movements were engaged in

worldmaking, hoping to build a just society on a global scale, so we must continue their project, this time, importantly, taking into account the disasters of climate change that will disproportionately affect countries in the Global South. Reparation, according to Táíwò, is about more than mere income redistribution.

This line of argument is admirably dismissive of liberal technocratic tinkering with palliative policies, but there is an obvious retort to it: socialist, communist, and anarchist revolutionaries since the nineteenth century have always been devoted to this sort of "worldmaking," and there is nothing original about such a formulation. There has never been a need to justify world revolution in terms of "reparations" for past injustices; rather, the imperative has simply been that because people of all races and genders are horrifically suffering in the present, we need socialism (economic democracy). The revolutionary project has been justified on *class* grounds, not racial grounds. Why the need for a new justification? The answer is clear: reparations is currently a fashionable idea, and for the sake of one's career and relevance, it makes sense to use fashionable ideas to reframe old ideologies. Doing so may be wholly unnecessary, but at least it gives one's book the appearance of originality.

It seems noteworthy that nowhere in his book does Táíwò use the word "socialism," even though his vision for the future is the traditional socialist one: "everyone in the world order should have capabilities that grant effective access to the means of maintaining their biological existence, economic power, and political agency. Our target must be a global community thoroughly structured by non-domination." Maybe he thought that using the dreaded s-word might not be wise from a careerist point of view, or maybe he thought it would associate his book with an earlier Marxist tradition and thus detract from his attempts at both originality and distinguishing his account from one that prioritizes *class* solidarity. Whatever the reason, the omission is telling.

Much of *Reconsidering Reparations* is dedicated to reviewing the history of what Táíwò calls Global Racial Empire and how it led to the structural disadvantages people of color face today. A historian need have no quarrel with any of this. It is an incontrovertible truth that, for hundreds of years, people of color have been systematically exterminated, enslaved, exploited, massacred, forced off their lands, stripped of their cultures, reduced to peonage, denied the opportunity to own a home, denied a decent education, disproportionately imprisoned, disproportionately consigned to unemployment, and disproportionately subjected to police brutality. A large part of the literature on reparations is concerned to establish these facts, and they certainly do need to be broadcast far and wide. Left critics of the reparations concept do not deny any of the horrifying history or the abysmal present.

What they deny, first of all, is that reparation on a scale large enough to make a difference is practicable. As Coates wrote, "Broach the topic of reparations today and a barrage of questions inevitably follows: Who will be paid? How much will they be paid? Who will pay?" Surely tens of millions of Blacks in the United States are entitled to reparations (not to mention the many descendants of Native Americans and arguably other groups), a number on an altogether different scale than, say, Japanese-American internees or Holocaust survivors. Each of these people, we may grant for the sake of argument, is owed a very large sum of money. Táíwò endorses the idea of unconditional cash transfers to African Americans, perhaps on top of a universal basic income (UBI) for everyone. It isn't hard to imagine the vast logistical and bureaucratic difficulties of administering such a plan (not the UBI but the reparations). Táíwò's proposals are extremely abstract, like those of most reparationists, but other writers have suggested that truth commissions could assess the harm cumulatively suffered by African Americans, and on that basis the amount of each payment could somehow be determined. In *Atonement and Forgiveness: A New Model for Black Reparations* (2006), Roy Brooks proposes that a trust fund administer individual payments for the purposes of education and funding businesses, and the total amount of money in the trust would be determined by multiplying the average difference in income of Black and white Americans by the number of Black Americans.

Most writers (including Brooks and Táíwò) reject the idea of merely a one-time cash payout in favor of remedies that "deal with long-term issues in the African-American community," to quote philosopher Molefi Kete Asante. "Among the potential options," Asante says, "are educational grants, health care, land or property grants, and a combination of such grants" (cited in Alfred Brophy's *Reparations: Pro and Con* (2006)). Community development programs are a popular idea in the literature;

for example, Táíwò mentions the African-American Reparations Commission's plan that money be transferred to "cooperative enterprises" and that financing be provided for the "planning and construction of holistic and sustainable 'villages' with affordable housing and comprehensive cultural-educational, health and wellness, employment and economic services."

Whatever the moral merit of these and a myriad of other vague proposals, they face obvious and intractable obstacles. First, as mentioned, is the administrative and political nightmare of determining which individuals or communities will receive reparations, how they will be distributed, and how they will be funded. Second, and even more fundamental, is the question that Adolph Reed posed in 2000 and that has not been answered, because it cannot be answered: "How can we imagine building a political force that would enable us to prevail on this issue?" It is a shockingly obvious problem with the whole reparations discourse, and so intractable that it utterly vitiates the latter. Are we to believe that in an age of resurgent proto-fascism, fueled in part by white fears of something as mild as "critical race theory" and the very idea that racism has played a significant role in American history, a tiny minority of anti-racist activists will be able to build a nationwide movement so overwhelming that it sweeps into power a supermajority of legislators committed to radically restructuring society on the basis of reparations for slavery? Does any serious person find this scenario remotely conceivable?

Táíwò, like nearly all reparationists, scarcely even acknowledges these problems. Why are they so rarely discussed? A cynic would have a ready answer to this question: the politics of reparations is largely *performative*, a way of demonstrating one's political virtue, of surfing the wave of elite liberal preoccupations and perhaps even boldly veering off to the left, thus really proving one's revolutionary bona fides. It doesn't matter if ambitious national—much less global—reparations legislation is inconceivable; the point, if you're an academic, is to have a trendy research project and to play around with various ideas for their own sake. Táíwò, for example, waxes philosophical on conceptual distinctions such as *responsibility vs. liability*, and on the strengths and weaknesses of certain arguments for reparations, including "harm repair" arguments, "relationship repair" arguments, and his own "constructive view" that he considers the most defensible. It's all a waste of time. The most important question is ignored: *how are we to build a massive political movement that will crucially depend on the altruism of white people in a country where whites have been consistently more than 70 percent opposed to the movement's goals?*

Most reparationists don't consider themselves Marxists, but since some do, it is worth pointing out that the movement they advocate doesn't make contact with Marxism. Eugene Debs was a true Marxist when he said, "Solidarity is not a matter of sentiment but a fact, cold and impassive as the granite foundations of a skyscraper. If the basic element, identity of interest, clarity of vision, honesty of intent, and oneness of purpose, or any of these is lacking, all sentimental pleas for solidarity, and all other efforts to achieve it will be barren of results." There is no shared interest or solidarity between white and Black workers when the latter demand from the former (and other whites) financial compensation for centuries of white supremacy. This is instead an idealistic appeal to mass altruism, which, given the motivating force of economic self-interest for most people (of which Marxists are well aware), is unlikely to get very far.

Therefore, it is not only the practicability of material reparations (on a substantial scale) that Marxists deny. It is also the revolutionary or socialist character of the program itself. As Reed, again, has argued, the program is profoundly anti-solidaristic, in that it pits Black workers against white workers. "We've suffered more than you," it says, "and therefore deserve more, even at your expense." It tends to minimize, in fact, the suffering and exploitation of white workers, so much so that even authors who consider themselves anti-capitalist, like Táíwò, are apt to recognize the systemic *class* injustice of capitalism, if at all, only in the mode of an afterthought. This is certainly true of *Reconsidering Reparations*. The book evinces hardly any awareness that capitalism in its origins, its history, and its present has been a horror story not only for people of color but for the exploited and immiserated of all races. Europe's peasantry wasn't exactly coddled during the transition from feudalism to capitalism, which, lest we forget, required kicking them off the land and produced centuries of mass impoverishment in cities and the countryside. Popular uprisings were crushed again and again, vast numbers were massacred, millions were subjected to forced labor of some form, millions experienced the death-in-life of slaving away in mines and early factories.

It should be unnecessary to observe, too, that even today many whites are not having an easy time of it. In the U.S., 43 percent of people on welfare are white. Death rates for whites, especially those without a college degree, have been rising for years, largely because of the "deaths of despair" phenomenon. And most white men (56 percent) lack a college degree (compared to 74 percent of Black men). More whites are killed by police than all other races combined, although the rate at which Blacks are killed is more than twice as high as the rate for whites. Weak unions and stratospheric economic inequality don't harm only people of color: poor whites are actually more pessimistic, more depressed, and more prone to committing suicide than poor Blacks and Hispanics. Underlying all this is the fundamental fact of capitalism: most people of all races are deprived of control over their work and ownership of productive assets, leaving them with little defense—in the absence of unions—against high rates of exploitation, low wages, autocratic domination by investors and managers, and economic insecurity. Nor are whites unaffected by the housing crisis, the burden of student and consumer debt, environmental crises, or the cultural and psychological pathologies of life in a viciously atomized society.

It isn't hard to make a case, therefore, that working-class whites deserve "reparations" too. As a Marxist would argue, the wealth they've produced for generations has been stolen from them, and they've suffered immensely as a result. Why don't we talk about reparations that the capitalist class owes to the working class? Why is the agenda framed in terms of *whites vs. non-whites*? Again, the answer is clear: this sort of "race reductionism" is, from the perspective of the ruling class that finances it, a fantastically useful diversion from class struggle, which in its implications leads toward the sort of race war that white supremacists advocate. We see, then, that a supposedly left discourse effectively joins hands with the far-right, and even provides it with excellent talking points. ("Those Blacks, lazy parasites, want to take all our hard-earned money! We already give them welfare, now they want even more!") It helps the racists. This may be an unfair thing to say, but one recalls Marcus Garvey's flirtation with the Ku Klux Klan. Black nationalism or anything like it—anything that treats the artificial concept of "Black people" or "the Black community" as denoting an entity with a coherent set of interests, as though it isn't riven by its own class conflicts—is not a genuine left politics.

While it is important to talk about the specific problems faced by people of color, it is even more important, for the sake of solidarity and building a political coalition against both capitalism and proto-fascism, to talk about the *shared interests* of (so to speak) "the 99 percent." The reparations discourse does the exact opposite of this.

Defeating the right

How can we defeat the far-right and the stagnant center? That is the urgent question. The left has to focus ruthlessly on the question of strategy.

There is a widespread belief among leftists that the only way to defeat racism and thereby achieve working-class solidarity is to constantly talk about how terrible it is to be a person of color, how oppressed such people have been throughout history, and how saturated in racism society is. We have to, as much as possible, draw attention to race rather than submerge it under the fact of shared class interests. In her book *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (2016), for instance, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor chastises Bernie Sanders for "essentially argu[ing] that addressing economic inequality is the best way to combat racism." This is an old argument, she says, from the pre-World War I right wing of the socialist movement, which was discredited when Communist parties around the world were able to recruit millions of non-white people by recognizing the legitimacy of their own distinctive, racially inflected and colonially determined grievances. In the U.S., thousands of Blacks joined the Communist Party because of the party's attention to the scourge of racism. Moreover, their recruitment to the left did much to energize it and, perhaps, radicalize it. Surely these facts validate a race-centered strategy?

What she fails to see is that the situation today is very different. Today the left has an imperative need to recruit Latinos and whites, who otherwise might join the far-right. There is little danger of Blacks joining a white nationalist movement. If we want to drive economically insecure, socially unmoored, and politically despairing whites into the arms of the right, a great way to do that is by telling them, in effect,

that their own suffering and anxieties are of little moment compared to the suffering of Blacks, and that whites are almost universally racist. Similarly, we should tell men that their masculinity is toxic, that all of them are sexist oppressors and mansplaining chauvinists. As Steve Bannon said in 2017, "the longer [the Democrats] talk about identity politics, I got 'em. I want them to talk about racism every day. If the left is focused on race and identity, and we [Republicans] go with economic nationalism, we can crush the Democrats." Bannon, whatever else he may be, is a savvy political operator whose opinions on strategy should be taken seriously.

The Communist Party in the 1930s had to overcome an incomparably more virulent racism among white workers and unionists than exists today. But it did so not by *emphasizing* race, and certainly not by calling for whites to pay enormous amounts of money for reparations. That would have gotten it nowhere, just as it has gotten the left nowhere in recent years. Instead, it focused obsessively on the identity of class interests between the races. In essence, it followed the strategy of Bernie Sanders, the Marxist strategy (not that Sanders is a Marxist). It's true that, in the effort to recruit Blacks, it also took up the cause of their distinct racial oppression, as with the Scottsboro campaign. But it didn't take this racial advocacy to such a monomaniacal extreme that it would alienate the masses of white workers and obscure the fundamental message about "Black and White" having to "Unite and Fight."

In truth, whatever leftists who have been steeped in critical race theory or Afro-pessimism might think, racism today isn't anything like the obstacle to working-class unity it was generations ago. Decades after the historic achievements of the Civil Rights Movement, overt displays of racism are wildly socially unacceptable and are easily shamed through iPhone videos and social media. But even if we accept the very dubious premise that a deeply rooted anti-Black racism is still a major hindrance to building an anti-capitalist political movement, it makes no sense to think we can overcome such racism by expatiating endlessly on the suffering and oppression of Blacks. If people are as racist as we're supposed to think, they won't care! These appeals will leave them cold, or rather will *alienate* them from the political organizations that are trumpeting the message. The Communist Party was more intelligent: you overcome racism by bringing people together, and you do that by ceaselessly educating them on their common interests against the ruling class.

This obvious strategy, the Marxist one, doesn't mean adopting the caricature of "class reductionism" that no sane person actually believes, according to which only class matters or every form of oppression can be solved through an exclusively class-based politics. The absurd, bad-faith nature of the charge of class reductionism is shown by the fact that one of its alleged exemplars, Adolph Reed—whose Marxism (i.e., emphasis on class) is so controversial in DSA that he had to cancel a talk to its New York City chapter in 2020—has written a beautiful, poignant book on his experience growing up in the oppressively racist Jim Crow South. He is hardly blind to the significance of racism—which makes all the more striking his insistence that racism is fairly trivial today compared to what it was sixty years ago.

It still has to be challenged, of course, as do sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia. But, in general, "telling people they're racist, sexist, and xenophobic is going to get you exactly nowhere," says Alana Conner, a social psychologist at Stanford. "It's such a threatening message. One of the things we know from social psychology is that when people feel threatened, they can't change, they can't listen." To quote another writer, Margaret Renkl, "somehow you need to find enough common ground for a real conversation about race." One way to find common ground is to talk about common interests. That can help dissolve people's defenses against hearing what you have to say. It's also useful, Renkl notes, to remember that you yourself are hardly innocent either, so you shouldn't be too condemnatory of basically decent people who, like you, are unaware of their prejudices. "Prejudice is endemic to humanity itself." There is no such thing as purity, much as the woke mob may disagree.

In short, even if it is only racism and the oppression of Blacks you're concerned about—for some reason being uninterested in class oppression as such, which, today, is exactly what's responsible (rather than racism) for most of the deprivation Blacks experience—you should still situate your discussion of race in a broader, consistent emphasis on the capitalist-engendered suffering of all races. This is especially advisable if you actually want to get policies passed, including those relating to "identity politics," since, as Mark Lilla reminds us, you first have to get people in power who share your values. "You can do nothing

to protect black motorists [pulled over by police] and gay couples walking hand-in-hand down the street if you don't control Congress and, most importantly, if you don't have a voice in state legislatures." You have to get your people elected, and you do that by showing you relate to voters' shared concerns—about the economy, wages, healthcare, housing, unemployment, working conditions, wealthy tax cheats, and the like.

It is also worthy of note and bears repeating that the so-called class reductionists (the Marxists, the ones who prioritize class solidarity) are right that universal programs such as Medicare for All, "Housing for All," free higher education and abolition of student debt, and redistribution of income from the wealthy to the poor would massively reduce racial inequality and achieve many of the goals of race-based reparations. This is argued, for example, in Adaner Usmani and David Zachariah's article "The Class Path to Racial Liberation," but one needs only a little common sense to see its truth. Given that Blacks are, for example, overrepresented in poverty and among those without a college education, it is clear that universal programs will disproportionately benefit them. Since such programs are also, as we have seen, incomparably more politically viable than reparations—unless you think a majority of ostensibly racist whites can be convinced in the near future to give up large amounts of their income to people they hate—it is very puzzling that identitarians are often unmoved by the idea of class-based legislation. In effect, their political practice sabotages the only realistic ways of realizing their goals.

Reed is right, evidently, that "some on the left have a militant objection to thinking analytically." Race-based politics tends to be grounded in *feelings*: outrage that racism still exists and that people of color are disproportionately oppressed. These are understandable feelings, but a politics of self-expression is an unintelligent and nonstrategic politics that risks handing victory to one's enemies.

The need for universalism

In a *Dissent* interview, Táíwò acknowledges that much of the reparations program will probably never be politically popular. But then he gives the game away: "a lot of the…things that could be part of a reparations drive don't necessarily need to be framed as reparations." Okay, so why did you write a book framing them as reparations? In doing so, you're only contributing to their marginalization. He goes on:

> For instance, reducing fossil fuel use polls better than reparations, and it is likely to gain popularity as the climate crisis becomes more and more apparent. If we follow the divest/invest strategies that Black Youth Project and other groups have talked about…that's a win from a reparations standpoint, and you would never need to use the word. You could simply explain what pollution is and why you'd like less of it, and explain the better things that you'd like to do with those resources, like healthcare and housing, and prevention of intimate partner violence and intercommunal violence in non-carceral ways.

So in the end he endorses Sanders-style universalism. Apparently we've been arguing about nothing this whole time.

The failures of Black Lives Matter illustrate the folly of a non-Marxist strategy. The BLM movement did "raise consciousness" for a while, to the point that 52 percent of the public supported it in the summer of 2020. But support has declined since then, and the movement's goals have gone mostly unrealized. The "Defund the Police" demand didn't work out so well, as cities and the U.S. government are spending more money than ever on police departments. It might have been strategically smart to emphasize that whites, too, suffer immensely from police brutality and are killed in very large numbers, but it seems that most identitarians are uninterested in the problems of white people (particularly white cisgendered men). It is unlikely, however, that any amount of campaigning on the narrow issue of police brutality would have resulted in significant change. If you want to defund the police, the way you go about it is not by centering the police but by focusing attention on positive and universal proposals regarding housing, education, employment programs, and the like.

It is true that the "universal" measures in the original version of the Build Back Better bill were, likewise, defeated, despite being wildly popular. But why were they defeated? According to most of the reporting, it was because of two senators: Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema. If the Democratic Party had been more politically competent and managed in 2020 to get a majority of 52 or 53 in the Senate, it is quite possible that these proposals would have passed, making a major difference in the lives of Black people—and whites too, who deserve justice no less than Blacks.

Again, none of this is to dismiss issues of "identity," including abortion rights, trans rights, and gay rights. They deserve prominent advocacy. But they cannot be allowed to crowd out and marginalize—as they too often do today—fundamental, universal, and solidaristic issues of class. These should provide the continually emphasized ideological framework for every other demand, and, for moral and strategic reasons, should be ceaselessly championed by nearly every organization on the left.

In general, the political terrain of the twenty-first century, everywhere in the world, promises to be dominated by various types of populism. People everywhere are bitterly resentful toward the "elite," however they define the elite. It is the essential task of the left to channel this populism in the right direction, focusing ire on the *class* elite rather than the supposed cultural or "racial" or "ethnic" elite, the cultural outsiders. That way lies fascism, which is becoming an increasingly threatening global phenomenon. If we want to stop fascism, we have to be Marxists.

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Only Class Struggle Can Save the Left

A striking paradox of the history of the left is that it is full of self-defeat. From the bitter divisions between statist and anti-statist socialists in the nineteenth century to the vicious rivalries between Communists and Socialists in the 1930s, followed by many more episodes of destructive sectarianism and flawed strategy up to the present, the left has often had trouble getting its act together. It isn't clear why this is the case, although doubtless the usual lack of resources in comparison to the right (funded by business) has played a not insignificant role. It is indisputable, however, that the left has periodically suffered from a deficit of analytical and strategic intelligence. Confronted with the rise of fascism in the 1930s, for example, it was obviously suicidal for Communists and Socialists to train their guns on each other. In recent decades, a different type of suicidal impulse has gripped the left, both the activist and the academic left: a fixation on "identity" at the cost of a relative disregard of class struggle. It is high time that the left exorcised its death instinct.

There are, of course, a myriad of social and political hierarchies that deserve to be dismantled, and no consistent leftist would be unmoved by the oppression of women, people of color, homosexuals, transgender people, and other groups that have become associated with identity politics. The question is simply one of emphasis. Is it right to subordinate class organizing and class consciousness to organizing and messaging around gender, sexuality, race, and other such "cultural" identities, as leftists and left-liberals have regularly done since the 1990s? Or, on the contrary, should the message and practice of class solidarity be the basis for all left politics, the continually emphasized framework within which most other organizing and mobilizing takes place? Should, in short, class consciousness become the dominant theme of the left once again, as it was long ago?

In a new book, Cedric Johnson, in effect, answers that question in the affirmative. *The Panthers Can't Save Us Now: Debating Left Politics and Black Lives Matter* is a provocative and insightful collection of essays and responses by Johnson and several of his critics, who are specifically responding to his award-winning 2017 *Catalyst* essay of the same title. Scholars Jay Arena, Touré Reed, Mia White, and Kim Moody write the (respectively) appreciative and not-so-appreciative replies, Moody in particular providing spirited criticisms. Johnson's perspective aligns with that of so-called "class reductionists" like Adolph Reed, Jr. and Vivek Chibber (who writes an Introduction) in its critique of the Black Power nostalgia among left academics and activists today. "The premise of black exceptionalism," Johnson writes, that underlies such

nostalgia "obscures contemporary social realities and actual political alignments, and forestalls honest conversations about the real class interests dominating today's neoliberal urban landscape."

Before delving into Johnson's book, however, it may be worthwhile to contextualize it with a more general critique of the left's elevation of identity politics at the expense of class. The Marxist project remains an essential one, and, after the long reign of postmodern cultural theory, we could do with more forthright defenses of it.

In defense of common sense

Actually, Chibber has recently written a compelling defense of a type of "structuralist" Marxism in his book *The Class Matrix: Social Theory after the Cultural Turn* (which I've summarized here). Predictably unpopular in left-wing culturalist circles, the book lucidly explains the primacy of class structures relative to cultural discourses and identities. But even Chibber's succinct theoretical discussion is lengthier than it has to be, given the simplicity of the issues.

Since the 1980s, under the banner of intersectionality, it has become fashionable on the left to insist on the equivalent status of various "simultaneous oppressions," such as those of class, race, gender, and sexuality. We shouldn't rank them or argue that one is, in some sense, fundamental; this would amount to a kind of chauvinism, a disrespect for the claim to equal victimhood of other groups, and would thus be very gauche in the decorous environment of postmodern academia. One might find oneself tarred and feathered as a "reductionist," a most opprobrious label to be avoided at all costs. Instead, class, race, and gender are "imbricated" (a popular word that the sophisticate should use as often as possible), embedded within each other, intersecting, overlapping, dialectically interrelated, etc. Race and class, for example, are so closely related in our system of "racial capitalism"—which, we're told, is the only kind of capitalism that has ever existed—that it can be difficult even to distinguish them. Racism is *constitutive* of capitalism, part of the intrinsic logic of capital accumulation. (This makes it incredible, by the way, that a man as brilliant as Karl Marx would have devoted so little attention to racism in his lifelong excavation of the logic of capital accumulation.)

This kind of thinking leads to such statements as the following, from Robin D. G. Kelley's foreword to the third edition of *Black Marxism* by Cedric Robinson:

> [C]apitalism does not operate from a purely color-blind market logic but through the ideology of white supremacy. We see it in the history of the policing of Black and Brown communities, land dispossession, displacement, predatory lending, taxation, disfranchisement, and environmental catastrophe; in racial differentials in wages and employment opportunities; in depressed Black home values; in the exclusion of Black people from better schools and public accommodations for which they are taxed; and in the extraction of Black labor and resources to subsidize white wealth accumulation.

The obvious retort to this passage is that countless white people, too, have been victimized by land dispossession, displacement, predatory lending, taxation, disfranchisement, environmental catastrophe, depressed home values, exclusion from better schools, and the extraction of labor and resources to subsidize wealth accumulation (in recent decades among blacks too, not only whites). Accordingly, it can hardly be white supremacy that has driven these processes, even if it has, of course, sometimes exacerbated them for black people. Rather, they have been driven by the capitalist drive for profits at the expense of the large majority of people, no matter what color their skin happens to be.

"White supremacy" is of no relevance to the capitalist exploitation of millions of workers in, say, China, or in a city like Lagos, Nigeria (to use one of Cedric Johnson's examples in his book). Notwithstanding current academic fashion, there have clearly been capitalisms, at least on local and national scales, that aren't particularly racialized, in that the masses of the exploited and oppressed are not thought to be of a different race than their oppressors.

The type of thinking represented by Kelley, which takes white supremacy to be no less essential to capitalism than, say, exploitation of workers, is, ultimately, a product of the widespread academic tendency to engage in mere description rather than explanation, a tendency that can lead analysis astray. Descriptively, yes, there exist "simultaneous oppressions" that "intersect" and "overlap" and can only with difficulty be teased apart in people's subjectivity and everyday experience. Racism, sexism, and "classism" all flow together and interpenetrate in daily experience, such that one cannot really say any is more fundamental than the others. Similarly, the history of capitalism has indeed been bound up, in many contexts, with white supremacy, and it is hardly a great insight to give this obvious fact the name of "racial capitalism," as the allegedly important Cedric Robinson did. It is even less of an insight, because it's false, to say that the history implies racism is logically constitutive of capitalism and just as foundational as class.

When Stuart Hall, for instance—who is beloved by many postmodern semi-Marxist academics—famously wrote that "Race is…the modality in which class is 'lived,' the medium through which class relations are experienced, the form in which it is appropriated and fought through," he was saying something very silly, a fact that has escaped his admirers. Class is lived in *many* "modalities," not only "race": work practices, conflicts between employer and employee, differing modes of interaction between the classes, forms of leisure that characterize one or another class, levels of education that people reach, occupational horizons, political struggles, in certain contexts racial or gender divisions—and many of these types of experience actually *unite* races that are in the same class, such that it is either meaningless or wrong to say "race is the modality in which class is lived." Hall and his acolytes have been misled not only by shallow thinking (disguised by the usual pretentious verbiage and jargon) but by their "descriptivist" effort to *fuse together* (race and class) when what explanation requires is analytical *separation*.

Marx was far more sophisticated when he insisted that explanation, or the scientific method, requires *abstraction* from complex appearances (experience). The point of explanation is to *simplify* appearances, to "reduce" phenomena to their essences by formulating simple explanatory principles. As Noam Chomsky points out, this is the method of the natural sciences and ought to be the method of the human sciences. It is a sign of the irrationality of the humanistic disciplines that "reductionism," or simplification, is considered an intellectual vice, when—if it's done right—it is in fact the entire purpose of analysis and the meaning of understanding.

(I might note, incidentally, that my own discipline of history, which has bred so many left academics and activists, is especially averse to general explanatory principles, often preferring to "problematize" "metanarratives" like the Marxian, class-centric method and revel in description for its own sake, anecdotal stories for their own sake, "contingency," "discontinuity," fragmentary perspectives, and idealistic focus on "discourses." Many historians seem to be temperamentally attracted to the *particular*, the level of kaleidoscopic appearance, rather than deeper and more general understanding in the mode of a Gabriel Kolko, an Albert Soboul, or a Chomsky. Hence, in part, the celebration of crisscrossing subjective identities and identity politics, a political universe of fragmented and mostly nonrevolutionary identitarian interest groups.)

What was the method of Marx himself? He started from objective relations of material production *abstracted* from the many dimensions in which they are experienced. "[L]ife involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself." "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." "The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life."

Marx's "base/superstructure" metaphor has spawned generations of caviling academic sophistry objecting to such "reductionism," such a "mechanistic" understanding of society, but it is, after all, only a metaphor. And in fact it's a useful one, precisely *because* it simplifies the chaos of social appearances. One only needs some commonsense reasoning to arrive at Marx's casually expressed intuition. Let me quote from a recent book of mine where I defend so-called class reductionism:

> A culture and politics [including collective conceptions of gender, race, and other identities] is not somehow the product of spontaneous generation; it is brought into being by actors and institutions, which need *resources* in order to bring it into being. The production and distribution of resources, in particular material resources, takes place in the economic sphere. So, the way that resources are allocated according to economic structures—who gets the most, who gets the least, how the structures operate, and so on—will be the key factor in determining, broadly speaking, the nature of a given society with its culture and politics. The interests of the wealthy will tend to dominate, but at all times individuals and groups will be struggling by various means, implicitly or explicitly, to accumulate greater resources and power for themselves. This simple argument grounds historical materialism or "the economic interpretation of history" in the overwhelming importance of control over resources…

Class relations, which broadly determine the production and distribution of resources, therefore provide the basic set of interests and the institutional infrastructure around which is fleshed out the whole array of society's other objective and subjective relations of power (which in turn, of course, have some reciprocal influence on economic processes). From *a priori* reasoning like this, you reach the conclusion that in order to abolish or radically transform both central and peripheral relations of power, it is necessary to overthrow the dominant mode of production, which conditions everything else more than the latter conditions the former. It is not only issues like wages, working conditions, income and wealth distribution, housing, public health, unemployment, access to well-funded public resources, environmental destruction, the horrors of factory farming, imperialism, militarism, and rampant political corruption that are determined by the class system (far more than by various discourses and subjectivities of race, gender, and sexuality); even, say, the problems of commercial sexual objectification of women, business funding of attacks on women's rights, political scapegoating of immigrants, and business-funded attacks on the LGBTQ+ population cannot be solved except through sweeping assaults on capitalist structures, which will require massive working-class solidarity across races, genders, and sexualities.

This sort of "class reductionism"—the revolutionary primacy of class solidarity, as opposed to a reactionary racial solidarity (e.g., black vs. white), gender solidarity, ethnic solidarity, or whatever—is mere common sense. It has a commonsensical corollary too: rather than constantly talking about white racism and male sexism—or, for example, the far greater suffering of people of color than whites, who are all ostensibly "privileged" (which many whites living in relative poverty would deny)—activists should foreground talk about shared class interests among wage-earners. Doing otherwise threatens to destroy the solidarity necessary to create a new society or even to elect good public officials. How many whites are you going to attract to your side by monomaniacally denouncing a supposed white supremacy or the alleged ubiquity of white racism? "You're all terrible, privileged people!" is what is heard. "But we'll let you be our allies if you can try to educate yourself out of your racism." That's a brilliant way to hand victory to the right. I've elaborated on this point elsewhere, in connection with the hopeless and counterproductive national campaign for reparations for slavery.

Devotees of the racial capitalism idea, however, argue that because racism and capitalism are inseparable, anti-racism as such is anti-capitalist. It is an attack on the system at its foundation, no less than is the fight for universal social programs like expansive public housing legislation, abolition of student and medical debt, free higher education, and labor law reform. This mistake is emblematic of the political dangers to which faulty analysis can lead. It is true, of course, that capital has exploited and fostered racism, as it has fostered divisions and enmities between genders, ethnicities, groups with different kinds of education or occupational skill, and every other social division that could fragment the working class and shore up the power of business. It is also true that ideologies of race have, historically, been used to justify the plundering, dispossession, enslavement, and extermination of countless millions around the world (including those whose skin looks "white," like the Irish, Slavs, and Jews). The vaunted Cedric Robinson certainly didn't discover these facts.

But the fact that one can easily imagine a capitalist world of only one race—though of divisions between nationalities and other groups—whereas it is impossible to imagine a capitalism with only one class already shows class is much more fundamental than race. Academics love to problematize, "interrogate," and complicate simple truths, since they misunderstand what it means to understand something (believing that *the more complicated, the better*, which is the opposite of rationality), but no amount of postmodernist problematizing can erase the simple truth that "race" or racism is an ideology, an identity, a mishmash of "discourses" and ways of treating people, various types of institutional exclusions and inclusions, whereas class is a set of objectively existing locations in a system of production that determines how resources are allocated. Racism functions, in part, by forcing certain people (but not *only* those "racialized" people) into certain subordinate locations in an independently defined and existing constellation of positions of economic power. If racism were abolished, the given relations of production would still be there, only the various positions in them would be filled by a different distribution of black, white, and brown people. There would be more blacks and browns at the top and more whites at the bottom. This would do nothing to eliminate capitalism, worker exploitation, environmental degradation, colossal military budgets, the threat of nuclear war, epidemic unemployment, inadequate healthcare for millions (but at least there would be more whites and fewer browns and blacks among those millions!), privatization of public resources, the global housing crisis, commodification of the human personality, and every other evil that emerges from capitalism.

Since Marx, ironically, still has a good reputation among many postmodern leftists, I might observe that he evidently, in effect, agreed with all these points, given that he spent his life writing about class and said little about "race" except to argue that workers of all races have to unite and overthrow the bourgeoisie, which is the point I'm making. Apparently—surprise!—he thought what's crucial is to attend to common class interests. The strategic question that occupied him and should occupy us is how to facilitate working-class unity. It is dubious at best that he would have thought the contemporary left's obsessive talk of white racism and the plight of people of color with little attention to the frequently equal hardships of whites is the way to do it.

"But racism is exactly what is preventing the working class from uniting and challenging capitalism!" objects the race-addled leftist. Nonsense. Compared to the white supremacy and racism of sixty years ago, the anti-black racism of today—when you can destroy a person's life by recording an iPhone video of him saying the n-word—is rather trivial, as the much-maligned Adolph Reed Jr. (who grew up in the Jim Crow South) has remarked. More important in fragmenting the working class are such factors as the general atomization of neoliberal life, the privatization of urban, suburban, and rural space, the inherent structural difficulties of building a nationwide labor movement or even unionizing a particular workplace, the ubiquity of business propaganda across the mainstream media, the trivialization of political discourse, and, yes, the left's highly disproportionate focus on identitarianism. "The longer [the Democrats] talk about identity politics," Steve Bannon, a Machiavellian strategist, said in 2017, "I got 'em. I want them to talk about racism every day. If the left is focused on race and identity, and we [Republicans] go with economic nationalism, we can crush the Democrats."

Even if it were true that white racism is a significant obstacle to class solidarity, Bannon's statement would be no less intelligent. You're not going to build an anti-capitalist movement with "racists" by telling them how racist they are.

Against race reductionism

Cedric Johnson's book is, in effect, a case study in the centrality of class (over race) to both understanding and strategy. In his original 2017 article, a follow-up 2019 essay published in *Jacobin*—both appearing in the book—and his response to criticisms by Mia White and Kim Moody, Johnson dismantles the racially reductionist thinking that "insist[s] on the uniqueness of the black predicament and on the need for race-specific remedies" (such as reparations). He quotes an expression of this black exceptionalism by one of the founders of Black Lives Matter, Alicia Garza: "When we say Black Lives Matter, we are talking about the ways in which Black people are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity. It is an

acknowledgement [that] Black poverty and genocide [are] state violence." This is an apt quotation, for it reveals the chauvinism and political immaturity of this ideology that downplays such facts as that 43% of people on welfare are white, more whites have been killed by police since 2015 than all other races combined, substantial proportions of the incarcerated are Hispanic and white (23% and 30% respectively at the end of 2020), Hispanics had a poverty rate of 17% in 2020 (compared to 19.5% for blacks), and 47% of black adults are in the middle class (compared to 52% of whites).

Johnson's more sophisticated perspective, which builds on a rich scholarship of neoliberalism, is that the plight of the urban black poor "as a reserve of contingent and unemployed labor is the consequence of neoliberal rollback, technological obsolescence, and informalization, not the revival of Jim Crow racism. The expansion of the carceral state since the seventies has come to replace the welfare state as the chief means of managing social inequality." He continues:

> "The prison expansion and the turn to militaristic hyper-policing are not motivated principally by racism. Whether in Chicago's North Lawndale neighborhood or the Ozark country of southern Missouri, the process of policing the poor is orchestrated by the same diverse cast of beat cops, case managers, probation officers, district attorneys, public defenders, prison guards and wardens, social reformers, conservative and liberal politicians, weapons manufacturers, lobbyists, nonprofits, and foundations: a kind of social control complex that has been growing by leaps and bounds as poverty, cynicism, and the surplus population increase and the neoliberal era grinds on."

Johnson's arguments are far too multifaceted and dense with ideas and history to summarize adequately, but their core is to critique and historicize the "black ethnic politics" that is celebrated today, retrospectively in the form of the Black Power era and contemporaneously in the form of the Movement for Black Lives. Such ethnic politics has been and will continue to be largely a failure for many reasons, for instance that it cannot connect effectively with most white Americans—frequently only alienating them, and in any case relying to a considerable degree on the possibility of their altruistic sympathy for blacks (which is ironic considering the simultaneous insistence on whites' racist commitment to their own supremacy)—and that it is premised on the naïve, non-Marxist idea that by virtue of their common experience of racism, blacks of all classes, occupations, and ideologies have "deeply shared political interests." No matter how radical its rhetoric and policy stances may be, black exceptionalism always ends in mere racial liberalism at best, delivering "official recognition and elite representation" (as did Black Power, by the 1970s and '80s).

To understand the origins of Black Power is to understand its limitations. Accordingly, Johnson discusses the context of Cold War liberalism, the decline of progressive labor activism after the Second Red Scare, the consequent turn by liberals toward more *cultural* explanations of black poverty (as with the famous Moynihan Report of 1965), the increasing physical separation between black and white workers as a result of "white flight," and the War on Poverty's programs in urban neighborhoods that cultivated local leadership and "support[ed] Black Power's genesis and evolution." The War on Poverty barely addressed the deepening problems of structural unemployment and non-unionized employment, which, rather than "institutional racism," were (and are) primarily responsible for urban poverty. In this political context of mere liberal anti-racism, Black Power resorted to similarly inadequate and "idealistic" (non-Marxist) calls for socialist revolution, armed struggle, and solidarity with the Third World, calls that were hardly "suited to the affluent, advanced industrial society" of the United States. Much of the Black Power repertoire of rhetoric, self-presentation, and action was more like political theater than a serious politics—although, given the decline of the left, the dominance of anti-communist liberalism, and the resultant inner-city political confusion and despair, one can hardly blame the courageous radicals of that era.

In any event, the legacy of all this, by the 1980s, was that "limited but significant political integration had changed the face of public leadership in most American cities, with some having elected successive black-led governing regimes. In retrospect, the Black Power movement was a transitional stage where black popular discontent diversified the nation's governing class."

Johnson's criticisms of the contemporary efforts to resurrect something like this movement are the obvious ones many Marxists would make: for example, that the *Vision for Black Lives* agenda of the Movement for Black Lives "proceeds from the specious view that effective politics should be built on the grounds of ethnic affinity rather than discrete political interests." The *Vision* does express solidarity with "all oppressed people" and lists a raft of extremely progressive, almost revolutionary demands relating to worker rights, divestment from fossil fuels, a radically progressive tax code, universal healthcare, a universal basic income, an end to the privatization of natural resources, and many other issues. But in general, the agenda is framed in the racially essentialist terms of blacks vs. nonblacks, as in the Preamble's reference to "those who claim to be our allies." Johnson laments the authors' apparent inability to see that "a politics that builds broad solidarity around commonly felt needs and interests *is* a form of anti-racism, one that we desperately need right now…" Such a politics is what the Communist Party, for instance, built in the United States in the 1930s, as expressed in its slogan "Black and White, Unite and Fight!"

Now, thoughtful responses to Johnson's broadside are possible. One might grant the necessity of organizing the working class as such but argue that blackness is still such a potent source of individual and collective identity that it makes sense to *also* build on a racial foundation. It's true, one might say, that a minority of blacks have interests aligned with the capitalist class, but the point is to reach out to the majority who don't, and who can potentially be mobilized on the basis of their shared race and their common experience of racism. It's still the case in the United States that people are more readily organized through non-class identities, and we might as well appeal to those in the attempt to build a larger class movement—especially given that many of the grievances of these "non-class identities" are in effect class grievances. We should also, of course, appeal to a common class identity, to the extent that that resonates with people. In her essay, Mia White in fact claims that "a truly 'interracial' landscape of working-class solidarity with white people is most deeply possible through and with Black study, with a naked focus on race."

That last claim is pretty counterintuitive, but overall, these replies would seem to have some merit. Johnson doesn't directly answer them, but he does say that the enormous size of the African American population today should render talk of "black self-organization" and "black sentiment" obsolete. "At nearly 46 million, the black population in the United States is greater than the population of Canada [and] three times the size of the population of Greece… Why are so many incapable of thinking about the black population with the same complexity they would afford those populations?" Again, though, his interlocutor could reply, "Black Americans are all victims of racism, unlike Canadians or Greeks! They at least have that in common." In his foreword to *Black Marxism* quoted earlier, Robin Kelley gives an example: "universal health care, a fundamental long-standing demand of the Black freedom movement, will not by itself magically abolish the conditions that produce racialized health inequities, nor will it guarantee equal, bias-free treatment for patients."

But at this point the debate threatens to become uninteresting. "Class-first" types like Johnson and Adolph and Touré Reed can certainly acknowledge that racism remains a problem and won't necessarily be completely solved through the "universalist," class-based measures that Bernie Sanders and socialists advocate; they would insist, however, that enacting such measures would go an immensely long way toward realizing identitarian goals. Whatever residual racism (or sexism) remained could presumably be addressed through progressive educational and other policies designed to eradicate these last vestiges of a more backward era. Pressuring government to this end is of value, but it pales into insignificance compared to the imperative of *class* legislation that will improve the living and working conditions of everyone and address the threat of ecological collapse. Racism in and of itself is, as Johnson shows, of incomparably less importance than the race-blind aspects of neoliberalism in producing dismal outcomes for (some) black people.

Even in the cases of policing and incarceration, supposedly the quintessential examples of racism, class is a more powerful explanatory variable. For one thing, it wasn't merely "racism"—a concept so abstract that, in itself, it can't explain much—that gave rise to the carceral state in the neoliberal period. "Rather, mass incarceration was the creation of various constituencies—black and white; urban, suburban, and rural; liberal and conservative; New Democrats, black nationalists, victims' families, drug rehabilitation clinicians, social workers, and community activists—who supported expanded police protection, more

punitive sentencing laws, increased funding for prisons, and the like." Even black political elites and local black constituencies have often embraced conservative, pro-policing policies like mandatory minimum sentencing laws. Over and above these discrete interests, the rise of the carceral state has coincided with a *war on the public* of much greater significance than an imagined war on black people alone, who, it's true, disproportionately belong to the surplus population (especially in cities) that is being controlled, suppressed, incarcerated, and left behind economically. Given their overrepresentation among the poor, it is no wonder they're overrepresented among the arrested and imprisoned.

Kim Moody objects to the way Johnson deploys the "surplus population" concept, pointing out that according to a study in 2014 of 1,300 inmates, nearly two thirds of the prison population were employed prior to incarceration. "Those who are sentenced to prison are not primarily from the 'surplus population.'" But Johnson has little trouble refuting this argument, observing not only that a single small study is hardly an authoritative source of data but, more importantly, that employment status at the time of arrest isn't the key criterion here. The existence of the carceral state serves to discipline and regulate "the poor, homeless, so-called 'disconnected youth,' noncitizen workers, and [those engaged in] criminalized forms of work." These people may be temporarily employed, irregularly employed, sometimes employed full-time, but in their millions they constitute, as Marx said, a reserve army of labor.

Another shibboleth of the contemporary left that Johnson addresses is that the New Deal was wildly racist, and that its racism shows the inherent limitations of universal programs. According to Mia White, "the benefits of universal programs such as the New Deal cannot be misremembered as materially transforming for the better the lives of the most marginalized Black Americans." Statements like this are doubly problematic: first, the New Deal wasn't universal, since some of its measures deliberately excluded certain categories of the working class; second, it did benefit millions of the most marginalized blacks through programs like the WPA and the CCC (many of whose work camps, at least outside the South, were racially integrated). Moreover, the New Deal wasn't quite as racist as people think. Its limitations were more often determined by class factors than racial ones. To take a commonly cited example: it is true that the Social Security Act excluded domestic and farm workers, which would seem to be very racist; the problem is that the large majority of such workers were white. "Some 11.4 million whites were employed as agricultural laborers and domestics, compared to 3.5 million blacks." Thus, the Social Security exemptions excluded 27 percent of all white workers nationally. These are facts that have been covered up by identitarians and much of the scholarship that inspires them.

The Panthers Can't Save Us Now is, in short, the sort of book that is all too rare on the left today, an unapologetic attack on the hegemony of identity politics. The case it makes strikes me as almost self-evidently true. In a critical discussion of Asad Haider's *Mistaken Identity*, Johnson quotes a clear-sighted statement: "As long as racial solidarity among whites is more powerful than class solidarity across races, both capitalism and whiteness will continue to exist." Fair enough. But then comes Haider's illogical conclusion: "positivist arguments that class matters more than race reinforce one of the main obstacles to building socialism." Um, okay. This is what the left has become, this ideology according to which we can achieve class solidarity and break down the (alleged) solidarity among whites only by talking about…race. And how much worse things are for people of color than for whites. Because somehow *that* will get through to (alleged) white racists, *that* will be the thing that builds solidarity with them. *Not* emphasizing the common interests and common suffering of all races, but *distinguishing* the races from each other and arguing that one of them is much more privileged than the others. –This train of thought is so irrational and un-Marxist one doesn't know what to say.

To understand the reactionary nature of the race-infatuated discourse, one need only consider the fact that much of the ruling class is perfectly happy to subsidize it and promote it. The *New York Times* and other wealthy institutions have invested enormous resources in the 1619 Project, a discourse that foregrounds race and marginalizes class. Corporations and businessmen have given large sums of money to Black Lives Matter. Politicians have draped themselves in kente cloth. Is it at all conceivable that ruling-class institutions would lavish such attention on, say, labor unions, or on any discourse that elevated class at the expense of race? No, because they understand what many leftists apparently don't: class struggle can drive a stake through the heart of power, while race struggle certainly cannot. On the contrary, racial

narratives are *useful* to the capitalist class, for dividing the working class. Leftists acknowledge this fact in other contexts, but, under the perverting influence of postmodernism and critical race theory, they're blind to its strategic implications in the present.

I doubt Johnson or other "class reductionists" would insist on *never* talking about the plight of people of color or organizing, say, undocumented immigrants to fight for a more humane immigration system; they would only insist on placing such struggles in their proper class context and incorporating them within a much broader class movement. Talk of the common interests of working people should be endlessly repeated and unabashedly prioritized, so that it frames all or nearly all other political battles. And when talking about the disproportionate suffering of people of color, blame should be placed not primarily on the diffuse and idealistic concept of white racism but on the real source of oppression: capitalist class structures that have led to deindustrialization, de-unionization, militarized policing of the multiracial surplus population, privatization of public resources, and theft of over $50 trillion from the working class in the last forty years. All the white racists out there can be reclaimed and redeemed only in common struggle against the class enemy, struggle that has the potential to educate them out of their racism.

The concept of race is so artificial in the first place—very much *unlike* that of class—that to obsess over it is bizarre. It's a strange kind of fetish, whether it's an obsession of the right or of the left. This, in the end, may be the main point of Johnson's book. If oppressed people identify strongly with a particular race, it is the task of radicals to raise their consciousness so that it encompasses class as well, identification with people of other races. But in order to accomplish this, radicals first have to raise their own consciousness and shed their own race fetishism. A little more Marx and a little less Cedric Robinson would be a good thing.

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The Righteous Outrage of Norman Finkelstein

As I was reading Norman Finkelstein's new book, *I'll Burn That Bridge When I Get to It!: Heretical Thoughts on Identity Politics, Cancel Culture, and Academic Freedom*, I thought of Obama's joke at the expense of Rahm Emanuel: "he's one of a kind, and thank god he's one of a kind." Finkelstein, too, is very much one of a kind. But the analogy with Emanuel fails, because in fact *one* Rahm Emanuel is far too many whereas one Finkelstein is not nearly enough. We need hundreds of him. That is to say, we need hundreds of left intellectuals with the courage and intelligence to think for themselves and never sell out, to refuse to compromise—even to risk alienating fellow leftists by publicly repudiating woke culture and the more vacuous forms of identity politics in favor of an unstinting adherence to class politics. Nor would it hurt to have more writers who are as eloquent and hilarious as him.

It is widely known on the left that Finkelstein is, as it were, a martyr to truth and justice, having been subject to outrageous calumniation and denied an academic career because of his relentless advocacy of the Palestinian cause. With *I'll Burn That Bridge*, he shows his willingness to burn bridges not only with the establishment but also with the "left" of today, for which he shows scarcely mitigated contempt. He considers it, or dominant tendencies within it, to have degenerated from soaring moral and intellectual heights with Rosa Luxemburg, W. E. B. DuBois, and Paul Robeson into a censorious, narcissistic, morbidly navel-gazing culture preoccupied with subjectivist trivialities like personal pronouns at the expense of solidaristic struggle for a better world. "Whenever I see *he/him* or *she/her*, I think *fuck/you*." ("You must be living an awfully precious life," he goes on, "if, amid the pervasive despair of an economy in free fall, your uppermost concern is clinging to your pronouns.") If the book is not simply ignored, one can expect that it will elicit a flood of vituperation from leftists and liberals: "racist, misogynistic, transphobic, white supremacist, juvenile, incoherent, petty!" The intelligent reader will not be tempted by such facile judgments but instead will engage with the book's substance, because it has important things to say.

It consists of two parts: in the first, Finkelstein "deconstructs" identity politics and the cancel culture it has given rise to, focusing on five figures whom he eviscerates: Kimberlé Crenshaw, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Robin DiAngelo, Ibram X. Kendi, and Barack Obama. In the second part, he considers a related

subject with which he is intimately familiar: academic freedom. To what extent should a regime of free speech reign on the university campus, and under what circumstances should an academic's "offensive" speech in the public square result in disciplinary action? Is it wrong for universities to grant Holocaust deniers a platform? When teaching, should professors strive for "balance"—presenting with equal force all sides of an issue so that students can make up their own minds—or should they teach only their own perspective? What should we think of campus speech codes? Finkelstein addresses all such questions at length and in a spirit of uncommon seriousness.

One difficulty with the book is that it has a sprawling and meandering character, consisting variously of memoir, brutal polemic, dense argumentation, forensic dissection of texts, scores of long quotations, innumerable long footnotes, and very funny ridicule of everything and everyone from Michelle Obama to Bari Weiss, from the *New York Times* to woke terms like Latinx ("why would an ethnic group want to sound like a porn site?"). At its core, however, beneath the variegated surface, the book is an anguished *cri de coeur* against pervasive cultural, political, and intellectual rot—an unapologetic defense and exegesis of the heavily maligned "Western canon" (John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, Bertrand Russell, Kant, DuBois, Frederick Douglass, and the like), a sustained lamentation over how far the left has fallen, a furious denunciation of rampant philistinism and pusillanimous groupthink (quoting Mill: "That so few now dare to be eccentric marks the chief danger of the time"), and a proudly unfashionable celebration of such quaint notions as Truth, Reason, and Justice (which Finkelstein capitalizes, in a consciously anti-postmodernist flourish). The book's kaleidoscopic nature and intimidating length might bewilder the reader, so in this review I propose to summarize and comment on several of its main arguments, to facilitate their diffusion.

Before doing so, however, I can't resist quoting a few Finkelsteinian zingers, to preface the following heavy discussion with a bit of levity. On MSNBC's Joy Reid: "living proof that not all yentas are Jewish and not all bovines are cows." On Angela Davis: "Once upon a time she was on the F.B.I.'s Ten Most Wanted List. Now she's on Martha's Vineyard's Five Most Coveted List." On Henry Louis Gates: "a virtuoso at crawling on the ground while typing on his keyboard."[1] On Amy Goodman (whom he doesn't name): "Goddess of Wokeness…a woke machine, churning out insipid clichés as her mental faculty degenerates to mush." On Ibram X. Kendi: "mallet-wielding grifter…preposterous poseur…[whose] 'definitive history of racist ideas in America' reduces to a compendium of prepubescent binary name-calling." On Robin DiAngelo's morbid obsession with diagnosing "racism": "She is the monomaniacal Captain Ahab in pursuit of the White Whale. She is little Jackie Paper out to slay Puff the Racist Dragon. Her palette comprises two colors—white and black… What an unremitting, remorseless, insufferable bore!" On the widespread fascination with transgender people: "the first day of a graduate seminar, students used to describe their intellectual interests. Nowadays, it's de rigueur to declare your sexual orientation. It's only a matter of time before a student announces, 'I'm *she/her* and I'm packing a thick, juicy nine-incher.'"

In an adaptation of Emma Goldman's "If I can't dance, I don't want your Revolution," Finkelstein declares: "If I can't laugh, I don't want your Revolution." Political conservatives, too, have complained about the humorlessness of the woke crowd, but if you're alienating even die-hard leftists, maybe it's time to rethink your messaging.

Identity politics

Debates on the left over identity politics go back decades, and it is easy to be sick of them. Unfortunately, there is no prospect of their ending as long as identity politics and woke culture remain dominant on the left and in the Democratic Party—as they surely do today, at the expense of a class politics. Finkelstein is aware that the identity politics of the left isn't quite the same as the identity politics of the Democrats, but he is right that they overlap, and that such a politics is more conducive to being neutered into empty symbolism (statues, token representation in the corporate class, electing a vapid con artist like Obama) than a Bernie Sanders-style—or more radical—class politics is.

[1] Incredibly, he called Obama a "post-modern Frederick Douglass."

Serious leftists, like Robin D. G. Kelley, have written competent defenses of identity politics, and Finkelstein certainly isn't arguing against the necessity of incorporating anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-homophobia, and other such "woke" agendas into popular movements. What he objects to are the forms that identity politics often takes, and its tendency to devolve into celebration of an insular tribal identity. The binary, balkanizing drawing of lines between groups and near-contempt for the "oppressing" group—white vs. black, cis vs. trans, straight vs. gay, man vs. woman—is, in its parochialism and vitiating of solidarity against capitalism, not what a real left politics looks like. He quotes at great length some words of Frederick Douglass in 1894 that might well have gotten him "cancelled" today:

> We hear, since emancipation, much said by our modern colored leaders in commendation of race pride, race love, race effort, race superiority, race men, and the like… [But] I recognize and adopt no narrow basis for my thoughts, feelings, or modes of action. I would place myself, and I would place you, my young friends, upon grounds vastly higher and broader than any founded upon race or color… We should never forget that the ablest and most eloquent voices ever raised in behalf of the black man's cause, were the voices of white men. Not for the race; not for color, but for man and manhood alone, they labored, fought and died… It is better to be a member of the great human family, than a member of any particular variety of the human family. In regard to men as in regard to things, the whole is more than a part. Away then with the nonsense that a man must be black to be true to the rights of black men. I put my foot upon the effort to draw lines between the white and the black…or to draw race lines anywhere in the domain of liberty.

Moreover, the very idea of being "proud" of what group one happens to belong to—proud of being black or a woman or gay or trans—is puzzling. "[I]t perplexes why one should feel *proud* of one's zoological difference," Finkelstein writes. "[W]hat sense is there in making a 'cult' of that over which one has no choice…? Shouldn't one aspire to transcend the 'inevitable' part—the color of one's skin—so as to be judged by the 'free part'—the content of one's character?" Similarly, the idea of "loving one's people" is odd, first in that it amounts to "loving one's self writ large," which, in its narcissism, hardly seems like a noble thing. It easily becomes chauvinism. Second, one would certainly not love all the individuals who are alleged to constitute "one's people." Many or most of them one would likely personally despise—just as, on the other hand, one would "love" many people belonging to a "different group." Too much identification with some imposed identity such as race is exactly what leads to irrational racial hostility (including against whites), sexist hostility (also against men), and other divisive social forces. Identity politics can be dangerous and destructive, not only on the right but even the left. "In their goodness and badness, there exist only persons, not peoples."

The vacuousness of contemporary identity politics is best exposed by considering its "great minds," the Crenshaws, Coateses, Kendis, and DiAngelos. For a really thorough demolition, Finkelstein would have had to review the record of various feminist and queer theorists too, but it's a big enough task to critique the writers on race. Or, more precisely, that isn't a *difficult* task—it's so easy that Finkelstein is able to devote huge chunks of these chapters to sheer mockery—but it does require patience and a willingness to wade through endless intellectual muck. Take Crenshaw. Unsurprisingly, in her seminal 1989 article on intersectionality "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," "she conspicuously omits class in her dissection of oppression." It disturbs her that white feminists are presumptuous enough to speak for black women, but she "seems less concerned or, for that matter, even conscious that a high-achieving Black woman speaking for Black *working-class* women might also be problematic."

Or take DiAngelo. She has a pathological obsession with racism and an utterly Manichean, paranoid view of the world. If you're white, you're a racist—whether you're John Brown or Jefferson Davis, a fascist or an anti-fascist. Racism is ubiquitous, "immovably entrenched in our psyches and structures" (as Finkelstein paraphrases), "the air we breathe and the water we drink," all-encompassing and constantly reproduced, she says, "automatically"—and therefore, evidently, ineradicable. At best, it can occasionally be "interrupted"—through the "diversity training" at which DiAngelo excels and for which

she charges a hefty fee. Meanwhile, her book *White Fragility* has sold almost a million copies and has had quite an influence on woke culture, helping to instill a collective fixation on—incidentally—the same *idée fixe* of Ta-Nehisi Coates (according to Cornel West): the almighty, unremovable nature of white supremacy. "Whites," says DiAngelo, "control all major institutions of society and set the policies and practices that others must live by." Yes, whites are a homogeneous master-class: the billionaires and the working class, they're all equally guilty, they're all oppressors. And to blacks she says, as Finkelstein summarizes, "Beware! Don't trust white people! They're all racists, racists to the core! Every last one of them! They're hard-wired for racism; it's in their DNA." This is a message perfectly calculated to pit workers against each other. No wonder the business class has so enthusiastically promoted her book!

What about Ibram X. Kendi? Finkelstein seems to take particular pleasure in disemboweling this (as he says) non-scholar and non-activist, for his critique/massacre is a full 110 pages long and features withering juxtapositions with a titan, DuBois. It's sad that a book review can't communicate the verve or the slicing humor of this chapter (and others). Kendi's book *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, for example, whose "only novelty is to shoehorn the epithets *racist* or *antiracist*, *segregationist* or *assimilationist* into every other sentence…[is] less a definitive history than an exhaustive, and exhausting, *taxonomy* that's as supple as a calcified femur and as subtle as an oversized mallet. It proceeds from the fatuous, almost juvenile, conceit that fastening binary, wooden labels on the actors and ideas incident to Black history will shed light on it." One problem with Kendi's and our culture's promiscuous, indiscriminate use of the label "racist" is that the concept becomes diluted: "to be a racist ceases to be what it ought to be: a scarlet badge of shame… [W]hat information is conveyed by a label that collapses the distinction between Frederick Douglass [whom Kendi considers a racist] and the Grand Wizard of the K.K.K.?" The abolitionists were all racists, as were DuBois, Martin Luther King Jr., Richard Wright, E. Franklin Frasier, etc. etc.—while Kendi singles out for praise Harry Truman, Michelle Obama, Eldridge Cleaver, Pam Grier, Bo Derek, Kanye West, etc. "[T]he rigor of his taxonomy recalls not the Periodic Table but, on the contrary, Pin the Tail on the Donkey."

As Finkelstein says, Kendi embraces the woke conceit that, over four hundred years, "African-Americans haven't registered any progress in the struggle against racism. Each seeming stride forward has been attended by a step backward." If anything, he implies, things have only gotten worse! Such an "analysis" recalls the flagrantly ahistorical, unabashedly gloomy academic school of Afro-pessimism, and, by reifying differences between "whites" and "blacks" and valorizing anti-white resentment among the latter, serves the same function of hindering the class solidarity necessary to achieve real progress in struggles over the distribution of wealth, working conditions, affordable housing, high levels of unemployment, expansion of public resources, abysmal healthcare, environmental destruction, hypertrophying militarism, and the like. (No wonder, again, Kendi has been fêted by the establishment and can charge $45,000 for his talks.[1] It helps, too, that his only real policy proposal is…affirmative action.)

After Finkelstein's devastating exposure of Kendi's countless inconsistencies, hypocrisies, and idiocies—his woke dismissal of the Civil Rights Movement in favor of the macho Black Panthers (who, by comparison, achieved almost nothing); his (in Kendi's words) "striving to accept and equate and *empower* racial difference" even as he argues that the idea of race is a "mirage" that was invented to rationalize exploitation; his insistence that all racial disparities in society are purely a result of racism; his valorizing of racial differences (e.g., he praises the "irrepressible Blackness" of his friend) at the same time as he says anti-racists see only individuals and not racial behavior ("there is no such thing as Black behavior"); his positing of a deep separation between so-called white culture and black culture; his arguing against the racist "assimilationist" urge to value white culture over black even as he manifestly values white culture over black (lecturing before white audiences, accepting a fellowship at Harvard University, presiding over a research center at Boston University, being proud of publishing in white journals like *The Atlantic*)—nothing remains but the empty husk of a social-climbing charlatan. That such a person can be widely considered to be more or less on the left is a crushing indictment of the state of the left.

[1] He is hardly alone in this sort of thing. Finkelstein reports that, according to local activists in Kerala, India whom he met, Naomi Klein had demanded $25,000 plus a round-trip first-class airline ticket to give a talk there.

For charlatanry, though, few can beat the next entry on Finkelstein's shit list: Obama. "Barack Obama is the perfected and perfect instrument of identity politics, its summa summarum. He represents the cynical triumph of form over substance, color over character. He is the cool Black dude who is also the reliable—in Professor Cornel West's words—'mascot of Wall Street.'" Most leftists are hardly enamored of Obama, so I need not summarize the case against him. Nor would I even try, because I couldn't possibly reproduce the distinctive Finkelsteinian humor—and most of this very long chapter consists of (factually grounded) ridicule, directed at nearly everyone in Obama's presidential coterie, a "revolting retinue of bootlickers." Aside from Obama himself, the most satisfying skewering, I found, was of Samantha Power, the "Battleaxe from Hell…downright *evil*…[whose] conscience only bestirs at the suffering of victims of official U.S. enemies." One might argue that in this chapter Finkelstein's profound contempt for the "Elmer Gantry in blackface" at the head of this gaggle of amoral mediocrities gets the best of his prodigious literary gifts, since the ruthless mockery goes on and on and becomes somewhat tiresome, but it can't be gainsaid that it's all well-deserved.

After six chapters and almost 400 pages on the subject, Finkelstein's summary of identity politics is worth quoting:

> Identity politics has distracted from and, when need be, outright sabotaged a class-based movement [viz., Bernie Sanders'] that promised profound social change. It counsels Black people not to trust whites, as their racism is so entrenched and so omnipresent as to poison their every thought and action. It conveys to poor whites that they, no less than the white billionaire class, are beneficiaries of racism, so that it would be foolhardy of them to ally with Black people… Then, identity politics puts forth demands that either appear radical but are in fact politically inert—Defund the police, Abolition of prisons—as they have no practical possibility of achievement; or that leave the overall system intact while still enabling a handful, who purport to represent marginalized groups, to access—on a "parity" basis—the exclusive club of the "haves." This, in effect, performance politics has spawned a disgusting den of thieves who brand themselves with radical-sounding hashtags, churn out radical-sounding tweets, and insinuate themselves into positions of prominence, as they rake in corporate donations, cash corporate paychecks, hang out at the watering holes of the rich and famous, and thence can be safely relied upon not to bite the hand that feeds them…

One might object that he's painting with too broad a brush here, that advocacy of the interests of minorities and women can, depending on the context and the cause, indeed be an essential political program, but he wouldn't deny this. He has the highest regard for the Civil Rights Movement, after all—although he would deny that that was identity politics. "The human rights of a victimized group must, of course, be uncompromisingly defended." More problematic than such defense is to make a cult of group differences (group "pride") in the way of the woke, and to place class issues at the bottom of the heap rather than the top, where they belong. "Human dignity is not possible without the ability to pay for a roof over one's head, clothes on one's back, and food on one's table."

Whatever genuinely emancipatory political impulses exist in identity politics have long been, on the whole, coopted and buried under an avalanche of left-liberal virtue-signaling, preening and posing, careerism, and sabotage of a substantive left. Just consider how the woke mob reacted to the Sanders campaign, the most serious challenge to the establishment in more than a generation: they tried to "cancel" Sanders for his being a "privileged white male" with a supposed blind-spot on race. His "economic reductionism," according to Angela Davis, prevented him from "developing a vocabulary that allows him to speak…about the persistence of racism, racist violence, state violence." (Note the pretentious academic language, as if you need a special "vocabulary" to talk about racism and violence—which Sanders, by the way, did.) As Finkelstein says, "When the 'hour of serious danger' to the status quo struck during Bernie Sanders' class-struggle insurgency, the 'true nature' of woke radicalism—not just its opportunism but, even more, its rancid, reactionary core—was exposed as each and all of these erstwhile 'radicals' enlisted under

the banner to stop him." Woke cancel culture cooperated with the establishment media's cancel culture to stop the Sanders juggernaut.

Cancel culture and academic freedom

"Cancel culture might be defined as the turning of a person into a non-person." By that definition, it has been around for a very long time. Arguably, it is as old as civilization. The first and second Red Scares in the U.S. were instances of cancel culture; so is the corporate media's treatment of virtually everyone on the left; so is the woke treatment of anyone who publicly strays from the party line. Even if such victims of woke defamation campaigns usually find their footing again or don't always suffer career consequences in the first place, the mob's impulse to censor and silence remains operative and ever-vigilant. Finkelstein knows cancel culture from the inside, and it is unsurprising that he resolutely opposes it.

His defense of a regime of nearly untrammeled free speech is rooted, first and foremost, in his conviction that this is the surest way to Truth. He quotes DuBois: when free speech is stifled, "the nation…becomes morally emasculated and mentally hog-tied, and cannot evolve that healthy difference of opinion which leads to the discovery of truth under changing conditions." But John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* is the text he primarily grounds his argument in, and he quotes from it liberally in his chapter on the right of even Holocaust deniers to make their case in public forums such as a college campus. "Complete liberty of contradicting and disproving our opinion," Mill writes, "is the very condition which justifies us in assuming its truth… The beliefs which we have most warrant for, have no safeguard to rest on but a standing invitation to the whole world to prove them unfounded." As Finkelstein translates, "if you want to rationally hug your certainty, you must first meet the challenge of every naysayer." Your opponents can even be *useful* for prodding you to rethink weak points in your reasoning or evidentiary basis, exposing little errors in your arguments, giving you something to think about that you had overlooked, in general giving you the opportunity to more rationally ground your beliefs.

The mob's desire to silence, attack, and destroy comes from feeling threatened, not from being rationally certain and confident. The latter attitudes are more likely to yield calm composure and willingness to give opponents a hearing because you know you're able to refute them. When a mob tries to prevent someone from talking because it feels threatened by his speech, it's quite possible, often, that his speech has some truth in it. Suppressing it—unless it's merely emotive speech like "fuck you!"—possibly allows his opponents to persist in having false or partially false views.

But someone might reply, "What if his speech is socially harmful? Isn't that a legitimate reason to suppress it?" Well, the definition of "harmful" is, of course, contested, and it evolves over time. Eugenics and forced sterilization were once considered a very enlightened movement, being supported by progressives like Bertrand Russell, Helen Keller, Jane Addams, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. Now eugenics is considered downright evil. Who is to say your definition of "socially harmful" is, in all cases, the right one, or that your application of it is always right? "When it comes to curbing speech," Finkelstein says, "experience thus confirms the general rule in human affairs: humility is to be preferred over arrogance."

Moreover, if the "harmful" speech is socially marginal such that hardly anyone believes it, what's the great danger in letting someone say it now and then? If, on the other hand, it's not marginal but holds the assent of millions, letting someone express it presents an opportunity to argue against it and thus inoculate people. The strategy of pure suppression is apt to lead many to think there might be something "dangerously truthful" to it—"the establishment doesn't want us to hear this because it's threatened by its truth!"—and thus might contribute to its diffusion across the population. People might think they're being "rebellious" or anti-establishment by believing it, and furthermore that they're upholding noble values of free speech against authoritarian censoring leftists (as the reactionary right thinks today). I might also note that giving authorities the right to suppress or punish certain kinds of speech, and even encouraging them to do so, will soon lead to their suppressing speech you *like*.

The left has historically been in the vanguard of fights for free speech, from the abolitionists to the IWW (and most other unions, in fact) to the Socialists during World War I to the Civil Rights Movement. Its departure today from these honorable traditions is yet more evidence that it's become a pseudo-left, a

reactionary left—for the empowering of authorities to regulate speech is ultimately reactionary. It's ironic that many self-styled anarchists advocate increasing the power of unaccountable bureaucrats to control what is said and what isn't.

Admittedly, it might have strengthened Finkelstein's discussion to consider in more depth possible counterarguments. It is, after all, very unfortunate that media operatives like Rush Limbaugh, Alex Jones, and the whole stable of Fox News social arsonists have brainwashed millions of people. It is likely they couldn't have had such a destructive impact had the FCC's Fairness Doctrine not been repealed in 1987. Maybe it was right to repeal it, but a case can at least be made that it was wrong. Issues of online content moderation, too, come into play in any debate over censorship, and Finkelstein doesn't say much about these. The reason, it seems, is that he doesn't think the internet has raised significantly new questions about free speech, and in any case there is already an extensive literature on web censorship.

Among the many excellent points he makes is one that cuts to the heart of wokeness: the collective obsession with pinning a label—racist or not, sexist or not, transphobic or not—on every thought passing through one's head and every utterance one makes, and then cancelling all the thoughts that (and all the people who) stray an inch past what's deemed "acceptable," is ridiculous and paranoid. It's also reactionary, because it makes *solidarity* vastly more difficult. One of the more memorable passages in the book is when he imagines, in some alternate universe, a Robin DiAngelo who actually *does* care about fighting oppression of blacks and not only grifting off a culture's pathologies. Were she to speak before a group of workers, she might say something like this (italics in the original):

> *…Although racism is real and you should always be at the ready to fight it whenever it rears its ugly head, you all, Black and white, have a helluva lot more in common. You're all, Black and white, trapped in dead-end jobs. You all earn poverty wages… [You have to] organize together, as one because you* ***are*** *one, to overthrow this wretched, corrupt, god-forsaken system. You can't eliminate every fleeting, non-p.c. thought passing through your head. The mind is a tricky business… You can't wait until everyone's thoughts are simon-pure. You don't have the time, and they never will be. You cannot police your thoughts, and it's probably better that way. Were it otherwise, you wouldn't be human. You're fallible, you're imperfect vessels. You weren't born, and your minds can't be, immaculate… If you unite to change the system, then your psyches will fall into place. It's common struggle, common sacrifice, that produces mutual respect, even mutual love. A connection that binds will be forged by you, united in the heat of battle facing a common enemy, each marching beside the other, each lifting the other, each protecting the other. You don't become better persons by each of you, singly, struggling with your racist demons. You become better persons by all of you, together, struggling against an antihuman system…*

Wokeness is what happens when the destruction of the labor movement proceeds so far, and social atomization becomes so all-consuming, that even the "left" adopts an individualistic, moralistic, psychologistic, censorious, self-righteous, performative approach to making social change.

"The fight against racism must focus…not on the intangible, impalpable, unchangeable, invisible, or unprovable, but, instead, on what's substantive, meaningful, and corrigible. In the first place, securing economic opportunity and legal equality." The Sanders program was far more substantively "anti-racist" than the puny liberal programs of most of his woke critics. (As for Sanders' being constantly hounded to support "reparations" for blacks, I've explained elsewhere why that demand is anti-solidaristic, politically impossible, and ultimately a diversion from radical social transformation.)

The last chapter of *I'll Burn That Bridge* delves into a specific dimension of cancel culture: when is it appropriate for a professor to be disciplined for his public behavior and statements, whether on social media or in some other context? This issue bears, of course, on Finkelstein's own career, but he is hardly the only academic to have been disciplined in recent decades for alleged "incivility" or taking unpopular political stands. The chapter is tightly argued and has a more disciplined structure than others, consisting

of analyses of four academic freedom cases (Bertrand Russell in 1940, Leo Koch in 1960, Angela Davis in 1969, and Steven Salaita in 2014) and then general reflections that conclude in a discussion of his own case. He endorses the American Association of University Professors' standard that "a faculty member's expression of opinion as a citizen cannot constitute grounds for dismissal unless it clearly demonstrates the faculty member's unfitness to serve [i.e., to teach]"—which was surely *not* the case in the four instances he examines. But he goes much further and questions whether it should even be seen as a professional obligation that one always use civil language in one's scholarship (which Finkelstein didn't when writing about the Holocaust industry and Alan Dershowitz's lies). Given all the invective in Marx's *Capital*, for example, the book would never have been published by a university press today and Marx wouldn't get a position at a top university. "But if the likes of Marx wouldn't qualify for a tenured appointment at a first-rank university, isn't that a reductio ad absurdum? Doesn't it conclusively demonstrate the inanity of a standard commanding restrained and temperate language?"

One might connect Finkelstein's lengthy discussion of academic civility with his book's focus on woke politics by pointing to something his targets have in common: a preoccupation with policing language and thought at the expense of more substantive concerns. Academia insists on politeness, decorum, "neutral" language, which often serves to enforce conventions, emasculate dissent, and uphold power structures; wokeness insists on ceaselessly monitoring your own and others' language, in fact making that a priority, allowing people to feel "radical" by doing nothing that remotely challenges real power structures. (No surprise that woke culture has largely emerged from the academy.) To do justice to Truth and Justice, though, requires more than this. In the case of scholarly writing and speaking,

> There are moments that might positively require breaking free of the constraints imposed by polite public discourse in order to sound the tocsin that, as we indifferently carry on in a privileged sanctuary of peace and prosperity, innocent people are being butchered by our own state. The uncivil reality, not uncivil words, should be cause for reproach and excoriation, while uncivil words might be called for to bring home the uncivil reality.

It can at least be said for Finkelstein that he practices what he preaches: his book, to put it mildly, does not shrink from uncivil words.

The anti-academic

It should be clear from what has been said here that *I'll Burn That Bridge When I Get to It* is an unusual book. It requires a lot of patience to read, but I think the effort is worth it. It's not a "polished" work, but in an academic and literary environment that sometimes seems to value polish above all else, including moral and intellectual substance, one appreciates something a little more raw. And someone with the courage to *tear down*—in order to build up.

Finkelstein is in the tradition of the great incorruptible truth-tellers. He relates an anecdote from when he was a graduate student at Princeton in 1984: his work exposing a bestselling scholarly hoax on the Israel-Palestine conflict had gotten the favorable attention of the editor of the *New York Review of Books* and his friend (Arthur Hertzberg) at Columbia University, and he sensed that career possibilities were opening up for him. But then, in a meeting with Hertzberg, he was bluntly asked, "Are you in Chomsky's stable?" Despite knowing the probable consequences of giving the wrong answer, he unhesitatingly said he deeply admired Chomsky and was grateful for his support—which, of course, was the wrong answer. He never heard from the men again. Even so, "I was proud of myself," he writes, "not to be tempted, at all, by the lure of fame and fortune, and I was grateful for this test of my fidelity to Truth (and Chomsky), so that I could prove in my own person dead wrong the cynics who imagine, or console themselves, that everyone has a price."

That unshakeable commitment, that willingness not to conform, combined with intellectual power, is chiefly what has set Finkelstein apart from most of his peers. One hopes that his book and his example will inspire young idealists to follow in his path.

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How to Rebuild the Left

One might as well state the matter clearly: given the realities of global warming, rampant environmental destruction, escalating imperialistic clashes, and a crisis-prone global economy, there is no hope for the world unless an international left can be resurrected. A left at least as powerful as the one that created social democracy in the wake of World War II. As complex in their origins as the world's ills are, they can be expressed and explained in a single sentence: internationally, there is a political right, a proto-fascist far-right, and a stagnant though tenacious center, but, in effect, no left. That is, there is no real force that represents the interests of the exploited and immiserated majority. No wonder things are so bad. The burning question is: how to build such a left?

How *not* to build it is clear: devote overwhelming attention to issues of race, gender, and sexuality. Indeed, a major reason the left is so weak today is that for decades it—or something that has claimed the mantle of the left, in academia, the media, and politics—has focused disproportionately on such issues, neglecting grievances that unite people across boundaries of race, gender, and sexuality. The ineffectual nature of such a "left" should be obvious from one consideration alone: "universal" issues—which affect workers whatever their identity—of wages, working conditions, income and wealth distribution, scarce housing, unemployment, public health, student and consumer debt, ecological destruction, the shrinking and starving of public goods, murderous imperialism, hypertrophying militarism, and the very survivability of human civilization are scarcely touched by discourses and activism around racial and gender disparities. ("We want to have it as good as white cisgendered men!" Okay, meanwhile you'll still be dealing with all the crises I just listed.) If you want to build a new world, you don't go about it by ignoring working-class grievances as such, attending only to matters that affect, say, women, gays, and black people; you target the very structures of capitalism, the class-defined exploitative institutions that have oppressed billions (of white men too, even heterosexual ones!) for centuries.

It has been fashionable among liberals and "leftists" for years to ridicule this so-called "class reductionism," but thankfully resistance is finally building to reactionary postmodern notions of the priority of racial and gender oppression over class. Norman Finkelstein, for example, who is widely known as the courageous and academically martyred advocate of Palestinian rights, has just published a book called *I'll Burn That Bridge When I Get to It!: Heretical Thoughts on Identity Politics, Cancel Culture, and Academic Freedom*. I've written a lengthy review here; suffice it to say that Finkelstein is fearless, and ruthless, in his exposition of analytical and political common sense. Adolph and Touré Reed are well known for exposing the follies of what they call "race reductionism"—for example, the gloomy and ahistorical academic school of Afro-pessimism—and their colleague Cedric Johnson has published a book called *The Panthers Can't Save Us Now: Debating Left Politics and Black Lives Matter* that eviscerates the current faddish nostalgia for Black Power. (Again, for anyone who would prefer a summary and critique, I wrote a review of the book that also goes into some depth in defense of Marxism against its postmodern critics.)

Examples could be multiplied, but Musa al-Gharbi has already performed this service in a recent article titled "Woke-ism Is Winding Down." If it is true that wokeness has passed its peak and is, or soon will be, on the decline, this is likely not something to be uncritically celebrated. Nevertheless, it may open the space for a more serious left politics that tackles agendas such as rolling back American imperialism and rebuilding social democracy. Or even, perhaps, advancing the distant goal of economic democracy, i.e., workers' control of the economy. Somehow, this traditional lodestar of the left has been almost totally forgotten and abandoned.

Left academics have honed the art of "problematizing" political common sense, for example by inventing a concept called "racial capitalism" and using it to argue that "white supremacy" is a pillar of capitalism no less foundational than class exploitation itself—as if Shanghai or, say, Lagos, Nigeria, not being ruled by "whites," aren't capitalist cities—but people with a modicum of analytical intelligence will see through these woke gambits. The more you talk about how racist all whites are and how much more

oppressed all blacks are, the more you're serving the business class by dividing the working class. Why else would the *New York Times*, quintessential outlet of liberal business, have invested enormous resources into the 1619 Project if not that it understood the profoundly *non-radical* implications of such racialism? Better to talk about *racial* capitalism than simply *capitalism*—*racial* exploitation than *class* exploitation—*reparations* (at the expense of white workers) than *socialism*. The reparations discourse is a brilliant way to destroy working-class solidarity.

With a kernel of political rationality, one can see that it's necessary to reach out to white workers, not alienate them or ignore them. Leftists could learn a thing or two from (of all people) Ralph Waldo Emerson, of whom a woman who frequently heard his lectures said, "Whatever else it might be that I cannot understand, he tells me this one thing, that I am not a God-forsaken sinner. He has made me feel that I am worth something in the sight of God, and not a despised creature." The contemporary "left," from feminists to critical race theorists, essentially tells white men (and the women who identify with them) that they're despised creatures worth nothing in the sight of God. It shouldn't be a surprise when people take this message to heart and turn to a Republican Party that cares not a whit about their well-being but at least *tells* them it does.

It's common sense that empathy, rather than demonization, is necessary for organizing a movement. If, like most liberals and leftists, one doesn't live among the mythologized and despised "white working class," one can at least read about their experiences, thus undermining one's own prejudices and finding common ground on which to educate and organize. Take a book like Arlie Hochschild's *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*, published in 2016. She makes it clear that, however misguided are supporters of Donald Trump's Republican Party, the large majority are not neo-Nazis, virulent racists, or wealthy cynics eager to crush the working class. "Blue-collar" white men across the South, and the communities they represent, are "victims" no less than the victimized groups celebrated by liberals. Neoliberal capitalism has left them behind, as they suffer from (at best) stagnating wages, environmental pollution and destruction, decaying infrastructure, decaying communities, and poor public health outcomes. Meanwhile, they're conscious of their low status: "we're seen as backward and poor." Hochschild's exercise in empathy, as in the following passage, is sadly lacking among most liberals and leftists today:

> You [an average white man in the South] are a stranger in your own land. You do not recognize yourself in how others see you. It is a struggle to feel seen and honored…
>
> You turn to your workplace for respect—but wages are flat and jobs insecure. So you look to other sources of honor. You get no extra points for your race. You look to gender, but if you're a man, you get no extra points for that either. If you are straight you are proud to be a married, heterosexual male, but that pride is now seen as a potential sign of homophobia—a source of dishonor. Regional honor? Not that either. You are often disparaged for the place you call home. As for the church, many look down on it, and the proportion of Americans outside any denomination has risen… People like you—white, Christian, working and middle class—suffer this sense of fading honor demographically too, as this very group has declined in numbers.

To begin to wrest power from a depraved Republican and Democratic elite, a corporate sector that cares about literally nothing but profits, it is necessary to appeal to "white America" no less than "black America" (to use race-reductionist metaphors suggested by identity politics). As always, you start by emphasizing what you have in common with people, for instance that you care deeply, as they do, about community, family, economic security, a healthy natural environment, and that you resent no less than they do impersonal government bureaucracies that tax your hard-earned money to wage wars abroad and in fact—here's an opportunity for education—redistribute income *upwards*, to wealthy investors and big business. You don't talk about how racist these people are—after all, everyone is a *little* racist (including against whites), a *little* sexist (against men too: "Men are arrogant, stupid, misogynistic!"), and has numerous prejudices and unappealing traits—but instead you argue that people of all races are being

exploited and victimized, and that ostensibly "lazy" black people work just as hard as whites to get ahead but are just as burdened by taxes and bills and debt. It doesn't require much imagination to find common ground with struggling whites. Over time, using the "class reductionist" strategy of Bernie Sanders, you educate people and build a movement that promises to transform society much more radically than little identitarian programs of reducing disparities will.

None of this requires that you sacrifice the interests of minorities. It is rather the only way to fully realize those interests, given both the necessity of a broad popular movement and the (in most respects) shared interests of minorities and working-class white men. Through common struggle, not through woke demonization, you'll succeed in reducing the incidence of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other such vices.

In short, as Finkelstein argues in his eloquent new book, it's urgent for leftists to shed their race obsessions and gender obsessions and remember the Marxian lesson that class solidarity—albeit incorporating identitarian goals—is the sine qua non of a revolutionary movement. Hardly anything is more important today than organizing to make class struggle the defining issue of, for example, the left wing of the Democratic Party.

Objective economic structures, not subjective identities, are the fundamental evil to be combatted. Until they are, the left will remain, in effect, nonexistent.

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The Second Cold War Is More Dangerous than the First

Twenty years ago, Noam Chomsky published a bestselling book called *Hegemony or Survival*. Since then, the stark choice he posed has only become more urgent. Depending on how humanity responds to the challenges of ecological destruction and imperialistic war, in the next decade that terrifying question "Hegemony or survival?" may well be answered.

Modern history shows that the most dangerous periods are when two or more great powers are struggling for hegemony. The eighteenth century in Europe was a time of "multipolarity," as Britain, France, Prussia, Austria, and Russia were almost continually at war, competing for geopolitical advantage and to divide the continent between them. The conflicts escalated in the era of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, as a mighty France, bursting with revolutionary energy, strove for absolute dominance against, in the end, Britain and Russia.

The 1815 Congress of Vienna led to a century-long balance of power presided over by an industrializing Britain, which soon became the supreme world power. Once industrialization swept the rest of Europe, however, particularly Germany, Britain's power began to be challenged, not only in the Scramble for Africa but in Europe itself. German elites wanted their country to be the next Britain, and to a great extent it was their desire for hegemony that precipitated both world wars.

Since 1945, the United States has been virtually a global hegemon. As John Ross notes in the recently published *Washington's New Cold War*, even at the height of its relative economic achievement in the mid-1970s, the Soviet Union's GDP was only 44 percent of the U.S.'s. The Soviets had vast power in their limited sphere encompassing Eastern Europe and Central Asia, but they were not a capitalistically expansive, dynamically growing imperial power in the mode of the United States—or, more recently, of a resurgent China. China's GDP is 74 percent of the U.S.'s, and its growth rate is higher (it has grown seven times faster than the American economy since 2007). Measured by purchasing power parities, the U.S. accounts for only 16 percent of the world economy, and China's economy is 18 percent larger. In short, for the first time since World War II, we are entering an era of real competition between two mammoth economies, a declining hegemon and an aspiring hegemon.

When people talk about "the China threat," this is, in effect, all they mean. In the long run, China poses a greater threat to U.S. power than the Soviet Union ever did. Mainstream commentators and politicians prate about China's threat to democratic values and human rights—there always has to be an ideological rationalization for geopolitical strategy—but U.S. foreign and domestic policy since the Second

World War tells us how much its elites care about democracy and human rights. From the Vietnam War to the catastrophic invasion of Iraq, and from U.S. support for thugs like Batista, Diem, Iran's Shah, Suharto, Duvalier, Trujillo, Somoza, Pinochet, Marcos, Rios Montt, Mobutu, Saddam Hussein, Mubarak, Sisi, Modi, Mohammed bin Salman, and Netanyahu to CIA coups and attempted coups against countless governments, it is self-evident that policymakers care little about the moral values they pretend to espouse.

Americans have to ask themselves: is it worth risking nuclear war—and an apocalyptic nuclear winter—for no loftier purpose than to maintain their country's violently enforced grasp of overwhelming global power?

Threats to U.S. Power

The current flashpoint, of course, is the war in Ukraine, which is helping to midwife a "partnership" between China and Russia, both of which are also deepening their ties with Iran. Decades ago, Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote that "a coalition allying Russia with both China and Iran can develop only if the United States is shortsighted enough to antagonize China and Iran simultaneously." He would presumably not be very happy with U.S. policies that are bringing about exactly this coalition. At the same time, U.S. missteps in the Middle East and its relative disengagement from the region since the Obama presidency are allowing China to improve its position there, as illustrated by the deal it recently brokered between Iran and Saudi Arabia to normalize relations. China's burgeoning economic interests not only in the Middle East but across most of the world, a function of its colossal, globe-spanning Belt and Road Initiative, require the country to play an ever-greater diplomatic role in fraught regions. Saudi Arabia, for its part, has shown it is happy to defy Washington, even joining much of the world in disregarding Western sanctions on Russia.

While Washington's failure to convince most countries to economically and diplomatically isolate Russia highlights the U.S.'s declining "hegemony," the real threats to American power run deeper than diplomatic embarrassments. In coming years, the very status of the dollar as the world's dominant currency may be threatened. A kind of "de-dollarization" has been happening for some time now, as, for example, the share of dollar reserves held by central banks declined from 71 percent in 1999 to 59 percent in 2021. But in the last few years, and especially since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the ongoing effort by many countries to undermine the dollar's dominance of the global financial system has intensified.

In part, this is because of the U.S.'s "weaponization" of the dollar: in the recent past, Cuba, Venezuela, Iran, Afghanistan, and Russia have all suffered from financial and trade sanctions that have included even freezing overseas assets and removal from the SWIFT messaging system that underpins the world's financial infrastructure. Other countries, understandably worried about suffering the same fate, share Russia's interest in developing new financial institutions and networks outside of the U.S.-led system. Apart from this motivation, they simply want to reduce their exposure to the effects of U.S. economic and monetary policy, which can devastate economies. And as China rises, it makes sense for it to promote use of the renminbi, or at least non-dollar currencies.

To that end, the BRICS countries, for instance, have been establishing new institutions and market mechanisms to bypass the dollar, and are even exploring the possibility of creating a new reserve currency based on the BRICS basket of currencies. Institutions like the New Development Bank, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, new payment infrastructures that are alternatives to SWIFT, central bank digital currencies, bilateral trade conducted in currencies other than the dollar, and a renminbi oil futures market to partially de-dollarize the global oil trade all point toward a future currency regime that is at least multilateral, if not bilateral. The economist Nouriel Roubini argues that, "in a world that will be increasingly divided into two geopolitical spheres of influence," a bilateral currency regime is likely to emerge, perhaps in the next decade.

Given that "the dollar's dominant position in the global financial system [is] the very foundation of [the U.S.'s] global leadership," as two experts note, Washington can hardly be viewing all these developments with equanimity. Loss of the dollar's status as the world's reserve currency would have severe consequences for the American economy. But this outcome is exactly the end-goal of Washington's bellicose policies toward its perceived rivals! Through economic sanctions and aggressive military

actions—expanding NATO to Russia's borders and encircling China with U.S. bases, military forces, and militarized partner states like Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and even Taiwan—the United States is driving into existence a hostile bloc of great powers and medium-sized powers that are necessarily committed to its defeat. Their policies, then, will become increasingly belligerent, which will serve to justify even more belligerent U.S. policies, in a vicious circle that amounts to an extraordinarily dangerous "hybrid war" and arms race.

History shows that imperial hubris crescendos before a fall. In this case, though, it won't be only the empire that falls; it will, in all likelihood, be civilization itself.

Addicted to War

The Pentagon has made a record budget request this year of $842 billion, which it says is necessary to counter China. This claim should inspire skepticism, given that the U.S. has around 750 overseas military bases and China has about eight—one in Djibouti and a few on man-made islands in the South China Sea. China's military budget, which has been increasing since America's "Pacific Pivot," is $225 billion, not a small sum but still a fraction of the Pentagon's. It is an interesting thought-experiment, incidentally, to imagine how Washington would react if China had scores of military bases off the U.S. coast and had deputized countries in the Americas to act as its armed sentinel states. Most probably, we wouldn't be around to talk about it, because a world war would already have wiped us out.

In fact, contemporary China is probably the most pacific great power in world history, as Craig Murray observes. As the U.S. has rampaged all over the Middle East and expanded its direct or indirect military presence to virtually every region of the globe, what wars has China started? What territories has it annexed? What countries has it invaded? The usual response is that sometime in the future it might invade Taiwan—but given the harm such an invasion would likely inflict on the Chinese economy (because of Taiwan's cutting-edge semiconductor industry, whose physical facilities could well be damaged or destroyed in an invasion), we should be skeptical of this claim too. Even hawkish Chinese generals seem to think war with Taiwan would be "too costly." In any event, are annual military budgets of almost a trillion dollars necessary to defend Taiwan?

The conclusion is inescapable that the U.S. is simply trying to intimidate an economic rival, a country that, like Putin's Russia (only more so), challenges its unfettered dominance of the entire world economy. The record of Washington's foreign policy since 1945 is to seek and enforce compliance in any way it can, whether through carrots or sticks—blandishments and economic or military aid in some cases, coups, invasions, sanctions, paramilitary operations, and militaristic bullying in others. Defiant regimes cannot be tolerated. Accordingly, policymakers want a compliant (or weakened) Russia and a compliant or weakened China. The calculus is evidently that military buildup, whatever crises it leads to and however unpredictable its long-term effects, is the surest means of achieving these ends. It also has the virtue of projecting overwhelming power, which is something powerful states value for its own sake.

Even if the United States doesn't succeed in provoking military conflicts with China (as it did with Russia), the new Cold War of which Washington is the primary instigator is profoundly damaging to the interests of humanity. As the *Washington Post* reports, this new Cold War "may see the world divided into opposing camps for decades, stymieing cooperation on climate change, choking global action on human rights abuses, paralyzing international institutions and increasing tensions in contested regions." If only for the sake of cooperating to tackle global warming, nothing is more imperative than for great powers, first among them the U.S., to adopt conciliatory policies.

But that means Americans have to pressure their government to this end. And that, in turn, means building an anti-imperialist left. From Bernie Sanders to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (not to mention right-wing legislators), there isn't a single principled anti-imperialist in Congress. In a time of staggering dangers from war and ecological destruction, this is a shocking and shameful fact.

For now, it seems that humanity is choosing the path of battling for hegemony rather than surviving.

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The Left and the Ukraine War

To be a leftist in the United States is a dispiriting experience, but in the last year one of the more dispiriting things has been to see the attitude of many leftists themselves on a subject of crucial importance: the war in Ukraine. The consensus of the Washington establishment remains that the U.S. must support Ukraine against Russian aggression, in the form of providing enormous amounts of military aid. Progressives in Congress largely share this consensus, having voted for military aid and even cravenly retracted their letter to Biden in October that suggested he pursue diplomacy. Outside the halls of power, too, many leftists effectively support Washington's policies. To be sure, they add the qualification that one must also oppose American imperialism—but when they're supporting a U.S. proxy war that is providing pretexts to increase military spending and expand NATO (an instrument of U.S. power), this is an empty qualification. The sad fact is that there is little vocal advocacy in the U.S. today for the only moral position, namely to engage in immediate negotiations to end this horrific war.

Instead, most liberals, conservatives, and even leftists seem to support Antony Blinken's rejection of any ceasefire or negotiations that "would potentially have the effect of freezing in place the conflict, allowing Russia to consolidate the gains that it's made." In other words, negotiations have to be postponed until Russia is in a weaker position than it is now. In fact, the official U.S. war aim is "to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine," as Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin says. That means Russia has to be so devastatingly weakened—preferably defeated—that its capacity to wage war is destroyed. This, in turn, means that the war must go on for a very long time, perhaps "to the last Ukrainian," as John Quigley speculates. Zelensky, who seems "heroically" willing to countenance the ongoing destruction of his country, is now even insisting that Russia give up Crimea.

All this is madness, and ought to be seen as such by any clear-eyed opponent of the U.S. empire (which is vastly more global, hegemonic, and dangerous to the world's population than today's Russian "empire"). Before accepting complete defeat, Putin—whom, after all, we're supposed to view as a bloodthirsty monster—would likely wage total war on Ukraine, possibly including use of nuclear weapons. So anyone who defends the U.S. war aim (and Ukraine's current war aims, as stated by Zelensky) is advocating the destruction of Ukraine and, perhaps, nuclear war. Aggression should indeed be opposed, but not at the expense of human survival or the survival of millions of Ukrainians.

However strenuously it has been denied by Western supporters of this war, Russia has legitimate grievances (at least much more legitimate than those that have motivated U.S. wars since the 1960s) that must be addressed in order to end the killing. It isn't a simple matter of evil imperialism vs. a wonderful pacifist democracy. Scores of experts, including even Cold Warriors like George Kennan, have discussed the many provocations from the U.S., NATO, and Ukraine that brought on Putin's invasion, and we needn't rehash the whole history here. What is at stake is, in large part, a clash of rival imperialisms—a global one (the U.S.'s) and a relatively minor regional one (Russia's)—which means there is no morally pure outcome, as there rarely is in politics. A peace settlement will have to be a compromise, which, like most compromises, will doubtless leave all parties somewhat unhappy but at least will end the slaughter. Russia, for example, may well end up retaining Crimea (which it annexed in 1783—until 1954) and certain other small strips of territory it has gained. Leftists and left-liberals who wring their hands about how this would teach the lesson that aggression sometimes pays would do well to reflect on another fact: if, somehow, NATO and Ukraine manage to inflict a terrible defeat on Russia, this will teach America that unfettered military expansion—and incitement of war—is a great way to crush one's enemies, and it will apply the lesson to China.

It's worth noting, too, that it isn't only a confrontation of great powers that is at stake, or the survival of millions of Ukrainians and their country's physical infrastructure, or an atrocious empowerment of the U.S. military industry. The longer this war goes on, the more damage is done to the natural environment, including efforts to combat global warming. In just the first seven months of the war, the fighting released 100 million metric tons of carbon into the atmosphere. Meanwhile, as a report by Chatham House notes,

"across the world, countries are building or reopening coal power stations and investing in oil and gas development." Soaring energy prices have led to a "gold rush" for new fossil fuel projects. Oil companies are making record profits. Are we supposed to care more about punishing Russia than leaving a livable world to our descendants?

This is to say nothing of the large-scale food insecurity the war has fostered, the cost-of-living crises that are impoverishing millions, and the displacement of refugees. These problems cannot be solved until the war ends. And it can end only with negotiations. One expects neocon vampires like Anne Applebaum, Bill Kristol, and Robert Kagan—not to mention Biden administration officials like Blinken and Victoria Nuland—to experience throes of ecstasy over any war that projects American power, but when even progressives and leftists are vehemently defending U.S. proxy wars and effectively dismissing the idea of negotiations, it is clear that America's moral and intellectual rot runs very deep indeed.

Liberals and leftists ought to be embarrassed that the most vocal advocacy of the antiwar position today is from the likes of Marjorie Taylor Greene, Tucker Carlson, and right-wing libertarians. It's time that the left reclaimed its antiwar traditions.

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What "Security Threat" Does China Pose?

Everyone who abhors war, detests imperialism, and favors cooperation between nations on global warming, poverty reduction, protection of biodiversity, international disarmament, implementation of international law, and other left-wing priorities ought to be appalled by the escalating tensions between the U.S. and China and actively organizing against them. The new Cold War between "East" (including Russia) and "West" is more dangerous than the first one, not only in having already provoked a proxy war between great powers in Europe itself, and not only in undermining any progress toward goals that are urgent for all of humanity, but also in preparing the conditions for a horrific large-scale war that might well end in nuclear winter. The coming years will, to a substantial degree, determine the future of civilization, which puts a tremendous burden on all decent people to struggle to end the madness.

"Both sides," of course, bear responsibility for the new Cold War, just as all great powers share most of the responsibility for failing to act decisively on global warming. Given the disproportionate power and imperialistic history of the United States, however, it is this country that bears most of the blame, in both cases. So it is, first and foremost, this country's policies that we have to change. Even were this not the case, though, the principle that Noam Chomsky has enunciated would apply: it is the dangers presented by *their own* states, not enemy states, that citizens have a duty to organize against. Westerners should, primarily, criticize their own governments, which they can hope to influence. They can't meaningfully influence China or Russia.

The question arises, then, as to how best to steer America from a course of aggression to one of cooperation and conciliation. That is, how can we build an antiwar movement? A crucial task, evidently, is to delegitimize the direction of policy vis-à-vis China that began under Trump and has continued under Biden, the pursuit of military provocation and economic warfare. This entails a relentless focus on refuting the reasons Washington gives to justify its aggressive posture.

Americans are inundated with the message that China is a "threat," and that for this reason it must be confronted. They hear it from every major media outlet—CBS, Fox, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, etc. This message reflects the attitude of Washington, which obviously views China as a major threat—to American "security," "national security" (as stated for example in the 2022 National Defense Strategy). Two questions pose themselves: first, is China indeed a threat, and if so, to what, precisely? Second, is confrontation the best means to deal with whatever threat China represents?

National security

The concept of "national security" has been thrown around promiscuously for generations, not only in politics and the popular media but even the international relations scholarship. Rarely is it noticed that the term, unless clarified, is meaningless, or that its meaning varies by context. Was George W. Bush protecting America's "security" by invading Afghanistan and Iraq, thereby massively increasing terror, and terrorist recruiting, across the Middle East? Is the government protecting Americans' present and future security by subsidizing the fossil fuel industry, thus accelerating global warming? Prima facie, the most obvious meaning of security is something like Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms: freedom of expression, freedom of religious belief, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. But this kind of security for the average person—is this a high priority of the U.S. government? Is it what is meant by the mantra that China is a security threat? Is China responsible for the economic insecurity of most Americans, or their housing insecurity, or their fear of mass shootings, or their fear of getting sick because they won't be able to pay medical bills?

"Security," therefore, apparently doesn't mean the security of Americans, at least not of the vast majority. The government could invest $800 billion in, say, upgrading infrastructures of public health and housing—you know, *actual* security infrastructures—rather than upgrading the military and thereby encouraging a dangerous arms race with China. Realist scholars like John Mearsheimer propose an alternative definition: security in the technical sense means the state's very survival in an anarchic system of international relations. Potential rivals exist everywhere, so states have to be prepared for military confrontations. Their need to survive, therefore, has a corollary: "great powers [seek] to maximize their relative power," Mearsheimer writes, "because that is the optimal way to maximize their security. In other words, survival mandates aggressive behavior," in order that the state can defend itself against a potential aggressive rival. The ultimate goal in this dog-eat-dog security competition is to be a regional hegemon that can trounce any opponent, and then to prevent any other country from becoming a rival hegemon.

This "realist" reasoning might sound plausible, although one can see right away that it tends to rationalize and legitimize militarism (as shown by Mearsheimer's judgment that the brutal expansionism of Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union in the 1930s and '40s was quite rational, for they were only trying to survive!). Can it really be maintained, however, that contemporary China threatens the very survival of the United States? Only through its arsenal of nuclear weapons can China even conceivably threaten the U.S., which means that the most rational American policy is not to provoke a nuclear arms race but to try to phase out all nuclear weapons worldwide. This would certainly increase America's security. Since the new Cold War only exacerbates the nuclear threat, the U.S. government's motivation for it, contra Mearsheimer, cannot be to ensure its own survival. So, if "security" concerns are, as is often said, what motivate America's confrontational policies, we need another definition of that perplexing word.

The work of earlier realists such as Hans Morgenthau, as well as Marxists, provides the answer: in the absence of genuine military threats to a country (like the very fortunate United States since 1812), security is nothing but a euphemism for state power and prestige. The struggle for power as an end in itself is what motivates all ruling elites and governments. Economic, military, geopolitical, ideological, cultural power—even a hegemon will insatiably strive for more power, *total* power, crushing all dissent everywhere to the extent possible. "A political policy," says Morgenthau, "seeks either to keep power, to increase power, or to demonstrate power." Whether this is because of human nature, as Morgenthau argues, or the inevitable dynamics of powerful institutions, or the fact that only power-hungry people rise to the top, it is a general principle.

Since Americans rarely look favorably on government as such, opponents of the new Cold War would do well to constantly emphasize that its primary purpose is to defend and assert the hegemonic power (i.e., "national security") of the U.S. government, together with certain segments of the business community—for example, defense contractors—that are closely interlinked with government. Constant exposure of the belligerence of U.S. policy, as contrasted with China's relative restraint, would undermine public support for confrontation. When U.S. officials, in characteristic fits of mind-boggling hypocrisy, charge that China is threatening global peace and stability, one might quote Kishore Mahbubani's article in Harper's Magazine entitled "What China Threat?":

> Quite remarkably, of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom), China is the only one among them that has not fired a single military shot across its border in thirty years, since a brief naval battle between China and Vietnam in 1988. By contrast, even during the relatively peaceful Obama Administration, the American military dropped twenty-six thousand bombs on seven countries in a single year. Evidently, the Chinese understand well the art of strategic restraint.

China is indeed a threat—to the dominance of a small American elite, centered in finance, government, and tech, over world politics and the world economy. As Deborah Veneziale explains in *Washington's New Cold War*, much of the hostility of America's capitalist class (or particular sectors of it) to China results from the difficulty of accessing its domestic market. "U.S. tech giants such as Google, Amazon, and Facebook have virtually no market in China, while companies like Apple and Microsoft face increasing difficulties… [These companies] yearn for a change to the political system in China that would open the door to the country's massive market, and major actors in this sector are actively working to advance Washington's hostile foreign policy." Finance, likewise, is unhappy with China's capital controls, which restrict capital flows into and out of the country. George Soros expressed the frustration of many financiers when he tweeted in January 2022 that "Xi Jinping is the greatest threat that open societies face today."

Aside from grievances due to China's non-neoliberal character, a significant reason for Washington's strategy of aggressive confrontation is simply that expansion of U.S. military capacity is an end in itself, for which pretexts have to be sought. As Morgenthau might say, such a policy demonstrates (and can help keep) power, which is the whole point of being a government. It is also the kind of thing that companies like Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, and BAE Systems will benefit from and lobby for. It's hardly a secret that there is a revolving door between the Pentagon and private military contractors: even Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin was on the board of directors of companies like Raytheon before Biden appointed him. Cold Wars are in the interest of very wealthy corporations and very powerful government bureaucracies, which can use them to justify larger congressional appropriations and expansions of their power.

China will constrain the U.S. empire

Returning to "security" risks—risks to the security of the global dominance ("leadership" is the preferred term) of U.S. elites—it is true that as China's economy grows, its geopolitical power will necessarily grow as well, thus challenging U.S. "leadership." There is some sense, therefore, if not much justice, in Biden's attempts to slow China's economic growth by restricting exports of cutting-edge semiconductor chips and other high-tech equipment. Whether such restrictions are in the interest of American consumers, or of humanity as a whole, is much more debatable. In any event, to partially delegitimize the trade wars that the U.S. is escalating, and which may well become quite harmful to Americans, it suffices for dissenters to note at every opportunity that these wars' entire purpose is to hurt China's economy so it will have more trouble challenging the global dominance of America's tech industry and the U.S. government. Most Americans are smart enough to know that their interests and those of the government don't usually coincide.

Indeed, that's the crucial question to keep asking in public forums: *why should we hate and fear China so much?* It makes a lot more sense to hate and fear our own government, together with the corporate sector with which it is fused. China caused none of the vast human suffering, the desolation of hundreds of millions of lives over two generations, that has brought American society to its knees; it merely benefited from the decisions by corporate executives to relocate factories abroad, where it was easier to exploit labor at a higher rate. The fight of working Americans is not with China.

But what about China's theft of intellectual property? What about its military threat to Taiwan? What about that terrifying *balloon* that floated into U.S. airspace? Surely all this justifies a new Cold War

that could last a generation or more! Well, in fact, as every reasonable person knows, the right way to deal with whatever genuine threats China might pose is to pursue diplomacy, preferably through one of the multilateral institutions that exist for precisely such cases as these, including the United Nations and the World Trade Organization. When the U.S. rejects the obvious path of diplomacy in favor of military escalation and overblown rhetoric, it is clear that it's merely seizing on real or imagined provocations as pretexts for pursuing some other goal it prefers not to publicize. This was clear when the Bush administration flailed around for excuses to invade Iraq—from weapons of mass destruction to ousting Saddam Hussein to building a wondrous new democracy—and it's clear now, as the Biden administration orchestrates the wholly unnecessary military and economic containment of China.

In fairness, it is perfectly natural for a hegemonic government, used to getting its way and running rampant over most of the world, to try to prevent the emergence of a peer competitor. As Marco Rubio said plaintively in a moment of refreshing candor some weeks ago, "Brazil cut a trade deal with China. They're now going to do trade in their own currencies, get right around the dollar. They're creating a secondary economy in the world, totally independent of the United States. We won't have to talk about sanctions in five years, because there will be so many countries transacting in currencies other than the dollar that we won't have the ability to sanction them." From a superpower's point of view, these are major crimes, the worst crimes possible. To constrain the ability to bully and browbeat that the U.S. has enjoyed since the late 1940s is totally unforgivable.

But the American people should question whether such a threat to their government's power is also a threat to them. Maybe a forced reining in of the U.S. empire could be *good* for Americans. Whatever constrains the power of the elite is likely to expand the power of the majority. Those who favor peace, in any case, should welcome the emergence of a new superpower that can challenge the policies of the most warmongering country on earth, such as by brokering peace agreements the United States refuses to. However authoritarian China is internally, its role in the world might end up being relatively constructive.

This is especially the case given that, in its search for support among other countries and peoples, it can't appeal to any democratic ideology it supposedly represents, as the U.S. at least rhetorically can. To win moral authority, China has to actually *deliver* rather than merely *preach*.

In the end, then, China's rise poses a straightforward security threat: it threatens the security of the old order, the Washington-directed, neoliberal, war-as-a-first-resort order. It threatens to bring about a more multilateral world, with less impunity for America's crimes and more recourses to which victims can turn. People everywhere—except the West's power centers—should cheer this fact.

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Love of Freedom Defines the Political Left, Not the Right

Political discourse in the United States consists largely of lies and confusions. One of the greatest of lies and confusions, which I hope to help dispel in this article, is the common delimitation of the very concepts "left" and "right": it is claimed that to be on the right is to value freedom above all—this is what "small government" is supposed to mean, for example—while to be on the left is to value equality, if necessary an equality enforced tyrannically by an enormous, Soviet-style government. Nothing could be further from the truth than this conventional wisdom. The opposite is closer to the truth: to be on the right means, in effect, to advocate an enforced equality of nearly universal servitude and anti-democracy, while to be on the left means to value the greatest freedom for the greatest number. Since left and right are still the most salient political categories (notwithstanding the fantasies of some commentators that they're obsolete concepts), it is of utmost importance to be clear about their meanings.

Underlying this debate about definitions and political commitments is an important strategic point: the left has to reclaim the language of freedom from the faux-libertarian right. We shouldn't let conservatives get away with pretending they're the ones who value free speech, for example. The only reason freedom of expression is (to some degree) protected today is because of centuries of left-wing activism.

A couple of approaches to this subject are possible. One might expound the history of left and right, from the seventeenth century to the present, using it to illustrate the underlying values of the "radical" and the "conservative" traditions (with a congeries of milquetoast "centrists" always somewhere in between). Alternatively, one might analyze contemporary ideologies and policy positions, showing what their implications for freedom and human flourishing are. Both of these approaches would yield the same result: the left's is a philosophy of emancipation and not mere insipid "equality"—unless it's an equality of emancipation (freedom); the right's is a philosophy of, to quote Corey Robin, defending hierarchy, or more specifically, of "having power, seeing it threatened, and trying to win it back." The right's is an authoritarian, not a libertarian, philosophy. There have, admittedly, been people and governments who have called themselves leftist—or socialist, democratic, communist—who have been profoundly authoritarian, but they have always been attacked by more principled leftists, often anarchists or left-Marxists like Rosa Luxemburg, for their betrayal of libertarian values and having been corrupted by a love of power.

It was during the Cold War that the present political confusions became embedded in American culture. Before the 1940s, defenders of laissez-faire capitalism, from Social Darwinists like William Graham Sumner to anti-New Dealers like Herbert Hoover, had indeed insisted they were the true upholders of freedom, but labor organizers and socialists from Samuel Gompers to Eugene Debs had compellingly countered these claims. Franklin Roosevelt was revered for identifying freedom with economic security: "I am not for a return to that definition of liberty," he said in one of his fireside chats, "under which for many years a free people were being gradually regimented into the service of the privileged few. I prefer and I am sure you prefer that broader definition of liberty under which we are moving forward to greater freedom, to greater security for the average man…" This inclusion of security in the definition of freedom was common sense to most Americans: you weren't free if you had to work long hours in poor conditions for low wages, subject to the capricious tyranny of an employer because it was absolutely forbidden to form a union, i.e., to cooperate with your coworkers for mutual uplift. Most people in the 1930s took it for granted that the "freedom" of conservatives was the freedom of the ruling class to dominate, exploit, and immiserate the majority.

By the late 1940s and 1950s, during and after the Second Red Scare, big business had successfully counterattacked and "sold free enterprise" to Americans as the epitome of freedom itself. This was an easier sell than it would have been had the Soviet Union not been there to tarnish the idea of socialism (or communism), which used to mean nothing but an extension of democracy into the economic sphere: ordinary people freely controlling their own work, in the form of worker cooperatives and democratic government coordination of large industry. Americans were now persuaded to believe something ridiculous: whatever a government calls itself, it is in fact that thing. If, like the USSR, it calls itself socialist, communist, or left-wing, we have to take its word for it, because governments are always honest and trustworthy. (But then why didn't we take the Soviets' word for it when they called themselves a democracy, and thus conclude that the USSR had invalidated democracy just as it had supposedly invalidated socialism or communism? Could it be that we were simply victims of the West's propaganda to defame an old anti-capitalist tradition?)

The history of the left was now forgotten, as, perversely, to be on the left ostensibly meant to be a totalitarian, a "collectivist," who was willing to sacrifice freedom for the gray equality of a universal government bureaucracy. It was forgotten that the revolutionary left had always been at the forefront of the struggle for freedom. The words of the Declaration of Independence—"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" (note the alteration of John Locke's original "life, liberty, and property")—written in the context of mass struggle against illegitimate power, belonged to the tradition of the left. The abolitionist movement to emancipate the slaves was denounced for its radicalism by conservatives and centrists of the day. In the early twentieth century, the Industrial Workers of the World courageously tested the limits of American democracy in their famous free speech fights. In the 1930s, the Communist Party helped organize the early stages of a long civil rights movement against lynching, the Jim Crow regime, and economic exploitation of blacks in the South. The New Left of the 1960s expanded the realm of freedom further in its battles, anticipated in the Port Huron Statement,

against the stultifyingly conformist, bureaucratic, right-wing Cold War establishment. And the counterculture, which conservatives so hated that it helped birth the New Right, had freedom as its watchword: free love, free access to drugs, free celebration of life and music and community.

In the meantime, conservatism was marshaling its forces for an all-out fifty-year assault against the emancipatory legacy of the New Deal and the New Left. Characteristically, it disguised its real intentions in the language of liberty: its economic philosophy it called libertarianism, although what it meant in practice was nothing but the tyranny of big business unconstrained by unions, government regulation, or the welfare state. This dystopian "free market" vision of the Mont Pelerin Society, significantly, was attractive to Southern white supremacists, who voted for Barry Goldwater, an early right-wing "libertarian," in 1964 despite his being a Republican. Why this affinity between white supremacists and business supremacists? (One sees it today too, as white supremacists have notoriously supported Donald Trump, a business supremacist.) Because both groups worship power and hierarchy. In desiring a weakened—in some respects—federal government, what both types of conservatives really want is unfettered power over a subordinate group, whether non-whites or workers. With a smaller, weakened government, they can more easily wield this power unhindered by irksome federal laws and regulations that protect workers, minorities, public resources, and the natural environment.

In other words, however appealing the "small government" slogan might seem, or however grounded in classical liberalism, it is motivated today by values *opposite* to those of classical liberals like Wilhelm von Humboldt and Immanuel Kant. Humboldt argued that a human being "is born to inquire and create, and when a man or a child chooses to inquire or create out of his own free choice then he becomes in his own terms an artist rather than a tool of production or a well-trained parrot." For Kant, "there is only one innate right: freedom (independence from being constrained by another's choice), insofar as it can coexist with the freedom of every other in accordance with a universal law." In a time before the colossal modern corporation, before the vast complexity of industrial capitalist society, it made perfect sense to arrive from these premises at the conclusion that the state ought to be very small.

But circumstances change. How far the libertarian, anarchistic sensibility of Humboldt and Kant is from modern conservatism is clear from, say, the famous Powell Memorandum of 1971, which plotted the counterattack of the New Right against the New Left. To restore the ideological and cultural hegemony of big business over American society, Lewis Powell advocated, for example, a "Big Brother"-style monitoring of all media and educational institutions—not by the state, it's true, but by the Chamber of Commerce. "The national television networks should be monitored in the same way that textbooks should be kept under constant surveillance. This applies not merely to so-called educational programs…but to the daily 'news analysis' which so often includes the most insidious type of criticism of the enterprise system [i.e., capitalism]. …[T]he result is the gradual erosion of confidence in 'business' and free enterprise." It is necessary, then, to control what the public is allowed to see, hear, and read, so that confidence in capitalism is not eroded.

This waging of political war on behalf of the rich and powerful, so as to eliminate dissent against the system that has given them their power, is antithetical to classical liberalism. It has nothing in common with the desire for universal freedom.

Consistent leftists certainly have no love of "big government": just read the writings of anarchists in the last 180 years, from Bakunin through Alexander Berkman to David Graeber. (*These* are the real successors to classical liberalism.) Even Marxists are well aware that the state tends to crush individual freedom, which is why they look forward to a withering away of the state. They understand, however, that a social democratic government that guarantees people the right to healthcare, free education, expansive public resources, and a decent standard of living is at least preferable to a Milton Friedmanite laissez-faire capitalism that leaves people no recourse against total domination by super-concentrations of economic power (and the government they control).

The distinction is sometimes made between negative freedom and positive freedom: "negatively, liberty is the absence of restraint; positively, it is the power to act and to enjoy," to quote the liberal priest John Ryan (in his 1912 book *A Living Wage*). And it is claimed that conservatives value negative freedom while leftists value positive freedom. This, too, is false. For one thing, social conservatives are very

comfortable restraining the liberty of others. Whatever one may think of abortion, same-sex marriage, and other social issues, it is evident that to legislate against them is to restrict the freedoms of women, gays, and other targeted groups. But economic conservatism, too, amounts to limiting people's freedom, including their negative freedom. If strong labor laws, for instance, do not exist or are not enforced, employers can easily prevent workers from unionizing, which is an obvious infringement of their freedom. More generally, having to obey all the orders of a boss lest you be fired and left to the tender mercies of unemployment and (in many cases) a brutal job market is a clear "restraint" on your liberty. The philosophy of conservatism, therefore, is a philosophy of authoritarianism, precisely the opposite of what its exponents usually say.

In fairness, conservatives are often more honest when talking to each other. They can be quite open about their hatred of democracy (i.e., the *freedom* of everyone to participate in politics). In his presidential address in 1978 to the Mont Pelerin Society, for example, economist George Stigler suggested that victory in their privatization crusade might be achieved by "the restriction of the franchise to property owners, educated classes, employed persons or some such group." As Nancy MacLean documents in *Democracy in Chains*, Stigler's colleague James Buchanan, along with Murray Rothbard, Friedrich Hayek, and other "libertarian" authoritarians (who infamously supported Chile's dictator Pinochet), were likewise very hostile to democracy, as conservatives have typically been. (It's hardly a surprise that the Republican Party is currently trying to make it harder for certain groups of people, such as college students, to vote.) But this is perfectly natural if their ideology, as I'm arguing, is in its essence opposed to the freedom of everyone except the economic and political elite.

None of this is to say that all leftists are consistent, however. Woke cancel culture, which has been criticized by both leftists and conservatives, tends to restrict people's freedom of expression, by implanting the fear in them that if they say something slightly outside the bounds of what is considered acceptable at that moment, they'll suffer grievous consequences. If cancel culture could go as far as many of its practitioners would like it to go, very little dissent on matters of social significance would exist or be tolerated. A timidity and frigidity of thought would descend like a pall under a regime of soft totalitarianism. Cancel culture is hardly a new thing in history—conservatives and centrists have always practiced it to silence dissent, whether by excluding leftists from the dominant media, destroying their careers, imprisoning them, or killing them—but it is unseemly for leftists to participate in it.

In the end, the values of the left are those of the Enlightenment (in reaction against which conservatism was originally founded). "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity," said Kant. "'Have courage to use your own understanding!'—that is the motto of the Enlightenment." Voltaire's loathing of censorship, Rousseau's love of freedom, Kant's emphasis on the critical use of reason, Adam Smith's moral philosophy of sympathy, Spinoza's faith in democracy, Humboldt's exaltation of individual creativity, Benjamin Rush's philosophy of universal education, Condorcet's belief in progress—these are the pillars of the left, the emancipatory tradition in politics. The "equality" that is valued is the equality of human rights, the equality of freedom, which presupposes a relative equality of economic security. Against the conservative love of unaccountable power and imposed inequality, the left believes in the universality of human dignity.

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Postliberals Against the Common Good

"The Republican Party is the most dangerous organization in human history," says Noam Chomsky. It seems like a ridiculous statement. "Has there ever been an organization in human history that is dedicated, with such commitment, to the destruction of organized human life on Earth? Not that I'm aware of." He has a point. Even the Nazis didn't want to destroy civilization itself; they wanted to kill millions of people and dominate civilization, not bring it to an end. The Republican Party is much more ambitious, and more nihilistic: it is the capitalist id, or rather the capitalist death instinct, adopted as the organizing principle of a vast political force. *Profit over people at all costs, including* ***acceleration*** *of global warming—not to mention demolition of organized labor, the welfare state, the regulatory state, progressive taxation, public*

resources like education and transportation, and the whole legacy of the New Deal. For Republicans even more than Democrats, enslavement to the business oligarchy is the highest good.

This being the case, one might be perplexed that "postliberals" and other conservatives who pride themselves on their concern for "the common good" do not devote all their energy to defeating Republicans and organizing a popular movement for social democracy. In fact, they tend to do the opposite: they praise and endorse Republicans (especially pseudo-populists like Donald Trump, Josh Hawley, and J. D. Vance) while denouncing the "progressives" or "democratic socialists" who are struggling to build movements that will defend the common good and repair the social fabric rent by hyper-capitalism. On issue after issue, from protection of the environment to the resurrection of labor unions to the dismantling of psychopathic mass incarceration, it is organizers on the left, not the right, who are actually trying to *conserve* society. In this sense, it is leftists who are the true conservatives.

The political attitudes of most postliberals are approximately those manifested in Patrick Deneen's new book *Regime Change: Toward a Postliberal Future*. It's a very flawed book, as I explain in a forthcoming review. Here, I want only to note the incoherence of its political stance, which is that of right-wing postliberalism in general (as opposed to left-wing postliberalism, such as Adrian Pabst's). As in his earlier book *Why Liberalism Failed*, Deneen deplores the atomization of modern society and the decline of community, stability, family, and traditional norms of social obligation. But he blames this social crisis on "liberalism," a constellation of ideologies (some of which, historically, are mutually contradictory), rather than the material social relations of capitalism, as Marxists have done since the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. In Marx's famous words, "The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations… All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned…" Since capitalist class structures are the real basis for a way of life—an atomized, profit-obsessed, consumerist, hedonistic way of life—postliberals have gotten the very name of their philosophy wrong. It should be called postcapitalism, assuming the goal really is to create a cohesive, communal society.

What a postcapitalist world would look like is hard to imagine, but it would at least do away with the antagonistic and exploitative production relations that are ultimately responsible for the atomization postliberals lament. Ordinary people would control their work, in the form of worker cooperatives and democratic government coordination of large industry (possibly still in a market-oriented economy). The 1912 platform of Eugene Debs' Socialist Party isn't a bad place to start. If the notion of some degree of "government planning" seems unrealistic or tyrannical, we should remember that even today, the U.S. government engages in economic planning on a colossal scale, for instance through its subsidies to high-tech industry, its trade and tariff policies, its military procurement programs, and its regulation of all sectors of the economy. During World War II, in fact, government planning was remarkably successful, leading to full employment and setting the stage for the prosperous 1950s and 1960s. We don't live in a true market economy.

Instead of taking their "communitarian" values to their logical, anti-capitalist conclusion, however, most postliberals remain on the level of culture, identity politics, and other half-measures. Deneen, like his co-thinkers Gladden Pappin, Chad Pecknold, Adrian Vermeule, Yoram Hazony, and others, advocates restrictions on immigration in the hope that this will somehow shore up the national community and protect wages. (He disregards the fact that the presence of undocumented immigrants and refugees stimulates the economy and creates jobs.) He argues that we have to renew the "Christian roots of our civilization" by making politics "a place for prayer" and reinfusing religion into public and private activities. Broadly, "an ennobling of our elite," such that it is selflessly concerned with the well-being of "the people" and "work[s] to improve the[ir] lives, prospects, and fate," will revitalize society and community. He fails to explain how such an ennobling of the ruling class can ever occur in the context of advanced capitalism, characterized by the global hegemony of unfettered greed.

In fact, Deneen even deprecates social democracy and its "progressive liberalism," claiming without evidence that redistribution of wealth to workers has "led to extensive damage to the broader economic order." He seems unaware that postwar social democracy, created through overwhelming pressure by unions, socialists, and communists, was the closest modern society has ever come to protecting families, communities, and social stability.

It isn't hard to criticize the idealism, political naïveté (as if class conflict isn't endemic to capitalism!), and historical ignorance of postliberalism. But the basic incoherence of the ideology is that its attacks on liberalism and the left, and its defense of conservatism, only serve to empower the forces most dedicated to sabotaging the very values postliberals claim to uphold, values like "national resilience," "common purposes," and the "social covenant." Republicans and business reactionaries love to keep the political focus on things like the decline of religion, the ostensible immigrant invasion, and the excesses of liberal identity politics, so that they can go on smashing the working class, appropriating most of the world's wealth, privatizing and atomizing society, and destroying the prospects for human survival. Postliberals are in danger of being useful idiots for the most insatiable sociopaths on the planet.

Will it be denied that the Republican Party is as bad as all this? Consider the evidence. Donald Trump is supposedly a populist, someone trying to turn Republicans into the party of the working class. It turns out that his administration, like all Republican administrations since Reagan's, was utterly slavish to the most misanthropic sectors of business. His NLRB waged an "unprecedented" attack on workers' rights. He weakened or eliminated over 125 policies that protected the country's air, water, and land. His budgets savagely slashed benefits for low-income Americans, continuing a longstanding Republican practice. All this is the exact opposite of protecting the "common good" that postliberals say they value so much.

What about the great "populist" senators Hawley and Vance? They give, at best, tokenistic and rhetorical support to the working class: neither has even cosponsored the Protecting the Right to Organize Act, and Hawley, according to the AFL-CIO, has almost always voted against the interests of workers. Vance, a venture capitalist, finds it much more congenial to spew racist "great replacement" nonsense—an identity politics of the right—and blame those with a low income for their own failures than to actually do anything to help the latter. If this is the record of Republicans who present themselves as pro-worker, it isn't hard to imagine how bad establishment Republicans are.

Perhaps the greatest crime of the Republican Party is that it is almost rock-solidly opposed to even the mildest proposals to address global warming, which threatens not only working people but all life on earth. The sweltering summer the world has just experienced will likely be seen as a gloriously mild one thirty years from now, when wildfires are raging everywhere, ocean levels are much higher, and whole continents are descending into chaos. The Republican plan to address the coming cataclysms is…to make them worse. Project 2025, a conservative blueprint for the next Republican president, calls for "shredding regulations to curb greenhouse gas pollution from cars, oil and gas wells and power plants, dismantling almost every clean energy program in the federal government and boosting the production of fossil fuels." The inadequate Inflation Reduction Act, which provides $370 billion for investment in clean energy, would be repealed. Allied nations would be encouraged to use more fossil fuels, and the National Security Council would be forbidden to consider climate change worthy of discussion.

Nihilism on this scale, an explicit embrace of something close to species-suicide by a major political party, is unheard-of in history. It is collective criminal lunacy, worse than Nazism, as Chomsky rightly notes. And yet how many postliberals, how many conservative proponents of the traditional values of family, community, and morality, are strongly speaking out against it, against this brazen threat to all families, communities, and morality itself? Their priority, rather, is to denounce "critical race theory" and keep out immigrants, as if that will heal the country.

Postliberals claim to favor policies that support marriage and family, singling out for praise Hungary's initiatives to offer paid leave for parents and financial incentives for three or more children. They also support government spending on large infrastructure projects. So why didn't they aggressively lobby Congress to pass Biden's original Build Back Better bill in 2021? This bill, which couldn't pass because of Republican opposition, would have been an immense boon to working families through its investments in childcare and preschool, paid family and medical leave, community college, child tax credits, physical infrastructure, affordable housing, health care, and environmental protection. It was the most ambitious measure in generations to repair the social compact and encourage family formation. Not a single Republican supported it.

It is hard to imagine that any party has ever been more committed to destroying families than the Republican, yet the self-proclaimed defenders of family values aim their ire at Democrats. However bad

Democrats are, they are the party responsible for the New Deal, for Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, for the almost-passed Build Back Better bill, for Biden's NLRB that is as supportive of unions as Trump's was hostile towards them. We should recognize, then, a perhaps unpalatable truth: since Republicans will never do a single thing opposed to the interests of the billionaire class, the only hope for the United States is to keep them out of power at the same time as popular movements are pushing Democrats to the left. Had the Democratic Party won a few more seats in the Senate in 2020, transformative laws on voting rights, union organizing, family welfare, and environmental protection that were passed in the House might have been enacted. It was a tragic missed opportunity, but, with the defeat of Republicans and the election of leftists, such opportunities can appear again.

Postliberals can contribute positively to politics, but only if they follow the recent example of one of their own: Sohrab Ahmari, who has written an impressive book on corporate America's plunder of the working class, entitled *Tyranny, Inc: How Private Power Crushed American Liberty—And What to Do About It*. Ahmari still seems to have some illusory hope regarding the likes of Hawley, Vance, and Marco Rubio, who wouldn't be in the Republican Party if they really wanted to help people. (Token populist moves shore up their voting base.) But at least Ahmari has apparently realized that the battle against liberal identity politics is less important than the battle for a left-wing economic agenda—and in fact that the right-wing crusade against wokeness sabotages the struggle for workers' rights and a livable future, since it empowers Republicans.

One hopes that more postliberals will, similarly, come to their senses.

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Nikole Hannah-Jones, Frederick Douglass, and the Left

Twitter conversations with public intellectuals are rarely worthy of note, but a recent exchange I had with Nikole Hannah-Jones, famed mastermind of the *New York Times'* 1619 Project, was symptomatic of widespread tendencies in left-liberal culture and brought up important issues.

Hannah-Jones is a spokeswoman for wokeness, the cultural phenomenon that, as I've written elsewhere, is brilliantly undermining the left and providing grist for the mill of the right-wing outrage machine. Historically, a crucial method of undermining the left is to divide the working class according to race and ethnicity, fostering resentments and enmity between groups of people who share economic and political interests. Accordingly, in a characteristic statement, Hannah-Jones tweeted that "it is Black people who are the greatest agents of democracy the United States has ever seen. No one see[s] this country with more clarity than Black Americans. It is why while so many other[s] falter, we always muster the courage to do what must be done." Divide people by race, elevating some and lowering others, with the effect of undercutting interracial solidarity: that's the way of the conservative and the liberal, not the leftist.

Regarding Hannah-Jones's tweet, we may pass over the grandiloquent language, as if "Black Americans" (as a group) have never "faltered" and have "always" mustered the courage "to do what must be done." Only one thing is worth noting here: this is explicitly the language of myth-making, of glossing over messy reality in order to create a cult of black people. Other groups are inferior, less courageous and clear-sighted. The discursive terrain we're on—since we're in the realm of identity politics—is thus a mythopoetic exaltation of "a" people who have a particular skin color.

Setting aside the rhetoric, her substantive claim is, in effect, that black activism is the main reason the U.S. achieved something slightly akin to democracy. Is this true? Upon consulting historical scholarship, we find that it is not. Consider Alexander Keyssar's definitive survey of American democracy, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (2000). Electoral democracy was, in fact, expanding even before the abolition of slavery, and later it expanded to include women (a movement that was led by whites), and then finally, with the Civil Rights Movement, it expanded to include blacks in the South. This was a nearly two-hundred-year struggle, certain phases of which hardly involved black people at all.

As a good historian and a non-ideologue, Keyssar emphasizes the salience of class, not race. "It is class—and its link to immigration—that shapes the periodization of the story," he argues. "The history of the right to vote [is]…a protracted yet dynamic conflict between class tensions and the exigencies of war." In the Jacksonian era, property requirements for white men's right to vote were dismantled, as masses of propertyless whites mobilized to expand the suffrage. After the Civil War, agitation among freed slaves and the determination of white Republicans gave black men the right to vote, but by the end of the century they had lost it in the South. This was not, however, merely a result of racism, as woke orthodoxy would have it. For one thing, many poor whites were disfranchised as well, in order to protect the power of the propertied. More importantly, "[r]idding the electorate of blacks was a means of rendering most of the agricultural laborers of the rural South politically powerless…[which would allow] landowners and businessmen [to] wield unchallenged control of the state." Class power was what mattered most.

Contrary to common belief, the disfranchisement of Southern blacks was not the only example of democratic backsliding between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These tumultuous decades saw the explosive growth of an immigrant industrial working class that terrified the country's economic and political leaders, who now turned against universal manhood suffrage. It was necessary to "diminish the power of the worst classes," one eminent writer argued in 1883. Across the country, efforts to do so thrived. As Keyssar summarizes, they included "the introduction of literacy tests, lengthening residency periods, abolishing provisions that permitted noncitizen aliens to vote, restricting municipal elections to property owners or taxpayers, and the creation of complex, cumbersome registration procedures." Hundreds of thousands of "paupers" were excluded from the franchise. Naturalization laws were made more restrictive, reducing the proportion of immigrants who could vote. Felons and ex-felons were disfranchised. The list of inventive means to purify the electorate and thus protect the existing distribution of economic (and hence political) power was very long.

In short, black Southerners were hardly the only victims of disfranchisement; and when many of these laws were overturned in the 1960s and 1970s, it was because of activism not only by black people but also labor unions (crucial supporters of the Civil Rights Movement) and a vast liberal legal and political infrastructure that even swept up Nixon's Republican Party in the reforming zeal. (For example, the Nixon administration shortened state residency requirements for voting, enfranchising millions.)

It might seem I'm making too big a deal out of a couple of flippant tweets, but it's the tendency of thought they represent that is at issue. American political culture suffers from a collective fixation on skin color and ethnicity: both on the left and the right, identity politics dominates. On one side are authorities like Hannah-Jones, Ibram X. Kendi, and (the more sophisticated) Robin D. G. Kelley, who obsess over a supposedly ubiquitous racism (or "white supremacy") and romanticize the posturing and preening militancy of Black Power; on the other side are people like Donald Trump, Ron DeSantis, Christopher Rufo, and their billionaire backers, who preach their own identity politics in order to keep the focus off class, which would threaten to genuinely remake society. Identitarian leftists are playing the right's game when they set white against black, as if there aren't enormous, class-determined antagonisms of interest within both white and black populations.

The crudity of race reductionism can be stunning. Hannah-Jones is evidently of the opinion that every white person (including, say, an underpaid adjunct professor) is "a member of the ruling class." She, on the other hand, a multimillionaire with deep ties to the establishment, is a revolutionary and one of the oppressed because she's black. Not all advocates of identity politics adhere to such a preposterous racialism, but to the extent that one foregrounds factors other than class position (which is the most direct determinant of income, life chances, and economic and political power), one's politics is in danger of sliding toward some such faux-radical reductionism. The effect, again, is to divide white workers, "privileged" members of the "ruling class" (no matter if they're unemployed or barely scraping by), from black workers, who are the truly oppressed and deserve reparations paid for by taxes on whites.

When you point this out to identitarians, specifically that the racialism of their politics—if it isn't significantly tempered by emphasis on common interests and common grievances—has the effect of vitiating working-class solidarity, they're apt to say something like, "If racism is already entrenched, how is acknowledging that what divides?" There are two errors here: first, sixty years after the transformative

victories of the Civil Rights Movement, racism is vastly less "entrenched" than it once was; second, the most effective way to overcome some people's residual racism is to educate them on the common interests shared by economically suffering people of different races, not to constantly attack them for being privileged racists. This will only alienate them, deepen their racism, and push them into the arms of the far-right. The Communist Party of the 1930s was much more intelligent when it adopted the slogan "Black and White, Unite and Fight!" In common struggle, whites and blacks overcame their mutual antipathies and built industrial unions that greatly benefited working people of all colors.

In any case, in a time when you can virtually ruin a person's life by taking a video of them saying something racist and posting it on the internet, it's clear that racism is hardly as virulent or hegemonic as left-liberals like to pretend. It exists, but it's relatively marginal compared to the forms of class power that are decimating working people of all ethnicities (worldwide). Not only blacks are affected by precarious employment, low wages, the housing crisis, student debt, global warming, psychopathically militaristic foreign policies, decades of disinvestment in public infrastructure, rising levels of homelessness, and countless other crises. Shouting about racism or white supremacy won't solve any of these problems.

Unsurprisingly, it fails to impress liberal identitarians that some of their most cherished icons have had contempt for forms of race politics that are fashionable today. White racial pride, for instance, is taken to be downright evil, but black pride—as exemplified by Hannah-Jones' original tweet quoted above—is considered admirably rebellious or even revolutionary. It is scarcely acknowledged that, say, Frederick Douglass, a uniquely towering figure, fervently opposed even black racial pride. Whether or not one agrees with him, Douglass's arguments should be grappled with:

> For my part I see no superiority or inferiority in race or color. Neither the one nor the other is a proper source of pride or complacency. Our race and our color are not of our choosing. We have no volition in the case one way or another… When a colored man is charged with a want of race pride, he may well ask, What race? For a large percentage of the colored race are related in some degree to more than one race. But the whole assumption of race pride is ridiculous. Let us have done with complexional superiorities or inferiorities, complexional pride or shame… Our policy should be to unite with the great mass of the American people in all their activities… We cannot afford to draw the color line in politics, trade, education, manners, religion, fashion, or civilization…

This is from a speech in 1889 entitled "The Nation's Problem." A few years later, in 1894, Douglass sounded the same themes:

> We hear, since emancipation, much said by our modern colored leaders in commendation of race pride, race love, race effort, race superiority, race men, and the like… In all this talk of race, the motive may be good, but the method is bad. It is an effort to cast out Satan by Beelzebub. The evils which are now crushing the negro to earth have their root and sap, their force and mainspring, in this narrow spirit of race and color, and the negro has no more right to excuse and foster it than have men of any other race. I recognize and adopt no narrow basis for my thoughts, feelings, or modes of action. I would place myself, and I would place you, my young friends, upon grounds vastly higher and broader than any founded upon race or color. Neither law, learning, nor religion, is addressed to any man's color or race. Science, education, the Word of God, and all the virtues known among men, are recommended to us, not as races, but as men. We are not recommended to love or hate any particular variety of the human family more than any other…

The *separatism*, the racial self-love, of Nikole Hannah-Jones's philosophy, and of influential strains of identity politics (on the left and the right), is diametrically opposed to the philosophy of Frederick Douglass, which is grounded in the much more capacious humanism of the Enlightenment. To be proud of being black

is as senseless as to be proud of being white, or of being a man or a woman, or heterosexual or homosexual. Chauvinism is not a virtue.

For many reasons, then—historical, politically strategic, and moral—identity politics is bankrupt, at least if it isn't explicitly grounded in the imperative of class solidarity.

The left will not be a real left until the likes of Hannah-Jones, who make a virtue of their historical and moral ignorance, are widely seen not as challenging power-structures but as indirectly defending them. Economic exploitation and insecurity, the roots of oppression, afflict people of all races; and all races have played, and will play, an integral role in the struggle to democratize society. The perennial conflict between rich and poor, whatever their skin color, is the fulcrum of injustice.

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Postliberalism: A Dangerous "New" Conservatism

In Wilhelm von Humboldt's book *The Limits of State Action* (1792), one of the most thoughtful expressions of classical liberalism, these passages appear:

> The true end of Man…is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole. Freedom is the first and indispensable condition which the possibility of such a development presupposes… Whatever does not spring from a man's free choice, or is only the result of instruction and guidance, does not enter into his very being but still remains alien to his true nature; he does not perform it with truly human energies but merely with mechanical exactness…
>
> [T]he principle of the true art of social intercourse consists in a ceaseless endeavor to grasp the innermost individuality of another, to avail oneself of it, and, with the deepest respect for it as the individuality of another, to act upon it… The very variety arising from the union of numbers of individuals is the highest good which social life can confer, and this variety is undoubtedly lost in proportion to the degree of State interference. Under such a system, we have not so much the individual members of a nation living united in the bonds of a civil compact, but isolated subjects living in relation to the State…

The entire book is an elaboration of these ideas. In them, we do not see a vulgar individualism, a reduction of humans to mere nodes in the cash-nexus who buy and sell to one another and need protection from each other, the kind of anti-humanism for which traditionalists and Marxists have criticized classical liberalism. We see, instead, an appreciation of the richness of every individuality; an emphasis on the human need for community, respect, friendship, and love; an anarchist critique of coercive institutions, in particular the state; a proto-Marxist theory of the alienation of labor; socialistic intimations that people have the right to control their own labor; in short, a liberal humanism of the sort that leftists of various persuasions would embellish in the following two centuries.

If one were to believe the "postliberals" who have burst onto the ideological scene in recent years, liberalism doesn't have the moral or intellectual resources for such a mature humanism. It seems they haven't read Humboldt.

Postliberalism has emerged in the UK and U.S. during the last ten years as a reaction against the manifest failures of what its thinkers call liberalism. The economic, social, political, and environmental crises that afflict the world they attribute to a systemic lack of regard for the "common good," which, in turn, they attribute to a liberalism that has been horribly successful in its reduction of humans to atoms—"increasingly separate, autonomous, nonrelational selves replete with rights and defined by our liberty, but insecure, powerless, afraid, and alone." So writes Patrick Deneen, professor of political science at the University of Notre Dame, in his 2018 book *Why Liberalism Failed*. Other vocal postliberals include Adrian Vermeule, Sohrab Ahmari, Yoram Hazony, Adrian Pabst, Chad Pecknold, Gladden Pappin, and some other writers associated with such magazines as *American Affairs*, *UnHerd*, and *Compact*. For all their

differences, these writers share a rejection of any one-sided fixation on liberty, whether it be that of right-wing libertarianism—the "free market" doctrine to which the Republican Party is at least rhetorically committed—or left-wing social liberalism, the liberalism of identity politics. They seek to resuscitate ideas of social obligation, duty, community, and tradition, for example in the forms of family, church, and nation. The modern understanding of liberty is unhealthily and immorally *licentious*; better is the ancient and Christian conception that true freedom consists in self-control, self-discipline (under the constraints of tradition and religion), rather than slavish submission to base and hedonistic appetites.

Postliberals, therefore, criticize the modern gospel of "progress" and its ideological cognates, alleged solvents of social bonds, such as "Enlightenment rationalism," or the application of critical reason to all forms of order and authority for the sake of dismantling whatever isn't emancipatory, liberal, or conducive to economic growth. Their perspective is reminiscent of that of the social theorist and historian Christopher Lasch, whose 1991 book *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* was an extended critique of the ideology of progress and a history of its dissenters in the United States. Preferring an honest recognition of ineluctable *limits*—not least ecological limits—over modern liberalism's faith in endless economic growth, endless moral progress, and liberation from the benighted parochialism of the past, Lasch turned to the culture of the lower middle class as a more human and realistic alternative. Without denying the historical vices of this culture ("envy, resentment, and servility"), he was nevertheless impressed by "the moral conservatism of the petty bourgeoisie, its egalitarianism, its respect for workmanship, its understanding of the value of loyalty," in general its *rootedness*, so different from the deracinated *future*-fixation—detachment from the past—of contemporary liberal elites. Postliberals share these concerns and values.

What postliberalism amounts to, then, is a rejection of dominant tendencies of modernity. Some writers are more willing than others to acknowledge the positive achievements of liberalism—for instance, in *The Politics of Virtue* (2016), John Milbank and Adrian Pabst grant that liberalism "has afforded some protection against the worst transgressions upon the liberty of some by the liberty of others"—but, on the whole, postliberals are attracted to a kind of Burkean conservatism. "Right-wing on culture, left-wing on the economy" is how they are usually characterized. Through this formula, they think, it may be possible to bring back social cohesion, "the wisdom of tradition," and respect for "the common good."

Two books published this year by leading lights of postliberalism, Patrick Deneen and Sohrab Ahmari, provide an opportunity to critically evaluate this "new" school of thought (perhaps not so new). On the one hand, Deneen's *Regime Change: Toward a Postliberal Future* illustrates the weaknesses of the ideology; on the other hand, Ahmari's *Tyranny, Inc.: How Private Power Crushed American Liberty—and What to Do About It* illustrates its potential strengths. Ultimately, however, despite its mutability, postliberalism is misguided and dangerous in its idealism, its theoretical confusions, its political naïveté, and many of its political commitments. It too easily slides into proto-fascism. What is valid in it can be and has been expressed more sophisticatedly by the Marxist left.

Since it has the ear of some right-wing populists, such as J. D. Vance and Josh Hawley, and it seems to be growing in influence, this ideology should be taken seriously. Leftists may be able to find common ground with its advocates on certain issues, but in general, they should strongly resist this latest brand of conservatism.

The Idealism of Postliberalism

One of the major analytical flaws of postliberalism is, in fact, one of the weaknesses of all conservatism: its idealism, in the anti-Marxian sense. In all his romantic talk of reverence for ancestral traditions, Edmund Burke abstracted from the actual daily functioning of these traditions, from their foundations in appalling violence, in constant violations of the dignity and freedom of the lower classes, in the irrationality of a nation's being subject to the will of some arbitrary monarch who happened to be born to a previous monarch. A very different conservative, Milton Friedman, similarly abstracted from the daily realities of capitalism—the indignities of working for a boss, the suppression of the right to unionize, the violence in which the rule of capital is grounded—in his simplistic paeans to "freedom." (His famous book

Capitalism and Freedom (1962) consists of abstract idealizations like this one, chosen at random: "The kind of economic organization that promotes economic freedom directly, namely, competitive capitalism, also promotes political freedom because it separates economic power from political power and in this way enables the one to offset the other." As if, in the real world, economic power doesn't tend to confer political power!) Fascism was even worse: it idealized will, nation, race, the state, the Leader, and war, abstracting from the grubby realities of all these things.

Being a type of conservatism, postliberalism does the same. Its very name is idealistic and simplistic. "Liberalism" can't be the fundamental problem we face today for the simple reason that there isn't only one liberalism, there are many. Among the classical liberals, there were British, French, American, and German figures, as diverse as John Locke, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Kant, Thomas Paine, William Godwin, John Stuart Mill, and Tocqueville. There were socialists, anarchists, and capitalists. There were deists, Protestants, Catholics, and atheists. There were democrats, republicans, and monarchists. And in the twentieth century, liberalism evolved in even more complex ways, towards social democracy and its protection not only of "negative liberty" but also "positive liberty," as in the freedom of people to have a living wage, a home, an education, and affordable healthcare. Even the anarchist communism of Peter Kropotkin can be said, in some respects, to belong to the liberal tradition. In short, the core intuition of liberalism—"a general enlargement and freedom and rational direction of human life," as Lionel Trilling described it—can be fleshed out institutionally in innumerable ways, including in socialism (which isn't Sovietism), i.e., people's democratic control of their work. (In fact, one can argue that Marxism is but a continuation and conceptual deepening of the best traditions of liberalism.)

Patrick Deneen's two recent books—*Why Liberalism Failed* and *Regime Change*—exemplify the idealism of conservatism. Again and again, imposing a false unity on the liberal tradition, he blames liberalism for things that are more realistically attributed to capitalism. When he refers to "[recent] decades of liberal dismantling of cultural norms and political habits essential to self-governance," what he means is capitalist dismantling. Liberalism is but an ideological attitude, a constellation of philosophies; capitalism—how people work, how they acquire property, how they exchange goods, how class relations are structured, how culture is produced and politics is organized—is the real basis for a way of life.

When Deneen, in *Why Liberalism Failed*, writes that "[liberalism] has remade the world in its image, especially through the realms of politics, economics, education, science, and technology, all aimed at achieving supreme and complete freedom through the liberation of the individual from particular places, relationships, memberships, and even identities," one recalls the words of an infinitely more profound thinker:

> The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations… It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation… All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned…

No mere ideological "tendency" (to quote Trilling again) could achieve all this. It is the class structures of capitalism that have remade the world.

Regime Change is shot through with idealism. The basic structure of the book is reasonable enough: in the first two chapters, Deneen diagnoses the faults of liberalism, including not only its ostensible ripping apart and atomizing of the social fabric but also its elevation of hypocritical liberal elites ("the managerial class," the real power elite) who don't care about "the people" but use identity politics to pretend they do, shredding the last vestiges of traditional norms in the process. In the next three chapters, he presents the postliberal vision. He calls this "common-good conservatism," associating it with Burke, Benjamin Disraeli, and G. K. Chesterton, but more generally with "the classical and Christian tradition of the West—a common-good political order that seeks to harmonize the various contentious elements of any human society." This conservatism aligns itself with the "common sense" of ordinary people, who "seek stability,

predictability, and order within the context of a system that is broadly fair." The solution to contemporary social ills is to implement the political philosophy of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, a "mixed constitution" (democratic and aristocratic) in which an elite much more noble than that of today will "work to improve the lives, prospects, and fate of the people," as the people, in turn, demand excellence from the elite and themselves are influenced by the virtues of the new aristocracy.

In the final two chapters, Deneen fills out his Aristotelian vision, which he calls "aristopopulism," while also gesturing towards an answer as to *how* this glorious new society will be realized. His answer isn't particularly satisfying: "an ennobling of our elite" will come about "through the force of a threat from the *popolo* [people]," that is, "through the efforts of an energized, forceful, and demanding populace." This is pretty much all he says on the matter. Likewise, his sketches of the better world to come consist of empty bromides and exhortations. Rather than meritocracy, we need a society that integrates the "working-class ethos of social solidarity, family, community, church, and nation" with the "virtues of those blessed by privilege." To combat racism, we shouldn't embrace affirmative action or other divisive approaches but should resurrect Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of a "deeper 'integration.'" Tepidly criticizing the ardent nationalism of people like Yoram Hazony (author of *The Virtue of Nationalism*), *National Review* editor Rich Lowry, and other "national conservatives," Deneen proposes instead "*a new form of integration of local, national, and international*" (italics in the original). What that concretely means he leaves unsaid. His practical program for reinfusing religion into social life is similarly perfunctory, containing little more than such vague entreaties as "a simple first step would be to publicly promote and protect a life of prayer." Politics should be "a place for prayer, since politics is how we together seek to realize the good that is common."

One of the greatest swindles of postliberalism is its nostalgia for an idealized past. According to Deneen, the Enlightenment project of individual liberation required the overthrow of "older social forms that had taught and reinforced the cultivation of virtue." Traditional institutions "protect the stability and order that most benefits ordinary people," and in fact are deeply democratic "because they are the creation of countless generations of forebears" and "largely develop from the 'bottom up.'" As it happens, feudalism wasn't a particularly democratic institution that cultivated virtue. Nor was absolute monarchy. Nor was the Catholic Church, which, until the spirit of liberalism finally began to permeate it, was a rapacious tyranny that burned heretics, policed thought, crusaded against the advance of knowledge, and made common cause with autocrats everywhere. (Also, of course, it now has the distinction of systemically aiding and abetting child abuse.) However inspiring the figure and philosophy of Jesus may be, history has shown that religious institutions, like all administrative hierarchies, are prone to abusing their power unless suffused with the liberal spirit of respect for individual rights.

This worship of religion is a classic instance of mistaken idealism. Postliberals are enamored of Christianity, attributing much of what is good in our civilization to its religious inheritance and much of what is bad to its abandonment of religion. Most of the time, they ignore questions about whether, after all, it is *true* that something called "God" exists or that Jesus is His son and was resurrected after dying for our sins, or any of the other dogmas of Christianity (or Judaism)—and rightly so, for in order to evaluate the plausibility of any proposition, it's necessary to use the Enlightenment's "rationalistic" method they dislike. With regard to socially relevant questions, they appear to have a pragmatist conception of truth: if a belief is useful, we might as well believe it. But is religion in fact useful? Its violent, tortured, bigoted history suggests otherwise. Nor is it at all clear that humans need religion in order to enjoy a healthy communal and family life or to heed the moral duties that bind us all together.

Often, religion has functioned to *undermine* the well-being of communities and families. It isn't a secret that conservative politicians use appeals to religion to convince people to vote against their economic interests. An infamous example is that of Governor Sam Brownback of Kansas, a religiose Christian who passed radical tax cuts in 2012 that, as the Brookings Institution summarizes, "led to sluggish growth, lower-than-expected revenues, and brutal cuts to government programs" like schools, housing, infrastructure, and police and fire protection. Similarly, for over a hundred years, businesses in the American South have used conservative Christianity to ward off the threat of unionism, helping to keep the region in a state of relative poverty. In *Struggle for the Soul of the Postwar South* (2015), historians

Elizabeth and Ken Fones-Wolf describe how corporate executives in the postwar era relocated their factories to this region, where "chambers of commerce advertised the benefits [of] locating in a 'distinctly religious city' where the 'labor is of native Anglo-Saxon stock—loyal and efficient.'" The CIO's Operation Dixie was unable to overcome the resistance that evangelical Protestantism (among other forces) put up to unions.

On the whole, then, postliberals have a rather uncritical attitude towards tradition and religion, as conservatives usually do. They're nostalgic for a lost social cohesion, the lost unity of "Western culture." As Adrian Pabst writes in *Liberal World Order and Its Critics* (2019), identity politics (combined with "corporate crony capitalism") is "changing the fundamental character of Western civilisation from being a cultural community bound together by common values that define shared interests to a 'business community' based on sectional interests that promote divisive values." But when, exactly, was "Western civilization" such a unitary entity? The history of Europe is the history of constant clashes, constant wars, constant struggles between different value systems and interests and cultures, long centuries of violence and bloody suppression of innumerable popular uprisings. Divisiveness *is* history. And idealism is false history.

Buried under all the confusions and shallowness of postliberalism, however, there is a truth: throughout its five-hundred-year history, riven by war, privatization and the destruction of the commons, mass immiseration, and the crushing of democracy, capitalism has profoundly disrupted communities and uprooted identities. This is precisely why, or one reason why, leftists and "the people" have fought against it. Genuine leftists are well aware of the human need for roots, for order and stability and community. The great anarchist mystic Simone Weil even wrote a book entitled *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties towards Mankind*. "To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul… Money destroys human roots wherever it is able to penetrate, by turning desire for gain into the sole motive." There is no reason such a recognition should be incompatible with the best traditions of liberalism, for instance Humboldtian liberalism. That is, there is no reason a philosophy of individual rights and individual dignity should preclude a recognition of mutual obligations and the essentially *social* nature of humanity, including even a valorization of *honorable* traditions and shared norms that constrain unfettered liberty. This isn't the place to delve into the philosophies of communism, socialism, and anarchism—the writings of Kropotkin, William Morris, Anton Pannekoek, Rudolf Rocker, Murray Bookchin, etc.—but the societies they envision are hardly licentious or degenerate or atomized. (Or remotely similar to the Soviet Union's state capitalism, with which socialism and communism are absurdly associated.) They are eminently ordered, communal, and democratic, *because* they are grounded in a liberal humanist sensibility.

Indeed, one might even say that the real reason the world is in such an awful state is the opposite of that given by postliberals: there is *too little* freedom, not *too much*. There is too much authoritarianism, not enough liberalism or democracy. In particular, the authoritarian structures known as corporations have overwhelming power—including over governments—which they certainly do not use in the interests of humanity, community, or social harmony. Noam Chomsky is surely right that classical liberalism, or libertarianism, in its profoundest forms is not only *not* fulfilled in capitalism but actually incompatible with it, inasmuch as capitalism tends to violate both the negative and positive liberties ("freedom from" and "freedom to") of ordinary people. A vast literature of the left, of journalism, and of historical scholarship exposes the tyrannical nature of capitalist institutions; for example, in 2017, the philosopher Elizabeth Anderson published a well-received book called *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)*. (A corporation is "a government that assigns almost everyone a superior whom they must obey… [T]here is no rule of law… Superiors are unaccountable to those they order around. They are neither elected nor removable by their inferiors," etc.) The most recent addition to this literature may be a surprise, though: Ahmari's new book.

Tyranny, Inc. could not be more different from *Regime Change*. It appears, in fact, that Ahmari is undergoing a semi-conversion to the left, or to aspects of the left. It is striking, after all, that a postliberal should have written a book the very subtitle and substance of which valorizes "American liberty." Whereas Deneen wallows in a lazy idealism that traffics in windy abstractions like virtue, excellence, and tradition,

Ahmari investigates the material conditions workers have faced under the neoliberal onslaught, together with the corrupt political economy that has brought about these abysmal conditions. Where Deneen believes that an enlightened Aristotelian aristocracy will magically come into being and work to uplift the people, Ahmari comprehends the essential fact of class struggle and advocates the resurrection of strong unions and social democracy. He even uses Marxist language: "cultural norms, practices, and beliefs…rest on a material substrate that includes law, politics, and economics." In short, while Deneen and his co-thinkers blame a unitary ideology of their imagination called liberalism, Ahmari, at least in this book, blames capitalism.

One can't help wondering if the postliberal gang is a little unhappy with Ahmari's semi-apostasy. Consider his criticisms of conservatives in his concluding chapter:

> [C]onservative defenders of the [social] system are often the first to lament its cultural ramifications: …a decline in civic and religious engagement, particularly among the poor and working classes; low rates of marriage and family formation; and so on.
>
> …[What results] is a downright ludicrous politics centered on preaching timeless virtues while denying what political theory going back to the Greeks has taught, and what every good parent or teacher knows: that cultivating virtue requires tangible, structural supports. A child will struggle to master honesty if his parents routinely model dishonesty; a body politic will likewise spurn the virtues if subjected to merciless economic exploitation.
>
> It's true that more populist conservatives these days are prepared to defend right-wing cultural values against "woke capital." But few if any dare question the coercive power of capital itself. Dig into the policy platforms of tub-thumping GOP populists, and you will likely find effusions of unreserved praise for capitalism.

Here, he is coming close to the realization that right-wing populism is completely phony, that it has always functioned to distract from the class conflicts that are fundamentally responsible for popular suffering, so that a large portion of the public instead rages against LGBTQ people, liberals, Muslims, immigrants, Jews, Communists, China, and anyone else *not* big business. To be sure, postliberals don't effusively praise capitalism, as other populist conservatives do. But if they really valued "the common good" about which they prattle, they would, like leftists and the new-and-improved Ahmari, direct their ire at the chief agents of the collapse of community, family, morality, and the natural environment, namely the capitalist class. Otherwise they're in danger of being useful idiots for this class that is interested only in further shredding the social compact.

Tyranny, Inc. is dense with journalistic investigations of a litany of types of "coercion" corporations inflict today on employees and the public, informed by a competent telling of the history behind it all (relying on scholars like Karl Polanyi, John Kenneth Galbraith, and David Harvey). Among other topics, Ahmari illuminates the many ways in which the sacred doctrine of "liberty of contract" between employer and employee conceals chasmic disparities in power that can ruin people's lives. He illustrates the capture of the judiciary by the corporate sector. He exposes the predations of private equity, including its use of private emergency services (firefighting firms, ambulance companies) to fleece unsuspecting innocents of tens of thousands of dollars. He discusses the ongoing evisceration by Big Tech and Big Finance of the U.S.'s newspaper industry, which has seen almost a third of its newspapers shutter since 2005 (while many of the remainder are gutted by their new Wall Street owners). And so on. The most viable solution to all these tragedies, he argues, is to revive Galbraithian countervailing power. "Once more, it's up to the American worker to drag our politicians and corporate leaders into a new consensus."

Insofar as Ahmari remains a postliberal, his book shows the mutability of this ideology. Its proponents can choose any particular agenda to devote their energies to, whether reconstituting unions and social democracy, advocating a Catholic theocracy (like Adrian Vermeule), fighting against the rights of non-heteronormative people, seeking a much more restrictive immigration regime, denouncing so-called "liberal" interventionist foreign policy, or prohibiting the teaching of the history of racism in the U.S.'s

public schools. Rhetorically at least, all of this can be defended in terms of shoring up the disintegrating social order and protecting "communal solidarity." In a sense, this mutability can be considered a strength, for it allows postliberalism to appeal to people of very different values and interests. But it is the strength of fascism, an ideology that likewise prided itself on being postliberal. Fascism was no less resourceful in appealing to different groups of people, including peasants, landowners, industrialists, the petty bourgeois, racists, traditionalists, even a small minority of workers, who were told their interests would be represented in the great community of the nation bound together by common traditions. In practice, of course, fascism, as a species of conservatism, ended up representing above all the interests of the ruling class, while crushing unions and working-class political parties.

The Proto-Fascism of Postliberalism

Tyranny, Inc. shows that leftists can find common cause with postliberals on some issues. To the extent that someone of the right really does care about the common good, or rather the good of the vast majority (to which the good of the ruling class tends to be inimical, since its power rests on the exploitation of others), a socialist might well be willing to work together with him. Such an alliance, necessarily limited and conditional, is often ridiculed as "red-brownism" by leftists, but it does happen in politics that people of different ideologies cooperate on a political campaign or policy that will conduce to the greater good. A politics that rests on maintaining one's purity is unlikely to get very far.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that postliberalism is very dangerous, potentially fascist. Insofar as it is *anti*-liberal—which left-leaning postliberals, such as Adrian Pabst, are not—this isn't a difficult case to make. "Within the West, Hungary has set the standard for a reasonable approach," Gladden Pappin believes. Vermeule deplores the expansiveness of liberal rights: "Yesterday the frontier was divorce, contraception, and abortion; then it became same-sex marriage; today it is transgenderism; tomorrow it may be polygamy, consensual adult incest, or who knows what." In *Conservatism: A Rediscovery* (2022), Yoram Hazony argues that "cultivation of the national religion is an indispensable purpose of government." He goes so far as to affirm, quoting Irving Kristol, that "*there is no inherent right to self-government if it means that such government is vicious, mean, squalid, and debased*." But who is to make such a judgment? Why is your definition of what is right and good necessarily better than someone else's? Are you infallible? What gives a reactionary religious nationalist like Hazony the right to impose his vision of the good life on an entire society?

Apart from the noxious political commitments of most postliberals, there is an even deeper problem: in conditions in the United States today, to ground one's politics in attacking liberalism is to undermine *postliberals' own professed values* of "national resilience," "common purposes," and the "social covenant" (to quote Adrian Pabst's *Postliberal Politics*). This is because the chief beneficiaries are the forces most aggressively sabotaging these values, the Republican Party and reactionaries in the business community.

To put it bluntly, postliberals' embrace of politicians like J. D. Vance, Josh Hawley, even (in some cases) Donald Trump, and their hope for an authentically populist, working-class Republican Party, is incredibly naïve. Nor is it new. At least since (in fact, before) Richard Nixon's Southern Strategy, Republican politicians have been clothing themselves in populist garb, stoking culture wars and denouncing liberal elites in order to cleave the "working-class" vote from Democrats. As Nixon's vice president, Spiro Agnew traveled the country attacking "permissivists," "elitists," "radical liberals," "thieves, traitors, and perverts." Reagan liked to invoke the "postliberal" themes of family and community: "When they [Democrats] talk about family, they mean Big Brother in Washington. When we talk about family, we mean 'honor thy father and mother.'" These themes, of course, have been a mainstay of Republican rhetoric for generations. "I am here to say to America," Bob Dole pontificated, "do not abandon the great traditions that stretch to the dawn of our history. Do not topple the pillars of those beliefs—God, family, honor, duty, country—that have brought us through time and time again." George W. Bush preached the virtues of compassionate conservatism, which proved to be just as oxymoronic as common-good conservatism will

doubtless be. Today, the enemies du jour are critical race theory, transgenderism, and wokeness, but the underlying strategy is always the same.

And what does that strategy eventuate in? Tax cuts for the rich, gutting of regulations to protect the environment, and a war on workers and the poor. Trump's NLRB waged an "unprecedented" attack on workers' rights. His administration weakened or eliminated over 125 policies that protected the country's air, water, and land. His budgets savagely slashed benefits for low-income Americans, continuing a longstanding Republican practice. The great "populist" senators Hawley and Vance give, at best, tokenistic and rhetorical support to the working class: neither has even cosponsored the Protecting the Right to Organize Act, and Hawley, according to the AFL-CIO, has almost always voted against the interests of workers. Vance, a venture capitalist, finds it much more congenial to spout racist "great replacement" nonsense and blame those with a low income for their own failures than to actually do anything to help the latter. Meanwhile, the Republican Party remains rock-solidly opposed to even the mildest proposals to address global warming, which threatens not only working people but all life on earth. If this sabotage of life itself is what the postliberal common good looks like, one might even *prefer* the classical fascists.

Analytically, a key error that helps make possible postliberal political naïveté (assuming the likes of Patrick Deneen and Yoram Hazony are acting in good faith) is to associate together, in one overarching nefarious tradition, classical liberals, modern economic conservatives, New Deal liberals, contemporary centrist liberals, woke identitarians, and "liberal" imperialists from Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson to Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden. In a sense, even Marxism is included in this tradition, inasmuch as it shares the orientation towards *progress* of all these groups, their detachment from and denial of the virtues of tradition. (As if the left doesn't want to *preserve healthy traditions* and *abandon unhealthy ones*.) This is a hopelessly confused classification, wholly superficial because of its idealistic focus on the supposed shared commitment to vague concepts of progress and freedom. In order to understand political history, you have to consider the material interests that these different groups and ideologies serve.

For example, economic conservatives like Milton Friedman or Paul Ryan are liberal or libertarian in name only. Their talk of free markets is a fig leaf for outright authoritarianism in the form of slavish support for corporate tyrannies (as Ahmari describes), which would have horrified classical liberals like Adam Smith. Most conservatives don't care about a mythical free market anyway, as shown by their enthusiasm for exorbitant government spending on the defense industry and for munificent tax breaks and subsidies for corporations. Capitalism could not survive without these sorts of government interventions, nor can markets operate without some firms soon exerting "illiberal" market power; so it is idle for postliberals to talk about a nonexistent economic liberalism.

New Deal liberals were and are totally different from self-styled economic liberals, serving a *popular* constituency—so it's odd that Deneen attacks them, too. After all, they often acted—as progressives still act—in approximately the same way as his ideal aristocracy would, "work[ing] to improve the lives, prospects, and fate of the people." If one cares about the common good, why denounce social democracy, which more than any other capitalist formation protected families and communities? But because the progressive state was irreligious, non-traditional, and supposedly inspired by elite fear and loathing of the people (?), it was and is bad. (Deneen also opines that redistribution of wealth to workers has "led to extensive damage to the broader economic order," citing no evidence.) His preferred reforms include increasing the size of the House of Representatives to 6,000 members; requiring that every American serve one year in the military; "substantially reducing" university education and investing in more vocational education; breaking up monopolistic companies; investing more public funds in infrastructure and manufacturing; penalizing companies that employ undocumented immigrants; banning pornography and passing laws that promote "public morality"; and enacting policies that reward marriage and family formation, such as Hungary has instituted under Orbán. Predictably, he says nothing about labor unions, except, as a parenthesis, that strengthening them is "a worthy undertaking."

Leftists would be more sympathetic to postliberals' contempt for the conventional centrist liberalism of the Democratic Party today, albeit not necessarily for the same reasons. Indeed, many are similarly disdainful of the performative, business-friendly identity politics that has become a dominant ethos in the "professional-managerial class" that postliberals despise. But to call this "class" the real power

elite, the real oppressors—as Deneen and others do—is both laughable and proto-fascist. This thesis is a core premise of right-wing postliberalism, for, if you can find a villain that isn't the capitalist class, you don't have to locate yourself uncomfortably close to the left. The PMC will do the job nicely, since it's a diffuse category of people, many of whom have an elite status, that pervades and partially runs society's hegemonic institutions. Its members tend to be culturally different from the masses of Americans without a college degree, so it's easy to stir up resentment against them, which can be used to elect reactionaries who will do the bidding of the *real* ruling class (while blaming woke liberal professionals for the suffering that results).

Deneen's treatment of the "managerial elite" is influenced by a favorite text of postliberals, Michael Lind's *The New Class War: Saving Democracy from the Managerial Elite* (2020), which itself is influenced by James Burnham's famous book *The Managerial Revolution* (1941). Burnham posited that ownership and control were separated in modern corporations, and that, as a result, a new managerial class was replacing capitalists as the ruling class. This was a flawed analysis: for one thing, despite the transformations of the economy that had indeed occurred in preceding decades, corporations were still subject to the logic of capital, which required that they squeeze profits out of the exploited labor of workers. Capitalism was not ending. But whatever plausibility the thesis may have once had was long gone by the time of the 1980s' shareholder revolution, which Deneen and Lind seem not to have heard of. The stubborn fact is that some people still make their money from ownership and investments, while others make money by selling their labor-power. These two groups tend to have antagonistic interests, an antagonism rooted not in the vague cultural differences between the "meritocracy" and "the people" that Deneen describes—such as (he says) the former's mobility, its "disconnection from a shared cultural inheritance," and its identity politics—but rather in objective structures of how money is made and how power is distributed in the workplace and the economy.

It is true that most professionals occupy an ambiguous place between capitalists and the larger working class. Barbara and John Ehrenreich theorized this ambiguity in their landmark 1977 essay "The Professional-Managerial Class," and Marxists since then have devoted a great deal of effort to making sense of this huge group of people, some of whom have more interests in common with the traditional working class and others with corporate executives and owners. Since its emergence in the early twentieth century to help manage "the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations," the PMC has, most of the time, not shown much solidarity with the blue-collar working class. In fact, in their 2013 essay "Death of a Yuppie Dream," the Ehrenreichs argue it "has played a major role in the oppression and disempowerment of the old working class." Professionals (usually more or less politically centrist, or "liberal" in today's jargon) are easy to dislike, since they often exhibit the vices of high-status groups everywhere: they're prone to being smug, elitist, hypocritical, conformist despite their pretensions to independent thought, complicit in the neoliberal evisceration of society, etc. Leftists are, perhaps, almost as fond of ridiculing them as conservatives; see Catherine Liu's *Virtue Hoarders: The Case against the Professional Managerial Class* (2021) and Amber A'Lee Frost's "The Characterless Opportunism of the Managerial Class" for examples.

Nevertheless, if you want a more communal, just, and sustainable social order, you have to think about strategy. No class exemplifies virtue. The question is whether your agenda will be to dismantle corporate power, the real engine behind the atomization that postliberals decry, or to attack the relative peons of the PMC, who (as the Ehrenreichs note) are beginning to succumb to the disintegrating economic and political forces that have decimated the old working class. The second path is the road of fascism, the search for a scapegoat that only ends up empowering the most vicious elements of the ruling class. The first path, according to which professionals in precarious economic circumstances ought to be *appealed* to instead of vilified, is the road to genuine social change.

In other words, postliberals have to make a decision: do they want to concentrate on combating social liberalism—banning pornography, criminalizing gender-affirming health care for those who suffer from dysphoria, erecting draconian barriers to immigration, banning "liberal" books and school curricula that address America's real history—thereby empowering faux-populist Republicans who will cut social programs, attack unions, increase military spending, accelerate environmental destruction, give

corporations and the wealthy even more power than they have, and devastate families and communities? Or do they want to concentrate on tackling the latter crises and forego a war on social liberalism? They can't have it both ways, because only the left will ever honestly confront the material catastrophes that are savaging working-class communities. The left itself would do well to start prioritizing *class solidarity* rather than only identity politics (as some leftists have argued), but at least it is trying to do far more for the working class than the right is (since the right, after all, exists to serve business). Even Biden's Build Back Better bill, which couldn't pass because of Republican opposition, would have enormously benefited working families through its investments in childcare and preschool, paid family and medical leave, community college, child tax credits, physical infrastructure, affordable housing, health care, and environmental protection.

Thus, because of its alleged interest in the public good but its conservative (Republican) orientation, postliberalism is ultimately incoherent. It is not a new ideology, being in many ways a return of paleoconservatism, of the anti-modernism of Jerry Falwell and Pat Buchanan, even of the—admittedly more extreme—alt-right of several years ago, which shared a lot of the reactionary cultural grievances of postliberals. Deneen & Company try to make their ideas more respectable by invoking Aristotle, Aquinas, Tocqueville, Pope Leo XIII, and other exalted names, but this is a transparent exercise in idealistic mystification. The proto-fascism is right below the surface.

There is a particle of hope, however. If more postliberals choose the left-wing path of *Tyranny, Inc.* than the far-right path of *Regime Change*, they might manage to make a positive contribution to American politics. But this will require shedding their illusions about the likes of J. D. Vance, Marco Rubio, and Josh Hawley, and instead following the example of, say, Bernie Sanders. That's where a humane, working-class politics is to be found.

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The Origins of Patriarchy

One of the many reasons that any Left that emerges from academia—as does much of today's "Left," with its disproportionate emphasis on issues of gender, race, and sexuality—is doomed to ineffectiveness is that academics tend to cultivate a stubborn refusal to think. Truth and justice are of less concern to them than careers, academic politics, and adherence to institutional norms. The result is that they can sometimes be blind to the most obvious facts of the world, preferring to "complicate" even the essential, albeit simple, insights that are much more far-reaching than the "problematizations" that are preferred. Turbid and pretentious thinking blocks the way to both truth and a rational politics.

Some aspects of contemporary feminism are a case in point. No reasonable person could deny that women, like men, have a right to economic and social well-being (with all the "radical" implications of that fact), but reasonable people can certainly object to some of the confusions and dishonest fixations of left-liberal feminism. These revolve around the concept of "patriarchy," that nefarious thing that has existed for thousands of years across most of the world. So what is patriarchy?

In the most general sense, it just means male domination. It has many dimensions, from intimate relationships to the possession of power in political and economic institutions. Wherever it exists, there is said to be misogyny and oppression of women; thus, it is always rooted in "men behaving badly." If men would simply respect women, and if patriarchal indoctrination were eradicated, male domination would wither away and the sexes would finally be treated as equal.

According to these notions, which have become feminist dogmas, male domination is as unjust and oppressive as, say, capitalist domination and exploitation of workers, or imperialist domination and exploitation of foreign countries. Men are the main problem, and they have to be educated, lectured, browbeaten, and ridiculed (as they often are in liberal and left spaces) into a deep awareness of their undeserved privilege, so that they'll be persuaded to give up their privilege for the greater good. This massive project of dismantling patriarchy will doubtless alienate much of the public, both men and women,

pushing them away from the left and into the arms of the far-right, but that, supposedly, is the price of progress.

One of the latest sallies in this long-running feminist crusade is a book published this year entitled *The Patriarchs: The Origins of Inequality*, by science journalist Angela Saini. It's a sprawling survey of the alleged origins of patriarchy, of myriad examples of it around the world, of its academic theorizations, and of resistance to it. While the book isn't without merit, its chief interest is in its manifesting the intellectual shallowness and self-deception with which feminism itself is plagued. It presents an opportunity, therefore, to dispel some common confusions that have had baleful political consequences. Maybe if we can give more plausible answers to questions around "patriarchy," this will discourage frivolous pseudo-political research and activism in favor of attention to more urgent issues such as the revival of the labor movement, the resurrection of social democracy, and mitigation of global warming.

As a social constructionist feminist, Saini premises her entire account on the obligatory, but false, denial that there is anything natural about male domination. She quotes primatologist Frans de Waal: "I think when people say that patriarchy is sort of natural for the human species,…that male dominance and male violence are natural, I think they are totally exaggerating." Here we have a characteristic instance of sloppy thinking. Male *physical* dominance is of course entirely natural: on average, men are stronger, larger, and taller than women. So, this dimension of "patriarchy" is indeed dictated by nature.

Moreover, given that the anthropological consensus is that a strict *matriarchy* has never existed whereas social systems manifesting some degree of patriarchy have been overwhelmingly common in history (if not universal), in what sense is male dominance not "natural"? There is evidently *something* about human nature that causes patriarchy to keep reappearing again and again, countless times, in societies many of which have had no contact with each other, from at least the Neolithic era to the present. The Marxist anthropologist Maurice Godelier went so far as to argue that even in the most egalitarian societies, "in the last analysis" it is likely that men have "occupied the summit of the power hierarchy"—doubtless because, in the last analysis, questions of power are grounded in questions of physical force. In principle, if men wanted to, they could always band together and forcibly have their way with the women. Brute facts of physiology therefore mean that women and children are in some respects subject to male power, and that it is men's good will that keeps their potential violent self-assertiveness in check.

Feminists have sometimes denied the salience of male physical strength, size, and aggressiveness, but their arguments have been unconvincing. Consider one example: in her overrated classic *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett remarked that "male supremacy…does not finally reside in physical strength but in the acceptance of a value system which is not biological." But value systems can certainly be grounded in biology, so this statement isn't quite true. (For instance, the value placed on sex and procreation is clearly biological in origin, as is the value placed on strength.) Similarly, Millett averred that "superior physical strength is not a factor in political relations—*vide* those of race and class." This seems true enough, until one reflects that if some race of people were discovered who happened to be physically weak, we would hardly be surprised to find that they were, e.g., frequently enslaved by others. That is to say, contrary to social constructionist orthodoxy, "nature" (as opposed to nurture) is very relevant to social relations.

The postmodern feminist insistence that "culture" is everything and "nature" is nothing does not withstand a moment's scrutiny. It is still regularly denied, for example, that sex hormones have anything to do with gendered behavior, but this is a ludicrous anti-scientific idealism (culturalism) that has been refuted countless times. Even apart from male physicality, there are natural tendencies toward masculine dominance. The ubiquitous identification of masculinity with such qualities as relative autonomy, detachment, strength, self-control, and self-possession, all of which are valorized as manifesting a kind of dominance, does not come out of thin air. It results from the average behaviors and psychologies of the sexes, not from some malevolent conspiracy of misogynists to oppress women and spread groundless stereotypes.

One doesn't need acute observational skill to notice that, cross-culturally, women tend to laugh and cry much more often than men, to have more intense emotions, and to be more excitable than the somewhat "detached" male. To take a flippant example: the female tendency to scream and run at the sight of a mouse or a cockroach or some other critter, and to appeal to a nearby man to deal with it, doesn't exactly exude

dominance or self-control.[1] Neither do tendencies to cry or "giggle" far more easily than the opposite sex. The experiences of a trans woman like Julia Serano are of interest here: in ***Whipping Girl***, Serano writes about how her emotions became more intense after her hormone therapy, as did her senses of touch and smell, and her sexual sensitivity and pleasure. Susceptibility to emotions—things that *happen to* you, that you can't really control—and sensitivity to physiological sensations are, again, antithetical to the valorized concept of self-control.

Given all these biological facts, and the fact that it's natural for the sexes to define themselves in relation to each other, it is perfectly rational for women, on average, to embrace their comparative advantage in attributes such as "nurturing," feminine physical beauty, attractive anti-masculine behavior like "giggling," and empathetic receptiveness. It happens that these traits don't lend themselves to asserting dominance. But they're attractive to men, just as masculine confidence, strength, height, financial prosperity, and charisma are attractive to women. It isn't "misogyny" that draws the sexes to each other in this way, with contrasts being drawn such that the relative dominance of one sex is valued by both. It is just the natural dialectic of sexual attraction.

Indeed, in light of women's valorization of relative male dominance in romantic and sexual contexts, it can rankle that feminists denounce this same dominance as being terrible and misogynistic. On one hand, women will not rarely want a man to protect them, which is to say have a slightly higher status than them (for one's protection of a "weaker" person indicates one's higher status). In the realm of dating, they will often say they want a man who can "make them laugh," a desire and phrase that indicates a self-conception of relative passivity. Or they'll want a man to take them to dinner or a movie, to buy them flowers or jewelry, or more generally to provide for them, all desires that place women in a position of passivity in relation to the man.

On the other hand, the very notion of male dominance is supposed to be morally odious. It's no wonder that a lot of young men today are confused about what's expected of them. But if you take seriously the implications of feminist dogma, you should consider female desire itself morally odious! A large proportion of women, for instance, enjoy rough sex, which is to say overt male dominance. Sex in general is a pretty "patriarchal" affair: one party is being penetrated, acted on (acted in), ejaculated into, ecstatically subjected to the perceived muscular strength of the other. Sex is rather important to human life, so one suspects that its mechanics of male assertiveness and female receptiveness might condition general patterns of human psychology.

Being a doctrinaire social constructionist, Saini mentions none of this. In fact, she never really answers the question of how male domination began or why it is so universal, perhaps because doing so would necessitate acknowledgment of these unsayable facts. Instead, in an attempt to sum up her discussion, she says, "States institutionalized human categorization and gendered laws; slavery influenced patrilocal marriage; empires exported gendered oppression to nearly every corner of the globe; capitalism exacerbated gender disparities; and religions and traditions are still being manipulated to give psychological force to the notion of male domination." All this is doubtless true, and one can agree that many forms of patriarchy can and ought to be dismantled. But it is wrong to deny obvious facts just because they conflict with feminist ideologies.

If no aspect of male dominance is grounded in biology, does that mean male dominance in sports and athletics has nothing to do with biology? Men are primarily responsible for building the material infrastructure of civilization (which elevates their status): is this unrelated to their greater physical strength, or their typically greater visual-spatial abilities and interest in mechanical problems?

Men's sexual arousal is stimulated in large part through the visual sense. Since the sexes want to attract one another, it is, therefore, rational for women to beautify and objectify themselves, even if this

[1] That sentence might sound like mockery, but it isn't. It's a true statement of how people, both men and women, perceive certain kinds of "feminine" behavior in relation to "masculine" behavior. These simple, daily behavioral tendencies, which in the case of this example are hardly a product solely of "socialization" or "culture," influence how people think of women and men in relation to each other (e.g., less-dominant vs. more-dominant, on average). It is puzzling that most gender theorists and feminists are blind to the significance of these behaviors.

also causes them sometimes to be treated more as objects than subjects. The infamous "male gaze" that can, indeed, be dehumanizing isn't merely a social artifact but is partly an expression of male biology. To demonize the male sex for its "objectification of women," as if that's always misogynistic, is thus to demonize how the male brain works.

Relative male dominance is so deeply embedded in society and the human mind that it can never be wholly extirpated. It is everywhere. Every chivalrous gesture expresses masculine authority. When couples marry, the woman often wants to adopt her husband's last name. In ballroom dancing, men are the customary "leaders," which is apparently a form of patriarchy (because it's male domination). Men are expected to refrain from hurting women's feelings, in fact to treat them, in some measure, with greater respect and kindness than they treat other men—evidently because women are perceived as more emotionally fragile than men. Implicit in a man's romantic attraction to a woman is a kind of condescension, a *protective* urge, not radically different from his urge to protect his children.

None of this means men are "superior." On average, women are superior in some ways, men in others. (And there are always exceptions.) Value-judgments are not the point, and only an immature or damaged person would care about them. The point is to understand, not make cheap judgments.

One wishes, in short, that feminists would show a little more understanding of women and men. The habit of demonizing the latter, the treatment of them as little more than oppressors, is intellectually, morally, and politically unjustifiable. Some kinds of "patriarchy" are both natural and good, and are appreciated by women (even if not all will admit that to themselves). Some kinds of sexism, such as protecting women and being kinder to them than men, are good and are widely valued. It may be unfair that masculinity tends to be respected more than femininity, but this is hardly the only instance of unfairness in life. It's also unfair that, *ceteris paribus*, tall men are valued over short and strong over weak, and that physically attractive people are preferred to the unattractive, and the charismatic to the uncharismatic. Nature itself is unfair: the emotional and cognitive structures of the human brain did not evolve to primarily heed the moral quality of "fairness."

Not all feminism, however, is trivial or deluded or consists of barely concealed misandry. Materialist feminism, in particular, is essential: all women should have the right to free childcare, extended maternity leave, pay for household work, strong unions, generous wages, high-quality education, and a rewarding job. It should be widely accepted for women to have positions of dominance in political, economic, and cultural institutions. Even foreign policy ought to be considered a feminist issue: militaristic policy is hardly in the interests of women and children abroad and domestically. (It is telling, then, that feminists rarely have much to say about it and do even less to organize against it.) Addressing all these injustices, in fact, would be the most effective way of raising the "cultural" status of women with which academic feminists are so concerned.

If the feminist movement were to prioritize issues of economic security, it could become a major asset to the left. It could help draw people away from a Republican Party that ridiculously claims to speak for the working class; it would help revive a labor movement that is crucial to elevating women's conditions. But in order to rise to this level, it first has to shed its academic influences and theoretical pretensions. It has to treat its culturalist preoccupations with theorizing gender, sexuality, and some monolithic thing called patriarchy as being second-order concerns. Whether in the coming years feminists will be able to shift their priorities remains to be seen, but few political projects can be more urgent.[1]

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And here's something I wrote back in 2014, which I included in my third book:

[1] [After posting that article on academic websites I got an email from some woman that made my day: "I randomly came across your article 'The Origins of Patriarchy' last night and as an outspoken feminist… oh my god! I was fuming. If you're that articulate in the classroom and if you were to give a lecture about that topic, some of your female students would have the biggest crush on you haha." I love infuriating idiots! But she's probably right that some students would have a crush on me, which in itself is pretty telling (as regards female psychology).]

Thoughts on Stupidity

One of the books I'd like to write someday is a comprehensive investigation of stupidity. I want to demonstrate its ubiquity, from politics to philosophy and so forth, and then try to explain it in various ways, using biology, psychology, and commonsense reasoning. It's just astonishing how *bad* people are at certain kinds of thinking (such as empathy and abstract reasoning), and I want to understand this. In part it's a result of contemporary social structures, but in part there must be biological and psychological causes.

I'm not talking about things that require real talent, such as quantum physics or hyper-abstract philosophical reasoning or even being good at reading maps. I'm talking about common sense. Very few celebrated philosophers have philosophical common sense (for example, they ask idiotic questions like "Can computers think?" or "Can machines understand language?,"[1] etc.); feminists and postmodernists have ridiculous radical-empiricist ideas about biology's irrelevance to gender norms or the mind's being a nearly blank slate; intellectuals tend to have naïve conceptions of how politics works, and they often have little institutional self-understanding; Leninists think it's possible for "the working class" to simply take over the national government, while many anarchists are convinced that if we can just abolish the government, things will be great. And then there's the political right wing, and ordinary people everywhere (including in the educated elite). Wherever I turn, I'm suffocated by this miasma of stupidity.

The first task is to distinguish between the types of stupidity. As I said, I don't find a simple lack of talent to be particularly interesting. Everyone lacks some talents. I myself am a moron at activities that require visual-spatial intelligence or kinesthetic intelligence, and I'm pretty bad at mathematics. Such facts are in large part a function of one's genetic endowment, and so there is really nothing that needs explaining. A lack of social intelligence, which has much to do with a subtle deficiency in empathy, is a little more interesting: I've always been intrigued by people who talk about themselves endlessly, unaware of how boring they are. Or people who act awkwardly without knowing it. (Introverts, on the other hand, are often aware of their occasional awkwardness but can't do much about it. Sometimes they just don't know what to say, or they're *too* aware of themselves as viewed by others, and so end up being uncomfortably quiet.) But this isn't so mysterious: aside from its being obviously, in part, a reflection of straightforward genetic factors, social unintelligence is somewhat explainable by the fact that people are more interested in themselves than others. Necessarily so. With some, this manifests itself partly in a lack of sensitivity to other people's reactions. They enjoy talking so much more than listening that it can seem as though all you have to do is shove a person in front of them and, like a pigeon responding to a stimulus, they'll launch into an extended monologue.

Incidentally, a lack of "sensitivity" (physical, emotional, and cognitive) is of course one trait—even a defining trait—of broadly unintelligent people. Arthur Schopenhauer understood this when he said, in his curmudgeonly way,

> The truly stoical indifference of ordinary persons to noise is amazing; no noise disturbs them in their thinking, reading, writing, or any other work, whereas the superior mind is rendered quite incapable by it. But that very thing which makes them so insensitive to noise of every kind also makes them insensitive to the beautiful in the plastic arts, and to profound thought and fine expression in the rhetorical arts, in short, to everything that does not touch their personal interest… Actually, I have for a long time been of the opinion that the quantity of noise anyone can comfortably endure is in inverse proportion to his mental powers, and may therefore be regarded as a rough estimate of them. Therefore, when I hear dogs barking unchecked for hours in the courtyard of a house, I know what to think of the mental powers of the inhabitant. The man who habitually slams doors instead of shutting

[1] In recent decades an incredible amount of "research" in philosophy, the cognitive sciences, and artificial intelligence has been devoted to answering questions like these. As Noam Chomsky says, it all consists of "confused attempt[s] to answer a question that has no meaning." Noam Chomsky, *Powers and Prospects* (London: Pluto Press, 1996), 40.

> them with the hand, or allows this to be done in his house, is not merely ill-mannered, but also coarse and narrow-minded. That "*sensible*" in English also means "intelligent," "judicious," accordingly rests on an accurate and fine observation.[1]

Schopenhauer exaggerates here, but it does seem that, for whatever reason, the different kinds of sensitivity tend (though not always) to exist together in a particular person. Someone highly sensitive to physical stimuli will also likely be sensitive—or will have the mental potential to be sensitive—to artistic and/or intellectual stimuli, and to people's reactions to him, and to the thoughts and emotions behind people's facial expressions (a capacity that amounts to a kind of empathy). From what I gather, neuroscience isn't advanced enough yet to explain why this may be so—if indeed it is so.

While the psychologist Howard Gardner has famously described eight or nine different kinds of intelligence, including musical, linguistic, interpersonal, intra-personal, and so on, people usually have in mind something more general when thinking "He's smart!" or "He's a little slow." This broad impression that one gets of someone's intelligence evidently involves various modalities, including his empathy or interpersonal intelligence, his intra-personal intelligence or awareness of his own feelings, thoughts, and motives, and his linguistic intelligence or ability to verbalize thoughts, memories, feelings, etc. Together, these seem to be the main determinants of our opinion of another's general intelligence. Of course in specific contexts other things come into play; for instance, as I said a moment ago, someone might well conclude that I personally am not very smart if he observed my absentmindedness or my forgetfulness.

But the general mental "slowness" of many people, such as the elderly or some working-class people you see in public buses, is mildly interesting. It must have to do with the brain's slower processing of information, or a less efficient neural circuitry than in "intelligent" brains. What role does one's social environment play in this? Surely poor education during youth may contribute to mental slowness, or a low IQ, later in life. Physical health is certainly important: research shows that malnutrition severely hinders cognitive development in children.[2] Insofar as people in the lower classes lack the money to eat as healthfully and buy as good an education as those in the upper class, they're at a clear disadvantage. Nor are they helped by the frequent necessity of parents to work two or more jobs—intellectually stultifying jobs—or by the unhealthy and un-nurturing home environment that may result from this fact and other stresses of low-income life.[3] Moreover, with a low income one likely has less easy access to books, high culture, varied social experiences, and other intellectual stimulation than the middle-class or well-off, which may cause innate potential to atrophy. Living in dilapidated, crime-ridden neighborhoods, or in culturally barren trailer parks or low-income suburbs, may foster certain types of intelligence but rarely the kinds valorized by mainstream society. –I'll return to the "working class" in a moment, for, despite all these disadvantages, in some respects its members show more intelligence than their supposed betters.

What I'm most intrigued—and disturbed—by is not low IQ but rather three very common deficiencies: a lack of empathy, a lack of self-insight, and a deficiency in the capacity to reason or "think abstractly." These deficiencies seem to be spread fairly evenly throughout the U.S. population and aren't obviously distributed by class—with the partial exception of the empathy deficit, which appears to be more common among the wealthy than the middle class or the poor.[4] This particular finding is an example of

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[1] From *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. II.

[2] See, e.g., Hasanain Faisal Ghazi and Syed Aljunid, "Eating for Intelligence: Breakfast and IQ among Iraqi Children," United Nations University, http://unu.edu/publications/articles/eating-for-intelligence-iraqi-children.html (accessed April 1, 2014).

[3] Such stresses in themselves appear to affect intelligence, according to research. See Amina Khan, "Poverty can sap brainpower, research shows," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 2013. As for the home environment, research confirms the obvious: "the family in general, and the mother in particular, need to provide a *varied* amount of stimulation, to allow exploration, play and varieties of perceptual experience… In rearing the child, the 'climate' seems important—democratic but demanding, a home which encourages resourcefulness and independence. These probably lead to clearer and richer concepts, not to mention a belief in one's 'self.' This all strengthens the ability to 'cope.'" David W. Pyle, *Intelligence: An Introduction* (Boston: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1979), 58.

[4] See Daniel Goleman, "Rich People Just Care Less," *New York Times*, October 5, 2013.

science confirming common sense. People are influenced by their social environment, which, to a great extent, amounts to their class position, since one's economic resources largely determine where one lives, whom one interacts with, what kinds of institutions one identifies with, etc. Or, from a different perspective, in order to rise in the ranks and become "wealthy" one is often compelled to act in a generally selfish and greedy way. However you look at it, therefore, the wealthy face many pressures to develop unsympathetic character traits like arrogance, greed, and a lack of empathy. The human tendency to rationalize everything one does and justify one's social existence further tempts the rich into adopting Social Darwinistic ideologies, such that they may have contempt rather than compassion for the poor.

Conversely, it is well-known that the poor are far more generous than their "betters." They give relatively more to charity than the rich do, and studies have shown that they're "more attuned to the needs of others and more committed generally to the values of egalitarianism."[1] No surprise there: knowing hardship firsthand, the poor have more compassion for the suffering. And they may well live in a more communal environment than the rich, which itself fosters mutual understanding and concern—especially since this ethic of mutualism helps the poor survive. If empathy can be called a kind of intelligence—an emotional understanding of others, an ability to imagine oneself in their shoes and see the world through their eyes—then it would seem that in this respect the poor are more "intelligent" than the socially esteemed.

On a broad scale, the dearth of empathy and the pervasiveness of stupidity throughout history have often dumbfounded progressives and radicals. The socialist Einstein famously remarked, "Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity. And I'm not sure about the universe." (Another fun quotation of his is, "The difference between stupidity and genius is that genius has its limits.") One can be sure that he was, at least in part, thinking of Nazism, the very epitome of a lack of empathy. And its lack of empathy made possible—indeed, was a component in—its unbelievable stupidity. Its racist thinking exemplified one classic psychological source of the empathy deficit, namely humans' categorization of particular others as *other*—and an inferior or hateful other at that. This affective labeling evidently interferes with cognitive functioning, such that one may become insensitive to rational considerations. No amount of science or philosophy could have convinced most fervent Nazis that their hatred of "the Jew" (or the Slav, the Communist, the Gypsy, the homosexual) was idiotic; their hate was a brutal and stupid primitive "structure of feeling" in their minds that caused them to act in brutal and stupid, primitive ways. Emotional impulses directed *against* people or types of people, as opposed to impulses of openness and compassion, seem to be dangerously susceptible to a disregard of facts and logic if they contradict the content of the impulse.

In short, it is surely the case that much of the stupidity, or inability to reason objectively, that Einstein lamented is directly related to an absence of empathy and openness, and a knee-jerk psychological defensiveness. Comments on the internet, for instance, frequently provide evidence for this. These reflections of mine from a few years ago give an example:

> Chomsky recently wrote an article describing how the rights enshrined in the Magna Carta have been shredded in the last five hundred years. Naturally, in the "Comments" section under the article online are observations to the effect that Chomsky, that horrible Commie, wants to take us back to the year 1215. Etc. An eight-year-old would understand Chomsky's point(s), but apparently these people can't. They've been indoctrinated into a pre-eight-year-old level of intelligence and rationality. They can't interpret statements from "Commies" except through a fog of "Fuck you." Virulent hostility toward people who challenge them so colors their mind that they *can't understand what is being said*. It becomes impossible to consider arguments on their merits; all that really registers (implicitly) in these people's minds is that "This horrible guy is saying 'Fuck you!' to me—his very existence is a 'Fuck you!'—so I have to defend myself [i.e., my opinions and sense of self] by attacking him." It's a fascinating phenomenon, which gives clues as to how Nazism and concentration camps are possible. Hatred of the Other, whether Commie or Jew or whatever, *consumes the mind*, so that any capacity for lucid reasoning is lost and

[1] Paul Piff, quoted in Ken Eisold, "Why Are the Poor More Generous?," *Psychology Today*, August 23, 2010.

> the other's humanity is barely recognized. The kind of mind susceptible to this descent into semi-madness must be deeply paranoid, anxiously sensitive, insecure, prone to feeling as if it is beset by all kinds of demons that have to be destroyed. Commies, socialists, Muslims, terrorists, gays, big government, immigrants…the whole world is against me! All these evil forces have to be destroyed! Thus: far-right conservatives.
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> There's a continuum, of course; not everyone who hates Chomsky has a thoroughgoing fascist, authoritarian, paranoid mindset. But most have traveled some distance down that road. (Actually, everyone to some extent shares these traits—subtly categorizing certain people and disliking them as instances of that category, etc.)

Affective and cognitive capacities are thus inextricably tied together, to the point that behavior called "cognitive," such as abstract reasoning about politics, history, and societal functioning, incorporates and is grounded in affective attitudes—acts of valuing, of caring, of implicitly sympathizing with other points of view. The more broad-minded and inclusive one can be in these affective stances, the more objective, rational, and "intelligent" one will tend to be. (Even Nietzsche, the supposed arch-perspectivist, in the *Genealogy of Morals* recognized the possibility and necessity of such objectivity: "There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective 'knowing'; [but] the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity,' be.") The problem is that our society of atomized relations and bitter anonymity, in producing people who are not only isolated from opposing viewpoints but also lonely, unrecognized, hostile, and defensive, discourages inclusive affective stances. Shallow, stupid, dogmatic thinking, often in the form of cruel and anti-human ideologies, is the result.

There are also more straightforward causes of the stupidity epidemic. Powerful people and institutions don't want the masses to empower themselves on the basis of solidarity and knowledge, so they use their considerable command over resources to fragment people and keep them ignorant. The ideal is that they act and think as irrationally as possible, for instance by voting against their own economic interests, refusing to unionize, and blaming their woes on people who are even worse off than they (such as blacks or undocumented immigrants). It isn't necessary to dwell on the ways that big business accomplishes its goals of social control; suffice it to say that when business has a virtual monopoly over government and the media, the kinds of information, entertainment, commentary, ideologies, and educational policies on offer will not conduce to rationality and social understanding.[1] Instead, submissive respect for authority, slavish-mindedness (not questioning what authorities tell you), conformism, thinking-by-emotional-impulse, jingoistic identification with the "home team" (in sports, politics, and other spheres), impatience with sustained analysis as opposed to sound-bites, and lack of interest in substantive issues will be strongly encouraged and valorized—especially in an age of hyper-consumerism and a smashed labor movement. A pronounced intellectual laziness and lack of curiosity about others' beliefs will be widespread, not least because of the self-fixated personality-type manufactured by late-capitalist social structures and consumerist values. And, to repeat, the human tendency to filter out information that contradicts what one believes or wants to believe is accentuated in a society that makes it very easy to surround oneself only with like-minded people and news sources.

It must be said, too, that what someone may unthinkingly interpret as "stupidity" or irrationality is in many cases only *ignorance*. To an academic like me, who has easy access to data, critical studies of society, and left-wing viewpoints, people will seem unintelligent when they engage in the kinds of simplistic discourse that proliferate on the internet and in the media. Doubtless media figures often *are*

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[1] See, e.g., Alex Carey, *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy: Corporate Propaganda versus Freedom and Liberty* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945–60* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985); Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011/1979); and Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979).

unintelligent and dogmatic; but the ordinary people one talks to are frequently merely ignorant of certain facts and opposing viewpoints, because the corporate media do not propagate them. It is lazy and elitist to interpret such ignorance as unintelligence or an indication of it.

All this helps explain the disturbing phenomenon of mass irrational and anti-factual thinking, but I'm still not quite satisfied. Despite understanding these factors, I remain surprised and bewildered each time I encounter a new instance of stupidity. For example, it mystifies me that millions of people can think the 9/11 attack in New York was planned by George W. Bush and/or his associates. Even after hearing compelling arguments against the conspiracy theory, they cling to it. They're unmoved by the argument that even to *attempt* such an improbable and certain-to-be-leaked plot would require literal insanity; or that if the goal was to have an excuse to invade Iraq, it would have made much more sense to blame the attack on Iraqis rather than Saudis (especially since Saudi Arabia is an important ally of the U.S.); or that, in fact, there *was* no leak, which is an impossibility if the plot existed (because its complexity is such that many, many people would have had to be involved, and someone certainly would have leaked the story). Like so many other believers of odd theories, these people are *committed* to an idea and will let nothing stand in the way of their commitment. *What is it like* to have a mind like that? I want to understand how it's possible, but on some level I simply can't. All I can do is state truisms about these people being unable to reason dispassionately on a particular set of issues, or thinking in terms of faith rather than disinterested logic. But, in fact, that seems to apply to *most people*—ultimately to everyone, in certain ways, but some more so than others. Most people, for reasons having to do with both their genes and their social upbringing (nature and nurture), evidently don't have a rigorously self-critical, logical, "broad-minded rationality"-governed cast of mind. The Chomskys are rare, the Sarah Palins common.

But you don't have to go to the extremes of Sarah Palin to find examples of a relative lack of interest in logical and evidence-based reasoning, or the kinds of "insensitivity" I mentioned in the context of the Schopenhauer quotation above. They're very common—throughout history.[1] I have to conclude that nature has designed humans, on the whole, to be creatures less of impartial reason and intellection than of emotion, sexuality, play, self-expression, sensitivity to personal interest, and brute *habit*. This appears to be a trans-historical fact, and thus, probably, is a biologically determined one. In particular, the priority of habit over reason and open-mindedness is striking. We get used to thinking and behaving in certain ways, and it becomes difficult to accept any change. In this sense, humans, like all other species, tend to be conservative, basing their existence on various forms of *repetition*. There is comfort and stability in routine, repetition, habit, the use of already-formed schemata to interpret experiences; and the brain itself evidently prefers to use old neural pathways instead of forging new ones, except when it must. Thus we're averse to changing our minds on an issue or adopting a new affective/cognitive stance—especially if the opinions we already hold have become integrated into our sense of self. In some cases, to change our mind might even necessitate changes in behavior or lifestyle, a very uncomfortable thing. In short, we *value* our beliefs; and to adopt new values, so to speak, isn't easy. Moreover, in this context it means admitting we were wrong about something or were thinking about it in a superficial way, an admission that can be painful, especially if one has a fragile sense of self (as many or most do, regardless of the brave show they put on).

Such considerations help explain why it is frequently so hard to change someone's mind on an issue. In fact, people's beliefs often have the character of lazily held *prejudices*, whether or not we call them prejudices in the narrow sense. Rarely have they been arrived at through processes of disinterested reasoning; more often they're products of socialization, indoctrination, peer-group pressure, and gradual exposure to new views that slowly come to seem less exotic and more familiar, hence "acceptable." For instance, according to Gallup polls, in 2009 only 40 percent of Americans thought that same-sex couples should have the same marriage rights as heterosexual couples; by 2014, that number had risen to 55 percent. The reason is probably just that more people got *used* to the idea—it seemed less strange and radical—as

[1] To give a personal example: all through my years of schooling I was constantly frustrated by the academic dullness of my classmates. Their lack of interest in, and understanding of, everything from mathematics to history to classical music baffled me. Like most people, they were (understandably) more interested in socializing with peers, partying, etc.

media coverage expanded and more states legalized gay marriage. Most of those who changed their mind, I suspect, were persuaded not by specific arguments—they didn't have an "Aha!" moment—but rather by a process of *acclimation*. The majority of people simply don't *care* about arguments very much, or even about ideas, in the sense of wanting to rationally evaluate ideas on their merits and so "disinterestedly" accept or reject them. They have other interests, typically revolving around sociality and self-expression. Their lack of interest is probably both a cause and an effect of a lack of intellectual ability/acuity/sensitivity, in part genetically and in part socially determined.

While I haven't seen any research on this, I suspect that what's usually involved in adopting a new perspective on a subject is a mostly *unconscious* process of acclimation and assimilation. One's *inclinations* or *predispositions* change, as it were. For people who are more intelligent and rational than others—that is, who are able to consider ideas relatively disinterestedly, divorced from any emotional valences they may have—the process of "changing one's mind" is correspondingly under more conscious control, such that they have more free will. But even for these people, once they have decided on a certain viewpoint, they are definitely inclined—"inertially," so to speak—to persist in it. Their minds are *less* brutely and unconsciously inertial than others', but no one is immune to these unconscious and inertial influences. We all have an implicit "web of beliefs" in our mind, an affective and cognitive framework of ideology-fragments, background assumptions about people and the world, intellectual and emotional residues of previous experiences, commitments to particular values and social groups. Insofar as this framework is semi-coherent, changing certain beliefs might necessitate changing many others. Besides, the whole "framework" itself, which in its totality is essentially the very cast of one's mind, tends to be quite rigid (the more so as one gets older). The question is: to what extent is the mental framework with which one interprets the world factually grounded, rationally justifiable, and open to new influences? Given both the authoritarian nature of modern society and most people's evident lack of intellectual interest and acuity, it's hardly surprising that the usual answer is "not very."

Recent research has led to conclusions that are especially unflattering to political conservatives. Supporting the findings of that classic work of social psychology *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), scientists are discovering that "*liberals and conservatives disagree about politics in part because they are different people at the level of personality, psychology, and even traits like physiology and genetics.*"[1] As several scholars write, "There is by now evidence from a variety of laboratories around the world using a variety of methodological techniques leading to the virtually inescapable conclusion that the cognitive-motivational styles of leftists and rightists are quite different. This research consistently finds that conservatism is positively associated with heightened epistemic concerns for order, structure, closure, certainty, consistency, simplicity, and familiarity, as well as existential concerns such as perceptions of danger, sensitivity to threat, and death anxiety."[2] Liberals tend to be more open to new experiences and more empathetic, while conservatives care more about purity, authority, conformity, and in-group/out-group status. They are more sensitive to negative stimuli, such as disgust and danger, than liberals.[3] Inasmuch as empathy, open-mindedness, curiosity, and tolerance of uncertainty can reasonably be thought to correlate with high intelligence and rationality, it would seem, then, that liberals and leftists are on average more intelligent than conservatives. Indeed, research has consistently shown that the socially conservative tend to be less intelligent than the socially liberal.[4] Conservatives also seem more prone than liberals to believing *more strongly* in mistaken beliefs after being shown evidence that these beliefs are

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[1] Chris Mooney, "Scientists Are Beginning to Figure Out Why Conservatives Are…Conservative," *Mother Jones*, July 15, 2014. Italics in original.

[2] Quoted in ibid. The inclusion of "consistency" in this list is odd, since it is easy to demonstrate that rightwing and fascist ideologies are more or less incoherent.

[3] John Hibbing, Kevin Smith, and John Alford, "Differences in Negativity Bias Underlie Variations in Political Ideology," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 37 (2014): 297–350.

[4] See Ronald Bailey, "Are Conservatives Dumber Than Liberals?," Reason.com, June 13, 2014; Satoshi Kanazawa, "Why Liberals Are More Intelligent Than Conservatives," *Psychology Today*, March 21, 2010; Rebecca Searles, "Intelligence Study Links Low I.Q. To Prejudice, Racism, Conservatism," *Huffington Post*, February 1, 2012; John Cloud, "Study: Are Liberals Smarter Than Conservatives?," *Time*, February 26, 2010.

wrong.[1] On the other hand, subjects were more likely to be open-minded if they were first asked to do an activity that made them feel good about themselves—a result that suggests the importance of a healthy, confident sense of self to rational and open-minded thinking. This supports the reasonable idea, referred to above, that dogmatic, irrational, and unempathetic thinking is at least sometimes caused by a deficiency in the sense of self. Thus, to repeat, it's likely that a society with less anti-social structures and values than our own would produce a more rational and intelligent—and informed—population.

Despite all this research critical of conservatives, liberals and leftists are perfectly capable of being dogmatic and irrational themselves. I've already given the example of 9/11 Truthers. Liberal supporters of Obama are another group of people with whom it is frequently futile to argue. They have such an "affective attachment" to Obama that confronting them with evidence and compelling arguments that, e.g., he has too often supported big business over people, presided over an incredibly dangerous expansion of the national security state, been content to *increase* the threat and presence of terror in the world through his global drone-killing campaign, done precious little to address global warming, etc., often only elicits silly rationalizations and *ad hominem* attacks. In these cases it's hard to avoid the conclusion that the liberal's affective commitments are making him insensitive to another, more rational perspective (more rational in that, given the liberal's basic values of freedom, democracy, and social welfare, a consideration of facts makes it more consistent to criticize Obama than to support him).

Of course, no one is totally immune to stupidity and irrationality, because the human mind is not a rational machine. What's disturbing is the frequency of these things, not their existence. Consider intellectuals again. Upon perusing philosophical scholarship, for instance, an intelligent and rational layman is likely to be struck by the sheer perverseness of many of the ideas he comes across. The theories of extended mind, of eliminative materialism, of modal realism, of anti-realism in accounts of what 'truth' is (accounts that reject the correspondence theory of truth), as well as the (incoherent) postmodern denial that there is such a thing as "objective truth," and the common dismissal of the utterly obvious Chomskian idea that the human brain is *programmed* to learn, or 'grow,' language, and countless other bizarre positions, show how difficult *sensible* abstract thinking can be for intellectuals. Earlier in this book I mentioned the peculiar phenomenon of scholars in political science, history, economics, sociology, and other such disciplines denying the existence of class or class struggle, or that the agendas of government and the media are overwhelmingly the agendas of the rich, or that, in general, historical materialism is far more realistic and analytically powerful than idealism. And I needn't repeat the arguments I've brought against certain feminist ideologies beloved by liberal academics.

To the question "How is all this woolly thinking possible?," the answers are fairly obvious and have already been suggested. Their premise is that many or most people are somewhat easily indoctrinated and aren't very acute thinkers, who can turn a critical eye on everything and "intuitively," imaginatively analyze it in the light of objectivity. Certainly very few people have Chomsky's razor-sharp logical vision, which somehow can quickly grasp the essence of a matter and parse it clearly. In the extreme form it takes with him, this is ultra-rationality: a minimal determination by (semi-)emotional states of mind, social and ideological conventions, *ad hominem* attitudes, mere *habit*, and a maximal ability to "step outside oneself" and see things in their proper relations to each other by taking—insofar as is humanly possible—a God's-eye point of view, or something like it.[2] This Chomskian hyper-rationality is a very specific *talent*, which people have to varying degrees. Among most intellectuals, evidently, it isn't closely approximated.

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[1] Marty Kaplan, "The Most Depressing Discovery About the Brain, Ever," *AlterNet*, September 16, 2013. For example, "people who thought WMDs were found in Iraq believed that misinformation even more strongly when they were shown a news story correcting it."

[2] This is the meaning, for instance, of Chomsky's precept that we should apply to ourselves the rational and moral standards we apply to others—something that is rarely done—and try to view ourselves as others might view us. As for not being manipulated by emotions: it's of course true that any passionate leftist can get quite emotional about politics. The point, however, is that the emotions (to the extent possible) have to come *after* the reasoning, so to speak. The latter should ground the former, not vice versa.

Thus, these people have fairly pliable natures: they are taught and socialized to think and act in certain ways, and they willingly do so, assuming that these are the best ways and not devoting much time to critically examining their beliefs and ways of doing things. Or, if they do devote time to that, they must lack a particular *ability*. This seems like the best explanation of why some people, who have been subjected to basically the same influences as others, nonetheless manage to think in more sensible and rational ways.[1] Most philosophers, for example, think mainly on the level of *words*, not "the things themselves" (to quote Edmund Husserl). They discuss concepts and terms like perdurantism and endurantism, dualism and monism, functionalism and emergentism, playing with arguments and modifying them to make them more consistent…never trying to get *beneath* the superficial level of words and think in a deeper, more *intuitive* way.[2] Hence they end up with wildly implausible positions like denial of the private character of consciousness, or they argue endlessly over false and shallow alternatives without trying to "dissolve" the puzzles by showing how they arise out of mistaken ways of thinking.

In fact, the fixation on *words* rather than *substance* is a very common cause and manifestation of stupidity and irrationality. In the broader society it means not only shallow thinking, as with academics, but also such an extreme emotional attachment or aversion to certain words that clear thinking becomes impossible. All it takes is that one invoke terms like free market, conservative, liberal, socialism, communism, welfare, terrorist, big government, Democrat, Republican, Obama—or, among feminists, misogyny, sexism, victim-blaming, "mansplain"—and, as often as not, lucid thinking is thrown out the window. People accept or reject something on the basis of a mere label that serves as a disguised value-judgment, i.e., 'Bad!' or 'Good!' Emotional content effaces cognitive content. The human mind's susceptibility to this phenomenon of emotional labeling has been incredibly useful to power-structures' use of propaganda in the last hundred years, as a way to manipulate people into thinking irrationally.

I won't give examples of *conservative* label-fixation, since they're too obvious. (Some given thing or idea is automatically wrong and horrible because of its association with communism or homosexuals or atheists or black people, etc.) Slightly more interesting are those leftists who fall victim to the same pathology. For instance, after Richard Dawkins argued once that some forms of rape and pedophilia are worse than others, feminists and others among the political-correctness police flooded the liberal media with outrage at what a horrible person Dawkins must be in order to have said that. It didn't matter that even a rational eight-year-old could have seen he was right: it's obviously worse to, say, anally rape a child than to briefly touch his genitals and do nothing else (which is the example Dawkins gave); it's worse to violently force oneself upon a screaming, protesting woman than to have sex with her when both partners are drunk and the woman two days later decides she was "raped." But the words 'rape' and 'child abuse' are so charged that some people become *unable to make distinctions* when they hear them. They reverse the meaning of Dawkins' statement, so to speak: while his real meaning was that some kinds of behavior are more horrific than others, they interpret him as saying that some forms of child abuse and rape are okay or not so bad. And then they protest, "No, child abuse is never okay!" and feel good about themselves for taking such a courageous moral stance. In reality, they're sub-rational morons, at least in that moment of being unable to understand a moral truism.

Anyway, these pathologies fortunately are not universal among the populace, being, probably, more common among the elite than the relatively poor. Since it is the more educated and privileged sectors of the population that are most inundated by propaganda and indoctrination, it should be no surprise that some of the most rational and clear-headed thinking exists among the "lower classes." The white lower class is a partial exception, to the extent that it identifies with the middle class and has contempt for those lower in

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[1] Another factor may be that some people, through accident or mental independence or curiosity, at an early age are exposed to different and more rational ideas than the mainstream, and are to that extent inoculated against indoctrination.

[2] Saul Kripke is one of the few philosophers who appreciates the importance of intuition, as is clear from his books *Naming and Necessity* (1972) and *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (1982). Others include Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Frege, and the twentieth-century phenomenologists, whose method was intuitive and introspective.

status. But, in the U.S., low-income blacks and Hispanics, as groups, probably have a more defensible picture of society than most other socio-economic groups do. For example, a recent poll found that blacks are—justifiably—increasingly pessimistic that progress is being made toward racial equality, an attitude that contrasts with that of the mainstream.[1] A study in 2013 found that higher percentages of minorities say global warming is happening and want the president to take action to address the issue.[2] In general, it's widely recognized that low-income minorities, and to an extent low-income whites, tend to have more progressive political views than the mainstream—and progressive views (with few exceptions) are demonstrably more rational, evidence-based, and empathy-based than conservative views.

I still haven't said much about the third kind of unintelligence I mentioned above: people's lack of self-insight and their (or rather our) remarkable capacity for self-deception. To a degree this phenomenon can be explained by factors I've already invoked, such as low introspective ability, emotional or empathic insensitivity, and susceptibility to indoctrination. But in fact the question of self-deception is such a vast and difficult subject, which has inspired so much literature in philosophy and psychology, that it can hardly be touched upon here. Contrary to what Sartre argued, the mind is profoundly opaque to itself; in many respects we are constantly deceiving ourselves (without knowing it), telling ourselves stories to bolster our self-regard, passing lightly over incidents that might contradict our self-interpretations, refusing to probe deeply into matters that make us uncomfortable because we fear what they might reveal about us, and willingly accepting people's facile approval of us as confirmation of our value. We attribute noble motives to ourselves when a moment of intelligent self-reflection would show that money or power or sex is the deeper motive. We call others cowardly or greedy or selfish without "stepping outside ourselves" to acknowledge that our own behavior is so as well. We tell ourselves we feel a certain way about someone when our real feelings (as shown by how we treat him or her) are quite different. In general, we run on autopilot most of the time, living on the glib and facile level of sociability, not *thinking* about things but just *behaving*, persisting in habits, refusing to subject ourselves to the ruthless rule of reason. It's an understandable and tempting way to live, but not a productive or healthy one.

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Also, I sort of like these thoughts I put in my third book:

The Value of the Humanities

The old question of the humanities' relation to humanity continues to bedevil, bewilder, and bemuse. Intellectuals like Stanley Fish perform mental acrobatics to justify their life-pursuits.[3] Do art and the humanities tend to ennoble? Does immersion in them make moral, elevated, broad-minded, and empathetic? Does it give one a greater appreciation of "life's meaning," or greater understanding of other minds and cultures, or greater capacities for public-spirited and informed citizenship? Does it give one the mental habits and resources with which to live well and resist modern dehumanization? What, in the end, is the humanities' value at all?

Or are the naysayers right that this sphere of study and creation is not only economically unproductive but also elitist, solipsistic, socially disengaging, and in general useless, even harmful? Given the age in which we live, it seems that a clear and forceful statement of the value of the humanities—if indeed we decide they have value—is in order.

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[1] Carol Morello, "African Americans are more pessimistic about racial progress, poll finds," *Washington Post*, August 22, 2013. www.eesi.org.

[2] Margarite Suozzo-Gole, "Fact Sheet: Polling the American Public on Climate Change," Environmental and Energy Study Institute, April 2013, at www.eesi.org.

[3] See Fish's articles "Will the Humanities Save Us?" and "The Uses of the Humanities, Part Two," *New York Times*, January 6 and 13, 2008.

That creating and studying humanistic works need not make humane is shown by the caliber of so many people who create and study these works. "Humanistic" intellectuals are perfectly capable not only of being cultural decadents, contemptible narcissists, and personally immoral obscenities (pedophiles, sadists, abusers of women, whatever you want), but also of being enthusiastic fascists, Nazis, and semi-Eichmannian bureaucrats. The scholarship of Zeev Sternhell, for example, shows how the ideological seeds of fascism germinated in the fecund soil of alienated turn-of-the-century European intellectual culture.[1] George Steiner's thoughts are worth quoting at length:

> The simple yet appalling fact is that we have very little solid evidence that literary studies do very much to enrich or stabilize moral perception, that they *humanize*. We have little proof that a tradition of literary studies in fact makes a man more humane. What is worse—a certain body of evidence points the other way. When barbarism came to twentieth-century Europe, the arts faculties offered very little moral resistance, and this is not a trivial or local accident. In a disturbing number of cases the literary imagination gave servile or ecstatic welcome to political bestiality. That bestiality was at times enforced and refined by individuals educated in the culture of traditional humanism. Knowledge of Goethe, a delight in the poetry of Rilke, seemed no bar to personal and institutionalized sadism… It is at least conceivable [not only that the humanities don't humanize, but that] the focusing of consciousness on a written text, which is the substance of our training and pursuit, diminishes the sharpness and readiness of our actual moral response. Because we are trained to give psychological and moral credence to the imaginary, to the character in a play or a novel, to the condition of spirit we gather from a poem, we may find it more difficult to identify with the real world… Thus there may be a covert, betraying link between the cultivation of aesthetic response and the potential of personal inhumanity.[2]

One can't help thinking of Hannibal Lecter reveling in Bach's Goldberg Variations as he kills and cannibalizes his victims.

It is significant, however, that such juxtapositions seem strikingly incongruous. Great artistic and philosophical works have an intrinsically elevated character, in the sense of embodying and speaking to our higher capacities: reason, spirituality, existential wonder, empathy (thus the genre of tragedy, for example), creativity guided by standards of beauty and human resonance, and the quest for understanding. Whatever the "usefulness" of art and the humanities, their being a manifestation and confirmation of such high values and capacities already justifies them. Humans are perpetually drawn to them, from the cave-paintings of Cro-Magnon man to the poetry of postmodern man. They are the creative facets of the human spirit at play, self-constrained only by rules of logic, proportion, harmony, expressive power, and fidelity to experience. It is a magnificent fact that art and the humanities hold a magnetic attraction for people in all times and of all ages: we're fascinated by them, whether the six-year-old fantasy-conducting a Beethoven symphony or the sixty-year-old writing a commentary on the philosophy of Spinoza. And if the creation and appreciation of such works is, so to speak, justified in itself, so is the study and analysis of them. For that is a humanistic, creative act as well, an expressing of our higher powers, a contribution to the thoughtful assimilating of experience, an oblique contribution to the object of analysis itself (to its meaning for others). This whole humanistic and artistic sphere of life—together with the academic study of it—does not need a justification outside itself; it is justified as long as it moves us, grips us, captures our imagination and is not creatively barren or a parody of itself, as it can be in the hands of mediocrities.

The reason it seems as though art and the humanities *should* have a morally uplifting effect is that they intrinsically affirm humanity. Their pursuit of beauty and truth is a pursuit of what is good and noble,

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[1] Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[2] George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998 (1967)), 60, 61.

what inspires and serves as an ornament to life, what raises one's vision from crass self-advantage to a more disinterested and universal plane of experience. We are drawn out of ourselves and called to join a community of minds. Indeed, one of the foundations of art is empathy, implicit identification with the feelings and thoughts of others; it is largely this that moves us, whether in a piece of music or a poem or a painting. Thus there is a kind of inherent moral quality to art, or at least good art—even to negative works like, say, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. But a huge proportion of art and philosophy—surely the best of it—is more positive, moral, and "humanistic" in spirit than absurdist or nihilistic, and in such cases the connection between morality and the humanities is especially clear. It strikes us as particularly obscene that admirers of Goethe should have become Nazis.

On the other hand, art also exists in tension with humanity, as the passage quoted from George Steiner shows. While the aesthetic may have moral overtones, it is perfectly possible to sacrifice morality in the creation and appreciation of art. In themselves, the ethical and the aesthetic are two very different things. Kierkegaard, for example, illustrates this with his famous story of Johannes the Seducer, whose aesthetic approach to life disregards morality. A lived philosophy of aestheticism, in fact, can be pure decadence, pure moral and psychological rot; see Thomas Mann's story "Death in Venice," or consider an aesthete like Oscar Wilde (whose life, however, was not without some tragic dignity—unlike that of his lover Lord Alfred Douglas, and most other such refined hedonists). The production of art even has an ironic similarity to capitalist production: humans and nature are objectified and subordinated to a "higher" principle, whether beauty and profundity in art or profit and capital accumulation in capitalism. Some film directors are notorious for treating actors cruelly in the attempt to produce a more compelling work of art, and performance artists sometimes integrate violence into their routines. Doubtless such art is rarely good, consisting of mere provocation; but it is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the aesthetic stance, inasmuch as the ethical-for-its-own-sake is obliterated.

From this perspective, there is nothing inconsistent about artists and most types of humanistic intellectuals (except maybe ethicists) being morally objectionable in some way. Art and the humanities constitute a separate sphere of life, a separate set of values, from ethical treatment of others, even if particular works—the large majority—do embody and proceed from an ethical vision that is properly moral. Indeed, the humanities don't *give values* at all; they *reflect* values, as science does, and can be used in the service of any agenda. They don't in themselves give meaning to life or make us appreciate life's value; they don't necessarily make their partaker wise or compassionate or broad-minded. They have no *necessary* utilitarian justification. All depends on *how* one "takes them up." The most that can be said is that using art and the humanities in a morally and intellectually elevated way, to improve oneself and the world, is more consistent with their spirit than *not* being improved by them would be. They are most fully realized when one remakes oneself in the light of the values they embody, namely human connection, exaltation of the imagination, and insatiable hunger for truth. One honors and personifies art and philosophy by treating *oneself* as a work of art and philosophy.

Thus, if you approach art and the humanities with the right attitude, they *can* be all the things stated in the first paragraph above, and that does give them a myriad of utilitarian justifications. A good system of education would approach these works from a humanistic standpoint, not only as valuable in themselves (aesthetically, philosophically, etc.) but as important components of the good life—as means for us to make *ourselves* more valuable. Their study, and the study of good scholarly analyses of them, should make us more thoughtful and empathetic, more informed about the world and better able to act intelligently on that information, more adept at "critical thinking" about people and society, more open to alternative viewpoints, more well-rounded and able to appreciate the "more complexly valuable" experiences we have access to,[1] and, yes, more moral and concerned for others. Reading good literature and literary criticism is not only a pleasure in itself but can foster deeper understanding of ourselves and others; reading moral philosophers and their commentators can and should make us more thoughtful about how we act and interpret our actions; listening to and studying great music can invigorate, can sharpen the appetite for life

[1] Barton Swaim, "Book Review: 'The Value of the Humanities' by Helen Small," *Wall Street Journal*, February 14, 2014.

and cultivate acute sensibilities; studying history can teach innumerable lessons about our own society, where it's headed, and how best to change it. None of this is automatic; it requires good teachers, an educational system that prioritizes humane learning, and an open and interested attitude on the part of students.

Incidentally, these reflections on what the humanities *can* be also provide some criteria for great art, philosophy, historical writing, and critical commentary. The distinction can be conceptualized as between decadence and vitality. The literary criticism of Georg Lukács elaborates on this in detail,[1] but to an extent it is intuitive. What is healthy, and what isn't? What stimulates to action and exalted achievement, and what enervates or alienates or seems comically pretentious? (Much of "avant-garde" art falls under the latter category.) What induces a feeling of brotherhood with humanity, and what fills with contempt or existential nausea? What *integrates*, is ambitious and comprehensive, and what fragments, is overly specialized or parochial? What contributes to realistic understanding, rationally and clearly placing things in proper relations to each other, and what mystifies or obfuscates? Despite what formalists and postmodernists and *l'art pour l'art* advocates might think, considerations of morality and "healthiness" and truth—considerations of *content*—cannot be irrelevant to judging the value of a work of art (although of course art should never be subordinated to ideology or moralism).[2] While it's true that art and the humanities in a sense constitute their own separate sphere of experience with its own standards, on a deeper level they are integrated into life, society, and personality, and cannot or should not be divorced from their context. The Goethean and Marxian attention to the *whole* is the noblest, truest, healthiest, and most moral—most humanistic—approach to living, to art, and to analysis.

Whether any of this justifies the enormous academic apparatus of the humanities is an open question, which I'm inclined to answer in the negative. Most scholarship and criticism is forgettable, and most teaching is of middling value to the student, who is not well served by the anti-humanistic, pro-status quo priorities of the educational establishment. Nevertheless, when done well, humanistic teaching can open the student's mind to new and more adequate ways of viewing the world, and it can even contribute to such things as democracy, civic engagement, and other populist values our society pretends to uphold. In particular, if their spirit is properly imbibed, the humanities can instill a healthy and moral disgust with capitalism, consumerism, arbitrary authority, irrational thinking, war, and all things inhumane. At their heart, art and the humanities are essentially moral, the very jewel of human creativity and moral awareness.

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Actually, since I've included two long-ish sections from my third book, I might as well put some other passages here that I like. I'm not a fan of much of the book, but I think these sections (the book's first sections, plus some other scattered ones) aren't too bad. I'll start with the introduction.

Introduction

This is an odd book, both timely and untimely. From an objective standpoint it is timely, addressing the urgent issues of our age. It takes as its starting point the coming demise of a civilization, at the hands of global warming, economic stagnation and crisis, and possible nuclear war—all ultimately products of corporate capitalism in its neoliberal phase. It consists largely of reflections on how we got here, how to interpret our society and ourselves, and what ideals are worth extracting from the wreckage of the past. It eschews academic conventions in favor of getting directly to the point and not mincing words.

But that is also why it's untimely. Its defiance of institutional norms and political correctness, in addition to its unusual, Nietzsche-esque form, makes it very different from the kinds of books that attract

[1] See, e.g., his *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

[2] Even the postmodernist decadent Susan Sontag recognized the value of this Marxian-humanistic perspective late in her life, when she to some extent repudiated the formalist sins of her youth. See my *Notes of an Underground Humanist*, 432, 433.

traditional publishers and markets. To its cost, it exists *between* academic and popular markets, drawing from scholarship but presenting ideas in an un-academic way. Indeed, the whole of Part Two consists of summaries of and commentaries on left-wing scholarship that has impressed me. Few writers dedicate themselves to collecting and summarizing scholarship, to make it more accessible to the public and bring it all together; Noam Chomsky is one. But since good, materialistic (Marxist or semi-Marxist) scholarship is so useful in explaining our world, I've decided to compile here some of the notes I've taken in recent years on the work of such academics as Robert Brenner, David Harvey, Harry Braverman, David Graeber, and Walden Bello. People who don't find academic writings accessible should nevertheless know of this scholarship and at least read summaries of it, so they have a better understanding of society.

Part One is even more unconventional, jumping from subject to subject in a series of brief reflections. Superficially these "sections" might appear to be random and unrelated to each other, but I have organized them carefully so that thematic threads tie them together. They're taken from a huge collection of notes I've accumulated in the last fifteen years, on philosophy, history, psychology, music, etc. Overall, the unifying perspective is the young Marx's: "For a ruthless criticism of everything existing!," including capitalism, the U.S. government, Western intellectual culture, academia, postmodernism, certain strains of feminism, even the concepts of "genius" and "greatness" that people use to exalt a few individuals and denigrate everyone else. I want to defend the integrity of reason and the individual from attacks by the bane of our age, institutional thinking and behavior. Collectivism is humanity's enemy; unfortunately it's almost ubiquitous in the modern world. But its most dangerous manifestation is corporate capitalism, which is why the book's main polemic is against capitalism.

This book is essentially an extension of my first, *Notes of an Underground Humanist* (2013), and can be read in conjunction with it. Subjects I discuss only briefly here are dealt with in more depth there, and vice versa. My second book, *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution: History and Possibilities in the United States* (2014), is probably the most original and important of the three, containing a major revision of Marxism and clarification of its true relation to anarchism, a discussion of the past and present of the "solidarity economy" (focusing on cooperatives), and a case-study of the successful New Era Windows cooperative in Chicago. Readers interested in a constructive critique of Marxism should turn to that book, which also contains informed speculation about where society may be headed in the next fifty years, as the present *ancien régime* disintegrates.

I have to confess to a rather pessimistic point of view on that score. I think we're all in for some horrific suffering and titanic upheavals. I just hope we make it through the conflagration and into a more peaceful world on the other side.

Part 1

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Valedictory.— Our civilization is approaching the end. We're peering over the precipice, and chaos boils below. The time has come to sum it all up, to take account of where we are and what we've done, and to pass judgment. We, the generations now living, have been lucky or unlucky enough to be present as history nears its climax; we have an abundance of human experience to survey and draw conclusions from, conclusions to pass on to posterity as it surveys the even more breathtaking ruins we'll leave behind. We want to go out with some dignity, with positive lessons to impart to our descendants so that they know not all of us were idiots. We've lived long enough to learn life's truths; we've suffered enough to be wise. Let's cast our glance from the future to the past and grasp the threads of human thought while there is still some link between what was and what is, some memory of what is rapidly fading. Perhaps some future explorer will discover our buried treasure, our Dead Sea Scrolls, and read about lost worlds, and be carried away by tales of folly and adventure. In the meantime, a few glimmers of honesty and perspective may light up our world and reveal it to itself…

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Advice for writers.— In general, it's a good idea for writers to imagine how their work would be seen by posterity. Would their descendants view it as parochial, time-bound, and faddish, or would they still find intrinsic and timeless merit in it? Would it hold up in a different cultural context? If not, the writer should rethink his work so as to give it more universal relevance, thereby heightening its artistic and intellectual value. It's true that one cannot, even in imagination, entirely rise above one's culture and view its artifacts from the outside; nevertheless, insofar as we're *humans* and not mere cultural byproducts, the exercise is partly within the bounds of possibility. Indeed, people are constantly judging their societies and particular social practices from a human, semi-"objective" standpoint; such are moral judgments, properly so-called, grounded in the timeless and universal morality of the Golden Rule, i.e., respect and compassion for others. Aesthetic and intellectual judgments, too, are not mere epiphenomena of a particular culture but are natural, though socially influenced, expressions of innate structures in the human cognitive and affective faculties. The writer's, in fact the artist's and philosopher's and scientist's, task ought to be to transcend the limitations of time and place and appeal to the highest standards of the innately human. Ideally his work would be "immortal."

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Enlightenment.— Said Samuel Johnson, on art: "Nothing can please many, and please long, but just [i.e., true] representations of general nature. Particular manners can be known to few, and therefore few only can judge how nearly they are copied. The irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight a-while, by that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest; but the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth." This statement is a sufficient indictment of most postmodernist art, and most things culturally postmodern. It's time we turned away from relativism, solipsism, social atomism, fragmentary perspectives, ironical self-consciousness, instant gratifications, pop art, pop philosophies, and commodified creativity. Honesty and truth are overdue.

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On the use and abuse of "perspective" for life.— There are delights and dangers in adopting a broad perspective on oneself and one's society. Looking at the "big picture" can either electrify or paralyze one's will. The latter possibility is obvious, given, for example, the big-picturesque horrors of global warming and capitalist global pollution. Oceanic garbage patches the size of continents, slums the size of cities, cities disintegrating into slums, and a planetary future incinerated in the vortex of capitalism are not things that quicken the will to live. Internecine violence running riot from Mexico to the Middle East, from central Africa to Russia, as governments outdo each other in the art of cultivating murderous resentments, does not inspire confidence in one's ability to make meaningful change. Despair on a cosmic scale, encompassing life from low species already extinguished to high species threatened with extinction, suffocates "optimism of the will," "pessimism of the intellect" alone remaining.

The added burden of such modern afflictions has done nothing to ease the ancient burdens philosophers and poets have bewailed since the Upanishads. Earth is a pale blue dot in the infinite expanse of desolate space. What matter our little earthly tribulations or triumphs? Someday we'll all be gone, Earth itself will be gone, and it will be as though nothing ever was. No art, no music, none of the sound and fury of a Faustian but forgotten history. "All is vanity!" The flower of youth wilts, as poets have lamented for millennia, withering into a decayed old age and finally death. Pleasures are evanescent; time consumes all, like Saturn devouring his children. The transience of everything makes life seem meaningless—as does, in another way, the immensity of Earth (however microscopic it is on the cosmic scale), the prodigious mass of humanity compared to which the individual is too puny to mention. People come and go like flies. –The plaintive cry of Ecclesiastes still resonates two thousand years later.

On the other hand, the "big picture" need not be utterly demoralizing. To contemplate the grandeur of the universe can be a nearly religious experience, Kantian in its sublimity. "Two things fill the mind with

ever-increasing wonder and awe," Kant said, "the more often and the more intensely we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me." One feels vanishingly insignificant but gloriously exalted at the same time, uplifted to dazzling infinity as one glories in the ability to *reflect* on this black unbounded cosmos. The relative immensity of Earth, likewise, and one's being a mere momentary individual among billions, fills with wonder and awe, even love for all fellow creatures stranded inexplicably on this floating island in space. Time itself overawes. Translucent as a pellucid mountain river, the life-engendering flow of time carries us along to experience the beauty of *change*. The broad human perspective illuminates hope and the reality of change.

To glance over the modern world is to know the temptation of despair, but it is to know *possibility* as well. Fatalism is a factually incorrect philosophy. Horrors happen daily, but from a broad perspective one sees also constant kindnesses and life-saving interventions. A billion moments of moral beauty every day; ten billion meaningful connections between this life and that life. Even lost in anguish, even surrounded by modern ugliness, one can see beams of hope piercing the gloom. To know the true urgency of humanity's situation, however, *should* entail not wretched immobility but galvanized movement, passionate activism. When people join together, they *can* make meaningful change.

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The Goethean possibilities of history.— A major advantage of living at this time, so late in history, is that the past is a kaleidoscope of cultural achievements, or rather a cornucopian buffet whose fruits one can sample—a kiwi here, a mango there—a few papayas—and then choose which are one's favorite delicacies—which are healthiest, which savory and sweet—and invent one's own diet tailored to one's needs. History can be appropriated by each person as he chooses, selectively used in the service of his self-creation. The individual can be more complete than ever in the past! Only, to bring the magnificent array of possibilities down to earth and so give *all* people the means to sample history's treats requires a revaluation of society's values and transformation of its structures. It's time we spread the banquet not in the gilded halls of the elite but in the humble homes of the people.

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Götterdämmerung.— Albert Camus: "We [moderns] read more than we meditate. We have no philosophies but merely commentaries. This is what Étienne Gilson says, considering that the age of philosophers concerned with philosophy was followed by the age of professors of philosophy concerned with philosophers. Such an attitude shows both modesty and impotence. And a thinker who began his book with these words: 'Let us take things from the beginning,' would evoke smiles. It has come to the point where a book of philosophy appearing today without basing itself on any authority, quotation or commentary would not be taken seriously." The reality that he describes is nothing else than institution-think. Expertly calibrated, self-replicating capitalist-friendly institutions dominate culture, and such institutions cannot get to the heart of the matter or exalt the sort of world-engendering creativity that highly ennobles. What they can do is manufacture minute monographs, reduce to the common denominator, and make ever less relevant to human concerns. I recall what I wrote once in college:

> Looked at the Tufts University philosophy department website; I might apply there. Part of its mission statement is "to provide students with the skills necessary for Ph.D. research, as well as to foster the independence of mind required for genuinely creative philosophical work." It depressed me to read that, as if a draft of nihilism had wafted by: life felt picayune suddenly, mechanical, scholarly—training people to think!—and denying philosophy even as they preach it! Well-oiled parts of the machine, functioning smoothly, cooperating with contemporary ways of doing things. What philosopher has ever cooperated? Philosophy is rebellion, war with authority in every form; it is a *way of life*, not 'tidy thinking' or scholarship or a specialty. Spartacus was a philosopher; Daniel Dennett is not.

The verbose perverseness that passes for philosophy now signifies a perversion of the human spirit, a discursifying of it, a domesticating institutionalizing of it, perversely appropriate to a society that has "repressively desublimated" all that is profound and creative in life. The late-capitalist categorical imperative of culture is to trivialize at all costs and for all profits, to privatize, atomize, marketize, professionalize, impersonalize, and stupidize, all in order to replicate and accumulate, to replicate and accumulate institutions and a New Man, *homo bureaucraticus*. Or, ultimately, *homo economicus*. Certainly philosophy, of all things, cannot flourish in such an environment, nor can anything else that demands to be free and unconstrained by institutional limits. The existentialist cry of the mid-twentieth century—followed by the barbaric yawp of the Sixties' youth movements, preceded by the anti-capitalist vibrancy of labor movements in their heyday and earlier Romantic culture for the modernity-ambivalent elite and saturnalian revelry for the untamed multitude—has died, or faded from cultural prominence, but its echo cannot die until humankind itself does. The cycle continues, and we're about to see another of its revolutions…

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Modernity vs. humanity.— Herbert Gutman's "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815–1919" (1973) reminds us of what a rich world we lost with the standardization and atomization of society. Such diversity and humanness, artisanal craftsmanship and pride, free-wheeling festivals of life outside the factory. Actually, already in the mid-nineteenth century the dehumanization was apparent, according to Mike Walsh in the 1840s: "A 'gloomy, churlish, money-worshipping spirit' had 'swept nearly all the poetry out of the poor man's sphere,' said the editor-politician. 'Ballad-singing, street dancing, tumbling, public games, all are either prohibited or discountenanced, so that Fourth of July and election sports alone remain.'" Local and national power-structures pressing the masses into dull rectangular shapes. The nascent nation-state suppressing local variety, spontaneity being dangerous to centralized power.

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Homo ludens vs. homo institutorum.— The psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott said it simply—one of those simple but profound truths worth remembering: "*It is creative apperception more than anything that makes the individual feel that life is worth living.*" Creativity is not uniquely human, but humans are uniquely creative. We have a need to create, and to love, and to inquire—to express ourselves and see ourselves reflected in the world. We have the urge to *play*, an urge innate in our biological nature. "Creative impulses are the stuff of playing. And on the basis of playing is built the whole of man's experiential existence." The child plays with his toys and his playmates, exploring his new world in the realm of fantasy, like the poet and the artist. The musician *plays* music, as the athlete plays a sport. In theater, one watches a *play*. The scientist and the philosopher play with ideas, perhaps in great seriousness but with those elements of fun, creativity, "tension," and voluntary submission to implicit rules that Johan Huizinga invokes in *Homo Ludens* (1938) to define play. Social life is essentially playful, very clearly so as regards flirting and dating, in which the tension of play takes the form of *sexual* tension. And when things get more intimate the partners engage in sexual *foreplay*—and intercourse itself can be delightfully playful. The ubiquity of games in human societies, from simple hide-and-seek to chess and complex card games, in addition to the thrill of friendly *competition* in indefinitely many forms (athletic, intellectual, artistic, etc.), shows how the agonistic spirit suffuses the human mind. The spirit of play, in short, is the spirit of freedom, "superfluity," joyful self-expression, and immersive engagement with the world.

At the other end of the spectrum are *modern institutions*. Humans, it turns out, are capable not only of play but also of dull and dead seriousness. We have the capacity to *obey authority*, and to imbibe its individuality-denying, repressively collectivistic norms. We join institutions or are subject to them, to the impersonal rules that dictate how we are to act and think, and without even noticing it we participate in the near-extirpation of our individuality (at least in the institutional context). The self-effacing, amoral, mechanical mentality of the typical bureaucrat is the obvious example, which, as Hannah Arendt observed

in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), can lead straight into complicity in monstrous crimes. But more benign manifestations exist. Theodor Adorno already remarked in the 1940s that "even the so-called intellectual professions are being deprived, through their growing resemblance to business, of all joy. Atomization is advancing not only between men, but within each individual, between the spheres of his life."[1] In leisure time one might still "play" and be creative, though mass-produced culture was sapping even leisurely pursuits of their authentically creative and spontaneous element; but in the context of the "job," the rote conformism of *seriousness* had crowded out freedom and self-expression. Ultimately corporate capitalism itself, with its hideous architecture of concrete hierarchies to control society and amass profit, was and is responsible for such pernicious tendencies—for the bureaucratic collectivism that requires but a nudge to become fascist totalitarianism, and for the detaching of hapless functionaries from the consequences of their actions so that professionals and bureaucrats and intellectuals can all become little Eichmanns engineering distant horrors, and for the kitschifying of culture that brings totalitarianism into the sphere of play, and for the routinizing and vulgarizing of creativity that empties life of its meaning. The two principles are at opposite poles: *creative play*, and *capitalist-institutional atomization*.

It is the tragedy of modern man that "two souls, alas, dwell within my breast." We seek self-affirming self-expression—authentic engagement with others—even as we let ourselves be regimented by authority. The path to reclaim play, i.e., our very humanity, is the path to reclaim democracy, human dignity, and social justice: tear down the walls that divide us from ourselves and others. Bring back the "ballad-singing, street dancing, tumbling, [and] public games," and scandalize the bosses with your flouting of their rules. Resurrect the *public*.

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On the Holocaust.— Even seventy years later, having learned nothing, Western intellectuals still love to proclaim with the ponderous air of authority that the Holocaust was "thoroughly at odds with the great traditions of Western civilization," as Richard Rubenstein paraphrases in his book *The Cunning of History: The Holocaust and the American Future* (1975). It was contrary to all our glorious Western values of freedom, truth, beauty, rationality, and other pretty words that intellectuals pretend to admire. Let's leave aside the fact that "the West" has never had a monopoly on such values: they're not *Western* values but *human* values, which people from prehistory onwards have implicitly subscribed to and acted on. More pertinent is the fact that for centuries the West has been more committed to quite different values, such as insatiable greed, plunder and enslavement of foreign peoples, genocide of native populations, vicious exploitation of wage-laborers, murderous hatred of the "Other," ever-increasing policing of society (in both "soft" and "hard" forms), and atomizing bureaucratic collectivism that dehumanizes everything it touches. None of this has been because Westerners are uniquely evil or have a different human nature from other peoples; it has been because a new kind of society arose, structured around the institutional imperative to accumulate capital at whatever cost to the natural and human worlds. At the same time as horrific tendencies of racism and nationalism gradually developed under the influence of an *'inter-nationally'* organized imperialistic capitalism, trends of depersonalization, regimentation, authoritarian control and monitoring of populations, and manufacturing authority-friendly popular attitudes through propaganda grew more pronounced. The relatively "personalistic" slavery of the antebellum American South gave way to the impersonal industrial slavery of the South in the 1890s and later.[1] The violent and tumultuous conquest of society by profit-driven market relations, not *humanizing* but *atomizing* and *instrumentalizing*, spread reifying habits of thought that reduced humans to numbers, calculations, agglomerations, categories, ideologies, foreign objects to be used and discarded. Ever-larger concentrations of capital and industry made possible and necessary ever-larger bureaucracies, with their diabolical Weberian "formal rationality" and "efficiency"—exquisite subordination of every human impulse to the order from on high, the administrative rule, the technique for the smooth functioning of power. Corporate capital and national

[1] See Douglas Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009).

governments matured together, intertwining in their policy formation and administrative machinery, the interests of one often becoming the interests of the other, each requiring for the sake of its power that social dissent be regulated or eradicated and domestic capital continue accumulating. In an over-competitive capitalist world, the obsession of big business with big profits led to nationalistic protectionism, tariff wars, conquest of colonial markets, the "scramble for Africa," an international arms race that exalted "blood and iron" as supreme values, and ideologies of national and racial grandeur to justify all this imperialism. A brutalization of the human spirit proceeded apace, particularly as savage colonial wars and amoral colonial administration trained bureaucrats in the efficient use of pure violence to attain the ends of power.[1] World War I brought imperialist brutality home to Europe, intensifying it exponentially in the process. Afterwards, millions of shattered, defeated, resentful, homeless men roamed the continent, seething with rage against this society that had forgotten them, directing their rage at scapegoats readymade by the ruling class's ongoing demonization of them: Socialists, Communists, Jews, foreign peoples, effete intellectuals—anything and anyone whose targeting would distract from class structures. Again capitalism plunged into crisis: the Great Depression happened, which raised fears among ruling classes that organized labor or even Communists would attain political power. To prevent this, in a political environment of gridlock and dysfunction, conservatives and big business turned in desperation to the fascist movements that had spread in the 1920s, which they thought they could control. They installed Hitler, and elsewhere in Europe fascist parties made significant headway.[2] Under Hitler, finally, all the nefarious tendencies of Western civilization that had been building for decades and centuries were unleashed in a *danse macabre* that culminated in the most unfathomable enormity in history, the Holocaust. The racism, the institutional and ideological "categorizing" of people, the enslavement and genocide of the Other, the efficient doing-away-with superfluous people (the Jews were made stateless so that no government had to protect them), the impersonal cost-benefit mode of thinking, and the totalitarian aspects of bureaucracy, states, corporations, capitalism itself, were all perfected—the principle of submission to authority was deified. It should be noted that Nazism and the Holocaust were singularly compatible with corporate capitalism: big business all over the West cooperated with and funded the Nazis (at least until that became politically inexpedient in Allied countries during World War II), who performed a useful service in destroying the German labor movement; and Jewish slave labor was gratefully used by politically connected companies. Nor is there any inherent reason why business should object to genocide, which, in fact, can be profitable for firms lucky enough to get the contracts.[3] Clear elective affinities exist between the anti-humanism of capitalism—everything subordinated to the mania for profit, workers ideally being pushed down to a starvation diet for the sake of profits (or, even better, being eliminated entirely through mechanization and automation)—and the anti-humanism of Nazism, which subordinates everything to the mania for power. The superfluity of *humanity* to capitalism was made literally manifest in the superfluity of individuality, personality, and millions of physical beings to state-capitalist totalitarianism—such that the death-factories can perhaps be considered an apt symbol of modernity itself. –In short, far from being a betrayal of Western values, the Holocaust was the *apotheosis* of some of the most deep-seated, albeit implicit, Western values and social structures. Even if it hadn't happened, the catastrophe it signified would have anyway, namely the elimination of human connections in mass society and in the dominant institutions of modern civilization.

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[1] See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1958). Nikolai Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy* (International Publishers Co., 1929) is a good analysis of the sources and nature of imperialism.

[2] See, e.g., Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005); Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); and Daniel Guérin, *Fascism and Big Business* (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1939).

[3] As Rubenstein argues, "both genocide and slave labor proved to be highly profitable enterprises… The business of mass murder was both a highly complex and successful corporate venture," as it has always been during the imperialistic age from the 1870s to the recent Iraq war. After all, "the same attitude of impersonal rationality is required to run successfully a large corporation, a death camp slave factory and an extermination center. All three are part of the same world." *The Cunning of History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 60, 62. The thoroughly capitalist nature of the Nazi regime is made clear in Ernest Mandel's *The Meaning of the Second World War* (London: Verso, 1986).

This plague of multifarious inhumanity has by no means been overcome since World War II; it has only assumed different forms in an age in which explicit racism and virulent nationalism have—at least until recently—gone out of style.

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To see the Holocaust in a grain of sand.— While the industrialized murder of six million people is in a category all its own, one can observe in daily life many of the tendencies that make it possible. The thinking that sees the machinery of death as solely a thing of the past, an incomprehensible anomaly that we have decisively overcome in our more enlightened age, is deeply embedded in us but, as the "enormous condescension of posterity" always is, deeply wrong. One needn't invoke the obvious monstrosities to show how a semi-Holocaustic spirit, a spirit of distanced disregard for all human and natural considerations (including the very survival of the species), still suffuses our society. One needn't, for instance, point to the U.S.'s bureaucratically administered near-annihilation of Vietnam for the sake of preventing a national liberation movement from starting a "domino effect." One needn't mention the U.S.'s provision of arms to Indonesia between the 1970s and 1990s with which to slaughter hundreds of thousands of East Timorese, nor the Reagan administration's torture of Central America to "shock and awe" the population into acceptance of reactionary governments and domination by U.S. business. One needn't invoke the Clinton administration's murder of maybe half a million Iraqi children by means of economic sanctions, nor the second Bush administration's destruction of Iraq to get control of the country's oil and benefit politically connected companies like Halliburton, nor, in general, any of the *thousands* of heinous Western political crimes documented in books by Noam Chomsky, Alexander Cockburn, Edward Said, Naomi Klein, Jeremy Scahill, left-wing historians like Gabriel Kolko and Walter LaFeber, and too many other critical voices to list. It's not even necessary to mention the most recent abominations of drone warfare—murder by video-game—or killing of particular people (including American citizens) by executive fiat, or indefinite detention without trial, or construction of a surveillance state that dwarfs anything even dreamed of by Hitler or Stalin. All this is in direct continuity with traditions that eventuated in the Holocaust, but to discuss these obscenities is superfluous. It makes it too easy for me to make my case.

No, I see the machinery of death—can't help seeing it—in the very *words* spoken by low-level bureaucrats, in gestures of contempt by police officers (quite apart from rampant police brutality), in someone's command to "Get away, this is private property!," in a corporation's laying off a thousand workers for the sake of the bottom line, in pop culture's erasure of individuality, in academia's enforcement of "politically neutral" scholarly norms, and in the very *anonymous* structure of capitalist mass society. When an airport security guard callously rifles through someone's luggage or behaves in an intentionally brutish way—indeed, when an airport employee simply commands you, in the *I-will-not-be-contradicted* tone of authority, to step back behind the line because it's not your turn yet—the kernel of moral horror and human degeneration is evident. When an employee says, "I'm sorry, it's the rules; I didn't make them, I just follow them," he has already placed one foot on the path to Nazism. All it takes now is the right circumstances and a succession of nudges for him to become a gas-chamber attendant or an SS officer. For he has forsaken rationality, independence, freedom, sympathy for others, and absolved himself of responsibility and the need to have a conscience. Because of its rarity, few things impress me more than when someone "doing his job" momentarily disregards the rules and makes an exception for you out of his sympathy. "The fee is twenty dollars," he says, "but forget it, I'll waive that." A glimmer of humanity! "Maybe there's hope for the species after all," I then think. But I'm quickly disabused of that delusion when I reflect on the absence of rationality and compassion in social relations themselves, a fact that pressures us all to act in socially irrational and impersonally cruel ways.

Even the most seemingly innocent and ubiquitous actions can have the seed of anti-personal amorality—lack of identification with others, or groupthink and mindless conformism, contempt for people who are "different" or don't follow the common norms—that bears fruit in Nazism and genocide. He who ignores a homeless person on the street has the stain of moral corruption in him, however he rationalizes his behavior. (So much the worse for humanity that we all do that, from time to time.) He who automatically

recoils from a working-class black or Hispanic or white man approaching him in the subway with a friendly air, just to talk, must be profoundly alienated from his fellow human beings, a stranger to them, unconcerned with the majority of them, in fact slightly disgusted by those who show a little independence vis-à-vis conventional styles of dress and behavior. Their fates, their lives and hardships, leave him cold; he simply doesn't care. This is usually true, indeed, even with respect to strangers who belong to one's own social stratum: since they're strangers, what happens to them is not a matter of concern.

"Men are accomplices to that which leaves them indifferent," George Steiner said.[1] Are you indifferent to the suffering of another person, whether in the neighboring house or on the other side of the world? Then, in a sense, you're an accomplice to it. You let it happen—or you may even indirectly participate in it, say by paying taxes to a militaristic government. After World War II people reproached themselves and were reproached for their silence as the Holocaust was happening, their *having done nothing to make it stop*. Well, why is that question not asked now? The world is in as much agony as ever, and most people are as silent as ever. Nothing has changed. Even now, as in the 1940s, people are being systematically murdered, tortured, enslaved, made superfluous by the hundreds of millions (being herded into gargantuan slums where they merely subsist animal-like, or, in the U.S., being imprisoned *en masse* for having black skin and not having a vital economic role in society). The point isn't only that "all that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing"; it is that modern, impersonal evil largely *consists of* people doing seemingly nothing—following rules, showing indifference, ignoring the plea for help. That way lies barbarism.

Of course there are other manifestations of the barbarity. It isn't only because of individual stupidity that millions of Americans deny global warming, detest homosexuals, revile "liberals," and nurse secret race-hatred. It isn't only, or even mainly, an individual's genes that make possible the phenomenon of the latently fascist "authoritarian personality."[2] There are far more diabolical social forces at work. Such stupid and prejudiced attitudes, which by their nature cannot be based on dispassionate reasoning about facts or impartial openness to experiences, to new people and new ideas—such attitudes well up out of the impersonal, defensive, diffusely resentful, beset-from-all-sides mode of experience that has disfigured so many millions of minds since mass society made the individual superfluous. Without self-validation, one becomes a moral and intellectual homunculus. To some extent we moderns are all *les étrangers*, but evidently some feel more so than others—often from their greater material grievances—and embrace in their alienation emotional notions of belongingness versus otherness, Us versus Them. Contempt and hatred for the outsider, comforting submission to the authority of the insider. The question is, who will get to these alienated masses first, the left or the right? As it turns out, the right has far more resources than the left, since the right is precisely big business, and so the winners in the race are usually the forces that blame all woes on everything except the one thing that matters, class. And so instead of a more productive semi-submission to left-wing authority—(for, after all, there *is* an authoritarianism of the "left," an undemocratic institutional and personality structure, deplorably common among leftist political parties and fringe groups)—what you get is a counterproductive submission to fascist authority. And thus a pullulating of radically illogical thinking, which, combined with mass anonymity and impersonality, gets you—the Holocaust. Or, more recently, *enthusiastic marching into global environmental destruction*, the goose-stepping elite leading its goose-stepping followers straight off the cliff.

The market mode of behavior is therefore, humanistically speaking, the twin of the authoritarian, or rather totalitarian, mode of behavior. Corporations, of course, are totalitarian entities (hierarchies that rent employees, suppress dissent, enforce a common ideology, etc.), and capitalism is just fragmented totalitarianism, profit-making machines competing against each other and trying to destroy each other. An

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[1] George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman* (New York: Atheneum, 1976), 150.

[2] Theodor Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950). The spread of contemporary semi-fascist movements and parties has revived interest in this concept, and recent work largely validates Adorno and his colleagues' conclusions. See, for example, William F. Stone, Gerda Lederer, and Richard Christie, eds., *Strength and Weakness: The Authoritarian Personality Today* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1993).

unfortunate externality of which is the destruction of life and nature. So, in addition to plowing full steam ahead to end millions of species and hundreds of millions of human lives, companies have now accomplished the grotesquerie of profiting *by means of* this very apocalypse. Capitalism can make money from its own self-immolation! For example, companies are buying water rights and farmland because "drought and food shortages can mean big profit"; the greater frequency of natural disasters means insurers can raise rates; and melting ice in the Arctic exposes oil reserves for BP and Shell to exploit.[1] Just as a brave new world of *species*-holocaust lies ahead, so new frontiers of profit thus tantalize our intrepid corporate world-conquerors. *Vive* capitalism and its commodification of all!

–The point, however, is that the potential for humanity's self-extinction by means of Weberian formal rationality—methodical calculation, quantitative reasoning, mechanical adoption of the proper means to an end—is implicit not only in the operation of any bureaucracy but also in the simplest market transaction. For each side seeks personal profit of some sort in disregard of "externalities" and non-market values. Someone with an idealist turn of mind could even interpret the modern world, in Hegelian fashion, as a progressive, dialectical unfolding of all the human and anti-human dimensions latent in the logic of the market transaction, revealed as the all-devouring market economy has colonized the world. All the modern reduction of people and nature to commodities, and the mass movements of workers' resistance, and the extermination of whole peoples, and the despairing cultural reactions against market-driven alienation, and the subordination of society and politics to the power of money—a left-wing Hegel would say it's all there, in potentiality, in the mere act of selling a product to a customer for a profit. –Cosmic evil can be present in a grain of sand.

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Collectivism.— Collectivism comes in both noble and evil forms. In the former, the principle of the individual is paramount; in the latter, the principle of the mass. The one means the rule of mutual self-actualization, self-respect, sympathy for others, democracy, human diversity—"an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all," to quote Karl Marx. It is, in short, authentic community and sociality, healthy equality, a state of society in which, to quote Hegel, individuals recognize the self in the other and the other in the self, humans as human, rational beings as rational—freedom and dignity personified, one's desire for the other's recognition calling forth one's own powers and potentialities. Perhaps never fully realized on a large scale, this anarchist ideal of free and dignified (though not conflictless) community can at least be approximated—as it is, for example, in many grassroots-democratic activist groups, not to mention families, friendships, and relationships between lovers—and *must* so be in order for the social animal called *homo sapiens* to really belong to himself and be at home in the world.[2]

On the other hand is the all-too-common kind of large-scale collectivism, the reducing-to-the-common-denominator kind. This is often present to some degree—along with the "good" kind of collectivism, existing in tension with it—even when a small group of people, be they friends or acquaintances or strangers, interact socially. One is pressured, almost imperceptibly, to conform to the ideas and norms that emerge from the group's behavior, the senses of humor, the opinions that command the

[1] Julia Greenberg, "6 Industries That Will Profit From Global Warming," *Wired*, February 27, 2014; Matthew Campbell and Chris V. Nicholson, "Investors Seek Ways to Profit From Global Warming," *Business Week*, March 7, 2013.

[2] See Alexander Berkman's thoughts on equality in *ABC of Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1977/1929), 25: "'But will not life under anarchy, in economic and social equality, mean general levelling?' you ask. No, my dear friend, quite the contrary. Because equality does not mean an equal amount but equal *opportunity*… Do not make the mistake of identifying equality in liberty with the forced equality of the convict camp. True anarchist equality implies freedom, not quantity… Individual needs and tastes differ, as appetites differ. It is equal opportunity to satisfy them that constitutes true equality. Far from levelling, such equality opens the door for the greatest possible variety of activity and development. For human character is diverse, and only the repression of this free diversity results in levelling, in uniformity and sameness."

most assent, the reactions to particular charismatic or uncharismatic people in the group. Even on this innocuous level of everyday sociality, the group spontaneously develops something like a collective consciousness that molds and guides one's own consciousness along the path of uniformity. All participants must recreate in the common space that has been cleared, drawing from the common touchstones, the tropes, social techniques, group interests—sports, television, movies, popular music. Defying the accepted norms, however slightly, gets one ostracized—frequently by being ignored, an effective method.

Collectivistic coercion takes more pernicious forms, however, in institutions and institutionally determined mass thinking and action. Here is where the real crimes against all that is good in life take place. Examples have already been given; let us only quote a few thoughts from the anarchist Alexander Berkman, who fathomed the depths of modernity's extreme collectivism:

> Our lives and habits, our behavior and manners, even our thoughts and feelings are pressed into a uniform mould and fashioned into sameness. The spirit of authority, law, written and unwritten, tradition and custom force us into a common groove and make a man a will-less automaton without independence or individuality… The authority of the past and present dictates not only our behavior but dominates our very minds and souls, and is continually at work to stifle every symptom of nonconformity, of independent attitude and unorthodox opinion. The whole weight of social condemnation comes down upon the head of the man or woman who dares defy conventional codes… In science and art, in literature, poetry, and in painting this spirit compels adaptation and adjustment, resulting in imitation of the established and approved, in uniformity and sameness, in stereotyped expression.[1]

While tendencies of repressive collectivism exist in all social life, outside institutional contexts they are not truly *repressive*, per se. It is only with stultifying institutional authority, market relations, policing and soldiering, and the professionalizing of the mind that one gets…the mass holocaust of individuality. Personally, having spent much time in academia, I am most familiar with intellectuals' collectivism, and so will focus on it here.

I must confess to an emotional *disgust* with the "stereotyped expression," the cowardly uniformity of the intellectual world in all its crannies, from the mainstream media to the cobwebbed corners of academe. It's hard for me to be objective about something with which I am so intimately familiar. It's gotten to the point that the very idea of being published in a scholarly journal or by a traditional publisher makes me uncomfortable, because it associates me with the Machine. To submit to being "polished" like a pretty pebble in the tumbler of bureaucratic culture seems to me a violation. The benefit to it, of course, is that it's the only way to be taken seriously—although if you dissent too much from favored dogmas, even having the imprimatur of a respected institution or publisher won't be enough to earn you the good will of most intellectuals.

The basic point is simple and obvious: institutions select for obedience and conformity, such that if you act independently you will almost certainly be kicked out or ostracized. If you're slavish, you will meet with greater success. The essence of any large institution is thus collectivism, submersion in the mass and subordination to impersonal rules. Contemporary conservatives who decry "socialist collectivism" (amusingly accusing Obama and other such center-right politicians of it) are unaware that the institutions and behavior they adore, namely corporations, market-determined behavior, and acknowledgement of other people only as instantiating the types "employee," "manager," "executive," etc., are the most collectivistic of all. In the truest sense of individualism, it's impossible to imagine a more anti-individualistic structure than the market or its corporate apotheosis, in which people's individuality is (ideally) erased. Because of this erasure, though, these institutions do exemplify a *perverted* individualism, in the same way that bureaucracy and totalitarianism do: all that exist are *atoms*, windowless monads of suppressed humanity.

Being farther from the operations of power, academia is less pathologically fragmented and collectivistic than the market economy or the corporate world. The difference is fairly marginal, though,

[1] Ibid., 26.

given that every facet of academic culture embodies fragmentation and collectivism. Scholarship is intensely specialized, people spending entire careers studying subtopics of a subtopic; the fetish of "expertise" reinforces the notion that all that matters is familiarity with a specialized and conventional scholarly literature; careerist imperatives overwhelm any interest in truth, realistic understanding, or genuine originality (at least in the humanities and social sciences). Economics, for example, is a particularly egregious case, because its main functions are to mystify and to provide ideological idealizations of capitalist behavior. Already in the 1980s, economists were complaining that

> Economics has…become so broad and so complicated that, within the fields, one group of specialists barely speaks the same language as the Ph.D.s across the hall. And so much of what is published seems more to proselytize for an ideology than to make sense of the chaotic world… It's no wonder that a single economic development can be interpreted as a godsend or a disaster, depending on the interpreter's frame of reference.[1]

Even in more serious disciplines than economics, though, the worship of ideology—i.e., collectivism—over intellectual integrity is so obvious that only the blindly indoctrinated could fail to see it. In history departments, for instance, the "fashionable theory of economic nondeterminism" of politics and society about which Gabriel Kolko complained in the 1960s, and which has reigned since at least the 1950s, now takes postmodern forms of obsession with gender, sexuality, and "discourse." As a result, the incredibly important work of Kolko and likeminded New Left historians, like that of other materialist scholars such as the political scientist Thomas Ferguson, is almost *never mentioned* among academics. Indeed, it is unmentionable, because of its subversive implications and its implicit critique of postmodernist idealism. A radical like Kolko is not "one of us," he is not mainstream enough, and so is to be ignored. The fact that his work explains the sources of American foreign and domestic policy is irrelevant; what matters is that other academics don't mention him, so it would be impolitic to do so oneself.

We tend to forget that intellectual artifacts are not simply produced by individuals pursuing their own idiosyncratic interests; they are, in most cases, expressions of institutional priorities and configurations. They are *collective* products, testaments to institutional agendas, power-relations, and the kinds of work that can make it through academic and media filters—which of course tend to filter out anything that is challenging to their own power and interests. In forgetting this institutional context and background, we forget that there are overwhelming pressures for only innocuous and conventional work to be rewarded, and for critical voices to be marginalized. The vast majority of people in an elite institution will be successfully indoctrinated with its ethos and agendas, so that the interests of the institution become their own personal interests. As a result, they react with extreme emotional hostility to anyone who doesn't follow the rules with utmost fidelity—thereby revealing the essential meanness and smugness of collectivism. All may be pleasant and polite on the surface, as long as norms are followed, but scratch this veneer and an abyss of petty hate and contempt opens up. Whether you're a scholar booted from academia for criticizing Israel or a graduate student who incurs the wrath of professors for not submitting to hyper-specialization, the "herd of independent minds" will brook no dissent.

The rule of collectivism also produces a ubiquitous *stupidity*. I'll have more to say later about the subject of stupidity in America; for now, I'll confine myself to the observation that narrow institutional points of view are almost never sensible, self-critical, or grounded in reason and realism. They are dogmatic and stupid, based on myths about the importance and value of the institution in question (and therefore the people who identify with it). So, to the extent that someone identifies with an institution—as most professionals do—he will exhibit traits of dogmatism, stupidity, and self-overestimation. For example, journalists are trained to think that their profession, in its present reality, is both "objective" or "neutral" between opposing points of view and inherently adversarial towards power, two ideas that are obviously

[1] Quoted in Kenneth Gergen, *The Saturated Self* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 83. The shallowness of contemporary economics is shown by the fact that virtually no American economist predicted the 2008 financial crisis and economic collapse.

false (and mutually inconsistent); politicians are generally convinced of the nobility of their motives and their relative innocence regarding social problems or state crimes; most academics believe the self-glorifying myth that ideas and philosophies, rather than institutional dynamics, are what move the world. And nearly all professionals are basically ignorant of the functions they really serve in the political economy, their complicity in the evils of the world, and the by-no-means-flattering reasons they have been able to rise in their professions (namely because of their obedience, lack of intellectual curiosity, and willingness not to challenge norms). They often even deny such truisms as that society has a ruling class and that the wealthy have wildly disproportionate control over politics, the media, and mainstream ideologies. In other words, naïve self-deceptions are ubiquitous among the institutional automatons who constitute the "elite."

In addition to an underlying meanness, smugness, and stupidity, intellectual collectivism breeds a remarkable pretentiousness. Whether it's a philosopher poring over a sentence by Nietzsche, a literary or film critic writing a turgid essay on some little facet of a poem or a movie, a poet laboring for hours and days to come up with the most dense and paradoxical imagery possible, or a postmodernist disguising a trivial idea in jargonistic, pleonastic prose, intellectuals excel in pretense. Academic conferences can be unbearably pretentious, full of people taking themselves seriously to a comical degree—priding themselves on their vocabulary, their articulateness, their specialized knowledge—subject to the delusion, apparently, that what they're talking about has some sort of significance (which it rarely does).[1] The endless "calls for papers!" to submit to yet another conference remind one of how insular and therefore feckless the intellectual world is. But because academia takes itself very seriously, it encourages self-serious behavior in the people who submit to it. "Pretentiousness," in fact, often just means "institutionally sanctioned behavior." Since institutions are artificial and anti-human, the behavior appropriate to them strikes us as artificial, even ludicrous (or, sometimes, downright evil, as in the case of the corporate sector).

Incidentally, it isn't only academics. Far from it. One turns on the television, flips to CNN, and sees Serious People discussing issues of high moment, such as whether Edward Snowden is a traitor or a hero, or what to think of the president's latest rhetorical performance. "Panels" provide "expert" "commentary" on "both sides" of an issue. It is all intensely serious and important, and one is overawed by the intellectual fireworks on display.

The ubiquity of such pretentiousness in elite culture serves an important function: it signifies that *authority is being taken seriously*. That's generally what elite pretentiousness is, just a taking-seriously of authority, a refusal to acknowledge how absurd and risible are the performative dimensions of authority. The rules about what can be said and what can't be said, and how to say what can be said, protect the supposed legitimacy of authority, which is to say authoritarian collectivism (for that's what authority means: a collective submission to power). If you're forbidden from "questioning the motives" of your fellow politicians, or from asking a scholar "*Who cares?*" about the (usually uninteresting) thesis of some little article he has published, or, in general, from saying "Come on, let's be *real* and admit what we all know but are pretending to deny!," then institutions can function smoothly and authority can operate without a hitch. That's the categorical imperative that explains much of what is ludicrous and awful about the world.

For all these reasons, I take a different perspective from most people regarding who it is I respect and who I don't. I'm inclined to respect someone who's lower on the totem-pole, because he still may have an independent mind (and also is typically not such an asshole as his superiors are); the successful and admired, on the other hand, I usually consider rather contemptible. *Ceteris paribus*, someone who's a "top scholar" has already lost most of my respect (unless he or she proves me wrong). Few things are sadder than an institutionalized mind.

Certainly there are overwhelming pressures to submit; but one should at least try not to *mentally* submit too. A little nonconformism is a good thing.

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[1] The one question that doesn't exist in their otherwise amply stocked arsenal of interrogatives is the most important one: *"Why does this matter?"*

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Social Luddism, a necessity.— No one has ever said it better than Mario Savio in 1964, in the context of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement. Just as we have a duty to remember and reflect on every great horror of history, so, in a different sense, do we have a duty to remember and reflect on words like these, spoken in a moment of high disgust with the bourgeois world: *"There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part, you can't even passively take part. And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop! And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!"* This is the immortal message of anarchism—man's primordial and instinctual cry for freedom. And it is the passion that has birthed a better world from time immemorial, and will continue to do so until the human species is extinguished. *Authority vs. freedom and rationality*: *that* is the underlying "dialectic" of history.

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I dance, therefore I am.— A piece that's good for restoring the love of living after you've been corrupted by contact with authority is Beethoven's King Stephen Overture. It's joy in fun and fun in joy. Enjoy! :-)

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The secular divine.— My God: Beethoven's Choral Fantasy. I discovered that piece earlier this year [2010]. I thought it was a little strange at first, unstructured and meandering, but…you know, it's quintessential Beethoven, the affirmation of everything in spite of everything, the redemption of the universe. I often get tears in my eyes when watching great music performed by…*people*, people who have devoted their lives to art and you can see it when they're singing, the hours and years of practice and passion as they belt out their notes, their devotion to music. That beautiful soprano with the blond hair coiffed perfectly and the makeup and earrings on—the most beautiful thing about her is that she's a woman, just a normal person who wants to look pretty like all women and has a family and sees her friends every day and has to do maintenance on her house every year—and yet here she is standing between an orchestra and a chorus, belting out Beethoven, *singing*—humans can *sing!* (how superfluous!)—singing about how "graceful, charming and sweet is the sound of life's harmonies!" The three men and the three women singing about God's grace being bestowed on humanity when love and strength are united, and peace and joy advancing in perfect concord, and then the chorus trumpeting that we must "accept the gifts of high art!," and the orchestra and piano and the conductor swinging his arms wildly singing along with the chorus (you can only see his lips moving but you know he's shouting as loud as the singers)—can you picture these men and women sitting and standing beside each other in front of a rapt audience, not fighting or arguing or talking of money or politics or responsibilities but *singing about art*? It's a miracle, the greatest miracle of life.

A community, timeless and universal because they're performing music scribbled two hundred years ago by a deaf man who lived alone in his cluttered and filthy apartment—scratched-in ideas transported from one man's head to a concert hall where worshipers pay homage to the thing most worth paying homage to, art. It'll all be over soon (two hours), but its very transience enhances its beauty.

*

The clean air of the Baroque.— Notwithstanding the uniquely life-affirming character of Beethoven's music, Bach has pieces that are more invigorating than anything except, perhaps, standing atop some Himalayan peak a breath away from the heavens. (The difference is that the air of Bach, unlike that of the Himalayas, has a superabundance of oxygen.) –To momentarily escape from the polluted atmosphere of modern culture into the "luminiferous ether" of the Baroque and Classical periods, which transmits light

straight into one's *money-stained* soul—Bach's translucent Partita No. 5 for keyboard, Handel's limpid Water Music, Vivaldi's sun-drenched Four Seasons—restores youth and life. It's actually possible to *breathe* in this air of freedom from commodification!

*

Antitheses.— For the last couple of hours I watched videos on YouTube of William Buckley, Norman Mailer, Martin Amis, Christopher Hitchens and such characters. It was almost an unreal experience. These people and evidently their circles were/are not ordinary, in the worst possible way. I was watching degenerates, narcissists, poseurs, boors, and bores. No doubt brilliant in their own diseased way. But I couldn't help thinking I was in the electronic presence of personified decadence. Hitchens of course was the embodiment of sleaze, his whole being *icky, greasy, slimy*. Those are the adjectives that come immediately to mind when I look at him. The perfect emblem of this group of people, this whole literary cocktail-party subculture, would be a picture of Hitchens' face in the midst of an attempted smile. A grotesque, false image. Pop culture meets pretentious intellectualism meets Roman orgies.

–The essence is simple: with those people, as with most pop culture, I can feel myself being lowered—to the particular (and the vulgar). With Chomsky, as with good classical music, I can feel myself being elevated—to the universal. It's pollution vs. cleanliness. Shiny pollution vs. radiant cleanliness.

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From the Greeks to the Enlightenment.— The best way to think about the human task of living is that it should be, as Nietzsche said, a continual journey of self-overcoming. The project should be that embodied in the great religions' concepts of salvation or nirvana: t*o overcome particularity*, to wash out the blemishes of self-fixated particularity. That is, to fuse the particular, i.e. oneself, with the universal, by remaking oneself in its light. We are born spotted, tainted with the "sin" of self-immersion, base impulses, and ignorance; our task is to become (relatively) spotless, elevated above ordinary determinations so that in freedom we master ourselves. The imperative, in short—the *categorical* imperative—is to be *clean*, and, on the whole, whatever doesn't make you feel clean should usually be rejected as ignoble and corrupting. We all have capacities for high and low things, for things that a universal humanity would appreciate and things it would despise. Our calling is to cultivate the former capacities and let the others atrophy. –On one side is stupidity, ignorance, slavishness, unreasoned emotion, unconcern for others, greed, smugness, hedonism, and brute bodily pleasures, all things that entrap within the *determined self*, the unfree and "unclean" self ruled by animal impulses. On the other side is intelligence, knowledge, courage, reason, compassion, generosity, a deep humility, and "spiritual pleasures," things that liberate from the self's primal immediacy and so make free and dignified. Insofar as these latter qualities are grounded in internalization of "the other's" perspective—broadening of experience and the desire to impress the other—which is a uniquely human capacity that makes possible our very self-consciousness, they are, in a sense, the *fulfillment of human potential*, of the universality implicit in self-consciousness. The former qualities, by contrast, are merely human manifestations of the lowest animal conditions and instincts. Stupidity, for example, is utterly immersed in itself; intelligence incorporates others.

While it may sound odd, therefore, the idea of cleanliness—moral, intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, etc.—is a useful "regulative principle" for human thought and action (to speak in Kantian language). It is evocative; it is imprecise but elevating, and recalls that other ennobling idea, the concept of universality. It shouldn't be confused with *purity*, which is extreme, potentially fanatical and anti-humanistic; cleanliness is more moderate—merely moral, beautiful, rational, humane, elevated above petty resentment and neurotic fixations. One can also use the idea of cleanliness as a test to determine what is "decadent": if some cultural artifact doesn't seem *healthy*, a sign and product of good health, vigor, or lofty universality, one might well call it decadent—that is, a symptom of sickness, neurasthenic self-consciousness, polluted and anti-human life, pathological social atomization, or psychological and cultural exhaustion. Most twentieth-century avant-garde art is decidedly decadent (which doesn't mean it's

worthless). Even late-nineteenth-century composers, such as Brahms and Wagner, can be very decadent, unlike Mozart and Haydn. The social context of the former was, so to speak, dirty and sick (hypochondriacal, navel-gazing)—as you can sometimes hear in its music—that of the latter relatively clean and vital, naïvely confident.

The ideals of cleanliness and universality overlap with, but are superior to, Nietzsche's ideals of strength, enthusiasm, "overflowing vitality," instinct, *virtù* in the Renaissance sense. There is some intuitive plausibility to Nietzsche's judging the worth of things by determining where to place them on the spectrum from shriveled weakness to brimming-over strength. This standard of value is reminiscent of past "aesthetic moralities" that center not on the antithesis *right/wrong* or *good/evil* but on *noble/base*: Aristotle's ethic of virtue is an example, as is, perhaps, Goethe's (unoriginal) conception of the "genius" whose demonic vitality is such that he isn't bound by ordinary standards of right and wrong.[1] One problem with such an emphasis on "strength," of course, is that it subordinates the claims of altruism to those of egoism. The weak but good man is considered lower than the strong but amoral man. Another problem is the vagueness of words like "strong" and "weak": their meanings are elusive, tending to evaporate the more closely you examine them. Moreover, insofar as the terms are meaningful at all, someone can be psychologically strong and weak in different respects—indeed, *everyone* is both strong and weak (whatever that means). A third problem, perhaps most damning, is that the Nietzschean—or Calliclean—value-system is the parochial ethic of the master class, which has the requisite leisure and privilege to care about individualistic values of "*virtù*" and whatnot. To people preoccupied with the tasks of survival, all this master-moralizing seems *juvenile*, parasitic, self-indulgent, a mere luxury. It's unreal. What makes more sense is to try to be morally and intellectually clean—compassionate, cooperative, communally oriented, not self-fixated but attuned to the health of the collective, which is also the health of the self. One attains a kind of universality—and "strength"—simply by working together with others, molding and being molded by them, internalizing their perspectives, thus achieving intelligence, knowledge, courage, reason, and the other noble values that thinkers from Plato to Nietzsche have upheld (in different ways and for different reasons). The egoistic ideal of strength or "health" is therefore best achieved precisely through altruism, which can also be a symptom of it.[2]

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In defense of Socrates.— Nietzsche ridiculed the Socratic equation "*reason = virtue = happiness*," calling it "weird" and decadent, but in fact one can consider Nietzsche's ridicule itself to be weird and decadent. It is of a piece with his inability to see the value of the altruistic Christian morality, the psychological profundity of which should be obvious. Happiness is based on high self-esteem, which requires that you see your implicit self-love confirmed in the world, reflected in people's behavior towards you, validated by yourself and others. Ordinarily, acting virtuously will get you not only self-respect but also the respect and affection of others—which will itself increase your self-respect, and so your happiness. In those cases in which doing the right thing gets you ostracized or punished, you will still at least have the happiness of knowing your own value, and your superiority to the contemptible herd. Conversely, it is well known that dissolute living or obsessive chasing after fame and money does not equal stable happiness, because it does not entail a secure sense of self. So, inasmuch as it is reasonable to do what makes you happy, it is reasonable to do what is right and virtuous. Moreover, the pleasures of reason—science, philosophy, inquiry and creativity—can be definitely happiness-inducing, even if at times an obsessive engagement with philosophy or science can be tormenting. Doubtless there is *some* truth to the cliché that ignorance is bliss; for example, ignorantly believing in God—the idea of which reason rejects—can make people happy, and

[1] Goethe's example is Napoleon. In Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov is initially seduced by this ethic, until through suffering he rises to the higher Christian morality. It's worth noting, by the way, that the Nietzschean and Goethean standards of value were already recognized, and rejected, by Plato, whose character Callicles espoused them in *The Gorgias*.

[2] See Max Scheler's discussion of St. Francis in *Ressentiment* (1912).

understanding the "meaninglessness" of human existence isn't necessarily a happy experience. It can drive to despair. In fact, however, it is never just *a thought* (like the thought of God's nonexistence) that makes someone unhappy; it is a thought conceived in certain circumstances, for example conditions of social alienation or loneliness or lack of interest in life. It isn't *reason* or *knowledge* that makes unhappy, as so many poets and others have thought; it is *a particular set of experiences*, which cause you to latch onto some given thought and obsess over it, imagining that it is the source of your unhappiness. In a healthy social environment, it's perfectly possible not to be disturbed by some truth that a person in a different social context might find disturbing. –In any case, it's a risky strategy to pin your happiness on a lie, like the lie that God exists, because doubt is apt to seep in and upset your carefully arranged house of illusions.

In short, the Socratic equation is not only morally uplifting but psychologically valid, all things considered. One can object to it on the grounds that it optimistically oversimplifies, given that virtuous people are not necessarily happy—and vice versa—and "rational" people are not necessarily virtuous or happy, etc.[1] But on the level of ideal-types—and/or in a sanely organized society—there does seem to be an elective affinity between the three concepts of reason, morality, and happiness. Enlightenment thinkers thought so. And the Enlightenment was not a "decadent" movement; it was too naïve, confident, optimistic, and vigorous for that. What *is* decadent, perhaps, is a late-nineteenth-century rejection of something as universal and "*clean*" as the Socratic and Enlightenment association of reason, morality, and happiness—for such a (Nietzschean) rejection proceeds from a faux sophistication, a disgust with optimism, a fondness for perverse formulations, a late-romantic or *fin-de-siècle* fascination with the irrational and the repressed. –One should strive to be rational and moral, and relative happiness may well ensue.

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Thoughts on morality.— The "moral sphere" has extended in recent centuries, so that now such things as slavery, colonialism, racial segregation, and discriminatory treatment of women are considered wrong. But we still have a ways to go. There are the obvious left-wing concerns: horrific treatment of animals and the environment, brutalization of homeless people, demonization of immigrants, tolerance of degrading wage-labor, etc. But aside from these issues are ones that almost nobody talks about, which can be summed up in the observation that people are frequently *not nice* to each other. Being unkind ought to be considered *immoral*, not just unpleasant. Unkindness is ubiquitous, and in a sense it's inhuman. Indeed, any act that demonstrates an absence of empathy should be thought of as immoral. For what is morality if not respect and consideration for others?

Broadly speaking, then—but also strictly speaking—it's immoral, say, to ignore someone (*ceteris paribus*), whether a homeless person on the street or someone who's talking to you at a party or a friend who sends you an email. That is, doing so has negative implications regarding your worth as a human being. If you want to be a good person, you should always act on the basis of empathy and respect. That isn't always possible, of course, which just means it's impossible to be an absolutely good person, or to always abide by moral imperatives.

In fact, imperatives can conflict. Respecting human life is a duty, but one may also have a duty to kill a mass murderer if that's the only way to prevent him from killing again. Or one may, in some extreme scenario, have a duty to lie to someone, even though lying is immoral because it shows a lack of respect and so forth. Moral values can also conflict with non-moral values—and it isn't always right to follow the moral value in this case. For instance, it may hurt a person's feelings to criticize an irrational belief he holds, but one's commitment to truth and reason may justify so criticizing his belief. (It's debatable whether commitment to truth is "moral" *per se*, but insofar as it doesn't impinge on one's treatment of others, a case can be made that it's a non-moral value.) All this goes to show that no one, except maybe a very young child, is "innocent," everyone is tainted, indeed in most moments we're acting contrary to morality in some

[1] One can also object that, contrary to Kant's philosophy, morality cannot be grounded in pure reason alone, and so in this sense morality ≠ reason. I think that this Humean and Nietzschean objection is correct, but to defend it would require a technical discussion inappropriate here.

way or other (e.g., by not roaming the streets looking for suffering people to help). Still, the broader one thinks of the moral sphere as being, and the more one acts on that belief, the more one can pride oneself on being a "basically good" person.

*

Reason = virtue = dignity.— One of the glories of being human is that we're the only creature that can intentionally *rise above* impulses that nature has implanted in us. What a miracle! Our self-consciousness and intelligence make it possible to reflect on some deep aspect of ourselves and say, "No, I reject that," and act contrary to it. For example, it seems to be a natural impulse, or at least a natural *tendency*, for us to treat unattractive or uncharismatic or obese or short people differently from their opposites, to show them less appreciation or affection (other things being equal). This seems to be true in every society, and so must be grounded in nature, in natural responses to the world. Nature, in fact, has given us a myriad of immoral, "illiberal" impulses. But it has also given us the ability to internalize others' viewpoints, thus giving us empathy and allowing us to invent the concept of morality. And so we can say, "No, it's wrong to treat people differently on the basis of qualities that are *not part of the moral sphere*, such as height or skin color or attractiveness," and adjust our behavior accordingly, to some extent defying nature. Indeed, such moral defiance of nature is a major manifestation of humans' unique *freedom*; and so, as classical thinkers have said or implied (Plato, the Stoics, Kant, Hegel, Goethe), we are in a sense acting more freely—less "instinctively"—when we choose to act morally and rationally rather than hedonistically or in other ways determined by primitive impulses. Not only is moral behavior *right*; it's *dignified*.

[Here I put that short essay on "the value of the humanities."]

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Literature in the service of compassion.— I recommend Gogol's story "Diary of a Madman." Comedy and tragedy are united seamlessly: the more comical it becomes, the more tragic. It's reminiscent of *Don Quixote*, except more moving. A civil servant who has been ground into the dirt for decades, treated as a nobody, his sole purpose in life to sharpen His Excellency's quills and copy out documents—becomes infatuated with His Excellency's daughter. He starts having conversations with her dog, to find out more about her. The more debased he is, the more his humanity rebels: he has been so degraded that he comes to believe he is King Ferdinand VIII of Spain, waiting for the deputation that will take him to his new kingdom. Instead it takes him to an insane asylum (which he thinks is Spain)—after he has finally, in his own eyes, regained his dignity by behaving like a king with the clerks at his office. His delusion has even given him the courage to declare his love to the girl. (Courage required delusion, because of the delusive trappings of society.) But in the asylum they manage to strip him even of his life-saving insanity: he cries out that he is a miserable wretch, that he longs for his mother in his old peasant hut. "Give me a troika with horses swift as the whirlwind! Climb up, driver, and let the bells ring! Soar away, horses, and carry me from this world!" But after this piteous speech, the last sentence of the story is the comical non sequitur, "And did you know that the Dhey of Algiers has a wart right under his nose?" The man is obsessed with little things like that, little flaws in appearance, little gradations in rank, because that's what his society is obsessed with. And that's the tragedy of it. He has been made incapable of seeing his humanity, even as he screams inwardly that he is a man!

You see, appearance is everything. Social status determines all. It takes a change in his self-perceived status for the man to finally put an end (in his own eyes) to his dehumanization. That's the only way people know how to, in this world. There is no such thing as humanizing yourself, because the only way to do so is to play the game of social rank, which is a dehumanizing game. You can't break out of the framework; the charade has become the cast of your mind. So even if you're a king, you're still dehumanized.

And obviously the dog is symbolic.

What a masterful story! Totally free of sentimentality—totally lighthearted—but infinitely tragic. It forces the reader to rely on his imagination, to imagine the real situation behind the character who writes such silly journal entries. At forty-two years of age he goes insane. Think of all the pain behind that! We're forced to *imagine* the pain, though, which makes it more effective. –Through such means, literature can sharpen our moral sense.

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The fraudulence of status.— In order to determine someone's intellectual or artistic integrity and acuity, a simple test is available. It has to be supplemented with others, but it's useful. If in any context you can tell that someone is responding to a set of ideas or a work differently from how he otherwise would have on the basis of *who produced it*, you know he lacks integrity as an intellectual or an artist. If it's clear that he dismisses a work or an idea because it wasn't produced by a person with the proper credentials, the proper status or fame or institutional qualifications—or, conversely, if he positively values a work because it *was* produced by such a person—you can write him off as shallow or a fake. I'm talking particularly about people who, as judged by society, are supposed to be the "experts" in some given field, in other words academics, artists, critics—the arbiters of taste and "truth." If they show any snobbery or credentials-worship or groupthink, you know immediately that, to that extent, they're charlatans and frauds.

By this standard, unfortunately, the enormous majority of intellectuals and artists are, to some degree, frauds. As I said above, they value institutional conventions more than genuine merit. An art critic will extravagantly praise some silly painting with a respected name attached to it and ignore a nearly identical painting by an unknown. So then you know: "Buffoon." An academic philosopher won't care about original ideas he reads in a student's paper but will be terrifically impressed by unoriginal or simplistic ideas he reads in a book by Foucault or some lesser-known colleague. "Buffoon." Since institutions function by virtue of groupthink and snobbery, it's no surprise that virtually everyone (at least among the higher-ups) in a given institution is a groupthinker and a snob.

One sees it constantly. It's the very *air one breathes* in any elite institution. To give a random and perhaps subtle example: years ago I attended a literary conference for a few days and took these notes:

> There are public readings every night, usually by the famous writers here. Ravi Shankar, Alexander Chee, Josip Novakovich, Katha Pollitt (annoying liberal feminist). But last night and tonight, readings by students. Much less well-attended, of course, than the celebrities' readings. But they're more enjoyable, more affecting. All these diverse people, many of them shy and worn down by life, all talented, all sharing their private lives with strangers. Brought together by a love of something the culture doesn't love; the only common denominator a love of writing. People not famous, writing on faith. Predictably none of the famous people attends these readings, only a few students. But they're so much more powerful than those other readings! Far more intimate, certainly more transporting because no ego is involved and no books outside waiting to be bought, only mysterious pasts like that woman whose every piece is about her son Simon who died young and those women who read quietly with head bowed low, their writing wonderful. What has brought them here? What pasts? Most of them won't be successful authors because few people have the right luck and connections, but they continue writing anyway on faith.

At the celebrity readings the audience is duly appreciative, basking in the presence of fame, applauding the sometimes idiotic selections on display. (For example, Katha Pollitt read a piece that related her experiences with a small group of Marxist activists; most of it was devoted to glib jokes at their expense, which duly elicited laughter from the audience.) The whole charade, with all the glamor and self-congratulation and two-minute-long introductions of each writer, repulsed me. Such artificiality! Any of the poems and stories written by the students could have been read and would have received the same applause; people would have been clamoring to buy the book, would have wanted autographs—although, actually, those reactions

might have been relatively justified, since some of the students' work was better than the celebrities'. Only in the later, sparsely attended student readings could one escape the snobbery and credentials-worship.

Evidently there is something about "high status" that brings out human mediocrity. –For one thing, the *spectacle* of it all, of the cultural world, is supremely *vulgar*. No one is more vulgar than an intellectual trying to get noticed. Just think of the Slavoj Žižeks dancing for the cameras, clamoring for attention, costuming themselves (sometimes literally) in whatever garb will provoke a response from the culture industry. Fashionable decadents, clownish self-promoters, actors on the stage of a (now) dying civilization. Such as when a Žižek makes it his mission to offend the delicate sensibilities of his liberal intellectual friends—declaring, for instance, that "the problem with Hitler was that he wasn't violent enough." "What?!" the culture industry duly gasps, playing along by pretending to be aghast. "Well," he gives his prepared response, "Hitler's violence didn't fundamentally challenge the system, and in this sense Gandhi was more violent than Hitler." Ah, good point, great contribution, way to contribute to rational discourse—let's play on the meaning of "violence" and twist it around to provoke our liberal friends and capture the headlines of a bored intellectual world, since the only thing that matters is getting noticed. These people, these insular attention-whores of the elite—and, more generally, all the millions of pseudo-intellectual upper-crusters and middle-crusters who in their parasitic boredom take them seriously, just as they take seriously (or play the game of taking seriously) all and only those who have the stamp of some elite institution's approval on their forehead—as though the whole charade of status, recognition, riches, resumé-padding, curricula vitae, *means* anything!—should be seen not really as autonomous and dignified human beings but more as *institutional byproducts*, waste products of the culture-factories. Such a huge industry with such huge profits is bound, after all, to produce a titanic volume of pollution.

What all this phony status-worship amounts to, in short, is *anti-democracy*. We don't live in a democratic world, which is just to say we don't live in a human world, a world based on individuality, morality, clear communication, and rationality. We live, as I've said, in an institutionally structured world—what's worse, a world structured by *capitalist* institutions. Integrity and merit will rarely be rewarded in such a world, and democracy will barely exist.

In a sense, though, these reflections should be a comfort to the millions of people who unjustly suffer from a lack of recognition, whether they're talented artists or dedicated activists. Their lack of recognition, far from proving their lack of worth, can be thought of as an indication of it, since what civilization values is pretense and fraud. And highly "successful" people should ask themselves what their success suggests about them, and whether they too, like so many others, are living an inauthentic existence.[1]

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With regard to the elite, another test for intellectual integrity is readily available: simply ask the person in question what he thinks of Noam Chomsky. If he expresses contempt or scorn, you know what to think of him. Assuming he isn't ignorant of Chomsky's work, he has either internalized conventional norms and ideologies, and thus has become blind to facts and moral truisms, or he is a fundamentally dishonest person. (Or both.) Alan Dershowitz is the obvious example.[2]

The reason I make these seemingly harsh and closed-minded judgments is that nearly all Chomsky's political, social, and ethical commentary follows from elementary values and truths and is backed up by overwhelming evidence. Most of what he says is, indeed, mere common sense, expressed eloquently. Only a mind that has been subtly or egregiously warped could fail to see the essential social and moral truth in his opinions, or would fail to be impressed by his reasoning and his superhuman factual knowledge. It's no surprise, then, that most "ordinary people" wherever he goes seem to adore him, and that authorities and the elite loathe him. For the latter have achieved their station by internalizing warped

[1] On the notion of authenticity, see Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

[2] See Howard Friel, *Chomsky and Dershowitz: On Endless War and the End of Civil Liberties* (Olive Branch Press, 2014).

norms, while the former, who have not had to be so deeply indoctrinated (because they're more distant from the workings of power), still have common sense and understand moral principles, such as that you should apply to yourself the standards you apply to others. Or that participatory democracy is a positive value. Or that it's good to alleviate others' suffering. These three principles alone, in conjunction with an array of facts, are enough to establish Chomsky's positions.

Intellectuals love to insist that "things are complicated," in part because it's by complicating simple things that they get a paycheck—but also because it absolves them of the responsibility to take a stand against the powerful institutions they serve—and then they dismiss Chomsky because of his supposedly simple-minded statements. But moral truths are, in fact, not terribly complicated. In any case, it is clear what to think of people who flippantly denounce someone but rarely or never give specific examples to justify the denunciation. (Or, when they do give examples, they actually redound to Chomsky's credit, as in the case of his consistently defending the right to free speech of people who hold obnoxious views. How *deformed* must a mind be not to understand that defending the right of a Holocaust-denier like Robert Faurisson to air his views isn't the same thing as defending the views themselves??[1] The very notion of *principle* is foreign to the average intellectual—a fact that Chomsky himself documents abundantly.)

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The upside-down world.— Given the nature of modern society, failure is a point in one's favor. –Our world is like a stagnant pond: the scum floats to the top.[2]

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Anti-intellectual intellectuals.— If intellectual curiosity means the desire to learn new things, encounter new ideas, explore and explain the world, then "intellectuals" have no more of it than other people do. Possibly less. They limit themselves to one field and do their job and earn their paycheck, as a reward for serving the masters by enforcing conventional wisdom and political correctness. In fact, it's much more common to find subtlety and openness of thought, as well as sheer common sense, among the working class, which has been far less indoctrinated and regimented than the middle and upper classes. The British journalist William Cobbett said it in 1820: "Give me leave to say that...these [lower] classes are, to my certain knowledge, at this time, more enlightened than the other classes of the community... They see further into the future than the Parliament and the Ministers. –There is this advantage attending the pursuit of their knowledge: they have no particular interest to answer; and, therefore, their judgement is unclouded by prejudice and selfishness. Besides which, their communication with each other is perfectly free. The thoughts of one man produce other thoughts in another man. Notions are canvassed without the restraint imposed upon suspicion, by false pride, or false delicacy. And hence the truth is speedily arrived at." Talk to someone from the working class about politics and, unless he's a white man who has been corrupted by Limbaughite fascism, you'll see he understands elementary Marxian truths—that the rich run the country, politicians are virtually bought by the corporate sector, American "democracy" is a sham, the whole game is rigged against the majority of the population—that most academics can't even comprehend, much less believe. The more education, the less rational.[3]

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[1] "The Faurisson affair" of the late 1970s is worth reading about if you want an example of cleanliness fighting an uphill battle against pollution.

[2] As the historian Albert Prago said, in an amoral society, the amoral man is best qualified to succeed.

[3] To give a minor example: upon my arguing once that big business has near-total control over U.S. policy, a highly respected liberal historian said there was an obvious problem with this opinion, namely: if the rich are so clearly in charge, why doesn't everyone know this fact and rebel against it? To which I replied that most people (not academics) do know it—just look at public-opinion polls—but that it isn't exactly easy to rise up collectively and overthrow a society's central institutions. His blindness to these profoundly obvious truths is symptomatic, and very different from non-academics' relative clear-headedness. See Nicholas Abercrombie et al., *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984).

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Popular sanity.— No reasonable person would deny that pop culture is a vulgar, artificial, debased and debasing thing. Does this mean that "the people"—who tend to enjoy pop culture—are vulgar and debased? Not necessarily. For one thing, we should distinguish between popular culture and pop culture, "the corporate-sponsored mass culture that is so often mistaken for [the former]," to quote T. J. Jackson Lears. Genuine popular culture is the kind of thing there was among the farmers in the 1890s' Populist movement, among New England's Italian anarchists in the early twentieth century, and among working-class communities of the nineteenth century.[1] Neighborhood theaters, festivals, picnics, churches, benefit societies, cooperatives, democratic labor unions, Communist-associated ethnic workers' clubs in the 1930s—every conceivable form of mutuality. Popular culture is bottom-up, not top-down, and so *brings together*. Mass culture, by contrast, is founded on the co-optation and mutilation of a few popular impulses into means of making profit, tools of business. Whatever is good and authentic in the original becomes bad and commercial in the copy. In music: classical, jazz, blues, bluegrass, folk, rap—all can be puerilized, vulgarized, atomized, lucrified. Same with literature, theater, the plastic arts, religion, dance, and sex. It can all cease to be a means of authentic expression, a sublime sublimation of individuality, as it becomes impersonal—impersonally replicated on the assembly-line of capitalist culture.

It's the same, incidentally, with social movements. Truly popular movements are anti-authoritarian, even anarchistic, emancipatory; the Ku Klux Klans, the fascism, the McCarthyism, the social conservatism are not populist but pseudo-populist, business-engendered and -supported.[2] Strains of authentic popular discontent are manipulated, attenuated, and directed to new repressive ends as the elite sees in them an opportunity.

People value art, self-expression, and emancipation. In a society that doesn't reward those things—or actively suppresses them—many people will embrace their ubiquitous substitutes and even cling to them desperately to escape, if momentarily, a life of hassled boredom. When one is surrounded by fun and "sexy" distractions, sees everyone else indulging in them, and is relentlessly pressured to do the same oneself, it requires a willful and rebellious nature to turn away from them and into the past or an alternative present. One may, therefore, end up with low cultural tastes—or, politically, sympathize with a pseudo-populist "movement" like the Tea Party—but the deep-seated human affinity for high art and high values can never be wholly eradicated. Even a world formed and defined by anti-human social structures cannot destroy the instinct for beauty and high creativity, which is wont to show itself in small and unexpected ways.

We're reminded of all this by the socialist Oscar Ameringer's autobiography, *If You Don't Weaken* (1940). In it he describes proselytizing for socialism in the 1890s, in isolated communities in Oklahoma, where he got a good reception. The "white trash" took a liking to him and his message.

> "White trash!" [he writes]. There is good stuff in those people. If many of them now are below par it is not their nature that made them so, but the greed and stupidity of their so-called betters…
>
> Dinner over, and dishes washed, the two o'clock meeting started under the big tent with singing and instrumental music. Singing was led by our choir, recruited on the ground. The instrumental music was supplied by myself and three sons, and we played only the best, so far as the best can be played by a brass quartet augmented by piano. Before our instrumental concert, I usually gave a short lecture on classical music, which I defined as Bill Nye had defined Wagner's music: "it is a helluva lot better than it sounds." I also explained how to acquire the appreciation of good music by simply listening to it with all

[1] See, e.g., Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), and Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

[2] See Jesse Lemisch, *On Active Service in War and Peace* (New Hogtown Press, 1975).

> your mind and heart. Believe it or not, we played arrangements of Beethoven, Mozart, and Schubert quartets, chorals of Bach, songs of Mendelssohn…and of course gems from Stephen Foster, America's own sweet singer. They loved it. Those simple people took to good music like ducks to water. Their minds were not yet corrupted by the Tin Pan Alley trash that later was a music for profit. Besides, "classical music" is folk music clarified, interpreted and ennobled by the great masters, and these were folk people.[1]

What we need are social structures that bring out the best in us, not the basest.

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Lessons from history.— The elite has the money, but the workers have the dignity. The elite consumes; the workers produce. Future ages always forget the past elite or view its decadence with horrified contempt; the lower classes go on to found new societies and are vindicated. The masters die off, Hegel said, being collectively a parasitic excrescence, while the slaves birth new worlds. Think of the old American South: the slaves went on to form cultures of Christian love and soulful living—the "Negro spiritual," gospel, ragtime, blues, jazz, arts of sublimated emancipation—while the slave-masters' culture, based on idle leisure and violent exploitation of a productive people, withered away. Think of the French *ancien régime*: the aristocracy was good only for patronizing its artistic servants (Mozart and others), while the *sans-culottes* made revolutions that began the modern era. Think of ancient Rome: the grand empire collapsed under the weight of its own rot, as the despised barbarians triumphed and a more democratic Europe rose. Thus will our modern global empire collapse, our modern aristocracy succumb to its own decadence, and our *sans-culottes* lead the way to a new world.

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Revolutionary betrayal.— Here's a (somewhat oversimplified) one-sentence summary of the origins, trajectory, and outcome of the American Revolution: it "ended in reaction as the Founding Fathers used race, nation, and citizenship to discipline, divide, and exclude the very sailors and slaves who had initiated and propelled the revolutionary movement."[2] In general, *mutatis mutandis*, that's how revolutions go. *Class struggle* is the original and essential meaning for most of the population, but the leadership that takes over uses ideology to justify setting up a new hierarchy, a new authoritarian structure. One elite takes the place of another—and so the vicious cycle of history continues. In the case of the American experience, the Progressive historian Carl Becker pithily observed that the Revolution wasn't only about home rule but also about who would rule at home. For example, during the revolutionary turmoil of the 1770s farmers and urban tradesmen in several colonies forced the ruling elite to pass radically democratic laws and constitutions meant to protect debtors and the economic independence of all "commoners." The Pennsylvania constitution of 1776 actually abolished property restrictions on voting, created a unicameral legislature with members elected for one year, created a judiciary appointed by the legislature for seven-year terms but removable at any time, and eliminated the post of a governor who could veto laws, installing in his place a twelve-member Supreme Executive Council that would administer the government. The Thermidorian reaction to all this "irresponsible" democratizing occurred in the 1780s, when bondholders and other anti-debtor, anti-farmer groups forced governments to roll back many of the rights previously won by the people, in the name of "fiscal responsibility." Our now-revered federal Constitution, far from being "revolutionary," was but the culmination of Thermidor. Throughout these years "ordinary farmers agitated for a more accountable, localist, and responsive government because they accurately perceived the

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[1] Oscar Ameringer, *If You Don't Weaken* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1940), 265, 266.

[2] Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso, 2000), 328.

class agenda behind the new federal Constitution."[1] Of course they basically lost the fight, as democrats usually do (except in the long run).

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The ironic anti-capitalism of the Founding Fathers.— In the footnotes to chapter 6 of Chomsky's *Understanding Power* are these illuminating remarks: "[Thomas] Jefferson did not support capitalism; he supported independent production… The fundamental Jeffersonian proposition is that 'widespread poverty and concentrated wealth cannot exist side by side in a democracy.' This proposition is dismissed by liberals making peace with the rich and coming to terms with inequality, but Jefferson perceived the basic contradictions between democracy and capitalism… In 1817 he complained that the banks' mania 'is raising up a monied aristocracy in our country which has already set the government at defiance…' A year earlier he said he hoped the United States would reject the British example and 'crush in its birth the aristocracy of our monied corporations which dare already to challenge our government to a trial of strength and bid defiance to the laws of our country…'" "Men divide naturally into two parties, 'aristocrats and democrats,' [Jefferson] wrote. On one side stood 'those who fear and distrust the people, and wish to draw all powers from them into the hands of the higher classes'; on the other stood 'those who identify with the people, have confidence in them, cherish and consider them as the honest & safe, altho' not the most wise depository of the public interests…'" Among all the Founders Jefferson had the most positive view of democracy, but later in their lives even John Adams and James Madison were disgusted by the growth of American capitalism. After all, they had been trained in the Ciceronian school of civic virtue, republican ideals of engaged citizenship, liberty and independent-mindedness, public-spiritedness—all the very opposite of capitalism, this tornado of privatization that has been laying waste to the world since the fifteenth century. The tragedy of our Founding elitists, including even Jefferson, was that they were mere tools of historical forces they didn't understand: in thrall to the conservative, antiquity-derived ideology of republicanism, which incorporated the naïve Enlightenment notion that in the sphere of politics men of property (unlike the propertyless) could act in disinterested and virtuous ways, they were blind—until it was too late—to the fractionating and mammonizing tendencies of commercialism and early industrialism. The republican empowerment of the opulent and crushing of the poor had the opposite effects Madison and Adams wanted it to: it helped clear the ground for the most rapacious tyranny in history, the tyranny of capital. *This* is the Founders' true legacy.

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The dialectic of business's attacks on the public sphere.— In my Master's thesis, *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution* (2010), I argued that in the coming decades, the state and the ruling class, in order to partly contain popular discontent and so prop up their power, will probably have to evolve in ways that will undermine their position in the long run. I ought to have noted that neoliberalism itself—the state's configuration in the past thirty-five years—has shown similar dynamics. It has been the means by which the ruling class has maintained and even augmented its power after the popular uprisings of the 1960s and 1970s, but ultimately it will prove—or is proving—to have made the long-term position of the ruling class untenable. It has so undermined social stability that I suspect power-structures all over the world are panicking now. In the last twenty years there has been a militarizing of police forces and an expansion of the "national security" state in order to control the population, and these trends are intensifying. But they won't prove adequate to the challenge. As the global economy falls apart and privatization continues to

[1] Seth Cotlar, review of *Taming Democracy: "The People," the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution*, by Terry Bouton, and *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution*, by Woody Holton, *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 76, no. 4 (November, 2010): 971–973.

rend the social fabric, the ruling class will, I think, have to start tolerating and even supporting the kinds of decentralized "solidarity economy"-esque initiatives Gar Alperovitz discusses in *What Then Must We Do?* (2013), because they'll be thought to help stabilize society and will seem less subversive towards power than mass political movements (which will exist too). Gradually, with the conditional help of sectors of the ruling class that don't understand the historical significance of their actions, a new society will thereby be constructed in the interstices of the dying one. Thus, the rich and their state will advance to another stage of the dialectic, another stage of their self-undermining, in which they participate more actively—out of necessity—in destroying the conditions of their rule. The "necessity" of this stage, if it occurs, will have organically emerged from the previous neoliberal phase, which itself grew out of the unsustainability of the earlier, more "populist" phase (the heyday of the welfare and regulatory state between the 1940s and 1970s), and so on back to the beginning. Marx was right that history has a logic.

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Capitalist parricide.— The nation-state and capitalism were born as twins from the fertile, ancient womb of greed and power-hunger. They grew up together, were playmates from an early age—going on treasure hunts, playing Cowboys and Indians, in their later years preferring Monopoly—learned from each other, helped each other achieve their dreams, relied on each other in difficult times. Their youths and early adulthood were full of storms and stresses, brutal competition with bullies in their neighborhood—feudalism, aristocracy, absolute monarchy, foreign empires—in addition to more distant but redoubtable enemies like community, untamed nature, and the stubborn human urge for freedom, but in the end, working together, they were able to triumph over all adversaries. And yet just at the pinnacle of their glory, cracks in their relationship emerged: the nation-state, the (slightly) more responsible partner, resented capitalism's reckless and profligate ways and thus demanded adherence to codes of behavior that capitalism found onerous. So the latter, having always been the more ambitious and restless one, plotted to free itself from all constraints, whatever the cost. At last the opportunity arose: with the help of new technology it broke free of nation-statist, welfare-statist restrictions and roamed the world unencumbered by social contracts or conscience. Power-mad, it reveled in orgies of violence and destruction that reduced every country they touched to semi-chaos. With blind disloyalty, having been corrupted to the point of insanity by power, it finally even turned against its brother and plotted to *kill* the nation-state. Perhaps the state's continued remonstrances against the totalitarianism of profit-making, feeble and infrequent though they were, annoyed it. Whatever its motives, capitalism resolved to sabotage the laws, conventions, contracts, treaties, borders, and civil society organizations that were the conditions of its brother's life: former compromises between the siblings were scrapped, and capitalism appropriated more and more of the world to its own private sphere of arbitrary power. The resultant social disorganization, popular protest, and ruination of nature amounted to a slow-acting poison wending its way through the nation's metabolism, making it ever sicker and more desperate to suppress every rebellious symptom of the illness. At the same time the state, ironically, behaved especially abjectly toward its conniving and too-powerful brother/partner, trying to stay in capitalism's good graces—and too weak now, anyway, to act independently. All its efforts, however, were for naught: its sibling had outgrown it and showed no mercy. The nation-state succumbed to its afflictions and approached death. –But a surprise lay in wait for capitalism. Far from now being the supreme, unchallenged power on earth, it found, as it stared in epiphanic panic at its collapsing brother, that in killing the nation-state it had also killed itself! A reckoning worthy of Edgar Allan Poe's horror! The dying state could no longer protect capitalism from its enemies or its own demonic will to self-destruction, and so it, too, advanced swiftly to its mortality. Thus the brothers, still dripping with blood from all their conquests, were swallowed up in the death-heap of history, to which they had themselves contributed so mightily. Death reclaimed its own.[1]

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[1] See my paper "The Tortured Demise of the Nation State," in chapter 2 of *Notes of an Underground Humanist*.

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Lessons from a critical sociologist.— In the last chapter of *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966), Barrington Moore explains the value of Marxian analytical methods, as contrasted with methods that emphasize *cultural* factors, ideologies, subjective values, etc. Here are excerpts: [see the excerpts from years ago in my journal].

He's right. An egregious and well-known example is the myth, or the Big Lie (see *Mein Kampf*), propagated by pseudo-scholars like Samuel Huntington, Bernard Lewis, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris that we're in the midst of a potentially apocalyptic "clash of civilizations" between the Christian (or, in some versions, secular) "West" and the Muslim "East" or "Middle East." This *cultural* fault-line is conceived as the primary geopolitical fact of the present. It's Us versus Them. The Huntingtonian hypothesis has been amply refuted since its introduction in the early 1990s;[1] it is widely known by now, or should be, that "they" don't "hate us for our freedom" (or our Christianity or secularism or whatever) but for our savage imperialistic policies that are ripping their societies apart. Nevertheless, bipolar, culturalist, Huntington-type thinking persists, largely because of its usefulness to the powerful. (It distracts from intra-societal conflict, particularly from class and other institutional structures, and generates popular support for militaristic policies.)

Indeed, this sort of culturalism is not far from racialism, which is not far from racism. As the story goes, people in a particular region of the world—in this case, North Africa and the Middle East—acquired a long time ago, in some primeval past, something called "a culture," which has stayed with them nearly unchanged for centuries and millennia just because cultures are the sorts of things that are very hard to change. The longer they exist, the harder it is to change them. By virtue of mere inertia, as Moore says, traditions are supposed to pass from generation to generation passively, like the ebb and flow of time itself. There is little room for human agency in this story: one grows up in a cultural atmosphere, soaks it up like a sponge, and passes it on to one's descendants. So now, in the twenty-first century, an Arab or Middle Easterner necessarily has this tremendous cultural burden simply because he comes from North Africa or the Middle East. He cannot be other than he is; it is virtually in his blood. –Edward Said dealt with all this long ago in his classic *Orientalism* (1978), but, since ideological servants of power-structures continue to exist, "Orientalist" thinking does as well.

Culturalism, or idealism, comes in less obnoxious forms too. In fact, in these forms it's almost ubiquitous. Hackneyed concepts like "American individualism" or "the competitive spirit" or "Americans' traditional conservatism" are used to explain everything from the proliferation of guns and violence in the U.S. to the weakness of labor unions. With that simple rhetorical trick, the whole history of the labor movement, of business and state violence, of corporate propaganda and public-relations campaigns, of myriad social possibilities that were foreclosed by repression, is erased.[2] What culturalism/idealism really amounts to is *anti-historical thinking*. No wonder conservatives and the powerful love it: for knowledge of history is dangerous to authority, and has to be suppressed.

Even scholars who think of themselves as consummate historians are often inadvertently suppressing history by putting forward idealistic interpretations. For example, to explain political policies

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[1] See, for example, Edward Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," *The Nation,* Oct. 4, 2001; Sandra Buckley, "Remaking the World Order: Reflections on Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*," *Theory & Event* 2, No. 4 (1998); Carl Gershman, "The Clash within Civilizations," *Journal of Democracy* 8, No. 4 (October 1997). In fact, polls have demonstrated that the vast majority of Muslims have nearly identical values to Western liberals. See my paper "'Eastern Muslims' and 'Western Liberals': Ne'er the Twain Shall Meet?," at www.academic.edu.

[2] See David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Patricia Cayo Sexton, *The War on Labor and the Left: Understanding America's Unique Conservatism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1991); Alex Carey, *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy: Corporate Propaganda versus Freedom and Liberty* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1996); and Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

in terms of the ideologies that politicians use to justify them is to suppress the *real* history, the institutional history, in favor of a fairy-tale that glorifies the powerful. To take a random but typical instance: in *The Global Cold War* (2005), Odd Arne Westad argues that "the United States and the Soviet Union were driven to intervene in the Third World by the ideologies inherent in their politics."[1] He pays little attention to economic dynamics and institutional interests, relying instead on policymakers' rhetoric and self-understanding. Thus, in addition to legitimizing powerful actors and the political status quo, his method falsifies the history, or rather "superficializes" it.[2]

But it may be unfair for me to pick on Westad: his approach is and always has been the default approach of 90 percent of intellectuals. What people who actually care about truth should do is heed Moore's materialist admonitions.

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The science.— It's embarrassing (to humanity) that it's still necessary to give evidence that men and women are innately different, but I'll quote a couple scientists whose books the reader may not have read. In *The Blank Slate* (2002), Steven Pinker summarizes what should be common sense: "Variation in the level of testosterone in different men, and in the same man in different seasons or at different times of day, correlates with libido, self-confidence, and the drive for dominance… When women preparing for a sex-change operation are given androgens, they improve on tests of mental rotation and get worse on tests of verbal fluency. The journalist Andrew Sullivan, whose medical condition had lowered his testosterone levels, describes the effects of injecting it: 'The rush of a T shot is not unlike the rush of going on a first date or speaking before an audience. I feel braced. After one injection, I almost got in a public brawl for the first time in my life. There is always a lust peak—every time it takes me unaware.'"

"Many of the sex differences [in behavior] are found widely in other primates, indeed, throughout the mammalian class…" An obvious but very suggestive fact.

"The brains of men differ visibly from the brains of women in several ways. Men have larger brains with more neurons (even correcting for body size), though women have a higher percentage of gray matter. (Since men and women are equally intelligent overall, the significance of these differences is unknown.) The interstitial nuclei in the anterior hypothalamus, and a nucleus of the stria terminalis, also in the hypothalamus, are larger in men; they have been implicated in sexual behavior and aggression…"[3]

Pinker also gives compelling evidence that "two key predictions of the social construction theory—that boys treated as girls will grow up with girls' minds, and that differences between boys and girls can be traced to differences in how their parents treated them—have gone down in flames." One can expect that many feminists will dismiss Pinker as an ideologist and so forth, but the range of scientific literature he draws on is impressive.

Simon Baron-Cohen's *The Essential Difference: Male and Female Brains and the Truth about Autism* (2003) is more systematic, providing overwhelming evidence that male and female brains are innately different, in interesting ways. His main thesis is that male brains are better at systemizing (which he defines), while female brains are better at empathizing. The "maleness" and "femaleness" of brains varies between individuals, but clear tendencies apply to each sex. The behavioral and biological evidence Baron-Cohen adduces validates most stereotypes about the sexes, such as male dominance, aggression, and interest in certain types of abstract intellection, versus female nurturance, attention to people's feelings, and interest in people-centered things over "systemizing." He mentions the usual compelling data relating to hormones, for example that boys born to women who have been prescribed a synthetic female hormone

[1] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4.
[2] See my *Notes of an Underground Humanist*, 251, 252.
[3] Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 346–348.

(diesthystilbestrol) are likely to show more female-typical behaviors. Or that male-to-female transsexuals show a reduction in "direct" forms of aggression (physical assaults) and an increase in indirect or "relational" aggression—which suggests that "testosterone affects the form that aggression takes."[1] He also gives evidence to support the obvious idea that genes—and there are genetic differences between males and females—partly determine systemizing and empathizing abilities.

Anyway, isn't it just *reasonable* to think that both biology and socialization would contribute to the nature of gender roles? *A priori*, this is what a reasonable person, unblinded by ideology, would think. No surprise, then, that science tends to confirm it.

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Institutional blinders.— What makes things like academic "gender feminism" possible—or the postmodern dismissal of science, or scientists' dismissal of philosophy, or analytic philosophers' dismissal of all things Continental, or historians' dismissal of sociology, or economists' dismissal of history—is the parochialism of modern intellectual life, which grows out of the institutional fragmentation of society. Most of the time, whatever isn't institutionally sanctioned isn't pursued, because most people are conformists content to adopt the limits of their institution as approximately the limits of their mind. So academics narrow themselves to their chosen department of knowledge and rarely venture out into the big, scary world of other kinds of thought. "The way *I* do it is right," everyone thinks, "and besides, it's necessary to specialize in something. So I devote my intellectual labors to my specialty." Also, understandably, all people (not just academics) interest themselves only in what they find most congenial to their tastes and beliefs. The problem is that their tastes and beliefs are encouraged to be limited and one-sided given the limits and one-sidedness of institutions, including the one that has molded them most.

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Self-refuting postmodernism.— The concept of "socialization" cuts both ways. If feminists want to argue that people are socialized into so-called patriarchal norms, I can argue that they, and other postmodernists, have been socialized and indoctrinated into rejecting science (insofar as it contradicts favored dogmas), deploring "phallocentrism" or "phallogocentrism," and exalting Foucault or other postmodern "thinkers." That is, I can take their ideas to their logical conclusions: if our beliefs and scientific theories are mere products of power-systems, then postmodern beliefs, too, have no intrinsic rational validity but are only expressions of a certain kind of society. This reductivism of course conflicts with the implicit claims to *truth* that postmodernists make when they put forward their ideas. In other words, if their ideas are right, as they think, then they can't be right, because there is no such thing as rightness or truth or autonomous reason. Everything is supposed to be a mere expression or reflection of a particular state of affairs, and nothing is even remotely "autonomous"—a dogma, incidentally, that denies humans dignity, creativity, freedom, and reason. This kind of (pseudo-)philosophical postmodernism amounts to a profound nihilism. Its extreme philosophical empiricism—much more extreme than, say, David Hume's—is revealingly similar to B. F. Skinner's radical behaviorism, which, likewise, effectively denied humans dignity and creativity by interpreting them in terms of mere conditioning, reinforcement, and stimulus-and-response. So, whether it's behaviorism, or an empiricism that denies individuals contribute anything to their own development, or a postmodernism that says "Language speaks us" (i.e., we're mere products of particular discourses or languages or power-systems or whatever), the Enlightenment values of autonomous reason and freedom have no place.

Nevertheless, there is some value to philosophical postmodernism: socialization does, after all, exist (though that has been understood for a very long time). Gender feminists, for example, *have* been

[1] Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 99.

socialized into their bizarre beliefs; they're not as autonomous or rational as they implicitly, and self-contradictorily, think.

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Postmodern irony.— Given the rigor of the scientific method, the conclusions of modern natural science are much less "socially constructed" than are the ideas of postmodernists who critique science as being socially constructed. Maybe these people should look in the mirror from time to time.

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Thoughts on common feminist arguments.— To object to a belief on the grounds that it's a cliché is not a compelling argument. Something can be a cliché and yet be true. Such is the case, for example, with the belief that big business has immense influence over politics. Nor is it a convincing argument to object to a belief on the grounds that it's offensive. Wall Street tycoons might take offense at the idea that they thrive off the systematic exploitation of millions of workers, but that doesn't make it any less true.

On the other hand, the argument that a belief is *morally* offensive cannot be so easily dismissed. But here the question immediately arises: how can *truth* be *morally offensive*? As David Hume argued, the realm of "is" and the realm of "ought" are radically distinct, such that a fact cannot be morally wrong or objectionable. It just *is*. And to believe what *is* is surely, likewise, not morally wrong.

And yet there are difficulties here. It seems morally offensive to believe, say, that white people are on average less intelligent than blacks, or men are less intelligent than women. But, prima facie, neither belief appears *necessarily* false. For all we know, nature might have designed things that way. So, if those are possible truths, how is it that they can seem morally objectionable?

Here it's necessary to clarify a few things. First, the concept of "intelligence" is scientifically useless, meaningless. Scientifically it can be fleshed out in an indefinite number of ways. So, the offending statements in the previous paragraph, being effectively meaningless, can in fact *not* be true. Consider, then, some variation on them. Suppose someone believes that men are on average less adept at empathic understanding of others than most women are, because of biological structures in the brain. (And suppose this belief can be "precisified" so as to have scientific content and be testable.) Is that belief morally objectionable? No, it isn't. Insofar as it has cognitive content and isn't merely an underhanded way of denigrating one sex or the other, it is nothing but a neutral hypothesis to be accepted or rejected.

In fact, it's only insofar as the element of *valuing*—or *devaluing*—is present that it can be morally wrong to believe something. The intuition that it's wrong to think whites are less intelligent than blacks is explained by our sense that the real *point* of that belief is that *whites are inferior*. The "value-judgment" aspect of the statement is what's offensive. If the concept of intelligence had scientific meaning and could be separated from its emotional overtones, it wouldn't be morally wrong to believe the statement, as long as one didn't invest it with emotional content or use it to justify the belief that whites are inferior. Morality, to repeat, has to do with the act of valuing or devaluing, not with simple statements of fact (or non-fact).

This is also what explains the intuition that even to *care* about certain questions is morally wrong. To care about the differences between the brains of black people and white people seems wrong because we suspect that the only reason anyone would care is if he or she were a racist, and so wanted to demonstrate that one race is inferior to the other. However, such an awful motive isn't necessarily what would lead someone to be interested in differences between the *sexes*, because sexual differences are much more substantial and biologically meaningful than racial differences. There are legitimate scientific reasons to investigate differences between men and women. Again, as long as one doesn't invest hypotheses or conclusions with emotional content, i.e., use them to justify denigrating some category of people, the act of believing them is morally innocuous.

Thus, it *can* be innocuous to believe that women, for example, tend, on average, to be more

emotional than men, or more changeable in their moods, or more excitable, or whatever. It is by no means necessarily the case that someone who has these beliefs—and most people do, at least implicitly—thinks thereby that women are "inferior" to men or is only interested in the ideas to justify misogyny. For these statements may, after all, be true, given how little science understands about the human species! (And no reasonable person would deny that evidence exists to support these clichés, and others.) On the other hand, inasmuch as publicly advertising such views, or giving evidence for them and seeking out biological explanations, may give aid and comfort to misogynists and social conservatives, one has to think long and hard before concluding that the possible scientific gains in understanding outweigh the possible moral costs.

It's unfortunate that humanity is so constituted as to be able to pervert and corrupt truths, or possible truths, into supposed justifications of immoral and even meaningless value-judgments. Because some people act this way, many feminists lash out at *anyone* who makes speculations about biology or psychology that can be perceived by misogynists and feminists as unflattering to women. Thus you get the totalitarian climate of political correctness, in which even making a mild, correct observation about male and female behavior in our society is enough to get you slandered as a "misogynist." Indeed, the very act of generalizing at all—even with qualifications—is typically seen as beyond the pale, given the aversion postmodernism has to general truths (preferring fragmentary understanding, particularity, obsessive acknowledgement of human diversity, etc.). "That's a generalization!" the postmodernist screams in outrage, unaware that generalizations can be true or approximations of the truth. Even stereotypes frequently contain a kernel of truth—one reason for their being stereotypes to begin with.

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Subversive common sense.— Nietzsche's self-appointed task of "revaluating values" isn't difficult. It requires only a slightly independent mind to see the silliness of conventional wisdom. For example, to be "successful" typically means to conform well, not to have moral and intellectual integrity or to be a broad-minded and compassionate human being. Quite the contrary! Thus, financial and career success, in themselves, are contemptible (for many reasons, actually).

Or, being a man who "gets" a lot of women tends to have negative implications regarding your moral and intellectual worth. The Tucker Maxes of the world are beloved by young women, while the merely good or overly intellectual men are not. There is nothing admirable about being charismatic or seducing females by projecting "masculine dominance."

Or, to act morally, while always a good thing, is usually psychologically indistinguishable from acting so as to be thought well of by others. Even if you *want* to do something considered immoral or unkind, you take the easy way out and fit in with the crowd.

Or, most leftists conform almost as much as everyone else, only in a different milieu. To question Leninism in the International Socialist Organization will get you ostracized or expelled; to point out obvious truths about human biology and psychology to feminists will get you demonized as a misogynist; to offer slight qualifications to anarchism in some anarchist group will get you hated as an authoritarian; and hipsters are embarrassing. Ideologically defined groups are no credit to humanity.

Or, an "intellectual" can, to a first approximation, be defined as an educated person who loves to hear himself or herself talk. Other criteria can be given: one should have no commitment to truth for its own sake, one should take others seriously as long as they have a few letters after their name, one should care far more about career goals than mentoring students, etc.

Or, being a soldier, that oh-so-noble vocation, requires a unique skillset: being uniquely willing to submit to orders without question, being willing to kill others only because you've been told to, and being naïve enough to believe that there's something called "my country" for which you should fight, because you've been told to.

Or, children are more interesting and independent than adults, who have matured into a propriety-worshipping, authority-respecting, penny-pinching old age.

Or, believing in God makes you *less* moral than atheists, because it supposedly means you act morally mainly for God's sake (not humans'—or only indirectly), and it's a way of disrespecting the suffering of billions of people (God is just), and, most likely, it means you're prejudiced in various ways.

Or, the U.S. government is second only to the Nazis in the number of people it has killed or helped kill. (Actually, in two hundred years, from the Indians to the Iraqis and beyond, we've surely taken first place.)

Or, the glorious "free market" means that starving people without money can't eat, and public education or public transportation or social welfare programs don't exist, and future generations don't have a say in what kind of world we leave them (because they lack money), and nothing can interfere with the reduction of people and nature and life itself to *commodities*.

Or, the U.S. Communist Party, for all its faults, basically began the Civil Rights Movement in the 1930s, organizing whites and blacks to fight for their collective economic, political, and civil rights. Social welfare in the U.S. was born in response to Communist agitation and stimulation of mass protest in the early 1930s. In the 1940s and '50s authorities crushed the new laborite institutions that had nurtured racial equality and solidarity, so the later Civil Rights Movement had to be organized mainly around churches rather than unions.

–See? It's not hard.

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Against Nietzsche.— Nietzsche was indisputably brilliant, but his way of writing doesn't lend itself to the disinterested pursuit of truth. His impassioned, sarcastic, lightning-quick style is more like literature than proper philosophy or science. Indeed, if his ideas are distilled into their essence, divested of their decorative eloquence, they become no more than *interesting perspectives*—and there become fewer of them. (His writing is somehow dense and diffuse at the same time.) As for the content of his philosophy, I'll only make the obvious point that, like so many brilliant psychologists, he greatly overestimates the importance of psychology and underestimates the importance of institutional structures. He reduces everything to body and psyche, to an individual's physical health, mental character, emotional vitality, and the influence of such asocial elements as climate and weather. It doesn't occur to him that not everything is *affect*; it is possible, e.g., for thinkers simply to follow trains of thought that seem plausible to them, their affective or bodily needs having nothing to do with the matter. Reason *can be* relatively autonomous, and it's a treacherous task to read something into a person's psychology from the fact that he holds certain beliefs.[1] Nor does it occur to Nietzsche that people are so enmeshed in social structures that it is more often these, not individual psychologies, that determine beliefs, even much behavior. –Marxism is the way to go, though Nietzsche is a worthy adversary.

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Against Freud.— To think that people desire *pleasure* more than *recognition* (validation) is ridiculous. Virtually every facet of society points to the priority of recognition over mere pleasure. Culture may be partly a sublimation of libidinal drives, but it is even more a manifestation of the human need for the other's esteem.

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[1] It can be done, but not in the promiscuous way Nietzsche does it.

The writer.— For whom do I write? Not really for myself, since I want an audience. But not really for other people either, since I don't have in mind anyone in particular when I'm writing, and knowing that my works are read doesn't give me much pleasure. Besides, I don't have a high enough opinion of most people for their approval to mean a lot. What I'm writing for, then, is something abstract, not concrete. I have in mind, obscurely, an "abstract" audience. Most immediately, the abstraction in question has to be the abstract Other in my consciousness, the "other" in the "self-other" structure that defines human consciousness. My mind is permeated by otherness—I'm aware of myself as an other to myself—and it's this that drives me to create. Getting recognition from concrete people is slightly satisfying because it entails some small recognition from the Other in my mind, and so from myself. Ultimately, then, it's *myself*—but in a mediated way—to whom I want to prove my worth, or the supposed "objective justifiability" of my self-respect.

But since the Other that accompanies me (and makes possible human self-consciousness) is abstract, it really can only correspond to another abstract entity. Thus I'm led to imagine things like God or humanity or posterity, universal things "out there" whose recognition or appreciation of me would truly confirm my value. Recognition from them would be as "objectively real" as it can get, and so would basically satisfy me. I create for these things, and I pretend that they exist and aren't just figments of my imagination. Since they *don't* exist, I'll never be satisfied, never certain of my objective worth (the notion of which, in any case, is meaningless). Still, I have to keep striving, impressing myself on the world, imagining that I'm writing for posterity and all humanity, imagining that I'll be immortal…

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The enduring truth of Hegelian mysticism.— The paradox of the self, or human consciousness, is that it's a concrete abstractness, or an abstract concreteness. It's incoherent: it's a fusion of the universal and the particular, abstract otherness and concrete individuality, and it is never at one with itself. It seeks to coincide with itself, to bring the otherness and individuality together so that its self-otherness is abolished and its individuality, its self-love, is fused with objective reality—thereby confirmed and made *real* (no longer only "imaginary")—but it is doomed to fail. (This is where Hegel went wrong. He was optimistic, but there is in fact no transcending of the self-distancing inherent in self-consciousness.)

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So much for my third book (or selections from it). Now here's the introduction of my dissertation. I totally rewrote it for the book, so I'll put the original version here in order not to lose it. It's flawed, but I think it has merits.

Introduction

Mark Twain showed characteristic wisdom when he remarked, supposedly, that while history does not repeat itself, it rhymes. The most recent evidence for this thesis concerns the state of the world economy, the "fundamentals" of which are *not* "strong" (John McCain's erstwhile optimism notwithstanding). In many respects, the Great Recession of 2008–9 rhymed with the Great Depression of the 1930s, as political and academic commentators have pointed out.[1] Even more ominously, contemporary economic trends continue to rhyme with the trends that preceded and precipitated the Great Depression. All indications are that the world is headed for another such cataclysm, although of course it will not follow the contours of the last one. This grim prognosis is the reason I thought it would be worthwhile and timely to reconsider the experiences of the long-term unemployed in the United States—more specifically, in Chicago—in the Great Depression; for the ranks of our own unemployed are about to swell dramatically.

[1] E.g., Peter Temin, "The Great Recession and the Great Depression," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 15645, January 2010, at http://www.nber.org/papers/w15645.

In the first chapter I parenthetically draw parallels between the political economy of the late 1920s and that of the present, but I'll make a few more remarks here. The central point is the old Keynesian one, which originally was the old socialist and Marxian one (until Keynes appropriated it and made it respectably bourgeois and mainstream): economic growth at a compound rate cannot continue indefinitely when aggregate demand is weak. David Harvey said it well in 2010, in the thick of the Great Recession: "A synoptic view of the current crisis would say: while the epicentre lies in the technologies and organisational forms of the credit system and the state-finance nexus, the underlying problem is excessive capitalist empowerment vis-à-vis labour and consequent wage repression, leading to problems of effective demand papered over by a credit-fuelled consumerism of excess in one part of the world [the West, especially the U.S.] and a too-rapid expansion of production in new product lines in another [e.g., much of Asia]."[1] The problem of excessive capitalist empowerment and consequent wage repression remains, and is essentially the problem of the late 1920s, when American Communists, among others, were predicting an economic collapse on the basis of old "underconsumptionist" and "overproductionist" arguments.

Wherever one looks, one finds parallels between the past and the present. The explosion of consumer credit in the late 1920s (mentioned in the following chapter) has been dwarfed by the explosion of credit since the 1980s—an explosion necessary because of the broad-based stagnation and decline of American workers' income over the same period. But expansion of credit with no corresponding expansion of income cannot continue indefinitely, as the economic collapses of 1929 and 2008 showed. Since the Great Recession ended, income inequality in the U.S. has continued to rise, as it did in the 1920s: for example, between 2009 and 2012, the top 1 percent captured 95 percent of total income growth. As before the Depression, unproductive speculation on the stock market, sustained by financial bubbles, has in the last 40 years become an increasingly favored form of investment by the titans of capitalism, even as deindustrialization has left millions of Americans without stable work and is contributing to the erosion of the middle class. Organized labor has suffered enormous defeats since the 1970s, as it did in the 1920s, to the point that union density in the private sector is now what it was in 1930 (a little less than 7 percent). And so on and on one can list the parallels—the pathologies.[2]

In short, there is every reason to believe that we're entering an era of prolonged economic stagnation punctuated by crisis, an era structurally analogous (in some ways) to the Great Depression. The obvious question, then, is—What can we learn from the past about how the future will unfold, and about how we can make the future unfold in a *positive* way? This being an academic work of history, I will not discuss these questions much in the body of the work. I have already done so, in any case, in another book, *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution: History and Possibilities in the United States* (2014), where I also show how a few revisions to the doctrines of orthodox Marxism can and should inform, in interesting and productive ways, the strategies of left-wing activists in the 21st century. Nevertheless, I hope that this dissertation at least indirectly illuminates our current historical moment, with regard both to its dominant features and to the possibilities that lie dormant within it.

Much has been written about the history of the unemployed in the United States—although perhaps not as much as one would think, given the importance of the topic. One of the most notable studies is Alexander Keyssar's *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts* (1986), a pioneering social history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that includes discussion of politics, organized labor, "spontaneous" collective action by the jobless, and ways that people coped with losing their livelihood. While only a few pages are devoted to the 1930s, the implicit recognition throughout the

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[1] David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital, and the Crises of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 118.

[2] Josh Bivens et al., "Raising America's Pay: Why It's Our Central Economic Policy Challenge," *Economic Policy Institute*, June 4, 2014, http://www.epi.org/publication/raising-americas-pay/ (accessed January 13, 2016); Estelle Sommeiller and Mark Price, "The Increasingly Unequal States of America," *Economic Policy Institute*, January 26, 2015, http://www.epi.org/publication/income-inequality-by-state-1917-to-2012/; "Union Members Summary," Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 23, 2015, http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm. See also Robert McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009), 2009 introduction.

book of the agency and dignity of people who suffered the ignominy of unemployment is something I have tried to emulate in this study, even to emphasize.

One reason Keyssar does not discuss the Great Depression at length is that so much had already been written about it. Well-known books by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., William Leuchtenburg, Lester Chandler, Irving Bernstein, Robert McElvaine, and many others had flooded light on the plight of the unemployed in those years, while far less was known about the century preceding the 1930s. On the other hand, much of the earlier scholarship had been rather dismissive of the jobless, treating them as basically passive, apathetic, and apolitical.[1] It showed little interest in "ordinary people" on their own terms, in reconstructing their lives and struggles and thoughts, instead making sweeping, and sometimes unflattering, generalizations about them. Of course, since this scholarship was usually national in scope and focused on the most important political and institutional currents of the Depression, it could hardly be expected to do justice to the variegated tapestry of people's experiences. Local studies would be better adapted for that.

One such work is Joan M. Crouse's *The Homeless Transient in the Great Depression: New York State, 1929–1941*, published in the same year as Keyssar's book. This is an exemplary study of one category of the homeless unemployed, which reconstructs not only the dynamics of the state's relief administration—and the effects of its partial dismantling in late 1935—but also the experiences and attitudes of both transients and the public as it related to them. The influence of the "new" (by now old) social history is evident in Crouse's sympathetic treatment of that despised category the non-resident unemployed, in all their diversity and frustrated dignity. Indeed, by the 1980s and '90s one is hard-pressed to find historical scholarship that does not valorize the experiences of "ordinary people" to the same degree that they were devalued in an earlier time.

The work of James Lorence, for example, takes seriously the organizing of the unemployed that went on throughout the 1930s, instead of dismissing its significance as some earlier histories had. However, Lorence focuses not on the rank and file of the movements but on the most prominent activists and institutions that led the organizing. Thus, in *Organizing the Unemployed: Community and Union Activists in the Industrial Heartland* (1996), he gives "an exhaustive analysis of the Michigan unemployed movement in all its phases and expressions" from the early Depression to the Second World War, but an analysis primarily of institutional activities and interrelations—between local and state governments, left-wing political parties, unemployed organizations, and industrial unions such as the UAW (which by 1937 was heavily involved in organizing the jobless).[2] Social history is largely absent. Likewise, in *The Unemployed People's Movement: Leftists, Liberals, and Labor in Georgia, 1929–1941* (2009), Lorence is concerned mainly with the activities of leaders and institutions, although he does devote considerable space to discussion of race relations and the tribulations of African-Americans. He also more explicitly argues than in his book on Michigan that "the presumably inarticulate gained a voice" and effectively pressured authorities. "[T]he Depression crisis," he states, "taught the unemployed to combine to speak with one voice; and the result was an increase in governmental responsiveness under pressure from below."[3] This is quite a different emphasis from that of earlier "top-down" scholarship.

For instance, one might contrast it with two articles written decades earlier, one by Daniel J. Leab and the other by John Garraty. The first, published in 1967 and titled "'United We Eat': The Creation and Organization of the Unemployed Councils in 1930," has valuable information on how the Communist Party organized the jobless, how Unemployed Councils were structured, and what Communists thought of their successes and failures in rousing the public, but it takes a somewhat condescending perspective toward the jobless, treating them as little more than a semi-apathetic mass that had to be organized from the outside. Garraty's article, published in 1976 and titled "Unemployment during the Great Depression," has a different and broader focus but shares the "condescending" attitude of Leab's. In brief, Garraty relies on novelists of the day, reporters, autobiographical accounts, and sociological studies to argue (in part) that the vast

[1] I give examples at the beginning of chapter three.

[2] James Lorence, *Organizing the Unemployed: Community and Union Activists in the Industrial Heartland* (New York: State University of New York, 1996), xiii.

[3] Lorence, *The Unemployed People's Movement* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 6, 228.

majority of the unemployed in Europe and the U.S. were demoralized, politically passive, hopeless, and ashamed of their unemployment. After a paragraph in which he acknowledges that many protests did occur, he concludes that they were "sporadic, unfocused, and to a considerable extent merely rhetorical."[1] Such an interpretation, while doubtless partly true, can certainly be contested as an oversimplification; and I do so contest it in chapter six.

An exception among pre-1980s scholarship is that of Roy Rosenzweig, who in the 1970s wrote a series of articles on Depression-era activism among the Communists, Socialists, and Musteites. The content of his three essays is clear from their titles: "Radicals and the Jobless: The Musteites and the Unemployed Leagues, 1932-1936," "Organizing the Unemployed: The Early Years of the Great Depression, 1929-1933," and "'Socialism in Our Time': The Socialist Party and the Unemployed, 1929-1936." Like Leab, he is more concerned with the organizers and the institutions they helped form than with rank and file members; however, he paints a nuanced and sympathetic picture of the latter that attributes more agency to them than most previous historians had. He flatly rejects William Leuchtenburg's judgment (in *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*) that "most of the unemployed meekly accepted their lot," insisting on the contrary that "the jobless employed a number of spontaneous survival strategies such as informal and formal cooperative movements, family and neighborhood networks of assistance, individual and group looting of supermarkets, coal bootlegging, determined searches for work, and innovative stretching of income."[2] His articles substantiate this point in relation to political and semi-political activities, by showing that in many cases it was the ordinary members of the Unemployed Councils, Workers' Committees, and Unemployed Leagues who pressed for more radical action and even had to be restrained by the ideological leftists. In Chicago, the Workers' Committee quickly came under the control of the grassroots unemployed, who founded dozens of locals with thousands of members all over the city; and the same was true, though perhaps to a lesser extent, of the Unemployed Councils.

On the whole, then, it is not hard to find historical scholarship that discusses the unemployed in the Depression. Two works on Chicago must also be mentioned: Randi Storch's *Red Chicago: American Communism at its Grassroots, 1928–1935* (2009), which has some material on Communist organizing around relief policies, eviction fights, and police brutality, and Lizabeth Cohen's *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (1990), which has a chapter on how local institutions such as benefit societies, building and loan associations, churches, and welfare-capitalist employers ultimately failed to protect the unemployed from the ravages of economic collapse, causing them to turn to the federal government and the New Deal. However, it should be evident by now that virtually none of the historiography takes a direct and sustained look, over the entirety of the Depression decade, at the social history of the long-term unemployed, which is what interests me. Certainly it does not do so with regard to Chicago, as a local study. This strikes me as a rather gaping gap in the literature, a gap that ought to be closed. Whether I have successfully done so in this dissertation is for the reader to judge.

One might ask, however, why this "gap" in the historiography is something to be closed in the first place. What is there to be learned by a history of the experiences, the survival strategies, and the various modes of resistance of "the unemployed" in Chicago in the Depression? On one level, the answer is the same one that can be given as regards any piece of historical writing: it fills in details, adds to our fund of knowledge, makes interpretive connections that have not necessarily been made before. Not all scholarly perspectives or agendas are very interesting, but they do, at least, present information that can be used by other writers.

But of course one wants more than that bare minimum. And one wants more than merely the fact that the U.S. currently has such a bleak economic future that analyses of the 1930s will soon be of particular interest again. What one wants are arguments that challenge conventional patterns of thought (or scholarship) and portray history in a new light. So the question here is, what are the conventional patterns of thought that I want to challenge?

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[1] John Garraty, "Unemployment during the Great Depression," *Labor History*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Spring 1976): 152.

[2] Roy Rosenzweig, "Organizing the Unemployed: The Early Years of the Great Depression, 1929–1933," *Radical America* 10 (July–August 1976): 38.

Social history since the 1970s has done much to counteract posterity's "enormous condescension" towards the forgotten masses by reconstructing their lives, their agency, to some extent restoring the dignity that the dominant society denied them in life and later in death. Numberless works have followed in the democratic and humanistic spirit of E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), showing how people found ways to resist, even to construct their own relatively autonomous subcultures. This vast scholarly project, however, has arguably not gone far enough, in at least two respects. First, as I've said, there has still not been enough attention to the huge and socially significant category of the long-term unemployed in all periods of U.S. history. Instead, there are works on other subjects that, at most, overlap with unemployment; or there are works that address unemployment in one chapter and then move on to some other topic. But unemployment has been such a central part of the history of capitalism—being one of the most widely shared, and most debilitating, of experiences—and is so integral to an understanding of the system's functioning, that it deserves a whole literature of its own, not just in public policy but in social history too.

Perhaps more importantly, historians have not really plumbed the depths of people's opposition to the dominant society. A virtual library of historiography has been written on the subject of explicit political and economic resistance, especially in the form of labor unions and social movements, but more can still be said about subtler types of resistance and nonconformism. In particular, the anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian dimensions of people's behavior and thoughts can be further explored. If capitalism means private ownership of the means of production, private control (by the owners or their representatives) over the workplace, production for the single purpose of accumulating profits that are privately appropriated by the owners, and such tendencies as ever-increasing privatization of society (an outgrowth of capital owners' extension of their control and ownership to ever more social domains), the mediation of more and more human interactions through market processes, and commodification of increasingly many things, including human labor-power, nature, ideas, and public goods like education and health care—all of which tendencies have become increasingly pronounced in recent centuries, except when held in check by popular movements or other countervailing forces[1]—then it can be shown that the vast majority of people have, in various ways and often even unknowingly, opposed it. Much of labor history, of course, has this implication, though it is not always made clear. Thus, I think historians should do more to show the extent to which people are ambivalent, even hostile, towards dominant institutions, practices, ideologies, and values. This anti-Gramscian emphasis is one of the guiding themes of my dissertation.

On the most basic level, for instance, everyone acts in a rather "communistic" way, as the anthropologist David Graeber points out.[2] Even corporate executives, not to mention people less integrated into market structures, ordinarily act according to what Graeber calls "baseline communism." For, if communism means "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" (as Marx defined it), then it simply means sharing, helping, and cooperating—giving to others in need what you're able to give them, even if it is only advice, assistance at some task, sympathy or emotional support, or some money to tide them over. Friends, coworkers, relatives, lovers, even total strangers constantly act in this way. In this sense, in fact, "*communism is the foundation of all human sociability*"; it can be considered "the raw material of sociality, a recognition of our ultimate interdependence that is the ultimate substance of social peace," as Graeber says. Society is held together by this dense anti-capitalist fabric, into which the more superficial patterns of commercialism, the profit motive, and greed are woven. One might even reverse the typical judgment of apologists for capitalism: not only is capitalism not a straightforward expression of human nature (supposedly because we're all naturally greedy, as a Milton Friedman or a Friedrich Hayek might say); it is more like a perversion of human nature, which is evidently drawn to such things as compassion, love, community, respect for others, and free self-expression unimpeded by authoritarian rules in the economic or political sphere. Capitalism is parasitic on "everyday communism," which is but a

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[1] See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944).

[2] David Graeber, "On the Moral Grounds of Economic Relations: A Maussian Approach," *Open Anthropology Cooperative Press*, Working Papers Series #6 (2010), at www.openanthcoop.net/press. See also Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (New York: Melville House, 2011).

manifestation of human needs and desires. In short, insofar as there is a "hegemony" of capitalist culture and ideology at all, simple reflections such as these—even apart from historical analysis—already show that it must be quite superficial compared to the underlying substratum of human sociality, which expresses itself in frequently anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian ways in every moment of the day.

Everyday communism, however, has historically been especially pronounced among the lower classes—the peasantry, industrial workers, struggling immigrants, the petty-bourgeoisie—who have relied on it for survival in hard times and even in normal times, and who, moreover, have not been as deeply integrated into commercial structures and ideologies as the elite has. Social history has done much to illuminate the "communism" (without calling it that) of the American working class during its many formative decades, through description of the thick networks of voluntary associations that workers, especially immigrants, created among themselves, and of the "mutualist" ethic to which they subscribed in the context of their battles with employers, and of the vitally *public* character of their shared culture up to at least the 1940s.[1] All this was very much anti-capitalist and anti- the dominant ideologies of the day, whether individualism, the "open shop" idea, Social Darwinism, or imperialistic nationalism. The long-term unemployed have tended to be ignored in this historiography, so in the third chapter I try to show in what respects they, too, acted in communistic ways. For unemployment did not produce only atomization, as is commonly supposed; it also gave rise to the opposite, community. And that is what is most interesting to study.

The Gramscian notion of hegemony—which James C. Scott defines as the idea that "class rule is effected not so much by sanctions and coercion as by the consent and passive compliance of subordinate classes"[2]—has been criticized repeatedly and should, I think—if watered down from this strong formulation—be relegated to the status of little more than an important qualification to the truths of a "vulgar Marxism" that assigns overwhelming explanatory power to brute economic and political coercion, and to *interest*—primarily class-determined—rather than *values* or *consciousness* (which tend to reflect economic position). Before defending this statement, however, and elaborating on its relation to my dissertation, I want to make a suggestion that pertains to "bottom-up" social history as a whole, to its very *raison d'être*. To my knowledge, the radical political scientist Thomas Ferguson's challenge, in 1995, to social historians has never met with a response:

> Perhaps in reaction to the last generation of "consensus historians," many recent studies of American history make a determined effort to discuss the often very painful daily-life experiences of ordinary people. This research has produced many significant works that amount to a powerful indictment of conventional pluralist theories of American politics. But while I am totally in sympathy with efforts to "assert the dignity of work," "reveal the thoughts and actions of the rank and file," or show ordinary people as "active, articulate participants in a historical process," and similar aims, I am very skeptical about this literature's frequent unwillingness and inability to come finally to a point. That ordinary people are historical subjects is a vital truth; that they are the primary shapers of the American past seems to me either a triviality or a highly dubious theory about the control of both political and economic investment in American history.[3]

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[1] See, among innumerable others, Herbert Gutman, *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class*, ed. Ira Berlin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987); David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Susan Porter Benson, *Household Accounts: Working-Class Family Economies in the Interwar United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

[2] James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 315, 316. On hegemony, see the thoughtful discussions in Leon Fink, *In Search of the Working Class: Essays in American Labor History and Political Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 89–143.

[3] Thomas Ferguson, *Golden Rule: The Investment Theory of Party Competition and the Logic of Money-Driven*

In other words, why do we do social history in the first place? What are the general truths we are trying to establish? Admittedly, there need not be such truths at all. The project of unearthing the lives and thoughts of people whom history has tried to bury in oblivion—the "voiceless toilers" from time immemorial, upon whom have been built great civilizations that "despised them and [have done] all [they] could to forget them," to quote G. E. M. de Ste. Croix[1]—is an intrinsically noble endeavor, a kind of moral crusade to be waged for its own sake. It would be nice, though, if there were also certain truths we were trying to illustrate in our reconstructions and analyses.

It seems to me that there is one such truth above all, which is implicit in much historiography but ought to be made explicit: the Gramscian idea of hegemony, as defined a moment ago, is wrong. Any emphasis on consent, consensus, culture, ideology, shared values, "discourses," or some such concept as being what secures the obedience of the lower classes and so explains the perpetuation of a given society is at best highly misleading. If labor history, blood-sodden, conflict-saturated, shows anything at all, it shows that. This, I think, is the best answer to Ferguson's question about the overarching purpose or implication(s) of this type of social history. The point is not that ordinary people are the primary shapers of the past, for, as Ferguson says, this is either a truism or completely wrong (since surely the economic and political elite, which possesses incomparably the most resources, has more direct power than "ordinary people" over the paths that history takes). But the anti-Gramscian point is both substantive and true, as I'll argue presently. It has the merit, moreover—if explicitly emphasized by historians—of elevating bottom-up social history to an even higher moral level, for it implies that people are not mere receptacles for propaganda, slavish beings with easily inscribable *tabula rasas* for minds, but rather have to be *coerced* into a subordinate status because of their essentially independent and freedom-loving nature. Thus, to the degree that historians reject the tendency of thought known as Gramscianism and embrace a more traditional Marxian view that highlights struggle, the use of force, violence, the conflict between rich and poor, and the soft compulsion of institutional structures, they can pride themselves on their knowledge of serving both morality—or, better, "humanism," a belief in the inherent dignity of all people—and truth. If, that is, they accept the following arguments.

First, I must point out that even though it is not necessarily common in recent historiography to bandy about such notions as cultural hegemony or consent or the masses' ideological submission to their masters—and so this whole fuss I'm making about the Gramscian tendency of thought might seem pointless or dated—in fact the methods of some postmodern scholarship tend to imply an idealism much more extreme than that of Gramsci (who was, after all, a Marxist). While this is not the place for a sustained critique of postmodernism,[2] it is relevant to observe that the postmodern fixation on discourses, language, "vocabularies," culture, "society's imaginary," and subjective identities, as opposed to objective class structures, institutional relations, class struggle, control over the means of producing wealth and of physical coercion, has implications that are more Gramscian than Gramscianism itself. For, to the extent that one emphasizes phenomena of ideology and consciousness as explicating the nature of social dynamics, one implies that people's subordination to the powerful is a product either of (1) their conscious choice, (2) their being too incompetent to rise through their own individual efforts into the ranks of the elite, or (3) their being brainwashed by culture and dominant ideologies. To the degree that one denies the primacy of economic structures in determining social relations, preferring the idealistic mode of explanation, one is forced to invoke such unattractive options in order to explain inequalities of power. This fact is ironic, since one of the guiding ideals of postmodern historians is their recognition of the agency and dignity of ordinary people (by, for example, relating, without judgment, how people see themselves and interpret their

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Political Systems (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 96.

[1] G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World, from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 210.

[2] See my *Notes of an Underground Humanist* (Bradenton, FL: Booklocker, 2013), chapters one and two; Willie Thompson, *Postmodernism and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997).

actions).[1] Being unaware of the logical implications of their idealistic perspective, they are unaware that the interpretation that attributes most rationality and dignity to people is a Marxism that treats idealist considerations as little more than an important afterthought.

Postmodernism, however, is but the most recent manifestation of the idealism that has always afflicted mainstream intellectual culture, even back to the Enlightenment—or rather back to antiquity, when Plato viewed the world as consisting of shadows of ideal Forms, Hindus and Buddhists interpreted it in spiritual terms and as being somehow illusory, and Stoics were telling "the slave in the mines that if he would only think aright he would be happy."[2] Such idealism is no surprise, since people (intellectuals) whose institutional function is to produce words and ideas are naturally going to think that words and ideas are of exceptional importance, and that bodily needs and processes of material production are vulgar and uninteresting. Moreover, from a Marxian perspective it makes perfect sense that mainstream intellectuals would propagate ideologies that distract from class struggle and class structure, because the dominant interests in society—viz., wealthy individuals and institutions, which are dominant because they have the most control over the most resources—are not going to support, and indeed will try to suppress, interpretations that draw attention to their wealth and power by showing how it operates, how it has been acquired, and how it is inversely related to the power of ordinary people. In other words, a materialist analysis that foregrounds class conflict and the exploitation of subordinate classes threatens the given distribution of power, so it will incur the wrath of the powerful and will tend to be "filtered out" of intellectual institutions.[3] "Politically neutral" or idealist scholarship, unchallenging to the wealthy, will therefore predominate. One recalls that before the reign of postmodernism there was the reign of the liberal consensus school of historians such as Louis Hartz, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Oscar Handlin, and Daniel Boorstin, a school that makes one think of a bourgeois version of Gramscianism in its emphasis on the socially cohering force of a relative consensus of values among all classes.[4] Thus, "the fashionable theory of economic nondeterminism" of politics and society about which Gabriel Kolko complained in the 1960s has in fact been fashionable since at least the 1940s, and will probably continue to be so until class-based social movements again reach the level they attained in the 1930s.[5]

In defense of the Marxism that guides this dissertation, a few general statements may be offered. The explanatory primacy of class over other variables can be established on simple *a priori* grounds, quite apart from empirical sociological or historical analysis. One has only to reflect that access to resources—money, capital, technology—is of unique importance to life, being key to survival, to a high quality of life, to political power, to social and cultural influence; and access to (or control over) resources is determined

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[1] See, e.g., Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), and Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). Needless to say, good "postmodern" scholarship, like Moreton's, tempers its focus on subjectivity and ideology with attention to economic context and the overwhelming power of big business. I am commenting only on *tendencies* that I see as problematic.

[2] W. W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilisation* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1927), 298.

[3] There are many examples of intellectuals whose careers have been damaged or destroyed because of their radical scholarship. In one egregious case, Thomas Ferguson was denied tenure at MIT explicitly because of his materialist writings. See Peter Mitchell and John Schoeffel, eds., *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 243.

[4] The radical historian Jesse Lemisch devastatingly criticized this school in his 1969 paper "Present-Mindedness Revisited: Anti-Radicalism as a Goal of American Historical Writing Since World War II," published in 1975 (as *On Active Service in War and Peace: Politics and Ideology in the American Historical Profession*) by an obscure independent press because it was too left-wing to make it into establishment journals.

[5] The quotation is from Gabriel Kolko, *The Roots of American Foreign Policy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 81. A recent example of such economic nondeterminism is Odd Arne Westad's highly regarded book *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), which argues, implausibly, that "the United States and the Soviet Union were driven to intervene in the Third World by the *ideologies* inherent in their politics" (my italics), rather than by economic and strategic considerations of power. Kolko's and Walter LaFeber's works are excellent correctives to the liberal idealism of a Westad.

ultimately by class position, one's position in the social relations of production. The owner of the means of production, i.e. the capitalist, has control over more resources than the person who owns only his labor-power, which means he is better able to influence the political process (for example by bribing politicians) and to propagate ideas and values that legitimate his dominant position and justify the subordination of others. These two broad groups of owners and workers—an analytic classification that, of course, simplifies and abstracts from the complexities of the real world in order to create a model that can facilitate understanding—have opposing interests, most obviously in the inverse relation between wages and profits. This antagonism of interests is the "class struggle," a struggle that need not always be explicit or conscious but is constantly present on an implicit level, indeed is constitutive of the relationship between capitalist and worker. The class struggle—that is, the structure and functioning of economic institutions—can be called the foundation of society, the dynamic around which society tends to revolve, because, again, it is through class that institutions and actors acquire the means to influence social life. Marx was therefore right to contrast—albeit in metaphorical and misleading language—the economic "base" with the political, cultural, and ideological "superstructure."[1]

It may be of interest to note, incidentally, that Marx was far from the first writer to prioritize class struggle. Aristotle's *Politics* already has a definitely materialistic bias, treating it as a truism that "class" (to use an anachronism) is of foundational significance to society. More recently, James Madison was, in essence, a proto-"historical materialist," as is clear from his famous *Federalist No. 10*:

> [T]he most common and durable source of factions [he writes] has been the various and unequal distribution of property. Those who hold and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society. Those who are creditors, and those who are debtors, fall under a like discrimination. A landed interest, a manufacturing interest, a mercantile interest, a moneyed interest, with many lesser interests, grow up of necessity in civilized nations, and divide them into different classes actuated by different sentiments and views.

Charles Beard went so far as to say that *The Federalist* "is in fact the finest study in the economic interpretation of politics which exists in any language; and whoever would understand the Constitution as an economic document need hardly go beyond it."[2] The quotation from Madison indicates that, strictly speaking, the idea of class conflict denotes more than just the conflict between worker and capitalist (or master and slave, etc.); it extends to conflicts between economic subdivisions of the dominant class(es). In the dissertation, however, I disregard this extension of the concept, since it is of little relevance to my subject.

An enormous amount of scholarship shows the explanatory power of the Marxian framework that uses class, or class struggle, to understand the world.[3] Even ideologies of race, nation, and gender are largely

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[1] The base/superstructure controversy has spawned an entire literature, but the previous sentence in the text is really all that's needed to end the controversy and establish the meaning and validity of the Marxian metaphor. *Of course* the economy is the "base" and everything else the "superstructure." After all, culture and politics and ideologies are not somehow the product of spontaneous generation; they are brought into being by particular actors and institutions. And in order to bring into being the forms and content of a culture and politics, one needs resources. The production and distribution of resources, in particular material resources, takes place in the economic sphere. So, the way that resources are allocated according to economic structures—who gets the most, who gets the least, etc.—will be the key factor in determining, broadly speaking, the forms and content of a given culture and politics. The interests of the wealthy will tend to be disproportionately represented. –In the entire literature (not all of which I've read), I don't recall ever encountering this simple and decisive, commonsensical argument.

[2] Charles Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1921), 153.

[3] Among many others, see the works of E. P. Thompson, Paul Sweezy, Paul Baran, Ernest Mandel, Raymond Williams, Harry Braverman, G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, David Noble, Gabriel Kolko, Walter LaFeber, Noam Chomsky,

a product of class—of slavery and its aftermath in the U.S., of European imperialism, of attempts by the Victorian upper class to control working-class women's lives and sexuality.[1] In the case of religious fundamentalism in the U.S., for example, historians have shown that since early in the twentieth century, and especially since the 1970s, conservative sectors of the business community have subsidized right-wing evangelical Christianity in order to beat back unionism and liberalism, which have been tarred and feathered as communist, socialist, godless, etc.[2] More generally, for centuries the ruling class (which is to say the aggregate of those who occupy the dominant positions in a society's dominant mode of production, and so have shared interests) has propagated divisive ideas of race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and gender in order, partly, to fragment the working class and so control it more easily and effectively. It is true, again, that such arguments—that all Marxist or "economistic" arguments—simplify, abstracting from complicating factors; and mainstream scholars typically consider this fact to be a weakness of Marxism, a sign of unsophistication. The pejorative label "reductivism" is flung at any argument that explains a set of phenomena in economic terms, especially in terms of class struggle. Somehow, it is considered an intellectual *vice*, and not a *virtue*, to *simplify* for the sake of *understanding*. After all, the world is a complex place, and in order to understand it one has to simplify it a bit, explain it in terms of general principles. As in the natural sciences, a single principle can never explain *everything*; but, if it is the right one, it can explain a great deal.

Since this is an important point for my dissertation, which gives pride of place to class struggle, it deserves a more extensive defense than the preceding three sentences. I will yield here to Noam Chomsky, whose eloquence is unsurpassed. The following is an excerpt from an interview:

> *Question: But you're often accused of being too black-and-white in your analysis, of dividing the world into evil élites and subjugated or mystified masses. Does your approach ever get in the way of basic accuracy?*
>
> *Answer:* I do approach these questions a bit differently than historical scholarship generally does. But that's because humanistic scholarship tends to be irrational. I approach these questions pretty much as I would approach my scientific work. In that work—in any kind of rational inquiry—what you try to do is identify major factors, understand them, and see what you can explain in terms of them. Then you always find a periphery of unexplained phenomena, and you introduce minor factors and try to account for those phenomena. What you're always searching for is the guiding principles: the major effects, the dominant structures. In order to do that, you set aside a lot of tenth-order effects. Now, that's not the method of humanistic scholarship, which tends in a different direction. Humanistic scholarship—I'm caricaturing a bit for simplicity—says every fact is precious; you put it alongside every other fact. That's a sure way to guarantee you'll never understand anything. If you tried to do that in the sciences, you wouldn't even reach the level of Babylonian astronomy.
>
> I don't think the [social] field of inquiry is fundamentally different in this respect. Take what we were talking about before: institutional facts. Those are major factors. There are also minor factors, like individual differences, microbureaucratic interactions, or what the President's wife told him at breakfast. These are all tenth-order effects. I don't pay much

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David Montgomery, Robert Brenner, Erik Olin Wright, Göran Therborn, Perry Anderson, Thomas Ferguson, David Harvey, and John Bellamy Foster.

[1] See David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1999); J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York: J. Pott & Co., 1902); Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1958); Catriona Parratt, *"More Than Mere Amusement": Working-Class Women's Leisure in England, 1750–1914* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001).

[2] See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Ken and Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Struggle for the Soul of the Postwar South: White Evangelical Protestants and Operation Dixie* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

> attention to them, because I think they all operate within a fairly narrow range which is predictable by the major factors. I think you can isolate those major factors. You can document them quite well; you can illustrate them in historical practice; you can verify them. If you read the documentary record critically, you can find them very prominently displayed, and you can find that other things follow from them. There's also a range of nuances and minor effects, and I think these two categories should be very sharply separated.
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> When you proceed in this fashion, it might give someone who's not used to such an approach the sense of black-and-white, of drawing lines too clearly. It purposely does that. That's what is involved when you try to identify major, dominant effects and put them in their proper place.[1]

Karl Kautsky said something similar when he wrote, in *Foundations of Christianity*, "[T]he task of science is not simply a presentation of that which *is*, giving a faithful photograph of reality, so that any normally constituted observer will form the same image. The task of science consists in observing the general, essential element in the mass of impressions and phenomena received, and thus providing a clue by means of which we can find our bearings in the labyrinth of reality."[2]

Likewise, Jean Jaurès wrote in his classic history of the French Revolution, "In every order of questions, in every order of facts we must attempt to draw out the most general idea. We must seek the largest and simplest concept under which we can group the greatest number of orders and objects, and we will thus little by little extend our net over the world… In all times and places, under the infinite and overwhelming diversity of particular facts, science through a daring operation perceives and draws out a few decisive and profound characteristics. And it is this clear and relatively simple idea that it tests and develops through observation, calculations, and by the ceaseless comparisons of the extension of the act and the extensions of the idea."[3] This is the method of the true scientist, both the natural and the social scientist.

The postmodern academic agenda of "problematizing" "narratives"—especially "meta-narratives" like the Marxian approach to history—has had many salutary consequences for our understanding of the world. Simplifications often *are* superficial. But not always: sometimes they are much deeper than the "complications" that scholarship revels in, which distract from essential general insights into how power works, and how class is the basis for the institutional infrastructure that regulates social behavior. Just as it is of little interest to problematize for the sake of problematizing—as is done all too frequently—so the mainstream scholarly aversion to general truths, to generalities as such, is wrong.

The class-focused perspective in fact allows us to understand how the approach to history that heeds only the *particular* and not the *general*—the *exception* at the expense of the *rule*—could have become dominant in the first place. It has to do with how postmodernism itself—i.e., an emphasis on the particular, the fragmented, the single exception, and the subjective, the imagistic, the discursive, the self-interpretations of actors (as if self-interpretations are always correct and not usually deceived)—could have become the reigning paradigm in the humanities. The key, to repeat, is that this approach to writing history does not challenge the dominant interests in society, the main power-structures, the "ruling class" in traditional Marxian language, so it will be allowed and encouraged to proliferate. The explanation of postmodern particularism—"every fact is precious; you put it alongside every other fact"—really is similar to the explanation of its idealism. Again, regarding the idealism: the reason someone like Foucault could become an inspiration for mainstream scholarship is that his works attend to everything except class:

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[1] Adam Jones, "The Radical Vocation: An Interview with Noam Chomsky," February 20, 1990, at http://zcomm.org/wp-content/uploads/zbooks/www/chomsky/9002-vocation.html (accessed February 1, 2016).

[2] Karl Kautsky, *Foundations of Christianity: A Study in Christian Origins* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972/1908), 12.

[3] Jean Jaurès, *A Socialist History of the French Revolution* (1901–04), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/jaures/.

discourse, knowledge, consciousness, the body, the state.[1] Such anti-Marxism, being politically safe, is always good for having a stable and successful career, especially in a time (post-1970s) when organized labor is on the decline, such that there is no powerful political constituency to subsidize and promote materialist scholarship. Foucault was appropriate to a time when big business was decimating labor, the rise of feminism was turning cultural attention to the body and sexuality, conservative ideological attacks on the overweening power of "big government" made it appropriate for intellectuals to study the history of the state's attempts to control "discourses," etc. To many intellectuals, class struggle seemed to have disappeared. Of course, this perception was only a symptom of the *intensification*—and *triumph*—of class struggle on the capitalist side and its substantial defeat on the labor side.[2]

In a similar way, the historiographical agenda to problematize Marxian common sense by treating class as merely a "social construct," a subjective identity not different in kind from gender or race or sexuality, as if objective institutional structures do not exist—and so arguing that Marxian explanations are "unsophisticated" because of all the little factors they ignore—is essentially just a way of enforcing mainstream ideologies and thus serving the masters, the corporate sector and wealthy university donors, most of whom certainly do not want general truths about class, wealth, and power to be propagated. Scholars may not be aware of these facts or have such motivations in mind when ignoring class or criticizing its analytic prioritization, but this is the effect that doing so has, and this is the main institutional function of postmodern intellectual agendas.

As a result, I depart from academic orthodoxy in this dissertation, preferring to illustrate general truths about the conflict between (relatively) rich and (relatively) poor that roughly determines social dynamics. I am interested in the particular less for its own sake than for its broader implications. The foregrounding of class at times gives the book a polemical tone, as in some passages on the service that Chicago's police force regularly rendered the business community, but it is a logical fallacy to think that a slightly polemical tone indicates that a work has abandoned the "disinterested" pursuit of truth in favor of advancing a political agenda. For one thing, "tone" can always be separated from the actual arguments that are made: e.g., in the case of Chomsky's writings, the morally outraged tone does not entail that the facts he unearths and the arguments he makes are false. Secondly, it simply happens to be the case that certain truths about how the world works are not morally acceptable, so that by describing them, even in neutral language, one cannot avoid giving the impression of partisanship. There is no reason, after all, to think that the revelation of historical truth must necessarily shine a positive light on the rich and powerful. The contrary would be more likely to be the case. Therefore, it is far from being a counterargument to left-wing writing such as Chomsky's or Howard Zinn's or Gabriel Kolko's that it seems partisan or polemical, for this is what one would expect of a true description of a world in which power is concentrated in the hands of a small elite that, quite rationally, pursues its own interests. Indeed, from this perspective, the *lack* of a partisan tone in most mainstream scholarship suggests (though does not entail) it has not penetrated to essential truths about how society works.[3]

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[1] To see how explanatorily impoverished, even confused, such a scholarly focus is compared with the focus on class, contrast Foucault's famous *Discipline and Punish* with the Marxist classic *Punishment and Social Structure* (1939), by Georg Rusche and Otto Kirchheimer. While the latter *explains*, the former merely *describes* (badly and obscurely).

[2] On neoliberalism, see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*; Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (Toronto, Ontario: Seven Stories Press, 1999); Robert Pollin, *Contours of Descent: U.S. Economic Fractures and the Landscape of Global Austerity* (New York: Verso, 2003); Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (New York: Verso, 2006); Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2007); Greta Krippner, *Capitalizing on Crisis: The Political Origins of the Rise of Finance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); David McNally, *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010); Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, *Capital Resurgent: The Roots of the Neoliberal Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Andrew Glyn, *Capitalism Unleashed: Finance, Globalization, and Welfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[3] For more thoughts on recent historiography, see my paper "A Critique of Current Historical Scholarship," at www.academia.edu.

In short, I think it is time for historians to, in some respects, problematize the ceaseless problematizing and return to basics. Which means returning to a non-Gramscian Marxism, or at least a Marxism that relegates considerations of culture and hegemony to a decidedly subordinate place. Many arguments can be given in favor of this type of Marxism, and many have been given, especially in a book published in 1980 called *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, by Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan Turner. This book is essential reading for a just evaluation of the Gramscian concept of hegemony, and I cannot hope to reproduce even a fraction of its arguments here. One should also read the last chapter of James C. Scott's classic *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), which builds on the analysis given in the earlier book. In the following I will sketch only a few general arguments, after which I will discuss the 1930s in relation to a paper that presents a perspective different from my own: Melvyn Dubofsky's well-known and provocative "Not so 'Turbulent Years': A New Look at the 1930s," published as a chapter in a book edited by Charles Stephenson and Robert Asher called *Life and Labor: Dimensions of American Working-Class History* (1986). Last, I'll provide a brief summary of each chapter in the dissertation.

The first point to be made is that the foundation of social order is, in fact, violence and the threat of violence. Perry Anderson makes the point by imagining what would happen if the threat vanished. While a kind of consent may ordinarily prevail in our society, it is "constituted by a silent, absent force…: the monopoly of legitimate violence by the State. Deprived of this, the system of cultural control would be instantly fragile, since the limits of possible actions against it would disappear."[1] One can imagine how differently people would behave if there were no police force or military or security guards or prisons. Surely the poor and even many in the middle class would quickly overrun the property of the rich—neighborhoods, banks, mansions—and take what they could, or distribute it among themselves. This fact already suggests that most people's ordinary "consent" to the system of rule that exists is basically *prudential* and not ideological, not an indication that they think prevailing hierarchies are legitimate. Later I quote unemployed men in the Depression who had no moral compunctions whatever about stealing, refraining from doing so only because of the possible consequences to their families and themselves.

The threat of state-sanctioned violence is so ubiquitous that we hardly ever notice it or stop to think about it. It hovers over even the hallowed groves of academe, seemingly so peaceful and idyllic. David Graeber muses on the fact that "graduate students [are] able to spend days in the stacks of university libraries poring over Foucault-inspired theoretical tracts about the declining importance of coercion as a factor in modern life without ever reflecting on the fact that, had they insisted on their right to enter the stacks without showing a properly stamped and validated ID, armed men would have been summoned to physically remove them, using whatever force might be required."[2] In any given context, if one doesn't behave in the proper way then one can expect violent repercussions. Violence is the ultimate arbiter—as generations of workers and activists have learned to their cost, and as the history of capitalism shows all too clearly. In a late capitalist society—hyper-bureaucratized, hyper-regimented, hyper-regulated[3]—it does not take long for young people to internalize this fact and, as they age, to adjust their behavior accordingly.

However, while the (unconscious) adjustment of behavior to conform with dominant social structures is in part determined by the ever-present threat and reality of violence, it is also determined simply by the "dull compulsion of economic relations," to quote Marx. And not only economic relations: *all* institutional relations. If one wants to participate in society, one cannot escape them. Speaking of capitalism, Max Weber observed that the economy "is an immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which presents itself to him…as an unalterable order of things in which he must live. It forces the individual, in so far as he is involved in the system of market relationships, to conform to capitalistic rules of action."[4] To survive, one has to get a job, cooperate with bureaucracies, buy the commodities on

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[1] Perry Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci," *New Left Review*, I, 100 (November–December 1976): 43.
[2] David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2015), 58.
[3] See Graeber, *Utopia of Rules.* Also Michel Crozier, *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1964).
[4] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 1997 [1930]), 54.

offer, obey the dictates of certain authorities, in general conform. But this does not imply *endorsement* of the structures and values to which one must conform.

The three preceding paragraphs are sufficient to answer the old, "grand" sociological question of how societies manage to function when they are so riven by conflicts between groups and between individuals. For this purpose, it is not necessary to invoke ideologies or culture or hegemony or "false consciousness" at all. One has only to recognize that (1) the means of violence are overwhelmingly in the hands of the wealthy and those who (directly or indirectly) serve them, whose interest is in maintaining the given distribution of power, and (2) the dominant social structures have a "compulsory" dynamic of their own, even apart from the physical violence that is always on hand to back them up. Even if every member of the subordinate groups perfectly understood how he was exploited and dominated and saw through every mystifying element of the dominant culture, we can see how he would still be inclined to "fit in" in order to survive. Unless his oppression was unbearable, it would make perfect rational sense for him not to risk everything by overtly challenging the institutions that enforced his subordination. To an outside observer it might look as if he were a victim of false consciousness or viewed the system of inequality as legitimate and just—or, alternatively, were discontented but deplorably "passive" or "apathetic" or "apolitical"—when in fact he was merely a rational person with insight into the functioning of power and the probable consequences of flouting its authority.

Of course, most—or all—people in history, including most intellectuals and most members of the ruling class, have not had a scientifically lucid understanding of the world or a perfectly consistent and rational system of values and beliefs (if that is even possible). We are all brought up in a cultural and political environment opaque with myths, deceptions, rationalizations, legitimizing rituals, every technique of obfuscation imaginable. No one is impervious to such influences; we all, surely, have elements of incoherence and false or deluded consciousness in our (mostly unconscious) individual ideological framework. So it is necessary to consider the Gramscian question of consciousness, particularly in relation to subordinate classes.

Before continuing, however, it may be noted that there are senses in which this question is not very interesting. For one thing, people's reports of their beliefs tend to be quite superficial, which makes it hard to draw conclusions from them about the "consciousness" of the masses. What someone says he believes—and even what he privately *thinks* he believes—is clearly context-dependent, stimulus-dependent, mood-dependent. In one moment, perhaps after hearing a conservative politician speak, he may think that "big government" is society's main problem; in another moment, perhaps after hearing a progressive politician speak, he may think that government should regulate the economy much more aggressively, and that the country needs a single-payer national health insurance system. In one moment he may think that the government should nationalize "too-big-to-fail" banks, or even that all businesses should be owned and run by the people who work in them and not by investors or their representatives; in another moment he may think that such ideas are absurd and unrealistic. It is notorious that polling results depend on how questions are phrased.[1] In many cases, what people think they believe may be contradicted by their actions and by other statements of theirs. For example, millions of Americans might say that the free market should be the overwhelmingly dominant mode of social regulation even as they complain about the increasing costs of public education, the cost and inadequacy of private health insurance, the limited availability of public transportation, the limited number of public parks in their city, and so forth. In such cases it might be tempting to say they have a "divided consciousness," but it is evident that what they really would like is a more extensive and better-funded public infrastructure, not a dismantling of public resources in favor of the market. It is only because the "free market" has acquired positive connotations in mainstream culture and politics that people might say they support the expansion of its range, not understanding what such support logically entails.

In general, people are far from having acute insight into what they believe and value; and both their "real" (often *implicit*, not explicit) and reported beliefs and values are far from being consistent with each

[1] Carl Bialik, "When Wording Skews Results in Polls," *Wall Street Journal*, September 25, 2010.

other or over time.[1] Human consciousness is not exactly an exemplar of lucidity and (self-)honesty, as Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud understood (which is why they were less interested in consciousness as such than in uncovering its hidden grounds and determinants, the *hidden meaning* of conscious states). Self-deception is extraordinarily common, frequently taking the form of merely superficial or nominal adherence to a system of beliefs just because it is a socially accepted thing to believe in. When polls say that 71 percent of Americans in 2014 identified as Christian, what does that mean?[2] How does one interpret that finding? How many of these people consciously regulated their lives according to a Christian ideology, and how many used the label "Christian" without its having a perceptible effect on their behavior or values? How many would in fact reject most Christian doctrines, or ideas that have come to be associated with Christianity? One can ask comparable questions about people who consider themselves patriotic, or who say they believe in the "free-enterprise system," or who identify as conservative (or liberal), etc. These sorts of questions, which challenge the meaningfulness of people's reports of their values and beliefs, can pose problems for a Gramscian or idealistic type of analysis.

It is not even clear that most people have much in the way of determinate beliefs at all.[3] And certainly it is doubtful that beliefs, to the extent that they exist, tend in and of themselves to be important regulators of behavior. The world consists, by and large, of pragmatists who do not ordinarily exhibit sustained interest in ideologies or abstract ideas, who may think about such things from time to time but then continue to participate in society in a pragmatic and realistic way, treating it (society) as more or less *given* even if they find many of its features absurd or repellent. We all must, to a large degree, accommodate ourselves to the world and live in it on *its* terms; that is part of what it means to become a mature adult. But such accommodation is a very weak form of "consent" indeed; for it is a consent into which we are *forced*, on pain of ostracism, physical starvation, and legal punishment. In a world of such extreme institutional obstacles to effecting change, it is sensible and natural for people to devote their energy to tasks of survival and recreation (through available, or "hegemonic," channels like movie-watching, television, and spectator sports) rather than active political dissent or the crafting of considered opinions on issues of moment—even if, to repeat, at bottom they might believe society to be horribly unjust and in need of radical change.

Nevertheless, despite the nebulousness, contradictoriness, and *half-formed* character—and the pragmatic and basically "reactive" character—of an individual's and a group's political and cultural consciousness, it can hardly be denied that popular attitudes do, in some sense, exist and have consequences. It is the business class's understanding of this that explains its intense efforts since the early twentieth century to shape the public mind, to indoctrinate people with conservative ideologies.[4] One of the arguments I make in this dissertation, then, is that the long-term unemployed in the Depression, contrary to what scholarship has often assumed, were not generally apolitical, that in fact they tended to have a definite left-wing politics. Sometimes this politics was expressed in protest marches, sometimes in "eviction riots," sometimes in fervent support for Franklin Roosevelt, but most often simply in "the tenacity of self-preservation," to quote James C. Scott's characterization of Malaysian peasants in the 1970s. As with these exploited peasants, so with the unemployed in Chicago forty years earlier we can see "in ridicule, in truculence, in irony, in petty acts of noncompliance…in resistant mutuality, in the disbelief in elite homilies, in the steady, grinding efforts to hold one's own against overwhelming odds" a radical-left politics,[5] a kind of class struggle and implicit consciousness of class interests against the rich, albeit one handicapped by the distinctively American absence of a major labor party in the national political arena. In certain contexts, even self-preservation can be a political act.

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[1] Nicholas Abercrombie et al., *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), 141–144.

[2] Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape," May 12, 2015, at http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/.

[3] Abercrombie et al., *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, chapters 5 and 6.

[4] See, e.g., Alex Carey, *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy: Corporate Propaganda versus Freedom and Liberty* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997) and Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945–60* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

[5] Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 350.

When the poor aided the poor, and when the unemployed joined their more fortunate employed fellows on the picket line, and even when people grumbled about the absurdity of a social order that would deprive healthy men of the opportunity to make a living, an intrinsically subversive anti-capitalist mentality was manifesting itself. The mechanisms of "hegemony" had in part broken down: the legitimacy of the social structures that determined the U.S.'s political economy was being denied, and people were "taking matters into their own hands" by one means or another. This was far from unprecedented, of course. In fact, Immanuel Wallerstein was probably right that "it is doubtful if very many governments in human history have been considered 'legitimate' by the majority of those exploited, oppressed, and maltreated by their governments… Governments tend to be endured, not appreciated or admired or loved or even supported."[1] Nonetheless, the 1930s did signify an eruption of counter-hegemonic thinking and behavior (including among the—rarely examined—unemployed), as the class struggle burst into the open.

Historians have sometimes downplayed the radicalism or revolutionary consciousness of the masses during the 1930s, preferring to emphasize the basic stability of the political economy, the conservative character of the New Deal, the relatively small numbers of people who became members of the Communist party, and the channeling of popular discontent into the Democratic Party. For example, in their 1977 article "Unemployment, Class Consciousness, and Radical Politics: What Didn't Happen in the Thirties," Sidney Verba and Kay Lehman Schlozman argue that few American workers at the time were politically radical or "fully" class-conscious, in the sense of identifying with a class and believing that the interests of that class were opposed to the interests of others. Despite the Depression, they were in most cases optimistic about the long-term future and still favored the "American dream" of advancing through hard work and risk-taking.[2] Such interpretations are lent support by the writings of liberals in the 1930s who were disappointed, even bewildered, by what they saw as the passivity of most of the unemployed. Sherwood Anderson represented these views when he argued in 1936 that "There is in the average American a profound humbleness. People seem to blame themselves."[3]

In his aforementioned paper, Melvyn Dubofsky presents a sophisticated version of this "pessimistic" perspective. While acknowledging that the 1930s was in many respects a uniquely turbulent decade, he reminds us that workers to some extent remained divided by nationality, race, and religion, and that the majority almost never acted in a notably "militant" way. He quotes from Robert and Helen Lynd's 1937 study of Muncie, Indiana: workers' ambitions were "largely those of the business class: both are caught up in the tradition of a rising standard of living and lured by the enticements of salesmanship." They "worshipped" the automobile as the symbol of the American dream, and preferred going for a drive to attending a union meeting. "Fear, resentment, insecurity, and disillusionment," the Lynds wrote, "has been to Middletown's [i.e., Muncie's] workers largely an *individual* experience for each worker, and not a thing generalized by him into a 'class' experience." Thus do the Lynds and Dubofsky embrace the Gramscian point of view that foregrounds cultural hegemony, especially in relation to "Middle America." Dubofsky admits that the situation is somewhat different in more urban environments such as New Haven, where, according to a study by E. Wight Bakke in 1940, workers did not share the drives of the business class and did have a collective sense of their own class. "'Hell, brother,' a machinist told Bakke, 'you don't have to look to know there's a workin' class. We may not say so—but look at what we do. Work. Look at where we live. Nothing there but workers. Look at how we get along. Just like every other damned worker. Hell's bells, of course there's a workin' class, and it's gettin' more so every day.'" Nevertheless, in New Haven, too, there was an absence of collective militancy, in large part because of workers' realism about what was

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[1] Quoted in Abercrombie et al., *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, 156.

[2] One is tempted to remark, however, that, if defined this way, the "American dream" was surely attractive not only to Americans but to people all over the Western world, and perhaps throughout much of history in many different societies. The concept of "success through hard work" is hardly an American invention. Nor should commitment to the "American dream" be assumed to preclude commitment to left-wing ideas and causes. See Sidney Verba and Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Unemployment, Class Consciousness, and Radical Politics: What Didn't Happen in the Thirties," *Journal of Politics*, vol. 39, no. 2 (May 1977): 291–323.

[3] Quoted in Anthony Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933–40* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 38.

possible. "They regularly had had to adjust their goals to actual possibilities," Dubofsky says, "which almost always fell far below their aspirations. As one worker after another informed Bakke, life involved putting up with it, grinning and bearing it, and using common sense to survive."[1]

This conclusion, it seems to me, gets to the crux of the matter. It certainly is possible to overestimate the class consciousness and militancy of America's working class in the Depression. And it is surely the case that the lower classes, now and a century ago, tend to be integrated into the "dominant culture" in many respects, just as they are *not* integrated in many other respects. The question is to what extent we should emphasize their (and our) indoctrination with the ideas and values of the ruling class, and to what extent we should emphasize, in contrast, their (and our) independence, their rationality and understanding, their opposition to the hierarchies of power, their realism and pragmatism. I have argued that the Gramscian perspective, as an explanation of why capitalist society continues to function and why people do not continually rebel against its many injustices and indignities, must be subordinated to an explanation that simply invokes the threat of violence and the dull compulsion of institutional structures. *Prudence* and *realism*, that is, are better explanations of people's broad "conformism"—in the 1930s and today—than mass delusion and indoctrination ("false consciousness," "hegemony," or whatever term one likes). In this study, therefore, I choose to highlight people's rationality and realism, as well as their courage and opposition to dominant practices and values, rather than the ways in which they may have submitted to mainstream culture and accepted its commercial and individualistic values. This strikes me, moreover, as a more *interesting* interpretation than the Gramscian one put forward by Dubofsky and the Lynds in relation to Muncie, Indiana.

In the sixth chapter of the book, for example, where I consider the collective action of the unemployed, I address one of the major ways in which historians have downplayed the radicalism and class consciousness of Americans in this period. It has sometimes been remarked in the historiography that most of the unemployed were far less responsive to abstract Communist slogans about socialist revolution or ending imperialist wars than efforts to win concrete gains in such forms as increased relief appropriations and better conditions in homeless shelters. Most of the time, it was not the nuances of Communist ideology that attracted people but (1) Communist actions in defense of the poor and (2) programmatic goals like national unemployment insurance and a shorter workweek. One might say, then, that people had the equivalent of a "trade-union consciousness" (concerned with "bread-and-butter" issues), not a "revolutionary consciousness." And this conclusion may be largely correct, provided one recognize that no working class anywhere in the world has ever been different in this regard. As James C. Scott says, "the rank-and-file actors in most, if not all, revolutionary situations are in fact fighting for rather mundane, if vital, objectives that could in principle—but often not in practice—be accommodated within the prevailing social order."[2] Better wages, better treatment, more control over production, perhaps a house of one's own with some land—these are the sorts of demands that most often animate people, whether in the United States in the 1930s or Germany or Russia twenty years earlier. Barrington Moore has shown that factory workers in Russia just before the October revolution had as "pragmatic" a consciousness as any patriotic American might have had at the time, wanting, among other things, an eight-hour day, a minimum wage, severance pay in case of dismissal, and better toilet facilities. "The whole thrust of these demands," Moore sums up, "was to improve working conditions, not to change them… Once again we see that the workers' idea of a good society…is the present order with its most disagreeable features softened or eliminated."[3]

So, first of all, we should give up the remnants of American exceptionalism that seem present in Dubofsky's paper, and in the "pessimistic" way of thinking about American workers that it represents. The main way in which America has been exceptional is simply in the brutality and aggressiveness of its

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[1] Melvyn Dubofsky, "Not so 'Turbulent Years': A New Look at the 1930s," in *Life and Labor: Dimensions of American Working-Class History*, eds. Charles Stephenson and Robert Asher (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 205–223.

[2] Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 341.

[3] Barrington Moore, *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains: M. E. Sharpe, 1978), 369, quoted in Scott, 343.

capitalist class as compared to that of other countries.[1] With such an incomparably formidable adversary, it is hardly surprising that organized labor and the Left in the U.S. have frequently fared worse than their counterparts in France, Italy, England, and elsewhere. (Incidentally, like most social historians, Dubofsky plays down this crucial aspect of American society in his attempt to explain the failures of the Left in the 1930s, instead invoking "trade-union opportunism, corporate co-optation…New Deal liberalism," and "the inability of most workers and their leaders to conceive of an alternative to the values of marketplace capitalism.")[2]

But secondly, whatever left-wing intellectuals have thought about the ideological unsophistication or lack of class consciousness of the masses, the fact is that the skeptical attitude most Americans displayed toward Communism and "revolution" in the 1930s was in many ways more sensible, rational, and healthy than the ideological fanaticism—or, in more positive language, "theoretical consistency"—of committed Communists themselves.[3] Was the skepticism in part a product of "bourgeois cultural hegemony" and hence "conservatism"? One can make that argument if one wants. But given conditions in Stalinist Russia, and given the prospects for a Communist revolution in the United States, and given the utopian nature of the ideology being proselytized and the frequently intolerant and offensive behavior of the proselytizers, the most natural conclusion is simply that the majority of unemployed and poor Americans were too *clear-headed* to throw themselves into a nationwide Communist movement (or the attempt to build one). They were hard-headed realists—ironically more so, in certain respects, than the Marxist dreamers who prided themselves on their realism. "Ordinary people" tended to stay close to the material foundation like good Marxists were supposed to, issues of survival, material comfort, achieving concrete gains, eroding the power of the rich (for instance by supporting FDR, as they saw it) without necessarily seeking to overthrow the entire social order, a goal they understood to be hopeless and deluded. Nor, again, was this true only of the *American* working class. The reason that the ideal of workers everywhere has usually been "the present order with its most disagreeable features softened or eliminated," and not the overthrow of this order and creation of a new one, is that most people have a healthy common sense and a suspicion of utopian nostrums. *Not* that they are too indoctrinated by mainstream culture to think clearly.

This is not to say, however, that people are without ideology, nor that in their own ways they cannot be quite extreme left-wing radicals. The political program of an astonishingly broad swath of the American populace in the 1930s would, if enacted, have constituted in effect a revolution without a revolution. Upton Sinclair's End Poverty in California campaign, Huey Long's Share Our Wealth program, Charles Coughlin's overwhelmingly left-wing radio broadcasts in 1934 and 1935 ("Capitalism is doomed and not worth trying to save"), and the immensely popular Lundeen Bill, introduced in Congress in 1934 and 1935 in opposition to the more conservative Social Security Act, all amounted to full-on class war against the rich.[4] But also in more subtle ways—as I show throughout this study—the unemployed in Chicago had a rather mature understanding of class conflict, if typically an understanding that incorporated attitudes of political cynicism and resignation to the largely individualized (or at least family-centered) nature of survival in urban America. Such attitudes were thoroughly rational and realistic; nevertheless, I particularly try to highlight the ways in which people overcame their isolation and built community even on the basis of "atomizing" unemployment.

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[1] See Patricia Cayo Sexton, *The War on Labor and the Left: Understanding America's Unique Conservatism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1991).

[2] Dubofsky, "Not So 'Turbulent Years," 223.

[3] As it happens, even the most doctrinaire Marxists among them were not theoretically consistent, and did not really understand Marxism or have the type of class consciousness that "sophistication" requires. I establish this in chapters four and six of *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution*. The fact that even Leninists, who have always prided themselves on their theoretical sophistication, have an essentially incoherent ideology shows what a chimera is the notion of "correct" consciousness as opposed to the consciousness corrupted by bourgeois hegemony and incoherence. There can be no litmus tests in these matters.

[4] McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 238–240.

In a longer study I might have included a chapter that generalizes beyond the Great Depression to argue that the large majority of people have a primarily left-wing, in some ways even anarchist and Marxist, ideological framework (though of course one full of inconsistencies and lacunae). This is not a difficult argument to make. For instance, one can use polls to show that the American public has social democratic values. Even in the 1980s, when conservatism was ascendant in politics and elite culture, the public remained broadly left-wing. On environmental regulation, a major poll in 1983 found that 58 percent of people supported the radical proposition that "protecting the environment is so important that requirements and standards cannot be too high, and continuing environmental improvements must be made regardless of cost." Another 1983 poll found that 74 percent supported a jobs program for the unemployed even if it meant increasing the size of the federal deficit. In 1986, 66 percent of the public thought that "government should spend money now on efforts similar to those of the Great Society programs to help the poor people." Large majorities supported keeping regulations on industrial safety, offshore oil drilling, auto emission and safety standards, and the teenage minimum wage. In 1979, 79 percent of the public thought there was too much power concentrated in the hands of a few large companies for the good of the nation. More recently, a Pew Research Center poll in 2015 found that, while only 27 percent of Americans are bothered "a lot" by the amount they pay in taxes, 61 percent are bothered a lot by the feeling that the wealthy do not pay their fair share. Eighty-four percent thought money has too much influence in political campaigns. In early 2015, 75 percent of Americans supported raising the federal minimum wage to $12.50 by 2020 (and 63 percent wanted it raised to $15). A year later, 58 percent supported replacing the Affordable Care Act with a federally funded healthcare program providing insurance for all Americans, and 59 percent of likely 2016 voters supported the radical idea of expanding Social Security to Americans of all ages "so that everyone has a guaranteed minimum income." By and large, it seems that most people are far more leftist than the business, political, and intellectual elite.[1]

Instead of exploring these matters, however, I confine myself to elaborating on Robert McElvaine's argument that the 1930s saw a shift leftward in the values and practices of the American people, a shift towards community, cooperation, and generosity. I also accept Lizabeth Cohen's argument that the Depression caused workers and the unemployed to turn from welfare capitalists, local charities, and ethnic associations to unions and the federal government as guarantors of economic security. Where I go further than she is to argue (in chapter six) that this shift in attitude is another indication that, despite their demoralizing experiences, the unemployed tended to be far from apathetic and apolitical, that in fact it was common for them to have a more sensible and realistic politics than many of the Communists who tried to organize them. They knew that the world is not a just place, that it was hopeless to try to create a workers' government or to construct a classless utopia. In their own way they were fighting against a bourgeois ideological hegemony by insisting, through protest marches and letters to politicians (among other means), that the government must radically intervene in the economy to curb the excesses of capitalism. Ordinary people decisively rejected the old ideology of "limited government" and paved the way for the New Deal. (As we'll see, most wanted a much more radical version of the New Deal.)

I should note, though it is probably already evident, that in this dissertation I somewhat reconceptualize the idea of class struggle, broadening it in several ways. Above I equated the term to "the structure and functioning of economic institutions," by which I meant the objective antagonism of interests

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[1] Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, *Right Turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 14–16; Pew Research Center, "Federal Tax System Seen in Need of Overhaul," March 19, 2015, http://www.people-press.org/2015/03/19/federal-tax-system-seen-in-need-of-overhaul/; "Americans' Views on Money in Politics," *New York Times*, June 2, 2015; National Employment Law Project, "New Poll Shows Overwhelming Support for Major Minimum Wage Increase," January 15, 2015; Gallup, "Majority in U.S. Support Idea of Fed-Funded Healthcare System," May 16, 2016, http://www.gallup.com/poll/191504/majority-support-idea-fed-funded-healthcare-system.aspx; Progressive Change Institute, "Poll of Likely 2016 Voters," https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.boldprogressives.org/images/Big_Ideas-Polling_PDF-1.pdf. See also Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

between capitalist and worker. This "objectivist" understanding of the concept, while implicit in Marx's writings, amounts to an appropriation of Ste. Croix's use of it in his magnificent 1981 study of the ancient Greek world quoted earlier. Ste. Croix points out that class struggle need not involve collective action or activity on a political plane, and it need not even be accompanied by "class consciousness" or an *awareness* of "struggle" at all.[1] But furthermore, on the basis of this understanding I extend the notion even further and treat the efforts of the poor and the unemployed to survive in a hostile world as themselves a manifestation of class struggle, and as being implicitly political. For—to be somewhat glib—they certainly involved struggles against authorities and their (class-based) prioritization of "fiscal austerity" (to use an anachronistic term), and they grew out of class. Working-class efforts to survive, and to resist, were and are essential products of exploitative class dynamics. They also frequently involved collective solidarity, the solidarity of the poor with the poor. In contexts of severe deprivation, the mere fact of surviving can be a type of resistance to dominant social structures, a way of asserting oneself against realities of class and power that are, in effect, organized to crush one under the boot of the ruling class or even, in some cases, to erase one's existence. For most people, fighting daily for the survival of their family and collectively fighting employers or relief authorities or pro-business political policies are not sharply separated activities, the latter belonging to "class struggle" and the former not. Such distinctions are artificial and arbitrary, mere intellectual contrivances. The whole existence of the poor tends to incorporate a kind of generalized and diffuse class struggle and class consciousness—perhaps not a theoretically sophisticated consciousness, but a realistic one.

I'll elaborate on these arguments in later chapters, when I discuss the "class consciousness" of particular (types of) actors. It may be noted here, however, that such ideas recall James C. Scott's arguments in (among other writings) his 1989 paper "Everyday Forms of Resistance," where under the broad category of the paper's title he lists acts such as "foot-dragging, dissimulations, false compliance, feigned ignorance, desertion, pilfering, smuggling, poaching, arson, slander, sabotage, surreptitious assault and murder, [and] anonymous threats." "These techniques," he observes, "for the most part quite prosaic, are the ordinary means of class struggle."[2] Against the charge that he makes the concept of class resistance overly inclusive, Scott marshals a number of arguments, for instance that when such activities are sufficiently generalized to become a *pattern* of resistance, their relevance to class conflict is clear. (As we'll see, activities like pilfering, dissimulation to relief authorities, false compliance with unreasonable conditions for receiving relief, and anonymous threats against state legislatures, not to mention collective protests, were indeed generalized patterns of resistance among the Depression's unemployed.) We might paraphrase Scott's definition as follows: lower-class resistance is any act by a member of a given class that is intended either to mitigate or to deny claims made on that class by superordinate classes or to advance its own claims (e.g., to work, land, charity, or respect) vis-à-vis these superordinate classes. Even when workers shirk on the job or when the poor try by any means to obtain resources for themselves, class resistance to dominant institutions and inegalitarian value-systems is occurring.

The dissertation is organized as follows. In chapter one I provide a brief overview of the Great Depression and its effects on Chicago, and then, at the end, summarize again some of the main arguments I'll make in later chapters. The second chapter is different from the others in saying nothing about the *agency* of the unemployed, consisting instead of a litany of the woes they had to endure. While not much is said explicitly about the machinations of Chicago's political and business elite, most of what is discussed serves as an implicit critique of the class priorities of this elite that was happy to sacrifice the well-being of hundreds of thousands on the altar of "lower costs." The reader may notice parallels between the political agenda of "economy" during the Depression and the agenda of "austerity" in our own day.

In the third chapter I explore some of the dimensions of people's activeness, specifically the ways in which they coped physically and emotionally with the tragedies that had befallen them. Having been virtually outcast from many of society's dominant institutions, the unemployed had to reconstruct their lives even in the midst of their collapse. In most cases this would not have been possible if the poor had not

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[1] Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, 44, 57.

[2] James C. Scott, "Everyday Forms of Resistance," *Copenhagen Papers*, no. 4 (1989): 33–62.

been munificent in giving aid to one another—a feature of Depression life that has still not been exhaustively analyzed. Indeed, David Graeber is surely right that the disciplines of anthropology and history could do more than they have to illuminate the myriad dimensions of "everyday communism" that have always formed the bedrock of society. Ideological blinders have prevented us from studying, even from seeing, the deep-rooted modes of cooperation and generosity that not only make society possible but, as I have argued, frequently amount to powerful forms of class solidarity. In addition, I examine the many ways in which the impoverished unemployed constructed their own modes of recreation, from sports to gambling to dancing. General studies of life in the Depression, such as David E. Kyvig's *Daily Life in the United States, 1920–1940* (2004), James R. McGovern's *And a Time for Hope: Americans in the Great Depression* (2000), and Robert McElvaine's *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (1984), broadly describe the forms of recreation and popular culture that Americans indulged in during these years, but they do not focus on people without work, nor on a particular location (Chicago, in this case). A local study permits greater depth.

The fourth chapter is devoted to "the unattached," who often had to live in flophouses or public shelters because they could not afford their own rooms. Not until late 1935 did the relief administration provide outdoor relief, or home relief, for most of the unattached, and even then thousands still used the free shelters that remained open or the cheap flophouses in the Hobohemian district. I describe in detail the miserable conditions in which "shelter men" lived, the conditions that amounted to a form of class war calculated to humiliate and degrade the poor. (Whether policymakers and administrators had intentions of class war in mind is beside the point; the institutions they served functioned so as to beat down the poor, as this study bears out.) Shelter clients tended to be well aware of class structures and of the conflict between rich and poor that determined U.S. politics. They even organized to press for changes in shelter administration. Thus, I focus on what shelter men thought of their situation, and on how they coped with being the objects of a cruel and inhumane policy.

In the following chapter I discuss three types of institutions that had an impact on the unemployed: governments, unions, and churches. With regard to the first, I illustrate what a low priority the well-being of the poor was to the Chicago and Illinois governments by recounting the dreary story of relief financing from 1930 to 1941, which is to say the story of how the elites of the business and political worlds singularly failed to provide for the millions of Illinoisans thrown out of work. As a wealthy state that periodically even had budget surpluses, Illinois certainly could have afforded to be more munificent than it was in the funds it diverted to relief. That it *wasn't* testifies to the degree to which class conflict determines politics. Unions and churches, on the other hand, frequently showed striking compassion for, and solidarity with, the unemployed, although their inadequate resources prevented them from being as effective as they might have been. The main reason I include a section on unions is simply that very little scholarship addresses the question of how unions in Chicago engaged with both their out-of-work members and the broader unemployed population. Indeed, little scholarship addresses the question as it relates to any place in the country, not only Chicago, although James Lorence's aforementioned works on Michigan and Georgia are notable exceptions.

Originally I had intended to include a chapter on outdoor relief, to complement the chapter on indoor relief. I wanted to investigate what it was like to be on relief: what the procedures were, how they changed over the years, what humiliations had to be suffered, what the different types of work relief entailed and what people's attitudes toward them were, what the grievances were of people working on CWA and WPA projects, how individuals (as opposed to groups) resisted the injustices they continually experienced, etc. I came to realize, however, that such a chapter could be a book in itself. Nor, probably, would the payoff be worth the effort of writing it, because so much other scholarship already discusses these issues (though admittedly not as a local study of Chicago). Standard general histories of the Depression and the New Deal provide answers to the questions I had in mind, and it was unlikely that a monograph on Chicago would significantly challenge their interpretations. In any case, I was less interested in relief for its own sake than in clients' responses to it, particularly their resistance, and I already planned to devote the last chapter to a consideration of the collective action of the unemployed. So in the end I decided it made little sense to write an enormous chapter on home relief, and substituted for it the one I have just described,

which consists, in effect, of a contrast between the relative inhumanity of the dominant political economy and the relative humanity of the subordinate political economy of unions and churches. Historians have not sufficiently emphasized the degree to which niggardly relief was a political choice rather than an economic necessity.

In the sixth chapter I follow this account of the politics of relief with a discussion of the politics and activism of the unemployed. Again, much has been said about this subject in writings by Roy Rosenzweig, Daniel J. Leab, James Lorence, Randi Storch, and Franklin Folsom, the latter in a popular book called *Impatient Armies of the Poor: The Story of Collective Action of the Unemployed, 1808–1942* (published in 1991). But there is no systematic discussion of the social history in Chicago, and barely a mention of the second half of the 1930s. My main concern, to repeat, is to highlight the realism and the militancy of ordinary people, to undermine the myth of their dominance by mainstream indoctrination. Especially when material comforts fall away and people sense that they are being treated unfairly, radicalization can happen very quickly. The "self-blame" of the unemployed was not such an utterly dominant reaction as many historians have thought. And even when there was self-blame, anger at an unjust society was not infrequently present as well. Such anger helped motivate the radicalism that emerged on local and national scales, a radicalism of both "form"—including widespread occupying of private property, sit-ins at relief stations and legislative chambers, constant demonstrations and hunger marches, collective thefts—and "content," i.e., the policy goals that, in fact, were in essence revolutionary. In our own time of social crisis, high unemployment (see page 60), and slowly building mass struggles, it is useful to recall how class-conscious and rebellious people were the last time society was at such a fever pitch of polarization.

Throughout the dissertation I try to make distinctions—to the extent that the sources allow—between subcategories of the unemployed, such as ethnicities and income levels. The most obvious distinctions are between African-Americans and whites, especially native whites, because the hardships of blacks were on a more acute plane than those of whites. Not surprisingly, then, blacks were more frequently militant and class-conscious—and of course race-conscious—than whites. Nevertheless, unemployment united as well as divided, in part through efforts of the Communist party to bridge racial divisions.

In short, with this dissertation I'm trying both to fill a few gaps in the historiography and to put forward an interpretation of the unemployed in the 1930s that rescues them from posterity's condescension. To adopt Marx's famous dictum, they were not only "made" by their circumstances, by their misfortunes; they also made their own history, and made themselves as they made history. Through personal and collective struggle they refused to let the political economy cast them aside as so many "redundant" pieces of human scrap metal. Their legacy, in fact, is the legacy of class struggle against overwhelming odds.

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Meanwhile, in recent years I've taken some notes on books and articles I was reading. I might as well put a few of those jottings here, in case one or two potential readers would be interested.

On humans' language faculty

You may have heard of the "talking gorilla" Koko. I remember as a child reading about this fascinating creature that had been trained to use sign language to communicate desires, thoughts, feelings, and the like. This was utterly amazing to me, because the idea of non-human apes possessing even the rudiments of human language seemed outlandish. Apes seem to be on such a vastly more primitive cognitive level than humans that I found it miraculous and thrilling that Koko could apparently express somewhat sophisticated ideas. The truth, of course, was that she couldn't.

Laura Ann-Petitto's contribution to the first edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Chomsky*, titled "How the brain begets language," is interesting and instructive in this Koko-context. (The book can be downloaded at Z-Library.) So much so that I want to quote long passages for the benefit of any other amateurs like me who might be interested in these matters. One of the intriguing things about Petitto's

chapter is the same thing that has always baffled me about people's responses to Chomsky: somehow, ideas that strike me as perfectly reasonable, if not embarrassingly truistic, are considered controversial or obviously wrong by hordes of academics and many others. (I have to admit that this has given me a rather uncharitable view of the intelligence of the average intellectual.) E.g.:

> I first met Noam Chomsky through a project that attempted to get the baby chimp Nim Chimpsky to "talk." At nineteen, with the certainty of youth, I knew that I would soon be "talking to the animals." Nim was the focus of our Columbia University research team's Grand Experiment: could we teach human language to other animals through environmental input alone with direct instruction and reinforcement principles? Or would there prove to be aspects of human language that resisted instruction, suggesting that language is a cognitive capacity that is uniquely human and likely under biological control? Nim was affectionately named "Chimpsky" because we were testing some of Chomsky's nativist [rationalist] views. To do so, we used natural sign language. Chimps cannot literally speak and cannot learn spoken language. But chimps have hands, arms, and faces and thus can, in principle, learn the silent language of Deaf people.
>
> By the early 1970s, a surprising number of researchers had turned to learning about human language through the study of non-human apes. Noam Chomsky had stated the challenge: important parts of the grammar of human language are innate and specific to human beings alone. Key among these parts is the specific way that humans arrange words in a sentence (syntax), the ways that humans change the meanings of words by adding and taking away small meaningful parts to word stems (morphology), and the ways that a small set of meaningless sounds are arranged to produce all the words in an entire language (phonology). The human baby, Chomsky argued, is not born a "blank slate" with only the capacity to learn from direct instruction the sentences that its mother reinforces in the child's environment, as had been one of the prevailing tenets of a famous psychologist of the time, B. F. Skinner… Innately equipped with tacit knowledge of the finite set of possible language units and the rules for combining them, the baby listens to the patterns present in the specific language sample to which she is being exposed, and "chooses" from her innate set of possible grammars the grammar she is hearing…
>
> My departure from Project Nim Chimpsky in the mid 1970s to attend graduate school in theoretical linguistics at the University of California, San Diego, was bittersweet. It had become clear that while Nim had some impressive communicative and cognitive abilities, there was a fundamental divide between his knowledge and use of language and ours. No one can "talk to the animals" by sign or otherwise. Nim's data, along with our close analyses of data from all other chimp language projects, unequivocally demonstrated that Chomsky was correct: aspects of human language are innate and unique, requiring a human biological endowment.

And people were surprised by this? Wow. Poor Chomsky has had to argue with irrationalists his whole life.

It turns out that non-human primates are (of course) almost completely incapable of *abstraction*. For them, as for every other animal except humans, it seems that only what is immediately present—in sensory experience, memory, desire, or whatever—exists. For example, apes cannot construct patterned sequences of three or more signs. "After producing a 'matrix' two words, they then—choosing from only the top five or so most frequently used words that they can produce (all primary food or contact words, such as *eat* or *tickle*)—randomly construct a grocery list. There is no rhyme or reason to the list, only a word salad lacking internal organization." Petitto continues:

> Alas, the whole story is even worse than irregularities in chimpanzees' syntax, morphology, and phonology: the very *meanings* of their words were "off." For one thing, chimps cannot, without great difficulty, *acquire* the word *fruit*. While apes seem to have

> some capacity to associate words with concrete things and events in the world they inhabit, unlike humans, they seem to have little capacity to acquire and readily apply words with an *abstract* sense. Thus, while chimps can associate a small set of labels with concrete objects in the world (*apple* for apples, *orange* for oranges), they have enormous difficulty acquiring a word like *fruit*, which is a classification of both apples and oranges. There is no tangible item in the world that is literally fruit, only instances or examples of this abstract kind-concept that seems to exist only in human heads.
>
> For another thing, chimps do not *use* words in the way we do at all. When we humans use the common noun *apple* in reference to that small round and juicy object in the world that we eat, we do not use it to index (pick out) only one object in the world (say, a specific red apple on a table), nor do we use it to refer to all things, locations, and actions globally associated with apples. Instead we use the label to "stand for" or *symbolize* the set of related objects in the world that are true of this particular kind-concept in our heads. Crucially, we also know the range or scope over which word kind-concepts may apply: for example, the label *apple* symbolizes a set of related *objects* and therefore this label is used only in reference to objects, not actions… Chimps, unlike humans, use such labels in a way that seems to rely heavily on some global notion of *association*. A chimp will use the same label *apple* to refer to the action of eating apples, the location where apples are kept, events and locations of objects other than apples that happened to be stored with an apple (the knife used to cut it), and so on and so forth—all simultaneously, and without apparent recognition of the relevant differences or the advantages of being able to distinguish among them. Even the first words of the young human baby are used in a kind-concept constrained way (a way that indicates that the child's usage adheres to "natural kind" boundaries—kinds of events, kinds of actions, kinds of objects, etc.). But the usage of chimps, even after years of training and communication with humans, never displays this sensitivity to differences among natural kinds. Surprisingly, then, chimps do not really have "names for things" at all. They have only a hodge-podge of loose associations with no Chomsky-type internal constraints or categories and rules that govern them. In effect, they do not ever acquire the *human* word *apple*.

Surprising?! Frankly, what surprises me is that apes can be taught to *sign "words"* at all. I find that pretty impressive. Though maybe I shouldn't, since apes obviously communicate with each other in some primitive way that involves gestures.

Aside from information about chimps' non-acquisition of language, Petitto's paper presents interesting data on comparisons between monolingual deaf children and monolingual hearing children, as well as bilingual hearing children in "typical" (spoken) contexts, bilingual hearing children who were taught two *signed* languages and nothing spoken (because their parents were deaf), and bilingual hearing children who acquired both a signed and a spoken language. One finding was that deaf babies' development of (signed) language proceeds at exactly the same pace and follows exactly the same stages as hearing children's development of language. (A point for Chomsky, which is to say for the *biological—preprogrammed*—perspective, no matter the modality of communication.) As for "bilingual hearing children exposed to both a *signed* and a *spoken* language from birth (e.g., one parent signs and the other parent speaks), [they] demonstrate no preference whatsoever for speech, even though they can hear." In the experiment conducted, they produced their first word in French and their first word in sign language at the same time.

What's also notable is that babies who were exposed to, say, French and English at the same time "achieved their linguistic milestones on the same timetable as *mono*linguals, revealing no language delay or confusion." Isn't that incredible? It's hard enough—in fact, *magical*—for babies to *construct in their head an entire language* on the basis of the fragmentary, scattered linguistic data they're exposed to from their parents. (This is the "poverty of the stimulus" miracle.) But for them to construct *two* languages on the basis of these confusing and conflicting data is impossible to comprehend. Imagine being an infant who

hears a hodgepodge of sounds from adults, some of the sounds being organized according to the rules of English and others according to those of German: and you (your brain) *instinctively* can recognize that these differences exist, these sounds are organized in different ways, and you build up in your brain (unconsciously) a set of structures of two different languages *at the same time, without getting irremediably confused*. That feat is absolutely astonishing. Science has no conception of how it's accomplished.

But one thing it indicates, at least, is that Chomsky is right that the infant's brain *hungers* for linguistic data, it's desperately eager to construct linguistic structures spontaneously on the basis of the verbal sounds (or hand gestures) it encounters. There is obviously a *language faculty* in the human brain, a specialized mental organ that effortlessly and unconsciously uses sensory (auditory and/or visual) data to construct the unimaginably complex rules of a particular language. Humans are *genetically endowed* with this aptitude, this predisposition; we don't just use our "general intelligence" and rules of association or induction or whatnot to develop a language, contrary to what empiricists think. This fact is so obvious even from this single piece of evidence—the *ease* with which infants learn *even two or more languages at the same time!* (when *adults* find it *infinitely more difficult*)—that even I, who have a pretty dim view of intellectuals, find it shocking they can reject Chomsky's "biologism" (Universal Grammar, etc.) and maintain an allegiance to empiricism.

I know I'm just a dilettante and have no professional status in linguistics or related disciplines. But these aren't technical issues that you need extensive training in order to understand. They're very general, having to do with simple rules of logic and induction (or "abduction"): it's like inference to the best explanation. Despite what professionals might say—not Chomsky, who is consistently democratic, but other professionals—you and I have a right to have an opinion about straightforward topics like this, insofar as we're capable of reading and reasoning. (Not all people are truly capable of reasoning, but I assume *you* are.) The technical linguistics—no, I can't possibly understand that. But the reasoning about rationalism vs. empiricism—yes, since I am, and you are, able to understand chains of reasoning and evaluate evidence bearing on these chains of reasoning, we're qualified to hold opinions about general "philosophical" matters. (Of course, the more we read and the more we reflect, the more qualified we are.)

And it seems to me that however hard it might be sometimes to *confirm* rationalist (nativist) hypotheses, or even to flesh them out in such a way that they're immune to all objections from empiricists, they have an enormous amount of plausibility *prima facie*. Not least because it's uncontroversial that *other* animals are genetically preprogrammed to act in specific ways barely influenced by environmental stimulation. (E.g., baby squirrels engage in squirrely behavior (digging) even if they've been deprived of input from other squirrels and are confined in solitude to an isolated room.) Presumably empiricists wouldn't deny that humans are animals, right? We're part of the animal kingdom. So you'd think that what's true of all other animals would be true of us, no? Why should *we* not be preprogrammed if *other* animals are? We're not angels![1]

Anyway, let's leave this empiricist nonsense aside. Returning to *interesting* things… You're aware of the infant "babbling" phenomenon, right? *Ba-ba-ba-ba*, etc. What does that babbling mean? For many researchers, babbling is "the initial manifestation of human language acquisition, or, at least, of language production." This seems plausible. More specifically, though, some researchers think that babbling is "determined by the development of the anatomy of the *vocal tract* and the neuroanatomical and neurophysiological mechanisms subserving the *motor control of speech production*." But no, *that* hypothesis is wrong, because *deaf* babies babble too! They *manually, not vocally*, babble! This scientific discovery of *hand* babbling "confirmed a claim central to Chomsky's theory: that early language acquisition is governed by tacit knowledge of the abstract patterning of language that is biologically endowed in the species, and that this governance is so powerful that it will 'out' itself by mapping onto the tongue if given

[1] As I've noted elsewhere on this website, the indubitable fact of psychological/behavioral preprogramming has uncomfortable implications with regard to the postmodern dogma that gender (gendered thinking and behavior) is nothing but a social construction: viz., that the dogma is flat-out false. Postmodern empiricism and idealism (elevation of "discourses" and "culture" above class structures and sheer brute *material facts*, including biological facts) are just flaky irrationalism.

the tongue, or the hands if given the hands—all the while preserving linguistic structures across the two modalities." In other words: empiricism loses again.

The idea of hand babbling is fascinating. If babbling is indeed an early manifestation of the language faculty, then, of course, you'd expect to see it manifested somehow in deaf babies too (who have the language faculty), not only hearing babies. But what does it mean to say that hand gestures can *babble*? Well, Petitto discovered that there is actually syllabic organization (analogous to *ba-ba-ba*) in deaf babies' silent hand babbling. "In signed languages, the sign-syllable consists of the *rhythmic closing and opening*…alternations of the hands/arms. This sign-syllabic organization has been analyzed as being structurally homologous with the closing and opening of the mouth aperture in the production of consonant–vowel (closed–open) mouth alternations in spoken language." So babies can express *ba-ba-ba* or *da-da-da* or *ma-ma-ma* with their hands, not only their mouths.

> …If babies are born [as Chomsky argues] with *tacit knowledge* of the core patterns that are universal to all languages, even signed languages, then the [Chomskyan] hypothesis predicts that differences in the form of language input should yield differences in the hand activity of [deaf babies]. In biological terms, *tacit knowledge* was construed [in our experiment] as the baby's sensitivity to specific patterns at the heart of human language—in particular, the rhythmic patterns that bind *syllables*, the elementary units of language, into baby *babbles*, and then into *words and sentences*.

Babies are, it appears, highly sensitive to these linguistic patterns, even if they're deaf and exposed only to signed language. But why else would they be so sensitive if not that they were *predetermined* to be so sensitive?

Anyway, the broader point is that deaf children experience the same linguistic milestones at the same rate as hearing children, and the Chomskyan hypothesis that internal linguistic structures will find some way to manifest themselves in external expression, even if the usual verbal/auditory mode is impaired, is supported. The language faculty is a core *genetically determined and elaborated* property of humans. As should have been obvious all along.

None of this is to deny, however, the great conceptual and scientific difficulties associated with this faculty. Such as how and why it appeared in the first place (a question we'll probably never have a good answer to, as Richard Lewontin argued), or what the universal linguistic rules are, or how the baby's brain processes sounds to construct a language on the basis of these rules. The human brain is mostly a mystery and will, I suspect, remain so.

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Notes on the evolutionary history of life

Reading *A New History of Life: The Radical New Discoveries about the Origins and Evolution of Life on Earth* (2016), by Peter Ward and Joe Kirschvink. A great book, so dense with information I have to take notes in order not to forget everything.

For almost a billion years the early Earth, largely molten, was bombarded by meteorites and comets, as well as ultraviolet radiation. An environment not exactly hospitable to life. It seems that the oldest fossil is from 3.4 billion years ago, of bacteria that needed the element sulfur to live and died if exposed to oxygen. (Related bacteria exist today.) The world was much hotter than today, with air composed of the (to us) toxic gases methane, carbon dioxide, ammonia, and hydrogen sulfide.

There have been many hypotheses for where and how life began. One possibility is that scalding deep-sea vents provided its environment. "The vents emit chemicals that are appropriate for the evolution of life, such as hydrogen sulfide, methane, and ammonia amid lots of hot water. The vent chemistry would be largely decoupled from the atmosphere, and thus the evolution of life could have taken place independent of the atmosphere. This removed the problem that the Earth's atmosphere at the time was not chemically

correct to form life. But the so-called vent origin had its own problems. How could RNA, that highly unstable molecule, have formed in the vents, with their high temperatures and pressures?"

Another possibility is that RNA (which can form DNA) may have originated in desert conditions. "RNA is a very fragile molecule, large and complicated, and thus very easily destroyed. Water attacks and breaks up the nucleic acid polymers (strings of smaller molecules) that make up RNA." So maybe a dry environment would be more promising. The problem is that Earth's surface at this time was pretty much entirely ocean. But what about Mars? Mars never had planet-covering oceans, but it did have large bodies of water, which are necessary in order to form the borate minerals that are needed to stabilize RNA. It also had other advantages over Earth. So maybe life came here on meteorites from Mars.

Experiments have shown that meteorites can come here from Mars without being heat-sterilized, meaning life could have survived the journey. A large impact on Mars could easily have hurled life-bearing meteorites onto Earth. This is the scenario the authors favor.

Anyway, here's how the chapter on the beginning of life ends:

> The two major components necessary for life are a cell that can reproduce itself and some sort of molecule that can carry information, as well as performing chemical catalysis (changing conditions so that a chemical reaction that would not otherwise occur does take place because of the action of the catalyst being present)… Cells and RNA [may have] evolved as a single unit—double-walled cells of fat with small RNA nucleotides within them grew by obtaining more fat and more nucleotides, which could have passed through gaps in the fat of the cell wall, whereas the larger linked nucleotides of the interior would be too large to pass out of the walls. The material available on the early Earth necessary to make the protocells were chemicals that would have combined to form fatty (lipid) molecules, which themselves would readily link together to form sheets and then spheres.
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> …The earliest life might have been composed of cells with very porous cell walls, allowing the swapping of whole genomes, a process known as horizontal gene transfer. But there came a time when the cell systems went from ephemeral to permanent. This is the point that biologist Carl Woese called the "Darwinian threshold." It is the point where species, in something approaching the modern sense, can be recognized, and when natural selection—evolution in other words—takes over. Natural selection favored more functionally complex, integrated cells than simpler precursors, and they flourished at the expense of the simpler modular varieties.
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> Modern Earth life was born when the radical changing of genes stopped. Some who study the evolution of the first life, such as Carl Woese, believe that arriving at this grade of organization is the most important event in all of evolutionary history. Yet those first cells were surely not alone, for there were probably ecosystems packed with all manners of complex chemical assemblages that had at least some life aspects. We can think of a giant zoo of the living, the near living, and the evolving toward living. What would that zoo contain? Lots of nucleic acid creatures of many kinds, things no longer existing and having no name because of this. We can imagine complicated chemical amalgamations that have been roughly defined as RNA-protein organisms, RNA-DNA organisms, DNA-RNA-protein creatures, RNA viruses, DNA viruses, lipid protocells, protein protocells. And all these huge menageries of the living and near living would have existed in one thriving, messy, competing ecosystem—the time of life's greatest diversity on Earth, perhaps 3.9 to 4.0 GA (billion years ago), but with our new view being that it was later rather than sooner. Natural selection whittled what might have been a thousand really different kinds of life down to one.

So, sometime in the middle of the Archean period (which lasted from 4.2 billion to 2.5 billion years ago) various life forms appeared, somehow. Much of early life used methane for food, but eventually

cyanobacteria evolved, which were the first oxygenic photosynthesizing organisms. "Some of their descendants were enslaved by other organisms, and now serve us all as the green light-gathering organelles in plants and other algae. Every plant on Earth now has tiny 'capsules' that evolved from those first cyanobacteria, but are now 'endosymbiosis' slaves doing the bidding of the multicellular plant." Over hundreds of millions of years, these oxygen-producing cyanobacteria radically changed the composition of the atmosphere. This is the Great Oxygenation Event.

"[T]he evolution of the cyanobacteria was the most profound biological event on this planet (even more so than the evolution of the eukaryotic cell, and then multicellular life)."

One major consequence of all this production of oxygen and consumption of carbon dioxide was the first Snowball Earth event, which may have lasted 100 million years or so. This would have been around 2.3 billion years ago. The majority of life died out, but cyanobacteria survived, probably in local hot springs. Only after volcanic activity had released enough greenhouse gases could this frozen period come to an end. When it did, the cyanobacteria multiplied in numbers "almost incomprehensible" because the oceans, having been submerged under ice for so long, had loaded up on nutrients from hydrothermal vents. So there were further massive increases in the amount of oxygen in Earth's atmosphere, until it was "supersaturated" in oxygen (because there weren't yet organisms capable of breathing it, as animals do). Finally oxygen-breathing eukaryotes appeared around 2 billion years ago, restoring some balance to the atmosphere. They used mitochondria, which had originally been independent bacteria, as sources of energy—which relied on oxygen.

It took a very long time, though, for common multicellular life to evolve. Why? For a billion years or more there wasn't enough oxygen to support animal life (even though, it seems, many millions of years earlier there had been more than enough, when there weren't any oxygen-breathing organisms around at all). The reason is that there was an overabundance of sulfur-using bacteria, which relied on a type of photosynthesis that doesn't split water apart or produce oxygen. They populated most of the ocean, and after dying, their rotting bodies would have used up many of the oxygen molecules being emitted by other bacteria. After hundreds of millions of years these sulfur-consuming bacteria largely (though not entirely) died out for various complicated reasons, making possible levels of oxygen that could support animal life.

But there were already primitive multicellular organisms around, going back to 2 billion or more years ago. *Grypania*, for example, were bacteria that seem to have lived as "colonies" of cells, held together and bound by membranes. Multicellular plants evolved over a billion years ago, "species probably looking very much like the green and red algae found on any seashore." But it isn't until about 600 MA (million years ago) that fossils of true animals appear in abundance.

A summary:

> Here is a view of a shallow sea bottom, some 1 billion years ago: Kelp-like plants and green algae wave in the currents, as do shimmering mats of rainbow-hued microbial life, multicolored sheaths of the softest chiffon covering all of the sunlit portions of the bottom. Stromatolites peak out from the bottom sheaths, large to small domes and hummocks punching upward out of the microbial sheaths. The water is thick with life, single celled to multicellular. There is nary an animal anywhere on the planet…
>
> In the oceans a revolution was brewing a billion years ago, while on land there may already have been a vast biomass of life: the ever-resourceful microbes, invading first ponds and swamps, but ultimately covering wetlands, bogs, and anywhere that was exposed to sun, had a least a modicum of water, and might get windblown dust with enough phosphates and nitrates to allow these tiny, single-celled plantlike microbes to grow their land-covering tarps of green snot. Life, colonizing the land in exuberance…

But then a second Snowball Earth episode occurred, from 717 to 635 million years ago, once again extinguishing most life. This second episode may have been caused primarily by the movement and tectonic activity of continents. The supercontinent Rodinia began to split apart, which substituted an abundance of maritime climates for formerly arid ones. This created the potential for increased chemical weathering of

silicate rock minerals, which causes a reduction of carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere. And thus a reduction of temperature.

In addition, the new (single-celled) plant species spreading over the land about 750 MA may have sucked up so much carbon dioxide that the Earth significantly cooled.

Whatever the cause, the huge masses of snow and ice that resulted shut out most sunlight and led to the loss of nutrients like iron, phosphates, and nitrates. But over millions of years, volcanoes and hot springs produced small warm bodies of open water, in which organisms could thrive. "Evolution works best on small, isolated populations. Thousands of these small marine and even freshwater refuges would have been evolutionary incubators, using the principle of 'genetic bottlenecks' (where tiny populations, when isolated, can quickly evolve because of their small number of genes). In this way, protozoa, those small single-celled eukaryotes, may have evolved into many different kinds of metazoans—animals. With the release of the snowball conditions, caused by the eventual buildup of greenhouse gases from all of those active volcanoes, there would have been rapid melting of the ice, as well as a rapid release of these thousands of new evolutionary experiments."

So Snowball Earth ironically fostered conditions necessary for the future rapid evolution of complex organisms. This is even more likely because it's known that many organisms respond to environmental stress by wholesale reorganization of their genomes. And Snowball Earth was certainly stressful.

The Ediacaran period, the last period before the start of the Paleozoic Era, began 635 million years ago and saw the beginning of truly complex and large multicellular life. Perhaps even animal life. Tiny wormlike creatures with *bilateral symmetry* appeared around 600 MA, and they apparently evolved into many of the larger Ediacarans, which colonized the world. These were soft-bodied, sexually reproducing, virtually immobile creatures that lasted until 540 million years ago, when they were wiped out by the animals, including predators, of the Cambrian explosion. Some of them were like fronds, some like worms, some like soft discs, etc. They don't seem to have any obvious evolutionary descendants.

Summing up:

> In the time between about 635 and 550 million years ago, a whole new category of organisms had evolved, ones with internal water-filled spaces that could act as an internal or hydrostatic skeleton, as well as creatures with muscles, nerves, specialized sensory cells, germ cells, connective tissue cells, and the ability to secrete precipitated skeletal hard parts. Animals or not, the Ediacarans were the first on Earth to evolve skeletons, albeit nonmineralized. Skeletons allow for the attachment of muscles, and muscles allow locomotion. Locomotion then creates other needs that continue to drive the evolution of ever more complexity. Once moving, an animal needs sensory information to find food and mates, as well as to avoid predators. Sensory information needs a brain to process it. All of these developments were intertwined, and were triumphs of the eukaryotic metazoan revolution, which is really what happened near the end of the Proterozoic.

Then, of course, was the Cambrian explosion, when all the current animal phyla appeared. It was apparently a result, at least in part, of oxygen levels finally growing high enough by 550 or 540 million years ago. The iconic fossils of this time are the trilobites, arthropods with three body sections, fairly complex eyes, limbs, and large size. Even two or three feet long. But trilobites weren't the first animals: they appeared around 520 million years ago, well after the first tiny fossilized exoskeletons from about 545 MA. There were also brachiopods, echinoderms, mollusks, sponges, and cnidarians (the latter two may have been present among the Ediacarans), but the arthropods were the most successful and numerous animals of the Cambrian.

The authors have a fascinating discussion of what I've always found to be a central problem with Darwinism, namely that it can't really explain the origin of *novelty*. "The radical breakthroughs—be it the appearance of wings, legs for land, segmentation in arthropods, or even large size, the hallmark of the Cambrian explosion—could not stand up to stories about many and sudden [random] mutations all working

in concert to somehow radically change an organism." Exactly. But apparently this problem has been solved in recent years, which, if true, strikes me as a theoretical development of the first importance. Commenting on Sean Carroll's 2005 book *Endless Forms Most Beautiful*, they list four "secrets to innovation." First is to "work with what is already present." It isn't always necessary to build new equipment; it's easier to work with what's already given. The second and third are multifunctionality and redundancy.

> Multifunctionality first is using an already present morphology or physiology to take over some second function in addition to that for which it was first evolved. Redundancy, on the other hand, is when some structure is composed of several parts that complete some function. If one of these can be then co-opted for some new kind of job, while the remaining parts are still able to function as before, there is in place a clear path for innovation that is far easier to use than the total de novo formation of some entirely novel morphology from scratch. Cephalopod swimming and respiration are like this. Cephalopods routinely pump huge quantities of water over their gills, and like many invertebrates used separated "tubes" or designated channels for water coming in and water being expelled, to ensure that oxygen-rich water is not rebreathed. But with minor morphological "tinkering" with this excurrent tube, a powerful new means of locomotion came about. Breathing and moving could now take place using the same amount of energy by utilizing the same volume of water for respiration and movement.

The fourth "secret" is modularity. Animals built of segments, including to an extent vertebrates, are composed of modules. Limbs branching off arthropod segments have been modified into feeding, mating, locomotion, and other functions, while vertebrates' digits have been used to walk on land, to swim, and to fly.

But more interesting than these four "secrets to innovation" is the research on the genetic "switches" that tell various parts of the body when and where to grow. The old view was that if new animals come into existence, it must mean there are new genes. Surely a sponge or a jellyfish must have fewer genes than the more complex arthropods! Wouldn't the common ancestor of all arthropod groups have had to add new genes to those that were present in the sponges and jellyfish? No: all that was necessary was to use the already existing genes in different ways. In fact, "ten different Hox genes were all that were necessary to utterly change and diversify the arthropods." Incredibly, the thousands or millions of different kinds of arthropod morphologies all evolved using the same toolkit of ten genes. Frankly, I don't fully understand this part. But I'll quote some passages anyway:

> One of the great discoveries [of the recent 'evolutionary development' field] is that the exact sequence of different body regions on an arthropod from its head to midregion to abdomen are lined up first on chromosomes in the same geographic pattern, and then on the developing embryo itself…
>
> …The old idea that some gene or genes of an arthropod coded for the construction of a leg is false. The Hox genes make proteins. These proteins then become the means of starting and stopping the growth of particular regions of a developing embryo. Some of these proteins are concerned with making specific kinds of appendages. If those Hox gene proteins are somehow moved to different geographic regions on the developing embryo, the product that is produced will move as well. In this way a leg that was formerly in one part of the body might suddenly be found in a totally new place—if, however, the Hox gene protein was somehow moved to the corresponding place on the embryo long before the leg was formed. Innovation came from shifting the geographic places or "zones" on an embryo that a specific Hox gene protein could be found in.

So…but how do these shifts happen? How does the organism, or the set of Hox genes, 'know' when it's time for some innovation, time to change things around? Presumably there's some sort of interaction with

the environment, some environmental trigger for novelty. But the authors don't go into this subject in any depth.

Anyway, their suggestions are tantalizing, and I'll have to do more reading on this topic. Epigenetics is surely relevant to all this.

The Cambrian ended 485 million years ago with a mass extinction (but a "minor" one that killed less than 50 percent of species). Oxygen levels had increased, and now, during the Ordovician, there was a new explosion of diversity. Coral reefs appeared, benefiting from the higher oxygen levels, and have remained one of the most significant and diverse of all ecosystems. Life spread to environments that had been poorly populated, such as freshwater lakes and both deep and shallow regions of the sea. It may be that the late Cambrian extinctions actually made possible all this new vitality: "[They] acted like gasoline on the open fire of diversification, perhaps, in that those forms that were less adaptive died out, opening the way for new innovation and new species in the same manner that ridding a garden of weeds leads to a rapid proliferation of new growth from the nonweeded." Many of the primitive and inefficient evolutionary designs from earlier were replaced, as competition killed off the less fit.

The biggest winners in the Ordovician were animals that lived in colonies, such as corals, bryozoans, and sponges. This was a new adaptation that hadn't really been present during the Cambrian. The Ordovician period ended 444 million years ago with the first of the "big five" mass extinctions, probably caused by a "little ice age" and falling sea levels that destroyed habitats.

In this period and through the Silurian, Devonian, and Carboniferous, plants and animals invaded the land. Lichens, fungi, and sheets of green microbes were on the land even a billion years ago, but it wasn't until about 475 million years ago that aquatic green algae began the evolutionary changes that would allow them to get nutrients and reproduce on land. And it wasn't until 50 million years later that the fossil record shows clear remains of plants with roots and stems—but no leaves yet. It took yet another 40 million years (around 385 MA) for plants with true leaves to appear. But then change was more rapid: by 360 MA, trees were up to 25 feet tall and forests almost completely covered the world.

This plant invasion utterly changed the nature of the land and the atmosphere. All the sand dunes and dust storms started to disappear as roots held the grit and dust of the land in place. Thicker soil formed as plants died and rotted, and "the ragged, rocky landscape that had always been Earth began to soften." By the late Devonian, atmospheric oxygen levels had shot up to 30 or 35 percent (compared to 21 percent today). And these oxygen levels allowed limbed, lungless fish to climb out of the sea and survive the hundreds of thousands of years it took to evolve an efficient, air-breathing lung.

In order for the green algal group, the Charophyceae, to come onto land it had to protect itself from desiccation. This may have been done by coating itself in the same sort of cuticle that covers its reproductive zygotes. But the cuticle cut off easy access to carbon dioxide (which, in water, had been simply absorbed across the cell wall), so it had to evolve many small holes called stomata that allowed the entry of carbon dioxide. Modern plants still have these. Meanwhile, stems evolved so that plants could grow upright and access more light in an environment where there was competition between many low-growing plants.

But why did it take tens of millions of years for leaves to appear? It seems that plants evolved the genetic toolkit to assemble leaves but then had to wait a long time to actually use them, because carbon dioxide levels were too high. The problem is that high CO_2 levels mean a very warm planet. The stomata that let CO_2 in also let water out, a process that cools the plant. In a hot climate, a lot of cooling is needed, which means a lot of stomata. But there was so much CO_2 that *few* stomata were needed to absorb sufficient carbon dioxide. A large leaf with few stomata would cause the plant to overheat to the point of death, so, in short, leaves couldn't appear until the planet was cooler. This began to happen as deeper roots evolved for stability and access to nutrients and water: deeper roots increased the chemical weathering of silicate rocks, which drew CO_2 out of the atmosphere and cooled the climate. So the land became full of plant life that animals could eat, as the atmosphere was full of oxygen for them to breathe. It was time for the next big step.

Arthropods were well-adapted to be the first on land, since their exoskeletons could protect them from desiccation. But they still had to evolve proper respiratory structures. The pioneers certainly had less efficient such structures than later species, but air can diffuse across the body wall of very small land

animals, so this was a help. What the first land spiders and scorpions evolved was a book lung, so called because of its resemblance to the pages of a book. ("A series of flat plates within the body have blood flowing between the leaves. Air enters the book lungs through a series of openings in the carapace.") It seems that proto-scorpions with water gills came onto land 430 million years ago (perhaps scavenging on dead animals that had washed up onto beaches), followed by millipedes and insects 10 and 20 million years later. Flying insects existed 330 million years ago, by which time oxygen levels had reached modern-day levels and were climbing to record heights.

The vertebrate transition to land is a complicated story. The famous *Tiktaalik*, which was a fish with a flattened head and sturdy interior bones and limb-like fins with which it could prop itself up in shallow water, may have been an ancestor of the amphibians that lived their whole adult lives on land. It existed about 375 million years ago. (The Devonian, from 416 to 359 MA, has been called the Age of Fish.) More generally, the rhipidistians, lobe-finned fish some of which still exist (such as the living fossils called coelacanths), appear to have been the ancestors of the first amphibians. Still-living lungfish shed light on the transition from gill to lung.

It's possible that the first amphibians evolved about 400 million years ago, although the first tetrapod bone fossils (as opposed to tracks) are 360 million years old. *Ichthyostega*, from around this time, was a genus that was a kind of proto-amphibian, which like several other similar genuses existed soon after the devastating late Devonian mass extinction (caused by a drop in atmospheric oxygen that created widespread anoxia in the seas). It didn't lead to an evolutionary radiation of amphibians, however; within a few million years, it and the other pioneering tetrapods for some reason disappeared. It wasn't until 340 or 330 million years ago that amphibians were widespread. *Pederpes*, from about 350 MA, may have been the first true amphibian, since it had the legs necessary for land life.

In short, "The evidence at hand suggests that the evolution of the amphibian grade of organization, essentially a fish that came on land, may have taken place twice, or even three times, the first being some 400 million years ago as evidenced by the Valentia footprints as well as the *Tiktaalik* fossil discovery, and the second some 360 million years ago, and the last some 350 million years ago."

Moving on…the next really interesting 'phase' of life is the time when giants reigned, during the Carboniferous and the first half of the Permian periods. Between 320 and 260 MA, atmospheric oxygen reached the highest levels in Earth's history, making possible huge arthropods (and amphibians). Dragonflies with 30-inch wingspans, spiders with 18-inch legs, six- or seven-feet-long millipedes and scorpions. But why was there so much oxygen? "When a great deal of organic matter is buried, oxygen levels go up." In fact, 90 percent of the Earth's coal deposits are found in rocks of the time period mentioned a moment ago. The Carboniferous was the time of forest burial "on a spectacular scale" (as trees were spreading to new areas)—as well as the burial of plankton, which produced huge amounts of both oxygen and carbon at the bottom of oceans. Another piece of the puzzle is that

> …[b]ack in the Carboniferous, many or perhaps all of the bacteria that decompose wood were not yet present, with the key to this the seeming inability of microbes to break down the main structural component of wood, the material lignin. Trees would fall and not decompose back then. Eventually sediment would cover the undecomposed trees, and 'reduced' carbon was buried in the process. With all of these trees (and the plankton in the seas) producing oxygen through photosynthesis, and very little of this new oxygen being used to decompose the rapidly growing and falling forests, oxygen levels began to rise.

Eventually you got massive arthropods as a result.

It was also in this time that reptiles evolved, which, unlike amphibians, laid amniotic eggs. (They didn't have to lay eggs in water.) This was around 310 MA or earlier. Fairly soon thereafter, "three great stocks of reptiles had diverged from one another to become independent groups: one [synapsids] that gave rise to mammals, a second [anapsids] to turtles, and a third [diapsids] to the other reptilian groups [such as dinosaurs, lizards, snakes, etc.]—and to the birds."

Regarding mammals, the authors suggest, somewhat whimsically, that there were three "ages" of mammals. First was during the Permian, the heyday of therapsids: technically these weren't mammals, but they were close, as you can see from pictures on Google. For instance, their legs weren't so splayed out to the side as in modern lizards but were under the trunk of the body, making possible a more upright position. Also, the therapsids were probably warm-blooded. They included the cynodonts, which gave rise to modern mammals. Second was the time between the late Triassic and the end of the Cretaceous, when small mammals lived in the shadow of the dinosaurs, usually creeping around at night, in burrows or in trees. Third was the real "age of mammals," after the mass extinction that decimated the dinosaurs. –So mammals have been quite resilient. At least until *homo sapiens* emerged, a species that may well kill off most mammals in the next century or two.

And then, 252 million years ago, occurred the greatest of all mass extinctions, the Permian extinction. About 90 percent of species were snuffed out. The extinction itself, or at least the most deadly phase of it, may have lasted no more than 60,000 years. Trilobites were killed off, though they had been declining for a long time.

What caused the cataclysm? First, colossal volcanic eruptions in Siberia likely ejected large amounts of CO_2 into the atmosphere, causing global warming, as acid aerosols blocked out sunlight and caused acid rain. The Wikipedia article on the event notes that massive coal beds may also have ignited, which could have released more than 3 trillion tons of carbon. To make things even worse, all this emission of carbon could have led to severe anoxia in the oceans, which would have permitted sulfate-reducing bacteria to thrive. Huge amounts of hydrogen sulfide would have poisoned the water and bubbled up into the atmosphere. Bad enough in itself, this would have weakened or destroyed the ozone layer, exposing much of the life that remained to fatal levels of UV radiation. And so on. It was a pretty hellish time.

The first few million years of the Triassic weren't much better. Temperatures in the ocean were an incredible 110°F, and on the land they were around 140°. Not much could survive these temperatures. "The entire zone of the topics would have been devoid of animals, and complex life would have hung on only at high latitudes." But it was a paradise for sulfur-loving, oxygen-hating microbes.

Later in the Triassic, mammals and (especially) dinosaurs started to become more prominent—though it wasn't until the Jurassic that the Age of Dinosaurs arrived. But even before this, an amazingly diverse assemblage of life appeared:

> In some ways it was not unlike the Cambrian explosion—a slew of newly invented body plans filling up an empty world, just as the first animals rapidly evolved into the cornucopia of body plans that filled the seas after the extinction of the first animals, the Ediacarans. And like the great Cambrian explosion, many of the body plans of novelty turned out to be but short-term experiments, to be pushed into extinction by the competition and/or predation of better-designed organisms. There is no time period other than the Cambrian and Triassic in which such a diversity of new forms appeared.

The main reason is just that the world was so empty that virtually any new design would work, at least for a while. But the authors also suggest that times of low oxygen, like the Triassic, foster a diversity of new body plans. "Body plans were being evolutionarily modified by intense selective pressures, and dominant among these was the need to access sufficient oxygen to feed, breed, and compete in a low-oxygen world."

In the sea, "new stocks of bivalve mollusks took the place of the many extinct brachiopods, while a great diversification of ammonoids and nautiloids refilled the oceans with active predators. Fully a quarter of all the ammonites that ever lived have been found in Triassic rocks, a time interval that is only 10 percent of their total time existence on Earth… A new kind of coral, the scleractinians, began to build reefs, and many land reptiles returned to the sea." On land, therapsids diversified and competed with archosaurs and many kinds of reptiles. Dinosaurs emerged about 235 million years ago, but remained rather rare and small for over 30 million years.

In an atmosphere with little oxygen, certain adaptations evolved. To breathe as efficiently as possible, the ancestors of dinosaurs and birds adopted bipedalism. "By removing the quadruped stance, they were freed of the constraints of motion and lung function." Ancestors of mammals, on the other hand, evolved a secondary palate, which allows simultaneous eating and breathing. (The nasal cavity is separated from the oral cavity.) They also grew a new powerful set of muscles called the diaphragm, which allowed a more forceful system of inhaling and exhaling.

Meanwhile, many reptiles solved the problem of living in a hot, low-oxygenated world by returning to the cooler sea. (A high temperature entails a high metabolic rate—a high rate of using energy—which means the animal needs more oxygen to fuel the metabolic processes. Since there were low oxygen levels in the Triassic, one solution was to move to the relatively cool oceans.) Ichthyosaurs, placodonts (like large seals), eventually plesiosaurs, etc.

But then 200 million years ago there was another mass extinction, and the Triassic came to an end. Another volcanic event, probably, led to skyrocketing CO_2 levels and a lethal greenhouse effect. Every group except the saurischian dinosaurs either died out or got smaller over this period, which had the lowest oxygen levels of the last 500 million years. Why did the saurischians do better than the others, even expanding their numbers? The authors argue it's because they were "unique in possessing a highly septate lung (one with many tiny flaps to increase surface area) that was more efficient than the lungs of any other lineage… [I]n the very low oxygen world that occurred both before and after the Triassic-Jurassic mass extinction, this respiratory system conveyed great competitive advantages." The Age of Dinosaurs began.

It didn't start out very auspiciously, though:

> …At the beginning [of the Jurassic], it was a shattered world: a world again coming out of mass extinction; a world without coral reefs; a world where the dinosaurs were still few in number, species, and size; a world of such low oxygen that insects could barely fly, but to no matter, as no vertebrate flier could have caught them anyway.
>
> By the end of the Jurassic the largest land animals of all time were common: dinosaurs were lords of all creation; tiny primitive birds and tinier primitive mammals hid in the lowest-rent districts in town. At the beginning the seas were so bare that stromatolites had made a comeback, and the larger fish and predators were few indeed.
>
> By its end there was a veritable cornucopia of the most spectacular marine denizens to have ever populated the sea: long-necked reptilian plesiosaurs, dolphin-like ichthyosaurs, and splendid primitive fish—similar to the modern-day gar and sturgeon (both with strange body armor)—schooled among vast coral reefs and an ocean filled to exuberance with all manner of ammonites and their more squid-like relatives, the belemnites…

With regard to dinosaurs, the authors don't focus on well-known facts like that birds evolved from them (or, in fact, *are* them—dinosaurs still exist!) or that because of their dominance mammals "retreated in size and numbers to become a minor aspect of the land fauna." They're trying to write a *new* history of life, after all. So, in keeping with their overall argument that levels of carbon dioxide and oxygen have been some of the most important variables for life on this planet, they suggest that both dinosaur numbers and size increased as oxygen levels rose through the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods.

> …By the end of the Cretaceous (in the Campanian age, 84 to 72 million years ago) there are hundreds of times more dinosaurs than during the Triassic to late Jurassic. So what was the cause of this great increase? The relationship suggests that oxygen levels played a role in dictating dinosaur diversity. Through the late Triassic and first half of Jurassic, dinosaur numbers were both stable and low, as was atmospheric oxygen when compared to today's values. Gradually, oxygen rose in the Jurassic, hitting 15 to 20 percent in the latter part of the period. It is only then that the numbers of dinosaurs really began to increase. Oxygen levels steadily climbed through the Cretaceous, and so too did dinosaur numbers, with a

> great rise in dinosaur numbers found in the late Cretaceous, the true dinosaur heyday. The dramatic rise in oxygen at the end of the Jurassic was also the time that the sizes of dinosaurs increased, culminating in the largest-known dinosaurs appearing from the late Jurassic through the Cretaceous.

Other factors must have played a role too, such as the appearance of angiosperms (flowering plants) in the mid-Cretaceous, which created more plants and sparked an insect diversification. More resources became available in all ecosystems.

Another interesting observation is that dinosaurs, or at least many of them, had the same highly efficient air-sac system of breathing that birds do, and the same hollows in their bones in which the air sacs rested. (Birds are far more effective at extracting oxygen from air than mammals, and dinosaurs must have been too.) They were also warm-blooded, like birds: they could generate heat in their bodies without external heat sources.

The chapter on the Mesozoic oceans I don't find particularly gripping, so let's skip to the chapter on the extinction of the dinosaurs. This event, of course, was caused by an asteroid impact. It led to a several-month period of darkness from all the material thrown into the atmosphere, which was long enough to kill much of the plant life on Earth, including plankton. "With the death of the plants, disaster and starvation rippled upward through the food chains." In addition, for a number of years solar energy transmission to Earth was reduced through absorption by aerosols, which produced a decade of near-freezing temperatures in a world that had been largely tropical. More than half of the species died out.

But now the mammals and birds had their chance to shine. The earliest-known mammals were tiny, shrew-sized things called morganucodontids, living about 210 million years ago in the late Triassic. "Much of mammalian success came from anatomical change, including the separation of the jaw and the ear bones, which allowed the skulls of later mammals to expand sideways and backward, a prerequisite for bigger brains. But the most important of all innovations was the revolution of mammalian teeth. The upper and lower molars of morganucodontid jawbones interlocked, letting them slice their food into pieces." The two major groups of mammals today, marsupials and placentals, diverged 175 million years ago.

So all kinds of new and larger mammals were appearing after the K-T asteroid impact…until once again, 9 million years later, there was a mass extinction. A greenhouse event, such as we're experiencing today, known as the Paleocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum (PETM). It isn't clear what caused it, though it surely involved raised methane levels, but the actual event lasted 10,000 or 20,000 years and raised global temperatures by 5° to 8° Celsius. According to Wikipedia, this warm period lasted about 200,000 years. Among plants, the gymnosperms (conifers, etc.) disappeared…but then after it was all over they reappeared. Old insect species eventually came back to life too, after seemingly going extinct for a while. But the mammals that died out didn't return; instead, the PETM marked "the start of our modern-day mammalian fauna." For instance, many marsupials and carnivorous ungulates (hoofed mammals) went extinct, while, afterwards, more modern herbivorous ungulates and carnivores preying on them appeared.

Gradually the world cooled:

> From the Eocene to the start of the 23.5–5.3-million-year-ago Miocene epoch, the world slowly began to cool. At first, during the Eocene, this was almost imperceptible, and in fact there was a global tropical forest with crocodiles living inside the present-day Arctic Circle. But in the Oligocene this cooling accelerated, creating a different kind of major climate, and changing what had been a near uniform global climate to one with extreme seasonality. At the same time, giant continental ice sheets began to form on Antarctica, and probably Greenland as well. These swelling ice sheets caused a rapid and dramatic fall in sea level. At higher latitudes, forests gradually gave way in many places to grassland meadows and savannas…

This brings us, finally, to modern ecosystems. The primates, naturally, are the animals that interest us. They date well back into the Cretaceous, some of the earliest belonging to the lemur branch. The

Purgatorius genus, luckily for us, survived the K-T extinction; by 45 million years ago, more advanced anthropoids (which today include monkeys, apes, and humans) existed in Asia. Ten million years later, smarter, larger, and more aggressive monkeys existed, such as *Catopithecus*, which "has a skull the size of a small monkey's, a relatively flat face, and is the first primate to sport the same arrangement of teeth humans have—two incisors, one canine, two premolars, and three molars."

The hominids arrived five or six million years ago with the appearance of the famous Lucy and her kind, *Australopithecus afarensis*. The most important descendant of the early pre-Pleistocene hominids is the first member of our genus, *Homo habilis*, about 2.5 million years old. "This creature gave rise to *Homo erectus* about 1.5 million years ago, and *H. erectus* either gave rise to our species, *Homo sapiens*, directly about 200,000 years ago, or through an evolutionary intermediate known as *Homo heidelbergensis*. Our species has been further subdivided into a number of separate varieties. Some workers consider the Neanderthals to be a variety, while others interpret it as separate species, *Homo neanderthalensis*."

The first fairly modern *Homo sapiens* lived 200,000 years ago in Ethiopia. Soon this group migrated out of Africa and spread around the world, the different habitats leading to slightly different morphologies and physiologies among members of the same species.

Over the past 2.5 million years, because of orbital changes Earth has undergone, ice ages have repeatedly occurred, the more recent interglacial periods on average lasting about 11,000 years. They haven't been anything like Snowball Earth, but they've been cold enough. "As late as fourteen thousand years ago, the continental glaciers covering most of Canada and large portions of what is now the United States were still slowly melting under gradually rising temperatures." After the end of the last ice age, human populations began to increase markedly. By 10,000 years ago, humans had colonized all of the continents except Antarctica.

Meanwhile, in fact for the last 50,000 years, other changes were happening: the larger mammalian species were disappearing. For example, in the Late Pleistocene epoch of 15,000 to 12,000 years ago, a significant proportion of large mammals in North America went extinct. "At least thirty-five genera (and thus at least this number of species) became extinct. Six of these lived on elsewhere (such as the horse, which died out in North and South America but lived on in the Old World). The vast majority, however, died out. In fact, most belonged to a wide spectrum of taxonomic groups, being distributed across twenty-one families and seven orders." For thousands of years we've been in the midst of a tenth mass extinction. Which, of course, is accelerating now.

One reason for these extinctions may be that climatic changes have caused nutritious plants in North America and elsewhere, such as willow, aspen, and birch trees, to shrink in numbers and give way to the less nutritious spruce and alder groves. Another reason is probably that humans hunted species to extinction.

In South America, 15,000 to 10,000 years ago 46 genera went extinct. In Australia, earlier and over a longer period of time, 45 species of marsupials died out. Large reptiles also vanished, including a giant snake, a giant monitor lizard, a giant tortoise, etc. "The larger creatures that did survive were those capable of speed or those that had nocturnal habits." Africa was the continent least affected. "The loss of large mammalian genera in North America was 73 percent; in South America, 79 percent; in Australia, 86 percent; but in Africa, only 14 percent died out during the last hundred thousand years."

What does the future hold? The very long-term future isn't in doubt: life on Earth is doomed. The sun's energy output has been increasing for billions of years and will continue to do so. The sun won't become a red giant until about 7.5 billion years from now, but life will be long gone by then, maybe by half a billion years from now. The sun will just be too bright and energetic for organisms to survive here; in fact, oceans will evaporate (though after life disappears), and conditions will approach those on Venus.

Another problem is that CO_2 levels have been slowly but inexorably decreasing for at least a billion years. "The lowering levels are because of both life and plate tectonics: as more and more CO_2 is used to make the skeletons of organisms, especially in the oceans, CO_2 is consumed. If these skeletons stay in the oceans, the skeletally confined CO_2 (now in calcium carbonate) will recycle. But plate tectonics makes the continents ever larger, and an increasing amount of limestone, which is the grave of atmospheric CO_2, becomes locked to the continents as sedimentary deposits." The decrease of carbon dioxide won't lead to a

colder planet, because the increase of the sun's intensity will utterly dwarf the cooling effects of diminishing CO_2. (Needless to say, carbon dioxide emissions from human activity will not stop the long-term trend of disappearing atmospheric CO_2.)

A low-CO_2 atmosphere will kill off photosynthetic organisms (which will, in turn, reduce oxygen levels). For a long time, plants will be able to adapt; there will even still be types of plants when carbon dioxide concentrations have dropped to as low as 10 ppm. "Eventually, however, even these last holdouts will die out." Phytoplankton will be devastated too, thus devastating all marine life. After all plants and animals have gone extinct, those hardy creatures the bacteria will still be around. Cyanobacteria, for instance. Meanwhile, the Earth will look more like it did early in its history: soils will blow away, leaving behind bare rock surfaces. The mechanical weathering of rock will build up an enormous volume of blowing sand, and the surface of the planet will become a giant series of dune fields.

It's a rather bleak future. It'll be as if life never existed. Everything that's happened—gone. No wonder people want to believe in God.

Anyway, there you have it. A summary of life's evolution. What humanity's future holds is anyone's guess, though personally I'm not very optimistic. Turning from this book to the political headlines of today is like turning one's gaze from the night's canopy of stars to a small mass of writhing maggots. The little things of the present are just so *little* compared to the grand sweep of life's history.

But we must press on, and try to influence the future using what we've learned from the past.

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Closed borders and democratic theory

You may have noticed that the question of immigration is on people's minds lately (as it has been, almost without interruption, since the mid-nineteenth century;—ugh, the repetitiveness and predictability of history). The whole "border crisis" is absurd: the only crisis is a humanitarian crisis, and it could be solved simply by abolishing ICE, diverting more resources to processing immigrants ("legal" and "undocumented"), reforming the punitive nature of border control, and changing American foreign policies so as to support the democratization and development of countries from which migrants are fleeing (largely as a result of past American foreign policies). None of this will happen, since we live in a dystopia controlled by reactionaries, proto-fascists, and big business. But it's always worth remembering that, in principle, the solutions to any given social problem are (in nearly all cases) pretty clear. The reason they can't be enacted is that the powerful, despite what they might say, aren't interested in solutions. They're interested in the path of least resistance, and in maintaining their own power.

I thought I'd post something about border policies, not because I have anything new to say on the subject but because I recently came across an interesting article by a political theorist named Arash Abizadeh, "Democratic Theory and Border Coercion: No Right to Unilaterally Control Your Own Borders" (2008). Full disclosure: Abizadeh was a professor of mine at Wesleyan University. Few of us students thought much of him as a professor, but after reading his paper I have to admit he's at least capable of compelling argumentation—for the morally right conclusion, moreover. I decided to translate his arguments into non-academese for any interested reader, since I think they're of more than merely academic interest.

My own opinion, for what it's worth, is that the politically fraught question of immigration should be a non-issue. It's a nice tool for proto-fascists to rile up masses of ignorant people and get them to vote for politicians who are interested only in increasing repression and empowering the wealthy, but that's all it is. What should happen, ideally, is that borders become ever more porous, in the long run heading toward a regime of open borders (to the extent possible), since freedom of movement should be a fundamental human right and immigration is far from harmful to a domestic economy or society. If there were more global freedom of movement, moreover, it's possible that states would begin to implement more humane and progressive social policies, since otherwise they might lose some of their population to countries that did have such policies. Instead of the neoliberal race to the bottom, there might be something like a race to the top.

Wage levels would tend to equalize everywhere, which would be good for low-wage countries and bad for high-wage countries—but, at the same time, it would likely be easier to organize a global labor movement, which would be good for the non-rich everywhere. In the very long run, the nation-state system itself should be dismantled to the degree possible, since nation-states are violent, authoritarian, illegitimate entities.

Anyway, let's get to Abizadeh's article…

Usually we think of a country as having the right to unilaterally control its own border policy, subject only to democratic input from its citizens, not from foreigners. What foreigners want doesn't matter because they're not members of the state. Many commentators reject unilaterally closed borders, or restrictive and punitive border policies, on the grounds of liberalism, which is committed to universal human rights, individualism, freedom of movement, and so on. (Some, such as Frederick Whelan, even argue that "liberalism in its fully realized form would require the reduction if not the abolition of the sovereign powers of states…especially those connected with borders and the citizen-alien distinction"—a position Chomsky and many other anarchists advocate, since liberalism after all is just supposed to mean a regime of individual freedom, which is what anarchism means.) Abizadeh, however, chooses to argue against unilateral border policies on the basis of *democratic* grounds, not liberal grounds. This is what makes his paper novel and interesting, since, prima facie, it would seem that considerations of democracy are in tension with those of liberalism: democracy supposedly "requires a bounded polity whose members exercise self-determination, including control of their own boundaries." Liberalism is universal, democracy is particular and bounded. So how can you use democratic theory to argue *against* unilaterally closed borders?

It's simple: argue that "the demos [the community, the people] of democratic theory is in principle *unbounded*, and the regime of boundary control must consequently be justified to foreigners as well as to citizens." This is Abizadeh's conclusion. Whether a state recognizes or denies (to foreigners) the legal right to freedom of movement, to the degree that it is democratic it can only arrive at its policy as "the result of democratic processes giving participatory standing to foreigners asserting such a right [to freedom of movement]." What these democratic processes would look like is an open question, but they would involve international or supra-state organizations of some form or other.

Of course, one is free to reject Abizadeh's arguments, but (if his arguments succeed) to that extent one is an authoritarian, not a democrat.

The core of the argument is very simple. According to democratic theory, a state's coercive powers (involving coercive acts and coercive threats) have to be democratically justified to all those over whom they are exercised, which is to say the members of the demos must have the opportunity to participate in political decision-making on a free and equal basis. But a country's regime of border control subjects both members *and nonmembers* (non-citizens) to state coercion. "Therefore, the justification for a particular regime of border control is owed not just to those whom the boundary marks as members, but to nonmembers as well."

The obvious objection to this argument is that, even if foreigners are subject to coercion, justification is owed only to citizens, since foreigners have no political standing in the state. It seems to me that this objection reveals an unattractive and illiberal comfort with treating any non-citizen in an authoritarian or even brutal way (remember, that's how the Nazis could "legally" exterminate Jews: they had deprived them of citizenship), but be that as it may, Abizadeh points to a more serious logical flaw: the objection's presupposition, that the demos is inherently bounded, is incoherent.

It's an argument that Whelan makes: how can a state *democratically* determine its own civic (and territorial) boundaries, the boundaries of the demos? Who are the people who will vote on this question of membership? You'd have to somehow determine the membership of the group that is entitled to vote on the question in the first place—but how do you decide this second-order membership question? It would itself need to be voted on. Ultimately you get an infinite regress. As Whelan says, "the boundary problem is one matter of collective decision that cannot be decided democratically… We would need to make a prior decision regarding who are entitled to participate in arriving at a solution… [Democracy] cannot be brought

to bear on the logically prior matter of the constitution of the group itself, the existence of which it presupposes."

As Abizadeh comments, the problem is that "democratic theory *requires* a democratic principle of legitimation for borders, because borders are one of the most important ways that political power is coercively exercised over human beings. Decisions about who is granted and who is denied membership, and who controls such decisions, are among the most important instances of the exercise of political power"—especially given the incredibly brutal nature of modern border controls (involving police dogs, electric wires, incarceration, deportation, torture, shooting on sight, etc.). By the very act of constituting the state's civic and territorial borders, you're disenfranchising large numbers of people—"outsiders"—over whom power is exercised. But this violates democratic theory.

(And if you look at history, you'll find that no state, including no "democratic" state, has ever been founded democratically. Civic and territorial borders are always created by means of violence, and are policed very violently.)

If you abandon the "bounded demos" thesis, however, the incoherence disappears:

An alternative reading of democratic legitimacy comes into view: the view that political power is legitimate only insofar as its exercise is mutually justified by and to those subject to it, in a manner consistent with their freedom and equality… The democratic principle of legitimacy requires replacing coercive relations with relations of discursive argumentation, and legitimating the remaining instances of coercion by subjecting them to participatory discursive practices of mutual justification on terms consistent with the freedom and equality of all. On this view, democratic theory *does* provide an answer to the boundary question: the reach of its principle of legitimation extends as far as practices of mutual justification can go, which is to say that the demos is in principle unbounded.

Therefore, a regime of border control can be legitimate only if there are international democratic institutions in which both citizens and foreigners can participate to determine what the border policies will be. (Actually, it seems to me that Abizadeh's arguments call into question the very existence of borders except insofar as "foreigners" and "citizens" can vote on who will be entitled to be a citizen and where the territorial border will be drawn. But he doesn't draw this conclusion, for some reason.)

I'd note here that in the absence of such international institutions (in which foreigners can help determine what will be a given country's border policies, to which they are coercively subjected), the most democratic option would be to adopt a maximally permissive and open border policy, since this reduces the element of coercion. People who oppose this conclusion, or Abizadeh's arguments, are not "good democrats" standing up for their own country's right to self-determination (right to determine its own policies); they are authoritarians comfortable with coercing masses of people who have had no role whatsoever in determining the policies to which they're subjected.

The remainder of the article is concerned with answering objections based on the "self-determination argument for unilateral border control" (the argument I just mentioned, that a country has a right to determine its own policies). Abizadeh's strategy is to argue that the self-determination argument is incompatible with the most plausible liberal and democratic arguments for the very existence of borders (separate countries) in the first place. So if you accept any of those arguments, you're logically compelled to *reject* the self-determination argument.

For example, liberals are, rightly, afraid of "concentrated political power and its potential to breed tyranny." One way they have tried to thwart this potential is by dividing and dispersing power (as in the "checks and balances" American system of government). Well, the worst tyranny of all would be a global tyranny. So, many liberals see "a plurality of political units [countries] as a crucial bulwark against tyranny," in that it makes a global tyranny impossible. Okay, so far so good. But how do unilaterally closed borders help counteract the threat of a global tyranny? If tyranny is bad and individuals should have the right to escape it, there should be relatively *open* borders that hold out the promise of safe haven for refugees fleeing a tyranny. Thus, if you accept this particular liberal argument for the existence of separate countries, you're bound to reject the argument for closed borders.

Anyway, I think you get the point. The main value of the article is in providing some theoretical points to make against (unilateral) closed-border advocates. These people are not democrats.

But, frankly, that should have been obvious all along. ICE is hardly a "democratic" agency. I also doubt that any academic article, or the arguments it makes, can sway the minds of more than a micro-fraction of conservatives, since very few of these people are susceptible to reason or questions of principle (much less compassion). Nevertheless, more highly evolved people can find food for thought in the occasional scholarly article.

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Notes on a radical interpretation of the Cold War

I've been reading Gabriel and Joyce Kolko's classic *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945–54* (1972). Being a brilliant materialist analysis that's utterly indispensable to an understanding of the postwar world, the book is out of print and hard to find anywhere. It's a massive tome, but I thought I'd quote here just a few necessary correctives to the bromides and platitudes of mainstream liberal scholarship. (Almost by definition, liberal historians are worse at their craft—more superficial and ideological—than radical historians, because the latter get to the *root* of the matter, as is suggested by the etymology of the very word 'radical.') The overall purpose of the book is to delineate how the U.S. tried to reconstruct the postwar world in ways favorable to capitalism and the country's own hegemonic, imperialistic power.

Quoting the authors (p. 6):

> We have not written a book about the "Cold War," an egregious term that burdens one's comprehension of the postwar era with oversimplifications and evokes the wrong questions. At best, that unfortunate phrase describes United States–Soviet diplomacy in the narrowest context, as if that relationship subsumes most that is crucial in the history of our times. It gives us no framework within which to understand the fact that the postwar experience, the formal cold peace between Russian and the United States notwithstanding, has been one of conflict, war, repression, and ever-mounting violence. That process has occurred despite literal peace between Russia and the West essentially because the larger, more significant context for understanding postwar history is the entire globe and the revolution, the counterrevolution, and the great, often violent, interaction between the United States, its European allies, and the vast social and economic transformation in the Third World that is the defining fact of our world [in the early 1970s]. It is only in this context that Soviet-American relations should be placed, and it is here that the limits of the notion of the Cold War become most apparent. For that static concept conditions us not to probe further the real character of the forces of intervention and expansion—and therefore violence—in our times. It minimizes the nature and causes of mankind's fate today, leading us to believe that conflict and violence are accidental rather than inevitable consequences of the objectives of American foreign policy and the imperatives it has imposed on movements of social transformation throughout the world.
>
> To approach the history of the postwar world as if Soviet–American rivalry encompasses its major theme—a notion implicit in the term 'Cold War'—is to leave most of the crucial dimensions of our epoch off to the side of any picture in a bewildering, disconnected profusion. Such a specialized focus leads to myopia, for the bulk of the crucial events of our time are interrelated, and one cannot truly understand anything without comprehending a great deal more than United States–Soviet diplomacy. This global context, and the goals motivating the conduct of American foreign policy, are the main subject of our book…

It's a little sad that even today, students are taught the history of the late 1940s to the late 1980s through the lens of the "Cold War." It's certainly a convenient way to teach, since the rhetoric and ideology of "Communism vs. anti-Communism" was so common in these decades, to some degree providing a framework for politics and culture in most of the world. "The Russians are coming!" was a ubiquitous war-

cry for conservative and liberal (not left) policymakers and intellectuals, used to justify a whole array of values and goals they held. And it did deeply influence society and culture, beating people into line, disciplining the labor movement and marginalizing dissenters. The Manichean worldview did incalculable damage to progressive hopes around the world, and was of incalculable benefit to reactionaries and neofascists. But rhetoric and ideology are, in the end, superficial and misleading. American goals and policies would have been substantially the same had there been no Soviet Union. The latter provided a very useful pretext to pursue policies that were in the interest of American capitalism, more particularly of the ruling class. After the Cold War, new rationalizations were immediately thought of to justify the same astronomical levels of defense spending and the same interventions around the world: the war on drugs, the war on terrorism, the clash of civilizations, spreading freedom and democracy, etc. It's always the same old bag of ideological tricks, amounting to the same old refrain "Us vs. Them!" During the "Cold War," the Them were the "Communists" (whatever that word is supposed to mean). But you can insert into the Them space whatever plausible enemy you want, whenever you want.

Whatever the official rhetoric, the fact is that it was the U.S. that was the massively expansionist power, not the Soviet Union or China. It was capitalism that was, and is, expansionist. Since capitalism, or imperialism, amounts to a whirlwind of repression, it provoked resistance everywhere. And it was convenient to call this resistance "Communism!" (Cue the hysterical shrieks.) "It's the Russians! They're behind it!" But the real conflict wasn't between the Soviets and the U.S. The Soviet Union was a rather minor power compared to America, fearsome only within its narrow zone of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The real conflict was between capitalist imperialism and the worldwide resistance it engendered. And that remains the real conflict to this day, as it was long before the Cold War.

For the conventional, superficial liberal interpretation, on the other hand, you can consult Odd Arne Westad's celebrated book *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (2005). It's a tour de force of historical misinterpretation, shallow idealism that has the heroic naïveté to take at face-value the rhetoric of every mediocre politician.

The Kolkos' analysis of the famous Marshall Plan is a beautiful refutation of the liberal mythology, providing one case-study in a book that's full of them. As they say, "Since 1947 the public, as well as subsequent scholars, has regarded the Marshall Plan as an expression of the unprecedented generosity of a powerful nation rebuilding its potential economic competitors from the ruins of war and spreading the bounty of American production to the ravaged people of Europe. Even otherwise critical historians have discussed the program in terms of enlightened self-interest and as an effort to forestall Communist penetration by raising the living standards of the masses in Europe and to reestablish normal trading patterns through which the entire world would realize prosperity and peace." The usual liberal pablum.

The book's chapters on the Marshall Plan are far too lengthy and rich to be discussed or quoted in much depth here. But I have to give you a taste of them. The concern of U.S. policymakers was that European capitalism be reconstructed in a way that would benefit American interests. For one thing, without a major aid program, it was feared that American exports would plummet. But so, perhaps, would imports. As Averell Harriman told the Senate in 1947, for instance, "the decline of Europe would require far-reaching readjustments of agricultural and industrial production in this country and in other areas. It might well affect our ability to obtain needed imports and, particularly, essential raw materials…" From internal memos, papers, and policy statements, it seems that policymakers weren't particularly worried about the spread of Communism in Europe; they only invoked that theme in public statements and addresses to Congress in order to get a reluctant public and Congress behind a large program of aid. ("We have to stop Communism! It's a crisis over there! We don't have much time left!") Nor did the Truman administration care about raising the living standards of the European masses. In fact, its political and economic agenda was almost consistently to *lower* living standards, or at least prevent their rise.

"America's intention to shape Western Europe's economic policies was the critical fact of the [Marshall Plan] from the beginning." (The plan began to be implemented in mid-1948.) "Washington did not propose merely to fill Europe's shopping list, and the initial thrust of United States policy was in manipulating European fiscal affairs." But this manipulation was flawed from the start: the Economic Cooperation Administration, the American agency that administered the Marshall Plan, had contradictory

goals. On the one hand it desired the industrial reconstruction and renewed prosperity of Europe, while on the other hand it wanted monetary conservatism and balanced budgets. The ECA continually pressured European governments to enact deflationary economic policies—which were incompatible with a return to full prosperity and full employment. So, in part because of this, the Marshall Plan ended up partially failing.

> To a very real extent, the ECA went beyond the needs of the American economy for stable markets, and pressed orthodox [conservative] policies on governments… The first result was to strengthen those conservative political forces in Europe that desired a similar program. The ECA, in its general financial policy, introduced strict banker's criteria of balanced budgets, stable currencies, high profits to entice investment, and low wages to discourage consumption. Public pronouncements aside, the American administrators believed that it was essential to keep internal mass living standards at a low level in order to have a surplus for export and to limit imports so as not to upset further the balance of payments. The European governments were now required to restrict their expenditure in social welfare and subsidies in order to balance the budget, and the American advisers always maintained that "excess egalitarianism" in taxation policy suppressed incentive… In Italy, Germany, France, and the Benelux, profits over the first year rose far out of proportion to any other index of reconstruction, and the contours of the old order gradually reemerged in their solid, traditional form…

In West Germany, for example, in mid-1948 there was a currency reform that limited the amount of money in circulation, hurting low-income groups and benefiting many businesses. Profits skyrocketed while real wages fell sharply and unemployment nearly doubled by December 1948. Tax reform and tightened credit further hurt workers and enriched the wealthy. Ultimately, "the economic outcome was not the reconstruction of German industrial power, but rather the full restoration of the propertied class" (p. 435). Meanwhile, Americans put former Nazis in control of German heavy industry (especially in the Ruhr) and made sure industries wouldn't be nationalized, as some had been in Britain.

"The governments of Belgium and Italy introduced economic policies similar to those in Germany, with much the same results. The Italian government successfully reduced its balance of payments and budget deficits and renewed confidence in the value of the lira. The economy continued its deflationary trend…" In France, throughout 1947 and '48 workers' standard of living declined: the average wage barely covered essential food. Large strikes and revolts were crushed. "It was ultimately cheaper to crush a strike, split the unions, and repress the workers than to pay the price of a higher standard of living which the French government and the ECA saw as an unacceptable inflationary thrust that would shatter their plans for a balanced budget, trade surplus, high profit, and 'reconstruction' conforming to their capitalist model."

By the way, readers familiar with neoliberalism will notice that the economic agenda of the ECA was pretty much the same as that of the IMF (with its structural adjustment programs that have done so much to decimate the Third World since the 1970s): downsizing welfare states, undermining unions, privatizing public property, tightening credit, encouraging exports, etc. Coincidence? I think not.

As for the materials that Europeans bought from U.S. suppliers through the Marshall Plan, in many cases they were simply compelled to buy whatever American policymakers and industries forced on them. (And this was after the initial European request for $29 billion had been slashed to $13 billion over a four-year period. So much for American generosity.) "During the first year the ECA cut certain food requests sharply and made their allocations on the basis of United States agricultural surpluses." To limit future competition, Europe got only half the number of tractors it wanted. And less than half the number of freight cars (at least in the first 15 months). Congress insisted that at least 50 percent of aid had to be shipped in American boats. American firms sold grossly overpriced oil to Europe. In fact, much of the Marshall Plan amounted to a needed subsidy to the U.S. oil and agriculture sectors.

It's worth noting, incidentally, that in a sense the Marshall Plan was just another example of the U.S. government subsidizing the exports of U.S. firms. Starting from after World War I, tens of billions of dollars had already, by the time of the Marshall Plan, been loaned and granted to Western Europe, nearly all of which had then returned to buy American goods. So it's misleading to call these sorts of aid programs

"generous." They're generous to American businesses, and they're essential—and remain essential—to keeping the American economy humming. (So much for "free markets." These are government subsidies. Capitalism crucially relies on absolutely massive government subsidies of a thousand different types.)

Summing up one aspect of their discussion, the authors write, "for the working class of Europe the ERP [European Recovery Program] experience of capitalist reconstruction was an unequivocal calamity. This class was required to increase its effort in the production process, to abstain from asserting demands, and to reap a falling standard of living and unemployment. An appreciation of this fact as a crucial dimension of the ERP is essential to understanding the real meaning of the Marshall Plan."

In 1949 and 1950, unemployment in West Germany continued to rise, to the point that tens of thousands of skilled workers, scientists, and artists fled to the Soviet zone in 1949. Conservative policies continued to have the same depressive effects in Belgium, Italy, and France, even as Europe still suffered from a dollar shortage (which had been a key reason for the Marshall Plan, to reconstruct markets in Europe for American exports).

It didn't help that the U.S. was entering a severe recession in the last couple of years of the 1940s, which aggravated Europe's economic problems. The recession "mainly reflected the recurrence of the crisis of overproduction and maldistribution of income" in capitalist economies. The American market for European exports (which were needed to overcome Europe's dollar shortage) dried up, and businesses pressured the U.S. government to enact even higher tariffs than already existed. In a context of recession and acute pressure by powerful business lobbies, Congress was more and more reluctant to send funds to Europe. So in the end the Truman administration was compelled to once again invoke "national security" in an effort to save the Marshall Plan and, eventually, go beyond it.

> The administration's many bruised encounters [with Congress] had shown that the only palatable rationale for Congress to continue to send funds abroad was a rearmament and an anti-Communist program… Indeed, the historian will search in vain to discover why the United States decided to press for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and arms aid to Europe in mid-1949 unless he looks at these economic problems in conjunction with the congressional mood. The Soviet military dangers were far less critical than during the previous year. The Russians lifted the blockade on Berlin in May and had embarked on one of their most extensive peace campaigns. There was, in short, no overt military or security crisis in the spring and summer 1949 when the administration presented the NATO bill to Congress and asked for $1 billion in military aid to Europe. But there was a serious crisis in the domestic economy. Such an approach, from the inception, made the United States military policy on the questions of NATO and European rearmament intimately linked to the policy of European recovery.

Actually, in 1949 not even Congress was naïve enough to take seriously the idea that "the Russians are coming!" Instead, the State Department emphasized to Congress and the public the need to assist Europe with its "internal military security." "Internal order was a dominant concern because most of Western Europe's conservative economic policies precluded welfare measures or a rise in the standard of living." Popular resistance to capitalism was a constant threat, and European governments, it was claimed, needed larger armed forces to deal with the threat.

But the "defense" stimulus that Congress approved wasn't enough. The American and Europe economies needed a further boost if they were to get out of their crisis, a crisis that seemed solvable only by a powerful external stimulus to capitalism (some such stimulus as World War II had been, though not necessarily on that colossal scale). Luckily, the Korean War came at just the right time and saved both Europe and the U.S., boosting defense spending enormously and thus raising aggregate demand.

As Kolko says (p. 476), the late 1940s "highlighted the dangers of peace to world capitalism, and the failure of strictly economic means, within the framework of capitalist alternatives, to keep the vast productive capacity of the United States and Western Europe from sinking into the mire of stagnation, if not depression. The artificial stimulus of rearmament needed as its rationale a crisis somewhere in the world

if Washington was to resolve its new dilemma, one that was the result of the Marshall Plan's failure to achieve its original goals through purely economic means."

On this subject, Noam Chomsky remarks in his brilliant *Understanding Power* (p. 39), "military spending was considered the only thing that could [rebuild the world market], it was seen as the engine that could drive economic growth after the wartime boom ended, and prevent the U.S. from slipping back into a depression. And it worked: military spending was a big stimulus to the U.S. economy, and it led to the rebuilding of Japanese industry, and the rebuilding of European industry—and in fact, it has continued to be our mode of industrial management right up to the present." That's pretty much why the famous NSC 68 (National Security Council Memorandum 68, in 1950)—the major Cold War document—called for a vast increase in military spending.

This is why, to quote Kolko, "Russia's real threat was scarcely military, but [rather] its ability to communicate its desire for peace and thereby take the momentum out of Washington's policies." As usual with politics, appearance was practically the opposite of reality.

Kolko's analysis of why NATO was formed (in 1949) is of interest. It wasn't to deal with the Soviets: the U.S. was quite willing and able on its own to fight the Soviets if they invaded Europe, and in any case it was at that point inconceivable that they would invade. They were far too weak, for one thing. "NATO's formation was much more the outcome of Europe's desire to prevent a resurgent Germany from yet again disturbing the peace [for Germany was initially excluded from NATO], to which the United States added its desire to strengthen Western Europe's ability to cope with internal revolt as well as to sustain a psychological mood of anti-Soviet tension that the administration thought functional." Anyway, for many ruling classes around the world—but especially the American—the more military spending, the better. NATO was "functional" for this purpose.[1]

A minor civil war, or a border war, between the two Koreas had already been going on before 1950. Both North and South repeatedly announced their intention to invade each other, and it was a highly unstable situation. The dictatorship of Syngman Rhee was incredibly brutal, corrupt, and economically incompetent, and provoked large-scale resistance in the South (just as Diem's dictatorship in South Vietnam did later). Rhee was determined to reunite Korea. So the North struck first, in the summer of 1950. A few weeks later, the Indian ambassador to China floated a compromise plan according to which (among other provisions) the Security Council would mediate the dispute, but the U.S. rejected it (after China and Russia had accepted it). Doubtless Washington thought it was premature—they didn't want to let a good crisis go to waste.

General Douglas MacArthur, of course, was totally reckless, hoping to use the crisis to liberate Asia from Communism, even at the risk of a world war. He had to fulfill his destiny, you see. (Napoleon's vanity and grandiosity were, arguably, no match for MacArthur's.) But Washington was reckless too, embracing his vision of reuniting Korea rather than just ejecting the North. By September 1950,

> Truman had authorized a major increase in United States troops in Europe, and urged NATO members to follow suit. Administration members over these same weeks sustained demands for continued high levels of military spending…and pressed to consolidate the immense strengthening of American global military and economic power that had begun the prior June [when North Korea invaded the South]. A quick end to the war in Korea at the 38th parallel, which the administration could reasonably anticipate by virtue of the massive offensive then being planned, might immobilize all its economic and military efforts… Truman and Acheson saw Korea as a handle

[1] Later (p. 662), Kolko summarizes: "NATO and the Western European alliance…was, first of all, an integrative economic mechanism that offered practical solutions for the United States' immediate needs and future hopes, and then [in addition] operated on an ideological and political plane. Its military value [e.g., as providing bases] was still essential to the autonomous American and sea forces. It coped with the threat of internal upheaval, which in itself required incorporating more reactionary allies [such as Franco's Spain] who had still to confront local resistance, and it provided a framework for an integrated West Germany's future role in Europe."

> with which to control world affairs essentially outside Asia [in Europe], while MacArthur still hoped to use the crisis to deepen America's commitment to fulfill its destiny in Asia…

Washington knew China was prepared to enter the war after the U.S. troops crossed the 38th parallel, but it went ahead with its plan anyway. What's a little world war, after all? But the fact is that Washington's position was ambiguous, or at least not as totally determined as MacArthur's. Truman and his advisors didn't want peace, but they didn't want a larger war with China. The stronger force, MacArthur, thus carried the day for a while, which got the Chinese involved (and appalled European allies, who seem to have considered the general a near-lunatic). Sometime in November or December MacArthur proposed dropping thirty to fifty atomic bombs in Manchuria, while Truman meanwhile said at a press conference that "there has always been active consideration of [the bomb's] use," thereby provoking something of a diplomatic crisis. By early 1951 the Chinese had pushed MacArthur back past the 38th parallel, and then began a stalemate that lasted over two years.

The story is pretty well-known. Truman soon fired MacArthur for his outrageous public statements; the U.S. pushed the battle lines a bit north of the 38th parallel again; armistice talks began in 1951, with the Communists wanting a return to the parallel and the Americans wanting a cease-fire along the existing battle lines; the Americans inflicted massive destruction on North Korea with their air and naval power (in fact, all of Korea, but especially the North, was virtually destroyed); talks got bogged down in details about the repatriation of prisoners of war (the American position violated the 1949 Geneva Convention); in 1953, America even committed the genocidal, Nazi-esque war crime of bombing irrigation dams that provided the water supply for the North's rice production.

In the meantime, rearmament and increased U.S. demand actually weren't unequivocally good for Europe. They did pull Europe out of its recession, but enormous U.S. demand for strategic raw materials caused some European states to face raw material shortages (prices for these materials had shot up) and an aggravated dollar deficit. Britain, for example, suffered from inflationary pressures and growing unemployment (because factories, unable to afford newly expensive raw materials, were closing). Also, Britain's shift toward rearmament—"as a predictable source of dollars and a stable demand that might keep the economy on an even keel"—caused it to lose export markets. "The industries that the English most relied on for export were those that were diverted to arms." This had a permanent, damaging effect on its future trade.

But West Germany and Japan—not having to rearm—benefited, moving into England's markets. Their economies, oriented towards export, grew rapidly, even though, at least in Germany, unemployment remained high and the income distribution worsened. Business continued to benefit far more than workers. But I recall that Robert Brenner, in his magisterial *The Economics of Global Turbulence*, attributed Germany's and Japan's long-term economic growth to this very fact (at least in part): high profits and low wages permitted heightened investment, given the large size of export markets (which themselves had much to do with U.S. military spending). Kolko likes to criticize the Marshall Plan and the conservative European policies it partially engendered—which continued with the shift to rearmament in the early 1950s—for failing to raise the masses' standard of living, but from Brenner's point of view this fact was rather constructive. It tended to ensure high profits and thus long-term economic growth (notwithstanding recessions in the short term).

Kolko himself acknowledges this (p. 640):

> Measured against its initial goals, the Marshall Plan was both a success and a failure. Probably its most important accomplishment was its aid to the firm consolidation of the conservative class in its control of Western Europe, guaranteeing the continuation of a capitalism Washington hoped would become even more receptive to American capitalism…
>
> Washington had successfully guided Western Europe's economic policies to enhance profits and investments and prodded the region's governments to pursue orthodox economic policies. The United States also attained its ends in the absolutely vital function of subsidizing its exports and securing significant concessions in Europe and its colonies for American industries, many of which would have

> suffered critically without the ERP [the Marshall Plan]. No less important was Washington's reintegration of West Germany under conservative leadership into Western Europe…

On the other hand, he says, Washington was unable "to impose its almost mystical ideal system of free, nondiscriminatory, multilateral trade upon the world." In addition, to repeat, conservative policies led to unemployment, inflation, and recessions, with the mass suffering that entailed. "Finally, having achieved the conservative goal of a strong currency and balanced budget, Western European economies began to stagnate and head straight toward depression, only to be revived temporarily by the Korean War and arms production before again confronting renewed crises."

These notes are getting lengthy, but I have to quote Kolko's conclusion to one of his final chapters. First, I should just say: given Washington frenzied rhetoric about the rampant militarism of the Soviet Union, the evil plans it had for the whole world, there aren't sufficient words to characterize the irony of the real world. For the Soviets were in fact desperate for peace and continually returned to that theme in different contexts. In the early 1950s, to prevent West Germany's eventual inclusion in NATO, they even proposed on several occasions that Germany be reunited under free elections, etc.—proposals the U.S. rejected, since they weren't in American interests. So, while the Soviets were periodically pleading for peace and supporting the world peace movement, it was the U.S. that was heightening and hastening the arms race, for its own economic and geopolitical purposes.

> Truman, in his last message to Congress in January 1953, reflected the premises of his postwar foreign policy and summed up its myths, leaving to Eisenhower some crucial advice on his basic course. Paranoid images of Communist chieftains building a vast war potential in their campaign, drugging masses of deluded followers throughout the world to insurrection, sabotage, and aggression, of cynical Communist identification with the forces of nationalism and economic change throughout the world merely "…to enslave more millions of human souls"—all this Truman conjured for future politicians to confront. There could be no respite, no peace; and in his final words the departing President reflected the essence of America's postwar policy and the rationalization under which its more enduring objectives had long since been buried. "Were we to grow discouraged now, were we to weaken and slack off, the whole structure we have built, these eight years, would come apart and fall away. Never then, no matter by what stringent means, could our free world regain the ground, the sheer momentum, lost by such a move." The crisis of mankind, the tension and pain by which history had been tormented for so long, could not cease.

And yet, as Kolko writes later, "after 1950, with the increasing equalization of the military balance [between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.], and with the eventual success of the Soviet peace offensive in convincing a few Western leaders that diplomacy has a place, after all, in the scheme of things, the alliance based on fear and terror was challenged at its very core. For practical purposes, the continuing, gradual erosion of Washington's tenuous mastery over its bloc was to become a defining trend of postwar history."

Anyway, I've skipped over a lot of profound analysis, but I'll end the summarizing here. The book is practically a work of genius, and therefore totally ignored by the intellectual community. But I recommend you seek it out and read it if you want to understand the last 75 years of American history, and world history.

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Origins of the European state system

Reading Charles Tilly's classic *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992* (1992). Taking notes on it for myself, but also for any interested readers. It's an influential account of how and why Western and ultimately global civilization took the political form it had achieved by the late twentieth century.

The book is structured in part around the dualism or dialectic between cities and states, or, more exactly, "capital" and "coercion." (But also, more memorably, the importance of *war* as a factor in state formation.) As Tilly says,

> Over the eight or ten millennia since the couple first appeared, cities and states have oscillated between love and hate. Armed conquerors have often razed cities and slaughtered their inhabitants, only to raise new capitals in their place. City people have bolstered their independence and railed against royal interference in urban affairs, only to seek their king's protection against bandits, pirates, and rival groups of merchants. Over the long run and at a distance, cities and states have proved indispensable to each other.

Why did national states and national armies eventually win out in Europe over other forms of state organization, such as regional empires, city-states, and federations of cities? "Surely part of the answer lies in the dialectic of cities and states that developed within a few hundred years after 990… Behind the changing geography of cities and states operated the dynamics of capital (whose preferred sphere was cities) and of coercion (which crystallized especially in states). Inquiries into the interplay between cities and states rapidly become investigations of capital and coercion."

"…Only late and slowly did the national state become the predominant form. Hence the critical double question: *What accounts for the great variation over time and space in the kinds of states that have prevailed in Europe since AD 990, and why did European states eventually converge on different variants of the national state?* Why were the directions of change so similar and the paths so different? This book aims to clarify that problem, if not to resolve it entirely."

After summarizing the perspectives of other theorists, Tilly gives a useful general statement of his argument:

> This book takes up the problem where Barrington Moore, Stein Rokkan, and Lewis Mumford left it: at the point of recognizing decisive variations in the paths of change followed by states in different parts of Europe during successive epochs, with the realization that the class coalitions prevailing in a region at a given point in time strongly limited the possibilities of action open to any ruler or would-be ruler, and with the specific hypothesis that regions of early urban dominance, with their active capitalists, produced very different kinds of states from regions in which great landlords and their estates dominated the landscape. It goes beyond Moore, Rokkan, and Mumford most emphatically in two ways: first by placing the organization of coercion and preparation for war squarely in the middle of the analysis, arguing in its rasher moments that state structure appeared chiefly as a by-product of rulers' efforts to acquire the means of war; and second by insisting that relations among states, especially through war and preparation for war, strongly affected the entire process of state formation. Thus in this book I derive alternative histories of state formation from continuously-varying combinations of concentrated capital, concentrated coercion, preparation for war, and position within the international system.

There follows a more detailed and lengthy statement, which I might as well quote here too:

> Men who controlled concentrated means of coercion (armies, navies, police forces, weapons, and their equivalent) ordinarily tried to use them to extend the range of population and resources over which they wielded power. When they encountered no one

with comparable control of coercion, they conquered; when they met rivals, they made war.

Some conquerors managed to exert stable control over the populations in substantial territories, and to gain routine access to part of the goods and services produced in the territory; they became rulers.

Every form of rule faced significant limits to its range of effectiveness within a particular kind of environment. Efforts to exceed that range produced defeats or fragmentation of control, with the result that most rulers settled for a combination of conquest, protection against powerful rivals, and coexistence with cooperative neighbors.

The most powerful rulers in any particular region set the terms of war for all; smaller rulers faced a choice between accommodating themselves to the demands of powerful neighbors and putting exceptional efforts into preparations for war.

War and preparation for war involved rulers in extracting the means of war from others who held the essential resources—men, arms, supplies, or money to buy them—and who were reluctant to surrender them without strong pressure or compensation.

Within limits set by the demands and rewards of other states, extraction and struggle over the means of war created the central organizational structures of states.

The organization of major social classes within a state's territory, and their relations to the state, significantly affected the strategies rulers employed to extract resources, the resistance they met, the struggle that resulted, the sorts of durable organization that extraction and struggle laid down, and therefore the efficiency of resource extraction.

The organization of major social classes and their relations to the state varied significantly from Europe's coercion-intensive regions (areas of few cities and agricultural predominance, where direct coercion played a major part in production) to its capital-intensive regions (areas of many cities and commercial predominance, where markets, exchange, and market-oriented production prevailed). The demands major classes made on the state, and their influence over the state, varied correspondingly.

The relative success of different extractive strategies, and the strategies rulers actually applied, therefore varied significantly from coercion-intensive to capital-intensive regions. As a consequence, the organizational forms of states followed distinctly different trajectories in these different parts of Europe.

Which sort of state prevailed in a given era and part of Europe varied greatly. Only late in the millennium did national states exercise clear superiority over city-states, empires, and other common European forms of state.

Nevertheless, the increasing scale of war and the knitting together of the European state system through commercial, military, and diplomatic interaction eventually gave the war-making advantage to those states that could field standing armies; states having access to a combination of large rural populations, capitalists, and relatively commercialized economies won out. They set the terms of war, and their form of state became the predominant one in Europe. Eventually European states converged on that form: the national state.

In another publication Tilly makes the point that states are little more than protection rackets, like the Mafia. Rulers or would-be rulers come in and say, "Submit to my rule, give me tribute (or taxes or periodic forced labor or something), and I'll protect you from bandits and other people or armies like me. If you don't submit, I'll punish you or kill you." Historically, the central activity of states has been war or preparation for war. Which, in a sense, includes "war" against their own population. Even today, the coercive apparatus of the state is overwhelming, however much states have acquired other functions like administering social welfare programs and public goods such as education.

Another "theoretical" statement:

> The story concerns capital and coercion. It recounts the ways that wielders of coercion, who played the major part in the creation of national states, drew for their own purposes on manipulators of capital, whose activities generated cities… Although states strongly reflect the organization of coercion, they actually show the effects of capital as well; as the rest of this book will demonstrate, various combinations of capital and coercion produced very different kinds of states. Again, cities respond especially to changes in capital, but the organization of coercion affects their character as well; Lewis Mumford's "baroque city" lived on capital like its cousins, but showed a clearer imprint of princely power—in palaces, parade grounds, and barracks—than they did. Over time, furthermore, the place of capital in the form of states grew ever larger, while the influence of coercion (in the guise of policing and state intervention) expanded as well.

Capital defines the realm of exploitation (relations of production and exchange produce surpluses that capitalists capture), while coercion defines the realm of domination. "The processes that accumulate and concentrate capital also produce cities," where trade, warehousing, banking, and in some respects production go on. Coercion has to do with armed force, incarceration, expropriation, and so on. "Europe created two major overlapping groups of specialists in coercion: soldiers and great landlords; where they merged and received ratification from states in the form of titles and privileges they crystallized into nobilities, who in turn supplied the principal European rulers for many centuries." Coercion and capital can certainly merge, but, on the whole, they're sufficiently distinct that they can be analyzed separately.

"Efforts to subordinate neighbors and fight off more distant rivals create state structures in the form not only of armies but also of civilian staffs that gather the means to sustain armies and that organize the ruler's day-to-day control over the rest of the civilian population." Of course, as a state builds up its extractive and administrative infrastructure, different groups acquire power and interests of their own, and they may limit the character and intensity of warfare the state can carry on. Over time, rulers have to bargain with their subjects to get the resources they need for war-making and control of the subject population, and the latter can thus acquire greater rights and powers. This process grew more pronounced especially *after* the long centuries of "indirect rule," in which states (empires, city-states with sway over large hinterlands, etc.) generally had to rely on cooperation from and bargaining with local authorities who paid tribute to the "state." It wasn't until the era of the French Revolution that most European states really began to institute *direct* rule from top to bottom, a type of rule that necessitated much greater financing and larger administrative apparatuses.

"The transition to direct rule gave rulers access to citizens and the resources they controlled through household taxation, mass conscription, censuses, police systems, and many other invasions of small-scale social life. But it did so at the cost of widespread resistance, extensive bargaining, and the creation of rights and perquisites for citizens [such as the beginnings of representative democracy]. Both the penetration and the bargaining laid down new state structures, inflating the government's budgets, personnel, and organizational diagrams. The omnivorous state of our own time took shape."

The book is dense with empirical detail that isn't easy to summarize, but now and then there are points of general interest. Here's an interesting paragraph, for example, even more interesting if you know how important the French *intendants* were to the rise of absolutism and a relatively centralized state structure:

> No one designed the principal components of national states—treasuries, courts, central administrations, and so on. They usually formed as more or less inadvertent by-products of efforts to carry out more immediate tasks, especially the creation and support of armed force. When the French crown, greatly expanding its involvement in European wars during the 1630s, stretched its credit to the point of bankruptcy, the local authorities and officeholders on whom the king's ministers ordinarily relied for the collection of revenues ceased cooperating. At that point chief minister Richelieu, in desperation, began sending out his own agents to coerce or bypass local authorities. Those emissaries were the royal intendants, who became the mainstays of state authority in French regions under Colbert and Louis XIV. Only in faulty retrospect do we imagine the intendants as deliberately designed instruments of Absolutism.

Most far-reaching innovations like this emerged as ad hoc means to achieve immediate goals. Meanwhile, through all these processes of extracting resources from populations, a society's class structure significantly affected the state's organization, "and variations in class structure from one part of Europe to another produced systematic geographic differences in the character of states. Not only the ruling classes, but all classes whose resources and activities affected preparation for war, left their imprint on European states."

Different paths to state formation

Tilly argues that there were, broadly speaking, three major paths to state formation: coercion-intensive, capital-intensive, and capitalized coercion. The differences resulted from rulers having to adapt to very different environments and class structures. Here's another long quotation from the first chapter:

> In the *coercion-intensive* mode, rulers squeezed the means of war from their own populations and others they conquered, building massive structures of extraction in the process. Brandenburg and Russia—especially in their phases as tribute-taking empires—illustrate the coercion-intensive mode. At the very extreme of the mode, however, armed landlords wielded so much power that no one of them could establish durable control over the rest; for several centuries, the Polish and Hungarian nobilities actually elected their own kings, and struck them down when they strove too hard for supreme power.
>
> In the *capital-intensive* mode, rulers relied on compacts with capitalists—whose interests they served with care—to rent or purchase military force, and thereby warred without building vast permanent state structures. City-states, city-empires, urban federations, and other forms of fragmented sovereignty commonly fall into this path of change. Genoa, Dubrovnik, the Dutch Republic, and, for a time, Catalonia, exemplify the capital-intensive mode. As the history of the Dutch Republic illustrates, at the extreme this mode produced federations of largely autonomous city-states, and constant negotiation among them over state policy.
>
> In the intermediate *capitalized coercion* mode, rulers did some of each, but spent more of their effort than did their capital-intensive neighbors on incorporating capitalists and sources of capital directly into the structures of their states. Holders of capital and coercion interacted on terms of relative equality. France and England eventually followed the

> capitalized coercion mode, which produced full-fledged national states earlier than the coercion-intensive and capital-intensive modes did.
>
> Driven by the pressures of international competition (especially by war and preparation for war) all three paths eventually converged on concentrations of capital and of coercion out of all proportion to those that prevailed in AD 990. From the seventeenth century onward the capitalized coercion form proved more effective in war, and therefore provided a compelling model for states that had originated in other combinations of coercion and capital. From the nineteenth century to the recent past, furthermore, all European states involved themselves much more heavily than before in building social infrastructure, in providing services, in regulating economic activity, in controlling population movements, and in assuring citizens' welfare; all these activities began as byproducts of rulers' efforts to acquire revenues and compliance from their subject populations, but took on lives and rationales of their own…

I'm starting to think my "summary" of the book will consist almost entirely of lengthy excerpts. I doubt these will be of much interest to anyone.

> Over Europe as a whole, alterations in state control of capital and of coercion between AD 900 and the present have followed two parallel arcs. At first, during the age of *patrimonialism,* European monarchs generally extracted what capital they needed as tribute or rent from lands and populations that lay under their immediate control—often within stringent contractual limits on the amounts they could demand. In the time of *brokerage* (especially between 1400 and 1700 or so), they relied heavily on formally independent capitalists for loans, for management of revenue-producing enterprises, and for collection of taxes. By the eighteenth century, however, the time of *nationalization* had come; many sovereigns were incorporating the fiscal apparatus directly into the state structure, and drastically curtailing the involvement of independent contractors. The last century or so, the age of *specialization,* has brought a sharper separation of fiscal from military organization and an increasing involvement of states in the oversight of fixed capital.
>
> On the side of coercion, a similar evolution took place. During the period of patrimonialism, monarchs drew armed force from retainers, vassals, and militias who owed them personal service—but again within significant contractual limits. In the age of brokerage (again especially between 1400 and 1700) they turned increasingly to mercenary forces supplied to them by contractors who retained considerable freedom of action. Next, during nationalization, sovereigns absorbed armies and navies directly into the state's administrative structure, eventually turning away from foreign mercenaries and hiring or conscripting the bulk of their troops from their own citizenries. Since the mid-nineteenth century, in a phase of specialization, European states have consolidated the system of citizen militaries backed by large civilian bureaucracies, and split off police forces specialized in the use of coercion outside of war.
>
> By the nineteenth century, most European states had internalized both armed forces and fiscal mechanisms; they thus reduced the governmental roles of tax farmers, military contractors, and other independent middlemen. Their rulers then continued to bargain with capitalists and other classes for credit, revenues, manpower, and the necessities of war. Bargaining, in its turn, created numerous new claims on the state: pensions, payments to the poor, public education, city planning, and much more. In the process, states changed from magnified war machines into multiple-purpose organizations. Their efforts to control

> coercion and capital continued, but in the company of a wide variety of regulatory, compensatory, distributive, and protective activities.

I'm not summarizing all the empirical details of the book, since I think the book's main interest is in its general theses. At the end of the second chapter Tilly states several of these, in fact partially answering the big question he started with (italicized near the beginning of this blog post). He's been describing the great variations over the millennium in states' access to capital, their proximity to important cities, etc. So then he says, "There are three answers [to the question about the great variation of European states over the last millennium and their eventual convergence on the national state]: the relative availability of concentrated capital and concentrated means of coercion in different regions and periods significantly affected the organizational consequences of making war; until recently only those states survived that held their own in war with other states; and finally, over the long run the changing character of war gave the military advantage to states that could draw large, durable military forces from their own populations, which were increasingly national states." So, much of it comes down to the imperatives of war, and the socioeconomic environments in which states had to make war. Needless to say, this analysis is rather simplified.

He also gives broad answers to some smaller questions. For example:

> *Why, despite obvious interests to the contrary, did rulers frequently accept the establishment of institutions representing the major classes within their jurisdictions?* In fact, rulers attempted to avoid the establishment of institutions representing groups outside their own class, and sometimes succeeded for considerable periods. In the long term, however, those institutions were the price and outcome of bargaining with different members of the subject population for the wherewithal of state activity, especially the means of war. Kings of England did not *want* a Parliament to form and assume ever-greater power; they conceded to barons [like with the Magna Carta of 1215], and then to clergy, gentry, and bourgeois, in the course of persuading them to raise the money for warfare.

Incidentally, this trend continued into the twentieth century. As the research of Göran Therborn, for instance, has shown, the culminating, universal expansions of the franchise in most Western countries were achieved in the twentieth century in the context of the First and Second World Wars. Admittedly, it wasn't only because of nations' need to finance the wars; it was also because of the sheer scale of mass mobilization, and the unleashing of popular democratic energies (especially during and after World War II).

A couple more questions and answers:

> *Why did city-states, city-empires, federations, and religious organizations lose their importance as prevailing kinds of state in Europe?* Two things happened. First, commercialization and capital accumulation in the larger states reduced the advantage enjoyed by small mercantile states [like in Italy], which had previously been able to borrow extensively, tax efficiently, and rely on their own seapower to hold off large landbound states. Second, war eventually changed in a direction that made their small scale and fragmented sovereignty a clear disadvantage, and they lost to large states. Florentine and Milanese republics crumbled under the weight of the fifteenth and sixteenth century's military requirements…
>
> *Why did war shift from conquest for tribute and struggle among armed tribute-takers to sustained battles among massed armies and navies?* For essentially the same reasons: with the organizational and technical innovations in warfare of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, states with access to large numbers of men and volumes of capital gained a clear

advantage, and either drove back the tribute-takers or forced them into patterns of extraction that built a more durable state structure. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Russian state made the transition as Ivan III and Ivan IV used awards of land to tie bureaucrats and soldiers to long-term service of the state. During the eighteenth century, the ability of populous states such as Great Britain and France to draw mass armies from their own citizens gave them the means to overpower small states.

How war made states, and vice versa

In the third chapter he gets into more detail about the subject of war and state formation. Since the seventeenth century, European states began to disarm their populations, including rival powerholders like great landowners. Disarmament took place in many small steps, such as seizures of weapons at the end of rebellions, prohibitions of duels, introduction of licensing for private arms, and so on. "In England, the Tudors suppressed private armies, reduced the princely power of great lords along the Scottish border, contained aristocratic violence, and eliminated the fortress-castles that once announced the power and autonomy of the great English magnates. Louis XIII, the seventeenth-century monarch who with the aid of Richelieu and Mazarin rebuilt the armed force of the French state, probably tore down more fortresses than he constructed. But he built at the frontiers, and destroyed in the interior. In subduing magnates and cities that resisted his rule, he commonly demolished their fortifications, reduced their rights to bear arms, and thereby decreased the odds of any serious future rebellion."

In urban areas, the installation of routine policing played a part in civilian disarmament, while in regions dominated by powerful landlords it was necessary to dismantle private armies and eliminate walled and moated castles. Rulers' simultaneous creation of armed force generated durable state structures not only by making armies significant organizations within the state but also by bringing forth treasuries, supply services, mechanisms for conscriptions, tax bureaus, etc. In the late seventeenth century, for instance, England's governments built royal shipyards into the country's largest concentrated industry. (One of the innumerable examples in recent centuries of governments, not "the free market," being responsible for industrial development.)

Over the last millennium, war has been the dominant activity of European states. Even state finances reflect that fact. "From the late seventeenth century onward, budgets, debts, and taxes arose to the rhythm of war." In France, borrowing for eighteenth-century wars overwhelmed the state, ruined its credit, and led to the calling of the Estates-General in 1789 that began the French Revolution. Britain, too, acquired huge state debts, which signified the expansion of bureaucratic state capacity largely under the impetus of war. (Of course, this tendency continued into the twentieth century, as the two world wars, for example—especially the second—stimulated gigantic growth of governments. In the U.S., the New Deal had already enormously expanded state capacity, but the war increased the federal budget tenfold and was fantastic for economic growth. War is great business! And it has been so for well over five hundred years, since the long era of mercenary forces crisscrossing Europe.[1])

In fact, major war efforts usually produced a *permanent* expansion of the state apparatus. "When Holland and Spain reached a truce in their draining war over Dutch claims to independence in 1609, many observers on both sides expected relief from the extraordinary taxation that had beset them during the previous decade.

[1] On mercenaries: "The peculiarity of the system became clear early on, when in 1515 'two Swiss armies, one in the service of the French king and one in the service of an Italian baron, met on opposing sides in a battle at Marignano in northern Italy and almost completely annihilated each other.' The event helped persuade the Swiss to avoid wars of their own, but it did not keep them from shipping mercenaries to other people's battles." The dominance of mercenary armies didn't completely end until the wars of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire, which were fought by ordinary French citizens.

As it turned out, debt service, building of fortifications, and other state activities easily absorbed the revenues freed by military demobilization. Taxes did not decline significantly in either country."

The struggle for maritime empire also helped shape different kinds of states, though not as much as land warfare.

> The connection between state and empire ran in both directions: the character of the European state governed the form of its expansion outside of Europe, and the nature of the empire significantly affected the metropole's operation. Capital-intensive states such as Venice and the Dutch Republic reached out chiefly by the ruthless pursuit of trading monopolies, but invested little effort in military conquest and colonization. Coercion-intensive states such as the Norse and the Spanish devoted more of their energy to settlement, enslavement of the indigenous (or imported) labor force, and exaction of tribute. The in-between states, such as Britain and France, entered the imperial game relatively late, and excelled at it by combining the capitalist and coercive strategies.
>
> The capitalist strategy added relatively little bulk to the central state, especially when conducted through essentially private organizations such as the Dutch East India Company. These commercial megaliths, however, became political forces to be contended with in their own right; thus privatization pushed the state toward bargaining with its subject population, or at least with the dominant commercial class. The strategy of conquest and settlement, which inevitably called forth durable armies and navies, added to the central state bureaucracy, not to mention the world-wide web of officialdom it called into being. Where it brought in riches—especially in the form of bullion, as in Spain—conquest created an alternative to domestic taxation, and thereby shielded rulers from some of the bargaining that established citizens' rights and set limits on state prerogatives elsewhere. [So that's one reason Spain, for example, remained relatively politically backward in the following centuries.]

It seems to me that Tilly's distinction between capital and coercion bears on the old debates about the nature of "Oriental despotism," states like Russia, China, ancient Egypt, and the like. As he says, "We might imagine a continuum from an imperial Russia in which a cumbersome state apparatus grew up to wrest military men and resources from a huge but uncommercialized economy to a Dutch Republic which relied heavily on navies, ran its military forces on temporary grants from its city-dominated provinces, easily drew taxes from customs and excise, and never created a substantial central bureaucracy." Many of these "Oriental" states throughout history were coercion-intensive because of their largely uncommercialized economies, and they needed cumbersome political structures to extract taxes and other resources from a peasant social base that didn't have a widespread money economy.

Bargaining and direct rule

As stated earlier, all the (very brutal) processes of state formation over many centuries[1] necessitated that rulers engage continually in various forms of "bargaining" with their subjects, which over time gave the

[1] "From the short-run perspectives of ordinary people, what we in blithe retrospect call 'state formation' included the setting of ruthless tax farmers against poor peasants and artisans, the forced sale for taxes of animals that would have paid for dowries, the imprisoning of local leaders as hostages to the local community's payment of overdue taxes, the hanging of others who dared to protest, the loosing of brutal soldiers on a hapless civilian population, the conscription of young men who were their parents' main hope for comfort in old age, the forced purchase of tainted salt, the elevation of already arrogant local property holders into officers of the state, and the imposition of religious conformity in the name of public order and morality."

latter durable rights but also imposed obligations on them. "The core of what we now call 'citizenship,' indeed, consists of multiple bargains hammered out by rulers and ruled in the course of their struggles over the means of state action, especially the making of war." Through these processes of "struggle, negotiation, and sustained interaction with the holders of essential resources," states came to reflect the class structures of their subject populations.

"Bargaining" could itself be brutal, as when rulers sent in troops to crush a tax rebellion or a capture a reluctant taxpayer, but it also took more peaceful forms: "pleading with parliaments, buying off city officials with tax exemptions, confirming guild privileges in return for loans or fees, regularizing the assessment and collection of taxes against the guarantee of their more willing payment, and so on." Means were set up by which citizens could seek redress, such as through petition and representation in local assemblies. Later, in the last couple of centuries, workers, bourgeois, and others took advantage of these means to press for more expanded rights such as direct representation. Eventually states responded to the population's demands by creating programs like social insurance, public education, veterans' pensions, and housing, which cumulatively changed the character of government so that it became even more bureaucratic and civilian.

It's probably superfluous to note, by the way, that "bargaining" goes on up to the present and never stops. The state always has to try to keep its citizenry—its main enemy, to quote Chomsky—sufficiently pacified so that they won't rebel *en masse*. Both repression and more constructive kinds of bargaining are essential to this. In recent decades, the state has fused especially closely with the most exploitative and predatory sectors of the ruling class, so the constructive forms of bargaining have tended to wither. Which explains rising mass discontent, and in fact the slow-moving collapse of society itself.

Anyway, for most of the last millennium, microstates like city-states and petty principalities ruled in a relatively direct way, but larger states didn't. They had to deal with powerful intermediaries (clergy, landlords, urban oligarchies, independent warriors) who had a lot of autonomy and could hinder state demands that weren't in their own interest. This reliance on indirect rule began to change in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as "the nationalization of military power" (shifting from the hiring of mercenaries to the recruitment of soldiers from their own populations) occurred, to deal with the increasing scale of war and for other reasons. Having to work through intermediaries had never been ideal: it set serious limits on the quantity of resources rulers could extract from the economy. By the eighteenth century, "as war demanded greater resources, emphatically including manpower, and as the threat of conquest by the largest states grew more serious, ever more rulers bypassed, suppressed, or co-opted old intermediaries and reached directly into communities and households to seize the wherewithal of war. Thus national standing armies, national states, and direct rule caused each other."

The French Revolution and Napoleonic Empire greatly accelerated the shift to direct rule, both because other states emulated the French model of centralized government and because France imposed that model wherever it conquered. Tilly's discussion of the Revolution is very good, if necessarily simplified, and worth quoting at obnoxious length (among other reasons because it gives the lie to revisionist historians who have resisted the traditional Marxist description of the event as a "bourgeois revolution"):

> The lawyers, officials, and other bourgeois who seized the state apparatus in 1789-90 rapidly displaced the old intermediaries: landlords, seigneurial officials, venal officeholders, clergy, and sometimes municipal oligarchies as well. "[I]t was not a rural class of English-style gentlemen," declares Lynn Hunt, "who gained political prominence on either the national or the regional level, but rather thousands of city professionals who seized the opportunity to develop political careers." At a local level, the so-called Municipal Revolution widely transferred power to enemies of the old rulers; patriot coalitions based in militias, clubs, and revolutionary committees and linked to Parisian

activists ousted the old municipalities. Even where the old powerholders managed to survive the Revolution's early turmoil, relations between each locality and the national capital altered abruptly. Village "republics" of the Alps, for example, found their ancient liberties—including ostensibly free consent to taxes—crumbling as outsiders clamped them into the new administrative machine. Then Parisian revolutionaries faced the problem of governing without intermediaries; they experimented with the committees and militias that had appeared in the mobilization of 1789, but found them hard to control from the center. More or less simultaneously they recast the French map into a nested system of departments, districts, cantons, and communes, while sending out *représentants en mission* to forward revolutionary reorganization. They installed direct rule.

…By and large, the Federalist movement, with its protests against Jacobin centralism and its demands for regional autonomy, took root in cities whose commercial positions greatly outpaced their rank [in the new administrative system]. In dealing with these alternative obstacles to direct rule, Parisian revolutionaries improvised three parallel, and sometimes conflicting, systems of rule: the committees and militias; a geographically-defined hierarchy of elected officials and representatives; and roving commissioners from the central government. To collect information and gain support, all three relied extensively on the existing personal networks of lawyers, professionals, and merchants.

As the system began to work, revolutionary leaders strove to routinize their control and contain independent action by local enthusiasts, who often resisted. Using both co-optation and repression, they gradually squeezed out the committees and militias. Mobilization for war put great pressure on the system, incited new resistance, and increased the national leaders' incentives for a tight system of control. Starting in 1792, the central administration (which until then had continued in a form greatly resembling that of the Old Regime) underwent its own revolution: the staff expanded enormously, and a genuine hierarchical bureaucracy took shape. In the process, revolutionaries installed one of the first systems of direct rule ever to take shape in a large state.

That shift entailed changes in systems of taxation, justice, public works, and much more. Consider policing. Outside of the Paris region, France's Old Regime state had almost no specialized police of its own… The revolutionaries changed things. With respect to ordinary people, they moved from reactive to proactive policing and information-gathering: instead of simply waiting until a rebellion or collective violation of the law occurred, and then retaliating ferociously but selectively, they began to station agents whose job was to anticipate and prevent threatening popular collective action. During the Revolution's early years, Old Regime police forces generally dissolved as popular committees, national guards, and revolutionary tribunals took over their day-to-day activities. But with the Directory [1795-99] the state concentrated surveillance and apprehension in a single centralized organization…

Resistance and counter-revolutionary action followed directly from the process by which the new state established direct rule. Remember how much change the revolutionaries introduced in a very short time. They eliminated all previous territorial jurisdictions, consolidated many old parishes into larger communes, abolished the tithe and feudal dues, dissolved corporations and their privileges, constructed a top-to-bottom administrative and electoral system, imposed expanded and standardized taxes through that system, seized the properties of emigrant nobles and of the church, disbanded monastic orders, subjected clergy to the state and imposed upon them an oath to defend the new state church, conscripted young men at an unprecedented rate, and displaced both nobles and priests

> from the automatic exercise of local leadership. All this occurred between 1789 and 1793… What is more, the new state hierarchy consisted largely of lawyers, physicians, notaries, merchants, and other bourgeois…
>
> [Counterrevolutionary resistance in the west of France] grew directly from the efforts of revolutionary officials to install a particular kind of direct rule in the region: a rule that practically eliminated nobles and priests from their positions as partly autonomous intermediaries, that brought the state's demands for taxes, manpower, and deference to the level of individual communities, neighborhoods, and households, that gave the region's bourgeois political power they had never before wielded. In seeking to extend the state's rule to every locality, and to dislodge all enemies of that rule, French revolutionaries started a process that did not cease for twenty-five years. In some ways, it has not yet ceased today…[1]

As he sums up, "the revolutionary transition from indirect to direct rule embodied a bourgeois revolution and engendered a series of anti-bourgeois counter-revolutions." But the changes, even across Europe, couldn't be wholly reversed. And they led to further changes, such as the rise of nationalism. "Direct rule and mass national politics grew up together, and reinforced each other mightily." Over the course of the nineteenth century, states imposed national languages—for ease of communication and administration—created national education systems, controlled movement across frontiers, and generally tried to homogenize conditions within their borders. Which led to rebellious nationalisms among minorities.

Thus, in the "dialectical" logic Marxists love to invoke, as states built up their capacity, they found they had to deal with new, unanticipated burdens. For instance, new organizations to make war or draw the requisites of war from subjects—including customs services, treasuries, and regional administrations—developed their own interests. With regard to Brandenburg-Prussia, which became famously bureaucratic by the eighteenth century (leading to the infamously bureaucratic structures of Germany later on), Tilly quotes another historian: "the bureaucracy acquired an *esprit de corps* and developed into a force formidable enough to recast the system of government in its own image. It restrained the autocratic authority of the monarch. It ceased to be responsible to the dynastic interest. It captured control of the central administration and of public policy." This is just one example of a much broader trend.

Another ironic result of direct rule and the expansion of government capacity was the *civilianization* of government. The state had always been an essentially military institution, but in the process of creating structures to support an expanded military force, more and more resources were devoted to non-military purposes like a larger civilian bureaucracy and growing the civilian economy (which in the later nineteenth century far outstripped military expansion, thus further reducing the social and political dominance of the military). By the late twentieth century, in nearly all Western countries very small proportions of the population were under arms, small proportions of state budgets were devoted to the military, and small percentages of national income were spent on soldiers and weapons.

Lineages of the national state, and thoughts on the Third World

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[1] For a very brief summary of the contours of the French Revolution, see Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, chapter 3. He notes that the large majority of representatives of the Third Estate in 1789 weren't bourgeois in the sense of being actual capitalists (merchants, etc.), and they weren't even particularly revolutionary. In the beginning, they only wanted to create a constitutional monarchy and eliminate the privileges of the nobility. It required continual interventions by the more radical populace, in the succeeding years, to force the leaders to become truly revolutionary. Nevertheless, in its outcomes and many of its guiding values, I'd say the epochal event certainly qualifies as a "bourgeois revolution."

In the fifth chapter, Tilly goes into greater detail about the three paths to state formation mentioned above. He starts with the coercion-intensive one, focusing on Russia and Eastern Europe. It's a pretty impressive capsule history he provides, from AD 1000 to the nineteenth century, but here's the main point:

> In broadly similar ways, Russian, Polish, Hungarian, Serbian, and Brandenburger states formed on the basis of strong alliances between war-making princes and armed landlords, large concessions of governmental power to nobles and gentry, joint exploitation of the peasantry, and restricted scope for merchant capital. Repeatedly, leaders of conquering forces who lacked capital offered their followers booty and land, only to face the problem of containing the great warrior-landlords they thereby created…
>
> Although the relative weight of crown and nobility (and therefore the extent to which warfare created durable state structure) varied significantly from state to state, all these states stood out from their European neighbors by heavy reliance on brute coercion. When, in the sixteenth century, large volumes of eastern European grain began to flow westward, the existing structure of control permitted great landlords to profit directly from those shipments; they used state power to contain merchants and coerce peasant producers, building a new serfdom in the process [even as the old serfdom in the west was ending]. In that balance of power, even extensive commercialization did not build cities, an independent capitalist class, or a state more greatly resembling those of urban Europe.

So, because there were so few cities and such little concentrated capital, it was, typically, necessary to create enormous coercive apparatuses to squeeze and control the peasantry (and also to fight and control the nobility). The main difference is that in some of these states, like Russia, one armed landlord early on established supremacy over his rivals, while in others, like Poland, the multitude of armed landlords were able to prevent any one of their own from achieving such supremacy. (Which led to a weaker Polish state and its dismemberment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.)

Let's skip the history of capital-intensive states like Venice and go straight to the capitalized-coercive Britain. I'll revert to quoting, once again. Not everyone knows much about the Magna Carta—which, among other things (such as protecting peasants' right to the commons), helped set a precedent for a degree of political representation—so here's something about that:

> In the process of making war and intervening in dynastic rivalries, the barons on whom English kings relied for their wars acquired enough power to fight the king as well as each other, exacting chartered concessions—most dramatically in Magna Carta—from the monarch. The Great Charter of 1215 committed the king to cease squeezing feudal obligations for the wherewithal to conduct wars, to stop hiring mercenaries when barons would not fight, and to impose the major taxes only with the consent of the great council, representative of the magnates. The council started to wield durable power, reinforced especially by its place in the approval of new taxation. Later kings confirmed the charter repeatedly. Nevertheless, the continuing efforts of English monarchs to create armed force produced a durable central structure: royal treasury, courts, and domain.

The Hundred Years' War (1337–1453), a result of English kings' efforts to hold onto their French possessions, required such exorbitant finances that Parliament was able to consolidate its position. Even for more than a century afterwards, wars with France and Scotland involved Parliament in royal fundraising and established its right to consent to taxation. The House of Commons, meanwhile, "came increasingly to represent a tight alliance of merchants and cash-cropping landowners" who, aided by legally sanctioned enclosures of open fields and common lands, grew heavily involved in the marketing of grain and wool.

The Stuart kings of the seventeenth century made the mistake of disrespecting the prerogatives of this rising capitalist class (the merchants and landowners represented in the House of Commons) in their struggles for money to fund yet more wars. The agrarian and mercantile bourgeoisie didn't look fondly on kings' attempts to tax without Parliament, or, more generally, to construct an absolutist state in which the bourgeoisie was very definitely politically subordinate. Charles I, especially, let power go to his head, and as a result he lost it (his head). In the 1630s his credit with financiers failed, "and his demands for loans and taxes only sharpened conflict with Parliament and its financiers. By 1640 he was seizing the gold and silver left in the Tower of London for safekeeping, and bargaining with the goldsmiths and merchants who owned it for a loan secured by customs revenues. Charles' attempt to raise and control an army to put down rebellion in Ireland and resistance in Scotland did him in."[1]

After the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the renewal of British military involvement on the continent, "Britain started to form a substantial standing army, an effective central bureaucracy took shape, and the tax-granting House of Commons gained power vis-à-vis the king and his ministers." Basically, a bourgeois revolution had occurred over a long period, from the mid-sixteenth century (when enclosures began, Henry VIII suppressed the Catholic Church and seized its revenues while expropriating monasteries, and England commercialized at the same time as much of its peasantry was proletarianized) to the late seventeenth century. Absolutism had been defeated, a capitalist—though not yet industrial capitalist—economy had spread, and various types of capitalist class had secured political power. In the next two centuries, political centralization and direct rule deepened, incrementally, as capitalism advanced and matured.

Moving ahead to the seventh and last chapter, Tilly wonders why Third World governments tend to be quite different from those of the West, and not in good ways. In particular, why is the place of the military so different, so overwhelming? "On the whole, [militaries in the Third World] intervene in domestic political life far more directly and frequently, and with more obviously damaging consequences for rights of citizens. Why should that be?" It's certainly an important question. There are many answers to it, of course, but Tilly focuses on those his earlier analysis bears on. Here's a useful review of that analysis:

> Think back to the central paradox of European state formation: that *the pursuit of war and military capacity, after having created national states as a sort of byproduct, led to a civilianization of government and domestic politics*. That happened, I have argued, for five main reasons: because the effort to build and sustain military forces led agents of states to build bulky extractive apparatuses staffed by civilians, and those extractive apparatuses came to contain and constrain the military forces; because agents of states bargained with civilian groups that controlled the resources required for effective war-making, and in bargaining gave the civilian groups enforceable claims on the state that further constrained the military; because the expansion of state capacity in wartime gave those states that had not suffered great losses in war expanded capacity at the ends of wars, and agents of those states took advantage of the situation by taking on new activities, or continuing activities they had started as emergency measures; because participants in the war effort, including military personnel, acquired claims on the state that they deferred during the war in response to repression or mutual consent but which they reactivated at demobilization; and finally because wartime borrowing led to great increases in national debts, which in turn generated service bureaucracies and encouraged greater state intervention in national economies.

Given this analysis, one possibility is obvious: since Third World states have largely acquired and built up their militaries from abroad, through military aid from great powers, it hasn't been necessary to undergo a

[1] Again, for a short summary of the main issues involved in the English Civil War, see *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, chapter 3.

long process of "bargaining" with the civilian population. There hasn't had to be "the same internal forging of mutual constraints between rulers and ruled," as Tilly says in the article linked to earlier. Nor have several other of the above conditions applied.

When you have the U.S and other powers giving extreme support to military organizations in the Third World or the Global South, it isn't surprising that such organizations become dominant over civilian competitors. Or that they use their dominance to seize power repeatedly, whenever the civilian government is failing or doing something they don't like. And the government will, indeed, often fail or become dysfunctional in an international context of subordination to the interests of the West (as in the frequent inability to have an independent tariff policy to protect domestic industry, or the necessity to apply for loans from an IMF that attaches such onerous conditions to the loans that society partially breaks down and the population rebels). Since there isn't much need to protect borders anymore or, usually, engage in external wars, armies develop great power *internally* that they may use to influence domestic politics.

In any case, one thing does come out very clearly from the book: states are in the business of coercing, and are formed in profoundly morally illegitimate ways. Primarily through war: war against internal and external enemies. In this respect, Tillyism is quite friendly to anarchism and the left. The real question, especially in our dangerous era today, is how to get states *away* from the business of making war. Presumably the only way to do that is through mass popular movements to pressure leaders and to elect leftists to political office.

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Against liberal "pluralism"

In the time of Trumpism, Michael Paul Rogin's great book *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* (1967) shouldn't be as neglected as it is. It's quite relevant. I recall reading Jesse Lemisch's brilliant little pamphlet *On Active Service in War and Peace: Politics and Ideology in the American Historical Profession* (1969) and taking notes on it where I quoted Lemisch's appreciative discussion of Rogin's work. I should have read Rogin then.

So here are some notes on a wonderful old book.

Its target is the postwar, Cold War school of liberal thought called "pluralism," expounded by such intellectual luminaries as Richard Hofstadter, Louis Hartz, Seymour Martin Lipset, Daniel Bell, Talcott Parsons, Daniel Boorstin, etc. It's still with us, at least implicitly, throughout the political mainstream. And Rogin's criticisms still very much hold up.

But let's start at the beginning, where Rogin poses the problem that the book sets out to answer: how to understand McCarthyism, which had traumatized the intellectual class.

> When McCarthy first became prominent, most liberals interpreted the danger he posed in fairly straightforward terms. To them McCarthy was simply the most successful a number of conservative Republicans capitalizing on the Communist threat to attack the New Deal at home and the Fair Deal abroad. "McCarthyism" was a synonym for smear attacks on liberals, its roots were in traditional right-wing politics, and its principal targets were innocent individuals and liberal political goals…
>
> But to many writers such traditional analysis failed to account for McCarthy's strength. In their eyes, McCarthy was getting support not from established groups with which traditional conservatism had been associated but rather from the dispossessed and discontented… Moreover, McCarthy appealed to the mass of people over the heads of their elected leaders. And the established eastern elite, unsympathetic to the Wisconsin senator, was one of his important targets.

> All this suggested that popular democracy constituted a real threat to the making of responsible political decisions. McCarthy appeared not in the guise of a conservative smearing innocent liberals but in the guise of a democrat assaulting the political fabric.

Meanwhile, just as faith in democracy suffered during the McCarthy years, so did sympathy for radicalism. To many intellectuals, McCarthy seemed like "the bearer of the historical radical mission," challenging established institutions like earlier leftists had. People started talking about the "radical Right"; and radicals or extremists as such, whether on the left or the right, were seen as dangerous anti-democrats. This view, you may notice, still predominates in the mainstream.

"In this new view, McCarthyism was a movement of the radical Right that grew out of movements of the radical Left." This idea reminds me a little of Zeev Sternhell's analysis of European fascism, which he argues grew out of earlier ideological currents among Marxists and syndicalists. It seems that centrist intellectuals like to blame the left for the right, and associate the two. (What a surprise.) "Left-wing protest movements, democratic in their appeal to the popular masses, radical in the discontent they mobilized, had borne fruit in McCarthyism. To some, McCarthy was directly descended from an agrarian radical tradition [Populism, etc.]…"

This might seem like an absurd thesis, but it is true, after all, that McCarthy and earlier agrarian radicalism had a similar geographical base of support. Outside the South (which opposed McCarthy just because he was a Republican and the South was Democratic in the 1950s), protest movements from the 1880s to the 1930s were strongest in the West and the western Midwest. Later, political leaders in these states vociferously supported McCarthy. In fact, the same state that had produced the great radical Progressive Robert La Follette—Wisconsin—also produced McCarthy! So the evidence seems compelling.

Nevertheless, Rogin rejects the thesis. When you look more closely, McCarthyism had only a traditional conservative heritage and no "agrarian radical" character at all. You can't blame it on the masses or excessive democracy or the heritage of the left. You can blame it on the elites, and on the dangers of *too little* democracy.

Summing up the view he rejects, Rogin says,

> Those connecting it with the earlier [left-wing] movements see McCarthyism, first, as a democratic revolt of dispossessed groups against the educated, eastern elite. Like McCarthyism, agrarian radicalism is also said to have substituted moralistic, irrational appeals for a rational politics. For many writers, these movements embody a nativist mystique which, glorifying the ordinary folk, threatens the civilized restraints of a complex society.

You'll notice, again, that contemporary mainstream denunciations of "populism"—as if the fascist and leftist versions of populism are essentially the same—are the descendants of these earlier revisionist interpretations of McCarthyism and agrarian radicalism. We're still living, to some extent, in the framework of a (decaying) "centrist" politics hammered out during the Cold War.

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Rogin follows this introduction with a very thoughtful and interesting chapter on the ideology, or the political theory, of "pluralism" that produced these interpretations of left and right radicalism. He summarizes it as follows:

> Modern pluralism, I will argue, is not simply a defense of shared power or a sympathy for diverse values but also a theory of history in which industrialization is the major actor. *[Notice the ahistorical substitution of an abstract "industrialization" for concrete conflict between classes and subclasses. See also modernization theory.]* Industrialization destroys traditional stability, but the success of industrialization enables group politics to dominate

> a society. Mass politics is defined by its orientation to the institutions and norms of industrial society. Group politics does not eliminate political moralism *[which pluralists don't like, preferring issues-based pragmatism]* but rather directs it to its proper concern—social cohesion in a constitutional, industrial society. Group politics is the conflict not among groups but among group leaders, socialized into the dominant values and associations of industrial society. Pluralism does not extend its tolerance for diversity to mass movements and anti-industrial attitudes felt to threaten the conditions of diversity.

From this brief description, you can already recognize the ideological heritage of most of the political gerontocracy that runs the U.S. today. Especially in the Democratic Party (the Republican is actively discarding mainstream traditions, despite behind-the-scenes efforts of so-called "moderates" like Mitt Romney and Lisa Murkowski to keep it still residually semi-sane), Cold War pluralism, proceduralism, pragmatism, centrist liberalism, elitism is the ideology that governs the leadership. When Biden a few months ago said, nauseatingly, that the country "needs a Republican Party that's principled and strong," that was pluralism speaking. The liberal hatred of Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez is the reaction of pluralist elitism to critiques of elitism. In order for real progress to happen, we need this pluralist centrism to decline, as it's finally doing today. (Of course, that opens the way for neofascism, but the left simply has to fight this challenge off.)

Rogin's discussion of pluralism is extremely rich; I wish I could reproduce even a fraction of its richness here. The pluralists were/are, in essence, semi-conservatives concerned above all with social cohesion and stability in an industrial society. They share *avowed* conservatives' fear of the irrational masses and mass society itself—since it can supposedly lead to disorder, mass movements, totalitarianism, and the like—but they think the masses can be disciplined and controlled by belonging to a network of formal and informal groups in a bureaucratized society. They share Durkheim's worry that an epidemic of anomie and alienation, and thereby dangerous mass movements, can arise in a modern individualistic society in which old traditions and communities have been lost, but they respond that the solution to mass society is the *pluralist society* in which "groups provide individuals with specific channels for realizing their demands, focusing their members on the practical desires that can be realized in ordinary democratic politics… Moreover, when an individual belongs to many groups he cannot act in an extreme fashion in support of one group without threatening his commitment to another. He thus becomes committed in general to the society and is unable to threaten that commitment through the support of a particular extremism."

It's a nice little theory, especially as it's fleshed out in distinctions like that between rational *class* politics (not *ideological* but involving clashes of narrow economic interests between groups) and irrational *status* politics, based on vague status anxieties that bring forth things like the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, later McCarthyism, earlier Progressivism, and Populism. But pluralism isn't hard to criticize. For instance, an argument Rogin could have made is that the modern, "stable" society its theorists love was made possible precisely by ideological mass movements like abolitionism, which indirectly abolished slavery, and the unemployed workers' movement of the 1930s, which led to the welfare state. The civil rights movement, too, which had a "mass" character, was necessary to expand democracy and the liberal constitutional order that is the pluralists' be-all and end-all. It seems these writers aren't the most perceptive historians (despite including in their ranks famous historians like Hofstadter).

Their views of agrarian radicals can also be criticized right off the bat. For example, in line with their fetish of "industrial society," pluralists interpret both earlier radicals and McCarthy as having directed irrational moralistic appeals "against the development of an instrumental, bureaucratized industrial order." Whatever the truth about McCarthy, recent scholarship by Charles Postel, for example, has demolished this view of Populists: they were actually quite forward-thinking, industrial, modern, and highly rational in their analyses of social ills and prescriptions for a more just and democratic social order. This is also one of Rogin's main arguments.

Certain other pluralist arguments might seem more plausible. Like the argument that McCarthyism and Populism/Progressivism had a petit-bourgeois base in common, receiving support from the small, independent, old middle class (which, out of its status anxiety, supposedly feared concentrated industry).

In the pluralist view, certain specific similarities between McCarthyism and agrarian radicalism are due to the rural, small middle-class basis they shared in common. The movements were anti-British, anti-Wall Street, anti-international bankers, anti-eastern aristocracy. They were pro-German. They stood for the moral absolutes associated with agrarian virtue, such as personal integrity and religion. They were against bigness, favoring equal opportunity and the small producer. Calling upon the traditions of a rural, individualistic America, McCarthyism and agrarian radicalism threatened in the name of the popular will to destroy the pluralist society in which they lived.

Most of this is a caricature of reality, as Rogin will show.

The relevance to the present, again, is that pluralist analyses of small-p "populism" still dominate mainstream perceptions, insanely associating the far left with the far right as equally dangerous, undemocratic, and irrational.

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As an aside, here's an intriguing comparison of the pluralist, or centrist-liberal, thinking with that of America's "Founding Fathers" the Federalists (James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and their followers, who were opposed to the more democratic Jeffersonians):

> [The Federalists'] political outlook resembles that of the pluralists. Here [with the Federalists] is the same fear of an uprising of the masses, the same suspicion of democracy. Federalists and pluralists alike place a considerable reliance on responsible leadership. Both groups of thinkers are pessimistic about human nature and optimistic about the power of institutions to check and control human beings. Both are preoccupied with the importance of balance. Both rely heavily on a pluralism of interests and institutions. Both express powerful nationalistic sentiments while asserting the primacy and legitimacy of (mainly economic) individual self-interest. Both insist that political institutions must [inevitably] be rooted in social conflict, yet desire those institutions to stand apart from and mediate social conflict.

Birds of a feather. Neither Federalists nor pluralists were the true *conservatives* of their day (Edmund Burke and other monarchists/feudalists were the real conservatives at the end of the eighteenth century), but they share the more general conservatism of belonging to the establishment and wanting to suppress the people.

Anyway, Rogin has no trouble dismantling some of the absurdities of pluralist theory. Like the typical attacks on left-wing radicalism and right-wing McCarthyism for their supposed moralism, populism, intolerance, extreme and apocalyptic rhetoric, conspiratorial and utopian thinking, etc. He has only to point out that good, respectable, mainstream conservatism has been just as susceptible to all these tendencies. (Just read newspapers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to be amazed by the wild hysterical overreactions to labor unions, strikes, and agrarian organizing.) Which, from pluralist theory, you wouldn't think would be the case. So much the worse for pluralist theory.

Let's move on to something more interesting. How does the base of support for Populism/Progressivism compare with the base for McCarthyism? Is it largely the same, as the pluralists argue? Rogin conducts a few case-studies, namely of Wisconsin and the Dakotas. With regard to Wisconsin, for example, after a long and expert analysis of voting patterns, Rogin concludes as follows:

> Progressivism in Wisconsin mobilized poor Scandinavian farmers against the richer areas of the state… McCarthy, on the other hand, rose to power with the votes of the richer German inhabitants of the farms and small cities in southern and eastern Wisconsin—anti-Progressive except when they were victims of McCarthy-type tactics during World War I

> [when Germans were demonized all over the country]. McCarthy's unique strength was not as important as this [traditional] Republican Party strength. In any case, it reflected less a continuity with the Progressive past and more the particular issues, preoccupations, and individual attachments of politics in the Korean War decade…

For instance, Czechs and Poles tended to support McCarthy, not because of any "status anxiety" or whatnot but probably because of the Communism issue. Czechoslovakia had recently been the victim of a Communist coup d'état and Poland was under the thumb of the Soviet Union. So Communism was on the minds of Czechs and Poles.

Summing up his extremely detailed discussions of three Midwestern states, Rogin says that after the social base of agrarian radicalism had declined by the 1940s-50s, there was no longer a significant force to challenge conservative Republicanism.[1] "McCarthyism rose to power in the Middle West in the context of conservative dominance. While he had marginal agrarian radical support, the overwhelming majority of those who sent McCarthy-supporters to the Senate was part of the regular Republican constituency." Unlike radicalism, McCarthyism was not a "mass" phenomenon, nor did it realign the bases of the two major parties in any way.

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Rogin dedicates a couple of chapters to demolishing pluralist attacks on Populism and Progressivism—not a difficult task, but he's a virtuoso at it. (E.g., Progressives weren't just backward-looking rural nostalgists, Populists were actually no more anti-Semitic than the rest of their society, etc.)

He raises the important, and still very timely, question of why rural America has been prone to conservatism. Again, a crucial factor has been the decline of farmers' radicalism since the 1940s, which isn't only a result of prosperity and the relatively small numbers of farmers but also the fact that farming was increasingly mechanized and commercialized, even dominated by agribusiness. But why had non-farm rural areas, such as small towns, always been prone to conservatism, going back to the nineteenth century? Well, simply because local elites *always* tend to be conservative, so they can maintain their power. They don't want the outside world horning in on the little sets of power relations they've constructed in their town or small city, and they have always viciously opposed unions, agrarian radicalism, and, since the 1930s-40s, the New Deal state. (See, for example, Elizabeth Tandy Shermer's *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (2013). Phoenix gave us Barry Goldwater, so you can guess how conservative it was.) In the South, of course, the conservatism even goes back to slavery and Reconstruction, and racism has been of inestimable benefit to local power-structures. So the conservatism of "Trump country" has very deep roots, even if political realities in the last fifty years, such as Democrats' abandonment of the working class, have intensified the problem.

(But don't forget that—despite what the media says—it isn't so much the "white working class" that is Trump's base as the petty bourgeoisie and middle class: small business owners, managers, supervisors, real estate and insurance agents, in general moderately affluent people who, in many cases, lack a college degree. These are always the popular base of fascism or neofascism.)

McCarthy's base of support overlapped to a large degree with Trump's. First, it's worth noting that the contemporary split in the Republican Party—between, roughly speaking, the lunatic base and the corporate-bureaucrat elite, or (oversimplifying) small business and big business—already existed in embryo

[1] The most important reason for the decline of agrarian radicalism was probably that there were vastly fewer farm families in 1950 than in 1890. Also, World War II had brought prosperity to most farmers, nullifying their former grievances. "Economically radical movements had generally pitted farmers against their conservative, small-town rural neighbors. As the relative proportions of farmers in the Middle West declined drastically, the conservative, nonfarm vote increased in importance. Hence, conservative strength in South Dakota and other former agrarian radical territory indicated in large part the disappearance of the agrarian radical social base." Very different from what the pluralists would have you think!

in the 1940s. As the big corporations on the east coast became even more established and bureaucratized by the 1940s, more integrated into a colossal New Deal state, they became less militantly conservative than they had been before the Great Depression. They became the "liberal Republicans" of the postwar era, the Rockefellers and so on. On the other hand, the more provincial and smaller centers of business in the western Midwest and South/west remained ultra-conservative: isolationist, fearful of cosmopolitan values and ways of life, suspicious of big cities and big bureaucracies, religious, and fiercely opposed to unions and the New Deal state. These were the conservatives who most supported McCarthy, given his attacks on Communists, liberals, cosmopolitan intellectuals, government bureaucrats, the United Nations, etc. Such rhetoric, or such an ideology, wasn't new in American conservatism; just think of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s. McCarthy only used it in a more extreme, successful, and mainstream way. Later politicians from Goldwater (well, sort of) to George Wallace, Nixon to Reagan, George W. Bush to Trump—amid hordes of lesser figures—would follow a similar "anti-elitist," demagogic playbook. Actually, this has been a crucial component of the so-called "New Right" of the post-1950s.

Trump is certainly nothing new. He's just an unusually vulgar and successful player of the proto-fascist game. Similar in a lot of ways, actually, to the pioneering McCarthy. (For example, McCarthy was a complete nihilist and sadist who cared only about his own power and prestige, was dismissive of civil liberties and democratic rights, had contempt for established political norms, and liked to think of himself as a "tough guy" who "thinks with his gut.")

According to polls, McCarthy did get a sizable amount of support from the populace. It fluctuated a lot, from 15 percent in 1951 to 50 percent in early 1954 (after which it declined permanently). Not surprisingly, Republicans were much more likely than Democrats to view him favorably. Professionals and executives were least likely to support him, while small businessmen and unskilled laborers were more likely to. (There are some similarities here with Trump.) But it seems that most of his support, especially among the working class (to the extent that it supported him), was simply a function of his being identified with anti-Communism at a time of huge propaganda campaigns against Communism, in the context of the Korean War.

Thus, contrary to what the pluralists argued, the meaning of McCarthyism wasn't some "revolt of the masses" against established institutions and responsible political leadership.[1] After all, Eisenhower, the most "respectable" figure imaginable, remained widely popular in these years. Rather, it was elites, not the masses, who were to blame for McCarthyism. "Conservative Republican activists [such as many businessmen] provided McCarthy with the core of his enthusiastic support," but the actions and inactions of political elites helped to augment his power:

> Some, like moderate Republicans in their battle with the Democrats, congressmen in their battle with the executive, newspapers in their search for news, thought they could use him. Others, like Southern Democrats, saw no need to treat McCarthy differently than they treated other senators. Still others, moderate Republicans in their desire for party unity [such as Eisenhower, who didn't denounce McCarthy but actually *enabled* him], [or] liberal Democrats in their desire for reelection, were afraid of him.

As with Trump—who was, and still is, made possible by Democratic elitism, corruption, and incompetence[2]—the whole establishment was complicit in McCarthyism. The rot extended down to provincial newspapers across much of the country that supported him; even establishment newspapers that opposed him, like the *New York Times*, gave him abundant publicity. "To understand the role of the press

[1] Here, there *is* somewhat of a difference with Trump. Americans by now share a broad disgust with established institutions, and some of them—generally belonging to the middle layers—incline toward fascist solutions. I'd venture to say, though, that the majority incline toward the left, favoring, e.g., universal healthcare, higher wages, and greater public investment in infrastructure.

[2] If Democrats want to avoid Republican gains in 2022 and a possible Trump victory in 2024, they have to enact an ambitious legislative program. The reason they won't is that they're elitist, corrupt, and incompetent.

in the McCarthy period one must realize that a figure who gains notoriety sells more papers, and that to ignore such a figure is to risk losing sales to competing publishers." Yep. There's nothing new under the sun.

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The book's final chapter consists of an unremitting evisceration of pluralism. Rogin demolishes the whole sociological/political metaphysic that still animates the Democratic Party. If Biden and the rest of the gerontocracy were capable of self-critical thought, I would think someone should recommend that they read this chapter. Pluralism, or liberalism, is so intellectually bankrupt that it isn't very interesting to argue against anymore, so I won't reproduce the arguments he makes. But here's a paragraph that gets to the heart of the matter regarding mass movements (which liberals always fear):

> Behind the pluralist misinterpretation of McCarthyism and fear of agrarian radicalism [or any other radicalism] lies a legitimate suspicion of mass movements. But this fear, fed by the triumph of totalitarianism in Russia, Italy, and Germany, obscures the differences among mass movements. To find radical roots for McCarthy's support is to underestimate the middle-class diversity of the American populace. For the pluralists, McCarthyism and agrarian radicalism were united by their *petit bourgeois* character. But in America the *petit bourgeois* class is both enormous and diverse. Different political movements can call on support from different segments of that class; their support can be *petit bourgeois* without being significantly related. It is a mistake to identify mass movements with authoritarianism and pressure groups with democracy. Rather there are authoritarian and democratic mass movements, just as there are authoritarian and democratic pressure groups. [For example, labor is democratic; business is authoritarian.] The Populist mass movement operated within the established constitutional framework of the republic; it was not a threat to democracy.

The petite bourgeoisie can go either way, left or right. As can the "middle class" in general, or, rather, different strata of the middle class. An immigrant small business owner in New York City might very well join a left-wing movement; a white small business owner in the Midwest will probably be conservative or proto-fascist.

Let's hope and pray that mass movements of the *democratic* kind spring up in the coming years, to demolish the complacent technocratic liberalism that was so beloved by the pluralists.

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The secret history of automation

Here are some notes on an unjustly neglected book by the great Marxist David F. Noble (social historian of technology) called *Progress Without People: New Technology, Unemployment, and the Message of Resistance*. It was published in 1995, but it was ahead of its time, since its warnings resonate even more profoundly today:

> The information highway is barely under construction, the virtual workplace still largely experimental, but their consequences are readily predictable in the light of recent history. In the wake of five decades of information revolution, people are now working longer hours, under worsening conditions, with greater anxiety and stress, less skills, less security, less power, less benefits, and less pay. Information technology has clearly been developed and used during these years to deskill, discipline, and displace human labour in a global speed-up of unprecedented proportions. Those still working are the lucky ones. For the

> technology has been designed and deployed as well to tighten the corporate stranglehold on the world's resources, with obvious and intended results: increasing dislocation and marginalization of a large proportion of the world's population—within as well as without the industrial countries; growing structural (that is, permanent) unemployment and the attendant emergence of a nomadic army of temporary and part-time workers (the human complement of flexible production); a swelling of the ranks of the perpetually impoverished; and a dramatic widening of the gap between rich and poor to nineteenth-century dimensions.

All these tendencies have reached crisis levels by now, and even mainstream economists are warning that in the coming years automation will eliminate millions of jobs. –On the other hand, automation could make possible an unprecedented life of leisure for everyone—for instance, a four-day or three-day workweek—if we could only shift the priorities of government.

One of the uses of the book is as a reminder that it is the government, not the private sector, that's responsible for the most important technological and scientific innovations. The only reason the capitalist economy works at all is that government (i.e., the public, the working and middle classes) shoulders most of the burden and the cost of innovation. The public sector and what you could call the "public-private sector" (involving public-private partnerships, most notably in high technology and science) is the most dynamic part of the economy. E.g.:

> What mechanization was to the first industrial revolution, automation was to the second. The roots of the second industrial revolution lay in the state-sponsored technological developments of World War II. Military technologies—control systems for automatic gunfire, computers for ballistics and A-bomb calculations, microelectronics for proximity fuses, radar, computers, aircraft and missile guidance systems, and a host of sensing and measuring devices—gave rise to not only programmable machinery but also "intelligent" or self-correcting machinery. In the postwar years, the promotion of such technologies was fuelled by Cold War concerns about "national security," the enthusiasm of technical people, management's quest for a solution to its growing labour problems, and by a general cultural offensive to restore confidence in scientific salvation and technological deliverance following the twin traumas of depression and global war. Often with state initiative and subsidy, industrial application of these new technologies (as well as an intensification of older forms of fixed automation and mechanization) began to take hold, in steel, auto, petroleum refining, chemical processing (and uranium enrichment), and aircraft, machinery, and electrical equipment manufacture, among others (pp. 24–25).

The economy was growing healthily in the postwar era, so the slow and gradual introduction of automation didn't lead to crises of unemployment or massive worker resistance. It started to by the late 1960s, though. "The increasing displacement, deskilling, and disciplining of workers in industry proceeded apace, largely unnoticed except by the workers themselves until, by the end of the 1960s, the situation exploded in an upsurge of pent-up rank-and-file militancy." All across the Western world, the ruling class had to put down an epidemic of rank-and-file resistance, often violently, in the 1970s. Layoffs, the degradation of work, and speed-ups resulted in countless wildcat strikes and relatively new forms of working-class direct action such as "shop-floor organization, counter-planning strategies against management, rank-and-file caucuses against union leadership, and systematic sabotage." North America and Western Europe were riven by industrial conflict.

One of the responses to all this discontent was to partially co-opt it. "The managers of some companies experimented with new methods—so-called job enrichment, job enlargement, and quality of worklife schemes—designed to absorb discontent and redirect energies along more productive paths. Sweden was a centre for such experimentation and became a model throughout the industrialized world." In the end, most of workers' victories from these schemes of "participation" and "job-enrichment" were

very limited and short-lived. “In the wake of these limited gains, the rebellious [rank-and-file] energies that had brought them about dissipated and all but disappeared. In their place arose committees, rules, agreements, and other formal devices for dealing with the new challenges at the workplace, including the challenge of new technology.” The technology issue was formalized, bureaucratized, regulated in the form, e.g., of new contract language between unions and employers pertaining to the introduction of new technology. “Whatever these gains, however, they were achieved at the expense of removing the technology issue from the shop floor and thus from the realm of direct action available to the workers themselves. ‘With increasing formalization,’ [one sociologist] observed, ‘the spread of sabotage could once again be held in check by pressure from trade union organizations opposed to it.’”

As has often happened, then, union leadership cooperated with business to suppress and defuse rank-and-file discontent. Resistance lasted into the 1980s, as workers in Europe and North America engaged in sabotage of new technology that threatened to put them out of a job, deskill their work, and give ever greater powers of surveillance to management, but ultimately the rolling tide of automation—organized and implemented so as to benefit *management*, not workers—proved unstoppable. So here we are today, on the precipice.

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Noble is an expert on the social history of technology, and he continually insists on the fact that automation has been designed in such a way as to benefit management, not workers. It isn’t some “automatic,” “natural,” or apolitical process by which the best and most efficient technological designs are chosen by engineers, adopted by businessmen, and then tested (for productivity, efficiency, profitability) in the crucible of the marketplace. Technical development “is not some abstractly rational enterprise with an internal logic all its own, but rather a human effort that reflects at every turn the relations of power in society.”

Engineers simply want to do what’s good for society, “yet, consistently, again and again, they turn out [technical] solutions that are good for the people in power (management) but often disastrous for the rest of us (workers). Can this be explained?” Yes, it can! “For one thing, few technical people have any contact whatsoever with workers; in their education and their professional careers, they typically communicate only with management. Not surprisingly, they tend to view the world pretty much as management does, whether they know it or not. They are taught and usually believe that this is simply the most objective way of looking at things, but it is, in reality, the view from the top, the perspective of those with power.”

Noble gives a couple of examples. Here’s one:

> For seven years I investigated the history of automated machine tools. Much of the pioneering design and development work of these tools took place at MIT, and I spent many months pouring over the vast collection of documents from the ten-year project. I discovered that the engineers involved in creating this self-professed revolution in metal-working manufacturing had been in constant contact with industrial managers and military officers, who had sponsored and monitored the project. Yet I found not a single piece of paper indicating that there had been contact with any of the many thousands of men and women who work as machinists in the metal-working industry—those most knowledgeable about metal-cutting and…those most directly affected by the technical changes under development… The engineering effort was essentially a management effort, and the resulting technology reflected this limited perspective—the worldview of those in power (p. 74).

In our society, an authoritarian pattern predominates in all institutions and workplaces. “So when an engineer begins to design a top-down technical system, he reasonably assumes from the outset that the social power of management will be available to make his system functionable. Such authoritarian systems

are also simpler to design than more democratic ones, since they entail fewer independent variables, and this also makes them more appealing to designers. Finally, authoritarian systems satisfy the engineer's own will to control and offer the engineer a powerful place in the scheme of things. Thus, for all these reasons, new technical systems are conceived from the outset as authoritarian ones, perfectly suited for today's world."

Behind the history of industrial automation, Noble found not merely technical and economic considerations but rather three overriding impulses: "1) a management obsession with control; 2) a military emphasis upon command and performance; and 3) enthusiasms and compulsions that blindly fostered the drive for automaticity."

So, first of all, managers "consistently solicit and welcome technologies that promise to enhance their power and minimize challenge to it, by enabling them to discipline, deskill (in order to reduce worker power as well as pay) and displace potentially recalcitrant workers. Perhaps more than any other single factor, this explains the historical trend toward capital-intensive production methods and ever more automatic machinery, which have typically been designed with such purposes in mind." These purposes, and technologies designed in accord with them, are hardly new: they go back to the early days of the first industrial revolution. But let's focus on more recent times:

> In the late 1940s control engineers at MIT (who had just completed a rolling mill control system designed to enable Bethlehem Steel management to eliminate "pacing" by workers) turned their "fertile genius" to the metal-working industry. The ultimate result of their efforts, "numerical control" (NC), reflected management's [priorities] and set the pattern for all subsequent development of what are now known as computer-aided manufacturing systems. As the very name suggests, control was and remains its essence, not just management control of machines but, through them, of machinists as well.

Noble quotes industry insiders on the nature of numerical control. For example: "With numerical control, there was a shift of control to management. The control over the machine was placed in the hands of management." "I remember the fears that haunted industrial management in the l950s. There was the fear of losing management control over a corporate operation that was becoming ever more complex and unmanageable. Numerical control is restoring control of shop operations to management." "Numerical control has been defined in many ways. But perhaps the most significant definition is that [it] is a means for bringing decision-making in many manufacturing operations closer to management. Since decision-making at the machine tool has been removed from the operator and is now in the form of pulses on the control media, [NC] gives maximum control of the machine to management." Automation, in the ways it has been carried out, is therefore just another stage in the long history of "scientific management" (sometimes called Taylorism, though that makes it too narrow) that Harry Braverman wrote about in the 1970s.

In the history of automated machine tools, alternative designs, more democratic and worker-friendly than numerical control, were proposed, but they never got much funding from military or (later) industrial backers. "Thus, NC became the dominant and, ultimately, the only technology for automating metal-working."

The perfect compatibility of the military mentality with the business mentality is interesting, and telling. Sorry for the long quotation, but it's informative:

> The military has always played a central role in the technological development of U.S. industry, from mining and metallurgy to shipping and navigation, from interchangeable parts manufacture to scientific management. As the army and navy have been the major movers in the past, the air force has led the way in our time… If we just consider today's so-called high technology—electronics, computers, aerospace, cybernetics (automatic control), lasers—all are essentially military creations. When some of these war-generated

> technologies were brought together to automate the metal-working industry, the military was once again the driving force.
>
> From the start in the late 1940s down to the present day, the air force has been and remains the major sponsor of industrial automation. With regard to numerical control, the air force underwrote the first several decades of research and development of both hardware and software, determined what the technology would ultimately look like by setting design specifications and criteria to meet military objectives, created an artificial market for the automated equipment by making itself the main customer and thereby generating demand, subsidized both machine-tool builders and industrial (primarily aerospace) users in the construction, purchase, and installation of the new equipment, and even paid them to learn how to run it.
>
> Numerical control was just the beginning of air force involvement in the automation drive. The air force numerical-control project had global significance; on a recent visit to a locomotive factory in Prague, I was surprised to find the air force NC programming system in use even there. And before long, this single project had evolved into the more expansive Integrated Computer Aided Manufacturing Program. More recently, ICAM became the still more ambitious and diversified MANTECH (manufacturing technologies) programs, designed to promote the computer automated approach to manufacturing not only in industry but also in universities…
>
> The effects of this military involvement reflect the peculiar characteristics of the military world. First and most obvious is the military emphasis upon command, the quintessence of the authoritarian approach to organization. This means, essentially, that subordinates must do as they are told, with no ifs, ands, or buts; the intent is to eliminate wherever possible any human intervention between the command (by the superior) and the execution (by the subordinate). It is easy to understand the military emphasis upon automation, given its potential for eliminating such intermediate steps… In the military outlook, an army of men behaving like machines is readily replaced by an army of machines. This command orientation neatly complements and powerfully reinforces the managerial obsession with control. If the business suit and the uniform are interchangeable in our day, so too are the minds that go with them.

As for the idea that the ostensibly "no-nonsense economic rationality of profit-seeking businessmen" is primarily what guides their adoption of new technologies, it's largely false. Noble presents fascinating evidence that businessmen aren't motivated mainly by the prospect of cost savings or higher profits in their adoption of automation. Rather, there are various cultural, social, and psychological pressures to get the newest cool thing, to follow the herd mentality and do what others are doing, to obey the supposedly objective momentum of technological progress even without calculating whether some new machine is profitable or might actually *increase* costs. It seems that rigorous studies of the cost effectiveness of new equipment—does it increase productivity or not?—are rarely conducted. Actually, "by means of creative accounting and sophisticated use of the tax laws, machines can mysteriously make money for their owners even if they don't work or are never used."

So the dominant ideology of the "inevitable laws of technological progress" and the hyper-rationality of businessmen's economic genius is nonsense. New equipment is frequently unnecessary or costlier than what was used before.

What about the vaunted discipline of the market? Doesn't this ensure that firms whose acquisitions of new equipment aren't profitable will succumb to the competition? No. For one thing, the state, which is perfectly willing to spend extravagantly and wastefully, is largely responsible for the advance of automation. "Not only has it subsidized extravagant developments that the market could not or refused to bear, but it also absorbed excessive costs and thereby kept afloat those competitors who would otherwise have sunk." When your primary customer is the government, you don't have to worry about market discipline.

Moreover, defense-related industries "are *expanding* along with the military automation programs, as more and more businesses rush to this state-supported sanctuary to escape the unpredictable vicissitudes of the market. At the same time, the military automation programs are today being matched by those of civilian agencies such as the Department of Commerce, the National Science Foundation, and others. All have now become the publicly funded pushers of automation madness, charting a course and promoting a pace that no self-adjusting market, had it existed, would ever have tolerated."

Economists tend to focus on "market logic" and ignore the influence of the state, so they write as if it's the market that is impelling the "inexorable," "automatic" adoption of automation. But, again, this is either false or highly oversimplified.

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Noble dedicates chapter five to an effective critique of market worship, together with the "quasi-religious faith in the automatic beneficence of technological progress" that tends to go along with it. He summarizes the quasi-religious philosophy as follows:

> It goes like this—people with money are offered incentives (the chance to make more money) to urge them to invest in a new, improved plant and equipment (so-called innovation). This innovation automatically yields increased productivity and, hence, lower costs and prices, which results in greater competitiveness. Finally, this enhanced competitiveness necessarily brings about what Adam Smith, the great eighteenth-century philosopher of capitalism, called the "wealth of nations": economic growth, jobs, cheap and plentiful commodities, in short, prosperity.

At every point, this religious faith is questionable.

For example: "To begin with, the assumption that rich people will invest in new means of production if given sufficient lucrative incentives presupposes that they would not do so voluntarily without such inducements. As such, it is itself a tacit recognition of the inadequacy of the market as a stimulus to development." What if it isn't lucrative to invest in new means of production, new factories or businesses or whatnot? Then capitalists won't invest in them. In recent decades, real estate and financial speculation have become more lucrative than productive investment. This is one reason for the deterioration of infrastructure, the decline of manufacturing, and the slow collapse of society. So much for the automatic beneficence of the market.

What about the link between innovation and productivity? "When investment does in fact generate innovation [as it usually *doesn't*], does such innovation necessarily yield greater productivity? The assumption here is that the return of profits to the investor will be matched by more and cheaper goods for society." He remarks that this assumption is "the cornerstone of apologies for capitalism, its central tenet of legitimation." But it has become highly dubious. Even the business press admits that there's a lot of investment in labor-saving technology designed to increase profits without necessarily adding to productive output.

In any case, with all the capital investment in recent decades and supposed advances in productivity, have you noticed any declines in prices? Hardly. If there have been gains from productivity, it seems that neither workers nor consumers have captured them. (You can check business headlines from recent years to confirm this.) So there goes another justification of capitalism.

Well, I'll end the summarizing here, even though I haven't discussed at all a very interesting chapter on the millennium-old (Christian) origins of the Western (and now global) "religion of technology" that has become hegemonic since the first industrial revolution. It's a rich book, despite its brevity, and worth reading, in its totality amounting to a brilliant critique of this technology-worship (as if technology itself, regardless of social or political context, holds out salvation). Elsewhere, Noble wrote a cutting critique of the automation and commodification of higher education. It seems that his life's mission, or one of them, was to deepen our understanding of the human meaning of technology and to critique and contextualize our

blind reverence for it. As an antediluvian traditionalist, I can only wish more writers would adopt the same calling.

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America's use of the atomic bomb on Japan

Years ago I posted some thoughts on America's use of the atomic bomb at the end of World War II. I happen to be reading parts of Gabriel Kolko's classic *The Politics of War*, and his investigations of the issue have gotten me interested in it again. Not least because I sometimes discuss it in university classes, so I should have a firmer knowledge of the history than I do. After reading some academic articles, I've realized that (some of) my earlier conclusions, based on Gar Alperovitz's book, were inadequate. I still think it was a terrible crime that illustrated the amorality of most political leaders, but my earlier judgments were a little simplistic.

Since most people are unaware of the scholarship and there's a colossal amount of ignorance out there about this controversial topic, here are a few comments...

Let's look at what Kolko says. He's arguably one of the greatest American historians of the twentieth century, so he's worth taking seriously. Unlike some of the revisionists (critical of Truman) who argue that the Japanese government was desperate for peace and on the verge of surrender by July 1945, he's aware of the profound divisions in that government between militarists who wanted to continue the war and liberals who wanted to end it as soon as possible (not unconditionally but with an assurance that the Emperor could remain on the throne). The Americans knew of these disagreements among Japanese officials, that a peace faction was contending against the intransigence of the army. In late May 1945, Joseph Grew, a high official in the State Department, "won the President's support for a proposal to offer the Japanese surrender terms permitting them to retain the Emperor if they chose, which in fact was the American position since the year before." But Truman, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Secretary of War Henry Stimson wouldn't yet authorize a public offer to the Japanese, since they thought (for some reason) the situation wasn't ripe for a public change in policy. It wasn't until the Potsdam Declaration on July 26 that an "offer" (or ultimatum) was made. Meanwhile, Truman decided not to warn Japan of the possibility of an atomic attack.

At Potsdam, the Americans were very eager to get from Stalin (to quote Truman) a "reaffirmation of Russia's entry into the war against Japan, a matter which our military chiefs were most anxious to clinch." The prospect of an American invasion of Japan was dreadful—although, as more recent scholarship has established, estimates given by Truman and others after the war that an invasion would have caused hundreds of thousands of American casualties or even fatalities were hardly discussed at all among officials at the time, nearly all of whom (including Truman, it seems) thought such figures "entirely too high." Around 25,000 fatalities was the usual estimate. Even General Curtis LeMay said in October 1945 that the atomic attacks had saved "thousands of lives"—and he had every reason to inflate the numbers for public consumption, so it's significant that he didn't. (See J. Samuel Walker's 2005 review of the scholarly literature for a discussion of casualty estimates.)

Anyway, during the Potsdam Conference the Americans heard news of the first successful test of the atomic bomb. Winston Churchill's reaction was characteristic of the man:

> Churchill was the first to realize the bomb had political and military significance... Field Marshal Alan Brooke thought the Prime Minister's infantile enthusiasm bordered on the dangerous: "He was already seeing himself capable of eliminating all the Russian centres of industry... He had at once painted a wonderful picture of himself as the sole possessor of these bombs and capable of dumping them where he wished." He tried to communicate the fantasy to his associates, but they resisted it, and he [unsuccessfully] urged Truman to dispense with the aid of the Russians in the war.

On July 24, Truman, Churchill, and the Combined Chiefs of Staff had a meeting wherein "they agreed that the military situation still necessitated an invasion of Japan, requiring perhaps a million or more men. They did not expect the bomb to alter that fact." So there goes the conventional retrospective defense of American decision-making that it was *either* invasion *or* the atomic bomb, and the Americans dropped the bomb to make an invasion unnecessary. Truman himself used this justification in later years, but he was simply lying or had a faulty memory. As the judicious and unpartisan Samuel Walker writes in his 2005 article, "In the summer of 1945, the president and his chief advisers never weighed a decision between the bomb and an invasion as an either/or proposition. This was a postwar construct that followed the dichotomy drawn by Stimson, Truman, and other policymakers in their [later] explanations for using the bomb. During the last weeks of the war, they were keenly aware of alternatives to an invasion other than the bomb."

So actually, despite the meeting on July 24, American leaders were not at all certain that an invasion would be necessary (although they continued to plan for it). This is clear from Truman's diary entries, for example, and the statements of high-ranking army officials. They evidently hoped, for instance, that the staggering blow of Russia's entry into the war would help persuade the Japanese to surrender. On the other hand, General George Marshall, at least, thought that if it came to an invasion, six to nine atomic bombs should be used to support the American forces.

On July 24 "Truman sent instructions to the Air Force to drop the first bomb as soon as it was ready, and weather permitted, 'after about August 3rd,' and to deliver the rest on four target cities 'as soon as made ready.'" Kolko's judgment is that "the bomb was built to be dropped [and] no one ever had the slightest doubt America would use it." As General Leslie Groves later said, "As far as I was concerned, [Truman's] decision [to use the bomb] was one of noninterference—basically, a decision not to upset the existing plans."

The original draft of the Potsdam Declaration had a clause saying the Emperor could be retained, but Secretary of State Byrnes excised it because it might appear to be a retreat from unconditional surrender. The Joint Chiefs of Staff supported the revision, against Stimson and Grew, who thought retaining the clause might help strengthen the Emperor and liberals against the hard-line army. Of course, we can't know how the Japanese would have reacted to the Declaration if the clause had been retained. From later scholarship—contrary to the arguments of anti-Truman revisionists—it's highly unlikely they would have surrendered right away. But it might have, sooner or later, given the upper hand to the liberals in Japan's government who had already been reaching out, albeit awkwardly and tentatively, to "neutral" parties like the Russians to try to broker peace. Especially since the devastating naval blockade of Japan, the continuing destruction of the country's agricultural, industrial, and transportation resources, the diminishing morale among soldiers and civilians, etc. were exerting intense pressure on the government to end the war.

After the Declaration, Foreign Minister Togo, without real support from his divided government, continued to press the Russians to explore means of ending the war without unconditional surrender—overtures the Americans were aware of (because of code-breaking) but that they did nothing about, rightly or wrongly. So the war continued, and a few days later Hiroshima was bombed. Kolko sums up the whole affair by saying, "Mechanism [i.e., bureaucratic inertia] prevailed. No one seriously explored any of the options—neither Japanese surrender, nor delay, nor withholding the bomb." He continues:

> Any realistic assessment of the objective conditions of the Japanese during those weeks might have convinced a reasonable group of men that significant alternatives to prolonged war existed, but the Japanese leaders themselves were incapable of confronting their defeat and acting accordingly. For precisely the same reasons of mechanism and conservatism, which the Japanese in their own desperate way shared, the Americans decided to use the bomb as a known and now predictable factor of war, an economical means of destroying vast numbers of men, women, and children, soldiers and civilians. Well before August 1945 they had reduced this to a routine.
>
> The United States could have won the war without the Russians and without the atomic bomb.

The last statement is an unknowable counterfactual, but it is at least plausible, and echoes the conclusion of the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey of 1946. What is certain is that there was no moral agonizing over the decision to use the bomb, hardly even a doubt or a second thought. Stimson, for a while, didn't even want to issue any peace offer like the Potsdam Declaration until *after* the bombs had been dropped. Why should there be moral qualms when America had for months been firebombing dozens of Japanese cities and killing hundreds of thousands of civilians? They knew the bomb would be less destructive than all that.

It's true that the Americans wanted to end the war as soon as possible, and they obviously thought dropping atomic bombs might contribute to that. (On this point, most scholarship, including Kolko's, has concluded that Alperovitz is wrong to think the bomb was used *primarily* as a diplomatic weapon against the Soviets, to intimidate them.[1]) Even if few people thought an invasion of Japan would cost hundreds of thousands of casualties, and there was actually some doubt that an invasion would be necessary at all, the longer the war went on, the more Americans would die. (And, axiomatically, saving even a few thousand American lives was worth killing hundreds of thousands of Japanese.) But then: why not try harder, publicly or through "back channels," to make peace with Japan? Of course, the Japanese leadership was even more culpable for not surrendering months earlier and saving countless lives.

But in World War II, no one cared much about saving lives.

The first bomb was dropped on August 6. The historian Sadao Asada has a good article on Japan's decision-making in the following days. The military initially denied it was an atomic bomb, but Togo called an emergency cabinet meeting on August 7 at which he argued that, lest the U.S. keep dropping such bombs, Japan should accept the Potsdam terms with the condition that the emperor system remain in place. But the army wouldn't agree—it was adamant for a decisive battle on the homeland against an American invasion—so the meeting broke up. On the 8th Togo met with Emperor Hirohito to argue for surrender, and Hirohito, who was very disturbed by the Hiroshima bombing, wholly agreed. It was arranged that the Supreme War Council would meet the next day. Early on the 9th, just before the meeting, the Soviet Union declared war, which was another terrible shock, albeit not as unexpected as the atom bomb. But the army, concerned with "honor" and the like, was still resistant to surrender. In the middle of the meeting came yet a third staggering blow: the bombing of Nagasaki, which a local commander had ordered, having been authorized by Washington to do so. The U.S. hadn't even bothered to assess the impact of the first bomb or of the Soviets' declaration of war, and Asada (among many other scholars) concludes the Nagasaki bomb was unnecessary. Meanwhile, the army still refused to surrender! Another meeting later that day resulted in the same stalemate. Shortly before midnight a conference with Hirohito was convened at which the usual debates between the army and the peace faction were reenacted, with no breakthrough. So then, "in an act unprecedented in modern Japanese history, the prime minister stepped up to the emperor, bowed deeply, and submitted the matter for an imperial decision." Hirohito ordered surrender, and later on the 10th the conditional surrender was relayed to Washington through the Swiss and Swedish governments. (It was a considerable surprise to Washington, which had expected the war to last weeks or months longer.[2])

In later statements, high-level Japanese officials said the "psychological shock" of the Hiroshima bomb had aided their efforts to end the war—as had the Soviet declaration of war. It is hard to say which was more important, but Asada thinks the bomb was. For one thing, he argues it allowed the army fanatics to save face: they could say they were defeated by *superior science* rather than "spiritual weakness" or strategic errors. As Japan's chief cabinet secretary recalled later, "The atomic bomb was a golden

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[1] As Kolko says, by 1942 the Russians knew of the Manhattan Project and were trying to build their own bomb. "At no time did the Americans believe they could surprise the Russians with a weapon that would cause them to cower, and at every stage in their diplomacy the Russians acted with full knowledge that the United States was likely to be the first to have an atomic bomb." This isn't to say, however, that possession of the bomb was of *no* diplomatic importance, especially in the following years. See this other article by J. Samuel Walker.

[2] In fact, at first Truman rejected the surrender because it wasn't unconditional! Instead, the White House replied with an intentionally ambiguous statement that emboldened Japanese militarists once more, which required that Hirohito intervene on the side of peace again on the 14th. Meanwhile, despite the surrender, Truman had authorized the continuation of bombing raids on cities, though not the use of a third atomic bomb.

opportunity given by Heaven for Japan to end the war. There were those who said that the Japanese armed forces were not defeated. It was in science that Japan was defeated, so the military will not bring shame on themselves by surrendering." The bomb was a "clever pretext" for ending the war.

But surely it ultimately came down to Hirohito's decision, and he, while vacillating, had been inclined to end the war for months. Had he been a stronger person, he probably could have compelled the army to surrender weeks or months earlier.

As I indicated, the Strategic Bombing Survey of 1946 concluded that "in all probability" Japan would have surrendered before November 1, the day scheduled for an American invasion, "even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated," but some scholars have argued this conclusion was based on too little evidence. Who knows? When it comes to counterfactuals, all you can do is speculate. It does seem very likely, though, that at least *with* the Russian entry into war (and without the bombs), Japan would have surrendered before November.

What is clear is that the whole tragic and absurd episode of the last weeks of the war was, to quote Kolko, "testimony to the irrationality and profound immorality of all leaders and the triumph of unwavering mechanism in the war between Japan and the Allies." The scholarly literature on use of the bomb is full of incredibly detailed investigations of why it was dropped, what weight was given to various considerations, why available alternatives weren't seriously pursued, and so on, but surely there is something a little misguided about this whole endeavor. Political leaders, in brief, are not so *thoughtful*, not so concerned with morality or absolute consistency or the most efficient possible means of attaining carefully defined ends. They exist in an environment of overwhelming power and pressures to expand power, bureaucratic momentum, intra-bureaucratic turf wars, technological fetishism, intoxication with military technology because of its glorious *power* and use as a tool of intimidating others. Whatever political leaders say, their environment is *power for the sake of power*. "We have this great new weapon, we might as well use it!" It reminds me of Madeleine Albright's objections to Colin Powell's refusal to use the military in Bosnia in 1993: "What's the point of having this superb military that you're always talking about if we can't use it?!" Power is to be projected for its own sake. That's the only ethic of power. Leslie Groves, for example, who was mostly in charge of determining when and where to use the bomb, "was anxious to justify the effort and the expenditures of the Manhattan Project, and he avoided outlining alternatives to Truman that could change existing plans and frustrate his objectives. Thus the bomb fell more because of bureaucratic imperatives than because of carefully considered questions of national interest." (From the other article by Walker I linked to in a footnote.) And scholars who have written, in particular, about Truman's alleged pinpricks of conscience in later years are wasting their time. *Who cares* about Truman's conscience? He was a morally and intellectually puny man (racist, self-deceiving, authoritarian, obedient to capitalist class power, self-serving, morally unimaginative, intellectually incurious), a nonentity like most public officials.

The bomb was used for many reasons: it might help defeat the Japanese; it might help end the war before the Soviets had conquered much territory in East Asia; it might help save American lives; *and crucially*: it projected American power to both allies and enemies; enormous resources had been poured into its construction; powerful officials had always taken for granted that the bomb would be used; hardly anyone expressed any opposition to it; political leaders are moral cowards; etc. Were the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki horrific crimes? Of course. You need only a little moral common sense to see that. (Just read about the bombs' actual effects on the victims, if you can stomach such reading.) The Americans and, obviously, the Japanese could both have exerted more effort than they did at ending the war months earlier. Or, if they had cared about Japanese lives at all, the Americans could at least have bombed an exclusively military target or warned people to leave the area before the attack, as General Marshall futilely advocated. Even the sociopathic Curtis LeMay, in charge of the strategic bombing of Japan, admitted that he and the other American (and foreign) leaders were war criminals or would have been punished as such had they lost the war.

Nationalist habits of thought cause irrationality and moral imbecility, leading many people to think the atomic bombings (and the firebombing of Tokyo and other cities, also in Europe) were necessary and justified. They weren't.

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January, 2024

Henry Plotkin's article "The Central Problem of Cognitive Science: The Rationalist–Empiricist Divide" (2008) is useful. It notes that the classical empiricists (Locke, Hume, etc.) didn't deny innate psychological processes and structures, such as a capacity for forming associations based on particular features of our perceptions; they only denied innate representational knowledge of the world. This is what empiricists continue to deny, and what rationalists, like Konrad Lorenz, Jerry Fodor, and Chomsky, affirm. Lorenz made an important contribution in 1965 when he noted that learning—an individual's learning about the world as he develops from infancy—is almost always adaptive in outcome. 'Adaptive' in the evolutionary sense. Thus, learning as an adaptation (to the environment) must itself be innate, an outcome of Darwinian evolution. That is, humans (and other animals) have innate constraints on learning, on what will be learned and how it will be learned. "It is important to note," Plotkin writes, "that Lorenz was not claiming merely that the mechanisms underlying learning are innate. He was asserting that some representational knowledge is innate, because that is what points the learning mechanisms at the specific features of the world that must be learned." "…[T]he idea of evolved constraints on learning was original to him, and was a seminal contribution to cognitive science."

Empiricists (including in the twentieth century) had assumed that

> learning was a general process, the same process, caused by the same cognitive mechanisms in all learners, human and non-human, and that within each species, knowledge is gained by way of some single learning mechanism. Even Piagetians, working outside of the intellectually crippling confines of behaviorism, adopted a general process view. This is why Lorenz's 1965 insight was so revolutionary, and why constraints in animal learning received so much attention. It provided sound justification for the view that learning need not, indeed was unlikely to be, a general process; and that its specificity and difference in different species is the product of evolution.

The "new rationalism" was, of course, stimulated in large part by Chomsky's "poverty of the stimulus" argument, namely that "the output of some computational process, for example perception, contains more information than the proximal stimulus, the input, and hence that the increase in the information of the output must be coming from features of the computational mechanism itself." As Fodor wrote, such an argument shows that "sensory information alone underdetermines perceptual integrations" (i.e., perceptions). As I've often said, this seems obvious. In the case of language, for instance, the toddler hears nothing but a continuous stream of sounds; it doesn't *hear* syntax or words or sentences. It has to *impose* a structure on the sounds: they don't come with a syntactic structure right on the surface. Only if the child's brain were equipped with a special faculty for somehow detecting hidden grammatical structures—and also semantic units and complex phonological rules!—in unbroken streams of sound could it possibly figure out what's going on. Moreover, the grammar is so insanely complex that it, um, isn't easy to believe that toddlers are consciously deciphering it, figuring it out, and then creating a language on that basis. If a genius like Chomsky has spent his life deciphering syntax, I'm skeptical that two-year-olds can manage it. Their construction of a language has to be *unconscious*, determined by innate principles and processes that *automatically* linguistically parse the verbal sounds that are heard.

From the point of view of most academics, committed to irrationality, the problem with this Chomskyan hypothesis seems to be that it's too rational.

Meanwhile, Fodor's thesis of the modularity of mind became central to cognitive science. Plotkin implies that one needn't have an innatist interpretation of modularity, but the idea of mental modules does strike me as peculiarly compatible with the rationalist, innatist view.

Anyway, a large body of evidence has accumulated that infants only a few months old display knowledge relating to causality, intuitive physics, numerical competence, and so on. Theoretically, in their short life they could have learned all this, but it seems doubtful, given their restricted sensory systems, uncoordinated movements, inability to reason, and constant sleeping. The knowledge is innate. These 'knowledges' "are modern-day psychology's Kantian *a prioris*; the realization of Lorenz's learning constraints that direct the infant's attention to specific and constant features of the world."

Aside from these considerations of cognition and language, there is *affective* evidence. Why would infants automatically direct their attention to others' eyes and to direction of gaze? Why would they *point* in order to direct others' attention, if not because of an innate proto-understanding that other people have minds? In fact, I'd even add that the infantile sucking and grasping reflexes manifest a kind of representational knowledge of the world (encoded in genes), viz. that nipples exist and provide sustenance and that there are graspable objects in the world.

Plotkin sympathetically presents the arguments of recent empiricists who are aware of things like innate attentional biases but still deny innate representational knowledge. He then makes a good counter-point:

> It remains the case that there is a contradiction, a deeply serious contradiction, between a denial of representational nativism on the one hand, and an acceptance of innate attentional biases or innate differential weightings within networks on the other. It is this: How can some feature of a cognitive system which biases attention, or differentially weights input, be considered as anything other than a form of representation of some aspect of the world? If human infants are predisposed to attend to faces rather than to elbows, and if that predisposition takes the form of attending differentially to a particular configuration of horizontal lines which occur regularly within the neonates' highly limited visual space, then that configuration is a specific aspect, a *representation*, albeit a highly reduced and fragmentary representation, of something in the world of infants, viz. the faces of its caretakers.

Frankly, I'm convinced that empiricism is *massively wrong*. That is, the mind is absolutely saturated with and determined by innate "knowledge," innate cognitive and emotional and aesthetic structures, principles, rules, constraints, ideas, instincts, expectations, intuitions, operations. Over millions of years of organisms' interactions with the environment, this inconceivably rich innate endowment—knowledge and means of getting around in the world—has accumulated. Plato really was right, in a sense: the foundation of an individual's knowledge comes from previous lives. Millions of previous generations.

It's awe-inspiring to think of the unbroken chain of life stretching back billions of years, in which I am yet one more link, link #5,000,000,000,000. On one end is a bacterium, or rather a strand of RNA; on the other end is Chris Wright. (Well, now Aidan Yusipov.)

Stephen Laurence and Eric Margolis's long, comprehensive paper "The Poverty of the Stimulus Argument" (2001) decimates the empiricist criticisms and shows that the argument is overwhelmingly, inescapably plausible. Aside from the authors' massive evidence for the total impossibility of a relatively blank empiricist mind's acquisition of language—there are just too many hurdles, too many ways to get one's guesses about the right grammar wrong—secondary considerations are compelling. For instance, why is it that virtually all children acquire language at the same rate and through the same stages? To quote Karen Stromswold's study, "The order in which these 15 children acquired complex constructions—questions, negative constructions, passives, datives, exceptional case marking constructions, embedded sentences, preposition-stranding constructions, causative constructions, small clause constructions, verb-particle constructions, and relative clause constructions—was extremely regular." Given an empiricist framework, why would these patterns appear? People approach problems differently, after all.

Ugh, empiricists:

> Empiricists sometimes write as if empiricism is the default position, the one that should be adopted in the study of language, all things being equal. The assumption is that a domain-specific mechanism of acquisition is plainly implausible. This is an odd position to maintain, however, especially in light of the approach that is widely taken with regard to the distinctive abilities in other species. These days there is little hostility to the idea that there are special mechanisms devoted to the acquisition of bee dance, bird song, nest building, web design, or mate selection (to name just a few). Quite the contrary; the best work in comparative psychology is widely recognized to overstep the restrictions that empiricism would impose. It's hard to believe that things should look differently just because the focus switches to Homo sapiens.

Early philosophical criticisms from the likes of Nelson Goodman and Hilary Putnam were silly. Goodman even said only his respect for nativism's (innatism's) advocates enabled him to take it at all seriously, and that it was "an intrinsically repugnant and incomprehensible theory." What a dumbass. Being steeped in a culture of empiricism and behaviorism had so thoroughly corrupted Goodman's mind that he couldn't even *understand* an opposing viewpoint! Putnam objected to the "vagueness" of nativism, whatever that means. Laurence and Margolis have no trouble dispatching the various early criticisms, and they don't find it too difficult to refute later criticisms either.

Henry Plotkin's *Evolutionary Thought in Psychology: A Brief History* (2004) is pretty good. I've sometimes wondered how behaviorism was able to dominate for so long, given its intellectual poverty, but if one knows a bit of history it isn't that mysterious. For one thing, its emergence in the early twentieth century dovetailed with the Progressive state's—and the business community's—interest in controlling the population through propaganda and other means. (See the Creel Committee, for example, and the corporate advertising campaigns of the 1920s.) Modern states are, in part, in the business of "behavior modification," and behaviorism can be a theoretical, or methodological, underpinning for that. Just as certain ideas of psychoanalysis can, which accounts for early propagandists' interest in that field.

Aside from this political and economic utility, which Plotkin doesn't mention, he observes that American society is famously "practical" and anti-theoretical—and behaviorism was especially popular in the U.S. It was far more interested in *prediction* and *results* than in *explanation*, and thus fit with "the American character."

But there were more respectable reasons for the rise and dominance of behaviorism. One of them, of course, is the Watsonian suspicion of introspective reports and internal mental states in general. This suspicion is somewhat understandable in light of the profusion of pseudo-scientific speculation at that time about instincts (thousands of possible instincts were proposed!), the nature of consciousness and the human mind, etc. The behaviorist impulse to purge all the nonsense, everything that wasn't strictly scientific, and pare psychology down to its essentials was healthy, even if it went way too far. Here's Plotkin on instinct theory and behaviorism:

> The behaviorists would have none of what was outrageously bad science, if it was science at all. The bases of instincts were not publicly observable. The entire notion of instinct ran counter to the empiricism of behaviorism which, as an idea whose time had come, simply steamrolled one of the sillier and more shameful episodes in psychology's history. The inevitable collapse of instinct theory added to the impetus of behaviorism… The central tenets of [behaviorist] psychology were that psychology as science is based on what happens in muscles and other peripheral organs, and on how a few basic reflexes are elaborated by experience, either by conditioning or a history of reinforcement contingencies, to result in observable behavior.

Rationalism was largely purged from psychology, as was evolutionary theory. But even this wasn't wholly regressive, since at least it counteracted the influence of eugenics, which was grounded in Darwinian

notions (or rather vulgarizations of them). Emphasis on environmental factors as opposed to "nature" and heritability at least challenged the racism of eugenics.

This in fact is one reason Franz Boas founded cultural anthropology, which rejected all "biologism" and embraced social constructionism. For Boas, "culture is extragenetic, works identically in all social groups, results in differences in different social groups because of difference in history, and as a force in humans is far, far greater than that of biology." Boas was appalled by the popular racism of his day, so he went to the other extreme of total empiricism. This permitted an attitude more enlightened even than that of Bertrand Russell, who favored eugenics.

After some decades of "clearing the air" of all this noxiousness, biology, innatism, and evolutionary theory were able to reenter psychology, in the 1950s and 1960s. On one hand there was the Cognitive Revolution, stimulated partly by computer science; on the other hand there emerged sociobiology. (To be fair, in Europe the Gestalt school had arisen in the meantime, but that had nothing to do with evolutionary theory.)

The negative achievement of behaviorism reminds me of the negative achievement of postmodernism, which ridiculed and tried to "deconstruct" all the grand theorizations of Marxism-Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, structuralism, Althusser, and other dense left-wing theoretical debates, instead embracing a kind of empiricism, a theoretically nugatory analysis of discursive appearances, fragmented cultures, hybrid identities, simulacra and pop cultures. Like behaviorism, in its anti-theoretical and "particularistic" stances (notwithstanding the "theory" pretensions of many postmodernists), it went too far. Historical materialism, for instance, is essential, not some grand narrative that has to be discarded.

I had never encountered the concepts of the Baldwin effect or of C. H. Waddington's genetic assimilation, which seem like interesting additions to evolutionary theory but aren't easy to fully grasp. If I have time, maybe I'll read another book on epigenetics.

The evidence of constrained learning in non-human animals is interesting, not least because it tends to refute empiricism. For example, it turns out that rats find it easier to associate taste and smell stimuli with the stimulus of nausea than with electrical shock. Likewise, Plotkin mentions "the acquisition of song in song-birds which is powerfully constrained towards the learning of species-specific song; humming-birds able to acquire certain strategies that fit well with their natural foraging behavior; and sex-differences in spatial learning ability in different species of vole which matches their reproductive strategies." Language learning in humans is surely another example, an even more compelling one (because of the complexity of language, which "general learning processes" can't possibly accommodate).

By the way, insofar as all this is determined by evolution, "evolutionary psychology" is obviously, in principle, a valid discipline. Notwithstanding the criticisms leftists have made of it (many of which are justified).

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My not having written anything about Israel's genocide of Palestinians doesn't mean I haven't been thinking about it constantly. The videos on Twitter have been almost unbearable to watch. I had no respect for Biden previously, but I didn't fully understand what a monster he is, a sociopath happy to enable and contribute to a literal genocide. And it's been striking to see legions of liberals and conservatives reveal themselves as old-fashioned racists happy to countenance genocide. No wonder the Holocaust was able to happen! Once again, the establishment media is happily complicit in the most barbarous crimes imaginable: the BBC, for example, refused to air South Africa's devastating case against Israel before the International Court of Justice but aired Israel's rebuttal. Norman Finkelstein—whom, by the way, I've had some entertaining long conversations with when I went down to his apartment in Brooklyn—calls Israel the SS: the Satanic State. And Joe Biden is now and forevermore to be known as Genocide Joe.

Reading Rashid Khalidi's excellent *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance, 1917–2017* has given me a deeper historical understanding. Though I already knew the basic history and its very simple moral dimensions. Israel evidently thinks it's *finally* on the verge of achieving the long-sought goal of Zionism, to purge all of Palestine of its indigenous

inhabitants. Slaughter and expel the Gazans so as to turn that strip of land into a tourist mecca, and continue settling the West Bank and killing its inhabitants until they're confined entirely to desert wastelands. Because of the unfathomably evil U.S. empire, it might get its wish. But the entire world now loathes it, so the near-achievement of its dreams has come at quite a cost.

One very worrisome wild card is Israel's possession of nuclear weapons. When a state is run by psychopathic genocidal maniacs who feel like a tiger backed into a corner, and when they have access to "weapons of mass destruction" (unlike Saddam Hussein), the future of the species is at risk.

To be fair, the species probably has no future anyway. And maybe it doesn't deserve to.

Trump will likely win the 2024 election because people think Biden sucks and he's too egomaniacal to step aside. And it's downhill from there. Two generations of abjectly mediocre political leadership have left the U.S. a basketcase of a country at the mercy of jackals and vultures.

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As has been the case for the last 25 years, my life continues to feel meaningless unless I'm writing something. Too bad nothing seems worth writing about and in any case I feel my talents waning! But I can still comment on articles and books, at least. In fact, I can console myself with the thought that these short commentaries are of some value, since the one talent I still have is that I'm consistently rational and, unlike nearly everyone, almost always right.

I know contemporary philosophy is of interest to very few people, doubtless including you, the reader, but I find it worth occasionally critiquing anyway. And maybe there's value in quoting it sometimes and thereby immortalizing it in my journal, as an expression of a certain type of society that future readers can laugh at. For example, consider the respected Joseph Rouse's 1991 paper "The Dynamics of Power and Knowledge in Science." It's fashionably Foucauldian, postmodernist, and pragmatist, and therefore forgettable. But interesting as a symptom. We have the predictable denial that knowledge and power are "analytically distinct domains" and the predictable affirmation that knowledge/power is "temporally, socially, and spatially dispersed," such that knowledge is about more than beliefs or propositions and power is about more than causally influencing the acts of others. I'm surprised the paper doesn't have the (by now) beloved word "imbricated." It turns out that the things that mediate power (and its resistance) include not only the social world, as we're accustomed to thinking, but also "tools, processes, practices, and things worked with and upon." Um, yes, I'd have to agree with that. Rouse's book *Knowledge and Power: Toward a Political Philosophy of Science* (1987) apparently "initiated [the] rethinking [of the distinction between the natural and the social] by extending 'power' beyond narrowly 'social' interactions to include transformations of the configuration of practices and things within which actions are intelligible." So, in other words, Rouse has taught us that the concept of power can involve acting on nature and physical things, not only people. Wow! That wouldn't have occurred to me!

But the insights keep coming. Scientific knowledge, too, can be modeled on "this reinterpretation of power as dynamic and heterogeneous. Knowledge is then not something possessed and exchanged, but a process mediated by heterogeneous and contested alignments." What a stroke of genius! "For example, 'genes' emerge as objects of possible discourse through accumulations of capabilities and insights in specific contexts…" In general, "strategic alignments [i.e., "gradual transformations, reproductions, and extensions of localized knowledges"] are constitutive of knowledge. Thus, a statement, skill, or model does not count as knowledge in isolation or instantaneously. Rather, their epistemic standing depends upon relations to many other practices and capabilities, and especially upon how these relations are reproduced, transformed, and extended." It then gets *really* deep:

> Knowledge therefore has a more complex temporality than do operant or abiding warranted beliefs. To take something as knowledge is to project it as a resource for ongoing activity, whether in further research or in various "applications." Knowledge in this sense *circulates*, and its points of articulation, or even collection and assessment, are caught up

> in its circulation… Scientific work continually reorganizes what is known as a resource for further investigation.

The intellectual pyrotechnics are dazzling.

Knowledge isn't a distinct *object* domain. Instead, to understand it dynamically "in all its local proliferation and heterogeneity invokes considerations 'properly' belonging to other domains were the world present in such discrete bundles." Power and knowledge, you see, overlap in many ways! They can't be strictly separated from each other. By the way, Rouse isn't just talking about "background knowledge." "Instead," he says, "I take the 'field' within which scientific claims acquire significance and justification to include more than a web of belief: skills and techniques, instruments and material systems…resource availability…institutional structures, relevance to other social practices or political concerns, and much more." Thus, "epistemic and sociopolitical alignments intertwine."

There's no need to go on. Even apart from the unoriginality of all this and the silliness of pretending that any of it is intellectually substantive is the deeper sterility of the project, the quintessentially "philosophical" project of trying to clarify meanings of particular concepts. What is power, what is knowledge? They are *actually* such and such, they have all these hidden dimensions and overlap in so many ways! Fine, whatever. Concepts like these, like *most* concepts, are rather vague and can be fleshed out and extended as you like. By analyzing them you're really only analyzing how we use certain words or, if you're trying to extend their meanings, how we should use them or what's implicit in our usage of them. It's mostly a linguistic exercise—and a sociologically descriptive one, in this case (stating truisms about scientific practice and how it involves 'extra-epistemic' processes)—not an interesting philosophical one. "Knowledge," especially scientific production of knowledge, implicates a whole lot of phenomena, that's true. But why is that interesting? It doesn't imply, for instance, that science isn't getting closer and closer to understanding the essence of a mind-independent world, or that knowledge is somehow all relative or merely expressive of power relations, or that there is no objective truth about the world.

Let's look at a representative work from a more famous writer: Bruno Latour. Here's a paper entitled "On actor-network theory: A few clarifications" (1996). Oh the profundities that await us:

> [Actor-network theory, or ANT] was devised as a reaction to the often too global concepts like those of institutions, organizations, states and nations, adding to them a more realistic and smaller set of associations. Although ANT shares this distrust for such vague all-encompassing sociological terms, it also aims at describing the very nature of societies. But to do so it does not limit itself to human individual actors, but extends the word actor—or actant—to *non-human, non-individual* entities…
>
> …As a first approximation, ANT claims that modern societies cannot be described without recognizing them as having a fibrous, thread-like, wiry, stringy, ropy, capillary character that is never captured by the notions of levels, layers, territories, spheres, categories, structures, systems. It aims at explaining the *effects* accounted for by those traditional words without having to buy the ontology, topology and politics that go with them. ANT has been developed by students of science and technology, and its claim is that it is utterly impossible to understand what holds society together without reinjecting in its fabric the facts manufactured by natural and social sciences and the artefacts designed by engineers. As a second approximation, ANT is thus the claim that the only way to achieve this reinjection of things into our understanding of social fabrics is through a network-like ontology and social theory.
>
> …This is the most counterintuitive aspect of ANT. Literally there is nothing but networks, there is nothing in between them, or, to use a metaphor from the history of physics, there is no aether in which networks should be immersed…
>
> [There are advantages of thinking in terms of networks. For example, we can avoid old binary oppositions in social theory like far/close, inside/outside, and small-scale/large-scale. On the latter:] the notion of network allows us to dissolve the micro-macro

> distinction that has plagued social theory from its inception. The whole metaphor of scales going from the individual to the nation state, through family, extended kin, groups, institutions etc. is replaced by a metaphor of connections. A network is never *bigger* than another one, it is simply *longer* or *more intensely* connected. The small-scale/large-scale model has three features which have proven devastating for social theory: it is tied to an order relation that goes from top to bottom or from bottom to top—as if society really had a top and a bottom; it implies that an element "b" being macro-scale is of a different nature and should thus be studied differently from an element "a" which is micro-scale; it is utterly unable to follow how an element goes from being individual to collective and back… [Etc., etc., for many more pages.]

There are people who take this garbage seriously!

Somehow it's taken as a substantive question whether we should think of society in terms of *networks* or in terms of *structures* and *institutions*. Imbeciles, these are metaphors. You can choose whatever metaphors you like; the real intellectual work isn't done by the metaphor but by your specific explanations of events. Sure, society consists of networks, if you like. And yes, we can also say these networks incorporate physical objects and other non-human things. You can have whatever "social ontology" you like: society consists of people or networks or structures or institutions or relations or whatever. Debates about social ontology are empty! Empty and comical. Ontological questions are meaningful when they pertain to the physical world, but regarding the social world it's just a matter of which way of talking about it you prefer. The intellectual substance enters when you start discussing, for example, rival economic theories/explanations, or the causes of particular historical events, or the reasons for mass immiseration, and so on. Postmodern "theory," which tries so hard to be profound, ends up as less than superficial.

Even when Marx wrote "Society does not consist of individuals but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand," it wasn't a particularly substantive statement. It was mostly just an indication that he was going to approach society "as a whole" instead of focusing on atomized and de-historicized individuals. On the other hand, if you want to include in "social ontology" the broad question of historical causation, of materialism vs. idealism, well then the debates get more substantive—albeit dumb, because it doesn't take genius to see that control over material resources is a matter of greater social consequence than what ideas people happen to believe (or *say* they believe, perhaps deceiving themselves about their real attitudes).

Ugh, forget about the commentating on mediocrities. Let's turn to something more rewarding. I think I, for some reason, hadn't previously read H. A. Prichard's classic paper "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" (1912). Prichard's writing gets straight to the point, and I love his breezy ambitiousness. Here's the first paragraph:

> Probably to most students of Moral Philosophy there comes a time when they feel a vague sense of dissatisfaction with the whole subject. And the sense of dissatisfaction tends to grow rather than to diminish. It is not so much that the positions, and still more the arguments, of particular thinkers seem unconvincing, though this is true. It is rather that the aim of the subject becomes increasingly obscure. "What," it is asked, "are we really going to learn by Moral Philosophy?" "What are books on Moral Philosophy really trying to show, and when their aim is clear, why are they so unconvincing and artificial?" And again: "Why is it so difficult to substitute anything better?" Personally, I have been led by growing dissatisfaction of this kind to wonder whether the reason may not be that the subject, at any rate as usually understood, consists in the attempt to answer an improper question. And in this article, I shall venture to contend that the existence of the whole subject, as usually understood, rests on a mistake, and on a mistake parallel to that on which rests, as I think, the subject usually called the Theory of Knowledge.

You have my attention, sir!

As he takes it, moral philosophy exists to answer the question "*Why be moral?* Why can't I just do what I want?" And there's a parallel here with the theory of knowledge. "Just as we try to find a proof, based on the general consideration of action and of human life, that we ought to act in the ways usually called moral, so we, like Descartes, propose by a process of reflexion on our thinking to find a test of knowledge, i.e. a principle by applying which we can show that a certain condition of mind was really knowledge, a condition which *ex hypothesi* existed independently of the process of reflexion."

As you may know from my old reflections on the subject, I think we never have knowledge in the strictest possible sense. That would entail absolute certainty, the absolute absence of doubt: but there can always be doubt inasmuch as we can always conceive the possibility that we're massively deceived in some inexplicable way. It's always possible to question your beliefs, even the ones that seem indubitable, like my belief that there is a patch of white in my field of vision right now. Even if the possibility scarcely makes sense at all, it *might* be that I'm somehow, in some transcendent and true metaphysical world, bizarrely deceived.

But setting aside this weird possibility and these weird philosophical doubts, I'd have to agree with a number of philosophers that I do indeed have *knowledge* of what is immediately present to me (my perceptual experiences). Anything beyond that is more tenuous as knowledge, although the probability of some belief's truth might still be very high (taking into consideration all relevant factors).

On the old Platonic question of why we should be moral, I agree with Hume and my past self—*contra* philosophers like Philippa Foot (and Plato, Kant, and many others)—that, if acting immorally advances your own interests and it doesn't sting your conscience, it's perfectly rational to act immorally. If you don't care whether people would judge you as lacking integrity or being a bad person, then fine, go do immoral things. For, ultimately, that really is the most compelling reason to act well: you want to think of yourself as a good person, and you want others to think of you that way (and you don't like the thought that *if they knew* about your bad actions, they'd likely consider you a bad person). But some of us don't care much, and there isn't a lot you can say to change their minds. If they think they'll get away with the bad behavior and it'll be good for them and that's all they care about, no sustained philosophical argument can "prove" to them they should act differently (e.g., that they're being irrational if they don't).

Of course, there are other reasons too. If you care about people, you should act morally. Likewise if you want to make the world a better place, or if you want to model behavior for your children, and so on. Also—getting back to reasons that pertain to your own self-interest—it's more *dignified* to act well than to act badly, so that should matter to you if you care about having dignity. To have self-control, to present yourself (even to yourself) in the best possible light, is to be dignified. But there is no "categorical imperative" to be moral, only "hypothetical imperatives."

Maybe you think judgments of personal badness or goodness are meaningless, mere expressions of the judger's attitude and not somehow "objectively true." And so why should you care what others happen to think about you or what they would think if they knew the immoral things you'd done? Why should you care about morality itself, since it's just a collection of values people happen to have? You have different values, so screw them! We're all free to have whatever values we want, and to make rather arbitrary judgments about others' badness for not adhering to *our* values. Others think you're bad for being willing to lie all the time, but you think they're bad for being so brainwashed as to believe that always telling the truth is important and good. Or for not acknowledging that *they* often lie too, or whatever. Well sure, your skeptical, not to say nihilistic, beliefs about the nature of morality and values may even be true. (I think they are, in fact.) But it'll still be the case that society has a generally agreed-upon morality according to which people will judge you as "bad" or "immoral" for doing certain things, and you'll have to live with their judgments, their ostracism of you, or your knowledge that if they knew about your acts, nearly everyone would consider you despicable. Sometimes, of course, society's moral judgments are themselves immoral, and the lone dissenter is the moral and courageous one. But in that case he at least has the comfort of truly believing himself to be in the right—based on fundamental moral precepts that *others* acknowledge too (only misapplying them or disregarding them, as you think, in this instance)! But the situation is different if you're just someone who wants to act on his own inclinations, selfishly, casually rejecting moral

rules when they're inconvenient, and then comforting yourself with the thought that value systems are, at bottom, pretty arbitrary—"we humans happen to value kindness, mutual respect, and compassion, but we could have been constituted differently, so who really cares! Our moral judgments are merely manifestations of how our minds, through evolution, happen to have been constituted!" For this person, it will be difficult to be fully at peace with himself, fully confident of his worth—because, after all, as a human, it's probable that even he can't totally avoid the perception that there is something good and valid about conventional morality. So on some level even he will have the suspicion that he's not a "good person." And that will bother him, perhaps even, unconsciously, make him very unhappy. So then we come back to the point that, for these reasons, it's rational for him to be moral.

But again, if he's a sociopath or a psychopath and genuinely doesn't care, there is no other compelling argument we can give. And philosophers should stop looking for one.

An intuitionist like Prichard might reply to the questions "Why should I tell the truth? Why should I repay my debts? Why should I treat people as they'd like to be treated?" by saying "It's just self-evident that these are the right ways to act! You know, intuitively, that they're right. You can't escape that intuition, much as you try. So your question is misguided. You should act in these ways because they're self-evidently right." Upon reflection, his interlocutor might have to admit he does share those intuitions. But he could retort, "Saying they're right, or even pointing out that they strike *me* as obviously right, isn't a very compelling argument. I don't want to be bound by intuitions I happen to have for whatever reason. My question is exactly *what justifies* those intuitions, and why I should abide by them. And here you're silent." A non-intuitionist can point to all sorts of other considerations, such as that a common morality holds society together and therefore should be followed, but if a determined skeptic truly doesn't care about any of your reasons, it won't be irrational for him to act immorally. He isn't doing anything "contrary to reason" or "contrary to his nature" or whatnot.

Anyway, on a somewhat different topic, I want to note, again, that some of the puzzles philosophers get themselves into are a result of taking words too seriously or too literally or applying them in contexts that go beyond their original meaning. For instance, philosophers will sometimes inquire, and expound at great length, about the nature of "obligation" (or "normativity," etc). What does it mean for something to be an obligation? Why is it an obligation? Why is *not lying* an obligation? It makes more obvious sense to say that repaying a debt or keeping a promise is an obligation, because you've already committed yourself to it. Since you bound your future self to act a certain way, and you told someone you would, you're "obliged" to act that way. But, in the absence of a prior commitment like this, why am I obliged not to lie, not to kill, not to steal? What is the "meaning" of the obligation here? To whom is it an obligation? To humanity in the abstract, to myself, to all particular people? And why should I have obligations to these people, especially if they have no personal connection to me or haven't done anything for me that deserves my gratitude and reciprocation?

Well, in fact, I'd say the strict notion of obligation isn't appropriate to a lot of moral contexts. No wonder we find it mysterious, then! Centuries ago, we used to think of telling the truth and whatnot as *virtues*, not necessarily "obligatory duties." The Greeks talked of virtues, as did medieval moralists (as Stanley Cunningham notes in "Does 'Does Moral Philosophy Rest Upon a Mistake?' Make an Even Greater Mistake?" (1970)). Virtues are *good* but not as binding as obligations. You *should* tell the truth—because that shows respect for others, it's how you would want to be treated, it justifies people thinking of you as a good person—but it isn't precisely an obligation you mysteriously have to everyone. Nor do you have an "obligation" not to kill. Why would you have an obligation not to kill someone who had done you wrong? It's *good* not to kill him, and you could even use the word 'right'—the *right* thing is not to kill him, because killing is wrong, for whatever reasons you want to give (our common humanity, life is precious, you're inflicting pain on his loved ones, the Golden Rule, etc.). But you don't have a literal *duty* to him not to kill him. A duty to yourself, maybe? Are you betraying or contradicting yourself in some way by killing or stealing or lying, as some philosophers, notably Kant, have claimed? This argumentative gambit reeks of artificiality, of desperation to justify continued use of words like obligation and duty. It's best just to admit that we talk about moral situations in various ways, using different words with slightly different meanings and connotations, but that the salient meaning of them all is merely *don't do that, it's bad, i.e. people*

disapprove of it (or *do that, it's good, people highly value it*). Attempts to precisify it all, to make fine conceptual distinctions, to flesh out or invent "deeper" meanings of words that are casually used in different contexts, are misguided. Moral language exists to enable people to get along with each other. That's the extent of its meaning. Don't look for anything deeper than that. If you do, if you take too literally the subtle differences in conceptual valences of different words (like between right and good) and probe them too obsessively, you're just being tricked by accidents of language and etymology.

"What is the Good? What does it mean for something to be right vs. good? How do duties differ from virtues? What does it mean to say someone is a virtuous person? How can I have duties to distant people I don't know? Why should I act morally?" Ugh, stop with all this! The "naturalistic" analysis is [almost] always best. Just follow the Golden Rule, that's the point of it all. Act in ways that are plausibly implied by the Golden Rule. But if you can feel good about yourself even without acting morally, fine, go ahead. There's no profound, non-obvious argument to convince you to be moral.

–The dirty little secret of philosophy is that most of the "perennial questions" are, ultimately, pretty easily answered. (The ones that aren't, on the other hand, are most often pretty obviously unanswerable, or at least permanently shrouded in mystery and paradox.) And some of them, like "Why should I be moral?", are kind of juvenile. Searching for a knock-down argument where there isn't one. Life is full of ambiguity and difficult decisions. Becoming an adult means tolerating that ambiguity and ceasing to look for certainty.

[See the thoughts in the entry from April, below.]

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I recently learned that one of the ways in which I'm unusual is that I have aphantasia. I mean, I always knew I can't really visualize things—although I may have been a little better at it when I was young—but I didn't know until recently that it's a "condition," and it's rare. The idea of being able to call images to mind at will seems incredible to me; I always see nothing but black when I close my eyes. I thought everyone did! I suspect my condition is bound up with my other odd, and sometimes inconvenient, traits, like my terrible memory. And maybe other cognitive abilities and disabilities.

February

Almost everything seems frivolous when radical evil rules the world and is on the verge of destroying an immense proportion of life on Earth. Not to mention exterminating a people in full view of everyone, every government and every national population everywhere. One person—Genocide Joe—could end it, but he insists on its continuing month after month, even if it will cost him his reelection. Not even self-interest can stop him from providing the means for the genocide, so committed is he to the exterminationist settler colonial project. Not even the prospect of outright neofascists taking over his government can stop him from passionately supporting genocidal neofascists in Israel. Almost everything seems frivolous except preventing Evil like this from seizing power, or casting it out once it's seized power.

But the 2024 choice is between Genocide Joe and Nihilist Trump. It's enough to plunge the most steely stoic into despair.

Trump will win, fascists will take over, and civilization's days will be numbered. This century, either nuclear war or ecological destruction (largely but not entirely from global warming) will likely bring organized society to a close. The Holocene will definitively end and the ensuing thousands of years will be a time of chaos. Humanity might be driven extinct. It would be sad, but at least it would give the planet a chance to recover from the damage this disastrous species had done to it. All the glorious achievements of the culture creators, the Newtons and Beethovens, and the moral heroes, the millions of good people struggling to elevate humanity, will have proven no match for the profound evil of the Bidens and Trumps, the businessmen and politicians.

In the end, it seems that human DNA was simply too prolific of moral mediocrity for the species to flourish for very long. The Chomskys were much too rare, the mediocrities much too common. Higher

intelligence was an interesting experiment, but, because of the suffering it entails, it probably shouldn't be attempted again. With the demise of the hominid line, it quite possibly won't be.

*

Aidan is a delightful little guy, although he's definitely in his terrible twos. He's quite a cutie, with his dimples and his adorable voice and his pronunciations of words (and made-up words). Helicopter is habucabu; race car is wiki car (or rather 'cah'); water is wadoo; airplanes and helicopters are kabak, for some reason (he's called them kabak for many months); nutter-butter cookies are butterfly; star is giggle-star (from "Twinkle, twinkle, little star"). He *loves* cars and wheels, bulldozers and excavators, motorcycles and firetrucks. (A point against feminists, empiricists, and social constructionists, since he spontaneously loved these things as soon as he had such toys at only a few months old.) He has a shy personality, like his parents; hopefully as he gets older his cuteness will compensate for that. I'd say I'm a good father, being infinitely patient and caring and enthusiastic with him. He seems to like music, though it's too early to tell if that will amount to anything.

*

"Without it no music: cognition, biology and evolution of musicality" (2015) by Henkjan Honing et al. A comment on the empiricism of much scholarship:

> Until relatively recently, most scholars were wary of the notion that music could have a biological basis: "There is no reason to believe there is a universally shared, innate basis for music perception. Although the possible survival value of music has often been speculated about, music has not been around long enough to have shaped perceptual mechanisms over thousands of generations. Clearly, music is a cultural artifact, and knowledge about it must be acquired…" This position is typical of scholarly thought in musicology over the last 50 years, with music viewed as a cultural product with no evolutionary history and no biological constraints on its manifestation.

Fortunately, the times they are a-changing, and the field of biomusicology is more sophisticated than this earlier position.

It's very possible, after all, that music has been around for hundreds of thousands of years and therefore has been able to "shape perceptual mechanisms." Or, rather, music itself hasn't shaped perceptual and cognitive changes but has been shaped by them. But it's a mystery why and how these changes have happened, these changes that manifestly *have* established a biological basis for musical perception. For humans do "share a predisposition for music, especially when the focus is perception rather than production. To recognize a melody and move to (or perceive) the beat of music are trivial skills for most humans and, at the same time, fundamental to our musicality. Even infants and young children are sensitive to a number of musical features that are common across cultures."

I still find it hard to comprehend the existence of universally shared traits across a species. How on earth can emergent traits spread across a large population? One would think the behavior would have to emerge as a genetic modification in one individual, and then it would spread among his or her descendants. But how is it even mathematically possible for a trait that begins in this way to colonize an entire group of thousands or millions of individuals in the following generations? If the trait is obviously or overwhelmingly adaptive, maybe I can understand it; but traits like music perception or numeracy are hardly adaptive. So why would they spread to everyone? They could be "spandrels," of course, byproducts of other adaptations. But music perception and production are pretty damned complex sets of skills, so it remains a puzzle that they evolved at all.

Probably earlier hominids had primitive music perception, like they enjoyed stamping their feet or hitting a hollow log in a repetitive rhythm. They likely even vocalized while doing so, shouting in different

pitches. Actually, auditory perception of *tones*, sounds that contain integer harmonics, must go back millions of years. As W. Tecumseh Fitch says in his article "On the Biology and Evolution of Music" (2006), "the natural sounds that have harmonic structure are essentially limited to vocalizations created by animals—the main sounds of biological interest for most species. Even the basic proclivity of the auditory system to seek tonality—its 'desperate search for pitch'—may thus represent an ancient adaptation to the characteristics of the voice, whose evolution began with the first terrestrial vertebrates (or before)."

So the earliest rudiments of what later flowered as human musical perception go back a very long time. Perceptual adaptation to the relatively tonal nature of the *voice* must have advanced, becoming more refined and discriminating, as hominid vocal ranges and refinements grew and cognitive structures evolved. Eventually this co-evolution of sensorimotor, perceptual, and cognitive abilities made possible human receptivity to full tonality, the system of pitches and harmonics and so on that's grounded in the physics of sound. Tonality was sort of implicit in the nature of the human voice, and so from attunement to the voice came, gradually, with greater sophistication of cognition, attunement to musical tonality. Or so it seems to me. All this must have been bound up with the emergence of numeracy (which was only implicit for a long time, until people started counting and creating number systems)—for recognition of rhythm and a beat, the repetitive pulse of equal intervals, strikes me as bound up with recognition of equal numerical divisions.[1] And numeracy is quite possibly—as Chomsky has suggested—an offshoot of the language faculty, an abstraction from it, since both language and numbers are recursive systems that yield discrete infinity. So then music, too, if it presupposes the capacity for open-ended counting, would be in part an offshoot of the language capacity. Not because both music and language can be forms of communication but because of the cognitive structures implicit in both faculties.[2]

As for why humans *enjoy* music, there are doubtless many reasons. There's the social character of musical production and audition, the enjoyment of shared experiences, shared creativity, and shared self-expression, together with the possibility of joyous movement (dancing) to the musical beat. Music is a kind of *play*, a creative and interactive exploration of sound engaged in for its own sake, because creative expression is intrinsically satisfying. There's also what Leibniz said: "Music is the pleasure the human mind experiences from counting without being aware it is counting." The enjoyment of sounds organized tonally must come, at least in part, from the mind's intrinsic enjoyment of certain physical proportions, ratios, and of the computational processing of these dynamic sequences of sound. All this unconscious brain activity is evidently "pleasurable" in itself. Meanwhile, the intellectual effort that we can devote to the production, study, and appreciation of music is another source of pleasure, for intellectual "play" is fun. But musical enjoyment of course has to do with appreciation of "beauty," and what *that* is, or how to understand it, is yet another mystery. So is the question of why and how music is so closely related to the emotions.

In addition, people enjoy the sheer experience of a repetitive beat, and of creating another beat or rhythm or musical forms on top of it. There's something hypnotic about a beat. I don't know why—I guess because it's predictable, it's regular, stable, highly ordered, inertial, full of momentum, also 'symmetrical.' The human mind finds comfort and enjoyment in repetitive rhythms, like the rhythm of the infant suckling a breast. You're "carried along" by rhythm.

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[1] [On rereading this, I'm reminded of Kant's idea that arithmetic corresponds to the inner sense of *time*, while geometry corresponds to the outer sense of *space*. And of course musical beats are intrinsically bound up with time, being divisions of it. So maybe the distinctively human perception of time, more advanced than that of other animals, is, in part, another outgrowth of the language faculty, at least if human cognition of number is. An interesting hypothesis! But sadly I see no way to test it. You might say it's easily falsified by the fact that people who can't talk surely perceive time as the rest of us do, but, as Chomsky says, the core of language isn't its externalization but some recursive capacity very deeply buried in the human mind.]

[2] In fact, like language, music would seem to be an instance of finite means (particularly the notes in the chromatic and diatonic scales) being used to produce an unlimited output, in this case of melodies, phrases, musical expressions, whatever. Would this count as "discrete infinity," like language and numbers? And could Chomsky's notion of Merge be applied at all usefully to music, in that units can combine to form new units, which themselves can combine into larger units? I'm thinking here of phrases and melodies. –Actually, upon further reading, I see that Ray Jackendoff and Fred Lerdahl came up with a "generative theory of tonal music" decades ago. It's certainly a suggestive theory.

Here's an interesting fact, which recalls what Plotkin said in his article I quoted: "How does the young bird, surrounded by songs of many different species, know which sounds to imitate? The answer…is that young birds have an innate template for their species-specific song: a proclivity to attend to and imitate certain types of song and not others. Deprived of sounds fitting this template, the bird will imitate whatever else is in the environment. But given songs of its own species the bird will unerringly imitate those, and for most species only those." Mind-boggling that nature has figured out how to do all this, all this "constrained learning" and everything else.

Anyway, I'm inclined to agree with Ray Jackendoff, in his article "Parallels and Nonparallels between Language and Music" (2009), that we should be "cautio[us] in drawing strong connections between language and music, both in the contemporary human brain and in their evolutionary roots." They're surely two very different faculties, albeit with some intriguing similarities. As he says, "language and music differ substantially in their rhythmic structure, in their use of pitch, in their 'meaning' (propositional versus affective), and in the form and function of their hierarchical structures." The vast architecture of tonality, fleshed out in monumental creations of Western classical music, is implicit in the music faculty and has little or nothing to do with language, which doesn't even need sound but can be expressed in sign. Language is conceptual; music isn't. But I might be right that music perception developed, as an odd byproduct, from perceptual and cognitive attention to the (relatively tonal) voice, as sensorimotor, perceptual, and cognitive systems grew more sophisticated over many thousands of years. And if music presupposes human cognition of number, which in turn is (perhaps) an offshoot of the language faculty, then in this respect, too, music would derive from the cognitive ramifications of language. Even though in their essences, music and language are quite different.

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For a long time it's seemed obvious to me that female faces on average look younger than male faces. It's hard to explain why, but they look softer, less "strong," less severe, more "open," like a child's. If this is really a natural tendency, it would help explain why men are frequently attracted to teenagers or even younger children, namely because their faces are somewhat feminine in their youthfulness. (And their bodies are feminine in their smallness.) Female facial youthfulness also makes sense given the youthfulness of female minds and personalities, their relative excitability, love of giggling, receptiveness, emotionalism (not a sexist prejudice but a truth), etc. The face tends to express what's inside. I, for example, have a youthful face, and I've always felt I have a rather youthful mind.

Scientific research supports these ideas. Like Daniel Fitousi's paper "How facial aging affects perceived gender" (2021):

> Generally, the results suggest that female faces are perceived as more masculine as they become older; and young faces (age 20 and 30) are judged as older as they become more masculine. Why do aging and gender interact? The answer is rooted in the perceptual structure of the faces themselves. Perception of facial gender and age rely on shape and texture cues… Facial aging is conveyed by morphological cues such as a) an increase in the size of the jaw, b) thinning of the lips, and c) an increase in the distance between the eyebrow and the eyes. Textural cues for aging particularly affect the skin: a) skin tone becomes darker, b) it has more wrinkles, c) its luminance contrast decreases, and d) its pigmentation becomes yellower. Many of these shape and texture cues also signal masculine features. Men have bigger jaws, their lips are thinner, and their eyebrows are closer to their eyes than females; moreover, they tend to have darker skin with lower contrast. The upshot is that many of the features that serve as cues for old age are also signs of masculinity…
>
> From an evolutionary standpoint, the current findings make sense. Fertility in young females may be signaled by cues for femininity and cues for age. The correlation between the two types of cues leads to informational redundancy that increases the chances

> that information about fertility is transmitted efficiently and correctly to potential mates. This idea can also explain the success of cosmetics and its higher prevalence among women. Sexual attractiveness and anti-aging are two main goals of the cosmetics industry, and the current study can explain why. Signals of femininity are positively correlated with attractiveness, and as we have shown here are also negatively correlated with age. This finding can explain the biological incentive for using cosmetics to highlight sexually dimorphic attributes of femininity, but also to conceal cues for old age. Both serve as signals of fertility and are expressed on the same facial cues. For example, Russell (2009) demonstrated the existence of a sex difference in facial contrast that affects the perception of gender. Females have greater luminance contrast between the eyes, lips and the surrounding skin than men. Russell (2009) showed that cosmetics consistently increase facial contrast and thus are functioning to exaggerate feminine features and consequently their attractiveness. Notably, skin contrast also differs between young and old faces and serves as a cue for age. Lower levels of contrast signal old age…

Whoops, it appears that, once again, dogmatically social constructionist feminists are very wrong.

It's striking how different heterosexual male and female minds are—and how blind people must be not to perceive this fact. The kind of mind that craves being-penetrated by a big erect penis, being rubbed and caressed by a strong muscular person, and that smiles and laughs and cries incredibly easily is very different from the kind of mind that craves penetrating a vagina, rubbing and caressing a soft fleshy body, and that offers smiles and laughs and tears rather sparingly. The differences between the sexes are endless.

I might as well also say, again, that the constant whining of feminists is both pathetic and irritating. "Men have treated us so badly throughout history!" Yes, welcome to the world. Women have treated one another very badly too—just as men have treated men very badly, and women often treat men badly. People suck. But your rage at men for, in effect, being stronger and more assertive than you, and therefore able to dominate you (which, in some contexts, you enjoy, though you won't admit it), reflects a pronounced naïveté and is one-sided. There's more sense in Camille Paglia's perspective: "Women should regard men with a mix of gratitude and rational fear." Men have not only dominated women; they've also, as Paglia notes, through all history given their lives and their labor for women and children. Moreover, women can, mostly, thank men for the comforts and satisfactions of modern civilization: sanitation, medicine, technology, science, mathematics, industry, physical infrastructure, and most of the best art, music, philosophy, and literature. Hegel and Gabriel Garcia Marquez (in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) were right that it's primarily men who make history. "If civilization had been left in female hands," Paglia says, "we'd still be living in grass huts." Women are relatively content to just live, to have a home and family and friends; men are more often driven to *achieve*, to make a mark on the world. Men are restless, women, on average, are soft and sated (as long as they have the things they want). All this is, to some extent, encoded in the human genome—as it must be, since it appears to have been true in all places at all times.

I've always found it ironic that, by incessantly whining and complaining, blaming others, and being highly emotional, most feminists only validate stereotypes about women. An alternative would be to grow up and accept some responsibility.

*

For the heck of it, I read Chomsky's 1969 article "Some Empirical Assumptions in Modern Philosophy of Language." I won't pretend to have understood every paragraph, but it's a brilliant demolition of Quine and Wittgenstein. Those two thinkers (like most others) are really quite primitive and irrational compared to Chomsky. I've pointed out problems with Wittgenstein in other discussions, like when commenting on Scott Soames' book many years ago, but, aside from his seemingly willful obscurity—specialists constantly disagree about how to interpret even his most famous "arguments," like the private language argument (maybe, after all, his perverse thought-fragments don't justify all the attention devoted to them?)—his chief inadequacy is just that he was intellectually formed in an environment of empiricism

and behaviorism and couldn't break out of that framework. Unlike Chomsky, he lacked the genius and intellectual self-confidence to do so. A lot of the puzzles he grapples with, and the confusions and superficialities and irrelevancies he gets himself into, are a function of the empiricist background assumptions he brings even to his critiques of empiricist doctrines (and that he often carries to even greater behaviorist extremes). The possibility of rationalism, or innatism or cognitivism or thoroughgoing "mentalism," scarcely occurs to him, or when it does he peremptorily dismisses it. It's more congenial to him to (periodically) descend to outright absurdities, like when he says thinking might be the "activity performed by the hand, when we think by writing," to quote an example Chomsky gives. Maybe he didn't really mean that, but for such a thought even to occur to someone he must have been pathologically steeped in behaviorism. *The Blue and Brown Books*, from what I remember, are full of perversities like that, often in the context of the philosophy of mathematics.

Again—and irrelevantly—this aversion to the idea of an inner mental reality reminds me of aspects of postmodernism, all the social constructionist dogmas of the likes of Judith Butler and other "gender theorists." Why in God's name is Western intellectual culture so enamored of empiricism?

I admit it's tempting to believe what Wittgenstein says in one of his "rare categorical assertions" (to quote Chomsky), which has to do with the presumed absurdity of, in Wittgenstein's words, "investigating, analyzing, the meaning of a word." He says "a word hasn't got a meaning given to it, as it were, by a power independent of us, so that there could be a kind of scientific investigation into what the word really means. A word has the meaning someone has given to it." We give words meanings by explaining them. If we can't give an explanation, then the word doesn't "have a strict meaning."

But this just isn't right. As Chomsky says, it's sheer dogmatism to reject the possibility that humans are born "with a rich system of constraints on the possible grammatical rules, possible concepts and their interrelations and relations to sensory evidence, the characteristics of physical objects and the ways in which they interact, the structure of space and time, [etc.]." He goes on: "For such an organism, we would surely want to say that the meanings of words are given to it in part by a power independent of any conscious choice; and a scientific investigation of the conditions that determine how an elaborate semantic and syntactic system was constructed on the basis of evidence would certainly be quite in order." In fact, humans might be so richly endowed that, "with no element of voluntary choice and no ability to give a conscious account (explanations) of the structure of [their] system of concepts or system of beliefs," they unconsciously acquire all the knowledge of an incredibly complex language. Why must every language user be able to consciously explain the meaning of every word he uses? That's just a weird behavioristic demand with no rational justification. In fact, given the evidence of sixty years of empirical research, there's no doubt whatever that our concepts are structured in ways we're not consciously aware of. That is, we're not aware of all the dimensions of their meanings. Chomsky likes to give the examples of everyday concepts such as river and house.

It's true, admittedly, that most concepts are fuzzy around their edges, and that there might appear to be only "family resemblances" between all their uses. But does that really mean the concept in question in fact has no determinate meaning? This can't be true, surely. Even the classic Wittgensteinian concept "game" has the semantic content of, say, not serious, play-ish, (semi-)frivolous, and the like. So that when one applies the concept to some activity, one is applying these properties to the activity. Maybe the totality of activities we call "games," from boardgames to (metaphorically) life itself, in themselves have no relevant property in common; still, when we apply the concept, we're applying its meaning, or at least certain aspects of its meaning, to each of them.

In any event, the point—and the point of Chomsky's essay—is that the puzzles and paradoxes presented by Quine and Wittgenstein tend to evaporate once you embrace the "rationalism" of sophisticated cognitive psychology.

I might add that the notion of language-games isn't particularly useful. Also, of course, Wittgenstein's idea that almost all philosophical questions arise from confusions due to inappropriate uses of ordinary language is very wrong, even if *sometimes* this is half-true. Nor do I find it earth-shattering to say linguistic meaning is use. Surely it should have been, and was, obvious before him that the meanings of linguistic expressions are, um, pretty closely bound up with how the expressions (words, phrases,

sentences) are used. But the uses, the actual particular usages, of expressions are not *literally* their meanings; rather, meanings are (despite Hilary Putnam) in the head. The *rules* of how, e.g., a word is used are its meaning, and those rules are somehow represented in the brain—as they must be inasmuch as we're able to use words correctly. Likewise, *what I mean* when I say something is a mental phenomenon, a fact of consciousness, of my intentions. So both the semantics and the pragmatics of language use are *in the head*, not (only) "external."

A large proportion of what Wittgenstein wrote was either wrong, obvious, or confused.

I like Richard Schlagel's short 1974 paper "Contra Wittgenstein." It's so refreshing when a philosopher is actually rational! "While it is true that language plays an important role in philosophical considerations, it is not true that the inadvertent influence of grammatical forms due to the misuse of ordinary language has been a *primary* cause of philosophical problems." Duh!

*

The way I soothe my conscience for not writing more academic articles is that there isn't only one road to truth. One doesn't have to write academically in order to get at reality. Most academic writing, in fact, even in good papers or books, is merely a function of unnecessary professional norms. I'm happy to *use* academic writing for understanding, but I don't feel the need to indulge in all its throat-clearing and mutual masturbation and verbiage-fetishizing.

Besides, writing in general, but especially academic writing, seems so damned ineffectual. Hard work is admirable, but how does one justify hard work that hardly anyone reads or is affected by?

*

There aren't words in the English language that could do justice to the unspeakable evil of Joe Biden, Antony Blinken, Jake Sullivan, and others (not to mention Netanyahu and other Israeli officials, but that goes without saying). Imagine providing the arms to kill tens of thousands of innocent civilians in the most horrible ways, injure hundreds of thousands more, starve many thousands to death, and expel over 2 million people from their homeland. If you can do that and, in addition, continue to defend the aggressor politically and diplomatically, constantly telling the most obvious and outrageous lies to the media, you've lost your humanity. All the more so if at the moment when catastrophic hunger threatens, you cut off aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, as Biden did. The genocide of Gazans is probably the most horrific event of the 21st century, so far—a century that has already seen plenty of horrific events, such as the U.S's near-destruction of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya. But the leadership of the West, with Biden in front, in effect wants it to continue. (They pretend they don't, but their actions expose this pretense for the fraud it is.)

Needless to say, as war criminals and enablers of crimes against humanity, every last one of them deserves to be hanged. I suspend my opposition to the death penalty when it concerns those who have committed genocide. They don't belong among the living anymore. Their humanity has already died, their conscience is nonexistent, so we might as well confirm the reality by killing their bodies, which is really all that remains of them. They're zombies animated only by the power relations in which they're embedded.

The scale of the suffering they've caused beggars the imagination.

Millions and millions of others—liberals and conservatives—passionately support what Israel is doing, so their humanity, too, has essentially died, as the people who supported the Nazis' extermination of Jews had mostly lost their humanity. But these psychotic cheerleaders of genocide at least aren't directly responsible for it, so they have the legal and moral right to continue living. Their punishment should be that others shun them for the rest of their miserable lives.

But the sad truth is that anti-Arab racism saturates the West, and tens of millions are comfortable with it and complicit in it. More broadly, billions of people the world over are quite racist. And of course "classist." Which is to say, they've lost touch with a part of their humanity. Gratuitous, morally senseless

callousness and cruelty have taken over an aspect of their personalities. They see people not as people but as instantiations of morally meaningless categories.

It's unfortunate that you can't tell someone's moral worth just by looking at him. It would be better if people glowed, so that a Chomsky would be blinding to look at and a Biden or Trump would be pitch-black. But ultimately individuals are, naturally, highly ambiguous and contradictory, so such moral "measurements" are obviously not possible. And morality is a human construct anyway, however grounded it is in our nature.

In any event, the current blood-frenzy in Gaza and its rhetorical echoes around the world are yet more proof of the moral squalor of the human species.

As for Israel, there is no depth to which it won't sink. Its horrific offensive in Rafah began today, February 11th, to coincide with the Super Bowl, so that American audiences will be distracted. What other government besides Israel would be capable of such psychopathic cynicism? (Maybe the U.S. would.)

By coincidence, I happen to be rereading James Green's *Death in the Haymarket* for a class I'm teaching on labor history. It's a good book, which makes you quiver with rage at the injustice of capitalist society. It also memorably depicts the fundamental evil and mediocrity of the respectable classes. After the four innocent anarchists were hanged on November 11, 1887, "one reporter described a palpable feeling of relief among downtown people, because the execution had occurred without a single hand being raised in violent protest." So their class privilege, thank God, would continue unmolested. This is what people care about, being safe and secure in their wealth and privilege. Social justice and the suffering of the majority are of no concern to them.

It'll be interesting to observe, in the coming months and years as the full reality of the genocide is unearthed, political and media personalities backtrack on their earlier vampiric thirst for blood. Fortunately the internet does not forget. They'll be hounded without end. On the other hand, there will be no real justice for them, as their careers and lives will go on pretty much as before.

*

[Deleted updates on several romantic relationships/flings.]

"Tell us more about Aidan." He gets cuter and cuter. At around 25-26 months he's started pretend playing (at least in a more impressive form than before). Such playing seems like quite a cognitive achievement! The last time I was there he said "Aidan dibing bulldoziz" several times while holding a bulldozer toy onto which he had put a little Lego man. Earlier that day I had sat him atop a large lawnmower in a park nearby (he adores lawnmowers), where he turned the steering wheel and I remarked that he was driving the lawnmower, which he repeated. So that night, evidently, he was pretending that he was the Lego man driving the bulldozer. He also said, while pushing a car away from the bulldozer, "Bye bulldo, bye…" He was adopting the mental perspective of the car driving away. It's hard to know how to interpret pretend playing, and I didn't get much illumination from reading a couple academic articles on it. But it's interesting that children's cognition is, in a sense, more advanced in play than ordinarily, since in play they're able to partially shed their ordinary egocentricity and adopt the perspectives of others.

Actually, the very ability to know that drawings of something in a book represent the real thing in the world is impressive. At a shockingly early age, like maybe 1 or less, children seem to instinctively know that the drawing of a duck represents the same thing as the real duck they see in the lake. Even if the two look quite different! And when they play with a toy car they say "beep beep," as if the car is a real one on the road. The human brain is programmed to understand at a very early age the idea that "*this* represents *that*."

*

Reading a textbook called *Color Atlas of Genetics* (2007), by Eberhard Passarge. I don't think I had known that genomes "contain parts that can move from one location to another, called *mobile genetic elements* or *transposons*. This lends the genome flexibility to adapt to changing environmental conditions

during the course of evolution." Interesting! And there's also, as you may know, horizontal gene transfer, gene duplication, *de novo* gene birth, gene fusion, genetic drift, exon shuffling, etc., all of which play a role in evolution. We've come a long way from the days of "evolution occurs just through random mutation." In fact, it turns out that the most important parts of the genome are much less susceptible to mutation than less important parts.

That book isn't a great introduction, so I turned to *Genetics for Dummies* (2024), a very good overview. High school/college biology is coming back to me, having been buried for 25 years somewhere in my brain. The details of mitosis, meiosis, and genetics as a whole are, in a sense, indescribably beautiful, especially given that there isn't a divine intelligence behind them—as you'd think there should be, in light of their incredible complexity. Somehow all these exquisitely organized processes just…evolved, in an unplanned way. And somehow they all happen constantly in an unplanned way, "automatically," based only on laws of physics and chemistry.

From hydrogen and helium atoms, in the beginning, you get, 13 billion years later, cellular mitosis, meiosis, the laws of inheritance, DNA transcription and translation—and every other miraculous thing in the body.

What's also miraculous is that scientists have figured all this out. I don't understand how they've been able to penetrate so deeply into the workings of a dizzying array of molecules, and of even tinier components of molecules. How would one go about deciphering it all? It doesn't even seem possible. Astonishing collective genius was required.

It's stunning to reflect that for every one of us, *one molecule* gives the blueprint. As we sit in subways and buses and walk around cities, what we are are gigantic moving and talking manifestations of *one molecule*. One molecule at the center of every cell of our body, except for red blood cells. Each of us is a slightly different, but overwhelmingly similar, molecule. –Well, strictly speaking, we're 46 molecules, since human DNA is divided into 23 pairs of chromosomes, 23 pieces of DNA from our mother and 23 from our father. I am nothing but the elaboration in flesh and blood of 46 molecules. Think of how much information is coded in these molecules! The brain, the heart, the liver and kidneys, the stomach and intestines, the skeleton and immune system and muscles and lungs and reproductive system and everything else—all encoded in *46 fucking molecules!* (Actually, in a sense it's even less than that, since a lot of the alleles in each pair of chromosomes are a duplicate of what's on the other chromosome.)

The social sciences are so intellectually impoverished and unchallenging compared to the natural sciences. (Admittedly, economics is challenging—which may be one reason that most economists are terrible at it, adhering to shallow neoclassical ideology.)

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Sweet mellow mood on an overcast Friday, listening to Sviatoslav Richter's interpretation of Schubert's piano sonata D. 784. The darkness and fierce anger of the first movement interspersed with brief passages of heavenly consolation, some angelic voice piercing the gloom.

*

Airman Aaron Bushnell immolating himself outside the Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C., shouting "Free Palestine!" as the flames engulfed him and he collapsed. Pure heroism, breathtaking courage. Choosing to die as a saint, in an act so shocking that even the depraved corporate media is compelled to cover it. CNN, incredibly, actually read the statement he gave before killing himself: "I will no longer be complicit in genocide. I'm about to engage in an extreme act of protest. But compared to what people have been experiencing in Palestine at the hands of their colonizers, it's not extreme at all. This is what our ruling class has decided will be normal." Bushnell's self-immolation provoked CNN to say the g-word, even the c-word (colonizers) and the r-word (ruling class), so he was right: something like his act was necessary in order for a little bit of truth to momentarily break through the deluge of non-stop propaganda.

Bushnell was someone unlike the rest of us: he couldn't go about his day, day after day, as his government is committing the most transparent genocide in history. He took simple morality so seriously that he decided he couldn't live in a world as immoral as ours. Unbelievable nobility of soul, this willingness to face up to the reality of what's happening every day as everyone else goes shopping, goes drinking, goes on dates, and covers their eyes. His act wasn't "extreme"; it was perfectly appropriate and morally called for, even though the heroism it took was almost beyond what is human.

In an era of ubiquitous moral frivolity, an era of soundbites and social media, a 25-year-old refused to let his humanity die. And so he killed himself.

As he did so, by the way, a police officer pointed a gun at him and ordered him repeatedly to "get on the ground!" (He soon did, as he died.) Even in the presence of such a heroic act, society couldn't have the good taste to suspend its farcical nature for one second. A fascist functionary had to aim his gun at the flame-engulfed man, adding an element of absurdist comedy to the scene. But it was somehow appropriate, the contrast between Bushnell and the fascist. This fascist mentality, this fascist reality, is exactly what Bushnell was protesting. It surrounds us, it is everywhere. The police officer personified precisely the moral monstrousness—total callousness—Bushnell was denouncing.

I hope his martyrdom catalyzes something.

March

The massacre on October 7th was entirely understandable (even if criminal), just as Nat Turner's massacres were understandable, but it was surely a mistake. It gave Israel the perfect pretext to finish its ongoing genocide of Palestinians. A miserable life in the open-air prison of Gaza is hardly a happy fate, but the rampant slaughter of tens of thousands, and death by starvation of more, seems worse. I also find it catastrophic that the indirect consequences of Hamas's action will probably help give Trump the presidency. But it's interesting, at least, that the West is finally losing every last shred of legitimacy. The contrast between the attitude of the ruling class and the attitude of most of the population has been remarkable.

This genocide has shattered the myth that political and economic leaders are, basically, decent people caught in a mesh of complex and inhuman institutions. They're not decent: they're shocking cowards, personifications of cruelty and power-hunger, cliquey elitists who value their bubble of privilege above all else. To quote Marx, they are exterminators whom "history has already nailed to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them."

There is no future for such a civilization as ours.

It's obvious, but it's worth noting again: few of history's many ironies are as pungent as the irony that Zionism is a genocidal project that has turned Jews into Nazis. The Nazis wanted *Lebensraum*, and Israelis want *Lebensraum*. The Nazis had a Hunger Plan, and now Israel has a Hunger Plan. Already in the 1940s Zionism was Nazi-esque, given the many massacres of Palestinians that took place—and the whole crusade of driving Palestinians from their homes. But the Nazism has been on proud and celebrated (in Israel) display for the last five months. Israeli tanks are crushing scores of live Palestinians (pictures on social media of bodies squashed like a smashed bag of tomatoes); Israeli soldiers are firing on people trying to get food from aid convoys; pictures are emerging of children and old men starved to death, looking like victims of Auschwitz. Mass graves of Arabs recall the mass graves of Jews. The IDF, "the most moral army in the world," consists of beasts in human form. How many Klaus Barbies are there in the IDF and Israeli security forces, and how many horrors worthy of Klaus Barbie are happening right now in Israeli prisons?

Zionism is a product of the same kind of culture that birthed Nazism, the imperialistic culture of racial, ethnic, and religious prejudices, of "manifest destiny," of European colonialism. Today, it is an atavism, an anachronism. It doesn't, or shouldn't, really belong to the twenty-first century. It's the last instance of genocidal settler colonialism—rationalized by the Bible, no less! What could be more anachronistic? But if Zionism ends up precipitating or helping to precipitate a nuclear war that brings an

end to civilization, this wouldn't be without some poetic justice. The last expression of the Western genocidal impulse heralding human speciescide—that would be somehow appropriate.

(In any event, if Zionism doesn't get the job done, capitalism will. Capitalism is worse than genocidal: it's speciescidal.)

*

Been reading randomly lately. Like novels for the first time in ages, such as *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, *Out of This Furnace* (classic labor history), *Ragtime*, *Quitting Time* (another classic, though largely forgotten), *Player Piano* (Vonnegut), *Dead Souls* (beautifully written but kind of boring), *Fontamara* (Ignazio Silone's anti-fascist classic), *The Dispossessed* (Le Guin), *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (saw it on a bookshelf), and *Southern Rebel in Reverse*—actually a memoir. Also *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, since Oliver Sacks is great. He's the R. D. Laing of neurology, seeking to humanize patients rather than reduce them to a collection of symptoms.

His book is a reminder that every millisecond of life is a miracle. It's strange that I don't continually reflect on what a godlike achievement it is to, say, see an object. Trillions of photons zip around and collide with atoms and other things…and a few of them enter the tiny holes in our eyes…and are captured by retinal photoreceptors that convert them to electrical signals…and the brain works these signals up into the colored images we see. Somehow, from a cacophony of photons hitting the retina from all angles, the brain forms a stable, three-dimensional image. It can infer that some objects are farther away than others; in fact, it can create the very illusion that there *are* solid objects all around us, objects that aren't composed primarily of empty space (as they really are) but are dense and continuous. None of this is remotely capable of being truly, intuitively understood.

Billions of photons hit the page of a book—that is, the billions of molecules that constitute a page—and bounce into your eyes (somehow not being knocked off course by all the other molecules in the air)…and a tiny fraction of a second later you see a page with words on it. The brain imposes on all these photons-transformed-into-electrical-signals the schemata of language, of letters, so that you see letters and not random marks. And it filters these letters through the schemata of linguistic syntax and meaning, so that you see words and sentences rather than mere strings of letters. At the same time, you experience perceptions from other sensory modalities. And all these perceptions are integrated into one consciousness, one sense of self, and are stored in memory as "my" perceptions. The illusion of a "you" who owns these memories is created every second, to accompany all perceptions. And all these unimaginable neural processes occur because of trillions of molecules in your head interacting automatically, in milliseconds, according to nothing but the laws of physics and chemistry. But from these automatic physical processes, the sense of personal free will, intentionality, a thinking self, emerges…to then *reflect on* the mystery of this whole chain of causation. –And Daniel Dennett thinks that in principle the human mind can understand everything. (It's closer to the truth to say it can't genuinely understand anything.)

Sacks' book also reminds me of the proximity of "sickness" to "health," a proximity so close that the conditions essentially interpenetrate. I'm reminded of my own relatively healthy sickness. I'm primordially set apart from the world—my absent-mindedness, self-consciousness, shyness, forgetfulness (especially of people's names), inability to find someone to love, lack of interest in most people and increasing lack of interest in anything, emotional deadness. I'm somewhat enclosed within myself, and always have been. But I haven't always had the sort of semi-anhedonia I've had for many years now.

I care less and less about intellectual creation and more about merely making money, so I can have a fairly comfortable middle age and old age. I want to be able to make major financial contributions to Aidan's life. But I can't think of any job I want. Getting pretty sick of teaching, actually.

I sometimes feel so weary and disengaged that I'm almost ready for retirement, if not death.

*

Reading an interesting (though very basic) book called *Why Icebergs Float: Exploring Science in Everyday Life*, by Andrew Morris (2016). Maybe if more academics read science and imbibed its rigorous spirit, they'd be less prone to writing pretentious silliness about the likes of Foucault, Lacan, and Deleuze.

…Now a book called *The Epigenetics Revolution: How Modern Biology is Rewriting Our Understanding of Genetics, Disease, and Inheritance* (2012), by Nessa Carey.

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Aidan's language skills are advancing pretty rapidly. He constantly repeats things people say, though often without understanding what he's saying. And today in a video Amina recorded he said, out of the blue, "Put the phone back right here." Amazing that two-year-olds can learn idioms so easily, and can unthinkingly say words in the correct order. It's also mysterious how they learn to distinguish between questions and statements. How does Aidan already know that sentences starting with "Did" or "Where," etc., are questions? The brain must be primed, at a certain age, to be on the lookout for interrogatives, doubtless by being hyper-attuned to intonation, inflection, pitch, and the like. But frequently, for example, we don't raise our voice at the end of questions. So how does the child figure out what "Where?" means, or other words like that? I suppose the brain just has to make guesses, and it gradually eliminates various possibilities the more times it hears the word in different contexts. Finally it hits on the right guess, the meaning that makes sense in all the contexts it hears the word.

The child figures out "Daddy" means a particular person, and then when someone says "Where is Daddy?" on repeated occasions, perhaps while looking around, the child thinks of Daddy and wonders where Daddy is. So this speculative looking around for something becomes associated with "Where?"

But "where" is a simple example. I'll have to look at more academic papers to see what ideas are floating around about these questions. Of course "theory of mind," "shared intentionality," and so on are crucial. Spontaneously understanding others' states of mind is essential to learning many words, which is surely (one reason) why autistic children have trouble with language. Normal children must be exquisitely sensitive to people's intentions and feelings, thus facilitating enormously the acquisition of a lexicon.

On a trip to the grocery store, Aidan saw cereal on someone's cart and said, "Dadda's food." I usually call it cereal when around him, not food. So it seems he understands levels of meaning, as it were: it's both cereal and something more general, food. Interesting that two-year-olds know an object can exist in overlapping categories, that two or more words, with increasingly abstract meanings, can apply to it.

It's unbelievable that a miracle source of energy, efficient and nearly pollution-free, exists, namely nuclear energy, but *environmentalists* have been largely responsible for curtailing its use (for instance by increasing its regulatory costs), thereby increasing the use of polluting and carbon-intensive fossil fuels. If they had instead, since the 1970s, *aggressively advocated* for it everywhere in the world, maybe it would have been possible to stay under the 1.5°C limit for global warming! But now civilization is probably doomed—partly because of environmentalists! I hate the ironies of history.

It's appalling to contemplate the level of suffering we're all going to experience, but especially people in the Global South, most of whom are least responsible for the crises. Another irony it's painful to contemplate.

…There's something strangely moving about the contradiction between the vastness of human suffering throughout history and the innocence of Aidan. A new life, completely ignorant of all the horror. For him, none of it has happened: he's a bundle of joyful curiosity about the world. How beautiful that every time a person is born, it's all new again. A fresh start, a blank slate. Infinite possibilities, and in the meantime a flood of new discoveries every day, new animals and plants and people and objects to see, discoveries that have been made tens of billions of times but are fresh and riveting for Aidan. Always the instinctual life-affirmation, life's primordial affirmation of itself.

On one side, the disgraceful oppression and injustice meted out to the peasants of Fontamara, hoary as civilization but even more grinding under the Fascists; on the other side, the bright eyes and pristine laugh of a two-year-old. The leaden weight of the past vs. the lightness of freedom and early childhood.

How sad that, in the end, years from now, the past and the horror will likely prove the dominant principle.

*

I've lived my whole life in ignorance of botany, so I'm reading Brian Capon's *Botany for Gardeners* (2005). My gardening skills are far below mediocrity, but luckily you don't have to be a gardener to appreciate this book.

Random bits of interesting trivia: How is it that sun-loving plants can bend and grow toward the source of light? Answer: when the stem is illuminated from directly above, "cells [in the stem] undergo equal rates of elongation, resulting in vertical growth. But when lit from one side, stems change direction because cells on the shaded side grow faster than those toward the light." Their faster growth, of course, causes the stem to bend towards the more slowly growing side (the illuminated side). Fascinating! But why do shaded cells grow faster? Because of the hormone *auxin*. "When light strikes one side of a stem, auxin accumulates in the shaded side, causing the cells there to grow at the fastest rate."

Similarly, suppose you tip over a potted plant so that the plant is horizontal now. You'll soon find that the stem returns to its vertical growth. How? Because "under the influence of gravity, auxin collects in the lower side of the stem where it stimulates the cells to grow more rapidly than those across the top." So the stem bends upwards.

What about the opening and closing of flowers? This, too, is controlled by hormones. When a flower opens, "cell expansion occurs in the petal's upper surface; when the flower closes, cells in the lower petal surface increase in size." The same principle applies in the case of Venus fly traps: their closing is just an exceptionally rapid growth response (on the part of cells on the outside). Pretty amazing!

The aging process in fruits and leaves is, naturally, directed by hormones, particularly ethylene:

> When fruits ripen, various biochemical events take place. Color changes result from the breakdown of green chlorophyll and an increase in yellow, orange, and red pigments. Tannins, which protect immature fruits against predators, give way to sugars—making some fruits attractive to seed-dispersing animals. And, primarily as a result of ethylene's influence, drastic changes occur in cell structure, including the breakdown of membranes and the softening of cell walls. The outcome of such processes is seen in the rapid deterioration of a fruit as it becomes overripe, ready to release its seeds. Unprotected by tannins, well-stocked with carbohydrates, and the cuticle layer degraded, the ripe fruit also becomes a perfect medium on which fungi can grow. Their presence eventually leads to the fruit's decomposition.
>
> …Leaf senescence [in autumn], prior to abscission [separation from the stem], includes the breakdown of chlorophyll and weakening of cell walls at the base of the petiole, in a narrow band of cells called the *abscission zone*. In spring and summer, auxin produced in the leaf keeps the abscission zone intact. But low night temperatures and short days in autumn cue the leaves to reduce auxin production and increase the liberation of ethylene. The latter stimulates an enzymatic breakdown of cellulose walls and pectin in the middle lamellae—the glue holding cells together. The restriction of ethylene's destructive effects only to cells in the abscission zone illustrates the precise control plants exercise over their hormone systems.

Let's turn to the question of how the plant uptakes water. It starts with osmosis into the root. "During osmosis, water molecules attempt to equalize their concentration on both sides of cell membranes when they move into or out of living protoplasm [i.e., the interior of the cell]." In brief, here's how it works:

> In most soils, small quantities of salts are dissolved in large volumes of water. Conversely, the protoplasm of epidermal cells [in roots] contains lesser amounts of water in which salts,

> sugars, and other substances are concentrated. Thus, when water moves (diffuses) from the soil, where it is most abundant, it seeks to dilute the cells' solutions.

When water enters the cell it's stored in the large central vacuole, which expands and presses the cytoplasm against the rigid cell wall. Eventually the cell becomes *turgid*, or fully inflated. "Cell turgor gives firmness to water-filled tissues. The difference between crisp and wilted lettuce leaves illustrates the nature of turgid and nonturgid (flaccid) cells." I hadn't known that wilted plants are literally just…their cells aren't fat with water.

So how does the water get up to the stem and leaves? Basically, the root's turgid epidermal cells discharge water into spaces between other cells, cortex cells, where the water works its way into the hollow tubular cells of the *xylem* at the root's center. Articles online have technical details, but the upshot is that water is pushed up the xylem with a slight pressure. At the same time, the evaporation of water from the surfaces of cells in the leaves generates a "pulling" force that can lift water hundreds of feet up a tree.

Okay, let's move on to the main attraction: *photosynthesis*. It's absurd I've never known exactly what photosynthesis involves. After all, it's "the single most important process on Earth," since "the large-scale storage of abundant sunlight in the form of compact, energy-rich food molecules is the unique function of Earth's flora." In fact, "autotrophic [i.e., making their own food] plants hold the key to life on Earth; they alone are the intermediaries between the sun and all other creatures. And it is their leaves' microscopic chloroplasts that have the awesome responsibility of making the system work." So let's investigate photosynthesis, the process that makes it possible for you and me to live.

(It's worth noting that photosynthesis provides, directly and indirectly, not only our food and oxygen but even most of the world's energy, almost 90 percent of it, through fossilized photosynthetic fuels. It's also, apparently, the *sole source* of the organic carbon that all carbon-based life forms use to build themselves.)

Combining the book and a lot of articles, I've arrived at this understanding: photosynthesis takes place in the organelles called chloroplasts, which contain *chlorophyll* molecules (two different kinds: chlorophyll *a* and *b*). They also have *carotene,* which reflects orange/red/yellow light (unlike chlorophyll, which reflects the green wavelength), and *xanthophyll*, which reflects yellow. By the way, "when leaves turn yellow [in autumn], they simply lose chlorophyll that had previously masked the appearance of the orange and yellow carotene and xanthophylls." Interesting! The point of photosynthesis is that the wavelengths of light *absorbed* by these molecules are transferred into the synthesis of food, in other words carbohydrates (sugar and starch), fats, and proteins.

It might be obvious, but it's interesting to reflect that what a leaf is, in essence, is just a "solar collector crammed full of photosynthetic cells." Actually, that's too simple: leaves also contain thousands of pores on their surface (mostly their bottom surface) called *stomata*, through which carbon dioxide enters and oxygen is released. Anyway, leaves exist to produce the plant's food, from light, water, and carbon dioxide.

The way it works is…insanely complex. As usual. But I'll try to make it comprehensible. First, chlorophyll *b*, carotene, and xanthophylls absorb and channel photons to chlorophyll *a*, whose electrons are thereby boosted to a higher energy potential. In their energized state, chlorophyll's electrons are diverted into an "electron transport chain" that ends in the formation of the molecules NADPH and ATP. Meanwhile, chlorophylls get back the electrons they've lost by the splitting of water molecules (so that these molecules donate electrons to the chlorophyll), which breaks down water into its components hydrogen and oxygen. In its new gaseous form O_2, oxygen then flees the hectic scene into the atmosphere.

In the second stage of photosynthesis, carbon dioxide links to sugar molecules called ribulose bisphosphate, producing new molecules that then, with the help of ATP and NADPH, are rearranged to form, ultimately, glucose and other sugars, including more molecules of ribulose bisphosphate (thus allowing this stage of photosynthesis to keep repeating again and again as long as ATP and NADPH are available). So we've finally arrived at carbohydrates that the plant can use for energy! Specifically, glucose, fructose, sucrose, starch, and cellulose. Yay! These sugars can also be used to form lipids and amino acids

(i.e. proteins). Starch (made of glucose) is the principal food stored in plant cells, while cellulose (also made of glucose) is incorporated into the structure of cell walls.

Okay, enough about photosynthesis. My brain hurts. Just to write those four paragraphs I had to spend hours trying to piece together the story from a dozen articles and a couple books.

Let's move on to reproduction and flowers. Plants produce two kinds of reproductive cells: gametes and spores, the latter of which grow into a plant simply by mitotic cell divisions. Only the more primitive plants, like ferns, rely on spores. More interesting is sexual reproduction. The whole point of flowers, of course, is to attract insects and other small animals so that they'll propagate pollen, each grain of which contains sperm. *Stamens* are the male reproductive structures, which consist of a *filament* and an *anther* on its top. Within the anther is where pollen develops. *Pistils*, the female structures, are divided into three parts: at the top is a *stigma*, a sticky receptive surface to which pollen adheres; the long *style* elevates the stigma to a favorable position for pollen collection; and at the base is an *ovary*. The ovary is what ultimately becomes a fruit. As a reward for their assistance with reproduction, animals are given a nutritious liquid called *nectar* at the base of the petals, pistil, and stamen. (When they're maneuvering around to access the nectar, pollen is scraped off them and new pollen brushes against them. "The petal's color patterns, called *nectar guides*, are virtual road maps directing visiting insects to the sweet food, past waiting stamens and pistils.")

Wind and water can also pollinate plants. In grasses, for instance, "the anthers dangle on quivering filaments," and vast amounts of pollen are borne on breezes so that hopefully some tiny fraction will find its way to appropriate flowers. The most ancient pollen producers are *gymnosperms*, non-flowering seed-producing plants, whose seeds aren't enclosed in an ovary or flower. (The opposite type, the flowering type, is called *angiosperms*.) Their pollen is scattered, frequently, from male cones—hence the name *conifer* trees—which are actually just modified leaves. This system evolved before insects and hasn't changed since, so it has no need of flowers to attract animals. Some flowering plants, on the other hand, are aquatic species that use water to disseminate pollen. For example, the underwater plant called ribbon weed forms female flowers on long stalks that reach to the water's surface, whereas male flowers, formed near the base of the plant, simply float to and on the surface like tiny sailboats. "Propelled by gentle winds, some [of these little sailboats] eventually make contact with the female flowers and transfer pollen."

(By the way, bamboo "trees" are actually grass! This is because their stems are hollow and don't have the same vascular system as trees. In lawn grass, what is most visible is not the stem but the long, thin leaves that jut up from the stem. Even lawn grass grows tiny flowers—if you don't mow it.)

Many species of flowering plants have evolved means of ensuring *cross-pollination*, which is more advantageous than self-pollination. These means include "self-incompatibility, chemical barriers in the stigma that treat a plant's own pollen as if it were from another species; spatial separation of the anthers and stigmas in a bisexual flower; or staggered timing of pollen release and the stigma's receptiveness in each flower." Cross-pollination also happens when separate male flowers (*staminate*) and female flowers (*pistillate*) form on the same plant.

Here's something I didn't know: the reason many flowers close at night and on rainy or overcast days is to protect the pollen from moisture.

A couple of useful paragraphs:

> The stage is set for reproduction when, by one means or another, compatible pollen comes to rest on a flower's stigma. Of the two cells within a pollen grain, one is destined to grow into a long tube, a *pollen tube*, that penetrates the pistil's tissues in search of a microscopic opening in one of the ovules, located in the ovary. Germination and growth of the pollen tube is rapid and is promoted by food substances and hormones supplied by the stigma and style. Botanists still don't understand how a pollen tube locates the ovule's tiny pore…
>
> The second of a pollen's cells divides to become two sperm that move through the pollen tube and enter the ovule. Before the pollen tube and sperm's arrival, each ovule must be equipped with an egg, ready for immediate fertilization. A *zygote* is formed when one of the two sperms unites with the egg. The second sperm combines with another cell in the

> ovule. The product of that union is a temporary food-storage tissue, called the *endosperm*, used to nourish the zygote as it grows into an *embryo*, the miniature plant within a seed…
>
> As ovules grow and mature into seeds, they remain enclosed by the ovary, which slowly enlarges to become a fruit…

Some fruits, such as peaches, apricots, plums, and cherries, have only one seed in their hard center; strawberries, on the other hand, have a whole lot of tiny, ripened ovaries (the true fruit) on their surface, each with a seed in it. Botanists have classified fruits into several categories. For example, "a *simple fruit* is derived from a flower bearing a single ovary; examples include tomato, orange, grape, melon, and peach. An *aggregate fruit* comes from a flower having many ovaries. Thus, an aggregate fruit is a collection of small fruits borne on a single receptacle, such as blackberry, raspberry, and strawberry." The fruit's function is to protect the seed until it's ready for dispersal. One method of dispersal is to be eaten by animals (the hard seeds pass through digestive tracts without being harmed). Another method is exemplified by dandelions, whose small fruits have feathery parachutes that can disperse them through air. (A botanist's definition of fruit, by the way, is obviously different from the popular definition of fruit as being something edible and sweet. You wouldn't want to eat dandelion fruits. Likewise, in the botanical sense, tomatoes, bell peppers, cucumbers, peas, okra, olives, avocadoes, corn, green beans, chick peas, nuts, etc. are all fruits, since they come from the flowering part of a plant and contain seeds. Vegetables are the other edible parts of a plant, like the leaves, stem, roots, and bulbs.)

The book's last chapter, on genetics and inheritance, is confusing as hell, being much too cursory. Sporophytes, gametophytes, megaspores, alternation of generations…and genetics is complicated enough even without these weird alternating generations. So screw it, I'm done with botany for now. At least I know a little more than I used to.

Oh the miracles and beauties of nature! And oh, the headaches one gets when reading about them!

*

Understanding Living Systems (2023), by the respected biologists Raymond Noble and Denis Noble, is an interesting book. They argue against Dawkinsian genetic reductionism, which has apparently become a kind of orthodoxy. I suppose I've been guilty of it too, like in what I wrote in February.

This is from the preface:

> This book addresses four fundamental misunderstandings about living organisms. In the first half of the twentieth century, and particularly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, ideas on living organisms and their evolution were formulated in what became known as the Modern Synthesis. For this there were four main pillars: (1) that changes in the structure and function of organisms in one generation could not be passed on through the germ line—this dogma was formulated by August Weissman in 1883 and, in the mid-twentieth century, became a fundamental part of a gene-centric dogma; (2) that organisms could not alter their genes, so causation was held to be a one-way process, from gene to organism functionality; (3) that the organism was best viewed as a passive vehicle for retaining genes in a 'gene pool' and, most significantly, that the behaviour and function of organisms was controlled to this end (this gave birth to the selfish-gene concept, popularised by Richard Dawkins in his best-selling book, *The Selfish Gene*); (4) that evolution occurs through small random changes in genes (gene mutations) that are passively selected in the process of natural selection. What we show in this book is that none of these pillars is correct, or stands as originally formulated. It is clear now that selective changes in the organism can be passed on through the germ line; that there is no hard barrier to the germ line, and that some key factors, such as epigenetic changes, do pass through that; and that there can be no 'gene pool' that is separate from the organisms. So the vehicle–gene separation is simply mistaken, both philosophically and scientifically.

> The Modern Synthesis led to the view that organisms are passive living systems, which experience environmental changes but play no active role in the process of evolution. On the contrary, we show that organisms are active agents in evolution. This book also addresses another fundamental misconception: that DNA is a 'secret code' or set of instructions to the organisms. Furthermore, the evolution of species has involved major rearrangements of the genome, not just small random mutations. Natural selection is also an active process performed by organisms, not a passive one…

I find this critique of the received view very attractive. As the authors say, genes are not "the driving force and the goal of organisms." They are "part of a regulatory system and not its directors. The director is the self-regulating organism." They go on: "The organism does not wait for commands given by genes. Just as musical notes can be arranged in many ways to create compositions, organisms use their genetic heritage, implementing a diverse range of possible outcomes. Furthermore, when their heritage is inadequate to cope with environmental stress, organisms can alter their genes. Thus, organisms can change their genetic heritage."

In essence, the debate is between two positions: are organisms the tools of genes (permitting their survival through generations) or are genes the tools of organisms?

However appealing the authors' critique is, I have to admit it does seem as though reproduction is the main purpose of the organism, and that reproduction is essentially replication of the *slightly modified* genome. So the organism would then be the tool of genome (semi-)replication. This is a pretty compelling view.

The authors say the genome doesn't self-replicate, since replication depends on processes in the cell, such as correction of replication errors. Fair enough. But aren't the enzymes that correct errors in DNA replication themselves coded for by DNA? It seems like DNA itself is doing an enormous amount of the work, though admittedly not all of it.

They also say that "faithful replication is not the purpose of life [because DNA *isn't* faithfully replicated between generations]. Responding to change [in the environment] is." But you could still say: replicating DNA *in such a way that it responds to change* is the purpose of life.

This reminder is useful, though: "…Indeed, there are several essential amino acids that the body cannot manufacture, which must be obtained by organisms in their diet. Thus, we do not have genes for these amino acids, and nor do we have genes for a great deal else, including all the membranous processes where much of the complex control of cells occurs. Even the nuclear membrane is part of this active mechanism whereby the cell can select what has access to the DNA." So, as they say, the cell, in a sense, "controls" and "instructs" its DNA.

Another reminder (this time that *transposons* exist): "The genome can be reorganised… The evidential basis is now substantial, beginning notably with Barbara McClintock's work in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. McClintock showed genome reorganisation in corn (maize), where large domains are moved from one region of the genome to another *in response to environmental stress* [my italics], and even from one chromosome to another." Remarkable. Another potential basis of evolution, and of environmental feedback into the genome. (But I still don't understand how it happens.)

What about epigenetics? It's known that epigenetic modifications—caused by the environment—in the parent can be inherited by the child, but

> It is often argued that such epigenetic changes will not persist for more than a few generations, or not become incorporated into the genome. However, evidence from studies of populations living at high altitude contradicts this assumption, where what must have been initially a stress-induced epigenetic change is assimilated into the genome. So populations of humans have adapted to the persistent hypoxia of high altitude in several locations, and recent genome-wide studies have demonstrated the genes involved. In some populations, genetic signatures have been identified in metabolic pathways involved… In

> Tibetans, such changes are found in several genes involved in these pathways, and this is an example of adaptation acquired in genes orchestrated by the organism.

Awesome. I did not know that. So epigenetics *is* relevant to evolution! And Lamarck was *partly* right!

Again: "We say that reproduction is not simply a matter of producing a copy; its purpose is not replication but the creation of novelty. This is important for organisms because they experience continual changes in their environment and their interactions with other organisms, including other species. Nothing is static."

"The goal is not to maintain genes in a gene pool, but to bring about change to enhance fitness. So, far from the gene-centred view that life is a vehicle for maintaining them, genes are changed, often in substantive ways, to enhance survival." This seems like a fair point. The goal isn't to maintain genes, certainly not individual genes. The goal is to enhance (or at least maintain) fitness, which can be done by rearranging or modifying the genome.

It's worth noting that if simple replication were the point of life, why would sexual reproduction have evolved at all? Why wouldn't cellular mitosis, or cloning, have remained the only method of propagation? Sexual reproduction changes things!

I'd also note that DNA and RNA aren't exactly "replicators," as (I recall) Dawkins calls them. Nor are genes. *Cells* are replicators. They replicate themselves, which DNA doesn't do. (DNA relies on a myriad of external processes that replicate it.)

Another reason it doesn't make sense to say DNA replication is the purpose of life is simply that for a long period in the history of life, DNA didn't exist. It's probable even RNA didn't exist at the earliest stages.

It isn't the genome that's the "organizer" of life, but rather the whole system itself. "Genes cannot do anything unless used by the system of which they are a part; they are tools of our fate, not arbiters of it. Living beings harness genes in their functions, not the other way around."

A rather exciting philosophy:

> …This interdependency of living things is not static, or a fixed relationship; it is one that undergoes continual change, with organisms adjusting in relation to it. This is intelligence. It requires assessment, understanding, problem-solving and relevant action. What happens in one part of the system, to pull it in one direction, is reflected in other regions. The system maintains integrity, not by keeping itself 'the same' but by processes of creative change. This brings us back to the idea of shaking the genes up and not simply conserving them.
>
> Reproduction is an instrument of this creative process. Reproduction does not simply replicate. It brings about change. This is most obviously the case in shaking up the genes, life's toolbox. Transgenerationally, this change is reflected in evolution. Evolution is a dynamic, creative process of adaptation, of change, a moulding of living systems. As such, it has direction. It solves problems. It is part of the intelligence of life. This contrasts with the view of evolution as a passive and non-directed process of random gene mutations passively selected by the environment (natural selection)… Variability is life's force for dynamic and creative, purposeful change.

One problem with all this emphasis on change and innovation and openness and creativity is that generation after generation, for thousands of generations, the same kinds of organisms behave in the same ways. And the genome mostly determines those ways. Squirrels are programmed to dig; songbirds are programmed to sing; humans are programmed to speak. There's a lot of truth to genetic determinism. Genes don't literally *determine* behavior, since the organism reacts in fast and even "creative" ways that aren't directly determined by DNA. But DNA does massively constrain behavior.

In the end, I don't know how substantive the whole debate is. People like Dawkins would surely agree with many of the authors' arguments (particularly ones I haven't copied here because they're not very

interesting). But some of their claims are too strong, just as some of the gene-centric claims are too strong. The truth is likely somewhere in the middle.

April

I see Aidan every three weeks, and it's incredible how much his linguistic abilities have changed each time I see him. He's now (27 months) speaking pretty competently much of the time. Pronouncing words better, learning new words all the time, speaking short sentences (The sun is shining, This is an ambulance, Go for a walk, Where did Mama go?, Aidan is coming back, Ah need to put the hat on, and so forth). He's a good boy, sweet and happy and mostly obedient. Except for his nearly constant refusal to eat good food.

Something I've never heard or read anyone comment on is the necessary *gradualness* of words acquiring meanings for toddlers. Initially, even as children are using certain words in the right way, they still must be little more than *sounds* to them, sounds with a use. But over time, they really do become words with a meaning, with cognitive significance. But how long does this process take? How gradual is it? When does a word cease to be just a sound and become a word? We'll never know, because we can't ask kids about it.

Anyway, to return to complaints and laments, specifically self-complaints and self-laments: it seems that I'll never be able to initiate and complete another significant intellectual project, because I'm too fond of reading in all subjects and lack the discipline and obsession to pursue one project to exhaustion. I'll certainly never be able to write a 700-page tome, as I once hoped. Historical research I experience mostly as drudgery. I think all I'll ever be able to do now—all I've been doing for years—is write relatively brief articles.

The unusual breadth and consistent rationality of my mind are worthy qualities, but originally I had hoped for more.

For many years, the creative side of my mind has been slowly declining in relation to the 'consuming' side, the side that enjoys reading and accumulating knowledge. It's been sad to progressively observe the waning of the creative impulse. Those moments of excitement and suspense and sometimes inspiration as I pursued thoughts wherever they led me, or as I carefully crafted literary sentences, are apparently gone for good. Those adventurous, fecund years are all behind me. I ought to have done more with my talents when I still had them!

Reading a book entitled *Infinite Powers: How Calculus Reveals the Secrets of the Universe* (2019), by Steven Strogatz. From the introduction:

> Without calculus, we wouldn't have cell phones, computers, or microwave ovens. We wouldn't have radio. Or television. Or ultrasound for expectant mothers, or GPS for lost travelers. We wouldn't have split the atom, unraveled the human genome, or put astronauts on the moon…
>
> …It's a mysterious and marvelous fact that our universe obeys laws of nature that always turn out to be expressible in the language of calculus as sentences called differential equations. Such equations describe the difference between something right now and the same thing an instant later or between something right here and the same thing infinitesimally close by…
>
> …From the old elements of earth, air, fire, and water to the latest in electrons, quarks, black holes, and superstrings, every inanimate thing in the universe bends to the rule of differential equations. I bet this is what Feynman meant when he said that calculus is the language God talks. If anything deserves to be called the secret of the universe, calculus is it.

I knew calculus was important, but I didn't know it was *that* important.

"Three mysteries above all have spurred [calculus's] development: the mystery of curves, the mystery of motion, and the mystery of change."

Calculus began with early geometers' centuries-long efforts to figure out (e.g., calculate the areas and volumes of) curved shapes like circles and spheres. "The breakthrough came from insisting that curves were actually made of straight pieces. It wasn't true, but one could pretend that it was. The only hitch was that those pieces would then have to be infinitesimally small and infinitely numerous. Through this fantastic conception, integral calculus [in an embryonic form] was born." What makes curves especially important to figure out is that they're key to unlocking the secrets of nature, since curves define, for example, the parabolic arc of a ball in flight, the elliptical orbits of planets, and the convex shapes of lenses for microscopes and telescopes. "And so began the second great obsession: a fascination with the mysteries of motion on Earth and in the solar system." This was the era of the Scientific Revolution. The problem was that existing forms of math, like arithmetic and geometry, couldn't deal with accelerated motion (changing speed or changing direction). So another kind of math had to be invented, differential calculus. "This time the act of wishful fantasy was to pretend that motion at a changing speed was made up of infinitely many, infinitesimally brief motions at a *constant* speed."

Isaac Newton was the world-historic figure who "solved the holy grail of calculus: he discovered how to put the pieces of a curve back together again—and how to do it easily, quickly, and systematically. By combining the symbols of algebra with the power of infinity, he found a way to represent any curve as a sum of infinitely many simpler curves described by powers of a variable x, like x^2, x^3, x^4, and so on." As if this weren't enough, he "cracked the code of the universe," discovering that motion of any kind always unfolds one infinitesimal step at a time, steered from moment to moment by mathematical laws written in the language of calculus. "With just a handful of differential equations (his laws of motion and gravity), he could explain everything from the arc of a cannonball to the orbits of the planets."

Thus, according to Strogatz, the mysteries of curves and motion were solved. (This might be overstating it. I don't think Zeno's paradoxes have been resolved on an *intuitive* level, even if calculus somehow solves them mathematically.) But the mysteries of change remained. "Emboldened by the Newtonian paradigm, the later practitioners of calculus asked: Are there laws of change similar to Newton's laws of motion? Are there laws for population growth, the spread of epidemics, and the flow of blood in an artery? Can calculus be used to describe how electrical signals propagate along nerves or to predict the flow of traffic on a highway?" In modern times, scientists have worked out the laws of change and used calculus to solve them and make predictions.

Calculus has even been used in medicine. In fact, even the subatomic world can be described by calculus. It's true that according to quantum mechanics, trajectories of subatomic particles have to be described as probability waves instead of Newtonian trajectories. "As soon as we do that, however, calculus returns triumphantly. It governs the evolution of probability waves through something called the Schrödinger equation." So even where Newtonian physics breaks down, in the subatomic world, Newtonian calculus still works!

So much for the book's introduction.

I can't really summarize the book, since it's pretty dense. But I can quote interesting passages. What calculus revolves around, of course, is the fascinating and paradoxical concept of infinity. More exactly, it's based on what Strogatz calls the Infinity Principle: "To shed light on any continuous shape, object, motion, process, or phenomenon—no matter how wild and complicated it may appear—reimagine it as an infinite series of simpler parts, analyze those, and then add the results back together to make sense of the original whole." This is what Archimedes did when he estimated that pi (the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter) is greater than $3 + \frac{10}{71}$ and less than $3 + \frac{10}{70}$:

> To probe the mysteries of circles, spheres, and other curved shapes, [Archimedes] always approximated them with rectilinear shapes made of lots of straight, flat pieces, faceted like jewels. By imagining more and more pieces and making them smaller and smaller, he

> pushed his approximations ever closer to the truth, approaching exactitude in the [unreachable] limit of infinitely many pieces.

In a sense, Archimedes was almost two thousand years ahead of his time, since the method he used to estimate pi anticipated integral calculus. So did the method he used to calculate the area bounded by a parabola, and the surface area and volume of a sphere, and so forth.

But

> When Archimedes died, the mathematical study of nature nearly died along with him. Eighteen hundred years passed before a new Archimedes appeared. In Renaissance Italy, a young mathematician named Galileo Galilei picked up where Archimedes had left off. He watched how things moved when they flew through the air or fell to the ground, and he looked for numerical rules in their movements… Meanwhile, a young German mathematician named Johannes Kepler studied how the planets wandered across the sky. Both men were fascinated by patterns in their data and sensed the presence of something far deeper. They knew they were onto something, but couldn't quite make out its meaning. The laws of motion they were discovering were written in an alien language. That language, as yet unknown, was differential calculus. These were humanity's first hints of it.
>
> Before the work of Galileo and Kepler, natural phenomena had rarely been understood in mathematical terms. Archimedes had revealed the mathematical principles of balance and buoyancy in his laws of the lever and hydrostatic equilibrium, but those laws were limited to static, motionless situations. Galileo and Kepler ventured beyond the static world of Archimedes and explored how things moved…

I won't go through Galileo's and Kepler's laws of motion, but since these thinkers dealt with curves (parabolas, swinging pendulums, planetary orbits, the volumes of curved shapes like wine bottles), they worked on integral calculus. "They channeled the spirit of Archimedes, carving solid objects in their minds into imaginary thin wafers, like so many slices of salami."

However, only when new ideas from Islamic and Indian mathematics had permeated Europe did European mathematicians really find a way forward, "a chance to go beyond Archimedes and break new ground"—with differential calculus. "Differential calculus cuts complicated problems into infinitely many simpler pieces. Integral calculus puts the pieces back together again to solve the original problem." Logically, it would seem that differential calculus should have come first. Not least because it's easier. Calculus courses today start with derivatives, "the relatively easy techniques for slicing and dicing," and then work up to integrals, "the much harder techniques for assembling the pieces into an integrated whole." But historically integrals came first, because differential calculus grew out of algebra, which "took centuries to mature, migrate, and mutate."

In its original form in China, India, and the Islamic world, algebra was verbal, not symbolic. "Unknowns were words, not today's *x* and *y*." But after migrating to Europe around 1200, it gradually evolved into an art of symbols, which made it both more abstract and more powerful. "This new breed, symbolic algebra, then coupled with geometry and spawned an even stronger hybrid, analytic geometry, which in turn begat a zoo of new curves, the study of which led the way to differential calculus."

Around 1630, Fermat and Descartes, working separately, invented analytic geometry, which, for the first time, linked algebra to geometry. It's the *xy* graph we're all familiar with today, which charts relations between variables. Algebraic equations could be represented geometrically on graphs. The possibilities this presented for math were stupendous. "A whole new continent of curves and surfaces opened up as soon as equations were viewed geometrically. Lush jungles of geometric flora and fauna waited to be discovered, cataloged, classified, and dissected."

Fermat was the better mathematician, and he came up with an early version of differential calculus when he applied algebra to "optimization problems" (which have to do with how to get the fastest, biggest,

most efficient, or whatever, result). Since I don't fully understand Strogatz's discussion and it's too dense to summarize anyway, we can skip it. But one point that struck me is that Fermat was the first person to apply (an embryonic form of) differential calculus to physics, when he calculated how light refracted when it passed from one medium (air) to another (water). It turned out that light travels in the most efficient way—not the most *direct* way (on a straight line through different media), but the fastest. "Of all the possible paths light can take, it somehow knows, or behaves as if it knows, how to get from here to there as quickly as possible. This was an important early clue that calculus was somehow built into the operating system of the universe." In other words, the reason light refracts through water at a particular angle is that that angle allows it to get from point *a* to point *b* in the fastest way. –It's all so incredible, nature. But so maddening to think the human mind is too limited to fully understand everything, and *why* everything is as it is! Why laws of nature are what they are, etc. We'll never know!

In any event,

> Fermat paved the way for calculus in its modern form. His *principle of least time* revealed that optimization is woven deeply into the fabric of nature. His work on analytic geometry and tangent lines blazed a trail to differential calculus that others soon followed. And his virtuosity with algebra enabled him to find the areas under certain curves that had eluded even his most illustrious predecessors. In particular, he found the area under the curve $y = x^n$ for any positive integer n, using little more than his bare hands. (Others had solved the first nine cases, $n = 1, 2, \ldots, 9$, but couldn't find a strategy that worked for all n.) Fermat's advance was a giant step forward for integral calculus, one that would set the stage for breakthroughs to come.

He was a genius, but he didn't quite make the decisive leap that Newton and Leibniz did, which "revolutionized and unified the two sides of calculus." The missing link was what was later called the *derivative*, a concept whose applications "would go far beyond curves and their tangents to include any sort of change at all."

Here's another paragraph I have to quote:

> The pivotal moment in the story of calculus occurred in the middle of the seventeenth century when the mysteries of curves, motion, and change collided on a two-dimensional grid, the *xy* plane of Fermat and Descartes. Back then, Fermat and Descartes had no idea what a versatile tool they'd created. They intended the *xy* plane as a tool for pure mathematics. Yet from the start, it was a crossroads of sorts, a place where equations met curves, algebra met geometry, and the mathematics of the East met that of the West. Then, in the next generation, Isaac Newton built on their work as well as on the work of Galileo and Kepler and brought geometry and physics together in a great synthesis. Newton's spark set off the fire that lit the Enlightenment and caused a revolution in Western science and mathematics.

So what is a derivative? It's a rate of change of one variable with respect to another. "Derivatives come up whenever we want to quantify how a change in something is related to a change in something else." The symbol for the derivative is dy/dx—similar to the ordinary rate of change $\Delta y/\Delta x$, except that the two changes dy and dx are imagined to be infinitesimally tiny. dy/dx is the slope of a continuously changing curve.

Well, I'm not going to summarize Strogatz's long mathematical discussion, since I'm too dumb to understand it. But the point is that Newton and Leibniz solved the ancient problem of how to systematically calculate the areas of regions bounded by curves. Independently, these two guys discovered and proved a fundamental theorem that connected areas to slopes, and thus *integrals* (infinite sums of infinitesimally small pieces) to *derivatives* (rates of change at each point or moment). Previously, it wasn't known that these two operations—calculation of geometric areas and calculation of slopes—were closely related. The

importance of the "fundamental theorem" of calculus can't be overstated: "it's the key to predicting the future of anything we care about (in the cases where we can) and to unlocking the secrets of motion and change in the universe."

Strogatz says calculus was sort of like the Cambrian explosion for mathematics. "Once it arrived, an amazing diversity of mathematical fields began to evolve. Their lineage is visible in their calculus-based names, in adjectives like *differential* and *integral* and *analytic*, as in differential geometry, integral equations, and analytic number theory." Differential geometry, for instance, "used calculus to shed light on the structure of smooth surfaces and revealed cousins they never knew they had, unimaginable curved shapes in four dimensions and beyond." Thus evolved non-Euclidean geometry and eventually general relativity.

The logic of differential equations is the logic of the universe, as Newton showed. Even the simple, iconic equation $F = ma$ is a differential equation, because acceleration is a derivative (the rate of change of a body's velocity).

Strogatz, like other mathematicians and physicists, is awestruck by the fact that this puny animal called *homo sapiens* can, on some level, unravel the mysteries of the cosmos, and he approvingly quotes Eugene Wigner's famous essay on "the unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics." But I'm not sure our capabilities are so mysterious. Nature is evidently structured according to *quantities*. So once an animal had evolved that could understand the concept of number—could build numbers in its mind, could grasp a system of discrete infinity (probably because of its possession of language, from which numbers are likely an abstraction, as Chomsky suggests)—the rest fell into place. It became possible to mentally manipulate numbers, which meant mentally manipulate physical entities, the substance of the universe. The real and original mystery is our possession of language, which has made possible our possession of the concept of number.

Anyway, it's an enlightening book, though its explanations of calculus are hard to follow.

*

Read *The Call of the Wild*. It's a book that makes you feel. My eyes welled up at the end, from the vastness and the beauty, the majesty and the mythology.

The symbolism and realism run together and strengthen one another. The whole book is wonderfully symbolic and realistic. Even the depictions of Buck's mental states are fairly plausible. Dogs have mental lives, after all; they aren't mere zombie-like behavior. Buck may be a sort of mythical *Übermenschean* creature, but his character is drawn vigorously and compellingly.

All the characters are realistic. For instance, Mercedes, the sole woman, is defiantly female, the whining, crying, spoiled brat. The expectation that because of her female weakness she's entitled to special treatment, and the absence of self-contempt for her weakness and stupidity—these are common female traits we're all familiar with. "I'm a weak and unthinking woman, I deserve to be treated better than you men!" Likewise, we're familiar with the bull-headed stupidity of a Hal, an unfortunate type of primitive male. Happily, John Thorntons exist. I laughed when Hal, Mercedes, and Charles crashed through the ice and drowned: it was as if London was wishing the world would be rid of this whole species of soft pathetic self-centered human.

A great book, magnificently, albeit subtly, anti-civilization. Its rawness and cleanliness and virility sweep away the parochial decadence of culture today, the petty stupid academics and craven politicians and money-slavering businessmen and lawyers. Wild nature is brutal and merciless, but it has a purity that beckons.

Also been reading H. P. Lovecraft, to whom I prefer Jack London. But Lovecraft isn't bad. I don't know why he's so beloved by counterculture types, but I was curious, so I thought I'd read him.

Now for *Germinal* (1885), Émile Zola's classic novel about coal miners in France.

…Well, Zola's most famous novel isn't exactly uplifting. My God, what a picture of screaming human misery. It's almost unbearable at times, the unending descent into ever deeper abysses of misery, every possible type of suffering. But predominantly poverty and hunger. And yet the writing and the overall

conception are so brilliant one has to keep reading. I really am in awe of the stamina and brilliance required to write such a novel (and other great novels). What an imagination Zola had!

There are so many incredible scenes, even beautiful and romantic ones—like Catherine and Étienne trapped in a pit underground on the verge of death, finally consummating their love. A profound, haunting, symbolic image. I suppose the novel contains a bit of melodrama, but it's forgivable. What an impassioned, agonized call for justice!

One emerges from this book bleeding pity for Maheude and all the others, and of course disgusted by a society capable of such cruelty, but also with one's appetite for life whetted. I think of young, innocent, healthy Aidan, so privileged and happy, and I'm very glad I'll see him tomorrow. The world teems with misery, and one should never forget this, but it's still possible to take pleasure in good things. Life's innocent enjoyment of itself, as when a young child runs and shouts around a playground, is still something to cherish. Even if such enjoyment is inevitably transient, it can be appreciated while it lasts.

*

Today Aidan said something that almost counted as a joke, though I doubt he knew it. I was bouncing a ball on his head and he said, smiling, "Ah need to wear the helmet!" He doesn't really ever wear a helmet, but Amina sometimes mentions it to him. Anyway, it was a charming remark.

He also came up to me while I was on my phone and said "Boo!" Then laughed. So he's at the stage of being able to say things to elicit particular emotional responses, on the basis of his own responses when others say those things to him. "Theory of mind," etc. (But of course that theory of mind stuff goes back to before the age of two.) He's developing more of a personality. Sometimes when we're walking in the street he'll say "Hiya!" to people we pass. In general he's quite shy, though.

Aidan has a great memory for words and names of objects, but he struggles with names of colors. It's kind of amazing, actually: I tell him the colors of a couple of objects and a few seconds later ask him what they are, and he frequently gets them wrong. He can't remember how to apply the word even for five seconds! I go over the colors of several objects again and again and again, but he rarely remembers them. Though he's most successful with blue, for some reason. Given his great memory in other contexts, this cries out for an explanation. I suppose color is just too abstract a concept at this point, so he doesn't know what the words are supposed to denote. Evidently toddlers, at least early toddlers, assume nouns are supposed to name objects and people, not properties. Their minds exist too much on the level of immediacy to be able to understand such abstractions.

Anyway, it's occurred to me that if it were necessary, I'd die for Aidan. It's not exactly because I'm "full of love" for him; it has more to do with a sense of what's right, a sense of obligation. But not a burdensome obligation. I brought him into the world, and I want him to live out his life, to have a good life. You immediately acquire massive responsibilities once you create a person. Even without reflection, your priority becomes your child's life. It's an oddly "automatic" thing that doesn't seem to depend either on deeply felt emotions or on logical reasoning or any other factor. It's just a given. I don't feel some sort of palpable, physiological emotion of love for Aidan, at least not ordinarily, though it wouldn't be wrong to say I love him. My actions, at least, indicate I do. There's no question I *care* about him deeply, which is why I'd sacrifice my life for his. To some extent—probably in part because I don't see him often enough—he's still just an external being to me, someone with whom I don't profoundly *identify*. But my simple awareness of the connection between us has an impressive power to motivate. Sometimes I do come closer to really *feeling* something, like, on occasion, when I'm holding him and smothering him with kisses; and there's a notable pleasure in his company, i.e. in his cuteness. Enough of a pleasure to make me tolerate his mother!

*

David Enoch's academic paper "Agency, Shmagency: Why Normativity Won't Come from What Is Constitutive of Action" (2006) is insightful and funny, and reminds me of what I wrote in January. The

whole vast post-Platonic philosophical attempt to ground morality or normativity in something ironclad like *the nature of reason* or *the nature of God*—or, more relevantly and recently, *the nature of action* or *the nature of being an agent*—is doomed to fail. Interesting arguments have been made along the way, but in the end the whole millennia-long project was misguided. The "sentimentalist" theorists of the Enlightenment, such as Hutcheson and Hume, were on the right track, not the rationalist or Kantian or realist theorists who came before and after.

Christine Korsgaard, for example, tries to explicate the nature of action in order to construct a foundation for normativity/morality. Enoch introduces his discussion with this attempt to motivate Korsgaard's project:

> The intuitive idea can be put, I think, rather simply: In order to know what it takes for a car to be a good car, we need to understand what cars are, what their constitutive functions are, and so on. A good car is just a car that is good *as a car*, good, that is, in measuring up to the standards a commitment to which is built into the very classification of an object as a car. Analogously, then, perhaps in order to know which actions are good (or right, or reason supported, or rational, or whatever), all we need is a better understanding of what actions are, or perhaps of what it is to be an agent, someone who performs actions. Perhaps the normative standards relevant for actions will fall out of an understanding of what is constitutive of action just as the normative standards relevant for cars fall out of an understanding of what is constitutive of cars.

If this is the "intuitive idea," then it's stupid. Cars have a function. Humans don't, and actions don't. That is, there is no general function of *action* as such. Almost everything we do is an action: one might almost say that action is life, or willed life. So there can't be a good action or a good human in this "functional" sense, the sense in which there can be a good car.

"Action, so Christine Korsgaard tells us, is self-constitution. That your action (partly) constitutes yourself, or perhaps that in your action you constitute yourself, is constitutive of what an action is. From this, Korsgaard continues, an important result follows: 'Action is self-constitution. And accordingly,…what makes actions good or bad is how well they constitute you.' Korsgaard believes that the whole of morality—and, indeed, the whole of practical rationality, and perhaps even rationality more generally—can be extracted from this insight."

Okay, so right away we're in the realm of metaphor and myth. *In acting, you constitute (construct) yourself.* Or, alternatively, *your actions constitute you.* That's an odd and unnatural way of talking. The fact is that you are who you are, and you act in accordance with that. Your acts neither bring you into existence nor define you, since there are many other dimensions to who you are (your genetic code, your values, your intentions, your talents, your regrets and resentments, your loves and hates, and so forth). Moreover, the idea of *actions doing a good job of constituting you* ("constituting you well") is meaningless. However Korsgaard wants to flesh that idea out, it's meaningless from the beginning. Whether you're a Chomsky or a Jeffrey Dahmer, you're still "well-constituted" as who you are.

Enoch sets aside such criticisms and makes a different one, which is reminiscent of what I wrote in January. Remember that one of the points of this whole Platonic, Kantian, Korsgaardian, transhistorical project of grounding morality in something objective or non-moral is to provide a knockdown answer to a moral skeptic:

> We are to imagine, then, someone who remains indifferent when we tell him that his actions are immoral or irrational. He then reads Korsgaard and is convinced that self-constitution is a constitutive aim of action, so that you cannot even count as an agent and your bodily movements cannot even count as actions unless you aim at self-constitution of the kind Korsgaard has in mind. And assume that our skeptic is even convinced that—miraculously—morality and indeed the whole of practical rationality can be extracted from the aim of self-constitution. Do we have any reason to believe that now he will care about

> the immorality or irrationality of his actions? Why isn't he entitled to respond along the following lines: "Classify my bodily movements and indeed me as you like. Perhaps I cannot be classified as an agent without aiming to constitute myself. But why should I be an agent? Perhaps I can't act without aiming at self-constitution, but why should I act? If your reasoning works, this just shows that I don't care about agency and action. I am perfectly happy being a shmagent—a nonagent who is very similar to agents but who lacks the aim (constitutive of agency but not of shmagency) of self-constitution. I am perfectly happy performing shmactions—nonaction events that are very similar to actions but that lack the aim (constitutive of actions but not of shmactions) of self-constitution." Has Korsgaard put us in a better spot vis-à-vis this why-be-an-agent (rather than a shmagent) problem than we were vis-a-vis the why-be-moral or why-be-rational challenges with which we—or at least Korsgaard—started?...

The skeptic has no reason to *care* about Korsgaard's argument regarding his not being a full-fledged agent—unless he really *wants* to be such an agent. As Enoch says, "However strong or weak the reasons that apply to [the skeptic] and require that he be moral, surely they do not become stronger when he realizes that unless he complies with morality his bodily movements will not be adequately described as actions."

In any event, you can see how silly and artificial this whole Korsgaardian project is. An action isn't *really* an action unless it fulfills certain criteria? Give me a break. People act in countless kinds of ways, from hedonistic and "immoral" to compassionate and "moral." It's all actions, it's all bodily movements and intentions and desires and reasons. As I said in January, the *naturalistic* analysis, which doesn't use weird philosophical metaphors and abstruse rationalistic justifications for acting in ways we're socialized to act in, is the best.

(It seems like many modern moral philosophers are in the game of doing what Nietzsche said Kant was trying to do: having got rid of God, they hope to bring him in through the back door. They have a nostalgic yearning for the certainty that came with belief in God, the banishment of doubt, the belief in objectivity, so they try to construct some new rationalistic God—for instance, *moral realism*, or, alternatively, Korsgaard's neo-Kantianism—to ground their values and actions. They're only willing to go halfway to a fully modern, naturalistic stance.)

All this moralistic theorizing is just *unnecessary*! It seems *unproductive*! I sympathize with Orson Welles, who said, "I'm suspicious of philosophy. I have a real philistine doubt about its worth. Anthropology seems to be just at its beginnings, and philosophy kind of at its end." I'll admit it can be interesting to read Korsgaard and others, but in the end they're wrong and their ideas don't contribute much to the world. The project of denying analytical and naturalistic common sense is doomed.

As I remember writing many years ago: "Damn it, man, it would be refreshing to be *wrong* for once!" In its consistency and rationality, my 'system of thought' puts to shame that of almost all other intellectuals. What I ought to do is sit down and spell everything out rigorously, like I said in my twenties I would someday do.

The problem is that there's far too much I'd have to read and cite. I have to make money, after all—probably get a full-time job soon, so I'm not living paycheck to paycheck.

…Okay, was I too quick and glib in those thoughts critical of Korsgaard? Fine! I'll be more serious! Let's embrace the philosophical drudgery! Let's turn to Korsgaard's influential book *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (2009).

First, I want to note again that a Kantian project is prima facie implausible, since its whole point is just to find some convoluted philosophical justification for doing what we're socialized (or genetically predisposed?) to do. We want to assuage our philosophical conscience, so we laboriously try to come up with wonderful philosophical reasons to do what society already wants us to do. The conclusion is given beforehand, so to speak, and we try to invent respectable reasons to get to that conclusion. There's something suspicious about the whole thing!

But I should confess I have a soft spot for Korsgaard. Not only because she's an unusually clear writer. More substantively, I like her reverence for Kant. That isn't particularly fashionable, which is sad,

because Kant, despite all the things he was wrong about, was a profound, systematic, and beautiful thinker. Surely one of the top five philosophers in history. I can't but respect someone who loves Kant.

Since his moral system was wrong, though, so is Korsgaard's. The problems start in the book's preface. In its first paragraph. Human self-consciousness, different from the consciousness of other animals, "makes it necessary to *take control* of our beliefs and actions"—because we can't escape having a capacity to control and direct them in a way other animals lack—"but we must then work out how to do that: we must find normative principles, laws, to govern what we believe and do." Really? Why *must* we? What kind of "must" is this? It would seem that plenty of people get by without having any conception of the normative principles or laws that are supposed to govern what they do.

Proceeding to the third paragraph…

> If, when we act, we are trying to constitute ourselves as the authors of our own movements, and at the same time, we are making ourselves into the particular people who we are, then we may say that the function of action is *self-constitution*. This conception of action opens up the possibility that the specific form of goodness or badness that applies to human actions—rightness or wrongness—is goodness or badness *of their kind*, goodness or badness *as actions*. A good action is one that constitutes its agent as the autonomous and efficacious cause of her own movements.

Whoa, slow down there! Through our actions it may be true that we're, in some sense, (partially) showing who we are, but that doesn't mean the function of action is self-constitution. Why can't "the" function of action just be to realize desires? Or why can't action as such have no "function" at all?

Now for the second sentence: what I just wrote pulls the rug out from beneath Korsgaard's reasoning, but even apart from that, it's significant that the idea of the goodness or badness of an action *as such* strikes us as bizarre and meaningless. Action is action. It sounds very weird to say certain actions more successfully achieve the goal of *being an action* than others. When a way of talking sounds as artificial as this, you know there's something wrong with it.

Third sentence: um, okay. Some actions don't fulfill their purpose, sure—like if you trip over yourself while walking—and so then you're not being "efficacious." But it's really stretching things to hope to get an entire moral theory out of considerations like this.

It deteriorates from there:

> …I also draw on the work of Plato, to explain the kind of unity that a person must have in order to be regarded as the author of her movements. For it is essential to the concept of an action that it is attributable to the person as a whole, as a unit, not to some force that is working in her or on her. *[No. Whatever anyone does, even if they're drunk or high, is an action. The only thing "essential" to the concept of an action is that it be something you do.]* And it was Plato who taught us, in the *Republic*, that the kind of unity required for agency is the kind of unity that a city has in virtue of having a just constitution.
>
> Following Plato's lead, in this book I argue that the kind of unity that is necessary for action cannot be achieved without a commitment to morality. *[This is getting silly. You can't be "unified" without being moral? You can't truly act without being committed to morality? This is such fantastical philosophical nonsense.]* The task of self-constitution, which is simply the task of living a human life *[um, we're all living human lives, simply by virtue of living!]*, places us in a relationship with ourselves—it means that we interact with ourselves. We make laws for ourselves, and those laws determine whether we constitute ourselves well or badly. And I argue that the only way in which you can constitute yourself well is by governing yourself in accordance with universal principles which you can will as laws for every rational being. It follows that you can't maintain the integrity you need in order to be an agent with your own identity on any terms short of morality itself. …The

> moral law is the law of self-constitution, and as such, it is a constitutive principle of human life itself.

None of this seems promising, but okay, it's only the preface.

It's at least odd, however, to think of morality as having to do primarily with a type of relation to oneself. Surely the essence of morality, as people understand the concept, is a type of relation to others. If you treat others well, you're moral. Simple as that. Bringing in all sorts of considerations of autonomy, agency, the nature of action, practical reason, self-constitution, self-unity, and the like, in order to show that there's some kind of rational imperative to be moral—rather than accepting that morality is grounded in simple sentiments like compassion and respect, and that's pretty much the end of the matter—makes it seem like we're engaged in nothing more than a highfalutin kind of verbal, philosophical game.

Here's another statement of where she's headed, from chapter 2:

> In Chapter 1, I explained the general thesis for which I am arguing in this book: that action is self-constitution. By this I mean that we human beings constitute our own personal or practical identities—and at the same time our own agency—through action itself. We *make* ourselves the authors of our actions, by the way that we act. As I said before, this apparently paradoxical thesis depends on the ideas that action requires agency, and agency requires unity. An action is a movement attributable to an agent considered as an integrated whole, not a movement attributable merely to a part of an agent, or to some force working in her or on her. Since some ways of acting unify their agents better than others, the extent to which a movement is an action is a matter of degree: some actions are more genuinely actions than others. The actions that are most genuinely actions, I will argue, are the ones that accord with the principles of practical reason. These principles are therefore constitutive principles of actions, principles that we must be at least trying to follow if we are to count as acting at all. And this is what explains their normativity, or the way that they bind us.

So what are the principles of practical reason? First there's the hypothetical imperative, that if you will an end, you must will the means to that end, and second there's the categorical imperative, that you must will your maxim as a universal law.

Let's start with the hypothetical imperative. It gets a little strange here. Apparently the hypothetical imperative "unifies and constitutes the will." Korsgaard thinks we're not necessarily *willing* something whenever we're acting. Suppose I want to write a book: I have to *will* that I sit down and get to work. At many moments I'll want to stop, want to take a break or give up or do something else—all these impulses "will attempt to control or overrule my will, to divert me from my work"—but I have to keep insisting to these desires "I am not you; my will is this work." "If I give in to each claim [i.e., each desire] as it appears, *I* will do nothing and I will not have a life. For to will an end is not just to cause it, not even if the cause is one of my own desires and impulses, but to consciously pick up the reins, and *make myself* the cause of the end. The reason that I must conform to the hypothetical imperative is that if I don't conform to it, if I *always* allow myself to be derailed by timidity, idleness, or depression, then I never really *will* an end. The *desire* to pursue the end and the desires that draw me away from it each hold sway in their turn, but *my will* is never active. The distinction between my will and the operation of the desires and impulses in me does not [then] exist, and that means that I, considered as an agent, do not exist. Conformity to the hypothetical imperative is thus constitutive of having a will. It is, in fact, an essential part of what *gives* you a will."

Okay, so for Korsgaard, the hypothetical imperative has to do not with whims and momentary desires but with a deeper sort of will that expresses your more considered desires, your deeper goals. And your will isn't active except when you're *truly controlling* yourself and your actions in this way. Fine. I suppose she's entitled to interpret concepts like 'will' and 'agency' however she wants. But at best, you have to say "*in a sense* you're not a *genuine* agent unless you're disciplining yourself to act according to your *deepest will*." Surely it's more natural to say we're *all* agents, we're all acting most of the time, we're

all willing our acts. But I'll admit that the *self* is less involved, less implicated, in certain actions than others, and that it might be permissible, albeit idiosyncratic, to say you're *most* an agent when your self is, through hard deliberation, relatively "unified"—not flightily distracted—and deeply implicated in what you're doing.

But it's worth pointing out that to talk of "unity" in this way is merely metaphorical, since even if I get distracted from my work by going out to socialize or watching TV or whatnot, I'm still a "unified" self choosing those actions. It's not as though I suddenly become schizophrenic by indulging a desire I have at that moment. I'm still Chris Wright, a self with a unified consciousness.

> Again, none of these Korsgaardian arguments seem promising. It's too easy to poke holes in them. So much for the hypothetical imperative. What about the categorical imperative?
>
> > I have argued that action is a form of self-determination, and that we can derive the hypothetical imperative from the fact that acting is determining yourself to be a cause. The hypothetical imperative is a constitutive principle of action, for you are not acting unless you are determining yourself to be a cause. But as I've just indicated, Kant thought that the fact that action is self-determination has a further implication. It also implies that the categorical imperative is a constitutive principle of action. For determining yourself to be a cause is not the same as being moved by something within you, say some desire or impulse—or to use Kant's own language now, some *incentive*—operating as a cause. When you deliberate, when you determine your own causality, it is as if there is something over and above all of your incentives, something which is *you*, and which chooses which incentive to act on. So when you determine your own causality you must operate as a whole, as something over and above your parts. And in order to do this, Kant believes, you must will your maxims as universal laws.

I should say again that I find her use of Kant and other old classics appealing, and I find some of these thoughts here intuitively attractive. But there's something a little contrived about them. And, as it turns out, there's something contrived and convoluted about her whole discussion of the categorical imperative, so I'm not about to summarize it. She actually says it's impossible *not* to will maxims as universal laws (but then where does the normativity of the categorical imperative come from?), and that the categorical imperative, strictly speaking, isn't the moral law. So more argumentation, in more chapters, is necessary to get us to the moral law.

As one continues to plow through all the thickets of verbiage, the activity becomes increasingly unrewarding. I'm thinking of Orson Welles again… What's the *point* of all this desperate determination to rehabilitate, by endless convoluted and problematic arguments, Kantian formulations? If they're this hard to expound and defend, Christine, there must be something wrong with them!

Well, I've had enough of this book. It has ingenuity and brilliance, but all the brilliance is in service of a perverse and hopeless project. It's a gigantic exercise in pointlessness. It's the ruins of theology, all this talk of the categorical imperative and the moral law and the unified agent (or the "unified constitution") and on and on. So much verbiage, my God! But I suppose that's what a lot of moral philosophy is: secularized theology. Theology for a secular age. It's hopelessly behind the times.

Korsgaard spent years writing this book, and many more years pursuing thoughts that led to it…and it was all mostly a waste of time. How did she not see how riddled with holes, and how often *merely metaphorical*, her arguments were? The whole damn thing is, in a sense, *imaginary*! Fictional and superfluous!

(William Fitzpatrick also gives compelling criticisms in his article "The Practical Turn in Ethical Theory: Korsgaard's Constructivism, Realism, and the Nature of Normativity" (2005).)

Still, the questions she asks are of course interesting and important. *From whence does moral obligation get its force? What is the source of [our perception of] obligation? What explains the "**necessitation**"—to quote Kant and Korsgaard—that accompanies obligation, or rather that **is** the perception of obligation?* As I indicated months ago, I think it's sufficient to provide a psychological, not

a philosophical, answer. You know that people want and expect you to act morally, and you want their approval—you want to be thought of, and to think of yourself, as a worthy person—so you're impelled to act morally on pain of potentially losing the respect of others and even yourself. You're part of the human community, so you take seriously the judgments and principles of this community. You want to belong to it, you want to be bound by its values and norms because that reinforces your sense of self, it helps to *define* your self. Basically, the source of necessitation is just your "conscience," your inner voice of self-judgment and also care and sympathy for others. –But actually, no, it's more than that: there's a human capacity for disinterested moral perception, the ability to look at a situation and judge what is fair or not, what is just or not, and then on account of that judgment to be motivated to act in the moral way—simply because you "disinterestedly" value the idea of fairness and justice. You have a relatively unthinking commitment to it. "I shouldn't steal his money—that's wrong." "She gave me a gift, so the right thing would be to send a thank-you card." Frequently, you're just unthinkingly motivated by considerations of reciprocity and respect. They're the underlying substrate of social life, and you ordinarily accept them without question.

So I guess the most immediate source of the perception of obligation isn't the desire for approval or anything like that; it's your disinterested awareness of what's right and wrong, good and bad. This is probably an innate human tendency resulting from genetic programming, as Chomsky speculates, although obviously the moral capacity can express itself in different ways depending on your society and upbringing. Evidently it comes from the ability to imagine yourself as an other. You know you wouldn't want your money stolen or you'd appreciate a thank-you card or whatever, so you act in the appropriate way towards another person. The force of "necessitation" reflects the force of your valuing of someone else's experience, perspective, and feelings.

All this is, moreover, supplemented by your (typically *implicit*) desire to be thought well of, to be accepted as part of the human community, a person on the same level and adhering to the same basic values as others, which further motivates you to act as you're morally supposed to act. "She would expect a thank-you card, so I should send one. It wouldn't reflect well on me if I didn't." "If someone saw me steal this money, they'd lose respect for me."

It should go without saying—despite some ambiguity in how I expressed myself above—that I think there's no such thing as moral obligation outside of our *perception* of it. There isn't some Platonic or realist or rationalist realm of objective obligations we have to one another. Surely the idea that there is violates Occam's razor. As Orson Welles said, what we really need is anthropology, not this sort of dead, non-naturalistic philosophy.

–As I often say, in order to sketch answers to many of the "big questions" in philosophy and human life, all that's needed are several paragraphs like what I just wrote. You really don't need all the long books and thousands of years of arguments. In fact, there would be vastly fewer (perverse) books and essays today on philosophical questions if it weren't that elite intellectual institutions demand the production of such verbiage in order to have a paycheck and get tenure. It's all mostly for the sake of *institutional* factors—and financial factors—not philosophical ones.

*

I don't know what's going to happen in the next few decades as a result of global warming and ecological destruction, but here's one distinct possibility, or even probability: hundreds of millions of people, mostly in the Global South, will die from heat waves, famine, droughts, and pandemics. They'll try to migrate to places more north, but the northern countries will use their militaries to keep them out. Wars will break out, killing millions. Regions near the equator will become largely uninhabitable. Coastlines will be subject to more and more flooding, which will contribute to economic crises engulfing the North as well as the South. Millions in the North, too, will die from the fallout of global warming. But gradually, as populations decline and economic activity decreases—at the same time as societies are aggressively deploying cleaner technologies (perhaps even coming up with ways to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere)—carbon emissions will decline. Will it be too late, though, to prevent a continued indefinite rise in global temperatures? At least the decline of emissions will moderate warming. I doubt humanity will

go extinct, since it seems to be practically the most adaptable form of life in Earth's history. (Aside, perhaps, from some microorganisms, what other entity has conquered the Arctic, the desert, and the tropics?) But humans will have to adapt to a much more extreme and unstable climate than they've experienced in the last 12,000 years.

Much of this could have been avoided if the world had been building thousands of nuclear power plants in the last fifty years, but…oh well! The human species may be remarkably intelligent, but it's shockingly dumb.

May

Something it's easy to forget is that even little ol' me has had a positive impact on hundreds of lives (not to mention the *hundreds of thousands* of people who have read and, in many cases, downloaded my writings). Just by being an über-kind professor who lets students submit papers late or revise their papers or take make-up exams or even submit assignments long after the end of the semester if they present a good case (I change their grades), plus, of course, enlightening them on the *real* history of the U.S.—sometimes students say it's made a big impression on them—I've helped make the world a slightly less absurd place.[1]

Speaking of which: Israel. It isn't often in history that a country has sealed a very densely populated area shut and then bombed it to smithereens and tried to starve it into oblivion. Not many things are more evil than that, except maybe the Holocaust and, in a sense, speciescidal capitalism. The enormity of Netanyahu's and Biden's crimes passes understanding. It's too gigantic to truly comprehend. Millions of innocent people, half of them children, *intentionally* smashed into the blood-soaked dirt. Osama bin Laden was a trivial little troublemaker compared to Biden, one of the great mass murderers of the last fifty years. (Don't forget his intentionally provoked and prolonged war in Ukraine. It could have ended years ago, but Biden's inner circle wants to keep it going as long as possible in order to harm Russia.)

…And yet, after reading about the likes of Biden and Netanyahu, one listens to some charming music—not even necessarily classical, just something like Mannheim Steamroller (they have some beautiful songs)—and it's still easy, especially with the help of alcohol, to get misty-eyed about the human species. About its simplicity and goodness. Just think of a group of people playing instruments together! Maybe they're playing the works of some composer, or maybe they're creating original music themselves, it doesn't matter: in essence, they're *playing*, like children; they're reveling in the possession of *superfluous* mental capacities. There is no *reason* for the human ability to play and love music. But we come together anyway and play the fiddle, the drum, the triangle, the oboe, all together in a complex harmony and melody, just because we can. Just because it strikes us as *beautiful*. That's the sole reason, that mysterious perception and enjoyment of *beauty*. No other organism in the history of life has been such as this.

Yes, there is depravity, there are the Bidens and Obamas and Netanyahus. But how can one give up on the species when there is music? *We are the reason that music exists*. What an astonishing species that has such a range of capacities!

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Been reading some of the contemporary philosophical literature on personal identity, the subject that so tormented me in my early years. (I struggled with it in my college senior thesis.) Most of it is

[1] Here's a comment from this semester, for instance: "I just wanted to thank you again for a wonderful semester and share that I'm actually 36 years old and can honestly say that I absorbed more U.S. history than I ever have in my life in your class. Thank you for being so passionate about the course and for really challenging me with all the essays/reading responses." Another girl loved to talk to me after class and found the readings and lectures fascinating. She was an exceptional student, who said it was the best course she'd ever taken. (Which, I think, says more about how crappy the other courses were than how good mine was.)

admirably nuanced but ultimately unsatisfying. Endless articles and books grapple with the puzzles and paradoxes, but hardly ever do thinkers try to get to the *bottom* of the matter so as to understand what's going wrong and why the subject is so intractable. I'll try to sketch a few ideas here, which have something in common with my thoughts from college.

The questions are pretty simple, at least in appearance. What does it mean for person *A* to be the same as, or identified with, person *B*? (What does it mean for me to say when I look at a picture of myself at the age of 10 that that person was me, or that I am him?) Under what conditions does someone cease to be the same person? Or is that even possible? Exotic thought-experiments have been invented to flesh out and evaluate various concepts, intuitions, and theories, from teleportation to brain transplants to terrible accidents that radically change someone's personality and/or cause him to lose his memories.

It's important to note that the concept of personal identity has multiple meanings and dimensions. We're not concerned, or at least not primarily concerned, with the meaning according to which someone's traits can change so much that we say, "He's not the same person he used to be; he's so different now." We can say this even if he has the necessary psychological and physical continuities for us to say that in a more fundamental sense, we're referring only to one person, a person who has changed.

But even here, with such an elementary conceptual point, difficulties can already arise. Maybe the person's psychological changes are *so* extreme that we're tempted to say he's actually, literally, a different person than the one who inhabited his body years ago. (Think, for example, of Robert Pirsig and "his" earlier self "Phaedrus" in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Pirsig sees them as two entirely different people. (See my discussion of the book many years ago.)) But how would we know for sure? How could we decide one way or the other? What would it even mean to say they're literally two different people?

One already begins to suspect that there's something a little specious about the idea of personal identity. In at least some cases—"borderline cases"—there is no "fact of the matter" about whether *A* and *B* are the same person. It's not a matter of discovery (understanding an objective fact) but of decision, of how we decide to apply the concept. If my brain is transplanted into a different body, is that person me? What if the operation has changed "my" personality slightly? What if it's changed it radically? What if "I," or rather the person in the new body, have lost most of "my" (his) memories, while still having the same personality? Would the person think he was the same person as the one who inhabited the original body? Would others think so? Answers to such questions become arbitrary. Indeed, they're not really substantive or interesting at all. The concept of a person incorporates so many heterogeneous aspects, both physical and mental, and is so fuzzy around the edges—e.g., is someone who is rendered brain-dead by a catastrophic accident the same person as before the accident? ("yes and no" is the answer)—that we should be careful lest the questions we find ourselves asking are meaningless.

In her paper "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit" (1989), Korsgaard argues that the same person could occupy a different body. And she poses the question whether the same body could come to have a new person in it. These are not interesting questions. Surely the same body could have a new *self*, i.e., a new sense of self (for the "self" is nothing but the sense of self): this clearly happens sometimes, after terrible traumas that cause someone to lose all sense of identification with the "previous person" who inhabited his body. You could then say, if you want, that there was a new person there. Or, if you preferred, you could say there was only ever one person—whose sense of self had been so disrupted at one point in his life that *for him*, two people had inhabited the same body. These are more like terminological than substantive issues.

And yet there are deep puzzles about personal identity. So deep, in fact, that I'm tempted to invoke Wittgenstein's "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." A paper that briefly hints at them, and that stands out for its perceptiveness, is R. G. Swinburne's "Personal Identity" (1974). Swinburne notes that for most theorists, what it means for *A* to be the same person as *B* is that there are continuities and similarities of mind and body between the two. The point of his paper is to argue that, while such continuities and similarities provide *evidence* of identity (that *A* is *B*), they can't be the *meaning* of identity. He marshals quite a few arguments. For example, if what it means to be me is to have this body and this character and memories, how can I coherently wish that I be someone else in a more fortunate position?

People often have such a wish. "I wish I were you! You're smarter, better-looking, and more successful." It certainly seems to be a coherent wish. It's possible to imagine my being you and your being me. But then the conventional understanding of personal identity appears to be mistaken.

What is to take its place? Swinburne's alternative consists of two words, which I've italicized in the following passage:

> Wherein does the identity of persons consist? The identity does not consist solely in the continuity of one or more observable characteristics, for empiricist theories [as he calls them] took all these into account… The only alternative is to say that personal identity is *something ultimate*. It is unanalysable into conjunctions or disjunctions or other observable properties. Bodily continuity, continuity of memory and character, are however the only evidence we have of its presence; it is observable only by observing these.

"Something ultimate." That's pretty cryptic. And he says nothing else about it. That might seem oddly lazy and unconvincing, but in fact I think his silence is justifiable, since almost nothing *can* be said about it. It's true you could invoke the idea of a "soul" or "spiritual substance" or something like that, but I take science and modern philosophy to have dispelled such mystical notions. Rather, personal identity has to do with the bare fact of conscious existence, as I wrote in college. In saying the 10-year-old Chris Wright is the same person as the 43-year-old Chris Wright, I'm saying, first of all, that *this consciousness, this existence-for-itself*, was *that consciousness/existence-for-itself*. It's the same conscious existence transposed in space and time. (I'm also saying, of course, that there are psychological and bodily continuities and similarities.)

The problem is that what I've just said is almost meaningless. What does it mean to say "the same conscious existence"? *As* conscious existence, all people are the same! In a sense, we're all the same "existence-for-itself" (consciousness) transposed in space and time. *Your* existence-for-itself, as such, is in no way different from mine—except that it's *for you*, not me. So there is also something circular here, inasmuch as we're defining what it means to be me by using the words "for me"—existence-*for-me* (or for-itself). But that isn't a vicious circularity. It isn't absurd or viciously circular to say I am *this subjectivity*—the bare fact of this subjectivity as such—and that this subjectivity has existed every waking moment since I was born.

But there are more puzzles. Suppose I worry that after surgery on my brain I won't wake up. Being in a philosophical mood, I worry that even if someone inhabiting this body wakes up, it won't be me. It won't be *this* existence-for-itself but a different one. Even if it isn't a realistic possibility, it seems imaginable that I'll never wake up even as *some other consciousness*, some other self, does. And suppose that self has all my memories and characteristics. Then *for him*, he will be me! He'll think "What a relief, I survived the operation." But in fact *I* will never have woken up—and no one will be any the wiser.

If that example seems strange, consider this one, from Derek Parfit. (But he doesn't use it in the way I will.) Suppose I get into a teleportation machine that disintegrates my body and perfectly reconstitutes it on another planet. The reconstituted person, with all my memories and my body and character, will see himself as me, and everyone will take him to be me. He'll think "I survived, yay!" But maybe, in fact, the machine actually killed me and *copied* me. No one will have the faintest inkling of that fact, and no evidence can conceivably show it to be the case. This is because, as Swinburne says, I am something "ultimate," something sort of outside the empirical world. (I'm reminded of Wittgenstein's statement that the self, or the subject, doesn't belong to the world but is the limit of the world.)

As I wrote in my college senior thesis—a document with brilliant intuitions but terrible argumentation—in my concrete fullness I am more than a bare particular subjectivity: I have a certain cast of mind, a fleshed-out sense of self, a body and memories and thoughts that all, together, define me. (Of course, they can gradually change over time.) But the essential core of it all is *something ultimate*, something non-empirical that we all have in common, namely that brute fact of a particular subjectivity or existence-for-itself, a particular 'looking-out-at-the-world.' *This* is the most essential thing I share with my 10-year-old self, for he and I, despite how different our minds are, are ultimately the same existence-for-itself (in a more meaningful, "personal" way than everyone else is the "same" as me).

In reference to *this* thing, it isn't exactly meaningless to ask whether the same person could occupy a different body or the same body could, at different times, have two different people in it. But there is no way we, or even the person in question, could ever know if it were the same person or two different people. So in this sense, again, it does seem meaningless to ask the questions. The person in the new body might *think* he was the same person as in the previous body—as in the case of the teleported person—but he might well be wrong. Existence for that other person might have ended.

Another criticism Swinburne could have given of the usual psychological-continuity criterion and definition of personal identity is one Marya Schechtman gives in "Personhood and Personal Identity" (1990). It's the old objection Bishop Butler raised to John Locke's idea that memory connectedness is the criterion of identity. The problem with the criterion is that it's circular, and that memory isn't reliable:

> A madman may think he remembers leading the troops at Waterloo, but this does not make him Napoleon. Therefore, if memory connectedness is to be a criterion of personal identity, we must have some way of distinguishing between real and merely apparent memory. But that distinction is no more than this: real memories are apparent memories in which the person remembering is the person who actually had the experience. The obvious problem with the memory criterion of personal identity, then, is that one must already have a criterion of personal identity in order to define memory. Butler argues that, since the fact of identity is prior to the distinction between real and apparent memory, personal identity cannot be defined in terms of memory connectedness.

Parfit tries to avoids the circularity by using his bizarre notion of impersonal "quasi-memories," but Schechtman argues he fails.

Maybe there's some way around the objection, but the ideas I've suggested avoid it entirely. The mysterious "something ultimate" avoids it, because it is defined in terms of brute existence-for-itself. It doesn't depend on memory. Again, though, there is something unsatisfactory about what I've said, because it's almost meaningless to say that *this* existence-for-itself, this consciousness, is the same as the consciousness of (and that *was*) the being called Chris Wright when he was ten years old. I could be a "different" consciousness, which means a different person, without even knowing it! All the psychological connections—common memories, common traits, etc.—between the past and the present would make me think I'm the same person even if that previous person's life had ended (as in the case of the man killed by the teleportation machine that produces a copy of him).

In the end, I always return to Kant's admonition that human reason has a tendency to go beyond its proper, natural sphere, and thereby gets embroiled in paradoxes. Some things we're destined never to adequately conceptualize.

…At the considerable risk of (even more) repetition, I'll again try to clarify my view, which is the view I've held since the age of 19 or 20. The literature makes a distinction between reductionist and non-reductionist views of the self. As Derek Parfit says in his paper "Personal Identity and Rationality" (1982), philosophers like Locke, Hume, Grice, Ayer, Mackie, and Parfit have been reductionists, while Butler, Reid, Chisholm, Geach, Swinburne, and most others have been non-reductionists. Reductionist views are those Swinburne calls empiricist in the passage I quoted: personal identity consists in other facts, namely continuities of memory, character, and all the rest. The non-reductionist view, of course, is that identity is itself a further fact and can't be analyzed in terms of anything else.

The obviously correct view, surely, is that *both* positions are true in a sense. As we ordinarily talk, *who I am* depends on my personal properties, all my bodily and psychological qualities, including continuities and even discontinuities between my past and present. Insofar as there are discontinuities or differences between my past and present character/body, I'm not quite the same person I was but have changed. Inasmuch, on the other hand, as I'm "numerically identical" to the one-year-old Chris—that is to say, inasmuch as baby Chris was the person who will someday die at an old age—it isn't a question of character traits and memories. It's a question of something brute, something that doesn't change, something that either exists or doesn't exist. What can this thing be? Just *this particular existence-for-itself*. The full

experiential consciousness of this existence-for-itself grows and changes over time, as "my" body and mind change—and this is the sense in which the reductionist view is right (I am this body, memories, desires, intentions, and the like, all bundled together)—but the conscious existence *as such* doesn't—which is the truth of non-reductionism. As conscious existence, I am not reducible to other facts.

It's almost uncanny how adept philosophers are at avoiding the right answers to many questions. As I used to say in my twenties, it has to do with their inadequate intuitive abilities, their (institutionally cultivated) preference to remain on the level of endless discursiveness rather than—by means of simple, rational intuitions—trying to go deeper than shallow binary alternatives.

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Just finished reading the classic black novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston. A beautiful book dense with poetry and feeling. But perhaps a little overrated. The truth about its value lies between the scorn expressed by Richard Wright and the rapturous praise expressed by Alice Walker.

While reading the Afterword written by Henry Louis Gates Jr., I was strangely affected by this paragraph Hurston wrote about her last encounter with her dying mother:

> As I crowded in, they lifted up the bed and turned it around so that Mama's eyes would face east. I thought that she looked to me as the head of the bed reversed. Her mouth was slightly open, but her breathing took up so much of her strength that she could not talk. But she looked at me, or so I felt, to speak for her. She depended on me for a voice.

I thought of the sad days coming, someday, when my own mother will be on her deathbed. It will be difficult to see her frail and ill, this woman who has been such a dynamo her whole life. A long and full life, from being an adorable toddler to a beautiful and loving woman at the center of her community to, finally, a doting grandmother who likes to travel the world with her husband—and then to end up sick and sad and, perhaps, if my father dies first, alone in her house. I hope her life won't end in the dismal way her mother's did and my father's father's did. Regardless, her sons will be at her deathbed and it will be a melancholy scene, the passing of an entire life, memories alone remaining until they, too, fade. Even just to think about my mother at the age of 85 or so waddling around the house or the backyard, so decrepit, looking back on the vast past, is sad.

And my father too, once a dashing young man who was the twin brother of Robert Redford, then someday at 90 years old all crumpled and weak. One doesn't want to feel pity for one's parents. Their pain and weakness, and then their absence, will be hard for me. It will be just me and Aidan and Amina (and my brothers), and I'll feel adrift without my parents. The nostalgia will ambush me at night and I'll look at pictures and think I should have told them I loved them more and called them and visited them more often.

My parents are very good people, which is exceedingly rare in this world. Two of the kindest people I've ever known, actually. If their sons are unusually kind too, it is doubtless in large part because of their example.

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Reading a lengthy history of Western philosophy by W. T. Jones (1975), starting with volume 5, on the 20th century to Wittgenstein and Sartre. Has some useful pages on the Kantian background, against which much of 20th-century philosophy was reacting. Reminds one of how Kant's emphasis on the creative nature of the human mind, its structuring of experience, helped inspire Romanticism and German idealism. The Romantic exaltation of the human spirit, of creativity and genius and self-expression—which you can see in Wilhelm von Humboldt and the early Marx, as well as poets and many others in the first half of the 19th century (who often used these ideas to critique the capitalist *suppression* of human creativity and individuality)—was partially underpinned by Kant's philosophy. So was the idea, common to thinkers from

Hegel and Schopenhauer to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, that the self is essentially *activity*—whether "transcendental syntheses" or "a relation relating itself to itself" or freedom and choice or whatever else—"and not a static, encapsulated substance," to quote Jones. (In retrospect, of course, Kant only anticipated the more scientific understanding of modern neurobiology and cognitive science that the brain actively and creatively constructs experience.)

Hegel was a development of Kantianism in a "historicist" direction, according to which Mind or Spirit unfolded and developed historically, creating itself and its experiences. Schopenhauer had a different, ahistorical interpretation of Kant, but he too, like all the idealists, emphasized the creative powers of the mind. Again, while there are truths twisted and buried in these theories, it's only through modern science that you can grasp them without all the speculative philosophical baggage. And you don't need idealism to explain human creativity! Materialism (science) can get the job done just fine—except insofar as we run up against the limitations of human cognition. But idealism offers no way out of that. It offers only greater mysteries and idiocies.

But in interpreting the intellectual history of the 19th century, it's useful to keep in mind this Kantian background of the insistence on the multidimensional creativity of the mind. It can be interpreted in idealist and spiritualist, Romantic ways, as it frequently was—in opposition to the hated materialism and vulgarity of the Industrial Revolution—but it needn't be. There is no reason to think that organic matter that is organized in a certain way can't be creative or conscious.

One problem with Kantianism, supposedly, was that it could lead straight into skepticism and relativism. Kant had reacted against Hume's philosophy for this reason, arguing that the reason we could have *a priori* knowledge of the world is that the mind imposes structures on experience. "We can know *a priori* of things only what we ourselves put into them," as Kant said. So by this means he tried to defeat skepticism. *Certain* knowledge *is* possible, because our minds structure the world (i.e., the world of their experience). But there was still the thing-in-itself, after all, to which mental categories couldn't apply. We couldn't know anything about it! And given the mind's construction of experience, it seemed, perhaps, that there might not even *be* an objective reality. All was mere appearance. So even Kantianism had skeptical implications, against which philosophers eventually reacted.

Needless to say, since we're talking about philosophers, confusion abounded. The truth is that science can, probably, get us closer and closer to the true nature of the world-in-itself (the world 'before' it has been perceptually and cognitively processed into experiences). But obviously we can never totally escape skepticism. We can never know if we've finally understood what the world is in its deepest essence. And we'll certainly never *intuitively* understand the inner nature of the cosmos. Kant was right about that. (As I've been saying for almost 25 years.) We can't "intuit" the world of general relativity and quantum mechanics.

"Analytic philosophers" like G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell rejected Kantian skepticism and idealism, but first let's take a look at Bergson, Dewey, and Whitehead. They were sort of transitional figures between the 19th and 20th centuries. One of the virtues of Jones' book is that it has long excerpts from the original writings, which in the case of Bergson help the reader see how inadequate the ideas are. All this love affair with duration and intuition (by which one "places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible") and building up a weird speculative metaphysics on this basis, plus a fundamental distinction between instinct and intelligence, a mystical vitalistic interpretation of evolution, distinctions between different kinds of moralities and religions (closed and static vs. open and dynamic)—it's all mostly of historical interest. One does see with Bergson a step, however confused, towards phenomenology. But, as Lukács said, Bergson belonged to the irrationalist or anti-rationalist tradition in continental thought from the late 18th century to the era of fascism (not that he was a fascist!).

I'm not much more interested in Dewey. Have always considered him a rather flaky and boring thinker, with his slippery, hard-to-pin-down, and unsuccessful attempts to find a third way between various old philosophical oppositions (realism vs. idealism, rationalism vs. empiricism, and so on). Like Bergson, I think he's mainly of historical interest—although his ideas on education are doubtless of value. He's very reflective of the Progressive Era with his overriding concern to solve problems, his notion that thinking is

the solving of problems, even that truth is but "processes of change so directed that they achieve an intended consummation." I don't see much logical rigor in his thought.

As for Whitehead: his philosophy was the last of the great efforts of speculative metaphysics, and it's too strange and obscure to be of much interest. It's a good thing speculative philosophy has passed out of fashion.

Russell was a complicated figure, of course. And I'm not about to summarize his views. More interesting to me is what my own views are. Particularly about physical things and perceptual appearances and all that. (I've had a few drinks, so forgive me if my thoughts are a bit slipshod.) My intuitions haven't changed from years ago. There is no getting around the fact that, necessarily, we're confronted with only sensations/perceptions/representations, not external matter "in itself." We experience representations/appearances, that's all. Things appear to us. In that sense, objects are "mental." They're in consciousness, they're sensory/perceptual appearances. I alone have direct access to what I perceive. Which means it isn't wholly "physical" in some objective sense, some matter-in-itself sense that isn't perspectival but entirely objective. And yet what I see, what I touch, is (perceived as) *outside* of me, and therefore is not simply "mental," i.e., contained within my mind, my head, my consciousness. It's external, or at least I perceive it as such. I'm interacting with external objects. My *emotions* are entirely mental, as are my thoughts. Physical objects are different.

But you see the conundrum. *As I experience them*, physical objects are, by definition, mental and therefore *in my head*. They're objects of my consciousness, mental objects. But, on the other hand, I experience them as being external, different from my internal thoughts and emotions. So they're both non-mental (external) and mental.

As I wrote years ago, we can (obviously) view physical objects in our experience from two perspectives. Everything we see and touch is a physical, public object that other people see and touch; on the other hand, everything is private to us and therefore, as we experience it, is never experienced by others. So an object in our experience can be seen as an independently existing object or it can be seen as private perceptual appearances/representations. It can be seen as physical or mental.

Ultimately, given science and rationality, the "representational" point of view is the truth. Each of us has his own private experience of the world, and *as we experience it*, the world, by definition, is mental. But there is certainly a *mind-independent world, matter-in-itself*—atoms, electromagnetic waves, etc.—that none of us ever "directly" experiences and will never know the full truth of. Science tries to get at it. But we're imprisoned in our minds. So the objective essence of the world is, in a sense, shut off from us, forever.

So you can say there are three levels, so to speak. There is each person's cognitive, affective, and perceptual (tastes, smells, pains, etc.) internal life, which we all see as obviously mental and private. Then there is the "external" world as experienced by each person, which is matter and the physical world *for us*. (How the brain constructs it from stimuli.) And then there is the *actual* physical world, nature/matter *in itself*, which science tries to understand.

By the way, if any philosophers will shout "Wittgenstein!" here, as if I'm being pre-Wittgensteinian with all this talk of private experiences and whatnot, I'll reply, "You're an idiot! You've been indoctrinated into admiring the late Wittgenstein because he was at Cambridge and had known Russell and wrote cryptic stuff that seems profound because it's cryptic! Grow up and stop worshipping a behavioristically deluded weirdo!"

I don't know exactly how Russell's views relate to my own, and I don't much care. I'm interested in truth, not what Russell thought. (In his long intellectual evolution, some of Russell's views on these matters are pretty strange. Such as his postulation of "sensibilia," sensory objects that—somehow—exist even when they aren't being sensed. As the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* says, "Sensibilia make it that the objects of sense, color patches and like, do not simply go out of existence when unobserved. Rather, sensibilia persist and we sample them when we occupy positions that present specific [e.g.] table-perspectives." Russell was so weird sometimes.)

But I admit that there are peculiar implications of truth (i.e., my ideas). When a bunch of people are together talking about some particular object, like a painting they're looking at, they're really talking about a lot of different objects, namely the painting *as each of them sees it*. They're talking about their

perceptions/representations, interpreted as a physical object that others see. But of course it's really a lot of different objects (which manifest in each person's mental space), a lot of different appearances. I don't see why any of this should be hard for philosophers to accept.

Where are the objects? That seems to have bothered G. E. Moore. Well, again, they're both in the mind and in the mind-independent external world! Everything we experience, as such, is in consciousness, in the head (in some sense). But there is an objective world of molecules and electromagnetic waves and all the inferred entities of physics, and the objects we perceive are, of course, in that world and, *in themselves*, are composed of those entities (not of colors and other qualities our brain constructs). This is why the brain creates our representations, including our common experiences of space and time, in such a way that they appear three-dimensional or "out there"—because there is, in fact, an *out there*. The external space we see and touch is a subjective representation of an objective external spacetime.

I know I've been repeating myself a lot, but I'm just trying to clarify my ideas as much as possible. I honestly don't see any alternative to them, any alternative compatible with modern science.

There is matter in itself, there is matter as we experience it, and there is consciousness—in which experienced matter exists, so to speak, but which is very different from experienced matter (and of course objective matter). Experienced matter is stuff you can touch and divide; consciousness you can't touch or divide. (Hence Descartes' division between mind and matter.) But the former is "in" the latter—therefore mental in some sense—inasmuch as the latter is aware of it. –Anyway, since consciousness is a kind of nothingness, its only quality being that it is *of* things, it hardly needs arguing that it's very different from both experienced and objective matter.

I've avoided the term "sense data" in all this because of its philosophical baggage. "Representation" or "perceptual appearances" is sufficient for my purposes.

When you think about fundamental things like what I've been discussing, you soon see that paradoxes or semi-paradoxes are inescapable. The idea of "mental things that are also non-mental" is…difficult.

…A shorter way of stating the "paradox" is to note, first, that consciousness is a factor in the perception of a table, but it isn't a factor in the table itself. And yet the table, as such, is really just the perception of the table! When we're not looking at it, the table has no appearance, no color and so on, it's just what it *objectively* always is, the inferred entities of physics. The table *as it appears to us—as a table*—comes into existence when we look at "it." It is only our perception of it. (This is the particle of truth in idealism/phenomenalism. But idealists go wrong when they deny that there is the objective world of physics and chemistry.) Conceptually and linguistically we can distinguish between the table and our perception or representation of it, but that's a distinction without (much of) a difference.

This doesn't mean our perception of a table is always "accurate." In certain conditions, it might, say, appear a different color than it "really" is, which is to say than it ordinarily appears.

I should note that I find very mysterious the fact that, despite the mayhem of trillions and trillions of particles and waves zipping around and colliding everywhere, the world appears very stable and fixed. It consists, for us, of discrete objects and organisms. *How can there be such order when there is such flux?*

[See the December entry for more thoughts about "representationalism" and so on.]

Anyway— Russell was wrong about *a lot*. (Very different in this respect from Chomsky.) But he was right about values. His beliefs were, essentially, those I've expressed innumerable times—because they're obvious. Philosophers who disagree are simply, to that extent, superficial thinkers with little capacity for rational intuition. Here are some things Russell got right:

> When we assert that this or that has "value," we are giving expression to our own emotions, not to a fact which would still be true if our personal feelings were different…
>
> When a man says "this is good in itself," he *seems* to be making a statement, just as much as if he said "this is square" or "this is sweet." I believe this to be a mistake. I think that what the man really means is: "I wish everybody to desire this," or rather "Would that everybody desired this." If what he says is interpreted as a statement, it is merely an affirmation of his own personal wish; if, on the other hand, it is interpreted in a general

> way, it states nothing, but merely desires something. The wish, as an occurrence, is personal, but what it desires is universal. It is, I think, this curious interlocking of the personal and the universal which has caused so much confusion in ethics…

All this is basically correct, though deeper analysis is necessary, such as I provided in my long paper on values in my mid-twenties. Or that J. L. Mackie provided in *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*.

It's always funny to read, and to read about, G. E. Moore, because he was a hilarious dullard. It doesn't reflect well on philosophers that he was influential, helping to found analytic philosophy. But I admit his method of close analysis, *if done well*, can yield insights. But "close analysis" is really just philosophy! (Obviously it need not be close analysis *of language*, which oddly captivated analytic philosophers for most of the twentieth century.)

Speaking of Mackie, it's shameful that I haven't read more of his work. So I'm going to switch to reading him now. Starting with his classic *Problems from Locke* (1976).

It isn't exactly an easy read. But it's brilliant. Does a good job, in the first couple of chapters, of defending both Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities and the representational theory of perception to which he subscribed, and to which, in some form, anyone who accepts modern science surely has to subscribe. Despite all the philosophical objections to it that have been proposed since Berkeley. And that were still alive when Mackie was writing. (And probably *still* are.) For instance, "How can I know that the percept, or representation, I see is like the external world it represents?" To which I'd reply: um, it *isn't* like the external world, although it does convey information about the world. Colors, sounds, tastes, smells, and so on convey important information about the world-in-itself that we're interacting with.

But how we experience the world is entirely a product of our brains, and there is no reason to think our experiences resemble how the world is in itself.

Most of the book doesn't grab me, but I will say that Mackie strikes me as a more insightful and much more reasonable thinker than, say, Wittgenstein. And Quine. For instance, he's open to "Chomsky's innateness hypothesis" about language. I don't love his general sympathy with empiricist views (except in the case of values, in which case skeptical "empiricism" is right), but he's surely a more nuanced and reasonable empiricist than most.

*

Sometimes Amina tells me cute things Aidan has said. For instance, on the way home from daycare they walk past a church that has a little statue of Jesus with arms outstretched. Aidan asked "What's that?" and Amina said it's Jesus. So every day Aidan began saying "I wanna see Jesus," "That's Jesus," and one day "That's Jesus and not an octopus," while stretching out his arms. Octopuses have long outstretched "arms," so he associated them with the statue and had to correct himself.

Aidan was probably the first person in history to utter the sentence, "That's Jesus and not an octopus."

I'm taking care of him for a week as Amina enjoys New York. I won't try to record all the adorable things he says and does. But one charming thing is that he's started prefacing sentences, occasionally, with "ummm," since he's heard me do it. "But, ummm, the pickup truck is broken. I need two batteries for the pickup truck." (It doesn't take batteries.) Or if I ask him something like "Do you want a cracker?" he might say "Well…okay." Because he's heard me say that. In his sweet high-pitched voice, much of what he says is delightful and hilarious.

Having a child helps you appreciate how unbelievably stupid one has to be to deny Chomskian innatism. I suppose no anti-Chomskian has ever had a child? I use a word once, and several minutes later Aidan uses it correctly in a different context. For instance, I said "We have to bring the pieces of the train track over here," and an hour later Aidan said "A piece of the truck is broken." I had never heard him say the word "piece" before. But he brought me a tiny chipped-off piece of a toy truck to affix back onto the truck, and, after one earlier hearing, he used the word in the right way in a very different context. How do you explain that except on the hypothesis that the human brain has an incredibly rich array of conceptual

structures built into it, just waiting, hungrily, to be attached to some linguistic sign? He knew right away that "piece" means *a part* of something, and that objects of all sorts have *parts*, even that when something is chipped off an object it is *a part* and can be referred to by the word "piece," like a segment of a toy train track can.

And Aidan's constant talking to himself when he's alone, repeating things people have said or combining words in new ways—is that just "general learning mechanisms" (à la empiricism) or general human intelligence manifesting itself? Why then the *obsessive attention* to speech? Why the repeating everything people say right after they've said it? At the very least, this is the *constrained learning* of Konrad Lorenz. In fact, it is a kind of inborn "knowledge" of how the world, the world-for-humans, is structured and communicable to others. The human mind parses all the data it's presented with in very specific ways, and, as I said a moment ago, it's on hair-trigger alert—at least at a young age—to associate the innate ways it cuts up the data with verbal sounds or gestures. Its memory for these sounds is almost beyond belief. Two-year-olds hear a sound a few times and can repeat it in appropriate contexts forever afterwards. *On a couple of exposures, its proper use is permanently embedded in their memory.* And that's true of *thousands* of words! In a sense, that's a far more impressive cognitive achievement than anything adults ever achieve.

[In fact, empiricism about language learning can be refuted from a single consideration: immerse an adult in an environment where not a single person speaks his language and he has no access to any materials in his language, and he'll probably never learn the language that's spoken except for some basic words and sentences. But if you put a child in that environment—which is comparable to the environment an infant/toddler encounters—within a rather short time he'll become fluent. Obviously this isn't because of general intelligence, since the adult might well be more intelligent than the child. It's because of…magic. Biological programming in the child to learn or "grow" a language in his brain, as his limbs grow because of genetic programming.]

June

There's a tendency to think that someone who has had a large and positive (according to certain values) impact on the world has thereby had a more meaningful and valuable life than others. "Objectively," somehow, he has had a relatively meaningful life. But that's not true. The very notion of a "meaningful life" is a strange human construction. It can be defined in any number of ways. A solitary artist can have just as meaningful a life as Martin Luther King Jr., inasmuch as what "meaning" is for him might be different than what it is for King. According to King's standards, it might not be very meaningful; but according to the artist's standards, King's life might not be very meaningful. The realm of values is the realm of "relativism."

What's meaningful or valuable is in the eye of the beholder. God doesn't exist, and there are no "objective values."

But it's true that the definition of "meaning" as *having a positive impact on others* is a very understandable and natural one.

Anyway, enough of philosophy. There are more important things to do than philosophy. As the likes of Biden, Blinken, and Netanyahu are cheerfully exploding babies and beheading mothers and empowering torturers, one feels bound to do something, no matter how futile it is.

I saw a video of a boy a couple years older than Aidan whose face was mostly intact but whose head gaped empty, his brain gone, just a big cavity there. I saw videos of babies' headless bodies held aloft by their parents. I've seen charred corpses and scattered limbs. Toddlers shaking uncontrollably in a hospital after being buried under rubble for hours.

I'm so sick of sociopaths determining the course of history. That's all it's ever been. Psychopaths and sociopaths enlisting the masses to perform deeds of unimaginable sadism.

As the U.S. and its client states lose their control of most of the world, I'm very worried that they'll react, eventually, with the use of nuclear weapons. Many in the Israeli government are committed to taking the world with them if Zionism doesn't triumph. They're Nazis, except that for the swastika they substitute

the Star of David. The U.S. and Europe, too, are run by madmen, though admittedly they're *slightly* saner than Israel's rulers. Their most recent triumph of political sanity is deciding that Ukraine can use American weapons to strike Russian territory. I guess the calculation is that Putin won't escalate things even further? Or, given the psychopathy of our rulers, they probably hope he will, so they can then respond with more devastating attacks to trigger a spiral into nuclear war that they hope will destroy Russia without destroying the West. That's how the criminally insane would think, so it's doubtless how a large proportion of our elites think.

To return to Gaza, the journalist Jonathan Cook is surely right:

> Until seven months ago, Israel's goal was to keep the Palestinians a subjugated, enslaved, hopeless people, confined to a series of concentration camps in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They were expected to remain mute in their suffering and invisible to the outside world.
>
> Over the long term, it was assumed that Palestinians would prefer to flee their immiseration in these permanently occupied, colonised lands.
>
> The slave revolt of 7 October—brutal and ugly as such revolts have been throughout history—was a devastating shock. Not just to an Israel wedded to its racist, hands-on colonial project of subjugating the Palestinian people. It was also a shock to the West's wider colonial project, into which Israel is so tightly integrated.
>
> In Washington's "rules-based order," the only meaningful rule is that what Washington and its clients want, they get. The planet, its resources and peoples are viewed as little more than playthings by the world's superpower-in-chief.
>
> Revolts to this order—whether advanced by Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen or the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Iran—cannot be allowed to become a model. The "rules-based order" must be restored with a savagery necessary to teach the colonized and enslaved their place.
>
> That was the message of Washington's own black sites needed in its futile "war on terror," from Abu Ghraib to Guantanamo—sites that drew on Israel's experiences of "breaking" inmates at Facility 1391.
>
> The complicity of western establishments in Israel's current genocide is not an anomaly. It does not derive from a misunderstanding or confusion. The western political and media class see the genocide in Gaza as clearly as the rest of us. But for them, it is justified, required even. The colonized and oppressed must be taught that resistance is futile…

The institutional psychology Cook describes is ultimately what's behind the West's participation in Israel's genocide. It's behind what drives politicians like Nikki Haley to write "Finish them!" on bombs that are to be dropped on Gaza. It's behind Biden's refusal to be budged.

There's also the fact that the donor class is fanatical for Israel, and politicians won't go against donors. Moreover, all the old economic, political, military, and cultural ties between the U.S. and Israel militate against reining in Nazis. America's own past is Nazi-esque, and Nazi-esque sympathies have permeated its ruling class for 150 years. (Consider the history of the Cold War, for example.) In its bones, the political class still loves the idea of Western settler colonialism. Dislodge the primitives and make the desert bloom! It just makes sense, from a certain provincial racist and geopolitical point of view. Alienating Arabs everywhere doesn't matter as long as their governments remain subservient. Even Democrats' loss of the presidency is a risk they're willing to take for the sake of class goals.

It's possible, however, that an additional factor is at play: the U.S. government may have decided, like Israel, that it's time they settled the age-old problem of Gaza once and for all. There is no future for Palestinians in Gaza, and for decades there hasn't been. "We might as well finally kick them out and kill them, so the issue is settled!" Where will they go? The U.S. must be talking to countries right now about

taking in refugees. But how will it persuade countries to take them? American wars have already produced millions of refugees in the last twenty years. What in the hell will happen to the Gazans?

*

Published an article about the West's descent into insanity (which seems to have been pretty widely read, judging by the responses to it):

NATO's Endgame Appears to Be Nuclear War

The world is at its most dangerous moment since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Back then, however, the fear of total destruction consumed the public; today, few people seem even to be aware of this possibility.

It is easily imaginable that nuclear war could break out between Russia (and perhaps China) and the West, yet politicians continue to escalate tensions, place hundreds of thousands of troops at "high readiness," and attack military targets inside Russia, even while ordinary citizens blithely go on with their lives.

The situation is without parallel in history.

Consider the following facts. A hostile military alliance, now including even Sweden and Finland, is at the very borders of Russia. How are Russian leaders—whose country was almost destroyed by Western invasion three times in the twentieth century—supposed to react to this? How would Washington react if Mexico or Canada belonged to an enormous, expansionist, and highly belligerent anti-U.S. military alliance?

As if expanding NATO to include Eastern Europe wasn't provocative enough, Washington began to send billions of dollars' worth of military aid to Ukraine in 2014, to "improve interoperability with NATO," in the words of the Defense Department. Why this Western involvement in Ukraine, which, as Obama said while president, is "a core Russian interest but not an American one"? One reason was given by Senator Lindsey Graham in a recent moment of startling televised candor: Ukraine is "sitting on $10 to $12 trillion of critical minerals… I don't want to give that money and those assets to Putin to share with China."

As the *Washington Post* has reported, "Ukraine harbors some of the world's largest reserves of titanium and iron ore, fields of untapped lithium and massive deposits of coal. Collectively, they are worth tens of trillions of dollars." Ukraine also has colossal reserves of natural gas and oil, in addition to neon, nickel, beryllium, and other critical rare earth metals. For NATO's leadership, Russia and China can't be permitted access to these resources. The war in Ukraine must, therefore, continue indefinitely, and negotiations with Russia mustn't be pursued.

Meanwhile, as Ukraine was being de facto integrated into NATO in the years before 2022, the United States put into operation an anti-ballistic-missile site in Romania in 2016. As Benjamin Abelow notes in *How the West Brought War to Ukraine*, the missile launchers that the ABM system uses can accommodate nuclear-tipped offensive weapons like the Tomahawk cruise missile. "Tomahawks," he points out, "have a range of 1,500 miles, can strike Moscow and other targets deep inside Russia, and can carry hydrogen bomb warheads with selectable yields up to 150 kilotons, roughly ten times that of the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima." Poland now boasts a similar ABM site.

American assurances that these anti-missile bases are defensive in nature, to protect against an (incredibly unlikely) attack from Iran, can hardly reassure Russia, given the missile launchers' capability to launch offensive weapons.

In another bellicose move, the Trump administration in 2019 unilaterally withdrew from the 1987 Treaty on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces. Russia responded by proposing that the U.S. declare a moratorium on the deployment of short- and intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe, saying it wouldn't deploy such missiles as long as NATO members didn't. Washington dismissed these proposals,

which upset some European leaders. “Has the absence of dialogue with Russia,” Emmanuel Macron said, “made the European continent any safer? I don’t think so.”

The situation is especially dangerous given what experts call “warhead ambiguity.” As senior Russian military officers have said, “there will be no way to determine if an incoming ballistic missile is fitted with a nuclear or a conventional warhead, and so the military will see it as a nuclear attack” that warrants a nuclear retaliation. A possible misunderstanding could thus plunge the world into nuclear war.

So now we’re more than two years into a proxy war with Russia that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and has seen Ukraine even more closely integrated into the structures of NATO than it was before. And the West continues to inch ever closer to the nuclear precipice. Ukraine has begun using U.S. missiles to strike Russian territory, including *defensive* (not only offensive) missile systems.

This summer, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and Belgium will begin sending F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine; and Denmark and the Netherlands have said there will be no restrictions on the use of these planes to strike targets in Russia. F-16s are able to deliver nuclear weapons, and Russia has said the planes will be considered a nuclear threat.

Bringing the world even closer to terminal crisis, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg states that 500,000 troops are at “high readiness,” and in the next five years, NATO allies will “acquire thousands of air defense and artillery systems, 850 modern aircraft—mostly 5th-generation F-35s—and also a lot of other high-end capabilities.” Macron has morphed into one of Europe’s most hawkish leaders, with plans to send military instructors to Ukraine very soon. At the same time, NATO is holding talks about taking more nuclear weapons out of storage and placing them on standby.

Where all this is heading is unclear, but what’s obvious is that Western leaders are acting with reckless disregard for the future of humanity. Their bet is that Putin will never deploy nuclear weapons, despite his many threats to do so and recent Russian military drills to deploy tactical nuclear weapons. Given that Russian use of nuclear warheads might well precipitate a nuclear response by the West, the fate of humanity hangs on the restraint and rationality of one man, Putin—a figure who is constantly portrayed by Western media and politicians as an irrational, bloodthirsty monster. So the human species is supposed to place its hope for survival in someone we’re told is a madman, who leads a state that feels besieged by the most powerful military coalition in history, apparently committed to its demise.

Maybe the madmen aren’t in the Russian government but rather in NATO governments?

It is downright puzzling that millions of people aren’t protesting in the streets every day to deescalate the crisis and pull civilization back from the brink. Evidently the mass media have successfully fulfilled their function of manufacturing consent. But unless the Western public wakes up, the current crisis might not end as benignly as did the one in 1962.

*

The videos of children’s blown-up bodies in Gaza are bad enough—heads burst open so they’re just raggedy flesh flapping against shoulders—but seeing a young father crying while holding his baby girl wasting away from malnutrition affected me. There’s nothing he can do, he can only watch as his child slowly dies. This is happening to tens of thousands of people.

Imagine the agony of that father and that little girl.

Ralph Nader estimates that over 200,000 Gazans have probably died so far, not the 37,000 we’re supposed to think. The official number of dead has been stuck at about 35,000 for months, which is completely farcical.

If you want to understand how detestable people in the ruling class are, just consider that the major reason the world is in the hideous state it’s in is that *these people are ensuring it remains in such a state*. It’s in their interest for it to be in such a state. If it weren’t, the ruling class would use its nearly infinite resources to change things—to end war, to end starvation, to abolish nuclear weapons, to defeat global warming, to clean up the environment, to shrink militaries and invest in socially necessary infrastructure. The reason none of this gets done is that it isn’t in the class interest of the owners of the world—who could

get it done if they wanted to, if they pooled their resources and cooperated (as they cooperate on other issues that are important to them, like destroying labor movements).

Of course, institutional structures are to blame. But so are the people who run these institutions, who *aggressively* enact anti-human agendas. They amass trillions of dollars in their own coffers so the rest of the world can toil and starve as their slaves, and the more wealth they get the more they want. They compete to be the world's first trillionaire. It's both unutterably pathetic and cosmically despicable. They're nothing but glorified thugs, Mafia dons, whose criminality makes that of Nero look petty.

Their children and grandchildren will inherit universal death and destruction, but they don't care.

In a sense, I guess you could say I hate them; but in another sense, they're so primitive (morally and intellectually), and humans in general are so primitive (most would behave the same way if they had power), that I just have contempt for them and can't muster much emotional energy against them. "People are hurricanes," as Chomsky has said. You don't hate hurricanes, you only lament that they happen. Even 43 years into life, I still find it difficult to understand and identify with my species.

*

I read Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. The novel Harold Bloom said was "clearly the major aesthetic achievement of any living American writer," and that others have called the Great American Novel. I'm somewhat pleased with myself for reading the whole thing; even Bloom said he couldn't finish it the first two times he tried because of the "overwhelming carnage." The main reason I had trouble, for a few days, finishing it is different: its plotlessness makes it pretty boring at times. But the carnage isn't very pleasant, that's true. Some scenes are sickening. On the other hand, after a while I kind of looked forward to the carnage, since it meant that at least something was happening. And yet I grew desensitized to it such that it wasn't as perversely fascinating as in the beginning.

What keeps the reader going and what elevates the novel is that the "neo-Biblical" writing is extraordinarily beautiful and unusual. I'm in awe of the mind that could be so inexhaustibly inventive in describing deserts and mountains and barbarians trekking across deserts and mountains. McCarthy's writing is so remarkable it's able to paint the terrible (true) story of a gang of greedy, bestial murderers as being of timeless metaphysical significance.

I definitely didn't *like* the book, though. It isn't really the kind of book you like.

I couldn't help noticing its resonance in a time when a people who suffered a genocide are carrying out another genocide—in full livestreamed view of the world. (The first livestreamed genocide. Capitalism is always conquering new frontiers!)[1]

Incidentally, if this book can be thought of as the Great American Novel, that says a lot about America.

*

Reading William Appleman Williams' classic *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959/72). Not sure why I haven't already read it, except that I thought it would be a little less sophisticated than, say, Gabriel Kolko. And I was right. But still, it's a very important book, and, in its arguments, more sophisticated than earlier orthodoxy and later "post-revisionism" in the mode of John Lewis Gaddis. (In recent months I've also read other books by "revisionists" like Kolko, Thomas McCormick, Greg Grandin, etc. Bruce Cumings is great too, and Lloyd Gardner.) Only so-called "economic determinist" scholarship is of deep explanatory value.

[1] And yes, this genocide is indirectly a result of capitalism—of American imperialism, domination of foreign countries for the sake of economic and strategic power, the pattern of outright authoritarianism that spreads from authoritarian control of capital over labor, dehumanization of poor people, the enormous American military budget that helps business and helps keep the economy growing, the incredible power over American politics of the Zionist lobby (funded by capitalist oligarchs like Sheldon Adelson), the colonizing project of Israeli business, etc.

Williams' interpretation of American foreign policy resurrects the old Marxian emphasis on the need for foreign markets, sources of raw materials, and opportunities for foreign investment. This emphasis is little more than common sense, since strategic power rests mainly on economic power and the latter entails economic expansion across the world—especially in the era of capitalism, which has the imperative of constant growth (the search for new markets, new investment opportunities, and new sources of raw materials). The power of the state rests on that of business and vice versa, and both, being centers of power, have an interest in always expanding their power. They want to control as much as possible, preferably everything, including foreign countries (if they can). Even apart from the voluminous evidence Williams presents, then, his perspective is, '*a priori*,' extremely plausible. (As a result, mainstream academics, servants of power, have ridiculed it for sixty years.)

He calls this government policy of ensuring access everywhere to markets and raw materials the Open Door Policy and says (rightly), like LaFeber, that it began in a mature way in the 1890s. The evidence is overwhelming, but here's a salient quotation from the State Department in 1898:

> It seems to be conceded that every year we shall be confronted with an increasing surplus of manufactured goods for sale in foreign markets if American operatives and artisans are to be kept employed the year around. The enlargement of foreign consumption of the products of our mills and workshops has, therefore, become a serious problem of statesmanship as well as of commerce.

Williams traces the paths of the Open Door Policy through the decades, but let's skip to the 1940s. His discussion of the early Cold War is illuminating. With good reason, he blames it primarily on the U.S. and its Open Door Policy. After all, America was vastly more powerful than Russia, and "power and responsibility go together in a direct and intimate relationship." (The same is true today: America, being far more powerful and expansionist than Russia, bears most of the responsibility for the hostile relations between the countries.)

The Soviets were so weak in 1945 that they were very conscious of a "need to reach some kind of agreement with America." The latter, to say the least, did not reciprocate. I might note, by the way, that the American "desire to keep the Soviets from establishing any long-range influence in eastern Europe" was quite unreasonable, given that the Soviet armies already occupied the area—were they supposed to just happily withdraw, after all the death and destruction they had suffered??—and the Soviet government desperately, and rationally, wanted a buffer zone to protect the country from any future invasion. But Washington was fixated on having economic access to, and thus (given America's economic strength) domination of, almost the entire world. Here's a salient paragraph:

> The drive to achieve [this "open door" goal] began in earnest while the war was still being fought. For his part, Secretary of State Cordell Hull never eased off on the pace he had established in 1933. "The primary object," he reiterated in 1940, "is both to reopen the old and seek new outlets for our surplus production." One of his principal concerns was to break into the British trading system, a campaign in which he was vigorously encouraged and supported by American exporters. Hull's weapons included lend-lease and Britain's growing need for a major recovery loan. The United States made its aid conditional upon the acceptance by England of the open-door principle.

After the war, moreover, American leaders dreaded the possibility of a return to depression and understood that large foreign markets were necessary to prevent that. That was a major reason for the Marshall Plan. (A government subsidy to American business.)

In 1945, Stalin wanted a large loan from the U.S. to help Russia rebuild, but Washington dismissed that request. So he at least wanted massive reparations from Germany and its allies. But the Americans said that, unlike after World War I, they wouldn't lend money to countries so they could pay reparations. These were hardly "friendly" decisions. (They remind me of American refusals—recounted by the economist

Jeffrey Sachs, who strongly objected at the time—to financially help Russia in the 1990s, very different from Washington's willingness to help Poland.)

It seems that on almost all issues except the status of Eastern Europe, Russia relented under American pressure:

> Thus Russia withdrew from Iran, leaving the Western powers in a predominant strategic and economic position. Thus it also retreated from its efforts to modify Western supremacy at the entrance (and exit) of the Black Sea. And thus it acquiesced, though under vigorous protest, when on May 3, 1946, the United States abruptly and unilaterally announced that it was terminating reparations to Russia from the Western zones of occupied Germany.

This American action appears to have significantly increased Russia's hostility to Washington.

In September 1946, the Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace made a speech advising a more conciliatory policy toward Russia. For instance, "We should be prepared, even at the expense of risking epithets of appeasement, to agree to reasonable Russian guarantees of security." This speech got him fired.

The following year was notable for both the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, which were "the two sides of the same coin of America's traditional program of open-door expansion." Contain "Communism"—resistance to American imperialism—so that America could have economic and political power everywhere.

After 1947, the Soviets got more "anti-American" and more authoritarian in Eastern Europe. And things continued from there. (But in succeeding years the Soviets did what they could to lower tensions, for example by sponsoring peace initiatives that America rejected.)

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Again, I saw a video of a child, at most two years old, eyes closed, lying in a hospital bed, hardly moving and breathing in a labored way, almost entirely covered in bandages, what little skin visible red and blistered. The young Palestinian journalist who posted it wrote, "I held my breath when I saw this child screaming in pain. I could not bear this scene. He was burned all over his body as a result of the occupation army's bombing of his house." Later he posted another picture of the same child: "When I visited this boy yesterday, he was in so much pain I broke down and couldn't take it. I couldn't stop thinking about him all day. When I finished reporting today, the first thing I did was go to see him, but he wasn't there. He died a painful death, his only fault being that he was born a Palestinian in Gaza." The words are horrifying enough, but a picture really is worth more than a thousand words.

That little body with a diaper on over its bandages, quivering and breathing in pain, insensible to everything but pain—that little boy completely ignorant of what's happened to him and why he's suffering so, why this sudden change happened, struggling to survive but finally succumbing to his burns—a life snuffed out two years after its birth—that sweet innocent face, awake but eyelids closed—

There's nothing I can say. There are no words to describe the scene. It shatters me.

I hate this world so much.

And I hate that Netanyahu and his cabinet and Biden and his advisors won't die swinging from nooses. They're *perfect enemies of humanity*. "Masters of war," as Bob Dylan said in maybe the greatest anti-war song ever written. Embodiments of evil who are loved by millions, celebrated, obeyed and worshiped as power is always worshiped.

I hate this world. I want nothing to do with it. I want to take Aidan away and live on an island far from humans except for a few kind people close to me. I want to forget everything I've learned about civilization and forget it even exists. I don't want to see large groups of people anymore, or see tall buildings or cars driving on congested streets, or plaques honoring figures from the past. I never again want to see a newspaper. I don't want to know about the existence of the internet or smartphones or televisions. I want my mind to be wiped clear of all the pollution and all the evil.

But it's all going to continue, and it's going to get exponentially worse. Unimaginable suffering will engulf the planet. Why was life created in the first place? The mass suffering is unbearable. The cruelty is unbearable.

July

Well, as always, if you focus on the positives and temporarily forget the horrors and the evil, life can be fairly enjoyable. I almost have a bad conscience enjoying myself when the Gaza genocide is unfolding (and the Sudan famine and the Ukraine war and on and on), but that's no way to live. Even Chomsky, who knows more about all the suffering going on than anyone else, having immersed himself in it for seventy years, has somehow been able to enjoy his life. As I've often said, he's the best model of how to live. (Not necessarily in all the specifics—we can't all spend our lives fanatically researching the crimes of the ruling class—but in his humaneness, his moral integrity, his intellectual curiosity, his egalitarianism, his obsessive commitment to *principle*, his hyper-rationality, and his selflessness. No one has ever come closer to perfection than he.)

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Reading a book called *Speak: A Short History of Languages*, by Tore Janson (2002). The history of language has always fascinated me. For one thing, I can't fathom how such an incredibly rich cognitive system as language came into being, both biologically (genetically) and culturally. But the history of particular languages is fascinating too. For example, English, German, Swedish, Dutch, Danish, etc. come from a common language, called Proto-Germanic. And then there are the languages that come from Proto-Slavic, such as Russian, Czech, Polish, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, and Serbo-Croatian. (These two 'Proto' languages were probably spoken around 2,000 years ago.) And of course French, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese come from Latin. In turn, these three large language groups belong to the Indo-European languages, all of which come from Proto-Indo-European. Greek, Baltic languages, Celtic languages, Albanian, Sanskrit, Hindi, ancient Hittite, and so on also came from Proto-Indo-European. How one linguistic group originally spread over such a vast area—much of India, the Middle East, and Europe—isn't clear, though it may have involved military conquest or the gradual spread of farming many thousands of years ago (assuming the Proto-Indo-European people were the farmers).

Another stunning story is the spread of Latin, of course. "The Latin language is found in a few inscriptions from around 600 BC… Romans probably acquired the idea of a written language from their northern neighbours, the Etruscans, who constituted the dominating group in central Italy down to the fifth century BC. The Etruscans had adapted the Greek alphabet to the needs of their language, and the Romans in turn modified the Etruscan script to create the Latin alphabet…" From a few thousand speakers and writers, Latin became the progenitor of languages spoken by hundreds of millions today.

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Sunday afternoon. Field's nocturne no. 11 in E-flat. Especially the first minute and a half. Solitude as usual, because the vulgarity and atomization of my society doesn't permit togetherness. But the simple beauty of this nocturne consoles. It raises mundane existence to something more poetical and transcendent, sweet and pure.

I quite like being alone, most of the time. It's so great to be away from people, to listen to Bach while reading philosophy or a good history book or fiction. One wants to get drinks with friends sometimes, to go on dates or to an occasional cultural or social event, but mostly what I want is to sit at home—preferably with a woman—and indulge in intellectual pleasures. Until people become less vulgar in their musical and cultural tastes, their conversation, their interests and opinions, their treatment of others, I'll always much prefer my own company.

In this context I feel bound to mention, once again, my annoying perception of a difference between myself and at least 95% of "intellectuals." Their tendencies to irrationality and unintelligence are ultimately expressions of the vulgarity and decadence that afflict most people, in this case the vulgarity and decadence of bureaucratic, power-serving, and not-committed-to-the-pursuit-of-truth institutions. Here's a fairly trivial example.— A year or two ago I posted something on Twitter to the effect that the music of, say, Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart is on a higher creative level than even the best popular music. Scores of musicians, primarily classical musicians with PhDs, collectively gasped in horror and attacked me for a couple of days. It was actually very fun, debating all these "woke" idiots. Apparently I was a white supremacist for believing such a truism. These classical musicians were able to say with a straight face that the Beatles are essentially as creatively profound as Beethoven. "You're arguing against people with PhDs in music!" "So what? That only means you've been even more indoctrinated than most into a vulgar relativism." (They were appalled by that comment. "Can you believe this guy? He thinks education entails indoctrination!" Moronic academic snobs.)

"The herd of independent minds," to quote Chomsky.

Here's another example of academic unintelligence I came across recently: saw an interview of the wildly overrated philosopher David Chalmers in which he said,

> I think it's possible for an AI system to be conscious. I think it's possible for a machine to be conscious. The brain itself is a big machine. Somehow that machine produces consciousness. I think if biology can do it, I don't see why silicon can't do it. We don't understand how silicon could give us consciousness, but we also don't understand how neurons could give us consciousness. So I don't see a difference in principle.

Great argument. We also don't understand how iron or arsenic or oxygen or uranium or helium could give us consciousness, but because neurons can, surely all these elements can too! What a dumbass. The brain is a very different kind of "machine" than AI. How do people like Chalmers become famous philosophers? That fact in itself is an indictment of Western intellectual culture.

By the way, I recently made the foolhardy decision to post my journal online. I'm tired of keeping it secret. The great problem is its length. It's *so* long, *so* full of valuable material, that, ironically, it'll probably end up being almost totally ignored.

(Aside from Chomsky's work, I can't think of a better guide to a rational and comprehensive philosophical-historical-political-psychological-aesthetic worldview than the bulk of this journal.)

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I've been watching videos of the great Buddhist monk Thich Naht Hanh some nights as I try to fall asleep. He was a beautiful soul. Want to transcribe some thoughts of his that might help me partially overcome the futile desire for *transcendence* of some sort that has plagued me since my teenage years (you can see it expressed even in my earliest entries, and in those entries from the age of 19 when I longed for a self-consciousness-overcoming "spiritual orgasm," and many years for sex and love, and for deep philosophical understanding, and always for recognition from posterity, and the fondness for drinking alcohol, and on and on, a constant dissatisfaction):

> …When you come home to the present moment with your in-breath, you become fully alive, fully present, you can touch life in the here and the now. You feel that you are alive, you touch the miracle that you are alive. Because to be alive is the greatest of all miracles. And with only one in-breath you can touch that miracle. That is why you can say, "present moment, wonderful moment." If someone asks you, "My dear friend, has the most wonderful moment of your life arrived?"…it would be a pity if such a moment does not arrive at all. You may have a tendency to say, "oh, it does not seem that it has arrived, that wonderful moment, but I'm sure that it will arrive sometime in the future." But if we keep

> living the way we have lived our life in the past twenty years, it will not arrive in the next twenty years. It might not arrive at all, that moment we call the most wonderful moment of our life. And for many, many of us, that moment doesn't arrive—at all. The Buddha said, "You have to make the present moment into the most wonderful moment of your life." And this is possible. Because if you are able to go home to the present moment, to the here and the now, become fully alive, become fully present, you can touch all the wonders of life within yourself and around you. Everything belonging to you is a wonder. Your eye, your ear, your nose, your body, your mind. And because you are not mindful, you don't touch them deeply, you don't know that they are wonders. Until you die, and you begin to regret that you have not lived at all. That is why our true home must be sought in the here and the now. It can be touched in the here and the now.

It's the ancient cliché about living in the moment, but while listening to it last night I was struck by its profundity. *To take seriously* the adage to live in the moment. We don't take it seriously, because we've heard it so many times and it sounds so trite.

To stop hoping for something better. There is nothing better, not fundamentally. Life *is what it is*, it's always the essence of life, moments passing away, good and bad moments but always the same transience, the same self-consciousness, the same human condition. This moment is, essentially, as good as it gets, as miraculous as it gets.

Naturally, unless you're a monk, you can't always be savoring and concentrating on the present moment. But you can come back to it.

Being happy like this is easier said than done. But I don't have to feel as though most moments with Aidan are somehow inadequate or not sufficiently suffused with self-transcending love, as though once again life is a letdown or there's something wrong with me or I have to drink in order, hopefully, to *feel*. Just sitting with Aidan reading a book is a pleasure, a "wonderful moment," something to appreciate.

Drinking is indeed fun, it sweetens life, but I can love the sober moments too of reading, writing, listening to music, walking in the park, not always being half-aware of some existential lack that a woman or alcohol or at last a new creative project could theoretically fill but never does. Whatever the perceived insufficiency is, it'll always be there as a condition of living, so you accept it and set it aside and remember that every moment is a miracle, that *this moment* is what you've been longing for all those years, the fulfillment you've hoped for because there is none else and nothing is more wonderful than here and now. Hearing a bird, tasting a meal, seeing a squirrel munching its acorn, lying on the grass. This is the meaning of life, you don't need great accomplishments or an unattainable profound understanding of it all.

I should remember that.

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Reading Laurence BonJour's *In Defense of Pure Reason: A Rationalist Account of* A Priori *Justification* (1998). Should have read it a long time ago, especially since in graduate school I was already impressed by BonJour's cogent arguments and philosophical common sense. It's a brilliant book, instructive and full of careful and fairly convincing arguments.

"One main goal of this book is to arrive at an understanding of the nature, rationale, and limits of the *a priori* variety of epistemic justification. It is obvious that the initial conception of such justification offered above is predominantly negative in character: *a priori* justification is justification that does not depend on experience. But where then does such justification come from? How is the positive idea…of justification by pure thought alone to be understood?" For many empiricists, "there is something mysterious, perhaps even somehow occult," about a supposed "capacity for direct intellectual insight into necessity" (that is, necessary truths pertaining to reality), a capacity rationalists think is "the fundamental requirement for reasoning and reflective intelligence generally."

I'd note that since logical deduction itself is *a priori*, and it involves argumentative steps that strike us as logically *necessary*…empiricist qualms are puzzling.

Until Hume, nearly all philosophers throughout history were rationalists in BonJour's sense. Even Locke and Berkeley. But Hume insisted that *a priori* justification concerned only "relations of our ideas," not "matters of fact." Kant was actually rather close to this position—according to BonJour—but, with the exception of John Stuart Mill, there weren't many "clear examples of empiricism" until the advent of positivism with Comte and Mach. Since then, empiricist skepticism about the *a priori* has become increasingly prevalent in the Anglo-American world.

"Moderate empiricism," as BonJour calls it, is the familiar position that only analytic propositions can be justified *a priori*. What BonJour calls radical empiricism, associated with Quine, is the position that *a priori* justification doesn't exist at all. (Leave it to Quine to argue for the stupidest idea of all.)

Before examining empiricism in depth, BonJour makes some interesting criticisms of Kant, but I won't go into much detail. Kant is usually considered a rationalist, of course, but BonJour thinks that's sort of a false view. For one thing, unlike previous rationalists, Kant rejects the idea that we can know anything about the world in itself from *a priori* reasoning (or from *a posteriori* reasoning). That is, synthetic *a priori* knowledge can apply only to the world of *appearances*, since such knowledge/justification is necessarily, he thinks, a result of the mind's (*a priori*) structuring of experience. So his rationalism is much more modest than that of earlier thinkers. (Incidentally, BonJour of course accepts—like I did in my journal entries when I was 20—that, on Kant's definitions of analytic and synthetic, there is indeed synthetic *a priori* knowledge, for example 7+5=12.[1])

But BonJour thinks even *that* statement exaggerates Kant's rationalism. We needn't go into the argument here, though, since it's rather involved. And I'm not sure how compelling it is. The upshot, for BonJour, is that Kant's insistence on the impossibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge that doesn't derive from the mind's imposition of its categories on experience gets him into insuperable logical difficulties that end up undermining even his limited version of rationalism.

The problem I have with BonJour's rejection of Kant's position is that…the latter seems pretty reasonable. I mean, Kant was wrong that we can't say anything about the world-in-itself. We can say *a lot* about it (though not with 100% certainty), as science has shown. But can we say anything about it *purely a priori*, with no use of experimental evidence? Surely not. Science needs empirical evidence. So it seems Kant was right that we have no synthetic *a priori* knowledge about the world in itself. All the synthetic *a priori* knowledge we have applies to the world *as we experience it*. And that's because the mind imposes its own structures on the data it receives from the senses! As Kant said. He was wrong to dismiss the idea that the mind-independent world might be structured in such a way that through mathematics, aided by experimental evidence, we could at least partly understand it. But otherwise his position strikes me as very defensible.

I should also note more generally, against Kant, that, for all we know, many of our synthetic *a priori* intuitions *may* apply to the world-in-itself. Certainly mathematics does, or seems to. That it does isn't as indubitable as that it applies to/in the world of our experience, but, from the success of science, we have every reason to think it does. Some other *a priori* intuitions, such as that an object can't be both red all over and green all over, aren't really relevant to a mind-independent world, since mind (brain) is precisely what creates colors and shapes for us (the world-in-itself has no colors).

BonJour's basic argument against moderate empiricism (i.e., reliance on analyticity as explaining all *a priori* justification, so that it isn't necessary to accept synthetic *a priori* justification) is that "no conception of analyticity is capable of providing an adequate epistemological account of the generally

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[1] As Kant says, "if we look more closely, we find that the concept of the sum of 7 and 5 contains nothing save the union of the two numbers into one, and in this no thought is being taken as to what the single number may be which combines both. The concept of 12 is by no means already thought in merely thinking this union of 7 and 5; and I may analyze my concept of such a possible sum as long as I please, still I shall never find the 12 in it." This is obviously right. The concept of 12 isn't contained in the concept of the sum of 7 and 5, in the way that the concept of being male is contained in the concept of a brother. As I noted when I was 20 (discussing A. J. Ayer), you have to carry out a mental operation of synthesis in order to arrive at 12. The arithmetic proposition, while *a priori*, is not analytic (in Kant's sense), so it must be synthetic.

acknowledged cases of *a priori* justification"—or perhaps of *any* case of such justification. He goes through the various accounts of analyticity that have been offered and argues that all of them leave unexplained the justification of *logical truths*. They simply take for granted that we can intuitively see the necessity of such truths. But that's no different from the rationalist's position! For example, we can just *intuit* that the relation of transitivity is necessary. If all *B* are *C* and all *A* are *B*, then all *A* are *C*. (If all men are mortal and all Greeks are men, all Greeks are mortal.)

But couldn't an empiricist just say these basic logical and mathematical intuitions aren't really substantive or synthetic, that, as Hume said, they only concern relations between our ideas rather than mind-independent facts? So they're only "analytic"?

I suppose BonJour might reply that logical and mathematical truths, for example, because of their necessity, *are* mind-independent facts. But is that right? In a sense it is, because these truths don't depend on what anyone happens to believe about them. They aren't subjective like that; they're objective. But on the other hand, it's because of the structures of our minds that we assent to them. They express our cognitive architecture. So in that respect they aren't really "mind-independent."

I think Chomsky is right that this whole analytic-synthetic/empiricist-rationalist debate is misguided and confused. The concepts aren't clearly defined. As BonJour himself shows, analyticity has been defined in many not-equivalent ways. And so has the concept of "synthetic," though he doesn't discuss that much.

Anyway, after his long discussion of moderate empiricism, BonJour proceeds to eviscerate Quine's radical empiricism (which he regards, rightly, as hard to take seriously). First, he argues very plausibly that Quine's belief in the unintelligibility of analyticity, and of related concepts like synonymy, is mistaken. Quine's whole rejection of the very idea of linguistic meaning—evidently he didn't like its non-behaviorist connotations—is, of course, an example of philosophers getting so lost in their labyrinths of abstruse argumentation that they become less rational than a guy on the street. And then there's the Quinean "naturalized epistemology" that rejects the very idea of epistemic justification, reinterpreting epistemology merely as psychology. To quote BonJour's paraphrase, "we have a set of beliefs that describe the external world; part of that very set of beliefs describes how the beliefs are *caused* [not *justified*] by observation; but we have no cogent reason for thinking that *any* of these beliefs are true." So what results is an insane form of skepticism. Since Quine hasn't given any good reasons for abandoning traditional epistemology, there seems no reason to take his so-called naturalized epistemology seriously. But it does at least show where you end up if you reject the notion of *a priori* justification in favor of arguing that "all reputable cognitive endeavors can be accounted for on a purely empirical [or observational] basis," as BonJour paraphrases. You end up in arrant absurdity, in fact the veritable demise of philosophy, even of argument itself. (Obviously Quine's position is self-defeating, since he clearly thinks his arguments are *justified*. But how can they be justified if the idea of justification should be abandoned?)

Quine's whole philosophy amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum* of whatever empiricist and behaviorist considerations led him to formulate it.

As for rationalism, it seems presupposed by thinking itself. As I just, in effect, noted, "if one never in fact grasps any necessary connections between anything, it is difficult to see what reasoning could possibly amount to." That is, "there is ultimately no alternative to reliance on *a priori* insight, if reasoned thinking that goes beyond mere perception or observation is to be possible." However, contrary to what most rationalists have thought, this doesn't mean that *a priori* justification is always *infallible*. "[Historically,] there are simply too many compelling examples of propositions and inferences that were claimed to be objects of rational insight, and hence to be justified *a priori*, but that subsequently turned out to be false or mistaken." At best, we can say that "an apparent rational insight will count as genuine only if it *actually* involves the sort of authentic grasp of the necessary character of reality that ensures truth." But, given the possibility of mistakes, we can't know if any particular case of apparent insight is genuine, and therefore we can't know when an insight is infallible (which means, in effect, it never is). As BonJour says,

> a moderate rationalism that abandons the indefensible claim of infallibility should hold instead that…it is *apparent* rational insight (and, correlatively, apparent self-evidence) that

> provides the basis for *a priori* epistemic justification. Such justification will thus, in common with all or virtually all other kinds of justification, be fallible, since it will be possible that the apparent insight that justifies a particular claim is not genuine. The moderate rationalist's main thesis is that such an apparent insight still yields a reason, albeit a fallible one, for thinking that the proposition in question is true.

Much of the book consists of a defense of rationalism against a variety of epistemological and metaphysical objections, but I won't go through all that. I think BonJour's arguments are consistently very reasonable. In the last chapter he uses rationalism to solve, or at least sketch the solution of, a particular philosophical problem, namely the famous Humean problem of induction. Philosophers have generally assumed there couldn't be an *a priori* solution to this problem, but BonJour pretty compellingly argues they've been wrong. I might as well say here that I've never been terribly bothered by the problem of induction, namely, how can inductive reasoning be justified? "What sort of *reasoning* moves from the observation of particular cases in which *A* has been followed by *B* [as its effect] to the general conclusion that *A* will *always* be followed by *B*? Hume's initially startling thesis is that there is no such reasoning, that the conclusion in question is not based on reasoning at all but is rather the result of an ultimately arational process: *custom* or *habit*." Well, it's seemed evident to me that if you just supply the premise that *nature is lawlike*, inductive reasoning is justified. It doesn't have to be merely a result of habit. It's true that that premise is itself an example of inductive or abductive reasoning, so using it to justify induction is circular, I suppose. But it's such an overwhelmingly plausible justification that I don't see how it can be avoided. If we take nature to be lawlike—as it appears to be—then inductively generalizing from particular instances is entirely legitimate.

BonJour in effect adopts the stated premise as the solution, arguing that it's *a priori*. Thus, *a priori* reasoning can solve important philosophical problems.

I perused some of the responses to the book by philosophers and wasn't surprised to find a lot of embarrassingly silly stuff. Gilbert Harman, Paul Boghossian, Georges Rey, Albert Casullo—some of their objections were worthy of a rather unintelligent undergraduate. BonJour's response to all their criticisms (in the journal *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*) was impressive.

I would note, by the way—something BonJour doesn't mention—that the truth of rationalism in the sense of an incredibly rich innate genetic endowment built in to the individual's mind at birth likely entails that rationalism in BonJour's "intuitionist" sense is also true. Humans have substantial synthetic *a priori* cognition (at least on Kant's definition of synthetic) in accord with the architecture of their minds.

Peter Carruthers' book *Human Knowledge and Human Nature: A New Introduction to an Ancient Debate* (1992) is good too, though he has a more empiricist point of view than BonJour. But his empiricism is relatively intelligent, since he accepts that humans are endowed with innate concepts and innate knowledge. It's only the rationalist notion of "substantive *a priori* knowledge" that he rejects. He's wrong to do so, but it's an interesting book anyway.

Actually, in one sense he accepts substantive *a priori* knowledge, but in another sense not. Innate concepts (like causation), innate knowledge (like the very complex "folk psychology" we all naturally use to understand one another), and innate "information-bearing mental structures" (like Universal Grammar) are all *a priori*, "at least in the sense of not having been learned from experience" (though they're *triggered* by experience).[1] And they're surely "substantive." But Carruthers rejects a different kind of substantive *a priori* knowledge. Here's the relevant paragraph:

> If the course of evolution has provided us with substantive innate knowledge, either of our own psychology or of other aspects of the natural world, then it will at the same time have provided us with substantive *a priori* knowledge. It is important to realize, however, that the status of such knowledge as *a priori* will be quite different from what rationalist

[1] The Poverty of the Stimulus argument applies to all of them. They're far too rich to be mere extrapolations from experience. Instead, the mind brings them *to* experience.

> philosophers have generally had in mind when they have employed the phrase '*a priori* knowledge'. In particular, the knowledge in question will not have been acquired merely through the thinking of it, by a process of reasoning alone. Innate *a priori* knowledge of folk-psychology, for example, would not consist of beliefs that can be discovered to be true just by thinking of their subject-matter; nor would their content be intuitively certain. Rather, we would find ourselves with those beliefs already; and then, provided that they are both true and reliably acquired through evolution, this would be sufficient to constitute them as knowledge…

I'd reiterate that this old debate between rationalists and empiricists over the synthetic *a priori* ("substantive *a priori*") isn't as interesting or clear as they've thought. What's clear and important is that rationalists have been right about innate concepts and knowledge—while empiricists have been right that most or all of these innate mental structures (which provide the framework for our experience) don't give us knowledge of the world-in-itself, and we certainly can't know from pure *a priori* reasoning that they do. We need science to investigate the mind-independent world. So, again, Kant's compromise between empiricism and rationalism was very close to being right. (He was only wrong in thinking it was impossible for us to say anything at all about the mind-independent world.)

August

I find it puzzling that so few people kill themselves. Apparently less than a million in the world kill themselves every year. Life is so hard and so pointless, and so long, but only a tenth of one percent of people commit suicide! Isn't that incredible? What a testament to humanity's innate *life-affirmation*.

Personally, life seems pretty meaningless unless I'm writing.

I guess I should start to do that again, like write articles. However pointless that ultimately is.

I've also been looking for non-academic jobs, and applying to some. But most of even the ones I could potentially do—my god, how '*vulgar*' they seem. How unfulfilling! Bureaucratic, administrative, capitalist, merely *functional*. Utterly depressing.

How do people work five days a week from 9 to 5 (or longer) most of their lives? With hardly any vacations. It seems almost psychologically impossible. But this is the world capitalism has created, where you're *lucky* if you're one of the ones who works forty-plus hours a week from your twenties to your sixties. If you're unlucky, you end up being massacred so that some powerful psychopaths can amass even more power.

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At 31 months, Aidan's language skills are excellent. It's been an explosion in the last few months. Lots of sentences. "No we don't wanna listen to Scarlatti! We wanna listen to Mozart!" (For him, Mozart = the overture to the *Marriage of Figaro*. That's the only piece he really likes.) "You don't want Daddy to hold my hand." "It's fun to throw rocks into the water!" (Without being prompted by any such statement.) "You want Daddy to carry you." "We need new batteries for the train." "I'm trying to go find the second wheel." "We need a smaller person to go into the [toy] train." "It's gonna be so much fun to throw rocks into the water." "Aidan can go down the steps by himself." All unprompted. His understanding, of course, is far superior to his speech.

He makes mistakes too, of course. For example, he might say, "You want [or 'I want'] Daddy to bite your finger," meaning "I want to bite Daddy's finger." Or "You want to carry Daddy" (or "You want to carry you"), meaning "I want Daddy to carry me." These sorts of mistakes are pretty systematic, and thus are surely very common at his stage of linguistic development. Something about the way the language faculty matures.

He also constantly repeats phrases and sentences he's heard, even long after hearing them. Songs, sentences from his parents, etc. Randomly says them to himself again and again, outside of any appropriate context. All this is evidence for the "language instinct"—as if more evidence were needed. As far as I'm concerned, science has conclusively established it (contrary to a vast amount of empiricist and behaviorist writing).

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Reading Reza Aslan's *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* (2013), which made a big splash when it was published. A good synthesis of scholarship. It shows that Kautsky's interpretation, which I summarized here years ago, was pretty accurate: Jesus the revolutionary, who didn't reject violence but accepted its inevitability in the struggle to free Palestine from both Rome and the tyranny of the priestly caste and other wealthy oppressors. A visionary utopian, he wanted to establish the kingdom of God *on earth*. One useful thing about the book is that it describes the many other "messiahs," prophets, and revolutionaries who wandered around Palestine in those years, in some cases violently and successfully challenging the powerful. So much so that Rome finally sent a huge army to crush the Jewish Revolt, around 70 A.D., and utterly annihilate Jerusalem. In the previous century there had been Hezekiah the bandit chief, Judas the Galilean, Simon of Peraea, Athronges the shepherd, John the Baptist, Theudas the wonder-worker, Eleazar son of Dinaeus, "the Samaritan," "the Egyptian," Jesus ben Ananias, Menahem, Simon son of Giora, Simon son of Kochba, and so forth. Plus the Essenes, the Sicarii (assassins), and the Zealots. Jesus the Nazarene was just another of these people, less radical than the Zealots but more radical than John the Baptist. When the Gospels were written, after the annihilation of Jerusalem and long after the total failure of Jesus's messianic prophecies, it was necessary to reinterpret his message so that it was otherworldly. And also more acceptable to non-Jews, more universal, and not so hostile to Romans. So, as Kautsky argues too, the writers injected a healthy dose of antisemitism, blaming not the Romans but the Jews for Jesus's execution.

Jesus himself surely said a lot of otherworldly things—in fact, his preaching was probably rather ambiguous on many points—but the compilers of the New Testament did what they could to excise the Jewish nationalism from his message and make it relatively non-political. Neutering it, but also universalizing it, was key to its success.

A guy named Stephen was the first of Jesus's followers to be killed after the crucifixion. His crime? Saying that Jesus was not only the messiah, and was not only resurrected into eternal life, but was *God made flesh*. A notion totally anathema to Jews. This was the birth of a new religion. To quote Aslan, "The story of the zealous Galilean peasant and Jewish nationalist who donned the mantle of messiah and launched a foolhardy rebellion against the corrupt Temple priesthood and the vicious Roman occupation comes to an abrupt end, not with his death on the cross, nor with the empty tomb [from which he was supposedly resurrected], but at the first moment one of his followers dares suggest he is God."

The original apostles, farmers and fishermen, were limited in their ability to spread Jesus's message because they could neither read nor write. So

> The task of defining Jesus's message fell instead to a new crop of educated, urbanized, Greek-speaking Diaspora Jews who would become the primary vehicles for the expansion of the new faith. As these extraordinary men and women, many of them immersed in Greek philosophy and Hellenistic thought, began to reinterpret Jesus's message so as to make it more palatable both to their fellow Greek-speaking Jews and to their gentile neighbors in the Diaspora, they gradually transformed Jesus from a revolutionary zealot to a Romanized demigod, from a man who tried and failed to free the Jews from Roman oppression to a celestial being wholly uninterested in any earthly matter.
>
> This transformation did not occur without conflict or difficulty. The original Aramaic-speaking followers of Jesus, including the members of his family and the remnants of the Twelve, openly clashed with the Greek-speaking Diaspora Jews when it

> came to the correct understanding of Jesus's message. The discord between the two groups resulted in the emergence of two distinct and competing camps of Christian interpretation in the decades after the crucifixion: one championed by Jesus's brother, James; the other promoted by the former Pharisee, Paul. As we shall see, it would be the contest between these two bitter and openly hostile adversaries that, more than anything else, would shape Christianity as the global religion we know today.

The story is very well-known by scholars, and I needn't describe it in depth.

But one interesting thing, an unsolvable mystery, is what happened after Jesus died. He would have been just another failed messiah if not for a key difference from all the others: his disciples claimed that after his death he was resurrected. They saw it with their own eyes. Even under torture, they wouldn't recant their testimony. This "miracle" is what sustained the faith of the early Christians. "Without the resurrection, the whole edifice of Jesus's claim to the mantle of the messiah comes crashing down." Who the hell knows what really happened. He obviously wasn't resurrected, but somehow his followers convinced themselves he was. Maybe they stole his body? Maybe they got high together on some drug? Maybe they saw someone who looked like him?

I might as well also briefly mention the conflict between Paul and Jesus's followers in Jerusalem, since I wasn't previously aware of the history. I had the impression that Paul was primarily the one who ended up defining Christianity and founding a new religion, but I didn't know much else. It worked out well for him in the long run that, despite being Jewish, he insisted in his preaching and his letters to the Diasporic assemblies that the Jewish law no longer mattered, the Temple didn't matter, Judaism didn't matter, and justification was by faith (in Jesus) rather than by works. For the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. essentially brought all this to pass in reality. Judaism became a pariah and the Christian congregations scattered around the empire no longer had any connection to a chief congregation in Jerusalem that insisted they maintain many Jewish traditions.

> Christianity after the destruction of Jerusalem was almost exclusively a gentile religion; it needed a gentile theology. And that is precisely what Paul provided. The choice between James's [Jesus's brother's] vision of a Jewish religion anchored in the Law of Moses and derived from a Jewish nationalist who fought against Rome, and Paul's vision of a Roman religion that divorced itself from Jewish provincialism and required nothing for salvation save belief in Christ, was not a difficult one for the second and third generations of Jesus's followers to make.

So Pauline theology, according to which Jesus was God and so on, became dominant.

Until his execution in 62 A.D., Jesus's brother James was the head honcho, the leader of the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem and thus, in effect, of the (relatively few) "Christian" congregations everywhere. He, Peter, John, and the other elders in Jerusalem admonished Paul not to depart *too much* from Judaism in his teachings. They summoned him a couple of times to explain himself, and by the time of his death it seemed that his interpretation didn't have a very auspicious future. Until after the destruction of Jerusalem.

As for James (James the Just), he appears to have been a pretty exemplary character. Like his brother Jesus—or so Aslan argues, plausibly—he had no interest in founding a new religion. (Jesus actually said he was there to fulfill the law, not to abandon it (like Paul).) But he did want Jewish society to be more humane, and he hoped the Second Coming of Jesus, expected soon, would usher in the Kingdom of God. Meaning, essentially, the casting off of Roman rule and establishment of a just society. His views are clear from his epistle in the New Testament—which he didn't write, but which almost certainly expressed his views and was probably written by someone from his inner circle. As Aslan says, this makes it "one of the most important books in the New Testament, because one sure way of uncovering what Jesus may have believed is to determine what his brother James believed." (James revered his brother and was devoted to his legacy.)

So it's significant that James's epistle is passionately concerned with the plight of the poor and bitterly condemns the rich:

> "Come now, you wealthy ones, weep and howl for the miseries that are about to come upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and the venom within them shall be a witness against you; it shall eat your flesh as though it were fire" (James 5:1–3). For James there is no path to salvation for the wealthy who "hoard treasures for the last days," and who "live on the land in luxury and pleasure" (James 5:3, 5). Their fate is set in stone. "The rich man will pass away like a flower in the field. For no sooner does the sun rise with its scorching heat, which withers the field, than the flower dies and its beauty perishes. So it shall be with the rich man" (James 1:11). James goes so far as to suggest that one cannot truly be a follower of Jesus if one does not actively favor the poor. "Do you with your acts of favoritism [toward the rich] really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?" he asks. "For if you show favoritism, you commit sin and are exposed as a transgressor of the law" (James 2:1, 9).

For James, and therefore probably for Jesus, *works* were at least as important as *faith*. In fact, they went together. "For as the body without spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26).

I suppose some of Aslan's arguments might be controversial, but he's indisputably an expert. Remarkably erudite. And his semi-Kautskian interpretation of both Jesus and the early history of Christianity has the ring of truth. *Of course* Jesus was, in effect, a revolutionary, and explicitly politically engaged. Anachronistically but not untruthfully, one can call him an anti-imperialist, an anti-capitalist, a utopian, and a semi-insurrectionist (he gathered scores of people on his way to Jerusalem, where he violently overturned tables, attacked authorities, and caused a near-riot). His concern was with justice on earth—compassion, love, relative equality, freedom from oppression—and he used the ideologies at hand to articulate his subversive values.

With Paul began, in earnest, the domestication and depoliticization of Jesus, together with his universalization. "Faith, not works" is singularly compatible with maintaining the political status quo. No wonder Pauline Christianity triumphed. Just like Lutheranism 1400 years later. As usual, it comes down to class interests and the ideologies conditioned thereby. (Even the class interests of the poor can be served by "faith, not works" inasmuch as sublimating the desire for material salvation into an otherworldly vision provides consolation and prevents the poor from being slaughtered in insurrections. So it can be in the interests of both dominant and exploited classes to embrace Pauline and Protestant ideologies. And of course the Catholic religion too, which served the purposes of both poor and rich. Though mainly the rich.)

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I've decided I can no longer abide my ignorance in matters of diet and health. This is useful stuff to know, and also intellectually engaging. So I'm reading Gary Taubes' brilliant, albeit controversial, book *Good Calories, Bad Calories: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom on Diet, Weight Control, and Disease* (2007). It argues against the widespread idea that diets high in saturated fats and cholesterol are bad for your heart and your weight, instead insisting that high-carbohydrate diets are, more often, what lead to obesity and heart disease. For decades, until very recently, the Establishment declared that carbs are good for the heart and for weight control, while fats are bad, but the opposite is closer to the truth. Actually, it's pretty common now, finally, to hear about the downsides of high-carb diets—and even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was widely known that high-carb diets can lead to excessive weight gain. (This is also a premise of the famous Atkins diet from the 1970s to the present, along with other diets and many bestselling books from the 1940s on.) But things went awry in the middle and late twentieth century, when influential scientists starting with Ancel Keys got things backward. Doubtless one reason the "good carbs" dogma conquered the culture was that it benefited agribusiness and other corporate interests, which promoted it. (The dairy, egg, and meat industries, on the other hand, certainly opposed it.)

The dogma wasn't totally absurd, at least prima facie. For it was thought that consuming too many calories was what led to obesity, and since fat has more than twice as many calories per gram as protein and carbs, cutting down on fat should lead to losing weight. So should exercise: burn more calories than you consume. But Taubes argues—on the basis of prodigious evidence—that it isn't the *quantity* of calories that matters but the *quality*.

Let's look at some of the basics first.

> [Coronary heart disease] is a condition in which the arteries that supply blood and oxygen to the heart—known as coronary arteries because they descend on the heart like a crown—are no longer able to do so. If they're blocked entirely, the result is a heart attack. Partial blocks will starve the heart of oxygen, a condition known as ischemia. In atherosclerosis, the coronary arteries are lined by plaques or lesions, known as atheromas, the root of which comes from a Greek word meaning "porridge"—what they vaguely look like. A heart attack is caused most often by a blood clot—a thrombosis—typically where the arteries are already narrowed by atherosclerosis.

Cholesterol, on the other hand, "is a pearly-white fatty substance [a lipid] that can be found in all body tissues, an essential component of cell membranes and a constituent of a range of physiologic processes, including the metabolism of human sex hormones. Cholesterol is also a primary component of atherosclerotic plaques, so it was a natural assumption that the disease might begin with the abnormal accumulation of cholesterol…"

Actually, in the 1940s even Ancel Keys insisted that dietary cholesterol (the cholesterol we consume in our diets) had little relevance to heart disease. Like other researchers, he observed, correctly, that eating foods high in cholesterol usually had almost no effect on the cholesterol levels in our blood. A few years later, however, he decided that dietary *fat* is what elevates cholesterol levels. (Hence the still-widespread belief that a low-fat diet is a low-cholesterol diet.) But he had oversimplified. It turns out it isn't the *total* amount of dietary fat that increases cholesterol but rather the fat's degree of "saturation," as well as what's called the chain length of the fats. "This saturation factor is a measure of whether or not the molecules of fat—known as triglycerides—contain what can be considered a full quotient of hydrogen atoms, as they do in saturated fats, which tend to raise cholesterol, or whether one or more are absent, as is the case with unsaturated fats, which tend, in comparison, to lower it." Hence the common notion for many decades that saturated fats are where the real danger is.

The problem is that a lot of research has failed to show that people with high cholesterol have unusually clogged arteries. Besides, "even if high cholesterol was *associated* with an increased incidence of heart disease, this begged the question of why so many people…suffer coronary heart disease despite having low cholesterol, and why a tremendous number of people with high cholesterol never get heart disease." Nevertheless, in 1960 the American Heart Association endorsed Keys' idea that high cholesterol is the leading heart-disease risk and therefore that Americans should reduce the fat in their diets, especially saturated fat. (Strangely, this endorsement was less than four years after the AHA had firmly *rejected* Keys' hypothesis. The evidence hadn't changed, so maybe some corporate lobbying had made a difference? Less dietary fat = more carbs, more sugar, more profits for certain industries, etc.)

Through shoddy science, the fat-cholesterol hypothesis gained popularity in the following decades. For example, it was observed that Japanese men who lived in Japan had low blood-cholesterol levels and low levels of heart disease, while Japanese men in California had higher cholesterol levels and higher rates of heart disease. It was considered largely irrelevant that Japanese men in California who had very low cholesterol levels *still* had higher rates of heart disease than men in Japan. There are plenty of other examples of such flawed research. Keys and scientists who agreed with him saw in research what they wanted to see, and the press reported their conclusions. Sometimes studies coming to opposite conclusions wouldn't even be published. More often, though, they were just dismissed or ignored.

In passing, Taubes mentions the "French paradox": "a nation that consumes copious saturated fat but has comparatively little heart disease." One of the many pieces of evidence against the fat-cholesterol

hypothesis. (In fairness, I should note that one study in the 1990s concluded that a man who avoided saturated fat his entire adult life until the age of 90 could expect to live…an extra four months.)

The climate of opinion turned decisively in favor of Keys' hypothesis in 1977, when Senator George McGovern's Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs published the first *Dietary Goals for the United States*. It basically endorsed Keys' ideas, despite acknowledging that they were scientifically controversial. "Eat less fat and more carbs!" There was a lot of dissent among the scientific and medical communities, not to mention the livestock industry, but it didn't much change the thinking of the committee. A few years later, the Department of Agriculture published its *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, which echoed McGovern's report. From then on, more and more scientists (whose funding often depended on government priorities) began to fall in line. Soon the National Institutes of Health, the Surgeon General, the National Academy of Sciences, etc. were enforcing the new "consensus"—which was still based on astonishingly little science. Even international bodies like the World Health Organization have tended to accept it.

Meanwhile, a number of studies have suggested the opposite of the fat-cholesterol hypothesis. In some cases in Japan, Spain, and Italy, increases in fat consumption over decades have correlated with *declines* in heart disease and strokes. Studies of Mediterranean immigrants to Australia suggest that the initially low heart disease rates of these people fall even lower after they've immigrated, despite a considerable increase in their meat consumption. In fact, by the late 1980s Ancel Keys himself told the *New York Times*, "I've come to think that cholesterol is not as important as we used to think it was"! That's a pretty big "whoops," considering the impact of his earlier hypotheses.

Okay, let's shift now to evaluating what Taubes calls the carbohydrate hypothesis. He starts out by noting that "diseases of civilization" have invariably appeared among "traditional" populations that began to be exposed to Western diets:

> …The new diet inevitably included carbohydrate foods that could be transported around the world without spoiling or being devoured by rodents on the way: sugar, molasses, white flour, and white rice. Then *diseases of civilization,* or *Western diseases,* would appear: obesity, diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease, hypertension and stroke, various forms of cancer, cavities, periodontal disease, appendicitis, peptic ulcers, diverticulitis, gallstones, hemorrhoids, varicose veins, and constipation. When any diseases of civilization appeared, all of them would eventually appear.
>
> This led investigators [in the 1920s and later] to propose that all these diseases had a single common cause—the consumption of easily digestible, refined carbohydrates. The hypothesis was rejected in the early 1970s, when it could not be reconciled with Keys's hypothesis that fat was the problem, an attendant implication of which was that carbohydrates were part of the solution…

It's not easy to summarize Taubes' very rich and long description of the history and the science. As with the fat-cholesterol story, there's a shameful amount of bad science and lack of common sense on the part of authorities. For half a century, diabetologists rejected convincing evidence that sugar and refined carbohydrates were responsible for diabetes, believing instead that fatty diets caused the disease. Some influential researchers also attributed far too much importance to dietary fiber in preventing "diseases of civilization," believing wrongly that a fiber-deficient diet was responsible for colon cancer, polyps, diverticulitis, and so on. (You'll still see claims like this on "respectable" websites, for example.)

Following a remarkable and far-seeing British scientist named Thomas Latimer Cleave (and his collaborator George Campbell), Taubes argues that these modern chronic diseases are largely caused by the most radical change to the internal environment of human bodies in two million years: the introduction of diets high in sugar and refined carbohydrates. Excessive consumption of these can lead to a constellation of conditions now called *insulin resistance syndrome* or, more often, *metabolic syndrome*. These conditions are common to diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. They include, for instance, elevated levels of blood fats known as triglycerides, low levels of HDL cholesterol (now known as the "good cholesterol"),

hypertension, chronically high levels of insulin (called *insulinemia* or *hyperinsulinemia*), the increased presence of LDL particles ("bad cholesterol"), a relative insensitivity of cells to insulin (called *insulin resistance*), and high levels of a protein called fibrinogen that increases the likelihood of blood clots in arteries. The introduction of refined carbs in modern diets has massively compromised the incredibly complex homeostatic mechanisms in the human body that evolved over millions of years.

I have to include a long quotation here:

> This whole-body homeostasis is orchestrated by a single, evolutionarily ancient region of the brain known as the hypothalamus, which sits at the base of the brain. It accomplishes this orchestral task through modulation of the nervous system—specifically, the autonomic nervous system, which controls involuntary functions—and the endocrine system, which is the system of hormones. The hormones control reproduction, regulate growth and development, maintain the internal environment—i.e., homeostasis—and regulate energy production, utilization, and storage. All four functions are interdependent, and the last one is fundamental to the success of the other three…
>
> All other hormones, however, are secondary to the role of insulin in energy production, utilization, and storage. Historically, physicians have viewed insulin as though it has a single primary function: to remove and store away sugar from the blood after a meal. This is the most conspicuous function impaired in diabetes. But the roles of insulin are many and diverse. It is the primary regulator of fat, carbohydrate, and protein metabolism; it regulates the synthesis of a molecule called glycogen, the form in which glucose is stored in muscle tissue and the liver; it stimulates the synthesis and storage of fats in fat depots and in the liver, and it inhibits the release of that fat. Insulin also stimulates the synthesis of proteins and of molecules involved in the function, repair, and growth of cells, and even of RNA and DNA molecules, as well.
>
> Insulin, in short, is the one hormone that serves to coordinate and regulate everything having to do with the storage and use of nutrients and thus the maintenance of homeostasis and, in a word, life. It's all these aspects of homeostatic regulatory systems—in particular, carbohydrate and fat metabolism, and kidney and liver functions—that are malfunctioning in the cluster of metabolic abnormalities associated with metabolic syndrome and with the chronic diseases of civilization.

I had no idea insulin is so important for so many functions.

In six very dense chapters, Taubes discusses the history of the science of "the carbohydrate hypothesis." I'll try to summarize the main points.

Most of the fat in the body consists of triglycerides, though cholesterol is a type of fat too. Both types are shuttled through the blood in particles called lipoproteins, and the amount of cholesterol and triglycerides varies in each type of lipoprotein. The types include low-density lipoproteins (LDL), high-density ones (HDL), and very low-density ones (VLDL). Most of the triglycerides in the blood are carried in VLDL, while much of the cholesterol is found in LDL. (Some is also found in VLDL.) LDL and, much more so, VLDL are implicated in heart disease and other conditions. Measuring total cholesterol in the blood doesn't tell you how much of it is carried by the bad low-density or very low-density particles and how much by the good high-density particles, so it isn't a particularly useful measurement. (One reason HDL particles are "good," apparently, is that they transport cholesterol back to the liver, either for excretion or to be used by other tissues that synthesize hormones.)

The amount of (slightly bad) LDL in the blood can be raised by consuming saturated fats, but levels of the more damaging VLDL are raised by consuming carbohydrates. (Moreover, saturated fats also raise the *good* HDL cholesterol.) So, to paraphrase a pioneering researcher in the 1950s-60s named John Gofman,

> If a physician put a patient with high cholesterol on a low-fat diet, that might lower the patient's LDL, but it would raise VLDL. If LDL was abnormally elevated, then this low-

> fat diet might help, but what Gofman called the "carbohydrate factor" in these low-fat diets might raise VLDL so much that the diet would do more harm than good. Indeed, in Gofman's experience, when LDL decreased, VLDL tended to rise disproportionately. And if VLDL was abnormally elevated to begin with, then prescribing a low-fat, high-carbohydrate diet would certainly *increase* the patient's risk of heart disease.

It's worth noting that not only a low-carb diet but also a *low-calorie* diet can reduce the level of triglycerides in the blood, although for other reasons such a diet might not be very healthy.

Meanwhile, other researchers found (in 1960) that high triglyceride levels were far more common than high cholesterol in coronary-heart-disease patients. "Only 5 percent of healthy young men had elevated triglycerides, compared with 38 percent of healthy middle-aged men and 82 percent of coronary patients." So, again, since a high-carb diet increases triglycerides (carried by VLDL), it's a good idea to avoid such a diet.

Another interesting finding, from 1977, was that the higher the HDL cholesterol, the lower the triglycerides and risk of heart disease. (And vice versa: the more triglycerides, the less HDL.) Evidently there was some mechanism that inversely linked HDL to triglycerides. Unfortunately, the medical and political establishment chose to ignore the implication that, to prevent heart disease (and obesity and diabetes), raising HDL is much more important than lowering either LDL or total cholesterol. For decades, the country would remain in the grip of Keys' simplistic "cholesterol is bad" hypothesis.

In fact, even today we're regularly told that LDL cholesterol is a significant predictor of heart disease, when the truth, according to Taubes, is that high levels of triglycerides are far more dangerous. LDL is a relatively marginal risk.

I've noted that consuming saturated fat, contrary to over fifty years of dogma, isn't very bad, since it increases the good HDL (and the potentially *slightly* bad LDL). Carbohydrates, on the other hand, lower both LDL and HDL, as they raise triglycerides. But another noteworthy fact is that *monounsaturated fat* is good, because it both lowers LDL cholesterol and raises HDL. The reason this is noteworthy is that *the principal fat in red meat, eggs, and bacon—foods we've been told are unhealthy—is monounsaturated fat.* With a porterhouse steak, for instance, about 70 percent of the fat might improve the relative levels of LDL and HDL, compared with what they would be if carbohydrates like bread, potatoes, and pasta were consumed. Thus, "eating a porterhouse steak in lieu of bread or potatoes would actually reduce heart-disease risk, although virtually no nutritional authority will say so publicly. The same is true for lard and bacon."

I've ignored some complications in this summary. In particular, it turns out that LDL particles actually come in seven different types! The smallest and densest of these types are what correlate negatively with HDL and positively with heart disease. So it's too simplistic to say "LDL is bad," as we usually hear. Rather, only the small and dense LDL is bad. Some people have mostly large, fluffy LDL particles, which are harmless, while others have mostly small, dense LDL, which are more likely to cause atherosclerosis. "Small, dense LDL can squeeze more easily through damaged areas of the artery wall to form incipient atherosclerotic plaques." The proliferation of small, dense LDL in the blood goes together with high triglycerides and low HDL. And once again, research shows that the less fat in the diet and the more carbohydrates, the smaller and denser the LDL (and therefore the greater the risk of heart disease). At the same time, the more *saturated* fat in the diet, the larger and fluffier the LDL—which is a beneficial effect.

So what are the actual mechanisms that explain all this stuff? Here's a simplified summary of some of them:

> After we eat a carbohydrate-rich meal, the bloodstream is flooded with glucose, and the liver takes some of this glucose and transforms it into fat—i.e., triglycerides—for temporary storage. These triglycerides are no more than droplets of oil. In the liver, the oil droplets are fused to [lipoproteins]. The triglycerides constitute the cargo that the lipoproteins drop off at tissues throughout the body… This lipoprotein has a very low density, and so is a VLDL particle…

> The liver then secretes this triglyceride-rich VLDL into the blood, and the VLDL sets about delivering its cargo of triglycerides around the body. Throughout this process, the lipoprotein gets progressively smaller and denser until it ends its life as a low-density lipoprotein—LDL…
>
> If the liver has to dispose of copious triglycerides [because of a high-carb diet], then the oil droplets are large, and the resulting lipoproteins put into the circulation will be triglyceride-rich and very low-density. These then progressively give up their triglycerides, eventually ending up, after a particularly extended life in the circulation, as the atherogenic [i.e., bad] small, dense LDL. This triglyceride-rich scenario would take place whenever carbohydrates are consumed in abundance…

Lipoproteins that cling to artery walls "begin the accumulation of fat and cholesterol that is characteristic of atherosclerotic plaques," which cause heart disease.

What does insulin have to do with all this? Taubes' discussion isn't ideal, so I've had to do some investigating online. Insulin, produced in the pancreas, is released in response to increased blood glucose (sugar) levels. It transports the glucose to cells and tissues that use it for energy, and in doing so, it lowers blood sugar levels. It also takes the glucose to the liver, which uses it to synthesize and secrete triglycerides for storage in fat tissue. Problems arise if the conditions of *insulin resistance* and/or *hyperinsulinemia* (chronically elevated levels of insulin in the blood) are present. Insulin resistance is when cells don't respond normally to insulin, with the result that glucose doesn't get into the cells and instead builds up in the blood. If someone who is insulin-resistant eats a carbohydrate-rich diet, his pancreas will have to secrete even more insulin to try to get the glucose into cells; the higher insulin levels will prompt even greater production of triglycerides by the liver, and thus will raise triglyceride levels in the blood. Which increases the risk of heart disease.

Diabetes is a condition of chronically high blood sugar, but not everyone with insulin resistance or hyperinsulinemia becomes diabetic. Some people continue to secrete sufficient insulin to overcome their insulin resistance—but this hyperinsulinemia still causes problems by elevating triglyceride levels in the blood.

I've never known much about diabetes, so I'll describe it briefly. Type 1 diabetes is a lifelong condition in which the pancreas makes little or no insulin, which means cells can't absorb glucose. It thus builds up in the blood. Type 2 diabetes, which is much more common, is characterized by cells' insulin resistance rather than the pancreas's insufficient production of insulin. Ironically, diabetics can sometimes suffer from *low* blood sugar—but this often happens because they've taken too much insulin in their therapy or some other medication, or they've increased physical activity without eating more or adjusting their insulin dose, etc.

Why is chronically high blood sugar bad anyway? For one thing, it raises insulin levels, which themselves raise triglyceride levels. But there are other problems. Raising blood sugar increases the production of what are called *reactive oxygen species* (ROS) and *advanced glycation end-products* (AGEs), both of which are potentially toxic.

> The former [ROS] are generated primarily by the burning of glucose (blood sugar) for fuel in the cells, in a process that attaches electrons to oxygen atoms, transforming the oxygen from a relatively inert molecule into one that is avid to react chemically with other molecules. One form of these reactive oxygen species are *free radicals*, and all of them are together known as *oxidants*, because what they do is *oxidize* other molecules… The object of oxidation slowly deteriorates. Biologists refer to this deterioration as *oxidative stress. Antioxidants* neutralize reactive oxygen species, which is why antioxidants have become a popular buzzword in nutrition discussions.

Oxidative stress is an important cause of cancer, arthritis, aging, autoimmune disorders, and cardiovascular and neurodegenerative diseases. So high blood sugar can be very bad indeed!

What about AGEs? These can be just as bad as ROS. Glycation is when a sugar molecule, like glucose, attaches to a protein (or a lipid or nucleic acid) without the benefit of an enzyme to control the reaction. Since no enzyme is overseeing the process, "the sugar sticks to the protein haphazardly and sets the stage for yet more unintended and unregulated chemical reactions." If blood sugar levels are fairly low, the sugar and protein will disengage and that'll be the end of it. But if blood sugar is elevated, the process of forming AGEs will move forward, until a lot of AGEs will bind together and to other proteins, such that proteins that should have nothing to do with each other will be inexorably joined.

> Since 1980, AGEs have been linked directly to both diabetic complications and aging itself (hence the acronym). AGEs accumulate in the lens, cornea, and retina of the eye, where they appear to cause the browning and opacity of the lens characteristic of senile cataracts. AGEs accumulate in the membranes of the kidney, in nerve endings, and in the lining of arteries, all tissues typically damaged in diabetic complications. Because AGE accumulation appears to be a naturally occurring process, although it is exacerbated and accelerated by high blood sugar, we have evolved sophisticated defense mechanisms to recognize, capture, and dispose of AGEs. But AGEs still manage to accumulate in tissues with the passing years, and especially so in diabetics, in whom AGE accumulation correlates with the severity of complications.
>
> One protein that seems particularly susceptible to glycation and cross-linking is collagen, which is a fundamental component of bones, cartilage, tendons, and skin. The collagen version of an AGE accumulates in the skin with age and, again, does so excessively in diabetics. This is why the skin of young diabetics will appear prematurely old, and why…diabetes can be thought of as a form of accelerated aging, a notion that is slowly gaining acceptance. It's the accumulation and cross-linking of this collagen version of AGEs that causes the loss of elasticity in the skin with age, as well as in joints, arteries, and the heart and lungs.

As one scientist says, "Part of the problem with diabetes, and aging in general [is that] you end up with stiff tissue: stiffness of hearts, lungs, lenses, joints… That's all caused by sugars reacting with proteins." Wow. It's amazing what a panoply of negative outcomes—including aging itself!—can be caused by a high-carb diet.

> But there is no reason to believe that glucose-induced damage is limited only to diabetics, or to those with metabolic syndrome, in whom blood sugar is also chronically elevated. Glycation and oxidation accompany every fundamental process of cellular metabolism. They proceed continuously in all of us. Anything that raises blood sugar—in particular, the consumption of refined and easily digestible carbohydrates—will increase the generation of oxidants and free radicals; it will increase the rate of oxidative stress and glycation, and the formation and accumulation of advanced glycation end-products. This means that anything that raises blood sugar, by the logic of the carbohydrate hypothesis, will lead to more atherosclerosis and heart disease, more vascular disorders, and an accelerated pace of physical degeneration, even in those of us who never become diabetic.

The reason that refined and simple carbohydrates like sugar and flour are especially bad is that, because they're easier to digest, they produce a greater and faster rise in blood sugar and insulin after a meal. Complex carbohydrates such as starch take longer to digest, especially if they're bound up with fiber (indigestible carbohydrates). They still aren't great, though.

But it isn't quite that simple, because the sugar we typically eat (sucrose), in addition to having glucose that goes straight into the bloodstream, also has fructose, which instead goes straight to the liver and therefore doesn't elevate blood sugar. So for a long time it was thought that there's nothing wrong with consuming a lot of fructose or even sucrose. In 1986, the FDA actually said sugar (sucrose) probably isn't

a dietary evil! A couple years later, so did the Surgeon General and the National Academy of Sciences. As late as 2002, the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies of Science concluded there was still "insufficient evidence" to warn against consuming too much sugar!

But the point is that when fructose goes to the liver, it's converted into triglycerides—fat—and then shipped out on lipoproteins for storage. Therefore, the more fructose in the diet, the more fat in the blood. The high-fructose corn syrup flooding the market in these decades (with the blessing of the FDA) thus contributed to the obesity epidemic and the diabetes epidemic. And the increase in heart disease. Fructose also is more prone to forming AGEs than glucose. And it helps cause insulin resistance. As well as hypertension.

–That's something I haven't mentioned, by the way: what causes insulin resistance? Later in the book, Taubes gives his answer: chronically high levels of insulin themselves cause it. When cells are having too much glucose constantly being pushed on them because of excessive glucose and therefore insulin in the blood, they get fed up and say "No more!" Websites, whether rightly or wrongly, mention other causal factors too: excess body fat (frequently a result, as we've seen, of consuming carbohydrates, which can be converted into fat), physical inactivity, stress, insufficient sleep, certain medications (like statins), etc. In short, the modern lifestyle and diet tends to lead to insulin resistance, metabolic syndrome, and diabetes.

These conditions are also associated with Alzheimer's disease and cancer. Taubes' discussion of the former is pretty complicated, but the upshot is that mechanisms have now been identified to make it plausible that eating excessive carbs and increasing insulin levels is a cause of Alzheimer's. As for cancer, for a long time it was thought that fat and red meat were a significant cause. But by the end of the 1990s, according to Taubes, studies had largely refuted this "fat-cholesterol hypothesis." Some research, on the other hand, had found that sugar intake was positively correlated with both the incidence of and mortality from colon, rectal, breast, ovarian, prostate, kidney, nervous-system, and testicular cancer.

This fact isn't surprising, because many studies have shown that insulin provides fuel and growth signals to cancer cells. Already in the 1970s, researchers reported that malignant breast tumors had more receptors for insulin than did healthy tissue (implying that hyperinsulinemia would favor the growth of tumor cells). Also relevant is the insulin-like growth factor (IGF) secreted by the liver and other tissues. IGF sends growth and proliferation signals to cells, including to cancerous cells. But if insulin levels are high enough, insulin itself can stimulate cells' IGF receptors—and can even make more IGF available to cells. What's even worse is that tumor cells have more IGF receptors than healthy cells, just like they have more insulin receptors (to get the glucose they need to grow). So the chronically high levels of insulin and IGF induced by modern diets are great for cancerous cells.

In general, then, it seems that people will tend to live longer if they have low levels of insulin and IGF and low blood sugar. Experiments on mice, worms, and fruit flies have supported this hypothesis. When scientists have induced mutations in the genes that control both insulin and IGF signaling, the organisms have lived much longer than usual. For example, in 2003 researchers in Paris reported that mice with only one copy of the gene for the IGF receptor (which meant that cells would be relatively unresponsive to any IGF available in the blood) lived 25 percent longer than mice that had both copies of the gene.

The last part of the book is devoted to the science of obesity and the regulation of weight, which so far Taubes hasn't said much about. He introduces his discussion this way:

> The trouble with the science of obesity as it has been practiced for the last sixty years is that it begins with a hypothesis—that "overweight and obesity result from excess calorie consumption and/or inadequate physical activity," as the Surgeon General's Office recently phrased it—and then tries and *fails* to explain the evidence and the observations. The hypothesis nonetheless has come to be perceived as indisputable, a fact of life or perhaps the laws of physics, and its copious contradictions with the actual observations are considered irrelevant to the question of its validity. Fat people are fat because they eat too much or exercise too little, and nothing more ultimately need be said.

A National Academy of Sciences report years ago contradicted this idea when it concluded that "Most studies comparing normal and overweight people suggest that those who are overweight eat fewer calories than those of normal weight." It's also noteworthy that percentage of fat in the diet decreased from the 1970s on, when the population's weight was increasing. Presumably, then, low-fat diets aren't a good way to lose weight. (Studies have confirmed this. For instance a Cochrane Collaboration study in 2002 and a USDA analysis in 2001. Semi-starvation diets are typically ineffective as a treatment of obesity.)

Regarding the "sedentary behavior is responsible!" hypothesis, evidence accumulated by the CDC and other agencies suggested that in the 1990s, for example, Americans were no less physically active at the end of the decade than at the beginning, despite the continued rise in weight and obesity in those years. Besides, while low-income people tend to be more overweight, they are often the hardest-working people in society. They frequently work at more physically demanding jobs, or they work several jobs to make ends meet.

Or think of the women among the Pima Indians in southwestern Arizona over a century ago. They were usually more obese than the men despite working much harder, spending their days harvesting crops and grinding corn, wheat, and mesquite beans. It's more likely that their relatively new Western diets full of sugar and flour were to blame.

Exercise just isn't a good way to lose weight. It rarely works well, especially in the long term. Study after study has confirmed this, not to mention a ton of anecdotal evidence. And it's hardly surprising: as one physician calculated in 1942, "a 250-pound man will have to climb twenty flights of stairs to rid himself of the energy contained in one slice of bread!" Besides, when you're physically active, you work up an appetite, so you tend to eat more.

Obesity epidemics, by the way, are hardly a phenomenon unique to the contemporary world. Taubes gives paragraph after paragraph of examples of extreme weight gain among poor populations in non-industrialized or semi-industrialized societies. Here's a sample:

> In a 1959 study of African Americans living in Charleston, South Carolina, nearly 30 percent of the adult women and 20 percent of the adult men were obese although living on family incomes of from $9 to $53 a week. In Chile in the early 1960s, a study of factory workers, most of whom were engaged in "heavy labor," revealed that 30 percent were obese and 10 percent suffered from "undernourishment." Nearly half the women over forty-five were obese. In Trinidad, a team of nutritionists from the United States reported in 1966 that one-third of the women older than twenty-five were obese, and they achieved this condition eating fewer than two thousand calories a day—an amount lower than the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization recommendation to avoid malnutrition. Only 21 percent of the calories in the diet came from fat, compared with 65 percent from carbohydrates.

Taubes spends many, many pages arguing against the still-common idea that obese people simply eat too much and/or aren't physically active enough. The upshot of his discussion is that genetic, hormonal, and metabolic processes are why some people get fat when others don't despite having comparable diets. "Some of us simply seem predisposed, if not fated, to put on weight from infancy onward." Rather than someone's getting fat being driven by hunger and sedentary behavior, hunger and sedentary behavior can be driven by a hormonal disposition to be overweight—"just as a lack of hunger and the impulse to engage in physical activity can be driven by a metabolic-hormonal disposition to burn calories rather than store them." Some bodies are predisposed to burn up excess calories in cellular metabolism and increased physical activity, whereas other bodies are predisposed to store excess calories. "The ability to burn up small excesses…on the order of a few hundred calories [consumed in excess] a day, is 'well within the capacity of the ordinary person, but in the obese individual the power of flexibility is much less evident.'" Thus, "a critical variable in the facility with which we gain weight is whether we respond to superfluous calories by storing them away as fat and/or muscle or by converting them to heat and physical activity."

The body's internal regulation to maintain a homeostatic equilibrium is a major reason why dieting often doesn't result in a significant loss of weight. Restricting calories induces a slowing of metabolic rate, i.e., a reduction of energy expenditure in the body (less energy going to cells) to compensate for the loss of calories. People also get lethargic and less physically active because the body has slowed down the metabolism to compensate for the fewer calories coming in. Even semi-starvation diets might not accomplish much, especially in the long term.

Low-carb diets are a different story. By now, it's widely known that people can lose a lot of weight on such a diet, so I needn't go through the many studies Taubes describes. (You can lose weight by consuming as many calories as usual, as long as those calories don't include carbs.) I should mention a few points, though, such as the common objection that one has to consume enough carbs for the brain and nervous system to get their necessary fuel from glucose. Here's a useful paragraph:

> Though glucose is a primary fuel for the brain, it is not the only fuel, and dietary carbohydrates are not the only source of that glucose. If the diet includes less than 130 grams of carbohydrates, the liver increases its synthesis of molecules called ketone bodies, and these supply the necessary fuel for the brain and central nervous system. If the diet includes no carbohydrates at all, ketone bodies supply three-quarters of the energy to the brain. The rest comes from glucose synthesized from the amino acids in protein, either from the diet or from the breakdown of muscle, and from a compound called glycerol that is released when triglycerides in the fat tissue are broken down into their component fatty acids. In these cases, the body is technically in a state called ketosis, and the diet is often referred to as a ketogenic diet.

This keto diet, you may know, has become popular for losing weight. And it works: ketosis is when the body burns stored fat for energy instead of glucose, so of course if you stay on the diet long enough, you'll probably lose fat.

But how healthy is a keto diet if you stay on it for years? It seems to be perfectly healthy, despite what nutritionists and authorities may say. In fact, even an *all-meat* diet can be healthy! To give one example, in the early twentieth century the Harvard anthropologist Vilhjalmur Stefansson spent a decade eating nothing but meat among the Inuit in northern Canada, who he insisted were completely healthy and vigorous.

We still constantly hear that a varied diet is necessary for good health, but this appears to be false. You don't really have to eat fruits and vegetables. Animal products contain all the essential amino acids and also twelve of the thirteen essential vitamins in large quantities. Only vitamin C is present in *small* quantities in animal foods. This is why nutritionists think that to avoid scurvy you have to eat fruits and vegetables. But, well, evidently that wasn't true of the Inuit. Nor of other traders and explorers, such as Richard Henry Dana and his sailing crew in the mid-nineteenth century, who ate nothing but meat for sixteen months with no adverse consequences. Nor of Stefansson and another guy when they participated in a yearlong experiment (in 1929) overseen by scientists from Cornell and the Russell Sage Institute of Pathology. They ate nothing but meat, and were continually monitored and tested to make sure they weren't cheating. By the end of the year they were in perfect health: had lost a few pounds of fat, had low blood pressure, no kidney damage or diminished function (as is thought to be a consequence of a high-protein diet), no scurvy, and Stefansson's gingivitis had cleared up.

So why didn't they suffer from scurvy? Because a vitamin-C deficiency is yet another effect of consuming a lot of sugar and refined carbohydrates! (Same with the B vitamins.) So if you cut out the carbs, you don't need a ton of vitamin C. The reason is that glucose and vitamin C use the same insulin-dependent transport system to get into cells, meaning they effectively compete against one another. If you increase blood-sugar levels, the cellular uptake of vitamin C drops. To overcome this adverse effect of sugar, it helps to eat fruits and vegetables.

Another interesting conclusion from scores of experiments is that people can eat fewer calories in the form of fats and proteins and they won't feel hungry, whereas they can eat far more calories in the form

of carbohydrates and will still feel hungry. The medical-research establishment is apparently unable to explain this stubborn fact, but it cries out for an explanation. Just as the idea that you can lose weight while eating unrestricted amounts of fat and protein demands an explanation.

But I want to note, first, how contemptible, destructive, and arrogant the "experts" have always been on these issues. (As on so many others relating to politics, economics, history, and everything else.) "Claims that weight loss occurs even with high-caloric intake, but no carbohydrates, are absurd," the American Medical Association declared in 1974 and insisted for a long time, dismissing studies, a ton of anecdotal evidence, and the testimony of physicians and patients. Even today you still constantly see false claims and bad recommendations on the websites of organizations like the AMA and the American Heart Association. *You simply cannot ever trust what "the experts" say, on any given topic. Experts are nothing but embodiments of political institutions and interests*. Millions upon millions of lives have been ruined and ended by the perverse medical advice of so-called experts. When good science contradicts their politically approved dogmas, they'll do everything they can to suppress it and ignore it.

For a long time, "experts" have thought that overeating and sedentary behavior are the causes of obesity, and the cure is to create a caloric deficit by eating less and/or expending more. But the truth is that overeating and inactivity are typically side effects of a metabolic and hormonal defect that prevents cells from getting the energy they need because calories, instead of going to the cells that need them, are being excessively deposited into fat tissue. "We overeat because we're getting fat, not vice versa." The body is trying to compensate for the inadequate energy it's getting—as a result of the metabolic/hormonal defect that causes too much food to be deposited in adipose (fat) tissue—by inducing overeating…which itself then contributes to the obesity and *still* doesn't allow cells to get enough energy! In a sense, the body is being internally starved even as it's growing larger and larger.

The hormonal defect is determined primarily by genetic inheritance, but in order for the defect to actually show up it has to be triggered by environmental factors, namely diet. "Since insulin is the hormone responsible for promoting the incorporation of fat into our adipose tissue and the conversion of carbohydrates into fat, the obvious [dietary] suspects are refined carbohydrates and easily digestible starches, which have well-documented effects on insulin."

> In this hypothesis, obesity is another variation on the theme of insulin dysfunction and diabetes. In Type 1 diabetes, the cause is a lack of insulin. The result is an inability to use glucose for fuel and to retain fat in the fat tissue, leading to internal starvation, excessive hunger, and weight loss. In obesity, the cause is an excess of insulin or an inordinate sensitivity to insulin by the fat cells; the result is an overstock of fuel in the adipose tissue and so, once again, internal starvation. But now the symptoms are weight gain and hunger. In obesity, the weight gain occurs with or without satisfying the hunger; in Type 1 diabetes, the weight loss occurs irrespective of the food consumed.

As a brilliant physician named Alfred Pennington wrote in the 1940s-50s, "What happens when low-calorie diets are applied is that the starved tissues of the obese are starved further." A more rational treatment would be one that makes fat flow readily out of the fat cells, that directs "measures primarily toward an *increased* mobilization and utilization of fuel" by the muscles and organs. He argued that this is what carbohydrate restriction accomplished. As Taubes says, "the cells would respond to this increased supply of fuel by accelerating the rate of metabolism—utilizing the fuel." Meanwhile, the person's appetite would decrease because of the accelerated flow of fat out of the adipose tissue, which itself, again, is a result of the faster metabolism, the heightened burning of energy in cells, triggered by a low-carb diet. The person would eat less because his fat tissue was shrinking, rather than—according to the conventional mainstream hypothesis—his fat tissue shrinking because he was eating less.

Of course, obesity is more complex than just carbs, insulin, and genes. For one thing, regarding any particular individual, *where* he gains weight is determined by the *lipophilia* ("love of fat") of that region. He or she might have a double chin or fat thighs or buttocks or ankles or a "beer belly"—and in many cases, it wasn't by eating too much or because of a general metabolic defect. It's more *local* than that. As a German

endocrinologist named Julius Bauer said in the early twentieth century, "the genes responsible for obesity act upon the local tendency of the adipose tissue to accumulate fat (lipophilia) as well as upon the endocrine glands and those nervous centers which regulate lipophilia and dominate metabolic functions and the general feelings ruling the intake of food and the expenditure of energy. Only a broader conception such as this can satisfactorily explain the facts." Taubes elaborates:

> Those of us who seem constitutionally predisposed to fatten simply have adipose tissue that is generally more lipophilic than that of lean individuals; our adipose tissue may be more apt to store fat or less willing to give it up when the body needs it. And if our adipose tissue is so predisposed to accumulate excessive calories as fat, this will deprive other organs and cells of nutrients, and will lead to excessive hunger or lethargy.

Even in cases of undernutrition, the abnormal lipophilic tissue might seize on foods and increase its stock at the expense of the whole organism, which could put the energy to better use. Bauer also suggested that insulin enhanced the deposition of glucose in the adipose tissue, exacerbating the problem of lipophilic tissue.

American "experts" ignored Bauer's ideas, but research on laboratory animals has supported them. Genetically obese mice will fatten regardless of how much they eat. Even if they're starved, their bodies will prefer to consume the protein in their muscles and organs rather than the fat in their adipose tissue. They'll even starve to death while they still have fat in them, far more fat than lean mice that are allowed to eat as much as they want!

Here's an interesting piece of trivia, by the way. We're all familiar with squirrels that double their body weight in late summer to prepare for hibernation during the winter. We assume the way they double their weight is by eating much more. It turns out that's not true. Even if they're forced in laboratories to eat only as much as they ate in April, they'll still gain the weight they need. "The seasonal fat deposition is genetically programmed—the animals will accomplish their task whether food is abundant or not. If they didn't, a single bad summer could wipe out the species."

Let's go into more depth about insulin. One of its functions, as I've said, is to lower blood sugar by facilitating the entry of glucose into cells—which is why diabetics, who have high blood sugar, need insulin therapy. In 1905, a German physician named Carl von Noorden argued that diabetes and obesity are consequences of the same defects in the mechanisms that regulate carbohydrate and fat metabolism. Updating his ideas to take account of the role of insulin, we can say that Type 1 diabetics, who can't produce insulin, are unable either to use blood sugar as a source of energy or to convert it into fat (triglycerides) and store it—because insulin is crucial to this process too. So the body allows glucose to overflow into the urine, resulting in glycosuria, a primary symptom of diabetes. In the era before the discovery of insulin and insulin therapy, these diabetics became emaciated and wasted away because they couldn't store fat.

In obese people, on the other hand, the ability to get glucose into cells for energy is impaired, but not the ability to convert it to fat and store it. So instead of excreting glucose into the urine, they transfer it to fat tissue. Von Noorden argued that over time, as the ability to burn glucose for energy further deteriorates and "the storage of the carbohydrates in the fat tissues also suffers a moderate and gradually progressing impairment" (perhaps there's less room in the tissue for as much deposition of fat as before?), glucose chronically builds up in the blood, appears in the urine, and the person becomes diabetic. This is the transition from obesity to Type 2 diabetes.

After insulin was discovered in 1921, it began to be used as a fattening hormone for chronically underweight patients. Insulin therapy increased their appetite for carbohydrates, and the latter in turn stimulated their insulin production (to deposit glucose both in cells that burned it as energy and in adipose tissue as fat), in a cycle that eventually brought them to a normal weight. Unfortunately for diabetics, this cycle makes them fatter, even when they're obese to begin with. So insulin therapy for diabetics is very much a mixed bag, especially because the weight gain increases the risk of heart disease. (It also causes greater insulin resistance in cells, which leads to the need for even *more* insulin therapy, causing greater weight gain, etc.)

But why, on a *molecular* level, do we get fat? What are the *actual mechanisms* going on? Taubes' summary of the science of fat metabolism is fascinating and lengthy, but I can only describe some of the highlights. It was all understood by the 1970s, but somehow it still hasn't been fully absorbed by mainstream thinking about human obesity. Scientists used to think that fat tissue (all over the body—under the skin, between organs, even in bones) is relatively inert, like a garbage can into which fat is deposited, but nothing could be farther from the truth. The triglyceride in the cells of adipose tissue is in a continuous state of flux, going into and out of cells according to the body's momentary needs, all of it regulated by hormones and nerves that profusely crisscross the tissue.

A triglyceride molecule is composed of three fatty acids linked together on a backbone of glycerol. Some of the triglycerides in fat tissue come from fat in our diet, while the rest come from carbohydrates. Fat is stored in fat cells in the form of triglycerides, but it enters and exists the cell in the form of free fatty acids (triglycerides are too big to slip through the cell membrane). It's these fatty acids that, along with glucose, are burned as fuel in cells. As soon as free fatty acids pass into a fat cell, they're immediately repackaged with glycerol into triglycerides, which themselves are continuously broken down (inside the cell) into free fatty acids. Back and forth, assembly and disassembly are constantly going on inside these fat cells. Fatty acids that *aren't* immediately assembled into triglycerides slip back out of the cell and into the blood circulation again, where many of them will be taken up by tissues and organs to be used as fuel. Those that aren't—maybe about half—will go into the liver and be turned again into triglycerides, where they'll be loaded onto lipoproteins (VLDL particles) and shipped back to the fat tissue for storage.

This incredibly dynamic and repetitive process, this continuous flow of fatty acids out of fat cells and into the circulation, depends on the level of glucose in the blood. A single molecule, called *glycerol phosphate*, is pivotal to the whole system. This molecule is produced from glucose when it's used for fuel in fat cells and the liver, and it (glycerol phosphate) is essential to the binding of three fatty acids into a triglyceride because it provides the glycerol molecule that links the three acids together.

> In fact, the rate at which fatty acids are assembled into triglycerides, and so the rate at which fat accumulates in the fat tissue, depend primarily on the availability of glycerol phosphate. The more glucose that is transported into the fat cells and used to generate energy, the more glycerol phosphate will be produced [as a byproduct of the burning of glucose]. And the more glycerol phosphate produced, the more fatty acids will be assembled into triglycerides. Thus, anything that works to transport more glucose into the fat cells—insulin, for example, or rising blood sugar—will lead to the conversion of more fatty acids into triglycerides, and the storage of more calories as fat.

So you can already see why a high-carb diet can lead to weight gain: you need glucose to form triglycerides, and the more glucose there is in the blood, the more triglycerides. With low blood sugar, fewer fatty acids are bound up into triglycerides and more can escape into the blood, where they can be burned up as fuel in tissues and organs. With high blood sugar, more glycerol phosphate is produced (by cells' use of glucose as fuel), which in turn increases the conversion of fatty acids into triglycerides, "so that they're unable to escape into the bloodstream at a time when they're not needed" (since the glucose that's circulating can be used for cells' energy needs).

In fact, without at least some carbohydrates in the diet, it may be impossible to accumulate any excess body fat at all. For there won't be any glycerol phosphate to create triglycerides (fat molecules). As an endocrinologist named Edgar Gordon wrote in 1963, "It may be stated categorically that the storage of fat, and therefore the production and maintenance of obesity, cannot take place unless glucose is being metabolized. Since glucose cannot be used by most tissues without the presence of insulin, it also may be stated categorically that obesity is impossible in the absence of adequate tissue concentrations of insulin." Lower concentrations of insulin in the blood will therefore allow more fatty acids to flow out of adipose tissue, thus facilitating the body's weight reduction.

It should also be clear now why a kind of "internal starvation" can take place in the presence of high blood sugar, insulin, and obesity. For as more and more fatty acids are fixed in the fat tissue (due to

the abundance of glycerol phosphate), energy available to cells all over the body is reduced by the "relative unavailability of fatty acids for fuel."

Another important point is that fructose is converted into glycerol phosphate more efficiently than is glucose. This is why fructose is considered the most *lipogenic* (fat-producing) carbohydrate. However, glucose is still needed to stimulate the pancreas to secrete insulin. What this suggests is that the combination of glucose and fructose—either in sucrose (table sugar) or in high-fructose corn syrup—is the best formula for stimulating fat synthesis and storing fat in the body's tissues. No wonder obesity rates have climbed as high-fructose corn syrup has conquered American diets since the 1970s.

What about lipophilia? Why do some parts of the body accumulate more fat than others? Insulin is relevant here, too. It has to do with an enzyme called lipoprotein lipase.

> A critical enzyme in this fat-distribution process is known technically as lipoprotein lipase, LPL, and any cell that uses fatty acids for fuel or stores fatty acids uses LPL to make this possible. When a triglyceride-rich lipoprotein passes by in the circulation, the LPL will grab on, and then break down the triglycerides inside into their component fatty acids. This increases the local concentration of free fatty acids, which flow into the cells—either to be fixed as triglycerides if these cells are fat cells, or oxidized for fuel if they're not. The more LPL activity on a particular cell type, the more fatty acids it will absorb, which is why LPL is known as the "gatekeeper" for fat accumulation.

Insulin is the main regulator of LPL activity, and the regulation functions differently between tissues and sites in the body. "In fat tissue, insulin increases LPL activity; in muscle tissue, it decreases activity. As a result, when insulin is secreted [because of the consumption of carbohydrates], fat is deposited in the fat tissue, and the muscles have to burn glucose for energy. When insulin levels drop [as with high-fat diets], the LPL activity on the fat cells decreases and the LPL activity on the muscle cells increases—the fat cells release fatty acids, and the muscle cells take them up and burn them." So this is another reason the body tends to lose fat on fatty diets.

LPL activity is also affected by sex hormones, age, weight, and other factors. Women have greater LPL activity in their adipose tissue than men, which "may be one reason why obesity and overweight are now more common in women than in men." Testosterone suppresses LPL activity in abdominal fat but has no effect on LPL in the hips and buttocks. So increasing fat accumulation in the abdomen as men age may be a result of both increasing insulin and decreasing testosterone.

The obese have increased LPL activity in their fat tissue, so they gain more weight. As for diet, it seems that LPL activity in fat tissue increases with weight loss on a calorie-restricted diet and decreases in muscle tissue, causing fat to remain in fat tissue rather than being burned up by muscles. So this is another reason why low-calorie diets, unless they're extreme, might not be very effective in losing weight.

The science of fat metabolism, in short, is pretty unequivocal about the evils of carbohydrates (especially carbohydrate-dense starches and refined carbohydrates) and the benefits of dietary fat. And this science was thoroughly understood by the 1970s. Nevertheless, it's precisely in the 1970s and 1980s that most authorities began saying high-carb diets weren't the main problem! An enormous amount of evidence, presented at numerous conferences and in journal articles and books, already indicted such diets, but this had no effect on the developing consensus that fatty diets caused obesity and heart disease. I know it must be annoying to people who read my writings how often I harp on the theme that professional "intellectuals," especially authorities, rarely have intellectual integrity, but as you can see, the evidence is pretty compelling.

To give just one example:

> [In the 1960s and 1970s, authorities on nutrition] would readily admit that they didn't know what caused obesity (why [as they saw it] some people ate too much and others didn't) and that calorie restriction conspicuously failed to cure it. After nearly twenty years in the field, as Jean Mayer wrote in the introduction to his 1968 monograph, *Overweight*, he was "as

> aware as any man of the gigantic gaps in our knowledge—and of the likelihood that many of our present concepts may be erroneous." He also noted, in his discussion of hormonal influences on obesity, that insulin "favors fat synthesis" and that someone who oversecretes insulin could "tend to become hungry as a result." But when a physician suggested publicly, as Dr. Atkins did, that carbohydrates raised insulin levels, that insulin favors fat synthesis, and that a diet lacking carbohydrates might reverse this process, these nutritionists would denounce it, as Mayer himself did in 1973, as "biochemical mumbo-jumbo."

The highly respected Harvard nutritionist Fred Stare ridiculed the Atkins diet, which recommended large amounts of meat and eggs, as "nonsense," and condemned the author as "guilty of malpractice." Of course, the exact reverse was closer to the truth.

The American Medical Association, which has a hideous history (it's an important reason, for example, why the U.S. doesn't have national healthcare), even officially censured Atkins' bestselling book, inadvertently demonstrating in its denunciatory report that a man with no ties to the medical establishment had a better understanding of the science of fat metabolism than the establishment.

As I've already noted, it isn't irrelevant that the authorities who were defending sugar and carbs (like Fred Stare's department at Harvard) received a lot of money from the sugar industry and the soft-drink industry. Taubes gives some sordid examples.

The book's last chapter before the epilogue is an interesting discussion of the causes of the feelings of hunger and satiety, but I won't go into detail on that. I'll just say that, based as usual on his prodigious research, Taubes concludes (following the brilliant French scientist Jacques Le Magnen, who died in 2002) that the sensation of satiety is promoted by "anything that induces fatty acids to escape from the fat tissue and then be burned as fuel," because the body will be getting the energy it needs and won't have to keep eating. Contrariwise, anything that induces fat synthesis and storage, such as the elevation of insulin caused by carbohydrates, will promote hunger (at least relatively speaking) by removing the available fuel from the bloodstream. And it does seem from experience that a carbohydrate-rich meal is usually less filling than a protein-rich and fat-rich meal. For instance: "why is it that most of us can imagine eating a large bag (twenty ounces) of movie popcorn—more than eleven hundred calories if popped in oil, as it typically is—but not so the equivalent caloric amount of cheese: say, fifteen slices of American cheese, or a cup and a half of melted Brie?" It's a good question.

> The simple explanation is that the insulin induced by the carbohydrates serves to deposit both fats and carbohydrates (fatty acids and glucose) as fat in the adipose tissue, and it keeps those calories fixed in the adipose tissue once they get there. As long as we respond to the carbohydrates by secreting more insulin, we continue to remove nutrients from our bloodstream in expectation of the arrival of more, so we remain hungry, or at least absent any feeling of satiation. It's not so much that fat fills us up as that carbohydrates prevent satiety, and so we remain hungry.

The role of insulin in stimulating hunger is also suggested by Le Magnen's experiments on rats. When he "infused insulin into sleeping rats, they immediately woke and began eating, and they continued eating as long as the insulin infusion continued. When during their waking hours he infused adrenaline—a hormone that promotes the mobilization [i.e., loss] of fatty acids from the fat tissue—they stopped eating."

In short, this book is an epic takedown of high-carb diets. In fact, it's one of the best works of popular science I've ever read, practically a work of genius in its synthesis of an unbelievable amount of research. It isn't the easiest of reads, and it's a bit repetitive, but it illuminates a vast range of phenomena that are systematically obscured by most medical, scientific, and political authorities. One reviewer said it's "easily the most important book on diet and health to be published in the past one hundred years." Of course it doesn't clear up everything—I still have a lot of questions about the etiology of heart disease and other conditions—but on what it does cover, it's darned compelling.

September

I know we're not supposed to acknowledge that women, like men, are human and have faults, but the fact is that they're human and they have faults. For instance, there's a pronounced tendency for them to be, in some regards, quite primitive and shallow (like men). I was recently on a date at the end of which the woman indicated that I was too thin and not tall enough for her to be attracted to me. (5'10", 170 pounds.) I appreciated her candor, frankly! Usually females hem and haw about chemistry and whatnot, but here at least was an honest one. She was speaking for a substantial proportion of her sex. If I were over six feet tall and bulkier than I am, my dating history would have been very different. Because females love male dominance. *They tend to be hyper-attuned to a man's status*. Male strength indicates status. So does height. Alternatively, you could be fat, but if you're rich or powerful, they'll gravitate to you. And your status will actually matter to them—they won't just be play-acting. If you're a fat emperor or a chubby celebrity, most women will be interested in you, because of your status. They like a Brad Pitt because his handsomeness suggests high status.

(Men are less concerned with a woman's status. They'll still, in all likelihood, want to have sex with a beautiful woman even if society judges her, for whatever reason, to be of a low status. A good-looking man with a low status, on the other hand, will be of little interest to the average woman.)

Anyway, if you want to understand gender relations, one word suffices: *schismogenesis*. David Graeber and David Wengrow use this concept in their book *The Dawn of Everything*, but it can be applied to other domains than they use it for. The most obvious is gender. Men and women naturally define themselves in relation, i.e. in opposition, to one another. Therefore, in probably all societies, women are associated with…female sexuality and a few things closely tied to it (sex, raising children, caring for people, dancing, etc.), while men are associated with…almost everything else. E.g., hunting, politics, protecting the community, providing leadership, creating art and music, writing, philosophy, science, humor, sports, building things, technology, war, exploring the world, and so on. Because of women's biological functions, the feminine realm has typically been rather circumscribed, leaving the rest of life to be dominated by men. It's schismogenesis. A useful (if obvious) concept. Which is why you'll rarely see it used by an academic, at least in the context of explaining gender.

The contrasts in gender roles aren't absolute, but there always have been and always will be contrasting *tendencies*.

Equally obvious, and therefore denied by "gender theorists" (ideologists), is that nature itself has, in some respects, followed a kind of schismogenetic principle in drawing the blueprints for the physiology and psychology of the sexes. Biologically and psychologically, men and women generally complement one another, as Plato and every other minimally sensible thinker has said.

Here's another way to say it. The sexes want to attract each other. Men tend to find relative female receptiveness, giggliness, objecthood, and weakness attractive, so it's hardly surprising that women embrace these (biologically conditioned) roles. Women, on the other hand, find male dominance and strength attractive, so men naturally cultivate those traits. Gender is very simple and natural, notwithstanding sixty years of academic attempts to complicate it.

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It's starting to bother me more that I only see Aidan every three weeks, that I can't see him at the end of every day. But there's nothing to be done about it. I'm going to miss so much in the next few years. He's a sensitive and adorable little boy. We watched a short cartoon set to "The Flight of the Bumblebee," and near the end a flower managed to gobble up the bumblebee (until he was saved by his friends). Aidan started crying very hard when he saw that, it seemed almost traumatizing to him. But now he loves watching that video, he gets very excited and sometimes anxious in a lighthearted way. "Bzzz! It's going to the flowoo! It's trying to look some for food [sic]." "It's closing [on] the bumblebee! It's trying to catch him!

Oh oh oh oh oh oh!"—while flapping his arms and hands up and down, a movement he often makes when excited or upset. "We can look some for bumblebees later! That's fun! We've got to go outside and find these bumblebees."

Another time he pointed at a wasp walking on the ground. "A little bug!" "Yeah, a little wasp," I said. "A little waft," he repeated. "It's not a little train." The conceptual connections children make are pretty funny.

It's interesting to observe the development of the ability to pretend. Last month, while holding one of his regular conversations with himself, he lined up a couple of toy cars and said, "3, 2, 1, go! We didn't wait yet. Dere's a red sign over dere [while pointing]. And the wight turns green, and then we go." Imagining pretend situations like this is another manifestation of the human capacity to go beyond what is immediately given in sensation, whether it takes the more primitive form of perceptually and conceptually structuring sensations (categorizing them as the kind of thing they are) or the more advanced ability to imagine perceptions that aren't even there. The human mind separates itself from the environment, cognitively processes it, reworks it in imagination, brings memories into relation with what it sees at that moment, imposes mini-narratives on what it's seeing, and adds an emotional valence to certain perceptions by considering them in relation to particular desires and fears—including the (empathized) desires and fears of others. When Aidan cried because the cartoon bumblebee was engulfed by the flower, he was implicitly imagining or 'understanding' the bumblebee's fear, its desire to escape the flower, and semi-identifying with it. (He didn't *completely* identify with it, because he still saw the bee as something separate from him, an other. It wasn't *he* who was trapped by the flower, it was the bee. But his deep emotional response showed that in some sense, somehow, he adopted the point of view of the bee. The "phenomenology" of all this, of what is going on in consciousness and how such a response to someone else's experience is possible, is pretty obscure. What is the psychological "meaning" of this intense empathy/sympathy? I should read the great phenomenologist Dan Zahavi to see what he has to say about empathy.)

Anyway… The mind/brain largely creates its world. Observing the maturation of a child's brain is observing the deepening and enriching of its ability to create its own world, to add more and more dimensions to its perceptual experience.

–Speaking of phenomenology: it's hilarious that one of the central experiences of life, the domain of intersexual relations, has always been almost off-limits to phenomenological analysis. As far as I know, hardly any phenomenologist has ever probed it in depth! Why? Because of the anti-feminist conclusions you'll inevitably come to! Feminism has made it impossible to be *intellectually honest* about an overwhelmingly important area of human life. If you say anything some silly feminist won't like, your career might be jeopardized. I've always considered the totalitarian hegemony of an irrational type of feminism to be one of the most striking illustrations of the fraudulence of academia.

*

The brilliant Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah, is dead. Israel is killing thousands of Lebanese left and right, plus Gazans—probably more than 300,000 by now. This worse-than-Nazi state is completely out of control, because the U.S. continues to psychotically and irrationally send it all the weapons it needs to carry out its genocidal ambitions. (It's worse than Nazi Germany because most Germans didn't fanatically support extermination of all European Jews, whereas nearly all Israelis support extermination of Palestinians.) It deserves to be wiped off the face of the earth, like Nazi Germany.

I accompanied Norman Finkelstein on one of his long daily walks for the first time in over a year. He was "shattered" by Nasrallah's death, and is writing a book on the genocide and UN human rights organizations' unwillingness to call it by its name. He's a good conversationalist, more loquacious than me. A very generous guy too. Apparently some years ago he took in a homeless man for two and a half years, and another homeless guy we talked to had declined Norm's offer to pay for his college education. He's befriended many of the down-and-out people in his neighborhood, plus various immigrants and others. Has a great sense of humor too. An unusual person, a "true original."

He also gave me some dirt on famous leftists. Evidently the great journalist Alexander Cockburn was an asshole, more so (in some respects) even than Christopher Hitchens; Tariq Ali and Perry Anderson are wildly rich (why don't they use their money to expand left-wing media infrastructures and support *Truthout, The Intercept,* and other struggling publications?!); Angela Davis charges $50,000 to give a talk; Edward Said was a fairly typical academic snob; and Chomsky, beneath the humble exterior, is, naturally, very arrogant. But when you're Chomsky, to be arrogant is just to be rational, because he *is* unique. Unlike nearly all academics, he treats everyone, whether a famous Harvard professor or someone educated at a community college, more or less equally—because, as Finkelstein says, he's conscious that they're all beneath him! An interesting case of extreme arrogance motivating, or helping to motivate, equal treatment of everyone, by way of a sense of *noblesse oblige*: he feels an obligation to share his astonishing mind and knowledge with everyone, whatever their status. And he isn't impressed by the status of those in the elite, because he's above them.

October

Dan Zahavi's lengthy discussion of empathy in *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame* (2014) is quite complicated, but it's a good survey of the debates and the ideas that have been proposed. As usual, in the end one is left feeling that there's something misguided and masturbatory about all the incredible subtleties and dozens of little distinctions and scores of disagreements among academics, from Theodor Lipps, Max Scheler, Husserl, Heidegger, and the like to Alvin Goldman, Marco Iacoboni, Vittorio Gallese, Pierre Jacob, and many others. The correct point of view will acknowledge the merits of all the different approaches. Zahavi, of course, favors a phenomenological approach, which "differs rather markedly from recent attempts to explain empathy in terms of mirroring, mimicry, imitation, emotional contagion, imaginative projection, or inferential attribution." For the phenomenologist Scheler, for instance, we are empathically able to directly experience, to *perceive*, other minds, or at least certain aspects of other minds. "For we certainly believe ourselves," he writes, "to be directly acquainted with another person's joy in his laughter, with his sorrow and pain in his tears, with his shame in his blushing, with his entreaty in his outstretched hands, with his love in his look of affection…and with the tenor of his thoughts in the sound of his words."

"For Scheler," Zahavi writes, "empathy is what allows me to experience other subjects. It neither entails that the other's experience is literally transmitted to me, nor does it entail that I undergo the experience I perceive in the other…" That's certainly plausible enough. Scheler distinguishes between empathy and sympathy: "Whereas empathy has to do with a basic perceptually based understanding of others, sympathy adds an emotional response."

Likewise, for Husserl's student Edith Stein, empathy (as Zahavi summarizes) "is the basic cognitive source for our comprehension of other subjects and their experiences, and it is what more complex kinds of social cognition rely on and presuppose."

Anyway, I'm not about to summarize the entire chapters-long discussion. Mirror neurons are, of course, another important element in explaining how we can understand others' states of mind.

My own answer would be more *explanatory* than other phenomenologists', drawing on my analyses from many years ago. We can understand and, to some extent, identify with others *only because we are our own other*, though not in the same way other people are 'other.' Self-consciousness has a kind of self–other structure, inasmuch as it (the self) is aware of itself. (I can, and to some degree always do, view myself as an object for myself, and can evaluate myself, etc.) When I perceive other people and, more or less accurately, their states of mind, the abstract otherness in my own mind is partially instantiated, so to speak, in those other people. It is at that moment associated with them, sort of "projected" (in a very *thin* way) into (my experience of) them, so that they are thinly internalized at that moment in my mind. I'm not actually experiencing their emotions, nor do I have to have experienced their exact emotion at some point in my life in order to 'understand' it. But in a thinner way, I can immediately grasp what kind of experience they're having, what their response to it is, *why* their response is such, and what the context is. This can only be

because I implicitly see them as being(s) like me (in the relevant respects), which presupposes that I can sort of project my consciousness, or rather my (human) 'mode' of consciousness, into them, albeit while still being aware that they're *other* than me.[1] (This awareness is possible because I'm other than myself, or, to say it differently, otherness is inherent in my self-experience. So *everything* I encounter is other than me. It's true that other people are *more* other than me than I myself am, because of the paradoxical self–other nature of my self—I'm aware that I am myself even as I am my own object—but the fact remains that everything, including my own body and mind, is an object to, or other than, me.) In short, neither Zahavi nor, it seems, any other phenomenologists sufficiently emphasize the fact that the self's self-otherness is what makes possible empathy, sympathy, and all other forms of understanding other people's minds.

One's self-otherness is where it all comes from, all our interpersonal experiences. It's what makes them possible. Otherwise we wouldn't even have an (advanced) notion of otherness—of others as being other, nor of others (*as* other) as being like us. It's strange that, from what I've read, Zahavi doesn't truly appreciate this fact. I'm not sure other thinkers do either. (In fact, crazily enough, I don't recall this fundamental point explicitly being made by any writer!)

…The more you think about it, the more it seems that the otherness inherent in consciousness is the solution to all the questions that have plagued thinkers for centuries about how it's possible, and what it means, to care about other people. Everyone knows it's perfectly understandable and rational to care about yourself. But why care about others?? How is that rational or even psychologically possible?? How can people so completely devote themselves to another that they sacrifice every consideration of their own well-being?! Where in the psyche would such "disinterestedness" or "altruism" come from? Given the obvious self-regard of the psyche, it seems inexplicable! Well, in brief, it's possible because *others are part of you!* They're instantiations of the *otherness* part of you. In caring about yourself, you care about your entire self, your whole paradoxical self–other nature. Which means you can care about other people to the extent that the *otherness* of your mind (of your self-consciousness, your sense of self) is identified with them. And—incidentally—you'll tend to care about people more if you sense that they care about you too, because you care about yourself—so, they're instantiating an aspect of you by caring about you, even as they also instantiate the otherness aspect of you, such that you see them as *others* whom you *identify* with.

But that's just one case, albeit a common one. I can't go into all the different cases of why you'd care about some given person more than others.

On the other hand, you might hate people who insult you or attack you or hate you—because, while (like all people) they instantiate an aspect of you, namely your self-otherness, they radically contradict your self-regard. *Everyone* is at least "*thinly* internalized" by you in the moment of interacting with them or thinking about them, and people who (are seen to) obnoxiously challenge your sense of self in some way cause an at least slight self-disharmony. Because of that internalization (of challenge-by-another, which to some degree means challenge-by-yourself, since the other person instantiates your self-otherness). Everything in your experience—including even perception of the physical world—is internalization/self-projection, internalization (assimilation) of objects/others and projection of mental capacities and structures (such that everything you experience is contoured and fleshed out by the structures in your own mind). In perceiving the world and the people in it, you're perceiving, in large measure, the nature of your mind/brain.

I'll admit this is all pretty obscure and would require a long exposition in order to be persuasive and systematic. I grappled with some of it around fifteen years ago. The problem with long phenomenological expositions is that they become extremely tedious and offensively masturbatory, almost sickly in their obsessive introspective probing of consciousness. –But in its essence, the core of an explanation of how social life is possible is very simple, so simple that other thinkers seem to have overlooked it. Or at least not fully appreciated its significance. The phenomenology of the self is what explains (the possibility of) interpersonal relations.

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[1] Similarly, if I have empathy or sympathy for an animal, it's because I'm projecting a human or semi-human mode of experience into it (i.e., perceiving it as having such a type of experience). And that might not be wrong! We're all animals, and it's possible that our human consciousness isn't totally different from certain other animals' consciousness. They do experience pain, after all, and not only pain.

–It's strange that all of that was inspired by questions about how Aidan could care so deeply about the fate of a cartoon bee momentarily engulfed by a flower. But at least I've somewhat cleared up the puzzles in my own mind (on the basis of ideas from my twenties). That bee was, for Aidan, an other—so you'd think he wouldn't care about it, since it was a separate being from him. But he is his own other and cares about himself, so he can care about other beings too inasmuch as their otherness partakes of his own self-otherness. Besides, he has a less differentiated sense of himself vs. the world than adults do, so he can spontaneously care more deeply about other beings than adults do. His natural innate affirmative stance toward himself and his world spreads out over everything—partly because other beings aren't as fully other for him as they are for adults.

Ugh, phenomenology isn't easy.

*

Rachmaninoff's Prelude in B minor, Op. 32/10; Prelude in D-flat, Op. 32/13; Morceaux de Fantaisie: Elegie and Melodie; Moment Musical Op. 16/5. Sadness, nostalgia. Grading a hundred papers, drinking a beer, tired of life. Tired of my incredibly abusive, mentally ill ex-wife. Tired of creating. It's annoying to still be mostly unknown. Anyway, nothing ever changes, so what's the point?

But life itself is a joke, so that's all secondary. Someday the human species will go extinct, whether in the next two hundred years or when the sun gets hotter, expands, and snuffs out life on earth. However extinction happens, the suffering with which it will coincide will put to shame all the suffering of history. Think of the worldwide suffering of all previous mass extinction events! That'll happen again, probably many times. How strange and unfortunate it is that life exists. Better eternal nothingness than suffering life that ends in nothingness.

*

Yahya Sinwar, leader of Hamas and architect of the October 7th prison breakout, was killed yesterday. Israel, for some reason, released the drone footage of his last moments alive, when he was the last one left among his men fighting the invaders in a bombed-out building, his hand blown off. His final act was to defiantly throw a stick at the drone hovering near him.

On social media, thousands of people are in awe at his "legendary" death, worthy of a Hollywood movie. And they're struck by the contrast between him and the cowardice of Israeli leaders. Like so many thousands of his compatriots, he died the death of a hero: bravely fighting psychotic colonizers, laying down his life for the principle of national independence.

Sinwar was a brutal man, like many leaders of national independence movements. And his major legacy is to have provided the pretext Israel needed to complete the genocide of his people. But in his courage, at least, he was exemplary. His martyrdom is an inspiration.

It's interesting to be living in a time when the stakes are so clear, when there is righteousness and there is evil. However flawed you are, if you're on the side of the resisters, you're on the side of the righteous. If you're on the side of the oppressors, you're on the side of evil. That's always been the case, but the genocide of the Palestinians starkly illuminates it.

Liberals lament the genocide of Native Americans—and then side with the genocide of Palestinians. They're exactly the people who were complicit in the killing of natives in the nineteenth century. Little except the technology and the geopolitics has changed. The morality is the same. And those guilty are the same: the nonentities who constitute the West's elite, in politics, business, and media.

(For example, contrast Kamala Harris with Yahya Sinwar. Her statement after his death was amusing. "I will say to any terrorist who kills Americans [like the Israeli government?], threatens the American people, or threatens our troops or our interests [like the Israeli government?], know this: We will always bring you to justice. Israel has a right to defend itself, and the threat Hamas poses to Israel must be eliminated. [Etc.]" Harris is a nothing, a kind of negative human space. Just another vapid apparatchik.)

Again: it's interesting to be living in a time when what millions of people are experiencing as an *apocalypse*, the total destruction of themselves and their world, is treated as just another news item alongside others. An entire people and its culture is being erased, even as the rest of us go on with our lives and the powerful actively participate in the destruction—and are rewarded with money, power, and reelection. Because the victims are poor (and Arab), they're of no consequence.

…When you see pictures of the wasteland that Gaza has become, you realize: that's the moral core of Zionism. Just like the wasteland of much of Europe at the end of World War II was the moral core of Nazism. (See the two paragraphs I wrote years ago on the movie *Der Untergang*.) Zionism, especially in its Jewish supremacist version, is a mirror image of Nazism, and so has a moral void at its center. Since the Jews are the chosen people, it is permissible to destroy anything and everything that gets in their way, even if it be, conceivably, all non-Jews everywhere. As the Nazis were willing, if necessary, to kill any non-Aryans, so the Jewish supremacist state is willing to kill any non-Jews. –And Jews too, in fact! Hundreds killed on October 7 were killed by the IDF. –In the end, both Nazism and Zionism come to worship the same thing and nothing else: power. Power not even for a particular group of people, who are all expendable (Nazis killed Germans and Zionists kill Jews), but rather a particular set of institutions. The totalitarianism of Germany meets the totalitarianism of Israel.

–But then you see that Nazism and Zionism, in their practice, are little else but the logic of power itself, a racial version of that logic. As I've written before, power is inherently totalitarian, seeking to colonize everything from the mind to the earth, from language to art. Power takes over everything and, ideally, leaves nothing behind, nothing outside itself. Except ruins.

*

It's incredible that there are still philosophers, scientists, and other intellectuals who believe in, or argue about, the existence of "God." There are lots of them! Anyone who takes the idea of God seriously has already shown his intellectual immaturity. The idea of God is incoherent, ill-defined, completely mysterious, and useless—except for consolation. Rationally and scientifically, it's useless. How do people not understand that it's nothing but a relic of a primitive and superstitious past?

It irks me that idiots like, say, the young British philosopher Philip Goff are taken seriously and even considered influential. Apparently he's "close to 50%" sure that his version of Christianity is true. Okay. And he defends panpsychism, another silly and unscientific idea. ("The basic commitment [of his version of "Russellian monism"] is that the fundamental constituents of reality—perhaps electrons and quarks—have incredibly simple forms of experience." They're primitively conscious. Okay. Whatever. That's a stupid idea, but it also leads nowhere and can't be tested, so what are we to do with it? It's just desperate speculation intended to avoid the traditional difficulties of the mind-body problem, which idiots are still writing about because they can't accept the truism that the human mind is too limited to understand *everything*, that it's perfectly predictable that there are aspects of our experience and the world that will always be mysterious to us. So, instead, these pointless people, in order to earn a paycheck from elite institutions, come up with insane "new" ideas that they can argue about for a few years and make a reputation on. "Most panpsychists," Goff says, "will deny that your socks are conscious, while asserting that they are ultimately composed of things that are conscious." My god, you don't know whether to laugh or cry. How does this get us out of the mind-body problem?! It's pure speculation, prima facie incredibly implausible—there's no evidence for it—and we'll never know if it's true because there's no way to test it. Meanwhile, the difference between qualitative consciousness and quantitative matter remains! Panpsychism doesn't get rid of that intuitive difference! It only says: all matter is conscious. Okay, great way to resolve an intuitive paradox. You imbeciles.)

I don't understand why it's so hard for even the trained "thinkers" to think. What is so hard about this stuff?? As I speculated 20 years ago or so, I think it has to do with a relative lack of the capacity of *rational intuition*. Discursiveness is shallow; intuition goes deeper. (And then you flesh out the intuitions in arguments.) But this is only to gesture at an answer. I really can't explain why 95% of intellectuals and 95% of people are so bad at thinking. (See my thoughts on stupidity from ten years ago.)

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Reading Paul Farmer's brilliant book *The Uses of Haiti* (1994/2006). A student asked me about the specific reasons for America's occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 and its support for the Duvalier dictatorship, and I had to give a rather vague answer because I didn't know enough details. So that shamed me into further educating myself about U.S. interventions in Latin America. (Alan McPherson's *A Short History of U.S. Interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean* (2016) is a decent survey, though not sufficiently materialistic/realistic.) Another great book I just read is David Schmitz's *Thank God They're on Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921–1965* (1999).

It's obvious but worth repeating that, with the partial exception of the World War II period, the U.S. has pretty consistently been on the side of the (neo-)Nazis, the fascists, the dictators, the military juntas, and the death squads. Americans' self-understanding couldn't be more different from the reality. Whoever has provided "stability" under capitalist rule, suppressing the left and keeping their country subordinate to the interests of American business, has been our ally. Nazi Germany would have been our natural ally if it hadn't been so imperialistic itself. America's leaders loved Mussolini and were happy with Hitler—until the late 1930s. It would be shocking, then, if America *weren't* a close ally of the current Israeli Nazis and *weren't* participating in the most visible and publicized genocide in history. The U.S. ruling class *detests* anything hinting of real democracy, humanitarianism, compassion, or morality. These are inimical to capitalist power.

The genocide of the Palestinians would seem to be the fifth genocide the U.S. has committed or participated in. First was the Native Americans—which should probably be considered scores of genocides because of how many discrete "peoples" (tribes) we exterminated. Second and third—at the very least quasi-genocides—were the Vietnamese and Cambodians ("Anything that flies on anything that moves," to quote Henry Kissinger, is pretty genocidal), and fourth was the East Timorese. Am I forgetting any? That's an impressive record!

But it's the kind of record you'd expect from totalitarian mediocrities. Reading how government officials talk to each other is amusing. For instance, before and during the Cold War they were unsophisticated enough to believe their own propaganda about Communism. In internal discussions, there was a constant paranoia about Communism. "Ho Chi Minh has direct Communist connections…[and runs] a political organization emanating from and controlled by the Kremlin." He has a "clear record as an agent of international communism." Somoza "has his foot firmly on the spark of communism." "How do you tell in Guatemala what is a Communist-front organization and what is not?" "[We have to] eliminate the conditions that promote Communism." "A strong base for Communism exists in Latin America." Iran might "presently slide into Communism and [be] irrevocably lost to us." "If Arbenz is not a Communist he will certainly do until one comes along." "Communism is, itself, an interference with the internal affairs of these countries." "The Guatemalan people revolted against Communist rule." (The rule wasn't Communist at all, and the "people" didn't revolt.) Sukarno "is naïve about Communism." Protests in Venezuela against Vice-President Nixon were "undoubtedly organized by the Communists." "The threat of Communism in Latin America [is] greater today than ever before." "[Uruguay] is in the greatest danger of a Communist takeover." Military intervention "will continue to be necessary to prevent…slippage toward Communism." "Instability may invite Communism." The American University in Beirut (according to Eisenhower) is "under considerable Communist influence" because it advised against a visit by John Foster Dulles. ("If you go and live with these Arabs," Eisenhower opined, "you will find that they simply cannot understand our ideas of freedom and human dignity.") "Argentina's full collaboration is needed in the common effort to resist the encroachments of international Communism." Bosch shows "tolerance of Communist activities in the Dominican Republic." "There has been an increase of Communist sympathizers in the ranks of [Goulart's] Cabinet aides." And so on.

The simple-mindedness of this Manichean worldview speaks for itself. It's as if "international Communism" is some monolithic, centrally coordinated force sweeping the globe! They really believed that! More tragically, Manichean worldviews can lead to extreme violence against perceived enemies. Now

that Communism isn't the foremost devil anymore but rather *terrorism*, I wouldn't be surprised if Biden and Blinken truly believe most Palestinians are potential terrorists. So it's permissible to kill them. It's assuredly the case that most U.S. government officials are still very racist towards Arabs. Israel shares the Western values of freedom, democracy, and human dignity; Arabs don't!

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To live is to be surrounded by mediocrity. In most cases, the person himself is mediocre. In all cases, he is surrounded by the mediocre.

I'm so suffocated by this environment of mediocrity that I don't feel motivated to do anything. You try and you try and you try…despairingly try to put some beauty and truth into the world, again and again…but it leads nowhere, changes nothing, and only alienates you even more. You end as you began, at the base of a mountain you've been unable to climb even three steps up.

Capitalism is driving civilization off a cliff. Just consider the recent report from the World Meteorological Organization! A hundred years from now it will be a world of ruins.

So much the better, perhaps. Does humanity, capable of Nazism, Zionism, and every other conceivable form of cruelty and stupidity, really deserve to go on for millions of years?

November

The politics and culture of late capitalism are so debased that, for the purpose of escapism, I'm reading books like *The Epic History of Biology* (1993), by Anthony Serafini. Such glorious purity! The self-effacing desire to *know*, to *inquire*! From Empedocles to Leeuwenhoek to Pasteur to the present. So opposite from the debased selfishness and the vulgarity of American politics and culture, the Twitter feeds I scroll daily and the newspaper headlines. People like Peter Thiel and Elon Musk striving mightily to impose a neoliberal fascism on the country because it would be good for business, meanwhile funding research they hope will allow them to overcome mortality, or "the ideology of the inevitability of death" (to quote Peter Thiel, the lunatic billionaire behind the scumbag J. D. Vance). It's a society that exalts people too mediocre even to talk about.

…Speaking of mediocrity: Kamala Harris. And the entire Democratic party. Trump, a convicted felon, just won reelection. It turns out that committing genocide and shunning every hint of economic populism aren't a winning strategy. Embracing Dick Cheney and his daughter, along with other establishment Republicans, isn't a winning strategy. Following the same playbook as Hillary Clinton in 2016 isn't very smart, it seems. What a surprise. One almost has to respect Democrats' undying commitment to world-historic incompetence.

Of course, it isn't just incompetence. It's shameless corruption, insular elitism, class loyalty, and outright evil. The party has to be burned to the ground. For decades, leftists have been saying you have to reach out to the working class—but the party can't do that because of the class composition of its leadership and its donors. So it loses again and again and again. Republicans *can* reach out to the working class—on cultural issues, which is to say by appealing to racism, xenophobia, homophobia, religion, anti-"liberal elites," and the like. This isn't necessarily what people want to hear most, but at least it expresses *some* recognition, however perverse, of the grievances of those who feel left behind. And in a battle between center-right technocracy and neofascism, neofascism will usually win.

It's very striking. After the weak centrism of Carter, we got Reagan. After the weak centrism of Clinton, we got Bush. After the weak centrism of Obama, we got Trump. And after the weak centrism of Biden and Harris, we got Trump again.

The entire political class consists of fourth-rate people. People immune to compassion, to courage, to rationality, moral principle, intellectual curiosity, and simple kindness. People who value nothing but status and power.

I so despise "centrist" politicos that my disgust at Trump's victory is slightly adulterated by schadenfreude. Apparently there's a cost for committing genocide after all! (I also have a bit of schadenfreude towards the pathetic men-haters and whites-haters whose whole world revolves around identity politics. They bear some of the blame, for having helped in recent decades to direct liberal attention away from class.) I'm a little hopeful, too, that Trump will end the horrific war in Ukraine. But since he'll worsen global warming and ecological destruction, this will be something of a Pyrrhic victory. Civilization is still doomed.

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The next four years of attempted dismantling of the "administrative state," and thus attempted destruction of society, might be the shock that finally starts a real left-wing backlash. People will get "mad as hell" and they "won't take it anymore." Economic pain will get worse. Neoliberalism can't go on forever. The dying off of the repulsive old guard of the Democratic party may give opportunities for leftists to come to power. Collapse always presents opportunities—for both the left and the right. The center will not hold much longer.

I was depressed and I'm sure I will be tomorrow or the next day, but for now I'm feeling strangely energized. Real progress can't happen until the Clintonite Democratic Party is burned down, which will, surely, begin in the coming years on the crest of popular rage. It'll be a long struggle. But the enormity of popular suffering will light the match and put it to the kindling. The Clintons, Obamas, Pelosi and Schumer and Harris and the rest of them will burn on the pyre as the civilized among us dance gleefully around the flames, watching these devils turn to ash, be left behind in the ashes of history. An entire era of unutterable mediocrity consumed in the bonfire. When things fall apart is when heroism enters the stage.

Billions of people are already doomed from global warming, and the horrors ahead of us will defy description. Optimism is unintelligent. But much of the species will survive, and we can struggle mightily to improve the conditions in which they'll live. We'll carve out spaces of anti-capitalism, decade after decade. We'll work without cease to preserve what we can of nature, of beauty and life. We'll torch the institutions that have brought us to this point and erect new institutions in their place. The remainder of the century, indeed of history, will be a long revolutionary struggle. (The struggle never ends, because a utopia is never reached.)

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I don't think I've conveyed how disturbed I am by the thought that my journal is fated for oblivion. It's a kind of cognitive dissonance: that something so valuable can remain unknown seems absurd. And yet it's almost certain that, in part because of its length, this document is destined to interest and influence hardly anyone.

How can *truth* matter so little? That's hard for someone like me to understand. The world is a swamp of irrationality, conformism, and institutionalism, so you'd think a massive document guided mostly by logic and truth would be a beacon. The lack of proportion between its merit and its inevitable reception is obscene.

But that's life, obscene and absurd. Every day, what goes on everywhere: obscene and absurd. At least I can console myself that I've given the world something to make it a little more beautiful.

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I have to keep saying it again and again because I find it so astonishing: *from electrochemical processes between trillions of molecules determined by nothing but the laws of nature, consciousness, intentionality, qualia, and a sense of self emerge*. This fact is the essence of both the mind-body problem and the free will vs. determinism paradox. Neither paradox will ever be resolved. Tens of millions of words have been written about both, but in the end we're still left with the mystery.

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Been reading books about Israel and the Middle East, since the issue is so crucially important to the future of world politics. I've been thinking that maybe I should immerse myself in geopolitics and write more about it. I'm sick of having an unorganized intellectual life.

Zionists, of whatever ethnic and religious background, are some of the most morally and intellectually corrupt people in the world today. The things they say and do are beyond belief. The very idea of worshipping a kind of theocracy—a Jewish state is as evil an idea as a Christian state or a Muslim state—is medieval, illiberal, utterly primitive. Typically, they consider it anathema to utter a word of criticism of the Israeli government! Famous "liberal" intellectuals like Isaiah Berlin have held this fascist, state-worshipping position. (He told Chomsky he didn't think Jews should criticize Israel in public. Elie Wiesel was the same, or worse. Robert Nozick too, the supposedly anti-statist "libertarian.") The anti-Arab racism of Zionists is staggering, in the tradition of Nazism. The enraged, hysterical self-righteousness while committing the most transparent genocide in history shows the depravity to which humans can descend. In a sense, even Heinrich Himmler was on a higher moral level, for he acknowledged how difficult it was to kill Jews, how much "strength" it required, how much you had to suppress your natural human feelings. Zionists don't say that. They say Palestinians are murderers and terrorists (the colonizer's reflexive reversal of the truth) and have to be eradicated, full stop. There's no apparent recognition of how difficult it is to kill hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children; there is only the outraged demand that it be done. (Not in so many words—usually—but that's what they're saying.) I've actually spent a year in something like a state of shock that I'm witnessing what I'm witnessing. In the twenty-first century, I'm seeing the most barbarous Nazism play out on hundreds of social media videos every day! And millions of people are demanding that it continue, until every last Palestinian is gone!

What we're seeing is Nazism reaching out from the grave to keep killing more people, because the creation of Israel was, in large part, a response to the Nazi Holocaust. Now it's Jews instead of Germans doing the killing, but it's still the legacy and continuation of Nazism. The delayed after-effects of World War II. Instead of Europeans being punished for the Holocaust, it's Arabs—who had nothing to do with it. They just wanted to live their lives peacefully in the land they had occupied for centuries. But then the West came in with its bad conscience and its antisemitism—let's send these troublesome Jews over to the Middle East!—and carried out *yet another* genocidal program of settler colonialism.

But it appears that Israel doesn't have much of a future. Just as Germany's genocidal ambitions brought about its downfall, so Israel's Palestinian genocide, and more generally its hyper-militarism, will help bring about its own downfall. The civil war brewing within Israel is one factor, a factor caused by Israel's rightward, fascist shift in recent decades; its being a pariah state is another factor; its addiction to war is yet another. It will be satisfying to see this satanic state collapse, but it'll be terrible to see it take other countries with it.

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"We want your land, so we're going to kill all of you. Through bombing, shooting, starvation, deprivation of water, denial of medical care, pushing you into the desert, any means necessary to get rid of all you annoying people who are in our way. Your stubborn will to survive is a major nuisance; we've had enough. You all just have to be killed. The men, the women, the elderly, the disabled, the children and teenagers, the babies, the fetuses, all of you. Don't bother pleading to the world: it won't do anything to stop us. In fact, it'll help us! Where do you think we're getting all our weapons from?!"

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I have to admit it's taken me an inordinately long time to wake up to the unbelievable power of the Israel lobby over the American government. I've tended to agree with Chomsky that the U.S. follows its

strategic interests, that it's happy to buck Israel's policy preferences when they contradict U.S. interests, that Israel is pretty much just a useful Middle Eastern base of the American empire and doesn't overly influence American foreign policy. But I now think that's oversimplified. For example, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt present a compelling case in *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (2007). Neoconservatism itself is inseparably bound up with Israel and the gigantic, sprawling Israel lobby, which for a long time has dominated political, cultural, and media narratives. "Jews comprise the core of the neoconservative movement. In this sense, neoconservatism is a microcosm of the larger pro-Israel movement."

On the other hand, I think it's also true that support for Israel is only one part of the larger neoconservative movement.

Israel Shahak's books are useful too. And Chomsky himself, in writings and interviews, acknowledges the power of the Israel lobby. While he's surely right that policymakers see Israel largely as an instrument of American hegemony, it's hard to deny that, for many decades, policy towards the Middle East has been massively swayed by pressure coming from Israel and its shockingly wealthy, vast, dominating lobby. (Neoconservatives, Christian Zionists, Israeli officials, media companies, an array of think-tanks, lobbying organizations like AIPAC, wealthy businessmen, pro-Israel journalists and intellectuals, a substantial part of American Jewry, etc.) In the face of all this, the Palestinians never had a chance.

Moreover, it does seem, as Mearsheimer argues, that the lobby has sometimes dragged the U.S. into policies harmful to its own geostrategic interests. Far from being a source of pro-American stability in the Middle East, Israel has tremendously exacerbated anti-Americanism and done much to delegitimize the U.S. in the eyes of the world. You could argue—as Mearsheimer doesn't, because his "realism" isn't particularly realistic—that its having helped motivate the 9/11 attacks (just read bin Laden's famous statement) was actually in the interest of the U.S. government, since it used the 9/11 pretext to expand its power. The U.S. doesn't mind Muslim terrorism, and, from the 1980s on, even encourages it and fosters it! Nevertheless, the fact is that this tiny satanic country on the coast of the Mediterranean has held wildly disproportionate power over American policymaking. The war in Iraq, for instance, was hatched in the minds of neoconservatives and pro-Israel strategists. It's also hard to believe that America would have so obsessively targeted Libya, Syria, and Iran (virtually destroying the first two) if not for Israel's influence.

The fight against militarism has to be, in large part, a fight against Israel.

December

At this point, the U.S. is a pathetic failed state. For the second time, a hyper-corrupt real estate media buffoon is becoming president. The current president just pardoned his sleazy, corrupt son *for any crimes he may have committed in the last eleven years,* despite having a contemptibly low pardon rate of *deserving* people unjustly locked behind bars. Biden continues to participate in the Gaza genocide, while bringing the world even closer to nuclear war with Russia. There is barely any whiff of democracy in this country anymore. Nearly all of us are *subjects*, like in a monarchy. One individual (Elon Musk) is worth over $300 billion at the same time as, by any *sensible* measure, probably a third of the country is living in poverty or just above it. (The official poverty measure is $31,000 for a family of four, which is…absurd.) America is both a laughing stock and the shame of humanity.

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What can you say about a civilization where a few people have the power of life and death over billions? A few people could decide to have a nuclear war. A few people can decide to invade countries and destroy the lives of tens of millions. A few people can decide to worsen global warming and accelerate the semi-collapse of society. All you can say is that such a civilization is profoundly, unimaginably

immoral. And that insofar as the people who run it not only don't democratize it but act so as to make it even *less* democratic, they are profoundly, unimaginably immoral.

Our social system is completely insane. *One man* can make decisions that determine the future of the species. One man can destroy nations, just by saying the word! How do these people who have so much power feel *okay* with that?! How can they not be *constantly dumbstruck* by the *tyrannical* nature of the system on top of which they're perched? Evidently they're utterly without a moral core, and wholly indoctrinated, like some unthinking animal, into acceptance of the despotic institutions they lead. In many cases they seem to genuinely believe the nonsense they spout about "democracy"! To a thinking person, all this is unbelievable.

The world is a freak show, as George Carlin said.

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Let's turn from the squalor of politics to something more elevated: philosophy. Again.

Reading Michael Huemer's book *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception* (2001). (Saw it mentioned in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, so thought I'd take a look at it.) It's a decent book, but most of its arguments are wrong. Huemer is a "direct realist" or a "naïve realist," which means he "holds that perception gives us direct awareness of the external world and that it enables us to *know* (some of) what that world is like." We are directly aware of real, physical objects, things external to the mind. Representationalists or "indirect realists," on the other hand, maintain we're directly aware only of representations in our mind, not external, mind-independent things. Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant, for example, were representationalists, whereas Thomas Reid wasn't. As I've said many times, I, too, am a representationalist, a position I see as *obviously* necessitated by science. (Science explains that the nervous system constructs our perceptions, the sensory appearances we're aware of, in fact all our experiences and the objects in them—*as* the objects we perceive. Physics maintains that the world-in-itself, the genuinely objective, external world, is radically different from the colored, solid, noisy, smelly world of our experience, which is ultimately a mental world, a subjective world.)

According to Huemer, representationalists go wrong in thinking that *mental states are the only things we can be directly aware of*. The truth (he says) is that, *by means of* mental states, we are directly aware of the external objects we perceive—tables, books, apples, and everything else. As he says, "my perceptual experience [of an object with a shape and color] does not count as the awareness of any mental state or event, since no mental state or event has any shape or color" (p. 80). In a sense, he's right: my state of happiness, for instance, doesn't have a color or shape, nor does the mental event of some particular thought I'm having. On the other hand, insofar as something appears in consciousness, it can be called a mental event; and the appearance of a table, for example, occurs in consciousness, so it is, at least in part, a mental event. So in this regard Huemer is wrong.

Contra Huemer, representationalists don't think mental states are the only things we can be directly aware of. We can be aware of mental objects too, i.e., objects of consciousness. And those can have "physical" properties like color and shape.[1]

As I wrote in May, perplexities are inescapable when we philosophize about perception and the external world. In fact, I remember back in my twenties pointing out the obvious, that the physical objects of our experience can be interpreted in two different ways, as external physical objects and as "internal" representations. So yes, from one perspective (the commonsense perspective) Huemer is right: we are directly aware of external physical objects. This computer is certainly "external" to me: I can reach out and touch it, I can measure the distance between it and my head, etc. But from the more scientific and philosophical point of view, my experience of the computer, and therefore the computer itself *as I perceive*

[1] Actually, in one sense of "physical," color *isn't* a physical property. For things in themselves are not colored. Color is a secondary quality the brain fabricates by processing electromagnetic waves. But of course color *is* a physical property insofar as the physical world *we're acquainted with* is colored. So it's sort of a quasi-mental and quasi-physical property.

it, exists only in my head. Necessarily. Because perceptions, perceptual appearances, experiences, etc. as such are produced by the brain from sensory stimuli and exist in consciousness, which is, in a sense, in the head. (It doesn't have a specific *location* in the head, but it is an emergent phenomenon of the brain. See my old paper on the mind-body problem.)

It's somewhat disturbing and paradoxical to think that everything I experience, the entire world and all the people and things in it, is, *as experienced by me* (processed and produced in the brain), inside my head/body, in my consciousness, private to me. What an incredible fact! What an astonishing feat! The gorgeous sunset, majestic mountain ranges, hundreds of people I see every day, all of New York City and every other place I visit: in the forms in which I perceive them, all these are only in my mind, in my little head! My little brain/consciousness semi-*creates* all of them, the entire world, the whole universe of my experience!

Another way to state the "paradox" is that the physical things I perceive are hybrid physical-mental. I can cut them up with a knife, for instance, whereas I certainly can't cut up my internal conscious states with a knife. So this cut-up-able quality results from objects' physical nature, their being composed of objectively existing molecules and electric charges. But their solid and colored appearance, however "physical" it looks and feels, is, in a sense, mental, something I give them (i.e., something my brain fabricates).

Huemer quotes Hume, referring to direct realism (naïve realism):

> But this universal and primary opinion of all men [viz., direct realism] is soon destroyed by the slightest philosophy, which teaches us that nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception… The table which we see seems to diminish as we remove farther from it; but the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration; it was, therefore, nothing but its image which was present to the mind. These are the obvious dictates of reason; and no man who reflects ever doubted that the existences which we consider when we say *this house* and *that tree* are nothing but perceptions in the mind, and fleeting copies or representations of other existences which remain uniform and independent.

I don't know if the second sentence is a great argument for representationalism, but in any event, Hume's point of view here is correct.

Huemer goes on to try to refute objections to naïve realism, but his arguments are tortured and implausible. For instance, the argument from hallucination (against naïve realism) says that you can have a hallucination of an object that actually isn't present, and the hallucination might be indistinguishable from what you'd see if there *were* an object present. So what you're aware of in a hallucination is merely a mental image, a representation. And if that's what you're aware in the case of the hallucination, it's surely what you're aware of in the case of normal perception. All you ever see are mental images, not the external things themselves.

Huemer tries to dispatch this objection by saying "hallucination is not awareness at all. It is, so to speak, pseudo-awareness—that is, a mental state that seems like awareness of something…but is not in fact the awareness of anything, for awareness is a relation between the subject and the world, and the hallucination fails to have the right *relational* properties." Wow, that's dumb. You're not aware of *anything at all* when you hallucinate?! This is a great example of the absurdities in which philosophers sometimes get mired as a result of their convoluted arguments.

Rational intuition is how you find answers to philosophical puzzles. Not convoluted discursive argumentation, which easily leads you astray.

But Huemer does raise an objection to the existence of what he calls sense-data (or "whatever mental states, objects, events, properties, or other kind of mental phenomena we are directly aware of in perception, assuming indirect [i.e., representational] realism is true") that has bothered me for some time: namely, *where are the "sense-data"? Where are the "appearances" I'm aware of?* Are they in the head? Do they have no location at all? Are they in the same places as the physical objects they "represent"? I've

suggested that since they're in consciousness and consciousness is a manifestation of brain activity, they're in the head—"in a sense." They're not *literally* in the head, because you can't point to them in the way you can point to neurons or some section of the brain (*understood as a physical object, not a "sense-datum"*). But this is a problem with consciousness itself, not only "sense-data."[1] *Where is consciousness?* My answer in my old paper on the mind-body problem was that consciousness, being a radically emergent phenomenon of the brain, doesn't have a specific location. It isn't the kind of thing to which the property "location" applies. On the other hand, it *is*, in some bizarre non-literal sense, in the head, behind the eyes—for you are aware of the world from behind your eyes, looking out (or not, if you're blind). Consciousness is a very strange and elusive sort of nothingness, temporal but not spatial.

Well, but perceptual appearances are not a *nothingness* in that same way. They manifest, or are, colors and shapes, for example. So they're different from consciousness itself, even if they are *in*, or *objects of*, consciousness.

Everything in my consciousness manifests a brain state. The colors I see, the feeling of solidity when I touch a book, the perception of distance between myself and the book, the sounds I hear—they're all produced through neural processes, i.e., are "radically emergent" from these processes. The image of a distant tree looks far away, but since it's produced by my brain, it's really not far away at all. It's in my head, so to speak (but without a location, because it's radically emergent). The tree itself, the aggregate of molecules that compose it, *is* far away, which is why my brain produces the image so that it looks far away, corresponding to the location of the actual tree.

When you get closer to the tree and you reach out and touch it, you're touching the real, objectively existing tree,[2] but the *image* of the tree that you're touching—which of course looks like it's at arm's length, where the actual tree is—is still in your head, not "out there." Or rather, *for you* it *is* external—it's the tree itself—but objectively it isn't. Likewise, the way the tree feels on your skin is, obviously, mediated, constructed by your nervous system.

Anyway, while there are perplexities with this sort of representational (or "indirect") realism, it's impossible to take seriously any other theory. The idea that what we perceive are actual external things as they "really" are is hopelessly misguided. Just consider the words you're reading at this moment: what you see is not a series of marks on a computer screen but already-interpreted (by your brain) *words*, words and sentences that are "subjectively" invested with meaning. Even if those marks on the screen *were* "objectively" present in the mind-independent world and weren't just constructed by your brain from electromagnetic waves entering your eyes, you *still* wouldn't be seeing them "as they are." You're seeing them through your mental prism of linguistic understanding, philosophical thinking, and subjectivity.

Each of us lives in his own 'solitary' world, his own mind, which creates the entire universe of his experience. This fact may be disconcerting and suggest skeptical and solipsistic conclusions, but that's the price of having the intellectual integrity to follow reason and truth wherever it leads.

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For the heck of it, I'm reading Howard Robinson's *Perception* (1994), again because the *Stanford Encyclopedia* mentioned it. It argues for what Robinson calls the sense-data theory—which may be an unwise terminology on his part, since that word is so loaded and there are problems with the classical sense-data theories of Bertrand Russell and others. Here's the first paragraph:

> The majority of modern philosophers—that is, the majority of philosophers writing since the seventeenth century—have believed that in perception one is aware of some item other

[1] I keep using scare-quotes around that term because of how controversial it is, and because I don't understand it in the way the sense-data theorists of the early twentieth century did.

[2] More accurately, the electromagnetic repulsive forces in your hand and the tree are what cause the sensation of touch. You don't actually touch the tree's atoms. (This fact is another piece of evidence for the representational theory, incidentally, since it certainly *seems* that you're literally touching the tree. Appearance is not reality.)

> than the physical object one takes oneself to be perceiving. So if I see a tree, for example, what I am *really* or *directly* aware of is something which can roughly be thought of as a tree-image, in or before my mind, rather than a mind-independent physical tree in external physical space. The *ideas* of Locke and Berkeley, Hume's *impressions* and the *qualia, sensa* and *sense-data* of twentieth-century philosophers are all generally supposed to be of this type. On the other hand, the majority of strictly contemporary philosophers—that is, the majority of philosophers active in the analytic tradition since the Second World War—have denied that one need postulate such entities and affirm that we are, normally, directly aware of the external world itself.

If this is accurate, it's remarkable. Why does intellectual regression occur so often in recent history? (Postmodernism is the best example, but the humanities and social sciences are full of regression.) Evidently it's a manifestation of the bureaucratization of culture, the professionalization, the increasing predominance of groupthink, growing decadence, the *mass*-ification of intellectual life—conferring credentials on people who don't have keen abilities to *lucidly* think. Discursive complexity, pretentious prolixity, problematizing for its own sake become prized over simple insight and intellectual honesty.

Incidentally, Galileo was another thinker who endorsed indirect realism, as you can see here from his reasoning regarding primary vs. secondary qualities:

> Now, whenever I conceive of any material or corporeal substance, I am necessarily constrained to conceive of that substance as bounded and as possessing this or that shape, as large or small in relation to some other body, as being one, many or few… But I do not at all feel myself compelled to conceive of bodies as necessarily with such further conditions as being red or white, bitter or sweet, having sound or being mute, or possessing a pleasant or unpleasant fragrance… I think, therefore, that these tastes, odors, colors, etc., so far as their objective existence is concerned, are nothing but mere names for something which resides exclusively in our sensitive body, so that if the perceiving creatures were removed, all of these qualities would be annihilated and abolished from existence. But just because we have given special names to these qualities different from the names we have given to the primary and real properties, we are tempted into believing that the former really and truly exist as well as the latter.

The likes of Peter Hacker and David Armstrong have objected to the famous secondary-quality argument, but Robinson has no trouble refuting their objections. P. F. Strawson and Michael Dummett, for example, apparently argue that the perceptual appearance of the world and the scientific analysis of it don't contradict each other because they represent *different perspectives* on the world. So objects can, "in themselves," be colored from the commonsense perspective but not colored from the scientific perspective. This, of course, is nonsense. When you perceive an object as red and you judge it as red, you're perceiving and judging that it's *objectively red*. *That's the color it has at all times (even when you're not looking at it), the color that is an integral property of it.* So if science says the world in its objective essence isn't colored but is just a lot of colorless atoms and photons and the like, that's contradicting what you see and naturally believe.

Since we're talking about things that are *private* to the individual perceiver, we have to consider what Wittgenstein had to say about the matter. (*Sigh.*) That is, we have to delve into the amazingly famous and amazingly multiply interpretable private-language argument. As Robinson says,

> Sense-data, at least as usually conceived, are not public objects in public space, but are necessarily private to individual observers. They are what have come to be called *logically private objects*. The final crisis for the empiricist ["sense-data"] conception of perception was precipitated by Wittgenstein's famous polemic against such private objects. He argued

> that such things could not be objects of linguistic reference and, hence, not objects of thought or consciousness.

So the existence of private sensory events/objects isn't even possible!

First of all, whatever Wittgenstein's argument is, one has to note that it's just impossible to *argue away* the existence of private perceptual experiences. When I pinch myself, only *I* directly feel the pain. No one else does. So the pain is private to me, as all sensations and perceptions are private. No philosophical argument can be more compelling than someone's direct experience of physical pain, or the experience of others that *they* don't *directly experience* that person's sensation of pain. Any philosopher who argues to the contrary is arguing against the existence of sensations, and thus is engaging in sophistry that isn't to be taken seriously.

So even before any consideration of Wittgensteinian anti-privacy arguments, we know that "logically private objects" do exist and *no argument can prove their nonexistence*—because all you have to do to refute such an argument is punch a Wittgensteinian in the face. He'll feel pain, which the one who punched him won't feel. Therefore, private sensations exist. Q.e.d.

Likewise, when you say that that object looks green to you and I say it looks blue to me, neither of us can directly access the other's consciousness to understand how he could make such a perceptual "mistake." For consciousness itself is private. You and I have different, conflicting, perceptions, and no argument to the contrary can be more compelling than these kinds of immediately accessible and universally shared experiences (of people having different, therefore private, perceptions).

Galen Strawson has ridiculed sophists like Daniel Dennett for, in effect, denying the existence of consciousness—"It's the stupidest position in the history of thought"—and he has been right to do so.

To quote Robinson again, "There is a common idea behind all versions [i.e., interpretations] of Wittgenstein's argument. This is that there could be no language to describe logically private objects because the kinds of constraints that make for stability of use—and therefore for [linguistic] meaningfulness—are essentially public." Here, again, we can know in advance that the argument is false. For we *do* describe pain, pleasure, colors-as-they-appear-to-us, the taste of food we're eating, an emotion we're feeling, and the like, and all these things are private objects. So obviously, language can describe such things. Since language is public, public language can describe private objects.

Why would someone think public language can't apply to private things? I don't know. Since people experience *the same kinds* of private things, we can talk about them in mutually intelligible ways.

In any event, since I pointed out earlier that perceptual appearances *are actually 'public' when they're judged, as they ordinarily are, as being external phenomena (e.g., physical objects) other people can perceive, all this controversy about private objects doesn't acknowledge the dual character of perceptions, their private/public character*. (*Sensations*, like pain, are different, only private, though they have public behavioral manifestations.) My perception of this table is private to me, but the content of the perception, the table itself, despite being constructed by my nervous system, is experienced as a public, external physical object. The-table-as-it-appears-to-me is 'unthinkingly' perceived as being the same physical object as the-table-as-it-appears-to-you, so it's "public"—even though, ultimately, it's a mental event that's private to each of us.

Robinson goes into tortured detail picking apart interpretations of Wittgenstein's argument, but he doesn't really make any of these simple intuitive points.

The existence, or at least the ability to talk about, private objects is supposed to be impugned by the following premise (as Robinson states it): "If a word purports to name a logically private object then it is not possible to tell whether one is using it correctly or only seeming to use it correctly." As Wittgenstein says, "Whatever is going to *seem* right to me *is* right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right.'" You need some sort of public criterion of whether the word is being used correctly. If there is no such criterion—because of the privacy of the object in question—it's a meaningless word, since you can use it however you want.

But as I argued when I discussed these matters in my twenties, "how it seems to you" *can* incorporate a criterion, namely if the proper use of the word *strikes you with the force of conceptual*

necessity. You aren't arbitrarily *deciding* that some given use of a word as applied to, say, your private sensation is acceptable; you're being *compelled* into recognition of the correct use of the word. If you dip your hand into water that feels cold, you can't possibly assent to the sentence "This water is hot." Thus, yes, whatever *seems* right to you *is*, almost certainly, right—*because you include the 'public' within you. You are your own other—you've internalized the rules of the community (such that you are your own community, in a sense)*—and so you can use the public linguistic standards you've internalized to judge whether you're using a word correctly, even when you're applying it to a private experience.

Anyway, Robinson distinguishes between the traditional interpretation of Wittgenstein and the Kripkean one (again, see my discussion of the latter from my grad school years), and after a lot of labored argumentation against both, concludes that "no known view of language which excludes reference to the private is coherent." He's surely right, but I won't summarize all his arguments.

Having refuted Wittgenstein (or his interpreters), we proceed now to "the paradigmatically contemporary flight from sense-data, [which] takes the form of physicalist theories of perception." Prepare yourself for more perversity and irrationality. Again, if you've read my paper on the mind-body problem or other writings in the philosophy of mind, you know what I think of reductive physicalism, functionalism, behaviorism, eliminative materialism, and any other attempts to analyze away the *qualitative, phenomenal* dimension of experience. Their chief interest is sociological or psychological: their existence shows it's possible for highly educated, seemingly rational and sane people to convince themselves of lunatic philosophies, much more lunatic than even nonsense like religious belief or crazy conspiracy theories.

–Well, on second thought, Robinson's arguments against writers like the Churchlands and David Armstrong are too intricate to summarize. There's no point anyway, since any attempt to reduce the first-personal nature of experience to the third-person (i.e., the private to the public, the qualitative to the quantitative, the phenomenal to the physical) is clearly hopeless.

(To repeat: according to my emergentism, the phenomenal/qualitative *is* physical *in a sense*, inasmuch as it's a mysterious, 'mentalistic,' emergent state of the brain. Human cognition is too limited to understand how the mental emerges from the non-mental.)

At this point, you may be wondering why anyone would be so perverse as to deny that indirect realism must be true. Arguments from illusion, from hallucination, from secondary qualities, from science, naturally imply it! And the arguments against it seem weak, forced, convoluted, counterintuitive, and desperate. So what's going on?! Robinson answers:

> Resistance to the sense-datum theory is inspired mainly by the fear that such data constitute a *veil of perception* which stands between the observer and the external world. This threatens to engender skepticism, or even solipsism, and runs counter to good, plain common sense.

Horror of horrors! Skepticism! *Anything* is better than *any* version of skepticism! We have to save common sense! Well, I'm sorry, but sometimes common sense can't be saved. I think it's better to accept science and rationality.

Besides, I find the "veil of perception" idea (which is, in effect, just plain science) beautiful. It's wondrous and miraculous that this gray, wrinkly organ in my head can create the infinite kaleidoscope of my experiences, all the sublime sense-perceptions, objects, emotions, and thoughts that constitute my world. This fact inspires an almost religious awe in me. Why should we fear it, or try, futilely, to refute it?

…Incidentally, I emailed the famous philosopher Tyler Burge about these matters, and he sent a long reply. Here's one point he made:

> Vision science takes visual perception to be very accurate, in evolutionarily circumscribed circumstances, about the macro physical world. It represents distances, locations, colors, shapes, bodies, movement of bodies, surface textures and surface orientations in extremely accurate ways as long as the surfaces are not too far away (when resolution fails). So the sloganizing about "the world-in-itself" being very different from "the world of experience"

> is simply bad pop-sloganizing that survives because it is so vague and so removed from science. A reasonable point can be extracted from the sloganizing, but it is better to think literally and specifically about what science tells us.

He calls it sloganizing, but it's an accurate slogan. Perceptions can represent the world "accurately," but the distinction between the-world-as-perceived and the-world-outside-of-perception is nonetheless valid.

I pressed him a bit more—like on whether he agreed with one or two points in the first paragraph of Robinson's book that I quoted above—and he sent another email:

> Robinson's point that a majority of philosophers writing since the 17th century believed that one is 'really or directly aware of something [like] a tree-image, in or before my mind, rather than a mind-independent physical tree' is cherry-picked: Descartes, Reid, Kant, Marx, and others rejected the 'rather than'. […] Robinson is confused. Most philosophers do accept 'the representational theory of mind'. On this view, one is directly aware of physical objects, not in the sense that the causal relation to them is direct, but in the sense that one is aware of them not *by way of* being aware of anything else, including a tree-image (which may or may not be present, when one perceives a tree). Science does not require one to be aware of (or to consciously represent) the tree-image first; a conscious tree-image may not even be present. More importantly, when it is, it is an aspect of the representation of (and the awareness of) the tree, not something one is aware of at any time prior to being (much less, 'rather than being') aware of the tree, in having the representation of the tree. The conscious perception and the consciousness of the tree occur simultaneously: in fact they are different ways of describing the same thing. When one has a conscious perception of a tree, one is aware of the tree; and the awareness of the tree does not causally depend on the conscious tree-image: it *is* the conscious perception which involves, but is not restricted to, the conscious tree-image (the conscious tree-image is an aspect of the conscious perception of the tree). Everyone (except perhaps naïve realists), everyone including me and Robinson's opponents, believes in 'the existence of mental representations, neural mediations, etc.' Robinson is confused in not knowing science, and in thinking that one is 'really or directly' aware of a tree-image '*rather than* a mind-independent physical tree in external space' (with my italics on 'rather than'). This view is contrary to what we know from science. He is also a misleading historian of philosophy.
>
> 'Aware of' in English is supremely tricky, and not a good term for science—or philosophy, unless it is carefully explained. Lacking careful philosophical monitoring and explanation, it is either ambiguous or vague, and certainly tends to engender different (incompatible) inferences in different people. But everything I write above is literally true, regardless of how one uses 'aware of'. What is normally said in developmental psychology—and what I am comfortable in saying, given the way I understand 'aware of'—is that young children are, in conscious perception, directly aware of a tree by having a conscious perceptual representation of the tree, but they are not aware of the conscious perception (or the tree-image). They learn about it only later. Their conscious perception involves conscious awareness (a tree-image), but there is no awareness by the child *of* the tree-image. '*of*' is representational; and the tree-image is not represented by the child: it is an aspect of the representation of the tree; and it (the tree-image) is not represented by the child, or by most adults. It is an aspect, a conscious aspect, of the perception of the tree; but the child (and most adults) are not aware *of* the conscious tree-image—and do not represent it—when they are aware of (and perceptually represent) the tree. The tree-image is never perceptually represented, by anyone. Perception does not represent perceptual images: it represents only the environment. Sophisticated human beings conceive of tree-images, which are real and involve awareness, even though human beings never

> perceptually represent the tree-image. To understand this, fully, you'd have to read serious philosophy of perception, not pop arms-length philosophizing by people like Robinson.
>
> There are other ways of using 'aware of'. But none of them should be used to contradict what one knows from science: that it is wrong to say, as Robinson does, that one is really or directly aware of something *rather than* a mind-independent physical tree, when one perceives a tree consciously. In the relevant sense (not causal, but representational), one is directly aware of the tree. […]

Some of the criticisms of Robinson may be justified, but I think Burge is a bit uncharitable too.

He's right that talk of "direct awareness" is ambiguous and confusing. I'm "directly" aware of the mind-independent tree inasmuch as I'm directly aware of its representation in my mind. But, of course, I'm *not* "directly" aware of the tree in some mystical naïve realist way—the tree-as-it-is-in-itself-outside-of-perceptual-representations.

It's true that children aren't aware of the tree-image *as a tree-image*. They're naïve realists. They don't think of their experiences in terms of images or representations. But what Robinson is saying, in effect, is that they're aware of the mind-independent tree only by means of, or in being aware of, the mind-dependent tree-image. But Burge may well be right—if I interpreted him correctly—that this statement isn't very controversial. (It certainly *shouldn't* be!) So maybe Robinson went wrong there. But then is his whole book based on fundamental misunderstandings of philosophers in the last eighty years? That hardly seems likely. He's a respectable enough philosopher to be discussed in the *Stanford Encyclopedia*.

Burge recommended a (long, dense) book entitled *Seeing: The Computational Approach to Biological Vision* (2010), written by John Frisby and James Stone. So I'm reading that now. It's based on David Marr's highly influential ideas. Fascinating stuff, but the visual system, like everything else in the brain, is so inconceivably complex and mysterious that we'll never have a thorough understanding of it.

Even so, I'm impressed that scientists know as much as they do. They're still mostly in the dark, but it's impossible to deny the stupendous achievements of science, even just in this one area.

*

Reading *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement* (2010), by Justin Vaïsse. An instructive book, but too "idealistic" like all mainstream scholarship. If you want to be accurate about history and the ruling elites who largely determine how it unfolds, you have to be cynical in the Marxian and Chomskian way.

By the end of 2025, in some way or other, I'll have published a collection of many of my articles and blog posts in the last ten years. A small left publisher—the same one that published Finkelstein's book on identity politics and cancel culture—seems interested in the manuscript, but we'll see if they carry it to fruition.

The brightest spot in my life continues to be Aidan. A smart, sweet little boy. One of those "happy accidents" (to quote the beloved painter Bob Ross) that enrich life more than any of one's best-laid plans.

January, 2025

For the first time in years, I listened to the musical *Les Misérables* (the original Broadway recording). It always strikes me as sort of a revelation, because the music is so beautiful and the message so socialist. I can never help crying a little. It's even more moving when you've just been reading a book about neoconservative ghouls. The sudden shift from total amorality and self-deluding power-hunger to self-sacrificing love and revolutionary struggle is inspiring. One Fantine is worth a thousand Irving Kristols.

How encouraging it is that such an anti-capitalist musical was popular for decades even in the United States! It supports what I argued in my book on Chicago in the 1930s, about the implicit communist values of ordinary Americans—and ordinary people everywhere.

Speaking of which: I was surprised last week to see that my book was favorably reviewed a couple months ago in the academic journal *Labour/Le Travail*. For instance, here's the concluding paragraph:

> *Popular Radicalism and the Unemployed in Chicago During the Great Depression* challenges some of the most dominant interpretations of American working-class thought and action in the 1930s. It simultaneously recovers the radical possibilities of social transformation that masses of unemployed and working-class people embraced in the 1930s. Wright has demonstrated that it was, after all, a Red Decade, but that this was no mere anomaly in an otherwise unbroken tradition of rugged individualism and anti-centralization. It is a major intervention and powerful analysis that should command the attention of any historians serious about understanding this pivotal moment in the American experience.

I never expected such a review (nor such a long one). It even includes the words "frankly pathbreaking." As usual, I was an idiot not to keep searching for a more reputable publisher than Anthem Press after a lot of publishers had turned me down. Maybe then the book would have been noticed by more people.

*

What's happening in Los Angeles seems pretty historic. "The worst day in L.A. history," headlines say. "Some of the city's most expensive real estate is burning." Well, it's about damn time that wildfires and suchlike affected the ultra-privileged. I saw the reactionary, genocidal Zionist actor James Woods crying on TV because his home is gone. Poor guy! The worst things always happen to the best people.

Since the wealthy and powerful aren't doing anything about global warming except to make it worse, and since they constantly crush all popular movements to save civilization, there isn't much left to do except watch the world burn. And if the flames engulf the mansions where these maniacs live and play, at least that's a tiny measure of justice.

(What kind of person who has tens or hundreds of millions of dollars wouldn't give most of his wealth to, say, left-wing organizations like Democratic Socialists of America, or small media companies that desperately need the money, in order to help make society slightly sane and save the future? What kind of person with wealth and power and a platform wouldn't speak up about the Gaza genocide, or would even *cheer* it? How misanthropic and evil is it to hoard your riches while the world is in the state it's in! Token philanthropic exercises won't save your soul.)

We're getting a glimpse of what the rest of history will look like. I have inexpressible pity for the generations to come…

*

Reading Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. A very bizarre novel—but, in a sense, not much more bizarre or unbelievable than modern life itself. Maybe that's part of the point? 2025 is an appropriate time to be reading the book, given how surreal everything is becoming.

If the world ever needed Chomsky's voice of reason, it's now.

And yet, contrary to what most people think, it's very easy to understand why the world is going to the devil. (As Bulgakov would say.) The universal madness makes perfect sense. This is what happens when a rapacious capitalist elite succeeds in throwing off all its fetters. People lose their minds, because they're deluged by insane propaganda the sole function of which is to permit the ruling class's total domination of everything. The global reign of profits and capital is the time of monsters.

*

The Master and Margarita strikes me as a flawed masterpiece, hard to interpret and at times totally mysterious. "What on earth is the point of this scene?" is a question I asked more than once. And I don't know exactly what the overall message is supposed to be. But the book is incredibly imaginative and brilliantly fantastical, in this respect already embodying a rebellion against the dreariness of Soviet life in the 1930s, the faux-socialist propagandizing, the kitsch of socialist realism and the tyranny of authoritarian-bureaucratic materialism. Since contemporary culture is at least as vulgar, kitschy, and materialistic as Soviet culture ninety years ago, the novel remains rebellious and defiantly romantic. It represents imagination, magic, romance, spirit, against the ubiquitous vulgarity of commerce, consumerism, sex appeal, and bureaucracy. To turn from the book to reality is to turn to something *shriveled*, something disenchanted.

*

Because I'm a glutton for punishment, I returned to the philosophy of perception by reading William Fish's *Philosophy of Perception: A Contemporary Introduction* (2021). I don't understand why contemporary philosophy has to be so mind-numbing. As I've said many times, I think the incredible "subtleties" and terminological niceties and infinite verbiage-vomiting usually amount to ways of *avoiding* the central, intuitive, rational core of some given issue. This is suggested, for example, by passages in which philosophers deny intuitively obvious facts. Consider this passage (p. 85):

> When exploring the literature surrounding qualia, it is easy to get perplexed by the fact that the term has been used in a variety of different ways that is confusing, even for philosophers. For instance, there is an extremely benign usage that treats an experience having qualia as equivalent to its having phenomenal character or there being something it is like to have the experience (e.g. Chalmers 1996); on such a definition, almost all parties would accept that there are qualia. At the other end of the spectrum, there are extremely precise definitions, such as Dennett's characterization of qualia as "ineffable, intrinsic, private, directly apprehensible properties of experience." On this definition, most parties—Dennett himself included—would simply deny that qualia exist…

Okay, then most parties are idiots. For "what it is like" to have an experience *is obviously*, in some sense, ineffable, intrinsic, private, and directly apprehensible. When I have an experience of pain, with all the "intrinsic and directly apprehended" features of that pain, *you* can't know exactly what it was like for *me* to feel that pain. You can't be me!

I'm so sick of encountering this behavioristic bullshit in philosophy.

Here's another quote, from Ned Block: "Much of recent philosophy of perception is oriented towards accounting for the phenomenal character of perception—what it is like to perceive—in a non-mentalistic way—that is, without appealing to mental objects or mental qualities." So, again with the anti-mentalism. Philosophers, being people, are just not very rational. Whatever difficulties arise from the philosophical belief in mental objects/qualities with which we're directly acquainted in perception (call them what you want: sense-data, qualia, representations, appearances, etc.), any alternative theory flies in the face of reason and science. *The brain produces mental qualities, conscious mental contents, by processing sensory inputs.* How can that be denied?

*

Chomsky has called Trump the most successful con man in history, and he's right. It's fascinating that a pure con man, someone who has built his success and reputation on nothing but bluster and lies, has twice captured the leadership of the most powerful country and empire in history. With the crucial assistance of world-historic Democratic incompetence/corruption, he's done what most people would have thought unimaginable ten years ago. But in retrospect, his achievement makes perfect sense. For the

phenomenon of Trump is just the logical expression of a spiritually dead society. (A radio station broadcasted MLK's epic speech on the Vietnam war today while I was driving back from Pennsylvania to New York. The nation is no longer only "*approaching* spiritual death." With the Gaza genocide, the obscene Ukraine war, and *everything else*, it has magnificently surpassed King's worst fears.) America is cooked. Run by satanic billionaires, centimillionaires, and their legions of minions, America has been waiting a long time for a psychopathic Trump-like figure to confirm its complete degeneration.

Nothing could be more apt than two Trump presidencies!

*

I wish George Carlin could have been alive now. Looking forward to the collapse of society, he would have been tickled by the second Trump presidency.

Everywhere you look is a horror show. Attacks on free speech, on immigrants, on unions, on workers, on LGBTQ people, on the environment, on education, on foreign aid that saves millions of lives, on the rule of law, on a functional federal government—the list already goes on without end. And he's been president for less than two weeks.

As I've said many times before, Marx got the timeline very wrong. Only now are we beginning to enter the era when capitalism, having defeated most of its enemies that had counteracted its all-devouring will to destruction, drives society into semi-collapse. The Trump administration is the capitalist id (with some faux-populist lunacy thrown in).

But since the Democratic party was totally captured by big business decades ago, there ultimately wasn't going to be a way to stop neoliberal proto-fascists from taking power sooner or later. Centrist "liberalism" is completely useless, in fact prefers semi-fascism to radical empowerment of the working class—just as in Italy and Germany (and elsewhere) in the interwar era it preferred fascism to socialism. Liberalism fears nothing more than a government that takes seriously the universality of human rights. So it fights half-heartedly against a Trump, who is at least preferable to a Bernie Sanders. (Not to mention a Cornel West.)

At least it's finally overwhelmingly obvious that the verdict of history on the last generation of Democratic leadership will be merciless. They did little but make the world a worse place, even genocidally worse, and cede ground to the Republicans. It's up to the younger people to start over and try to salvage of society what they can.

February

The people who run some left-wing website in Europe asked me to answer a few questions about postliberalism, since I wrote a long essay on it. Here are the answers I came up with. Postliberal writings are garbage, but I tried not to be too insulting.

Postliberalism: A Brief History of a Resurgent Ideology

Today we hear more and more about the theoretical and ideological current of postliberalism. What is it?

The term 'postliberal' has been used to refer to many different things, from far-right nationalist governments like Viktor Orbán's in Hungary to certain left-wing ideologies in the UK. What they have in common is a partial or complete rejection of liberalism for its alleged undermining of community, social bonds, and "the common good." Liberalism is viewed as inherently atomizing, given its elevation of individual rights, individual happiness, and individual freedoms over moral duties and social cohesion. If contemporary society seems as though it is in danger of falling apart, beset by crises from every direction, this is supposed to be because a dominant liberalism is approaching its logical, anti-social conclusions.

In a narrow sense, postliberalism denotes an ideological tendency among thinkers initially based in the UK and the United States, writers like John Milbank, John Gray, Maurice Glasman, Adrian Pabst, and, in the U.S., Adrian Vermeule, Patrick Deneen, Gladden Pappin, and Sohrab Ahmari. They and others draw on philosophy and theology, most often Catholicism, in their search for alternatives to liberalism. Some of them (notably Vermeule) embrace Catholic integralism, the integration of Church and State, and have decidedly anti-liberal values. Others are more left-wing, to some degree valuing individual freedoms but seeking to unite them with a communitarian emphasis on humans' social embeddedness. The "Blue Labour" faction in the UK is a prominent example. It is culturally conservative but economically leftist—as, indeed, are some postliberals in the U.S., such as Ahmari, who defends social conservatism but strongly advocates a revived labor movement to resurrect the New Deal state. Most postliberals, however, place considerably more emphasis on the social (and religious) conservatism part than the economic leftism part.

The most common postliberal formation, then—and the most natural, given the valorization of social "order" and "cohesion," religion and tradition, over individual freedoms—is on the far-right. National conservatism, for example, as expressed by a Yoram Hazony, is essentially a type of neofascism. Government should impose on the country a "national religion" and a relatively uniform national culture that prioritizes the patriarchal family and banishes all legacies of the 1960s' New Left. Draconian immigration restrictions should be enacted. In *Conservatism: A Rediscovery* (2022), Hazony goes so far as to say, "there is no inherent right to self-government." But this is a natural position for postliberals to hold, insofar as they argue that freedom shouldn't be allowed to go so far as to undermine community or birth a "debased" culture of, say, left-wing identity politics.

There are localist versions of postliberalism and (more commonly) nationalist versions, theocratic versions and semi-secular versions, fascist versions and laborite versions. Far-right politicians in the U.S., Italy, Poland, India, Israel, and elsewhere have been called postliberal, as have more leftist politicians in the UK. It's a mutable concept.

What are the origins of postliberalism?

Academic or "philosophical" postliberalism is often traced to the revival of virtue ethics in the twentieth century by philosophers like Elizabeth Anscombe and Alasdair MacIntyre, or, in the UK, to John Gray's critiques of the Enlightenment (for instance in *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (1995)) and the theologian John Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy school of thought. Around 2009 in the UK, the Red Tory and Blue Labour political factions emerged, the former being promoted by the think tank ResPublica, which apparently influenced David Cameron.

A few years later in the U.S., some anti-liberal Catholic traditionalists launched a blog called *The Josias* to elaborate and propagate their integralist ideas. Over time, they converted many to their cause, including the respected Harvard legal scholar Adrian Vermeule, whose aggressive advocacy has helped popularize their ideas. Patrick Deneen's 2018 bestseller *Why Liberalism Failed* also strengthened the budding movement.

In fact, though, "postliberal" ideas have been around for a very long time, at least since the Counter-Enlightenment reaction against the French Revolution. Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre, for instance, denounced the Enlightenment's rationalism and liberalism for corroding tradition, religion, and social bonds, thus causing the Revolution. Romanticism, in part a reaction against the Enlightenment, idealized the organic community, the *Volk*, religion, the Middle Ages. Catholic thought in the nineteenth century was generally very anti-liberal—see Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (1864)—although Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891) shows that, to some extent, the liberal notion of "rights" is compatible with Catholicism.

Incidentally, much of this Counter-Enlightenment tradition has another telling similarity with contemporary postliberalism: its idealism. Liberal *ideologies* are seen as responsible for modern atomization, for the prevalence of greed, selfishness, and fissiparous social tendencies. Adrian Pabst, for instance, refers to "the *self-erosion* of liberal values such as freedom [and] equality," "the inner logic of liberal ideology," as if we're dealing with a Hegelian self-unfolding of Spirit or the Idea. But Marxists since

the 1840s have been condemning modern society for its selfishness, greed, and atomism—while blaming these things, realistically, not on liberalism but on the capitalist mode of production. Liberalism has many different, and contradictory, manifestations, from communitarian anarchism to social democracy to right-wing laissez-faire economics. The crises of modern society result not from the dominance of some abstract philosophy but from the concrete functioning of capitalist institutions, the class interests that cause capitalists to commodify everything, to exploit humans and nature for the sake of profits.

Conservative thought from Burke to postliberalism likes to dwell in the rarefied realm of philosophy and abstractions like virtue, honor, tradition, and the common good (abstractions with which postliberal writings teem). But if one really wants to revitalize community, it is necessary to radically change the economic structures, the class structures, that have severed humans from one another and from nature.

How did the precursors of postliberalism develop in the twentieth century?

The most destructive precursor of postliberalism was fascism, which indeed saw itself, in effect, as postliberal. It apotheosized the national community, tradition, and authority, and prided itself on overcoming the individualism, materialism, and selfishness of liberal modernity. Moreover, like most postliberals, fascists attacked not the capitalist class, the true agent of degradation, but "liberal elites" and people who didn't belong to the community, such as intellectuals, socialists, and immigrants. The parallels between the past and the present are ominous.

In the United States, the New Right that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s incorporated anti-liberal, traditionalist, authoritarian views, frequently taking a religious form. Religious fundamentalism tends to reject liberal values that ostensibly undermine the patriarchal family, the community, the nation, and morality itself. One of its most prominent spokesmen, Jerry Falwell, declared in 1980 (in his book *Listen, America!*), "We must stand against the Equal Rights Amendment, the feminist revolution, and the homosexual revolution… The hope of reversing the trends of decay in our republic now lies with the Christian public in America. We cannot expect help from the liberals." Such "postliberal" attitudes have spread widely since then, with far-right populist movements.

Paleoconservatism is another forerunner of postliberalism. Most famously identified with the Republican politician Pat Buchanan, it is rather hard to distinguish from many types of postliberalism, given its nationalism, xenophobia, social conservatism, religious inspiration, isolationism, and economic protectionism.

Postliberalism leverages communitarian values that compensate for the social fragmentation and precarization produced by the competitive market known as "neoliberalism" in recent years—and is thus an antidote to atomized individualism. But what socioeconomic correctives does it intend to bring to the economy?

Postliberals often favor tariffs, the reshoring of manufacturing, vigorous antitrust enforcement, greater regulation of business, government investment in infrastructure and in vocational education, restrictive immigration policies and expansive pro-natalist policies (Orbán's Hungary is much admired), and relative "de-globalization."

Blue Labour advocates employee representation on corporate boards of directors, stronger labor unions, higher taxation of wealth than incomes, more social housing, investment in green manufacturing, and promotion of local economies and local democracy, in addition to the usual restrictive immigration policies. Also, like some other postliberal factions, it supports corporatism: "tripartite institutions are needed to provide a balance of interests between labor, capital, and government in the negotiation of wages, working conditions, and investment decisions," to quote Pabst's essay "Three Faces of Postliberalism" (in *The Oxford Handbook of Illiberalism*).

National conservatives, on the other hand, prefer a more American type of commitment to the "free market." So, there are disagreements among postliberals on economic policy.

In what relationship of continuity and discontinuity is postliberalism with neoliberalism, both theoretically and politically?

Postliberalism defines itself in opposition to neoliberalism, so you'd think the two things are polar opposites. The irony is that, in practice, it tends to *reinforce* certain aspects of neoliberalism, while undermining others. Protectionist policies undermine the free-trade commitments of neoliberalism. But if we understand postliberalism in a broad sense, as referring mainly (with a few leftist exceptions) to far-right anti-liberal movements and ideas that are sweeping much of the world, it is quite useful to neoliberalism's project of expanding capitalist class power. For it diverts popular rage to the wrong targets, as fascism did.

J. D. Vance, for example, styles himself a postliberal who cares about the public good, but he campaigned with a man whose administration is now trying to dismantle the administrative state, including onerous regulations on business, protections of unions and workers' rights, protections of the environment, and tax policies that aren't favorable to the ruling class. This is neoliberalism on steroids.

In fact, national conservatism itself advocates a "drastic reduction in the scope of the administrative state," apparently unaware that this profoundly sabotages the common good and the functioning of the nation. For generations it has been a major demand of the right-wing "libertarians" whom postliberals supposedly revile. So there isn't much coherence in certain varieties of postliberalism.

The MAGA movement, which can be called postliberal in the vulgarized sense that all right-wing populism can, is very useful to capital in its scapegoating of immigrants and liberalism for social crises that are due to the capitalist class's insatiable hunger for profits and power. Deindustrialization, for instance, has little to do with "liberalism"; it has to do with capitalism. By focusing attention on so-called liberalism, then, postliberals are performing a valuable service for the capitalist class. Doubtless this is one reason their ideas have been subsidized and widely propagated. (The billionaire Peter Thiel even signed the national conservative Statement of Principles, as did some right-wing libertarians.)

For a genuine break with neoliberalism, it is necessary, on the contrary, to embrace the best of the liberal tradition, which is to say the labor movement, democratic socialism—class struggle.

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It's sad that what I wrote in *The Book of Joe* was, basically, right: "...Then from the rubble shall rise another Rome, another Caesar, and Huns, Goths, Gauls, Franks, Vandals;

"And Charlemagnes, and Tamburlaines, and Genghis Khans, and Suleimans; and civil wars, and slaveries, and genocides, and holocausts.

"And thinly veiled capitalisms, and socialisms, and tribalisms, and globalisms: all, all shall go on, forever, until the sun swalloweth the earth!

"For I am the one god, the sole god men believe in: I, Mammon, the Eternal One—the Will to Possess."

Until the end of the species, nothing will fundamentally change, except that climatic and environmental chaos will make life either miserable or impossible for most people. Nothing can ever change. Humans are what they are, selfish and cruel and unintelligent and power-hungry.[1] Socialism on a large scale will never happen. Communism will never happen. Peace and cooperation on a large scale *cannot happen*. Humanity will never have a moment of "rest." *Nothing is in front of us but tumult until the end of time.* Microorganisms emerged billions of years ago, and then a species evolved that was capable of miracles: sending a Golden Record into space with Beethoven's Cavatina on it, to sail through the universe for eternity....but also, at the same time, performing the unimaginable "miracles"—near-impossibilities—

[1] Elon Musk, for example, is sort of an imbecile—and most people are less intelligent than him. Intellectuals, too, tend to be unintelligent. Chomsky has compared people to three-year-olds, as an explanation of why he doesn't usually get angry at them.

of *genocides* and *flooding the planet with such pollution that an entire epoch of natural history ended and a new one began*.

But when we're all gone, the Cavatina will still be floating through interstellar space. Billions of years from now, it will be floating out there.

At least we achieved some great things while we were here. Things no other organism in the history of the planet was capable of even approaching. Humans were a miracle. A noble experiment, albeit a failed one.

It's a "miracle," in fact, that civilization is still here, given the existence of thousands of nuclear warheads and the many incredibly close calls there have been to nuclear war. We're living on borrowed time.

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For years, I've been waiting for popular rage to grow unstoppable and a real shake-up of the political system to begin. But I've constantly had the sense that things weren't yet bad enough, that the capitalist class hadn't yet gone far enough to provoke the uprisings that will, at some point, come. I now think that, ***finally***, we're on the verge of something interesting. In the next four years, the greed and stupidity of the oligarchs will *finally* catch up to them. *At long last*, neoliberalism is approaching its logical conclusion of attempted dismantling of everything good in society. When you fire hundreds of thousands of federal workers, stop enforcing regulations on business, and slash and burn government spending, even the Republican rank and file will get outraged. There's likely a recession coming too, though maybe not this year. It's good Republicans will be in charge as the quality of life declines, so Democrats will be the beneficiaries. Corporate Democrats are useless, but the populist rage will empower relative leftists. Most of the Clintonites are getting old anyway, so their time is almost up.

Fascists will benefit from crisis too, but neoliberal fascism can't have a long-term future. At some point, as Polanyi argued, society will find a way to protect itself.

*

Reading random books in history, sociology, and economics. Yanis Varoufakis's *The Global Minotaur: America, the True Origins of the Financial Crisis and the Future of the World Economy* (2011) is particularly interesting. Much of its history of U.S. global planning since World War II is familiar to me, but some of the material on the 1970s is new. I had known that—contrary to the conventional wisdom—the U.S. government wasn't terribly upset with very high oil prices after 1973, but I didn't know the whole story.

U.S. planners were determined to maintain their global hegemony even after the demise of Bretton Woods in 1971, despite America's change from having a positive balance of trade to having a very negative one. (The "twin deficits," the trade deficit and the budget deficit, had finally necessitated the end of Bretton Woods.) The only way to do this was to "entice the rest of the world to finance the USA's deficits." Global capital had to flow into America, to pay for the government's exorbitant budgets and the economy's trade deficits. There were two prerequisites for this flood of capital into the U.S.: (1) improve the competitiveness of American firms in relation to their German and Japanese competitors; (2) raise interest rates high enough to attract large capital flows.

> The first prerequisite could be achieved in one of two ways: either by boosting productivity in the United States or by boosting the relative unit costs of the [German and Japanese] competition. For good measure, the US administration decided to aim for *both*. Labor costs were squeezed with enthusiasm and, at the same time, oil prices were 'encouraged' to rise. The drop in US labor costs not only boosted the competitiveness of American companies, but also acted as a magnet for foreign capital that was searching for profitable ventures. Meanwhile, as oil prices rose, every part of the capitalist world was adversely affected.

> However, Japan and Western Europe (largely lacking their own oil) were burdened much more than the United States.

So, high oil prices were in the interest of American hegemony, in part because they hurt Europe and Japan more than the U.S. and in part because, since oil was denominated in dollars, petrodollars flooded into American banks. (Which used them to buy government bonds, for instance, or to lend money to the Global South at high interest rates, leading to the debt crises of the 1980s. Needless to say, all this money from around the world that was financing U.S. government deficits was thereby also helping to finance the military.)

And crushing the labor movement, too, helped limit and finance the trade deficit, by making American firms more competitive and attracting foreign capital to invest in a country with relatively cheap labor (the U.S.). Somehow I had never really thought about this aspect of the anti-union crusade.

As for raising interest rates to attract capital inflows, the story of Paul Volcker's high interest-rate policy is well known. It both brought down labor costs (because of the severe recession) and was important in financing America's twin deficits.

> The United States could now run an increasing trade deficit with impunity, while the new Reagan administration could also finance its hugely expanded defense budget and its gigantic tax cuts for the richest Americans. The 1980s ideology of supply-side economics, the fabled trickle-down effect, the reckless tax cuts, the dominance of greed as a form of virtue, etc.—all these were just manifestations of America's new 'exorbitant privilege': the opportunity to expand its twin deficits almost without limit, courtesy of the capital inflows from the rest of the world. American hegemony had taken a new turn.

Varoufakis also notes that Volcker's high interest rates that so helped U.S. power did much to bring about the downfall of its geopolitical enemies—not only in the Global South but even in the Soviet bloc. Many countries in that bloc had been taking loans from Western banks since the 1960s. When interest rates shot up, "they gave their all to repay the debts as quickly as possible, imposing particularly harsh austerity measures on their own workforces. The result was mass discontent, major unrest and the first stirrings of organized opposition, e.g. the Polish trades union Solidarity, which was soon to spearhead a chain of events leading to the first collapse of a communist regime." Fritz Bartel describes all this in great detail in *The Triumph of Broken Promises: The End of the Cold War and the Rise of Neoliberalism* (2022). The energy crisis and high interest rates were catastrophic for the Soviet sphere.

"In short, the interest rate rise that was part and parcel of the Global Minotaur's own rise to prominence proved more effective in destroying the enemies of US foreign policy around the globe than any military operation the US could ever mount." (By the Global Minotaur he means the U.S.'s twin deficits that consumed enormous amounts of imperial tribute from around the world—but in a useful way, since America was able to be, in large part, the world's consumer, keeping economies growing.)

Huge trade deficits, of course, were tied to the erosion of America's manufacturing economy. So the revitalization of American hegemony after the 1970s, on the basis of the twin deficits and America's devouring of global capital surpluses, went hand in hand with the deterioration of the position of the American worker (who was suffering from the decline of manufacturing and industrial unions). What was great for the ruling class was terrible for the working class.

Anyway, the massive capital inflows to the U.S. in the years and decades before 2008—amounting to "more than 70 percent of global capital outflows" in a typical year—together with increases in America's corporate profitability, flooded equity and loans to U.S. corporations and households (and funded a huge wave of mergers and acquisitions). The whole world was complicit in America's soaring stock market and housing market.

But once the 2008 crash happened, Varoufakis argues that the U.S. could no longer fulfill its role of "consuming enough of the surplus outputs of Europe, Japan, China and Southeast Asia to prevent their economies from stalling." Well, in retrospect, he was wrong about that. It looked that way for a while, as

recession spread to large parts of the world, but the U.S. recovered and continues to have enormous deficits that help drive the global economy. Still, this can't continue forever. The "Global Minotaur" must surely die eventually. And that will really be something to see!

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Andrea Dworkin's 1983 book *Right-Wing Women* was just reissued. An impressively stupid, overly favorable *New York Times* review gives a sense of why Dworkin is rarely worth reading except as a symptom of certain cultural tendencies. She had a very limited, one-track mind, seemingly consumed by hatred of men.

> You might expect that Dworkin would have been wholly unsympathetic to the right-wing women in her book. But no: She credits them with seeing a stifling, male-dominated world as it really is. She suggests that the optimistic liberal woman, who holds out hope that the patriarchy can be reformed through incremental tinkering, is the delusional one, clinging to a faith that feminist demands could be anything short of revolutionary. The right-wing woman, by contrast, is a realist to a fault. She notices how men oppress women, and she doesn't believe in the possibility of transformative change. And so she acquiesces to male authority as a matter of survival: "She conforms, in order to be as safe as she can be."

Or...maybe she is just happy in the roles that women have had since time immemorial, as mothers, wives, homemakers, friends. Sometimes, it's true, conservative women conform to be "safe," but sometimes they're happy in their community in which men have a dominant role. It's perfectly natural, after all, for men to have dominant roles, especially given women's attraction to male confidence, strength, height, size, intelligence, mechanical skills, sexual prowess, and so on. This is too obvious to point out except to an intellectual. (See the articles I've written on this subject.)

Radical feminism is a kind of sickness, a cultural and sometimes psychological sickness. Probably the least intelligent left-wing ideology in history. A healthy, reasonable woman isn't oppressed by the thought of male dominance; she finds men attractive and appealing, while understanding that some caution around them is necessary because of their strength and the possibility of violence. (Women are often just as violent, but they're weaker, so they're less dangerous.) Women have many privileges, and men have others.

As for revolution, I've said before that there's nothing "revolutionary" about feminism. Raising blacks to equality with whites or women to "equality" with men (which hardly any woman actually wants, since even in the sex act there's a kind of inequality—as Dworkin, confusedly, acknowledged[1]) would do nothing to change the structures of society's dominant institutions. It would only change the distribution of types of people *within* these institutions.

This is funny:

> Dworkin compares Norman Mailer's homophobia to Anita Bryant's, pointing out the marked similarities, though only one of these figures was lauded as a genius. "Anita Bryant is stupid and Norman Mailer is smart," Dworkin acidly remarks. "Is the difference in the style with which these same ideas are delivered or in the penis?"

What a juvenile mind. A case of arrested development, and obvious penis envy. Mailer was called brilliant because of his many books, not because of his penis.

Dworkin had had some bad experiences with men, and, on top of that, she was ugly and obese, so it's not surprising she was profoundly bitter. But deeply rooted bitterness doesn't make for rational thought.

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[1] She compared sex to territorial occupation. Okay, so how does she think genuine equality is even imaginable? The only way is if no one ever has sex again. (Maybe, as a misanthrope, she would have liked that.)

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It's pretty remarkable that, probably, *these are the pivotal decades of the rest of human history,* and the world is doing very little about it. The global abdication of moral responsibility is beyond breathtaking. Hundreds of years from now, people will look back at this time and think, "Those selfish, short-sighted thugs! For decades they disinvested from nuclear power, they didn't pour much money into nuclear fusion, they put most of their eggs into the one basket of fossil fuels—and we're still suffering from their stupidity." The contemptuous curse will continue: "They didn't cut down on plastic pollution; they didn't try to stop the destruction of ecosystems; they unapologetically embraced the mantra Greed is Good by constantly electing unbridled capitalists, proto-fascists, and polluters like Donald Trump. They didn't even abolish nuclear weapons! They ruined us!"

But the fact is that *institutions*, not *people*, are mainly what govern society. Since the institutions of capitalism value nothing but profits, profits are pursued at all costs. It definitely makes sense to blame powerful people for their policies, but these horrible people are 'formed' by institutions, so it's the institutions that bear the most responsibility.

Anyway, I'm sorry, future people! I'm sorry we failed you! It's a terrible thing to know we've failed *all future people*. And even most life on earth! By rights, all of us living today—but especially the ruling class and global political leaders—should be reincarnated a hundred years from now to suffer from the conditions 'we' (*they*, and their grotesque institutions) created.